Identity and Ideology in the Boardroom*

PRELIMINARY; DO NOT CITE OR QUOTE

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Abstract

To what extent does diversity in demographic and professional backgrounds—i.e., identity—shape diversity in policy views—i.e., ideology—on governing boards, and how does diversity on these dimensions matter for organizational outcomes? We combine data on policy priorities of school board candidates in California with records of election outcomes, policy discussions in board meetings, and policy outcomes for school districts to document the relationship between identity and ideology among board members. We then trace out the causal path from policy preferences to board debate to policy change using a regression discontinuity design based on close elections. We show that while there are systematic differences in ideology across identity groups, electing a group member rather than a non-member typically has minimal effects on the ideological composition of boards. We then show that electing a board member with a stated policy priority has large effects on board actions and district outcomes across several policy domains, especially for priorities with little previous representation on the board. In contrast, electing a board member from a given identity group has null or muted effects on most board actions and policy types. We conclude that ideological mix on governing boards is a crucial determinant of organizational outcomes and that the weak relationship between identity and ideology can help explain the limited impacts of changes in board members' identities.

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1 Introduction

Most organizations—public and private, for-profit and non-profit—are governed by boards whose members are accountable to the organization's stakeholders. A long-standing debate asks whether and how board composition influences the quality of governance and whether policies designed to increase demographic diversity improve organizational performance. Major policy initiatives in this arena include the pending EU-wide institution of gender quotas for corporate boards (European Union, 2022), the adoption (and later abandonment) of board diversity rules for firms listed on the NASDAQ (Ramonas, 2024), and ongoing litigation related to race and gender quotas on public-sector governing boards, which exist in 25 US states (D'Agostino and Erickson, 2023).

How might policies that promote board diversity impact organizational governance? A leading theory is that they do so by expanding the diversity of perspectives or policy preferences on the board (Adams, 2016). Implicit to this view are the assumptions that board member background reliably proxies for viewpoints and that it is viewpoints that fundamentally matter. Other accounts hold that the demographic make-up of the board influences governance through other channels: demographic diversity may mitigate agency issues by weakening ties between the board and top management (Adams and Ferreira, 2009), may shape board dynamics by affecting whose voices are heard in discussions (e.g. Brito Rebolledo et al. 2024), or may link board members to particular communities in ways that have a sustained influence on their actions (Kranton and Akerlof, 2010). Another distinct possibility is that diversity has little effect on governance because boards themselves are ineffectual legal necessities, "akin to [...] wigs in English courts" (Adams et al., 2010).

Empirically distinguishing between these theories is challenging for several reasons. The first is that board members are not selected at random, so naive comparisons between observably similar organizations governed by different boards are likely to be confounded by unobservables that jointly influence outcomes and board composition. A second challenge is that, while data on the demographics and backgrounds of board members are increasingly available, information about their viewpoints and priorities—central to theories of whether and how board composition matters—typically are not. This problem is heightened by a lack of information on board deliberations and activities. Together, these data limitations complicate efforts to isolate mechanisms: A researcher with data only on board members' backgrounds and organizational outcomes cannot tell, for ex-

ample, whether a policy that changes a board's demographic composition fails to shift an outcome because it does not change the distribution of viewpoints on the board; because shifts in viewpoints do not successfully affect board actions; or because board actions cannot affect that outcome.

This paper uses new data on the viewpoints and policy actions of board members to directly test theories of board governance. Our setting is school boards in the US, which govern local school districts and allocate most of the hundreds of billions of dollars in public funds spent on primary and secondary education each year. We use large-language models to identify the policy priorities of tens of thousands of candidates running for school board as well as to extract data on members' participation in board deliberations from tens of thousands of school board meeting minutes. The other key ingredient to our analysis is exogenous variation in who serves on the board, which we isolate by focusing on narrowly-decided electoral contests. The combined dataset thus allows us to examine whether and how quasi-random changes in board composition, measured both in terms of backgrounds and, uniquely, the viewpoints held by members, translate into actions that boards take and real outcomes for the organization the board controls: the school district. Our main finding is that "ideology" matters: Shifting the priorities of board members has large causal effects on governance and organizational outcomes—especially when those priorities were previously neglected by the board. In contrast, shifts in identity are on average only weakly related to shifts in board-level priorities and have muted effects on both governance and policy.

Our analysis uses data from school districts in California. Our main dataset contains information on 25,857 candidates competing in 7,022 elections held in 1,074 districts between 1998 and 2022. We link these data to text descriptions of candidates' policy priorities and subsequent board actions. Priority data come from the candidates' political platforms, provided by the candidate and compiled by the League of Women Voters. The data on board activity comes from the minutes of board meetings, which districts are required by law to publish. We use large-language models to code text from these documents, focusing on topics that are the subject of previous research on school boards (equity, fiscal conservatism, and support for teachers), central to debates on education policy (capital investments, safety and health, dropout prevention, student enrollment, career pathways, and educational achievement), or the frequent subject of candidate discussion (parent engagement and the presence of controversial views in the district's curricula, policies, and practices, which we term "agenda bias"). Benchmarking exercises show that machine codes are at least

as accurate as human hand-codes. Finally, we link the election and board data to public datasets documenting financial, workforce, and student outcomes within school districts.

We begin by documenting how candidates' priorities vary by demographic group and professional background. We focus on groups that have been the focus of previous studies of school boards, and which parallel the demographic and professional categories explored in studies of corporate boards: gender, ethnicity (specifically Hispanicity, given the large Hispanic population in California), experience working as a teacher, and political affiliation. As expected, some policy priorities are correlated with sociodemographic characteristics. For example, 41% of female candidates cite equity as a priority, compared to 27% of male candidates. 37% of Hispanic candidates prioritize trimming school budgets, compared to 43% of non-Hispanic candidates. However, these are extreme cases. Views on most issues are more balanced across most groups. Further, even on the most polarized topics, substantial within-group variation remains. A random forest model that includes all background variables correctly predicts whether a candidate will prioritize equity only 65% of the time, a modest improvement over the 54% rate that would be obtained from a random coin flip.

We then turn to an analysis of the causal effects of electing board members with different identities, experiences, and beliefs. To do so, we use regression discontinuity models that compare outcomes in the years following close elections where a candidate with a given attribute either just beats or just loses to a candidate without that attribute.

We first show that electing a candidate with given policy priority substantially shifts the ideological composition of the board, but that electing a candidate of a given ethnic, gender, or employment background does not, even when the belief in question is "typical" of the identity. For example, electing a candidate who prioritizes equity raises the share of board members who prioritize equity by about 8 percentage points (95% CI=[0.054,0.106]), 37% of the baseline mean. In contrast, electing a female board member rather than a male board member slightly reduces the share of equity-focused board members, while electing a Hispanic rather than a non-Hispanic board member has no effect, even though both female and Hispanic candidates are more likely to prioritize equity in the cross-section.

We next use the narrow electoral contests design to examine the causal impact of electing candidates with different identities and ideologies on school district outcomes. Our main finding is that electing board members with a given priority has large effects on outcomes related to the priority,

while electing board members from specific identity groups or backgrounds generally has muted or null effects, even when group members tend to support a given priority.

Again, equity is a leading example. Electing a board member who states that educational equity is a priority raises test scores for economically disadvantaged students in the district by an average of 0.13 standard deviations (henceforth SDs; 95% CI=[0.10,0.17]) in the one to four years following the election. In contrast, electing a female board member raises scores for economically disadvantaged students by 0.04 SDs (95% CI=[.02,05]), less than a third as much, while electing a Hispanic board member, or a board member endorsed by the Democratic party does not affect scores of disadvantaged students at all, even though each of these groups is disproportionately likely to cite equity as a platform priority. We observe similar patterns for other policy types, including school spending and support for teachers. Analyses that jointly consider the effects of priorities and identity groups provide further support for the idea that priorities are the main determinant of policy changes.

Interpreting the finding that the demographic and professional identities of board members do not matter much for policy outcomes depends on what board members are doing. If board members from backgrounds associated with specific beliefs attempt to implement policies consistent with these beliefs but are voted down, one plausible policy implication would be to try to select more members from these backgrounds. If these board members succeed in passing motions in board meetings but the motions do not affect district outcomes, then boardsmanship training or institutional changes that expand board authority might be an effective intervention. In contrast, if the new board members do not attempt to change board policy, then changing policy outcomes by changing the demographic make-up of the board may be difficult.

We explore these questions with our data on board meetings. Electing a board member with a given priority has large effects on board activity related to that priority. Electing an equity-focused candidate raises the number of equity-related motions passed by about 17% of the pre-election mean, while electing a fiscally conservative member reduces the number of budget motions passed by 19%. We see similar findings for candidates prioritizing student safety and curriculum bias. These effects are generally more pronounced when the candidate's priority was not widely shared on the board at baseline. For example, the effect of electing a fiscal conservative is the most negative when the board passed more budget motions in the year before the election. The story here is fairly

clear: voters elect a member who prioritizes an issue, the board takes up and passes motions related to that issue, and policies change.

When it comes to demographic and career background, the story is both more muted and more complex. Electing female and Hispanic board members does not affect motions raised in the way that would be predicted by aggregate differences in views. For example, electing female or Hispanic board members on average slightly reduces the number of equity-related measures the board passes. This is consistent with the modest effects of electing candidates from these groups on board ideology. In contrast, electing a board member who is a teacher results in the passage of more motions related to budgets, equity, and teaching, while electing a Democratic board member results in more budget motions and motions related to teachers. We conclude that electing female and Hispanic members does not change policy much because board activity does not change much. Electing teachers or Democratic board members changes board activity, but these activities do not appear to move the policy needle.

This paper contributes to two main literatures. The first studies the relationship between board composition and organizational outcomes, focusing primarily on private sector boards of directors and the presence of traditionally underrepresented groups, such as women. The school board setting allows us to combine data on policy goals, board actions, and policy outcomes with exogenous variation in board membership for what we believe is the first time in this literature. Because corporate boards are appointed, much of the prior work has struggled to identify causal effects and only documented correlations (Erhardt et al., 2003) or causal relationships under strict assumptions (Adams and Ferreira, 2009; Cai et al., 2024). Several papers have used the introduction of gender quotas in corporate boards in Norway to provide plausibly causal evidence on on firm profitability, corporate workforce decisions, and women's labor market outcomes (Ahern and Dittmar, 2012; Matsa and Miller, 2013; Bertrand et al., 2019). While these papers find that board quotas shift some outcomes, they report null effects across many others and provide limited insight into the theorized mechanisms through which board members' backgrounds might or might not shape governance.

Our study also makes several contributions to the growing literature on school boards. Prior work has typically focused on certain observable board member characteristics—such as being a teacher or Hispanic—explicitly as proxies for unobserved policy views (Macartney and Singleton, 2018; Kogan et al., 2021; Shi and Singleton, 2023; Fischer, 2023). Our paper directly tests this theory

of action, showing that while some demographic and professional attributes correlate with policy priorities, their predictive power is limited and their real impacts are dwarfed by those of priorities. Board activity is also typically unobserved, leaving the mechanisms underlying policy effects unclear. We fill this gap by analyzing meeting minutes to examine board decisions both as an effect of changes in board composition and as a cause of district outcomes.[1] Closest to our work is Stemper (2022), which uses the same candidate platform data to study the effect of electing fiscally conservative "budget hawks"; our analysis replicates and fleshes out the board-level mechanisms supporting those findings using LLM text analysis.

One focus in the literature is on school boards as an input to education production. Complementing longstanding focuses on teachers (e.g. Kane and Staiger 2008; Rivkin et al. 2005; Chetty et al. 2014) and schools (e.g. Angrist et al. 2017), recent work examines the causal effects of principals (Branch et al., 2012; Bloom et al., 2015; Muñoz and Prem, 2024) and superintendents (Lavy et al., 2023) on student outcomes. Our results show that the effects of school board members can be substantial. The effect of electing an equity-focused board member on test scores for economically disadvantaged students is roughly equivalent to assigning *every* such student a teacher who is 0.3 to 0.4 standard deviations higher in the distribution of value added.

2 Background and Data

2.1 Boards

Boards are economic institutions created to mitigate agency problems that plague organizations (Hermalin and Weisbach, 2001). They are composed of members, generally elected or appointed by the organization's stakeholders, who meet regularly to recruit, monitor, and at times replace the management and make decisions that are vital to the functioning of the organization. Across sectors, the existence and some of the characteristics of boards are often mandated by regulation, although organizations typically retain some flexibility on the design. Public and private corporations in most countries must have boards of directors. Most non-profit organizations similarly have boards of trustees. Boards are also common among local governments, such as cities, towns, and school districts. The latter are the focus of this paper.

[1] Anglin et al. (2025) also uses meeting minutes as a source of data on school board deliberations.

2.1.1 School Boards

Nearly all of the 14,000 school districts in the United States are governed by boards of education, commonly referred to as school boards. These governing bodies, generally composed of 3 to 11 members, are responsible for the functioning of each school district. Their responsibilities include drafting curricula, developing the district's strategies, managing the budget and allocating funds to schools, engaging with the community, and implementing federal and state programs as well as court orders (Hochschild, 2005; Maeroff, 2010; Shi and Singleton, 2023). A key responsibility of school boards is recruiting and evaluating district and school management (such as the superintendent, top administrators, and school principals). Boards in most states also collectively bargain with the local teachers' union over employment contracts, influencing terms of employment such as pay, hours, and working conditions.

Elections In approximately 95% of U.S. school districts, all board members are elected through local elections.[2] While the timing of these elections varies across states, they tend to take place during general elections in November or during local elections in the spring or fall. Each member's term lasts 3 to 4 years. Terms generally do not expire at the same time, with many districts using a staggered election system to ensure continuity within the board. This system implies that, in each election, only about one-third of the board's seats are up for being filled.

School board meetings Most school boards in the U.S. operate through regular meetings, which occur at least once a month.[3] Due to so-called "Sunshine laws," most states have rules requiring that school districts be accessible to the public. The calendar and agenda of each meeting is thus made public in advance and meetings are open to the general public, who can participate in the discussion. The content of the meetings is also disclosed in detail in the form of minutes, typically published on each district's website.

School boards in California Boards in California share many features with boards across the country, but a few California-specific characteristics are important to highlight. First, each member

[2]Exceptions include Hawaii's single statewide district, certain districts in Indiana, and city school systems like Chicago.

[3]See records of the National School Boards Association (NSBA), available at https://www.nsba.org.

is elected for a four-year term, and elections are staggered so that members run in different years. In 2015, the State Senate passed Bill n. 415, mandating that local school board elections take place on statewide election dates (i.e., in even years); the law became effective in 2018. Second, boards must bargain with teachers' unions at least once every three years (Shi and Singleton, 2023). Third, since the passage of Proposition 13 in 1978, school boards in California—unlike in some other states—do not have the power to set local property tax rates (Loeb, 2001).

2.2 Data

2.2.1 School Board Elections

Our analysis combines data from several sources. Data on school board elections come from the California Elections Data Archive (CEDA) of California State University, Sacramento and cover the years 1998-2022. These records include the name of the school district, the type of election (at-large or by trustee area, full- or short-term), the date, the name of each candidate, and the number of votes received.[4] We limit our sample to board elections for K-12 local education agencies (LEAs) and exclude elections of college boards, county boards of education, and the state board of education. Appendix B.1 contains more details on the construction of this data set.

2.2.2 Candidates' Characteristics and Political Platforms

We are able to predict the gender for 89% and the race for 86% of candidates based on their names as reported in the election records.[5] We draw candidates' political affiliation from the L2 Historical Voter Record, a proprietary database containing the history of voter registrations for the near population of the U.S. For 75% of candidates, we uniquely matched a record based on name, school district, and year (see Appendix B.3 for details on the merging process). As reported in Panel A of Table 1, 44% of candidates are female, 31% are Hispanic, and 49% are Democrats (34% are Republicans) among those for whom we could determine these attributes.

Lastly, we link candidate records with data from the now-defunct Voter's Edge website. Voter's Edge was a partnership between the League of Women Voters of California and Maplight, a non-

[4] Among all elections in our data 59% are at-large, accounting for 73% of all candidates. 96% of candidates in our data ran for a full-term position.

[5] For race/ethnicity, we use the *ethnicolr* package, which calculates probabilities based on Census data. We classify a candidate as Hispanic if their predicted probability exceeds 0.5. For gender, we use *gender_guesser*, which predicts gender using a database of 40,000 name-gender pairs.

profit organization, that provided voters with an online guide to federal, state, and local races in California.[6] On the Voter's Edge website, each candidate had a page with their name, picture, the position they were running for, their occupation, endorsements, and political platform. Figure 1 shows the profile of a candidate running for a board member position in the San Leandro Unified School District, Area 2. We scraped the profiles for 10,069 school board candidates running in California races between 1998 and 2022. As reported in Panel A of Table 1, we were able to successfully link 37.8% of all candidates in the CEDA data to a webpage on Voter's Edge.

2.2.3 From Political Platforms to Priorities

We use candidates' political platforms to extract information on the policy items they care about. We refer to these as their priorities. Platforms vary greatly in length and detail. Table 2 provides some examples. Some platforms, such as the first one listed in Table 2, include a detailed text of the candidate's views. Others, such as the last one listed, include only a short list of items. The average candidate has a platform of 253 characters in length, with a standard deviation of 141.

To assign priorities from platforms, we feed the text of each platform into a large-language model (LLM) and ask it to respond to queries about a set of eleven priorities that we specified ex ante. We identified these priorities as follows. We started with policy types that are the subject of previous studies of school board decision-making. Three priorities fall into this category: reducing the level of the school budget (which we label *fiscal conservatism*), expanding equity in access to educational resources (*equity*), and supporting teachers and teachers' unions (*teacher support*). We added to this list a set of topics that have not been the focus of past studies of school boards, but which are the subject of debate in the economics literature and for which board decisions are important. There are six topics in this category: capital investments (*school facilities*), raising enrollment and competing for students (*enrollment*), school completion (*dropout*), the health and safety of students in schools (*safety*), career preparation (*career and technical education, or CTE*), and overall education quality (*academic achievement*). We complete the list with two policy priorities that are less often the focus of economics research but which are the subject of public debate and which candi-

[6]The League of Women Voters of California is a non-partisan organization that promotes voters' rights; its website can be accessed at https://lwvc.org/. Maplight is a non-profit organization that provides campaign finance, lobbying, and ethics disclosure solutions to state and local governments; its website is https://www.maplight.org/. We accessed information from Voter's Edge at https://www.maplight.org/ between October 5, 2023 and December 15, 2023.

dates frequently mention: *community engagement* and the presence of undesirable views or biases in academic curricula, policies, and practices (*agenda bias*).

Depending on the nature of the priority, some of the questions we feed the LLM require a yes/no answer (for example, "Is modernizing/upgrading/expanding physical facilities of schools one of the main priorities of the candidate?") while others require a score on a Likert scale (for example, "Considering the candidate's stance on policies endorsed/opposed by teachers' unions, teachers' involvement in educational policy-making, and teachers' collective bargaining rights, how would you rate their overall friendliness towards teachers' unions?"). When requiring a Likert scale score, we provided the LLM with examples of platforms associated with each score to make the prompt more informative. The full list of questions is shown in Appendix C.

