Partisan Fertility and Presidential Elections

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Policy priorities and political power

- Shifts in political power lead to sharp changes in public policy
  - Obama → Affordable Care Act (ACA)
  - Trump → Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA)

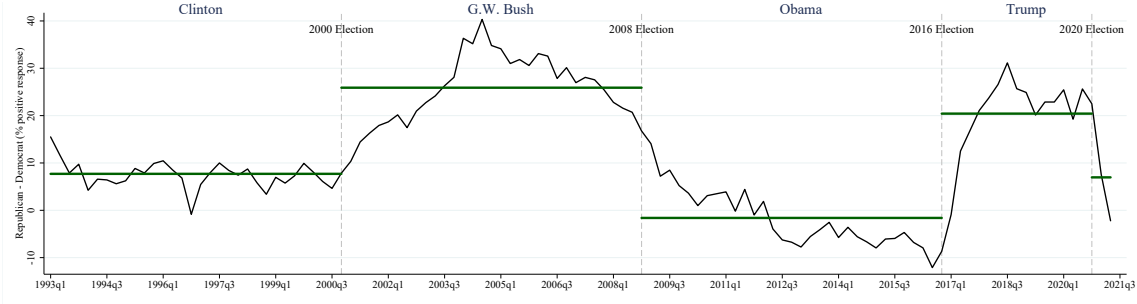
- Partisan division on policy priorities and worries about the future (Pew, 2018)
  - Dems: climate change, inequality, social program spending
  - Reps: undocumented immigration, national debt, tax increases
  - ⇒ Top priorities have little overlap

General satisfaction and political power

- Gallup tracks Americans' "satisfaction with the way things are going in the U.S."

	Pre-election (2016)	**Post**-election (2017)
Democrat	**43%**	13%
Republican	12%	**46%**

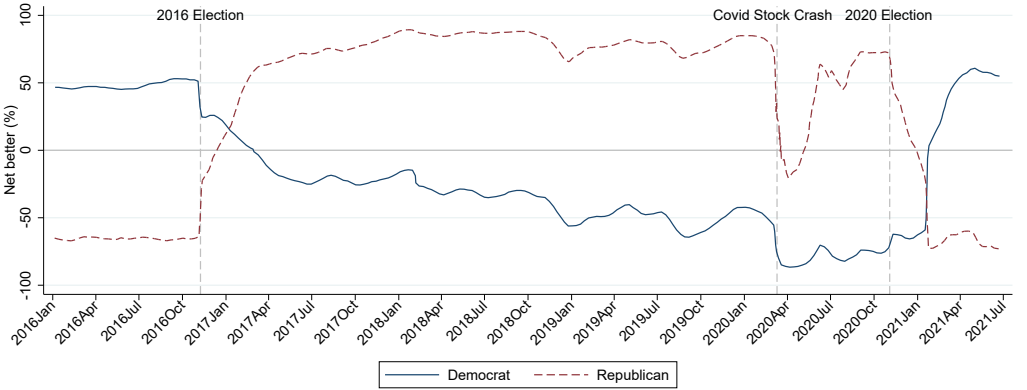
Economic optimism and political power



Difference in Republican versus Democrat optimism about the economy

(Bloomberg Consumer Comfort Survey)

Zooming in: 2016-2021



Net share of respondents who think the economy is improving versus worsening

(CIVIQS Survey)

Research question

Two observations:

- Large partisan swings in *general* satisfaction and *economic* optimism around regime-changing presidential elections
- Decision to have a child is a function of public policies and economic conditions

Research question: Do shifts in **political power** affect **fertility** decisions?

