

*Unintended Consequences?
Racial Redistricting and the
Representation of Minority Interests*

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One argument propounded by critics of "majority-minority" districts is that "packing" minority constituents into such districts leaves fewer members of Congress with electoral incentives to be sensitive to minority concerns. We test this effect empirically with data concerning the voting behavior of white incumbent representatives returned to the House following the 1992 redistricting cycle. Our findings, which indicate that at least some incumbents who lost black constituents during redistricting became less sensitive to the concerns of the black community, further complicate the societal calculus concerning the desirability of "majority-minority" districts.

The creation of "majority-minority" electoral districts has been a mixed blessing for African Americans. While such districts have almost invariably resulted in the election of black officials, previous research suggests that "redistricting aimed to help blacks" also tends to aid the Republican party, which since the 1960s has been less sensitive to civil rights issues than has the Democratic party. We extend this research by examining the effect of racially-motivated redistricting on the subsequent behavior of returning congressional incumbents following the 1992 elections. Our findings, which indicate that white incumbents who lost black constituents during redistricting became less sensitive to the concerns of African Americans, further complicate the societal calculus concerning the desirability of "majority-minority" districts.

RACIAL GERRYMANDERING AND ITS CRITICS

As interpreted by the Supreme Court in the 1986 case of *Thornburg v. Gingles*,¹ the 1982 revisions to the Voting Rights Act of 1965 "mandate the creation of a

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maximum number of minority districts whenever a geographical area contains a large, politically cohesive minority group" (Butler and Cain 1992, 36; Swain 1993, 197). The full impact of these new guidelines was not felt until the 1990s. Before the most recent redistricting cycle, black voters constituted a majority in only 15 congressional districts nationwide, four of which were in the South. After redistricting, the number of such districts nearly doubled nationwide, up to 27. In the South, where roughly 60% of African Americans reside, the numbers more than tripled, up to a total of 14 ("Where Minorities Are the Majority . . ." 1993).²

Most African Americans consider the creation of such "packed" districts a largely unalloyed good. Swain (1993) characterizes support for this "strategy" as the virtually unchallenged orthodoxy within the black community, noting that those who question its wisdom are "regarded as 'enemies of the group.'" The appeal of "the strategy" is not difficult to understand. Not only has it enhanced the community's descriptive representation, it has also—by contributing to the election of black representatives who do not rely on white votes for reelection—helped to maintain a strong liberal edge to black politics (Smith 1990; for a contrasting argument, see Canon 1994).

Nevertheless, in recent years, numerous criticisms have been raised regarding the use of racial gerrymandering to enhance minority representation. For some, like Thernstrom (1991) and Wells (1982), the issue is fundamentally normative. They view the creation of minority electoral "enclaves" with suspicion, seeing in them "a vision of America deeply at odds with that upon which the civil rights revolution was built." Others oppose reliance on "majority-minority" districts because they see it as a short-sighted strategy due to inherent limitations in the number of places where such districts can be drawn (Barone and Ujifusa 1985, 770; Swain 1993, 200–201). A third criticism is that it undermines effective representation, both because such districts are overly homogenous (contributing to unresponsive representatives) and because their convoluted shapes can confuse constituents (Polsby and Popper 1993; Swain 1993, 72–73, 197).

Potentially the most serious criticism of racial gerrymandering, however, concerns possible tradeoffs between descriptive representation of and substantive representation for the black community. Critics of "majority-minority" districting contend that in seeking to maximize their descriptive representation, African Americans and other minorities may lose sight of or even subvert their own substantive political interests by trading off greater (if more diffuse) influence for a larger (albeit still small) number of safe minority seats.

Specifically, this alleged trade-off has two dimensions: an electoral dimension and a representational one. First, packing minority voters into a few districts that are likely to elect minority representatives usually drains off strong Democratic voters from surrounding districts, making these neighboring districts whiter, more

²If Hispanic voters are included, the numbers increase even more, since two districts in Florida and five in Texas have Hispanic majorities. Nationwide, if Hispanics are included, the number of "majority-minority" districts is 51.

conservative, and more Republican. Based on a study of state legislative redistricting in South Carolina, Brace, Grofman, and Handley (1987) conclude that, under certain minimal conditions, redistricting "plans which advantage blacks also can be expected to advantage Republicans."

