

**RUN FOR
SOMETHING**

BACKGROUND

Do Democratic candidates in down-ballot races have a statistically significant impact on top of the ticket Democratic vote share? Is there evidence of a reverse coattails effect?

This research, validated over time, could be a useful input in making resource allocation decisions in statewide races and drive us to rethink how down-ballot races impact the broader statewide democratic electoral enterprise.

We already know that down-ballot candidates are the Gubernatorial and Congressional candidates of tomorrow. The question is, do those candidates impact those races today?

TOPLINE FINDINGS

Regression analysis suggests that having a contested state legislative race has a positive effect of **0.3% - 1.5%** on top of the ticket Democrat performance when comparing precincts with a Democrat and Republican running versus those races where only a republican is on the ballot.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Run for Something hypothesizes that reverse coattails is an actual phenomenon. By increasing the number of Democrats running down ballot, especially in areas that tend to be uncontested, they can excite voters with local issues and drive up Democratic participation.

Run for Something partnered with **Kinetic21** and **BlueLabs** to analyze the effect of 2020's down ballot races on Joe Biden's performance.

METHODOLOGY

DATA COLLECTION

We used 2020 election results data at the precinct level for our analysis. This data is not readily available, especially so early after Election Day, and required us to often communicate and acquire unstandardized data directly from county election officials. To meet project benchmarks, we had to limit the scope of the data in which we were able to analyze.

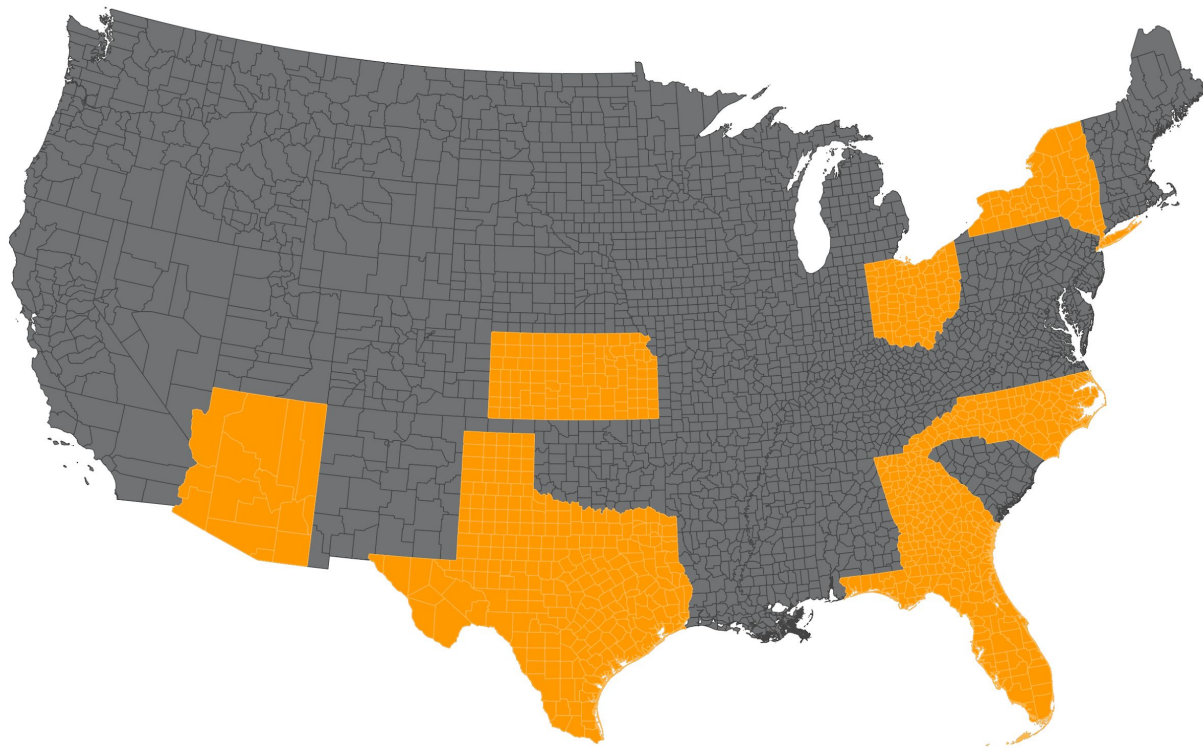
We narrowed the work to eight states total, and chose our states to ensure a variety of state election profiles (*next slide*). Within these states, we wanted to oversample from counties in which RFS had candidates. To increase our sample size, we identified both RFS counties and counties in which there were no RFS candidates but that mimicked the demographic profile of RFS counties. This gave us a list of 3,953 precincts within 61 counties for analysis.

