How Partisan Is Local Election Administration?*

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Abstract

In the US, elections are often administered by directly elected local officials who run as members of a political party. Do these officials use their office to give their party an edge in elections? We answer this question using a newly collected dataset of more than 5,600 clerk elections and a close-election regression discontinuity design, comparing counties that narrowly elect a Democratic election administrator rather than a Republican. Despite the concern that these officials tilt elections in their party's favor, we find that Democratic and Republican officials oversee elections with nearly identical results. To understand why partisan election officials oversee similar election results, we analyze data on the policies election officials choose. We present evidence that the local officials implement neutral policies rather than attempting and failing to advantage their party. While we cannot rule out some important risks of partisan election administration, including very small effects that nevertheless tip close elections, our results imply that local election officials are not typically and noticeably advantaging their preferred party.

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1 Introduction

In much of the US, elections are administered by partisan elected officials rather than non-partisan bureaucrats. This sets the US apart from its peers and leads many experts and members of the public to worry that election officials give their party an unfair advantage. When asked whether election officials are impartial, elections experts ranked the US 31 out of 34 OECD countries, ahead of only Hungary, Mexico, and Turkey (Norris and Grömping 2019). Describing partisan local and state election officials, election law expert Daniel P. Tokaji captures the concern many have: "Whether or not these officials have acted based on partisan bias is impossible to know for sure. What can be said with confidence is that conflicts of interest are a pervasive problem in U.S. election administration."[1] Do partisan election officials give their party an advantage?

Experts are concerned for a reason. Local election officials have considerable freedom in how they run elections (Kimball and Kropf 2006), and other partisan local officials appear to use their authority to advance their party's goals (de Benedictis-Kessner and Warshaw 2016, 2020; Gerber and Hopkins 2011). The US also has a long history of national, state, and local policies designed to limit the power of racial and ethnic minorities (Keele, Cubbison, and White 2021; Keyssar 2000). On the other hand, the job of local election officials is technical and these more bureaucratic offices may attract–and voters may select—officials who carry out their duties in the same way despite being members of different parties (Kimball et al. 2013; Lim, Silveira, and Snyder 2016; Shepherd et al. 2021; Thompson 2020). Campaigns and political parties also often bring lawsuits against local officials who make changes that disadvantage their party, making it more costly for local officials to advantage their party even if the law permits them to do so.

Research directly testing whether election officials favor their party is notably mixed. Democratic officials open more polling places than Republicans, but officials do not strategically locate polling places to advantage their party (McBrayer, Williams, and Eckelman

[1] https://www.acslaw.org/?post_type=acsblog&p=7355

2020; Shepherd et al. 2021). In some cases, partisans reject and accept provisional ballots to improve their party's chances (Kropf, Vercellotti, and Kimball 2013), but in others these decisions appear neutral (Merivaki and Smith 2016). Local election officials respond to constituent requests faster when the requester is likely to vote for their preferred party (Porter and Rogowski 2018), but Democrats and Republicans both take more time responding to requests from Latino constituents (White, Nathan, and Faller 2015). Local officials may manage registered voter lists (Stuart 2004), set election administration budgets (Mohr et al. 2019), or even design the ballot to advantage their party (Hamilton and Ladd 1996). But Palm Beach County's famous butterfly ballot that lost Al Gore more the 2,000 votes, more than the razor-thin margin in the 2000 Florida presidential election, was designed under the supervision of a Democratic local election official (Wand et al. 2001).

The existing evidence is mixed for two reasons. First, places that elect Democratic rather than Republican election officials are likely different for many reasons, and these reasons may influence how an election official from either party would administer elections. Policies like distance limits on polling places that make sense in big cities may not make sense in rural or suburban areas. Practices like all-mail voting that are familiar and well understood in the West may be unusual in the Northeast. And citizens in some places may be more likely to cast provisional ballots no matter who administered the election. All of the studies to date compare election administration by Democratic and Republican election officials in counties, and serving populations, that are different in unobservable ways. While many of these studies seek to address this by adjusting for observed differences in a regression, places that elect Democrat rather than Republican election officials may still be different on many unobserved dimensions.

Second, how elections are administered often has an ambiguous effect on election outcomes. For example, despite a widespread view that universal vote-by-mail would increase turnout and thereby advantage Democrats, it appears to not meaningfully advantage either party (Barber and Holbein 2020; Thompson et al. 2020). Democratic and Republican

election administrators may implement different policies, but it is unclear whether these individual policy differences add up in a way that advantages the administrator's party.

We address both of these issues, credibly estimating how much partisan election officials improve their party's performance in future elections.[2] To do so, we collect an original dataset of 5,644 clerk elections in 1,236 counties from 1998 to 2018. Using a close-election regression discontinuity design, comparing places that narrowly elect a Democratic clerk to those that narrowly elect a Republican, we estimate how much of an advantage partisan clerks give to their party in presidential and statewide elections. This design ensures that the differences we observe arise from who conducts election administration rather than pre-existing differences in citizen preferences or local conditions.

Despite widespread concern that partisan election officials advantage their party, we find that Democratic and Republican election officials oversee remarkably similar election outcomes when serving similar counties. Our preferred estimate implies that local election officials worsen their party's standing in presidential elections by one-tenth of one percentage point, and the most positive effect within the 95-percent confidence interval is a one-percentage-point advantage. While our year-by-year estimates are nosier, we find that the effect on Democratic vote share is similar in every year from 2004 to 2020.

Do election officials intend to conduct elections in a neutral way? Or do election officials seek to advantage their party but fail to noticeably improve their party's vote share? We study these alternative explanations using four different tests. While the evidence is only suggestive, we find no evidence that election officials try and fail to advantage their party. Instead, it appears as though local partisan election officials administer elections in a neutral manner.

Our findings also contribute new evidence about the degree of polarization in local policymaking and how much local policymaking resembles state and national policymaking. Elec-

[2]We occasionally refer to local election officials as clerks. This is shorthand. In some counties, local election officials are called auditor, election administrator, or supervisor of elections. In other counties, the chief elections officer has additional duties unrelated to elections and their titles are finance officer, probate judge, and tax assessor.

tion administration is a highly polarized issue at the state and federal level, with Democrats arguing for expanded convenience voting options and Republicans proposing identification requirements and rolled back early and mail voting options, among many other pitched battles (Hasen 2012, 2020). In a number of offices and across multiple policy domains, local policy is noticeably different when set by a Democrat rather than a Republican (de Benedictis-Kessner and Warshaw 2016, 2020; Gerber and Hopkins 2011; Warshaw 2019). Still, competition among local governments, electoral pressures, interest group influence, and candidate entry and selection may limit this polarization (Anzia 2021; Ferreira and Gyourko 2009; Lim, Silveira, and Snyder 2016; Thompson 2020). Our findings provide further evidence that local policymaking is not as partisan as federal and state policymaking in all domains and that policymaking by officials serving in more technical roles may be less partisan given the background and experience they are expected to bring to the role.

While we find that Democratic and Republican election officials oversee elections with similar outcomes, we cannot rule out small differences between Democratic and Republican officials that could determine very close elections. If an election is decided by less than a percentage point, we cannot confidently say that the clerk could not tip it in their party's favor. We also cannot rule out rare but very large effects — if a very small number of election officials dramatically change the outcomes of elections they oversee, this effect will make up only a small share of the average effect and be drowned out by the many officials who do not advantage their party. Still, we find that the average effect of replacing a Republican local election official with a Democrat is small, suggesting that most election officials are not meaningfully biasing elections in their party's favor.

The article is organized as follows. In the next section we discuss the authorities formally granted to partisan local election officials across the US. In Section 3, we discuss our new data on clerk elections and our research design. In Section 4 we present our main finding that partisan clerks do not meaningfully advantage their party. In Section 5, we present suggestive

evidence that clerks intend to conduct elections in a neutral way on average. We conclude with a discussion of what these findings imply for partisan local election administration.

2 The Role of Local Election Officials

Across the United States, thousands of local election officials play a central role in the administration of elections. While clerk selection methods, administrative structures, and statutory duties vary from state to state and even county to county, their responsibilities typically include registering voters, maintaining an up-to-date list of registered voters, hiring and training poll workers, selecting poll locations, printing ballots, acquiring and maintaining election equipment, running early and absentee voting, educating and communicating with voters, overseeing election day, tabulating the votes cast, handling provisional ballots, and certifying election results (Kimball and Kropf 2006).

Clerks administer elections within the bounds of a patchwork of complex and frequently-changing federal, state, and local laws. They also work in concert with a range of other officials to successfully conduct elections, including federal entities (the U.S. Election Assistance Commission), state officers (usually housed in the Secretary of State's office), municipal and county staff, and local volunteers (who typically serve as poll workers on Election Day). Clerks typically serve at the county level, though in ten mostly Northeastern states important responsibilities are carried out at the municipal level. Additionally, the most populous counties in a state frequently have their own forms of election administration.

Building on Kimball and Kropf (2006), and reviewing state and local election laws, we identify 32 states that contain at least some jurisdictions with a partisan elected official tasked with election responsibilities.[3] Of these, 21 entrust elected partisan clerks as the

[3]These states are Alabama, Arkansas, Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, New Jersey, Nevada, New Mexico, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Washington, Wisconsin, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

sole or primary election administrators.[4] Fourteen of these states delegate all local election administrative duties to one elected official in each county.[5]

Even among states that delegate considerable election administration authority to a partisan directly elected official, there are still differences across states in exactly what these partisan local election officials do. Table A.1 captures these differences. Most of the 21 states, but not all, give both registration and voting administration duties to the same elected officer. Most also entrust registration list maintenance and voting equipment decisions to the elected partisan clerk. However, in only about half do local election officials administer early voting and choose polling places, and many are limited in who they can hire as poll workers.

3 Studying Partisan Control of Local Election Offices

In this section, we first describe our data including original data on the elections of local election officials, county-level election results and turnout for presidential and statewide office from 2000 to 2020, and county-level election administration data on the number and location of polling places, the number of registered voters, the number of provisional ballots, and survey-reported wait times. Next, we discuss our close-election regression discontinuity design and how we make our estimates more precise.

