VOTER MIGRATION AND THE GEOGRAPHIC SORTING OF THE AMERICAN ELECTORATE

Abstract

Questions have been raised in recent years about the extent to which the nation is segregating by the political preferences of its migrants. Some have argued that internal migration selects, at least partly, on political criteria, and thereby produces increasingly polarized Republican and Democratic neighborhoods. We are among the first to empirically examine voter migration on a large scale. Using data for hundreds of thousands of partisan migrants across seven states, we show that partisans relocate based on destination characteristics such as racial composition, income, and population density, but additionally prefer to relocate in areas populated with copartisans. This tendency is stronger among Republicans, but is also true of Democratic registrants. Whether the role of partisanship is central or ancillary, if it is any part of the decision process, it has the potential to make important imprints on the political landscape of the United States.

The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step. This Chinese proverb is inspiring and motivating when the task at hand seems arduous. Relatedly, after some time has elapsed following the end of a journey, it is sometimes hard to see how we have arrived somewhere. How, for instance, has the United States arrived at a point in time where pundits and scholars alike are professing that the U.S. is becoming increasingly polarized by party and where the red and blue states have such strong inclinations toward one party? This geographic pattern of partisanship is plainly spatially non-random with red states starkly evident across most of the land while blue pervades the most densely populous regions.

Perhaps more strikingly, the pattern appears to be self-perpetuating and intensifying. Election after election, barring startling scandals or criminal indictments, Democratic and Republican strongholds bear true to our expectations that their voters adhere to past partisan loyalties. In 2008, despite President Obama's lopsided victory in many parts of the country, the geographic expression of rival partisan preferences appears to have heightened over previous elections (Gelman et al., 2008; Lesthaeghe and Neidert, 2009; Bishop and Cushing, 2008; Baldassari and Bearman, 2007). The counties that previously favored one party presented more asymmetrical victories for their preferred party, and the distribution of party registrants became increasingly askew in more locations. Bishop (2009) laments the clustering of like-minded Americans and claims that it breeds intolerance. He argues that heterogeneous communities teach their members to compromise by providing a neighborly forum for opposing viewpoints while homogeneous communities promote extreme beliefs and ideological inbreeding because opposing viewpoints are regularly dismissed without discussion or consideration.

In addition to potentially shaping political outlook and tolerance, there are important political consequences to unequal geographic distribution of party support. In the United States, the system of representation is most commonly embodied in the single-member district system where people are placed into electoral districts according to where they reside. In this system, the geographic pattern of partisanship is a primary component shaping campaign strategy and highly consequential to election outcomes. Politicians spend less time courting constituents in non-competitive areas, and these constituents, in turn, reward the lack of attention with loyalty. This is a somewhat odd characteristic of American politics that is perpetuated by the relationship of geography and our system of political representation.

1 Sources of Geographic Patterning

What creates, defines, and sustains these geographic patterns of partisanship that characterize the United States and shape the political behavior of individuals as well as politicians? Are we on a path to becoming a nation of intolerant individuals with even more deeply divided politics? Identifying and understanding the mechanisms underlying these patterns reveals insights into the inner workings of the American political system as well as the creation and sustenance of geographic polarization. Surely, many factors contribute to geographic variation though three sources appear as the major influences: population migration, polarization of the national parties, and individual behavior.

Migration evidently may alter the geographic partisan distribution, especially in the United States, the most highly mobile society in the history of the world, where 45 percent of the population over age 5 has lived somewhere else just five years prior (Perry, 2003, 2006). Migration choices are not random but, rather, are driven by particular preferences. If migrants sort geographically based on a desire for homophily, or the tendency of individuals to favor the company and presence of others who are similar to themselves, then the political landscape will develop a distinct character over time. Indeed, any type of systematic movement will translate into a spatially non-random pattern.

These patterns need not have their origin in migration. If the national political parties pull apart on social and economic policy issues, this type of party polarization may trickle down to the electorate and create clearer connections between a voter's policy preferences and his party identification (Fiorina and Levendusky, 2006; Levendusky, 2009). As a result, ideologically murky groups such as "Reagan Democrats," or blocs that are "socially liberal but economically conservative," gradually disappear, and a less cross-pressured, purified pattern of party support ensues. In a two-party system, when the elite spurn centrist positions, voters move away from the center and toward the political party that lies most proximate to their partisan preferences, a phenomenon that has been termed party sorting.

1 SOURCES OF GEOGRAPHIC PATTERNING

In addition, geographic patterns may have their roots in social processes. Single-party politics in specific localities may be reinforced by information biases in the social environment (Beck, 2002; Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1995; Burbank, 1997; Orbell, 1970; Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee, 1954). The greater the frequency of expression of a particular viewpoint within a bounded space, the higher the probability an individual will encounter those who have that viewpoint and come to share it as well. Individuals may gravitate toward viewpoints and behaviors, perhaps unintentionally, that are consistent or compatible with their social setting (Brown, 1981; MacKuen and Brown, 1987; Boyd and Iversen, 1979). Though few would make drastic changes, smaller movements in the pursuit of amity are presumably more common (Brown, 1988). While longer-term residents become increasingly homogeneous, more recent residents may be influenced by the politics of their new locale regardless of whether they selected into it by drawing upon politically relevant criteria.

