

Mixing, Matching, and Winning?
The Electoral Effects of Fusion Voting in Connecticut and
New York State Legislative Elections 2012-2020

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Abstract

Fusion voting—the practice of two or more parties cross-endorsing the same candidate—operates in only four U.S. states, and its effects on state legislative elections have never been systematically tested. Using linear probability models on every Connecticut and New York general election from 2012 to 2020 across four legislative chambers, I find that fusion’s electoral relevance is real but operates through different mechanisms in each state. In Connecticut, minor party votes average 3.28% per fused race and are concentrated in competitive contests; each percentage point delivers a large marginal effect on the probability of winning, but the signal disappears in cycles with few close races. In New York, minor-party votes average 5.90% and are distributed across races of varying competitiveness; the per-vote effect is smaller but consistent across both chambers and nearly every cycle, even as individual minor parties rise and fall. Pooled interaction models confirm the asymmetry, showing Connecticut’s steeper but more fragile slope against New York’s shallower but more durable one. The implication for candidates is the same in both states: seek the cross-endorsement. The votes it delivers are positively associated with winning, and the cost of seeking them is low.

Introduction

The ability to vote for a preferred candidate to represent one's interests in an elected capacity is one of the greatest hallmarks of any democracy. However, in recent years, those who control the rules of ballot design or how the votes are counted can control the actual vote count. There are several ways a candidate can appear on a ballot to help a voter make their choice. One of the most interesting options for party nomination is fusion, "Electoral fusion, or cross-endorsement, is the practice of two or more parties nominating the same candidate for the same office in a single election" (Benjamin and Catalano 2020).

Fusion's history in American elections is one of minor parties attempting to break through with either policy or electoral successes. Duverger (1954) argues that a single-member-district political system tends toward two parties, and the United States has had two dominant parties since Abraham Lincoln's reelection in 1864. However, there have been specific times in the country's history, and even more so at the local and state levels, when minor parties have been able to elect their own candidates or have had an incredible impact on the policies passed by members of the major parties. In the current moment of monumental polarization and dissatisfaction with the two major parties, third parties may be poised for reemergence, and fusion can help achieve this goal. This is visible in third-party electoral success declining in the late-1990s up to the mid-2000s (Hirano and Snyder 2007) but increasing in the last several election cycles (Tamas 2017).

Fusion candidacies can help minor parties in several ways. First, fusion can help minor parties get their issues onto the radar of the major parties (Davis 2020; Sekou 2020). Co-optation of minor parties was a strategy of major parties in the late 19th century (Tamas 2017). However, as time has progressed, minor parties have developed identities distinct from those of the major

parties, yet have attached themselves to the major parties when needed. Moreover, fusion can help third parties potentially boost their own candidates in other races and additionally increase turnout, allow major parties to differentiate themselves by fusing with certain minor parties, and give voters an option of voting on a third-party line if they remain truly disenfranchised with both major parties (Morse and Gass 2006).

Third-party members, however, do not have faith in the electoral successes of their own candidates. Moreover, minor-party members are not convinced they will become a major party. When asked whether they agreed with the statement “I believe my political party will become a major party in my state or the nation in the next ten years,” 34% agreed or strongly agreed, 38% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 28% were unsure (Davis 2020, 7). Yet, New York’s minor-party leaders want electoral success—their candidates elected to office—not just policy successes (Chamberlain 2013). This may be a classic case of party elites being removed from their party members, as often happens with Republicans and Democrats (Muirhead and Rosenblum 2012).

Fusion also allows voters to consider voting strategically (Fisher 2004; Baujard and Lebon 2022; Eggers and Vivyan 2020; Tromborg 2022). Cross-endorsement enables voters to support a candidate even if they are not fully aligned with their major party, helping them avoid voting for a “spoiler” and preventing a “wasted” vote for someone unlikely to win. (Berger 2005). Fusion’s role is extremely multifaceted in the states that allow it. Experiments have shown that fusion ballots are not confusing to voters and do not meaningfully affect voting behavior or feelings of democratic efficacy (Loepp and Melusky 2022).

Kantack (2017) and Lee and Bates (2025) have studied fusion’s effects on U.S. House elections in New York, with Lee and Bates identifying issue cooptation and race competitiveness

as the two strategic factors driving cross-nomination decisions from 1978 to 2018. Other studies have looked at how effective fusion is for electoral success in the U.S. House (Tamas 2017; Chamberlain 2012), European elections (Mair 1990), and county legislator elections (Michelson and Susin 2004); however, there has yet to be a systematic analysis of fusion's effects on American state legislative elections. I proceed by reviewing fusion's history and mechanics in Connecticut and New York, developing a hypothesis about fusion's effects on electoral success in Connecticut and New York legislative elections, describing the data and methods, presenting results across four legislative chambers over five election cycles, and concluding with implications for the study of electoral institutions and the future of minor-party politics in America.

Minor Party History in Connecticut and New York

The Working Families Party (WFP or WF) has a decades-long history of running and cross-endorsing more progressive candidates who focus on labor and other progressive issues. The WFP has found electoral success by fusing with Democrats and, occasionally, winning outright with their own candidates in special elections or at the local level. The Independent Party in Connecticut is a bit newer and more fractured than the WFP. The Independent Party is the third-largest party in Connecticut by enrollment, behind the Democratic and Republican parties. This is primarily due to voters' confusion about whether they want to be an "Unaffiliated" voter—not registered with either the Democratic or Republican Parties—versus becoming an actual member of the Independent Party. The Independent Party has been a solid cross-endorser of Republicans but has tacked left in recent years, endorsing more Democrats (Fenster 2022).

