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Partisan Effects of Voter Turnout: Turnout Effects by Race and Region

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to investigate how voter turnout in the American South¹ affects the outcome of elections, and if the South differs systematically with the North in terms of the effect of voter turnout. I am continuing a strand of analysis performed by Jack Nagel and myself in using actual election results to elucidate turnout effects.

We ran parallel studies of both Presidential elections and major statewide elections² searching for evidence to confirm or refute what is often called the “conventional” theory of voter turnout – that the party of the left, the Democrats in the American case, benefit from higher-than-usual levels of voter turnout. There are voluminous citations in the literature espousing this point of view³, and the popular media represents it as fact to the public. However, we found that that effect did not hold true. Rather, we found that, since the mid 1960’s, turnout has had a highly contingent impact on vote share, which varied based on contextual factors in a given electorate. Our findings closely corresponded with a theory posited by James DeNardo in 1980, based on a study he did on elections in the U.S. House,⁴ which he termed the “two-effects” theory⁵.

I would like to thank Merrill Shanks and Ben Highton for both supplying the dataset from CPS which made this analysis possible and for educating me on how best to use it. Additionally, I am indebted to the participants in Ray Wolfinger’s seminar and in Merrill Shanks’s seminar for invaluable advice, suggestion, and criticism. Any deficiencies in this analysis are solely the responsibility of the author.

¹ The South will be defined conventionally as the states which comprised the Confederacy during the Civil War.

² Gubernatorial and Senatorial.

³ To cite just a few examples: Burnham 1987, Edsall 1984, Piven and Cloward 1988, Radcliff 1994

⁴ James DeNardo, “Turnout and the Vote: The Joke’s on the Democrats”, *American Political Science Review*, Volume 74, Number 2, June 1980, pp. 406-420.

⁵ The Presidential study: Jack H. Nagel & John E. McNulty, “Partisan Effects of Voter Turnout in Presidential Elections”, *American Politics Quarterly*, Volume 28, Number 3, July 2000, pp. 408-429. The study of major statewide elections: Jack H. Nagel & John E. McNulty, “Partisan Effects of Voter Turnout in Senatorial and Gubernatorial Elections”, *American Political Science Review*, Volume 90, Number 4, December 1996, pp. 780-793.

To quickly summarize the two-effects model, DeNardo describes two different factors (or “effects”) which influence turnout. The first, more obvious one is the *composition* of the electorate – how many partisans of each party there are. (Independent voters are assumed to be mythical⁶ in the model.) For example, the composition of a given electorate might be 60% Democratic, 40% Republican. If one only considers this electorate’s composition, as the conventional model does, this seems to be a safe Democratic district.

The second factor to consider, however, is the rate of *defection* from one’s identified party; that is, the number of partisans who vote for the opposite party. If the rate of defection is high for a majority party, and lower for a minority party, the combination of the composition and defection result may result in a positive turnout effect for the minority party.

There was a striking exception to our findings in support of the two-effects model. We found that in the South, results that appeared to jibe with the conventional theory obtained. This is true of Presidential elections through the period from 1968 to 1996; in this period, Democratic candidates gained roughly one-half a percentage point of vote share (defined as votes for the Democratic candidate divided by total votes cast) for each percentage point increase in turnout. When elections in that period with a major third-party candidate were excluded (leaving 1972, 1976, 1984, and 1988), the results were even more striking: A percentage point increase in turnout yielded better than a two point increase in Democratic vote share. (See tables 1 and 2 below⁷). In the study of gubernatorial and senatorial elections, results in line with the conventional theory only held

⁶ Pun intended.

⁷ Mean deviating turnout by state, instead of using state dummy variables, produces essentially equivalent results.

for 1990-1994, yielding about one-third of a percentage point to Democratic candidates for each percentage point increase in turnout⁸. Since the apparent discovery of a turnout effect matching the conventional model is so much more sweeping in the Presidential analysis, this is where we will focus our efforts in this paper⁹.

