



How Useful is the *Cumul des Mandats* for Being Re-elected? Empirical Evidence from the 1997 French Legislative Elections

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This paper aims at estimating the impact of the *cumul des mandats* on the votes of incumbents in the 1997 French legislative elections. The model specifies the behavior of both the incumbent candidate and his/her direct challenger. Results show that holding a supplementary office does not increase the odds of re-election for an incumbent member of Parliament (MP), except for the offices of MP-mayor (*député-maire*) or more slightly MP-regional councillor (*député-conseiller régional*). The empirical estimates of the model do not validate a generally accepted idea that a local elected official derives a substantial increase in votes for future legislative elections. Consequently, some diminishing returns of several offices are anticipated by actors in the political market. Furthermore, many other factors affect the election outcome, such as the experience of the incumbent MP, party affiliation, the political characteristics of challenger and the nature of electoral system.

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The political and administrative architecture of France is characterized by a strong concentration of decision-making powers, both at the local and the national level. This situation leads to politicians holding several elected offices. Currently, about 550,000 elected officials hold one or more local and national offices,¹ a minority of them, simultaneously. The *cumul des mandats*, so-called multiple office holding, is deeply rooted in the French institutional system, with the regular practice of one local elective office and a parliamentary office. To understand the reason why the *cumul des mandats* is so prevalent in France, it must be noted that six different offices coexist in the political market² since there exist 22 regional councils, 96 county councils and 36,000 municipalities.



In the French public debate, the government led by Prime minister Lionel Jospin decided to limit the possibility of such a *cumul des mandats* through legislative means³ in order to carry out an electoral promise announced during the French legislative campaign of 1997. Public opinion seemed widely favorable⁴ to such a measure.

The literature has focused on models of voter behavior and forecasting elections⁵ results. But, it has never addressed the question of the *cumul des mandats* as an electoral advantage (or a disadvantage) for the re-election odds of incumbent candidates. Friedman and Wittman (1995) have explored the reasons why voters, who supported legal initiatives to limit the number of terms that their representatives may serve, overwhelmingly re-elected their incumbents. Here the problem is similar, but concerns only the number of offices (local/national) and not the time period. The purpose of this paper is to revisit this political phenomenon, which has a direct influence on public decision-making. The literature has not really paid attention to the *cumul des mandats* with the exceptions of Knapp (1991), Caille (2000), Pachon *et al.*, 2000 and De Sousa (2004). More generally, according to recent research dedicated to the interactions between politics and economics, the *cumul des mandats* offers an interesting insight in terms of electoral behavior to better understand the mechanisms within the political market. Indeed, office holding is likely to influence the final vote, but it is only one factor among other political, economic and social considerations. In this perspective, a theoretical framework largely discussed by Lewis-Beck and Rice (1992), Palda (1994), and Lafay (1997) is put forward.

A cross-sectional analysis will be used to estimate the effect of the *cumul des mandats* on votes for incumbent candidates in the 1997 legislative elections. The estimation of the efficiency of different elective offices has to verify if this electoral practice increases the odds of re-election or is counter-productive. In this paper, the estimation strategy insists on the political variables concerning the personal characteristics of both candidates and constituencies, and the nature of the ballot system. The number of offices held and the configuration of office holding, the elective experience of the incumbent, the sum of campaign expenditures and the characteristics of the direct challenger are introduced as instrumental variables.

The next section examines the different strategies that underlie the *status quo* in the practice of the *cumul des mandats*. Next, we follow-up with a section that presents a statistical and descriptive analysis of the political population that holds more than one elective office. Penultimate section presents an ordinary least squares estimation of the *cumul des mandats* impact on the 1997 French incumbent MPs. Concluding remarks are formulated in the last section.



Strategies of the *cumul des mandats*

In the French debate, the question of the *cumul des mandats* was regularly discussed both during national campaigns and after the results of local elections, because its limitation seems to be a constitutional principle used to guarantee democracy. But, the French parliamentary representatives have never been so concerned by the *cumul des mandats* since 1958. First, how can the historical pattern, which leads MPs to seek positions within a local government, be explained? The second question is: why do voters vote for incumbents whereas they are not favorable to incumbency?

The rational choice theory applied to public decisions or to economic theory of democracy (Downs, 1957) provides an explanation by assuming that officials act politically to satisfy their interests. However, political experts argued that the *cumul des mandats* is due to the institutional system (notably the role of Parliament) and the weak influence of political parties.⁶

Not unlike the ‘paradox of [not] voting’, one can refer to another paradox highlighted by Mueller (2003): the ‘paradox of the politician’. Pizzorno (1986) explains this paradox as follows: ‘If only government decisions yield outputs with value, then politicians do not as such take advantage of it; they are both producers and sellers, and not buyers of policy. The nature of benefits derived from their activity remains undetermined. [...] Such benefits could be ‘power’ or ‘personal satisfaction’.

In the political market, candidates are going to seek re-election in order to maximize their utility function in the same way as all individuals. Indeed, the political candidate is assumed to be rational and, thus adopts a rational behavior, for example, the homo-oeconomicus becomes homo-politicus. What are his motives? Politicians are assumed to accept the rules of competition within the political market since constituency service is a positive-sum game (Fiorina, 1989). By assuming the existence of a rational politician, the homo-politicus does not differ from the homo-oeconomicus because he should not run for political career if the gains were zero. In this way, the political behavior of elected representatives would consist of prioritarily sending signals to voters in order to ensure them that the candidate will do his best to defend their interests.

