Who Should Run Elections in the United States?

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Much has been said since the 2000 presidential election regarding the administration of elections in the United States, particularly about how election administrators are selected and to whom they are responsive. Unfortunately, there has been little research on the different administrative structures that are possible and the preferences of Americans regarding these different administrative options. In this article we present the results from a national survey of American adults in which we asked them their preference for whether elections should be run by partisan or nonpartisan officials, whether the officials should be elected or appointed, and whether the administration of elections should be by a single unitary executive or by an election board. In addition to eliciting the basic preferences of Americans about these administrative choices, we also undertake a deeper analysis of these data to determine the underlying patterns in support for the different administrative options.

Introduction

The 2000 presidential election highlighted some questionable practices regarding how elections are administered in the United States. In this article we investigate public opinion about election administrators: Should they be partisan political figures? Should they be appointed or elected? Should elections be governed by a unitary executive official or by a deliberative body like an election board? Furthermore, we investigate whether differences in opinion about election administration exist among key subpopulations of the U.S. population. These specific questions are relevant because of reports where election administrators may have taken actions to benefit their own political careers, advance the cause of one political party over another, or help specific candidates or interests in their electoral efforts—especially in closely contested elections (e.g., Urbina, 2007).

Many different models of election administration exist at the state and local levels in the United States. There are 33 states with some type of statewide election official (secretary of state or other title), elected through partisan electoral processes; the rest of the states appoint a chief election official or board (Hasen, 2005). At the local level, election governance can be even more complex, as the administration of elections varies widely throughout the United States. Many states have variations in administration across counties within the state; there is rarely any linkage between the governance structure at the local level and the state's governance structure

(Hasen, 2005; Hayduk, 2005). The local variety in election official selection mechanisms has recently been studied, and this research found that a majority of local election officials are partisan elected administrators (Kimball & Kropf, 2006).

Of course, two of the most widely known allegations of political machinations by state election executives have focused on states at ground zero in recent presidential election controversies: Florida in 2000 and Ohio in 2004. In Florida 2000, Secretary of State Katherine Harris (R) was the point person for a number of decisions during her state's controversial vote recount while also acting as the honorary chair of the George Bush campaign in Florida (Posner, 2001). In the 2004 presidential election, Ohio Secretary of State Kenneth Blackwell (R) was a controversial partisan figure in his state because of his decisions before the election that were seen as potentially benefiting his own party: rules changes for voter challenges, the counting of provisional ballots, and the required design of valid voter registration forms. Blackwell made these decisions while also serving as the co-chair of the George Bush reelection campaign in his state.[1]

Examples of political and partisan election machinations have arisen from the other side of the partisan aisle, although not directly associated with contested elections. One example is California's former Secretary of State, Kevin Shelley (D). Shelley, who won his seat in a close election in 2002, was widely seen as an up-and-coming star in the California Democratic Party. However, during the early stages of California's implementation of the Help America Vote Act (HAVA), Shelley resigned under allegations that he used federal HAVA funds for partisan political purposes, allegations that were examined in audits by both California and the federal government (Alvarez & Hall, 2005).[2]

In the 2005 fall elections, the issue of state election governance was on the ballot in Ohio, and the issue of redistricting reform was on the ballot in California. Although these ballot measures called for nonpartisan governance (redistricting) boards, the ballot measures in Ohio and California called for the appointment of these nonpartisan governance officials by legislative officials. If American voters want election reform in the wake of the 2000 and 2004 elections, then why were both of these ballot measures defeated?[3] This basic question—the level of public support for different models of election governance—is what motivates our research. It is clear from the two ballot measure campaigns that there was public support for certain types of changes to election administration, given that more than three million ballots were cast in California in support of the creation of an appointed, nonpartisan board to undertake redistricting and over eight hundred thousand votes were cast in Ohio in favor of the creation of an appointed, nonpartisan election board. However, the status quo position garnered 70 percent of the vote in Ohio and 60 percent in California. Our results lead us to think that voters may have been more likely to pass the California and Ohio ballot measures if the governance (redistricting) officials were elected rather than appointed.

Other than the votes cast in Ohio and California on these two ballot measures and the internal campaign polling that was conducted in 2005 on these ballot measures, we are not aware of any public opinion data or academic research that attempts to assess the general state of public preferences regarding election gover-

nance in the United States.[4] While few in number, recent research has begun to consider the desirability of various election administration structures from a theoretical and international perspective (Cox, 2006; Elmendorf, 2006; Mozaffar & Schedler, 2002; Reynolds & Elklit, 2002). Indeed, in one of the few studies of election administration—a recent study of election administration in New York—Hayduk (2005) asserts that "there has been no systematic scholarly treatment of the subject of election administration since . . . 1934."

We know from other areas of academic study that the various dimensions of governance that are the focus of our analysis—elected versus appointed, partisan versus nonpartisan, and boards versus a single individual—do make a difference in policy choice and administration in many areas of administration. This research can inform the current policy debates about election governance and can serve as the foundation for additional research regarding who should administer American elections and what type of administrative structure should be employed. In the next section, we examine why the governance structure is important to defining election administration. We then discuss the survey data we have collected and the methodology behind the survey administration. After presenting the basic survey responses we obtained from our research, we report the results of our detailed multivariate statistical analysis of our survey data. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of this research for the debate about American election administration.

The Importance of Governance Structures

The issue of formal governance in administrative settings—by whom and how governmental entities are directed—has long been an issue in public administration and political science (Ingraham & Lynn, 2004; Lynn, Heinrich, & Hill, 2001). In our analysis, we focus on public preferences over three dimensions of how election officials are selected. First, should these individuals be elected or appointed? Second, should they be chosen on a partisan or nonpartisan basis? Third, should the governance structure be a board or solitary individual? Before considering the results of the survey data examining public attitudes toward how election officials should be selected, we discuss why we think that focusing on these three dimensions is important.