Social life is complex and multiple forces are likely at play. For instance, both party sorting and geographic sorting (whether through migration or individual changes among non-migrants) may be occurring simultaneously. While researchers have examined the origin, magnitude, and psychological motivation of party sorting (Levendusky, 2009; Layman and Carsey, 2002; Layman, Carsey and Horowitz, 2006), empirical examinations of geographic sorting are lacking. This may be because obtaining any data and conducting the associated analyses are more involved. Whatever the case, our aim here is to focus on this less-traveled path that seeks to understand the manifestations of migration into geographically distinct political patterns. In particular, is the partisan voter who is migrating to a new residence more likely to choose a neighborhood with a higher concentration of like-minded partisans? We examine this question by tracking the migration of hundreds of thousands of partisans from their origin to their destination, within and across state lines. We analyze the variation in these movements and seek to discern what origin-destination characteristics guide destination choice.¹

¹ McDonald (2011) finds support for this idea at the level of congressional districts with survey evidence that movers' destinations are a closer ideological match to their own preferences than their place of origin.

2 Migration Destination Determinants

Why has the United States moved toward a particular geographic partisan configuration? What fuels individual relocation choices and how are these choices tied to our political landscape? While no one would argue that relocation destinations are wholly determined by partisanship, the partisan composition of an area may still be part of the destination calculus. If relocation decisions are at least partly related to partisan preference, then change may be slow, but the potential to remake the sociopolitical landscape is real, and the process is in motion.

While previous research has not examined the role of partisanship in migration, other findings would imply that an empirical examination is likely to find that partisanship is *not* a factor in choosing relocation destinations. For instance, there is a strand of literature that argues that people are not especially polarized in their political opinions. Rather, citizens are largely inattentive to politics, and intermittent elections provide only episodic opportunities for politically polarizing thought (Campbell et al., 1960; Lewis-Beck et al., 2008). Moreover, others have shown that there has been no appreciable increase in polarization in liberal-conservative ideology or on a variety of controversial issues over a generation or more (Fiorina and Abrams, 2008; Fiorina, Abrams and Pope, 2006; DiMaggio, Evans and Bryson, 1996). This work undercuts the idea that one impetus for geographic sorting is greater ideological polarization at the mass level.

In addition, previous migration research has generally not highlighted the effect of political composition for migrants in the United States. Instead, demographers have focused on economic pull factors and the pattern of migration away from rural and urban locations and toward suburban areas (Gordon, Richardson and Yu, 1998; Carlino, 1985; Plane and Rogerson, 1994). They posit that suburbs are attractive because they offer good schools, lower crime rates, and a particular type of low density housing development. These studies emphasize economic necessity as the primary force directing migration streams. While the political leanings of migrants or of the suburbs is not generally considered in these studies (Baldassare, 1992; Frey, 1985; Frey and Korbin, 1982), some have noted that these preferences for suburbs and particular neighborhood characteristics do have an associated political effect. Others have separately noted that these suburban and exurban areas are racially and socio-economically

heterogeneous (Hanlon, 2009). The mixing of racially and socio-economically diverse populations creates politically competitive jurisdictions (Hopkins, 2009; Lang, Sanchez and Berube, 2008; McKee and Shaw, 2003; Hale, 1995).

2.1 Correlation of Partisanship and Migration Determinants

We may observe some type of geographic sorting simply because the largest determinants of destination decisions are correlated with partisanship. For instance, neighborhood income levels and housing stock are regarded as primary considerations in a migrant's choice of destination (Clark and Ledwith, 2007). So, if Republicans are wealthier, prefer newer housing and expansive acreages, then the geographic preferences of Republicans and Democrats may be artifacts of income distribution and an expression of the purchasing power of the rival partisan groups (Bartels, 2008). Relatedly, the literature has highlighted a partisan link to sprawl and development whereby liberals are drawn to compact development in urban settings while conservatives prefer more expansive, less planned spaces in suburban and rural areas (Lewis and Baldassare, 2010; Williamson, 2008; Walks, 2006). Similarly, residents may take stock of local tax levels and public services (Tiebout, 1956). And, as in the case of income, housing stock, and sprawl and development, attitudes toward taxes and public services have long created cleavages between the major parties.

Racial composition is also regarded as an important guide in a migrant's destination decision. Whites will not only flee mixed-race neighborhoods in central cities, but will relocate to all-white suburban neighborhoods and seek to insulate themselves there from the encroachment of minority populations though the erection of institutional barriers, including the creation of wholly new governments (Burns, 1994). Blacks, on the other hand, because of persistent discrimination, may be less able to translate income gains into choices to live in predominantly white suburban neighborhoods (Emerson, Chai and Yancey, 2001; Massey and Denton, 1993; South and Deane, 1993; Sampson and Sharkey, 2008). Self-segregation studies indicate that some blacks prefer neighborhoods with considerable black concentrations, though mainly out of fear of white hostility (Krysan and Farley, 2001; Ihlanfeldt and Scafidi, 2002). Other minority and immigrant groups may cluster geographically as a consequence of

in-group preference, solidarity, social and economic support, and ethnic resources (Fong and Chan, 2010). Residential segregation by race and ethnicity, then, is a function of both out-group avoidance and in-group preference that may have implications for the political composition of places, since race can be associated with partisanship. Black voters, in particular, are known to be lopsidedly Democratic in their partisan affiliation, and Latinos identify with the Democratic Party by, typically, a two to one margin. Contingent upon the proximity, income, and the salience of specific attitudes, surrounding white communities may reflect the other extreme (Giles and Hertz, 1994).

