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Electoral Cycle Fluctuations in Partisanship: Global Evidence from Eighty-Six Countries

Kristin Michelitch
Vanderbilt University

Stephen Utych
Boise State University

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Kristin Michelitch, Vanderbilt University
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Elections are defining elements of democracy but occur infrequently. Given that elections evoke mass mobilization, we expect citizen attachments to political parties to wax during election season and wane in between. By leveraging data from 86 countries across the globe to investigate the effect of the electoral cycle on partisanship, we find that the predicted probability of being close to a political party rises 6 percentage points from cycle midpoint to an election—an effect rivaling traditional key determinants of partisanship. Further, fluctuations are larger where the persistence of party presence throughout the cycle is weaker and socioeconomic development is lower. These findings challenge the discipline to introduce dynamic political events into the study of partisanship, alongside “static” individual-level and country-level determinants. Additionally, presumed cross-country or temporal differences in mass partisanship levels, long used as indicators of democratic consolidation or party system institutionalization, may be confounded by electoral cycle effects.

When will I see or hear from those political party people again? They just come around here making noise and giving t-shirts around the election period. If I may say something, between elections, they just abandon us. What those MPs are actually doing there in Parliament, we do not know it.¹

Although they are the most defining element of electoral democracies, national elections are few and far between. Every four years, on average,² electoral commissions stage an event of epic proportions—producing millions of ballot papers, hiring and training an army of polling station agents, and executing perhaps the country’s only nationwide event in which every citizen could theoretically participate. During election season, a wide variety of actors mobilize citizens. Political candidates and party elites, salivating in anticipation of obtaining or retaining power, are incentivized to reach out and mobilize the masses for political support, whereas they otherwise shift attention to elite legislative politics (Box-Steffensmeier and Lin 1997; Fisher 1999; Horowitz 2012; Lindberg 2010; Wilkinson 2004). Interest groups ramp up citizen mobilization efforts around elections given the added leverage to extract policy from parties (Chandra 2012; Khemani 2004). Civil society movements use elections as focal points

for coordinating mass action (Tucker 2007). Since elections are the apex of partisan group competition over policy direction and societal resource allocation, such actors not only draw citizens into politics around elections but also endeavor to mobilize citizens to take sides into partisan camps through in-person events and the mass media (Abney et al. 2013; Anderson 2003; Anderson, Tilley, and Heath 2005).

In this article, we argue that the cyclical nature of citizen mobilization efforts over the electoral cycle affects the level and intensity of mass partisanship. Higher levels of mobilization around elections increase the relative influx of information regarding party brands and partisan conflict (Brader and Tucker 2008; Lupu 2013), as well as the net benefit of political participation in partisan activities (Khemani 2004; Lindberg 2010; Tucker 2007). Exposure to such information and political participation are both well founded to engender and reinforce partisanship (Brader and Tucker 2001; Dinas 2014;

Kristin Michelitch (kristin.michelitch@vanderbilt.edu; <http://www.kristinmichelitch.com>) is an assistant professor at Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN 37203. Stephan Utych (stephenutyach@boisestate.edu) is an assistant professor at Boise State University, Boise, ID 83725.

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1. Michelitch interview with Ghanaian citizen prior to the 2008 elections.
2. Calculation from study data.

Greene 2004; Iyengar and Simon 2000; Valentino and Sears 1998). Finally, a well-known body of evidence has shown that as group competition intensifies, individuals desire to take sides and increase identification with their in-group, taking actions to strengthen in-group cohesion or out-group hostility (e.g., Brewer and Kramer 1985; Choi and Bowles 2007; Tajfel 1981). Applied to this setting, party competition alone may induce individuals to become partisan or intensify existing partisanship (Huddy 2013; Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe 2015). Taken together, we hypothesize that partisanship waxes during election season and wanes in between.

By constructing the widest cross-national data set on partisanship to date, spanning 86 countries across Africa (2000–2014), the Americas (2004–14), Asia (2001–12), and Europe (2002–12), and pairing it with data on the dates of national elections using the NELDA data set (Hyde and Marinov 2012), we find that partisanship fluctuates, on average, a total of 12 percentage points over the electoral cycle—dropping 6 percentage points from an election to the cycle midpoint and rising 6 percentage points up to the next election. The magnitude of this effect rivals traditional key determinants of partisanship in these data, such as being male (6 percentage point increase), educated above the country mean level (6 percentage point increase), and age (4 percentage point increase for each additional decade). The finding is robust to an examination of the intensity of closeness to a political party in a subsample for which we have data: partisanship is more intense at election time than in between. Given the statistical and substantive significance of these findings, we believe that the discovery that the electoral cycle influences partisanship represents a novel advance in one of the most well-studied phenomena in political science.

We expound upon this finding in three ways. First, an observable implication of the theoretical mechanism is that fluctuations in partisanship should be larger where parties do not have permanent community presence over the electoral cycle. Indeed, we find evidence that fluctuations are much larger where the permanence of party presence is weaker. Second, we posit and test whether fluctuations in partisanship over the electoral cycle are larger where the country level of development is lower, democracy is younger, competitiveness is higher, voting is compulsory, the effective number of parties is higher, the electoral system is more party-centric, and the electoral cycle is longer. We find evidence that electoral cycle fluctuations in partisanship are indeed larger in lower income countries, as measured by the Human Development Index, but find no support for other moderating effects. Last, we collect data on the dates of nation-wide “second-order” (subnational and supranational) elections. We find evidence that partisanship fluctuates slightly more over the electoral cy-

cle when such elections are incorporated as qualifying elections in the cycle, a finding driven by subnational elections from powerful subnational bodies.

This study provides an important advance in the study of partisanship. We find that a dynamic factor—the position in the electoral cycle—can influence whether and to what degree individuals feel attached to political parties. By contrast, existing scholarship has considered “static” individual, institutional, and cultural determinants of partisanship (e.g., Brader and Tucker 2008; Huber, Kernell, and Leoni 2005; Ishiyama and Fox 2006) or the long-term stability in aggregate partisanship in response to long-term political, economic, and social environmental change (Clarke and Stewart 1998; Dalton and Wattenberg 2000).³ Additionally, while previous research has tended to focus on country-specific or region-specific examinations of partisanship,⁴ with the vast majority of studies concentrating on high-income countries,⁵ this study offers theory and evidence that is so general as to be applicable to all regimes with multiparty elections.

Uncovering the significance of the electoral cycle as a determinant of partisanship is both normatively and empirically important. Notably, partisanship determines and mutually reinforces a wide range of political behavior and opinions. As Brader and Tucker sum up: “Partisanship is the central organizing principle of mass politics” (2008, 3). Scholars have found partisanship not only to be highly associated with the propensity to vote and vote choice (e.g., Butler and Stokes 1963; Campbell et al. 1960; Dinas 2014; Ishiyama and Fox 2006) but also with other forms of political participation and engagement (e.g., Fowler and Kam 2007; Gerber, Huber, and Washington 2010; Greene 2004; Huddy 2013; Huddy et al. 2015), as well as political attitude formation (e.g., Lodge and Hamill 1986).

Given the salient role of partisanship, stable and high levels of mass partisanship have been cited as the glue that attaches citizens to elite politics in a democracy, allowing them input, oversight, and a vehicle for participation in politics (Almond and Verba 1963; Weisberg and Greene 2003). Our work has shown that this glue dissolves over the years between the

3. Relatedly, those studying vote intention and turnout in second-order elections have long noted that such behavior is affected by the position within the first-order election cycle (e.g., Reif and Schmitt 1980) and even that such second-order elections may affect behavior toward first-order politics (Bechtel 2012).

