

Political Influence during Childhood

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Why Childhood Matters

Focus: long-term determinants of **political attitudes**

A large literature in economics and political science shows that:

- Youth is a critical period for the formation of (political) attitudes
- Political preferences formed early tend to crystallize and remain stable into adulthood
- Early-life environments can therefore have lasting political consequences
 - Parents and family background
 - Schools, curricula, and peers
 - Neighborhoods, places, and local institutions
 - Media and information environments

Jennings, Stoker and Bowers (2009); Cantoni et al. (2017); Chyn (2018); Billings, Chyn and Haggag (2021); Fouka (2020); Cantoni and Pons (2022); Brown et al. (2023); Braghieri and Eichmeyer (2024); Kaplan, Spenkuch and Tuttle (2025)

What We Still Do Not Know

But one question remains largely unexplored:

Does growing up under office-holders of a given political color durably shape political preferences in adulthood?

In particular, we study exposure to **Republican vs Democratic governors during childhood**.

Mechanisms

How can partisan exposure during childhood matter?

1. Inspirational Leadership

Governors are salient political figures. Their visibility, popularity, and perceived success may leave a lasting imprint on young citizens.

2. Institutional Power

Governors control budgets, appointments, and policy domains such as education, thereby shaping the environments in which political attitudes are formed.

These mechanisms are not mutually exclusive:

- One works through *who the governor is*
- The other works through *what the office allows the governor to do*

Contribution

This paper:

- It studies whether routine partisan alternation in democratic government leaves durable political traces on **future voters**.
- It identifies the causal effect of childhood exposure to Republican vs Democratic governors using a **stacked fuzzy RD** based on close gubernatorial elections.
- It shows that partisan exposure during childhood shifts adult political outcomes: party registration (1.8 percentage points over a four-year term.), primary behavior, and broader political attitudes.
- It shows that these effects are concentrated in school age and helps distinguish between leadership and institutional-power channels.

Literature Contribution

- **Political context and place effects:** we isolate a specific, election-determined component of childhood environment: partisan control of the state executive office.
Cantoni and Pons (2022); Brown et al. (2023); Chyn (2018); Billings, Chyn and Haggag (2021)
- **Institutions experienced during youth:** rather than a specific reform or indoctrination episode, we study the average effect of routine partisan alternation in a contemporary democracy.
Cantoni et al. (2017); Fouka (2020); Braghieri and Eichmeyer (2024); Kaplan, Spenkuch and Tuttle (2025)
- **Political socialization and timing of preference formation:** we show that partisan governance matters during school age, well before first-time voting, with effects that persist into adulthood.
Sears and Valentino (1997); Dinas (2013); Giuliano and Spilimbergo (2025); Daniele, Aassve and Le Moglie (2023); Carlitz et al. (2025)

INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND

Institutional Background

State Governor:

- The chief executive of the state
- Directly elected, typically 4-year terms
- Powers:
 - Manage state budgets (35% education, 10% transportation, ...)
 - Vetoing state legislation, propose bills and budgets
 - Appointing key officials (e.g., judges, top state bureaucrats)
- Highly visible (86% can accurately identify their governor)
- Key figure in American Politics: Bernick (2016) documents more than 500 papers examining governors

Descriptive Data

Focus on the economy and education:

- State party platforms [Analysis Platforms](#)
- State of the State [Analysis Speeches](#)

Descriptive Data

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The system is highly partisan:

- Pre-WW2 partisan positions were close on many relevant topics
- Post-WW2 relative partisan positions are similar to today (with some exceptions)
- Large geographical variation
- Partisanship matter for spending, policies and outcomes Potrafke (2018): : more than 100 papers on how governors shapes policy
- Examples: Public health expenditure Joshi (2015), redistribution of school spending Hill, Jones (2017), air quality Beland, Boucher (2015), Education Beland and Oloomi, (2017)
- Using party manifestos, we are able to predict party affiliations [Analysis](#)

DATA

Data - Voter Registration

Voter registration files collated and harmonized by L2 data (Oct 2024): 196M individuals

- Necessary to vote in elections
- Main outcome: Party Affiliation
 - Choose a party (40%D - 31%R) or independent (28%)
 - Necessary to vote in closed primaries (other internal party decisions)
 - Strongest predictors of actual voting behavior Bartels, 2000
 - Among those who voted 96% registered D voted Harris and 94% registered R voted Trump
 - 8 states: No information

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Treatment assignment:

- Based on year of birth and residential address today
- Assume that the current state of residence is the state at the time of exposure
- Info on residence available since 2008

Are Movers a Problem?

We assign childhood exposure using *current* state of residence. This creates bias if:

- **Composition:** a close Republican win changes the probability of being a *stayer*:
 - Most composition discontinuities are below 1 p.p. (ANES, L2, 5-year Census data)
- **Heterogeneity:** movers/stayers respond differently to childhood partisan exposure, so the stayer effect differs from the full-sample effect.
 - Compare the RD among stayers to the ideal sample RD. Result: estimates are small and statistically insignificant (L2, ANES)
- **Sorting:** movers systematically relocate to states with a different partisan environment, creating spurious jumps at the current-state cutoff.
 - Run the RD on movers only and check whether movers generate spurious discontinuities at the current-state cutoff: no meaningful evidence of sorting-driven bias (L2, ANES)

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 - Run the RD on movers only and check whether movers generate spurious discontinuities at the current-state cutoff: no meaningful evidence of sorting-driven bias (L2, ANES)
- **Robustness:** Estimates unchanged when excluding individuals with out-of-state registration or control for mover status.

EMPIRICAL FRAMEWORK

Empirical Framework

Effect of one extra year with a R governor instead of a D governor between age a and b

$$Y_{i,s} = \beta_s + \beta \text{NumYearsRep}_{i,s}^{a,b} + \beta_r \text{BY}_{i,s} + \epsilon_{i,s}$$

i = individual, s = state

- State Fixed-effects (β_s) - control for state specific shocks
- Cohort control ($\beta_r \text{BY}_{i,s}$) - control for cohort specific shocks

Still... state-cohort specific shock could be correlated to $\text{NumRepGov}^{a,b}$

Stacked Regression Discontinuity

$NumYearRep^{a,b}$ is determined by (many) elections that use a discontinuous assignment rule

→ Estimate β using a stacked RD Borusyak and Kolesman-Shemer (2025)

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For each $\tau = a, \dots, b$
(Stacked) First Stage:

$$NumYearsRep_{i,s}^{a,b} = \alpha_s + \alpha RepGov_{i,s}^\tau + \alpha_1 MV_{i,s} + \alpha_2 MV_{i,s} \times RepGov_{i,s}^\tau + \alpha_r BY_{i,s} + \mu_{i,s}$$