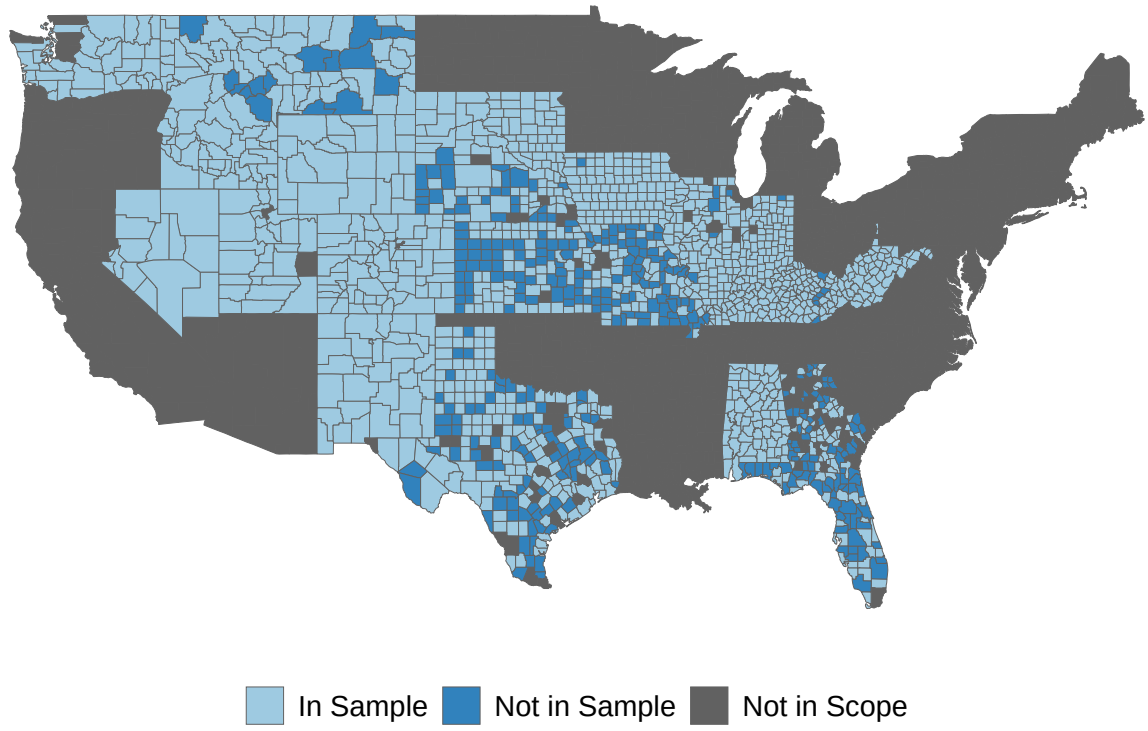
3.1 New Data on the Elections of Partisan Local Election Officials

For this project, we gathered an original dataset of 5,644 elections of partisan local election officials in 1,236 counties and 21 states held between 1998 and 2018. We collected these results in three steps: First, we scraped state election websites for all county-level results.

[4]These states are Alabama, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Washington, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

[5]These states are Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

Figure 1: **Map of Our Original Data on the Elections of Partisan Local Election Officials.** Out of 1,582 counties that elect a partisan election official, 1,236 appear in our dataset at least once. Alaska and Hawaii do not have directly elected partisan election officials.



Next, we visited county election websites for results not available from states. Finally, we contacted counties directly to request results not available on their websites.

Figure 1 shows the counties for which we have data in light blue. Counties with directly elected partisan election officials where we could not find election data are in dark blue. We use dark gray to denote counties where towns, cities, and villages run elections, boards share responsibilities for elections, or election officials are appointed or nonpartisan.

One notable feature of the county clerk election data we collect is how low the correlation between Democratic presidential vote share and Democratic clerk vote share is in these counties. Democratic presidential vote share correlates with lagged Democratic presidential vote share in these counties with a correlation coefficient of 0.89. Meanwhile, Democratic clerk vote share correlates with Democratic presidential vote share with a correlation coefficient of 0.34. Figures A.1 in the appendix capture this pattern.

3.2 County-Level Election Results and Voter Participation

We obtained county-level presidential election results for 1996 to 2020 from Dave Leip's Election Atlas.[6] We also compiled data on every regularly scheduled gubernatorial election from 1994 to 2017 and every regular US senate election from 1994 to 2020 from Leip's Atlas. Dave Leip's Election Atlas also contains data on the number of ballots cast during federal general elections and the number of votes counted in the race for the highest federal office on the ballot, either representative, senator, or president.[7]

We measure turnout as the share of county residents age 18 and older who voted. We estimate the number of residents age 18 and older in a county using estimates of county population by age for every year from 1969 to 2019 produced by the National Cancer Institutes's Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results Program.[8]

3.3 County-Level Data on Election Administration

We assemble a set of indicators on how elections have been run over time and across counties primarily using the Election Administration and Voting Survey (EAVS) from the US Election Assistance Commission. We use this survey to measure for each even-year federal general election in every county the number of polling places, provisional ballots cast, provisional ballots rejected, absentee ballots rejected, and the number of observations removed from the registration list. We use Dave Leip's Election Atlas to measure the number of registered voters in a county in every even-year federal general election as well as the share of registered voters listed as members of the Democratic party.

In addition to these data sets, we follow Pettigrew (2017) in using the Cooperative Congressional Election Study to measure the share of voters who had to wait at the polls for

[6] `https://uselectionatlas.org/`

[7] Due to a small number of irregularities in the number of ballots cast in some counties, we use the number of votes in the race for the highest federal office as our measure of turnout.

[8] `https://seer.cancer.gov/popdata/`

more than 10 minutes. We compute this measure by county for each federal general election between 2006 and 2018 except for 2010.

3.4 Empirical Strategy: Regression Discontinuity Design

We estimate the advantage election officials give to their co-partisans using a regression discontinuity design, estimating regressions of the form

$$Y_{ct+k} = \mu + \tau Dem_{ct} + f(M_{ct}) + \epsilon_{ct+k}$$

where Y_{ct+k} is Democratic presidential vote share in elections held k years after the election official was elected in county c, year t. Dem_{ct} is a dummy variable indicating a Democratic local election official winning the election. $f(M_{ct})$ is a flexible function of the margin M_{ct} by which the Democratic local election official won. M_{ct} is positive for a Democratic win, negative for a Republican win, and zero in an exact tie. M_{ct} ranges from -0.5 to 0.5. We interpret τ as the average effect of electing a Democratic rather than Republican local election official in counties where the election was an exact tie. In other words, the effect of electing the next most likely or marginal Democrat to be a local election official.

Our close-election regression discontinuity design ensures that, when we compare counties that elect a Republican and those that elect a Democrat, both sets of counties have a similar average partisan makeup, state political environment, preferences over election administration, and population, in addition to any other fixed and time-varying county factors.

Our regressions identify the average effect of electing a Democratic rather than Republican election official in places with tied elections when the only thing that changes sharply at that point is which candidate was elected (Cattaneo, Idrobo, and Titiunik 2019; Imbens and Lemieux 2008; Lee and Lemieux 2010).[9] We evaluate the plausibility of this assumption by using our regressions to evaluate whether pre-election county-level characteristics are similar

[9]While this assumption has been disputed in a small number of particular cases (Caughey and Sekhon 2011), this assumption holds under the majority of cases studied (Eggers et al. 2015).

in counties that narrowly elected Democratic officials and those that elected Republicans. We place a special emphasis comparing turnout and Democratic presidential vote share from before the local election official was elected because turnout and Democratic presidential vote share are our primary outcomes and tend to correlate highly within a county over time. In Section A.4 in the online appendix, we show that counties where a Democratic election official narrowly won are similar on a large number of pre-treatment characteristics to counties where a Republican narrowly won, including the lagged Democratic presidential vote share.

As we describe throughout, our intention is to estimate the effect of replacing a marginal Republican with a marginal Democrat, and this is the effect our design identifies under the assumptions we mention above. Our design does not identify the effect of a candidate changing the party they associate with or the effect of replacing a typical Republican with a typical Democrat (Hall 2019: Ch. 2; Marshall 2021).

We present results using a variety of regression specifications. We show multiple specifications because of the bias-variance trade off that must be resolved in every regression discontinuity analysis. If the functional form of the running variable is not flexible enough, it can induce bias, mistaking a smooth curve in the outcome look like a discontinuity. On the other hand, less flexible specifications that use more data and fewer degrees of freedom make the estimate more precise. We present multiple specifications to ensure that our results hold across different functional forms of the relationship between Democratic election official vote share and our outcomes.

3.5 Improving Precision by First Predicting Outcomes

One of the main challenges in estimating the advantage clerks give their party is statistical precision. The regression discontinuity design estimand is difficult to estimate such that analysts who come to the data with flat priors often leave with substantively uninformative posteriors (Stommes, Aronow, and Sävje 2021).