The argument for nonpartisan elections in the United States, especially at the local level, dates back to the Progressive era at the beginning of the twentieth century (Hofstadter, 1963; Mowry, 1951). Three rationales have generally been given for the use of a nonpartisan ballot. First, it was designed to break down party machines and "sanitize" local government. Second, it was thought that party labels could be distracting from the actual problems in a municipality; in short, people may vote for a party without considering the issues. Third, it was argued that local governmental activities are more administrative than political and therefore are best served by nonpartisan officials (Cushman, 1923).

Unfortunately, it is difficult to assess the direct effect of the nonpartisan ballot on government performance because the move to nonpartisan elections was often a part

of a broader reform package. With this caveat, an analysis conducted at the time when many such changes occurred found that nonpartisan ballots might be more effective in smaller jurisdictions, since it is possible to know the candidates better in a smaller jurisdiction (Cushman, 1923). Nonpartisan ballots are less effective in larger jurisdictions, and where there are long ballots, because in these instances party labels serve as important cues to voters. This issue of party cues is important because without them voters are forced to use other information, such as occupational information, incumbency, or the ethnicity of a person's surname (Hagensick, 1964; Klein & Baum, 2001; Squire & Smith, 1988). The use of cue giving raises the question of whether nonpartisan elections provide voters with the information they need to make decisions about how to vote.

Additionally there is research regarding election governance in nations other than the United States, and this literature has taken up the question of partisanship and election governance. For example, Lehoucq (2002) developed a model of election governance in which he argued that, in many countries, electoral governance has been established independently of legislative and executive institutions. As a result, Lehoucq asserted that in such nations (he discussed Costa Rica, Chile, and Uruguay), after the transfer of election governance to independent boards, "each has become renown for regularly scheduled, clean and typically hotly contested elections" (Lehoucq & Molina, 2002, p. 42). Others have studied the degree of independence or autonomy of the election governance process in African nations as a strategic choice, a function of the historical legacies of each nation's political development as well as political and ethnic competition (Mozaffar, 2002). It is clear that there is much to learn about the partisan control of election administration from the experiences of other democratic nations (Mozaffar & Schedler, 2002).

The second issue is whether election officials should be selected through election or appointment. This question is particularly important because the motives and incentives of an election official may differ depending upon the method of selection. Unfortunately, a conflict of interest may arise regardless of appointment or election since the election official's job may be contingent upon her own successful reelection or the reelection of a particular government official.

In the related field of government regulation, Besley and Coate (2003) highlight the potentially significant problem that may exist when an elected representative is responsible for the appointment of a government regulator. Besley and Coate hypothesize that the responsibility of appointing a regulator effectively introduces a new dimension into a process that voters view as having little salience but that special interests view as highly salient; resulting in the election of an official who caters to special interests along the regulation dimension. However, when regulators are elected, the regulation dimension becomes the only issue in the campaign; thus, regulators should display a pro-consumer bias, which Besley and Coate's empirical evidence documents. Applying these results to the issue of electoral governance implies that elected officials will more accurately represent the preferences of the voting public, but this extrapolation of Besley and Coate's results to electoral governance might be problematic given the conflict of interest that may arise if election administrators are elected.

Judges provide another lens through which we can evaluate how a government official's behavior is influenced by the method of selection. The rationale for selecting judges using an electoral mechanism is that it might make judges responsive to the electorate for their decisions, instead of being responsive to the political powers that appoint them (Dimino, 2003). Elections also insulate judges from the other institutions of government that they are supposed to constrain. These reforms were structured to balance the independence and accountability of the judiciary, with judges serving fixed terms and with limits put on the ways in which they can campaign (Dimino, 2003). The effect of the electoral mechanism of judicial selection on decision making has been documented, especially in capital punishment cases. For example, "soft on crime" judges in California, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Texas have been removed from office and subjected to political pressure in their decision making (Bright & Keenan, 1995).

The third issue, whether decisions about electoral governance should be made by an individual or a group, is complex, in part because group decision making is largely shaped by the dynamics of the group, how they are selected, and the legislative form the group takes. The size, composition, compensation, and functions of a board can affect both its performance and operations. Legislatively created boards often function differently and make different decisions than boards created through executive decisions (Howell & Lewis, 2002; Mitchell, 1997). In some cases, boards not only primarily buffer the professional staff of an organization from the public but also play key roles in decision making. In addition, boards' decisions often serve the interests of their personal home constituency, which in the case of partisan election administration are the interests of the board member's partisan constituency (Price, 1963).

Because boards function much like mini-legislatures, we can also look to the literature on agenda setting in legislatures to gain insight into the difference between one person making a decision and having a board (Ordeshook & Schwartz, 1987). Obviously, a single executive does not have to worry about developing coalitions and counting votes to win a vote on a given policy proposal. However, a board can have such dynamics: the structuring of the board, the existence of an agenda setter, and the number of votes needed to make a decision (e.g., majority rules vs. supermajority rules) all shape the decision-making process (Fedderson & Pesendorfer, 1998; Guarnaschelli, McKelvey, & Palfrey, 2000; Janis, 1982). In addition, the number of members on the board is critical to the decision-making dynamic; a board with an odd number of members has a different dynamic than one with an even number of members, given that ties can occur with an even number of members.

In summary, election governance and the decisions associated with elections are likely to vary based on how individuals are selected to serve as election administrators and whether decisions are made by a unitary election official or by an election board. In other policy domains, the decision-making dynamic varies across these dimensions, especially based on whether individuals are elected or appointed and whether the decision making is done by an individual or a board. To assess how the public views these issues, we turn next to survey data examining public attitudes toward how elections should be governed.

Methodology

That there is little academic research on election governance has been noted by other scholars. In the preface to a symposium on election governance in *International Political Science Review*, the editors stated that "Electoral governance remains a 'neglected variable' in the study of political democratization" (Mozaffar & Schedler, 2002; see also Huefner & Tokaji, 2006). There have been no national studies of public attitudes regarding election governance previously conducted in the United States nor have there been comparable studies of public attitudes toward governance generally that can inform our work. We do have the work of the Collins Center for Public Policy, Inc., which asked about the public attitudes of Floridians after the 2000 election toward the nonpartisan election of local election officials, but this work provides little theoretical basis for what we should expect in our findings (MacManus, Moreno, Scher, & Thomas, 2001).

