THINK LOCALLY, VOTE LOCALLY: AN EXAMINATION OF VOTER BEHAVIOR IN OPEN PRIMARIES AND GENERAL ELECTIONS IN ATHENS-CLARKE COUNTY

by

ELLEN MEREDITH KEY

(Under the Direction of Arnold Fleischmann)

ABSTRACT

In 2006, Athens-Clarke County (ACC) switched to nonpartisan elections for the mayor and county commission. Using data obtained from the ACC Board of Elections, this study explores the effects of this rules change on voter turnout in primary and general elections, as well as the effect of nonpartisanship on voters' ballot selection in an open primary system. The findings suggest that voters turn out to vote in primaries base on the degree of local competition, while turnout in general elections is a function of statewide competition. Additionally, voters strategically select primary ballots based on ballot dynamics. Nonpartisanship does not appear to affect voter turnout, but the removal of local offices from the primary ballot does affect the probability of voters choosing a Republican ballot.

INDEX WORDS: Nonpartisan elections, Turnout, Ballot choice, Athens-Clarke County, Strategic Voting

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my grandfathers, J.R. Jacks and Bruce Key. While they both saw me begin my journey through graduate school, neither is around for its completion, both having passed away during my first year at UGA. I will always remember how they encouraged and supported me in all my endeavors.

I love you.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Athens-Clarke County (ACC), a small college town in northeast Georgia, differs greatly from the rest of Georgia in its partisan politics. While the rest of Georgia, and the South as a whole, has virtually abandoned the Democratic Party in favor of the Republicans, local government in ACC remains dominated by Democrats. In 2006, Athens-Clarke County (ACC) switched to nonpartisan elections for the mayor and county commission, thus removing these local offices from the party primary ballot. The 2006 switch to nonpartisanship prompted an inquiry into participation in open primary elections, including how open primaries compare to general elections. Those who pushed for the change claimed that this would free voters from having to make the uncomfortable decision of selecting a Republican primary ballot to have a say in statewide races or a Democratic primary ballot to influence local races. They also hoped that the removal of party identification for local offices would allow Republican candidates to make inroads in this extremely Democratic county without the albatross of the "Republican" label.

Using electoral data for 1976 to 2006 obtained from the ACC Board of Elections, this study explores the role competition plays in primary and general election turnout, as well as the effects of the new nonpartisan system. The study also re-conceptualizes strategic voting, which has, until this point, largely ignored the idea of ballot dynamics, focusing instead on a race for a single office. Instead of taking a myopic view, this study contends that voters look at competition at both the state and local levels before deciding in which party's primary to vote. The findings suggest that voters are drawn to the polls by local competition in the primaries and by statewide competition in general elections. Although there has only been one election cycle under the new system, the findings also suggest that nonpartisanship decreases primary, but not general election, turnout. By removing a substantial number of local races from the primary ballot, the mobilizing potential of local elections is limited.

In terms of ballot selection, the results indicate that voters select a primary ballot based on the degree of competition in local races. Voters are more likely to choose a Democratic ballot when local elections are competitive and a Republican ballot when they are not. While the removal of local offices from the primary ballot positively affects the probability of voters selecting a Republican ballot when the Democratic mayoral race is competitive, nonpartisanship makes voters less likely to select a Republican ballot in uncompetitive mayoral years than they would have been under a partisan system.

CHAPTER 2

EXISTING RESEARCH

Electoral rules have long been the focus of debate and have been manipulated to further certain political agendas. States adjust their presidential primary dates as they jockey for positions that they think will afford them the most influence in the candidate selection process. Super Tuesday, which started as a Southern primary to draw candidates to the region, is set to become a semi-national primary in 2008 as states legislatures across the country work to set the earliest primary dates and attract the media coverage and campaign spending which goes along with early contests. Such political maneuvering, however, is not limited to presidential elections. Different ballot structures are adopted to capitalize on or minimize the influence of popular candidates. Redistricting is often done not to distribute voters more equitably and ensure equal representation, but for partisan advantage. Electoral districts are gerrymandered to make them more secure for the majority party, to gain a foothold in an inhospitable political environment, or to minimize the chances of electoral success for the minority. Even at the local level, municipalities tinker with election rules to create the most favorable environment for local parties or politicians. With so many ways to change the rules in hopes of changing the game, it is important to examine the effects, both intended and unintended, and the beneficiaries of these changes.

Progressive 'Reforms'

While Schattschneider contends that "the political parties created democracy and that modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of the parties" (1942, 1), not everyone agrees

that party influence is a positive thing. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the so-called reformers of the Progressive Era attempted to weaken the grip of political machines on local politics (see Olson 1965, 5; Welch and Bledsoe 1988, 1-9; Bridges 1997, 1-30). Political machines and party bosses provided social services as well as a means for social and economic advancement of party members, yet they were also corrupt. Those who sought to reform the political system were members of the upper-middle or upper classes and were biased against members of the working class who were served and represented by the machines (Welch and Bledsoe 1988).

Seeing political machines as the source of all of a city's problems, reformers worked to change both the political party and electoral systems but not completely eliminate political party influence in local elections (Olson 1965). Reforming political parties involved five aspects: the replacement of party caucuses with primaries; the creation of initiative, referendum, and recall elections; the popular election of U.S. senators; and nonpartisan and at-large elections (Welch and Bledsoe 1988, 6). The Australian ballot was adopted to shield voters from intimidation and bribery by party leaders. Civil service reform was also instituted to keep parties from using the spoils system to reward party loyalists with jobs (Bridges 1997, 7). Electoral reform was not limited to the reduction of party influence in local elections; reforms also consisted of the establishment of voter registration rolls and other such rules to decrease voter fraud along with the creation of election boards to conduct and oversee elections (Welch and Bledsoe 1988, 6).

Although it may seem at first blush that all electoral reforms were enacted over the protests of partly leaders, some reforms were actually welcomed by political elites. Faced with the problem of blacks and poor whites attempting to access the political system, Southern leaders welcomed the adoption of the direct primary (Key 1949, 406-442, 533-554, 619-643). Not only

did the direct primary exclude these "undesirables" from the political system, but, as an added bonus, it also served to eliminate "*any* viable alternative to Democratic candidates" (Ware 2002, 19 emphasis in original). Though the political systems of the North and South operated differently during the Progressive Era, northern reforms were often encouraged and instituted by the political leaders who controlled the state legislatures (Ware 2002). By designing rules to exclude voters who may be unhappy with the status quo, these party leaders hoped to secure their positions of power and electoral success. Moreover, these party leaders realized that the caucus system was increasingly inefficient, and the direct primary system was seen as a way to keep the public involved in the nomination process while simultaneously strengthening the party and their own power.

While the stated goal of electoral reforms such as nonpartisan elections is to eliminate the negative influence of political parties from local elections, institutional reform often has ramifications beyond the intended effects. Party labels are a heuristic device; their removal decreases the information available to voters, which may lower turnout or cause voters to abstain from casting a vote in contests that are nonpartisan. Voter registration requirements force voters to plan ahead and register before the date of the election; those who forget are not allowed to participate. More often than not, those who change the rules do so for their own benefit (Bridges 1997, 6-30). As with most things, the "good" of reform comes with unintended, often "bad," effects.

Unfortunately, there is imperfect understanding of the effects of electoral rules and rules changes on voter behavior. Before one can gain an understanding of these effects, it is necessary to examine the relevant literature on voter behavior, most of which was conducted in the 1970s

and 1980s. Happily, there has been a resurgence of interest since 2000 in turnout, strategic voting, roll-off, and local elections.

General Election Turnout¹

One of the main concerns of election scholars has been declining turnout in both general and primary elections at different levels of government. Research has identified three main types of variables that influence turnout: demographic characteristics, political context, and institutional structure. Some voters are predisposed to turn out because of their demographic characteristics, while other voters are mobilized by increased levels of competition and campaign specific effects, such as advertising and negative campaigning. Additionally, the type of voting system used, as well as relaxed rules regarding voter registration and holding elections in even years, have been shown to affect turnout.

Individual Characteristics

Individual characteristics are able to explain some, but not much, variation in voter turnout. Most studies aggregate demographic characteristics to the local or even state level. These studies have found older citizens to be more likely to vote than their younger counterparts (Alford and Lee 1968; Abramson et al. 2003, 81), while men voted more often than women until the turnout gender gap began to disappear (Hamilton 1971; Abramson et al. 2003, 78). Unsurprisingly, the higher someone's level of education, the more likely that individual is to turn out to vote (Alford and Lee 1968; Abramson et al. 2003, 82). While these characteristics have been shown to influence turnout at every level, Hamilton (1971) found that their influence is amplified in municipal elections.

Other scholars have focused on the idea that voting is habit-forming. Certain individuals are more likely to turn out and, once they have cleared that hurdle of voting in the first election,

¹ See Appendix A for a synopsis of major research on voter turnout in primaries and general elections.

are more likely to vote again. Aside from the logistics of registering to vote and finding the polling place, mobilization is important in getting voters to turn out (e.g., Freedman et al. 2004; Cox 1999). In their study of voter mobilization, Gerber et al. (2003) found that if voters are contacted and urged to vote, they are more likely to vote, not only in that election, but also in local elections the following year. While the process of voting and abstention is habit forming, "get out the vote" campaigns can only go so far. While mobilization efforts can affect turnout, the individual must have the above-mentioned individual characteristics to be predisposed to vote (Niven 2001). If those characteristics are present and help an individual to become a voter, "one's pattern of behavior itself has an independent effect on subsequent conduct" (Gerber et al. 2003, 540).

Electoral Context

Political scientists acknowledge that the dynamics of an election can create situations unique to that particular race. Even if individual voters are predisposed to participate, the circumstances surrounding a particular election can either stimulate or stifle voter interest in the race and, in turn, affect turnout. While the characteristics of individual voters cannot be manipulated by rules, the context surrounding an election may be affected by changes in these rules. Most of the studies of election year context have focused on the levels of competition in individual races, as well as the level and number of offices on the ballot in a given year.

If a large majority of the electorate appears to be rallying behind one candidate for a specific race going into the general election, that particular race will not have a lot of draw for voters. That is, if voters do not expect a race to be competitive, they will not feel compelled to turn out to support their candidate of choice. On the other hand, if a race appears to be very

close, voters will be more likely to turn out because they feel their vote has more potential to influence the outcome of the election (Conway 1981; Gilliam 1985; Cox 1999).

Scholars often focus on comparing the level of turnout in elections at different levels over time. While individual races can draw voters to the polls, it is expected that the higher the race, the more likely voters are to be aware of and involved in the race. Although one would expect turnout to be higher in local elections due to the smaller size of the electorate, this is not always the case. One explanation might be the power of the media to mobilize voters in statewide and national races (Bullock 1990). Media coverage, including advertising, tunes voters in to the race and informs them about the candidates and their positions, thus heightening interest and increasing the likelihood of turning out to vote. Negative campaigning, which one would expect to turn off voters, actually increases voter turnout. There are some caveats, however. Negative campaigning activates partisans while demobilizing independents and is effective so long as the mudslinging is not extreme (Lau and Pomper 2001). Campaign spending, which can be used for mobilization efforts to activate voters already predisposed to vote and for advertising to heighten awareness of the race and the candidates involved, also helps to increase turnout (Gilliam 1985; Niven 2001; Freedman et al. 2004).

Institutional Structure

The historical political environment of a state or locality, as well as the institutional structure (the rules governing elections) shape the way voters interact with the electoral system. The effect of electoral rules on voter turnout has been examined in both experimental and real contexts. Experiments have tested different types of voting systems such as cumulative voting

and proportional representation to see their relationship to voter turnout (Bowler et al. 2001).² However, the type of voting system used does not matter if a voter is not registered. The larger the number of days between the last day of registration and the date of the election, the lower the turnout (Gilliam 1985). This has become less of a concern now that all states have registration deadlines no more than thirty days before election day. Moreover, election day registration actually increases turnout for young voters as well as increasing turnout across all levels of income (Knack and White 2000).