We address this problem by estimating the partisan advantage using residuals from a separate prediction exercise.[10] As we mention above, we have collected the county-level results for all presidential, senate, and gubernatorial elections we study as well as all available data on voter turnout and county-level administration. Yet, we only have data on partisan clerk elections for a subset of counties and years. We use the full dataset to predict each of our outcomes using the following regression:

$$Y_{ct+k} = \beta_{st+k} Y_{ct-j} + \gamma_{st+k} + \epsilon_{ct+k}$$

where Y_{ct+k} is a post-treatment measure of the outcome (e.g., Democratic presidential vote share), Y_{ct-j} is the most recent pre-treatment measure of the outcome, and γ_{st+k} and β_{st+k} capture the state-year-specific relationship between the lagged outcome and the current-period outcome. Substantively, this regression predicts how a county will vote based on how other counties in the same state and year and that voted the same way in the previous election voted this year.[11]

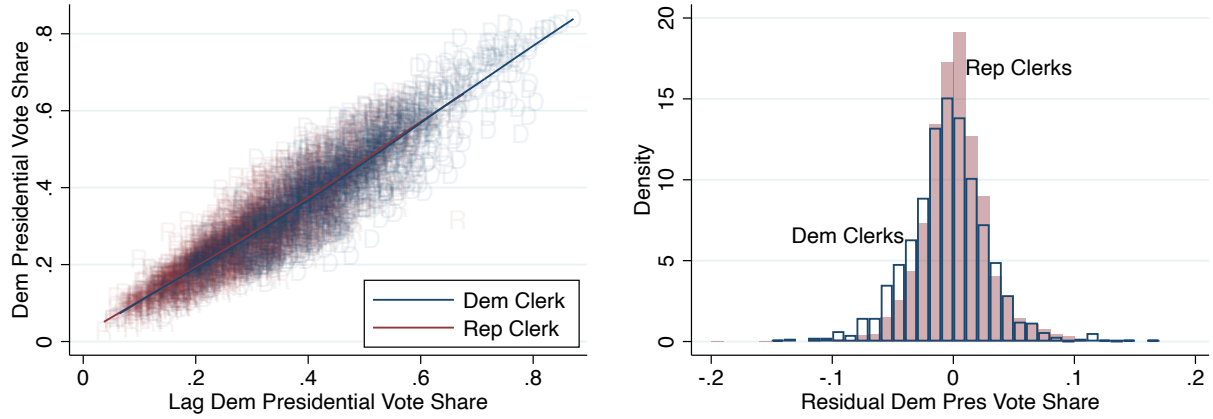
To avoid using post-treatment information in the prediction exercise, we fit the equation above holding out each county-year one-by-one, predicting the outcome using only other observations from the same state and year, then computing the residual by taking the difference between the prediction and the realized value of Y_{ct+k} for that county-year.

Because presidential election outcomes and turnout are highly correlated within a county over time, especially after accounting for state-year specific trends, this dramatically improves our precision and reduces then imbalance in county-level characteristics that can arise by chance.

[10] See Noack, Olma, and Rothe (2021) for formal results demonstrating that this procedure is unbiased.

[11] We discuss the choice of estimating state-year-specific slopes and fixed effects in Section A.3 in the online appendix. This regression minimizes out-of-sample prediction error when compared to fully pooled estimates of β and γ, state-specific estimates, and year-specific estimates.

Figure 2: **Democratic and Republican Election Officials Conduct Elections With Similar Results**. The left panel presents the relationship between Democratic presidential vote share and lagged Democratic presidential vote share separately in counties with Democratic and Republican clerks. The relationship is nearly identical in both sets of counties. The right panel presents the distribution of the residuals from predictions of Democratic presidential vote share in counties with Democratic and Republican election officials. Democratic clerks oversee elections that are slightly less favorable for Democratic presidents on average than expected.



4 Clerks Do Not Meaningfully Advantage Their Party

4.1 Descriptive Graphical Evidence

First, we show descriptive graphical evidence that presidential candidates from the clerk's party perform no better than expected based on historical election results. Figure 2 captures this result. In the left panel, we plot the Democratic presidential vote share for a county and year on Democratic vote share in the previous presidential election. Counties with a Democratic clerk are colored blue, counties with a Republican clerk are colored red, and we fit separate locally weighted regressions for counties with Democratic and Republican clerks. The lines are nearly identical—even in the raw data before turning to our research design, the data provides very little reason to suspect that clerks are giving their party a substantial advantage in presidential elections.

The right panel of Figure 2 plots histograms of the residual of predicted Democratic presidential vote share for counties with Democratic and Republican clerks.[12] The histograms overlap substantially, yet the histogram for Democrats is shifted slightly to the left and has a modestly wider dispersion.[13] This implies that, if anything, Democratic clerks oversee elections that are worse for Democratic presidential candidates on average and that these election results are somewhat harder to predict using one lag.

4.2 Graphical Evidence Suggests Clerks Do Not Advantage Their Party

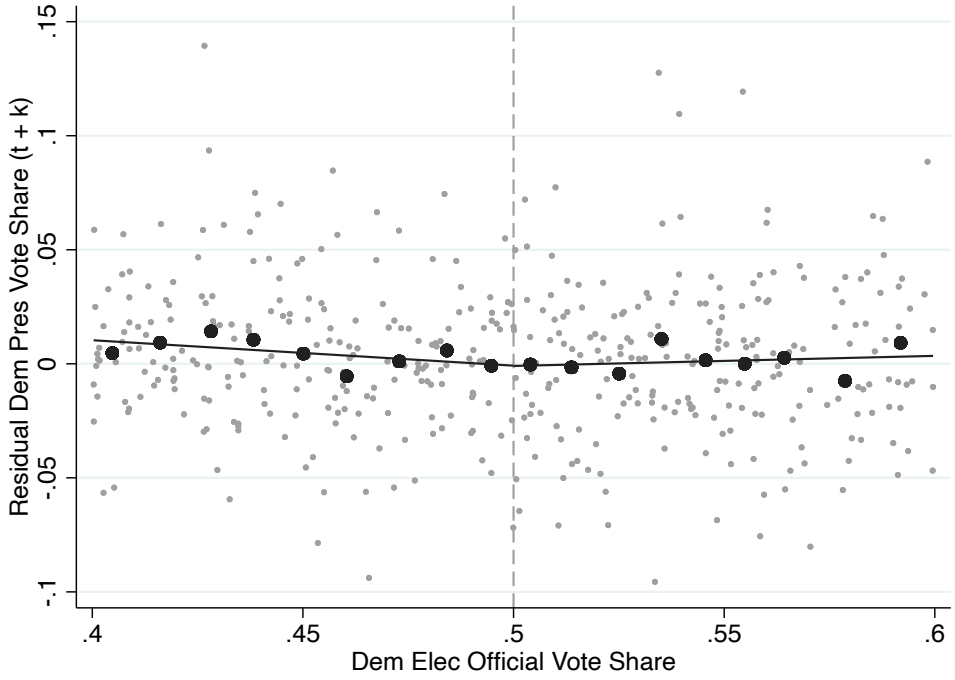
Figure 3 captures our main result that local election officials do not improve their party's vote share in presidential elections. On the horizontal axis, we plot the two-party Democratic vote share in the race for local election official. We subset to cases elections with a Democrat and Republican both on the ballot. This means that a Democratic official runs elections to the right of 0.5, and a Republican official runs elections to the left of 0.5. We plot as our vertical axis the residual of Democratic presidential vote share in each county in the first presidential election after the election official was elected. Each of the small grey points represents the election of a county election official and the subsequent presidential election result. The large black points are equal-sized binned averages made up of 25 points each and computed separately for counties that elected a Democratic clerk and those that elected a Republican. The solid lines are linear regression lines.

We can learn about the effect of electing a Democrat rather than a Republican as local election official by focusing on the 50-50 point in the middle of the plot. Average residual Democratic presidential vote share is approximately flat across the plot as expected since the predicted democratic vote share should capture the normal party vote in each county. The

[12] See Section 3.5 for a discussion of how we compute the residuals.

[13] The average of the residuals is 0.002 in Republican-controlled counties and -0.005 in Democrat-controlled counties. The standard deviation of the residuals is 0.028 in Republican-controlled counties and 0.035 in Democrat-controlled counties.

Figure 3: **Electing a Democratic Election Official Rather Than a Republican Does Not Meaningfully Increase Democratic Presidential Vote Share.** Two-party Democratic vote share for the local election official is the running variable, making 0.5 the threshold above which a county has a Democratic election official and below which they have a Republican. Democratic presidential vote share in the following presidential election is plotted along the vertical axis. The large black points are equal-sized binned averages marking the average of 25 elections each. The binned averages are computed separately for each side of the 50-50 threshold. The black line is linear regression line fit separately on each side of the 50-50 threshold.



binned averages of residual Democratic presidential vote share captured in the black dots suggest that a line is an appropriate approximation of the conditional expectation function. To the left and right of 0.5, the average residual Democratic presidential vote share is nearly identical, suggesting that election officials do not advantage their party.

4.3 Regression Estimates of the Advantage Clerks Give Their Party

In Table 1, we provide formal estimates of the effect of electing a Democrat rather than a Republican as election official on Democratic presidential vote share. Column 1 reports the

Table 1: **Effect of Democratic Election Officials on Democratic Presidential Vote Share.**

	Dem Pres Vote Share			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Dem Elec Official	-0.000	0.001	0.007	-0.000
	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.007)
N	437	799	799	375
Clusters	437	799	799	375
Deg of $f(V)$	1	3	5	CCT
Spline	Y	N	N	Y
Bandwidth	0.10	0.25	0.25	0.08

Robust standard errors clustered by clerk election in parentheses. The reported estimates come from regressions on the full sample of LEO elections held between a Republican and a Democrat. Spline means that the flexible regression of the outcome on Democratic LEO vote share was fit separately on both sides of 0. The outcome is first regressed on a state- and year-specific lag using all counties including those for which clerk election results are not available. The regression discontinuity is estimated using the residuals from that regression.

estimate from a local linear regression fit separately for counties that elected Democrats and those that elected Republicans and only using elections where the Democrat received between 40% and 60% of the vote, i.e., a bandwidth of 0.1. Column 2 reports the estimate from a global third-order polynomial regression with a bandwidth of 0.25. Column 3 reports the estimate from a global fifth-order polynomial regression with a bandwidth of 0.25. Column 4 reports the estimate from a local linear kernel regression with the bandwidth selected by the procedure described in Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014).

We find consistent evidence across all four specifications that local election officials do not meaningfully advantage their party's candidate for president. The point estimates range from 0 to 0.7 percentage points, with three out of four point estimates falling below 0.2 percentage points. Across all four columns, our confidence intervals include zero. The confidence interval from our preferred specification, column 1, has an upper bound of a 1.1 percentage point effect.