TABLES 1 AND 2 ABOUT HERE

Arguably, this result can be understood to fit DeNardo's two-effects model, which presupposes that in a highly Republican electorate, high turnout will favor Democrats. Since the implementation of the Southern strategy¹⁰ in President Nixon's campaigns, the South has appeared to be majority Republican in Presidential elections. But if this is so, why do we not see the same effect in the non-South during the same period? As Table 3 shows, turnout is wholly insignificant in the non-South during those same elections, elections in which the non-South was just as decisively Republican as the South.

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

Whether one is a proponent of the conventional model or the two-effects model, one must ascertain a way to reconcile these two results. The obvious solution is that some

⁸ Third-party elections were excluded in this study. These results were obtained using ordinary least squares with dummy variables.

⁹ Note to professors: A future version of this paper may include a small gubernatorial-senatorial analysis to buttress the findings made in the main presidential analysis.

¹⁰ Nixon's Southern strategy was an attempt to lure white Southern Democrats to the Republican party, particularly those who were disaffected by the Democratic party's move leftward on race and/or other cultural issues.

regional effect makes the South qualitatively different than the non-South. But what specifically is the difference?

One possibility is the different demographic mix of the two regions, in particular the different concentrations of African-Americans (see Figure 1). The African-American population in the United States is concentrated in the South as a legacy of slavery. While the difference between South and non-South is decreasing over time, the South still has roughly twice the proportion of African-Americans as the non-South. Forty years ago, the difference was nearer to three to one, and the migration of blacks north and whites south began long before then; for blacks the migration was heaviest during the depths of the Depression and World War II; whites began drifting south in the post-war period¹¹. While this cross-pollination affected the balance of power to some degree within each region, North and South remain decidedly distinct from each other demographically.

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

It is axiomatic that because of the higher proportion of African-Americans in the South, their votes as a bloc have a greater influence on the outcomes of elections. This is highly relevant, because African-American voting patterns are distinctive. They vote nearly exclusively Democratic, at rates of nearly 90%, and this pattern has been consistent throughout the period observed (with normal fluctuations). This voting pattern emerged quite logically, as the Democrats were able to transform themselves from the party of segregation to the party of civil rights in a generation, while the Republicans exhausted

¹¹ See Van Wingen and Valentine, 1988. Prior to the Depression, the percentage of the South which was black was close to half; the Deep South was majority minority.

their hard-won goodwill on the civil rights issue with efforts repositioning themselves to attract Southern white voters.¹²

Thus, since blacks vote Democratic with near unanimity, and since there are more blacks in the South, a sensible hypothesis can be drawn that the reason that high overall turnout in the South benefits Democrats is because high black turnout, part-and-parcel of high overall turnout, is by definition comprised of overwhelmingly Democratic supporters. This would of course happen in the non-South as well, but on a smaller scale, so that it has less effect on the overall results.

Data

In order to test this hypothesis, we must acquire data on turnout delineated by race to see if differential turnout rates between blacks and non-blacks had different effects on election outcomes.

This is a path we intentionally avoided in previous analyses, because of all the disadvantages of working with sample survey data versus data gathered through observation of actual results. These include inevitable inaccuracies in self-reported data, insufficient sample sizes in some instances, the chore of specifying how the sample is and is not congruent with the overall targeted population, and frequently inconsistent availability of data – i.e., sometimes data is not collected, or perhaps it is collected in a fashion incompatible with previous research. However, sample research also certainly has its undeniable uses; in fact, it is unthinkable to contemplate modern political science

¹² There is a large literature on this; two examples are Cosman 1966 and Carmines & Stimson 1989.

without the contributions made possible by survey research. In this case, there is no other avenue from which information on voter turnout by race can be obtained.¹³

Thus, we obtain the data from the Current Population Survey (CPS). The CPS began in 1972, encompassing nearly our entire period of interest. However, the survey suppressed state-level information for the forty smallest states in the period between 1974 and 1976 (due to misplaced privacy concerns), eliminating the Ford-Carter election from our menu. This leaves us the elections of 1972, 1980, 1984, 1988, 1992, and 1996.