There are practical political and policy considerations, however, that lead us to focus on several key variables. First, we are interested in determining if preferences over election governance differ for voters and nonvoters.[5] It would be problematic from a public policy perspective if voters and nonvoters possess different views about electoral governance. Although it is difficult to predict the direction of preferences *a priori*, given the history of discrimination in election administration that has occurred toward minorities, we might expect minorities to be more sensitive to specific types of governance structures compared to other demographic groups (Keyssar, 2000; Kousser, 1974). We also analyze whether or not the confidence voters have in their 2004 presidential ballot being counted correctly has an effect on preferences over governance structures. We suspect that voters who lack confidence in their ballot being counted as intended may have different preferences than voters who are confident. Additionally, we are interested in analyzing whether a respondent's partisanship has an affect on the likelihood of preferring partisan election officials. One hypothesis is that the success of the Republican Party in the 2000–04 elections may make Republicans more likely to favor partisan election officials. Finally, we are interested in determining if preferences over the various governance structures vary according to region. For instance, is the West's history of progressive reform reflected in their preferences over governance structure?

Our data come from a telephone survey that was fielded from March 9 to March 15, 2005 by the International Communications Research (ICR) of Media, Pennsylvania, using their twice-weekly EXCEL omnibus survey. This omnibus survey methodology interviews randomly selected American adults using random-digit dialing techniques. The complete sample contained the responses from 2,032 respondents, of which a randomly selected subsample ($N = 1,176$) were posed three different questions regarding election governance in their area:

1. "The local or state officials who run your elections should be (a) appointed or (b) elected."

2. "The local or state officials who run your elections should be (a) partisan or (b) nonpartisan."

3. "Elections in your community should be overseen by (a) a single election official or (b) an election board."

In the Appendix we discuss the ICR survey methodology in more detail and provide some descriptive information regarding the respondents to this particular survey.

Views of Voters and Nonvoters on Election Governance

Our analysis focuses on the responses to these three survey questions. Table 1 reports the summary statistics for each question by respondent's voting status: voters in the first column, nonvoters in the second column, and the complete sample of American adults in the third column. To help evaluate the public's preferences, following the presentation of the summary statistics, we discuss elite opinions about each governance dimension. All the tabulated survey response data we present in this article have been weighted to produce estimates of the national populations.[6]

When asked whether their state and local election officials should be appointed or elected, approximately three-quarters of both voters and nonvoters preferred elected election officials. Approximately 20 percent of both nonvoters and voters felt that their election officials should be appointed; only 3–6 percent had no opinion. The clear majority in support of elections among both voters and nonvoters suggests a couple of different possibilities: (i) a political norm may exist in the United States

Table 1. Survey Responses on Election Governance

The Local or State Election Officials Who Run Your Elections Should Be:

	Voters	Nonvoters	Full Sample
Appointed	22.7 (178)	17.6 (62)	240
Elected	73.8 (579)	76.1 (268)	847
Don't know or refused	3.5 (27)	6.3 (22)	49

The Local or State Election Officials Who Run Your Elections Should Be:

	Voters	Nonvoters	Full Sample
Partisan	17.8 (140)	24.2 (85)	225
Nonpartisan	72.7 (570)	52.1 (184)	754
Don't know or refused	9.5 (74)	23.7 (83)	157

Elections in Your Community Should Be Overseen By:

	Voters	Nonvoters	Full Sample
A single election official	6.7 (53)	6.3 (22)	75
An election board	92.2 (723)	87.9 (309)	1,032
Don't know or refused	1.1 (8)	5.8 (21)	29

Form of Electoral Governance

	Voters	Nonvoters	Full Sample
Nonpartisan appointed board	17.9 (140)	7.7 (27)	167
Nonpartisan elected board	55.5 (435)	27.5 (97)	532
Partisan elected single official	1.2 (10)	1.7 (6)	16
Partisan elected board	5.7 (115)	14.2 (50)	165

where most may simply favor more elections to fewer elections, or (ii) regardless of party affiliation, voters do not trust elected officials to appoint fair and impartial election administrators.

Our question about whether election officials should be partisan or nonpartisan is intended to capture the mechanism by which these individuals should be chosen. Although some may interpret this question as asking whether election officials should be fair (nonpartisan) or biased (partisan), our use of the term partisan is common among academics, legislators, the media, and advocacy groups. The term "partisan election official" is used in other articles on election governance, for example in Hasen (2005) and Martinez (2006). Our wording closely mirrors a 2001 study in Florida that asked whether individuals favored or opposed "nonpartisan elections of county Supervisors of Elections" (MacManus et al., 2001). The 2005 Commission on Federal Election uses the phrase "nonpartisan election administration" and the term "nonpartisan" to refer to election officials (Committee on Federal Election Reform (CFER), 2005, pp. 50–53). In the context of the debate about Ohio State Issue 5, measure proponents used the term "bipartisan" when they refer to what were the measure's goals.[7] Advocacy groups use the phrase "partisan" or "nonpartisan" in their appeals for policy change; for example, *FairVote* lists "Nonpartisan Election Administration" as one of the eight reforms their organization supports.[8] A search through the mass media for variations in the descriptors "partisan" versus "party-elected" versus "party-appointed" to modify election officials found that only partisan was used in major media from 2000 through 2005 in major papers listed in the LexisNexis news database.[9]

American preferences regarding nonpartisan election administration are distinct when we compare voters and nonvoters. Although 73 percent of voters prefer nonpartisan election officials, a bare majority of nonvoters prefer nonpartisan election officials, and 24 percent of nonvoters had no opinion. The frequency of nonresponses among the nonvoting sample may indicate a high level of uncertainty in the nonvoting population regarding the effect partisanship may play upon election governance. Although we find strong support for nonpartisan election officials among voters, the high rate of nonresponse among the nonvoting population makes it difficult to elicit the preference of nonvoters on this dimension of election governance. We analyze the difference between voter and nonvoter opinion about governance official partisanship in greater depth in our multivariate analysis where we control for possible correlations with other factors such as education and age.

