

Legislative Factions Under Democratic One-Party Rule: Evidence from American Local Government*

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Abstract

With partisan and geographic polarization on the rise, state and local governments across the United States are increasingly dominated by a single party. Canonical theories, developed and tested in the context of the Solid South, suggest that one-party dominance of this kind fractures party coalitions and hinders democratic governance. In this paper, I evaluate these predictions in an important but largely unexplored legislative context: American local government. Using an original collection of roll call records from 132 municipal councils, I show that legislative behavior is more multi-dimensional when one party dominates, meaning legislative factions shift more from issue to issue. I argue that this instability arises from weak party institutions under one-party rule, not differences in elite preferences across contexts. My findings demonstrate the importance of competition in facilitating intraparty cooperation and raise questions about the capacity for electoral accountability in a growing set of one-party governments across the country.

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In 1939, Daniel Ellison, a Republican, was elected to his final term in the Baltimore City Council after nearly 20 years of service. Members of his party, naturally, sought election to the council in the terms that followed, yet, despite these attempts, no Republican has won a seat in the chamber since Ellison departed.¹ As a result, for over 75 years, the Democratic Party has completely controlled the legislative process in the city, with no credible out-party opposition within government. While the extent and duration of this single-party dominance in Baltimore is particularly extreme, the presence of one-party rule within a democracy is hardly unique to this specific context. Indeed, the United States has a long history of one-party government at both the state and local levels (Key 1949; Schleicher 2007). With increasing partisan and geographic polarization (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006; Bishop 2009; Nall 2015), moreover, one-party politics is again increasingly common across the country, such that as of the 2016 election there were 22 states in which one party held at least a veto-proof majority in the state legislature, along with a significant and growing number of local governments with overwhelmingly one-party councils.

What happens to legislative behavior and representation when one party rules? In his classic study of the one-party American South, Key (1949) argued that a lack of partisan competition could produce a type of factional politics that inhibited democratic governance and eroded the capacity for long-term policymaking, but that this result was hardly guaranteed. Subsequent work analyzing the development of two-party systems in the South and the role of competition in structuring state legislative politics generally—e.g., if there were stable cleavages, whether they were present in patterns of voting, and on which issues they crystallized—found relatively mixed evidence, with competition minimizing the number of factions in some states and contexts but not others (Havens 1957; Patterson 1962; Jewell 1964; LeBlanc 1969; Broach 1972; Harmel and Hamm 1986). More recently, scholars have again sought to identify the consequences of imbalanced party competition, both revisiting the case of the one-party South (Aldrich and Griffin 2018; Caughey 2018) and leveraging

¹Broadwater, Luke. 2016. “Republicans see hope of a City Council seat in Southeast Baltimore.” *The Baltimore Sun*. <http://www.baltimoresun.com/bs-md-ci-district-one-20161002-story.html>

new data on voting in modern state legislatures to examine patterns of competition and polarization (Aldrich and Battista 2002; Shor, Berry, and McCarty 2010; Hinchliffe and Lee 2016; Lee 2016). Yet, despite these valuable contributions, it remains unclear whether the chaotic factionalism that Key (1949) documented generalizes beyond the one-party South and, if so, what underlies this factional behavior.

In this paper, I examine the consequences of one-party rule for legislative behavior and factional stability. To do so, I draw on an unprecedented set of legislative records from the local level, which includes approximately 300,000 recorded roll call votes from 132 city and county councils across the country. Unlike data from the state and national legislatures, data on legislative behavior at the local level has never before been systematically collected for such an extensive set of local governments.² In addition, I pair this original collection of legislative records with survey-based estimates of ideology for 720 municipal officials. By combining these two unique sources of data and leveraging the rich variation in partisan and nonpartisan governments at the municipal level, I am able to evaluate not only whether one-party rule produces high-dimensional, factional voting behavior but also whether that behavior arises as a function of changes in institutional power or the heterogeneity of party coalitions.

After scaling the roll call votes from each council, I find that—for formally partisan governments—competition binds parties together, such that legislative behavior becomes less predictable and voting coalitions are more likely to shift from issue to issue under one-party rule. In contrast, I find no evidence of a relationship between the amount of partisan competition and voting behavior in formally nonpartisan governments, even though recent work has documented that local policy and elite preferences on local issues are increasingly partisan in nature (Tausanovitch and Warshaw 2014; Einstein and Kogan 2015; Einstein and Glick 2016; de Benedictis-Kessner and Warshaw 2016). This difference across institutional

²Prior work on local legislative politics, which is relatively rare, has typically only used data from a small number of cities or for one city over a long time period. For examples, see: Simpson (2001), Austin (2002), Burnett and Kogan (2014), and Santucci (2017).

contexts suggests that one-party rule weakens the institutional levers that parties have at their disposal, thereby eroding their capacity to prevent intraparty conflict.

To account for concerns that the types of individuals who hold office in partisan and nonpartisan governments may be fundamentally different or react differently to changes in partisan competition, I supplement my primary analysis with an examination of the ideological leanings of local legislators. Specifically, using a unique survey of municipal officials, I compare the ideological extremity of council members in similarly competitive partisan and nonpartisan contexts across two ideological dimensions, showing that there is essentially no relationship between the level of two-party competition and ideologically extreme preferences in either context. Importantly, the nearly identical trends across partisan and nonpartisan governments suggest that the types of individuals who run and win in local partisan and nonpartisan elections are quite similar, meaning that preference change is unlikely to underlie the relationship between party competition and legislative factionalism.

My findings contribute to our understanding of political parties and legislative institutions and they raise questions about the nature of representation and the stability of public policy in factional governments. This is of immense importance not only for theories of parties as institutions, but also practically for the many legislative environments across the United States that do not mirror the competitive, partisan context of Congress. Indeed, the increasing trend towards one-party dominance in state and local legislatures, combined with the significant number of cities and counties across the country using nonpartisan election systems, implies that the context within which legislative bargaining occurs is often highly unstable. This instability has the potential to create significant hurdles for representation and democratic accountability (Davidson and Fraga 1988; Schaffner, Streb, and Wright 2001; Wright 2008), while also injecting the political system with a substantial degree of uncertainty around the direction of public policy (McKelvey 1976; Schofield 1978), each of which may ultimately yield negative outcomes for governments and their residents. By examining the scope conditions under which legislative factions emerge, this paper, in turn, contributes

to our understanding of the dynamics and generalizability of these processes

How Competition Impacts Party Coalitions

What happens to legislative coalitions and voting behavior in the absence of two-party competition? Writing in the context of the one-party South, Key (1949) argued that competition between parties for office and within government creates the incentive for parties to act cohesively. As a result, when competition is absent and one-party dominates, legislative behavior becomes more factional, meaning that voting coalitions are more likely to shift from issue to issue. By specifying scope conditions for cohesive action, Key's theory contrasts with our typical understanding of party government. Parties, the conventional wisdom holds, organize conflict within legislatures, creating what scholars describe as 'low-dimensional' patterns of voting in the process (Poole and Rosenthal 1997; Wright and Schaffner 2002). In practice, this low-dimensionality means that members of the same party nearly always vote together and that voting coalitions rarely diverge from their strict partisan boundaries. Yet, Key's findings suggest that this feature of party government may not be inevitable. Rather, in certain contexts, such as when a party lacks credible out-party opposition, we should expect legislative behavior to become detached from the party line.