4. Huber et al.’s (2005) inter-regional investigation spanning Western Europe and North America is a notable exception.

5. For Africa, see Ferree and Horowitz (2010), Harding and Michelitch (2017), Ishiyama and Fox (2006), and Kuenzi and Lambright (2011). For Latin America, see Lupu (2013), Medina et al. (2010), Perez-Linan (2002), and Samuels (2006). For Eastern Europe, see Brader and Tucker (2001, 2008), Miller and Klobucar (2000), and Rose and Mishler (1998). For Southern Europe, see Gunther and Montero (2001) and Lisi (2014). And for Asia, see Sheng (2007).

“cheap talk” of electoral campaigns—when the “real politics” of legislating and implementing policy occur. Sagging partisanship between elections—and with it political engagement—can thus be seen as problematic for a well-functioning democracy in terms of a weakening citizen-state connection for many years between elections. As the opening quote suggests, citizens can feel “abandoned” by national politics outside of elections when politicians no longer need citizens’ votes (Lindberg 2010). Indeed, depressed citizen engagement between elections has been well noted to mutually reinforce political business cycle dynamics, in which government is much more responsiveness around elections (Golden and Min 2013). That the present study found electoral cycle fluctuations in partisanship to be much larger in low-income countries is consistent with Shi and Svensson’s (2006) finding that the political business cycle is stronger in such contexts.

On the other hand, fluctuations in partisanship over the electoral cycle may be beneficial. For one, partisanship biases attitude formation and the consumption and perception of political news media (e.g., Bartels 2002), as well as attribution of blame for political failure (e.g., Malhotra 2008). Having a less-biased citizenry between elections may help citizens more clearly evaluate government performance or consider and incorporate new ideas—allowing citizens to hold government actors more accountable. The presence and intensity of partisanship is also linked to higher levels of societal polarization (e.g., Hetherington and Weiler 2009) and discrimination between citizens on partisan lines across diverse settings in ostensibly nonpolitical activities (Carlin and Love 2013; Fowler and Kam 2007; Iyengar and Westwood 2015). Moreso, elections have been shown to exacerbate interpartisan discrimination in ordinary, real-life economic activities (Michelitch 2015) and correlate with increased political violence (Dunning 2011). Such authors may view sustained “election levels” of partisanship throughout the electoral cycle as a danger to the well-being of society in terms of national unity.

Last, levels of partisanship are often compared cross-nationally as an indicator of party system institutionalization (Dalton and Weldon 2007; Mainwaring and Zoco 2007) and democratic consolidation (Brader and Tucker 2001; Converse 1969). This work has shown that electoral cycle effects are quite large in magnitude, implying that cases of presumed cross-national differences in mass partisanship levels (e.g., Ishiyama and Fox 2006; Keefer 2010; Lisi 2014; Pereira 2012; Sheng 2007), as well as over-time differences in mass partisanship levels within a country (e.g., Schickler and Green 1997), may be confounded by election cycle effects.⁶ We suggest that, to

the extent possible, public opinion surveys could consider keeping the timing of survey data collection consistent during the electoral cycle so as to facilitate within-country over-time and cross-national comparisons of partisanship and other measures affected by the electoral cycle.

THEORY

Partisanship has been conceptualized in comparative politics scholarship as when an individual “feels close to a political party” (Brader and Tucker 2008; Huber et al. 2005; Ishiyama and Fox 2006). Importantly, this study focuses on partisanship toward any party whatsoever and not the more well-studied phenomenon of partisanship type—allegiance toward one party over another (see discussion and review in Johnston [2006]). Thus far, partisanship presence has been found cross-nationally to be determined by both individual traits (e.g., gender, education, age, urban/rural status), country-level institutional factors (e.g., clarity of responsibility), or an interaction between the two (Huber et al. 2005). In addition to these “static” factors, researchers have examined long-term change in partisanship presence over decades due to macrolevel changes in society (e.g., Clarke and Stewart 1998; Dalton and Wattenberg 2000). In this article, we seek to expand upon these veins of scholarship to include a dynamic determinant of partisanship: the electoral cycle.

As an 86-country study, this article seeks to provide as broad a theoretical and empirical treatment of the effect of the electoral cycle on partisanship as possible, given the data available. Our arguments apply to any regimes holding multi-party elections, whether they be new or old democracies, competitive or noncompetitive, or characterized by various styles of campaigning. Like others taking a cross-national approach, we remain agnostic about the “pathways to partisanship” (Brader and Tucker 2008) as being a social psychological attachment to a party as a social group (Campbell et al. 1960; Converse 1969; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002; Greene 2004), a running tally of parties’ performance information (Achen 2002), or both (Fiorina 1981).

Importantly, our central arguments in this article are relevant to both perspectives, and we draw from both to theorize the relationship between the electoral cycle and partisanship. Both perspectives underscore the stability of partisanship type, that is to say, that individuals do not typically switch allegiance between parties without major shifts in the party landscape. However, both perspectives allow for changes in partisanship presence and intensity. The running tally per-

6. Surveys that hold proximity to an election relatively constant (e.g., election studies such as the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems) would

not face this potential omitted variable. Unfortunately, election studies are scarce in the developing world and researchers therefore can rely more heavily if not exclusively on the public opinion barometers.

spective, for example, holds that citizens engage in Bayesian updating with respect to expected future benefits from a party (Achen 2002) or retrospective party evaluations (Fiorina 1981). As individuals receive more information about party fit in the short or medium term, they update their closeness to the party. On the other hand, the social psychological theory of partisanship as a social group identity would hold that the intensity (also called salience or strength) of group identity could fluctuate in the short-term due to in-group mobilization efforts and/or intergroup competition (Brewer and Kramer 1985; Huddy 2013; Huddy et al. 2015; Tajfel 1981). In line with these theories, we expect individuals' partisanship to wax and wane in presence and intensity over the course of the electoral cycle.

Electoral cycle fluctuations in citizen mobilization

We expect that the temporal proximity to an election increases partisanship for multiple reasons. First, elections catalyze an increase in partisan mobilization of citizens (Box-Steffensmeier and Lin 1997; Fisher 1999; Horowitz 2012; Lindberg 2010; Plasser and Plasser 2002; Tucker 2007; Wilkinson 2004).⁷ As party elites and their candidates anticipate the prospect of obtaining or retaining political power leading up to an election, they hit the campaign trail to mobilize citizens. Partisan mobilization efforts from political parties are lower during the midpoint of the electoral cycle and increase during "campaign season" as the next election draws near, lingering afterward during any disputes or protests over election results (Tucker 2007; Wilkinson 2004), coalition formation (Fisher 1999), or distributions of patronage (Lindberg 2010). In some instances, parties may completely disappear outside of elections, as the opening quote of this article suggests. Local offices, staff, and candidates may pack up and head back to the capital, and funds deplete for "party boys" to blast campaign messages from speakers strapped to slow-moving vehicles. In other instances, parties may maintain more of a permanent presence in local communities, holding party meetings, sponsoring soccer clubs, conducting outreach, providing information about efforts to achieve partisan goals, or otherwise making themselves available for citizen complaints or requests. However, even in such cases, parties shift resources from citizen mobilization to routine expenditure on organizational operations, assistance in legislative and executive governing, and fund-raising outside of election season (Box-Steffensmeier and Lin 1997; Plasser and Plasser 2002).

