LocalView:
Scaling Up the Study of Local Politics & Policy-Making in the United States

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Adjunct Assistant Professor, Columbia University

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About me

I’m a computational social scientist.

- I work on data science, applied survey methodology, and public opinion research at **NORC (National Opinion Research Center) at the University of Chicago**.
- I’m a political scientist by training, specializing in American Politics, political communication, and political methodology.

*like 🕺 **show biz** 🕺 but with a k.

American Politics happens in town hall

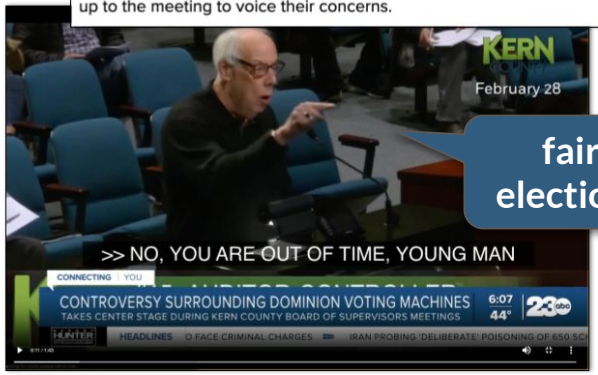
Maskless protesters upend Boston City Council meeting, sending councilors online instead

public health

Uproar at Board of Supervisors meeting over Dominion voting machines

A group of residents opposed to the renewal of a contract with Dominion showed up to the meeting to voice their concerns.

fair elections



"Nobody's giving us any answers": Uvalde families demand details of shooting investigation at City Council meeting

gun violence

Cincinnati poised to become first US city with Conversion Therapy ban

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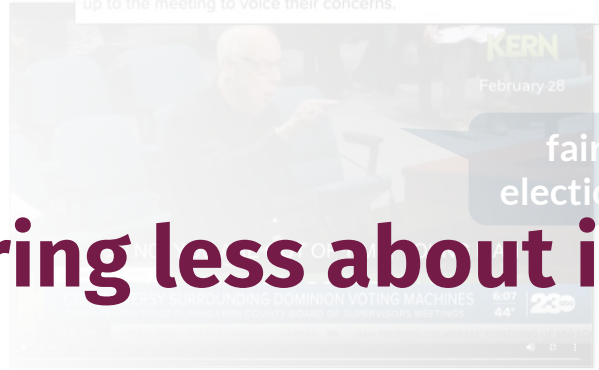

… but voters are hearing less about it.

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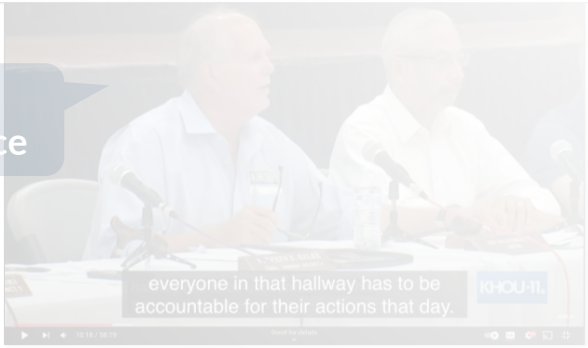

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LocalView

LocalView: A Database of Public Meetings to Map Local Policy-making in the U.S.

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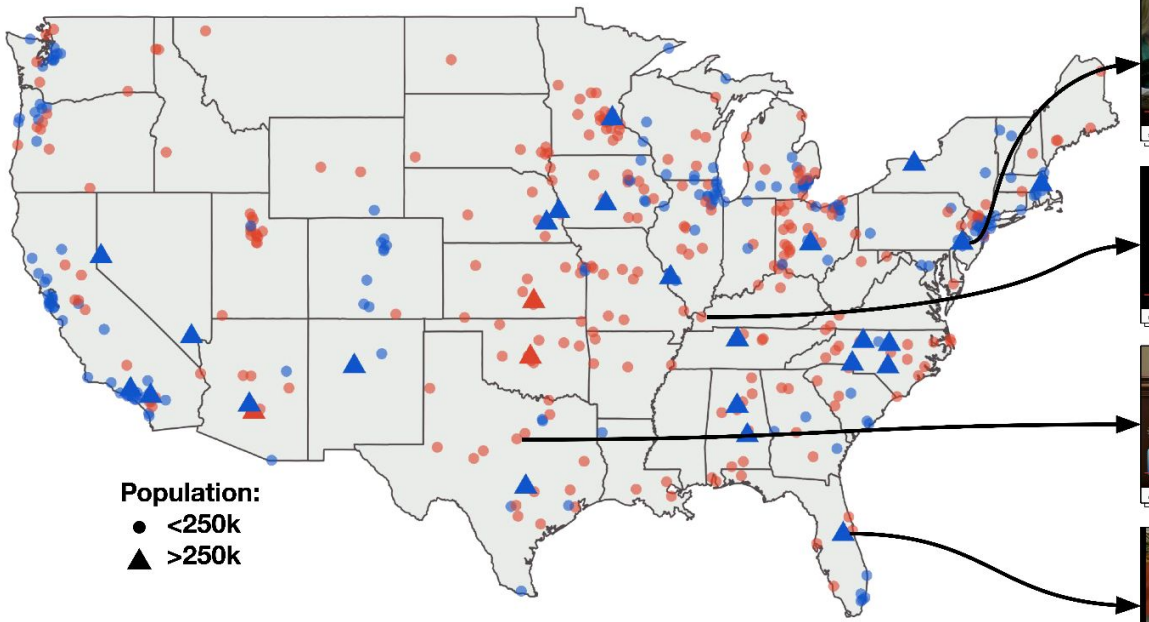

Philadelphia, PA (2017):

[35:08] the central challenge [for] people … around the globe now is **climate change** … the costs of inaction are high

Paducah, KY (2018):

[2:03:28] **religious freedom** means to … raise a **family** according to one's religious convictions … it extends into the public arena as well

Granbury, TX (2018):

[24:26] it was discussed that … it's beneficial for this **business owner** to have the sign on his own **property**

Orlando, FL (2016):

[27:53] in the **LGBTQ community** … cannot be silent when it comes to this kind of **gun violence**

