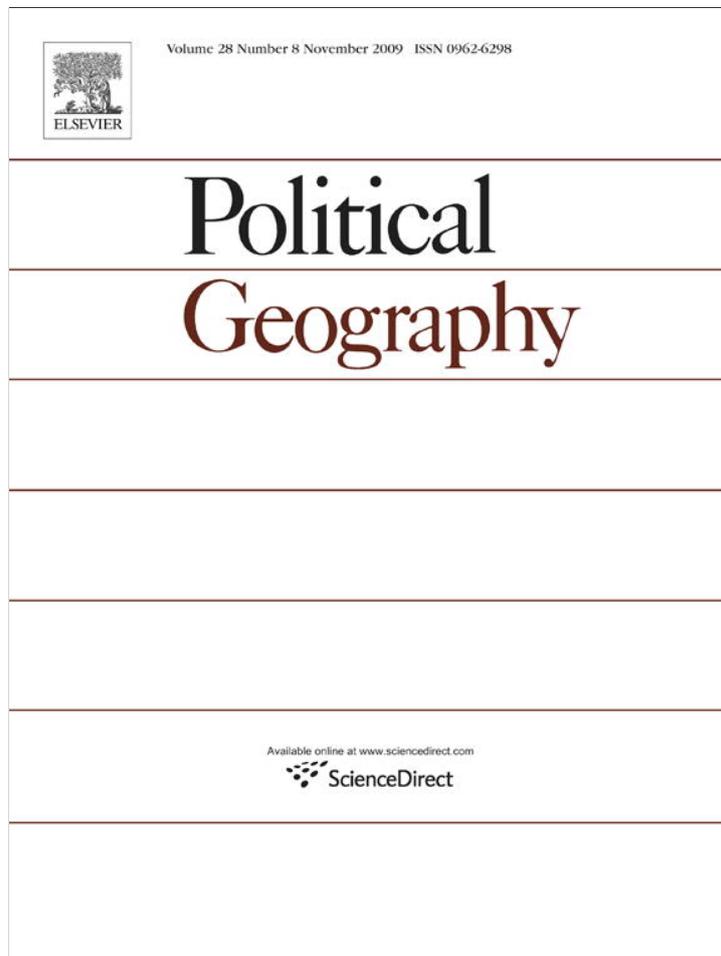


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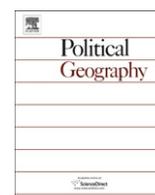
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Probing the reds and blues: Sectionalism and voter location in the 2000 and 2004 U. S. presidential elections

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The election outcomes of a place hinge largely on what is within its political boundaries: economic, social, cultural, and other compositional factors facing voters. Yet, it is also important to investigate geographic context, both within and between places. This study presents renewed emphasis on two geographic factors that relate to electoral outcomes while controlling for compositional attributes: sectional distinctions and population density. Within different regions of the United States and across different locations (urban, suburban, and rural residents), there exist notable differences in presidential voting. Using survey and county-level data on the 2000 and 2004 U.S. presidential elections, this study evaluates the partisan preferences of voters from a regional perspective, and from a density perspective. The findings demonstrate independent relationships between section and voting, and location and voting. A major consequence of the distinctiveness of section and location in the face of migration effects (as noted by others) is the increased spatial polarization of the electorate's political preferences in these recent presidential contests.

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The 2000 and 2004 presidential elections employed new buzzwords in American politics defining the battle lines of the era: “blue” and “red.” The extremely narrow margin of victory in these two contests placed political observers’ attention squarely on the electoral map of the United States and what it could reveal about the dynamics shaping the fight for the world’s most influential political office. Indeed, between 2000 and 2004, at least at the state-level, the stability of partisan divisions were remarkable because only three states changed allegiances – Iowa and New Mexico switched in favor of Bush and New Hampshire went for Kerry, marking all of New England blue in 2004.

In this study, we move beyond the overly simplistic analytic dualism of red Republican and blue Democratic states in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections. We employ a research design that emphasizes two components of political geography that influence presidential voting behavior: sectionalism and location. First, in the case of sectionalism we partition the United States into five geographic regions that show considerable differences in voter

preferences. Second, we evaluate the electoral significance of location – defined as urban, suburban, and rural settings for voters and measured in terms of population density for county-level analyses. With the expectation that sectionalism and location have independent as well as interdependent effects on presidential vote choice, our study proceeds in the following manner. First, we evaluate the independent relationship between sectionalism and location regarding presidential preferences. Next, we examine whether the relationship between location and presidential vote choice remains when sectionalism is held constant, i.e. examining whether vote choice varies within a region depending on population density. Finally, we assess whether section influences voter preferences irrespective of location – for example, investigating whether rural voters’ preferences vary across regions.

The results of numerous multivariate analyses using individual- and county-level data reveal a consistent pattern: both section and location trend significantly with voter preferences in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections. Generally, the South and Mountains/Plains are markedly more Republican than the Midwest, Pacific Coast, and Northeast sections of the United States. Both across and within these sections, vote choice frequently varies according to location (population density) controlling for relevant correlates such as race and socioeconomic status. Furthermore, sectional differences remain even when

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location is held constant. For instance, compared to rural voters in the Northeast, rural voters in the South are much more likely to vote Republican.

The now-familiar “red and blue” characterization from 2000 and 2004 exists as a trope, reflecting the aggregating effect of state-based presidential election rules through the Electoral College system. But, relying on this dualistic conception of partisan preferences in the United States obfuscates two important geographic and exogenous phenomena: sectional differences reveal themselves across states and location differences exist within states. In short, where voters call home matters. The results below join and sometimes contrast with past research that has also explored political geography and its relationship with election outcomes. By investigating the role of sectional politics, we seek to contribute to an important debate on the changing nature of regional differences in presidential preferences.

Our findings suggest that previous ways of looking at sectional distinctions may not help us understand the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections. For example, Bense's (1984) foundational contribution portrays section as an economically centered dualistic core vs. periphery conception by viewing U.S. sectional conflict between a center (the Northeast and upper Midwest) and the rest. Yet, sectional vote differences can be found in five regions of the United States even after controlling for economic and educational differences between places. And, with respect to location, we extend Morrill, Knopp, and Brown's (2007) bivariate means of contradistinguishing Republican and Democratic counties, which focuses on the location of voters in terms of urban, suburban, and rural, by empirically demonstrating the role of density *ceteris paribus*.

The role of place in American politics

In this section, we discuss several reasons for the relevance of place in election outcomes. First, we note that presidential campaign strategies hinge on variability in state-level competitiveness. Next, we consider some explanations for how geography relates to voter preferences. Then we turn to a discussion of the relevance of sectionalism in shaping voting patterns, noting that realignment theory factors heavily in this approach. Finally, we discuss the recent role of population mobility in contributing to the re-sorting of voters into more politically distinct geographic locations and what this has meant for contemporary presidential politics.

It is too simplistic to state the obvious fact that geography is crucial to understanding election outcomes. In the American case, with its federal system that makes states the decisive unit of analysis for determining who wins the Electoral College and thus the presidency, modern campaigns obsess over targeting finite resources in the so-called battlegrounds where the outcome is decided (Shaw, 2006). Political geography matters because in any given election, there is considerable variability in state-level competitiveness and this fact means that some states are more influential than others are because they can potentially swing in either the Democratic or the Republican direction. For instance, in 2000 and 2004, back-to-back closely contested elections, one state proved decisive in determining the winner: Florida in 2000 and Ohio in 2004. Thus, campaign strategies are inextricably bound to place because the spatial distribution of votes ensures that presidential candidates will focus their efforts (i.e., visits and television advertising) on a subset of pivotal states (Gimpel, Kaufmann, and Pearson-Merkowitz, 2007; Shaw, 1999).

If we take the examples of Florida and Ohio, the two decisive battlegrounds in the 2000 and 2004 contests, respectively, it is apparent that these states are different. Florida, with its remarkable

rate of in-migration from outside the South (Black & Black, 1987), now appears only nominally southern. Over the decades, the massive influx of retirees, Yankees, Cubans, and Latinos from other Caribbean countries, in addition to a changing economy based heavily on service industries (with tourism leading the way), has transformed the politics of the Sunshine State – making it a battleground since 1992. Ohio, on the other hand, is a swing state that looks quite different from Florida. Economic vulnerabilities have not been spatially distributed evenly during the U.S. transition toward post-industrialism (Agnew, 1987a), and the Buckeye State suffered economically for years because of an “old economy” industrial base that has been a net loser in the age of globalization. Declining economic opportunities has led to substantial out-migration, to states such as Florida. Hard times can lead to retrospective voting that punishes the presidential nominee affiliated with the party of an unpopular incumbent (Fiorina, 1981).