It is necessary to remember that elections do not happen in isolation; this increases the importance of examining the dynamics of the ballot as a whole. By far the factor that has been found to be the most influential in affecting turnout in general elections is timing. It is theoretically possible to have a presidential, senatorial, house, gubernatorial, and mayoral race all on the same ballot. The more races on the ballot, the more opportunities there are for a race to attract a voter to the polls; however, all types of races do not affect turnout equally. The coupling of Senate and House races in the same election year increases turnout over House races alone (Dawson and Zinser 1976). While Bullock (1990) found that turnout in local races is lower than in presidential races when isolated races are examined, looking at the entire ballot, Lee (1960) found that turnout increases when a mayoral race is present. It is important to note that these findings may be due to differences in the governmental form of the cities studied. Alford and Lee (1960) found cities with a political form of government, such as a mayor-council structure, have higher turnout than administrative council-manager cities. These findings were echoed by Wood (2000) in his study of local voter turnout.

 $^{^{2}}$ Cumulative voting is a system in which a voter is given the same number of votes as there are candidates on the ballot. The voter then distributes these votes among the candidates as she sees fit. Voter turnout is higher in under cumulative voting (Bowler et al. 2001).

While states and municipalities do not have control over the congressional or presidential general election calendar, they do control when they hold their statewide and local primaries and general elections. Holding these elections in even years when there is guaranteed to be at least a U.S. House race, if not a U.S. Senate and/or presidential race, results in higher turnout than holding elections in odd years (Hajnal and Lewis 2003; Wood 2002). Just as the length of time between the registration closing date and the general election negatively affects turnout, turnout is also affected by the length of time between the general and runoff elections (Wright 1989).

The relevant literature suggests the following hypotheses:

H₁: Higher levels of competition increase turnout.

H₂: Statewide competition increases general election turnout more than local competition.

Primary Election Turnout

As noted above, most of the existing research on elections has focused on general elections. Fewer studies have examined primary elections, with most of the research geared towards presidential and congressional primaries. Fewer studies still have attempted to explain what happens in local primary elections. As a result, studies that examine voter behavior at the subnational level often base their hypotheses on findings from presidential primary studies. Some scholars have found this extrapolation to be problematic because voters in state-level races do not always behave like presidential primary voters (Tedin and Murray 1981). Both presidential and sub-national research revolves around aggregate analysis of turnout, competition, and campaign outcomes. In those studies exploring primary turnout, the same three categories of variables that affect turnout in general elections can be applied, and the findings for the most part echo the findings of general election studies. The effects of individual characteristics are amplified in primary elections and voters respond to increased level of intra-

party, as well as two-party, competition. Again, the timing of elections and the openness of the primary system have also been found to affect primary turnout.

Individual Characteristics

Primary voters were long thought to be significantly different from general election voters. Those voters who were active and interested enough to participate in political primaries were considered more ideologically extreme than the average general election voter. The conventional wisdom about primary voters was finally challenged when Norrander (1989) showed them to be no more ideologically extreme than general election voters. While primary voters might be no more ideologically extreme than their general election counterparts, they may be more partisan. The higher the intensity of partisan affiliation, the more likely a voter is to turn out, regardless of party (Norrander 1986). Primary voters are also more likely to be older (Ranney 1972) and have higher socioeconomic status than nonvoters (Kenney and Rice 1985; Verba et al. 1993). All in all, primary voters "are a subset of the active citizenry characterized by only a few attitudinal and demographic distinctions. What also leads a portion of voters to participate in the primaries is the context surrounding the election" (Norrander 1986, 49).

Electoral Context

Just as in general elections not expected to be competitive, uncompetitive primary elections decrease turnout. However, in those areas dominated by one party, primaries are more important than general elections and thus have larger turnout (Abromowitz et al. 1981). While Jewell found "large differences in levels of turnout in the Democratic primary, with the highest turnout found in states that have the least two-party competition and the highest level of competition within the primary"(1977, 253) in the Democratic South, Kenney and Rice (1985) determined that two-party competition actually increases turnout in the country as a whole.

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Norrander (1986) found that there are different dynamics for in- and out-parties in her study of presidential primaries. The in-party is likely to be less competitive and have more incumbents running, thus lower turnout. This goes against the findings of Jewell's 1984 gubernatorial study, who found the stronger party tends to have more contested primaries, which increases turnout. This may be explained by the level of election studied and the tendency of presidential incumbents to be unopposed in the primaries. The partisan balance of a state also affects primary turnout. The party of strength in a particular state will be more likely to experience high competition, or contested primaries. Conversely, the weak party will likely experience low levels of competition in its primary elections (Rice 1985). If the two parties are in relative parity, turnout is expected to be higher because a single vote has more potential to decide the ultimate winner of the election (Hill and Leighley 1993).

Institutional Structure

Just as turnout for general elections increases when simultaneous elections for multiple offices are held, the same holds true for primary elections. Many states hold presidential primaries in the early spring in order to have more of a say in the presidential nomination process, while their primaries for other offices remain in the summer. These decisions increase the number of elections held and reduces the number of offices on each ballot, resulting in decreased turnout (Boyd 1989). In addition, the coupling of gubernatorial primaries with presidential primaries increases turnout over presidential primaries alone (Boyd 1989).

Crucial to the study of primary elections are the rules that govern party registration and primary ballot choice. There are three main types of primaries: closed, blanket, and open. Closed primaries are restricted to registered party members. Blanket primaries list every candidate on the same ballot and allow voters to vote for a candidate for every office, regardless of the candidate's or voter's party affiliation. Open primaries allow all voters to participate, regardless of party affiliation, but voters are only allowed to choose among the candidates listed on one party ballot.³ Opponents of closed primaries argue that closed primary systems limit voter choice; the same is true for open primaries in that they limit voters to the candidates of a single party. While voters are not restricted to voting in the primary of the party in which they are registered, they are still limited to one party's ballot. Proponents of open primaries believe the system gives voters enough choice while simultaneously allowing independents and supporters of minor parties an opportunity to participate (Cain and Gerber 2002).

Burden and Green (2000) show that closed primaries increase the probability that voters will identify themselves with a party and strengthen their partisan identification. By definition, open primaries do not exclude independents, allowing voters of all stripes to participate. It is unsurprising that the more open the primary system, the higher the expected turnout (Jewell 1984; Kenney 1983). Thus, this suggests the following hypothesis:

H₃: Local competition increases primary turnout more than statewide competition.

Ballot Choice in an Open Primary⁴

Under the open primary system, once voters arrive at the polls, they must select a ballot. Since voters are not restricted to picking the ballot of the party (if any) with which they identify, most models of primary voting behavior have used survey data instead of party registration. Survey data are also used because states with open primaries do not allow voter registration by political party. Four types of voters have been identified: sincere, strategic, crossover, and strategic-crossover. Sincere voters vote for the party and candidates they prefer, while strategic voters select a less-desirable candidate from their party whom they believe stands a better chance

³ In 2000, twenty-one states used an open primary system (Kaufmann et al. 2003).

⁴ See Appendix B for a synopsis of major research on primary elections.

of winning the general election. Crossover voters select a candidate from the other party whom they believe will do the best job. Strategic-crossover voters, also known as "spoilers" or "raiders," engage in an extreme form of strategic voting in which the voter selects the weakest candidate of the opposing party in hopes that the candidate will be easy to defeat in the general election (Cain and Gerber 2002, 6-7). Research on strategic and crossover voting has focused on the influence of intra- and inter-party competition on voter behavior, as well as the affect of strategic voting on both the total number of votes a candidate receives and the outcome of the election.

Traditionally, strategic and crossover voting has been examined for a single office, with presidential primaries being the focus of the majority of research. While open primaries may increase strategic voting (Cherry and Kroll 2003), most researchers agree that strategic voting requires highly sophisticated voters who are able to "ignore their true preference among the candidates in the primary, considering instead the implications of their choice for the general election several months ahead" (Abramowitz et al. 1981, 903). Furthermore, intra-party competition reduces the likelihood of partisan voters venturing to the other party's ballot (Hedlund 1977-1978; Hedlund and Watts 1986). Nevertheless, voters do sometimes engage in strategic, crossover, and strategic-crossover voting.

Scholars are divided as to the effect strategic and crossover voting has on the outcome of an election. In their study of voting in California under the blanket primary system, Alvarez and Nagler (2002) examined five state assembly races and found that 15.1% of Republicans crossed over to vote in the Democratic party primary for one district; this change was large enough to affect the outcome of the election. Similarly, Cherry and Kroll (2003) show that in experimental research, strategic voting can affect the outcome of elections. Chen and Yang (2002) agree; however, they also model a way for the effects of crossover voting to be counteracted by voters voting strategically within their own party's primary.

Not everyone is convinced that strategic and crossover voting will, in fact, change outcomes. Contrary to Alvarez and Nagler, Sides et al. (2002) found that California's switch from a closed to a blanket primary system did not affect the outcome of major party primaries. They also found that those who did select the opposing party's ballot were those who were looking to "hedge their bets" (93) and were already primed to cross over. In two studies of strategic crossover voting in presidential primaries, Southwell (1988; 1991) finds that the outcome of elections are only altered when one party's primary is uncontested, leading to high levels of strategic voting by the supporters of that party. However, such strategic voting is rare, and the outcomes of elections held under open and closed primary systems are almost identical.

Insincere voting may change the total number of votes a candidate receives while not changing the outcome of the election. The support for a candidate may be diluted by strategic crossover voting, but Hedlund (1977-1978) found that the change in the degree of support for candidates did not alter the outcome of the 1976 presidential primary. Crossover voting may also increase support for incumbents, but in their study of the California blanket primary, Salvanto and Wattenberg (2002) found that this increase in support does not alter the outcome of elections. Regardless of the potential of strategic voters to shape the course of elections, scholars agree that strategic crossover voting is extremely rare due to the sophistication and coordination required (Geer 1986; Hedlund and Watts 1986; Southwell 1989; 1991). Moreover, the candidates selected in open primaries are not more moderate as a result of strategic voting (Cherry and Kroll 2003), and the "dangers" of strategic voting in open primaries are outweighed

by the ability of open primaries to produce more electable candidates than closed primaries (Geer 1986).

Given what is known about voter behavior in open primaries, the following is hypothesized:

H₄: Where one party dominates the other statewide, voters will strategically select the primary ballot of the party that is more competitive at the local level.

Local Elections 5

Over and above what is known about turnout in general, this study contains a local dimension. It is therefore, worthwhile to examine the relevant literature on local elections, specifically those in nonpartisan settings. The goal of nonpartisan elections was to improve rationality in voting. Reformers hoped that nonpartisan elections would allow voters to "look at the 'public interest' and not just their interests as defined by a political party" (Welch and Bledsoe 1988, 7). For the reformers, however, "public interest" involved efficiency rather than the economic and public works needs of the average voter. Davidson and Fraga (1988, 374) outline two types of nonpartisan systems. The first type consists of elections that are nonpartisan in ballot only. The only difference between "ballot-nonpartisanship" and partisan elections is the lack of candidate party identification on the ballot. The second system involves elections that take place in a climate of "organizational-nonpartisanship," where no groups, neither organized parties nor slating groups, are active. Research has shown that organizational-nonpartisanship is rare (Davidson and Fraga 1988). Scholars have found that slating groups tend to arise in nonpartisan cities and that descriptive representation is decreased under nonpartisan election systems. Additionally, because nonpartisanship reduces the already limited information

⁵ See Appendix C for a synopsis of major research on local and nonpartisan elections.

available about local candidates, turnout in nonpartisan cities is lower than their partisan counterparts.

In nonpartisan settings, especially those which are nonpartisan in ballot only, parties are often replaced by slating groups (Fraga 1988; Bridges 1997). Using a case-study approach, Williams and Adrian (1959) examined whether nonpartisan elections can effectively shield local elections from the influence of state and national party politics, which are thought to be incapable of addressing the needs of the local community. In those communities in which slating groups had arisen, voting for these groups displayed patterns similar to those of political parties. Davidson and Fraga (1988) also found that slating groups take over many of the functions of political parties in nonpartisan environments and should be classified as political parties. Lacking the staying-power of traditional parties, slating groups thrive in cities with at-large elections, a coordinated business class, and a council that can respond quickly to the needs of an expanding minority population (Davidson and Fraga 1988, 386-387). If these criteria are not met, slating groups collapse.