To provide some intuition for what the priorities are and how they are coded, Table 2 shows the political platforms of three candidates listed on Voter's Edge who run in different districts and years, together with the associated priorities. The first candidate mentions maintaining a balanced budget (which alludes to *fiscal conservatism*), a high-quality education (*academic achievement*), and a highly qualified workforce (*teacher support*); he also mentions building new schools (*facilities*) and stresses gains for all students (*equity*). The second candidate, with a much more concise platform, mentions *safety* of students, serving *parents* as well as students, no social experimentation in the classroom (*agenda bias*), and a sound financial plan to cut wasteful spending (*fiscal conservatism*). The last candidate only lists three items, two of which ("parent involvement" and "school safety") connect directly to our priorities.

To assess the accuracy of the LLM classification, we compared the LLM's decisions to those made by two human raters. We asked two research assistants to answer each of the 27 classifying questions for a randomly selected sample of 200 candidate platforms. Across all questions, the correlations between the ratings of the LLM and those of each research assistant — a measure of human-machine inter-rater reliability (IRR) — were 0.84 and 0.75, similar to the human-human IRR, which was equal to 0.77.

While our approach allows for a fairly rich description of candidates priorities, the analysis of many priorities creates an expositional challenge. For brevity, our discussion in the main text largely focuses on the three priorities that have been the focus of prior studies of school boards: fiscal conservatism, equity, and teacher support, as well as on student safety, which we chose because

we wanted to consider a priority explicitly targeting students' behavioral (as opposed to cognitive) outcomes. We present parallel analyses for other priorities in the appendix. A striking feature of our findings is the consistency of results across the different domains we consider.

2.2.4 Mapping Priorities and Identities to Outcomes

A goal of our analysis is to understand whether board members succeed in achieving their stated goals. This requires a mapping between district-level outcomes and priorities. Sometimes these mappings are clear. For example, candidates who want to reduce spending succeed if district spending falls. Other mappings are reasonably clear but potentially multi-dimensional. For example, candidates who want to promote educational equity presumably succeed if achievement for less-advantaged groups improves, but there is more than one plausible definition of "disadvantaged group."

Our approach is to consider multiple measures where there is ambiguity. For example, we assess the success of candidates with an equity priority using measures of achievement for economically disadvantaged students and measures of achievement for Hispanic students. We measure the success of candidates who support teachers using teacher exit rates (which we expect to decline) and salaries for entering teachers. In many cases, we focus on one measure in the main text, while reporting results for others in appendices. As we discuss below, findings are generally similar across measures. Online Appendix Table A1 reports the full mapping between priorities and outcome measures.

We also want to know what outcomes we should reasonably expect to be impacted by electing a candidate from a given demographic or professional background. Here, we follow the literature on both corporate and school boards. This literature combines an exploratory approach that looks at how changes in board composition affect many different outcomes (e.g. Matsa and Miller, 2013) with the idea that shifts will follow group differences in preferences or interests. For example, Kogan et al. (2021) points out that non-white voters typically express more support for school spending than white voters, so electing more Hispanics may change school finance decisions, while Shi and Singleton (2023) makes the point that teachers on school boards may try to shift policies in ways that help teachers. We therefore test the effects of electing board members from different backgrounds on each of our main outcome measures, while focusing on a) policies for which group

members exhibit disproportionate support, as measured in platform data, and b) policies in which there is a group-specific interest.

2.2.5 District Outcome Data

Student outcomes We use district-level data on student enrollment, achievement, and behavior. Our main source of information on student enrollment comes from the records of the Common Core of Data (CCD) of the U.S. Department of Education for the years 1986-2022. The CCD contains counts of students in grades K-12 attending schools within each district, broken down by race and ethnicity. It also reports the number of students who scored proficient in Math and English state assessments. We complement these records with those from the Stanford Education Data Archive (SEDA), which provides mean standardized scores in statewide Math and English assessments by district, grade, demographic group, and year. These data, described in detail in Fahle et al. (2021), are available for the years 2009-2019.We combine enrollment and achievement information with data on students' non-academic outcomes included in the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) of the U.S. Department of Education. These data, collected bi-annually, are available for the years 2009-2020.

Panel B of Table 1 presents summary statistics for student outcome variables, measured in the year before an election. Standardized test scores vary substantially by students' ethnicity and economic status: For example, economically disadvantaged (ECD) students have an average score of -0.47, while for non-disadvantaged peers it's 0.18 (panel A). The average district in our sample enrolls 12,402 students, 50% of whom are Hispanic. Districts with close elections (those with a margin of victory within 5 percentage points) are observationally very similar to the overall sample.

School finances Data on school district finances come from the CCD. These data include total expenditures; expenditure on instruction, teacher wages, and capital projects; total revenues; and revenues earmarked for specific programs such as bilingual education, compensatory and basic skills, gifted and talented students, vocational programs, and safety programs. As reported in Panel B of Table 1, school districts spent an average of $8,900 per student, with half of this amount dedicated to instructional purposes.

Teaching workforce We draw information on teachers from three distinct sources. The first are the records of the California Department of Education (CDE), which list individual teachers' demographic characteristics and teaching assignments for the years 2012-2018. We use these data to calculate teachers' exit rates in each district and year, defined as the share of teachers who leave the district at the end of the year divided by the total number of teachers in the district. On average, the exit rate is 11% both in our full sample of districts and in the sample of districts and years with close elections (Table 1, panel B).

Our second source of teacher information are data on the total number and the total wages of teachers, available at the district-year level from the CCD for the years 1986-2017. The average teacher wage is total amount of the teacher wage bill divided by the total number of teachers. This variable is equal to about $89,000 in both samples (Table 1, panel B).

Our third and last source of teacher information are records from Form J-90—the Salary and Benefits Schedule for the Certificated Bargaining Unit—from the CDE, available for the years 2000-2019. These records detail the salary and benefit schedules in place in each district. Specifically, Form J-90 reports salaries corresponding to unique combinations of education level (class) and years of experience (step). Classes include a BA degree with additional credit hours, while steps begin with the initial year of experience. On average, the wage of teachers in the entering class is $40,000 in both samples. [7]

2.2.6 School Board Meeting Minutes

We compile a novel dataset with information on the content of 74,056 school board meetings, forming an unbalanced panel of 573 school districts spanning the years 2016-2023. To construct this dataset, we manually collected PDF files of meeting minutes from the websites of each school district.

To extract information on the meetings, we fed the text of each meeting record through an LLM, using a structured process similar to what we used to extract platform priorities. We focused on five pieces of information: (i) general information about the meeting (date, time, and length); (ii) names of present and absent school board members; (iii) a list of all motions, their proponents and

[7] Information on salary schedules, which are directly negotiated between the district and provide us with direct information on pay structure which—unlike average wages—is insensitive to the composition of the teaching body in each district.

opponents, and their outcomes; (iv) a measure of dissent in the discussions, defined as the LLM's rating from 1-10 of the level of contentiousness and disagreement observed during the meeting; and (v) the topic of each motion, classified using our list of priorities. We link minutes information to district-years and to specific candidates using information on name, year and school district.

Table 3 gives three examples of what minutes data look like and how we assign them to different topics. One important point here is that while the topic of a motion is typically clear, the stance of a motion on a topic often is not. For example, the first listed motion deals with teacher salaries, but it is unclear whether it would raise them or lower them. Similarly, the third motion approves a new social studies curriculum, but does not provide details on the content of the curriculum. We therefore assign motions to priorities if they are potentially relevant. For example, a motion on teacher salary is relevant to budget and therefore to the fiscal conservatism priority, as well as to teacher support. When we analyze these data we focus on counts of potentially relevant motions rather than trying to determine whether the motions are for or against the priority.

Panel C of Table 1 describes the meetings data. On average, meetings have five board members present out of 6; they last about three hours and are used to vote on seven motions, nearly all of which are passed.

3 Identity and Ideology Among Board Members

3.1 Can Group Identity Predict Ideology?

We begin our analysis by exploring the joint distribution of group identity and ideology on school boards. We start by describing how candidates' stated priorities vary across socio-demographic (or identity) groups. Figure 2 shows the share of candidates in each identity group who list each priority on their platform. For brevity, we focus here on four priorities (fiscal conservatism, equity, teacher support, and safety) and four dimensions of identity (ethnicity, gender, occupational background, and political affiliation).[8] For each share, we calculate confidence intervals within each identity group; stars indicate the statistical significance of the difference in shares across identity groups within a dimension (e.g., between males and females).

[8]Table A2 shows the share of candidates in all the identity groups we consider who list each of our eleven priorities. Table A3 shows the same statistics for the subsample of districts with close elections.

Candidates' identities and ideologies are correlated in expected ways. For example, candidates who are Hispanic, teachers, or Democrats are less likely to be fiscally conservative than their counterparts, while Hispanics, females, and Democrats are more likely to prioritize equity. Notably, differences by gender and political affiliation are pronounced: females are 15 percentage points more likely than men to prioritize equity (55% of the male average), while Democrats are 16 percentage points more likely to do so than Republicans (61% of the Republican average). Female candidates are also six percentage points more likely to prioritize safety and health for students and staff. Lastly, teachers and Democrats are more likely to prioritize teacher support.

However, substantial ideological variation persists within identity group. One way to see this is simply to note that, although some of the differences in Figure 2 are statistically significant, many are relatively small. To quantify this intuition, we attempt to flexibly predict candidates' priorities by using the identity variables as covariates in a random forest model. The predictive power turns out to be weak. For example, the model correctly predicts whether a candidate prioritizes equity 65% of the time, only a modest improvement over the 54% accuracy obtained by random guesses matching the share of candidates prioritizing equity in the data.[9] Similarly, the model predicts fiscal conservatism, teacher union support, and safety and health priorities with accuracies of 58%, 76%, and 66%, respectively—again, only modest improvements over baseline guessing rates of 51%, 63%, and 55%.

3.2 Do Changes in Identity Group Representation Shift A Board's Ideology?

Next, we examine whether altering the representation of specific identity groups on a school board leads to meaningful shifts in its ideological composition. To estimate causal effects of identity shifts on board ideology, we must address the potential endogeneity of elected members' characteristics. The selection of school board members is not random; it may reflect electorate preferences that also influence the outcome variable. For example, boards with more female members may tend to prioritize equity due to the composition of the electorate.

To overcome this issue, we exploit quasi-exogenous variation from close elections using a regression-discontinuity (RD) framework. Continuing with the working example, suppose we are interested in the causal effect of electing a female candidate on the share of board members who prioritize

[9] Since 35% of candidates prioritize equity, the probability of a correct prediction based on chance is $= 0.35^2 + 0.65^2 = 0.54$.

equity. We estimate the following model in the sample of elections where the marginal winning and losing candidates are of different genders:

$$y_{i,t,t+k} = \beta_0 + \beta D_{i,t} + f(m_{i,t}) + \theta_{t+k} + \varepsilon_{i,t,t+k} \tag{1}$$

$y_{i,t,t+k}$ is the outcome (here, the share of board members who prioritize equity) in district i with election in t, measured in $t + k$, with k ranging from 1 to 4. The variable $D_{i,t}$ equals one if district i elects a female candidate in t. The variable m_{it} denotes the vote share margin, defined as the difference between the vote share of the female candidate and either (i) the closest losing candidate (if the female candidate wins) or (ii) the closest winning candidate (if the female candidate loses); thus, m_{it} serves as the running variable of our RD model. We assume f to be piecewise linear, allowing its slope to differ on either side of the cutoff. We control for calendar year fixed effects in the vector θ_{t+k}. We estimate equation (1) on the subsample of close elections, selected using the mean-squared error optimal bandwidth of Calonico et al. (2020). Under the assumption that any unobservable determinants of outcomes are continuous around the cutoff, estimates of β in this specification correspond to the average treatment effects of electing a woman on the share of board members who prioritize equity one to four years after the election, among all districts with close elections. A similar approach can be used to estimate the effects of electing members from other identity groups by appropriately redefining $D_{i,t}$, m_{it}, and the estimation sample.

The design passes standard tests of RD validity. Appendix Figures A1 and A2 present McCrary tests confirming the smoothness of the density function around the RD cutoff for each identity and priority. Additionally, Appendix Figure A3, Figure A4, and Figure A5 show that estimates of β using $y_{i,t,t-1}$ (i.e., the host of outcome variables in the year prior to the election) are indistinguishable from zero, indicating outcome balance between the treatment and control groups prior to the treatment.

Estimates of β indicate that changing the identity composition of a school board does not necessarily trigger a shift in ideology. Figure 3 illustrates this point by looking at how electing female and Hispanic board members affects the share of board members who prioritize equity. Although cross-sectional differences in the rates at which men and women prioritize equity are large, marginally electing a female candidate barely alters the share of equity-prioritizing board members. As shown

in the top panel of Figure 3, the point estimate is in fact slightly negative. A similar null result emerges when examining the effect of electing a Hispanic candidate (Figure 3, center panel).

By contrast, as shown in the bottom panel of Figure 3, electing a member who prioritizes equity raises the share of board members with that priority by 8 percentage points (95% CI=$[.05, .11]$). This is equal to 50% of the below-threshold mean.

As reported in Appendix Tables A4 and A5, the finding that electing members with different identities has limited effects on board ideology extends to other priorities and identities, as does the finding that electing a member with a given ideology typically has a sizable effect on a board's ideological mix.[10] Taken together, these findings indicate that simply emphasizing identity-group representation may not be sufficient to shift the underlying distribution of viewpoints and ideologies on school boards.

4 Identity, Ideology, and School District Outcomes

We now investigate how changes in the composition of school boards affect policy outcomes of school districts. Our goal is to determine whether shifts in identity group representation or in members' ideology produce the largest impacts. We begin by examining the effects of each attribute in isolation, and then we extend the analysis to consider multiple attributes of the board members simultaneously.

4.1 Effects of Identity Group Representation

To evaluate whether electing a candidate from a specific identity group affects district outcomes, we estimate versions of equation (1) in which the variables $D_{i,t}$ and $m_{i,t}$ capture the election of a candidate from a given group. We focus on the effects of *changes* in outcomes, defining the dependent variable $y_{i,t,t+k}$ as the difference between the outcome measured up to four years after the election and that measured in the year prior to the election. Findings are similar in alternate specifications that place outcome levels on the left side and control for pre-election covariates.

For (relative) brevity, we focus in the main text on four identity groups — females, Hispanics,

[10] Appendix Table A4 shows how electing a candidate with a given identity or ideology affects the share of board members with the same characteristic. Appendix A5 shows how electing members with a given identity *barely* affects the share of candidates with a given ideology.

teachers, and Democrats – and five outcomes: the logarithm of total district spending per pupil, average English and Math test scores for economically disadvantaged (ECD) students, the share of students receiving suspensions, teachers' exit rates, and the logarithm of the average salary for novice teachers. Estimates of β are presented in Table 4; corresponding RD plots are shown in Appendix Figures A6 and A7. Appendix Figures A4 and A5 show the balance in the dependent variables across treatment and control groups in the year prior to each election.

These estimates indicate that changes in identity group representation produce effects on outcomes that largely align with the groups' stated priorities. However, these effects are generally modest. For example, electing a female candidate — who is on average more likely than a male to prioritize equity (see Figure 2) — increases test scores for disadvantaged students by 0.03 SDs (Table 4, column 2) but reduces spending per pupil by 1% (column 1). Female candidates also increase teacher exit rates by 3 percentage points (or 27% of the mean exit rate in the years preceding an election, column 4). In contrast, electing a Hispanic candidate, who is more likely than non-Hispanics to prioritize equity and safety, has no significant effects on spending or ECD test scores, and only leads to a slight reduction in suspension rates (column 3) and an increase in teacher exit rates. Notably, electing a teacher candidate — whose priorities differ only marginally from those of non-teachers — yields the largest effects: a 4% increase in spending per pupil, a 3 percentage point increase in suspension rates (75% of the pre-election mean), and a 2 percentage point reduction in teacher exit rates (18%), consistent with Shi and Singleton (2023). Electing Democrats, despite their distinct priorities compared to Republicans, does not produce any discernible effects on the outcomes examined.

4.2 Effects of Ideology

We next estimate the effects of members' ideology on outcomes. To do so, we estimate versions of equation (1) where $D_{i,t}$ and $m_{i,t}$ capture the election of members with a given stated priority and $y_{i,t,t+k}$ is the change in a school outcome variable with which the priority is associated. We report these estimates in Table 4. We focus on the four priorities examined above; results on all other priorities and outcomes are in Appendix Tables A6, A7, and A8.

These estimates indicate that electing members who prioritize a specific issue significantly affects the outcome most closely associated with that issue. For example, electing a candidate who

prioritizes fiscal conservatism reduces spending per pupil by 11% (Table 4, column 1), while electing a candidate who prioritizes equity increases ECD students' average test scores by 0.13 SDs. Similarly, electing a candidate who prioritizes safety/health increases suspension rates by 2 percentage points (or 50% of the pre-election mean, column 3), and electing a candidate who prioritizes teacher support reduces teacher exit rated by 4 percentage points (36%, column 4) and raises the salaries of novice teachers by 8% (column 5).

These estimates are all larger in magnitude than the effects of electing candidates from various identity groups, even for policy areas where group differences in viewpoints are relatively large. Figure 4 illustrates this point using standard regression discontinuity plots. The left panels contrast the effects of electing a female or Hispanic board member on ECD test scores to the effects of electing an equity-focused board member. The right panels focus on spending per pupil, and compare the effects of electing a female or Hispanic member to the effects of electing a fiscally conservative board member.

They are also large relative to the effect of other education policies. The effect of electing an equity-focused board member on ECD students' test scores is similar to the effect of assigning every such student to a teacher who is about 0.3-0.4 SDs higher in the distribution of teacher value-added (Chetty et al., 2014).[11] The reduction in spending from electing a fiscally conservative board member is similar in size to the increase in spending in districts that benefit from state-level school finance reforms Jackson et al. (2016).

4.3 Identity vs. Ideology in Determining Districts' Outcomes

The evidence presented thus far shows that ideological differences among elected members are stronger drivers of district outcomes than identity differences when examined separately. However, these findings rely on analyses that consider one dimension of identity or ideology at a time. In Section 3 we demonstrated that identity and ideology are correlated. For example, a member who prioritizes fiscal conservatism is also less likely to be a Democrat. Consequently, the RD estimate of the effect of a candidate who prioritizes fiscal conservatism might partially capture the effect of electing a non-Democrat. Along similar lines, it is also possible that shifts in ideology can account

[11] We obtain these values by dividing our estimated effects, reported in district-level SDs, by 2.86, the scaling factor from cross-district to cross-student SDs reported in Biasi et al. (2024), and then dividing the value we obtain by the estimates of the standard deviation of teacher effects for reading and math reported in Chetty et al. (2014), which are 0.10 and 0.14, respectively.

for the effects of identity on outcomes.

