

# Determinants of party and mayor reelection in local governments: An empirical examination for Argentina during 1983-2011\*

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## Abstract

This paper examines the determinants of reelection of parties and mayors in Argentine local elections during the 1983-2011 period. Using a unique and comprehensive database recording local election results for over 1600 local governments, we test three potential sources of variation: structural factors, political/institutional variables and economic variables. We find that incumbency advantage is strongly and significantly related with a higher probability of reelection. We also find that localities with high structural poverty tend to have higher probability of reelection. Finally, we find that local governments with large population and with municipal charters have lower probability of reelection. For robustness, we recast the electoral data to yield data at the unit of analysis of the electoral cycle. We test the same variables as determinants of the duration of the cycle. The results are very much in line with the main section.

Keywords: Reelection; Transfers; Fiscal Policy; Local Governments

JEL Codes: H72; C23; C25

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# 1 Background and motivation

In most federal regimes there are (at least) three levels of government –federal, state/provincial and local. While there has been much study on the inter-governmental relations, most of the work has focused on the federal-state relations. Only a small fraction of both theoretical and applied work has studied economic and political aspects of inter-governmental relations looking at the local level [[Brollo and Nannicini \(2012\)](#), [Timmons and Broid \(2013\)](#), [Arvate \(2013\)](#), [Sour \(2013\)](#), [Boulding and Brown \(2014\)](#), [Freille and Capello \(2014\)](#), [Bracco et al. \(2015\)](#), [Rodríguez-Chamussy \(2015\)](#)]

The plan of the paper is as follows. In section 1, we review the literature and outline some theoretical considerations that motivate our analysis. Section 2 describes characteristics of the Argentine local government system. Section 3 describes the data and the methodology of estimation. Section 4 concludes.

## 2 Intergovernmental relations in a federal system

According to [Cingolani et al. \(0009\)](#), most recent work on the area of intergovernmental relations stress the allocation and distribution of financial resources between the different levels of government. The literature on fiscal federalism has gradually shifted from the study of efficiency and welfare effects associated with different decentralized settings to the study of the political rents derived by governments from different levels from the allocation and distribution of funds and grants [[Bordalejo \(2005\)](#), [Paniagua \(2012\)](#)]. In other words, this literature highlights the role and examines the consequences of the existing institutional arrangements, the different trends at the subnational level and the wide range of motivations of political actors.

The study of political aspects of federalism involves a fundamental question: whether the logic behind the the inter-governmental allocation of resources is programatic or particularistic. This depends on different factors –economic, political, etc- as has been pointed out by [Cingolani et al. \(0009\)](#). Factors such as political power, electoral competition and the institutional design are relevant to explain the degree to which different parties and politicians can engage in either type of allocation. In light of this, it is important to note the role of the characteristics of the electoral and party system. This is all the more relevant in federal countries where electoral politics takes place amidst a mix of national,

regional and local parties competing for offices at different levels of government.

[Suárez Cao \(2011\)](#) examines whether Argentine political federalism has become more entrenched as political competition at the sub-national level has become ever more influential on national politics. The author suggests that the 1994 Constitutional reform strengthened the power asymmetries between the President and the governors against the latter although governors still retain some bargaining power over two aspects: the legislative coalition and territorial support for the Presidential race. She supports these claims using Other authors have suggested that it is not the state-level but rather the local-level government which has gained a prominent role in federal politics. This is what [Fenwick \(2010\)](#) argues suggesting that given certain institutional configurations, the national government may better achieve its policy goals by collaborating directly with local governments. She shows that this appears to have been the case in the area of social protection in Brazil. The type of institutional arrangements leading to an effective national-local coalition, she argues, is less likely to appear in a country like Argentina where local governments are more likely to be captured by state-level governments. [González \(2012\)](#) also provides a comparative study between Argentina and Brazil concluding that state-level governments have maintained (Argentina) or reduced (Brazil) their political power in the period 1983-2009.

Argentina experienced a huge reshuffle of inter-governmental relations during the 90's decade when several public services were transferred from the nation-level to the sub-national level –education, health. During the 00's decade, Argentine inter-governmental relations took in another big change as the national government allocated a vast amount of social spending and infrastructure directly to the local governments. The increase in non-targeted social programs administered by the national government during the last decade together with the formation of “league of municipalities” allied to the national government has meant that national-local relations have increased.