Second, even if new "majority-minority" districts do not contribute to the defeat of neighboring Democrats, the overall representation of black political interests could be harmed if the surviving incumbents—facing whiter constituencies in redrawn districts—become less sensitive to the policy preferences of the black community. As Butler and Cain (1992, 15) note "in some situations, a minority may exercise more influence by having substantial blocks of voters putting pressure in a number of 'white' districts than by having a single representative of their own" (see also Swain 1993, 205; Thernstrom 1987, 244).

While the claims regarding this representational trade-off are plausible, they have never been subject to rigorous scrutiny. In this study, we propose a simple empirical test, using data from the 1992 redistricting cycle and roll-call voting scores, to examine the impact of racially based redistricting on the voting behavior of returning members of Congress. While this test should be considered preliminary rather than dispositive, its results have important implications for public policy. If roll-call voting behavior is unaffected by changes in the racial composition of congressional districts, we must entertain the possibility that this fear has been exaggerated and the case for "majority-minority" is strengthened. On the other hand, if roll-call behavior does tend to track changes in district racial composition, the claims of critics gain additional weight, and evaluations of the wisdom of racial gerrymandering become more complicated.

DATA, METHODS, AND MODELS

To examine the impact of changes in district racial composition on representational sensitivity to African-American policy preferences, we propose a simple "before and after" test of congressional voting behavior using multivariate regression models.

The dependent variable in our analysis is each returning, white, incumbent, House member's 1993 vote rating by the AFL-CIO's Committee on Political Education (COPE). We examine only white incumbents since it is their behavior in response to the loss of black constituents that is the focus of our enquiry.¹

Our independent variables fall into three conceptual categories: ideological, political, and racial. As a measure of ideology and (functionally) as a baseline against which to measure postredistricting voting behavior, we include each member's 1992 COPE rating. Since raw 1992 COPE scores are likely to covary with disturbances in the error term, we calculated a "purged" form of the independent variable using a two-stage least squares procedure. After regressing 1992 COPE

¹In addition to African-American MCs, we also exclude from the analysis those of Hispanic, Native American, and Native Hawaiian descent, leaving a total of 286

scores on 1992 Americans for Democratic Action scores (which is exogenous and independent of the error term), we used these fitted scores in our subsequent analysis.⁴ Since members of Congress are generally consistent in their voting patterns (Kingdon 1981, 274–78), we expect a strong positive relationship between the fitted 1992 and 1993 COPE scores.

Next, we include three political variables on the right-hand side of the equation. First, party is a dichotomous variable coded 1 for Democrats and 0 for Republicans.⁵ Second, we include the year each member was first elected to the House. Third, we also include President Bill Clinton's 1992 percentage of the two-party presidential vote in each member's district. *Ceteris paribus*, we expect partisanship and Clinton's 1992 vote to be positively correlated with 1993 COPE scores, while we expect the year of first election to be negatively correlated with the dependent variable (since there has been a general trend toward the election of more conservative members⁶).

Finally, we include four independent variables related to constituency characteristics. The first of these is region, which is coded 1 for those members representing one of the 11 states of the old Confederacy and 0 otherwise. Second, we include a measure of the change in the racial composition of each member's constituency. This variable is calculated by subtracting the size of the district's African-American population (in percent) before the 1992 redistricting cycle from the size of the population after redistricting. If congressional voting behavior responds to fluctuations in the size of the black population in a district—or, in the negative language of racial redistricting, if the loss of black constituents results in greater insensitivity to their preferences—we would expect the racial difference variable to be positively signed and statistically significant. Summary statistics related to changes in district racial compositions are reported in table 1. As is evident from these figures, the greatest interdistrict movement of black constituents occurred in the South, where the average white member of Congress saw the percentage of African Americans in his or her district drop by 3.64 points between 1992 and 1993. The drop was especially marked in southern districts represented by Republicans, where the average black population percentage fell by 6.55 points.

⁴The results of the first regression are:

$$\begin{aligned} 1992 \text{ COPE Score} &= 20.11 + 0.74(1992 \text{ ADA Score}) \\ \text{Adjusted } R^2 &= .80 \end{aligned}$$

The substantive impact of using the fitted values is minimal. In fact, a comparison of models using the raw 1992 COPE scores, raw 1992 ADA scores, and the fitted values demonstrated the same independent variables reaching virtually identical levels of statistical significance. Similar transformations (not reported) were used on the subsets of the data analyzed separately below. For a more complete description and defense of two-stage least squares regression, see Wonnacott and Wonnacott (1979, 292–94).

