(A slightly edited version of)

States of Change:
The Impact of Changes in State Characteristics on Party Fortunes in the Electoral College

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The 2012 presidential elections represented the second consecutive defeat for the Republican Party and fourth defeat out of the last six presidential elections. Though both the 2008 and 2012 elections were not particularly close in outcome, they were by no means blowouts. Still, at least some pundits and party activists have started to talk of an increasing Democratic “lock” on the Electoral College. Republican strategists Mike Murphy and Trent Wiscup offered that, “The GOP’s biggest challenge is the fact that the Democrats begin each presidential election with a near lock on the Electoral College” (Murphy and Wisecup 2013). This perceived advantage was echoed by Nate Silver (2012) who pointed out that Mitt Romney would have had to do much better than pulling even in the popular vote to have had a shot at winning the Electoral College, and Jonathan Bernstein (2012) who points out that the same was true for John McCain in 2008. Much of the discussion of the perceived Democratic advantage focuses on important demographic changes in the states and how those changes are making electoral life more difficult for Republican presidential candidates, echoing Judis and Teixeira’s sense of the impending problems demography poses for the Republican Party (Judis and Teixeira 2004). Most of the talk along these lines focuses on the increasing size of the minority vote, especially the Latino vote and its concentration in key states. For instance, addressing the electoral impact of immigration policy, Rand Paul, the Republican Senator from Kentucky, recently argued, “Texas is going to be a Democratic State within 10 years if we don’t change” (Gluek 2014). This belief in the potential impact of demographic changes has even motivated Democratic leaders to mount a new effort (nicknamed “Battleground Texas”) aimed at converting Texas to a Democratic state by mobilizing Latino and Black voters (Burns 2013).

This paper addresses the issue of electoral change in the states in a number of ways. First, I document the magnitude, direction, and effects of changes in party support in presidential
outcomes in the states. In some states there have been substantial changes in partisan support, sometimes favoring the Democratic Party and sometimes the Republican Party, while a handful of states have been remarkably stable. The second part of the paper analyzes the sources of those changes in the context of a dynamic model that focuses on how changes in state population characteristics are associated with changes in party support. Although some of the commonly identified culprits of partisan change do bear some impact in isolation, they take a back seat to changes in longer-term political factors. Finally, the third part of the paper is an attempt to provide some sense of how the changing political environment combines with changing state populations to produce changes in party performance on Election Day.

**Studies of Presidential Outcomes in the States**

Studies of state-level presidential outcomes have not typically focused on tracking changes in party support over time. Exceptions to this, of course, are studies of electoral realignment (Mayhew 2001), most of which are primarily concerned with documenting sometimes-seismic shifts in party support across states and in the nation over time. Although the focus here is on changes in party support, this is not an effort to document or test ideas about sustained realignments. Indeed, while realignment studies frequently focus on converting the state, regional, or national vote from one party to another, this paper places equal emphasis on states in which the dominant party becomes more dominant, or those states that become more competitive, even if not shifting from one part to the other. At some level, this is reminiscent of Pomper’s concept of electoral “conversion” rather than standard realignment, though without isolating single elections as the trigger (Pomper 1967).
Beyond realignment studies, others have analyzed state level outcomes from a variety of different perspectives. Some studies have focused very narrowly on a specific influences such as voter turnout (Hansford and Gomez 2010) or home state advantage (Disarro, Barber, and Rice 2007), while others focused on broader explanatory models (Gurian, Macdonald, and Rabinowitz 1984; Holbrook 1991; Rosenstone 1983). A handful for studies have used the states to examine the effects of presidential campaigns on state outcomes (Holbrook and McClurg 2005; Shaw 1999; 2008), while a number of others have been less concerned with substantive explanations and more so with forecasting state outcomes, sometimes based on state characteristics (Campbell 1992; Campbell, Ali, and Jalalzai 2006; Klarner 2008; Rosenstone 1983) and other times based on state-level trial heat polls (DeSart and Holbrook 2003; Soumbatiants, Chappell, and Johnson 2006). These studies tell us that state outcomes in a given year are relatively easily accounted for by a mix of long-term and short-terms influences. Holbrook (1992), Gurian et al. (1984), and Rosenstone (1983) find that party and ideology are important structural determinants of outcomes, with ideology assuming a more prominent role. Deviations around these long-term, structural outcomes tend to be accounted for by short-term forces, some related to campaign activities (Holbrook and McClurg 2005; Shaw 1999; 2008), while others are not (Hansford and Gomez 2010). Importantly, from one election cycle to the next, national conditions do not tend to alter the relative outcomes across states but instead generate intercept shifts along the lines of “a rising tide lifts all boats” (Campbell 1992; Holbrook 1991). Notably, most academic studies of presidential outcomes in the states do not focus on explaining changes in party fortunes over time.
Explaining Electoral Change.