### **3 Local governments in a federal country: The Argentine case**

Argentina is politically organized as a federal country with three overlapping levels of government: Federal level (1 unit), province level (24 units) and local level (2259 units). The financial relations between different levels of government are governed by the so-

called Régimen de Coparticipación Impositiva. This regime basically sets up a tax-sharing scheme between the Federal and provincial levels of government: there are both nation- and province-level taxes. The latter are raised and collected by the provinces while the former are raised and collected by the Nation. A fraction of the amount collected in national taxes –called the Masa Co-participable– is “devolved” to the provinces (the so-called automatic transfers) while the rest goes to finance expenditures by the National government and the Social Security System<sup>1</sup>. The Federal government also grants discretionary, non-automatic transfers to the provinces.

After the Federal level, provinces are the second most important level of government accounting for nearly 40% of total consolidated public spending. Although total spending by local (municipal) governments has been increasing in the last 10 years, it represents a minor fraction –around 7%- of total consolidated public spending.

As of 2010, there are 2259 recognized local governments in Argentina, half of which have the legal status of municipality<sup>1</sup>. Local governments elect their own representatives and receive transfers from both the provincial and national governments. In most provinces, a population of at least 10000 is required for a municipality to earn the right of sanctioning their own municipal charter. Smaller local governments are not given this right. In many aspects, Argentine municipalities are afforded a great deal of autonomy by law. Due to the tax-sharing system, however, in practice municipalities are heavily dependent on both automatic and discretionary transfers from above. This is the case for the large majority of Argentine local governments where own-source municipal revenues amount to less than half of total revenues; in many cases, own-source revenues are less than 10% of total revenues. In other words, on average for municipalities in over half of the Argentine provinces, only around 3 out of 10 *pesos* –the local currency- are locally collected<sup>2</sup>.

Municipal governments in Argentina are heterogenous in several aspects. They differ

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<sup>1</sup>Each province has its own municipal regime which, among other things, specify the population criteria for being considered a municipality and provisions regarding their autonomy. The population requirements are usually higher in larger provinces –criteria range from 2000 to 10000 for Santa Fe, Córdoba and Salta- than in smaller provinces –criteria range from 500 to 1000 for Catamarca, Corrientes, Chaco, La Pampa, Neuquén and Santa Cruz. Several provinces define different types of municipalities according with population size; this often entails different fiscal and political autonomy regimes. The legal status for units not meeting the population requirement for a municipality varies between provinces –Comisión de Fomento, Comuna, Comisión Municipal, Delegación Municipal, Comisión Rural- although most of them face similar restrictions on their fiscal and political autonomy.

<sup>2</sup>This includes the sale of public assets and capital resources which are highly volatile.

in total population –three municipalities with over a million inhabitants while several municipalities in Chaco, Corrientes and other provinces have less than 1000 inhabitants-, economic status –from rich and resourceful agricultural and industrial districts with large tax bases to desolate and impoverished municipalities with little own-source revenues-, and the extent of their capacity and autonomy –municipalities providing a wide range of public services to municipalities providing only the most basic set of services. Figure 3 shows the average local government population and the total number of local governments by province. The five largest provinces –Buenos Aires (BUE), Mendoza (MZA), Córdoba (CBA), Santa Fe (SFE), and Entre Ríos (ERI) have very different distributions of local governments. While the first two have the largest average population by local government, local governments in the latter are amongst the least populated districts on average. For all the other provinces, however, a clear pattern emerges: there seems to be negative association between total number of local governments and average population size.