Next, we consider the basic responses to our third question on election governance: Should elections in the respondent's community be overseen by a single election official or an elections board? Looking at the figures in Table 1, both voting and nonvoting Americans support the concept of an elections board; the rate of nonresponse is under 6 percent for both groups. Regardless of voting status, nearly 9 in 10 respondents prefer an elections board to single election official.[10] Given the support for elections boards and the low nonresponse rate, it is quite clear that Americans, regardless of their level of political participation in voting, prefer a group of individuals overseeing elections to a single individual.

We conjecture that Americans' strong preference for an elections board versus a single election official may be attributable to a perceived difference in the ease of electoral fraud for each governance structure. The public is most likely aware it is more difficult for a board to commit election malfeasance—a board requires that some or all members coordinate their actions. Similarly, most Americans are familiar with the necessity of checks and balances upon the actions of government officials. Although it may be viewed as superfluous to create another administration level to oversee the election official(s), Americans may see a board as a check upon the undesirable actions of a single election official.

Next, we consider how the opinion of the American public captured in this survey compares to elite opinion about election governance that has been reported in several studies and reports. If electoral procedures are used to select election officials, then a clear conflict of interest exists on the part of the election official. Furthermore, those running for office may politicize the election administration process. Despite public support for elected governance officials, concern exists among knowledgeable officials that electoral selection may politicize election administration (Hasen, 2005).[11] In 2002 a bipartisan committee studying election reform in Florida recommended the formation of a state elections board to administer elections: No member of this board could be an elected official or political lobbyist.[12] The Florida committee suggested an alternate selection method for election officials: the appointment of election officials on a bipartisan or nonpartisan basis.

But how does voter opinion about partisan election officials compare to elite opinion? In a 2005 collaborative research report entitled "Challenges Facing the American Electoral System: Research Priorities for the Social Sciences," 16 political scientists identified partisan election administration officials as "...the most distinctive and potentially troublesome feature of the American electoral system...".[13] Following the 2000 presidential election, Florida Governor Jeb Bush formed a bipartisan, special committee with the express goal to "Revitalize Democracy in Florida." The 2001 Florida Governor's Select Task Force on Election Procedures, Standards, and Technology recommended, "The Florida legislature should change the elected county Supervisors of Elections to nonpartisan positions."[14] In fact, the special task force went one step further and recommended that all individuals who belong to the county canvassing boards and/or state canvassing board be prohibited from active political involvement while serving on the board. In the face of popular support and the 2001 Florida Task Force's recommendation, the Florida legislature rejected this recommendation when it passed election reform legislation in 2001. Florida seems to be a case were there is a clear disconnect between the preferences of experts and the public and the preferences of those who hold elected office.

Finally, we can leverage extensive studies conducted in Florida following the 2000 election to assess the wisdom of the public's desire for election boards. In the 2001 Governor's Select Task Force on Election Procedures, Standards, and Technology, the committee recommended that the state should consider "...the establishment of an independent elections commission, with no elected officials or lobbyists as members..." Thus, the informed, bipartisan select task force agreed with the

public that an election board (commission) appears to be the best method through which to monitor and govern elections.

Returning to the opinions of our survey respondents about election governance, we can estimate each individual's preference over the package of possible governance structures, assuming separable preferences (e.g., Lacy, 2001). At the bottom of Table 1, we present four of the possible combinations from our three questions and report the percent of respondents who express these preferences. These results give a clear message: The status quo governance structure employed by most states receives little support when compared to other forms of electoral governance. The greatest level of support among both voters and nonvoters is for elected, nonpartisan election boards; a near majority of voters prefer this governance structure.

It appears that on the issues of election boards and the method of selection, voters and nonvoters are in relative agreement. However, we see in Table 1 that differences in public opinion over partisan election officials may exist between voters and nonvoters. The relative agreement (disagreement) between voters and nonvoters does not reveal if other subpopulations of the American electorate are in agreement on how governance officials should be selected. In order to investigate possible differences between voters and nonvoters as well as other subpopulations of the American electorate, we conduct a multivariate analysis.

Multivariate Analysis

We isolate the effect of various attributes upon a voter's likelihood of supporting elected versus appointed election officials and nonpartisan versus partisan election officials by estimating two multivariate models where each administrative choice was the dependent variable. In Model 1 the dependent variable is the respondent's preference over the method of selection for the election governance official(s): appointed = 0 and elected = 1. In Model 2 the dependent variable is the respondent's preference over the partisan nature of the election governance position: partisan = 0 and nonpartisan = 1. We did not estimate a model for the third question regarding single election officials versus electoral board because the strong support for election boards makes estimation of a multivariate model difficult and of little utility.[15] As our dependent variables in both models involve binary choices, we use a binary logit to produce estimates for our various independent variables in these models.

We use the multivariable analysis to test for differences in governance opinion within different subpopulations. Specifically, we test for differences between the following groups: (i) voters versus nonvoters; (ii) voters who are confident in the electoral process versus voters who are not confident; (iii) minorities versus whites; (iv) partisan identification; and (v) relatively experienced versus inexperienced voters. Below we discuss specific hypotheses as to how we anticipate these groups may differ in their views of election governance. In addition to variables that pertain to these five groups, we include as control variables three typically found in models of public opinion: *generation, education, and gender.*[16]

Table 2. Logit Estimates for Election Governance Models

Variable	Model 1 Elected vs. Appointed Model[a]		Model 2 Nonpartisan vs. Partisan Model[b]	
	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error
Minority	−0.20	0.21	−0.77†	0.21
Did not vote	0.13	0.22	−0.42	0.22
Voted not confident	1.11†	0.42	−0.23	0.34
Republican	0.06	0.19	−0.64†	0.22
Independent	0.59†	0.20	0.05	0.23
Age	−0.21†	0.09	0.18	0.09
Education	−0.15†	0.07	0.29†	0.08
Female	0.35†	0.16	−0.12	0.17
2+ adults	−0.18	0.19	0.38	0.20
Northeast	−0.99	0.50	0.14	0.53
North Central	−1.00†	0.47	−0.05	0.52
West	−1.04†	0.43	0.60	0.50
Moralist	−0.68	0.44	−0.08	0.51
Individualist	1.22†	0.46	0.05	0.49
Out of power party	0.08	0.22	0.14	0.24
Constant	2.06†	0.45	0.16	0.48

[a]Logit where the number of observations included is 1,019, the value of 1 corresponds to voters who prefer nonpartisan officials and 0 corresponds to voters who prefer partisan officials.
[b]Logit where the number of observations included is 937, the value of 1 corresponds to voters who prefer elected officials and 0 corresponds to voters who prefer appointed officials.
†Indicates significance at 95% level.

