

The Electoral and Policy Effects of Election Timing in City and County Governments

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Abstract

In recent years, a consensus has developed among scholars that the timing of elections has large effects on the electoral and political process at the local level. This literature has found that on-cycle elections lead to higher turnout, change the composition of the electorate, and could impact local governments' policy outputs. But much of this work has focused on public schools. There has been little prior research on the impact of election timing on either elections or the broader political process in city and county governments. In this paper, we bring together a bevy of data sources on turnout in local elections, the outcomes of these elections, and local policy outputs. Overall, our results indicate there are significant participatory benefits to on-cycle local elections while few *political* consequences. Moving local elections on-cycle significantly increases overall voter turnout and the participation of younger and less wealthy voters. But it has negligible effects on the partisan composition of the electorate or the partisan and ideological outcomes of elections. Nor do on-cycle elections change the policy outputs of local governments. Our results help build a more holistic understanding of representation in local governments and the distinctive role of electoral institutions in facilitating representation.

Keywords: Local politics, ideology, partisanship, representation, legislatures, election timing

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1 Introduction

In recent years, a consensus has developed among scholars that the timing of local elections has large effects on the electoral and political process at the local level. This literature has found that on-cycle elections lead to higher turnout (Hajnal and Lewis, 2003; Marschall and Lappie, 2018); they change the composition of the electorate (Kogan, Lavertu, and Peskowitz, 2018; Hajnal, Kogan, and Markarian, 2022); and, more tentatively, they could impact governments’ policy outputs (Anzia, 2013). Several recent studies have also found that on-cycle elections improve policy representation (Schaffner, Rhodes, and La Raja, 2020; Dynes, Hartney, and Hayes, 2021; Hartney and Hayes, 2021). Even a recent paper that is generally skeptical of the impact of voting reforms on electoral outcomes suggests that “[election timing] is ... the rare kind of policy that could change outcomes” (Grimmer and Hersh, 2023).

In this paper, we re-assess this consensus and provide the first holistic assessment of the impact of election timing on the electoral process and political outputs of city and county governments. To do so, we draw from a new comprehensive dataset of elections in medium and large cities and counties across the country between 1990 and 2021 (de Benedictis-Kessner et al., 2023). We also examine data on the impact of election timing on the composition of the electorate in California cities (Hajnal, Kogan, and Markarian, 2022). Finally, we examine the impact of election timing on local government policy outputs, including fiscal policies from the Census of Local Governments, gay rights policies from HRC’s Municipal Equality Index, and housing policy from the Census Bureau’s Building Permits Survey. We also leverage new advances in causal inference to avoid pitfalls of more traditional time-series models. Throughout our analysis, we examine how within-place variation in election timing affects outcomes using both regression models and the fixed effects counterfactual models developed by Liu, Wang, and Xu (2022).

Consistent with previous work, we find that on-cycle elections have much higher turnout than off-cycle elections. Switching from off-cycle to on-cycle elections more than doubles

voter turnout. It also affects the demographic composition of the electorate. We find that switching to on-cycle elections leads to a younger and less wealthy electorate. However, we only find modest evidence that election timing affects the partisan or ideological composition of the electorate. This suggests that election timing is likely to only have small impacts on downstream electoral or policy outcomes that are influenced by the partisan composition of the electorate.

As predicted by the limited impacts of election timing on the political composition of the electorate, we find only slight evidence that election timing affects the partisanship or ideology of local government officials. They appear to only very modestly affect the proportion of Democrats or Republicans to be elected. And they do not change the ideological preferences of the winners of local elections.

We also examine how the timing of elections influences policy outcomes. Previous work has yielded mixed evidence on the policy effects of election timing (Anzia, 2011, 2012*a*; Berry and Gersen, 2011). We find that on-cycle elections appear to have no substantial effects on the overall expenditures of local government, the number of local government employees or their average pay, the municipal equality index of cities (one measure of local social policy related to LGBTQ rights), the number of multi-family housing units or the multi-family proportion of housing units permitted.

Overall, our findings indicate that shifting local governments to on-cycle elections would significantly increase participation in the political process. Yet the shift to on-cycle elections would have little effect on the partisan or ideological composition of local governments. Nor are on-cycle elections likely to have substantial policy effects (Berry and Gersen, 2011). Our paper contributes to a larger literature on the catalysts and hindrances to democratic representation in local governments in the United States (Trounstine, 2010; Tausanovitch and Warshaw, 2014; Warshaw, 2019). It also affirms recent research on the partisan-neutrality of most electoral institutional reforms (Grimmer and Hersh, 2023).

The paper proceeds as follows. First, we discuss the historical and theoretical background

of election timing, both of which guide our analyses. We then introduce our data and research design. Next, we examine the effect of election timing on voter turnout in local elections, including both aggregate turnout and the composition of the electorate. We then turn to the effects of election timing on electoral outcomes, including the partisanship and ideology of elected officials. Finally, we examine the impact of election timing on policy outputs in municipal governments.

2 Background

Election timing across the United States varies substantially in states and cities. While national elections are held in November of even-numbered years, states and cities often hold elections in the spring, or in odd-numbered years. This is largely a result of reform efforts in the early 20th century, in which political parties, organizations such as the National Municipal League, and other organized interest groups encouraged cities to hold off-cycle elections (Anzia, 2012*b*; National Municipal League, 1916; Trounstine, 2010, 2020). These reforms were often designed to stunt the influence of political machines in cities, separate local elections from the themes of more contentious partisan national contests, and increase the influence of informed and knowledgeable voters (Trounstine, 2009).

As a result, many cities switched from holding their elections concurrently with federal elections in November of even years to instead holding them during other months or in odd years. More recently, however, local governments have shifted their elections to be on-cycle with federal and state contests in order to decrease the costs of running elections or to increase voter turnout (Jomsky, Mullins, and Pope, 2015). These changes have not been without debate: some cities have opposed such changes in their timing under the assumption that off-cycle contests allow voters to focus on local issues (Koss, 2015). The contemporary policy debate around this particular institution has continued both in legislative and judicial bodies.¹ In part, this is because of the unclear effects of election timing on a variety of

¹See, e.g., *Citizens Project v. City of Colorado Springs*, <https://www.cpr.org/2022/06/06/>

electoral and political outcomes.

Recent work has highlighted the particular role of on-cycle elections as an important way in which governments can improve participation and – by implication – democratic representation and accountability (Payson, 2017; Dynes, Hartney, and Hayes, 2021; cf. de Benedictis-Kessner, 2018). There is a large literature that finds that off-cycle elections have substantially lower turnout (Hajnal and Lewis, 2003; Holbrook and Weinschenk, 2014; Marschall and Lappie, 2018; Kogan, Lavertu, and Peskowitz, 2018). In general, these studies indicate that on-cycle elections more than double voter turnout relative to off-cycle elections. Theoretically, this increased participation could incentivize politicians to represent the wishes of a broader electorate relative to the smaller electorate of off-cycle voters.

More recently, scholars have examined how election timing affects the composition of the electorate by leveraging information from the voter file about the demographic and partisan characteristics of voters (Kogan, Lavertu, and Peskowitz, 2018; Hajnal, Kogan, and Markarian, 2022). The biggest effects of election timing are on the age of the electorate (Kogan, Lavertu, and Peskowitz, 2018). On-cycle elections have substantially more young voters and fewer senior citizens that go to the ballot box. There is also evidence that voters in on-cycle elections are less affluent than voters in off-cycle elections. Finally, voters in on-cycle elections appear to be somewhat more racially diverse than voters in off-cycle elections.

Of course, the fact that election timing affects the age and income of voters does not automatically mean that it will change the partisan or ideological composition of the electorate. Changing the age composition of the electorate, for instance, would only lead to partisan effects if older voters tend to be politically homogeneous (Grimmer and Hersh, 2023). According to the 2020 exit polls, however, there were only modest partisan differences between senior citizens and middle aged voters. About 47% of people 65+ voted for President Biden, compared with 52% of people between the ages of 30-44. This implies that even large changes in the relative turnout of older and younger voters will probably only change the partisan

[colorado-springs-april-elections-lawsuit/](#).

composition of the electorate by a percentage point or two.

