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UNITED STATES ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

**Their Impact
on Women and
Minorities**

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Preconditions for Black and Hispanic Congressional Success

Bernard Grofman and Lisa Handley

Our purposes are to examine preconditions for black and Hispanic congressional success and to account for differences in minority congressional representation by region. Our chief explanatory variable is electoral geography—the geographic distribution of black and Hispanic voting strength within states and across states. In particular, we show that there are major regional differences in the nature of minority population concentrations. We also show that, without a significant (combined) minority population concentration approaching 50 percent, minority electoral success at the congressional level is highly improbable. Furthermore, we show that such sizable minority population concentrations (roughly a quarter of a million persons) rarely are found outside of urban areas.

BLACK CONGRESSIONAL SUCCESS BY REGION

If we look at black population as of 1980, we find that more than half of all blacks resided in southern or border states—52.2 percent to be precise (13,598,881 of 26,046,119, not including the District of Columbia). The southern population is 18.2 percent black, whereas nonsouthern population is 8.2 percent black. In contrast, there were in 1988 only five southern or border-state congresspersons, compared with 18 from the smaller black population in the non-South. Of course, there are fewer members of Congress elected from the South (there are only 142 southern congresspersons, compared with 293 from the non-South), but 3.5 percent of southern members of Congress are black while 6.5 percent of nonsouthern members of Congress are black. “Why are there so few black members of Congress from the South?” would seem a natural question.

Geographic Concentration of Black South Versus Non-South

Of the states with black population over 400,000, 11 are found in the South and nine in the non-South. There are six states in the non-South and six states in the South with a population exceeding one million blacks, although only in the non-South is there a state with above two million blacks (New York). Such slight differences in black population concentrations at the state level would not appear to account for differences in black congressional success rates in these two parts of the country. Indeed, the six states in the non-South with above one million blacks elected in 1990 15 black congresspersons, whereas the six southern states with above one million elected only two black congresspersons. In particular, four of the six southern states with above one million blacks failed to elect a black member of Congress. Thus, we need another explanation of lower rates of black congressional success in the South than statewide black population figures.

At the municipal level, black population is much more concentrated in the non-South than in the South. We develop in table 3.1 a number of indices of the relationship between black urban concentration and black congressional success in the South and non-South. We have created parallel tables for black population standard metropolitan areas (SMAs), but the results are so similar that we have omitted these tables.

Table 3.1 reveals that 13 of the 19 black non-South congresspersons came from cities with more than 500,000 blacks. These cities (New York, Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles) have at least one black congressperson. Moreover, four of the five black members of Congress from the South come from districts containing cities (Houston, Baltimore, and Memphis) that are above 300,000 black in population. Similarly, all 18 nonsouthern congresspersons and five of the six southern congresspersons come from districts containing cities with at least 100,000 blacks. Most of these cities are large enough in total population to comprise at least one congressional district (Atlanta, Kansas City, Newark, Oakland, and St. Louis are the only exceptions), but most black congresspersons (18 of 22) are elected from districts whose principal city is not majority black in population (the exceptions are from Atlanta, Baltimore, Detroit, and Newark).

Table 3.1 also reveals that every city with at least 500,000 blacks elects at least one black congressperson but only six of the 18 cities with between 100,000 and 299,999 blacks are the basis for districts that elect a black congressperson (33 percent). Note there are no differences in the election rates of black members of Congress between southern and nonsouthern cities with very substantial black populations because there are *no* southern cities with more than 500,000 blacks and *no* nonsouthern cities with between 300,000 and 499,999 blacks. Looking only at cities with between 100,000 and 299,999 blacks, we see that differences in black electoral success between the South and the non-South are not statistically significant—five out of 12 (42 percent) versus one out of six (17 percent) cities

Table 3.1
Black Congressional Representation as a Function of Black Population
Concentration in Cities, South and Non-South,* 1980