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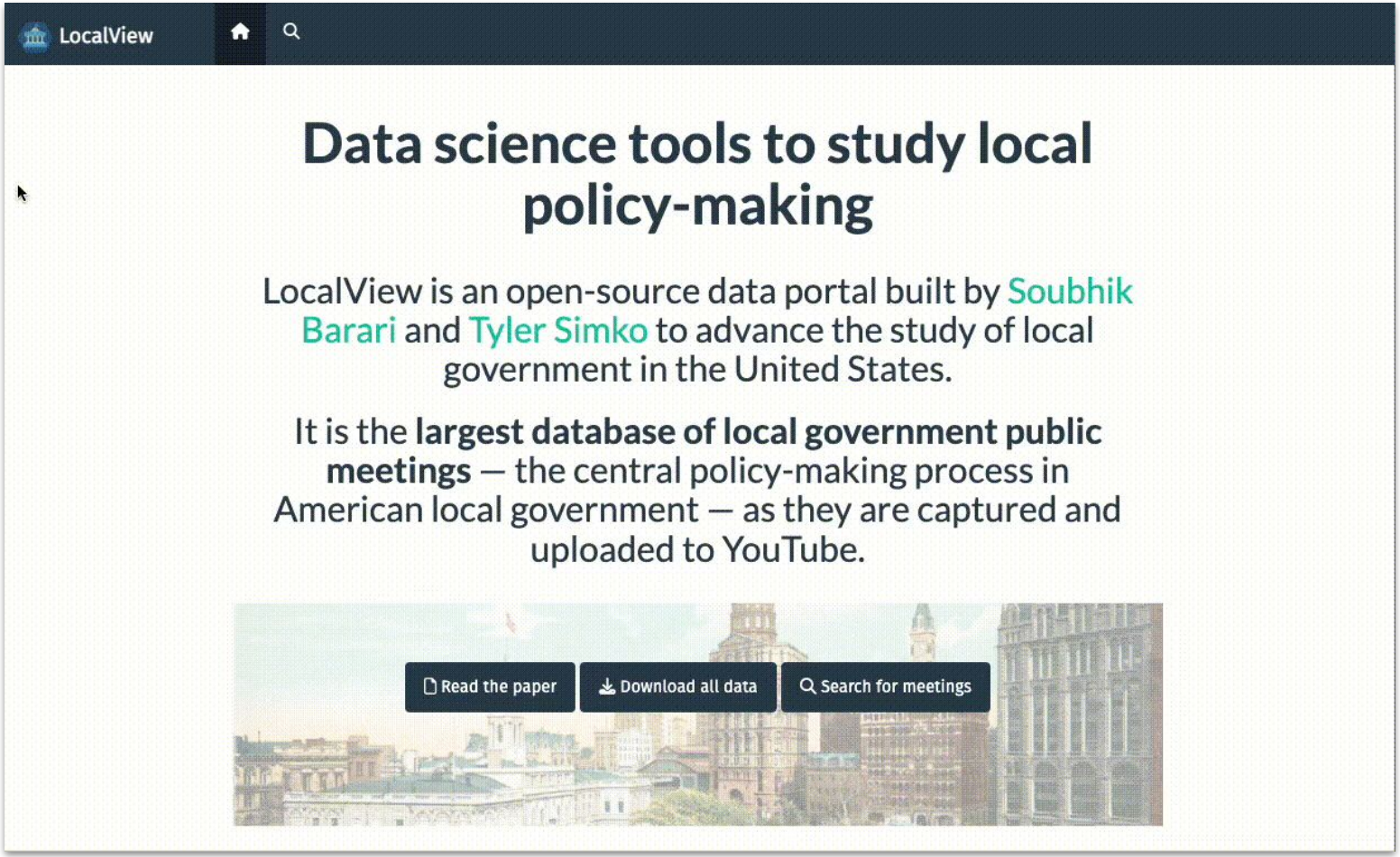

How* we** built LocalView

*Published in ***Nature: Scientific Data***:
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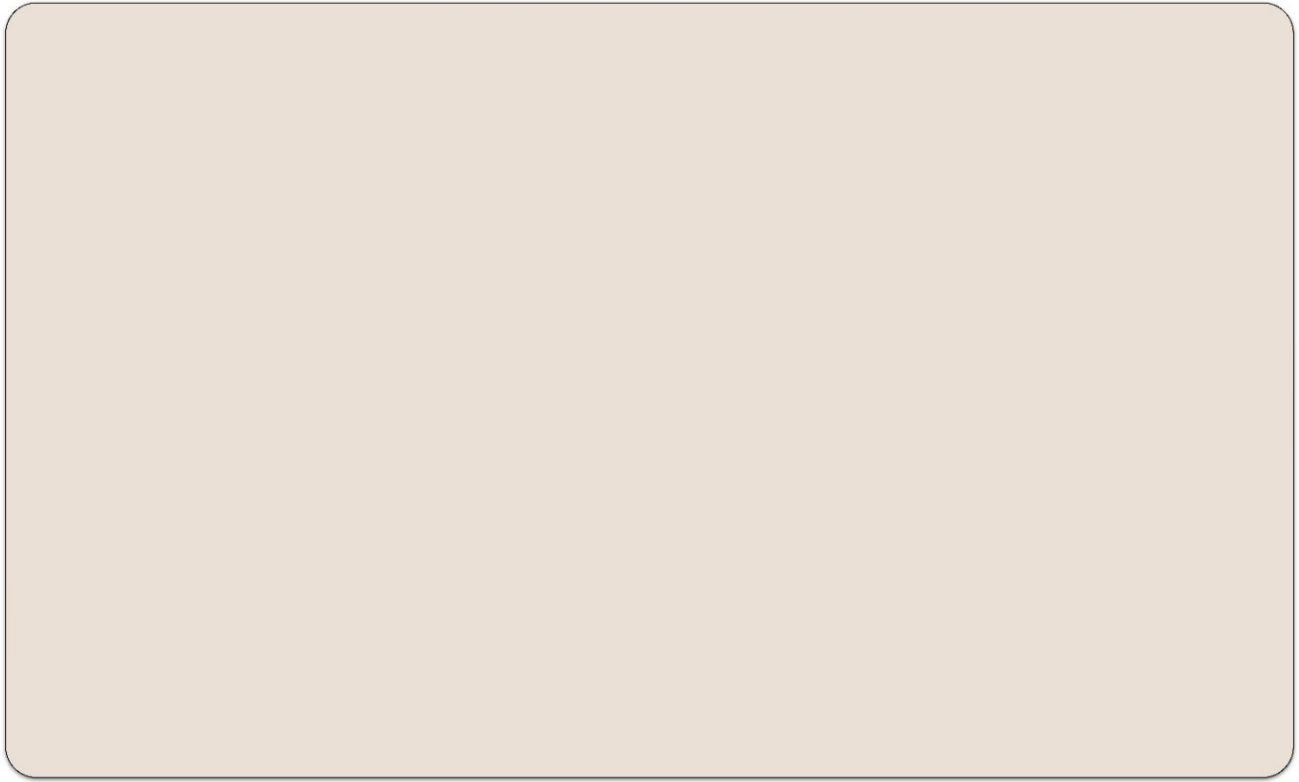

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Step 1: Query for local government public meetings on YouTube API using all incorporated places from U.S. Census.

>2 million
video search results

Place	State	FIPS
Cambridge	MA	11000

19,502
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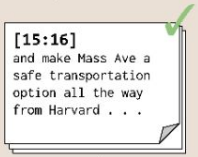

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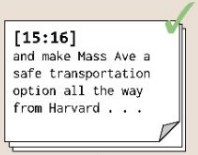

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Step 3: Parse meeting details and combine with metadata to create database.

LocalView

Text	Date	Type	...	FIPS
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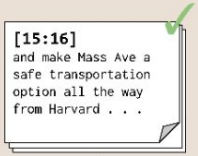

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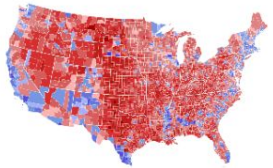
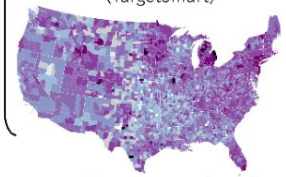
Step 4: Merge with other datasets.

Ex: **population density**
(American Community Survey)



Ex: **election outcomes**
(TargetSmart)



Ex: **COVID-19 outbreaks**
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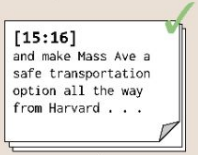

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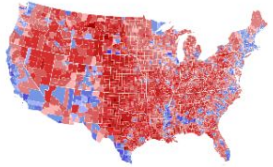

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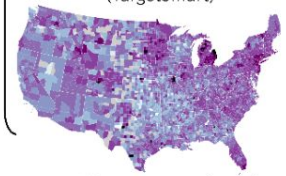

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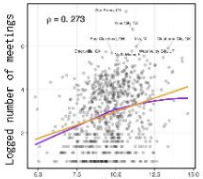
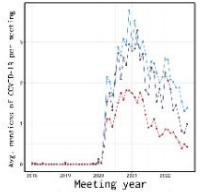
Step 5: Analyze.

