



Volume 46, Issue 2

Voting behavior in Tour de France host communities

Kerianne Rubenstein
Syracuse University

Anna Pierce
Syracuse University

Georgia Andrews
Syracuse University

Abstract

There is evidence that hosting the Tour de France, unlike other mega sporting events, can yield economic benefits. This article builds on these findings by examining the political benefits of hosting a Tour de France stage. We measure the relationship between hosting a stage of the Tour de France and the likelihood of the incumbent party's re-election. While several scholars have claimed that political leaders benefit from hosting mega-events, there is little, if any, empirical work investigating this. Our results show there is no significant relationship between the re-election rates of the incumbent party in communes that hosted a Tour de France stages. Further, our article contributes to the academic discussion surrounding the political benefits from hosting mega-events.

Editor's Note: This paper was originally submitted under a different manuscript number on 02/11/2026 and accepted for publication on 4/10/2026. A system error required us to replace the original submission with a new manuscript with a later manuscript number.

Citation: Kerianne Rubenstein and Anna Pierce and Georgia Andrews, (2026) "Voting behavior in Tour de France host communities", *Economics Bulletin*, Volume 46, Issue 2, pages 630-637

Contact: Kerianne Rubenstein - knrubens@syr.edu, Anna Pierce - apierc03@syr.edu, Georgia Andrews - ggandrew@syr.edu.

Submitted: July 14, 2026. **Published:** June 30, 2026.

1 Introduction

The Tour de France is an annual multi-stage bicycle race held each summer in France. Male professional cyclists compete in 21 daily races, called stages. The Tour takes a different route each year, and typically begins in another country for the first stage or two. There are some traditional stages that occur every year, such as the final stage ending on the Champs-Élysées in Paris.¹ Otherwise, the majority of start and finish locations vary from year to year.

Increasing prize money, which increases the incentives for the best cyclists to compete in the event, and expanding broadcasting coverage of the Tour has kept the event popular and engaging for spectators (Mignot, 2016).² As a result, the Tour is one of the most-watched sporting events on the planet with 3.5 billion viewers worldwide. In 2024, the event was expected to attract 12 million attendees over 23 days and generate about \$955 million USD in economic activity.

One of the under-explored potential benefits of hosting a mega-event, like the Tour de France, would be the likelihood of re-election for the local politicians who bid to host a stage. Considering the observed economic benefits associated with hosting the Tour, we might also expect to observe political benefits. The motivation for this article can be summarized with the following quote:

Attention mayors of France: if you see a middle-aged man with buzzed gray hair and black-rimmed glasses sketching a map of your town in a spiral notebook, get excited. You may be hosting a stage of the Tour de France in the future. – Brand (2010)

That man was Jean-Louis Pagès, who determined the Tour’s route each year.³ Cities still bid and pay to host a stage start or finish. The costs include clearing roads, repaving asphalt, routing traffic, insurance and crowd infrastructure. In 2025, the mid-Tour stages cost 100,000 euros for a start and 140,000 euros for a finish. Some cities that hosted multiple consecutive stages pay much more. For example, Brest, paid 3.6 million euros to host the first four stages in Brittany in 2021 (Klopp, 2025). French cities pay less than the international “Grand-Depart” locations. Foreign cities also pay the race organizer, Amaury Sport Organisation, a hosting fee, which in recent years has ranged between 5 and 7 million euros (Novy-Williams, 2024).

This article examines the impact of hosting a Tour de France stage on voting behavior at the commune level. We consider hosting a Tour stage start, finish, or rest day as our treatment variable, and a dummy variable which indicates if the commune re-elected their incumbent after hosting. We find no observed political benefits, in terms of incumbent party re-election, associated with hosting a Tour de France stage.

¹The Tour de France’s final stage has been in Paris every year except for 2024, because of the Olympic Games.

²Top riders rarely skip the Tour de France altogether. Recovery from or preparation for other major races, like the Vuelta a España and the Giro d’Italia, or concerns about their health might lead some riders to skip the Tour de France voluntarily, but it is not very common.

³Pagès passed away in October 2024.