In line with this prediction, recent studies have found that there are only modest partisan differences due to election timing. Kogan, Lavertu, and Peskowitz (2018) examines differences between on and off-cycle elections on the political composition of voters in school tax referenda in four states. They find that on-cycle referenda have 1-2 percentage points more Democrats and liberals in the electorate than off-cycle elections. Hajnal, Kogan, and Markarian (2022) examine switches in election timing among California cities between 2008 and 2016. They find that moving off-cycle elections in California to occur concurrently with presidential elections slightly increased the percentage of Democrats and liberals in the electorate by 3-4 percentage points. But they found little or no such effects from moving elections to occur concurrently with midterm federal elections and state elections.²

Another pathway whereby election timing might influence elections is by changing the turnout of policy demanders, such as unions and other interest groups (Anzia, 2011, 2013; Payson, 2017). These groups might be over-represented in lower turnout off-cycle elections. But Kogan, Lavertu, and Peskowitz (2018) finds that low-turnout referenda elections “do not appear to materially increase the share of ‘high demanders’ in the electorate. Although education employees make up a somewhat larger share of the electorate in low-turnout elections, the difference is small and they still account for a small slice of voters.”

The muted impact of election timing on the partisan, ideological, or ‘high demander’ composition of the electorate implies that switching to on-cycle elections is unlikely to substantially affect election outcomes. Due largely to limited data on local election outcomes, however, there has not been much empirical study of the impact of election timing on the outcomes of elections. Hajnal and Trounstone (2005) find that cities with higher voter turnout and concurrent elections tend to have more racially diverse city councils. Anzia and Bernhard (2022) find that women candidates are more successful than men in off-cycle elections

²It is also worth noting that the regression models in Hajnal, Kogan, and Markarian (2022) include city fixed effects to examine over-time variation within cities, but they do not include year fixed effects. As a result, it is difficult to disentangle the impact of election timing from longer-term changes in the composition of the electorate in California.

for some local offices but not other local offices.

The modest impact of election timing on the partisan composition of the electorate also implies there are unlikely to be large policy effects from election timing, at least via the electoral process.³ Indeed, the previous literature on the policy impact of election timing has generated mixed results. Anzia (2011) finds that school districts with on-cycle elections pay experienced teachers about 3% less than districts that hold off-cycle elections. Similarly, Anzia (2012*a*) finds that school districts in Texas that were forced by a state law to switch to on-cycle elections responded by granting about 1% lower salary raises to teachers. In contrast, Berry and Gersen (2011) find that switches to on-cycle elections in California school districts led to modest (less than 1%) changes in teacher salaries. Moreover, these small effects were not robust across different research designs. Overall, these studies indicate that switching to on-cycle elections reduces teacher salaries by between 0-3 percentage points. However, to our knowledge, there has been little study of the causal impact of election timing on policy outputs from other levels of local government, such as counties or cities.

Finally, several studies have examined the impact of election timing on political representation more generally. Dynes, Hartney, and Hayes (2021) finds local governments are less responsive to the mass public in places with off-cycle elections. In addition, Schaffner, Rhodes, and La Raja (2020) and Hartney and Hayes (2021) find that local governments with off-cycle elections are somewhat less congruent with the ideological preferences of their constituents. But the effects on congruence are relatively modest in size. Overall, the causal effects of election timing on the electoral and political outcomes of local governments more broadly remain unclear.

³To the extent election timing affects policy, it would have to be via lobbying from interest groups or other non-electoral mechanisms.

3 Research Design and Data

This section discusses our data and research design. We have assembled a diverse set of data to comprehensively examine the impact of election timing in local politics. First, we discuss our data on local elections, the American Local Elections Database (de Benedictis-Kessner et al., 2023). Next, we discuss data on the composition of the electorate in several types of elections (Hajnal, Kogan, and Markarian, 2022). Finally, we discuss data on policy outputs in local governments.

3.1 Research Design

As previous literature has recognized, there are a wide variety of potential confounders that make it difficult to determine the causal effect of election timing on downstream outcomes. As a result, our primary analyses use the `fect` package in `R` to examine over-time changes in election timing within places using the counterfactual fixed effects models developed by Liu, Wang, and Xu (2022). This model is based on a difference-in-differences approach, and allows us to accommodate switches both from off-cycle elections to on-cycle elections and the reverse. We examine separately switches from off-cycle to on-cycle elections (in the main body of the paper) and switches from on-cycle to off-cycle (in the appendix). This approach also enables us to demonstrate the absence of pre-treatment placebo effects, and to visualize the dynamic trajectory of the post-treatment impact of election timing. In Appendix A, we show that each of our main analyses using `fect` pass placebo checks (i.e., no pre-treatment effects on outcomes of interest) that validate the parallel trends assumption. Most of our analyses also satisfy more demanding equivalence tests (Liu, Wang, and Xu, 2022).

In the appendix, we also show results using a variety of more standard regression models. These include cross-sectional models with year fixed-effects. In these models, we also control for the partisanship or ideology of places since previous work has shown that partisanship and ideology are important predictors of local electoral and policy outcomes (Tausanovitch

and Warshaw, 2014; Warshaw, 2019; Einstein and Kogan, 2016). They also include models with year and city/county fixed effects to isolate over-time variation within places.

3.2 Local Elections Data

To examine turnout, election outcomes, and the ideological preferences of elected officials, we use a new data source of local elections and local political candidates from 1990-2022 in medium and large cities and counties (de Benedictis-Kessner et al., 2023). The final dataset that we use consists of 4,440 mayoral elections, 17,809 individual city council elections and 5,568 county legislative elections in 663 cities and 564 counties.

These data give us information on several characteristics of both the constituencies that elect local politicians and those leaders once they are in office. On the constituency side, these data contain the Democratic share of the two-party presidential vote for the city (for citywide candidates) or district in which candidates ran for office (for district-level city councilors and county legislators). On the candidate side, these data contain information about the partisanship, race, and gender of candidates.⁴ These data also contain information on the ideology of a subset of these candidates who were matched to campaign finance records from the database curated by Bonica (2019). This measure (a CF-score) creates an ideological score for people based on their contributions to federal and state candidates in elections. Higher scores indicate more conservative contributors, and lower scores indicate more liberal ones. We use the partisan and ideological information about both constituencies and candidates for the analyses that follow.

We also use our data on local elections to define whether elections take place on- or off-cycle. We define on-cycle elections as those that take place concurrently with a major federal election in November of even-numbered years (Dynes, Hartney, and Hayes, 2021).

⁴The partisanship, race, and gender estimates of candidates in these data rely on validated models for each characteristic that incorporate information from a variety of sources (de Benedictis-Kessner et al., 2023). Partisanship estimates, in particular, are based not necessarily on ballot designations alone but on information from voter files, campaign finance-based ideological scores, candidate websites, and news reports, among other sources.

Off-cycle elections, in contrast, do not take place at the same time as federal elections but occur in other months or in odd-numbered years.

Figure 1 plots the timing of elections for cities in our data that switch the timing of their mayoral elections. As the plot indicates, a large number of cities switched the timing of their mayoral elections over the course of the last three decades. This includes cities like Gilbert, AZ, which held its mayoral elections in the summer of presidential election years until 2016, when it switched to holding November elections, but also cities like Pawtucket, RI, which has held its elections on-cycle for much longer (since 2002). Finally, it also includes cities like Baton Rouge, LA, which has gone back and forth between holding its mayoral elections on- and off-cycle in the last three decades.

3.3 Composition of the Electorate

In order to examine the impact of election timing on the composition of the electorate, we focus on data from Hajnal, Kogan, and Markarian (2022) on the impact of election timing on the composition of the electorate in California city elections between 2008 and 2016 based on aggregated voter file data assembled by Catalist. The original paper examined a bevy of different variables. Our analysis focuses on only a handful of these variables. First, we examine the demographic composition of the electorate. In particular, we examine the percentage of voters that are 65+ and the percentage of voters that make more than 100,000 dollars. Next, we examine the partisan and ideological composition of the electorate. Specifically, we focus on the percentage of voters that are Democrats and the percentage that are liberals.