Since the 1940s, other scholars have sought to test Key's hypothesis about competition and legislative organization. Notably, a number of scholars have examined the transition from one- to two-party democracy within the state legislatures, generally finding that the introduction of competition does indeed bind parties together (Havens 1957; Patterson 1962; Broach 1972; Harmel and Hamm 1986). However, the evidence is not entirely unanimous (Jewell 1964; LeBlanc 1969); indeed, even Key (1949) himself raised questions about the conditions under which competition would and would not fuel cohesive legislative organization.

More recently, as patterns of party competition have shifted in the United States, scholars

have again sought to evaluate the consequences of one-party dominance. Yet, in contrast to early research on the Solid South, recent scholarship has tended to operationalize legislative behavior in terms of polarization between the parties rather than either cohesion within the parties or the dimensionality of the voting space (Aldrich and Battista 2002; Shor, Berry, and McCarty 2010; Hinchliffe and Lee 2016; Lee 2016).³ This distinction is important because—while polarization is certainly worthy of investigation—evaluating competition purely in this manner fails to capture potential changes in intraparty legislative organization. Indeed, as many of the earliest studies of the South noted, one- or no-party democracy was largely chaotic, with coalitions shifting from issue to issue. Evaluating changes in partisan polarization in one dimension, however, may not necessarily capture this legislative factionalization because factionalization implies the presence of other dimensions of conflict besides party.

These other dimensions of conflict, whether frequently changing or organized consistently around a particular issue—e.g., race in Congress prior to the partisan realignment that occurred in the 1960s—are important because they have the potential to shape policy outcomes. For example, consider the success of killer amendments in a legislative body like Congress. As Jenkins and Munger (2003) explain, amendments of this kind are most likely to be successful precisely in those cases when an issue on a secondary dimension cross-cuts the party. And indeed, empirically, the evidence suggests that in Congress nearly all of the successful killer amendments that have been identified have dealt with one particular cross-cutting divide: race (Poole and Rosenthal 1997; Jenkins and Munger 2003; Finocchiaro and Jenkins 2008). As a result, in these cases, majority-favored policies failed because those who opposed them leveraged the multidimensional nature of legislative politics.

This example of killer amendments in Congress is instructive because it illustrates a more general point: the type of factional politics discussed in this paper creates the opportunity for chaos within the policymaking process (McKelvey 1976; Schofield 1978). This chaos,

³For a notable exception, see Carroll and Eichorst (2013), who find that the voting behavior of state legislators is more predictable in contexts where the parties are in a competitive battle for control of the chamber.

unless constrained by institutional structures like parties (Shepsle and Weingast 1981), can fuel significant policy instability, which may have further consequences of its own. For example, when public policy is uncertain or can change on a whim, it can deter investment by businesses or government and, in the process, erode the tax base by imposing costs on the individuals who live there (Baker, Bloom, and Davis 2016; Tiebout 1956). Similarly, this type of uncertainty can also incentivize short-sighted policies that cater to interest groups rather than the public (Key 1949). For example, in his study of the Chicago City Council, Simpson (2001) finds that the highly factional ‘Council of the Grey Wolves’ from 1871 to 1931 was a period filled with corruption and few major accomplishments.

However, even if highly factional governments can avoid the graft and shortsightedness associated with these examples, there remains a problem of democratic accountability. Indeed, if one-party governments are functionally no-party governments, then the chaotic, unstable patterns of voting in the legislature will make it significantly more difficult for voters to gather the requisite information to hold their representatives accountable, a process that is only exacerbated if representatives do not vote in concert with their expressed campaign ideology (Wright and Schaffner 2002). Thus, the barriers to accountability may be higher precisely in those contexts where voters are unlikely to be getting what they bargained for.

Together, the theory and examples in this section suggest that politics becomes more factional, or multidimensional, when one party dominates, and that this instability may have consequences for representation and governance. Yet, much of our theory and evidence about how competition impacts party factions and the dimensionality of legislative voting stems directly from early studies of the American South, and so it remains unclear whether the patterns uncovered by early researchers generalize beyond this unique context. Moreover, even if they do, we know remarkably little about the mechanisms through which competition shapes legislative behavior. In this paper, I revisit the consequences of one-party competition and explore two potential pathways through which it impacts legislative coalitions: the institutional power of political parties and the heterogeneity of their members’ preferences.

Two-Party Competition and Institutional Power

If one-party dominance leads to—or allows for—the factionalization of party coalitions, as early theory predicts, what underlies this change? One possible answer to this question is that one-party dominance weakens the institutional power of parties. The logic for this type of mechanism stems directly from the collective action problem facing party coalitions. Specifically, because of the broad-based nature of their coalitions (Aldrich 1995; Bawn et al. 2012), individual members will often have an incentive to deviate from the party line when it suits their personal interests, even though doing so imposes costs on the party as a whole. To prevent this challenge from unraveling the coalition, parties institutionalize themselves within the political system, creating and leveraging tools to hold their members accountable and thereby protect their power and longevity (Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991; Cox and McCubbins 1993, 2005). For example, scholars have shown that parties provide campaign support to influence who wins the nomination process (Cohen et al. 2008; Hassell 2015), manipulate the legislative agenda to limit issues that might divide the party (Cox and McCubbins 2005; Katznelson and Mulroy 2012), and use selective benefits and targeted punishments to shape how their members vote (Snyder and Groseclose 2000; Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart 2001; Nokken and Poole 2004). It is through the use of these institutionalized powers that parties constrain the scope of legislative conflict and incentivize cohesive legislative action, thereby creating the low-dimensional environment common to American legislatures in the process (Poole and Rosenthal 1997; Shor and McCarty 2011).

Yet, while the evidence suggests that these institutional powers induce cohesion within the party, in a one-party government, the incentive structure changes, weakening the relative power of party institutions as tools to organize conflict and prevent intraparty divides. This occurs in two ways. First, the presence of credible out-party competition makes cooperation more important for political outcomes, amplifying the incentive for the dominant party to institutionalize their organization within the legislature and develop the tools necessary to keep their members in line (Harmel and Hamm 1986; Cox and McCubbins 1993). Absent

competition, there is less of an incentive for the party apparatus to create, sustain, or strengthen these institutional tools because the risk of reelection and policy losses are simply not as great.

