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# What Made Carolina Blue? In-Migration and the 2008 North Carolina Presidential Vote

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## Abstract

In this article, we examine the role that in-migration played in contributing to the 2008 Democratic presidential victory in North Carolina. Prior to Barack Obama, the last time the Tar Heel State was carried by a Democrat was Jimmy Carter in 1976. Since the late 1980s, North Carolina has undergone tremendous demographic change. In addition to a growing Hispanic population that is primarily comprised of noncitizens, the state has witnessed a very large increase in the number of residents who were born and raised in Northern states such as New York. Historically, in much of the postwar South, Northern migrants helped grow the Republican Party. We find that in North Carolina this pattern no longer holds. In contemporary North Carolina, migrants born outside the South are more likely to identify and register as politically unaffiliated, and their growing share of the state's electorate directly contributed to Obama's narrow win.

## Keywords

2008 presidential election, North Carolina, migration, voting, political behavior, residential mobility, party realignment

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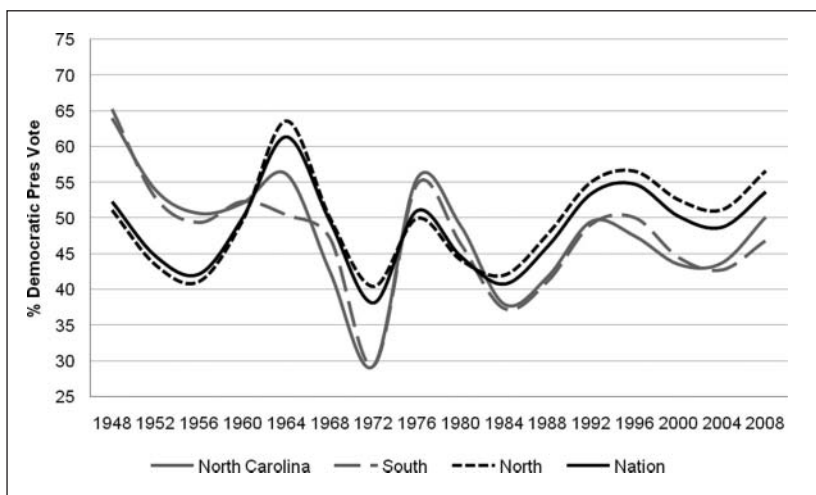
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There is a well-known joke among North Carolinians who reside in the Research Triangle (the area encompassing the cities of Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill). Do you know what Cary stands for? Answer: *Concentrated Area of Relocated Yankees*. The joke speaks to the drastic compositional change taking place in what was not so long ago a very Southern state. Cary, North Carolina, a town located southwest of the capital city of Raleigh, had a population of 43,858 in 1990 (U.S. Census Bureau). According to the 2007 census estimate, there are now 121,796 Cary residents, ranking the city as the seventh largest in North Carolina. Cary's 177% population increase is not an aberration. In fact, there are numerous mushrooming metropolitan centers in the Tar Heel State. These burgeoning municipalities share a common factor driving their unprecedented growth: The increase in North Carolina's population is mainly attributable to in-migration from other states, with many of these newer arrivals hailing from outside the South.<sup>1</sup>

In this article, we consider the role of in-migration as a factor benefiting the Democratic Party in the 2008 North Carolina presidential election. North Carolina presents an intriguing study of the relationship between population change and electoral behavior. Like its Southern neighbors, since the 1960s, this erstwhile "Solid South" Democratic state moved in favor of the Republican Party. By the mid-1990s North Carolina Republicans had made impressive electoral inroads, delivering credible two-party competition in federal, state, and even local contests (Christensen & Fleer, 1999). But since then, GOP growth has tapered off. As we demonstrate in this study, one reason for the revival of Democratic fortunes in presidential politics is the growing presence of a considerably less Republican population of non-Southern migrants.

Before 2008 the last Democratic presidential candidate to carry North Carolina was Jimmy Carter in 1976. By 2008 the current mixture of Tar Heel voters manifested itself in the state's most competitive presidential election. Barack Obama's two-party vote margin was just 0.3%. Although we recognize that several factors are responsible for Obama's slim victory, including a surge in African American turnout, strong support from younger voters, heavy resource allocation by the Obama campaign, and a short-term political climate greatly favoring the Democratic Party (for a thorough review of the North Carolina contest, see Thornton, 2009), we train our attention on the significance of a changing electorate.

With the use of survey data we show that several demographic and political characteristics distinguish Tar Heel migrants (individuals born outside the South) from their native counterparts. We then use polling data and the voter registration data made available through the North Carolina State Board of Elections, to assess differences in the party affiliations of migrants and



**Figure 1.** The two-party percentage of the popular presidential vote, 1948-2008

natives. Finally, we go one step farther by examining vote choice. Polling data on voter intentions for the 2008 election and voting tabulation district analyses, both support the thesis of this study. After controlling for several factors, the individual- and aggregate-level models unequivocally demonstrate that the growing presence of migrant Tar Heel voters was a primary reason for Democrat Barack Obama's North Carolina victory. We conclude with a discussion of why the trend in favor of the Democratic Party may continue for some time to come. And more broadly, we speak of this development in other Southern states, where the migrant population has crossed a threshold, obtaining a critical mass where these residents are now reshaping the region's political landscape.

## Presidential Politics in State, Region, and Nation

Figure 1 presents the popular presidential vote (two-party) from 1948 to 2008, with data on election returns for North Carolina, the South (including North Carolina), the North, and the entire nation. Admittedly, particularly in the South, exclusion of the significant third-party candidacies of Thurmond in 1948 and Wallace in 1968 somewhat distort the true picture of voter preferences in these years. Nonetheless, it is evident that since the end of World War II, North Carolina and the rest of the Southern states track very closely in their two-party presidential voting. By contrast, the North manifests a markedly different pattern and due to its much larger electorate, it naturally

hews closer to the national returns. From 1948 to 1960, the North is substantially less supportive of Democratic nominees. But since 1964, with the exception of Southern Democrat Jimmy Carter's White House campaigns in 1976 and 1980, Northerners have cast a higher percentage of Democratic presidential votes than their Southern counterparts.

The insurgent Dixiecrat campaign of 1948 set off a long-term decline in Southern support for Democratic presidential candidates. Two-party competition in Southern presidential elections was the norm from 1952 through 1964. With the exception of Jimmy Carter's Democratic victory in 1976, from 1968 to 1988 Southern Republicanism reigned supreme in presidential elections. Over these two decades the region's overwhelming support of GOP nominees proved an insurmountable electoral hurdle for Democratic candidates (Black & Black, 1992).<sup>2</sup> In 1992 and 1996, Democrat Bill Clinton pulled the South back into the competitive range—winning four Southern states in each cycle, including a South-wide popular vote majority in 1996 (50.05% of the two-party vote). But in 2000 and 2004, Republican George W. Bush won every Southern state.

Of course the jumping off point for this study is the 2008 presidential election, and in this year all four geographic categories exhibit a pronounced increase in Democratic voting. In 2008 there is notable separation between the Democratic presidential vote registered in North Carolina vis-à-vis the entire South (50.2% vs. 46.9%). The Northern Democratic vote was a robust 56.6%, whereas the national Democratic vote came in at 53.7%. In this article, we evaluate one critical factor that accounts for why North Carolina went "blue" in presidential politics for the first time in more than 30 years. Specifically, we assess the impact of non-Southern in-migration on the 2008 North Carolina presidential vote.

Because of longstanding cultural differences between Southerners and those from outside the region, which are clearly manifested in political behavior (e.g., see Figure 1), all of our analyses make comparisons between migrants and natives. A migrant is defined as any North Carolina resident born outside the South.<sup>3</sup> Given the region's shared history, in this study, those North Carolina registrants born in any Southern state are classified as natives.<sup>4</sup> With this simple division of the North Carolina electorate, we expect to find significant differences in party affiliation, and, more important, disparities in the 2008 presidential vote, depending on migrant or native status.

## Migration and Partisan Change in the American South

Leading explanations of partisan change include mobilization, conversion, generational replacement, and immigration. All these factors have received attention in analyses of the post-World War II Southern political transformation. There is a sizable literature that has considered the role of in-migration

as an explanation for fostering postwar Republicanism in the American South (e.g., see Hood, Kidd, & Morris, 2004). From the 1950s to the 1980s, there was a substantial out-migration of Southern Blacks (Stanley & Castle, 1988; Sly, 1981) and a rising percentage of White in-migrants who were born outside the region (Black & Black, 1987; Wolfinger & Arseneau, 1978). Given the timing and location of Republican inroads in Southern presidential politics, and the recognition that the departure of African Americans was met with the arrival of a disproportionately White population that was less Democratic than native White Southerners, it seemed obvious that immigration was a leading cause of GOP growth.

Scholars, however, have not reached anything close to a consensus position on the electoral impact of immigration on the rise of Southern Republicanism. To be sure, most of the studies that evaluate the role of immigration look beyond its immediate effects on voting behavior and instead focus on its more permanent impact in terms of the secular Republican partisan realignment. Many scholars contend that White in-migration to the South had a large effect on building the Southern GOP (Campbell, 1977; Converse, 1972; Lublin, 2004; Moreland & Steed, 2004; Polsby, 2004; Scher, 1997; Topping, Lazarek, & Linder, 1966; Wolfinger & Arseneau, 1978; Wolfinger & Hagen, 1985). Other scholars have placed much greater emphasis on the role of conversion and generational replacement as explanations for GOP growth (Beck, 1977; Black & Black, 2002; D. Green, Palmquist, Schickler, 2002; Hayes & McKee, 2008; Petrocik, 1987; Stanley, 1988). Yet despite a lack of agreement on the magnitude of the effects of non-Southern immigration, the lion's share of studies do find that on balance it benefited the Republican Party.

