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## Measuring the Impact of Partisanship on Mayoral Policy

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THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND PUBLIC POLICY

MEASURING THE IMPACT OF PARTISANSHIP ON MAYORAL POLICY

By

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This thesis is dedicated with all my love and thanks to:

First, my family, for their constant belief in me, support, and love.

My husband, for moving cross-country to support my intellectual endeavors, and sharing me  
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables .....	vi
Abstract .....	vii
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Theoretical Foundation .....	3
Hypotheses, Methods, and Data .....	5
2. ORIGINAL DESIGN, REPLICATION, AND EXTENSION .....	8
Methods .....	8
Dependent and Independent Variables .....	8
Control Variables .....	9
Replication Results .....	10
Extension .....	11
3. CONCLUSION .....	12
Concerns About the Data Set .....	12
Theoretical Possibilities .....	13
Lack of Competition .....	13
Concluding Remarks .....	14
APPENDIX .....	15
A. SUPPLEMENTARY STATISTICS .....	15
REFERENCES .....	17
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH .....	20

## LIST OF TABLES

1	Expectation of Parameters .....	13
2	Replication Results .....	13
3	Extension Results.....	14
4	Summary Statistics.....	15

## **ABSTRACT**

A debate has emerged over the impact that partisan local elections have on policy. While Ferreira and Gyourko (2009) found a null effect, Gerber and Hopkins (2011) find that the relationship is more complex. Gerber and Hopkins (2011), in their article ‘When Mayors Matter: Estimating the Impact of Mayoral Partisanship on City Policy’ argue that partisan elections result in mayors who put forth policies influenced by their partisanship. Gerber and Hopkins find that in policy areas where there is less shared authority between cities and either state or federal government, partisanship influences the policies implemented by mayors. To build on the work of Gerber and Hopkins, I have modified a variable of the existing data set, margin of victory. I predict that mayors elected by smaller margins will be less inclined to implement partisan policies as evidenced through spending on public safety.



# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

Opinions on how local mayoral elections should be conducted are mixed. Some scholars decry partisanship in local elections, claiming that these elections are harmful to voters and the democratic process (Wagner 2012). Sherrill (1998) argues that while partisanship may be bad, non-partisan elections are even worse. Sherrill claims removing partisanship from the ballot does not remove partisanship from the election, but instead makes it harder for uninformed voters to utilize the information shortcuts they need to vote. Others argue that partisanship is a useful heuristic for low information voters, and as such taking it away diminishes their ability to vote correctly (Zaller 1992).

There is also debate over what happens once these partisanly elected mayors are in office. Gerber and Hopkins (2011), in their article ‘When Mayors Matter: Estimating the Impact of Mayoral Partisanship on City Policy’ argue that partisan elections (along with non-partisan elections that list party affiliation on the ballot) result in mayors who put forth policies influenced by their partisanship. This is in opposition to previous work, where null results were found for partisan influence on policy at the mayoral level (Ferreira and Gyourko 2009 as cited in Gerber and Hopkins 2011). Ferreira and Gyourko’s explanation comes from work by Tiebout (1956), that suggests that individuals will choose to live near those who share their preferences, and as such city policy will reflect those partisan preferences. Gerber and Hopkins counter with the theory that instead, what is really happening is that partisan mayors are putting partisanly charged policies into effect, but not all of the time. Partisan influence is only observed for certain policy areas where the city shares less of its authority to enact policy with state and federal

governments. Gerber and Hopkins find that in areas where there is less shared authority between cities and either state or federal government (such as police and fire budget expenditures), partisanship influences the policies implemented by mayors (2011). In areas where there is more shared authority (housing and transportation), partisanship does not appear to have an effect on policy outcomes (Gerber and Hopkins 2011) .