In both models we include two other variables: *2+ adults* and *controlling party*. The variable *2+ adults* is valued 1 if two or more adults live in the house, or 0 if only one adult lives in the house. Zuckerman, Dasovic, and Jennifer (2005) show the importance of spousal influence on vote choice, we hypothesize that the estimated coefficient for *2+ adults* may be significant in the model for the partisanship of election officials because single-adult households may substitute spousal advice for partisan queues. We also include a variable we call *controlling party*. This binary variable takes the value of 1 if an individual lives within a state where the governor's office and both houses of the state legislature are all controlled by the same party and the respondent does not identify with that party.[17] We include *controlling party* to test for the possibility that preferences may be responsive to the political geography of the state in which an individual resides.

The estimates for the logit coefficients and their associated standard errors are given in Table 2. The first two columns in Table 2 provide results from Model 1 for elected or appointed officials. The second set of results in Table 2 are for Model 2 and relate to a dependent variable that takes a value of 1 if the respondent prefers nonpartisan election officials and 0 for partisan election officials. The number of observations included in both models differs from the total *N* of the survey, 1,176, because uncertain responses and voters who declined to answer certain characteristic questions such as age are not included in the logit models.

In this situation, assessing the fit of a multivariate model is difficult because of the type of model we use (binary logit does not have a natural goodness-of-fit

statistic like the R^2 statistic) and the nature of our data.[18] There are a variety of goodness-of-fit measures that are applicable for binary logit models and, as applied to our data and model specification, we fit the data well, although there is room for improved model specifications in future research. The chi-square test, which compares our model specification to a null model containing only an intercept, for each model is statistically significant and our models correctly predict 77 percent (Model 1) and 80 percent (Model 2) of the cases.[19] But when we consider that the survey responses for both questions are highly skewed (in Model 1, 76 percent of the responses are coded 1, the remainder 0; in Model 2, 80 percent are coded 1, the remainder 0), it is also clear that any model specification will have difficulty improving upon other simple goodness-of-fit metrics. For example, a comparison of our model's rate of prediction success to that of the null model containing only an intercept shows that the intercept-only model does nearly as well as our model specification. Any model specification will have trouble improving on the predictive power of the simple naïve guess, that most of the data will be 1 and not 0.[20]

Rather than focus our attention on the logit results reported in Table 2, we instead concentrate on the easier-to-understand analysis of the logit coefficients provided in Table 3. The estimated first difference for Model 1 (and 2) is the difference in the estimated probability of supporting elected (nonpartisan) officials due to changing one particular independent variable from its median characteristic, holding all other independent variables to their median response.[21] A list of the median characteristics is provided in the footnote to Table 3.

We now investigate whether differences exist in electoral governance preferences among the five identified subpopulations. We are interested in comparing the preferences of voters and nonvoters because any difference between these two groups may make it difficult to assess how a change in governance will affect voter turnout. Analyzing the variable *nonvoter* across the two different models we see that voting status appears to have no effect upon individual preferences over the manner in which a governance official is selected. However, voting status is on the cusp of significance for an individual's preference about whether or not governance officials are affiliated with a party ($t = -1.9$). *Ceteris paribus* a nonvoter is six points more likely to prefer a partisan election official when compared to the likelihood of a voter preferring partisan election officials.

Recent research finds a relationship between local election governance and practices and the issue of voter confidence (Atkeson & Saunders, 2007), and we too suspect that voters who lack confidence that their ballot is counted correctly may have different preferences about who should govern elections. We included the variable *not confident* because we think voters who are not confident in the current electoral process may be opposed to continuation of the status quo governance structure. Alvarez, Hall, and Llewellyn (in press) find that voters who were relatively less confident that their ballot for president in the 2004 election was counted as intended were less likely to vote in the 2006 mid-term election. Therefore, comparing governance preferences based on whether or not a voter was confident their 2004 presidential vote was counted as intended is important; any difference between the two subgroups of voters may identify an action election officials can take to improve

Table 3. First Differences Based upon Logit Model Coefficients

Variable	Model 1 — Election vs. Appointed Model[a]			Model 2 — Nonpartisan vs. Partisan Model[a]		
	Possesses Attribute	Does Not Possess Attribute	Effect	Possesses Attribute	Does Not Possess Attribute	Effect
Median Individual	0.68			0.87		
Minority	0.63	0.68	−0.05	0.76	0.87	−0.11
Did not vote	0.71	0.68	+0.03	0.81	0.87	−0.06
Voted but not confident	0.86	0.68	+0.18	0.84	0.87	−0.03
Republican	0.69	0.68	+0.01	0.78	0.87	−0.09
Independent	0.63	0.68	−0.05	0.87	0.87	+0.00
Female	0.75	0.68	+0.07	0.86	0.87	−0.01
2+ adults	0.68	0.72	−0.04	0.87	0.82	+0.05
Northeast	0.45	0.68	−0.23	0.87	0.87	+0.00
North Central	0.44	0.68	−0.24	0.85	0.87	−0.02
West	0.43	0.68	−0.25	0.91	0.87	+0.04
Moralist	0.56	0.68	−0.12	0.85	0.87	−0.02
Individualist	0.49	0.68	−0.19	0.87	0.87	−0.00
Controlling party	0.69	0.68	+0.01	0.88	0.87	+0.01
Effect of Age Levels[b]	Current Generation Placement[d]	Previous Generation	Change	Current Generation Placement[c]	Previous Generation	Change
Generation Y[c]	0.76	—	—	0.83	—	—
Generation X[d]	0.72	0.76	−0.04	0.85	0.83	+0.02
Boomers[e]	0.68	0.72	−0.04	0.87	0.85	+0.02
Age 59+	0.64	0.68	−0.04	0.89	0.87	+0.02
Effect of Education Levels[b]	Completed This Level	Highest Completion; 1 Level Lower	Change	Completed This Level	Highest Completion; 1 Level Lower	Change
Did not complete high school	0.74	—	—	0.79	—	—
Completed high school	0.71	0.74	−0.03	0.83	0.79	+0.04
Some college	0.68	0.71	−0.03	0.87	0.83	+0.04
College graduate	0.64	0.68	−0.04	0.90	0.87	+0.03
Graduate degree	0.61	0.64	−0.03	0.92	0.90	+0.02

