# Political Factions: Primary Preferences and Split Ticket Voting in the 2024 MN Federal Elections

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When looking at the 2024 elections both of the main party candidates were seen as highly unpopular. Kamala Harris, before running for office, was sitting at a low 30 percent acceptance rate. She was also different from post vice presidents as she was not as involved in the presidency as past vice presidents have been. Donald Trump was also a highly unpopular candidate as he had just lost the 2020 election and when he was president he was sitting at a low 30 percent approval rating. These two different candidates brought us to the question of how people would vote in this election– whether they would vote across party lines or vote for the candidate that best represented their values. So we asked the question "Who do you think out of all the candidates best represents you?" This question would allow us to see if people only vote within party lines or if this election led to people choosing to vote across party lines and vote for a candidate that would best represent them. In this paper, we will demonstrate that voters who supported a losing candidate in the primary elections were more likely to vote split ticket during the general election. Comparing the support levels of Vice President Harris and President Biden would reveal greater support for the former in more liberal precincts and for the latter in more conservative precincts. Lastly, the proportion of the votes each presidential candidate would receive in the general election would be higher than the proportion of the vote they received in the Super Tuesday primary. In this paper we were able to draw some conclusions that people who marked that they would vote for a different candidate that was not part of the general election have a higher probability to split ticket votes. Furthermore, Kamala Harris had more

support on Election Day than Biden did in the primary but Trump's Election Day support was lower than his showing for Super Tuesday.

When we look back at previous research on why people vote for certain candidates in a primary election, one of the biggest aspects is the electability of that candidate. For instance in the 1988 primary elections voters who agreed more with Dole at times still chose to vote for Bush in the primary as they saw him with a higher chance of winning the general election[1]. As Alan I. Abramowitz details in *Viability, Electability, and Candidate Choice in a Presidential Primary Election: A Test of Competing Models*, because Bush was the incumbent, people had more faith in him to win the general election even if their values did not align fully with those Bush espoused. This same point was also made by Mohammad Reza Mirhosseini[2] in *Primaries with strategic voters: trading off electability and ideology*; Mirhosseini argued that people will sometimes, in order to focus on winning, be willing to put aside their values and choose the person who both generally represents them and has a chance to win the general election. For instance, when people are choosing who to vote for in the primary voters may take a look at the polls of the individual candidates. If they see that these candidates have no chance of winning they will not vote for them but rather use their vote in a more "productive" way and choose to vote for the candidate who has a better electability chance in the general election.

Further into this theory, we can look at two specific models that speak on the behaviors of voters when it comes to choosing their candidates. These two specific models are the Folk theory model and the Michigan Model. The folk theory model states that people would vote for candidates from different parties if their values align with theirs and that people do vote for

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[1] Abramowitz, Alan I. "Viability, Electability, and Candidate Choice in a Presidential Primary Election: A Test of Competing Models." *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 51, no. 4, 1989, pp. 977–92. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/2131544. Accessed 10 Oct. 2024.

[2] Mirhosseini, Mohammad Reza. "Primaries with Strategic Voters: Trading off Electability and Ideology." *Social Choice and Welfare*, vol. 44, no. 3, 2015, pp. 457–71. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/43662601. Accessed 10 Oct. 2024.

specific issues. Under this model, candidates are wise to spend more money, and more time and campaign presence, on locations that could be split or won. Then there is the Michigan model which explains that voters will vote for their party whether or not a candidate backs their views if they are running for their party. As Achen and Bartel[3] wrote in their book *Democracy for Realists*, people are part of voter groups and their ideological group will far outweigh their political thoughts. This hits at the idea that voters will vote for the party that they have been a part of and not vote based on their ideas. As well, the identity of the voter is important when looking at the voter's choice. For instance, in *Racial Identity and Voting: Conceptualizing White Identity in Spatial Terms*, Weller and Junn[4] describe how because racial resentment has become a part of voter choice for many citizens, it may affect the way that they vote even if it means voting for different parties.

We set out to study three hypotheses: the first, that supporters of non-nominated candidates would be more likely to vote split ticket; the second, that support for Vice President Harris would be higher than for President Biden in more liberal precincts, and vice versa in more conservative ones; and the third that the proportion of votes both party nominees received in the general election would be higher than the percentage of support they received in the primaries.

