

Black Turnout and Registration in Majority-Minority Districts A Quantitative Study of the Impact of Race on Political Participation

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ABSTRACT

Understanding what can incentivize the entire and minority populations to participate in politics is important to understand voting patterns. To answer this question, this study focuses on whether race has an impact on voter registration and turnout. This study sought to determine whether moving from a majority-White to a majority-Black district will increase turnout and registration among the general population as well as the Black population. Utilizing ten-year legislative reapportionment, this study compares the percent voter registration and percent turnout both before and after the 2012 round of redistricting in Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina. Results indicated that co-racial incumbents have the ability to motivate increased voter registration among the total and Black population. Turnout results were much less straightforward, indicating that there are other factors that impact turnout than the race of the incumbent. Thus, it appears the creation of majority-Black districts has a greater impact than just the ability to elect more Black representatives.

Introduction

Living in such a geographically and racially diverse country, the different types of Congressional districts in the United States reflect this diversity. One type of district in particular is the majority-minority district which concentrates a minority population of a state into a district so it is almost guaranteed that a minority will be elected to Congress. Majority-minority districts across the United States have been a leading way to increase minority representation since the Civil Rights era and the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (Keele & White, 2011). Research has also shown that majority-minority districts may have an impact on political behavior and participation (Barreto et al., 2004; Fraga, 2016; Gay, 2001; Griffin & Keane, 2006; Henderson et al., 2016; Keele & White, 2011; Whitby, 2007). How, and if, majority-minority districts still impact participation are questions that scholars are answering to this day. One area of specific interest has been separating descriptive representation, when an incumbent physically looks like their constituents, from substantive representation, when an incumbent is advancing policies that their constituents support. This study seeks to analyze the effects of descriptive representation, instead of substantive representation in order to see the impacts, if any, that the race of an incumbent has on their constituents.

Literature Review

The passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 ushered in a series of policy changes that sought to increase minority political participation and minority representation in Congress. By eliminating literacy tests, as well as implementing other measures to ensure the protection of minorities, the Voting Rights Act substantially increased minority representation and participation (Keele & White, 2011).

In the years following the Voting Rights Act, Democratic lawmakers sought to create majority-minority districts, which are districts that pack a large enough number of minorities into a single district so they constitute a majority of the constituency. Consequently, this led to a significant increase in minority representatives in Congress, moving from five Black House members in the 1960s to twenty-four in 1989 (Hill, 2013). To this day majority-minority districts are still used to try and guarantee minorities representation in Congress.

Although majority-minority districts have been credited with increasing minority representatives in Congress and encouraging increased minority political participation, it does raise questions whether majority-minority districts continue to function in a similar way today, decades after the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Bobo and Gilliam (1990) hypothesized in their study that when minorities hold positions where they could wield political power, there would be increased levels of empowerment among all minorities, leading to higher levels of political participation. This hypothesis stated that empowerment would occur because of “its effects on several social psychological factors, in particular, its impact on levels of political trust, efficacy, and knowledge about politics” (p. 379). The idea that a minority politician may be able to influence the levels of political participation has been an area of interest for many researchers, yet results vary significantly from study to study. Various studies have looked at this broad question from many angles, focusing on different geographic areas, units of analysis, specific minority groups, and utilizing unique methods, yet despite all of this research, many gaps still exist.

Recent studies have focused on a variety of specific areas to determine whether minority representatives increase political participation. Whitby’s 2007 study focused on levels of Black turnout in Louisiana and South Carolina during the 2004 elections, collecting data at the county or parish level. Other studies like Griffin and Keane’s 2006 study, Gay’s 2001 study, and Keele and White’s 2011 study also focused on Black turnout and descriptive representation. Focusing on different geographic regions and types of elections ultimately yielded different findings, indicating that behavior might change depending on the region or the type of election. Barreto, Segura, and Woods took a different approach in their 2004 research, instead deciding to focus on turnout in Latino majority-minority districts, focusing specifically on five counties in California. Fraga’s 2016 study focused on a much broader approach, analyzing turnout in Alabama, Arizona, California, Florida, Illinois, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Texas for non-Hispanic Whites, African Americans, Latinos, and Asians (Fraga, 2016). Furthermore, researchers have focused on many different units of analysis and regions from across the United States, which is important because the vast size of the United States and differences between regions make it difficult to generalize results for the entire nation. Thus, the large geographic size of the United States, and the many different levels of elections, whether local or national, has allowed researchers to explore the impacts of majority-minority districts on political participation at many different levels. However, what is largely missing from recent studies is an analysis of voter registration in majority-minority districts. Given that voter registration is a prerequisite to actually turning out to vote, it is interesting that recent studies have not focused on the effects of majority-minority districts on voter registration in addition to turnout.

