

Dissension in the Ranks?

An Experimental Test of Rationality and Spatial Voting in Local Elections

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**Discussant Comments
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Research Question and Design

- Research Questions:

1. Do voters have rational preferences between candidates in local elections?
2. How do party and ethnic endorsements affect voter preferences between candidates?

- Case: 2011 San Francisco Mayoral Election

- Method: Exit Poll Surveys of 1,593 voters

1. Pairwise comparisons test transitivity of preferences (b/w top 5)
2. Experimental treatments introduce information cues
 - Party Endorsements
 - Ethnic Group Endorsements

Summary of Results

- Rationality of Preferences
 - Intransitivity = 25 – 30%
 - Higher than state / national elections
 - BUT → Intransitivity pretty low given difficult setting
 - More Informed → More Transitive
- Subjects More Likely to Choose Conservative Candidate:
 - Conservative
 - NOT a Democrat
 - Approved of previous (conservative) local government
- Effects of Adding Endorsements (Party and Ethnicity)
 - Ideology matters less
 - Ethnicity matters more
 - For Ethnic AND Party Endorsement
 - Party ID still matters
 - But magnitude of coefficient is 30% lower (significant difference?)

Strengths

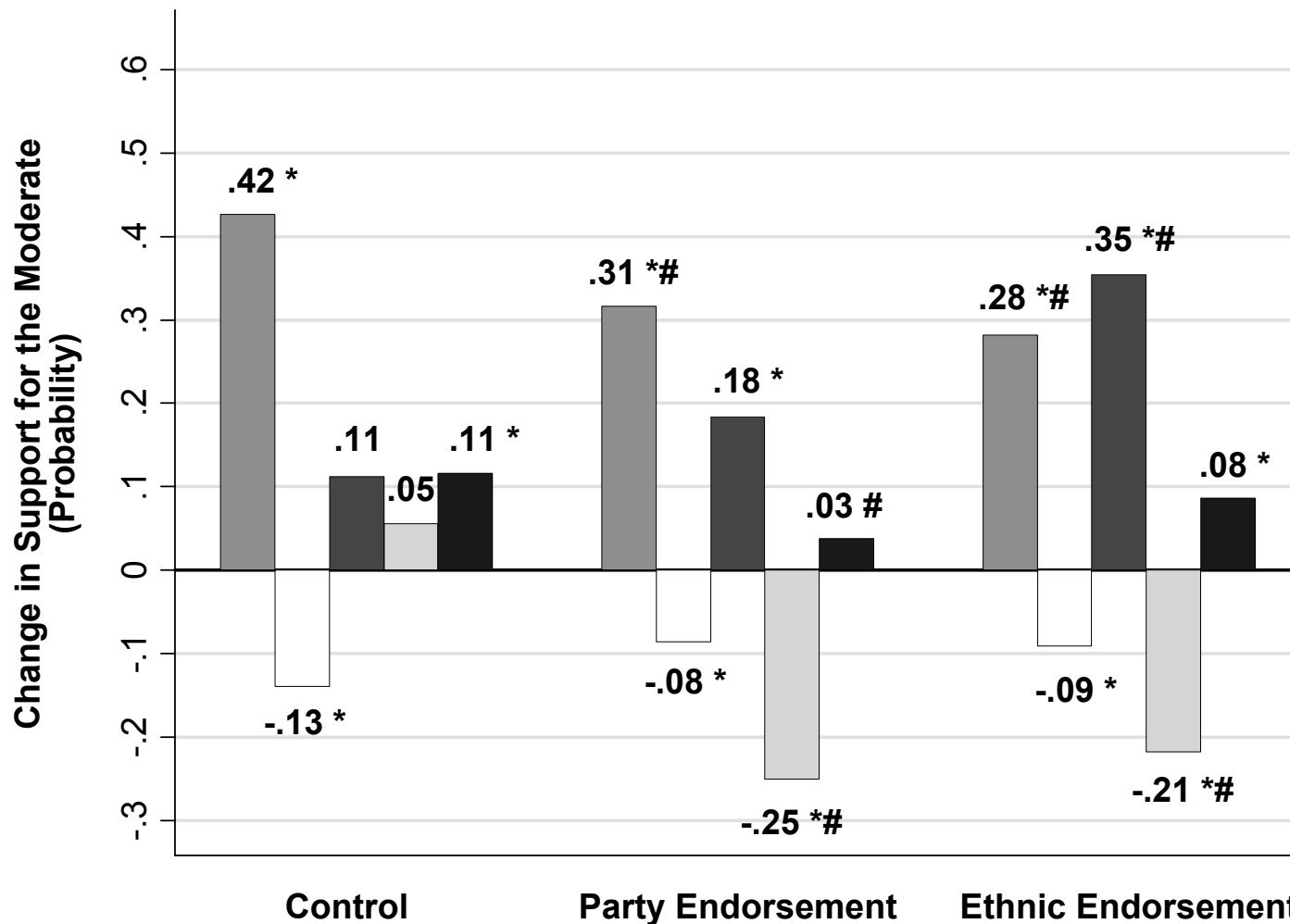
1. Estimates of Candidate Ideological Positions
 - Partnered with local surveys, lots of questions!
2. Pairwise Preferences
 - Enables test of transitive preferences
 - Preferable to asking “vote choice”
 - Chosen method avoids strategic voting
3. Embedding Experiment in Survey
 - Enables test of information effects “in field”
 - Distinguishes between types of information effects
 - Actual Endorsements = Good
 - No deception
 - Makes study a strong test of hypothesis
4. Interesting Results – Speak to Broad Questions
 - Quality of vote choice in local elections
 - How different information cues affect voter preferences

