Book Review: Tucker, J. A. (2006). Regional economic voting: Russia, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic, 1990-1999. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press

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Book Reviews

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In this outstanding new study, Joshua Tucker evaluates the economic voting literature in light of the postcommunist evidence and in doing so turns much of it on its head. This literature is almost exclusively concerned with the United States and, to a lesser extent, the long-established democracies of Europe. Moreover, it is mostly dominated by a single hypothesis—that incumbent parties and candidates are likely to perform better when economic conditions are better. Tucker suspects that in new democracies, particularly those undergoing simultaneous political and economic transitions, the dynamics will be different. In the cases he examines, the impact of economic conditions on election results is driven less by a party's incumbency status and more by its relationship to the transition itself.

Tucker studies 20 parliamentary and presidential elections in 5 postcommunist countries—the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Russia, and Slovakia. Comparing election results at the regional level, he evaluates the relative usefulness of two different models for understanding the effect of economic conditions on election outcomes. The "referendum model" views a party's incumbency status as the best predictor of its electoral performance. Tucker's "transitional identity model" attributes a party's electoral prospects to whether voters identify it with the old regime or new regime. The two models generate three "standard economic hypotheses"—hypotheses about the predicted effect of economic conditions on parties' electoral performance in a given region. The incumbency hypothesis predicts that incumbent parties will perform better in regions of the country where economic conditions are better. The new regime (NR) hypothesis expects that parties associated with the new liberal-capitalist order will perform better in regions with better-performing economies. The old regime (OR) hypothesis predicts that parties associated with the old communist order will perform better in regions where economic conditions are worse.

A comprehensive test of these three hypotheses alone would be sufficient for a book-length study of economic voting. However, Tucker goes far beyond this. For apart from these "standard" hypotheses he also comes to grip with several "conditional economic voting hypotheses." The latter identify the conditions under which the standard hypotheses are more or less likely to hold. In doing so, he takes his cue from Powell and Whitten (1993) who posit that the incumbency hypothesis should find more support where voters ascribe to the government more rather than less control over the economy. Tucker tests a number of conditional hypotheses that extend from this "clarity of responsibility" argument—that the standard economic hypotheses should find more support in elections for the constitutionally dominant office (whether president or parliament), for party voters expect to command a larger share of the national vote, and for dominant coalition partners.

Apart from responsibility-based arguments, Tucker tests a number of other conditional hypotheses that have received far less attention in the literature. These predict that the standard hypotheses will hold up differently across presidential and parliamentary elections and between East-Central Europe and Russia; that they will fare worse in elections dominated by personalities rather than economic issues; that they will find less support where traditional old regime parties have reformed themselves in a social-democratic direction and where new regime parties have morphed into populist ones; and that they will perform differently with the passage of time.

The conditional hypotheses are surely interesting in and of themselves. However, they also offer theoretically defined subsets of data on which to test the standard hypotheses. For example, does the transitional identity model perform better than the referendum model even in elections for the dominant constitutional office? Tucker exploits such possibilities to the maximum.

The first part of his analysis is a series of statistical regressions for each party in each of the 20 elections, resulting in a total of 88 separate regression analyses. He uses a method that allows one to calculate the effect of a simulated economic shock on the vote for a particular party. He is then able to estimate a confidence level that the effect is indeed in the direction predicted by the hypothesis. For each of the three standard hypotheses he calculates the percentage of parties that cross a 90% confidence threshold that the specified economic shock had the predicted effect. The second part of the analysis consists of a series of paired case studies designed to provide a richer though theoretically defined context to the statistical analysis.

The results clearly indicate more support for the transitional identity model over the referendum model and, within the transitional identity model, for the OR hypothesis over the NR hypothesis. Remarkably, these results remain practically identical across a broad series of robustness tests; regardless of whether one uses different economic indicators, includes initially excluded borderline cases, or adjusts the size of the simulated economic shock downward, the same results are obtained. Also, the NR and OR hypotheses perform well across different time periods and across different types of OR (traditional communist vs. social democratic) and NR (liberal vs. populist) parties. Most interestingly, he finds that the impact of incumbency is entirely dependent on a party's transitional identity; incumbency only affects the electoral performance of new regime parties, not old regime parties. The overall results of the study are unambiguous: the NR and OR hypotheses work regardless of the time period in question, the partisan orientation of a party, or a party's incumbency status. All of this gives the study's results a degree of certainty rarely achieved in comparative political research.

