Electing Black Mayors:
Does Party Information Make a Difference?

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Abstract

Does party information affect minority electability? With nonpartisan ballots used in more than three-quarters of local elections, studies tend to overlook the importance of party when attempting to identify the central factors that influence minorities being elected to office. However, by coding newspaper articles about mayoral elections in the U.S. from 1990 to the present, I show that party information is often a central feature of partisan and nonpartisan contests alike. The importance of this finding should not be understated as the data reveals that an increase in voter access to party information substantially weakens the effect of an African American candidate's race on their electability. The implication of this is that minority candidates have tools that can be deployed to overcome racial prejudice and that local elections - even officially “nonpartisan” elections - are not as candidate-centered as many scholars have assumed.

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As a diverse society, who we elect is a vital indicator of our progress towards inclusion. Political leaders not only represent the "face" of our society, but also reflect how power and influence are distributed. Thus, it is not surprising that scholars have paid a great deal of attention to how voters respond to minority candidates in an attempt to identify the steps we can take to increase descriptive representation. In the context of U.S. local elections, most of this attention is focused on whether particular electoral systems create environments that are more or less advantageous to minority electability. Scholars initially exhibited a great deal of skepticism about the potential of minority candidates to win nonpartisan elections precisely because the absence of party would encourage voters to give greater consideration to physical attributes like race (Adrian 1952; Jennings and Zeigler 1966; Karnig 1976; Lieske and Hillard 1984). Since then, party and race have been the focus of a vast number of studies; yet, we still have surprisingly little knowledge or consensus about how these two attributes interrelate to affect vote choice.

On the one hand, experimental evidence appears to confirm our early suspicions that minority candidates are more electable when voters know their party affiliation (Burnett and Kogan 2014; Kam 2007). On the other hand, observational studies find that minorities fare just as well in nonpartisan elections (Abrajano, Alvarez, and Nagler 2005; Stein et al. 2005) and that their electoral prospects may actually improve when party is left off the ballot (Marschall and Ruhil 2006; Meier et al. 2005; Sonenshein 1986). Thus, existing literature leaves us with a baffling puzzle: why do methodological choices (experimental versus observational data) produce incongruous explanations of the relationship between race, party, and vote choice? I propose that the problem resides in how observational studies measure partisanship: voters are thought to be informed of the candidates' parties in partisan contests, but are assumed to be unaware of party affiliation in nonpartisan elections. Yet, this simple dichotomy rarely exists. Even in officially nonpartisan contests voters are regularly knowledgeable of candidate party affiliation. To correctly identify the relationship between a candidate's race and an individual's vote choice, models of local voting behavior should reflect this reality.

I show how this is possible by considering the *amount* of party information available to voters in partisan and nonpartisan mayoral elections across the United States. Equipped with this continuous measure of party information, I argue that party moderates the influence of race on vote choice: as the level of party information available to voters increases, the effect of race on vote choice is weakened. I find that it is not the type of electoral system – partisan or nonpartisan – that affects minority electability, but rather the availability of party information. This means that the real and experimental worlds produce findings that are more alike than otherwise thought: party cues influence how voters react to minority candidates. The implication of these findings is that minority candidates have tools that can be deployed to overcome racial prejudice and that local elections - even officially "nonpartisan" elections - are not as candidate-centered as many analysts have assumed.

Race, Party, & Voting Behavior

A general consensus across the political science literature is that individuals rely on shortcuts, such as party (Rahn 1993; Schaffner, Streb and Wright 2001), incumbency (Krebs 1998), and candidate attributes (Matsubayashi and Ueda 2011; Squire and Smith 1988) to offset the high

cost of obtaining, processing, and evaluating information about the candidate's policy positions, political experience, and future objectives (Downs 1957; Popkin 1994; Lupia and McCubbins 1998). While a number of studies have reinforced the strong effect that cues about partisanship and incumbency have on voter decision-making, there is less clarity when it comes to explaining the influence of a candidate's attributes on voters (Krebs 1998; Wolman, Page, and Reavley 1990).

Nonpartisan elections – which account for nearly three-quarters of all local elections in America – are one arena where scholars predict that candidate attributes will be especially important to voter decision-making. Indeed, political scientists projected early on that racial cues would be especially salient to voter decision-making in nonpartisan elections and, subsequently, warned of the damage that this new form of ballot could have on minority electability (Adrian 1952; Freeman 1958; Jennings and Zeigler 1966; Karnig 1976; Lieske and Hillard 1984; Mueller 1970; Pomper 1966). Experimental studies of minority candidates and vote choice substantiate this assertion. In the absence of party labels, white respondents are less likely to vote for or positively evaluate minority candidates across various levels of office (president, governor, and city councilman) regardless of their personal characteristics, issue positions, or job experience (McConnaughy et al. 2010; McDermott 1998; Terkildsen 1993).

Other experiments, however, find that this effect diminishes when respondents are informed of candidate partisanship. For example, respondents in Kam's (2007) study were given information on three judicial candidates – two white and one Latino – to test whether ethnicity affected voter preferences. Half of her respondents were provided with information about the party of the governor that endorsed each candidate. When given that cue, the support for the Latino candidate increased by 10 percentage points. Similarly, Burnett and Kogan (2014) relate partisan cues to the salience of a candidate's ethnicity by showing participants a series of quotations from either white or Latino candidates. Some respondents were given information about the candidates' parties and others were not. They find that quote misattribution decreased by 44 percentage points when information about candidate party affiliation was also provided. The authors acknowledge that their results fail to speak explicitly to whether or not ethnic categorization disadvantages minority candidates, but they nevertheless caution that nonpartisan elections are liable to impair minority electability.

Based on experimental studies alone we might conclude that any negative effects a minority candidate's race has on their ability to capture votes is offset by party cues. This explanation, however, is belied by observational studies that show nonpartisan elections either pose no disadvantage for minority candidates (Abrajano, Alvarez, and Nagler 2001; Stein et al. 2005) or, in some cases, actually increase the odds of a minority being elected (Marschall and Ruhil 2006; Sonenshein 1986). Yet, whereas the experiments control for respondent knowledge of partisanship, the observational models neglect the possibility that party influences vote choice in nonpartisan elections. At the same time, their discussion of particular elections suggests that an unmeasured level of party information may actually be instrumental to explaining election outcomes. For example, Abrajano, Alvarez, and Nagler (2001) comment in their study of the 2001 Los Angeles city election that voters were well informed about the partisanship and ideological leanings of the contenders *despite* the elections being officially nonpartisan. Similarly, Stein and colleagues (2005) note that of surveyed voters, 86% were able to correctly identify the party affiliations of both candidates in Houston's 2001 "nonpartisan" mayoral election.

I argue that, by failing to take into account this unmeasured level of party information, prevailing studies on minority candidates and vote choice have missed a pivotal moderating variable thereby obfuscating the true effect of racial cues on minority electability. In the next section, I develop a theoretical framework that explains how knowledge of candidate partisanship is likely to moderate inclinations toward race-based voting when minorities are on the ballot.