7. Further, government spending increases ahead of elections (Golden and Min 2013), which might be seen as an implicit form of incumbent campaigning even in electoral authoritarian regimes (Pepinsky 2007).

Concurrent with party mobilization of citizens, "interest groups" (e.g., ethnic groups, business associations, and civil society groups) play an active role in mobilizing citizens to partisan sides at election time (Chandra 2012; Green and Gerber 2008; Schlozman and Tierney 1986). Of course, such interest groups conduct important activities throughout the electoral cycle (e.g., lobbying political officials around law making and implementation, holding meetings and events). However, elections represent a key time of leverage to extract policy from politicians in exchange for "electoral resources" such as votes or campaign donations (Khemani 2004). Thus, citizen mobilization efforts by interest groups are much more active at election time to marshal such electoral resources (Anzia 2011).

Last, elections may act as focal points for coordinating partisan political participation in the form of civil society movements (Tucker 2007). Not only can citizen movements, like interest groups, take advantage of the political competition to capture domestic and international attention and gain leverage over political elites, but elections make a convenient rallying point to coordinate collective organization. For example, by revealing a growing level of popular discontent with major fraud by an incumbent party, elections may spark immediate post-election citizen mobilization (Little, Tucker, and LaGatta 2015; Tucker 2007). Citizens throughout the country receive a relatively simultaneous signal, and there is a limited time frame to resolve the issue before the incumbent party takes office.

The effect of citizen mobilization on partisanship

There are two major and well-demonstrated pathways through which partisan mobilization efforts may increase citizens' partisanship: (1) through an influx of partisan campaign information and (2) by increasing the net benefit of political participation.

An influx of partisan campaign information. One of the most intuitive pathways through which such campaigning strengthens citizen partisanship is through an influx of partisan campaign information, and citizen attention to it (Abney et al. 2013; Anderson 2003; Anderson et al. 2005; Bechtel 2012). Citizens can be exposed to partisan campaign information by mobilizing actors in-person—through tours (Jourde 2005), rallies (Horowitz 2012), quid pro quo clientelist relations (Hicken 2011), or informally through social networks (Sinclair 2012). They can also be exposed through mass media (e.g., television, radio, newspapers, the internet), either by the procurement of advertising space by mobilizing agents, or by independent coverage of the election by journalists (Strömbäck and Kaid 2009). Campaigns thus "subsidize" in-

formation costs for citizens (Freedman, Franz, and Goldstein 2004).

Much of this information emphasizes “party brands,” characterizing for what and whom parties stand at election time (Lupu 2013), as well as valence issues (e.g., integrity, competence; Abney et al. 2013). According to theorists of partisanship, such information allows citizens to “update” their fit with political parties (Iyengar and Simon 2000), and partisanship strengthens (Brader and Tucker 2008; Lupu 2013). Because campaigns and the media seek to organize political conflict on partisan lines to mobilize citizens (Freedman et al. 2004; Schattschneider 1960), it follows that increased exposure to party brand information strengthens partisan divisions and persuades citizens to take sides (Brader and Tucker 2008; Greene 2004; Valentino and Sears 1998). Often, competition is framed as a shared quest for candidates and their supporters to use their symbiotic relationship to gain access to state resources and policy control versus opposing candidates and their supporters (Lindberg 2010; Michelitch 2015). Indeed, citizens often select into self-confirming partisan media, thereby reinforcing partisanship (Iyengar and Simon 2000).

Party loyalties could also be reinvigorated during campaigning through an agenda-setting effect. Exposure to party competition increases its accessibility in the minds of citizens and the importance of partisanship for citizens’ attitudes and behaviors (Iyengar and Simon 2000; McCombs and Shaw 1972; Scheufele 2000).⁸ Elections may further increase incentives to seek exposure to campaign information to become informed in anticipation of voting or other political participation, perhaps because the utility of such participation increases when one is informed (Shineman 2013).

An increase in the net benefit of political participation.

Not only do campaigns “subsidize” information costs for citizens, but they also subsidize the cost and raise the benefit of political participation. Mobilizing actors from parties, interest groups, and civil society make available and solicit participation in activities such as rallies, neighborhood or town-hall meetings, appearances at prominent businesses, religious services, markets, or civil society groups, voter-registration drives, and other culturally specific local events (see, e.g., Chandra 2012; Horowitz 2012; Jourde 2005; Lindberg 2010). In addition to explicitly partisan mobilization, some civil society groups simply endeavor to promote political participation at election time for its own sake—such “get out the

vote” campaigns aim specifically to lower the cost of registering to vote or increase the cost of not voting by evoking civic duty or social pressure (Green and Gerber 2008). Between elections, such widespread opportunities may not be available, especially where parties are not particularly embedded in local communities. Interacting with a party official between elections is often costly and difficult.

Citizens expect to receive both experiential and, in many cases, material benefits through political participation during election season (Hicken 2011; Lindberg 2010). There are two types of material benefits citizens in some countries might expect. First, they may expect cash or in-kind goods at election campaign events—t-shirts, sugar, soap, rice, stickers, yard signs, bands, dancing, football matches, and so forth—much like one expects to consume drinks, snacks, and entertainment at a party. Second, citizens may expect if they participate as good partisans by supporting candidates at rallies, meetings, and at the polls, they will be rewarded by favorable access to state resources or policy if the party they support wins the election. Outside of election season, political participation may not be rewarded with such a high amount of benefits because the benefits have been exhausted at election time and citizens lose leverage over the parties (Chandra 2012; Khemani 2004).

The positive correlation and mutual reinforcement between partisanship strength and political participation is a well-known empirical regularity with strong psychological foundations (Brader and Tucker 2001; Campbell et al. 1960; Dinas 2014; Fowler and Kam 2007; Greene 2004; Huddy et al. 2015; Plasser and Plasser 2002). Behavioral choices supporting a party, especially repetitive choices, result in a sense of commitment and loyalty, intensifying partisanship (Brader and Tucker 2001; Dinas 2014). This reinforcement may reduce cognitive dissonance, in which individuals seek conformity between behavior, identity, and attitudes (Dinas 2014; Festinger 1957). Thus, repetitive acts can lead to “escalating commitments” toward an identity (Benabou and Tirole 2006). Internally, such acts are “self-signals” to one’s self-concept of identity. Visible acts of support—wearing t-shirts, staking yard signs, flying flags, attaching bumper stickers—remind others of one’s loyalty, reinforcing identity externally. In turn, stronger partisanship reinforces political participation (Fowler and Kam 2007; Gerber et al. 2010; Greene 2004; Huddy 2013; Huddy et al. 2015). When groups are engaged in competition, individuals can desire to increase the status and welfare of their group at the expense of other groups, which tends to blur the lines between group utility and individual utility, and perceive costs of political participation to further group interests to be lower (Brewer and Kramer 1985).

8. Exposure to party brands may be nonvoluntary by observing billboards, overhearing radio blasted in open air markets, or driving behind a car with aggressive partisan bumper stickers.

Intergroup competition and group identity salience

Last, there may be deeper psychological mechanisms through which elections draw citizens closer to political parties. Temporal proximity to group competition, especially high-stakes competition over societal resources, is known to increase individuals' desire to take sides on group lines in that competition, as well as strengthen in-group cohesion and out-group hostility (Brewer and Kramer 1985; Tajfel 1981). Indeed, some believe it may be central to the fundamental nature of group competition, even dating back to prehistorical times, for humans to attach themselves to groups in times of competition for leadership or control of resources (Choi and Bowles 2007). Such a fundamental psychological effect of electoral competition between parties may therefore reinforce participation, exposure to information, and partisan identity.

