Supplemental Information for Laboratories of Democratic Backsliding

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June 29, 2022

A1 Data Sources

Table A1: Data Sources for Democracy Indicators

Indicator	Source
Automatic Voter Registration (any)	McGhee, Hill, and Romero 2021
Automatic Voter Registration (back end)	McGhee, Hill, and Romero 2021
District compactness	Kaufman, King, and Komisarchik 2019
early voting	Correlates of State Policy
Election data completeness	MIT Election Lab
felony disenfranchisement	Correlates of State Policy
Gerrymandering: declination (Cong.)	Warshaw and Stephanopolous 2020
Gerrymandering: declination (Cong.-Pres.)	Warshaw and Stephanopolous 2020
Gerrymandering: declination (state leg.)	Warshaw and Stephanopolous 2020
Gerrymandering: declination (state leg.-pres.)	Warshaw and Stephanopolous 2020
Gerrymandering: Efficiency gap (Cong.)	Warshaw and Stephanopolous 2020
Gerrymandering: Efficiency gap (Cong.-Pres.)	Warshaw and Stephanopolous 2020
Gerrymandering: Efficiency gap (state leg.)	Warshaw and Stephanopolous 2020
Gerrymandering: Efficiency gap (state leg.-pres.)	Warshaw and Stephanopolous 2020
Gerrymandering: mean-median difference (Cong.)	Warshaw and Stephanopolous 2020
Gerrymandering: mean-median difference (Cong.-Pres.)	Warshaw and Stephanopolous 2020
Gerrymandering: mean-median difference (state leg.)	Warshaw and Stephanopolous 2020
Gerrymandering: mean-median difference (state leg.-pres.)	Warshaw and Stephanopolous 2020
Gerrymandering: partisan symmetry (Cong.)	Warshaw and Stephanopolous 2020
Gerrymandering: partisan symmetry (Cong.-Pres.)	Warshaw and Stephanopolous 2020
Gerrymandering: partisan symmetry (state leg.)	Warshaw and Stephanopolous 2020
Gerrymandering: partisan symmetry (state leg.-pres.)	Warshaw and Stephanopolous 2020
military and overseas ballots not returned	MIT Election Lab
military and overseas ballots rejected	MIT Election Lab
No-fault absentee voting	Correlates of State Policy
number of felons ineligible to vote as percent of state population	Correlates of State Policy
online registration	MIT Election Lab
Opinion-policy difference (economic)	Caughey and Warshaw 2018
Opinion-policy difference (social)	Caughey and Warshaw 2018
percent of eligible voters who register	MIT Election Lab
postelection audit required	MIT Election Lab
provisional ballots cast	MIT Election Lab
provisional ballots rejected	MIT Election Lab
registration or absentee ballot problems (off-year)	MIT Election Lab
registration or absentee ballot problems (on-year)	MIT Election Lab
registrations rejected	MIT Election Lab
Restrictions on voter reg. drives	Brennan Center
Same day registration	Grumbach and Hill 2021
State allows currently incarcerated to vote	National Conference of State Legislatures
under- and over-votes cast in an election	MIT Election Lab
voter ID (any)	Grumbach and Hill 2021
voter ID (strict)	Grumbach and Hill 2021
voters deterred because of disability or illness (off-year)	MIT Election Lab
voters deterred because of disability or illness (on-year)	MIT Election Lab
voting wait times	MIT Election Lab
website for absentee status	MIT Election Lab
website for precinct ballot	MIT Election Lab
website for provisional ballot check	MIT Election Lab
website for registration status	MIT Election Lab
website with polling place	MIT Election Lab
Youth preregistration	National Conference of State Legislatures

A2 Additional Construct Validation

Figure A1: Correlation with Cost of Voting Index

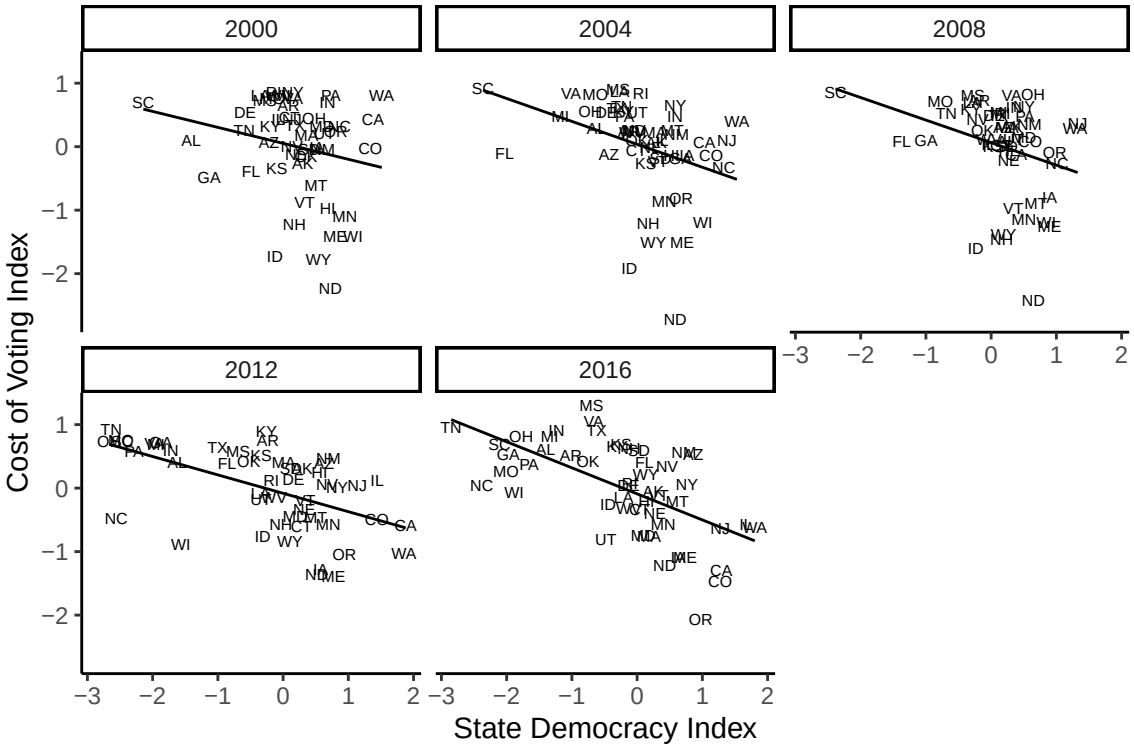
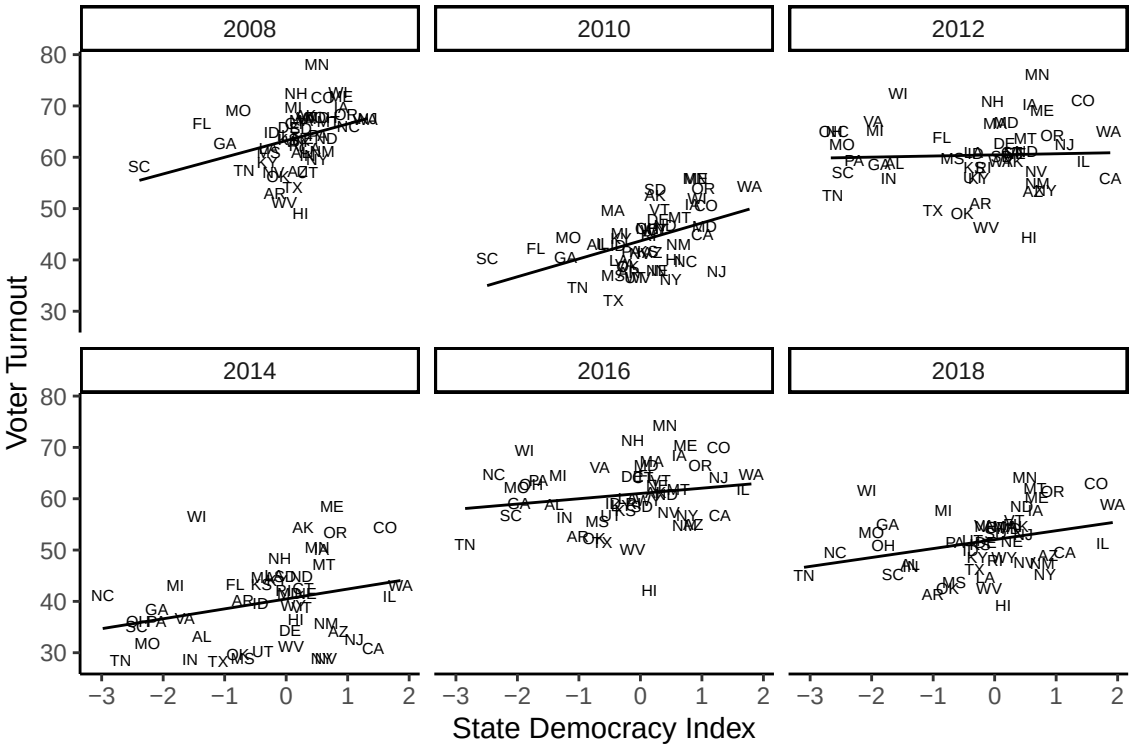


