Political Geography 66 (2018) 1–13

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Political Geography

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/polgeo

Contagious Republicanism in Louisiana, 1966–2014

M.V. Hood III, James E. Monogan III*

University of Georgia, Dept. of Political Science, Athens, GA, 30602, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Party identification
Geospatial regression
Panel data
Southern politics

ABSTRACT

In this paper, we build on prior work by Hood, Kidd, and Morris (2012), who show that growth in Republican identification in Southern states since 1965 rose in response to black mobilization. In their theory of relative advantage, as more African-Americans registered with the Democratic Party, white voters could maintain the same intraparty status by moving to the sparser-populated Republican Party. In this project, we focus on Louisiana and how the state's local-level politics created the opportunity for partisan contagion among parishes for organizational, electoral, and mobilization reasons. We show that, beyond the factors known to contribute to a rise in Republican identification in the South, whenever a parish in Louisiana became more Republican, there were spillover effects in neighboring parishes. Hence, as one parish became more Republican, neighboring parishes followed suit. We also show that as the extraction of natural resources such as oil and natural gas rose, a parish was more inclined to become more Republican.

Introduction

Over the past 50 years, the South has shifted from a Democratic to a Republican stronghold. While several factors have been shown to shape the emergence of this new pattern, to what degree did citizens at a local level change their party identification in reaction to what they witnessed in neighboring counties or parishes? There is ample reason to believe that party registration in one parish would react to partisanship in neighboring parishes: Political ideas are more likely to spread among neighbors, citizens are likely to see the firsthand results of neighbors' party switching, and if a mobilization strategy is successful in one county then party leaders are likely to extend the same strategy to neighboring places.

We test this idea of local-level contagion of GOP identification within the context of the theory of relative advantage developed by Hood, Kidd, and Morris (2012). We analyze a panel data set of 64 Louisiana parishes over 49 years from 1966 to 2014 using a method that accounts for spatial and temporal autoregression in geographically-referenced panel data (Franzese & Hays, 2007). In investigating the spread of GOP identification in Louisiana we find evidence of both significant spatial and temporal autoregression. Over time then, the level of Republican identification within a parish is related not only to the previous time period but to its neighboring parishes as well.

Theoretical underpinnings

The theory of relative advantage stipulates that the demonstrated over-time rise in Republican registration in Louisiana in the post-Voting Rights Act (VRA) era is a direct product of the ability of the black populace to participate in the political process (Hood et al., 2012). Within a parish we should see increasing numbers of whites registering as Republicans where there was a *relative advantage* of doing so. Namely, this trend should occur in those parishes where larger numbers of (re) enfranchised black citizens were registering and identifying as Democrats, thus producing a crowding-out effect for white conservatives and the influence they could exert on Democratic Party politics. Hence, the value of identifying as a Democrat for white conservatives should decrease over time as the ability of this group to use the Democratic Party to nominate candidates and pursue policy objectives is diminished. For white conservatives, and much later white moderates, the Republican Party represented a ready-made viable alternative to the increasing intra-party competition that characterized the post-VRA Democratic Party.

The theory of relative advantage indicates that the presence and extent of black political mobilization should be the driver behind the shift of white conservatives with regard to registering and identifying as Republicans. As such, our models include a measure of black

* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: th@uga.edu (M.V. Hood), monogan@uga.edu (J.E. Monogan).

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2018.07.002
Received 13 May 2017; Received in revised form 16 June 2018; Accepted 3 July 2018
Available online 17 July 2018
0962-6298/

mobilization at the parish level in order to act as a direct test of relative advantage theory. In the pre-Civil Rights era, such a threat to white political hegemony might have been defined simply by the size of the local African American population. Key's *black-belt hypothesis* however, is not an adequate manner in which to conceptualize the political upheaval created by the Voting Rights Act and other constitutional and statutory changes in this area. The size of the black population may still exert some degree of casual influence on the rate of Republican registration and we, therefore, include such a measure in the empirical models. As Key was writing before the widespread (re)enfranchisement of African Americans in the region, the size of the African American population in the post-Civil Rights era may actually be viewed to have a negative relationship with GOP registration. Clearly, with almost all black Southerners registering and identifying as Democrats, the relative size of the African American population could effectively be viewed as a ceiling or cap on the size of GOP registration within a specific parish.

The rise of viable sub-state two-party competition in the South varied considerably across the eleven states of the region. Some states like North Carolina actually contained local Republican Party organizations, a residual dating back to the Civil War and the Reconstruction Era. In other states, especially those in the deep South, there was virtually no formal Republican Party in any organizational sense of the word outside of a very small group of citizens seeking political patronage. These *post-office* Republicans in the deep South were seldom involved in traditional party-building activities such as recruiting and promoting candidates to run for office. Not only should Republican Party registration be affected by the size of black mobilization within the parish, but also by the extent of the existing organizational development of the Republican Party within the state. For those states where the Republican Party maintained some local party organization we should see increases in GOP registration earlier, compared with those states where the GOP was essentially anemic or essentially non-existent. The latter pattern seems to fit the data in the case of Louisiana.