Indeed, the characteristics of Iowa, New Hampshire, and New Mexico – the only three states that switched partisan support in the 2004 election make it evident to even the most casual political observer that these states are also different from each other. This fact brings up the second point we want to emphasize, and others have made apparent (see Gimpel & Schuknecht, 2004), place matters because of marked differences in the composition of states' demographic characteristics of residents. To assess the changing culture within a region or state depends on “specific material and demographic changes...within the region” (Mellow, 2008, p. 19). One of the reasons that Florida, Ohio, Iowa, New Hampshire, and New Mexico are so different and yet were swing states in 2000/2004 stems from contrasting combinations of compositional features producing similarly narrow electoral margins. For instance, varying percentages of racial/ethnic groups, occupational groups, religious (or non-religious) groups, and age groups can aggregate into close competition because of offsetting partisan preferences among individuals who comprise these groups.

Nonetheless, if compositional factors fail to account for all the variance in electoral outcomes, some geographic contextual factors must therefore be in play. If one were to interpret a “finding” of geographic context “mattering” to political outcomes as a shortcoming of political science as King (1996) does, then an interdisciplinary approach is warranted. Political geographers have long wrestled with clarifying a generalizable understanding of place as it relates to politics. Agnew synthesizes scholarship on place, to forward a definition that comprises elements in the study of politics and geography beyond the simplistic spatial boundaries of the state or its federalized subdivisions. Place for Agnew (1987b, p. 230) is a structuralist process through and in which “social causes ‘produce’ behavior”. Place comprises three elements: *locale*, a setting for localized social interaction, *location*, the geographic setting in which larger social and economic forces operate, and *sense of place*, the subjectively symbolic and perhaps unique link residents feel with their place.

Our analysis borrows this appreciation for the role of place not as a causal factor understood only *ceteris paribus*, but a channel through which our variable of interest, population density, relates with electoral outcomes in the 2000 and 2004 U.S. presidential elections. Additionally, as Johnston and Pattie (2006) have asserted, the compositional approach is not mutually exclusive to the contextual one, and the analyses that follow use both lenses to explain American electoral outcomes for two important elections.

First, within each state we expect voter location or place-of-residence (Gimpel & Karnes, 2006) to exhibit an independent effect on voter preferences. Shared experiences within similar settings such as an urban, suburban, or rural community produce contextual effects that translate into differences in voter preferences across locations. For example, despite a high rate of poverty in rural

locations, these residents are much more likely to oppose federal assistance than inner city dwellers because the former possess a more limited view of government – and a greater belief in self-reliance (see Gimpel & Karnes, 2006). Thus, consistent socialization patterns in similar locations can vary voter preferences across different locations to the extent that social networks emphasize common viewpoints on a broad range of political issues.

Likewise, because urbanites live in social milieus where diversity, in all its many varieties (racial, ethnic, religious, sexual, occupational, etc.) is prominently on display, it is conceivable that these residents are more likely to self-identify as liberals because tolerance is a way of life as well as an effective coping mechanism when living in such a varied setting. Routine exposure to a variety of people undoubtedly sets in motion a different socialization process than the one present in a rural setting. Although perhaps overstated (see Oliver & Ha, 2007), suburban locales are often the most homogeneous in terms of physical features like the layout of neighborhoods and shopping centers (Gainsborough, 2001; Oliver, 2001) and this relatively high degree of geographic conformity attracts middle-to-high income voters who spatially and politically, live between the more traditional rural way of life and the more diverse urban lifestyle that many suburbanites chose to escape. Variation in the combination of compositional and contextual features that impinge upon residents in these different types of locations results in different presidential preferences.

We can also broaden the scope of place to understand voting behavior in presidential elections. Moving beyond location, with one of its main components being the level of density – going from the city to the suburb to the countryside – there are distinctive political regions or sections of states that exhibit similar voting behavior in presidential elections (see Shelley, Archer, Davidson, and Brunn, 1996). Further, these sections have displayed similar electoral preferences for long historical periods. Two of the most enduring sectional cleavages in American politics are (1) North versus South, sometimes referred to as battlefield sectionalism because the divide crystallized with the Civil War (Black & Black, 2002) and (2) core versus periphery, which distinguishes the more industrialized east from the more agriculturally based southern and western parts of the nation (Bensel, 1984). While we believe there is more lasting evidence for battlefield sectionalism than a core versus periphery divide in American politics, the latter approach still has empirical support (see Mellow & Trubowitz, 2005).

Although they have attracted criticism (e.g., Carmines & Stimson, 1989; Mayhew, 2002), realignment explanations have factored prominently in accounting for sectionalism in American politics. Sectionalism, according to Gimpel and Schuknecht (2004: p. 16), “has usually been understood in straightforward partisan terms, and usually construed regionally, contrasting the states that support Democrats with states that are more evenly matched, or else support Republicans.” Despite its many variants (e.g. Bullock, Hoffman, and Gaddie, 2006; Mayhew, 2002), most realignment approaches attempt to explain sectional differences in American politics. For instance, in prominent accounts of realignment, critical elections give rise to a fundamentally different set of political issues that define partisan eras, altering the balance of political competition in sections of the United States (Burnham, 1970; Key, 1955). Realignments appear to manifest nationally when looking superficially at presidential election outcomes, but they are better understood as an aggregation of sectional and parochial reactions to crises or issues (Burnham, 1982).

Issues figure prominently in realignment explanations because some are salient and divisive enough to alter existing voter alignments (Carmines & Stimson, 1989; Sundquist, 1983). Major historical events leave lasting political imprints that vary by region in the United States. The historical legacy of slavery and the Civil War

continues to reverberate in the racial division of American politics. Many scholars contend that the 1896 election reinforced the sectional cleavage between the North and South (but see Bartels, 1998), with the northern states becoming more Republican and the southern states remaining solidly Democratic (Black & Black, 1992; Miller & Schofield, 2003). In this historical period between 1896 and 1932, racial liberals aligned with the northern Republican Party whereas racial conservatives disproportionately remained in the Democratic Party of the old Confederate states. Similarly, the next crisis of the Great Depression and its resulting partisan realignment in the 1930s has left an enduring class division in voting behavior. The Democrats used trade liberalization policy as a way to unite its regional factions during its dominance in the mid 20th century.

In many ways, the two major parties have “completely reversed their traditional regional bases” because of changes in how voters within regions react to crises and issues (Mellow, 2008, p. 35). By the 2000 presidential election, those states that were Democratic in 1896 are more likely to be Republican in 2000 and vice versa for states that were Republican in 1896 (Miller & Schofield, 2003). The behavior of political elites, candidates and party activists, essentially had the effect of rotating the issue positions of the parties (Miller & Schofield, 2003; Schofield, Miller, and Martin, 2003). The once racially and economically conservative southern Democratic Party maintains strongholds in the Northeast and Pacific Coast, where it is viewed as a liberal party on racial and economic issues. By contrast, the once almost entirely northern Republican Party, known for being racially progressive and economically protectionist, attracts support in the racially and economically conservative South and interior West (Webster, 1989). So, although the same two parties have dominated American politics since the Civil War, changes in the coalitions of groups that support Democrats and Republicans (Petrocik, 1981) means that the parties now stand for different things. Sundquist (1983, p. 10) reminds us that while realignments are frequently seen as nationalized transformations, the “patterns of political organization and competition have been profoundly different” between section. Because of different mixtures of compositional, contextual, and historical effects, we expect that certain regions of the United States exhibit distinguishable presidential voting patterns.

Finally, an explanation for the stark electoral differences in varying shades of red and blue in 2000 and 2004 is that population mobility has served to spatially polarize voter preferences. Lacking a temporal element and precise mobility measures, the data below cannot empirically test this polarization theory that others have elucidated, but the correlation between location and vote choice supports the argument that spatial polarization of the electorate enables elite polarization through elections. As Gimpel and Schuknecht (2004) and others have pointed out (see also Bishop, 2004; Oppenheimer, 2005), migration patterns are anything but random. Americans increasingly move into locations compatible with their demographic and political preferences. A consequence of these migratory patterns is greater spatial homogeneity, which in turn reinforces demographic and political similarities in shared locations (e.g., rural areas) and at the same time magnifies political differences across places (e.g., rural versus urban locations, and the South versus the Northeast). By probing the reds and blues in the context of section and location while controlling for compositional factors, we can explicitly test the role of place in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections.

Data and methods

We rely on exit polls and county-level data to evaluate the effects of section and location on voting behavior in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections. The individual-level data are from the

2000 Voter News Service (VNS) and the 2004 National Election Pool (NEP). These data are confined to Election Day voters and the sample sizes for these polls are large (over 12,000 cases per election), giving us confidence in their representative accuracy of the entire voting public. It bears reminding that exit poll and survey data suffer in varying degrees from respondent memory and social desirability biases, interviewer effects, and other concerns voiced elsewhere (see Biemer et al., 2003, for a specific evaluation of the exit polls), but there is little reason to suspect that these issues would substantially influence the inferences drawn below. In the individual- and county-level analyses, the respective dependent variables are Republican presidential vote choice (1 = Republican vote, 0 = Democratic vote) and the Republican two-party share of county-level returns.