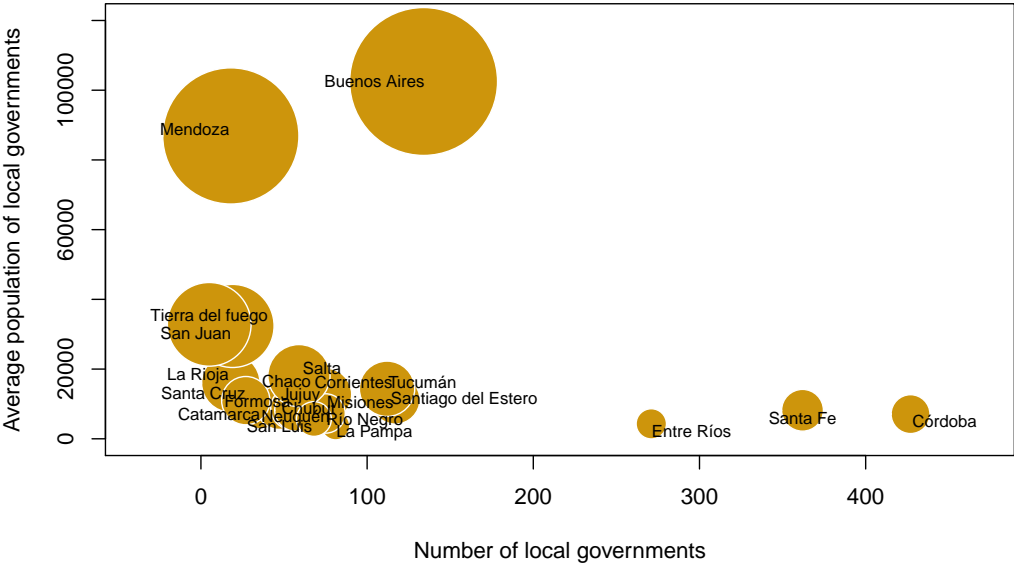


Figure 1: Number of local governments and average population by district size (total population)

## 4 Data and methodology

Our data includes 1804 local governments<sup>3</sup>. If we rank municipal governments according to their population size, the top 1%, 5% and 10% comprised 35%, 68% and 80% of total population in 2011. Equivalently, the remaining 90% of the local governments –around 1750 local governments- comprise only around 20% of total population.

Although we have a balanced panel structure –1804 local units observed for 8 periods– we were unable to collect election data for all governments and periods. We have complete data –all 8 (eight) municipal elections for all local governments- only for a few provinces (Buenos Aires, Chaco, San Juan, Santa Fe, Mendoza). For most provinces we missing data particularly for the first 3 or 4 elections. If we exclude the 1983, 1987 and 1991 election, our data on election and reelection covers almost 94% (parties) and 87% (mayors) of total amount of elections in this period (a total of 9026 local government elections).

We have complete electoral history on incumbency, reelection/change for over 1300 local governments and around 920 local mayors.

We build on a very basic model of reelection by just including two types of variables: incumbency dummies (*pjinc* and *ucrinc* and political alignment with the state level government (*align*). Due to data limitations, we were unable to collect enough data on the local government’s degree of electoral competition and other political variables. We introduce a few additional controls for structural (economic and social) factors that may have an effect on the probability of reelection –i.e.

## 5 Parties

We first examine the determinants of reelection of parties and mayors. Since the outcome variable is binary –1 when a party/mayor is reelected; 0 otherwise-, we use a generalized linear model to run the data models. Table 1 and 3 below present the results of the regressions of reelection of parties and mayors respectively. Looking at Table 1 we see that all variables have the expected sign. Incumbent parties, specially the two biggest

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<sup>3</sup>There are 1947 local governments in our original database but we exclude two provinces from consideration, Corrientes and Santiago del Estero. These provinces were intervened by the Federal government during the 90’s decade. Due to these interventions, local elections were often held at irregular periods and did not follow the electoral calendar of other provinces.

parties in Argentina –*Partido Justicialista* and *Unión Cívica Radical*- have both a greater impact on the probability of reelection compared to being incumbent from other parties. Also, there are benefits from being part of the political coalition at the state level as this has a positive effect on the probability of reelection.

We split in three sub-periods according to political leadership and economic policies: the Alfonsín years (1983 through to 1991); the Menem years (1995, 1991 and 2003 elections); and the Kirchner period (2007 and 2011 elections). Although this may be arbitrary, the political dynamics and economic structure of each of these periods were starkly different and it is probably a good idea to consider them separately. Although the qualitatively results do not change, it can be seen that the political alignment dummy, *align1*, switches signs between the different periods. While in the 1983-1991 period, this may be due to the large number of municipalities governed by the *Partido Justicialista*; in the 1995-2003 this is likely due to a significant increase in party change after the economic and political crisis in 2001. The last column shows the odd-ratios for the full sample with year dummies.

