Partisan Context and the Structure of the Vote in Mayoral Elections

Thomas M. Holbrook
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
holbroot@uwm.edu

Karen Kaufmann
University of Maryland
kkaufma1@umd.edu

Presented at the 2013 meeting of the Elections, Public Opinion and Parties conference, September 13-15, Lancaster, UK

Abstract

In this paper we test examine the determinants of vote choice in partisan and nonpartisan U.S. mayoral elections. We are explicitly interested in the effect of differences in partisan context on the mix of considerations voters bring to bear when deciding how to vote. We are particularly interested in the idea that there are substitution effects whereby party identification loses explanatory power and other factors gain importance to fill the void. We explore this ideal using survey data from 40 separate mayoral elections, 11 of which use partisan ballots. We do not find much evidence of substitution but do find evidence of an important organizing function for party labels.

Studies of the influence of context have played an important and perhaps underappreciated role in the study of U.S. elections (see Marsh 2002). Of most interest to us are those studies that set out explicitly to examine how contextual variables influence attitudes and vote choice, either directly or indirectly (see for instance Books and Prysby 1999; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; MacKuen and Brown 1987; Miller 1956; Prysby and Books 1987). The underlying assumption of these and other contextual studies is that the environment in which individuals live exerts an external influence on them, whether that environment is defined in social, demographic, institutional, or attitudinal terms, and that the source of this influence lies in the way context affects the information to which voters are exposed. (Prysby and Books 1987). Here, we focus on an important institutional context that varies across local settings and that has real and demonstrable consequences on the types of information to which people are exposed: the use of partisan versus nonpartisan ballots in local elections. We are particularly interested in the extent to which ballot structure at the local level influences the mix of considerations that voters emphasize in their decision-making. Using a unique data set of survey responses gathered during forty separate mayoral elections, we bring important individual-level data to bear on this question.

Partisan and Nonpartisan Elections

Progressive reform efforts early 20th century U.S. politics focused considerable attention on decoupling local political affairs from the influences of partisan politics. In addition to scheduling local elections in off cycles and supplanting mayor-council systems with administrative systems, these reforms also

including moving to a nonpartisan ballot that in most places substituted the party nomination with a system in which candidates competed without party labels on the ballot. Much of the focus of research on the effects of these reforms has focused on political participation, with some studies finding lower rates of turnout in nonpartisan than partisan cities (Alford and Lee 1968; Karnig and Walter 1977; Schaffner, Streb, and Wright 2001), while others have found no significant relationship (Caren 2007; Wood 2002). As interesting as this work is, participation effects were not the intent of the reforms. Rather, the intention of these reforms was to wrest power from local political machines. And, indeed, local party organizations are less involved in local elections in nonpartisan than partisan cities, and there is considerable evidence—mostly from aggregate-level studies—that party-line voting is partially supplanted by group, candidate, or issue-based voting in nonpartisan settings (Arrington 1978; Mueller 1970; Matson and Fine 2006; Pomper 1966; Schaffner, Streb, and Wright, 2001; Taylor and Schrekhise 2003). However, in spite of evidence of decreased party voting in nonpartisan cities, some studies of specific locales suggest that removing the party label from the ballot does not always result in removing party from the campaign, as voters are still able to discern the party connections of the candidates demonstrate partisan voting patterns (Hagensick 1964; Salsbury and Black 1963).

Our analysis is informed by the full body of work on nonpartisan elections, but benefits particularly from those that have focused on the role or party cues in local elections. Specifically, we take up a question that mostly has been studied at the aggregate level in local politics: what is the influence of party cues on voting

behavior in partisan and non-partisan cities, and are there substitution effects such that other cues (race, sex, incumbency, issues, etc.) assume greater prominence in non-partisan cities when party cues are not as accessible? In a departure from the existing literature we address these questions with individual-level survey data.

Connecting Parties to Political Behavior

Beginning in 1960s, scholars of American elections came around to the idea that individuals developed a psychological identification with political parties, one that greatly simplified the vote decision and also provided a broader mechanism for voters to understand the political world (Campbell et al. 1960). Decades later, studies still confirm that political parties provide an important cue, one that simplifies the political world and shapes both the formation and direction of political attitudes (Bartels 2002; Goren 2005; Goren, Fererico, and Kittilson 2009; Rahn 1993; Weinschenk 2010; Zaller 1991). However, the use of party cues does not rely just on the existence of party identification in the electorate but also on a party signal regarding the connections of political elites and political issues to the one of the political parties. Rahn's(1993) experimental work captures this point quite well, finding that attaching party labels to candidates has a profound impact on the type of information people used: when provided with party cues, subjects tended to disregard other sources of information (candidate messages); whereas in the absence of cues candidate messages became important pieces of information in decision making. Other experimental work supports the general conclusion that party labels are an important aid to decision-making, though these studies differ somewhat as to the impact of party cues on the importance of other types of

information (Arceneaux 2008; Bullock 2011; Gerber, Huber, and Washington 2010; but see Nicholson 20011).

This body of work, along with the research on partisan and nonpartisan contests, provides strong evidence of party labels as an important heuristic device. The nature of heuristic devices is that the make information processing easier (Downs 1957; Lupia 1994; Popkin 1991). This doesn't mean that they always lead to "correct" decisions (though they should be in the ballpark), but they do make it easier for people to make a decision. Where partisan cues are more pervasive, we anticipate that decision-making—in this case, voting behavior—will be more heavily influenced by party identification than by other considerations. Where party cues are more scarce—mostly in nonpartisan city—we anticipate decreased reliance on party identification and an increased use of other cues.

Beyond party affiliation, there are multiple other considerations whose salience could depend upon the presence or absence of party cues, including incumbency and retrospective evaluations (Fiorina 1981; Jacobson 2013). In non-partisan cities, the advantage if incumbency should be greater and evaluations of local conditions should be more strongly related to vote choice. There are also important social and demographic characteristics that are traditionally connected to party support at the polls (Axelrod 1986; Brook and Manza 1998) and should take on heightened importance in the nonpartisan setting. Among these are sex (Kaufmann and Petrocik 1999), race (Carmines and Stimson 1989), and socioeconomic status and economic sector (Brook and Manza, 1998; Stonecash et al. 2000). It is these social and demographic characteristics—in particular race,

ethnicity, and class—that attracted the attention of much of the aggregate work in this area (Arrignton 1978; Matson and Fine 1998; Pomper 1966; Salisbury and Black 1963). In short, there are reasons to expect a substitution effect in nonpartisan cities. Absent one of the most ubiquitous and accessible political cues—party affiliation—voters in non-partisan cities will rely upon other cues to aid in the decision-making process. to a greater extent than they do in partisan contests.

Still there are some reasons to expect that the hypothesized substitution effects may not emerge, or at least may be weaker than anticipated. First, it is possible that the formal distinction between partisan and nonpartisan contests does not translate into completely distinct partisan environments. Addressing this issue over fifty years ago, Gilbert (1962, 345) stated that, “The differences between "partisan" and "nonpartisan" cities are often sharper in form than in fact, since some nominally nonpartisan cities are effectively partisan.” We bring data to bear on this question in one of the following sections. Second, the glue that connects social and demographic groups to candidates is in fact the party cue, so it is possible that in nonpartisan environments, with fewer (or no) partisan cues, it is more difficult for voters to make the connection between their race, sex, or economic position and vote choice. so, an alternative to substitution is that muddled party cues could simply lead to less structure in vote choice in general.

