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The Electoral Fortunes of Gubernatorial Incumbents: 1947–1981

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I break down gubernatorial electoral outcomes into expected vote and short-term changes, using an intrastate baseline measure. Employing these measures, I find evidence of period effects in the role played by incumbency, including the growth in its importance in the last decade. Incumbents' gains are most notable in first reelection contest, but tail off in subsequent races. Moreover, these advantages are more pronounced after a two-year term than after a four-year term. Other factors influencing incumbents' success are less clear in their impact: Sabato's measure of reputation is associated with electoral gains, but increasing state bureaucratization appears more weakly linked.

Political scientists are showing increasing interest in the electoral impact of incumbency. Legislative scholars have led the way, spurred by the claim that the number of vulnerable members of Congress has been declining. Initial efforts to explain incumbency's impact focused on systemic forces, such as reapportionment (Erikson, 1972a; Tufte, 1975), but more recent analyses have moved to consider specific resources employed by congressional incumbents, such as the frank, and the nature of their reelection contest (most notably, the strength of the challenge they confront).[1]

* An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the 1982 Southern Political Science Association meeting in Atlanta, Georgia. I am grateful for very helpful comments and suggestions from Thad Beyle, John Hibbing, David R. Mayhew, Larry Sabato, Robert Savage, Jesse White, and David Whiteman. Nonetheless, I remain personally responsible for the analysis and its conclusions.

[1] For examples, see Cover and Brumberg, 1982; Mann and Wolfinger, 1980; Abramowitz, 1980; Hinckley, 1980a, 1980b; Cover, 1977; and Mayhew, 1974; in an exception to these studies examining the many resources of incumbents, Alford and Hibbing, 1981, rule out generational explanations.

Curiously, the focus on the institution-specific advantages of incumbency has led to the neglect of other political officeholders.[2] Perhaps more important, this focus neglects some important paradoxes. On the one hand, senatorial incumbents are often viewed as less secure than House incumbents, apparently because of the relative visibility of the offices and the respective strength of the challenges mounted against them (Abramowitz, 1980, p. 634). Governors, who are even more visible than senators and whose reelection efforts are surely also subject to strongly mounted challenges, should then be even more vulnerable. Hinckley offers data suggesting that senatorial incumbents were more secure than gubernatorial incumbents in the 1948–66 period (1970, pp. 840–41) and, indeed, that incumbency appears to offer no advantage for governors. Based on related findings, Seroka (1980) attributes differences between senatorial and gubernatorial success to political executives' particular vulnerability to the impulse to "throw the rascals out." (One of President Ford's aides offered this statement of the conventional wisdom, "People forget what you have done for them and remember only what you did to them" [Cronin, 1980, p. 45].) On the other hand, governors appear to be far safer than senators in recent years. For example, Morehouse (1981) shows only four of thirty-five Democratic incumbents losing between 1970 and 1979 and attributes greater Republican losses to Watergate, while Patterson (1982) finds that incumbency makes a positive contribution to vote shares in 1978 gubernatorial elections.

The dominant view is that states' elections are increasingly competitive while gubernatorial incumbents appear to be increasingly secure. The exception occurs in the occasional election where state contests are submerged in a larger floodtide of reaction to outside events, such as Watergate or Reaganomics. Still, some controversy apparently remains unresolved: Piereson argues that "incumbency is a growing advantage" (1977, p. 956) to governors, while Turett suggests that "between 60 and 70 percent of all incumbents do less well in their bids for reelection" (1971, p. 118).

Governors appear to offer an ideal focus for an analysis of the benefits of incumbency. States form partially autonomous jurisdictions which have distinctive characteristics, affording incumbents different oppor-

[2] Fiorina, 1977a, 1977b, offers one exception to the institution-specific focus, suggesting another (not inconsistent) explanation for the role played by incumbency, arguing that the growth of the public sector produces increasing resources which can be used on behalf of an incumbent. This model has been formally elaborated more recently by Fiorina and Noll, 1978. On the latter point, for example, there are relatively few studies on the advantages of gubernatorial incumbency. Turett, 1971; Cowart, 1973; Piereson, 1977; Seroka, 1980; Morehouse, 1981; Patterson, 1982; and portions of Hinckley, 1970, are the notable exceptions.

tunities for political achievement. As political executives, governors provide us with an opportunity to examine the differences between legislative and executive experience. This may be important, since governors are well known (what evidence is available suggests they are far better known than legislators [see, for example, Sabato, 1978, p. 8]) and are probably far more vulnerable than legislators to being held responsible for the course of events within their constituency. (Indeed, organizational theorists sometimes argue that executives are held responsible for their organizations, as symbols, irrespective of their personal role—a point to which we will return below [for one such statement, see Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978, chap. 9, particularly p. 236].)

Any analysis of this problem must begin by resolving some of the apparent controversy over the impact of gubernatorial incumbency. This controversy is created in part by analytic differences among the various studies of gubernatorial incumbency, with three characteristics appearing particularly important: (1) The several available works rely on different methods ranging from success rates (Morehouse), simple vote shares (Seroka), and victory margins (Turett), to attempts to establish partisanship within the state as a prior expectation against which particular elections can be assessed (Piereson, 1977; and Patterson, 1982). (Limited survey evidence is also offered by Cowart, 1973.) Ultimately, a method consistent with this last goal but more sensitive to interstate and interelection differences will be proposed and used; it will support the development of additional evidence about secular influences on gubernatorial fortunes. (2) These studies focus on different time periods: Turett's work concludes with the 1969 elections, Piereson's with those in 1970, while Seroka's evidence extends through 1976, and Patterson's work is based on the 1978 elections. Some of the different conclusions, perhaps, arise from period effects as a result. (3) Some studies, notably Turett's, examine limited groups of states (he includes nineteen), excluding others in an effort to focus on "competitive" elections. Since the effects of method, period, and scope may confound the discussion, each needs to be examined in a systematic analysis of the impact of gubernatorial incumbency.