The key explanatory variables are measures of section and location. With respect to section, we eschew a simple North/South dichotomy in favor of a five-region division of the United States used by Black and Black (2007) in their recent work, *Divided America: The Ferocious Power Struggle in American Politics*. It is evident from their longitudinal analyses of the American electorate spanning the last half century (1950s–2004), that there are marked compositional and contextual differences in these five sections of the United States: (1) the South (2) the Mountains/Plains (3) the Midwest (4) the Pacific Coast and (5) the Northeast. The mixture of

historical, contextual, and compositional components (the distribution and electoral effects of race/ethnicity, ideology, religion, gender, and party) in these five sections translates into notable differences in voting behavior (Fig. 1).

The South and Mountains/Plains are reliably Republican whereas the Pacific Coast and Northeast are loyally Democratic in 2000 and 2004. The Midwest, on the other hand, constitutes an electoral battleground, revealing a close split in the two-party vote. Because Black and Black (2007) did not employ multivariate analyses, this project provides an opportunity to extend their findings to see if these sectional distinctions have a significant effect on vote choice when controlling for other factors. In addition, we are interested in finding out if the strength of partisan support according to section holds when controlling for other factors. In our models, we designate the Northeast as the omitted variable and include dummies for South, Mountains/Plains, Midwest, and Pacific Coast. Based on Black and Black's findings we expect that voters residing in the Republican strongholds (South and Mountains/Plains) should be significantly more likely to vote Republican than voters living in the Northeast.

The second independent variable of interest is location. With the survey data, we use a three-part classification scheme that separates voters according to whether they reside in an urban, suburban, or rural community. Rather than rely on self-reporting,

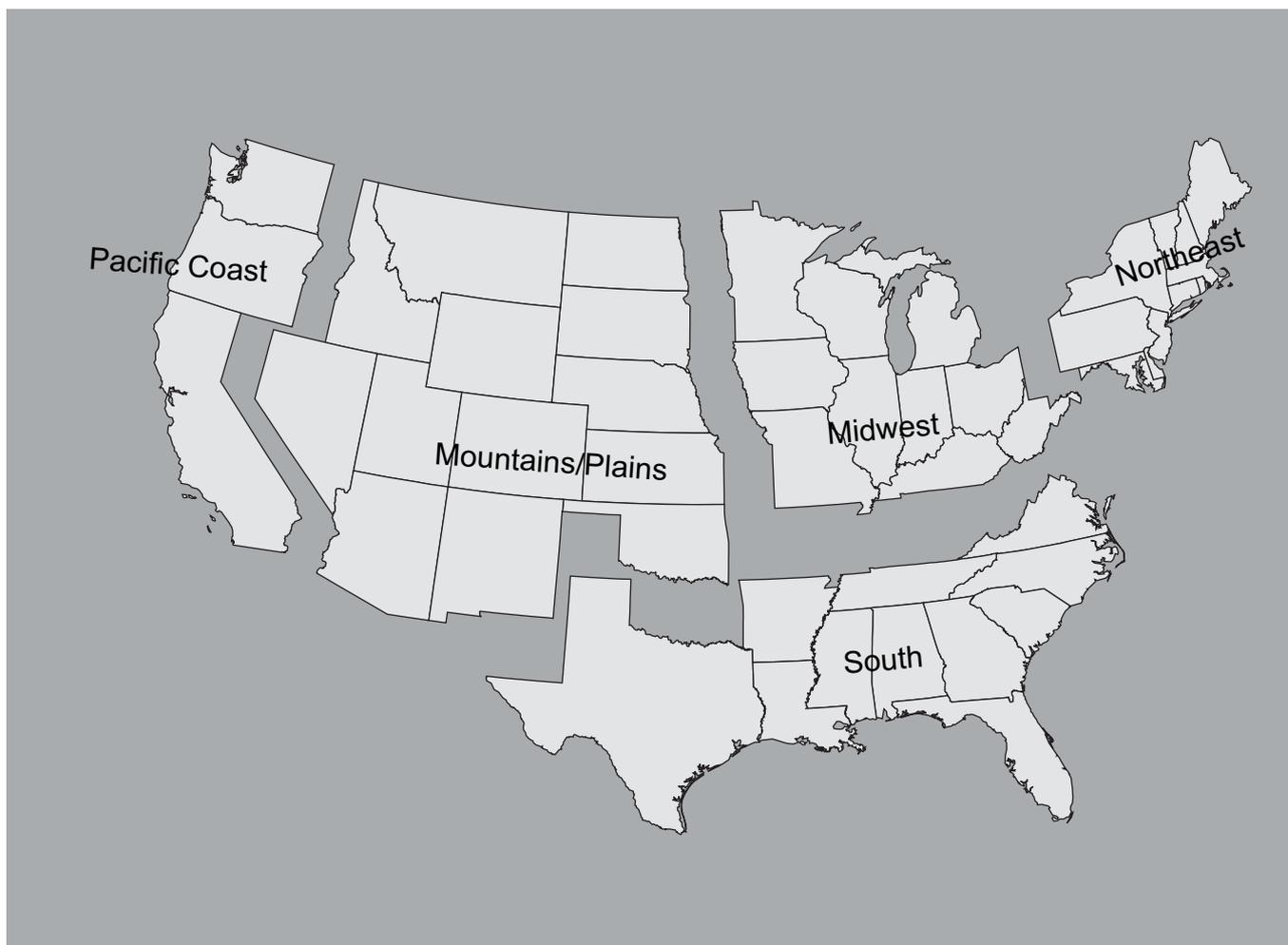


Fig. 1. Black and Black (2007) Sections of United States. Note: the South is: AL, AR, FL, GA, LA, MS, NC, SC, TN, TX, and VA; the Mountains/plains is: AZ, CO, ID, KS, MT, NE, NV, NM, ND, OK, SD, UT, and WY; the Midwest is: IL, IN, IA, KY, MI, MN, MO, OH, WV, and WI; the Pacific Coast is: CA, OR, and WA; the Northeast is: CT, DE, DC, ME, MD, MA, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, and VT. AK and HI omitted.

the exit pollsters code respondents based on precinct zip codes' affiliation with a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). The variable's three values indicate either urban (precinct within an MSA-designated city exceeding 50,000 people), suburban (adjacent to but not within a city exceeding 50,000 people), or rural. This designation of location generally captures population density and we hypothesize that the more dense the location the lower the support for the Republican presidential candidate. Therefore, we expect that after controlling for other factors, compared to urban voters (the omitted category in the regressions) rural and suburban voters are more likely to vote Republican. We have a purer measure of location in the county-level analyses in the form of population density. It is expected that greater county-level population density negatively associates with the Republican share of the presidential vote.

In the individual-level presidential vote choice models for 2000 and 2004, we use the following control variables: (1) *Party Identification* (1 = Democrat, 2 = Independent/other, 3 = Republican) (2) *Ideology* (1 = Liberal, 2 = Moderate, 3 = Conservative) (3) *Race* (1 = African American, 0 = otherwise) (4) *Gender* (1 = Male, 0 = Female) (5) *Age* (9 categories) (6) *Family Income* (6 categories) and (7) *Religion* (1 = Protestant/other Christian, 0 = otherwise). Similar to the exit poll analyses conducted by Gimpel and Schuknecht (2004), we want to see if section and location show statistically significant effects on vote choice even after controlling for the aforementioned compositional variables. To the extent possible, we have selected county-level control variables that are similar to these individual-level controls.

We use U.S. counties in our aggregate-level analyses because they are the smallest geographic unit for which reliable demographic and political data are available. The criteria for deciding which geographic unit to use include judging their size, mutability, and the prospects for data availability. Regarding size, the smaller the geographic unit measured by population, the better. The use of smaller population units lessens the ecological inference problems that arise when inferring individual-level behavior from aggregate statistics (Kim, Elliot, and Wang, 2003). Unit boundaries should also be stable across time as much as possible to allow researchers to compare results across elections.

Multivariate analysis requires as much nonmissing data for each case on each variable as possible, so data availability is another important criterion. The unit that balances these three elements is the county and county-equivalent units for the continental U.S. (county-equivalents include Louisiana's parishes and some independent cities, largely in Virginia, that are de facto counties). There are political units smaller than counties and county-equivalents for which vote totals are measured, such as wards and precincts. Unfortunately, with few exceptions (King et al., 1997), electoral and demographic data on the entire nation are unavailable for sub-county entities. Additionally, zip codes, legislative and congressional districts, wards, and precincts frequently undergo arbitrary and non-arbitrary boundary changes. Hence, county is the smallest, most static aggregate-level unit for which relevant control variable data can be found in addition to our variables of interest.

