The persistence of white ethnicity in New England politics

James G. Gimpel[a,*], Wendy K. Tam Cho[b]

[a]Department of Government, University of Maryland, 3140 Tydings Hall, College Park, MD 20742, USA
[b]Department of Political Science and Department of Statistics, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Urbana, IL 61801, USA

Abstract

There was a consensus among earlier students of New England politics that the political influence of European ancestry was fading by the latter half of the 20th century. We examine this proposition in recent times by exploring the role of ethnic ancestry in explaining the political divide in the region's presidential voting in over 1500 New England towns. Contrary to earlier predictions, ethnic origin does retain some explanatory power in models of recent voting behavior, and ethnic cleavages have not been entirely replaced by economic divisions in the electorate. Although the settlement patterns of the more established and numerous nationality groups (i.e. Irish and Italians) are less associated with partisanship than they were 50 years ago, the political salience of white ethnicity persists, suggesting that ethnic groups do not simply dealign or politically "assimilate" over time. Some groups maintain a strong identity in spite of upward mobility because movement from city to suburbs is selected not just on housing, income or school characteristics, as is usually the case, but on ethnicity too. Towns with significant concentrations of specific European ancestry groups lean Republican, even after we have accounted for the presence of other sources of political leaning and past voting tendencies, while Democratic attachments are undeniably strong in towns where the newer immigrant groups have settled. The "new ethnicity" (i.e. racial minorities) and the "old ethnicity" (i.e. white ethnics) clearly carry distinct political implications for this region's presidential politics.
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* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: jgimpel@gvpt.umd.edu (J.G. Gimpel), wendy@cho.pol.uiuc.edu (W.K.T. Cho).

The study of white ethnicity and politics has lost momentum in recent years. One reason may be that "ethnicity" has become synonymous with the ethnicity of minority populations only, and so the large immigrant influx from Asian and Latin American nations since the late 1960s has redirected the research spotlight to the political assimilation and identity of minority groups. Perhaps as well, many have come to accept the notions of assimilation suggesting that ethnic identity declines in significance as immigrant heritage grows increasingly distant. But whatever the source, the literature plainly recognizes ethnic identity to be an enduring foundation for political attitudes and vote choices. Accordingly, ethnic identity, whether that of whites or others, may become less prominent, but nevertheless remain an important indirect influence, long after the initial conditions that fueled its saliency have faded from collective memory.

Electoral geographers suggest that place identities have remained relevant to political attitudes and behavior, in spite of the trends toward nationalization and homogenization that seem to be eroding distinctive local patterns (Agnew, 1987, Chap. 5; Gimpel & Schuknecht, 2003). Place identities are constructed by the resources and constraints of the physical environment, features of the built environment, including government institutions, and the people who come to reside there (Johnston, 1991, Chap. 3). Political behavior in New England remains place-specific due in part to the history of dense immigrant settlement from the 19th and early 20th centuries. The contemporary political character of New England remains tied to ethnicity through the reinforcement of governing institutions at the micro-level of the town (as opposed to the county or some broader geographic unit), a unit small enough to encompass relatively homogeneous local populations. The arrival of newer immigrant groups to New England is reshaping the relationship between ethnicity and politics, as older ethnic groups redefine their interests relative to the interests of the newer arrivals who are gradually gaining political influence.

Understanding the persistence of ethnic influence on political attitudes requires some attention to the ongoing political socialization process in local environments. The geographic structure of ethnic politics is more than locating the areas where voters of a particular ethnic origin are concentrated, since these concentrations are only the beginning of the story. From these place-specific foci, ethnic influence may diffuse. Voters may socialize neighbors and their offspring to express and sustain political views that might otherwise be washed away by other forces. A brand of politics emerging from distant ethnic roots can influence offspring and nearby others who are completely uninformed about ethnicity. This phenomenon is sometimes referred to as a kind of contagion (Agnew, 1987; Cox, 1969; Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995; Johnston, 1986a; Johnston et al., 2004), or diffusion, but can also be understood in terms of ordinary socialization and learning processes (Cox, 2002, 144). Geographic concentration is instrumental for steering new populations toward established values because proximity facilitates political communication and learning (Burbank, 1995; Johnston, 1986a,b). People are also rewarded with acceptance for adopting locally expressed values, suggesting that social pressures toward conformity can impede otherwise strong winds of change. Even in cases

where there may be very little social interaction among local members of a population, people do emulate what they see and believe, suggesting that those who live together behave similarly (Johnston et al., 2004, 3). This socialization process creates greater homogeneity of political viewpoint in local environments than would be present otherwise.

By examining the persistent effect of white ethnicity on political behavior, we seek to broaden our understanding of ethnic political development and voting. We begin our inspection by discussing the past role and prominence of white ethnicity. We then juxtapose these historic assessments of ethnic persistence and decline with the patterns observable by our empirical analysis of the effect of white ethnicity on presidential politics in over 1500 towns in six New England states. We conclude with a discourse on the implications of these findings for understanding the persistence of ethnicity in electoral politics.

New England politics

Politics in New England have long been associated with ethnicity and immigration, and these characteristics have long been geographically concentrated. Prominent political scientists who wrote about New England politics in the mid-20th century described it as cleaved between immigrants and non-immigrants, separating economic interests that steered some populations toward urban and some toward rural settlement (Dahl, 1961; Eisinger, 1978; Key, 1955, 1956; Lockard, 1959). There were, to be sure, differences between northern New England (Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine) and southern New England (Connecticut, Rhode Island and Massachusetts) in precisely these terms (Becker, 1997). Vermont, for instance, was the most strongly Republican of the states because its agricultural economy invited no recent immigrant populations (Key, 1956, 25; Lockard, 1959, 11). Maine and Vermont were noteworthy as the only two states that had resisted the 1936 Roosevelt landslide, and Vermont was Eisenhower's best state in the 1952 and 1956 elections (Speel, 1998, 21). Connecticut, Rhode Island and Massachusetts, on the other hand, were heavily industrialized states that needed to fill their labor pool with immigrants from abroad. The greater social and economic heterogeneity of these states provided them with the familiar class foundation for traditional two-party politics (Key, 1956; Lockard, 1959).

This earlier understanding of New England politics as cleaved between immigrant and native, and farm versus factory, was shaped by accurate, albeit case-oriented, observations of the politics of the time. Later surveys showed that the recent immigrant population, and particularly Catholics, strongly supported the candidacy of Kennedy over Nixon in 1960, as did the working-class population (Converse, Campbell, Miller, & Stokes, 1961; Rourke, 1965, 151).