Incentives to hold more than one elected office

In the private sphere, holding different representative or executive offices (board of directors, trade unions, semi-public companies, inter-municipal councils...) obviously contributes to maximizing personal profit. But in the public sphere, since politicians do not seek such an objective, a paradigm of political power follows. Political power cannot then be converted into valuable



utility and then into consumer goods. To go beyond this utilitarian dimension, Wittman (1973) proposes to coincide politicians' objectives with those of the voters so that these two groups seek only the realization of a program. But, if they have common objectives, why do politicians decide to run for office instead of participating in collective action? To answer this question, it must be demonstrated that the *cumul des mandats* is the best means of continuously increasing the political capital of elected representatives.

Before validating such an assumption, it is worth pointing out the theoretical arguments that justify gains resulting from holding several political offices. The theory of contestable markets (Baumol, Panzar and Willig, 1982) will be used as an analytical framework to explain the reasons why politicians have incentives to hold more than one office. Indeed, in a multiple production framework, a good x can contribute both to the creation of units producing the good x and units producing an annex good y .⁷ Multiproduction is likely to generate specific economies called economies of scope that account for a peculiar situation where only one firm produces more efficiently quantities of at least two goods than two firms producing separately one of these two goods.

By analogy, let us consider that the production costs of a deputy-mayor's office (X_1, X_2) by one politician are lower than the separated production costs of a deputy's office (X_1) and mayoral office (X_2) run by the politician 1 and 2, respectively. So, we obtain:

$$C(X_1, X_2) < C(X_1, 0) + C(0, X_2) \text{ with } X_1 > 0 \text{ and } X_2 > 0$$

By assuming that costs are the same for all elected representatives, the holding of several offices by only one politician will be more efficient than production by n politicians if the following relation is confirmed:

$$C(X) < \pi \sum_{i=1}^n C(X_i)$$

Accordingly, the structure of production costs of one office is higher than those of two or more offices for the same period. The political economy issue of the *cumul des mandats* is based on gains derived from the practice of multiple offices. Economies of scope may concern the campaign expenditures (logistics, political team, *militants*), the cost of building and diffusing the candidate's image in his constituency, and the decreasing returns of information (Mueller and Stratmann, 1994). However, these latter two points provide arguments to contest the political market as a contestable market. Thus, though the number of barriers to entry provide a serious advantage to the incumbent, the *cumul des mandats* can enable a candidate to bypass this information deficit, notably through the practice of different local elective offices. In this perspective, an incumbent candidate who benefits from at least two offices, for example, both



national and local offices, can diffuse information about his political action in t and then reduce his costs of information during the campaign in $t + 1$. Through the capacity to intervene at the local level, the candidate sends signals about the results that he hopes to achieve in the next national elections. Finally, an incumbent deputy with one or two local offices will reduce information asymmetries within the political market and will enable voters to be informed about his policy objectives as compared to his challenger. That is the reason why the nature of office(s) that increase the odds of re-election and the intensity of this relationship must be analysed and evaluated.

By assuming firstly that each candidate is a national or local representative, his propensity to run for an extra office is closely linked to his political supply, his experience in the constituency, his ability to increase voters' welfare and his position faced with his first challenger. All these considerations can be weighted differently according to the kind of ballot, the term between each election and the nature of the electoral stakes. It is important to remember that the 1997 legislative election was singular since the election was 2 years earlier than the official date: 2 years after municipal and county elections, and 1 year before regional elections.

Until now, literature has stressed the factors affecting election outcomes and demonstrated the influence of variables, such as the candidate's personal characteristics, party affiliation, economic conditions and campaign spending.⁸

Voter strategies

Is the restriction of the *cumul des mandats* an efficient way to change the political life of a country, or is it not intended to reduce vertical political competition between the national government and the local authorities, often considered as citadels? Salmon (2000) observes that the reform of *cumul des mandats* could turn out to be counter-productive, if 'it is not replaced by some other form of protection of subcentral government'. Local decision-makers who are simultaneously national decision-makers cannot be in the position of efficiently influencing redistribution policy if they play only a local role.

Given the sovereignty of the voter in his choices, it is worth discussing strategies used by voters to maintain their elected representatives both at local and national level. The basic assumption is that rational voters will select representatives and will favor multi-office candidates whose redistribution policy can positively influence the constituent's interests (Friedman and Wittman, 1995). But, voters have to face uncertainty concerning the stability and the consistency of their choices. In the more or less immediate future, is the voter capable of maintaining the order of his preferences, particularly the partisan order, from which he gets personal satisfaction? This uncertainty is partly based on the nature of available information that he can control. Since



there exist many situations in which voters cannot correctly anticipate the future state of their environment, and thus, are not aware of the direct consequences of their choices, we assume that voters are willing to delegate many elected offices to one politician in such a way that this latter best represents voters' interests. For the politician, such a strategy leads to the reduction of his transaction costs. This assumption is directly derived from the agency relation existing in the political market where the principal-voter entrusts an implicit contract to the agent-candidate. The 'delegation' is achieved when voters consider that better informed candidates are able to offer them favorable public policies. Buchanan and Vanberg (1989) use the term of rational deference, analogous to the theory of rational ignorance (Downs, 1957). But, unlike the delegation of decision-making authority to a selected agent in a principal-agent relationship, voters prefer to defer to authority because of lower costs in the acquisition of information. Such reasoning is only valid when the information cost decreases according to the number of offices at stake. In other words, the less the voter is encouraged to spend time obtaining information on a candidate, the more he will be willing to vote for this candidate when he runs for another election.