The Impact of Incumbency

Gubernatorial terms of office substantially limited the number of incumbents seeking reelection until recent years. For this reason and others, Sabato has argued that a modern governorship emerges after World War II. Accordingly, an analysis of gubernatorial incumbency can be usefully focused on the postwar era, concentrating on this modern governorship and avoiding conclusions based on the limited number of states permitting incumbents to run for another term in earlier periods.

We can begin by looking at gubernatorial election outcomes, considered over three periods: 1947–59, 1960–69, and 1970–81.[3] To examine the benefits of incumbency, the fortunes of incumbents can be compared with those of successor candidates (those seeking an open seat vacated by a member of their own party). Table 1 uses the simplest measures available—the proportion of the votes cast for candidates of either party—reporting both overall averages and the proportion of cases within various categories of competition. The latter can be used to assess the claim that average results are influenced by the relative proportions of competitive and noncompetitive elections.

Examining the distribution of cases, scope decisions appear to be particularly important for the first period, where there are a substantial number of one-sided victories by Democratic successor candidates (most occur in the South). The importance of these candidacies had declined by the 1960s, however, as Democratic incumbents became more successful and fewer Democratic successor candidates won essentially uncontested elections. Systematic analysis of vote-share categories remains difficult in any event.

Turning to the average vote proportions, the evidence suggests that both Turett and Piereson are correct, to a point. As Turett suggests, incumbents did appear to do worse than successor candidates of their party in the earlier periods which he examined (extending through the second period included here). On the other hand, as Piereson suggests, incumbency does appear to be a "growing advantage," particularly in the most recent decade (which he did not examine). In fact, by the third period included in table 1, incumbency appears to offer a noteworthy advantage in the electoral area, with incumbents' vote totals averaging 6 and 7 percent higher for Democrats and Republicans respectively, than successor candidates' totals.

Turett used another approach in assessing incumbents' advantages: examining the proportion of incumbents losing ground in their margins of victory. This has the benefit of comparing the relative performance of an incumbent in the actual electoral contest. This standard suggests that fewer incumbents seeking reelection (thus excluding incumbents seeking their first full term) have lost ground in their margins of victory in the most recent period, 1970–81 (53.2 percent), compared to the earlier

[3] There are two other advantages to this focus: it avoids confounding incumbency with the impact of the realignment period of the Great Depression; and it allows us to use a data set reported in Sabato, 1978, which essentially begins after World War II. The analysis treats three periods; the first two incorporate the separation of the 1960s from earlier periods common to many of these studies, while the last period provides a separate update for the work concluding in 1969 or 1970.

TABLE 1

VOTE SHARES OF GUBERNATORIAL CANDIDATES

PART ONE: FOR SUCCESSORS SEEKING AN OPEN SEAT (SUCCESSOR'S SHARE OF ALL VOTES—PERCENT)

	1947–59		1960–69		1970–81	
	(PARTY AFFILIATION OF PREVIOUS GOVERNOR)					
	DEM.	REP.	DEM.	REP.	DEM.	REP.
Average % Cast for Candidate	70	52	56	50	53	44
Share of Votes						
Less than 50%	16	37	43	47	44	84
50% to 55%	16	33	22	24	24	4
55% to 60%	12	12	12	29	11	12
60% to 65%	6	9	10	0	7	0
65% to 90%	26	9	6	0	13	0
More than 90%	24	0	6	0	0	0
Totals	100	100	99	100	99	100
(N)	(50)	(43)	(49)	(17)	(45)	(25)

PART TWO: FOR INCUMBENTS SEEKING REELECTION (INCUMBENT'S SHARE OF ALL VOTES—PERCENT)

	(INCUMBENT'S PARTY AFFILIATION)					
	DEM.	REP.	DEM.	REP.	DEM.	REP.
Average % Cast for Candidate	61	54	56	53	59	51
Share of Votes						
Less than 50%	28	28	33	34	17	43
50% to 55%	20	33	24	37	28	24
55% to 60%	20	16	16	16	15	24
60% to 65%	4	16	8	13	17	7
65% to 90%	22	7	18	0	21	2
More than 90%	6	0	2	0	2	0
Totals	99	100	99	100	99	100
(N)	(54)	(61)	(51)	(38)	(53)	(42)

Note: Percentage totals reflect the impact of rounding; two elections involving independents are excluded; three elections where governors of one party are succeeded by governors of the other party, in midterm, are also excluded.

periods, where 67.0 percent lost ground in the 1960–69 period, and 64.9 percent lost ground in the 1947–59 period.[4] Still, the apparent decline in

[4] The selection process limiting analysis to nineteen states may be objectionable on other grounds, but it makes little difference here. For example, in the states he examines, Turett reports 62.8 percent losing ground in 1960–69, and 68.0 percent losing ground from 1950–59 (1971, p. 119). Using only his nineteen states, 53.7 percent of the incumbents lose ground from 1970–81.

incumbents losing support may be a trivial finding, since a number of cases involve differences of less than one percent. Accordingly, we need a more sensitive measure to overcome these limitations.

As with most analyses of congressional incumbents' safety, each of the approaches considered thus far ignores (or at least oversimplifies) the impact of systematic constituency differences. Perhaps incumbents run in districts in which candidates from their party are expected to fare better (or worse) than those of the other party.[5] Closely contested districts, after all, may produce more close contests and more incumbent defeats than other, safer districts where an incumbent wins and holds a seat for many terms. Framed in this perspective, the issue must be resolved by examining the fortunes of a party's candidates compared to their expected performance; do incumbents do better than expected, for that constituency? Once the issue is posed in these terms, we can then also ask what factors are associated with the relative success of incumbents in improving on this baseline. It is this path which Cowart (1973) and Patterson (1982) have adopted; unfortunately, their work is limited to a few elections.

In appendix 1, a more general approach to the measurement of this expected vote is reported. Briefly, it involves the calculation of a seasonally adjusted (for presidential year surges in participation), twelve-year backcast, moving average of previous gubernatorial election results, which yields a measure of the expected vote for a gubernatorial candidate for each state in each election, based on previous gubernatorial elections in that state (rather than national elections occurring in the state, as Piereson, 1977, uses).[6] The difference between this expected vote and the actual vote can be treated as a measure of the short-term change from an expected result—the question then becomes "are incumbents doing better than we might otherwise expect?" Turett's simpler standard can also be compared more systematically by looking at the mean victory margins rather than simply at proportions improving their margins and proportions lowering theirs.

