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Cross-country comparison of the Incumbency Advantage: the need for bounds and evidence from 38 countries

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Abstract

The systematic comparison of the incumbency advantage across multiple countries' legislatures has proven elusive, in part because the incumbency advantage is defined and estimated differently across settings. To achieve comparable estimates, we focus on the individual advantage, not the party's, and use a regression discontinuity design comparing winners and runners-up. We define the *incumbent-runner-up advantage* and construct bounds for it. We then show that the upper bound of this object coincides with the upper bound of the *incumbent-challenger advantage*, the empirical counterpart of the theoretical definition of the incumbency advantage. The resulting 'upper-bound incumbency advantage' can be estimated in any electoral setting and is meaningful across both concepts. With data for 38 national legislatures, we provide the first like-for-like cross-country comparison of the incumbency advantage and relate it to electoral turnover, economic development, democratic quality, corruption, and electoral systems.

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The incumbency advantage measures the power of holding elected office. A high incumbency advantage may allow a politician to extract personal rents or to remain in office despite facing a higher quality opponent.[1] It may allow politicians to enact unpopular (but potentially necessary) policies and still be re-elected.[2] Moreover, an increase in the incumbency advantage (the vanishing marginals) was initially framed as the main mechanism explaining the decrease in the 'net partisan swing' in the US Congress, described by Mayhew (1974) as the most important electoral instrument voters have to convey their preferences.

The power to hold on to an elected office aggregates to the overall power of an institution (e.g., national parliaments). This link between individual electoral power and power at the institutional level proposed by Mayhew (1974) can be studied empirically in a comparative context by relating country specific characteristics to the incumbency advantage. So far, however, this avenue of research has not been thoroughly pursued as we lack a definition of the incumbency advantage that can be estimated using the same method and has the same theoretical meaning across political systems.

In this paper we make three contributions to fill this gap. First, we define the *incumbent-runner-up advantage* and construct bounds for it. This is the paper's central conceptual contribution. The bounds are necessary because the researcher observes *who* reruns and who doesn't, but not the reason why, strategic decision or random attrition. The bounds follow from incomplete information. Second, we

[1] See models of moral hazard (e.g., Barro (1973)) and adverse selection (e.g., Banks and Sundaram (1998)).

[2] See Canes-Wrone et al. (2001) and Ashworth (2005).

show that the upper bound of the incumbent-runner-up advantage coincides with the upper bound of the *incumbent-challenger advantage*. The incumbent-challenger advantage is the closest concept to the theoretical quality-based definition of the incumbency advantage (Eggers (2017)). Its empirical counterpart can be estimated with the bounds defined in Lee (2009) and Anagol and Fujiwara (2016), based on assuming different counterfactual outcomes in the election following assignment of incumbency status. Third, we compile candidate-level data (winners and losers) for the national legislatures of 38 countries across all levels of economic development and provide the first like-for-like cross-country comparison of the incumbency advantage. Our estimates range from negative to highly positive.

Few studies have directly compared the incumbency advantage across countries. Those that have do not compare more than a handful. Schiumerini (2025) compares Argentina (Governors), Brazil (Mayors), and Chile (Mayors). Song (2018) compares six national legislatures (Canada, India, Japan, Korea, UK, and the US).[3] De Magalhaes et al. (2025) compares local elections for four countries (Brazil, Colombia, Denmark, and Finland). Bowles and Marx (2021) looks at legislative elections for 12 African countries but pools the data and does not present cross-country estimates.

In recent work, Descamps et al. (2026) study what they call the global incumbency advantage: using all presidential and parliamentary elections held since 1945, they estimate how a national electoral victory affects the probability that winning parties and leaders retain power beyond their term. The object they measure is deliberately different from the theoretical incumbency advantage studied here: it pools executive

[3]Also Brazilian Mayors and Indian state legislatures.

and legislative offices and includes the endogenous timing of elections. Our focus is the individual legislator's incumbency advantage, estimated from close races for the same office across time. We return to this contrast in Section 3.3.

Most recent studies with a comparative focus are country specific and use regression discontinuity design (henceforth RDD) as the estimation method. These studies often have diverging definitions of the incumbency advantage and focus on different offices. Some compare winning parties versus runner-up parties.[4] Others estimate the effect for the individual politician of being the winner (vs. being the runner-up) on subsequent electoral success.[5] Most of these estimates, however, are not directly comparable. For example, winner vs runners-up comparisons tend to count the choice not to rerun the same as a defeat, and rerunning rates vary considerably across countries. Moreover, party estimates have to explain context specific attributes such as party-switching, institutional weakness, and different term-limits, therefore making cross-country comparison difficult.

To achieve comparable estimates across countries, the first restriction we impose is to focus on the individual and not on the party. In political systems with weak parties and substantial party switching, the interpretation of party-based results becomes harder (e.g., for Brazil see De Magalhães (2015) and Klašnja and Titiunik (2017) and for Zambia see Arriola et al. (2022)). Moreover, the issue of rerunning is not dealt with by the focus on parties. Most countries have three or more competitive

[4]For example, US House, Lee (2008); Brazil Mayors, Klašnja and Titiunik (2017); Canada Parliament, Kendall and Rekkas (2012); Germany, Hainmueller and Kern (2008); UK, Eggers and Spirling (2017); Zambia, Macdonald (2014).

[5]For example, Brazil Mayors, De Magalhães (2015); Finland local, Hyytinen et al. (2018); India, Linden (2004); Ireland, Redmond and Regan (2015); Norway, Fiva and Smith (2018); South Korea, Kang et al. (2018).

parties; parties do not necessarily file a candidate for every seat; some parties are new entrants; and some parties disappear after a few electoral cycles. Moreover, evidence from the US states also suggests the focus on the individual or 'personal' advantage is justified. Fowler and Hall (2014) have shown that in US state legislatures the personal advantage tends to be positive, whereas the partisan advantage is zero; and Lopes da Fonseca (2017) finds similar results for mayoral elections in Portugal.[6]

We study two concepts of the incumbency advantage that differ in the interpretation of 'non-incumbent'. The first is the *incumbent-runner-up advantage*, which compares the same individual rerunning as the incumbent or rerunning as a non-incumbent. The second is the *incumbent-challenger advantage*, which relates to the 'quality difference' model of the incumbency advantage and compares a sitting incumbent with their current challenger (Eggers (2017)). Neither concept is point identified, so both require the estimation of bounds. The key distinction is in how those bounds arise. The bounds for the incumbent-runner-up advantage require no counterfactual assumption: they are needed only because the researcher does not observe why politicians do not rerun. The bounds for the incumbent-challenger advantage (Lee (2009) and Anagol and Fujiwara (2016)) instead impute counterfactual outcomes to candidates in elections they did not contest. Our main theoretical result, Proposition 1, is that the two upper bounds are nonetheless equivalent. We can therefore define an *upper-bound incumbency advantage* that is estimable in any electoral system, holds its meaning across both concepts, and – because it equals the incumbent-runner-up upper bound – rests on no counterfactual assumption.

[6]See also Erikson and Titiunik (2015).

Our third contribution compiles a cross-country data set that links individual politicians over time and shows that close elections in these countries are valid for regression discontinuity design, extending Eggers et al. (2015) to individual-level data across countries (data sources are listed in Section A).

Focusing on individual candidates and using RDD yields an estimand that can be applied across any electoral system.[7] All that is required is to identify individual winners and runners-up and compare how they fare in the following election. Because the counterfactual is *the same individual* as a runner-up, the design controls for party effects: winners and runners-up have the same average party affiliation at the cutoff, which can be tested for balance. The usual external-validity caveat is tempered by Hainmueller et al. (2015), whose assessment suggests RDD validity extends beyond close races.

In the final section we relate these RDD estimates to country characteristics. The upper-bound incumbency advantage is negatively correlated with electoral turnover (though the two are distinct objects), positively with GDP per capita, and negatively with corruption (the V-Dem index averaged over each country's window); it is unrelated to parliamentary power (Fish and Kroenig (2009)). All results also hold for the lower-bound incumbent-runner-up advantage. Finally, we contrast our measure with the "global incumbency advantage" of Descamps et al. (2026): their national power retention is U-shaped in democratic quality, whereas our electoral advantage for individual legislators rises monotonically with it. Taken together, the estimates show that the individual incumbency advantage is a feature of rich democracies with

[7]The exception would be a system with a one-term limit for legislators.

clean elections. Where executives are entrenched, e.g., Uganda and The Gambia, individual legislators enjoy no advantage at all, even as national incumbents retain power for decades.

1 Definitions of the Incumbency Advantage

1.1 The incumbent-challenger advantage - theory

The theoretical literature that has explored the incumbency advantage and its mechanisms has focused on a setup that compares two adversaries facing each other in an election. One is the incumbent (i.e., the winner of the previous election), the other is the challenger. Incumbency advantage is then defined as the difference in the vote-share (or probability of victory) that can be attributed to one of the candidates being the incumbent. To fix ideas let the utility of voter i when electing candidate $j = \{a, b\}$ to be defined below as in Eggers (2017):

$$u_i(j) = \theta_j + \gamma I_j,$$

where θ_j is the quality of candidate j and I_j is an indicator variable for incumbency status.[8] Then, when candidate a faces candidate b, the resulting vote share for candidate a is:

$$V_t = \frac{1}{2} + \theta_a - \theta_b + \gamma(I_a - I_b),$$

[8]Eggers (2017) assumes electorate balance regarding party preferences in his main analysis.

where $\frac{1}{2}$ represents the baseline vote-share of a two-candidate race with balanced party preferences, $\theta_a - \theta_b$ is the difference in quality (unrelated to incumbency) between incumbent and *challenger*, and γ is any attribute valued by the voters that is solely due to having held office, i.e., to being the incumbent.

The advantage of an incumbent versus a challenger can either come from quality differences or from direct benefits of holding office (γ). Higher quality among incumbents compared to challengers can be explained by electoral selection, strategic challenger entry, or both (Ashworth and Bueno de Mesquita (2008) and Eggers (2017)). Benefits of holding office can range from franking rights (Mayhew (1974)), resource availability (Meirowitz (2008)), seniority (Muthoo and Shepsle (2014)), connections (Brollo and Nannicini (2012)), or signalling (Caselli et al. (2014) and Fowler (2015)).

Estimating the incumbent-challenger advantage is important but difficult. The unfeasible real-life experiment would be to first have a sample of individuals running for office, then to randomly allocate incumbency status (treatment) to some and challenger status (control) to those remaining.[9]

1.2 The party incumbent-challenger advantage

A feasible RDD estimation of the incumbent-challenger advantage requires two conditions: (i) exactly two contestants, and (ii) the *same* two contestants, in consecutive electoral cycles. When these conditions hold, winner and incumbent coincide, as do runner-up and challenger. In practice, these condition holds in the US strict

[9]Fowler (2015) approximates this by randomly informing a group of voters about the margin of victory of their sitting governor.

two-party system. If party A wins in t and only A and B contest $t+1$, then A is the incumbent and B the challenger, so the RDD comparison of the winning party with the runner-up party in the following cycle identifies the *party* incumbent-challenger advantage, the object of Lee (2008).[10]

Conditions (i) and (ii) are unlikely to hold without a strict two-party system. Even in countries with a two-party system, condition (ii) is unlikely to hold once you consider individuals instead of parties. The individual winner or the runner-up in the first electoral cycle may choose not to rerun (or be the subject of random attrition) before the following electoral cycle. Once the equivalence between incumbent and winner and between runner-up and challenger is lost, there is a choice to be made. Should we analyze the effect of being the winner (or 'becoming the incumbent') versus being runner-up, or the effect of being the incumbent versus being the challenger. The former is straightforward to define and estimate with RDD. So we discuss it first.

1.3 The incumbent-runner-up advantage

Let us define the incumbent-runner-up advantage using a potential outcomes framework. Let D_i be an indicator variable for a politician i winning an election

[10]Under these conditions RDD party estimates combine quality-based advantages with the direct advantage of incumbency status, since each party may run a different candidate in the second cycle; Eggers (2017) discusses this, and Erikson and Titiunik (2015) and Fowler and Hall (2014) propose decompositions into personal and partisan components for strict two-party systems.

(e.g., a seat in parliament) in period t, i.e., candidate i receives the treatment and $D_i = 1$.[11] If candidate i loses the election in period t, candidate i is assigned to the control group and $D_i = 0$. At this stage we can think of the assignment of treatment (winning or losing) as random.[12] In period $t + 1$ elections for the same office take place again. Let the indicator variable R_i be equal to 1 if politician i runs in period $t + 1$, and zero otherwise. Let W_i be equal to 1 if politician i wins the election in period $t + 1$ and zero otherwise. Define the composite outcome $Y_i = W_i.R_i$: it takes value 1 if politician i runs and wins, and 0 otherwise, i.e., if politician i does not run ($R_i = 0$) or runs and loses ($R_i = 1$ but $W_i = 0$). Each of R_i, W_i, and Y_i has two potential values indexed by treatment status: e.g., $Y_{i,1}$ is the electoral result in $t+1$ of politician i if she was the winner in t, and $Y_{i,0}$ if she was the runner-up in t.

The unconditional estimate $E[Y_{i,1} - Y_{i,0}]$, i.e., the effect of winning in t on running-and-winning in $t + 1$, is point identified and is estimated directly by RDD. This is the *individual and unconditional incumbency advantage* of De Magalhães (2015), the object estimated, without discussion of bounds, in a series of papers in different settings: Lee (2001), the working paper version of Lee (2008), for US House candidates; Linden (2004) for Indian legislators; Trounstine (2011) for US city councillors; Hyytinen et al. (2018) for Finnish local elections, among others cited in the Introduction. It counts every decision not to rerun as a defeat.