Ex: **descriptive**



Ex: **correlational**



Ex: **longitudinal**

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So what can LocalView tell us about local politics?

Issue attention changes over **time** and across **context**

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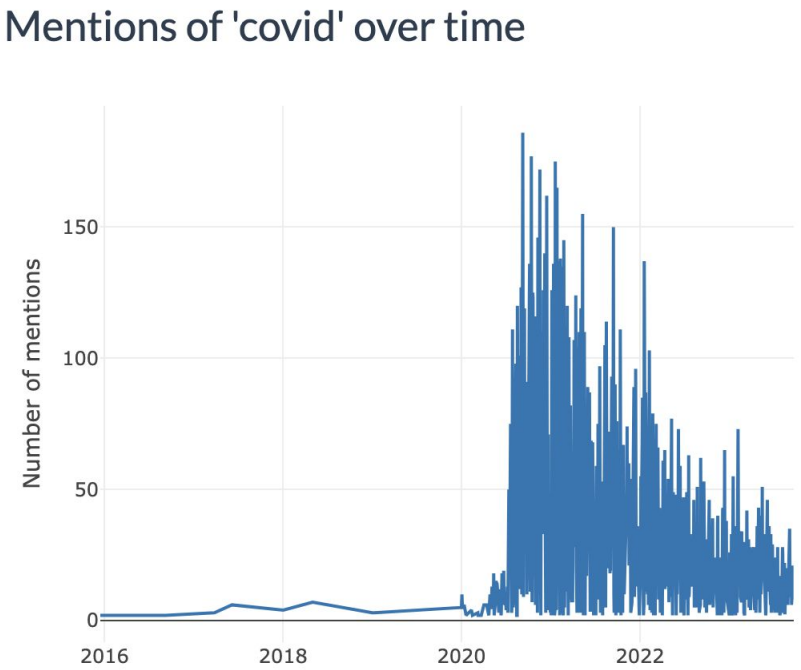

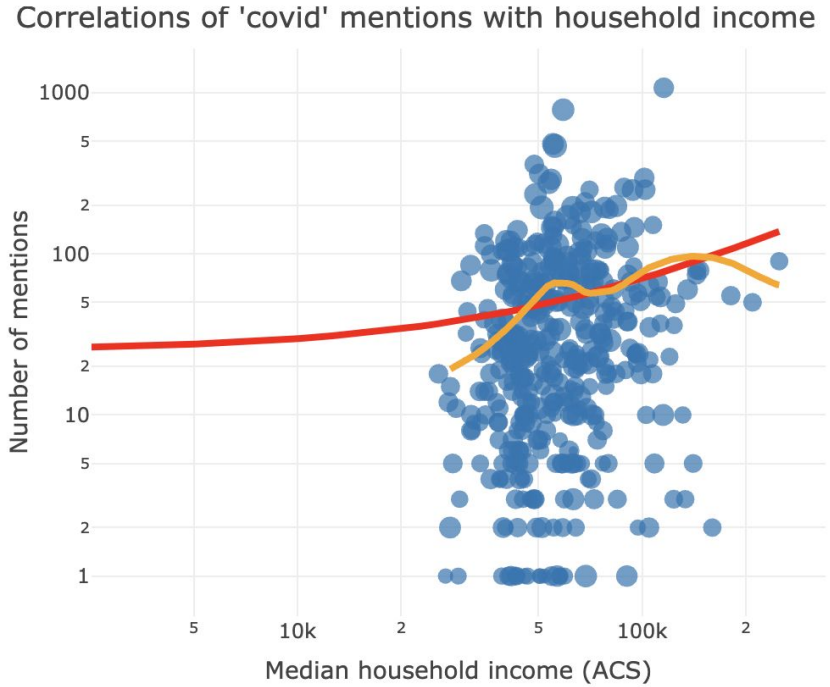

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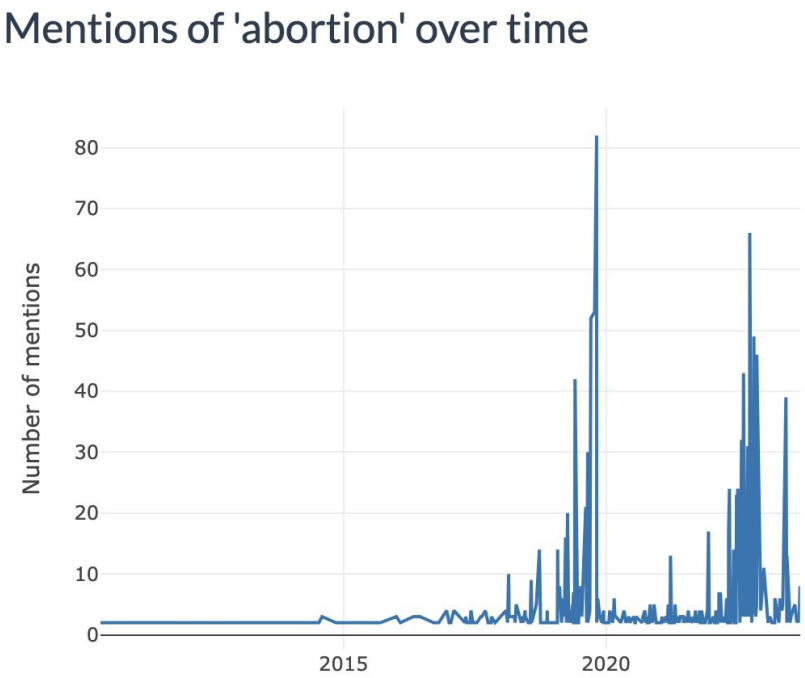
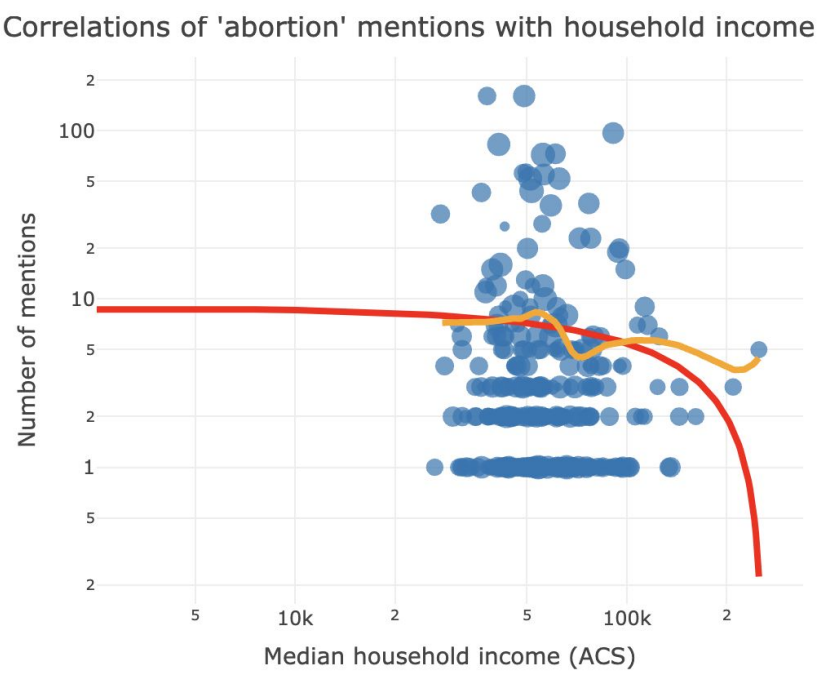
Issue attention changes over time and across context





