

How Partisan are U.S. Local Elections? Evidence from 2020 Cast Vote Records*

Aleksandra Conevska¹, Shigeo Hirano², Shiro Kuriwaki³, Jeffrey B. Lewis⁴, Can Mutlu¹, and James M. Snyder, Jr.¹

¹Harvard University, Department of Government

²Columbia University, Department of Political Science

³Yale University, Department of Political Science and Institution for Social and Policy Studies

⁴University of California Los Angeles, Department of Political Science

June 2025

Abstract

Analyzing nominally partisan contests, previous literature has argued that state and local politics have nationalized. Here we use individual ballots from the 2020 general elections covering over 50 million voters to study the relationship between individual national partisanship and voting in over 5,700 contested down-ballot contests, including nonpartisan races and ballot measures. Voting in partisan contests can be explained by voter's national partisanship, consistent with existing literature. However, we find that voting for local nonpartisan offices and ballot measures is much less partisan. National partisanship explains more than 80 percent of the within-contest variation in voting for partisan state and local offices but less than 10 percent for local nonpartisan contests and local ballot measures. The degree of partisanship in local spending measures varies by the type of service – e.g., education, roads, public safety, housing. Finally, we find evidence of structure in the pattern of votes on local spending measures.

*We thank Anthony Fowler, Gary King, Stephanie Ternullo, Jessica Trounstein, Hye Young You, and participants at the University of California San Diego, Columbia University, the University of Copenhagen, University of Pennsylvania, the Bocconi-Collegio Carlo Alberto Workshop in Political Economy (Turin), the Midwest Political Science Association Annual Meeting, and Harvard University, for their helpful comments. We thank Jessica Y. Lee and Alisha Arshad for their excellent RA work. Authors listed alphabetically.

Introduction

According to many observers, the partisan and ideological divisions polarizing U.S. politics at the national level are now also manifest in state and local politics. Some even claim that this has created a situation in which voting behavior in local elections is divided along the same partisan divisions as national level voting. Our article provides new empirical evidence regarding this claim.

Scholars have theorized several possible forces driving state and local political divisions to align with national partisan or ideological cleavages. First, polarization among political elites may have created increasingly distinct Democratic and Republican brands associated with distinct ideological positions. Voters rely heavily on party cues, so their choices increasingly mirror their national partisan leanings even when voting at the state and local levels (Hopkins, 2018). Second, the policy agendas of state and local governments may have changed, or voters' preferences over these agendas might have changed (or both), resulting in state and local political cleavages that align more closely with national partisan and ideological divisions. Third, the relative decline and nationalization of local news media may have reduced voters' information about state and local politics, leading them to rely even more on partisan or ideological cues.¹

On the other hand, until recently the conventional wisdom was that local politics was largely disconnected from national politics. One reason is that the routine policy choices facing local governments differ from the main issues that divide the parties at the national level, and often relate more to managerial competence.² Moreover, local governments compete with one another for businesses and residents, constraining what they are able to do, particularly regarding the types of redistributive policies that divide the parties nationally (Tiebout, 1956). Interest group cleavages often differ at the local and national levels, so the cues voters receive from local interest groups may cross-cut the national partisan divisions. Anzia (2022) renews this argument, studying how chambers of commerce, real estate developers, neighborhood associations, and police and fire labor

¹ See for example Hopkins (2018); Martin and McCrain (2019); Hayes and Lawless (2021); Moskowitz (2020); Hopkins and Gorton (2024).

² Over a century ago Munro (1923, 7) wrote: "The great majority of city officials and employees are engaged in rendering social and economic services – teaching in the schools, preserving public order, caring for the public health, supervising playgrounds, building streets, inspecting markets, safeguarding the water supply, removing waste, putting out fires, and figuring tax bills. These services ought to have no political or partisan flavor. There is a right and a wrong way of performing them, but no Democratic or Republican way." See also Oliver, Ha and Callen (2012).

unions participate in local policymaking.³ Finally, voters have firsthand experience with many local government services, unlike most of the activities of the federal government, so they may be less dependent on party cues when voting in local elections.

Voting behavior in nominally partisan offices, i.e., contests where a party label appears next to the candidates on a general election ballot, is closely correlated with party identification and the presidential vote, and the correlations have grown in recent years. This is well documented for congressional and gubernatorial races, and several studies find similar correlations for other partisan offices down the ballot. Separately, studies of state and local representation find that policy outcomes chosen by state and local governments are correlated with the partisan or ideological preferences of their constituents.⁴

Most elected offices in the U.S. are nominally nonpartisan, i.e., voters vote on candidates without a party label. About 75 percent of elected municipal offices and over 90 percent of school board elections are elected on nonpartisan ballots.⁵ For these offices, the relationship between voters' choices and partisanship or ideology appears to be weaker and more variable. Voting often seems more related to factors such as race, ethnicity, home-ownership, incumbency, specific issues, and even local government performance.⁶ Findings on votes for ballot measures are also mixed. At

³ See also DiSalvo (2023) who focuses on police unions.

⁴ For studies of congressional and gubernatorial elections see Jacobson (2015); Abramowitz and Webster (2016); Fiorina (2017); Hopkins (2018); Sievert and McKee (2019). For studies of other state and local offices see Melusky and Richman (2020); Weinschenk et al. (2020); Weinschenk (2022); Kuriwaki (2025). For studies of representation see for example Erikson, Wright and McIver (1993); Choi et al. (2010); Hajnal and Trounstine (2010); Tausanovitch and Warshaw (2014); Einstein and Kogan (2016); Sances (2021); Caughey and Warshaw (2022). Some studies employ regression discontinuity designs in order to identify the causal effect of elites' party affiliations on policy outcomes (e.g., Leigh (2008), Ferreira and Gyourko (2009), Gerber and Hopkins (2011), de Benedictis-Kessner and Warshaw (2016), Thompson (2020)). Because these designs hold voters' preferences fixed, they cannot tell us much about nationalization among voters.

⁵ Butler and Torres (2025) conduct an exhaustive search of local elected municipal executive and legislative offices in each state (i.e., mayors, councils, commissions, etc.), and find that 20287 out of 26756 are nonpartisan. The statistic for school board elections comes from our estimation; see Appendix A.

⁶ See Anzia (2021); Trounstine (2009); Warshaw (2019) for reviews of the literature on elections for local offices. Abrajano, Nagler and Alvarez (2005), Oliver and Ha (2007), Rock and Baum (2010), Bonneau and Cann (2015), Boudreau, Elmendorf and MacKenzie (2015), and Sances (2018) find statistically significant relationships between voting and partisanship or ideology, with varying magnitude. Schaffner, Streb and Wright (2001), Taylor and Schreckhise (2003),

the state level, vote choice and partisanship or ideology are highly correlated for some hot-button issues, but relatively low for other measures. Partisanship and ideology may play even less of a role in voting on local ballot measures. Instead, studies find significant correlations with factors such as income, education, race, interest group endorsements, and proxies for self-interest.⁷

However, we know little about the broad picture nationwide. Existing studies are based on a small number of elections in a small number of localities, and often study one or two of the six types of state and local contests discussed here: nominally partisan and nonpartisan state level offices, nominally partisan and nonpartisan local offices, statewide ballot measures, and local ballot measures.⁸ There are over 500,000 local officials elected in the U.S., and many thousands of local ballot measures each election cycle. Even at the state level there are hundreds of nonpartisan races for judges and other offices each election cycle, and 150 or so statewide ballot measures. No studies have estimated the average levels or trends in nationalization for even a small fraction of these. As a result, as Anzia (2021) argues in her review of the literature, we know little about the structure of voter preferences over *local issues*, and whether the cleavages among voters on those issues mirror the divisions over national issues.⁹

In this article, we present the most comprehensive study to date of the relationship between a voter's national partisanship and their voting pattern in state and local elections. We overcome the measurement challenges in previous literature by using cast vote record (CVR) data from the

Ansolahehere et al. (2006), Berry and Howell (2007), and Weinschenk (2022) show that the relationship between voting and partisanship is much weaker when party labels are not on the ballot, and some even find statistically insignificant relationships.

⁷ Kitchens (2023) finds weak evidence that partisanship is related to vote choice in ballot measures funding schools. Lupia (1994) and others have studied the informational value of endorsements on ballot measures. Gerber and Phillips (2003) find some evidence that partisanship matters, but that other factors, including endorsements, matter as well. Rugh and Trounstine (2011) find significant relationships with some socioeconomic factors. Tedin, Matland and Weiher (2001) find that partisanship is related to vote choice, but only for Blacks.

⁸ A few studies cover longer periods of time or a broader geographic scope, but these use office or ballot measure totals, from which it is difficult to infer the behavior of individual voters with a high degree of confidence.

⁹ Some surveys provide additional evidence regarding voter preferences on local issues, e.g., Tausanovitch and Warshaw (2013, 2014), Cann (2018), Jensen et al. (2021), and Marble and Nall (2021). Summarizing the findings from these articles, Anzia (2021, 139) suggests that voter's views on national policy issues "do not always map onto to their preferences on local government issues." More recently, Schaffner, Rhodes and La Raja (2024) finds evidence that attitudes on many local issues are correlated with ideological positions on national policies.

November 2020 general elections. These records capture the anonymous, individual-level ballots of millions of voters, allowing us to directly compare their votes for federal offices – i.e., President and Congress – with their votes for state and local offices, such as state legislators, mayors, county commissioners, and sheriffs, as well as for state and local measures on a variety of issues, including taxes, bonds and spending by state and local governments. We have CVR data for 24 states and over 450 counties, with over 2200 contested nonpartisan contests and nearly 1850 ballot measures on the ballot at the state, county, municipal, school board, and special district levels.

Only a few existing studies use CVR data to analyze voting in state or local elections. Kuriwaki (2025) focuses on voting in nominally partisan state and local elections in South Carolina. Alvarez, Hall and Levin (2018) analyzes CVR data from both partisan and nonpartisan local elections, but limit attention to three offices in Pierce County, Washington, in 2008. Morse (2021) examines the correlation between votes on a 2018 state amendment and governor or U.S. senator in Florida.

Our findings show high levels of presidential party loyalty in state candidate elections with party labels (state partisan offices), slightly weaker levels in local candidate elections with party labels (local partisan offices), and much weaker levels in nonpartisan offices and ballot measures. We summarize our findings by simple comparisons between Democratic and Republican voters. Our main measure, Absolute Partisan Gap (*APG*) is the absolute percentage-point difference between nationally Democratic and nationally Republican voters (as inferred from their votes for President and Congress) in support for the winning candidate in each down-ballot contest. The *APG* is 100 if national partisans vote exactly according to their national partisanship on the down-ballot contest, and 0 if there is no correlation between voters' national partisanship and vote choice on the down-ballot contest. The *APG* is 91 percentage points for the average state partisan office, 85 points for the average local partisan office, but only 22 points for local nonpartisan offices (e.g., school boards and city councils) and 18 points for local ballot measures. In an individual-level regression predicting vote choice in these subnational offices, a voter's national party allegiance explains nearly 89 percent of the within-contest variation in vote choices for state partisan office, but less than 8 percent of the same variation in vote choices for local ballot measures.

Some of the most interesting findings appear when we compare across local offices and across local ballot measures. Among local nonpartisan offices, for example, nonpartisan county legislatures have an *APG* nearly 10 points higher than school board races, which have an *APG* of only 21 points. Within local ballot measures that specifically ask voters to approve local sales taxes or bonds, spending for school or library projects have an *APG* of 27 percentage points, but ballot measures for road projects have an *APG* of 14. Spending for police is the only type of ballot measure we find in which the direction of voting is reversed: Democrats are *less* likely to vote yes on the

spending than Republicans are. We find some evidence of issue voting on local ballot measures. In particular, we find that the votes on local education spending measures correlate highly with each other, but are less correlated with national partisanship.

In short, at the local level, not all politics is nationally partisan. Consider Republicans, that is, voters who cast a straight Republican ticket for all federal offices in 2020, including a vote for Donald Trump. In state partisan races, 3.2 percent of these voters split their ticket, voting for Democrats for some offices. In local partisan races, 6.8 percent split their ticket for a Democrat. However, also at the local level, on average 52.6 percent of the Republicans voted *yes* on local ballot measures to increase or maintain taxes or spending, or to pass bonds. These differences in voting behavior could reflect factors such as the ideological positions of the candidates and ballot measure proposals, variation in relative candidate qualifications and the salience of these qualifications for voters, local interest group activity, and differences in the way voters perceive the functioning of their local government relative to their state government or the federal government.

Data and Measures

Traditional sources of data on voting patterns pose a problem for studying voting in local elections. Post-election surveys rarely ask how people voted for mayor, school board, or ballot measures. While aggregate election results can provide estimates of ticket splitting rates by using the difference in Presidential and local office vote-shares, these only measure *net* ticket splitting. Past research using vote-shares has also struggled to standardize precinct results covering all local offices across multiple states. In this study, we turn to *cast vote records* to study patterns of voting behavior.

Cast Vote Record Data

Cast vote records are electronic records of every choice made on every ballot (Wack, 2019). They are by-products of voting scanners and tabulators, that scan paper ballots and translate each marked vote into an official vote. Election officials also often use cast vote records to conduct post-election audits. CVRs are anonymous. While CVRs are not usually made public following an election, officials sometimes release them voluntarily to promote the transparency of their administration, and more commonly release them in response to public records requests. As noted above, CVR data has been used in previous studies of voting behavior (Lewis, 2001; Wand et al., 2001; Herron and Sekhon, 2003; Gerber and Lewis, 2004; Herron and Lewis, 2007; Frisina et al., 2008; Bafumi et al., 2012; Morse, 2021; Kuriwaki, 2025). CVRs are unique in the ability to measure the joint

relationships between different contests exactly, avoiding the limitations of aggregated election returns and surveys (Kuriwaki et al., 2024).

Until recently, cast vote records covering large portions of the U.S. were not available for academic research. After the 2020 election, a group of election skeptics, data scientists and other interested parties engaged in a large-scale, crowd-sourced effort to collect CVR data from county officials, often flooding them with public records requests.¹⁰ We use the cast vote record database that resulted from this activity, which Kuriwaki et al. (2024) describe in detail. We build on the data in Kuriwaki et al. (2024) with records collected or cleaned later, and we also include cases where the cast vote records cover only a part of a county.