Research design

- We exploit the **surprise 2016 election** of Trump
  - Option markets: 12% probability of Trump victory (Langer and Lemoine, 2020)
  - Polling: 15% and 29% (New York Times & FiveThirtyEight)

- **Event study** design
  - Compare fertility across groups likely to favor Republican or Democrat candidates
    - Republican vs Democratic-leaning counties
    - Hispanics vs non-Hispanics (within-county)

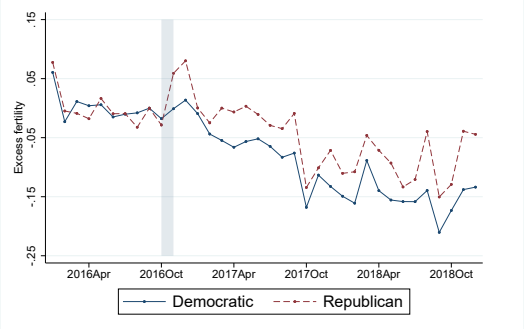
Data

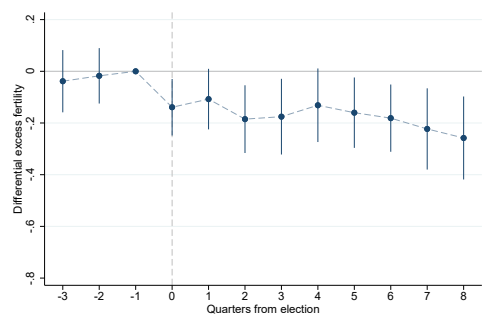
Administrative data for US births from NCHS

- Outcome: **excess fertility**
  - Birth rate in a county or by ethnicity
  - Normalize by subtracting mean fertility by county × month-of-year (× ethnicity)
  - Quarterly frequency

- **Conception timing**: reported last menstrual period
  - Measured with noise: 7-day lag btwn start of last menses & ~2 week fertile period
  - Example: if start of last menses was in October, a baby could have been conceived *after* the election date of November 8 ⇒ t-1 is partially treated
  - **Upshot**: both $t-1$ and t are in treatment window

Fertility effects across political geographies



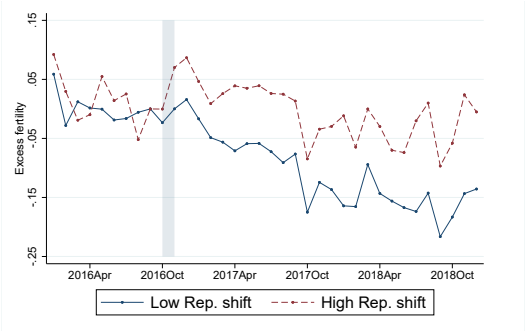


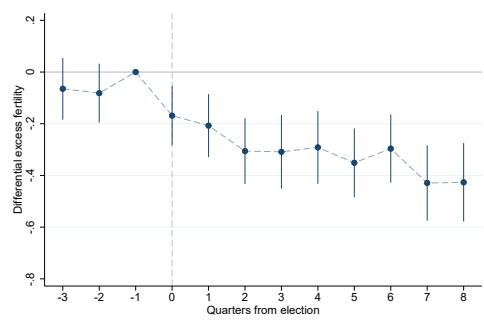
Rep/Dem counties classified by **vote share** in 2012

Interpretation of quarterly magnitudes

- Avg. quarterly treatment effect: 0.173 excess births per 1,000 women
  - The shift equals 1.2% of the 2015 national fertility rate
- Pre-existing R-D fertility gap of 1.02 (14.83 vs 13.81)
  - Trump's election widens this gap by 17%
- Translates into a fertility gap of 46,000 births in the nine qtrs post-election
  - = 0.6% of total 2015 births
  - Requires a counterfactual assumption