From 1950 to 1980, the percentage of Whites living in the South who were born outside the region increased from 8% to 20% of the population (Black & Black, 1987, p. 17); and in terms of the Southern electorate, migrant Whites accounted for 9% of presidential voters in the 1950s and up to 25% by 1980 (Black & Black, 1987, p. 21). Clearly the share of White migrants in the South is nontrivial and it has been growing substantially with each decade. Nonetheless, there is considerable state-level variation in the percentage of White migrants. For instance, whereas Southern states such as Virginia and Texas, and especially Florida,<sup>5</sup> have historically contained high numbers of nonnative Whites, this was not true of North Carolina.

The self-selective behavior of Northern migrants to the South has heavily emphasized relocation into industrialized, growing metropolitan centers located primarily in the Peripheral South (Black & Black, 1987; Judis & Teixeira, 2002).<sup>6</sup> In the 1950s it was in the Peripheral South where initial Republican gains were concentrated in presidential elections (Phillips, 1969). The faster rate of modernization in these Southern states, especially in terms of urbanization and with it economic growth, has been the main draw for nonnative Whites (Sly, 1981). Although North Carolina is by definition a

Peripheral South state, it has historically been a laggard in terms of attracting White migrants who were born outside the region.

In North Carolina, 3% of the White population was born outside the South in 1950 and this number increased to 11% in 1980 (Black & Black, 1987, p. 17). Hence, even by 1980 the Tar Heel State showed little evidence of the massive in-migration that was about to occur. Of the 11 ex-Confederate states, North Carolina ranked eighth in its percentage of Whites born in the North. The Deep South states of Louisiana (9%), Mississippi (8%), and Alabama (8%) were the only ones with lower percentages of Whites born outside the South (Black & Black, 1987, p. 17). A primary reason why North Carolina did not draw higher numbers of Northern migrants is that it was the second least urbanized state in the South from 1950 to 1980. For these three decades only Mississippi had a lower urban percentage than North Carolina. It was not until 1990 that a majority (50.4%, U.S. Census Bureau data) of the North Carolina population resided in urban settings. In short, before the late 1980s North Carolina was not a magnet for nonnative migrants.<sup>7</sup>

Given the Democratic Party's legacy of electoral dominance in every Southern state, it is undoubtedly true that between the 1950s and 1980s North Carolina migrants were, on average, necessarily more Republican and less Democratic in their party identification. But because of the relatively small portion of White migrants in North Carolina who were born outside the South from 1950 to 1980, the long-term increase in support for the Republican Party was necessarily fueled by native White Southerners.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the rapid growth in North Carolina's migrant population does not heat up until the 1990s (see Judis & Teixeira, 2002; Luebke, 1998), and by this time, it is expected that among the multitude of newcomers who are born outside the South, they should be less supportive of the GOP than Southern natives. We would expect this to be the case because outside the South the Republican Party has experienced a secular decline (Rae, 1989) and the rate of this decline has sped up in more recent years, especially in the Northeast, the place of origin for so many recent migrants to North Carolina.

## **A Social Group Profile of Migrant North Carolinians, 1992-2001**

The interactions between place, migration, and political change are extremely complex. Rarely do we have the exact kind of data to identify all of the causal factors reshaping political behavior in those locations experiencing large-scale changes attributable to in-migration. Nonetheless, we contend that the most important explanation for why North Carolina has recently trended

away from the GOP and toward the Democratic Party is because the social group profiles of migrants make them more supportive of the latter party. In other words, we base our claims squarely on a compositional change explanation (see Gimpel & Schuknecht, 2004). We expect that North Carolina migrants and natives look significantly different across a range of demographic and political characteristics. To the extent that migrants and natives differ, so that the former are more inclined to cast Democratic presidential votes, the increasing percentage of nonnative Tar Heels directly contributes to Obama's narrow 2008 victory.

Ideally, we would like to show numerous social and political characteristics of the North Carolina electorate over a long time span that runs up to the 2008 presidential election. To the best of our knowledge, these data do not exist,<sup>9</sup> but we can make use of a polling series that lasted from 1992 to 2001 and includes a large sample of Southern residents. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, through its Odum Institute for Research in Social Science, conducted the Southern Focus Poll (SFP) from 1992 through 2001.<sup>10</sup> The definition of the American South in these surveys is slightly different from ours—in addition to the 11 ex-Confederate states (our preferred definition)—the SFP classifies Kentucky and Oklahoma as Southern states. There is no reason to think that the inclusion of these two border South states does much to alter the findings we would get from our more circumscribed definition of the South. Further, we do not expect that the pattern of voting eligible migrants to North Carolina has changed in a significant way from 2001 to the present. In short, these data should provide us with an informative portrait of the characteristics distinguishing Tar Heel migrants from their native Southern counterparts.

The SFP was conducted biennially, commissioned once in the spring and fall of each year from 1992 to 1999. It was also run two more times, but just once a year, in the spring of 2000 and the spring of 2001. Thus, there were a total of 18 SFPs. A typical poll surveyed a random and representative sample of 800 Southern residents. Given the size of these polls, we chose to isolate the sample of North Carolina residents and pool them over the time series from 1992 to 2001. In the multivariate analysis that follows, this aggregation of North Carolina respondents gives us a total of 1,499 cases.

Among the numerous questions asked from 1992 to 2001, we selected a core set of variables that were repeated for each survey and constitute the kinds of factors we expect to distinguish Northern-born migrants from Southern natives in North Carolina.<sup>11</sup> These variables include age (18-92 years), gender (1 = *Female*, 0 = *Male*), race (1 = *Black*, 0 = *otherwise*), education (1 = *less than grade 9*, 2 = *9th to 11th grade*, 3 = *high school graduate*,



4 = *some college*, 5 = *college graduate or more*), location (dummies indicating *Small Town*, *Suburb*, and *City*, with *Rural* as the omitted base category), religious denomination (1 = *Baptist*, 0 = *otherwise*), religious attendance (1 = *never*, 2 = *several times a year*, 3 = *2-3 times a month*, 4 = *once a week*, 5 = *more than once a week*), ideology (1 = *strong liberal* to 7 = *strong conservative*), and party identification (1 = *Democrat*, 0 = *otherwise*; 1 = *Republican*, 0 = *otherwise*; we designate the omitted category as unaffiliated and it consists of respondents who either classified themselves as independents, other party, or don't know/no answer). We also control for the year in which the survey was administered (1992 is the omitted category for this series of year dummies).

Our dependent variable was constructed from a question that asks respondents how long they have lived in the South (1 = *less than 5 years*, 2 = *6-10 years*, 3 = *more than 10 years*, 4 = *all my life*). We collapse the variable into a dichotomous measure so that 1-3 = 1 for a migrant and 4 = 0 for a native Southerner. Out of an *N* of 1,499, there are 470 Northern-born migrants in the North Carolina SFP pooled sample. Because the dependent variable is binary, we use logistic regression to determine which of the aforementioned covariates have a significant influence on whether a respondent is a migrant or native Southerner residing in the state of North Carolina from 1992 to 2001.

The results of our model shown in Table 1 make it apparent that Tar Heel migrants differ significantly from natives across a range of characteristics. Migrants are considerably older and less likely to be female than their Southern-born counterparts. It is important to point out that there is no statistically significant racial difference between migrants and natives—controlling for other factors, the native Tar Heel sample does not consist of a larger share of African Americans.<sup>12</sup> As we would expect, given the historical pattern, non-natives have attained a higher level of education than Southern-born Tar Heels. With rural as the location of comparison, we find that migrants are much more likely to reside in suburbs, those metropolitan rings that are most prominent around the high growth centers of the state, especially places such as Mecklenburg County (Charlotte) and Wake County (Raleigh and Cary), where Obama did very well (see Prysby, 2009).

The remaining covariates in Table 1 speak more directly to our expectations of why migrants are pushing the Tar Heel State in a Democratic direction. First, the two religious indicators are highly significant. Among Whites, the Baptist denomination in the South primarily means “Southern Baptist,” and these adherents are strongly aligned with the GOP (J. C. Green, Kellstedt, Smidt, & Guth, 2009).<sup>13</sup> Additionally, over at least the last decade, greater church attendance, irrespective of religious affiliation, has shown a

**Table 1.** Factors Distinguishing Migrants From Native Southerners in North Carolina, 1992-2001

Independent Variables	North Carolina Migrant
Age	0.013** (0.004)
Female	-0.250* (0.124)
Black	0.195 (0.193)
Education	0.385*** (0.065)
Small town	-0.001 (0.164)
Suburb	0.569** (0.203)
City	0.232 (0.163)
Baptist	-1.076*** (0.135)
Religious attendance	-0.219*** (0.048)
Ideology (liberal to conservative)	-0.185*** (0.054)
Democrat	-0.597*** (0.162)
Republican	-0.382* (0.150)
Constant	-1.012* (0.424)
Log likelihood	-810.00
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.13
N	1,499

Note: Logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is 1 = *North Carolina resident born outside the South*, 0 = *North Carolina resident who has lived entire life in the South*. These data are from Southern Focus Polls pooled from 1992 through 2001. Surveys were conducted twice a year, once in the spring and once in the fall except for 2000 and 2001, when the survey was only administered in the spring. A year dummy is included in the model, but not shown (1992 was the base category). The definition of South for the Southern Focus Polls is the 11 former Confederate states (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia) plus Kentucky and Oklahoma. For location, rural is the base category. For party identification, the omitted category combines independents, other party, and don't know/no answer as unaffiliated respondents.