Our initial data includes over 50 million voters. Our entire dataset covers 24 states, 480 counties. In this sample, Biden’s share of the two-party vote is 56.2 percent, which is 4 percentage points more than his vote-share nationwide, our subset is slightly more Democratic than the nation as a whole. Administered during the pandemic, this election featured roughly 43% of the national electorate voting absentee or by mail, compared to 32% in 2022, 23% in 2018, and 21% in 2016.¹¹ In the collection of counties included in our data, 53 percent of the voting age population is White, 12 percent are Black, and 27 percent are Hispanic.¹²

Categorizations of Local Offices and Ballot Measures

A time-consuming component of our data processing is the collection of information on the candidates and ballot measures. The raw CVRs do not include the wording of the local ballot measures. We used existing election databases, voter guides, and newspaper coverage to categorize

¹⁰ See <https://votedatabase.com> (last accessed June 2025). Media outlets described the movement to create this database. See Green (2024); *The Washington Post*, “Trump backers flood election offices with requests as 2022 vote nears,” September 11, 2022. <https://perma.cc/Z52R-KZB5>; *Bloomberg Technology*, “‘Raccoon Army’ Swamps Election Officials in Dubious Campaign to Disprove Results,” October 25, 2022. <https://perma.cc/J2H6-TAUD>.

¹¹ <https://electionlab.mit.edu/sites/default/files/2023-10/vote-by-mail.pdf>. The large number of votes by mail could be correlated with roll-off, as well as split-ticket voting. Szewczyk (2020) estimates that absentee voting in Utah reduced the use of straight party lever by 5-6 percentage points. This suggests that at least for partisan races the APGs we calculate for 2020 might be slightly lower than for other recent years. It is not clear what the expectations are for nonpartisan races and ballot measures.

¹² The population in our dataset does not differ significantly from the U.S. overall in terms of age or homeownership, but our dataset is about 8 percentage points less White and about 9 percentage points more urban (Appendix A).

as many offices and measures as possible. Details are given in subsequent sections.

For this article, we divide contests into six categories: a contest is either a partisan office, a nonpartisan office, or a ballot measure, and it is also either at the state or local level. *Partisan* offices are simply those where candidates run with party labels next to their names on the ballot. Almost always, those candidates must win their own party's primaries to get to the general election. *Nonpartisan* offices are those without party labels. A given office, such as mayor or county council, or even state judicial offices, can be partisan in some places but not nonpartisan in others. We define *state* offices to include elected officials who work for the state government – statewide executive officers, commissioners, state legislators, and state judges. *Local* offices encompass everything else, from municipal and county districts to school districts.

Ballot measures are quite common in the U.S. at the state and local level. All states except Delaware require voter approval of state constitutional amendments. Many states allow initiatives and referendums, allowing voters to pass laws or constitutional amendments directly, or to strike down a law passed by the legislature. Some states require voter approval of certain types of laws and policies, such as general obligation bonds or tax increases. In many localities, voter approval is required for bonds, tax increases, and to prevent some taxes from expiring. The state ballot measures in our sample are a mix of legislatively approved measures and initiatives. Almost all of the local measures were placed on the ballot by a local government, although a few are initiatives. Most measures require a simple majority to pass, although some require supermajorities.

Not all of the votes for President and other federal offices can be linked to subnational offices or ballot measures. Some voters do not face contested state or local races, or do not have the opportunity to vote on ballot measures. In certain cases, the CVR data split each voter's complete ballot across two or more rows representing separate pages of their physical paper ballots, and we are unable to link voting across these split records (for details, see Kuriwaki et al., 2024). Therefore, we study various subsets of this data given the availability of offices on the ballot. Figure 1 shows our sample sizes and their locations after we limit them to those linked to a federal office. State-level offices are in the top row, while local offices are in the bottom. The columns are organized by partisan offices (left), nonpartisan offices (middle), and ballot measures (right).

Many local elections are held *off*-cycle, and our data are all from a presidential election year, 2020. Nonetheless, the data contain many local contests – for example, 544 school board races, 602 municipal legislative races, and 1768 local ballot measures (see Tables 1 and 4). For each of these local contests – and also for state contests – the data contain a record of how each individual voted in that contest and how that voter voted for other offices such U.S. President and U.S. House.

We further limit the sample analyzed in the following ways. First, we drop uncontested races,

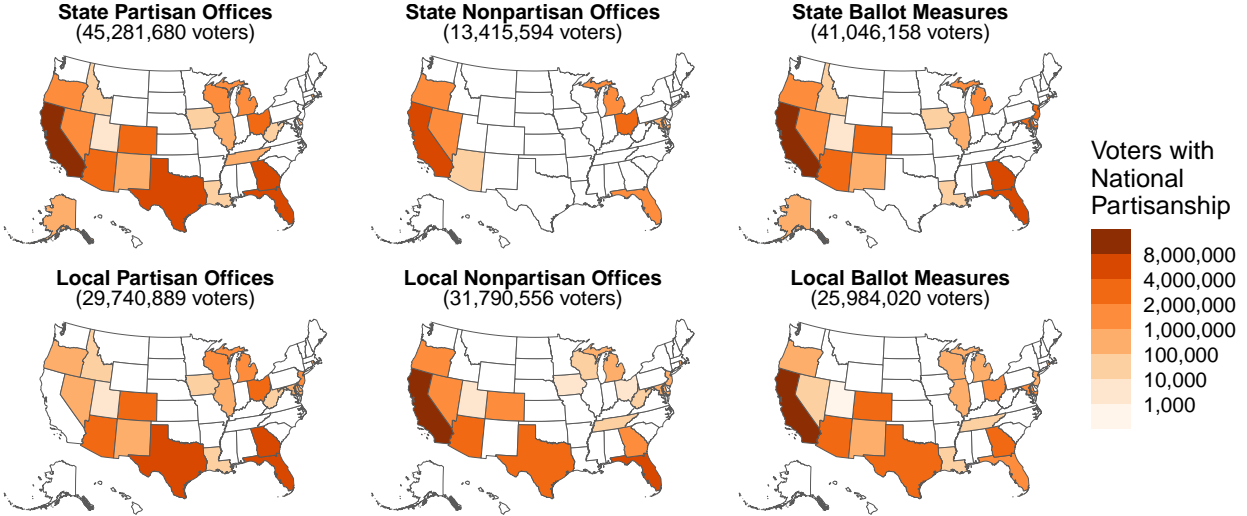


Figure 1: Summary Statistics. Total voters linked to their federal ballot, by state and category. Appendix A shows exact counts by state.

and minimally contested races where the winning candidate or choice received more than 95% of the votes. Second, for nonpartisan races, we drop cases where the top-two candidates received less than 75% of the total votes cast. Third, we drop contests with less than 100 votes. These small contests often occur in special districts, e.g., for water or sanitation. Fourth, we drop contests where voters could cast votes for more than one candidate – e.g., multi-member district and ranked choice elections. Just over 15% of the contests in our sample were of this type.

Measures of Partisan Voting

We want to capture the differences or similarities in how Democrats and Republicans vote as simply and intuitively as possible. We therefore focus on a measure we call the Absolute Partisan Gap (*APG*). Computed at the contest level, it ranges from 0 to 100, and it can be applied to a wide variety of first-past-the-post contests, including partisan races, nonpartisan races, and ballot measures.

To construct this measure, we first divide voters according to their *National Partisanship* based on their vote choices in the elections for President, the U.S. House, and U.S. Senate. Specifically, we call a voter Democratic if they voted only for Democratic candidates for federal offices, and we call a voter Republican if they voted only for Republican candidates for these offices. All others

are split-ticket voters, who we set aside in most of our subsequent analyses. By this measure, only 6 percent of our sample are split-ticket voters.¹³ Although our vote based measure of partisanship differs from the conventional survey-based measure of partisan identity, election surveys indicate that over 90 percent of voters that would be classified as national partisans using our definition in fact identify with that party.¹⁴

To define the Absolute Partisan Gap, let V_{1j}^D be the total votes cast for the winning candidate (or alternative) in contest j among Democratic voters, let V_{2j}^D be the total votes cast for the second place candidate (or alternative) among Democratic voters, and let $W_j^D = 100 V_{1j}^D / (V_{1j}^D + V_{2j}^D)$ be the percentage of votes cast for the winner among Democratic voters. Let V_{1j}^R , V_{2j}^R , and W_j^R be the analogs for Republican voters. The Absolute Partisan Gap is simply:

$$APG_j \equiv |W_j^D - W_j^R|. \quad (1)$$

For example, consider a race where the Democratic candidate wins. If all Democrats vote for the Democratic candidate and all Republicans vote for the Republican candidate, then $APG = 100$ (i.e., 100 percentage points). If 75% of Democrats vote for the Democratic candidate and 75% of Republicans vote for the Republican candidate, then $APG = 50$. If 50% of Democrats vote for the Democratic candidate and 50% of Republicans vote for the Republican candidate, then $APG = 0$. As another example, consider a nonpartisan race in which candidate A wins, followed by second place loser candidate B , and third place loser C . Suppose that among Democrats who voted for either candidate A or B , 65 percent voted for candidate A , and among Republicans who voted for either candidate A or B , 40 percent voted for candidate A . Then $APG = 25$.¹⁵

Note that we can compute APG in other ways. Consider a partisan office, and let D_j^D be the percentage of the two-party vote cast for the Democratic candidate among Democratic voters, and let D_j^R be the analogous percentage among Republican voters (that is, D_j^R is the percent of

¹³ In contrast, 53.6 percent are Democrats, 40.9 percent are Republicans.

¹⁴ In the 2020 Cooperative Congressional Election Study, 91 percent of respondents who we would classify as Democrats identify as a Democrat, 7 percent as a pure independent, and 2 percent as a Republican ($n = 8825$).

¹⁵ Dowling, Miller and Morris (2024) and Reece et al. (2024) use cast vote records to examine partisan voting behavior in nonpartisan elections. The former focuses on South Carolina and uses information about candidate partisanship from voterfiles. The latter employs CVR data from the same votedatabase.com that we use, and examines a measure very similar to APG .

Republicans who split their ticket in the contest). Then

$$APG_j = |D_j^D - D_j^R|. \quad (2)$$

As a practical matter, the absolute value is unnecessary, because $D_j^D > D_j^R$ in all cases.

In some special cases, APG is equivalent to other, more frequently used measures. For example, if there are only two candidates (a Democrat and Republican), and there are equal numbers of Democrats and Republicans, and the total votes for each candidate in the contest are equal, then APG is equal to the individual level correlation between partisanship and voting. That is, letting y_i be a binary variable indicating that voter i voted for the Democrat in contest j , and letting d_i be a binary variable indicating that i is a Democrat, we have $APG_j = |\text{Corr}(y, d)|$.¹⁶

For ballot measure contests, similarly let Y_j^D be the percentage of votes cast for the Yes alternative among Democratic voters and let Y_j^R be the analogous percentage among Republican voters. Then $APG_j = |Y_j^D - Y_j^R|$. Finally, consider the following. We manually collect metadata about each state and local ballot measure to determine which of the two alternatives can be considered more “Liberal” or more “Conservative” (more details on this below). For each ballot measure j where we make this determination, let L_j^D be the percentage of votes cast for the Liberal alternative among Democratic voters, and let L_j^R be the analogous percentage among Republican voters. Then $APG_j = |L_j^D - L_j^R|$. The absolute value is almost unnecessary for these contests, because $L_j^D > L_j^R$ in almost all cases.

One limitation of APG is that it focuses on the top two candidates or alternatives, ignoring other choices and roll-off. Our measure using percentages may be sensitive to the small baseline prevalence of Democrats and Republicans in a locality. However, when we consider more complicated and general measures that incorporate these other choices, the quantitative estimates change only slightly, and the qualitative conclusions do not change at all.¹⁷

¹⁶ See Appendix B for proof.

¹⁷ See Appendix B for log odds ratios. In Appendix B, we also calculate a measure that incorporates all choices, including the Normalized Probability of Different Choices ($NPDC$). The $NPDC$ essentially computes the probability that a randomly drawn Democratic voter and a randomly drawn Republican voter choose different alternatives. Results using the log odds ratio or the $NPDC$ are similar to those using APG (Appendix B).

The Partisan Gap in State and Local Elections

We first present the Absolute Partisan Gap for each group of offices. In the subsequent sections, we further subdivide offices and contests within each office group, and explore associations between characteristics of the locality.

Main Results

Table 1 presents basic summary statistics for three types of contests – partisan races in the top panel, nonpartisan races in the middle panel, and ballot measures in the bottom panel. Within each panel, the first row covers state contests and the second covers local contests.

The first two columns of the top panel show, for each type of voter (Democratic or Republican), the average percentage voting for the Democratic candidate in state and local partisan races. Evidently, voting in these races is highly partisan, with 92% to 97% of choices matching voters’ National Partisanship. As a result, the average values of *APG* are quite high – 91 points for state partisan races and 85 points for local partisan races.

For nonpartisan races and ballot measures, the average *APG* is much lower. Also, within each panel, the average *APG* is noticeably lower in local contests than in state contests.

Table 1: Voting Patterns by Partisanship

Contest Type	D^D	D^R	Absolute Partisan Gap	# Items
State Partisan Offices	94.7	3.3	91.3	912
Local Partisan Offices	92.4	7.1	85.2	690
State Nonpartisan Offices			33.0	113
Local Nonpartisan Offices			21.8	1916
State Ballot Measures			32.2	75
Local Ballot Measures			17.5	1767

D^D is the average percentage of the two-party vote cast for the Democratic candidate by National Democrats, and D^R is the percentage of the two-party vote cast for the Democratic candidate by National Republicans.

Table 1 shows that the average *APG* for partisan offices differs dramatically from those for nonpartisan offices and ballot measures. But what about the variation? Figure 2 below shows histograms that give a sense of the spread around the average values. The panels are ordered in the same way as in Figure 1. We see that among partisan offices, the *APG* are all centered at the high

end around 90 points, while the local ballot measures and nonpartisan offices are centered at the opposite end of the spectrum.

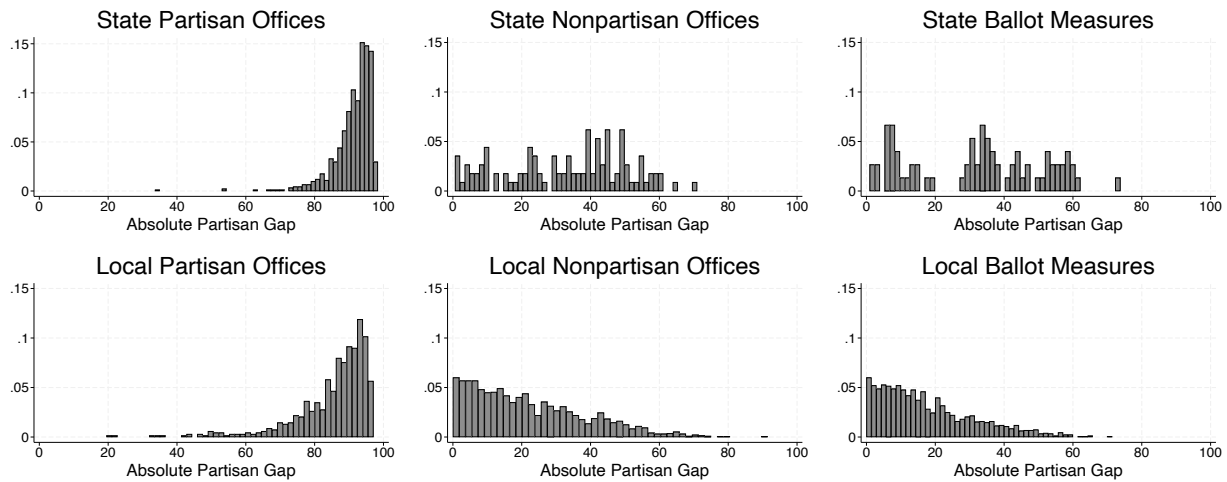


Figure 2: The Distribution of the Absolute Partisan Gap, by Type of Office

How many nonpartisan races for state and local offices exhibit highly partisan behavior? How many state and local ballot measures are highly partisan? It depends on what threshold we use to define “highly partisan.” For partisan offices, the average value of *APG* is more than 80 percentage points. Using 80 points as the threshold, almost no nonpartisan elections or ballot measures qualify. Relaxing the threshold to 60 points changes the story only slightly. Relaxing it further to 40 points – produced by partisan differences of [70% - 30%] or more – we see that 41 percent of state contests are classified as highly partisan, as are 16% of local contests.