The Working Families Party, Conservative Party, and Independence Party have been mainstays in New York politics. The Green Party, Libertarian Party, and Reform Party have had periods of increased visibility and ballot access, as well as periods of difficulty gaining ballot access in New York's history. The Serve America Movement (SAM) Party—a party dedicated to endorsing moderate candidates in the vein of No Labels—has sprung up in New York but has failed to maintain its statewide minor-party status. The Women's Equality Party (WEP) —a short-term minor party—was created explicitly to help then-Governor Andrew Cuomo's reelection; it attained statewide minor-party status because of Gov. Cuomo's electoral success on that line. It was able to fuse with candidates in the years it had statewide status, but then lost that status after the 2018 gubernatorial election (Davis 2020).

Connecticut's Working Families Party and Independent Parties are long-term political parties (Davis 2020), unlike short-term parties that emerged around a specific issue or candidate. For example, A Connecticut Party, created by Lowell Weicker to run for Connecticut Governor in 1990, became a major player in Connecticut politics through its ability to fuse with other candidates during the 1992 and 1994 elections—similar to the WEP in New York—but then receded into the background after A Connecticut Party Lt. Gov. Eunice Groark lost her bid for governor in 1994.

Mechanics of Fusion

There are three types of fusion candidacies. A major-party candidate can be fused with another major party (major/major) —for example, Democratic and Republican. A minor-party candidate can be fused with another minor party (minor/minor) —for example, a Green Party candidate fused with the Working Families Party. The most common form, however, is fusion

between a major-party candidate and a minor-party candidate (major/minor) —for example, a Republican candidate fused with the Conservative Party.

Fusion’s use varied in the 19th and early 20th centuries with three major flashpoints: the elections of 1872, 1896, and 1916. Tamas (2017) argues that fusion's demise was due to decreased polarization, in contradiction to Argersinger’s (1980) and Reed’s (2016) contention that its decline was due to the institution of the Australian ballot. Regardless of the reason for its decline, fusion has hung on in certain states. Four states operationally continue to use fusion – New York, Connecticut, Oregon, and Vermont—albeit in different ways (Benjamin and Catalano 2020).

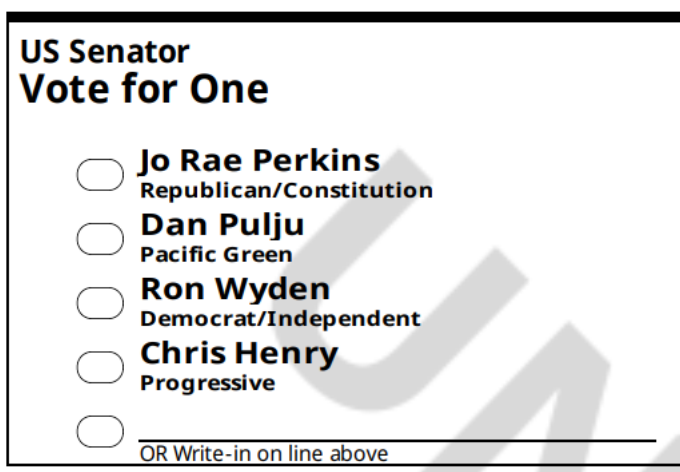


Figure 1. 2022 Oregon Ballot.

In Oregon and Vermont, candidates appear on a single ballot line with several party designations, a system known as aggregate fusion. In this form of fusion, a voter cannot register their intent to vote for a candidate on a particular party line. For example, Figure 1 shows the 2022 Oregon ballot for the U.S. Senate. In these two

states, voters can only “fill in the bubble” for candidates in one place. Without experiments, the electoral outcomes of races in Oregon and Vermont do not allow systematic analysis of voters' choices regarding their views of the fused ballot lines for each candidate.

OFFICE PARTY	1 Governor and Lieutenant Governor Vote for One
DEMOCRATIC PARTY	☐ 1A Ned Lamont and Susan Bysiewicz
REPUBLICAN PARTY	☐ 1B Bob Stefanowski and Laura Devlin
GRIEBEL FRANK FOR CT PARTY	☐ 1C Ned Lamont and Susan Bysiewicz
INDEPENDENT PARTY	☐ 1D Robert Hotaling and Stewart "Chip" Beckett
WORKING FAMILIES PARTY	☐ 1E Ned Lamont and Susan Bysiewicz

Figure 2. 2022 Connecticut Ballot.