\* $p < .05$ , two-tailed. \*\* $p < .01$ , two-tailed. \*\*\* $p < .001$ , two-tailed.

strong relationship with Republican voting proclivities (Layman, 2001). On both counts, migrant North Carolinians exhibit a significantly lower likelihood of religiosity linked to Republican voting behavior.

Finally, and perhaps even more telling of characteristics that denote partisan political behavior, migrants are significantly different from natives with regard to ideology and party affiliation. Ideology has been, and continues to persist as a factor driving partisan realignment in American politics, particularly in the South (see Abramowitz & Saunders, 1998; Black & Black, 2002; Hayes & McKee, 2008). Compared with natives, North Carolina migrants are much less likely to locate themselves on the conservative end of the ideological scale.

And in the case of party affiliation, we see that migrants are much less likely to identify with either major political party. Instead, they show a greater tendency to be unaffiliated. This may be a somewhat surprising finding because the crux of our thesis is that the social group profile of migrants strongly supports their being more Democratic in voting behavior. There are however, two points to keep in mind: (a) Democratic affiliation persists at a high rate among older native White Southerners and this reality coexists alongside the tendency of younger native Whites to have moved at a stronger pace in favor of the Republican Party (Hayes & McKee, 2008),<sup>14</sup> and (b) it is worth examining whether there are differences in the *loyalty* of voter preferences based on the stated party affiliations (or lack thereof) of migrants and natives. We will draw on a wealth of empirical evidence to further examine party affiliation, and how it varies among migrants and natives.

## The Changing Tar Heel Electorate

In 2008 Barack Obama was victorious in three Southern states: Florida, Virginia, and North Carolina. These Southern states share a common characteristic that contributed to a Democratic victory: they have the highest percentage of residents born in the Northeast (per the U.S. Census definition)<sup>15</sup>—the most Democratic region of the United States.

In fact, a census study on state-to-state migration flows from 1995 to 2000 showed that in North Carolina the largest percentage of migrants came from New York (Perry, 2003). In addition to a very high percentage of residents born from outside the state, since the 1990s North Carolina has witnessed a massive influx of Hispanics (see Ready, 2005), but most of these recent arrivals are noncitizens and therefore cannot vote (Bullock & Hood, 2006). The recent demographic changes in North Carolina are not only a sharp break from its historical pattern, but the changing population is altering the partisan balance in electoral politics (Luebke, 1998).

Although benefiting from a debatable “progressive” reputation (Bass & De Vries, 1995; Key, 1949; Luebke, 1998), historically, North Carolina is a typical Southern state, combining an overwhelmingly native White population with a substantial African American minority.<sup>16</sup> And of course, like the rest of the South, North Carolina’s politics was controlled by the Democratic Party. However, starting in 1964, the “Southern Strategy” of cultivating White support with a conservative message on race and economics (Lamis, 1988; Phillips, 1969) began to pay electoral dividends in presidential contests as the GOP laid the groundwork for its gradual ascent in down-ballot races (Aistrup, 1996; Black & Black, 1992; Lublin, 2004). Unlike the rapid,

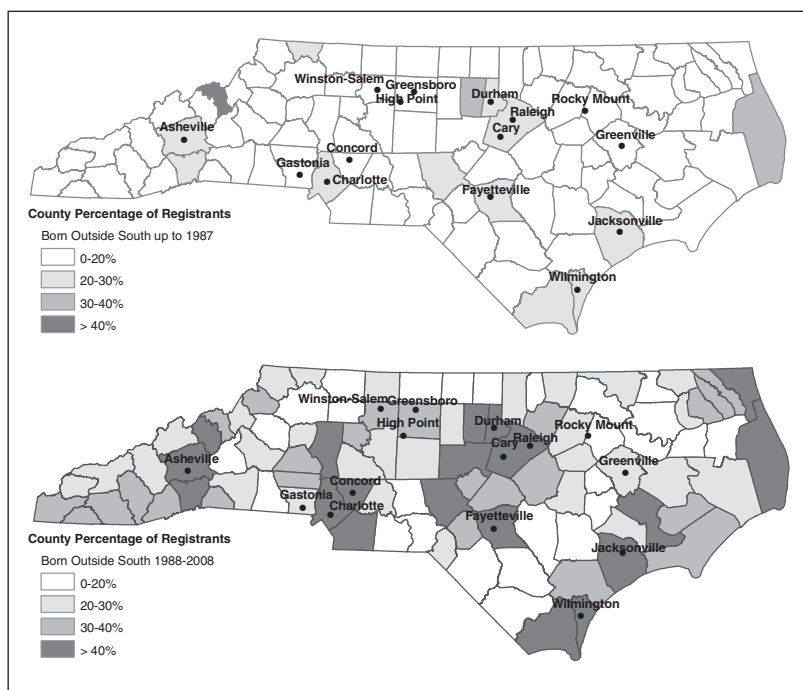
across-the-board, and permanent shift of Blacks in favor of the Democratic Party (both in terms of vote choice and party identification) in 1964, below the presidential level the movement of Whites away from the Democratic Party and toward the GOP was a secular realignment that took place over several generations (Abramowitz & Saunders, 1998; Green et al., 2002; Hayes & McKee, 2008).

Historically, most Southern states have displayed the tendency of “swallowing up” newcomers—having more influence on these recent arrivals than vice versa (on this point, see Brown, 1988). This was typically the case because the native Southern population was so much larger. But similar to Florida, in a state like North Carolina, where many communities are now disproportionately non-Southern born, presidential voting patterns in these localities have reached a point where the native political influence is diminishing in electoral importance.<sup>17</sup>

For our purposes it is fortunate that North Carolina requires voter registration by party affiliation. Party registration and party identification are certainly not conceptually equivalent. And in the South, party identification has been a lagging indicator of partisan support because many White conservatives who identified with the Democratic Party routinely voted Republican in presidential elections (see Black & Black, 1992, 2002; Key, 1949; Scher, 1997). Nonetheless, with a long time series, data on registration by party affiliation gives one a sense of the changing North Carolina electorate.

Figure 2 displays county-level data on the percentage of North Carolina registrants who were born outside the South. In addition, the 15 most populous cities are displayed as a point of reference. The top map provides the county percentage of non-Southern migrants still on the voter rolls in 2008, but who first registered in 1987 or earlier. The bottom map displays the percentage of North Carolina registrants born outside the South who first registered in the years 1988 to 2008. Both maps are shaded from white to dark gray, with darker shades indicating a higher county percentage of migrants born outside the South.

The differences between the two maps are striking. North Carolina has 100 counties. In the top map, showing data on first-time registrants through 1987, in 86 counties the percentage of registered non-Southern migrants was less than or equal to 20%. In all, 11 counties had between 20% and 30% registrants who were born outside the South. Just 2 counties had nonnative Southern registrant populations between 30% and 40%, and only 1 county had more than 40% registrants born outside the South (Mitchell County in western North Carolina).

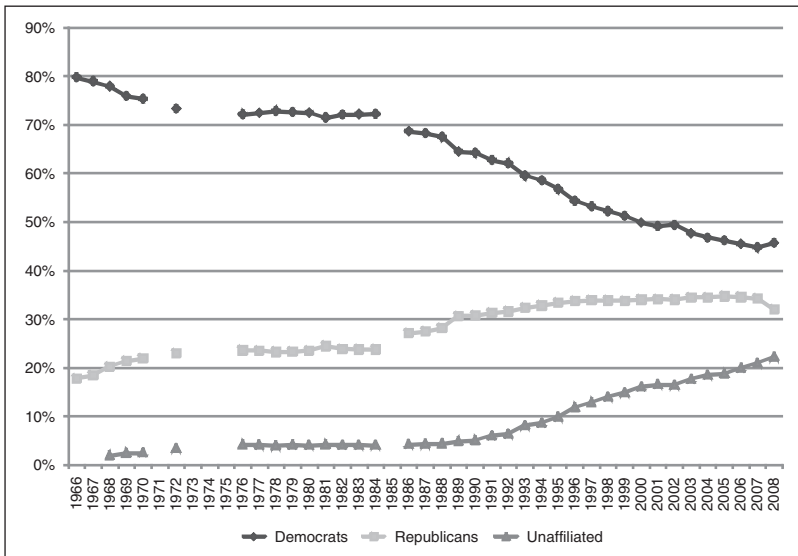


**Figure 2.** County percentage of North Carolina registrants born outside the South

Source: Maps were produced by the authors. Data are from the North Carolina State Board of Elections. Shapefiles are from the North Carolina General Assembly Redistricting Archives (counties) and ESRI (cities).