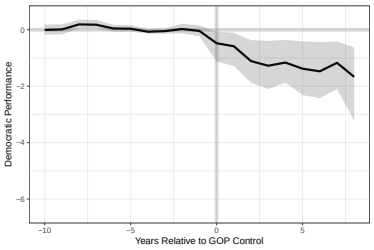
Figure A2: Correlation with Turnout of VEP



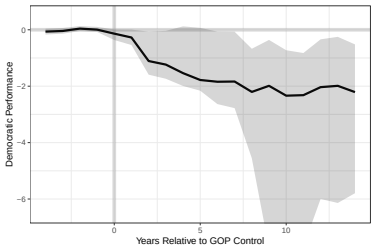
A3 Additional Synthetic Control Specifications

Figure A3: Effect of GOP Control Using Alternative Synthetic Control Specifications

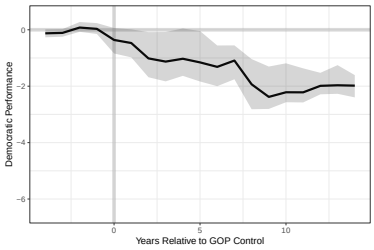
(a) Min. Pre-Treat Period = 6



(b) Min. Pre-Treat Period = 5



(c) Min. Pre-Treat Period = 4



Note: Panels (a) through (c) plot generalized synthetic control estimates, each varying the number of minimum pre-treatment periods required for a state to be included in the analysis.

A4 Additional Results

A4.1 Additive Democracy Index

Table A2: Main Results with Alternative Democracy Measure

	Outcome: State Democracy Score (Additive)						
	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**	**Model 4**	**Model 5**	**Model 6**	**Model 7**
competition_allleg_lag	0.141			0.111	0.140	0.103	0.061
	(0.120)			(0.116)	(0.104)	(0.119)	(0.133)
polarization_avg		0.037		0.050	0.066	0.067	0.055
		(0.141)		(0.120)	(0.106)	(0.132)	(0.124)
Republican			−0.440**	−0.430**	−0.418**	−0.424**	−0.472**
			(0.147)	(0.148)	(0.149)	(0.142)	(0.163)
competition_allleg_lag:polarization_avg					0.101		
					(0.080)		
polarization_avg:Republican						−0.075	
						(0.212)	
competition_allleg_lag:Republican							0.153
							(0.166)
Constant	−1.583***	−1.550***	−1.419***	−1.399***	−1.411***	−1.391***	−1.395***
	(0.060)	(0.111)	(0.083)	(0.129)	(0.127)	(0.132)	(0.130)
N	833	833	833	833	833	833	833
R-squared	0.776	0.773	0.791	0.793	0.795	0.794	0.795
Adj. R-squared	0.757	0.753	0.773	0.775	0.777	0.775	0.776

A4.2 Alternative Competition Measure: Electoral Competition

Table A3: Main Results with Electoral Competition Measure

	Outcome: State Democracy Score						
	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**	**Model 4**	**Model 5**	**Model 6**	**Model 7**
competition_votes_lag	0.111			0.065	0.066	0.067	0.139*
	(0.059)			(0.061)	(0.070)	(0.058)	(0.062)
polarization_avg		0.014		0.048	0.047	0.061	0.039
		(0.134)		(0.117)	(0.119)	(0.123)	(0.117)
Republican			−0.470**	−0.450**	−0.450**	−0.444**	−0.415**
			(0.165)	(0.171)	(0.169)	(0.166)	(0.155)
competition_votes_lag:polarization_avg					0.002		
					(0.054)		
polarization_avg:Republican						−0.061	
						(0.197)	
competition_votes_lag:Republican							−0.262*
							(0.123)
Constant	−0.578***	−0.609***	−0.454***	−0.407**	−0.407**	−0.402**	−0.464***
	(0.077)	(0.118)	(0.094)	(0.135)	(0.135)	(0.136)	(0.117)
State FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	833	833	833	833	833	833	833
R-squared	0.667	0.663	0.687	0.689	0.689	0.689	0.697
Adj. R-squared	0.639	0.634	0.660	0.661	0.661	0.661	0.670

***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05

A5 Conceptualizing Democracy

Democracy is a broad concept, so a helpful way to get conceptual traction is to break its definition into component parts. Mainstream scholars of American politics have tended to conceptualize of democracy through the lenses of *elections* and public opinion most prominently. This is the case among quantitative American politics and political economy scholars (e.g., Downs 1957; Lax and Phillips 2012; Gilens and Page 2014; Achen and Bartels 2016), but earlier qualitative Americanists also put their main focus on elections and how they translate into legislative seats (e.g., Dahl 2003).[1]

In this tradition, electoral policies help serve as indicators for how democracy is performing. Some of these are policies and procedures that set the rules of the game. Election laws can make it easy and simple, or difficult and costly, for members of the polity to exercise their most important form of political participation, their vote. Districts can be gerrymandered, compacting and diluting votes in ways to make their influence over who serves in office highly unequal. Other indicators of democratic performance are not rules about democratic inputs, but rather measures of democratic outputs. Prominently, a bevy of studies has investigated the correspondence between the policy and ideological attitudes of constituents on the one hand, and politician behavior and policy outcomes on the other (e.g., Erikson, Wright, and McIver 1993; Gilens 2012; Lax and Phillips 2012; Caughey and Warshaw 2018).

However, other scholars have relied on broader conceptualizations of democracy. With a wider geographic focus, comparativists have put in considerable effort to conceptualize—and measure—democracy and democratic performance. Most prominently, the V-Dem group has conceptualized five different components of democracy: elections, liberalism, participation, deliberation, and egalitarianism. Democracy requires rights, which limit what electoral and legislative majorities can do (Estlund 2009; Brettschneider 2010). This is the *liberalism* component. The most important rights in the liberalism tradition are usually negative rights, that is, freedom from state encroachment in rights to speech, association, belief, and other areas.[2]

In this article, we use electoral, liberal, and participatory conceptualizations of democracy, and do not focus on deliberation or egalitarianism. Still, we emphasize that there have been important critiques that liberalism does not capture the realization of rights in practice, and that liberal democratic regimes have depended on national prosperity derived from imperialism, racial exploitation, and the exclusion of nonwhite peoples (Mills 2017).[3]

[1] A focus on leaders in "competition for votes" is also central to Schumpeter (1942).

[2] The democratic component of liberalism is especially concerned that a 'tyranny of the majority' would violate the rights of minorities. Shapiro (2009) suggested that "nondenomination," itself closely related to liberalism, be a key tenet of democracy. Feminist theories of liberal democracy suggest that reproductive rights are necessary for women to be equal democratic citizens (Phillips 1991; Craske, Molyneux, and Afshar 2002). Some scholars have also suggested that protecting the owners of capital is also an important minority consideration (North 1981; Weingast 2016).