Second, changes in the level of competition alter the incentive structure for individual members of a legislature, decreasing the power of the carrots and sticks that parties wield. For example, given that parties exist—whether wholly or in part—to facilitate reelection (Downs 1957; Aldrich 1995; Bawn et al. 2012), then absent strong, credible electoral competition, parties will become less significant for incumbent member’s electoral prospects. As a result, there is less benefit to the member for adhering to the party line when it conflicts with their preferences because doing so is less likely to affect their electoral future. Indeed, while party-provided pork and committee power are certainly valuable, in a one-party context, they may not dramatically improve a member’s electoral fortunes, particularly relative to the cost of adhering to the party line, and so members will have less of an incentive to sacrifice for them.

This process of legislative factionalization through institutional weakness is akin to what scholars have observed in nonpartisan contexts. In the Nebraska state legislature, for example, Wright and Schaffner (2002) show that absent the institution of party, legislative behavior is unpredictable and largely unrelated to partisanship. If one-party politics weakens the institutional levers available to parties, then we would expect the results to look quite similar to the Nebraska context where those levers are nonexistent. In other words, it lends itself to the prediction that legislative behavior in partisan governments should come to look like nonpartisan governments when a single party dominates the political environment.

Two-Party Competition and Preference Heterogeneity

While institutional weakness is one mechanism through which factional voting behavior may arise, such an outcome could also be a function of how competition impacts the preferences of the politicians who run and serve. Specifically, absent strong partisan opposition, partisan considerations may simply become less important for legislator decision-making. As

Patterson (1962) explains, without “party as a reference group, the legislator is likely, consciously or unconsciously, to respond to different pressures in different voting areas” (200). As a result, absent competition, members will deviate specifically in circumstances when the preferences of important local constituencies conflict with the party’s priorities. At the local level, specifically, where a variety of groups have been shown to influence the political process and where policy tends to be more allocational in nature (Trounstine 2016), these types of cross-cutting constituencies may be particularly likely to form. Indeed, if the focus of debates is often on where resources are devoted or who benefits most from a service, then it creates the opportunity for coalitions to shift according to the specific locations or groups involved.

Empirically, if this type of preference-based mechanism is responsible for more unstable, opportunistic legislative factions, it should be observable in the expressed preferences of legislators. For example, when the two parties are equally balanced, we would expect legislators to hold more extreme ideological preferences as the parties become more significant and central factors for politics. When one party dominates, however, preferences should be more moderate and thus align with the party less.⁴ Empirically, these predictions align with a number of recent findings, which have shown that—when competition intensifies—the Democratic and Republican parties tend to be more polarized (Aldrich and Battista 2002; Coffey 2011; Hinchliffe and Lee 2016) and partisanship becomes a more important factor for legislative behavior and representation (Jenkins 2006; Carroll and Eichorst 2013; Bonica and Cox 2018).

It is important to note, however, that competition could also induce changes in preferences through party institutions. Indeed, recent scholarship has emphasized the significant influence parties possess with their control of nominations (Cohen et al. 2008; Masket 2011;

⁴It is worth noting that this prediction contrasts with Downs (1957) basic model of electoral competition, in which party positions converge to the median when competing against one another. However, the bulk of the empirical evidence does not support this prediction. Indeed, as Hinchliffe and Lee (2016) explain, the ideology of the median voter is rarely known with certainty and, under such conditions, “even Downsian-style theory would predict strong and clearly defined party differences” (174).

Bawn et al. 2012; Hassell 2015), and it is possible that—when competition is present and parties are strong—this power facilitates the cohesion within parties by supporting the election of more ideologically homogenous candidates. Still, if either of these preference-based mechanisms are responsible for changes in legislative factions, we should see differences in the expressed preferences of legislators as a function of local party competition. If preferences are stable regardless of the the amount of competition, however, it suggests neither of these mechanisms can explain the type of factional behavior that scholars have predicted.

Data

To evaluate the relationship between party competition and legislative factionalization, I draw on an original collection of legislative records from 132 city and county councils across the United States.⁵ In total, the collection includes nearly 300,000 recorded roll call votes and approximately one million unique legislative actions. Nearly all of this data was extracted directly from official council websites that city and county clerks use to publicly manage their legislative records. As a result, for each government in the sample, I have information about every bill that has been proposed in the council since that government’s online system was activated, such as who the sponsor was, how the bill fared in committee, what the final outcome was, and—if it received a vote—how each member voted. While the specific details that are included for each bill can vary somewhat across governments, with smaller governments being less likely to provide intervening legislative information, the records are generally similar because nearly all of the municipalities in my sample use the same record management platform known as ‘Legistar.’

While the size of the sample may seem modest in comparison to the total number of

⁵The full collection of councils used in this paper a subset of a larger collection of 180 councils. However, I omit all councils with less than 20 contested votes during the sample period. In most cases this is a function of a city only recently having adopted an online platform or having only briefly used the service. Dropping these sparse councils ensures I am not finding a highly structured space purely as a result of a limited number of votes. In Appendix B.2 I show that there is no reason to believe this decision biases the findings, with little observable difference between the included and omitted councils and no difference in the findings if I raise or lower the 20 vote threshold.

local governments in the United States, it is important to emphasize that the collection is unprecedented for studies of local politics. Very few scholars have used data of this kind and, when they have, it has typically been only a handful of cities over a short period of time. Yet, the substantial amount of institutional variation at this level provides significant advantages, even if the the full population of local governments is not available. Most relevant for this study is the large number of governments that use nonpartisan election systems, because without a nonpartisan baseline it is impossible to know whether legislative outcomes are a function of parties as institutions or simply differences in preferences across partisan legislators (Krehbiel 2007, 1993). While previous work has leveraged controlled case studies between partisan and nonpartisan governments at the state and national level to accomplish this (Jenkins 1999, 2000; Wright and Schaffner 2002), I turn to the local level of government instead.

Figure 1 depicts the full geographic distribution of the cities and counties in the sample, categorized by the type of government. As the map shows, the sample covers a broad cross-section of U.S. municipal governments, with at least one local government from 31 states and the District of Columbia. On average, the number of local governments included from each state is correlated with a state’s population, however, there are exceptions and the sample is not perfectly representative of local governments at-large. For a comparison of the cities and counties in the sample to the population, see Appendix B.1. In general, however, the local governments included in the sample are larger in size, more diverse, more highly educated, and have a wider range of functional responsibilities than cities and counties overall. In many ways, these differences make perfect sense: the types of local governments that will opt into a records management platform are precisely those that have more business to manage. However, despite this imbalance between the sample and population, there is generally less imbalance between the partisan and nonpartisan cities and counties included in the sample, and I account for it where possible through covariate adjustment and, in Appendix C.2, matching. Still, given the nature of the sample, the results may not generalize to cities and

counties at-large, and are instead most likely to be representative of large, diverse cities and counties with a broad policy portfolio.

