Partisan Elections, Competition, and Candidate Selection: Evidence from School Boards*

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Abstract

How do partisan electoral institutions affect local democracy? I study this question in the context of North Carolina school boards, where the state legislature has gradually converted nonpartisan elections to partisan contests since 2014. Using a difference-in-differences design that exploits this staggered rollout, I estimate the causal effect of partisan elections on candidate entry, voter behaviour, and representation. The reforms reshaped competition by creating partisan strongholds, in which candidates were increasingly unlikely to run in districts dominated by the opposing party. As a result, uncontested races rose sharply and candidates with professional experience, such as principals and former board members, were less likely to enter. At the same time, partisan labels polarized voter choice and mobilized turnout, reinforcing strongholds. These dynamics ultimately advantaged Republicans overall and reduced the professional expertise represented on school boards. The findings reveal a central tradeoff: while partisan rules lower information costs for voters, they also weaken competition and diminish the quality of representation in local governance.

JEL Codes: D72, P16, H75

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1 Introduction

Political parties are among the most consequential institutions in modern democracies. They structure electoral competition and organize legislatures, shaping who enters politics and how candidates and parties compete (Dal Bó and Finan, 2018; Besley et al., 2010; Canen et al., 2020). For voters, parties provide important heuristics that simplify complex political choices (Snyder and Ting, 2002). Political parties are ubiquitous in national and state politics, where there are formally embedded in the electoral process, from nomination rules to ballots listing partisan affiliation. But in local elections, formal partisan institutions have been historically absent.[1] Over the past two decades, however, the United States have seen a clear shift from nonpartisan local elections toward partisan contests.

To answer fundamental questions about the relationship between partisan electoral institutions and local democracy, this paper turns to school boards, which have been at the center of this trend. First, how do partisan elections affect candidate entry? By reshaping the strategic incentives for potential candidates, partisan rules may alter not only the types of candidates who run, but also the overall level of competition in elections. Second, to what degree does the presence of party labels mobilize voters? If the partisan identity of candidates is salient, the availability of such heuristics has the potential to shape voting behaviour, overshadowing other candidate attributes such as professional experience, community ties, or policy expertise (Hirano and Snyder Jr, 2019). Together, these dynamics can reshape the composition of school boards and have important implications for downstream governance.

To study the consequences of partisan elections, I draw on North Carolina school boards, where the state legislature has reformed 39 of 115 districts from nonpartisan to partisan contests since 2014. The staggered rollout of these reforms provides a rare opportunity to identify causal estimates of how introducing partisan electoral rules reshapes local democracy. These changes placed party affiliation on ballots and required candidates to secure their party's nomination to run. By linking comprehensive administrative data on candidate filings to their voters registration files, I recover party affiliation for all candidates — even in nonpartisan elections — allowing me to consistently

[1] Today, 75% of municipal offices and over 90% of school board members are selected in nonpartisan contests (Butler et al., 2025; Conevska et al., 2025). In such elections, candidates do not require party nominations and their party affiliations do not appear on ballots.

track behaviour before and after the reform. As such, this design enables me to examine how party labels affect voter behaviour, candidate entry and electoral competition.

I begin by investigating how the introduction of partisan elections affects the pool of candidates entering school board races. I find that partisan elections decrease the number of candidates running for school board and increase the share of elections that are uncontested by 19.2 percentage points (51.8% ; $p < 0.01$). The reduction in competition is most pronounced in contests where one party holds a clear majority. In Republican-leaning districts, Democrats are increasingly unlikely to run, leading to a rise in uncontested Republican victories; the reverse occurs in Democratic-leaning districts, where Republicans withdraw and uncontested Democratic wins become more common. In this way, partisan elections reduce electoral competition and create partisan strongholds, entrenching one-party dominance in many elections. In light of established evidence linking competition and candidate quality, these patterns raise concerns about whether partisan elections yield high-quality candidates.[2] Under partisan elections, I find that fewer candidates with prior school board experience run for office (26.0% ; $p < 0.01$) and fewer candidates are licensed principals (42.4% ; $p < 0.05$). Together, these results show that partisan elections not only reshape competition along partisan lines but also alter who is willing to run for office, with implications for both political representation and governance.

By leveraging variation in the partisan composition of voters across precincts, I study how candidates perform with varying numbers of co-partisan before and after party labels appear on ballots.[3] I find that partisan elections cause geographic polarization in voting behaviour: Republican vote shares increase by 24.1 percentage points (51.0% ; $p < 0.01$) in top tercile of Republican voter registration, while Democrat vote shares increase by 20.0 percentage points (32.1% ; $p < 0.01$) in the bottom tercile. Unaffiliated candidates lose approximately 14 percentage points in vote share across the board. Moreover, I find that partisan elections increase voter turnout by 8.3 percentage points (19.3% ; $p < 0.01$), especially in contested elections. Altogether, these results show that party labels strongly structure voter choice, consistent with reducing informational costs in low-salience local elections.

[2]See, for example, Dal Bó et al. (2017), Galasso and Nannicini (2011), De Paola and Scoppa (2011), and Gavoille and Verschelde (2017), who document that electoral competition is associated with higher quality candidates. Moreover, Besley et al. (2010) document that higher political competition is associated with pro-growth policies.

[3]I capture the partisan composition at a granular level of geography by linking precinct-level electoral returns to party affiliations listed in voter registration data.

Given these findings, I investigate how the implementation of partisan elections in North Carolina's school boards affected the composition of candidates who are elected. Because the reforms were implemented disproportionately in areas that lean Republican, the polarizing treatment benefited Republican candidates in aggregate. In treated districts, Republican candidates increase their vote share by 20.8 percentage points (53% ; $p < 0.01$) and increase their share of elected school board members by 27.9 percentage points (70.9% ; $p < 0.01$). Beyond changes in party success, I find evidence of shifts in the qualifications of elected candidates. Under partisan elections, school board members are less likely to be licensed principals or have past experience as a school board member, suggesting that partisan rules influence not only who wins but also the professional expertise represented on boards.

This paper contributes to a rich literature on political selection, which examines how institutions shape who enters politics and the quality of those who hold office (Besley, 2005; Dal Bó and Finan, 2018; Lim and Snyder Jr, 2021). Institutional features such as remuneration, voting technology, and term limits alter entry incentives and the characteristics of those willing to serve (Dal Bó et al., 2017; Fujiwara, 2015). Candidate self-selection is also central: prospective entrants weigh their chances of success and often opt out of unfavorable contests, with implications for candidate quality (Caselli and Morelli, 2004). A further strand highlights the role of political parties, which act as gatekeepers by structuring nomination processes and shaping who competes (Magesan et al., 2024; Casey et al., 2021; Hirano and Snyder Jr, 2019). In this paper I provide novel evidence on the role of partisan institutions in reshaping candidate supply, extending the literature on political selection to the context of local elections where party labels fundamentally alter who chooses to run.

Despite extensive evidence that partisan identity is one of the most powerful heuristics available to voters (Bullock, 2020), we know relatively little about how the introduction of partisan labels alters both voter behaviour and the supply of candidates. Experimental and survey evidence shows that voters weight party cues heavily when available (Kirkland and Coppock, 2018; Bonneau and Cann, 2015), and cross-sectional studies find that partisan elections yield outcomes more closely aligned with the partisan composition of the electorate (Conevska et al., 2025; Lim and Snyder Jr, 2015). Related work on judicial elections demonstrates that removing partisan labels can improve the quality of judges, as measured by peer evaluations and citations (Ash and MacLeod,

2021; Lim and Snyder Jr, 2015). Yet whether adding party cues in previously nonpartisan settings systematically reshapes local democracy remains unclear. This paper addresses that gap by exploiting North Carolina's staggered reform of school board elections, providing causal evidence on how partisan electoral institutions mobilize co-partisan voting, discourage professionally qualified candidates from running, and entrench partisan strongholds by reducing electoral competition.

Finally, the findings I report relate to a growing literature on the politics of school boards. Previous work has documented that the ideological, demographic, and professional makeup of school boards has meaningful consequences for both school administration and student outcomes (Biasi et al., 2025; Shi and Singleton, 2023; Fischer, 2023). In North Carolina in particular, Macartney and Singleton (2018) show using close-election regression discontinuity designs that marginally electing a Democrat reduces school segregation. Relatedly, Park et al. (2024) find that partisan affiliation shapes neighborhood outcomes, with the election of non-Democratic candidates raising home values and altering school attendance zones. A recent working paper by Hill et al. (2024) documents that partisan school board elections in North Carolina increased Republican success and was associated with higher teacher turnover and student disciplinary actions. My analysis complements this work by focusing on the mechanisms of change, showing how partisan labels structure voter choice and candidate entry, and how these dynamics affect the quality of representation.

This paper is structured as follows. In Section 2, I describe the institutional details and contextual background surrounding the introduction of partisan school board elections in North Carolina. I describe the data employed in my analysis in Section 3 and the empirical strategy in Section 4. I present my results in Section 5 before concluding in Section 6.

2 Contextual Background

2.1 Partisan School Board Elections in North Carolina

School board elections in North Carolina, much like in other states, have historically been conducted on a nonpartisan basis. This institutional feature stems from a Progressive-era reform movement aimed at curbing the influence of party machines in city administration, grounded in the rationale that local offices were primarily administrative rather than partisan (Schiesl, 1980). Leading into the 2010s, the vast majority of North Carolina's school boards remained nonpartisan, with candi-

dates' names appearing on the ballot without party affiliation.[4] Elected school boards govern the state's 115 local education agencies,[5] typically consisting of five to nine members serving staggered four-year terms. Representation structures vary across jurisdictions: some use at-large elections, others rely on single-member districts, and still others employ mixed systems. [6] Campaigns for these offices are typically modest, with limited advertising, low visibility, and few organized resources relative to higher-level races. Elections are generally held in November of even-numbered years to coincide with congressional elections.

In the mid-2010s, the Republican-controlled North Carolina state legislature initiated a series of reforms converting many school board elections from nonpartisan to partisan contests. These reforms introduced partisan primaries to nominate candidates, who would appear with their party affiliation on the ballot in general elections.[7] Over 10 years, 39 school boards' elections were reformed, bringing the total number of school boards with partisan elecitons to 53 by 2024 — Figure 1 illustrates the timing of the expansion and maps reformed school districts. Anecdotal accounts and media reports from the period indicate that Republican legislators disproportionately targeted districts with Republican-leaning electorates. I corroborate these claims empirically, documenting in Table 1 that reformed school boards have higher Republican voter registration and stronger electoral performance of Republican candidates at baseline.[8]

The politics surrounding these changes reflected competing views on the role of partisanship in local democracy. Proponents argued that partisan labels improve voter information in low-information contests and improve transparency. Opponents argued that partisan elections risk polarizing governance, narrowing the pool of candidates by discouraging independents and minority-

[4]Fourteen of North Carolina's school boards had partisan elections dating back to the 1990s, prior to the period I study. These "always treated" school boards are excluded from the differences-in-differences analysis presented below.

[5]The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction recognizes 115 local education agencies, a total that includes 100 county school systems and fifteen independent city school systems.

[6]In at-large systems, all board members are elected by the entire jurisdiction. In single-member district systems, the jurisdiction is divided into electoral districts, with each electing one representative. Mixed systems combine the two, with some members elected at-large and others from districts.

[7]In school boards that previously held off-cycle elections, the reforms also brought election timing in line with congressional elections. I perform robustness checks that exclude school boards with reformed timing, finding qualitatively and quantitatively similar results. These changes affect 15 of the reformed districts.

[8]Although reformed districts exhibited higher Republican strength at baseline, they were not on differential trajectories toward becoming more Republican prior to the reform, consistent with the identifying assumptions of the difference-in-differences design I implement.

party candidates, and shifting attention from administrative concerns to partisan conflict.[9] Consistent with these concerns, survey evidence shows that voters generally prefer to school board elections to be nonpartisan (Crawford, 2022). This reform aligned with broader efforts by the Republican majority to expand partisan electoral institutions across local offices,[10] situating North Carolina school boards within a wider trend of nationalized politics (Hopkins, 2022).

2.2 The Role of School Boards in Education Policy

School boards in North Carolina function primarily as managerial bodies within the public education system. The state legislature and the State Board of Education determine the framework of schooling — defining the standard course of study, graduation requirements, and key legal obligations — while local boards are tasked with implementing these standards. Their core responsibilities include selecting and overseeing the superintendent, approving personnel decisions, allocating budgets and resources across schools, and setting student attendance zones within the district.[11] Consistent with this managerial role, I document in Figure A1 that 58.9% of motions made in school board meetings relate to budget, personnel, facilities, and procurement. In this capacity, school boards act predominantly as administrators responsible for ensuring that schools operate effectively and in compliance with state and federal law.

Although their primary role is managerial, school boards do retain influence over how students experience schooling. Boards procure instructional materials and select supplemental textbooks. They may authorize elective courses and decide how to allocate resources toward specialized programs such as literacy interventions, technical education, or extracurricular offerings. Nonetheless, the scope of these duties is limited with curriculum related topics accounting for only 5.8% of motions in school board meetings.

[9] See example news coverage at : https://www.wunc.org/education/2017-04-20/state-republicans-want-to-bring-partisan-politics-to-local-school-boards.

[10] For example, the Republican-controlled General Assembly enacted a law in 2017 to make North Carolina's Superior Court and District Court judicial elections partisan.

[11] Local boards have no independent taxing authority. They rely on state appropriations for most current expenses and on county governments for local supplements and capital funding.

3 Data

To study school board elections, I employ data from the North Carolina State Board of Elections (NCSBE). Under North Carolina law, the NCSBE has supervisory authority over all elections in the state. Elections are administered locally by the 100 county boards of elections, which conduct contests for offices at the local, state, and federal levels and transmit results to the NCSBE for certification. Through this administrative structure, the NCSBE collects and maintains standardized data on voter registration, candidate filings, and election returns. This institutional arrangement is particularly advantageous for research, as it provides a consolidated and comprehensive dataset covering the universe of North Carolina elections, including school board contests, with consistent coding across counties.

Using electoral returns data from the NCSBE, I observe vote counts for all candidates running in the universe of electoral contests from 2010 onward.[12] The returns are reported at the precinct level, which allows me to analyze both overall contest outcomes and the distribution of votes across neighbourhoods. As such, I construct panels of electoral results at both the precinct and overall contest level, identifying winners based on vote counts in the returns data. Additionally, candidate lists from the NCSBE allow me to observe characteristics of all registered candidates.[13] Crucially, these data contain full names and addresses for all registered candidates, which I use for matching to voter registration data as described below. For partisan elections, the data also record party affiliations of candidates. Using these electoral returns, I am also able to identify incumbent candidates, who have previously been elected and have experience serving on school boards.[14]

3.1 Observing Partisanship in Non-Partisan Elections

A central challenge in my analysis is that candidates' party affiliations are not recorded in filing documents or displayed on ballots in nonpartisan contests. To address this, I draw on voter registration files covering the universe of registered voters in the state of North Carolina. Because

[12] These data include all local, state, and federal elections that the NCSBE oversees, not only school board elections. This includes general elections as well as primary elections when they are held.

[13] I do not observe the characteristics of "write-in" candidates, as they are not registered with the NCSBE. On average, write-in candidates only receive 1.3% of vote and are rarely elected. During my sample period, I observe write-in candidates winning in nine contests, exclusively in cases where no registered candidates appeared on the ballot.

[14] Since I only observe elections starting in 2010, I exclude candidates running prior to 2014 from measures of incumbency, as I cannot reliably identify their potential past elections.

these files contain party affiliation, names and residential address, I can link candidates to their voter registration records using their names and addresses. This procedure allows me to recover the partisan affiliation of school board candidates, making it possible to systematically analyze partisan dynamics in elections where party labels are not formally disclosed. Moreover, the voter registration files include age, sex, and race for all registered voters, allowing me to examine the demographic profiles of individuals running for office. In addition, the presence of unique voter identifiers enables me to track candidates over time, making it possible to study whether and how their party affiliations change across election cycles.

To match candidate filing data to their voter registration, I use fuzzy string matching using first, middle, and last name within country. As this often leads to multiple potential matches, I break any remaining ties using candidate's address information. Overall, this procedure yields a match rate of 87.1% among all filing school board candidates in the NCSBE data. Moreover, among candidates running in partisan elections, party affiliation in their matched voter registration files align with party labels they run under on ballots for 97.2% of candidates.[15] I use candidates party affiliation in matched voter registration data throughout my analysis to ensure a consistent definition of partisan identity for both partisan and nonpartisan elections.