Another concern is that in some states with negligible black populations, the number of blacks surveyed was insufficient to garner a reliable statewide turnout estimate. Fortunately, this did not apply to any of the southern states which are the main foci of our analysis; when looking at non-southern states by race, we will simply omit the states with insufficient samples from consideration; dropping these cases will not compromise any substantive findings¹⁴.

The turnout data obtained by CPS indicates much higher levels of turnout than one finds when looking at actual numbers of votes compared to voting-age population.¹⁵ However, this is not critical; Wolfinger and Rosenstone report that the rate of false claims of voting is fairly constant, and is not strongly correlated with any particular demographic characteristics.¹⁶ Problems particular to the CPS involving sampling of non-citizens and

¹³ There is a useful discussion on this subject by Raymond Wolfinger and Robert B. Arseneau in Political Parties: Development and Decay, ed. Louis Maisel and Joseph Cooper (Beverly Hills & London: Sage Publications, 1978), pages 185-186.

¹⁴ I split the nonsouthern states into two groups; this will be discussed at further length in a later portion of this paper.

¹⁵ This always reminds me of the survey that was done in Boston in 1975; almost 200,000 people claimed to have been in Fenway Park to see Carlton Fisk's famous home run in Game 6 of the World Series. Fenway Park only seats about 34,000.

¹⁶ They cite vote validation studies in Michigan. See Raymond E. Wolfinger and Steven J. Rosenstone, Who Votes? (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980), pp. 117-118.

household undercounts have been accounted for and corrected.¹⁷ Since we are looking at election data on the state level, there are plenty of cases (number of Presidential elections times number of states) to be sufficient for statistical analysis.

Additionally, Figure 2 is included as a reference for the elections under discussion, those from 1968 to 1996.

FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

Analysis and Findings

We were able to replicate the findings of the original study (as seen in Tables 1-3) with the sample data, despite the slightly different timeframes and despite the replacement of actual turnout data with self-reported data¹⁸. Thus, we can proceed with confidence that the sample data is sufficiently comparable to the actual data to test our hypothesis.

In the South, the initial findings indicate that the positive Democratic turnout effect obtains irrespective of race (see Table 4). An increase of one percentage point in black turnout gains the Democratic candidate four-tenths of a point; an increase of one percentage point in non-black turnout gains the Democratic candidate six-tenths of a point. The results are even more decisive when considering Republican vote share. However, there is a curious effect when you study the impact of turnout on third-party candidates; it is entirely driven upward by higher non-black turnout. For each percentage point in non-

¹⁷ Email correspondence with Ben Highton.

¹⁸ The major difference to speak of was an increase in the leverage of the Republican incumbency variable in controlling Democratic vote share. This is due to the absence of 1976; Pres. Ford's showing by a Republican incumbent was the weakest in the period 1968-1996, in terms of the vote share that his Democratic opponent, then-Gov. Carter, received. In terms of Republican vote share, Pres. Bush had the lowest overall in 1992, but of course Ross Perot cut into the margins of both parties substantially that year.

black turnout, a third-party candidate gains six-tenths of a point – precisely matching the Democratic candidate’s gain.

TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

This oddity compels us to again separate out the elections with a major third-party candidate from the elections with only two major candidates. As a practical matter, the only third-party candidate to have anything more than a negligible vote share in this period was Texan H. Ross Perot in 1992, who received 16% of the Southern vote, a little down from his national share of 19%.¹⁹ When we remove just the 1992 election from the analysis, we get the hypothesized finding – the Democratic vote share is driven primarily by black voter turnout.

TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE

With 1992 removed, we find that the black turnout coefficients are virtually unchanged; it remains true that for each percentage point increase in black turnout, the Democratic vote share increases four-tenths of a percentage point. The Republican coefficient is a mirror image of the Democratic coefficient, and the third-party regression is wholly meaningless – the significance of the Democratic incumbent dummy is solely a

¹⁹ The other 3rd party candidates in the period were Rep. John B. Anderson of Illinois in 1980 and Perot again in 1996. Anderson was a poor candidate in the South; his high water marks were 7% in Virginia and 6% in Florida; in no other state did he break 5%. Perot in 1996 did a little better than Anderson, but came nowhere near his 1992 performance; he did not reach 10% in any state. Though their overall vote share was low, in many states in 1980 and 1996 the 3rd party vote share exceeded the margin of victory between the two major candidates; these candidacies may have been decisive in a few scattered cases.

function of the fact that the only elections remaining in this sample that had major third party candidates are also the only elections with Democratic incumbents. Thus, we effectively diagnose the impact of the 1992 election on the sample by studying its absence.

One of the pitfalls, however, in analyzing Presidential elections is the omnipresence of exogenous contextual factors which detract from parsimonious theory building.²⁰ In 1972, Southern blacks had just recently acquired *de facto* access to the franchise. Rates of participation were still quite low; many African-Americans in the South may not have adjusted their behavior to fit the new circumstances.²¹ Also, blacks were generally lower in socio-economic status, more rural, and younger than the average Southerner; more so thirty years ago than today; these are all factors which tend to depress voter turnout rates. In Table 6, we see that for both black and non-black participation, seven of the eleven southern states were at their nadir in 1972 (as marked below). Why was participation low among both blacks and whites in the South in 1972? It was because of the candidate. South Dakota Senator George McGovern's candidacy was so weak it arguably took the Democratic party twenty years to undo the damage it wrought – and the South was his weakest region! In Table 7, which shows Democratic vote share by state between 1968 and 1996, we can see that in 1972 McGovern does worse against one opponent than Humphrey did against two, one of whom was a favorite son of the South.²²

TABLES 6, 7, AND 8 ABOUT HERE

²⁰ See Wolfinger and Arseneau, page 182.

²¹ Warren E. Miller and J. Merrill Shanks discuss behavior formation within generational cohorts in The New American Voter (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1996), pages 34-35.

²² In Table 7 we also see that it is unfortunate we are missing the 1976 data, as that represents the high water mark for Democrats in the post-Voting Rights Act period.

Consequently, 1972 is an outlier, with both unusually low turnout²³ and low Democratic vote share, and it exerts exceptional leverage over the model. If you omit 1972 and just observe the elections since 1980 (see Table 9), the positive relationship between black turnout and Democratic vote share is totally obviated, while a relationship between non-black turnout and Democratic vote share reasserts itself; for every percentage point increase in non-black turnout the Democratic vote share increases by four-tenths. The positive third-party vote share effect has returned as well, since the key year 1992 is back in the mix; for every percentage point increase in non-black turnout, third-party vote share increases by three-quarters of a point.

To sum up, there are two peculiar elections of these six that drive the overall finding of positive turnout effects for the period. In 1992, the large vote for Ross Perot in a high turnout year greatly reduced the usual Republican vote share, while at the same time the Democrats ran a strong regional candidate. The African-American vote remained monolithic; blacks either voted Democratic or stayed home. The non-black vote, however, was splintered by the presence of Perot; Republicans got fewer votes than they had gotten since 1976, creating an apparent, accidental Democratic advantage.

In 1972, McGovern's weak candidacy exacerbated demographic and institutional conditions already in place and brought about an election with very low turnout and extraordinarily high Republican vote shares. The non-black vote trended very Republican; there was no Democratic advantage to be found in higher non-black turnout in this

²³ It is important to mention that this was also the first Presidential election following the passage of the 25th Amendment, which lowered the voting age to 18. Turnout has not yet rebounded to pre-1972 levels.

election. Blacks, however, were one of the few traditional²⁴ constituencies that did not defect to Nixon in 1972; their protest vote was to not vote at all. Anywhere that Democrats did relatively better in the South in 1972, blacks were the catalyst, and where they did extremely poorly, blacks stayed home.