To disentangle the effects of identity and ideology, we extend the univariate RD model in equation (1) to allow for the effects of multiple candidate attributes simultaneously. Suppose we are interested in attributes j and l. We estimate the following model across the full sample of elections:

$$\begin{aligned} y_{i,t,t+k} &= [\beta_0^j + \beta^j D_{i,t}^j + \gamma_0^j m_{i,t}^j + \gamma_1^j D_{i,t}^j m_{i,t}^j] \times S_{i,t}^j \mathbf{1}(|m_{i,t}^j| \leq BW_j) \\ &+ [\beta_0^l + \beta^l D_{i,t}^l + \gamma_0^l m_{i,t}^l + \gamma_1^l D_{i,t}^l m_{i,t}^l] \times S_{i,t}^l \mathbf{1}(|m_{i,t}^l| \leq BW_l) \\ &+ \theta_0 \times S_{i,t}^l \mathbf{1}(|m_{i,t}^l| \leq BW_l) \times S_{i,t}^j \mathbf{1}(|m_{i,t}^j| \leq BW_j) \\ &+ \theta_{i,t+k} + \varepsilon_{i,t,t+k}, \end{aligned} \tag{2}$$

where $D_{i,t}^n$ and $m_{i,t}^n$ are defined relative to attribute $n \in \{j, l\}$, $S_{i,t}^n$ equals one if the winner and the closest losing candidate differ with respect to characteristic n, and BW_n is the chosen bandwidth for characteristic n. The parameters of interest are β_j and β_l, capturing the local average treatment effects of electing a candidate with characteristic j, conditional on l, and vice versa. These parameters are estimated off of the subsamples of elections where the winner and the closest losing candidate differ with respect to the characteristic, and where the vote margin falls within the mean-squared error optimal bandwidth of Calonico et al. (2020). The inclusion of the term $S_{i,t}^l \mathbf{1}(|m_{i,t}^l| \leq BW_l) \times S_{i,t}^j \mathbf{1}(|m_{i,t}^j| \leq BW_j)$ allows for different intercepts across elections based on whether the vote margin falls within the bandwidth for characteristic j, for characteristic l, for both, or for neither. This framework can be extended to accommodate more than two characteristics. Intuitively, what we are doing here is estimating regression discontinuity specifications for each candidate attribute simultaneously, imposing the assumption that effects are separable across attributes.

Table 5 presents estimates of equation (2) that consider four dimensions of identity (gender, ethnicity, occupation, and political affiliation) jointly with the priority relevant for each outcome. Our estimates confirm that ideology plays a stronger role in determining district outcomes than identity across most domains. For example, even conditioning on the four dimensions of identity, electing a candidate who prioritizes fiscal conservatism reduces spending per pupil by 10% (column 1). Similarly, electing a candidate who prioritizes equity increases ECD students' test scores by 0.12 SDs (column 2), and electing a candidate who prioritizes teacher support increases novice teacher

salaries by $1,700, or 8% (column 5).[12] The effects of identity are all close to zero and statistically insignificant, with the exception of a positive effect of electing a teacher candidate on student suspension rates (equal to 0.03 and significant at the 1% level; column 3). A joint test fails to reject the null that all identity effects are zero ($\chi^2(20) = 17.30, p = 0.63$).[13] Combined with our earlier findings, these results underscore that candidates' stated priorities are the primary drivers of changes in districts' policy outcomes.

4.4 Other Outcomes and Priorities

Thus far, we have focused on four priorities and the five outcomes most directly related to them. In Appendix Tables A6, A7, and A8 we provide results for the full sets of priorities and the outcomes with which they are associated. These results confirm that the election of a candidate with a given priority affects district policy across a wide variety of domains. We summarize an illustrative set of results here.

Consider first the set of alternate outcomes for candidates who prioritize equity. Our main results show that electing such a candidate raises test scores for economically disadvantaged students. We find that electing such a candidate also raises scores for Hispanic students by 0.07 SDs (95% CI= $[0.05, 0.09]$). We see effects on non-academic outcomes as well; electing a candidate who prioritizes equity reduces the rate at which Hispanic students are suspended by 0.03 (95% CI=$[-0.06, -0.01]$), or 75% of the pre-election mean.[14] There is no evidence that candidates who prioritize equity make things worse for more advantaged students. On average, equity-focused candidates raise score for all students by 0.06 SDs (95% CI= $[0.05, 0.09]$).

Next consider how candidates with other student-focused priorities shape district outcomes. Electing a candidate who prioritizes addressing dropout rate increases test scores for ECD students by 0.04 SDs and enrollment by 5 percentage points. Similarly, a candidate who prioritizes enrollment raises this outcome by 4 percentage points.

Turning to finance-focused priorities and outcomes, we show that electing a fiscally conservative

[12] To obtain a measure of teacher salaries that reflects changes in scheduled salaries but is insensitive to changes in workforce composition, we calculate the salary of novice teachers as the weighted average of scheduled salaries for novice teachers across scheduled lanes in each year, using as weights the numbers of teachers in each lane in the year preceding the election.

[13] On the contrary, a joint test rejects the null that all ideology effects are zero ($\chi^2(5) = 17.38, p < 0.001$).

[14] We do not have access to data on suspension rates for ECD students.

candidate lowers not only spending per pupil, but also revenues earmarked for CTE programs and spending on capital projects (Appendix Table A7). By contrast, electing a candidate who prioritizes the improvement of school facilities increases capital spending by $480 per pupil, or nearly 50% of the baseline mean (column 3), and electing a candidate who prioritizes CTE and vocational training increases CTE revenues by $340 per pupil, or 6% (column 2).

Lastly, we examine the impact of electing a candidate who prioritizes teacher support on additional teacher-related outcomes. We find that electing a candidate with this priority increases the share of tenured teachers and teachers' average wage, though it does not affect the average scheduled salary of "BA +60" teachers, i.e., those with a Bachelor's degree and 60 additional academic credits (Appendix Table A8). Our interpretation is that teacher wage effects operate through the retention of more senior, higher-paid teachers rather than changes in pay schedules among BA + 60 teachers, and the increase in schduled pay for novice teachers.

The one notable exception to the overall pattern is that electing a candidate who prioritizes academic achievement does not improve test score outcomes. If anything, it slightly *reduces* test scores for all students, ECD students, and Hispanics (Appendix Tables A6). Our interpretation is that avowing support for educational achievement when running for school board may not signal much about a candidate's viewpoints or plans. It is by far the most common priority, listed by 81% of candidates, and it may be the case that candidates who do not list it in fact still value it. In some ways, it is akin to a prospective corporate board member saying that they want to make the company more profitable: of course, but how?

5 Identity, Ideology, and School Boards' Actions

Our findings so far indicate that the ideological composition of a school board significantly affects policy outcomes but that the demographic and professional identities of its members appear to be less relevant. The policy implications of this finding depend on the mechanism linking member characteristics and outcomes, which we can learn about through board activity. For example, if board members from certain backgrounds attempt to implement policies aligned with their beliefs but are unable to have their voice heard (for example because they are in the minority), increasing their representation may be an effective policy. Conversely, if these board members successfully

implement their preferred actions but these actions have no effect on district outcomes, a more promising approach could involve expanding board authority. Finally, if board members do not attempt to act in accordance with their stated priorities, then altering board composition may be ineffective for achieving policy change.

To assess which of these explanations is more plausible, we analyze school board minutes and examine the motions related to various issues. Because nearly all proposed motions are approved, we focus on passed motions, leaving the very similar results for attempted motions to the appendix Table A10.

5.1 Ideology and Board Decisions

To examine how a school board's ideological composition impacts its actions, we estimate the causal effect of electing a candidate with a specific stated priority on the number of motions passed related to that priority. We do this by re-estimating equation (1) using the number of motions passed between one and four years after the election as the dependent variable. We start by examining the four categories of motions that correspond to the priorities we explored in our analysis of outcomes: budget, equity, safety/health, and teacher support.

These results indicate that electing a candidate with a particular priority significantly influences board decisions in areas corresponding to that priority. For example, electing a candidate who prioritizes fiscal conservatism reduces the number of passed budget motions per meeting by 0.39 (19% of the pre-election mean, Table 6, column 1). Because budget motions typically authorize spending increases, we interpret this finding as an effort to reduce the budget. Similarly, electing a candidate who prioritizes equity increases the number of equity-related motions by 0.09 (14% of pre-election mean, column 2), and electing a candidate who prioritizes safety/health increases the number of related motions by 0.1 (15% of the pre-election mean, column 3).

Another valuable aspect of board meetings is that they help us track the effects of priorities for which measurable policy outcomes are unavailable. One example is the presence of bias in school curriculum, the elimination of which is a priority for 4% of all candidates. We do not observe curricular outcomes, but minutes data lets us observe board actions that relate to curricula. Another example is community engagement; minutes data allow us to observe the number of community members participating in meetings.

Taking these outcomes as the dependent variables, we find a particularly strong effect of electing a candidate who prioritizes curriculum bias — their election results in 0.43 fewer curriculum motions (180% of the pre-election mean, 74% of the comparison districts' mean, column 5, and Figure 5).[15] This result aligns with the idea that most curriculum motions are designed to make the curriculum more liberal, while candidates who list agenda bias as a priority are disproportionately Republican (see Table A2). In contrast, electing a candidate who prioritizes community engagement increases neither the number of public comments during meetings (Figure 5, right panel) nor the number of motions passed on community involvement (Table 6, column 6), suggesting limited influence on actual participation levels.

Together, these findings support the view that a board's ideological composition affects outcomes by incentivizing actions that align with members' stated views.

5.2 Identity Group Representation and Board Decisions

Next, we examine how electing candidates from specific identity groups affects board activity. We focus on the same four identity dimensions used so far: gender, ethnicity, occupation, and political affiliation. We estimate equation (1) using the number of motions passed on different topics as the dependent variable.

Our results paint a complex picture, suggesting that the identity composition of school boards does affect board actions, though sometimes in unexpected ways. For example, although female candidates are more likely than their counterparts to prioritize equity, electing a woman reduces the number of motions related to equity (Table 6, column 2). We see similar results for Hispanic candidates across several domains, in the sense that the effects of electing a Hispanic candidate on board motions have the opposite sign from cross-sectional differences in priorities. These domains include equity, budget, and safety and health. While surprising, these findings are consistent with our earlier observation that electing these candidates does not significantly alter the ideological distribution of school boards (Appendix Table A5), so it is not clear how we should expect board activity to shift.

Electing teachers or democrats to school boards tends to increase the number of motions boards

[15]The pre-election mean number of curriculum-related motions is 0.23 per district, compared to the comparison districts' mean of 0.58. Curriculum bias has emerged as an increasingly debated educational issue, reflected in the rapid growth of school board motions addressing it in recent years.

pass on a variety of topics. Most of these are in line with priority differences. For example, electing Democrats raises the number of motions passed relating to budgets, teacher support, and curriculum, and it also raises community engagement. Electing teachers also raises the number of motions passed on budget, equity, safety/health, teacher support, and tends to raise community engagement as well. A possible interpretation is that Democratic candidates and candidates with backgrounds as teachers are better able to get motions through because they are more likely to be in agreement with other board members or other system stakeholders.

Overall, our results tell a story where electing female and Hispanic candidates does not shift board activity in the direction of priorities generally held by members of those groups. This suggests a straightforward rationale for why electing individuals from these groups does not shift outcomes that much: viewpoints do not change, and board activity does not change. When it comes to teachers and members of the Democratic party, the story is different: electing candidates from these groups affects board activity, but board actions do not translate to policy outcomes.

6 The Role of Board Composition

So far, we have examined the impact of electing a school board candidate with a specific characteristic on the actions of an average board. These impacts, though, may vary considerably depending on the board's baseline composition in terms of identity and viewpoints, in ways that are unclear ex ante. On the one hand, electing a candidate with a given priority might more easily shift the board actions if that priority is already shared by other board members. On the other hand, the same candidate may have a larger effect if their election produces a meaningful change in the share of board members who hold that viewpoint, a scenario more likely when that viewpoint is in the minority. From a policy perspective, it is crucial to understand the board composition scenarios in which electing members with underrepresented identities or viewpoints shifts board actions and policy outcomes, particularly given concerns that incremental changes might not lead to substantial policy differences.

6.1 Baseline Board Composition and Impacts on Board Actions

We start by focusing on actions, measured by the number of motions passed on each topic. In Table 7, each estimate corresponds to a version of β in equation (1), estimated considering one priority at a time and where the dependent variable is the number of motions that relate to each priority. Column 1 shows RD estimates obtained considering the full sample of elections; columns 2 and 3 split the sample by the number of priority-related motions passed on each topic at baseline.[16]

Most estimates support the theory that electing a candidate with a given characteristic can have large impacts when the candidate's views are in the minority on the board. For example, the impact of electing a candidate who prioritizes fiscal conservatism is smaller in magnitude and statistically insignificant in boards with a baseline number of budget motions below the sample median (and where presumably that viewpoint is already represented, as shown in column 2) and larger at -0.29 and statistically significant in boards with a number of budget motions above the median (column 3). This estimate corresponds to a 11% decline in the number of budget motions passed in these districts.

Some of the other priorities paint a similar picture. Electing a member who prioritizes safety/health also yields the largest effect (0.36, or a 100% increase) in boards with a number of baseline related motions below the median. Lastly, the effect of electing a member who prioritizes opposing liberal changes to the curriculum is larger in boards with a number of curriculum motions (which, as explained before, tend to make the curriculum more liberal) above the median, where that viewpoint was likely to be in the minority. Electing a member who prioritizes equity increases the number of motions on equity to a statistically significant degree, by 0.13 (47%), only in districts with a baseline number of equity motions below the median. The bias-corrected confidence interval for the effect of such a member in districts with a number of baseline related motions above the median is below 0.13, although the RD coefficient itself is 0.26.

Candidates prioritizing teacher support or community engagement are an exception to this pattern. In these cases, electing a candidate with such priorities shifts board actions only if these viewpoints are already shared by other board members. Conversely, in boards where baseline support

[16] We re-calculate the optimal bandwidth using the method of Calonico et al. (2020) for each dependent variable, outcome variable, and subsample considered in Table 7. Because of this, the sum of the samples in columns 2 and 3 is not necessarily equal to the sample in column 1.

for these priorities is below the median, the effects run counter to expectations. Taken together, the estimates in Table 7 suggest that the board composition scenarios under which a candidate with a particular priority meaningfully shifts board actions may vary depending on the specific policy issue involved.

6.2 Baseline Board Composition and Impacts on Policy Outcomes

Next, we look at effects on policy outcomes by baseline board composition. We study the impact of elected members' identity and ideology characteristics, and examine heterogeneity in impacts across boards with different baseline compositions in terms of each specific characteristic, captured by whether the board had a share of members with a given characteristic who were the minority or the majority.

Starting with ideology, we see again that, in most cases, the election of a member with a given priority on the outcome most directly linked to that priority is larger in boards with a smaller share of members who share that priority. For example, the reduction in per pupil spending caused by electing a candidate who prioritizes fiscal conservatism is larger at 18% in districts where fiscally conservative members are in the minority at baseline (Table 8, panel A, column 2), and smaller at 4% in districts where these members are the majority (panel A, column 3). The same is true for candidates who prioritize equity: their election raises ECD student test scores by 0.15 SDs in districts where equity-prioritizing members are in the minority (panel B, column 2), and by 0.04 SDs in districts where these members are the majority (panel B, column 3). Similarly, election of teacher supporting candidates increase teachers' starting salary by 9% in districts where they are in the minority, while no such effect is found in other districts. The picture is a bit more mixed when looking at the impact of electing members who prioritize safety/health mostly because our data contains very few districts where these members are the majority (panels C, column 3).

We also examine heterogeneity in the impact of candidates' identity on outcomes, depending on whether they are in the minority at baseline. We focus on the effect of electing a female or a Hispanic — two identity groups generally underrepresented on corporate boards, but not necessarily on school boards (in our sample, 44% of members are women and 30% are Hispanics; see Appendix Table A2). Since females—more than males—prioritize equity, we look at their impact on ECD student test scores; similarly, since Hispanics prioritize safety/health more than non-Hispanics,

we look at the number of suspensions. Starting with females, we see again that the election of a female candidate increases ECD student test scores by 0.09 SDs in districts where they are the minority (Table 8, panel E, column 2), and by a smaller 0.03 SDs in districts where they are the majority (panel E, column 3). This can be partly explained by the fact that the election of a female candidate increases the share of equity-prioritizing members by 2 percentage points when they are the minority (10% of the pre-election mean, Table A11, panel A, column 2), but rather decreases the share by 7 percentage points when they are the majority (20% of the pre-election mean, Table A11, panel A, column 3). Similarly, we estimate a larger and significant effect of electing a Hispanic candidate on the share of suspended students in districts where Hispanics are the minority on the board (a 0.012 percentage point reduction, or 30%; see panel F, column 2) and only an insignificant effect when these members are the majority (panel F, column 3).

Taking results on actions and policy outcomes together, these estimates support the theory that electing a candidate with a given characteristic can have a larger effect when that attribute is in the minority on the board.

7 Conclusion

This study highlights the importance of school board members' ideologies in shaping educational outcomes, and demonstrates that these ideologies cannot be adequately proxied by socioeconomic identities alone. Our findings show that the election of board members with specific priorities leads to significant changes in district-level outcomes, such as spending, student academic and non-academic outcomes, and teacher turnover. The mechanism appears to be straightforward: when elected, members with a given priority shift board activity in the direction of that priority. In contrast, electing a board member with a given demographic, professional or political background (relative to someone without that background) has limited effects on both the ideological mix of the board and on school district policies.

Our findings shed light on the mechanisms through which changes in board composition *can* shape policy but also on reasons they often do not. Specifically, our findings support a model in which board members have agency: they shape board activity towards their priorities and this produces large policy change. It also shows that demographic shifts in board composition may

relate only weakly to ideological shifts.

Our findings suggest that researchers seeking to understand the effects of policies that shift board composition would benefit from gathering data on members' policy preferences; predicted changes in preferences based on aggregate demographic shifts—the basis for much hypothesis generation in the literature on board governance—may be poor proxies for the actual ideological changes that take place on boards. From a policy perspective, our results show that changing who sits on boards can have large effects on organizational outcomes, but suggest that policies targeting priorities may be more effective than those that target identities.