Sorting by race or income can be seen as part of a larger phenomenon whereby migrants are driven by homophily. From a psychological standpoint, moving is a norm guided search behavior motivated, in part, by the desire for acceptance. Choices may reflect the racial composition of destinations, but would also include an assessment of values held by local populations, the acceptability of their routines, habits, and customs. People are drawn to particular places because they think they will fit in well among the locals (Gosling, 2008; Florida, 2008; McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook, 2001; Van Ham and Feijten, 2008). Visual inspection of residential areas provides information about housing type, dress, lawn care, automobile preferences, favorite stores, Christmas decorations, backyard playground equipment, and American flags flying from front porches, to name but a few (Gosling, 2008; Baybeck and McClurg, 2005). Such associations presumably send signals about preferences that prospective residents may use to discern the extent to which the current residents are like themselves. Dissonance reducing selection criteria may not be directly related to politics, but if they are sufficiently associated with political preference, either or both may generate geographic sorting that produces increasingly like-minded locales.

2.1.1 Support from Surveys

Data from the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) support the claim that many moving considerations are associated with partisanship. The CCES (2008, 2010) queried a national sample of recent movers about the importance of 15 different considerations in their choice of destination, asking them to rank each item on a scale from 1 (no importance at all) to 10 (very important). Of nearly 700 respondents, 3.5 percent ranked living near co-partisans above an 8 in importance while 39.1 percent

	Democrats	Independents	Republicans	Total
Job	32.7	37.0	39.1	35.8
Retirement	41.3	36.5	46.7	41.4
Housing	49.5	45.3	43.5	46.6
Affordability	63.7	56.3	59.2	60.3
Schools	32.0	28.6	35.9	32.1
Church	18.9	19.3	34.8	23.4
Safety	60.5	56.3	64.1	64.1
Climate	28.1	26.6	28.8	27.9
Stores	46.6	34.4	38.6	38.6
Friends	41.3	39.6	44.0	41.6
Family	46.3	46.4	44.0	45.7
Quiet	66.2	65.1	68.5	66.5
Excitement	38.1	29.7	40.2	36.2
Democrats	28.5	10.9	5.4	16.9
Republicans	11.4	15.6	39.1	20.4

Table 1: Percent of Survey Respondents Ranking Each Destination Criterion above 5 on a 1–10 Scale of Importance.

Source: 2008, 2010 Cooperative Congressional Election Study Respondents are recent movers.

N = 657

of Republicans and 28.5 percent of Democrats ranked co-partisan composition at 5 or higher. We can also see in Table 1 that these percentages are much larger than the percentages that care to live among members of the opposite party.

Though political criteria are not of primary importance, if 30% of migrants consider partisanship in their decision, the effect can be substantial. Between 2000 and 2004, Los Angeles County, CA, lost an estimated 95,000 people to net out-migration (Perry, 2006). Thirty percent suggests that about 28,500 migrants considered the political character of alternative destinations. Moreover, other decision criteria are associated with partisanship. Friends and family, for instance, are important considerations for many migrants and are also often co-partisans. In addition, those who valued proximity to stores also tended to value proximity to Democrats. Republican composition rankings were positively correlated with retirement, church, and neighborhood safety rankings. Hence, even when partisanship is not explicitly considered, it can be implicit by virtue of the factors that are related to it.

3 DATA AND METHODS

3 Data and Methods

In order to understand the effects of migration on the political landscape, we identify and track migration flows through voter files from 2004, 2006, and 2008 from seven states: New Jersey, Maryland, Delaware and Pennsylvania, in the East; and California, Oregon, and Nevada, in the West. These states were selected for their adjacency, because they register voters by political party, and importantly, because they maintain accessible, high quality, voter registration records. Using first name, last name, and day, month, and year of birth, we identified migrants in the four-year time span from 2004–2008 who moved outside their zip codes but either stayed within the state or moved to adjacent states (e.g., Oregon to California; California to Nevada; Nevada to Oregon).² Utilizing names and complete birth dates in this manner amounts to a conservative matching procedure that helps us avoid false positives. We examined the four year period knowing that many migrants do not re-surface on the registration rolls until a high stimulus event such as a presidential election occurs.