Minority Electability & Cue Dominance

The theory of minority electability presented here builds on the idea that voters utilize shortcuts in order to simplify decision-making during the voting process, but contends that particular heuristics have a stronger impact on vote choice than others. In particular, I argue that when a minority candidate is also a co-partisan, voters are more likely to vote according to party rather than racial considerations.

For most voters, a cue like race indirectly impacts vote choice by triggering a particular image of what that candidate will be like in terms of their ideology, competence, and character. White voters in particular depict African-Americans as lacking the necessary qualities of a strong political leader (Best and Williams 1990; Broockman et al. 2014), describing them as less hardworking (Gilens 1999; Sniderman and Piazza 1993), less competent (Sigelman et al. 1995), and less intelligent (Bobo et al. 2012). Black candidates are also more likely to be associated with the Democratic Party, depicted as ideologically liberal, and thought to be especially sensitive to minority-related issues when compared to their white counterparts (Berinsky et al. 2011; Jacobsmeier 2014; Sigelman et al. 1995). Absent other information, the stereotypes triggered by a black candidate's race can certainly cost them votes (McDermott 1998). In fact, many African-American candidates pursue campaign agendas that consciously avoid emphasizing their race or racializing issues in order to lessen the use of racial stereotypes (Kaufmann 2004). However, media coverage of minority politicians, which tends to disproportionately focus on race and ethnicity, makes it difficult to prevent unfavorable – and typically automatic – stereotyping (Niven 2002; Zilber and Niven 2000).

Despite the automaticity in which this process of categorization occurs, the effect of stereotyping on impression building is constrained when individuals receive additional information – what Kunda and Thagard call "individuating information" – that is pertinent to the judgment at hand (Kunda and Thagard 1996). This information does not necessarily eliminate the activation of stereotypes, but it can *neutralize* the importance of the stereotype by redirecting the observer's attention. Individuating information is thought to make stereotypes impotent because individuals view stereotype-based judgments as less valid than those that are rationalized from individuating information (Crawford et al. 2011; Hilton and Fein 1989; Locksley et al. 1980; Nisbett, Zukier, and Lemley 1981). In the context of a biracial election, I propose that party cues are precisely the type of individuating information that can counteract the negative effects that racial stereotypes have on vote choice.

Whereas race incites particular impressions about a candidate that may or may not be substantiated with further information, party provides voters with the ability to make competent inferences about candidate issue positions and ideology (Conover and Feldman 1989; Rahn 1993). Furthermore and perhaps more importantly, party information activates partisan-rooted loyalties that typically make evaluating and weighing other pieces of information unnecessary for voters (Cohen 2003; Popkin 1991; Rahn 1993; Zaller 1992). As Beck (1997) explains, party

labels "organize and simplify" electoral contests that are otherwise laden with "strident rhetoric" that most voters find confusing.

But how does party supplant racial cues in *nonpartisan* contests? Previous studies of judicial elections indicate that party identification is a key indicator of vote choice across partisan and nonpartisan ballot formats (Bonneau and Cann 2013; Rock and Baum 2010). If this is true, then it seems likely that partisanship also has a role to play in mayoral elections regardless of whether or not party labels are on the ballot. To confirm this, I conducted a content analysis of local newspaper coverage of biracial (white-black) mayoral elections in large U.S. cities from 1991 to 2015.[1] Using the News Bank Database, I collected every article about the relevant mayoral contest for the two months preceding each election. I then recorded the total number of election-related articles and coded the number of articles that mentioned the party and race of the top vote-getting black and white candidates. Although using news coverage of the elections is an imperfect substitute for the information that was available to voters, previous media studies show that newspaper articles are typically an accurate reflection of the issues discussed in local campaigns (Barrett and Barrington 2005; Erbring, Goldenberg and Miller 1980) and that newspaper readers receive approximately the same campaign information as and television viewers (Mutz 1995). Moreover, newspaper articles are the only archived source of campaign coverage that is consistently available across cities and time.

In total, I found newspaper coverage for 128 of the 159 large city biracial elections during this period, resulting in 7,574 articles coded. Table 1 displays key summary statistics for the number of election-related articles and the regularity with which the party of the top vote-getting black candidate was mentioned. Clearly, it is not uncommon for party cues to be available in nonpartisan contests. In some cases nearly 82 percent of articles about a nonpartisan election referenced the black candidate's party affiliation. This indicates that a simple dichotomous indicator of partisan elections would inadequately reflect the potential role of party in nonpartisan elections.

Table 1: Content and Frequency of Coverage of the "Top" Black Candidate

	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Articles per election	59.17	37.18	9	209
# articles mentioning candidate party in all elections	22.16	28.61	0	164
# "nonpartisan" election articles mentioning candidate party	13.07	13.29	0	69
% articles mentioning candidate party in all elections	33.22	25.46	0	96.64
% "nonpartisan" election articles mentioning candidate party	23.61	19.56	0	81.81
% partisan election articles mentioning candidate party	46.79	26.79	2.32	96.64

[1] Large cities are defined as those that had a population of 100,000 or more between 1991 and 2015. More discussion about the cities sampled can be found in the section on study design and a complete listing in the paper's appendix.

Figure 1 provides a visual comparison of the frequency of party cues in partisan and nonpartisan contests. More often than not there are some references to candidate party, but there is also considerable variation in terms of the regularity with which voters might be exposed to party information. So, how do we determine *when* voters are informed of candidate party? Unlike partisan elections, where we know with certainty that even the most disengaged voter will see the candidates' parties on the ballot, it is difficult to identify the number of party mentions that are necessary before we can state with confidence that voters are knowledgeable of candidate partisanship in nonpartisan elections. Indeed, it is rare that every voter – or even most – read every article about an upcoming mayoral election. Thus, it would be hasty to assume that because references to the candidates' parties exist in news coverage, voters were also knowledgeable of that information.