The incumbent-runner-up advantage we define differs from this object in one respect: it partials out random attrition – candidates who leave electoral politics for

[11] The discussion that follows focuses on individual politicians but can also be applied to parties.

[12] In the empirical estimation we will exploit regression discontinuity design. Hyytinen et al. (2018) and De Magalhaes et al. (2025) show that a coin-toss assignment of an election winner (due to an actual draw in the vote count) and RDD estimates yield similar results in practice.

reasons unrelated to whether they won or lost in t (a predetermined propensity to retire, illness). Such candidates should not contribute to measuring the incumbency advantage, because their exit carries no information about the value of holding office. Since the share of random attrition may vary widely across countries, a comparable estimate should account for it.

Definition 1. The incumbent-runner-up advantage is the average effect of winning office in t on being elected for the same office in $t+1$, among candidates whose rerunning decision is not determined by attrition unrelated to the election outcome in t.

Definition 1 and the bounds we construct for it are the paper's central conceptual contribution. Unlike the sample-selection bounds discussed below, they require *no* counterfactual assumption about how any candidate would have fared in an election she did not contest; they follow only from the researcher's incomplete information about *why* some candidates do not rerun. To make this precise, let α be the share of candidates subject to outcome-unrelated attrition. Because such attrition affects bare winners and bare runners-up alike at the cutoff, these candidates contribute zero to the observed effect, so that[13]

$$E[Y_{i,1} - Y_{i,0}] \;=\; (1-\alpha)\cdot\theta_{IR},$$

[13]Exiting *upward* to a higher office would break the symmetry above. For the national legislators we study the channel is negligible: De Magalhães et al. (2025), tracking the careers of Brazilian federal deputies, find that barely winning a seat does not meaningfully raise the probability of moving to a higher office, so upward exit does not contaminate the rerunning margin in practice.

where θ_{IR} is the incumbent-runner-up advantage of Definition 1. The share α is not identified: we observe *who* does not rerun, but not *why*. All we know is its logical range: it can be as low as zero (every exit is strategic), and it cannot exceed the observed non-rerunning share of the group that reruns the most, $\alpha \leq 1 - \max\{E[R_{i,1}], E[R_{i,0}]\}$. Hence θ_{IR} is set identified, not point identified, and $E[Y_{i,1} - Y_{i,0}]$ (the object discussed in De Magalhães (2015)) is its *lower bound*, obtained at $\alpha = 0$. We refer to the parameter as the 'incumbent-runner-up advantage' to highlight that it compares incumbents with their runners-up instead of incumbents and challengers.[14]

The RDD's identification assumptions guarantee that differences in quality between those becoming the incumbents and runners-up need not be considered.[15] At the cutoff, RDD measures the effect of becoming the incumbent vs being the runner-up for the same individual i. Quality effects still play a role in the incumbent-runner-up advantage, but only through the selection into entry, e.g., the scare-off effect. For example, it may be that the winners face weaker opponents than the runners-up in the subsequent election, thus giving the winners some advantage. Importantly, part of the incumbent-runner-up advantage may be precisely through such a mechanism: to find it easier (or cheaper) to rerun. Formally, the incumbent-runner-up effect on rerunning is defined as: $E[R_{i,1} - R_{i,0}]$. This is a key component of the incumbent-runner-up advantage that is not present in the theoretical definition of

[14]The term 'personal incumbency advantage' has been defined in Fowler and Hall (2014) and in Erikson and Titiunik (2015) as the difference in the two-party vote share of the same individual candidate when running in an open-seat versus running as the incumbent in the same district at the same time.

[15]At the implementation stage we can test this assumption with balance tests.

the incumbent-challenger advantage, since the latter is defined once we have conditioned on who is running.

If the reason for non-rerunning is predetermined or the attrition is random, then it should affect the treatment and control group alike. Thus, we can construct the *upper-bound incumbent-runner-up advantage* as the lower-bound estimate scaled by the rerunning rate of the group with the largest rerunning rate: $\frac{1}{\max\{E[R_{i,1}],E[R_{i,0}]\}}.E[Y_{i,1} - Y_{i,0}]$. In most cases, winners have the highest rerunning rate, and the upper-bound can be re-written as $\frac{1}{E[R_{i,1}]}.E[Y_{i,1} - Y_{i,0}]$.

To fix ideas regarding the bounds, let us compare two settings. In both there are 100 winners and 100 runners-up. All elections in period t were ties and the winners were chosen by a coin-flip. In setting A 98 winners and 100 runners-up do not rerun. The two winners who do rerun are elected in period $t+1$. In setting B everyone reruns. There are 51 winners and 49 runners-up from period t who are successful in period $t+1$. Our estimate of the lower-bound incumbent-runner-up advantage $E[Y_{i,1} - Y_{i,0}]$ delivers a result of 2% for both settings. Once we scale the success rate in the second electoral cycle for both winners and runners-up according to the rerunning rate of the winners from t who chose to rerun as incumbents in $t+1$: $\frac{1}{E[R_{i,1}]}.E[Y_{i,1} - Y_{i,0}]$, we have the upper-bound estimates. Notice that the upper-bound estimates deliver an incumbent-runner-up advantage of 100% in setting A and an incumbent-runner-up advantage of 2% in setting B (the same as the lower-bound). The choice of which estimate is more relevant depends on whether we believe random attrition or strategic concerns to be the main force driving rerunning rates.

If we believe that non-rerunning for winners in setting A was due to random

attrition and we wish to abstract from it, then we should compare 100% incumbency advantage in A with 2% in B (winning office in setting A gives certainty of being re-elected as long as random attrition does not affect the individual). If we believe that all non-rerunning in A is due to strategic concerns (those who did not re-run did so as they foresaw certain defeat), then we should compare an incumbency advantage of 2% in A with 2% in B.

In practice, these bounds will be very tight in electoral systems with high rerunning rates among winners (e.g., the US) and when the incumbent-runner-up advantage is close to 0 (e.g., Malawi). Moreover, note that these bounds are constructed through scaling only and, hence, the sign of the point estimate is the same in both bounds.

1.4 The incumbent-challenger advantage - RDD estimation

Our second contribution is to give the theoretical incumbent-challenger advantage of Section 1.1 an empirical counterpart, and to show that its bounds are exactly the sample-selection bounds of Lee (2009) as applied to close elections by Anagol and Fujiwara (2016). The essential difference from the incumbent-runner-up advantage is that these bounds *do* require a counterfactual assumption: because the incumbent-challenger advantage is defined conditional on contesting the next election, bounding it means imputing an electoral outcome in $t+1$ to candidates who did not contest it.

The ideal experiment to estimate the incumbent-challenger advantage is unfeasible as it requires randomly assigning incumbent/challenger status once the candidates disputing the race have been determined. The feasible estimate of the incumbent-

challenger advantage requires us to use results from an RDD comparing winners and runners-up from period t and to impose four assumptions. These assumptions allow us to re-establish the equivalence between winner in t and incumbent in $t+1$ and between runner-up in t and challenger in $t+1$.

To present these assumptions, we use the classification of candidates by rerunning behavior introduced by Lee (2009) in the context of sample-selection bounds and applied to close elections by Anagol and Fujiwara (2016), whose derivations we follow throughout this section. Winners and runners-up come as four types of candidates: "always-takers", who rerun whether they are winners or runners-up in the first electoral cycle; "never-takers", who do not rerun under any circumstances; "compliers", who rerun if they are winners but do not rerun if they are runners-up; and "defiers", who rerun if they are runners-up but do not rerun if they are winners.

The first necessary assumption to generate an equivalence between winner and incumbent and between runner-up and challenger is that there are no defiers (Lee (2009)).

The second assumption is that we can identify the share of never-takers by the share of non-rerunners in the group with the highest rerunning rate. We can therefore exclude the 'never-takers' and condition our estimates on the individuals who reran ('always-takers') or were willing to rerun (compliers). In other words, the incumbent-challenger advantage has to be estimated comparing winners and runners-up conditional on the rerunning rate of the largest group. Post-treatment bias would occur if we were to condition the sample on winners who rerun and on runners-up who

rerun; as pointed out in De Magalhães (2015).[16]

Third, we must assume a success rate for compliers who were runners-up – who by definition did not rerun – as if they had rerun. This assignment of a counterfactual electoral success rate will determine the bounds.

Finally, we must also assume that the rate of electoral success among the winners who become incumbents in t who rerun in $t+1$, which is observed, would be the same had they faced the runners-up compliers that we 'forced' to rerun in a counterfactual election with the third assumption.

With these four assumptions, we regain the equivalence between winner and incumbent and between runner-up and challenger.

Definition 2. The empirical approximation of the incumbent-challenger advantage is the effect on winning in the subsequent election conditional on being always-taker or complier: $E[W_{i,1} - W_{i,0}|R_{i,1} = 1]$.[17]

Definition 2 can be expanded as discussed in Anagol and Fujiwara (2016)[18] (we suppress the i subscript for brevity):

$$E[W_1 - W_0|R_1 = 1] = \frac{1}{E(R_1)}.[E(W_1R_1 - W_0R_0) - E[R_1 - R_0].E(W_0|R_1 = 1, R_0 = 0)].$$

[16] See also Zhang and Rubin (2003), Montgomery et al. (2018), and Coppock (2018). Note that differential rerunning rates are not the only effects in the causal pathway of the close election RD from period t. Media exposure and campaign spending are other examples (Prato and Wolton (2018)).

[17] This is the definition if the share of winners who rerun is higher than the share of runners-up who rerun. Otherwise, the share of "never-takers" is assumed to be the share of runners-up who do not rerun.

[18] See Appendix A.1. of Anagol and Fujiwara (2016).

The first term in the right-hand side of the expression ($\frac{1}{E(R_1)}$) scales the effect to the share of rerunning by the winners. This is because we disregard the never-takers. The second term is the unconditional effect on rerunning and winning described in definition 1 ($E(W_1R_1 - W_0R_0)$). The first component of the third term ($E[R_1 - R_0]$) can also be written as $Prob(R_{i,1} > R_{i,0})$, which is the preferred notation of Anagol and Fujiwara (2016).[19]

The first component of the third term is the estimate of the effect that being the winner (vs. being the runner-up) in t has on rerunning rates in $t+1$. The third term ($E[R_1 - R_0].E(W_0|R_1 = 1, R_0 = 0)$) is being subtracted from the unconditional effect on $Y = W \times R$ to isolate the effect on W for the winners in t who rerun in $t+1$ (i.e., $R_1 = 1$). The second component of the third term, $E(W_{i,0}|R_{i,1} = 1, R_{i,0} = 0)$, is the only unobservable. It indicates how well the 'compliers' ($R_{i,1} = 1, R_{i,0} = 0$) who were runners-up – and by definition did not rerun – would have done had they run again in $t+1$.

The estimated object has bounds that are determined by our assumptions regarding $E(W_{i,0}|R_{i,1} = 1, R_{i,0} = 0)$, the counterfactual electoral success of compliers. We pinpoint the *upper-bound* if we assume that all compliers were to rerun and lose, $E(W_0|R_1 = 1, R_0 = 0) = 0$. For the *lower-bound* we assign compliers with a probability 1 of electoral success in $t+1$.

[19]This is so under the assumption of no defiers: $E(R_1 - R_0) = Prob(R_1 = 1, R_0 = 1) + Prob(R_1 = 1, R_0 = 0) - Prob(R_0 = 1, R_1 = 1) - Prob(R_0 = 1, R_1 = 0)$.

1.5 Relating the bounds

Proposition 1. The upper-bound of the incumbent-challenger advantage is equivalent to the upper-bound of the incumbent-runner-up advantage.

To see this note that if $E(W_{i,0}|R_{i,1} = 1, R_{i,0} = 0) = 0$, then $E[W_{i,1} - W_{i,0}|R_{i,1} = 1] = \frac{1}{E(R_{i,1})}.[(E(Y_{i,1} - Y_{i,0})]$, which equals the upper-bound defined in section 1.3.

Proposition 1 is straightforward but important. First, it implies that one can state that the 'incumbency advantage' in a given setting is no higher than a certain value, without having to specify the specific definition of the 'incumbency advantage' that is being measured, i.e., incumbent-runner-up or incumbent-challenger.

Second, it also implies that – with knowledge of the effect of winning (vs being the runner-up) on rerunning rates – one can easily reconstruct the incumbent-challenger advantage from the incumbent-runner-up advantage and vice-versa, allowing researchers who are interested in one object to infer it from estimates of the other.

Third, Proposition 1 highlights important differences between these two concepts. For the upper-bound of both concepts to be equivalent, compliers in the runner-up group must all fail to be elected in period $t + 1$, but for different reasons. In the incumbent-runner-up upper-bound estimate, non rerunning by compliers is interpreted as a strategic decision, choosing not to rerun because they knew they would lose. This highlights the part of the incumbent-runner-up effect that works through rerunning decisions. In the incumbent-challenger estimates, *all* compliers in the runner-up group are assumed to have rerun – in order to create the runner-

up/challenger equivalence – and lost.

A remark on terminology is warranted for settings where the point estimate is negative – an incumbency *dis*advantage, as we find for, e.g., India, Korea, Malawi, and Uganda. The 'upper bound' is defined by the selection assumption most favorable to the incumbent (maximal attrition; compliers lose), not by its numerical size. When $E[Y_{i,1} - Y_{i,0}] < 0$, scaling by a rerunning rate below one amplifies the magnitude, so the 'upper bound' lies numerically *below* the lower bound. Nothing is wrong: the identified set is still the interval between the two numbers; only the assumption labels attach to opposite ends. We keep the assumption-based labels throughout and flag the negative cases in the tables.