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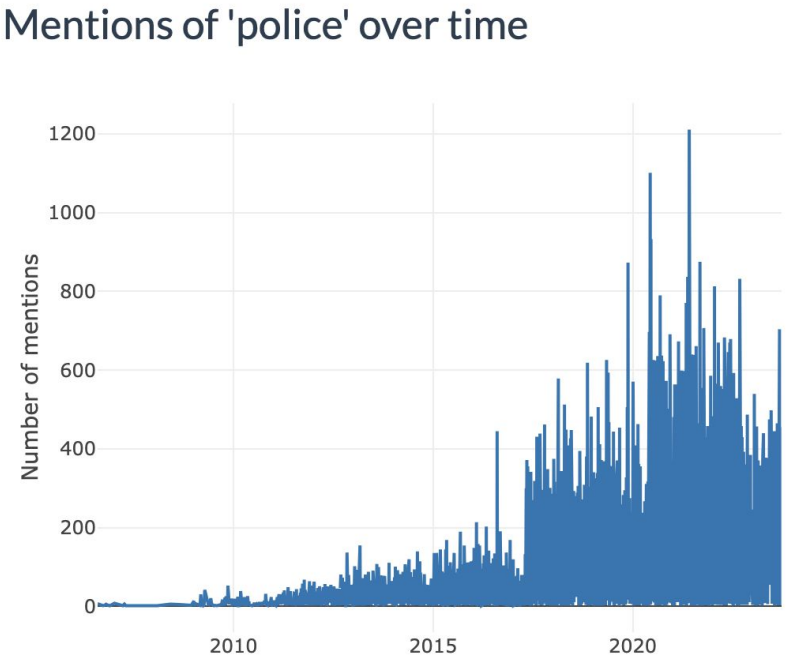

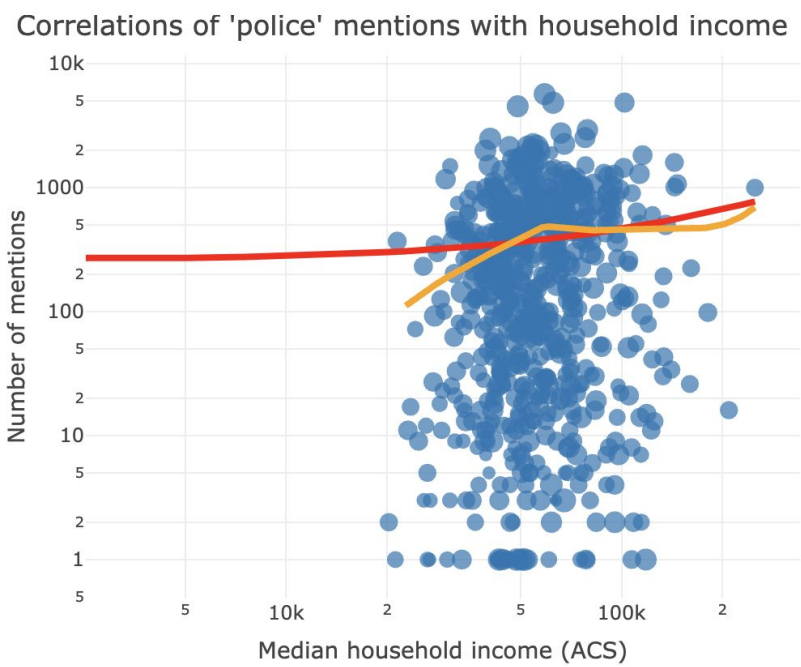

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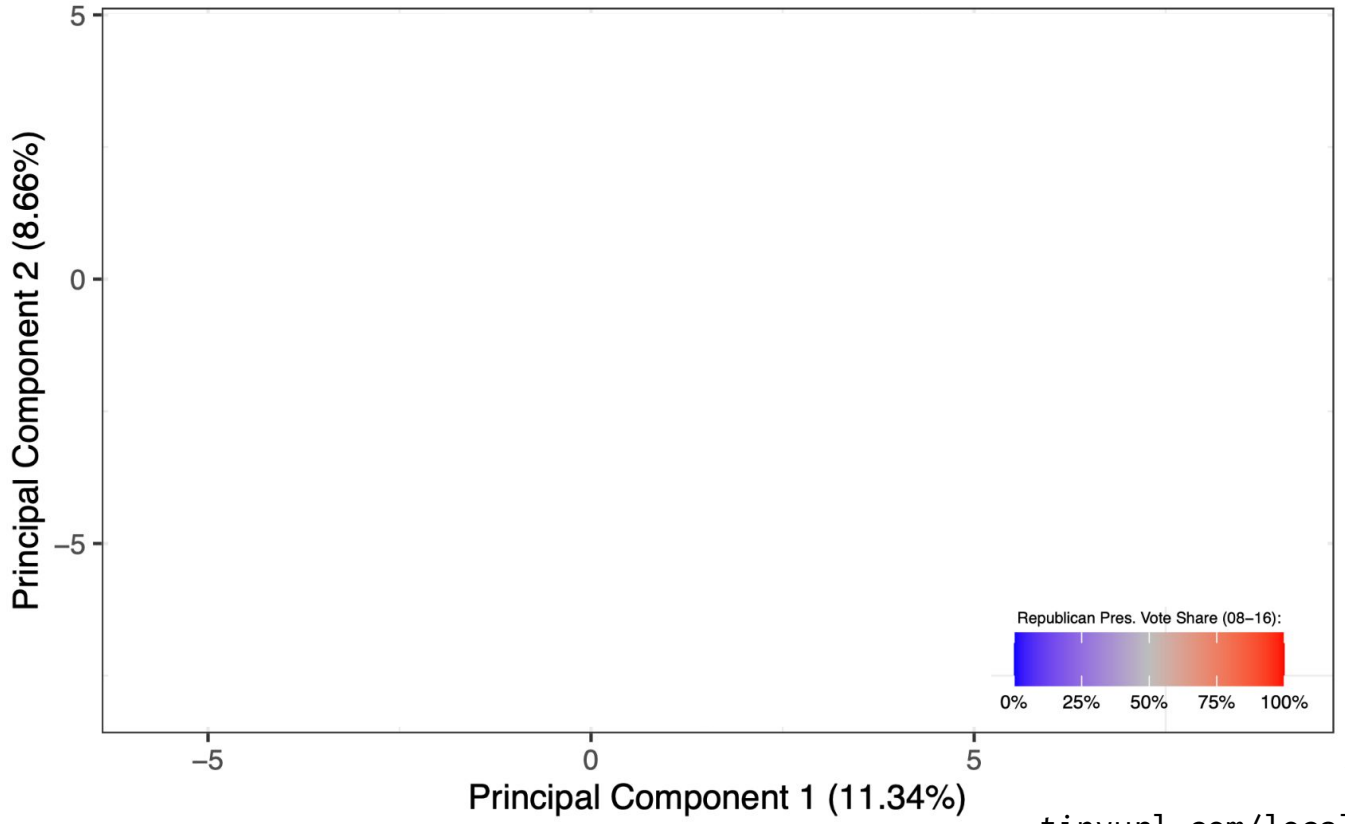
Democratic cities and Republican towns govern differently