To be sure, migrants identified using these voter files do not represent all migrants. In Table 2, we use the U.S. Census Current Population Survey from March 2008 to describe the total migration flow within counties, across counties within the same state, and across state lines into an adjacent state. There is an impressive volume of migration among the residents of our seven states. Among all migrants, Table 2 reports that half to two-thirds are moving within counties. The percentage migrating across county lines, but within the state, varies from just 1 percent in Nevada to 25 percent in Maryland. The share of migrants moving from outside the state is lowest in California (8 percent), and highest in Delaware (30 percent). Of those crossing state lines, substantial shares of Nevada's and Oregon's migrant flow originate from California—at 51 percent and 21 percent respectively (see Table 2 upper right). About 39 percent of California's out-of-state migration is from Oregon, and 7 percent from Nevada. Among the Eastern states, New Jersey receives about 16 percent of its cross-state migrants from Pennsylvania, while Pennsylvania receives about 48 percent of its cross-state migrants

²At this point a question arises as to whether we should evaluate individual movement, or household movement, since many voters move together with family members (e.g., spouses, adult children), as a part of a household unit, not as individuals, suggesting clustering or dependence across individual observations. But after estimating alternative models, it quickly became clear that with the large number of cases in this research there was no substantively significant difference in estimates resulting from using households as observations, or from clustering standard errors by household. We therefore present straightforward models of individual movement, although the alternatives are available.

State	Migrant		Type of]	Move			Migrant	s from out	of state	
	% of	% across	% across	% from	% from	% from	% from	% from		% from
	Population	county	county	state	abroad	CA	NV	OR		other
California	11	67	19	8	9		7	Ю		06
Nevada	14	83	1	15	1	51		4		45
Oregon	16	59	23	16	7	21	~			72
						%from	% from	% from	% from	% from
						Ŋ	MD	PA	DE	other
New Jersey	8	<u>66</u>	15	15	4	l	С	12	*	85
Maryland	6	51	25	23	-	С		11	*	86
Pennsylvania	6	56	22	21		16	10	I	*	74
Delaware	8	63	ß	30	2	11	~	48	I	34
Universe: Adults	at least 18 years of	f age.								
Source: U.S. Cens	us Bureau, Curren	tt Population S	urvey, 2008 M	arch Suppler	nent					
* CPS sample doe	s not have any res	pondents in th	iis category.							

Table 2: Migration, by State and Type of Move, 2008

3 DATA AND METHODS

from Delaware, and a far smaller 12 percent from New Jersey. Maryland, for its part, receives very few migrants from New Jersey (3 percent), but does receive 10 percent of its out-of-state flow from Pennsylvania and 7 percent from Delaware. Consistent with findings from classic migration studies, the bulk of moves are quite local in nature (Long, 1988; Cadwallader, 1992).

In Table 3, we present the summary information for in-state migration from 2004 to 2008 that we gleaned from the voter files. To gauge the relative size of these populations, we compute their percentage of the total registered voter population in 2008. For instance, the total number of migrants moving within California but to a different zip code was 12.2 percent of the total number of 2008 registered voter population. Of that group, about 32 percent were Republicans, 43 percent were Democrats, and 26 percent were Independent or unaffiliated with any political party. The largest migratory population as a share of registered voters was in Oregon, at 12.9 percent. The smallest was in Delaware, at 6.5 percent. Generally, Democrats are a larger share of migrants as well as a larger share of registrants.³ Notably when Republicans move, they are more likely than Democrats to leave a county or a state entirely.

The migrants identified from the voter files amount to 20–35 percent of the total in-state migrants estimated by the annual U.S. Census CPS annual migration studies (*U.S. Census Bureau*, 2008). Since we rely only on voter registration lists, our data do not represent all migrants. Instead, our subset of migrants is likely more politically interested and active, as indicated by their rapid re-registration upon relocation. These data limitations are coupled with the important advantage that party registration and critical geographic information on the migrant's origin and destination are available in the voter files. The geographic identifiers allow us to merge in other relevant information on the partisan composition and the sociodemographic makeup of these areas. The Census CPS studies are valuable, but contain no political information (Schachter, 2001). Similarly, housing surveys that track residential mobility rarely include political information, and as even their lead investigators admit, also suffer from issues related to self-reporting (Taylor and Morin, 2008). Hence, while these other sources provide information on migrants, they would not allow us to examine the effect of migration on America's political landscape.

³The principal exception is New Jersey where a peculiar registration law encourages voters to register as unaffiliated but then declare a political party once they vote in their first primary election.