In our search for empirical evidence for the theory of relative advantage we cannot ignore other prominent theories related to the rise of the Republican Party in the region. Other explanations for GOP growth include demographic change (especially in-migration) (Bass & De Vries, 1976; Scher, 1997; and; Stanley & Castle, 1988), economic development (Cobb, 1999; Shafer & Johnston, 2001, 2006; and; Sosna, 1987), and religion (Green, Kellstedt, Smith, & Guth, 2010, 1998; Kellstedt, 1989). In order to determine the extent to which relative advantage theory provides an empirical explanation for the rise in GOP party registration in Louisiana we must simultaneously control for the presence of competing causal mechanisms posited by other scholars. Only in this manner can we be reasonably assured that political mobilization on the part of blacks is the primary, or at least one among a number of, empirical explanations for the increase in Republican Party activity at the sub-state level.

As we address this question of how white voters reacted to increased black voters' mobilization and to patterns of party registration in neighboring areas, we should note that we treat parishes (Louisiana's equivalent of counties) as the unit of analysis. While an individual voter makes the decision of how to register, our theory maintains that social context that has to be measured more broadly affects these individuals' choices. In a parish with many registered African Americans, per Hood et al.'s (2012) theory, white voters throughout that parish will face the dilemma of remaining in the Democratic Party with diluted influence or defecting to the Republican Party and carrying larger weight. This is because Louisiana state election law organizes parties at the parish level. Meanwhile, as neighboring parishes show a higher share of Republican registration, voters throughout the parish could observe Republican electoral gains, and these voters may be subject to recruiting efforts. There are always are limits to drawing conclusions from aggregate-level data as it is individuals who make choices about how to register. However, given our theory, observing registration at the parish level ought to capture the relevant variance behind our predictor variables.[1]

A brief history of the party system in Louisiana

The South is no monolith as key differences exist across states in the region. In this regard perhaps none is more distinctive than Louisiana. Until recently we would also describe Louisiana as one of the most Democratic states in the region, second only to Arkansas on most indicators of partisan strength (Grosser, 1982). Over the course of the last half-century however, the Republican Party has made major strides in Louisiana. In 1960 the Democrats held all federal offices and all state constitutional offices. In the state legislature Republicans did not hold any seats in either chamber. By 2010 the Republicans controlled six of seven U.S. House seats and one U.S. Senate seat. At the state level the governor's office, five of six executive offices, and a majority in the state house were held by GOP officeholders—a remarkable feat given the entrenched nature of Democratic Party politics in the Bayou State.

Following Reconstruction, Louisiana appeared like much of the rest of the South with the Democratic Bourbon Elite taking control of the state's party system. During this timeframe Louisiana was effectively a one-party state with all control resting with conservative business interests within the Democratic Party. Known as the second party system in Louisiana, the white working class along with the black populace effectively had no voice in the political process during this time (Grosser, 1982; Key, 1949).

Unlike other Southern states which continued to be characterized by Bourbon control, the party system in Louisiana underwent a radical change beginning with the election of Huey Long to the governorship in 1928. From this time until 1963 the state party system could still be characterized as one-party, but very strongly bi-factional with the dividing line being that of economics: the *haves* versus the *have-nots*. This type of class-based political system, pitting the Good-Government faction against the Long populists, failed to materialize to the same degree in the South outside of Louisiana.

The collapse of the bi-factional third party system was produced in large part as a reaction from white conservatives to the race issue. Parent (2004) also writes that the largest political sea change in the state revolved around the Civil Rights Movement. Writing in the early 1980's, Grosser labels this the *No Party* era. In a similar vein others have described the state party-system in the 1970s and 1980s as being multi-factional in nature, with a fairly weak Republican Party included among these groupings along with black, populist, and conservative Democrats (Bass & De Vries, 1995 and Landry & Parker, 1982).

Following the Civil Rights Era, Democrats were able to maintain control with a strong bi-racial coalition of blacks and white populists, many of whom were Cajuns in south Louisiana (Bass & De Vries, 1995). The race question that generated a realignment among whites in the Protestant north did not have the same resonance for those whites of French or southern European heritage (Grosser, 1982; Parent, 2004). Even in the early 1980s, Grosser (1982) still indicated that there was no evidence of a Republican majority in the state. During this time blacks became a major base of support for the Democratic Party, and the number of black elected officeholders greatly increased (Parent & Perry, 2010). For example, Parent (2004) reports that black officeholding went from 33 to 333 positions in ten years (1968–1978).

By the mid-1990s Republicans had made concerted gains in officeholding at multiple levels, with the most high profile being the election of Mike Foster to two terms as governor. Parent and Perry (2010)

[1] As an additional validation test of our results, Appendix 3 presents a model of individual-level partisanship using the 2006–2016 Cooperative Congressional Election Study. This individual-level *kriging* model does show that the more proximate neighbors are, the more likely they are to have a similar partisanship.