TABLE 9 ABOUT HERE

That leaves the remaining elections (as summarized in Table 10), which fall under what might be called “normal politics”; that is, there are no particularly unusual circumstances putting one party (usually the Republicans) at a disadvantage, and creating the appearance of a systematic edge in turnout. The elections where one side or another has an unusual advantage are the exception in the American system, not the rule.

In our sample of “normal” elections, there are no statistically significant effects on vote share from variations in turnout (excepting some incidental effects on third-party vote share; third-party candidacies were trivialities in the South in the elections under examination²⁵). Some of the coefficients are somewhat sizeable, and those point in the expected direction²⁶, but in actual terms the impact of turnout was minor and unpredictable.

TABLE 10 ABOUT HERE

²⁴ Albeit a fairly new traditional constituency.

²⁵ In any event, the effects seem to more or less cancel out.

²⁶ Specifically, the positive effect of non-black turnout on Democratic vote share (0.18), and the negative effect of black turnout on Republican vote share (-0.21)

Those elections that lie outside the realm of “normal” politics were in 1972 and 1992; a brief word about each of the remaining four elections in the sample is in order. 1980 was a fairly close election between incumbent Georgia Democrat Jimmy Carter, a moderate, and former California Governor Ronald Reagan, the leader of the Republican party’s conservative wing; also, John Anderson, a moderate Republican, defected from his party to run an independent campaign. Reagan defeated Carter, and Anderson was only a small factor. In 1984 Carter’s vice president Walter Mondale, an old-fashioned liberal from Minnesota, was routed in an attempt to wrest the White House back from Reagan. Reagan’s vice president George Bush of Texas, a more mainstream Republican, succeeded his boss by handily defeating liberal Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis in 1988. And in 1996, Democratic incumbent Bill Clinton of Arkansas faced retired GOP Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole of Kansas, with both candidates representing the more centrist wings of their parties; an encore third-party run by Perot fizzled.

In these elections (1980, 1984, 1988, 1996), the vote shares for the major parties stayed within a relatively narrow range -- reflecting their contested, divided nature.²⁷ This was a Republican era, with GOP vote shares in the South vacillating between the high forties and the low sixties. The only instance in which its share dipped below 40% was the 37% Senator Dole received in Arkansas, his opponent’s home state; Dole had a few other states in the low forties. The GOP peaked in Reagan’s 1984 landslide in the state of Florida, reaching 65%. The GOP average in the South over the four elections was 55%.

At the same time the Democratic performance was just as predictable; they stayed in a band between the high thirties and the low fifties. Unsurprisingly, their high water mark also involved a candidate’s home state, 56% in Georgia for President Carter; the

²⁷ Tables 7 and 8 are useful visual aids for this discussion.

Democratic nadir was in Florida in 1984, where Vice President Mondale only garnered 35%. The Democratic average in the South over the four elections was 43%. There was a huge contrast between the performance of Southern moderates (Carter, Clinton) and non-Southern liberals (Mondale, Dukakis) – whether it was their regional roots, their centrism, or just their good fortune, moderate Democrats far outperformed their liberal counterparts.

Third parties were largely unimportant in these elections, as Anderson only got 3% in 1980 and Perot 7% in 1996. In these two elections the third party vote share appears to draw from the Republicans more than the Democrats, but this is an illusory byproduct of the fact that the elections with third-party candidates were overall more closely contested by Democrats than those without.

