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## Florida Nonpartisan Trial Court Elections: An Analysis of Voter Turnout and Ballot Roll-Off

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FLORIDA NONPARTISAN TRIAL COURT ELECTIONS:  
AN ANALYSIS OF VOTER TURNOUT AND BALLOT ROLL-OFF

by

SHANNON L. FAGAN

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors in the Major Program in Political Science  
in the College of Sciences  
and in The Burnett Honors College  
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Thesis Chair: Dr. Aubrey Jewett

## **ABSTRACT**

This research explains the variance in voter turnout and ballot roll-off in county and circuit nonpartisan judicial elections in Florida from 2014 and 2016. Based on theory, a collection of constituent (demographic and socioeconomic), candidate, competition, and contextual variables is gathered to construct four regression models. Two full regression models were constructed for turnout and roll-off and analyzed using SPSS software, in addition to two best regression models analyzing five statistically significant variables found within each full model. Presidential year elections and higher populations age 65 and up had positive impacts on voter turnout, while primary elections, campaign expenditures, and populations of minor (other) party registered voters had statistically significant negative effects on turnout. Increases in ballot roll-off were associated with presidential year elections, and populations with more college degrees, higher median household income, and higher percentages of voters registered with no party affiliation or minor political parties. Roll-off decreased in primary elections. While various contextual, competition, and constituent variables had significant impact on both turnout and roll-off in Florida judicial elections, candidate characteristic variables had no significant impact on differences in voter turnout and ballot roll-off.

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## **THEORIES EXPLAINING TURNOUT & ROLL-OFF IN JUDICIAL ELECTIONS**

What explains differences in voter turnout and ballot roll-off in judicial elections?

Answers can be sought using four different theoretical perspectives.

### **Structural/Contextual Theory:**

Contextual theory is often used by political scientists when studying elections and voting behaviors. This theory focuses on the organization and environment of elections, and includes variables such as the election cycle, whether an election takes place during a presidential election year or during an off-year, the timing of elections within the cycle, nonpartisan primary or general elections, and the level of election.

### **Knowledge/Competition Theory:**

This theory holds that when people have more information about an election and perceive it to be an actual contest, they are more likely to turnout. This would include variables like: the number of candidates running, whether a race has an incumbent running or not, the amount of money spent by candidates, and the percent of a county or circuit residents who are lawyers.

**Constituent Characteristics:**

This theory holds that the demographics of the voters may impact turnout, and includes variables such as education, income, age, minority status, and percentage of Republicans within a voting district. All of these factors have been shown to impact voter turnout in a wide variety of races.

**Candidate Characteristics:**

This theory looks at the characteristics of candidates and would include variables like race, ethnicity, and gender of the individuals running within a particular contest. Races involving minority candidates might involve lower turnout if the candidates were ignored, higher turnout if the candidates were viewed as pathbreakers or representing diverse communities or generating publicity, or have no effect at all. Also, there might be an interaction effect between some candidate characteristics and constituent characteristics. Namely races that involve an area (county or circuit) with a large percentage of black residents and black candidates (and/or a large percentage of Hispanic residents and Hispanic residents) which might cause higher turnout.



## LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Pozen (2008), we are currently in a new age for judicial elections, where campaign contributions and spending in judicial races have grown significantly over the years, while making judicial office positions more visible to the public than ever before (267). However, voter turnout for judicial elections has continued to remain low among judicial elections across the United States, as incumbency within judge positions, the noncompetitive nature of most judicial elections, and lack of interest from the public has continued (Volcansek 1981, 572). Pozen's "The Irony of Judicial Elections" discusses the beneficial and undesirable effects that judicial elections pose, where little knowledge of judicial candidates and unmotivated voters remain prevalent issues surrounding county and state judicial elections (Pozen 2008, 293-94).

Judicial elections are recognized more precisely as "low-information" elections within the political science community as a whole, as the majority of the public is uninformed (lacks information) about these types of elections, compared to highly-publicized legislative elections within a district or state (Iyengar 2001). In a study assessed by Johnson, Shaefer, and McKnight (1978), 2.5 to 4.9 percent of voters surveyed entering or leaving their polling place were able to recall a candidate up for a trial judge position in their district or state, proving some of Pozen's ideas to be correct about the ineffectiveness of judicial elections, based on the voters' insufficient knowledge on judicial candidates (Johnson Shaefer and McKnight 1978, 374; Volcansek 1981, 572; Pozen 2008, 293).

Before thoroughly discussing judicial voter turnout, one must describe the contexts of judicial elections in which my thesis will be focused on, specifically in the state of Florida. Since 1972, Florida has held nonpartisan judicial elections, involving both primary and/or general elections (if a run-off election is necessary), for the positions of trial judges around the state (Volcansek 1981, 122; Florida Bar 2016). As described by a judicial election brochure provided by The Florida Bar, general elections involving judges only occur following the primary, when a single candidate in the primary does not acquire a majority of the votes (over 50 percent) in the election (Florida Bar 2016). When this happens, a run-off between the top two candidates with the highest number of votes in the primary occurs in the following general election in November (Florida Bar 2016).

Trial judge positions include both county and circuit court judges, and under Florida law, an individual must qualify as a candidate for a judicial election and win in an arranged election to obtain the desired position (Florida Bar 2016). To qualify as a candidate within a county judge race, an individual must be a voter within the county of the position they seek, and are required to have been a member of The Florida Bar for five years (Florida Courts). However, in counties with a population of 40,000 or less, potential candidates are required only to be a member of The Florida Bar (Florida Courts). Whereas, candidates for circuit judge are required to have been admitted to the practice of law within the state five years prior to running for the position (Florida Courts). In addition, each candidate must collect signatures from at least 1 percent of eligible electors of the circuit or county to qualify as a candidate for judicial office (Fla. Stat. §105.035(3)).

Although not used in all congressional and most state and local offices, nonpartisan elections are required in trial court judicial elections in Florida (also common in other states), where individual candidates on the election ballot do not run under political party labels (Bonneau and Loepp 2014, 122). Under Florida law, a judicial candidate is “prohibited from campaigning or qualifying for such an office based on party affiliation” (Fla. Stat. §105.011). Chapter 105 of the Florida Statutes outlines all laws regarding nonpartisan elections, including the particulars of judicial trial court races. Once all candidates qualified for nonpartisan elections are certain, the names of candidates for county or circuit judicial office appear on the primary ballot (general ballot if run-off occurs) alphabetically, without incumbent or party affiliations attached (Fla. Stat. §105.041(2)). Additionally, section 105.071 of the Florida Statutes implements limitations on political activities of all judicial candidates, where individual candidates are prohibited from soliciting or accepting contributions from any political party, advertising themselves as a member of any political party, or making contributions to political party funds while running for judicial office.

