Political Schizophrenics?

Factors Affecting Aggregate Partisan Choice at the Local vs. National Level

Abstract

In a sample of 12 states across all regions of the United States, we find that 1 of every 3 counties supports a different party for president than for its local legislature. In this paper, we use a unique data set containing partisan affiliations of county councilors to analyze contexts that might lead voters to choose different parties at different levels of government. We find support for three explanations of representational splits: incomplete realignment, local electoral factors, and differentials in party strength. This paper takes a step toward understanding how parties and partisan identities operate in a federal system.

Keywords: representation; county; incumbency; political parties

In a popular account of the recent dramatic trend of political segregation, Bill Bishop (2008) explains that Americans now experience a "politics so polarized that…elections are no longer just contests over policies, but bitter choices between ways of life" (p14). Given work by scholars like Lakoff (1996) and Hetherington and Weiler (2009) indicating tremendous division between Republican and Democratic identifiers, as well as Green et al's (2002) research showing that partisan identification should be understood as a "a distinct and enduring psychological orientation," (p32) it would seem that partisan loyalties (and divides) run deep. Indeed, in recent elections ticket-splitting has declined to the lowest levels in 30 years (Kimball 2005) and majorities of individual Democrats and Republicans report having profoundly negative views of the other party (Pew 2016). But most studies of partisan divides rely on an exclusively national view of the world. At lower levels of government, the political reality is considerably more complex. In a sample of 12 states, across all regions of the United States, we find that approximately 1 out of every 3 counties selects different parties at the local and national levels - even in places that voted for presidential nominees by a landslide. In this paper, we explore why.

This is not a new question. Scholars of Southern politics have noted the tendency for at least half a century. V.O. Key described a peculiar kind of partisan, "indigenous to the South," who votes Democratic in local elections and for the Republican presidential nominee; a "political schizophrenic" in Key's eyes (1949, p278). Was he right to think of such behavior as an indication of illness? Or can other explanations help us to understand preferences for different parties across levels of government as rational (and perhaps enduring)? To what extent does such splitting even occur? We take a step toward answering these questions using a new dataset consisting of county council partisan affiliations and presidential vote returns.

There are a range of possible reasons that we might see representational splits across levels of government – only some of which point toward Key's conclusion. If, for instance, voters have well-formed preferences about national level politics but essentially flip coins in local elections we'd be quite likely to see representational splits and also to conclude that voters are irrational. But perhaps voters actually prefer Democratic (Republican) representatives for county government and Republican (Democratic) presidents as a result of their policy positions. Given that many national level debates are irrelevant at the local level, preferences for different parties at different levels are not inconceivable.

Such reasoning could have important implications for the study of elections. Perhaps, as scholars found for state level elites and voters in the 1960s and 70s, selecting representatives from a different party at the local level indicates that voters have multiple party identifications (Hadley 1985, Niemi et al 1987, Jennings and Niemi 1966). If so, this implies that we need to develop an understanding of how policy preferences map onto party labels at the local level (and how and when they come to be related). Are Democratic county officials more likely to promote public housing and preserve open space while Republicans focus on economic development, and law and order? What kinds of events (e.g. changes in property values) affect local loyalties? On the other hand, seeking answers to such questions may not help explain representational splitting if splits are driven predominately by lagging realignment. If voters' party attachments at the local level represent historical forces and not evaluations of local outcomes, policies, or candidates, we would be likely to see representational splits – but they would not be informative regarding voters' views of local parties and politics.

We analyze three reasons for differences in partisan representation across levels of government: incomplete realignment, local contextual factors, and differentials in party strength.

We find support for each explanation. First, differences between the local and national patterns have been driven by lagging realignment – but the extent to which this process is likely to continue is unclear. Second, we find evidence that the local context and changes in the local environment increase the probability of split representation. Finally, we show that the degree to which the parties are evenly matched affects splitting. In counties where the two parties compete more effectively in state and national elections, split representation is more common. The fact that partisanship is not tightly linked across levels of government (and that cross-level splitting has not declined in recent years) means that comprehensively understanding partisan identity and vote choice will require a greater focus on sub-state elections in the future.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. First, we define what we mean by split representation and review previous literature that establishes the basis of our predictions. Then, we describe the unique data that we collected to analyze the degree to which local representational patterns can be predicted by national level vote choice. Finally, we provide an overview of the method of analysis we use to study split representation and present evidence in support of our explanations of this phenomenon. This paper takes a step toward understanding how parties and partisan identities operate in local versus national elections and lays the foundation for further research on these topics.

Defining Split Representation

Before delving into our analysis it is important that we define the term "split representation" which we use throughout the paper. Although much of the research on ticket splitting focuses on the choice of different parties on a single ballot (Alesina and Rosenthal 1995, Fiorina 1996, Saunders et al 2005, Mebane 2000), Burden and Helmke (2009) recommend defining ticket splitting more broadly. They explain, "a ticket is split if voter i votes for party j

in contest *r* and for party *~j* in some other contest." Thus, splitting can occur within a single level of government or across levels of government, and in concurrent or non-concurrent elections. In the United States research has been focused within the federal level (primarily comparing Congressional and Presidential contests, or House and Senate contests) and across state and federal levels (comparing state legislative or gubernatorial contests and federal contests). The focus of our research is a form of cross-level ticket splitting, but unlike previous research we move further down the ballot to investigate local level outcomes. Furthermore, while most scholars have analyzed ticket splitting at the individual level, we follow Burnham (1965) and Brunell and Grofman (2009) and analyze split outcomes in the aggregate. In particular we investigate the factors that contribute to different parties winning county versus presidential level elections. We refer to this as "split representation."