Individual-level models and results

For the individual-level results we proceed as follows. First, we present descriptive data on the Republican vote based on region and location within each region. Then we present logistic regressions of the Republican vote with region and location as key explanatory variables. Each region is also analyzed separately to determine if location exhibits a significant effect on vote choice. Next, we present the predicted probabilities from the regression models according to region and voter location. Lastly, we consider whether region exhibits an independent effect on vote choice when

we hold location constant. We proceed in the same manner discussed above – starting with a presentation of descriptive data, multivariate results, and a tabular display of predicted probabilities.

We begin with Table 1, which presents the Republican percentage of the two-party vote according to region and location within each region. In addition, we present the Republican vote in the nation and according to location. Both elections were extremely close at the national level, with Democrat Al Gore outpolling Republican George W. Bush in 2000 by a half percent, and Bush beating Democrat John Kerry by a slightly larger majority in 2004. The variation in the Republican vote according to location is quite revealing of its effect on Republican support in the 2000 and 2004 contests. In both elections, a majority of urban voters supported the Democrat. Suburban voters narrowly favored the Republican and rural residents were firmly in the GOP column, with six out of 10 preferring Bush in both years.

Looking down the columns in Table 1 and focusing on the vote by region, the pronounced Republican advantage in the South and Mountains/Plains is apparent, as is the Democratic strength in the Pacific Coast and Northeast. The Midwest is clearly the sectional battleground, registering 51% and 50% Republican in the 2000 and 2004 elections, respectively. Notice however, the considerable variation in the Republican vote within each region according to voter location. With one exception, voters in the Northeast in 2004, it is always the case that regardless of region, rural voters are the most Republican while urban voters support the GOP the least. In the South and Mountains/Plains, with the exception of urban voters in 2000, all voters, whether urban, suburban, or rural, cast a majority Republican vote. In the Democratic strongholds of the Pacific Coast and Northeast, urban and suburban voters preferred the Democratic candidates in 2000 and 2004. Except for rural voters in the Northeast in 2004, in both sections they preferred the

Table 1

Republican presidential vote by region and voter location within each region of the United States (in percentages).

Region and Location	2000	2004	2000–2004
Nation (100%)	50	52	51
Urban	40	47	44
Suburban	51	53	52
Rural	61	60	61
South (29%)	55	57	56
Urban	47	56	52
Suburban	59	57	58
Rural	66	64	65
Mountains/Plains (10%)	57	61	59
Urban	48	51	50
Suburban	57	62	60
Rural	69	75	72
Midwest (25%)	51	50	51
Urban	38	40	39
Suburban	53	55	54
Rural	62	56	59
Pacific Coast (14%)	45	47	46
Urban	34	46	41
Suburban	48	46	47
Rural	57	58	58
Northeast (22%)	41	44	43
Urban	28	34	31
Suburban	44	49	47
Rural	51	38	47
Total cases	12,241	13,470	25,711

Note: data are from the Voter News Service (VNS) 2000 general election exit poll and the National Election Pool (NEP) 2004 general election exit poll. Data show the Republican percentage of the two-party presidential vote. Data are weighted.

Republican, but GOP support was much stronger among Pacific Coast residents (57% in 2000 and 58% in 2004). Finally, in the Midwest, rural and suburban voters supported the Republican, but urban voters were strongly Democratic in 2000 and 2004.

In Table 2 we turn to multivariate analyses of Republican vote choice in order to see whether section and location exhibit significant effects when controlling for other factors. With the seven control variables included in all of the logistic regressions (but not shown in the table) presented in Table 2, we find evidence that section and location independently influence vote choice in 2000. With voters residing in the Northeast as the base category, voters in every other region are more likely to vote Republican in 2000. Further, in terms of significance and the size of the effect, in keeping with the descriptive findings in Table 1, in descending order the most Republican voters are in the South, the Mountains/Plains, the Midwest, the Pacific Coast, and finally the Northeast. Also, with respect to location, both suburban and rural voters are more supportive of the GOP than urban voters (the omitted category). Moreover, as we expected, rural voters are the most Republican based on the coefficient and level of statistical significance ($p \leq 0.001$). In the national model for 2004, only the South and

Mountains/Plains indicate a statistically significant difference in Republican vote choice compared to Northeast voters. Again though, we find that both suburban and rural voters are more supportive of the GOP than urban voters, with rural voters the most Republican.

We now turn our attention to the models that evaluate the effect of location when region is held constant. In the South, only rural voters are significantly more Republican in their vote choice compared to urban voters. Historically, white rural southerners were the most loyal Democrats (Key, 1949). Likewise, it is the case that rural voters are more Republican than urban voters are in 2000 and 2004 in the Mountains/Plains and Midwest. Rural voters are more Republican in vote choice than are urban voters in the Pacific Coast in 2004 and the Northeast in 2000. Suburban voters are more likely to vote Republican than urban voters in the Mountains/Plains in 2000, the Midwest in 2004, and the Northeast in 2004. Overall, out of a total of 10 cases (each region multiplied by two for the 2000 and 2004 elections) in eight instances rural voters were significantly more likely to vote Republican compared to urban voters. By comparison, there are only three instances out of 10 in which suburban voters were more Republican in their presidential preferences when compared to urban voters.

Table 3 presents the predicted probabilities of voting Republican in the 2000 and 2004 elections, respectively. Holding the control variables from each of the region-specific models from Table 2 at their mean values (and holding the national vote model control variables at their means for the national probabilities), the table displays the Republican vote probability according to a voter's location (urban, suburban, or rural) and region (South, Mountains/Plains, Midwest, Pacific Coast, and Northeast). Moving down the rows it is apparent that the likelihood of voting Republican increases according to location, urban to suburban to rural. Also, within each location Republican probabilities are markedly higher moving from right to left (from Northeast to South). In 2000 and 2004, for voters who reside in the Republican strongholds of the South and Mountains/Plains, the likelihood of voting Republican exceeds 0.5 in every location. In the Midwest, only suburban and rural voters in 2000 were more likely to vote Republican. In the Democratic strongholds of the Pacific Coast and Northeast, with the exception of Pacific Coast rural voters in 2004, regardless of location these voters are more likely to vote Democratic in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections.

Finally, we can view these findings within each location for the two elections. Among urban voters, strong Democratic support outside the South and Mountains/Plains makes the national probability of voting Republican below 0.5. Among suburban voters, the markedly higher GOP support in the South and Mountains/Plains

Table 2
Presidential vote choice regressions for region and voter location within each region of the United States.

	2000	2004	2000–2004
<i>Nation</i>			
South	0.903 (0.088)***	0.619 (0.085)***	0.758 (0.061)***
Mountains/plains	0.506 (0.112)***	0.497 (0.112)***	0.497 (0.079)***
Midwest	0.371 (0.084)**	0.007 (0.083)	0.184 (0.059)**
Pacific coast	0.219 (0.100)*	-0.038 (0.097)	0.087 (0.069)
Suburban voter	0.168 (0.070)*	0.181 (0.066)**	0.182 (0.048)***
Rural voter	0.682 (0.081)***	0.532 (0.086)***	0.615 (0.059)***
Pseudo R ²	0.49	0.51	0.50
N	10,743	11,738	22,481
<i>South</i>			
Suburban voter	0.193 (0.132)	-0.048 (0.127)	0.063 (0.091)
Rural voter	0.918 (0.152)***	0.689 (0.169)***	0.810 (0.110)***
Pseudo R ²	0.51	0.57	0.54
N	3017	3518	6535
<i>Mountains/plains</i>			
Suburban voter	0.498 (0.248)*	0.130 (0.212)	0.264 (0.155)
Rural voter	0.624 (0.203)**	0.916 (0.227)***	0.776 (0.149)***
Pseudo R ²	0.49	0.48	0.48
N	1180	1274	2454
<i>Midwest</i>			
Suburban voter	0.191 (0.141)	0.298 (0.130)*	0.234 (0.094)*
Rural voter	0.834 (0.164)***	0.372 (0.161)*	0.638 (0.114)***
Pseudo R ²	0.47	0.53	0.49
N	2870	3097	5967
<i>Pacific coast</i>			
Suburban voter	-0.008 (0.194)	0.198 (0.186)	0.116 (0.133)
Rural voter	0.366 (0.298)	0.919 (0.262)***	0.722 (0.192)***
Pseudo R ²	0.53	0.52	0.52
N	1302	1368	2670
<i>Northeast</i>			
Suburban voter	0.188 (0.154)	0.295 (0.143)*	0.244 (0.104)*
Rural voter	0.460 (0.185)*	-0.054 (0.237)	0.269 (0.140)
Pseudo R ²	0.45	0.45	0.44
N	2374	2481	4855

Note: logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses (*** $p \leq 0.001$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, * $p \leq 0.05$ two-tailed). Dependent variable is vote for president (1 = Republican, 0 = Democrat). Omitted variables of interest are "Urban Voter" and "Northeast" (for Nation model only). Control variables included in all models, but not shown are: party identification (1 = Democrat, 2 = Independent/Other, 3 = Republican), ideology (1 = Liberal, 2 = Moderate, 3 = Conservative), race (1 = African American, 0 = otherwise), gender (1 = male, 0 = female), age (9 categories), family income (6 categories), and religion (1 = Protestant/Other Christian, 0 = otherwise).