Florida cites that nonpartisan elections are necessary in all trial judicial elections to maintain the principle of impartiality that is attached to the elected position of judge within our government (Florida Bar 2016). Nonpartisan elections are also meant to encourage experienced individuals from outside the political arena to run for office and limit the overall power political parties have over judicial politics (Kraus, 457). However, there have been various attempts over the years to remove the current nonpartisan election system of trial court positions. As early as 1978, constitutional amendments and bills have

made their way to the ballot and state senate and house floors, advocating for merit selection and retention election practices to replace nonpartisan elections of both county and circuit judges (National Center for State Courts). Proponents of these efforts, including the Florida Bar and interest groups such as Citizens for Judicial Integrity, argue that appointments would further ensure the independence of judges from partisan politics as well as promote the best qualified individuals for these positions (National Center for State Courts; Webster, 13). Also, the increased and dominating influence of lawyers, corporations, politicians, and other special interests in county and circuit judicial elections over the past fifty years have contributed to negative views on our nonpartisan elections (Kowal, 1). In 2000 however, Florida voters again overwhelmingly rejected a constitutional amendment on the matter, where the option of implementing merit selection and retention elections would have been allowed for all trial judge positions (National Center for State Courts).

According to most academics studying judicial elections, nonpartisan judicial elections are known to maintain far lower levels of voter turnout than those involving partisan elections (Bonneau and Loepp 2014; Dubois 1979). Electoral participation, also known as voter turnout, is “influenced both by the type of election as well as the nature of the ballot” (Bonneau and Loepp 2014). The Bonneau and Loepp (2014) study analyzes election data based on straight-party voting options or lack thereof in twenty-one states, however because Florida does not utilize the straight-ticket voting option, I am only focusing on the information provided by the authors in the introduction and the emphasis made on ballot design and voter participation. According to Bonneau and Loepp (2014),

nonpartisan statewide elections have lower voter turnout, while nonpartisan district elections have slightly higher turnout (125). My thesis will provide analyses of both county and circuit court elections in relation to differences between levels of turnout of judicial races in Florida.

The Streb and Frederick (2011) article studies the effects of voter participation in intermediate appellate court elections (IACs) and the impact of campaign spending (672). Although this study does not relate specifically to county and circuit court elections, their results may present similar findings to campaign spending and voter turnout in trial judge elections. According to their findings, the increase in the amount of money spent by candidates on an IAC elections from 2000-2008 does not produce a statistically significant increase in voter turnout (Streb and Frederick 2011, 677).

However, the results from the Streb and Frederick (2011) study contradicts the research of Gottfried et al., when looking at the spending of campaign money on things such as campaign advertising and its impact on voter participation in the 2007 Pennsylvania judicial election (Gottfried et al. 2010). Although the study does not discuss campaign spending in particular, as the Streb and Frederick (2011) study does, with the significant growth in voter participation when individuals were shown self-promoting and informational television ads from judicial candidates, you make the assumption that the authors of this study would promote the use of campaign spending on informational advertisements during judicial campaigns. In turn, this would help to promote voter participation in judicial elections, if the results of Gottfried et al. (2010) were accurate and could be replicated in elections in the future. Ultimately, Gottfried et al. emphasizes the

importance of knowledge in promoting higher voter turnout in judicial elections (Gottfried et al. 2010, 19). A Dubois study (1984) communicates the notion of statistical significance in campaign spending within an election, producing the highest coefficient value under the multiplicative competitive interaction model they created (421). Thus, we could assume that campaign spending would have a positive relationship with voter turnout.

Dubois (1979) analyzes voter turnout information among twenty-five non-Southern states during 1948 and 1974 in their study, and describe the factors that impact the varied levels of turnout among these states, which include election scheduling, and the levels of turnout in nonpartisan versus partisan races with merit retention elections included in their findings (868).

According to Dubois (1979), states that implement nonpartisan judicial elections have a lower proportion of voters choosing judicial candidates in elections than other partisan (party-affiliated) candidates on the ballot (871). And although judicial elections occur alongside other state and national elections, which raises overall turnout in elections, voters are less likely to know candidates in judicial contests and are more inclined to avoid voting within judicial races that are absent of party affiliation, because of lack of knowledge about candidates (Lovrich and Sheldon 1983, 243). This is also known as “roll-off” in elections, where select voters are likely vote for well-known offices on the ballot, while choosing to abstain from casting a vote for certain offices, such as judicial positions, located farther down the ballot (Dubois 1979, 872). Therefore, considering ballot (also known as voter) roll-off can provide more accurate means of measuring voter turnout of judicial elections specifically, rather than only looking at overall voter turnout levels of the general

election, as there are often discrepancies in the overall numbers of voters in an election and the number of voters who cast a ballot for a particular office position.

Scholars like Dubois (1979) have found that election scheduling affects state and local election turnouts significantly in judicial elections, while in mid-term elections years, voter turnout significantly decreases (870). Presidential elections involve higher voter turnout, and thus, academics would predict that voter participation in nonpartisan judicial elections during presidential years would also rise (Dubois 1979, 870). In a later study, Dubois has also said that run-off judicial elections also see higher levels in voter turnout as well (Dubois 1984, 425). However, this notion may be impacted by the timing of a run-off election, as most occur during the general election, following a close primary race.

Volcansek (1981) believes that the low visibility of the office is another factor of low turnout in judicial elections (572). However, Dubois (1979) also states that the type of judicial election has an impact on voter turnout, where nonpartisan races see smaller turnouts than partisan or merit retention races (871). According to Baum (2003), approximately one-quarter of the voters in a given election abstained from voting in supreme court seats from years 1980 to 1995 (3). Roll-off for nonpartisan elections equaled 29 percent, while roll-off in lower-level judgeships such as county and circuit positions was 34.5 percent, demonstrating that local judge races suffer greatly in voter participation (Baum 2003, 3).

In terms of voter participation, Davis (1991) explains the cost-benefit analysis that occurs in the minds of prospective voters, in which the individual decides whether the benefits of voting outweigh the costs of voting (1). This can certainly be applied to the voter

turnout of judicial elections, when thinking about the motivations of individuals that drive them to participate in the electoral process. Davis (1991) takes nonpartisan judicial election data from the state of Louisiana during the period of 1981-1988, and focuses on explaining the impact of contextual variables in voter turnout, such as election scheduling, ballot format, election systems, and competitiveness (Davis 1991). Although the demographics of Louisiana may not be the same as those seen in the Florida voter population, this information may help to mold my own study.