Explanations for Cross Level Representational Splits

Incomplete Realignment

The first explanation for the representation splitting that we consider is incomplete realignment of partisan identification. As the parties have sorted voters at the national level, local voting may not have kept pace with the change. Partisan affiliations exhibit a good deal of inertia (Green et al 2002) and as Key explains, "present partisan affiliations tend to be as much the fortuitous result of events long past as the product of cool calculation of interest in party policies of today" (1949, p285). Such a tendency could produce representational splits if the campaigns that voters *do* pay attention to are more likely to be national than local. That is, it is possible that people form attachments to parties which tend to dictate their votes at all levels of government (including the local level) but that particular national candidates or contexts move them to vote for the other party in some presidential elections. If voting for this other party in

presidential elections continues across many cycles, the voter might begin to shift her identification, and we might slowly see voting at lower levels come to match presidential choices. This is the pattern that scholars have identified in the south where voters began supporting Republican presidents in the mid-1960s (Green et al 2002, Aistrup 1996). Eventually, Republicans made gains in southern congressional and state politics as well (Bullock et al 2005, Bullock et al 2006, Arrington and Grofman 1999). However, some scholars (Aldrich and Griffin 2000, Hood et al 2004) provide evidence that Republican success at higher levels was actually predicated on success at lower levels of government (particularly the state level) where candidates were recruited and a party network built. Regardless of the direction of influence, if these predictions are relevant for county level partisanship as well we'd expect decreasing representational splits over time. But if, as Black and Black's (2002), argue a "solid Republican South….[is not] likely to emerge" (p3), then we may see no increase in consistency across time.

Local Context

A second explanation for split representation that we explore is the role of local contexts. One of the most important theories in the split-ticket voting literature is the balancing hypothesis (Fiorina 1992, 1996, Mebane 2000) which explains divided government as the result of strategic behavior on the part of voters to generate policy outcomes nearest to their ideal points. Unfortunately, because no measures of ideology across county level elected officials or voters exist, we are unable to test this thesis. However, we think it would be unlikely to explain cross governmental representational splits. As Burden and Helmke (2009) explain, a balancing model requires that policy outcomes are the result of some interaction between the governmental institutions which the voter seeks to balance. While county governments do, at times, implement

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policy made by state governments which may be dictated by presidential prerogatives, it seems highly unlikely that the average voter would view local politicians as having the authority (or ability) to balance federal policy.

We think a more likely explanation for split representation is the role of local context, including both election specific factors and local policy factors. A particularly important election specific factor should be the presence of incumbents (Burden and Kimball 1998 and 2002, Segura and Nicholson 1995, Nie et al 1976). Voters may keep familiar local incumbents in office regardless of party if they perform well. This could lead to representational splits across levels of government. Additionally, some electoral contexts may encourage locally focused voting more than others. For instance, voters might be more attentive to local issues in races that are not held concurrently with presidential elections. When elections *are* held concurrently with presidential elections, it the media coverage of the presidential race is likely to dominate. We might expect that in this type of setting, voters will learn little about local candidates and when given the option, will simply use their national level party identification as a heuristic. As a result, we might see fewer splits in such places.

Another possibility is that changes in local conditions could lead voters to pay more attention to county level politics at some times more so than others. Particularly if changing conditions are seen as being within the purview of local officials, voters may be more willing to abandon their national level party affiliation. One of the most important functions of local government is the management of land use. Voters may not care about the party affiliation of their representatives as long as they take the appropriate (in the voters' eyes) stance on development. Although this might seem to be a monumental task for the typically uninformed voter, Nicholson (2005) and Arceneueaux (2006) provide evidence that when issues are salient,

voters are able to hold representatives accountable for outcomes that are appropriate to their jurisdiction. Furthermore, scholars like Black and Black (1987), Glaser (1996), and Karp and Garland (2007) have argued that local politicians are able to adapt to their local context and successfully keep national level issues from infiltrating local races. For instance, a Democratic supervisorial candidate from North Carolina need not mention anything about health care reform, abortion rights, or gun control – because these issues are not affected by local policy. Thus, partisan divisions at the federal level need not be relevant in local elections. Local level conditions may allow candidates the opportunity to target different median voters and build different coalitions for county elections. We would expect certain types of voters to be more attentive to local conditions that others. Fischel (2001) and Oliver and Ha (2015) show that residents who own their own homes are the most likely to pay attention to local politics. In Oliver and Ha's estimation, owning a home was the single most important predictor of a respondent's vote choice being affected by local issues. Hajnal (2010) presents evidence that older voters are dramatically overrepresented in local electorates and Anzia (2016) shows that elderly voters can be extremely well organized policy demanders.