As a result, whatever their ideological preferences, voters will be driven to favor the *cumul des mandats*. Even if a voter is rationally ignorant, his political behavior is induced by economic rationality. Whatever the partisan affiliation, a voter will tend to eagerly encourage the *cumul des mandats* when his preferred party has fewer incumbents with multiple offices because the power redistribution is then more favorable.

Research hypotheses

From the previous theoretical framework, we can deduce three research hypotheses to be empirically tested:

- (1) Efficiency of the *cumul des mandats*: The more the incumbent candidate holds elective offices, the more the odds of re-election are high.
- (2) Nature of the *cumul des mandats*. All elective offices are not expected to have the same return. Indeed, we have to verify if the double or triple *cumul des mandats* is not counter-productive since voters are involved in a costly process for evaluating candidates and their redistributive policy. At the opposite significant, result for double or triple *cumul des mandats* should mean that there exists some decreasing costs of information for voters that encourage them to support the same candidate for different elections.
- (3) Competitive efficiency of the *cumul des mandats*. As this paper deals with candidates present at the second round, we need to evaluate the competitive efficiency of the *cumul des mandats* by comparing the position of the two



candidates. Then, the smaller the difference in the number of elective offices between the incumbent and his challenger, the more the incumbent is likely to be re-elected.

Descriptive Analysis and Stylized Facts

The first step in our analysis consists of determining the probability for an incumbent MP to be elected in the legislative election of 1997. Data concern the French legislative election outcomes and cover only metropolitan representatives of the *Assemblée Nationale*, for example, 555 MPs. The statistical analysis presents the political forces at the second ballot. Table 1 highlights the evolution of electoral outcomes between the two legislative elections. After a large defeat in 1993, a coalition of left-wing parties won the 1997 elections and formed a government under Lionel Jospin as prime minister. Beyond this victory, the second ballot of the poll is characterized by a slender gap between right- and left-wing parties. Nevertheless, this difference is more favorable to the left-wing candidates in 548 constituencies (seven candidates were directly elected in the first ballot against 73 in 1993).

Among elected candidates in 1993, only those that ran for re-election 4 years later are of interest to the study. It is important to note there that we assume that the *cumul des mandats* is a re-election strategy and not just a strategy to win through to the second round, as tested by François [2006]. Moreover, there are many issues at stake at the first round (i.e. candidates compete without the hope of winning), and this prevents us to estimate the efficiency of the *cumul des mandats* with all candidates from the first round. The sample is then reduced to 342 observations. This difference is derived from the decision of both the incumbents to run for re-election and the party to accept such a candidacy. This point is important in explaining the incentive to hold several offices at the local level. Indeed, a well-established incumbent can legitimize his candidacy as an MP even if his own party is not in agreement. For instance, it

Table 1 Elected candidates (metropolitan France)

| | 1993 | 1997 |
|-------------------------|------|------|
| <i>Left-wing party</i> | 85 | 310 |
| Men | 77 | 262 |
| Women | 8 | 48 |
| <i>Right-wing party</i> | 470 | 245 |
| Men | 456 | 233 |
| Women | 24 | 12 |

is not unusual to observe a dissident and the official candidate belonging to the same party running against each other in a local election. Finally, the simultaneous presence of three candidates on the second ballot was characteristic of the 1997 legislative elections and not in 1993.⁹ Thus, we have constructed an indicator of the quality of the vote for the 1993–97 period in order to take into account the incumbency effect between these two dates.

Table 2 presents the rate of success for incumbent candidates according to their party affiliation. The left-wing parties experience some advantages since about only one right-wing candidate out of two was successfully re-elected. This was the worst result for a right-wing party since the beginning of the Fifth Republic in 1958. Reciprocally, the left-wing incumbent candidates obtain a high score of re-election induced by their weak numbers in 1993. This situation contrasts with the events in 1993 when left-wing incumbent candidates were largely defeated (irregardless of the number of them holding office).

To appreciate how the *cumul des mandats* influences the political market, it is necessary to consider all possible configurations of multiple offices and not only the number of offices held. Since 1978, all legislative elections show an increasing trend in the *cumul des mandats*. In 1997, one MP out of two had at least two offices against one out of three 20 years ago. To better appreciate the spread of such a French practice, it should be remembered that only 10 per cent of MPs hold a single office (MP) in 1997 against 30 percent in 1978. This weak figure is mainly explained by a strong renewal of MPs who consequently have not yet had the time to run for other (local) office.

