Political Influence during Childhood

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Voters and Office-holders

- Selection Stage: (inclusive) aggregation of votes selects politicians

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Literature (incumbency advantage) has focused on how office-holders:

- Influence *CURRENT VOTERS*
- Finding mostly TRANSITORY effects

Impressionable Years

Rationalized by the “impressionable years hypothesis” that states:

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If officers-holders are able to affect young people:

- Influence *FUTURE VOTERS*
- With PERSISTENT effects

Mechanisms of Influence

1. Inspirational Leadership: Effective governance and implementing successful policies
   Healthy democratic feedback

2. Political Rent Accumulation: Gain access to powers, resources and persuasion tools
   Partisan entrenchment and democratic distortion

Does not require office-holders to act strategically or even consciously
Not all mechanisms require the future voter to know about the office-holder

Contribution

- Quantitative: “Influence stage” more relevant than previously thought
- Features of democracies: Inertia + consequences of “bad leaders”
- Institutional design: Which are the powers that generate influence

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Contribute to the literature on the long-run determinants of political preferences:

- Peers: Billings et al. (2021); Coriale et al (2023); Kaplan et al (2025)
- Local conditions: Cantoni and Pons (2022); Chyn and Haggag (2023); Elder et al. (2024); Brown et al. (2025)
- Life-event: Acemoglu et al. (2024); Giuliano and Spilimbergo (2024); Kaplan et al (2025); Goldstein and Kolerman (2025); Daniele et al. (2022)

These could be mechanisms through which office-holders affect preferences

Our paper

Office-holder: US state governors

QUESTION: What is the effect of (childhood) exposure to a Republican instead of a Democratic state governor on political preferences?

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, proposing bills, and budgets
  - Appointing key officials (e.g., judges, top state bureaucrats)
  - Agenda setting (State of the State addresses, media engagement)
- Highly visible (86% can accurately identify their current governor)

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- Highly visible (86% can accurately identify their current governor)
- Highly studied topic in American politics
  - Bernick et al., 2016: 532 papers on governors' role and powers – governors as major policy entrepreneurs
  - Potrafk, 2018: more than 100 papers on how governors shapes policy
  - Democratic governors spend more on education (+5 p.p.), welfare, and redistribution, adopt more progressive taxes, and pursue more liberal social and criminal justice policies

Descriptive Data

Focus on the economy and education

- State party platforms Analysis Platforms
- State of the State (Governor) Analysis Speeches
- Various laws changing curricula (Don't say gay vs. LGBT inclusive) More examples

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
- Using party manifestos, we are able to predict party affiliations Analysis

DATA

Data

Voter registration files collected and harmonized by L2 data (Oct 2024)

- Necessary to vote in elections (24 states automatic voter registration)
- Main outcome: Party Affiliation
  - 31 states: Party affiliation when registering
    - 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
  - 11 states: Party affiliation inferred by which primary you voted in
  - 8 states: No information

Survey data about attitudes

- American National Elections Studies (1952–2020)
- HERI CIRP Freshman Survey (1966–2010)

Treatment Assignment

Final Sample: 196M individuals

Treatment assignment:

- Based on **year of birth** and **residential address today**
- We assume that the current state of residence is your state at the time of exposure

Inter-state migration:

- If uncorrelated to the treatment $\rightarrow$ attenuation
  - About 70% of U.S.-born residents live in their birth state Molloy et al., 2011
  - Even less likely during childhood (87% of five-year-olds and 82% of 17-year-olds live in their birth state)
  - Results stable when removing or including movers in adulthood (after 2008 change in residence)
  - Confirm evidence using survey data (ANES), where we know the residential history
  - Confirm evidence using survey data (HERI), where respondents are 18/19
  - Our treatment does not predict migration out of state (ANES)

EMPIRICAL FRAMEWORK

Empirical Framework

Objective: Effect of having an R governor instead of a D governor at age τ

$$Y_{i,s} = \alpha + \beta RepGov^{\tau}_{i,s} + \epsilon_{i,s}$$
$$i = \text{individual},\ s = \text{state}$$

- $Y_{i,s}$: 100 if individual i in state s is a registered Republican; 0 otherwise
- $RepGov^{\tau}_{i,s}$: 1 if the governor in power at age τ was Republican; 0 otherwise

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Issues:

- State specific preferences (α_s)
- Birth year specific unobservables ($BY_{i,s}$)
- State - Birth year unobservables (Recession in a state Giuliano and Spilimbergo (2024))

Empirical Framework

- Regression discontinuity based on the gubernatorial election margin of victory

$$Y_{i,s} = \alpha_s + \beta_0 RepGov^{\tau}_{i,s} + \beta_1 MV^{\tau}_{i,s} + \beta_2 (MV^{\tau}_{i,s} \times RepGov^{\tau}_{i,s}) + \gamma_a BY_{i,s} + \epsilon_{i,s}$$

- $MV^{\tau}_{i,s}$: Margin of victory of the governor in power at age τ
- Cluster state $\times$ birth year level

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Identified under the continuity assumption:

- $\lim_{MV^t \to 0^-} \mathbb{E}[\epsilon | MV^{\tau}] = \lim_{MV^t \to 0^+} \mathbb{E}[\epsilon | MV^{\tau}]$
- Do not need $\mathbb{E}[\epsilon | RepGov^{\tau} = 1] = \mathbb{E}[\epsilon | RepGov^{\tau} = 0]$
- No manipulation at the threshold McCrary Test Balanced Observables

Sample Selection and Interpretation

Sample selection:

- $MarginVictoryAgeX_{i,s} < 0.1$ (i.e., max 0.45 vs 0.55): Average MSE-optimal bandwidth Calonico et al. (2014)
- $BirthYear >= 1945$: Post-political realignment (consistent order) Kuziemko and Washington (2018)
- Not Moved States (after 2008): More confidently infer the governor from the place of residence.

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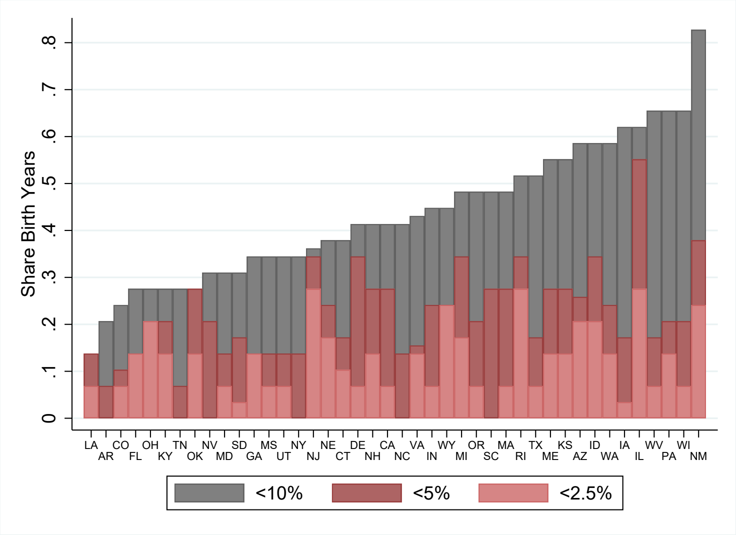
Interpretation: RD estimates local average treatment effects:

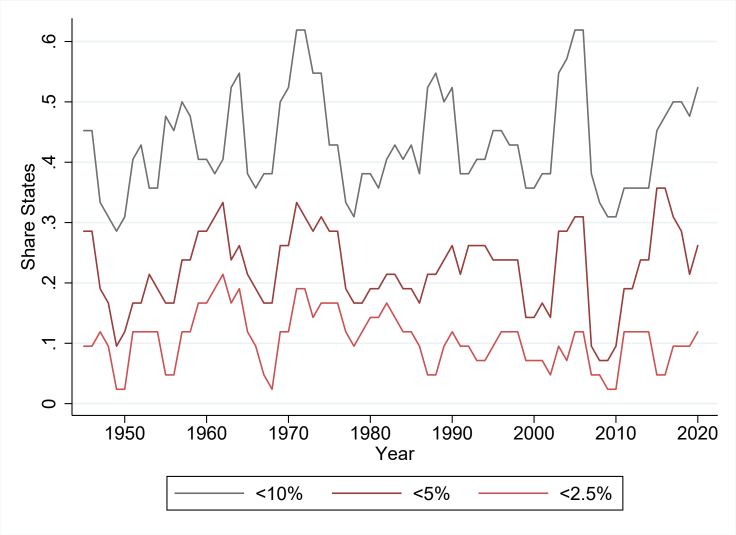
- Changes in potential outcomes if $MV^{\tau} = 0$
- We are going to over-emphasize some types of elections

Age 10 Governor

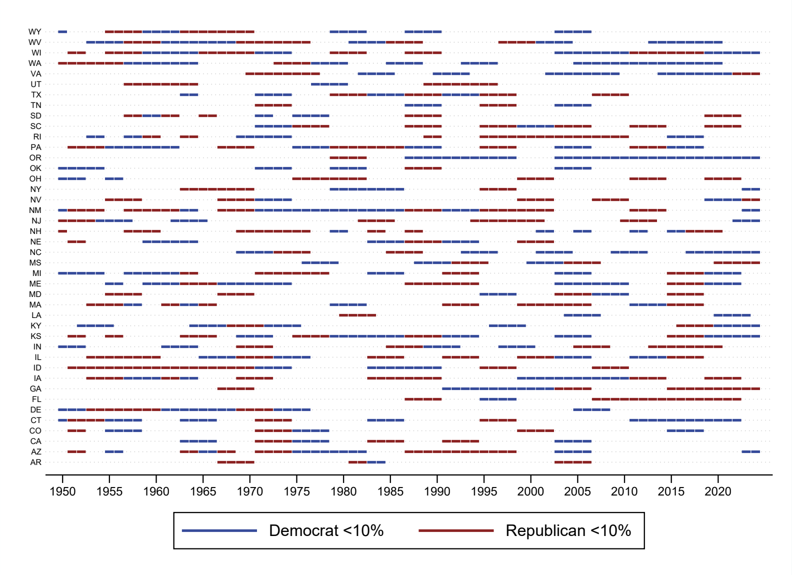
Total number of birth years: 62 (Born in 1945–2006)



Elections by Year



Close Elections by State and Year (MV<10)



Interpretation

Elections driving the variation.

- Swing states: equally matched candidates
- Safe Democratic states: strong Republican or weak Democrat
- Safe Republican states: strong Democrat or weak Republican

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Governors last for 4 years. Therefore:

- The election that decided the governor at age τ decided the governor at other ages.
- β_0 associated with $RepGovAge^{\tau}$ captures (partially) the effect at other ages.

Formal Analysis

RESULTS

RD Results

	Republican (1)
Republican at Age 10	
Observations	74.51M
Number Birth Years - States	1086
Number Elections	324
Sample	Full Sample

RD Results

	Republican
	(1)
Republican at Age 10	1.81***
	(0.51)
Observations	74.51M
Number Birth Years - States	1086
Number Elections	324
Sample	Full Sample

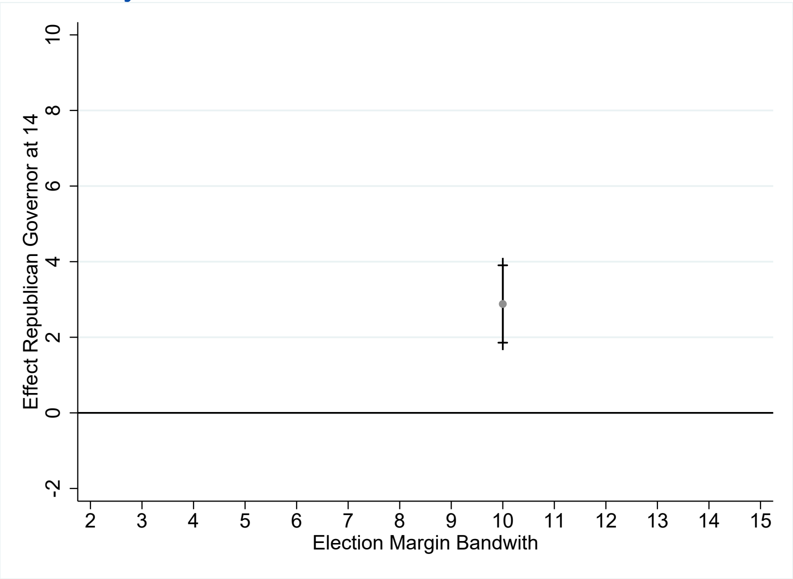
RD Results

	Republican (1)	Democrat (2)	Independent (3)	Republican (4)
Republican at Age 10	1.81***	-1.63**	-0.25	2.76***
	(0.51)	(0.81)	(0.72)	(0.68)
Observations	74.51M	74.51M	74.51M	52.02M
Number Birth Years - States	1086	1086	1086	1086
Number Elections	324	324	324	324
Sample	Full Sample	Full Sample	Full Sample	2Party-Registered