The Data

The primary data for this project come from the Urban Mayoral Election Study[1] (UMES), a public opinion survey administered prior to 40 separate mayoral elections in 39 cities from 2007 to 2011.[2] The overall sample size comprises 6365 respondents, with an average of 159 respondents from each city. The survey was administered via telephone interviews utilizing separate random-digit-dialing samples from each city and included approximately 90 questions.[3] Though the survey items covered a broad range of issues, perceptions of candidates, engagement with local politics, and voting behavior constituted a major part of the study. In keeping with most estimates of local political arrangements, the partisan ballot is used in 28% (eleven) of the contests covered by our surveys.[4]

One of the advantages of our design, relative to those who have gone before us, is the ability to capture considerable variation in other aspects of the political,

---

[1] This study was supported with fund from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Research Growth Initiative (Study #101X074) and the National Science Foundation (Study #0921343).

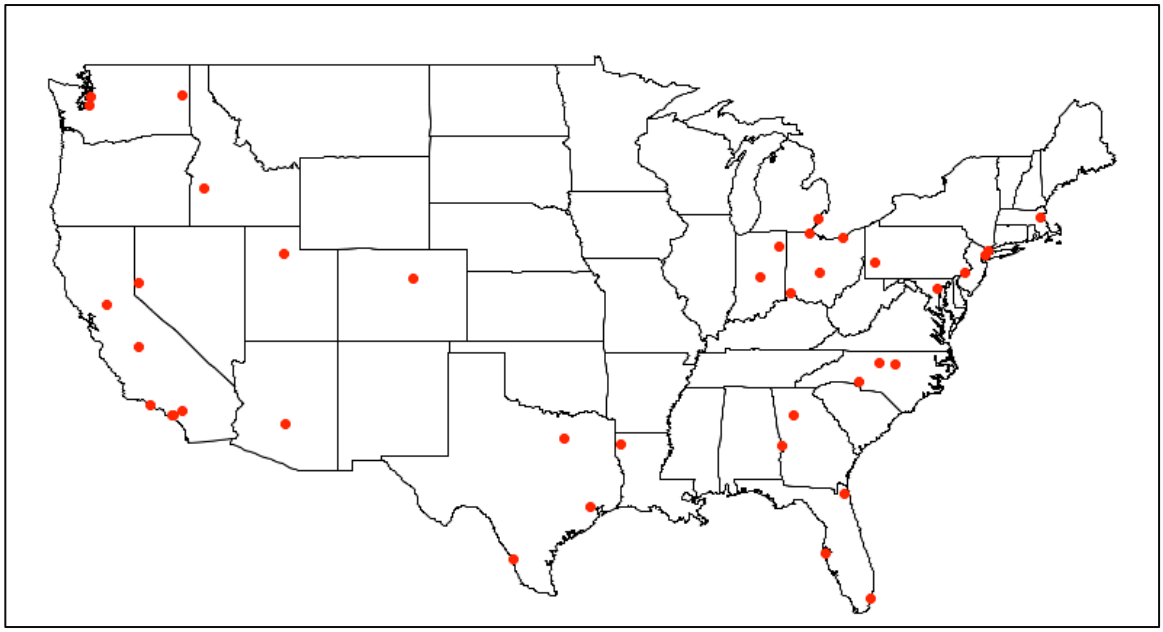
[2] The cases (Atlanta, GA, 2009; Baltimore, MD, 2007; Boise, ID, 2007; Boston, MA, 2009; Charlotte, NC, 2007 and 2009; Cincinnati, OH;, 2009 Cleveland, OH, 2009; Columbus, OH;, 2007; Columbus, GA, 2010; Dallas, TX, 2011; Denver, CO, 2011; Detroit, MI, 2009; Durham, NC, 2007; Ft. Wayne IN, 2007; Fresno, CA, 2008; Garden Grove, CA, 2010; Greensboro, NC, 2007; Houston, TX, 2009; Indianapolis, IN, 2007; Jacksonville, FL, 2011; Laredo, TX, 2010; Mesa, AZ, 2008; Miami, FL, 2009; Philadelphia, PA, 2007; Pittsburgh, PA, 2007; Reno, NV, 2010; Riverside, CA, 2009; Sacramento, CA, 2008; Salt Lake City, UT, 2007; Santa Ana, CA, 2010; Seattle, WA, 2009; Shreveport, LA, 2010; Spokane, WA, 2007; St. Petersburg, FL, 2009; Tacoma, WA, 2009; Toledo OH, 2009; and Yonkers, NY, 2007) selected for this study drawn from among the 125 largest cities in the U.S. While other large cities held elections during the same time period, the cities selected for this study were chosen, in part, to maximize variance in demographic and candidate diversity.

[3] The target population was the citizen voting-age population. Because there is a slight tendency to over-represent the non-Hispanic White population, post-stratification weights are used to bring the composition of the local samples into line with existing Census estimates of local racial composition, based on the adult citizen population.

[4] Cities in which partisan labels appeared on the ballot are: Baltimore, Charlotte (2007 and 2009), Fort Wayne, Indianapolis, Jacksonville, New York City, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Shreveport, and Yonkers. Shreveport uses a "non-partisan primary" and runoff system, but one in which candidates run on party labels and the ballots designate the party of the candidate. This is referred to as "non-partisan" because the candidates from all parties appear on the ballot. In the 2010 election used in this study, a Democrat and a Republican faced off in the runoff, so we classify it as partisan contest.

social, and demographic contexts in which urban mayoral elections take place. For instance, 22 of the races involve incumbent candidates, and 18 are open seat contests; 26 of the sitting incumbents are White, 10 are Black, and 4 are Latino; 16 of the contests involve Black and White candidates, one race had a White and Latino candidate, 16 had two white candidates, 4 had two Black candidates, and 3 had two Latino candidates; and there are 11 male-female races and 29 male-male races. There is also wide variation in the racial composition of the populations of these cities: the non-Hispanic White population proportion ranges from many cities less than .15 to .89 (Spokane), and the non-Hispanic Black population ranges from less than .05 in several cities to .83 (Detroit). The survey sample was designed to capture this range of experience in urban political life specifically to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Although not quite the same thing as demographic diversity, the map presented in Figure 1 illustrates the far-flung and geographically diverse nature of our sample of cities.

Figure 1. The Geographic Distribution of Cities in the Urban Mayoral Election Study



Partisan Ballots and Partisan Context

Not all nonpartisan cities are equally nonpartisan: party organizations are more active in some nonpartisan cities than others; in some nonpartisan cities one or more of the candidates have held partisan office at some point, making it easier for voters to bump up against partisan cues; and in some cities campaigns or outside groups have an incentive to bring party back into the election (Wright 2008). In other words, the simple, legalistic distinction between partisan and nonpartisan ballots does not always fully capture how partisan the electoral context is in nonpartisan cities. As referenced earlier, some of the foundational work in this area (Hagensick 1964; Gilbert 1962; Salsbury and Black 1963) documented significant residual partisanship in non-partisan cities. To the extent that this is the case, reliance on alternative voting cues (race, sex, incumbency) may not be as prevalent in non-partisan cities as anticipated by the aggregate election data.