In stark contrast to the top map, for first-time registrants between 1988 and 2008, there were 27 counties with non-Southern born registered populations at 20% or less. Overall, 30 counties had between 20% and 30% registrants who were born outside the South. There were 24 counties with migrant registrant populations between 30% and 40%, and 19 counties contained more than 40% registrants born outside the South. Three of these counties had majority non-Southern born registered populations: Mecklenburg (Charlotte) at 50.1%, Onslow (Jacksonville) at 50.8%, and Wake (Cary and Raleigh) at 54.7%. Simply put, Figure 2 captures a sea change in the composition of registered North Carolina voters.

Covering a much longer time span, Figure 3 charts the percentage of North Carolinians registered to vote, according to party affiliation, from 1966<sup>18</sup> through 2008. In 1966, at least with respect to party registration, the



**Figure 3.** North Carolina party registration, 1966-2008

remnants of the Solid Democratic South are evident as 80% of North Carolinians were registered Democrats and just 18% were registered Republicans.

Over this 42-year period, the trends in party affiliation are revealing. There has been a steady decline in registered Democrats and a gradual increase in registered Republicans. Notice however that the rise in Republican registrants climbs upward in the late 1980s and then increases very marginally since that time. Indeed, it appears the percentage of Republicans reaches a steady state from 2000 to 2007 (approximately 34% for each of these years). Another important finding is the steeper rise in the percentage unaffiliated from 1990 (5%) to 2008 (22%). Finally, between 2007 and 2008, the improving conditions of the Democratic Party contributed to the noticeable drop in registered Republicans and the uptick in registered Democrats.

In the more recent years of the time series we would expect that the voter registration data are a more accurate indicator of partisan sentiments because there are fewer older residents who may have switched parties but never changed their registration to reflect this fact. Specifically, the farther back in time we go the less correlative is Democratic registration with vote choice because from the 1960s through the 1980s a nontrivial percentage of Democrats were regularly voting Republican. In the more recent years, as the

Republican realignment has run its course, registration by party affiliation should be a more accurate measure of partisan support. If this speculation is correct, then the Democratic advantage in 2008 (46% Democratic vs. 32% Republican) is considerable and electorally meaningful. Also, by 2008, more than 1 in 5 registrants are unaffiliated. If these registrants lean strongly in favor of one party they will have a large influence on electoral outcomes.<sup>19</sup>

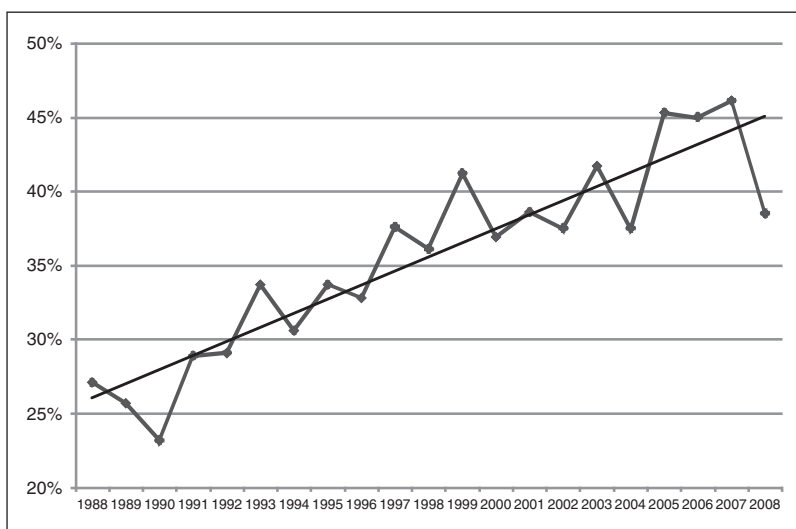
Finally, another way to illustrate the sharp increase in the percentage of non-Southern born North Carolina registrants is by plotting this number statewide for first-time registrants in the years 1988 through 2008 (the appendix provides detailed data on state of birth and party registration for 1988-2008). Figure 4 captures the steep increase in the statewide percentage of first-time registrants born outside the South from 1988 to 2008. The percentage of non-Southern born first-time registrants doubles between 1990 (23%) and 2007 (46%). There is a clear explanation for the subsequent drop in the portion of migrant registrants in 2008. There was a massive increase in the number of native Southern Blacks who registered between 2007 and 2008 and this brings down the total non-Southern first-time registrant percentage in 2008. From 2007 to 2008 the number of Blacks registering in North Carolina went from 62,957 to 302,063 or from 20.3% of the 2007 registration cohort to 31.4% of the 2008 cohort. Among the 2008 Black cohort, 27.9% were born outside the South and 72.1% were born in the region.

## Empirics

### *Migrant Status, Party Registration, and Party Affiliation*

The data for this section come from two primary sources: the voter registration database maintained by the North Carolina State Board of Elections and a pre-election poll of North Carolinians. Using the state registration database allows us to make inferences using the entire population of registrants in North Carolina. Except for a sliver of incomplete data on some registrants, we essentially have inclusive information on the entire population. Being able to use millions of cases makes drawing inferences about the North Carolina electorate a much more straightforward process. In addition, unlike survey data that relies on self-reported turnout, turnout in the voter history database is validated at the polling place. We do not have to be concerned, therefore, about issues related to turnout inflation.

The voter registration database contains a comprehensive listing of all North Carolina registrants and includes each registrant's party affiliation, race/ethnicity, gender, age, and various geographic locators such as voting tabulation district and county of residence. In addition, the database also



**Figure 4.** Migrant percentage of North Carolina electorate by registration cohort, 1988-2008

contains a field which details the state of birth for each registrant as well as their original date of registration in the state. From this field we were able to create an indicator that denotes whether a registrant is a migrant or a native. Any registrant born in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, or Virginia was considered a native Southerner and coded 0. All other registrants, including those born outside the United States, were considered migrants and coded 1.<sup>20</sup>

Our first model captures the effect that place of birth has on party registration. Specifically, we expect there to be significant differences between the registered party affiliations of migrants and natives. Given the legacy of the Democratic Solid South, natives should still be more likely to register as Democrats. And because of the secular realignment of most native Whites in favor of the GOP, it is anticipated that migrants will be more likely to select the unaffiliated registration option as opposed to registering as Republicans.

The dependent variable is *Party Registration*, and it contains three exhaustive categories: 1 for registered Democrats, 2 for registrants choosing the unaffiliated category, and 3 for registered Republicans.<sup>21</sup> The sample for the model presented in Table 2 includes all North Carolinians who registered to vote from 1988 through 2008. The explanatory indicators consist of variables



**Table 2.** Multinomial Logit Model Predicting Party Registration in North Carolina, 1988-2008

	Coefficient	Standard Error
Equation 1: Democratic registrants		
Female	0.3182***	0.0026
Age	0.0172***	0.00009
Black	1.9335***	0.0034
Other Minority	0.4415***	0.0053
Migrant	-0.3519***	0.0027
Constant	-0.1592***	0.0107
Equation 2: Republican registrants		
Female	-0.0332***	0.0026
Age	0.0099***	0.00009
Black	-1.7114***	0.0064
Other Minority	-0.8117***	0.0065
Migrant	-0.3601***	0.0027
Constant	0.8156***	0.0104
Likelihood ratio $\chi^2$	1,221,757***	
N	4,295,271	

Note: Entries are multinomial logit coefficients. Unaffiliated registrants are the base or comparison category. A set of  $n - 1$  dummy variables representing year of registration are also included in each equation.

Source: 2008 North Carolina Voter Registration Database.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

for a registrant's age (in years) and gender (coded 1 for *females* and 0 for *males*). Using White registrants as the base category we also include two dummy variables to denote *Black* registrants and *Other Minority* registrants, respectively.<sup>22</sup> Finally, we create a series of dummy variables to denote the year in which North Carolinians registered to vote. Using these registration cohort dummies will allow us to make inferences concerning changes in party registration among North Carolinians based on the year in which they first registered to vote. These measures will also help to control for variance in the dependent variable which cannot be directly measured. The 1988 registration year will serve as our excluded comparison category for the model presented in Table 2. Because our dependent variable contains three unordered categories, we use multinomial logistic regression. Because unaffiliated registrants were designated the base category, the results compare party registration between Democrats and unaffiliateds, and between Republicans and unaffiliateds.

**Table 3.** Multinomial Logit Model Predicting Party Affiliation in North Carolina, 2008

	Coefficient	Standard Error
Equation 1: Democrats		
Female	0.5492***	0.1366
Age	0.2027**	0.0786
Black	1.7227***	0.3000
Other Minority	0.1250	0.2925
Migrant	-0.8063***	0.1353
Constant	0.3933	0.2616
Equation 2: Republicans		
Female	0.2561	0.1363
Age	0.0749	0.0786
Black	-1.2787**	0.4290
Other Minority	-0.8063*	0.3358
Migrant	-0.6317***	0.1365
Constant	0.9035***	0.2589
Likelihood ratio $\chi^2$	285.8***	
N	2,056	

Note: Entries are multinomial logit coefficients. Independents are the base or comparison category.