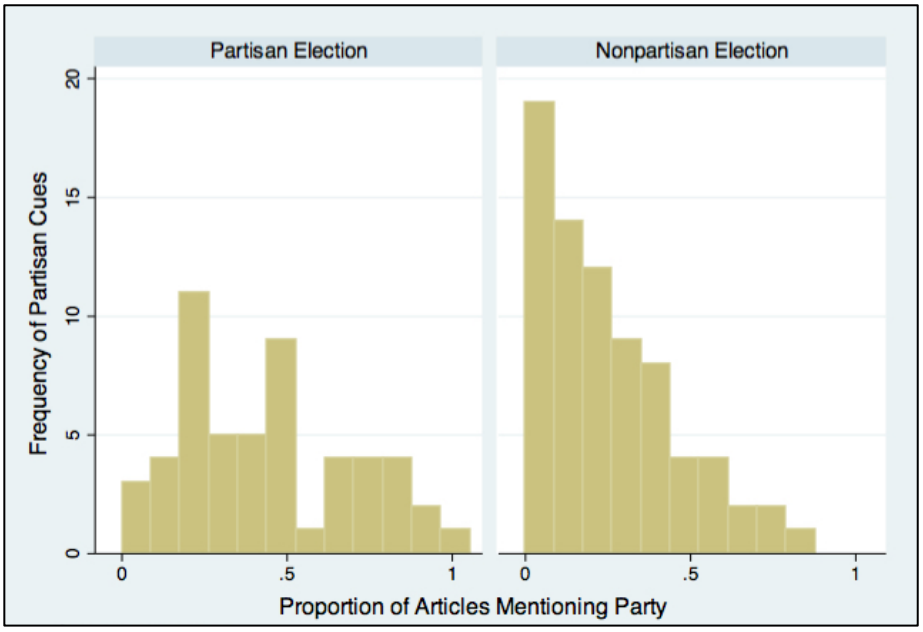

Figure 1. Partisan Cues in Partisan and Nonpartisan Elections.

Like the partisan/nonpartisan distinction, simplifying elections into those that mention party and those that do not is an imprecise approach to measuring the influence of party cues. A better alternative is to consider the amount of party information on a continuous scale. In this case, we would expect that as the percentage of articles mentioning candidate partisanship increases, the *likelihood* that a particular voter would be informed about the party affiliations of the candidates also increases.[2] Likewise, we would expect that fewer voters received partisan

[2] It is possible that using the percentage of articles inflates just how "available" party information was for voters. For example, if there are only 9 articles about a particular election, but 5 of them mention the black candidate's party, then the model would assume that the possibility of a voter being aware of party is relatively high. However, there are very few actual opportunities for voters to obtain this information. To account for this, I test the models using an alternate measure of party information – the *number* of articles that mention party. As discussed later on, the results, which are located in Table 6, are consistent with measuring information as a percentage.

cues if party affiliation was mentioned rarely in newspaper coverage. In this way the continuous scale allows us to test whether the proportion of votes received by the black candidate changes when their partisanship is more or less likely to be known by voters (all else being equal). Specifically, I posit the following hypothesis:

> Hypothesis: *Even in technically "nonpartisan" contests, as the level of party information in the media increases, race will become less salient leading to an increase in a) the black candidate's vote share and b) the probability of a black candidate winning the election.*

In addition to Kam's (2013) experiment mentioned previously, this hypothesis is in line with prior research showing that partisan cues are capable of reducing the effect of another candidate attribute, gender (Burnett and Tiede 2015; Matland and King 2002; but see: Sanbonmatsu and Dolan 2015). Yet, thus far the evidence suggesting that party supplants cues like race and gender is limited to experiments in which respondent information about the candidates is carefully controlled and, consequently, lacks external validity. I improve upon this work to show that party moderates the relationship between race and vote choice in *actual* elections.

In sum, this theory of minority electability suggests that negative racial stereotypes are more likely to hurt black electability when party information is absent or more difficult for voters to obtain. Showing that party information varies in its availability and its influence on voters in local elections is especially challenging. In the next section, I explain how I addressed this challenge by combining the content analysis discussed above with election data from mayoral elections across the United States.

Study Design

The observational study uses original data from 128 biracial mayoral elections in 39 American cities. Table 2 provides an overview of the number of elections observed for each city and the type of election they employ. The appendix features a more detailed list of the year of each election, the election stage, and the number of candidates competing by city. Although these cities are unrepresentative of *all* urban contexts, they offer a strong and representative sample of larger, diverse cities – in other words, those cities where we would expect to see a minority on the ballot. The elections span from 1991-2015 and are limited to those contests where at least one black and one white candidate were running. In cases where multiple black and/or white candidates were on the ballot, the analysis focuses on the vote share of the top vote-getting black and white candidates.[3] General elections make up the bulk of the contests in the dataset, but I also include primaries and runoff elections.[4] Since including primaries and runoffs means that

[3] There are 19 elections with 2 black candidates and 3 elections with 3 black candidates. To be sure that elections with multiple African-Americans contending are not biasing the results, I employ additional analyses that exclude these elections from the dataset. The results, available in the appendix, reflect that regardless of the number of black candidates running in an election, party cues continue to be a key component to understanding black electability.

[4] This includes both partisan and nonpartisan primaries. Because it is possible that the inclusion of partisan primaries will bias the results (since partisanship is constant and known across candidates, making race an arguably more salient factor), I rerun the main regression models

there can be more than one contest for a city-year observation, the regression models include a dummy variable that accounts for contests that occurred within the same election sequence. For example, because Albany, New York's 2005 general election results and newspaper coverage may very well be influenced by their 2005 primary, there is a dummy variable denoting that the general election is linked to its primary.[5]

Table 2. Election Type and Number of Elections Observed by City

City	State	Election Type	Number of Elections	City	State	Election Type	Number of Elections
Albany	NY	Partisan	5	**Memphis**	TN	Nonpartisan	2
Athens	GA	Nonpartisan	3	**Milwaukee**	WI	Nonpartisan	3
Atlanta	GA	Nonpartisan	3	**Mobile**	AL	Nonpartisan	3
Augusta	GA	Nonpartisan	7	**Montgomery**	AL	Nonpartisan	2
Aurora	IL	Nonpartisan	3	**New Orleans**	LA	Partisan	8
Baltimore	MD	Partisan	3	**New York**	NY	Partisan	3
Boston	MA	Nonpartisan	1	**Oakland**	CA	Nonpartisan	1
Buffalo	NY	Partisan	5	**Orlando**	FL	Nonpartisan	2
Charlotte	NC	Partisan	2	**Philadelphia**	PA	Partisan	8
Chicago	IL	Nonpartisan	3	**Pittsburg**	PA	Partisan	2
Cincinnati	OH	Nonpartisan	3	**Sacramento**	CA	Nonpartisan	2
Cleveland	OH	Nonpartisan	2	**San Francisco**	CA	Nonpartisan	2
Columbus	OH	Partisan	5	**Seattle**	WA	Nonpartisan	1
Denver	CO	Nonpartisan	6	**St. Louis**	MO	Partisan	7
Detroit	MI	Nonpartisan	2	**St. Petersburg**	FL	Nonpartisan	1
Houston	TX	Nonpartisan	10	**Syracuse**	NY	Partisan	2
Indianapolis	IN	Partisan	1	**Tampa**	FL	Nonpartisan	2
Jacksonville	FL	Nonpartisan	5	**Washington**	DC	Partisan	2
Los Angeles	CA	Nonpartisan	2	**Wichita**	KS	Nonpartisan	2
Macon	GA	Nonpartisan	2				

Information on the number of candidates running, incumbency, gender, race/ethnicity, and partisanship was acquired either through official election results found on the city clerk or county website or through the candidates' personal websites. When such information was not available from these sources, I made use of Project Vote Smart and Our Campaign's catalog of political candidates as well as news stories about the election that featured candidate biographical information.

