

Gender, Race and Gubernatorial Elections: A County Level Analysis

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Abstract

Using county demographic data from 36 states, this study examines the role of gender and race in the determination of gubernatorial elections in the United States. OLS was used to investigate this relationship. First, the result shows that white females with college degree tend to vote republican in gubernatorial elections. Secondly, more and more black males with college degree now tend to vote republican. Regardless of race, those that are unemployed votes democrat, while whites with above average income votes for the republicans in gubernatorial elections.

Key words: Gender, Race, Incumbency, Democrats, Republicans, County.

Introduction

This study employs county level data to examine the role of gender and race in the determination of gubernatorial elections in the United States. Many studies have focused on the effect of economic conditions and presidential popularity on state and national voting behavior. Abramowitz (1985), posits that public perception of favorable economic conditions and presidential popularity do impact positively on vote choice. King (2001) inferred that voters use the ballot for governor to express approval or disapproval of current economic conditions and the president's job performance. In their 1997 study, Gavin and Sanders suggested that the economy did have a significant impact on the outcome of the 1997 general election. Other studies emphasize the effect of candidate's issues and party affiliation on voters' choice (Abbe, Goodliffe, Herrnson and Patterson, (2003).

However, Piereson (1977) looked at the sources of candidate success in gubernatorial elections between 1910-1970 and noted the declining importance of partisanship and a corresponding increase in the importance of other factors, primarily incumbency. Piereson concluded that the most determinants of a candidate's success in an American election are the base strength of the two parties in his or her constituency. Murray and Vedlitz (1977), postulates that race and socioeconomic status in conjunction with higher voters participation rate are the main determinants of election results in large southern cities of the United States. The rest of this paper is divided into four subsequent sections. Section two reviews literatures on gender, race and political elections. Section three describes the data, methodology and model used. Section four highlights the results, and section five presents the conclusions of this study.

Literature review

There are numerous literature on the determinants of election results in the United States such as macroeconomic condition effects on presidential elections, party affiliation and incumbency, international or external political events etc. Few have focused on county level characteristics and gubernatorial elections. The main two schools of thought of the effects of economic condition on vote, according to Guseh (1996), are the ones that considers their economic condition before deciding whether to vote for the incumbent president or party. These are the ones called the self-interest pocketbook voters. The other school of thought considers the aggregate wellbeing in their decision on which they vote for. In their study of house elections from 1916-1996, Grier and McGarrity (2002), adopted two distinct paradigms that relates economic condition to congress or house elections. The first is the presidential party while the second is the paradigm of incumbency. They assert that favorable economic conditions help both the incumbents and all candidates of the presidential party get re-elected simultaneously. However, Kramer (1971) postulates that economic conditions have strong effects on Presidential party candidates alone in House elections.

Canon (1999); Lublin (1997); and Swain (1995) looked at the electoral importance of race and ethnicity in the U.S House general elections. They compared the size of minority population (African American and Latino) and the electoral outcomes in House general elections.

They concluded that as the African American or Latino population increases, the probability of African American or Latino descriptive representation also increases. Branton (2009) inferred that as the district-level proportion of African American increases, the number of African American candidates in both party primary elections likewise increases.

Data and Methodology

Data for this study are defined in Table 1. The data includes information about the county demographic compositions obtained for 36 states that held gubernatorial elections in November of 2006 from various sources. The certified results of the elections are published on the web sites of most states in the United States. Additional sources were utilized in a few cases where county-level breakdown of results were not available on the state web site. The dependent variable (MVRep) for this study is the victory margin of the republican candidate over the democratic candidate in the statewide elections. The results would have been the same with reversed signs if the margin of victory of the democratic candidate over the republican candidate had been used. The only reason for using this margin is because the President of the United States is a Republican at the time of the election. We also used the percentage of votes won by the republican (%REP) and democrat (%DEM) candidates separately as dependent variables to analyze the determinants of their voting success.

Twelve independent variables were used. These variables are *POP*, *MINC*, *UNEM*, *COL*, *HSCHL*, *AGE*, *NEAST*, *SOUTH*, *FEM*, *BLACK*, *HISP* and *WHITE*. The variables of interest are race and gender. In regards to race and gender, we expect *WHITE* and *HISP* to have positive effect or that whites and Hispanics are likely to vote republican while *BLACKS* is expected to have negative sign, in this case vote democrat. It is generally believed that women (*FEM*) and minority groups are more likely to vote for Democrat candidates. If this is supported by this study, then the signs of this variable (*FEM*) would be negative in the model with margin of victory of the Republican candidate, and the percentage of votes obtained by the Republican candidate, but positive for the percentage of votes received by the democratic candidate.