(Stacked) Second Stage:

$$Y_{i,s} = \beta_s + \beta \widehat{NumYearsRep}_{i,s}^{a,b} + \beta_1 MV_{i,s}^\tau + \beta_2 MV_{i,s}^\tau \times RepGov_{i,s}^\tau + \beta_r BY_{i,s} + \varsigma_{i,s}$$

This is like aggregating many age-specific close-election RDs into one IV design, where the treatment is total Republican exposure during childhood

Identification

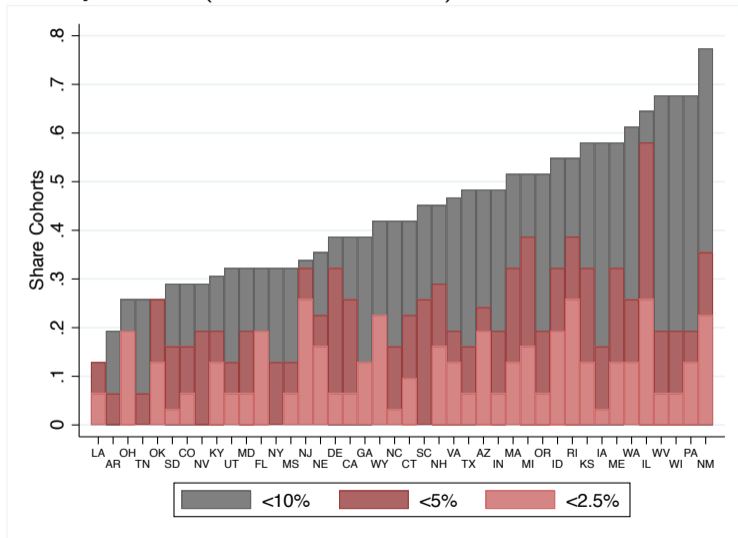
Identified under the continuity assumption for a regular RD.

$$Y_{i,s} = \alpha_s + \alpha \text{RepGov}_{i,s}^\tau + \alpha_1 MV_{i,s}^\tau + \alpha_2 MV_{i,s}^\tau \times \text{RepGov}_{i,s}^\tau + \alpha_r BY_{i,s} + \mu_{i,s}$$

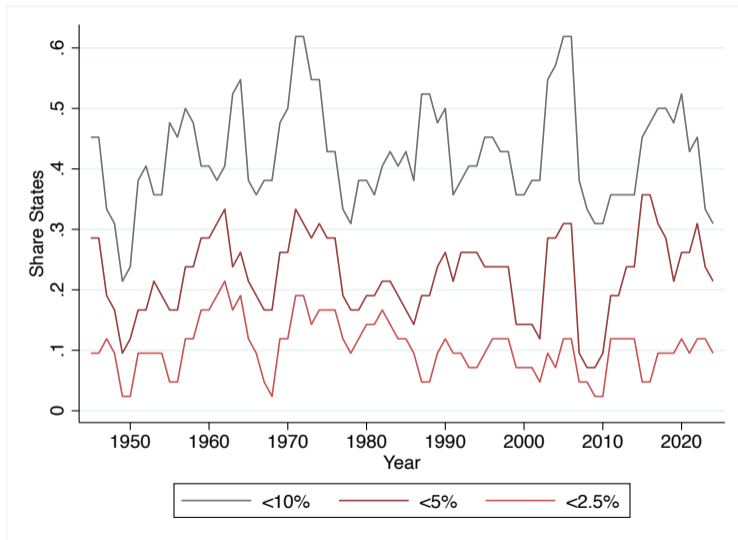
- Do not need $\mathbb{E}[\mu | \text{RepGov}^\tau = 1] = \mathbb{E}[\mu | \text{RepGov}^\tau = 0]$
- Needed $\mathbb{E}[\mu | MV^\tau]$ continuous at zero
- No manipulation at the threshold McCrary Test Balance Balanced Observables
- Estimate LATE at $MV = 0$

Close Elections by State

Total number of birth years: 62 (Born in 1945–2006)



Elections by Year



RESULTS

Childhood: $a = 6$, $b = 17$

Bandwidth: 10p.p.

Stacked Results

Republican
(1)

Years Rep Gov (6-17)

Observations	904.85M
Individuals	153.81M
Cohorts	2051
Elections	294
Sample	Full Sample
F-stat	212.2

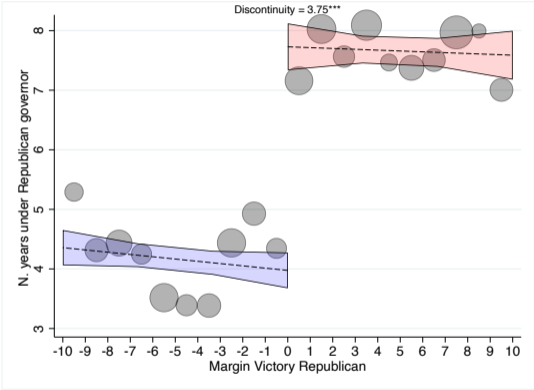
Stacked Results

	Republican (1)
# Years Rep Gov (6-17)	0.45*** (0.07)
Observations	904.85M
Individuals	153.81M
Cohorts	2051
Elections	294
Sample	Full Sample
F-stat	212.2

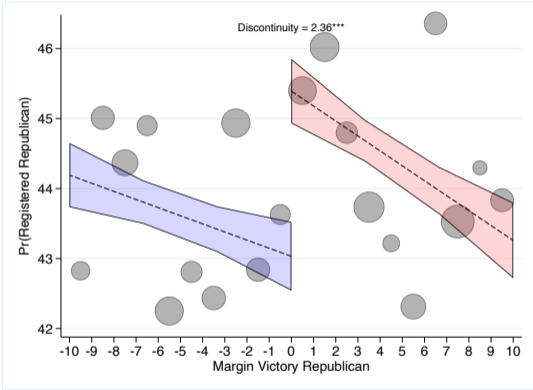
Stacked Results

	Republican (1)	Democrat (2)	Independent (3)	Republican (4)
# Years Rep Gov (6-17)	0.45*** (0.07)	-0.40*** (0.09)	-0.06 (0.09)	0.67*** (0.09)
Observations	904.85M	904.85M	904.85M	637.71M
Individuals	153.81M	153.81M	153.81M	107.24M
Cohorts	2051	2051	2051	2051
Elections	294	294	294	294
Sample	Full Sample	Full Sample	Full Sample	2Party-Registered
F-stat	212.2	212.2	212.2	184.9