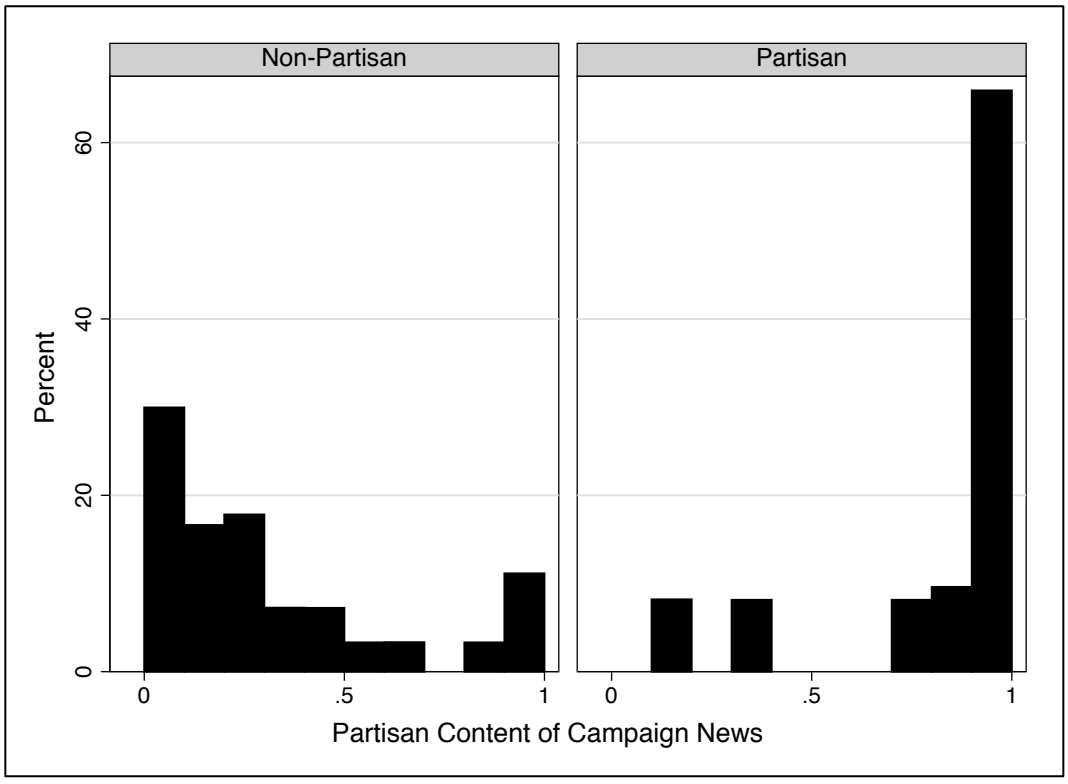
In order to address this possibility, we use two alternative methods to estimate the differences in partisan cues between partisan and non-partisan cities. First we use a gauge of partisan information, based on partisan references in local media coverage of the campaigns prior to the election, utilizing online searches for articles appearing in local newspapers. Specifically, we use the proportion of local newspaper articles about the contest that had partisan content. This is calculated by taking all articles that appeared in the three-week period prior to each election that mentioned both candidates and also included references to either the Democratic or Republican parties as a proportion of the total number of articles that mentioned both candidates. We take this measure as an indicator of the availability of partisan cues during the campaign.

The distribution of partisan cues in both partisan and non-partisan cities is presented in Figure 2. To be sure, cities that use partisan ballots, on average, hold elections in a much more partisan context than non-partisan cities (Mean=.30 vs. .83). Simply put, partisan ballots are likely to produce different effects because partisan cues are much more plentiful in partisan than non-partisan cities. But it is also very clear that there is appreciable variation in partisan cues *within* the two types of cities. While the variation is somewhat limited among partisan cities, there are some non-partisan cities that hold elections in very partisan environments. For instance, the "non-partisan" contests in 2007 in Columbus (OH) and Salt Lake City (UT), and in 2009 in Cincinnati (OH), were very "partisan" in content,[5] and a number

[5] It was the case of Columbus, Ohio, that first got us thinking about trying to capture the presence of partisan cues. While reviewing media stories about the mayoral elections for background information, we found so many media references to the mayor's partisan affiliation that we had to

of other non-partisan cities had substantial partisan content. It is interesting to note that even national partisan politics showed up in some of the contests we studied. This was particularly the case in 2007 in Durham, NC, and Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, PA. Perhaps the most blatant example of an attempt to nationalize a mayoral election was the flier distributed by the local Democratic Party in *non-partisan* Durham, NC, which asked voters, "Would you elect George W. Bush mayor of Durham?" (Dees 2007).

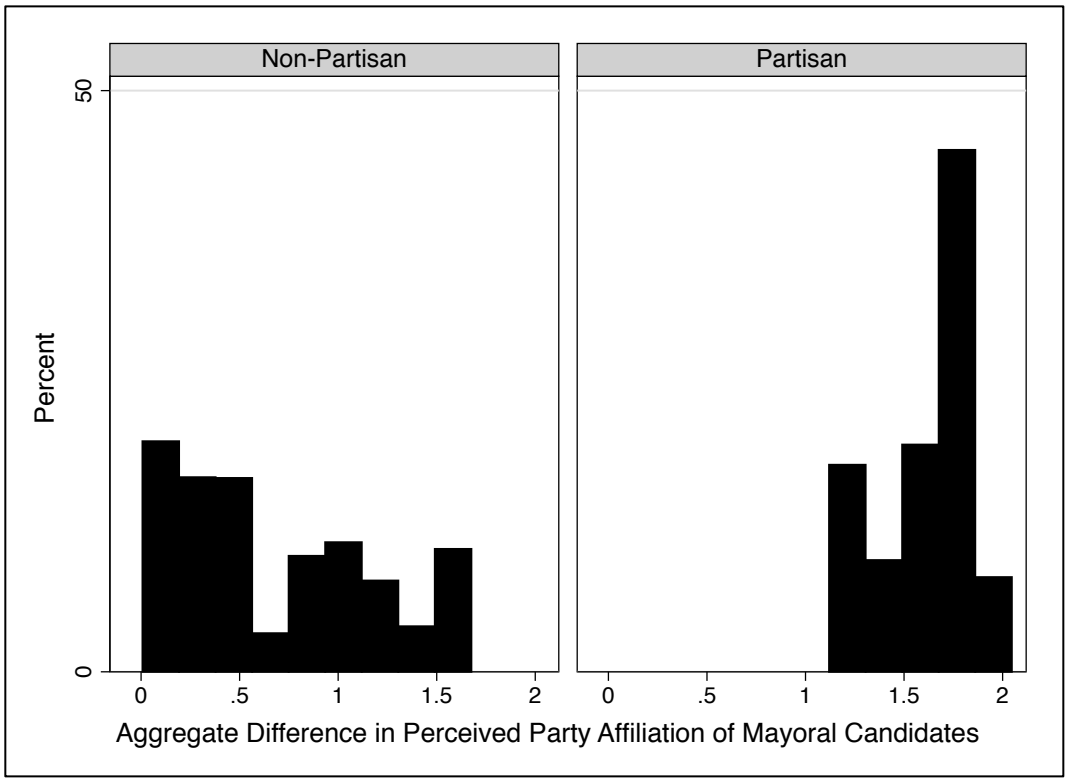
Figure 2. The Partisan Content of News Coverage of Mayoral Elections in Partisan and Nonpartisan Cities



double and triple-check sources to make sure it was really a "non-partisan" city. As it turned out, every story we found about the election included references to at least one of the political parties.

Another indicator of the difference in partisan context can be gleaned from the survey data we collected. We asked a number of questions related to perceptions people had about the candidates, including perceptions of the party affiliation of the candidates. We use responses to the candidate party affiliation items, aggregated at the city level to measure the partisan difference between candidates. Specifically, we first estimated the mean perception of party affiliation of both candidates on a three-point scale, and then took the absolute value of the difference between the two candidates as our measure of candidate differentiation. The larger this number, the greater the perceived partisan difference between the candidates. The distribution of aggregate candidate differentiation, by ballot type, is presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Aggregate Absolute Distance in Perceived Candidate Party Affiliation between Partisan and Nonpartisan Cities



Once again, we see very different patterns for partisan and non-partisan cities: The overall level of differentiation is much larger in partisan than non-partisan cities (.68 vs. 1.62), and there is appreciably more variation among non-partisan cities.[6] Again, this augurs for greater reliance on partisan cues in partisan cities, and perhaps greater reliance on alternative cues in non-partisan cities. Having said that, the variance in differentiation in non-partisan cities once again points to the some important overlap between the two sets of cities. The level of differentiation was great enough in six non-partisan cities (Columbus and Cincinnati, OH, Durham and Greensboro, NC, Fresno, CA, and Salt Lake City, UT) that they would fall comfortably within the distribution found in partisan cities. Coupled with the data on campaign coverage, this suggests that while there are clear differences in political life between partisan and non-partisan cities, the distinction hardly represents completely different political environments.