For our first hypothesis, regarding split ticket voting, we began by defining split ticket as supporting either a Representative or Senatorial candidate of a different party than that of one's vote for President (by contrast, a "straight ticket" voter supports candidates of the same political party for all three offices). As we do not want to limit our population to those who actually voted in this year's primaries, we expanded our question to ask which, of the following candidates, a

[3] Achen, C. H., & Bartels, L. M. (2017). *Democracy for Realists: Why elections do not produce responsive government*. Princeton University Press.
[4] Weller, Nicholas, and Jane Junn. "Racial Identity and Voting: Conceptualizing White Identity in Spatial Terms." *Perspectives on Politics* 16.2 (2018): 436–448. Web.

voter would *ideally prefer* to be President. Ultimately, the verbiage we settled on modified this to asking who would *best represent* the Respondent as President. Furthermore, due to the lack of a competitive primary on the Democratic side, we added Senator Bernie Sanders, the runner-up in the 2020 Democratic Presidential primary, because we believed that a significant number of respondents would feel best represented by him, even if they had no candidate such as him for whom to vote in this primary election.

Our second hypothesis was particular to the Democratic party. Specifically, we believed that comparing the support levels of Vice President Harris and President Biden would reveal greater support for the former in more liberal precincts, and for the latter in more conservative precincts (operationalized as the proportions of votes received by Vice President Harris and President Trump in the 2024 election, by precinct). However, we ran into an unanticipated difficulty– namely, that only five respondents (out of 665) registered a preference for President Biden. Such a small sample size would render any result derived meaningless, and so we are forced to accept that this study provided an inconclusive answer to this research question.

Our final hypothesis was that the proportion of the votes each presidential candidate would receive in the general election would be higher than the proportion of the vote they received in the Super Tuesday primary in MN-02 in March 2024. One of the difficulties for this question is that the populations of the general election and the primary are very different. Although I tried several different approaches to simulate the primary populations within the sample, the best I could come up with was to use the presidential preference question. A second difficulty arose because of the candidate change in the Democratic Party; to solve this, we decided to identify Harris and Biden votes as "the same", as they shared a ticket. Therefore, Presidential votes for Harris, primary votes for Biden, and presidential preferences for either

candidate would be identified. We recognize that this is a very imperfect solution, but it is the most natural approximation I could think of. Therefore, we operationalized the question as follows: For each presidential candidate, how does the share of their vote in the Super Tuesday primary compare to the proportion of voters who voted for them, compared to the proportion of people who indicated a preference for a candidate associated with that political party? We identified Biden, Harris, Dean Phillips, and Sanders with the Democratic Party, and Trump, Nikki Haley, Ron DeSantis, and RFK Jr. with the Republican Party. Noting that Sanders is an Independent, and RFK Jr. is a former Democrat who recently became Independent, we assign these candidates to a party by the candidate whom they endorsed for President (Sanders endorsed Harris; RFK Jr. endorsed Trump).

We gathered the data we needed to address these hypotheses through an anonymous paper questionnaire distributed to a convenience sample of voters at several Minnesota polling locations, immediately after they had voted. The questionnaire contained a diverse set of questions regarding the respondent's political positions and choices, as part of a group of research projects of which ours was a part. All surveys were conducted in-person, via these paper questionnaires, with an emphasis placed on the anonymity of responses by those conducting the surveys.

We tested our hypotheses through t-tests, using t and p-values to gauge the correlatory association between the relevant variables for each hypothesis. For the first, this was vote choices candidate preference. For the second, the data was simply insufficient to bear out meaningful testing. For the third, we compared in-party support proportions for each candidate during their assemblies compared to during the election. Due to the unusual circumstances of

Vice President Kamala's nomination, President Biden's Super Tuesday numbers are used in place of hers, the implications of which will be discussed later.

We found significant evidence that the rate of split ticket voting is higher among individuals who supported a candidate who did not become the eventual nominee, compared to those who supported the eventual nominee. As we can see in Figure 1, rates of split ticket voting are higher for both non-nominee supporters, as well as for GOP supporters. The width of the bars in Figure 1 correspond to the groups' relative proportions in the sample.

Taking a t-test yields $t = -2.8693$, and p-value = 0.002122. However, we can also perform separate t-tests on the GOP and Democratic supporting groups. This will increase the p-value for each, as the sample size decreases. While the GOP group remains significant, with $t = -1.8407$ and p-value = 0.03346, the Democratic group is marginally insignificant, with $t = -1.3473$ and p-value = 0.0895.