If we assume that in any given presidential election year state-level outcomes are largely driven by the types of people who live in the states, with some allowance for campaign activities to push the marker in one direction or the other, then explaining changes in outcomes over time must incorporate measures of changes in the underlying population characteristics. This is essentially the argument made by Judis and Teixeira (2004), who argue that some of the changes in state outcomes, as well as changes in the performance of parties in more localized areas can be tied to changes in demographic characteristics. Specifically, Judis and Teixeira point to the growth of the minority population, as well as the growth of professionals as an employment category. But what is important to Judis and Teixeira’s model of change is not just that the size of these group changes, but also that the connection between groups and parties has changed, largely in response to movement in the ideological center of the parties. Judis and Teixeira point to the increasing prominence of social conservatism in the Republican Party, along with the emergence of the progressive center approach of the Democratic Party as the impetus for changing the nature of group attachments to the parties. The professional class offers a good illustration of this sort of effect. Professionals as a group used to vote solidly Republican but by the mid-1990s that advantage had disappeared and in some cases tipped toward the Democrats (Judis and Teixeira 2004; Manza and Brooks 1999). By Judis and Teixeira’s account, this has occurred because professionals are generally socially moderate and are interested in “post-industrial” issues, such as environmental and consumer protect and not so interested in the agenda of the religious right. Turned off by the increasingly conservative Republican Party, the professional class moved the more centrist Democratic Party. As Judis and Teixeira put it,
“Professionals might not have come to the Democratic Party, however, if the party itself has not moved to them. (2004, 48).

In the case of racial minorities, issues related to immigration, civil rights, and social welfare programs have served to cement the connect to the Democratic Party. These are exactly the sort of issues that some contemporary Republican leaders worry will put these groups even farther outside the reach of their party (Burns 2013; Gluek 2014; Murphy and Wisecup 2013). Finally, Judis and Teixeira point to party positions on gender issues, along with the changing nature of the female population (greater workforce participation, high levels of education, greater percentage single) as cementing the connection between female voters and the Democratic Party.

It is important to note two different types of effects discussed here, each of which could be at work. First, there are compositional effects. Compositional effects occur due to changes in the makeup of the population. These are the types of effects that are most often articulated in popular discussions of changes in the states, e.g., “Colorado is becoming more Democratic because of the increased Latino population.” The other type of effects can be thought of as contextual effects. Contextual effects occur when there are environmental changes that alter the relationship between variables, e.g., “Colorado is becoming more Democratic because Latinos are becoming more aligned with the Democratic Party in response to the parties’ positions on immigration.”

Compositional changes are most likely to occur in two ways, either through migration or, over the long haul, through generational replacement. Of course, both processes are at work in all fifty states. Some academic research has addressed the political consequences of migration. Gimpel and Schucknecht (2001) make a strong argument, based on the characteristics of
migrants, that the expected effect of migration is a net benefit to the Republican Party. Though they do not find this in every instance, their study of county-level gubernatorial election returns generally supports the idea of in-migration as a benefit to Republicans (Gimpel and Schuknecht 2001). Others, however, suggest that the impact of migration may not be quite so clear.