[a]Median characteristics: white, confident voter, 2+ adults, independent, male, South, some college, boomer, traditionalist.
[b]Holding all responses at their median response level and varying education one interval at a time.
[c]Generation Y refers to individuals ages 18–27.
[d]Generation X refers to individuals ages 28–39.
[e]Boomers refers to individuals ages 40–58.

voter confidence. The variable *not confident* is operationalized from a question asked of voters regarding their confidence that their ballots were recorded correctly: "How confident are you that your ballot for president in the 2004 election was counted as you intended?" Respondents were asked to select one of the following options: very confident, somewhat confident, not too confident, and not at all confident. Responses to this question were categorized into a binary variable, not confident and confident.[22] Very and somewhat confident respondents were recoded as confident voters, and not too confident or not at all confident respondents were recoded as not confident voters.

We find that voters who are not confident that their vote for president in the 2004 election was counted as intended are 18 points more likely to prefer elected governance officials relative to appointed governance officials. It is conceivable that changes in the structure of electoral governance, such as electing governance officials, may ameliorate voter confidence among those voters who are currently not confident in the accuracy of the electoral process.

Given historical efforts in areas such as the South to discriminate against blacks, it is important for public officials to consider possible differences in the governance preferences of minorities versus whites. Looking at the results in Table 3, we do not observe a statistically significant difference in the preferences between minorities and whites in the manner in which governance officials are selected. However, we do notice an 11-point difference in the likelihood a minority prefers partisan election officials.

Why would a minority group such as African Americans be more likely to support partisan election officials, especially in the wake of the 2004 presidential election where a partisan election official made a decision to nullify many provisional ballots from minority areas in Ohio? Although this question requires further investigation, we think that a clue to understanding this problem may lie in the opinions of minorities on the other two forms of governance; minorities strongly prefer elected governance boards. Thus, politically homogenous minority groups, such as African Americans, may view the presence of a partisan and elected governance board, which cares more about party classification than racial classification, as an insurance policy to ensure that minority votes are counted fairly.

We expect that independents will prefer the election of governance officials when compared to both Democrats and Republicans. This expectation is based upon the rationale that independent voters may view the appointment of election officials by partisan leaders as an attempt to bestow an unfair advantage upon both Republicans and Democrats. Looking at the results from the Model 1 we indeed find that independents are 11 points less likely to support the appointment of election officials when compared to Democrats and Republicans.

During both the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections, Republican election administrators in the states of Florida and Ohio made pivotal and high-profile decisions that may have decided the presidential contest in favor of the Republican candidate. Although Republicans may view these decisions as fair, Democrats and independents may feel that these decisions were biased and place some level of blame upon the partisanship of the election administrators. Looking at the results in

Model 2 we find that both independents and Democrats are more likely than Republicans to prefer nonpartisan election officials. No difference exists between independents and Democrats in their likelihood of preferring nonpartisan election officials. Our results concerning partisanship may be capturing some degree of perceived success among Republicans to elect Republican election officials. It will be interesting to investigate whether the stronger preference for Republicans to prefer partisan election officials still exists following the 2006 mid-term election.

Finally, we test for differences across both region and political culture. We estimate the effect of region as there are unique election histories and experiences in the South, where there is a history of discrimination; in the West, with its history of progressive reform; and in the Northeast, which has a stronger partisan tradition (Keyssar, 2000). The effect of political culture upon the preferences of citizens and state institutions is discussed by Elazar (1970). Citing three different political cultures—moralist, individualist, and traditionalist—Elazar hypothesizes that the historical context of the original settlers made a lasting effect upon states' political institutions. We introduce the dummy variables *moralist* and *individualist* to control for any possible differences in election preferences, which may arise as a difference in the states' political institutions.

Purely following Elazar's (1970) arguments about political culture may lead one to hypothesize that the "traditionalist" culture, where appointed election officials is the norm, will result in traditionalists being more likely than "individualists" to prefer appointed election officials. Geographically, the South's history of racial and economic discrimination leads us to think that Southerners will have a stronger preference for elected officials as opposed to Western voters who live in states known for progressive election reform. This expectation is based on the assumption voters that will prefer elections over appointment if there is a perceived need for change in electoral governance.

We find the estimates for both region and political culture to be significant in the model explaining individual preferences over the method of selection for governance officials. As anticipated, the individual estimates for the South and individualist cultures indicate individuals residing in these states are more likely to prefer elected election officials relative to the West and traditionalist cultures. However, analyzing the geographic distribution of Elazar's "traditionalist" states, all but two of these states (Arizona and New Mexico) reside in the South (Gray & Hanson, 2004).[23] Thus, the effects of living in the South and living in a "traditionalist" culture tend to negate one another. Similarly, although the effect of living in an individualistic state, such as Illinois or Massachusetts, leaves one more likely to support elected officials, living in the North Central or East Coast regions negates this tendency. When we control for the political culture of a state, there are not any regional differences in the preferences over electoral governance.

Conclusions

The primary conclusions from our survey of 1,176 voters concerning the structure of electoral governance are: (i) voters prefer election boards to single election

officials; (ii) they prefer election to appointment in the selection of election officials; and (iii) they prefer nonpartisan to partisan election officials. Although we did find some evidence that voters and nonvoters differ in their opinions of election officials, the differences tend to be slight in substance. However, there is one potentially problematic difference between the two groups: A bare majority of nonvoters prefer nonpartisan election officials, and a large number of nonvoters declined to answer the question regarding their preference over partisanship. Additional research is needed to determine what, if any, effect the implementation of voter-preferred forms of electoral governance might have on the turnout decisions of voters and nonvoters.