Organizations besides parties, such as slating groups, that work to mobilize voters in nonpartisan settings interact differently with racial and socioeconomic groups. By targeting white, more affluent voters, this may result in the under-representation of racial minorities and the less affluent. Because parties over-represent longtime supporters, racial and ethnic representation in nonpartisan settings may be reduced. Furthermore, partisanship may help minority candidates because they are used to balance party tickets and make the party seem more inclusive (Welch and Bledsoe 1988). In a nonpartisan system, need for inclusivity is eliminated. Nonpartisan elections do free voters from party pressures; however, these pressures are replaced by ethnic or other loyalties. Under a nonpartisan system, politics is no longer party oriented; rather it is organized around ethnic groups (Pomper 1966). Nonpartisan elections also advantage social elites. The occupational status of city council members is moderately higher under a nonpartisan system, probably because those persons have the money necessary to buy the name recognition needed in a nonpartisan system (Cassel 1985; Welch and Bledsoe 1988). District, rather than at-large, seats benefit minority groups by making the minority the majority in their district. The use of at-large elections with numbered places in nonpartisan settings exacerbates the patterns of over-representation of majorities and socio-economic elites (Heilig and Mundt 1984, 57-82). Additionally, slating groups advantage rich, white voters by disadvantaging Democratic voters, who typically rely on partisan identification when deciding for whom to vote (Davidson and Fraga 1988).

If roll-off scholars have shown that voters are less likely to vote in low-information races, certainly the removal of partisan identification reduces the information available to voters; however, one must be cautious when interpreting low levels of turnout. Voters may fail to turn out because they are happy with the status quo or because they feel government is unable to address their needs. Additionally, high turnout may be a result of dissatisfaction or a way to reward those politicians who are adequately representing their constituents (Eulau and Prewitt 1973, 229). Nevertheless, without partisan cues, "nonpartisan electoral settings make the connection between candidate choice and personal interest very difficult, and as a result, such elections require higher levels of voter motivation and interest as a prerequisite to voting participation" (Hawley 1973, 64), but nonpartisan elections decrease available information for all voters, regardless of social status (Collins 1980). Nevertheless, scholars are divided as to the effects of nonpartisanship on electoral turnout. Several researchers agree that nonpartisanship decreases turnout (see Hamilton 1971; Karnig and Walter 1983; Welch 1978). Caren (2007) and

Schaffner et al. (2001) show that, in addition to reducing turnout, nonpartisanship also increases the importance of incumbency.

Once other variables are controlled for, nonpartisanship may not dampen turnout as much as one might expect. One early study (Alford and Lee 1968) found that turnout is usually lower in nonpartisan cities, but nonpartisanship is not as significant a factor as the form of government used. Still others have found that once controls are incorporated for the presence of a mayoral race and municipal elections held at the same time as statewide races, nonpartisan elections have no effect on turnout (Wood 2002). Lublin and Tate (1995) also found that when controlling for demographic and institutional factors, partisan and nonpartisan cities do not differ in their rate of turnout. As is the case in studying primary and general election turnout and roll-off, it is important to incorporate individual, contextual, and structural controls in the study of behavior under a system of nonpartisanship.

Given what is known about nonpartisan local elections, the following hypotheses are suggested:

- H₅: By moving elections for local offices to the general election ballot, nonpartisan elections raise general election turnout.
- H₆: By moving elections for local offices to the general election ballot, nonpartisan elections decrease primary election turnout.
- H₇: Adoption of nonpartisan elections increases the probability of selecting the minority party's primary ballot by removing most local offices from the primary ballot.

CHAPTER 3

SETTING THE SCENE

Athens-Clarke County (ACC) is a college town in northeast Georgia. The smallest in area of Georgia's 159 counties, ACC had a population of 101,489 according to the 2000 census. The median age of ACC residents is 25.4 years, with 39.8% of residents holding a bachelor's degree or higher, which is to be expected in a town whose largest employer is the University of Georgia. Although the median family income in 2005 is estimated to be \$46,033, almost thirty percent of Athens residents live below the poverty line. ACC also has a sizable minority population, with almost thirty-five percent of residents identifying as non-white.

By the end of the 1800s, the Democratic Party dominated Southern politics (Key 1949). During this period of single-party domination, most elections were decided in the Democratic primaries, with the Republicans failing to field candidates for many offices. The solid Democratic South began to fade as the Democratic Party took liberal positions on civil rights and the Vietnam War, driving Southern white voters to the Republicans (Black 1998). As Table 3.1 shows, while Georgia has, like other Southern states, become steadily more Republican, Athens remains a highly Democratic county.

The gap between the percentage of voters supporting a Democratic presidential candidate in Athens and the country for the 1976 to 2004 elections ranges from 4.1% to 12.2%. Compared to the rest of the state, 17% and 15.7% more voters in ACC have supported a Democratic candidate for president and governor, respectively, in the 2004 and 2006 contests. As might be expected of a county that goes against the partisan tide of the rest of the state, governing ACC has not always been smooth sailing.

Governing Clarke County

The Unification of Athens and Clarke County

Clarke County has not always had a system of unified government.⁶ The first push towards consolidating the city and county governments began in 1966, and the issue reemerged but failed to garner enough votes in 1969, 1972, and 1982 before finally passing in 1990. The 1990 consolidation referendum garnered the support of 57.5% of Athens and 59.9% of Clarke County voters. Durning et al. (2004, 122-123) propose three reasons for the success of the 1990 effort compared to the previous four attempts. First, a large percentage of the electorate was involved in the agenda-setting process, thus creating an optimal environment for success. Second, those supporting the unification process were also able to effectively manage resources and offer timely, uniform responses to criticisms from those against unification. While the pro-unification side was able to stay on message, their opponents lacked the organization necessary to counter their campaigns. Finally, as the population of Clarke County grew and residents shifted from Athens to unincorporated areas, voters were able to see the need for municipal services in outlying areas.

Before consolidation, Clarke County was governed by five county commissioners and a relatively weak chief executive officer. The Athens city council consisted of ten councilors and a mayor who had considerably more power. Both bodies were elected in partisan elections; the commission was elected in even years and the council in odd. After unification, "the new government had elements of both a strong mayor and a commission-manager form of government" (Durning et al. 2004, 119), with a mayor and ten commissioners who serve

⁶ For a detailed discussion of the ACC road to consolidation, see Durning et al. (2004).

staggered four-year terms. While municipal elections are required by state law to be nonpartisan, no such requirement exists for county government. The ACC charter originally called for nonpartisan elections, but a state legislator refused to support unification if the elections were not partisan (Floyd 2004c). Since the General Assembly retains the right to oversee local governments, there was no way to by-pass the state legislature, and the nonpartisan provision was dropped from the charter. Nevertheless, in 2006 the first nonpartisan elections for the mayor and the commission were held, thus removing these offices from the primary ballot.

The Push for Nonpartisan Elections

Just as with unification, the movement towards nonpartisan elections began well before the referendum was approved by voters in November of 2004. In 2002, four Democrats ran for mayor of ACC: Heidi Davison, Richard DeRose, Eric Krasle, and Doc Eldridge (the incumbent). With no candidate receiving a majority of the vote in the July party primary, the election came down to a runoff between Davison and Eldridge. Davison emerged as the victor, and since there was no Republican candidate, the mayoral race was decided in September. Focus then shifted to the county commission races for the general election, the main issues of which centered on suburban sprawl and the environment. While the statewide races failed to generate electoral excitement, local races piqued voter interest even without a mayoral contest on the general election ballot (Shearer 2002).

As voters were concentrating on the remaining local races, the ACC commission voted on a resolution to the local delegation to the General Assembly requesting the opportunity for a county-wide vote on nonpartisan elections. The commission was concerned that candidates were selecting their party based solely on electoral popularity. Knowing that candidates running under the Republican banner stood little chance of being elected, candidates would decide to run as Democrats when their policy positions more closely matched those of the Republican Party. The commission feared, in a sense, that many local candidates were really Republicans in Democratic clothing. Additionally, it was thought that the nonpartisan elections would save the candidates time and money since they would no longer be required to compete in a primary, a potential primary runoff, and the general election (Reid 2002).

Four previous commission votes were 5-5 ties, with the mayor casting the final vote. The mayor voted against the measure the first three times, only deciding in favor of sending the legislation on to the local delegation to the General Assembly the fourth time it was considered. Despite mayoral and commission approval, the local delegation did not submit the legislation to the General Assembly because of a lone dissenter, Representative Keith Heard. In 2003, however, Heard changed his position. Originally opposed to the resolution because it would require a change in the county charter and believing such changes should go through a citizen advisory committee, Heard eventually acknowledged that a referendum was the next best thing to such a committee. The bill was introduced to the Republican-controlled General Assembly on April 9, 2003. The GOP supported the change because it was thought that nonpartisan elections would better the party's position in ACC. After passage through the state legislature, the bill was signed into law by the Republican governor, Sonny Perdue, on June 3 (Reid 2003).

Debate around the issue in Athens centered on the possible political motive behind the push for nonpartisan elections, a motive whose existence Heard did not deny when he changed his position. Proponents of nonpartisan elections pointed to Augusta and Columbus, two other unified governments in Georgia that have nonpartisan local elections, and cited the potential reduction in time and money spent campaigning if primaries for local offices were eliminated. Additionally, having potentially to compete in three different elections could deter candidates who are unable to raise sufficient funds to challenge an established incumbent. Moreover, since most national party issues are not applicable to local government, the inclusion of a candidate's party identification on the ballot was superfluous. Enough quality information existed about the candidates, they argued, and nonpartisan elections would force voters to look at a candidate's qualifications instead of relying on the party label (Williams 2003). In the eyes of the nonpartisan advocates, partisan politics does not have a place in local government.

Not everyone agreed that the removal of partisan identification would be beneficial to voters. The opposition argued that, rather than providing superfluous information, the removal of party identification would withhold information and create confusion, leading to an uninformed electorate (Vipperman 2002). Analogous discussions were held in Jackson County, where probate judges wanted to remove their Democratic labels because the voters of Jackson County are becoming more Republican. Using logic similar to that of the opponents in ACC, Jackson County denied the judges' request for nonpartisan elections because it would reduce the amount of information available to voters (Floyd 2003).

Just as Jackson County voters' party ties were shifting, so were those of ACC residents, albeit in the opposite direction. Table 3.2 shows the winners of selected offices in ACC and indicates how the county vote differs from the eventual winner. In 2006, statewide politics was dominated by the Republican Party, while all ACC offices were held by Democrats, thus forcing voters to make a difficult decision when it comes time to select their primary ballot: they can either select a Republican ballot and influence statewide races or choose a Democratic ballot and have a say in municipal politics. Several politicians have blamed their defeat on ballot selection. Barbara Dooley, a 2002 Republican candidate for the U.S. House, believes she lost to Max Burns in the primary because Republican voters selected a Democratic ballot in order to vote for mayor

(Gross 2003). On the other hand, county commissioners worried that voters were choosing to vote in the Republican primary to support statewide candidates (Reid 2002a). This position was summed up in an opinion piece that appeared in the *Athens Banner-Herald* written by former mayor (and banker), Upshaw Bentley, "How many times have you had to choose between your local elections and state or national elections? It just isn't fair" (2004).

Fair play also concerned those opposed to nonpartisan elections. While the stated goal of the nonpartisan supporters was the reduction of "corrupting" party influences, it is unclear whether the subtextual motivations were as altruistic. Opponents argued that nonpartisan elections were a machination of the Republicans as minority party hoping to gain a foothold in a very Democratic county by shedding the scarlet "R" from their names. While proponents argued that nonpartisan elections would give a voice to silenced Republicans (Harver 2004), others argued that Republicans are only silenced because they do not have appealing candidates (Davison 2004). Furthermore, since Republicans can seldom win under a partisan system in Athens, they want to change the rules (Rowland 2004). Opponents also argued that differences do exist between Republicans and Democrats at the local level, and there is no reason for ACC voters to decide to make it easier for Republican candidates by going to a nonpartisan system (Hammock 2004).