So, a community with a large share of older residents or homeowners may produce split representation as these are populations that are most likely to have defined local political preferences that may deviate from their national allegiances.

Party Strength

A final possibility is that differences in party strength predict split representation. This thesis has many adherents (Burden and Kimball 1998, Steed and Moreland 2007, Key 1949 and 1953 to name a few). If (as was true in the south) a single party dominates in terms of organization, resources, candidate recruitment, and votes at the local level but is more evenly

matched at higher levels of government, the consequence could be split representation. "As of 1950," explain Black and Black (2002), "the southern Republican party had almost no followers, no leaders, and no candidates for public office…With an exception here and there, Republican leaders were uninterested in building a thriving party that regularly fielded candidates and sincerely attempted to win elections" (p57-59). In such an environment, even if voters wanted Republican representation at the county level, they'd be unable (or unwise) to make such a choice. Thus, Lublin (2004) and Glaser (1996) argue that a key factor to Republican success in the south has been the reestablishment of local Republican Party organizations and systems for nominating quality candidates. Seat by seat, the Republicans advanced onto the Congressional and later state politics scene, building resources and support in the electorate. The same process could occur at the local level and in other regions (e.g. as Democrats have gained in strength in the Northeast, see Rae 1989). We should expect that counties in which both parties draw significant funds and votes at higher levels of government, the chances of splitting across levels would be more likely as compared to places where one party has a clear advantage.

In sum, we expect that representational splitting will be more likely in counties where partisan realignment is incomplete, where local forces are likely to affect local vote choice, and where the parties are more evenly matched with regard to resources and support.

Data Collection

Collecting data on sub-state election outcomes is a time consuming process. It frequently means contacting government entities (like counties or cities) individually and in many instances historical data are simply unavailable as there are no requirements for registrars to keep data for any specified length of time. So, for our first foray into understanding representational splits across levels, we collected data from a sample of counties. We selected three states from each

Census region (West, Midwest, Northeast, and South) where we could get data on county

councilors' partisan affiliations for any years between 1990 and 2006. States that have

nonpartisan county elections (e.g. California) were excluded from our consideration as were

states that do not make county results uniformly available. The states we chose are Arizona,

Idaho, Iowa, Kentucky, Maine, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey,

North Carolina, and South Carolina.[1]

Counties in the states we selected hold partisan elections in even years.[2] The

concurrency of local and national elections is important because it minimizes the possibility that

representational splits are the result of differences in turnout.[3] Because many counties have

staggered elections for county council, we combined data across years to determine the partisan

makeup of each council in the year following an election. For instance, if three Democratic

councilors were elected in 1990 and two Republican councilors were elected in 1992, the first

year for which we would have complete data for this county would be 1993. In that year, the

county would be coded as having a 60% Democratic County Council. The years for which we

know the partisan makeup of the county council in each state along with the total number of

counties are listed in on-line appendix Table A1. We merged these data with county level

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[1] We gathered election returns from Arizona, Idaho, Maine, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, and South Carolina and collected blue book data from Iowa, Kentucky, Missouri, and Nebraska. North Carolina data were provided by the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners. The differences in the type of data we were able to gather required that we develop a common metric of partisan support. We use the proportion of county council members that are affiliated with the Democratic/Republican Party as this measure. The complete data set as well as replication commands are available upon request from the authors.

[2] The one exception is New Jersey, where some seats in some counties are elected in odd years.

[3] Although we do not have the ability to conclusively rule out the possibility that ballot roll-off is producing the representational splits, we have some evidence that indicates this is not the case. One of the states in our data set has complete election returns available and non-staggered county elections – Arizona. We found, in the 2000 and 2004 elections, that when Democratic county councilors won a larger proportion of the vote than Democratic presidential candidates, they also received a larger total number of votes. This was despite the fact that the total number of ballots case in county council elections was lower in every county. We also found a similar pattern in two North Carolina counties where we were able to collect election returns for 2000 and 2004. So while ballot roll-off occurs it is not the source of representational splits. These results are available from the authors upon request.

election returns for president and governor as well as campaign finance data for national level elections. In our analysis, we use the county level presidential and gubernatorial vote from the election held closest to (but not after) the year in which we have council data. For the county example referenced above, the presidential election data would come from 1992. Finally, we merged Census Current Population Survey data for population figures through 2006 and linearly interpolated data from the Census of Population and Housing.[4]

To clearly display the patterns in our data we convert partisan representation into a series of dummy variables: counties with local Democratic majorities and Republican presidential majorities, counties with Republican majorities at both levels, counties with Democratic majorities at both levels, and counties with local Republican majorities and Democratic presidential majorities. Table 1 presents proportion of counties that fall into each category for each state and region.

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

In our data, Western counties are the most consistent, while Southern and Northeastern counties are least consistent. Among counties that split, the Democratic Party maintains local dominance in the South and the West, whereas Republicans dominate in the Northeast. Midwestern counties are relatively equally divided locally with a slight Republican advantage.