<u>CITIES CLASSIFIED BY BLACK POPULATION</u>	<u>BLACK CONGRESSIONAL SEATS</u>			
	<u>NON-SOUTH</u>		<u>SOUTH</u>	
	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>
Cities with above 500,000 blacks	5(13)	0	-	-
Cities with between 300,000 and 499,999 blacks (Washington, D.C. omitted)	-	-	4(4)	1
Cities with between 200,000 and 299,999 blacks	2(2)	0	1(1)	1
Cities with between 100,000 and 199,999 blacks	3(3)	7	0	4

<u>CITIES CLASSIFIED BY BLACK POPULATION</u>	<u>CITIES WITH AT LEAST ONE BLACK MEMBER OF CONGRESS</u>	
	<u>NON-SOUTH</u>	<u>SOUTH</u>
	<u>PERCENT</u>	<u>PERCENT</u>
Cities with above 500,000 blacks	100	-
Cities with between 300,000 and 499,999 blacks	-	100
Cities with between 100,000 and 299,999 blacks	42	17

*The number in parentheses is the total number of black congresspersons representing those cities.

in the South elect blacks. In short, *once we control for the size of (urban) black population concentrations*, differences between the South and the non-South are small, albeit the few differences suggest that, even holding black population constant, the South is slightly less apt to elect black congresspersons.

The South versus non-South differences in number of black congressional seats are due to a compositional effect. Nearly seven million nonsouthern blacks (6,843,745) are found in cities with over 100,000 blacks; in contrast, not even three million southern blacks (2,861,282) are located in such urban concentrations. Thus, a much higher percentage of nonsouthern blacks than of southern blacks are found in cities with over 100,000 blacks (55.0 percent as compared to 20.4 percent).

Why should differences in geographic dispersion be such an important factor in accounting for different rates of black success in different parts of the country?

To answer that question, we must understand how the proportion of minority population in a district affects the probability of black congressional success.

Population Proportion and Black Congressional Success

Frank Parker of the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights under Law, a noted civil rights attorney, claimed that blacks are denied the opportunity to elect a candidate of their choice without a district that is 65 percent black. The essential argument is that, because of lower levels of black registration and turnout and a lower proportion of blacks who are of voting age, a district that is 50 percent black in population will not be anywhere near 50 percent black in turnout on election day. Thus, it may take a black population at or above 65 percent to provide "effective voting equality."¹ Also, blacks may be more willing to vote for whites than vice versa, and incumbents are apt to be white and thus have a double advantage against black challengers (race and the value of incumbency). Moreover, inexperience with campaigning, difficulties in raising funds, and lack of a large pool of candidates with strong records of previous governmental service all serve to handicap blacks who seek office.

We can look directly at the validity of Parker's claim for Congress. In Table 3.2 we show 1980s black congresspersons and the proportion black in the districts that elected them. Only districts that were over 65 percent black elected black congresspersons in every one of the five elections from 1982 to 1990; the Georgia 5th—which is exactly 65 percent black—elected a black to office now but did not always do so in the early 1980s. In the districts with between 50 percent and 64 percent black, only half (three of six) elected a black congressperson in 1982; but by 1990, all of these districts were electing blacks to Congress.

If we look only at the 1990 election districts, every district above 45.2 percent black elected a black member of Congress. Furthermore, only 15 of the 25 black congresspersons in 1990 were elected from majority black districts; five of the remaining nine black representatives were elected from districts that were 40 to 50 percent black (there are nine congressional districts with black populations falling in this range, hence half of them elected blacks), and the other four black members of Congress were elected from districts with less than 40 percent black populations (in the California 8th and 31st, the Missouri 5th, and the Connecticut 5th). However, six of nine of the nonmajority black districts that elected a black to Congress had substantial Hispanic populations, ranging from 25.1 percent to 38.0 percent.