Gerber and Hopkins claim (2011) that it is important to consider the impact of partisanship on elections, because if it is true that mayors behave in a partisan manner after elections, holding partisan mayoral elections could negatively impact constituents. Close elections could lead to only half of the electorate's wishes being represented if the mayor's partisanship determines policy. Gerber and Hopkins (2011), in the conclusion of "When Mayors Matter" point to two extreme examples of this taking place: Paul Coble, mayor of Raleigh, North Carolina and Graham Richard, mayor of Fort Wayne, Indiana, were both elected by small margins, then went on to implement heavily partisan policies. While the authors close the article on this gloomy prediction about mayoral elections, they provide a more positive view earlier on in the article. Gerber and Hopkins (2011) reference Republican mayors in Democratic cities (such as Rudolph Giuliani in New York City), who despite having the opposite party identification as their constituents have a successful tenure as mayor, without extreme partisan policies.

What if Coble and Richard are outliers, and on average, partisan affiliation does not necessarily translate to more partisan policies, following Giuliani more closely? This phenomenon is seen at the federal level. In Congress, there are several members who hail from a state where the opposite party is often in power. Scott Brown, a Republican senator from Massachusetts, received an American Conservative Union ranking of 50 percent in 2011. Bobby Bright, a Democratic Congressman from Alabama received an Americans For Democratic

Action ranking of 10 percent in 2010. While these may be more extreme cases of partisan discontinuity than others, these examples show that members of Congress are willing to vote with the other party to more closely align with the wishes of their constituents. While not as well documented or studied, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the same phenomenon may exist at the local level.

Therefore, while Gerber and Hopkins argue that partisanship has a negative impact on local constituencies, partisan elections at the mayoral level may not be inherently bad for constituents. I believe that the size of the margin a mayor wins by will impact the extent to which he or she introduces partisan policies. A mayor elected by a smaller margin will be less inclined to introduce more partisan policies.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

At the national elite level, party polarization has become more pronounced in recent years (Fiorina, Abrams and Pope 2006 as cited in Gerber and Hopkins 2011). In addition to policy makers having more partisan attitudes, it appears that today's voters are more partisan than voters were in the 1950's (commonly seen as the height of partisan voting), and it is a more ideologically driven partisanship than ever before (Bafumi and Shapiro 2009).

In addition to influencing the attitudes of political actors, partisanship has been shown to influence policy outcomes at both the federal and state level. Clinton, Jackman and Rivers (2004) find that partisanship is correlated with roll call votes. At the state level, Barrilleaux, Holbrok, and Langer (2002) find that partisanship can predict policy outcomes of state legislators.

Regardless of the level of government, policy makers face restraints. One limit on mayors while making policy is the constraint from shared authority with state and federal governments.

Cities are not independent governments; they are limited by state constitutions that create them (Briffault 1990). In addition to this fact, there are many areas of policy overlap between federal, state and local government (Grodzins 1960). When higher levels of government step in, local government officials are less able to craft policy in these areas. Another limit imposed on mayors is that of budget constraints. Cities typically cannot run deficits and are therefore constrained by how much revenue they have collected. Also, constraints exist at both the state and local level that prevent mayors from spending in certain areas (Ladd and Yinger 1989). It is important to consider these restraints, Gerber and Hopkins (2011) argue, because they contend it is the reason that Ferreira and Gyourko found null results.

There are four major qualities that make public safety expenditures an appropriate measurement of the influence of partisanship on local policy. First, while other areas of local policy may differ considerably from city to city, public safety spending is present in most large cities (Gerber and Hopkins 2011). Second, public safety is an area of policy that is typically treated as being an issue within the domain of local government (Gerber and Hopkins 2011; Roth and Ryan 2000). As such, there is little to no restraint from state or federal governments. Third, a majority of the budget for public safety comes from local revenues; federal and state contributions are often not even reported, as they represent such a small part of the state and federal budgets (Gerber and Hopkins 2011). Fourth, public safety spending is a policy area that is influenced by partisanship, at least at the federal level (Edsall 1991; Jacobson 1990; Petrocik 1996). Gerber and Hopkins (2011) make the assumption that issues are correlated across different levels of government. For example, Republicans and Democrats at the local levels of government stand on the same side of issues as their federal counterparts.