2 Related Literature

Sports economists have found little, if any, evidence to suggest that the host communities of sports mega-events receive a meaningful return on their investment. Barrios et al. (2016) found that the majority of the literature has failed to identify any short or long run economic benefits of hosting mega-events. In a comprehensive literature review, Bradbury et al. (2023) find that there is a lack of economic justification for publicly subsidized construction of professional sports venues.

With the Tour de France, however, results are more positive than a typical mega event or publicly funded sporting event. Makkonen and Mitze (2023) found that the tourism-related economic benefits are greater than the costs associated with hosting a stage. Survey data also suggests that hosting a stage of the the Tour de France can be profitable for host communities (Desbordes, 2007). Further, a survey using the contingent valuation method measured Danish households’ willingness to pay to host the first three stages of the 2022 Tour de France. It found a positive perception of the Tour’s economic benefits, with support for a tax to finance the stages decreasing with distance from host locations (Nielsen and Feddersen, 2023). These results indicate that individuals are aware of the benefits of hosting a Tour stage, and also that they recognize that these benefits are very localized to the hosting area.

While the economic benefits of hosting mega-events in general is dubious, others have argued there are potential benefits politically. First, there is evidence that hosting mega-events boosts self-reported happiness among a nation’s citizens (Kavetsos and Szymanski, 2010). This morale boost after a mega-event could translate to voting behavior in the next election (de Nooij and van den Berg, 2018; Solberg, 2017). Second, hosting a mega-event becomes a part of a politician’s “legacy” and increases their likelihood of running for re-election (Heberlig et al., 2017). Despite the empirical evidence of a “feel-good” factor that occurs after mega-events, there has been very little, if any, empirical research investigating if this is reflected in voting behavior after the event. Rewilak (2023) is the only paper, to our knowledge, that also observes voting behavior *after* hosting a mega event. The article finds that in US states that hosted the 1994 World Cup increased their Democratic vote share in future elections.

3 Data & Methods

Our data consists of election results for communes with more than 9000 inhabitants for the 1986, 1992, and 1998 French elections. A commune represents a similar administrative unit to a city or town in the United States, as each commune elects a mayor with an associated political party. The summary statistics for the data are presented in Table I. Our outcome variable, “Incumbent Party Re-elected” takes a value of 1 if the incumbent party’s candidate won the election. In our data, we can only observe the votes for each party, not individual candidates. The mean value for this variable is 0.274, which means that the incumbent party’s candidate is re-elected in 27.4% of our observations. The commune voting records were published in a open-source data platform from a French research university. We translated the records into English to allow for easy reading. Following translation, the voting

data was merged with the Tour de France stage data, allowing us to catalog which communes hosted a stage start, finish, or rest day, if they hosted a stage at all.

Data regarding stage information was collected by hand from past Tour de France records. We consider the two Tour de France races that preceded the election. The elections occurred in March, while the Tour de France took place in July. Therefore, it follows that the potential voter goodwill would carry over from the previous two Tours or the past year and a half.

Table I: Summary Statistics

	Mean	St Dev	Min	Max
Incumbent Party Re-elected	0.274	0.446	0.000	1.000
Hosted Stage Last Year	0.019	0.135	0.000	1.000
Hosted Stage in Last 2 Years	0.036	0.185	0.000	1.000
Hosted Start Last Year	0.016	0.126	0.000	1.000
Hosted Start in Last 2 Years	0.030	0.171	0.000	1.000
Hosted Finish Last Year	0.017	0.128	0.000	1.000
Hosted Finish in Last 2 Years	0.028	0.165	0.000	1.000
Hosted Rest Day Last Year	0.001	0.027	0.000	1.000
Hosted Rest Day in Last 2 Years	0.002	0.038	0.000	1.000

Note: 2,666 observations. Data from French communes with more than 9,000 residents for the 1986, 1992, and 1996 elections.

