

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Migration as an opportunity to register changing partisan loyalty in the United States

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**Abstract**

We explore the connection between residential migration choices and political party identification by movers who change their political party registration. We find that an impressive number of migrants choose neighbourhoods that favor their new party of registration. The association between the party change of the migrant and the balance of local partisanship in their new neighborhood cannot be accounted for by a process of neighbourhood socialisation because the move is too recent for socialisation pressures to have operated. It is more likely that the migrant's political transition occurred well before the relocation and shaped the destination search. Relocation offered an opportunity to mark a previously transformed partisan preference on the voter rolls. In this sense, partisan identification is stable, but observing any large subset of migrants may make it appear unhinged, as this group collectively takes its opportunity to officially disclose their change in political party loyalty when they have a chance to relocate and must reregister.

**KEYWORDS**

internal migration, party identification, political behaviour, political change, residential sorting, voter registration

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Uneven population growth across the United States, coupled with the increased spatial clustering of partisan identifiers, have produced intriguing and remarkable changes in the sociopolitical landscape over the last 60 years. Migration and settlement patterns are important politically when political institutions and electoral rules are closely tied to geography. One obvious example lies in the electoral college system for electing U.S. presidents. In 1876, Rutherford B. Hayes won the electoral college but lost the popular vote by 3%. A short time later, in 1888, Benjamin Harrison won the electoral college, whereas Grover Cleveland won the popular vote. These seemed like anomalies at the time, and it would be more than a century later, in the year 2000, when it happened again, with George W. Bush winning the electoral college majority and the presidency over Al Gore. But, not long after, in 2016, Donald Trump won the electoral college, whereas Hillary Clinton ran away with the popular vote majority. Shifting demographics may make this “anomaly” more common. For instance, if

more Democrats crowd into safe Democratic states like California, this movement makes it more likely that the electoral vote winner will not be the same as the popular vote winner. The same is true if more Republicans migrate to safe Republican states. Relocation patterns shape the electoral composition of states and regions, which in turn, have implications for elections and political representation.

Apart from actual votes, settlement patterns also influence social interaction, with political consequences to follow. Bill Bishop (2009) argues that neighbourhoods in the United States have been becoming more homogeneous over the last few decades, and that this has resulted in increased ideological polarisation. Others have also noted a connection between residential choices and a desire for homophily—to live among those who are similar in some way (Anacker & Morrow-Jones, 2005; Bishop 2009; Gimpel & Hui, 2015; Blanchard, 2007; Florida, 2002; Florida & Mellander, 2010; McDonald, 2011). If people are increasingly interacting with like-minded individuals, the limited exposure to cross-cutting viewpoints may entrench already-held beliefs, heightening intensity and intolerance. In this way, spatial

concentration has an effect on the formation, expression, and intensity of political preferences (Mutz, 2006).

From a self-selection standpoint, residential relocation choices are interesting because they embody revealed preferences for types of neighbours and neighbourhoods (Rossi & Shlay, 1982, 25). The political implications are not well-understood, and not even widely studied or discussed. Instead, the research that dominates the literature has long noted that the migration decision is chiefly economic, driven by the push-pull conditions of labour markets (Molloy, Smith, & Wozniak, 2011; Herzog, Schlottmann, & Boehm, 1993; Borjas, Bronars, & Trejo, 1992; Schlottman & Herzog 1981; Sandefur & Scott, 1981; Greenwood 1975; 1985; Sjaastad, 1962). Other phenomena, such as the growth of the suburbs and Republican flight from large diversifying central cities (Greenstein & Wolfinger, 1958; Taeuber & Taeuber, 1964; Wirt, 1965) have been identified, but political scientists have been slow to explore the impact of residential mobility on outcomes other than turnout. Some research exists that explores the impact of migration on the partisan leaning and political orientation of individuals (Brown, 1988; MacDonald & Franko, 2008). Others have identified large migration streams as a force for partisan change within regions and states (MacDonald, 2011; Cook, 2011; Hood & McKee, 2010; Robinson & Noriega, 2010; Bishop 2008; Dupre & Scala, 2002; Gimpel & Schuknecht, 2001). We have learned less, however, about the interplay between partisan affinity and residential relocation. Surely because economic factors are central to moving, there are secondary considerations that have important sociological dimensions, and both the economics and sociology of consumption decisions have political implications (Cho, Gimpel and Hui 2013; Gimpel & Hui, 2015, 2017, 2018).

## 2 | MOBILITY AND POLITICAL REORIENTATION

Despite uneven concentrations of partisans in particular areas, we are unsure how or if relocation decisions involve any consideration of the political composition of the destination. Although mobility is thought to be primarily anchored in economic and family considerations, people may wind up relocating to wherever their job prospects are best, or to locations where kinship ties are robust, not to areas they consider in harmony with their political outlook. Certainly, some who move to more politically consonant areas are doing so inadvertently because they have found economic opportunity there. Others may appreciate what on the surface appears to be nonpolitical attributes of the destination, not because they perceive anything politically compatible about it (Gimpel & Hui, 2017). These partisans simply transport their present political orientation to an area they read to be congruent with nonpolitical values. That the locale also reinforces their political values is a pleasant coincidence.

We must also be mindful that people choose their neighbourhoods for what they mean, making inferences about inhabitants from visual observations. Personal property is an extension of identity (Belk, 1988; Gosling, 2008), with a residence being a fundamental symbol of the self (Nasar, 1989; Sadalla, Verschure, & Burroughs, 1987). Homes, garages, automobiles, styles, and

decorations, as well as yards, attract the attention of others, and symbolise status and position (Reed, 2002, 239; Belk, 1988; Landon 1974; Levy, 1959). A dwelling is evaluated not simply because of its functional characteristics, but also for whether it fits one's self-image (Sirgy et al., 2005; Levy, 1959). Someone who identifies as a strong environmentalist, may place emphasis on housing with access to mass transit (Kahn, 2007). A giveaway that such residents may be present might be the presence of "green" vehicles in the neighbourhood, or perhaps homes with solar energy panels, as well as nearby businesses that cater to the tastes of eco-sensitive residents. Political sorting, resulting from the search for similar others, may be the result of racial and ethnic bias either for or against certain groups. Racial residential segregation has commonly been described as a result of the revealed preferences of White migrants in particular. Racial composition is also correlated with other neighbourhood characteristics, most obviously, income (Bayer, McMillan, & Reuben, 2004). And both race and income are commonly associated with partisan preference and related political viewpoints.