The diversity of specific areas researched is mirrored by the diversity of methods that have been utilized to determine whether majority-minority districts will have an impact on political participation. Griffin and Keane utilized a method that involved self-reports of post-election NBES respondents to determine Black political participation. This study was conducted using data from a presidential election, which as Griffin and Keane writes “relying on data acquired in a presidential election year to analyze the effect of congressional incumbent characteristics on turnout is not ideal”, as voters could be motivated to vote for president, rather than being motivated to vote by the Congressional incumbent (Griffin and Keane, 2006, p. 1002). While Griffin and Keane’s work utilized a survey that was only available for a presidential election year, other studies like Fraga’s 2016 study used the concept of redistricting to avoid this limitation. This study examined Congressional districts before and after reapportionment in ten states focusing on turnout in 2010 and 2012, the first a year when midterm elections were held, and the second a year when presidential elections were held (Fraga, 2016).

Results of current research offer a very conflicting understanding of the relationship between majority-minority districts and participation. Some studies have found a positive relationship between majority-minority districts

and political participation, such as Whitby whose 2007 study found a positive association between Black officeholders and turnout levels, writing that “the statistical results displayed in this study provide evidence that African-American descriptive representatives do have a politicizing effect on the African-American potential electorate, at least in local elections for council representation” (p. 1021). On the other hand, Gay 2001’s study found less optimistic results, that only occasionally would minority constituents experience turnout rates greater than in other districts, and that the overwhelming majority of majority-minority districts displayed the same patterns of voting behavior as other districts. Keele and White (2011) had results that were mixed within their study, with generally no effect on turnout in majority-minority districts, but in one county a very large negative effect, and in another a small positive effect. Consequently, studies looking into the effects of majority-Black districts on Black turnout have yielded a variety of conflicting results and are far from reaching a consensus.

Studies that focused on majority-Hispanic districts seem to have reached more of a consensus. Barreto et al. and Fraga both found that overall, residing in a majority-Latino district actually caused lower amounts of Latino turnout. Similar results were also found in Henderson, Sekhon, and Titiunik’s 2016 study which found that “Hispanic citizens are no more likely to vote by virtue of being moved to districts represented by co-ethnic politicians” (p. 410). This essentially means that this study found Hispanic voters would not be more likely to vote simply by having descriptive representation, or a co-ethnic incumbent. These results suggest that there could be more variables that impact turnout other than just race.

With consensus from researchers when studying participation patterns of Hispanic voters in majority-Hispanic districts, this research has decided to focus exclusively on majority-Black districts and voters at the Congressional level. Because there is already a degree of understanding about Hispanic voters, focusing exclusively on majority-Black districts was chosen as generally there seems to be less consensus on political participation in these districts. Many current studies such as Whitby’s 2007 study have focused exclusively on local elections, while there has been much less research done at the Congressional level looking at both Congressional districts and Congressional elections. By nature, Congressional Representatives will have the greatest sphere of influence in their own districts and during a Congressional election, thus it is very important to look at Congressional elections to determine the influence a representative has on their constituents. Additionally, because many of these studies are from before 2012, when the last round of redistricting occurred, there is a need to continuously look at the patterns of minority political participation in majority-minority districts as the composition of these districts and incumbents continuously change. Specifically looking at co-racial incumbents is critical to determine if race motivates individuals to go turnout out to vote and register. Very few, if any, studies have analyzed the relationship between majority-minority districts and voter registration, as well as turnout, thus this study seeks to fill some of these gaps in current knowledge. These gaps have led to the following question: Does moving to a majority Black district represented by a Black incumbent increase the percentage of voters registered and voting in elections?

Methodology

This methodology made use of the ten-year redistricting cycle to determine whether moving from a majority-White district to a majority-Minority district will increase political participation through a quantitative analysis.