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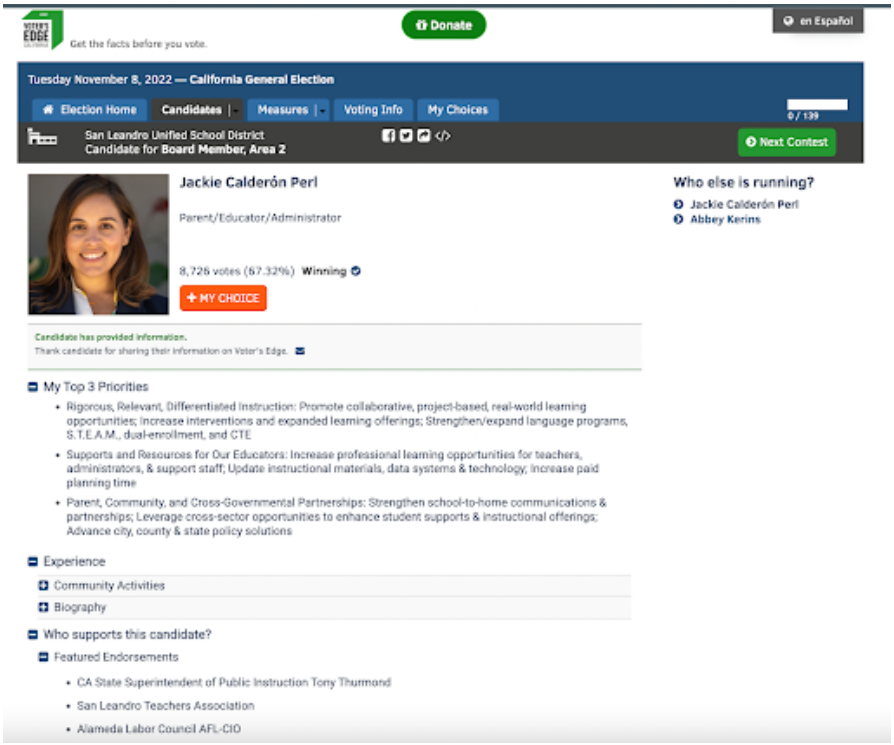
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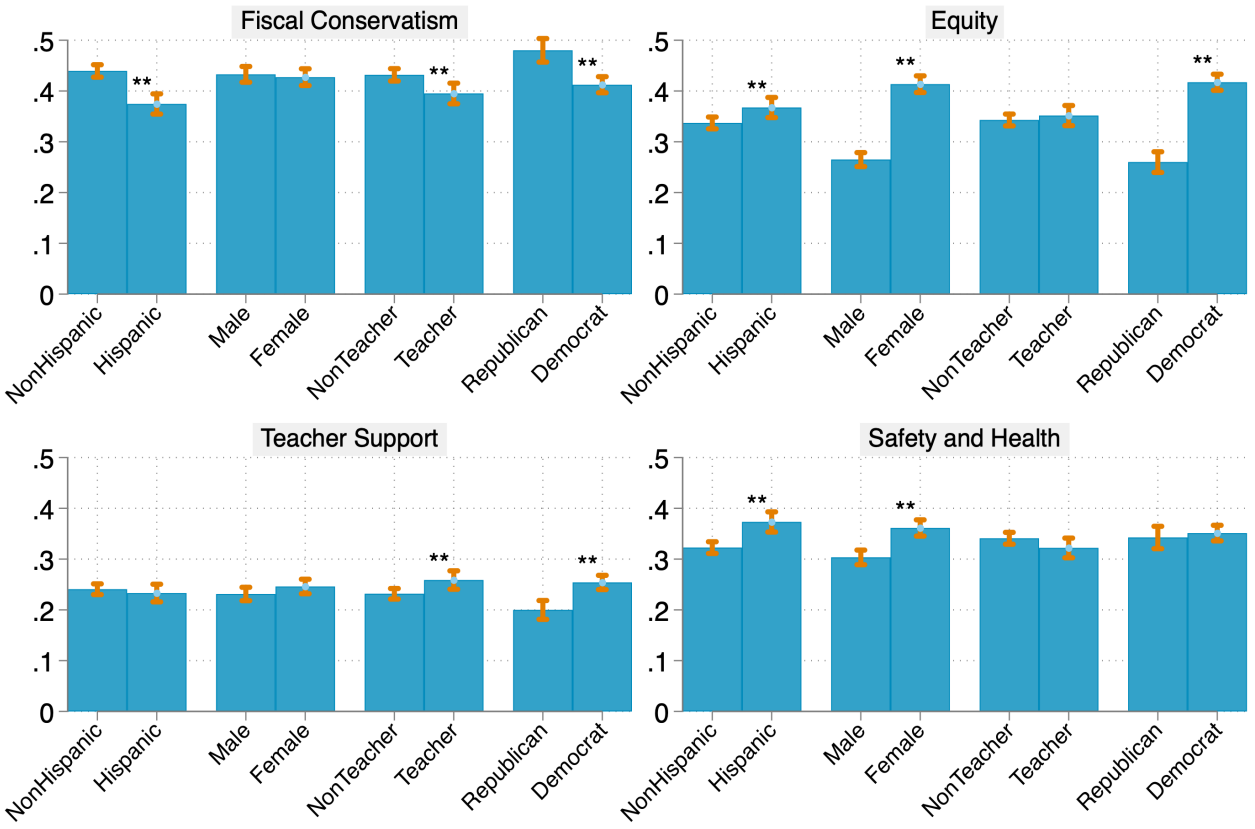
Figures

Figure 1: Example of a Candidate Profile on Voter's Edge



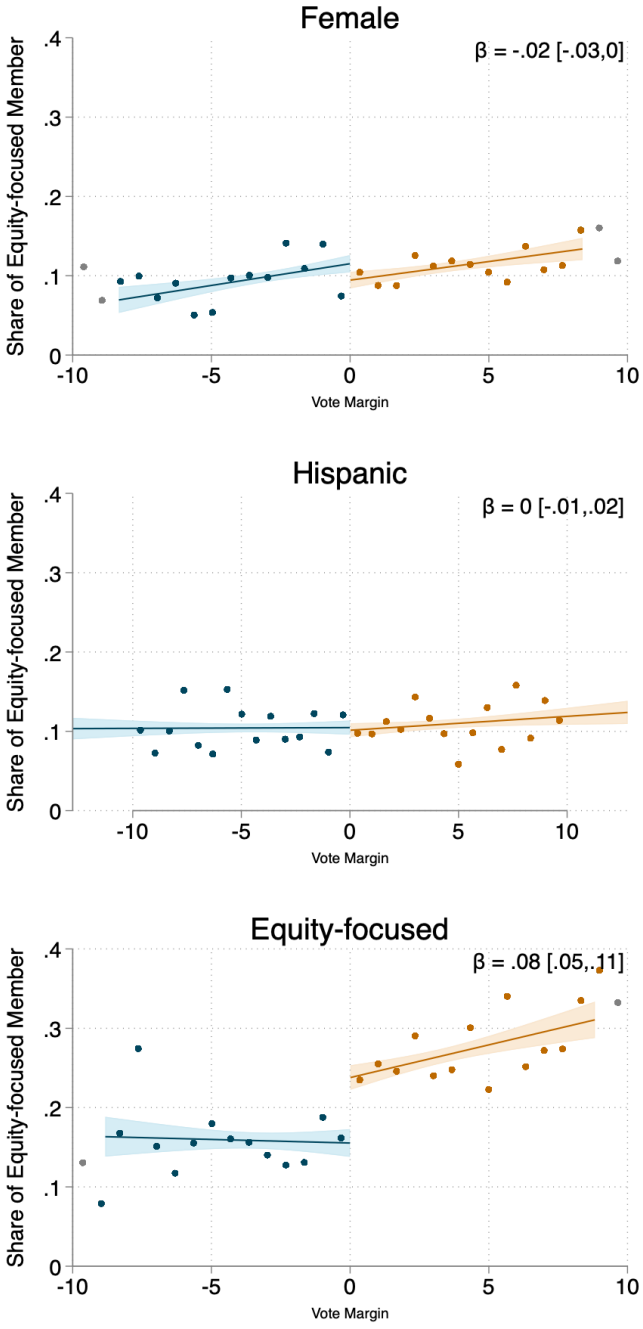
Notes: The figures shows an example of a candidate profile from the now-defunct Voter's Edgde, a partnership between the League of Women Voters of California and Maplight aimed at providing voters with an online guide to federal, state, and local races in California.

Figure 2: Differences in Ideology Across Identity Groups



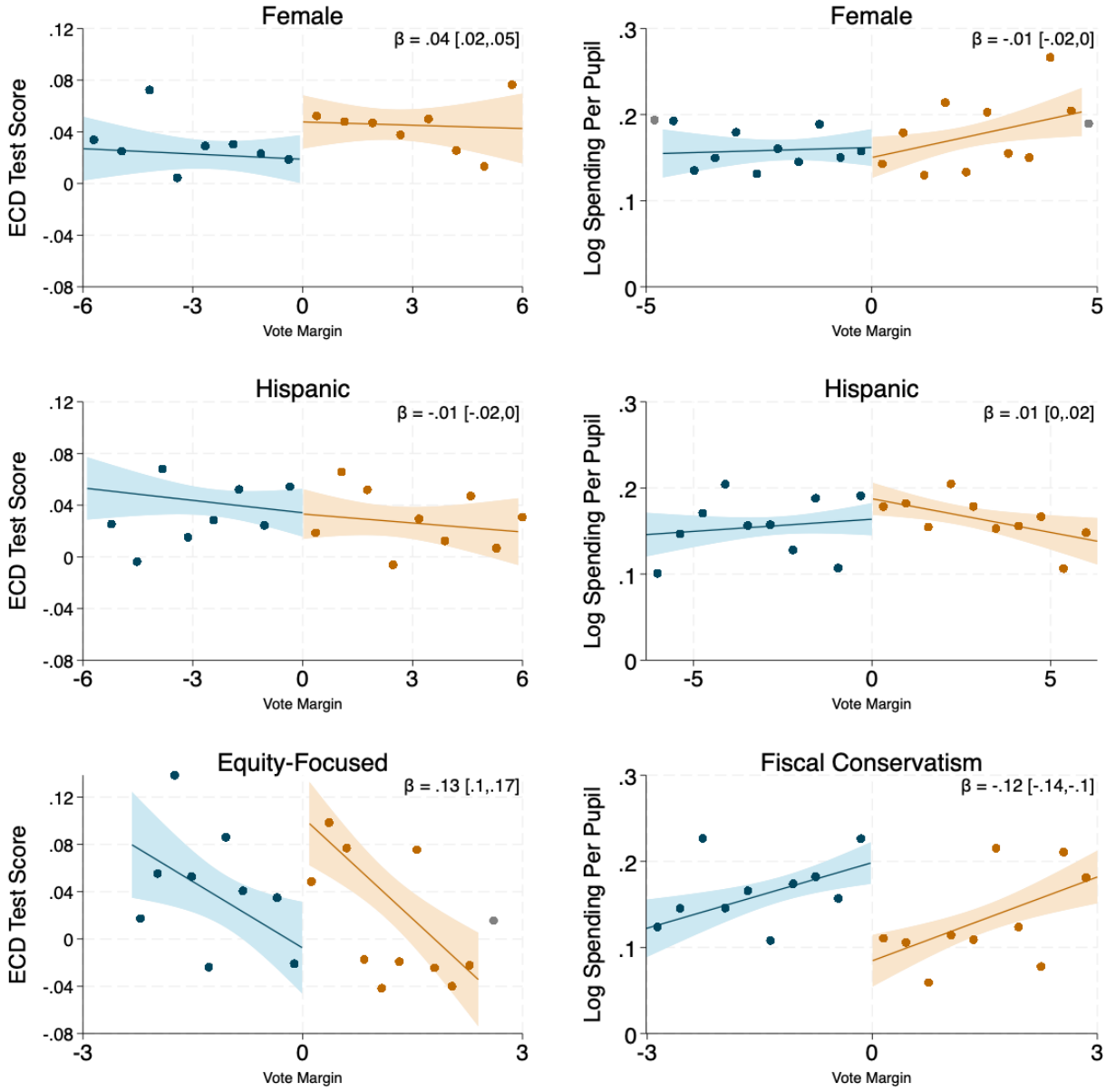
Notes: Bars represent the share of candidates in each identity group who list the priority in the title within their platform. 95% confidence intervals for each share are displayed in orange. Stars indicate the statistical significance of the difference in shares across identities belonging to the same dimension (e.g., between males and females). The sample is restricted to candidates with a valid platform (N= 8,585). + p<0.01, * p<0.05, ** p <0.01.

Figure 3: Elected Candidates' Identity and Ideology and School Board Composition: Regression-Discontinuity Estimates



Notes: Regression-discontinuity plots illustrating the model in equation (1), obtained defining defining $D_{i,t}$ and m_{it} to capture the election of a female candidate (top panel), a Hispanic candidate (middle panel), or a candidate who prioritizes equity (bottom panel). Shaded areas represent 95% confidence intervals, constructed using bias-corrected standard errors clustered at the election level. The bandwidths are set at the MSE-optimal level for the post-election period following Calonico et al. (2020).

Figure 4: Elected Candidates' Identity and Ideology on ECD Student Test Scores and Spending: Regression-Discontinuity Estimates

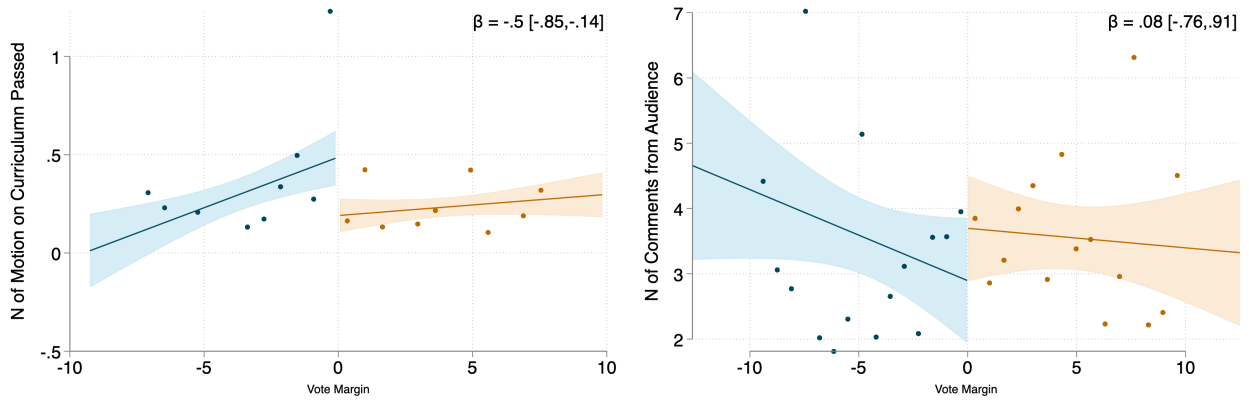


(a) ECD Student Test Scores

(b) log(Spending Per Pupil)

Notes: Regression-discontinuity plots illustrating the model in equation (1), obtained defining defining $D_{i,t}$ and m_{it} to capture the election of a female candidate (top panel), a Hispanic candidate (center panel), or a candidate who prioritizes equity (bottom panel). The dependent variable are average English and Math ECD student test scores (left column) and the logarithm of total spending per pupil (right column) one to four years after the election. Shaded areas represent 95% confidence intervals, constructed using bias-corrected standard errors clustered at the election level. The bandwidths are set at the MSE-optimal level for the post-election period following Calonico et al. (2020).

Figure 5: Elected Candidates' Ideology and Board Motions Passed: Regression-Discontinuity Estimates



(a) Agenda Bias

(b) Community Involvement

Notes: Regression-discontinuity plots illustrating the model in equation (1), obtained defining defining $D_{i,t}$ and m_{it} to capture the election of a candidate who opposes liberal curriculum changes (left panel) or prioritizes community engagement. The dependent variable is the number of motions passed on curriculum changes (left panel) or the number of instances of community engagement during board meetings (right panel), one to four years after an election. Shaded areas represent 95% confidence intervals, constructed using bias-corrected standard errors clustered at the election level. The bandwidths are set at the MSE-optimal level for the post-election period following Calonico et al. (2020).

Tables

Table 1: Summary Statistics of Main Outcome Variables

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
		All		Close Elections (< 5 pp)		
	N	mean	sd	N	mean	sd
Panel A: Candidate Characteristics						
Female	19,618	0.44	0.50	4,362	0.44	0.50
Hispanic	22,725	0.31	0.46	5,038	0.30	0.46
Teacher	22,725	0.18	0.38	5,038	0.18	0.38
Democrat	17,122	0.49	0.50	3,777	0.50	0.50
Have a Platform	22,725	0.38	0.49	5,038	0.39	0.49
Panel B: Educational Outcomes						
CCD Spending Per Pupil ($1,000)	3,760	8.90	4.57	2,056	8.75	4.02
SEDA Test Scores						
Hispanic	1,175	-0.42	0.28	639	-0.43	0.28
White	1,090	0.11	0.38	581	0.10	0.39
Economically Disadvantaged (ECD)	1,240	-0.47	0.25	677	-0.48	0.24
Non-ECD	1,202	0.18	0.38	655	0.16	0.39
CRDC Share Suspended Student	1,277	0.04	0.04	715	0.04	0.04
CDE Share Exiting Teacher	1,064	0.11	0.08	585	0.11	0.08
CCD Average Teacher Wage ($1,000)	3,307	89.42	33.63	1,819	89.27	33.22
CDE Starting Wage from Schedule ($1,000)	3,592	40.38	13.78	1,876	39.31	12.92
CCD Student Enrollment						
All	4,069	12,402	36,251	2,133	11,797	32,373
Hispanic	4,069	6,471	25,975	2,133	6,145	23,331
Panel C: Meeting Characteristics						
Total Number of Meetings	1,340	21.95	7.93	411	21.60	7.85
Board Size	1,340	5.58	1.14	411	5.45	1.09
N Present Member per Meeting	1,340	5.19	1	411	5.02	0.94
Run Time per Meeting (min)	1,336	178.46	59.55	410	171.66	57.69
Average Dissent Level	1,340	1.87	0.98	411	1.82	1.01
Minute Pages Per Meeting	1,340	9.66	17.29	411	10.53	20.64
N of Motions Per Meeting						
Proposed	1,340	7.19	2.11	411	7.23	2.23
Passed	1,340	7.09	2.13	411	7.11	2.24
Unanimously Passed	1,340	6.56	2.15	411	6.59	2.22

Notes: Close election includes any election where the vote share between the least popular winner and the most popular loser is within 5 percentage points. Panel A shows summary statistics of candidate characteristics. For the female dummy and Democrat dummy, we show statistics among candidates whose gender/political orientations are non-missing. Panel B shows summary statistics of district-level outcome variables one year before the election. Suspension includes both in-school and out-of-school suspensions. Panel C shows summary statistics from minute data at the district level in the year before the election.

Table 2: Examples of Political Platforms and Inferred Priorities

	Priority										
Voter's Edge Platform (Year, District)	Academic Achievement	Agenda Bias	Dropout	Enrollment	Fiscal Conservatism	Equity	Facility	Parent/Community Engagement	Safety and Health	Support Teachers	Vocational Ed.
Maintain a balanced budget to meet the needs of providing a high-quality education for all students while maintaining a prudent reserve. Maintain and support a highly-qualified workforce to provide a rigorous academic program, top notch extra-curricular activities, up-to-date technology, and continuous improvement for all students. To develop sustainability plan to ensure we are providing the best possible education for all students as our district reaches its capacity to build new schools and we possibly move to a declining enrollment. (2016, Rocklin Unified)	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0
Safety of Students, Serve Parents and Students – no social experimentation in the classroom, Sound Financial Plan for the District –more dollars to the classroom and no wasteful spending (2008, Grossmont High)	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0
School Safety, Smaller Class Sizes, Parent involvement (2018, El Rancho)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0

Notes: Examples of three political platforms listed on the website of Voter's Edge and associated priorities we assign them to. The assignment process is done using ChatGPT 4.0 with the questions listed in Appendix C.