We also make several other minor changes in our analyses compared to the original analyses in Hajnal, Kogan, and Markarian (2022). The original paper had a nuanced, multichotomous definition of election timing. We collapse their data on election timing to a binary variable based on whether the election took place at the same time as major federal elections (Dynes, Hartney, and Hayes, 2021). The original paper used one-way fixed effects to

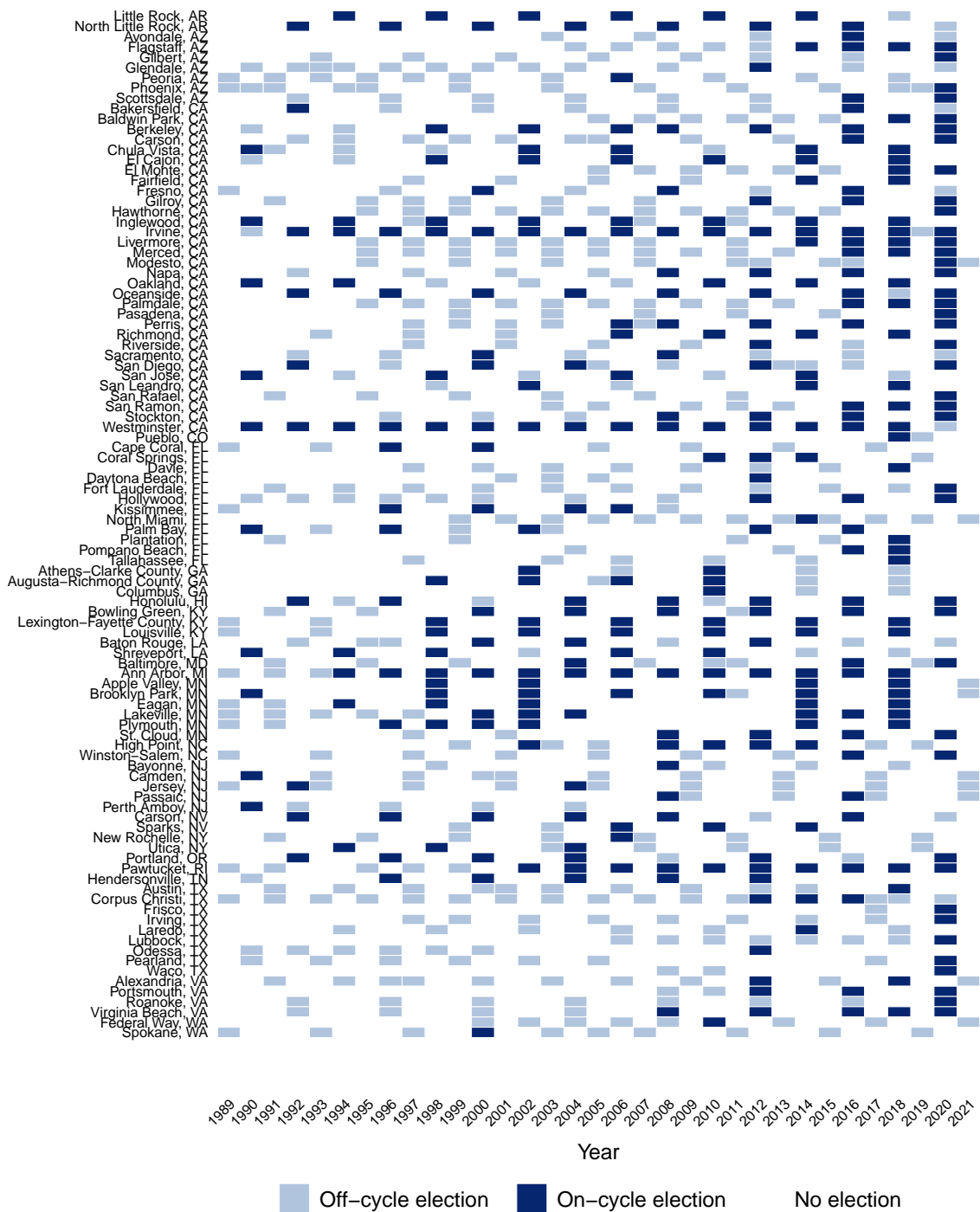


Figure 1: Election timing in cities that switched the timing of their mayoral elections. Light blue rectangles indicate a year in which an off-cycle mayoral election occurred, while dark blue rectangles indicate an on-cycle election, and blank white spaces indicate no mayoral election in that year.

account for time invariant unit-level confounders. We focus on two-way fixed effects models that account for both time invariant confounders within unit and unit invariant confounders within time periods.

3.4 Policy Outputs

To assess the subsequent outcomes of representation, we use data on fiscal policy data from the Historical Database of Individual Government Finances and specifically data on local government expenditures and revenue.⁵ These data have been broadly used in prior studies. We also harness data from the Census Bureau’s Annual Survey of Public Employment and Payroll (ASPEP), which records both the number of employees of different types and the payroll expenditures on those employees for local governments. As one measure of social policy, we use the Municipal Equality Index from the Human Rights Campaign, which measures the liberalness of policies related to LGBTQ rights in several hundred cities around the country. Finally, we use data from the Census Bureau’s Building Permits Survey, which tracks the number and type of building permits issued by cities for new privately-owned residential construction.

4 Election Timing and Turnout in Local Elections

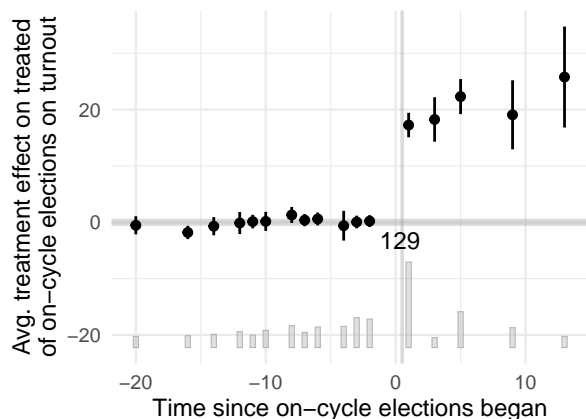
In this section, we examine the impact of election timing on the electorate in local elections. First, we examine the impact on aggregate turnout. Second, we examine the impact on the demographic composition of the electorate. Lastly, we look at the impact on the partisan and ideological composition of the electorate.

⁵These data are based on a Census of Governments conducted every five years and the Annual Survey of Governments collected in every non-census year. We adjusted all monetary figures into 2019 dollars based on the consumer price index. In our analyses of fiscal policy, we use logged per capita expenditures to account for population differences across cities.

4.1 Aggregate Turnout

We first examine the effect of on-cycle elections on aggregate voter turnout in local elections. As others have suggested, the lower turnout in off-cycle local elections may lead to representational biases. As a first look at this, we examine turnout differences in mayoral elections that are held on- and off-cycle based on the mayoral election data in de Benedictis-Kessner et al. (2023).⁶ In mayoral elections held on-cycle, turnout is 29% on average, while in off-cycle elections it is 13.3% on average.

Next, we examine the causal impact of election timing on turnout using the counterfactual fixed effects model developed in Liu, Wang, and Xu (2022). Figure 2 shows that switching to on-cycle elections increases voter turnout by about 20 percentage points. This is equivalent to a little more than a doubling in voter turnout between off- and on-cycle elections. Overall, this analysis confirms previous work showing massive effects of election timing on voter turnout.



(a) Mayoral elections

Figure 2: Effect of Switches to On-Cycle Elections on Turnout in Mayoral Elections

⁶For simplicity, we calculate turnout here as the total number of votes over the city-wide population estimate.

4.2 Composition of the Electorate

Next, we examine how election timing affects the composition of the electorate based on pooled data from California local elections between 2008 and 2016 in Hajnal, Kogan, and Markarian (2022) using a counterfactual two-way fixed effects model (Liu, Wang, and Xu, 2022). California is a good case study for the impact of election timing on elections in city and county governments because many local governments there have recently switched their elections to coincide with federal elections

The top panel of Figure 3 shows the effects of election timing on the demographic composition of the electorate. Panel (a) of Figure 3 shows that switching to on-cycle elections decreases the percentage of voters over 65 by 15-20 percentage points. Thus, switching to on-cycle elections has very large effects on the age composition of the electorate, leading to a much younger electorate. Panel (b) show that switching to on-cycle elections also leads to a less wealthy electorate.⁷

The average age and income of the electorate is important for a variety of representational reasons. But the fact that election timing changes these demographic factors does not automatically mean that it substantially influences the partisanship or ideology of the electorate. In fact, neither age nor income are strongly correlated with partisanship and ideology in recent American elections. They are also not strongly correlated with voting behavior (e.g., Gelman and Azari, 2017).

Next, we examine whether election timing influences the partisan or ideological composition of the electorate in the bottom panel of Figure 3. Panel (c) shows that switching to on-cycle elections has no detectable impact on the share of Democratic voters in the electorate. Panel (d) of Figure 3 examines the impact of election timing on the ideological composition of the electorate. It shows that on-cycle elections also has no detectable impact

⁷Our results using a two-way fixed effects counterfactual model are broadly similar to the one-way fixed effect regression results reported in the original papers. Like Hajnal, Kogan, and Markarian (2022), we find quite large impacts of election timing on the demographic composition of the electorate, but more muted effects on the partisan and ideological composition.