A significant portion of the data collected relies on the practice of redistricting. In order to determine if majority-Black districts increase political participation, a baseline of participation before and after redistricting is required. If there is no baseline measurement, there is no way to determine if moving from a majority-White district to a majority-Black district actually has an impact. To do this, the Congressional districts from the maps of the 2000 redistricting cycle and the 2010 redistricting cycle retrieved from the Census Bureau were examined to determine if individual counties have moved from majority-White districts to majority-Black Districts as well as the incumbent of these districts.

To determine if there are differences in political participation in majority-White and majority-Black districts, election reports were used to collect data on voter turnout and voter registration by county, discussed more in detail

below. For this study, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina were selected because of their majority-minority districts represented by a Black incumbent with the highest percent Black population in the country. While Tennessee’s ninth district has the second highest percent Black population in the country, it was not selected because Representative Steve Cohen is White, and this study is focusing on majority-Black districts represented by a Black incumbent.

Finding a Baseline

To determine if there was a change in political participation because of majority-minority districts, a baseline measure must first be collected. Thus, in order to determine if a change occurs, it was determined which congressional district and incumbent were assigned to each county in a state in 2010 and 2014. Although the 2012 election is the closest year after redistricting in 2010, it was not selected as it was a presidential election rather than a midterm election. Thus, 2014 was selected as the year to compare to 2010 as they were both midterm elections. Often, counties might change incumbents during a redistricting cycle and may move to different types of districts which is what provides a baseline measure. For example, in Allendale County, South Carolina, the representative in 2010 was Joe Wilson, a White incumbent. However, after the 2014 redistricting cycle the representative was Jim Clyburn, a Black incumbent.

Table 1 Sample County and Representatives Table.

| County | Congressional District 2010 | Congressional District 2014 | Representative 2010 | Representative 2014 |
|------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| Abbeville County | 3 | 3 | Jeff Duncan- White | Jeff Duncan- White |
| Aiken County | Partial 2nd and 3rd | 2 | Partial | Joe Wilson- White |
| Allendale County | 2 | 6 | Joe Wilson- White | Jim Clyburn- Black |
| Anderson County | 3 | 3 | Jeff Duncan- White | Jeff Duncan- White |
| Bamberg County | 5 | 6 | Mick Mulvaney- White | Jim Clyburn- Black |
| Barnwell County | 2 | 2 | Joe Wilson- White | Joe Wilson- White |

To organize the data, a spreadsheet was utilized with every county being analyzed. An excerpt of the spreadsheet used is seen in Table 1 displaying sample counties from South Carolina. In this study all of the counties in Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina were used to answer the research question. Next, the Congressional district maps were used to determine which district each county was a part of in 2010, and then in 2014. The incumbent was also recorded for each county in 2010 and 2014. Following this step, it was determined which counties moved from a majority-White district to a majority-minority. These counties were the treated counties in this method, and are the counties of particular interest. It was also determined which counties have remained in a majority-White district with the same incumbent as these are the control districts. Any counties that were split among different congressional districts are not considered in this methodology because differences in election data from each case meant that not all states had data at the precinct level readily available. Although the precinct level might have been preferred because precincts are a smaller geographic area than a county, this data was not available for every state. Because of these disparities, the decision was made to collect data from counties instead of tracking all precincts that might have moved from a majority-White district to a majority-minority district.

Measuring Political Participation

This study sought to measure two aspects of political participation: voter registration and voter turnout in the 2010 and 2014 Congressional Midterm elections. These two measures are the preferred way to measure participation quantitatively because it would be nearly impossible to accurately measure participation statewide based off of a survey or other similar method, particularly without the time and resources. In addition, both voter registration and voter turnout are accurately recorded by each state during elections, and thus there is no reason to devise a survey or other instrument to measure participation.

Voter Registration

While turnout is frequently the focus of studies when looking at majority-minority districts and participation, very few studies consider voter registration. Voter registration is important to consider because understanding its connections to majority-minority districts can help to determine whether a co-racial incumbent can lead to increased voter registration.