The practice of the *cumul des mandats* is not necessarily a left-wing tradition — the Communist Party (PCF) and the Socialist Party (PS) — or right-wing tradition — the Union pour la Démocratie Française (UDF) and the Rassemblement Pour la République (RPR) — parties. Beyond party affiliation (Figure 1), the *cumul des mandats* is more a concentration of the political powers of the incumbent government. Furthermore, the stronger the

Table 2 Rate of success for incumbent candidates

| Party | Number | Share (%) | Elected | Defeated | Rate of re-election (%) |
|--------|--------|-----------|---------|----------|-------------------------|
| PC | 12 | 3.51 | 12 | 0 | 100.00 |
| PS | 46 | 13.45 | 42 | 4 | 91.30 |
| RPR | 155 | 45.32 | 68 | 87 | 43.87 |
| UDF | 119 | 34.80 | 61 | 58 | 51.26 |
| Others | 10 | 2.92 | 9 | 1 | 90.00 |
| | 342 | | 192 | 150 | 56.14 |

PC, Communist Party; PS, Socialist Party; RPR, Rassemblement Pour la République; UDF, Union pour la Démocratie Française.



government is during its legislature, the more the MPs accumulate offices (two or three elective offices).

As depicted in Table 3, the structure of the *cumul des mandats* emphasizes that the office of mayor or municipal councillor is most often held by the MPs (in 77 percent of cases). A slight difference underlines the over representation of left-wing MPs within (urban) municipal councils (88 per cent of cases). On the other hand, other local offices (rural municipal councillor, county councillor or regional councillor) are historically the reserved sphere of right-wing candidates. Such an observation is confirmed by the composition of the Senate, the upper house of French Parliament.

More precisely, the political scene in May 1997 was composed of about 90 percent of candidates who held at least two offices. Thus, this paper aims at

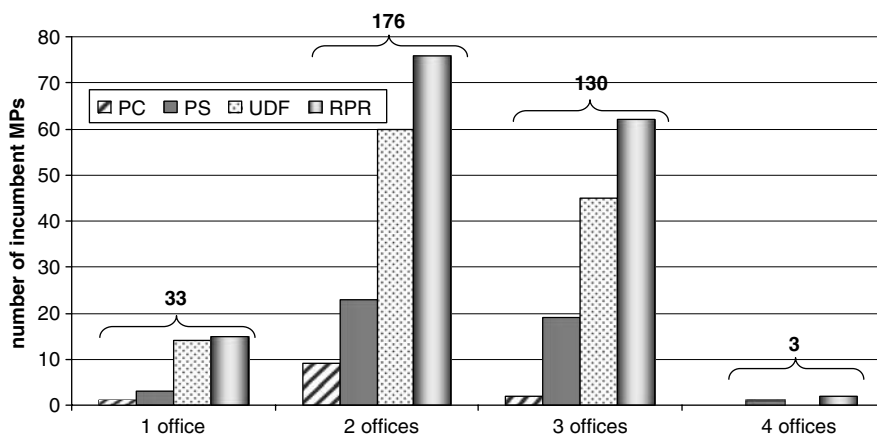


Figure 1 Partisan *cumul des mandats* in 1997.

Table 3 Nature of offices according to partisan affiliation

| | Total | PC | PS | RPR | UDF | Others |
|----------------------------------|-------|----|----|-----|-----|--------|
| Incumbent MPs | 342 | 13 | 49 | 186 | 147 | 15 |
| Mayor | 190 | 9 | 32 | 84 | 58 | 7 |
| > 50,000 People | 20 | 4 | 6 | 7 | 3 | 0 |
| < 50,000 people | 170 | 5 | 26 | 77 | 55 | 7 |
| Municipal council representative | 73 | 1 | 8 | 37 | 25 | 2 |
| County council representative | 135 | 1 | 18 | 66 | 49 | 1 |
| Regional council representative | 47 | 2 | 5 | 20 | 18 | 2 |

PC, Communist Party; PS, Socialist Party; RPR, Rassemblement Pour la République; UDF, Union pour la Démocratie Française.



identifying the kinds of offices favorable to re-election. Each office is represented by a dummy variable in the following manner:

1. In the case of a simple *cumul des mandats*: there are 104 MPs-Mayor (Mayor_i),¹⁰ 33 MPs-County Councillors (CC_i), 25 MPs-Municipal Councillors (MC_i) and 13 MPs-Regional Councillors (RC_i).
2. In the case of a double *cumul des mandats*: there are 68 MPs-Mayor-County Councillors (Mayor_CC_i),¹¹ 32 MPs-County Councillors-Municipal Councillors (CC_MC_i), 16 MPs-Mayor-Regional Councillors (Mayor_RC_i), 15 MPs-Regional Councillors-Municipal Councillors (RC_MC_i) and 0 MP-County Councillors-Regional Councillors (CC_RC_i).
3. In the case of a triple *cumul des mandats*: there are 2 MPs-Mayor-County Councillors-Regional Councillors (Mayor_CC_RC_i) and 1 MP-County Councillors-Regional Councillors-Municipal Councillors (CC_RC_MC_i)¹².

According to these descriptive statistics, it is obvious that the simple *cumul des mandats* and notably the MP-Mayor configuration highlights a deeply rooted practice within the French political space regardless of the party affiliation. How can this strategy of decision-makers influence the election results and provide (or not) an advantage to the incumbent MPs?

