Critical Analysis Project: Local Politics

1. INTRODUCTION

Scholars, pundits, and researchers all note that politics in the United States today are more partisan than ever before. In the past, party identification didn't mean much to Americans. For example, in the 1960's anti-integration southerners and pro-business northerners all subscribed to the same title: "Democrat." **Political partisanship** (i.e. Democrat vs. Republican) and **ideology** (i.e. liberal vs. conservative) did not line up; many conservatives called themselves Democrats and liberals called themselves Republicans. There wasn't a clear "Democratic" position on healthcare or a "Republican" stance on guns. Today, ideology and partisanship are more closely aligned—liberals are Democrats and Republicans are conservatives. This means that party labels today are more informative. Americans can (in most cases) identify whether they support a candidate based on that politician's party identification. In a similar way, parties can also help to inform voters on big, national-level issues. If a Republican voter doesn't know the details of a specific bill passing through Congress, they can assume that their stance would align with the Republican Party position. Clearly defined parties allow individuals to make **informational shortcuts** like these on unfamiliar, complicated issues. However, just because a person is a Democrat or Republican doesn't mean they will always side with their party. In situations where an individual has greater knowledge on a policy issue, for instances if it has to do with his or her own community, **will that individual still align with their party's stance or will they be more likely to make their own determination?**

2. THEORY

Party positions on the role of government are clearly defined: Democrats (generally) want to increase the size of government and Republicans (generally) want to decrease the size of government. Government scope is frequently defined in terms of spending; with Democrats wanting to spend more on programs and Republicans wanting to cut back the budget. An individual may be less likely to use a **partisan-lens**, however, and instead employ **a personal-lens** on spending that would affect them directly. For example, if an individual thought their communities roads needed to be improved, they would approve of greatly increasing money spent on infrastructure and transportation even if they were a Republican.

3. OPERATIONALIZATION

IV: Partisan Identification (pid3); Community Grade (comm_grade: CC18_426_1 through CC18_426_5)

DV: State Spending (state_spend: CC18_427_a through CC18_427_d)

4. HYPOTHESES

H1: Democrats will request greater state spending than Republicans

H2: Individuals who give their local community a worse evaluation will request greater state spending than those individuals who give their local community a better evaluation

*H3: ** Write your own hypothesis: do you think the partisan or personal lens is more impactful? ***