3.2 Teacher and Principal Licensing Data

Candidates' professional backgrounds shape the perspectives they bring to office, influencing both electoral competition and governance. For school boards, experience in the education sector provides candidates with direct knowledge of classroom and administrative realities, potentially making them better equipped to craft and evaluate education policy. To capture this dimension, I identify licensed teachers among school board candidates in my sample. Specifically, I use the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's License Verification Page, a publicly available tool that allows me to confirm whether a candidate holds a teaching license issued by the NCDPI. For each identified teacher, I observe the date of licensure, the current status of the license (active or expired), any disciplinary or administrative actions, and the specific subjects or programs for which the license was granted. Licensed teachers make up 24.5% of school board candidates and 26.1 % of elected members.

[15] In partisan elections, parties require candidates to be registered with the party they represent. Thus, this comparison is best interpreted as a validation of the match quality, rather than as a test of ideological consistency.

My analysis focuses in particular on candidates who are licensed as principals. In North Carolina, principal licensure requires an approved master's degree in school administration and prior teaching experience. The presence of principal-candidates therefore offers a way to study how advanced training in educational leadership and school management is represented within local electoral politics. Licensed principals make up 12.1% of candidates for school boards and 14.2% of those who are elected.

3.3 Descriptive Statistics

In this section, I present descriptive statistics that provide an overview of the school board elections that I study. Table 1 presents these statistics in three groups, based on the presence and timing of partisan elections. In column 1, I present descriptive statistics from 15 "always treated" school boards, where partisan elections were introduce before my analysis period.[16] In column 2, I report statistics for 39 "switcher" school boards, where partisan elections were introduced during the period I study (2010-2024). Finally, I present statistics from 61 "never treated" school boards in column 3. To ensure a proper baseline comparison to the control group, column 2 restricts observations to elections that occurred prior to the introduction of partisan elections. In column 4, I show differences between the "never treated" and baseline "switcher" elections, to characterize any targeting of the partisan reforms.

Electorates in "switcher" and "never treated" contests are of similar size, with approximately 31 thousand and 34 thousand registered voters respectively. These elections also feature a similar number of candidates, with approximately 1.8-1.9 candidates running for each available seat on average. Given the low average number of candidates, it is unsurprising that these elections are often uncontested. 41.1% and 34.7% of "switcher" and "never treated" elections respectively have a single candidate running for office. Principals and incumbents commonly run in school board elections, with approximately 0.3 principals and 0.7 incumbents competing in the average election.

"Switcher" and "never treated" elections vary in their partisan composition. At baseline, 51.6% of party affiliated voters in reformed elections are registered as Republicans, in contrast to 37.9% in school boards that were not treated. These differences are also reflected in electoral outcomes, where Republican candidates receive a 14 percentage point higher vote share and make up 14 per-

[16] Partisan elections in these school boards were introduced through reforms in the 1990s.

centage points more of the elected school board members.[17] The baseline differences in partisan composition I document here is consistent with anecdotal evidence that the Republican controlled state legislature targeted Republican leaning school boards for reforms. These baseline imbalances motivate a difference-in-differences design that allows for level differences across districts while focusing on relative changes over time.

4 Empirical Strategy

The staggered timing of the reform across North Carolina school districts creates quasi-experimental variation that I leverage to estimate the causal effects of partisan elections . This approach relies on a difference-in-differences/event study framework that compares changes in outcomes in districts that adopt partisan elections to those that retain nonpartisan elections, before and after the reform. This design allows me to isolate the impact of partisanship on electoral competition, candidate selection, and downstream policy outcomes under plausible identification assumptions.

In particular, I estimate:

$$Y_{cdt} = \sum_{k=-K}^{K} \beta_k \cdot D_{dt}^k + \gamma_d + \delta_t + \varepsilon_{cdt} \tag{1}$$

where Y_{cdt} denotes the outcome of interest for contest c in district d at time t. The parameters D_{dt}^k are a series of indicators equal to 1 if district d is in period k relative to the year it first held a partisan school board election, and 0 otherwise. The coefficients β_k trace the dynamic effects of the reform over time, allowing me to assess both pre-trends and the evolution of treatment effects. District fixed effects γ_d control for time-invariant characteristics of each district, while time fixed effects δ_t absorb common shocks across all districts. Standard errors are clustered at the district level.

It is important to note that in settings with staggered treatment adoption, such as the one that I study, the canonical two-way fixed effects estimator (TWFE) may introduce bias. To address this concern, I implement the imputation-based estimator proposed by Borusyak et al. (2024), which is specifically designed for settings with staggered treatment timing. This estimator constructs

[17] Recall that these measures of candidate partisanship come from matched voter registration files. In these baseline elections, partisan affiliation is not observed on ballots. The observed differences may reflect a more Republican candidate pool or voters learning partisan affiliations during campaigns.

counterfactual outcomes for each observation by imputing untreated potential outcomes for treated units using the evolution of outcomes among units that have not yet received treatment. By comparing these imputed potential outcomes to realized outcomes, a treatment effect for each unit can be estimated. The resulting estimates can be used to recover an average treatment effect that is not contaminated by negative weighting or comparisons across already-treated groups, mitigating the issues that can bias conventional two-way fixed effects designs in staggered rollouts. In practice, I use this estimator both to recover dynamic event-study coefficients and to estimate average treatment effects of partisan elections on my outcomes of interest. Moreover, this framework also for flexible estimation of heterogeneous treatment effects, which I use to recover effects across competitions with varying baseline partisan composition of the electorate.

5 Results

5.1 Candidate Entry, Electoral Competition, and Selection into Candidacy

5.1.1 Effects of Partisan Elections on the Number of Candidates

The introduction of partisan elections reshapes the electoral incentives potential candidates face when deciding whether to run for office. First, candidates must compete in partisan primaries, which raises the cost of entry and creates an additional hurdle for independents or those without strong party backing. Second, prospective candidates may anticipate voters' strong responses to party labels and adjust their entry decisions accordingly. In particular, otherwise qualified candidates without strong partisan support may be deterred from running while those aligned with the partisan majority may be more likely to enter. Consistent with these mechanisms, in this section I show that the introduction of partisan elections reduces the number of candidates in school board races. This decline is concentrated among candidates facing electorates with few co-partisans. As a result, I document the creation of partisan strongholds, where candidates of the majority party are increasingly likely to run unopposed.

To estimate the causal effect of partisan elections on candidate entry, I implement a difference-in-differences approach to identification that leverages the staggered reform of school boards' electoral systems. In particular, I estimate average treatment effects using imputation based methods as proposed by Borusyak et al. (2024). This strategy has two distinct advantages. First, it provides unbiased estimates of treatment effects under staggered adoption even when treatment effects are

heterogeneous across cohorts and over time, a setting in which conventional two-way fixed effects estimators may be biased (Goodman-Bacon, 2021; De Chaisemartin and D'Haultfœuille, 2023). Second, it allows for the estimation of heterogeneous treatment effects across the ideological distribution of voters, enabling me to assess whether partisan elections have differential impacts in Republican-leaning versus Democratic-leaning electorates.

I report the effects of the introduction of partisan elections on candidate composition in Table 2. On average, I find that 0.523 fewer candidates compete in school board elections following the reform, a sizable decrease of 27.5% relative to the control mean ($p < 0.01$). Figure 2a presents these results in an event-study format. In the years leading up to the reform, the number of candidates running in treated school boards was trending slightly upward, consistent with the treatment being targeted at more competitive elections. To the extent that this trend would have continued in the absence of treatment and introduced bias, the estimated treatment effects I report should be interpreted as a lower bound on the true effect. Immediately after partisan elections are introduced, the number of candidates falls sharply, and the decline not only persists but grows over time.

To better understand how partisan elections affect candidate entry across different electoral contexts, I estimate conditional average treatment effects for contests with varying electorates. By using voter registration files, I construct measures of partisan affiliation for voters participating in each election. I then estimate effects by tercile of baseline Republican voter registration share. Column 2 of Table 2 reports the effect of partisan elections on the overall number of candidates running in each tercile. While the number of candidates drops throughout, the effects are concentrated in the bottom and top terciles, where 0.532 and 0.624 candidates run repectively ($p < 0.01$). By contrast, the middle tercile experiences a smaller decline of 0.329 candidates.

Columns 3–5 disaggregate these effects by party affiliation. The number of Republican candidates falls by 0.320 in the bottom tercile, the most Democratic-leaning areas ($p < 0.01$). Republicans are somewhat more likely to enter in more moderate contests, gaining 0.159 candidates in the middle tercile ($p < 0.05$). By contrast, Democratic entry rises by 0.243 candidates in the bottom tercile ($p < 0.01$), but falls by 0.092 in the top tercile, where Republicans dominate ($p < 0.05$). Unaffiliated candidates withdraw across the board, with declines of 0.256, 0.344, and 0.330 candidates in the bottom, middle, and top terciles, respectively (all $p < 0.01$). Taken together, these

results indicate that partisan rules discourage entry by unaffiliated and out-party candidates while reinforcing partisan strongholds by encouraging co-partisan entry in favorable electorates.

5.1.2 Effects of Partisan Elections on Uncontested Elections

I next examine the causal effects of partisan elections on the prevalence of uncontested races. Table 3 presents difference-in-differences estimates of how the introduction of party labels alters the likelihood that school board contests go uncontested. In column 1, I report the average treatment effect, finding that partisan school board elections are 19.2 percentage points more likely to be uncontested. This is a sizable 51.8% increase relative to the baseline mean of 37.0%. As seen in Figure 2b, the prevalence of uncontested races is slightly decreasing in the pre-period, suggesting that the effects I find are a lower bound. Following the introduction of partisan elections, however, the share of uncontested contests rises sharply and continues to grow over time. By the end of the event window, treated districts are roughly 30 percentage points more likely to experience uncontested races. These dynamics suggest that partisan elections have a persistent effect on reducing competition, with the gap between treated and untreated districts widening as partisan rules become entrenched.

While the overall effect of partisan elections on competition is informative, disaggregating by the partisan composition of the electorate provides sharper insight into the mechanisms at play. In column 2 of Table 3, I document that the effects of partisan elections are concentrated in electorates with clearer majorities. In Democrat leaning contests (Tercile 1), the share of uncontested elections rises by 32.1 percentage points — a 76.6% increase ($p < 0.01$). Similarly, contests with Republican leaning electorates (Tercile 3) see a 24.9 percentage point increase in the share of uncontested elections (90.2% ; $p < 0.01$). By contrast, I find no effect in elections with more moderate electorates, where both parties retain incentives to compete.

To probe this mechanism further, columns 3 to 5 disaggregate uncontested outcomes by party affiliation, allowing me to identify whether partisan elections disproportionately deliver uncontested victories to Republicans, Democrats, or unaffiliated candidates. In the most Democratic tercile, partisan elections increase the probability of an uncontested Democrat victory by 57.2 percentage points ($p < 0.01$), while reducing the likelihood of uncontested Republican and unaffiliated victories

by 8.0 ($p < 0.01$) and 6.0 ($p < 0.01$), percentage points respectively. Symmetrically, in the most Republican tercile, uncontested Republican victories rise by 33.3 percentage points ($p < 0.01$), while uncontested unaffiliated candidates fall by 6.3 percentage points ($p < 0.01$). In more balanced electorates, partisan rules see uncontested Republican victories increasing by 17.5 percentage points ($p < 0.01$) in the middle tercile, accompanied by significant declines for Democrats and unaffiliated candidates. These estimated effects are plotted graphically in Figure 3.

5.1.3 Professional Experience and Selection into Candidacy

Partisan elections not only reduce the number of candidates but also change the basis on which they choose to enter. Once party labels dominate voter decision-making, other characteristics of candidates such as local reputation, or professional expertise may be overshadowed. This reduces the advantage such valence characteristics provide for candidates, lowering their expected electoral success. This is especially true for for high valence candidates whose partisan identity does not match the majority of the electorate. Focusing on these groups highlights a key consequence of partisan reform: the supply of candidates becomes increasingly structured by partisan identity, potentially at the expense of experience and quality.

I document the effects of partisan elections on two valence characteristics of candidates: previous experience on school boards and and professional experience as educators. Incumbency provides a signal of competence and familiarity with governance institutions. Similarly, professional experience as a principal conveys expertise in education policy and management, which are broadly valued across the partisan spectrum.[18] Moreover, both such candidates benefit from name recognition, and plausibly from their visibility as community leaders, though I do not measure this channel directly.

Table 4 and Figure 4a present the effects of partisan elections on the entry of incumbents. On average, I find that partisan reform reduces the number of incumbents running for reelection by 0.20 candidates per contest, a sizable 26 percent decline relative to the control mean ($p < 0.05$). The event study shows that the number of incumbents running in treated school boards was relatively stable prior to the reform, after which entry drops sharply and remains persistently lower in subse-

[18] In North Carolina, principals must hold a license that requires prior teaching experience, a master's degree in school administration, and completion of state-approved leadership training. As such, principalship is a strong signal of both professional competence and familiarity with the education system.

quent years. Disaggregating by the partisan composition of the electorate in column 2 reveals that these effects are most concentrated in electorates with a clear Republican majorities: 0.27 fewer candidates with experience on school boards chose to run in heavily Republican districts (Tercile 3), a 30% reduction relative to the control mean ($p < 0.05$). In columns 3 - 5 I disaggregated these effects by the partisan affiliation of the incumbent candidate to find these reductions are driven by incumbents who's affiliation does not match the majority in the electorate they run in. In particular, 0.16 fewer Democrat incumbents run in Republican leaning areas (85% ; $p < 0.05$) and unaffiliated incumbents candidates exit across the board.[19] These patterns suggest that partisan reforms weaken incumbency as a valence advantage, making electoral viability increasingly contingent on partisan alignment.

Table 5 and Figure 4b present the effects of partisan elections on the entry of principals. On average, I find that partisan reform reduces the number of principals running for office by 0.13 candidates per contest, a 37.4 percent decline relative to the control mean ($p < 0.01$). The event study shows that the number of incumbents running in treated school boards was mildly trending upward prior to the reform, suggesting that the estimated effects should be interpreted as a lower bound on the true decline. After the introduction of partisan elections, entry drops sharply and remains persistently lower in subsequent years. Disaggregating by the partisan composition of the electorate in column 2 reveals heterogeneous effects: principal entry rises in Democratic leaning districts (Tercile 1), but falls significantly in more balanced and Republican-leaning electorates. In particular, 0.16 fewer principals run in the middle tercile (53% decline; $p < 0.01$) and 0.15 fewer in the top tercile (43% decline; $p < 0.01$). Columns 3–5 further show that these reductions are driven by Democratic and unaffiliated principals, who are 0.08 and 0.05 fewer in Republican-leaning districts respectively (both $p < 0.05$). Republican principals, by contrast, show no systematic decline. [20] Taken together, these results indicate that partisan reforms deter the entry of principals in electorates where they lack partisan alignment, diminishing the supply of candidates with professional expertise in education.

[19] Appendix Table A1 replicates these results using the share of incumbents among all candidates as the outcome, finding qualitatively similar effects. This specification captures changes in the composition of the candidate pool, as opposed to levels of entry, but may be contaminated by changes in non-incumbent candidate entry.

[20] Appendix Table A2 replicates these results using the share of principals among all candidates as the outcome and finds qualitatively similar effects. As with incumbents, this specification captures changes in the composition of the candidate pool but is mechanically sensitive to changes in overall candidate entry.

5.2 Voter Response to Partisan Elections

The introduction of partisan elections supplies voters with clear ideological cues that may alter how they evaluate candidates. In low-information local elections without party labels, costly information environments may lead voters to rely more heavily on cues other than ideology, such as incumbency or occupational background. When partisan labels are introduced, partisanship becomes a more salient and accessible cue, potentially increasing its weight in voter decision-making. While the relative weight voters place on partisanship is not directly observable, a testable implication of such behaviour is that partisan elections should advantage candidates in places where their co-partisan make up a larger share of the electorate. Moreover, partisan labels may also increase voter participation by lowering informational costs and providing clearer heuristics for turnout decisions.