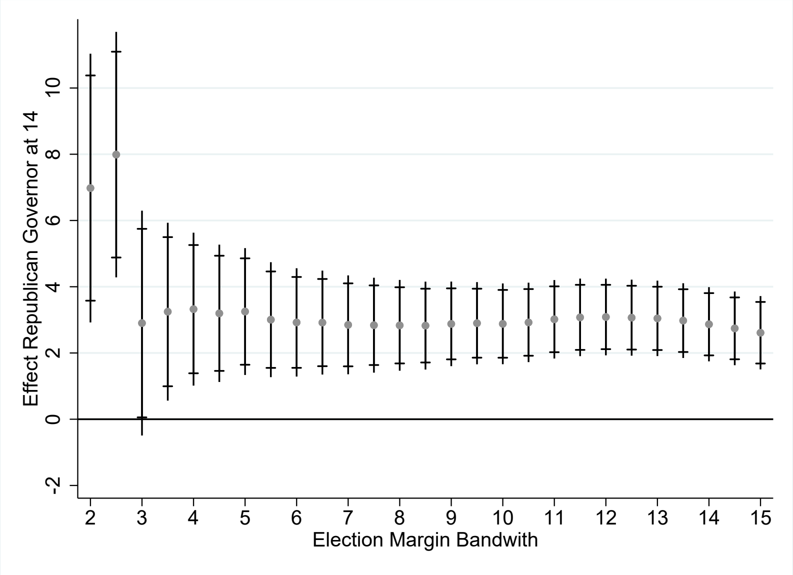
RD Results

	Republican (1)	Democrat (2)	Independent (3)	Republican (4)
Republican at Age 10	1.81***	-1.63**	-0.25	2.76***
	(0.51)	(0.81)	(0.72)	(0.68)
Observations	74.51M	74.51M	74.51M	52.02M
Number Birth Years - States	1086	1086	1086	1086
Number Elections	324	324	324	324
Republican at Age 14	2.28***	-1.02	-1.32*	2.73***
	(0.50)	(0.71)	(0.70)	(0.64)
Observations	75.96M	75.96M	75.96M	53.01M
Number Birth Years - States	1087	1087	1087	1087
Number Elections	317	317	317	317
Sample	Full Sample	Full Sample	Full Sample	2Party-Registered

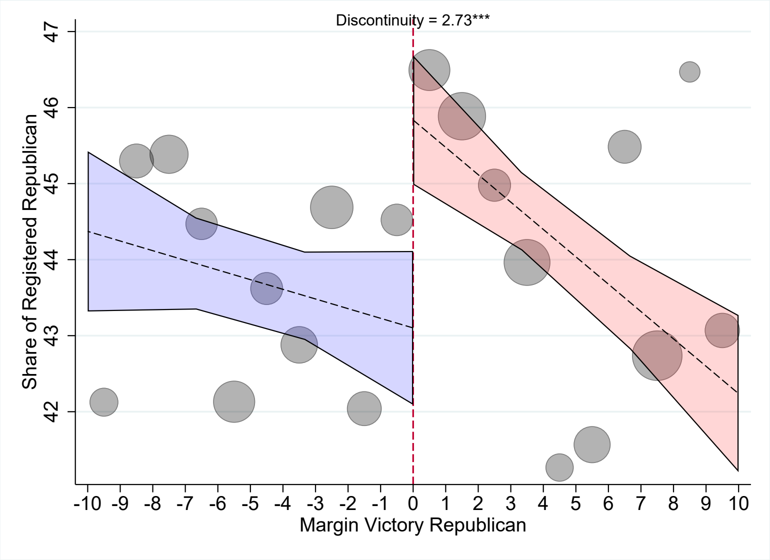
By Bandwidth - 14 years old



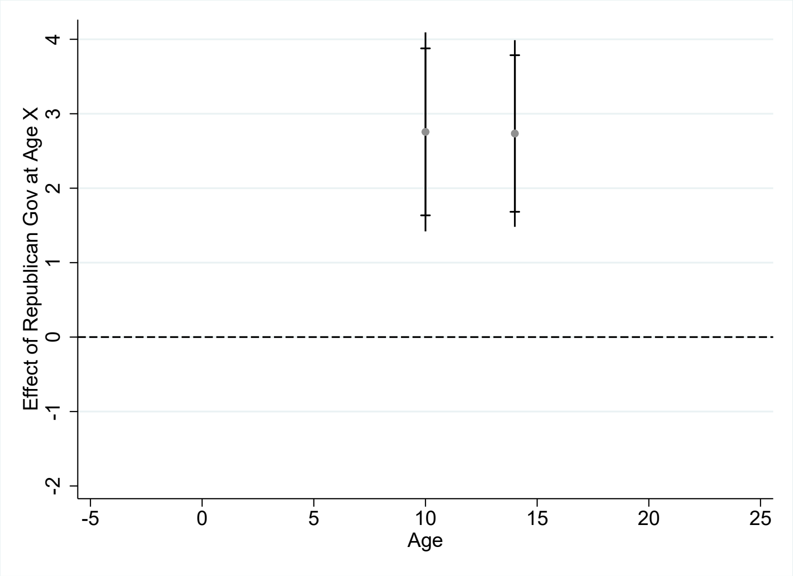
By Bandwidth - 14 years old



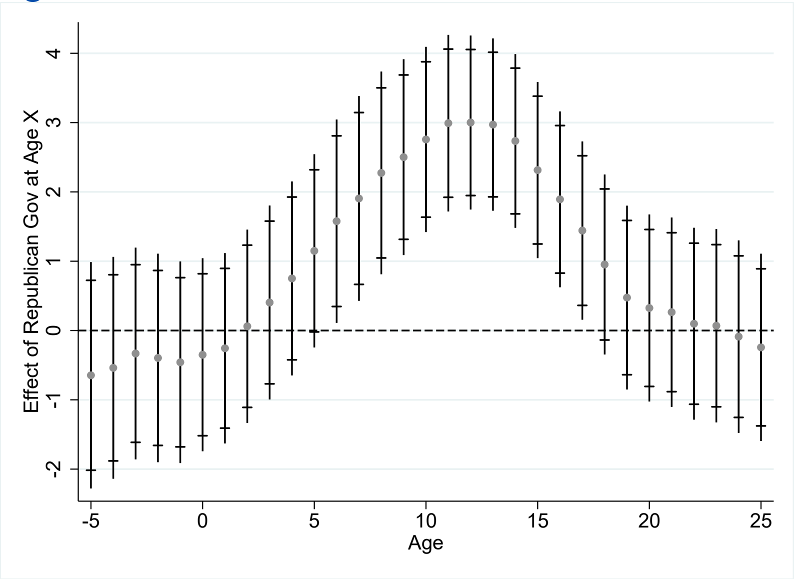
RD plot - 14 years old



RD plot by Age



RD plot by Age



RD Aggregation

- Effects seem to be driven by many years during childhood.
- Each estimate is difficult to interpret as it contains a mixture of different effects.

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- Each estimate is difficult to interpret as it contains a mixture of different effects.

Can we answer the following question:

How does the **share of childhood years** under Republican governors affect your likelihood of being a registered Republican?

$$RegRep_{i,s} = \alpha + \beta ShRep_{i,s}^{(6,17)} + \epsilon_{i,s}$$

RD Aggregation

Borusyak and Kolernman (2025) extend the RD design where the treatment status is the average or aggregate across multiple discontinuities

- Lower-Level Estimator: Stacks all RDs into a single aggregate RD, using each narrow Republican win as an instrument. Each individual can appear multiple times if there are multiple narrow-election Formal Equations
- Upper-Level Estimator: Share of years under a narrowly elected Republican governor as an instrument. Formal Equations

Both identify the causal effect of $ShRep^{a,b}$ on $Y_{i,s}$ under the standard RD assumptions.