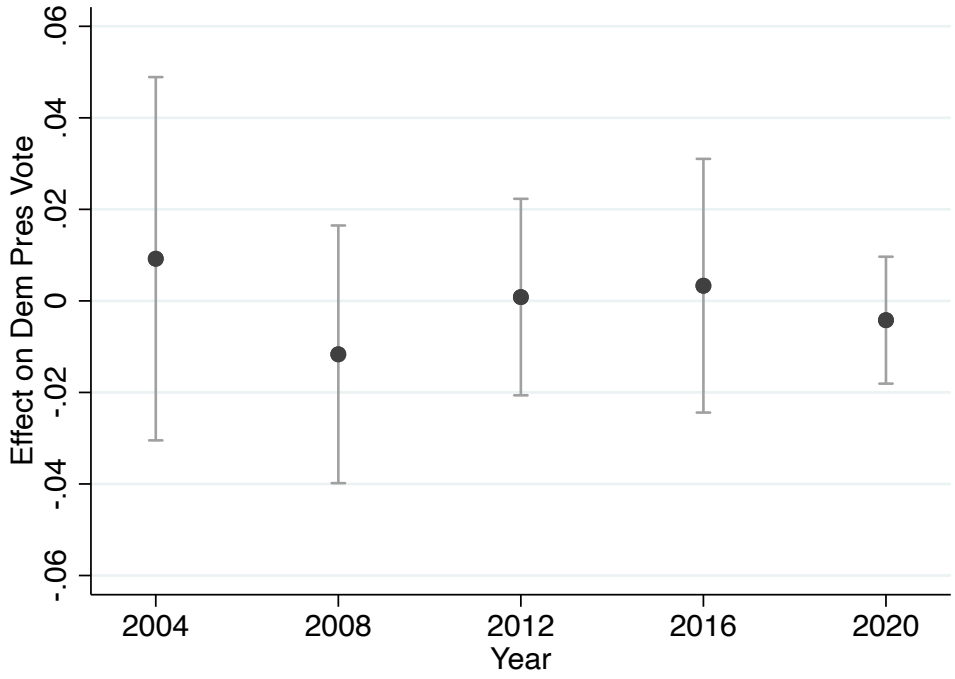
While Table 1 presents results across only four specifications, we estimate very similar effects across a much wider set of potential estimators. In Section A.4.2 in the appendix, we demonstrate that our estimates are similar for every choice of bandwidth from 0.02 to 0.25.

4.4 Similar Findings Across Time and States

This finding—that election officials do not noticeably advantage their party—is remarkably stable across elections and subsets of states. In Figure 4 we present estimates of the effect on Democratic presidential vote share in every presidential election since 2004. Despite the concern that election administration has become an increasingly salient and partisan issue, we do not find evidence that the marginal local election official provided their party an advantage in 2020 or in any previous election since 2004.

In the appendix, we study three sets of states where we might expect clerks to give their party a larger advantage. Across all three sets of states, we find that clerks give their party little to no advantage. First, in Table A.4, we present estimates of the advantage clerks give to their party in the 14 states where one directly elected partisan officials handles all local election administration. Three of the four reported point estimates of partisan advantage are negative, and all four are more negative than the corresponding point estimates we report in Table 1. Given the long tenure of clerks, and slow pace of the Southern realignment in local offices, we might expect that Democratic clerks in the South may favor the Republican party in statewide and national elections, especially in the first few elections in our data. In Table A.5 we report estimates of the partisan advantage clerks provide holding the South out of the analysis. We find substantively similar point estimates, implying that our national estimates are not masking positive effects in places where clerks are most likely to favor national co-partisans. Finally, some counties in our data were subject to pre-clearance requirements under the Voting Rights Act prior to the 2013 Supreme Court ruling in Shelby v Holder. In Table A.6 we remove these counties and find that, even when studying counties not subject to the pre-clearance requirement, clerks do not appear to advantage their party.

Figure 4: **Minimal Differences in Advantage Clerks Provide Their Party Over Time**. Each dot represents a regression discontinuity-based estimate of the effect of electing a Democratic clerk on residual Democratic presidential vote share in a given presidential election. The lines above and below each point represent 95-percent confidence intervals. Estimates come from regressions that mimic column 1 in Table 1 using local linear regression and a 10-percentage-point bandwidth.



In Table A.7, we extend our data to include all gubernatorial, senate, and presidential election results. While we add more data, predicting gubernatorial and senate election results based on lagged results is harder so the estimates are noisier despite adding additional data. Nevertheless, the point estimates are still substantively quite small, and a zero effect falls well within all of the 95-percent confidence intervals in the table.

5 Might Election Officials Choose Different Policies but Fail to Advantage Their Party?

Do election officials intend to conduct elections in a neutral way? Or do election officials seek to advantage their party but still fail to noticeably improve their party's vote share?

As we discuss in Section 2, our analysis focuses on officials with considerable authority. Still, if citizens are motivated to overcome barriers to participation, this authority might not meaningfully affect the election outcome or even turnout rates.

We find that this explanation—that election officials try and fail to help their party—is inconsistent with the data. We evaluate this explanation in four steps. First, we estimate the effect of electing a Democratic rather than Republican official in more and less competitive counties. A simple model of partisan election administration predicts that partisan officials would have a greater effect in more competitive counties, but we find that Democrats and Republicans oversee similar election outcomes regardless of how competitive elections are in the county. Second, we estimate the advantage clerks give to their party in counties with more and less racial and ethnic diversity. Another stylized model of elections predicts that clerks will have an easier time advantaging their party in more diverse counties, but we do not find evidence for this prediction. Third, we estimate the effect of electing a Democratic rather than Republican election official on eight separate measures of election administration. These measures are more proximate to the election official and should respond more to policy changes than vote shares, yet we find that Democratic and Republican clerks implement similar policies. Finally, we estimate the effect of electing a Democratic rather than Republican election official on voter turnout. This allows us to test whether, when all put together, Democratic election officials promote higher levels of participation (as is conventional wisdom) and yet still do not advantage their party. Across all four analyses, we find that Democratic and Republican officials implement similar policy regimes and produce similar outcomes on the dimensions we can measure and across different types of counties.

5.1 Clerks Do Not Advantage Their Party More in Competitive Counties

Election officials who are solely motivated by advantaging their party will have an easier time doing so in places where the public is more evenly split between Democrats and Republicans.

To see this, imagine that the only choice a clerk can make is whether or not to increase the cost of voting for the opposing party such that 20% of opposing party members fail to vote. In a county made up of 90% Democrats and 10% Republicans, a Democratic clerk motivated by partisan advantage would raise the cost of voting for Republicans, resulting in a 91.8% Democratic vote share in the election. In the same county, a Republican clerk motivated by partisan advantage would raise the cost of voting for Democrats, resulting in a 87.8% Democratic vote share in the election. This implies that the effect of electing a Democratic clerk rather than a Republican is a 4-percentage point increase Democratic vote share in this county.

Now, consider a county made up of 50% Democrats and 50% Republicans. A Democratic clerk motivated by partisan advantage would raise the cost of voting for Republicans, resulting in a 55.6% Democratic vote share in the election. A Republican clerk motivated by partisan advantage would raise the cost of voting for Democrats, resulting in a 44.4% Democratic vote share in the election. This implies that the effect of electing a Democratic clerk rather than a Republican clerk is an 11-percentage point increase Democratic vote share in this county, 7 percentage points larger than the effect in the Democrat-dominated county.

This pattern—that the advantage clerks give to their party should be bigger in counties that are more evenly split between Democrats and Republicans—holds across many versions of this simple model. In this simple stylized model where clerks are motivated entirely by advancing their party and are only able to affect the outcome by reducing the turnout of a fixed share of members of the opposing party, clerks give their party a much larger advantage in evenly-split counties. We describe this model in more detail in Section A.5.1 in the appendix.

This pattern allows us to make a prediction: if clerks are primarily motivated by providing their party an advantage, they will be more effective in competitive counties.

Table 2: **Effect of Democratic Election Officials on Democratic Presidential Vote Share, Safe v Competitive Counties.**

	Dem Pres Vote Share							
	Safe				Competitive			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Dem Elec Official	-0.004	0.000	0.003	-0.003	0.001	0.001	0.008	0.001
	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.011)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.008)
N	129	285	285	113	308	514	514	280
Clusters	129	285	285	113	308	514	514	280
Deg of $f(V)$	1	3	5	CCT	1	3	5	CCT
Spline	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y
Bandwidth	0.10	0.25	0.25	0.09	0.10	0.25	0.25	0.09

Robust standard errors clustered by clerk election in parentheses. The reported estimates come from regressions on the full sample of clerk elections held between a Republican and a Democrat. Spline means that the flexible regression of the outcome on Democratic clerk vote share was fit separately on both sides of 0. The outcome is first regressed on a state- and year-specific lag using all counties including those for which clerk election results are not available. The regression discontinuity is estimated using the residuals from that regression. Safe counties are those where the Democratic presidential candidate won more the 65% or less than 35% in the previous election. All other counties are coded as competitive.

We evaluate this prediction by estimating the effect of electing a Democratic rather than Republican election official in more and less competitive counties. Table 2 presents the results. We find that, despite the prediction that the effects would be larger in more competitive counties, the effects are not noticeably different. We also present evidence in Section A.5.1 in the online appendix that this result is not sensitive to our chosen definition of which counties are most competitive.

The simple model in which local officials are committed partisans seeking to advantage their party is inconsistent with our finding.