Jurjevich and Plane (2012) examine the idea of “political effectiveness” of migration, focusing on the tendency of net-migration patterns to either strengthen or dilute existing partisan strengths. They find that there is no simple, consistent answer to who benefits from migration, concluding, “Our results suggest migration streams are not just sometimes more plural and heterogeneous than the literature suggests, but often more plural and considerably more diverse” (Jurjevich and Plane 2012). Hood and McKee (2010) use a combination of survey data and data from party registration records to study the impact of migration patterns on the 2008 presidential outcome in North Carolina. What they find is that, on balance, non-natives were somewhat more liberal, had higher levels of education, and were more likely to register as Independents, than native North Carolinians. In aggregate, the effect of the growing non-native population helped seal Barack Obama’s 2008 victory in North Carolina (Hood and McKee 2010). Interestingly, Jurjevich and Plane (2012) identify North Carolina as a state in which Democrats are the main beneficiaries from net migration. In addition, Robinson and Noriega have tied the migration of highly educated professionals to increased Democratic prospects at the county level in several Mountain West states (Robinson and Noriega 2010). But the larger point from Jurjevich and Plane (2012) is that there is no single direction of partisan outcome from migration between states. Still, migration is clearly an important source of changing demographics across the states.

Of course, migration is only one mechanism for changing the population characteristics of the states. As mentioned above, generational replacement is another possibility, perhaps
working in concert with migration patterns. Over time, as new groups take up a larger share of the population, succeeding generations of those groups may take up even larger shares of the population, especially if there are differences in birth rates. Generational replacement could be especially important to understanding change in non-demographic population characteristics that are more clearly political in nature, such as party affiliation and political ideology. The transformation of party politics in the American South in response to the changing party positions on racial and social welfare issues provides one example of the potential impact of generational replacement in the transformation of geographic areas (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Hayes and McKee 2008; Miller 1991a), and a similar though not as substantial effect of generational replacement has been found in the Northeastern states, which have seen increases in Democratic identification (Knuckey 2009).

But even absent changes in composition, changes in party support could reflect changes in how groups align with the parties (contextual effects). For instance, it is possible that population characteristics could be relatively stable but party support could change a great deal if the existing groups shift their loyalties in a way that benefits one party over the other. Consider a hypothetical state with a large Latino population, where the elections are generally close and the Latino vote is evenly split. If, over time, the Latino vote changes to 60-40 in favor of the Democratic Party, perhaps in response the changing party positions on relevant issues, the overall vote share for the Democratic Party could increase, even if the size of the Latino population does not increase. And, of course, the change could be even greater if the Latino vote both grows in size and is activated by the partisan environment.
Related to contextual effects, another likely process for changing the partisan or ideological complexion of a state is *conversion*, whereby people simply change positions over time, most likely in response changes in the national or state political context. Indeed, both the increased strength of the Republican party in the South and the increased strength of the Democrats in the Northeast, are generally attributed to some combination of conversion and generational replacement (Knuckey 2009; Miller 1991b). At the same time, Robinson and Noriega found that conversion and generational replacement took a back seat to migration patterns in their county-level analysis of changes in party success in the Mountain West (Robinson and Noriega 2010).

Any or all of these processes could be responsible for producing the changes in presidential support in the states that are garnering increased attention. It is well beyond the scope of this paper, however, to sort out all of these possibilities. Instead, after documenting the nature of the changes that have taken place, I will explore in some detail alternative compositional changes as potential explanations, and then move on to a preliminary analysis of how contextual effects might also be at work.

**Changing States**

I use state-level presidential election returns from 1972 to 2012 to document the trends in party support. The primary interest here is to isolate relative change among the states over time. In order to do this I focus on the trend over time in the centered (around the fifty-state mean) results in the

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1 The starting date for this type of analysis is somewhat arbitrary (as almost any starting point would be), but using 1972 puts us on this side of the tumultuous events of the 1960s and the beginning of partisan changes in response to party strategies related to civil rights. In effect, beginning in the early 1970s places us more squarely in the modern party era yet still prior to changes in the parties that occurred in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s.
Democratic share of the two-party vote, separately for each state. Centering the vote allows me to focus on each state relative to all states without worrying about overall swings in party fortunes from one election to the next. To be clear, the focus is not on which party wins or loses a state, but on support for the Democratic Party over time, relative to gains or losses in all other states. In the initial analysis the trend over time is gauged by regressing centered Democratic vote share on year, separately for each state. This simple model also includes dummy variables for presidential and vice-presidential home state advantage, as well as one for southern states in 1976 and 1980. The southern dummy variable is necessary to capture the unnaturally high level of support for the Democratic ticket in southern states in response to the candidacy of former Georgia Governor Jimmy Carter. I then used the results from the state-by-state regression models to estimate the trend in Democratic support over time. In doing this I set the values for the dummy variables to zero so the "predictions" reflect the trend over time in state support for Democratic candidates, exclusive of these transitory perturbations.