A Naïve Model

We begin the analysis with a "naïve" model in which we examine the influence of categories of variables separately and make no judgments about the partisan placement of the candidates. Our goal here simply is to evaluate whether the explanatory power of a variable or group of variables differs across ballot types. This is a naïve model in that it ignores other influences and is agnostic about the partisan inclinations of the candidates. So, for instance, to evaluate the influence of respondent party identification in partisan versus non-partisan cities, we test a simple bivariate model with party identification as the independent variable and vote choice as the dependent variable. Here, instead of

[6] The city-level correlation between this measure of candidate differentiation and and the measure of campaign coverage (Figure 2) is .79.

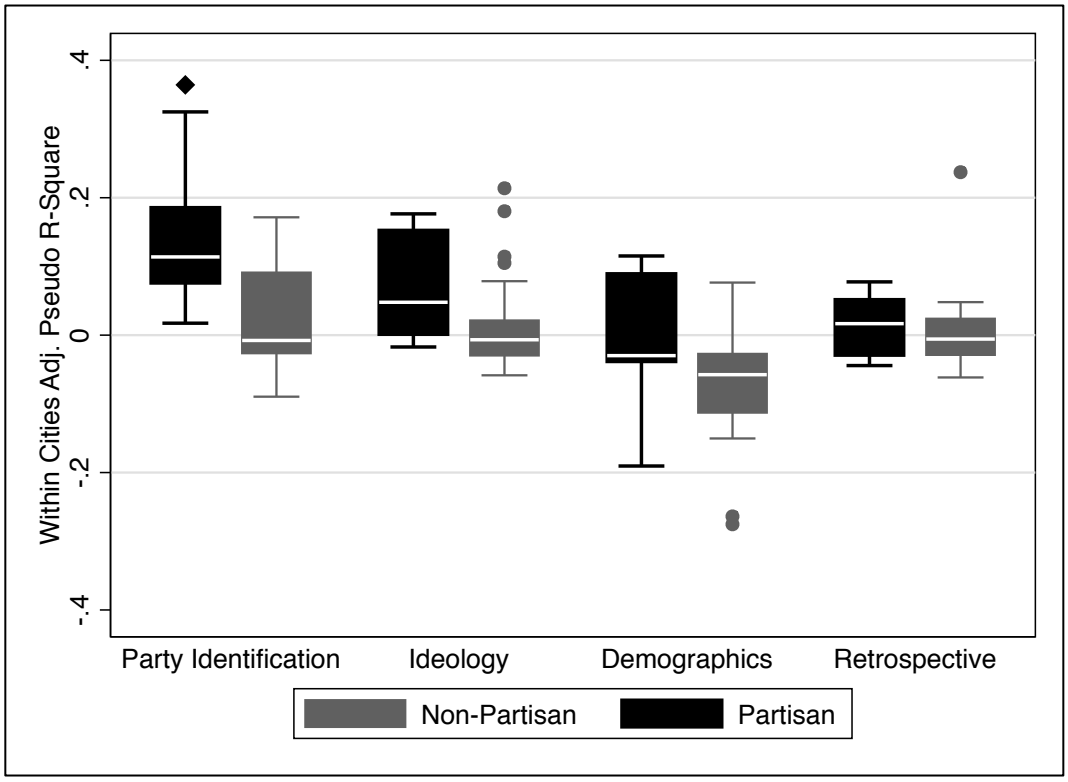
examining vote for the Democratic candidate, we are examining vote for "candidate 1" over "candidate 2," where "candidate 1" and "candidate2" are simple internal CATI system identifiers for the two candidates. In some cases candidate 1 is the Democratic candidate, while in other cases s/he is not. In some cases, we know the party affiliation of the candidates, in other cases we don't. What this means is that in the naïve model the slope for party identification will be positive in some cities and negative in others, depending upon the party affiliation of the candidates and the public's ability to discern that affiliation. The upside of the naïve model is that we do not have to make any judgments about the party affiliation of candidates in those non-partisan contests in which the candidates have limited partisan backgrounds. We are not interested in the direction of the slopes as much as we are in the explanatory power of the model; hence, we make comparisons of overall fit in partisan and non-partisan cities. In addition to party affiliation, we also test models for political ideology, retrospective evaluations, and demographic characteristics. Because these models include different numbers of independent variables,[7] we make comparisons based on the adjusted pseudo-R^2.

The results of the naïve model are found in Figure 4, where we present a box plot that summarizes the central tendency and dispersion of model fit among partisan and non-partisan cities. Just to be clear, we estimated models separately for each city and then summarized the model fit according to the ballot type used by the cities. There are two important patterns to these data. First, to the extent that there are differences across

[7] For the party identification and political ideology, we use simple self-placement measures; for retrospective evaluations, we use a single item that asks respondents if they are satisfied with the way things are going in their city; and for demographic characteristics we use respondent race (dummy variables for black and white respondents, with others (mostly Latino) set as the excluded category), sex, income level (dummy variables for low, middle, and high income, with "NA" as the excluded category), and dummy variables for union household and homeowner. See the Appendix for survey question wording.

the partisan and non-partisan contexts, the tendency is always in the direction of better fit in partisan than non-partisan cities. Second, this effect is most dramatic for those models for which partisan cues are more directly relevant: party identification and political ideology. For the demographic and retrospective models, we also see a poorer fit in nonpartisan than partisan election, but the drop off in fit is not nearly as dramatic as in the cases of party identification and political ideology. In other words, we don't see the sort of substitution effect we discussed earlier where by alternative cues grow in importance. Instead, all models are weaker in nonpartisan elections. In very general terms this suggests an important political consequence resulting from non-partisan elections: vote choice is generally less well organized in non-partisan than partisan elections. Absent party cues, there is a lot less structure and a lot more noise in the decision-making process. This is an important artifact of ballot design. Still, while the straight-up substitution effect is not supported, there is something like a narrowing of the gap between party and other cues. Indeed, the difference between the explanatory power of party identification and that of the other models is appreciably smaller in non-partisan than in partisan cities. To be sure, the party model is still stronger than the others in non-partisan cities, but it is not as dominant as it is in partisan cities. In other words, the superiority of the party model is not as great in nonpartisan cities. Taken together, these findings suggest that while the vote is less structured in non-partisan cities, the non-partisan ballot also has a sort of leveling effect whereby vote choice is not dominated to the same degree by party identification.

Figure 4. A Comparison of Model Fits in Partisan and Nonpartisan Cities



Of course, while the naïve model is illustrative, it comes with limitations. First, it ignores the fact that the variables used in the separate models are related to each other, making it difficult to tease out the independent effects of the groups of variables based on separate analyses. Second, it also ignores the fact that other important contextual variables could affect the relative importance of many of the variables. For instance, retrospective evaluations should be more important in contests in which an incumbent is running, than in open-seat contests (Lewis-Beck and Nadeau, 2001). Also, while variables such as race and sex are important pieces of the group basis of the party system in the U.S., they should be more strongly related to vote choice in contests in which a

male candidate squares off against a female candidate, or a Black candidate faces a white candidate than in contests in which the candidates are the same sex or race.[8]

The Vote Model

In order to address these shortcomings, we pool the data for the 40 mayoral elections and incorporate contest and candidate-specific variables. By pooling the data we can no longer ignore the partisan placement of the candidates. This is not a problem in the 11 partisan contests, in which party affiliation is part of the official record. However, in the remaining 29 contests, we must make some determination as to the relative placement of the candidates. Our solution to this is to place candidates according to their perceived partisan affiliation among the local electorate. The dependent variable in the vote model is a dichotomous indicator scored 1 for those intending to vote for the candidate perceived to be closest to the Democratic Party and 0 for those respondents who intended to vote for the candidate closest to the Republican Party. We use this scoring based on the assumption that even in many non-partisan elections there are partisan and ideological differences between the candidates that make it relatively easy to identify, or at least assume the partisan leanings of the candidates. Although it is possible to make relatively well-informed guesses about the party affiliation of many of the candidates running in non-partisan contests, based on partisan political histories or media descriptions of the candidates, this is not possible in all cases. In addition, it is not uncommon for candidates to declare political independence, or even for both candidates to declare they are affiliated with the same party (usually the dominant party in the local area), even if one of them has a much clearer claim to that party. In non-partisan cities

[8] While we had several contests in which Latino candidate faced each other, there was only one in which a Latino candidate face a White candidate.

we were able to make educated guesses about partisan affiliation of some of the candidates based on previous offices held, activities with or endorsement by a political party, or references in the local media. In eleven of the thirteen cities in which we were able to make educated guesses at the partisan affiliations of both candidates, and where they held different affiliations, the perception-based measure aligned with our educated guess. In the remaining cities in which we were unable to differentiate between the candidates' party affiliations (either because they had similar partisan backgrounds or because we could not uncover the information), we used the perception-based criterion to declare the "Democratic" candidate. This does not always mean the other candidate was a Republican, just that s/he was perceived as being less Democratic.