Source: Public Policy Polling, 2008.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

In addition to the voter registration data we also analyze party affiliation based on a pre-election poll conducted by the Public Policy Polling (PPP) firm. From August 20-23, 2008, PPP surveyed 2,066 North Carolinians, 46% of whom were migrants.<sup>23</sup> It is important to note that the definition of migrant used by this poll is more conservative than the definition of migrant we employ with the voter registration data. The survey defines a migrant as anyone not born in North Carolina. Unfortunately, the survey does not ask respondents where they were born, so we are unable to conceptualize in-migration as anything beyond not being a native-born North Carolinian. In addition to the migrant indicator, the survey also includes a measure of party affiliation (Democrat, Independent, and Republican) which serves as our dependent variable for the model presented in Table 3. Gender (1 = *female*, 0 = *male*); age (1 = 18-29 years, 2 = 30-45 years, 3 = 46-65 years, and 4 = 60+ years); Black (1 = *Black registrant*, 0 = *other registrants*); and Other Minority (1 = *other non-Black minority registrant*, 0 = *other registrants*) serve as our control variables in the model designed to predict party

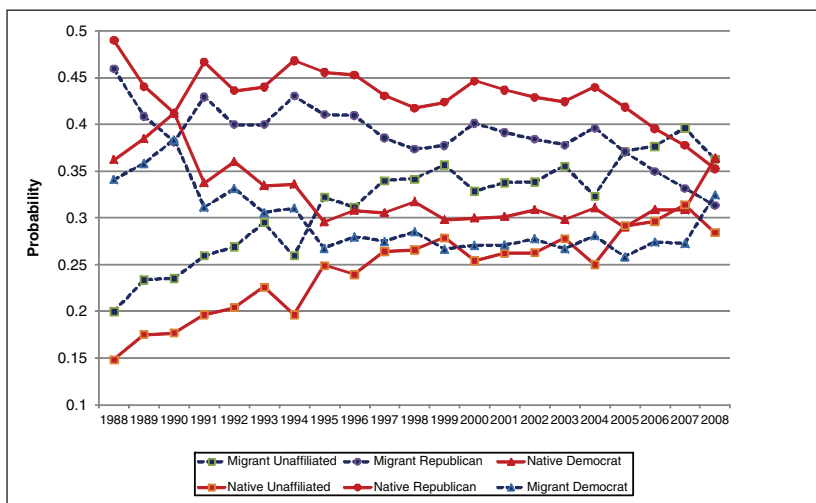
affiliation among North Carolinians. Because the dependent variable contains three unordered categories, we again use multinomial logistic regression to estimate the model parameters presented in Table 3.<sup>24</sup>

The results of our party registration model are found in Table 2. Equation 1 compares Democratic registrants with unaffiliated registrants. From the table we can see that Democratic registrants are more likely to be female, Black or other minorities, and older. In addition, as denoted by the registration year dummies, subsequent registration cohorts are less likely to register as Democrats as one moves out from the base year of 1988. Finally, given the option of registering as either a Democrat or unaffiliated, migrants are significantly less likely than natives are to register as Democrats.

The second equation in Table 2 compares Republican registrants with those who choose to register as unaffiliated. The model results indicate that unaffiliated registrants are more likely to be female, younger, or minorities when compared with Republican registrants. As with the first equation, the registration year fixed effects indicate that, as time passes, North Carolinians are becoming less likely to register as Republican over unaffiliated. This is a departure from previous decades when in-migration was one of the factors driving increases in Republican Party identification (Christensen & Fleer, 1999). Again, we see a sizable effect for the place of birth indicator in the second equation. *Vis-à-vis* natives, migrants are statistically much likelier to register as unaffiliated over the Republican option.

Because multinomial logit models are difficult to interpret since there is more than one equation that must be considered, we convert the findings in Table 2 into predicted probabilities where Southern nativity and year of registration are allowed to vary across the three categories of party registration.<sup>25</sup> The other variables in the model are set at their mean of modal values, making the registrant of interest a White female who is 42.8 years old. In Figure 5, the probability of migrants and natives identifying as Republicans, Democrats, or unaffiliateds is plotted by year of registration (1988-2008).

Looking at the figure one can see over most of the time period that natives are more likely to register as Republicans compared with migrants across all registration years. For both groups the probability of registering as a Republican remains fairly stable over time, until 2004 where Republican registration turns downward. From 2004 through 2008 the probability of GOP registration among natives slips from .44 to .35, with migrants experiencing a similar decline from .40 to .34. Examining Democratic registration by nativity reveals a similar pattern with native North Carolinians more likely across the time series to register as Democrats compared with migrants. Democratic registration across both groups generally declines from 1988 through 1995, flattens out through 2007, and then shoots up in 2008.



**Figure 5.** Probability of party registration by cohort and migrant status, 1988-2008

Finally, the most notable shift occurs among those individuals who registered as politically unaffiliated. Here we find that migrants far outstrip Southerners across all registration cohorts. For example, the probability that a migrant in 1988 registers as unaffiliated is .20 compared with .15 for a native Southerner. The sizable gap widens over time and by 2008 individuals born outside the South showed a .36 probability of registering unaffiliated, compared with .28 for native Southerners—an 8-point gap. Another key element demonstrated by Figure 5 concerns the fact that the ranks of unaffiliated migrant registrants has continually increased as a share of eligible voters across registration cohorts, passing Democrats in 1995 and Republicans in 2007 (the jump in registered Democrats in 2008 left migrant unaffiliateds and native Democrats at almost identical shares of the electorate). Looking at the composition of the North Carolina electorate over the past 20 years reveals a clear pattern: Migrants have comprised a steady stream of independent registrants.

A second set of individual-level results pertaining to party affiliation among North Carolinians is detailed in Table 3. The multinomial logit model compares independents to Democrats, and independents to Republicans, respectively. Equation 1 indicates that age is positively related to the probability of identifying as a Democrat, and women and Blacks are also more likely to be Democrats as opposed to independents. Migrants, conversely, are statistically more likely to be independents. Comparing independents to Republicans indicates that women, Blacks, and other minorities are less

likely to call themselves Republicans, whereas older North Carolinians are more likely to identify with the GOP. Again, migrants are more likely to identify as independents when the choice set includes Republican.

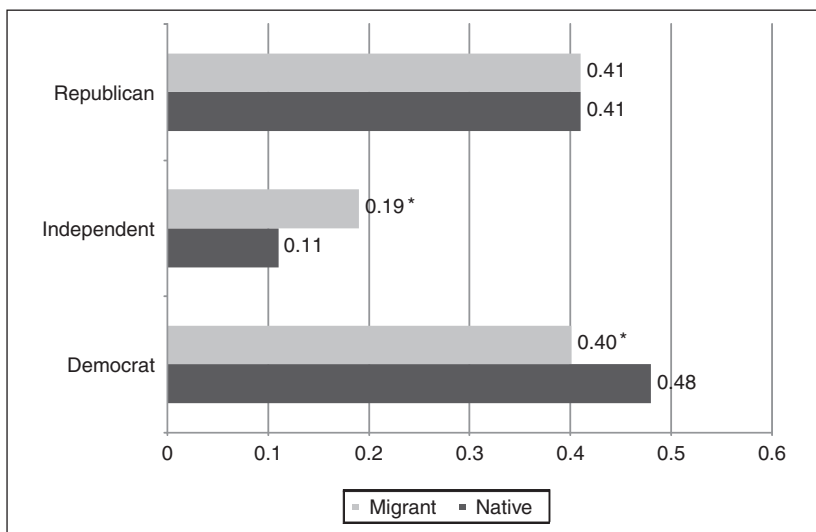
The results presented in Table 3 are translated into a set of predicted probabilities, which are displayed in Figure 6. In terms of partisan self-identification among North Carolinians there is no difference in the probability of Republican identification between migrants ( $p = .41$ ) and natives ( $p = .41$ ). But migrants are significantly more likely to identify as political independents ( $p = .19$  vs.  $p = .11$ ). Finally, migrants are significantly less likely to identify as Democrats at .40, compared with natives at .48.

### *Migrant Status, Voting Preferences, and Voting Patterns*

The second set of empirical models explores the effect of the migrant population on election outcomes, specifically the 2008 presidential election in North Carolina. The first of these, use voting tabulation districts (VTDs) as the unit of analysis. An ordinary least squares regression model is specified using the percentage of the vote cast for the Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama as our dependent variable. We hypothesize that the size of the migrant turnout at the VTD-level should positively covary with the 2008 Democratic presidential vote. The models presented in Table 4 are weighted by the presidential vote total for each VTD.

All of the independent variables in the model are based on actual turnout characteristics within each of the approximately 2,700 VTDs found in North Carolina. Using the voter history database allows us to circumscribe the registration file according to actual turnout in the 2008 general election. Because our unit of analysis is the VTD, we aggregated individual-level data from the registration database to create VTD-level explanatory variables. These variables include the percentage of females, Blacks, and other minorities within each VTD who actually voted. In addition, we also include indicators for the percentage of Democrats and unaffiliated party registrants voting in each VTD (Republican registrants are used as the excluded comparison category). We also included three age-related variables denoting the percentage of voters in each VTD who are 18 to 29, 30 to 44, and 65 years or older. Those voters falling into the 45 to 64 years age range constitute the excluded age category. A second model in Table 4 includes two interaction terms created by multiplying the percentage of Democrats/unaffiliateds with the percentage of migrants within a VTD.