RDA Estimates – Lower-level

	Republican (1)	Democrat (2)	Independent (3)	Republican (4)
Share Years Rep Governor (6-17)	5.32***	-4.63***	-0.76	7.92***
	(0.89)	(1.16)	(1.10)	(1.13)
Observations	883.55M	883.55M	883.55M	620.65M
Sample	Full Sample	Full Sample	Full Sample	2Party-Registered
F-stat	215.1	215.1	215.1	189.0

Upper-level Instrument By Bandwidth

Additional Results

Effects on:

- Voting in Republican and Democratic primaries
- Amount donated to Republican and Democratic party (or candidates)
- Answer to surveys on adults:
  - Attitudes: Racial and LGBT attitudes, preferences for equality (ANES)
  - Policy positions: Gun laws, abortion, affirmative action, adoption for gay couples (ANES/HERI)
  - Timing: Effects already there at 18 years old (HERI)

Results Additional Outcomes Results Surveys

DIRECTLY TESTING MECHANISMS

Mechanisms

Evidence for Political Rent Accumulation:

- Governor controls the board of education
- Court-mandated school spending Jackson et al. (2016)
- Governor budget responsibility
- President's party is aligned with the Governor

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- Governor budget responsibility
- President's party is aligned with the Governor

Preliminary evidence for Inspirational Leadership:

- No effects by popularity (Approval rates)
- Effects not heterogeneous by performance (GDP growth)
- No consistent evidence on (gendered) role model effects

Other Mechanisms

- Number of distinct Republican\Democratic Governors
- Senators (15% of the size of the effect)
- House representatives (No effect)

Conclusion

- **Governors during childhood shape adult political preferences**
- Effects peak at 13–15
- Share of ages 6–17 under a Republican $\Rightarrow$ $\approx$5 pp higher Republican registration (2-party larger)
- Political Rent Accumulation seems to play a role, while no clear evidence on popularity or performance

THANKS

Upper-Level Estimator back

$$ShRep^{a,b}_{i,s} = \gamma_s + \gamma_0 ShRepNE^{a,b}_{i,s} + \gamma_1 Q_{i,s} + \gamma_2 XX_{i,s} + \epsilon_{i,s}, \tag{2 FS}$$

$$Y_{i,s} = \beta_s + \beta_0 \widehat{ShRep}^{a,b}_{i,s} + \beta_1 Q_{i,s} + \beta_2 X_{i,s} + \rho_{i,s}, \tag{2 SS}$$

- $ShRep^{a,b}_{i,s} = \sum_{\tau=a}^{b} \frac{RepGov^{\tau}_{i,s}}{(b-a+1)}$: Share of years under a Republican governor.
- $ShRepNE^{a,b}_{i,s}$: Same as $ShRep^{a,b}_{i,s}$, but only using elections with $MV^{\tau}_{i,s} < c$.
- $Q_{i,s}$: Aggregated controls (e.g., share of narrow elections, average margin of victory).
- $BY_{i,s}$: Birth year fixed effects.

Lower-Level Estimator back

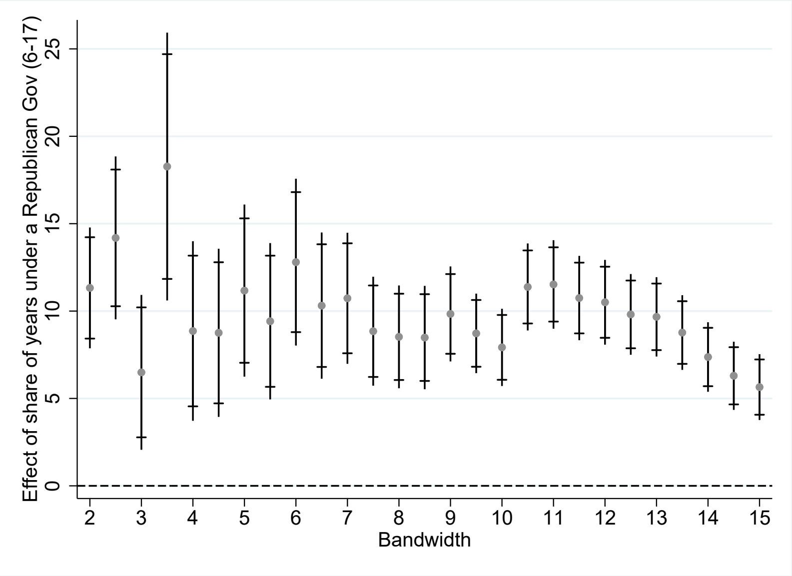
$$ShRep_{i,s}^{a,b} = \gamma_s + \gamma_0 RepGov_{i,s}^{\tau} + \gamma_1 MV_{i,s}^{\tau} + \gamma_2 (MV_{i,s}^{\tau} \times RepGov_{i,s}^{\tau}) + \gamma_3 X_{i,s} + \epsilon_{i,s}, \quad \text{(3 FS)}$$

$$Y_{i,s} = \beta_s + \beta_0 \widehat{ShRep_{i,s}^{a,b}} + \beta_1 MV_{i,s}^{\tau} + \beta_2 (MV_{i,s}^{\tau} \times RepGov_{i,s}^{\tau}) + \beta_3 X_{i,s} + \rho_{i,s}, \quad \text{(3 SS)}$$

Notation:

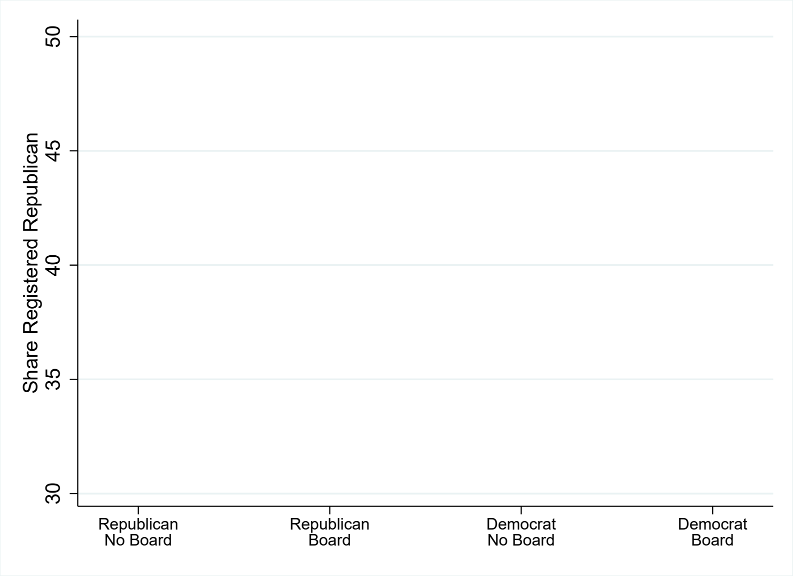
- $RepGov_{i,s}^{\tau}$: Dummy for a Republican governor at age τ.
- $MV_{i,s}^{\tau}$: Margin of victory in the election at age τ.
- $ShRep_{i,s}^{a,b}$: Defined as in the upper-level estimator.