As politics has been extended into ever more realms of human activity, it has increasingly become associated with everyday consumer choices (Cohen, 2003; Kahn, Mishra & Singh 2013; Hoewe & Hatemi, 2017; Matos, Vinuales, & Sheinin, 2017) both in the United States, and in other countries (Koivula, Räsänen, & Saarinen, 2017). Because it is difficult to disentangle partisan preferences from a set of other preferences that may be governing relocation decisions, it may be helpful to examine the behaviour of a subset of voters who have both relocated and switched their party of registration. With this portion of the electorate, if there is a partisan aspect to their evaluation of destinations, we should observe change in the characteristics of the old neighbourhood vis-à-vis the new neighbourhood.

In our data on voter migration, we hypothesise that those who change their party of registration from origin to destination, are especially likely to choose politically compatible destinations. To explore this idea, we examine the migration patterns of a large number of voters both within the states where they reside, as well as across state boundaries to adjacent states. We first examine descriptive data to obtain a sense of how often mobility is accompanied with a change in party registration. Then, among movers who change their party registration, we explore whether the new party registration is more congruent with the balance of partisanship in their new environs.

Our observations possess the important advantage of being actual cases of residential relocation, as opposed to self-reports or recollections of past movement. Although we may not have data that bear on the precise mental steps or psychological sequence, our data *do not* show that the partisan switch is one that develops over a prolonged period of time as a slow acculturation process after relocation. Rather, the data on political party registration suggest that both the move and the partisan switch are proximate to one another in time. We are not observing movement first, and then partisan reorientation 5, 10, or 20 years later. We are observing moves that are closely associated in time with a registration with a different political party, *not allowing any time for the acculturation process in the new location to operate*. With no time for socialisation to occur, any political reorientation has to have occurred *beforehand*, and when the opportunity

to move arises, they have seized upon it to both register that new affiliation as well as move to a place more congenial to their new political identity.

### 3 | THE DYNAMICS OF RELOCATION AND PARTY SWITCHING

Admittedly, there is some ambiguity in the chain of events leading to the observation of a switch in party registration with relocation. For example, we are not able to discern exactly when the decision to switch parties occurred. In many cases, an individual psychologically realigns with another party well before the move occurs to the new location that is politically compatible with the revised partisan identity. There are many fact patterns that are consistent with this scenario. These voters might be living in a neighbourhood that they perceive themselves to be increasingly out-of-touch and uncomfortable with the local majority (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995; Van Ham & Feijten, 2008). Perhaps they are upwardly mobile, newly professional, and find that their views increasingly align with the Republican Party. When they have the opportunity to move, they use that chance to reregister as Republicans upon finding a socially compatible neighbourhood. Note that the causal direction here treats the relocation destination as a deliberate consumption choice following the psychological modification of a political preference. Relocation presents an important opportunity to bring party registration in line with party identity through the act of reregistration upon consummation of the move.

Others, however, may find relocation disruptive to previous habits of mind. Possibly, they express low to middling interest in political matters and moved to a politically dissonant location somewhat inadvertently. They may have been subject to political cross-pressures, having been subject to the socialising forces of one party earlier in life, but more recently subject to the pull of the other. Previous research suggests that migrants whose views are cross-pressured or only weakly moored will find themselves meandering gradually into political conformity with the local environment (Brown, 1981; Orbell, 1970). There is some possibility that moves are accompanied by a switch in party orientation consonant with the new location (Brown, 1988). This expectation is consistent with the belief that there is a social psychological environment that pressures the new arrivals to adopt the values and viewpoints of the majority (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954). Successful adaptation to a new environment is thought to involve the feeling of being accepted by established residents. Acceptance may come only with the adoption of similar viewpoints on a variety of subjects, politics included. This socialisation process is ordinarily thought to involve a lengthy period of acculturation where partisans first dealign, distancing themselves from their previous views, but do not immediately realign, readily adopting new ones. Judgement ambivalence, conflict, and attitude cross-pressures frequently characterise the political psychology of the new resident in this process of adaptation. Party change may occur slowly as migrants first adopt a case-by-case or individualistic approach to political evaluation and judgement (Brown, 1988). Here, partisan reorientation follows after the move, although vulnerability to social pressure

may itself be an antecedent factor anchored in both genetic and early environmental influences.

Fiorina and Abrams (2012) have expressed doubt about the socialisation mechanisms theorised to lie behind the increasing political party bias of counties, towns, and neighborhoods, pointing out that people frequently do not interact with their neighbours and rarely discuss politics. A self-selection argument places less weight on the role of social influence in producing conformity. If some significant flow of migrants is sorting itself into politically congenial locations from the outset, a location could become politically one-sided as the population of new arrivals accumulates over time. Over the course of a generation, a steady stream of in-migrants guided by self-selection could alter a place's political character even without the complementary causal force of socialising peer pressure. Some part of neighbourhood political change is the result of self-selection, some share is the consequence of long-term residents changing their minds, and part is probably attributable to the new arrivals who are gradually pressured into conformity with locals. At present, our research is unable to identify the precise proportions at play, but future research should make possible exactly such a determination.

### 4 | PARTY IDENTIFICATION AND PARTY REGISTRATION

As Finkel and Scarrow (1985) noted a generation ago, party identification and party registration are related, but not identical. Presently, 29 U.S. states (and the District of Columbia) offer citizens the option of registering with a political party, but some very large states do not, including Illinois, Ohio, Michigan, and Texas. From the YouGov 2010 *Cooperative Congressional Election Study*, a nationally representative survey drawn from a large online pool of respondents, 87% of identifying Democrats were also registered as Democrats. Eighty-one percent of Republican identifiers were registered as Republicans with 17% registered as independent. An estimated 78% of those saying they identified as independent were also registered as independents/undeclared—almost 10% said they were registered as Republicans, and 12% were registered Democrats.