Hopes that the new system will help candidates who would otherwise compete as Republicans are not unfounded; much of the research on nonpartisan elections has found that nonpartisan systems tend to benefit the Republican candidate. This has been attributed to many factors, including the ability of Republican voters to link more accurately their self-interest with particular candidates, Republican orientation of nonparty communication and opinion leaders, and the reliability of Republican voters to turn out on election day (Converse 1962; Hawley 1973). Moreover, "nonpartisan elections more often than not facilitate the election of Republicans in cities which usually vote Democratic in partisan races" (Hawley 1973, 165-66) due to intra- and inter-party conflict and the lack of policy innovation by the majority party. Without the cognitive shortcut of party identification, right-leaning candidates may increase their chances of victory because they "would be relieved of the one major political disadvantage they would have in partisan elections – their partisan identification" (Hawley 1973, 44), especially as prominent Democratic candidates begin to fade away.

While debates raged in the editorial pages of the local newspaper, interests organized within the community. Unhappy with Mayor Davison's stance towards business, the Athens Chamber of Commerce created a "business friendly" scorecard for local officials based on their votes on zoning issues and other economic matters. Most commissioners failed to receive passing grades, further straining relations between the Chamber and government. The Chamber also created a nonpartisan PAC to support "business friendly" candidates. Although the PAC was supposed to be nonpartisan, a majority of the members were Republican-leaning, a fact that troubled some who believed the focus should be on both nonpartisan issues and the upcoming referendum on nonpartisan elections rather than partisan politics (Floyd 2004a).

With backing from the decidedly partisan business community and former mayor Eldridge, who changed his party identification to Republican after losing to Davison in 2002, the nonpartisan referendum was placed on the 2004 general election ballot. Although nonpartisan elections were a salient issue for local elites, many voters were focused on the other issues, including a presidential race, two congressional elections, three county commission races, and a sales tax measure. The referendum passed with 68.58 % of the vote and Democrats blamed the loss on the television advertisements put out by those supporting the referendum (Floyd 2004b).
Just as with the battle over consolidation, those opposed to the measure were overwhelmed by better organization on the part of the proponents.

The First Election Under the New System

The Candidates

In an editorial in the *Athens Banner-Herald*, Tom Chasteen, a 2006 mayoral candidate and long-time county commissioner, called the change in electoral rules "exciting." He added,

[t]here is uncertainty ahead in that many of the old party rules are being thrown out the window, but there is also a chance in this transition for a fresh start. We are now non-partisan in a partisan world. What a fine opportunity. Our community has always survived and thrived on being a little different from the world around us. Imagine - we are no longer saddled with immediate adversaries depending on the political make-up of our government versus that of the state (Chasteen 2006).

Joining Chasteen in the first campaign under the new rules were four other mayoral candidates and nine candidates competing for five county commission seats. Profiles for the five mayoral candidates are presented in Table 3.3.

Of the five mayoral candidates, Davison and DeRose had run in the 2002 election, with Davison beating the incumbent mayor in the primary runoff. As noted above, Chasteen had held elected office in ACC since 1990. Maddox, although never having held elected office, worked for the state government for many years before taking on a second job as the pastor of a local church. At 26, Rusk was the only one of the five to have never before worked or campaigned for elected office. Nevertheless, Rusk was no stranger to politics. His grandfather was former Secretary of State Dean Rusk, and his father is involved in politics in neighboring Oconee County.

While five candidates ran for mayor, only two of the five county commission seats up for election were contested.⁷ In the District 1 race, James Garland was the only candidate who had

⁷ Candidate profiles are shown in Table 3.4.

previously run for elected office; he ran for the same position in 2002. Despite Doug Lowry's lack of political experience, he was endorsed by both the *Athens Banner-Herald* and *Flagpole Magazine*, Athens' weekly paper. Two of the Super-District 9 candidates, Alvin Sheats and Ed Vaughn, had prior campaign experience going into the 2006 race. Sheats was an ACC commissioner from 1995 to 2003, while Vaughn previously ran for the commission as a Green Party candidate in 2002. Girtz, a teacher at an alternative school in Athens, had never sought political office prior to running in 2006. The three unopposed commission candidates (George Maxwell, David Lynn, and Kathy Hoard) were all incumbents seeking re-election.

Partisanship

Although the municipal races were officially nonpartisan, only one candidate, James Garland, a Libertarian, publicly acknowledged partisan identification as something other than a Democrat. Those who pushed for nonpartisan elections were concerned that candidates were selecting their party affiliations based on electoral popularity, and the speculation over who was a "true" Democrat continued throughout the ostensibly nonpartisan campaign. The candidates' previous primary ballot selections were examined by the *Athens Banner-Herald* in order to determine partisan leanings, but no candidate had ever voted in a Republican primary, save 1996, when Davison, DeRose, and Sheats voted in the Republican presidential primary instead of the uncontested Democratic contest (Aued 2006e). Davison, Chasteen, DeRose and Sheats had all run for elected office as Democrats. In 2004, Vaughn ran for county commission as a Green Party candidate, yet voted Democratic in the 2002, 2004, and 2006 primaries. Rusk, although declining to identify with a party, described himself as "populist" (Aued 2006e). Maddox had voted exclusively in Democratic primaries, yet did not claim to be a Democrat, citing his boss, Democratic Labor Commissioner Michael Thurmond, as the reason for his ballot selection.

Although the Clarke County GOP did not endorse candidates in 2006, group members supported both Chasteen and Maddox. Of all the candidates, Maddox was the most evasive about his party identification, probably due to the large amount of financial support he received from local Republicans.

The Issues

As the incumbent mayor, Davison had the benefit and burden of running with a record that included an indoor smoking ban, the creation of a downtown historic district, environmental regulation, neighborhood initiatives, increased numbers and pay for firefighters and police officers, and the creation of a Partners for a Prosperous Athens (PPA), a group created in 2006 to address increasing poverty in Athens. It was only after the creation of PPA that poverty became an openly discussed issue in Athens politics. PPA went on to become the centerpiece of Davison's campaign (Aued 2006f). In spite of these accomplishments, Davison continued to draw fire from the business community for ignoring economic development.⁸

Davison was not the only candidate in 2006 to go against the Chamber of Commerce's interests. Four county commission candidates, Vaughn, Girtz, Garland, and Lowry, criticized the Chamber's positions on a number of issues, including zoning laws and environmental regulation. Some, however, were more vocal than others. Although Garland and Lowry were both conservative candidates, Garland's positions most closely matched those of the Chamber, criticizing the current commission's increased business regulations. Lowry cited his experience as a business owner to convince the Chamber that he would be sensitive to the needs of the business community. Vaughn criticized the Chamber for ignoring small business in favor of

⁸ Other campaign issues included affordable housing, both for low-income residents as well as a floating homestead exemption to provide seniors with a property tax break; education; economic development; domestic partner benefits; public transportation; improved city services, such as leaf and limb pickup, fire stations, and water lines; and the city's growing crime rate.

catering to larger companies. Citing the need for balance between business needs and the needs of the citizens, Girtz campaigned for a "living wage" in Athens (Aued 2006c). As with the campaign for nonpartisan elections, county government and business interests continued to be at odds.

Winners and Losers

As election day approached, two candidates, Rusk and Jones, dropped out of the race. Rusk withdrew from the mayoral race for fear his presence on the ballot would draw supporters who would otherwise back Davison, allowing a more conservative candidate to win. Jones dropped out under decidedly more controversial conditions. Originally hoping to challenge David Lynn in the District 5 commission race, Jones was unable to move to the district in time to meet the residency requirement. Choosing instead to run for the District 9 seat, Jones continued his campaign against Lynn. Residents of the Cobbham neighborhood represented by Lynn received emails from a couple in North Carolina who were looking to move to the area, yet the couple did not exist. The emails were traced to Jones, who confessed that he had concocted the family to "gather information to use in his campaign, which [revolved] around criticizing Lynn and the six-month ban on new Greek houses Lynn pushed through the commission in February" (Aued 2006a). Both Jones' and Rusk's names appeared on the ballot; only Jones's votes were counted because Rusk informed the Board of Elections of his decision to withdraw before election day.

With the field for the three competitive races narrowed to nine, candidates focused on strategy. Only the District 1 race was expected to be decided in the general election; the other two were expected to end in a runoff. Although all candidates hoped to win the fifty percent plus one needed to win the general election, they made contingency plans. Mayoral candidate Tom

Chasteen said he had no doubts the mayoral election would go to a runoff and his "focus from day one [had] been on being one of the top two and getting into the runoff" (Aued 2006d). Maddox was the only candidate who stated that if all his supporters turned out, he could win in the general election. General election turnout was higher than expected, probably due to the high-profile mayoral race. As expected, the District 1 election was decided on election day and the other two races went to runoffs. Davison and Maddox advanced to the mayoral runoff, while Girtz and Sheats competed in the District 9 runoff.

The Aftermath

When the dust settled, Davison, Lowry, and Girtz were left standing. The dearth of conservative choices may have disappointed those who hoped nonpartisan elections would bring candidates who might identify themselves with the Republican Party; however, the chairman of the Clarke County GOP holds out hope that this will change once new candidates emerge and older incumbents fade (Aued 2006b). In the short run, nonpartisanship does not appear to have changed the face of local government. No incumbents were defeated and most of the victors won by comfortable margins. At first blush, nonpartisanship appears to be politics as usual, only in November and December rather than in July and August. Nevertheless, the switch to nonpartisan elections may have brought about changes in voter behavior that require further investigation.

Year	Office	U.S.	Georgia	Clarke
1976	President	50.1%	66.7%	62.3%
1978	Governor		80.6	84.5
1980	President	41.0	55.8	52.9
1982	Governor		62.8	54.5
1984	President	40.6	39.8	46.8
1986	Governor		70.5	70.5
1988	President	45.6	39.5	49.7
1990	Governor		52.9	51.8
1992	President	43.0	43.5	53.1
1994	Governor		51.1	62.2
1996	President	49.2	45.8	55.6
1998	Governor		52.5	65.2
2000	President	48.4	43.0	52.5
2002	Governor		46.2	57.3
2004	President	48.3	41.1	58.1
2006	Governor		38.2	53.9

Table 3.1: Democratic General Election Vote in the U.S., Georgia, and Clarke County, 1976-2006

Year	President	Governor	U.S. Senate	U.S. House	Mayor	
1976	D	-	-	D	-	
1978	-	D	D	D	-	
1980	D	-	R	D	-	
1982	-	D	-	D	-	
1984	R	-	D	D	-	
1986	-	D	D	D	-	
1988	R	-	-	D	-	
1990	-	D	D	D	D	
1992	D*	-	D*	D	-	
1994	-	D	-	D*	D	
1996	D*	-	D	D*	-	
1998	-	D	D*	R	D	
2000	D*	-	D^+	R	-	
2002	-	D*	D*	R	D	
2004	D*	-	D*	D	-	
2006	-	D*	-	D*	D	

Table 3.2: Winning Party in ACC, 1976-2006

* Eventual winner of a different party than the ACC winner.
* Special election to fill seat of the late Paul Coverdell.

Table 3.3: 2006 ACC Mayoral Candidate Profiles⁺

Tom Chasteen

Profession: Owner, Chasteen Insurance Company Top Issues: Job creation, traffic engineering and bike access, greenspace and water protection.

Heidi Davison

Profession: Athens-Clarke County Mayor, 2003-present Top Issues: Environmental protection, county growth, public safety.

Richard DeRose

Profession: Writer; Consultant; Owner, New Concept Builders Top Issues: Affordable housing, illegal immigration, taxes.

Charlie Maddox

Profession: District tax director, state Department of Labor; pastor, Twin Oaks Baptist Church

Top Issues: Job creation and retention, fiscal responsibility, responsive government.