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	Total Across Zips within State	Across County within State	Across State
California, Total 2008 Voters: 15,828,265			
Total Migrants (% 2008 Registered Voters) Republican (% migrants) Democrat (% migrants) Unaffiliated/Independent (% migrants)	1,937,147 (12.2) 611,730 (31.6) 831,032 (42.9) 504,385 (26.0)	632,944 (4.0) 200,010 (31.6) 266,133 (42.0) 166,801 (26.4)	107,824 (0.7) 39,620 (36.7) 39,535 (36.7) 28,669 (26.6)
Delaware, Total 2008 Voters: 580,860			
Total Migrants (% 2008 Registered Voters) Republican (% migrants) Democrat (% migrants) Unaffiliated/Independent (% migrants)	38,023 (6.5) 12,177 (32.0) 17,247 (45.4) 8,599 (22.6)	5,780 (1.0) 1,965 (34.0) 2,513 (43.5) 1,302 (22.5)	42,647 (7.3) 15,413 (36.1) 17,498 (41.0) 9,736 (22.8)
Maryland, Total 2008 Voters: 3,202,481			
Total Migrants (% 2008 Registered Voters) Republican (% migrants) Democrat (% migrants) Unaffiliated/Independent (% migrants)	387,829 (12.1) 105,414 (27.2) 212,860 (54.9) 69,555 (17.9)	144,186 (4.5) 39,831 (27.6) 77,130 (53.5) 27,225 (18.9)	74,238 (2.3) 27,141 (36.6) 32,837 (44.2) 14,260 (19.2)
New Jersey, Total 2008 Voters: 4,986,947			
Total Migrants (% 2008 Registered Voters) Republican (% migrants) Democrat (% migrants) Unaffiliated/Independent (% migrants)	362,043 (7.3) 51,896 (14.3) 72,559 (20.0) 237,588 (65.6)	140,783 (2.8) 20,083 (14.3) 26,880 (19.1) 93,820 (66.6)	73,173 (1.5) 10,617 (14.5) 11,874 (16.2) 50,682 (69.3)
Nevada, Total 2008 Voters: 1,416,965			
Total Migrants (% 2008 Registered Voters) Republican (% migrants) Democrat (% migrants) Unaffiliated/Independent (% migrants)	173,476 (12.2) 63,531 (36.6) 71,103 (41.0) 38,842 (22.4)	11,863 (0.8) 5,808 (49.0) 3,703 (31.2) 2,352 (19.8)	26,887 (1.9) 11,248 (41.8) 10,181 (37.9) 5,458 (20.3)
Oregon, Total 2008 Voters: 2,586,966			
Total Migrants (% 2008 Registered Voters) Republican (% migrants) Democrat (% migrants) Unaffiliated/Independent (% migrants)	332,653 (12.9) 106,332 (32.0) 126,493 (38.0) 99,828 (30.0)	109,538 (4.2) 35,534 (32.4) 41,892 (38.2) 32,112 (29.3)	24,842 (1.0) 7,843 (31.6) 9,692 (39.0) 7,307 (29.4)
Pennsylvania, Total 2008 Voters: 8,422,504			
Total Migrants (% 2008 Registered Voters) Republican (% migrants) Democrat (% migrants) Unaffiliated/Independent (% migrants)	561,760 (6.7) 180,706 (32.2) 288,753 (51.4) 92,301 (16.4)	221,093 (2.6) 78,970 (35.7) 101,354 (45.8) 40,769 (18.4)	139,806 (1.7) 50,568 (36.2) 61,889 (44.3) 27,349 (19.6)

Table 3: Number and Political Party of Migrants, by Type of Move, 2004–2008

Source: State Voter files, 2004, 2008.

4 Movement Patterns

4.1 Transition Matrices

We now proceed to an examination of the extent to which a partisan gap actually appears in the residential destination choices of migrants. Figures 1 and 2 present transition matrices for the migration from 2004 to 2008. The units shown on the horizontal and vertical axes are categories of partisan spread, where spread is defined as the difference between the percentage registered Republican and the percentage registered Democratic. Positive values indicate a higher percentage of Republicans while negative values indicate a higher percentage of Democrats. On the horizontal axis, we have the partisan spread for 2008 while the vertical axis displays the spread for 2004. Each migrant falls into one of these ranges in 2004 and possibly a different range after they relocate in 2008. The legends to the right of the figures show that as more voters fall into particular cells, the shading in that box darkens. The boxes on the 45 degree line in the plot represent moves of little to no change in partisan leaning of the relocation site. In the most extreme geographic sorting scenario, the upper left and lower right corners of these graphs would be darkly shaded, showing a tendency for partisans residing in politically adverse locations to move to far more friendly ones. But, this pattern is absent. Instead, movement is less extreme and more gradual.

Figure 1 shows the transition matrices for moves of less than 10 miles while Figure 2 displays the data for moves in excess of 150 miles. We separated the data by distance of move because distance seems to be a good proxy for defining various types of moves that are likely to be characterized by different motivations, logistics, and choices. Long distance moves are often precipitated by a job change or a significant family event such as marriage or death of a relative. On the other hand, local moves occur more frequently and for more ordinary reasons such as safety, a desire for a new house, or wanting to move into a specific school district. We would expect to see differences between Figures 1 and 2, and this expectation is borne our in the transition matrices. For local moves, there is a stronger adherence toward movements near the status quo as indicated by the distinct clustering around the 45 degree line. Cells to the right of the line indicate movement to more Republican friendly areas while cells to the left of the line represent movement toward more Democratic areas. For Democrats, cells







Figure 2: Transition Matrices for Moves of greater than 150 miles

4 MOVEMENT PATTERNS

to the left of the diagonal indicate a propensity to sort, while cells to the right indicate mixing. For the Republican graphs, the reverse is true. More drastic changes are observed at longer distances than shorter distances, but in both instances, when large changes are observed, they can be attributed more to Democrats than Republicans. Lastly, we note that these five percentage point blocks *understate* the extent of change because significant movement occurs within five percentage points. Moreover, at both distances, Democrats tend to be spread out more evenly from very friendly locations to inhospitable turf while Republicans appear to favor copartisan settlement a bit more.

