

Marginal Voters and Their Racial Prejudice

Suzanne K. Barth Nikolas Mittag Kyung H. Park*
Wellesley College CERGE-EI Wellesley College

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Abstract

This paper studies whether marginal voters are more or less prejudiced in democratic elections in comparison with regular voters. We focus on low-level statewide elections in which marginal voters are plausibly ill-informed in order to mitigate concerns that the estimates reflect unobserved candidate-specific attributes that correlate with race. Both descriptive evidence and falsification tests reaffirm the research design. We find considerable evidence that marginal voters engage in more racial discrimination than regular voters. There is no evidence of bias against female candidates.

JEL Codes: J15, D72, P16

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1 Introduction

In 2008, there was considerable uncertainty as to whether or not racial prejudice would affect Obama’s vote share in the general election.¹ As it turned out, Obama comfortably defeated McCain even though the margin of victory would have been even larger in the absence of racial animus (Stephens-Davidowitz (2012)). Despite the experience of ’08 and ’12, many questions on the role of racial considerations in democratic elections remain open. Within a decade, yet another Presidential election was marked by pervasive speculation as to whether or not racial prejudice could decide the outcome even though both candidate Trump and Clinton were white. This reflects a fundamental ambiguity as to whether *marginal* voters - defined as those who eschew midterm elections only to participate when the Presidency is at stake - are more or less likely to discriminate than *regular* voters. Our paper characterizes the racial preferences of marginal voters who, by sheer size², could have far-reaching impact on minority representation.

An empirical study of voter discrimination is especially vulnerable to the classic omitted variables problem that often bedevils studies of discrimination. The literature finds that numerous factors influence the voter’s decision calculus including the candidate’s character (Callander and Wilkie (2007), Kartik and McAfee (2007)), valence (Stokes (1963), Groseclose (2001), Ansolabehere and Snyder Jr (2000)), and competence (Persson and Tabellini (2000), Canes-Wrone et al. (2001)) to name a few, many of which are unobserved in data. In addition, minority and non-minority candidates tend to represent different policy platforms³, which implies that voters could spurn minority candidates due to policy rather than racial considerations. If any unobserved candidate-specific characteristic correlates with race, then our estimates would misrepresent how marginal voters respond to candidate race.

Two key features of our empirical design help moderate this concern. First, our paper focuses the analysis on a subset of elections in which marginal voters are conceivably less attuned to candidate-

¹In June of 2008, multiple polls predicted that racial considerations would have negligible influence on the results. By September of 2008, the polls reversed course and hinted that racial animus could very well cost Obama the election. While polls are notoriously noisy, it is widely believed that racial preferences are especially difficult to elicit due to the “Bradley effect”.

²For example, Jacobson and Carson (2015) finds that turnout in U.S. Congressional elections falls by an average of 13 percentage points between midterm and Presidential years. The difference is more than twice as large in municipal elections (Hajnal and Lewis (2003)).

³In particular, minority representatives in juries (Anwar et al. (2012)), in the judiciary (Boyd et al. (2010)), and in the legislature (Pande (2003), Dharmapala and Ross (2004)) secure more favorable outcomes for minorities than non-minority officials.

specific attributes in comparison with regular voters. These are down-ballot statewide elections that include contests for Attorney General, State Treasurer, Railroad Commissioner, Comptroller of Public Accounts, and Commissioner of Agriculture to name a few.⁴ Both descriptive evidence and formal falsification tests support the idea that marginal voters are less knowledgeable about these candidates in comparison with regular voters. This mitigates the omitted variables concern since a candidate’s character or valence cannot sway votes when these and other candidate-specific characteristics are not known.

Second, we adopt methodology from an expanding literature that uses distinctly ethnic sounding names and finds pervasive discrimination against minorities in searches for employment (Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004)), hotel lodging (Edelman et al. (2015)), and rideshares (Ge et al. (2016)).⁵ We combine election results from the universe of political contests held in the state of Texas during 1992 to 2010 with Census Genealogy records which provide the probability of race or ethnicity conditional on *surname*. For example, roughly 92.7%, 90.81%, and 93.81% of persons in the U.S. with the surname of “Rodriguez”, “Garcia”, and “Hernandez” self-identify as Hispanic. Thus, even though candidate race is not listed on ballots, voters should be able to deduce the candidate’s race or ethnicity with high degree of accuracy due to the informational content in names.

A point about our research design is worth mentioning here. Our focus on surnames rather than first names is driven by data availability.⁶ A concern is that voter perceptions of candidate race is measured with error to the extent that we mistakenly code candidates with distinctly African-American first names as whites due to their non-distinct surnames. However, an interesting feature of our data is the scarcity of distinctly African-American first names, which is consistent with minority candidates being *positively* selected since distinctly African-American first names predicts low socio-economic status (Fryer Jr and Levitt (2004)). In addition, this type of measurement error would lead us to *understate* the responsiveness to other racial groups to the extent that the

⁴There are a number of studies on the role of heuristics in “low-information” elections; however, the modal study focuses on whether party labels affect vote choices. The few that study racial heuristics focus on U.S. Congressional elections (McDermott (1997)) which receive more media attention than the down-ballot statewide elections that are the focus of this study. Other studies use survey experiments focusing on a single municipality in a single year (McDermott (1998)).

⁵The strategy of using names to identify race or ethnicity has also been used to study whether prejudicial beliefs affect minority work performance (Glover et al. (2015)). Related field experiments examine whether dark-skinned hands receive fewer responses in Craigslist ads for iPods (Doleac and Stein (2013)).

⁶Similar to Fryer Jr and Levitt (2004), we first attempted to obtain vital records from the state of Texas but were unsuccessful. The Census Genealogy records are publicly available.

estimated vote share of whites include those who face discrimination.

We find that marginal voters are considerably more responsive to candidate race than regular voters. In down-ticket statewide elections, the county-level vote share for the Democratic candidate decreases by roughly 5.1 percentage points when the Democratic candidate has a distinctly Hispanic surname and increases by 5.8 percentage points when the Republican candidate has a distinctly Hispanic surname. These results are only true in years when the Presidency is at stake and vanishes in midterm years. Because voter turnout increases by roughly 30% between midterm and Presidential years, these estimates imply a strikingly large difference in the response to candidate race between marginal and regular voters. In addition, we find that these patterns are more consistent with a model of taste-based rather than statistical discrimination.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. In the Section 2, we review related literature. In Section 3, we will introduce the data and descriptive statistics. Section 4 shows the econometric model used to estimate the difference in racial preferences between marginal and regular voters. Sections 5 presents the main results, examines potential mechanisms, and shows additional analysis including a subsection on gender discrimination. In Section 6, we discuss direct and indirect implications of voter bias and finally, in Section 7, we conclude.

2 Review of Related Literature

Our paper lies at the intersection of several literatures. One literature focuses on whether or not voter support for specific *policies* such as welfare reform (Gilens (2009)), universal health care (Tesler (2012)), criminal sentencing (Peffley et al. (1997)), and financial aid for post-secondary education (Feldman and Huddy (2005)) are driven by racial resentment. The idea is that prejudicial constituents may be less willing to extend public support towards black versus white constituents. Prejudice is typically measured using survey questions that ask respondents whether they agree with, for example, the statement “if blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites”. Scholars have pointed out that a respondent who agrees with the above statement could be motivated by a strong sense of individualism rather than racism (Kinder and Sanders (1996)). The difficulty in extricating racial from ideological preferences is a source of dissent in this literature (Huddy and Feldman (2009)).

In similar vein, the existing evidence on whether or not voters discriminate against minority *candidates* is decidedly mixed. Several studies find no evidence that voters are biased against minority candidates in gubernatorial (Citrin et al. (1990)) or mayoral (Hahn et al. (1976)) elections. These findings contrast with Terkildsen (1993) whose lab experiment shows that prejudicial voters are much less likely to support black gubernatorial candidates especially those with darker complexion. Stephens-Davidowitz (2012) also finds that Obama lost 4 percentage points in 2008 and 2012 due to racial animus using a novel measure of prejudice based on Google search rates. However, the mechanism underlying these findings is not definitive. Voters could spurn minority candidates because race correlates with attributes that voters find less appealing. Indeed, McDermott (1998) finds that policy considerations can partly explain the loss in vote share among minority candidates.

Another strand of literature examines how racial considerations affect the extensive margin; that is, whether to participate or not. Bobo and Gilliam (1990) finds that black constituents are much more likely to engage in political activity including turnout in areas with black mayors. Studies of congressional elections in Georgia and Florida show evidence that black candidates mobilize black voters but demobilize white voters (Voss and Lublin (2001)). Gay (2001) finds that the election of black congresspersons depresses white turnout while sometimes increasing black turnout using data with additional states. In more expansive analysis of Congressional, Senatorial, or Gubernatorial contests across the U.S., Washington (2006) finds that turnout among both white and black voters increases in the number of black candidates on the ballot.