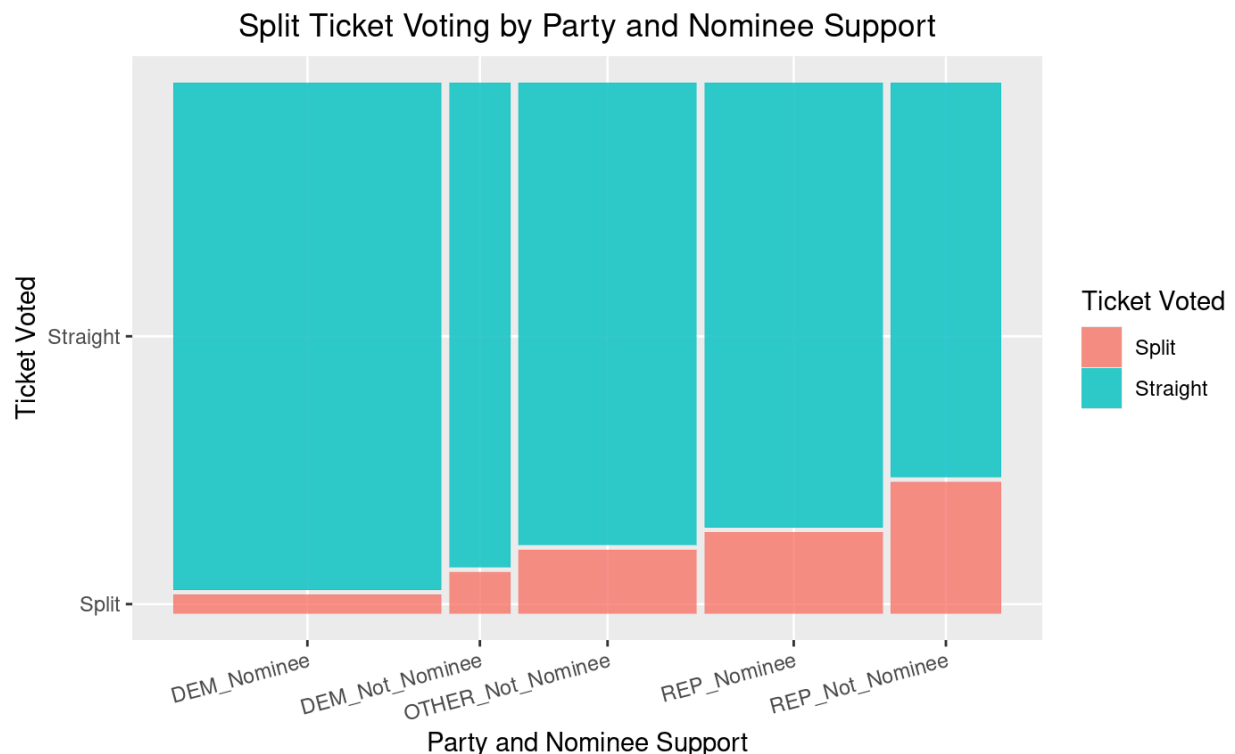Split Ticket Voting by Party and Nominee Support

Figure 1: Across parties, split ticket voting occurred at higher rates among voters who self-reported representation by presidential candidates other than the eventual nominee. Additionally, split ticket voting occurred at higher rates among those who identified with Republican presidential candidates, compared to Democratic presidential candidates.

As we indicated above, our sample produced insufficient Biden-supporting voters to draw any meaningful conclusions. As such, we will now examine our third hypothesis. We hypothesized that the proportion of candidates' support among voters who indicated a preference for a candidate associated with their party, would exceed the support that that candidate received on the Super Tuesday primary within MN-02. This hypothesis was partially borne out in the data, but not completely.

First, we must note the MN-02 primary results for the two parties: President Biden 19404 of 27043 votes, a proportion of 71.75%; President Trump received 31035 of 46462 votes, a proportion of 66.80%.