Table 2 run models with additional control variables such as population employment and percentage of population with at least one NBI –both variables measured at the department-level, meaning they only vary between departments, not between local governments. Models are run both using pooled logistic regression and generalized linear mixed-effects models. As expected, it can be seen that the party dummies are strongly significant. The percentage of population employed is statistically significant and positive which is also expected. Rather counter-intuitively, the percentage of population with NBI is positively associated with the probability of reelection. We do not have thus far a good theoretical explanation that may support the statistical evidence. Figure 5 shows plots for random intercepts for both provinces and departments; this graph allows us to capture some of the specific characteristics associated with provinces and departments which are not captured by any of our control variables.

## 6 Mayors

On average for the whole sample, mayor reelection rates are lower than those of parties. The mean reelection rate of parties stands at 59% while that of mayors stands at 47%. This may be due to several factors such as the existence of term limits, furthering political careers, and other institutional constraints such as party primaries. For example, our

Table 1:

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>				
	All	reelecp1			All
		Yrs 1983- 1991	Yrs 1995- 2003	Yrs 2007- 2011	
pjinc	5.352*** (0.147)	8.075*** (0.718)	7.119*** (0.269)	3.374*** (0.199)	5.777*** (0.154)
ucrinc	5.653*** (0.195)	21.224 (390.821)	6.237*** (0.272)	4.189*** (0.291)	6.126*** (0.201)
align1	0.555*** (0.068)	-0.467** (0.185)	-0.626*** (0.171)	1.219*** (0.093)	0.673*** (0.072)
factor(year)1991					0.129 (0.160)
factor(year)1995					-0.119 (0.167)
factor(year)1999					-0.092 (0.158)
factor(year)2003					-1.216*** (0.169)
factor(year)2007					0.619*** (0.138)
factor(year)2011					1.032*** (0.132)
Constant	-1.592*** (0.045)	-1.481*** (0.114)	-2.130*** (0.086)	-1.223*** (0.062)	-1.939*** (0.124)
Observations	10,091	2,700	4,502	2,889	10,091
Log Likelihood	-2,985.823	-417.760	-789.042	-1,472.599	-2,796.055
Akaike Inf. Crit.	5,979.647	843.519	1,586.084	2,953.197	5,612.111

*Note:*

\*p&lt;0.1; \*\*p&lt;0.05; \*\*\*p&lt;0.01



Table 2:

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	reelecp1			
	<i>logistic</i>		<i>generalized linear mixed-effects</i>	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
pjinc	3.788*** (0.208)	3.923*** (0.212)	7.477*** (0.446)	7.465*** (0.440)
ucrinc	3.969*** (0.231)	4.179*** (0.236)	5.787*** (0.459)	5.837*** (0.462)
align1	0.738*** (0.104)	0.786*** (0.105)	0.192 (0.141)	0.185 (0.141)
popocup_dept	0.057*** (0.006)	0.094*** (0.009)	0.133*** (0.011)	0.157*** (0.014)
nbipob_dept		0.055*** (0.010)		0.065*** (0.018)
Constant	-3.663*** (0.267)	-5.775*** (0.478)	-7.370*** (0.717)	-9.208*** (0.894)
Observations	2,889	2,889	2,889	2,889
Log Likelihood	-1,319.296	-1,303.749	-1,100.939	-1,094.818
Akaike Inf. Crit.	2,648.592	2,619.498	2,215.877	2,205.636
Bayesian Inf. Crit.			2,257.658	2,253.385
<i>Note:</i>			*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