Results

Several econometric models (Nannestad and Paldam, 1994; Servais, 1997, Lewis-Beck and Paldam, 2000) have been used to explain the percentage of votes obtained by a party in a given election on the basis of a vector of both relevant political and economic variables. These models mostly look for an estimation of a linear relationship of a voting function in order to understand the voting mechanisms from the voter and the candidate's point of view.

In this paper, the model used below is drawn from the theoretical framework of electoral models not to forecast election outcomes but in order to identify the determinants of the *cumul des mandats*.

Specification of variables

The influence of the *cumul des mandats* can be estimated by introducing adequate dummy variables in a general vote function, which specifies a linear relationship between candidates' votes and two groups of instrumental variables:

- dummy variables corresponding to each kind of office; and
- variables representing both personal and political characteristics of incumbents and of their major opponents.



The numerical dependent variable, denoted $Votes97_i$, corresponds to the share of votes gained by the incumbent candidate i at the second ballot. Many assumptions have been tested to measure the influence of the *cumul des mandats* on electoral outcomes and the strength of this relationship.

The first bloc of independent variables will be statistically performed from a dummy variable, which will serve as a dummy reference to avoid the problem of a dummy trap (Hardy, 1993). This means that all kinds of *cumul des mandats* will be analyzed according to the fact that the candidate is only MP.

Secondly, quantitative and qualitative information for each candidate concerning both political and personal characteristics is defined as follows:

- $Party_i$ takes the value 1 when the candidate belongs to a right-wing party and 0 otherwise. A negative sign is expected because the rate of re-election (Table 2) of conservative MPs is weaker than left-wing incumbent MPs. By doing that, it will be possible to determine the loss in votes for a conservative incumbent present at the second ballot.
- $Experience_i$ corresponds to the political experience of candidate and takes the value 0 to 9 (total direct parliamentary elections). That means the number of times that the incumbent was elected to the *Assemblée Nationale*. A positive sign is expected — the more the political experience, the higher the odds of re-election.
- Sex_i is a dummy variable that takes the value 1 for a male candidate and 0 otherwise. Given the number of female candidates, a positive relationship is expected between the results and the political gender (Atkeson, 2003).
- $\Delta Offices_i$ accounts for the difference in elected offices held by the incumbent and his direct challenger. A positive sign is expected and means the political advantage obtained by the MP to be yet locally established.
- $Partitot_i$ is a multiplicative term of variables ($TotOffices_i$ and $PartyChal_i$) that takes into account, interaction between the number of the challenger's offices ($TotOffices_i$) and his political affiliation ($PartyChal_i$). In this way, it measures the weight of the second ballot's opposition when candidates belong to the same party but hold different offices. Whereas $TotOffices_i$ only explains the influence of the number of offices held by the challenger, $Partitot_i$ is more relevant since it provides the share of votes gained by the number of offices in the case of politically opposed candidates. That is the reason why the expected sign is positive.
- $\Delta Votes93_i$ measures the gap in votes between the elected candidate and his direct challenger in the 1993 legislative elections. Indeed, it must be considered the ease of election for candidates according to their previous legislative result. But in some cases, three candidates were in competition in the second ballot, then a dummy variable was created and called $Triang_i$, which takes the value 1 for a triangular election and 0 for a duel.



By multiplying $\Delta Votes_{93_i}$ and $Triang_i$, it is possible to know the exact increase in votes for a candidate elected among two direct challengers. Then the estimation of this coefficient indicates how much a candidate elected in 1993 (in the case of a triangular) can increase his odds of re-election.

- $\Delta CampSpend_i$ designates the difference between the amount of campaign spending of the incumbent and his direct challenger. This variable is used in French francs per registered voter in order to avoid problems of heteroskedasticity. According to the hypothesis of Foucault and François (2005), a positive relationship is expected and would permit to measure the marginal gain for each extra franc that the incumbent spends.

Estimation results

The general function to estimate is the following:

$$Votes_{97_i} = a + b_1 Offices_i + b_2 Party_i + b_3 Experience_i + \dots + b_n \Delta CampSpend_i + e_i$$

In order to estimate the influence of different configurations of office holding, three models are estimated according to the simple *cumul des mandats* (model 1), the double *cumul des mandats* (model 2), and the triple *cumul des mandats* (model 3).

Table 4 presents the results of the ordinary least squares regression according to the hypothesis discussed above. Besides a satisfying quality of estimation¹³ (R^2 near 0.5), the main findings state a weaker empirical evidence than expected for the multiple office holding. Indeed, the model 1 confirms a positive relationship between office holding and vote share for both the mayoral office (2.05) and the regional councillor office (3.17). In contrast, model 2 offers a more robust specification since all coefficients are statistically different from zero but with a negative sign. This result suggests that simultaneously holding an MP office and a local office (regardless of the kind) is counter-productive. In a sense, the theory of the cost of information by voters is not valid. For example, the disadvantage for the incumbent MP reaches a high (−4.205) if he holds simultaneously regional councillor and municipal councillor offices. It means that such a double *cumul des mandats* reduces the vote share by 4.205 percentage points compared with only holding a MP office. Concerning the triple *cumul des mandats* (Mayor_CC_RC_i and CC_RC_MC_i), the lack of observations makes the explanatory power of the regression difficult. A future step of research would consist in regarding the sense of the *cumul des mandats*, either from a ‘top-down’ logic (as assumed in this paper) or a ‘bottom-top’ logic.¹⁴