These elections have more in common with each other than with either 1972, where Nixon gave McGovern a drubbing in the South unprecedented in the modern era, or 1992, where Perot's appropriation of 16% of the vote forced the Republican vote share down to 42% in the South (and even lower in the non-South), by far the GOP low point for the period – while Democratic percentages, while still somewhat diminished, stayed within usual historical bounds, also at 42%²⁸. Governor Clinton in 1992 did better than Mondale or Dukakis in the South – despite the Perot phenomenon. Conversely, President Bush was hurt far more than Clinton by Perot in the South, considering what the GOP's expected vote share would have been in a two-party race.

From this breakdown of the component elections, we can arrive at the conclusion to reject the hypothesis that black voter turnout in the South was causing a pro-Democratic

²⁸ For the record, when the percentages are rounded to the nearest tenth, Bush beat Clinton in the South 42.5% to 41.7%.

voter turnout effect overall. In fact, when the component elections are deconstructed, the pro-Democratic voter turnout effect dissolves.

Racial Turnout Effects in the North

It seems prudent to observe elections outside the old Confederacy as a means of contrasting and adding texture to the Southern analysis. As briefly discussed earlier, we are constrained in a full analysis of racial turnout effects in the non-South because in the CPS surveys, some states with relatively small black populations unsurprisingly have an insufficient number of blacks surveyed to get a good estimate of turnout.

To address this, I analyzed the states in terms of their overall percentage of African-Americans (1998 estimate), and in terms of the average number of blacks sampled over the six elections. Conveniently, all the states with less than 5% black populations also had sample sizes that were small enough to give pause to a researcher. So the decision was made to just use those states with black populations of 5% or higher²⁹.

Results from this sample of states, which I will call Group A, ought not to be generalized for the entire union. Voting patterns may differ by context, and certainly some states with highly distinctive political cultures and leanings are omitted. The Group A states systematically differ from the remainder of the non-Southern states (Group B) in several ways; to cite just the most conspicuous, they are significantly larger and for the

²⁹ This is admittedly a bit arbitrary, so I experimented with other, slightly different samples; results were substantively the same. The final list of states included were California, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. The District of Columbia was dropped as a non-state and as an outlier.

most part more densely populated and urban³⁰. However, we are practicing the art of the possible; effective analysis is only possible where sufficient data exists.

TABLE 11 ABOUT HERE

Certainly it is true that these states differ as well from the Southern states which have been the subject of our primary analysis. However, it is interesting that a parallel analysis yields similar results (see Table 12). When we initially look at all six elections in our sample, we see a twist on a familiar theme. While we find that the Republican Party suffers in the face of higher turnout, the primary beneficiaries are not the Democrats, but third party candidates. The main driver of the turnout effect is the non-black turnout. For each additional point in non-black turnout, the Republicans lost a shade under a point, and the third party candidates gained about one and one-quarter points.

TABLE 12 ABOUT HERE

Given our previous discussion, it is obvious that our atypical elections of 1972 and 1992 are exerting extraordinary leverage.³¹ When we therefore follow the precedent set above and extract those years, we get striking results (see Table 13). When looking at black turnout effects on vote share, we see that any benefit that Democrats gain is rather

³⁰ That is, in addition to the different demographic makeup by which the groups are defined, of course. There may be other systematic differences as well.

³¹ This is truer of 1992 than 1972. Perot was stronger in the non-South than the South, while McGovern managed respectable showings in several Northern states that dwarfed his Southern efforts.

minor, about one-eighth of a point. Third party candidates (Anderson and the 1996 vintage of Perot) see a turnout effect of essentially zero.

TABLE 13 ABOUT HERE

When looking at non-black turnout, however, we are struck by the finding of a statistically significant *positive* turnout effect for the Republican Party; and a corresponding *negative* turnout effect for the Democratic Party. This finding does not correspond with our³² previous finding for overall turnout, without regard to race. In that case, turnout seemed to be wholly insignificant³³. In fact, it appears here that perhaps in the North reliable black Democratic votes were camouflaging an enormous pro-Republican turnout effect in the non-black electorate. For each one-point increase in non-black turnout in this sample of non-Southern states (Group A), we see the Democrats losing one point of vote share, and the Republicans gaining about one and one-sixth points³⁴. Given common assumptions about Democrats benefiting from high voter turnout, these findings are nothing short of astonishing.