In table 2, the power of incumbency is assessed against these two standards, margins of victory and short-term changes from the expected vote, examining them within the three time periods employed in table 1. The unexplored conjecture guiding Turett's strategy of selecting competitive

[5] This limitation in incumbency analyses focused on the House of Representatives is understandable, since constituency boundaries change in a substantial number of the competitive districts through redistricting. Stable state boundaries, on the other hand, allow us to incorporate constituency differences into gubernatorial analyses.

[6] This is an important change. A measure employing several contests from the same or contiguous years incorporates national, transient influences into factors influencing the measure of expected vote; this appears inconsistent with our understanding of a normal vote. It also confounds sometimes distinctive national contests with those focused on state issues.

TABLE 2

AVERAGE GUBERNATORIAL MARGINS OF VICTORY AND SHORT-TERM CHANGES IN VOTE INCUMBENTS AND SUCCESSORS SEEKING AN OPEN SEAT GUBERNATORIAL ELECTIONS: 1947–81

	VICTORY MARGIN (%)			
	NO ELECTIONS EXCLUDED		CONTESTED ELECTIONS	
	SUCCESSORS	INCUMBENTS	SUCCESSORS	INCUMBENTS
1947–59	29.579	18.911	19.467	16.972
(N)	(93)	(115)	(81)	(112)
1960–69	16.707	13.675	12.801	12.694
(N)	(66)	(89)	(63)	(88)
1970–81	14.262	17.869	14.262	16.995
(N)	(70)	(95)	(70)	(94)
	SHORT-TERM CHANGE IN VOTE (%)			
1947–59	−3.079	−.565	−3.585	−.551
(N)	(81)	(115)	(81)	(112)
1960–69	−5.209	1.598	−5.605	1.449
(N)	(66)	(89)	(63)	(88)
1970–81	−4.246	3.702	−4.246	3.523
(N)	(70)	(95)	(70)	(94)

states can also be examined by removing those states where the election is essentially uncontested (as indicated by the victor obtaining more than 90 percent of the votes).

Table 2 suggests that average margins of victory are declining somewhat. This decline appears particularly strong in the last period studied by Turett (essentially the second period here); in the more recent decade, it has tapered off (and reversed direction, mildly, in both incumbents' and contested successors' elections). More important, it suggests that incumbents used to achieve narrower margins of victory than successor candidates (partly, but not entirely due to the consideration of uncontested elections), but that relationship had been reversed by the third period studied here. Particularly when uncontested elections are excluded, the 1960s emerge as a pivotal decade, as has been found with congressional incumbency (Alford and Hibbing, 1981).

Examining incumbents' performance assessed against a measure of the expected vote, we see a different story which helps account for the findings reported by Turett. Short-term changes in votes are on average negative, reflecting the widely noted trend toward more competitive elections. Turett's finding, which indicates declines in incumbents' margins (saying nothing about others), reflects, in part, the overall secular trend

toward more competitive elections. Incumbents' relative performance (compared to their expected vote) has been stronger than that of successor candidates throughout the period, but in recent years incumbents have been able to improve on the expected vote rather than simply minimize their losses. At the same time, successor candidates are doing no better (indeed, a bit worse) than they were twenty years ago. This elaborates Piereson's general finding that "incumbency is a growing advantage" (1977, p. 956), as well as extends it by another decade. Apart from this, we can see that the expected vote measure removes the skewing influence of noncompetitive elections, allowing us to incorporate them into the overall analysis without changing the results.

As a result, many of the puzzles about the impact of incumbency appear resolved. Throughout the period studied, incumbents did better than successors. In the 1950s, this relative advantage allowed them to resist the tendency toward more competitive elections, to some degree; in the 1970s, incumbents were able to improve on the baseline expectation established in the recent past, while successor candidates often lost ground. Once again, we confront the incumbency puzzle, to be addressed in a new setting. What factors produce the advantage gubernatorial incumbents enjoy?

Competing Explanations?

The incumbency effect identified here closely parallels the related finding from legislative studies. It appears to have grown during the same time period, and it appears to be comparable in magnitude, although different methods preclude direct comparisons. Accordingly, both conventional wisdom and this related legislative literature shape our efforts to account for the impact of incumbency. As Patterson and Caldeira note, gubernatorial elections "offer a handsome focus for some analytical questions of basic interest" (1983, p. 687). In this case, they provide quasi-autonomous jurisdictions, distinctive but stably bounded constituencies, and sufficient numbers for comparative analysis. This allows us to examine three types of explanations offered for incumbents' advantages. Only one advances clear claims to broader theoretical import, but all propose accounts of the factors favoring incumbents which appear to be testable.

One explanation takes the form of a conjecture, focused on the accumulation of incumbents' advantages; in this view, as the governor serves, experience and political capital accumulate, enhancing the incumbent's prospects in the next election. Paradoxically, other literature argues that longer service in office is associated with increasing losses, as grievances accumulate and political capital is expended. These con-

trasting accounts yield conflicting predictions about the impact of continued gubernatorial service, which will be examined in the next section.

Two other explanations link incumbents' advantages to quite different factors. The public choice literature appears to suggest that the expansion of public services, among its other impacts, provides incumbents with more resources to use in enhancing their political prospects. If so, incumbents' relative success should be linked to these changes. The third explanation to be considered suggests that candidate-based appeals, rather than structural features of the office, determine incumbents' fortunes.

These three explanations may not be mutually exclusive (that is, each might contribute to the incumbency advantage, without reference to the others), but they imply quite different concerns. If length of service contributes to incumbents' advantages, it can, if desired, be limited, as it is in a number of states. If the expansion of the public sector is linked to this growing advantage, conclusions may be drawn about the desirability of this expansion. On the other hand, if candidate-based differences are involved, less manipulable factors are responsible (and concerns over this growing advantage may be regarded as less warranted).