Candidates in Connecticut and New York are listed on separate party ballot lines. Figure 2 shows the 2022 Connecticut ballot. In this case, voters could vote for Ned Lamont and Susan Bysiewicz on the Democratic Party line, or the Griebel Frank for CT Party line, or the Working Families Party line. If a voter voted for Lamont/Bysiewicz on all three party lines, it was considered an overvote and printed out on the ballot tape as an “unknown” vote. Unknown votes are apportioned to the Democratic, Griebel Frank for CT Party, or Working Families Party line in proportion to the number of votes Lamont and Bysiewicz received on those lines that were not overvotes. This is needed in Connecticut because statewide minor-party status is gained, lost, or

retained on a per-office basis. For local, state, and

federal candidacies, a minor party could nominate a candidate for that office in the next special or general election only if its candidate received 1% of the vote in the prior general election for that particular office (Conn. Gen. Stat. §9-373b 2024; Conn. Gen. Stat. §9-453t 2024). Under a relatively new law upheld by the 2nd Circuit Court of Appeals, New York requires minor parties to garner 130,000 votes or 2% of the total votes cast for their gubernatorial and presidential candidates to maintain statewide ballot access. This is a much stricter version of the law currently in effect relative to the study period (New York Election Law §6-120 2020; *SAM Party*

of *New York v. Kosinski*, No. 20-3047 (2d Cir. 2021)). Connecticut and New York fusion is, therefore, disaggregated (Benjamin and Catalano 2020). It allows for a more intricate accounting of which party-label voters are voting for per candidate. South Carolina outlawed fusion after the 2022 election (South Carolina General Assembly 2022), and during the period analyzed in this study, fusion declined precipitously. Therefore, Connecticut and New York are the only states that allow analysis of whether minor-party vote share from fused ballot lines predicts electoral outcomes from 2012 – 2020.

Connecticut and New York Ballot Lines

Investigating the prevalence of fusion in New York and Connecticut helps develop a hypothesis about its effects on electoral outcomes. The tables below display how many candidates appeared on different ballot lines.

In Connecticut, the Working Families Party (WF) and Independent Party (I) have done most of the cross-endorsing over the 2012-2020 period. There have also been a few Green Party (G) and petitioning candidates (PC).

Table 5. Ballot line counts of candidates’ political party affiliations running for the Connecticut Senate per election cycle.

	2012	2014	2016	2018	2020
D Only	13	11	15	15	12
R Only	18	15	12	9	20
D/WF	21	19	19	18	16
R/I	14	17	21	24	12
D/I	0	1	1	0	2
D/I/WF	0	0	0	2	5
I Only	1	0	1	1	7
G Only	3	4	4	3	1
PC Only	1	1	1	0	3
WF Only	1	4	0	0	0

Table 6. Ballot line counts of candidates’ political party affiliations running for the Connecticut House per election cycle.

	2012	2014	2016	2018	2020
D Only	85	76	63	70	67
R Only	96	66	53	46	52
D/WF	50	55	60	73	63
R/I	35	59	74	87	74
D/I	1	0	0	1	3
D/I/WF	1	2	1	1	8
I Only	2	4	2	2	7
G Only	4	9	9	4	2
PC Only	8	14	11	12	10
WF Only	2	0	2	2	0
R and Others	0	0	2	0	0
D and Others	0	0	1	1	0

Similar patterns appear in the Connecticut Senate and House over this five-cycle period. Democrats have mostly fused with the WFP but have gained some traction in fusing with the Independent Party, especially in the 2020 cycle. This trend has continued past 2020 into the 2022 and 2024 cycles at an even larger scale. The WFP did not cross-endorse any Republicans in either chamber during the study period.

Ballot lines in New York are much harder to categorize neatly. Because of New York’s “multi+” system (Benjamin and Catalano 2020), minor parties can rise and fall from the threshold of being a recognized statewide minor party every four years. I categorize the New York ballot lines as major parties plus additional parties, whichever minor parties they may be. For both chambers of the New York Legislature, “Other Minor Party Combinations” refers to minor/minor fusion. There are a few instances of Democratic-Republican fusion that have been counted under D+1.

Table 7. Ballot line counts of candidates’ political party affiliations running for the New York Senate per election cycle.

	2012	2014	2016	2018	2020
D Only	11	11	10	5	16
D + 1 Party	30	31	21	22	29
D + 2 Parties	8	3	21	22	12
D + 3 Parties	1	2	3	3	1
D + 4 Parties	0	0	0	2	0
R Only	6	6	5	5	6
R + 1 Party	11	7	2	5	10
R + 2 Parties	27	24	11	5	22
R + 3 Parties	5	5	27	32	8
R + 4 Parties	0	1	3	0	0
Other Minor Party Combinations	19	11	18	15	11

In the New York Senate, Democrats show consistent fusion with one party—this is typically the Working Families Party. In 2016 and 2018, Democrats were also frequently cross-endorsed by the Women’s Equality Party (WEP). The WEP was created largely to boost Governor Andrew Cuomo’s (D-NY) 2014 reelection campaign (Davis 2020). The WEP lost statewide minor-party status in 2020, causing a dip in the D+2 line. There is a slight uptick in 2020 under the D+1 line due to increased cross-endorsement with the Serve America Movement (SAM) Party. Republicans follow a similar pattern, endorsed by the Conservative and Independence Parties with great frequency in 2012 and 2014. Still, the R+3 line gained many more participants in 2016 and 2018—these are additional cross-endorsements from the Reform Party. The Reform Party lost statewide recognition in the 2020 cycle, with the R+2 line reclaiming many of its candidacies after fusion with the Conservative and Independence Parties.

Table 4. Ballot line counts of candidates’ political party affiliations running for the New York House per election cycle.

