Do Primaries Work?

Local Policy Conservatism and Primary Candidate Positioning

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MASS REPRESENTATION IN PARTY NOMINATIONS

Political scientists believe that party nominations present candidates with a "strategic positioning dilemma" (Brady, Han, and Pope 2007): in order to win the nomination and the general election, candidates position themselves as a spatial compromise between their partisan base and the median voter. **How do we know that voters' policy preferences matter in nominations?**

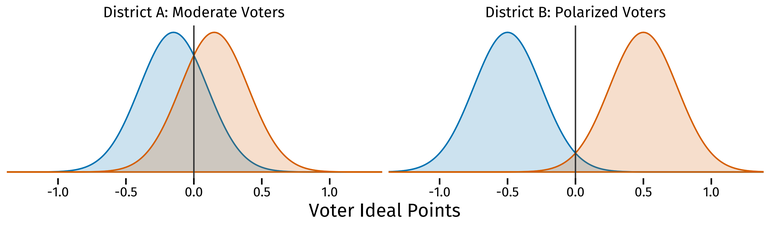
Theoretical issues:

- Nominating elections have high information costs; do voters meet them?
- Interest groups/informal party networks may supersede voter's policy preferences.

Methodological issues:

- Lack direct measures of voter preferences in nominating constituencies.
- Existing studies of primary representation operationalize voter preferences using insufficient proxies (can't infer ideal points from vote shares, Kernell 2009) or don't operationalize constituency preferences at all.

Two Districts with Equal Medians
Equal vote shares under Median Voter Theorem



QUESTIONS

1. How to measure policy preferences of ***distinct partisan groups*** in the ***same district***?
2. Do candidates position themselves to fit ***party-public preferences***?

IRT MODEL FOR DISTRICT PARTISAN PREFERENCES

Group-level model: Estimate ideal points for ***partisan groups in each district***. Assume individual ideal points θ_i are Normal within district-party groups g.

$$\theta_i \sim \text{Normal}\left(\bar{\theta}_{g[i]}, \sigma_{g[i]}\right) \tag{1}$$

Estimate $\bar{\theta}_g$ with group-level item response probit model (Caughey and Warshaw 2015).

$$\Pr\left(y_{ij}\right) = \Phi\left(\frac{\bar{\theta}_{g[i]} - \kappa_j}{\sqrt{\sigma^2_{g[i]} + \sigma^2_j}}\right) \tag{2}$$

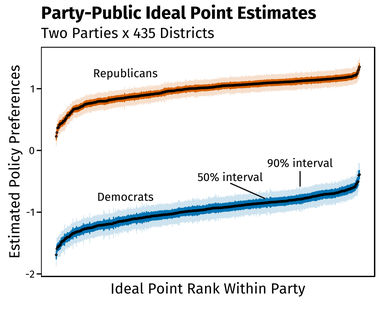
Group means pooled toward hierarchical regression. Data from districts (d), states (s), and regions (r) with ***party-specific parameters*** (p):

$$\bar{\theta}_g \sim \text{Normal}\left(\zeta_p + \mathbf{x}'_d\beta_p + \alpha_{sp} + \psi_{rp}, \sigma^{\text{district}}_p\right) \tag{3}$$

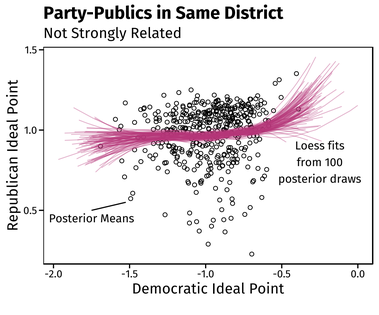
Opinion data: CCES (2012, 2014, 2016), ANES (2012, 2016)
Covariate data: Foster-Molina (2016), Correlates of State Policy

Model Estimates

Party-Public Ideal Point Estimates
Two Parties x 435 Districts



Party-Publics in Same District
Not Strongly Related

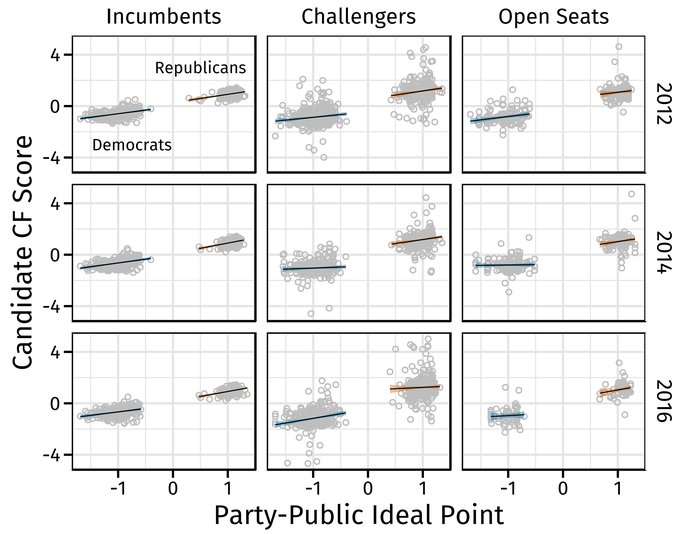


Non-relationship between partisans in same district justifies modeling decisions:

- Estimating parties separately
- Allowing hierarchical parameters to vary by party

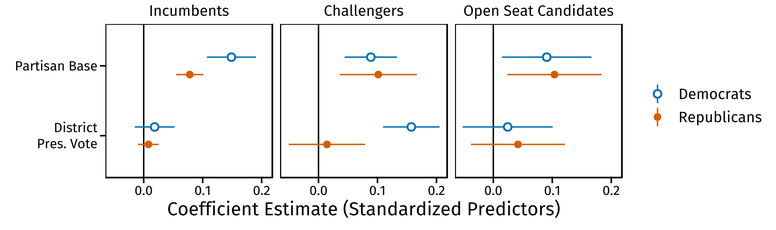
RELATIONSHIP TO CANDIDATE POSITIONS

Initial exploration suggests district-party preferences are positively but weakly related to candidate positioning (CF scores)…



…but district-party preferences are ***stronger predictors*** than district presidential vote.

Local Partisan Preferences Outperform Presidential Vote
As Predictors of Candidate CF Scores



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