5.2 Clerks Do Not Advantage Party Their More in Diverse Counties

Even if clerks are primarily motivated by providing their party an advantage, they may fail to do so if they cannot easily distinguish between members of their party and the opposing

Table 3: **Effect of Democratic Election Officials on Democratic Presidential Vote Share, More v Less Racially and Ethnically Diverse Counties.**

	Dem Pres Vote Share							
	More Diverse				Less Diverse			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Dem Elec Official	0.007	0.006	0.021	0.011	-0.002	0.001	0.003	-0.005
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.014)	(0.015)	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.009)
N	106	196	196	77	331	603	603	264
Clusters	106	196	196	77	331	603	603	264
Deg of $f(V)$	1	3	5	CCT	1	3	5	CCT
Spline	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y
Bandwidth	0.10	0.25	0.25	0.07	0.10	0.25	0.25	0.08

Robust standard errors clustered by clerk election in parentheses. The reported estimates come from regressions on the full sample of clerk elections held between a Republican and a Democrat. Spline means that the flexible regression of the outcome on Democratic clerk vote share was fit separately on both sides of 0. The outcome is first regressed on a state- and year-specific lag using all counties including those for which clerk election results are not available. The regression discontinuity is estimated using the residuals from that regression. More diverse counties are those where the non-Hispanic White residents make up less than 80% of the population. All other counties are coded as less diverse.

party. Most of the tools clerks have that could plausibly affect turnout—moving or closing polling places, responding to some constituent requests and not others, rejecting a ballot, etc—could make it harder for members of the clerk's party to vote just as much as members of the opposing party. As Hersh (2015) points out, public officials and campaigns often have relatively limited information to go on when trying to identify and turn out supporters.

Race is one of the most useful heuristics for guessing the party a citizen may vote for. There is also a long history of race-based disenfranchisement in the US. Accordingly, we might expect that clerks would have a harder time giving their party an advantage in counties where the population is overwhelmingly composed of non-Hispanic White citizens.

We investigate this prediction in Table 3. For the purposes of the table, we define racially and ethnically diverse counties as those where non-Hispanic White residents make up less than 80% of the population. While we find slightly more positive point estimates in diverse counties, the evidence is consistent with clerks not providing an advantage to their party even in the most diverse counties. We further validate this finding in Figure A.5 in the

Table 4: **Effect of Democratic Election Officials on Policies and More Proximate Outcomes.**

	Polling Places (1)	Prov Share (2)	Prov Rejection (3)	Absentee Rejection (4)	Reg (5)	Reg Removal (6)	Dem Reg Share (7)	Wait Share (8)
Dem Elec Official	0.019	0.005	-0.031	0.014	0.016	0.007	-0.002	-0.028
	(0.077)	(0.005)	(0.055)	(0.016)	(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.047)
N	273	380	273	459	743	457	296	379
Clusters	205	261	186	300	433	294	174	260
Outcome Mean	0.975	0.005	0.497	0.030	0.857	0.092	0.488	0.159
Deg of $f(V)$	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Spline	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Bandwidth	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.10

Robust standard errors clustered by clerk election in parentheses. The reported estimates come from regressions on the full sample of clerk elections held between a Republican and a Democrat. Spline means that the flexible regression of the outcome on Democratic clerk vote share was fit separately on both sides of 0. The outcome is first regressed on a state- and year-specific lag using all counties including those for which clerk election results are not available. The regression discontinuity is estimated using the residuals from that regression.

appendix which shows that our finding is not sensitive the threshold we use to separate more and less diverse counties.

5.3 Democratic and Republican Clerks Administer Elections Similarly

An alternative explanation for our results is that partisan clerks implement different policies, but these differences have approximately neutral effects on election outcomes. If clerks are committed partisans but do not know that these policies are not effective at improving their party's position, they may pursue them anyway. Alternatively, Democratic and Republican clerks may have ideological positions about how elections ought to be administered and then implement their preferred policies while in office.

Table 4 presents estimates of the effect of electing a Democratic rather than Republican election official on outcomes more proximate to the policy choices these officials make. Across the eight columns, we present the effect of electing a Democratic rather than Republican

election official on 1) the number of polling places per 1,000 residents, 2) the share of votes cast provisionally, 3) the share of provisionals rejected, 4) the share of absentee ballots rejected, 5) the share of voting-age residents registered, 6) the share of registrations removed from the list, 7) the share share of registrants registered with the Democratic party, and 8) the share of voters in the CCES reporting a wait time longer than 10 minutes. In all cases, the effect of electing a Democrat rather than a Republican is too close to zero to rule out both groups implementing the same policies on average. We find precise evidence that electing a Democrat does not reduce removals from the voter rolls or increase the share of registrants aligned with Democrats. The effect on the number of polling places is not our most precise measure, but given the central role of most local officials in setting the number and location of polling places, this is especially strong evidence against the expectation that Democratic and Republican officials pursue markedly different policies. Our estimates of the effect on the number of provisionals, the share of provisionals or absentees rejected, and wait times are noisier due to much more idiosyncratic variation in the raw data. Still, we do not find evidence that electing a Democrat rather than a Republican affects these outcomes either. We find evidence that registration is slightly higher under Democratic election officials, though, given that we study a large number of policies, this positive effect may have arisen simply due to chance.

5.4 Democratic and Republican Clerks Produce Similar Turnout

Table 5 presents estimates of the effect of electing a Democratic rather than Republican election official on turnout. The columns mirror those of Table 1. Across all four columns, we find that, after accounting for differences in where and when Democrats and Republicans run for office, members of both parties oversee similar levels of voter participation on average. Focusing on our preferred specification in column 1, we can reject the hypothesis that Democratic officials increase turnout by one percentage point or more.

Table 5: **Effect of Democratic Election Officials on Turnout.**

	Votes per Voting-Age Resident			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Dem Elec Official	0.001	0.000	0.002	0.001
	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.004)
N	758	1384	1384	728
Clusters	437	804	804	419
Deg of $f(V)$	1	3	5	CCT
Spline	Y	N	N	Y
Bandwidth	0.10	0.25	0.25	0.10

Robust standard errors clustered by clerk election in parentheses. The reported estimates come from regressions on the full sample of clerk elections held between a Republican and a Democrat. Spline means that the flexible regression of the outcome on Democratic clerk vote share was fit separately on both sides of 0. The outcome is first regressed on a state- and year-specific lag using all counties including those for which clerk election results are not available. The regression discontinuity is estimated using the residuals from that regression.

Put together, Tables 4 and 5 cast doubt on the claim that local election officials implement different policies that fail to translate into more support for their party. Instead, Republican and Democratic officials appear to run elections in a similar fashion on average after accounting for the differences in where and when they serve.

6 Conclusion

The unusual American practice of electing partisan local officials to oversee elections reasonably has many experts and members of the public concerned. When an official runs as a member of a party, it is natural to expect that they will use their authority to advance their party's goals. As political science professor Martha Kropf put it in a recent interview,"having local officials that are elected on a partisan basis running elections seems

fishy."[14] Even some local election officials themselves report feeling uncomfortable running as partisans when they have a duty to be neutral.[15]

Over the decades since the closely contested 2000 presidential election, election administration has become an increasingly partisan issue at the state and national level with Democrats typically seeking to expand the number of ways people can vote and Republicans arguing for more election security measures (Hasen 2012, 2020). Throughout, politicians and organized groups have claimed that local election officials have used their authority to advantage their party. In 2018, Republicans Rick Scott and Donald Trump claimed that Democratic election officials in Broward County, Florida forged ballots to give Scott's opponent an advantage.[16] Also in 2018, local Democrats argued that the Republican clerk in Dodge County, Kansas moved the only polling place in the city far away from Latino residents to favor Republican Kris Kobach's candidacy for governor.[17]

Using a credible research design with new partisan clerk election data from across the US, we find that partisan election officials do not typically offer a large advantage to their party. While we cannot be confident that partisan officials do not offer rare and large or very small but determinative advantages to their party, our findings make clear that clerks are not consistently providing their party a meaningful advantage.

We also find no evidence that clerks are trying and failing to advantage their party. Instead, clerks appear to be administering elections in a neutral way. This casts further doubt on the claim that local election officials are using their authority to benefit their party.

While clerks do not advantage their party, this does not imply that having partisan elected officials run elections is the best system available. In many parts of the country,

[14] https://www.npr.org/2018/11/29/671524134/partisan-election-officials-are-inherently-unfair-but-probably-here-to-stay

[15] Ibid.

[16] https://www.politifact.com/article/2018/nov/13/trump-rick-scott-allege-fraud-broward-no-evidence/

[17] https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/oct/28/dodge-city-polling-place-voter-suppression-voting-rights

elections are run by appointed, nonpartisan bureaucrats, and future work should consider how the benefits and costs of such a system weigh against the benefits and costs of the system we study in this article. Even though elected partisan clerks are not favoring their party on average, it "seems fishy," as Professor Martha Kropf put it. Future work should consider how even neutral partisan election administration can leave citizens suspicious that the election was unfair.

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Online Appendix

Intended for online publication only.

Contents

A.1 The Responsibilities of Local Election Officials

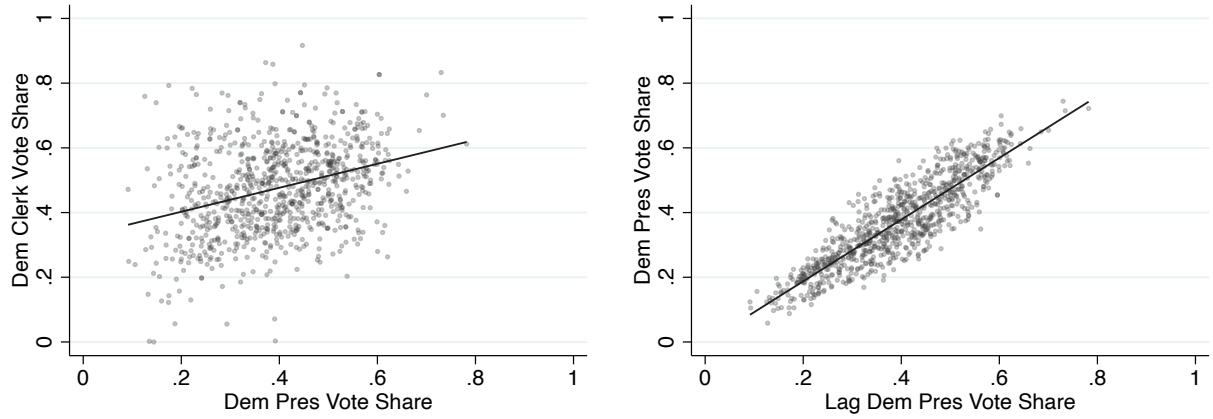
Table A.1 describes the duties elected partisan election officials are responsible for across states. In cases where officials have limited discretion under state law, we indicate that by describing the discretion they have as high, mid, or low, indicating a lot, some, or little discretion, respectively.