Table 3
Republican presidential vote probabilities for the 2000 and 2004 elections according to voter location within each region of the United States.

	South	Mountains/ plains	Midwest	Pacific coast	Northeast	Nation
<i>2000 Election</i>						
Urban voters	0.50	0.57	0.45	0.36	0.31	0.44
Suburban voters	0.61	0.74	0.54	0.37	0.37	0.52
Rural voters	0.73	0.72	0.67	0.45	0.43	0.62
<i>2004 Election</i>						
Urban voters	0.62	0.64	0.37	0.36	0.32	0.47
Suburban voters	0.63	0.72	0.46	0.43	0.39	0.53
Rural voters	0.76	0.82	0.49	0.61	0.36	0.62

Note: probabilities were derived from the models in Table 2 with all the control variables set at their mean values.

results in slightly greater likelihood of voting Republican nationally. Indeed, with respect to location, suburbia is a presidential battleground in 2000 and 2004. The impressive Republican support among rural voters in the South and Mountains/Plains, coupled with the relatively smaller drop-off in the other regions, makes the national rural vote probability comfortably Republican (0.620 in 2000 and 0.619 in 2004).

Another way to evaluate the effects of sectionalism and location on vote choice is to consider whether there is regional variability in vote choice when location is held constant. Referring back to Table 1, in the 2000 election we see that the sectional pattern of presidential voting within each location holds – urban voters in the South and Mountains/Plains are more Republican than urban voters in the Midwest and the latter are more Republican than urban voters in the Pacific Coast and Northeast. This pattern is only slightly different in 2004. Even when location is held constant, it is evident that region and voter preferences present noteworthy correlations.

Table 4 presents multiple logistic regressions to determine whether region has a significant effect on presidential vote choice when location is held constant. Among urban voters, compared to Northeast voters (the baseline category), only those who reside in the Republican strongholds of the South and Mountains/Plains are more likely to vote Republican in the 2000 and 2004 elections. In the case of suburban voters, change between 2000 and 2004 is evident. In 2000, voters in the Republican strongholds and the Midwest were all more likely to cast Republican ballots as compared to Northeast voters. But in 2004, we have further evidence that the battleground location in American politics is suburbia because only suburban southerners are more likely to vote Republican compared to their Northeast counterparts. Given the previous findings (see Table 3), it is not surprising that there are clear differences in the likelihood that rural residents vote

Republican according to region. In 2004, rural voters in every region outside the Northeast are more likely to vote Republican.

Table 5 presents the predicted Republican vote probabilities from Table 4 for each location according to section for 2000 and 2004. Among urban voters, only among those in the South and Mountains/Plains in 2004 does the Republican vote probability exceed 0.5. The vote probabilities for suburban residents provides further confirmation of their swing voter status, as the overall likelihood of voting Republican centers around the 0.5 mark in 2000 and 2004. The Republican vote probabilities for rural residents provide a stark contrast to the data shown for urban and suburban voters, because, with the exception of rural Northeast voters, rural voters are overwhelmingly partial to voting Republican in 2000 and 2004. When we hold location constant, it allows us to assess the variability in vote choice according to region. Despite large differences in the level of Republican voting depending on the location, within a given location it is clear presidential vote preferences differ meaningfully across region as GOP support declines going from the South and Mountains/Plains to the Midwest to the Pacific Coast and Northeast.

County-level spatial models and results

The individual-level analyses above provide empirical evidence in support of our conclusion that location matters in our understanding of electoral outcomes and the context of population density influences vote choice both nationally and within regions. In terms of both section and location, the individual-level data demonstrate geographic patterns beyond what is predicted by solely compositional factors, like socioeconomic status, race, and ethnicity. To bolster these findings, we also use aggregate-level electoral results. Rather than use exit poll respondents, we can use geographic areas as the unit of analysis (Eagles, 1995) and run analogous models to corroborate our findings with regard to sectionalism and location. Counties embody a balance between population size, static boundaries, and data availability, so we draw parallels between our individual-level models in order to approximate closely the same logic when extrapolating to county-level multivariate analysis.

Fig. 2 depicts the bivariate relationship between population density and Republican two-party vote share in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections among counties within contrasted pairs of the Black and Black (2007)-defined regions (the y-axes measure the mean of 2000 and 2004). The horizontal line bisecting the plot represents the 0.5 line; cases above expressed more support for George W. Bush than Al Gore/John Kerry. Clustering is evident,

Table 4
Presidential vote choice regressions by voter location and according to region of the United States.

	2000	2004	2000–2004
<i>Urban voters by region</i>			
South	0.779 (0.160)***	0.654 (0.153)***	0.714 (0.111)***
Mountains/plains	0.397 (0.183)*	0.423 (0.201)*	0.378 (0.135)**
Midwest	0.300 (0.173)	−0.038 (0.162)	0.123 (0.118)
Pacific coast	0.127 (0.197)	−0.143 (0.171)	−0.012 (0.128)
Pseudo R ²	0.53	0.56	0.54
N	3832	4681	8513
<i>Suburban voters by region</i>			
South	0.777 (0.136)***	0.364 (0.121)**	0.552 (0.089)***
Mountains/plains	0.637 (0.232)**	0.274 (0.171)	0.418 (0.138)**
Midwest	0.290 (0.119)*	0.019 (0.110)	0.132 (0.080)
Pacific coast	0.118 (0.146)	−0.184 (0.137)	−0.049 (0.099)
Pseudo R ²	0.47	0.50	0.48
N	4218	5300	9518
<i>Rural voters by region</i>			
South	1.348 (0.177)***	1.553 (0.257)***	1.375 (0.144)***
Mountains/Plains	0.648 (0.198)**	1.426 (0.271)***	0.995 (0.156)***
Midwest	0.706 (0.170)***	0.476 (0.239)*	0.554 (0.135)***
Pacific Coast	0.174 (0.247)	1.116 (0.288)***	0.576 (0.179)**
Pseudo R ²	0.44	0.47	0.45
N	2530	1749	4279

Note: logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses (*** $p \leq 0.001$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, * $p \leq 0.05$, two-tailed). Dependent variable is vote for president (1 = Republican, 0 = Democrat). Omitted variable of interest is “Northeast.” Control variables included in all models, but not shown are: party identification (1 = Democrat, 2 = Independent/Other, 3 = Republican), ideology (1 = Liberal, 2 = Moderate, 3 = Conservative), race (1 = African American, 0 = otherwise), gender (1 = male, 0 = female), age (9 categories), family income (6 categories), and religion (1 = Protestant/Other Christian, 0 = otherwise).

Table 5
Republican presidential vote probabilities for the 2000 and 2004 elections according to region and voter location.

	Urban voters	Suburban voters	Rural voters
<i>2000 Election</i>			
South	0.44	0.66	0.86
Mountains/plains	0.40	0.66	0.80
Midwest	0.38	0.56	0.80
Pacific coast	0.35	0.54	0.73
Northeast	0.24	0.44	0.53
<i>2004 Election</i>			
South	0.53	0.59	0.86
Mountains/plains	0.52	0.58	0.86
Midwest	0.42	0.52	0.73
Pacific coast	0.40	0.48	0.85
Northeast	0.36	0.50	0.43

Note: probabilities were derived from the models in Table 4 with all the control variables set at their mean values.