Table 4 OLS estimation of 1997 votes

| | <i>Model 1</i> | | <i>Model 2</i> | | <i>Model 3</i> | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------|--------------------|---------------|--------------------|---------------|
| | <i>Coefficient</i> | <i>t-Stud</i> | <i>Coefficient</i> | <i>t-Stud</i> | <i>Coefficient</i> | <i>t-Stud</i> |
| Mayor | 2.052*** | (2.64) | — | — | — | — |
| CountyC | 1.394 | (1.18) | — | — | — | — |
| RegionalC | 3.172* | (1.80) | — | — | — | — |
| MunicipalC | -1.203 | (-0.92) | — | — | — | — |
| Mayor_CountyC | — | — | -3.807*** | (-4.19) | — | — |
| Mayor_RegionalC | — | — | -3.787*** | (-2.41) | — | — |
| CountyC_MunicipalC | — | — | -4.093*** | (-3.35) | — | — |
| RegionalC_ MunicipalC | — | — | -4.205*** | (-2.55) | — | — |
| Mayor_CountyC_RegionalC | — | — | — | — | -1.246 | (-0.20) |
| CountyC_ RegionalC_ MunicipalC | — | — | — | — | 5.661 | (0.91) |
| Partitot | 5.355*** | (6.98) | 5.878*** | (7.81) | 5.344*** | (6.93) |
| Experience | 0.704*** | (3.13) | 0.572*** | (2.57) | 0.762*** | (3.36) |
| Sex | -2.013* | (-1.64) | -1.902 | (-1.58) | -2.073* | (-1.64) |
| Δ Votes93 | 0.122*** | (6.99) | 0.123*** | (7.20) | 0.127*** | (7.17) |
| Δ Offices | 1.319*** | (3.63) | 2.161*** | (5.39) | 1.046*** | (2.92) |
| Δ CampSpend | -0.160 | (-0.59) | -0.140 | (-0.53) | -0.091 | (-0.33) |
| Partisanship | -5.39*** | (-4.39) | -4.968*** | (-4.13) | -5.685*** | (-4.59) |
| Constant | 51.192*** | (27.36) | 52.264*** | (29.43) | 52.308*** | (28.30) |
| Observations (<i>N</i>) | 340 | | 340 | | 340 | |
| Adj. <i>R</i> ² | 0.506 | | 0.525 | | 0.49 | |
| Ramsey test (F stat) | 4.59*** | | 3.50** | | 8.40*** | |
| Breusch-Pagan Test (χ^2 stat) | 4.58** | | 8.72*** | | 6.30*** | |

OLS, ordinary least squares.

Dependant variable: votes of incumbent MPs in 1997. ***Statistically significant at the 1% level; **Statistically significant at the 5% level; *Statistically significant at the 10% level.

The main result concerns the more frequent office held by French MPs, for example, the MP_Mayor office. Knapp (1991, 26–27) comments on the attractive position of the *députés-maires*, who are able to obtain through their national proximity to the central government, the keys to the success of their local public policies. The estimation confirms these economies of scope as the *député-maire* increases his vote share by 2.052 percent. Among all local offices, the mayoral office is a powerful incentive to run in a legislative election (if not elected) or to remain incumbent. Another positive relationship exists for the County councillor office ($b = 1.394$), that is to say an advantage in votes of 1.394 points of percentage. Nevertheless, this coefficient is far from being significant.



With regard to this specific election, such results have to be interpreted in detail. First, to hold several local offices is counter-productive for a national election because the cost of information at the MPs constituency level is likely to be higher than at the county or municipal level. If the size-effect (in terms of constituency's size) is not favorable to the incumbent MP, two kinds of simple *cumul des mandats* out of four lead to an increase in votes. Such findings mean that the influence of the *cumul des mandats* must be considered vis-à-vis the 1997 French legislative elections in the context of the dissolution of the *Assemblée Nationale* decided by the French President. This decision deeply modified the strategy of incumbent MPs because they were not ready to offer other public policies. Such a handicap could not be compensated for by their local presence because the redistributive effect of local offices is lower than national offices. It should be remembered that last county elections and municipal elections were held in 1996 and 1995, respectively.

Concerning the control variables, we find a robust specification since all explanatory coefficients are statistically significant with the exception of the campaign spending variable regardless of the model. On this latter issue, the value of $\Delta CampSpend_i$ is regularly around -0.1 without significance. An explanation can be advanced: the two-ballot system implies that candidates have to concentrate their efforts on the first ballot and, consequently, it is no longer a strategic asset to win elections. A second explanation concerns the change in the public guidelines for campaign spending in 1993 and 1995, which implied a more similar behavior in leading candidates. That invalidates the previous practice in France in which candidates with multiple offices raise more money (François, 2006).

The personal characteristics of candidates provide interesting results on the determinants of the vote in 1997 and provide useful information about the ability of the candidate to use the *cumul des mandats* as a political strategy. Indeed, once the difference of office holding between the incumbent MP and his challenger compared, a positive and significant advantage occurs for the MP. Each extra office held by the MP provides an automatic electoral gain of 1.319 percentage points (model 1), 2.161 percentage points (model 2) and 1.046 percentage points (model 3). The higher value in model 2 compensates for the loss of vote share derived with all kinds of double *cumul des mandats*. Similarly, the variable *Partitot* indicates that candidates belonging to the same party at the second ballot (25 cases) are discriminated against in favour of the candidate who holds more offices. Indeed, in model 1, the left- or right-wing incumbent MP gains about 5.35 percentage points of votes compared to the challenger who has not accepted the principle of political coalition.