[3] To varying degrees, scholars in the liberal tradition have addressed such critiques by emphasizing *equality* of those rights under law—and the realization of rights in practice. Smith (1993) emphasized that the disconnect between the liberal understandings of American democracy and historical race and gender hierarchies necessitates the tracing of "multiple traditions" in American civic identity. King (2009) extended this idea, suggesting that dynamics in American democracy could be illuminated by looking at immigration policy and who it determined to be a full member of the polity. These debates over liberalism help to conceptualize the

The richest dive into the democratic performance of states in recent years has been that of Michener (2018), who points to individuals' interactions and experiences with state government as central to democratic performance. This article takes a related but distinct route in empirically investigating democracy in the states, addressing *de jure* laws (e.g., election law), implementation (e.g., gerrymandering), and observed democratic outcomes (e.g., the correspondence between opinion and policy) over time.

egalitarianism component of democracy. Democracy may depend on both procedural rules and substantive outcomes (Brettschneider 2010). Furthermore, the centrality of chattel slavery and racial hierarchy to the history of the United States has led American scholars across a variety of disciplines to focus explicitly on the rights and equities of African Americans as key markers of democratic performance (Foner 1988; Shelby 2005). Such analysis has broadly investigated racial democracy in terms of the right to vote (e.g., Kousser 1974), civil liberties (e.g., Francis 2014), and the distribution of social and economic capital (e.g., DuBois 1935; Glaude Jr. 2017). Further research has linked institutional racism and authoritarianism, both in the Jim Crow era of pervasive lynching (Mickey 2015), as well as the post-civil rights era (Parker and Towler 2019).

A6 Replication with Measures Covering Liberal and Egalitarian Democracy

A6.1 Extending Measure to Liberal Democracy

In section A5, we described the electoral, liberal, and egalitarian subcomponents of democracy. In this section, we develop two new democracy measures that extend coverage to the liberal and egalitarian subcomponents, and use them to replicate our main results. The first of the two alternative measures builds on the original electoral democracy measure by adding indicators of *liberal* democracy. Figure A4 plots the discrimination parameters for the 61 indicators in this measure.

The indicators covering liberal democracy and freedom from authoritarian control come from different sources. Indicators related to criminal justice are from the Correlates of State Policy Database (Jordan and Grossmann 2016), as well as the Bureau of Justice Statistics and Institute for Justice. We also include state asset forfeiture ratings by the Institute for Justice "Policing for Profit" dataset.[4]

The discrimination parameters in Figure A4 suggest that a small number of indicators do not load well onto the latent democracy dimension (discrimination parameters close to zero). Although some indicators related to the carceral state, such as state incarceration rates and asset forfeiture ratings, load onto the democracy index well, others, such as three strikes laws and Black incarceration rates are orthogonal. This is suggestive evidence that that authoritarianism related to policing and incarceration might be a separate dimension of state democracy. A separate carceral authoritarianism dimension would be consistent with the results of Grumbach (2018), who finds that in contrast to many other policy areas (e.g., health care or gun control policy), criminal justice policy in the states has not shown much polarization by party.

Tables A4 and A5 show similar results to those with the main electoral democracy measure used in the article. The most important substantive difference in the results is that those using this liberal-electoral measure show somewhat smaller (and not as often statistically significant) effects of competition. The similarity of the overall results reflects the fact that the electoral democracy indicators load much more strongly in the measurement model than do the liberal democracy indicators, as seen in Figure A4.

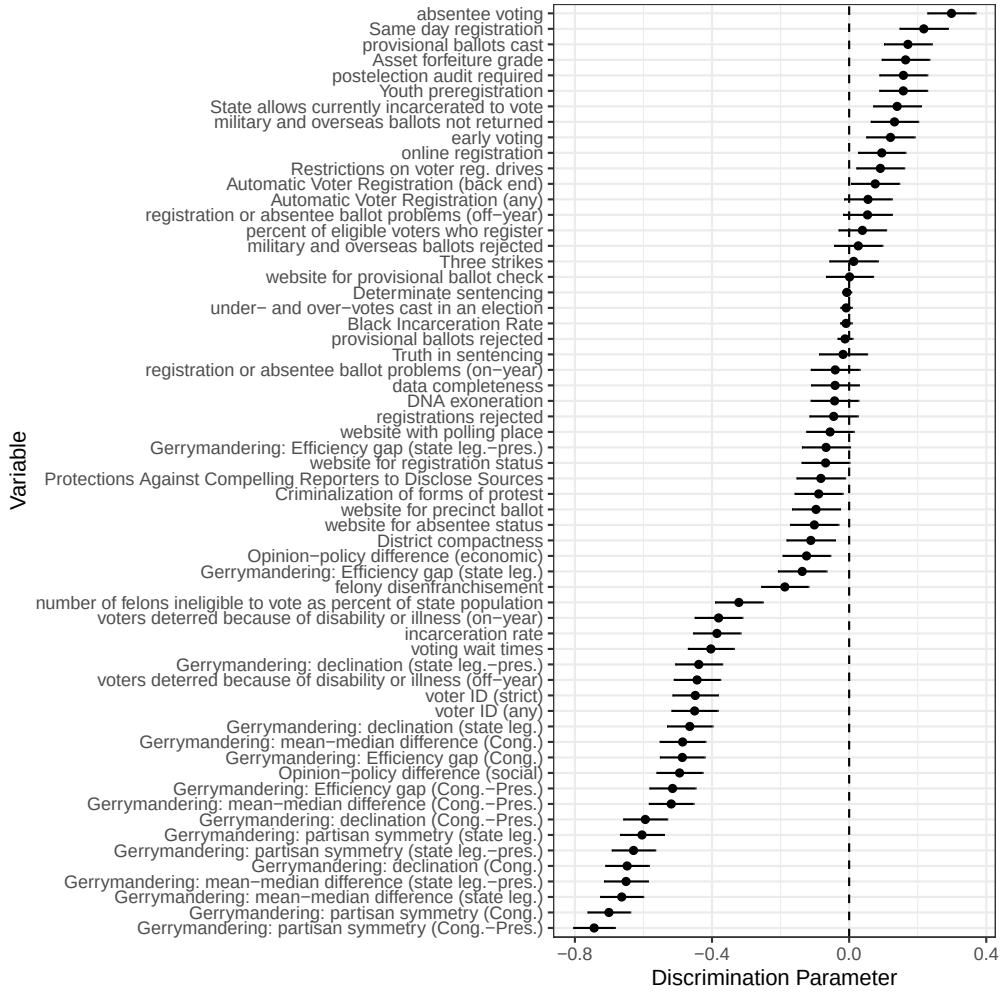
A6.2 Extending Measure to Egalitarian Democracy

The second alternative measure not only broadens the coverage of elements of liberal democracy, but also includes indicators of *egalitarian* democracy. This broader alternative measure is based on a total of 116 indicators. We then fit a model with the 116 indicators using the same Bayesian factor analysis specification as our main State Democracy Index measure.

Table A7 replicates our main analysis using this broader democracy measure. The results once again suggest a central role for Republican control of government, and little effect of competitiveness or polarization. However, unlike the results presented in this article, here

[4]Available at https://ij.org/report/policing-for-profit-3/policing-for-profit-data/

Figure A4: Factor Loadings of Democracy Indicators (Electoral and Liberal)



Note: Figure presents the discrimination parameter estimates and Bayesian credible intervals for indicators used in the State Democracy Index.

the interaction of polarization and Republican control is significant and relatively substantial (-0.150 standard deviations). In addition, the effect of Republican control is modestly smaller with this democracy measure. This is unexpected, because the broader democracy measure includes additional indicators related to liberalism and egalitarianism that correspond more closely to the left-right political spectrum, such as the dimension captured by measures of "state policy liberalism" (e.g., Erikson, Wright, and McIver 1993; Caughey and Warshaw 2016).