Summary and hypotheses

In sum, we argue that elections induce a rise in citizen mobilization by parties, interest groups, and civil society movements to take partisan sides, which wanes in between. Higher levels of campaigning increase partisanship through an influx of political information regarding party brands and partisan conflict, an increase in the net benefit of political participation, and perhaps even a psychological anticipation of partisan group competition. Gains in partisanship may mutually reinforce increases in political participation, exposure to political information, and group cohesion. We do recognize that each country—and election—is unique. Indeed, the exact “bundle” of activities and actors mobilizing citizens at election time, and the strength of different pathways connecting such activities to partisanship, is likely to vary cross-nationally and over time. This article posits that, despite such differences, a very general relationship may exist between the electoral cycle and partisanship.

While much campaign hype occurs in the lead-up to an election, it is important to remember that it does not instantly cease after election day. Lengthy waiting times to count ballots, protest and contestation of results or fraud, and coalition formation mean that citizen mobilization often lasts for quite lengthy time periods after an election (Fisher 1999; Little et al. 2015; Tucker 2007). Media coverage of the winner and loser continues to report on party reactions. Furthermore, once people have participated in an election, they may continue to experience a boost in partisanship directly afterward. Dinas (2014), for example, underscores this post-election increase in partisan salience due to the act of casting a ballot: “party identification is strengthened when individuals convert a partisan identity or leaning into a behavioral choice through the act of voting.” Indeed, it is well

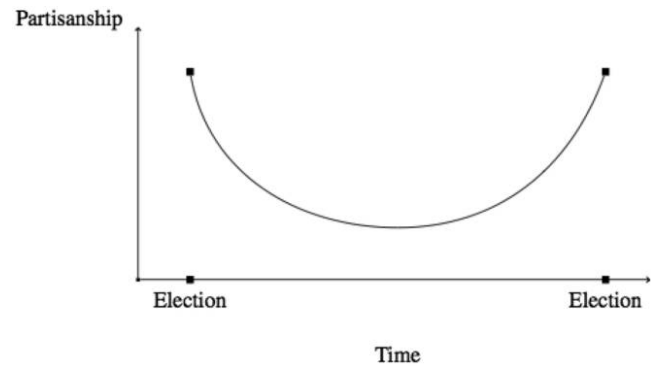


Figure 1. Electoral cycle effects on partisanship. We hypothesize that partisanship waxes toward elections and wanes after, as depicted in this stylized symmetrical illustration.

demonstrated that “post-electoral euphoria” increases political engagement directly subsequent to major elections.⁹

Figure 1 depicts a stylized version of our hypothesized relationship between the electoral cycle and partisanship. Partisanship descends moving away from the last election as campaigning wanes and ascends toward the next election as campaigning waxes. Although figure 1 depicts a symmetric relationship before and after an election for simplicity, we wish to emphasize that fluctuations may certainly be asymmetric—partisanship may drop off quickly after an election and increase slowly and steadily as the next election draws near, or vice versa. We do not have a strong hypothesis as to the exact slope and shape of the quadratic relationship in this cross-national study.

RESEARCH DESIGN

To test our primary hypothesis that citizens' partisanship increases as elections are more proximate, we merge large cross-national surveys from regional barometers. We leverage 464,171 respondents from 86 countries' cross-national barometer surveys in Africa (Afro Barometer 2000, rounds 1–5; <http://www.afrobarometer.org>), the Americas (Americas Barometer 2004, rounds 1–5, by the Latin American Public Opinion Project; <http://www.LapopSurveys.org>), Asia (Asia Barometer, rounds 1–3), and Europe (European Social Survey 2012, rounds 1–5), as well as election dates and features of

9. Specifically, scholars (e.g., Reif and Schmitt 1980) have found that proximity to “first-order” (major) elections carries over into behavior—such as increased turnout—in “second-order” (minor, such as European Parliament or regional) elections that are positioned shortly after the first-order elections in the first-order election cycle. However, when such second-order elections occur more distantly during the first-order election cycle (long after such euphoria has depleted), turnout is much lower in second-order elections.

elections from our own research and the NELDA data set version 3 (Hyde and Marinov 2012).¹⁰

Our main dependent variable, *Partisanship*, is measured by the question “Do you feel close to a political party?” with response options “yes = 1/no = 0” in these data sets.¹¹ In a subset of country-rounds, respondents can state the answer to “How close?” with response options “not very close, somewhat close, and very close.” Where included, we can additionally examine *Partisanship Closeness*, coded as 0 if not partisan, 1 if not very close, 2 if somewhat close, and 3 if very close.¹²

Operationalizing the electoral cycle is a bit tricky, given that electoral cycles vary in length and electoral rules vary widely across countries. We thus measure a respondent’s position in the electoral cycle between the last election and the next election as the percentage of time passed between the two, calling this variable *Proximity*. Increasing values indicate increasing temporal proximity to the next election. For example, 0 is the day after an election has taken place, .5 is halfway through the cycle, and 1 is the day of an election. In the main analysis, we consider national elections for president or legislature, designating the last elec-

tion to be the last voting experience, and next election to be the next voting experience to create the cycle.¹³

Further, we hypothesize that the effect of the election cycle on partisanship will be nonlinear—a U-curve with the salience being the lowest when the elections are furthest away. Thus, we utilize the term *Proximity*² along with *Proximity* to allow for such a quadratic form. This modeling choice is substantiated by observing the relationship between *Partisanship* and *Proximity* via a Lowess regression, a nonparametric locally weighted scatterplot smoothing regression (see app. 3.1; appendix available online).

The focus of this article is on the effect of the electoral cycle on partisanship. Because the electoral cycle can be reasonably taken as exogenous to other determinants of partisanship, it is not necessary to control for other determinants.¹⁴ However, the including known individual level predictors of partisanship allows us to improve statistical efficiency and compare the effect of the electoral cycle to standard benchmarks. We therefore include individual-level demographics that have been demonstrated to be causes and not consequences of partisanship. *Female* is an indicator variable coded as 1 for females and 0 for males. *Urban* is an indicator variable coded as 1 for urban residents and 0 for rural residents. *Age* is a continuous measure of respondent age. *Educated* is an indicator variable for whether a respondent is above the median education level within his/her country, or below.

We model each individual i living in country c at time t as having a level of partisanship Y_{ict} :

$$Y_{ict} = \gamma_1 Proximity_{ct} + \gamma_2 Proximity_{ct}^2 + \mathbf{X}'_{ict}\beta + \mathbf{S}'\phi + \epsilon_{ict}. \quad (1)$$

The vector \mathbf{X}_{ict} contains individual-level variables. We include country fixed-effects to control for unmeasured country-level effects, given by a vector of country indicator variables \mathbf{S} .¹⁵ Last, ϵ_{ict} is unobserved/unmodeled determinants of individual i ’s partisanship.¹⁶ We use logistic regression to esti-

10. Afro Barometer countries include Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Americas Barometer countries include Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Trinidad & Tobago, United States, Uruguay, and Venezuela. Asian Barometer countries include Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Mongolia, Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam. European Social Survey countries include Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom. We leave out countries that have only had 1 round of surveys, because there would be no good counterfactual along the election cycle for such countries. We include future scheduled elections where possible. Arab Barometer has no partisanship question.