Andy Rusk*

⁺ Information on profession and key issues from *The Athens Banner-Herald*, November 5, 2006

* Withdrew from race

Table 3.4: 2006 ACC Commission Candidate Profiles⁺

Contested Elections:

<u>District 1</u> James Garland Profession: Researcher, Sink & Associates Top Issues: Extension of county services to outlying areas, economic development, floating homestead exemption, budgeting.

Doug Lowry Profession: Self-employed real estate agent Top Issues: Business, regional poverty, transportation.

District 9

Kelly Girtz Profession: Teacher, Classic City Performance Learning Center Top Issues: Existing neighborhood improvements, public safety, poverty.

Alvin Sheats

Profession: Director, Hancock Community Development Corp. Top Issues: Workforce housing, employment, environment, underage drinking.

Ed Vaughan

Profession: Meat cutter, U.S. Navy Supply Corps School Top Issues: Inequalities in county services, local business, sprawl, greenspace, bike lanes.

Chuck Jones*

Uncontested Elections: District 3 George C. Maxwell

District 5 David Lynn

District 7 Kathy Hoard

⁺ Information on profession and key issues from *The Athens Banner-Herald*, November 5, 2006

^{*} Withdrew from race

CHAPTER 4

TURNOUT

The winners of the 2006 nonpartisan election are known, but the effect of nonpartisanship on the electorate has yet to be explored. Having held one election under the new rules, it is possible to examine the effects of nonpartisanship on voter decision making. This chapter seeks to examine the factors which influence turnout in both primaries and general elections and the effect of the switch to nonpartisan elections in 2006.

Data and Methods

Historically, election turnout has been declining across the country, although nationally turnout in 2004 and 2006 was higher than other recent elections. As Figure 4.1 shows, although turnout varies widely from election to election, general election turnout in ACC is increasing; primary turnout, on the other hand, is declining.⁹ If turnout in primary and general elections is diverging, what is the cause? Turnout has traditionally been lower in the South compared to other regions of the county due to the disenfranchisement of blacks through the 1960s, lower levels of economic development, and the lower voting rates of white Southern women (Cassel 1979). The lack of inter-party competition in the solidly Democratic South also served to decrease competition for state races, although state legislative turnout mirrors turnout for national races outside the South (Austin et al. 1991). As noted previously, ACC remains a Democratic stronghold as Georgia as a whole has joined the rest of the South in becoming more Republican.

⁹ Appendix D presents the percent turnout for all types of elections held in ACC from 1979 to March 2006.

The data for this chapter come from the ACC Board of Elections, which keeps a record of county election results since the 1960s. This analysis examines the returns from 1976, the first election after the 1975 renewal of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, to 2006 aggregated at the county level. Although data are available before 1976, the heated congressional debate surrounding the Act's renewal indicates that while an estimated 2 million black voters registered to vote in the South after the initial passage, there were those who believed the incorporation of black voters was not complete by the renewal date (Costello 1975; McDonald et al. 1994, 67-102). In light of this, 1976 was chosen as the starting point for this study to allow enough time for non-white voters to begin to integrate into the electorate and still provide for three decades worth of elections for examination.

Ballot dynamics, demographic characteristics, and electoral rules have all been shown to influence turnout, and this chapter will test the following hypotheses:

- H₁: Higher levels of competition increase turnout.
- H₂: Statewide competition increases general election turnout more than local competition.
- H₃: Local competition increases primary turnout more than statewide competition.
- H₅: By moving elections for local offices to the general election ballot, nonpartisan elections raise general election turnout.
- H₆: By moving elections for local offices to the general election ballot, nonpartisan elections decrease primary election turnout.

Since the influence of these factors may be different in primary and general elections, this

chapter will examine primary and general election turnout separately. An increase in general

election competition is expected to boost turnout more than a similar increase in the primaries.

Presidential preference primaries, runoffs, and special elections are excluded from the analysis.

Voters may feel a compulsion to vote in presidential preference primaries which is not present in

other primaries. Having already cast a ballot in a primary or general election, voters may be

fatigued and thus less likely to turn out to vote in either primary or general election runoffs.

Similarly, voters may be less likely to turn out in special elections due to lack of information and visibility.

The dependent variable is the percentage of registered voters who turned out to vote in a given election. Although registered voters are a self-selecting group, which makes it a less than ideal basis for analysis, "the actual electorate is most likely viewed as a subset of the available rather than the eligible electorate...Council candidates simply accept as a given the proportion of citizens who are registered" (Eulau and Prewitt 1973, 251). In his meta-analysis of voter turnout studies, Geys (2006) finds that most studies of turnout use voting-age population (VAP) as the denominator when computing turnout. Unfortunately, the inclusion of persons who are unable to vote due to criminal history or citizenship status artificially deflates turnout. Voting-eligible population (VEP) would be best; however, such data are not readily available for ACC during the entire period studied. As a result, the total number of registered voters is the most acceptable alternative to the VEP ideal.

Due to the continuous nature of the dependent variable, Ordinary Least Squares regression (OLS) is used to measure the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. Certain factors influence one type of election but not the other; therefore, the primary model will be presented first, followed by the general model. Each model incorporates electoral context, institutional structure, and individual characteristic variables.

Primary Election Model

Primary turnout differs by party, especially in areas with a history of one-party dominance. Figure 4.2 shows how turnout has varied by party over time in ACC. Although Southern politics was ruled by the Democratic Party for most of the 20th century, the Democratic hold on the South has diminished over time. Turnout in the Democratic primary has declined from its peak in the early 1980s, while Republican primary turnout has increased with the resurgence of the Republican Party in the South. Nevertheless, turnout in the Republican primary in Clarke County has never exceeded ten percent since 1976. Therefore, turnout in Democratic primaries is expected to be higher than that of Republican primaries. To account for this, the model includes a variable for the primary party. The Democratic variable is coded 1 for a Democratic primary and 0 for a Republican primary.

Competition raises awareness and the salience of an election, thus increased competition is expected to increase turnout (H_1). If voters do not perceive an election to be competitive, they are less likely to turn out and support their chosen candidate. Although influential, competition may operate differently depending on the level of the contest (Dawson and Zinser 1976; Lee 1960; Conway 1981). Traditionally, the higher the race, the more likely voters are to be aware of and involved in the contest. Due to the partisan differences between ACC and Georgia as whole, this may not hold.

The primary turnout model incorporates three measures of electoral competition: statewide, local, and mayoral. Table 4.1 presents a truncated picture of competition in Clarke County. The statewide measure is a count of the contested races at the state or federal level.¹⁰ While races for Georgia House of Representatives may mobilize some voters, they are not compatible with the county-wide aggregate turnout measure and are excluded from the count.¹¹ Likewise, the local competition measure is a count of contested local offices. This includes all county-wide constitutional officers but excludes the mayoral race and all county commission races. It is expected that an increase in the number of competitive local races will increase turnout more so than similar increase in statewide competition (H₃). A competitive mayoral race

¹⁰ Contested races are defined as any race with two or more candidates.

¹¹ Nonpartisan judicial races have also been excluded because they appear on primary ballots for both parties and the degree of competition is expected to influence turnout for both parties equally.

is included as a separate dichotomous variable for whether or not the race was contested. The mayoral race is considered separately due to the race's high visibility and importance for local politics (Lee 1960; Wood 2000).¹²

As noted above, Georgia has become more Republican during the time period studied. While a time-counter variable could be included in the model to account for the change over time, the statewide competition variable captures the increase in Republican competition. Figure 4.3 shows this increase in Republican competition in the state over time.

The 2006 switch to nonpartisan elections removed the mayor and county commission from the ballot. If local races do draw voters to the polls, the removal of these influential races is expected to decrease primary turnout (H_6). In order to determine whether the institutional structure affects turnout, a dichotomous variable for nonpartisanship has been included.

Finally, studies have shown the importance of controlling for community characteristics when examining turnout. To control for changes in characteristics of the electorate across the time series, the model includes four demographic variables, three of which are interaction terms: Democrat*percent white, Democrat*percent female, percent college educated, and Democrat*median family income.¹³ The percent white and percent female variables are the percentage of the county population over 18 years of age that identifies as white and female respectively. Since whites have been shown to have higher turnout that other racial groups (Abramson et al. 2003), it is expected that the higher the percentage of white voters in the county, the higher turnout will be. However, since white voters tend to vote more Republican than non-whites (Abramson et al. 2003), the percent white variable is interacted with the party variable. As the percentage of white residents of voting age increases, turnout in the Republican

¹² It is not possible to interact party with the various competition measures because the Republican Party has not had competitive races at the local level.

¹³ Appendix E presents summary statistics for the community characteristic variables.

primary is expected to increase, while Democratic primary turnout declines. Females, on the other hand, historically have lower turnout than males. Although the gender gap in turnout is closing, women have been voting more consistently for Democratic candidates since the 1980s (Abramson et al. 2003). To account for the different effects for each party, the gender variable has also been interacted with party. An increase in the percentage of females of voting age is expected to have a positive effect on Democratic primary turnout.

Higher levels of education are positively correlated with higher turnout (Abramson et al. 2003), and it is hypothesized that the greater the percentage of college educated persons in the county, the higher the turnout. For the 1970s and 1980s, the percent college educated is the percentage of the total county population over 25 with at least four years of college education. For the 1990s and 2000s, it is the percentage of persons with a bachelor's degree or higher, due to a change in the way this data is reported.

Higher levels of affluence are also associated with higher turnout (Abramson et al. 2003). As such, median family income in the county, adjusted for inflation to 2006 dollars, is included. Once again, median family income is expected to affect turnout in the two party primaries differently; as such, the income variable is interacted with the party variable. Since more affluent voters tend to vote for the Republican party (Abramson et al. 2003), an increase in the median family income for the county is expected to increase Republican primary turnout. The U.S. Census provides yearly estimates for race and gender by age at the county level. Yearly values for the population over eighteen years of age were interpolated from decennial census figures for income and percentage of college educated adults in the county. Although assuming a constant rate of change over an entire decade is questionable, it is the only means available to collect these data. The equation for the regression is as follows:

Primary Turnout = $a + b_1$ Democratic primary + b_2 Competitive Statewide + b_3 Competitive Local + b_4 Competitive Mayor + b_5 Nonpartisan + b_6 % Female + b_7 % White + b_8 % College Educated + b_9 Median Family Income + b_{10} Party*% Female + b_{11} Party*% White + b_{12} Party*Median Family Income

Results

The results for the primary turnout model are presented in Table 4.2.¹⁴ Two of the nine variables are statistically significant, including one at the 0.05 level. While the count of competitive statewide races is not statistically significant, the count of competitive local races is. Each additional competitive local race increases turnout by 3.85%, all else held constant. Figure 4.4 shows how Democratic primary turnout varies as the number of competitive local elections increases.¹⁵ As local competition ranges from its lowest value to its highest, turnout in the Democratic primary doubles, holding all else constant. While a 3.85% increase may seem slight, it is important to remember that the mean turnout for primary elections is just 19%. Using the total number of registered voters in 2006, an increase of 3.7% results an additional 1,418 voters at the polls. Therefore, an additional competitive local race can have a substantial effect on primary turnout.

The statistical significance of the local variable indicates that local races are drawing voters to the polls more than statewide races. This also helps explain the higher turnout in the Democratic primary because the Republicans have failed to have contested primaries at the local level. Voters are mobilized by competitive local races and decide which primary to vote in based on the level of local competition. This idea will be explored further in the next chapter.

¹⁴ The Breusch-Pagan test does not indicate the presence of heteroskedasticity. Serial correlation may be a problem in time series analysis, yet the Breusch Godfrey test shows serial correlation is not present in the model. Additionally, tests for multi-collinearity indicate that multi-collinearity is not present in the model.

¹⁵ Republican turnout is not included because there were no Republican primaries with competitive local elections.

The nonpartisan variable is significant at the 0.08 level. While not the standard level of significance used in most social science research, this is very close. Removing nonpartisan races from the ballot decreases primary turnout by 10.36 percent. Again using the 2006 numbers, this is a reduction of 3,819 voters. As hypothesized, the removal of several races from the primary ballot decreases turnout because there are fewer competitive local races to mobilize voters.