At times, voters have registered as partisans because they wanted to vote in primaries—registering as an independent in a “closed primary” state precludes you from voting in a primary. Voters have also been known to register as partisans in one party in spite of identifying with another because the party of registration controlled all local political offices. This was the case in the South up until very recent times (Hadley, 1985; Trounstone, 2018). Party identification may not correspond to party registration for large subsets of highly mobile citizens. This is because movers may alter their party identification long before they ever mark such a change on the registration rolls—providing their state registers voters by political party in the first place.

In spite of some differences between party registration and party identification, party registration is, by far, the best guide to party preference that parties and candidates have as they seek to mobilise voters in election campaigns (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1992). Politicians

struggle to identify voter preferences in the absence of party registration information, forced to invest in costly voter identification programs to generate records that are nearly always incomplete.

The act of party registration itself demands some effort and is episodic.<sup>1</sup> If a voter's psychological attachment to a preferred party gradually or suddenly erodes, they need not change their party of registration in order to participate in general elections so there is little incentive to do so. If they stay at the same address, voters may go months, years, even decades without ever reregistering to alter a party preference. Certainly in closed primary states, failure to reregister may prevent them from voting in the primary of the party they have come to prefer, but for many, this is not much of an inconvenience as long as they can continue to exercise free choice in the general election.

Indeed, perhaps a switch in party identity occurred long ago, but has not yet been translated into a change on the voter rolls. In this sense, the reregistration is likely a lagging indicator of a change that had already occurred—some time years ago. This is why registration figures will make it appear that there is far more party switching than there actually is at any given time. Some of these changes in party identity occurred not at the time of reregistration but some period before, and so the act of moving and reregistering at a particular point for a particular group of voters represents an accumulation of partisan change from an undetermined span of time. In summary, party identification is stable, as the previous research has found, but observing a subset of movers may make it appear surprisingly unhinged, as this group collectively takes its opportunity to finally mark their dissatisfaction with their previous affiliation.

## 5 | DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

We now turn to our data on partisan change and stability among movers across the seven states that constitute our study area. First, it is clear from our data that the prevalence of migration and party change is significant enough that it can alter the partisan balance at the aggregate state level, even if all of the population mobility occurs within the state and no one arrives from the outside. The percentage of Republicans, Democrats, and independent/unaffiliated (hereafter "Independents," for simplicity) voters at the origin does differ from that at the destination even among the within-state migrants. From 2004 to 2010, Republicans gain from within-state migration in Delaware and New Jersey, but lose ground in the other states. Democrats gain ground in Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, California, Nevada, and Oregon.

Party switchers, as Table 1 reveals, are the largest share of within-state relocating voters in the Western states, once we discount New

**TABLE 1** Volume of party registration switching among migrating voters within state, 2004–2010

East	Party registration switchers						
	Total %	R to D	D to R	R to I	D to I	I to D	I to R
Delaware	9.8	1.1	2.4	0.9	2.8	1.4	1.2
Maryland	13.1	2.2	1.9	1.5	1.8	4.3	1.4
New Jersey	32.2	1.0	0.9	2.4	3.3	16.6	7.9
Pennsylvania	13.1	4.7	2.5	1.3	1.2	2.5	0.9
West							
California	18.3	3.2	2.4	2.7	3.0	4.7	2.3
Nevada	14.4	3.4	2.6	2.0	1.5	2.9	2.0
Oregon	17.6	2.9	1.5	2.8	2.5	6.1	1.9

Note. D: Democrat; I: independent; R: Republican.

Jersey due to its unusually large number of unaffiliated voters.<sup>2</sup> Moving from independent to one of the two major parties is more common than switching in the reverse direction. Republican to Democratic switches are also more common than Democratic to Republican, except in Delaware. In fact, high levels of migration internal to these states, appear to punish the Republican Party primarily with Republicans losing a net of 5.6% versus Democrats in Oregon, nearly 4% in Pennsylvania, and about 3% in California and Maryland, all as a result of changes in registration. Republicans do considerably better competing against the lure of the association with the independent category, but not by much, except in New Jersey, where the independent group is so large, it cannot help but drop (see footnote 1).

Cross-state migrants to adjacent states are much smaller in number than within-state movers. Whereas the California data contain nearly 2.6 million within-state movers from 2004 to 2010, only around 186,498 arrived in California from Oregon and Nevada. Similarly, about 382,020 within-state movers in Oregon are found in our data, but only 76,244 moved there from California or Nevada. New Jersey and Pennsylvania draw in more migrants from the other three nearby states than either Maryland or Delaware.

Table 2 shows that a substantially larger percentage of cross-state migrants than within-state migrants are party switchers. Delaware is a good example; whereas a mere 10% of its within-state movers changed their party registration, 31% of the Delaware-bound cross-state migrants did so. New Jersey is also distinctive. More than half (51%) of cross-state migrants changed their party from origin to destination, compared with just 32% of those moving but remaining inside New Jersey. The very large percentage (18.8%) of Pennsylvanians who switched from independent to Democrat were largely from New Jersey, and the same is true for the 10% share who switched from independent to Republican. As for whether the party switching associated with cross-state migration benefits Republicans or Democrats in

<sup>1</sup>As of early 2018, 36 states plus the District of Columbia have online voter registration, which has reduced the required effort significantly over in-person registration. The greater costs are probably informational. People are not aware of how and where to reregister and often don't inquire until an election approaches. If they do not register by the closing date deadline, typically 14 to 30 days out from an election, they may not be able to vote until the next election.

<sup>2</sup>Recent figures show that about 47% of New Jersey's electorate—about 2.4 million people as of Fall 2012—are classified as unaffiliated/independent (with 33% Democratic and 20% Republican), but state election rules allow unaffiliated voters to ask for the ballot of their preferred party when voting in primary elections. Once an unaffiliated voter casts a ballot for a candidate in one of the parties' primaries, the affiliation on the voter rolls automatically changes to the party for which the vote was cast. Clearly, if voters do not vote in primaries, then they may remain in the independent category for quite a long time.