To test my theory of minority electability, that an increase in party information improves black electability, I use the information about party cues gleaned from the analysis of news

excluding them. These results, available in the appendix, show no meaningful differences from the models in the main text.

[5] In the appendix, I rerun the regression models without these 27 "linked" observations. The results are consistent with the models in the main text.

articles to generate the central explanatory variable: the percentage of articles that reference the black candidate's party. The effect of party information is tested on two primary outcomes: the black candidate's overall vote share and an electoral victory by the black candidate. The first outcome specifically tests the principal hypothesis' claim about the relationship between party information and black vote share. However, because the data includes a mixture of election types – primary, general, and runoff elections – and variation in terms of the number of candidates running (with the majority of contests featuring two, but others as many as 6), the second dependent variable – a black election victory – is necessary to capture situations where black candidates win the election despite obtaining a relatively small percentage of the vote.

The statistical model includes several independent variables that are typically related to vote choice and that are featured prominently in existing models of local voting behavior: whether the contest was partisan or nonpartisan, incumbency, if the election had 3 or more candidates,[6] the amount of racial information made available to voters via newspaper coverage, and the type of election (primary, general, or runoff). For the majority of cities there is only one election to analyze while for others I have up to seven. Consequently, the statistical models include as many potential confounding city-level demographics as possible: the population size, the percentage of black and white residents, the percent of college educated residents, the median household income, and the percentage unemployed. Data for each variable was matched to the year of the election or for the closest year that data was available. For example, the Houston mayoral election for 2009 uses U.S. Census population estimates from 2010 while the 1993 election is matched with population estimates from the 1990 Census. Finally, from Einstein and Kogan (2015), I include the percentage of residents that voted for the 2008 presidential candidate from the same party as the black mayoral candidate to account for how aligned the city's general political preferences are with the black candidate.

The study design used here makes a dramatic improvement over existing observational studies. By combining observational data with a content analysis, the study gains considerable generalizability without losing the contextual detail that the existing studies, which focus on one or a few elections, excel at. Additionally, by limiting the dataset to elections that feature a black candidate on the ballot, I avoid conflating factors that influence black electability with those that increase the odds of a black candidate running. This makes a considerable improvement over Marschall and Ruhil's (2006) study of black mayoralties, which covers an impressive 309 cities but includes elections with no black candidates on the ballot. Recent research (Juenke 2014; Juenke and Shah 2015; Shah 2010; Shah 2014) illustrates that failing to account for *when* minorities are on the ballot is particularly problematic for correctly specifying models that will predict the likelihood of a minority candidate winning.

Results

Before testing for information effects, Model 3.1 of Table 3 investigates the bivariate relationship between a simple dichotomous indicator of partisan/nonpartisan elections and black vote share. This allows us to compare the current study to previous work on minority electability in partisan/nonpartisan contests. Although the coefficient for nonpartisan elections in Model 3.1 is negative, suggesting that minority candidates perform best when party labels are on the ballot, this relationship is not statistically significant in the conventional sense. In other words,

[6] Candidates had to obtain at least 5% of the vote in order to be included in the dataset as a viable candidate.

consistent with prevailing studies, Model 3.1 implies that there is no meaningful difference in how black candidates fare when party labels are on or off the ballots. But is this simplified depiction of party influence an adequate reflection of the role party plays in voter decision-making?

Table 3. The Effect of Partisan Cues on Black Vote Share

	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.4
% Party mentions		35.21***(6.458)	27.02** (9.23)	25.08*** (6.243)
% Race mentions				-2.382 (7.179)
Nonpartisan elections	-4.475(3.441)	1.659 (3.452)	-4.481 (5.535)	5.003 (3.684)
% Party mentions x nonpartisan elections			17.85 (13.00)	
Incumbent				26.58*** (3.942)
3(+) Candidates				-8.948** (2.867)
Election Type				
General				2.701 (3.793)
Runoff				8.766 (8.476)
Population (logged)				0.266 (1.811)
% Black				0.108 (0.114)
% White				0.0174 (0.154)
Share of pres. vote for candidate's party				0.105 (0.0789)
Bachelor's degree				0.0560 (0.156)
Median household income (logged)				-0.477 (7.349)
% Unemployed				-0.219 (0.403)
Constant	39.34***(2.73)	24.01***(3.857)	27.76***(5.08)	14.29 (85.52)
N	128	128	128	126
R^2	0.044	0.219	0.230	0.604
AIC	8.74	8.54	8.54	8.06

Note: All Models use OLS regression with a dummy variable for contests that occurred in the same election sequence and robust standard errors in parentheses.
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Turning to information effects, Model 3.2 adds to our bivariate model the key explanatory variable: the percentage of election-related articles that mention the black candidate's party affiliation. The results of this model provide us with two important findings. First, the official context of the election – partisan or nonpartisan – is inconsequential to black vote share. Second, the availability of party cues considerably improves black electoral prospects. On average, the black candidate receives 27% of the vote when no party information is available to voters. This vote share increases to more than 44% when half of election-related articles mention party affiliation.

Models 3.3 and 3.4 provide us with even more confidence that party information has important implications for black electability that are not captured by a simple partisan/nonpartisan distinction. Whereas Model 3.1 leads us to believe that black candidates are not systematically disadvantaged by nonpartisan contests, Model 3.3 reveals the "hidden" information that gives this statement credibility. By adding an interaction between the level of party information available to voters and the partisan/nonpartisan status of the election to our previous model, we discover that yes, black candidates can perform well in nonpartisan elections, but only because so many of those contests provide voters with partisan cues. Although this relationship just misses conventional thresholds of statistical significance (with a P-value of 0.118 and 95% confidence interval spanning from -5.12 to 44.79), Figure 2 illustrates that the effect of party information on vote choice – though positive in both partisan and nonpartisan contests – is especially potent in officially "nonpartisan" elections.

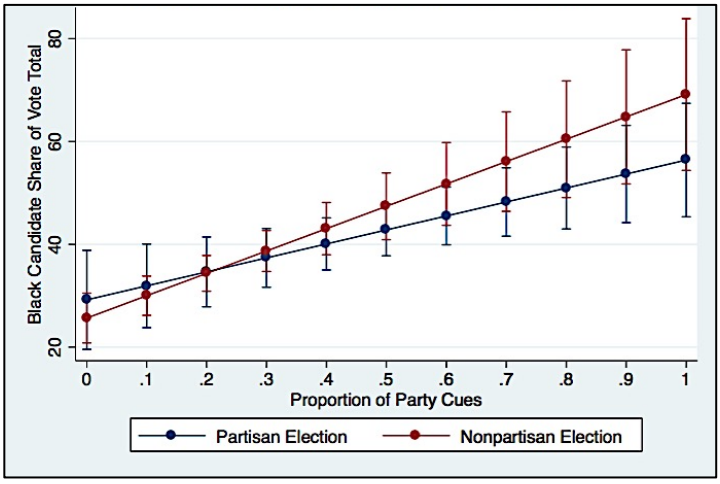

Figure 2. Effect of Party Information of Black Candidate Vote Share in Partisan and Nonpartisan Elections (with 95% confidence intervals).