	2012	2014	2016	2018	2020
D Only	36	36	33	36	65
D + 1 Party	70	61	46	44	53
D + 2 Parties	32	27	33	29	11
D + 3 Parties	0	1	21	23	0
D + 4 Parties	0	0	0	7	0
D + 5 Parties	0	0	1	1	0
R Only	22	26	15	12	22
R + 1 Party	34	39	27	27	30
R + 2 Parties	41	37	17	26	43
R + 3 Parties	6	11	36	26	9
R + 4 Parties	0	0	3	3	2
R + 5 Parties	0	0	1	0	0
Other Minor Party Combinations	36	19	24	28	36

Similar trends are evident in the New York House. One significant difference is the loss of the WEP and Independent lines to Republicans, leaving many Democrats running solely on their own with no fused lines or with only the WFP cross-endorsement in the 2020 cycle.

Hypothesis

State legislative elections can produce different results than congressional elections. These more localized contests often hinge on particular local issues or the specific strength of a candidate relative to their national party, meaning that factors beyond major party identification can carry greater weight than they do in federal races (Hunt and Rouse 2023). I therefore advance the following hypothesis: **Minor-party vote share will be positively associated with the probability of winning state legislative elections.**

Data & Methods

To examine the electoral effects of fused minor-party votes, I compiled a database of all election results for Connecticut and New York legislative races from 2012 to 2020. This

timeframe was chosen so that redistricting would not be a variable to consider – all district lines remained consistent throughout this period, and there were no legal challenges in either state that affected district boundaries.

I estimate linear probability models (LPMs) using the database. The dependent variable is a binary indicator of electoral success (Win = 1, Loss = 0). Independent variables include major-party vote share, minor-party vote share, incumbency status (1 = incumbent), party identification (1 = Democrat, 0 = Republican), and whether the election occurred in a presidential year (1 = Yes, 0 = No). Separate models were estimated for each election year from 2012 to 2020, and pooled models were estimated for each chamber across all years and for both states.

While logistic regression is commonly used for binary outcomes, the close mathematical relationship between major-party vote share and the win/loss variable introduces problematic multicollinearity, leading to unstable coefficient estimates. LPMs provide more stable and interpretable coefficients in this context, allowing for direct interpretation of how each independent variable affects the probability of winning and enabling comparison of nested models through R^2 differences and F-tests.

I include only races in which at least one major-party candidate was fused with a minor-party candidate. Unopposed races are excluded because minor-party votes cannot affect the electoral winner. I also exclude races featuring only minor-party competition, as no minor-party candidate running without major-party opposition won a general election in either state during this period. Accordingly, the analysis estimates the relationship between minor-party vote share and electoral success among races in which fusion voting was available to voters. Although minor-party candidates won special elections during this timeframe, I consider only general elections. Finally, a small number of New York races in which a Democratic candidate was

cross-endorsed by the Republican Party, or vice versa, are excluded, as major/major fusion of this kind renders minor-party vote share analytically irrelevant to the electoral outcome.

Tables 5 through 7 present the main results. As a proof of concept, Table 5 reports the nested Connecticut Senate models, illustrating the incremental contributions of the minor-party vote share and the fusion endorsement indicator. Table 6 presents the fully specified chamber-specific models for all four legislative chambers utilizing Model 3 from Table 5. Table 7 presents the pooled comparative models, including specifications with state and chamber interaction terms that allow for a direct test of the CT/NY asymmetry.

Table 5. Connecticut Senate Linear Probability Models

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constant	-0.649*** (0.097)	-0.658*** (0.099)	-0.578*** (0.099)
Major-party vote share	2.111*** (0.243)	2.072*** (0.245)	2.006*** (0.239)
Minor-party vote share		1.288 (1.141)	6.199* (2.594)
Fusion endorsement			-0.204* (0.089)
Incumbent	0.375*** (0.060)	0.377*** (0.059)	0.364*** (0.060)
Democrat	-0.004 (0.041)	-0.007 (0.041)	-0.006 (0.041)
Presidential year	-0.004 (0.041)	-0.005 (0.041)	-0.017 (0.041)
Num. Obs.	252	252	252
R ²	0.619	0.621	0.629
R ² Adj.	0.613	0.613	0.620

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table 6. Chamber-Specific Linear Probability Models

	CT Senate	CT House	NY Senate	NY House
Constant	-0.578*** (0.099)	-0.721*** (0.048)	-0.336*** (0.041)	-0.378*** (0.028)
Major-party vote share	2.006*** (0.239)	2.308*** (0.115)	1.474*** (0.099)	1.450*** (0.062)
Minor-party vote share	6.199* (2.594)	3.619*** (1.023)	2.577*** (0.515)	2.758*** (0.334)
Fusion endorsement	-0.204* (0.089)	-0.041 (0.040)	0.009 (0.038)	0.012 (0.026)
Incumbent	0.364*** (0.060)	0.249*** (0.032)	0.240*** (0.047)	0.280*** (0.027)
Democrat	-0.006 (0.041)	-0.057** (0.022)	-0.121** (0.042)	-0.060* (0.024)
Presidential year	-0.017 (0.041)	0.009 (0.021)	0.014 (0.032)	0.032 (0.019)
Num. Obs.	252	830	376	802
R ²	0.629	0.637	0.656	0.721
R ² Adj.	0.620	0.634	0.650	0.718

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table 7. Pooled Comparative Linear Probability Models