Figure 1 documents the changes in party fortunes. Here, the solid straight line represents the estimated trend in Democratic support over time, and the data points represent the actual election outcomes. It is important to recall that in some cases the trend line does not appear to fit the scatter plot as well as it "should" because it excludes the effects of home state advantages and the southern advantages in 1976 and 1980 (see MS and GA as exemplars of this phenomenon). It is also worth pointing out that the observations above the zero point are not necessarily cases in which the Democratic candidate won the state; instead, these are cases in which the Democratic candidate fared better than he did, on average, across the fifty states in that election year.

\footnote{All election data are taken from Dvaid Leip’s Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections (http://uselectionatlas.org/)}
The states in Figure 1 are ordered from left to right from the top left corner by the magnitude of Democratic gains. In most cases the actual election outcomes (the dots) hug the trend line fairly closely, again with those significant deviations usually reflecting a home state advantage or the south in the 1976 and 1980 elections. The clearest message from this figure is that there are myriad experiences among the states. In some states the Democrats experienced
steep increases in vote share, while in others they experienced steep declines; in some states the gains or losses were much more modest, and some states are flat-liners, showing virtually no change over time; and there are instances where the change was enough to flip states from one party’s column to the other, while in other instances the change only served to reinforce the dominant party’s grip on the state. On the Democratic side, the largest gains were on the west coast (California and Hawaii) and the northeast (Vermont, New Hampshire, New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut), while the largest gains on the Republican side were mostly in Border States (West Virginia, Kentucky, Oklahoma, and Arkansas) and the Mountain West (Wyoming and Utah). Interestingly, in the context of strategic discussions referenced earlier (Burns 2013), Texas also represents one of the largest Republican gains, despite the pronounced increase in its Latino population during this time period. It would appear that Democratic aspirations for Texas far exceed their actual prospects.

One way to gain a clearer understanding of the degree of change (or stability, in some cases) is to isolate elections at the beginning and end of this eleven-election series. Using the predicted outcomes as the measure of the expected level of support, I calculate the partisan leanings of the states for two different time periods: the 1972 to 1980 elections and the 2004 to 2012 elections. This measure is based on the average predicted Democratic share of the centered two-party vote for each of these time periods, enabling comparison of the two outcomes to reveal both the direction and magnitude of changes in Democratic support. These changes are presented in Figure 2, below. In this figure, the ubiquitous chromatic heuristics of red and blue are used to identify states where the trend over time has favored Republicans (red) or Democrats (blue). The blunt end of the arrow indicates where the states started, on average, during the 1972-1980 elections, and the point at the head of the arrow designates where the states end up,
on average, for presidential elections from 2004 to 2012. Beyond color, those arrows pointing to the left indicate Republican gains, while those pointing to the right indicate Democratic gains. It is important to recall that party support is expressed relative to all states, in each year. So for instance, in a Republican blowout year, such as 1972, the Democrats could still lose a state like Minnesota, where George McGovern ran about 10 points better than he did across all states. The Democratic candidate does not necessarily win states that run above the zero-point in this figure, but the Democratic candidate does better in those states than in states where they find themselves on the negative side of horizontal axis.