While existing research shows that policy support, votes, and participation are all influenced by racial considerations, it is not clear whether this is due to racial preferences of marginal or regular voters. An active literature characterizes the differences between marginal and regular voters along other dimensions. Fowler (2015) finds that marginal voters in gubernatorial elections - defined as those who participate only because the gubernatorial and Presidential elections happen to coincide - are much more likely to support the Democratic party. Interestingly, these findings comport with analysis that examines the partisanship of voters whose participation decision is affected by inclement weather (Fowler (2013), Gomez et al. (2007)). Because weather is random, the similarity in results across different instruments is consistent with the Presidency being a valid exclusion in the voter's ballot decision. Jackson (2000) shows that younger, less educated, Hispanic⁷, and female

⁷It is worth noting that a relative increase in minority voters in Presidential years should bias us against fin-

voters have a relatively higher likelihood of participating in Presidential versus midterm years.

The distinction between marginal and regular voters is important. It is well-known that the President-elect’s party tends to lose support in the subsequent midterm election, in part, because of the surge in turnout in Presidential years and the precipitous decline thereafter ([Campbell \(1960\)](#), [Campbell \(1987\)](#), [Knight \(2014\)](#)). [Fowler \(2013\)](#) finds that compulsory voting laws in Australia increase both turnout and the share of seats held by the Labor Party. [Bechtel \(2013\)](#) shows qualitatively similar results in a study of compulsory voting in Switzerland. [Anzia et al. \(2012\)](#) shows that teachers unions exert greater influence in school board elections during “off-cycle” versus “on-cycle” years. These studies demonstrate that marginal voters can (i) directly influence the separation of powers through the likelihood of divided government, (ii) have substantial influence on the partisan composition of elected officials, and (iii) leave local elections more vulnerable to organized special interest groups. We extend the literature by examining whether marginal voters facilitate or deter the representation of minorities in public office.

3 Data and Descriptive Statistics

Our data includes election results from the universe of political contests held during 1992 to 2010 in the state of Texas. Several factors motivate our choice of state. First, while it is relatively difficult to obtain state-level election results, Texas provides this information on-line in a format that is fairly accessible via web scraping techniques.⁸ Second, Texas has the third largest Hispanic population in the contiguous United States which, importantly, increases the odds that we will have sufficient variation in candidate race. Finally, Texas has the most chapters of the Ku Klux Klan and is one of six states that holds elections for Railroad Commissioner which is an office with a fairly narrow policy domain. These features will provide traction as to whether the observed patterns are more consistent taste-based versus statistical discrimination.

The specific data elements include vote totals for each candidate and the number of registered voters at the county-level as well as each candidate’s incumbency status, political party, and full

ding that marginal voters are more discriminatory than regular voters to the extent that voters exhibit own-group preference.

⁸To our knowledge, there is no centralized data warehouse that contains this information. [Ansolabehere and Snyder Jr \(2002\)](#) point out that “Collecting data on statewide elections is tedious, and must be done state by state. We strongly suspect that this is the main reason no one appears to have done this before.”

name. We are able to assign each candidate to a race or ethnic group by merging information from the U.S. Census Genealogy records which includes (i) the frequency of a surname and (ii) the probability that persons with a given surname identify with a specific race or ethnic group. Our assignment rule of candidates to racial groups is as follows: All candidates are initially defined as white. However, if more than 80% of persons with the given surname self-identify as Hispanic, for example, then all candidates with this surname are re-categorized as Hispanic.⁹

Table 1 shows the top 20 surnames among all candidates separately by each racial group ranked according to their joint probability of race and surname. Our approach appears successful in identifying Hispanic and Asian candidates. All of the top 20 candidates that we categorize as Hispanic or Asian have surnames that voters could conceivably perceive as distinctly Hispanic or Asian sounding names. In contrast, our measure undercounts the number of African-American candidates. This is unlikely to be driven by the type of measurement error in which candidates with distinctly African-American first names are mistakenly coded as white. An interesting feature of the data is a notable dearth of distinctly African-American first names¹⁰ which is consistent with minority candidates being *positively* selected (Fryer Jr and Levitt (2004)).¹¹

Table 2 describes the variation in candidate race for different offices in general elections. We organize the data into elected office type-by-year cells and count the number of candidate observations from each racial group. The table shows that the variation in candidate race is predominantly driven by Hispanics. Importantly, there is considerable variation in statewide contests, the focal point of our main analysis, even though more variation lies in local elections. For example, roughly 21% of all the candidate-year counts in elections for Railroad Commissioner have distinctly Hispanic surnames and only two statewide offices, State Treasurer and Supreme Court Chief Justice, never observe Hispanic candidates.

Next, we present descriptives that speak to the key premise that voters are less informed about

⁹As an example, according to the U.S. Genealogy records, 95.93% of persons with the surname of Nguyen identify as Asian, and thus, any candidate with the surname Nguyen is categorized as having a distinctly Asian surname. The idea is that if 95.93% of persons in the U.S. with the surname Nguyen self-identify as Asian, then voters are likely to associate candidates with the surname Nguyen as Asian as well.

¹⁰Fryer Jr and Levitt (2004) provide examples of distinctively African-American first names such as Tyrone, DeShawn, Reginald, Shanice, Precious, Kiara, and Deja. None of the down-ballot statewide candidates have distinctly African-American first names.

¹¹In addition, if voters discriminate against black candidates and we mis-classify African-American sounding names as whites, then our estimates of the vote share received by white candidates will be understated. This will have the impact of attenuating our estimates of the disadvantage for Hispanic candidates.

Table 1: Candidate Surnames as a Signal of Race and Ethnicity

Rank	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Unmatched
1	Smith	Washington	Garcia	Nguyen	Greytok
2	Johnson	Muldrow	Rodriguez	Tran	Hinckson
3	Miller	Grays	Martinez	Chen	Kohlhausen
4	Brown	Beckles	Hernandez	Wong	Magnis
5	Harper	Winkfield	Lopez	Le	Worldpeace
6	Jones	Amadi	Gonzalez	Liu	Yokie
7	Williams		Perez	Vu	Nuchia
8	Davis		Sanchez	Cheng	Malazzo
9	Anderson		Ramirez	Vo	Naishtat
10	Wilson		Torres	Hoang	Touzel
11	Martin		Flores	Chow	Cranberg
12	Taylor		Rivera	Yoo	Sarpalius
13	Moore		Gomez	Yao	Arashvand
14	Thompson		Diaz	Yau	Dorrycott
15	White		Reyes	Hsiao	Morovich
16	Clark		Morales	Sinha	Berriozabal
17	Thomas		Cruz	Chae	Alvarez
18	Hall		Ortiz	Sakai	Fastuca
19	Holm		Gutierrez	Mahajan	Markantonis
20	Baker		Chavez	Shinoda	Deotte

Note: Census Genealogy records show both 1) the prevalence of a given surname $P(\textit{surname})$ and 2) the distinctiveness of the surname $P(\textit{race}|\textit{surname})$. A candidate is categorized as the race r group if $P(r|\textit{surname}) > 0.80$. All other surnames are categorized as Whites. Names are ranked according to $P(r, \textit{surname})$. Among the surnames that are not matched to the Census Genealogy records, a random subset are shown in the column labeled as Unmatched.

candidates who run for low-level statewide office. Panel (a) of Figure 1 shows Google search trends across time for John Cornyn, a U.S. Senator from Texas, and three Railroad Commissioners. The plot clearly shows that the Google search rates are substantially higher for the U.S. Senator in comparison with Railroad Commissioners. To the extent that on-line search rates reflect demand for information, this pattern is consistent with voters being less knowledgeable about candidates who run for statewide office. It is worth emphasizing that the selection of these individuals grossly understates the disparity in search rates across high versus low level office. For example, including former Governors George Bush and Rick Perry would increase the difference given their high profile forays into Presidential politics.¹²

¹²Specifically, Google Trends provides data on search rates as a share of the maximum search rate over the time horizon. These data are provided at the weekly level which we have aggregated to the monthly level. Google Trends allows users to compare trends across a handful of terms. This explains why our figure includes trends for a limited number of politicians. However, these politicians are chosen in a way that severely understate the differences. Finally, a value of 0 does not imply that no searches are conducted for a given search term. If the search rate does not exceed