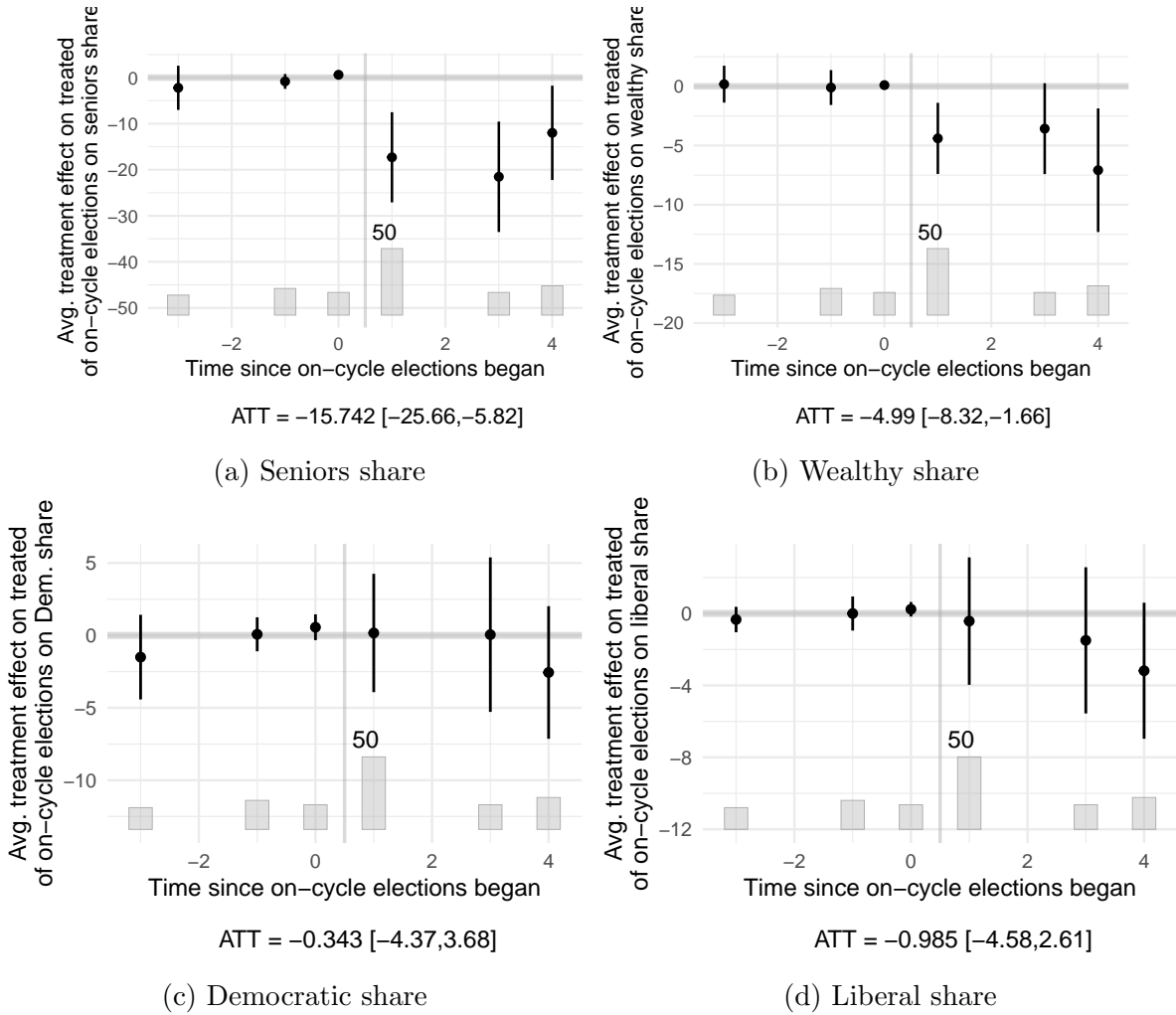


Figure 3: Effect of Switches in Election Timing on Partisan and Ideological Composition of the Electorate in California Elections

on the share of liberals in the electorate.

Overall, our analyses in this section indicate that election timing can have very large impacts on the demographic composition of the electorate. On-cycle elections lead to substantially fewer senior citizens in the electorate. They also lead to more somewhat socioeconomically diverse electorates. But there are more modest impacts of election timing on the partisan and ideological composition of the electorate.

5 Election Timing and Electoral Outcomes

In this section, we examine the impact of election timing on the outcomes of local elections. First, we examine its impact on the two-party vote share of Democrats and Republicans in mayoral, city council, and county legislative elections. Similarly to the earlier results, Figure 4 suggests that on-cycle elections might lead to slightly higher Democratic vote share (ATT = 1.6 percentage points). But the results are not statistically significant.

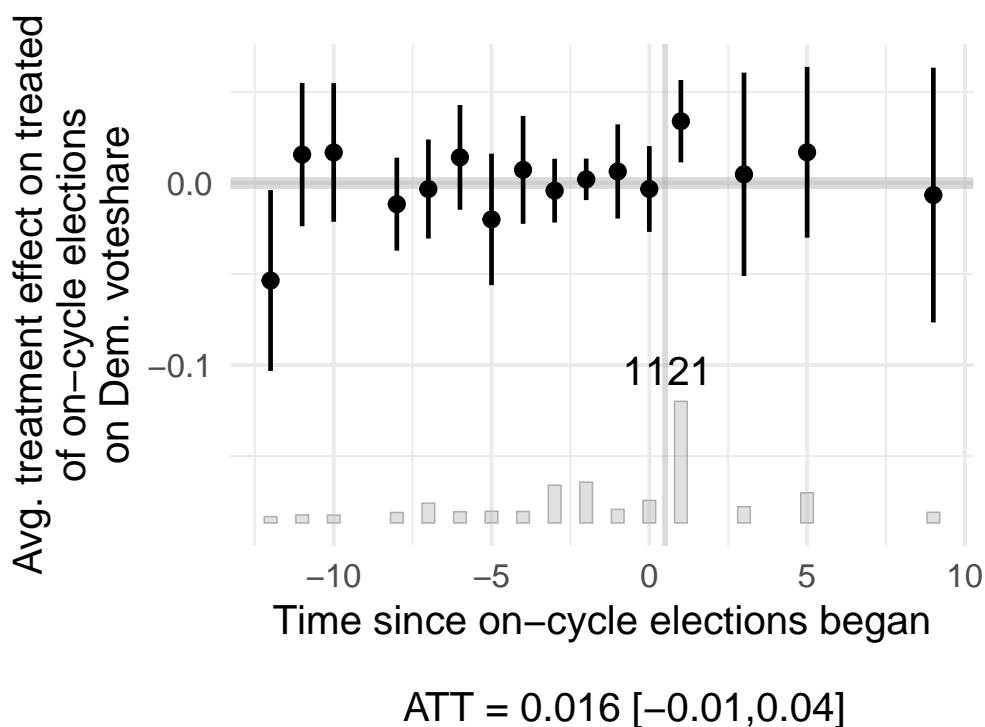


Figure 4: Effect of Switches to On-Cycle Elections on Democratic Vote Share across Mayor, City Council, and County Council Elections

Next, we examine the effect of election timing on the ideology of the winners in local elections. To examine this, we harness the auxiliary data from de Benedictis-Kessner et al. (2023) that contains campaign finance-based measure of candidates' ideology (Bonica, 2019). Figure 5 again shows that on-cycle elections have no significant effects on the ideology of the winning candidates.