Stacked RD: First Stage and Reduced Form

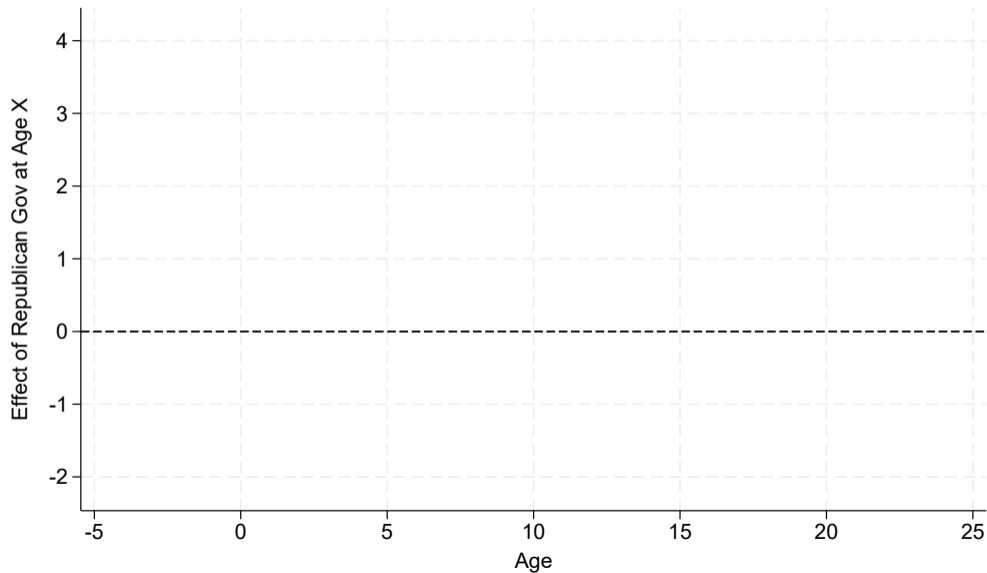


(a) First Stage

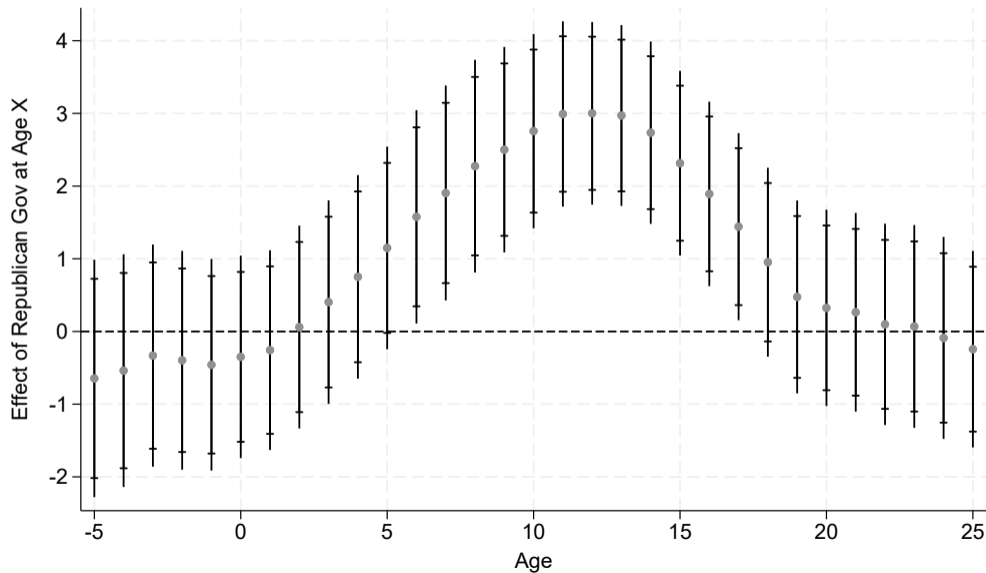


(b) Reduced Form

RD plot by Age



RD plot by Age



Additional Results

Effects on:

- Voting in Republican and Democratic **primaries**
- Answer to **surveys**:
 - Attitudes: Racial and LGBT attitudes, preferences for equality
 - Policy positions: Gun laws, abortion, affirmative action, adoption for gay couples
 - Timing: Effects already there at 18 years old

Results Additional Outcomes

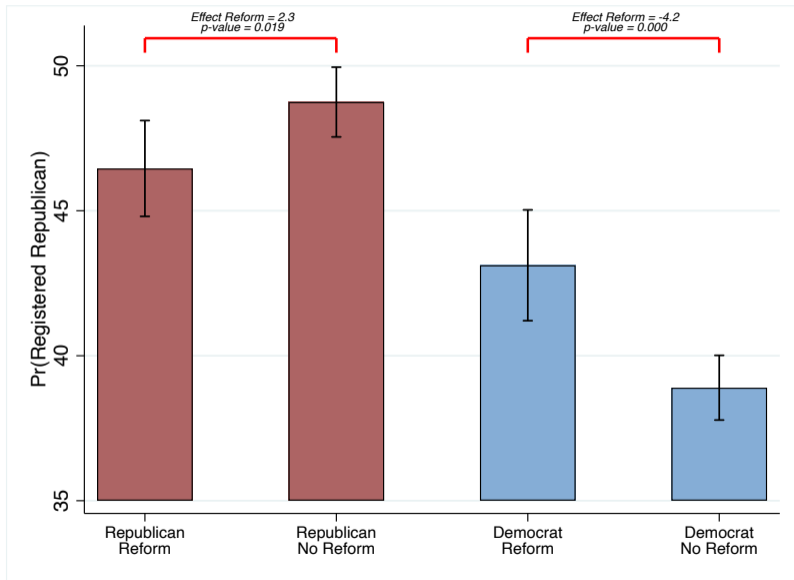
Results Surveys

DIRECTLY TESTING MECHANISMS

Institutional Mechanisms

	Republican (1)	Republican (2)	Republican (3)	Republican (4)	Republican (5)	Republican (6)
Effect (Republican governor)	0.43*** (0.11)	0.19** (0.08)	0.43*** (0.10)	1.54*** (0.12)	0.63*** (0.12)	0.91*** (0.10)
Effect (Democratic governor)	-0.03 (0.11)	-0.35*** (0.08)	-0.23** (0.09)	0.13 (0.09)	-0.34*** (0.08)	-0.47*** (0.11)
Observations	637.71M	637.71M	637.71M	637.71M	637.71M	637.71M
Individuals	107.24M	107.24M	107.24M	107.24M	107.24M	107.24M
Mechanism	Board of Education	School Reform	Full budget responsibility	Term length	Swing state	President alignment
F-stat	140.5	211.2	254.4	157.6	115.7	90.5

Court-Mandated School Reforms



Leadership Mechanisms

	Republican (1)	Republican (2)	Republican (3)	Republican (4)
Effect (Republican governor)	0.51*** (0.10)	-0.11 (0.08)	0.42** (0.17)	0.37*** (0.13)
Effect (Democratic governor)	-1.22*** (0.14)	-0.31*** (0.08)	-0.56*** (0.18)	-0.36*** (0.09)
Observations	644.57M	644.57M	644.57M	644.57M
Individuals	108.17M	108.17M	108.17M	108.17M
Mechanism	Popularity (Q5)	Popularity (Q2)	Gov. approval (Q5)	Gov. approval (Q2)
F-stat	121.0	134.6	134.5	228.7