To collect the necessary data on voter registration, a spreadsheet was organized with all of the counties of interest in the first column, which were determined when it was decided which counties would serve as control and treated. Then, the population over 18 data for each county from 2010 and 2014 was found. This data was available through the Census' ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates 5-Year Estimate Data Profile. The number of people over the age of 18 served as the data for the voting age population in this study.

Next the number of individuals in each county registered to vote in 2010 and 2014. The location of this data varies by state, but it is typically available through either election results, the state election commission, or the Secretary of State (for each individual state). The number of individuals registered was recorded in the spreadsheet, as seen in Table 2, for both years, and then the percent of the population registered in 2010 and 2014 was calculated. To find the percent registered in 2010, the number of registered voters in 2010 was divided by the voting age population of 2010. This process was repeated to calculate the percent of the population registered in 2014.

In order to determine if there was a change in the percentage of the population registered in 2010 to 2014 the percent difference was calculated. To calculate this, the 2010 population registered was subtracted from the 2014 population registered, and then divided this number by the average of the number. By applying this formula to all counties of interest, the change in the population registered for every case was determined.

The final step used to determine whether moving from a majority-White district to a majority-minority district increased voter registration was to find an average of the counties of interest. An average of the control counties, which were the counties that remained in a majority-White district with the same incumbent was calculated. Next, an average of the treated counties, which were the counties that moved from a majority-White district to a majority-minority district, was calculated the average percent difference in both the control and the treated data was then used to determine an answer to the research question.

For the states that had voter registration reported by race, the same process was repeated but looking specifically at the Black population to see how majority-minority districts impact Black voter registration. In the case of this study, voter registration by race was only available in Georgia, Louisiana, and South Carolina.

Table 2: Sample Voter Registration Calculations

| Counties | District Type | 2010 Registration | 2010 Population Over 18 | 2010% Registered | 2014 Registration | 2014 Population Over 18 | 2014% Registered | Increase/Decrease |
|-----------------|------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Baldwin County | M White to M White. Same Incumbent | 115,209 | 134817 | 85.46% | 123,800 | 148019 | 83.64% | -2% |
| Bibb County | M White to M White. Same Incumbent | 12,229 | 17312 | 70.64% | 12,076 | 17750 | 68.03% | -4% |
| Calhoun County | M White to M White. Same Incumbent | 66,276 | 90174 | 73.50% | 67,221 | 90849 | 73.99% | 1% |
| Chambers County | M White to M White. Same Incumbent | 23,207 | 26469 | 87.68% | 21,814 | 26693 | 81.72% | -7% |
| Chilton County | M White to M White. Same Incumbent | 26,477 | 32208 | 82.21% | 26,378 | 33056 | 79.80% | -3% |
| Clay County | M White to M White. Same Incumbent | 10,104 | 10915 | 92.57% | 9,729 | 10596 | 91.82% | -1% |
| Cleburne County | M White to M White. Same Incumbent | 9,308 | 11268 | 82.61% | 9,829 | 11413 | 86.12% | 4% |

Voter Turnout

The second component of this methodology sought to determine whether a co-racial incumbent would motivate more voters to vote in elections in majority-minority districts. It is important to note for this study, the percent turnout was calculated out of the voting age population instead of the registered voters. By utilizing this method, the percent increase or decrease in turnout for all counties of interest was able to be determined.

Table 3: Sample Voter Turnout Calculations.

| County | District Type | 2010 Turnout | 2010 Eligible Voters | 2010% Turnout | 2014 Turnout | 2014 Eligible Voters | 2014% Turnout | Increase/Decrease |
|-----------------|------------------------------------|--------------|----------------------|---------------|--------------|----------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Bacon County | M White to M White. Same Incumbent | 2537 | 8087 | 31.37% | 2274 | 8389 | 27.11% | -14% |
| Brantley County | M White to M White. Same Incumbent | 3404 | 12920 | 26.35% | 3091 | 13814 | 22.38% | -15% |
| Bryan County | M White to M White. Same Incumbent | 8086 | 20574 | 39.30% | 8116 | 22818 | 35.57% | -9% |
| Bulloch County | M White to M White. Same Incumbent | 14607 | 53428 | 27.34% | 14153 | 57294 | 24.70% | -10% |
| Burke County | M White to M White. Same Incumbent | 6366 | 16366 | 38.90% | 6093 | 16864 | 36.13% | -7% |

First, a spreadsheet was used, shown in Table 3, to organize all counties of interest, which were determined previously as control and treated counties. Then the population over 18 in 2010 and 2014, which were the same numbers used to determine the percentage of voters registered, was calculated. The number of voters who voted in each county in 2010 and 2014 during the Congressional midterm election was then recorded. This information was available for every state in the same location as the voter registration statistics. The number of voters who voted in each election was then recorded in the spreadsheet alongside the population over 18.