Thoughts on Generalizability

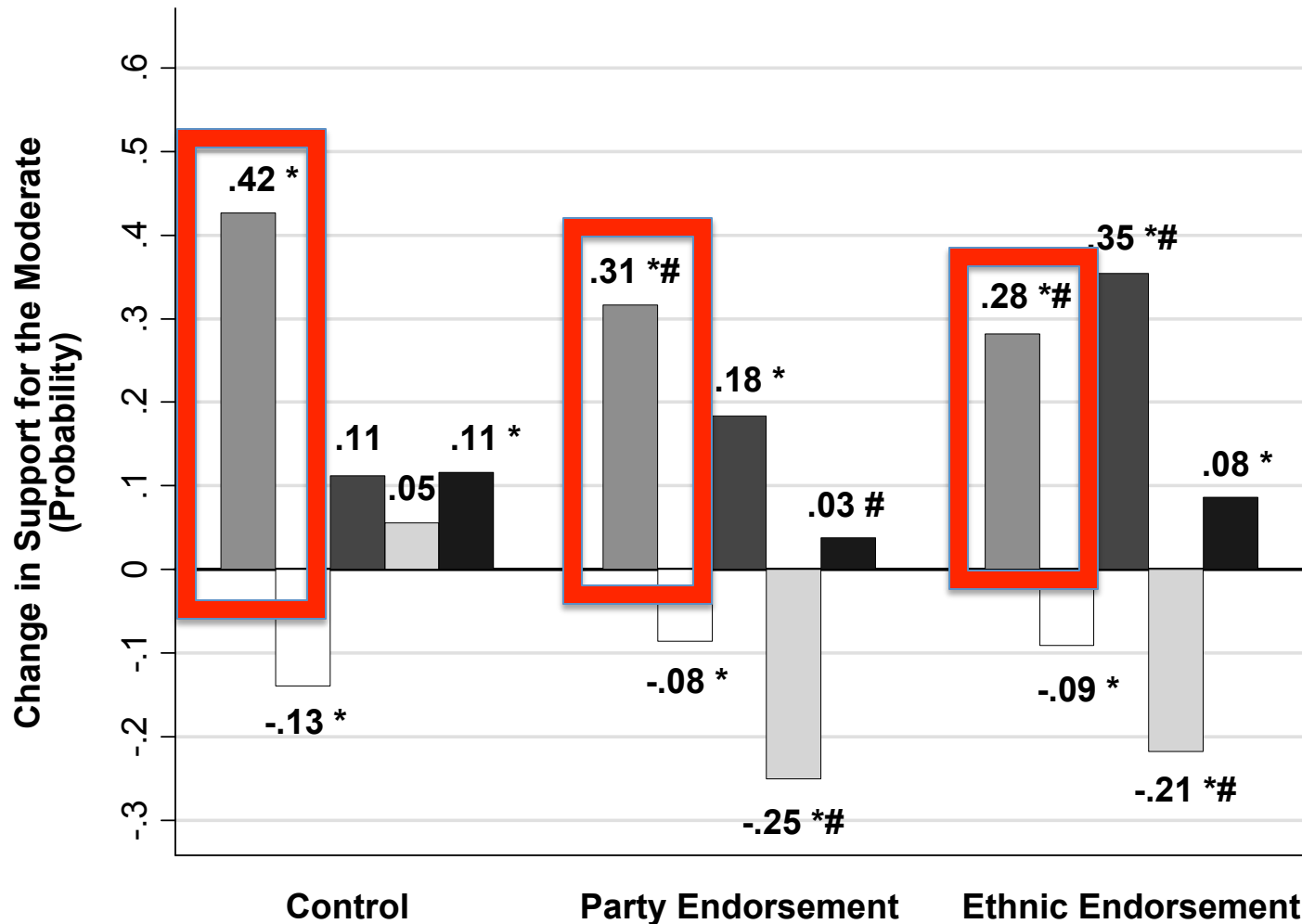
- Case Selection: 2011 San Francisco Municipal Election
 - Big Challenge for Transitivity
 - Multiple Candidates, All Democrats, No Party Cue
 - Small Challenge for Transitivity
 - Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) increases explicit transitive thinking
 - Debates reference ranking, Campaigns target 2nd Choice Votes, Ranked Endorsements
 - Results might over-estimate transitivity of preferences for local elections
 - Competitive Non-Partisan Plurality Election
- Survey Method: Exit Polls
 - Concern: Would People Change Preference After Casting Vote?
 - Alternative – Survey During Campaign
 - Preferences Still Forming
 - Advantage of Current Design
 - Observed Significant Effects Must Be Really Strong
 - Concern with Current Design
 - Might Miss Effects that Would Occur During Campaign