Other Officials

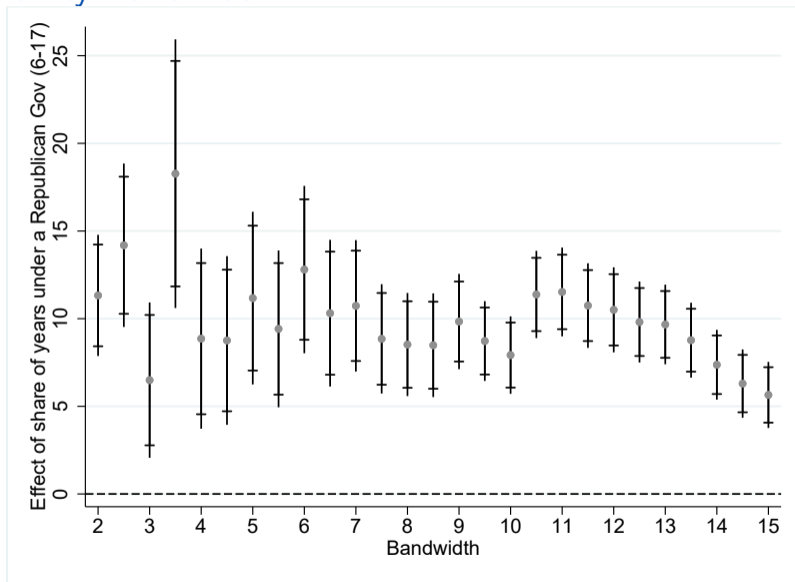
- Senators (25% of the size of the effect) ●
- House representatives (Not conclusive) ●

Conclusions

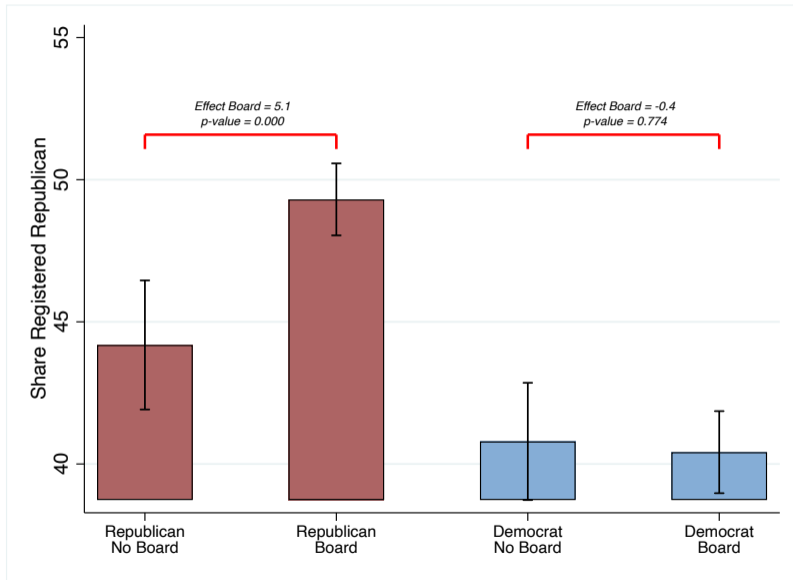
- Childhood exposure to partisan office-holders has **persistent effects** on adult political preferences.
- One additional year under a Republican governor during ages 6–17 increases the probability of Republican registration in adulthood (0.45pp).
- These effects are concentrated in **school-age years**, are already visible by age 18, and also appear in primary participation and survey-based attitudes.
- The evidence is most consistent with governors shaping future voters through both **institutional power** and, more tentatively, **leadership** channels.
- More broadly, the results suggest that ordinary partisan governance does not only affect current voters: it also helps shape the **political preferences of future voters**.