5.2.1 Co-partisan Voting and Geographic Polarization Under Partisan Elections

To study how partisan elections affect voter behaviour across electorates with differing ideological composition, I combine precinct level voter registration records with electoral returns data. Precincts are the smallest geographical unit at which such data is available and allow me to capture local partisan composition to study changes in voting behavior at a granular geographic level. For each precinct, I define the Republican lean of the electorate as the share of party affiliated voters registered as Republican.[21] I then examine heterogeneous changes in support for Republican, Democratic, and unaffiliated candidates across the distribution of precinct partisanship. This design provides an indirect test of whether partisan cues influence voter behavior: if voters place greater weight on party labels when they are available, then Republican candidates should gain disproportionately in Republican-leaning precincts, Democrats should benefit in Democratic precincts, and unaffiliated candidates should lose support across the board.

In Figure 5 I plot estimated conditional average treatment effects across the distribution of partisan composition of precincts. The patterns that emerge illustrate heterogeneous responses of voter behaviour. Following the introduction of partisan elections, Democrat candidates experienced large electoral gains in Democrat leaning areas, while losing vote share in Republican dominated

[21] In my main analysis, I exclude unaffiliated voters from my measure of partisan lean of a precinct. Results are robust to an alternative measure that uses the share of all voters that are registered Republicans. Throughout the analysis, I use baseline Republican lean to mitigate bias that may be introduced by endogenous change to the partisan lean of voters.

precincts. This finding is mirrored for Republican candidates, who face electoral gains in moderate and Republican leaning areas, while losing votes in Democrat dominated precints. By contrast, unaffiliated candidates lose vote share across the board, regardless of the partisan composition of precincts.

To summarize these findings, I present conditional average treatment effects by tercile of baseline Republican vote share of precincts in Table 6. As reported in Column 1, Republican candidates experience heterogeneous effects across the partisan distribution of precincts. In Democratic-leaning precincts (Tercile 1), they lose 6.7 percentage points in vote share ($p < 0.10$), a 46.8% decline relative to the control mean. In moderate (Tercile 2) and Republican-leaning precincts (Tercile 3), Republican candidates experience gains 24.1 and 25.3 percentage points ($p < 0.01$), or 69.2% and 51.% respectively. Column 2 shows the mirror image for Democratic candidates. In Democratic leaning precincts, Democrats gain about 20.0 percentage points (32.1% ; $p < 0.01$) in vote share, while facing losses of 7.7 percentage points (18.1% ;$p < 0.05$) in moderate precincts and losses of 8.7 percentage points (33.8% ;$p < 0.05$) in Republican-leaning precincts. Column 3 shows that unaffiliated candidates experience consistent and large vote share losses across the distribution, ranging from 13.2 to 14.7 percentage points ($p < 0.01$), effectively entirely eliminating their share of votes.

One potential concern is that the results in Columns 1–3 reflect not only voter behavior but also endogenous candidate entry, since vote shares are determined jointly by who chooses to run and how voters allocate support. If partisan elections deter potential challengers, then observed changes in vote shares may partly reflect shifts in the composition of candidates rather than voter behavior. I document in Section 5.1 below that the introduction of partisan elections is indeed associated with a higher likelihood of uncontested races. To address this concern, Columns 4–6 restrict the sample to contested elections. While the effect sizes are generally smaller, the patterns that emerge are similar. Overall these findings demonstrate that partisan elections systematically reallocate votes along partisan lines, with Republicans and Democrats gaining primarily in their respective strongholds and unaffiliated candidates losing support across the board.

In Figure 6 I report event study findings to illustrate how vote shares evolve over time, separately by baseline Republican lean of precincts. The results corroborate findings from Table 6 and

show that changes to voting behaviour are immediate following the partisan election reforms and persist for duration of the event study window. Moreover, vote shares are stable across all terciles in the pre-reform period, providing little evidence that the estimated effects are confounded by underlying trends in voter polarization.

These results are robust to a variety of robustness checks. About one third of reformed school boards previously held off-cycle elections, which were aligned with congressional elections as part of the partisan reform. This raises the concern results may be driven by a different composition of voters who participate during on-cycle elections. In Table A4 and Figure A7 of the Appendix I exclude treated school boards that transitioned from off-cycle to on-cycle elections, finding remarkably similar patterns in voter behaviour. A further concern might be that candidates endogenously switch party affiliation in their voter registration files in response to the reform. To address this, I re-estimate the results using lagged party affiliation — registration records from four years prior, when candidates could not plausibly have switched in anticipation of running — and obtain nearly identical effects.

5.2.2 Effects of Partisan Elections of Voter Participation

The results above show that partisan elections shift the distribution of votes across candidates and strengthen partisan alignment in electoral outcomes. A natural next question is whether these changes are accompanied by changes in voter participation. School board contests are typically characterized by low information, and party labels provide a salient heuristic that may reduce the costs of participation. If partisan labels mobilize otherwise disengaged voters, we would expect to observe higher turnout in reformed contests.

To examine how partisan elections affect voter participation, I present contest-level estimates of treatment effects on turnout in Table 7. Column 1 shows that the introduction of partisan elections is associated with a 16.7 percentage point increase in voter turnout, measured as the number of cast votes as a share of eligible voters ($p < 0.01$).[22] This corresponds to a 40.7% increase in turnout relative to the control mean. These results are corroborated by the event study presented in **??**, which reports dynamic treatment effects. While there does appear to be a mild increase in voter

[22] In multi-seat school board elections where voters may cast multiple votes, turnout is calculated relative to the total number of potential votes that could be cast by eligible voters

turnout prior to the reform, turnout sharply increase immediately following the introduction of partisan elections and is sustained for following 8 years.

In Column 2, I exclude reformed school boards that transitioned from off-cycle to on-cycle elections. Because congressional elections draw higher turnout, a potential concern is that the Column 1 estimates reflect changes in election timing rather than the introduction of partisanship. By removing school boards subject to these timing reforms, Column 2 isolates the variation attributable to partisan elections alone. The effect I find is smaller, with partisan elections being associated with 8.3 percentage points higher voter turnout ($p < 0.01$). Nonetheless, this is a sizable 19.3% increase relative to the control mean, suggesting that voters are indeed more likely to participate in school board elections when party labels are present.

Columns 3 and 4 present conditional average treatment effects for contested and uncontested elections separately, revealing that the increases in voter turnout are driven by contested elections. When excluding school boards that transitioned timing in Column 4, I find that contested elections experience a 15.7 percentage point increase in turnout (35% relative to the mean ; $p < 0.01$). By contrast, I fail to find an effect among uncontested elections.

To investigate these pattern further, I leverage richer electoral returns data that are available for elections after 2014. These data allow me to not only observe the number of votes cast for each candidate, but also the incidence of undervotes. Undervotes occur when voters submit a ballot but abstain from the school board contest, a common pattern in low-salience elections where many voters are drawn by higher-profile, up-ballot races. If partisan labels reduce information costs, they should not only increase overall turnout but also decrease the incidence of undervoting among those who already participate.

I estimate a small and statistically insignificant decrease in the undervote rate overall in Columns 5 and 6. However, this masks interesting heterogeneity. In Columns 7 and 8, I find that the undervote rate drops by 14.2 - 14.6 percentage points ($p < 0.01$), a decrease of approximately 80% relative to the control mean. On the other hand, the undervote rate in uncontested elections increases by 5.0-6.0 percentage points. These results are suggestive of dynamics often associated with affective polarization, whereby partisan identity influences not only positive support for co-partisans but

also abstention in races lacking meaningful choice.

5.3 Overall Effects of Partisan Elections on Election Outcomes

5.3.1 Party Vote Shares and Affiliations of Elected Candidates

Having established that partisan elections polarize voting behavior in both Democratic- and Republican-leaning areas, I now turn to the overall effects of the reform. Symmetric responses need not yield symmetric outcomes—while Republican candidates gain in Republican-leaning districts and Democratic candidates gain in Democratic-leaning districts, the aggregate consequences hinge on the partisan composition of the districts subject to reform. Figure 8 overlays the estimated treatment effects from Figure 5 with the density of treated precincts, illustrating that reforms were disproportionately concentrated in Republican-leaning areas. This skew in treatment geography implies that the aggregate effect of partisan elections is to advantage Republicans overall.

Table 8 and Figure 9 show that the introduction of partisan school board elections reshaped both the distribution of votes across parties and the partisan composition of elected candidates. As reported in Column 1 of Table 8, candidates who are registered Republicans gained about 20.8 percentage points ($p < 0.01$) in vote share, relative to a pre-reform mean of 38.8%. This effect corresponds to a more than 53.5% increase in their average vote share. By contrast, in Column 2 I find that Democrat affiliated candidates' only experience a small and insignificant decrease of 1.2 percentage points in vote share relative to their baseline mean of 36.0%. As seen in Column 3, unaffiliated candidates experienced a large decline of 16.2 percentage points ($p < 0.01$) relative to a baseline of 13.6%, reducing their average vote share to near zero. This result is consistent with the much higher barriers to unaffiliated candidates running in partisan elections, candidates are typically required to be registered with the party under which they run. The event-study estimates I present in Figure 9 corroborate these findings: Republican gains and unaffiliated losses emerge immediately following the introduction of partisan elections and persist for the duration of the event window I estimate. One might be concerned that these patterns simply reflect pre-existing partisan trends in treated school boards. Reassuringly, I find no evidence of differential pre-trends in the years leading up to the reform, suggesting that the results are not driven by selection.

The effects of partisan elections on the composition of elected candidates are even starker than those on vote shares. Because school board elections fill a limited number of seats by plurality rather than proportional allocation, small changes in aggregate vote shares can be amplified into larger changes in representation. As reported in Column 4, Republicans' share of elected candidates increased by 27.9 percentage points ($p < 0.01$) — a 70.9% increase relative to the baseline mean of 39.2%. Much of this gain reflects Republican candidates absorbing support that previously went to unaffiliated candidates. While Democrats did not face a large decrease in vote share, they do experience a reduction in seat share. Under partisan elections, the share of elected school board members affiliated with the Democratic Party decreases by 10.9 percentage points ($p < 0.05$) relative to a control mean of 38.1%. In Column 6 I find that Unaffiliated candidates saw their representation fall by 16.7 percentage points ($p < 0.01$), effectively eliminating them from elected positions. The event-study estimates in Figure 9 corroborate these findings: Republicans' gains and the corresponding losses for Democrat and Unaffiliated candidates emerge immediately after the reform and persist over time, with no evidence of differential pre-trends.

5.3.2 Professional Background of Elected Candidates

In Section 5.1.3 I document that partisan elections affect the professional backgrounds of candidates who chose to run for school boards. How does this differential entry, paired with greater co-partisan voting, affect the characteristics of candidates who are ultimately elected to serve on school boards?

I begin by documenting the effects of partisan elections on representation of incumbents — those with previous experience serving on boards — in Table 9 and Figure 10a. I find that following the introduction of partisan school board elections the share of elected members who have previous experience serving on boards falls by 11.8 percentage points, a sizeable decrease of 26.2% relative to the control mean ($p < 0.05$). As seen in Figure 10a, this decrease is short-lived, with the effect concentrated in the first two election cycles following the reform.[23] Dissagregating effects by partisan lean of the electorate shows that incumbent representation falls for members who's partisan affiliation does not match the majority and is amplified for members affiliated with the majority.

[23] These dynamics are consistent with incumbent advantage reemerging once partisanship of school boards is realigned to match that of the majority in the electorate.

I find similar effects for principals in Table 10 and Figure 10b, whose representation among elected school board members falls 8.7 percentage points, a 58.2 % reduction relative to the control mean ($p < 0.01$). These effects are driven by a reduction in elected Democrat principals in Republican leaning districts and Unaffiliated principals, who are less represented among winners across the three terciles or partisan lean of the electorate.

Taken together, these results indicate that partisan reforms do not merely alter candidate entry, but also transform the composition of elected officials. Incumbency and professional expertise lose their cross-partisan appeal, with electoral viability increasingly conditioned on partisan alignment. In this way, partisan elections reduce the representation of experienced and professionally trained candidates on school boards, potentially shifting governance toward officials selected primarily for their partisan identity.

6 Conclusion

Democracies rely on elections not only to aggregate voter preferences but also to attract candidates with the skills and knowledge necessary to govern. Electoral institutions play a central role in shaping this selection process, influencing who chooses to run, which candidates succeed, and ultimately the quality of representation. In this paper, I find that partisan electoral institutions reshape the functioning of local democracy, drawing on North Carolina school boards as a case study. Leveraging the staggered roll out of partisan reforms, I document that that the introduction of party labels transform both the supply of candidates and the behaviour of voters. On one hand, partisan elections lower information costs, mobilizing turnout while polarizing voter choice along party lines. At the same time, they discourage entry by minority-party candidates, stifling electoral competition and entrenching party dominance. These reforms also result in fewer candidates with professional experience running and being elected. My findings reveal a central tradeoff: partisan institutions can enhance participation and clarify ideological choices, but they do so at the cost of weakening competition and narrowing the quality of representation in local governance.

These reforms also make school board elections resemble state and national contests, where partisan identity is the dominant organizing principle. This parallel raises a broader question for

future research: to what extent do partisan institutions themselves contribute to the polarization, reduced competition, and selection challenges observed in higher-level politics? At the same time, my findings underscore the importance of understanding the governance consequences of such reforms locally. Local political institutions are central to allocating resources, managing personnel, and setting priorities, and if partisan institutions narrow the pipeline of experienced candidates and entrench one-party dominance, they may weaken the capacity to govern effectively. As more jurisdictions across the United States consider adopting partisan elections for local offices, evaluating how these institutional changes affect not only who is elected but also how they govern remains an important task for future research.

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Tables and Figures

6.1 Tables

Table 1: Descriptive Statistic — Characteristics of School Board Elections

	(1) Always Treated	(2) Switcher	(3) Never Treated	(4) S - NT
Number of Registered Voters	18,579.1	30,816.7	34,202.2	-3385.4
	(33,480.6)	(38,400.6)	(48,971.9)	(7,827.9)
Number of Candidates	1.419	1.791	1.942	-0.151
	(0.656)	(0.840)	(1.039)	(0.094)
Uncontested Elections (0/1)	0.601	0.411	0.356	0.055
	(0.491)	(0.493)	(0.479)	(0.053)
Number of Principal Candidates	0.251	0.303	0.347	-0.044
	(0.552)	(0.588)	(0.648)	(0.059)
Number of Incumbent Candidates	0.812	0.760	0.765	-0.005
	(0.751)	(0.802)	(0.813)	(0.102)
Rep. Voter Registration Share	0.308	0.516	0.379	0.137***
	(0.162)	(0.118)	(0.178)	(0.026)
Vote Share:				
— Republican	0.248	0.388	0.246	0.142***
	(0.329)	(0.382)	(0.336)	(0.040)
— Democrat	0.592	0.360	0.491	-0.131***
	(0.399)	(0.393)	(0.392)	(0.038)
— Unaffiliated	0.021	0.136	0.125	0.012
	(0.103)	(0.272)	(0.251)	(0.023)
Share of Elected Members:				
— Republican	0.295	0.393	0.248	0.145***
	(0.432)	(0.466)	(0.413)	(0.047)
— Democrat	0.547	0.381	0.511	-0.131***
	(0.479)	(0.466)	(0.474)	(0.046)
— Unaffiliated	0.019	0.125	0.119	0.007
	(0.130)	(0.313)	(0.305)	(0.026)
Number of Elections	243	419	1099	1518

Notes: This table reports means and standard deviations (in parentheses) of school board election characteristics across three groups of districts. Column 1 reports statistics in "Always Treated" school boards, where partisan elections were introduced prior to the study period. Column 2 reports statistics in "Switcher' school boards, where partisan elections were introduced during the study period. Observations in Column 2 are restricted to elections prior to reforms, when the elections were still held in a nonpartisan format. Column 3 reports statistics for school boards that only nonpartisan elections. Column 4 reports the mean difference between switcher and never-treated districts, with standard errors in parentheses, clustered at the school board level.
$^{*}p < 0.10$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{***}p < 0.01$.

