Pre-registration
Public Perceptions of Local Partisan Elections
CCES 2018 Pre-Election Wave
Investigator: Evan Crawford

Start of study: 10/1/2018 (approximate date)

Intervention Implemented by: YouGov on behalf of the Cooperative Congressional
Election Study

Background & Rationale:

In recent years several state governments have considered legislation mandating changes
to how local elections are conducted. The majority of these proposals include a
requirement that local elections drop nonpartisan ballots and require candidates to run as
partisans. The recent activity of these "party defenders" has prompted a renewal of
progressive-era debates surrounding the merits of nonpartisan ballots as a means to elect
local leaders. A central tenet of the nonpartisan reformers is that much of local
government is administrative and inherently apolitical. This is certainly the view of
contemporary advocates seeking to maintain their local elections as nonpartisan contests.
Nonpartisan reformers believe that the job of the local government should not be
entangled with partisan politics. Broadly speaking, party defenders reject the premise
articulate by nonpartisan reformers. Where reformers see party labels as providing a
crutch to voters who might be uninformed about local candidates and issues, party
defenders see valuable information for voters that are relevant to the office that
candidates seek. Both camps argue that the public is with them on this issue yet there is
little empirical evidence to cite when it comes to the public's views on local elections. I
use new survey data from the 2018 CCES to reveal the public's attitudes as they relate to
elections for various local offices. I place this new data in the context of the legislative
landscape nationwide.

C13 JEL classification(s): D72

Population
  - CCES module for Reed College, pre-election wave
    - National sample stratified by state and district

Treatments

  - N/A

Manipulation check

  - None

Outcomes

We ask respondents "How do you think the following offices should be chosen?"

RCO321   Local Election Officials
RCO322   Local School Board
RCO323   Sheriff
RCO324   District Attorney
RCO325   City or Town Council
RCO326   Members of the United States House of Representatives
RCO327   Members of the $INPUTSTATE State Legislature

Each of the following survey items will be analyzed to determine if responses vary across office-types:
1.   They should be elected by the public, in a partisan contest
2.   They should be elected by the public, in a non-partisan contest
3.   They should be appointed by an elected official or other governing body.
4.   I don't think it matters
5.   I'm not sure

Descriptive Questions (Exploratory Analyses)

There is little research on public attitudes about preferences for how local officials should be chosen. One notable exception is Alvarez and Hall (2005) who show that nonpartisan elected board is the more preferred local election authority in a nationwide survey of citizens. I focus initially on testing for differences in public preferences across office type.

1. Do voters differ in their preferences for how local offices (RCO321-RCO325) are chosen compared to how state and federal offices are chosen (RCO326-327)?
2. Among only local offices (RCO321-RCO325), do voters differ in their preferences for how those offices are chosen?

Hypotheses (Confirmatory)

— **H$_{REFORM}$:** For each local office (RCO321-RCO325) voters will be more likely to choose "elected in a non-partisan contest" as preferred selection method compared to "elected in a partisan contest" or "appointed."
    o **H0:** No difference in preferences for selection methods
    o *One tailed hypothesis* **(Nonpartisan reformers theory)**: Prior belief that progressive-era reforms responsible for nonpartisan elections at the local level is rooted in preference among voters for nonpartisan/administrative local government.

— $H_{DOMINANT}$: Differences between selection method preference will vary across local offices conditional on the dominant selection method (nationwide) for that office.
- *One tailed hypotheses:*
  - $H_{DOMINANT\_SB}$: For local school board (RCO322) voters will be more likely to choose "elected in a non-partisan contest" as preferred selection method compared to "elected in a partisan contest" or "appointed."
    - 4 states and parts of 2 others use partisan elections for local school board. The remaining 44 use non-partisan elections (Crawford 2018).
  - $H_{DOMINANT\_CC}$: For city/town council (RCO325) voters will be more likely to choose "elected in a non-partisan contest" as preferred selection method compared to "elected in a partisan contest" or "appointed."
    - 22 of the top 30 cities (by population) elect their city councils by non-partisan election (National League of Cities). The remaining 8 use partisan elections. Prior research shows approximately 77% of city councils are elected by non-partisan ballot (MacManus and Bullock 2003).
  - $H_{DOMINANT\_SHERIFF}$: For Sheriff (RCO323) voters will be more likely to choose "elected in a partisan contest" as preferred selection method compared to "elected in a non-partisan contest" or "appointed"
    - 4 states use nonpartisan elections for sheriff, 1 state uses both nonpartisan and partisan, 1 state uses gubernatorial appointment, and 2 states have no sheriff. The 42 remaining states use partisan elections (National Sheriff's Association).
  - $H_{DOMINANT\_DA}$: For District Attorney (RCO324) voters will be more likely to choose "elected in a partisan contest" as preferred selection method compared to "elected in a non-partisan contest" or "appointed"
    - 4 states use nonpartisan elections for district attorney/chief prosecutor, 4 states use appointment by a statewide official. The 42 remaining states use partisan elections (Ellis 2012).

— H_{GEO}: Differences between selection method preferences will vary conditional on the respondent's state/county/city of residence and the selection method therein.
- *One tailed hypotheses:*
  - For each local office (RCO321-RCO325) voters who live in a jurisdiction that uses (non-partisan contest/ partisan contest/ appointed) to choose said office will be more likely to choose (non-partisan contest/ partisan contest/ appointed), respectively, as preferred selection method for said office.

- Regardless of whether voters could correctly identify the selection method of each of these offices (we do not ask that question), expectation is that voters' preferences are a product of the selection method they are familiar with.