Finally, none of the demographic characteristic variables were statistically significant. Due to the use of the county as the level of analysis, there is not much variation in these characteristics over time. This lack of variation and significance provides more confidence that the model is being driven by local competition and the primary party, rather than demographic characteristics.

General Election Model

Now that we have an idea of the dynamics involved in primary elections, we can examine how primary elections compare to general elections. Naturally, the general election model will not contain the Democratic variable. Instead, the general election model includes a dichotomous variable indicating the presence of a presidential race. Although turnout varies from year to year, general election turnout is consistently higher in presidential years.¹⁶ It is hypothesized that many voters who might otherwise abstain from voting feel compelled to turn out for a presidential election due to the high profile nature of the race, regardless of the expected closeness of the presidential vote. The presidential variable is coded 1 if there was a presidential election that year and 0 if there was no presidential contest.

While the nonpartisan system removed the mayor and the commission from the primary ballot, these races were on the general election ballot. Having additional competitive races in the general election should increase turnout, but nonpartisan elections may operate differently. The

¹⁶ Figure 4.5 presents general election turnout by year in both presidential and non-presidential years.

lack of partisan identification makes nonpartisan races low-information contests. Hawley (1973) argues that nonpartisanship requires a more motivated and interested electorate, but scholars disagree as to the effects of nonpartisan elections on turnout. Some believe nonpartisanship depresses turnout (e.g., Caren 2007); others believe that other variables, such as the presence of a mayoral race, wash out the effect of nonpartisanship (e.g., Wood 2002). Nevertheless, the nonpartisan variable in this model is expected to have a negative influence on turnout.

The rest of the variables are the same as the primary election model and the equation for the regression line is as follows:

Turnout = $a + b_1$ President on ballot + b_2 Competitive Statewide + b_3 Competitive Local + b_4 Competitive Mayor + b_5 Nonpartisan + b_6 % Female + b_7 % White + b_8 % College Educated + b_9 Median Family Income

Results

Table 4.3 presents the results of the general election turnout model.¹⁷ As expected, the presence of a presidential race increases turnout an average of 32.7%, all else held constant. Whether it is the high visibility of the presidential race or a feeling of civic duty to vote for president is unclear. What is clear is that the presidential race mobilizes a large percentage of the electorate, regardless of what else is happening on the ballot.

Although the presence of a presidential race increases turnout, statewide competition also influences turnout. An increase of one competitive statewide race increases turnout by 3%, holding all else constant. The relationship between turnout and statewide competition is shown in Figure 4.6. The presidential turnout line ends at 7 because there was not a presidential year with more than 7 contested statewide races. Nevertheless, there is a clear positive relationship between statewide competition and turnout. With turnout for general elections averaging 47.95%, an additional statewide race has the potential to bump it over the 50% mark.

¹⁷ As with the primary election model, there is no evidence of heteroskedasticity or serial correlation.

Unlike the primary model, the competitiveness of local elections is not statistically significant in the general election model. This is consistent with the hypothesis that voters think locally in primary elections and are motivated by statewide competition in the general election. This may be due to the lack of competitive local races on the November ballot, with most local races having been decided in the summer primaries. However, as more elections are held under the nonpartisan system, there is a greater chance that local elections will be able to mobilize more voters to turn out in November.

Discussion

Riker and Ordeshook's (1968, 25) "calculus of voting" equation states that voters will turn out to vote when the benefits received from voting times the probability the voter will receive those benefits by voting are greater than the costs of voting to the voter. In the primary model, local competition drove turnout; the opposite is true in general elections. This may be due to the lack of local general election competition, most of the races having been decided in the primaries prior to 2006. It may also be because voters in ACC feel there are more benefits to be gained from participating in local politics in the primaries and from voting in statewide races in general elections.

Because local and statewide competition is measured in the same units in both models, it is possible to compare coefficients across models. An increase of one competitive local primary election increases turnout over 0.50%, more than a similar increase in statewide general election competition. Local primary competition and statewide general competition appear to be of relatively comparable influence in their respective elections, but given the number of statewide and local races on the ballot, there are more opportunities for statewide races to be contested. As a result, statewide races have a higher potential to increase turnout than local races.



Figure 4.1: Clarke County Election Turnout: 1979-2006



Figure 4.2: Clarke County Primary Election Turnout: 1979-2006

		Numb	er of Democr	atic Candida	ites	Num	ber of Repub	lican Candid	ates
Year	Democratic	Governor	U.S.	U.S.	Mayor	Governor	U.S.	U.S.	Mayor
	Ballots		Senate	House			Senate	House	
1976	100%			7				0	
1978	94.6	6*	6*	2*		2	2	0	
1980	94.9		6*	1*			6	1	
1982	94.1	10		1*		2		0	
1984	96.2		2*	2*			3	0	
1986	88.2	2*	4*	1*		1	4*	1	
1988	72.4			1*				1	
1990	93.0	5	1*	2*		4	0	2	
1992	76.2		1*	5			5	5	
1994	79.9	4*		1*	3*	5		3	1
1996	68.5		1	2			6	1*	
1998	61.4	6	2	1	1	4	1*	1*	1
2000	92.1			0				2*	
2002	74.8	1*	1*	7	4*	3	3	2	0
2004	79.5		8	4			3	1*	
2006	70.7	4		1	nonpartisan	2*		1*	nonpartisan

Table 4.1: Party Competition and Percent of Clarke County Primary Voters Choosing a Democratic Ballot: 1976-2006

* Includes Incumbent



Figure 4.3: Republican Statewide Competition in Georgia: 1976-2006.

Table 4.2: Primary	Election	Turnout
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	Coefficient	Std. Error
Electoral Context		
Democratic	-270.40	404.87
# of Competitive Statewide	0.59	0.49
# of Competitive Local ¹⁸	3.85**	1.23
Competitive Mayor	3.20	3.34
Institutional Structure		
Nonpartisan (2006)	-10.36*	5.71
Demographic Characteristics		
% Female	3.46	6.01
% White	-0.50	0.83
Median Family Income	-0.001	0.01
% College Educated	0.33	0.22
Party * % White	0.33	1.01
Party * % Female	7.42	7.42
Party * Median Family Income	-0.003	0.01
Constant	-121.57	
n	36	
r^2	0.91	
Adjusted r ²	0.86	

p < .05 * p < .10

¹⁸ The model was also run combining the mayoral and local competition variables. The results are similar and are presented in Appendix F.



Figure 4.4: Clarke County Primary Turnout and Local Competition



Figure 4.5: Clarke County General Election Turnout by Year: 1976-2006

	Coefficient	Std. Error			
Electoral Context					
President on Ballot	32.72*	4.85			
# of Competitive Statewide ¹⁹	3.01*	0.80			
# of Competitive Local	3.08	4.11			
Competitive Mayor	-0.46	6.33			
Institutional Structure					
Nonpartisan (2006)	-3.70	14.33			
Demographic Characteristics					
% Female	9.65	6.54			
% White	0.01	0.95			
Median Family Income	-0.002	0.01			
% College Educated	0.25	0.54			
Constant					
n	23				
r^2	0.88				
Adjusted r	0.79				
p < .03					
Clarke County General Turnout and Statewide Competition					
8					
	•				
	•				
ont		•			
440					

Table 4.3: General Election Turnout Using Statewide Competitiveness and Mayoral Competition

Figure 4.6: Clarke County General Turnout and Statewide Competition

Statewide Competition

٠

······ Presidential Yr. Trend Line —· —· Non-Presidential Yr. Trend Line

5

Presidential Year

20

0

0

•

10

Non-Presidential Year

15

¹⁹The model was also run using CQ risk ratings for U.S. House and Senate to determine competitiveness. The statewide measure then consisted of a count of contested statewide races (excluding U.S. House and Senate). U.S. Congressional races were added in to the statewide count if CQ rated the election as "Leaning Republican," "Too Close To Call," or "Leaning Democratic." The results of both models are nearly identical and the CQ results are presented in Appendix G. Given the similarity in results, one can be more confident in the accuracy of the statewide count of competition variable.

CHAPTER 5

STRATEGIC VOTING AND BALLOT CHOICE

Most of the existing research on elections has focused on general elections. Fewer studies have examined primary elections, and fewer studies still have attempted to explain what happens in local primary elections. As the previous chapter shows, competition at different levels brings Athens voters to the polls for primaries and general elections. But what happens once they have made the decision to turn out? Some politicians and Republican Party leaders in ACC expressed concerns that Athens Republicans were placed in the awkward position of choosing a Republican ballot to vote in statewide races, which they have a low probability of influencing, or selecting a Democratic ballot to affect the outcomes of local races. The new nonpartisan system, it was hoped, would free Athens Republicans to select a Republican primary ballot without running the risk of ending up with a liberal Democratic mayor. The switch to nonpartisan elections allows for the application of a quasi-experimental research design to assess the effects of personal and contextual factors in a voter's strategic decision to select either a Republican or Democratic primary ballot.

Most research has examined strategic and crossover voting for a single office. Voters in open primaries, however, not only look to see where the action is in terms of a single office, but also compare up- and down-ballot races when deciding which party's primary ballot to select. This requires us to re-conceptualize strategic voting in terms of statewide and local political climates. The offices on the ballot may determine which party's primary ballot is chosen, especially in areas which often vote against the partisan tide of the state as a whole. This understanding of strategy is as of yet unexplored in the primary voting literature.

If local races are what draw voters to primary elections, one would expect voters to strategically select the ballot with the most primary competition. Given the partisan leanings of the county, one would expect voters to vote almost exclusively in the Democratic primary, yet some voters still choose a Republican ballot. This chapter will examine the factors prompting voters to pick a particular party's ballot once they are at the polls and test the following hypotheses:

- H₄: Where one party dominates the other statewide, voters will strategically choose the primary ballot of the party that is more competitive at the local level.
- H₇: Nonpartisan elections increase the probability of choosing the minority party's primary ballot by removing most local offices from the primary ballot.

Data and Methods

Much of the research into strategic voting relies on party identification or partisan leanings to aid in determining the frequency of such behavior (Hedlund et al. 1982; Abramowitz et al. 1981). Due to the lack of party registration in Georgia, it is impossible to model sincere or strategic voting as other scholars have done. A strategic voter, recognizing the importance of local government and its impact on his or her daily life, may choose to vote in the primary of the party which dominates local politics, even if this means foregoing a chance to vote in a primary which may have more importance for state politics (H₄).

Furthermore, while research on primary voting has analyzed the impact of open and closed primary systems, few studies have examined the effects of nonpartisan races on primary ballot choice. This is due to the very nature of nonpartisanship, which excludes races from primary ballots. However, the switch to nonpartisan elections in ACC provides an environment in which to study the impact of rules changes on ballot selection. If voters do vote strategically

to influence local elections, the removal of local elections from the ballot should eliminate this behavior (H₇).

While most studies of primary voting behavior rely on survey data (Burden and Green 2000; Tedin and Murray 1981; Southwell 1991; Abramowitz et al. 1981), this study utilizes over a decade of voter history data from Athens-Clarke County. This unique data set tracks the over 34,000 registered voters in ACC from 1996 to 2006. While someone's actual vote is unknown, the ballot selected in a particular primary is recorded, as well as the self-reported race and gender of the voter from the voter's registration file. This allows for the modeling of individual characteristics and eliminates the problems with recall associated with survey data (Atkeson 1999; Wright 1992; Wright 1993). The dependent variable is the ballot selected. This variable is coded 1 for a Republican ballot and 0 for a Democratic ballot. Because of the binary nature of the dependent variable, a probit model will be used.

To account for individual characteristics, race and gender are incorporated into the model. The race variable is coded 1 if the voter is white and 0 if the voter is non-white. White voters are shown to be more likely to vote Republican (Finkel 1993; Lacy and Burden 1999; Lublin 1999). The gender variable is coded 1 if the voter is female and 0 if the voter is male. As research has shown, females are more likely to vote Democratically (Abramson et al. 2003; Schaffner 2005).