In addition to restraints from higher levels of government, mayors are subject to the wishes of the constituents who elected them. One way of measuring how well a mayor is representing constituents is through policy congruence. Policy congruence is the fit of policy decisions to constituent desires. While quantifying this measure at the state and local level is difficult, we can assume that mayors, like other elected officials, (when not restricted by a term limit) will want to be reelected (Uslaner 1983). A mayor up for reelection therefore has to think about electoral accountability; he risks losing the election if his policies are too partisan and his constituents are of the opposite party (Uslaner 1983).

Electoral mandates are often discussed in the media as the amount of political discretion a policymaker has been awarded by the voters. A mandate is a signal from voters asking for a change in policy (Grossbeck, Peterson, and Stimson 2007). If we treat a vote as a policy mandate from constituents, then the margin of victory can be used as a measure of the degree to which constituents are asking for a change from the status quo.

### **Hypotheses, Methods, And Data**

While Gerber and Hopkins address the direction of change in partisan policy, they do not attempt to study the variation across mayors to gauge if there is a difference in the extent to which the policy changes are partisan. It may be that while partisanship does in fact influence policy, the extent to which it does varies by city and election. This could be contingent on the margin by which the mayor wins the election. A Republican mayor elected by a more predominantly Democratic constituency might be elected by a smaller margin than a Republican mayor elected by a predominately Republican constituency would be. I predict that mayors elected by smaller margins will be less inclined to implement partisan policies as they have less of an electoral mandate than mayors elected by larger margins.

In order to measure the interaction between partisanship and mayoral policy, Gerber and Hopkins (2011) created a new data set from the 130 largest cities in the country, as determined by the 2007 Census data. Elections for these cities are recorded from 1990 onward. Partisan elections (elections where parties select a candidate who appears on the general election ballot) as well as non-partisan elections that list party identification on the ballot are included in the data set. Non-partisan races that did not have partisanship listed on the ballot are excluded along with elections that are contests between two members of the same party. Of the 522 elections that took place during this time frame in these cities, 137 observations are recorded. Part of the reason for the difference between these two numbers is that elections are only recorded when there is a new mayor. Incumbents are not included in the data set. Fiscal policy measures are taken from the Census Bureau's Annual Survey of Governments and Census of Governments, covering revenues, expenditures and employment data from 1970 to 2006. Gerber and Hopkins are most concerned with the change in policy because it reflects the impact the mayor has had on the policy in question, and is a reflection of his or her partisanship.

The sources of revenues in the data set include taxes per capita, total tax collections, local sales tax, property tax and local taxes as a proportion of local revenue (Gerber and Hopkins 2011). The purposes for collecting these data are to measure the changes that take place over both size and streams of revenue (Gerber and Hopkins 2011). These variables should be partisanly charged; Republicans may gravitate to certain taxes over others, and Democrats may be attracted to different sources of revenue (Gerber and Hopkins 2011).

Direct expenditures are measured as a percentage of the budget for that given fiscal year. Expenditures studied include police, fire, housing, healthcare, roads, parks, natural resources, libraries, sanitation, administration, and code enforcement (Gerber and Hopkins 2011). Some of

these particular areas are associated with partisanship. For example, Republicans have historically been more likely (at the federal elite level) to spend more on public safety than Democrats, and often campaign that they are “tough on crime” (Geber and Hopkins 2011). So we should expect Republican mayors to follow the same trend and spend more on public safety spending at the local level- public safety.

Employment data are included to help understand how mayors spend money within a given policy area, and if partisanship influences this spending (Gerber and Hopkins 2011). Variables include share of public employees in the police department, changes in the number of employees, and police salaries (measured as the share of total city payroll) (Gerber and Hopkins 2011).

To build on the work of Gerber and Hopkins, I have introduced a new hypothesis. I hypothesize that candidates who win by a larger margin will be more partisan. I take the top half of the data set and divide it into two groups: 50 percent of the vote to 75 percent of the vote and 75 percent of the vote and above. These cutoffs were chosen because they represent the top two quartiles. A variable in my regression is used to differentiate between these two groups, called high margin of victory.