What emerges from this methodologically rigorous analysis is a substantial and original contribution to the literature on economic voting. The vast majority of this literature merely attempts to identify the effect of economic conditions on the performance of incumbent and nonincumbent parties. This study is among the first to evaluate these conventional arguments in transitional polities and to consider the impact of economic conditions on other party categories besides incumbency status. Tucker refrains from predicting the effects of economic performance on left- and right-wing parties. However, his findings have clear implications for the study of this issue in the advanced democracies. What is more, Tucker's analysis of conditional economic voting hypotheses goes much further than any previous attempt. He not only finds new ways to apply to transitional democracies the established "clarity of responsibility" conditional hypothesis but also breaks new ground in exploring an array of additional such hypotheses.

Viewed in light of the literature on postcommunist economic voting, this book stands out as a truly comparative analysis in a vast sea of single-election and single-country case studies. In addition, his finding that economic voting had similar impacts on both unreformed and reformed communist parties will be of interest to the literature on communist successor parties which tends to focus on the differences between these two types of parties. It also joins a growing number of studies that go beyond a pure path-dependent approach to the study of communist legacies by systematically analyzing how such legacies combine with transition-specific effects to shape outcomes. Tucker also notes the interesting possibility that old regime parties may provide an institutionalized outlet for voters' economic frustrations and thereby have a stabilizing effect on postcommunist democracies.

My only criticism concerns the appropriateness of including Russia alongside the other four countries in a comparative study of economic voting. In Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and perhaps even Mečiar's Slovakia, one can be reasonably sure that the official election results at the regional level actually reflected the will of the voters. In the case of Russia we can be much less certain. Many of Russia's regional administrations have become notorious for committing various forms of electoral fraud (Gelman, 1999; Kirkow, 1998; Mendras, 1999). And despite Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's assertions to the contrary, this was true throughout the Yeltsin period, when the elections considered in this study took place (Fish, 2005, pp. 30–81). To his credit, Tucker retests the hypotheses while excluding the 1993 Russian parliamentary elections on the grounds that it was marred by serious allegations of fraud. He also finds that the results of the analysis would not have differed substantially had Russia been excluded from it entirely. However, if the conduct of many regional elections is any guide, one should likely assign less credibility to national election results as reported by Russian regional officials. Accordingly, this reviewer remains skeptical when considering the extent to which the official Russian election results actually reflect the way citizens voted.

That aside, Tucker presents an original hypothesis on economic voting and finds consistently stronger empirical evidence for it than for the conventional theory in the field. This alone would be enough to make for a highly noteworthy contribution. However, apart from this he sets a new standard for the analysis of conditional economic voting hypotheses. In fact, anybody attempting to evaluate conditional hypotheses in any subject area could do worse than to rely on this book as a prototype. *Regional Economic Voting* is a shining example of how to design a monograph in a way that derives maximum theoretical leverage from a body of evidence while cautiously keeping one's conclusions as close as possible to this evidence. This book is a remarkable achievement and will be widely read.

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Saskia Sassen has written a sweeping account of the role of the state in the process of globalization that will challenge her readers' understanding of both of these concepts. Sassen argues that previous scholars have employed too-narrow definitions of globalization that have led them to miss important aspects of the process. In particular, many of the important effects of globalization occur not in the relationship between states but within the individual state by changing the nature of the state's territory and authority and the rights of its citizens. This core argument is used as the basis for numerous additional arguments about the development of the nation-state, the origins of globalization, executive power in the United States, internet governance, and numerous other topics. In making these arguments, Sassen draws on and integrates a wide array of literature, from sociology, history, law, philosophy, and some elements of political science, such as the state development literature. However, Sassen does not draw much on economics or the international and