Previous research finds that young, minority, and less educated voters tend to possess less political information (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1997). We find voters who tend to be at a disadvantage in obtaining political information, as well as nonvoters and those living alone, appear more likely to support partisan election officials. The support of less informed voters for partisan election officials may be a reflection of the fact that those at an informational disadvantage may be more likely to use partisan cues in forming political opinions. The differences in election governance based upon who has greater access to political information are troublesome since racial and ethnic minorities, a potentially vulnerable segment of the voting population, may remove themselves (or remain removed) from the electorate if the system of election governance is not reliable or easily understandable in their eyes. This difference in opinion raises a difficult question: Should election administration be designed to satisfy high-propensity voters, or should election administration be designed to encourage marginal voters to enter the electorate?

When we combine the responses across the three questions, we find that 27.5 percent of nonvoters and 55.5 percent of voters prefer an elected, nonpartisan board to oversee elections. The desirability of the most frequently employed governance structure in statewide elections, the single elected partisan official, received support from less than 2 percent of both voters and nonvoters. Despite the potential problem of the separability of preferences, these results lead us to conclude that first, the current status quo governance structure employed by most states, single elected partisan officials, is unpopular when compared to other forms of electoral governance, and that second, a near majority of adults and voters prefer elected, nonpartisan election boards to oversee the state and local electoral process.

One seemingly surprising result is that voters who lack confidence in the accuracy of their vote being counted correctly are significantly more likely to prefer electing election officials. Why would those who lack confidence in the accuracy of the election system prefer more elections is left for future research, but we hypothesize that elections, even if poorly managed, may be viewed by the public as a method to "take back" government.

Party affiliation does have an effect upon the preferences of voters over electoral governance. Independents are much more likely than either Democrats or Republicans to prefer elected to appointed election officials. Consistent with specific events surrounding the 2000 and 2004 elections, Republicans are more likely than Democrats or independents to prefer partisan election officials. As implied by the Downsian spatial model, party affiliation of election officials is more desirable among the

historically less informed voters. Voters who are young, living alone, or lacking advanced levels of education are all more likely to prefer party-affiliated election officials.

Understanding public opinion about election governance is important, as it is clear that election reformers are increasingly calling for changes in the administrative structure of the electoral process. Calls for independent, nonpartisan election administration were made in the strongly worded report of the CFER, especially at the federal and state levels (CFER, 2005). Both State Issue 5 and Proposition 77 in Ohio and California would have instituted different reforms seeking to produce nonpartisan election administration boards. Even though both of these initiatives failed to pass in statewide elections, the issue of election administration reform (in the context of redistricting) in California is still on the policy agenda, with legislation currently working through the process and the possibility of another ballot measure fight over this issue in the future (Nicholas, 2006). Our analysis indicates that voters may have been more willing to adopt State Issue 5 and Proposition 77 if the boards were elected rather than appointed. If reformers want to persuade the public to alter the structure of election administration, they will first need to understand what the public understands about election administration, what their preferences about administrative structures may be, and which segments of the population and electorate support certain types of reforms. It is clear that, even though voters express interest in having a different form of election governance than the traditional single elected election official, campaigns to change election governance have to be well run and well framed if they are to be successful.

Additional research is needed to determine if the public's choice for elected, nonpartisan election boards is also the electoral governance structure that is best able to prevent electoral fraud and to instill confidence in voters that the process is fair. Although there is a dearth of academic research on election administration generally, we see that there are related areas of academic research that might be able to shed substantial light on appropriate governance structures for election administration. For example, governance structures are widely studied in economics and finance, and research from those fields might be successfully applied to the future analysis of election administration governance.[24] In addition, further research is needed to determine how election governance affects other aspects of the election process. For example, it may be that different election governance structures may utilize different election management techniques, such as contracting out election services or deferring to professional election management staff. Furthermore, governance may affect the types of decisions and the willingness of election officials to engage in reforms and innovations that may improve the electoral process. Although we found that nonvoters are more likely to prefer elected election officials, additional research is needed about the preferences of nonvoters regarding election governance and to determine whether a disaffection with the way elections are run in their locality has any causal relationship with their decision not to participate in the political process.

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Notes

1. The many complaints against Blackwell are summarized in a 102-page report issued in January 2005 by the U.S. House Judiciary Committee Democratic Staff. See "Preserving Democracy: What Went Wrong in Ohio," Status Report of the House Judiciary Committee Democratic Staff, January 5, 2005, http://www.house.gov/judiciary_democrats/ohiostatusrept1505.pdf.

2. The California audit was conducted by the California State Auditor, Bureau of State Audits, "Office of the Secretary of State: Clear and Appropriate Direction is Lacking in Its Implementation of the Federal Help America Vote Act," December 2004, 2004-139, http://www.bsa.ca.gov/pdfs/reports/2004-139.pdf. The federal audit was conducted by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, Office of Inspector General, "Final Report: Audit of Expenditures of Help American Vote Act Funds by the California Office of Secretary of State," Report No. E-HP-CA-01-06, December 2005, http://www.eac.gov/docs/CA%20audit.pdf.

3. In Ohio, election governance was on the ballot in the form of State Issue 4 (redistricting reform) and State Issue 5 (creation of a new appointed election administration board) in the 2005 election. Issue 4 received support from 30.30 percent of votes cast and Issue 5 received support from 29.92 percent of ballots cast (http://www.sos.state.oh.us/sos/ElectionsVoter/Results2005.aspx). In California, the primary issue on the 2005 ballot was redistricting reform, and the creation of a nonpartisan group of retired judges to undertake future redistricting in that state; this measure received support from 40.2 percent of ballots cast (http://ss.ca.gov/elections/sov/2005_special/sov_pref_pgxiii_votes_for_against_props.pdf).

4. Some polling on the election governance measures in Ohio and California was conducted after the November elections by the JEHT Foundation (http://electionupdates.caltech.edu/JEHT_redistricting.pdf), with data therein on perceptions in both states about independent election administration.