Figure 2. Direction and Magnitude of State-level Support for Democratic Presidential Candidates from 1972-1980 to 2004-2012
This figure sheds important light on the question of a growing Democratic advantage in the Electoral College. In very gross terms, there is an important trend in favor of Democratic presidential candidates. Looking just at the direction of movement (ignoring magnitude), there are 29 states that have seen Democratic gains and 21 states where Republicans have gained strength. In terms of electoral votes, the states where Democrats have made inroads control 366 electoral votes, while the states with Republican gains control just 169 electoral votes. This is a substantively large and meaningful difference. However, it may overstate the case somewhat, since some states in which the parties gained strength were already in the Democratic or Republican column and only became more strongly partisan, and in a few states where the parties gained strength (e.g., Mississippi and Georgia for the Democrats, and Minnesota and Wisconsin for the Republican), their position is improved but they are still at a distinct disadvantage. And, of course, there are a handful of states where movement very slight, though on balance in one party’s favor.

Another way of assessing the importance of partisan change is to focus on what can be considered cases of conversion (switching from one party to another) or changes in swing status (moving from competitive to non-competitive or from non-competitive to competitive). Figure 3 highlights twenty-one states that fall into either of these categories. The vertical dashed lines are at -2 and +2 points, representing a fairly tight band of competitive outcomes. There is only one state (West Virginia) that can be described as a switching from solidly one party (Democratic) to solidly the other (Republican), while the remaining twenty states moved into or out of the competitive zone. Across all twenty-one states, six states representing 40 electoral votes moved in the Republican direction, while fifteen states representing 188 electoral votes moved in the Democratic direction. Again, the net effect of this movement favors the Democrats.
Accounting for Partisan Change

Any effort to establish determinants of partisan change requires a dynamic approach. At best, static designs that measure *levels* of partisan support and *levels* of some set of independent variables can tell what types of states partisan support is relatively high or low, but they cannot tell us how *changes* in the values of the independent variable affect *changes* in the partisan support, which seems a more interesting question. Since the interest here is in explaining changes in partisan support over time, all independent variables are measured as change variables. In most of the following analyses, the dependent variable is based on the measure used in Figures 2 &3, and is expressed as the change in the average value of the mean centered Democratic vote from 1972-1980 to 2004-2012. In other words, the change in the expected level of party support
from the first three to the last three of the eleven elections between 1972 and 2012. The independent variables can be grouped into three different categories: measures change in the racial and ethnic makeup of the states, measures of change in socioeconomic and occupational make up of the states, and changes in the underlying political orientation of the states.

**Race and Ethnicity.** The first group of variables account for the racial and ethnic makeup of the states. Based on relatively longstanding and increasingly strong connection between the Democratic Party and racial and ethnic minorities (Judis and Teixeira 2004; Kaufmann 2004; Lewis-Beck 2009; Miller 1991b; Miller and Shanks 1996), the expectation is that Democratic gains are greatest in states with the greatest decline in White population and corresponding increase in the relative size of racial and ethnic minorities. The specific measures used here are the share of the citizen voting-age population who are Latino, non-Hispanic White, Non-Hispanic Black, and non-Hispanic-other groups. Recall that most of popular discussions of the source of the increased Democratic advantage has focused on changes in the racial and ethnic configuration of the states.

Figure 4 presents simple, bivariate evidence for the impact of changes in race and ethnicity as sources of political change in the states. The picture that emerges is interesting but varied. The strongest relationship is between the change in percent White and change in Democratic vote, with a correlation of -.45, though the picture is a bit mixed. Among states with relatively small losses in White population percent there is a mix of states with both large Democratic gains and large Democratic losses, though there are more states with Democratic

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3 Recall that the centered Democratic vote in each year is based on each state’s trend over time, controlling for home state advantage and the unique nature of the southern states in the 1976 and 1980 elections.

4 All demographic data were obtained via the Integrated Public Use of Microdata Series (IPUMS), hosted by the University of Minnesota (Ruggles et al. 2010).
losses. The picture is somewhat clearer among states that have seen the greatest loss in the White share of the population: the lower left quadrant of the graph (steep losses in White population and steep losses in Democratic support) is virtually empty, with the interesting exception of Texas, which became substantially more Republican at the same time it saw a significant decline in the White share of the population. The plot for changes in the Latino population is almost a mirror image of the plot for the White population, with Texas again as an outlier, and the plot for “other” bears a very similar pattern, with Oklahoma and Alaska replacing Texas as outliers. The plot for changes in the black population shows a substantially weaker relationship. There are several states with significant Democratic gains and several states with significant losses among states with relatively small increases in the Black population, though, on average, states with larger increases in the Black population show positive changes for the Democratic Party.