DATA COLLECTION BY STATE

Traditional battlegrounds
growing red: FL, OH, NC

Emerging battlegrounds: AZ, GA,
TX

Additional states: KS, NY



CONTESTED PRECINCT DEFINITION

Our analysis compared contested races (treatment) to uncontested Republican races (control). This required some precinct definitions for state legislature analysis.

- **Contested races** are those that had both Democrats and Republicans running in all state legislative chambers on the ballot.
- **Uncontested R races** are those where Republicans ran unchallenged in both state legislative chambers.
- **Semi-contested** refers to races where an independent candidate was present in the race and received at least 20% of the vote.

Using these definitions, we narrowed our dataset to three segments of precincts: those that had **only** uncontested races in both state legislative chambers; those that had a mix on contested races, and those that had **both** state legislative chambers contested.

PRECINCT DISTRIBUTION BY CONTESTED STATUS, STATE

STATE	TOTAL PRECINCTS ON VOTER FILE	UNCONTESTED (D)	SEMI-CONTESTED (D*)	CONTESTED	UNCONTESTED (R)
AZ	1,481	0	0	79	0
FL	5,816	95	3	1,068	0
GA	2,650	0	0	8	33
KS	3,592	36	0	29	146
NC	2,662	0	0	58	0
NY	15,213	0	0	87	0
OH	8,930	155	0	1,089	56
TX	8,645	0	0	28	11
TOTAL	48,989	286	3	2,446	246

* No precincts in any state had purely semi-contested Republican races, and therefore the category is not included above

ANALYSIS

Precinct-level results data was matched against the Targetsmart file to append demographic and modeled features to the dataset. These features were used as inputs into regression models built to analyze the differences in Democratic support. Key features used include:

- Age
- Race
- Income
- Urbanity
- Education
- Targetsmart Partisanship Score
- Clinton 2016 Vote Share

ANALYSIS

We completed a series of regression models to determine whether contested races have a significant impact when the entire population is included in the analysis.

The most important consideration in modeling this effect is to control for underlying differences in partisanship between precincts with contested and uncontested races.

Using available features, we performed combinations of LASSO's and post-modelling multicollinearity tests to come up with 3-4 reasonable options, and then select that which we believe to best capture the data.

FINDINGS

KEY RESULTS

In models with controlled multicollinearity, contested races has a consistently positive effect on 2020 Democratic top of the ticket (Biden) performance that ranged between 0.3 - 1.5%.

This range reflects the availability of a few different features of partisanship, and the resulting positive coefficient. Depending on the key feature being used to control for partisanship, this coefficient dropped in and out of significance within the model.

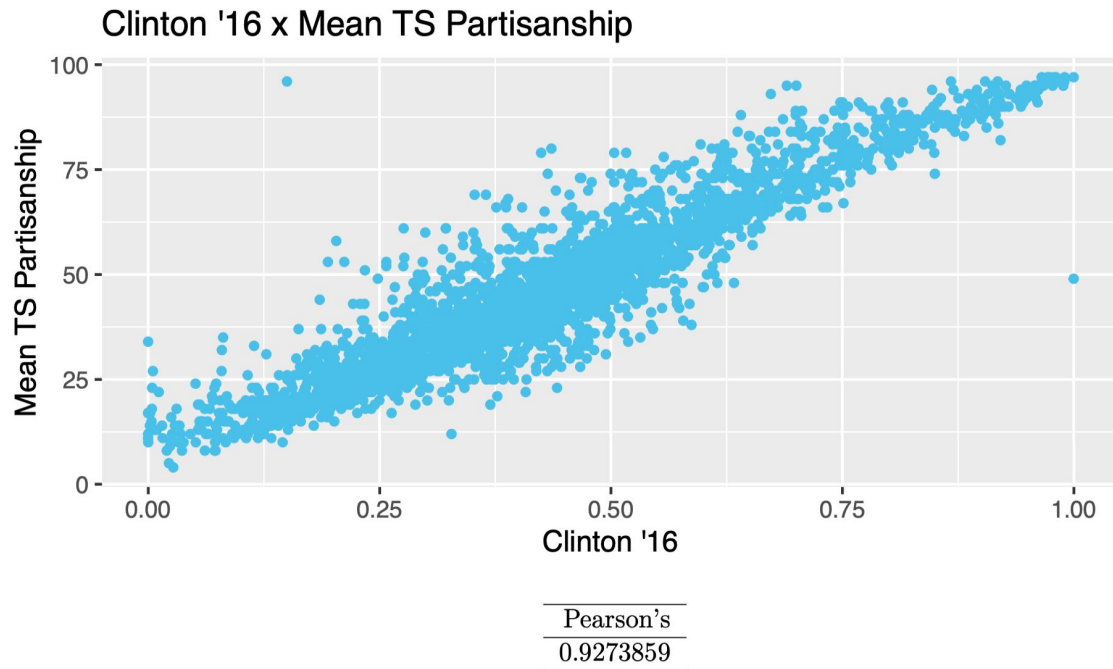
When using Clinton '16 two-way vote share as the primary measure of partisanship, we see a 1.5% boost on topline performance with a p-value that indicates significance.