RDA - Sensitivity Bandwidth

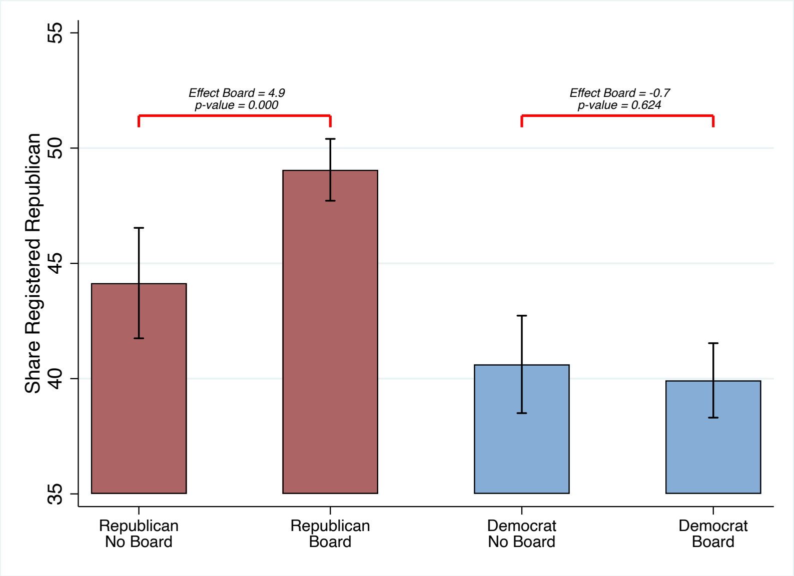


BACK

Board of Education

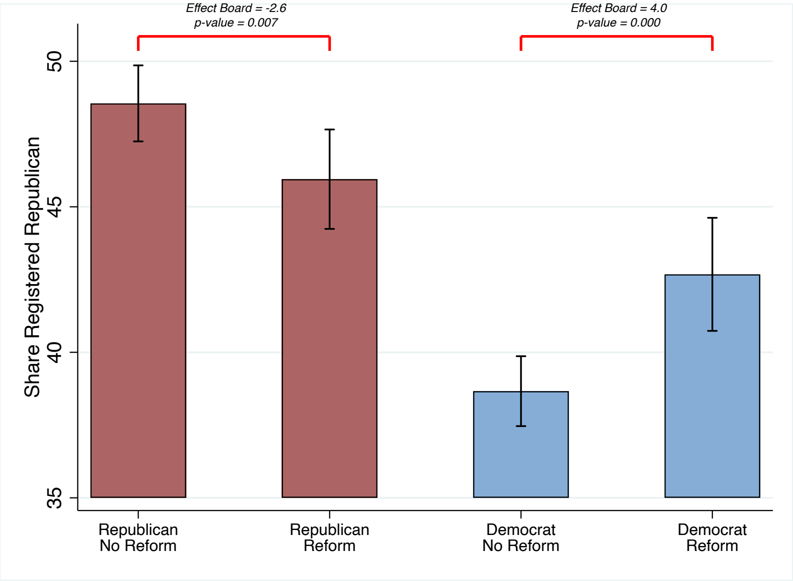


Board of Education



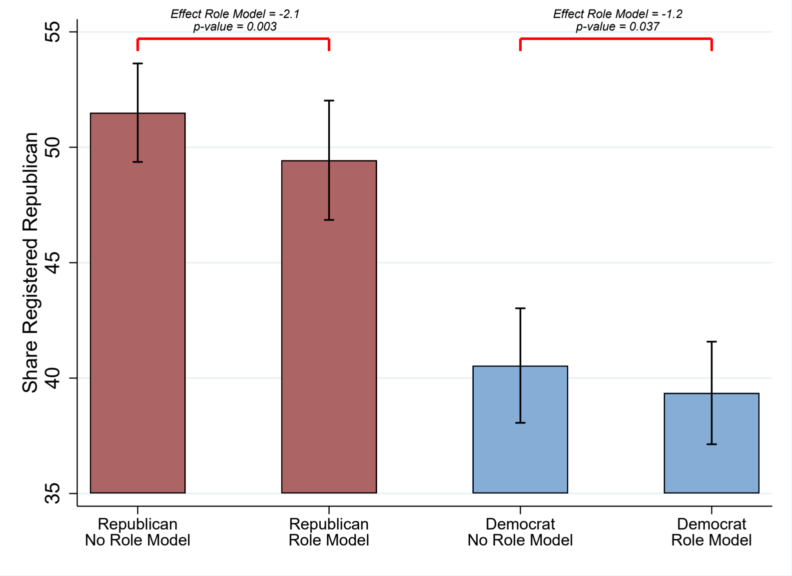
BACK

Court-mandated Reform

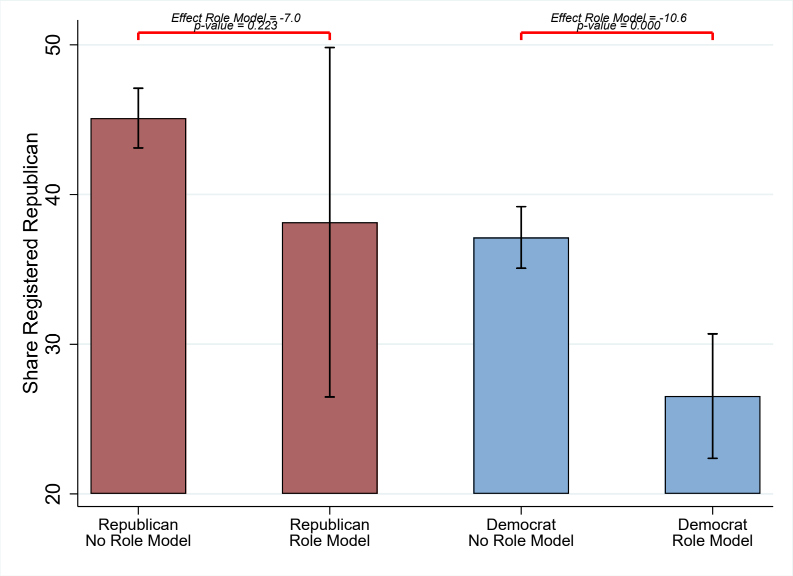


BACK

Role Model

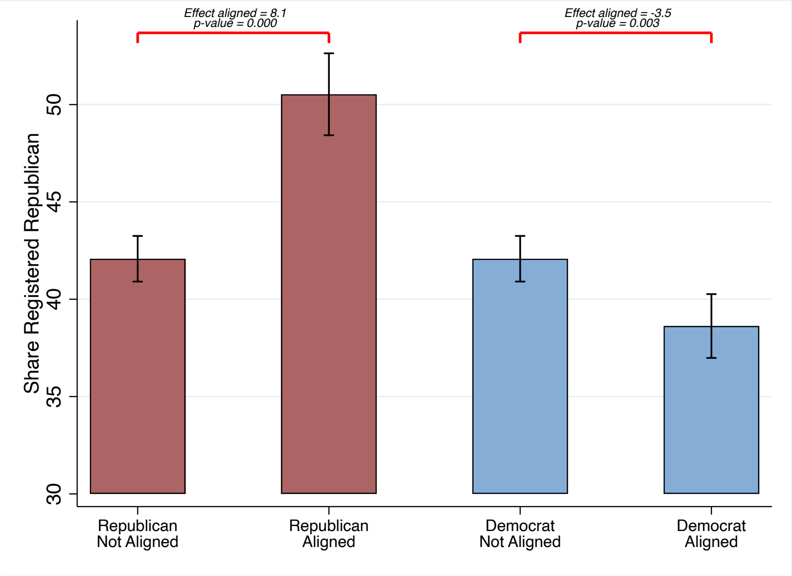

Effect Role Model = -2.1
p-value = 0.003
Effect Role Model = -1.2
p-value = 0.037
Share Registered Republican
55
50
45
40
35
Republican
No Role Model
Republican
Role Model
Democrat
No Role Model
Democrat
Role Model