Fresh immigrant roots, in the context of the 1960s, were found in several populations: Irish, French Canadians, Italians and Poles—all of whom were predominantly Democratic in their partisan orientation by comparison to the Yankee Republicans (Lockard, 1959, 312; Petrin, 1990). At the time, these immigrant

populations occupied the lowest rungs on the economic ladder, and so, not surprisingly, they found their way into Democratic party politics through the first half of the 20th century (Dahl, 1961, 45). Subject to the discrimination and segregation that perpetuated poverty, they developed a high degree of group consciousness that led them to vote together (Fuchs, 1957, 436; 1968; Marston, 1988). Even in locations where interethnic competition for office encouraged Republican voting by some groups (e.g. the Italians in New Haven), ethnic bloc voting was commonplace throughout the region.

There was also a consensus among early students of New England political behavior that the political influence of European ancestry was fading by the latter half of the 20th century. Urban machines and political bosses were disappearing, and politicians were making fewer explicit appeals to nationality groups. Germans, Irish, and Italians were moving up and out of traditional port-of-entry enclaves, and were no longer homogeneous proletarian blocs sharing a common experience of discrimination and poverty (Dahl, 1961, Chap. 4; Lockard, 1959; Wolfinger, 1965). This increasing economic heterogeneity among white ethnics led Dahl to conclude that ethnically-based politics could not last in New Haven, and was giving way to a politics defined more by economics, with the haves versus the have-nots (Dahl, 1961, 59). While Dahl's theory of ethnic political development was almost immediately challenged, he was certainly not alone in predicting the declining political salience of white ethnicity for the New England states, or elsewhere. His predictions appeared to be based in the dominant sociological tradition of the day, as expressed in the influential work of the Chicago school (Park, 1950; Park, Burgess, & McKenzie, 1925).

Enduring ethnicity and social concentration

Dahl's three-stage assimilation model was sharply criticized by those who insisted that ethnicity was not subsumed by class, but that the two operated in tandem to influence political behavior (Miller, 1971, 1974; Parenti, 1967). These scholars insisted that many white ethnic subcultures had not been absorbed into the mainstream, and that minimally, ethnicity played a symbolic and intermittent role in defining political identity (Parenti, 1967, 723). Wilson and Banfield's well-known article suggested that ethnic voters remained cohesive political blocs in spite of their economic heterogeneity, even on measures associated with tangible costs and bene-fits. The voting patterns on these measures were more consistent with calculations of group-interest or community-minded considerations, than with self-interest nar-rowly construed (Wilson & Banfield, 1964, 885). In the second edition to their famous work, *Beyond the Melting Pot*, Glazar and Moynihan (1970) were forced to admit that the full assimilation of the ethnic groups they had studied was further off than they had expected (pp. xxiii, xxxiii). Through the 1970s, a series of scholars con-tinued to challenge the assimilationist perspective, arguing that ethnicity persisted in spite of intermarriage, upward economic mobility and migration to the suburbs (Cohen, 1977; Greeley, 1971, 1974; Novak, 1973). More recent research on Asians

and Latino immigrants has dismissed the idea that assimilation is a smooth, linear process (Rumbaut, 1997; Waters, 1990).

Students of Dahl, sympathetic to the ethnic-decline thesis, pointed out that ethnicity may be sustained past the first generation by the emergence of middle-class ethnic office holders who are able to sustain ethnic consciousness through name recognition and particularistic appeals (Wolfinger, 1965). More importantly, ethnic identity may be a core component of partisanship purely through the inter-generational transmission of party identification from parent to child. While one might not consciously connect ancestry to a chosen party affiliation, the connection may still be a function of inherited loyalties, rooted in the time when ethnic identity and party identification first fused (Wolfinger, 1965). In this way, political identity need not be the product of contemporary interests, but simply of family tradition and habits (Jennings & Niemi, 1974; Knoke & Felson, 1974; Knoke & Hout, 1974).

The intergenerational socialization process that sustains a multi-generational connection between ethnicity and politics might be especially powerful in places where geographic mobility is limited—where residential settlement patterns are highly segregated, and where there is a tradition of inward-looking ethnic communities (Allen & Turner, 2004; Carsten, 1988; Ianni, 1957). In New England, primary relationships remain more ethnically homogeneous than they do in any other region of the United States. Although the area's manufacturing towns attracted few job-hunters in the last quarter of the 20th century, as globalization took its toll in high unemployment rates and shuttered factories, surprisingly few people left the region. Suburbanization led to the internal reshuffling of the population, but none of the New England states declined in population between 1960 and 2000, with New Hampshire actually doubling in size, due in part to local migration streams from southern New England. The region, in fact, has experienced a remarkable level of geographic stability.

Census figures provide evidence that residents of the six New England states have had very low rates of mobility. The 2000 Census reports that 58% of New England's residents remained in the same house over the previous 5 years, compared with only 53% of those living in other states ($t = 4.7$; $p \leq 0.001$). Although New Englanders have reported increasing migration across state lines, much of this migration is internal to New England, such as the movement from Massachusetts to New Hampshire and Vermont. At the same time, Maine, Vermont, Massachusetts and Connecticut all rank in the top ten most stable states using this criterion, a characteristic that no doubt reinforces, and is reinforced by, the kinship ties that sustain ethnic attachment (Kobrin & Speare, 1983).

Settlement stability coupled with geographic concentration has provided a steady stream of ethnic names for many political offices into the beginning of the 21st century. While ethnic identity may not have been a conscious, highly salient consideration as the average New England voter walked into the voting booth in the 2000 or 2002 elections, vote choices may nevertheless be traceable to ethnicity anchored in family tradition (Abramson, 1973; Alba, 1976; Wolfinger, 1965, 908). In short, the forces of ethnic concentration and geographic immobility, often

strengthened by common religious confession, have helped to maintain the intergenerational continuity of the relationship between ethnicity and politics. Enduring ethnic roots and continued social concentration suggest that we have every reason to expect the sustained influence of white ethnicity on New England's political behavior. That is not to say, however, that we expect party loyalties of white ethnic communities to be entrenched in the traditions of the past. It is certainly possible that the suburbanization and upward economic mobility of the older ancestry groups has redefined their political interests. As early as 1954, Campbell, Gurin, and Miller (1954) show that third generation ethnic Americans were more Republican than their Democratic parents and grandparents.