THANKS

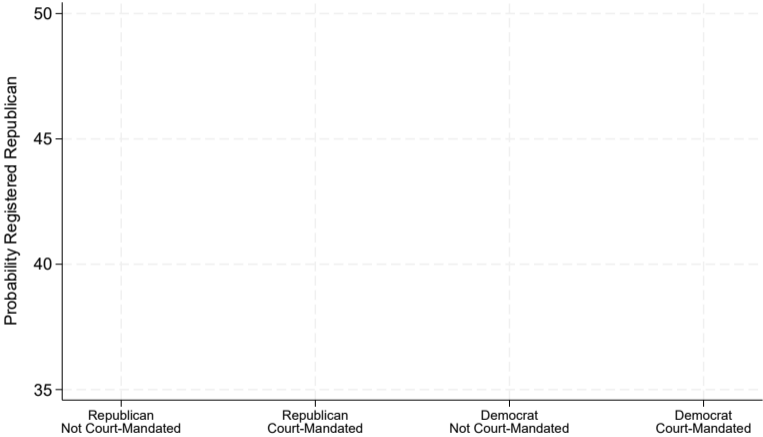
RDA - Sensitivity Bandwidth

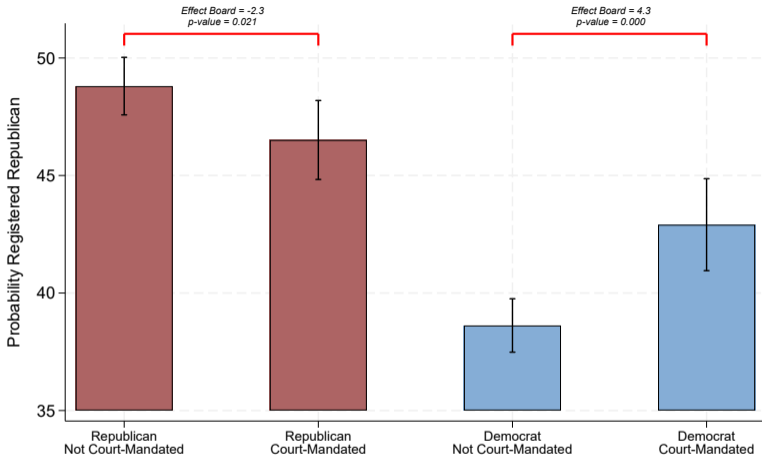


Board of Education



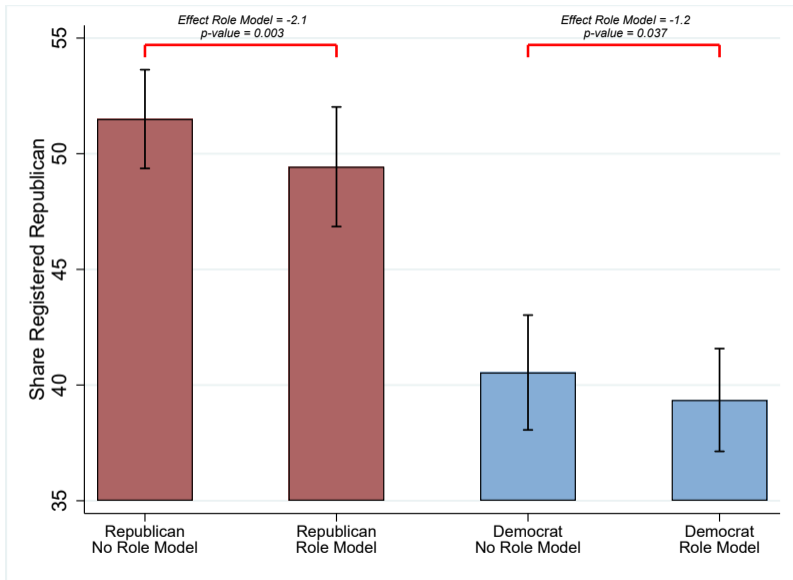
Court-mandated Reform



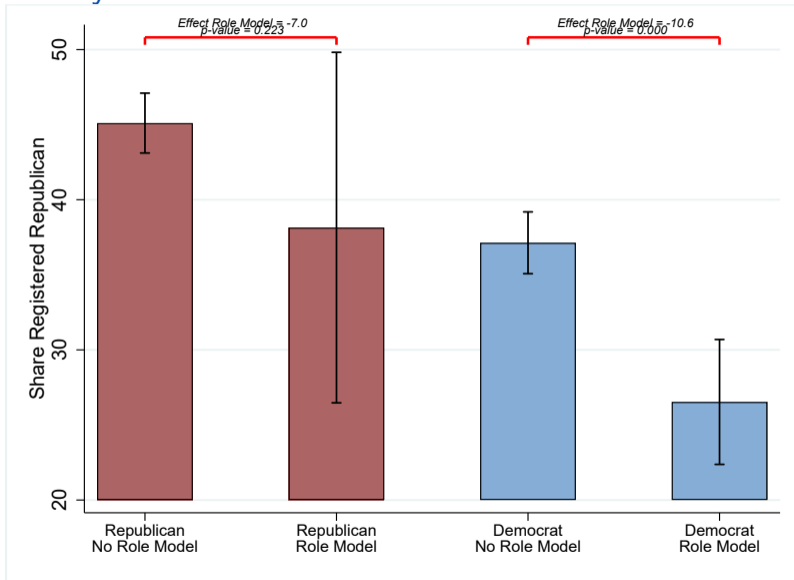


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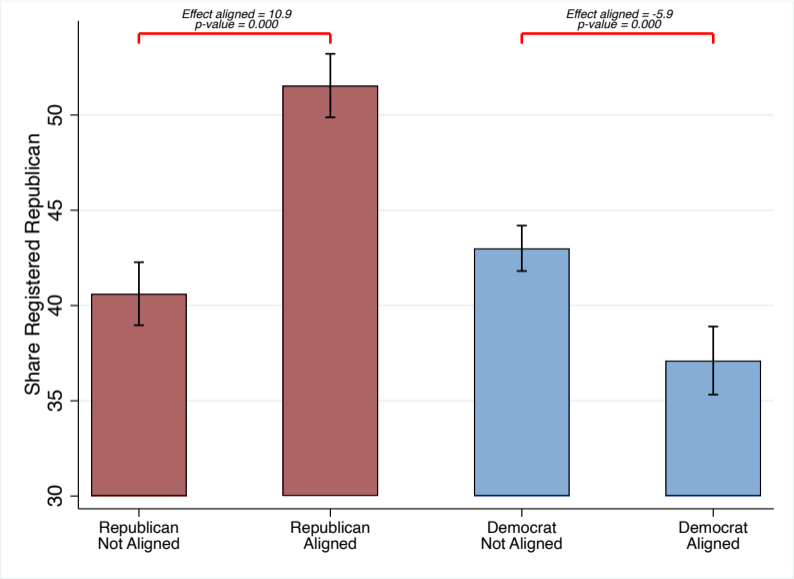
Role Model



