

Rejoinder to Bullock

Donald L. Davison, *Rollins College*
Michael A. Krassa, *University of Illinois*

As we note in our paper, the complex dynamics of voters' partisan and candidate choices involve a large number of sometimes interrelated causal forces that come together in peculiar ways to produce sometimes unexpected results. However, like Key (1949) and many other scholars, we conclude that race is an extraordinarily important determinant of political behavior in the American South. We are pleased that Professor Bullock shares our overall assessments of the sources of the southern partisan realignment, and note that his criticisms are framed in somewhat simplistic constructions of certain theories and arguments. We are happy for this opportunity to elaborate on our comments.

The Complex Dynamics of Voter Behavior

Much of Bullock's commentary hinges on the characterization that we have offered a single, all-encompassing explanation for all partisan change in the South. However, the explanations submitted in our paper are themselves complex dynamics, offered as a part (albeit a very important part) of a large picture. Further, what Bullock identifies as "the explanation" is never seen to have been used as an independent variable at all; rather it is one consequence among many others of our explanation for political behaviors unleashed in part by the Voting Rights Act.

A simplistic reading might lead one to conclude that our analysis shows that the reason that whites defect to the Republican party after the passage of the VRA is that they become unhappy with the positions the Democratic party must now represent. Indeed, this possibility is offered as one explanation consistent with the behaviors we document. However, the data do not support explicit conclusions about individual attitudes of black or white Southerners; no hypotheses about attitudes are tested and no conclusions are drawn. We offer an argument that it is important to understand and account for the change in the Southern political context produced by the VRA. Indeed, it is

inappropriate to reduce complex mass behaviors to any single explanatory variable.

The VRA, by guaranteeing nearly three million blacks the franchise, changed the political, social, and economic dynamics of the region, disturbing both the order and the equilibrium of the old system. It is the changed context that we link to changes in a variety of behaviors, one of which is increased rates of white defection to the Republican Party. It is not too great a leap to suggest that many whites became disaffected with the issues the Democratic Party necessarily embraced, given its increased black composition. Importantly, this is not mutually exclusive with other individual and mass level forces (and explanations) at work (see Davison 1985; 1987).

For example, it is indeed possible that some whites were predisposed toward the Republican Party prior to the passage of the VRA. Until the Republican Party became a viable electoral alternative in non-presidential elections, however, it was senseless to 'waste' one's vote--if one voted at all (Petrocik 1987, 362-3). Some new and old voters were mobilized into the Republican Party during the pre-VRA period, but the numbers were relatively small, and an increase in the rate of defection cannot be found until after the VRA. It also should be noted that there is no support for the thesis that in-migration to the South has a significant role in producing the dramatic shift toward the Republican Party (Petrocik 1987, 359-62). It is not true that transplanted Northerners drive the realignment.

On the surface, Bullock's most compelling criticism is that there is some movement to the Republican Party prior to the passage of the VRA in 1965. This is offered as proof that the VRA does not influence the drift toward the Republicans. A look at our figures and text shows that we, too, document a slight movement toward the Republicans prior to 1965, reflective of the multifaceted forces shaping partisan change, including perhaps the increasing salience of civil rights in this period. Thus, rather than refuting us, this observation complements our results.

Professor Bullock is indeed correct that partisan differences on civil rights emerge before the enactment of the VRA (Davison 1985; 1987). Republican presidential politics, the portrayal of the civil rights struggle in the national media, and increased efforts by the Republican Party to build some base in the South all may have encouraged the beginning of a realignment toward the GOP. Yet it remains that the VRA was the most significant national policy regarding vote denial

adopted and implemented by the federal government during this period. And since its net result was the addition of three million eligible but previously unregistered southern blacks to the rolls, the VRA is a logical consideration if one seeks to understand the sources of the change in southern voting patterns. Indeed, the dramatic increase in registration rates in the South immediately following the VRA suggests that it influenced both white and nonwhite mobilization patterns (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 1968, 12-13; U.S. Bureau of Census 1977, 507). Consistent with this, the most dramatic changes in partisan voting occur in 1966 and 1970, the off-year congressional elections immediately following the VRA.

Further, comparing the affected and unaffected counties is illustrative. Bullock cites the importance of Goldwater's appeal in 1964 and Nixon's attractiveness in the Rim South in 1968. However, it is possible that the cart is not adequately distinguished from the horse in this critique, as it is not clear whether it is the VRA's or Goldwater and Nixon's coattails. (Of course, the literature on coattail effects is itself mixed; moreover, coattails are rarely seen to extend from a presidential election to an off-year election.)