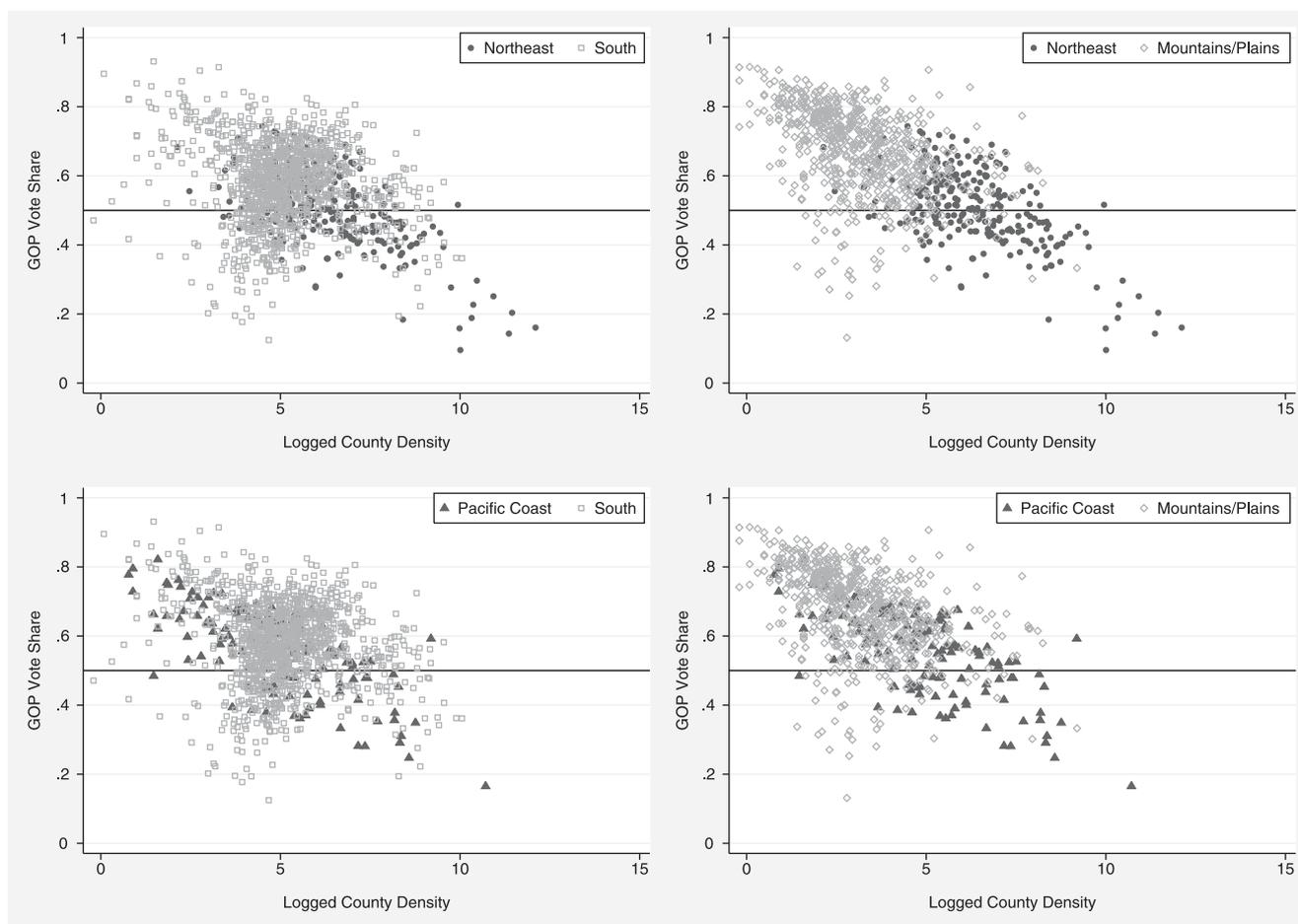


Fig. 2. Comparison of region pairs using counties by density and vote share, 2000 and 2004.

depicting regional variation on both axes among all four contrasted pairs. The Mountains/Plains and the South both exhibit generally low population density and high Republican voting proclivities. Conversely, counties in the Northeast show evidence of greater heterogeneity of voting but still lean toward Democratic voting than Mountains/Plains states, and are noticeably denser in residents. The three Pacific Coast states (omitting Hawaii and Alaska), similar to the Northeast, consist of counties on both sides of the “red–blue” divide as well as a wide variance in population density. Irrespective of the overall differences between regions, all regions generally demonstrate the same negative relationship between population density and electoral preference for George W. Bush in 2000 and 2004. Those living in more populous areas tend to vote for Democratic presidential candidates.

Unlike a random sample of respondents who can safely be thought of as independent observations, our sample of counties (and county-equivalents) is a complete universe of available observations, exhaustively covering the land area of the lower 48 states plus the District of Columbia. Political analysis of geographic units needs to be sensitive to the non-independent nature of place that has confronted geographic analysis of all kinds. Tobler's (1970: p. 236) oft-cited “law” of geographic analysis, that “everything is related to everything else but near things are more related than distant things,” states clearly a logic that multivariate analysis of geographic units needs to include an acknowledgement of what is “near”. To accommodate this potential spatial dependence, our analyses rely on a maximum likelihood model that includes

a spatial lag term. Analogous to a “ $t - 1$ ” lag term in time series analysis, the spatial lag term includes values of the dependent variable from adjoining units as an independent variable, where adjoining means any shared border or point (using “queen” rather than “rook” contiguity).

To create this spatial term, we generated weights based on county contiguity. Geographic Information System (GIS) software, such as GeoDa, can create the weights for counties when supplied with a map consisting of polygons for each county (GeoDa and spatial weighting is explained in Anselin, Syabri, and Kho, 2006). To demonstrate the degree to which counties in the U.S. are politically spatially dependent in their voting patterns, Fig. 3 presents a plot of the standardized share of the 2004 Republican presidential vote and the standardized measure of the spatial lag (keeping in mind that unstandardized Republican vote share is the dependent variable). If there were no spatial dependence among counties, the cases would cluster in a horizontal line, exhibiting no relationship. As evident in the scatterplot, counties' aggregated vote preferences relate strongly with neighboring counties' vote preferences: counties' vote returns resemble those of their adjacent neighbors.

The degree of spatial homogeneity between contiguous counties is not constant across values of Republican vote share. Counties in the upper right quadrant are cases where both counties and their neighbors vote predominantly for George W. Bush, and cases in the lower left voted for John Kerry along with neighboring counties. The spatial dependence appears greater among the Republican counties in the upper right, compared to the

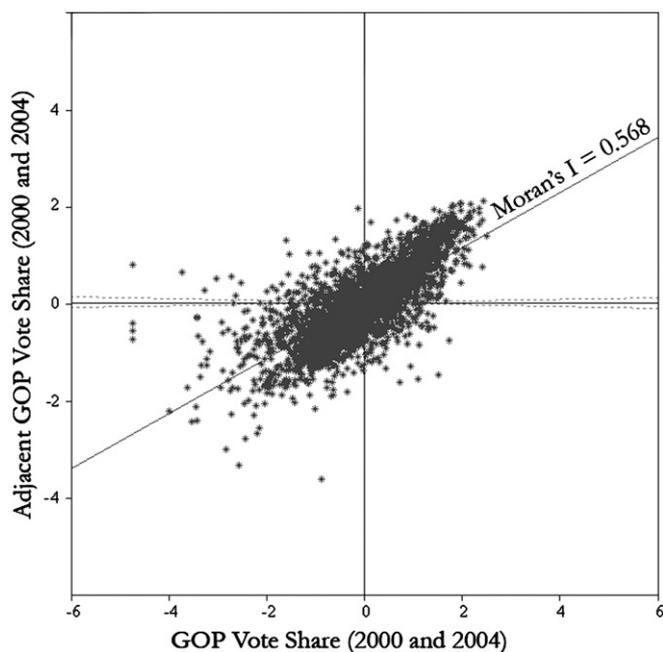


Fig. 3. Spatial dependence of county Republican voting, 2004 election. Note: figure depicts degree of spatial dependence where GOP Vote Share indicates the standardized values of proportion of each county's votes for Bush and the vertical axis measures Bush's vote share in neighboring counties. The Moran's I statistic describes the slope of the bivariate regression line, calculated by GeoDa (Anselin et al., 2006). Source: Scammon et al. (2005).

Democratic counties in the lower left where the cases are more scattered around the general trend. The reason behind this asymmetry in spatial dependence relates to inherent geographic differences between urban and rural counties. Urban counties typically sit within a ring of less dense counties, the suburban and exurban bedroom communities that surround a city. Hence, more dense counties are less likely to share attributes with neighbors than the more numerous sparsely populated counties, which are more likely to exist amidst similar neighbors.

In the county-level models, the dependent variable is simply the proportion of the two-party vote received by the Republican presidential candidate George W. Bush in 2000 and 2004 (Scammon, McGillivray, and Cook, 2001, 2005). Our variables of interest on the right-hand side of the equation are the Black and Black

(2007)-defined regions, residential density, and population change. While the individual-level analysis operationalized density with the familiar, three-category ordinal scale including rural, suburban, and urban, the county-level analysis utilizes the full range of population concentration by measuring residential context as the natural log of population density.