Davis (1991) also stresses the importance of incumbents in judicial office, as they usually hold the office in future elections based on uncontested elections (21). According to the work of Volcansek, incumbency does have significance over voter turnout in judicial elections (1981). As high percentages of voters are unaware of judicial candidates prior to voting more often than not, the factor of incumbency, in reference to the recognition of an incumbent's name on the ballot, may provide a higher number of votes cast within a competitive election, based on superficial familiarity with a candidate. Alternatively, incumbency might also lead to a decrease in voter turnout of a judicial contest, as individuals are less likely to vote in elections they deem to be less competitive and are highly likely to result in favor of the incumbent judge. With this in mind, Dubois (1984) considers that although incumbency may have a positive effect in primary races, it could be less advantageous in general elections (423).

In addition, Lovrich and Sheldon (1983) discusses the effects of voters being informed and knowledgeable in nonpartisan judicial elections, where they have confidence and knowledge about a race and because of this, will participate (Lovrich and Sheldon



1983, 253). Hall states that “voter participation is responsive to competition, incumbency, and contextual forces that increase salience and information” (Hall 2007, 1147). Therefore, this may help to explain the reason for differences in levels of voter turnout and roll-off in judicial elections. Because individuals are less informed about candidates running in judicial elections, they may lack the drive to vote because they are unaware of the candidates up for position, as this office is less visible in all forms of media. Also, voters may choose to abstain from voting because they do not feel that doing so will benefit them, when few differences among candidates exist or they do not feel close to a specific candidate (Mendez, 5).

As discussed above, factors involving voting district demographics such as education levels, candidate characteristics such as gender and race, have a significant effect on influencing voter turnout in races involving trial court judges. Baum (2007) states that variables such as political knowledge and education have an impact on an individual’s choice to vote in an election, while income levels of individuals in a given district have an insignificant effect on whether someone chooses to vote in a given race (310). Hall (2007) also believes that the use of nonpartisan ballots and lack of competition existing within individual races (i.e. race involving two candidates) have an impact on elections with district based constituencies, more than its effect on state-wide judicial races, such as supreme court positions.

According to Hall (2007), education levels of the electorate play a significant role in the percentage of roll-off occurring within judicial elections. In a 2007 study, Hall found that in jurisdictions with higher levels of education (i.e. earned bachelor’s degree and

above) among an electorate would have significantly higher participation in judicial elections within state supreme court elections; therefore, a more educated public would have a negative relationship with voter roll-off (Hall 2007, 1154). However, some political scientists, including Streb, have found statistical insignificance with the educational levels of individuals and voter roll-off within their own studies of intermediate appellate court elections, but this may be due to the creation of state and district-level jurisdictions, which are drawn without much uniformity, and may account for these differences (Streb 2009, 658). Individuals who may come out to vote in a given election may not be an accurate depiction of all individuals who live within that voting district, impacting the results of education levels and voter turnout (658).

Racial and ethnic factors of candidates also have an impact on levels of voter turnout within judicial races, according to the work of Lovrich, Sheldon, and Wasmann (1988). Minority cues replacing voting cues created by political party affiliations, which are not present in nonpartisan elections (816). If an election contains one or more candidates that are recognized as members of a minority group (i.e. Hispanics, African Americans, etc.), this factor may influence a voter's intentions on voting for a judicial candidate in a particular race. In *Voting Cues in Nonpartisan Trial Court Elections*, Dubois states that studies have suggested that religious-ethnic cues from candidate surnames can be factors in an individual's voting choice in judicial elections (Dubois 1984, 398). "Roll-off declines in biracial elections and research finds that voters, particularly from racial and ethnic minority groups, are more engaged when minority candidates are on the ballot" (Lovrich 1988). Gender demographics of candidates may also follow along similar lines, however

there are fewer studies focused on the variable of gender of candidates and voter turnout in judicial elections. However, past research conducted by Dubois (1984) does support that voting turnout and an individual's choice may involve the factoring in of a candidate's sex within a select race (Dubois 1984, 398).

**Questions to be Answered:**

1. What explains differences in voter turnout in nonpartisan judicial elections of Florida counties and circuits?
2. What explains differences in ballot roll-off in nonpartisan judicial elections of Florida counties and circuits?

## **HYPOTHESES**

### **Structural/Contextual:**

H1: Judicial races that occur during presidential elections will have higher voter turnout compared to those held during off-years. Voters are more likely to turn out to vote in higher numbers during presidential elections because of high visibility of electoral office positions of the federal government, and tend not to turn out for elections that take place during off-years, as elections at the state and local levels are less visible to the public.

H1a: Judicial races that occur during presidential elections will have higher ballot roll-off compared to races held during off-years. Voters are more likely to turn out to vote for the highest office on the ballot (i.e. presidential race), however they often do not vote all the way down the ballot. In off-year elections, voters are perhaps more likely to vote down the ballot as there are fewer races present.

H2: Judicial races that occur during a primary will have lower turnout compared to those held in the general election. Voters are less likely to participate in primary elections due to being unaware of when primaries take place, as most occur in August prior to general elections held in November. This may also be due to the perceived lack of importance of primaries by voters in comparison to general elections, and/or the effort involved in taking time to vote in two elections within a four-month period.

H2a: Judicial races that occur during a primary will have lower roll-off than races held during a general election. Voters who show up for primaries are more likely to vote for

all races on the ballot than individuals who vote during a general election, who are there to vote for the higher office positions on the ballot.

H3: County judicial races will have lower levels of voter turnout compared to circuit races. Circuit judge races may be seen as more significant to voters than county races, as circuit judge positions deal with more serious cases, involving felonies and civil cases involving more than \$15,000, promoting higher turnout. Circuit judicial elections also cover a larger geographic area compared to county judicial elections, allowing for higher turnout among voters.

H3a: County judicial races will exhibit less roll-off than circuit judicial races. Individuals are more likely to recognize and know about county judicial races, based on locality, than they are to recognize circuit races.

**Knowledge/Competition:**

H4: Judicial races involving more than two candidates will have higher voter turnout compared to races involving only two candidates. Elections with more than two candidates are seen as more competitive races, and competition tends to increase turnout among voters.

H4a: Judicial races involving more than two candidates will have higher ballot roll-off than races with two candidates. Individuals are more likely to vote in races involving only two candidates, as voters prefer a smaller number of choices to choose from. Judicial races involving more than two candidates provide more options for voters, however this makes voters less likely to choose a candidate in the race. As the number of candidates increase, the less likely individuals will take the time to vote in a specific race.