Readers may be skeptical, or have normative and theoretical reasons to weight particular democracy indicators differently than the equal weighting in the additive indices and data-driven weighting in the Bayesian factor analysis measures. To assuage this concern, we simulate 100,000 measures using the 51 indicators from the main State Democracy Index, and another 100,000 measures using the 116 indicators from the broadest democracy measure. In each simulated measure, we generate randomly generated weights between 0 and infinity

Table A4: Explaining Dynamics in Liberal & Electoral Democracy

	Outcome: State Democracy Score						
	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**	**Model 4**	**Model 5**	**Model 6**	**Model 7**
Competition	0.187			0.159	0.182	0.157	0.120
	(0.104)			(0.096)	(0.095)	(0.102)	(0.110)
Polarization		0.016		0.023	0.036	0.025	0.027
		(0.125)		(0.112)	(0.104)	(0.120)	(0.114)
Republican			−0.443**	−0.427**	−0.417**	−0.426**	−0.459**
			(0.154)	(0.151)	(0.154)	(0.147)	(0.176)
Competition × Polarization					0.081		
					(0.064)		
Polarization × Republican						−0.011	
						(0.187)	
Competition × Republican							0.120
							(0.199)
Constant	−0.785***	−0.762***	−0.617***	−0.620***	−0.629***	−0.619***	−0.617***
	(0.065)	(0.111)	(0.087)	(0.127)	(0.128)	(0.131)	(0.127)
State FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	833	833	833	833	833	833	833
R-squared	0.712	0.705	0.727	0.732	0.733	0.732	0.733
Adj. R-squared	0.687	0.680	0.704	0.708	0.709	0.708	0.709

***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05

for each democracy indicator, such that each simulation produces an additive index with different weighting of indicators. We then run the main difference-in-differences hypothesis tests on each of the simulated measures (this is analogous to the Bayesian boostrap). Figure A5 plots the distribution of coefficient estimates for the tests using each of the 100,000 simulated measures of each type. The "Electoral" measures use the 51 State Democracy Index measures, and the "Full" measures use the broader set of 116 indicators.

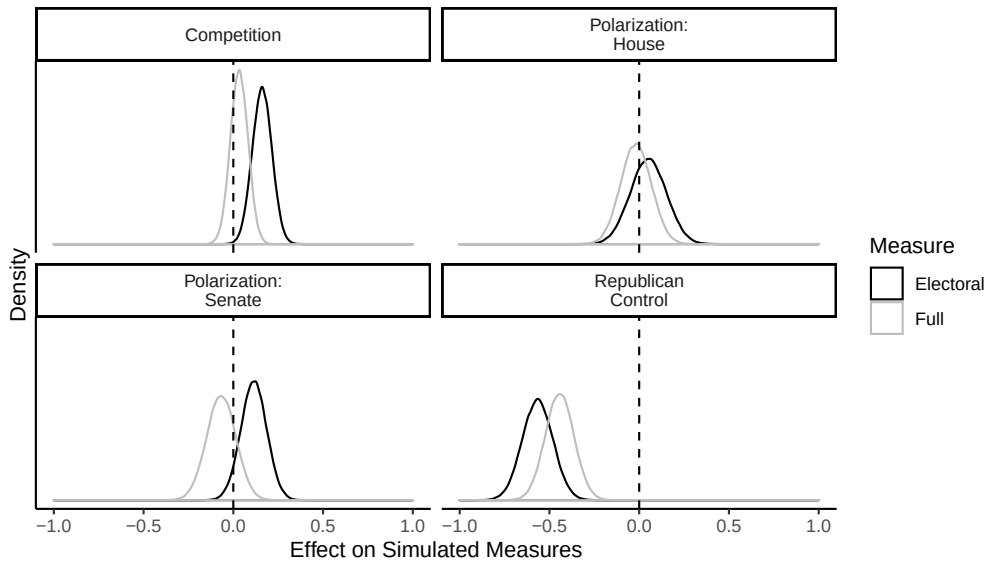
Figure A5 increases our confidence in the main results. Large proportions of coefficients from the hypothesis tests on the simulated measures are close to zero for the competition and polarization measures (an exception is competition's effect on simulated *Electoral Democracy* measures, which are consistently positive but modest). By contrast, Republican control of government has a large negative effect on democratic performance across the many simulated measures. The results, in other words, are robust to many, many different weighting schemes for the democracy indicators—and many different ways of quantitatively operationalizing the concept of democracy.

Table A5: Racial Demographic Change and State Liberal & Electoral Democracy

	Outcome: State Democracy Score			
	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**	**Model 4**
Δ % Black	−0.0001	−0.001	0.0005	0.001
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.005)	(0.003)
Δ % Latino	−0.001	0.0001	−0.0004	−0.004
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.003)
Competition		0.274		
		(0.140)		
Polarization			0.028	
			(0.177)	
Republican				−0.720**
				(0.221)
Δ % Black × Competition		0.001		
		(0.004)		
Δ % Latino × Competition		−0.002		
		(0.002)		
Δ % Black × Polarization			0.001	
			(0.003)	
Δ % Latino × Polarization			−0.001	
			(0.002)	
Δ % Black × Republican				−0.004
				(0.004)
Δ % Latino × Republican				0.007*
				(0.003)
Constant	−0.747***	−0.757***	−0.757***	−0.388*
	(0.168)	(0.167)	(0.164)	(0.179)
State FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	833	833	833	833
R-squared	0.705	0.713	0.705	0.734
Adj. R-squared	0.680	0.687	0.679	0.710

***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05

Figure A5: Effect of Republican Control on Simulated Democracy Measures



A7 Additional Discussion of Theories of Democratic Expansion and Contraction

A7.1 The Role of Competitive Parties

Does a competitive party system help or harm democracy? Schattschneider famously proclaimed that "[t]he political parties created democracy and modern democracy is un-

Table A6: Indicators in Full (Electoral, Liberal, and Egalitarian) Democracy Measure

Electoral Indicators	Liberal & Egalitarian Indicators
absentee ballots not returned	Abortion consent post-Casey
absentee ballots rejected	Abortion consent pre-Casey
absentee voting	Abortion insurance restriction
Automatic Voter Registration	Allows public breast feeding
data completeness	Asset forfeiture grade
District compactness	Ban on sanctuary cities
early voting	Black-white spatial segregation index
felony disenfranchisement	Black Incarceration Rate
Gerrymandering: declination (Cong.-Pres.)	black/white incarceration ratio
Gerrymandering: declination (Cong.)	Corporate contribution ban
Gerrymandering: declination (state leg.-pres.)	Criminalization of forms of protest
Gerrymandering: declination (state leg.)	Determinate sentencing
Gerrymandering: Efficiency gap (Cong.-Pres.)	DNA exoneration
Gerrymandering: Efficiency gap (Cong.)	Dollar limit on individual contributions per cycle
Gerrymandering: Efficiency gap (state leg.-pres.)	Dollar limit on PAC contributions per cycle
Gerrymandering: Efficiency gap (state leg.)	Emergency contraception
Gerrymandering: mean-median difference (Cong.-Pres.)	Fair employment comm.
Gerrymandering: mean-median difference (Cong.)	female/woman governor
Gerrymandering: mean-median difference (state leg.-pres.)	Gestation limit
Gerrymandering: mean-median difference (state leg.)	Hate Crime Law
Gerrymandering: partisan symmetry (Cong.-Pres.)	Higher ed spending
Gerrymandering: partisan symmetry (Cong.)	incarceration rate
Gerrymandering: partisan symmetry (state leg.-pres.)	income per capita
Gerrymandering: partisan symmetry (state leg.)	Inequality in life expectancy by income
military and overseas ballots not returned	interest group density
military and overseas ballots rejected	K-12 spending per pupil
number of felons ineligible to vote as percent of state population	Latino-white segregation index
online registration	legislative professionalism
percent of eligible voters who register	LGB Civil Unions or Marriage
postelection audit required	LGB Non-discrimination
provisional ballots cast	LGB Public accommodations
provisional ballots rejected	Limit on individual contributions
registration or absentee ballot problems	Limit on PAC contributions
registrations rejected	Medicaid covers abortion
Restrictions on voter reg. drives	number of individual bankruptcies
Same day registration	Opinion-policy difference (economic)
State allows currently incarcerated to vote	Opinion-policy difference (social)
under- and over-votes cast in on-cycle election	Parental notice
under- and over-votes cast in off-cycle election	Partial birth abortion ban
voter ID (any)	percent uninsured (health insurance)
voter ID (strict)	percent women in legislature
voters deterred because of disability or illness	Physician required
voting wait times	post-redistributional (post-tax and transfer) gini
website for absentee status	Poverty rate (black)
website for precinct ballot	Poverty rate (Latino)
website for provisional ballot check	Poverty rate (Native)
website for registration status	poverty rate (percent under FPL)
website with polling place	pre-redistributional (pre-tax and transfer) gini
Youth preregistration	Preemption of local minimum wage
	Preemption of local sick leave laws
	Protections Against Compelling Reporters to Disclose Sources
	Public funding elections
	Race discrimination ban public accomodations
	Repealed death penalty
	Right to work
	Same Sex Marriage Ban Constitutional Amendment
	Sodomy Ban
	state equal rights amendment
	state high court professionalism
	State Religious Freedom Restoration Act
	Three strikes
	Truth in sentencing
	unemployment
	union density
	Upward socioeconomic mobility
	Waiting period