	Pooled Baseline	State Interaction	Chamber Interaction	Full Pooled Model
Constant	-0.437*** (0.019)	-0.449*** (0.022)	-0.438*** (0.020)	-0.436*** (0.022)
Major-party vote share	1.643*** (0.049)	1.634*** (0.049)	1.644*** (0.049)	1.634*** (0.049)
Minor-party vote share	2.530*** (0.190)	3.684*** (0.521)	2.663*** (0.224)	4.345*** (0.771)
Fusion endorsement				-0.037+ (0.021)
Incumbent	0.304*** (0.018)	0.303*** (0.018)	0.305*** (0.018)	0.301*** (0.018)
Democrat	-0.066*** (0.014)	-0.067*** (0.014)	-0.067*** (0.014)	-0.067*** (0.014)
Presidential year	0.016 (0.013)	0.016 (0.013)	0.016 (0.013)	0.016 (0.013)
New York		0.015 (0.019)		0.025 (0.021)
Senate			0.002 (0.019)	-0.010 (0.014)
Minor-party vote share × New York		-1.252* (0.542)		-1.716* (0.704)
Minor-party vote share × Senate			-0.421 (0.349)	
Num. Obs.	2260	2260	2260	2260
R ²	0.649	0.650	0.649	0.651
R ² Adj.	0.648	0.649	0.648	0.650

+p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Analysis

Connecticut Senate

Across the 2012-2020 period, fusion voting had a limited and inconsistent effect on electoral outcomes in the Connecticut Senate. Year-by-year models indicate that adding minor-party vote share rarely improved model fit in a statistically meaningful way. The baseline model—including major-party vote share, incumbency, party identification, and presidential year—already explains a substantial portion of the variance in electoral outcomes (R² ranging

from 0.509 in 2018 to 0.716 in 2012). The addition of minor-party vote share produced negligible improvements in most cycles, with ΔR^2 values at or near zero in 2018 and 2020, and no year-over-year F-statistic reaching conventional significance thresholds except in 2016, where the improvement approached but did not cross the $p < 0.05$ threshold ($F = 2.758$, $p = 0.103$).

The pooled Connecticut Senate model (Table 5) tells a more nuanced story. In Model 3—the fully specified model including minor-party vote share and a fusion endorsement indicator—minor-party vote share is statistically significant ($\beta = 6.199$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that across the full five-cycle period, higher minor-party vote shares are associated with a higher probability of winning. However, the fusion endorsement variable itself carries a negative and significant coefficient ($\beta = -0.204$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that simply receiving a cross-endorsement—net of the votes it generates—is associated with a lower probability of winning. This counterintuitive finding likely reflects selection effects: fusion endorsements in the Connecticut Senate are disproportionately concentrated in competitive races where the outcome is less certain, rather than in safe seats where a candidate would win regardless. The endorsement variable, in other words, is picking up the competitiveness of the race as much as the effect of the endorsement itself.

Incumbency remains the dominant non-vote-share predictor throughout ($\beta = 0.364$, $p < 0.001$ in Model 3), and party identification does not reach significance in any Senate model, consistent with the relatively even partisan composition of Connecticut Senate districts over this period. Presidential-year effects are also consistently non-significant, suggesting that surge-and-decline dynamics common in federal elections do not translate meaningfully into Connecticut Senate races.

Connecticut House

The Connecticut House presents a somewhat stronger case for fusion's electoral relevance than the Senate, though the pattern remains uneven across cycles. Year-by-year model fit improvements from adding minor-party vote share are statistically significant in three of the five cycles examined: 2012 ($\Delta R^2 = 0.019$, $F = 7.932$, $p = 0.006$), 2016 ($\Delta R^2 = 0.042$, $F = 19.46$, $p < 0.001$), and 2020 ($\Delta R^2 = 0.012$, $F = 6.277$, $p = 0.013$). In 2016, the inclusion of minor-party vote share accounts for an additional 4.2 percentage points of variance in electoral outcomes—a meaningful gain given the already high baseline R^2 of 0.625. The 2014 and 2018 cycles, by contrast, show negligible improvements ($\Delta R^2 = 0.006$ and 0.003 , respectively), suggesting that fusion's electoral relevance in the Connecticut House varies considerably across cycles.

The pooled CT House model (Table 6) reinforces this pattern. Minor-party vote share is positive and highly significant ($\beta = 3.619$, $p < 0.001$), and the fusion endorsement variable, while negative in direction, does not reach significance ($\beta = -0.041$, $p = 0.305$). This stands in contrast to the Senate, where the endorsement indicator was significant, suggesting that at the House level, the cross-endorsement itself carries less of a competitive signal—likely because House races are more numerous and more varied in competitiveness, diluting the selection effect observed in the smaller Senate chamber. Incumbency remains strongly significant ($\beta = 0.249$, $p < 0.001$), and party identification is significant here in a way it is not in the Senate ($\beta = -0.057$, $p < 0.01$), reflecting more pronounced partisan sorting across the larger, more geographically diverse House chamber.

The cycles in which fusion most clearly matters—2012, 2016, and 2020—are all presidential election years, while the two cycles where effects are negligible—2014 and 2018—are midterm years. Although the presidential-year indicator does not reach statistical significance

in the pooled model, this pattern suggests that higher-turnout presidential cycles activate a different pool of voters, some of whom may be more inclined to cast their ballots on a minor-party line. This remains speculative given the current model specification and warrants further investigation.