Table 3: Examples of Meeting Minutes and Inferred Keywords

	Priority										
Board Meeting Minutes (Year, District)	Academic Achievement	Agenda Bias	Dropout	Enrollment	Fiscal Conservatism	Equity	Facility	Parent/Community Engagement	Safety and Health	Support Teachers	Vocational Ed.
APPROVE EXTRA ASSIGNMENT SALARY SCHEDULE – Deputy Superintendent requested Board approval of revised Extra Assignment Salary Schedule, effective January 26, 2017. (2017, Rocklin Unified)	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
Motion Failed: Approve/Ratify Service Agreement between the El Rancho Unified School District and the Los Angeles County Sheriff Department for one (1) Deputy Sheriff from July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020; funded by District General funds. *(omitted)* Justification: Ratification of contract is necessary due to missing information necessary for the contractual agreement. *(omitted)* Failed with a motion by Carolyn Castillo and a second by Leanne Ibarra. (2019, El Rancho)	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Recommendation and Adoption of McGraw M21-22-124 Hill Impact Social Studies Curricula for Bear Valley Unified School District 6th – 12th Grade. (2022, Bear Valley Unified)	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Notes: Examples of three motions from board meeting minutes and associated keywords we assign them to. The assignment process is done using Claude 3.5.

Table 4: Elected Candidates' Identity and Ideology and School District Outcomes: Regression-Discontinuity Estimates

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
		Student Outcomes		Teacher Outcomes	
	log(Spending pp)	ECD Test	Share Suspended	Share Exit	log(Salary), novice teachers)
Fiscal Conservatism	-0.11**				
CIs	[-0.14, -0.10]				
bw	2.99				
N	1175				
Equity		0.13**			
CIs		[0.10, 0.17]			
bw		2.42			
N		197			
Safety and Health			0.02*		
CIs			[0.00, 0.04]		
bw			5.06		
N			323		
Teacher Support				-0.04**	0.08**
CIs				[-0.06, -0.04]	[0.07, 0.10]
bw				2.75	2.54
N				126	834
Female	-0.01*	0.03**	-0.00	0.03*	-0.02
CIs	[-0.02, -0.00]	[0.02, 0.05]	[-0.02, 0.01]	[0.01, 0.06]	[-0.03, 0.01]
bw	4.66	7.94	8.48	11.62	4.22
N	2887	1029	825	695	2516
Hispanic	0.01	-0.01	-0.01+	0.02+	0.03**
CIs	[-0.00, 0.02]	[-0.02, 0.00]	[-0.02, 0.00]	[-0.00, 0.06]	[0.02, 0.04]
bw	6.58	7.15	9.27	9.73	3.27
N	3217	977	824	632	2076
Teacher	0.04**	-0.01	0.03**	-0.02**	-0.01**
CIs	[0.03, 0.05]	[-0.03, 0.01]	[0.02, 0.05]	[-0.03, -0.01]	[-0.02, -0.01]
bw	2.49	9.82	5.10	6.28	3.56
N	1419	845	494	437	1869
Democrat	-0.00	0.01	0.00	-0.01	0.01+
CIs	[-0.01, 0.02]	[-0.01, 0.03]	[-0.01, 0.02]	[-0.04, 0.02]	[-0.01, 0.03]
bw	6.52	6.66	8.88	12.96	5.71
N	1658	473	456	410	1560
$\bar{y}_{t-1}$	8.97	-0.48	0.04	0.11	39.31

Notes: Each set of estimates corresponds to β in equation (1), obtained defining $D_{i,t}$ and m_{it} to capture the election of a candidate with identity or ideology as specified in the row header. The dependent variable is the $t+k$ vs $t-1$ difference ($k = 1, 2, 3, 4$) in the logarithm of spending per pupil (column 1), average English and Math ECD student test scores (column 2), the share of suspended students (column 3), the share of teachers exiting the district (column 4), and the logarithm of salary of novice teachers (column 5). The last row presents mean of the level of educational outcome in the year before the election (in levels). Bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals clustered at the election level are shown in brackets. The bandwidths are set at the MSE-optimal level for the post-election period following Calonico et al. (2020). + p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01.

Table 5: Elected Candidates' Identity and Ideology and School District Outcomes: Multivariate Regression-Discontinuity Estimates

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
		Student Outcomes		Teacher Outcomes	
	log(Spending pp)	ECD Test	Share Suspended	Share Exit	log(Salary), novice teachers)
Fiscal Conservatism	-0.10*				
	(0.03)				
Equity		0.12*			
		(0.04)			
Safety and Health			0.02		
			(0.01)		
Teacher Support				-0.01	0.08+
				(0.02)	(0.04)
Female	0.02	0.02	-0.01	0.03	-0.00
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.03)
Hispanic	0.00	0.01	-0.01	0.03	0.03
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Teacher	0.00	-0.01	0.03**	-0.02	0.01
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Democrat	0.01	-0.01	-0.00	0.01	0.01
	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.01)	(0.03)	(0.04)
N	17219	4005	3130	2440	14736
$\bar{y}_{t-1}$	8.97	-0.48	0.04	0.11	39.31
Joint test on null effect					
Identity variables			$\chi^2(20) = 17.30, p = 0.63$		
Ideology variables			$\chi^2(5) = 17.38, p = 0.00$		
Estimates from univariate RDs					
Priority	-0.11**	0.13**	0.02*	-0.04**	0.08**
CIs	[-0.14, -0.10]	[0.10, 0.17]	[0.00, 0.04]	[-0.06, -0.04]	[0.07, 0.10]

Notes: Each column shows estimates of the parameters βs in equation (2), obtained considered all the characteristics shown simultaneously. The dependent variable is the $t+k$ vs $t-1$ difference ($k = 1, 2, 3, 4$) in the logarithm of spending per pupil (column 1), average English and Math ECD student test scores (column 2), the share of suspended students (column 3), the share of teachers exiting the district (column 4), and the logarithm of salary of novice teachers (column 5). The row with heading $\bar{y}_{t-1}$ presents mean of the level of educational outcome in the year before the election. In columns 1 and 5, summary statistics are presented for the levels of spending in thousand dollars, rather than the logarithmic values. Results from joint test on null effect of all identity variables across all columns are presented. The same for ideology variables is presented, too. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the election level are shown in brackets. The bandwidths are set at the MSE-optimal level for the post-election period following Calonico et al. (2020). + p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01.

Table 6: Elected Candidates' Identity and Ideology and Passed Board Motions: Regression-Discontinuity Estimates

	(1) Budget	(2) Equity	(3) Safety Health	(4) Teacher Support	(5) Curriculum	(6) Engagement
Fiscal Conservatism	-0.39**					
CIs	[-0.61, -0.22]					
bw	7.81					
N	691					
Equity		0.09				
CIs		[-0.03, 0.18]				
bw		8.50				
N		749				
Safety and Health			0.10+			
CIs			[0.00, 0.19]			
bw			8.38			
N			695			
Teacher Support				0.03		
CIs				[-0.21, 0.26]		
bw				10.90		
N				589		
Agenda Bias					-0.43**	
CIs					[-0.85, -0.14]	
bw					9.87	
N					99	
Engagement						-0.00
CIs						[-0.04, 0.04]
bw						8.34
N						736
Female	-0.01	-0.10*	0.00	0.14*	0.01	0.02
CIs	[-0.23, 0.17]	[-0.20, -0.02]	[-0.13, 0.11]	[0.02, 0.29]	[-0.04, 0.05]	[-0.02, 0.05]
bw	8.07	9.76	9.22	11.20	9.49	8.43
N	1054	1153	1107	1233	1127	1063
Hispanic	-0.30**	-0.10*	-0.10*	-0.18**	-0.03	-0.04+
CIs	[-0.51, -0.13]	[-0.18, -0.00]	[-0.17, -0.02]	[-0.31, -0.06]	[-0.08, 0.03]	[-0.08, 0.00]
bw	8.82	9.51	10.80	10.70	9.92	8.06
N	1110	1139	1210	1209	1167	1068
Teacher	0.11	0.07	0.11*	0.06	0.02	0.05*
CIs	[-0.09, 0.37]	[-0.03, 0.17]	[0.03, 0.23]	[-0.08, 0.22]	[-0.05, 0.09]	[0.00, 0.11]
bw	11.20	9.17	9.06	10.40	9.61	9.22
N	911	825	824	877	851	829
Democrat	0.20*	0.03	0.06	0.26**	0.04*	0.04+
CIs	[0.03, 0.47]	[-0.05, 0.13]	[-0.03, 0.17]	[0.10, 0.50]	[0.00, 0.10]	[-0.00, 0.09]
bw	6.48	9.35	11.20	6.02	7.27	6.96
N	511	605	680	500	541	533
$\bar{y}_{t-1}$	2.16	0.65	0.68	1.40	0.23	0.25

Notes: Each set of estimates corresponds to β in equation (1), obtained defining defining $D_{i,t}$ and m_{it} to capture the election of a candidate with identity or ideology as specified in the row header. The dependent variable is the number of motions passed on each topic in the column header, measured one to four years after an election. The last row presents mean of the number of motions on each topic in the year before the election. Bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals clustered at the election level are shown in brackets. The bandwidths are set at the MSE-optimal level for the post-election period following Calonico et al. (2020). + p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01.

Table 7: Elected Candidates' Identity and Passed Board Motions, by Number of Motions at Baseline: Regression-Discontinuity Estimates

	(1)	(2)	(3)
		N of Motions Passed on the Topic	
	All	<Median	>=Median
Panel A: Effect on Number of Budget-related Motions Passed			
Fiscal Conservatism	-0.39**	-0.13	-0.29+
CIs	[-0.61, -0.85]	[-0.51, -0.88]	[-0.74, -1.89]
bw	7.82	9.46	9.95
N	691	174	214
$\bar{y}_{t-1}$	2.06	1.40	2.66
Panel B: Effect on Number of Equity-related Motions Passed			
Equity	0.09+	0.13+	0.26
CIs	[-0.03, 0.13]	[-0.01, 0.19]	[-0.18, 0.11]
bw	8.51	8.44	8.54
N	749	224	188
$\bar{y}_{t-1}$	0.67	0.38	1.03
Panel C: Effect on Number of Safety/Health-related Motions Passed			
Safety and Health	0.10+	0.36**	-0.20*
CIs	[0.00, 0.17]	[0.16, 0.38]	[-0.38, 0.00]
bw	8.39	13.41	10.51
N	695	233	220
$\bar{y}_{t-1}$	0.70	0.39	0.98
Panel D: Effect on Number of Teacher-related Motions Passed			
Teacher Support	0.03	-0.25+	0.72**
CIs	[-0.21, 0.00]	[-0.59, 0.00]	[0.36, 1.00]
bw	10.91	13.51	11.61
N	589	167	151
$\bar{y}_{t-1}$	1.39	0.85	1.91
Panel E: Effect on Number of Curriculum-related Motions Passed			
Agenda Bias	-0.43**	-0.23	-0.67*
CIs	[-0.85, 0.00]	[-0.88, 0.00]	[-1.89, 0.00]
bw	9.88	6.69	10.01
N	99	18	32
$\bar{y}_{t-1}$	0.25	0.12	0.38
Panel F: Effect on Number of Community Involvement Motions Passed			
Community Involvement	-0.00	-0.04**	0.09*
CIs	[-0.05, 0.00]	[-0.09, 0.00]	[0.02, 0.12]
bw	8.35	5.73	6.62
N	736	116	188
$\bar{y}_{t-1}$	0.28	0.12	0.38

Notes: Each set of estimates corresponds to β in equation (1), obtained defining defining $D_{i,t}$ and m_{it} to capture the election of a candidate with the priority specified in the row header. The dependent variable is the number of motions passed by the board on each topic between $t+1$ and $t+4$. Column 1 shows estimates on the full sample; column 2 shows estimates on the sample of boards with a baseline (the year before the election) number of passed priority-specific motions below the median in the calendar year; and column 3 shows estimates on the sample of boards with a number of passed priority-specific motions above the median. Rows with heading $\bar{y}_{t-1}$ present mean of the level of educational outcome in the year before the election. Bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals clustered at the election level are shown in brackets. Bandwidths set at the MSE-optimal level for the post-election period following Calonico et al. (2020). + p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01.

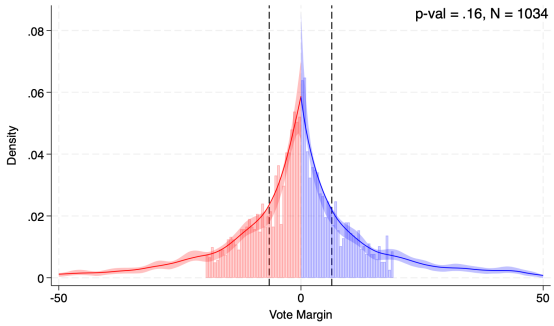
Table 8: Elected Candidates' Identity and District Outcome, by Baseline Board Composition: Regression-Discontinuity Estimates

	All	Share members w/characteristic in the	
		minority	majority
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Panel A: Dependent variable is log(Spending/pupil)			
Fiscal Conservatism	-0.11**	-0.18**	-0.04**
CIs	[-0.14, -0.10]	[-0.21, -0.17]	[-0.07, -0.02]
bw	2.98	2.17	3.53
N	1175	615	435
$\bar{y}_{t-1}$	2.17	2.16	2.25
Panel B: Dependent variable is ECD student test scores			
Equity	0.13**	0.15**	0.04**
CIs	[0.10, 0.17]	[0.12, 0.19]	[0.04, 0.10]
bw	2.42	2.53	3.55
N	197	162	46
$\bar{y}_{t-1}$	-0.42	-0.45	-0.33
Panel C: Dependent variable is share students suspended			
Safety and Health	0.02*	0.02*	0.05
CIs	[0.00, 0.04]	[0.00, 0.05]	[-0.05, 0.15]
bw	5.06	4.74	4.95
N	323	268	38
$\bar{y}_{t-1}$	0.04	0.04	0.04
Panel D: Dependent variable is log(Teachers' starting salary)			
Teacher Support	0.08**	0.09**	-0.03
CIs	[0.07, 0.10]	[0.08, 0.11]	[-0.10, 0.00]
bw	2.54	2.19	3.66
N	834	679	90
$\bar{y}_{t-1}$	10.50	10.50	10.60
Panel E: Dependent variable is ECD student test scores			
Female	0.04**	0.09**	0.03**
CIs	[0.02, 0.05]	[0.07, 0.13]	[0.01, 0.05]
bw	7.94	3.48	9.00
N	1029	294	553
$\bar{y}_{t-1}$	-0.48	-0.50	-0.47
Panel F: Dependent variable is share students suspended			
Hispanic	-0.01*	-0.01**	-0.00
CIs	[-0.02, 0.00]	[-0.03, -0.00]	[-0.03, 0.03]
bw	9.27	8.80	8.52
N	824	628	168
$\bar{y}_{t-1}$	0.04	0.04	0.04

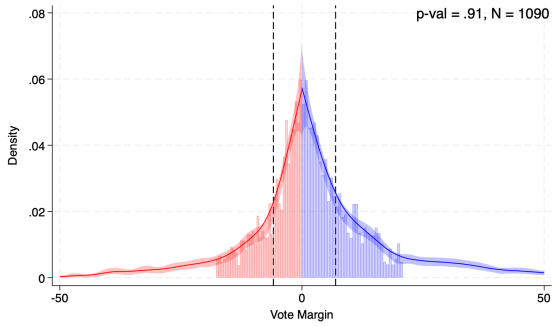
Note: Each set of estimates corresponds to β in equation (1), obtained defining defining $D_{i,t}$ and m_{it} to capture the election of a candidate with the priority or identity specified in the row header. The dependent variable are various district outcomes as specified in the panel header, measured as differences between $t-1$, and from $t+1$ to $t+4$. Column 1 shows estimates on the full sample. Column 2/3 restricts to boards where the number of members sharing the specified priority or identity is in the minority/majority, both relative to the total number of board members with non-missing values for that characteristic. Rows with heading $\bar{y}_{t-1}$ present mean of the level of educational outcome in the year before the election. Bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals clustered at the election level are shown in brackets. The bandwidths are set at the MSE-optimal level for the post-election period following Calonico et al. (2020). + p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01.

A Additional Figures and Tables

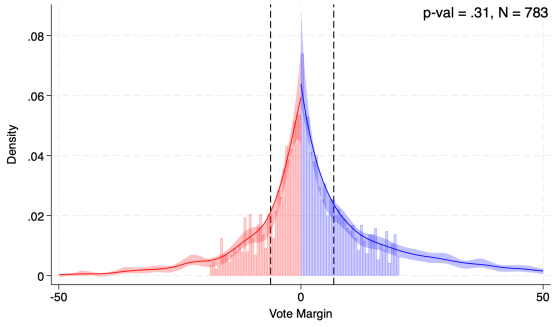
Figure A1: Density of Vote Margin: Identity Groups



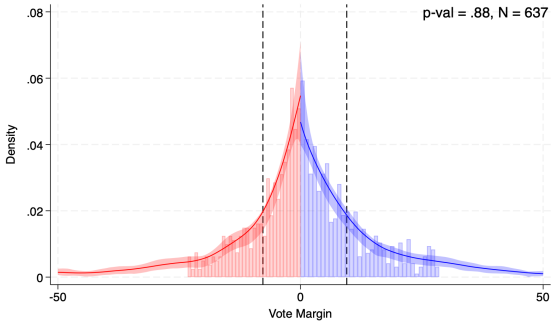
(a) Hispanic vs NonHispanic



(b) Female vs Male



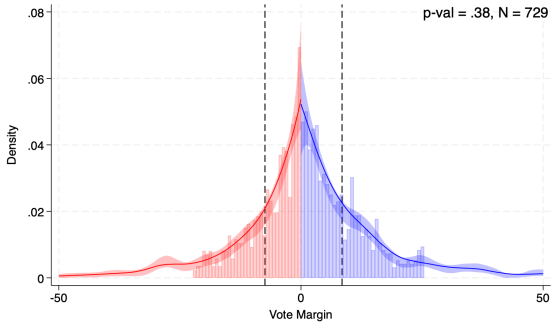
(c) Teacher vs NonTeacher



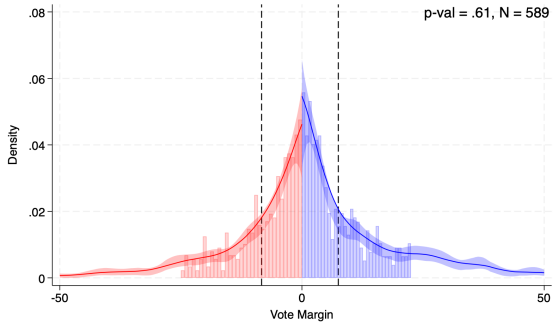
(d) Democrat vs Republican

Notes: Distributions of vote margins around the cutoff that determines whether a candidate from a given identity group wins. The x-axis measures the vote margin, defined as the difference between the vote share of the most popular losing candidate and the least popular winning candidate. A positive vote margin indicates that the least popular winner belongs to the focal identity group and the most popular loser does not. Conversely, a negative vote margin indicates that the most popular loser belongs to the focal identity group and the least popular winner does not. The dotted lines illustrate the optimal bandwidth used in the density test. Confidence intervals correspond to McCrary tests for the smoothness of the density function around the cutoff; p-values and numbers of observations for this test are shown in the figure.