Scholars disagree on the best way to measure population density. Both population density (and its log) and the urbanized percentage of a county are each flawed measures (Goodall, Kafadar, and Tukey, 1998). The former has a biased measure of geographic units with high population areas and a large proportion living in a city, while the latter homogenizes over a quarter of U.S. counties to a single minimum value of zero percent. The analysis here uses logged density to avoid the bottom-clustered distribution issues of the urbanized percentage measure. A handful of extreme outliers (e.g., boroughs of New York City, Washington, D.C., and other fully urban counties) along with the expectation that the effect of urban density conforms to a pattern of diminishing returns impelled us to use the log of density rather than density itself. Mobility is more difficult to measure. Trying to evaluate the political effects of population mobility is difficult without specialized data sources. While the individual-level data above do not ask respondents for their residential stability, we can measure the growth or decline of county population by including a measure of how much the county population has changed between 2000 and 2005.

To make sure the aggregate-level analysis comports with the individual-level modeling above, we selected control variables with an eye toward comparability and matching. Age is measured as the percentage of the county that is 65 years and higher. Race is measured simply as the county percentage of black residents. To measure the level of formal education, the percentage of residents in counties with a bachelor's degree is used. For income, we use the median annual family income in tens of thousands of dollars. Age, race, education, and income are 2005 estimates calculated by the U.S. Census Bureau (2008). To control for the explanatory power of religious affiliation, we include the number of Evangelical Protestants who are listed members of a church (Jones et al., 2002) as a percentage of county population. Ecological measures of religion are difficult. To estimate a county-level measure of evangelicals, the analysis relies on Jones et al. (2002) and their measures of congregations and members. That study classifies denominations upon a commonly accepted taxonomy employed by Steensland et al. (2000).

Tables 6 and 7 display the multivariate analysis results from the county-level models for the 2000 and 2004 presidential contests,

Table 6
Aggregate county-level regression analysis, republican share of the two-party presidential vote, 2000.

	Continental U.S.	South	Mountains/plains	Midwest	Pacific coast	Northeast
Logged population density	-0.015 (0.001)**	-0.014 (0.002)**	-0.023 (0.003)**	-0.009 (0.003)**	-0.015 (0.005)**	-0.006 (0.003)*
Age 65+ percent	+0.003 (0.000)**	-0.000 (0.001)	+0.006 (0.001)**	-0.001 (0.001)	+0.003 (0.002)	+0.004 (0.002)*
Black percent	-0.002 (0.000)**	-0.002 (0.000)**	-0.001 (0.002)	-0.004 (0.000)**	-0.006 (0.003)*	-0.004 (0.000)**
Bachelor's degree percent	-0.002 (0.000)**	-0.001 (0.000)*	-0.002 (0.001)**	-0.001 (0.000)**	-0.004 (0.001)**	-0.006 (0.001)**
Median income (in \$10k)	+0.043 (0.002)**	+0.043 (0.004)**	+0.053 (0.006)**	+0.024 (0.003)**	+0.013 (0.012)	+0.055 (0.001)**
Evangelical protestants percent	+0.001 (0.000)**	+0.001 (0.000)**	+0.000 (0.000)	+0.001 (0.000)**	+0.002 (0.001)	+0.002 (0.001)
Population change percent	+0.001 (0.000)**	+0.001 (0.000)	+0.000 (0.001)	+0.001 (0.000)	+0.002 (0.001)	+0.001 (0.001)
South		+0.040 (0.006)**				
Mountains/plains		+0.027 (0.007)**				
Midwest		-0.001 (0.006)				
Pacific coast		+0.004 (0.009)				
Spatial lag (ρ)	+0.643 (0.014)**	+0.590 (0.024)**	+0.623 (0.033)**	+0.708 (0.024)**	+0.477 (0.063)**	+0.495 (0.041)**
Intercept	+0.092 (0.014)**	+0.179 (0.025)**	+0.076 (0.032)*	+0.114 (0.026)**	+0.343 (0.071)**	+0.146 (0.042)**
R ²	0.654	0.642	0.577	0.606	0.697	0.766
N	3,109	1,143	674	913	133	244
log-likelihood	3610.85	1311.19	714.40	1330.9	168.827	354.72

Note: maximum likelihood estimation, standard errors in parentheses (* $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$).

Table 7

Aggregate county-level regression analysis, republican share of the two-party presidential vote, 2004.

	Continental U.S.	South	Mountains/plains	Midwest	Pacific coast	Northeast
Logged population density	−0.011 (0.001)**	−0.013 (0.002)**	−0.017 (0.003)**	−0.006 (0.003)*	−0.013 (0.005)*	−0.004 (0.003)
Age 65+ percent	+0.002 (0.000)**	−0.001 (0.001)*	+0.005 (0.001)**	−0.001 (0.001)	+0.002 (0.002)	+0.005 (0.002)**
Black percent	−0.002 (0.000)**	−0.002 (0.000)**	−0.001 (0.002)	−0.004 (0.000)**	−0.004 (0.003)	−0.004 (0.000)**
Bachelor's degree percent	−0.004 (0.000)**	−0.003 (0.000)**	−0.005 (0.001)**	−0.003 (0.000)**	−0.006 (0.001)**	−0.008 (0.001)**
Median income (in \$10k)	+0.050 (0.002)**	+0.045 (0.005)**	+0.063 (0.006)**	+0.031 (0.003)**	+0.024 (0.012)*	+0.068 (0.007)**
Evangelical protestants percent	+0.001 (0.000)**	+0.001 (0.000)**	0.001 (0.000)**	+0.001 (0.000)**	+0.003 (0.001)	+0.002 (0.001)
Population change percent	+0.000 (0.000)*	+0.001 (0.000)	−0.000 (0.001)	+0.001 (0.000)	+0.003 (0.001)*	+0.001 (0.001)
South	+0.036 (0.007)**					
Mountains/plains	+0.028 (0.007)**					
Midwest	−0.014 (0.006)*					
Pacific coast	−0.005 (0.008)					
Spatial lag (ρ)	+0.632 (0.015)**	+0.553 (0.025)**	+0.648 (0.032)**	+0.717 (0.024)**	+0.495 (0.064)**	+0.463 (0.039)**
Intercept	+0.109 (0.015)**	+0.249 (0.027)**	+0.057 (0.032)	+0.115 (0.026)**	+0.316 (0.073)**	+0.136 (0.041)**
R^2	0.659	0.650	0.572	0.652	0.699	0.778
N	3109	1143	674	913	133	244
log-likelihood	3503.86	1285.68	658.98	1309.23	164.47	355.50

Note: maximum likelihood estimation, standard errors in parentheses (* $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$).

respectively. The most obvious finding related to degree of urbanity is that increased population density corresponds to lower levels of voting for Republican candidates at the county level. When controlling for important correlates of county-level vote share, population density, our measure of location, demonstrates a significant impact upon electoral outcomes. This finding stands up when considering the totality of U.S. counties (in the lower 48) as well as the five Black and Black-defined regions. The relationship between place and vote outcomes is lowest among counties in the Northeast and highest among those in the South and Mountains/Plains regions. The control variables behave as expected (counties with proportionally fewer blacks, fewer bachelor's degree holders, more income, and more Evangelical Protestants, voted more for George W. Bush). Intuitively, a county's neighbor's Bush vote share correlates strongly with Bush vote share, as measured by the spatial lag term (frequently referred to elsewhere as rho), which fortifies the spatial dependence evidence depicted in Fig. 3.

The results from testing the relationship between county population shifts and electoral outcomes, is less clear. Looking at all the lower-48 counties, counties that exhibited net population increases between 2000 and 2005 were the same counties that were more likely to vote for George W. Bush in 2000 and 2004, but the small magnitude of the effect frustrates interpretation. Part of the problem is the coarseness of the measure. Instead of measuring true population shifts in and out, our metric encompasses only net population change across a five-year span roughly concomitant with the measurement of our dependent variable.

Discussion and conclusion

In 2008, with the election of Democrat Barack Obama, it appeared that the red state/blue state divide had narrowed. Although there were obvious changes to the dynamics of contemporary presidential elections, overall, we see in the 2008 results strong evidence for the persistence of sectional divisions and the endurance of distinct preferences tied to place. With regard to change, in winning the White House, Obama increased the Democratic Electoral College vote total to 365 compared to the 251 votes garnered by John Kerry in 2004. In 2008, nine states switched in favor of the Democratic candidate and Obama managed to win one of Nebraska's five electoral votes by winning the popular vote in the Second Congressional District. Further, the Democratic share of the two-party vote increased by 4.9 points in 2008; going from 48.8% in 2004 to 53.7% in 2008 (Federal Election Commission data).