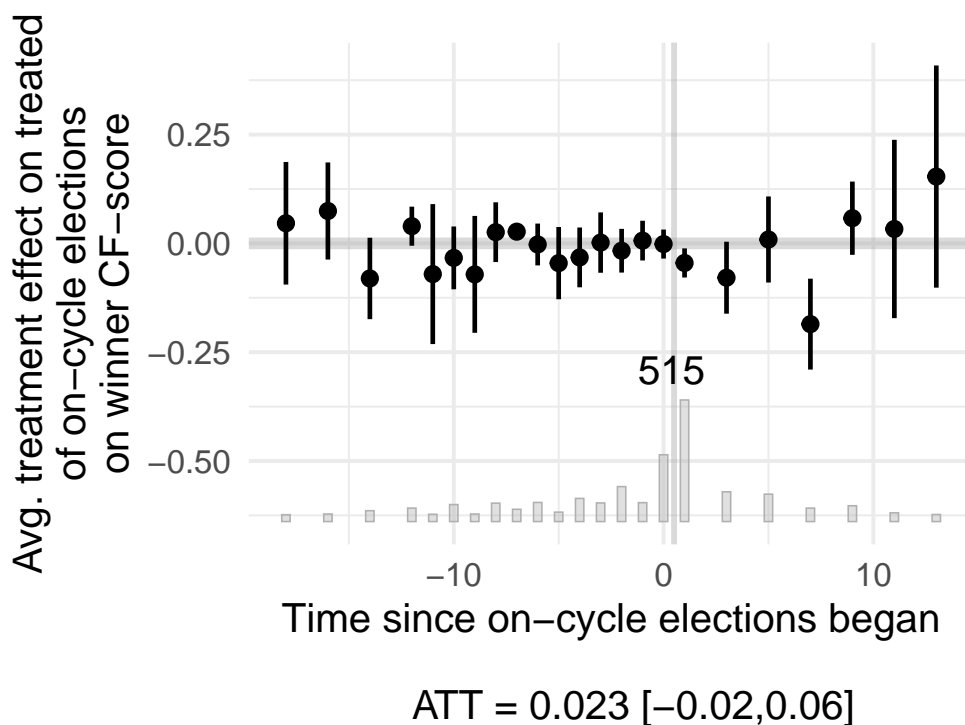


Figure 5: Effect of Switches to On-Cycle Elections on Ideology of Winners across Mayor, City Council, and County Council Elections

6 Election Timing and Local Policy Outputs

In this section, we examine the effect of election timing on the policy outputs of local governments. Specifically, we examine whether mayoral election timing affects per capita expenditures, the average pay of municipal employees, the per capita number of city employees, cities' LGBTQ rights policies, or housing policy.⁸ These results are shown in Figure 6. We also examine the effects of county legislative election timing on per capita county expenditures, county employee pay, and the per capita number of county employees in Figure 7. These analyses use the counterfactual fixed effects model (Liu, Wang, and Xu, 2022), which leverage within-city and within-county switches in election timing.

Figures 6 and 7 indicate that election timing has no short or medium-run causal effects

⁸We focus on the timing of mayoral elections given the role of mayors as executive policymakers in these cities and previous research showing the effects of mayors, but not city councilors, on policy (de Benedictis-Kessner and Warshaw, 2016; de Benedictis-Kessner, Jones, and Warshaw, 2023).

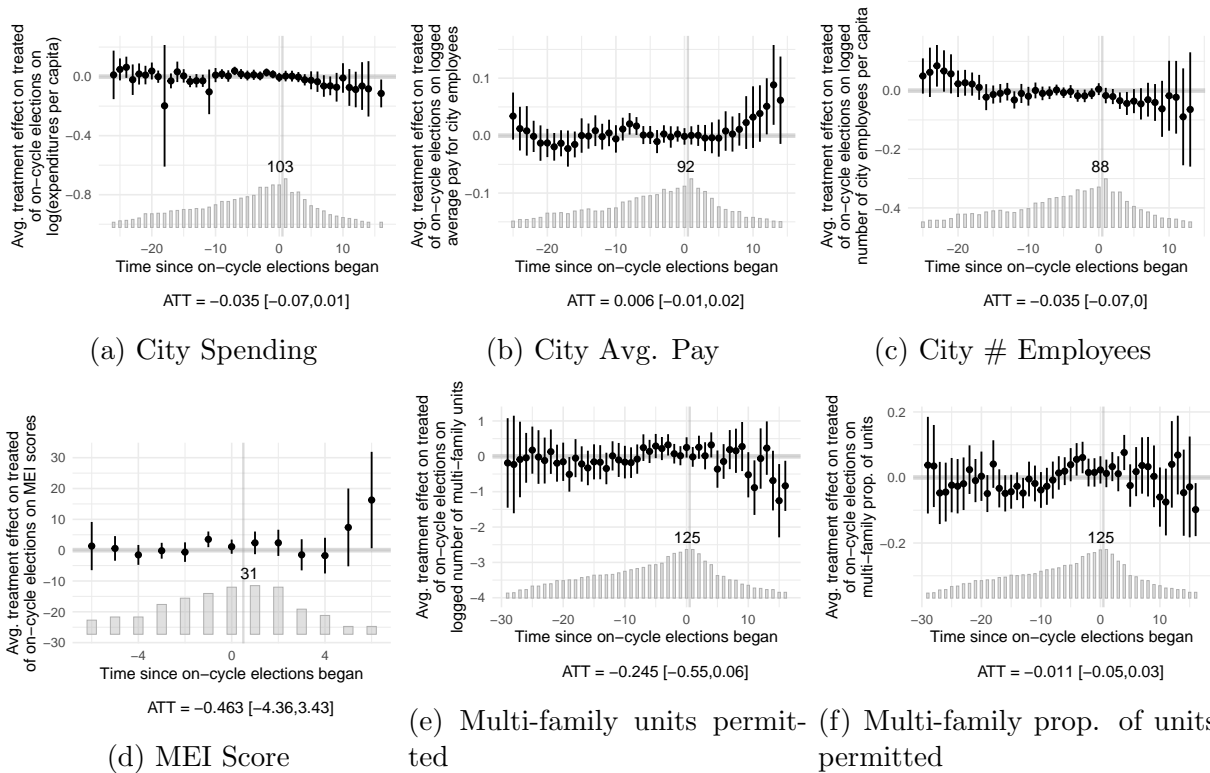


Figure 6: Effect of Switches to On-Cycle Elections on City Policy Outputs

on any of the policy outputs we examine. So, overall, there does not appear to be strong evidence that election timing influences municipal or county policy outputs. It is possible that the effects of election timing on policy take longer to materialize, but we do not have sufficient data to examine this possibility.

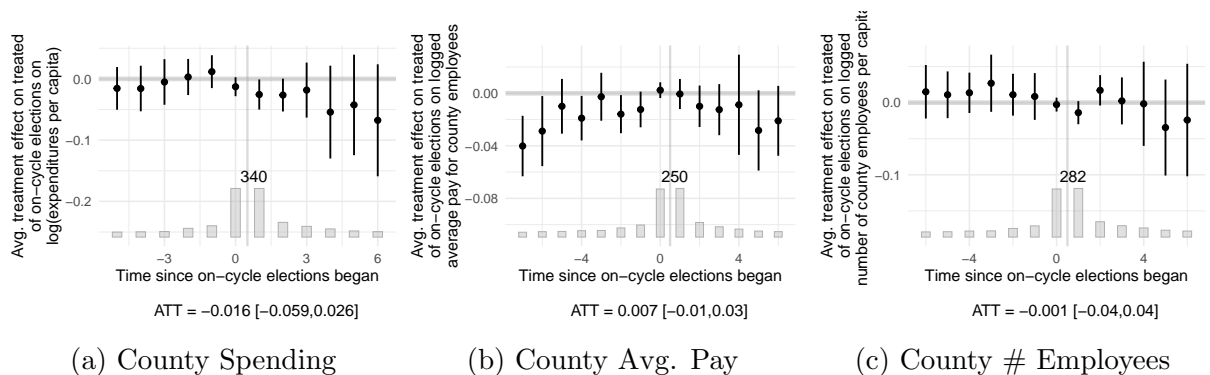


Figure 7: Effect of Switches to On-Cycle Elections on County Policy Outputs

7 Conclusion

In this paper, we have examined how election timing influences the electoral and policy processes of local governments. Consistent with previous literature, we have shown that switching to on-cycle elections substantially increases turnout. Moreover, it reduces the proportion of older and wealthier people in the electorate. However, we found only small effects of election timing on the partisan or ideological composition of the electorate. The muted effects on these groups suggest that the impact of election timing on the electoral and political process is likely to be relatively limited.

We uncover little evidence that election timing influences the outcomes of mayoral, city council, or county legislative elections. We find no evidence that on-cycle elections affect the partisan outcomes of elections, and none that it affects the ideology of local elected officials. Election timing appears to have minimal effects on who – demographically or politically – is elected to local office.

Finally, we examine the impact of election timing on the policy outputs of city governments. We find no evidence that switching to on-cycle elections affects municipal expenditures, the pay of local employees, the number of municipal employees, LGBTQ rights policies enacted by municipal governments, or their housing policy. We also find no impact of election timing on the policies of county governments.