Table A7: Main Results with Broad Democracy Measure

	Broader Democracy Measure						
	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**	**Model 4**	**Model 5**	**Model 6**	**Model 7**
competition_allleg_lag	0.032			0.016	0.032	0.0001	−0.044
	(0.064)			(0.058)	(0.058)	(0.062)	(0.071)
polarization_avg		−0.042		−0.027	−0.018	0.008	−0.020
		(0.080)		(0.063)	(0.056)	(0.066)	(0.066)
Republican			−0.276***	−0.273***	−0.267***	−0.261***	−0.324***
			(0.069)	(0.070)	(0.072)	(0.071)	(0.093)
competition_allleg_lag:polarization_avg					0.056		
					(0.048)		
polarization_avg:Republican						−0.150*	
						(0.065)	
competition_allleg_lag:Republican							0.186
							(0.112)
Constant	−1.543***	−1.567***	−1.444***	−1.463***	−1.470***	−1.448***	−1.458***
	(0.049)	(0.078)	(0.053)	(0.077)	(0.076)	(0.077)	(0.077)
N	833	833	833	833	833	833	833
R-squared	0.936	0.936	0.943	0.943	0.944	0.945	0.945
Adj. R-squared	0.931	0.931	0.939	0.938	0.939	0.940	0.941

***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05

thinkable save in terms of the parties." Scholars point to the consolidation of a competitive party system to explain large scale expansions of democracy in the U.S., Africa (Rakner and Van de Walle 2009), Europe (Mares 2015), and around the world (Weiner 1965). Intense competition for control of state legislatures in the late 19th and early 20th centuries may have provided crucial incentives for state governments to expand the franchise to women. As Teele (2018) argues, politicians have incentives to "enfranchise a new group if they are insecure in their current posts and looking for new ways to win, and if they believe they have a chance at mobilizing the newly enfranchised voters to support their party" (443). Similarly, the more competitive party system in the North is a potential reason for the region's incorporation of white working class and immigrant voters into local and state politics (Keyssar 2000). Beyond its state-sanctioned racial hierarchy, the one-party environment of the "Solid South" during Jim Crow was additionally problematic (Key 1949; Bateman, Katznelson, and Lapinski 2018; Olson 2020).

Furthermore, rational choice and quantitative scholars of American politics highlight the issue-bundling role of competitive parties in democratic systems. By aggregating voters and politicians into groups and reducing the dimensionality of politics (Poole and Rosenthal 1997), parties help solve collective action problems for voters, and social choice problems for legislators (Aldrich 1995). Translating mass preferences into governmental behavior is much more difficult absent this issue-bundling role of parties.[5] Voters rely on party cues in elections, and legislators rely on parties to avoid the "cycling" problem of choice in environments of multidimensional preferences (Shepsle and Weingast 1981).

On the other hand, party competition might provoke politicians to constrain democracy. The incentives for a party in government to stack the deck in its favor—by violating norms or changing the rules—are greatest when its hold on power is marginal. An important argument from Frances Lee (2009) suggests that these incentives from competition for legislative

[5]The behavioral analogue of this issue-bundling is the concept of "constraint" from Converse (1964).

majorities generates polarization through "partisan brinksmanship." Indeed, much scholarly and journalistic ink has been spilled about this hyperpartisan brinksmanship, in which legislators oppose any proposal from the outparty, no matter how reasonable or minor, using any and all procedural means at their disposal to do so. The precipitous increase in the use of the filibuster in the U.S. Senate over the past two decades might reflect such incentives.

Yet there has been little extension of Lee's theory to dynamics in democratic performance. Not only may parties facing intense competition use procedure to prevent outparty victories, they may have incentives to expand or contract democracy in their polity by manipulating the composition of the electorate or using the power of the state to hamper the ability of groups aligned with the outparty to organize and mobilize. We would not expect, for instance, the same attempts at manipulation in the 2000 presidential election in Florida were pre-election polls suggesting George W. Bush would cruise to a landslide in the state.

In recent years, we have seen many examples of competitive elections for state government that may have gone the other way under different levels of democratic performance. The 2018 Florida gubernatorial election between Democrat Andrew Gillum and Republican Ron DeSantis was decided by only about 30,000 votes out of over 8 million cast for the two candidates. In the same election, voters approved a ballot initiative to restore voting rights to previously incarcerated felons after the completion of their sentence—newly enfranchising over one million Floridians.[6] Had such a law been in effect in the 2018 gubernatorial election, and given the predicted partisanship and turnout of the newly enfranchised Floridians, the winner would have plausibly been Gillum instead of DeSantis. Not only would this have installed a Democratic governor; it would have prevented the unified control of government that currently provides Republicans great opportunity to change policy in the state. By contrast, an uncompetitive party system in Florida would have very different incentives. Republicans in government would not have to worry that reinstating the franchise for ex-felons would flip crucial elections. The same could be said of the 2018 Georgia gubernatorial election, where Stacey Abrams lost a close race after a series of potentially consequential polling place closures (Niesse and Thieme 2019).

North Carolina offers another potential case of competition influencing politicians' democratic incentives. Voter turnout in the state had been increasing throughout the 1990s and 2000s, and state legislative and gubernatorial elections were growing increasingly close as the Southern state transitioned from being a member of the 'Solid' South toward a more competitive party system and status as a swing state in presidential elections. In a rare sweep in this competitive climate, the state's new unified Republican government began implementing a series of changes to election policy beginning in 2011 that weakened democracy in the state.

A7.2 The Role of Polarization

While the prospect of the outparty taking power may give politicians incentives to expand or contract democracy, it matters how deep the ideological disagreements are between the parties. As the parties become more polarized, with Democrats becoming more liberal

[6] In 2019 the Republican-controlled Florida state legislature later passed legislation to preempt this re-enfranchisement; the decision was upheld by the Florida Supreme Court in 2020.

and Republicans more conservative, the partisan stakes of holding power—and the cost of losing it—grow dramatically. Scholars have investigated a number of potential causes of elite polarization, including racial realignment (Schickler 2016), mass polarization (Abramowitz and Webster 2016), and changes in the interest group environment (Hacker and Pierson 2010; Krimmel 2017). But regardless of its origins, the main idea here is that elite polarization, by deepening the divide between the parties' policy agendas, gives parties greater incentive to ensure that they win and their opponents lose. These strong incentives could lead the parties in government to look for new ways to influence the cost of voting in elections for different groups in their states.