Explaining Incumbency

The Accumulation of Advantages (or Disadvantages?)

Conventional and political wisdom often maintains that incumbents use the powers of their office to improve their initial political standing. At its simplest, this argument implies that incumbents start from an established baseline, enhancing their political position in subsequent elections. The initial results, reported in table 2, suggest that this is true, since incumbents do indeed do better than successors. This argument also appears to be consistent with Erickson's finding that incumbent representatives gain, on the average, in their first reelection effort (1971) and Born's finding that they also post gains in their second effort (1977), while Alford and Hibbing (1981) argue that incumbents continue to enhance their standing, albeit more slowly, in subsequent terms. Still, Born and Erickson argue that no further gains emerge, and Turett (1971) finds that many incumbents suffered declines in their margins of victory, apparently contradicting this contention.

Additional analysis is needed to examine this finding in the gubernatorial context and to test the argument that incumbents are able to improve their standing in subsequent elections. The expected vote measure outlined above can serve as an indicator of the baseline, so, if this simplified argument is accurate, incumbents' short-term achievements in

the previous election should be linked to those in subsequent elections. In other words, successes in one election should provide the basis for continuing, mounting success subsequently (on the other hand, consider Alford and Hibbing's results, 1981). Examining the correlation between the short-term change in incumbents' previous elections with the short-term change in the reelection result, we find that this is modestly true (r = .319). (Turett's simpler measure, the margin of victory, provides a somewhat stronger result, with r = .564; this is to be expected, since the baseline expectation is confounded by this measure.) The result conceals, however, an important period effect: in the first period, r = .464; in the second period, r = .306; and in the third period, r = .127. In addition, the linkage between gains in the last election and gains in this election is stronger for Republicans than Democrats (r = .446 and .231, respectively). Thus, incumbents' ability to capitalize on previous successes was modest in the 1950s, but it has waned to the point of being irrelevant since then.[7]

Much more specific hypotheses are sometimes offered regarding the role of continuing service. These contend that incumbents use their service in office to amass political capital, enhance their personal standing, enlist political supporters, and thwart potential opposition. If true, more extended service should be associated with improved election results. Alford and Hibbing (1981) report supportive findings, while Born's results suggest that the advantages of service wane after the sophomore term (1977, 1979).

On the other hand, as previously noted, the literature on organizational theory proposes a symbolic role for the executive, who serves as a handy—if not always carefully considered—focus for discontent. Literature suggesting that voting is more powerfully shaped by retrospective assessment (Fiorina, 1981a) and/or by a relatively greater motivational force for discontent, the so-called negative voting model (Kernell,

[7] Interestingly, surges in participation (as measured by the collateral measure of short-term change in expected participation) in the incumbent's previous election are more strongly related to the continuing change in participation in this election, with r = .479. This probably reflects important secular trends rather than incumbency effects. A model of causation is implied by the relationships in question. Long-term participation has little relationship to short-term changes in the incumbent's advantages (r = .049) and vice versa (r = .104). Long-term participation and long-term levels of incumbent advantage are inversely related (r = −.570), as are short-term changes in each (as noted, r = −.301). It suggests an unsurprising conclusion: less competitive elections are associated with lower participation, both in the long term and in the short term. This is generally consistent with Patterson and Caldeira's findings (1983), although measurement differences preclude direct comparisons. See the report in appendix 2 on this point as well. The tie between the long-term levels of participation and incumbent advantage has weakened over time, while the association between short-term advantages has varied (as we might expect, given the conception of these measures).

1977) is consistent with this alternative argument. It suggests that incumbency should be a disadvantage, particularly in times of discontent, because the incumbent will be blamed for the course of events in the state, whether or not they can be controlled. If true, the longer a governor is in office, the more these disadvantages accumulate, and the more electoral support will erode.

A related account of these forces, drawn from the literature on presidential popularity, is based on the so-called coalition of minorities hypothesis. Dating back to Mueller's investigation of the linkage between wars and presidential popularity (1973), declines in executive popularity are predicted, other things being equal, over the incumbent's tenure in office. These declines are based on the judgments of many small but distinctive groups offended by particular decisions and indecisions, whose numbers accumulate, reducing the overall level of support. Schlesinger offered a similar model to account for gubernatorial insecurity, suggesting that governors "accumulate grievances" rather than support as they continue in office (1966, pp. 68, 69; noted in Hinckley, 1970, p. 842). These arguments imply, quite immediately, that the longer a governor is in office, the more support will erode.

If true, governors holding office for a four-year term will have lost more support than those holding office for two years. Further, those seeking more than two terms will lose more support than those seeking a second term in office. They also imply that participation will be stimulated by the presence of a long-term incumbent, whose actions invigorate increasing numbers of opponents. The negative voting hypothesis, in particular, ascribes greater motivational force to disaffection than to support and predicts higher turnouts among opponents (Kernell, 1977, p. 60, "disapproval of the President's job performance is associated with higher midterm turnout"). These arguments also require the use of a measure of the deviation from expectations for their assessment, predicting that the deviations will be less favorable to incumbents who have been in office longer. In table 3, the relevant evidence is presented.

As the disaffection hypothesis predicts and as Alford and Hibbing's findings (1981) would suggest, gubernatorial incumbents' relative short-term gains, assessed against a measure of the expected division of the vote, attenuate as they persist in office; this holds true for longer terms and for those seeking additional terms.[8] While participation is depressed in elec-

[8] It might be argued that an artifact of the method has produced the latter result. Since it is based on a moving average of outcomes, the expected division is increasingly composed of earlier elections for that incumbent as more terms accumulate (and the result indicates that surges in support subside). Artifice does not account for the other results predicted by the same hypothesis, since participation is stimulated by further terms (as the hypothesis would

TABLE 3

SHORT-TERM ELECTORAL CHANGES IN GUBERNATORIAL CONTESTS FOR TWO-YEAR AND FOUR-YEAR TERMS AND FIRST FULL TERM, SECOND, THIRD, FOURTH, FIFTH, ETC. TERMS