Most of the nonpartisan state races with *APG* > 40 are judicial contests in Ohio. Although these elections are nominally nonpartisan, they have a unique feature: party labels do not appear on the general election ballot, but the candidates are chosen in partisan primaries.¹⁸ It is not surprising that these races are relatively partisan, since party organizations and politicians often campaign heavily for their nominees (Cheek and Champagne, 2003; Schotland, 2006). If we set these aside, then the average value of *APG* for state offices is just 28 points, and only 25 percent of the contests have *APG* > 40.¹⁹

¹⁸ In 2021, elections for the state supreme court and appeals courts in Ohio became fully partisan, with party labels appearing on the general election ballot. In Michigan, state supreme court nominees are chosen at party conventions. We do not include the Michigan supreme court elections here because they were in multi-seat contests.

¹⁹ Appendix B show results analogous to those in Table 1 and Figure 2 for the absolute values

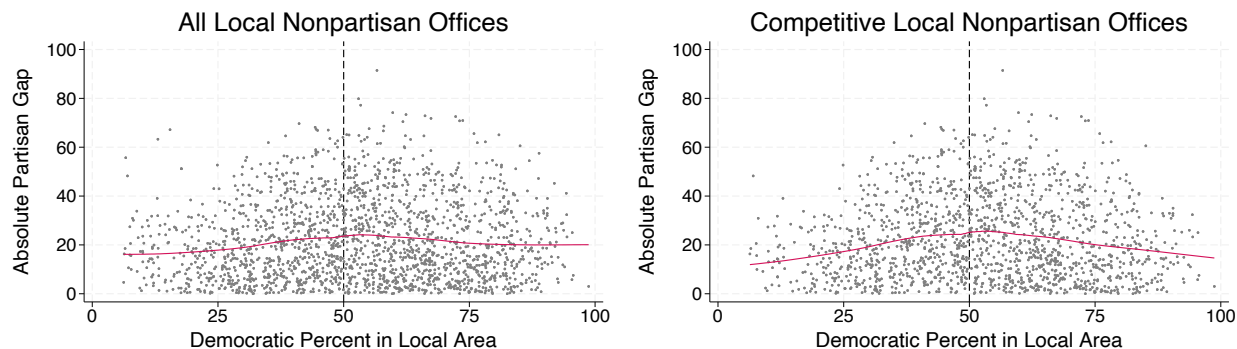


Figure 3: Absolute Partisan Gap vs. Partisan Competitiveness in Local Area. Loess curves in red. A contest is considered competitive (right panel) if the winner receives less than two-thirds of the total votes cast for the top two candidates.

Theoretically, the *APG* for local nonpartisan offices and local ballot measures might be small simply because the contests are extremely uncompetitive. If the winning side receives 80% of the votes, for example, then the gap between Democratic and Republican voters is unlikely to be large. Indeed, the relationship between *APG* and the margin of victory is negative. However, as shown in Appendix C: (i) most of the local contests in our sample, especially for nonpartisan offices, are actually fairly competitive; (ii) the relationship between the margin of victory and *APG* is weak, and (iii) the relationship only becomes noticeable when the margin of victory is more than about 25 to 30 percentage points, where a small fraction of the contests lie. So, this factor cannot account for the small *APGs*.

One reason that *APG* tends to be small in local nonpartisan contests is that the top two candidates in many of these races probably have similar ideologies, party affiliations, and positions on national policies. But even when that is not the case, voters might care more about candidates' positions on local issues or their performance on local matters, rather than candidates' ideologies, party affiliations, and positions on national policies. The latter are likely irrelevant for the day-to-day work of a county treasurer, town clerk, or school board member. They are probably not often relevant for county commissioners or mayors either, except perhaps in major cities or the largest counties. Based on our own reading of hundreds of newspaper articles, campaign advertisements, and editorials, it appears that local issues dominate the coverage and debates (see also Oliver, Ha and Callen (2012)).

of the log odds ratios. The substantive patterns are similar. For nonpartisan offices and ballot measures, the absolute log odds ratios in the histograms are almost all below 4, while for partisan offices the vast majority of the absolute log odds ratios are above 4.

Moreover, if the top two candidates in many nonpartisan local races have similar ideologies, party affiliations, and positions on national policies, it is important to acknowledge that this is equilibrium behavior. That is, there is probably no strong demand for candidates who espouse strongly opposing ideologies, party affiliations, and positions on national policies – otherwise, such candidates would have an incentive to run. Figure 3 shows that although there is some tendency for *APG* to be higher in areas that are more competitive, the differences between competitive and uncompetitive areas are small.²⁰ Thus, even in areas where there are roughly equal numbers of Democrats and Republicans, most of the nominally nonpartisan local races do not divide the electorate along partisan lines.

We also investigated the degree to which *APG* varies depending upon constituency size and racial segregation, focusing on local contests.²¹ In large counties and cities, the local government might not seem very “local.” Fewer voters may be personally acquainted with the candidates running, or have firsthand knowledge of the overall quality of services in the polity. In these cases, partisan or ideological cues might have a larger role. We find that the *APG* is modestly higher in larger constituencies. The total number of voters explains between 4 percent and 17 percent of variation in *APG*, depending on the type of contest. Second, given the claims regarding the significance of race in urban politics and the overlap between racial, ideological and partisan cleavages in recent years, we might expect voting to be more partisan or ideological in racially segregated areas (e.g., Trounstein (2018)). An index of racial segregation explains between 1 percent and 7 percent of variation in *APG* in local contests. Evidently, these variables can only account for a small percentage of the variation in *APG*.

Defining Partisanship by Party Lever Use in Michigan

Above, we measure national partisanship using votes for presidential and congressional candidates. Voters in some states have the option to *pull the party lever*. This automatically votes a straight party ticket for all nominally partisan contests, which voters can then override on a race-by-race basis. For Michigan, we have information about whether voters exercised this straight-party option or not, and whether they deviated from this option anywhere on the ballot. This is arguably a more

²⁰ In both figures, the Democratic percent in a local area is computed using National Partisanship for all voters eligible to vote for the local office. In the right-hand side figure, competitive races are those where in the CVR sample, the winner’s share is less than two-thirds of the total votes cast for the top two candidates.

²¹ See Appendix C for details on these analyses.

direct expression of partisan preference, and can also be used as a measure of partisanship. Using this measure produces *APGs* for partisan state and partisan local offices that are about 4-9 points higher than the estimates produced using our main measure (See Appendix C). Part of this might be due to a type of mechanical effect – since voters know that their choices in partisan races are all filled in automatically, they might not check these races carefully down the ballot (Thornburg, Davis and Buell, 2025). For nonpartisan contests and ballot measures, which are still left blank even after pulling the party lever, the *APGs* are similar using either definition of partisanship.

Roll-Off and Minor Candidates

The results above focus on the two leading candidates or alternatives. They therefore exclude *roll-off* – voters who turn out to vote but skip certain contests – as well as votes cast for candidates other than the winner and first runner-up, which we refer to as minor candidates. Here we show that including these other choices does not substantially change the results.

The first panel of Table 2 shows that 4.4 percent of voters in contested state partisan offices roll off, as do 4.5 percent in contested local partisan offices. Here, contested races include races with a Democrat and Republican candidate and both candidates receive at least five percent of the vote. The second panel shows a significant increase in roll-off in contested races for nonpartisan state and local offices, 22.5 and 16.2 respectively. In the last panel, we see that roll-off for both state and local ballot measures is only slightly higher than roll-off for the contested partisan offices, and less than half as large as the roll-off for contested nonpartisan offices. In many cases, this means voters are likely skipping nonpartisan offices but voting on local measures further down the ballot, or in columns further to the right.

Regarding minor candidates, Table 2 reports the vote percentage for all candidates other than the top two that received more than 1 percent of the vote. Evidently, few voters voted for minor candidates in 2020. In some states and localities, no such candidates are allowed on the ballot (e.g., the top-two systems in California and Washington), and in many races no such candidates ran even though permitted. In any case, the number of votes cast for minor candidates is too small to alter our main conclusions.

Explanatory Power of National Partisanship

An alternative way to summarize our data involves calculating the amount of variation that national partisanship can explain at the individual-level. Such analyses are impossible with aggregated election results, but straightforward with cast vote records.

Table 2: Roll-Off and Votes for Minor Candidates, in Percentages

Contest Type	Contested Cases			Uncontested	
	Roll-Off	Minor Cands.	Items	Roll-Off	Items
State Partisan Offices	4.4	0.6	912	19.2	558
Local Partisan Offices	4.5	0.9	685	20.1	2680
State Nonpartisan Offices	22.5	0.6	112	34.5	180
Local Nonpartisan Offices	16.2	2.9	1885	28.9	785
State Ballot Measures	7.8		75		
Local Ballot Measures	8.0		1743		

We estimate regressions at the individual voter level with voting on a down-ballot contest as the dependent variable and National Partisanship as the independent variable. The regression model is of the form:

$$v_{ij} = \alpha_j + \beta d_i + \epsilon_{ij}, \quad (3)$$

where v_{ij} is a binary variable denotes voter i 's choice in contest j , d_i is voter i 's National Partisanship (1 if Democratic and 0 if Republican), and α_j is short-hand for the contest-specific fixed-effects. If a single voter votes on three different contests, they enter the data three times with a fixed effect for each contest. For partisan races, we code $v_{ij} = 1$ whenever a voter votes for the Democrat. For non-partisan races and ballot measures, we code $v_{ij} = 1$ whenever a voter votes for the candidate or ballot measure choice that is preferred more by national Democrats than by national Republicans.²² This coding scheme allows us to use the same specification for nonpartisan contests and ballot measures, where the Democratic-preferred candidate is not readily obvious. This data-driven coding scheme likely over-estimates the explanatory power of national partisanship on the outcome.

The within-group R-squared of the fixed-effects regression in equation (3) captures the within-contest explanatory power of National Partisanship. This seems like the most natural measure to assess how well National Partisanship can account for voters' choices.²³

²² Applying this coding to partisan races does not change v_{ij} , since national Democrats always voted more for the Democratic candidate than national Republicans.

²³ More formally, the within-group R-squared is the R-squared of the mean-differenced model. Let \mathcal{I}_j be the set of voters voting in contest j , let N_j be the number of voters in \mathcal{I}_j , and denote the averages $\bar{v}_j = (1/N_j) \sum_{i \in \mathcal{I}_j} v_{ij}$, let $\bar{d}_j = (1/N_j) \sum_{i \in \mathcal{I}_j} d_i$, and let $\bar{\epsilon}_j = (1/N_j) \sum_{i \in \mathcal{I}_j} \epsilon_{ij}$. Then the

Table 3: Voting Patterns by Partisanship, Regression Estimates

Outcome	Democrat	Within	
		R-square	Obs.
State Partisan Offices	0.942 (0.003)	0.887	123,569,913
Local Partisan Offices	0.903 (0.006)	0.813	54,787,899
State Non-Partisan Offices	0.320 (0.023)	0.099	43,905,071
Local Non-Partisan Offices	0.284 (0.015)	0.073	53,803,579
State Ballot Measures	0.392 (0.026)	0.156	216,832,128
Local Ballot Measures	0.286 (0.015)	0.077	60,039,903

Each row is a separate regression. Standard errors, clustered by contests, are in parentheses. Fixed effects for contests included in all cases.

Table 3 shows the R-squared estimates for each subset of offices. Each row represents a regression for a different outcome. The Democrat column indicates the coefficient $\hat{\beta}$ on the National Partisanship variable. The patterns are the same as in Table 1. National Partisanship explains over 80 percent of the variance in voting for local partisan offices, but less than 8 percent of the variance in voting for local ballot measures and local non-partisan offices.²⁴

When we limit our attention to contests where we can identify the Democratic and Republican candidates, or the Liberal and Conservative alternatives, the explanatory power of National Partisanship is several percentage points larger. We manually identified ballot measures that could be considered as some form of spending increase, or if not a spending increase, a proposal that would

within R-squared is the R-squared of the regression:

$$[v_{ij} - \bar{v}_j] = \beta [d_i - \bar{d}_j] + [\epsilon_{ij} - \bar{\epsilon}_i].$$

The across-contest R-squared is the R-squared of the regression where the variables are collapsed to contest-level means. This measure captures both the partisan lean of the district as well other factors such as candidate-specific valence.

²⁴ We also estimate models with all of the contests pooled, and regressors interacted with National Partisanship. We also included the independent variables *Partisan Slant*, *Voteshare Margin*, and *Constituency Size* to assess the relative importance of these factors. See Appendix C for a more detailed description and the results.

move policy in a conventional liberal or left ideological direction (we explain this process in more detail when discussing ballot measures). We then define v_{ij} in equation (3) so that in nominally partisan contests, 1 indicates voting for the Democratic candidate, and in spending-related or ideological ballot measures, 1 indicates voting in the liberal direction. With these specifications, state ballot measures that are either spending-related or ideological exhibit an R-squared of 0.206 ($N = 170,412,065$), and local ballot measures that are either spending-related or ideological exhibit an R-squared of 0.104 ($N = 42,966,899$).

Variation in Partisanship Across Local Offices

There are many different types of elected local offices. Some offices have a broad range of responsibilities, while others are more focused on more particular tasks or policy issues. Some are executive offices, while others are more legislative or judicial in character. Some are highly visible to the public, while others relatively obscure. Is voting more partisan for some offices more than others?