5. We use two questions to screen for voters. First, voters are required to self-identify themselves as voters. Second, voters must self-identify as being registered voters. In addition, voters must provide the voting technology used to cast their ballot. If respondents failed to identify themselves as registered to vote and as voters, then they are classified as nonvoters.

6. We use the population weights provided by ICR. ICR's description of the EXCEL population weights states that the "weighting process takes into account the disproportionate probabilities of household selection due to the number of separate telephone lines and the probability associated with the random selection of an individual household member. Following application of the above weights, the sample is post-stratified and balanced by key demographics such as age, sex, region, and education." Readers interested in more detailed statistical analysis of these data, including hypothesis tests for statistical significance, will find them below where we present multivariate models that provide hypothesis tests for statistical significance while controlling for the effects of other covariates. The two choices in each question were rotated to avoid bias.

7. See http://www.sos.state.oh.us/sos/ElectionsVoter/results2005.aspx?Section=1063.

8. http://fairvote.org/?page=63.

9. The data themselves support the conclusion that respondents understood the question. One would expect that individuals who historically lean upon the voter cue of candidate party affiliation, that is, those at an informational disadvantage, will be more likely to support partisan election officials. This is precisely the relationship uncovered using the multivariate analysis. We find voters who are more likely to be at an informational disadvantage, such as African Americans, the poorly educated, and the young, are more likely to support partisan election officials. If the question were indeed widely

misinterpreted, it is difficult to understand why the young, poorly educated, and African Americans would all be more likely to support biased election officials.

10. Given the lack of variation in the responses concerning the form of electoral governance, there is little of interest when we examine these responses by party control for registered voters.

11. Others have disagreed, most recently former Election Assistance Commissioner Ray Martinez III; see Martinez (2006).

12. Governor's Select Task Force on Election Procedures, Standards, and Technology, December 30, 2002.

13. "Challenges Facing the American Electoral System: Research Priorities for the Social Sciences," March 2005, http://elections.ssrc.org/research/FinalReport030105.pdf, page 12.

14. "Revitalizing Democracy in Florida," 2001, The Governor's Select Task Force on Election Procedures, Standards, and Technology.

15. Given that more than 9 of every 10 registered voters in our sample stated a preference for an election board, there are few instances where respondents stated a preference for a single election executive. Thus, there simply is too little variation in the dependent variable here for reliable estimation of a multivariate model or for meaningful statistical tests of hypotheses.

16. Generation takes the value of 1 if the respondent is between the ages of 18–27, 2 for ages 28–39, 3 for ages 40–58, and 4 for ages 59 and over. For discussion of typical covariates associated with the study of American public opinion, see Erikson, Luttbeg, and Tedin (1980).

17. Except in the case of Nebraska where the state legislature is unicameral.

18. For further discussion of the goodness-of-fit tests for discrete choice models, see Greene (2002).

19. The chi-square test statistics are 55 (Model 1) and 54 (Model 2), both with 15 degrees of freedom.

20. For Model 1, our model specification predicts 77 percent of the cases, and the intercept-only model predicts 76 percent of the cases; for Model 2, our specification predicts 80 percent of the cases, and the intercept-only model predicts 80 percent. Thus, our proportional reduction in error is slight or nonexistent in these situations, again due to the simple fact that our data are highly skewed toward one of the two responses.

21. We use the CLARIFY package in STATA to compute these first difference estimates. See King, Tomz, and Wittenberg (2000).

22. The binary variable was selected due to a limited number of responses reporting somewhat confident and not at all confident.

23. While most traditionalist states are Southern, it is not the case that all Southern states are traditionalist as Maryland and Missouri are classified as individualistic.

24. Classic treatments are found in Coase (1937), Alchian and Demsetz (1972), and Michael Jensen and William Meckling (1976). An article that applies the insights from the economics of information literature to the problem of election administration is Alvarez and Hall (2006). Another literature that might be successfully applied to the election governance problem is the analysis in economics of "mechanism design"; see the discussion of this literature and the citations in Mas-Colell, Whinston, and Green (1995).

25. More information regarding the ICR EXCEL survey is available from http://www.icrsurvey.com/ICRExcel.aspx.

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Appendix: Survey Methodology

The ICR EXCEL omnibus telephone survey methodology consists of interviews with approximately 1,000 respondents, conducted twice a week.[25] ICR undertakes a random-digit dialing approach to sampling telephone households, and within each

sample household a single adult respondent is selected based on the adult with the most recent birthday. The ICR EXCEL survey data are then weighted to produce a nationally representative sample of the adult population; we use these population weights in all of the univariate and cross-tabulated analyses reported in this article. Given the sample size of the ICR EXCEL survey we use, a typical survey proportion (50%–50% split) will have a 95% confidence level of approximately 3 percentage points.

In Table A-1 below, we report weighted survey frequencies from our ICR data, in comparison to the similar frequencies from the 2004 Current Population Survey. There we compare our ICR sample to the Current Population Survey (CPS) on gender, age, education, and region. The weighted ICR survey frequencies closely match the CPS estimates of the same population parameters, especially once we take into account the slightly different categorizations used for age and educational attainment.

Table A-1. ICR Survey Compared to 2004 Current Population Survey[a]

	2004 Survey	2004 CPS[a]
Gender		
Male	48.2	48.1
Female	51.8	51.9
Age		
Age 18–24 years	12.9	12.9
Age 25–34 years	18.4	18.1
Age 35–44 years	20.7	20.0
Age 45–54 years	18.9	19.3
Age 55–64 years	12.9	13.6
Age 65–74 years	8.5	8.5
Age 75 years and over	6.2	7.6
Refused	1.5	—
Education		
Less than high school	16.4	15.4
High school	33.0	31.8
Some college	22.9	27.3
College degree	16.5	17.0
Graduate degree	8.1	8.5
Technical school or refused	3.1	—
Region		
Northeast	19.5	19.0
North Central	22.7	22.5
South	35.8	35.8
West	22.0	22.7

[a]Information collected from U.S. Census Bureau's November 2004 Current Population Survey (CPS) and November 2004 Voter Supplement.