Table 2: Effect of Partisan Elections on the Number of Candidates Running for School Board

	(1) Num. of Candidates	(2) Num. of Candidates	(3) Num. of Republican Candidates	(4) Num. of Democrat Candidates	(5) Num. of Unaffiliated Candidates
Average Treatment Effect	-0.523***				
	(0.0877)				
CATE in Tercile 1 of Republican Voter Reg. Share		-0.532***	-0.320***	0.243***	-0.256***
		(0.0675)	(0.0847)	(0.0624)	(0.0262)
CATE in Tercile 2 of Republican Voter Reg. Share		-0.329***	0.159**	-0.0807	-0.344***
		(0.104)	(0.0648)	(0.0603)	(0.0452)
CATE in Tercile 3 of Republican Voter Reg. Share		-0.624***	-0.133	-0.0917*	-0.330***
		(0.0891)	(0.0957)	(0.0485)	(0.0416)
School Board FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Control Mean of Dep. Var.	1.901				
Control Mean of Dep. Var. in Tercile 1		1.846	0.170	1.132	0.221
Control Mean of Dep. Var. in Tercile 2		1.890	0.620	0.793	0.271
Control Mean of Dep. Var. in Tercile 3		1.997	1.014	0.459	0.325
Observations	1,806	1,803	1,803	1,803	1,803

Notes: This table reports average treatment effects (ATE) and conditional average treatment effects (CATEs) of partisan school board elections on the number of candidates running in school board elections, estimated by terciles of Republican voter registration share. Candidate party affiliation is measured using official voter registration records linked to candidate filings. Terciles are defined using the baseline distribution of Republican voter registration across contests. Estimates are obtained using the imputation-based difference-in-differences estimator proposed by Borusyak et al. (2024). Observations are at the contest level. All specifications include school board and year fixed effects. Standard errors, clustered at the school board level, are reported in parentheses.
$^{*}p < 0.10$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{***}p < 0.01$.

Table 3: Effect of Partisan Elections on the Share of Uncontested Candidates in School Board Contests

	(1) Uncontested	(2) Uncontested	(3) Uncontested Republican	(4) Uncontested Democrat	(5) Uncontested Unaffiliated
Average Treatment Effect	0.192***				
	(0.0532)				
CATE in Tercile 1 of Republican Voter Reg. Share		0.321***	-0.0804***	0.572***	-0.0600***
		(0.0361)	(0.0184)	(0.0324)	(0.00992)
CATE in Tercile 2 of Republican Voter Reg. Share		0.0399	0.175***	-0.0752**	-0.0577***
		(0.0553)	(0.0444)	(0.0366)	(0.0125)
CATE in Tercile 3 of Republican Voter Reg. Share		0.249***	0.333***	-0.0252	-0.0627***
		(0.0503)	(0.0338)	(0.0354)	(0.0198)
School Board FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Control Mean of Dep. Var.	0.370				
Control Mean of Dep. Var. in Tercile 1		0.419	0.011	0.344	0.023
Control Mean of Dep. Var. in Tercile 2		0.394	0.104	0.199	0.053
Control Mean of Dep. Var. in Tercile 3		0.276	0.111	0.069	0.065
Observations	1,806	1,803	1,797	1,797	1,797

Notes: This table reports average treatment effects (ATE) and conditional average treatment effects (CATEs) of partisan school board elections on the share of uncontested candidates in school board contests, estimated by terciles of Republican voter registration share. Columns 1-2 report outcomes for any uncontested contest, while columns 3-5 report uncontested contests by party affiliation of the uncontested candidate. Candidate party affiliation is measured using official voter registration records linked to candidate filings. Terciles are defined using the baseline distribution of Republican voter registration across contests. Estimates are obtained using the imputation-based difference-in-differences estimator proposed by Borusyak et al. (2024). Observations are at the contest level. All specifications include school board and year fixed effects. Standard errors, clustered at the school board level, are reported in parentheses.
$^{*}p < 0.10$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{***}p < 0.01$.

Table 4: Effects of Partisan Elections on Entry of Incumbent Candidates

	(1) Num. of Incumbent Candidates	(2) Num. of Incumbent Candidates	(3) Num. of Incumbent Republican Candidates	(4) Num. of Incumbent Democrat Candidates	(5) Num. of Incumbent Unaffiliated Candidates
Average Treatment Effect	-0.200**				
	(0.0882)				
CATE in Tercile 1 of Republican Voter Reg. Share		0.00155	0.0166	0.0720	-0.0838***
		(0.0587)	(0.0405)	(0.0458)	(0.0189)
CATE in Tercile 2 of Republican Voter Reg. Share		-0.0993	0.123	-0.104	-0.116***
		(0.128)	(0.0784)	(0.118)	(0.0317)
CATE in Tercile 3 of Republican Voter Reg. Share		-0.271**	0.0427	-0.163**	-0.144***
		(0.107)	(0.102)	(0.0723)	(0.0385)
School Board FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Control Mean of Dep. Var.	0.765				
Control Mean of Dep. Var. in Tercile 1		0.772	0.028	0.670	0.069
Control Mean of Dep. Var. in Tercile 2		0.673	0.241	0.334	0.098
Control Mean of Dep. Var. in Tercile 3		0.899	0.542	0.191	0.160
Observations	1,455	1,452	1,452	1,452	1,452

Notes: This table reports average treatment effects (ATE) and conditional average treatment effects (CATEs) of partisan school board elections on the number of incumbent candidates running in school board contests, estimated by terciles of Republican voter registration share. Columns 1-2 report outcomes for all incumbents, while columns 3-5 report effects on the number of incumbents by party affiliation. Candidate party affiliation is measured using official voter registration records linked to candidate filings. Terciles are defined using the baseline distribution of Republican voter registration across contests. Estimates are obtained using the imputation-based difference-in-differences estimator proposed by Borusyak et al. (2024). Observations are at the contest level. All specifications include school board and year fixed effects. Standard errors, clustered at the school board level, are reported in parentheses.
$^{*}p < 0.10$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{***}p < 0.01$.

Table 5: Effects of Partisan Elections on Entry of Principal Candidates

	(1) Num. of Principal Candidates	(2) Num. of Principal Candidates	(3) Num. of Republican Principal Candidates	(4) Num. of Democrat Principal Candidates	(5) Num. of Unaffiliated Principal Candidates
Average Treatment Effect	-0.133***				
	(0.0439)				
CATE in Tercile 1 of Republican Voter Reg. Share		0.100**	0.0373**	0.100**	-0.0343***
		(0.0458)	(0.0160)	(0.0436)	(0.00945)
CATE in Tercile 2 of Republican Voter Reg. Share		-0.158***	-0.0423	-0.0587	-0.0556***
		(0.0594)	(0.0456)	(0.0682)	(0.0160)
CATE in Tercile 3 of Republican Voter Reg. Share		-0.153***	-0.0180	-0.0812**	-0.0512***
		(0.0498)	(0.0489)	(0.0409)	(0.0161)
School Board FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Control Mean of Dep. Var.	0.335				
Control Mean of Dep. Var. in Tercile 1		0.371	0.012	0.319	0.034
Control Mean of Dep. Var. in Tercile 2		0.297	0.101	0.174	0.021
Control Mean of Dep. Var. in Tercile 3		0.353	0.181	0.099	0.071
Observations	1,806	1,803	1,803	1,803	1,803

Notes: This table reports average treatment effects (ATE) and conditional average treatment effects (CATEs) of partisan school board elections on the number of licensed principal candidates running in school board contests, estimated by terciles of Republican voter registration share. Columns 1-2 report outcomes for all principals, while columns 3-5 report effects on the number of principals by party affiliation. Candidate party affiliation is measured using official voter registration records linked to candidate filings. Terciles are defined using the baseline distribution of Republican voter registration across contests. Estimates are obtained using the imputation-based difference-in-differences estimator proposed by Borusyak et al. (2024). Observations are at the contest level. All specifications include school board and year fixed effects. Standard errors, clustered at the school board level, are reported in parentheses.
$^{*}p < 0.10$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{***}p < 0.01$.

Table 6: Effects of Partisan Elections on Geographic Polarization of Voting Patterns

	All Elections			Contested Elections		
	(1) Republican Candidates' Vote Share	(2) Democrat Candidates' Vote Share	(3) Unaffiliated Candidates' Vote Share	(4) Republican Candidates' Vote Share	(5) Democrat Candidates' Vote Share	(6) Unaffiliated Candidates' Vote Share
CATE in Tercile 1 of Republican Voter Reg. Share	-0.0674*	0.200***	-0.132***	-0.0759*	0.108***	-0.120***
	(0.0400)	(0.0448)	(0.0175)	(0.0408)	(0.0372)	(0.0145)
CATE in Tercile 2 of Republican Voter Reg. Share	0.241***	-0.0770**	-0.146***	0.121***	-0.0208	-0.117***
	(0.0347)	(0.0364)	(0.0212)	(0.0353)	(0.0353)	(0.0169)
CATE in Tercile 3 of Republican Voter Reg. Share	0.253***	-0.0872**	-0.147***	0.155***	-0.0581	-0.124***
	(0.0344)	(0.0361)	(0.0205)	(0.0365)	(0.0367)	(0.0158)
School Board FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Control Mean of Dep. Var. in Tercile 1	0.144	0.623	0.096	0.164	0.586	0.109
Control Mean of Dep. Var. in Tercile 2	0.348	0.424	0.119	0.395	0.382	0.118
Control Mean of Dep. Var. in Tercile 3	0.496	0.257	0.125	0.534	0.242	0.123
Observations	36,558	36,558	36,558	25,604	25,604	25,604

Notes: This table reports conditional average treatment effects (CATEs) of partisan school board elections on candidate vote shares, estimated by terciles of Republican voter registration share. Candidate party affiliation is measured using official voter registration records linked to candidate filings. Terciles are defined using the baseline distribution of Republican voter registration across precincts. Estimates are obtained using the imputation-based difference-in-differences estimator proposed by Borusyak et al. (2024). Observations are at the precinct–contest level. Columns 1–3 report results for the full sample of elections, while Columns 4–6 restrict the sample to contests in which the number of candidates exceeds the number of available seats (contested elections). All specifications include school board and year fixed effects. Standard errors, clustered at the school board level, are reported in parentheses.
$^{*}p < 0.10$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{***}p < 0.01$.

Table 7: Effects of Partisan Elections on Voter Participation

	(1) Turnout Rate	(2) Turnout Rate	(3) Turnout Rate	(4) Turnout Rate	(5) Undervote Rate	(6) Undervote Rate	(7) Undervote Rate	(8) Undervote Rate
Average Treatment Effect	0.167***	0.0834***			-0.0295	-0.0413		
	(0.0244)	(0.0171)			(0.0248)	(0.0267)		
CATE in Contested Elections			0.241***	0.157***			-0.142***	-0.146***
			(0.0231)	(0.0166)			(0.0207)	(0.0215)
CATE in Uncontested Elections			0.0885***	0.0138			0.0601***	0.0499***
			(0.0207)	(0.0121)			(0.0179)	(0.0192)
School Board FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Excl. Timing Shifters	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Control Mean of Dep. Var.	0.417	0.430			0.215	0.217		
Control Mean of Dep. Var. in Contested Elections			0.430	0.444			0.175	0.177
Control Mean of Dep. Var. in Uncontested Elections			0.394	0.406			0.286	0.290
Observations	1,757	1,541	1,757	1,541	1,185	1,131	1,185	1,131

Notes: This table reports estimated treatment effects of partisan school board elections on turnout and undervote rates. Turnout rate is defined as the number of votes cast in an elections as a share of eligible voters. In multi-seat elections, the denominator is adjusted to reflect the total potential number of votes that could be cast. Undervote rate is defined as the share of cast ballots where no vote is recorded in the school board contest. Columns 4 - 8 restrict the sample to elections after 2014, when undervote data is available. Columns 2, 4, 6, and 8 exclude school boards which transitioned from off-cycle to on-cycle elections as part of the reform. Conditional average treatment effects for contested and uncontested elections are reported in Columns 3-4 and 7-8. An election is considered contested if the number of candidates exceeds the number of available seats. All specifications include school board and year fixed effects. Standard errors, clustered at the school board level, are reported in parentheses.
$^{*}p < 0.10$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{***}p < 0.01$.

Table 8: Effects of Partisan Elections on Electoral Success of Candidates by Partisan Afflilation

	Vote Share			Share Elected		
	(1) Republican	(2) Democrat	(3) Unaffiliated	(4) Republican	(5) Democrat	(6) Unaffiliated
Partisan Election × Post	0.208***	-0.0124	-0.162***	0.279***	-0.109**	-0.167***
	(0.0371)	(0.0346)	(0.0206)	(0.0467)	(0.0454)	(0.0245)
School Board FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Control Mean of Dep. Variable	0.388	0.360	0.136	0.393	0.381	0.125
Observations	1806	1806	1806	1806	1806	1806

Notes: This table reports the effects of partisan school board elections on the electoral success of candidates, measured by vote share (Columns 1–3) and the share of elected school board members (Columns 4–6). Outcomes are disaggregated by candidate party affiliation. Candidate party affiliation is measured using official voter registration records linked to candidate filings. Estimates are obtained using the imputation-based difference-in-differences estimator proposed by Borusyak et al. (2024). Observations are at the contest level. All specifications include school board and year fixed effects. Standard errors, clustered at the school board level, are reported in parentheses. $^{*}p < 0.10$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{***}p < 0.01$.

Table 9: Effects of Partisan Elections on the Share of Elected School Board Members who are Incumbents

	(1) Share Incumbent	(2) Share Incumbent	(3) Share Incumbent Republican	(4) Share Incumbent Democrat	(5) Share Incumbent Unaffiliated
Average Treatment Effect	-0.118**				
	(0.0555)				
CATE in Tercile 1 of Republican Voter Reg. Share		-0.0245	-0.0431*	0.0643	-0.0429***
		(0.0493)	(0.0239)	(0.0517)	(0.0122)
CATE in Tercile 2 of Republican Voter Reg. Share		-0.180***	0.0755	-0.196***	-0.0572***
		(0.0632)	(0.0670)	(0.0618)	(0.0184)
CATE in Tercile 3 of Republican Voter Reg. Share		-0.0979	0.136***	-0.158***	-0.0699***
		(0.0607)	(0.0500)	(0.0397)	(0.0210)
School Board FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Control Mean of Dep. Var.	0.450				
Control Mean of Dep. Var. in Tercile 1		0.440	0.017	0.390	0.030
Control Mean of Dep. Var. in Tercile 2		0.477	0.151	0.254	0.072
Control Mean of Dep. Var. in Tercile 3		0.444	0.261	0.106	0.074
Observations	1,455	1,452	1,452	1,452	1,452

Notes: This table reports average treatment effects (ATE) and conditional average treatment effects (CATEs) of partisan school board elections on the share of elected school board members who are incumbents, estimated by terciles of Republican voter registration share. Columns 1-2 report outcomes for all incumbents, while columns 3-5 report effects on the share of elected school board who are incumbents by party affiliation. Candidate party affiliation is measured using official voter registration records linked to candidate filings. Terciles are defined using the baseline distribution of Republican voter registration across contests. Estimates are obtained using the imputation-based difference-in-differences estimator proposed by Borusyak et al. (2024). Observations are at the contest level. All specifications include school board and year fixed effects. Standard errors, clustered at the school board level, are reported in parentheses.
$^{*}p < 0.10$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{***}p < 0.01$.