Measuring Legislative Factionalization

In order to examine the relative organization of legislative behavior across local governments, I estimate the dimensionality of voting for each city and county council. Measures of dimensionality are perfectly suited to exploring questions of legislative organization and faction because they capture the stability of legislative coalitions. Thus, if all conflict is functionally between two parties or organized around a single ideology, then a legislature will tend to be one-dimensional; if, however, coalitions and preferences are less stable, shifting from issue to issue, multiple dimensions will be required to explain patterns of voting at a similar rate.

Unlike most studies that typically treat dimensionality as the first stage in the analysis of legislative roll-calls, I focus on this concept exclusively, paying particular attention to the strength of the first dimension. I do this because analyzing the ideal points by themselves might yield misleading conclusions in a highly factional context. Indeed, imagine that I simply scaled the votes for all of the legislatures in my data independently and found that, using a one-dimensional model, Republicans tend to be on the right and Democrats tend to be on the left, regardless of the level of party competition. Given those results, we may falsely infer that party structures politics the same in competitive and noncompetitive environments. Yet, if one-party rule does indeed lead to factional instability, other salient cleavages, such as race or class, will become more important as one party increasingly dominates. Empirically, this might mean that only half of the votes in a chamber are explained by partisanship, rather than 80 percent or more. By focusing on the explanatory power of the first, typically partisan, dimension, it allows me to explore this phenomenon more systematically across the full cross-section.

To construct a measure of this kind, I first fit a one-dimensional spatial model for each council separately using all of the records in my data from January 2012 through April

2017.⁶ To conduct the scaling, I use the nonparametric Optimal Classification (OC) method developed by Poole (2000). The primary difference between OC and the more commonly used parametric scaling methods, such as DW-Nominate and Ideal (Poole and Rosenthal 1985; Clinton, Jackman, and Rivers 2004), is that OC minimizes the number of vote classification errors while the parametric methods maximize the probability of the observed vote choices.

Next, to evaluate the fit of the spatial model, I use the ‘Aggregate Proportional Reduction in Error’ (APRE) statistic. This statistic measures how effective an n-dimensional spatial model is at classifying vote choices compared to a null model where all legislators vote in the majority.⁷ Thus, the APRE statistic accounts for the fact that some votes—such as those where many legislators are in the majority—are easy to predict by benchmarking the spatial model against an assumption of unanimity. In turn, if the APRE from a one-dimensional model—which is measured on a zero to one scale—is high for a particular city, it indicates a more stable, one-dimensional voting space. In contrast, when the APRE is low, it suggests a more plural or factional legislative environment.

By evaluating the APRE statistic in this manner, it transforms dimensionality into a relative concept. This is useful because evaluating dimensionality often relies heavily on subjective researcher judgment (Aldrich, Montgomery, and Sparks 2014) and can yield misleading conclusions about the explanatory power of a simple model. For example, a legislature may be one-dimensional, but if that dimension only explains 50 percent of the votes in the chamber, then it is still a relatively unstructured legislative environment where votes are difficult to predict. And indeed, this is hardly an insignificant point: both over time in Congress and across the state legislatures, there is substantial variation in how well a

⁶As Figure A.1 in Appendix A shows, this period aligns with the time period when most of the cities and counties currently using the platform adopted it.

⁷For all votes in a council we can calculate the APRE as:

$$\frac{\sum_{i=1}^q (\text{Minority Votes} - \text{Classification Errors})_i}{\sum_{i=1}^q \text{Minority Votes}_i}$$

where Minority Votes_i is the number of legislators voting in the minority for vote i and $\text{Classification Errors}_i$ is the number of misclassified votes from the optimal classification model for vote i (Armstrong II et al. 2014).

one-dimensional spatial model explains voting.⁸ This variation across contexts is important because it suggests that in some legislatures and in some time periods legislators are more willing to defect than others, which has direct implications for the power of organizations like parties and the ability of citizens to ultimately hold their representative accountable. In turn, this paper focuses on the relative fit of a one-dimensional model across cities and counties rather than the exact number of dimensions.

In addition, to ensure that the results presented in this paper are not driven by the choice of the APRE as a fit statistic, I include results for two alternative measures in Appendix C.1: the share of the variance explained by the model's first dimension and the percent of the nay votes correctly classified by the model. Higher values of these two statistics indicate a more one-dimensional voting space, and results from both of these alternative specifications align strongly with those presented in the main text.

Party Competition and Legislative Voting Behavior

In this section, I evaluate the relationship between the presence of partisan political competition and legislative factionalism. To do so, I draw on my measure of dimensionality, of which higher values imply a more one-dimensional—and thus less factional—voting space. In turn, if existing theory applies in this context, we should see relatively more factional government, in the form of lower APRE statistics, as one party increasingly dominates local politics. Unlike previous analyses, however, I examine this theorized relationship in both partisan and nonpartisan governments alike. Given that the primary difference between these two contexts is the presence of formal party institutions, analyzing the relationship between competition and legislative factionalization in each allows me to test whether in-

⁸For example, Shor and McCarty (2011) find large differences across states in how well a one-dimensional spatial model fits, with the model reducing classification errors by 80 percent in some states and only 20 percent in others. While they also find that the spatial model correctly classifies about 77 to 93 percent of all votes across states, the low error reduction rate suggests that this stems mostly from lopsided votes. In other words, for a number of states, the spatial model performs poorly at classifying the votes of those in the minority.

stitutions or preferences underlie the hypothesized change. Indeed, if government becomes more factional in partisan but not nonpartisan one-party contexts, then it would imply that competition weakens the institutional power of parties to bind their membership together.