Figure 2: **Principal Components of Issue Attention in Public Meetings**



Working paper:
tinyurl.com/local-polarization

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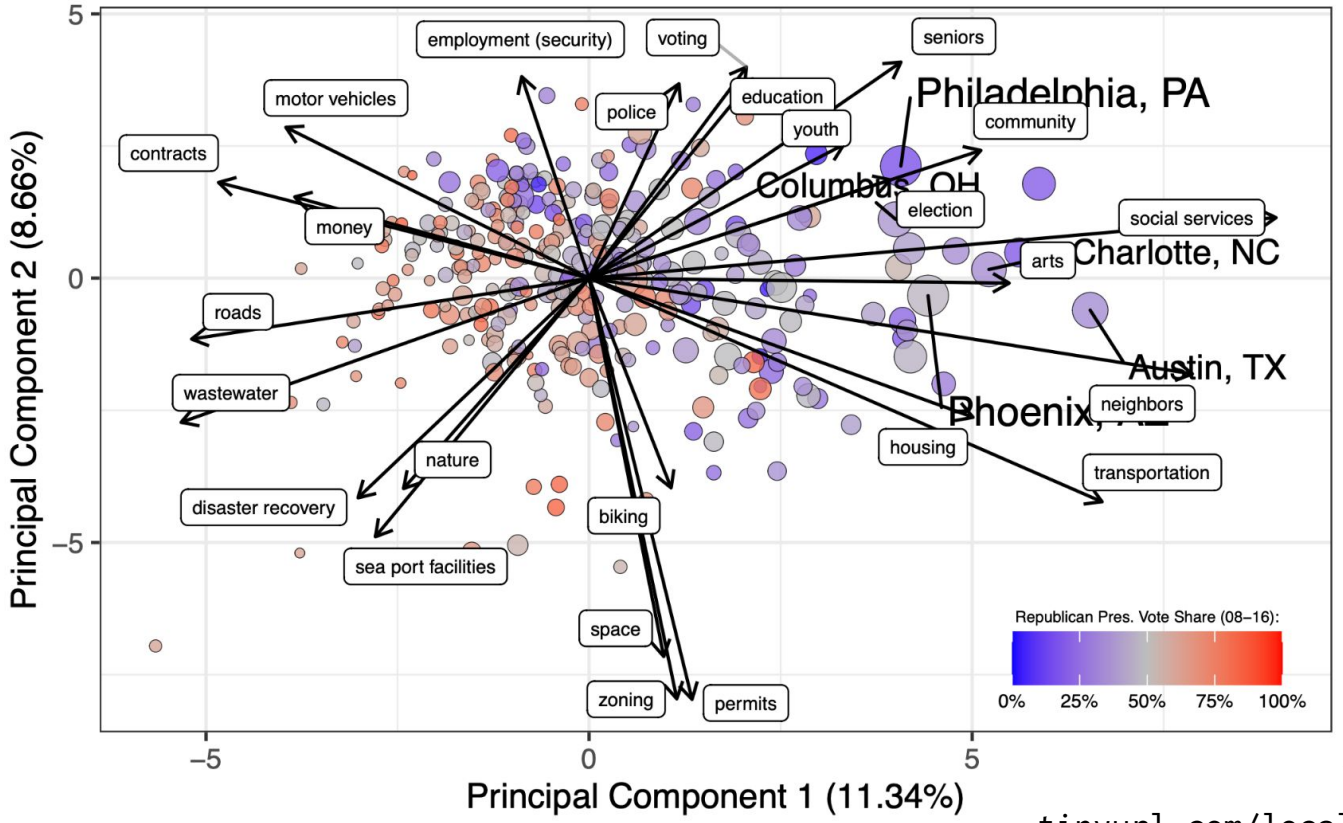

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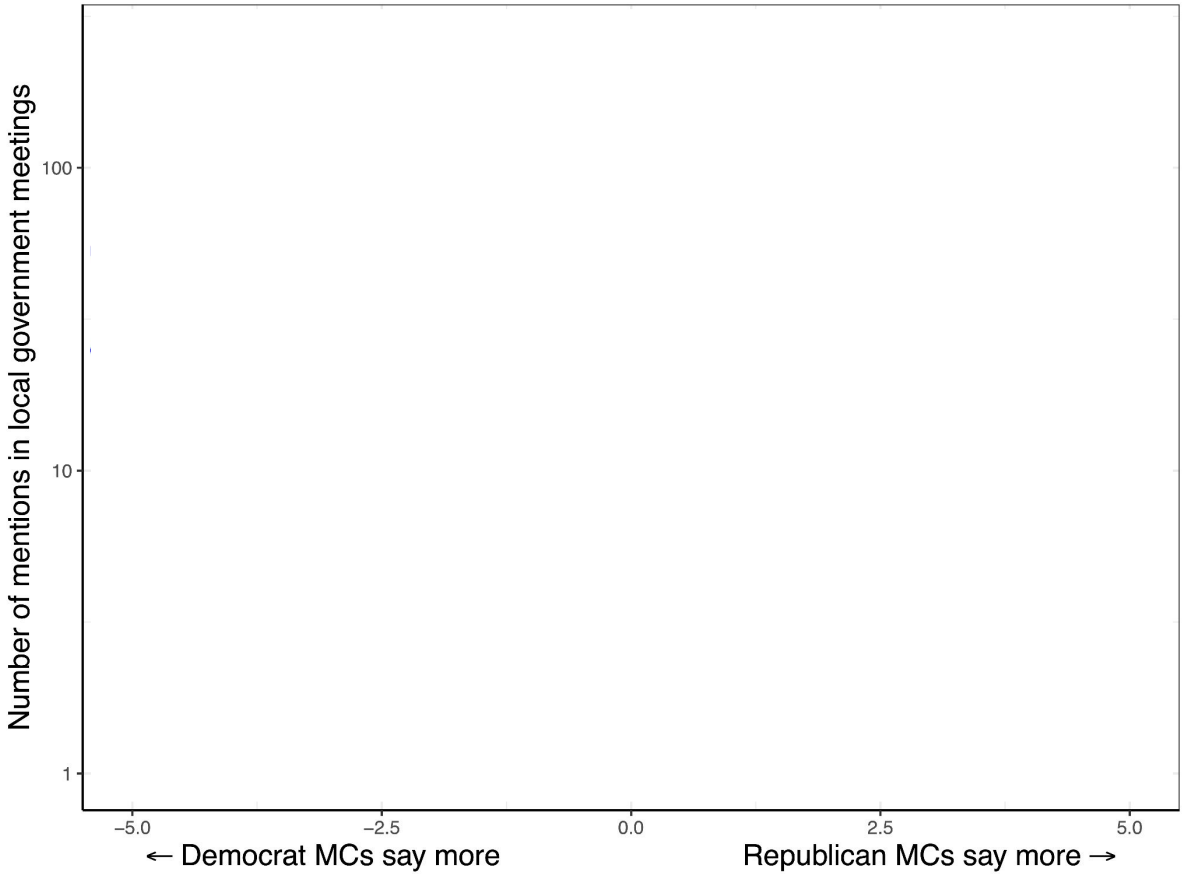