Importantly, Model 3.4 reveals that the relationship between party information and black vote share endures even when controlling for factors typically shown to affect vote choice in biracial elections: namely, incumbency (Hajnal 2001; Stein et al. 2005) and a larger field of candidates (Bullock 1984; Hajnal and Trounstine 2014). Figure 3 shows us the marginal effect that additional party cues have on voter support for the black candidate while holding all other variables from Model 3.4 at their means. A black candidate's vote share increases by more than 10 percentage points moving from an election with no party information to an election where half of all articles contain party cues. Another 11 percentage points are gained when all of the

articles discuss party, implying that voters are more compelled to support African-American candidates if they are informed about their party affiliation.

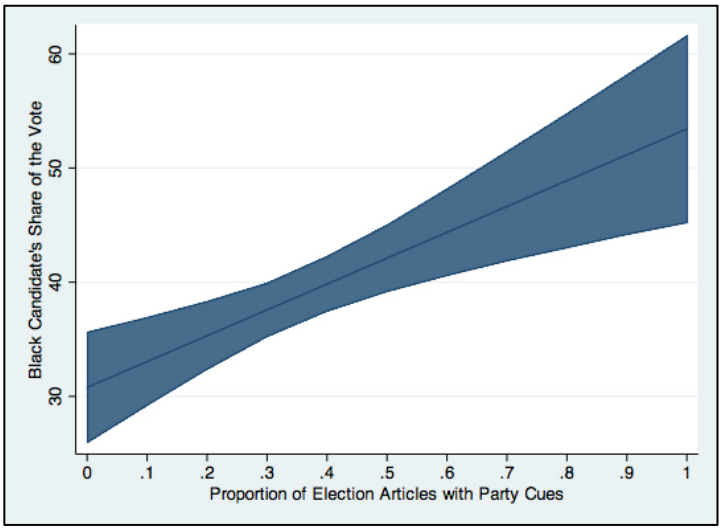

Figure 3. Marginal Effect of Partisan Cues on Black Candidate's Vote Share (with 95% confidence interval).

Table 4 confirms that in addition to partisan cues boosting a black candidate's vote share, this information also produces more black mayoral victories. Relying only on the conventional binary distinction of partisan/nonpartisan elections, as shown in Model 4.1, implies that black candidates have a 40 percent chance of winning *any* nonpartisan election – only slightly less than their 43 percent chance of winning a partisan contest. By adding a continuous measure of party information to Model 4.2, we find that black electability is actually highly dependent on voter access to party information. The probability of a black candidate winning, illustrated in Figure 4, more than doubles from 19 percent to 54 percent when moving from an election with no party information to an election where 50 percent of articles mention the black candidate's party.

Table 4. The Effect of Partisan Cues on a Black Election Victory

	4.1	4.2	4.3
% Party mentions		3.480*** (0.916)	3.722** (1.316)
% Race mentions			0.444 (1.568)
Nonpartisan elections	-0.145 (0.366)	0.457 (0.433)	1.410 (0.756)
Incumbent			4.207*** (1.242)
3(+) Candidates			-0.001 (0.626)
Election Type			
General			0.399 (0.680)
Runoff			0.511 (1.308)

Population (logged)			0.199 (0.349)
% Black			0.0102 (0.0234)
% White			0.0180 (0.0325)
Share of pres. vote for candidate's party			0.0315 (0.0221)
Bachelor's degree			0.0251 (0.0343)
Median household income (logged)			0.259 (1.421)
% Unemployed			-0.0998 (0.0883)
Constant	-0.322 (0.294)	-1.875** (0.543)	-12.16 (15.79)
N	128	128	126
R^2	0.003	0.103	0.320
AIC	1.39	1.29	1.16

Note: Models are logistic regressions with a dummy variable for contests that occurred in the same election sequence and robust standard errors in parentheses.
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

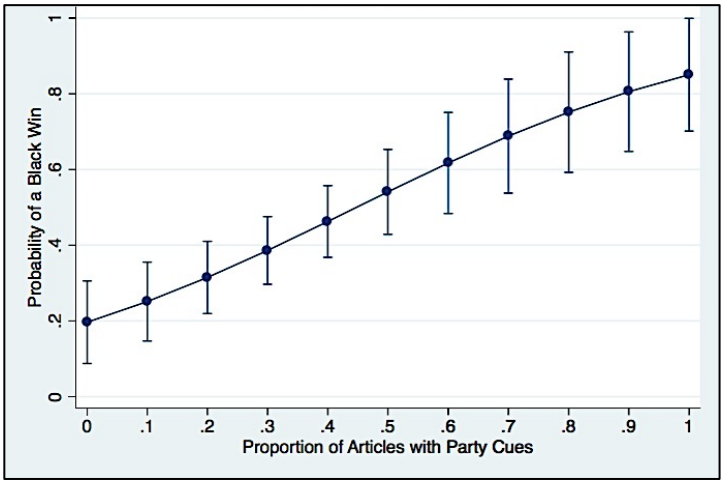

Figure 4. Effect of Partisan Cues on the Probability of a Black Candidate Winning (with 95% confidence interval).

Again, this relationship holds even when controlling for the variables added to Model 4.3. Holding all other variables from Model 4.3 at their means, Figure 5 compares how partisan cues improve the probability of a black candidate winning in partisan and nonpartisan elections. The probability of a black candidate winning a mayoral election increases from 0.24 in a "nonpartisan" election with no cues to 0.71 in a "nonpartisan" election where half of the articles contain information about candidate party. Unsurprisingly, the confidence intervals for partisan and nonpartisan elections overlap considerably at the highest levels of party information – those elections where we would expect the majority of voters to be aware of candidate party affiliation

regardless of whether or not party is on the ballot. However, Figure 5 illustrates that, in general, party information's sharpest effect is on vote choice in nonpartisan contests.