For all of the analyses, I follow Hinchliffe and Lee (2016) and operationalize two-party competition as ‘partisan imbalance.’ To construct this measure, I take the absolute value of the 2008 democratic presidential vote margin for each local government.⁹ Thus, a value of 0 indicates local presidential results that were nearly perfectly balanced between Barack Obama and John McCain in 2008, while a value of 1 indicates near perfect one-party voting.¹⁰

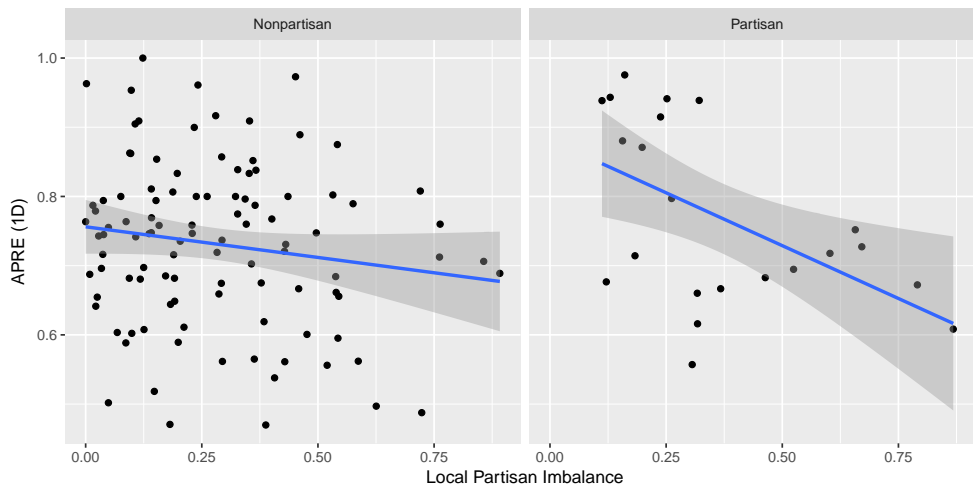
In Figure 2, I first present the simple bivariate relationship between my measures of party competition and legislative dimensionality, with partisan governments in the right panel and nonpartisan governments in the left panel. Because parties are more likely to be active in cities and counties that use partisan elections, we should see the predicted relationship in which parties reduce the dimensionality of conflict on the right but not the left. In the bivariate case, this is precisely the pattern we observe, with essentially no relationship between partisan imbalance and voting patterns in nonpartisan councils but a strong, negative relationship in partisan councils. On the one hand, the relationship documented for partisan councils is consistent with a long literature arguing that one-party dominance will provide the opportunity for intraparty factions to emerge. On the other hand, that there is no relationship for nonpartisan councils means that this factionalization is specifically related to formal party institutions. This is consistent with a theory of institutional capacity, whereby parties in noncompetitive, one-party contexts see their formal powers weakened and thus lose their institutional leverage over their members.

Next, to better account for factors that might be confounding the simple relationships presented in Figures 2, I conduct a series of multivariate regressions using the one-dimensional

⁹City-level presidential election returns come from Einstein and Kogan (2015) and county-level returns come from Congressional Quarterly’s Elections and Voting Collection.

¹⁰I use local presidential vote shares as opposed to member-level party identification to capture the potential out-party electoral threat and to account for the fact that in many nonpartisan local governments members do not publicly identify with a party.

Figure 2: Bivariate Relationships between Partisan Imbalance and APRE by Election System



APRE as the dependent variable and an interaction term between my measure of partisan imbalance and an indicator for partisan elections. I include this interaction term to estimate the relationship separately for partisan and nonpartisan governments, just as in Figure 2. Table 1 presents the results from these models. In column 1, I control only for factors that are likely to affect measurement of the fit of the spatial model, including council size and the total number of votes scaled.¹¹ In the subsequent columns, I add political, economic, and social factors that the literature suggests might shape local conflict. First, I include a set of demographic measures to capture the size and diversity of each local area, including a logged measure of population size, the percent of residents with a 4-year college degree, and the share of the population that is a racial minority. Second, given the broad variation in functional responsibilities across cities and counties, I include a measure of the scope of government authority (Oliver 2012). To construct this measure, I follow the norm in the literature and use spending data from the 2012 Census of Governments to identify the share of 25 different

¹¹For all of the fit statistics used in this paper, there is a modest relationship between the fit of the model and both the size of the council and the number of votes scaled. These relationships are depicted in Figures A.2 and A.3 in Appendix A. As a result, whenever possible, I account for these factors by analyzing patterns of voting within groups of councils that are of a similar size and by controlling for a logged measure of the number of votes scaled.

spending categories for which each local government has positive spending (Hajnal and Trounstein 2014). In addition, I also include a logged measure of direct general expenditures to capture the size of government beyond the number of functional responsibilities.

Across all models, the relationship between partisan elections and the APRE statistic is positive and substantively large. Accounting for the presence of the interaction term with party competition, this means that in competitive, two-party contexts, partisan governments are substantially less factional than their nonpartisan counterparts, with APRE statistics that are .10 to .13 higher, on average. This represents an approximately one-standard deviation increase in APRE when parties are present and competitive, which corresponds with a 10 to 13 percentage point decrease in error when predicting votes using the spatial model. In practice, this magnitude is similar to the increase in explanatory power from adding a second dimension to models of congressional roll calls during the period where race is known to have been an important cross-cutting divide (Aldrich, Montgomery, and Sparks 2014).

However, as the large, negative coefficient on the interaction term indicates, the presence of institutionalized parties does not always yield more organized voting behavior, with one-party governments using partisan elections seeing none of this gain in legislative organization. In fact, Figure 3, which plots the marginal effect of using partisan elections at all values of partisan imbalance, highlights that for the most one-party dominant cities and counties, those that use partisan elections are no more organized than their nonpartisan counterparts. In contrast, as the baseline coefficient on partisan imbalance shows, there is no relationship, on average, between the presence of party competition and legislative dimensionality in the nonpartisan context.

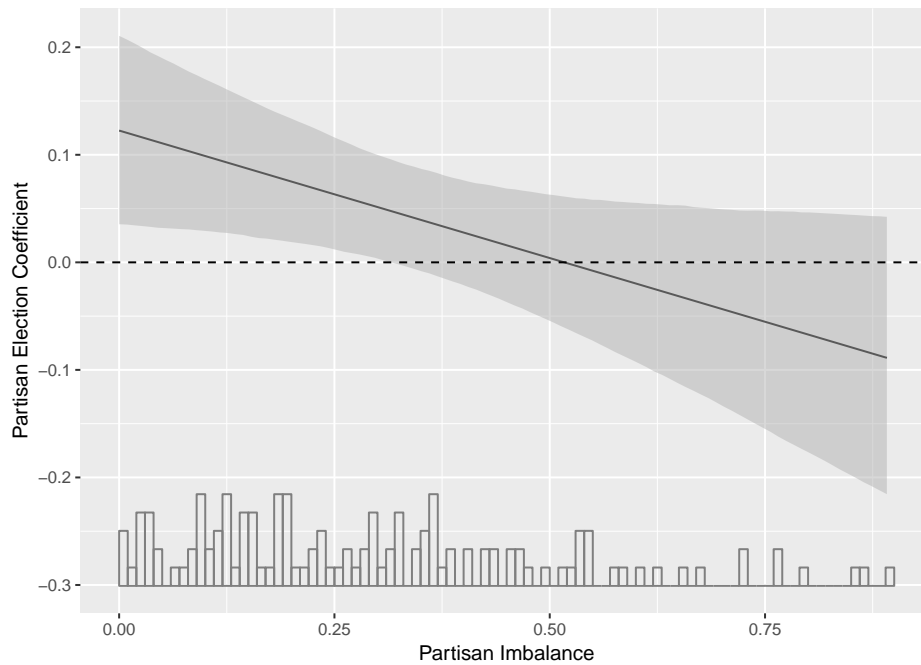
As the second to sixth columns of Table 1 show, these relationships all hold when I add additional theoretically-motivated covariates into the model, incorporate exact council size or state fixed effects, run the model exclusively on small councils, or account for potential differences in variance by weighting observations according to their total number of contested