11. We recognize that the standard comparative politics survey question may capture different notions of partisanship across countries, ranging from ideological proximity to clientelistic linkages, to contact with political party actors. Changes over the cycle thus might reflect fluctuations in ideological proximity, clientelistic linkages, or contact with political party actors. Such a question may further be interpreted differently across individuals, language translations, or over time. Future work should examine change in the meaning of this question across individuals and countries to ensure consistency of the measure. In this investigation, we find it interesting that closeness to a political party—however defined—waxes and wanes over the electoral cycle.

12. The follow-up question was not asked in the Americas Barometer or on rounds 1, 2, and 5 for the Afro Barometer.

13. Thus, if the last election had two rounds of voting due to a runoff election, the last election date would be the runoff. If the next election had two rounds of voting due to a runoff election, the next election date would be the first round of voting.

14. We do not know of a control variable that causes both election timing and levels of partisanship.

15. Including country fixed effects in the analysis allows each country to have its own intercept, thereby removing country level effects that could confound results if left uncontrolled.

16. We further note that $Proximity_{ct}$ and $Proximity_{ct}^2$, where we have respondents’ interview dates for surveys, would be $Proximity_{ict}$ and $Proximity_{ict}^2$. Otherwise they are the median date in which the survey was fielded. Mostly surveys are fielded over a span of a few weeks to maximally a few months, and therefore this should make little difference in a cycle of many years in this type of large-scale cross-national regressions framework.

mate the odds of having *Partisanship*, given that it is a binary outcome variable. With the ordinal *Partisanship Closeness* outcome variable, we use an ordered logistic regression. In order to weight each country survey round equally, each observation is weighted by 1/(number of observations from that country round). Standard errors are clustered at the country-round level to capture nonindependence in answers for each country-round.

We present descriptive statistics for *Proximity* in appendix 1.3 and for the main dependent variables—*Partisanship* and *Partisanship Closeness* in appendix 1.1. Appendix figure 3 reveals that there is good variation in the electoral cycle in the data set: surveys were conducted throughout the cycle, with a median of 50% of the way through.¹⁷ We also have ample variation in the two dependent variables. Interestingly, the world is almost evenly split when all citizens in the sample are pooled: 49% are partisan and 51% are not. In examining the spread of the closeness in the subset of observations for which we have data, 12% of all respondents are very close, while 28% are somewhat close, and 12% are not very close. Thus, of the individuals who are close to a political party, the majority are “somewhat close.”¹⁸

RESULTS

The results support our hypothesis that the electoral cycle influences partisanship. Model 1 of table 1 reveals the results of a logistic regression of partisanship on proximity to an election across 86 countries. As we predicted, partisanship fluctuates quadratically over the electoral cycle. Figure 2 depicts the relationship graphically; the fluctuation in the predicted probability of being close to a political party takes a quadratic U shaped form, with partisanship dipping to its lowest near the midpoint of the electoral cycle. The predicted probability of being close to a political party is roughly .54 in the first and last quintile of the cycle, while the minimum is in the middle (fifth) quintile at .48. This is a total absolute change over the cycle of 12 percentage points. For the interested reader, appendix 2 contains a graph of the marginal effect of the position in the electoral cycle on the probability of partisanship.

The substantive magnitude of this result rivals that of common determinants of partisanship. In this sample of countries, we can compare the effect of the electoral cycle to the

Table 1. Proximity to an Election and the Presence and Intensity of Partisanship

	Model 1: Partisanship	Model 2: Partisanship Closeness
Electoral proximity	-1.20*** (.376)	-.96** (.435)
Electoral proximity ²	1.13*** (.356)	.90** (.449)
Female	-.26*** (.011)	-.24*** (.015)
Age	.02*** (.001)	.02*** (.001)
Urban	-.08*** (.019)	-.03 (.022)
Educated	.23*** (.020)	.25*** (.026)
Cutpoint 1		-.24 (.321)
Cutpoint 2		.30 (.320)
Cutpoint 3		1.98*** (.325)
Observations	464,171	291,449
Country rounds	293	184
Countries	86	59

Note. Model 1 is logistic regression results whereby the dependent variable is Partisanship (1 = close to a political party, 0 = not). Model 2 is ordered logistic regression results whereby the dependent variable is strength of attachment to a political party (ranging from 0 to 3). In both models, standard errors (in parentheses) are clustered at the country-survey round level, and observations weighted by 1/(number of observations from country round). Country fixed-effects not depicted for brevity.

* $p < .10$.
 ** $p < .05$.
 *** $p < .01$.

individual level determinants of partisanship. Being male and having greater than country mean level of education, for example, is each associated with a 6 percentage point increase in the predicted probability of partisanship. Thus, a counterfactual sex change from female to male or counterfactually achieving relatively higher education is equivalent to moving from the midpoint of the electoral cycle to an election. Last, age is associated with partisanship—for each additional decade of life, there is a 4 percentage point increase in the predicted probability of partisanship. Thus, counterfactually aging by 15 years is equivalent to moving from the midpoint of the electoral cycle to an election.

The results of the more continuous measure of partisanship intensity (for which only a subsample of countries have data) complement the findings with the dichotomous

17. See also a histogram showing the number of survey rounds per country in app. 1.4. The modal number of surveys per country is 5 rounds. We exclude countries for which only one survey has taken place (for which there is no counterfactual data collection collected otherwise in the electoral cycle).

18. A violin plot in app. 1.2 depicts wide variation in the percentage partisan in each survey.

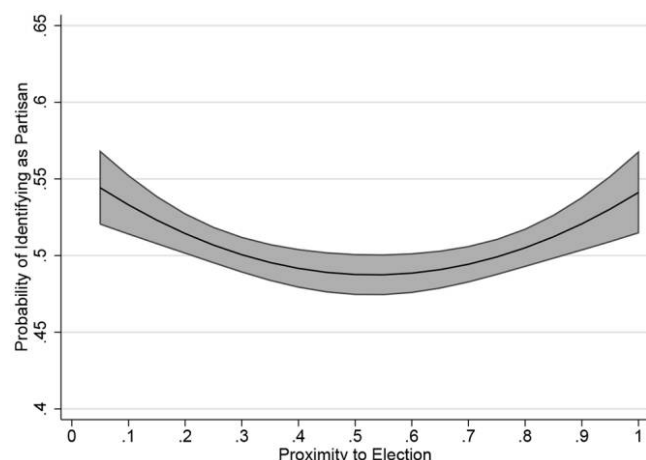


Figure 2. Predicted probability of partisanship over the electoral cycle. On the x-axis is the percentage through the electoral cycle from the last election (0) to the next election (1). On the y-axis is the predicted probability of identifying as partisan.

measure of partisanship (table 1, model 2). Given the poor readability yielded by graphing the predicted probabilities of four categories across the electoral cycle, we report the predicted probabilities and fluctuations in tabular form. Drawing attention to table 2, we find that the “very close” and “somewhat close” categories boost at election time, fluctuating by 5 and 7 percentage points over the cycle in absolute terms. There is no change over the cycle in the proportion of individuals predicted as “not very close.” Commensurate to the gains in the somewhat and very close categories, the number of nonpartisans fluctuates a total of 11 percentage points over the cycle, with the number being higher at the cycle midpoint than close to an election. That is, as elections become more proximate, individuals are less likely to identify as nonpartisan and more likely to identify as at least somewhat strong partisans.

