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State IQ, well-being and racial composition as predictors of U.S. presidential election outcomes

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ABSTRACT

We report state-level relationships between measures of well-being (e.g., IQ, income) and racial minority composition as predictors of this century's U.S. presidential election outcomes. In bivariate analyses, race only weakly predicted votes cast for democrats. Instead, large mutual suppression effects existed between racial composition and well-being. For example, when race appeared in the regression, the IQ sub-domain of well-being predicted votes cast for democrats in all elections since 2000. Likewise, when IQ (or any other well-being sub-domain) appeared in the regression, race strongly predicted votes cast for democrats. Suppression effects emerged because of negative correlations between well-being and minority composition, yet positive correlations between these variables and election outcomes. In sum, states with high well-being tended to favor democrats, as did states with larger minority populations.

1. Introduction

The goal of this descriptive study is to predict presidential election outcomes for the 50 U.S. states by considering state-level measures of well-being and racial composition (i.e., % minority). We focus on well-being because it has been a theme in campaigns going back to at least the 1980 election, wherein Ronald Reagan remarked: "Are you better off today than you were four years ago?" (Commission on Presidential Debates, 2012). We focus on racial differences in candidate preference because race is a strong predictor of democratic voting patterns. In 2012, for example, only 41% of White Americans voted for Barack Obama. For Black and Hispanic Americans, these values were 93% and 71%, respectively (Pew Research Center, 2012).

The U.S. president is clearly one of the most powerful and important persons in the world. Showing that well-being variables predict presidential election outcomes would therefore meaningfully expand our knowledge of both voting behaviors and the well-being nexus (see Pesta, McDaniel, & Bertsch, 2010a,b). And, because many well-being variables (e.g., income, education) are also human capital variables, knowledge of the relationship between well-being and voting behavior would contribute significantly to the human capital literature (see Organization for Economic Cooperation & Development (OECD), 2001).

Regarding well-being, economists and political scientists have had some success predicting election outcomes by appealing to income differences across voters within and between the 50 U.S. states. In this literature, income differences are often used as a proxy for voter-differences in well-being. For example, Gelman (2009) showed that whereas richer states vote democrat, richer people within richer states vote republican. Recently, however, Pesta et al. (2010a, 2010b) showed that single, state-level variables (e.g., income, intelligence) rarely exist independently of other state-level variables (e.g., education, crime). Instead, they appear as nodes in an inter-correlated nexus containing a large number of state-level variables. For example, strong inter-correlations exist between state measures of income, crime, education, intelligence, health, and religiosity. The size and consistency of these correlations allowed Pesta et al.

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(2010a, 2010b) to derive a general factor of state well-being. The well-being factor explained most of the variance in the component variables, and predicted other important social and political state-level outcomes (Pesta, Bertsch, McDaniel, Mahoney, & Poznanski, 2012; Pesta et al., 2010a,b).

1.1. The g/well-being nexus

Across dozens of studies, *g* is correlated with important, real-world outcomes (e.g., Jensen, 1998; Pesta et al., 2010a, b). The finding that *g* is essential to predicting a variety of life outcomes has led researchers to propose the existence of a *g* nexus (Jensen, 1998; Nyborg, 2003). As identified by Jensen (1998), the *g* nexus is a network of inter-correlated variables with general mental ability at the center. It has both horizontal and vertical components. The horizontal component comprises variables which co-vary and interact with general mental ability. Examples include income, education and health (Jensen, 1998). The vertical component includes presumed causes of individual differences in *g*, with a special focus on biological and neuropsychological variables (e.g., individual differences in properties of the human brain).

At the level of the U.S. state, we suggest that a well-being nexus exists which subsumes the *g* nexus. The horizontal and vertical components of the well-being nexus are similar to those seen with *g* at the individual level. Postulated causes of individual and group differences in well-being comprise the vertical dimension, while the consequences that follow from these differences comprise the horizontal dimension. Consistent with this idea, variables that correlate strongly with state-level *g* also correlate strongly with state-level well-being (Pesta et al., 2010a,b, 2012). How voting behavior fits within the well-being nexus might depend on various personality traits and political ideologies, which are issues we turn to next.