Role Model - Only Female Voters



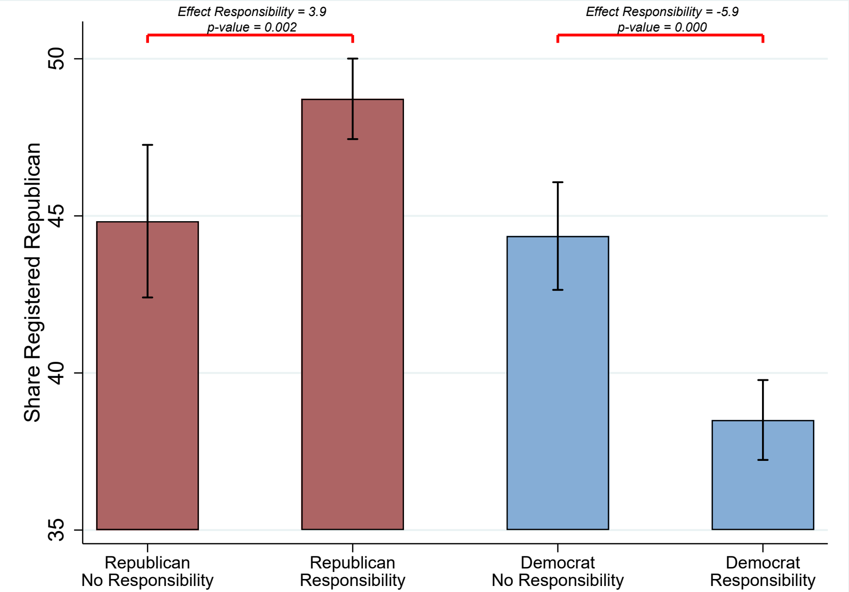
Back

Aligned President



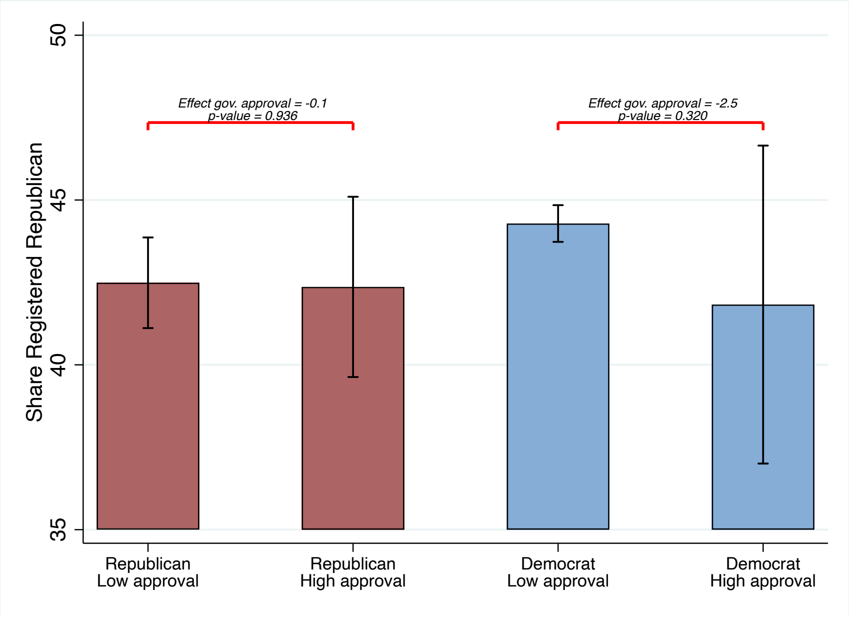
BACK

Budgetary Responsibility



BACK

Popularity



BACK

RDA Estimates – Upper-level

	Republican	Democrat	Independent	Republican
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Share Years Rep	4.73***	0.78	-5.31***	6.22***
Governor (6-17)	(1.15)	(1.83)	(1.77)	(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

Back

Other Outcomes

	Donation Amount		Voted Primary		
	Donation Rep	Donation Dem	Voted Rep	Voted Dem	Voted Rep
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Share Republican Year (6-17)	12.72	-39.19***	-0.44	-1.84***	2.69*
	(18.23)	(10.21)	(0.36)	(0.44)	(1.48)
Observations	883.55M	883.55M	13.38B	13.38B	1.90B
Sample Mean	35.62	47.82	6.57	7.60	46.37
Sample	Full Sample	Full Sample	Full Sample	Full Sample	2Party-Voters

Other Outcomes

	Voted Rep (1)	Voted Rep (2)	Voted Rep (3)	Voted Rep (4)
Share Republican Year (6-17)	4.09***	0.63	4.26**	5.72***
	(1.55)	(1.81)	(1.81)	(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	2Party-Voters	2Party-Voters	2Party-Voters	2Party-Voters
Primary Type	Not Presidential	Presidential	2016 Pres	Not Presidential

Back

House of Representatives

	Share Years Rep Representative (7-16)	Republican	Republican	Democrat	Independent	Republican
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Share Years Rep Representative (7-17)		-1.82***	-1.02	-1.05	3.32***	
		(0.50)	(0.69)	(0.65)	(0.62)	
Lower Level Instrument	0.19***					-0.19
	(0.01)					(0.13)
Observations	288.05M	288.05M	199.77M	288.05M	288.05M	199.77M
Sample	Full Sample	Full Sample	2Party-Registered	Full Sample	Full Sample	2Party-Registered
F-stat		971.3	884.5	971.3	971.3	

Back

Senate

	Republican	Democrat	Independent	Republican
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Share Years Rep Senator (6-17)	0.46**	-1.63***	1.23***	1.17***
	(0.18)	(0.32)	(0.29)	(0.28)
Observations	2166.30M	2166.30M	2166.30M	1521.75M
Sample	Full Sample	Full Sample	Full Sample	2Party-Registered
F-stat	567.5	567.5	567.5	533.2

Back

Distinct Governors

	Republican (1)	Republican (2)	Democrat (3)	Independent (4)
Share Years Rep Governor (6-17)	11.37***	14.70***	-6.00**	-5.65***
	(1.83)	(2.39)	(2.37)	(2.15)
N. Distinct Republican Governors	-2.36***	-3.13***	0.61	1.80***
	(0.32)	(0.43)	(0.41)	(0.39)
N. Distinct Democrat Governors	1.50***	1.57***	-0.96*	-0.54
	(0.37)	(0.53)	(0.58)	(0.51)
Observations	862.90M	609.55M	862.90M	862.90M
Sample	Full Sample	2Party-Registered	Full Sample	Full Sample
F-stat	135.1	132.3	135.1	135.1