The results are robust to numerous robustness checks (see app. 3). First, the results are robust to multi-level modeling, a different statistical approach to analyze these effects (app. 3.2). Second, the results are robust to alternative weightings of individual observations (app. 3.3): (a) no weights, (b) survey and country population weights, (c) survey and survey round weights, (d) only round weights, and (e) survey, survey round, and population weights. These robustness checks ensure that the result is not driven by particular countries that have more data or a smaller population.¹⁹ Third, the results are

19. Interestingly, the magnitude of the total fluctuation varies according to the different weighting schemes. When no weights are applied, fluctuations change an absolute value of 13 percentage points, while when survey and country population weights are applied, fluctuations amount to 25 percentage points, survey and survey round weights 14 percentage

points, only round weights 13 percentage points, and all three 34 percentage points. In the main analysis, we use the standard survey weights: $1/(\text{number of observations from country round})$. Larger effects when more populous countries being able to “count more” thus seem to show effect sizes to be much larger. Since 86 countries do not represent all countries, we do not make inferences to the global population, however.

20. If there were only one survey conducted per country, for example, this would be concerning because a “bad draw” could yield that high partisanship countries happen to be surveyed around elections and low partisan countries happen to be surveyed outside of election season. We are confident in the results because of the ample variation in the electoral cycle cross-nationally and a large swath of countries for which we have many surveys at varying times during the electoral cycle, but these robustness checks provide further confirmation.

EXTENSIONS

We have found robust support that the electoral cycle is a major determinant of partisanship cross-nationally: partisanship waxes around elections and wanes in between. We expound upon this finding in three ways. First, an observable implication of the theoretical argument is that fluctuations in partisanship should be larger where parties have less permanent presence to mobilize the citizenry over the electoral cycle. Second, we posit and test whether fluctuations in partisanship over the electoral cycle are moderated by a range of country-level factors. Last, we examine whether findings are flattened or amplified when “second-order” elections are incorporated.

Table 2. Predicted Probabilities of Partisanship Closeness over the Electoral Cycle

	Cycle Start	Cycle Midpoint	Cycle End	Start to Midpoint Change	Midpoint to End Change
Nonpartisan	.41	.47	.42	.06	-.05
CI	.37, .44	.45, .49	.38, .46	.01, .12	-.11, -.01
Not very close	.13	.13	.13	.00	.00
CI	.12, .15	.12, .15	.12, .15	-.03, .03	-.03, .03
Somewhat close	.32	.29	.32	-.04	.03
CI	.30, .35	.27, .31	.29, .34	-.01, -.08	-.02, .07
Very close	.14	.11	.13	-.03	.02
CI	.13, .16	.10, .11	.11, .15	-.01, -.06	.01, .05

Note. CI = confidence interval.

The permanence of party presence

If our theory is correct, one observable implication is that when the fluctuation in partisan mobilization activities is greater across the electoral cycle, the fluctuation in partisanship should also be greater. While time-series data on partisan mobilization efforts do not exist for any country, much less all 86 countries in our data set, Kitschelt's (2013) Democratic Accountability and Citizen-Politician Linkages Project (DALP) has collected data in a large swath of the 86 countries on the permanence of political party presence in communities over the electoral cycle.

Parties are perhaps the actor most responsible for mobilizing citizens. With more permanent party presence in local communities throughout the electoral cycle, parties may be able to maintain more active linkages to citizens that would act to increase exposure to party brand information and lower the cost (raise the net benefit) of participating in partisan politics in between elections. Where parties have permanent offices and paid staff, they often hold regular meetings, conduct community service and outreach, liaise with interest groups, and sponsor youth sports teams or women's associations. Permanent offices and paid staff also ensures a higher degree of availability for citizens to bring complaints or requests during the electoral cycle. By contrast, where parties' local presence with voters is fleeting and centered only on the election season, the contrast may be much starker in the level of opportunity to participate in partisan politics, contact politicians, or be exposed to party brand information inside and outside election season. Thus, consistent with this theoretical mechanism, we posit that where parties maintain less permanent presence in local communities, fluctuations in partisanship may be larger than where parties maintain a higher degree of permanent presence in local communities.

In Kitschelt's (2013) data set, expert coders respond for each party in a country: "Do the following parties or their

individual candidates maintain offices and paid staff at the local or municipal-level? If yes, are these offices and staff permanent or only during national elections?" The data are cross-sectional and were collected in 2008 and 2009, which is fortunately in the middle of our study time period. We recode the experts' responses in increasing order of permanence: 0 = no permanent offices, 1 = the party maintains local offices only during national elections, 2 = the party maintains permanent local offices in some districts, and 3 = the party maintains permanent party offices in most districts. Given that multiple coders coded each party, we next calculated an average score for each party.²¹ Finally, we take a weighted average of the party scores based on party vote share (provided in the DALP data set). Thus, the operationalization is meant to capture the overall atmosphere of party presence in a country.²² Figure 7 in appendix 4 displays a violin plot of our measure of *Party Permanence*, showing good variation cross-nationally.

We estimate a logistic regression interacting *Party Permanence* with *Electoral Proximity* and *Electoral Proximity Squared*, including the same demographic variables and survey weights as previous models, and clustering standard errors at the country level. We find that the interactions are significant (see table 12 in app. 4). Figure 3 displays predicted probabilities of partisanship over the electoral cycle when *Party Presence* is 1 standard deviation below the sample mean (left panel)

21. The DALP data set also provides the standard deviation of each party rating. This rating has a mean value of .673, with a standard deviation of .307 and a range of 0–2.12. We conduct a successful robustness check dropping countries for which there is higher than 1 standard deviation disagreement across experts regarding the permanence of party presence (see app. 4).

22. Observing party activities and offices in the local community may affect one's partisanship even if the party in question is not the party to which one is attached.

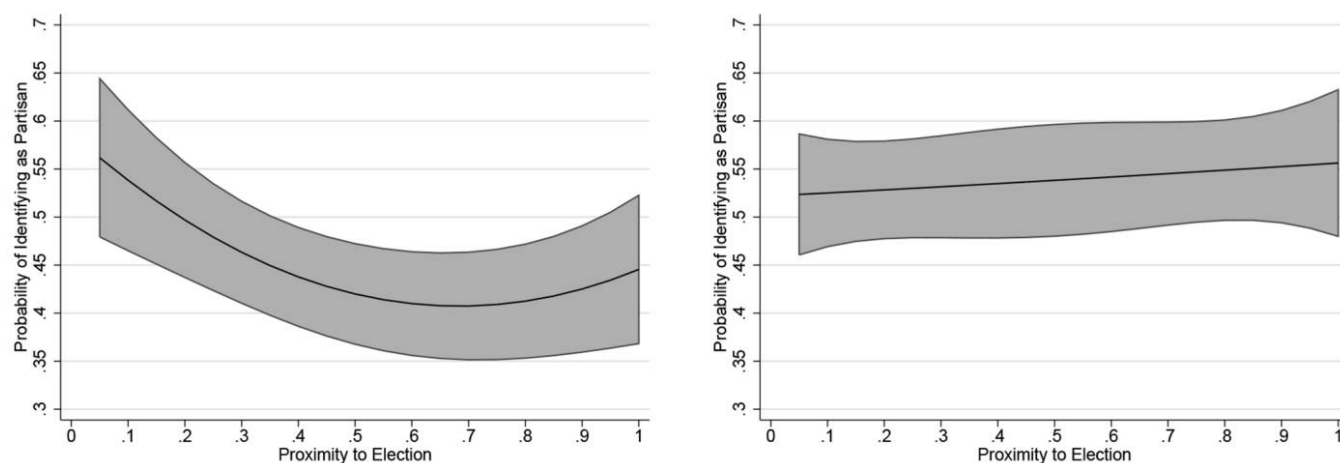


Figure 3. Predicted probabilities of partisanship over the electoral cycle. *Left*, low permanence of Party Presence; *right*, high permanence of Party Presence. On the x-axis is the percentage through the electoral cycle from the last election (0) to the next election (1). On the y-axis is the predicted probability of identifying as partisan.