Previous literature highlights the importance of information. Voters tend to have less information about the candidates competing in many down-ballot races – e.g., for state legislative seats, and low-profile local offices such as county clerk, register of deeds, city treasurer, or town auditor (Rogers, 2023). Both observational and experimental designs have shown that, for congressional, senatorial, and gubernatorial elections, less information leads voters to rely more heavily on party cues and to vote more consistently with their party identification (Moskowitz, 2020; Peterson, 2017). On the other hand, Kuriwaki (2025) shows that ticket splitting in local partisan offices is often higher than in congressional races, and even varies across local offices. He suggests that even if aggregate information is sparse, candidates in local offices may differ sharply on valence attributes, such as candidate performance, and that these measures correlate well with ticket splitting patterns.

Our data is well-positioned to begin exploring variation in partisan behavior at the local level, since it covers a wide range of offices and contains precise, individual level choices. Table 4 computes the *APG* for each type of office. We divided partisan offices into county legislature, other county office, municipal legislature, and sheriff. We also divided nonpartisan offices into county legislature, municipal legislature, mayors, and school board. These are listed in decreasing order of the *APG*.

Among local partisan offices, county legislators exhibit the highest *APG*, followed closely by miscellaneous county offices other than sheriff – both around 88 points. Sheriffs have the smallest *APG*, 73 points, followed by mayors elected on partisan ballots. The *APGs* are much lower for all

Table 4: Voting Patterns by Partisanship, Selected Local Offices

Office	D^D	D^R	Absolute Partisan Gap	# Items
<i>Local Partisan Races</i>				
County Legislature	93.3	5.1	88.1	309
Other County Office	93.6	5.6	88.0	126
Municip Legislature	92.0	10.4	81.6	71
Mayor/Municip Exec	89.3	12.7	76.6	30
County Sheriff	87.0	13.9	73.2	55
<i>Local Nonpartisan Races</i>				
County Legislature			30.2	44
Municip Legislature			25.5	531
Mayor/Municip Exec			21.5	217
Local School Board			20.7	544

D^D is the average percentage of the two-party vote cast for the Democratic candidate by National Democrats, and D^R is the percentage of the two-party vote cast for the Democratic candidate by National Republicans.

four groups of nonpartisan races. Again, county legislators are at the top. School boards races are the least partisan by our measure, with an *APG* of 21 points.²⁵

What factors might account for the patterns in Table 4? The low *APG* for sheriffs is consistent with previous literature that finds an especially high amount of split-ticket voting, and especially high incumbency advantage for sheriffs (Zoorob, 2022; Kuriwaki, 2025). They attribute their findings in part to high levels of name recognition or news coverage, suggesting that the availability of information plays a role. Moreover, similar to mayors, which also have relatively low *APGs*, the office is led by one person. It may be easier to assess performance when responsibilities are not broadly shared by many individuals, as in local legislatures. Third, sheriffs have a relatively limited set of responsibilities focused on law enforcement, for which it may be easier to recognize relevant qualifications and to evaluate incumbent performance. Citizens have a general sense of how safe they feel from personal experience, and they can also use commonly reported statistics,

²⁵ One concern with drawing inferences from the difference between Democrats and Republicans is that one group might be more likely to abstain from down-ballot races than the other. Recall from Table 2 that average roll-off is about 4 percent in partisan offices, 16 percent in local nonpartisan offices, and 8 percent in ballot measures. However, roll-off in nonpartisan contests and ballot measures tends to be more similar across the parties (See Appendix C).

such as crime rates, to judge performance. This may also contribute to the low *APG* of local school officials, since this office also focuses on a particular policy area with which many have personal experience, and with relatively accessible metrics to evaluate performance. Of course, the differences between partisan and nonpartisan elections are much larger than the variation across offices within each group.

Variation in Partisanship Across Issue Areas

Turning to ballot measures, there is much variation to consider. Some measures are closely related to contentious national issues, such as abortion, LGBTQ rights, labor regulations, affirmative action, and gun control. Others involve issues for which the positions of the national parties are unclear, such as gambling, alcohol, zoning, and land use. Whether voters have relatively well-formed preferences on these issues is an open question. Some measures might be even more obscure, including many administrative reforms. What should the residency requirement be for county commissioners? How often should the city charter commission be required to meet?

An especially large and important group of measures involve targeted spending, bonds, and state or local taxes. These tend to be highly specific, are proposed by state and local governments, and require voter approval. Take for example the following 2020 ballot measure, in the Dallas County (Texas) School District:

For/Against: “The issuance of \$3,271,600,000 of bonds for the construction, acquisition, and equipment of school buildings and for the purchase of necessary sites for school buildings; and the levying of a tax sufficient, without limit as to rate or amount, to pay the principal of and interest on the bonds and to pay the costs of any credit agreements executed or authorized in anticipation of, in relation to or in connection with the bonds. THIS IS A PROPERTY TAX INCREASE.”²⁶

Some voters might view these measures through an ideological or partisan lens – e.g., big government vs. small government, or government waste vs. private sector efficiency. Other voters might view them more in practical terms – “I drive on the roads, my children go to the schools, and my home and family are protected by the police and fire departments, so I am willing to pay more taxes to help maintain local infrastructure and services.” We study these in some detail.

We first divide the state and local ballot measures into two broad groups. These are shown in Table 5. The first two rows of the table cover non-spending ballot measures for which we can identify

²⁶ Text archived at <https://bit.ly/3FU8IgX>

the ideologically more liberal or more conservative alternative. These classifications are based on a variety of sources, including endorsements by parties, politicians and interest groups, campaign spending patterns, voter guides, newspaper coverage and editorials, and our own reading of the text of the measures. These measures include issues such as: minimum wage, police oversight, labor relations, affirmative action, language regarding gender, same-sex marriage, rent control, abortion rights, gun control/rights, marijuana use, presidential election popular vote pact, voting rights, and environmental/business regulations. The second two rows of the table cover measures on spending, bonds, and taxes. For most of these measures, passage implies higher levels of spending and/or taxes. We rely heavily on the *National Taxpayers' Union Ballot Guide* to identify and classify these, and we fill in the rest using other sources, especially local newspapers.²⁷

In the top two rows, the first two columns show the average percentage of each type of voter (Democratic or Republican) that voted for the Liberal alternative for each measure. In the bottom two rows the first columns show the average percentage of each type of voter (Democratic or Republican) that voted for the alternative that represented higher taxes or spending. The next two columns show the average Partisan Gap and Absolute Partisan Gap.

Table 5: Voting Patterns by Partisanship, Ballot Measures by Type

Contest Type	L^D	L^R	Partisan Gap	Absolute Partisan Gap	# Items
State Ideological Measures	71.7	25.2	46.5	46.5	28
Local Ideological Measures	75.6	37.6	38.0	38.1	67
State Tax/Spend Measures	75.6	30.7	44.9	44.9	13
Local Tax/Spend Measures	71.8	52.4	19.3	20.1	1068

L^D is the average percentage of the two-party vote cast for the Liberal alternative by National Democrats, and L^R is the percentage of the two-party vote cast for the Liberal alternative by National Republicans.

The bottom line is straightforward. First, the state ideological and tax/spending measures exhibit higher average *APGs* than the average across all state measures shown in Table 1. The same is true for the local ideological measures. Second, the average *APG* for local tax/spending measures is much lower than for the first three types of measures, and is only slightly higher than the average across all local measures shown in Table 1. Finally, all of the *APGs* in the table are much lower than the average *APG* for state or local partisan races shown in Table 1.²⁸

²⁷ See National Taxpayers Union (2024).

²⁸ State and local measures are not placed on the ballot randomly (Romer and Rosenthal, 1982).

Table 6 divides the local ballot measures even more finely, into specific issue categories based on our reading of the ballot measure. It then shows how *APG* varies across local issues. The *APG* tend to be small for the categories that the U.S. Census of Governments lists as “common city functions” – police, fire, sanitation (includes sewers, trash), roads (streets, highways, bridges, sidewalks), water supply and other functions including libraries and parks and recreation – on average, about 14 percentage points.²⁹ Note that these are generally the spending categories that Peterson (1981) would classify as allocational or developmental.

K-12 education is another, almost universal, function of local governments. Conflict over education issues appears to have increased within local school districts with some evidence that the severity is correlated with partisan competition (Holman, Johnson and Simko, 2024). While slightly higher, the average value of *APG* for education is still relatively low, 28 percentage points. The average *APG* for healthcare is similar to education. Peterson (1981) classifies education as both developmental and redistributive, and he classifies healthcare as redistributive.

Finally, housing, property development, and zoning are among the core functions of city governments. City governments have the authority to approve or stall changes to zoning codes and to construct or subsidize housing. The average *APG* for spending on housing measures is much higher than for other categories, about 47 percentage points – 76% of Democrats voting in favor and 71% of Republicans voting against. Peterson (1981) classifies housing as redistributive, and all of the measures in our sample included provisions for low-income/affordable housing. Housing proposals with no reservations for low-income housing might draw more bipartisan support.³⁰

To the degree that state and local governments, or the outside groups sponsoring initiatives are strategic, it is possible that the overall level of support for measures that end up on the ballot is greater than what we would see if measures were placed on the ballot randomly. It is not obvious how strategic behavior affects the levels of *APG*, however, since there is no reason to believe the state governments, local governments and/or groups systematically target Democrats or Republicans.

²⁹ We created the topic classifications based on our own reading of the measures, newspaper coverage and editorials, and various voter guides. In some states, standardized language used for different types of spending, tax, and bond measures makes it straightforward to identify the spending categories. For example, in Georgia E-SPLOST is used to refer to Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax measures for education. Certain state governments, such as Ohio, Michigan and California, provided short summaries of the measures that highlighted the relevant categories. The *National Taxpayers Union 2020 Ballot Guides* also provided summaries for most tax and spending measures. A few cases are classified in multiple categories.

³⁰ Survey data on people’s housing preferences from Trounstein (2023) shows that Republican respondents are more likely to prefer a housing proposal, all else equal, if it has no units reserved

Note also that the number of housing ballot measures is small, only 10, so we must be cautious in drawing broad conclusions.

Table 6: Voting on Local Ballot Measures By Issue

Issue	Y^A	Y^D	Y^R	Partisan Gap	Absolute Partisan Gap	# Items
<i>Voting for more taxes, spending, or bonds</i>						
Education	59.2	71.0	43.5	27.5	27.5	250
Libraries	66.1	78.0	56.2	21.8	21.8	23
Fire/EMS	67.8	74.9	62.8	12.1	12.8	227
Parks/Recreation	63.7	72.3	53.0	19.3	19.5	37
Police	58.5	56.2	59.1	-2.9	9.3	35
Roads	66.2	74.2	60.3	13.9	14.4	106
Water/Sanitation	74.2	80.1	65.4	14.7	16.2	26
Housing	66.4	76.2	28.9	47.4	47.4	10
Healthcare	64.2	77.2	53.2	24.1	24.1	25
General/Multiple	61.2	68.9	46.0	22.9	23.4	167
<i>Voting in favor, non-ideological, non-fiscal measures</i>						
Zoning/Land Use	52.9	56.1	47.8		10.1	42
Governance	69.3	72.2	63.3		11.3	362
Alcohol	69.7	73.9	66.2		8.6	67
Term Limits	61.2	64.0	58.1		9.7	33
Unclassified	66.0	68.4	61.4		11.7	125

Y^A is the average percentage of the two-party vote cast for the Yes alternative by all voters, Y^D is the average percentage of the two-party vote cast for the Yes alternative by National Democrats, and Y^R is the percentage of the two-party vote cast for the Yes alternative by National Republicans.

The relatively small average APG evident in most spending categories are mainly due to the propensity of *Republicans* to support higher levels of local government spending compared to their levels of support for state spending measures, with the exception of housing. It also contrasts sharply with the national Republican party's general message to cut government spending.³¹

for low-income housing. Democratic respondents move in the opposite direction.

³¹ The American National Election Study asks: "Some people think the government should provide fewer services, even in areas such as health and education, in order to reduce spending. Other people feel that it is important for the government to provide many more services even if it means an increase in spending. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought

The bottom panel of Table 6 shows the *APGs* for non-spending measures for which we have not classified as having an ideological direction: for example, term limits, alcohol ordinances, and the expediting of certain development permits. For each of these issues, the average *APG* is quite low. This is consistent with the view that partisan and ideological cleavages are less prominent among local issues and policies. Voting for zoning proposals, where we did not code a liberal stance, is much less divisive than voting for more spending on housing, but they also receive the lowest amount of overall support at 53%.

Evidence for Issue Voting on Local Ballot Measures

If partisanship does not explain much of the variation in voting in nonpartisan contests, then what does explain the variation? Various nonpartisan factors have been identified in the literature. In the absence of party labels, voters appear to rely on a number of different cues. In races for local nonpartisan offices vote shares are related to candidate attributes, such as incumbency, previous experience, place, race/ethnicity, and gender.³² In voting on local ballot measures, researchers have found relationships between vote choice and various socio-economic characteristics of voters such as homeowner status that could reflect voters' self-interests, as well as contextual factors such as campaigning and endorsements.³³

Here we present one analysis using our CVR data that suggests the existence of structure in voters' choices in these nonpartisan elections. The analysis also shows that this structure accounts for a much larger percentage of voters' choices than does partisanship. We focus on education spending. In particular, we identified all school districts in our sample for which two or more education funding measures appeared on the ballot simultaneously.³⁴ If voters have preferences

much about this?" Not surprisingly Democrats are significantly more supportive of government spending than Republicans, and the gap between partisan respondents has about doubled since the early 1980s.

³² See for example, Dubois (1984); Schaffner, Streb and Wright (2001); Lim and Snyder Jr. (2015); Kirkland and Coppock (2018).

³³ For studies studying voter-level characteristics, see for example Button (1993); Bachelor (2001); Tedin, Matland and Weiher (2001); Brunner, Ross and Washington (2011); Marble and Nall (2021). For studies studying endorsements and ideological pre-dispositions, see Ternullo (2024); Gerber and Phillips (2003).

³⁴ 22 school districts, spread across 8 states (AZ, CA, CO, MD, MI, OH, TX, WI) are included in the sample.

over local education spending, then their choices on these education measures should be highly correlated with one another. Decisions to support local education spending might or might not be correlated with partisanship – and, consistent with the results above, we find that the relationship is at best modest.

There are different ways to present the correlations. To parallel the regression analyses above, for each district we treat the first education measure in the CVR data as the dependent variable, and we average the choices on the remaining education measures to create the independent variable. We call these *Education Spending 1* and *Education Spending 2*, respectively.³⁵ In all cases, we orient the choices so that votes cast for higher levels of spending are coded as 1, votes cast for the other option are coded as 0, and voters who rolled-off are dropped.