When we use Targetsmart 2020 Partisanship Score as the primary measure of partisanship, the effect drops to a 0.3% boost, without being significant.

*This analysis is *not* an argument that Joe Biden had a coattails effect or did not. We didn't address this question.

CHOOSING THE PRIMARY MEASURE

Clinton 2016 two-way support and Targetsmart partisanship score should do roughly the same job in controlling for partisanship. We plot the two features against each other and demonstrate extremely high correlation. Because of this correlation, we feel comfortable with the directionality of the Targetsmart Partisanship Score's measured effect even without significance, and include it as a range in our overall estimated effect.



COMPARING MEASURES OF PARTISANSHIP

Version 1 (using Clinton 2016 two-way vote share) as our dependent variable shows that contested races have a positive effect on Biden vote share by 1.5%.

Version 2 (Targetsmart Partisanship Score) as our dependent variable shows that contested races have a positive effect on Biden vote share by 0.3%.

Table 6: Version 1: Model Summary

feature	coefficient	p_value	significant
intercept	0.3257240	9.5939e-159	Y
contested	0.0157282	1.7438e-03	Y
% black	0.1542624	4.8129e-62	Y
% HS or Less	-0.3773389	4.8524e-179	Y
% suburban	0.0223636	3.8475e-10	Y
% homeowners	-0.0883391	2.1112e-18	Y
% Clinton '16	0.6780419	0.0000e+00	Y

D.F.	R2	Adj R2
2646	0.89	0.89

Table 9: Version 2: Model Summary

feature	coefficient	p_value	significant
intercept	0.1505447	2.2261e-51	Y
contested	0.0039023	3.6702e-01	N
% black	0.1314953	7.1264e-62	Y
% HS or Less	-0.3744063	4.1627e-135	Y
% suburban	0.0149353	1.2680e-06	Y
% bachelor degree	0.2412454	8.7279e-38	Y
mean TS partisanship	0.0077203	0.0000e+00	Y

D.F.	R2	Adj R2
2646	0.919	0.918

CONCLUSIONS

CONCLUSION

This research shows an encouraging directional conclusion that reverse coattails existed in 2020 — contested state legislative races had a positive impact on topline Democratic performance, measured here using Biden two-way vote share.

The dataset used for analysis was robust, with 3,953 precincts within 61 counties included in analysis. With even more data, we would be able to draw a more conclusive result.

The result also leads to many follow up questions for future analysis — is this an isolated trend in the 2020 election cycle, or can it be replicated in other elections? With more data, could we draw state-specific conclusions or come to a more precise effect size?

RFS could invest in future research with an increased data sample to expand its ¹⁶learnings around the reverse coattails effect.

POSSIBLE FUTURE RESEARCH

Additional topics to build on this research include:

- Is there a consistent reverse coattails effect in earlier election cycles, or is this a 2020 phenomenon?
- Is there an effect on top of ticket races that are not the presidential? (Statewide races, especially in off-years)
- Is there a varied effect based on the different state profiles?
- Is there a reverse coattails effect on turnout?
- Does the effect vary based on the partisanship of the area? Can we compare very Republican areas to more moderate areas?

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APPENDIX

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DATA CAVEATS

- New York and Kansas did not have records for county or municipal level elections. For analysis regarding these races, both states were dropped from the analysis.
- There are a large number of precincts in Kansas data that did not have party identification included or was identified inconsistently (eg Democrat identified, but not Republican). For these precincts / races, rows have been dropped from analysis.
- Ohio does not have municipal election results reported. County level is the most granular analysis available.
- Registered voter estimates were calculated from the TargetSmart 2020 database. Where precincts weren't matched, no registered voter estimate is available.
- Under and over votes, which are reported in New York, Florida, and North Carolina, have been dropped.
- Write-in candidates, due to be reported inconsistently between states, have been removed from the analysis.
- Georgia senate results for the November general were not provided for analysis.
- New York allows candidates to run under different parties within same precinct (eg. Biden running under Worker's Party and Democrat tickets). For these precincts any individual running under Republican or Democrat had all votes consolidated under this party, other candidates were consolidated under an "other" party. So, using the case of Biden, he will only be listed as 90 votes under Democrat party, even if he actually received 3 votes under Worker's Party and 87 votes under Democrat party.

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