We expect the signs of the other demographic variables *POP*, *MINC*, *UNEM*, *COL*, *HSCHL*, *AGE*, *NEAST* and *SOUTH* to show mixed results. The signs of *MINC*, *COL*, *HSCHL*, *AGE*, *NEAST* and *SOUTH* are expected to be positive in the model of the difference between Republican and Democratic candidate, but negative in regards to the *POP* and *UNEM* variables. The signs of the regional variables (*NEAST* and *SOUTH*) are expected to be positive. In this case, we assumed that voters in these regions tend to vote predominantly Republican.

In this study, multiple regression framework is used to estimate the impact of race, gender and other social indicators (population, mean income, unemployment, high school and college graduate, age and regional location) on vote choice between the republican and democratic party.

Most gubernatorial election studies use exit polls to analyze vote pattern. These surveys include questions such as presidential popularity, perceptions of economic conditions and party affiliation, but do not include county segmentation in vote choice, and therefore are inappropriate for this analysis. In addition, the results of exit polls may differ systematically from the overall county population that it is intended to represent. Instead, the data drawn for this study are from 34 states that had gubernatorial election in 2019. Demographic data were collected from each county in those states. A model incorporating variables reflecting race, gender, and socioeconomic status within each county is used to test the effects of race and gender on gubernatorial elections. The model is defined as:

$$MVRep = b_0 + b_1POP + b_2MINC + b_3UNEM + b_4COL + b_5HSCHL + b_6AGE + b_7NEAST + b_8SOUTH + b_9FEM + b_{10}BLACK + b_{11}HISP + b_{12}WHITE + e$$

Results

The results of the descriptive and regression statistics are presented in Tables 1, 2 and 3. In Table 1, the mean difference between the percentage of votes received by the Republican and Democratic candidate (MVRep) was 11.96 with maximum and minimum percentage values of 98.8 and -92.0 respectively. This posits that there were a wide divergence in the distribution of votes among those who for the voted Republican and Democratic candidates. This result explains why the distribution is skewed to the left. Individually, the mean percentage votes received by the Republican (%REP) and Democratic (%DEM) were 54.137 and 41.781 respectively. However, the maximum and minimum percentage values of Republican votes were 99.4 and 0.0, while the Democrats recorded values of 95.8 and 0.6. The spread of the distribution are not as diverse compared to MVRep.

The mean percentage of the county population that are female (*FEM*), *BLACK*, Hispanic (*HISP*), and *WHITE* were 49.879, 8.6, 7.756 and 84.737 respectively. In the case of *FEM* and *WHITE*, their distributions are skewed to the left, while *BLACK* and *HISP* were skewed to the right.

The median income (MINC) within the county population was \$33,747.920, while the mean percentage of the county's labor force above 16 years that were unemployed (UNEM) was 4.797. While the median income was normally distributed the UNEM was skewed to the left. The percentage mean of high school (HSCHL) and college (COL) graduates were 72.20 and 14.300 respectively, while the percentage mean AGE of the county population was 37.79. The distribution of COL and AGE appears to be normal while HSCHL was not.

Table 2 model 1 presents the regression results for MVRep against non race and gender variables. The R-square was .131. Seven of the explanatory variables except COL were significant at least at the ninety-five percent confidence level. All significant variables had the expected signs. In addition, the magnitudes of all significant variables were reasonable.

In Table 2, model 2, MVRep was regressed against all the variables including race and gender. The R-square is .175. Nine of the explanatory variables were significant at least at ninety-five confidence level. The non-significant variables were COL, BLACK, and HISP. Coincidentally, model 2 non race and gender variables yielded the same statistical results as that of model 1, except that the magnitude of significance of MINC was smaller in model 2. In regards to race and gender the signs were as expected, although BLACK and the HISP variables were statistically insignificant. It is pertinent to note from the regression results that FEM and BLACK tend to vote Democrat while HISP and WHITE tend to vote Republican. Traditionally, HISP has always voted Democrats; therefore, the change in trend in 2002 could be due to the President being a Republican at the time of election.

Table 3 analyzes the vote pattern associated with Democrats and Republicans individually. The R-square was 0.180 and 0.149 respectively. The signs of POP, UNEM, FEM and BLACK variables with regards to the Democrats were positive and significant at the ninety-five percent confidence level. These results indicate that counties with larger population and higher unemployment levels tend to vote Democrat. In addition, FEM and BLACK in these counties displays higher propensity to vote Democrats in Gubernatorial elections. However, the signs of MINC, COL, AGE, NEAST, SOUTH, HISP, and WHITE variables were negative, but only MINC, AGE, NEAST, SOUTH, and WHITE variables were significant. Therefore, poorer and counties with larger number of younger citizens tend to vote for the Democrats. Compared to the Western region, NEAST and SOUTH counties voting pattern favors the Republicans while counties with fewer number of whites seems to vote for Democratic candidates in gubernatorial elections. COL and the HISP variables were not significant.