Table 10: Effects of Partisan Elections on the Share of Elected School Board Members who are Licensed Principals

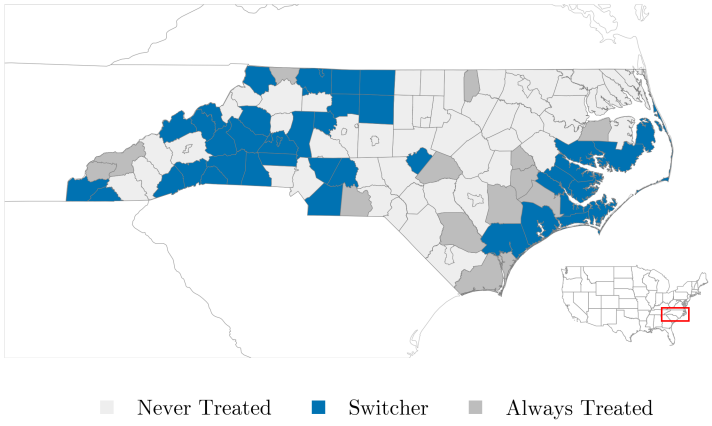
	(1) Share Principal	(2) Share Principal	(3) Share Republican Principal	(4) Share Democrat Principal	(5) Share Unaffiliated Principal
Average Treatment Effect	-0.0868***				
	(0.0275)				
CATE in Tercile 1 of Republican Voter Reg. Share		0.0482	-0.00738	0.0718*	-0.0160***
		(0.0385)	(0.00806)	(0.0378)	(0.00567)
CATE in Tercile 2 of Republican Voter Reg. Share		-0.0865**	-0.0121	-0.0441*	-0.0306***
		(0.0385)	(0.0261)	(0.0232)	(0.0112)
CATE in Tercile 3 of Republican Voter Reg. Share		-0.104***	-0.000158	-0.0737**	-0.0307***
		(0.0269)	(0.0330)	(0.0289)	(0.0111)
School Board FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Control Mean of Dep. Var.	0.149				
Control Mean of Dep. Var. in Tercile 1		0.158	0.001	0.154	0.003
Control Mean of Dep. Var. in Tercile 2		0.160	0.047	0.100	0.011
Control Mean of Dep. Var. in Tercile 3		0.129	0.074	0.035	0.019
Observations	1,806	1,803	1,803	1,803	1,803

Notes: This table reports average treatment effects (ATE) and conditional average treatment effects (CATEs) of partisan school board elections on the share of elected school board members who are licensed principals, estimated by terciles of Republican voter registration share. Columns 1-2 report outcomes for all principals, while columns 3-5 report effects on the number of principals by party affiliation. Candidate party affiliation is measured using official voter registration records linked to candidate filings. Terciles are defined using the baseline distribution of Republican voter registration across contests. Estimates are obtained using the imputation-based difference-in-differences estimator proposed by Borusyak et al. (2024). Observations are at the contest level. All specifications include school board and year fixed effects. Standard errors, clustered at the school board level, are reported in parentheses.
$^{*}p < 0.10$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{***}p < 0.01$.

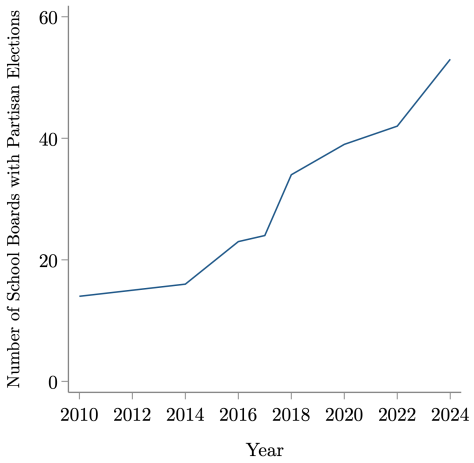
6.2 Figures

Figure 1: Expansion of Partisan School Board Elections in North Carolina

(a) Geographic Expansion

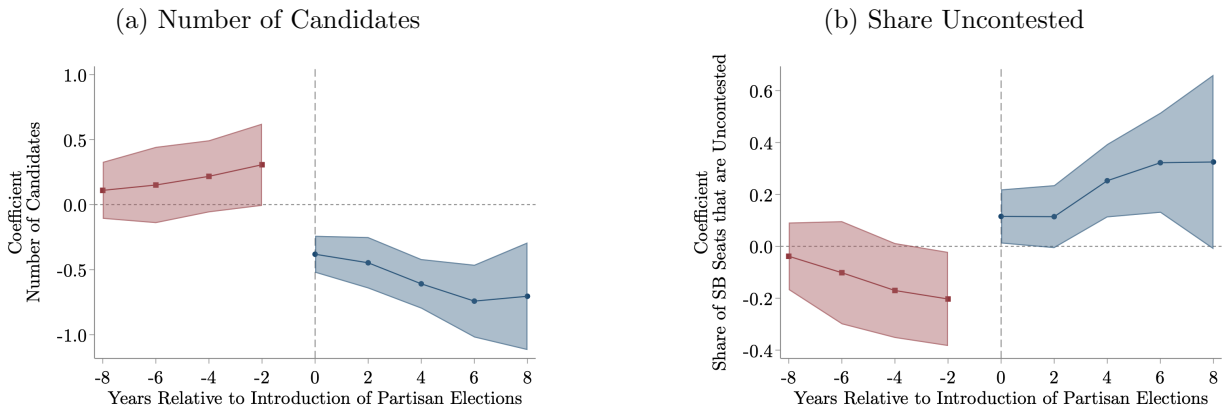


(b) Cumulative Number of Partisan School Boards



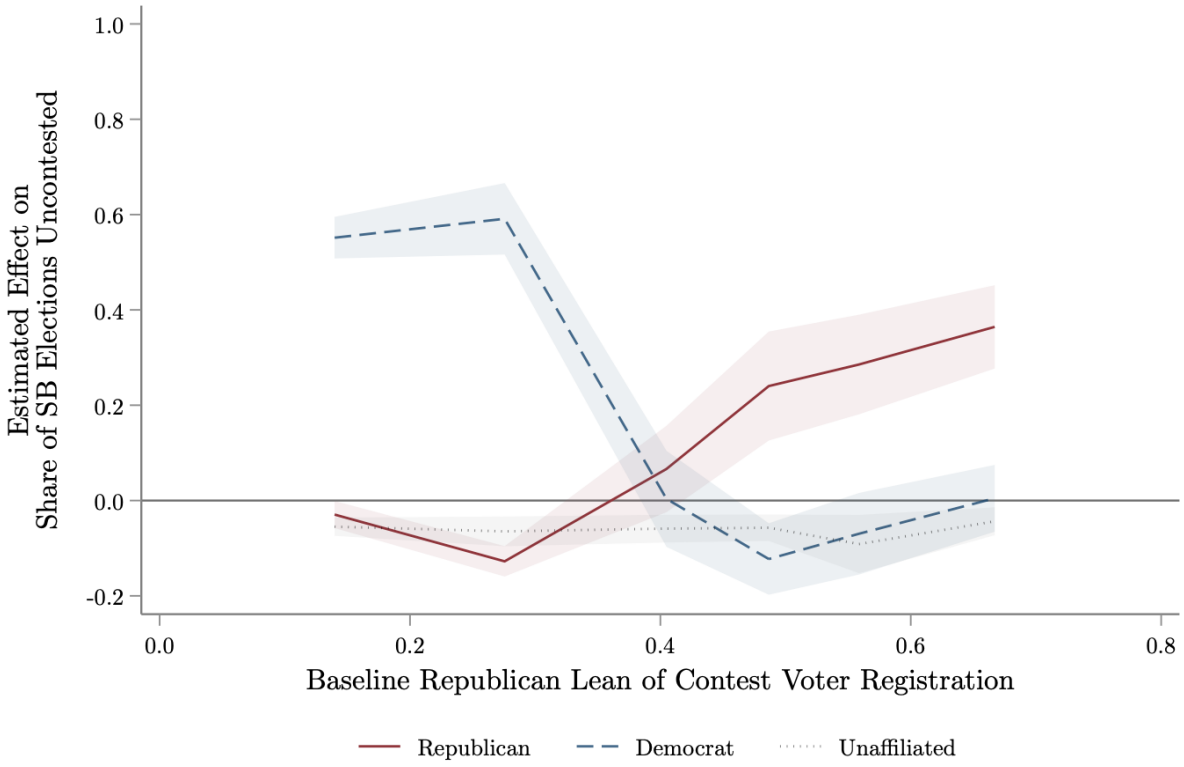
Note: Panel (a) shows local education agencies in North Carolina by treatment status: light gray indicates school boards that have never adopted partisan elections, dark gray indicates school boards with partisan elections prior to the study period ("always treated"), and blue indicates school boards that switched to partisan elections during the study period. Panel (b) plots the cumulative number of school boards with partisan elections from 2010 through 2024.

Figure 2: Dynamic Effects of Partisan Elections on Candidate Entry and Competition in School Board Elections



Notes: This figure plots event–study estimates of the effects of partisan school board elections on candidate entry and competition. Panel (a) reports coefficients for the number of candidates per contest, while Panel (b) reports coefficients for the share of school board (SB) seats that are uncontested. Estimates are obtained using the imputation-based difference-in-differences estimator proposed by Borusyak et al. (2024), with school board and year fixed effects. The unit of observation is the school board contest. Shaded areas denote 95 percent confidence intervals, with standard errors clustered at the school board level.

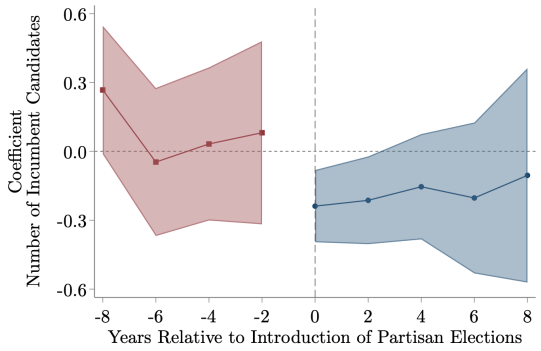
Figure 3: Heterogeneous Effects of Partisan Elections on Share of Uncontested Races Across Contest Partisanship



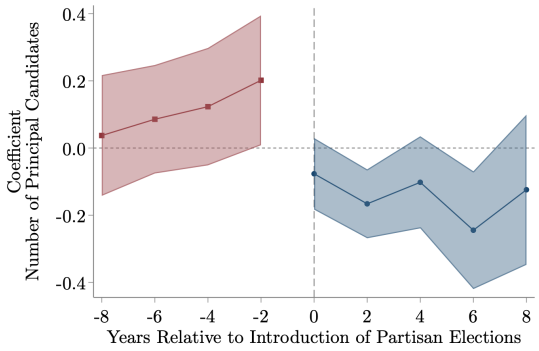
*Note:*This figure plots conditional average treatment effects (CATEs) of introducing partisan school board elections on the share of school board elections that are uncontested, across the distribution of contest partisanship. The horizontal axis is the baseline Republican share of voter registration in the contest; the vertical axis is the estimated effect on the share of uncontested races. The solid, dashed, and dotted lines correspond to Republican, Democratic, and unaffiliated candidates who are uncontested, respectively; shaded regions denote 95 percent confidence intervals where shown. Estimates are obtained using the imputation-based difference-in-differences estimator of Borusyak et al. (2024). Standard errors are clustered at the school board level.

Figure 4: Dynamic Effects of Partisan Elections on Professional Background of Candidates

(a) Incumbent Candidates

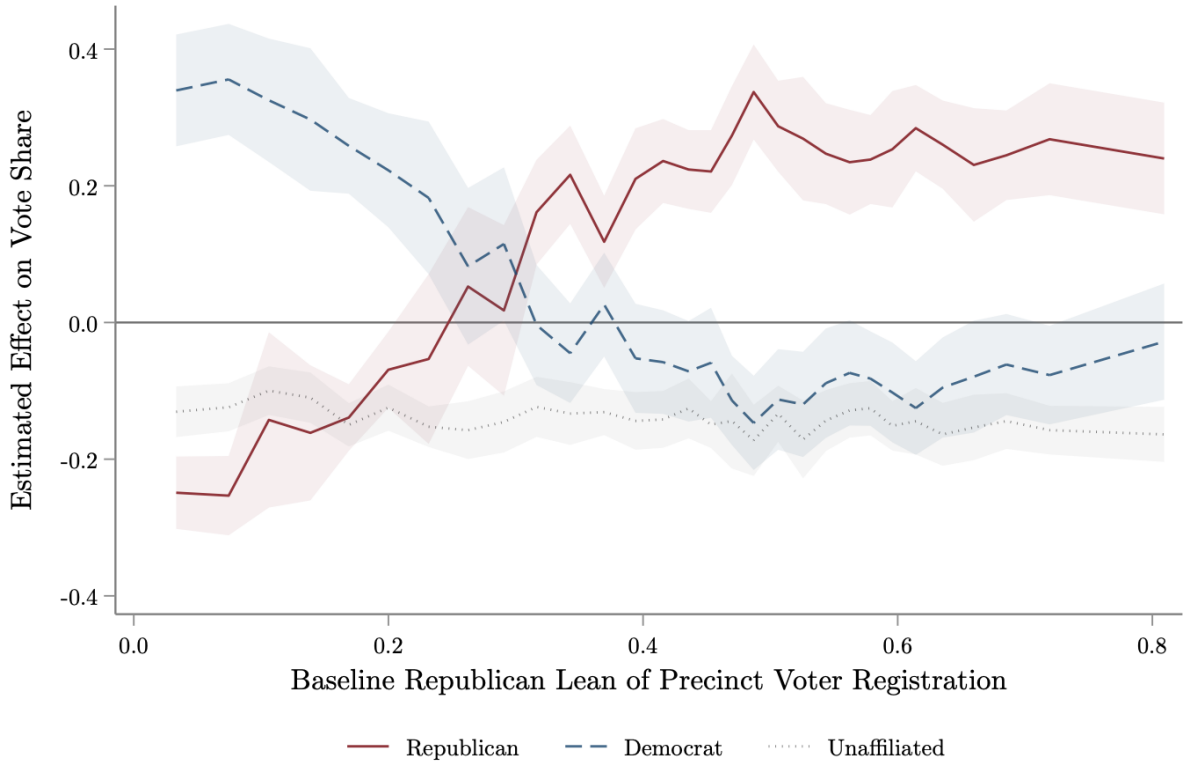


(b) Number of Principal Candidates



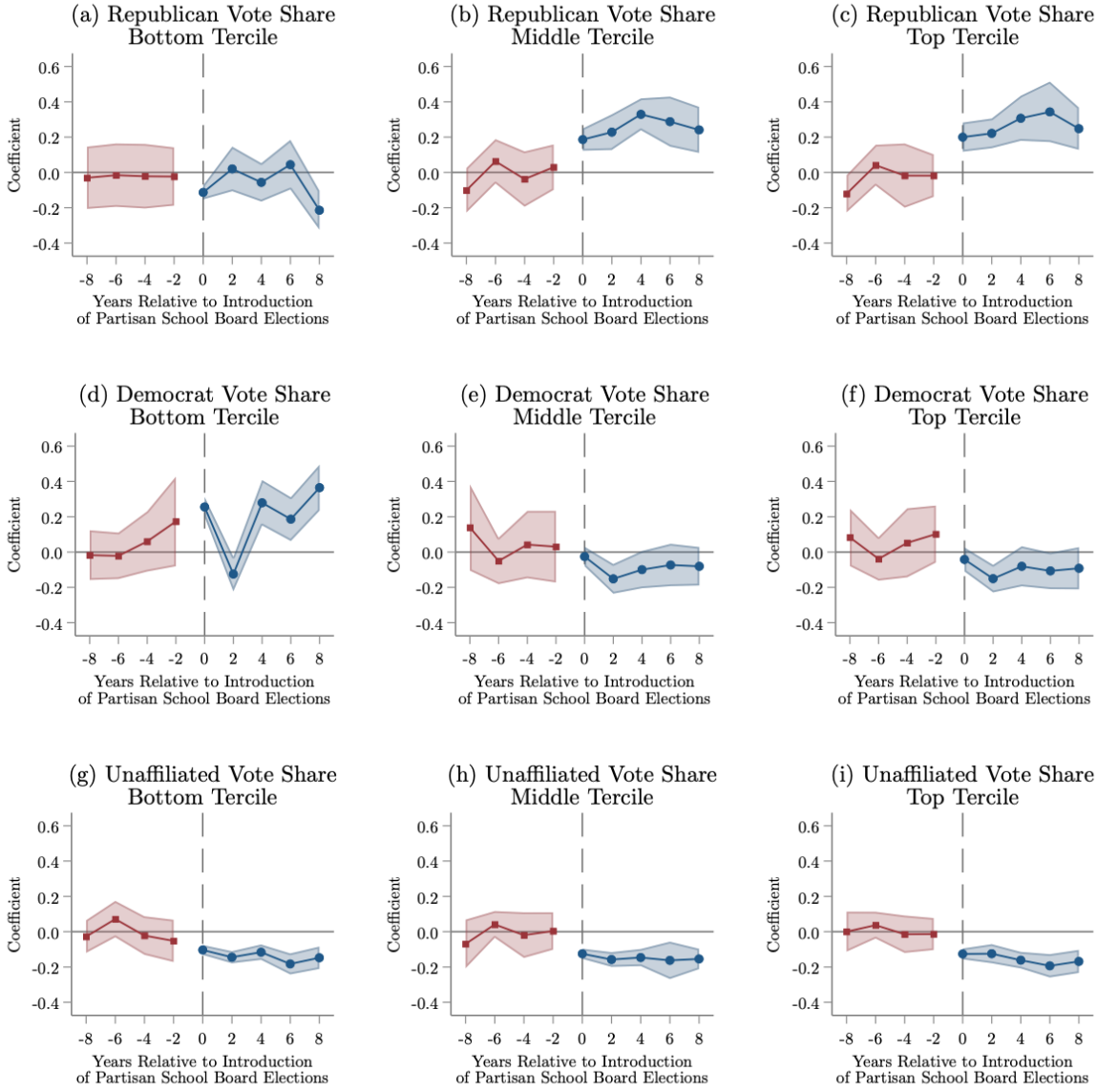
Notes: This figure plots event–study estimates of the effects of partisan school board elections on the professional background of candidates who compete in school board elections . Panel (a) reports coefficients for the number of incumbent candidates per contest, while Panel (b) reports coefficients for the number of licensed principals running per contest. Estimates are obtained using the imputation-based difference-in-differences estimator proposed by Borusyak et al. (2024), with school board and year fixed effects. The unit of observation is the school board contest. Shaded areas denote 95 percent confidence intervals, with standard errors clustered at the school board level.