**TABLE 2** Volume of party registration switching among migrating voters from outside the state, 2004–2010

East	Party registration switchers						
	Total %	R to D	D to R	R to I	D to I	I to D	I to R
Delaware	30.8	4.1	4.3	4.0	5.0	8.2	5.1
Maryland	31.0	5.1	3.3	3.6	3.9	10.1	4.9
New Jersey	51.1	4.0	2.9	15.7	23.7	3.1	1.6
Pennsylvania	40.3	3.7	3.7	1.8	2.2	18.8	10.1
West							
California	19.5	3.7	3.8	3.6	5.3	1.9	1.3
Nevada	21.6	4.4	4.2	3.5	3.4	3.3	2.7
Oregon	22.8	4.6	2.8	4.6	4.4	4.6	1.8

Note. D: Democrat; I: independent; R: Republican.

the aggregate, the results in Table 2 suggest either a wash—with neither party gaining an appreciable share of registrants over the other, for example, California and Nevada—or favor the Democrats, as in all four eastern states and Oregon. Of the two forces for partisan change, within-state migration is most helpful to Democrats and most undercuts Republicans. Migration across states is less harmful to Republican registration, though the Republican Party still does poorly relative to Democrats in New Jersey and Oregon.

In summary, the descriptive statistics highlight several key points. First, migration can alter the partisan balance of origins and destinations. Second, the volume of party switching after migration is remarkably impressive. Finally, although party loyalty may be generally stable, voters unquestionably use moving as an opportunity to change their party of registration on a widespread and routine basis. The next question is whether the political direction of the registration change is consistent with the political leaning of their destinations.

## 6 | MULTIVARIATE TESTS OF PARTY SWITCHING AND PARTISAN CONTEXT

To evaluate the hypothesis that switchers do change registration to match their new location requires a measure that captures the partisan difference between the origin and destination locales as the dependent variable. To operationalise this construct, we compute the difference in the percentage of Republican registration between the origin and destination. Positive values of the resulting measure indicate destinations that are more Republican than origins. Our explanatory variables control for differences between origin and destination locations that may be associated with partisanship and may also be relevant to the partisan change. This requires that we not only examine various combinations of partisan switching, but also observe those who move but remain loyal to the same party.

Among the control variables that are likely to be related to the variation in partisanship across space, we use the *difference between destination and origin in population density* on the straightforward expectation that a move to denser areas will be associated with Democratic gains and Republican losses. The *differences in percent Hispanic and percent Black* at the zip code level are expected to drive up

Democratic registration percentages, given that these populations exhibit Democratic loyalties.

Most migration researchers share a consensus that people generally migrate to improve their “situation,” however that situation may be defined (Maier & Weiss, 1991, 17). Sometimes, improvement is captured in the plainest of economic terms—gains in income. Certainly, some migrants may move to a more affluent neighbourhood from a less affluent one, altering the political composition of the neighbourhood in the process. To account for the frequency of this occurrence, we control for *the difference in median income* between destination and origin, as there is a general pattern of rising Republican identification with higher income. The U.S. census, including estimates for intercensal years, is the source for all of these zip code characteristics.

We were able to secure information on the religious characteristics of zip codes from a market research company, *InfoUSA*, which provided widely-utilised estimates of the types of churches and congregation sizes within each zip code. Unlike the economic and demographic information originating from U.S. census sources, figures on religious congregations are not based on a survey of where adherents *live*, but instead, are based on the geographic locations of the houses of worship. Even so, there is a limit as to how far residents will commute to religious services. In the absence of direct information about where congregants reside, this information on church location is a reasonable approximation for the residential concentration of adherents. Specifically, we include *differences between the destination and origin in the share of Evangelical Christians per 100 residents and the share of Jews per 100 residents*. We singled out these particular categories of religious affiliation because they commonly have one-sided political predilections, with Evangelicals favoring Republicans and Jews partial to Democrats.

The *distance between origin and destination zip codes* allows us to observe whether longer-distance moves, being generally most costly and involved, are more favorable to moving in the direction of more Republican destinations.

### 6.1 | State and county-level variables

Migrants often perceive their possible destination choices in non-independent clusters (Fotheringham & O’Kelly, 1989, 69). For example, a destination search may be confined to a particular county or metro area within reasonable proximity to employment. In addition, zip code boundaries may be quite arbitrary, as proximate neighbourhoods may not be considered substitutes for each other. As a means for accounting for the spatial dependence of neighborhood choices, we include three county-level covariates; county *population*, county *median home value*, and the *average Republican percentage of the recent presidential vote*. Total population at the destination is commonly included in migration models because it is thought to be a reflection of the magnetism of a place—larger destinations tend to attract more robust migration flows (Fotheringham & O’Kelly, 1989). We also suspect that more populous counties are more diverse, presenting greater variability across neighbourhoods than lightly populated, more rural locations.

High median home values in an area might not only slow migration to its constituent parts, but also diminish the propensity to search

out politically friendly enclaves within it. High home values are a sign of exclusivity. These are locations of uniform affluence, displaying only modest internal variation by neighbourhood compared with locations elsewhere. With greater homogeneity, there is little need to be highly discriminating among alternative neighbourhoods. More importantly, a large number of these affluent counties are home to lopsidedly Democratic populations throughout the study area. They are coastal and possess an eco-sensitive environmental affinity with the Democratic Party. Consequently, those moving to high home value counties as destinations are expected to be moving to less Republican and more Democratic areas.

Highly partisan counties are expected to house lopsidedly partisan zip codes, all other things equal. Regions pose a constraint, a lower and upper bound on how much their component parts can vary. More Republican counties tend to be more rural, with sparsely scattered and racially homogeneous populations throughout.

## 6.2 | Party switching

Our substantive focus in this paper is on those who change their party registration from origin to destination, hypothesising that these moves are generally consistent with the partisan direction of the move. Consistent with the descriptive data presented in Tables 1 and 2, among our explanatory variables, we examine registration change from Republican/Democrat/Independent to one of the other choices. In addition, we have a dichotomous variable to indicate partisan change. As a baseline for reference, we exclude those who maintained independent registration at both origin and destination. Descriptive statistics on these variables are presented in Tables A1 and A2.