H5: Judicial races with an incumbent candidate will have lower voter turnout than races without an incumbent candidate. Races with incumbents are more likely to be less competitive, generating little opposition and are more likely to be perceived by voters to result in the favor of the incumbent candidate. Open seat judicial races (without an incumbent) are likely to involve more competition.

H5a: Judicial races with an incumbent candidate will have lower ballot roll-off than races without an incumbent in the judicial race. Individuals are more likely to know the name of the incumbent of a race than a race involving new candidates, and therefore have a higher likelihood in voting in the specific race due to recall.

H6: There is a positive relationship between money raised by judicial candidates and voter turnout. More money raised by candidates will increase spending on advertising for the judicial race, increasing the visibility of the race to voters; therefore, increasing turnout.

H6a: There is an inverse relationship between money raised by judicial candidates and ballot roll-off. The more money spent by candidates in a judicial race will reduce the amount of ballot roll-off, as individuals are more likely to hear about the election and are apt to vote in the race.

**Constituent Demographics:**

H7: There is a positive relationship between education levels of voters within a county or circuit and voter turnout. Higher levels of education achieved by individuals within a specific voting district are more likely to result in higher levels of turnout within judicial races. This may be that individuals who are more educated are more likely to be

knowledgeable about a race and/or are more likely vote compared to individuals who are less educated.

H7a: There is a negative relationship between education levels of voters within a county or circuit and roll-off. Individuals who have achieved higher levels of education are perhaps more knowledgeable about the races on a ballot, and therefore are more likely to vote in smaller races such as a judicial race, decreasing ballot roll-off.

H8: There is a positive relationship between the age of voters and voter turnout. In judicial elections, we see lower voter turnout among younger voters as they are less likely to participate in elections, while older voters are more likely to vote in elections in bigger numbers, possibly due to their vested interest in policies affecting them. Higher turnout among older voters (likely retired) might also occur because they have more time to participate than younger voters who are likely working.

H8a: There is an inverse relationship between the age of voters and roll-off. Individuals over the age of 65 are more likely to vote for all races down the ballot, reducing ballot roll-off in judicial elections. As older voters are more likely to turn out for elections and are also less likely not to leave a race blank on the ballot.

H9: There is a positive relationship between income and voter turnout. Wealthier individuals are more likely to vote in elections within a voting district than are poorer individuals. This may be due to wealthier individuals having more time and resources to go out to vote than individuals with lower levels of income.

H9a: There is a negative relationship between income (Median Household Income) and ballot roll-off. Although wealthier individuals are more likely to vote in elections than

poorer individuals, this may impact the way individuals vote (down the ballot or major races) and therefore, may affect the percent of ballot roll-off of judicial races.

H10: There is an inverse relationship between the percent of people registered with no party affiliation and/or a minor political party (labeled “Other” in this research) and voter turnout. This relationship could exist, based on the nature of closed primaries within the state of Florida. Major political parties (Democratic and Republican) have consistent primary elections, while minor parties often do not. Individuals of minor parties may not be aware that they are able to participate in nonpartisan primary races, and therefore are less likely to turn out to vote.

H10a: There is a negative relationship between the percent of people registered with no party affiliation and/or a minor political party (labeled “Other” in this research) and roll-off. Registered voters of minor parties may be less likely to leave judicial races on their ballot blank, as they are not out to vote based on party, because candidates from minor parties are rare in races. More likely, they will choose to vote down the ballot if they are voting than individuals from major parties who are choosing to vote on party lines.

#### **Candidate Characteristics:**

H11: Judicial races involving one or more female candidates will have higher levels of turnout than races with no female candidates running. Having female candidates on the ballot increases differences between candidates (although stereotypical) and may influence a voter’s decision to vote, increasing turnout.

H11a: There is an inverse relationship between judicial races involving female candidates and roll-off. Perhaps judicial races involving female candidates are more likely



to grab the voter's attention to a lower office race than before, because of noticeable differences between candidates. This may result in lower ballot roll-off in judicial elections.

H12: Judicial races involving one or more black candidates will result in higher levels of turnout than races with the absence of an African American candidate. Voter turnout increases when races involve an African American candidate(s) and/or white candidate(s), perhaps due to the publicity generated by diversity within a race by the presence of minority candidates.

H12a: There is an inverse relationship between judicial races involving black candidates and roll-off. Judicial races involving black candidates may be more likely to be voted on, based on diversity that exists among candidates. The presence of a black candidate may make a typical judicial race more appealing to the voter and therefore, would result in lower roll-off.

H13: Judicial races involving one or more Hispanic candidates will result in higher levels of turnout than races with no Hispanic candidates running. Voter turnout increases when races involve a Hispanic candidate(s) and/or white candidate(s), perhaps due to the publicity generated by diversity within a race by the presence of a Hispanic candidate.

H13a: There is an inverse relationship between judicial races involving Hispanic candidates and ballot roll-off. Judicial races that include Hispanic candidate(s) may bring more voters to the race because of diversity among candidates, which may result in a voter making a choice among distinguishable candidates in an election. This may result in a voter choosing not to skip lower office races such as judicial ones; therefore, resulting in lower roll-off.

## METHODOLOGY AND MEASUREMENT

For the purposes of conducting my analyses, I am using regression analysis for a cross section of data from 2014 and 2016 county and circuit judicial races in Florida. The unit of analysis is each judicial election. Within this analysis, I collected information from the selected demographic, socioeconomic, contextual variables discussed above, in order to explain the differences in turnout in nonpartisan judicial elections in Florida counties and circuits.

### **Variables**

#### *Voter Turnout—*

Voter turnout of both county and circuit judicial races represents the dependent variable within my analyses. My analyses includes information on judicial races occurring within 2014 and 2016 election years. For a county judicial election, I calculated voter turnout by taking the total number of votes cast for the two (or more) candidates in the race divided by the total number of registered voters in the county. For a circuit race, I calculated voter turnout by taking the total number of votes casts for the two or more candidates in the specific race and dividing by the total number of registered voters in the circuit.

#### *Roll-off—*

Roll-off within judicial elections represents an additional dependent variable within my analyses, and includes data on judicial races (county and circuit) occurring within 2014 and

2016 election years. For a county judicial race, I calculate roll-off by taking the total number of votes cast for the two (or more) candidates in the specific judicial race divided by the total number of individuals who voted in the election overall (ballots cast) and subtracting this number from 1, reporting the data as a decimal and as a percentage. For a circuit race, I calculate roll-off by taking the total number of votes casts for the two (or more) candidates in the specific circuit race and divide it by the total number of individuals who voted in the election overall (ballots cast) and subtracting this number from 1, reporting the information as a decimal and percentage. For the denominator, I add the number of voters within the election of the counties that together make up a circuit when looking at the number of individuals who voted within the election overall. For instance, if 100 voters cast ballots and 85 votes total were cast for the judicial candidates, then the ballot roll-off would be reported as 15%.