Method for Analyzing Split Representation

This section describes our approach to systematically analyzing split representation. Our basic puzzle is to determine what factors loosen the partisan link across levels of government. One way to think about this is to say that in some counties the local partisan pattern is better predicted by the national level vote than in others. More specifically, conditional on the national

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[4] The states we sampled are highly representative of their respective regions on these census variables. Density plots revealing the similarity of distributions are available from the authors.

vote, we expect that the local partisan pattern will display greater variability where realignment is incomplete, where local forces are more likely to affect local vote choice, and where the parties are more competitive.

In other words, we hypothesize that these factors will increase the portion of local seat share that is unexplained by the national vote share. But, local seat shares and national vote shares represent two very different kinds of quantities. Both measures are bounded by 0 and 1, but local seat shares are discrete while national vote shares are continuous. Furthermore, local seat shares represent control of a total legislature tallied over time, while national vote shares represent only a single election and only a fraction of the whole vote. So, to analyze these processes we focus on the residuals from a simple model regressing the local pattern on the national pattern. A major advantage of this method is that we are not forced to assume that our local and national data can be placed on the same conceptual dimension or are drawn from the same distribution. This is important because it is clearly not the case that the county level vote for president represents the same quantity as the proportion of the local legislature from each party.[5]

We estimate the following models using OLS:

1) $E[y_i|x_i] = x_i'\beta = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_{1i} + e_i$

2) $|e_i| = z_i'\gamma + u_i$

Where y_i is the dependent variable with disturbance term e_i and x_i and z_i are vectors of covariates predicting the mean of y and e respectively.

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[5] One objection to this approach is that it does not distinguish between counties in which different parties win majorities at different levels and those in which the same party wins at both levels. For example the model treats similarly a county that offers 33% of its vote to the Democratic candidate for president and has 66% Democratic representation on the council and one that votes 67% Democratic for president and has 100% Democratic representation on the council. In alternate tests we add an indicator, *Split Representation*, coded 1 if different parties are offered a majority at different levels and coded zero otherwise to account for this. The results are very similar.

In our first estimation, the dependent variable (y_i) is the proportion of the *County Council* that is Democratic. The conditional mean is predicted by the percentage of the vote won by the Democratic candidate in the most recent *Presidential* election at the county level (x_{1i}). Then, we regress the absolute value of the residuals from the first equation (e_i) on a set of independent variables (z_i') representing incomplete realignment, local forces, and party strength. Estimates of the parameters γ are the main focus of our analysis.[6]

As explained above, our first dependent variable is the proportion of the *County Council* that is Democratic. Our independent variable is the percentage of the vote won by the Democratic candidate for *President* in the most recent presidential election. This variable should be positive, but if representational splitting is occurring it should not explain all of the variation in the local seat pattern. The regression reveals that the local seat pattern is strongly predicted by the national vote, but only about 30% of the variance is explained. These results are shown graphically in Figure 1.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

What explains the differences between the observed and predicted values displayed in Figure 1? We propose that incomplete realignment, local context, and partisan strength affect the capacity of the national vote to predict the local partisan pattern. To determine whether or not this is the case we turn to an analysis of the absolute value of the *Residuals* from the first regression. We use the absolute value of the residuals because our hypotheses do not generate predictions regarding whether the national vote will over- or under-predict local Democratic seat shares – only that the link between levels will be larger or smaller under different conditions.

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[6] Heteroskedastic regression models produce very similar results and are available from the authors.

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Our independent variables measure our three factors. To capture the degree to which realignment affects the local seat pattern we measure the absolute value of the difference between the average share of the vote won by the Democratic candidate in the 1956, 1960, and 1964 elections and the share won by the Democratic candidate in the most recent presidential election.[7] If incomplete realignment is driving representational splits, this variable will be positive and significant, indicating that the national level vote is a worse predictor of the local pattern in counties that have witnessed a great deal of change in their national vote pattern.

We also analyze the possibility that realignment has continued to decrease representational splitting over time by including a time *Trend*. If county politics caught up with national politics during our time period, this variable will be negative, indicating that the national vote has been a better predictor of the local seat pattern in more recent years.

We use a number of different variables to capture the effect of local context. Scholars have shown that incumbency has a strong influence on local vote choice. Voters may be willing to disregard party attachments to keep high performing incumbents in office. Additionally, the lack of information in local elections may lead local voters to prioritize incumbency over partisanship as a cue for their vote. We add a variable noting the proportion of the council that is *Incumbent* to capture these possibilities. We expect percent incumbents to positively affect the size of the residuals (indicating that the local partisan pattern is explained less well by the national level vote where more incumbents win). Unfortunately, as a result of staggered elections, we lose between one and four years of data for each county when we include this

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[7] We selected these dates because Green et al (2002) argue that individual level realignment seriously began in the South starting in 1965, so the three prior presidential elections should represent a good base for comparison.

measure, resulting in a large drop in cases and the exclusion of two states (New Jersey and Maine). For this reason, we present the models with and without this variable.

