

Tufte E R. *Political control of the economy*.
Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978. 168 p.
[Princeton University, NJ and Yale University, New Haven, CT]

As goes politics, so goes economic policy and performance. This is the case because, as goes economic performance, so goes the election. Evidence is provided (mainly for the US since 1945) that economic conditions are a major determinant of electoral outcomes, that political party platforms are often carried out in office, and that some presidents have provoked election-year economic booms to ensure their reelection. [The SSCI® indicates that this book has been cited in over 305 publications.]

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The 1970s, in retrospect, appear as golden years for the study of political economy. A series of studies¹⁻⁴ picked several plums of findings, by beginning with the insight that political and economic outcomes are endlessly entangled and, furthermore, that the world's events pay no attention at all to academic segregation of the study of politics and of economics.

For my research, a stay at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences in 1973-1974 yielded a paper on macroeconomic determinants of voting⁵ and a manuscript on political manipulation of the economy in election years, which then led to my book, *Political Control of the Economy*. The example of Robert K. Merton, also at the center that year, was essential; he made clear to me the importance of becoming self-conscious and strategic in the

choice of research issues, of taking one's work seriously but in good humor, and of trying to produce results that last. In short, some OTSOG spirit.⁶

Also helpful was Richard Nixon, who had so politicized economic policy in 1972 and had consequently provided—emerging as a valuable scholarly by-product of the Watergate and impeachment investigations—a thorough checklist of what presidents could do to the economy to enhance their reelection prospects. I collected evidence for a case study from those hearings and long-term data from surveys, aggregate statistical analysis, interviews with policymakers, memoirs, party platforms, policy statements, newspapers, and presidential libraries.

The book received the Kammerer Award in 1979 and has remained alive in the literature, particularly in research on voting and election forecasting. Many journalists and columnists have appropriated the findings. A few citations grow from data corrections and from revisionist critiques, especially following the dismal election-year economy of 1980. But, indicating that research may itself vibrate to the electoral-economic cycle, recent citations appear supportive, perhaps given the thesis-confirming economic boom of 1984.⁷ The voting equations have now survived an additional five congressional and two presidential elections, with the regression coefficients and R-squared values serenely intact.

I had hoped to write a second book on political economy dealing with politics and business, but around 1977 my interests turned back toward statistical matters. I published *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information*⁸ in 1983 and will finish up *Envisioning Information* in 1988. The world of classic maps, charts, and graphics is an elegant and beautiful one—unlike the bruising, gritty, and sometimes smarmy world of politicians, the economy, and political-economic ideologies.

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2. Lindbeck A. Stabilization policy in open economies with endogenous politicians. *Amer. Econ. Rev.* 66:1-19, 1976. (Cited 65 times.)
3. Hibbs D. Political parties and macroeconomic policy. *Amer. Polit. Sci. Rev.* 71:1467-87, 1977. (Cited 130 times.)
4. Nordhaus W D. The political business cycle. *Rev. Econ. Stud.* 42:169-90, 1975. (Cited 180 times.)
5. Tufte E R. Determinants of the outcomes of midterm congressional elections. *Amer. Polit. Sci. Rev.* 69:812-26, 1975. (Cited 125 times.)
6. Merton R K. *On the shoulders of giants: a Shandean postscript*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, (1965) Vicennial Edition, 1985. 302 p. (Cited 55 times.)
7. May A M. The political business cycle: an institutional critique and reconstruction. *J. Econ. Issue.* 21:713-22, 1987.
8. Tufte E R. *The visual display of quantitative information*. Cheshire, CT: Graphics Press, 1983. 197 p.