A second model again makes use of the polling data collected by the Public Policy Polling firm prior to the 2008 general election. In this case, we estimate a logistic regression model where presidential candidate preference



**Figure 6.** Partisan identification by migrant status in North Carolina, 2008

Note: Predicted probability of partisan identification. \*Difference significant at  $p < .05$ .

is our dependent variable coded 1 for those respondents who indicated they would vote for the Democratic candidate Barack Obama and 0 for those respondents who preferred Republican John McCain or Libertarian Bob Barr. In addition to the same controls for race, gender, migrant status, and age, which are included in the partisan affiliation model (Table 3), we also include dichotomous measures for independent and Democratic identifiers. As with the preceding model, a second model is also specified which includes two interactive terms (Democrat  $\times$  Migrant and Independent  $\times$  Migrant) designed to test whether migrants who are independents or Democrats are more likely to vote for Obama compared with native North Carolinians who identify as independents or Democrats.

Table 4 displays the results for our North Carolina presidential vote share model. In the additive model, our primary variable of interest, *Percent Migrant*, is significant and signed in the expected direction even after controlling for turnout by party registration. The model predicts that a 10% increase in the number of migrants within a VTD results in a 2.6% increase in the 2008 Democratic presidential vote share. A number of other controls were also found to be related to the Democratic vote share. The VTD percentage of Black, female, Democratic, and unaffiliated voters, are all positively related to Democrat Barack Obama's vote share. Among the age-related variables included in the model we see the percentage of voters 18 to 29 years

**Table 4.** Model Explaining the 2008 Democratic Presidential Vote Share in North Carolina

	Additive	Interactive
Percentage Female	0.2321** (0.0795)	0.2664*** (0.0740)
Percentage Black	0.3654*** (0.0183)	0.4029*** (0.0179)
Percentage Other Minority	0.0469 (0.0312)	0.0456 (0.0355)
Percentage Democrat	0.6625*** (0.0241)	0.4000*** (0.0312)
Percentage Unaffiliated	0.9166*** (0.0569)	0.4992*** (0.0792)
Percentage Migrant	0.2565*** (0.0170)	-0.3427*** (0.0584)
Democrat × Migrant	—	0.8238*** (0.0676)
Unaffiliated × Migrant	—	1.2350*** (0.1762)
Percentage 18-29 years	0.2176*** (0.0286)	0.1373*** (0.0279)
Percentage 30-44 years	0.0168 (0.0366)	-0.0745* (0.0368)
Percentage 65+ years	0.0627 (0.0381)	0.0264 (0.0354)
Constant	-0.3432*** (0.0387)	-0.1312** (0.0413)
N	2,692	2,692
R <sup>2</sup>	.89	.90

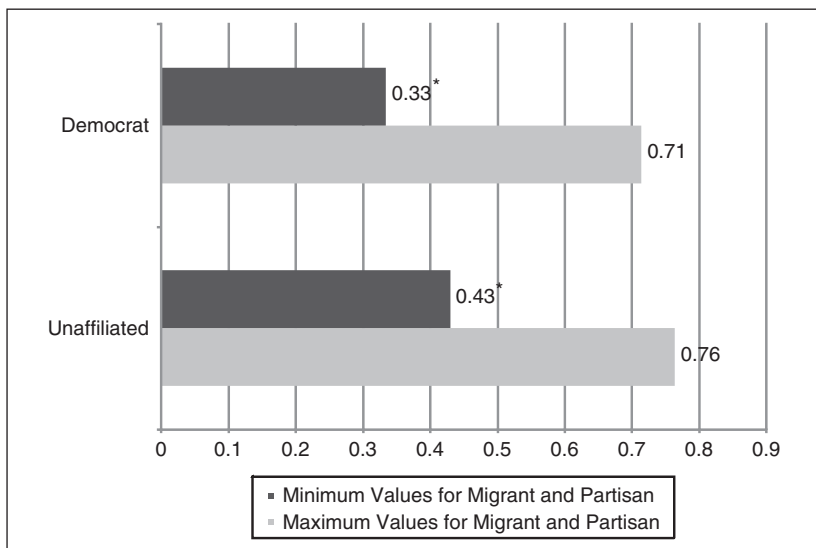
Note: Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. Model shown is weighted by the presidential vote total within each voting tabulation district.

Source: 2008 North Carolina Voter Registration Database; 2008 North Carolina Voter History Database; 2008 North Carolina Election Returns (State Board of Elections).

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

was positively and significantly related to the Democratic vote in comparison with the percentage of voters who were 45 to 64 years old. The other age categories, the percentage of voters 65 years or older and the percentage falling into the 30- to 44-year age range, were not significantly different from our comparison category. Overall, our additive VTD-level model explains 89% of the variance in the 2008 North Carolina Democratic presidential vote share.

The second model shown in Table 4 includes the addition of the two interaction terms previously described. The coefficients for both Democrat × Migrant and Unaffiliated × Migrant were statistically significant and signed in a positive direction, indicating that as the percentage of Democrats/unaffiliateds and the migrants within a VTD increases, so does the Democratic presidential vote. To illustrate the effects of migrant status and party registration on the 2008 Democratic presidential vote, we simulate a set of predicted values. The results are displayed in Figure 7. Holding the other variables in the model at their mean or modal positions, we illustrate the size



**Figure 7.** Democratic voting by party registration and migrant percentage

Note: Predicted values for Democratic voting for the minimum/maximum percentage of Democrats/unaffiliateds and migrants by voting tabulation district. \*Difference significant at  $p < .05$ .

of the interaction effects by setting the values for the additive and interaction terms equal to the actual VTDs that simultaneously contain the lowest and highest percentages of Democrats/unaffiliateds and migrants.<sup>26</sup>

The VTD with the minimal percentage of Democrats and migrants is predicted to produce a Democratic vote of 33%, compared with a Democratic vote of 71% for the VTD with the maximum values for these indicators—a statistically significant and substantial difference of 38 points. Similarly, a statistically significant 33-point Democratic vote difference emerges in the case of those VTDs with minimum and maximum values of unaffiliateds and migrants. In fact, setting the unaffiliated interaction to the maximum value yields a predicted Democratic vote of 76%—4 points higher than the maximum predicted vote for the Democratic interaction.

Table 5 details our set of findings regarding individual-level vote intentions for president in 2008. The additive model indicates that compared with Republicans, self-identified independents and Democrats are significantly more likely to prefer Democrat Barack Obama. In addition, older North Carolinians are less likely to support the Democratic candidate. Finally, support for Obama was significantly higher for residents who are not native to the Tar



**Table 5.** Model Explaining Democratic Presidential Preferences in North Carolina, 2008

	Additive	Interactive
Democrat	3.5355*** (0.1933)	3.0137*** (0.2554)
Independent	2.5721*** (0.2118)	2.0437*** (0.3146)
Age	-0.2582*** (0.0704)	-0.2600*** (0.0708)
Black	2.1103*** (0.2340)	2.1374*** (0.2343)
Other Minority	0.22099 (0.26694)	0.2222 (0.2689)
Gender	0.1273 (0.1224)	0.1318 (0.1230)
Migrant	0.7909*** (0.1209)	-0.0693 (0.3507)
Democrat * Migrant	—	0.9849** (0.3816)
Independent * Migrant	—	0.9429* (0.4322)
Constant	-2.9079*** (0.2800)	-2.4330*** (0.3145)
N	2,056	2,056

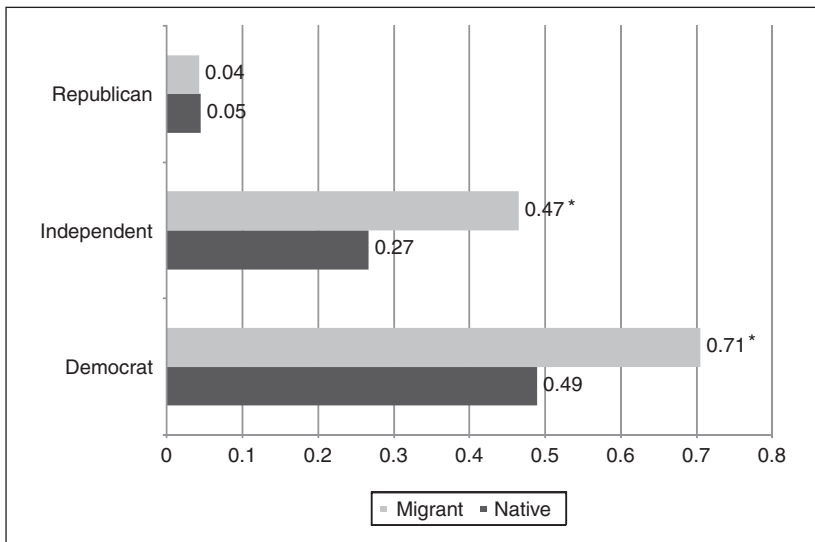
Note: Entries are logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

Source: Public Policy Polling, 2008.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Heel State. As with the VTD-level vote data we also present a second model with interaction terms in the second column of Table 5. Both interactions are statistically significant and positive, indicating that, compared with natives, migrant Democrats and independents are more likely to support Democrat Barack Obama.