Table 1: Relationship Between Partisan Elections, Competition, and Legislative Unidimensionality

	APRE Statistic					
	OLS					WLS
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Partisan Elections	0.12** (0.04)	0.12** (0.04)	0.13** (0.05)	0.12+ (0.06)	0.11* (0.06)	0.12** (0.05)
Partisan Imbalance	0.02 (0.05)	-0.01 (0.05)	-0.004 (0.05)	-0.03 (0.06)	-0.03 (0.06)	-0.01 (0.05)
Partisan Elec. * Imbalance	-0.20+ (0.11)	-0.24* (0.11)	-0.28* (0.12)	-0.30+ (0.17)	-0.29+ (0.16)	-0.24* (0.11)
% Non-White		0.02 (0.05)	0.02 (0.05)	0.05 (0.07)	-0.01 (0.06)	0.05 (0.05)
Government Scope		-0.06 (0.08)	-0.06 (0.09)	0.15 (0.10)	0.04 (0.10)	-0.08 (0.08)
log(Total Population)		0.01 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)
% 4-Year College		0.04 (0.07)	0.04 (0.07)	0.01 (0.08)	-0.004 (0.07)	0.08 (0.07)
log(Direct Expenditures)		0.01 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)
log(Total Votes Scaled)	-0.03** (0.01)	-0.03** (0.01)	-0.03** (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.03** (0.01)	-0.03* (0.01)
Constant	0.94** (0.05)	0.71** (0.10)	0.68** (0.11)	0.78** (0.14)	0.76** (0.12)	0.67** (0.10)
Council Group FE	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Exact Council Size FE	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
State FE	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Omit Large Councils (≥ 10)	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
N	126	126	126	126	98	126
R ²	0.40	0.44	0.53	0.58	0.35	0.46

+p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01

Figure 3: Marginal Effect of Using Partisan Elections on Legislative Dimensionality Across All Levels of Party Competition



votes.¹² In addition, as Appendix C.2 shows, they also hold when I conduct the analysis on a matched sample of partisan and nonpartisan governments. Thus, consistent with the simple bivariate depiction in Figure 2, this implies that the relationship between competition and legislative factionalism is a function of the institutions that are specific to partisan councils and the relative ability of these institutions to motivate partisan legislators to vote in unison.

Competition and Preference Heterogeneity

Given the differences across partisan and nonpartisan governments in the preceding analysis, it is clear that having parties institutionalized within the election system is central to how competition shapes legislative behavior. One question, however, is how much these findings

¹²Given that each council votes on a different number of bills, it is possible that the measure of fit—which is itself an estimate—is more precise for the cities and counties for which I have more contested votes. Weighting, in turn, accounts for this by increasing the relative weight of these cities and counties in estimating the coefficients.

are a result of actual institutional power wielded by parties within the legislature versus how competition shapes the ideological heterogeneity of the members who run and serve. For example, recent scholarship has emphasized the significant influence parties possess with their control of nominations (Cohen et al. 2008; Masket 2011; Bawn et al. 2012; Hassell 2015), and it is possible that this power underlies the reduction in dimensionality in competitive partisan systems.

To evaluate this preference-oriented mechanism, I use estimates of ideology for a set of 720 local council members from 463 unique city councils. These estimates, which come from a survey of municipal officials, were generated by applying “Basic Space” scaling to a set of twelve local policy questions (Poole 1998).¹³ These policy questions, which cover issues like housing, public services, and economic growth, follow Einstein and Glick (2016) and are framed in terms of policy tradeoffs. For example, for housing, council members were asked to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with the following statement using a standard five-point likert scale:

Cities should invest in affordable housing, even if it negatively influences neighboring property values.

As Appendix D explains, across the full battery of policy questions, two issue dimensions emerge from the scaling process, the first corresponding to partisan ideology and the second associated with preferences for market-based public policy solutions (e.g., charter schools, service privatization, etc.). Throughout this section, I use ideology estimates from both of these dimensions to assess the relationship between party competition and ideologically extreme preferences.

While previous work has documented a relationship between two-party competition and more extreme ideological polarization (Aldrich and Battista 2002; Hinchliffe and Lee 2016),

¹³The survey, which was conducted in early 2017, was sent to all 8,364 elected officials identified by Project Vote Smart as serving in a municipal council. The 720 responses includes only the individuals who responded to the battery of policy questions and represent a response rate of nine percent. For more details about the survey instrument, sample of council members, and ideological scaling process, see Appendix D.

the current analysis has two advantages. First, by using ideology estimates in multiple dimensions, I can better account for preference change in a context where more than one dimension may be relevant for legislative behavior. This is important because—when competition wanes and parties become less central for politics—members may drift away from the party precisely on those issues that are less inherently partisan. Analyzing only the partisan dimension of conflict, however, would miss this type of ideological change.

Second, by evaluating council member preferences in both partisan and nonpartisan governments alike, I can determine whether existing evidence suggesting that competition fuels polarization is unique to partisan systems or is instead a function of the pool of candidates. Indeed, if council members in partisan and nonpartisan governments express similar preferences, regardless of the level of two-party competition in their local jurisdiction, then existing evidence showing that polarization is worse in competitive two-party contexts is unlikely to be a function of either the pool of candidates who run and win or any form of pressure that parties wield during nominations. Moreover, evidence of this kind would also suggest that the findings in the previous section cannot be attributed to a preference-oriented mechanism and instead must stem directly from parties using their power to prevent defections within the legislature.