Table 7: Voting Patterns by Partisanship, Regression Estimates

Outcome	Democrat	Education Spending 2	Within R-square	Obs.
Education Spending 1	0.366 (0.038)		0.117	1,547,187
Education Spending 1		0.693 (0.013)	0.452	1,547,187
Education Spending 1	0.158 (0.024)	0.646 (0.019)	0.471	1,547,187
State Partisan Offices	0.880 (0.025)		0.832	10,557,732
State Partisan Offices		0.190 (0.012)	0.045	10,557,732
State Partisan Offices	0.878 (0.025)	0.007 (0.001)	0.832	10,557,732

Each row is a separate regression. Standard errors, clustered by contests, are in parentheses. Fixed effects for contests included in all cases.

The top panel of Table 7 presents the regression coefficient estimates, standard errors, and regression R-squareds (within-contest). In the first row, the independent variable is partisanship, as defined above. Consistent with Tables 3 and 6, partisanship explains only a small fraction of voting on local education spending measures – the R-squared is only 0.12. In the second row, the

³⁵ In most cases there is only one other education ballot measure used to construct *Education Spending 2*, but in some cases there are multiple measures. The patterns are basically the same if only one education measure is used to construct *Education Spending 2*. They are also basically the same if we reverse the roles of *Education Spending 1* and *Education Spending 2*.

independent variable is *Education Spending 2*. The estimated coefficient is nearly twice as large as the coefficient estimate on partisanship, and the R-squared is more than four times as large as that in the first row. The last row shows that when both variables are included in the regression, the estimated coefficient on *Education Spending 2* is more than four times as large as the coefficient on partisanship. Also the R-squared is only slightly larger than the R-squared in the second row where the only independent variable is *Education Spending 2*.

The second panel in the table provides a check that the subsample under study – i.e., localities with two or more local education spending measures on the November 2020 ballot – is similar overall to the full sample.³⁶ The first row of this panel replicates the analysis of the first row of Table 3, but restricting attention to the set of localities included in the top panel of Table 7. The coefficient on partisanship, and the regression R-squared, are only slightly lower than those for the full sample. The second and third rows show that *Education Spending 2* is a poor predictor of party choice in state partisan offices.

Note that the R-squared in the second row of the top panel is smaller than the top row of the second panel involving partisanship – i.e., *Education Spending 2* explains less of the variation in *Education Spending 1* than partisanship explains in voting for state partisan offices. One reason this is not too surprising is that the education spending measures underlying *Education Spending 1* and *Education Spending 2* often differ in significant ways – e.g., they sometimes involve spending on different types of facilities, including sports and arts facilities, and/or they involve different funding sources, in particular, bonds versus taxes. Some voters may favor some measures, but not others, based on these differences.³⁷

Overall, these results suggest the existence of a preference for local education spending that is only weakly correlated with partisanship, and that is far more important than partisanship in accounting for voting on local education measures. We also conducted analogous analyses of spending on fire and emergency medical services, and spending on roads, and find patterns quite similar to those for education spending.³⁸

³⁶ The number of observations is much larger than in the top panel because there are multiple local partisan offices in each locality.

³⁷ Alvord and Rauscher (2021) find that votes for bond measures and property tax measures correlate differently with local demographics.

³⁸ We do not report these results in detail here because the number of jurisdictions and voters involved are much smaller.

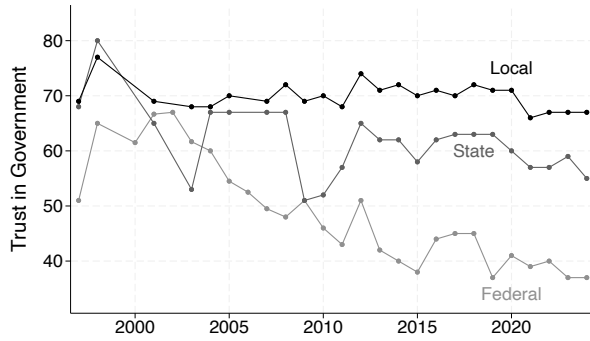
Discussion and Conclusion

The U.S. system of federalism allows voters to directly vote on anything from the members of a partisan Congress to a decision on how their local taxes are spent. In this study, we found that the degree to which national partisanship correlated with voters' choices in 2020 varied substantially across offices, ballot measures, and levels of government. Partisan voters rarely voted for candidates of the opposing party in partisan races for state offices, resulting in large Absolute Partisan Gaps of 91 percentage points, on average. They voted for candidates of the opposite party more in partisan races for local offices, but not dramatically more. This is consistent with claims that polarization has created distinct national partisan brands that voters use even in state and local elections.

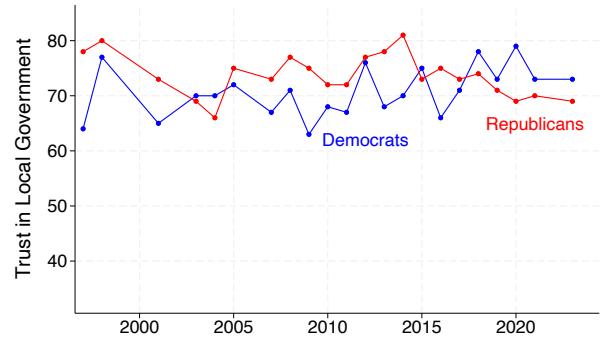
In nonpartisan races, however, especially at the local level, the average *APGs* were much smaller. For example, there is only a weak sense in which a nonpartisan school board candidate is the Republican or Democratic candidate. The differences in voting between Democrats and Republicans was also relatively small on local ballot measures, including measures to maintain or increase taxes and spending. In particular, Republican voters' support for spending by their local governments appears to be substantially higher than their support for spending by the federal government or their state governments. This is not to say that national partisanship is completely absent from local politics. For example, as Figure 2 shows, there is noticeable variation in *APGs* across local nonpartisan offices, indicating that partisan cleavages are important in some cases. Also, some items, such as spending on housing assistance, exhibit large average *APGs*. However, these make up a small fraction of the local measures that appear on the ballot. Overall, our findings suggest that many of the policy items or agendas facing state and local governments do not divide voters in ways that align closely with national partisan or ideological cleavages.

Evidently, voters view their local governments differently than they view the federal government. Our findings regarding voting on education spending measures are consistent with the existence of distinct local issue dimensions that go beyond national partisanship. Other evidence also supports this claim. Consider for example, trust in government. Voters' trust and confidence in their local governments has evolved quite differently from their trust in the federal government. This can be seen in Figure 4a, which shows the percentage of Gallup respondents who expressed a great deal or a fair amount of trust in various level of government between 1997 and 2024 (Gallup News Service, 2024). Trust and confidence in the federal government has fallen precipitously over the past 25 years. By contrast, trust and confidence in local governments is essentially flat.³⁹ Though noisier,

³⁹ Trust in local government exhibits a small but notable downward tick in 2021, which merits further investigation.



(a) By Level of Government



(b) Trust in Local Government by Respondent Partisanship

Figure 4: Trust in Government, 1997-2024. Data from Gallup Polls. Question asks: “How much trust and confidence do you have in... (i) The federal government to handle domestic problems. (ii) The government of the state where you live when it comes to handling state problems. (iii) Local governments in the area where you live when it comes to handling local problems.” Figures show percentage of respondents who respond a “Great Deal” or “Fair Amount.”

trust in state governments generally lies somewhere in the middle. Moreover, trust and confidence in local government is bipartisan, while trust and confidence in the federal government is not. For example, in 2023, 73% of Democrats and 69% of Republicans expressed a great or a fair amount of trust/confidence in their local governments, a gap of just 4 points (Figure 4b). Up until 2017, in most years Republicans had a higher trust of local government than Democrats. By contrast, the partisan gap of trust is 44 points for federal government, and 18 points for state government.

Thus, despite the highly partisan and polarized environment that exists at the national level, in the absence of partisan cues, voter behavior on issues that confront local governments does not exhibit the same level of partisanship and polarization. These patterns also emphasize the need for continued research to identify the forces shaping voter choices and attitudes in state and local elections. Our findings regarding education spending measures are consistent with the existence of distinct local issue dimensions that go beyond national partisanship. Existing scholarship suggests that local media coverage, interest group activities, and local endorsements are likely to be particularly important for understanding voter preferences on these local issue dimensions. This suggests, for example, that the decline of local newspaper circulation and resources might have important implications for local elections going forward. Future research should also investigate the contribution of institutional changes, such as the effect of nonpartisan ballots *per se*, off-cycle elections, or mail-in ballot accessibility in limiting the extent to which national partisanship or

ideological cleavages divide voters in state and local elections.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ See for example, Anzia (2014), Hajnal, Kogan and Markarian (2022), Butler and Torres (2025). de Benedictis-Kessner and Warshaw (2023) provide evidence that on-cycle elections tend to produce election and policy outcomes that align more with constituencies' general election partisanship. Our findings are for 2020, an on-cycle year. Investigating CVR records from off-cycle years might reveal even less partisan voting in down-ballot races.

ETHICAL STANDARDS

The authors affirm that this research did not involve human participants. The authors declare no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research documentation and data that support the findings of this study are openly available at the American Political Science Review Dataverse: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/QHGLJS>. (Note, this is pending final approval.)

References

- Abrajano, Marisa A., Jonathan Nagler and R. Michael Alvarez. 2005. "A Natural Experiment of Race-Based and Issue Voting: The 2001 City of Los Angeles Elections." *Political Research Quarterly* 58(2):203–218.
- Abramowitz, Alan I. and Steven Webster. 2016. "The Rise of Negative Partisanship and the Nationalization of US Elections in the 21st Century." *Electoral Studies* 41:12–22.
- Alvarez, R. Michael, Thad E. Hall and Ines Levin. 2018. "Low-Information Voting: Evidence from Instant-Runoff Elections." *American Politics Research* 46(6):1012–1038.
- Alvord, Daniel and Emily Rauscher. 2021. "Minority Support: School District Demographics and Support for Funding Election Measures." *Urban Affairs Review* 57(3):643–674.
- Ansolabehere, Stephen, Shigeo Hirano, James M. Snyder and Michiko Ueda. 2006. "Party and Incumbency Cues in Voting: Are They Substitutes?" *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 1(2):119–37.
- Anzia, Sarah F. 2014. *Timing & Turnout: How Off-Cycle Elections Favor Organized Groups*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Anzia, Sarah F. 2021. "Party and Ideology in American Local Government: An Appraisal." *Annual Review of Political Science* 24:133–150.
- Anzia, Sarah F. 2022. *Local Interests: Politics, Policy, and Interest Groups in US City Governments*. University of Chicago Press.

- Bachelor, Lynn W. 2001. "Dimensions of Community Conflict in Voting on Local Tax Proposals: Stadiums and School Funding." *State and Local Government Review* 33(3):185–194.
- Bafumi, Joseph, Michael C. Herron, Seth J. Hill and Jeffrey B. Lewis. 2012. "Alvin Greene? Who? How Did He Win the United States Senate Nomination in South Carolina?" *Election Law Journal* 11(4):358–379.
- Berry, Christopher R. and William G. Howell. 2007. "Accountability and Local Elections: Re-thinking Retrospective Voting." *The Journal of Politics* 69(3):844–858.
- Bonneau, Chris W. and Damon M. Cann. 2015. "Party Identification and Vote Choice in Partisan and Nonpartisan Elections." *Political Behavior* 37:43–66.
- Boudreau, Cheryl, Christopher S. Elmendorf and Scott A. MacKenzie. 2015. "Lost in Space? Information Shortcuts, Spatial Voting, and Local Government Representation." *Political Research Quarterly* 68(4):843–855.
- Brunner, Eric, Stephen L. Ross and Ebonya Washington. 2011. "Economics and Policy Preferences: Causal Evidence of the Impact of Economic Conditions on Support for Redistribution and Other Ballot Proposals." *Review of Economics and Statistics* 93(3):888–906.
- Butler, Daniel and Michelle Torres. 2025. "Nonpartisan Ballots and the Partisanship of Who Serves in Office." *Journal of Politics* .
- Button, James. 1993. "Racial Cleavage in Local Voting: The Case of School and Tax Issue Referendums." *Journal of Black Studies* 24(1):29–41.
- Cann, Damon M. 2018. "The Structure of Municipal Political Ideology." *State and Local Government Review* 50(1):37–45.
- Caughey, Devin and Christopher Warshaw. 2022. *Dyamic Democracy: Public Opinion, Elections, and Policymaking in the American States*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Cheek, Kyle D. and Anthony Champagne. 2003. "Partisan Judicial Elections: Lessons from a Bellwether State." *Willamette Law Review* 39:1357.
- Choi, Sang Ok, Sang-Seok Bae, Sung-Wook Kwon and Richard Feiock. 2010. "County Limits: Policy Types and Expenditure Priorities." *The American Review of Public Administration* 40(1):29–45.

- de Benedictis-Kessner, Justin and Christopher Warshaw. 2016. "Mayoral Partisanship and Municipal Fiscal Policy." *The Journal of Politics* 78(4):1124–1138.
- de Benedictis-Kessner, Justin and Christopher Warshaw. 2023. The Electoral and Policy Effects of Election Timing in City and County Governments. Technical report working paper.
- DiSalvo, Daniel. 2023. Interest Groups, Local Politics, and Police Unions. In *Interest Groups in U.S. Local Politics*, ed. Sarah Anzia. Springer Nature Switzerland pp. 85–99.
- Dowling, Conor M., Michael G. Miller and Kevin Morris. 2024. "Can Voters Locate Copartisan Candidates in Nonpartisan Elections? Evidence from Cast Vote Records."
- Dubois, Philip L. 1984. "Voting Cues in Nonpartisan Trial Court Elections: A Multivariate Assessment." *Law and Society Review* pp. 395–436.
- Einstein, Katherine Levine and Vladimir Kogan. 2016. "Pushing the City Limits: Policy Responsiveness in Municipal Government." *Urban Affairs Review* 52(1):3–32.
- Erikson, Robert S., Gerald C. Wright and John P. McIver. 1993. *Statehouse Democracy: Public Opinion and Policy in the American States*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Ferreira, Fernando and Joseph Gyourko. 2009. "Do Political Parties Matter? Evidence from U.S. Cities." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 124(1):399–422.
- Fiorina, Morris P. 2017. "The (Re) Nationalization of Congressional Elections." *Hoover Institution* .
- Frisina, Laurin, Michael C. Herron, James Honaker and Jeffrey B. Lewis. 2008. "Ballot Formats, Touchscreens, and Undervotes: A Study of the 2006 Midterm Elections in Florida." *Election Law Journal* 7(1):25–47.
- Gallup News Service. 2024. "Trust in Government." Accessed June 6, 2025. URL: <https://perma.cc/AVU9-5RRB>.
- Gerber, Elisabeth R. and Daniel J. Hopkins. 2011. "When Mayors Matter: Estimating the Impact of Mayoral Partisanship on City Policy." *American Journal of Political Science* 55(2):326–339.
- Gerber, Elisabeth R. and Jeffrey B. Lewis. 2004. "Beyond the Median: Voter Preferences, District Heterogeneity, and Political Representation." *Journal of Political Economy* 112(6):1364–1383.