1.2. Liberalism, well-being and IQ

Pesta et al. (2010a, 2010b) discovered that state well-being co-varied with liberalism/conservatism. High well-being states (e.g., Massachusetts and New Hampshire) tended to be more liberal, and low well-being states (e.g., Mississippi and Louisiana) tended to be more conservative. Pesta et al. (2010a, 2010b) reported the following correlations between state well-being, and teacher salaries ($r = .39$), minimum wage ($r = .35$); whether a state has amended its constitution to ban gay marriage ($r = -.43$); the percentage of state residents who are registered democrats ($r = .47$); live in same sex households; ($r = .42$); own guns ($r = -.34$); are atheist ($r = .58$); or are protestant ($r = -.68$). In the present paper, we anticipate that well-being will co-vary with presidential voting behavior through its relationship with liberal versus conservative dispositions.

Various personality traits measuring political ideologies may potentially explain why well-being correlates with liberalism/conservatism. Examples include right wing authoritarianism (RWA; Altemeyer, 1981) and social dominance orientation (SDO; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). High scores on RWA represent people who are committed to tradition and authority, and are resistant to change. High scores on SDO represent people who are more comfortable with social inequality, and who prefer hierarchical group orientations—often based on social dominance. Research has linked both personality traits to liberal versus conservative political ideologies. People high in either RWA or SDO tend to be more conservative (Heaven, Ciarrochi, & Leeson, 2011; Kemmelmiere, 2008; Laythe, Finkel, & Kirkpatrick, 2001; Mavor, Louis, & Sibley, 2010; Schoon, Cheng, Gale, Batty, & Deary, 2010; Sidanius & Pratto, 2001).

Regarding IQ and voting behavior, the literature suggests that high IQ is associated with increased voter turnout, political involvement and liberal attitudes (Cheng, Gale, Batty, & Deary, 2010; Deary, Batty, & Gale, 2008; Hauser, 2000). Recently, however, Rindermann, Flores-Mendoza, and Woodley (2012) reported that high intelligence is associated with more central political orientations. In reconciling these effects, perhaps American liberals are perceived as less "far" from center, relative to American conservatives, particularly those conservatives who align themselves with the Tea Party movement. Nonetheless, we anticipate that liberalism/conservatism will co-vary with IQ and the other sub-domains of well-being. Specifically, given correlations reported by Pesta et al. (2010a, 2010b), and given personality traits like RWA and SDO, we predict that high well-being states will be more likely to vote democratic.

Studies that tie RWA and SDO to political beliefs, however, use data from individual respondents, versus data aggregated to group levels. To our knowledge, no state-level data exist on these constructs. Further complicating the issue is the potential to commit an ecological fallacy (Robinson, 1950). The causality underlying individual differences might differ from that which explains aggregate-level data (we return to this issue in the discussion section). At any rate, a growing body of research shows that individual-difference variables (e.g., intelligence, personality) also predict when aggregated to geographically-clustered groups (e.g., nations across the world, or the 50 U.S. states).

For example, Rentfrow, Jost, Gosling, and Potter (2009) have calculated Big-five personality scores for each of the 50 U.S. states. State personality scores predict many important social and cultural phenomena (Jost et al., 2009). Likewise, researchers for nations (Lynn & Meisenberg, 2010; Whetzel & McDaniel, 2006) and for the 50 U.S. states (McDaniel, 2006; Pesta et al., 2012) have shown that intelligence measured at the aggregate level is a potent predictor of economic, psychological, and social outcomes. Thus, our goal is to examine whether state-level measures of well-being, combined with consideration of state racial composition, provide useful prediction of state voting behavior for this century's presidential elections.

Finally, we include state racial composition in our analyses because it co-varied strongly with the well-being variables reported by Pesta et al. (2010a, 2010b), and because we suspect it will also co-vary strongly with election outcomes. In the Pesta et al. data set, states with larger minority populations fared worse on all well-being sub-domains. We note, however, an unusual situation here in that our predictors (percent minority and well-being) are negatively correlated with each other, yet positively correlated with votes cast for democrats. This pattern of correlations typically results in a regression suppression situation (Tzelgov & Henik, 1991).

Most regression analyses are categorized as "redundancy regression" situations because the predictor variables are