We believe it important to distinguish between the minority population proportion needed to create "safe seats" and that needed to provide minority candidates a "realistic chance of elections"—that is, a probability well above 50 percent but still rather less than certainty. For Congress, it seems apparent that black population percentages as low as 45 percent can provide black candidates a near certain chance of election. Of course, we must be very careful in interpreting the percentages in table 3.2. A percentage of blacks sufficient to elect a

Table 3.2
Black and Hispanic Populations in Congressional Districts and Black
Congressional Representation, 1982-86

<u>DISTRICT</u>	<u>POPULATION</u>		<u>BLACK ELECTED</u>				
	<u>BLACK</u>	<u>HISPANIC</u>	<u>1982</u>	<u>1984</u>	<u>1986</u>	<u>1988</u>	<u>1990</u>
	<u>1982</u>	<u>1982</u>					
Illinois 1	92.1	1.1	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
New York 12	80.1	10.1	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Pennsylvania 2	80.0	1.2	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Maryland 7	73.3	1.0	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Michigan 13	71.1	3.1	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Michigan 1	70.7	2.1	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Illinois 2	70.3	7.4	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Illinois 7	66.9	4.7	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Georgia 5	65.0	1.1	no	no	yes	yes	yes
Ohio 21	62.3	1.0	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Tennessee 9	57.2	1.0	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
New Jersey 10	54.8	13.8	no	no	no	yes	yes
Mississippi 2	53.7	1.1	no	no	yes	yes	yes
Missouri 1	51.5	1.0	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
New York 6	50.3	9.4	no	no	yes	yes	yes
New York 16	48.5	37.9	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
New York 11	47.1	38.0	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
California 29	46.6	32.3	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Mississippi 4	45.2	1.0	no	no	no	no	no
Louisiana 2	44.5	3.5	no	no	no	no	yes
New York 18*	43.7	51.3	no	no	no	no	no
California 28	43.0	19.6	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
S. Carolina 6	40.9	1.1	no	no	no	no	no
Texas 18	40.8	31.2	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
N. Carolina 2	40.1	1.0	no	no	no	no	no
California 31	33.7	25.1	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
California 8	26.5	6.5	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Indiana 1	24.2	8.2	yes	no	no	no	no
Missouri 5	22.9	2.8	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Connecticut 5	4.2	3.3	no	no	no	no	yes

Note: This list contains the 25 congressional districts with the highest percentage of black residents as of the 98th Congress. At the bottom of the list are four congressional districts that also elected black representatives.

*Elected a Hispanic congressperson in each of these years.

black to Congress in an urban district with a substantial Hispanic minority (i.e., California's 29th) in fact may guarantee defeat for black candidates in a district carved out of Deep South black-belt counties.² The easiest way to summarize the results in table 3.2 is to note that *black congresspersons are elected from black plurality districts in which combined black plus Hispanic population is above 50 percent.*

There is another important point that seems to hold for black congressional seats; namely, that once districts above 50 percent black elect a black they appear to continue to do so (see table 3.3).

Table 3.3
Permanency of Black Electoral Success in Districts That Have Elected a Black*

<u>STATE</u>	<u>CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT</u>	<u>PRINCIPAL CITY</u>	<u>FIRST YEAR A BLACK ELECTED</u>
California	29th	Los Angeles	1962
	8th	Berkeley/Oakland	1970
	28th	Los Angeles	1972
	31st	Compton	1980
Illinois	1st	Chicago	1928
	7th	Chicago	1970
	2nd	Chicago	1980
Maryland	7th	Baltimore	1970
Michigan	13th	Detroit	1954
	1st	Detroit	1964
Mississippi	2nd	"delta district"	1986
Missouri	1st	St. Louis	1968
	5th	Kansas City	1982
New York	16th	Manhattan (Harlem)	1944
	12th	Brooklyn	1968
	11th	New York	1982
	6th	Queens	1986
Ohio	21st	Cleveland	1968
Pennsylvania	2nd	Philadelphia	1958
Tennessee	9th	Memphis	1974
Texas	18th	Houston	1972

*These are the congressional districts that have had continuous representation by a black since a black first was elected. Two congressional districts that have elected blacks have not done so continuously: (1) The Georgia 5th (principal city, Atlanta) first elected a black in 1972, but when Andrew Young resigned the seat in 1977, the seat went to a white, and a black was not elected again until 1986, and (2) the Indiana 1st (principal city, Gary) was served by a black representative for only one term, 1983-85.