Overall, our results indicate there are significant participatory benefits to on-cycle local elections while few *political* consequences. Moving more local elections on-cycle would significantly increase overall voter turnout and the participation of younger and less wealthy voters, while leading to little if any changes in electoral outcomes. Nor would on-cycle elections change the policy outputs of local governments. The modest electoral and policy effects of election timing appear to be similar to the non-existent or small effects of many other electoral rules and institutions in state and local politics (Tausanovitch and Warshaw, 2014; Schaffner, Rhodes, and La Raja, 2020; Caughey and Warshaw, 2022; Grimmer and

Hersh, 2023).⁹ Our findings in this paper contribute to ongoing policy debates about election administration and institutions that facilitate voter enfranchisement. Our paper also contributes to the literature on representation in local politics, as well as the broader literature on democratic governance in the United States.

⁹This does, however, contrast with some recent work showing the distinctive impact of another local electoral rule, district vs. at-large elections, on the racial makeup of local elected officials and subsequent policy outcomes (Abott and Magazinnik, 2020; Hankinson and Magazinnik, 2023; Trounstine and Valdini, 2008).

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**Supplementary Appendix for
“The Electoral and Policy Effects of
Election Timing in City and County Governments”**

A Placebo Checks for Main Results

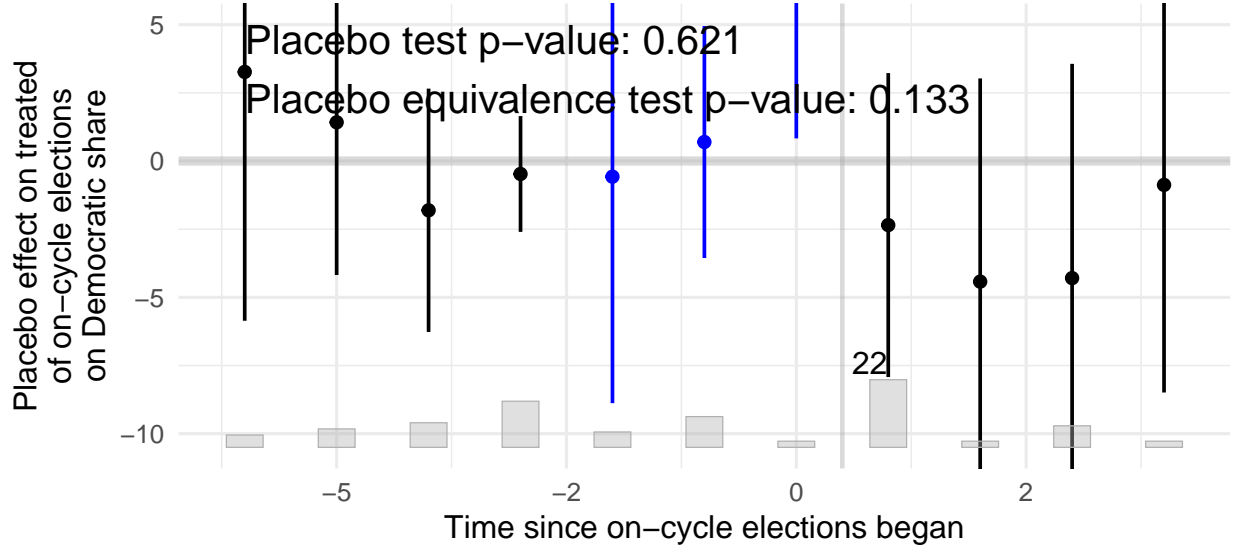


Figure A1: Placebo Check for Effect on Partisan Composition of Electorate

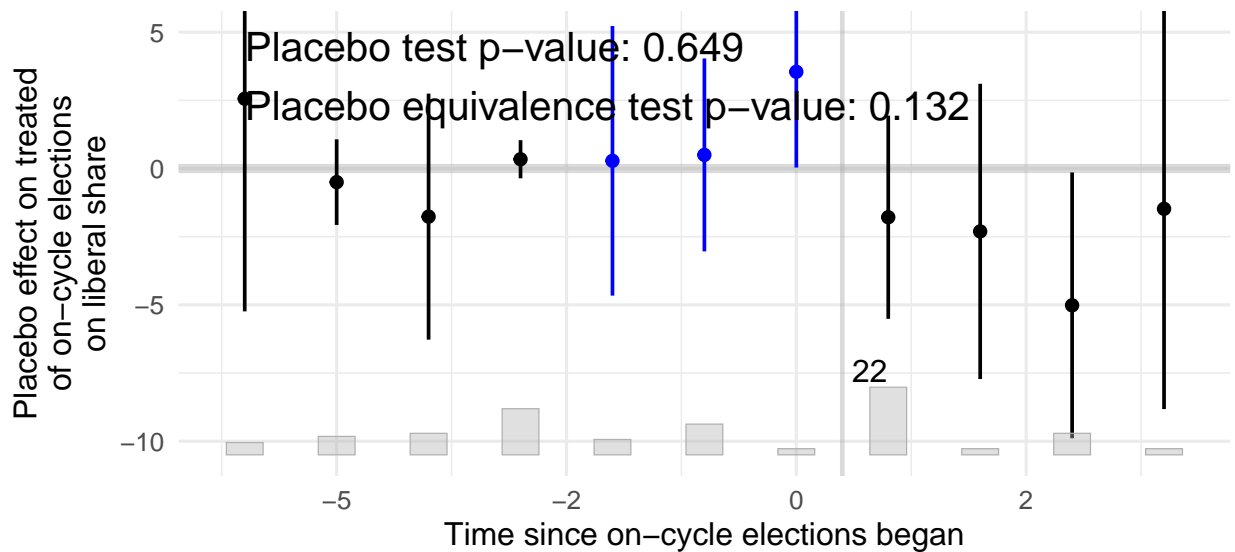


Figure A2: Placebo Check for Effect on Ideological Composition of Electorate

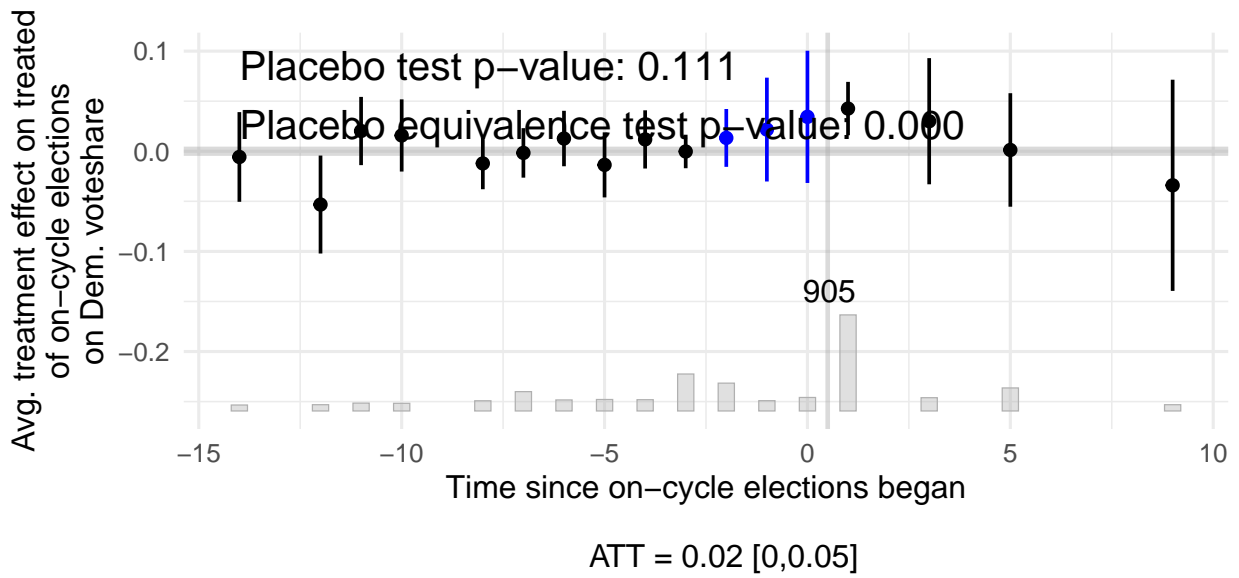


Figure A3: Placebo Check for Effect on Partisan Outcomes of Elections

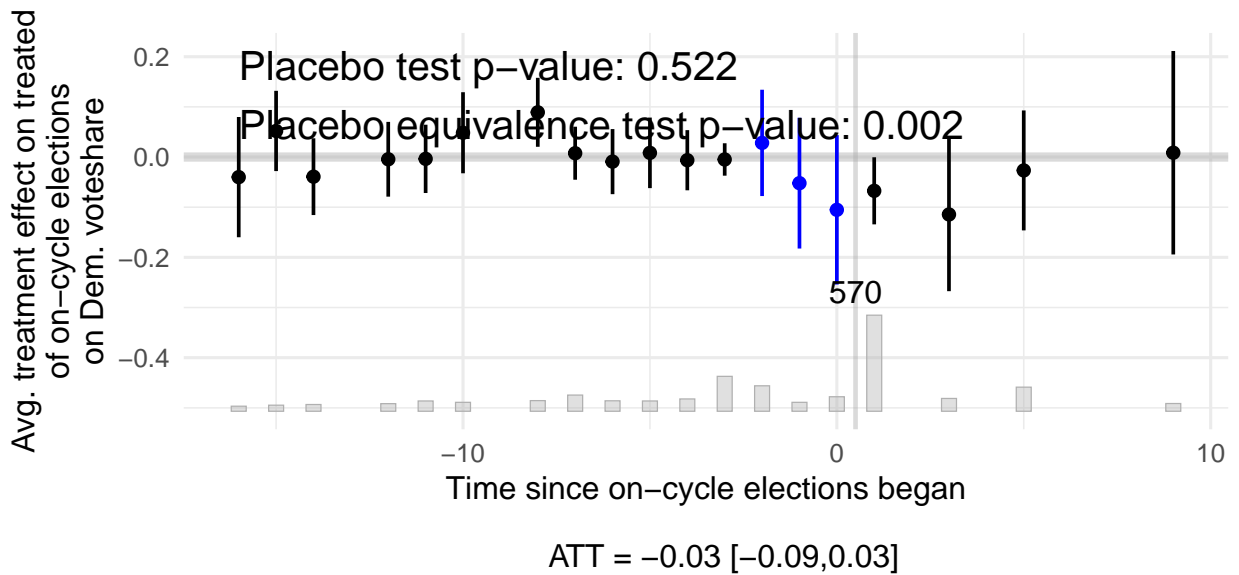


Figure A4: Placebo Check for Effect on Ideological Outcomes of Elections

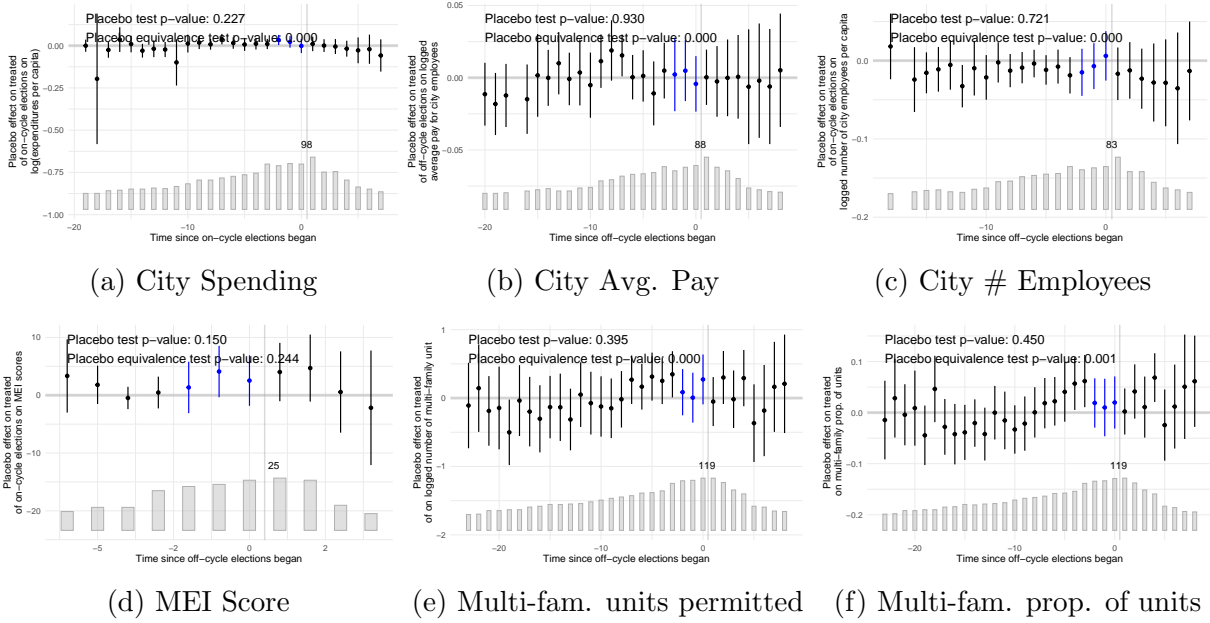