## Harris and Trump Intraparty Support in General vs Primary
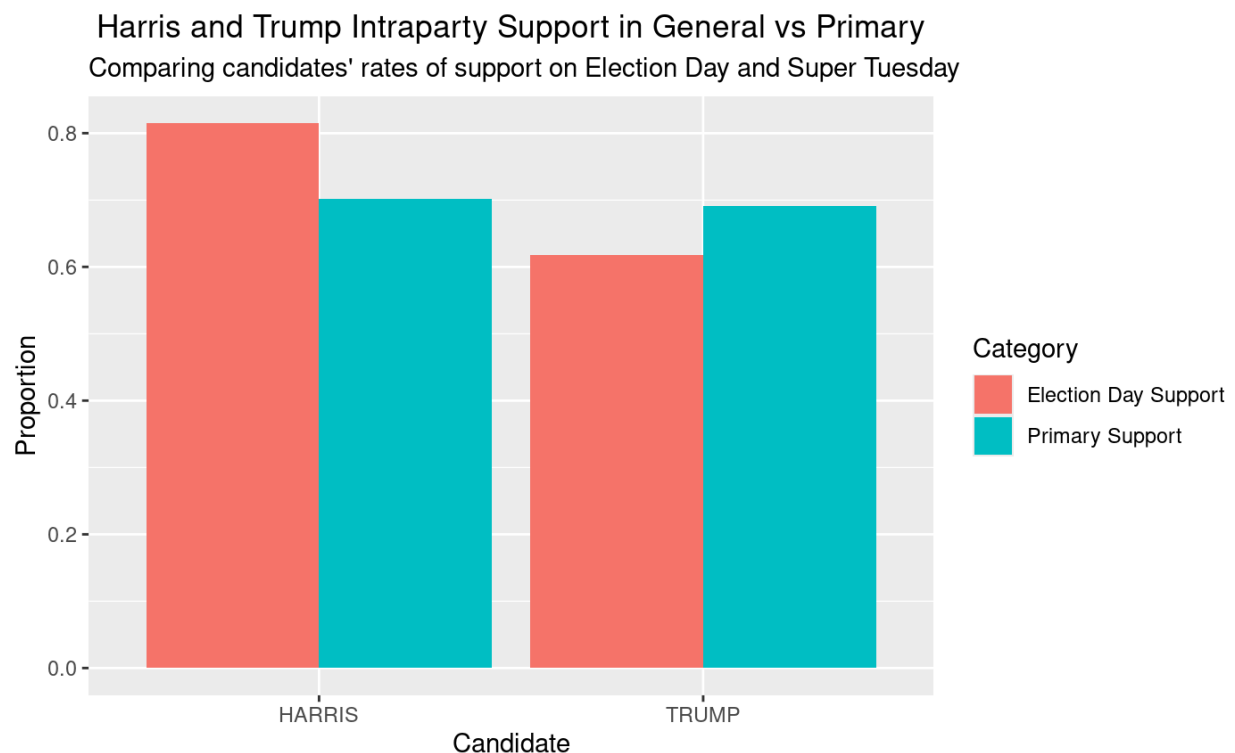### Comparing candidates' rates of support on Election Day and Super Tuesday

Figure 2: In the 2024 US Presidential Election, Harris received a significantly larger proportion of the votes in MN-02 among individuals who indicated a preference for a Democratic President (a proxy of partisan affiliation), than Biden received among registered Democrats in the Super Tuesday Democratic Primary. Conversely, Trump received noticeably, although not significantly, less support among Election Day voters who wanted a Republican President, compared to his level of support on Super Tuesday.

First, we will test the difference between Harris' Election Day support among people who preferred a Democrat for President, minus Biden's Super Tuesday support among Democratic primary voters. Performing a t-test gives $t = 3.9627$ and p-value = 9.391e-05, which is a significant result. Therefore, we have significant evidence that Harris' Election Day support was greater than Biden's primary support, consistent with our hypothesis. However, this also may go more to show the difference in support between President Biden and Vice President Kamala.

Running the same test for Trump, we get $t = -1.6639$ and p-value = 0.09742. This means that we have marginally significant evidence that Trump's Election Day support was *lower* among voters who wanted a Republican for President, compared to his Super Tuesday showing. This is very surprising, considering that Trump was the one with the more contested primary. The evidence clearly does not support our hypothesis in President Trump's case.

In summary, the data bears out our first hypothesis, showing that there is a correlation between desire for a non-nominated candidate and split-ticket voting; is insufficient to allow for a conclusion regarding our second hypothesis; and supports our hypothesis in the case of Harris, but rebuts it in the case of Trump.

Ultimately, this data and these conclusions are limited by the scale of our research, and by the circumstances of this election. Desire for the presidency of a non-nominated candidate has here a correlation with split-ticket voting, but we also see a significantly higher overall rate of split-ticket voting among respondents who voted for Trump, which might be indicative of any

number of things, from candidate differences, to perception of the election across party lines, to the makeup of those surveyed. Despite the locations surveyed being selected to provide a balanced slice of constituents, that slice is still representative of Minnesota, a historically blue state that this year reelected Democratic Senator Amy Klobuchar by 16 percentage points over her Republican challenger.

Challenges also occur with our third hypothesis, though the extrapolation of this one is hindered more by the unusual circumstances of Vice President Kamala's nomination, and specifically that she was not nominated in an open primary. The data regarding support for her in the general election compared to President Biden in the primary does support our hypothesis, but the data for Trump in his general election compared to his primary does not. This means that we cannot conclude in favor of our hypothesis, but nor can we conclude against it, as without any other reference point we can't speak to if the support of Trump is unusual in any way.

This leaves us with the need to collect more data going forwards. We can broadly say that there appears to be a correlation between constituents voting against their party down the ballot if their preferred candidate is not nominated, or even voting against their party for president and sticking to it down the ballot, and this may be important for parties to mind going forwards, perhaps as a potential point of leverage for down-ballot candidates to seize on when seeking to make gains in their elections. However, it also shows that people do, in the presidential election, generally vote in line with their party allegiance. This may display an avenue for future research in the shadow of partisan intoxication: that while people *do* vote with their party during presidential elections, this isn't necessarily the case in other elections, and there may even be room for voters to shift their support away from their party in these elections when they vote for a candidate who they do not prefer for president.