**Socioeconomic and Occupational Status.** The parties also have strong connections to groups based on socioeconomic and occupational status. The Democrats have traditionally drawn support from the poor and from union households (Manza and Brooks 1999; Stonecash et al. 2000; Stonecash, Brewer, and Mariani 2003), and there is the increasing connection between professional occupation groups and Democratic support, cited by Judis and Teixeira (2004) and others (Brooks and Manza 1997; Manza and Brooks 1999; Weakliem and Heath 1999). One of the important links between occupational status and voting behavior may be level of education, with higher education voters being somewhat conservative on economic issues but relatively liberal on cultural issues (Houtman 2001), presumably reacting to the changing positions in a manner described by Judis and Teixeira (2004). The following variables are used to measure changes in socioeconomic and occupation variables: change in the percent of the population living in poverty, change in the percent of the population living in union households, change in
the percent of the population employed in “professional” or “manager” occupations, and change in the percent of the population with BA or graduate degrees.

**Figure 4. Changes in Democratic Support as a Function of Changes in the Racial and Ethnic Composition of the States**

![Graph showing changes in Democratic vote as a function of racial and ethnic composition changes](image)

Figure 5 presents the relationships between changes in Democratic vote and changes in socioeconomic and occupational groups. Here we see the strongest patterns in for education and occupational status, with education showing the strongest relationship. Generally, states with the greatest increases in percent of the population with bachelor of graduate degrees, or in the percent of the population with management or professional occupations, also experienced the

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5 Professional and manager occupations are not always grouped together. The justification here is purely empirical: they are both positively related to change in Democratic fortunes, with change in managers (surprisingly) somewhat more strongly related than change in professionals.
greatest increases in Democratic vote share. Changes in union status also show a positive but not-quite-as-strong relationship to changes in Democratic support. Though all states experienced a decline in union households, Democrats made their greatest gains among those states that experienced the smallest decline in percent of the population from union households. Besides the impact of union identity on individual voting behavior, this figure no doubt also reflects the changing organizational power and mobilization potential of unions. Finally, there is a relatively modest, positive relationship between change in the poverty rate and change in Democratic support.

**Figure 5. Changes in Democratic Support as a Function of Changes in the Socioeconomic and Occupational Composition of the States**
**Political Orientation.** The last set of variables to consider is changes in the underlying political orientations of the states, changes in party identification and political ideology, specifically. Quite simply, populations in some states have developed stronger attachments to the Democratic Party, and populations in other states to the Republican Party, over time. Likewise, self-described liberals are on the rise in some states and on the decline in others. No doubt part of these changes are in response to the demographic variables described above. As Democratic-aligned groups take up a greater share of a state’s electorate, we should expect to see changes in the levels of Democratic party identification and increased support for liberal policies. However, individual-level studies of changes in party identification in the South and in the Northeast have identified conversion and generational replacement as the primary movers (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Knuckey 2009; Miller 1991b). In this case, compositional change in predispositions is expected to be in response to changes in the relative position of the national parties and the way voters react to those changing positions (Stonecash, Brewer, and Mariani 2003). As there is greater differentiation between parties, perhaps especially on cultural or social welfare issues, voter alignments in the states should change accordingly (Carmines and Stimson 1989), albeit perhaps slowly over time. Part of these changes reflect something like the concept of partisan sort, whereby formerly misplaced ideology increasingly aligns with party identification increasingly as party signals become clearer (Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2005; Levendusky 2009).

The measures used here come from Enns and Koch’s work on measuring state ideology and partisanship (Enns and Koch 2013). Enns and Koch derive estimates of the percent of the state population who identify as Democrats or Republicans and liberals or conservatives, utilizing multi-level regression and post-stratification from hundreds of polls representing of
740,000 respondents. The key advantage of these estimates of state party and ideology is that they are taken individual survey responses and can be aggregated into a metric that allows for clear estimates of the standard categories of Democrat or Republican and liberal or conservative. The measure used here is the net Democratic advantage (%Democratic-%Republican) and net liberal advantage (%liberal-%conservative) in each state and each election cycle. Change in these variables between election periods is then used to explain change in vote shares.