TIME IN OFFICE MEASURE	(N)	AVERAGE SHORT-TERM CHANGES IN INCUMBENT'S VOTE PERCENTAGE	PARTICIPATION
Term of Office			
Two Years	(160)	1.857	.783
Four Years	(135)	.760*	−1.574
Number of Terms			
First Full Term*	(28)	−4.203*	−.168
Second Term	(200)	2.368	−.604
Third Term	(54)	.665	.550
Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Term	(17)	.506	1.491

* Twenty-eight governors succeeded to office, without a regularly scheduled election; twenty-five of them come from the same party as the incumbent, so they are treated as seeking a "first full term" as an incumbent. Three others come from the opposite party, seeking a four-year term, so they are not included in calculations of the partisan division changes to avoid confounding the impact of the departed incumbent with that of the new incumbent. Four incumbents seeking three-year terms are excluded from the first part of the table.

tions involving first-term incumbents, it appears to be stimulated by an incumbent's persistence; third- and subsequent-term elections are associated with surges in participation. This, too, is consistent with the disaffection hypothesis suggesting that opponents increase as service continues and that they are more likely to participate in subsequent elections. Another result might be viewed as distinctive, but it can also be interpreted as support for the disaffection hypothesis: where a succeeding incumbent runs for a first full term (often produced by an incumbent resigning to take a seat in the Senate or to move on to another office), there are noticeable declines from the expected vote. This can reasonably be attributed to the negative reactions these maneuvers often prompt. A quite separate finding is that more frequently scheduled elections (that is, two-year terms) appear to stimulate participation (compared to four-year terms), a point which I have made elsewhere (Tompkins, 1981).

predict, but which methodological artifice would not have produced, by the same argument), and a four-year term produces less gain than a two-year term (here, too, the hypothesis predicts it, but artifice would produce a reversed result through the fewer number of elections included). With a consistent pattern of results emerging, it is reasonable to discount the influence of this particular aspect of the method.

These findings are similar to those of Alford and Hibbing on House incumbents (1981); a gubernatorial incumbent trying for a second term does markedly better than expected, but in subsequent terms, further additions to support subside. Beyond that, this work suggests that participation is stimulated by such self-seeking. A two-facet mechanism appears to be at work. In the first term in office, gubernatorial incumbents do have opportunities to advance their political fortunes; the impact of these advantages is largely played out by the second term, and the mobilization of discontent begins to affect the incumbent's political career as governor. (Notice the greater increases associated with two-year terms compared to four-year terms, suggesting that the resources of incumbency can be deployed rather quickly, but the disadvantages of service mount in only a few years.) This may provide another explanation for senatorial vulnerability, based on their six-year term rather than on the apparently suspect claim (based on the gubernatorial evidence) that senatorial visibility is responsible for the differences. In general, only small further gains in support emerge (this, too, is consistent with both Alford and Hibbing, and Born, since table 3 is focused on changes in support). Nonetheless, the picture of secular declines in popularity may also be consistent with these findings – the longer a governor is in office, the more incumbency's advantage diminishes.

These findings present a mixed picture of incumbency, where the initial advantages of office enhance electoral prospects while the accumulating burdens detract from them. But no direct explanation is provided for the results. One possible explanation is that asymmetries in voters' evaluations of incumbents produce the problem: blamed for bad tidings, less frequently rewarded for good news, the incumbent will ultimately lose some of the initial advantages of office. These evaluations are presumably tied to governors' abilities to affect the course of state government; the more resources the governors control, and the more power they have over such resources, the more able the incumbents are to influence electoral rewards and sanctions (or, perhaps, the more vulnerable they are).

Bureaucratic Resources?

This commonly offered explanation for the advantage of legislative incumbency is most clearly expressed within a public choice perspective. A simplified account suggests that Congress establishes new programs, which individual incumbents, as rational actors seeking reelection, claim credit for obtaining. These expanded public commitments are only generally shaped, leaving specific applications to bureaucratic initiative and discretion. The process of translating general commitments into formal rules and procedures creates grievances and difficulties; legislators

then offer their services as ombudsmen. In this process, incumbent legislators are able to claim credit for new public services, to offer redress and succor to those affected by bureaucratic elaborations of these new commitments (thus shielding legislators from responsibility), and finally, to deplore the results of this process by attributing it to institutional rather than personal factors (see Fiorina, 1977a, 1977b).

Extensive and controversial testing of some elements of this argument has been taking place in legislative studies. In particular, a number of studies have examined the influence of legislative casework services and other contacts coming through newsletters, "baby books," and the like (for example, Johannes and McAdams, 1981; McAdams and Johannes, 1983; Fiorina, 1981b; and Cover and Brumberg, 1982). Nonetheless, the conjecture also includes the hypothesis that incumbency effects are linked to improved opportunities for porkbarreling (See Fiorina, 1977a, p. 180; 1977b, pp. 41–42, 44, 46, 48, and Appendix). Less attention has been paid to this part of the argument. Two factors account for the neglect: As Alford and Hibbing (1981) point out, at the federal level, growth has been relatively constant, while the incumbency effect appears to have emerged more abruptly. Moreover, they rule out generational accounts of incumbency effects which might otherwise be linked to federal government growth.

Hirschman (1982) offers an essentially contradictory prediction. In his account, expanded public services inflate expectations about the contribution these services will make to public happiness. These expectations are disappointed, leading to disillusionment and withdrawal from public activity. For an incumbent politician, this frustration might be expected to have negative consequences, while the accompanying withdrawal may depress participation.

Governors appear to offer a useful setting for the examination of these contrasting arguments both of which suggest that incumbency's advantage is tied to the growth in public services. Unlike members of Congress, they face diverse constituencies, with state services elaborated at substantially different levels and during different time periods. Perhaps even more directly, governors, as political executives, are held responsible for the general activities of state government; and, at the same time, they, too, serve as ombudsmen and service delivery agents for their constituents. Indeed, the role may be sharpened for them.