Table A.1: **Local Election Offical Responsibilities and Selection by State.**

State	Officer	Registration	List Maintenance	Polling Place	Early Voting	Poll Workers	Voting Equipment	LEO Training
Colorado	Clerk	Yes	Yes	No	No	Low	Yes	High
Florida	Supervisor of Elections	Yes	Yes	Mid	Yes	Mid	Yes	Low
Georgia	Probate Judge	No	Some	Yes	Some	Mid	Yes	High
Idaho	Clerk	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Mid	Yes	Low
Illinois	Clerk	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Low	Yes	Mid
Iowa	Auditor	Yes	Some	No	Yes	Low	Yes	High
Kansas	Clerk	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Low	Yes	Mid
Kentucky	Clerk	Yes	Some	Some	No	Low	Yes	Mid
Missouri	Clerk	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Low	Yes	Low
Montana	Election Administrator	Yes	Yes	No	No	Low	Yes	High
Nebraska	Clerk	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Mid	Yes	Mid
Nevada	Clerk	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Mid	Yes	Low
New Mexico	Clerk	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Low	No	Mid
South Dakota	Auditor / Finance Officer	Yes	Yes	Some	No	Mid	Yes	Low
Texas	Clerk / District Clerk / Tax Assessor	Varies	Yes	Mid	Yes	Mid	Yes	Low
Utah	Clerk	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Low	Yes	Low
Washington	Auditor	Yes	Yes	No	No	N/A	Yes	Low
West Virginia	Clerk	Yes	Yes	Some	Some	Mid	Yes	Mid
Wyoming	Clerk	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Mid	Yes	Low

Registration administration refers to whether the LEO is in charge of administering registering voters and maintaining the voter list. High, mid, and low indicate degrees of discretion with high representing the most discretion and low representing the least authority.

Figure A.1: **Low Correlation between Democratic Clerk Vote Share and Democratic Presidential Vote Share**. The left panel presents the relationship between Democratic presidential vote share and Democratic clerk vote share. The right panel presents the must stronger relationship between Democratic presidential vote share and lagged Democratic presidential vote share.



A.2 Describing the New Data on Election Officials

As we discuss in the main text, the left panel of Figure A.1 presents the relationship between lagged Democratic presidential vote share and Democratic clerk vote share. The right panel plots the relationship between lagged Democratic presidential vote share and current period Democratic vote share. The correlation between presidential and clerk vote share is quite low, suggesting that voters are considering different factors in this race or candidates representing the Democrats and Republicans appeal to voters differently.

A.3 Predicting Election Results

Throughout the paper, we use outcomes that we construct by first using a lagged outcome to predict the outcome of interest then taking the remaining error from this prediction process. As we discuss in Section 3.5, we chose the predictor that minimized out-of-sample prediction error. We measured the out-of-sample prediction using leave-one-out cross validation, fitting our regression holding out one observation at a time, using that regression to predict the held out unit's outcome value, and computing the error as the difference between the observed and predicted outcome values.

As discussed in the main text, we tested four alternative regression specifications: state-specific coefficients and intercepts, year-specific coefficients and intercepts, state-year-specific coefficients and intercepts, and pooled coefficients and intercepts. Predicting Democratic presidential vote share, we find that the mean squared leave-one-out cross validation error is 0.030 for the state-year-specific regression, 0.041 for the year-specific regression, 0.053 for the state-specific regression, and 0.056 for the pooled regression. We choose the state-year-specific regression because it minimizes out-of-sample error.

Table A.2: **Regression Discontinuity Design Balances Pre-Treatment Democratic Presidential Vote Share and Turnout.**

	Lagged Dem Pres Vote Share				Lagged Turnout			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Dem Elec Official	0.027	0.029	0.034	0.017	0.001	-0.001	0.010	0.015
	(0.020)	(0.018)	(0.020)	(0.021)	(0.016)	(0.014)	(0.016)	(0.019)
N	470	853	853	430	791	1429	1429	630
Clusters	456	825	825	416	456	830	830	362
Deg of $f(V)$	1	3	5	CCT	1	3	5	CCT
Spline	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y
Bandwidth	0.10	0.25	0.25	0.09	0.10	0.25	0.25	0.08
Residualized	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N

Robust standard errors clustered by clerk election in parentheses. The reported estimates come from regressions on the full sample of LEO elections held between a Republican and a Democrat. Spline means that the flexible regression of the outcome on Democratic LEO vote share was fit separately on both sides of 0. Residualized means that the outcome is first regressed on a lag and the regression discontinuity is estimated using the residuals from that regression.

A.4 Validating the Main Findings

A.4.1 Counties that Narrowly Elect Democrats v Republicans Are Similar on Pre-Treatment Covariates

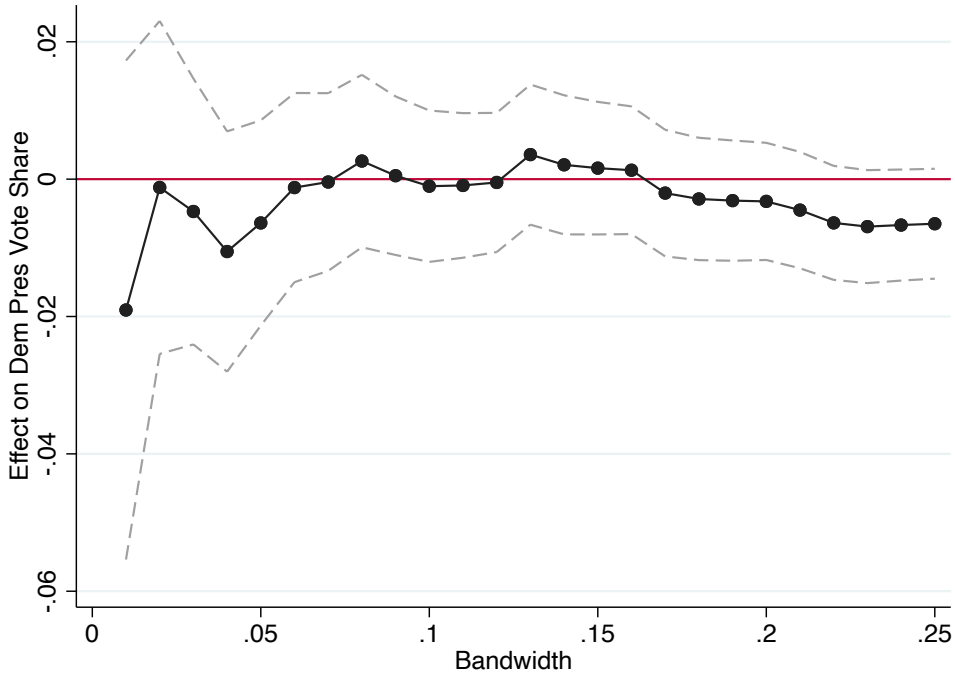
As we discuss in Section 3.4, our close-election regression discontinuity design should ensure that the local averages of pre-treatment county-level covariates are similar in places that narrowly elect Democrats and those that narrowly elect Republicans. We evaluate that this holds in practice in Tables A.2 and A.3. We find that the design works as expected, giving us balance on all of the pre-treatment covariates we check across all of our regression specifications

Table A.3: **Regression Discontinuity Balances County-Level Covariates.**

Outcome	Balance at RD Cut Point			
Log(Population)	0.409	0.354	0.331	0.207
	(0.242)	(0.215)	(0.250)	(0.271)
Share Non-Hispanic White	-0.016	0.009	0.002	0.011
	(0.035)	(0.032)	(0.037)	(0.037)
Share Black	0.017	0.010	0.027	0.020
	(0.019)	(0.017)	(0.019)	(0.020)
South	0.018	0.040	0.065	0.077
	(0.082)	(0.073)	(0.085)	(0.089)
West	0.047	0.027	-0.011	0.000
	(0.078)	(0.069)	(0.081)	(0.081)
N	460	834	834	487
Clusters	446	807	807	472
Deg of $f(V)$	1	3	5	CCT
Spline	Y	N	N	Y
Bandwidth	0.10	0.25	0.25	CCT

Robust standard errors clustered by clerk election in parentheses. The reported estimates come from regressions on the full sample of local election official elections held between a Republican and a Democrat. Spline means that the flexible regression of the outcome on Democratic local election official vote share was fit separately on both sides of 0.

Figure A.2: **Sensitivity of Estimated Effect on Democratic Presidential Vote Share across Bandwidths.**



A.4.2 Main Findings Not Sensitive to Choice of Bandwidth

Analyses of regression discontinuities must weigh the bias reduction that comes from using data only very close to the cut point against the precision improvement that comes from using data further from the cut point. In Figure A.2 we present our main result across many possible bandwidths. As we show, the choice of bandwidth does not meaningfully change the interpretation we would make—all of these analyses imply that local election officials do not meaningfully advantage their party.

Table A.4: **Effect of Democratic Election Officials on Democratic Presidential Vote Share, States with Full Authority in One Official.**

	Dem Pres Vote Share			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Dem Elec Official	-0.003	-0.002	0.003	-0.006
	(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.010)
N	235	446	446	185
Clusters	235	446	446	185
Deg of $f(V)$	1	3	5	CCT
Spline	Y	N	N	Y
Bandwidth	0.10	0.25	0.25	0.08

Robust standard errors clustered by clerk election in parentheses. The reported estimates come from regressions on the full sample of clerk elections held between a Republican and a Democrat. Spline means that the flexible regression of the outcome on Democratic clerk vote share was fit separately on both sides of 0. The outcome is first regressed on a state- and year-specific lag using all counties including those for which clerk election results are not available. The regression discontinuity is estimated using the residuals from that regression.