In terms of electoral competition, an ideal model would account for intra-party competition in high-level state races, such as the gubernatorial, U.S. House and Senate races, as well as the local mayoral race, resulting in six possible combinations of competition. Unfortunately, the available individual-level data are limited to the elections between 1996 and 2006, making such a model difficult because each permutation of competition did not occur within the time period studied.

To deal with this problem, a dummy variable is employed to represent the combinations of competition present in each election year.²⁰ The competitive mayoral year represents 2002, in which the mayoral race was contested in the Democratic primary. This year also saw an uncontested race for governor and Senate and a contested House race on the Democratic side. Republicans had competitive primaries for governor, Senate, and House in 2002, but no mayoral candidates. Given the lack of local competition on the Republican ballot, it is hypothesized that voters will strategically select a Democratic ballot to influence the outcome of local elections.

The uncompetitive mayoral variable represents 1998. In 1998, although both parties had mayoral candidates, neither party's mayoral primary was contested. The only contested Republican race was the gubernatorial primary, while Democrats had contested gubernatorial and senatorial primaries. Without a competitive local race on the ballot, voters are expected to be more likely to select a Republican ballot in order to participate in elections for statewide leadership.

Finally, year dummies are included to account for the other competition combinations. In 1996, the Democrats and Republicans had competitive races for the House and Senate, respectively. The only competitive race in 2000 was a Republican House race. In 2002, there was a competitive senatorial race on both sides and a competitive Democratic House race. The baseline year is 2006, allowing the nonpartisan system to be compared with turnout in other electoral contexts. Not having certain elections on the ballot, it is hypothesized, will be different from having the races present but uncontested. The gubernatorial race was the only competitive race of those examined on both sides in 2006.

²⁰ See Table 4.1 for a table of electoral competition in selected races, 1976 to 2006.

Results

The results of the probit regression model are presented in Table 5.1. The personal characteristics are both significant and in the expected direction, showing that race and gender are influential for ballot selection, as well as partisan identification (Lublin 1999) and vote choice (Finkel 1993; Lacy and Burden 1999). White voters are 24% more likely than non-whites to select a Republican ballot when gender is held at the modal value (female) and the year at the baseline. Holding race at the modal value (white) and year at the baseline of 2006, women are 6% less likely to pick a Republican ballot.

In terms of electoral competition, a competitive mayoral race reduces the probability of choosing a Republican ballot by 4% over the baseline of nonpartisanship, holding race and gender constant at their modal values. Even with competitive up-ballot Republican races, voters are less likely to vote in a Republican primary if there is a contested local Democratic election. Relative to a nonpartisan election, an uncompetitive mayoral election increases the probability of selecting a Republican ballot by 9%. Competitive statewide Republican races make voters more likely to select a Republican ballot than they would in a nonpartisan setting. If Republicans hoped that having nonpartisan elections would make voters more likely to select a Republican ballot. Voters do appear to be less likely to select a Democratic ballot in a competitive mayoral year under the nonpartisan system, but the findings suggest nonpartisanship makes voters less likely to select a Republican ballot in an uncompetitive mayoral year than they would otherwise.

Potentially more worthy of note is the predicted probability of selecting a Republican ballot for voters with certain characteristics. Table 5.2 presents the probabilities of selecting a Republican ballot for these interesting cases. In a competitive mayoral year, non-white females are the least likely to select a Republican ballot, followed closely by non-white males. White males are the most likely to select a Republican ballot, yet there is just a 34% chance that voters will choose a Republican ballot. In all cases, voters are more likely to select a Republican ballot in an uncompetitive mayoral year. Non-white voters are still the least likely to vote in the Republican primary. White females are 41% more likely to select a Republican ballot in an uncompetitive mayoral year than in a nonpartisan system. At 47%, white males are the most likely to vote in the Republican primary.

Discussion

Before the switch to nonpartisan elections, ACC voters were more likely to select a Democratic ballot if there was a competitive Democratic mayoral race. In uncompetitive mayoral years, voters were more likely to select a Republican ballot. When nonpartisan races are moved to the general election ballot in November, voters appear to be more likely to select a Republican ballot in a competitive mayoral year, but less likely than they would be in an uncompetitive year. It is unlikely that non-white voters will select a Republican ballot, regardless of competition. White voters, both male and female, appear to be the ones who respond more to changes in local competition.

This suggests that voters were behaving strategically when selecting a primary ballot, being drawn to the party with the most local competition. Although it may be too early to draw large conclusions about the effects of nonpartisanship, this type of strategic voting should no longer occur at the local level. While an in-depth analysis of campaign strategy is beyond the scope of this study, these findings may be of use to future campaigns when considering which voters to target with the goal of persuading them to "cross-over" and vote in the Republican primary.

	Coefficient	Std. Error	Effect
Individual Characteristics			
White	1.40*	0.028	0.24
Female	-0.17*	0.016	-0.06
Electoral Context			
Competitive Mayor (2002)	-0.10*	0.026	-0.04
Uncompetitive Mayor (1998)	0.24*	0.029	0.09
1996	0.13*	0.029	0.05
2000	-0.56*	0.031	-0.17
2004	-0.16*	0.026	-0.06
n	34585		
χ^2_2	5,023		
Pseudo r^2	0.132		

Table 5.1: Probit Model of Primary Ballot Choice (Republican = 1)²¹

* p < 0.05. Effect is the discrete change in the predicted probability for a one-unit change in the independent variable holding all Personal Characteristics constant at 1. For the effect of Personal Characteristics, the year is held constant at the modal year, 2004.

Table 5.2: Predicted Probability of Selecting a Republican Ballot ²²					
Predicted Probability					
Competitive Mayoral Year (2002)					
White Female	0.28				
White Male	0.34				
Non-White Female	0.02				
Non-White Male	0.04				
Uncompetitive Mayoral Year (1998)					
White Female	0.41				
White Male	0.47				
Non-White Female	0.05				
Non-White Male	0.07				

 ²¹ The model correctly classifies 75.99% and the independent variables reduce the prediction error by 63.40%.
 ²² All probabilities are relative to the 2006 baseline year.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

In ACC, the switch to nonpartisan elections divided political elites along partisan lines. Those in support of the measure hoped that the new rules would free voters to select a Republican primary ballot to vote in statewide elections, rather than being forced to choose between local and state politics. Although not explicitly stated, proponents hoped to help Republican candidates gain a foothold in county politics. Opponents of the switch claimed that nonpartisan elections would reduce the available candidate information, resulting in an uninformed, passive electorate. They also feared that the proponents were right and nonpartisanship would help candidates who would otherwise run as Republicans.

The findings of this study suggest some of these fears are unfounded. Turnout in both the primary and general elections under a system of nonpartisanship does not differ statistically from turnout in prior partisan elections. Instead, primary turnout appears to be driven by local competition, while general election turnout is a function of statewide competition. Nevertheless, nonpartisanship does affect the number of local races listed on the primary ballot, which in turn limits the mobilizational effect of local elections. Although local competition is not statistically significant in the general election model, this may be due to the fact that most local elections have historically been decided by primary elections. By shifting mayoral and commission races to the general election ballot in November, local competition may become more influential in the future.

As time passes, primary turnout may decrease while general election turnout increases due to this shift in timing. Electoral participation in local run-off races, however, is likely to remain low because these races are held during the week of Thanksgiving when many citizens are out of town. Choosing to hold local elections in even years as opposed to odd, like the old city council elections, should contribute to higher turnout levels than those associated with odd year elections.

As the Chapter 5 results indicate, pre-2006, the presence of a competitive Democratic mayoral race in Athens-Clarke County influences a voter's primary ballot choice. While race and gender both play a part in a voter's decision, a competitive mayoral election increases the probability that the voter will select a Democratic ballot because voters are acting strategically to have a say in the local governmental elections. Certainly with only one primary election under the new nonpartisan rules, it is too soon to judge the magnitude of this change, yet some effects seem likely. The potential effects of this change are threefold: slating groups may arise as they did in other nonpartisan cities, especially with active involvement of the Chamber of Commerce in Athens politics; the probability of selecting a Republican primary ballot will increase due to the removal of the mayor and county commission from the ballot; and candidates who lean or identify with the Democratic Party may suffer losses as a result of votes being split among many candidates. While the same may be true for the Republican Party, it is unlikely to suffer, at least in the short-term. Even without mayoral candidates on the ballot, the chances of a voter in ACC selecting a Republican ballot remain low. Negative repercussions of multiple Republicanleaning candidates may be felt as the party gains strength in local elections, but this momentum may take many cycles to build. Nevertheless, the switch to nonpartisan elections for local governmental offices has eliminated the form of strategic voting discussed here.

Future Research

Further examination is required to understand fully the impact of this change in election rules. As more nonpartisan elections are held and the nonpartisan variable becomes more than a dichotomous 2006 indicator, the long-term effects of the new system will become more apparent. The voting patterns of ACC residents should continue to be studied, as should the voting patterns of other counties that employ nonpartisan election systems.

In order to have a more complete picture of the effects of the removal of party identification from certain offices, future studies should include a model of voter roll-off. Ballot roll-off reduces the level of voter participation in elections. Vanderleeuw and Liu (2002, 381) propose that there are three types of voters: full participants, or those who complete their entire ballot; partial participants, those voters who fail to complete the entire ballots; and nonparticipants, those who do not vote at all. If voters have already paid the costs associated with voting by turning out on election day, what would cause a voter to fail to complete the entire ballot? If, as previous research has shown, lower information races cause voters to roll off at higher rates, ballot roll-off in local elections should increase with nonpartisan elections. Moreover, since incumbency status is still listed on the nonpartisan ballots, the importance of incumbency should increase under the nonpartisan system.

Due to limited data availability, the general election model does not include a measure of presidential race competitiveness. While many voters may feel compelled to turn out to vote for president regardless of the level of competition, others may stay home because they believe their vote will not matter in an uncompetitive race. In order to assess more accurately the influence of a presidential race on voter turnout, future studies should include a measure of presidential

competition, such as Daron Shaw's (1999) battleground state rating or pre-election statewide poll numbers from the National Network of State Polls.

In a similar vein, competitive races in which the entire county was not eligible to vote have been excluded due to the aggregate nature of the analysis. A more complete study of the effects of competition on turnout should be done at the district or precinct level, which would allow for the inclusion of both state house and county commission races. While the mayoral race is the highest profile race affected by the new nonpartisan system, commission races may mobilize voters. The 2000 sheriff and district attorney races, although county-wide, had the highest levels of participation of any race on the Democratic ballot, showing that lower-profile races can be a big draw for voters. By using electoral districts as the unit of analysis and thus including the ten county commission races, the nonpartisan variable may become statistically and substantively significant.

Analysis at the district level will also allow for more variation in the demographic characteristic variables. Research has shown these variables to influence voter turnout, and it is clear that aggregation at the county level obscures their effects. Although the Voting Rights Act requires the legislature to pay attention to the racial make-up of districts, no such requirement exists in regards to education and income. The more affluent districts in Clarke County may well have higher turnout rates than those in which the residents are less well off, a fact which is not captured by the models at the county level.

Finally, statistical analysis can explain many, but not all, of the changes brought about by the new electoral rules. Candidates may adjust their strategies to compete under the new system. They may target different groups of voters or change the way they allocate campaign funds. Research has shown business interests to be very active in local elections (e.g., Fleischmann and
Stein 1998), and this was certainly the case in ACC. The Chamber of Commerce was active both in the push for nonpartisan elections and in the 2006 races for mayor and commission, and there is every reason to expect that business interests will remain an active force in ACC elections. Moreover, politics in Athens, like Atlanta, appears to be elite driven, with politicians and other prominent community members taking the lead in advocating for and against nonpartisan elections. In such cities, campaign contributions tend to be large. Unfortunately, campaign spending data for local elections are not available before 2002 and could not be included in the model. However, as more elections occur and the Board of Elections transitions to a new electronic reporting system, campaign spending data will become more readily available. Its inclusion may more accurately measure competition as well as give hints as to the candidate's campaign and interest group strategy.