We use a linear probability model (OLS), which is represented in equations (1) and (2). Our outcome variable $ReElect_{ct}$ is a dummy variable indicating if a commune's municipal election re-elected the incumbent party. *Hosted*, the variable of interest, is a dummy variable for if the commune hosted a Tour de France stage in the last year or the last two years. Considering the delay between the Tour de France in July and elections in March, we would expect to see an effect if the city hosted the stage in the last year. We also include if they hosted in the last two years as a robustness check, because hosting a stage is not very common and could have a lasting impact. We also distinguish if the commune hosted a stage start, finish, or a rest day in separate specifications. Just 2.8% of our sample hosted a stage in the last two years. One reason we separate the *Hosted* variable like this is that the cities pay different fees to host stage starts versus finishes. Another reason is that the type of hosting will affect how long the riders and tourists will stay in the area. We also include department, year and incumbent party fixed effects.⁴

$$1. ReElect_{ct} = Hosted_{c,t-2|t-1} + \delta_c + \tau_t + \rho_{c,t} + \epsilon_{c,t}$$

$$2. ReElect_{ct} = Hosted_{c,t-1} + \delta_c + \tau_t + \rho_{c,t} + \epsilon_{c,t}$$

⁴In France, departments are a geographical area comprised of several communes.

4 Results and Discussion

Our results are presented in Tables II and III. The regression results show no significant correlation between hosting a stage and the incumbent party being re-elected. Our results are robust to various combinations of controls.⁵

Our findings suggest an interesting deviation from arguments made in the previous literature. As mentioned earlier, past research has suggested that there is a slight positive association with hosting a Tour de France stage in terms of public opinion and economic impact. However, our results suggest that this positive association does not carry into residents' voting patterns.

Table II: Likelihood of Re-electing Incumbents After Hosting in the Last Year

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Hosted Stage Last Year	0.001 (0.053)	—	—	—
Hosted Stage Start Last Year	—	-0.004 (0.057)	—	—
Hosted Stage Finish Last Year	—	—	0.061 (0.059)	—
Hosted Rest Day Last Year	—	—	—	-0.051 (0.261)
Department Fixed Effect	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year Fixed Effect	✓	✓	✓	✓
Incumbent Party Fixed Effect	✓	✓	✓	✓
Adjusted R-Squared	0.380	0.380	0.381	0.380
Observations	2,666	2,666	2,666	2,666

Note: Significance denoted as * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

⁵Available upon request.

Table III: Likelihood of Re-electing Incumbents After Hosting in Last Two Years

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Hosted Stage Last Two Years	0.025 (0.039)	—	—	—
Hosted Stage Start Last Two Years	—	0.033 (0.042)	—	—
Hosted Stage Finish Last Two Years	—	—	0.077* (0.045)	—
Hosted Rest Day Last Two Years	—	—	—	-0.088 (0.182)
Department Fixed Effect	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year Fixed Effect	✓	✓	✓	✓
Incumbent Party Fixed Effect	✓	✓	✓	✓
Adjusted R-Squared	0.380	0.380	0.381	0.380
Observations	2,666	2,666	2,666	2,666

Note: Significance denoted as * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

This article adds to the literature in several ways. First, we distinguish whether the host community hosted a stage start, finish, or rest day—unlike previous studies that treated all hosting the same. Second, we use commune-level data, offering more precise insights than department-level data used in past research. And most importantly, we aim to empirically measure the political benefits of a mega-sporting event. While scholars have suggested such a link, there is a lack of empirical studies to support these claims.

However, this article does have limitations. Data availability constraints prevent us from controlling for other commune-level factors that might affect incumbent re-election. We also only have access data from the 1986, 1992, and 1998 French elections at the commune level, so our findings may not apply to more recent elections. Further, while we would like to explore other political outcomes, our data only captures incumbent party re-election. Future research could expand on this article with more recent and detailed electoral data at the commune level if it becomes available. Other possible extensions to this research include department-level analysis and incorporating city hosting fees to do cost-benefit analysis.