**Structural/Contextual Variables:**

*Election cycle—*

This variable includes information on whether the specific judicial election (county or circuit) takes place during the presidential election year (2016) or an off-year (2014). Presidential years are scored “1” and off-years are scored “0.” Information on when specific races are conducted is found within records provided by county supervisor of election websites and through Florida’s Department of State website for circuit races, under their Candidate Tracking System.

*Timing of elections within election cycle—*

This variable describes whether a specific county or circuit judicial race took place during a primary or general election. Primary races are marked as “0” and general races are marked “1.” This information was collected within the same place as records collected for the election cycle, with individual county supervisor of election website election records and through the Florida Department of State website for its records on circuit court elections.

*Level of election—*

This information is labeled as “county” or “circuit” to differentiate between races on the spreadsheet, with information coming from both individual county supervisor of election websites and the Florida Department of State’s information through their Candidate Tracking System. County races are recorded as “0” and circuit races are recorded as “1.”

**Knowledge/Competition Variables:**

*Number of candidates—*

This variable is measured by adding up the specific number of candidates within a judicial race. I collected this data from the sources stated above, using individual county supervisor of election website election records for county races and through the Florida Department of State website for its records on circuit court elections.

### *Incumbent—*

The presence of an incumbent within a specific circuit or county race is also recorded within my set of data. For circuit elections, I collected this data through Florida's Department of State website for circuit races, which is located under their Candidate Tracking System. Elections results for 2014 and 2016 within the DOS system lists the incumbent candidate with an asterisk. County judicial election incumbent data is not explicitly given under election results records, however I collected this data by researching the specific county court race, and collected from information supplied by newspaper articles discussing the race(s), in addition to information provided by Ballotpedia. The presence of an incumbent candidate is recorded within the spreadsheet as a "1," and recorded as "0" when there is no incumbent present in a specific race.

### *Amount of Money Spent by Candidates—*

I combined the total expenditures of all candidates within the specific judicial race, in order to measure this variable. I found this data on both individual supervisor of election websites under public campaign finance records for county judge races, and found the records of circuit candidate expenditures through the Florida State Department website's finance records of campaigns and candidates.

### **Constituent Variables:**

#### *% With College Degree—*

I recorded the education levels of counties and circuits by calculating the percentage of people in the county/circuit with a college degree. I collected information needed through the United States Census Bureau with information recorded from 2012-2016 for individual counties. To determine the percentage of college degrees within a circuit, I took the percentage of college degree holders of each county and multiplied by the total number of people within the county to get the number of college degree (bachelors) holders of each county. Then, I added the number of individuals with college degrees from all counties of the circuit and divided by the total population of the circuit, and recreated the number into a percentage.

*% Over the Age of 65—*

Age is measured by the percent of persons 65 years and over located within counties and circuits. I gathered the information needed through the United States Census Bureau with the most recent information recorded, from July 2016 for counties as well as circuits.

*Income—*

I calculated this variable by providing the median household income within the specific geographic area related to the judicial race. I collected this information from the United States Census Bureau with the most current information available, from 2016. To calculate the median household income of a circuit, I multiplied the number of households of each individual county of the circuit by the median household income. For example, a circuit comprised of County A with 200 households and a median income of \$50,000, and County

B with 20 households and the median income of \$30,000:  $(200 \times \$50,000) + (20 \times \$30,000) = 10,600,000 / 220 = \$48,181.81$ .

*% Republican—*

I gathered information and calculated the percentage of Republican registered voters within a county through the book closing reports of voter registration of all Florida counties, located within the Department of State's website. I divided the total number of Republican registered voters, up until 29 days before the specific election takes place, by the total number of registered voters within the county. For circuit elections, I combined all numbers of registered voters within all counties within that circuit to calculate the number of registered Republican voters.

*% Democrat—*

I gathered information and calculated the percentage of Democratic registered voters within a county through the book closing reports of voter registration of all Florida counties, located within the Department of State's website. I divided the total number of Democratic registered voters, all registered up until 29 days before the specific election takes place, by the total number of registered voters within the county. For circuit elections, I combined all numbers of registered voters within all counties within that circuit and election period in order to accurately calculate the number of registered Democratic voters.

*% Other—*

I gathered information and calculated the percentage of all other party registered voters within a county through the book closing reports of voter registration of all Florida counties, located within the Department of State's website. I combined all minor party and non-party affiliated voters. Therefore, I took the total number of registered voters within that election period and subtracted both Democratic and Republican registered voters to calculate this number. Then, I divided the total number of other party registered voters, those registered 29 days before the specific election takes place, by the total number of registered voters within the county. For circuit elections, I combined all numbers of voters registered under minor parties within all counties of a circuit, in order to accurately calculate the number of other party registered voters.

**Candidate Characteristics:**

*Female Candidate—*

The presence of a female candidate within a county or circuit judicial election was noted, and information collected came within records provided by county supervisor of election websites and through Florida's Department of State website for circuit races, under their Candidate Tracking System. Races with a female candidate(s) were recorded as "1," while races with no female candidate were recorded as "0."



*Black Candidate—*

The presence of a black candidate within a county or circuit judicial election was noted, and information was found within records provided by county supervisor of election websites and through Florida's Department of State website for circuit races, under their Candidate Tracking System. In addition, I collected this information from images of candidates taken from Ballotpedia and newspaper articles related to the specific judicial elections. Rather than labeling the number of black candidates within a race, I will focus on only the presence of said candidate. Races without a black candidate were recorded as "0," while races with a black candidate were labeled "1."

*Hispanic Candidate—*

The presence of a Hispanic candidate within a county or circuit judicial election was noted and found within records provided by county supervisor of election websites and through Florida's Department of State website for circuit races, under their Candidate Tracking System. I also found this information from images taken from Ballotpedia and newspaper articles related to specific judicial elections. Rather than recording the number of Hispanic candidates within an election, I recorded only the presence of a Hispanic candidate(s) within a judicial race. Races with a Hispanic candidate were marked as "1," while judicial races without a Hispanic candidate were labeled "0."

## RESEARCH ANALYSIS

### I. UNIVARIATE ANALYSIS

Before analyzing findings from the completed regressions, an examination of individual dependent variables (turnout and roll-off) and independent variables is needed.

Turnout is one of two dependent variables tested in my research, and is originally calculated for each race by dividing the total number of votes cast for all candidates in the individual race by the total number of registered voters in the county. For all 155 judicial races studied, the average of turnout is 24.67%, with a standard deviation of 15.39.