Table 2: Counts of Candidate Racial Group by Election Type

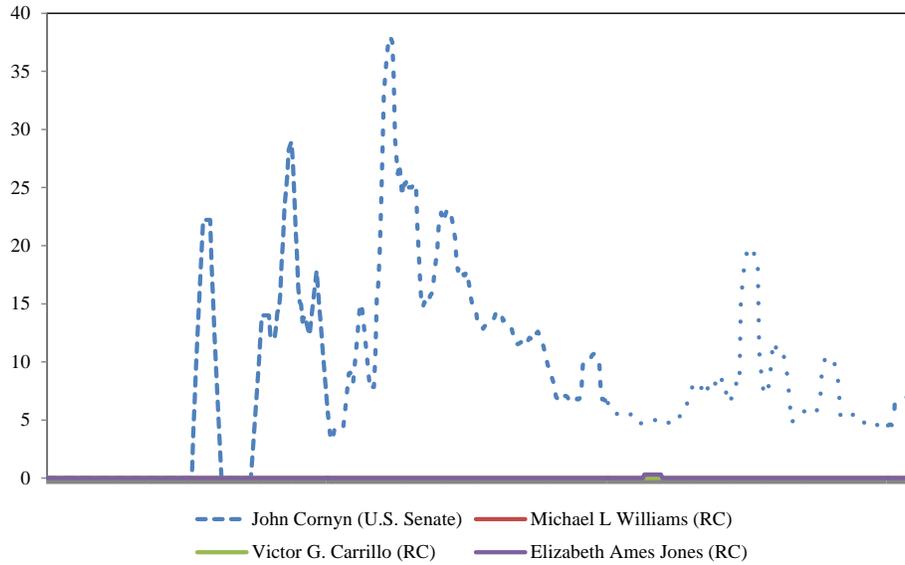
General Elections					
<i>High Information Elections</i>	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Fraction Hispanic
President	47				0.000
U.S. Senator	43		3		0.065
U.S. Representative	834	1	124	3	0.129
Governor	22		1	1	0.042
<i>Statewide "Low" Information Elections</i>					
Attorney General	14		2		0.125
Lieutenant Governor	12		4		0.250
State Treasurer	2				0.000
Railroad Commissioner	27		7		0.206
Comptroller of Public Accounts	13		2		0.133
Commissioner of the General Land Office	12		3	1	0.188
Commissioner of Agriculture	17				0.000
Court of Criminal Appeals Presiding Judge	4		1		0.200
Court of Criminal Appeals Judge	56		4		0.067
Supreme Court Chief Justice	12				0.000
Supreme Court Justice	67		7		0.095
<i>Local "Low" Information Elections</i>					
State Senator	381		39		0.093
State Representative	2266	2	311	11	0.120
District Attorney	431		44		0.093
Criminal District Attorney	268		10		0.036
District Judge	2098	1	282	4	0.118
Family District Judge	199		22	1	0.099
Court of Appeals Chief Justice	66		7		0.096
Court of Appeals Judge	319		38	2	0.106
Member, State Board of Education	144		22		0.133
Criminal District Judge	70		5	1	0.066

Note: Census Genealogy records show both 1) the prevalence of a given surname $P(\textit{surname})$ and 2) the distinctiveness of the surname $P(\textit{race}|\textit{surname})$. A candidate is categorized as the race r group if $P(r|\textit{surname}) > 0.80$. All other surnames are categorized as Whites. The table shows counts of racial groups across all general election-by-year cells.

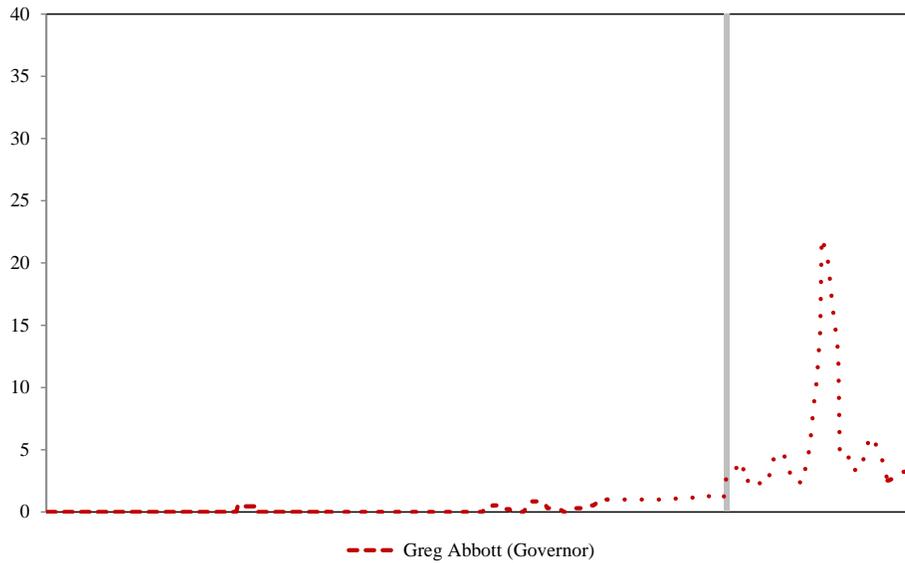
a certain threshold, Google reports the search rates as zero.

Figure 1: Google Trend Searches by Election Type 2004-Present

(a) U.S. Senate vs Railroad Commissioner



(b) Transition from Low to High Information Office



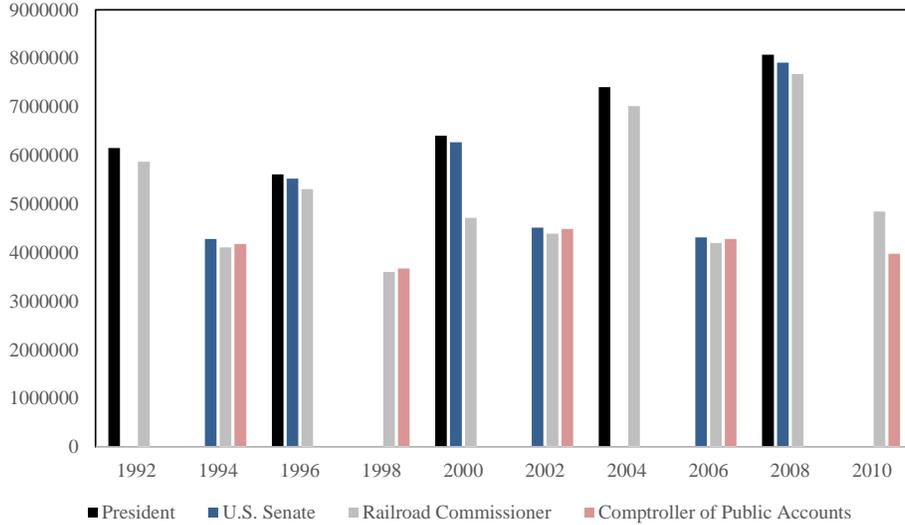
Notes: This figure graphs Google search rates as a share of the maximum search rate from 2004 to present. We average the weekly data to the month level. The vertical grey bar in Panel (b) denotes the date at which Greg Abbott announces his candidacy for state Governor.

Panel (b) of Figure 1 plots the Google search trends for Greg Abbott who has experience in both low and high level state office. In the earlier part of his career, Abbott served as a Texas Supreme Court Justice and state's Attorney General. In July 2013, Abbott announced that he

would run for Governor (demarcated by the vertical line) and would eventually win the general election by a margin of 21 percentage points. Prior to his announcement, search trends for Greg Abbott are close to zero and then dramatically increase during the general election. While this is only one case, it is rather interesting that the level of office strongly predicts the within-Greg Abbott variation in search rates. This pattern is closely aligned with the idea that voters are less informed in low-level statewide elections.

Finally, it is possible that voters abstain from elections in which they have little knowledge about the candidates. If voters participate in high-level elections and then roll-off in down-ballot contests, then this would imply that voters are well-informed conditional on voting. Figure 2 shows the statewide total number of votes in general elections separately for four office types by year. To facilitate visual presentation, we will focus on two high and two low level offices - President, U.S. Senate, Railroad Commissioner, and Comptroller of Public Accounts. The striking feature of this graph is that there is much more variation across midterm vs Presidential years than there is across office-type within a given year. With the exception of 2000, the vote totals in down-ticket statewide elections are surprisingly comparable to those for the Presidency and U.S. Senate. This pattern holds more generally across other types of statewide offices as well.

Figure 2: Vote Totals Across Office Type



Notes: The election results are collected from the Texas Secretary of State website. We show vote totals separately across these four types of elections by year.

4 Empirical Model

Baseline Model

To estimate voter responsiveness to candidate race, we use the following baseline model:

$$\begin{aligned}
 Demvs_{cet} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 DemHis_{pet} + \beta_2 RepHis_{pet} \\
 & + \beta_3 DemInc_{et} + \beta_4 RepInc_{et} + \delta_c + \gamma_e + \eta_t + \epsilon_{cet} \quad (1)
 \end{aligned}$$

The c , e , and t subscripts reflect that the election data are organized at the county, elected office (e.g. Railroad Commissioner, Comptroller of Public Accounts, and etc.), and year level. $Demvs_{cet}$ is the share of total votes in county c for the Democratic candidate running for elected office e in year t . $DemHis_{pet}$ and $RepHis_{pet}$ are indicator variables for whether the Democratic or Republican candidate has a distinctly Hispanic surname and $DemInc_{et}$ and $RepInc_{et}$ are indicator variables for whether the Democratic or Republican candidate is an incumbent, respectively. The race indicators vary only at the election-by-year level and we cluster standard errors accordingly.