To determine the percent turnout in 2010, the number of voters who voted in the 2010 General Election was divided by the 2010 population over 18 for each county. This was then used to determine the percent turnout out of the voting age population. These steps were repeated for 2014, dividing the number of voters who voted in the 2014 General Election by the 2014 population over 18 for each county.

To find whether there was a change in the percent turnout, the percent difference was calculated. To calculate this number, the 2010 percent turnout was subtracted from the 2014 percent turnout and divided this number by the average. Using this formula, the percent increase or decrease for all counties of interest was calculated.

The final step was to compare the control counties to the treated counties by taking an average percent increase or decrease. In order to find this, the average percent increase/decrease in turnout for all control counties, which are counties that remained in a majority-White district with the same incumbent, was calculated. Next, the average percent increase/decrease in turnout for treated counties was calculated, which are counties that moved from a majority-White district to a majority-minority district. Following these steps determined whether moving to a majority-minority district will increase turnout at rates higher than that of majority-White districts.

For the states that had turnout reported by race, the same process was repeated but looking specifically at the Black population to see how majority-minority districts impact solely that population and to calculate Black turnout. In the case of this study, turnout by race was only available in Georgia, Louisiana, and South Carolina.

Results

Implementing this method, it was possible to analyze whether majority-minority districts increased or decreased turnout and voter registration across all populations, as well as specifically for Black voters. Overall, results for voter registration were much more uniform across the board, while results for voter turnout were much more mixed.

Voter Registration

The first component of political participation analyzed was whether there would be an increase or decrease in the percent of individuals registered if a county moved from a majority-White to a majority-minority district, compared to if individuals continued to reside in a majority-White district with a constant incumbent. Overall, the results found that counties moving to a majority-Minority district saw an increase in voter registration higher than control counties. In fact, all treated counties analyzed saw a positive increase, compared to the control counties which not only faced lower rates of registration, but also had many counties that lost registered voters. Counties that moved from a majority-White to a majority-minority district saw voter registration rates move from 78.57% to 84.96% registered compared to control counties that went from 78.17% to 81.34%, with a percent difference of 6.85%, compared to an 9.26% difference in voter registration in treated counties over the same span of time.

Table 4: Voter Registration Results

| State | Races | 2010% Registered Control | 2014% Registered Control | % Difference | 2010% Registered Treated | 2014% Registered Treated | % Difference |
|----------------|-------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| Alabama | All | 83.82% | 81.98% | 0.51% | 87.40% | 94.39% | 0.52% |
| Georgia | All | 67.05% | 75.00% | 15.37% | 74.47% | 84.83% | 19.84% |
| Georgia | Black | 68.81% | 77.57% | 16.67% | 77.07% | 86.76% | 29.94% |
| Louisiana | All | 85.94% | 84.79% | 0.67% | 95.47% | 96.26% | 1.56% |
| Louisiana | Black | 81.34% | 81.95% | 3.67% | 97.99% | 98.80% | 2.63% |
| Mississippi | All | 81.88% | 89.67% | 7.82% | 84.66% | 94.26% | 9.66% |
| South Carolina | All | 74.92% | 76.83% | 5.65% | 61.64% | 65.90% | 10.03% |
| South Carolina | Black | 83.26% | 84.75% | 10.74% | 67.90% | 74.35% | 10.04% |
| Total | All | 78.17% | 81.34% | 6.85% | 78.57% | 84.96% | 9.26% |
| Total | Black | 76.94% | 83.38% | 11.92% | 81.30% | 88.37% | 12.85% |