Figure 6 presents the bivariate relationships for changes in political orientation. Not surprisingly, these plots show much stronger patterns than were found among the demographic variables, with Democrats making their strongest gains in states in which the Democratic and liberal advantage in self-described identity declined the least, and their greatest losses in states in which the Democratic and liberal advantage declined the most. Although changes in both variables are connected to substantial change in vote share, the relationship is especially strong for state political ideology. This is in keeping with previous research that has investigate the partisan and ideological structure of state presidential outcomes (Gurian, Macdonald, and Rabinowitz 1984; Holbrook 1991).

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6 Estimates of ideology are not available for the 1972 election, and estimates for both party and ideology are not available for the 2012 election. The 1976 values were used for the 1972 election, and the 2010 values were substituted for the 2012 election.
Figure 6. Changes in Democratic Support as a Function of Changes in Political Orientations.

Multivariate Model

As intriguing as all of the forgoing bivariate relationships are, many of them represent overlapping explanations and likely overstate the impact of some of the variables. Although political commentary is frequently bivariate in nature, it is important to assess these factors in combination to get a sense of which are most clearly responsible for changes in Democratic presidential votes and which are simply reflecting the influence of other variables. Toward that end, Table 1 presents multivariate models that assess the impact of various combinations of independent variables. Among the Demographic variables, overall change in the non-white
The impact of demographic characteristics is mixed. Considered in isolation (Model 1), without including party and ideology, there are significant effects from changes in the nonwhite population, changes in union household, and changes in the percent of the population with bachelor degrees or higher. Democratic presidential prospects improved in states with increases in the nonwhite population and in states in which the population with college degrees increased the most, and were diminished in states in which the union population declined the most, all else held constant. While these relationships support a demographic explanation of partisan change, they largely disappear when tested alongside changes in partisan and ideological identification (Model 3). The lone exception to this is change in labor households, which continues to hold some sway over changes in presidential outcomes. As noted earlier, this probably reflects not just the party leanings of union members but also changes in the organizational and mobilization capacity of unions in the states.

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7 Using change in the separate racial and ethnic groups at the same time introduces some colinearity and the results are not quite as strong as when using the catchall nonwhite measure. Using change in education serves as a good proxy for changes in management and professional occupations (the two are correlated at r=.91) and also allows for estimation of whatever other effects there are from education. When change in percent management and professional occupations is used instead of education the results are largely the same.
Table 1. Determinants of Political Change in the States from the 1972-1980 to 2004-2012 Presidential Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change in Liberal Advantage</th>
<th>Change in Democratic Vote Share</th>
<th>Change in Liberal Advantage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.863 (1)</td>
<td>0.736 (2)</td>
<td>0.442 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.091</td>
<td>0.139</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in Dem. Advantage</td>
<td>-0.017</td>
<td>0.097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.058</td>
<td>0.058</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in Nonwhite CVAP</td>
<td>0.390</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.196</td>
<td>0.095</td>
<td>0.442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in Poverty Rate</td>
<td>0.412</td>
<td>0.809</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.430</td>
<td>-0.413</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in Union Households</td>
<td>0.473</td>
<td>0.269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.241</td>
<td>0.112</td>
<td>0.266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in BA or higher degree</td>
<td>0.964</td>
<td>0.940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.286</td>
<td>0.244</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-7.66</td>
<td>8.756</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adj. R²</td>
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<td>0.73</td>
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</table>

All estimates are OLS estimates with Huber/White robust standard errors. **Bold** coefficients are significant at p<.05 (one-tailed, where there is a one-tailed hypothesis)

Overall, it is changes in political ideology that have the greatest and most consistent influence on changes in presidential outcomes. Ideology is significant and important when considered alongside party identification, both with and without the addition of the demographic variables. Changes in party identification are dwarfed by the changes in ideology in Model 2 and the slope is not remotely close to significant, in part because of shared variance (r=.67). In the full model (3), Ideology continues to dominate, while party falls just short of statistically significant (p = .053), and change in union households also remains statistically significant.
Measuring the relative impact of ideology, party (marginal significance), and union households reveals the extent to which ideology dominates the others. The relative impact of the independent variables is calculated by subtracting the predicted outcome at the lowest value of the independent variable from the predicted outcome at the highest value of the independent variable. By this measure the net effect of changes in ideology is a 17.4-point change in centered Democratic votes, whereas the net effects for party identification and union membership are 4.2 and 5.2 points, respectively.