Table 1: Averages of Turnout, Roll-off, and Ratio Independent Variables

	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>N</b>
Turnout %	24.676	15.395	155
Roll-Off %	15.611	6.171	155
Candidate #	2.36	.692	155
Total Campaign Expenditures (\$)	221137.54	131689.524	155
College Degree %	28.101	5.380	155
Age 65 and Up%	18.646	5.174	155
Median Household Income	49228.179	4558.981	155
Other Registered Voter %	27.002	3.405	155

Among the 64 county judicial races that took place in 2014 and 2016, most races took place during the 2016 presidential election year. Compared to 44 county races in 2016, there were only 20 county races that took place in 2014. Based on data, most county judge elections take place and are often decided during the primary of each election year; only 15 out of 64 county races took place during the general election versus 49 during the primaries. Roughly 56% of county judge races had an incumbent candidate running, with the majority of races involving female candidates (51). Additionally, 24 county races included at least one black candidate, with only 19 races involving one or more Hispanic candidates.

Table 2: Characteristics- County Races

	<b>Presidential Year</b>	<b>Off Year</b>	<b>Primary</b>	<b>General</b>	<b>Incumbent</b>	<b>Female Candidate(s)</b>	<b>Black Candidate(s)</b>	<b>Hispanic Candidate(s)</b>
# of County Races	44	20	49	15	36	51	24	19
Total # of County Races: 64								

Broward County had one of the lowest voter turnouts among all counties, with only 9.26% turnout among registered voters within a judicial election. However, Bradford County maintained high turnout at 72.55%. Miami-Dade County maintained the highest amount of candidate expenditures in a judicial race; however, Collier County had the lowest, with candidates spending only \$32,938 combined. Leon County holds the highest percentage of bachelor’s degree holders among all Florida counties, while only 6.4% of

individuals have achieved a bachelor’s degree in Dixie County. Orange County maintains the highest number of minor or other party registered voters at 29.94%.

Table 3: Ratio Levels- County Races

	<b>Turnout</b>	<b>Roll-Off</b>	<b>Total Campaign Expenditures</b>	<b>College Degree %</b>	<b>Age 65 &amp; Up %</b>	<b>Median HH Income</b>	<b>Rep Reg. Voter %</b>	<b>Dem Reg. Voter %</b>	<b>Other Reg. Voter %</b>
<b>Min</b>	9.26%	.72%	\$32,938.22	6.4%	11.3%	\$34,634	21.76%	24.04%	10.85%
	Broward	Dixie	Collier	Dixie	Orange	Dixie	Broward	Collier	Holmes
<b>Max</b>	72.55%	31.41%	547,112.12	45.2%	31%	\$60,303	51.67%	57.77%	29.94%
	Bradford	Orange	Miami-Dade	Leon	Collier	Monroe	Holmes	Dixie	Orange

## II. MULTIVARIATE REGRESSION ANALYSIS

### Turnout: Full Model

For the full model of turnout, R square is .903; therefore, the full model of turnout explains 90 percent of variance in the differences in turnout of judicial elections from electoral years 2014 and 2016. The adjusted R Square is reported as .894.

Table 4: Coefficients and R Square (Turnout Full Model)

	<b>B</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	<b>Beta</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
(Constant)	79.560	6.414		p < .001***
Presidential Year	5.487	.874	.179	p < .001***
Primary Election	-33.211	1.114	-.886	p < .001***
County Race	-.852	.951	-.027	.372
Candidate #	.110	.709	.005	.877
Incumbent	-1.377	.944	-.044	.147
Total Campaign Expenditures (\$)	-8.259E-6	p < .001	-.071	.017**
College Degree %	-.060	.148	-.021	.686
Age 65 and Up %	.178	.091	.060	.053*
Median Household Income	-7.546E-5	p < .001	-.022	.607
Other Registered Voter %	-.982	.159	-.217	p < .001 ***
Female Candidate	-.466	.996	-.013	.641
Black Candidate	-.514	1.052	-.015	.626
Hispanic Candidate	.259	1.030	.008	.802

p- value: \*\*\* = .01    \*\* = .05    \* = .10

<b>R Square</b>	<b>Adjusted R Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
.903	.894	101.432	.000

To determine statistical significance, I chose the standard of .10 for all regressions, based on the small number of cases (155) gathered from Florida counties (67) and Florida judicial circuits (20).

The variables that achieved statistical significance within this regression include: (1) Presidential Year, (2) Primary Election, (3) Total Campaign Expenditures, (4) Age 65 and Up, and (5) Other Registered Voter %.

According to the regression model, judicial races held during presidential years had 5.5% higher turnout than judicial races held in off-years. Judicial races held during primary elections had on average 33.2% lower turnout than races held during general elections. For every 1,000 dollars spent on campaigning, turnout decreased by .008%. For each 1 percent higher senior population, turnout increased by .18%. A 1 percent increase in the percent of people registered as "other" results in a .98% decrease in turnout. All but one of these relationships were as expected. Somewhat surprisingly, spending more money on judicial races actually had a negative effect on turnout.

Variables that did not achieve statistical significance include County, Candidate #, Incumbent, College Degree %, Median Household Income, Female Candidate, Black Candidate, Hispanic Candidate. Interestingly, none of the candidate characteristic variables (i.e. female, black, Hispanic) achieved statistical significance in terms of explaining differences in voter turnout.

According to Beta, the primary election variable is ranked most important at -.886. The other registered % and presidential year variables followed in importance with standardized regression coefficients at .18 (presidential year) and -.21 (other registered

voter %). Total campaign expenditures and age population were ranked somewhat less important, with impacts of -.07 (total campaign expenditures) and .06 (age 65 and up %).

**Turnout: Best Model**

For the best model of turnout, R square is .90; therefore, the best model of turnout explains 90 percent of variance in the differences in turnout of judicial elections from electoral years 2014 and 2016. The adjusted R Square is reported as .895.

Table 5: Coefficients and R Square (Turnout Best Model)

	<b>B</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	<b>Beta</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
(Constant)	75.587	4.068		p < .001***
Presidential Year	5.282	.805	.172	p < .001***
Primary Election	-33.525	.986	-.894	p < .001 ***
Total Campaign Expenditures (\$)	-7.448E-6	p < .001	-.064	.020**
Age 65 and Up%	.180	.081	.061	.027**
Other Registered Voter %	-1.070	.122	-.237	p < .001***

p- value: \*\*\* = .01    \*\* = .05    \* = .10

<b>R Square</b>	<b>Adjusted R Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
.899	.895	264.735	.000

All five statistically significant variables chosen for the turnout best model remained statistically significant. These five variables—presidential year, primary election, total

campaign expenditures, age 65 and up %, and other registered voter %-- alone explain 90% variance in turnout. Adjusted R square is .895 in this model.