Gerber and Hopkins (2011) hypothesize that while city governments are limited in what they can spend, in areas where there is less oversight from the state and federal government, the partisanship of the mayor will determine how they spend money in these areas. For example, there is more involvement at the state and federal level in social spending, but this is not the case with police spending. Local governments provide most of the funding as well as the management of police departments. In addition to this fact, police spending is also an area of the budget that has a partisan aspect to it.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **ORIGINAL DESIGN, REPLICATION, AND EXTENSION**

Gerber and Hopkins (2011) hypothesize that while city governments are limited in what they can spend, in areas where there is less oversight from the state and federal government, the partisanship of the mayor will determine how they spend money in these areas. For example, there is more involvement at the state and federal level in social spending, but this is not the case with police spending. Local governments provide most of the funding as well as the management of police departments. In addition to this fact, police spending is also an area of the budget that has a partisan aspect to it.

#### **Methods**

Gerber and Hopkins use a regression discontinuity design in addition to an OLS regression. Regression discontinuity is an appropriate method in this particular case to use because it allows a better comparison between Republicans who barely win and Democrats who barely lose (Gerber and Hopkins 2011). There is a significant cutoff at 50.1% of the vote and 49.9% of the vote (winning the election). This is a reasonable assumption in majoritarian systems and is supported by other scholars (see Lee, Moretti, and Butler 2004).

However, since I am interested in what may or may not be a significant cutoff, I cannot use regression discontinuity. An assumption of regression discontinuity is that a cutoff does indeed exist. I cannot make an assumption that matches what I plan to test.

#### **Dependent and Independent Variables**

The dependent variable in question is change in the share of city spending on police between elections, measured as the percent change in spending. It is measured the year after the



election takes place, to allow for the new mayor to change the budget. The variable is calculated by subtracting the percentage spent on police of the last mayor's budget from the new mayor's budget. Incumbents are excluded from the data set. These data come from the Bureau of the Census.

The independent variables are: *Democrat wins*, *percent Democrat*, *percent Democrat squared*, *percent Democrat cubed*, *independent loses*, *December fiscal year*, *logged 1990 population*, *percent black in 1990*, *logged median income 1990*, *intergovernmental revenue per capita*, *Democrat wins X percent Democrat*, *Democrat wins X percent Democrat squared*, *Democrat wins X percent Democrat cubed*.

*Democrat wins* is an indicator variable for elections which the Democratic candidate won. *Percent Democrat* is the percentage of votes won by the two top candidates that were won by the Democrat. *Percent Democrat squared* and *percent Democrat cubed* are the percent Democrat variable squared and the percent Democrat variable cubed, respectively. These terms are added to the model to improve model fit. The data for these variables comes from the Bureau of the Census.

### **Control Variables**

*Independent loses* is an indicator variable for elections lost by an independent. *December fiscal year* is an indicator variable for cities with fiscal years ending in December. *Logged 1990 population* is the city's logged population as of the 1990 Census. *Percent black in 1990* is the city's percentage of residents who are non-Hispanic blacks as of the 1990 Census. *Logged median income 1990* is the city's 1990 logged median household income. *Intergovernmental revenue per capita* is the city's inter-governmental revenue per capita in the election year.

*Democrat wins X percent Democrat*, is an interaction between the Democrat wins and percent Democrat variable. *Democrat wins X percent Democrat squared* and *Democrat wins X percent Democrat cubed* are squared and cubed interaction variables, respectively. This transformation is, again, to aid in model fit. All control variables come from the Bureau of the Census.

### Replication Results

I was not able to replicate the results of Gerber and Hopkins exactly, as they relied on multiple imputation to correct missing values. While my coefficients are slightly different, the direction of the relationships is the same. Democratic mayors are expected to spend about 1.52% less than their republican counterparts. However, these results are not statistically significant.