and 1 standard deviation above the sample mean (right panel). Low permanence of party presence is associated with an absolute partisanship fluctuation of 22.1 percentage points over the cycle. By contrast, partisanship levels are quite stable throughout the electoral cycle where the permanence of party presence is high.²³

Country-level moderators

We posit and test whether fluctuations in partisanship over the electoral cycle are moderated by the following country-level factors. Readers can find an expanded version of this subsection in appendix 5 detailing thicker theoretical motivation, data sources and coding.²⁴

1. Information about parties, party organizational structures, knowledge of institutions, and thereby voters' attachments to parties, grow over time (Converse 1969). These more permanent, long-run partisan attachments in older democracies may help mitigate electoral cycle effects. We use the cumulative *age of democracy* variable from the Political Institutions and Political Events (PIPE) data set (Przeworski 2013) logged to investigate this proposition.

2. Lower *socioeconomic development* may be associated with greater fluctuations in partisanship over the electoral cycle because: (a) the net benefit of political participation around elections may be greater in low income countries due to political clientelism, reinforcing partisanship at this time (Horowitz 2012; Lindberg 2010); and (b) the contrast in the availability of political information via the mass media may be starker over the electoral cycle in low-income arenas where the mass media infrastructure is weaker (Horowitz 2012). We utilize the United Nation's Human Development Index (HDI) as a measure.
3. Systems with *compulsory voting* may increase the electoral cycle's effect on partisanship by drawing high numbers of people into politics at election time who are otherwise politically disengaged. When voters are incentivized "exogenously" to vote, they have been shown to become more informed and engaged (Shineman 2013). We use the PIPE data set for an indicator variable for compulsory voting.
4. Higher *effective number of parties* may lead to larger fluctuations in partisanship because they lead to mobilization more on club, rather than public, goods (Chhibber and Nooruddin 2004), thereby intensifying the stakes of partisan competition and perhaps increasing electoral cycle fluctuations in partisanship. The Varieties of Democracy (V-dem) data set has a measure of the effective number of parties.
5. The electoral cycle effect may be stronger in *party-centric electoral systems* where voters are more likely

23. Appendix 4 contains graphs of the marginal effect of the position in the electoral cycle on the probability of partisanship at high and low levels of party permanence.

24. Readers may make correlational rather than causal inferences, given that some of the moderating variables may be endogenous, not to the primary explanatory variable (electoral proximity), but to partisanship (the dependent variable).

to attach to parties rather than individual politicians (Carey and Shugart 1995). To operationalize, we use the Electoral Systems and the Personal Vote (ESPV) data set, which includes a variable ranking candidate centrality (Johnson and Wallack 2012).

6. *Competitive* electoral races may stimulate a higher degree of fluctuations over the electoral cycle because they are known to entail increased mobilization activities and lead citizens to learn more information about political candidates (Kam and Utych 2011). However, noncompetitive elections could represent focal points for opposition mobilization or ruling party repression (as in electoral authoritarian regimes) and may thereby intensify partisanship (Tucker 2007). We calculate the margin of victory by expanding the NELDA data set.
7. Voters have “short political memories” (Healy and Lenz 2014), thus, it may be that the longer the electoral cycle length, the greater the fluctuations in partisanship over the cycle. We calculate cycle length from our own data.
8. The *quality of democracy*, which we measure by the V-dem Electoral Democracy Index, may affect the magnitude of fluctuations in partisanship. When democracy is lower quality, we may see smaller fluctuations if citizens disengage over the entirety of the cycle due to disenchantment with the process of elections. On the other hand, when elections have poor quality, it can represent a focal point of mobilization (Little et al. 2015).
9. Older parties may yield more permanent attachments that are less prone to short or medium term fluctuations versus newer parties. We use the Data-

base of Political Institutions’ (Beck et al. 2001) measure of *average party age*.

With these data, we undertake two main types of analyses in appendix 5. First, we show results are robust to the inclusion of these variables as simple “control” variables in appendix table 14. Second, we interact these variables with the electoral *Proximity* and *Proximity Squared* variables. We caution that many moderators are either fixed at the country level or have limited variation over time within a country during the study time period. Because the study has 86 countries, statistical power therefore becomes limited to detect effects, especially because the moderator must be interacted twice. Thus, we urge the reader to view the results with a grain of salt—that there may be small effects that exist that are not statistically distinguishable from zero due to limitations of statistical power.

In table 15 in appendix 5, we show that the only one of these nine moderators for which statistical significance is reached is the level of country development, as measured by the UN’s HDI. Figure 4 depicts the predicted probability of partisanship over the electoral cycle when HDI takes on a value of 1 standard deviation above the mean (left panel) and 1 standard deviation below the mean (right panel). When HDI is high, there is very little fluctuation in partisanship over the electoral cycle. When HDI is low, the predicted probability of being partisan decreases by a little over 10 percentage points from the beginning of the cycle to the midpoint, and increases just under 10 percentage points from the midpoint to the end of the cycle. This finding is consistent with our hypothesis that countries with lower levels of development experience greater fluctuations in partisanship over the electoral cycle.

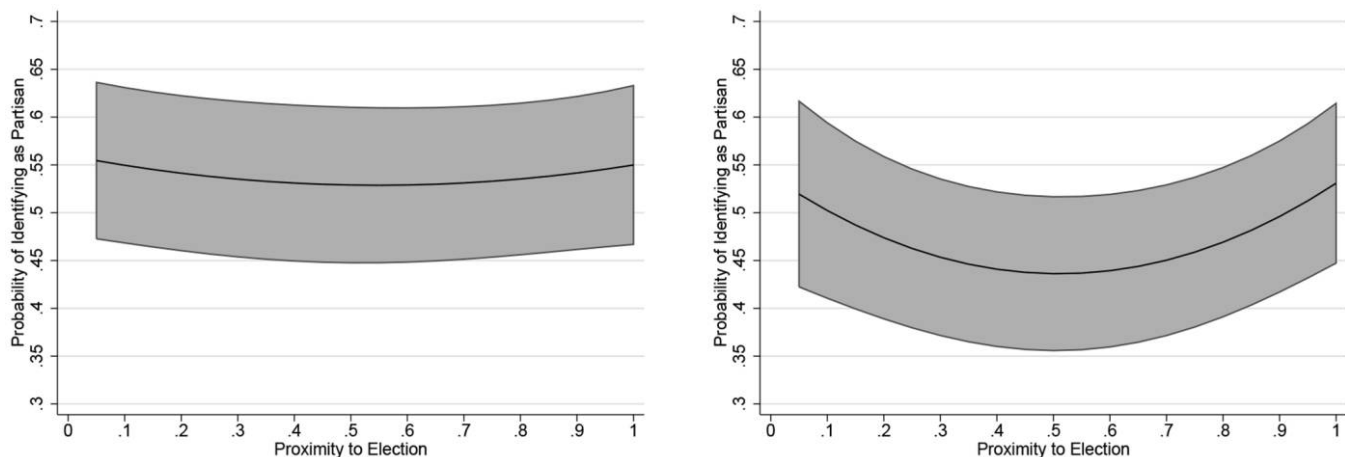


Figure 4. Position in the electoral cycle on the predicted probability of partisanship with HDI high and low. The left panel is when HDI takes on a value of 1 standard deviation above the mean, and the right panel, 1 standard deviation below the mean. On the x-axis is the percentage through the electoral cycle from the last election (0) to the next election (1). On the y-axis is the marginal effect of the position in the electoral cycle on identifying as partisan.