## 6.3 | Model estimation

We use a hierarchical generalised linear regression to model the relationship between the state and county-level variables and the difference in partisanship between destination and origin zip codes for individual migrants in two regions; four Eastern states (Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania) and three Western states (California, Nevada, and Oregon). Individual movements within regions are probably not independent of one another, but share certain characteristics, and may be more similar to others within close proximity than they are to those in more distant locations.

For this application, the level-one model can be written as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{DiffRep}\%_{ij} = & \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}(R-D)_{ij} + \beta_{2j}(D-R)_{ij} + \beta_{3j}(R-I)_{ij} + \beta_{4j}(D-I)_{ij} \\ & + \beta_{5j}(I-R)_{ij} + \beta_{6j}(I-D)_{ij} + \beta_{7j}(R-R)_{ij} + \beta_{8j}(D-D)_{ij} \\ & + \beta_{9j}(\text{DiffDensity})_{ij} + \beta_{10j}(\text{DiffBlack})_{ij} \\ & + \beta_{11j}(\text{DiffHispanic})_{ij} + \beta_{12j}(\text{DiffIncome})_{ij} \\ & + \beta_{13j}(\text{DiffEvangel})_{ij} + \beta_{14j}(\text{DiffJewish})_{ij} \\ & + \beta_{15j}(\text{Distance})_{ij} + r_{ij} \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

where  $i$  indexes individual movers,  $j$  indexes locations, and  $r_{ij}$  represents the residual for individual  $i$  in neighbourhood  $j$ . At the second level, we model  $\beta_{0j}$  as a function of several level-2 predictors; county population size (in 1,000s), average county Republican vote, and median county home value (in \$1,000s). Categorical variables for each state of destination, with one baseline exclusion, are also added. The

level-1 intercept is modeled as shown below:

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{Population})_j + \gamma_{02}(\text{RepVote})_j + \gamma_{03}(\text{HomeValue})_j + \gamma_{04}(\text{State}_1)_j + \dots + \gamma_{07}(\text{State}_7)_j \quad (2)$$

Equation 2 assesses the extent to which the three level-2 indicators at the county-wide level influence the migrating population's mean level of Republican-leaning movement to constituent neighbourhoods. Positive values for these variables show that they influence movement in a Republican direction, whereas negative values show that higher values are associated with migration flows to less Republican (usually more Democratic) locations.

## 7 | RESULTS OF ESTIMATION

With a range of alternative destination choices, are political features of the various possible destinations relevant once we control for other covariates? Certainly, for some migrants they are, particularly those inclined to make a party switch. For our purposes, this is a key result found in Tables 3 and 4. Specifically, those switching from Republican to Democratic in the West, and moving within their state, are likely to move to a neighbourhood that is nearly 2 percentage points less Republican than the one they left. In the East, the impact is about half that, but in the same direction (Table 3). For those making the opposite switch, from Democratic to Republican, there is movement in a more Republican direction, by about 0.71 percentage points in the three Western states, and by nearly 2 percentage points in the East. Other types of registration change are also associated with the changing partisan composition of neighbourhoods. Republicans who change their registration status to independent also relocate to less Republican neighbourhoods—as if they are dealigning in the direction of their move. Interestingly, Democrats do the same thing in reverse—as switching to being Independent is associated with moving to more Republican neighbourhoods (West:  $\beta_{4j} = 0.59$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ; East:  $\beta_{4j} = 0.47$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ; see Table 3). As for the independent voters who switch to one of the two major parties, here, the tendency to match a new party choice to a neighbourhood inclination is not so clear-cut. Independent voters switching to Republicans actually move to slightly less Republican areas in the West, but more Republican areas in the East. The coefficients for Democrats making the same transition are substantively weak in the West, and not statistically discernible from zero in the East.

For the large plurality of party registrants who do not change parties, the results for within-state movers in Table 3 are more consistent with the reality of partisan mixing rather than partisan sorting across neighbourhoods—at least using zip codes as the geographic scale of observation. Specifically, within-state movers in both regions gravitate to locations where the opposition party is slightly stronger at their destination than it was at their origin. The durable Republicans wind up in locations that are 1.06 and 0.44 percentage points less Republican (more Democratic) than where they started from. Unwavering Democrats gravitate to areas that are 0.51 and 1.0 percentage points less Democratic (more Republican). This evidence of partisan mixing is consistent with the idea that many migrants leave behind

**TABLE 3** Movement to more Republican or Democratic neighbourhoods by party and type of partisan switch, 2004–2010, within state movers

	West within state $\beta$ (SE)	East within state $\beta$ (SE)
Intercept	-9.53* (0.04)	7.84 (0.05)
Population (1,000s)	0.0001* (0.000002)	0.0005* (0.00002)
Home Value (1,000s)	-0.0001* (0.00003)	-0.009* (0.0001)
% Republican	0.16* (0.001)	-0.17* (0.001)
California	0.08* (0.02)	—
Nevada	-1.48* (0.04)	—
Maryland	—	3.48* (0.04)
New Jersey	—	5.77* (0.04)
Pennsylvania	—	-0.92* (0.04)
Switch R to D	-1.94* (0.03)	-1.08* (0.04)
Switch D to R	0.71* (0.03)	1.98* (0.04)
Switch R to I	-1.69* (0.03)	-0.62* (0.04)
Switch I to R	-0.30* (0.04)	1.40* (0.04)
Switch D to I	0.59* (0.03)	0.47* (0.05)
Switch I to D	-0.35* (0.03)	-0.04 (0.03)
Republican (No Switch)	-1.06* (0.02)	-0.44* (0.02)
Democrat (No Switch)	0.51* (0.02)	1.00* (0.02)
Change % Evangelical	0.02* (0.0002)	-0.002* (0.0002)
Change % Jewish	-0.48* (0.003)	-0.46* (0.002)
Change Pop Density (1,000s)	-0.55* (0.001)	-0.44* (0.001)
Change Income (1000s)	0.07* (0.001)	0.11* (0.001)
Change %Black	-0.43* (0.001)	-0.30* (0.0003)
Change % Hispanic	-0.15* (0.0003)	-0.13* (0.001)
Distance miles	0.002* (0.0001)	-0.004* (0.0002)
N	2,888,668	2,452,651
*p < 0.001		
R <sup>2</sup> level 2 only	0.04	0.07
R <sup>2</sup> levels 1 and 2	0.44	0.54