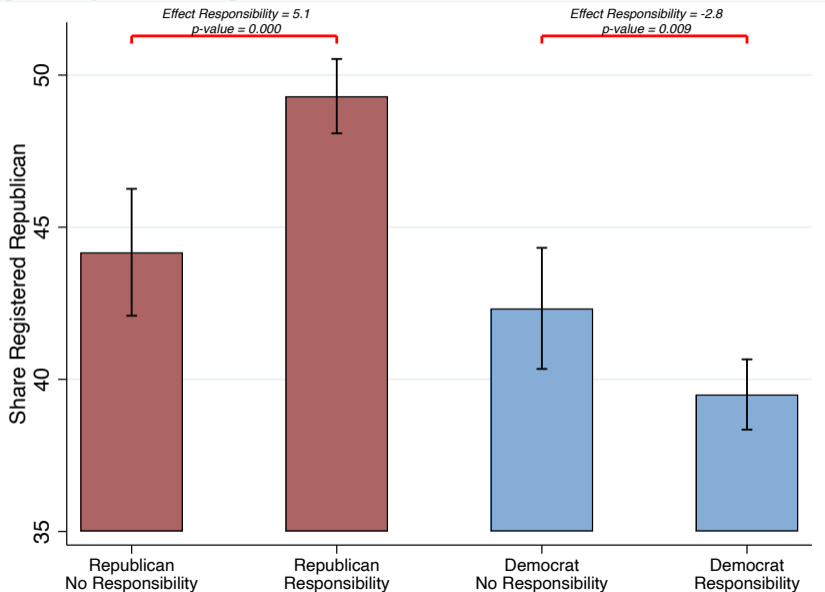
Role Model - Only Female Voters



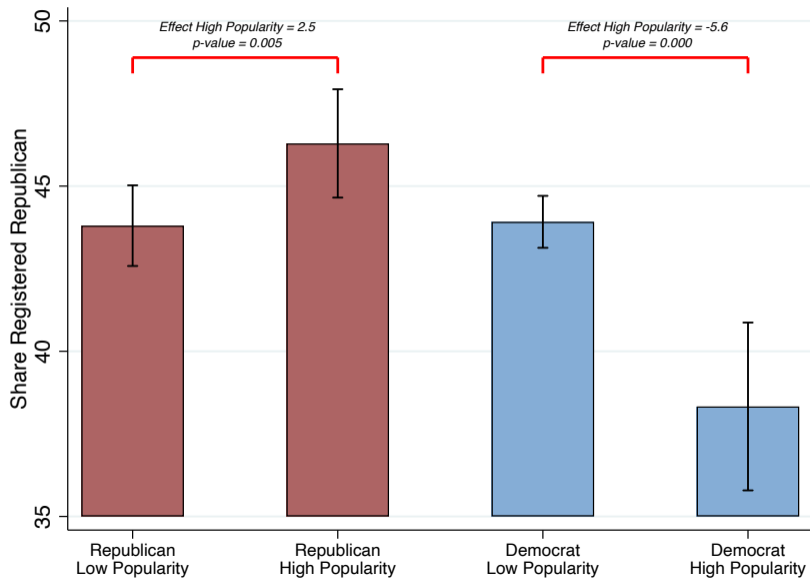
Aligned President



Budgetary Responsibility



Popularity



RDA Estimates – Upper-level

	Republican	Democrat	Independent	Republican
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Share Years Rep Governor (6-17)	4.73*** (1.15)	0.78 (1.83)	-5.31*** (1.77)	6.22*** (1.71)
Observations	146.11M	146.11M	146.11M	101.89M
Sample	Full Sample	Full Sample	Full Sample	2Party-Registered
F-stat	201.3	201.3	201.3	188.2

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Other Outcomes

	Rep. primary (1)	Dem. primary (2)	Not voting (3)	Two-party Rep. (4)	Two-party Rep. (5)	Two-party Rep. (6)	Two-party Rep. (7)
N. years under Rep. Governor (6-17)	-0.03 (0.04)	-0.15*** (0.04)	0.18** (0.08)	0.90*** (0.19)	0.80*** (0.22)	0.83*** (0.20)	0.81*** (0.23)
N. years Rep. Gov. × Age					0.01 (0.01)	.	0.00 (0.02)
N. years Rep. Gov. × Birth year					.	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.02)
Observations	4052.94M	4052.94M	4052.94M	483.18M	483.18M	483.18M	483.18M
F-stat	61.8	61.8	61.8	57.7	32.7	31.1	20.9

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Other Outcomes

	Voted Rep (1)	Voted Rep (2)	Voted Rep (3)	Voted Rep (4)
Share Republican Year (6-17)	4.09*** (1.55)	0.63 (1.81)	4.26** (1.81)	5.72*** (1.80)
× Age on Election Day				-0.15** (0.06)
× Birth-Year				-0.33*** (0.09)
Observations	1.03B	0.86B	0.20B	1.03B
Sample Mean	46.37	46.37	46.37	46.37
Sample Primary Type	2Party-Voters Not Presidential	2Party-Voters Presidential	2Party-Voters 2016 Pres	2Party-Voters Not Presidential

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House of Representatives

	Republican (1)	Democrat (2)	Independent (3)	Republican (4)
N. years under Rep. Representative (6-17)	-0.16*** (0.04)	-0.08 (0.06)	0.26*** (0.05)	-0.10* (0.06)
Observations	289.66M	289.66M	289.66M	203.23M
Sample	Full Sample	Full Sample	Full Sample	2Party-Registered
F-stat	937.9	937.9	937.9	856.2

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Senate

	Republican (1)	Democrat (2)	Independent (3)	Republican (4)
N. years under Rep. Senator (6-17)	0.23*** (0.04)	-0.44*** (0.07)	0.18*** (0.05)	0.44*** (0.06)
Observations	1489.51M	1489.51M	1489.51M	1055.59M
Sample	Full Sample	Full Sample	Full Sample	2Party-Registered
F-stat	401.0	401.0	401.0	378.4

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Distinct Governors

	Republican (1)	Republican (2)	Democrat (3)	Independent (4)
Share Years Rep Governor (6-17)	12.32*** (2.02)	16.08*** (2.58)	-8.37*** (2.49)	-4.01* (2.32)
N. Distinct Republican Governors	-2.54*** (0.35)	-3.36*** (0.46)	1.02** (0.42)	1.53*** (0.40)
N. Distinct Democrat Governors	1.72*** (0.41)	1.87*** (0.57)	-1.40** (0.61)	-0.28 (0.53)
Observations	953.69M	678.69M	953.69M	953.69M
Sample	Full Sample	2Party-Registered	Full Sample	Full Sample
F-stat	122.5	121.3	122.5	122.5

Results – ANES data

	Republican (1)	Democrat (2)	Independent (3)	Republican (4)
N. years under Rep. Governor (6-17)	0.84** (0.38)	-0.95** (0.39)	0.11 (0.26)	1.29*** (0.44)
Observations	167903	167903	167903	144193
Sample	Full Sample	Full Sample	Full Sample	2Party-Registered
F-stat	136.4	136.4	136.4	130.1

Additional Results – ANES data

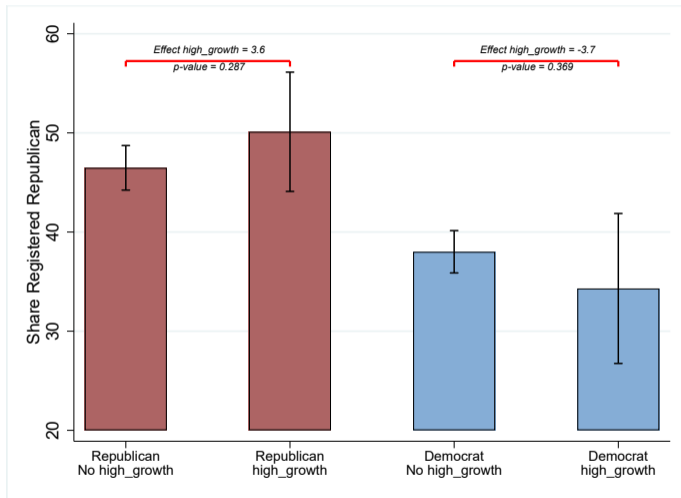
	Gun law protection (1)	Immigrants don't steal jobs (2)	Legal Abortion (3)	Government's aid to black (4)	Gay protection (5)	Aff. act. hiring (6)	Worrying about equality (7)
N. years under Rep. Governor (6-17)	-0.84** (0.33)	-0.84*** (0.32)	-0.15 (0.13)	-0.70** (0.31)	-0.40** (0.17)	-0.79** (0.33)	-0.43** (0.18)
Observations	165989	165989	165989	165989	106604	115840	165989
Sample Mean	31.87	36.37	78.51	26.96	79.70	24.48	35.17

Additional Results – HERI data

	Democrat leaning (1)	Legal abortion (2)	Legalized Marijuana (3)	No gender roles (4)	Normalizing Homosexuality (5)	Ban on death penalty (6)	Environmental protection (7)	Criminals' rights (8)
N. years under Rep. Governor (6-17)	-0.01*** (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.01 (0.00)	-0.01 (0.00)	-0.03*** (0.01)	-0.01 (0.00)	-0.02*** (0.01)
Observations	9837	7772	9804	7897	9224	8613	8505	9550
Sample Mean	3.07	2.54	2.02	2.45	3.08	2.15	3.13	2.26