Although close with the presidential year of the full model (5.5 percent increase in voter turnout in presidential years), the best model denotes that judicial races held during presidential years had 5.3% higher turnout than judicial races held in off-years, a .2% difference. Higher voter turnout during presidential years is not a surprise finding, as this has been consistently verified by other studies focused on political research.

Individuals are more likely to turn out to vote during presidential election cycles, due to the increased popularity of these elections, and are less apt to be motivated to vote for lower office positions during off-year elections.

Judicial races held during primary elections had on average 33.5% lower turnout than races held during general elections. Confirming my hypothesis, the average American voter is less likely to vote during primary elections, and voters turn out in higher percentages during more visible general elections.

For every 1,000 dollars spent on campaigning, turnout decreased by .007%. This result is very surprising, as I predicted that campaign expenditures would bring lesser known judicial to the forefront of the public, and influence higher turnout. The reasoning for this finding is not known to me, and requires further research into why this is.

For each 1 percent higher senior population, turnout increased by .18%. Therefore, one can make an assumption that areas with higher older voter populations (ages 65 and up) tend to demonstrate higher numbers of voter turnout than areas that have smaller populations of older voters, confirming my hypothesis.



For every 1 percent increase in the number of people not registered in a major party, there is a 1.1% decrease in turnout. Voter turnout among minor parties is well documented among other areas of turnout research, and with these findings validates the hypothesis that individuals registered as other parties are less likely to turnout for Florida judicial elections than individuals of major parties. Therefore, one would infer that voter turnout among major party registered voters is higher than among minor party registered voters. One reason is likely the closed nature of most Florida primary elections. Florida voters not registered with a major party may often not realize that they can vote in judicial elections held during primary elections. While judicial trial court elections in Florida are non-partisan, a contributing factor to this finding would be the lack of representation of candidates from minor parties on the ballot more generally, caused by state and federal election regulations. Individuals from minor parties often do not feel represented within elections because of this, and in turn are less likely to turn out to vote.

Ultimately, comparing the full model and the best model regression for turnout, there are only slight differences in the reporting data. However, these differences are not substantial enough to change their statistical significance, the direction of the variables, or their impact on voter turnout.

### **Roll-Off: Full Model**

For the full model of roll-off, R square is .644. Thus the full model explains 64 percent of variance in the differences in roll-off in judicial trial court elections from electoral years 2014 and 2016. The adjusted R square is reported as .612.

Table 6: Coefficients and R Square (Roll-Off Full Model)

	<b>B</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	<b>Beta</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
(Constant)	10.518	4.933		.035**
Presidential Year	3.067	.672	.249	p < .001***
Primary Election	-7.979	.857	-.531	p < .001***
County Race	-.831	.731	-.067	.258
Candidate #	-.643	.546	-.072	.241
Incumbent	.107	.726	.009	.884
Total Campaign Expenditures	-2.278E-6	p < .001	-.049	.390
College Degree %	.340	.114	.296	.003***
Age 65 and Up%	.005	.070	.004	.946
Median Household Income	p < .001	p < .001	-.199	.018**
Other Registered Voters %	.619	.122	.341	p < .001***
Female Candidate	-1.011	.766	-.071	.189
Black Candidate	-.281	.809	-.020	.729
Hispanic Candidate	-.286	.792	-.021	.718

p- value: \*\*\* = .01    \*\* = .05    \* = .10

<b>R Square</b>	<b>Adjusted R Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
.644	.612	19.653	.000

The standard of .10 was utilized for statistical significance, based on the small sample size of 155 judicial races gathered from Florida counties (67) and Florida judicial circuits (20). Based on the F statistic, the statistical significance of this model is at the .000 level.

The variables that achieved statistical significance in this regression include: (1) Presidential Year, (2) Primary Election, (3) College Degree %, (4) Median Household Income, and (5) Other Registered Voter %.

Judicial races held during presidential years had 3.1% higher roll-off than judicial races held in off-years. This result was no surprise, as a higher percentage of individuals often vote in elections during the presidential electoral cycle, but are more likely there to vote for higher office races that they are aware of and are less likely to vote in less visible races such as county or circuit judge races.

Judicial races held during primary elections had 8.0% lower roll-off than races held during general elections. For each 1 percent increase in college degrees, there is a .34% increase in roll-off. This result runs contrary to my hypothesis that roll-off would decrease among areas with higher populations of more educated individuals (those attaining college degrees). Perhaps populations with higher education levels are more likely to choose to vote in races they are most knowledgeable about, and leave races they are less familiar with blank. However, further inquiry into education levels and their contribution to ballot roll-off would be beneficial in further explaining this occurrence.

Median household income of a county or circuit has a small positive effect on roll-off (less than .000% for each \$1,000 increase), disproving my initial hypothesis. Median

household income remains a statistically significant variable in determining the differences in ballot roll-off; however, the influence of median household income levels of an area in terms of roll-off is less influential than one would expect to find.

For each 1 percent increase of people not registered in a major party, there is a .62% increase in roll-off. This confirms my hypothesis, as an inverse relationship exists between other party registered voters and roll-off. As explained with turnout, minor parties are often not represented in elections and may impact the number of minor party voters at the ballot. Individuals registered for other parties do turn out to vote regardless of representation, although in smaller percentages; however, these voters are more likely to vote for higher office elections that are deemed popular by the public, and are not as likely to vote for every race on the ballot. However, this result does contribute further questions as to why nonpartisan judicial elections show an increase in roll-off, when party affiliations of candidates are not present on the ballot in nonpartisan races.

Variables that did not achieve statistical significance in this model are as follows: County Election, Candidate #, Incumbent, Total Campaign Expenditures, Age 65 and Up %, Female Candidate, Black Candidate, and Hispanic Candidate. Similar to both regression model results of turnout, candidate characteristics overall do not make a statistically significant impact on ballot roll-off.

According to the full regression model of roll-off, the most important variable according to Beta was primary election, with a -.53 impact. The second most important variable was other registered voter %, with an impact of .34. Then, college degree % with a .296 impact followed by presidential year with an impact of .249. The least important

variable of the five significant variables is median household income, with an impact of -.199.