Contrary to the Republicans, the signs of MINC, UNEM, AGE, NEAST, SOUTH, HISP and WHITE variables were positive and significant, while POP, COL, FEM and BLACK were negative. The POP and MINC variables indicate that counties with smaller population and richer counties tend to vote for the Republican candidates. Also, counties with older population seem to vote for the Republicans. Both NEAST and SOUTH also seem to vote Republican in conjunction with HISP and WHITE. COL, FEM, and BLACK were not significant.

Conclusion

This study used county level demographic data to examine the role of gender and race in the determination of gubernatorial elections in the United States. The data for this study were drawn from various sources. These data were county information for the gubernatorial elections held in November 2006. Most of the certified results are published on the websites of most states in the United States. OLS was used to investigate the relationship of gender and race on gubernatorial election using county level data. The dependent variable (MVRep) for this study is the difference between the percentage of votes received by the Republican and the Democratic candidate. The independent variables were percentage of votes received by the Republican and Democratic candidates as represented by %REP and %DEM respectively. Other variables are Female (FEM), Black, Hispanic (HISP), White, MINC (median income in the county), etc. Our study finds that females and Blacks tend to vote predominantly Democrats in all the models of this study. However, white females with college degree tend to vote Republican in gubernatorial elections. Our results also suggest further that more and more black males with college degree now tend to vote Republican. Regardless of race or gender, those that are unemployed votes Democrat, while whites with above average income votes Republican in gubernatorial election. In the incoming gubernatorial election, we would like to undertake a county level comparative study to ascertain the consistency of our findings.

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Table 1: Definitions, and descriptive statistics

Variable	Definition	Mean	Max	Min
MVRep	Difference between the percentage of votes received by the Republican candidate and the Democrat candidate	11.963	98.8	-92.0
%REP	Percentage of votes received by the Republican candidate	54.137	99.4	0.0
%DEM	Percentage of votes received by the Democrat party candidate	41.781	95.8	0.6
FEM	Percentage of the county's population that is female	49.879	57.8	9.0
BLACK	Percentage of the county's population that is black	8.600	92.0	0.0
HISP	Percentage of the county's population that is Hispanic	7.756	97.5	0.1
WHITE	Percentage of the county's population that is white	84.737	99.8	2.2
MINC	Median income in the county	33,747.920	77,513.0	3,746.0
UNEM	Percentage of the county's labor force above 16 that is unemployed	4.797	27.5	0.0
COL	Percentage of the county's population that are college graduates	14.300	33.9	0.0
HSCHL	Percentage of the county's population that are high school graduates	72.200	96.0	9.0
AGE	Mean age of the county's population	37.790	58.6	20.0
NEAST	Northeastern region of the U.S.	.090	1.0	0.0
WEST	Western region of the U.S.	.400	1.0	0.0

Table 2: Results of regression for difference between Republican and Democrat candidate

Variable	Estimate Model 1	Estimate Model 2
POP	-0.137 (6.258)***	-0.110 (4.946)***
MINC	0.088 (3.160)***	0.059 (2.139)**
UNEM	-0.137 (5.723)***	-0.120 (4.853)*
COL	0.031 (1.408)	0.024 (1.139)
HSCHL	0.210 (6.523)***	0.185 (5.843)***
AGE	0.127 (5.774)***	0.067 (2.897)***
NEAST	0.064 (2.896)***	0.074 (3.414)***
SOUTH	0.181 (7.033)***	0.227 (8.718)***
FEM		-0.066 (2.878)***
BLACK		-0.079 (1.691)*
HISP		0.036 (1.343)
WHITE		0.163 (3.206)***
R-square	0.131	0.175
F	36.294	33.982

Notes: The dependent variable is MVRep . The first figure in each cell is the regression coefficient. The second figure in each cell ie. in parenthesis is the t-statistic. ***Significant at the 99 percent level of confidence. **Significant at the 95 percent level of confidence.

*Significant at the 90 percent level of confidence

Table 3: Results for Democrat and Republican Candidates

Variable	Estimate Democrat	Estimate Republican
POP	0.121 (5.451)***	-0.108 (4.799)***
MINC	-0.156 (6.436)***	0.131 (5.316)***
UNEM	0.156 (6.781)***	0.158 (6.582)***
COL	-0.004 (0.214)	-0.007 (0.355)
AGE	-0.089 (3.847)***	0.065 (2.768)***
NEAST	-0.054 (2.518)**	0.087 (3.953)***
SOUTH	-0.079 (3.419)***	0.215 (9.084)***
FEM	0.081 (3.520)***	-0.034 (1.444)
BLACK	0.118 (2.535)**	-0.093 (1.970)**
HISP	-0.024 (0.882)	0.062 (2.274)**
WHITE	-0.141 (2.781)***	0.145 (2.812)***
R-square	0.180	0.149
F	38.416	30.618

Notes: The dependent variable is MVRep . The first figure in each cell is the regression coefficient. The second figure in each cell ie. in parenthesis is the t-statistic. ***Significant at the 99 percent level of confidence. **Significant at the 95 percent level of confidence.