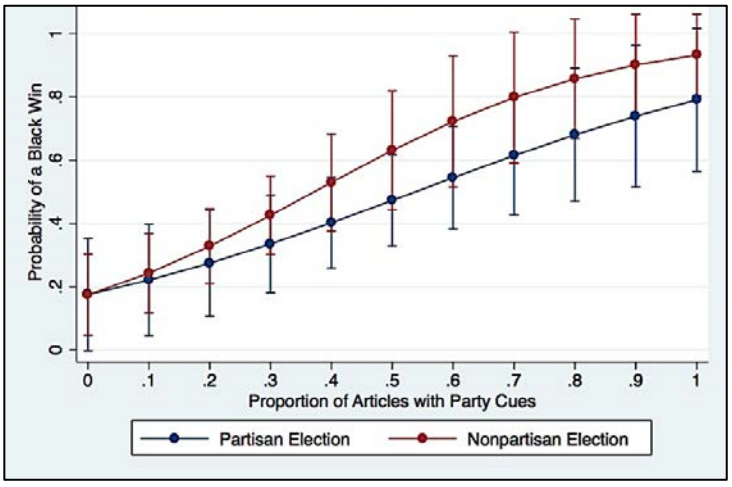

Figure 5. Effect of Party Information on the Probability of a Black Candidate Winning Partisan or Nonpartisan Election (with 95% confidence intervals).

What remains puzzling about the findings from both Table 3 and Table 4 is why party information also has a positive effect on black electability in partisan elections – where party affiliation is plainly marked on voter ballots. Although the theory of minority electability – that voter access to party information offsets negative biases stemming from racial cues – was meant to highlight the influential role that unmeasured levels of party information have in nonpartisan elections, it might be the case that additional information about candidate partisanship chips away at the relative importance voters place on racial cues in officially partisan elections as well. Put simply, black candidates benefit from elections where party affiliation becomes an increasingly central aspect of the contest regardless of whether that election is officially partisan or nonpartisan. This suggests that releasing more information about their partisanship to voters could be a well thought-out campaign strategy employed by the candidate to increase their vote share. Indeed, Spiliotes and Vavreck (2002) report that candidates are particularly tactical when deciding whether to make partisanship a main component of their campaign rhetoric. In this scenario, the relationship between partisan information and vote share/election outcome may be more endogenous than causal. I examine this possibility in the following section.

Robustness Checks

In this section I perform a series of robustness checks on our main models (3.2, 3.4, 4.2, and 4.3) to address the potential limitations of a causal relationship between party information and minority electability. First, as suggested above, it is possible that levels of party information vary in response to expectations about how such information will affect voter preferences. If this is the case, then to accurately assess the relationship between party information and vote share we need to identify a set of instrumental variables that are highly correlated with former, but have no direct effect on the latter. These instruments will be used in a two-stage least squares regression model (TSLS) to estimate the effect of our potentially endogenous variable, party information. I use two variables to do this: whether or not the candidate's main opponent

identifies with a different party and whether or not the city's news outlets have a pronounced partisan bias.

The first instrument, *opposition party*, is coded 1 if the white candidate's party is different from the black candidate's party and 0 if they both affiliate with the same party. According to our theory of minority electability, the use of party information helps to offset negative biases stemming from racial cues, but this information is considerably less valuable to voters if both candidates are from the same party. The application of this idea to nonpartisan elections is clear: candidates should be more prone to using party cues when their opposition is from another party and less so when they share partisanship. But how does this help us to understand the utility of party information as a campaign strategy in partisan elections, which presumably produce candidates from the same party in primaries and opposite parties in general elections? The interesting thing about mayoral elections is that we actually do find cases where officially partisan elections yield different-party candidates in primaries and same-party candidates in general elections. In some cases this results from cities that offer open primaries. In other cases, it is not uncommon for the runner-up in the primary election to continue their run into the general election if the city is overwhelmingly Democratic or Republican. In this dataset, 32 percent of the "partisan" general elections feature candidates from the same party.

While it seems probable that a candidate would seek to share party information only in contexts where they believe it will increase their odds of winning an election, their campaign strategy cannot control for how the media reports it. Traditional models of vote choice depicted the media as a conduit for elite discourse (Bennett 1990; Zaller 1992), but we now know that the media both report the campaign as carried out by the candidates and offer their own point of view (Box-Steffensmeier et al. 2009). Recall that one of the major setbacks faced by minority candidates is the inordinate amount of attention that the media draws to their race or ethnicity even when they attempt to run a race-free campaign (Kaufmann 2004). This means that while media references to a candidate's partisanship may be the consequence of the candidates bringing party into their campaigns, we need to also accept the possibility that the media itself has a stake in offering this information to its readers. Under such conditions we should find the highest levels of party information in cities that have particularly partisan news outlets. To account for this, I use Gentzkow and Shapiro's (2010) index of media slant, which measures the partisan slant of newspapers in major cities across America. Gentzkow and Shapiro developed this index by measuring the frequency with which newspapers used phrases regularly employed by Republicans or Democrats as captured in the *Congressional Record*. From this index, I created our second instrumental variable, partisan news, which is coded 1 if the news outlet in the city is especially prone to using partisan language and 0 if its content is "unbiased," which in this case means that it rarely frames its stories with a Republican or Democratic angle.

Transforming Gentzkow and Shapiro's original index into a binary scale is done for two reasons. First, given that we want to account for the possibility that cities with partisan news outlets are more likely to report the party affiliation of the candidates *regardless* of their partisan bias, categorizing a city's news source as partisan (or not) makes more sense than if we were to measure to what degree the news reports stories with a Democratic or Republican spin. For example, a Republican-leaning news source may be more likely to reveal a Democratic candidate's party affiliation to persuade voters to cast their ballots *against* them even if the said Democrat attempts to minimize public knowledge of their party. The second reason for the transformation is to eliminate any concern of collinearity between the political preferences of a

city (captured by presidential vote share in our model) and the political leanings of the newspaper.

Table 5 reports the first stage of the TSLS regressions, which estimate how well our instrumental variables predict party information, and the results of a series of specification tests done to ensure that the instruments chosen are a viable substitute for party information. The regression model employed uses a limited information maximum likelihood estimator (LIML), which is more robust to the presence of weak instruments (Hahn et al. 2004). As shown in both models 5.1 and 5.2, the instruments are highly significant predictors of the percentage of party information and, aside from nonpartisan elections and education level, are the only variables that explain variation in the level of party information. While the statistical significance of these instruments is a good sign, it is not enough to conclude that they are sufficient instruments. As advised by Sovey and Green (2010), I further test the tenability of these variables as instruments and provide the results at the bottom of the Table 5.

Following Stock and Yogo (2005), I performed a test of weak instruments, which looks at the ratio of the bias of the estimator to the bias of the OLS estimator. If the null hypothesis – that the instruments are weak – holds, then we would conclude that the instrumented model's estimates are biased. According to Staiger and Stock (2002) a key criterion for measuring the reliability of an instrumental estimator is that it has an F-statistic of 10 or greater. The two reported in models 5.1 and 5.2 are 22.96 and 20.55, respectively. Using these values we can easily reject the null hypothesis that the chosen instruments are weak. In other words, our models tolerate a bias of no more than 5% in the TSLS estimator. Additionally, the significant p-value indicates that the instruments (opposite party and partisan news) have meaningful explanatory power for the percentage of party mentions even *after* controlling for the other covariates (e.g., nonpartisan elections in Model 5.1 and all of the additional covariates in Model 5.2).

