CultureCase

Using a referendum to measure support for arts funding

This research was conducted by **Katharina E Hofer** at the **University of St. Gallen, Switzerland**

Summary

This paper delved into the results of a referendum to increase financial support for a local theatre in Switzerland. The research discovered that the income of citizens, the local proportion of older residents, and proximity to the theatre were ‘significantly and closely related’ to voting in favour of spending more on the arts. Support for the party rejecting the proposals in the referendum was associated with people voting against more financial support for the theatre.

The data in this study comes from the 2009 cantonal referendum in St. Gallen, Switzerland

In effect, the proposal would have shifted the financing of the theatre even more to the canton (paying in 70 per cent to the city’s 30 per cent) and the total amount of subsidies would increase. This meant that ‘for voters outside the city of St. Gallen, casting an approving ballot in the referendum [can be] interpreted as support for the performing arts and the willingness to pay for it’.

The vote was passed by 51.7 per cent of the electorate, with a turnout of 42.4 per cent

Attempts to measure the level of support for the arts using political instruments tend to ignore the fact that ‘a sizeable part of the population does not vote’. By comparing the profile of voters to the local populations the author suggests that ‘support for cultural spending among voters might be larger than among the overall population’. Given that voters tend to have higher levels of education, skew older and to the higher income brackets it is likely that they

would ‘agree to more spending for the arts than an average citizen would if required to cast a ballot’.

Keywords

referendum **funding** **theatre** **Switzerland**

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Author email	**katharina.hofer@unisg.ch**

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