Figure A5: Placebo of Switches to On-Cycle Elections on City Policy Outputs

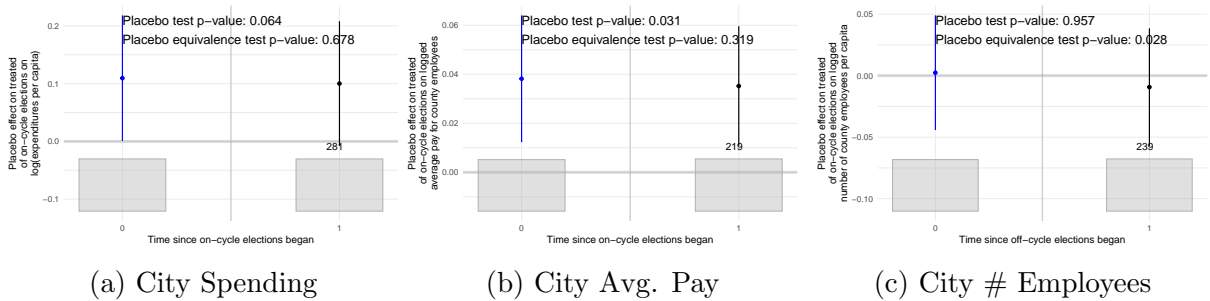


Figure A6: Placebo of Switches to On-Cycle Elections on County Policy Outputs

B Regression tables for analyses of switches to on-cycle elections

Table A1: Effect of Election Timing on Democratic Voteshare in Local Elections

Dependent Variable:	Democratic voteshare							
	Mayor		City Council		County Legislature		All Offices	
Model:	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
<i>Variables</i>								
On-cycle	0.046 (0.039)	0.023 (0.038)	0.0006 (0.022)	0.036** (0.017)	-0.014 (0.029)	0.032* (0.018)	-0.016 (0.017)	0.032*** (0.012)
Pres. Dem. voteshare	1.42*** (0.080)		1.31*** (0.105)		1.50*** (0.063)		1.41*** (0.049)	
<i>Fixed-effects</i>								
Year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
City/County		Yes						
City/County-District				Yes		Yes		Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>								
Observations	2,233	3,080	3,433	12,153	1,800	21,361	7,466	36,594
R ²	0.407	0.644	0.493	0.740	0.569	0.718	0.498	0.735
Within R ²	0.225	0.0002	0.347	0.0007	0.513	0.0007	0.394	0.0007

*Signif. Codes: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1*

Table A2: Effect of Election Timing on the Ideology of Winners in Local Elections

Dependent Variable:	Winner CF-score							
	Mayor		City Council		County Legislature		All Offices	
Model:	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
<i>Variables</i>								
On-cycle	-0.084 (0.070)	-0.074 (0.086)	-0.030 (0.058)	-0.044 (0.042)	0.048 (0.052)	0.008 (0.028)	-0.031 (0.039)	-0.017 (0.022)
Pres. Dem. voteshare	-2.55*** (0.147)		-2.02*** (0.185)		-2.62*** (0.237)		-2.30*** (0.104)	
<i>Fixed-effects</i>								
Year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
City/County		Yes						
City/County-District				Yes		Yes		Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>								
Observations	2,070	2,753	2,652	10,420	1,177	13,023	5,899	26,196
R ²	0.358	0.617	0.368	0.729	0.457	0.755	0.378	0.742
Within R ²	0.226	0.0006	0.212	0.0003	0.354	1.23×10^{-5}	0.277	4.64×10^{-5}