As a proxy for factors that lead communities to focus more on county level politics independent of national politics, we include a dummy variable noting counties that have *Staggered Elections* for county council where some of the councilors are elected in presidential years and others are elected in congressional years. Local contexts are likely to be more visible during congressional elections years. So, if local context is driving split representation, then this variable will positively affect the residuals. We also include a contextual variable that captures local policy choice. Scholars of local politics have provided persuasive evidence that maintaining property values is the primary policy goal for local voters (e.g. Fischel 2001). So, we include the absolute value of the one year *Change in Median Property Values ($100k).* We expect this variable to positively predict representational splitting. We add the share of *Homeowners* with the expectation that this population will pay the most attention to the local context and the share of the population that is *Age 60 and Older* because these voters ought to be more likely to have significant local contextual loyalties and so, should increase splitting. Conversely, we expect the proportion of the population that is *African American* to generate more consistency in voting at different levels of government because of partisan loyalty to the Democrats.[8] If this is the case, a larger black population should decrease the size of the residuals. To capture populations of people who are less engaged in local politics, we include the proportion of the population that *Moved* to the county within the last 5 years. We expect this variable to be negatively related to

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[8] In our dataset, Democrat majority councils have larger black populations (about 8%) compared to Republican led councils (about 3%); however most Democratic councils are found in counties that are majority white. In our three southern states, virtually every county with very large black populations has a Democratic led council, but between 1/3rd and 2/3rds of the councils are Democratic in predominately white counties too. In North Carolina (the only state where we were able to gather racial data on elected officials), 40% of the Democratic county commissioners are white.

the size of the residuals as new residents might be more likely to rely on their presidential choice as a heuristic in local elections while they learn how their ideological leanings map onto local debates.

Finally, we include variables to analyze the effect of party strength. Two indicators of a party's potential to win local elections are the share of votes the party receives in state level elections and the share of funding it receives in national elections. More balanced partisanship (e.g. more competitive elections) at the state and national levels should lead to a greater possibility of splitting, as more resources are available to the minority party. To capture these concepts, we include the absolute difference from a 50-50 partisan split in the most recent *Gubernatorial Election* and the absolute difference from a 50-50 partisan split in *Campaign Funding* in national elections. The former variable was constructed using county level data available from the CQ Voting and Elections database. As with the presidential election variable, we use results from the gubernatorial election closest to, but not after, the year for which we have county council data.[9] The funding variable was constructed using 2006 county level data from OpenSecrets.org. The data are drawn from Federal Election Commission releases and include contributions to both candidates and parties in national elections. We would have liked to include additional years, but the data are unavailable at the county level prior to 2006.

These variables are proxies for the relative balance between the two parties among voters in state elections and the competitiveness of the national electoral environment. If the parties are precisely evenly matched, each will garner 50% of the vote and 50% of the total funding dollars. If one party dominates completely it will garner 100% of the vote and dollars. Our measures

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[9] Due to missing data, we were forced to use the results of the 1992 gubernatorial election race for our 1991 observations in Missouri. Excluding these observations does not change our results. Alternative tests using the presidential election split instead also produces extremely similar results.

capture the difference between these two states of the world. So, if one gubernatorial candidate received 75% of the vote, our gubernatorial split variable takes a value of 0.25. If the candidate wins 52.5% of the vote, our variable takes a value of 0.025. We expect these variables to negatively predict residuals because higher values (e.g. a more unbalanced electoral environment) mean that fewer voters and resources are available for the opposition party. At high values, the party that dominates in state and national elections is likely to dominate at the local level too. But when elections are closely contested, either party may have a chance to win, so the national vote may be less tightly linked to the local seat pattern.

Finally, we add a controls for the *Size of the county council* and natural log of the county *Population* to account for the possibility that larger places have more competitive local politics and potentially less engaged voters. Our models include state fixed effects to account for the possibility that state laws and party structures affect the degree to which the national vote predicts the local pattern (*Kentucky*, with the largest number of observations, is the reference category). We estimate bootstrapped standard errors.[10] Summary statistics for all variables are listed in the on-line appendix Table A2.[11]

Analysis of Split Representation

As revealed in both Table and Figure 1, a significant proportion of counties select different parties at different levels of government. Is this because of lagging realignment, local context, party strength, or unexplained factors? The regression results in Table 2 offer support for all three of the explanations of representational splitting.

[INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

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[10] We used Stata/SE 14.2 for this estimation (500 replications, seed set to 1).
[11] Upon publication a replication dataset will be available at http://faculty.xxxxxx.edu/xxxxxxx

Nearly every coefficient is in the predicted direction and statistically significant. However, the national vote did not become a better predictor of local seat shares over the course of our time series. It appears that unlike the state and Congressional levels, local realignment was not more prevalent during this period. That said, the other measure of the realignment hypothesis *is* significant and powerful. The difference from the 1956/60/64 presidential vote has a positive effect on the residuals suggesting that in counties where national partisan loyalties have changed a great deal, local seat shares are predicted less well by the national vote. We analyzed the geographic locations of counties that have significantly realigned at the national level. Among counties that have significantly realigned toward the Democratic Party at the national level and vote Republican at the local level, 58% are in the Midwest, 27% are in the Northeast, and 15% are in the South. Counties that have realigned toward the Republican Party at the national level and still vote Democratic locally are heavily concentrated in the South (71%), but also appear in the Midwest (20%) and West (9%). We take this combination of results to suggest that realignment generated many of these representational splits, but that a threshold was reached such that further realignment at the local level is likely to be minimal. Thus, additional factors must also be contributing to the ongoing pattern.