The temporal ordering of events is important, as Bullock notes, and we offer the possibility that race is primary, with the VRA and related politics eliciting mass political reactions, even as Goldwater and Nixon exploited those sentiments. Moreover, it is instructive that the counties unaffected by the VRA show a slow trend toward the Republican Party, while the covered counties show a comparatively dramatic shift to the Republicans in 1966 and 1970. Perhaps it is only coincidental that almost all of the non-covered counties are in the border states and contain comparatively fewer blacks, while almost all of the covered counties are in the deep South and have large black populations. However, if one seriously contends that race and the VRA are not significant variables, the only reasonable hypothesis would be that the trends in the affected and unaffected counties should be similar. Clearly such a hypothesis cannot be confirmed.

Dual Partisanship, Presidential Coattails, and Off-Year Elections

Bullock also offers that the split partisan identification of many voters will confound the results. Many Southerners vote Democratic in state and local elections, yet support the Republican Party in presiden-

tial contests. Indeed, the South was not 'solidly' Democratic in presidential elections even before Nixon and Goldwater. Eisenhower won four southern states in 1952, and five in 1956, and Goldwater won five in 1964. While Nixon won six states in 1968, he won only three by a majority, and won the other three by plurality over Wallace and Humphrey (*CQ* 1987, 123-128). And of course Strom Thurmond bolted the 1948 Democratic National Convention over such issues as civil and states' rights, and took much of the South with him. One does not have to look just at Goldwater and Nixon to see either the role of race, or the way that Republican presidential candidates have exploited it in the South.

These, however, are important reasons to use off-year Congressional elections. Given the split partisanship, the better test of whether some whites abandon the Democratic Party is those off-year contests where national politics and issues are less significant. That many whites appear to abandon their affiliations in favor of Republicans in off-year congressional voting suggests that the appeal of the Democrats has weakened in both contexts (national and state). Either that, or some Republican presidential candidates have not coattails, but trains that extend across several years.

A White Flight Metaphor

Bullock also takes issue with a concluding phrase that suggests that "white flight" is a useful metaphor here. He argues that such is not a valid heuristic because it connotes a transformation that is sudden and dramatic, where gradualism is more apropos. Though consistent with the caricature sometimes presented in the popular press, Bullock's depiction of white flight is inconsistent in several regards with the scholarly literature on how whites react to neighborhood and organizational integration (Schelling 1978, 135-66 and 1971, 143-186; Granovetter and Soong 1983; Achen 1986).

First, Bullock argues that white flight is an inept metaphor because partisan flight is not merely a racial issue. A quick reading of our paper shows we could not agree more. One explanation offered is that many whites find the national level policies of the Republican Party appealing, and begin to defect for that reason. (Of course, Bullock also says that given the split partisanship among Southern whites, the national policies of Republicans should not have a strong impact on comparatively local congressional races.)

However, it is quite possible, even probable, that issues play some role in the decision of many whites to leave their longtime Democratic address. This is by no means antithetical to the white flight metaphor; indeed, race also is never the sole explanation for residential flight in the scholarly literature. In the same way that whites who move out indicate a real preference for the better schools, neighborhoods, and recreational opportunities afforded elsewhere, so too might whites who leave their party prefer the “better policies” of the alternative party. There is no dissonance here; the metaphor holds quite nicely. Many whites who leave a transitional neighborhood will never list race as one of the reasons -- let alone list it as “the reason” -- for their departure. Indeed, whether home or party, it is probably true that some do change only for the better environment offered by the alternative.

Fundamental to both such “tipping” models, however, is that the presence of blacks provides an impetus or catalyst for moving or changing behavior, even if it is not the sole motive. Tipping models rarely, if ever, say that race is *the* motive, but almost all find that race is the catalyst (Schelling 1971, 1978; Granovetter and Soong 1983), and thus it may be for voting behavior as well. While not moving strictly because the Smiths next door are black, the better alternative of a new suburb might not have been selected if whites had moved in next door instead. Similarly, we conject that the Republican alternative would not have been so attractive to whites in heavily black deep South counties had the VRA brought, say, three million white college professors into their party home instead. It would be rash to assert that Republican politics and policies were irrelevant, just as it is rash to argue that the qualities of a neighborhood (new or old) are unimportant. It is also rash to argue race is not an important catalyst for either type of flight.