In addition to the individual-level variables used in the naïve model, we incorporate several contextual variables: Democratic (or candidate identified as "Democrat") share of campaign spending, incumbency (1=Democratic incumbent running, 0=open seat, -1=Democratic challenger), and the race (1=Black Democrat,/White opponent, 0=same race, -1=White Democrat/Black opponent) and sex (1=female Democrat/male opponent, 0=same sex, -1=male Democrat/female opponent) of the candidates. We expect that the probability of voting for the Democratic candidate increases with Democratic spending, and should be positively related to incumbency. We do not have *a priori* expectations for the additive effects of candidate race and sex but expect that they are important conditioning influences on respondent race and sex. In addition, we have included a dummy variable identifying incumbent contests. Again, there is not additive expectation for this variable, but we expect that it has an activation effect on retrospective evaluations.

The individual-level variables are the same as those used in the naïve models: respondent party identification, ideological placement, satisfaction with local conditions, race, sex, income, union household, and home ownership. With the exception of the retrospective item, each of these variables have a clearly partisan expectation: Self identified Democrats and liberals, along with females, non-whites, union members, renters, and low income respondents should be the most likely to vote for the Democratic candidate. For satisfaction with local conditions, however, the directional effect depends on the party of the incumbent mayor: respondents who are relatively satisfied with local conditions should be more likely to support the incumbent mayor (or his/her party) than those who are dissatisfied. Since the dependent variable is "vote for the Democrat" we reverse coded satisfaction with local conditions when the incumbent mayor was not a Democrat. This way, the expected direction of the coefficient is always positive. To reiterate, we expect this variable to be important primarily in incumbent contests, though it is possible that voters reward or punish the candidate from the mayor's party, whether the mayor is running or not.

The results of the vote analysis are presented in Table 1. Here we used a standard logit model and clustered the standard errors by contest in order to minimized the effects of non-independent observations (many individuals from the same cities), especially for the contest-specific variables. We analyze partisan and non-partisan cities separately and then try to gauge the importance of differences between the two contexts. An alternative method would be to have a single model and interact every variable with a partisan/non-partisan dummy variable. However, for the sake of simplicity, and since the results

would ultimately reduce to those presented in Table 1, we opted for examining the contexts separately.

We begin by describing the determinants of vote choice in partisan cities as our referent, and then describe differences that emerge in non-partisan cities. Among the city-level variables that are not used in interaction terms, we find that campaign spending matters in the expected positive direction, but that incumbency status is not significant. Spending has a relatively strong effect: the probability of voting for a Democratic candidates who spent no money[9] was .40, while the probability of voting for a Democratic candidate whose opponent spent no money was .69. It is worth noting, given how campaign spending is intrinsically linked with incumbency status (Jacobson, 2013), that when spending is excluded from the model incumbency status is a significant and important determinant of vote choice. The remaining city-level variables--the dummy variable for incumbent elections and the variables measuring candidate race and sex—are interpreted below in the context of their interactions.

Turning to the individual-level determinants of vote choice, there are a number of important influences. We begin with the attitudinal influences. First, as expected, party identification holds appreciable sway over voting behavior. The predicted probability of a Democratic vote among respondents who self-identified as strong Republicans is .31, while for strong Democrats it is .73. Even when controlling for party identification, there is still an important ideological component to the mayoral vote: respondents who described themselves as very conservative had a .49 probability of vote for the Democratic candidate, while the probability very liberal respondents casting a

[9] Technically $0 expenditures does not mean the candidate spent no money, just that s/he did not spend enough to be require to file a campaign finance statement.

Democratic vote was .66. Though statistically significant, this effect is considerably weaker than that of party identification, which is hardly surprising given the traditionally partisan rather than ideological basis of U.S. electoral politics. Finally, we turn to retrospective evaluations. Taking into account all components of the interaction term, there is no significant effect from retrospective evaluations in open seat contests but a powerful effect in contests involving an incumbent. In incumbent contests, the predicted probability of casting a Democratic vote among respondents with retrospective evaluations least friendly to the Democratic candidate--very negative evaluation when the Democratic candidate is the incumbent, or very positive evaluations when the Democrat is the challenger—is only .34, while the predicted probability of a Democratic vote among those with the most friendly retrospective evaluations in .70. This effect is much stronger than that of ideology and somewhat weaker than that of party identification.

We now turn to demographic characteristics, beginning first with the interaction between candidate and respondent race. To get a sense of racial basis of urban voting, independent of the influence of candidate race, we set the candidate race variable to zero (both candidate have the same race) and consider just the additive terms for respondent race. Bearing in mind that the excluded category is mostly comprised of Latino voters and a few voters or Asian descent, the coefficients for the race dummy variables tell us that Black voters are not significantly different from the excluded category, whereas White voters have a significantly lower probably of casting a Democratic vote. However, the coefficient for Black voters is significantly stronger when a Black Democrat is running against a White opponent, while the slope for White voters is unaffected.

For the final group of demographic factors—all related to socioeconomic status—we see very little connection to vote choice. There is absolutely no connection between income level and vote choice, nor is there any effect from home ownership. There is however, a significant relationship between living in a union household and the probability of casting a Democratic vote. Respondents living in union households have a .62 probability of reporting a Democratic vote intention, compared to a .56 probability for those in non-union households. The magnitude of this effect is relatively limited but still statistically significant.

So voting behavior in partisan mayoral elections looks a lot like voting behavior in U.S. federal and state elections: campaign spending, party affiliation, ideology, and retrospective evaluations are important predictors of vote choice, and demographic characteristics play more of a supporting role. This, in and of itself, is important as there are so few studies of local elections using individual-level data from across multiple cities (see Oliver and Ha (2007) for the only other example of such a study). But the key question for this analysis is whether or not there are important and significant differences between partisan and non-partisan cities. The results of the analysis for non-partisan cities are presented in the third and fourth columns findings in Table 1. Rather than walking through the results variable-by-variable, as we did for partisan cities, we choose to focus our attention on the differences. One place to begin the comparison is with the overall fit of the model. Using the pseudo-R^2 and the proportional reduction in error as the basis of comparison, the findings from the naïve model are confirmed here: vote choice in partisan elections has more structure than vote choice in nonpartisan elections.

The PRE statistic is especially instructive: the vote model reduces error in predicting vote choice by 59% in partisan elections and by 42% in nonpartisan contests.

In terms of the importance of specific variables in the vote model, we use two different bases for comparison. The strictest comparison is the take the difference in slopes between partisan and nonpartisan races and test to see if those differences are statistically significant. The other comparison is not based on whether the slopes are statistically different but on whether different variables materialize as statistically significant in partisan versus nonpartisan cities. This is an especially important standard because the narrative to emerge from most quantitative social science research reflects which of the variables in a model are statistically significant. In other words, the "story" we end up telling is based on which variables are statistically significant, so we are asking if the story of nonpartisan elections is different from that of partisan elections.