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Heterogeneity by GDP growth



Example - Don't Say Gay Bill

Florida Parental Rights in Education Act (HB 1557) - March 28 2022

- Prohibit public schools from having “classroom discussion” or giving “classroom instruction” about sexual orientation or gender identity before grade 3
- Prohibits public schools from maintaining the confidentiality of a disclosure by a student, including of the gender identity or sexual orientation of a student, from parents

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Example - LGBT Inclusive

California SB 48 - Signed by Governor Gerry Brown on July 13 2011

- Requires the instruction in social sciences to include a study of the role and contributions of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Americans.
- Prohibits the State Board of Education and the governing board of any school district from adopting textbooks or other instructional materials that contain any matter that reflects adversely upon persons because of their sexual orientation

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Example - Anti CRT

Florida Stop WOKE Act (Stop Wrongs to Our Kids and Employees Act) - April 22 2022

- Prohibits schools and businesses from teaching certain concepts related to race, racism, and privilege
- Prohibits workplace diversity training
- Penalties would include disciplinary action, including job termination and loss of public funding for state schools.

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Example - 2020 Election

New Oklahoma 2025 high-school curricula need to include:

- Identify discrepancies in 2020 elections results by looking at graphs and other information, including the sudden halting of ballot-counting in select cities in key battleground states, the security risks of mail-in balloting, sudden batch dumps, an unforeseen record number of voters, and the unprecedented contradiction of "bellwether county" trends.

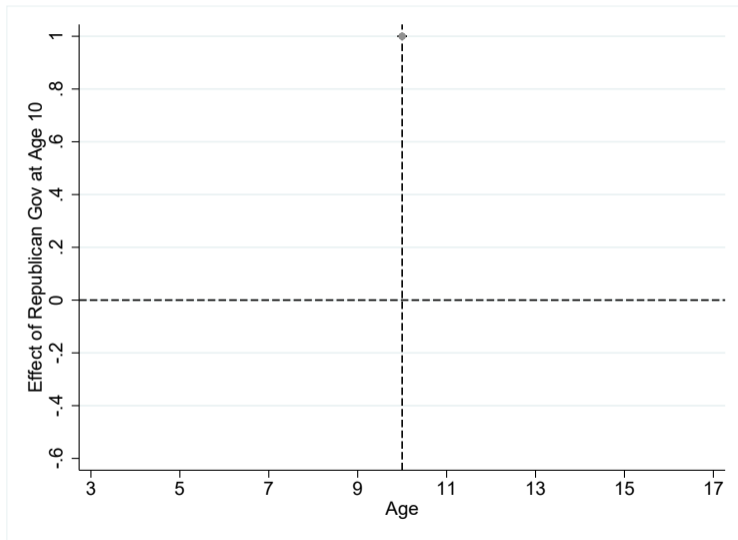
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Empirical Framework – Coefficient Interpretation

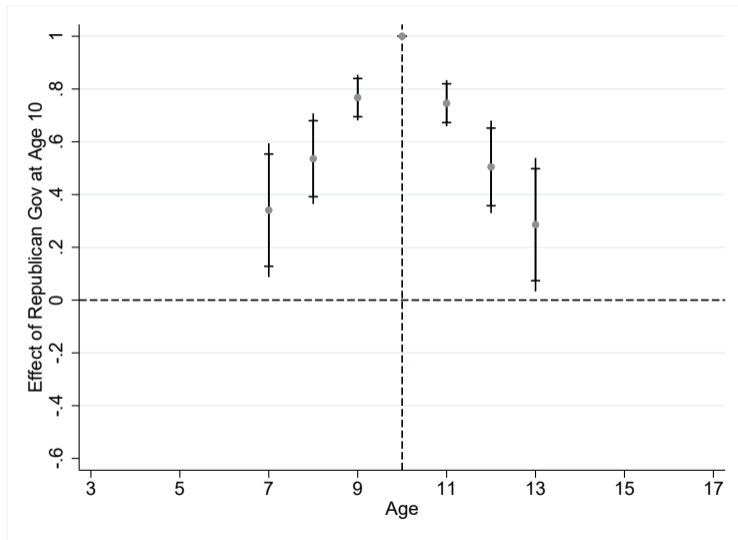
To interpret β_0 , we reformulate the baseline equation

$$RepGov_{i,s}^z = \alpha_s + \beta_0 RepGov_{i,s}^T + \beta_1 MV_{i,s}^T + \beta_2 (MV_{i,s}^T \times RepGov_{i,s}^T) + \beta BY_{i,s} + \epsilon_{i,s}$$

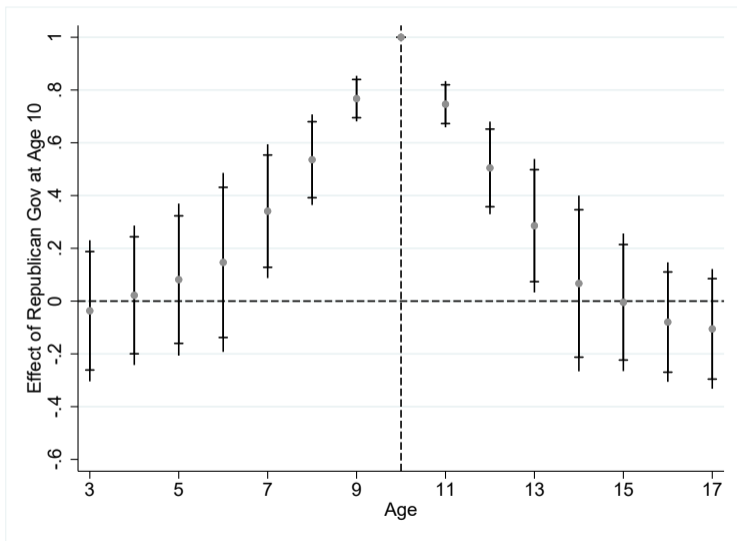
Empirical Framework – Coefficient Interpretation $\tau = 10$