The variables measuring local forces represent some of these additional factors. As predicted, counties with large proportions of incumbents serving on the county council have a local seat pattern that is less likely to be explained by national level partisanship. Similarly, staggered elections, changes in median home values, larger populations of homeowners, and a higher proportion of older residents increase the unexplained portion of the local vote. A larger black population is associated with more consistency across levels. Contrary to our expectations, the coefficient on movers suggests that counties with more mobile populations are more likely to

witness representational splits. Additional investigation revealed that result interacts with home owning. Counties with a large share of new residents and large homeowner population are likely to see higher rates of representational splits. But, counties with many new residents and lots of renters do not. This suggests that homeowner movers have an incentive to be attentive to local level electoral contests.

The significant negative coefficients on gubernatorial vote split and funding split indicate that in counties where the election for governor is closely contested and federal funding is more evenly matched (indicating relatively balanced party strength), the unexplained portion of the local seat share increases. When one party dominates it is likely to win at all levels of government, but when parties' support and resources are more balanced, splitting is more likely.

Figure 2 graphically presents the marginal effects of several variables from the second model: difference in the presidential vote since the 1956/60/64 election, change in median home values, the gubernatorial vote split and incumbency. An analysis of standardized coefficients reveals that lagging realignment and local context are equally powerful explanations, with partisan balance being less important. In one final analysis we interact incumbency and difference in presidential vote to understand how these factors might work together. We find that realignment only matters in counties where a large share of incumbents serve on the council. In counties with more turnover there is no effect of the past presidential vote. Furthermore, incumbency has a negative effect on the residuals in places that haven't witnessed realignment. All of these findings point to the same conclusion: local incumbents can successfully distance themselves from national parties.

Conclusion

Our analyses offer support for all three hypotheses regarding the factors that encourage representational splitting. We find that realignment positively contributes to the probability of splitting. However, we also find no indication that realignment is likely to continue, echoing recent findings by scholars of southern politics (e.g. Hood and McKee 2010). Secondly, our data lend support to the thesis that voters view local officials independently from federal officials and can be focused enough on local level politics to generate representational splits. The presence of incumbents, as well as changes in the value of homes, the proportion of the population that is older than 60, and the share that own their homes all increase the size of the residuals, indicating that the national vote predicts local seat shares less well in these types of communities. Counties that hold staggered elections are also more likely to witness representational splits. Large populations and larger Black populations, produce more consistency across levels. Finally, we find that more evenly matched parties at the state and national level decrease the connection between the national vote and the local seat pattern. In areas that are less competitive at higher levels of government, local seat shares are well predicted by the presidential vote.

Polarization at the national level has continued at a breakneck pace over the last decade. What will this hold for the future of local politics? The data that we present here suggest that local politics may offer a damper on these changes. When local electoral factors and local policy are utilized by candidates to build coalitions at the local level that differ from coalitions at the national level, partisan identities may not be as hardened.

Of course individual level data will be integral to confirming that these patterns are not simply the product of aggregation. But assuming they are not, our results indicate that scholars of partisanship and vote choice may glean insights on partisan patterns by asking questions at the

local level. If, as Green et al (2002) suggest, partisanship is like religious identity, what does it mean for someone to be a Catholic in some settings but a Jew in others? Do differentials in party strength produce cognitive dissonance in voters or are they satisfied to think of themselves as Democrats in county politics and Republicans otherwise?   If party labels mean different things in national and local elections, are voters still able to make rational, reasoned choice without perfect information? Some scholarly work investigating the multidimensionality of partisanship has taken advantage of differences in loyalties and vote choice across levels of government – particularly in state versus national elections (Hadley 1985, Niemi et al 1986, Craig et al 1999), but there are opportunities for theory building in analyzing sub-state governments as well. We eagerly anticipate future work that more thoroughly explores the role of parties and partisan identification at the local level. Although the measurements are indirect, our analysis has taken an important step toward understanding how partisanship works in a federal system by identifying aggregate contributors to split representation.

