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Districts and their Legislators: Do District Demographics Impact the Legislator's Political Ideology?

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Districts and their Legislators: *Do District Demographics Impact the Legislator's Political Ideology?*

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Introduction

There is a general agreement that correlation between a district's demographics and the political ideology of the legislator is strong. The 2016 presidential election, coupled with state and local elections, led to an overall conservative swing. As a result, our group decided to further examine the correlation of district demographics and the political ideology of the legislator. Our focus is on the 2016 Ohio State House legislators and their corresponding districts to scrutinize the relationship between district demographics and political ideology of the legislator during the 2016 election.

District demographics in this study are defined as the district's percentage of non-white residents, the competitiveness of the district, and the districts median income. We measured political partisanship with a modified version of the Shor-McCarty ideological measure and political ideology with American Conservative Union (ACU) scores.

Abstract

Extensive research has been conducted to examine the relationship between district demographics and the political ideology of legislators. In this study, we examine the relationship between district demographics and the ideologies of members in the Ohio State House elected in 2016. Our measures of ideology include legislators' American Conservative Union scores and the Shor-McCarty ideological measure. The study controls for legislator partisanship, as well as district level characteristics such as median income, and the percent of non-white residents.

Research Question

We have one principal research question we aim to answer through our data and research:

- How do the demographics of a district impact the ideology of the legislator?

Hypotheses

We have formulated six hypotheses to test our dependent variables of partisanship and conservative score against. These hypotheses are:

- The more competitive the district is, the less partisan the legislator will be.
- The more racially diverse the district is, the more partisan the legislator will be.
- The higher median income for the district, the less partisan the legislator will be.
- The more competitive the district is, the lower the legislators ACU score will be.
- The more racially diverse the district is, the lower the legislators ACU score will be.
- The higher the median income is for the district, the higher the legislators ACU score will be.

Research Design

This study examines the legislators in the Ohio House of Representatives during the 2016-2017 election cycle. In addition, to studying the legislators, we are also examining each of the 99 voting districts. We are achieving this by gathering data of the median income, district competitiveness, and the percent of non-white residents in the district. In collecting this information, we are aiming to test if the demographics of the districts causes the legislators to be more or less politically conservative.

The independent variables in the study are median income, the percent of non-white residents, and the competitiveness of the district. These variables will be known as the "demographics". The dependent variables are the legislators' Conservative Score, and Partisanship.

After data collection, we were able to run two regression tables to examine if there was any relationship between the variables.

Results

Through our regression analysis examining the effect of district demographic measures on our dependent variables of Partisanship and Conservative Score, we were able to deduce some significant results.

Table 1: Regression Table Comparing Partisanship and Demographics

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	−53.969	106.999		−.504	.615
	PartyDem	−34.341	22.303	−.162	−1.540	.127
	Competitiveness Percentage	−.484	.557	−.086	−.869	.387
	Percent Non-White	.107	.730	.017	.147	.884
	D Median Income	.002	.001	.316	2.919	.004
	D Median Age	−.159	1.558	−.010	−.102	.919

a. Dependent Variable: Partisanshore   Adjusted R Square= 0.081, N=99

Table 2: Regression Table Comparing Conservative Score and Demographics

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	42.833	12.757		3.358	.001
	PartyDem	66.484	2.659	.896	25.003	<.001
	Competitiveness Percentage	.023	.066	.012	.354	.724
	Percent Non-White	−.309	.087	−.142	−3.548	<.001
	D Median Income	.000	.000	−.079	−2.156	.034
	D Median Age	−.109	.186	−.020	−.587	.558

a. Dependent Variable: ACU   Adjusted R Square= 0.894, N=99

- District median income and Partisanship have a strong positive relationship, with a high significance value of .004.
- District pct. Non-white and competitiveness are not significantly related to change in partisanship, - with p-values values of .884 and .387, respectively.
- District percent non-white and the Conservative Score have a strong negative relationship with the variable of ACU with a high significance value of <.001.
- District median income is positively and significantly associated with legislator conservatism, with a p-value of .034.

Conclusion

Overall, we found a strong positive correlation between significant variables that bolster our hypotheses. The strong positive relationship between a district's median income and Partisanship, and a district's percentage of non-white residents and the Conservative Score, produced results that support our hypothesis of a strong relationship between district demographics and the political ideology of the legislator. Additionally, we found little evidence of a significant relationship between a district's median income and competitiveness when analyzed against Conservative Score.

This election cycle was a volatile time to try and disseminate answers on whether district demographics are substantially linked to the ideology of the legislator. In such close succession with the 2016 presidential election, our hypothesis was supported but further research may need to be conducted to illustrate a true pattern.