Ironically, although the ethnic composition of this region has undergone considerable change since the middle of the 20th century, the arrival of new populations may have had the effect of reinforcing the linkage between ethnicity and political identity for established white ethnic groups. New immigrants have streamed into the older port-of-entry locations where Democratic party politics remains dominant—the same locations that the older white ancestry groups had left behind. The recent immigrants are distinguished neither by being predominantly White nor from European nations. Their ethnicity is perhaps especially salient because it is associated with racial traits, not simply a voluntary identification (Waters, 1990, 158–160). They are also settling in established, mostly urban, co-ethnic neighborhoods where they are socialized into the politics of the Democratic party, and are gradually changing the complexion and character of local political organizations (Hardy-Fanta & Gerson, 2002).

That the new ethnics are racially distinctive, do not necessarily live near the old ethnics, are less economically secure, and are becoming an increasingly important Democratic voting bloc suggests that there is geographic "balkanization" or segregation of the old from the new that is evident in rival political interests. Glazar and Moynihan (1970) suggested (although later dismissed) the idea that the salience of white ethnicity for politics was maintained in spite of their earlier predictions precisely because of the resurgence of racism that accompanied black power (p. xxxvii). The emerging body of research on "whiteness" suggests that racist beliefs are integral to white ethnic identity (Barrett & Roediger, 1997; Marston, 2002; Roediger, 1991). By extension one might also offer the hypothesis that an emerging connection between white ethnicity and Republican voting in New England is attributable to the rising tide of racially distinctive new immigrants who, joining African Americans, are increasingly mobilizing within Democratic ranks. Heppen and Mesyanzhinov (2003) found a similar pattern underlying partisan change in Louisiana between 1948 and 2000 (see also Giles & Hertz, 1994).

In New England, the new ethnic groups have settled into segregated communities, both from one another and from those of European ancestry. High concentration is an indication of relative geographic immobility, an immobility associated with organizing institutions (e.g. churches) that help to reinforce ethnicity as a resource and political relation (Gamm, 1999; Glazar & Moynihan, 1970). Political socialization research predicts that geographic concentration will enhance ethnic bloc voting. Accordingly, we now turn to an examination of the social and political

Table 1
Ten most frequent white ethnic ancestry groups claimed by New Englanders in Census 2000 and the extent of their regional concentration

Rank	Group	Total claims	Percent	Moran's I*
1	Irish	2,682,214	19.5	0.38
2	Italian	1,868,581	13.6	0.62
3	English	1,793,761	13.0	0.34
4	French	1,285,267	9.3	0.39
5	German	1,010,760	7.3	0.32
6	French Canadian	776,833	5.6	0.28
7	Polish	733,125	5.3	0.59
8	Portuguese	434,434	3.2	0.32
9	Scottish	389,821	2.8	0.14
10	Swedish	253,900	1.8	0.15

Figures under "Total claims" indicate the number of New Englanders claiming to be of each nationality group. Entries under "Percent" indicate the percentage of the population claiming to be of each nationality group. *All listed Moran's I statistics are significant at $p < 0.0001$.

geography of the region, cataloging the concentration of the groups of interest with maps of ethnic ancestry across the New England towns.

Geography

White ethnic ancestry at the turn of the new century

Table 1 lists the major white nationality groups present in New England as reported by the 2000 census.[1] Citizens of Irish and Italian ancestry are most numerous at 20 and 14% of the region's population, respectively. England, France and Germany round out the top five origin nations for the New England population, with French Canadians listed as the sixth most frequently mentioned white ancestry group. Eighty-two percent of the New England population traces its ancestral origins to one of the ten groups listed in Table 1. Maps 1 through 5 illustrate the geographic concentration of the ethnic-origin population for the five most numerous white ancestry groups listed in Table 1: Germans, English, Irish, French and Italian.[2]

The maps display the spatial distribution of these populations using the Gi* statistic, an indicator of local spatial association that incorporates distance

[1] Census 2000 was the first census where respondents were allowed to report more than one ethnicity. These results indicate all responses, not simply the ones that were reported as exclusively one ethnicity.

[2] Without question it would be useful to have data on Jewish settlement in New England and elsewhere, but because the concern of the U.S. Census in collecting this data has been national origins, and Jewish immigration originated from many nations, data that identify Jews as a distinct ethnic group are not available.
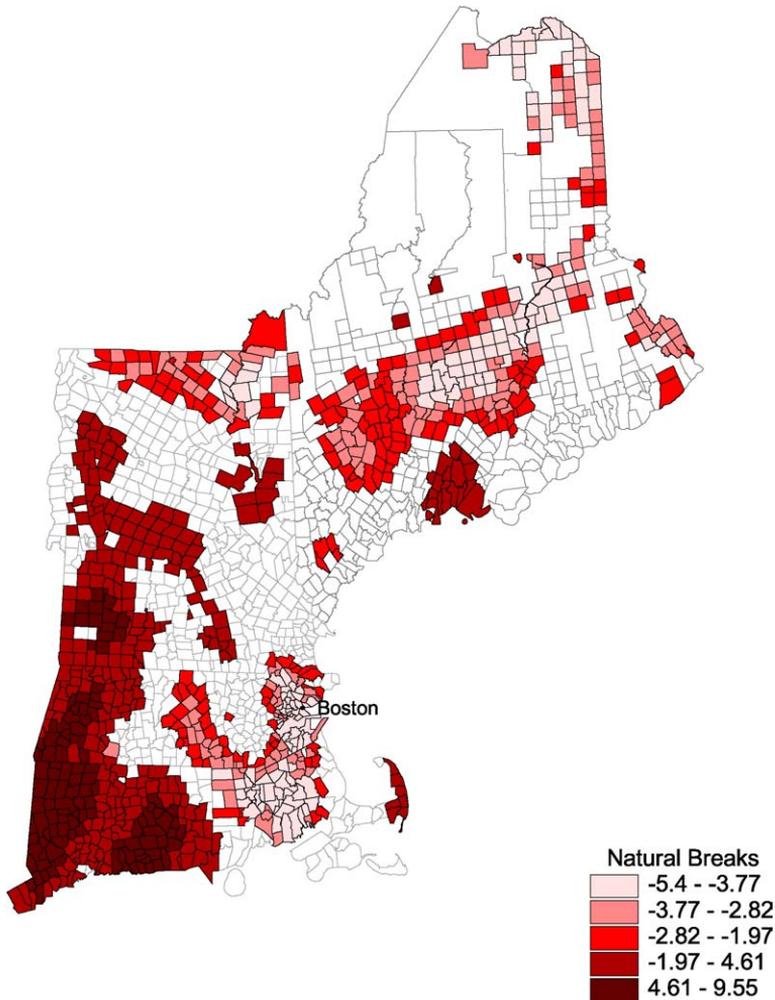
Map 1. Settlement concentration of the population of German Ancestry in New England, census 2000 (Gi* Statistic).