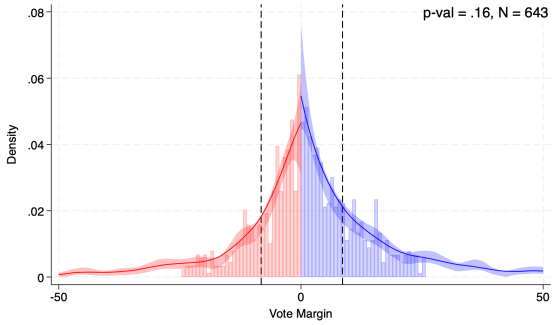
Figure A2: Density of Vote Margin: Ideology for Priorities



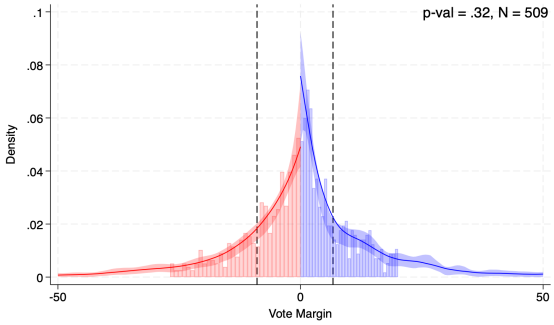
(a) Fiscal Conservatism



(b) Equity



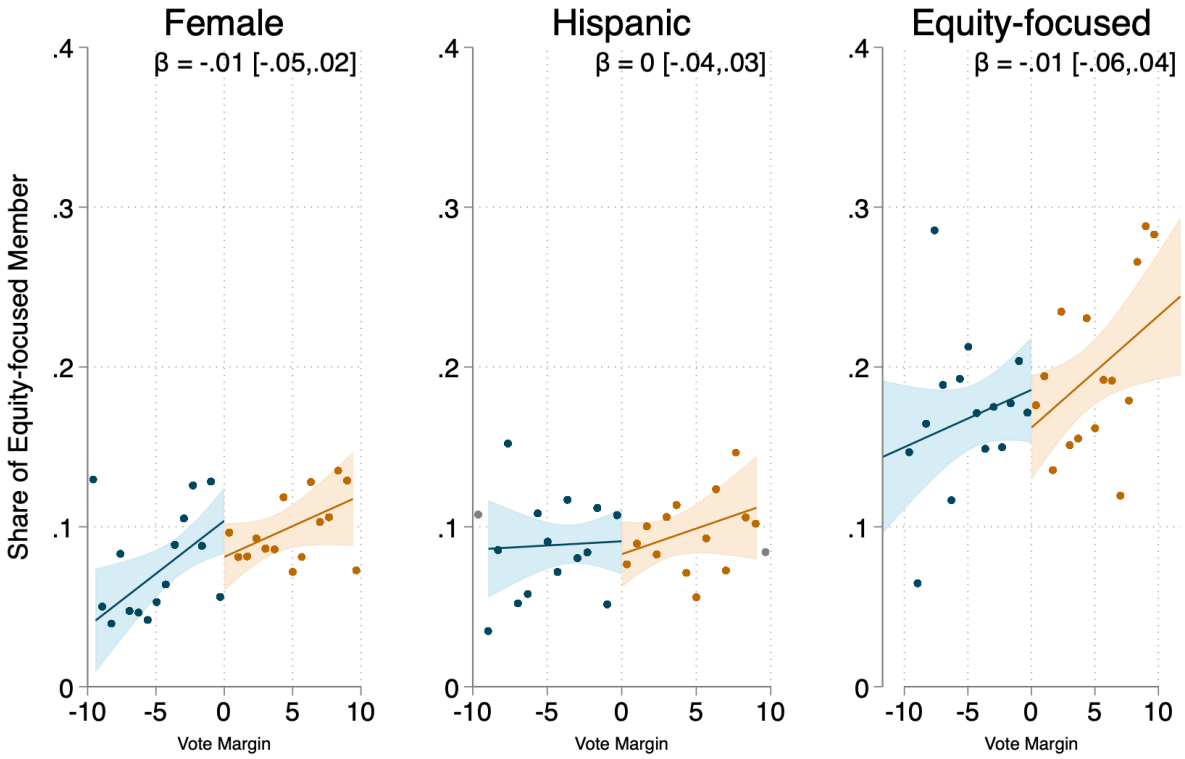
(c) Safety and Health



(d) Teacher Support

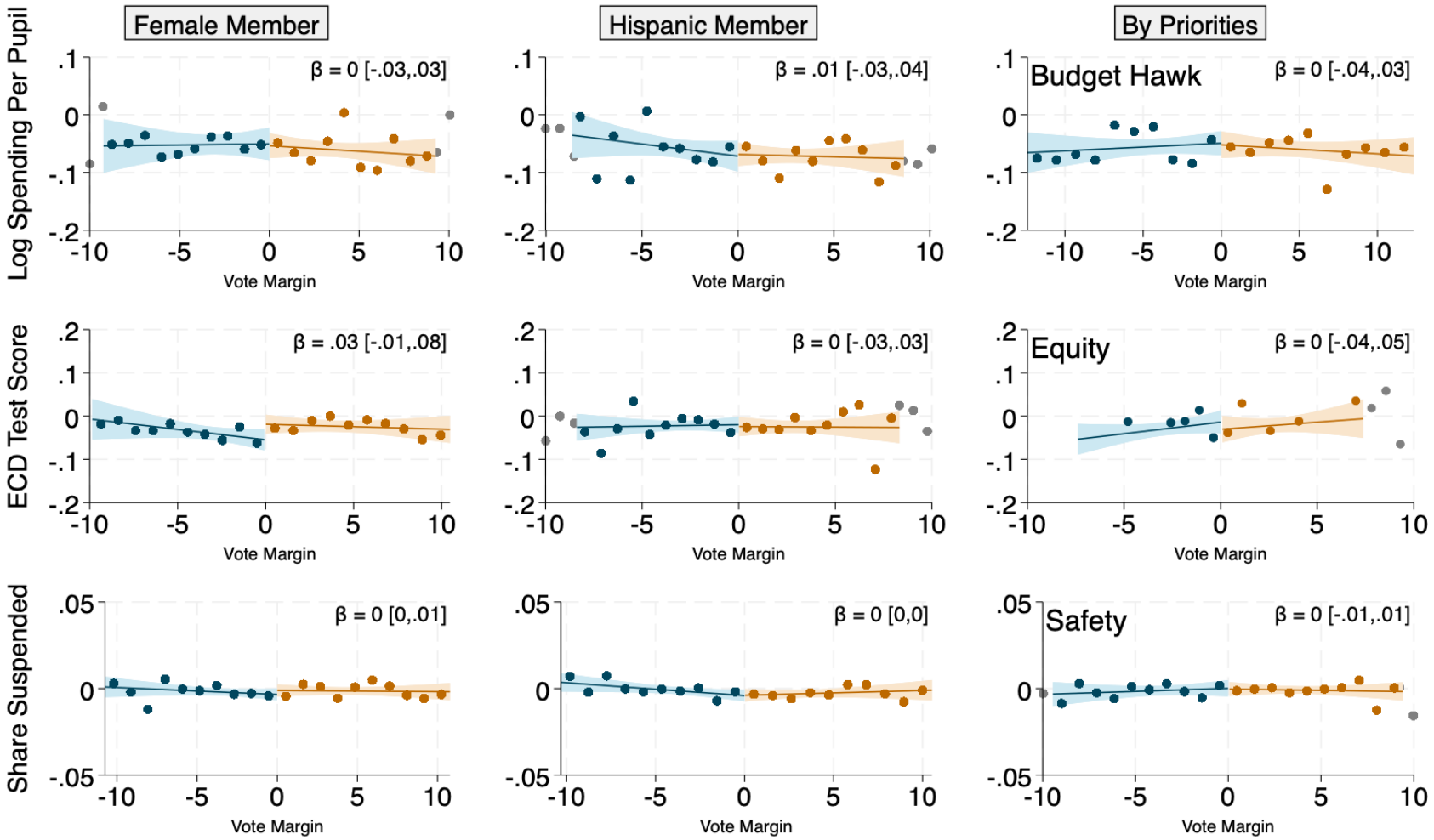
Notes: Distributions of vote margins around the cutoff that determines whether a candidate from a with a given ideology (or priority) wins. The x-axis measures the vote margin, defined as the difference between the vote share of the most popular losing candidate and the least popular winning candidate. A positive vote margin indicates that the least popular winner prioritizes the focal issue and the most popular loser does not. Conversely, a negative vote margin indicates that the most popular loser prioritizes the focal issue and the least popular winner does not. The dotted lines illustrate the optimal bandwidth used in the density test. Confidence intervals correspond to McCrary tests for the smoothness of the density function around the cutoff; p-values and numbers of observations for this test are shown in the figure.

Figure A3: Regression Discontinuity: Balance in Outcome Variables in the Year Preceding An Election



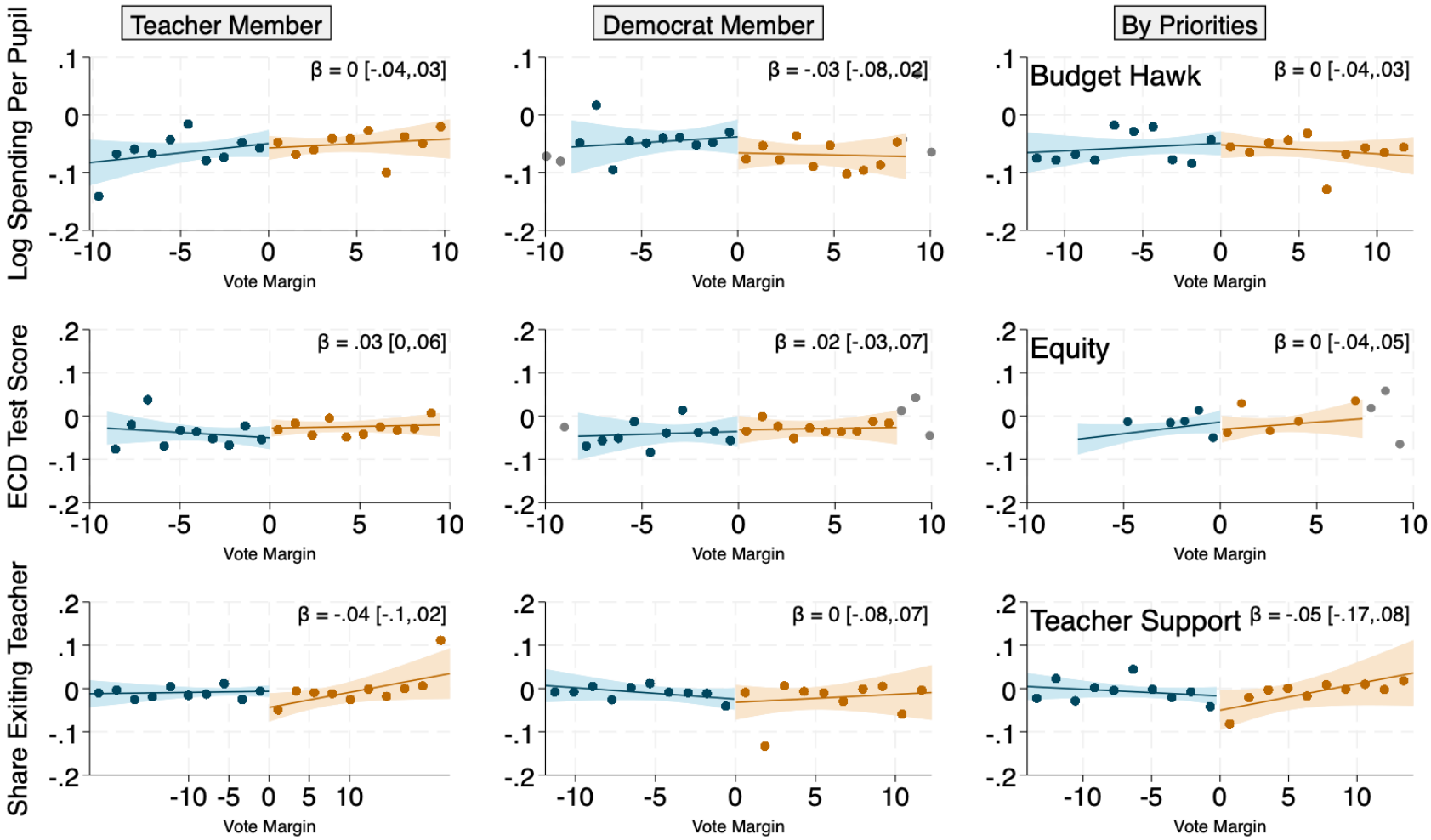
Notes: Regression-discontinuity plots of equation (1), obtained using, as the dependent variable, changes in the outcome variable between $t-2$ and $t-1$ (where t is the election year). The treatment variable is reported in the column headers; the outcome variable is reported on each y-axis. Bias-corrected robust 95% confidence intervals are reported. A triangular kernel weight is used, with a linear control for vote margin. Calendar year fixed effects are included. Dependent variables are changes in the outcome from the year before the election.

Figure A4: Regression Discontinuity: Balance in Outcome Variables in the Year Preceding An Election



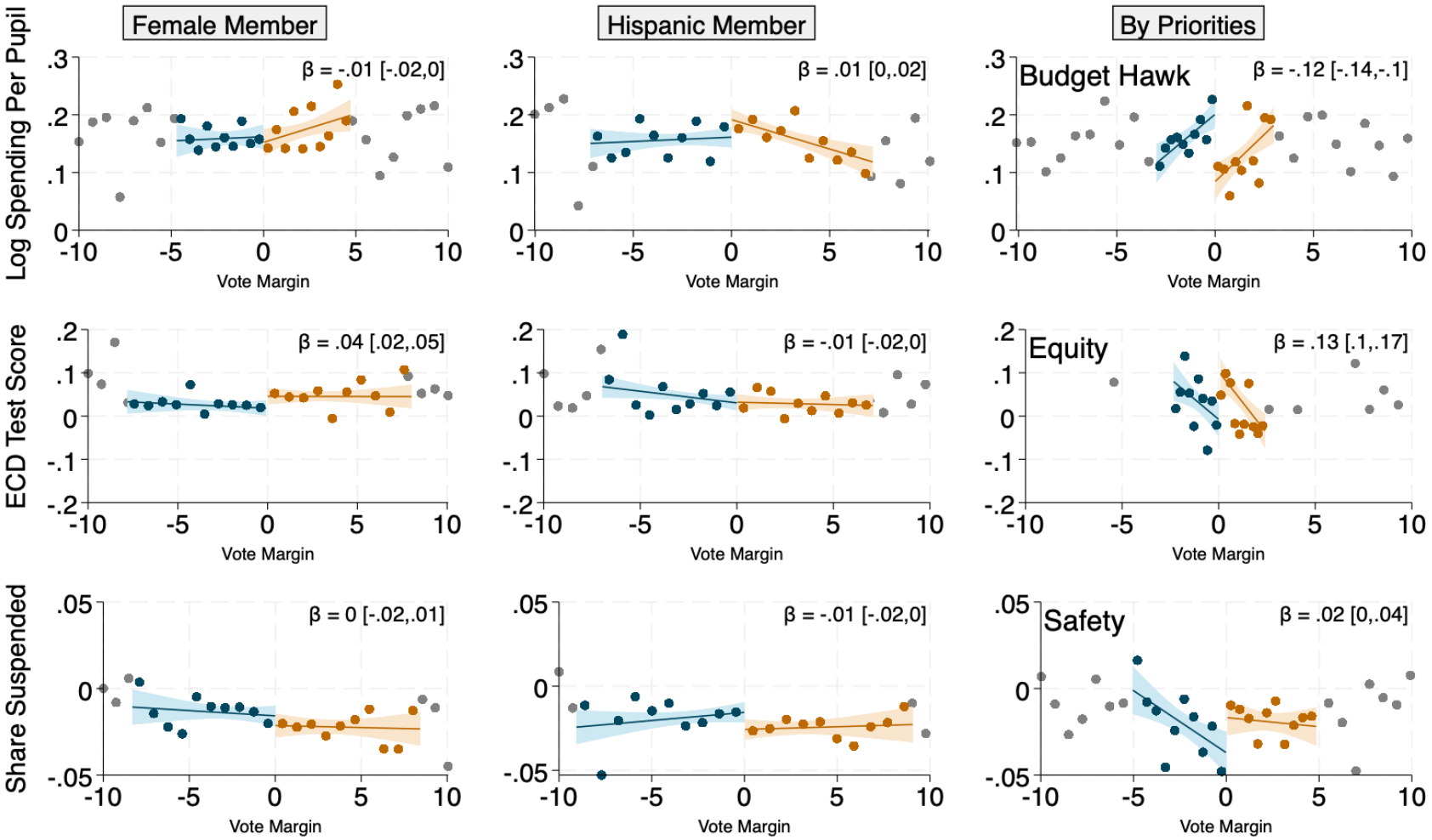
Notes: Regression-discontinuity plots of equation (1), obtained using, as the dependent variable, changes in the outcome variable between $t-2$ and $t-1$ (where t is the election year). The treatment variable is reported in the column headers; the outcome variable is reported on each y-axis. Bias-corrected robust 95% confidence intervals are reported. A triangular kernel weight is used, with a linear control for vote margin. Calendar year fixed effects are included. Dependent variables are changes in the outcome from the year before the election.