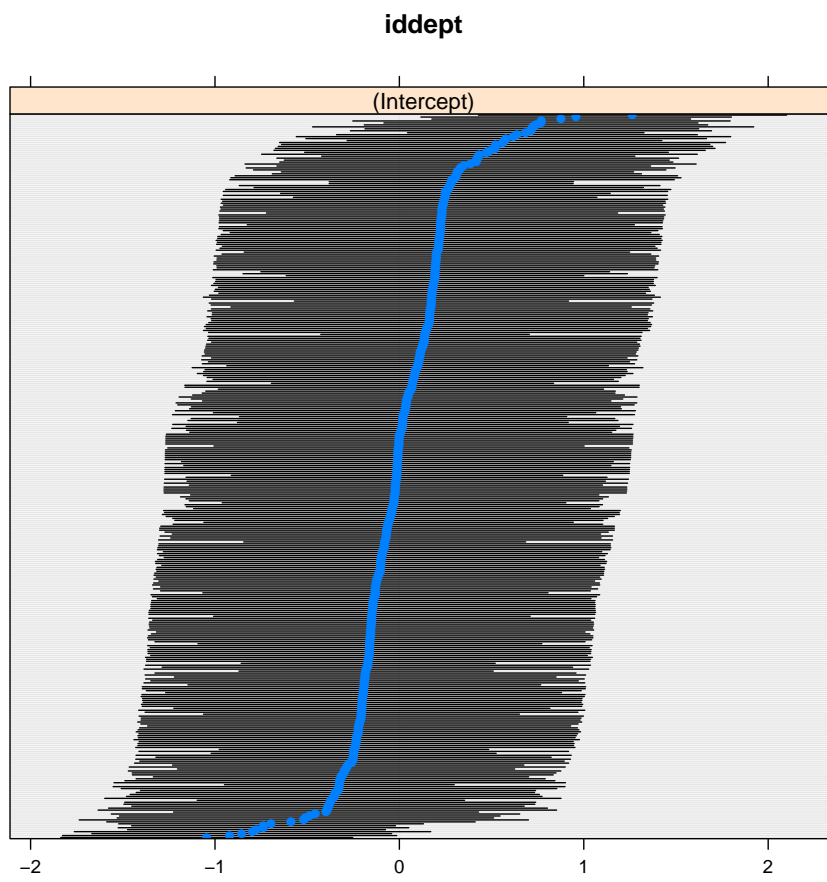


Figure 2: Random intercepts for “departments”

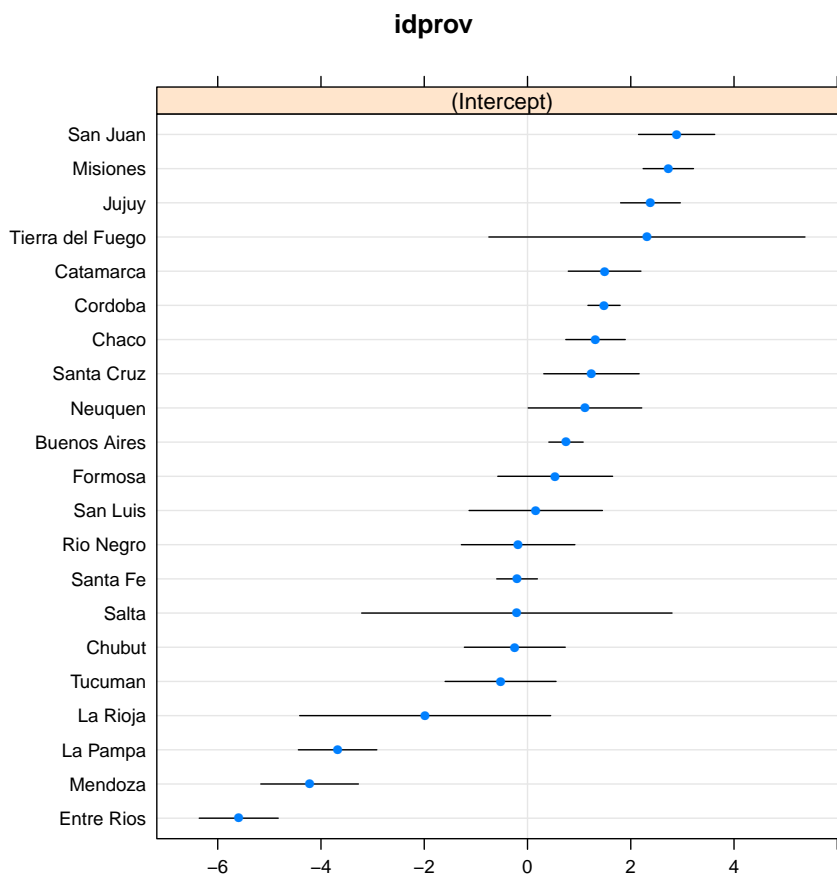


Figure 3: Random intercepts for “provinces”

data shows that the reelection rate for mayors in governments with municipal charter is only 37% while it is almost 40% higher (reelection rate of 51%) in governments without municipal charter. In this section we test a model of mayor reelection using a model much like that of the previous section but with a few variables controlling for personal and local-level characteristics.

