

Oh No! I've Accidentally Elected a Republican!

The Effects of Nonpartisan Local Elections on City Council Partisan Composition

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BYU



Research Question

Does the presence (or absence) of party labels in local elections impact partisan representation on city councils?

Hypothesis

In non-partisan elections, voters cannot rely on the heuristic of candidate partisanship. So, candidates that would typically affiliate with an unpopular party can run without a party and still secure victory.

Provo City Council District 5 Vote for one

- COY D. PORTER
- RACHEL WHIPPLE
- ZAC GREEN

Non-partisan sample ballot

COUNCIL LANCASTER CITY

CONSEJO DE LA CIUDAD DE LANCASTER

(Vote for not more than Four)

(Vote por no más de Cuatro)

- Ismail Smith-Wade-EI DEM
- Faith M. Craig DEM
- Janet Diaz DEM
- Lochard Calixte DEM
- Ethan Brown REP
- Elizabeth E. Elias REP
- Dena M. Maounis REP
- Joey Dastra GGP

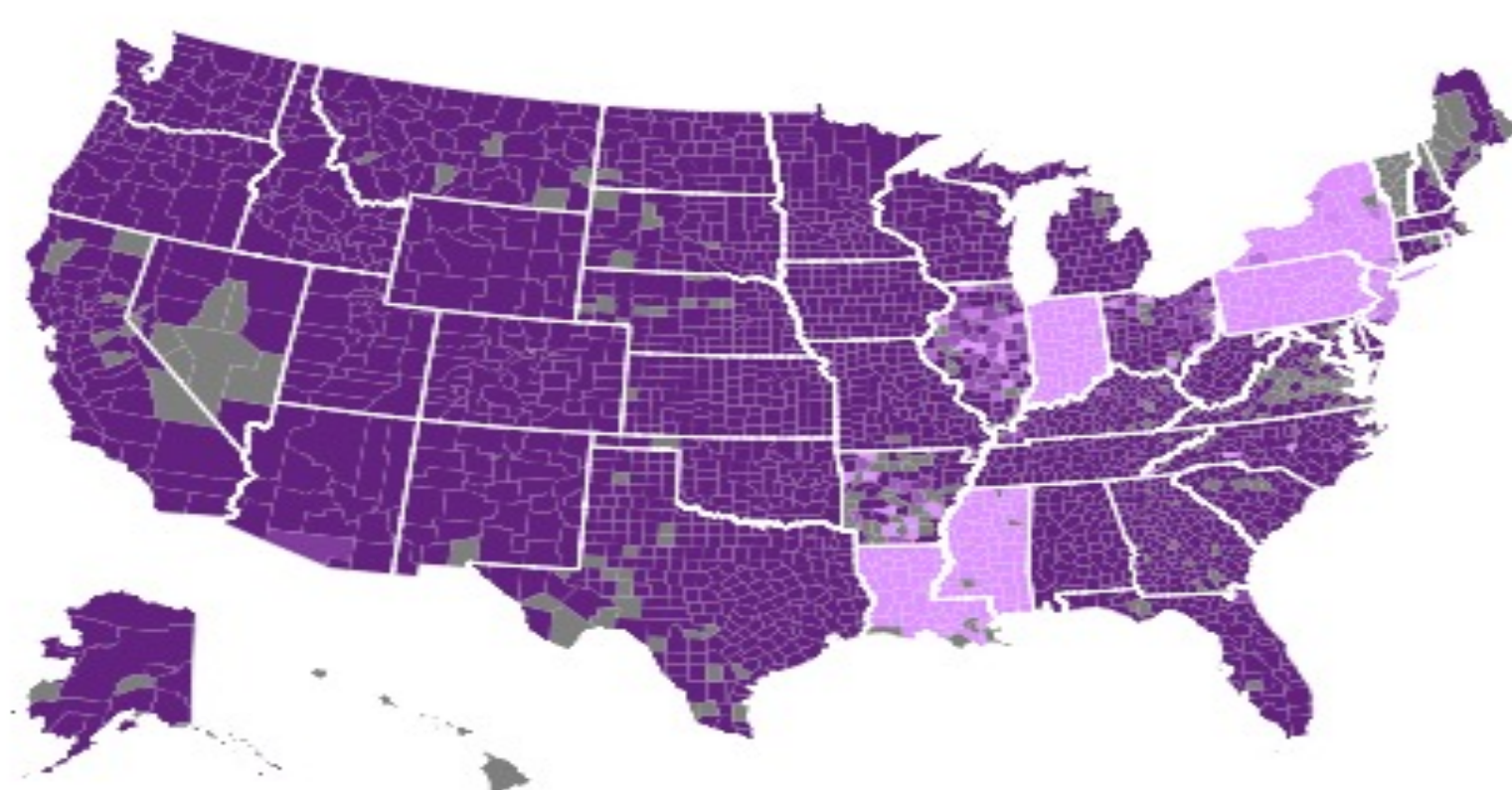
Partisan sample ballot

Data

Nearly comprehensive data set of municipal governments and their electoral institutions in the U.S., $n > 15,300$. No past work has examined this question at this scale.

We measure officials' & residents' partisanship using a campaign consulting firm's dataset that predicts every registered voter's partisanship based on available registration, turnout, survey, geographic and consumer data.