New York Senate

In contrast to Connecticut, fusion voting demonstrates a more consistent and substantial relationship with electoral outcomes in the New York Senate. Year-by-year models show statistically significant improvements in model fit from the inclusion of minor-party vote share in two of the five cycles examined—2012 ($\Delta R^2 = 0.061$, $F = 17.021$, $p < 0.001$) and 2014 ($\Delta R^2 = 0.040$, $F = 13.234$, $p = 0.001$)—with the 2018 cycle approaching significance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.019$, $F = 3.126$, $p = 0.081$). The 2012 improvement is particularly notable: Adding minor-party vote share accounts for an additional 6.1 percentage points of explained variance over a baseline model that already explains 67.9% of outcomes—the single largest year-specific fusion effect observed in either state's Senate chamber across the full study period.

The 2016 and 2020 cycles diverge from this pattern, showing minimal improvements in model fit that do not approach statistical significance. These cycles correspond to periods of notable minor-party volatility in New York: 2016 saw the rapid expansion of Women's Equality Party cross-endorsements, while 2020 marked the WEP's loss of statewide ballot access and the concurrent contraction of the Independence Party line following New York's tightened ballot-access thresholds. The turbulence in the minor-party landscape during these cycles may have disrupted the stable relationships between minor-party vote shares and electoral outcomes, which are more evident in calmer electoral environments.

The pooled New York Senate model (Table 6) confirms that minor-party vote share is a meaningful predictor of electoral success over the full period ($\beta = 2.577$, $p < 0.001$). The fusion endorsement variable is not significant ($\beta = 0.009$, $p = 0.813$), consistent with the interpretation that, in New York's multi-party environment, what matters is not simply receiving a cross-endorsement but how many votes that endorsement actually delivers. Incumbency remains strong ($\beta = 0.240$, $p < 0.001$), and party identification reaches significance ($\beta = -0.121$, $p < 0.01$), reflecting New York's stronger partisan sorting at the district level relative to Connecticut.

New York House

The New York House produces the strongest and most consistent fusion effects of any chamber examined. Minor-party vote share significantly improves model fit in every election cycle from 2012 to 2020. F-statistics range from 17.784 (2016) to 31.080 (2012), all with p-values below 0.001, and ΔR^2 values range from 0.026 in 2014 to 0.056 in 2012. The consistency of this pattern across all five cycles is itself a finding: Unlike in Connecticut, where fusion effects emerge in some years and disappear in others, New York House elections show a reliable, detectable fusion signal regardless of the specific minor-party configuration active in a given cycle.

The pooled New York House model (Table 6) yields the highest overall model fit of any chamber in the study ($R^2 = 0.721$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.718$), and minor-party vote share is positive and highly significant ($\beta = 2.758$, $p < 0.001$). As in the Senate, the fusion endorsement indicator is not significant ($\beta = 0.012$, $p = 0.644$), reinforcing the interpretation that vote delivery—not endorsement per se—is the operative mechanism in New York. In 2012 and 2018, the inclusion of minor-party vote share accounts for 5.6 and 4.3 additional percentage points of explained

variance, respectively—gains that reflect real and meaningful relationships between fusion vote totals and electoral outcomes, not artifacts of large sample size.

The year-by-year stability of these effects stands in instructive contrast to the volatility of New York's minor-party landscape. Even as individual parties—the WEP, the SAM Party, the Independence Party—rose and fell in statewide ballot access, the aggregate electoral signal of minor-party vote share remained detectable and consistent, suggesting that New York voters have internalized fusion voting as a practice that transcends any particular party label.

Pooled Comparative Models

The pooled comparative models in Table 7 provide a direct, systematic test of whether fusion voting's electoral effects differ between Connecticut and New York. Across all four specifications, major-party vote share ($\beta \approx 1.634$, $p < 0.001$) and incumbency ($\beta \approx 0.303$, $p < 0.001$) remain the dominant predictors of electoral success. Minor-party vote share is positive and significant across all pooled specifications (β ranging from 2.530 to 4.345, $p < 0.001$), confirming that fusion vote totals carry electoral information even when controlling for state and chamber differences.

The critical test of the CT/NY asymmetry comes from the interaction term between minor-party vote share and the New York indicator. In both the State Interaction model and the Full Pooled Model, this interaction is negative and statistically significant ($\beta = -1.252$, $p < 0.05$ and $\beta = -1.716$, $p < 0.05$, respectively). The baseline minor-party vote share coefficient captures the Connecticut marginal effect; the interaction term adjusts that slope for New York. The New York slope is therefore the sum of the two terms—approximately 2.63 in the Full Pooled Model—which aligns closely with the chamber-specific estimates for both the NY Senate ($\beta = 2.577$) and NY House ($\beta = 2.758$). Connecticut's baseline slope is larger in magnitude ($\beta =$

4.345), meaning each additional percentage point of minor-party vote share has a greater marginal impact on the probability of winning in Connecticut than in New York.

This asymmetry is meaningful and theoretically interpretable. For candidates who were fused, the following percentages of the vote were received on the minor-party line over the study period: Connecticut House 3.35%; Connecticut Senate 3.31%; New York House 5.86%; New York Senate 5.96%. Connecticut's minor-party votes are scarcer and more concentrated—disproportionately appearing in genuinely competitive races where marginal votes carry greater weight. Each minor-party vote percentage point, therefore, buys more in Connecticut precisely because those votes are rarer and more strategically targeted. In New York, minor-party votes are more broadly distributed across races of varying competitiveness, yielding a smaller per-vote marginal effect even as the aggregate relationship remains more consistent across cycles. New York's fusion effect is broader and more reliable; Connecticut's, when it appears, operates with greater leverage per vote.