The δ_c , γ_e , and η_t represent a set of county, elected office, and year fixed effects.

The main parameters of interest are β_1 and β_2 . In the absence of voter discrimination, we would expect both parameters to be close to zero. However, if voters discriminate against minority candidates, then we would expect county-level support for the Democratic party to fall (e.g. $\hat{\beta}_1 < 0$) when the Democratic candidate is Hispanic and to rise (e.g. $\hat{\beta}_2 > 0$) when the Republican candidate is Hispanic. In other words, these parameters capture the voter’s willingness to trade off party allegiance in order to vote for a candidate without a distinctly Hispanic name. Thus, they can be interpreted as a *marginal rate of substitution* type of parameter. Estimating equation (1) on all, midterm, and then Presidential years will shed light on voter responsiveness to race for average, regular, and marginal voters, respectively.

The β_3 and β_4 parameters attached to incumbency status provide an important falsification test of our research design. Existing literature finds strong evidence of an incumbency advantage even in low-level statewide elections. However, to our knowledge, there is no evidence on whether the incumbency advantage differs in midterm versus Presidential years. Our key identification assumption is that marginal voters are ill-informed of candidate-specific attributes in low-level statewide elections. If this is true, then we should observe an incumbency advantage in midterm years (i.e. $\hat{\beta}_3 > 0$ and $\hat{\beta}_4 < 0$) that dissipates in Presidential years as a large fraction of poorly informed voters head to the polls.

Marginal versus Regular Voters

To estimate the differential response across marginal and regular voters, we augment the baseline model by including the $\log(\text{totalvotes})$ and $\log(\text{totalvotes})$ -by-race interactions:

$$\begin{aligned} Demvs_{cet} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 DemHis_{et} + \beta_2 RepHis_{et} + \beta_3 DemInc_{et} + \\ & \beta_4 RepInc_{et} + \beta_5 \log(\text{totalvotes})_{cet} + \beta_6 \log(\text{totalvotes})_{cet} * DemHis_{et} \\ & + \beta_7 \log(\text{totalvotes})_{cet} * RepHis_{et} + \delta_c + \gamma_e + \eta_t + \epsilon_{cet} \quad (2) \end{aligned}$$

The β_5 parameter reflects the *difference* in partisan support between marginal and regular voters when both candidates are white. This is easiest to see by taking the derivative of the dependent variable, $\frac{D}{V}$, with respect to $\log(V)$ where $\frac{D}{V}$ and $\log(V)$ is shorthand for Democratic vote share

and the log of total votes, respectively.¹³

$$\beta_5 = \frac{\frac{\partial D}{\partial V}}{\partial \log(V)} = \frac{(\frac{1}{V}\partial D - \frac{D}{V^2}\partial V)}{\frac{\partial V}{V}} = \underbrace{\frac{\partial D}{\partial V}}_{\text{Marginal}} - \underbrace{\frac{D}{V}}_{\text{Regular}}$$

It follows that the β_6 and β_7 parameters represent how the response to candidate race differs between marginal and regular voters. For example, we can say that marginal voters are $\beta_6 * 100$ percentage points more or less likely to vote for a Hispanic Democratic candidate in comparison with regular voters. The β_7 parameter has an analogous interpretation associated with HispanicWe will show results from specifications that log the dependent variable in which case, β_6 and β_7 will represent the differential response between marginal and regular voters in percent terms.

In equation 2, the estimates of β_5 , β_6 , and β_7 use year-to-year variation in voter participation. This variation could be due to a number of exogenous factors including weather on election day. Our goal is to estimate the responsiveness of race for those voters who typically abstain and are induced to participate when the Presidency is at stake. This focus is motivated by the fact that a sizable fraction of voter eligibles are induced to participate along this margin. Thus, by their sheer size, this specific set of marginal voters could exert considerable influence on eventual public policy. In practice, we will present results from a specification that instrument for $\log(\text{totalvotes})$ and $\log(\text{totalvotes})$ -by-race interactions with an indicator for Presidential years and Presidential year-by-race interactions. The instrumental variable estimates will yield the differential effect between marginal and regular voters along our margin of interest.

5 Main Results

5.1 Results from Baseline Model

Table 3 shows results from the baseline model. Column 1 shows estimates from a specification that pools together all years. They imply that, on average, the Democratic and Republican parties lose 3.3 and 1.2 percentage points in vote share when their candidate has a distinctly Hispanic name. Column 2 restricts the sample to midterm years in order to hone in on regular voters. The

¹³This derivation is the same as the one used to estimate the effects of abortion access on the living conditions of the marginal child (Gruber et al. (1999)) and to relate average and marginal cost curves (Berndt (1994)).

estimates suggest that regular voters exhibit a fairly muted response to race as the estimates are closer to zero and not statistically significant. In column 3, we restrict the sample to elections held in Presidential years. The estimates imply that the Democratic and Republican parties lose 5.1 and 5.8 percentage points, respectively, when their party's candidate is Hispanic. Given that the mean county-level Democratic vote share across all years is 0.347, these estimates represent roughly 15 and 9 percent changes, respectively. The stark contrast between midterm and Presidential years provide strong *prima facie* evidence that marginal voters respond to race more than regular voters.

In addition, the table shows estimates associated with incumbency status, $DemInc_{et}$ and $RepInc_{et}$. There are several points worth noting. First, column 1 implies that, on average, voters prefer incumbents which is in line with extensive evidence that finds an incumbency advantage even in low-profile elections ([Ansolabehere and Snyder Jr \(2002\)](#)). It is interesting, though, that the incumbency advantage is differentially stronger for Democratic candidates both in percentage points and in percent terms. One explanation may be linked to the fact that Texas traditionally favors Republican candidates, which could imply that the average Democratic candidate is higher quality conditional on winning the election. In this case, the differential incumbency advantage by party arises because Democratic incumbents are more positively selected than Republicans.

Second, and more importantly, the incumbency advantage is only present in midterm years and vanishes completely in Presidential years. The estimates in column 2 suggest that in midterm years a Democratic and Republican incumbent should expect an 8 and 3 percentage point gain in vote share, respectively. However, in column 3, the estimates associated with incumbency are effectively zero and not statistically significant for either party. The fact that incumbency is only a strong predictor of vote choices in midterm years is consistent with the idea that Presidential elections elicit voters who are interested in national politics but are less attuned to down-ticket contests. In other words, in down-ballot statewide elections, incumbency status may matter less in Presidential years because marginal voters are less likely to know who the incumbents are.¹⁴

¹⁴A counterargument is that incumbency status should have *less* influence among regular voters to the extent that these constituents are better-informed and thus rely less on cues. However, if incumbency status represents electoral *selection* (i.e. incumbents have higher ability) as argued in [Ashworth and De Mesquita \(2008\)](#), then the observed patterns are expected.

Table 3: Effects by Midterm vs. Non-Midterm Election Years

Dep Var: Democratic Candidate Vote Share (Mean is 0.347)			
	<u>Election Years:</u>		
	All	Midterm	Non-Midterm
<i>Candidate Race:</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)
Democratic Hispanic	-0.033*** (0.012)	-0.020 (0.014)	-0.051*** (0.011)
Republican Hispanic	0.012 (0.013)	-0.004 (0.011)	0.058** (0.023)
<i>Incumbency Status:</i>			
Democratic Incumbent	0.054** (0.021)	0.080*** (0.025)	-0.007 (0.005)
Republican Incumbent	-0.027*** (0.010)	-0.030*** (0.011)	-0.003 (0.015)
Observations	20,065	13,716	6,349
R-squared	0.860	0.870	0.876

Note: These regressions restricts the sample to statewide low information elections which include elections for Attorney General, Lieutenant Governor, State Treasurer, Railroad Commissioner, Comptroller of Public Accounts, Commissioner of General Land Office, Commissioner of Agriculture, Court of Criminal Appeals, Supreme Court Justice. Elected office, county, and year fixed effects are included in all specifications. Standard errors are clustered at the elected office-by-year level.