4.2 Urban Movement

Another notable difference between Democrats and Republicans is apparent when we examine movement in and out of urban locations. In general, Democrats prefer urban locations more than Republicans. As an example, Figure 3 shows migration in and out of Portland, Oregon. The top map displays the movement of Democrats. The bottom map shows Republican movement. The pattern that is most striking is that migration to Portland from other locations in Oregon is dominated by Democratic registrants. There is some movement into Portland by Republicans, but the vast majority of the movement into Portland is by Democrats. On the other hand, the bottom figure shows that Republicans are moving out of the city in large numbers. This is just one example but illustrative of geographic sorting where migration to a particular area is favored by one party, and migration away from that same location is dominated by the other party. Although we have displayed the data graphically for just one city, this pattern is evident in many other cities in our data. Simply, Democrats and Republicans are not exhibiting either random or similar migration patterns. Democrats prefer the cities more than Republicans. We also note that we may additionally be observing a type of "partisan attraction" since Portland (and many large cities) has a high concentration of Democrats. Democrats may be perpetuating their dominance by either attracting more Democratic voters or converting those who live there into more habitual Democratic ways of thinking.





5 Partisan Patterns in Residential Relocation

The patterns we have noted thus far are interesting but do not speak to the roots of the variation. People are moving, and potentially altering the political landscape in the process but we are unsure of whether the movement is linked to political factors, controlling for the usual social and economic variables known to be associated with relocation. To untangle these complex relationships and to separate the effects of partisan preferences from salient factors such as upward mobility, we turn to a multivariate analysis.

Table 4 shows the results from a set of hierarchical linear models where our dependent variable measures the change in partisan spread between the origin and the destination.⁴ Our hierarchical linear model is a three-level model where individuals (level 1) are nested in zip codes (level 2), which are nested in states (level 3). We employ a varying intercepts model where the intercept is allowed to vary by zip code as well as by state.⁵ Variation by zip code allows us to take zip code characteristics such a population size into account. Some of our zip codes are far more densely populated than others, so this is one way to incorporate that variance. We are also able to allow state-level differences such as unique registration laws, electoral climate, and taxation schemes to influence the results. While our main interest is in individuals and the change that the individual experiences from a specific move, we acknowledge that indicators of place also provide relevant and useful information, and can be included in a hierarchical linear model with multiple levels.

Our independent variables include measures of party affiliation. "Republican" and "Democrat" are dichotomous variables that indicate that the individual was registered with that party before the

⁴Our dependent variable takes on values from 1 to 16. To determine the value, we first compute the change in the spread between Republican and Democratic registration percentages between the origin and the destination of the move. The spread is defined as the difference between Republican and Democratic registration rates. This value is calculated for both the destination and origin. We then compare these two values to one another to determine if the change in the spread from the origin to the destination favors the Republicans or the Democrats. If this value is positive, then the change is in favor of the Republicans. A negative value indicates that the spread has moved toward the Democrats favor. Next, we place these values in one of 16 categories. If the change in spread is in favor of the Democrats favor, then the change is given 2. The other categories are 3 (Democrat favor between 20-40), 4 (Democrat favor between 14 and 20), 5 (Democrat favor between 8 and 14), 6 (Democrat favor between 4 and 8), 7 (Democrat favor between 2 and 4), 8 (Democrat favor between 0 and 2), and so on to 16 in a symmetric fashion favoring the Republicans. So, as the dependent variable increases, the change moves in direction of the Republicans. We create this ordinal variable so that every move on its scale is a substantively significant move from a political viewpoint.

⁵Our model includes an intercept (that may vary by zip code and state), coefficients for the level-1 independent variables, and a stochastic term ($Y_{ijk} = \beta_{0jk} + \beta_p X_{pi} + r_{ijk}$, where the indices *i*, *j*, and *k* denote individuals, zip codes, and states respectively).

move and re-registered with that same party after the move. We also include dichotomous variables for party switchers, both switches from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party and vice versa.⁶ In addition to these variables that measure partisan registration, our other independent variables tap the characteristics of location. The change in the percent white variable measures the change in the percentage of the non-Hispanic white population between the destination and the origin locations. A positive value indicates that the destination has a higher percentage of non-Hispanic whites than the origin location. We have a similar variable for the percentage of blacks, the percentage of elderly, the median age, the population density, the median income, and the number of square miles of parks per capita. To calculate this last variable, we used a Geographic Information System (GIS) to measure the extent of green space available within a radius of three miles of both origin and destination locales, gauging the total square mileage of park land.

For geographic sorting to be occurring, we should see evidence that Republicans move to areas that are more favorable to Republicans than the locale from which they moved. Similarly, Democrats should migrate toward areas that are more favorable to Democrats. To examine whether there is evidence of this phenomenon, we separated the data into 4 subsets: moves of under 10 miles; moves between 10–50 miles; moves between 50–150 miles; and moves of greater than 150 miles. We separated the data in this fashion to examine whether the characteristics of different types of moves might exert unique influences on migration patterns. Such a hypothesis would seem fitting since local movers (< 10 miles) are qualitatively distinct in a number of important respects from migrants relocating from farther flung locations. The selectivity of migration operates differently across distance, generating flows that are distinct by information levels, income, and motivations for relocation.