### Roll-Off: Best Model

Table 7: Coefficients and R Square (Roll-Off Best Model)

	<b>B</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	<b>Beta</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
(Constant)	7.080	4.582		.124
Presidential Year	2.583	.624	.210	p < .001***
Primary Election	-8.243	.768	-.549	p < .001***
Other Registered Voter %	.625	.118	.345	p < .001***
College Degree %	.292	.100	.254	.004***
Median Household Income	p < .001	p < .001	-.171	.020**

p- value: \*\*\* = .01    \*\* = .05    \* = .10

<b>R</b>	<b>R Square</b>	<b>Adjusted R Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig</b>
.789 <sup>a</sup>	.622	.609	49.017	.000

The best model of regression explains 62% of variance in determining differences of roll-off among county and circuit judicial races. There is a 2% difference in variance between the full and best models of roll-off, however there is insignificant changes between the results of the models.

Judicial races held during presidential years had 2.6% higher roll-off than judicial races held in off-years. Judicial races held during primary elections had 8.2% lower roll-off

than races held during general elections. For each 1 percent increase in college degrees, there is a .29% increase in roll-off, and for every 1,000 dollar increase in the median household income of a county or circuit, there was a less than .000% increase in roll-off. For each 1 percent increase of people not registered in a major party, there was a .63% increase in roll-off.

Comparing the full model with the best model regression for roll-off, there are slight differences in numbers, however none significant enough to change their statistical significance, their direction, or impact from the results found in the full regression model of roll-off.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of my research was to determine and explain the differences of voter turnout among nonpartisan judicial races involving both counties and circuits in the State of Florida, while also focusing closely on the differences in ballot roll-off within county and circuit court elections. The unit of analysis used in creating both turnout and roll-off regressions was each county or circuit race. Using cross sections of data from 2014 and 2016 judicial elections, I intended to explain what factors overall had a significant impact on voter turnout and ballot roll-off of judicial elections in Florida. During my research on this subject, I collected information from various demographic, socioeconomic, and contextual variables and placed this information within a spreadsheet. Then, I went on to conduct four regression analyses using SPSS software, completing a full model including all variables for turnout and another full model for roll-off; I then created a best regression model for turnout and best model for roll-off, including the five variables found statistically significant by the full models.

The completed regressions revealed predicted results as well as surprising findings in terms of turnout. The variables that seemed to have the most impact on voter turnout in county and circuit judicial races involved two contextual variables: presidential year and primary election. Both had statistically significant effects on turnout and according to the standardized regression coefficient had the highest amount of influence on voter turnout, with an increase in turnout of races held during a presidential election year and a decrease in turnout in primaries versus general elections. The constituent variable percent of other

registered voters also had a statistically significant impact, with a decrease in voter turnout in races with higher numbers of minor party or non-party affiliated registered voters.

While older populations were associated with increased voter turnout, increases in total campaign expenditures tended to reduce voter turnout, in contradiction to my initial hypothesis. However, this may be due to the increased number of individuals (therefore increased expenditures) who run in judicial primary races versus the run-off races that occur during the general. Further research should be conducted to explain this finding.

Although there were several variables found not statistically significant in both voter turnout and ballot roll-off regressions, the types of variables found within this group are interesting. All candidate characteristics seem to have little effect on voter turnout of races, though I hypothesized that they would lead to an increase in turnout. Therefore, one might assume from these results that characteristics linked to candidates do not have a significant impact on the decisions made by an individual to vote in an election. However, candidate characteristics may have more influence over the choice a voter makes in an election rather than their decision to vote within a specific race. Presence of an incumbent candidate does not have a significant impact on voter turnout or ballot roll-off either, running contrary to initial thoughts.

In determining differences in ballot roll-off among county and circuit judge races, contextual and constituent variables became two of the most significant variables in both full and best regressions. Presidential year and primary election variables had statistically significant impacts on differences in roll-off among judicial races, as they did in voter turnout. The percentage of college degree holders, median household income, and the



percent of other party registered voters also had a statistically significant effect on ballot roll-off. According to the standardized regression coefficient, the percent of other party registered voters had the second largest impact, lending support to my original hypothesis. Higher median household income had a smaller positive effect on roll-off while, more surprisingly, judicial races with a higher percent of residents with college degrees in a county or circuit were actually associated with increased ballot roll-off as well.

Ultimately, the research executed in this thesis will go on to aid other political scientists in their research on elections in the future, as well as validate similar findings from previous research done on this topic. Although my research focuses on data collected from Florida nonpartisan judicial elections in 2014 and 2016 only, my study might prove helpful in other studies explaining differences in voter turnout and ballot roll-off among other individual states that have nonpartisan judicial elections. My findings may prove useful in other research studies that focus on Florida nonpartisan judicial race turnout and roll-off overall. More broadly, these results may help to shed light on turnout and ballot roll-off disparities of all states that utilize nonpartisan judicial elections.

Though my research is strong in terms of describing differences in voter turnout of county and judicial races of Florida, it lacks focus on individual voting behavior, as I concentrated on county and circuit judicial races as my unit of analysis. Further research should be conducted in this area, using the individual as a unit of analysis to determine factors of roll-off and voter turnout in nonpartisan judicial elections. Additional studies on Florida nonpartisan judicial races that extend to other election years (prior to 2014 or after 2016) would be beneficial in further explaining voter turnout and ballot roll-off differences

in Florida elections. Future studies might also use public opinion surveys when collecting their data, and may focus on specific categories of variables, such as constituent, structural, or competition variables. Political scientists may also be interested in determining whether similar factors influence voter turnout and ballot roll-off in higher judicial races, such as intermediate appellate court and state supreme court retention elections in the state of Florida and beyond. Although twenty-one states in the U.S. conduct nonpartisan judicial elections, variation exists among states in their application of nonpartisan elections among judicial positions. Future studies concentrating on other types of elections (i.e. retention, partisan, etc.) would aid in creating a broader picture of judicial ballot roll-off within the United States.

If Florida legislators were to pursue policy changes that would increase turnout in judicial elections, they might focus on minor procedural changes that can be made to the current election process. As most judicial offices are filled during primary elections, only 25 percent of all eligible voters within a county or circuit on average are choosing candidates for all trial judicial positions in Florida. If all major judicial races were to take place during the general election, overall voter turnout would likely increase significantly. Our current system allows for run-offs during the general election only when no candidate reaches above 50 percent of votes during the primary. Proposed legislation can still allow for races involving three or more candidates to run during primary elections with accompanying run-off elections in the general, but instead of placing judicial elections involving two candidates in primary elections, such elections can be mandated to take place during the general. In terms of limiting ballot roll-off in Florida judicial races, higher placement of

judicial elections on the ballot may provide better results. Partisan races located near the top of the ballot, such as presidential and major legislative races, see lower levels of roll-off, while trial judge races, often listed near the bottom of the ballot with all other nonpartisan races, experience increased levels of ballot roll-off.

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