5.2 Marginal versus Regular Voters

We turn our attention to estimating the difference in the responsiveness to race between marginal and regular voters. Column 1 of Table 4 presents estimates of equation 2 using OLS. The estimate in the first cell implies that marginal voters are 6.5 percentage points more likely to vote for the Democratic candidate in comparison with regular voters. The estimate in column 2 indicates that this corresponds to a 19.4% difference between marginal and regular voters. It is worth noting that this finding is in lockstep with existing political science literature that shows marginal voters tend to lean Democratic (Fowler (2015), Gomez et al. (2007)). Interestingly, the estimates associated with the log(totalvotes)-by-race interactions imply negligible difference in the responsiveness to race between marginal regular voters. In general, the factors that drive variation in participation may be selecting voters along dimensions that are largely unrelated to voter prejudice.

Column 3 shows estimates of the first-stage regression. The estimates imply that county-level participation in low-level statewide elections increases by roughly 29% in Presidential versus

Table 4: Marginal versus Regular Voters (Down-Ballot Statewide Elections)

Democratic Vote Share = D/V					
<i>Dep Var:</i>	OLS		First Stage	Second Stage	
	D/V	log(D/V)	log(totalvotes)	D/V	log(D/V)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
log(totalvotes)	0.065*** (0.017)	0.194*** (0.051)		0.030*** (0.004)	0.102*** (0.010)
log(totalvotes)*Democratic Hispanic	0.006** (0.003)	0.024** (0.011)		-0.129*** (0.020)	-0.249*** (0.045)
log(totalvotes)*Republican Hispanic	0.001 (0.005)	0.001 (0.018)		0.068** (0.027)	0.281*** (0.097)
Presidential Year			0.293*** (0.023)		
Presidential Year*Democratic Hispanic			0.037 (0.030)		
Presidential Year*Republican Hispanic			0.129*** (0.025)		
P-value for Joint Significance Test			0.000		
Observations	20,065	20,065	20,065	20,065	20,065
R-squared	0.845	0.816	0.992	0.557	0.594

Note: These regressions restrict the sample to low level statewide elections which include elections for Attorney General, Lieutenant Governor, State Treasurer, Railroad Commissioner, Comptroller of Public Accounts, Commissioner of General Land Office, Commissioner of Agriculture, Court of Criminal Appeals, Supreme Court Justice. The regressions include controls for whether the Democratic or Republican candidate is an incumbent, main effects for candidate race, county fixed effects, and a time trend. Robust standard errors are reported.

midterm years. While the interactions with race imply that the increase is even higher with Republican Hispanic candidates, this reflects the fact that the only Presidential election in which we observe Republican Hispanic candidates is in 2004, a year with above average turnout.¹⁵ Formally, the F-statistic associated with a joint significance test sits comfortably above the conventional weak instruments threshold of 10 and the p-value is effectively 0. The main takeaway, though, is that the Presidency is a very strong determinant of voter participation even in low-level statewide elections.

Columns 4 and 5 show the two-stage least squares results in percentage point and percent terms, respectively. The estimate associated with log(totalvotes) implies that the marginal voter is 3 percentage points more likely to support the Democratic candidate in comparison with regular voters when both candidates are white (a 10.2% increase). However, the interaction with Democratic Hispanic implies that marginal voters, who typically support the Democratic party, are 12.9 percentage points or 24.9% more likely to favor the Republican candidate when the Democratic candidate's

¹⁵There are also Republican Hispanic candidates running in down-ballot statewide elections in 2000, however, these are uncontested elections.

race switches from white to Hispanic. In levels, Democratic candidates with distinctly Hispanic sounding names are 9.9 percentage points less likely to receive support from marginal voters in comparison with regular voters. Effect sizes for Republican Hispanic candidates are comparable in percent terms.

What drives these results? One explanation is that marginal voters have a higher willingness to trade off policy for candidate race due to a distaste for Hispanic candidates (Becker (1971)). The fact that there is strong evidence of taste-based discrimination in traditional labor markets raises the possibility that similar dynamics could operate in democratic elections (Charles and Guryan (2008)). At the same, voter discrimination could reflect the fact that minority candidates tend to represent a different set of policies than non-minorities. Indeed, a number of studies show that minority representatives across various levels of government choose distinct policy positions than those of the majority (Pande (2003)). Thus, ill-informed marginal voters could rationally eschew minority candidates to the extent that race provides an informative signal as to the candidate's policy preferences. We will explore these two potential mechanisms next.

5.3 Potential Mechanisms

Taste-based Discrimination

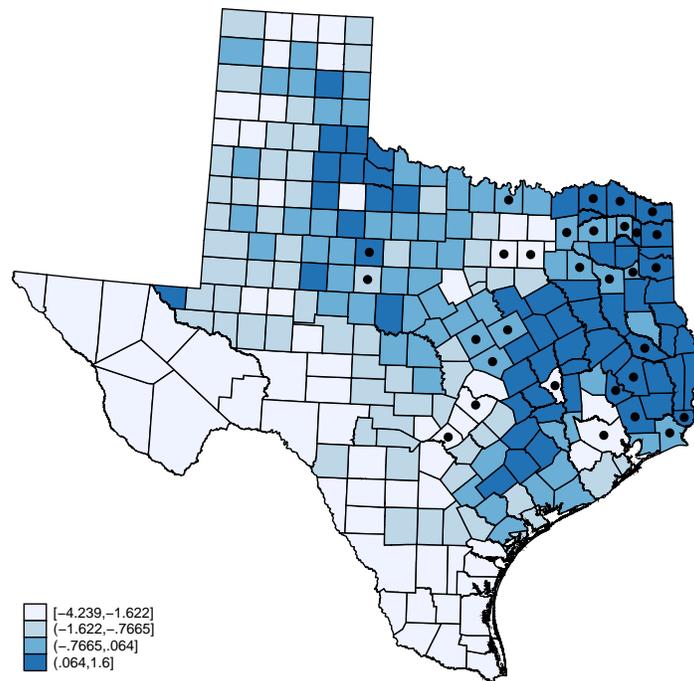
To assess taste-based discrimination, our strategy will be to construct a proxy of racial prejudice and then examine whether or not the effects are heterogeneous across counties with different levels of predicted prejudice. We preface this analysis with two important caveats. First, we recognize the existence of cleaner tests of taste-based discrimination in the literature (Charles and Guryan (2008), Knowles et al. (2001), Anwar and Fang (2006)); however, adapting these methods to this context is extremely difficult.¹⁶ Second, the validity of this exercise hinges critically on the reliability with which our proxy measures racial prejudice. While we will do what we can to validate our measure, we emphasize the need to interpret the following evidence with caution.

Our proxy of racial prejudice is based on Stephens-Davidowitz (2012) (hereafter SD) who uses Google search rates for racially offensive terms as a proxy for racial animus. It is reassuring

¹⁶As an example, Knowles et al. (2001) conduct an innovative test for police bias that is predicated on the intuition that if searches of motorists are conducted rationally (e.g. without tastes for discrimination), then the rates of successful car searches should be equalized across racial groups. This test is not easily applied to elections since it requires a measure of electoral success and data with performance metrics for down-ballot statewide politicians are not readily available.

that SD finds that these search rates positively correlate with conventional measures of prejudice constructed with the General Social Survey, are more prevalent in the South, as well as among older, less educated, and less racially diverse populations since these patterns comport with prior research on the correlates of racial attitudes. A complication is that the google search rates are unavailable at the county level. Thus, we take the author’s estimates from a regression of racially charged search rates on demographics and then project them onto county-level characteristics in order to construct a county-level measure of predicted racial animus.¹⁷

Figure 3: Spatial Patterns of Predicted Racial Animus



Notes: We construct a measure of predicted prejudice by taking a weighted average of the share of population older than 65, share with a bachelor’s degree, fraction Hispanic, and fraction black. The weights are point estimates from regressions of Google search rates of racially insensitive terms on these covariates which are in [Stephens-Davidowitz \(2012\)](#). The black dots in Panel (b) are counties that are known to have active chapters of the Ku Klux Klan.

Figure 3 maps the variation in county-level predicted prejudice in Texas. The map illustrates that prejudice is expected to be higher in East Texas with pockets of high levels of prejudice in North Central Texas. This is generally consistent with the discourse found in various on-line forums

¹⁷Specifically, we use the estimates in column (3) of Table 3 in SD.

that debate which areas of Texas are most racist.¹⁸ In addition, the map displays circular dots that denote counties with known chapters of the Ku Klux Klan.¹⁹ The map shows that counties with active KKK chapters are associated with above median levels of predicted prejudice. The exceptions are almost all in populous metropolitan areas including San Antonio, Austin, Dallas-Fort Worth, and Houston, where white supremacy is less likely to reflect the median voter’s preferences. In addition to the validation exercises in SD, these spatial patterns provide additional reassurance that our measure may reflect more signal than noise.