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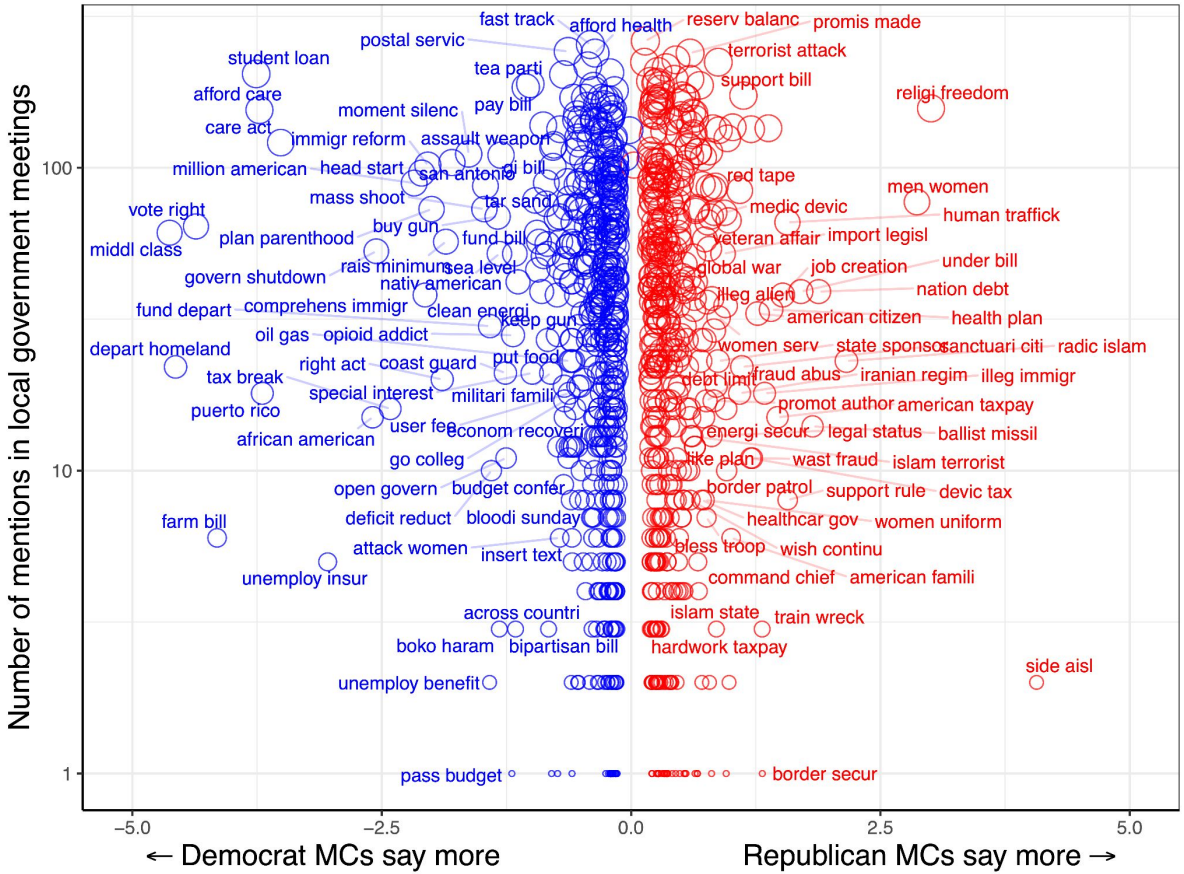

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Using each observed count w_{ij} of each partisan phrase j in each municipality i, we wish to separately measure both its baseline *intensity* of partisan language, β_i, and the degree of its *slant*, ψ_i, in a Democrat or Republican direction. To accomplish this, we fit the following model:

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w_{ij} &\sim \text{Pois}\big(\lambda_{ij}\big), \\
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\end{aligned}
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The quantities of interest estimated from this model are β_i and ψ_i. The fixed effect β_i can be interpreted as a place-level intercept of partisan expression which may capture factors like average meeting length and number of meetings,[11] while the ψ_i captures a slope for the partisan slant of the particular phrase in question j. We estimate the unknown parameters in our model with an Expectation Maximization (EM) algorithm (details in Appendix D).

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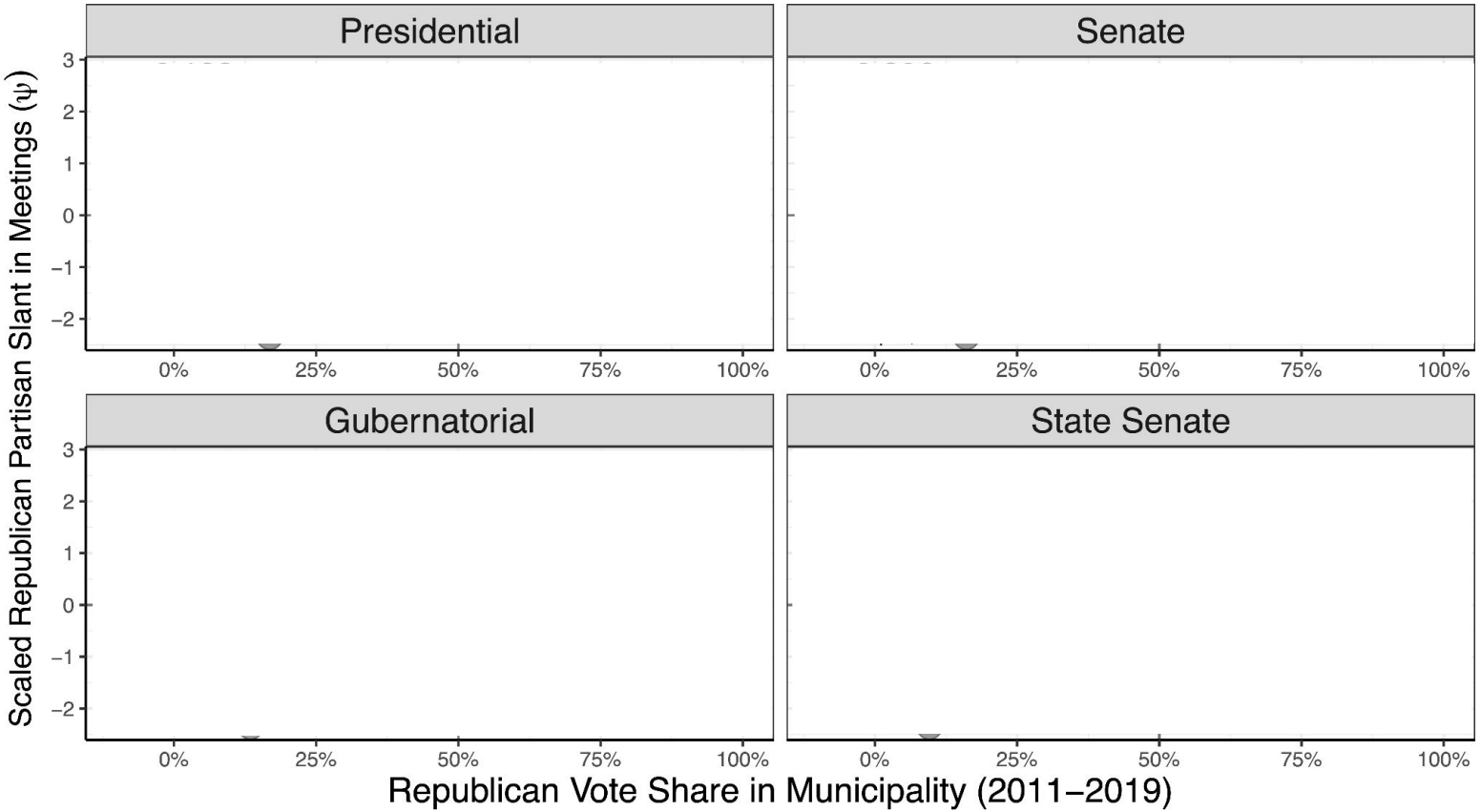