Fertility effects across political geographies



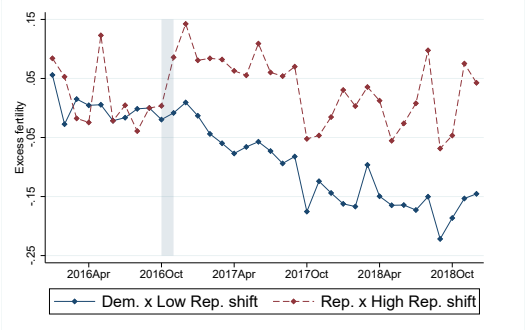


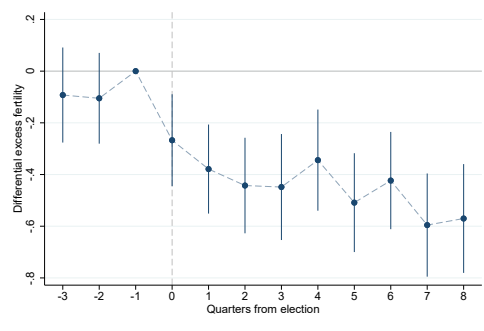
Rep/Dem counties classified by **Republican shift** between 2008 & 2016

Correlation between 2012 vote share & Rep shift measures = 0.16

Magnitude: 2.2% of 2015 national fertility rate

Fertility effects across political geographies





Rep/Dem counties classified by **vote share** × **Republican shift**

Magnitude: 3.2% of 2015 fertility rate for these counties

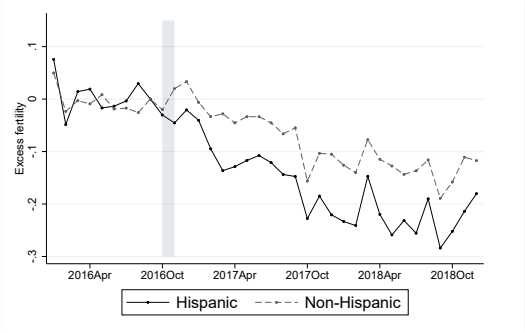
Hispanic partisanship

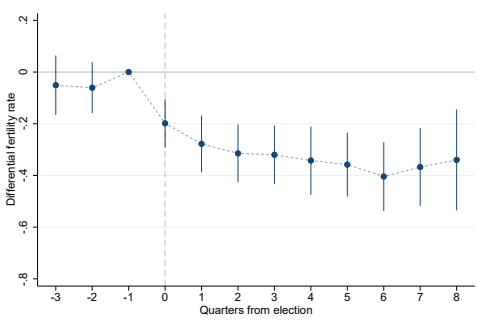
- Hispanics lean heavily Democratic:
  - Hispanics voted 2-to-1 for Hillary Clinton

- They were singled out by the Trump campaign:

> *"When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best... They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people... It's coming from all over South and Latin America" (Trump campaign launch)*

Fertility effects between ethnic groups (*within* counties)