- Gerber, Elisabeth R. and Justin H. Phillips. 2003. "Development Ballot Measures, Interest Group Endorsements, and the Political Geography Of Growth Preferences." *American Journal of Political Science* 47(4):625–639.
- Green, Rebecca. 2024. "FOIA-Flooded Elections." *Ohio State Law Journal* 85:255.
- Hajnal, Zoltan L. and Jessica Trounstein. 2010. "Who or What Governs?: The Effects of Economics, Politics, Institutions, and Needs on Local Spending." *American Politics Research* 38(6):1130–1163.
- Hajnal, Zoltan L., Vladimir Kogan and G. Agustin Markarian. 2022. "Who Votes: City Election Timing and Voter Composition." *American Political Science Review* 116(1):374–383.
- Hayes, Danny and Jennifer L. Lawless. 2021. *News Hole: The Demise of Local Journalism and Political Engagement*. Cambridge University Press.
- Herron, Michael C. and Jasjeet S. Sekhon. 2003. "Overvoting and Representation: An Examination of Overvoted Presidential Ballots in Broward and Miami-Dade Counties." *Electoral Studies* 22(1):21–47.
- Herron, Michael C. and Jeffrey B. Lewis. 2007. "Did Ralph Nader Spoil a Gore Presidency? A Ballot-level Study of Green and Reform Party Voters in the 2000 Presidential Election." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 2(3):205–226.
- Holman, Mirya, Rebecca Johnson and Tyler Simko. 2024. Measuring Conflict in Local Politics. Technical report OSF PrePrint. URL: <https://osf.io/vst9g>.
- Hopkins, Daniel J. 2018. *The Increasingly United States: How and Why American Political Behavior Nationalized*. University of Chicago Press.
- Hopkins, Daniel J. and Tori Gorton. 2024. "Unsubscribed and Undemanding: Partisanship and the Minimal Effects of a Field Experiment Encouraging Local News Consumption." *American Journal of Political Science* 68(4):1217–1233.
- Jacobson, Gary C. 2015. "It's Nothing Personal: The Decline of the Incumbency Advantage in US House Elections." *The Journal of Politics* 77(3):861–873.
- Jensen, Amalie, William Marble, Kenneth Scheve and Matthew J. Slaughter. 2021. "City Limits to Partisan Polarization in the American Public." *Political Science Research and Methods* 9(2):223–241.

- Kirkland, Patricia A. and Alexander Coppock. 2018. "Candidate Choice Without Party Labels: New Insights from Conjoint Survey Experiments." *Political Behavior* 40:571–591.
- Kitchens, Karin E. 2023. "School Characteristics and Voting: What Matters in Turnout and Passage." *Urban Affairs Review* 59(6):1838–1874.
- Kuriwaki, Shiro. 2025. "Ticket Splitting in a Nationalized Era." *The Journal of Politics* . Preprint at <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/734263>.
- Kuriwaki, Shiro, Mason Reece, Samuel Baltz, Aleksandra Conevska, Joseph R. Loffredo, Taran Samarth, Can Mutlu, Kevin E. Acevedo Jetter, Zachary Djanogly Garai, Kate Murray, Shigeo Hirano, Jeffrey B. Lewis, James M. Snyder Jr. and Charles H. Stewart III. 2024. "Cast vote records: A Database of Ballots from the 2020 U.S. Election." *Scientific Data* .
- Leigh, Andrew. 2008. "Estimating the Impact of Gubernatorial Partisanship on Policy Settings and Economic Outcomes: A Regression Discontinuity Approach." *European Journal of Political Economy* 24(1):256–268.
- Lewis, Jeffrey B. 2001. "Estimating Voter Preference Distributions from Individual-Level Voting Data." *Political Analysis* 9(3):275–297.
- Lim, Claire S.H. and James M. Snyder Jr. 2015. "Is More Information Always Better? Party Cues and Candidate Quality in US Judicial Elections." *Journal of Public Economics* 128:107–123.
- Lupia, Arthur. 1994. "Shortcuts Versus Encyclopedias: Information and Voting Behavior in California Insurance Reform Elections." *American Political Science Review* 88(1):63–76.
- Marble, William and Clayton Nall. 2021. "Where Self-Interest Trumps Ideology: Liberal Home-owners and Local Opposition to Housing Development." *The Journal of Politics* 83(4):1747–1763.
- Martin, Gregory J. and Joshua McCrain. 2019. "Local News and National Politics." *American Political Science Review* 113(2):372–384.
- Melusky, Benjamin and Jesse Richman. 2020. "When the Local is National—A New High-Water Mark for Nationalization in the 2018 United States State Legislative Elections." *Regional & Federal Studies* 30(3):441–460.
- Morse, Michael. 2021. "The Future of Felon Disenfranchisement Reform: How Partisanship and Poverty Shape the Restoration of Voting Rights in Florida." *California Law Review* 109(1):1–91.

- Moskowitz, Daniel J. 2020. "Local News, Information, and the Nationalization of U.S. Elections." *American Political Science Review* 115(1):114 – 129.
- Munro, William Bennett. 1923. *Municipal Government and Administration: Administration*. Vol. 2 Macmillan.
- National Taxpayers Union. 2024. "NTU Ballot Guide: 2020 General Election, October 27, 2020." <https://perma.cc/LP56-MDZY>.
- Oliver, J. Eric and Shang E. Ha. 2007. "Vote Choice in Suburban Elections." *American Political Science Review* 101(3):393–408.
- Oliver, J. Eric, Shang E. Ha and Zachary Callen. 2012. *Local Elections and the Politics of Small-Scale Democracy*. Princeton University Press.
- Peterson, Erik. 2017. "The Role of the Information Environment in Partisan Voting." *The Journal of Politics* 79(4):1191–1204.
- Peterson, Paul E. 1981. *City Limits*. University of Chicago Press.
- Reece, Mason, Joseph Loffredo, Alejandro Flores, Samuel Baltz and Charles Stewart III. 2024. "Hidden Partisanship in American Elections."
- Rock, Emily and Lawrence Baum. 2010. "The Impact of High-Visibility Contests for US State Court Judgeships: Partisan Voting in Nonpartisan Elections." *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 10(4):368–396.
- Rogers, Steven. 2023. *Accountability in State Legislatures*. University of Chicago Press.
- Romer, Thomas and Howard Rosenthal. 1982. "Median Voters or Budget Maximizers: Evidence from School Expenditure Referenda." *Economic Inquiry* 20(4):556–578.
- Rugh, Jacob S. and Jessica Trounstine. 2011. "The Provision of Local Public Goods in Diverse Communities: Analyzing Municipal Bond Elections." *The Journal of Politics* 73(4):1038–1050.
- Sances, Michael W. 2018. "Ideology and Vote Choice in US Mayoral Elections: Evidence from Facebook Surveys." *Political Behavior* 40:737–762.
- Sances, Michael W. 2021. "When Voters Matter: The Limits of Local Government Responsiveness." *Urban Affairs Review* 57(2):402–427.

- Schaffner, Brian F., Jesse H. Rhodes and Raymond J. La Raja. 2024. "Are Local Policy Attitudes Distinct?" *Political Science Research and Methods* p. FirstView.
- Schaffner, Brian F., Matthew Streb and Gerald Wright. 2001. "Teams Without Uniforms: The Nonpartisan Ballot in State and Local Elections." *Political Research Quarterly* 54(1):7–30.
- Schotland, Roy A. 2006. "New Challenges to States' Judicial Selection." *Georgetown Law Journal* 95:1077.
- Sievert, Joel and Seth C. McKee. 2019. "Nationalization in US Senate and Gubernatorial Elections." *American Politics Research* 47(5):1055–1080.
- Szewczyk, James. 2020. Does Vote-by-Mail Cause Voters to Gather Information About Politics. Technical report Tech. rep., Working Paper.
- Tausanovitch, Chris and Christopher Warshaw. 2013. "Measuring Constituency Policy Preferences in Congress, State Legislatures, and Cities." *The Journal of Politics* 75(2):330–342.
- Tausanovitch, Chris and Christopher Warshaw. 2014. "Representation in Municipal Government." *American Political Science Review* 108(3):605–641.
- Taylor, Jon and William D. Schreckhise. 2003. "The Impact of Issue Voting on a Local Nonpartisan Election." *State and Local Government Review* 35(3):174–182.
- Tedin, Kent L., Richard E. Matland and Gregory R. Weiher. 2001. "Age, Race, Self-Interest, and Financing Public Schools Through Referenda." *Journal of Politics* 63(1):270–294.
- Ternullo, Stephanie. 2024. "Local Political Campaigns & Partisan Support for Residential Zoning Reform." *Working Paper* .
- Thompson, Daniel M. 2020. "How Partisan Is Local Law Enforcement? Evidence from Sheriff Cooperation with Immigration Authorities." *American Political Science Review* 114(1):222–236.
- Thornburg, Matthew P., Garrison Davis and Duncan A. Buell. 2025. "Understanding Nonpartisan Roll-Off Among Straight Party Voters." *Election Law Journal* .
- Tiebout, Charles M. 1956. "A Pure Theory of Local Expenditures." *Journal of Political Economy* 64(5):416–424.
- Trounstine, Jessica. 2009. "All Politics is Local: The Reemergence of the Study of City Politics." *Perspectives on Politics* 7(3):611–618.

- Trounstine, Jessica. 2018. *Segregation by Design: Local Politics and Inequality in American Cities*. Cambridge University Press.
- Trounstine, Jessica. 2023. “You Won’t Be My Neighbor: Opposition to High Density Development.” *Urban Affairs Review* 59(1):294–308.
- Wack, John P. 2019. “Cast Vote Records Common Data Format Specification Version 1.0.” *National Institute of Standards and Technology* .
- Wand, Jonathan N., Kenneth W. Shotts, Jasjeet S. Sekhon and Jr. Mebane, Walter R. 2001. “The Butterfly Did It: The Aberrant Vote for Buchanan in Palm Beach County, Florida.” *Political Analysis* 9(3):275–297.
- Warshaw, Christopher. 2019. “Local Elections and Representation in the United States.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 22(1):461–479.
- Weinschenk, Aaron C. 2022. “The Nationalization of School Superintendent Elections.” *Social Science Quarterly* 103(3):597–606.
- Weinschenk, Aaron, Mandi Baker, Zoe Betancourt, Vanessa Depies, Nathan Erck, Quinne Herolt, Amanda Loehrke, Cameron Makurat, Hannah Malmberg, Clarice Martell, Jared Novitzke, Bradley Riddle, Tara Sellen, Leah Tauferner and Emily Zilliox. 2020. “Have State Supreme Court Elections Nationalized?” *Justice System Journal* 41(4):313–322.
- Zoorob, Michael. 2022. “There’s (Rarely) a New Sheriff in Town: The Incumbency Advantage for Local Law Enforcement.” *Electoral Studies* 80:102550.

Online Appendix for:
How Partisan are U.S. Local Elections?
Evidence from 2020 Cast Vote Records

Aleksandra Conevska Shigeo Hirano Shiro Kuriwaki Jeffrey B. Lewis Can Mutlu
James M. Snyder, Jr.

American Political Science Review

A Details About the Sample

Table A.1 presents the demographics of the counties studied in this article. We take county-level demographic data from the 2020 decennial Census at the county level as a comparison. The Table reports the average and median value of each demographic variable, as well as the overall (population-weighted) value.

Table A.2 shows the number of voters covered in any one of those contests, and Table A.3 shows the number of contests used by state.

Table A.1: Demographic Characteristics of Counties Used. *Comparison of the counties in our sample (CVR, $n = 483$) with all counties in the United States (Nation, $n = 3221$). All statistics are computed using data from the 2020 Decennial Census at the county level.*

	Overall		Average County		Median County	
	CVR	Nation	CVR	Nation	CVR	Nation
Percent White	53.3	61.2	69.4	75.3	73.2	82.1
Percent Black	11.6	12.3	8.8	8.7	3.1	2.2
Percent Hispanic	27.2	19.5	15.2	11.9	8.9	4.8
Percent Under 18	22.1	22.0	21.8	21.9	22.0	21.9
Percent Over 65	16.2	16.9	19.0	20.2	18.2	19.9
Percent Urban	89.6	80.1	52.1	37.1	57.3	34.8
Percent Homeowning	22.4	24.2	26.8	28.5	26.8	29.0

Table A.2: Sample Size of Voters by State and Office. Number of voters in our CVR data whose ballots are linked to their federal office vote choice. See Figure 1. Ctys indicate number of counties. (The totals do not match those of Table A.1 exactly because here we treat counties in Alaska, Delaware, and Rhode Island as a single county).

State	Ctys.	Partisan Offices		Non-partisan		Ballot Measures	
		State	Local	State	Local	State	Local
Alaska	1	316,248	-	-	-	316,581	-
Arizona	4	2,685,699	2,688,984	17,551	2,084,024	2,688,824	2,599,379
California	40	14,346,203	-	5,491,386	12,807,363	14,911,259	8,844,274
Colorado	62	3,245,809	2,505,590	-	1,026,569	3,244,325	2,167,959
Delaware	1	503,534	503,538	-	-	-	-
Florida	36	6,483,425	6,123,131	1,379,856	6,367,970	6,104,761	1,296,378
Georgia	89	4,213,231	4,213,204	-	1,815,270	4,088,273	2,143,584
Iowa	1	11,277	11,276	-	8,765	11,290	-
Idaho	1	27,453	27,453	-	-	27,449	-
Illinois	12	504,929	504,932	-	-	504,703	402,865
Louisiana	1	23,590	23,590	-	-	23,590	23,590
Maryland	19	-	299,415	584,498	786,741	2,108,564	1,388,933
Michigan	29	1,176,516	1,178,987	1,157,997	825,068	1,179,055	843,189
New Jersey	10	-	1,972,592	-	538,945	2,683,730	159,654
New Mexico	11	224,689	224,689	-	-	224,688	109,795
Nevada	17	1,393,138	801,282	1,393,181	1,199,168	1,347,479	71,651
Ohio	36	2,328,058	2,328,651	2,328,644	6,816	-	1,846,054
Oregon	15	1,062,746	362,942	1,062,481	1,062,205	1,062,857	750,688
Rhode Island	1	508,326	253,292	-	154,469	511,873	336,250
Tennessee	2	310,061	-	-	11,554	-	86,693
Texas	45	4,596,778	4,402,148	-	3,009,641	-	2,404,709
Utah	1	6,857	6,857	-	3,317	6,857	146
Wisconsin	13	1,263,351	1,258,601	-	65,769	-	508,229
West Virginia	2	49,762	49,735	-	16,902	-	-
Total	449	45,281,680	29,740,889	13,415,594	31,790,556	41,046,158	25,984,020

Table A.3: Sample Size of Contests by State and Office. Number of contests in our CVR data whose ballots are linked to their federal office vote choice. Cells are of the form m/n , where m indicates the number of contests that are *contested* according to the 95-5 threshold we define in the article, and n indicates the total number of contests. Most of the analyses in the article is run with only contested contests. Each legislative district's contests is counted as its own contest.