A series of simple tests offers little comfort for either position. The relationship between bureaucratization and incumbency effects should be positive if the picture of self-interested incumbents using public sector growth as a mechanism to improve reelection prospects is accurate; it should be negative if Hirschman's dashed-expectations hypothesis is accurate (and participation should be reduced). The purest measure of

state government size appears to be the number of (full-time equivalent) state employees, which avoids confounding states' wealth and other exogenous features with the core issue of bureaucratization.[9] This measure of size is essentially unrelated to short-term changes in incumbents' fortunes (measured as above, $r = -.032$). Removing the influence of state size by using a per capita employment measure and thus measuring bureaucratization, does not improve matters much ($r = .143$). We might object to these static tests, but a test of the relationship between growth in employment and changes in support fares no better ($r = -.029$; an adjustment for yearly growth does not change the situation, $r = .019$). Hirschman's withdrawal hypothesis fares even worse, since changes in state employment are positively associated with short-term improvements in participation (for yearly change in employment, $r = .257$).

The picture of self-enhancing incumbent activity rests on the presumption that governors control public activity in the states. Perhaps, then, public attributions of responsibility (and therefore their sanctions at the polls) are influenced by gubernatorial control over state activity. Here, too, there is substantial interstate variability (Beyle and Dalton, 1981; Dometrius, 1979), making this a more sensitive focus for a test of this claim. These powers also shape the governor's ability to allocate rewards and punishments, so they play a role in any porkbarreling behavior, implying a direct link to the larger public-choice explanation of incumbency effects. Neither overall gubernatorial power, measured by Dometrius's index, nor its components (appointment powers and budgetary powers), are related to changes in electoral fortunes or to participation (for short-term changes in votes, $r = -.041$, $-.027$, and $-.060$, respectively; for participation changes, $r = .001$, $.041$, and $-.113$).

These null findings cast substantial doubts on one portion of the "bureaucracy did it" account of incumbency's advantage. While they say nothing about changes in incumbents' behavior, or about the influence of changes in staff composition (or its use), they do cast doubt on the hypothesized tie between the growth in the public sector and incumbents' improving fortunes. A more statistically persuasive test would incorporate these explanations into fully elaborated models of gubernatorial election outcomes; lacking both fully established models and measures of some key factors influencing all of these elections—consider, for example, campaign spending (Patterson, 1982)—such a test is impossible for now. In appendix 2, a simple multivariate exploration of the factors examined

[9] Turett reports a related analysis, examining the relationship of expenditure effort with vote margins, finding no relationship (1971, p. 120). The measure appears objectionable on the noted grounds. Data on full-time equivalent state employment first become available in 1954 (except in Connecticut, where it is not reported until the following biennium).

here, using OLS regression, is reported; its value is limited by uncertainties about model identification and the related problem of specifications of causal priority. The literature is not particularly helpful in these matters, in part because a dynamic model, predicting changes in outcomes, is involved. (The problems are explained in more detail in Hanushek and Jackson, 1977, pp. 246–50.)

This exploratory effort suggests that important period effects are involved. In the first period (1947–59), the variables involved have little predictive success; the greater success in the second period (1960–69) wanes in the third period (1970–81). In the second period, public sector expansion is associated with stimulated participation, and by the third period, bureaucratization appears to be linked to improved incumbent fortunes. Gubernatorial power appears to play little role in influencing electoral prospects throughout this period.

While their ultimate value is suggestive, these analyses are useful for several reasons. Interstate and intrastate differences in bureaucratization are considered, while incumbents' performance is measured through their ability to improve on a locally developed baseline. Since measures of political and bureaucratic change are employed, a dynamic model is assessed. Finally, state executives are clearly visible and their performance (and, therefore, its electoral consequences) should be tied directly to changes in governmental activity. The very limited support we find for the "enhance the bureaucracy/enhance the incumbent" proposition raises a number of issues. Apart from the period effects which appear to be involved (on the basis of limited evidence), the findings also suggest that the mechanism involved in these conjectures requires further elaboration. At the very least, we probably need to distinguish between political executives and legislators—perhaps it also raises new doubts about the importance of these explanations for the emergence of the incumbency advantage in the 1960s.

Do the Best Succeed?

A quite different, and simple conjecture about incumbents' advantages suggests that their performance in office will influence electoral outcomes. The better their performance, the more successful they will be in seeking reelection. While we have no data on good members of Congress, save for the occasional effort to identify the "ten dumbest" members, Sabato has reported a systematic effort to identify the "outstanding" governors from 1950 to 1975 (1978). While this reputational exercise must be viewed as hazardous,[10] it does provide us with a

[10] A number of concerns can be raised about this classification effort: it is essentially impressionistic, with no effort made to assure its replicability. Consider the criteria Sabato of-

measure of success in office, developed outside the analysis performed here. Unfortunately, it may also reflect political success as an implicit standard of achievement and thus be essentially circular. For example, Sigelman and Smith (1981) were only modestly successful in attempting to predict a governor's reputation using background and structural variables. Still, other things being equal, we might hope that successful incumbents do well at the polls, while less successful governors do less well.

Sabato's effort identifies 117 governors as outstanding (37.5 percent of those he examined) and further distinguishes the twelve most outstanding. Many served in states where reelection was not permitted at the time, while others' primary service came in earlier years. Our test of the "rewards of performance" proposition then is limited to those governors seeking election between 1950 and 1974, comparing the fortunes of all those elected with those seeking reelection, and comparing the reelection fortunes of those identified as outstanding with the remainder regarded as less outstanding.

These results suggest that outstanding governors fare better at the polls. Compared with the remainder, merely outstanding governors appear to achieve gains of about 4 percent above the expected level of support, while those Sabato considers to be the most distinguished of all do more than a percentage point better than that. There is some small decrease in participation associated with the most successful governors, suggesting that they may be the beneficiaries of voters' complacency. This is largely a test of the link (not necessarily causal) between external reputation and political success, but it does at least suggest that outstanding reputations are related to political success.