Discussion

Major-party vote share and incumbency dominate every model, consistent with the broader literature on state legislative elections. What is more theoretically consequential is what happens at the margins—and how differently those margins operate across the two states.

Connecticut

The Connecticut results do not support a clean null hypothesis. Minor-party vote share reaches statistical significance in the pooled models for both the Senate and House, and year-by-year analysis reveals significant improvements in model fit in three of five cycles in the House and suggestive patterns in several Senate cycles. At the same time, these effects are neither consistent across cycles nor large in absolute terms. The more accurate characterization is one of

conditional relevance: fusion voting matters in Connecticut in some years, in some chambers, but not reliably or uniformly enough to constitute a structural feature of Connecticut electoral politics in the way it does in New York.

The key to understanding Connecticut's pattern lies in the dearth of minor-party votes relative to New York. With an average minor-party vote share of just 3.28% across the study period, Connecticut's fused-ballot line votes are concentrated in a smaller number of genuinely competitive races, where candidates actively seek cross-endorsements precisely because they believe the margin will be tight. This concentration amplifies the marginal impact of each percentage point of a minor-party vote, yielding a larger per-vote coefficient in the pooled models relative to New York. But it also means that when competitive races are fewer—as in 2018 and 2020 in the Senate—the fusion signal effectively disappears. Connecticut's fusion effect, in short, is leveraged but fragile. This competitiveness-driven pattern echoes Lee and Bates' (2025) finding that race competitiveness is one of two key strategic drivers of cross-nomination decisions in New York congressional elections.

New York

The New York results provide strong support for the hypothesis. Minor-party vote share is a consistent and significant predictor of electoral outcomes across both chambers and across all five election cycles in the House, with significant effects in three of five Senate cycles as well. This consistency is itself a substantive finding. New York's minor-party landscape underwent considerable turbulence between 2012 and 2020, including the rise and fall of the WEP and the emergence and collapse of the SAM Party. Despite this volatility, the aggregate electoral signal from minor-party vote share remained detectable and stable, suggesting that New York voters have internalized fusion voting as a practice that transcends any particular party

label. The minor-party line functions as a durable expressive vehicle in New York regardless of which party occupies it in a given cycle.

The CT/NY Asymmetry and the Interaction Term

The pooled comparative models confirm and formalize this asymmetry. The negative and significant interaction term between minor-party vote share and the New York indicator ($\beta = -1.716$, $p < 0.05$ in the Full Pooled Model) does not indicate that fusion matters less in New York—the chamber-specific models make clear that it does not. Rather, it captures the difference in the per-vote marginal effect between the two states. Connecticut's slope is steeper because its minor-party votes are sparser and more targeted; New York's slope is shallower because its minor-party votes are more broadly distributed. The two states represent different equilibria of the same underlying mechanism: the electoral leverage of fusion voting is a function of both the volume of minor-party votes and the degree to which those votes cluster in competitive races.

Conclusion

Fusion voting occupies an unusual position in American electoral politics—legally permitted in only a handful of states, understudied at the state level, and perpetually caught between its promise as a mechanism for minor-party influence and its practical limits in a first-past-the-post system. This study offers the first systematic analysis of fusion voting's electoral effects in state legislative elections, drawing on a comprehensive and novel dataset of general election results in Connecticut and New York from 2012 to 2020. Using linear probability models estimated across four legislative chambers and five election cycles, I find that fusion voting's electoral relevance is real but conditional, and that it operates differently across the two states, illuminating the underlying mechanics of cross-endorsement politics.

In Connecticut, fusion voting is conditionally relevant. Minor-party vote share predicts outcomes in the pooled models for both chambers and in several individual cycles—particularly the House in 2012, 2016, and 2020—but effects are neither consistent across years nor large in absolute terms. Connecticut’s fusion politics, dominated by just two long-established minor parties, appears to have reached an equilibrium in which the WFP and Independent Party labels retain their mobilizing function in competitive races but are not differentiated enough to generate consistent effects across the full range of legislative contests.

In New York, the picture is markedly different. Minor-party vote share consistently predicts electoral outcomes in both chambers and across virtually every cycle examined, despite substantial turbulence in the minor-party landscape over this period. New York’s multi-party ecosystem offers voters ideologically differentiated expressive options, and fusion voting has become structurally embedded in state legislative politics in a way that transcends any particular party or cycle. The pooled interaction term confirms the asymmetry: Connecticut’s fusion effect is leveraged but fragile; New York’s is broader and more consistent.

These findings also reinforce the broader literature’s conclusions about the limits of fusion for minor parties themselves. Third parties fare better in fusion states (Tamas 2017), and fused candidates do gain real votes from minor-party endorsements (Michelson and Susin 2004; Kantack 2017; Loepp and Melusky 2022). But no candidate in either state won a general election on a minor-party line alone during the study period. Fusion boosts minor-party vote totals and helps parties maintain ballot access, but it does not break the two-party electoral ceiling. Minor parties in Connecticut and New York remain, in Tamas’s (2017) terms, barnacles on the major parties—capable of influencing outcomes at the margins but not of achieving independent electoral success. Even ranked-choice voting, a more structural reform, increases support for

third parties without putting their candidates over the top (Simmons, Gutierrez, and Transue 2022). Legitimate third parties can persist in a cross-endorsing role within a first-past-the-post system (Chamberlain 2013), but persistence is not the same as independent power.