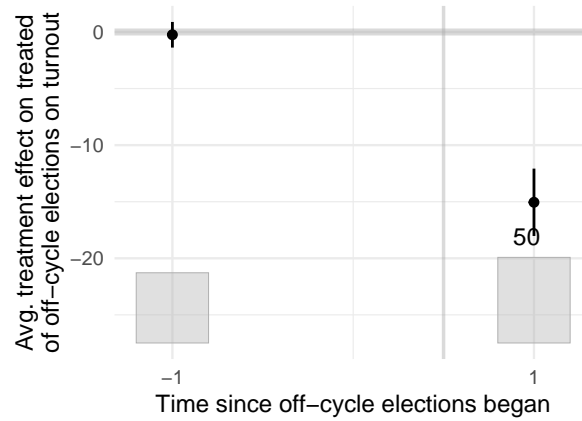
*Signif. Codes: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1*

Table A3: Effect of Election Timing on Policy Outputs in Local Elections

Dependent Variables: Model:	log(Expenditures per capita)		log(Avg. Pay)		log(# of employees per capita)		MEI Score		log(multifamily units)		Multifamily prop. of units	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
<i>Variables</i>												
On-cycle	-0.089*	-0.015	0.002	-0.001	-0.131***	-0.011	-3.35	-4.45*	0.092	-0.128	-0.004	0.010
	(0.049)	(0.019)	(0.014)	(0.008)	(0.050)	(0.016)	(2.47)	(2.57)	(0.128)	(0.123)	(0.018)	(0.015)
Mass ideology	-0.510***		-0.035		-0.553***		-47.3***		-0.397*		-0.283***	
	(0.077)		(0.022)		(0.075)		(4.30)		(0.203)		(0.031)	
log(Population)	0.155***	-0.122***	0.023***	0.112***	0.099***	-0.213***	9.51***	-10.7	1.50***	1.08***	0.086***	0.089***
	(0.024)	(0.038)	(0.006)	(0.019)	(0.020)	(0.046)	(1.49)	(26.5)	(0.063)	(0.207)	(0.008)	(0.028)
<i>Fixed-effects</i>												
Year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
City		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>												
Observations	15,776	15,835	12,971	13,024	12,971	13,024	1,927	1,927	15,381	15,440	15,232	15,291
R ²	0.464	0.866	0.713	0.880	0.697	0.949	0.674	0.904	0.352	0.523	0.229	0.417
Within R ²	0.178	0.006	0.029	0.020	0.205	0.023	0.426	0.005	0.247	0.007	0.134	0.003

Clustered (City) standard-errors in parentheses
 Signif. Codes: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1

C FECT results for analyses of switches to off-cycle elections



(a) Mayoral elections: Off-cycle

Figure A7: Effect of Switches in Election Timing on Turnout

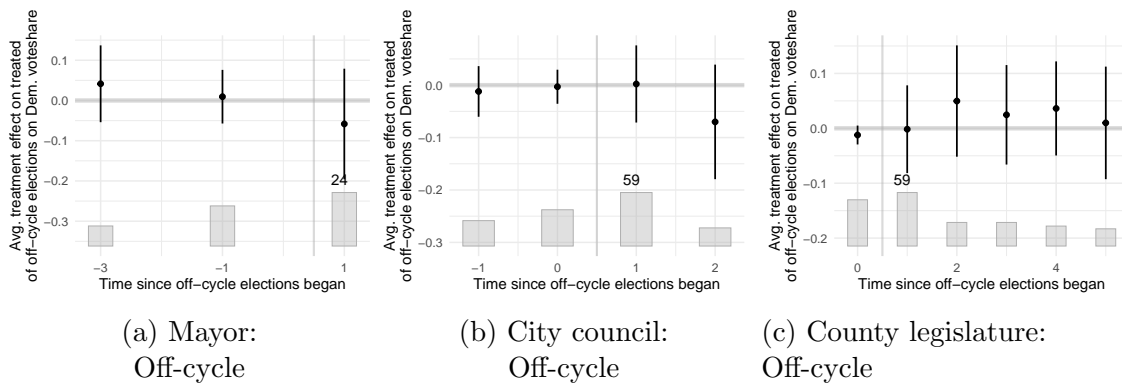


Figure A8: Effect of Switches in Election Timing on Democratic Vote Share

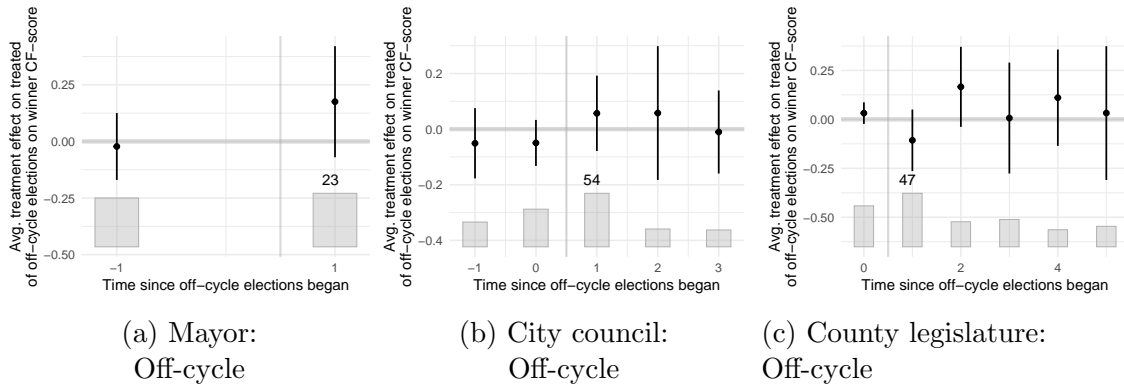


Figure A9: Effect of Switches in Election Timing on Ideology of Winners

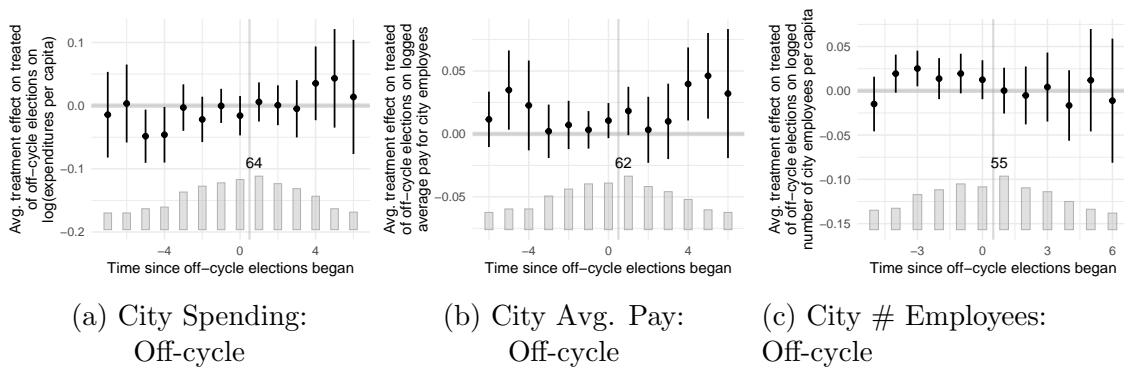


Figure A10: Effect of Switches in Election Timing on City Policy Outputs

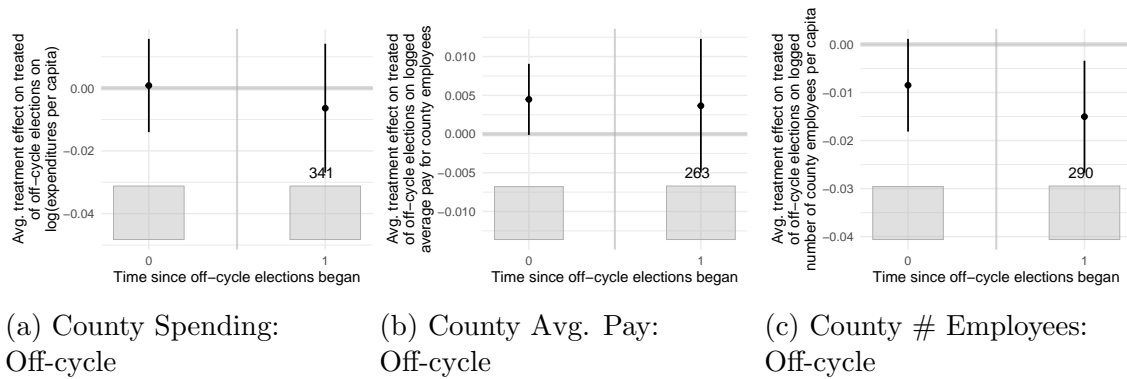


Figure A11: Effect of Switches in Election Timing on County Policy Outputs