Election Types in Sample by County

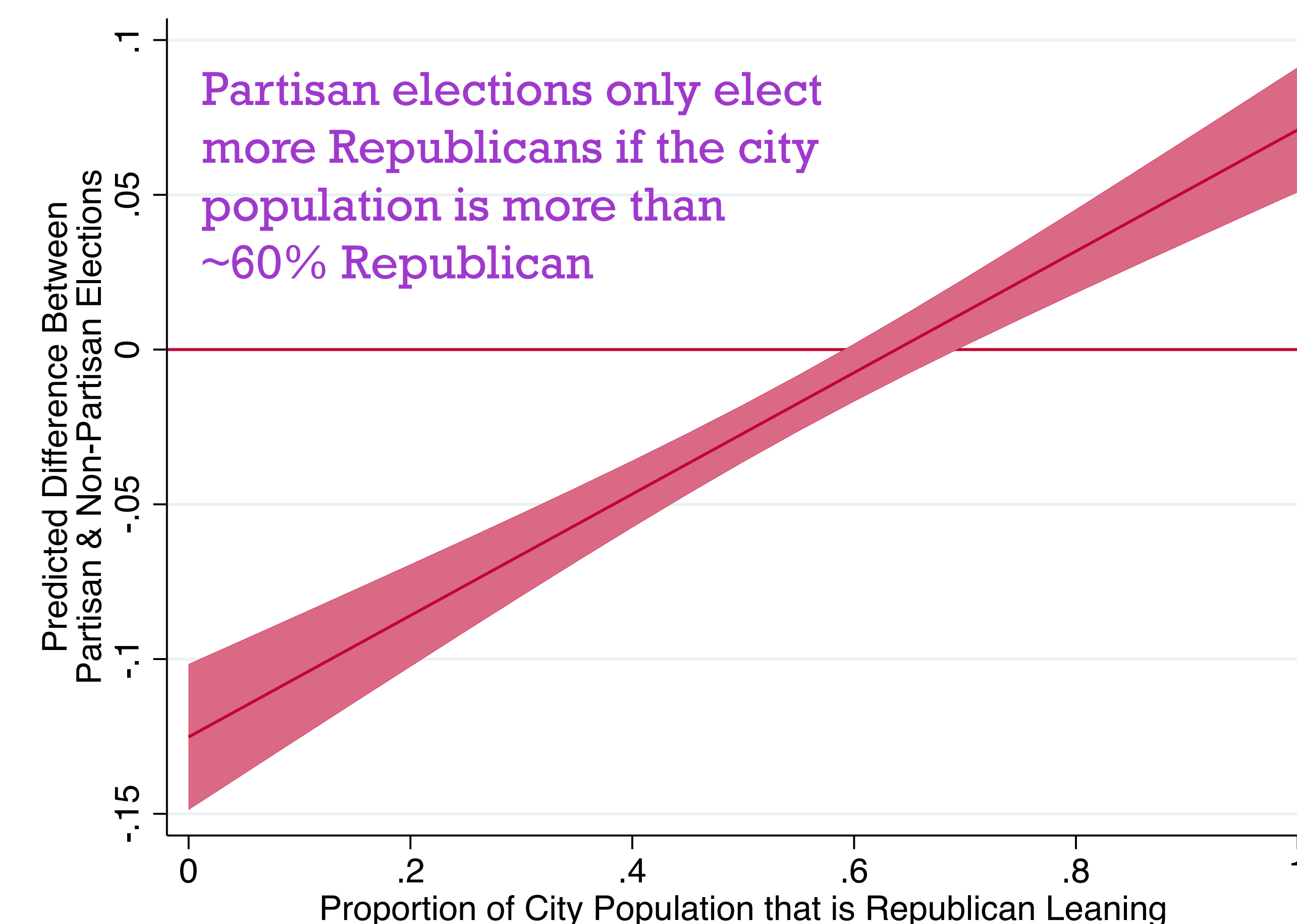
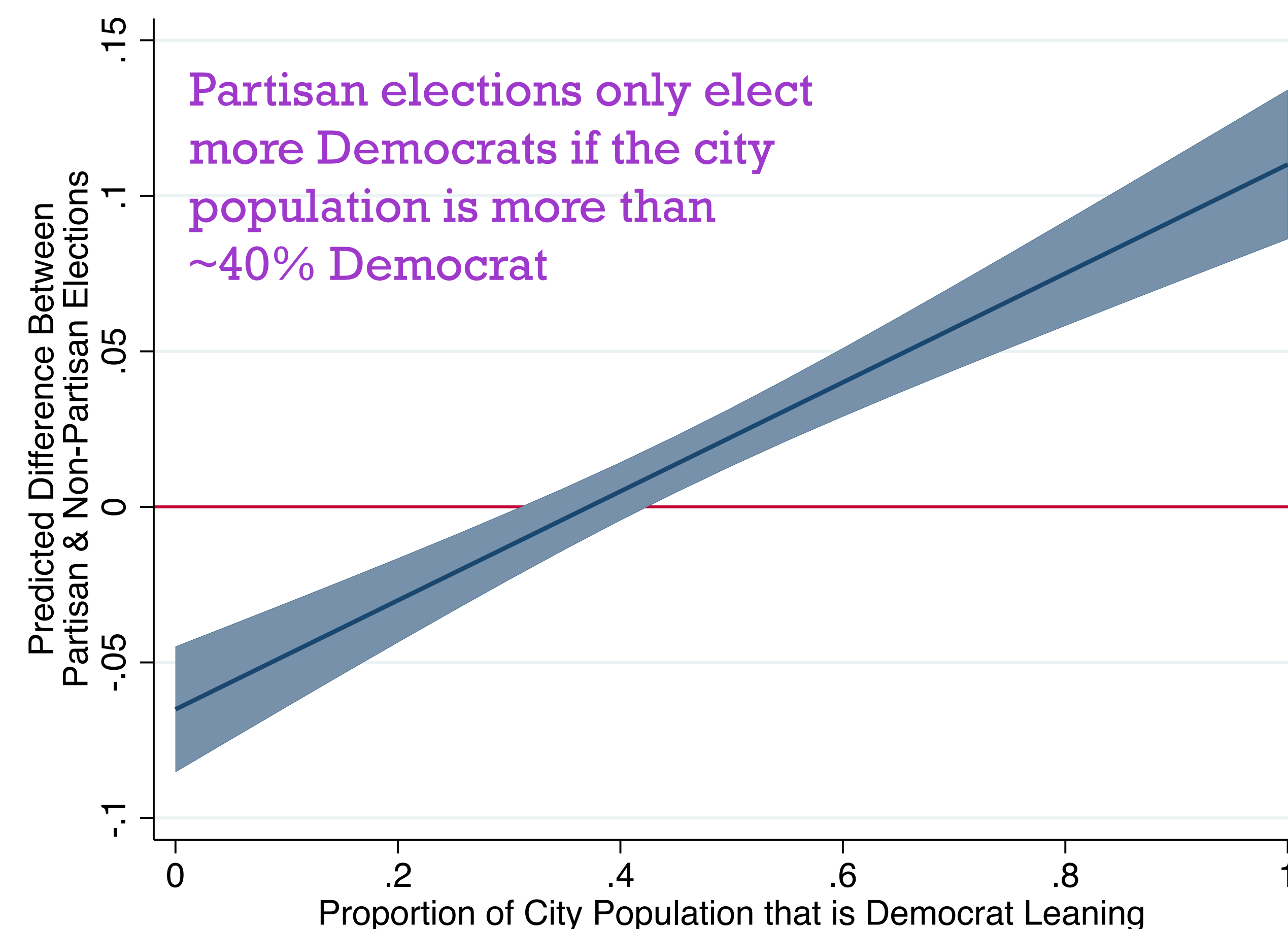
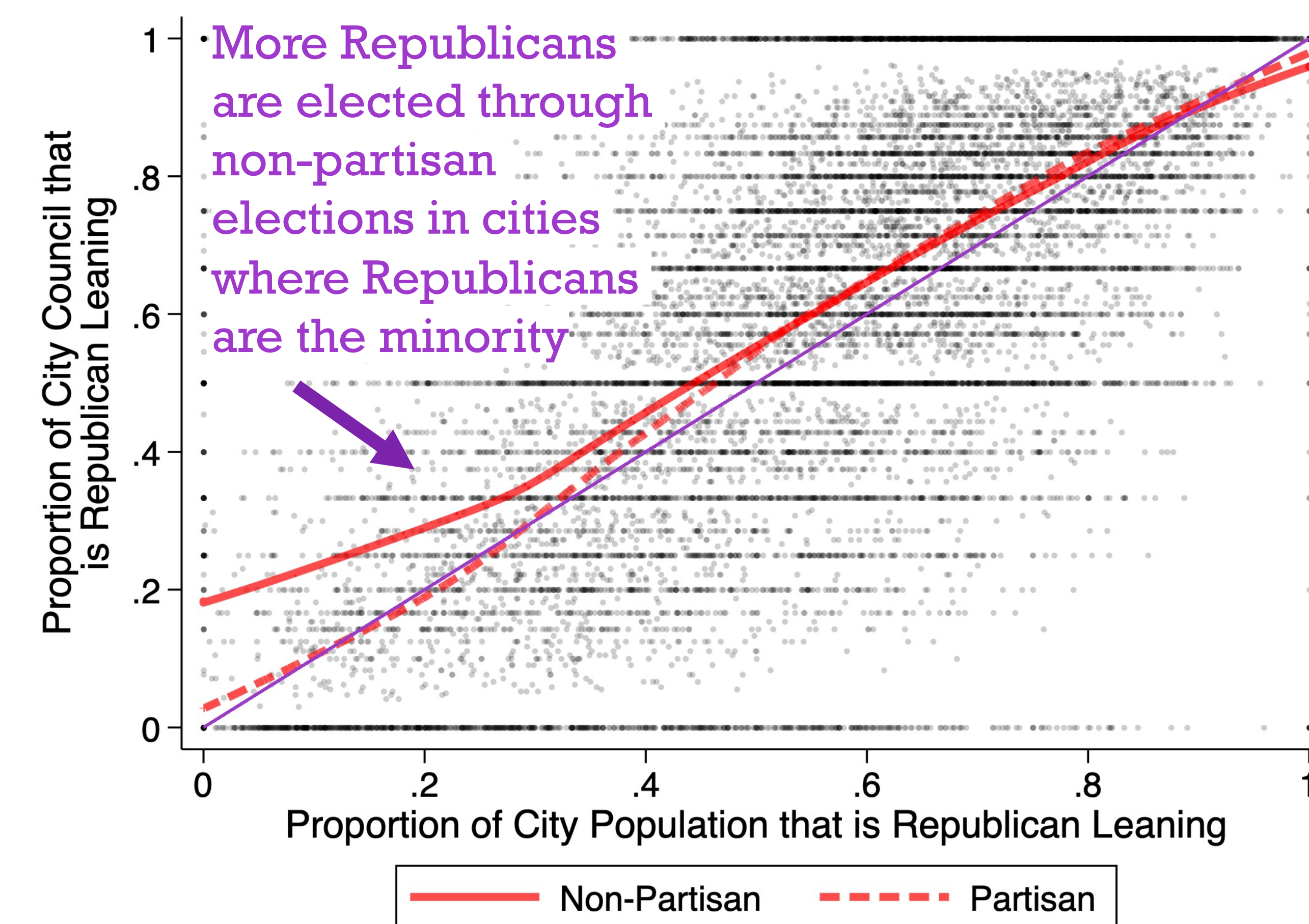
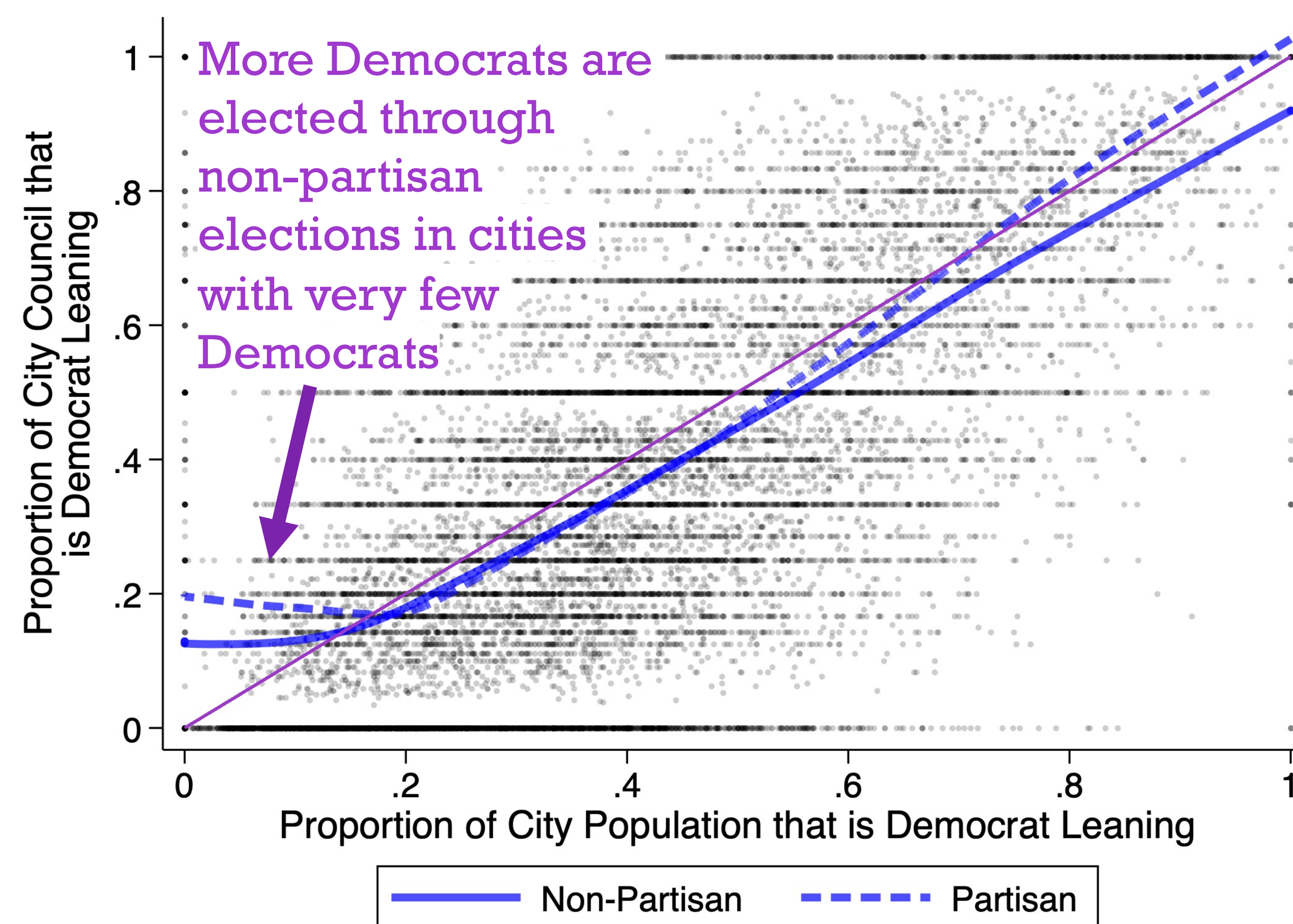


Nonpartisan 0 25 50 75 100 Partisan

Methods

Each resident & official is coded as either Republican/Republican Leaning or Democrat/Democrat Leaning, even if they aren't technically registered as a member of either party.

Results



Discussion

Non-partisan elections allow for the possibility that minority party candidates "sneak" their way into office in cities where their party or ideology is unpopular.

Electoral institutions matter when it comes to partisan representation on U.S. city councils.

Existing literature (de Benedictis-Kessner & Warshaw 2016) establishes that the partisan leanings of local officials translates to policy outcomes, so these representational incongruities could also impact local policy.