At the state level, similar results were observed as seen in Table 4. In South Carolina, counties that moved to a majority-minority district as the percent registered moved from 61.64% in 2010 to 65.9% in 2014. Control counties moved from 74.92% registered to 76.83%. In Mississippi control counties moved from 81.88% of the population registered in 2010 to 89.67% registered in 2014, while in treated counties registration moved from 84.66% in 2010 to 94.26% in 2014. Thus, Mississippi had an average higher overall increase in registration, with treated counties seeing

a percent difference of 9.66%, compared to the 7.82% average difference in control counties. Louisiana saw a difference of 1.56% in registration in counties that moved from a majority-White district to a majority-minority district, and a difference of 0.67% in control counties. In Georgia, treated counties saw a percent difference of 19.84% as the percent of people registered moved from 74.47% to 84.83%, while control counties saw a difference of 15.37% moving from 67.05% to 75%. Finally, Alabama registration rates in control counties moved from 83.82% in 2010 to 81.98% in 2014, leading to a difference of 0.51%. In treated counties the registration rates moved from 87.4% in 2010 to 94.39% in 2014, leading to a difference of 0.52%

Looking specifically at Black registration in treated and control counties, similar results were found with control counties seeing an increase in voter registration from 76.94% in 2010 to 83.38% in 2014, while treated counties saw an increase in voter registration from 81.3% to 88.37%. In control counties there was a difference in voter registration of 11.92%, while treated counties had a difference of 12.85%. This indicates that moving to a majority-minority district has the ability to increase turnout for Black populations, as well as the entire population in counties.

Turnout

Results for turnout were much more mixed than registration with significant variation depending on the state. Overall, for all populations, turnout in treated counties had a difference of 11.93% as compared to a 3.06% difference in turnout in control counties. However, there was variation depending on the state and county as turnout levels fluctuated significantly. What was interesting was that when exempting the two states that require strict voter ID law, Alabama and Mississippi, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures (Underhill, 2020), the average change in turnout was actually higher on average. Exempting Alabama and Mississippi led to a turnout difference of 0.78% for control counties, and a difference in turnout of 0.25% in treated counties as seen in Table 5.

Table 5: Voter Turnout Results.

| State | Races | 2010% Turnout Control | 2014% Turnout Control | % Difference | 2010% Turnout Treated | 2014% Turnout Treated | % Difference |
|----------------|-------|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| Alabama | All | 35.51% | 31.32% | 7.33% | 44.47% | 40.01% | 17.72% |
| Georgia | All | 32.58% | 30.01% | 3.85% | 41.52% | 38.97% | 0.55% |
| Georgia | Black | 31.24% | 28.47% | 4.96% | 43.38% | 39.94% | 10.07% |
| Louisiana | All | 35.56% | 40.85% | 15.79% | 49.02% | 60.46% | 21.63% |
| Louisiana | Black | 31.17% | 40.11% | 28.65% | 52.23% | 62.70% | 19.01% |
| Mississippi | All | 33.84% | 30.22% | 10.39% | 45.10% | 30.08% | 41.06% |
| South Carolina | All | 42.09% | 38.17% | 8.23% | 31.95% | 29.71% | 3.49% |
| South Carolina | Black | 39.24% | 35.46% | 13.60% | 33.05% | 36.06% | 3.81% |
| Total | All | 35.81% | 34.04% | 3.06% | 42.43% | 37.50% | 11.93% |
| Total | Black | 33.51% | 33.19% | 2.99% | 40.87% | 39.88% | 0.30% |

While as a total average, it seems as though moving to a majority-minority district causes a very significant decrease in turnout as compared to residing in a majority-White district, looking at the individual states paint a much different picture. Alabama was the only state to see a significant decrease when individuals moved from a majority-White to a majority-minority district, as turnout moved from 44.47% in 2010 to 40.01% in 2014 as compared to moving from 35.51% in 2010 to 31.32% control counties. This meant that the percent difference in treated counties was 17.72% as compared to a difference in control counties of 7.33%. In Louisiana, moving to a majority-minority district led to an increase in turnout, moving from 49.02% in 2010 to 60.46% in 2014, while control counties saw an increase from only 35.56% to 40.85%. Mississippi also saw decreased turnout when counties moved from a majority-White district to a majority-Black district, as indicated when turnout went from 45.10% to 30.08% in 2014 while control counties saw a movement from 33.84% turnout to 30.22% in 2014. The remaining two states all had counties that moved from majority-White districts to majority-minority districts exhibiting a higher rate of turnout than in the counties that remained in majority-White districts. For Black turnout, similar results were found as the overall difference in turnout in the control counties was 2.29%, while in the treated counties it was only 0.3%. These numbers, however, are deceptive as results varied by state. In South Carolina, turnout in control counties decreased from 39.24% in 2010 to 35.46% in 2014, as compared to a movement from 33.05% in 2010 to 36.06% in 2014 for treated counties. This indicates that in South Carolina, the Black population was much more willing to participate when moved to a majority-minority district compared to those who resided in majority-White districts. What is also interesting is that overall, counties that moved from a majority-minority district back to a majority-White district saw a percent difference in turnout for the Black population of 13.3%, which is revealing that moving from a district with a co-racial incumbent to a district with a White incumbent caused significantly lower turnout rates.