While we are constrained from looking at the states in Group B by race, we can look at the overall effects of turnout in those states. Given that the black population in the Group B states are all four percent or less, overall turnout is effectively a proxy for non-black turnout. Since the demographics and political culture of Group B states differ from the Group A states, not to mention the Southern states, if the pattern we have seen in the other groupings also obtains here, it will be strong evidence of its robustness.

³² Nagel & McNulty, 2000

³³ See Table 3

³⁴ Third-party noise accounts for the extra one-sixth of a point.

Following our previously established methodology, we first look at all the elections available in the period; we see a result clearly driven by the big third-party vote in 1992 (see Table 14). When looking at the normal elections only, however, we again find that higher turnout benefits Republican candidates mainly at the expense of Democratic ones (see Table 15). When turnout increases by one point in Group B states, Republicans gain about three-quarters of a point of vote share, and Democrats lose about two-thirds. This buttresses the previous finding, and demonstrates that this startling discovery is true across all sectors of the nation.

TABLES 14 AND 15 ABOUT HERE

Discussion

In terms of DeNardo's theory, we had argued that, since the electorate on a national level has trended rather strongly Republican since 1968, high turnout elections might tend to favor Democrats; in effect, it would tend to produce results which corresponded with the prevailing conventional wisdom³⁵. In the elections currently under study --1980, 1984, 1988, and 1996 -- it appears the opposite is true.

From another perspective, however, the DeNardo hypothesis still holds. Consider the relative constancy of the Democratic vote. This may be conceptualized as the Democratic base, the core vote. The Republican vote, conversely, has swung more wildly; their core vote is no larger than the Democratic core, and probably smaller. This leaves the party peripheries. Without attempting to formally ascribe party labels to them, we ought to analyze where swing voters in the North have landed in these elections.

³⁵ Nagel and McNulty, 2000

In the eighties, Republican majorities were forged by grafting “Reagan Democrats” onto the Republican core vote. These Reagan Democrats were concentrated in key, populous states (such as most of the states which comprise Group A, plus some of the Southern rim states); they were voters who had had a lifelong Democratic affinity, but who found themselves drawn to Ronald Reagan. By 1996, however, Clinton’s move to the center combined with lackluster Republican candidacies allowed the Reagan Democrats to gravitate “home” to the Democratic Party...or at least to Ross Perot. Thus, if we retreat to the supposition that the U.S., despite the Republican trend in the executive, was still majority Democratic through this period (a highly defensible proposition given national party registration and the make-up of the House of Representatives and the state legislatures), then the classic defection thesis holds for the non-black populace, at least in electoral circumstances which do not deviate too much from the norm.

No such behavior is observed in the black populace, but this is easy to accept, since there is no core black Republican vote to speak of³⁶ and the black Democratic core is well over fifty percent. We would have to look at polling data estimating fluctuations in Democratic margin of victory among blacks alone to identify such a dynamic, an exercise which would probably be challenging without being terribly illuminating.

In the South, the higher percentage of blacks overall tends to muffle the impact of the increasingly Republican non-blacks, leading to a basically neutral turnout effect in “normal elections”. There has been a stronger tendency in the South to have wild swings in vote share, particularly Republican vote share, but this is likely due to regional-contextual issues in specific elections (such as the complete rejection of the McGovern candidacy, for example.)

³⁶ If it exists, it is in the single digits.

How might these findings impact evaluation of future elections, for example the coming race between Texas Governor George W. Bush³⁷ and Tennessean Vice President Al Gore? There are several implications to be drawn.