Conclusion

The analysis of gubernatorial incumbents' fortunes is dominated by the

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fers, which he draws from Kallenbach: "a governor should be evaluated on his ability as a judge of men, ability to make hard decisions and assume responsibility, political sensitivity and timing, political audacity and zest for combat, ability to inspire confidence and loyalty, sense of proportion and perspective, and ability to withstand unfair criticism" (Sabato, 1978, p. 53). While the partisan composition of the governors identified as outstanding is fortuitously balanced, the selection process appears to favor activist styles. Consider the statement, "As one source consulted for this study commented when asked his opinion of a prominent Border state governor: 'He's outstanding, even if a crook' " (Sabato, 1978, p. 54). Nonetheless, it does appear to include most of those governors generally viewed as most capable. Objections to it suggest that, at the worst, it represents a modest test of the rewards of virtue. More critically, it may have elements of a self-fulfilling prophecy, since outstanding governors may achieve their reputation through political, and therefore electoral success, rather than through other aspects of their job performance. Thus this is a weak test of the hypothesis.

TABLE 4

SHORT-TERM CHANGES AFFECTING GUBERNATORIAL CONTESTS FOR INCUMBENT'S ELECTIONS BY SABATO'S REPUTATIONAL RANKING

REPUTATION OF INCUMBENT	(N)*	SHORT-TERM CHANGES IN INCUMBENT'S VOTE PERCENTAGE	PARTICIPATION
Most Outstanding Incumbents	(14)	5.141	−.606
Outstanding Incumbents	(106)	4.167	.130
Other Incumbents	(123)	−.308*	.553

* Each election is considered separately, two other incumbent elections involve cases where a candidate of the other party takes office before a regularly scheduled election – so the number of cases considered in this instance is two less than the number considered in measuring participation changes.

process of secular change. Competition stimulates participation, while uneventful contests retard it. The 1960s appear to have been a critical period for governors, as it was for members of the U.S. House, although this work does not resolve the debate over the cause of the changes which emerge. Still, an incumbency advantage is nothing new for governors; they benefit from the general fortunes of their party (since that shapes their prospects), but they also have done better than successor candidates in this modern era. Incumbency appears to involve two forces at odds with each other: the initial advantages which come with the office, improving their prospects, and the subsequent burdens associated with service, which stimulate participation and erode the incumbents' abilities to enhance their standings. Public choice explanations for the impact of incumbency require further analysis; it seems clear that relative advantages in gubernatorial power make no difference, and that the growth of the public sector is linked to some gains in participation (perhaps contrary to Hirschman's expectation). Bureaucratization may now play some role in enhancing incumbents' prospects, but this is a recent phenomenon, if true; it does not account for the important changes in incumbents' advantages in the 1960s. Other findings underscore the importance of candidate-based forces (such as the gains achieved by Sabato's outstanding governors). They also suggest that much remains to be explained, since the comprehensive, if exploratory model of the factors associated with electoral change is only modestly successful at predicting these changes.

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Appendix 1: The Treatment of Gubernatorial Electoral Series

The problem of disentangling long-term patterns and short-term changes from them poses a number of difficulties when tackled using only aggregated election return data. Some of these are insurmountable, such as the level-of-analysis problem (requiring the development of measures that presumably have an individual-level analog using only aggregate data). I have argued elsewhere (Tompkins, 1980) that a relatively simple approach can be employed to perform a decomposition of an electoral series that is generally satisfactory for the purposes of identifying meaningful long-term and short-term components in an election series. While gubernatorial elections pose greater difficulties for other methodologies, based on curve-fitting algorithms, they are easily treated within this framework.

The first problem that such series pose is the off-year to on-year cycle – presumably in the years in which presidents are elected there is some surge in the number and character of the participants. To account for this, the series can be seasonally adjusted – in this case, by deflating on-year elections by a measure of this surge. The simplest approach, the difference between mean on-year levels and mean off-year levels, also appears to be the most satisfactory. Since a major realignment is generally regarded as emerging in the early 1930s, these differences are best calculated over the post-1932 period, avoiding confusion with the realignment process and the infusion of women into the electorate. Accordingly, where states have both on-year and off-year elections, the level of participation and the percentage vote for Democratic candidates are seasonally adjusted by this process. In five states – Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, New Jersey, and New York – changes in gubernatorial terms affect the results of this adjustment, since the differences would be attributed to a few unusual elections (for example, Illinois changed from on-year to off-year elections in 1978), so the election results are not adjusted for these cases. The Democratic vote share is used for a measure of the partisan division since it involves less fluctuation from decisions to offer a candidate in particular elections and from independent candidacies.

This adjusted data series must then be partitioned into its long-term component (roughly a measure of a normal vote) and its short-term component (roughly a measure of the election-specific forces involved). Notice that we are interested in breaking down a current election result into these two distinctive components, not in forecasting a subsequent result. Two polar strategies can be identified: one would attempt to fit the series with a time-series function (such as of the ARIMA family), using past information to approximate most closely the current election result, while the other would use long-ranging historical averages as measures of the long-term component, leaving remaining variation to be attributed to more transitory forces. The first strategy confuses transitory electoral forces which persist for an election or two (and would normally be regarded as short-term features) with more durable characteristics of the partisan division. Apart from that, estimation of such a function proves to be an ambiguous enterprise with these series, rendering any results suspect. The second strategy is far too insensitive to the evolutionary processes characterizing political change in recent years.

Accordingly, a strategy that amounts to an intermediate approach is employed: a twelve-year-backcast moving average measure, including the current value, is computed for each point in the series. This value is treated as the long-term component of the election outcome, presumably attributable to the underlying partisan division, while the remainder is treated as the short-term component, a measure of immediate election forces. The year-based backcast overcomes the problems produced by unequal timing of gubernatorial elections (which are set, nonetheless, in a larger electoral system with predictable timing). The twelve-year frame best satisfies the order condition which we would impose—balancing the variation incorporated into the remaining short-term change measure with the degree of stability captured by the long-term measure. (Eight years or less hardly seems to produce a long-term measure, but sixteen years leaves a substantial persisting element attributed to the short-term component.)

Thus, each election result (with the Democratic vote share and participation examined separately) is subjected to the following process to produce the measures used here. Within each state, the seasonal adjustment value is subtracted from the Democratic vote share and the participation proportion in each on-year election, while off-year elections are used as is; these values are treated as the seasonally adjusted election results. They are then broken down into the long-term component (a twelve-year moving average of results, including the current election and cast back twelve years—thereby including at least four elections' values in the result) and a short-term component (the difference between the seasonally adjusted outcome and the long-term component).