⁵Rep. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt) is coded 1 since he caucuses with the Democratic party.

⁶In the Senate, for instance, Ornstein, Peabody, and Rohde (1993, 16) report that since the mid-1970s the percentage of conservatives has increased from 35% of the total membership to 50%.

TABLE I
CHANGES IN DISTRICT RACIAL COMPOSITION, 1992-1993

Category	Mean Black Population, 1993	Mean Black Population, 1992	Mean Difference 1993-1992
White members of Congress	7.87	9.33	-1.46
Democrats	10.01	11.16	-1.15
Republicans	5.12	6.97	-1.85
Southern white members of Congress	13.63	17.27	-3.64
Democrats	17.04	18.68	-1.64
Republicans	8.67	15.22	-6.55

The mean 1.63 point drop for white southern Democrats masks the fact that half of the returning white southern Democrats (24 of 48) gained black constituents in 1993.

Third, since previous scholarship has suggested that African-American political strength is stronger in urban areas (where organization is easier) than in rural areas (where diffusion of the black population may hinder its ability to influence elected officials),² our independent variables include the percentage of each congressional district's population that resides in rural areas. Fourth, to test for any multiplicative effect between changes in black constituency size and the relative urbanization of a district on congressional voting behavior, we create an interactive term by multiplying the two variables together. If members who lost black constituents from largely rural districts became particularly less responsive to African-American policy preferences, this term should generate a positive and statistically significant coefficient.

To mitigate collinearity problems generated by calculating several variables using similar metrics, we have centered our four, nondichotomous independent variables (year of first election, rural population, Clinton's vote, and change in district racial composition) around their respective means by subtracting the mean value of the variable from the observed value. This standardization makes the constant terms easier to interpret.

FINDINGS

In our first cut at the data, we analyze all returning white members of the One-Hundred-Third Congress in the same models. In place of the customary OLS model, we calculate a censored regression model, which is appropriate since the dependent variable (1993 COPE scores) is constrained to values between 0 and 100, inclusive (see Amemiya 1973). The censored regression model corrects for these

²See Combs, Hibbing, and Welch (1984), and Whitby (1985, 1987).

TABLE 2
TWO-STAGE, CENSORED REGRESSION ESTIMATES OF 1993 COPE
OR "REDUCED FORM" COPE SCORES,
WHITE MEMBERS OF THE 103RD CONGRESS

Variable	All Members	Democrats	Republicans	All Members, "Reduced Form"
1992 COPE score	1.27*** (.10)	1.14*** (.14)	1.33*** (.15)	1.32*** (.11)
Party	19.08*** (3.98)			19.48*** (4.41)
Year first elected	-0.50*** (.13)	-0.35** (.15)	-0.85*** (.24)	-0.62*** (.15)
Clinton's % of two-party vote	44.73*** (15.93)	38.28** (19.21)	61.81** (26.83)	49.47*** (17.61)
Region	-1.58 (2.69)	-7.83** (3.27)	3.54 (4.93)	-1.75 (2.98)
Rural population	0.10** (.05)	0.08 (.06)	0.12 (.08)	0.11** (.06)
Change in racial composition	0.54** (.25)	0.61** (.27)	0.34 (.46)	0.63** (.28)
Race*rural interactive term ^a	0.03** (.01)	0.03** (.01)	0.01 (.02)	0.02* (.01)
Constant	-25.81***	6.63	-31.58***	-33.53***
Pseudo-R ²	0.90	0.66	0.61	0.88
Number of cases	286	161	125	286

The pseudo-R² is calculated by squaring the correlation between the predicted and observed values of the dependent variable.

^aChange in district racial composition \times rural population percentage.

* $p \leq .10$; ** $p \leq .05$; *** $p \leq .01$

constraints and generates a pseudo-R² calculated as the square of the correlation between the predicted and observed values of the dependent variable. The results of this model are summarized in the first column of table 2. As expected, all of the ideological and partisan variables have robust effects on 1993 COPE scores. Membership in the Democratic party, prior ideological voting patterns, and a strong district showing by Bill Clinton all have strong positive correlations with 1993 voting behavior, while more recently elected members generally earned lower 1993 COPE ratings.