As we expected, and consistent with past migration research, factors such as racial composition, income, population density, and age all display a consistent relationship with destination choices. As we had mentioned earlier, the roots of migration decisions usually do not lie in partisanship but may lie in other characteristics of the destination, perhaps the racial composition, the population density,

⁶These types of party switches are more common than one might think largely because individuals do not commonly reregister with a different party at their place of residence if their official registration does not preclude them from casting a ballot for the candidate of their choice. Migrating and the necessity to re-register, however, lessens the cost of registering with their favored party or new allegiance. In this way, migration offers a voter an opportunity to reveal updated and more true party preferences that have evolved over time.

	< 10 miles	10–50 miles	50–150 miles	150+ miles
Intercept	8.360*	8.297*	7.789*	8.020*
Intercept	(0.039)	(0.039)	(0.094)	(0.194)
Age	0.030*	0.052*	0.116*	0.127*
0	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.004)
Republican	0.227*	0.308*	0.410*	0.633*
1	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.013)	(0.017)
Democrat	-0.054*	-0.065*	-0.077*	-0.103*
	(0.004)	(0.006)	(0.012)	(0.015)
Republican Switch	0.105*	0.208*	0.317*	0.523*
	(0.014)	(0.016)	(0.030)	(0.037)
Democrat Switch	-0.039*	-0.033*	-0.003	0.012
	(0.012)	(0.015)	(0.027)	(0.032)
Percent White Change	0.063*	0.078*	0.083*	0.060*
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.001)
Percent Black Change	-0.061*	-0.048*	-0.030*	-0.065*
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Percent Elderly Change	0.148^{*}	0.227*	0.321*	0.396*
	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Median Age Change	-0.070*	-0.162*	-0.215*	-0.229*
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Density Change	-0.045*	-0.137*	-0.140*	-0.119*
	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Median Income Change	0.611*	0.461*	0.302*	0.275*
(per \$10K)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.004)
Park miles per capita Change	-0.003	0.010*	0.010*	0.004*
(per 100 sq. miles)	(0.013)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.002)
N (level-1)	1,654,093	1,318,359	350,698	251,010
N (level-2)	4,113	4,698	4,419	3,650
N (level-3)	7	7	7	6
AIC	7,346,594	6,278,671	1,734,777	1,270,482
Log-Likelihood	-3,673,281	-3,139,320	-867,373	-635,225

Table 4: Influences on Migration. Dependent Variable is change in partisan spread between origin and destination. Results separated by distance of move.

Hierarchical Linear Model

Positive values indicate that the partisan spread changes in favor of Republicans.

Negative values indicate that the partisan spread changes in favor of Democrats.

Standard errors in parentheses.

 $^*p < 0.05$

5 PARTISAN PATTERNS IN RESIDENTIAL RELOCATION

the affluence, or the preference for green space. As we can see, there is a strong tendency for individuals to move toward neighborhoods that are more white, less black, less dense, and have higher incomes. These are not surprising findings since many view migration to be a form of upward mobility (Sampson and Sharkey, 2008). There is some variation in the coefficients as the distance of the move changes though the direction of the coefficients remains constant and the variation exposes some distinct patterns. In particular, while moves in each of the distance ranges in Table 4 are related to upward mobility, as measured by change in median income, this relationship is more pronounced for moves involving shorter distances. Possibly, this is because local movers have substantial information about their destination options, and are primarily concerned about neighborhood quality and housing. They often cite housing characteristics, specifically the inadequacy of their current housing, as their reason for moving to a new, but nearby location.

These monotonic patterns across migration distances also appear in the partisanship variables. Unlike the variables that measure forms of upward mobility, we were less certain that a relationship might exist for the partisanship variables. Since these other characteristics of destination choices may be associated with partisanship, we also wondered if the change in political climate would have any remaining association with partisanship after all of these other factors have been controlled and included.⁷ This is our central query, and the answer to this question was not clear or obvious.

The models indicate that one's party preference is significant even after these other effects are taken into account, suggesting that partisan sorting does occur for apparently *political* reasons. Specifically, Republican migrants show a preference for moving to areas that are even more Republican, and this tendency increases monotonically as the distance of move increases. Democrats display a similar preference for their own, though the tendency is not as strong as it is for Republicans. This may be an artifact of the high volume of urban flight from lopsided Democratic cities into more Republican areas. The same tendency toward one's own party is also evident among party switchers, and again, more so for Republicans than Democrats.

⁷It is surely possible that our partisanship variables are capturing the effect from variables that remain omitted from the model. These types of nuances are always present in these types of models since the models themselves are unable to establish a causal link. All the same, these models offer credible, if not definitive, evidence of particular claims.