A second important feature of all tipping models of white flight is that they are dynamic, taking place over time. It is extremely unusual to observe dynamics with catastrophic cusps where change is wholesale and instantaneous, as Bullock suggests white flight implies. Rarely, if ever, does the scholarly literature on the subject use the term “flight” in a manner to suggest jet travel. Rather, the literature shows that the transition from all-white to majority black often exceeds a decade.

One of the reasons that white flight models almost always imply an over-time dynamic rather than a catastrophic cusp phenomenon is that racial tolerances are not uniformly distributed. Rather, moving to another neighborhood (or party) is conditioned by one’s tolerance for a

particular black density, and by one's neighbor's tolerance. One may have a tolerance for a higher density, but after others of lesser tolerance move one may likewise feel compelled to move, and so on until the neighborhood has "tipped" (Schelling, 1971, 1978; Granovetter and Soong 1983). Similarly, although change in support for the Democratic party may have been dynamic, not every black registered and voted in 1966. Rather, black mobilization, allegiance to the Democratic party, and impact on that party grew gradually throughout the 1960's and 1970's. Thus, the white reaction was also gradual. But the catalyst for the latter dynamic was race -- racial density, to be precise. Indeed, the dynamic on which our argument is based reflects that the subtle yet profound abandonment of a family home, just like the abandonment of a partisan home, requires time and is dependent upon one's own preferences, racial densities, and the behaviors of other whites.

Elite-Mass Differences: Should One Expect a Linkage to Decision Making?

The model we present discusses mass behavior and does not attempt to consider how elites or organizations react to county level demographics. It does not seem necessary that an organizational response should be the same as a mass response, especially if the organization is administered by any sort of elite. Scholars regularly find that elite behaviors and attitudes are different from those of the masses, and it does not necessarily follow that party elites will make decisions using the same criteria and rules as the masses. One should not conclude that the Republican elite will force more candidates to run in districts where there are more blacks, for example. Indeed, there is little research to show that the officials of either party make decisions on the basis of county level conditions, and there is even less to show a linkage between local conditions and the number or quality of candidates for office. Simply put, the noncorrelation of the percentage of blacks in South Carolina's counties with the number of Republican candidates for office in those counties in 1974 is a test of just that, and not of whether whites supported Republicans.

In fact, the hypothesis that the number of Republican candidates should be greater where blacks are more numerous arguably is not a logical test of white voting patterns at all. The problem is that approximately 92% of blacks identify with the Democratic Party. Consequently, barring the unlikely prospect of universal white support,

fielding more candidates as the black share of the population increases could be a strategy for Republican self-destruction. We thus fail to understand why one would believe this is expected or even viable party strategy.

Even if one were to accept Bullock's proposition that whites would all support the Republican candidate in local elections as there are more blacks, then a *small* pool of Republican candidates should be expected. If the literature on divisive primaries is credible, then one's strategy should be to try to field a limited, manageable pool of primary candidates in those venues in which there is some chance of winning a general election. Again, elite decisions should not be expected to be the same as those of the masses.

Contextual Data, Research and Explanation

The contextual fallacy occurs because people sometimes use aggregate results to infer the behaviors or motives of individuals to which the data do not speak. Given data showing that mean candidate quality by county increases as percent black increases does *not* permit one to conclude that a given candidate from county A is better than a given candidate from county B, that a black is a better candidate, that party officials target districts on that basis, or even that better candidates emerge *because* a county has more blacks. Stating any of these conclusions violates one or another rule of statistical inquiry and/or causal modeling. Our paper draws no parallel conclusions.

In our paper we find that as mean white education levels go from high to low, the *rate of change* in Republican voting increases. We explicitly argue that the rate of change is sensitive to education and to racial densities. Support for the Republican party increases more dramatically in counties where mean county education is low than where it is high, where the VRA applied, and where black densities are high. One should be cautious when attempting to impute an individual logic to this finding, as many individual logics are compatible with these data. The data do not rule out the possibility that the aggregate change is due to, say, a change in the voting behaviors of thousands of black professionals in a VRA covered county switching over time to the Republican party. While unlikely, such an explanation is impossible to rule out within the data presented. It may be safe to rule out that explanation on other evidence, but such evidence is precisely what is required to test that particular hypothesis.