Figure 5: Heterogeneous Effects of Partisan Elections on Candidate Vote Shares Across Precinct Partisanship



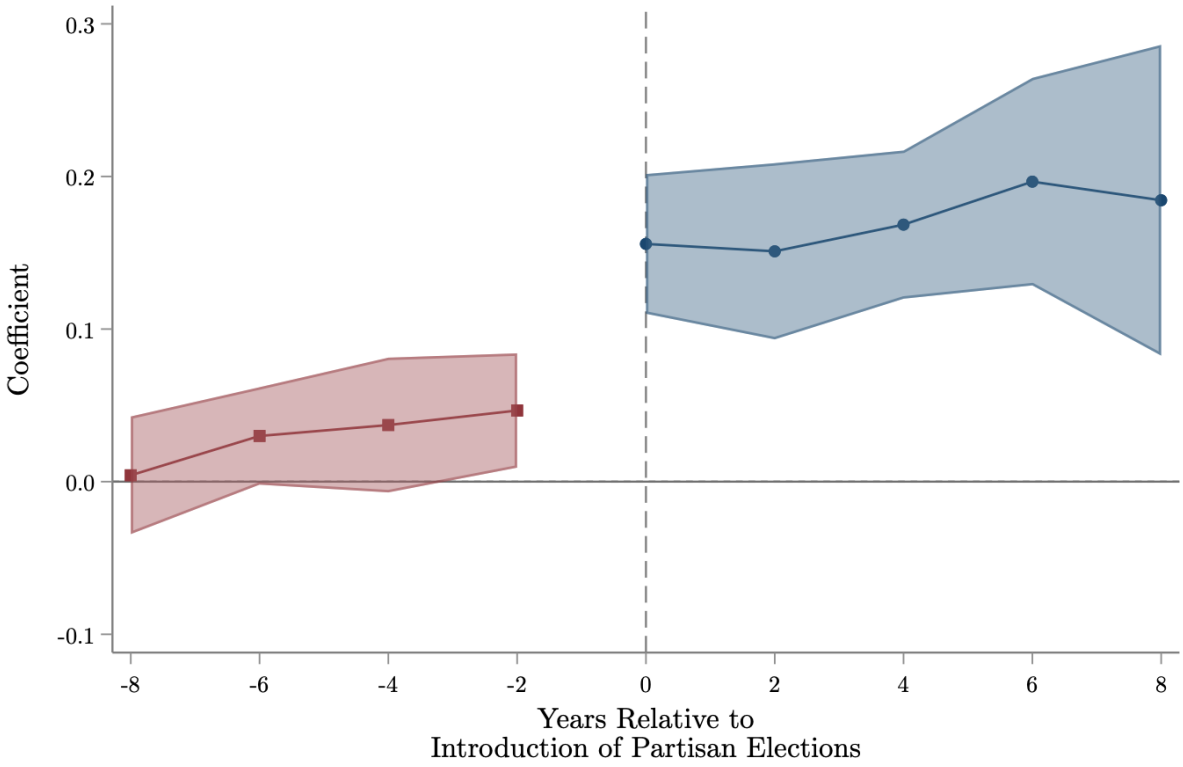
Note: This figure plots conditional average treatment effects (CATEs) of introducing partisan school board elections on candidates' vote shares across the distribution of precinct partisanship. The horizontal axis is the baseline Republican share of voter registration in the precinct; the vertical axis is the estimated effect on vote share of candidates affiliated with a given party, as measured through linked voter registration. The solid, dashed, and dotted lines correspond to Republican, Democratic, and unaffiliated candidates, respectively; shaded regions denote 95% confidence intervals where shown. Estimates are obtained using the imputation-based difference-in-differences estimator of Borusyak et al. (2024). Standard errors are clustered at the school board level.

Figure 6: Dynamic Effects of Partisan Elections on Candidate Vote Shares, by Baseline Republican Registration Tercile



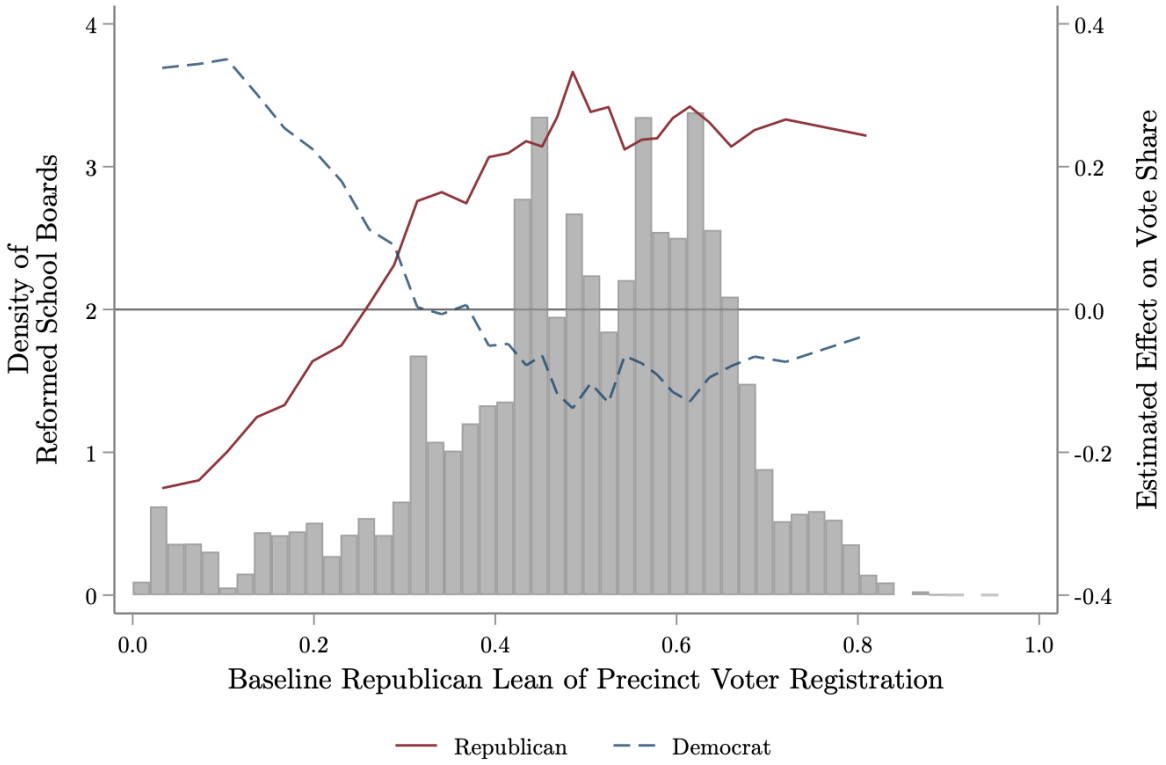
Note: This figure plots event–study estimates of the effect of introducing partisan school board elections on candidate vote shares, separately by terciles of baseline Republican voter registration share. Panels (a)–(c) report results for Republican candidates, panels (d)–(f) for Democratic candidates, and panels (g)–(i) for unaffiliated candidates, as measured by party affiliation in candidates' linked voter registration files. Dynamic treatment effects and pre-trends are estimated following the imputation–based difference-in-differences estimator proposed by Borusyak et al. (2024). All specifications include school board and year fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the school board level. The unit of observation is the precinct–contest. 95% confidence intervals are shown.

Figure 7: Dynamic Effects of Partisan Elections on Voter Turnout



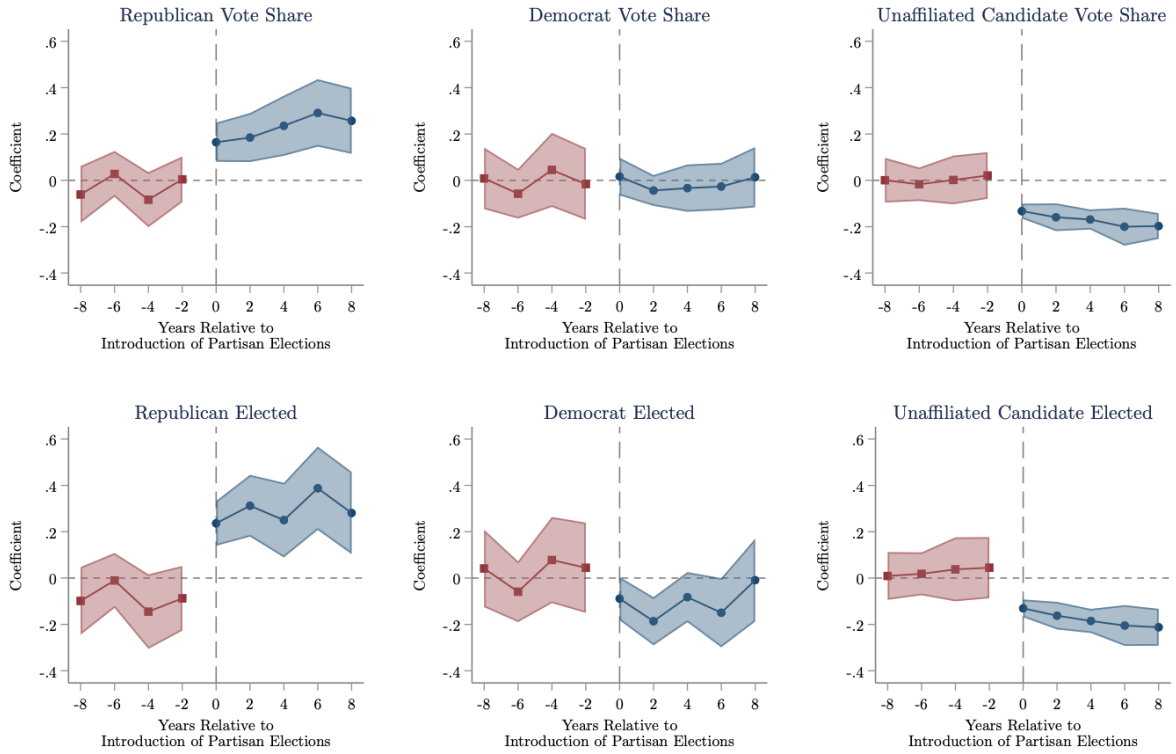
Note: This figure plots event–study estimates of the effect of introducing partisan school board elections on voter turnout. Dynamic treatment effects and pre-trends are estimated following the imputation–based difference-in-differences estimator proposed by Borusyak et al. (2024) and include school board and year fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the school board level. The unit of observation is the school board contest. 95% confidence intervals are shown.

Figure 8: Concentration of Partisan Election Reforms in Republican-Leaning Precincts



Note: This figure overlays the estimated effects from Figure 5 with the distribution of baseline partisan composition in reformed school boards. The solid red line plots the estimated effect of partisan elections on Republican vote share and the dashed blue line the effect on Democrat vote share, across precincts with varying baseline Republican share of registered voters in the precinct. Gray bars show the density of voters in reformed school boards across the distribution of baseline Republican registration. Estimates are obtained using the imputation-based difference-in-differences estimator of Borusyak et al. (2024), with school board and year fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the school board level.

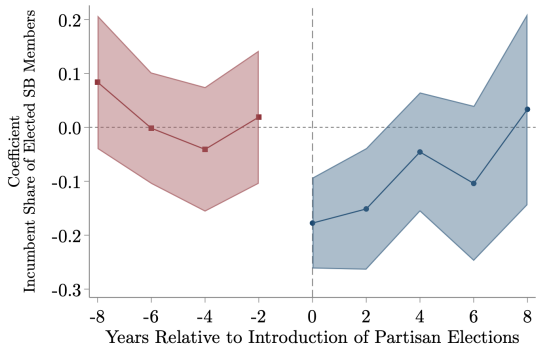
Figure 9: Dynamic Effects of Partisan Elections on Partisan Vote Shares and Elected Candidates



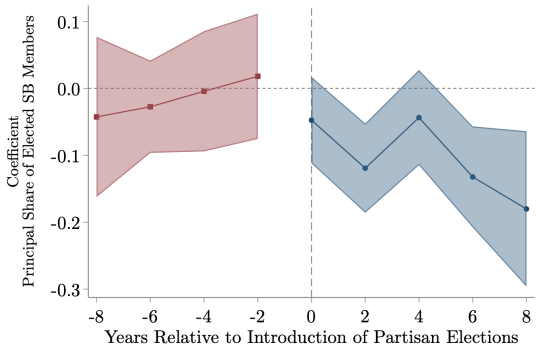
Note: This figure presents event–study estimates of the effects of partisan school board elections on election outcomes. Panels (a)–(c) show effects on the vote share received by Republican, Democrat, and unaffiliated candidates, respectively. Panels (d)–(f) report effects on the probability that a candidate from each group is elected. Estimates are obtained using the imputation-based difference-in-differences estimator of Borusyak et al. (2024), with school board and year fixed effects. The unit of observation is the school board contest. Shaded areas denote 95 percent confidence intervals, with standard errors clustered at the school board level.

Figure 10: Effects of Partisan Elections on Professional Background of Elected School Board Members

(a) Incumbent Candidates



(b) Number of Principal Candidates



*Notes:*This figure plots event–study estimates of the effects of partisan school board elections on the professional background of elected school board members. Panel (a) reports coefficients for the share of elected candidates who are incumbents, while Panel (b) reports coefficients for the share of elected candidates who arw licensed principals. Estimates are obtained using the imputation-based difference-in-differences estimator proposed by Borusyak et al. (2024), with school board and year fixed effects. The unit of observation is the school board contest. Shaded areas denote 95 percent confidence intervals, with standard errors clustered at the school board level.

A Appendix Tables and Figures

A.1 Tables

Table A1: Effects of Partisan Elections on Entry of Incumbent Candidates as Share of All Candidates

	(1) Share Incumbent Candidates	(2) Share Incumbent Candidates	(3) Share Incumbent Republican Candidates	(4) Share Incumbent Democrat Candidates	(5) Share Incumbent Unaffiliated Candidates
Average Treatment Effect	-0.0558				
	(0.0435)				
CATE in Tercile 1 of Republican Voter Reg. Share		0.131***	-0.0118	0.183***	-0.0380***
		(0.0428)	(0.0181)	(0.0422)	(0.00981)
CATE in Tercile 2 of Republican Voter Reg. Share		-0.109**	0.0563	-0.112**	-0.0518**
		(0.0512)	(0.0479)	(0.0523)	(0.0210)
CATE in Tercile 3 of Republican Voter Reg. Share		-0.0507	0.0853**	-0.0689**	-0.0624***
		(0.0481)	(0.0407)	(0.0317)	(0.0199)
School Board FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Control Mean of Dep. Var.	0.369				
Control Mean of Dep. Var. in Tercile 1		0.380	0.012	0.340	0.025
Control Mean of Dep. Var. in Tercile 2		0.384	0.117	0.206	0.061
Control Mean of Dep. Var. in Tercile 3		0.353	0.191	0.082	0.077
Observations	1,451	1,448	1,448	1,448	1,448

Notes: This table reports average treatment effects (ATE) and conditional average treatment effects (CATEs) of partisan school board elections on the share of all candidates running in school board contests that are incumbents, estimated by terciles of Republican voter registration share. Columns 1-2 report outcomes for all incumbents, while columns 3-5 report effects on the share candidates by party affiliation of the incumbent. Candidate party affiliation is measured using official voter registration records linked to candidate filings. Terciles are defined using the baseline distribution of Republican voter registration across contests. Estimates are obtained using the imputation-based difference-in-differences estimator proposed by Borusyak et al. (2024). Observations are at the contest level. All specifications include school board and year fixed effects. Standard errors, clustered at the school board level, are reported in parentheses.
$^{*}p < 0.10$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{***}p < 0.01$.