A.4.3 No Substantial Average Effect in States Granting Full Authority to One Official

In Table A.4, we present the results of our analysis focused only on states where one official have broad and unilateral authority. Our estimates are substantively similar to the estimates we report in Table 1.

Table A.5: **Effect of Democratic Election Officials on Democratic Presidential Vote Share, Non-Southern Counties.**

	Dem Pres Vote Share			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Dem Elec Official	0.003	0.004	0.007	-0.000
	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.008)
N	325	586	586	268
Clusters	325	586	586	268
Deg of $f(V)$	1	3	5	CCT
Spline	Y	N	N	Y
Bandwidth	0.10	0.25	0.25	0.08

Robust standard errors clustered by clerk election in parentheses. The reported estimates come from regressions on the full sample of clerk elections held between a Republican and a Democrat. Spline means that the flexible regression of the outcome on Democratic clerk vote share was fit separately on both sides of 0. The outcome is first regressed on a state- and year-specific lag using all counties including those for which clerk election results are not available. The regression discontinuity is estimated using the residuals from that regression.

A.4.4 Finding Not Sensitive to Excluding the South

In Table A.4, we present the results of our analysis focused only on states where one official have broad and unilateral authority. Our estimates are substantively similar to the estimates we report in Table 1.

Table A.6: **Effect of Democratic Election Officials on Democratic Presidential Vote Share, Counties Not Subject to Pre-Clearance under VRA.**

	Dem Pres Vote Share			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Dem Elec Official	-0.004	-0.003	0.002	-0.002
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.008)
N	588	769	769	316
Clusters	588	769	769	316
Deg of $f(V)$	1	3	5	CCT
Spline	Y	N	N	Y
Bandwidth	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.07

Robust standard errors clustered by clerk election in parentheses. The reported estimates come from regressions on the full sample of clerk elections held between a Republican and a Democrat. Spline means that the flexible regression of the outcome on Democratic clerk vote share was fit separately on both sides of 0. The outcome is first regressed on a state- and year-specific lag using all counties including those for which clerk election results are not available. The regression discontinuity is estimated using the residuals from that regression.

A.4.5 Finding Not Sensitive to Excluding VRA Counties

In Table A.6, we present the results of our analysis focused only on counties not covered under the pre-clearance provisions of the Voting Rights Act. Our estimates are substantively similar to the estimates we report in Table 1.

Table A.7: **Effect of Democratic Election Official on Democratic Vote Share, Elections for President, Senate, and Governor.**

	Dem Vote Share			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Dem Elec Official	0.005	0.005	0.009	0.004
	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.007)
N	1278	2351	2351	1575
Clusters	437	806	806	538
Deg of $f(V)$	1	3	5	CCT
Spline	Y	N	N	Y
Bandwidth	0.10	0.25	0.25	0.13

Robust standard errors clustered by clerk election in parentheses. The reported estimates come from regressions on the full sample of clerk elections held between a Republican and a Democrat. Spline means that the flexible regression of the outcome on Democratic clerk vote share was fit separately on both sides of 0. The outcome is first regressed on a state- and year-specific lag using all counties including those for which clerk election results are not available. The regression discontinuity is estimated using the residuals from that regression.

A.4.6 No Substantial Average Effect in Senate, Governor, or Presidential Elections

In Table A.7, we present the results of our analysis including elections for governor, senator, and president. Our estimates are substantively similar to the estimates we report in Table 1 though noisier and slightly more positive.

A.5 Studying Mechanisms

A.5.1 Effects Largest in Competitive Districts if Officials Are Committed Partisans

As we discussed in the main text, the effect of electing a Democratic rather than a Republican clerk should be larger in counties that are evenly balanced between the parties if the clerks are focused exclusively on advantaging their party. We generate this prediction by studying a very simple model of a clerk's behavior. In the model, clerks can reduce the turnout of either party by a factor $1-p$ or do nothing. Here, p represents the turnout rate of the party affected by the policy and can range from 0 to 1 depending on how effective the policy is at reducing turnout. If clerks want to maximized their party's vote share, Democratic clerks will always reduce Republican turnout, and Republican clerks will always reduce Democratic turnout. Plugging in values of p and the share of citizens who are members of each party, we can compute the Democratic vote share under Democratic and clerks as

$$DemVS = \frac{DemPopShare}{DemPopShare + RepPopShare * p}$$

and the Democratic vote share under Republican clerks as

$$DemVS = \frac{DemPopShare * p}{DemPopShare * p + RepPopShare}$$

.

We can then take the difference of these two vote shares to get the effect of electing a Democratic rather than Republican clerk on Democratic vote share.

In figure A.3 we plot how the effect on Democratic vote share changes when the district has more or fewer Democrats in the population. We show how the effect changes for different values of p. Partisan clerks seeking to maximize their party's vote share have the biggest effect when they serve a county where 50% of residents are Democrats and 50% of residents are Republicans.

Figure A.3: **In Model of Partisan Officials Seeking to Advantage Their Party, Effect on Democratic Presidential Vote Share Largest in Competitive Counties.**

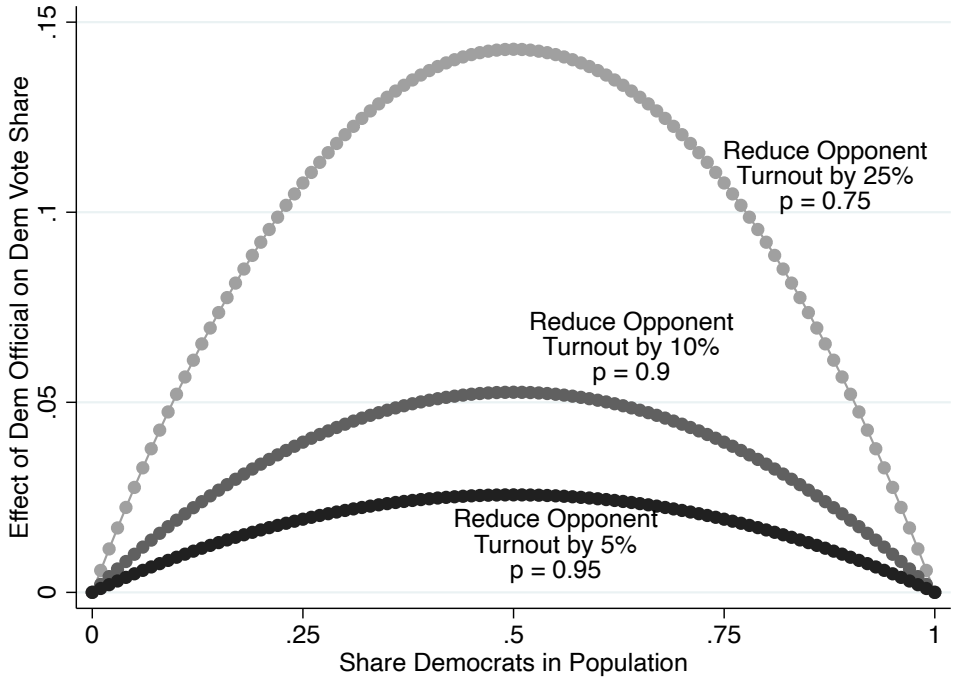
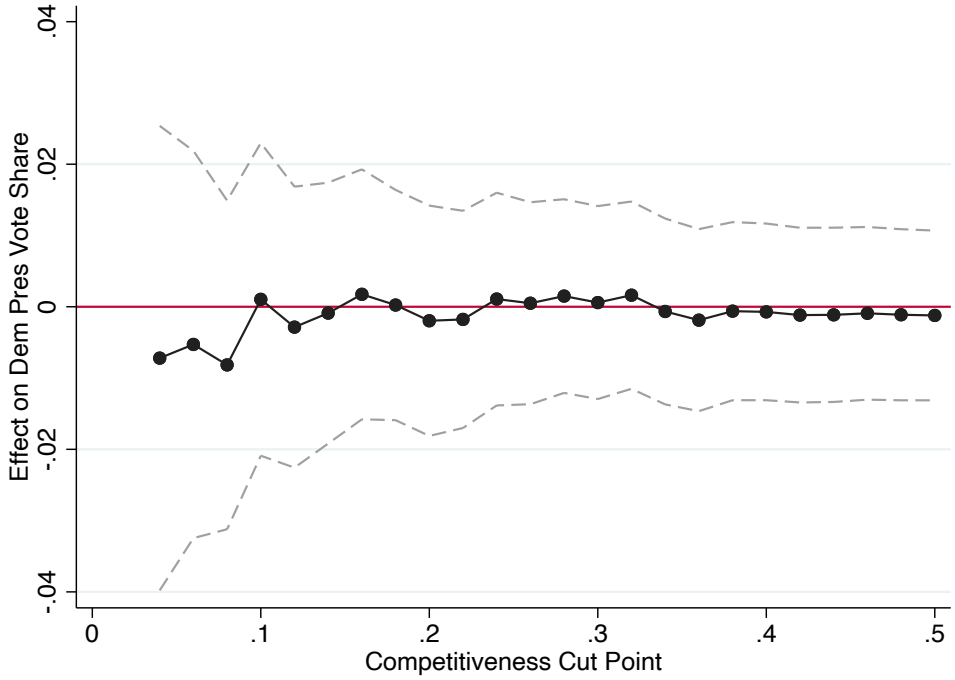