Note. D: Democrat; I: independent; R: Republican; SE: Standard Error. Two level hierarchical linear model. Dependent variable: Difference in R% between origin and destination zip codes—positive values indicate a move to a more Republican zip code. Cell entries are coefficients with standard error in parentheses. Source: State Voter files, 2004, 2006, 2008, and 2010 for California, Nevada, Oregon; Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, plus 2006–2010 U.S. census data; religion data for 2010 at zip level originate from *InfoUSA*.

more unified red and blue locations within their states for heterogeneous and purple suburbs.

The covariates that capture differences between origin and destination characteristics paint an interesting portrait. Having a larger congregation of Jewish religious adherents at the destination relative to the origin drives down Republican registration in both the Eastern and Western states. The Evangelical presence is associated with larger Republican migration streams in the West, but not in the Eastern states. As one might predict, greater density is associated with lower Republican registration, as is an increase in the share of Black and Latino residents. Rising income from origin to destination predicts fewer Democrats at the destination. Longer distance moves within a state are to more Republican leaning destinations in the West, but to more Democratic locations in the East.

**TABLE 4** Movement to more Republican or Democratic neighbourhoods by party and type of partisan switch, 2004–2010, movers from other states

	West out-of-state $\beta$ (SE)	East out-of-state $\beta$ (SE)
Intercept	-28.63* (0.17)	-14.88* (0.13)
Population (1,000s)	0.0007* (0.00001)	-0.003*(0.0001)
Home Value (1,000s)	0.004* (0.0002)	0.018* (0.0001)
% Republican	0.49* (0.002)	0.21* (0.002)
California	5.07* (0.09)	—
Nevada	6.52* (0.08)	—
Maryland	—	-1.70* (0.07)
New Jersey	—	-12.63* (0.07)
Pennsylvania	—	12.88* (0.06)
Switch R to D	-3.74* (0.12)	-4.79* (0.09)
Switch D to R	-0.02 (0.13)	0.34* (0.09)
Switch R to I	-3.81* (0.12)	-3.13* (0.08)
Switch I to R	-1.40* (0.17)	4.30* (0.07)
Switch D to I	0.16 (0.12)	.52* (0.07)
Switch I to D	-0.13 (0.13)	3.46* (0.06)
Republican (No Switch)	-3.02* (0.07)	-3.60* (0.05)
Democrat (No Switch)	0.11 (0.06)	-1.56* (0.05)
Change % Evangelical	0.02* (0.0007)	0.007* (0.0008)
Change % Jewish	-0.57* (0.008)	-0.44* (0.005)
Change Pop Density (1000s)	-0.70* (0.004)	-0.46* (0.003)
Change Income (1,000s)	0.09* (0.001)	0.02* (0.001)
Change % Black	-0.49* (0.003)	-0.30* (0.001)
Change % Hispanic	-0.03* (0.001)	-0.21* (0.001)
Distance Miles	-0.002* (0.0001)	0.003* (0.0002)
N	279,815	568,788
*p < 0.001		
R <sup>2</sup> level 2 only	0.25	0.40
R <sup>2</sup> levels 1 and 2	0.46	0.66

Note. D: Democrat; I: Independent; R: Republican party; SE: Standard Error. Two level hierarchical linear model. Dependent variable: Difference in R% between origin and destination zip codes—positive values indicate move to a more Republican zip code. Cell entries are coefficients with standard error in parentheses. Source: State Voter files, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010 for California, Nevada, Oregon; Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, plus 2006–2010 U.S. census data; religion data for 2010 at zip level originate from *InfoUSA*.

Migration across state lines is generally a more costly undertaking than a move within state. From establishing residency and obtaining a new driver's license, new bank accounts, and adjusting to a potential host of new laws and regulations, the move from one state to another is almost always more involved than within a state. Results for cross-state migrants also show that party switching does occur coincident with moves to locations that lie in the direction of the switch. Certainly, for those who switch from Republican to Democrat, the destination locations are 3.7 and 4.8 percentage points less Republican than the origins (see Table 4). Those who switch in the opposite direction only move to marginally more Republican locations in the East, but there is no effect in the West. Republicans who reregister as independents move to less Republican locations in both regions. Democrats reregistering as independents move to more Republican

areas in both regions, although with no statistical difference in the West. The independents who switch to the Republican Party move to more Republican locations in the East, though to less Republican locales in the West. This latter finding for the West can be accounted for by California as a magnet for cross-state migrants who are drawn to very Democratic-leaning places throughout its cities and suburbs.

As with the within-state migration category, we see that stalwart party identifiers show some propensity to mix, rather than to sort. Republicans in particular, find themselves moving to areas that are, on average, 3 to 4 percentage points less Republican. These are substantively large effects that reflect the economic draw of larger Democratic cities and suburbs in California and Oregon. Notably, however, the Democrats moving across state lines try to find even more Democratic neighbourhoods in that to relocate, having a greater choice of politically-friendly options in the region than Republicans do.

The level-2 variables show some rather different effects on choice of out-of-state migration destination than they do the within state choices. Our modelling revealed that county-level covariates mattered much more to cross-state flows than they did to within-state movement (comparing explained variation in Tables 3 and 4). This is not surprising, given that many within-state flows also occur *within counties* rather than across them. As for the level-2 coefficients, Republican voting history and higher home values in a county are associated with moves to more Republican neighbourhoods in both regions, but county population size is associated with moves to more Democratic zip codes in the East. Flows to major metropolitan areas in these four states are to counties with fairly uniform Democratic traditions in suburban New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, DC. It is not easy to find a one-sided Republican neighbourhood proximate to these cities, much less within them.