Table A2: Effects of Partisan Elections on Entry of Principal Candidates as Share of All Candidates

	(1) Share Principal	(2) Share Principal	(3) Share Republican Principal	(4) Share Democrat Principal	(5) Share Unaffiliated Principal
Average Treatment Effect	-0.0564**				
	(0.0232)				
CATE in Tercile 1 of Republican Voter Reg. Share		0.0799**	0.0121**	0.0825**	-0.0146***
		(0.0378)	(0.00608)	(0.0371)	(0.00363)
CATE in Tercile 2 of Republican Voter Reg. Share		-0.0452	-0.00187	-0.0184	-0.0250***
		(0.0289)	(0.0206)	(0.0162)	(0.00798)
CATE in Tercile 3 of Republican Voter Reg. Share		-0.0796***	-0.00723	-0.0535**	-0.0189***
		(0.0250)	(0.0275)	(0.0246)	(0.00651)
School Board FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Control Mean of Dep. Var.	0.133				
Control Mean of Dep. Var. in Tercile 1		0.137	0.003	0.126	0.007
Control Mean of Dep. Var. in Tercile 2		0.146	0.044	0.091	0.010
Control Mean of Dep. Var. in Tercile 3		0.113	0.055	0.037	0.021
Observations	1,800	1,797	1,797	1,797	1,797

Notes: This table reports average treatment effects (ATE) and conditional average treatment effects (CATEs) of partisan school board elections on the share of candidates running in school board contests who are licensed principals, estimated by terciles of Republican voter registration share. Columns 1-2 report outcomes for all principals, while columns 3-5 report effects on the share of principals by party affiliation. Candidate party affiliation is measured using official voter registration records linked to candidate filings. Terciles are defined using the baseline distribution of Republican voter registration across contests. Estimates are obtained using the imputation-based difference-in-differences estimator proposed by Borusyak et al. (2024). Observations are at the contest level. All specifications include school board and year fixed effects. Standard errors, clustered at the school board level, are reported in parentheses.

$^{*}p < 0.10$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{***}p < 0.01$.

Table A3: Effects of Partisan Elections on Entry of Teacher Candidates

	(1) Num. of Teacher Candidates	(2) Num. of Teacher Candidates	(3) Num. of Republican Teacher Candidates	(4) Num. of Democrat Teacher Candidates	(5) Num. of Unaffiliated Teacher Candidates
Average Treatment Effect	-0.0894				
	(0.0783)				
CATE in Tercile 1 of Republican Voter Reg. Share		-0.194***	-0.00335	-0.0482	-0.148***
		(0.0534)	(0.0304)	(0.0417)	(0.0221)
CATE in Tercile 2 of Republican Voter Reg. Share		-0.169	0.108**	-0.111	-0.170***
		(0.175)	(0.0441)	(0.119)	(0.0519)
CATE in Tercile 3 of Republican Voter Reg. Share		-0.0331	0.112*	-0.0187	-0.129***
		(0.0651)	(0.0642)	(0.0466)	(0.0245)
School Board FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Control Mean of Dep. Var.	0.645				
Control Mean of Dep. Var. in Tercile 1		0.719	0.066	0.529	0.110
Control Mean of Dep. Var. in Tercile 2		0.541	0.177	0.289	0.069
Control Mean of Dep. Var. in Tercile 3		0.713	0.355	0.210	0.141
Observations	1,806	1,803	1,803	1,803	1,803

Notes: This table reports average treatment effects (ATE) and conditional average treatment effects (CATEs) of partisan school board elections on the share of candidates running in school board contests who are licensed principaps, estimated by terciles of Republican voter registration share. Columns 1-2 report outcomes for all principals, while columns 3-5 report effects on the share of principals by party affiliation. Candidate party affiliation is measured using official voter registration records linked to candidate filings. Terciles are defined using the baseline distribution of Republican voter registration across contests. Estimates are obtained using the imputation-based difference-in-differences estimator proposed by Borusyak et al. (2024). Observations are at the contest level. All specifications include school board and year fixed effects. Standard errors, clustered at the school board level, are reported in parentheses.
$^{*}p < 0.10$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{***}p < 0.01$.

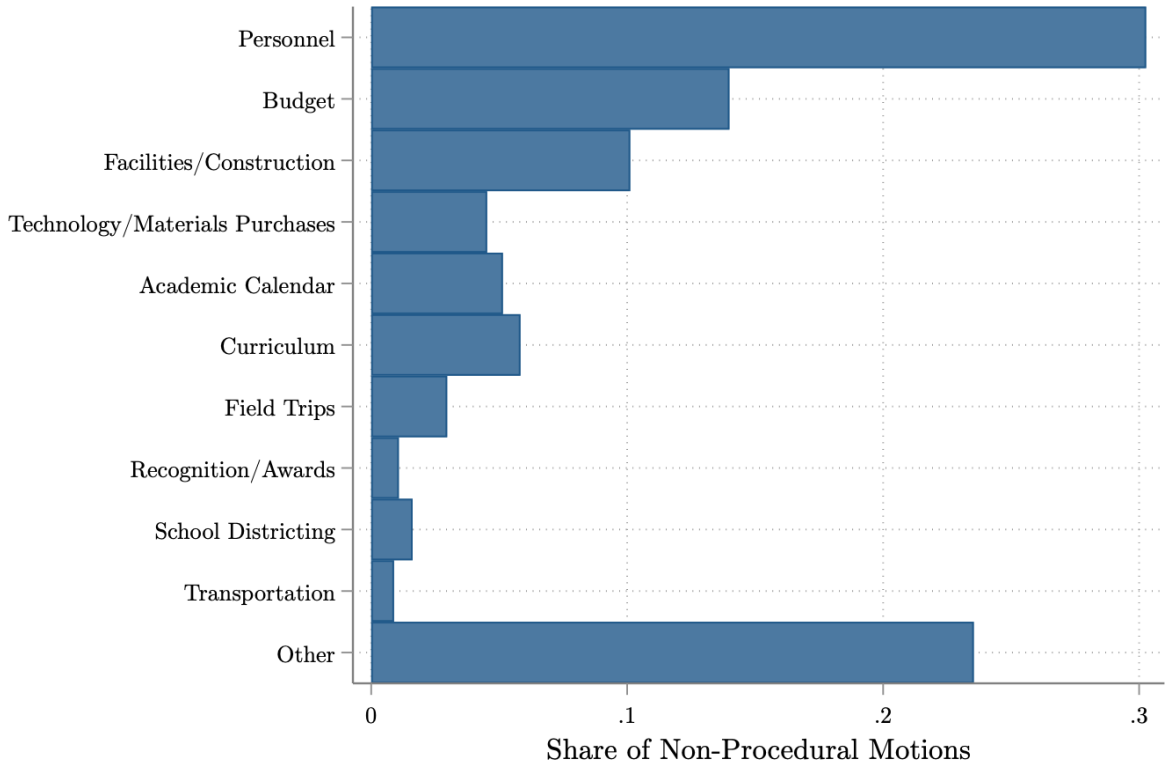
Table A4: Effects of Partisan Elections on Geographic Polarization of Voting Patterns — Excluding Boards That Transitioned from Off–Cycle to Congressional Election Timing

	All Elections			Contested Elections		
	(1) Republican Candidates' Vote Share	(2) Democrat Candidates' Vote Share	(3) Unaffiliated Candidates' Vote Share	(4) Republican Candidates' Vote Share	(5) Democrat Candidates' Vote Share	(6) Unaffiliated Candidates' Vote Share
CATE in Tercile 1 of Republican Voter Reg. Share	-0.152***	0.257***	-0.133***	-0.157***	0.161***	-0.128***
	(0.0297)	(0.0407)	(0.0172)	(0.0337)	(0.0344)	(0.0135)
CATE in Tercile 2 of Republican Voter Reg. Share	0.220***	-0.0706*	-0.136***	0.0901**	-0.00474	-0.109***
	(0.0385)	(0.0381)	(0.0262)	(0.0366)	(0.0400)	(0.0198)
CATE in Tercile 3 of Republican Voter Reg. Share	0.233***	-0.0821**	-0.137***	0.151***	-0.0525	-0.115***
	(0.0324)	(0.0381)	(0.0230)	(0.0350)	(0.0371)	(0.0146)
School Board FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Control Mean of Dep. Var. in Tercile 1	0.141	0.625	0.095	0.162	0.587	0.109
Control Mean of Dep. Var. in Tercile 2	0.351	0.425	0.114	0.399	0.383	0.112
Control Mean of Dep. Var. in Tercile 3	0.504	0.252	0.123	0.540	0.240	0.119
Observations	32,974	32,974	32,974	23,512	23,512	23,512

Notes: This table reports conditional average treatment effects (CATEs) of partisan school board elections on candidate vote shares, estimated by terciles of Republican voter registration share. Candidate party affiliation is measured using official voter registration records linked to candidate filings. Terciles are defined using the baseline distribution of Republican voter registration across precincts. Estimates are obtained using the imputation-based difference-in-differences estimator proposed by Borusyak et al. (2024). Observations are at the precinct–contest level. The sample excludes school boards that transitioned from off–cycle election timing to alignment with congressional elections as a result of the partisan reform. Columns 1–3 report results for the full sample of elections, while Columns 4–6 restrict the sample to contests in which the number of candidates exceeds the number of available seats (contested elections). All specifications include school board and year fixed effects. Standard errors, clustered at the school board level, are reported in parentheses.
$^{*}p < 0.10$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{***}p < 0.01$.

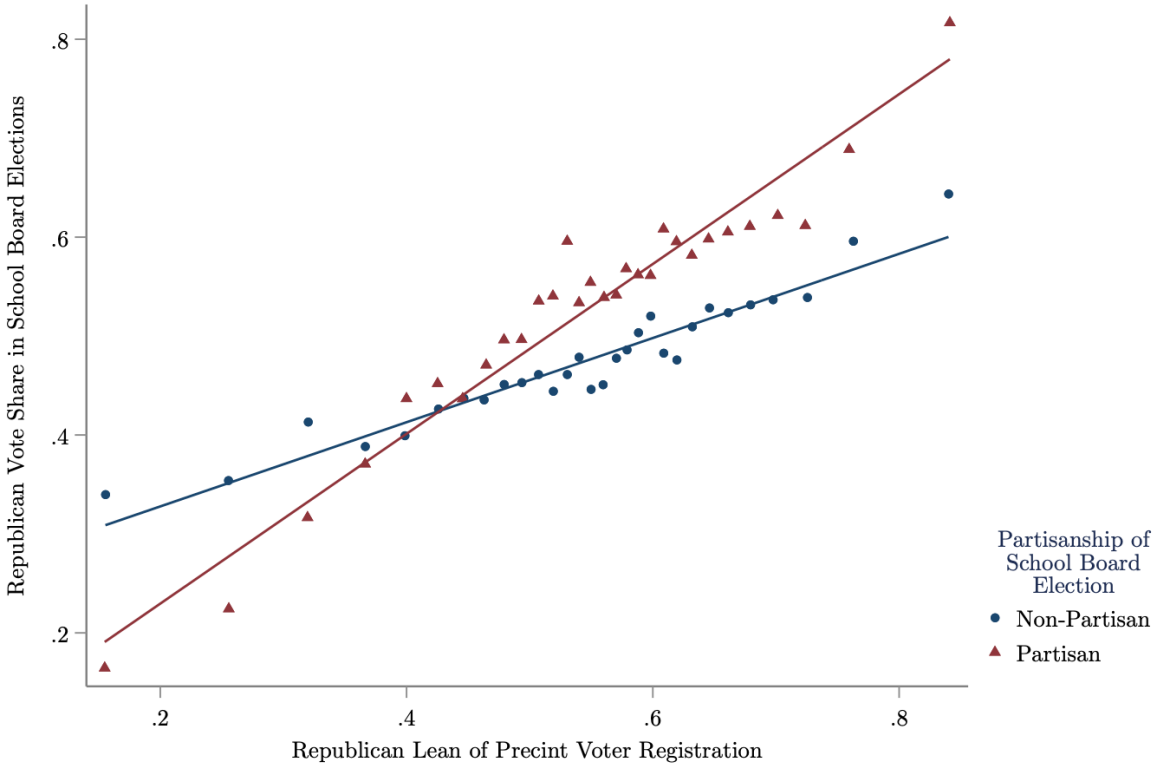
A.2 Figures

Figure A1: Motion Categories in School Board Meetings



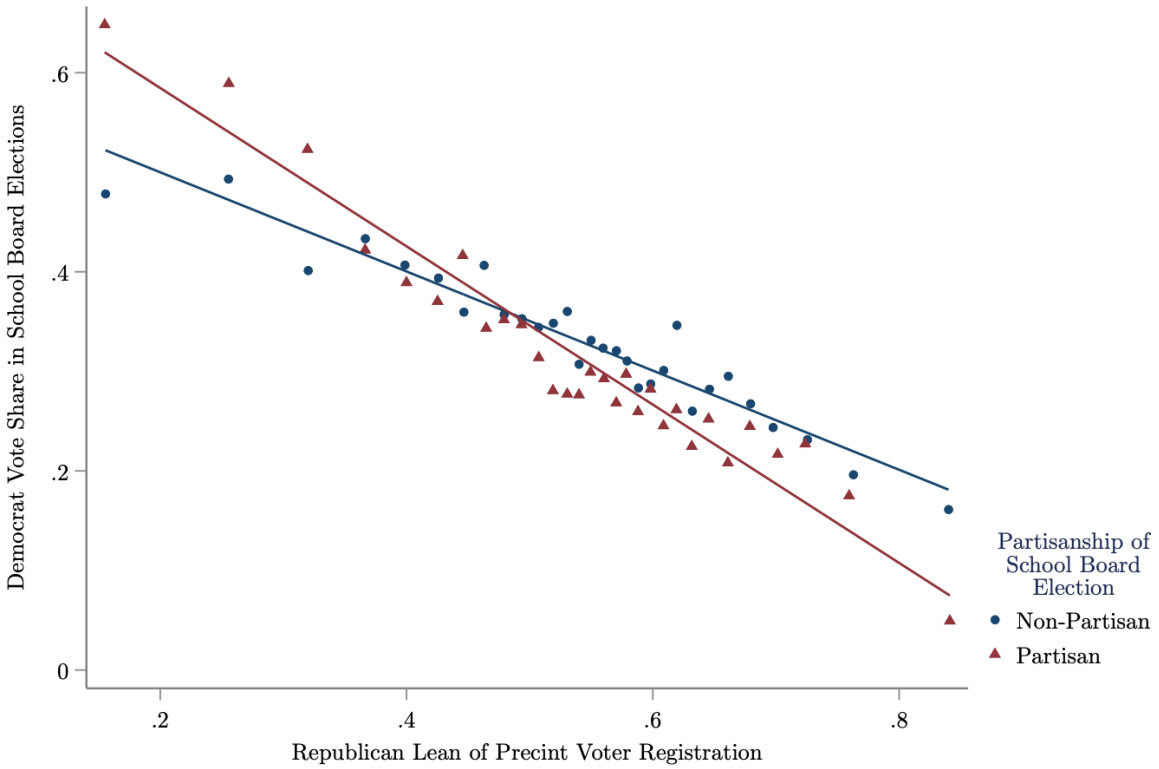
Note: This figure plots the distribution of motions made during North Carolina school board meetings over common motion categories. Motions come from over 10,000 scraped school board meeting minute documents covering 46 school boards. Procedural motions are excluded. I extract motions from meeting minute documents and categories them with the help of Antrhopic's claude-sonnet-4-20250514 API.