A graphical interpretation of these findings is presented in Figure 8. Holding the other variables at their mean or modal values, we present the probability of support for the Democratic presidential candidate by party affiliation and nativity. Beginning with Republicans, we see that there is little support for Obama among natives at .05 or migrants at .04. For independent identifiers the gap between migrant and natives in terms of expressing a preference for the Democratic candidate is sizable and statistically significant at .20. The model predicts that the probability of a native independent supporting Obama is .27 versus .47 for migrant independents. Likewise, the effect of migrant status for Democratic identifiers is also sizeable with the probability of natives supporting Obama at .49 and migrants at .71. The difference in probabilities, at .22, is statistically significant. It should be noted that these findings (and those from Table 3 as well) are a very conservative gauge of the effect of in-migration on North Carolina politics in 2008. The poll conducted by PPP includes native Southerners in their definition of migrant. Given the wide degree of divergence between natives and migrants in these models, the real effect of in-migration from outside the region should, in reality, be even



**Figure 8.** Presidential preference by partisan affiliation and migrant status, 2008

Note: Predicted probability of voting for Democrat Barack Obama among North Carolinians.

\*Difference significant at  $p < .05$ .

more pronounced as native Southerners closely resemble their North Carolinian peers in terms of partisan affiliation and voting behavior.

### *Empirical Summary*

Our research shows that the characteristics and behavior of migrants varies considerably from that of native North Carolinians. Evidence from the Southern Focus Poll indicates they are more likely to be male, older, better educated, less religious, and reside in suburban areas. Politically, Tar Heel migrants are less ideologically conservative and more likely to be unaligned in partisan terms, identifying themselves as independents. This same pattern of partisan affiliation/registration was also borne out with analyses using voter registration and individual-level polling data. We can state definitively that compared to natives, migrants are much more likely to register as unaffiliated or identify as independent. Finally, two different sources of data related to voter preferences and vote outcomes confirm that migrants to North Carolina were much more likely to have supported Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama. Additionally, migrant independents and

migrant Democrats were more likely to have supported Obama compared to natives in these political categories.

## Discussion and Conclusion

In 2008, only Missouri witnessed a more competitive presidential outcome than North Carolina. Aided by the Obama Campaign's enormous mobilization drive and his appeal among the African American electorate, the largest positive swing in presidential turnout from 2004 to 2008 occurred in the Tar Heel State (voting eligible turnout increased by 13.8%).<sup>27</sup> There is no question that the rise in participation exhibited a strong Democratic bias that enabled Obama to squeak out a victory in a state that the GOP owned for more than 30 years. As we have shown in this study, the changing face of the Tar Heel electorate directly contributed to North Carolina going blue in the 2008 presidential election. Nonetheless, we would not be surprised if the state returns to the Republican column in 2012. Our claim is not that North Carolina is now a Democratic state in presidential politics, but rather because of population change through a continuing and substantial influx of migrants born outside the South, these voters are pushing the state in a competitive direction—essentially making it a swing state, or to stick with the color-coded language, we contend that North Carolina has become a purple state in presidential elections.<sup>28</sup>

Short-term conditions will affect the direction in which North Carolina swings in future presidential contests. Indeed, given the propensity of migrants to eschew identification with a major political party, and the fact that North Carolina is the only Southern state to also hold its gubernatorial election in presidential years, makes it more sensitive and volatile than most to national forces (on this point see Prysby, 2009). Compared with native Southern Tar Heels, migrants stand out as a group more susceptible to short-term political conditions because they are more politically independent. But as we have shown, the social group profile of migrants also reveals a set of characteristics that make them more partial to the Democratic Party.

The electoral dynamics we uncover in North Carolina are by no means unique and thus we would be remiss if we did not place this study in the broader context of Southern presidential politics. The current state of national elections, with a resurgent Democratic Party outside the South, has prompted many political observers to mistakenly view Dixie as a vast swath of Republican territory. This is not an accurate portrayal of the current state of presidential politics and a brief tour back in time reveals how subregional distinctions continue to influence contemporary contests.

In the post–World War II South, Republican inroads were initially paved in the Peripheral states, which contain the lowest percentage of African Americans, the most upwardly mobile residents, and not surprisingly the greatest influx of residents born from outside the region (Black & Black, 1987; Phillips, 1969). In the 1950s, Eisenhower had more success in garnering the votes of Peripheral South residents. By contrast, the Deep South states remained much more solid in their support of Democratic presidential candidates. This pattern changed in the 1960s with the full flowering of the civil rights movement. As the racial issue came to the fore in presidential politics, when Republican Barry Goldwater introduced his “Southern Strategy” in opposition to Democrat Lyndon Johnson’s successful leadership of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Deep South Whites moved swiftly in favor of Republican presidential candidates (Black & Black, 2002; Carmines & Stimson, 1989; Cosman, 1966). With the exception of the Democratic interlude in 1976, from 1968 to 1988, Republican voting across the South was consistently high and the GOP’s candidates were so dominant that the presidency was a virtual lock thanks in part to Southern votes. Over this period, the region was properly referred to as “The Vital South” (Black & Black, 1992) because it not only gave the GOP a large head start in presidential elections but also because Democratic candidates who failed to win Southern electoral votes found it impossible to win the presidency.

In the 1980s, the Reagan Presidency was transformational in its effect on realigning White conservatives to the GOP and dealigning White moderates (Black & Black, 2002), but Reagan’s successor was perceived as lacking conservative bona fides and the “Vital South” ended in 1992 with an economic downturn that allowed a Democratic native son of the South to capture four states below the Mason-Dixon Line. Clinton again won four Southern states in 1996—showing twice—that even without a single Southern state, a Democrat could now win the White House (Stanley, 2006). But after Clinton, Republican George W. Bush exhibited an appeal capable of sweeping the region’s electoral votes in 2000 and 2004. Yet over the course of these elections, from the 1950s through 2008, an important demographic pattern was making an impression that manifested itself in the historic election of Democrat Barack Obama, who won Florida, North Carolina, and Virginia.

To be sure, the Peripheral/Deep South distinction remains relevant because of what it reveals with respect to differences in political behavior (Black & Black, 1987, 1992, 2002; Key, 1949; McKee, 2009). The Peripheral South continues to have more population change through a larger in-migration of residents born outside the region and this directly contributes to an electorate that is more supportive of Democrats. We think, however, that 2008 has

revealed a somewhat different pattern in Southern presidential politics. As we noted previously, the three Peripheral South states Obama won, have the largest percentage of residents born in the Northeast—the bluest region in the United States (McKee, 2009).<sup>29</sup> And although Obama was denied a victory in Georgia and South Carolina, he did very well in these states too.<sup>30</sup> We point this out because these two Deep South states have the largest percentage of Northeastern born residents after the three Obama carried.

In short, 2008 seems to have revealed a “South-Atlantic” pattern in contemporary Southern presidential elections. What makes Georgia and South Carolina more difficult for a Democrat to carry is that, true to their Deep South heritage, racially polarized voting is more pronounced in these states, thus White vote shares are harder to come by. With the exception of Texas, which of course has experienced tremendous change because of the expansion of its Hispanic electorate<sup>31</sup> (McKee & Hayes, 2009), these five South-Atlantic states have witnessed the most population growth since the 1980s (McKee, 2009).

Political geography has greatly contributed to the latest pattern of Southern presidential politics. Migratory patterns often exhibit quite natural relocation flows as the most prevalent newcomers in the South-Atlantic states originate from the Northeast,<sup>32</sup> whereas the Peripheral South states of Arkansas, Tennessee, and Texas have seen their largest share of Northern migrants born in the Midwest (McKee, 2009)—a region more hospitable to the Republican Party than is the Northeast (Black & Black, 2007). In contrast to Bill Clinton, who built winning Southern coalitions with appeals to African Americans and Whites born from within and outside the region, Barack Obama assembled winning coalitions based on an almost one-sided share of the Black vote and greater support from Whites who, like Obama, were not native to the South. So the Tar Heel State is not alone in exhibiting compositional change to its electorate that benefits Democratic presidential candidates. Virginia is perhaps an even clearer example of this, with large changes occurring in the northern parts of the state where a bevy of non-Southern residents have settled to work in and around the District of Columbia (Barone & Cohen, 2009). Due in no small part to the in-migration of residents born outside of Dixie, North Carolina and Virginia have joined Florida, the quintessential Northern transplant state, as the newest presidential battlegrounds, in a region where Republican is a word now almost as common as was the word Democrat, before the death of the Solid South.