State	Ctys.	Partisan Offices		Non-partisan		Ballot Measures	
		State	Local	State	Local	State	Local
Alaska	1	24 / 51	-	-	-	2 / 2	-
Arizona	4	18 / 26	15 / 29	1 / 1	14 / 34	2 / 2	66 / 67
California	40	72 / 98	-	7 / 8	985 / 1125	12 / 12	320 / 320
Colorado	62	83 / 110	49 / 127	-	17 / 25	11 / 11	191 / 191
Delaware	1	29 / 55	6 / 29	-	-	-	-
Florida	36	92 / 97	55 / 103	3 / 3	324 / 324	6 / 6	23 / 23
Georgia	89	121 / 259	126 / 815	-	27 / 93	3 / 3	48 / 48
Iowa	1	0 / 2	1 / 5	-	1 / 2	1 / 1	-
Idaho	1	3 / 6	2 / 4	-	-	1 / 1	-
Illinois	12	27 / 43	40 / 87	-	-	1 / 1	15 / 15
Louisiana	1	1 / 4	0 / 6	-	-	7 / 7	1 / 1
Maryland	19	-	12 / 20	3 / 5	19 / 25	2 / 2	37 / 37
Michigan	29	45 / 52	162 / 1207	14 / 61	49 / 149	2 / 2	124 / 124
New Jersey	10	-	63 / 127	-	37 / 81	3 / 3	7 / 7
New Mexico	11	39 / 67	22 / 50	-	-	5 / 5	3 / 3
Nevada	17	34 / 52	12 / 44	42 / 98	45 / 51	5 / 5	7 / 7
Ohio	36	51 / 66	41 / 304	37 / 105	2 / 2	-	471 / 471
Oregon	15	49 / 52	3 / 4	6 / 12	147 / 334	4 / 4	47 / 47
Rhode Island	1	36 / 113	13 / 84	-	15 / 41	1 / 1	81 / 81
Tennessee	2	6 / 9	-	-	6 / 6	-	4 / 4
Texas	45	114 / 221	60 / 271	-	471 / 662	-	284 / 284
Utah	1	2 / 6	0 / 5	-	0 / 3	7 / 7	1 / 1
Wisconsin	13	54 / 69	0 / 62	-	0 / 1	-	36 / 36
West Virginia	2	12 / 12	8 / 20	-	3 / 5	-	-
Total	449	912 / 1,470	690 / 3,403	113 / 293	2,162 / 2,963	75 / 75	1,766 / 1,767

Nonpartisan School Board Elections Using data and information from the website Ballotpedia (<https://ballotpedia.org>) and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), we estimated that 8.4% of districts nationwide employ partisan elections for their school boards. To make that estimate:

- We began with a complete list of 13,028 general purpose (K-12) school districts in the United States in 2019 from National Center for Education Statistics.
- Ballotpedia notes that Alabama, Connecticut, Louisiana, and Pennsylvania use partisan elections for all school board elections (<https://perma.cc/UB2Z-DHSW>). We assumed that every one of the districts in those four states uses a partisan election ballot.
- They also note that Georgia, North Carolina, Rhode Island, South Carolina and Tennessee all allow individual school district's some discretion over the use of partisan or non-partisan elections. We assumed that all of the districts outside of these five states and the four states that mandate partisan elections employ non-partisan elections.
- For the four states that allow school districts discretion in the use of partisan or non-partisan elections, we examined election results to determine the form of election that was used in each school district. In particular, we assumed that a district uses partisan elections if any candidate appeared on the ballot along with their party label in any contest for that district's board in a recent election. In particular,
 - For Rhode Island and North Carolina, we examined the official statewide vote canvases from the 2024 primary and general elections.
 - For South Carolina and Georgia, we relied on data from Ballotpedia. Ballotpedia notes that 109 (61%) districts in Georgia use partisan ballots (without listing those districts). Ballotpedia also shows the winning candidates in all recent SC school board contests, including the party labels of the candidates if a partisan ballot was used (see, for example, <https://perma.cc/QYD6-ZPTR>).
 - Because Ballotpedia only presented election results for a small number of Tennessee school board elections and the official Tennessee statewide vote canvas does not include the results of local school board elections, we determined the election type for as many Tennessee districts as we could by examining the election results that were posted online by every Tennessee county election commission that has a webpage and which posted 2024 election results.
 - Because the NCES data reports (slightly) different numbers of districts for each state than do the elections returns and Ballotpedia and because we could not determine the election type for some Tennessee districts, we re-weighted our data to match the share of NCES districts that each state comprises.

B Measures of the Partisan Gap: Relationships and Alternative Measures

B.1 Proof of Relationship Between APG and Correlation Coefficients

If there are equal numbers of Democrats and Republicans, the total votes for each candidate in the contest are equal, and there are only two candidates (a Democrat and Republican), then APG is equal to the individual level correlation between partisanship and voting. That is, letting y_i be a binary variable for voter i voting Democrat in a local contest j , and letting d_i be a binary variable for being a Democrat, we have

$$APG_j = |\text{Corr}(y, d)|.$$

To see this, note that $\text{Corr}(y, d) = \text{Cov}(y, d)/[\text{SD}(y)\text{SD}(d)]$. The numerator can be rewritten:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Cov}(y, d) &= E(yd) - E(y)E(d) \\ &= \Pr(d=1)E(y|d=1) - \Pr(d=1)\Pr(y=1) \\ &= \Pr(d=1)E(y|d=1) - \Pr(d=1)[\Pr(d=1)E(y|d=1) + \Pr(d=0)E(y|d=0)] \\ &= \Pr(d=1)[E(y|d=1) - \Pr(d=1)E(y|d=1) - \Pr(d=0)E(y|d=0)] \end{aligned}$$

With an equal number of Democrats and Republicans, this reduces to

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Cov}(y, d) &= \frac{1}{2}[E(y|d=1) - \frac{1}{2}E(y|d=1) - \frac{1}{2}E(y|d=0)] \\ &= \frac{1}{4}[E(y|d=1) - E(y|d=0)] \end{aligned}$$

which is equal to $\frac{1}{4}APG_j$ when $E(y|d=1) > E(y|d=0)$, as is almost always the case in the data.

If the total votes for the two candidates in local race y are equal, then $E(y) = \frac{1}{2}$ as well, so $\text{Var}(y) = \text{Var}(d) = \frac{1}{2}(1 - \frac{1}{2})$, and therefore $\text{SD}(y)\text{SD}(d) = \frac{1}{4}$. Thus, $\text{Corr}(y, d) = APG_j$. Here we have computed expectations but the equality holds exactly in sample analogs.

In fact, the equivalence is somewhat more general than requiring that the the sample be 50-50 Democrat and Republican. As long as the national partisan and down-ballot contest have the same margins, i.e. are equally lopsided such that $E(y = 1) = E(d = 1)$, this equality holds.

B.2 Log Odds Ratio

Figure B.1 and Table B.5 reproduce our main results using the log odds ratio instead of the Absolute Partisan Gap. The log odds ratio is: $\log\left(\left[\frac{W_j^D}{100-W_j^D}\right] / \left[\frac{W_j^R}{100-W_j^R}\right]\right)$, where W_j^D is the percentage of Democrats who vote for the winning candidate in downballot contest j and W_j^R is the percentage of Republicans who do the same. Large log odds ratios indicate higher correspondence. Log odds ratios have some advantages when comparing different kinds of elections across which the frequencies of lopsided and closely-contested elections differ. Our main

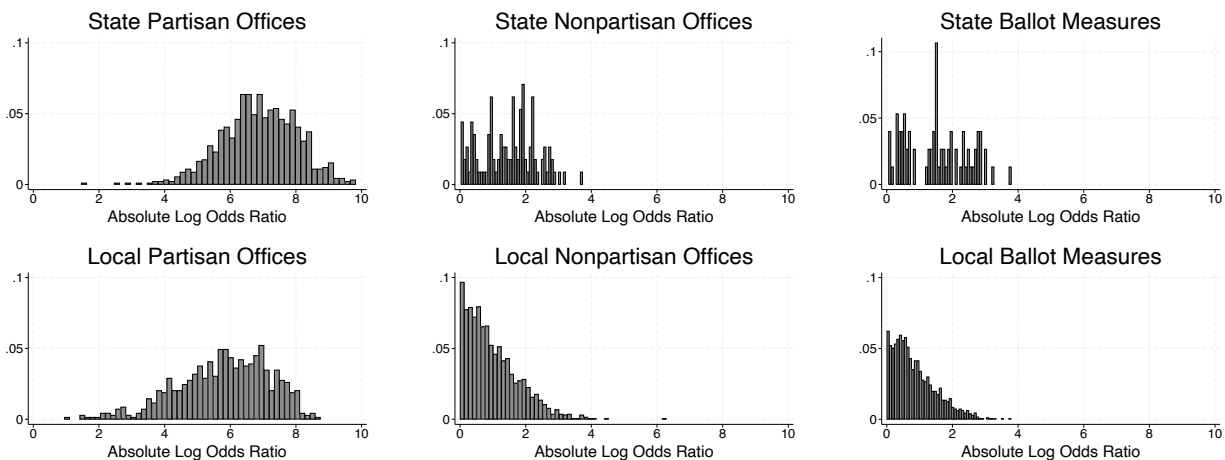


Figure B.1: The Distribution of the Absolute Partisan Gap by Odds Ratios, by Type of Office

findings on the difference between local and state offices remain unchanged in these figures and tables.

Table B.4: Voting Patterns by Partisanship, Log Odds Measure

Contest Type	Absolute Log Odds	# Items
State Partisan Offices	6.9	912
Local Partisan Offices	5.8	690
State Nonpartisan Offices	1.5	113
Local Nonpartisan Offices	1.0	1916
State Ballot Measures	1.5	75
Local Ballot Measures	0.8	1767

B.3 More than Two Choices

It is possible that *APG* underestimates the degree of partisanship in local nonpartisan races because it restricts attention to the winner and runner-up. Here, we show that is not the case, by examining three other measures, which are similar to *APG* in spirit, but which incorporate votes for other candidates and roll-off.

Let M be the number of alternatives in a contest j , let P_{jm}^D be the fraction of Democratic voters who choose alternative $m \in \{1, \dots, M\}$ in contest j , and let P_{jm}^R be the analogous fraction for Republican voters. For example, in a school board race with 4 candidates, $M = 4$, and the probability $P_{j,m=1}^D$ is equivalent to the ratio $V_{1j}^D / (V_{1j}^D + V_{2j}^D + \dots + V_{mj}^D)$ used in the main text.

The first measure, which we call Absolute Partisan Differences, is a direct extension of *APG*:

$$APD_j \equiv (1/2) \sum_{m=1}^M |P_{jm}^D - P_{jm}^R|$$

Note that we divide by two because of double-counting, so that APD_j always lies between 0 and 1.

The second measure is similar, but uses squared-differences, so we call it Squared Partisan Differences:

$$SPD_j \equiv \sqrt{(1/2) \sum_{m=1}^M (P_{jm}^D - P_{jm}^R)^2}$$

Again, we must divide by two because of double-counting, so SPD_j always lies between 0 and 1. Note that when we consider only two alternatives, APD_j and SPD_j are both equal to APG_j divided by 100.

The third measure is based on the probability that a randomly drawn Democratic voter and a randomly drawn Republican voter choose different alternatives. Since the draws in this exercise are independent from each other, the probability that a randomly drawn Democratic voter chooses the same alternative m as a randomly drawn Republican voter is then

$$P_j^{same} \equiv \sum_{m=1}^M P_{jm}^D P_{jm}^R \quad \text{and} \quad P_j^{diff} = 1 - P_j^{same}$$

While intuitive, P_j^{same} and P_j^{diff} are also sensitive to the overall distribution of voters across the alternatives. To see this, consider the multi-alternative version of the $APG_j = 0$ case, that is, $P_{jm}^D = P_{jm}^R = P_{jm}$ for all m , in which the fraction of Democratic and Republican voters choosing alternative m is the same for each alternative. Then $P_j^{same} = \sum_{m=1}^M P_{jm}^2$. This is like a Herfindahl index, so it is minimized when $P_{jm} = 1/M$ for all j , and is larger the more the P_{jm} 's are skewed away from equality and towards 0 and 1. They are also sensitive to the number of alternatives. To see this, suppose $P_{jm} = 1/M$ for all m . Then $P_j^{same} = M \times (1/M)^2 = 1/M$, which is decreasing in M .

We can reduce these nuisance factors by a normalization. Consider the normalizing factor $F_j^{same} = \sum_{m=1}^M [(P_{jm}^D + P_{jm}^R)/2]^2$. This is what P_j^{same} would be if P_{jm}^D and P_{jm}^R were the same for all m , keeping the total number of voters that choose each alternative equal to what it is in the data. Dividing gives the measure we use, which we call the Normalized Probability of Different Choices:

$$NPDC_j \equiv 1 - \left(P_j^{same} / F_j^{same} \right)$$

Table B.5 below shows averages of these measures calculated using different sets of alternatives and voters. In all cases, we use all contests we define as competitive in the main text to compute the averages presented in the table. In the first column, we consider only the winning alternative and first runner-up, and restrict attention to voters who cast a vote for one of those alternatives. In the second column, we consider the winning alternative, the first runner-up, and rolling-off, and

consider voters who chose one of those alternatives. In the third column, we consider all candidates that received at least 1% of the total votes, and all voters that voted for any of these candidates or rolled-off. We always include rolling off as an alternative. Note that for ballot measures two alternatives (Yes/No) and roll-off are the only three possibilities, so the statistics are blank for ballot measure cases.

The most important message from table Table B.5 is that values do not change much as we move from column 1 to column 2 to column 3.

Table B.5: Other Measures Comparing Democratic and Republican Voters

Contest Type	Top 2 Only	Top 2 Plus Roll-off	All Choices
<i>Absolute Partisan Differences</i>			
State Partisan Offices	0.913	0.882	0.879
Local Partisan Offices	0.852	0.822	0.823
State Nonpartisan Offices	0.330	0.301	0.301
Local Nonpartisan Offices	0.222	0.218	0.233
State Ballot Measures	0.322	0.308	
Local Ballot Measures	0.175	0.174	
<i>Squared Partisan Differences</i>			
State Partisan Offices	0.913	0.876	0.872
Local Partisan Offices	0.852	0.816	0.816
State Nonpartisan Offices	0.330	0.279	0.277
Local Nonpartisan Offices	0.222	0.203	0.211
State Ballot Measures	0.322	0.302	
Local Ballot Measures	0.175	0.167	
<i>Normalized Probability of Different Choices</i>			
State Partisan Offices	0.835	0.832	0.831
Local Partisan Offices	0.735	0.732	0.730
State Nonpartisan Offices	0.137	0.127	0.127
Local Nonpartisan Offices	0.075	0.074	0.082
State Ballot Measures	0.134	0.134	
Local Ballot Measures	0.046	0.047	

All Choices includes all candidates who received at least 1% of the total votes.