The consequences of this procedure are examined in more detail in Tompkins (1980). It should be noted that Piereson (1977) also uses what he calls "a floating average." He uses a four-year span, which appears to be insufficient to produce a long-term measure and which introduces variations attributable to presidential-year surges in participation and interest. He employs a measure that is properly not a "floating average," but rather a "floating minimum," to set his baseline—this is unlikely to reflect accurately the baseline where substantial ticket-splitting takes place (and, indeed, his finding of greater advantage in the 1960s may well be attributable to a baseline lowered by increasing ticket-splitting). Finally, he uses national legislative offices (Senate and House) to establish this baseline, but this requires a problematic assumption that national- and state-level politics are inevitably intermixed. This assumption is particularly troublesome in off-years, since governors are the most visible officials standing for election then (see Sabato, 1978, p. 8, for a review of some evidence). Since many states have moved to off-year gubernatorial elections, this point appears to be more important in recent years. This separability renders any standardization process which uses national elections suspect. (Turett, 1971, presents some evidence on separability of state and national elections consistent with this argument, for much of the

period under study here; Hinckley, 1970, also provides some mixed evidence on the distinctiveness of senatorial and gubernatorial elections, particularly in off-years.) Finally, if we inspect the mean level of short-term change produced by this new measure, we find that variations among the states, in any given year, are far more substantial than variations in the mean level of change over the years. This, too, suggests that intrastate differences dominate national variations from one year to the next. It is important to note that this procedure is conceptually related to Patterson's use of 1956–76 gubernatorial election results to produce a baseline measure of partisanship; other background work on the method employed here (Tompkins, 1980) suggests that he has considered an unnecessarily long span (reducing the ability to explain immediate election results) and has confounded his results by not adjusting data for surges in participation and partisanship associated with presidential years. The methods employed here are closely related to those employed by Hopkins and Lyons (1980), Flanigan and Zingale (1980), and Hofstetter (1973) as well.

Appendix 2: A Preliminary Multivariate Assessment

The bivariate assessments of the major explanations for the incumbency effect which are included in the text are troublesome in several ways. Most important, they risk confusing parallel secular changes, treating spurious relationships as important. So, for example, gubernatorial elections have become more competitive while the public sector has grown; it may be that these trends are unrelated, but any measure of association will reflect their correlation over the time periods involved (or, since little relationship appears in the bivariate case, it may reflect the net effect of a positive causal tie between the two, but a negative association between the secular trends in each variable).

The most statistically desirable approach would involve the development and estimation of a model of the various forces influencing incumbents' abilities to improve on their baseline expectations. This model would reflect intertwined causality (that is, for example, our belief that short-term changes in voting shares and in participation are mutually related), the ordering of various explanatory forces, and the full array of significant influences on these outcomes. We lack models to inform the ordering; we lack data on key variables influencing outcomes, such as, for example, campaign spending—as in Patterson's investigation of 1978 elections (1982)—and we lack a broader theoretical backdrop which could inform the process. As a result, this assessment is not feasible.

Still, some preliminary results bear review. A simple exploratory strategy involves the estimation of relative importance of each factor considered, using OLS regression. Multicollinearity among some of these factors may cloud parameter estimates. The equations are generally unimpressive at predicting results, but this is due, in part, to a demanding task: unlike some predictions of election outcomes, long-term components of the electoral series have been extracted, leaving only short-term components to be explained. Whatever stochastic error remains is incorporated in the latter component, much as it is in a difference equation model, so the feasible predictive performance of these equations is probably lower than in other such cases. (Patterson's work is an example of a case where this year's overall vote is predicted using previous votes, so, in effect, he predicts the net effect of the expected vote plus changes from it. See 1982, p. 466.) Finally, this analysis explores factors influencing incumbents' relative success, considered separately; the first section of the paper should be consulted for an estimate of the magnitude of an overall incumbency effect (incumbents compared to successor candidates).

Table 5 reports parameter estimates for the cases in question. We have already seen evidence suggesting period effects in these cases, so separate equations are estimated for our three periods.

TABLE 5

OLS ESTIMATES OF FACTORS INFLUENCING INCUMBENT'S SUCCESS
STANDARDIZED REGRESSION COEFFICIENT (BETA) ESTIMATES

	SHORT-TERM COMPONENTS (INCUMBENT'S)							
	VOTE PERCENT				PARTICIPATION LEVELS			
		PERIOD				PERIOD		
FACTOR	OVERALL	I	II	III	OVERALL	I	II	III
Political								
Last Election's								
S.-T. Vote	.322**	.62**	.23	.25				
S.-T. Partic.					.522**	.30	.49**	.35**
Long Term								
Vote Percent	.051	.09	−.03	.23				
Participation					.039	.02	−.07	−.06
Short Term								
Vote Percent					−.268**	.28	−.36**	−.26*
Participation	−.275**	.07	−.33**	−.37*				
Length of Service								
Years in Term	−.279**	−.07	−.27*	−.32*	−.307**	−.35	−.23*	−.29*
Ln(# of Terms)[a]	−.204**	−.17	−.27**	−.10	.082	−.14	.16	.15
Bureaucratization								
Employment/Cap.	.151*	−.13	.12	.34*				
Yearly Growth					.215**	−.02	.25**	.26*
Gov. Power	.039	.00	.05	.02	.052	−.14	.14	−.02
Ln(Reputation)[a]	.265**	.16	.29**	.36**	.086	.12	.17	.18
R-Square	.315	.39	.40	.31	.519	.20	.52	.34
Adjusted *R*-Square	.286	.26	.33	.22	.498	.03	.47	.24
(N)	(192)	(46)	(81)	(63)	(192)	(46)	(81)	(63)

[a] Two variables are log-transformed; the distributions' shape, as reported in text, and predictive power support this.

* Indicates *t*-test value sufficient to establish coefficient's significance at .05 level.

** Indicates *t*-test value sufficient to establish coefficient's significance at .01 level.