## Appendix

### *Distribution of North Carolina Registrants by Place Born and Party Registration, 1988-2008*

State	Percentage Born	Percentage Democrat	Percentage Unaffiliated	Percentage Republican
Alabama	0.76	37.8	27.6	34.6
Alaska	0.11	31.4	33.8	34.8
Arizona	0.20	27.9	33.7	38.4
Arkansas	0.22	38.2	30.1	31.7
California	1.98	32.4	31.6	36.0
Colorado	0.38	32.2	32.0	35.8
Connecticut	0.85	36.3	37.2	26.5
Delaware	0.19	35.2	31.8	33.0
District of Columbia	0.81	54.9	23.7	21.4
Florida	2.51	33.4	28.7	37.9
Georgia	1.77	35.6	28.9	35.5
Hawaii	0.14	30.7	34.7	34.6
Idaho	0.08	23.4	36.6	40.0
Illinois	1.63	29.9	35.5	34.6
Indiana	0.91	26.8	32.7	40.5
Iowa	0.36	25.5	36.7	37.8
Kansas	0.29	28.4	31.6	40.0
Kentucky	0.75	36.1	24.6	39.3
Louisiana	0.57	37.6	28.1	34.3
Maine	0.22	27.9	35.9	36.2
Maryland	1.32	41.3	25.9	32.8
Massachusetts	1.23	31.5	42.8	25.7
Michigan	1.73	28.1	37.5	34.4
Minnesota	0.35	26.3	38.0	35.7
Mississippi	0.41	38.6	26.8	34.6
Missouri	0.54	28.6	35.1	36.3
Montana	0.06	25.4	34.6	40.0
Nebraska	0.19	28.7	30.1	41.2
Nevada	0.06	31.2	35.0	33.8
New Hampshire	0.19	25.2	42.5	32.3
New Jersey	2.51	38.6	33.5	27.9
New Mexico	0.12	31.9	31.2	36.9
New York	7.02	41.5	30.4	28.1
North Carolina	46.69	47.3	21.3	31.4
North Dakota	0.08	24.9	36.1	39.0
Ohio	2.63	29.4	32.7	37.9
Oklahoma	0.32	32.2	26.5	41.3
Oregon	0.14	28.8	32.3	38.9

(continued)

## Appendix (continued)

State	Percentage Born	Percentage Democrat	Percentage Unaffiliated	Percentage Republican
Pennsylvania	3.17	35.9	25.2	38.9
Rhode Island	0.22	29.0	44.3	26.7
South Carolina	2.93	46.4	24.9	28.7
South Dakota	0.07	27.2	30.6	42.2
Tennessee	1.09	30.6	30.1	39.3
Texas	1.39	29.5	33.2	37.3
Utah	0.14	23.9	35.8	40.3
Vermont	0.14	27.3	41.6	31.1
Virginia	3.97	35.1	31.5	33.4
Washington	0.33	31.9	34.6	33.5
West Virginia	1.33	39.1	23.2	37.7
Wisconsin	0.53	27.1	38.2	34.7
Wyoming	0.05	25.8	32.9	41.3
American Samoa	0.00	34.8	34.8	30.4
Guam	0.01	35.6	32.6	31.8
U.S. Virgin Islands	0.02	64.0	28.6	7.4
Puerto Rico	0.16	42.0	35.8	22.2
Other country	4.14	39.4	37.2	23.4
South (natives)	59.37	44.6	23.2	32.1
North (migrants)	36.31	35.1	31.7	33.2
U.S. Territories	0.19	44.1	34.9	21.0
(migrants)				
Other country	4.14	39.4	37.2	23.4
(migrants)				

Source: 2008 North Carolina Voter Registration Database.

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## Notes

1. The South is defined as the 11 ex-Confederate states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.
2. Since 1964, a majority of White Southerners have voted Republican (two-party vote) in every presidential election (Black & Black, 2002). From 1968 to 2008, versus Democrats, GOP candidates have amassed an 80% success rate in Southern state presidential contests (winning 93 out of 116 Southern state presidential contests [These data exclude the five states George Wallace won in 1968: Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, and Mississippi]). This lopsided Republican presidential advantage in Dixie includes four candidates who swept the region (Nixon in 1972, Reagan in 1984, Bush I in 1988, and Bush II in 2000 and 2004).
3. We would prefer to make the distinction between migrants and natives on the basis of where an individual grew up, but we do not have these data.
4. In the case of our 2008 survey data, the definition of native is narrowed to just those respondents born in North Carolina.
5. For instance, there is little dispute that the massive influx of Northerners into Florida directly accounted for Republican growth (Clarke, 1981; Colburn, 2007; Gimpel & Schuknecht, 2001, 2004; Parker, 1988; Polsby, 2004).
6. The Peripheral South consists of Arkansas, Florida, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. The Deep South includes Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina.
7. Although it might appear to be an interesting, but trivial point, from 1960 to 1980 among Southern states, North Carolina had the lowest percentage of households with air-conditioning (Arsenault, 1984, p. 611). The prevalence of air-conditioning is highly correlated with urbanization.
8. We should note that North Carolina has a "mountain" Republican population that dates back to the Civil War (Fleer, Lowery, & Prysby, 1988).
9. Beginning in 2000, Elon University has conducted The Elon University Poll (<http://www.elon.edu/e-web/elonpoll/>). Some of these surveys take note of differences between native North Carolinians and those born outside the state and the South. Evidence from these polls corroborates our findings on key differences between migrants and natives, such as ideology and religiosity (see Vercellotti, 2008).
10. For more information on the Southern Focus Poll go to [http://www.irss.unc.edu/odum/jsp/content\\_node.jsp?nodeid=82](http://www.irss.unc.edu/odum/jsp/content_node.jsp?nodeid=82).
11. A variable for household income was asked in all of these surveys, but we exclude it from the analysis because the refusal rate was very high (>15% of respondents



- refused to state their household income). Hence, a regression that includes household income would most likely result in biased estimates.
12. Among current North Carolina registered voters, this is the racial composition of migrants and natives (based on the ex-Confederate South definition), respectively: 77.9% Whites, 14.1% Blacks, and 8.0% other race/unknown; 71.7% Whites, 25.9% Blacks, and 2.4% other race/unknown.
  13. The original response options for a respondent's religious preference included Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Church of Christ, Other Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Other, None, and Don't Know/No Answer.
  14. Recent scholarship has shown that the partisanship of the youngest generation of voting eligible native Southern Whites is trending Democratic (Knuckey, 2006).
  15. These states are Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont.
  16. In North Carolina in 1980, 75% of the population was White, 22% Black, and 1% Hispanic; in 2007 the North Carolina population was 68% White, 22% Black, and 7% Hispanic (data are from the U.S. Census Bureau).
  17. See Luebke (1998) and Judis and Teixeira (2002) for informative reviews of the changing North Carolina electorate. Luebke focuses on the settlement patterns of recent Northern transplants, who as a group possess more socially tolerant and progressive political attitudes. Judis and Teixeira discuss postindustrial economic sectors such as the Research Triangle and Charlotte—localities that have successfully recruited highly educated workforces from outside the South.
  18. 1966 was the earliest date that North Carolina maintained annual registration records.
  19. Between 2004 and 2008, in North Carolina the increase in Republican registration was 4.8%, the increase in Democratic registration was 10.4%, and the increase in unaffiliated registration was 35.6% (D'Aprile & Anderson, 2009, p. 17). At different times the Democratic and Republican parties in North Carolina chose to open up their presidential primaries for unaffiliated registrants to participate. Republicans allowed the unaffiliated to participate in November, 1987; Democrats allowed the unaffiliated to participate in October, 1995. These changes became effective by statute in 1987 (Don Wright, Legal Counsel to the North Carolina State Board of Elections provided us with this information).
  20. In addition to U.S. states, the place of birth indicator in the North Carolina registration database includes codes for U.S. protectorates and a general code for anyone born outside the U.S. or a U.S. protectorate.
  21. This measure excludes a small number of North Carolinians who registered as Libertarians.

22. Other racial minorities account for trace amounts of registrants in North Carolina with *other race* and *unknown* being the largest two categories after *White* and *Black*. White and Black registrants account for 95.2% of total registration.
23. Public Policy Polling firm [www.publicpolicypolling.com](http://www.publicpolicypolling.com). Based on the data released to us, the PPP produced a very informative report on August 31, 2008 ("A Changing State.") summarizing the differences in the political characteristics and voter preferences of native and migrant Tar Heels.
24. The multinomial logit models presented in Tables 2 and 3 were reestimated using multinomial probit, a technique that does not impose the independence of irrelevant alternatives (IIA) property. The multinomial probit results are substantively identical to those presented from the multinomial logit technique with identical signs and significance between all of the coefficients in the models. The multinomial probit results are available from the authors on request.
25. All predicted values/probabilities are simulated using CLARIFY 2.1 (Tomz, Wittenberg, & King, 2003). The simulated probabilities in Figure 5 are based on a random sample of two million cases from the registration database.
26. The minimum values for the Democratic interaction term were 3.7% migrant and 15.8% Democratic and the maximum values were 18.4% migrant and 90.4% Democratic. For the unaffiliated interaction the minimum values were 4.9% migrant and 4.6% unaffiliated, whereas the maximum values were 47.4% migrant and 46.7% unaffiliated.
27. In 2004, presidential turnout in North Carolina was 57.8% and in 2008 it was 65.8%. Data are from Michael McDonald: <http://elections.gmu.edu/>.
28. Below the presidential level, since the mid-1990s, North Carolina has clearly trended Democratic, and this is true regardless of the type of election one seeks to examine (for evidence, see Prysby, 2009).
29. All of the statements regarding region of birth and population growth are from the census data shown in McKee (2009).
30. In 2008 these five South-Atlantic states had the closest presidential vote (two-party) margins in the South (nationally, North Carolina was 2nd, Florida was 5th, Georgia was 7th, Virginia was 8th, and South Carolina was 12th). Data are from the Federal Election Commission.
31. All five of the South-Atlantic states have experienced large increases in their Hispanic populations. The increase in the Hispanic population in Florida has had the greatest influence on its politics because such a large number of these Hispanics are from Puerto Rico and hence they are eligible to vote.
32. In Georgia, the percentage of residents born in the Midwest is slightly higher than the percentage of residents born in the Northeast (6.8% vs. 6.3%; McKee, 2009, p. 193).

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