— **H$_{STRATEGIC}$:** Differences between selection method preferences will vary conditional on the respondents' party affiliation and whether that party is the majority/minority party in their local jurisdiction (county/city). Prior research on state legislator preferences for partisan or non-partisan local elections suggests that that elites prefer selection methods they feel yield a partisan benefit. This includes a preference for partisan elections among those in the local majority and a belief that non-partisan elections disproportionately benefit candidates of the local minority party.

  o *One-tailed hypotheses:*
    - **H$_{STRATEGIC\_MAJ}$:** For each local office (RCO321-RCO325) voters who affiliate with the local majority party will be more likely to choose "elected in a partisan contest" as preferred selection method compared to "elected in a non-partisan contest."
    - **H$_{STRATEGIC\_MIN}$:** For each local office (RCO321-RCO325) voters who affiliate with the local minority party will be more likely to choose "elected in a non-partisan contest" as preferred selection method compared to "elected in a partisan contest."

— **H$_{OFFICE\_PARTY}$:** Differences between selection method preferences will vary conditional on party affiliation and the local office under examination. Inherent to the nonpartisan reformers argument is that local government is largely administrative and inherently apolitical. As certain local issues become nationalized (education, law and order, e.g.), the major parties have claimed issue ownership (Petrocik 1996). Party affiliation may therefore increase the salience of a particular local office because of the policy domain that office represents and which party claims "ownership." I code education as an issue "owned" by Democrats and law and order issues as "owned" by Republicans (Egan 2006). The expectation is that voters would want partisan elections for offices "owned" by a party with which they share an affiliation. Conversely, voters would want non-partisan elections for offices "owned" by the opposite party to increase the chances of one of their preferred candidates being elected.

  o *One-tailed hypotheses:*
    - **H$_{OFFICE\_PARTY\_SB}$:** For local school board (RCO322), Democratic voters will be more likely to choose "elected in a partisan contest" than Republican voters.
    - **H$_{OFFICE\_PARTY\_DA}$:** For District Attorney (RCO324), Republican voters will be more likely to choose "elected in a partisan contest" than Democratic voters.
    - **H$_{OFFICE\_PARTY\_SHERIFF}$:** For Sheriff (RCO323), Republican voters will be more likely to choose "elected in a partisan contest" than Democratic voters.

— **H**<small>PARTY_STRENGTH</small>: Differences between selection method preferences will vary conditional on strength of partisanship.
- o *Two-tailed hypotheses:*
  - ▪ For each type of office under consideration (RCO321-RCO327), of those who prefer they should be elected by the public (as opposed to those who chose appointed, not sure, or does not matter), strong partisans (strong R and strong D from CCES pid 7) will have different preferences (partisan vs. non-partisan) than will partisan leaners or independents.
    - • No directional expectation about whether strong partisans will have stronger or weaker preference for partisan elections.
      - o Stronger: Strong partisans are most likely to want to identify their co-partisans on the ballot whereas leaners/independents are more inclined to non-partisan ballots because they reduce the role or the two parties
      - o Weaker: Leaners/independents, while perhaps not officially affiliating with a party, still vote overwhelmingly for one party or the other and are *more* dependent on party labels than strong partisans to help them identify preferred candidates.

Analysis

- Change in proportion of "elected in a non-partisan contest" and "elected in a partisan contest" responses will be assessed using logistic regression.
  - Results will be converted for interpretation with relevant covariates held at mean values.
- Heterogeneous effects will be tested using interactions of relevant individual covariates (e.g. party id and strength of partisanship) and contextual variables (e.g. actual selection methods by geography and jurisdiction partisanship).

Covariates
- Covariates for inclusion in analyses (full questions listed in appendix):
  - Age (birthyr converted to age as 2016-birthyr)

  - Party or Ideology – dummies for 5 pt scale
    - Substitute in alternative model specifications
    - Party dummies created from CCES pid7
      - Strong R
      - Not very strong R + R leaners
      - Independent/Not Sure [omit dummy]
      - Not very strong D + D leaners
      - Strong D

- Ideology dummies created from CCES ideo5 scale

- Gender (female = 1)

- Political engagement index
  - CC18_300: News consumption in last 24 hours (responses 1-5)
  - CC18_417a: Sum of political activity in past year (responses 1-6)
  - CC18_418a: Ever run for office (yes = 11 [max value of index])

- Factual knowledge index: Correct answers to the following eight items
  - Majority party in US Senate, US House, State upper and lower chambers: CC18_309a/b/c/d
  - Party affiliation of current Governor, US Senators, US House: CC18_310a/b/c/d

- Self-reported political news interest: newsint

- Voting:
  - Past turnout (2016): CC18_316
    - Dichotomous: yes = 1; other = 0
  - 2018 election: CC18_401
    - Dichotomous: voted =1; other = 0

- State/County – To match with Sheriff, DA, LEO, and School Board
- Zip – To match with City Council, LEO, and School Board

- Self-reported income (series of dummies for categories – collapse YouGov "faminc" variable to quartiles)

- Self-reported education (series of dummies for categories – YouGov "educ" variable)

- Self-reported race (dummies for Black, Hispanic, Asian, other POC; omitted category is White; include multi-racial identity in variables)

- Additional covariates to be added to heterogeneity analyses.

  - Statewide competitiveness

  - Congressional competitiveness

  - Contextual covariates

    - Actual LEO selection method
    - Actual Local School Board selection method
    - Actual City/Town Council selection method
    - Actual Sheriff selection method
    - Actual District Attorney selection method

RCO321 - RCO327

DYNAMIC GRID

Partisanship and Local Elections

Please randomize the rows

IF INPUTSTATE==11 SKIP RCO327

Recently, there has been some discussion about how we choose representatives for various federal, state, and local offices.

In some places, these offices are chosen in partisan or in non-partisan elections.

In other places, they are appointed by other elected officials.

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