Second-order elections

In the main analysis, we empirically focused on “first-order” elections for the head of government and/or elected representatives to national government. Many countries have subnational or supranational “second-order” elections that are important but less so than first-order elections. When such second-order elections do not coincide with first-order elections, they typically see subdued political activity by mobilizing actors and engagement from citizens (e.g., Reif and Schmitt 1980). However, second-order elections can nonetheless be important mobilizing events drawing citizens into national level partisan competition (e.g., Bechtel 2012).

It could be that fluctuations exist between *any* elections at all, including second-order elections. We might expect fluctuations to be smaller when noncoinciding second-order elections “qualify” as a voting event because off-cycle second-order elections are less likely to be as mobilizing as first-order elections. However, fluctuations may be larger when we include second-order elections, given that they are no longer “hidden” throughout the first-order cycle, potentially buoying partisanship in between first-order elections. The role of second-order elections may further depend on degree to which second-order institutions are important enough to induce partisan mobilization (Elgie and Fauvelle-Aymar 2012).

We collected dates and expanded our data set to include two forms of nation-wide second-order elections—supranational elections and subnational (regional and local) elections—that are *not* simultaneous to national elections in the sample. The only countries with supranational elections are European Union countries with European Parliament elections. To measure the power of subnational authorities, we use Hooghe et al.’s (2016) Regional Authority Index (RAI) data set and the V-dem data set. See appendix 6 for more detail on the data, coding and statistical models.

Compared to the 12 percentage point total fluctuation in partisanship over the electoral cycle when using only first-order election dates, the magnitude of the effect of the electoral cycle on partisanship when adding second-order elections as qualifying elections is very similar. The total fluctuation in partisanship over the electoral cycle when all second-order elections are included is 13 percentage points, with only supranational election dates added—9 percentage points, subnational election dates only—14 percentage points, and with only those subnational election dates added from above mean importance subnational bodies—15 percentage points.²⁵

25. With the logic that decentralization may mitigate the electoral cycle effect since politics is *continually* “closer to the people,” we examine whether the first-order electoral cycle is moderated by the mere existence

Taken together, these results indicate that second-order elections are important for partisanship, but that some second-order elections (those regarding important subnational bodies) are more important than others. This work thus joins scholars emphasizing the importance of second-order elections for citizen political engagement (e.g., Bechtel 2012) and is consistent with work emphasizing that the degree of institutional authority affects citizen engagement around its elections (e.g., Elgie and Fauvelle-Aymar 2012).

CONCLUSION

We discover a striking result: across 86 countries in the Americas, Europe, Asia and Africa, partisanship fluctuates a total of 12 percentage points over the national electoral cycle. The magnitude of this effect rivals traditional determinants of partisanship such as being male (6 percentage point increase), educated above the country mean level (6 percentage point increase), and age (4 percentage point increase for each decade). We extend the analysis in three main ways. First, as an observable implication of the theory, we find that where parties are more permanently present throughout the electoral cycle, partisanship fluctuates little, but where they are only present around elections, we observe very strong electoral cycle fluctuations in partisanship (22 percentage points). Second, we analyze the importance of a range of country-level factors that could potentially moderate electoral cycle fluctuations. We demonstrate that fluctuations are larger in lower-income countries. Last, when “second-order” (supranational and subnational) elections are included alongside “first-order” (national) elections, we show fluctuations to be slightly larger, an effect driven by subnational elections for powerful subnational bodies.

That the electoral cycle affects partisanship, in addition to “static” individual factors and country-level institutional factors, is an important advance in the study of partisanship. While our theoretical expectations are motivated by existing comparative political science research, this result also resonates with lay knowledge of people and politics. Political events—especially elections—can draw people in to take sides in partisan camps. As a result, many people cite particularly striking political events that activate their interest and attachment to political parties. It is time to incorporate such dynamic events into our study of partisanship and, more broadly, political behavior and public opinion. Scholars of elite-level politics

of powerful subnational bodies, finding it is not. We also examine whether the existence of noncoinciding second-order elections moderate partisanship fluctuations over the first-order election cycle, finding that the first-order electoral cycle fluctuation is strong in settings with and without off-cycle second-order elections, but the fluctuation is slightly stronger in the latter.

have long established that the electoral cycle governs such outcomes as government expenditure (Golden and Min 2013) and racial bias in US state death penalty executions (Kubik and Moran 2003).

This article sets the stage for multiple avenues of future research. First, future studies might attempt to conduct more microlevel research over the electoral cycle that could disentangle which features of election campaigns suggested in this study—for example, the mass media, interest group activities—are the largest catalysts of partisanship, especially when parties are not embedded locally over the electoral cycle. Further, given the finding that being a copartisan with a winning versus losing party affects citizen attitudes toward democracy as a whole (Moehler and Lindberg 2009), one could further examine how partisanship with the incumbent versus opposition parties affects the ebb and flow of partisanship.

Second, a strong relationship exists between partisanship and political participation (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000; Powell 1986), as well as political attitudes (Bartels 2002; Gerber et al. 2010). The results of this article suggest that a fruitful research agenda lies in investigating the effects of the electoral cycle on patterns of political behaviors and attitudes. While a large body of work on second-order (minor) elections (e.g., European Parliament) emphasizes that their timing during the first-order (major) electoral cycle increases the level of citizens' political engagement if clustered around the latter (Reif and Schmitt 1980), scholars have yet to examine the electoral cycle's effect on yet other forms of political participation (e.g., contacting representatives, political discussion, demonstration) or attitudes (e.g., trust in government actors, support for democracy) save Michelitch (2013) study of sub-Saharan Africa. Future research could also endeavor to connect whether increases in partisanship at election time are responsible for the increase in political violence (Dunning 2011; Strauss and Taylor 2009) or interpartisan discrimination in ostensibly nonpolitical economic activity (Michelitch 2015).

Last, the findings in this study are relevant to existing studies that compare levels of mass partisanship cross-nationally, which is often taken to indicate party system institutionalization (e.g., Dalton and Weldon 2007; Mainwaring and Zoco 2007) and democratic consolidation (e.g., Brader and Tucker 2001). Especially in the developing world where electoral cycle fluctuations are strongest, comparative researchers are reliant on “barometer” style public opinion surveys occurring at variable points in time over the electoral cycle given the absence of election studies timed (naturally) at elections. What may appear to be cross-national differences in levels of mass partisanship may be confounded

by the omitted variable of the countries' relative position in their electoral cycles (i.e., it appears that country A has higher levels of partisanship than country B, but it is an artifact of the upcoming election in A). Similarly, what might appear to be upward or downward time trends in partisanship within a country may be confounded by electoral cycle effects. If possible, regular public opinion barometers could consider keeping the timing of their public opinion surveys relatively consistent during the electoral cycle so as to facilitate comparisons and analysis of mass partisanship levels and other attitudinal or behavioral measures prone to electoral cycle effects.

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