Note also that, whereas the sign for the upper and lower bound of the incumbent-runner-up advantage are necessarily the same, the sign for the lower and upper bound for the incumbent-challenger advantage may differ. This can happen if the effect of winning in t on rerunning in $t+1$ is very large and positive, but the effect on winning in t on electoral success in $t+1$ is small.

There is no general result relating the lower-bounds between the incumbent-challenger and the incumbent-runner-up advantage. Importantly, the incumbent-challenger lower bound may not be identified in some circumstances. For example, the counterfactual where all winners from t and all runners-up from t go on to win in $t+1$ is not possible in a setting with only two candidates per seat, and only one winner per seat. The imposition of the counterfactual of a 'win in $t+1$' for the runners-up who did not run again cannot take place in a setting in which most winners from t go on to win in $t+1$, such as the US. This is a limitation specific

to the incumbent-challenger lower bound. The incumbent-runner-up advantage we define, and its bounds, face no such difficulty: they impute no future behavior or outcome to anyone, and so remain identified in every setting.

To conclude this section: the sample-selection bounds of Lee (2009) and Anagol and Fujiwara (2016) can in principle be used to estimate the incumbent-challenger advantage. In practice, however, their lower bound is often not identified: the counterfactual it requires (non-rerunning compliers winning in $t+1$) is infeasible in settings, such as single-winner districts, where most incumbents already retain their seats. What survives in all settings is the upper bound, which – being equal to the incumbent-runner-up upper bound (Proposition 1) – needs no counterfactual and is the object we take to the data. In the next section we nonetheless report the incumbent-challenger lower-bound estimates where they are computable, noting that they may not be identified in some cases. Appendix Table A1 summarizes the two concepts, their bounds, and their relationship, as a reference for the reader.

2 Empirical comparisons

2.1 Data

The only requirement for our empirical exercise is electoral data that identify, by name, the winners and the runners-up across at least two consecutive electoral cycles. No restriction to any particular electoral system is needed: all that we require is a well-defined bare winner and bare runner-up. In first-past-the-post single-member districts these are simply the top two candidates. In multi-seat plurality and single-non-transferable-vote districts they are the last candidate to take a seat (the worst winner) and the first to miss (the best loser), e.g., Chile. In open-list proportional systems they are the bare winner and bare loser within a party or coalition list, e.g., Brazil. In closed and preferential-list systems they are the candidates at the last winning and first losing list positions, e.g., Latvia. Appendix Table A6 summarizes, for each legislature, the electoral system, the bare-winner/runner-up rule, and the data source.[20]

Our largest source is the Constituency-Level Elections Archive (CLEA, Kollman et al. (2022)), from which we construct candidate-level panels for Bahamas, Bangladesh, Belize, Canada, Croatia, Germany, India, Latvia, Lithuania, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Samoa, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Trinidad and Tobago, and Vanuatu. We complement CLEA with: Election Passport (Lubin (2023)) for Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Bermuda, Botswana, Chile, Ivory Coast, Gambia, Ghana, Jamaica, Malaysia, Uganda, and Zambia; Brazil (Tri-

[20]We admit a country-year only if at least 80 percent of its candidate names are available; the country-years dropped by this screen are listed in Appendix Table A3.

bunal Superior Eleitoral); Malawi (Electoral Commission); UK (Richard Kimber and Ian Outlaw);[21] and USA (MIT Election Lab). Within each country we link individuals across consecutive elections using the same protocol as De Magalhães and Brian (2026): Jaro-Winkler similarity computed separately for surnames and given names (weights 0.6 and 0.4), with automatic acceptance of high-confidence pairs, automatic rejection below the review band, and manual review by the authors of the medium-confidence pairs; for these CLEA legislatures we further restrict matches to candidates in the same constituency, which Section A.1 describes together with its bounded effect on the estimates. Appendix Table A4 reports the counts by country. Because our running variable is the vote margin between the bare winner and the bare runner-up, it is symmetric around the cutoff by construction, and a Cattaneo et al. (2020) manipulation test on it is passed mechanically. As a diagnostic we therefore report, in Appendix Table A7 and Figures A.1 and A.2, the density test for a robustness specification that widens the sample to include additional losers (and, in multi-member districts, additional winners); widening breaks the mechanical symmetry and makes the test informative. As a further check, Appendix Table A8 reports regression-discontinuity balance tests on predetermined covariates (prior incumbency and the candidate's lagged vote share) at the cutoff; for the large majority of legislatures neither jumps; the exceptions — prior incumbency for Germany and both covariates for Papua New Guinea — are in line with what multiple testing across 32 estimates would produce by chance, and Papua New Guinea is flagged throughout.[22]

[21] Accessible online at http://www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/outlaw/sheetindex.htm.

[22] Several legislatures for which we obtained candidate data are nonetheless left out of the analysis — for insufficient effective sample size, an electoral system that does not identify a bare winner and runner-up, or the within-constituency matching restriction. Appendix Table A3 lists each excluded

We were also able to compute the upper-bound incumbency advantage by retrieving point estimates from tables and graphs in the following papers: Fiva and Smith (2018) (Norway), Redmond and Regan (2015) (Ireland), Kang et al. (2018) (Korea), Fouirnaies (2021) (Denmark), and Linden (2004) (India). None of these papers estimated the upper-bound incumbency advantage, but enough information was available: RDD estimates for the lower-bound incumbent-runner-up advantage and the effect of winning (vs. being the runner-up) on rerunning.

2.2 Practical estimations of bounds

To illustrate the application of the bounds defined here, in Table 1 we construct the bounds for both definitions of the incumbency advantage from the objects that are easily estimated from an RDD comparing winners and runners in t on how they fare in $t+1$.

In the first three rows of Table 1 we present the estimated RDD effects.[23] Column 1 is the effect of winning (vs. being the runner-up) in t on running-and-winning in $t+1$ — the term $E[Y_1 - Y_0]$ in Definition 1 and $E(W_1R_1 - W_0R_0)$ in Definition 2. Column 2 is the effect on *running* in $t+1$, the term $E[R_1 - R_0]$ in Definition 2. Columns 3 and 4 are *levels* at the cutoff read off the intercept.

In the remaining rows of Table 1 we use these estimated objects to construct the bounds for three countries: USA, Brazil, and Malawi.[24] The colour-coding traces

legislature and the reason.

[23]Our estimates follow the robust bias-correction in Calonico et al. (2014) with CER-optimal bandwidths in Calonico et al. (2020), as suggested by De Magalhaes et al. (2025).

[24]In all three settings the RDD compares bare winners in t with bare losers in t. For the US and Malawi bare winners and bare losers are determined by geographical electoral districts. In Brazil they are determined within a party-coalition open list (see De Magalhães et al. (2025) for details).

how each bound is assembled from the first three rows.

Let us walk through the US row by row. The unconditional effect of barely winning in t on running-and-winning in $t+1$ is 0.41 (column 1): winning office raises the probability of holding it after the next election by 41 percentage points. This is the lower-bound incumbent-runner-up advantage. Bare winners rerun at rate 0.69 at the cutoff (column 3). If all of the winners who do not rerun ($1 - 0.69 = 0.31$) do so because of random attrition then the upper bound is $0.41/0.69 = 0.59$, as we partial out the maximum random attrition.

Now, we construct the incumbent-challenger upper bound from the expansion of definition 2: scale by the same rerunning rate, and subtract the rerunning effect (0.33, column 2) multiplied by the counterfactual success of the runner-up compliers, which the upper-bound assumption sets to zero: $\frac{1}{0.69}[0.41 - 0.33 \times 0] = 0.59$. The two upper bounds are *the same number* – the term that distinguishes the two concepts is multiplied by zero – which is Proposition 1 in action. The lower bounds, in contrast, differ: assigning compliers certain victory gives $\frac{1}{0.69}[0.41 - 0.33 \times 1] = 0.12$ for the incumbent-challenger advantage, while the incumbent-runner-up lower bound is 0.41 itself.

Table 1 gives us insights on the sign of the bounds. For the incumbent-runner-up advantage the bounds have the same sign by construction, as the upper bound is a re-scaling of the lower bound using a positive number; no counter-factual assumptions are necessary. For the incumbent-challenger advantage, whether the upper bound and lower bound have the same sign depends on the sign of the unconditional effect on winning (first three rows, column 1) and the sign of the difference between column

Table 1: RDD measurements needed and bound construction

	Unconditional RDD diff at cut-off		$\max\{winner_t, runnerup_t\}$ values at cut-off	
	Win_{t+1}	Run_{t+1}	$E[Run_{t+1}\|ran_t]$	$E[Win_{t+1}\|ran_t, ran_{t+1}]$
USA 76-18	0.41	0.33	0.69	0.77
Brazil 98-18	0.31	0.47	0.74	0.58
Malawi 94-14	-0.01	0.04	0.6	0.35

	Incumbent-Challenger	Incumbent-Runner-up
USA Upper Bound	$\frac{1}{0.69}[0.41\text{-}0.33\times 0] = \mathbf{0.59}$	$\frac{0.41}{0.69} = \mathbf{0.59}$
USA Mod-Lower-Bound	$\frac{1}{0.69}[0.41\text{-}0.33\times 0.77] = \mathbf{0.22}$	-
USA Lower Bound	$\frac{1}{0.69}[0.41\text{-}0.33\times 1] = \mathbf{0.12}$	**0.41**
Brazil Upper Bound	$\frac{1}{0.74}[0.31\text{-}0.47\times 0] = \mathbf{0.42}$	$\frac{0.31}{0.74} = \mathbf{0.42}$
Brazil Mod-Lower-Bound	$\frac{1}{0.74}[0.31\text{-}0.47\times 0.58] = \mathbf{0.05}$	-
Brazil Lower Bound	$\frac{1}{0.74}[0.31\text{-}0.47\times 1] = \mathbf{-0.22}$	**0.31**
Malawi Upper-Bound	$\frac{1}{0.60}[-0.01\text{-}0.04\times 0] = \mathbf{-0.02}$	$\frac{-0.01}{0.60} = \mathbf{-0.02}$
Malawi Mod-Lower-Bound	$\frac{1}{0.60}[-0.01\text{-}0.04\times 0.35] = \mathbf{-0.02}$	-
Malawi Lower-Bound	$\frac{1}{0.60}[-0.01\text{-}0.04\times 1] = \mathbf{-0.08}$	**-0.01**

Note: Regression Discontinuity Design (RDD) compares bare winners and bare losers in period t on how they fare in period $t+1$. USA elections 1976–2018 from the MIT Election Data and Science Lab; Brazilian elections from the Tribunal Superior Eleitoral; Malawian elections from the Malawi Electoral Commission.

1 and column 2 in the first three rows. If the sign of these two objects is the same as in the US and Malawi, then the upper and lower bound will have the same sign. In Brazil, the effect on rerunning is larger than the effect on winning, thus making the lower-bound negative, whereas the upper-bound is positive.

The theoretical lower bound for the incumbent-challenger advantage assigns a winning probability of one in $t+1$ to the runners-up from t who chose not to rerun (the untreated compliers). Anagol and Fujiwara (2016) considered this excessive and instead assigned compliers the winning rate of *treated* rerunners. Because in practice runners-up who rerun often outperform incumbents who rerun, we report a *moderate lower bound for the incumbent-challenger advantage* that assigns compliers the *maximum* of the winning rate of incumbents who reran and the winning rate of runners-up who reran.[25]

Appendix Table A2 expands the construction of all bounds to every country in our sample. In that table countries are listed alphabetically; Figure 1 instead ranks them by their upper-bound incumbency advantage, with the US at the top and the Bahamas at the bottom. Our own estimate for India, over 1989–2019, is a small negative upper bound (-0.08). We place next to it, in Table A2, the earlier estimates reconstructed from Linden (2004): an incumbency *advantage* of 0.15 in 1980–89 that turns into a *disadvantage* of -0.25 in 1991–99. The three rows together trace a clear structural break in Indian politics around the late 1980s, after which the advantage disappears; our 1989–2019 estimate spans the two regimes and lands

[25]De Magalhães (2015) document the same pattern among Brazilian mayors, likely due to selection: estimates that condition on rerunning can suggest an incumbency disadvantage that is not there.

close to zero.[26] The moderate lower bound is unavailable for the literature-derived rows, whose published sources do not report the winning rate of incumbents and runners-up who reran in $t + 1$.

2.3 Inference: comparing bounds across countries

Because the motivation is cross-country comparison, we need to be able to say whether two countries' upper-bound incumbency advantages are statistically distinguishable. The upper bound is a ratio of two estimated quantities, $\hat{\theta} = \hat{\tau}/\hat{\rho}$, where $\hat{\tau}$ is the RD effect on running-and-winning and $\hat{\rho}$ is the rerunning rate at the cutoff of the group with the higher rerunning rate; its variance must combine the uncertainty in both. Our default measure is the delta-method interval derived in Appendix A.2, which combines the variances of $\hat{\tau}$ and $\hat{\rho}$. For a subset of well-powered legislatures we also computed a cluster bootstrap that resamples electoral districts with replacement (500 replications) and recomputes the ratio on each draw, capturing the covariance between the two ingredients directly; it is close to the delta-method interval (Appendix A.2). Figure 1 displays the delta-method 95% intervals and Appendix Table A2 lists them numerically.