As Lieberman et al. (2019, 2) argue, "hyperpolarization magnifies tendencies for the partisan capture of institutions that are supposed to exercise checks and balances but may instead be turned into unaccountable instruments of partisan or incumbent advantage." It generates conflict about and within oversight agencies and the judiciary. It "erodes norms" of institutional behavior, such as the judicious use of executive power and fair treatment on issues such as bureaucratic and judicial appointments—and the levers of democracy, itself (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018).

Polarization may be asymmetric or symmetric (Hacker and Pierson 2005; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006), but polarization is fundamentally about the *distance between the parties*. This distinction is helpfully illustrated in debates about the political causes of economic inequality. Measures of congressional polarization (e.g., the distance between each party's median legislator), as well as measures of the ideological position of just the median Republican in Congress, are both strongly correlated with economic inequality in the United States. McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal (2006) argue that increased ideological distance between the parties produces legislative gridlock, which "in turn can affect the government's capacity to reduce inequality" (172). O'Brian (2019), on the other hand, suggests a simpler and more direct explanation for rising inequality is the rightward movement of the Republican Party. In this article, we similarly adjudicate between a polarization-centered and a Republican-centered explanation in democratic performance in the states.[7]

A7.3 The Role of Groups and Party Coalitions

The logics behind a competition-democracy relationship or a polarization-democracy relationship are strong. But an alternative theoretical tradition offers a simpler explanation for dynamics in democratic performance focused on the configuration of *interests* within party coalitions. Some interests in society stand to lose (or at least not win as much) by ceding control over the levers of government to a wider circle of people. Economic elites and large business interests may see greater amounts of wealth or profit redistributed to

[7]As McCarty (2019, 12) defines them, "polarization generally refers to differences on policy issues, ideological orientations, or value systems, while...partisanship can be more general in that it may refer to any partiality one feels toward one's own party regardless of whether polarized preferences and attitudes are the source." Although the competition theory is more consistent with partisan incentives and the polarization theory with true ideological polarization, my analysis does not directly adjudicate between the distinct microfoundations of ideology versus partisanship.

the masses.[8] Groups in favor of racial or gender hierarchies do not wish to expand voting and other participatory rights to African Americans and women. This theory is historically bounded. In contrast to theories that "drop the proper nouns," here our theory leads me to a specific focus on the Republican Party, and the historical processes that led to its modern group coalition.

This theory applied to the modern Republican Party is closely related to what Hacker and Pierson (2020) call "plutocratic populism":

> Plutocrats fear democracy because they see it as imperiling their economic standing and narrowly defined priorities. Right-wing populists fear democracy because they see it as imperiling their electoral standing and their narrowly defined community. These fears would be less consequential if they were not packaged together within one of the nation's two major parties.

Rising economic inequality, which puts the economic interests of plutocrats increasingly at odds with those of an increasingly large majority of voters, weakens the wealthy's commitment to democratic institutions. It also means that the plutocratic coalition cannot simply appeal to its electoral base on economic and policy grounds. Instead, it must reach out to right-wing populists with appeals based on ethno-racial, religious, and national identity cleavages. (Indeed, parties that pursue the economic interests of a narrow slice of society in a democratic system need an agenda that is at least somewhat popular, hence right-wing populism.) Donald Trump, himself, provides a clear example of this process. Republican elites dislike many things about Trump, but they very much enjoy that he mobilizes voters and signs high-end tax cuts. Trump, on the other hand, has little in the way of a policy agenda outside of enriching his family, general anti-immigrant rhetoric, and, for lack of a better phrase, "owning the libs;"[9] he is a vehicle that allows plutocrats to more effectively partner with voters who enjoy his appeals to right-wing populism.

The most consequential forms of right-wing populism, both historically and in the contemporary U.S., are, of course, based in racism. Slaveowners and, later, wealthy white landowners and businessmen, stood to lose from solidaristic interracial movements, and made efforts to attract poorer whites into their political coalitions with the enticement of a "psychological wage" based in their position above black people in the racial hierarchy (DuBois 1935). On the other side of this struggle, civil rights activists such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Bayard Rustin, as well as labor leaders such as A. Philip Randolph and Walter Reuther, emphasized the linkages between race, class, and democracy, arguing that powerful interests exploit racial divisions for political gain (Frymer and Grumbach 2021).[10] Although psychological racism is pervasive in the American public and historical moments of interra-

[8] The Founders explicitly cited that this protection of "property" as a justification for counter-majoritarian institutions in the Constitution (see, e.g., Beard 1913; Dahl 2003).

[9] Ahler and Broockman (2017) provide evidence that to the extent Trump support is related to policy views, it is on the issue of immigration.

[10] As Martin Luther King argued, "the coalition that can have the greatest impact in the struggle for human dignity here in America is that of the Negro and the forces of labor, because their fortunes are so closely intertwined" ("Letter to Amalgamated Laundry Workers," January 1962).

cial solidarity have been rare,[11] major *shifts* in how racism affects politics and policy require additional mechanisms, such as entrepreneurial elites who strategically exploit mass racism.

Indeed, political candidates and elites in the contemporary period have made racial appeals that tap racism in the mass public (e.g., Mendelberg 2001; Hutchings and Jardina 2009; Haney-López 2015), and these racist attitudes are associated with reduced support for democratic institutions (Miller and Davis 2020). Elites can similarly "racialize" policy in many contexts, as is especially prominent in the politics of welfare (Gilens 2009; Brown 2013) and health care (Tesler 2016, Ch. 5). Republican-aligned elites seized the opportunity presented by the presence of the first black president. Despite Barack Obama's avoidance of racial discussion and consistent promotion of black respectability politics (Gillion 2016; Stephens-Dougan 2016), his presidency, rather than signaling the emergence of a "post-racial America," was met with a Republican Party that made gains by radicalizing on issues of race and immigration (Parker and Barreto 2014). In the contemporary period, elite racial appeals and frames are facilitated by a sophisticated conservative media ecosystem that consolidates the mass elements of the Republican Party (Martin and Yurukoglu 2017; Martin and McCrain 2019).

Other commentators have focused instead on the forces of "tribalism," a psychological process in which people hunker down into identity groups in a (real or perceived) zero-sum conflict with outgroups (Fukuyama 2018; Chua 2019). The rise of this "tribalism" has also been employed as evidence of the dangers of democracy and the benefits of elite rule (Geltzer 2018). An argument from a very distinct political tradition, but one that is similarly 'bottom-up,' comes from scholars who consider psychological proclivities toward white supremacy (or, more narrowly, anti-blackness) to be an existential features of human civilization. Historical ebbs and flows of "tribalism," however, are difficult to explain with a primary focus on the evolutionarily-derived wiring of the Homo sapien brain. While the context of demographic trends and the first black president may have been necessary conditions, the recent racial radicalization of the GOP appears is centrally about the elites who help to activate latent mass racism by stoking racial threat and resentment.

Finally, the plutocratic-populist partnership is viable in the contemporary period because of the institutional and human geography of the United States, where Republican votes 'count' more than Democratic votes due to Republican voters' geographic dispersion across legislative districts and prevalence in small states. This longstanding electoral advantage for more geographically dispersed voters is distinct from gerrymandering, where governments redraw district lines to create electoral advantage. Instead, in plurality electoral systems like that of the U.S., geographic clustering, or what Chen, Rodden et al. (2013) call "unintentional gerrymandering" (see also Rodden 2019), creates premiums or penalties by differing rates of "wasted" votes. Wasted votes are any votes beyond what it takes to win the election, 50% plus one in a two-candidate contest. The geographic dispersion of voters by party can be formally modeled to predict the legislative seat premium or penalty for a given party (Calvo and Rodden 2015).

The GOP has the geographic opportunity—based in patterns of slave and free state

[11] The *New York Times*' "1619 Project" surmises that "for the most part" black Americans "fought alone" in their struggle for justice (available from https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html).

