

# Walter T. Melnik

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Milwaukee, WI 53233

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## Employment

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### Assistant Professor, Department of Economics

Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI

August 2018-Present

## Education

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### Ph.D. Economics

Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI

August 2018

### M.A. Economics

Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI

December 2013

### B.A. Economics

Grove City College, Grove City, PA

May 2011

## Fields of Interest

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Public Economics, Urban Economics

## Publications

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[“Legislative Redistricting, Party Politics, and the Spatial Distribution of Transportation Expenditure.”](#) *Economics of Governance* (25) February 2024: 1-29.

[“R&D Tax Credits and Innovation”](#) (with Andrew Smyth). *Journal of Public Economics* (236) August 2024: 1-15.

## Working Papers

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### Municipal Government Response to Mass Layoffs.

Abstract: *Using data from 595 municipalities in Ohio, I estimate how mass layoffs affect municipal government revenue. I then analyze municipalities' response along several margins: tax rates, expenditure, borrowing, and asset balance. Income tax revenue plummets after a mass layoffs, driven by a decline in the income tax base. Property tax revenue also declines, as does total revenue. Municipalities do not raise tax rates in response, but cut expenditure across several categories, including general government, public safety, leisure and community environment, and capital outlay. Cities also draw down unreserved fund balance substantially, avoiding deeper cuts to expenditure by depleting accumulated assets.*

## **Do Candidate Elections Constrain an Agenda Setter?**

*Abstract: Many states require referendum approval of local government tax increases. Nonetheless, local politicians may subvert voters' wishes by manipulating the referendum agenda. By forcing the median voter to choose between two undesirable options far above and far below her preferred tax and spending level, local officials may obtain public spending far above what the median voter prefers. I ask whether voters respond to this agenda setting behavior retrospectively, using data from Minnesota school districts' referendum and candidate elections. Counterintuitively, members of school boards that proposed unpopular spending referenda receive higher vote shares in their reelection bids. The effect is modest, but significant. A 10 percentage point decrease in vote margin on the least popular referendum proposed during an incumbent's term results in a 0.4 percentage point decrease in her vote share during the next candidate election - a 1.5% decrease from the mean. The results suggest that this effect is partially driven by fewer new candidates challenging the incumbent. The effect is larger in school board elections held during odd years.*

## **Ballot Order, Ballot Roll-Off and Home Sales: Evidence from Local Referenda in Ohio** (with Mike Conlin and Paul Thompson).

*Abstract: We study how an election item's position on the ballot affects the probability that voters abstain from voting on that item ("roll-off"), and on the probability that voters choose to vote yes conditional on casting a ballot. Local tax referenda in Ohio rotate ballot position every year based on the level of local jurisdiction that placed the referendum on the ballot, providing a source of exogenous variation to test these propositions. Previous research suggests that voters are less likely to cast a vote for election items lower on the ballot, and more likely to choose the status quo. These findings support the idea of choice fatigue, suggesting that facing more decisions impairs voters' decision making ability. Unlike previous papers, we are able to control for demographic characteristics (age and party affiliation) of voters who see each referendum. We find that voters tend to cast more yes votes for items lower on the ballot. We also find that older voters are much less likely, and partisan voters much more likely, to abstain from ballot items, showing the importance of controlling for these characteristics when estimating the effect of ballot position on roll-off.*

## **Do Mayors Love Their Mayors? Localism and Patronage in City Government**

### **R&D Tax Credits and the Network of R&D Labs** (with Andrew Smyth)

## **Teaching**

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*Principles of Microeconomics, Public Economics (Undergraduate and Masters), Sports Economics*

## **Awards**

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<i>Hoemke Scholarship, Michigan State University</i>	<i>Summer 2017</i>
<i>Kelly Research Fellowship, Michigan State University</i>	<i>Summer 2016</i>
<i>R. Lowell Harriss Dissertation Fellowship, Lincoln Land Policy Institute</i>	<i>2016</i>

## **Referee**

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*National Tax Journal*