Countries are independent samples, so a test that two upper bounds are equal is a two-sample z-test: $z = (\hat{\theta}_A - \hat{\theta}_B)/\sqrt{SE_A^2 + SE_B^2}$. For example, comparing the US and the UK – the two largest upper bounds among established democracies – gives $z = 1.15$ ($p = 0.25$): the two are statistically indistinguishable at conventional levels,

[26] Yang et al. (2025) document one channel consistent with such a break: the broadcast of the Hindu epics *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat* on state television in the late 1980s, which they link to the rise of Hindu nationalism and a realignment of Indian electoral politics over precisely this period. We did not see any meaningful period differences for any other country in our sample.

despite being estimated from thousands of races each. Countries whose rerunning rate at the cutoff falls below 0.3 have ratio standard errors too unstable for such pairwise tests; we report their bounds with confidence intervals but do not use them in the pairwise comparisons.

Figure 1 summarizes the whole comparison at a glance: it plots each legislature's upper-bound incumbency advantage with its 95% confidence interval, ranked by point estimate from largest to smallest. The large democracies (USA, UK, Germany, Canada) are estimated tightly, while several small legislatures span much of the $[-1, 1]$ range; the pairwise z-tests provide a formal complement to this visual comparison.

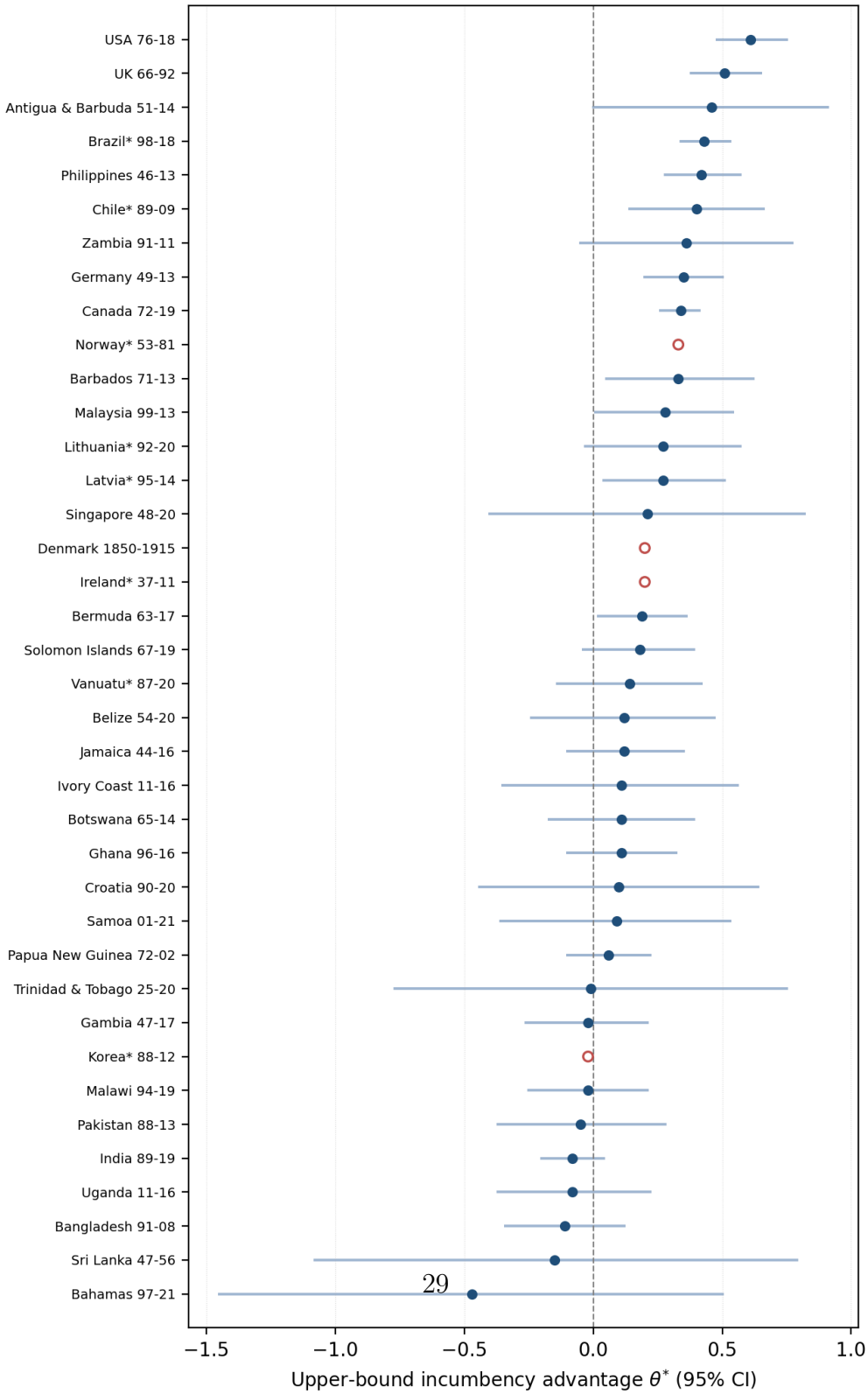
2.4 Decomposing the advantage: incumbents versus runners-up

Before relating the incumbency advantage to country characteristics, it helps to decompose it. Under the no-defiers assumption the upper bound is the difference between two rates at the cutoff,

$$\theta^* \;=\; \underbrace{E[W_1 \mid R_1 = 1]}_{\text{incumbents}} \;-\; \underbrace{E[Y_0]/E[R_1]}_{\text{runners-up}},$$

the probability that a bare winner who reruns wins again, minus the probability that a bare runner-up reruns and wins (scaled by the winner rerunning rate). Electoral turnover at the cut-off reflects only the first term; the upper-bound incumbency

Figure 1: Upper-bound incumbency advantage across national legislatures



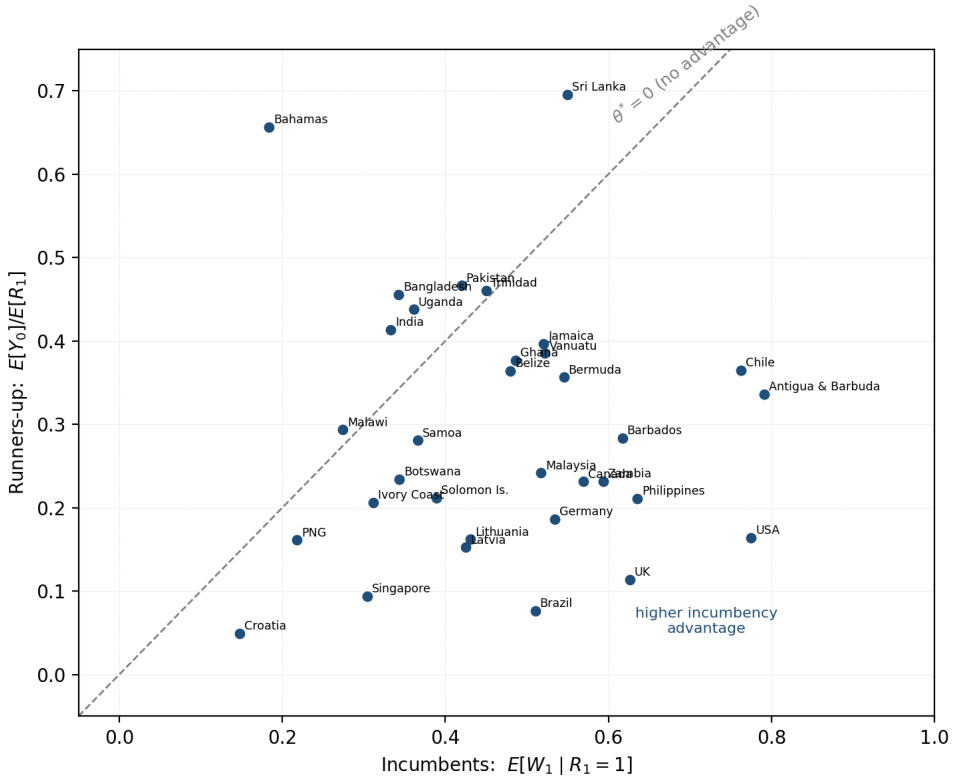
Filled markers: own-data and CLEA estimates with delta-method 95% confidence intervals. $*$ marks legislatures whose electoral system is not first-past-the-post (see Table A2). Open markers: the four literature-derived estimates (Norway, Denmark, Ireland, Korea), reported without intervals. The small legislatures at the extremes of the ranking have intervals that span zero, so

advantage is the *gap* between the two.[27] Figure 2 plots the two rates against each other: countries below the 45-degree line have a positive advantage, and the vertical distance to the line is θ^*.

The decomposition accounts for patterns that the correlations below only describe. Zambia's high advantage despite very high legislative turnover comes from beaten runners-up rarely running and winning, not from winners holding their seats especially often. Brazil and Ghana see winners hold their seats at nearly identical rates but differ sharply in how often beaten runners-up run and win, which is why their advantages diverge. The United States pairs a high rate of winners holding their seats with runners-up who seldom run and win, placing it far below the line, whereas countries above it – the Bahamas, India, Sri Lanka – are settings where beaten runners-up return at least as often as incumbents.

[27]Writing $Y = W \cdot R$ for the joint event that a candidate reruns ($R = 1$) and wins ($W = 1$), the upper bound is $\theta^* = E[Y_1 - Y_0]/E[R_1] = E[Y_1]/E[R_1] - E[Y_0]/E[R_1]$. Because R_1 is an indicator, $E[Y_1] = E[W_1 R_1] = E[W_1 \mid R_1 = 1]\, E[R_1]$, so the first term is $E[W_1 \mid R_1 = 1]$: the probability that a bare winner who reruns wins again. The second term, $E[Y_0]/E[R_1]$, is the probability that a bare runner-up reruns and wins (scaled by the winner rerunning rate $E[R_1]$). The upper-bound incumbency advantage is the gap between the two.

Figure 2: The incumbency advantage, partialling out attrition



Each point is a national legislature. The horizontal axis is the probability that a bare winner who reruns wins again, $E[W_1 \mid R_1 = 1]$; the vertical axis is the probability that a bare runner-up runs and wins (scaled by the winner rerunning rate), $E[Y_0]/E[R_1]$. The upper-bound incumbency advantage θ^* is the vertical distance below the 45-degree line; points above it have a negative advantage. Literature-derived legislatures, for which the two rates are not separately available, are omitted.

3 Correlates of the Incumbency Advantage

In this section we relate the upper-bound incumbency advantage (Figure 1; the full set of bounds is in Appendix Table A2) to country characteristics: electoral turnover, parliamentary power, economic development, and corruption. We focus on the upper bound because it is meaningful across concepts, comparable across countries, and identified; the parallel results for the lower-bound incumbent-runner-up advantage (Appendix Table A10) are similar. For brevity we drop 'upper-bound' and write simply 'incumbency advantage' here. The scatter plots omit confidence intervals for legibility.

Most of the estimates are from first-past-the-post electoral systems. As Figure 1 and Table A2 show, the lowest and highest estimates of the incumbency advantage occur under this system; countries with other electoral systems, marked with an asterisk, are scattered throughout the ranking – Brazil near the top, Ireland in the middle, Korea at the bottom. With more countries a pattern may emerge, but there is no indication that electoral systems are related to the incumbency advantage.

3.1 Turnover and Parliamentary Power

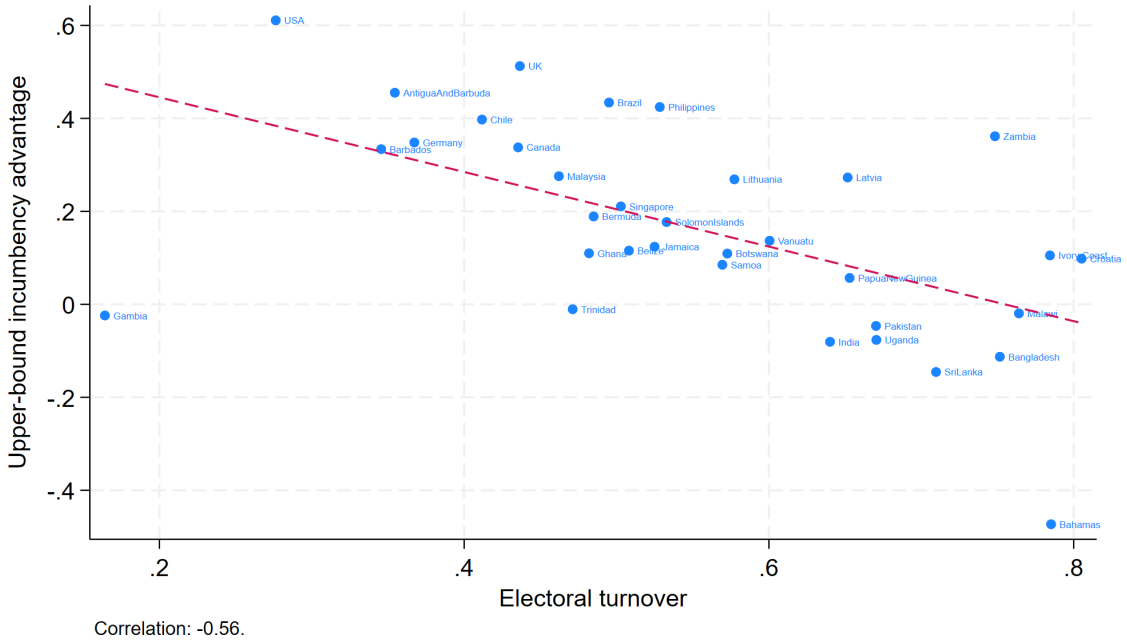
Turnover occurs when the incumbent fails to win reelection (Martin et al. (2023) and Marx et al. (2025)). We expect them to convey similar information as both concepts relate to the persistence of political power. As expected, in Figure 3 we show that electoral turnover is negatively correlated with the incumbency advantage (corr. -0.56). Low turnover rates and high incumbency advantage (top left) are self explanatory and so are high turnover rates and low incumbency advantage (bottom

right).