The other covariates in Table 4 mirror those in Table 3. A move to a more urbanised zip code is one that favours greater Democratic dominance. The same is true of moves that result in more Black and Latino neighbours in the new locale than in the old one. Moving to an area with higher median income also predicts a move to a more Republican leaning place, showing that gravitating to more affluent areas is responsible for partisan sorting in these states. Not surprisingly, a larger Jewish presence at the destination predicts a move to a more Democratic leaning area. Conversely, a larger Evangelical presence is associated with a more Republican one. For the adherents of these religious traditions, moving to a location to be closer to one's church or temple clearly facilitates political sorting, though more so in the Western states than in the East.

Across the two regions, the estimates are more alike than they are different. The differences boil down to the types of locations that are important magnets for migrants. The most popular East coast zip for cross-state migrants, 21921 (Elkton, Maryland), attracted over 5,000 new residents and is located equidistant between Baltimore and Philadelphia (approximately 50 miles), on the Maryland-Delaware state line. Several nearby zips are also rapid-growth locations. This is a low-cost area for housing compared with suburbs closer to either major city, but is within commuting distance of their suburbs, as well as other sizable cities in the region, such as Wilmington, Delaware (about 20 miles). It is a perfect location for maximising economic

opportunity in an uncertain economy while minimizing the cost of housing.

The most popular West coast zip codes for out-of-state migrants are largely in Oregon. Topping the list is 97701 (Bend, OR), which is also considered a moderate-cost area. Although employment there is growing, it is too far to commute to Portland (175 mi) or Salem (130 mi), or even Eugene (130 miles) for that matter. Unlike Elkton, Maryland, Bend is not considered highly accessible and does not lie on an interstate highway. Perhaps because of its relative isolation and moderate expense, however, Bend is one of the most popular settlement spots for retirees from California.

The convergence of migrant-receiving neighbourhoods at the junction of the Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland borders is a fascinating study in residential choice. These communities are all approximately within the same commuting distance of major cities in the region. Notably, more switchers from Democrat to Republican selected to live in the more Republican Pennsylvania zip codes than in either Delaware or Maryland. The very Republican Party oriented, Chester, Pennsylvania, (i.e., zip code 19013), historically famous as one of the few Republican machine cities, is another good example where switchers from Democratic to Republican were far more eager to move in than switchers from Republican to Democratic. A similar case in New Jersey is Wildwood, a beach resort area in Cape May County, and a traditionally Republican area in an otherwise heavily Democratic state. Our data show that 124 switchers from Democratic to Republican moved into Wildwood, whereas only a mere 35 switchers from Republican to Democratic moved in, yet statewide, there are more total switchers that move from Republican to Democratic than in the reverse direction. Perhaps Republicans survive in New Jersey because, as minorities, they can congregate in places like Wildwood. Maybe the best example of a location where out-of-state switchers from Republican to Democratic far outnumbered those who switched from Democratic to Republican is the prestigious and affluent Society Hill neighbourhood of Southeast Philadelphia. There, converted Democrats outweighed converting Republicans by 121 to 39 margin, or 3 to 1.

The West Coast also has intriguing examples that are good micro-level studies in the differential attraction of partisans changing their party identification. Ashland, Oregon, (zip 97520), well-known as a hippie enclave full of progressive thinkers and alternative lifestyle-types on the California-Oregon border, attracts far more switchers from Republican to Democratic than the reverse. So does the liberal university town, Eugene. There are fewer locations in the West where switchers from Democratic to Republican moving across state lines far outnumber those changing registration from Republican to Democratic, but there are some in Nevada, near Carson City and Reno (i.e., zips 89423, 89434). An interesting example of such a location in California is the affluent coastal community in Southern California, San Clemente, well-known for being the home of Richard Nixon. Perhaps a more typical example is the inland community of Modesto, California (i.e., zip 95350). Although the recession beginning in 2007 dampened population migration across the board, more Republicans and Republican converts continued to flow into these locations compared with established and newly converted Democrats.



Still, Democrats, by virtue of their substantial registration edge in California and Oregon, have more destinations to choose from that are one-sided in their favor, and they flow to those locations in more one-sided streams. One clearly does not move to Oakland, California (i.e., zips: 94605, 94610), and switch from being a Democrat to a Republican. The reverse switch (R to D), however, is nine times more common. The same is true of Portland, Oregon. It draws in newly converted Democrats at a rate eight times greater than it does newly converted Republicans.

## 8 | CONCLUSIONS

We have examined a particular subset of people, those who change their party registration coincident with a move to a new destination. To the extent that economic opportunities permit, these switchers commonly move to locations that favour their new party registration more than their origin location did. We are not as concerned here about whether this sorting occurs because politics is explicitly in mind as a relocation criterion, or is simply correlated with other preferences associated with income, housing density, religion, or racial/ethnic composition. Partisan sorting may have any number of indirect mechanisms anchored in economics, demographics, values, and consumption preferences (Gimpel & Hui, 2017). Nevertheless, even after we control for differences between a number of origin and destination characteristics that are related to the partisan composition of neighbourhoods, we still find a role for partisan composition to play among those who have a change in partisan orientation in mind. Whether the mechanism is direct or indirect, partisan sorting patterns appear at the zip code scale of geographic observation.

The supply of one-sided Republican and Democratic destinations clearly matters in a region. Democrats in both of these regions have more choices of safely Democratic areas than Republicans have of safe Republican ones. That must be taken into account as the results of estimation are considered, seeing that Democratic switchers to the Republican Party in Table 4 are often stuck with neighbourhoods not much different from the ones they left behind. The supply of politically compatible neighbourhoods is the ultimate constraint on political sorting. Democrats who have become Republicans migrating from Nevada to the San Francisco Bay Area for employment will have a very hard time finding a neighbourhood as congenial as the one they left.