Table A8: Explaining Democratic Expansion and Contraction in the States

Theory	*Measures*	*Predicted Effect on Democracy*
Competition	Competitiveness of elections or legislative majority	+ or -
Polarization	Distance between party legislative chamber medians	-
Racial threat	Change in state % Black and % Latino	-
Party	Republican control of government	-

borders, among other deep historical roots—to win state and federal elections with a nearly all white base.[12] While any party might be theoretically advantaged under an alternative geographic distribution of voters, in the U.S., the party more supportive of racial hierarchy has tended to be more geographically dispersed, and thus advantaged by electoral geography in a competitive two-party context (Calvo and Rodden 2015). This modern geography is the result of long term political-economic patterns of Indian removal (Frymer 2017), the slave plantation economy (Rothman 2005), and, in the 20th century, the rise of suburbanization and its interaction with race (Self 2005; Kruse 2013; Trounstine 2018)—which have combined to make white votes more pivotal in recent elections.[13]

Under this theory, the coalitional partnership between plutocrats and voters motivated by white (and related cultural) identity politics,[14] buttressed by electoral geography, leads to a clear prediction: Republican control of government will be democracy-reducing.

Table A8 summarizes the predictions of the three major theories of democratic dynamics that we test.

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[12]The only Republican presidential candidate since George H.W. Bush to win the popular vote, George W. Bush in 2004, won 44% of the Latino vote.

[13]Despite headlines about a "big sort" of Americans into ideologically homogeneous communities (Bishop 2009), there is a large body of evidence that residential choices are constrained and dominated by non-ideological preferences (Mummolo and Nall 2017; Martin and Webster 2018). Current geographic dispersion and "unintentional gerrymandering" are mostly not the result of residential sorting.

[14]we do not wish to downplay the importance of gender, sexuality, religion, and even cultural identities such as being a gun owner, to mass attitudes. They are important in their own right, and in their interaction with beliefs about race (Filindra and Kaplan 2016).

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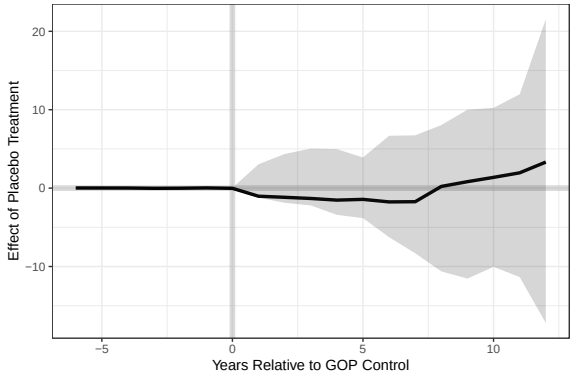
A8 Additional Robustness Checks

Figure A6: Synthetic Control Placebo Results

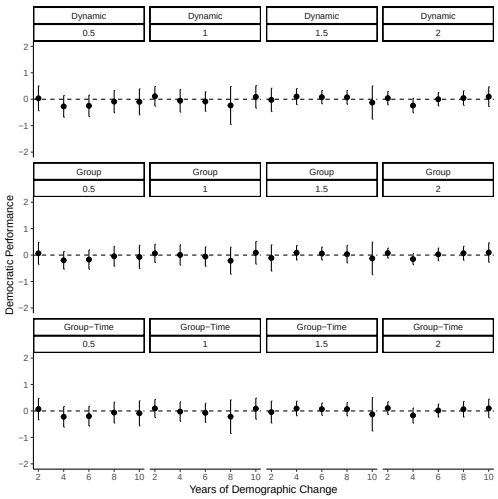


Note: Plot shows results of a generalized synthetic control specification in which a random set of states are assigned a placebo treatment with a probability of 0.5 in a (uniform) random year between 2000 and 2018.

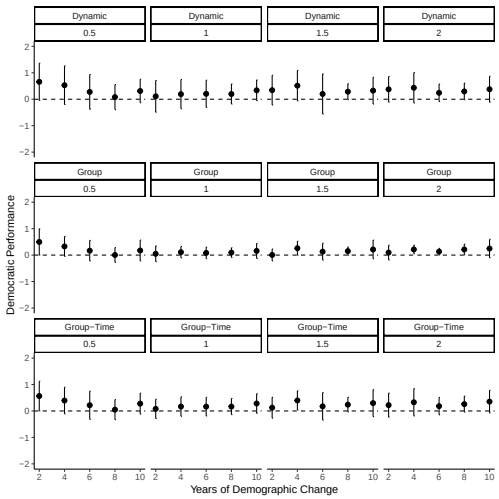
A8.1 Additional Callaway & Sant'Anna Difference-in-Differences Specifications

Figure A7: Effect of Competition and Polarization Using Callaway & Sant'Anna Estimator

(a) Effect of Competition on Democratic Performance



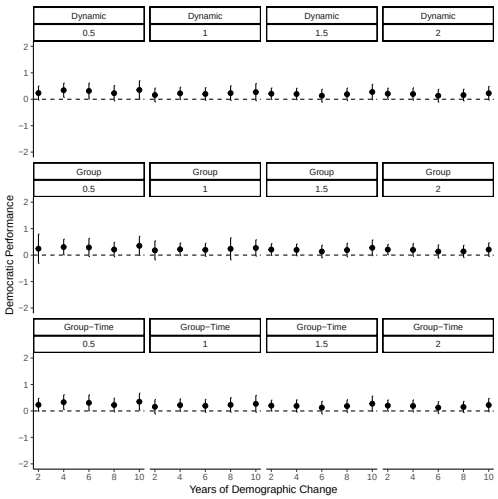
(b) Effect of Polarization on Democratic Performance



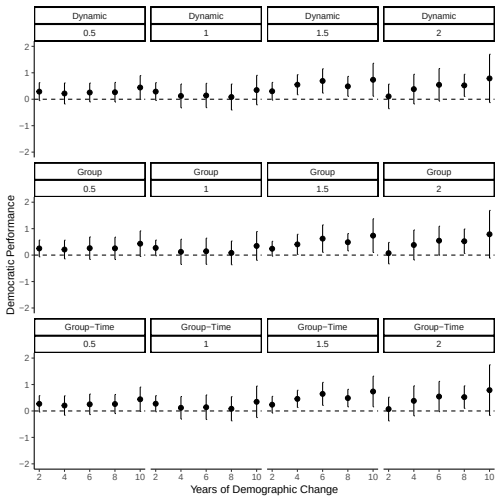
Note: Panel (a) shows the effect of partisan competition. Panel (b) shows the effect of polarization. Both panels use discretized treatment variables and ATT aggregation methods from Callaway and Sant'Anna (2020). Each panel shows the results from a particular Callaway and Sant'Anna (2020) ATT aggregator (Dynamic, Group, or Group-Time). The x-axis defines different time windows of change in the treatment variable (2, 4, 6, 8, and 10 years). The facet groupings represent different discrete thresholds for a state-year to be coded as treated (0.5, 1, 1.5, or 2 standard deviations of change).