These direct country comparisons show that both concepts are not empirically equivalent. The main difference between the incumbency advantage and turnover is that the latter highlights the change in the identity of the incumbent, whereas the former studies the effect of being the incumbent in relation to either a challenger, or the counterfactual scenario with the same individual as the runner-up. The example of Zambia with high turnover rates and high incumbency advantage highlights how these concepts diverge. Only 42% of incumbents run again in Zambia, generating a high turnover rate. But the upper-bound incumbency advantage either discounts such high attrition rate (incumbent-runner-up advantage) or conditions the results on rerunners being challengers (incumbent-challenger advantage). The incumbency advantage focuses on the effect of holding office on the *individual incumbent* , whereas turnover focuses on the institution, i.e., the *overall number of incumbents* who were not reelected.

New insights can be gained from contrasting both estimates. For example, Brazil and Ghana have a similar turnover rate, but very different incumbency advantages. In both countries incumbents are highly likely to rerun (74% and 66%) and that is an important explanation for the similarity in turnover rates. The important difference between both countries is the rerunning rates among runners-up, respectively 20% in Brazil and 50% in Ghana. Brazilian incumbents have an edge over runners-up that incumbents in Ghana do not have. This does not impact the relative turnover rate, but it is fundamental in explaining the incumbency advantage. For the individual candidate winning in Brazil yields a larger advantage than winning in Ghana.

Figure 3: UB Incumbency Advantage and Electoral Turnover



$n = 34$. Correlation with the upper bound: Pearson $r = -0.56$, Spearman $\rho = -0.61$.

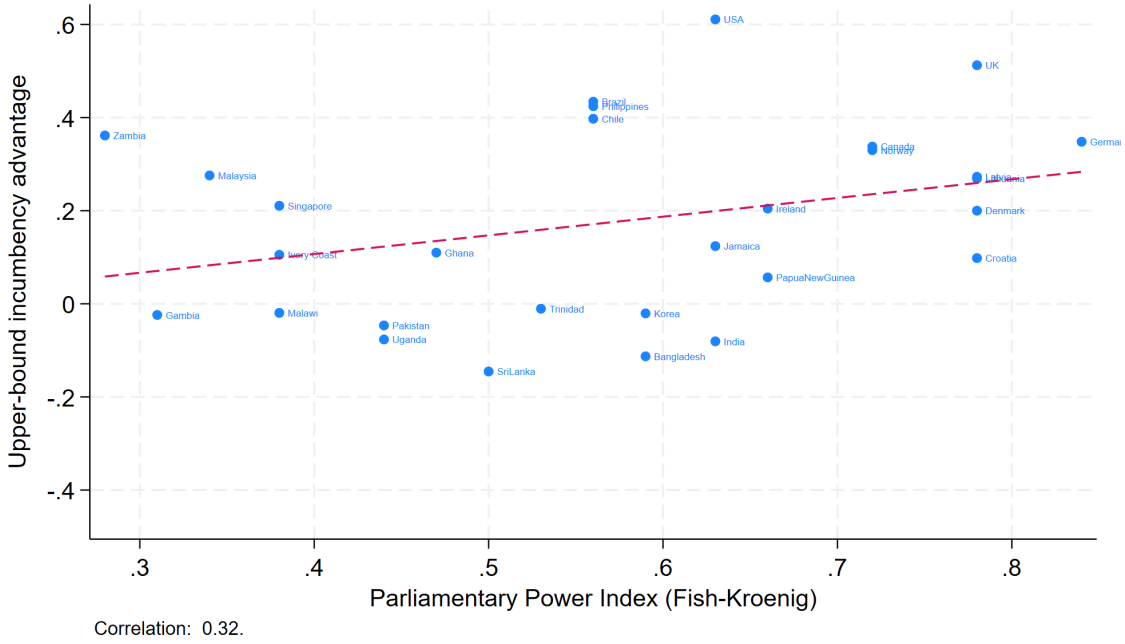
Nevertheless, both countries have a similar turnover rate, i.e., the number of new representatives in Parliament in each electoral cycle is the same.

In Figure 4 we relate the incumbency advantage with a different measure of parliamentary power, the index proposed and compiled in Fish and Kroenig (2009).[28] There is a small (0.32) not statistically significant correlation between the incumbency advantage and the Parliamentary Power index.

Mayhew (1974) puts forward an increase in the incumbency advantage (the vanishing of the marginals) as one of the main mechanisms to explain the lack of turnover

[28]The index is an average of 32 variables on parliamentary power coded 1 or zero by — at least five — country specialists.

Figure 4: UB Incumbency Advantage and Parliamentary Power Index



$n = 29$. Correlation with the upper bound: Pearson $r = 0.32$, Spearman $\rho = 0.29$.

in Congress. Figures 3 and 4 show that — in a comparative perspective — the relationships between turnover, parliamentary power, and the incumbency advantage are, at best, tenuous. The incumbency advantage focuses on the individual power to remain in elected office, whereas turnover focuses on change in power relations within the legislature. We document a clear disconnect between these powers. Such a disconnect can also be noted in contrasting the strong personal incumbency advantage estimated for US state legislators (Fowler and Hall (2014)) with the null majority-party effect in US state legislatures (De Magalhães (2021)). i.e., a party winning a slim majority in this election has no effect on that party winning a majority in the following election.

3.2 Economic Development and Corruption

Early results documenting an incumbency *disadvantage* came from developing countries: India (Linden (2004)), Zambia (Macdonald (2014)); or middle income countries: Romania (Klašnja (2015)) and Brazil (Klašnja and Titiunik (2017)). This led to a hypothesis that economic development is linked to the incumbency advantage, explicitly discussed in more recent papers such as Song (2018) and Lee (2020). Nevertheless, incumbency disadvantages have also been identified in richer countries such as Japan (Ariga (2015)) and Korea (Roh (2017)). As discussed in the introduction, these papers varied in method and electoral settings. For example, Klašnja (2015) and Klašnja and Titiunik (2017) study mayoral elections, whereas Linden (2004) and Macdonald (2014) study parliamentary elections. Linden (2004) provides an individual estimate and Macdonald (2014) a party estimate of the incumbency advantage.

In Figures 5 and 6 we return to this question, comparing the upper-bound incumbency advantage across national legislatures against GDP per capita, the V-Dem political corruption index, and the V-Dem electoral democracy index, with the two V-Dem measures averaged over each country's estimation window rather than a single recent year.[29]

The incumbency advantage rises with GDP per capita (corr. 0.41; Figure 5), the most robust of the correlates we examine.[30] There are two clear outliers: South

[29]GDP per capita is measured as a single recent-year figure (World Bank, constant 2015 US$). Averaging it over each country's estimation window instead – using the World Bank series where it is available (1960 onward) – yields a very similar correlation with the incumbency advantage (0.41 versus 0.41 on the 33 legislatures with time-series coverage), so the timing choice is immaterial.

[30]Two rows in Table A2 are special cases that we retain for completeness but exclude from the correlations: Bermuda is a British Overseas Territory rather than a sovereign national legislature,

Korea, with a high income and a zero incumbency advantage,[31] and Zambia, with a low income and a high advantage — a result that contrasts with the disadvantage reported by Macdonald (2014), who estimates the party rather than the individual advantage.[32]

The advantage falls with corruption (corr. −0.45; right panel of Figure 6), measured by the V-Dem political corruption index matched to each country's estimation window rather than a single-year perception ranking.[33] This is in line with Ferraz and Finan (2008) and Klašnja (2015), though countries such as Brazil and Zambia combine a high advantage with high perceived corruption, while Korea and Botswana combine low corruption with a zero advantage.

Finally, the advantage rises with democratic quality (corr. 0.46; left panel of Figure 6), and the relationship is monotone — a pattern we develop, and contrast with measures of national power retention, in Section 3.3.

3.3 Global vs electoral incumbency advantage

The contrast with Descamps et al. (2026) is instructive precisely because the two measures answer different questions. Their *global (post-term) incumbency advantage* measures the probability that a marginal election winner is still in power

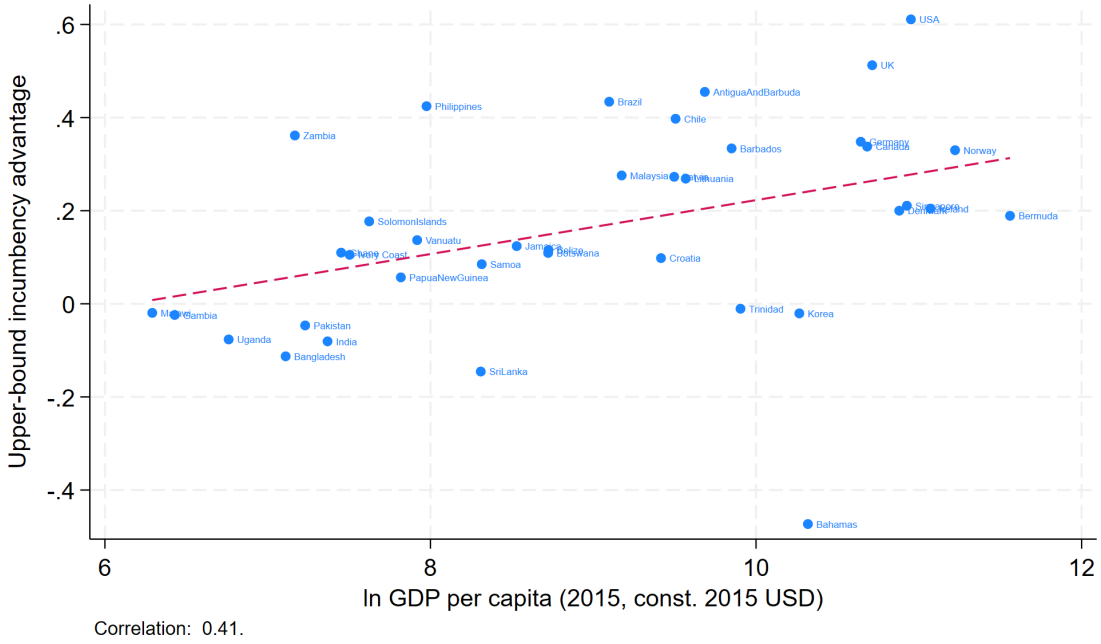
and the Danish estimate of Fouirnaies (2021) covers 1850–1915, before universal suffrage. Dropping these two, together with the four literature-derived rows, leaves the pattern intact and if anything slightly stronger: the correlations become −0.56 (turnover), 0.45 (GDP), 0.51 (democracy), and −0.46 (corruption).

[31]The South Korea case is studied in detail in Roh (2017) and Kang et al. (2018).

[32]This change from a disadvantage on party estimates to an advantage/no-advantage on individual estimates parallels the Brazilian-mayor results comparing Klašnja and Titiunik (2017) and De Magalhães (2015).

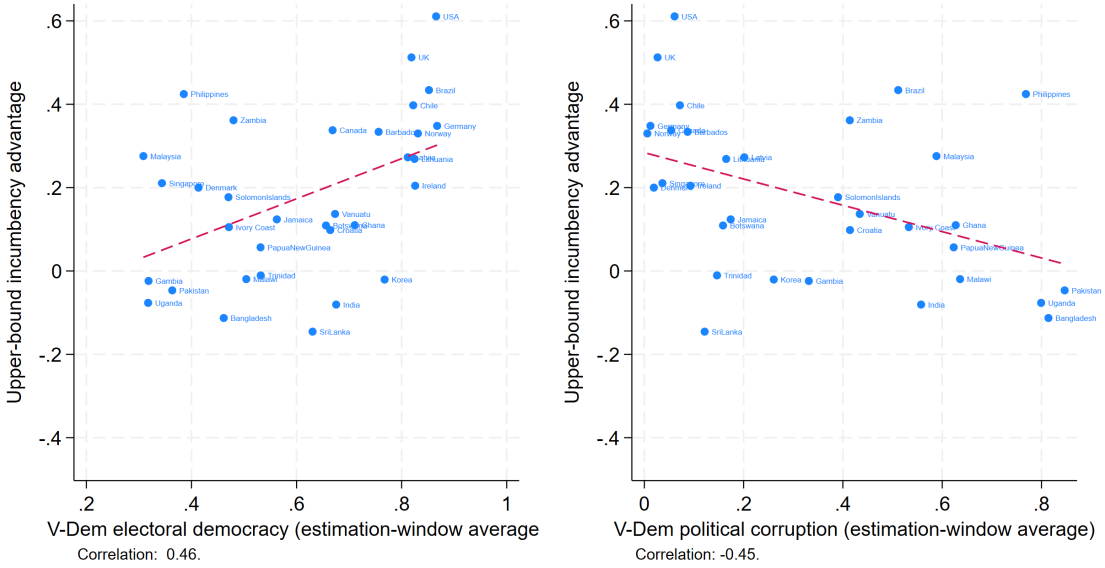
[33]Using the 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index ranking instead yields the same pattern (corr. −0.41).