A possible explanation for our results is the timing between hosting the Tour de France in July and municipal elections the following March, creating a 9–21 month gap between treatment and voting. Any short-run goodwill effect may fade before the election, particularly if economic conditions or national political factors become more salient. The null results may also reflect limited credit attribution and stable partisan alignment. While hosting may generate localized economic activity, these gains may be too small relative to municipal budgets to influence voter behavior, and voters may not attribute hosting decisions to incumbent effort given the role of external organizers. This idea aligns with recent research that finds that issue salience plays a limited role in local elections in Flanders (Reuse and Stiers, 2026). And another study shows that voter responsiveness to political stimuli depends heavily on electoral salience, with smaller events or informational signals having limited influence when

voters focus on more prominent political issues (Mann and Haenschen, 2024). Any benefits may also be offset by short-run disruption or reduced salience by election time. Electoral outcomes may be driven primarily by underlying political alignment rather than short-term shocks such as hosting a sporting event. But, with a low overall incumbent re-election rate of 27.4% our results suggest that broad electoral swings are unlikely to conceal a meaningful hosting effect.

5 Conclusion

Studies have found evidence of a positive economic impact of hosting the Tour de France, which differs from the abundant literature on other sports mega-events that finds little to no economic impact. Some scholars have argued that political leaders may push for mega-events because they are shown to boost national morale and thus, could increase their chances of re-election. This is a compelling argument, especially considering how infrequently mega-events are found to have economic benefits. However, there has been very little, if any, empirical work on the political benefits of hosting a mega-event.

In this article, we hypothesize that because the Tour de France has observed economic benefits, it's even more likely that we'd observe political benefits as well. However, using data from French communes we find no increased likelihood of incumbent party re-election after hosting a Tour de France stage. Our results could motivate future work looking at the political impacts of other mega-events that typically do not have economic benefits, like the Olympics, and to better understand the theoretical arguments made in Solberg (2017) and de Nooij and van den Berg (2018) about the political benefits of hosting mega-events.

References

- Barrios, D., Russell, S., and Andrews, M. (2016). Bringing home the gold? A review of the economic impact of hosting mega-events. *CID Working Paper Series: Harvard University*, 320.
- Bradbury, J., Coates, D., and Humphreys, B. (2023). The impact of professional sports franchises and venues on local economies: A comprehensive survey. *Journal of Economic Surveys*, 37(4):1389–1431.
- Brand, J. (2010). How are Tour de France towns are picked? Incognito. *The Christian Science Monitor*.
- de Nooij, M. and van den Berg, M. (2018). The bidding paradox: Why politicians favor hosting mega sports events despite the bleak economic prospects. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 42(1):68–92.
- Desbordes, M. (2007). A review of the economic impact studies done on the Tour de France: Methodological aspects and first results. *International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing*, 2(5/6):526–540.
- Heberlig, E. S., McCoy, J., Leland, S. M., and Swindell, D. A. (2017). Mayors, accomplishments, and advancement. *Urban Affairs Review*, 53(3):539–558.
- Kavetsos, G. and Szymanski, S. (2010). National well-being and international sports events. *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 31(2):158–171.
- Klopp, J. (2025). For Tour de France, foreign starts are a money-spinner. *Agence France-Presse*.
- Makkonen, T. and Mitze, T. (2023). Vive le Tour!? Estimating the place-based benefits of hosting the Tour de France. *Journal of Regional Science*, 63:1131–1161.
- Mann, C. and Haenschen, K. (2024). A meta-analysis of voter mobilization tactics by electoral salience. *Electoral Studies*, 87:102729.
- Mignot, J.-F. (2016). An economic history of the Tour de France, 1903-2015. *Sports Through the Lens of Economic History*, pages 55–70.
- Nielsen, C. and Feddersen, A. (2023). Willingness to pay for hosting the Tour de France. *Sports Economics Review*, 3:100014.
- Novy-Williams, E. (2024). Tour de France’s out-of-country starts a lucrative proposition. *Sportico*.
- Reuse, R. and Stiers, D. (2026). Finding your perfect match nearby. A test of proximity and issue salience voting in local elections. *Electoral Studies*, 99:103044.
- Rewilak, J. M. (2023). Dictating play to the left wing: Does soccer make you more democratic? *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*, 5:1–18.

Solberg, H. (2017). Mega events: Why cities are willing to host them, despite the lack of economic benefits. In *Legacies and Mega Events*. Routledge.