Suggestions

- Add Another Dependent Variable
 - Current: Tendency to Choose Conservative Candidate
 - Concern = Imprecision
 - Alternative – Did R Choose Shorter Ideological Distance?
 - Spatial model of voting
- Analyzing Effects of Endorsements
 - Current Estimate – Was More Conservative Candidate Picked?
 - Alternative Estimates
 - Did Party Cue Cause R to Choose Own Party More Often?
 - Did Ethnic Cue Cause R to Choose Own Ethnicity More Often?
- Presentation of Results
 - Currently – shows effects of each treatment, sorted by group
 - Suggestion – show effects on each group, sorted by treatment



NOTE: Bars indicate predicted changes (i.e., first differences) in support for the more moderate candidate as ideology, partisanship, ethnicity and local evaluations change. Grey = Ideology (change from -.93 to 1.92); White = Democrat (Democrat vs. non-Democrat); Dark Grey = Chinese (Chinese vs. White); Light Grey = Latino (Latino vs. White); Black = Local Evaluation (change from “fair” to “good”). * indicates first difference is significant at the .05 level (one-tailed); # indicates difference with control group is significant at the .05 level (one-tailed).



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Party Endorsement Effects Are Surprising

- Party Endorsement Info → Decreased Effect of Ideology
 - “Voters do not appear to use these endorsements as ideological signals for identifying candidates who share their policy views”
 - Seems counter-intuitive
 - Why not test this?
 - Compare categories of pairwise comparisons
 - Maybe Indifferent Responses are Biasing Results?
 - DV Coding
 - 1 = Conservative Choice
 - 0 = Otherwise (Liberal OR Indifferent)
 - Maybe endorsements made people more likely to choose indifference when endorsement not present?
 - Is this Result Unique to SF Election?
 - 15 Democrats Competing Among Democratic Population

Additional Data Source

- Would my San Francisco Survey Data be Helpful?
 - Expert Survey Evaluations of Candidate Ideology
 - Panel Survey Before and After Election
 - Ideological Evaluations:
 - Self, plus all 25 candidates
 - Preferences:
 - Vote Choice, Most Preferred, Candidate Evaluations
 - Assessments of Information
 - Embedded Treatments Increased VT and Information

Conclusion

- Interesting Study
- Estimates Transitivity and Accuracy of Preferences for Local Election
- Further Estimates Effects of Different Types of Information Cues
- Some Compelling Results
- Opens Door For Additional Research

Lingering Questions

- What were endorsements?
- What are ideological estimates of candidates?
- Missing Theoretical Explanation
 - Why expect more intransitivity among people who prefer candidate other than the top 5?
- Party Endorsement Decreases Transitivity (among subgroup)
 - Authors claim – maybe people considered party endorsement as signal of strength
 - Why not test this?