Figure 5: UB Incumbency Advantage and Economic Development



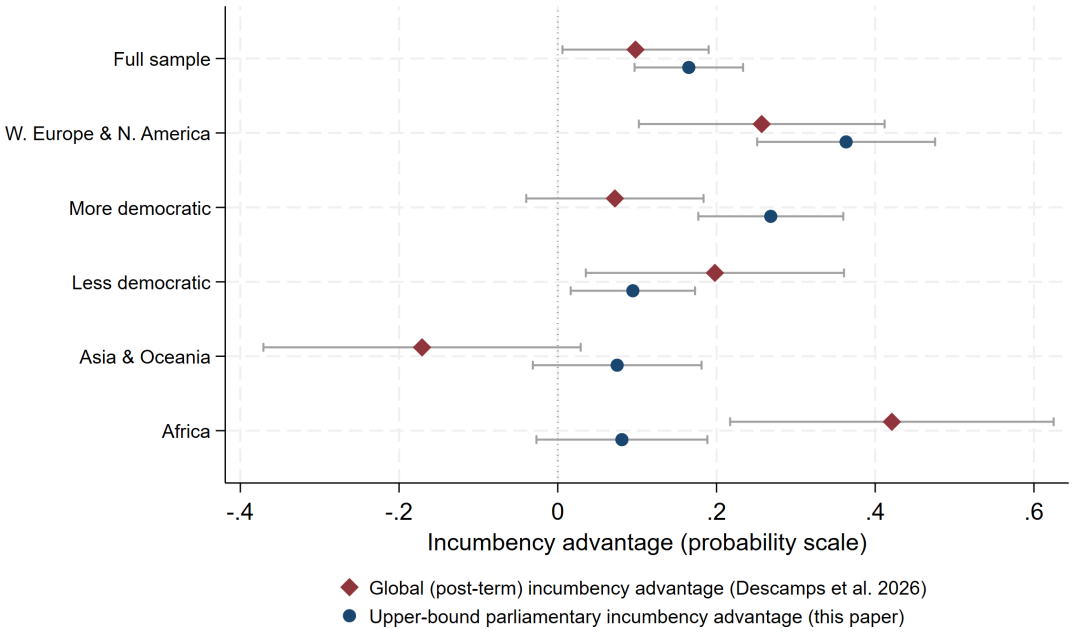
$n = 38$. Correlation with the upper bound: Pearson $r = 0.41$, Spearman $\rho = 0.50$.

Figure 6: UB Incumbency Advantage: Democracy and Corruption



$n = 33$ for both panels. Correlation with the upper bound: electoral democracy, Pearson $r = 0.46$, Spearman $\rho = 0.47$; political corruption, Pearson $r = -0.45$, Spearman $\rho = -0.49$.

Figure 7: Two objects: the global (post-term) incumbency advantage vs. the upper-bound parliamentary incumbency advantage



Bars: 95% confidence intervals. Global (post-term): party-level advantage at the scheduled term end, from Descamps et al. (2026), Table D.2. Parliamentary: subsample means of the country upper bounds in Table A2 (SE = between-country dispersion). Democratic halves: sample-median split of window-averaged V-Dem polyarchy; the Descamps et al. (2026) bins are Democracies and Autocracies.

six months past the scheduled end of the term (their Table D.2). This is a national, party-level object that deliberately includes autocracies and pools executive and legislative offices; ours is an *upper-bound parliamentary incumbency advantage* for individual legislators. Figure 7 compares, subsample by subsample, their global (post-term) advantage with the average parliamentary upper bound from Table A2. Where democracy is consolidated the two agree: in Western Europe and North America the global (post-term) advantage is 0.26 and our parliamentary average is 0.36. Everywhere else they diverge, and in Africa they diverge considerably: national election winners are 42 percentage points more likely to hold power beyond their scheduled term – almost tripling the retention probability of a close runner-up – while the average parliamentary upper bound for our African legislatures is 0.08, with several countries negative. Splitting both samples by democratic quality shows the divergence is systematic: their global (post-term) advantage is *larger* in the less democratic half (0.20 vs. 0.07), while our parliamentary advantage *shrinks* (0.10 vs. 0.27). The autocratic arm of their U-shape exists for the global (post-term) advantage; it does not exist for individual legislators. Descamps et al. (2026) also report, across existing subnational estimates, a positive association with GDP per capita and a negative one with corruption; our harmonized bounds confirm both on a like-for-like basis. That individual legislators show no autocratic arm is partly mechanical: our estimates require competitive close races that pass density tests, so settings where manipulation forecloses electoral competition contribute little to our sample (window-averaged V-Dem clean-elections correlates with the upper bound at 0.42).

The mechanism behind this divergence is documented in the country evidence. Entrenched executives retain national power for decades while presiding over exceptionally high legislative turnover: in Uganda, where the same president has held office since 1986, the parliamentary upper bound is -0.07; in The Gambia, whose estimation window spans Jammeh's 22-year rule, it is -0.10. Dominant executives actively engineer legislative turnover – controlling nominations, deselecting incumbents in primaries, and campaigning against their own party's reformers – to prevent legislators from developing independent bases of support. Opalo (2019) discusses the case of Kenya and Zambia, Wilkins (2021) the case of Uganda, and De Magalhães and Brian (2026) provide a detailed exploration of this divergence for eighteen African legislatures.

In Table 2 we show an exploratory regression analysis of the incumbency advantage on the variables in this section. Rather than force a single all-variables specification, we report a sequence of models with increasing controls: column (1) uses only (log) GDP per capita, which is available for every country, and each subsequent column adds covariates that are missing for some countries – window-averaged V-Dem democracy and corruption (unavailable for five micro-states), in-sample electoral turnover (unavailable for the four literature-derived rows), and the parliamentary power index – so the sample shrinks from 38 to 25. Democratic quality, income, and corruption are strongly correlated bivariately and are difficult to separate once entered together – the same multicollinearity that Descamps et al. (2026) report in their meta-analytic regressions. Indeed, once income and democracy are controlled for, the corruption coefficient turns positive and marginally significant (column (5));

Table 2: Partial correlations of the upper-bound incumbency advantage

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
GDP per capita (logs)	0.058**	0.039	0.068**	0.108**	0.118***
	(0.022)	(0.024)	(0.032)	(0.042)	(0.038)
V-Dem corruption (window)			0.076	0.187	0.340*
			(0.179)	(0.200)	(0.192)
V-Dem electoral democracy (window)			0.236		0.604**
			(0.187)		(0.258)
Turnover		-0.661***		-0.342	-0.319
		(0.222)		(0.245)	(0.222)
Parliamentary Power Index				-0.049	-0.509
				(0.261)	(0.307)
Constant	-0.356*	0.183	-0.594*	-0.611	-0.865**
	(0.197)	(0.284)	(0.334)	(0.410)	(0.386)
Observations	38	34	33	25	25

Note. OLS of the upper-bound incumbency advantage on country-level covariates. Column (1) uses only (log) GDP per capita, which is available for all 38 estimated legislatures; later columns add window-averaged V-Dem measures (missing for some micro-states), electoral turnover (computed in sample, hence unavailable for the literature-derived rows), and the Fish–Kroenig Parliamentary Power Index, so the number of observations falls from 38 to 25. Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Weighted variants (population and inverse-variance) are reported in Appendix Table A9.

the sign flip reflects this collinearity rather than a positive partial effect of corruption. The parliamentary power index remains unrelated to the incumbency advantage. The pattern is unchanged when observations are weighted by country population or by the inverse squared standard error of the upper bound (Appendix Table A9). An avenue for future research could be to investigate the unclear relationship between the incumbency advantage and institutional variables that should naturally correlate with it.

4 Final Remarks

Our main contribution is conceptual. We define the incumbent-runner-up advantage and construct bounds for it that require no counterfactual assumption: they follow only from the researcher's incomplete information about why some politicians do not rerun, and they bound the unobserved share of outcome-unrelated attrition rather than imputing any candidate's future behavior. We then show that the sample-selection bounds of Lee (2009) and Anagol and Fujiwara (2016) capture the theoretical incumbent-challenger advantage, and that in practice their lower bound is often not identified, while their upper bound coincides with our incumbent-runner-up upper bound (Proposition 1). The resulting upper-bound incumbency advantage is therefore straightforward to estimate, meaningful across both concepts, and free of counterfactual assumptions. It can be read as the incumbent-challenger advantage by imposing that non-rerunning runners-up would have lost, or as the incumbent-runner-up advantage by abstracting from random attrition. This framework lets future research achieve a comprehensive cross-country comparison of the incumbency advantage and understand the reasons for any divergences. Appendix Table A1 lays out the two concepts, their bounds, and their equivalence side by side.

The lower-bound incumbent-runner-up advantage is easily estimated and comparable across countries: its bounds are identified, its estimates share the sign of the upper bound by construction, and the exploratory correlates with turnover, parliamentary power, income, and corruption are maintained when it replaces the upper

bound. The lower-bound incumbent-*challenger* advantage is different. It is often implausibly low — 0.12 for the US against an upper bound of 0.59, and negative for the UK, against common sense and the literature — and, more consequentially, it may not be point-identified: the counterfactual it requires (non-rerunning compliers winning in $t+1$) is infeasible in single-winner districts where most incumbents retain their seats. Cross-country comparison of the incumbent-challenger lower bound is therefore not advisable; what travels across settings is the upper bound.

In the empirical exercise we compile data for the incumbency advantage for 38 countries. An indication that the upper-bound incumbency advantage and the lower-bound incumbent-runner-up advantage are capturing true cross-country variation in the power of elected officials can be seen in the negative correlation with electoral turnover rates. Note, however, that the incumbency advantage and electoral turnover are not empirically equivalent objects. Multiple countries have similar measures for one object and varying measures for the other.

Surprisingly, there is no correlation between parliamentary power - as measured by the index proposed in Fish and Kroenig (2009) - and the upper-bound incumbency advantage or the lower-bound incumbent-runner-up advantage — a puzzle that should be addressed in future research. Moreover, there seems to be no relationship between the electoral system and the incumbency advantage either. Most of our countries have first-past-the-post systems and the estimates vary from the highest to the lowest values. Other electoral systems also present high and low values of the upper-bound incumbency advantage.

We do uncover a robust positive correlation between the upper-bound incumbency

advantage (and the lower-bound incumbent-runner-up advantage) and a country's income per capita. We also observe a negative bivariate correlation between corruption and the incumbency advantage, though once income per capita and democratic quality are controlled for the coefficient flips sign (Table 2), reflecting the strong collinearity among the three. In the expanded sample, income per capita (positive) and electoral turnover (negative) retain partial correlations with the incumbency advantage, with income the more robust of the two. The level of development, as previously suggested in the literature, is a good starting point for research that wishes to explain differences in the incumbency advantage across countries. Schiumerini (2025) has recently honed in on the distance between the incumbent's capacity to deliver and the expectation of voters. If this distance is related to the levels of economic development, such an explanation would align with our results.

Recent papers have looked at large cross-country insights from comparing electoral turnover rates and policy (Marx et al. (2025)) and between electoral turnover, parliamentary power and corruption (Martin et al. (2023)). The comparable measures of the incumbency advantage presented here opens up the possibility for similar studies to include the incumbency advantage and therefore gain further insights in how political power persists and affects policy.

Finally, our electoral incumbency advantage should be kept distinct from the *global incumbency advantage* of Descamps et al. (2026), which captures national power retention and is largest in both the most and the least democratic settings, whereas ours rises monotonically with democratic quality. As we show in Section 3.3, the two can move in opposite directions within the same country — entrenched

executives retain national power while their legislators enjoy little electoral advantage — so the measures are complementary.

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A Appendix

Table A1: The two incumbency-advantage concepts and their relationship

	Incumbent-runner-up advantage	**Incumbent-challenger advantage**
What it compares	The same individual rerunning as the incumbent vs. as a non-incumbent.	A sitting incumbent vs. the current challenger.
Theoretical anchor	Defined in Section 1.3 (Definition 1).	Ashworth and Bueno de Mesquita (2008); Eggers (2017); Prato and Wolton (2018).
Lower bound	$E[Y_1 - Y_0]$: point identified; the individual & unconditional incumbency advantage (Lee (2001); Trounstine (2011); De Magalhães (2015)).	Not point-identified; the Anagol and Fujiwara (2016) lower bound requires a counterfactual that is infeasible in most single-winner settings.
Bounds come from	Incomplete information on *why* some winners do not rerun (the unknown random-attrition share α); *no counterfactual*.	Sample-selection bounds of Lee (2009) / Anagol and Fujiwara (2016), which *impute* the counterfactual success of compliers.
Upper bound	$E[Y_1 - Y_0]/E[R_1]$	$E[Y_1 - Y_0]/E[R_1]$

Proposition 1: the two upper bounds coincide — a single estimable number $E[Y_1 - Y_0]/E[R_1]$, reached under different assumptions (equal in implementation, not in definition).