Table 1. Determinants of Vote Choice in Partisan and Nonpartisan Cities (Logit estimates with standard errors clustered by contest)

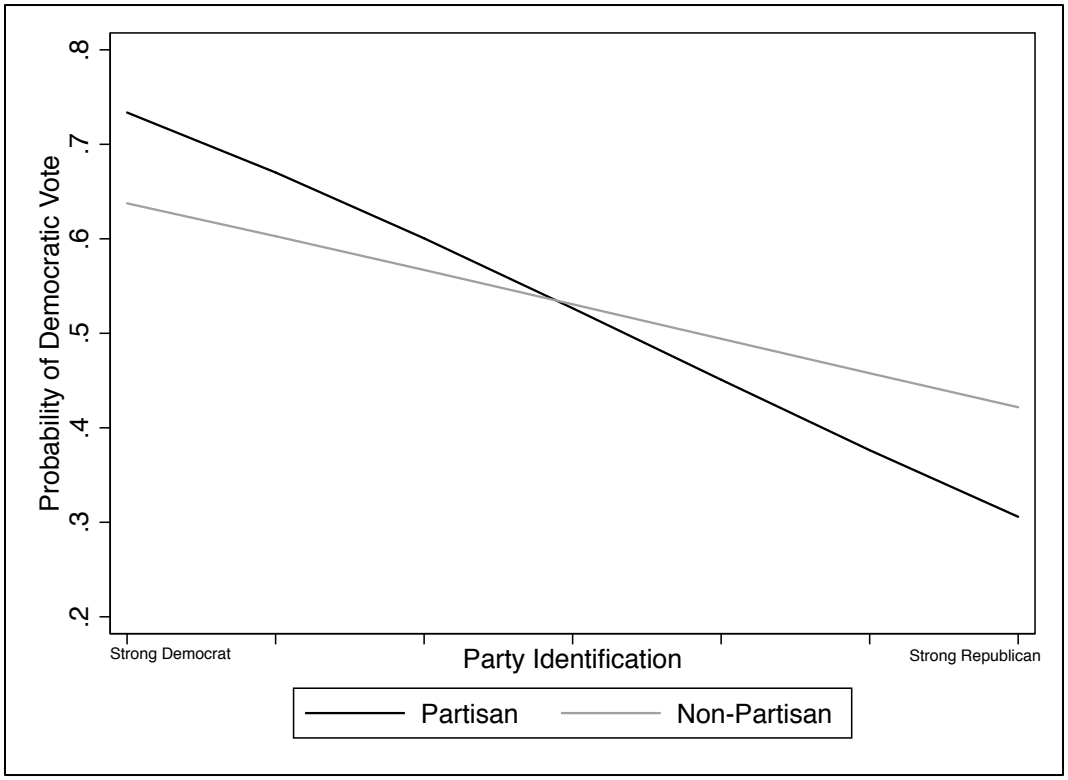
	Partisan Contests		Non-Partisan Contests		T-score for Slope Difference (Partisan-Nonpartisan)	Difference in Interpretation of Significant Factors?
	b	z-score	b	z-score		
Democratic Share of Spending	1.749	2.76*	1.563	2.76*	0.22	
Incumbency	0.310	1.43	0.473	2.00*	-0.51	Yes
Incumbent Election	-2.938	-6.14*	-1.158	-2.42*	-2.63*	
Candidate Sex	0.910	4.52*	0.507	3.03*	1.54	
Candidate Race	-1.167	-2.66*	0.408	1.31	-2.92*	Yes
Party Identification	-0.403	-10.73*	-0.167	-4.78*	-4.61*	
Political Ideology	0.259	2.47*	0.113	1.55	1.14	Yes
Satisfaction With Local Conditions	-0.072	-0.67	-0.002	-0.02	-0.45	
Satisfaction*Incumbent Election	0.825	4.27*	0.479	2.88*	1.36	
Female Respondent	0.025	0.13	0.095	1.17	-0.33	
Candidate Sex * Female	-0.347	-0.81	-0.058	-0.34	-0.63	
Black Respondent	-0.064	-0.14	-0.140	-0.48	0.14	
Candidate Race * Black Resp.	1.282	1.93*	0.498	1.36	1.03	Yes
White Respondent	-0.697	-2.37*	-0.178	-0.77	-1.39	Yes
Candidate Race * White Resp.	0.950	1.41	-0.598	-1.76*	2.05*	Yes
Low Income	0.074	0.24	0.226	1.12	-0.42	
Middle Income	-0.007	-0.03	0.338	1.69	-1.10	Yes
Top Income	-0.006	-0.03	0.340	1.68	-1.16	Yes
Union	0.397	2.00*	-0.018	-0.11	1.60	Yes
Home Owner	0.000	0.00	-0.231	-2.18*	1.07	Yes
Constant	1.037	1.76	-0.470	-0.96	1.97	
Individual Respondents	1059		2344			
Contests	11		29			
Pseudo-R^2	.31		.14			
PRE	.59		.42			

*p < .05 (one-tailed)

Using the stricter basis for comparison, there are few significant differences between the models. Most prominent among the differences, not surprisingly, is the effect of party identification, the slope for which is appreciably smaller in nonpartisan contests. At the same time, however, party identification remains an important and

significant predictor of vote choice—in fact still the strongest individual-level predictor. This comports quite nicely with the evidence presented in Figures 2 and 3, which showed that while less abundant than in partisan elections, party cues are still available in many nonpartisan contests. Figure 5 provides a more substantive picture of the value of party identification across these two contexts. While the net change in the probability of casting a Democratic voter across the range of party affiliation is .42 in partisan contests, it is approximately half that (.21) in nonpartisan cities. So while party continues to play an important role, it is much less important absent party labels. The other important difference by this strict test is the interaction between candidate and respondent race. The slope for the interaction between candidate race and White respondents is significantly more negative in nonpartisan cities, indicating that in this context White support for Democratic candidates is more dependent on the race of the candidates than in partisan cities. The other two significant differences are the additive term for incumbent elections and for candidate race. Because they are part of interaction terms, they are a bit difficult to interpret on their own. For the incumbent election slope, the implication is that when conditions are unfavorable for Democratic candidates, they pay a steeper price in partisan than nonpartisan elections. The race interactions are considered in more detail below.

Figure 5. The Impact of Party Affiliation on Mayoral Vote Choice in Partisan and Nonpartisan Elections



Using the less stringent basis for comparison (are variables significant in one context but not the other?) we see many more differences, including: incumbency is significant in nonpartisan elections but not in partisan elections, ideology is significant in partisan but not in non-partisan elections, and several of the demographic variables are significant in one context but not the other. The findings for incumbency and ideology are particularly interesting, suggesting that absent the cue-rich environment of partisan elections, incumbency substitutes as an important cue in nonpartisan races, and voters have a more difficult time connecting ideology to candidates. In nonpartisan cities, the probability of casting a Democratic vote when the Democrat is a challenger is .34, compare to .64, when the Democrat is the incumbent, a swing of thirty points. In partisan