In terms of the constituency variables, while region appears to be unrelated to 1993 COPE scores, the other three variables all generate statistically significant coefficients. Since the racial composition variable generates a positive coefficient, it appears that increases in the black percentage of district population are associated with higher 1993 COPE scores and that the loss of African-American constituents contributed to lower COPE scores, just as Swain and others predicted. Similarly,

even though the slope change is modest, the positive sign on the race-rural interactive term suggests that members whose rural black constituencies shrunk were more conservative in 1993 than before. This is consistent with Whitby's (1985, 1987) conclusions that rural black voters generally have less of an impact on their representatives' voting behavior and, by extension, that they require larger numbers to overcome organizational difficulties and to have an effective political voice.

Since Democrats are generally more sensitive than Republicans to the concerns of African-American voters (Swain 1993), we analyze Democratic and Republican members separately in the second and third columns of table 2.⁸ The results for the Democratic members look much like the results for the full House. As before, both the racial composition variable and the race-ruralism interactive term are significant and positive, indicating the important impact of black population size generally and the significant conditioning effect of urbanization. Republicans, however, are much different. While prior voting behavior, length of service in the House, and Clinton's district showing are all strongly associated with their 1993 COPE scores, none of the constituency-related variables even approaches statistical significance. This indicates that neither changes in district racial composition, nor the rural nature of the district, nor the interactive effect of the two had much appreciable impact on Republican voting behavior.

These findings suggest that Democrats and Republicans are quite distinct in their sensitivity to district racial composition. While there was a general trend toward higher COPE scores amongst white Democrats in 1993 (up almost 10 points), it was strongly influenced by district racial composition, with members who gained black constituents demonstrating more liberal voting behavior than their otherwise similarly situated copartisans. Among white Republicans, the trend toward lower COPE scores in 1993 (down more than 15 points) was unaffected by changes in the racial composition of their districts.

Since some studies have suggested that COPE scores may not be the most accurate measure of sensitivity to black policy concerns because the AFL-CIO "monitors legislation on defense and foreign policy . . . [and other issues] of low salience for blacks" (Swain 1993, 13; but see Whitby 1987), we calculated a "reduced form" of the dependent variable by recalculating each member's 1993 COPE score after dropping four of the votes that seemed of the lowest salience to African Americans: Hatch Act reform, the Workplace Fairness Bill (which would have banned the hiring of permanent replacement workers during a legal strike), a bill related to state preemption of the federal Employment Retirement Income Security Act, and the Goals 2000-Educate America Act (which would have set national performance standards set by voluntary labor, business, and education partnerships). Results using this reduced form dependent variable are reported in the last column of table 2 and—except for the fact that the interactive race/rural term just misses the

⁸We accept the inefficiencies generated by separating our data in this manner as preferable to the computation of several, multicomponent interaction terms, the interpretation of which becomes quite cumbersome.

TABLE 3
TWO-STAGE REGRESSION ESTIMATES OF 1993 COPE SCORES,
SOUTHERN WHITE MEMBERS OF THE 103RD CONGRESS, BY PARTY

Variable	Democrats	Republicans
1992 COPE score	1.59*** (.21)	1.25*** (.31)
Year first elected	-0.47** (.18)	-1.09** (.40)
Clinton's % of two-party vote	.3758 (.3872)	.6580 (.5110)
Rural population	0.04 (.09)	0.03 (.17)
Change in racial composition	1.36*** (.41)	0.64 (.43)
Race*rural interactive term ^a	0.02 (.02)	0.01 (.02)
Constant	-24.39*	-30.31***
Pseudo-R ²	0.75	0.56
Number of cases	48	33

The pseudo-R² is calculated by squaring the correlation between the predicted and observed values of the dependent variable.

^aChange in district racial composition × rural population percentage.

* $p \leq .10$; ** $p \leq .05$; *** $p \leq .01$.

.05 significance threshold—are virtually identical to those generated by “raw” 1993 COPE scores.