statistics (Fotheringham, Brunsdon, & Charlton, 2000, 99; Getis & Ord, 1992; Ord & Getis, 1995).[3] The interpretation of this statistic is unlike Moran's I in that $Gi*$ does not indicate positive and negative spatial autocorrelation. Instead, a negative $Gi*$ statistic indicates a clustering of low values and a positive statistic indicates a clustering of high values, with respect to the global mean. A random or unsystematic clustering of values around i produces middling values of $Gi*$ (Fotheringham et al., 2000, 100). $Gi*$ is valuable because it allows us to depict

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[3] Only the $Gi*$ statistics that are significant at the 0.05-level are mapped.
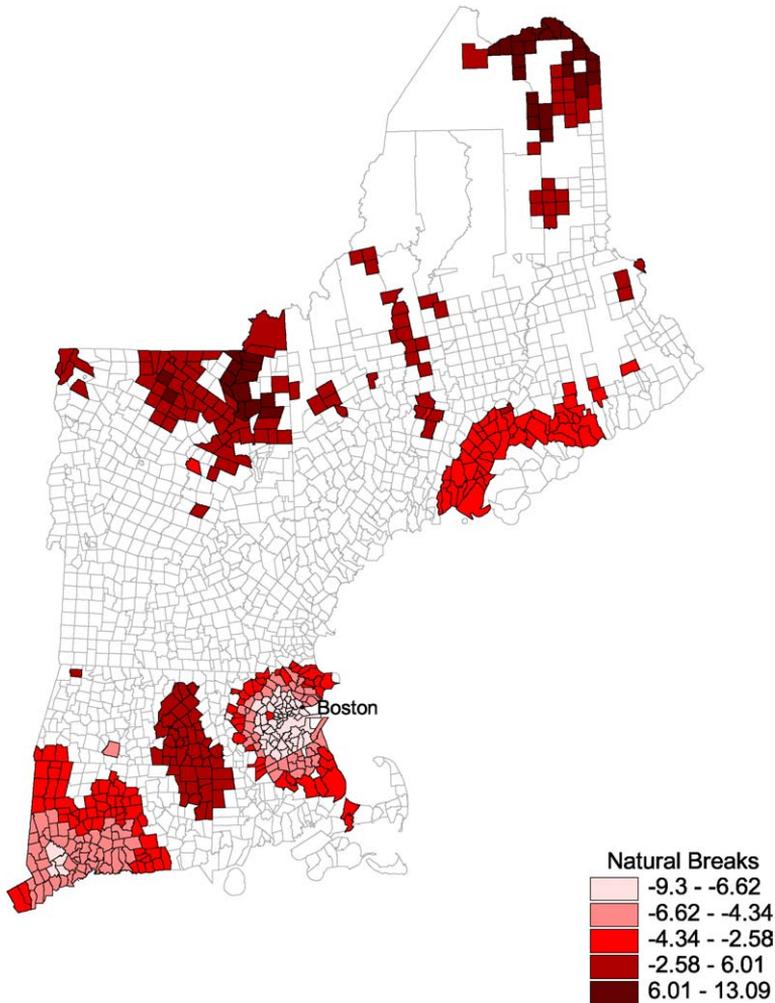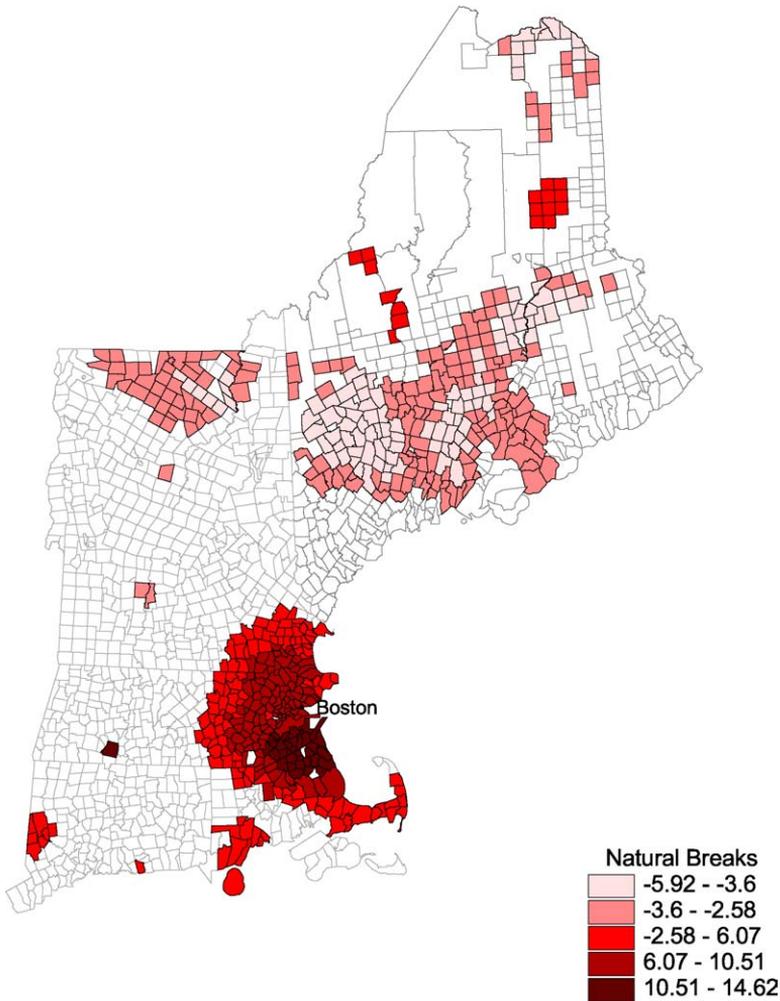
Map 2. Settlement concentration of the population of French Ancestry in New England, census 2000 (Gi* Statistic).