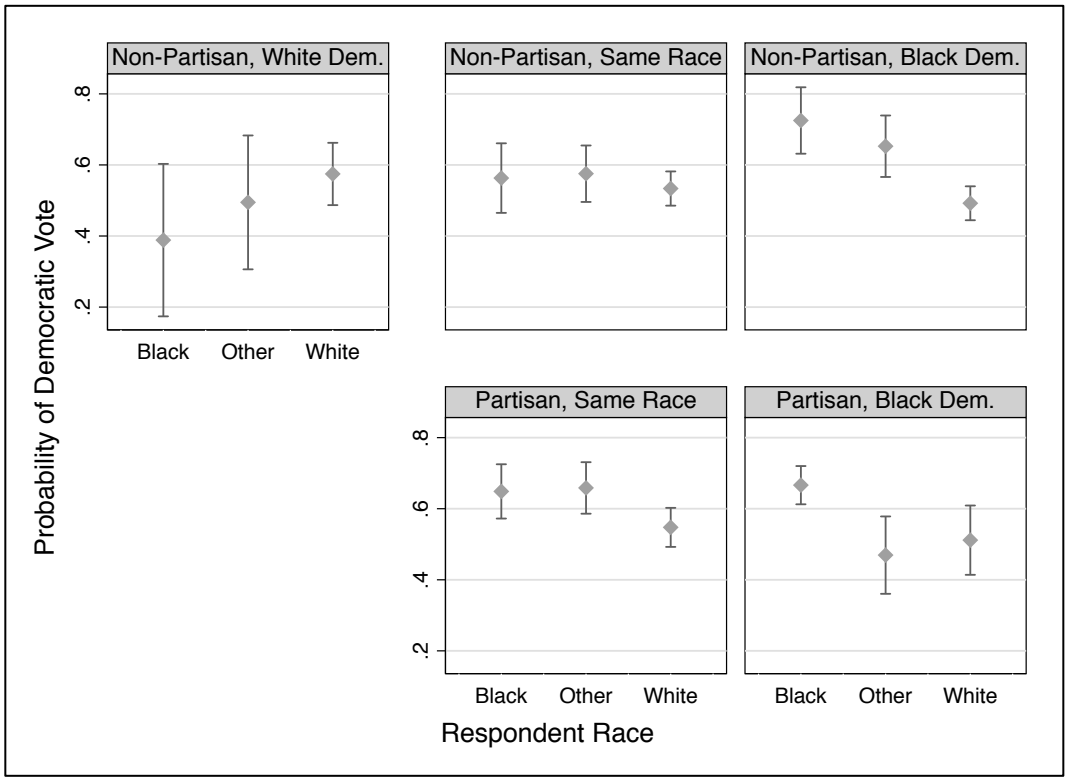
cities, the swing is only ten points and is not statistically significant. This is the starkest example of the type of substitution effect hypothesized at the beginning of the paper.

The demographic differences between the two contexts are interesting but perhaps not quite as impressive, since some slopes become significant in nonpartisan contests (homeowner, middle and top income, and the White race interaction), while others lose significance (Black race interaction, union household). Some of these changes are even less impressive when their substantive import is evaluated. For instance, the significant effect for middle and top income only indicate that those groups are significantly different (and more likely to cast a Democratic vote) compared to the baseline group, which is respondents who did not answer the income question. Middle and top income respondents are not significantly different from low-income respondents.

It is more difficult to untangle the effects of race across the two partisan contexts, given the number of interaction terms. These effects are summarized in Figure 6, which provides a somewhat clearer—though admitted just this side of murky—picture. First, it is important to note that there is only one instance of a White Democratic candidate facing an African-American opponent, the 2009 mayoral elections in nonpartisan Toledo, Ohio, in which the White candidate, Democrat Keith Wilkowski, faced self-declared Independent candidate Mike Bell, who is African-American. Due to the small number of cases from this one contest, what appears to be a strong pattern of racial voting is not statistically significant. Across the other settings, the primary difference to emerge is that in contests in which the two candidates share that same racial background, respondent race is a stronger predictor of vote choice in partisan contests; and in those cases where there is a Black Democrat running against a White opponent, respondent

race is a better predictor of vote choice in non-partisan contests. In the end, though, there is not a clear pattern of race taking on more or less meaning in partisan or non-partisan contests.

Figure 6. The Interaction Candidate and Respondent Race as Determinants of Vote Choice in U.S. Mayoral Elections



Conclusions

We began this analysis with a very simple goal, to uncover the extent to which voting behavior is affected by the use of partisan versus nonpartisan ballots, using survey data from forty separate U.S. mayoral elections. Our expectation, based in part on the literature on party cues, but primarily on aggregate studies of local elections, was that we would see a substitution effect such that alternatives to party identification—race, sex, incumbency, retrospective evaluations—would offset the decreased importance of party

identification and become stronger predictors of vote choice in nonpartisan elections. We found a number of differences in voting behavior between the two contexts, but substitution was not primary among them. To the extent that substitution took place it was found in the increased importance of incumbency in nonpartisan contests. This difference should not be minimized, however, because it is substantial, and also because it fits with the idea that information about the candidates is a vital element in structuring vote choice: absent information about candidate party affiliations, the information advantages associated with incumbency appear to gain importance.

If evidence of substitution is otherwise scarce, there is abundant evidence of another important effect, one in which party labels serve as an important structuring device for vote choice. The party label provides a lot of important information to voters, information that not only helps them make connections between their own party identification and that of the candidates but also facilitates connecting myriad other factors to the their vote choice. This structuring function was abundantly clear in both the naïve model and the full model, where there were stark differences in model fit between the two contexts and very little evidence of substitution.

These findings highlight an important function for partisan elections, one that has previously been discussed in the context of voter engagement in local election (Alford and Lee 1968; Karnig and Walter 1977; Schaffner, Streb, and Wright 2001). Party labels help organize the vote and bring meaning to candidate choice. This effect is not produced solely because of the legal distinction but because that distinction leads to differences in the availability of cues and the ability of voters to connect candidates with parties.

Question Wording Appendix

Perception of Candidate Party Affiliation

CI3. Would you say that [Candidate name] is a [ROTATE: Democrat, a Republican,] an independent, or what?

1. Democrat
2. Republican
3. Independent
4. Something else (vol.)
8. DON'T KNOW
9. REFUSED

Recoded to 1=Democrat, 2=Independent, 3=Republican

Respondent Party Identification

F1. Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a [ROTATE: Republican, a Democrat] an Independent, or what?

1. Republican (Next)
2. Democrat (Skip to F1b)
3. Independent (Skip to F1c)
4. Other (vol) (Skip to F1c)
8. DON'T KNOW (Skip to F1c)
9. REFUSED

F1a. [IF REPUBLICAN] Would you call yourself a strong Republican or a not very strong Republican?

1. Strong
2. Not very strong
8. DON'T KNOW
9. REFUSED

F1.b [IF DEMOCRAT] Would you call yourself a strong Democrat or a not very strong Democrat?

1. Strong
2. Not very strong
8. DON'T KNOW
9. REFUSED

F1c. [IF F1 = 3,4,8,9] Do you think of yourself as closer to the [ROTATE: Republican/ Democratic] Party or to the [ROTATE: Democratic/Republican] Party?

1. Closer to Republican
2. Closer to Democratic
3. Neither (VOL)
8. DON'T KNOW
9. REFUSED

These questions were used to create a seven-point scale: 1=strong Democrat, 2=weak Democrat, 3=Independent leaning Democrat, 4=Independent, 5=independent leaning Republican, 6=weak Republican, 7=strong Republican.

Respondent Ideology

F7. In general, would you describe your political views as [ROTATE: very conservative, somewhat conservative, moderate, somewhat liberal, or very liberal]?

1. Very conservative
2. Somewhat Conservative
3. Moderate
4. Somewhat Liberal
5. Very liberal
8. DON'T KNOW
9 REFUSED

Satisfaction with Local Conditions

LI1. On the whole, are you very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied with the way things are going in your city?

1. Very satisfied
2. Somewhat Satisfied
3. Somewhat Dissatisfied
4. Very Dissatisfied
8. DON'T KNOW
9. Refused

Income

A series of income range questions (e.g., "Is your total annual HOUSEHOLD income before taxes over or under $40,000?") were used to place respondents in narrow income ranges. These were used to create indicator variables for low (less than $40,000), medium ($40,000 to $74,999) and high (greater than $74,999) income groups. The excluded category is those respondents who did not answer the questions.