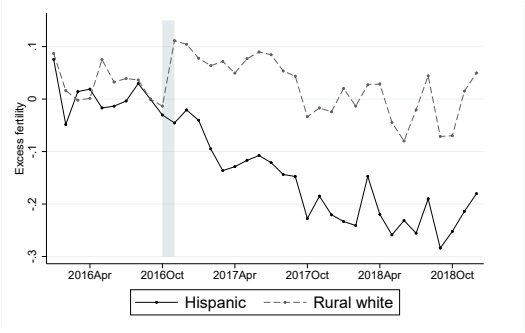


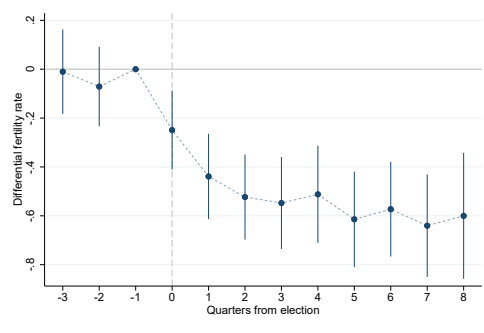


Hispanics vs non-Hispanics

Magnitude: 2.3% of 2015 national fertility rate

Comparing Hispanic fertility with whites in rural counties

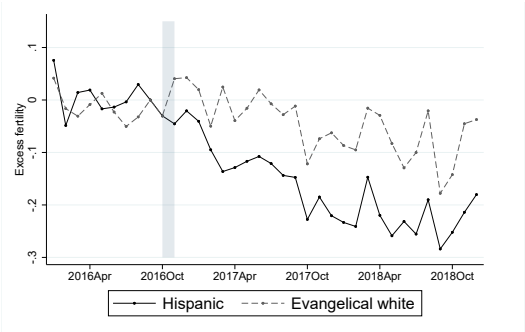


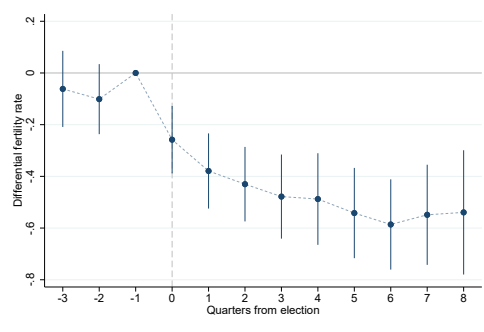


Hispanics vs **whites in rural counties**

Magnitude: 3.3% of 2015 fertility rate for these groups

Comparing Hispanic fertility with whites in evangelical counties





Hispanics vs **whites in evangelical counties**

Correlation between whites in rural & whites in evangelical measures = 0.17

Magnitude: 3.1% of 2015 fertility rate for these groups

Possible mechanisms

1. Actual or expected policy
2. Economic optimism
3. Updating beliefs about political and social climate

- Other forces possible, e.g., composition of migrants, within-household dynamics, polarized misinformation

Possible mechanism 1: Actual or expected policy

- Reminder: partisan divergence on policy priorities & worries about future
- Together with control of White House → possible change in fertility decisions

- Young adults who had/expected fewer children than their ideal cite:
  - 64% cost of childcare
  - 39% lack of family leave
  - 36% domestic politics
  - 33% climate change
  - 37% global instability
- Immigration policy salient for Hispanics (but group not large enough to explain entire R vs D cross-county effects)

Possible mechanism 2: Economic optimism

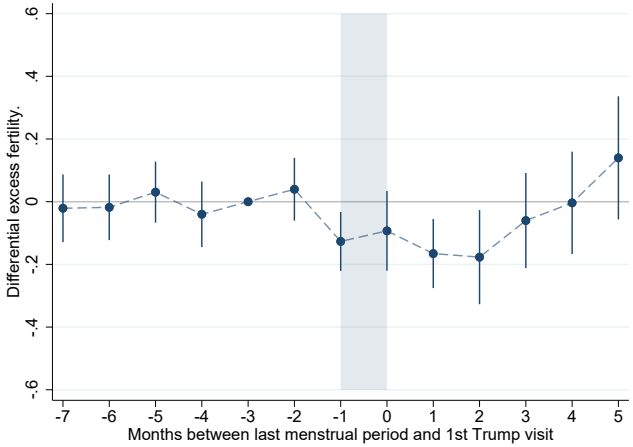
- Reminder: sharp shifts in partisan economic optimism after elections
- CIVIQS asks: “Do you think the nation’s economy is getting better or worse?"

Net better %	Nov 2016 (Pre)	Mar 2017 (Post)
Democrat	**+52%**	-4%
Republican	-63%	**+63%**

Possible mechanism 3: Updating about political & social climate

- We use Trump's pre-campaign visits to provide insight
- Campaign stops may cause people to
  - update Pr(Trump wins) ↑ ... but prediction mkts ↓
  - update view of *other* Americans' values
- Trump rallies
  - ⇒ Reps to think their worldview has broader local support
  - ⇒ reduce Dem & Hisp willingness to bring child into world, even absent Δ policy
- We can test this for Hispanics