Figure A8: Effect of Demographic Change Using Callaway & Sant'Anna Estimator

(a) Effect of Δ % Black on Democratic Performance



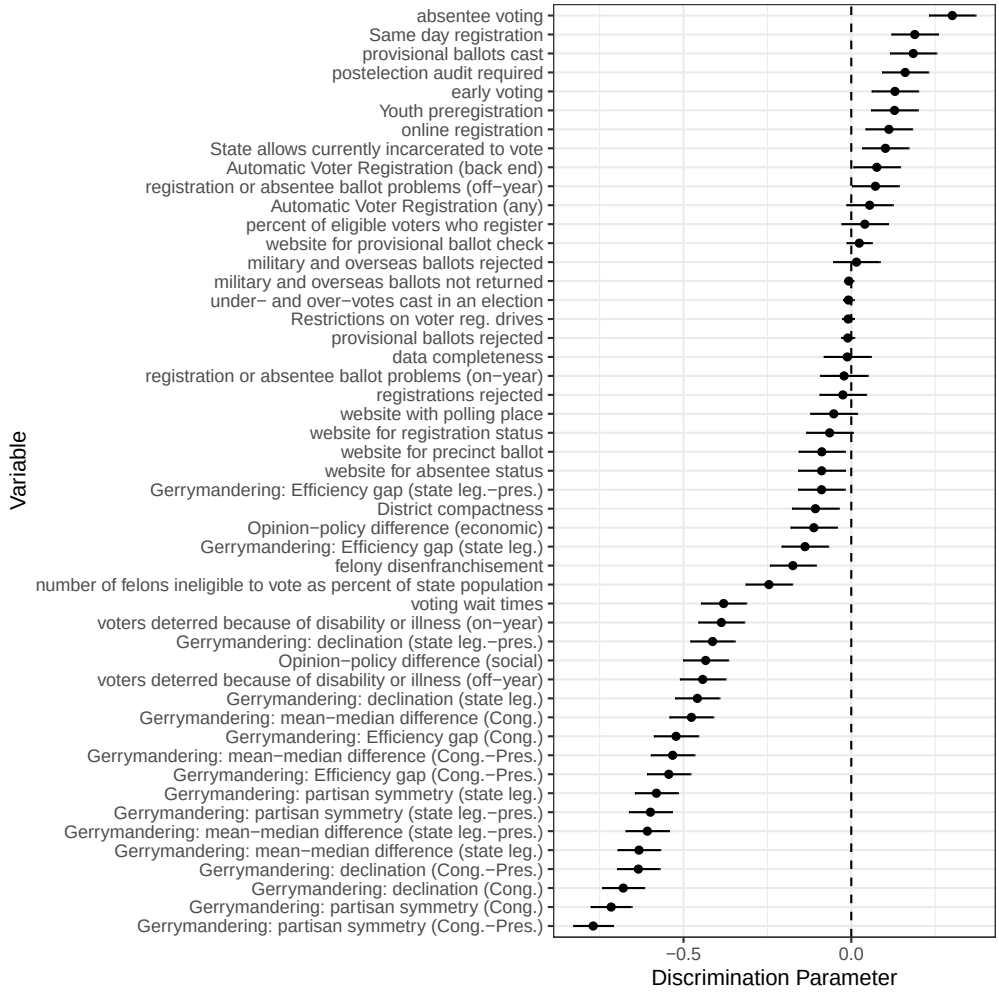
(b) Effect of Δ % Latino on Democratic Performance



Note: Panel (a) shows the effect of change in Black population. Panel (b) shows the effect of change in Latino population. Both panels use discretized treatment variables and ATT aggregation methods from Callaway and Sant'Anna (2020). Each panel shows the results from a particular Callaway and Sant'Anna (2020) ATT aggregator (Dynamic, Group, or Group-Time). The x-axis defines different time windows of change in the treatment variable (2, 4, 6, 8, and 10 years). The facet groupings represent different discrete thresholds for a state-year to be coded as treated (0.5, 1, 1.5, or 2 standard deviations of change).

A8.2 Robustness Checks with Measure Excluding Voter ID

Figure A9: Factor Loadings of Democracy Indicators (Excluding Voter ID)



Note: Figure presents the discrimination parameter estimates and Bayesian credible intervals for indicators used in an alternative measurement model that excludes indicators of voter ID.

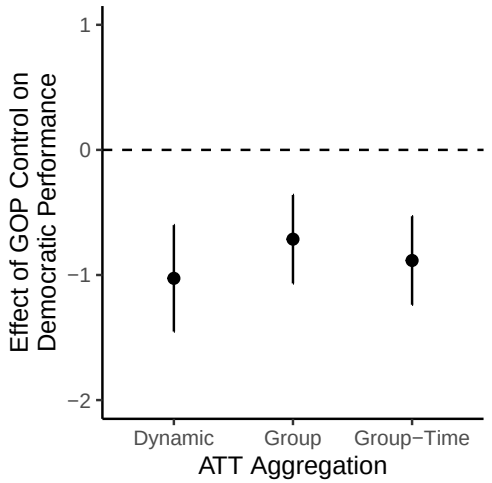
Table A9: Results Using Democracy Measure that Excludes Voter ID

	democracy_novoterid						
	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**	**Model 4**	**Model 5**	**Model 6**	**Model 7**
competition_allleg_lag	0.220*			0.190	0.215*	0.191	0.160
	(0.102)			(0.097)	(0.100)	(0.105)	(0.111)
polarization_avg		0.058		0.061	0.075	0.060	0.064
		(0.144)		(0.135)	(0.126)	(0.136)	(0.137)
Republican			−0.441**	−0.422*	−0.412*	−0.423**	−0.448*
			(0.169)	(0.165)	(0.168)	(0.159)	(0.189)
competition_allleg_lag:polarization_avg					0.087		
					(0.068)		
polarization_avg:Republican						0.003	
						(0.208)	
competition_allleg_lag:Republican							0.092
							(0.207)
Constant	−0.664***	−0.613***	−0.495***	−0.476***	−0.486***	−0.476**	−0.474***
	(0.074)	(0.122)	(0.101)	(0.143)	(0.144)	(0.148)	(0.144)
N	833	833	833	833	833	833	833
R-squared	0.644	0.635	0.656	0.663	0.665	0.663	0.664
Adj. R-squared	0.614	0.604	0.627	0.634	0.635	0.633	0.634

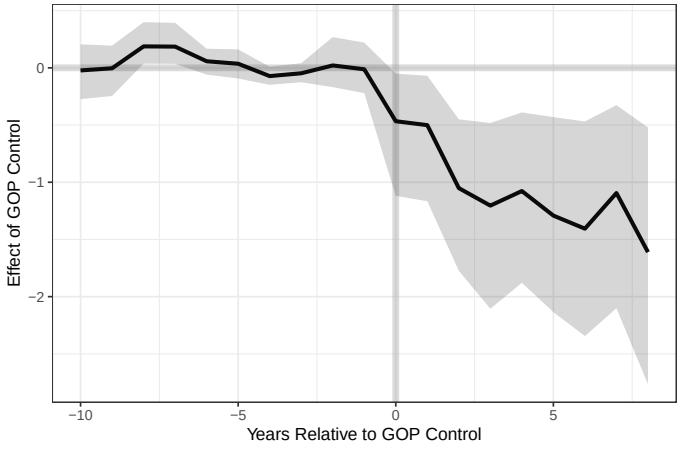
***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05

Figure A10: Effect of Republican Control on Democratic Performance Using Measure that Excludes Voter ID

(a) Republican Control Effect Using Callaway & Sant'Anna Estimator



(b) Republican Control Effect Using Synthetic Control



Note: These estimates use a democracy measure that excludes voter ID. Panel (a) shows results using the Callaway & Sant'Anna Estimator alternative ATT aggregation methods. Panel (b) shows the results of a generalized synthetic control analysis.

Table A10: Results Using Democracy Measure that Excludes Voter ID

	democracy_novoterid			
	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**	**Model 4**
pct_black_change	0.062	−0.026	0.132	0.133
	(0.266)	(0.282)	(0.400)	(0.270)
competition_allleg_lag		0.324*		
		(0.158)		
polarization_avg			0.032	
			(0.208)	
Republican				−0.708**
				(0.256)
pct_latino_change	−0.033	−0.003	−0.015	−0.182
	(0.218)	(0.208)	(0.219)	(0.202)
pct_black_change:competition_allleg_lag		0.006		
		(0.284)		
competition_allleg_lag:pct_latino_change		−0.122		
		(0.094)		
pct_black_change:polarization_avg			0.100	
			(0.233)	
polarization_avg:pct_latino_change			−0.014	
			(0.129)	
pct_black_change:Republican				−0.101
				(0.299)
Republican:pct_latino_change				0.310
				(0.167)
Constant	−0.635***	−0.629***	−0.639***	−0.329
	(0.174)	(0.176)	(0.177)	(0.180)
N	833	833	833	833
R-squared	0.635	0.646	0.636	0.662
Adj. R-squared	0.604	0.614	0.603	0.631

***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05