trends in the data around each geographic unit, providing us with a gauge of the regional concentration of each ethnic group. Our maps show the patterns in the distribution of a variable that exist across a mapping of its values. High values may be clustered in a particular region, while in other areas, a mix of high and low values is present. The Gi^* statistic is defined as

$$Gi^* = \Sigma_j w_{ij}(d) y_j / \Sigma_j y_j$$

where Gi^* is the measure of local clustering of attribute y around observation i, and $w_{ij}(d)$ is a distance-based weight representing the strength of the spatial relationship

Natural Breaks
-5.92 - -3.6
-3.6 - -2.58
-2.58 - 6.07
6.07 - 10.51
10.51 - 14.62

Map 3. Settlement concentration of the population of Irish Ancestry in New England, census 2000 (Gi* Statistic).

between units i and j. The particular measure that we use is a continuous distance-decay measure based on the average length of commute in the New England region.[4]

Briefly, the maps displaying the values of $Gi*$ by natural breaks indicate that the core of Italian concentration is in central Connecticut (Hartford, Bridgeport, New Haven) and centered around Boston. The core of German concentration is distinctly

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[4] We use a distance of 18 miles as the cut-off beyond which the spatial weight between observations drops to a value of 0. This figure was based on a combination of average commute times in New England and the average distance traveled over that time at a commuting speed of 40 miles per hour.
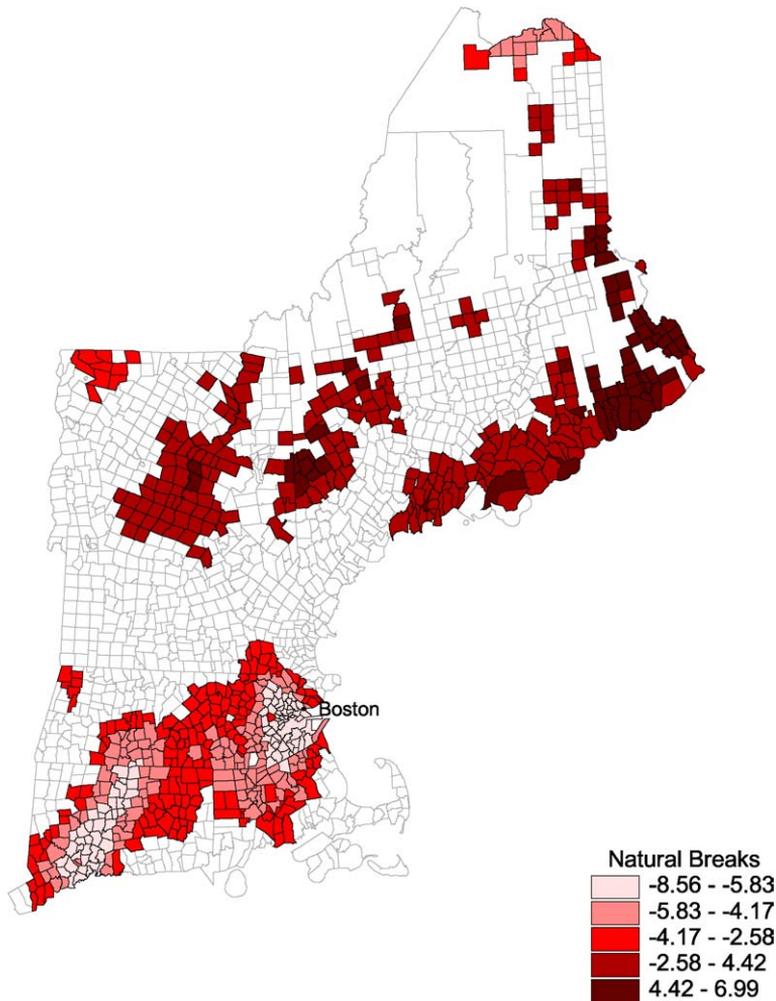
Map 4. Settlement concentration of the population of English Ancestry in New England, census 2000 (Gi* Statistic).

non-urban: the focus being rural western Connecticut and Massachusetts. The Irish are most heavily represented in the Boston metropolitan area and their distribution drops gradually as one moves away from there, and the core of French (and French Canadian) concentration is in central Massachusetts, and northern Vermont. The English ancestry group is most noticeably concentrated along the northern coast of Maine, but is dispersed across northern New England in general.

For the Irish and Italians, these maps largely reflect the historical loci of these groups' original immigrant settlement in southern New England's most urban areas, and remain largely consistent with where U.S. Census sources indicate one would have found each group concentrated in 1950 or 1960. Still, the subsequent
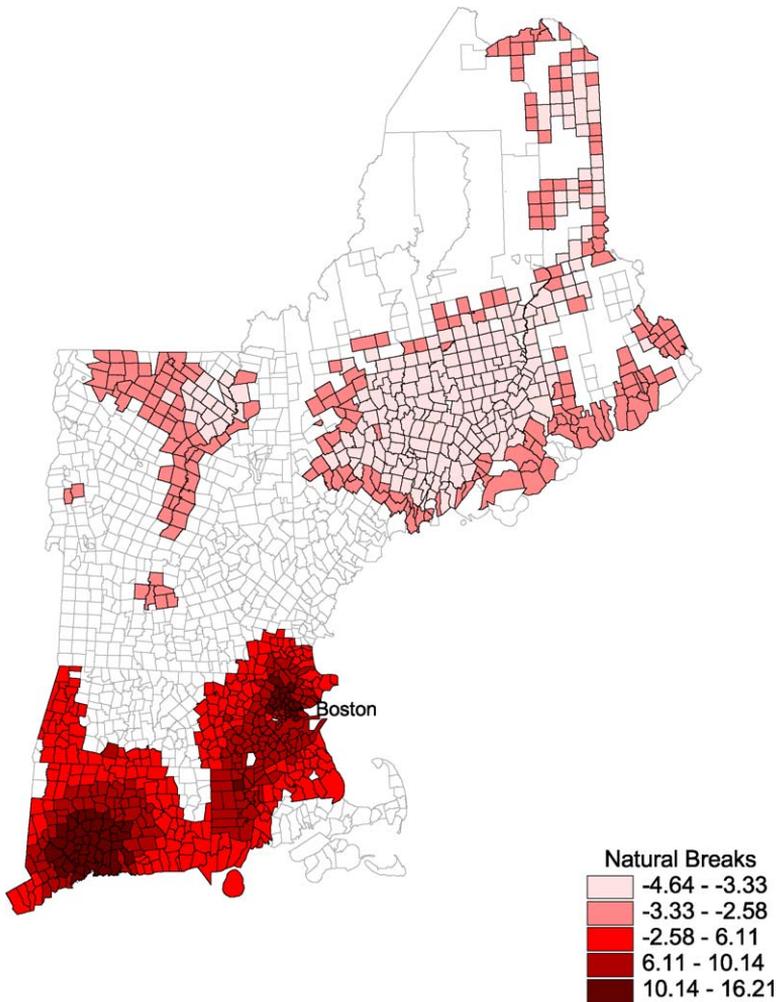
Map 5. Settlement concentration of the population of Italian Ancestry in New England, census 2000 (Gi* Statistic).

generations have diffused outward from the original core enclaves and now populate many affluent suburban towns consistent with their upward socioeconomic mobility.