Table 1: Expectation of Parameters

Independent Variable	$\beta$
Democrat Wins	negative
Pct Democrat	negative
Logged Population	Positive
Logged Median Income	Negative
Intergovernmental Revenue Per capita	negative

Table 2: Replication Results

Independent Variable	$\beta$	S.E.
Democrat wins	1.52	0.83
percent democrat	2.13	3.38
percent democrat squared	-6.61	9.96
percent democrat cubed	6.36	9.37
independent loses	-0.004	0.01
december fiscal year end	-0.01	0.01
Logged population 1990	0.001	0.004
percent black 1990	0.03	0.02
logged income 1990	0.01	0.02
inter-governmental revenue per capita	-0.04	0.01
democrat wins*percent democrat	-7.55	4.67
democrat wins*percent democrat squared	13.94	10.93
democrat wins*percent democrat cubed	-9.58	9.59
constant	-0.17	0.41

## Extension

The results for the regressions performed to test the large majority hypothesis are reported below.

Table 3 :Extension Results

Independent Variable	$\beta$	S.E.
Democrat wins	1.59	1.09
high margins of victory	-0.003	-0.02
percent democrat	2.13	2.67
percent democrat squared	-6.6	7.86
percent democrat cubed	6.36	7.41
independent loses	-0.005	0.01
december fiscal year end	-0.01	0.008
Logged population 1990	0.03	0.004
percent black 1990	0.01	0.02
logged income 1990	-0.04	0.02
inter-govermental revenue per capita	-0.036	0.005
democrat wins*percent democrat	-7.88	5.35
democrat wins*percent democrat squared	14.39	10.33
democrat wins*percent democrat cubed	-9.79	8.06
constant	-0.17	0.35

The variables of interest are not statistically significant and have large standard errors, even when the robust standard errors are used. This I believe is due to the small sample size within the groups I created.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **CONCLUSION**

Below I will explain what I believe to be potential reasons for the null findings, theoretical and otherwise. I will also discuss possible avenues for further research.

#### **Concerns About the Data Set**

Gerber and Hopkins acknowledge in the paper that the data set is quite small. This problem is amplified when the data set is cut in quarters. Another issue is that non-partisan elections will be underrepresented because more than two people are running. The top two candidates in a six-person election will have a smaller percent vote share than the top two candidates in a two or three candidate race. The data set only lists the top candidate, and does not list which elections are officially partisan or non-partisan. Without this information, it would be difficult to go back and find out which elections were officially non-partisan but allowed party identification to be listed on the ballot. City councils are also excluded from the data set.

There is considerable missing data when compared to the target universe. Of the original universe of 130 cities and roughly 570 elections, only 134 elections from 59 cities were obtained. Even these observations lack some data in some cases. However, the sample seems fairly representative of all large cities. Compared to the population (the 130th biggest cities in the United States) on average, in the sample there are larger populations, lower population growth, higher median household incomes, faster median house income growth, larger poor populations and fewer immigrants, and more likely to have partisan elections.

The methods used by Gerber and Hopkins, regression discontinuity and multiple imputation, were missing from my replication, and I believe their absence had a considerable impact on the results. Also, the availability of elections in the upper quartiles was limited, which I believe contributed significantly to the problems associated with the large standard errors.

### **Theoretical Possibilities**

This section is mostly based on speculation, however I believe the ideas warrant further exploration. The first and perhaps most obvious explanation is that while partisanship does appear to impact mayoral policy, the degree to which it does play a role does not vary by the margin of victory. There is not a significant “mandate effect” in most cases. Another potential explanation is that fiscal restraint masks what would otherwise be a larger magnitude of partisan expression. Mayors who would otherwise let partisanship rule cannot due to the funds simply not being there. Funds could be restricted and non-discretionary concerns may eat up too large a portion of the budget. There may be other political actors involved that may influence the budget process that too strictly limits otherwise extreme mayors.

### **Lack of Competition Hypothesis**

There is one other possible explanation that I believe connects the ideas of both Gerber and Hopkins and Ferreira and Gyuroko, which I call the lack of competition hypothesis. This is the idea that mayors elected by high margins may not change the budget much from their predecessor of the same party. It is reasonable to imagine a city in which historically, one party has one more often than another. In a city with a lack of competitive elections, we might expect very little party turnover, and therefore less difference between mayors.