Interestingly, several of the variables have coefficients that either monotonically increase or monotonically decrease as the distance of the move increases. For median age, median income, and all of the partisanship variables, the coefficients increase in magnitude as the distance of the move increases. The increasing magnitude in the coefficients makes sense since the number of possible destination choices is much larger if one is moving more than 150 miles versus moving within a 10 mile radius. There are simply more choices, so if one wants to move to a Republican area, one has a wide array of choices that can be maximized. Since one would expect coefficients to increase, the pattern for the median income variable is particularly striking since it is decreasing with distance. This pattern thus speaks strongly to the idea of an informational effect. Local movers have more information about their destination, and those moves are more about upward mobility as the local population sorts and re-sorts itself.

6 Discussion

We have long been aware that differences in the degree of partisan concentration exist across the national landscape. But, we were unsure whether migration patterns contributed to and exacerbate these partisan differences. Here, we have shown that the relocation patterns of a significant subset of the population exhibit geographic sorting. We have also provided evidence that partisan considerations are a part of a migrant's decision process in selecting a relocation destination. As well, variables that are associated with partisanship are part of the decision process. While changing the landscape may not be a fast process, if these patterns hold over time, the change may be slow, but ongoing and sure.

Certainly, migration is never only about politics, or even principally about it. We hypothesized and our data contained evidence that jobs and family concerns remain the most important factors in the migration decision. Nonetheless, once the major decisions about relocation have been made, that a move is going to occur, that it will be to this state, to this metro area, and to this county, then more micro decisions are made about specific neighborhoods, streets, and dwellings. At this level, the remaining potential locales often still sport a significant amount of partisan variation. And, it is at this

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point that considerations may be more proximate to political values, and where partisanship may play a more prominent role in the decision process. Whether the role of partisanship is central or ancillary, if it is part of the decision process, it has the potential to recast the political landscape of the United States. Moreover, if partisan considerations are injected at this final stage of choosing a destination, then they are highly consequential even if they were not the primary factors fueling the move.

Our transition matrices demonstrated that the bulk of movement occurs within that subset of locations that are attractive to movers of both partisan persuasions, possibly for their economic vitality. The most Republican locations are often rural areas where the employment prospects are limited while heavily lopsided Democratic locations, situated mainly in big cities, offer little economic opportunity, or are plagued by social problems that many residents would like to leave behind. Accordingly, geographic sorting, to the extent that it is occurring, is confined and constrained by job prospects—perhaps why large streams of Democrats continue to flee blighted areas for better opportunity in outlying locations. The sustained outward growth of metropolitan areas is the consequence of these combined flows from both rural and urban areas. It is in suburban areas where political competition is at its height that changes, even small ones, are most consequential and salient. Viewed from the standpoint of the narrowed range of feasible destinations, a one or two point gap in the party leaning of destinations is substantively wide, particularly when compounded over a generation.

We do note that many movers each year are relocating among populations that are less politically agreeable than the ones they left behind. A large proportion of this flow can be attributed to a general flight from urban areas, which affects Democrats more than Republicans. Not all partisans exhibit the same tendency to sort geographically. At the same time, our analysis indicates that geographic sorting is a significant effect even after a whole host of pertinent other factors had been taken into account for both Republicans and Democrats even if not for all Republicans and Democrats. Surely, not every migrant sorts, but a significant proportion do.

Although we have gauged these movements over a short period of time, our study is notable as the first to demonstrate geographic sorting effects over any time period. We do not know what impact the observed patterns have on public opinion, or the propensity for mass opinion to polarize. Apparently policy preference and political ideology are increasingly lining up with political party identification,

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thereby augmenting partisan intensity at many levels of political life, heightening partisan commitment and opinion polarization (Levendusky, 2009; Fiorina and Abrams, 2008).

We conclude with a familiar call for continuing work to be done on the relocation paths of nonvoters, whose patterns of resettlement may reflect greater partisan mixing than it does among voters. Analyzing relocation data at granular scales below the zip code would be useful to examine effect sizes—to see how much larger the partisan gap between alternative destinations might be using smaller units of observation. As well, an examination of state-level variation is important and relevant. Certainly it is possible that some states show wider partisan gaps at the destination locales because of variation in density, racial diversity, unique registration laws, open versus closed primaries, and the like. Movers to larger metropolitan areas in these states will find a far broader diversity of alternative destinations to choose from, in both socioeconomic and political terms. The political parties in these states are probably also more ideologically diverse, creating a greater distance between conservative and liberal poles than likely exists in reputedly moderate states such as Delaware or Nevada. The potential for partisan discrimination among neighborhoods may be far easier in some places than in others.

The positive news is that, in an economically robust, substantially free nation, we do see considerable movement of people across states and neighborhoods in search of better lives for themselves and their families. Economic upward mobility is still the leading source of migration flows in the United States. Migration and resettlement is never easy, however, imposing financial and psychological costs. It appears that upon resettlement, Republican migrants find themselves more sorted than before the move while Democratic migrants are also sorting, but less frequently. While these patterns are significant, they are not overwhelming. Many other factors are also considered. But, a significant effect, even a small one, if it persists over time, will stamp a distinct imprint upon the political landscape and perhaps also affect its citizens and their outlook.

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