It is also interesting that in table 2, region generates a statistically significant coefficient for Democrats, but not Republicans, indicating that there is something unusual about southern Democrats. To explore this further, we subdivide our data by region and report the findings in table 3. Again, as at the national level, table 3 indicates that there is a marked contrast between Republicans and Democrats. The positive and robust relationship between black constituency size and voting behavior exists only for Democrats in the South. The insignificance of the interactive term further suggests that southern Democrats rely so heavily on biracial electoral coalitions that they are sensitive to the size of their minority constituencies regardless of their level of relative urbanization. Southern Republicans, on the other hand, appear unaffected by changes in district racial composition. While the small number of cases ($N = 33$) is problematic, the results are basically consistent with those for the entire white Republican House caucus, which gives us greater confidence in these results. Even though the average southern Republican House member saw the size of his or her black constituency plummet by 43% (6.55/15.22) between 1992 and 1993, this apparently had little effect on voting behavior.

The impact of changes in the African-American composition of Southern congressional districts represented by white Democrats is highlighted in table 4, where

TABLE 4
 EXPECTED 1993 COPE SCORES FOR WHITE, SOUTHERN DEMOCRATS
 UNDER CERTAIN CONSTITUENCY CONDITIONS^a

Change in African-American % of District Population	Expected 1993 COPE Score
+4 ^b	77.29
±0	73.29
-1.63 ^b	71.07
-5	66.49
-10	59.69
-15	52.89
-18 ^b	48.81

^aTo illustrate the impact of district racial composition, all other variables (i.e., fitted 1992 COPE scores, year of first election, rural percentage of the population, and the race*rural interactive term) are set equal to their respective means.

^b+4 and -18 represent, respectively, the maximum gain and maximum loss of African-American constituents experienced by white southern Democratic MCs; -1.63 represents the mean change in district racial composition.

expected 1993 COPE scores are estimated for a hypothetical, white southern Democrat under a variety of different constituency conditions. After setting the value of the other independent variables at their respective means, 1993 COPE scores are predicted as changes in the African-American composition of the districts are allowed to range from the largest observed gain (four percentage points) to the largest observed loss (18 percentage points). As the figures demonstrate, this has a significant impact on the size of the predicted COPE score. A member whose black constituency grew by four percentage points is predicted to have a COPE score almost seven points higher (77.29) than the group mean (70.38). On the other hand, a member whose black constituency shrank by 18 percentage points is predicted to have a 1993 COPE score (48.81) more than 21 points lower than the average. Overall, the 28.5 point spread between the two extremes indicates that changes in African-American constituency size had a profound impact on the voting behavior of southern Democrats.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

While previous studies have shown that "majority-minority" districts undermine their substantive representation by wasting minority voters, we provide empirical evidence that such districts also waste minority constituents. As Swain (1993), Thernstrom (1987), and others have argued, at least some important groups of white representatives who lose minority constituents to racial-redistricting schemes become significantly less sensitive to minority policy preferences.

While our findings should be considered preliminary rather than dispositive, they seem to have at least two important implications for those concerned with

enhancing the representation of African Americans. The bad news is that there does, indeed, seem to be a significant trade-off between descriptive representation and substantive representation. "Packing" large percentages of minority voters into fewer districts limits the impact the minority community has in surrounding areas.

The good news is that, in this round of redistricting, events conspired to limit the severity of this trade-off in actual practice. While the creation of "majority-minority" districts seems inherently to involve some risk to the substantive representation of minority interests, as is often the case in the real world of politics, there was some "slack" in the system that blunted the edges of this dilemma in 1992. Three factors appear particularly important. First, due to creative cartography, a good percentage of the black constituents redrawn into new "majority-minority" districts were taken from districts already represented by Republicans, obviating the need to take as many from districts represented by white Democrats. Although this undoubtedly serves to make GOP incumbents safer, it does not have any direct representational costs since Republicans' sensitivity to black policy preferences seems unrelated to black constituency size. Second, and relatedly, although white Democratic officeholders are often portrayed as the natural losers in racial redistricting dramas, that was not always the case in 1992. Due to demographic trends and creative cartography, more than one third of white Democrats nationally (60 of 161) and half of those in the South (24 of 48) actually gained black constituents on a percentage basis between 1992 and 1993. Finally, any negative impact on substantive representation was mitigated by the general trend among white Democratic MCs toward more liberal voting behavior, which seems related to the increasingly liberal voting behavior of southern Democrats as they become "nationalized" (Whitby and Gilliam 1991).

Since these mitigating conditions may not obtain in the future, our general conclusion is especially important. There does, indeed, seem to be a significant, quantifiable trade-off between the descriptive and substantive representation afforded by "majority-minority" districts. While this might complicate the societal calculus concerning the desirability of such districts, the finding cannot be ignored.

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