Valuable raw data on the 2008 presidential election have not yet been released (i.e., the data for the National Election Pool 2008 exit poll), but summary statistics have, and these give us reason to question the notion that 2008 constitutes a clean break from the voting patterns we analyze in 2000 and 2004. First, the short-term political climate could hardly have been worse for the Republican Party in 2008, thanks to the historically high disapproval of Republican George W. Bush, public opinion opposing the Iraq War, and the financial collapse in September (Jacobson, 2009). These conditions pushed many voters in favor of the Democratic Party. Second, Barack Obama's candidacy served to mobilize traditionally Democratic groups – especially African Americans. We should also note that young voters (18–29 year olds) strongly shifted in favor of Democrat Barack Obama in 2008.

Compared to 2004, according to region, Obama netted three states in three different regions: the Mountains (Colorado, Nevada, and New Mexico), the Midwest (Indiana, Iowa, and Ohio), and the South (Florida, North Carolina, and Virginia). A compositional change explanation does an adequate job of accounting for the victories in the Mountain West states and the states in the South. Colorado, Nevada, and New Mexico all have large and growing Hispanic populations that favor the Democratic Party. Likewise, northern immigration to Florida, North Carolina, and Virginia is moving these states in a Democratic direction, especially in presidential contests. Finally, in the states of Indiana, Iowa, and Ohio we see little evidence of compositional change. Instead, we point out that these states, especially Indiana and Ohio (Iowa is a perennial swing state) were hit very hard by the economic downturn and this undoubtedly caused a short-term shift in favor of Democrat Barack Obama.

In six of the states that switched in favor of Democrat Barack Obama in 2008, we find evidence of compositional change that has made these states more of a purple hue than blue or red. On the other hand, the Midwest battleground shows a Democratic swing in three states that exhibit little compositional change, but a stronger positive reaction to a short-term political climate advantaging the Democratic Party. With respect to location, 2008 conforms to the extant presidential voting pattern: urbanites are Democratic (63% for Obama), suburbanites remain swing voters (50% for Obama), and rural voters favor the GOP (45% for Obama; these data include votes for all presidential candidates and were obtained from the 2008 exit poll data from CNN's Web site: www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/results/president/). Taking the bigger picture of contemporary presidential elections, we contend that the evidence from 2008 generally reinforces the red state, blue state paradigm. In fact, political observers continue to use this language

and we have little doubt that it will characterize discussions of the 2012 election. The underlying structure of American politics reflects strong and persistent spatial cleavages where an increasing share of the electorate clearly favors one party over the other in contemporary presidential elections.

We acknowledge that there is no simple explanation for why political geography correlates with voter preferences in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections, or in 2008 for that matter. As Morrill et al. (2007) demonstrate about the geographic patterns of the 2000 and 2004 election results, the exceptions to the larger trends are sufficiently important to question the analytic utility of foundational paradigms of understanding American political geography, such as Bense's (1984) core-periphery thesis. Our effort herein follows a path started by many others who have examined the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections, by seeking to compare the relationship between section and location with voting behavior.

Our results based on early 21st century data demonstrate that the massive population shifts occurring throughout the last century away from rural areas, have not eliminated sectional voting patterns. Analogous to Turner's (1908) doubts about the conventional wisdom, that urbanization made sectional political differences unimportant, and echoed quantitatively by Shelley and Archer (1989), we find that vibrant sectional differences persist into the 21st century. Likewise, Murauskas, Archer, and Shelley (1988) performed another defense of sectionalism, refuting Key's (1958) assertion that urbanization would wash away sectional differences. In this study, we have shown with individual- and county-level data, after controlling for several compositional factors that consistently affect vote choice, sectionalism and location still significantly relates to voters' preferences. Rather than accept the limited dichotomous retelling of American political geography through the lens of red and blue states, which has been offered both with evidence (Abramowitz & Saunders, 2008) and without (Brooks, 2001), we contend that a mixture of compositional, contextual, and historical effects account for the importance of place in influencing electoral outcomes.

Based on the regional classification employed by Black and Black (2007), in multivariate analyses of vote choice models, it is usually the case that voters living in the South and Mountains/Plains are more likely to cast Republican ballots in 2000 and 2004. In addition, rural voters are consistently more likely to vote Republican than are urban and suburban voters. Finally, whether we hold the region constant and evaluate location and vote choice or hold the location constant and evaluate region and vote choice, under either scenario both region and location exhibit a clear relationship with voter preferences. In addition, regarding population density in the county-level analyses, irrespective of region, we generally find that counties with sparser populations register a higher Republican vote. Morrill et al. (2007) identify "exceptional" counties in the 2004 election, meaning non-urban counties that voted for Kerry or metro areas that Bush won, and the latter cases are more often than not explained by counties' suburban nature, existing adjacent to an even larger urban center. Hence, what Morrill and his coauthors see as exceptions, we see as conforming to a larger pattern relating to population density.

This said, consistent with Morrill et al. (2007), we also recognize that population density and sectionalism can only take us so far in understanding presidential voting patterns. Compositional factors often loom large in those instances where certain counties stray from the typical red versus blue dichotomy. For example, a primary reason why there were several sparsely settled counties that registered disproportionately large vote shares for Democrat John Kerry in 2004 were because they have very high African American populations located in the South (i.e., Alabama and Mississippi). Similarly, many of the high density counties that cast atypically large Bush vote shares had lower minority populations and were located

in more politically conservative regions like the South and Mountains/Plains (see Gelman, Park, Shor, Bafumi, and Cortina, 2008). Thus, compositional factors usually reinforce and help account for the voting patterns we observe with respect to population density and section. Yet in those rarer instances where the general spatial trends in voting behavior do not hold, it is often because the compositional makeup of these counties defies the norm.

The traditional approach to studying presidential elections entails examining the relative impact of party identification, the candidates, and the issues (Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde, 2007; Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes, 1960; Flanigan & Zingale, 2006). This design places a premium on the impact of short-term conditions like the match up of candidates and the issues of concern to the electorate as the election nears. By contrast, party identification, because it is generally viewed as a stable attitude (but see Fiorina, 1981; Mackuen, Erikson, and Stimson, 1989) and the most important factor in shaping voter preferences, will be determinative of election outcomes when candidates are evenly matched and issues do not break in favor of one party or the other. The growing body of research that shows why, when, and where campaigns matter (see Holbrook 1996, 2002; Shaw 2006) is in one sense a direct refutation of the position that because most voters have made up their minds well in advance of Election Day, events on the campaign trail are not consequential. In a similar vein, this study emphasizes the importance of place in American presidential elections. So long as states, through the institutional design of the Electoral College decide the winners and losers of presidential contests, campaigns will be fundamentally bound to electoral geography. Because of this, place should be a standard approach to the study of presidential elections.

We want to conclude by highlighting the relevance of place in the current debate among political scientists and commentators over the question of whether the mass public is becoming ideologically polarized (see Abramowitz & Saunders, 2008; Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope, 2008). Some scholars assert that most of the recent increase in polarization is an elite phenomenon (Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope, 2006). According to this argument, it is not that voters have become any more ideological per se (i.e., more likely to self-identify as conservatives or liberals), but rather elected officeholders have become more ideologically polarized and as a consequence, voter preferences have polarized merely because their choices are now more differentiated – either vote for the liberal Democrat or the conservative Republican. Nevertheless, most voters are moderates seeking centrist candidates, but they end up disappointed because they find that more and more candidates have become ideologically polarized. The media, academics, and even the mass public adopted the red versus blue language during the Bush years because of these crisper divisions in voting patterns. Yet despite the talk of red and blue states, there remains insufficient discussion of the role of place in these debates.

We agree with others who assert that the ideological polarization of elites is partly a consequence of the increase in the spatial polarization of the mass electorate (e.g., Gimpel & Schuknecht, 2004), not just a reflection of elite preferences and redrawing political boundaries. More so than ever in American politics, politically likeminded residents live next to each other resulting in a rise in geographic areas that vote either heavily Democratic or heavily Republican (Bishop, 2008). Migration patterns are anything but arbitrary (Brown, 1988), with self-selected movers sorting themselves into increasingly homogenized communities, whether one examines the high socioeconomic status opportunity seekers or the places they left behind (Abramowitz, Alexander, and Gunning, 2006; Bishop, 2004, 2008; Gimpel, 1999; Gimpel & Schuknecht, 2001, 2004). By voting not only with ballots but also by sorting themselves geographically to "cast their votes for communities with moving vans" (Bishop, 2008, p. 199), Americans are self-

selecting into places nonarbitrarily in a grand “sequestration,” to use Agnew’s (1987b, p. 33) language. Beyond fueling polarization, the normative implications of this politically motivated re-sorting impinge upon the quantity and quality of civic engagement (Macedo et al., 2005). With a decline in the number of places with rough voting parity between Republicans and Democrats, this transformation enables office seekers to polarize ideologically. By probing a little deeper into the causes and consequences of a red versus blue America in the 2000 and 2004 U.S. presidential elections, we see that place is a fundamental reason for the growing ideological polarization of elected officeholders and the concomitant rise in vote divisions found among the mass public.

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