Empirical Framework – Coefficient Interpretation $\tau = 10$

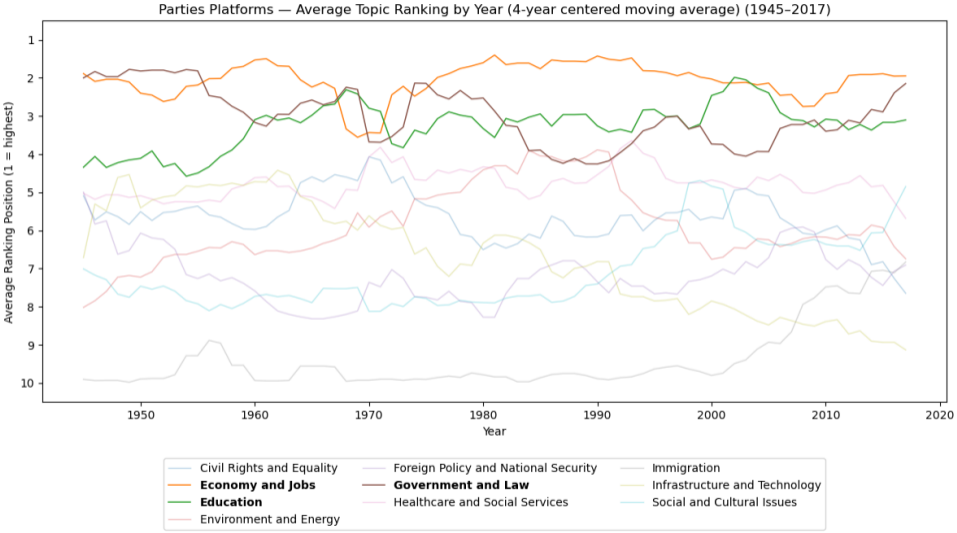


Empirical Framework – Coefficient Interpretation $\tau = 10$

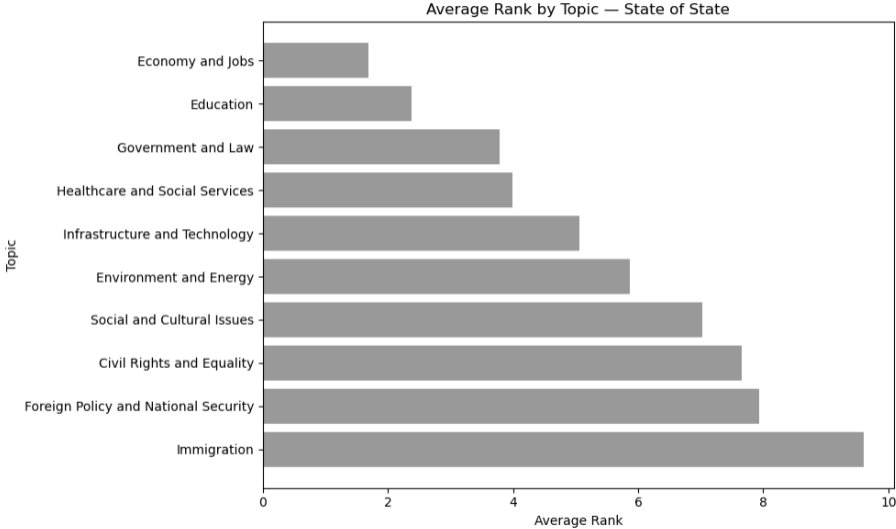


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State Party Platform



State of the State



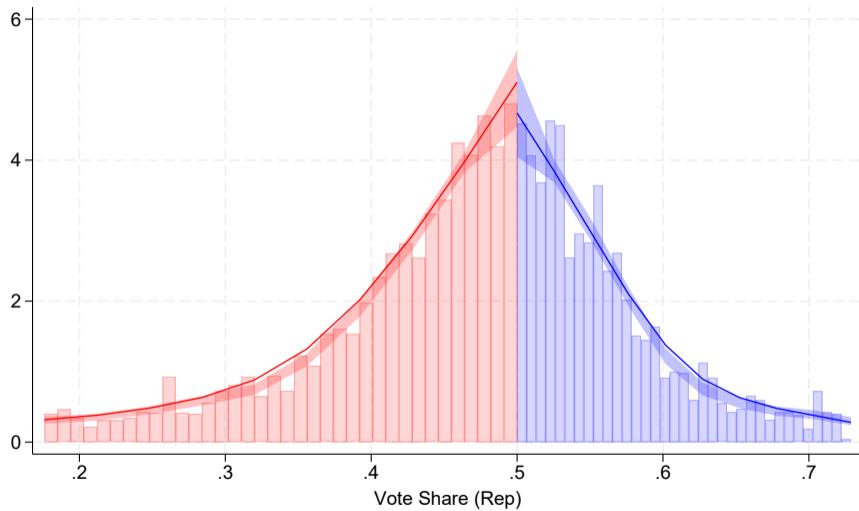
Background

- Education recent examples:
 - Don't say gay bills. Prohibit discussion topics of gender identity or sexual orientation. Since 2022, introduced in 15 (Republican) states. [Example](#)
 - LGBTQ inclusive curricula. Passed in 8 (Democrat) states [Example](#)
 - “Critical Race Theory” bans in 18 (Republican) states [Example](#)
 - Teach about 2020 “election irregularities” [Example](#)
- Recurrent political fight (Creationism Vs Evolution; Racial equity)

President and Governor political alignment matters

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Distribution Margin of Victory



Balancing

	RD Effect (1)	P-val (2)
<i>Demographic Characteristics</i>		
Urban pop.	-0.011	0.401
Rural pop.	0.011	0.462
Males	0.001	0.202
Youngsters	-0.001	0.668
Non-blacks	-0.000	0.934
Blacks	0.004	0.155
Foreign	0.008*	0.067
Married	-0.011	0.379
Divorced	-0.002***	0.005
Singles	-0.001	0.900
Widowed	-0.001	0.682
<i>Economic Characteristics</i>		
Low educated	-0.004	0.637
Mid educated	-0.004	0.314
High educated	-0.001	0.747
Employed	-0.004	0.595
Unemployed	-0.001	0.560
Inactives	-0.009	0.297
Poor HHs	-0.008	0.179
Rich HHs	0.000	0.958
<i>Political Environment</i>		
Incumbent Rep.	-0.020	0.885
Senators Rep.	-0.041	0.539
President Rep.	0.093	0.235
Prev. Margin (Abs.)	0.037	0.116
Prev. Margin (Signed)	-0.010	0.750
Prev. Gov. Rep.	0.063	0.500
Prev. Leg. Unified Dem.	0.058	0.453
Prev. Leg. Unified Rep.	-0.050	0.409
Midterm Year	-0.001	0.944

Are movers a problem?

- **1. Do close elections change who stays?** We test whether a close Republican win changes the probability of being a *stayer*:
 - ANES: compare current state to childhood state
 - L2: use no out-of-state registration as a proxy for staying
 - Census birth-state: compare current state to state of birth

We find essentially no: most discontinuities are below **1 p.p.**

- **2. Do movers systematically relocate toward one party?** Movers would bias the estimates if, for example, people exposed to one side of the cutoff were more likely to end up in more Republican or more Democratic states: no evidence that it occurs.
- **3. Robustness:** the main estimates are virtually unchanged when we exclude individuals with out-of-state registration histories or control for mover status.