Although the estimates from Model 3 explain some states better than others, the observed levels of change in party support track fairly well with the predicted levels of change (Figure 7). It is particularly important to note that there are no extreme outliers, nor is there any easily detectable heteroskedasticity.\(^8\) There also does not appear to be a strong regional pattern to whether states are above or below the regression line. All in all, a nice fitting model, dominated by changes in state ideology.

\(^8\) The Breusch-Pagan / Cook-Weisberg test for heteroskedasticity produces a \(\chi^2\) value of 1.25, \(p>.26\).
While ideology exerts the greatest influence in this analysis, it is likely the case that ideology mediates the effects of some of the demographic variables. This is certainly suggested by the fact that both change in the nonwhite population and change in education lost explanatory power when party and ideology were added to the model. This idea is tested in Model 4, where ideology is regressed on the demographic variables. Here, there is compelling evidence of indirect effects, with change in ideology being influenced by changes in the nonwhite population, changes in the poverty rate, and the level of education: states with increased nonwhite population, increased poverty rates, and increased levels of education tended to be more liberal, relative to other states, in the contemporary period than in the 1970s and 1980s. Interestingly, while change in union membership is related to change in party support (Model 3), it is not related to
changes in state ideology. Again, in part this could reflect the direct effects of union organizations on outcomes, in addition to the party loyalty of union members.

**Contextual Effects**

Finally, we turn to contextual effects, or to the idea that the relationships between state characteristics and vote shares may have changed over time in ways that help account for the changes in expected party votes in the states. The first step to addressing these effects is documenting changes in the relationships among variables. Toward that end, I examine the cross-sectional patterns in the data over time. If the national political context has changed over time in way that makes state demographic and political characteristics more relevant to state presidential outcomes, then we should see increasing correlations between those characteristics and vote share over time. A test of this proposition is presented in Figure 8, which presents the partial correlations (controlling for home state advantage and the southern region in 1976 and 1980) between state characteristics and the Democratic share of the centered two-party vote. In general, the pattern in Figure 8 supports the idea of state-level outcomes becoming increasingly connected to state-level characteristics. With the exception of changes in the Black population, all other race and ethnicity variables went from being essentially unrelated to state outcomes to having relatively modest relationships. Interestingly, there is no trend in the impact of poverty, other than that it is always in the unanticipated direction, suggesting that Democrats do worse where there are more poor people. Actually, this is not a new finding (Gelman 2009), nor is it terribly surprising, given that poverty tends to be concentrated in the conservative South. Percent union households went from a moderate relationship \( r = .36 \) to a fairly strong relationship \( r = .61 \), and percent management or professional occupations went from no relationship \( r = .01 \) to a strong relationship \( r = .60 \). The Relationship between education and
election outcomes saw the biggest swing, going from a weak negative (r=−.11) to a strong positive relationship (r=.58). The relationships between political orientations and outcomes increase substantially as well: the correlation between party and outcomes went from .29 to .81, and that for ideology went from .56 to .81.

The substantial increase in the correlation between party and candidate support fits well with Fiorina’s notion of party sorting (Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2005), and reflects the growing connection between party and ideology in the states. The correlation between state-level party identification and state-level ideology increased from .24 in the 1970s to .80 in the 2000s. In other words, party identification at the state-level increasingly reflects the underlying state ideological bent.
The key question is what sort of effect the changes in the relationships between state characteristics and Democratic vote share have on the distribution of Democratic support across the states in the contemporary period. In other words, what would Democratic vote shares across the states look like in the today if the relationships between state characteristics and election outcomes had not changed over time?

[THE REMAINING PART OF THE PAPER IS NOT DONE AT THIS POINT]
References