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Results – ANES data

	Republican (1)	Democrat (2)	Independent (3)	Republican (4)
Share Years Rep	$4.85^{\star}$	$-6.46^{\star\star}$	1.61	$9.48^{\star\star\star}$
Governor (6-17)	(2.80)	(2.89)	(2.01)	(3.48)
Observations	146671	146671	146671	125920
Sample	Full Sample	Full Sample	Full Sample	2Party-Registered
F-stat	7488.9	7488.9	7488.9	5029.8

Additional Results – ANES data

	Gun law (1)	Abortion (2)	Aid black (3)	Gay adopt. (4)	Gay prot. (5)	Aff. act. (6)
Share Republican Year (6-17)	-6.20***	-7.89***	-8.41***	-5.97**	-2.55	-9.04***
	(2.31)	(1.95)	(2.45)	(2.46)	(2.32)	(2.46)
Observations	144815	144815	144815	98078	94400	102264
Sample Mean	32.39	1.94	26.98	70.30	80.03	24.30

Additional Results – HERI data

	Dem. (1)	Ban Speak. (2)	Marijuana (3)	Gender roles (4)	Ban death pen. (5)	Env. law (6)	Soft crime (7)
Share Republican Year (6-17)	-0.11***	-0.07	-0.47***	-0.10*	-0.32***	-0.06	-0.27***
	(0.03)	(0.16)	(0.11)	(0.06)	(0.10)	(0.06)	(0.07)
Observations	11109	7916	11076	10408	9753	9543	10800
Sample Mean	3.07	2.01	2.02	-1.92	2.16	3.13	-2.74

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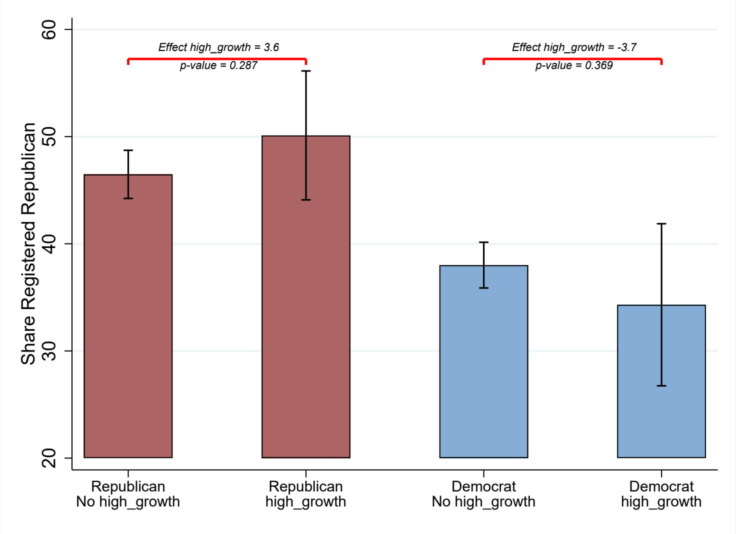
Heterogeneity by GDP growth



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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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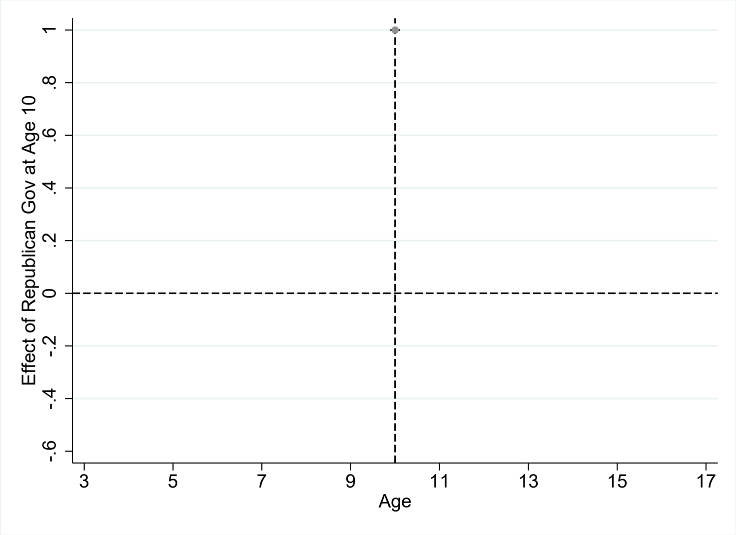
Empirical Framework – Coefficient Interpretation

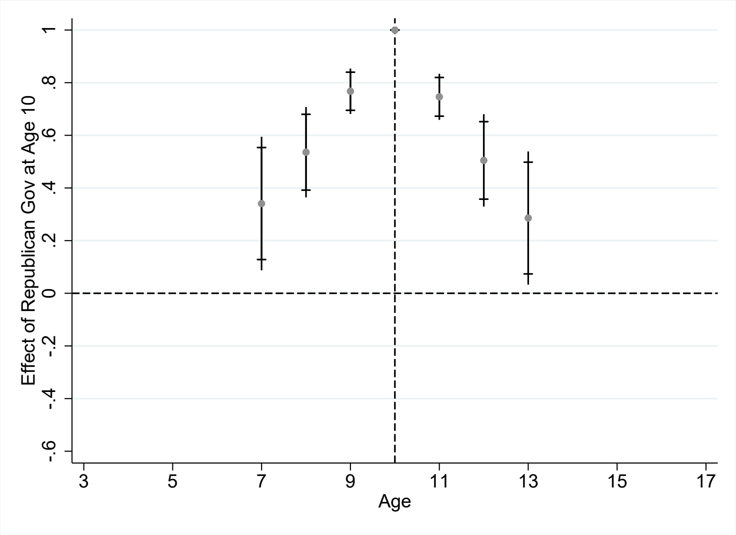
To interpret β_0, we reformulate the baseline equation

$$RepGov^{z}_{i,s} = \alpha_s + \beta_0 RepGov^{\tau}_{i,s} + \beta_1 MV^{\tau}_{i,s} + \beta_2 (MV^{\tau}_{i,s} \times RepGov^{\tau}_{i,s}) + \beta BY_{i,s} + \epsilon_{i,s}$$

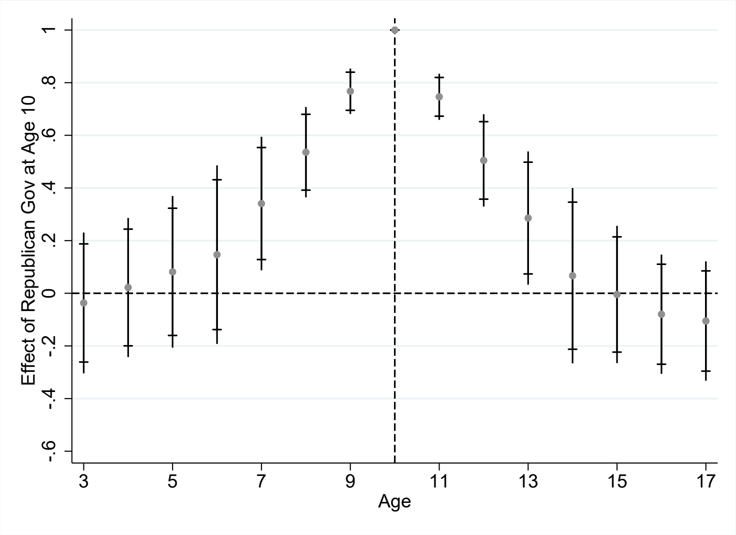
Empirical Framework – Coefficient Interpretation $\tau = 10$