Additionally, due to the Democratic-leaning preferences of ACC voters, candidates may publicly identify as Democrats even under the nonpartisan system. Candidates may also cater to business interests, knowing that is where the money is. Interviews with candidates as well as those involved in the rules change may provide additional insight into their perceptions of the nonpartisan system and changing strategies.

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Author (Date)	Dependent Variable	Type of Election	Year(s)	Research Approach
Cassel (1979)	General Turnout	Presidential Election	1953-1976	SRC-CPS Survey
Gilliam (1985)	General Turnout	U.S. House	1978	Aggregate-Level Election Data
Gerber et al. (2003)	General Turnout	-	1998-1999	Experiment
Austin et al. (1991)	General Turnout	Multiple Offices	1968-1986	Aggregate-Level Election Data
Bowler et al. (2001)	General Turnout	Local Elections	1979-1999	Aggregate-Level Election Data
Caren (2007)	General Turnout	Local Elections	1979-2003	Aggregate-Level Election Data
Hajnal and Lewis (2003)	General Turnout	Local Elections	2000	Survey
Wood (2002)	General Turnout	Local Elections	1993-2000	Aggregate-Level Election Data/ Survey
Bridges (1997)	General Turnout	Local Elections	1965-1989	Aggregate-Level Election Data
Collins (1980)	General Turnout	Local Elections	1973	Aggregate-Level Election Data
Conway (1969)	General Turnout	Local Elections	1965	Survey
Lee (1960)	General Turnout	Local Elections	1955	Interviews/Survey

Appendix A: Synopsis of Major Research on Voter Turnout

Author (Date)	Dependent Variable	Type of Election	Year(s)	Research Approach
Olson (1965)	General Turnout	Local Elections	1963	Aggregate-Level Election Data
Hamilton (1971)	General Turnout	Local Elections	1967	Aggregate-Level Election Data/ Survey
Schaffner et al. (2001)	General Turnout	Local Elections	1985-1989, 1993-1995	Aggregate-Level Election Data
Alford and Lee (1968)	General Turnout	Local Elections	1961-1962	Aggregate-Level Election Data
Geys (2006)	General Turnout	-	-	Meta-Analysis of Aggregate-Level Election Data
Jewell (1977)	Primary Turnout	Gubernatorial Primaries	1950-1976	Aggregate-Level Election Data (State Level)
Kenney (1986)	Primary Turnout	Senatorial Primaries	1968-1980	Aggregate-Level Election Data (State Level)
Kenney and Rice (1985)	Primary Turnout	Presidential Primaries	1976, 1980	Aggregate-Level Election Data (State
Norrander (1986b)	Primary Turnout	Presidential Primaries	1980	Survey Data
Ranney (1972)	Primary Turnout	Presidential Primaries	1948-1968	Aggergate-Level Election Data/Survey

Author (Date)	Dependent Variable	Type of Election	Year(s)	Research Approach
Boyd (1989)	Primary Turnout	State Primaries/ Presidential General Election	1976, 1980, 1984	CPS Survey
Kenney (1983)	Primary Turnout	Gubernatorial Primaries	1968-1980	Aggregate-Level Election Data
Niven (2001)	Primary Turnout	State Legislative Primaries	2000	Candidate Survey/ Individual-Level Election Data
Tam Cho and Gaines (2002)*	Primary Turnout	Multiple Offices	1944-1998	Aggregate-Level Election Data

Author (Date)	Dependent Variable	Type of Election	Year(s)	Research Approach
Ranney (1972)	Turnout	Presidential Primary	1948-1968	Aggregate-Level Election Data/ Survey
Boyd (1989)	Turnout	State Primaries/ Presidential General Election	1976, 1980, 1984	CPS Survey
Jewell (1984)	Turnout	Gubernatorial Primaries	1952-1980	Aggregate-Level Election Data
Kenney (1983)	Turnout	Gubernatorial Primaries	1968-1980	Aggregate-Level Election Data
Niven (2001)	Turnout	State Legislative Primaries	2000	Candidate Survey/ Individual -Level Election Data
Tam Cho and Gaines (2002)*	Turnout	Multiple Offices	1944-98	Aggregate-Level Election Data
Hedlund (1977-78)	Crossover Voting	Presidential Primary	1976	Survey
Hedlund and Watts (1986)	Crossover Voting	Presidential Primaries	1968-1984	Survey
Wekkin (1988)	Crossover Voting	Presidential Primary	1980	Survey
Gaines and Tam Cho (2002)*	Crossover Voting	Congressional Primaries	1910-64	Aggregate-Level Election Data
Sakvanto and Wattenberg (2002)*	Crossover Voting	Multiple Offices	1998	Individual-Level Election Data
Sides et al. (2002)*	Crossover Voting	Multiple Offices	1998	Survey
Abramson et al. (1992)	Strategic Voting	Presidential Primary	1988	ANES Survey
Grafstein (2003)	Strategic Voting	Presidential Primary	1988	ANES Survey
Southwell (1988)	Strategic Voting	Presidential Primary	1972, 1976, 1980, 1984	ANES Survey
Abramowitz et al. (1981)	Strategic Voting	Gubernatorial Primary	1977	Survey

Appendix B: Synopsis of Major Research on Primary Elections

Author (Date)	Dependent Variable	Type of Election	Year(s)	Research Approach
Gerber (2002)*	Strategic Voting	Multiple Offices	1996-98	Formal Model/ Aggregate-Level Election Data
Chen and Yang (2002)	Strategic Voting	-	-	Formal Model
Cherry and Kroll (2003)	Strategic Voting	-	-	Experiment
Southwell (1989)	Strategic Voting/ Crossover Voting	Presidential Primary	1984	CBS/New York Times Survey
Southwell (1991)	Strategic Voting/ Crossover Voting	Presidential Primary	1988	ANES Survey
Alvarez and Nagler (2002)*	Strategic Voting/ Crossover Voting	State Legislative Primary	1998	Survey
Kousser (2002)*	Strategic Voting/ Crossover Voting	Multiple Offices	1998	Survey/ Aggregate-Level Election Data

*Included in Voting at the Political Fault Line: California's Experiment with the Blanket Primary (2002)

Author (Date)	Dependent Variable	Type of Election	Year(s)	Research Approach
Adrian (1959)	Typology	Local Nonpartisan	-	Summary of Existing Literature
Cushman (1923)	Typology	Local Nonpartisan	-	Case Studies
Lascher (1991)	Roll-Off	Local Nonpartisan	1978-1984	Aggregate-Level Election Data
Schaffner et al. (2001)	Roll-Off	State Partisan/Nonpartisan	1972, 1976, 1984-1990	Aggregate-Level Election Data
Cassel (1987)	Representation	Local Nonpartisan	1980	CPS Survey
Davidson and Fraga (1988)	Representation	Local Nonpartisan	1979-84, 1985-1987	Survey
Gilbert (1962)	Representation	Local Nonpartisan	1928-1962	Aggregate-Level Election Data
Hagensick (1964)	Representation	Local Nonpartisan	1956-62	Candidate Biographies/Turnover Rates
Hawley (1973)	Representation	Local Nonpartisan	1957-66	Aggregate-Level Election Data/Survey
Lascher (1991)	Representation	Local Nonpartisan	1988	Survey
Williams and Adrian (1959)	Representation	Local Nonpartisan	1949-1957	Aggregate-Level Election Data
Adrian (1952)	Representation	Local Partisan/Nonpartisan	-	Case Studies
Gilbert and Clague (1962)	Representation	Local Partisan/Nonpartisan	1945-59	Aggregate-Level Election Data
Pomper (1966)	Representation	Local Partisan/Nonpartisan	1961-62	Aggregate-Level Election Data
Welch and Bledsoe (1986)	Representation	Local Partisan/Nonpartisan	1982	Survey
Bowler et al. (2001)	Turnout	Local Partisan	1997-99	Aggregate-Level Election Data
Caren (2007)	Turnout	Local Partisan	1979-2003	Aggregate-Level Election Data
Hajnal and Lewis (2003)	Turnout	Local Partisan	2000	Survey

Appendix C: Synopsis of Major Research on Local and Nonpartisan Elections

Author (Date)	Dependent Variable	Type of Election	Year(s)	Research Approach
Wood (2002)	Turnout	Local Partisan	1993-2000	Aggregate-Level Election Data/Survey
Bridges (1997)	Turnout	Local Nonpartisan	1965-89	Aggregate-Level Election Data
Collins (1980)	Turnout	Local Nonpartisan	1973	Aggregate-Level Election Data
Conway (1969)	Turnout	Local Nonpartisan	1965	Survey
Lee (1960)	Turnout	Local Nonpartisan	1955	Interviews/Survey
Olson (1965)	Turnout	Local Nonpartisan	1963	Aggregate-Level Eleciton Data
Hamilton (1971)	Turnout	Local Partisan/Nonpartisan	1967	Aggregate-Level Election Data/Survey
Schaffner et al. (2001)	Turnout	Local Partisan/Nonpartisan	1985-89, 1993-1995	Aggregate-Level Election Data

Year	Primary	Primary Runoff	General	General Runoff	Special
1976	35.65%	35.55	60.83	-	-
1977	24.06%	-	10.47	-	16.70 and 19.65
1978	35.65	18.62	29.27	-	-
1979	17.91	7.67	26.51	-	16.77
1980	45.32	43.83	71.30	-	-
1981	30.17	-	22.30	-	-
1982	52.31	47.51	50.94	-	38.28
1983	-	-	18.66	-	25.00, 18.50, and 37.45
1984	42.33	-	67.76	-	-
1985	23.14	22.81	26.92	-	12.45
1986	43.00	11.76	50.57	-	-
1987	31.20	-	33.50	-	-
1988	26.20	7.40	65.87	-	-
1989	-	-	16.40	-	19.64 and 16.54
1990	44.32	45.73	58.75	-	45.29
1992	37.59	20.56	75.96	43.02	38.23, 9.71,
1994	34.86	37.55	54.91	-	-
1996	23.01	7.98	60.70	-	-
1997	-	-	-	-	15.82
1998	20.07	13.08	46.05	4.14	-
1999	-	-	-	-	17.08
2000	26.58	-	68.99	15.49	-
2001	-	-	-	-	17.05
2002	39.88	37.74	54.81	-	-
2004	35.19	16.24	78.88	6.96	-
2006	21.45	14.87	52.48	27.05	-

Appendix D: Percent Turnout by Type of Election, 1976-2006

Variable	Minimum Value	Maximum Value	Mean
% White	58.87	76.70	69.68
% Female	45.58	52.34	51.13
Median Family Income	46033.00	47520.40	46977.72
% College Educated	14.97	39.80	20.94

Appendix E: Summary of Community Characteristics

	Coefficient	Std. Error
Electoral Context		
Party	-261.28	394.33
Competitive Statewide	0.63	0.45
Competitive Local	3.84**	1.20
Institutional Structure		
Nonpartisan (2006)	-10.34*	5.60
Individual Changeteristics		
<i>Matviauai</i> Characteristics	2 4 2	5 99
% Female	3.42	5.88
% White	-0.49	0.82
Median Family Income	-0.001	0.01
% College Educated	0.32	0.21
Party*White	0.33	0.99
Party _* Female	7.45	7.27
Party*Median Family Income	-0.003	0.001
Constant	-118.42	
Collstant	-110.42	
n _2	30 0.01	
r	0.91	
x = n < 05	0.00	

Appendix F: Primary Election Turnout (Local and Mayoral Elections Combined)

p < .05* p < .10

	Coefficient	Std. Error
Electoral Context		
President on Ballot	35.50*	5.96
Competitive Statewide (CQ)	2.75*	0.99
Competitive Local	1.08	4.78
Competitive Mayor	-2.22	7.30
Institutional Structure		
Nonpartisan (2006)	-0.91	16.29
Individual Characteristics		
% Female	-1.50	3.65
% White	0.37	1.09
Median Family Income	0.01	0.01
% College Educated	0.26	0.70
Constant	-406.98	
n	23	
r^2_2	0.83	
Adjusted r ²	0.72	
* <i>p</i> < .05		

Appendix G: General Election Turnout Using CQ Expert Ratings and Mayoral Competition