That these white ethic groups can now be found settled in a broader diversity of places than in times past suggests that their political interests have probably become more diverse, and their political behavior less predictable on the basis of their ethnic background. One can find the Irish in the ancestry of those who live in South Boston, but also in the backgrounds of residents at locations of much higher status, indicating that the class oppression that once helped solidify Irish ethnics as a political force is no longer present to unify their life experience. As an ethnic group
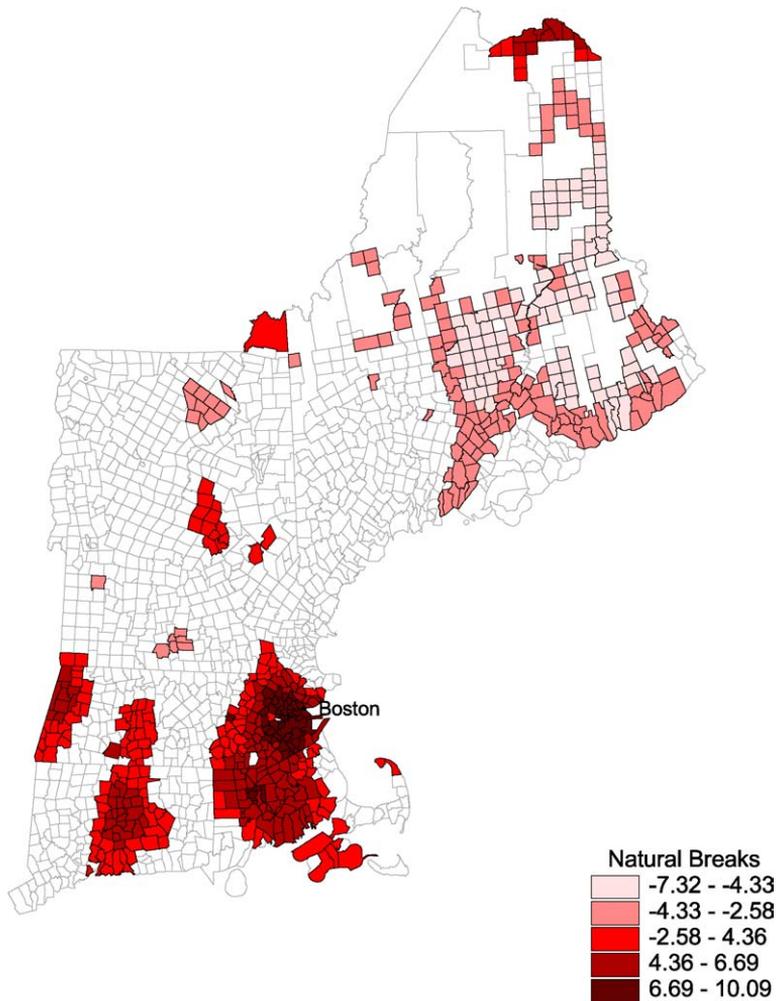
Map 6. Democratic percentage of the presidential vote in 2000 (Gi* Statistic).

becomes increasingly geographically dispersed, however, it usually loses its influence in shaping the regional political environment.

We also evaluate the influence of the newer ethnic groups (i.e. Latinos and Asians) alongside the more established ethnic groups in this area. Massachusetts and Connecticut have developed sizable Latino and Asian immigrant populations, and while they are less numerous than the white ancestry groups, substantial pockets of Puerto Rican, Chinese, and Korean concentration suggest the presence of a shared life experience that may forge distinctive politics at those locations (Hardy-Fanta & Gerson, 2002). Likely concentrations of these newer immigrant groups will be associated with Democratic voting in presidential elections because they tend to

Table 2
Spatial error model: influence of ethnic ancestry on the Democratic proportion of the presidential vote in New England towns

	1992	1996	2000
Intercept	36.355**	62.239**	47.019**
	(2.151)	(2.169)	(2.231)
Percent recent immigrants	0.657**	0.349**	0.448**
	(0.154)	(0.118)	(0.131)
Percent German	0.096*	−0.110*	−0.045
	(0.053)	(0.058)	(0.064)
Percent French	−0.130**	−0.028	0.012
	(0.029)	(0.032)	(0.035)
Percent Irish	−0.209**	−0.130**	−0.111**
	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.038)
Percent English	0.021	−0.047	−0.047
	(0.028)	(0.032)	(0.033)
Percent Italian	−0.093**	−0.003	0.074*
	(0.036)	(0.032)	(0.043)
Median income (in 1000s)	−0.023	−0.013**	−0.003*
	(0.159)	(0.000)	(0.001)
Percent in manufacturing	−0.161**	−0.058**	−0.034**
	(0.028)	(0.020)	(0.016)
Percent in agriculture	0.018	−0.020	−0.128**
	(0.065)	(0.057)	(0.054)
Average Democratic vote 1956–1964	0.265**	0.255**	0.147**
	(0.017)	(0.016)	(0.017)
Percent Black	0.576**	0.349**	0.830**
	(0.205)	(0.145)	(0.167)
Percent Asian	2.151**	1.120**	0.155
	(0.349)	(0.258)	(0.292)
Percent Hispanic	0.111	0.114*	0.273**
	(0.089)	(0.066)	(0.085)
Electoral population (in 1000s)	0.001	−0.001	0.001
	(0.011)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Percent for Ross Perot	−0.040**	−0.646**	
	(0.012)	(0.042)	
Percent for Ralph Nader			0.225**
			(0.063)
Spatial error (λ)	0.885**	0.883**	0.885**
	(0.022)	(0.023)	(0.023)
Likelihood	−4794.04	−4633.42	−4864.64
N	1519	1519	1519

Standard errors are in parentheses. *$p < 0.10$; **$p < 0.05$.

settle in urban locations in southern New England where Democratic party currents run strongest.