Table 5: Effects by Predicted Racial Prejudice in Non-Midterm Elections

Dep Var: Democratic Candidate Vote Share				
	Quartile of Predicted Racial Prejudice			
	Bottom	2nd	3rd	Top
Democratic*Hispanic	-0.019** (0.007)	-0.055*** (0.012)	-0.063*** (0.010)	-0.067*** (0.009)
Republican*Hispanic	0.016 (0.017)	0.073** (0.025)	0.064** (0.023)	0.078*** (0.023)
Joint Significance Test (p-value)				
Dem*Hisp			0.000	
Rep*Hisp			0.007	

Note: n = 6,349 and $R^2 = 0.728$. The sample is restricted to down-ballot statewide elections held in Presidential years. These include elections for Attorney General, Lieutenant Governor, State Treasurer, Railroad Commissioner, Comptroller of Public Accounts, Commissioner of General Land Office, Commissioner of Agriculture, Court of Criminal Appeals, Supreme Court Justice. The estimates are from a fully saturated regression that includes interactions between quartile of predicted racial prejudice and all of the following controls: incumbency status, county-level characteristics, office fixed effects, and year fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the elected office-by-year level.

Table 5 shows results from equation 1 that is fully interacted with quartiles of the county-year predicted prejudice distribution and restricts the sample to elections held in Presidential years.²⁰ The patterns clearly show heterogeneous effects with respect to predicted racial animus. In the bottom quartile, Democratic vote share falls by 1.9 percentage points when the Democratic candidate is Hispanic but this deficit is roughly 3 to 3.5 times larger in the next three quartiles.

¹⁸See for example, forums on city-data.com.

¹⁹This information is compiled from various sources including the United White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan website, Southern Poverty Law Center, and case law involving the KKK. As an example of the latter, *State of Texas v. Knights of Ku Klux Klan* is a case in which the KKK argues that the Texas Department of Transportation infringed on their right to free speech by denying their application to adopt a highway. The KKK’s intent was to adopt a portion of a highway that passed by a housing complex mostly populated by African-Americans as a means of intimidation.

²⁰The quartiles are computed using the unweighted county-year distribution of predicted prejudice.

The patterns are similar when the Republican candidate is Hispanic. For example, in the bottom quartile, the Democratic party gains 1.6 percentage points in vote share when the Republican candidate is Hispanic, but in the next three quartiles the analogous estimate is roughly 4 times larger. Tests of joint significance soundly reject that the estimates are equal. Importantly, these patterns hold when we control for county-level fraction Hispanic even though ethnic composition is a strong predictor of predicted prejudice.

Statistical Discrimination

In addition, we can examine whether the data favors the statistical model of discrimination more directly. While the Attorney General, Lieutenant Governor, and other statewide officials are responsible for a wide array of policy domains, the Railroad Commissioner heads a regulatory agency that specializes in Texas' oil and gas industry. This specialization enables us to assess the extent to which the observed patterns are driven by policy interests. In particular, we can restrict attention to Railroad Commissioner contests and examine whether the response to race differs across counties with respect to their per-capita oil and gas employees.²¹ If the responsiveness to race is driven by policy considerations, then we should observe heterogeneous effects to the extent that counties whose economies rely more heavily on the oil and gas sector have larger stake in these elections.

Panel A of Table 6 shows the effects of having a Hispanic sounding surname separately by quartile of per-capita energy sector employees. The striking feature of these estimates is their remarkable stability across quartiles. In counties with the least energy sector workers, Democratic Hispanic candidates lose 7 percentage points in vote share which is nearly identical to the 6.9 percentage point loss in counties with the most energy sector workers. The Republican party loses roughly 4 to 5 percentage points when their candidate is Hispanic and this effect is stable across all 4 quartiles. We note that these estimates are not precisely estimated and thus, we cannot statistically rule out that there exists a gradient across quartiles. However, the similarities in the point estimates undercut the narrative that political interest drives the main results.

Panel B shows estimates separately for each quartile of our predicted prejudice measure. Again, we observe a stark relationship between Hispanic disadvantage and predicted racial prejudice. There

²¹We gather data on county-level oil and gas employees from the U.S. Census Annual County and Business Patterns series.

Table 6: Elections for Railroad Commissioner

Dep Var: Democratic Candidate Vote Share				
Panel A: Effects by Political Interest				
	Quartile of Per Capita Energy Workers			
	Bottom	2nd	3rd	Top
Democratic Hispanic	-0.070*	-0.054*	-0.058	-0.069
	(0.031)	(0.026)	(0.038)	(0.039)
Republican Hispanic	0.048	0.038	0.051	0.051
	(0.042)	(0.035)	(0.044)	(0.048)
Panel B: Effects by Predicted Prejudice				
	Quartile of Predicted Racial Prejudice			
	Bottom	2nd	3rd	Top
Democratic Hispanic	-0.013	-0.080**	-0.084**	-0.093**
	(0.032)	(0.026)	(0.029)	(0.030)
Republican Hispanic	0.009	0.045	0.053	0.059
	(0.027)	(0.034)	(0.040)	(0.058)

Note: n=2,286. The R^2 in Panel A and B are 0.570 and 0.660, respectively. These regressions focus only on elections for the Railroad Commissioner with the usual set of controls. These estimates are based on a fully interacted version of equation 1 with respect to the quartiles for energy sector workers and predicted racial prejudice. The sample is restricted to Presidential years. Standard errors are clustered at the elected office-by-year level.

is no evidence that the electorate in the least prejudiced counties vote differently when faced with candidates with distinctly Hispanic sounding surnames. In contrast, in counties with higher levels of predicted prejudice, we find that both Democratic and Republican parties lose vote share when their respective candidate is Hispanic. For example, in the top quartile, the Democratic and Republican parties lose roughly 9 and 5 percentage points, respectively, when their candidate has a Hispanic sounding surname. That we find heterogeneous effects with respect to predicted prejudice and none in relation to policy interest is more consistent with the taste-based rather than statistical model of discrimination.

5.4 Additional Results

Gender Bias

In this section, we examine the possibility that voters engage in gender discrimination. The motivation for this analysis is twofold. First, existing literature finds mixed evidence of gender discrimination. While there is no gender difference in the win rate in general elections and in

campaign funds (Burrell (1994), Fox (2006)), some evidence suggests that voters have preference for male versus female candidates (Dolan (2004), Huddy and Terkildsen (1993)). Thus, our estimates may provide some clarity by contributing additional evidence using a new research design. Second, our estimated response to distinctly Hispanic sounding names could reflect gender rather than racial bias, especially since names signal gender in addition to race or ethnicity.²² Thus, this exercise will constitute an important robustness check of our main results. We will identify candidate gender by merging additional Census Genealogy records that provide the frequency of first names by gender.²³

Table 7 begins by showing results from equation 1 that now includes indicator variables for whether the Democratic or Republican candidate is a female. Columns 1 and 2 show results when we run the model separately for midterm and Presidential years, respectively. There are two main takeaways from these results. First, the estimates associated with race are very similar to our earlier findings that do not control for candidate gender. As before, voters exhibit a willingness to vote for the opposing party’s candidate when their party’s candidate has a Hispanic sounding name; however, this pattern is only observed in Presidential years.

Second, the estimates show very limited evidence of gender discrimination against female candidates, *on average*. In midterm years, the Democratic vote share falls by 2 percentage points (a 5% decrease) when the Democratic party fields a female candidate; however, the estimate is not statistically significant. The effect size is even smaller for Republican female candidates. In Presidential years, the estimates associated with candidate gender are even closer to zero which suggests that marginal voters exhibit less bias against female candidates than regular voters. Overall, the null result is rather interesting in light of compelling evidence that shows female politicians support very different policies than their male counterparts (Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004)). One may take this as additional evidence of the validity of our empirical strategy. Marginal voters do not seem to act on the differences in policy positions between men and women, which mildly suggests that they do not do so for Hispanic candidates either. However, another explanation could be that voters exhibit own-gender preference in which case the biases of male and female voters would neutralize one another.

²²While the Census Genealogy records do not provide the frequency of first names by race, they do provide these statistics with respect to gender. For example, according to the U.S. Census Genealogy records, 100% of persons with the first name Priscilla self-identify as female.

²³Candidates with gender-neutral first names such as Alex or Pat are not categorized as distinctly female names. Thus, only candidates with first names that are exclusively associated with women are defined as females.

Table 7: Voter Responsiveness to Gender (Down-Ballot Statewide Elections)

<i>Dep Var:</i>	D/V	D/V	D/V	log(D/V)
	Midterm (1)	Presidential (2)	Marginal vs Regular Voters (3)	(4)
Democratic Hispanic	-0.014 (0.015)	-0.049*** (0.010)	-0.154*** (0.026)	-0.323*** (0.061)
Republican Hispanic	-0.012 (0.011)	0.062** (0.023)	0.072** (0.029)	0.281*** (0.101)
Democratic Female	-0.020 (0.013)	-0.013 (0.011)	0.089*** (0.021)	0.242*** (0.053)
Republican Female	0.009 (0.010)	0.007 (0.010)	-0.061*** (0.019)	-0.231*** (0.051)
Observations	13,716	6,349	20,065	20,065
R-squared	0.871	0.878	0.384	0.343

Note: These regressions restrict the sample to low level statewide elections which include elections for Attorney General, Lieutenant Governor, State Treasurer, Railroad Commissioner, Comptroller of Public Accounts, Commissioner of General Land Office, Commissioner of Agriculture, Court of Criminal Appeals, Supreme Court Justice. The regressions include controls for whether the Democratic or Republican candidate is an incumbent, main effects for candidate race, county fixed effects, and a time trend. Robust standard errors are reported.