Trump campaign visits 2015-2016



Method: Dynamic DDD event study à la Abraham & Sun (2021)

Conclusion

Political polarization & declining fertility are two fundamental social challenges

- This paper **causally links partisanship to fertility** choices

Estimated DID partisan fertility effects: 1.2 - 3.3% of 2015 birth rates

- Effect size increases in intensity of partisanship – supports political sentiment as driver
- Magnitudes comparable to fertility effects of unemployment & cash transfers

Other elections:

- Bush (2000): fertility effects for Dem/Rep & high/low evangelical counties
- Obama (2008): no strong effects, but confounded by Great Recession

	(1) Dem. vs Rep.	(2) Low vs high Rep. shift	(3) Vote share × shift	(4) Hisp. vs non-Hisp.	(5) Hisp. vs rural white	(6) Hisp. vs evan. white
$Treat_{-3}$	-0.038	-0.065	-0.092	-0.051	-0.010	-0.062
	(0.061)	(0.061)	(0.094)	(0.059)	(0.088)	(0.075)
$Treat_{-2}$	-0.018	-0.082	-0.105	-0.061	-0.071	-0.101
	(0.055)	(0.058)	(0.089)	(0.050)	(0.083)	(0.069)
$Treat_0$	-0.139**	-0.169***	-0.267***	-0.198***	-0.249***	-0.258***
	(0.056)	(0.058)	(0.091)	(0.048)	(0.083)	(0.067)
$Treat_1$	-0.108*	-0.207***	-0.379***	-0.278***	-0.439***	-0.379***
	(0.060)	(0.062)	(0.088)	(0.056)	(0.089)	(0.074)
$Treat_2$	-0.185***	-0.306***	-0.443***	-0.315***	-0.523***	-0.430***
	(0.067)	(0.065)	(0.094)	(0.057)	(0.089)	(0.074)
$Treat_3$	-0.176**	-0.309***	-0.448***	-0.320***	-0.548***	-0.478***
	(0.075)	(0.073)	(0.105)	(0.058)	(0.096)	(0.083)
$Treat_4$	-0.131*	-0.291***	-0.344***	-0.342***	-0.512***	-0.488***
	(0.073)	(0.072)	(0.100)	(0.067)	(0.101)	(0.090)
$Treat_5$	-0.160**	-0.351***	-0.509***	-0.358***	-0.614***	-0.542***
	(0.069)	(0.068)	(0.097)	(0.063)	(0.100)	(0.089)
$Treat_6$	-0.181***	-0.296***	-0.423***	-0.404***	-0.573***	-0.586***
	(0.066)	(0.067)	(0.096)	(0.068)	(0.099)	(0.089)
$Treat_7$	-0.223***	-0.429***	-0.596***	-0.367***	-0.640***	-0.549***
	(0.080)	(0.074)	(0.102)	(0.077)	(0.107)	(0.099)
$Treat_8$	-0.258***	-0.427***	-0.570***	-0.340***	-0.600***	-0.539***
	(0.082)	(0.077)	(0.107)	(0.100)	(0.131)	(0.123)
Avg. Treat (0 to 8)	-0.173	-0.309	-0.442	-0.325	-0.522	-0.472
2015 avg. birth rate	14.007	14.007	13.878	13.896	15.701	15.221
Avg. Treat/2015 avg.	-1.2%	-2.2%	-3.2%	-2.3%	-3.3%	-3.1%
2015 avg. Treat-Control gap	-1.018	-.181	-.848	2.994	1.925	2.308
Avg. Treat/2015 avg. gap	17%	171%	52%	-11%	-27%	-20%
Observations	33,756	33,756	19,608	67,920	53,052	50,904
R-squared	0.367	0.369	0.394	0.314	0.247	0.272
County FE	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N
County×Ethnicity FE	N	N	N	N	N	N
Quarter event FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
N cluster county	2,813	2,813	1,634	2,830	2,830	2,830