Whether the ethnic groups are new or old, social concentration appears to be one of the keys to political empowerment, cohesion and influence. For white ethnics in many areas of New England, geographic segregation has waned, but not completely disappeared. Does persistent geographic concentration lead to bloc voting? And do

white ethnics wind up taking on political identities distinct from the newer immigrant groups? We now turn to our data analysis to answer these questions.

Data and analysis

Our data are at the township level. In particular, we examine behavior in 1519 New England towns in six states (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Rhode Island) from 1992 to 2000.[5] We would like to make inferences about how individual voters behave, but the lack of individual-level data poses a clear obstacle to this endeavor. Standard regression models yield insight into ''town behavior'' but are more ambiguous about how individuals in those towns behave. This is a classic instance of the ecological inference problem. In this case, however, the ecological inference problem is less vexing than in other contexts because while we are interested in individual-level behavior, the behavior of towns with large concentrations of ethnics is also an important component of our research question.

Ideally, researchers tilling these fields would have elaborate survey data tapping white ethnicity. However, even if such data were available, these scholars would still benefit from having the town-level data that we examine here. Township data are more granular than information available at the broad level of the county. Moreover, the historical and sociological evidence that New Englanders identify with their towns is compelling and suggests a strong link between geography and identity. Given the geographic component in this analysis and the availability of georeferenced data, we depart from the standard regression models to regression models that explicitly take the spatial component into account.

Perhaps not surprisingly, spatial analyses are important for both substantive as well as statistical reasons, and these two dimensions are closely linked. On the substantive front, spatial models allow us to critically examine theories in the proper geographic context (Agnew, 1987, 1996; Cox, 2002; Flint, 1998; Johnston, Shelley, & Taylor, 1990). Statistically, if spatial processes underlie the behavior of interest but are not accounted for in the model, inferences will be inaccurate and coefficient estimates may be biased. Erroneously ignoring spatial dependence (in the form of a spatial lag) may create bias and inconsistency in the same way that we understand the omitted variable problem to affect OLS estimates (Anselin, 1988, 1990). Alternatively, when the spatial error structure is ignored, simple inefficiency is apparent in the estimates but the standard errors are biased (Anselin and Griffith, 1988). Hence, even if one were not interested specifically in the spatial effect (as we are not here) but only in the aspatial effects, omitting the possibility of a spatial aspect from the model may affect the interpretation of the results, spatial and otherwise. We heed this caveat and pursue the appropriate spatial analysis.

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[5] Ideally, we would like to analyze ethnic variables in township data stretching back to the 1960s and 1970s. However, such data do not exist, particularly for the region's numerous smaller communities.

Our particular model is a spatial error model. We chose this specification after examining the data and the various diagnostics. In this particular study, there was some evidence for both a spatial lag and a spatial error component, in that both the Lagrange Multiplier error test and the Lagrange Multiplier lag test were significant. However, because the robust Lagrange Multiplier error test statistic was larger than the robust Lagrange Multiplier lag test statistic, a spatial error model was pursued. In the spatial error model, the dependence is incorporated into the error structure so that $E[\varepsilon_i \varepsilon_j] = 0$. That is, we can view a spatial error model as a regression with non-spherical error terms, where the off-diagonal elements of the covariance matrix express the spatial dependency structure. In this case, OLS is unbiased but is not efficient. So, the estimate of standard errors will be biased. The spatial error model would evaluate the extent to which the spatial patterns of town-level voting not explained by the measured independent variables can be accounted for by clustering of error terms. In other words, the spatial error model captures the spatial effects of unmeasured independent variables. A satisfactory spatial error model implies that a spatially-lagged dependent variable is not necessary for explaining the observed spatial patterns. Instead, the patterns are explained by geographic patterning of measured and unmeasured independent variables. For more detail on distinguishing between the spatial lag and spatial error alternative, see, for example, Burridge (1980), Anselin (1988), Anselin, Bera, Florax, and Yoon (1996), and Bera and Yoon (1993).

In addition, we note that there was considerable heteroscedasticity in our data, as one might expect from town-level data. We suspected that this might be the case and the Koenker-Bassett test clearly rejected the homoscedasticity hypothesis for each year of the data. In standard regression models, this often indicates a need to switch from an Ordinary Least Squares model to a Weighted Least Squares (WLS) model. We employ the spatial counterpart to the WLS model by running a spatial model that incorporates a groupwise heterogeneity variable. In our case, we created an ordinal variable that takes on one of ten values. The value of this variable increases as the population size of the town increases.

The results of our analysis are shown in Table 2.[6] Our dependent variable in these analyses is the Democratic percentage of the presidential vote in the given election year, 1992, 1996, or 2000.[7] Among our results, several notable and consistent findings are evident across the three elections. First, as the percentage of white ethnic

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[6] We also considered a model with dummy variables for the various states. While we do not present those results here, the results of those models did not significantly depart from the results shown here and did not alter any substantive interpretation.

[7] Note that we do not have individual-level data. Accordingly, our analysis speaks to the behavior of towns and not individuals, per se. We do not provide any ecological inference estimates for two reasons. First, in our query, the behavior of towns is interesting in and of itself. Second, the vast uncertainty that surrounds ecological inferences does not permit us to make reliable inferences in any case. Indeed, articles that employ the King estimator have been enshrouded in controversy on both the methodological front (Anselin & Cho, 2002; Cho, 1998; Freedman, Ostland, Roberts, & Klein, 1999; Herron & Shotts, 2003, 2004) as well as the substantive front (Cho & Gaines, 2004). In this paper, we neither enter this debate nor comment on it. We simply avoid it and focus on the interesting township behavior.

groups increases in towns, the vote is either evenly divided between the parties (i.e. not significantly behind either party), or it tends to lean Republican. We find statistically significant support for the Democratic candidate only among the Italian-heavy towns in 2000, and the German areas in 1992. In both these cases, the significance is at the 0.10 level only, and so one might not consider this result to be particularly strong. Moreover, of the significant effects, these are among the smallest in substantive terms. Towns high in English ancestry show no tendency to support either party. Lastly, marking a clear departure from the past, the Irish towns are the most consistently Republican of all, with the Italian and French towns joining them in 1992. Perhaps this is evidence that the economic prosperity which many white ethnics have enjoyed has transformed their partisan preferences, while the tie of national origin persists and continues to bind them together.