Although partisan sorting may be happening among a broad spectrum of partisans and party switchers, we also find ample evidence of partisan mixing, showing that politics is not an overriding factor in choice of destination. Durable partisans or nonswitchers show clear evidence that they will migrate to destinations where the opposite party has a greater edge relative to their origin. With Republicans commonly moving from rural and suburban areas that are lopsidedly red, and Democrats moving from one-party dominant inner-city locations, it is easy to understand how the two groups converge on mixed partisan areas located mainly in suburbs. A large number of Portland suburbs, for example, seem equally like to attract stable partisans from both parties. Other examples of such locations include the Los Angeles suburbs of Camarillo (zip 93012) and Santa Clarita (zip 91355). In the East, economically robust metro edge areas, such as Camp Hill (zip

17011) and Langhorne (zip 19047), Pennsylvania, are examples of locations that attract equal numbers from both parties, without regard to partisan political composition at the zip code level of observation.

Although here we are suggesting that a significant subset of movers do self-select into politically congenial neighbourhoods, we do not want to call into doubt the influence that long term exposure to a neighbourhood has on partisan socialisation and resocialisation (Brown, 1988; Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995). This is also an important process well worth continued research. There are undoubtedly cases of party switching that occur as the result of long term exposure to dissonant political contexts, but we are not able to observe those directly in our data. What we have seen is party switches that are observable at the time a person moves from one place to another, lacking prolonged exposure via residence in the new location. Our evidence shows that there is movement to a destination that is more congruent with their party change than their origin. This suggests, but does not prove, a rather different causal story, one in which the party switch happens before the change in context, and the new context is a result of rather than the source of the party reorientation. Additional studies at other scales of observation, more granular than the zip code, are surely needed, as are studies of movement and political orientation over longer spans of time.

Tens-of-thousands of voters move across state lines on an annual basis, exporting their political identities to new settings, and often changing their identities to suit their new environments. While incremental, the movement and resettlement patterns, if consistent over time, become increasingly consequential as they accumulate. The bulk of movers are destined for the most economically viable locations. Commonly, these are suburbs and exurbs of major cities that appear to be evenly competitive (e.g., purple) at the zip level, but at a more granular scale, could prove to be more one-sided. Continuous monitoring of the politicisation of previously non-political aspects of life will be helpful for understanding these movement patterns. As it now stands, many economic opportunities that remain determinative of migration flows appear to have no clear-cut political dimensions or implications. Whether this remains the case in the face of the gradual extension of partisan cleavage into the culture is a question we leave open.

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APPENDIX A

**TABLE A.1** Descriptive statistics for models of voter migration within state

	West within state		East within state	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Difference Rep %	-2.64	12.32	-1.16	13.28
Difference Dem %	0.18	11.16	2.80	14.45
N Nevada	0.02	0.13	-	-
N California	0.86	0.34	-	-
N Oregon	0.12	0.32	-	-
N Delaware	-	-	0.21	0.40
N Maryland	-	-	0.19	0.39
N New Jersey	-	-	0.57	0.50
N Pennsylvania	-	-	0.21	0.40
Switch R to D	0.03	0.18	0.03	0.18
Switch D to R	0.02	0.15	0.02	0.14
Switch R to I	0.03	0.16	0.02	0.12
Switch I to R	0.02	0.15	0.02	0.15
Switch D to I	0.03	0.17	0.02	0.13
Switch I to D	0.05	0.21	0.06	0.22
Stay R	0.26	0.44	0.26	0.43
Stay D	0.35	0.47	0.39	0.48
Stay I	0.12	0.32	0.15	0.35
Difference in Density	-511.10	6,790.93	-561.89	5,248.38
Difference in Income	-3,619.43	24,762.58	-3,327.23	20,813.95
Difference % Black	-0.31	9.30	-1.73	21.14
Difference % Hispanic	-0.07	20.51	-0.27	11.37
Difference Evangelical	0.38	23.15	-0.13	28.93
Difference Jewish	-0.03	2.02	-0.01	3.02
Distance Mileage	57.24	121.10	23.60	42.89

Note. D: Democrat; I: Independent; R: Republican. Descriptive statistics for variables included in Table 3.

**TABLE A.2** Descriptive statistics for models of voter migration across state lines

	West outside state		East outside state	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Difference Rep %	-3.51	16.09	1.10	20.52
Difference Dem %	0.95	13.69	6.01	25.41
N Nevada	0.26	0.44	-	-
N California	0.27	0.45	-	-
N Oregon	0.47	0.50	-	-
N Delaware	-	-	0.10	0.30
N Maryland	-	-	0.22	0.41
N New Jersey	-	-	0.17	0.38
N Pennsylvania	-	-	0.51	0.50
Switch R to D	0.26	0.44	0.04	0.20
Switch D to R	0.27	0.45	0.03	0.18
Switch R to I	0.47	0.50	0.05	0.23
Switch I to R	0.04	0.20	0.07	0.25
Switch D to I	0.03	0.18	0.07	0.26

(Continues)

**TABLE A.2** (Continued)

	West outside state		East outside state	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Switch I to D	0.04	0.20	0.13	0.34
Stay R	0.02	0.14	0.19	0.39
Stay D	0.04	0.20	0.25	0.43
Stay I	0.04	0.19	0.10	0.30
Difference in Density	-600.03	6,942.83	-163.20	7,596.96
Difference in Income	-8,552.28	27,094.23	-8,051.83	29,555.10
Difference % Black	-0.69	8.27	-1.49	26.67
Difference % Hispanic	-2.94	22.79	-0.12	12.97
Difference Evangelical	0.77	32.18	0.04	20.46
Difference Jewish	-0.06	2.68	0.08	3.36
Distance Mileage	606.03	308.92	114.88	93.96

Note. D: Democrat; I: Independent; R: Republican. Descriptive statistics for variables included in Table 4.

**TABLE A.3** Descriptive statistics for level-2 county covariates

	Western states		Eastern states	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
County pop. (1000s)	385.88	1,078.22	241.53	274.51
Median home value	298,439.64	162,986.97	207,740.87	113,637.41
% Republican vote	53.63	13.44	52.84	11.44
	N = 111		N = 115	

Note. Descriptive statistics for level-2 variables included in Tables 3 and 4.