The first and last models in Table 3 include all years. Columns 2 through 4 run the models using specific time periods. Model 2 includes elections from 1983, 1987 and 1991, model 3 includes the 1995, 1999 and 2003 election and finally model 4 includes only 2007 and 2011. The choice of sub-periods is not entirely arbitrary as each period corresponds itself with a different political and economic structure (Alfonsín and aftermath during 1983 and 1991; Menem and aftermath during 1995 and 2003; Kirchners 2007, 2011.). All variables have the expected sign: incumbent mayors from both main parties have between 1.5 and 20 times more odds at gaining reelection than mayors from other parties. Similarly, mayors competing in localities without municipal charter are 1.6 times more likely to be reelected. Finally, male mayors have slightly more odds than female mayors at being reelected. The probability of reelection for mayors is negatively affected by the existence of municipal charter –i.e. the municipal charter often has provisions for the rules governing limits to the reelection of mayors and fostering electoral competition and diversity.

Table 4 run additional models controlling for other socioeconomic and institutional factors. We focus on two variables. Firstly, the existence of municipal charter affects the probability of reelection of mayors negatively; this is consistent with the result in table 3. Secondly, the level of transfers affect the probability of reelection –i.e. greater transfers per capita increase the probability of reelection of mayors. The possibility that this effect is enhanced by the fact that the local government is aligned with the provincial government was tested but it did not prove to be statistically significant.

Tables 5, 6 and 7 provide additional regressions that are used as robustness checks on the variables tested throughout the previous models. These tables confirm the significant and positive association between the probability of reelection and incumbency, the existence of municipal charter and the level of inter-governmental transfers per capita.

Table 3:

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>				
	All	Yrs 1983- 1991	reelecm Yrs 1995- 2003	Yrs 2007- 2011	All
pjinc	0.503*** (0.067)	2.980*** (0.442)	0.977*** (0.099)	0.362*** (0.113)	0.459*** (0.088)
ucrinc	0.891*** (0.081)	3.022*** (0.494)	1.146*** (0.116)	1.418*** (0.156)	1.372*** (0.119)
align1	0.427*** (0.059)	0.288 (0.421)	0.451*** (0.096)	0.634*** (0.085)	0.378*** (0.069)
gendM	0.255*** (0.098)	0.080 (0.961)	0.565*** (0.169)	0.310** (0.129)	0.383*** (0.109)
cartaSi					-0.501*** (0.155)
Constant	-0.778*** (0.099)	-3.257*** (1.050)	-1.647*** (0.175)	-0.462*** (0.128)	-0.660*** (0.110)
Observations	5,848	394	2,663	2,791	4,085
Log Likelihood	-3,932.1	-196.8	-1,685.5	-1,853.2	-2,727.2
Akaike Inf. Crit.	7,874.3	403.6	3,381.0	3,716.4	5,466.5
<i>Note:</i>			*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01		

Table 4:

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>				
	reelecm				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
pjinc	0.769*** (0.125)	0.824*** (0.127)	1.980*** (0.726)	1.986*** (0.626)	1.815*** (0.687)
ucrinc	1.204*** (0.143)	1.287*** (0.146)	1.845** (0.895)	0.969* (0.560)	0.909 (0.567)
align1	0.239*** (0.090)	0.265*** (0.090)	-0.503 (0.542)	-0.397 (0.475)	-0.158 (0.634)
cartaSi	-0.589*** (0.186)	-0.583*** (0.187)	-0.925** (0.449)	-0.925** (0.418)	-0.923** (0.418)
popocup_dept	0.044*** (0.005)	0.062*** (0.007)	-0.014 (0.031)		
nbipob_dept		0.027*** (0.008)	-0.015 (0.040)		
align1:tottrfpc					-0.001 (0.002)
tottrfpc			0.001* (0.001)	0.001* (0.001)	0.001* (0.001)
Constant	-1.978*** (0.202)	-2.978*** (0.356)	0.287 (1.635)	-0.479*** (0.138)	-0.487*** (0.140)
Observations	2,791	2,791	455	492	492
Log Likelihood	-1,837.821	-1,831.856	-299.084	-322.724	-322.570
Akaike Inf. Crit.	3,687.642	3,677.712	614.168	657.448	659.140