Empirical Framework – Coefficient Interpretation $\tau = 10$



Empirical Framework – Coefficient Interpretation $\tau = 10$



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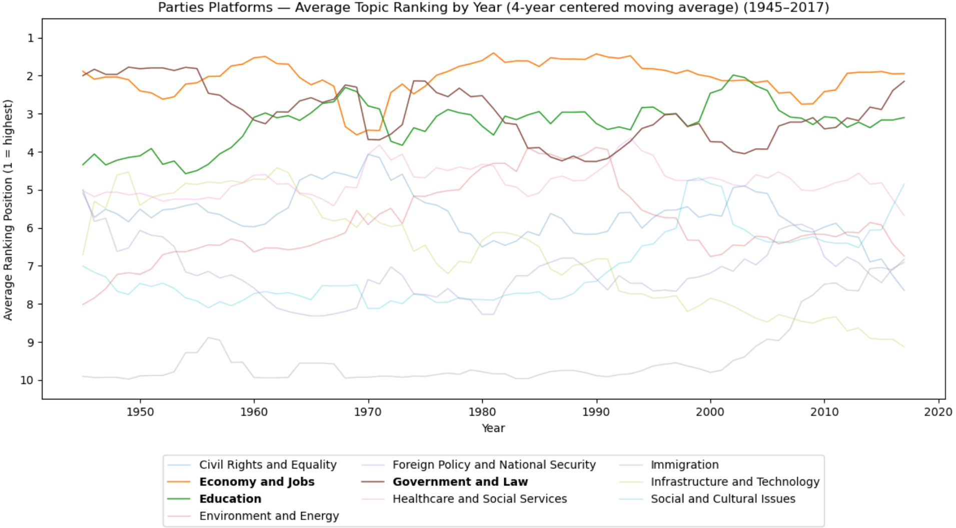
State Party Platform



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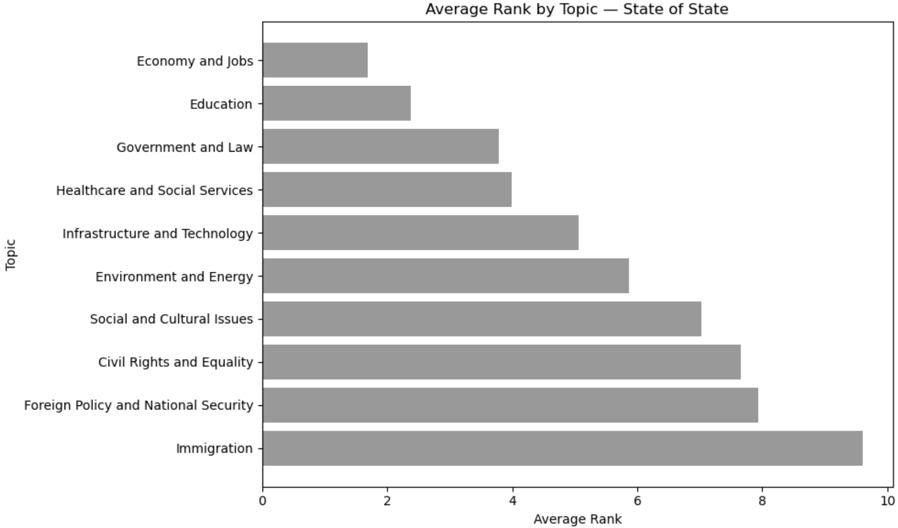
State of the State



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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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State Platforms

Economy and Jobs

(a) Democrat 1950-1969

(b) Democrat 1970-1989

(c) Democrat 1990-2009

(d) Democrat 2010-2017

(e) Republican 1950-1969

(f) Republican 1970-1989

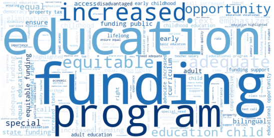
(g) Republican 1990-2009

(h) Republican 2010-2017

State Platforms

Education

(a) Democrat 1950-1969



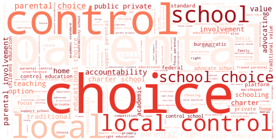
(b) Democrat 1970-1989

(c) Democrat 1990-2009

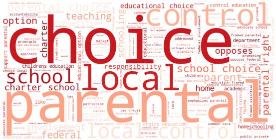
(d) Democrat 2010-2017

(e) Republican 1950-1969

(f) Republican 1970-1989



(g) Republican 1990-2009



(h) Republican 2010-2017

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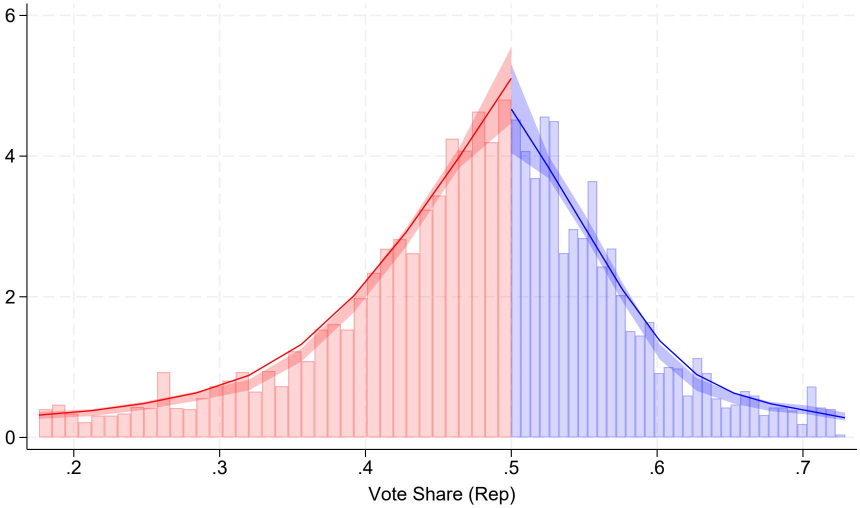
Distribution Margin of Victory



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Balancing

	RD Effect (1)	P-val (2)
Urban pop.	-0.004	.737
Rural pop.	0.003	.847
Males	0.001	.283
Youngsters	0.001	.773
Non-blacks	-0.001	.896
Blacks	0.004	.11
Foreign	0.007	.153
Low educated	-0.005	.525
Mid educated	-0.004	.306
High educated	0.000	.986
Employed	-0.004	.612
Unemployed	0.000	.99
Inactives	-0.010	.185
Poor HHs	-0.008	.136
Rich HHs	-0.001	.77
Married	-0.010	.354
Divorced	-0.002***	.008
Singles	0.002	.728
Widowed	0.000	.912

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