C Other Findings

C.1 Variation By Competitiveness

Figure C.2 shows how the Absolute Partisan Gap varies by the overall competitiveness of the contest. As we discuss in the main text, highly uncompetitive contests will have a lower APG by design because everyone votes for one candidate. In these graphs, high margin of victory indicate uncompetitive contests. While the relationship is negative, the slope is modest and it is only noticeable at the extreme ends of the plot.

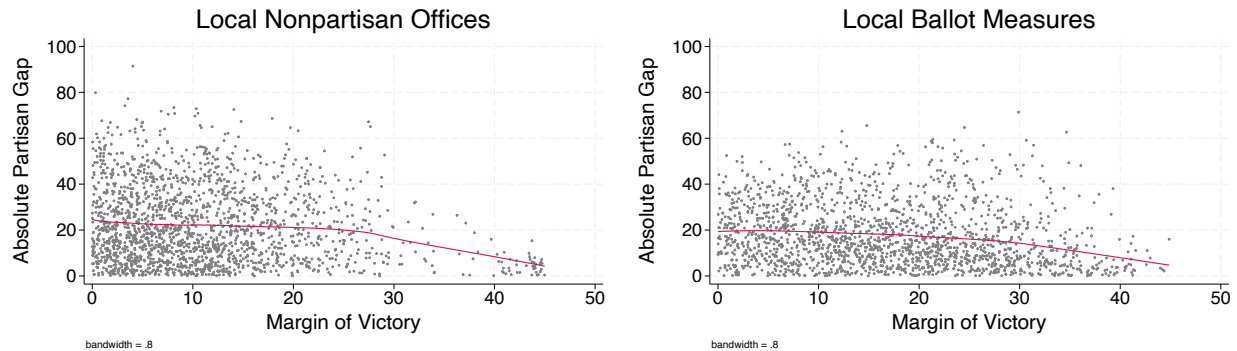


Figure C.2: Absolute Partisan Gap vs. Margin of Victory. Loess curves in red.

C.2 Differential Roll-off

Figure C.3 compares roll-off by Democrats (x-axis) and Republicans (y-axis). The panels are ordered in the same way as in Figures 1 and 2 in the main text – partisan offices on the left, nonpartisan offices in the middle, and ballot measures on the right, with state-level contests above and local-level contests below. We color contested in black and uncontested contests in gray.

For partisan races the patterns are clear: if there is no Democratic candidate in the race then roll-off by Democratic voters is often high; otherwise it is generally small. When there is no Democrat on the ballot then nearly half of the Democratic voters roll-off on average, and Republican voters roll-off only slightly more than they do in contested partisan races. A similar pattern is evident among Republican voters when there is no Republican candidate.

However, roll-off in nonpartisan races at the state level tends to be more similar across the parties. There are a number of exceptions – e.g., races with high roll-off among Democrats and low roll-off among Republicans. These are almost all cases in Ohio (recall discussion of Ohio’s state supreme court elections earlier). Otherwise, roll-off among Democrats and Republicans tend to vary together – the correlation is 0.88. For nonpartisan local races, the correlation between Democratic and Republican voter roll-off is also high, 0.86.

For ballot measures, both at the state and local level, roll-off is generally low and also similar across the parties. The correlation between roll-off by Democrats and roll-off by Republicans is

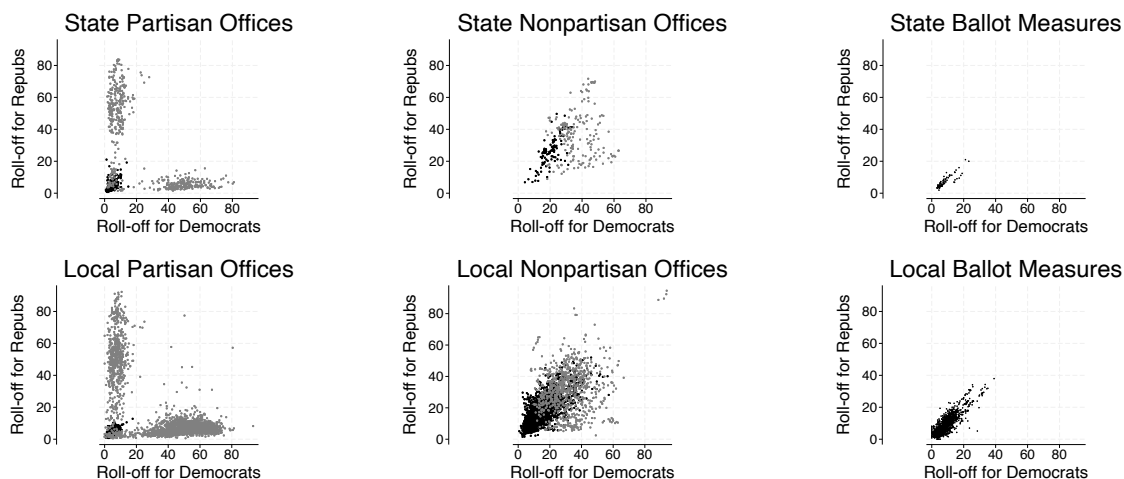


Figure C.3: Rolloff among Republicans and Democrats, by Type of Office. We color contested contests in black and uncontested contests in gray.

quite high – 0.96 for state ballot measures and 0.85 for local ballot measures. This suggests that Democratic and Republican voters do not differ substantially in how much they care about the outcomes, nor in their level of information.

C.3 Defining Partisanship By Party Lever Use in Michigan

In Michigan we can compare results using two different measures of partisanship: (i) the main measure used in the article based on voting in federal elections, and (ii) a measure based on the use of the party lever (straight-ticket option). In 2020, seven states allowed voters to select a party’s entire slate of candidates across all of the partisan offices on their ballot with one choice. This party lever option was available in two states for which we have CVR data, Michigan and Nevada. While the CVR data from Nevada do not indicate whether or not a voter employed the straight-ticket option, those from Michigan do. Across all Michigan counties for which we have CVR data, 56 percent of voters employed the straight-ticket option with 97 percent of those voters selecting either the Democratic or the Republican tickets. In the *party lever* definition of partisanship, these are the voters we define as Democrats and Republican.

Table C.6 shows the patterns in *APG* for the same groups of contests as Table 1 in the text, but using these two different definitions of partisanship. The *APG* values for each type of contest are similar for each contest type, regardless of which definition is used.¹

¹ The party lever also allows us to compute the *APG* for federal offices. Using our main definition of partisanship, the *APG* for federal offices is 100 percent by construction — Democrats by this definition can only support Democrats for federal offices and Republicans can only support Republicans. This is not the case for the party lever definition because Michigan voters can override their decisions to cast straight-ticket votes by indicating a preference for candidates of

Table C.6: Voting Patterns by Partisanship in Michigan

	<i>APG</i> with Party Defined By:			Avg No. of Partisan Voters	
	Party Lever	Federal Votes	No. Contests	Party Lever	Federal Votes
State Partisan Offices	96.8	92.7	45	13,639	22,340
Local Partisan Offices	95.2	86.2	162	15,056	23,936
State Non-Partisan Offices	21.4	20.7	14	10,777	18,180
Local Non-Partisan Offices	14.9	12.8	49	3,646	6,006
State Ballot Measures	6.8	7.0	2	570,948	974,876
Local Ballot Measures	16.4	17.1	124	5,566	9,539
Federal Partisan Offices	96.9	100.0	16	120,266	197,158

C.4 Partisanship and Locality Size

Figure C.4 shows the relationship between *APG* and locality size (measured by the total number of votes for the contest) for partisan offices, nonpartisan offices, and ballot measures. All three relationships are positive, but they are also relatively modest, with R-squares of 0.13, 0.04, and 0.17, respectively. Overall, it appears that while locality size is related to partisan voting, it is not a first-order driver of partisan voting.

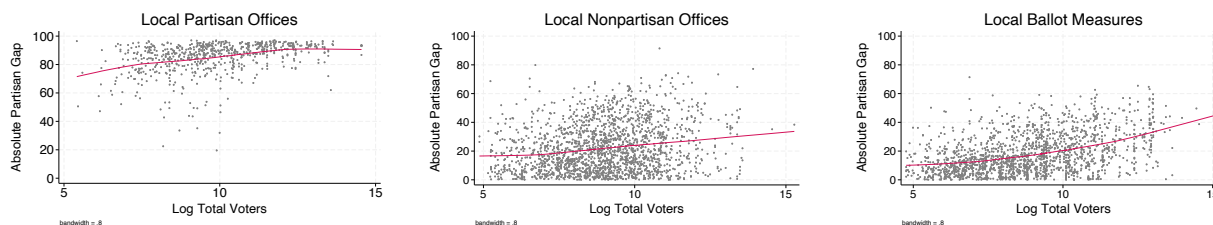


Figure C.4: Absolute Partisan Gap vs. Number of Voters in Local Area (in logs)

C.5 Partisanship and Racial Segregation

The preferences over public goods may vary by the degree of racial segregation or racial diversity. Residents in racially segregated neighborhoods may vote on candidates that propose anti-redistributive policies, and these coalitions may be correlated with partisanship. We collected racial segregation measures at the county-level. Counties were the most standardized geographic

different parties in particular contests. In the average contest, 1% of party lever Democrats and 2% of party lever Republicans supported candidates of the opposite party, resulting in the *APG* of 96.9 reported in Table C.6 for party lever partisans when voting for federal offices.

indicator in our dataset, although future work can geocode data by precinct. We use the dissimilarity index for White and Black alone constructed from census tract-level racial distributions from ICPSR 3942, where 0 indicates no segregation and 1 indicates full segregation.² We limit our attention to contests that are county-wide and drop contests which only occur in a small portion of the county, in order to retain a clearer correspondence between our racial segregation measures (with a cutoff of 60 percent of the countywide vote).

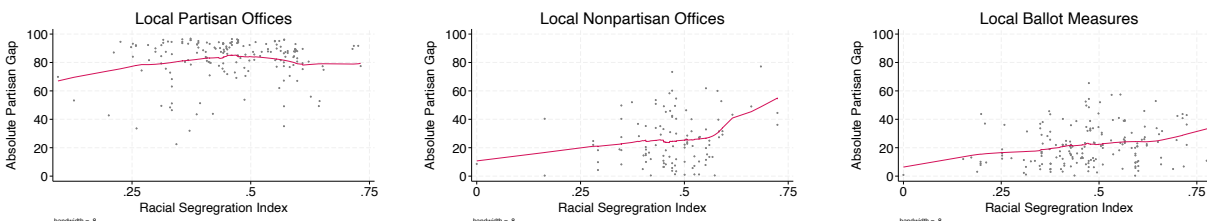


Figure C.5: Absolute Partisan Gap vs. Racial Segregation Index

Figure C.5 shows the relationship between *APG* and racial segregation for partisan offices, nonpartisan offices, and ballot measures. All three relationships are positive, but they are also relatively modest, with R-squares of 0.01, 0.09, and 0.06, respectively. Overall, it appears that while racial segregation is related to partisan voting, it is not a first-order driver of partisan voting.

C.6 Combined Regressions

To assess the relative contributions of various factors to *APG*, we estimate a series of stacked regression models. Table C.7 estimates five separate regression specifications of all contested contests. In each regression, the dependent variable is a binary measure that indicates votes for the option preferred more by Democrats than by Republicans. That is, we take the same approach as in Table 3 of the main text, and code voting for a candidate or ballot measure alternative the Left outcome if more national Democrats prefer it than national Republicans. All specifications include fixed effects for each contest. On the right-hand side, we include interactions with national partisanship (1 = Democrat, 0 = Republican) and a dummy variable for the type of contest (e.g., state partisan offices, local partisan offices, etc.). Interacting the variables in this way yields regression estimates that correspond to each component’s contribution to Partisan Gap. That is, the coefficient estimates reveal the proportion of Democrats voting left minus the proportion of Republicans voting left.

Model (1) reproduces the regression results in Table 3, and approximately the difference in means of Table 1. Models (2), (3), (4) and (5) adds three variables discussed in the section above:

² Kamp Dush, Claire M., Wendy D. Manning and David Van Riper. 2025. “IPUMS Contextual Determinants of Health (CDOH) Race and Ethnicity Measure: Residential Segregation - Index of Dissimilarity Inequity by County, United States, 2005-2022.”. Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2025-02-05. <https://www.icpsr.umich.edu/web/DSDR/studies/39242>

Partisan Slant, *Voteshare Margin* and *Constituency Size*. *Partisan Slant* is computed as follows: i) calculate the fraction of voters who are national Democrats among the voters casting ballots in a particular contest; ii) subtract 0.5 and take the absolute value. *Voteshare Margin* is the measure of competitiveness used in Figure C.2. Finally, *Size* is log of the total number of votes for the contest. All three variables are standardized to unit variance and mean 0.

Table C.7: Voting Patterns by Partisanship, Regression Estimates

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
State Partisan Office × Democrat	0.942 (0.003)	0.949 (0.006)	0.924 (0.004)	0.954 (0.004)	0.947 (0.007)
Local Partisan Offices × Democrat	0.903 (0.006)	0.906 (0.007)	0.894 (0.006)	0.930 (0.008)	0.921 (0.010)
State Non-partisan Offices × Democrat	0.308 (0.023)	0.311 (0.023)	0.312 (0.022)	0.311 (0.023)	0.321 (0.023)
Local Non-partisan Offices × Democrat	0.275 (0.015)	0.273 (0.015)	0.288 (0.014)	0.322 (0.018)	0.317 (0.017)
State Ballot Measures × Democrat	0.393 (0.025)	0.394 (0.025)	0.388 (0.024)	0.349 (0.024)	0.359 (0.023)
Local Ballot Measures × Democrat	0.284 (0.015)	0.277 (0.016)	0.302 (0.014)	0.328 (0.017)	0.314 (0.015)
Partisan Slant × Democrat		0.012 (0.009)			0.027 (0.009)
Voteshare Margin × Democrat			-0.051 (0.010)		-0.050 (0.011)
Size × Democrat				0.048 (0.009)	0.033 (0.009)
Observations	557,378,015	557,378,015	557,378,015	557,378,015	557,378,015

The outcome is voting for the Democrat-preferred alternative in contested candidate races or ballot measures. The coefficient on the interactions with (national) Democrat indicates the difference in APG. Standard errors, clustered by contests, are in parentheses. Fixed effects for contests included in all models.