Union Household

F5. Do you or anyone else in your household belong to a labor union? [IF YES: would that be you or someone else?]

1. Yes, Respondent
2. Yes, someone else
3. No
4. Yes, Respondent and someone else
8. Don't know
9. Refuse

Categories 1 and 2 were combined to create an indicator variable for union households.

Home Ownership

F14. Do you own or rent the home you live in?

1. Own
2. Rent
8. DON'T KNOW
9. NA

Racial Background

BG2. This question is just for classification purposes only and will help us make sure our sample is a good representation of the population in your city. Which do you feel best describes your racial background? Black or African American, White, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian American, Pacific Islander, or Hispanic or Latino?

INTERVIEWER: If multiple responses, prompt: "Which one best describes your race?"
CATI: ACCEPT ONE ANSWER ONLY

1. Black or African-American
2. White

3. American Indian or Alaskan Native
4. Asian American
5. Pacific Islander
6. Hispanic or Latino (SKIP to directive before BG3)
7. Other
8. DON'T KNOW
9. REFUSED

Used to create dichotomous indicator variables for Blacks (1=Black, 0=other) and Whites (1=White, 0=other). Latinos, Asian-Americans, and others are the excluded category.

References

Alford, Robert R, and Eugene C Lee. 1968. “Voting Turnout in American Cities.” *The American Political Science Review* 62(3): 796–813.

Arceneaux, Kevin. 2008. “Can Partisan Cues Diminish Democratic Accountability?.” *Political Behavior* 30(2): 139–160.

Arrington, Theodore S. 1978. “Partisan Campaigns, Ballots, and Voting Patterns.” *Urban Affairs Review* 14(2): 253–263.

Axelrod, Robert. "Presidential election coalitions in 1984." *The American Political Science Review* (1986): 281-284.

Bartels, Larry. 2002. “Beyond the Running Tally: Partisan Bias in Political Perceptions.” *Political Behavior* 24(2): 117–150.

Books, John, and Charles Prysby. 1999. “Contextual Effects on Retrospective Economic Evaluations the Impact of the State and Local Economy.” *Political Behavior* 21(1): 1–16.

Bullock, J G. 2011. “Elite influence on public opinion in an informed electorate.” *American Political Science Review*.

Campbell, Angus A, Philip E Converse, Warren E Miller, and Donald E Stokes. 1960. *The American Voter*.

Caren, Neal L. 2007. “Big City, Big Turnout? Electoral Participation in American Cities.” *Journal of Urban Affairs* 29(1): 31–46.

Downs, A. 1957. *An Economic THeory of Democracy*.

Gerber, Alan S, Gregory Huber, and Ebonya Washington. 2010. “Party Affiliation, Partisanship, and Political Beliefs: A Field Experiment.” *American Political Science Review* 104(04): 720–744.

Gilbert, Charles E. 1962. Some aspects of nonpartisan elections in large cities. Midwest Journal of Political Science 6:345-62.

Goren, Paul. 2005. “Party Identification and Core Political Values.” *American Journal of Political Science* 49(4): 881–896.

Goren, Paul, Christopher M Federico, and Miki Caul Kittilson. 2009. “Source Cues, Partisan Identities, and Political Value Expression.” *American Journal of Political Science* 53(4): 805–820.

Hagensick, A. Clarke. 1964. “Influences of Partisanship and Incumbency on a

Nonpartisan Election System." *The Western Political Quarterly* 17(1): 117–124.

Huckfeldt, Robert, Eric Plutzer, and John Sprague. 1993. "Alternative Contexts of Political Behavior: Churches, Neighborhoods, and Individuals." *The Journal of Politics* 55(2): 365–381.

Fiorina, Morris. 1981. *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections* Yale University Press.

Karnig, Albert K, and B. Oliver Walter. 1983. "Decline in Municipal Voter Turnout: A Function of Changing Structure." *American Politics Research* 11(4): 491–505.

Jacobson, Gary. 2013. *The Politics of Congressional Elections,* 8th edition. New York: Addison Wesley Longman.

Kaufmann, Karen M., and John R. Petrocik. "The changing politics of American men: Understanding the sources of the gender gap." *American Journal of Political Science* (1999): 864-887.

Lupia, Arthur. 1994. "Shortcuts Versus Encyclopedias: Information and Voting Behavior in California Insurance Reform Elections." *The American Political Science Review* 88(1): 63–76.

Nadeau, Richard, and Michael S. Lewis‐Beck. "National economic voting in US presidential elections." *Journal of Politics* 63.1 (2001): 159-181.

Mackuen, Michael, and Courtney Brown. 1987. "Political Context and Attitude Change." *The American Political Science Review* 81(2): 471–490.

Manza, Jeff, and Clem Brooks. *Social Cleavages and Political Change: Voter Alignments and US Party Coalitions: Voter Alignments and US Party Coalitions*. Oxford University Press, 1999.

Marsh, M. 2002. "Electoral context." *Electoral Studies* 21(2): 207–217.

Matson, Marsha, and Terri Susan Fine. 2006. Gender, ethnicity, and ballot information: Ballot cues in low-information elections. *State Politics and Policy Quarterly* 6:49-72.

Miller, Warren E. 1956. "One-Party Politics and the Voter." *The American Political Science Review* 50(3): 707–725.

Mueller, J E. 1970. "Choosing Among 133 Candidates" The Public Opinion Quarterly, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Autumn, 1970), pp. 395-402."

Richard Nadeau and Michael S. Lewis-Beck (2001). National Economic Voting in U.S. Presidential Elections. *The Journal of Politics*, 63, pp 159-181.

Nicholson, Stephen P. 2011. “Dominating Cues and the Limits of Elite Influence.” *The Journal of Politics* 73(04): 1165–1177.

Pomper, Gerald. 1966. “Ethnic and Group Voting in Nonpartisan Municipal Elections.” *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 30(1): 79–97.

Popkin, Samuel. 1991. “The reasoning voter: communication and persuasión in presidential campaigns.” : 291.

Prysby, Charles, and John Books. 1987. “Modeling Contextual Effects on Political Behavior: Static versus Dynamic Models.” *Political Behavior* 9(3): 225–245.

Rahn, Wendy. 1993a. “The Role of Partisan Stereotypes in Information Processing about Political Candidates.” *American Journal of Political Science* 37(2): 472–496.

Raudenbush, Stephen W, and Anthony S Bryk. 2002. *Hierarchical linear models : applications and data analysis methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA [u.a.]: Sage Publications.

Salisbury, Robert H., and Gordon Black. 1963. “Class and Party in Partisan and Non-Partisan Elections: The Case of Des Moines.” *The American Political Science Review* 57(3): 584–592.

Schaffner, Brian F, and Matthew J Streb. 2002. “The Partisan Heuristic in Low-Information Elections.” *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 66(4): 559–581.

Schaffner, Brian, Matthew Streb, and Gerald Wright. 2001. “Teams without Uniforms: The Nonpartisan Ballot in State and Local Elections.” *Political Research Quarterly* 54(1): 7–30.

Stonecash, Jeffrey M., et al. "Class and Party: Secular Realignment and the Survival of Democrats Outside the South." *Political Research Quarterly* 53.4 (2000): 731-52

Taylor, Jon, and William D Schreckhise. 1966. “The Impact of Issue Voting on a Local Nonpartisan Election.” *State and Local Government Review* 35(3): 174–182.

Weinschenk, Aaron C. 2010. “Revisiting the Political Theory of Party Identification.” *Political Behavior* 32(4): 473–494.

Wood, Curtis. 2002. “Voter Turnout in City Elections.” *Urban Affairs Review* 38(2): 209–231.

Wright, Gerald C. 2008. “Charles Adrian and the Study of Nonpartisan Elections.” *Political Research Quarterly* 61(1): 13–16.

Zaller, John. 1991. “Information, Values, and Opinion.” *The American Political Science Review* 85(4): 1215–1237.