The Anderson-Rubin test (1950) (A-R test) further confirms that the instruments chosen are significant: the null hypothesis, that the coefficients of the endogenous regressors in the equation are jointly equal to 0, is rejected. The A-R test is especially useful to test the robustness of potentially weak instruments since the power of the test is tied to the strength of the instruments. In other words, as instruments become weaker, the power of the test declines and the null is less likely to be rejected.

Table 5. First-Stage Regressions for Estimating Party Information

	5.1 % Party Mentions	5.2 % Party Mentions
Opposite Party	0.172*** (0.036)	0.154** (0.060)
Partisan News	0.135*** (0.037)	0.209*** (0.039)
Nonpartisan elections	-0.182** (0.036)	-0.131* (0.053)
Racial Cues		-0.047 (0.106)
Incumbent		-0.012 (0.052)
3(+) Candidates		0.064 (0.048)
Election Type		

General		-0.085 (0.059)
Runoff		-0.106 (0.104)
Population		0.000 (0.000)
% Black		-0.002 (0.002)
% White		0.004 (0.002)
Share of pres. vote for candidate's party		-0.000 (0.001)
Bachelor's degree		-0.009** (0.003)
Median household income (logged)		-0.158 (0.134)
% Unemployed		0.007 (0.006)
Constant	0.296***(0.033)	2.027 (1.472)
N	128	126
F statistic	22.96 (*p-val*: 0.0000)	20.55 (*p-val*: 0.0000)
A-R statistic	30.36 (*p-val*: 0.0000)	11.16 (*p-val*: 0.0038)
Kleibergen-Paap rk LM statistic	27.53 (*p-val*: 0.0000)	25.57 (*p-val*: 0.0000)
Basmann F-test	0.005 (*p-val*: 0.9411)	0.039 (*p-val*: 0.8434)

Note: Models 5.1 and 5.2 are the first stage of a Two Stage Least Squares (TSLS) regression and use a limited information maximum likelihood estimator. Both models include a dummy variable for contests that occurred in the same election sequence and report robust standard errors.
$p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

The Kleibergen-Paap (2006) rk LM statistic tests for underidentification. The significant p-value tells us that the chosen instruments adequately identify the equation. This test is a generalization of the Anderson (1951) or Cragg and Donaldson (1993) correlation tests to the non-*i.i.d.* case and, thus, has the advantage of its results being robust to heteroskedacity, autocorrelation, and clustering. The fourth statistic, Basmann's (1960) F-test, checks for overidentification in two ways: whether the instruments are uncorrelated with the error term and whether any of the excluded exogenous variables should be included in the structural equation. In this case, a significant test statistic would mean that our model employs a poor instrument or fails to treat one of the exogenous variables as an instrument. As reported, both F-statistics are non-significant, suggesting that our instruments are a good fit and that the models are correctly specified.

The chosen instruments appear to satisfy various tests of robustness. The next step is to test whether controlling for the possibility of endogeneity changes the relationship between party information and black vote share. Re-estimation using the instrumental variables in Table 6

shows that party information continues to affect a black candidate's vote share in a meaningful way. Comparing Model 3.2 to Model 6.1 we find that the coefficients for both party information and nonpartisan elections increase substantially. While nonpartisan elections appear to have a stronger influence on the black candidate's vote share, the relative impact of the two variables on our outcome remains unchanged. The difference between Model 3.4 and Model 6.2 is much more subtle. Again, we find a slight increase in the coefficients for party information, but no significant change in terms of its marginal effect on vote share or election outcome. The main difference we find is in Models 6.3 and 6.4, which report that nonpartisan elections now appear to significantly affect the probability of a black candidate winning an election. Yet, party information continues to play a strong role in predicting black electability even with this newfound relationship. Overall, the TSLS estimations provide confidence that our original models sufficiently tested and correctly reported the relationship between party information and black electability.

Table 6. Second-Stage Results for the Effects of Party Information on Black Electability

	6.1: Vote Share	6.2: Vote Share	6.3: Election Win	6.4: Election Win
% Party mentions	68.016*** (14.547)	30.33** (10.163)	4.155*** (0.560)	4.663*** (0.741)
% Race mentions		-1.777 (7.028)		-0.114 (0.798)
Nonpartisan elections	7.372 (4.230)	4.719 (4.026)	0.652* (0.255)	0.877* (0.387)
Incumbent		26.05*** (3.868)		1.749** (0.604)
3(+) Candidates		-8.277** (2.868)		0.304 (0.315)
Election Type				
General		2.419 (3.825)		-0.0460 (0.373)
Runoff		8.329 (8.456)		-0.202 (0.680)
Population		-0.121 (.063)		-0.372** (0.013)
% Black		0.0286 (0.105)		-0.0126 (0.0115)
% White		-0.120 (0.147)		-0.030 (0.0163)
Share of pres. vote for candidate's party		0.108 (0.0756)		0.013 (0.010)
Bachelor's degree		0.0605 (0.173)		0.029 (0.016)
Median household income (logged)		1.008 (7.645)		0.498 (0.719)
% Unemployed		-0.290 (0.427)		-0.084 (0.45)
Constant	9.726 (6.740)	10.84 (80.07)	-1.977*** (0.308)	-6.693 (7.495)

N	128	126	128	126
R^2	0.168	0.527		

Note: Models 6.1, 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4 are the second stage of a Two Stage Least Squares (TSLS) regression model. Models 6.1 and 6.2 use TSLS regression with a limited information maximum likelihood estimator while Models 6.3 and 6.4 use TSLS probit regression. All models include a dummy variable for contests that occurred in the same election sequence and report robust standard errors.
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

It is also possible that the model suffers from another form of endogeneity: omitted variable bias. Perhaps, for example, cities with higher levels of turnout or more competitive elections have more partisan cues. To address the possibility of an omitted variable influencing the results, I created a smaller data set of 19 cities that have multiple observations. In Table 7, I use city fixed effects to check the robustness of the results. Given the small number of observations for this dataset, I limit its testing to the black candidate's vote share. Using this smaller data set yields the same pattern of results: party information, as tested in Model 7.1, explains nearly 21 percent of the variation in an African-American candidate's vote share. When we combine this our other covariates in Model 7.2 more than 56% of the variation within cities and 58% of variation across cities is explained. Since a city's election type (partisan or nonpartisan) is unchanging for the years covered by the dataset, Model 7.3 limits our observations even further by considering the effect of party information in a "nonpartisan" setting exclusively. Model 7.3 looks remarkably similar to Model 7.2, but loses significance in the statistical sense with a reported p-value of 0.108 for the percentage of party mentions.