Figure A2: Partisan Elections and Geographic Polarization of Voting Patterns – Republican Vote Share



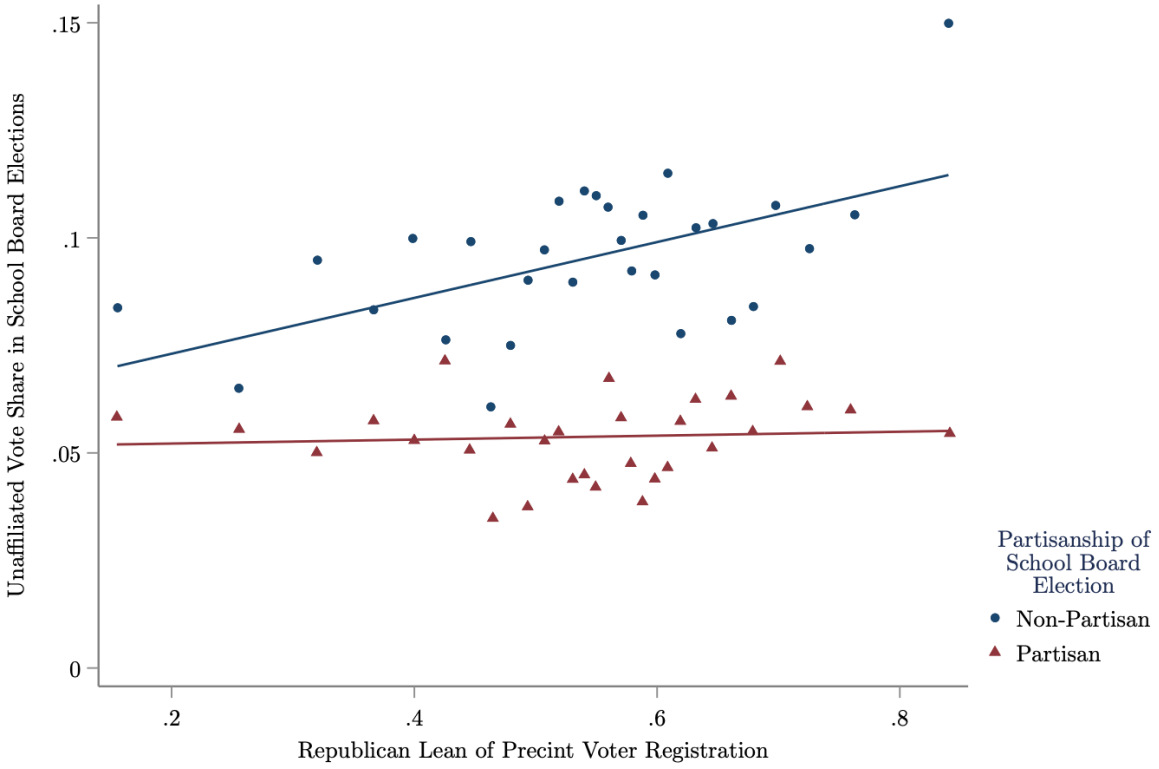
Note: This figure plots binned averages of the Republican vote share in school board elections against the Republican lean of voter registration at the precinct level. Non-partisan elections are plotted using blue circles, while partisan election are plotted with red triangles. The Republican lean of a precinct is defined as the share of registered Republicans among all voters affiliated with a political party. Republican vote share is defined as the total votes cast for Republican-affiliated school board candidates divided by total votes cast in the election. Candidate party affiliation is inferred from individual voter registration records and is applied consistently across both partisan and non-partisan contests. The binscatter plot include controls for school board and year fixed effects. The sample is restricted to school boards that transitioned from non-partisan to partisan school board elections during the analysis period. Fitted lines represent coefficients from regressions estimated separately by election type.

Figure A3: Partisan Elections and Geographic Polarization of Voting Patterns – Democrat Vote Share



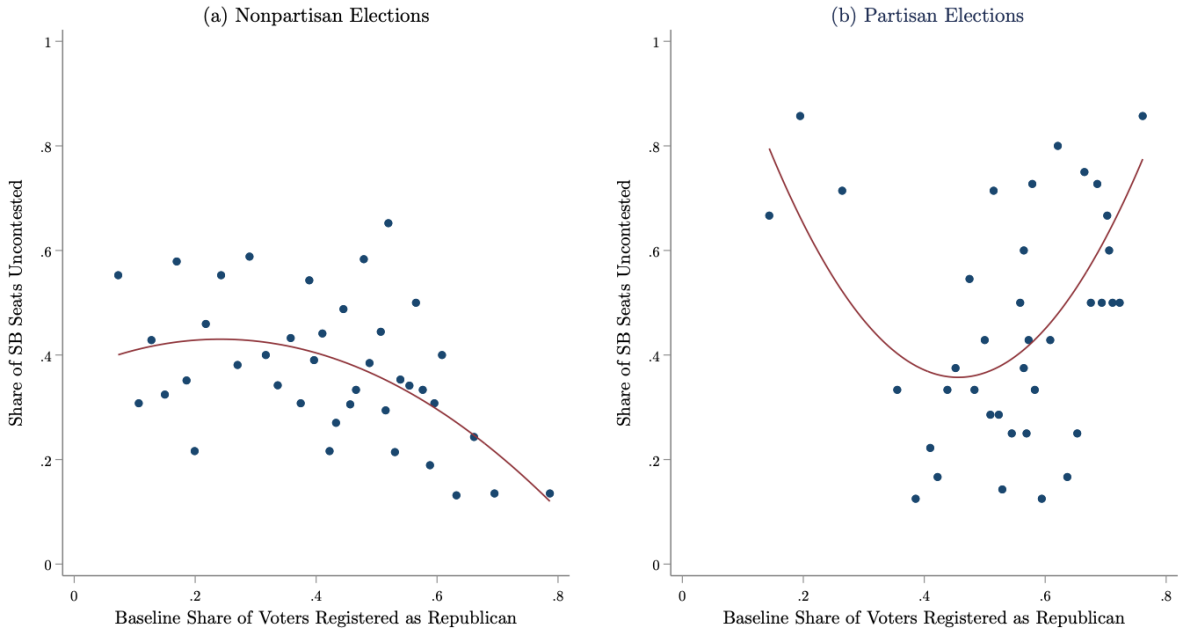
Note: This figure plots binned averages of the Democrat vote share in school board elections against the Republican lean of voter registration at the precinct level. Non-partisan elections are plotted using blue circles, while partisan election are plotted with red triangles. The Republican lean of a precinct is defined as the share of registered Republicans among all voters affiliated with a political party. Democrat vote share is defined as the total votes cast for Democrat-affiliated school board candidates divided by total votes cast in the election. Candidate party affiliation is inferred from individual voter registration records and is applied consistently across both partisan and non-partisan contests. The binscatter plot include controls for school board and year fixed effects. The sample is restricted to school boards that transitioned from non-partisan to partisan school board elections during the analysis period. Fitted lines represent coefficients from regressions estimated separately by election type.

Figure A4: Partisan Elections and Geographic Polarization of Voting Patterns – Unaffiliated Vote Share



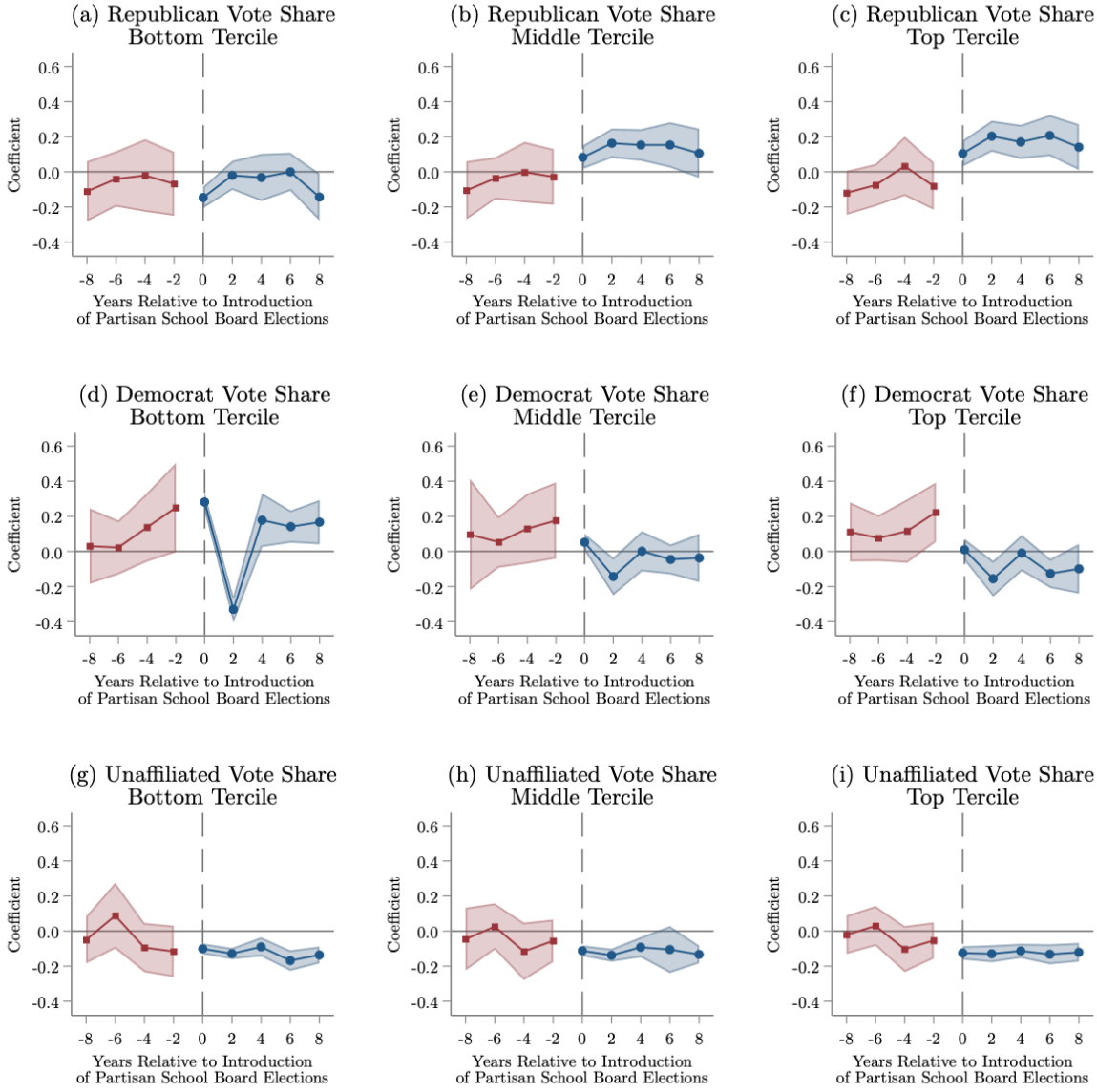
Note: This figure plots binned averages of the Unaffiliated vote share in school board elections against the Republican lean of voter registration at the precinct level. Non-partisan elections are plotted using blue circles, while partisan election are plotted with red triangles. The Republican lean of a precinct is defined as the share of registered Republicans among all voters affiliated with a political party. Unaffiliated vote share is defined as the total votes cast for school board candidates that are unaffiliated with a political party divided by total votes cast in the election. Candidate party affiliation is inferred from individual voter registration records and is applied consistently across both partisan and non-partisan contests. The binscatter plot include controls for school board and year fixed effects. The sample is restricted to school boards that transitioned from non-partisan to partisan school board elections during the analysis period. Fitted lines represent coefficients from regressions estimated separately by election type.

Figure A5



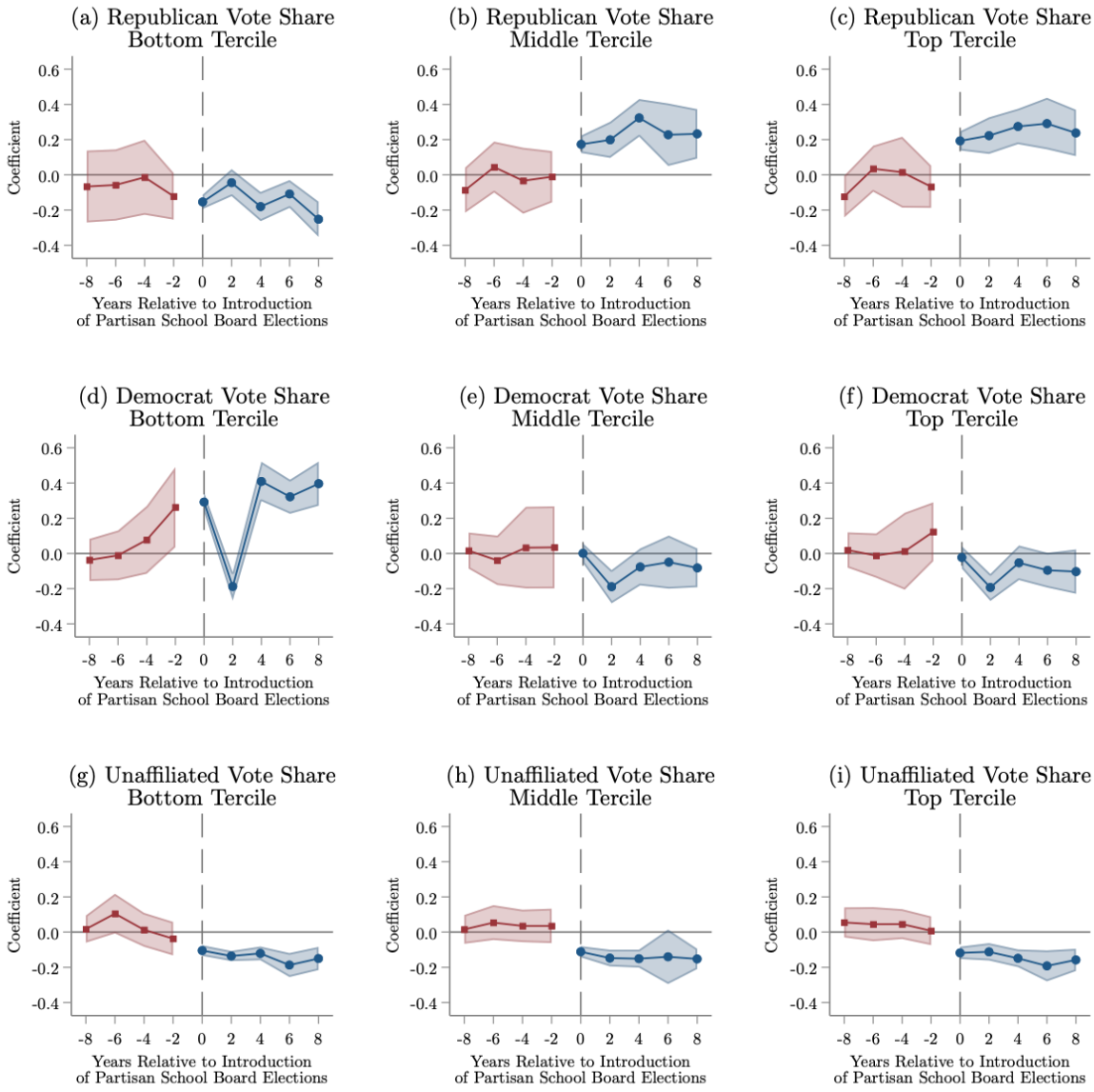
Note:

Figure A6: Dynamic Effects of Partisan Elections on Candidate Vote Shares, by Baseline Republican Registration Tercile — Contested Elections



Note: This figure plots event–study estimates of the effect of introducing partisan school board elections on candidate vote shares, separately by terciles of baseline Republican voter registration share. This figure restrict the sample to contests in which the number of candidates exceeds the number of available seats (contested elections). Panels (a)–(c) report results for Republican candidates, panels (d)–(f) for Democratic candidates, and panels (g)–(i) for unaffiliated candidates, as measured by party affiliation in candidates' linked voter registration files. Dynamic treatment effects and pre-trends are estimated following the imputation–based difference-in-differences estimator proposed by Borusyak et al. (2024). All specifications include school board and year fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the school board level. The unit of observation is the precinct–contest. 95% confidence intervals are shown.

Figure A7: Dynamic Effects of Partisan Elections on Candidate Vote Shares, by Baseline Republican Registration Tercile — Excluding Boards That Transitioned from Off–Cycle to Congressional Election Timing



Note: This figure plots event–study estimates of the effect of introducing partisan school board elections on candidate vote shares, separately by terciles of baseline Republican voter registration share. The sample excludes school boards that transitioned from off–cycle election timing to alignment with congressional elections as a result of the partisan reform. Panels (a)–(c) report results for Republican candidates, panels (d)–(f) for Democratic candidates, and panels (g)–(i) for unaffiliated candidates, as measured by party affiliation in candidates' linked voter registration files. Dynamic treatment effects and pre-trends are estimated following the imputation–based difference-in-differences estimator proposed by Borusyak et al. (2024). All specifications include school board and year fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the school board level. The unit of observation is the precinct–contest. 95% confidence intervals are shown.