Figure A5: Regression Discontinuity: Balance in Outcome Variables in the Year Preceding An Election



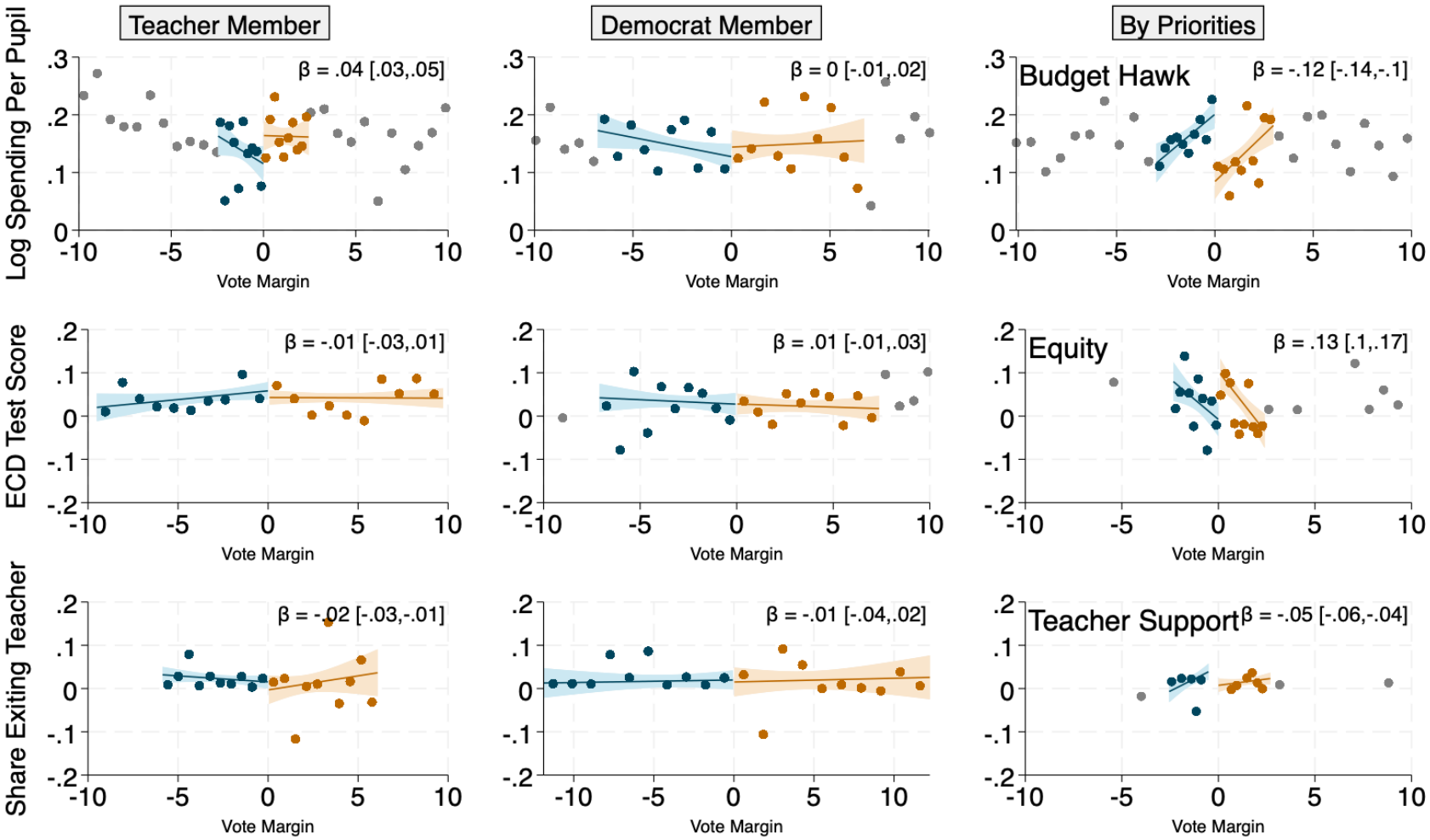
Notes: Regression-discontinuity plots of equation (1), obtained using, as the dependent variable, changes in the outcome variable between $t-2$ and $t-1$ (where t is the election year). The treatment variable is reported in the column headers; the outcome variable is reported on each y-axis. Bias-corrected robust 95% confidence intervals are reported. A triangular kernel weight is used, with a linear control for vote margin. Calendar year fixed effects are included. Dependent variables are changes in the outcome from the year before the election.

Figure A6: Effects of School Board Members by Gender, Ethnicity, and Priorities



Notes: Bias-corrected robust 95% confidence intervals are reported. Standard errors are clustered at the election level. A triangular kernel weight is used, with a linear control for vote margin. The bandwidths are set at the MSE-optimal level for the post-election period following Calonico et al. (2020). Calendar year fixed effects are included. Dependent variables are changes in the outcome from the year before the election. Sample of districts and year observations from the year to the four years after the election (five observations for each election). Test score of economically advantaged (ECD) students is the average of their English and Math score.

Figure A7: Effects of School Board Members by Occupation and Political Affiliation



Notes: Bias-corrected robust 95% confidence intervals are reported. Standard errors are clustered at the election level. A triangular kernel weight is used, with a linear control for vote margin. The bandwidths are set at the MSE-optimal level for the post-election period following Calonico et al. (2020). Calendar year fixed effects are included. Dependent variables are changes in the outcome from the year before the election. Sample of districts and year observations from the year to the four years after the election (five observations for each election). Test score of economically advantaged (ECD) students is the average of their English and Math score.

Table A1: Priorities and Outcomes

Priority	Outcomes
Academic achievement	Test scores (all students, ECD, minority); log(Spending/pupil)
Fiscal conservatism	log(Spending/pupil)
Equity	Test scores for ECD students, minority students
Teacher support	Teacher exit rates, salaries of novice teachers; Share tenured teacher, average wage
Health and safety	Share students suspended
Infrastructure and facilities	Capital spending/pupil
Enrollment	log(Enrollment)
Dropout	log(Enrollment)
CTE	Revenues for CTE programs/pupil
Agenda bias	N/A
Community involvement	N/A

Notes: List of priorities considered in the analysis and relative outcomes.

Table A2: Candidate Priorities and Demographic, Occupational, and Political Characteristics: All Candidates

		Race			Gender		Occupation		Political Affiliation	
	All	Hispanic	Asian	White	Female	Male	Teacher	NonTeacher	Democrat	Republican
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
N of Candidates	22,725	6,929	3,167	16,890	8,584	11,034	4,013	18,712	8,444	5,825
Have Platform	0.38	0.33	0.47	0.40	0.40	0.36	0.56	0.34	0.44	0.31
Share of Each Priority among Candidates with Valid Platform										
Academic Achievement	0.81	0.82	0.82	0.81	0.83	0.78	0.82	0.81	0.82	0.79
Agenda Bias	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.08
Fiscal Conservatism	0.42	0.37	0.43	0.44	0.43	0.43	0.40	0.43	0.41	0.48
Equity	0.35	0.37	0.37	0.34	0.41	0.27	0.35	0.34	0.42	0.26
Facility	0.26	0.26	0.25	0.26	0.25	0.27	0.24	0.27	0.25	0.28
Parent Engagement	0.43	0.45	0.45	0.42	0.48	0.38	0.43	0.43	0.45	0.40
Safety and Health	0.34	0.37	0.36	0.32	0.36	0.30	0.32	0.34	0.35	0.34
Support Teachers	0.24	0.23	0.24	0.24	0.25	0.23	0.26	0.23	0.25	0.20
Dropout	0.11	0.13	0.10	0.10	0.11	0.09	0.12	0.10	0.13	0.08
Enrollment	0.07	0.07	0.08	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07
CTE	0.16	0.17	0.14	0.16	0.16	0.16	0.18	0.15	0.17	0.14

Notes: Number of candidates, share of candidates with valid platform, and share of candidates with platform with each priority. Column 1 shows statistics for the full sample. Columns 2-4 focus on race categories (Hispanic, Asian, White); columns 5-6 focus on gender (Female, Male); columns 7-8 focus on occupation (Teacher, NonTeacher); and columns 9-10 focus on political affiliation (Democrat, Republican).

Table A3: Candidate Priorities and Demographic, Occupational, and Political Characteristics: Candidates in Close Elections (¡ 5 pp)

		Race			Gender		Occupation		Political Affiliation	
	All	Hispanic	Asian	White	Female	Male	Teacher	NonTeacher	Democrat	Republican
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
N of Candidates	5,038	1,514	689	3,767	1,917	2,445	903	4,135	1,881	1,282
Have Platform	0.39	0.34	0.50	0.42	0.40	0.37	0.57	0.35	0.46	0.33
Share of Each Priority among Candidates with Valid Platform										
Academic Achievement	0.81	0.83	0.81	0.81	0.82	0.80	0.82	0.81	0.80	0.79
Agenda Bias	0.04	0.03	0.03	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.02	0.08
Fiscal Conservatism	0.43	0.38	0.44	0.45	0.42	0.46	0.41	0.44	0.41	0.51
Equity	0.33	0.31	0.34	0.33	0.41	0.24	0.34	0.33	0.40	0.25
Facility	0.27	0.26	0.24	0.28	0.24	0.30	0.24	0.28	0.26	0.28
Parent Engagement	0.42	0.46	0.46	0.41	0.49	0.35	0.42	0.43	0.45	0.43
Safety and Health	0.33	0.35	0.33	0.31	0.33	0.32	0.31	0.34	0.34	0.35
Support Teachers	0.24	0.24	0.24	0.25	0.28	0.22	0.25	0.24	0.28	0.18
Dropout	0.10	0.12	0.08	0.10	0.11	0.09	0.12	0.10	0.13	0.07
Enrollment	0.07	0.07	0.08	0.07	0.08	0.07	0.06	0.07	0.07	0.06
CTE	0.16	0.16	0.16	0.17	0.16	0.16	0.19	0.16	0.16	0.16

Notes: Number of candidates, share of candidates with valid platform, and share of candidates with platform with each priority. Column 1 shows statistics for candidates in close elections. Columns 2-4 focus on race categories (Hispanic, Asian, White); columns 5-6 focus on gender (Female, Male); columns 7-8 focus on occupation (Teacher, NonTeacher); and columns 9-10 focus on political affiliation (Democrat, Republican).

Table A4: Elected Candidates' Identities, Ideologies, and School Board Composition: Regression-Discontinuity Estimates

	(1) Female	(2) Hispanic	(3) Teacher	(4) Democrat	(5) Fiscal Conservatism	(6) Equity	(7) Safety	(8) Teacher Support
β	0.12**	0.11**	0.12**	0.12**	0.14**	0.08**	0.09**	0.10**
CIs	[0.09, 0.14]	[0.09, 0.14]	[0.09, 0.14]	[0.09, 0.15]	[0.11, 0.17]	[0.05, 0.11]	[0.06, 0.11]	[0.08, 0.12]
bw	6.49	7.24	7.66	8.75	8.49	8.83	7.02	8.60
N	4895	4900	3775	2865	3350	2765	2565	2385
$\bar{y}_{t-1}$	0.34	0.16	0.20	0.30	0.25	0.22	0.21	0.15

Notes: Estimates and confidence intervals of the parameter β in equation (1), estimated considering each characteristic in the column labels as the explanatory variable and setting a bandwidth at the MSE-optimal level for the post-election period following Calonico et al. (2020). A triangular kernel weight is used, with a linear control for vote margin. The dependent variables are shown in the column labels. All specifications control for election year fixed effects. Bias-corrected confidence intervals are reported. + p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01.

Table A5: Elected Candidates' Identities and School Board Ideological Composition: Regression-Discontinuity Estimates

Share of members prioritizing:	(1) Fiscal Conservatism	(2) Equity	(3) Safety/Health	(4) Teacher Support
Female	-0.02*	-0.01+	-0.00	0.01
CIs	[-0.05, -0.01]	[-0.03, 0.00]	[-0.02, 0.01]	[-0.01, 0.02]
bw	8.51	8.52	9.34	8.59
N	5590	5590	5850	5625
Hispanic	-0.02**	0.00	-0.01+	-0.01**
CIs	[-0.04, -0.01]	[-0.01, 0.02]	[-0.03, 0.00]	[-0.03, -0.00]
bw	9.83	12.25	8.19	11.56
N	5635	6270	5160	6140
Teacher	0.01	0.06**	0.02+	0.00
CIs	[-0.02, 0.03]	[0.04, 0.09]	[0.00, 0.04]	[-0.02, 0.02]
bw	7.73	6.03	8.01	7.98
N	3795	3335	3855	3850
Democrat	0.00	0.01	0.02*	0.03**
CIs	[-0.02, 0.03]	[-0.01, 0.03]	[0.00, 0.05]	[0.02, 0.05]
bw	10.37	9.47	7.47	12.19
N	3140	3010	2620	3375

Notes: Estimates and confidence intervals of the parameter β in equation (1), estimated considering each identity dimension as the explanatory variable and setting a bandwidth at the MSE-optimal level for the post-election period following Calonico et al. (2020). A triangular kernel weight is used, with a linear control for vote margin. The dependent variables are shares of board members who prioritize fiscal conservatism (column 1), equity (column 2), safety/health (column 3), and teacher support (column 4). Each panel and column shows estimates from a separate regression. All specifications control for election year fixed effects. Bias-corrected confidence intervals are reported. See Table A4 for the mean share of members of each ideology. + $p<0.1$, * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$.

Table A6: Elected Candidates' Ideology and School District Outcomes: Student Outcome-Focused Ideologies

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
		Test Scores		log	Share Suspended	
	All	ECD	Hispanic	Enrollment	All	Hispanic
Academic Achievement	-0.02**	-0.04**	-0.03**	0.00*	-0.01	-0.01
CIs	[-0.04, -0.00]	[-0.06, -0.02]	[-0.05, -0.01]	[0.00, 0.01]	[-0.03, 0.01]	[-0.04, 0.00]
Bandwidth	7.12	6.50	6.86	4.12	6.96	6.45
N	863	770	714	2929	613	589
Equity	0.06**	0.13**	0.07**	0.00	-0.01	-0.03**
CIs	[0.05, 0.09]	[0.10, 0.17]	[0.05, 0.09]	[-0.00, 0.01]	[-0.03, 0.00]	[-0.06, -0.01]
Bandwidth	4.08	2.42	4.89	3.59	5.97	4.21
N	353	197	344	1460	334	266
Safety and Health	0.00	0.01	0.00	-0.00	0.02*	0.02*
CIs	[-0.02, 0.02]	[-0.02, 0.04]	[-0.02, 0.03]	[-0.01, 0.00]	[0.00, 0.04]	[0.00, 0.05]
Bandwidth	7.45	5.16	7.50	2.85	5.14	5.70
N	524	415	465	1191	323	346
Dropout	0.00	0.04**	0.02	0.05**	-0.02	-0.02
CIs	[-0.01, 0.03]	[0.03, 0.07]	[-0.01, 0.07]	[0.04, 0.06]	[-0.05, 0.01]	[-0.05, 0.01]
Bandwidth	4.02	3.62	4.29	2.40	6.64	7.36
N	156	138	127	456	154	166
Enrollment	0.01	-0.03+	0.01	0.04**	-0.01	-0.01
CIs	[-0.04, 0.04]	[-0.08, 0.01]	[-0.03, 0.06]	[0.03, 0.04]	[-0.03, 0.00]	[-0.04, 0.01]
Bandwidth	4.92	4.99	5.54	0.79	5.36	6.38
N	109	97	101	171	81	84
$\bar{y}_{t-1}$	-0.18	-0.48	-0.43	11.80	0.04	0.04

Notes: Each set of estimates corresponds to β in equation (1), obtained defining $D_{i,t}$ and m_{it} to capture the election of a candidate with identity or ideology as specified in the row header. The dependent variable is the $t+k$ vs $t-1$ difference ($k = 1, 2, 3, 4$) in the average English and Math test scores of all students (column 1), that of ECD students (column 2), that of Hispanic students (column 3), the logarithm of enrollment (column 4), and the share of students among all students (column 5) and that of Hispanic students (column 6). The last row presents mean of the level of educational outcome in the year before the election. In column 4, summary statistics are presented for the levels of spending in thousands, rather than the logarithmic values. Bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals clustered at the election level are shown in brackets. The bandwidths are set at the MSE-optimal level for the post-election period following Calonico et al. (2020). + p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01.

Table A7: Elected Candidates' Ideology and School District Outcomes: Finance-Focused Ideologies

	(1) log(Spending/pupil)	(2) CTE Revenue/pupil ($1,000)	(3) Capital spending/pupil ($1,000)
Fiscal Conservatism	-0.11**	-0.63**	-1.25**
CIs	[-0.14, -0.10]	[-0.84, -0.53]	[-1.39, -1.19]
Bandwidth	3.02	3.12	1.98
N	1190	1222	856
Facility Improvements	-0.00	-0.63**	0.48**
CIs	[-0.01, 0.01]	[-0.88, -0.51]	[0.40, 0.63]
Bandwidth	4.64	3.31	2.50
N	1262	1038	849
CTE and Vocational Ed.	0.00	0.34+	-0.52**
CIs	[-0.01, 0.01]	[-0.01, 0.95]	[-0.66, -0.43]
Bandwidth	4.57	6.39	3.77
N	641	742	606
$\bar{y}_{t-1}$	8.97	6.10	0.99

Notes: Each set of estimates corresponds to β in equation (1), obtained defining $D_{i,t}$ and m_{it} to capture the election of a candidate with identity or ideology as specified in the row header. The dependent variable is the $t+k$ vs $t-1$ difference ($k = 1, 2, 3, 4$) in the logarithm of total spending per pupil (column 1), the revenue for vocational outcome per pupil from federal and state combined (column 2), and the capital spending per pupil (column 3). The last row presents mean of the level of educational outcome in the year before the election. In column 1, summary statistics are presented for the levels of spending in thousands, rather than the logarithmic values. Bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals clustered at the election level are shown in brackets. The bandwidths are set at the MSE-optimal level for the post-election period following Calonico et al. (2020). + p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01.

Table A8: Teacher Supporting Candidates' Effect on Other Teacher Outcomes

	(1) Share Tenured	(2) log(Average Wage)	(3) log(BA 60 Salary)
Teacher Support	0.04**	0.02**	0.00
CIs	[0.02, 0.08]	[0.02, 0.03]	[-0.01, 0.03]
Bandwidth	4.96	4.20	5.42
N	252	1198	1491
$\bar{y}_{t-1}$	0.73	89.37	57.43

Notes: Each set of estimates corresponds to β in equation (1), obtained defining $D_{i,t}$ and m_{it} to capture the election of a candidate who prioritizes teacher support. The dependent variable is the $t+k$ vs $t-1$ difference ($k = 1, 2, 3, 4$) in the share of tenured teacher (column 1), the average wage of teachers, which is total wage bill divided by the total FTE of teachers (column 2), and the logarithm of BA 60 salary fixing composition at the year before the election, capturing only the change in the wage schedule in J-90. The last row presents mean and standard deviations of the level of educational outcome in the year before the election. In columns 2 and 3, summary statistics are presented for the levels of spending in thousand dollars, rather than the logarithmic values. Bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals clustered at the election level are shown in brackets. The bandwidths are set at the MSE-optimal level for the post-election period following Calonico et al. (2020). + p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01.

Table A9: Elected Candidates' Identity and Ideology and Other School District Outcomes: Multivariate Regression-Discontinuity Estimates

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Hispanic Student Outcomes		Teacher Outcomes	
	Test Scores	Share Suspended	Share Tenured	log(Avg. Wage)
Equity	0.05+	-0.03*		
	(0.03)	(0.01)		
Teacher Support			0.04	0.01
			(0.03)	(0.02)
Hispanic	-0.01	-0.01	0.00	-0.00
	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Female	-0.01	-0.01	0.04	-0.01
	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.03)	(0.02)
Teacher	-0.03	0.03**	0.01	-0.00
	(0.03)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Democrat	-0.01	-0.00	0.02	-0.05
	(0.03)	(0.01)	(0.06)	(0.06)
N	3728	3124	3510	15957
$\bar{y}_{t-1}$	-0.43	0.04	0.73	89.37

Notes: Each column shows estimates of the parameters βs in equation (2), obtained considered all the characteristics shown simultaneously. The dependent variable is the $t+k$ vs $t-1$ difference ($k = 1, 2, 3, 4$) in the average English and Math Hispanic student test scores (column 1), the share of suspended students among Hispanic students (column 2), the share of tenured teachers (column 3), and the logarithm of average salary (column 4). The last row presents mean of the level of educational outcome in the year before the election. In column 4, summary statistics are presented for the levels of spending in thousand dollars, rather than the logarithmic values. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the election level are shown in brackets. The bandwidths are set at the MSE-optimal level for the post-election period following Calonico et al. (2020). + p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01.