Figure 1: County Seat Shares vs. Presidential Vote Shares
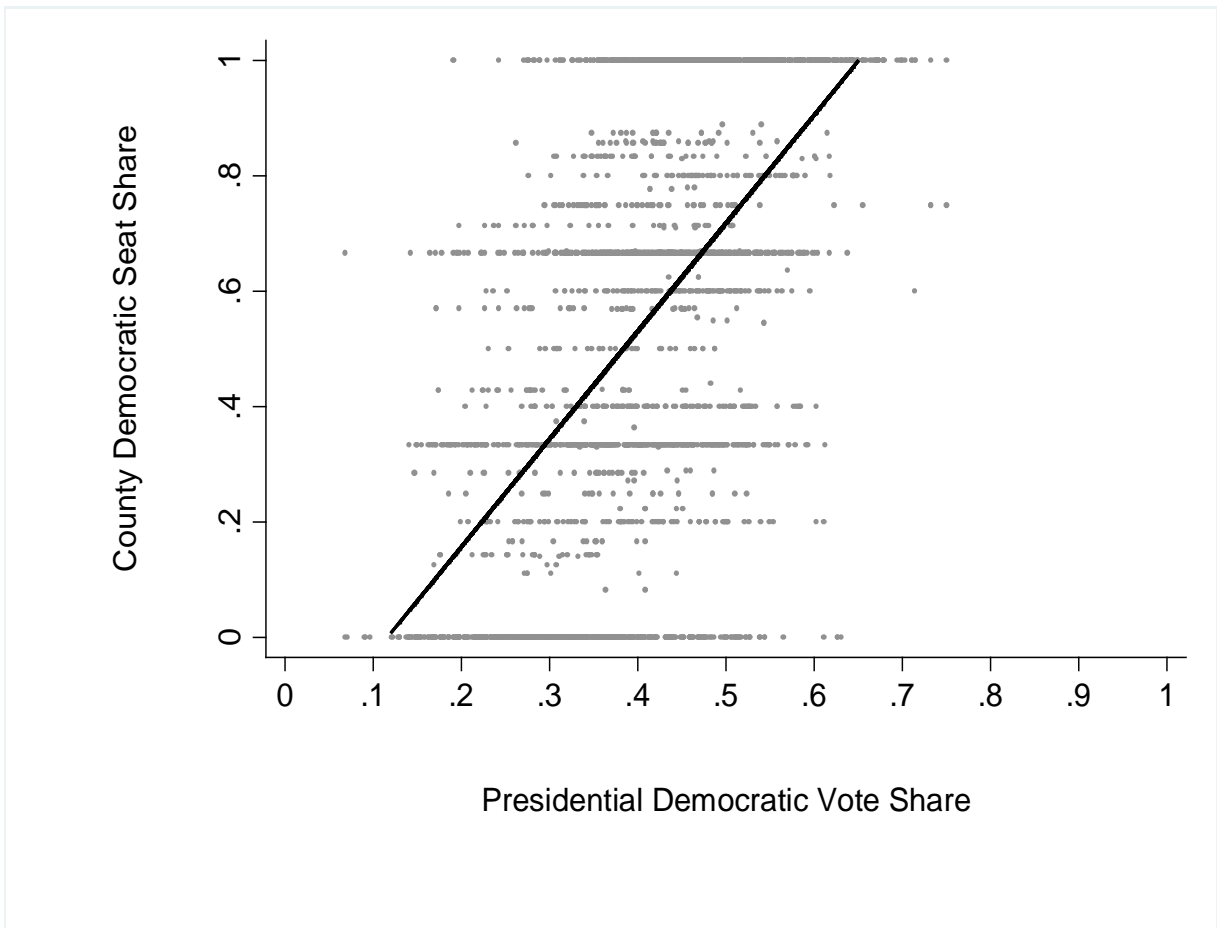
Note: Dots represent observed values; line represents predicted values from regressing County Seat Share on Presidential Vote Share

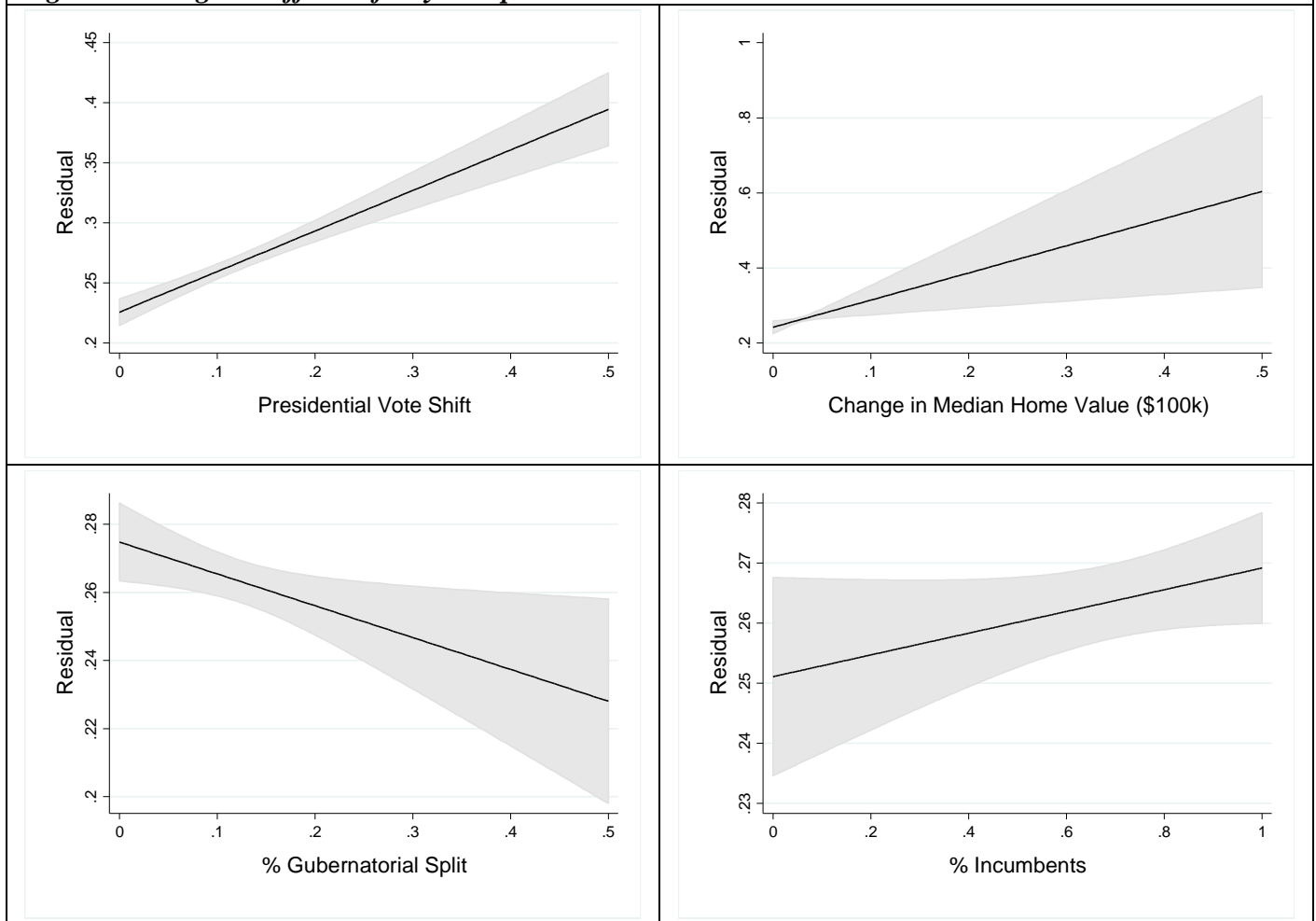*Figure 2: Marginal Effects of Key Independent Variables*