*Note:*

\*p&lt;0.1; \*\*p&lt;0.05; \*\*\*p&lt;0.01

Table 5:

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>				
	reelecp1				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
pjinc	4.225*** (0.764)	2.146 (1.355)	2.159 (1.368)	2.157 (1.383)	13.493 (98.605)
ucrinc	3.035*** (0.698)	3.078** (1.277)	3.096** (1.300)	3.350** (1.485)	0.948 (1.654)
align1	-1.118* (0.671)	-1.816* (0.997)	-1.821* (1.000)	-1.789* (1.010)	3.095* (1.794)
popocup_dept		-0.167* (0.089)	-0.168* (0.092)	-0.164* (0.093)	0.095 (0.144)
nbipob_dept		-0.051 (0.131)	-0.051 (0.131)	-0.001 (0.184)	0.056 (0.325)
tottrfpc			0.024 (0.312)	0.069 (0.316)	1.068 (0.655)
muni_pop				0.207 (0.521)	0.864 (0.801)
align1:tottrfpc					-42.534 (237.992)
Constant	-1.787*** (0.562)	5.072 (3.995)	5.118 (4.049)	2.633 (7.436)	-12.717 (12.829)
Observations	126	36	36	36	36
Log Likelihood	-55.279	-16.909	-16.906	-16.825	-9.247
Akaike Inf. Crit.	118.559	45.817	47.812	49.651	36.495

Note:

\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

Table 6:

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>				
	reelecpl				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
pjinc	5.352*** (0.147)	8.075*** (0.718)	7.119*** (0.269)	3.374*** (0.199)	5.777*** (0.154)
ucrinc	5.653*** (0.195)	21.224 (390.821)	6.237*** (0.272)	4.189*** (0.291)	6.126*** (0.201)
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*Note:*

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Table 7:

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>				
	reelecm				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
pjinc	0.503*** (0.067)	2.980*** (0.442)	0.977*** (0.099)	0.362*** (0.113)	0.459*** (0.088)
ucrinc	0.891*** (0.081)	3.022*** (0.494)	1.146*** (0.116)	1.418*** (0.156)	1.372*** (0.119)
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gendM	0.255*** (0.098)	0.080 (0.961)	0.565*** (0.169)	0.310** (0.129)	0.383*** (0.109)
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Constant	-0.778*** (0.099)	-3.257*** (1.050)	-1.647*** (0.175)	-0.462*** (0.128)	-0.660*** (0.110)
Observations	5,848	394	2,663	2,791	4,085
Log Likelihood	-3,932.170	-196.819	-1,685.548	-1,853.227	-2,727.262
Akaike Inf. Crit.	7,874.340	403.639	3,381.097	3,716.454	5,466.524

*Note:*

\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

## 7 Concluding remarks

This preliminary work suggests that reelection rates for local parties and mayors are related with both structural, institutional and economic characteristics. The main three factors that we have found to be statistically relevant to explain differences in reelection rates of local parties and mayors are the incumbency dummies, the existence of a municipal charter, and the percent of employed population and the level of transfers per capita. While these are only preliminary findings, more work is clearly needed.

## 8 Methodological appendix and data sources

The data for this paper has been collected over several years from many different sources. Data on elections and incumbencies were originally collected from Rodríguez, Jorge Alberto (1999). “Elecciones y reelecciones. El caso de los Municipios Argentinos, 1983 a 1999”. Buenos Aires. Editorial AECOS. We recoded and updated these data using information from the electoral bodies of all 24 Argentine electoral districts. We also obtained information from various secondary sources such as online local newspapers and radios, websites specializing in local affairs and thinktanks aggregating electoral information.

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