One challenge to using survey-based ideology estimates in this context, however, is that because not all council members respond from each council, it is impossible to estimate polarization along either dimension directly for any particular city. To account for this problem, I focus my analysis specifically on differences in the relative extremity of council members' ideal points as a function of their context. To do so, I take the absolute value of each members ideal point for both estimated dimensions and use these measures as the dependent variable in my analysis.¹⁴

¹⁴The primary assumption necessary for this measure to be valid is that the decision to respond to the survey be uncorrelated with both the type of government (partisan or nonpartisan) and the level of partisan competition. Correlation of this kind would be a problem, for example, if extremists were more likely to respond in certain contexts because they viewed it as an opportunity for position-taking. Given the low-salience, academic nature of the survey, however, this sort of behavior seems unlikely. Moreover, that the results show nearly identical behavior in partisan and nonpartisan governments implies that—even if the

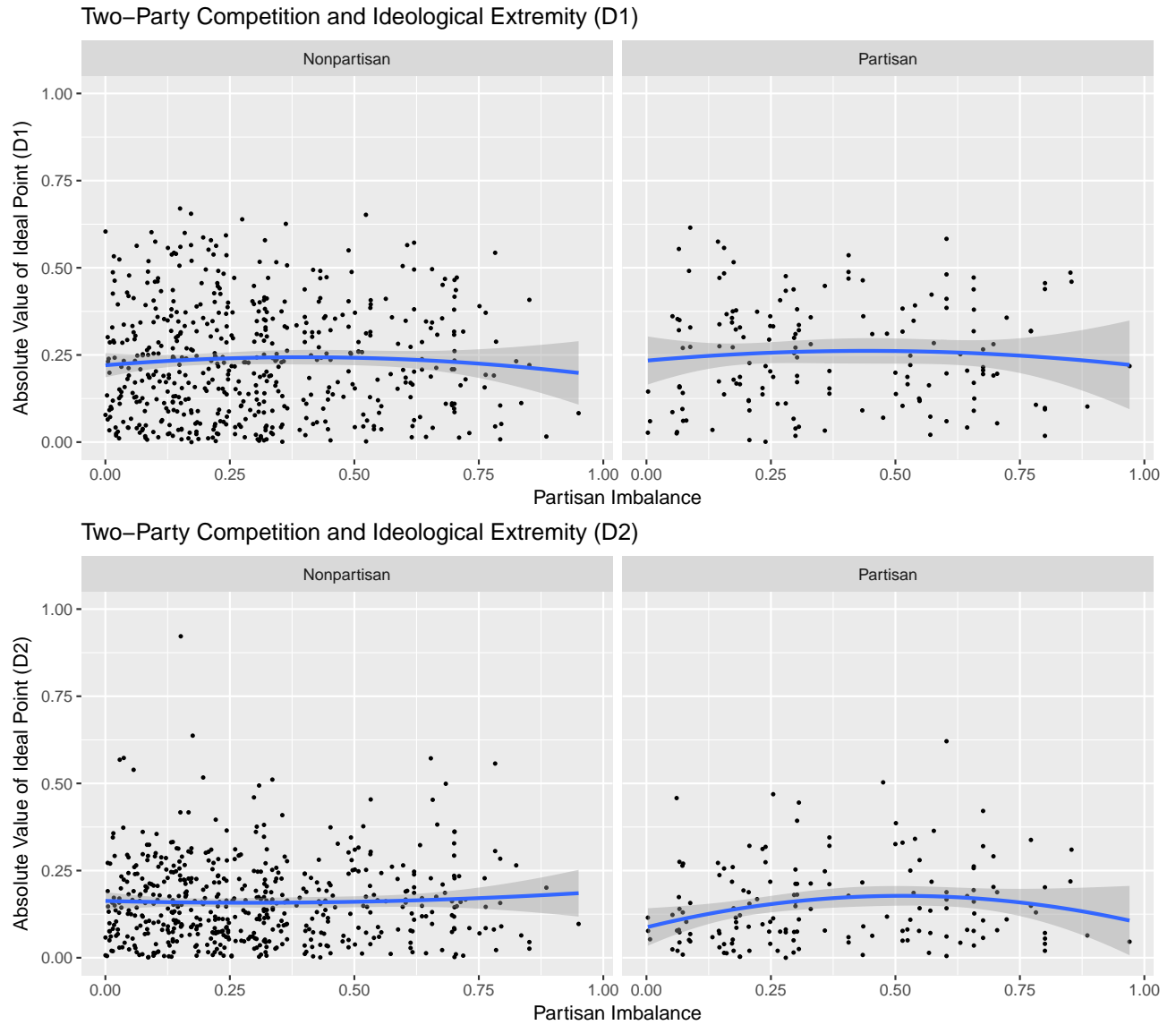
Ideological Extremity in Partisan and Nonpartisan Councils

If preference change were driving the results in the previous section, we would expect to see the expressed preferences of local council members be more ideologically extreme in competitive contexts. To test this hypothesis, Figure 4 depicts the bivariate relationship between partisan imbalance and the ideological extremity of council member ideal points for those serving in nonpartisan and partisan governments, respectively. To calculate ideological extremity, the first row uses the ideal points from the first estimated dimension and the second row uses the ideal points from the second dimension. As Figure 4 shows, for partisan governments, there is essentially no relationship between the level of competitive imbalance and ideological extremity, regardless of the ideological dimension, such that council members in more one-party dominant contexts are nearly identical to their counterparts in two-party contexts, on average. Moreover, as the right two panels show, this flat relationship is also present in nonpartisan governments, with little apparent difference across the two institutional contexts. This similarity in trends implies that the ideological distribution of council members in partisan and nonpartisan governments is similar and casts doubt on the hypothesis that preference change underlies the increase in factional behavior in institutionally partisan, one-party dominant governments.

To account for factors that might be confounding the simple bivariate relationship, Table 2 presents results from a series of regressions in which the absolute value of each council member's first and second dimension ideal points are used as the dependent variables. As with the analysis in the previous section, I include an interaction term between the use of partisan elections and local partisan imbalance to estimate the trends separately for partisan and nonpartisan governments. The first and third columns model this relationship hierarchically, with covariates at both the individual council member and city level. The second and fourth columns omit the group-level intercepts and instead cluster the standard

decision to respond is correlated with the level of competition—a preference-based mechanism is unlikely to explain the observed differences in dimensionality in the previous section.

Figure 4: Two-Party Competition and the Ideological Extremity of Council Members in Two Dimensions



errors by city. Modeling the relationship in one of these two ways is necessary to account for correlation among council members responding from the same city. For all specifications, I include a set of legislator-specific covariates, including sex, race, and party. In addition, I also include all of the city-level covariates used in the previous section, with the exception of council size and the total number of contested votes, which were used to account for error in measuring dimensionality.