These patterns for the dominant white ethnic groups stand in stark contrast to the towns with sizable numbers of blacks and those towns containing the more recent immigrants, Asians and Latinos. In the three elections we examine, the proportion of immigrants who had entered the country in the previous 10 years (i.e. "Recent Immigrants") is associated with greater support for Democratic candidates. This effect is especially strong in 1992. Black concentrations are predictably associated with strong Democratic voting. Perhaps only slightly less surprising, Hispanic concentrations are related to stronger Democratic support in 1996 and 2000.[8] More surprising, this tendency remains even for Asians, and so the voting tendency for towns with these minority groups and newer immigrants appears to follow different patterns than the ones that characterize the ethnic politics of the past.

The white ethnicity effects are interesting in and of themselves, as are the effects for the minority groups. However, perhaps what is most striking are these results taken together. Taken as a whole, we find evidence for both Dahl's assimilation theory and the mobilization theories that have been advanced for the minority ethnic groups. In this sense, our empirical findings tie together two different schools of thought, demonstrate how they are related, and provide clues on how ethnic bloc voting has morphed over time.

Finally, these main results on ethnicity are bolstered by the effects that we observe from the control variables in the model—the ethnicity effects remain even after accounting for many other potential alternative explanations for these presidential vote patterns. For instance, we have controlled for previous Democratic presidential voting in the region to account for the possibility that political patterns in the recent vote are simply a reflection of tradition or previous generations, and not the influence of present-day social and economic circumstances. This control allows us to determine whether ethnicity has an impact on the vote that is over and above the effect that might result from previous voting patterns. Unsurprisingly, our results show that Democratic support in the 1992–2000 contests is closely related to support for that party in the 1956–1964 elections. More importantly, in spite of this control,

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[8] Because these are town-level data and not individual data, we cannot be certain if Hispanics are the source of the Democratic leanings or if the presence of Hispanics causes the town voters (Hispanic, White, or otherwise) to lean more toward the Democrats. In either case, the effect is interesting and noteworthy.

the impact of the white ethnicity variables is still a prevalent force. Ethnic conflicts and cleavages present in the political behavior of New England towns may not be conscious to the present day claimants of these ancestral ties (Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960, 152). As Wolfinger (1965) pointed out, it may well be the case that the original causes for the fusion of ethnic identity to politics lie in the faraway past. But the geographic stability and "clustered dispersion" of these groups in a few locations has greatly facilitated the transmission of political identity down familial lines of communication. And the fact that these results for white ethnicity stand out even after controlling for presidential voting at the time earlier scholars were writing suggests that the effects for ethnicity are not just an artifact of earlier voting patterns.

We also find that towns with heavy manufacturing at their base are actually more inclined to vote Republican than Democratic—a product of the fact that the only towns that have managed to maintain an industrial base are prosperous small and medium-sized trade centers, not large, decaying, central cities. In addition, differences in the income of towns significantly cleave New England's politics in the 1996 and 2000 contests, but not in 1992. Finally, the income variable is important in helping to distinguish the effect of simple economics from the ethnic effect that we are attempting to isolate.

The Irish and Italians, to take two of the more numerous ethnic groups, have definitely made economic gains in the 40 years since earlier observers understood them to be the core of Democratic bloc voting in many of New England's larger cities. With that upward economic mobility has come migration to the suburbs and dispersion outward from the communities of initial settlement. In turn, we see the emergence of divided political loyalty, and a general political migration toward the Republican party. But these developments do not mean that assimilation has washed away the political relevance of white ethnicity.

What surprises us most, in fact, is that support for the GOP in locations of Irish and Italian concentration can be understood in ethnic terms, at least for some elections. White ethnic populations, then, are associated with bloc voting for Republican candidates. Our findings suggest the intriguing possibility that because some of the white ethnic groups in New England have maintained social cohesion and geographic propinquity in the face of upward economic mobility, the group has come to realign its political interests behind the party opposite the one supported by previous generations.

Conclusion

Ethnic groups do not simply dealign with their longevity in the United States, losing any sense of political cohesion whatsoever. They may, in fact, realign! There is evidence that this happens in New England because the members of these groups will often remain cohesive in spite of their economic and geographic mobility. For example, it is well known that Boston has a number of middle- and upper-income suburbs that are ethnically homogeneous (Gamm, 1999), for instance, Dover and Sherborn with their affluent populations of Yankee English extraction, and Cohasset

and Melrose with their Irish and Italian populations. What this means is that movement from city to suburbs is selected not just on housing, income or school characteristics, as is usually the case, but on ethnicity too. A popular characterization of suburbia is one of low density frontiers with weak institutions, where populations mix and intermarry, and ethnicity becomes less prominent. But, far fewer of New England's suburbs and exurbs can be characterized this way. Even in solidly middle-class suburbs, ethnic ties persist through kinship networks and institutions that maintain ethnicity. Many of the towns surrounding Boston, Providence and Hartford, are as old as their adjacent central cities, maintaining distinct ethnic traditions of their very own. True, the ethnic traditions of white suburbs have often been reinforced by the threat of African American ''invasion'' (Logan and Stearns, 1981), and in recent years, the threat has come not just from native born blacks, but from newer waves of immigrants as well (Allen & Turner, 2004). The same social segregation in large cities that socializes new generations of African Americans, Latinos and second generation immigrants into the politics of the Democratic party may also be closely connected to younger white ethnics being raised in suburban environments that are more friendly toward the GOP.

To be sure, New England's politics is still heavily Democratic in many suburbs and smaller towns. And, as the region's majority party, the Democrats are likely to have a significant share of even the most Republican-leaning groups. Ethnicity is a defining characteristic, but is not all there is to New England politics. In those locations where ethnic attachments in the community do not prove to be a decisive cue, voters may turn to other identities (e.g. socioeconomic status and occupation) to rationalize support for one viewpoint over another. The control variables in our model remind us that other important divisions cleave the New England electorate. Moreover, the coefficients for white ethnicity are much smaller in magnitude, and less consistent in direction, than the coefficients for more recent immigrant groups, and for blacks. Together, the coefficients for the white and the non-white ethnic groups are consistent with the idea that white ethnicity is a weaker cue for political behavior than it once was and still is for blacks and other groups whose ethnic status is less voluntary. But having said that, we forcefully punctuate that white ethnicity is far from dead as a political force in the northeastern United States, and the presence of economic and ideological divisions in this region's electorate is not synonymous with the disappearance of ethnic saliency.

Acknowledgements

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