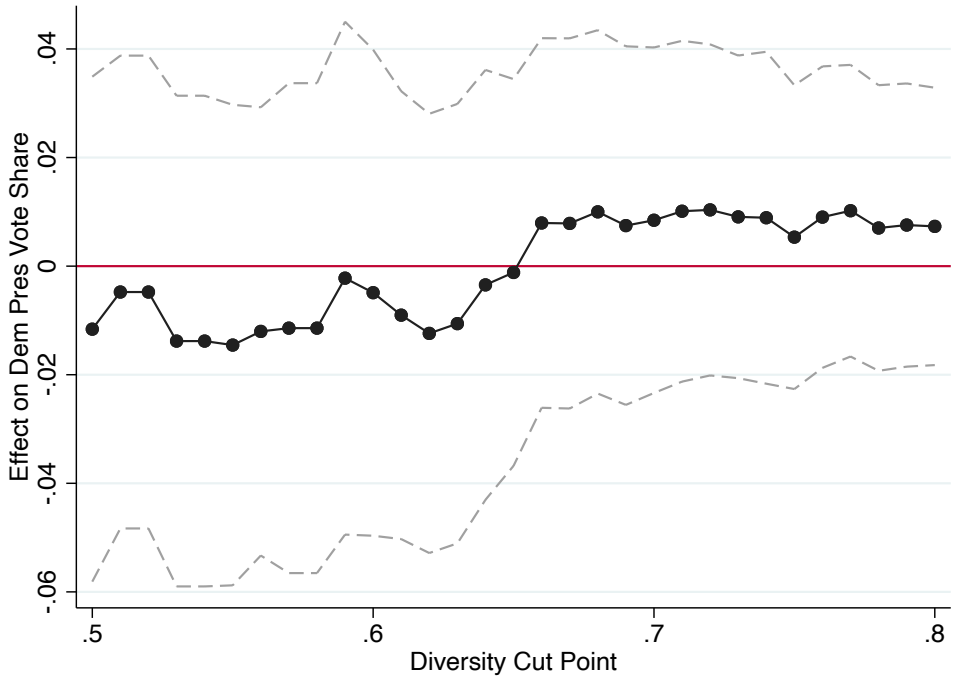
Figure A.4: **Effect in Competitive Counties Not Sensitive to Definition of Competitiveness.** The horizontal axis captures our definition of competitive counties. The win margin in the last Democratic presidential election must be smaller than the cut point value for a county to be included in the analysis. Estimates on the left side of the figure use fewer counties but restrict the analysis to a stricter definition of competitive. Each dot represents a regression discontinuity-based estimate of the effect of electing a Democratic clerk on residual Democratic presidential vote share. The lines above and below each point represent 95-percent confidence intervals. Estimates come from regressions that mimic column 1 in Table 1 using local linear regression and a 10-percentage-point bandwidth.



A.5.2 Findings Not Sensitive to Definition of Competitive Counties

In Figure A.4, we demonstrate that our finding that clerks do not advantage their party even in more competitive counties holds across many definitions of competitive.

Figure A.5: **Effect in Diverse Counties Not Sensitive to Definition of Diversity.** The horizontal axis captures our definition of diverse counties. Non-Hispanic White citizens must make up a smaller share than the cut point value for a county to be included in the analysis. Estimates on the left side of the figure use fewer counties but restrict the analysis to a stricter definition of diverse. Each dot represents a regression discontinuity-based estimate of the effect of electing a Democratic clerk on residual Democratic presidential vote share. The lines above and below each point represent 95-percent confidence intervals. Estimates come from regressions that mimic column 1 in Table 1 using local linear regression and a 10-percentage-point bandwidth.



A.5.3 Findings Not Sensitive to Definition of Diverse Counties

In Figure A.5, we demonstrate that our finding that clerks do not advantage their party even in more diverse counties holds across many thresholds for defining which counties are more or less diverse.

A.5.4 Effect of Electing a Democratic Clerk on All Policy Outcomes Collected

In Table 4 in Section 5.3, we present evidence that Democratic and Republican election officials implemented similar policies when serving in similar counties. Here, we share the full results for each of the policy outcomes. We find the same pattern as presented in the main text across all eight policy outcomes.

Table A.8: **Effect of Democratic Election Officials on Polling Places.**

	Polling Places per 1k			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Dem Elec Official	0.019	-0.029	-0.065	-0.047
	(0.077)	(0.064)	(0.076)	(0.070)
N	273	494	494	311
Clusters	205	366	366	232
Deg of $f(V)$	1	3	5	CCT
Spline	Y	N	N	Y
Bandwidth	0.10	0.25	0.25	0.11

Robust standard errors clustered by clerk election in parentheses. The reported estimates come from regressions on the full sample of clerk elections held between a Republican and a Democrat. Spline means that the flexible regression of the outcome on Democratic clerk vote share was fit separately on both sides of 0. The outcome is first regressed on a state- and year-specific lag using all counties including those for which clerk election results are not available. The regression discontinuity is estimated using the residuals from that regression.

Table A.9: **Effect of Democratic Election Officials on Provisional Share.**

	Provisional Share of Ballots			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Dem Elec Official	0.005	-0.000	0.002	-0.000
	(0.005)	(0.001)	(0.003)	(0.001)
N	380	698	698	197
Clusters	261	469	469	138
Deg of $f(V)$	1	3	5	CCT
Spline	Y	N	N	Y
Bandwidth	0.10	0.25	0.25	0.04

Robust standard errors clustered by clerk election in parentheses. The reported estimates come from regressions on the full sample of clerk elections held between a Republican and a Democrat. Spline means that the flexible regression of the outcome on Democratic clerk vote share was fit separately on both sides of 0. The outcome is first regressed on a state- and year-specific lag using all counties including those for which clerk election results are not available. The regression discontinuity is estimated using the residuals from that regression.

Table A.10: **Effect of Democratic Election Officials on Provisional Rejection Rate.**

	Provisionals Rejection Rate			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Dem Elec Official	-0.031	-0.031	-0.030	-0.035
	(0.055)	(0.049)	(0.057)	(0.059)
N	273	502	502	295
Clusters	186	335	335	199
Deg of $f(V)$	1	3	5	CCT
Spline	Y	N	N	Y
Bandwidth	0.10	0.25	0.25	0.11

Robust standard errors clustered by clerk election in parentheses. The reported estimates come from regressions on the full sample of clerk elections held between a Republican and a Democrat. Spline means that the flexible regression of the outcome on Democratic clerk vote share was fit separately on both sides of 0. The outcome is first regressed on a state- and year-specific lag using all counties including those for which clerk election results are not available. The regression discontinuity is estimated using the residuals from that regression.

Table A.11: **Effect of Democratic Election Officials on Absentee Rejection Rate.**

	Absentee Rejection Rate			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Dem Elec Official	0.014	0.008	0.010	0.010
	(0.016)	(0.013)	(0.016)	(0.016)
N	459	833	833	486
Clusters	300	540	540	317
Deg of $f(V)$	1	3	5	CCT
Spline	Y	N	N	Y
Bandwidth	0.10	0.25	0.25	0.11

Robust standard errors clustered by clerk election in parentheses. The reported estimates come from regressions on the full sample of clerk elections held between a Republican and a Democrat. Spline means that the flexible regression of the outcome on Democratic clerk vote share was fit separately on both sides of 0. The outcome is first regressed on a state- and year-specific lag using all counties including those for which clerk election results are not available. The regression discontinuity is estimated using the residuals from that regression.

Table A.12: **Effect of Democratic Election Officials on Registration.**

	Registered Voters per VAP			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Dem Elec Official	0.016	0.020	0.020	0.020
	(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.009)
N	743	1351	1351	660
Clusters	433	795	795	386
Deg of $f(V)$	1	3	5	CCT
Spline	Y	N	N	Y
Bandwidth	0.10	0.25	0.25	0.09

Robust standard errors clustered by clerk election in parentheses. The reported estimates come from regressions on the full sample of clerk elections held between a Republican and a Democrat. Spline means that the flexible regression of the outcome on Democratic clerk vote share was fit separately on both sides of 0. The outcome is first regressed on a state- and year-specific lag using all counties including those for which clerk election results are not available. The regression discontinuity is estimated using the residuals from that regression.

Table A.13: **Effect of Democratic Election Officials on Registration Removals.**

	Registrations Removed / Total Registrants			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Dem Elec Official	0.007	-0.003	0.005	0.006
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
N	457	816	816	400
Clusters	294	522	522	257
Deg of $f(V)$	1	3	5	CCT
Spline	Y	N	N	Y
Bandwidth	0.10	0.25	0.25	0.08

Robust standard errors clustered by clerk election in parentheses. The reported estimates come from regressions on the full sample of clerk elections held between a Republican and a Democrat. Spline means that the flexible regression of the outcome on Democratic clerk vote share was fit separately on both sides of 0. The outcome is first regressed on a state- and year-specific lag using all counties including those for which clerk election results are not available. The regression discontinuity is estimated using the residuals from that regression.

Table A.14: **Effect of Democratic Election Officials on Democratic Registration Share.**

	Dem Reg Share			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Dem Elec Official	-0.002	-0.000	0.002	-0.001
	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.007)
N	296	615	615	349
Clusters	174	359	359	202
Deg of $f(V)$	1	3	5	CCT
Spline	Y	N	N	Y
Bandwidth	0.10	0.25	0.25	0.12

Robust standard errors clustered by clerk election in parentheses. The reported estimates come from regressions on the full sample of clerk elections held between a Republican and a Democrat. Spline means that the flexible regression of the outcome on Democratic clerk vote share was fit separately on both sides of 0. The outcome is first regressed on a state- and year-specific lag using all counties including those for which clerk election results are not available. The regression discontinuity is estimated using the residuals from that regression.

Table A.15: **Effect of Democratic Election Officials on Wait Times.**

	Share Over 10 min Wait			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Dem Elec Official	-0.019	-0.051	-0.023	-0.021
	(0.022)	(0.019)	(0.022)	(0.023)
N	379	674	674	363
Clusters	260	464	464	250
Deg of $f(V)$	1	3	5	CCT
Spline	Y	N	N	Y
Bandwidth	0.10	0.25	0.25	0.09

Robust standard errors clustered by clerk election in parentheses. The reported estimates come from regressions on the full sample of clerk elections held between a Republican and a Democrat. Spline means that the flexible regression of the outcome on Democratic clerk vote share was fit separately on both sides of 0. The outcome is first regressed on a state- and year-specific lag using all counties including those for which clerk election results are not available. The regression discontinuity is estimated using the residuals from that regression.