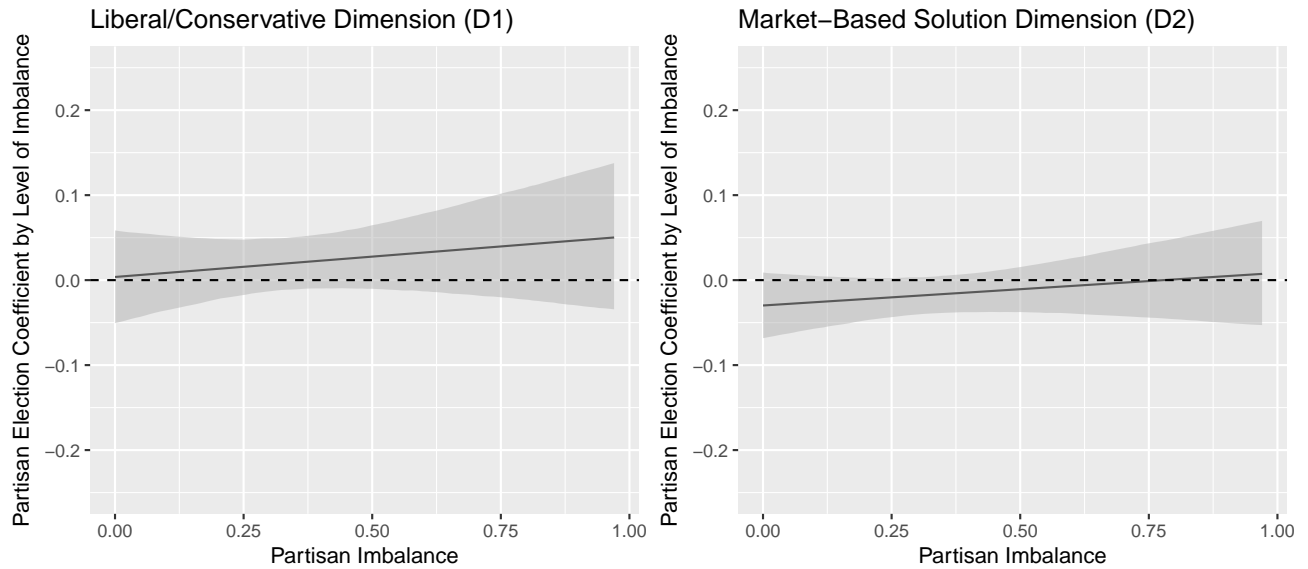
Consistent with the raw data, Table 2 shows little evidence of a difference in the relationship between partisan imbalance and ideological extremity across partisan and nonpartisan governments. This is true for both ideological dimensions and regardless of the model specification. Figure 5 illustrates this point by depicting the marginal effect of a council member being elected in a city that uses partisan elections across all levels of partisan imbalance. While there is some evidence of an increasing trend, such that elected officials in partisan governments are more extreme than nonpartisan officials as one party dominates, the largest differences tend to be at the highest and lowest values of partisan imbalance, where there are fewer observations and the variance is substantial. That the relationship is nearly identical in each context and across both dimensions implies that the types of politicians who run and win at the local level tend to have similarly extreme preferences, regardless of institutional context. Importantly, this suggests that differences in preferences cannot explain the differences in factional voting behavior because there simply are not any significant differences in preferences to begin with. This does not mean, of course, that all council members are strong ideological partisans. Rather, it suggests that the differences in factional behavior documented in this paper are likely a function of whether parties have sufficient institutional power to influence their members when they seek to defect.

Table 2: Regression Estimates: Ideological Extremity and Local Partisan Competition

	D1 Extremity		D2 Extremity	
	Hierarchical	OLS	Hierarchical	OLS
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Partisan Elections	0.003 (0.03)	0.004 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.03 (0.02)
Partisan Imbalance	0.07 ⁺ (0.04)	0.06 (0.04)	0.02 (0.03)	0.02 (0.03)
Partisan Elec. * Imbalance	0.05 (0.07)	0.04 (0.06)	0.04 (0.05)	0.04 (0.05)
Female	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Non-Hispanic White (CM)	0.001 (0.02)	0.0004 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Party-Republican	0.05** (0.01)	0.05** (0.02)	0.03** (0.01)	0.03** (0.01)
Party-Independent	-0.05* (0.02)	-0.06** (0.02)	0.001 (0.02)	0.001 (0.02)
log(Total Population)	0.03 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
% Non-White	-0.09 ⁺ (0.05)	-0.09* (0.04)	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.03)
% 4-year College	0.11** (0.04)	0.11** (0.04)	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.02)
log(Direct Expenditures)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Government Scope	0.04 (0.07)	0.05 (0.07)	0.01 (0.05)	0.01 (0.05)
Constant	0.09 (0.09)	0.07 (0.08)	0.08 (0.06)	0.08 (0.06)
Clustered SE	No	Yes	No	Yes
N	675	675	675	675
R ²		0.07		0.03
F Statistic (df = 12; 662)		4.08**		1.62 ⁺
Log Likelihood	275.94		470.12	

⁺p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01

Figure 5: Marginal Effect of Partisan Elections on the Ideological Extremity of Local Council Members Across All Levels of Party Competition



Discussion

In this paper, I have argued that one-party rule weakens the institutional power of parties, which allows for new legislative factions and cleavages to emerge. Specifically, the empirical analysis shows that when one party rules, voting patterns in partisan legislatures are less one-dimensional. This means that voting coalitions within each council are more likely to shift from issue to issue. Importantly, this relationship is not present within nonpartisan councils and I find no evidence that members of either nonpartisan or one-party councils are more ideologically extreme than their partisan and two-party counterparts. This suggests that competition influences legislative organization through weakening the institutional capacity of parties rather than by changing the underlying preferences of their members.

These findings are important because the manner in which legislators are divided into factions matters for both the political process and the policies that emerge from it. If there are only two factions, or parties, we should expect different outcomes than if cleavages are constantly changing (Schattschneider 1960), and these different outcomes may present challenges for a functioning, equal Republic. Indeed, in the cases where scholars have studied

highly factional legislative environments that lack strong, stable coalitions, they have found that representation can suffer. Key (1949), for example, argues that the high-dimensional environment found in certain Southern states opened up the government to special interests and prevented the government from pursuing long-term programs or policy change, while Simpson (2001) shows that disorganized politics of this kind can facilitate corruption and graft. Importantly, the evidence suggests that these types of unstable policy contexts create risk for individuals and businesses, creating little incentive for either to establish roots in a particular jurisdiction. Indeed, few benefit when government is essentially a lottery over policy outcomes, and, even for those who do, such benefits may not last for long.

Still, despite these potential concerns, recent work has argued that—with robust primary competition—representation may still be possible in one-party contexts (Caughey 2018), which raises the question: absent two-party competition, what types of intraparty cleavages emerge and along which issues are the factions most divided? This question is particularly important at the local level, where there are a number of potential cleavages that urban politics scholars have documented as being important for local electoral politics, such as race (Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1986; Sonenshein 1993; Kaufmann 2004; Barreto 2007; Hajnal and Trounstine 2014; Trounstine 2016), business or economic growth (Molotch 1976; Friedland and Palmer 1984; Stone 1989), and ideological progressivism (DeLeon 1992; Clavel 2010). Given the salience of these divides for local electoral politics, it is reasonable to think that they might gain traction when one (or no) party rules. However, in which contexts and under what conditions they do so remains unclear. Future work, in turn, should continue to leverage newly available sources of local data to better understand the dynamics of legislative politics without two-party competition and to explore the substantive reality of these contexts for representation and governance.

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