Concerning partisanship, the high significance of the variable *Party* indicates the significant deficit in votes for the incumbent right-wing coalition (about 5 percentage points on an average for any model). It should be recalled that only



half of these MPs are successfully re-elected. This expected negative relationship enables us to take into account the government's high level of unpopularity at the time of legislative elections. Nevertheless, this result must be considered with caution as we use a cross-section analysis for only one election.

Another interesting result concerns the political experience of the incumbent (*Experience*). As expected, incumbents who have been MP for a long time can increase their vote share. They obtain a gain in votes of about 0.7 percentage points (model 1) and 0.57 (model 2). This result supports the theory of Coats and Dalton (1992) that incumbents have at their disposal a political capital, and then they create a brand-name barrier for entry into political markets. No doubt, it would be worth verifying from what age the political experience of the MP is a disadvantage because of the wearing effect of being in power. This idea is close to the notion of sunk costs when the politician leaves the political market, notably for the last elected office. In the same perspective, we confirm the theory of progressive ambition (Schlesinger, 1966) in the sense that the form of ambition in the political sphere translates into the *cumul de mandats* conditioned by correctly choosing which offices to accumulate. In order to go further, a better knowledge of the long-term political life of French MPs could assert such a theory.

Another positive relationship reveals that the more the candidate was easily elected in 1993, the more he increases his odds of victory in 1997. Indeed, whatever the model, the value (0.12) and the significance of the variable $\Delta Votes_{93}$ suggest a positive influence on the results of the second ballot in 1997. Nevertheless, this finding has to be compared with the political experience. It seems that the ease of electoral success gives an advantage in the vote share that is four times less than the parliamentary experience. Table 4 does not precisely indicate the magnitude of this ease according to the nature of the second ballot in 1993 (duel vs three-corned elections). The reason for the latter problem is explained by the small number of such situations in 1993.

Finally, the variable *Sex* is the least robust of all independent variables even if it is significant for both model 1 and model 3 at a 10 per cent level of confidence. The expected negative relationship is compliant with the women's natural difficulties in entering into the French political market. Moreover, it means that such a disadvantage (about 2 percentage points) provides a strong incentive for female MPs to hold local offices to compensate for their 'natural' loss due to the discriminatory process of selection within political parties.

Conclusion

This paper aims at estimating the impact of the *cumul des mandats* on the votes of incumbents in the 1997 French legislative elections. It demonstrates



that holding a supplementary office does not increase the odds of re-election for an incumbent MP, except for the offices of MP-mayor or MP-regional councillor. The empirical estimates of the model do not validate a generally accepted idea that a local elected official obtains a substantial gain in votes for future legislative elections. Moreover, this negative relationship is stronger for all cases of double *cumul des mandats*. This means that in the political market, diminishing returns of holding several offices exist. Furthermore, many other factors affect the election outcome such as the experience of the incumbent MP, party affiliation, the political characteristics of challenger and the nature of the electoral system.

More generally, this paper admits that the more local offices the candidate holds, the lower his/her odds of winning. Thus, there is a real rivalry between a parliamentary office and all local offices, except once elected as either mayor or more slightly regional councillor. It can be assumed that a sort of opposition exists between the two following objectives: holding different local offices (at least two) and increasing his/her odds of re-election according to his position in the political market. If the candidate holds local offices other than mayoral, it will be more difficult to persuade voters that s/he has the capacity to reproduce his political action faced with national problems. That highlights the question of the vertical integration of the political system in France whose major characteristics are the control of local administration and the representation of local interests by national decision-makers.

A future research agenda could consist of studying the causality in order to appreciate the factors affecting election outcomes. According to the hypothesis of Ginsburgh and Michel (1983), some local economic variables (unemployment rate, household disposable income) should be added to the model to better specify voter strategies faced with the *cumul des mandats*. Thus, the results would have no doubt been more precise (1) using the panel data of several elections; (2) in taking into account the simultaneous relationship of the political behavior of the incumbent MP and his direct challenger (2SLS estimation of the vote share equation).

According to these findings, the proposition of the Jospin government to limit the *cumul des mandats* to two offices seemed paradoxical. Indeed, voters agree with this measure as much as they vote regularly for their incumbent candidates whatever the nature of the election. In fact, the *cumul des mandats* corresponds to the real vertical integration of the French political system, often described as an institutional oligarchy. It permits to confound voters and candidates' interests because it reduces the distance between central administration and local governments. As so long as centralization exists, the *cumul des mandats* will persist. In practice, the regulation implemented in 2000 was not as restrictive as expected because it only prevents holding executive functions within local authorities and double *cumul des mandats* that



we demonstrate to be counter-productive in terms of vote share. But it will be necessary to evaluate this reform by taking into consideration more than one election. That is why our results and comments about the Jospin reform are oriented towards the (political) conditions that could have been advanced for such a reform.