Table A2: Upper-bound Incumbency Advantage and lower bounds

National Legislature	Upper-Bound	95% CI	Inc.-Runner-up	Inc.-Challenger	
			L-B	L-B	M-L-B
Antigua & Barbuda 51-14	0.46	[-0.00, 0.91]	0.38	0.36	0.38
Bahamas 97-21	-0.47	[-1.45, 0.50]	-0.13	-0.47	-0.47
Bangladesh 91-08	-0.11	[-0.34, 0.12]	-0.06	-0.14	-0.12
Barbados 71-13	0.33	[0.05, 0.62]	0.31	0.03	0.14
Belize 54-20	0.12	[-0.24, 0.47]	0.08	-0.22	-0.05
Bermuda 63-17	0.19	[0.02, 0.36]	0.15	0.18	0.19
Botswana 65-14	0.11	[-0.17, 0.39]	0.10	-0.38	-0.06
Brazil* 98-18	0.43	[0.34, 0.53]	0.31	-0.24	0.09
Canada 72-19	0.34	[0.26, 0.41]	0.24	-0.15	0.06
Chile* 89-09	0.40	[0.14, 0.66]	0.28	-0.06	0.05
Croatia†90-20	0.10	[-0.44, 0.64]	0.05	-0.25	0.05
Denmark 1850-1915	0.20	–	0.14	–	–
Gambia 47-17	-0.02	[-0.26, 0.21]	-0.02	-0.01	-0.01
Germany†49-13	0.35	[0.20, 0.50]	0.27	-0.04	0.14
Ghana 96-16	0.11	[-0.10, 0.32]	0.07	-0.14	-0.01
India 89-19	-0.08	[-0.20, 0.04]	-0.04	-0.21	-0.12
India 80-89[a]	0.15	–	0.06	-0.18	–
India 91-99[a]	-0.25	–	-0.15	-0.32	–
Ireland* 37-11	0.20	–	0.18	–	–
Ivory Coast 11-16	0.11	[-0.35, 0.56]	0.08	-0.26	-0.01
Jamaica 44-16	0.12	[-0.10, 0.35]	0.08	-0.27	-0.08
Korea* 88-12	-0.02	–	-0.01	–	–
Latvia* 95-14	0.27	[0.04, 0.51]	0.17	-0.01	0.15

continued on next page

Table A2 (continued)

National Legislature	Upper-Bound	95% CI	Inc.-Runner-up	Inc.-Challenger	
			L-B	L-B	M-L-B
Lithuania*†92-20	0.27	[-0.03, 0.57]	0.19	0.09	0.19
Malawi 94-19	-0.02	[-0.25, 0.21]	-0.01	-0.08	-0.03
Malaysia 99-13	0.28	[0.01, 0.54]	0.22	-0.24	0.01
Norway* 53-81	0.33	–	0.24	–	–
Pakistan 88-13	-0.05	[-0.37, 0.28]	-0.03	0.02	-0.02
Papua New Guinea 72-02	0.06	[-0.10, 0.22]	0.05	-0.08	0.03
Philippines 46-13	0.42	[0.28, 0.57]	0.28	-0.02	0.14
Samoa 01-21	0.09	[-0.36, 0.53]	0.06	-0.48	-0.12
Singapore 48-20	0.21	[-0.40, 0.82]	0.11	-0.35	0.04
Solomon Islands 67-19	0.18	[-0.04, 0.39]	0.14	0.06	0.13
Sri Lanka 47-56	-0.15	[-1.08, 0.79]	-0.05	0.14	0.01
Trinidad & Tobago 25-20	-0.01	[-0.77, 0.75]	-0.00	-0.67	-0.31
Uganda 11-16	-0.08	[-0.37, 0.22]	-0.05	0.05	-0.03
UK 66-92	0.51	[0.38, 0.65]	0.34	-0.20	0.07
USA 76-18	0.61	[0.48, 0.75]	0.41	0.11	0.23
Vanuatu* 87-20	0.14	[-0.14, 0.42]	0.11	-0.07	0.03
Zambia 91-11	0.36	[-0.05, 0.77]	0.17	0.14	0.23

Note: Estimates by the authors except the four literature-derived rows (Ireland, Redmond and Regan (2015); Denmark, Fouirnaies (2021); Norway, Fiva and Smith (2018); Korea, Kang et al. (2018)), which carry no confidence interval. The 95% CIs are delta-method intervals (Section 2.3, Appendix A.2). [a] India 1980–89 and 1991–99 are reconstructed from Linden (2004) for comparison with our 1989–2019 estimate. ∗ electoral systems other than first-past-the-post; † single-member-district tiers of mixed-member systems.

Table A3: Legislatures and country-years excluded from the analysis

Panel A. Legislatures for which we obtained data but do not use

Legislature	Reason not used
France, Finland, Indonesia, Ukraine, Maldives	Within-constituency restriction: redistricting or renumbering between consecutive elections leaves too few constituencies whose borders persist for a reliable estimate.
Bahrain, Comoros	Two-round systems whose runoff rarely returns the two leading candidates, leaving too few close races.
Cayman Islands, Estonia, Panama	Too few close races for a reliable estimate.
New Zealand	Candidate names available in CLEA only from 2014 (too few consecutive elections).
Taiwan	Candidate names available in a single election (2012).
Malta	Single transferable vote: first-preference vote counts do not identify a bare winner and runner-up.

Panel B. Country-years dropped by the candidate-name screen, within otherwise-used legislatures

Legislature	Elections dropped (<80% real candidate names in CLEA)
Canada	1867
Germany	1961, 1965, 1969, 1972, 1976, 1980, 1983, 1987
Trinidad & Tobago	1966, 1971, 1976, 1981, 1986
Lithuania	1996, 2000
Singapore	1988, 1991, 1997, 2001, 2006, 2011, 2015
Sri Lanka	1960, 1965, 1970, 1977
Croatia	2000, 2003, 2007, 2011
The Gambia	1997 (all names coded −990; 2007–2017 retained)

Note: Panel A lists the legislatures for which we obtained candidate data but which do not enter the results, with the reason in each case. Panel B lists the country-years dropped, within otherwise-used legislatures, because fewer than 80 percent of candidate-name records are real names (the remainder carrying the CLEA missing codes −990/−992), which would otherwise generate spurious zero rerunning rates. All other country-years used in Table A2 passed the screen.

A.1 Name matching

We matched candidates in two waves. In the first wave, Table A5. , candidates were linked across consecutive elections within each country using Stata's `matchit` record-linkage command applied to the cleaned candidate-name string, and every uncertain pair was checked by hand. For each election year, `matchit` compared every candidate with those standing in later years of the same country and computed three string-similarity scores: a two-character n-gram (bigram) similarity, a whole-word (token) similarity, and a first-initials similarity, all with common stop-words removed. District and party were not used as hard blocks; instead, agreement on district and/or party lowered the name-similarity threshold required to declare a match. The canonical rule accepted a pair as the same individual when the bigram similarity was at least 0.90, at least 0.75 when the district agreed, or at least 0.50 when both district and party agreed, with exact whole-word matches always accepted and the cutoffs tuned country by country. Because district agreement relaxed rather than gated the threshold, the procedure deliberately admits candidates who move between constituencies. Every uncertain pair was then verified by hand: the authors inspected the scored comparison table and applied case-by-case corrections, confirming true links and removing false ones. Brazil was instead linked through an official candidate identifier (the *Tribunal Superior Eleitoral*'s CPF), while the United States and United Kingdom enter through pre-linked candidate panels.

In the second wave, to expand the sample, we drew further legislatures from CLEA (Table A4) and applied the more automated algorithm of De Magalhães and Brian (2026), which is less dependent on manual review: Jaro–Winkler component

similarities with a surname weight of 0.6 and a given-name weight of 0.4, automatic acceptance of high-similarity pairs, automatic rejection below the review band, and manual review of the intermediate, medium-confidence band. We added one deliberate restriction: we link candidates only *within the same constituency*. Unlike the fully manually verified legislatures in wave 1, where district agreement merely relaxed the name-similarity threshold and verified cross-constituency moves were retained, in wave 2 we require the two constituencies to coincide before a pair can be accepted or sent to review. We impose this restriction because cross-constituency matches cannot be verified without individual identifiers or close knowledge of individual careers, and because these legislatures redistrict rarely. It also makes the manual review tractable: 1,861 pairs, which we reviewed by hand, confirming 1,207 as the same individual and rejecting 654; estimates use the automatically accepted links together with the confirmed pairs.

The within-constituency restriction has a bounded effect on the estimates. For the six African legislatures, whose cross-constituency matches were verified individually in De Magalhães and Brian (2026), re-imposing the restriction — severing every candidate link that crosses a constituency — moves the upper bound only modestly and without a systematic direction, by between -0.04 (Botswana) and $+0.10$ (Zambia), with a median absolute change near 0.04. Because the restriction severs genuine cross-constituency reruns it lowers the measured rerunning rate, and since the upper bound divides the win effect by that rate the net movement is small and mixed rather than a systematic attenuation. This bounds the bias the restriction can introduce for the CLEA legislatures, where cross-constituency matches cannot be checked directly.

The within-constituency design is also the one adopted by dedicated single-country studies: Dano et al. (2025), studying French legislative elections, likewise match candidates by name within constituencies whose borders are unchanged between consecutive elections, dropping redistricted seats. France in fact illustrates the limit of this design on a short panel. The CLEA window we can use (2007–2017) straddles the 2010 *redécoupage*, which redrew most French constituencies, so too few seats persist across consecutive elections for a reliable within-constituency estimate, and France drops from our sample. The restriction likewise removes Finland, Indonesia, Ukraine, and the Maldives, where redistricting or renumbering between consecutive elections leaves fewer than a hundred persistent close races. Using the full 1958–2017 series, Dano et al. (2025) estimate a candidate-level incumbency advantage of about 25 percentage points for French legislators, consistent with the positive advantages we recover for comparable established democracies. This is what a dedicated single-country study, with the long series and constituency maps needed to track redistricting precisely, can add beyond a harmonized cross-country panel.

Table A4: Name matching: CLEA legislatures (algorithmic)

Country	Obs.	Elections	Pairwise Matches	Auto-Accepted	Manual Confirmed	Manual Rejected	% Checked
Bahamas	872	6	107	105	1	1	1.9%
Bangladesh	8,682	4	1,071	793	225	53	26.0%
Belize	890	16	313	308	5	0	1.6%
Canada	40,910	42	10,457	10,415	34	8	0.4%
Croatia	1,268	6	5	4	0	1	20.0%
Germany	12,769	7	2,590	2,512	71	7	3.0%
India	59,858	10	7,567	6,501	606	460	14.1%
Latvia	4,537	7	1,126	1,061	6	59	5.8%
Lithuania	4,234	6	444	438	1	5	1.4%
Pakistan	11,304	5	386	321	42	23	16.8%
Papua New Guinea	9,128	6	1,436	1,317	100	19	8.3%
Philippines	10,758	16	2,202	2,178	22	2	1.1%
Samoa	712	5	96	88	7	1	8.3%
Singapore	971	11	137	132	0	5	3.6%
Solomon Islands	3,849	14	918	910	6	2	0.9%
Sri Lanka	907	3	132	132	0	0	0.0%
Trinidad & Tobago	1,294	13	227	222	5	0	2.2%
Vanuatu	2,364	10	589	505	76	8	14.3%
Total	**175,307**	**187**	**29,803**	**27,942**	**1,207**	**654**	**6.2%**

Note: *Pairwise matches* counts candidate pairs identified as the same individual across two consecutive elections (auto-accepted links plus the manually confirmed medium-confidence pairs). *% Checked* is the share of identified pairs sent to manual review (review pairs / pairwise matches). The algorithm is described in Section A.1; the medium-confidence band has been reviewed by the authors and estimates use the auto-accepted links together with the manually confirmed pairs. Only the legislatures used in the analysis are listed; those we could not use are documented, with reasons, in Table A3.

Table A5: Name matching: author-compiled legislatures

National Legislature	Source	Elections covered
Panel A. Fuzzy string match (Stata `matchit`) with case-by-case manual verification		
Antigua & Barbuda	Election Passport	1951–2014
Barbados	Election Passport	1971–2013
Bermuda	Election Passport	1963–2017
Botswana	Election Passport	1965–2014
Chile	Election Passport	1989–2009
Gambia	Election Passport	1947–2017
Ghana	Election Passport	1996–2016
Ivory Coast	Election Passport	2011–2016
Jamaica	Election Passport	1944–2016
Malawi	Electoral Commission	1994–2019
Malaysia	Election Passport	1999–2013
Uganda	Election Passport	2011–2016
Zambia	Election Passport	1991–2011
Panel B. Official candidate identifier (no string matching)		
Brazil	*Tribunal Superior Eleitoral*	1998–2018
Panel C. Pre-linked candidate panels		
USA	MIT Election Lab	1976–2018
UK	Kimber & Outlaw	1966–1992

Note: Legislatures whose candidate panels were compiled by the authors. Panel A candidates were linked across consecutive elections with Stata's `matchit` and verified case by case; Panels B and C rely on official candidate identifiers or pre-linked panels. The matching procedure is described in Section A.1.