Table 7. Fixed Effects Models for Black Vote Share

	7.1	7.2	7.3 (*NP Elections Only*)
% Party mentions	29.82* (12.68)	27.14** (9.323)	20.79 (12.57)
% Race mentions		-6.268 (10.40)	-10.16 (14.72)
Incumbent		23.66*** (3.752)	29.03*** (5.250)
3(+) Candidates		-11.31** (3.839)	-4.961 (5.338)
Election Type			
General		-2.728 (4.199)	24.86 (13.77)
Runoff		5.105 (7.137)	36.87* (14.83)
Constant	30.18*** (4.902)	30.27*** (6.173)	8.292 (14.32)

N	*93*	*91*	*49*
City Groups	*19*	*19*	*11*
Within R^2	*0.07*	*0.555*	*0.619*
Between R^2	*0.209*	*0.584*	*0.369*
Overall R^2	*0.119*	*0.567*	*0.545*
AIC	*8.198*	*7.606*	*7.477*

Note: Models 7.1, 7.2, and 7.3 use Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression with a dummy variable for contests that occurred in the same election sequence and city fixed effects.
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Third, some elections may have a high proportion of articles that mention candidate party, but very few actual articles about the election. For example, Table 1 tells us that some contests had as few as 9 articles about the election. If 5 of those mention the black candidate's party, then a whopping 56% of articles have party cues, but there are still relatively few opportunities for voters to obtain information about candidate party. To account for this possibility I reran the models above using the total number of articles with partisan cues (as well as the total number of articles with racial cues) as the key independent variable. Party information does lose some of its explanatory capacity in models 8.3 and 8.6 (the number of party mentions has a p-value of 0.061 in Model 8.3 and a p-value of 0.057 in Model 8.6), which include other potential predictors of black support. Despite this, the overall results shown in Table 8 confirm that even when measured as a count, partisan cues continue to influence black electability.

Table 8. Effect of Number of Party Mentions on Black Vote Share & Electoral Victory

	8.1: Vote Share	8.2: Vote Share	8.3: Vote Share	8.4: Victory	8.5: Victory	8.6: Victory
# Party mentions	0.163** (0.0527)	0.156** (0.0548)	0.144$^{\wedge}$ (0.076)	0.016* (0.006)	0.018* (0.007)	0.0367$^{\wedge}$ (0.018)
# Race mentions			-0.187 (0.117)			-0.041$^{\wedge}$ (0.026)
Nonpartisan elections		-1.201 (3.492)	4.072 (3.660)		0.221 (0.428)	1.297$^{\wedge}$ (0.702)
Incumbent			27.01*** (4.482)			3.91** (1.236)
3(+) Candidates			-11.81*** (3.002)			-0.483 (0.619)
Election Type						
General			3.287 (3.598)			0.579 (0.747)
Runoff			9.357 (8.388)			0.685 (1.302)

Population (logged)			2.052			0.341
			(2.158)			(0.388)
% Black			0.185			0.021
			(0.128)			(0.024)
% White			0.157			0.028
			(0.160)			(0.032)
Share of pres. vote			0.082			0.024
			(0.077)			(0.019)
Bachelor's degree			-0.0215			0.0164
			(0.168)			(0.034)
Median household income (logged)			-4.169			-0.355
			(8.125)			(1.554)
% Unemployed			-0.0329			-0.065
			(0.441)			(0.084)
Constant	33.00***	33.87***	31.84	-0.784**	-0.946*	-6.385
	(2.364)	(3.334)	(94.47)	(0.252)	(0.381)	(17.727)
N	128	128	126	128	128	126
R^2	0.09	0.091	0.546	0.030	0.038	0.294
AIC	8.684	8.720	8.180	1.362	1.365	1.197

Note: Models 8.1, 8.2, and 8.3 use Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression and Models 8.4, 8.5 and 8.6 use logistic regression. All models have a dummy variable for contests that occurred in the same election sequence and robust standard errors in parentheses.
$^{\wedge}$ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Conclusions

This paper sought to resolve why observational and experimental studies of minority electability tend to produce diverging conclusions about the relationship between candidate race, partisanship, and vote choice. Combining a novel dataset of mayoral elections with a content analysis of election news coverage, I demonstrated that when we properly account for partisan information, the real and experimental worlds produce similar conclusions: party cues improve black electability. This has important methodological and substantive implications.

Methodologically, the findings confirm that it takes a continuous measure of party information to truly capture how party affects minority electability. Indeed, as noted in the discussion of the models from Table 3 and Table 4, a black candidate gains more than 10 percentage points of the vote share when moving from a nonpartisan election with no party information to one where half of all articles reference party. Furthermore, that candidate has a nearly 60 percent chance of winning their election. Yet, had we relied on the conventional binary classification of partisan/nonpartisan elections we would have concluded that a black candidate has only a 40 percent chance of being elected in *any* nonpartisan election**.** Clearly, relying on a partisan/nonpartisan distinction misinforms us about the relationship between party, race, and vote choice and, consequently, encumbers our theoretical understanding of minority electability.

Substantively, this means that the official status of the election – partisan or nonpartisan – rarely reflects the actual role that party is playing in the contest. Indeed, aside from incumbency

and the number of candidates running, voter access to party information is the most consistent factor for explaining voter support for black candidates. Again this highlights the importance of how we measure partisanship: when we take the amount of party information available into account, it reveals that black candidates have a tool they can use to overcome racial prejudice in partisan and nonpartisan elections alike.

There is unmistakably an important role for party information to play in future models of voting behavior. That said, the cue-based theory of minority electability presented here still requires some development. First, there is a very real chance of the relationship between party information and vote choice being endogenous. While the two-stage least squares regressions reported in Tables 6 and 7 does its best to account for this possibility, it is difficult to identify strong instrumental variables that completely dispel concerns about endogeneity. However, there is evidence to indicate that this theory also holds in an experimental setting, which would confirm the causal influence of party information on minority electability (Jaeger, forthcoming).

Second, it would be informative to determine *whose* vote choice is affected by party information. Do black candidates make comparable gains in their support from Republicans, Democrats, and Independents when their party affiliation is revealed? Considering that the vast majority of African-Americans do identify as Democrats, it is feasible that revealing a Republican identity could lead to a profound boost in Republican support, but also cost them votes amongst liberals. Likewise, does the availability of party information have similar consequences for voters of all racial and ethnic backgrounds? Possibilities such as this raise questions about whether party information is *always* beneficial to black electability.

Another important line of inquiry would be to consider other minority candidates: do Latino and Asian candidates experience the same boost in voter support from party information? Both Latinos and Asians are less likely to be associated with a particular party affiliation, so it could be that partisan cues are *even more* consequential for how voters evaluate their candidacy. Future work should pursue these questions through a combination of additional observational data and experiments. Combining these approaches would assist in fully developing and testing the causal claims behind the theory of minority electability.

Given what we know about the primacy of party affiliation for voting behavior, research concerning local elections should be better at incorporating appropriate measures of party into its models. It is not simply a matter of distinguishing which elections put party labels on the ballot and which do not. Rather, this paper demonstrates that party can play a fundamental role in determining who wins elections even when it has no “official” role.

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