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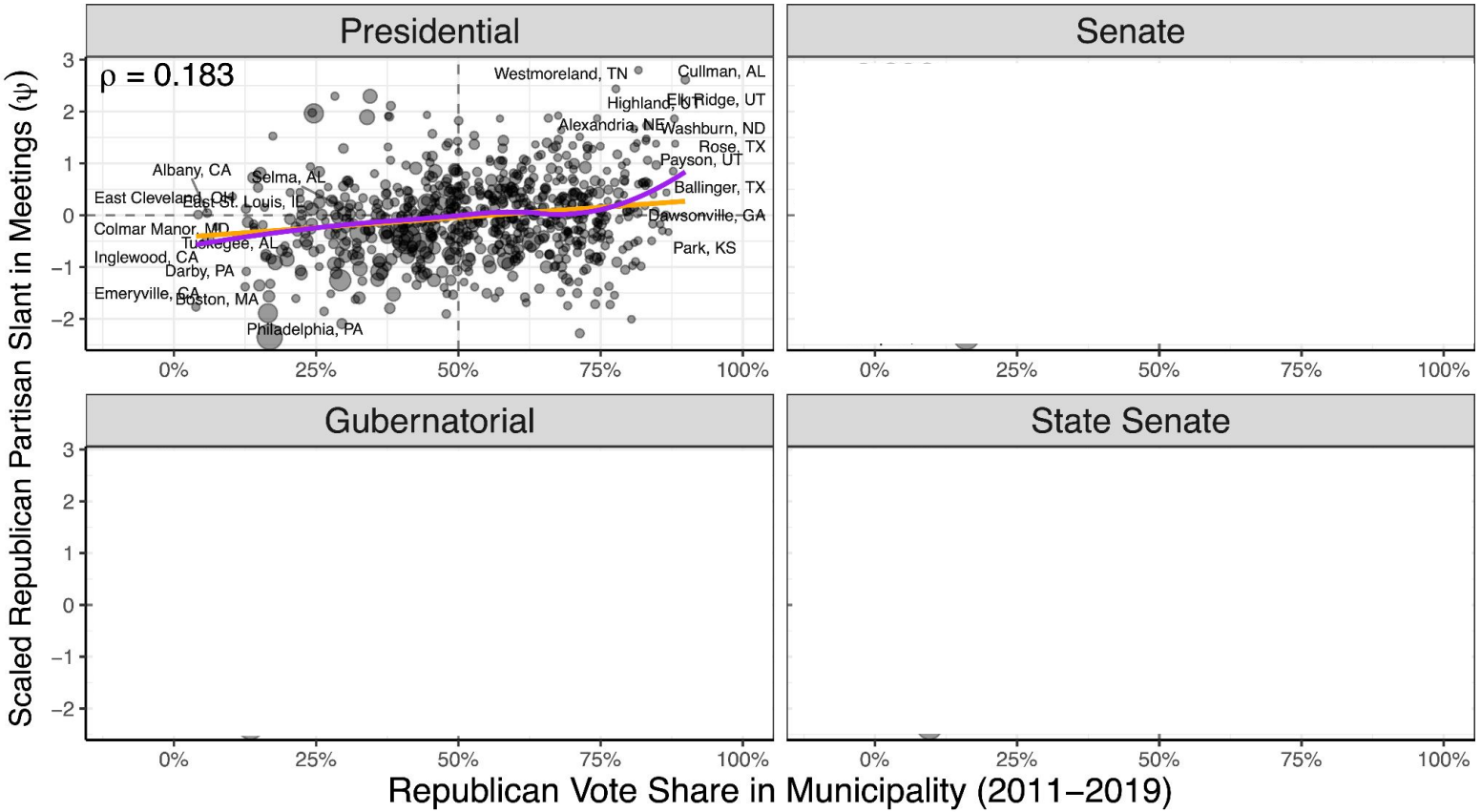

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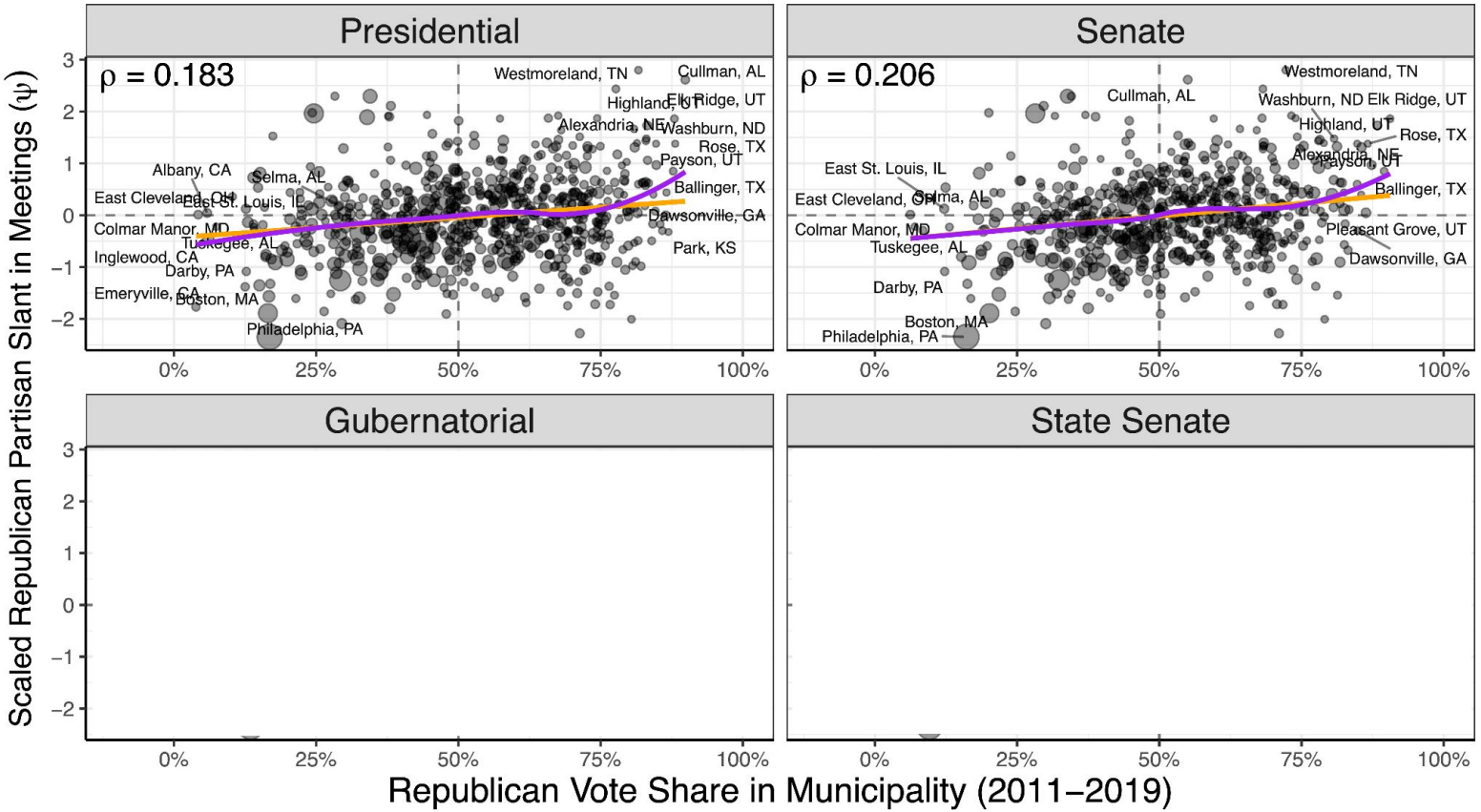