The *average* response to candidate gender may mask important differences between marginal and regular voters. In order to explicitly estimate differential effects between marginal and regular voters, we run the instrumental variables version of equation 2 but add Presidential year-by-gender interactions to the set of instruments in the first stage and log(totalvotes)-by-gender interactions in the second stage. As noted earlier, the coefficients associated with the log(totalvotes)-by-race and log(totalvotes)-by-gender interaction terms convey the difference between marginal and regular voters in the Hispanic-White and Female-Male gap in vote share, respectively. As before, we show these estimates both in percentage point and in percent terms in columns 3 and 4 of Table 7, respectively.

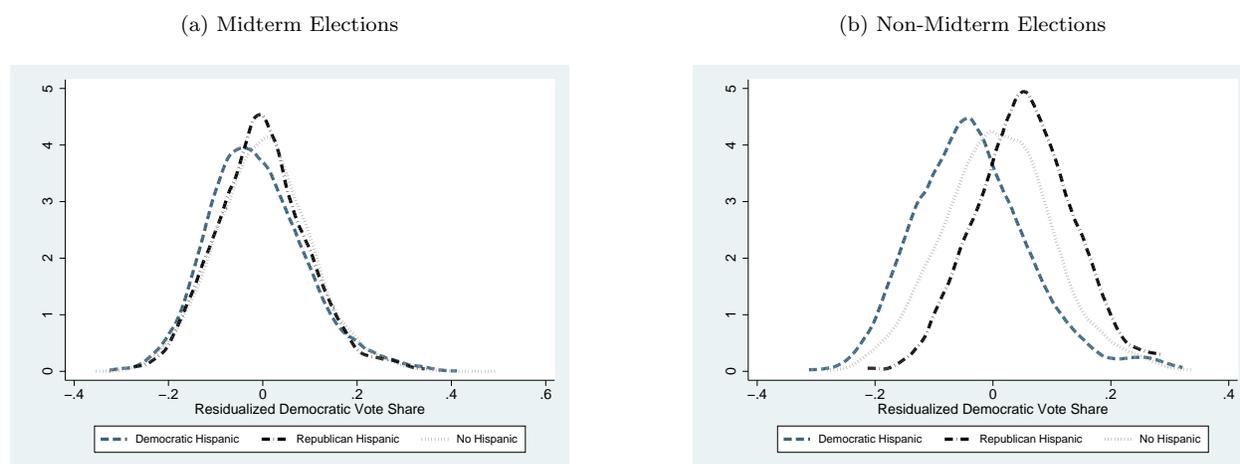
Columns 3 and 4 show that the race coefficients exhibit little sensitivity to the inclusion of gender controls. The difference between marginal and regular voters in their Hispanic-White gap in vote share continues to be considerably large both in percentage point and in percent terms even after controlling for gender. As alluded to above, the bias among marginal voters against Hispanic candidates does not extend to female candidates. Instead, marginal voters are 8.9 percentage points (or 24%) more likely to support the Democratic party when the Democratic candidate is female and 6.1 percentage points (or 23%) less likely to support the Democratic party when the

Republican candidate is female in comparison with regular voters. This finding may be indicative of own-gender preference since existing literature shows the increase in turnout during Presidential years is more pronounced among women in comparison with men (Kaufmann and Petrocik (1999), Jackson (2000)).

Distributional Effects

An additional concern is that our main results are driven by only a handful of counties. To this end, Figure 4 shows the county-level distribution in residual Democratic vote share separately across midterm versus Presidential years.²⁴ Panel (a) shows that in midterm elections, the distributions of county-level Democratic vote share is similar regardless of whether or not a Hispanic candidate runs for office. However, in non-midterm elections, Panel (b) shows stark shifts in the distribution depending on the candidate’s ethnicity. When the Democratic candidate is Hispanic, the distribution of county-level Democratic vote share shifts to the left signifying a loss in own-party support. When the Republican candidate is Hispanic, the distribution shifts to the right which reflects a gain in support for the opposing party. This clearly shows that our regression estimates are not driven by a handful of “outlier” counties but instead reflect broader changes in voting behavior.

Figure 4: Distribution of County-level Residualized Democratic Vote Share



Notes: These figures plot the distribution of residual county-level Democratic vote share from regressions of Democratic vote share on incumbency status, county-level characteristics, office and year fixed effects or in other words, equation 1 without the race indicators.

²⁴The residual variation is estimated from a regression of Democratic vote share on incumbency status, a set of county fixed effects, elected office, and year fixed effects.

Voter Turnout

Finally, Table 8 shows results in which we replace our dependent variable of county-level Democratic vote share with county-level turnout. This exercise is motivated by [Washington \(2006\)](#) who finds that additional black Democratic candidates on the ballot increases turnout by both black and white voters. In contrast, our estimates show no evidence of increased turnout in response to Hispanic candidates in our data. All of the point estimates are close to zero. This is true across midterm and non-midterm elections as well as in low and high fraction Hispanic counties. For example, in non-midterm elections, turnout is only 0.7 percentage points higher when the Democratic candidate is Hispanic in comparison with all white elections. While a few of the estimates are statistically significant, the magnitudes constitute negligible increases in turnout.

Table 8: Effects on County-level Voter Turnout in Low-Level Statewide Elections

Dep Var: Share of Registered Voters who Turnout (Mean is 0.443)							
	Overall	Election Type		Quartile of Fraction Hispanic			
		Midterm	Non-Midterm	Bottom	2nd	3rd	Top
Democratic*Hispanic	0.003 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.002)	0.007 (0.004)	0.000 (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)	0.003 (0.002)	0.005*** (0.002)
Republican*Hispanic	0.001 (0.002)	0.004*** (0.002)	-0.004 (0.010)	-0.001 (0.003)	0.001 (0.003)	0.002 (0.002)	0.005** (0.002)
Controls:							
Incumbency	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
County Fixed Effects	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Elected Office Fixed Effects	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Year Fixed Effects	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	20,065	13,716	6,349	5,096	4,976	5,015	4,978
R-squared	0.885	0.829	0.878	0.912	0.912	0.883	0.832

Note: These estimates are from versions of equation 1. The regressions restricts the sample to low level statewide elections which include elections for Attorney General, Lieutenant Governor, State Treasurer, Railroad Commissioner, Comptroller of Public Accounts, Commissioner of General Land Office, Commissioner of Agriculture, Court of Criminal Appeals, Supreme Court Justice. The regressions include controls for whether the Democratic or Republican candidate is an incumbent, county fixed effects, office fixed effects, and year fixed effects. County level demographic data is constructed using NHGIS data. Standard errors are clustered at the elected office-by-year level.

What explains the disparity across [Washington \(2006\)](#) and the results of this paper? One consideration is that [Washington \(2006\)](#) studies the elections of state Governors, U.S. Senators, and U.S. House of Representatives whereas this analysis focuses on down-ballot statewide elections. If voters are ill-informed about the candidates who run for Railroad Commissioner, state Attorney

General, and the Commissioner of the General Land Office, then candidate-specific attributes, such as race and ethnicity, are unlikely to influence voter decisions on turnout. However, race or ethnicity can affect vote choices to the extent voters can infer ethnicity from the informational content in the names listed on the ballot. Thus, the absence of effects on voter turnout is consistent with the narrative that voters are ill-informed in statewide low-level elections.

6 Implications

Voter discrimination has direct implications on the racial composition of elected officials. From 1992 to 2010, there is 1 down-ballot statewide election in Presidential years involving a Hispanic candidate whose election outcome may have been affected by discrimination. In this election, the Democratic Hispanic candidate received 49% of the vote, and thus, the 5 percentage point effect based on the estimates in Table 3 could have very well swung the outcome in favor of the Republican candidate. We emphasize that it is extremely difficult to measure the policy impact associated with 1 less Hispanic public official due to potential non-linear effects of ethnic diversity on policy outcomes. As an example, [Anwar et al. \(2012\)](#) find that an increase in the number of black members in the jury *pool* from 0 to 1 leads to a substantial decrease in the probability of conviction for black defendants.