What do these findings mean for candidates deciding whether to seek a minor-party cross-endorsement or several minor-party cross-endorsements? The data suggest that in both states, the answer is yes: go for the minor-party endorsement—though the logic differs. In New York, the case is straightforward: Fusion votes are a consistent and significant predictor of electoral success across both chambers and nearly every cycle, and the endorsement indicator itself carries no negative signal. Seeking a cross-endorsement in New York is a reliable strategy for marginal vote accumulation with no detectable downside. In Connecticut, the calculus is more nuanced. The negative fusion endorsement coefficient in the Senate pooled model reflects a selection effect—candidates who seek endorsements tend to be in competitive races—rather than a causal harm from the endorsement itself. Once the votes a cross-endorsement delivers are accounted for, those votes are positively associated with winning. The endorsement is most valuable precisely when a candidate needs it most: in a tight race where every percentage point matters. For candidates in safe seats, fusion endorsements are largely expressive. For candidates in competitive races, they may be decisive. Candidates will not know whether they are in competitive races until the votes are counted, so the natural answer is to seek the minor-party endorsement.

Several limitations of this study warrant acknowledgment. The analysis is restricted to general elections, excluding special elections, in which minor-party dynamics may operate differently. The study period ends in 2020, predating New York’s significant tightening of statewide ballot access thresholds, which will likely reduce fusion activity in future cycles and

may alter the patterns documented here. Moreover, the linear probability model framework, while appropriate given the multicollinearity constraints in these data, has well-known limitations for binary outcomes.

Future research should explore why voters opt to vote on a minor-party line when a major-party choice exists for the same candidate. This can be achieved through a generalizable experimental design that expands on the work of Loepp and Melusky (2022) and could provide valuable insights into this issue. As fusion voting faces new legal and legislative pressures across the states where it remains permitted, understanding its electoral mechanics at the state level becomes increasingly important for both scholars of electoral institutions and practitioners navigating an era of sustained dissatisfaction with the two major parties.

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Data Availability Statement

The raw and cleaned data used for the analysis in this article are permanently available at <https://github.com/nicholasdkapoor/Fusion>.

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Appendix

CT Senate	R ² Baseline	R ² with Minor Party Share	ΔR^2	F-Stat	p-value	R ² with Fusion Endorsement	ΔR^2	F-Stat	p-value
2012	0.716	0.721	0.004	0.72	0.401	0.719	0.003	0.452	0.505
2014	0.668	0.679	0.011	1.253	0.27	0.671	0.003	0.354	0.555
2016	0.674	0.691	0.017	2.758	0.103	0.674	0.000	0.075	0.786
2018	0.509	0.509	0.000	0.015	0.903	0.513	0.004	0.433	0.514
2020	0.67	0.670	0.000	0.04	0.843	0.670	0.000	0.064	0.802
All Years	0.619	0.621	0.002	1.076	0.301	0.619	0.000	0.079	0.779

CT House	R ² Baseline	R ² with Minor Party Share	ΔR^2	F-Stat	p-value	R ² with Fusion Endorsement	ΔR^2	F-Stat	p-value
2012	0.695	0.714	0.019	7.932	0.006	0.708	0.013	5.367	0.022
2014	0.655	0.661	0.006	2.609	0.108	0.660	0.005	2.456	0.119
2016	0.625	0.668	0.042	19.46	0.000	0.640	0.015	6.330	0.013
2018	0.577	0.580	0.003	1.187	0.277	0.578	0.000	0.151	0.698
2020	0.635	0.647	0.012	6.277	0.013	0.644	0.009	4.386	0.038
All Years	0.624	0.636	0.013	28.429	0.000	0.628	0.005	10.332	0.001

NY Senate	R ² Baseline	R ² with Minor Party Share	ΔR^2	F-Stat	p-value	R ² with Fusion Endorsement	ΔR^2	F-Stat	p-value
2012	0.679	0.740	0.061	17.021	0.000	0.695	0.016	3.934	0.051
2014	0.761	0.802	0.040	13.234	0.001	0.778	0.016	4.802	0.032
2016	0.751	0.760	0.009	2.688	0.106	0.751	0.000	0.005	0.943
2018	0.540	0.560	0.019	3.126	0.081	0.541	0.001	0.140	0.709
2020	0.537	0.548	0.011	1.678	0.199	0.542	0.005	0.697	0.406
All Years	0.631	0.656	0.025	26.882	0.000	0.636	0.006	5.772	0.017

NY House	R ² Baseline	R ² with Minor Party Share	ΔR^2	F-Stat	p-value	R ² with Fusion Endorsement	ΔR^2	F-Stat	p-value
2012	0.644	0.700	0.056	31.08	0.000	0.650	0.006	2.785	0.097
2014	0.760	0.786	0.026	18.704	0.000	0.773	0.013	8.819	0.003
2016	0.716	0.747	0.031	17.784	0.000	0.720	0.004	2.270	0.134
2018	0.671	0.714	0.043	24.189	0.000	0.686	0.015	7.732	0.006
2020	0.748	0.775	0.027	18.591	0.000	0.757	0.009	5.777	0.017
All Years	0.680	0.721	0.040	115.063	0.000	0.692	0.012	31.579	0.000

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