Table 1: Partisan Representations at Local and Federal Levels

	Democratic majority at both levels	Republican majority at both levels	Local Democratic majority, Republican Presidential	Local Republican majority, Democratic Presidential
West	13.1%	68.5%	17.8%	0.5%
Arizona	42.0%	34.0%	24.0%	0.0%
Idaho	4.6%	80.3%	15.2%	0.0%
Nevada	3.2%	74.2%	19.4%	3.2%
Midwest	28.1%	39.4%	19.7%	12.8%
Iowa	41.4%	21.7%	2.8%	34.1%
Missouri	30.6%	36.5%	25.8%	7.1%
Nebraska	1.1%	73.5%	24.7%	0.7%
Northeast	32.9%	23.5%	2.4%	41.2%
Maine	38.1%	15.9%	3.2%	42.9%
New Hampshire	10.0%	50.0%	0.0%	40.0%
New Jersey	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
South	31.6%	28.9%	35.6%	3.9%
Kentucky	32.9%	24.7%	37.5%	4.9%
North Carolina	22.0%	44.0%	33.5%	0.5%
South Carolina	35.3%	34.2%	28.3%	2.2%
Total	28.7%	36.5%	25.8%	9.0%
N	919	1168	827	288

Note: Cells contain row percentages

Table 2: Factors Affecting Partisan Differences Across Levels of Government

	Excluding % Incumbents			Including % Incumbents		
	Coeff.	Std. Error	P>|z|	Coeff.	Std. Error	P>|z|
Error function: $|e_i| = z_i'\gamma + u_i$						
Realignment						
|Difference from 1956/60/64 Pres Vote|	0.361	0.040	0.000	0.337	0.040	0.000
Time trend	0.000	0.001	0.688	0.000	0.001	0.688
Local Focus						
% Incumbents				0.018	0.011	0.110
Staggered Elections	0.063	0.023	0.005	0.066	0.025	0.009
|Change Median Property Value, $100k|	0.284	0.174	0.104	0.723	0.277	0.009
% Moved 5 years	0.247	0.053	0.000	0.224	0.055	0.000
% 60+	0.516	0.093	0.000	0.558	0.106	0.000
% Homeowners	0.090	0.059	0.127	0.059	0.067	0.384
% Black	-0.147	0.050	0.004	-0.136	0.052	0.008
Party Strength						
Gubernatorial Split	-0.121	0.036	0.001	-0.094	0.04	0.019
National Funding Split	-0.035	0.019	0.058	-0.027	0.021	0.192
Fixed Effects						
Arizona	-0.062	0.026	0.019	-0.071	0.03	0.017
Idaho	-0.170	0.030	0.000	-0.173	0.032	0.000
Nevada	-0.104	0.036	0.004	-0.091	0.037	0.015
Iowa	-0.005	0.013	0.699	-0.01	0.014	0.465
Missouri	-0.094	0.025	0.000	-0.094	0.028	0.001
Nebraska	-0.161	0.027	0.000	-0.176	0.03	0.000
Maine	-0.045	0.034	0.190			
New Hampshire	0.143	0.043	0.001	0.160	0.045	0.000
New Jersey	-0.197	0.044	0.000			
North Carolina	-0.128	0.023	0.000	-0.124	0.025	0.000
South Carolina	-0.095	0.027	0.000	-0.089	0.03	0.003
Total # County Councilors	-0.006	0.003	0.032	-0.006	0.003	0.024
Population (logged)	0.006	0.004	0.102	0.006	0.004	0.18
Constant	0.007	0.072	0.919	0.014	0.089	0.876
N	3,199			2,751		
R^2	0.089			0.089		

Note: OLS Regressions; bootstrapped standard errors reported, 500 replications, seed set to 1

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