Voter discrimination may also have *indirect* implications to the extent that in equilibrium candidates endogenously respond to voter bias.²⁵ In studies of labor market discrimination, a prevailing theme is that minorities should sort away from prejudiced firms in order to minimize the negative effects of bias on wages ([Becker \(1971\)](#), [Charles and Guryan \(2008\)](#)). In politics, it is plausible that minority candidates respond to voter bias in similar fashion by seeking office where bias is less likely to operate. In this case, Hispanic candidates should disproportionately seek office in districts with relatively large shares of Hispanic voters where prejudice against Hispanics is arguably less prevalent. We will assess this possibility using data on local election results in Texas including contests for state Senate, state House of Representatives, and district and appellate court judges to name a few.

²⁵In political economy, there is a growing sentiment that ignoring the candidate response to voter behavior could lead to analysis that is incomplete ([Besley and Coate \(1997\)](#), [Ashworth and De Mesquita \(2014\)](#), [Prato and Wolton \(2015\)](#)).

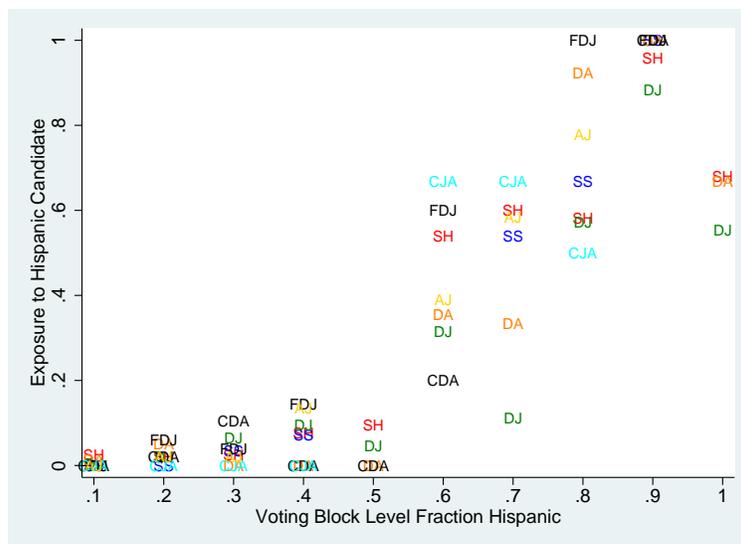
Figure 5 graphs exposure to Hispanic candidates in “down-ticket” local elections separately for each type of elected office. Voting bloc boundaries differ across different types of elected office. The x-axis partitions fraction Hispanic at the voting bloc level into 10 evenly spaced increments. We focus on Hispanic composition because it is observed and strongly correlates with actual racial prejudice which is not as easily observed by potential candidates. The y-axis plots the voting bloc’s exposure to Hispanic candidates. Exposure is defined as the fraction of elections in which a Hispanic candidate runs for office within a given voting bloc. As an example, if we observe a point “SS” with the (x,y) coordinates of (0.4,0.2), then this implies that in state Senate districts whose fraction Hispanic is between 30 and 40%, then these electorates observe a Hispanic candidate in 20% of all state Senate elections.

The notable feature of this graph is the sharp discontinuity at 0.5. In voting blocs where Hispanics constitute a minority of the population, Hispanics represent only a small fraction of the candidates overall. As soon as we cross the 50% threshold, however, there is a sizable increase in exposure to Hispanic candidates. Voting blocs whose fraction Hispanic is between 0.5 and 0.6 observe a Hispanic candidate in 35% of all elections. This is an increase of 31 percentage points in comparison with voting blocs in the left adjacent partition. From there, the likelihood of observing a Hispanic candidate steadily rises with the fraction Hispanic of the voting bloc. Regression results show that the increase is statistically significant and cannot be explained by bloc-level characteristics including age composition, educational attainment, unemployment rate, median household income, and total population.

A few remarks are in order. First, the increase in exposure to Hispanic candidates may be expected since legislators purposely re-draw district boundaries in order to increase minority representation. However, redistricting cannot fully account for these patterns. While district boundaries for state senate and state house of representative are re-drawn after each decennial census, the “one-person, one-vote” requirement does not extend to other types of office. Bloc boundaries associated with elections for district court judges, appellate court judges, criminal district attorneys, and family district judges are redrawn less frequently, and when they are, the intent is to even the “judicial burdens” (i.e. caseloads) across courts. Importantly, the increase in exposure to Hispanic candidates is sizable in elections related to the criminal justice system (roughly 25 percentage points). Given that the increase in non-criminal justice elections is roughly 38 percentage points,

redistricting can explain at most a third of the increase in exposure to Hispanic candidates across the 50% threshold.

Figure 5: Exposure to Hispanic Candidates in Local Elections



Note: This figure shows separately for different offices the fraction of election-by-year cells in which a Hispanic Democratic or Republican candidate is a candidate in the general election by the racial composition of the voting block. "SS", "SH", "DJ", "DA", "CDA", "FDJ", "CJA", and "AJ" stand for State Senate, State House of Representative, District Court Judges, District Attorney, Criminal District Attorney, Family District Judge, Chief Justice of Appellate Court, and Appellate Judge, respectively. State rep and state senate only use data from 2002 onward due to the fact redistricting and crosswalk are available only after then.

Second, the observed pattern is difficult to reconcile with other reasonable models of candidate entry. For example, Hispanic candidates could prefer to serve in majority Hispanic blocs because elected officials can satisfy the demands of own-group constituents more efficiently. Yet another explanation could be that voting blocs with more Hispanic persons have larger pools of aspiring Hispanic politicians which naturally yield Hispanic candidates at higher rates. However, neither of these explanations predict an abrupt change in exposure across the 50% threshold. Instead, the significant change in exposure at 50% is strongly suggestive of strategic selection into elections on the basis on racial composition. Because race is a strong predictor of prejudice, it is plausible that the observed patterns reflect indirect effects of voter bias on candidate behavior.²⁶

²⁶It is important to note that voter bias could have implications on the types of minority candidates who seek office. For example, [Anzia and Berry \(2011\)](#) find that female U.S. Congressional representatives outperform males by securing federal funding for their districts and the sponsoring and co-sponsoring more bills, which they interpret

7 Conclusion

In recent survey pieces on the economics of racial discrimination (Charles and Guryan (2011), Lang and Lehmann (2012)), there is no mention of studies on voter discrimination in democratic elections. To be clear, this is *not* a criticism.²⁷ It does, however, reflect the fact that voter discrimination receives far less academic attention even though there is evidence that voters respond to the candidate’s race (Stephens-Davidowitz (2012), Washington (2006)) and that diversity can substantially impact policy outcomes in ways that favor minority groups. For example, gender diversity in the federal judiciary (Boyd et al. (2010)), racial diversity among police (Anwar and Fang (2006)), and on juries (Anwar et al. (2012)) have been found to influence the adjudication of sexual harrasment cases, highway searches, and criminal conviction rates, respectively. It seems fair to say that voter discrimination probably deserves more attention than it currently receives.

Our paper contributes to the literature by characterizing the racial preferences of marginal voters who are defined as those who participate in Presidential years but otherwise abstain. We restrict attention to down-ballot statewide elections to focus on a subset of contests in which marginal voters are plausibly ill-informed of candidate-specific attributes. We find that in Presidential years, both Democratic and Republican candidates with distinctly Hispanic names lose 5 to 6 percentage points in vote share whereas in midterm years, this pattern vanishes. Our estimates imply that marginal voters are roughly 30% more likely to engage in voter discrimination in comparison with regular voters. Importantly, these patterns are more pronounced in counties that are predicted to have higher levels of racial animus; however, we find no differential effects in counties that plausibly have more at stake in highly specialized elections (e.g. Railroad Commissioner).

Finally, it is worth addressing what appears to be a disconnect between the generality of the paper’s title and the narrowness of the empirical results. While all of the results compare across Hispanic and white candidates, it seems plausible that the same mechanisms that affect Hispanic candidates would generalize to others. While this is purely anecdotal, the fact that two of Donald Trump’s delegates named “Nabi Fakroddin” and “Raja Sadiq” lost sizable vote share in the 2016

as evidence consistent with voters employing a higher standard for women due to gender bias. If similar dynamics extend to race, then we would expect *positive selection* of African-American and Hispanic candidates as well.

²⁷We emphasize that this is not a criticism. The papers cited in these surveys have made enormous contributions to the literature. The surveys themselves are open about their intent to review studies on labor market discrimination. Our only point is to highlight the relative scarcity of research on voter discrimination even though, to paraphrase Downs (1957), elected officials have tremendous impact along innumerable dimensions of economic life.

Republican Illinois primary in comparison with other Trump delegates with more familiar names points to the possibility that the behaviors documented in this paper may extend to non-Hispanic minority candidates as well. We imagine that future work will apply this research design more broadly to study the effects on other minority groups, in other geographies, and along other salient political outcomes.

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