Table A10: Elected Candidates' Identity and Ideology and Proposed Board Motions: Regression-Discontinuity Estimates

	(1) Budget	(2) Equity	(3) Safety Health	(4) Teacher Support	(5) Curriculum	(6) Engagement
Fiscal Conservatism	-0.39**					
CIs	[-0.61, -0.21]					
bw	7.97					
N	694					
Equity		0.09+				
CIs		[-0.03, 0.19]				
bw		8.61				
N		749				
Safety and Health			0.10*			
CIs			[0.00, 0.20]			
bw			8.28			
N			698			
Teacher Support				0.04		
CIs				[-0.20, 0.28]		
bw				11.00		
N				591		
Agenda Bias					-0.42**	
CIs					[-0.84, -0.14]	
bw					9.80	
N					98	
Engagement						-0.03
CIs						[-0.21, 0.17]
bw						10.40
N						99
Female	-0.01	-0.09*	-0.00	0.13*	0.00	0.01
CIs	[-0.23, 0.18]	[-0.19, -0.02]	[-0.13, 0.10]	[0.01, 0.29]	[-0.04, 0.05]	[-0.02, 0.05]
bw	8.22	9.81	9.19	10.50	9.43	8.26
N	1058	1151	1104	1178	1128	1059
Hispanic	-0.28**	-0.07+	-0.09*	-0.19**	-0.03	-0.02
CIs	[-0.49, -0.12]	[-0.14, 0.03]	[-0.16, -0.01]	[-0.32, -0.06]	[-0.08, 0.02]	[-0.06, 0.01]
bw	9.97	8.52	9.69	9.35	10.20	8.74
N	1165	1089	1147	1126	1169	1099
Teacher	0.13	0.07	0.12*	0.06	0.03	0.05*
CIs	[-0.07, 0.40]	[-0.03, 0.17]	[0.03, 0.24]	[-0.07, 0.23]	[-0.04, 0.09]	[0.01, 0.11]
bw	11.00	9.16	9.02	10.80	9.69	9.03
N	908	827	818	904	856	822
Democrat	0.20*	0.03	0.04	0.26**	0.04+	0.02
CIs	[0.03, 0.47]	[-0.05, 0.14]	[-0.04, 0.15]	[0.11, 0.50]	[0.00, 0.09]	[-0.02, 0.08]
bw	6.55	9.21	11.70	6.05	7.19	7.15
N	512	596	705	500	536	536
$\bar{y}_{t-1}$	2.26	0.68	0.58	1.37	0.58	0.25

Notes: Each set of estimates corresponds to β in equation (1), defined by $D_{i,t}$ and m_{it} for the election of a candidate with identity or ideology specified in the row header. The dependent variable is the number of motions proposed on each topic in the column header, measured one to four years after an election. Bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals clustered at the election level are in brackets. Bandwidths are set at the MSE-optimal level Calonico et al. (2020). + p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01.

Table A11: Elected Canddiates' Identities and School Board Ideological Composition: By Baseline Composition

	(1) All	(2) Minority	(3) Majority
Panel A: Share Equity-focused			
Female	-0.03	0.02	-0.07
CI	[-0.12, 0.05]	[-0.09, 0.13]	[-0.21, 0.06]
bw	8.36	8.10	6.58
N	3897	1693	1901
$\bar{y}_{t-1}$	0.3	0.25	0.34
Panel B: Share Safety and Health			
Hispanic	-0.01	0.00	-0.07
CI	[-0.10, 0.06]	[-0.10, 0.08]	[-0.27, 0.15]
bw	8.70	9.04	8.59
N	3797	3152	664
$\bar{y}_{t-1}$	0.38	0.37	0.46

Notes: Estimates and confidence intervals of the parameter β in equation (1), estimated considering each identity dimension as the explanatory variable and setting a bandwidth at the MSE-optimal level for the post-election period following Calonico et al. (2020). A triangular kernel weight is used, with a linear control for vote margin. The dependent variables are shares of board members who prioritize equity (panel A), and safety/health (panel B). Each panel and column shows estimates from a separate regression. All specifications control for election year fixed effects. Bias-corrected confidence intervals are reported. See Table A4 for the mean share of members of each ideology. + p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01.

B Data Cleaning Procedure

B.1 School Board Elections

- We use school board elections in elementary, high, and unified school districts. Starting from 6,319 elections, we drop 7 college board elections and 393 county- or state-level board elections. This leaves us with 5,919 elections.
- Some districts have multiple elections in a given year. We drop cases where two elections in the same district have opposite results in a given year (e.g., budget hawk wins non-budget hawk in one election but the opposite happens in the other). When multiple elections have the same results, we focus on the election with the closest margin.
  - We drop a small number of elections from the first criteria. Among 1,213 district and year observations with at least one election where either the least popular winner is a budget hawk and the most popular loser is not or the other way around, only 38 observations are dropped because the district has multiple elections of opposing results.

B.2 District Level Education Outcomes

- For all district-level outcomes, we exclude charter schools financed *and* governed by the state. As of 2017, 39 charter schools were such a case among all 1,769 charter schools.
- For data sets on student outcome variables (SEDA, CRDC), we use the versions including charter schools.
- CDE gives teacher outcomes excluding charter schools, and we use it as is since the local school district has no authority or oversight on staffing at charter schools.
- With variables related to district finance, we restrict our analysis up to the 2017-18 academic year to minimize the error resulting from the inconsistency of the CCD across years.
  - Up to the 2017-18 academic year, funding for charter schools that was allocated through local districts seems to be captured, excluding direct funding allocated to charter schools' own accounts in the county treasury. CCD reports finances for charter school districts separately starting in the 2018-19 academic year.

B.3 Merging Election Records with L2 Voter Data

- To identify candidates' political orientation, we link election records with L2 Historical Voter records (available starting from the year 2000). These voter records contain individuals' full names, home addresses, ages, and political party affiliations. We employ a fuzzy matching algorithm based on names, constrained within district-year combinations.[A-1] Since California Education Code §35107 requires school board candidates to reside within their district, restricting matches to within-district improves our match accuracy.

- With this matching process, we uniquely identify 71.8% of candidates in our election records within the L2 voter registration database. An additional 3.4% of candidates match multiple L2 entries but with consistent political affiliations, yielding a total of 75.2% usable matches for our analyses of political affiliation.

[A-1] For elections in odd-numbered years, we use L2 records from the preceding year.

C Mapping Political Platform to Priorities: Full Question List

We use eleven questions to identify eleven priorities. We now define each priority and specify the question used to identify it. Each question is designed to have a common opening and closing, main question, and some examples to facilitate the LLM's rating.

Common opening: Here are the top three priorities claimed by a candidate running for a school district board member election. [INSERT QUESTION HERE]

Common closing: Rate the candidate based on the entire statement rather than rating each priority. Provide the rating first, then briefly explain how you decided on the rating. Now, here's the statement you need to rate:

1. Academic achievement Is enhancing students' academic ability one of the main priorities of the candidate? Academic ability can be measured by proficiency in core subjects, higher education enrollment rate, or college readiness/preparation. Rate the statement on a scale from 1 to 3 where rate 1 means "none of the priorities is relevant", 2 means "at least one of the priorities is somewhat relevant", and 3 means "at least one of the priorities is directly relevant". Rate the candidate based on the entire statement rather than rating each priority. Here are examples of candidates rated as 1 because none of their priorities is directly about students' academic performance: Ex 1) "Fiscal Responsibility, Bring back the Open Door Policy, Student, teacher, and community advocacy." Ex 2) "Ensure a physically and emotionally safe learning environment for all students, Encourage and develop family, school, and community partnerships, Identify needs and manage resources effectively and efficiently." Meanwhile, these are examples of candidates rated as 3 because one of the priorities is explicitly about students' academic achievement. Ex 1) "Increased enrollment through marketing, better communication, and more access to popular programs, Competitive teacher, administrator, and staff value proposition, including better salaries, College AND career readiness through access to rigorous coursework and technical education" Ex 2) "Raise the district's academic ranking, Restore financial health, Increase the transparency accountability of the district's decisions." Ex 3) "Identify, prioritize, and repair learning loss and other consequences of COVID restrictions and disruptions.,Build strong governance processes, including rigorous budget man-

agement, public transparency, and defining clear objectives and key performance indicators for the district.,Support student access to meaningful resources that enable individual achievement, and reflect the actual needs and diverse skills and interests of the student population."

2 Agenda Bias (Curriculum / Free Speech / Ideology) Is ensuring that academic instruction is free from what the candidate perceives as external agendas or ideologies one of the main priorities? Rate the statement on a scale from 1 to 3, where 1 means "none of the priorities is relevant," 2 means "at least one of the priorities is somewhat relevant," and 3 means "at least one of the priorities is directly relevant."

3. Dropout Is reducing dropout rate one of the main priorities of the candidate? Rate the statement on a scale from 1 to 3 where rate 1 means "none of the priorities is relevant", 2 means "at least one of the priorities is somewhat relevant", and 3 means "at least one of the priorities is directly relevant". Rate the candidate based on the entire statement rather than rating each priority. Here are examples of candidates rated as 1 because none of their priorities is directly about dropout/completion. Ex 1) "Raise the district's academic ranking, Restore financial health, Increase the transparency accountability of the district's decisions." Ex 2) "Equity in opportunity for all students, Timely and safe reopening of schools, More sustainable and available technology." Meanwhile, these are examples of candidates rated as 3 because one of the priorities is explicitly about dropout/completion. Ex 1) "Safe, secure, drug-free schools and reduced dropout rate', 'Wise use of taxpayer dollars', 'Reduction of overcrowding." Ex 2) "'Increase students test scores', 'Decrease student drop out rate', 'Create, Enforce & Implement policies that will bring about a sense of community in our school."

4. Enrollment Is enrollment decline or enrollment growth one of the main priorities of the candidate? Rate the statement on a scale from 1 to 3 where rate 1 means "none of the priorities is relevant", 2 means "at least one of the priorities is somewhat relevant", and 3 means "at least one of the priorities is directly relevant". Rate the candidate based on the entire statement rather than rating each priority. Here are examples of candidates rated as 1 because none of their priorities is directly about enrollment: Ex 1) "Raise the district's academic ranking, Restore financial health, Increase the transparency accountability of the district's decisions." Ex 2) "Increase student

achievement through expanded in-class supports and afterschool programs., Eliminate district bureaucracy and implement spending transparency, Streamline parent & teacher resources and communication." Meanwhile, these are examples of candidates rated as 3 because one of the priorities is explicitly about enrollment. Ex 1) "Increased enrollment through marketing, better communication, and more access to popular programs,Competitive teacher, administrator, and staff value proposition, including better salaries,College AND career readiness through access to rigorous coursework and technical education" Ex 2) "Successful construction of facilities to accommodate future enrollment growth - we must live up to past practice with on-time on-budget projects adhering to the Facilities Master Plan as presented to our community, Critical budget decisions as more students enter our schools - given that we are locally funded, increased enrollment means tighter budgets while still continuing to provide a world-class education for all of our students,Support for struggling students and mental health services - academic success for all our students must be the goal; ongoing mental health services play a critical role in this success".

5. Equity/Equal Distribution of Resources Is equal distribution of resources for all students of various socioeconomic statuses one of the main priorities of the candidate? Rate the statement on a scale from 1 to 3 where rate 1 means "none of the priorities is relevant", 2 means "at least one of the priorities is somewhat relevant", and 3 means "at least one of the priorities is directly relevant". Rate the candidate based on the entire statement rather than rating each priority. Here are examples of candidates rated as 1 because none of their priorities is directly about equity, inclusion, or diversity: Ex 1) "Raise the district's academic ranking, Restore financial health, Increase the transparency accountability of the district's decisions." Ex 2) "Increase student achievement through expanded in-class supports and afterschool programs., Eliminate district bureaucracy and implement spending transparency, Streamline parent & teacher resources and communication." Meanwhile, these are examples of candidates rated as 3 because one of the priorities is explicitly about equity, inclusion or diversity. Ex 1) "Priority to special needs students, Strong community involvement, Efficient uses of resources." Ex 2) "School safety, Fiscal Conservatisms across the school district, Raising school performance in lower income communities" Ex 3) "Devoting time, and resources to equity begins in our schools. We must have open conversations with district personnel and parents regarding equity for all. Continuing to close the achievement gap for African Americans and low-income children.,

Establishing policies and protocols to make sure students and staff come back to a safe place during Covid-19 era., Fiscal solvency and transparency to make sure money is spent appropriately."

6. Fiscal Conservatism Is the candidate committed to minimizing school district spending and opposed to increasing the educational budget if it requires raising the tax rate? Rate the candidate's commitment on a scale from 1 to 3, where 1 means 'not committed to minimizing spending and likely supports increasing the budget,' 2 means 'somewhat committed,' and 3 means 'strongly committed.' Rate as 0 if it is hard to decide because it is not the main priority. Rate the candidate based on the entire statement rather than rating each priority. Here is an example of candidates rated as 0. Ex) "Teach to the "whole child," not just "to the test"; Technology and Fine Arts; Restore community confidence in public schools." Meanwhile, this candidate is rated as 1. Ex) "Facilities. We need to build new facilities and renovate existing facilities. Most schools were built in the 1950s and 60s and need modernizing. There are more than 1 billion in identified needs and no money; There is a shortage of Science, Math, and Special Education teachers. We need to raise salaries to be competitive with Silicon Valley and the shortage of supply." Finally, this candidate is rated as 3. Ex) "Will oppose new taxes and bonds; ensure that local students receive the classes they need to graduate from El Camino College; support Wiseburn School District Unification."

7. Infrastructure & Facility Improvement Is modernizing/upgrading/expanding physical facilities of schools one of the main priorities of the candidate? Rate the statement on a scale from 1 to 3 where rate 1 means "none of the priorities is relevant", 2 means "at least one of the priorities is somewhat relevant", and 3 means "at least one of the priorities is directly relevant". Rate the candidate based on the entire statement rather than rating each priority. Here are examples of candidates rated as 1 because none of their priorities is directly about improving facilities. Ex 1) "Raise the district's academic ranking, Restore financial health, Increase the transparency accountability of the district's decisions." Ex 2) "Equity in opportunity for all students, Timely and safe reopening of schools, More sustainable and available technology." Meanwhile, these are examples of candidates rated as 3 because one of the priorities is explicitly about improving facilities. Ex 1) "'Seeking additional sources of funding', 'Upgrading classroom facilities', 'Recruitment and retention of high quality staff" Ex 2) "Before leaving Grade 3, all children will be successful readers.', 'Ensure safe and clean school facilities that instill pride.', 'Promote a school culture in which learners and teachers

can thrive."

8. Health and Safety Is the health and safety of students and staff members one of the main priorities of the candidate? Rate the statement on a scale from 1 to 3 where rate 1 means "none of the priorities is relevant", 2 means "at least one of the priorities is somewhat relevant", and 3 means "at least one of the priorities is directly relevant". Rate the candidate based on the entire statement rather than rating each priority. Here are examples of candidates rated as 1 because none of their priorities is directly about students'/staff's health and safety. Ex 1) "Fiscal Responsibility, Bring back the Open Door Policy, Student, teacher, and community advocacy." Ex 2) "Increased enrollment through marketing, better communication, and more access to popular programs,Competitive teacher, administrator, and staff value proposition, including better salaries, College AND career readiness through access to rigorous coursework and technical education." Meanwhile, these are examples of candidates rated as 3 because one of the priorities is explicitly about students'/staff's health and safety. Ex 1) "Maintaining a safe environment for students and staff,Having students read by third grade,Continue to upgrade the schools and facilities" Ex 2) "As your school board member, I will promote skills and values that will help students prepare for success in their futures, whether through college or career.,As your school board member, I will promote sound educational policies. This means having safe, healthy classrooms., My goal for the future is to work with students, teachers, staff, and parents to help create a solid educational foundation that offers students choices."

9. Community/Parental Engagement Is communicating with parents or the community and encouraging them to get involved with the issues in the school district one of the main priorities of the candidate? Rate the statement on a scale from 1 to 3 where rate 1 means "none of the priorities is relevant", 2 means "at least one of the priorities is somewhat relevant", and 3 means "at least one of the priorities is directly relevant". Rate the candidate based on the entire statement rather than rating each priority. Here are examples of candidates rated as 1 because none of their priorities is directly about the engagement of parents or the community. Ex 1) "Focus on student achievement and every child's growth through core programs, data analysis, differentiation, and targeted instruction., Recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers and staff who can achieve this goal, and supporting their professional development., Provide a safe environment well-equipped for learn-

ing." Ex 2) "Equity in opportunity for all students, Timely and safe reopening of schools, More sustainable and available technology." Meanwhile, these are examples of candidates rated as 3 because one of the priorities is explicitly about engagement of parents or community. Ex 1) "Student Achievement - Focusing not only on improving test scores but also ensuring a quality education that is reflective of our diverse community., Community Involvement - Preparing our students for future success through the involvement of parents and the community. Ensuring lines of communication between the district, the school board, and the community are consistently available., Labor Relations - Providing all district staff with fair wages and benefits. Empowering our labor partners with the necessary support to better our students' education." Ex 2) "Improve community engagement and communication, Invest and develop technology infrastructure, Ensure campus safety for all children."

10. Teacher Support and Union Relationships Considering the candidate's stance on policies endorsed/opposed by teachers' unions, teachers' involvement in educational policy-making, and teachers' collective bargaining rights, how would you rate their overall friendliness towards teachers' unions? Rate the statement on a scale from 1 to 3, where 1 means "not friendly," 2 means "somewhat friendly," and 3 means "very friendly.

11. Vocational / Career and Technical Education Is vocational or career technical education one of the main priorities of the candidate? Rate the statement on a scale from 1 to 3 where rate 1 means "none of the priorities is relevant", 2 means "at least one of the priorities is somewhat relevant", and 3 means "at least one of the priorities is directly relevant". Rate the candidate based on the entire statement rather than rating each priority. Here are examples of candidates rated as 1 because none of their priorities is directly about vocational or career technical education. Ex 1) "Fiscal Responsibility, Bring back the Open Door Policy, Student, teacher, and community advocacy." Ex 2) "Ensure a physically and emotionally safe learning environment for all students, Encourage and develop family, school, and community partnerships, Identify needs and manage resources effectively and efficiently". Meanwhile, these are examples of candidates rated as 3 because one of the priorities is explicitly about vocational or career technical education. Ex 1) "Increased enrollment through marketing, better communication, and more access to popular programs, Competitive teacher, administrator, and staff value proposition, including better salaries, College AND career readiness

through access to rigorous coursework and technical education" Ex 2) "Expanding Career Technical Education, arts, and exploratory electives that meet the A-G requirements, Increase mental health support for students, Increasing SBUSD early literacy rates."