Discussion

This study sought to determine whether moving from a majority-White district with a White incumbent to a majority-Minority district with a Black incumbent would lead to increased voter registration as well as increased voter turnout. By focusing on the 2010 and 2014 midterm elections for Congressional districts with data at the county level, this research has revealed that moving to a majority-minority district does have an impact on political behavior, including both turnout and registration. Counties that moved from majority-White districts to majority-Minority districts exhibited higher rates of voter registration than in the control counties across all five states, indicating that majority-minority districts are able to impact political participation.

Very little recent research has focused on voter registration; thus, this research can provide a foundation for others wishing to explore the connection between voter registration and majority-minority districts. However, one limitation of this study is that it was performed using data from counties, rather than precincts because the data at the precinct level was not available in all cases. Although this limitation does exist, it was still beneficial to understand the effects of co-racial representation at the county level as it helps to understand how larger geographic units are affected and allows for comparison to other related studies. Future researchers would benefit from performing a similar study but choosing case studies where data is available at the precinct level. The body of research would also benefit from looking at other levels of districts, such as State Assembly districts or local election districts. By increasing research specifically on the relationship between voter registration and majority-minority districts, it will help to determine whether living in a district that is majority-minority mobilizes increased numbers of individuals to register to vote, which is in itself a key part of understanding voter turnout. In the current literature, Ansolabehere and Konisky (2006) find that registration is often a substantial barrier to voter turnout and that areas with low registration hurdles have turnout rates seven to ten percentage points higher than other areas which may have policies like voter ID laws (Ansolabehere & Konisky, 2006). Future research focusing specifically on majority-minority districts and registration could help to determine if co-racial candidates or having a large share of minority population will mobilize more individuals to register to vote and to overcome barriers to registration. Therefore, it is important for future studies to expand research on voter registration and majority-minority districts.

As discussed previously, turnout results from this study appear to be less straightforward, which is in line with other studies done in this area. There is not widespread consensus on the effects of majority-minority districts and turnout and whether they increase or decrease participation. In this study, results were mixed with two of the cases exhibiting higher turnout rates than the control districts, while three cases exhibited significantly lower turnout rates for all populations. In the case study of Mississippi, further reading revealed that 2014 was the year strict voter ID laws at the polls were implemented which could have accounted for the significantly lower rates of turnout during this year (Hoseman, 2017). This provides a new area for researchers to investigate to try and understand what was occurring when turnout was higher or lower in specific areas, as well as why results seem to be mixed.

While these limitations do exist, the overall result that turnout decreased in majority-minority districts is consistent with current literature. Rosenthal et al.'s (2018) results suggested that when minorities have increased descriptive representation, it can actually cause a decrease in turnout, while substantive representation has the opposite effect (Rosenthal et al, 2018). While this study was conducted in Israel, the results are very similar to those of my study. Similar results were found in Fraga (2016) which found that co-racial candidates, or candidates who are the same race as voters, do not actually have an independent effect on voter turnout, which would make sense given the varied results in this study.

However, further research into substantive versus descriptive representation's effects on turnout are required to strengthen this claim. In conclusion, the results of this study show that moving to a majority-minority district is able to increase voter registration by several percentage points above the increase of control districts. Voter turnout offered a less clear picture as results varied significantly case by case, indicating that there might be other more significant variables that influence turnout. These results indicate several new areas for further study mentioned previously.

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