Table A6: Design summary by national legislature

National Legislature	Years	Electoral system	Bare winner / runner-up	Source
Antigua & Barbuda	51-14	FPTP	Top two candidates in the district	Election Passport
Bahamas	97-21	FPTP	Top two candidates in the district	CLEA
Bangladesh	91-08	FPTP	Top two candidates in the district	CLEA
Barbados	71-13	FPTP	Top two candidates in the district	Election Passport
Belize	54-20	FPTP	Top two candidates in the district	CLEA
Bermuda	63-17	FPTP	Top two candidates in the district	Election Passport
Botswana	65-14	FPTP	Top two candidates in the district	Election Passport
Brazil	98-18	Open-list PR	Bare winner vs. bare loser within a party list	TSE (own)
Canada	72-19	FPTP	Top two candidates in the district	CLEA
Chile	89-09	Binomial (two-seat)	Worst winner vs. best loser in the district	Election Passport
Croatia	90-20	Mixed (SMD tier)	Top two in the SMD tier	CLEA
Denmark	1850-1915	Single-member (hist.)	Top two candidates in the district	Published RDD

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Table A6 (continued)

National Legislature	Years	Electoral system	Bare winner / runner-up	Source
Gambia	47-17	FPTP	Top two candidates in the district	Election Passport
Germany	49-13	Mixed (SMD tier)	Top two in the SMD tier	CLEA
Ghana	96-16	FPTP	Top two candidates in the district	Election Passport
India	89-19	FPTP	Top two candidates in the district	CLEA
Ireland	37-11	STV	Worst elected vs. best excluded (first-preference approx.)	Published RDD
Ivory Coast	11-16	FPTP	Top two candidates in the district	Election Passport
Jamaica	44-16	FPTP	Top two candidates in the district	Election Passport
Korea	88-12	Mixed	Top two in the SMD tier	Published RDD
Latvia	95-14	Preferential-list PR	Last winning vs. first losing list position	CLEA
Lithuania	92-20	Mixed, two-round SMD	Top two in the decisive round (SMD tier)	CLEA
Malawi	94-19	FPTP	Top two candidates in the district	Electoral Comm. (own)
Malaysia	99-13	FPTP	Top two candidates in the district	Election Passport

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Table A6 (continued)

National Legislature	Years	Electoral system	Bare winner / runner-up	Source
Norway	53-81	Closed-list PR	Last winning vs. first losing list position	Published RDD
Pakistan	88-13	FPTP	Top two candidates in the district	CLEA
Papua New Guinea	72-02	FPTP	Top two candidates in the district	CLEA
Philippines	46-13	FPTP	Top two candidates in the district	CLEA
Samoa	01-21	FPTP	Top two candidates in the district	CLEA
Singapore	48-20	FPTP	Top two candidates in the district	CLEA
Solomon Islands	67-19	FPTP	Top two candidates in the district	CLEA
Sri Lanka	47-56	FPTP	Top two candidates in the district	CLEA
Trinidad & Tobago	25-20	FPTP	Top two candidates in the district	CLEA
Uganda	11-16	FPTP	Top two candidates in the district	Election Passport
UK	66-92	FPTP	Top two candidates in the district	Kimber–Outlaw (own)
USA	76-18	FPTP	Top two candidates in the district	MIT (own)

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Table A6 (continued)

National Legislature	Years	Electoral system	Bare winner / runner-up	Source
Vanuatu	87-20	SNTV	Worst winner vs. best loser in the district	CLEA
Zambia	91-11	FPTP	Top two candidates in the district	Election Passport

Note: For each legislature, the electoral system, the rule used to identify the bare winner and bare runner-up (the two candidates on either side of the discontinuity), and the data source. 'Published RDD' rows are re-expressed in the common metric from estimates reported in the cited studies. Own-data legislatures were matched by the authors' original procedure; CLEA and Election Passport legislatures by the algorithm of De Magalhães and Brian (2026).

A.2 Inference: delta-method standard errors and a bootstrap check

The default confidence intervals reported in the main text are delta-method intervals. The delta method approximates the variance of the upper bound $\hat{\theta} = \hat{\tau}/\hat{\rho}$ by

$$\widehat{Var}(\hat{\theta}) \;\approx\; \frac{\widehat{Var}(\hat{\tau})}{\hat{\rho}^2} \;+\; \frac{\hat{\tau}^2\,\widehat{Var}(\hat{\rho})}{\hat{\rho}^4},$$

where $\widehat{Var}(\hat{\tau})$ is the robust bias-corrected RD variance and $\widehat{Var}(\hat{\rho})$ comes from the district-clustered local linear regression of the rerunning indicator on the running variable (the covariance term is omitted). For a subset of well-powered legislatures we also computed a cluster bootstrap that resamples electoral districts (500 replications) and recomputes the ratio on each draw. The two agree closely: for the United States the delta interval is $[0.48, 0.75]$ against a bootstrap interval of $[0.49, 0.73]$; for the

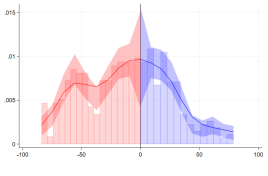
United Kingdom $[0.38, 0.65]$ against $[0.39, 0.62]$; and for Brazil $[0.34, 0.53]$ against $[0.31, 0.50]$. The bootstrap is materially wider than the delta interval only for a few small legislatures whose rerunning rate is very imprecisely estimated, where neither interval is informative.

Table A7: Manipulation test in the widened-sample robustness specification

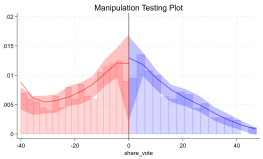
National Legislature	p-value	National Legislature	p-value
Antigua & Barbuda	0.94	Latvia	<0.001
Bahamas	0.98	Lithuania	0.80
Bangladesh	0.98	Malawi	0.83
Barbados	0.85	Malaysia	0.65
Belize	0.96	Pakistan	0.85
Bermuda	0.51	Papua New Guinea	<0.001
Botswana	0.84	Philippines	0.49
Brazil	0.16	Samoa	0.92
Canada	0.92	Singapore	0.91
Chile	0.49	Solomon Islands	0.94
Croatia	0.74	Sri Lanka	0.99
Gambia	0.93	Trinidad & Tobago	0.78
Germany	0.88	Uganda	0.73
Ghana	0.96	UK	0.54
India	0.99	USA	0.77
Ivory Coast	0.34	Vanuatu	0.12
Jamaica	0.92	Zambia	0.87

Note: p-value of the Cattaneo et al. (2020) manipulation (density) test for a robustness specification that widens the estimation sample beyond the bare winner and runner-up to include additional losers (first-past-the-post systems: up to four further losers per district) and, in multi-member districts, additional winners; the corresponding density plots are in Appendix Figures A.1 and A.2.

Figure A.1: Density Test, robustness specification (Antigua and Barbuda–Jamaica)

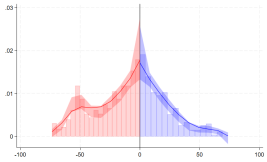


(a) Antigua & Barbuda



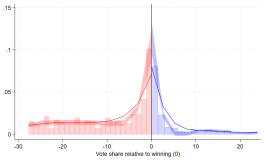
(b) Bahamas

(c) Bangladesh

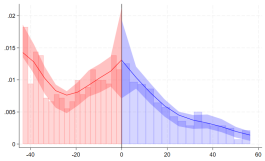


(d) Barbados

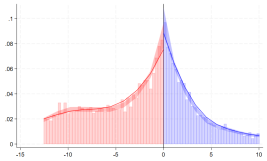
(e) Belize



(f) Bermuda

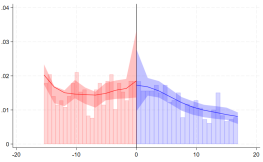


(g) Botswana



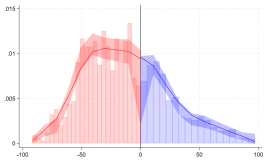
(h) Brazil

(i) Canada

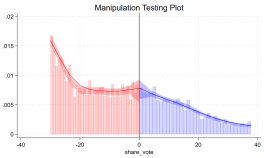


(j) Chile

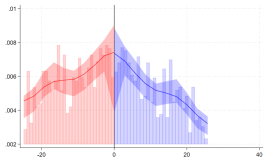
(k) Croatia



(l) Gambia

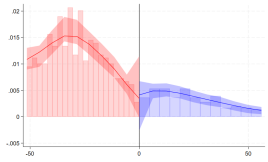


(m) Germany

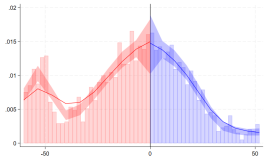


(n) Ghana

(o) India

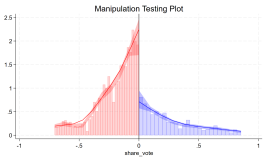


(p) Ivory Coast

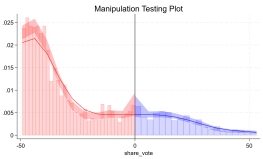


(q) Jamaica

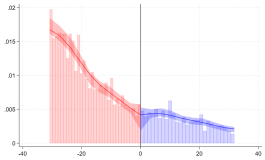
Figure A.2: Density Test, robustness specification (Latvia–Zambia)



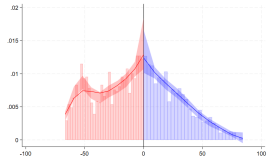
(a) Latvia



(b) Lithuania



(c) Malawi



(d) Malaysia

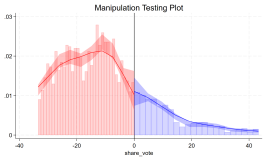
(e) Pakistan

(f) Papua New Guinea

(g) Philippines

(h) Samoa

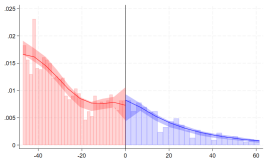
(i) Singapore



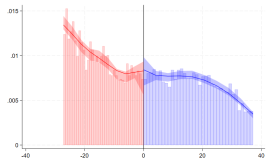
(j) Solomon Islands

(k) Sri Lanka

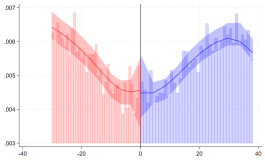
(l) Trinidad & Tobago



(m) Uganda

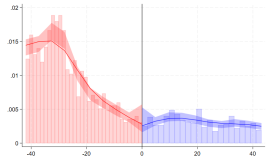


(n) UK



(o) USA

(p) Vanuatu



(q) Zambia

Note: Manipulation (density) test of Cattaneo et al. (2020) for the widened-sample robustness specification; p-values and details are collected in Table A7. Running variable: vote share relative to the winning threshold, normalized to zero.

Table A8: Covariate balance at the winner–runner-up cutoff

	Prior incumbency		Lagged vote share	
National Legislature	RD est.	(s.e.)	RD est.	(s.e.)
Bahamas	0.030	(0.130)	0.018	(0.080)
Bangladesh	−0.021	(0.056)	−0.019	(0.028)
Belize	0.124	(0.110)	0.040	(0.062)
Canada	−0.012	(0.025)	−0.012	(0.013)
Croatia	−0.007	(0.008)	−0.003	(0.008)
Germany	0.156**	(0.061)	0.028	(0.023)
India	0.025	(0.030)	0.007	(0.014)
Lithuania	0.069	(0.108)	0.099	(0.304)
Pakistan	0.038	(0.043)	0.019	(0.026)
Papua New Guinea	−0.187***	(0.075)	−0.044**	(0.023)
Philippines	−0.033	(0.042)	0.008	(0.022)
Samoa	0.157	(0.115)	0.098*	(0.060)
Singapore	−0.022	(0.112)	−0.027	(0.077)
Solomon Islands	−0.019	(0.086)	−0.003	(0.033)
Sri Lanka	0.006	(0.103)	−0.014	(0.061)
Trinidad & Tobago	−0.033	(0.169)	0.051	(0.103)

Note: Regression-discontinuity estimates (robust bias-corrected, CER-optimal bandwidth) of two *predetermined* covariates at the bare-winner/bare-runner-up cutoff in period t, for the CLEA candidate panels: *lagged vote share* is the candidate's vote share in the immediately preceding election – the standard continuous placebo – and *prior incumbency* is an indicator that the candidate won that election. A valid design requires no jump. Robust p-values: $^{*}p < 0.10$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{***}p < 0.01$.

Table A9: Upper-bound incumbency advantage — weighting robustness

	OLS	Population	Precision	CPI rank
GDP per capita (logs)	0.118***	0.189***	0.170***	0.081
	(0.038)	(0.047)	(0.035)	(0.049)
V-Dem corruption (window)	0.340*	0.454**	0.467**	
	(0.192)	(0.199)	(0.167)	
Corruption Perceptions rank (2021)				0.000
				(0.002)
V-Dem electoral democracy (window)	0.604**	0.230	0.298*	0.461
	(0.258)	(0.208)	(0.162)	(0.272)
Turnover	-0.319	-0.564	-0.407	-0.243
	(0.222)	(0.389)	(0.265)	(0.244)
Parliamentary Power Index	-0.509	-0.529*	-0.448	-0.391
	(0.307)	(0.276)	(0.279)	(0.325)
Constant	-0.865**	-1.180*	-1.149***	-0.460
	(0.386)	(0.680)	(0.359)	(0.521)
Observations	25	25	25	25

Note. Full specification of Table 2. Column (1) is unweighted OLS; column (2) weights each country by its 2015 population (World Bank); column (3) weights by the inverse squared standard error of the upper bound; column (4) replaces window-averaged V-Dem corruption with the 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index rank. Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table A10: Partial correlations of the lower-bound incumbent-runner-up advantage

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
GDP per capita (logs)	0.046***	0.036**	0.047**	0.072**	0.079***
	(0.013)	(0.014)	(0.021)	(0.026)	(0.023)
V-Dem corruption (window)			0.053	0.144	0.250**
			(0.116)	(0.124)	(0.115)
V-Dem electoral democracy (window)			0.194		0.417**
			(0.121)		(0.155)
Turnover		-0.419***		-0.270*	-0.253*
		(0.128)		(0.153)	(0.133)
Parliamentary Power Index				0.016	-0.302
				(0.162)	(0.184)
Constant	-0.289**	0.042	-0.429*	-0.418	-0.594**
	(0.119)	(0.164)	(0.216)	(0.255)	(0.231)
Observations	38	34	33	25	25

Note. Lower-bound incumbent-runner-up analogue of Table 2, with the same add-controls sequence: column (1) uses only (log) GDP per capita (all 38 estimated legislatures), and later columns add window-averaged V-Dem measures, in-sample turnover, and the parliamentary power index, so N falls from 38 to 25. Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.