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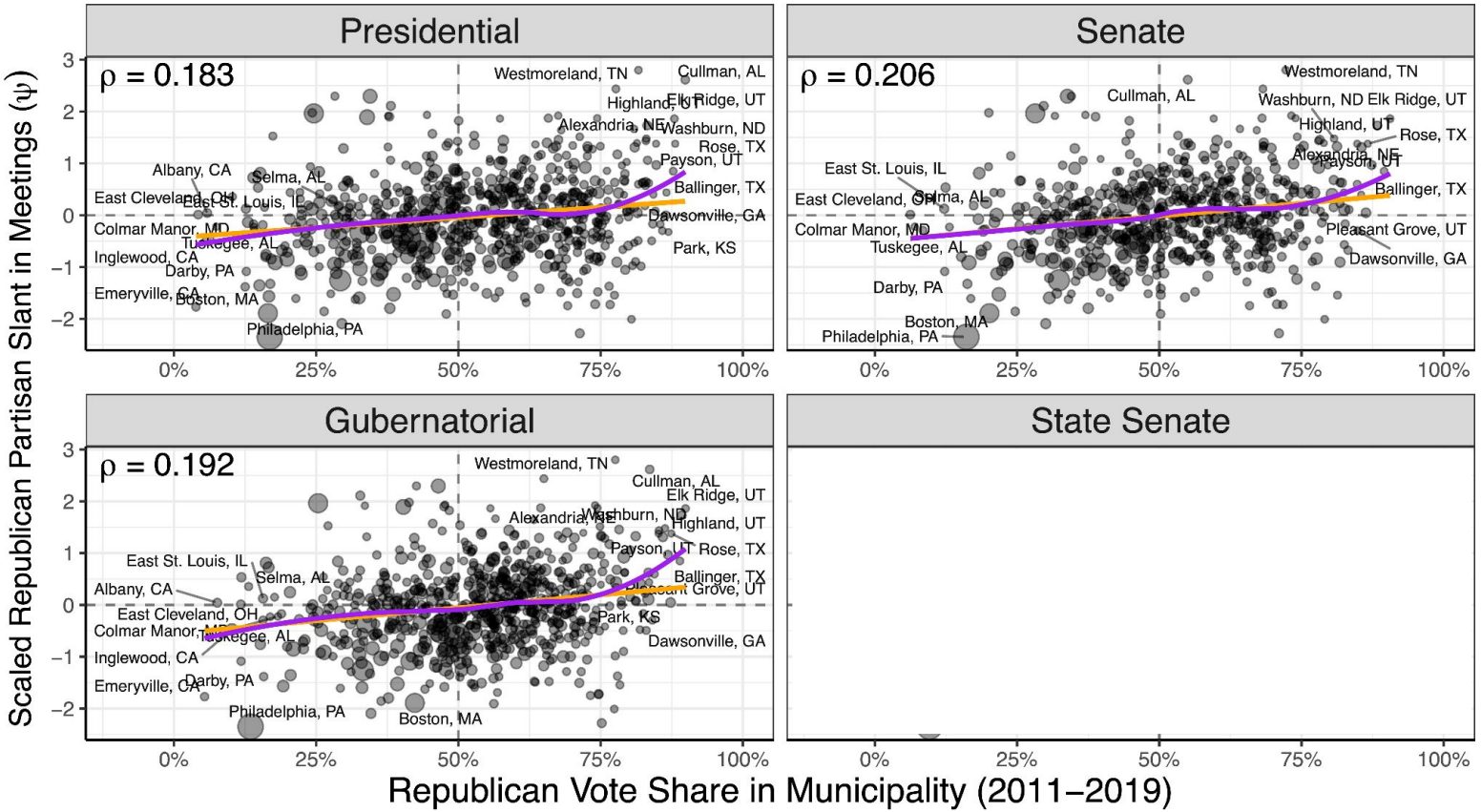

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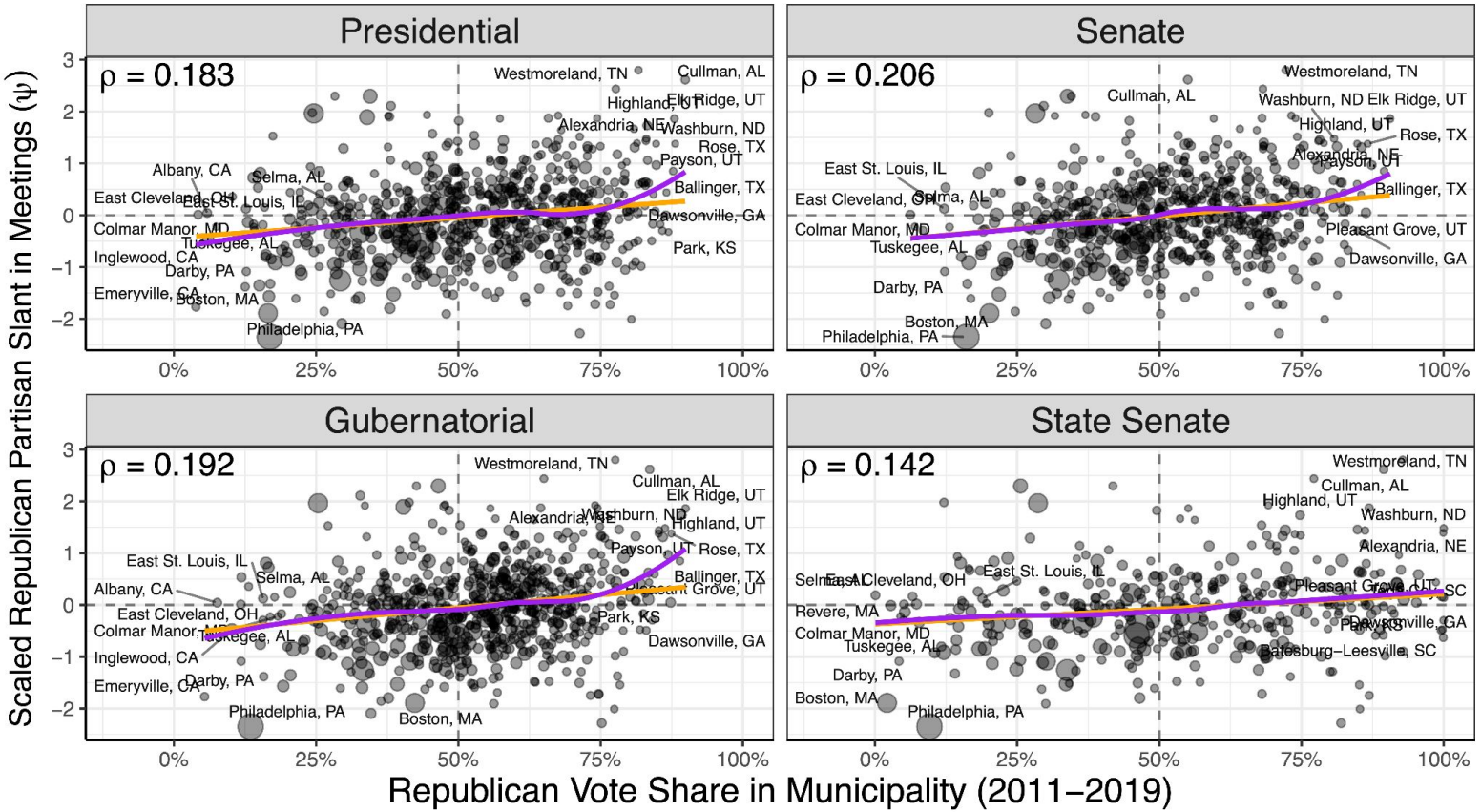

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Takeaways

- We built one of the world's largest central databases of local public meetings (tinyurl.com/localview-paper).
- We built a public dashboard currently in use by academics, journalists, and data scientists all over the world (localview.net).
- We illustrate the continued nationalization of local politics *beyond* elections (tinyurl.com/local-polarization).

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