## **Concluding Remarks**

My results support the partisanship hypothesis, finding similar results to Gerber and Hopkins (2011). There is no support for the larger majority hypothesis. This may be due in part to the fact that the data set is not large enough to truly accommodate quantitative analysis.

Further research could attempt to add more observations to the data set to try to correct this problem. An interesting future extension might be to recreate the data set, but for cities with mayor's councils and see if the same results are found.

## APPENDIX A

### SUPPLEMENTARY STATISTICS

Table 4: Summary Statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	S. D.	Min	Max
change in police spending	133	0.11	0.04	0	0.23
democrat wins	134	0.67	0.47	0	1
pctdem_med (high margin of victory)	134	0.81	0.40	0	1
pctdem_high(high margin of victory)	134	0.19	0.40	0	1
percent democrat	134	0.57	0.17	0.18	0.95
percent democrat squared	134	0.36	0.21	0.03	0.89
percent democrat cubed	134	0.24	0.21	0.01	0.85
independent loses	134	0.19	0.40	0	1
december fiscal year end	132	0.25	0.43	0	1
Logged population 1990	134	13.02	0.84	11.61	15.81
percent black 1990	134	0.27	0.17	0.01	0.67
logged income 1990	134	10.19	0.20	9.74	10.94
inter-governmental revenue per capita	134	0.50	0.61	0.04	2.99
democrat wins*percent democrat	134	0.44	0.33	0	0.95
democrat wins*percent democrat squared	134	0.31	0.26	0	0.89
democrat wins*percent democrat cubed	134	0.22	0.23	0	0.85

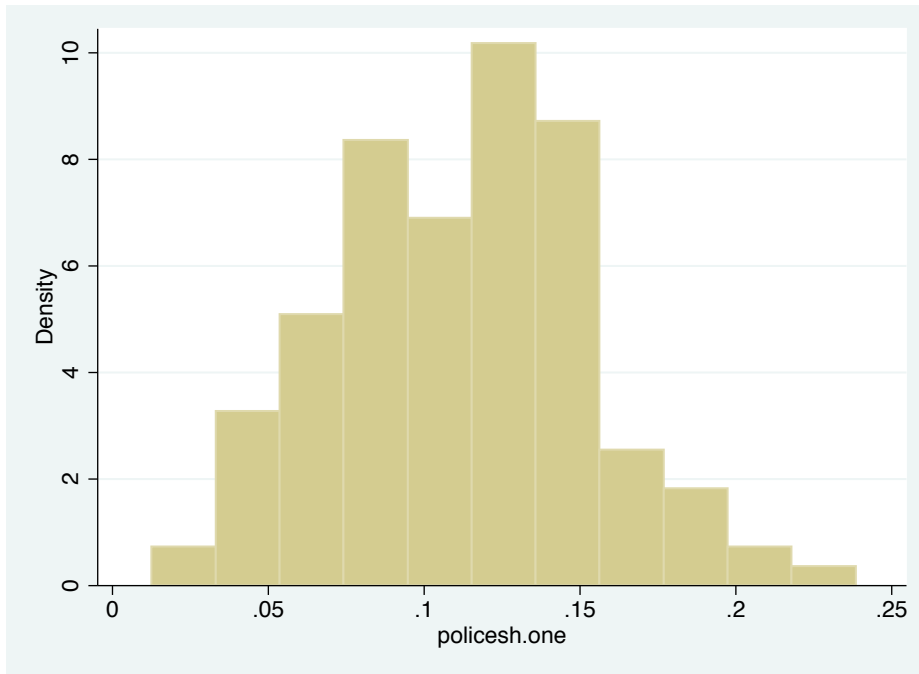


Figure 1: Histogram of Dependent Variable, Change in Police Spending



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## **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

In spring of 2012 Ashley Allen-Morgan graduated from Arizona State University with a Bachelors of Science in Political Science Summa Cum Laude. Her research interests include state and local politics and policy, drug and crime policy and finance.