Regarding the minor party candidacies of Pat Buchanan and Ralph Nader, the indication is that if either of them, or both in concert, become an estimable force in the electorate, recent history tends to indicate that they will attract the Democratic periphery which has fallen to Republican candidates in recent elections and which has been indispensable to Republican victories. The Buchanan and Nader candidacies thus ought to be more of a threat to Governor Bush than to Vice President Gore. Particularly in the case of Nader, this is contrary to conventional wisdom, which says that Nader will peel off votes from Gore's left flank; indeed, that follows classic ideological positioning theory, but consider that it has been fifty-two years since a third party candidate tried to run to a Democrat's left³⁸. Henry Wallace did not cut into Harry Truman's base much; the larger (especially at that time) Democratic core remained for the most part solid, and thus Truman was able to stave off Tom Dewey. Also of note in the 1948 election is Strom Thurmond's regional candidacy in the South; his presence on the ballot allowed Democratic peripherals disenchanted with Truman to vote for a Dixiecrat, rather than to support a Republican candidate, as they would in increasing numbers in subsequent years.

There is no reason as of this writing to suppose that the Gore-Bush contest will be atypical in any way, as 1972 or 1992 were. It appears that the election will be closely contested, and that Buchanan and Nader will not achieve more than nuisance status. Thus,

³⁷ Son of the former President

³⁸ In 1948, Harry S. Truman, a Democrat who succeeded Franklin D. Roosevelt as President upon FDR's death, won election in his own right by defeating Republican Thomas Dewey. Democratic defectors Strom Thurmond and Henry Wallace ran insurgent campaigns as well.

we expect that this race will follow the patterns described above, where any benefit from high turnout will be slight, but will likely accrue to Governor Bush in the aggregate, especially in regards to the non-black component of turnout. Specifically, high turnout in a traditionally Republican state, such as Indiana, would be likely to favor Vice President Gore, while high turnout in a more Democratic state such as California would help Bush.

This is the contrary nature of DeNardo's two-effects model – it directly contradicts the prevailing wisdom on voter turnout, especially in the popular press and among many political professionals. Yet, the conventional model is refuted by the findings in the data above, while the two-effects model remains viable.

That conclusion is dependent on the exclusion of those cases that do not fit the model– 1972 and 1992. If I were to make the exclusion arbitrarily, it would be simple data mining; however, I believe I have established just cause for that decision. Further, the exclusion carries a lesson of its own – that if remarkable circumstances occur that radically change the composition of the electorate, then the impact of voter turnout, contingent as it is on the electorate's composition, will radically change as well. This is an obvious but important caveat. If it comes to light in October that Governor Bush has a current cocaine habit, or that the Clinton Administration arranged the giveaway of the nuclear secrets disks at Los Alamos, we will have an election that will look like 1972 in the South – a blowout. If a well-respected, popular, qualified figure (such as General Colin Powell, for example) announced an independent run for President, we would have an election like 1992 (or like 1912³⁹). In both cases, the composition of the electorate (not necessarily their party

³⁹ When former President Theodore Roosevelt broke with the Republican party and actually finished ahead of the Republican candidate, incumbent William Howard Taft. This Republican schism allowed Democratic candidate Woodrow Wilson to win the Presidency, despite a decided national majority for the GOP.

affiliation, but how they will vote) would be so de-polarized that more recent elections would be a poor predictor of results.

We have discovered in this analysis that turnout effects in the South do not differ much from the North in the partisan effects of voter turnout when the different demographics and political dynamics are controlled for. Additionally, we have established even further that the knee-jerk belief that high turnout automatically benefits Democrats is simplistic, naïve, and, at least for Presidential elections in the last generation, wrong. Certainly, some can point to carefully targeted get-out-the-vote (GOTV) drives – which are designed to only recruit people who are known with virtual certainty to be reliable partisans – as an example of increased turnout that produces measurable results. This is undoubtedly true, but GOTV is but a small part of the mass phenomenon of turnout. Looking at the broad spectrum of the electorate, which is substantively impervious to serious manipulation, effects of voter turnout in the United States seem fairly unsystematic. It has proven to be one of the many wonders of democracy in action.

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