In conclusion, if French politicians seem to agree with the limitation of the *cumul des mandats* for democratic reasons and in response to public opinion, nonetheless, all governments should calculate the political cost of such a reform because it has to fulfill an electoral promise and has to protect its elected representatives of the *Assemblée Nationale* from the next legislative elections. A tradeoff emerges as follows. On the one hand, whether the government does not fulfill its promise, it can suffer a loss in votes from voters favorable to the limits. On the other hand, the electoral gain from the limitation of the *cumul des mandats* may be a loss because voters will consider that incumbent MPs are concerned by the *cumul*. Then, if they run for a new (national or local) office, they do not apply to themselves the legislative regulation for which they voted in Parliament.

The nature of the tradeoff could be determined by the influence of each configuration of the *cumul des mandats* and then explained by the not restrictive current regulation implemented in 2000 (Appendix 1).

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Notes

- 1 Ten times more than in the United Kingdom and six times more than in Germany.
- 2 In the paper, I am dealing with studying five out of these six offices. There are the MPs (Members of Parliament) mandate and the local offices. Among these latter, the regional council representative (*conseiller régional*), the county council representative (*conseiller général*), the municipal council representative (*conseiller municipal*) and the mayor (*maire*) are the elected offices that account for at best the French political scene. This terminology is used for the rest of the paper.
- 3 The law of 6 April 2000 prevents a mayor to be simultaneously president of local authorities (county council or regional council) or European MP.
- 4 According to an IPSOS survey from April 1998, 60 percent of the respondents would support a limitation of the *cumul des mandats* and 63 percent of them wish that their MP to be only an MP (Olivier, 1998).
- 5 See Lafay (1995) and Lewis-Beck and Paldam (2000) for a review.



- 6 In France, the debate around the question of the *cumul des mandats* is well summarized in the papers of Y. Meny (1992, 1997) and discussed in public law reviews like the *Revue du droit public* 6, 1997, December.
- 7 The case of sheep (x) and wool (y) illustrates usually this multiple production.
- 8 On this point, it is assumed that the financial cost of seeking a new office accounts for the marginal gain that an incumbent can obtain from his campaign expenditures (Foucault and François, 2005).
- 9 The legislative elections in 1997 are characterized by an outstanding increase of the three-corned contests: only 11 in 1988, 15 in 1993 and 79 in 1997, whose 76 with the presence of the French nationalist party (Front National).
- 10 $Mayor_i$ takes the value 1 when the incumbent candidate is MP-Mayor, 0 otherwise.
- 11 $Mayor_RC_i$ takes the value 1 when the incumbent candidate is MP-Mayor-County council representative, 0 otherwise. This codification is similar for the set of dummy variables concerning the nature of the *cumul des mandats*.
- 12 A first legislative step against the *cumul des mandats* has been implemented in 1985 and has led to a more opened political market but limited in the space and in the time. Indeed, this law has mainly concerned the local political market without reducing the political capital and the incentives of the MPs (Alliès, 1998). In practice, that entailed an increasing simple *cumul des mandats* and the liberalization of about 300 offices in the political market.
- 13 For readers interested by viewing the variance/covariance matrix for each estimation, it is available on simple demand.
- 14 I would like to thank an anonymous referee for this relevant comment.

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Appendix 1

Table A1 Summary of variables

| <i>Variable</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>s.d.</i> | <i>Min</i> | | |
|--------------------|-------------|-------------|------------|--------|-------|
| <i>Max</i> | | | | | |
| Votes97 | 52.21 | 8.344 | 30.08 | 79.23 | |
| Votes93 | 58.53 | 10.023 | 41.45 | 100 | |
| Challenger93 | | 41.45 | 10.018 | 0 | 58.55 |
| Δ Votes93 | 17.06 | 20.047 | -17.1 | 100 | |
| Triang | 0.009 | 0.093 | 0 | 1 | |
| MP | 0.096 | 0.295 | 0 | 1 | |
| Mayor | 0.304 | 0.460 | 0 | 1 | |
| CountyC | 0.096 | 0.295 | 0 | 1 | |
| RegionalC | 0.038 | 0.191 | 0 | 1 | |
| MunicipalC | 0.073 | 0.260 | 0 | 1 | |
| Mayor_CC | 0.198 | 0.399 | 0 | 1 | |
| Mayor_RC | 0.046 | 0.211 | 0 | 1 | |
| Mayor_CC_CR | 0.006 | 0.076 | 0 | 1 | |
| CC_MC | 0.093 | 0.291 | 0 | 1 | |
| CC_RC_MC | | 0.003 | 0.054 | 0 | 1 |
| CR_MC | 0.043 | 0.205 | 0 | 1 | |
| Partisanship | | 0.807 | 0.395 | 0 | 1 |
| Δ Offices | 1.058 | 1.011 | -2 | 4 | |
| Experience | 2.146 | 1.591 | 0 | 9 | |
| Spend | 3.713 | 1.22 | 1.120 | 8.098 | |
| Spend_chal | 3.040 | 1.173 | 0.567 | 6.653 | |
| Δ CampSpend | | 0.673 | 1.215 | -4.906 | 4.012 |
| Sex | 0.923 | 0.265 | 0 | 1 | |
| Partitot | 0.283 | 0.625 | 0 | 3 | |