HISPANIC CONGRESSIONAL SUCCESS

Hispanics are concentrated more highly in a handful of states than are blacks. In particular, the only two states with more than two million Hispanics, California and Texas, have over one-half (51.6 percent) of all Hispanics in the United States. Indeed, these states accounted for seven of the 10 Hispanic members of Congress elected in 1990. However, Hispanics are slightly less concentrated in large cities than are blacks; 24.8 percent of the Hispanic population is located

in cities with more than 200,000 Hispanics, compared with only 29.5 percent of the black population in cities with more than 200,000 blacks. Hispanics within cities also are considerably less segregated than blacks, an important point to note when the system of representation is based on single-member districts.³

For Hispanics and blacks, cities with large minority populations tend to elect minority representatives, although the pattern is not quite so clear for Hispanics as for blacks. The two cities (New York and Los Angeles) with more than 500,000 Hispanics elect at least one Hispanic congressperson. However, only one of the two cities with between 400,000 and 499,999 Hispanics is represented by a Hispanic congressperson (San Antonio elected a Hispanic to office in 1990, but Chicago did not). Of the 10 Hispanic congresspersons, seven are from cities with over 100,000 Hispanics, including three from cities with over 500,000 Hispanics. The other three Hispanic members of Congress come from districts centered on cities that have less than 100,000 Hispanics but that are majority Hispanic cities: Laredo, Texas; McAllen, Texas; and Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Hispanic Population Proportions and Hispanic Congressional Success

We show in table 3.4 the percent Hispanic and percent black in the 15 congressional districts with the highest Hispanic population proportions, and the electoral success (or absence thereof) of Hispanic candidates in these districts. There were 10 Hispanic members of Congress in 1990, 2.3 percent of the House, compared with a 1980 United States Hispanic population of 6.4 percent.

As table 3.4 indicates, Hispanics generally are not elected to Congress from districts that are less than 64 percent combined minority except in California and New Mexico. Excluding the California 34th and the New Mexico 3rd, however, it appears that a clear Hispanic majority and a combined minority population greater than 55 percent provides a substantial probability of Hispanic congressional success. To achieve certainty, a 60 percent Hispanic population and a combined minority population near 70 percent appears necessary. These percentages may not need to be as high in California or New Mexico, however.

There are several reasons that the percentages necessary to elect a Hispanic congressperson are higher than the percentages needed to elect a black congressperson. One of the primary reasons is that a much higher proportion of the Hispanic population is noncitizen than is the case for the black population. Therefore a district that is, for example, 60 percent Hispanic in total population may not be 50 percent Hispanic in eligible voters.⁴

As with blacks, once a district with significant minority population elects a Hispanic member of Congress, it continues to do so (only the New Mexico 1st, which first elected a Hispanic in 1968, failed to re-elect a Hispanic in 1990). Also, for Hispanics as for blacks, the principal difference between the 1970s and the 1980s was not in the percentage of minority population needed for

Table 3.4
Hispanic and Black Congressional Districts and Hispanic Congressional Representation in the 1980s*

<u>DISTRICT</u>	<u>1982 POPULATION</u> (in percent)		<u>HISPANIC ELECTED</u>				
	<u>HISPANIC</u>	<u>BLACK</u>	<u>1982</u>	<u>1984</u>	<u>1986</u>	<u>1988</u>	<u>1990</u>
Texas 15	71.7	1.0	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
California 25	63.6	9.6	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Texas 20	61.7	8.8	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Texas 27	61.5	2.7	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Texas 16	60.2	3.6	no	no	no	no	no
California 30	54.2	1.1	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Texas 23	53.1	4.1	no	yes	yes	yes	yes
New York 18	51.3	43.7	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Florida 18	50.7	15.8	no	no	no	no	yes
California 34	47.6	2.3	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
New Mexico 3	39.0	1.0	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
New York 11*	38.0	47.1	no	no	no	no	no
New York 16*	37.9	48.5	no	no	no	no	no
New Mexico 1	37.4	2.3	yes	yes	yes	no	no
Arizona 2	35.5	5.6	no	no	no	yes	no

Note: This list contains the 15 congressional districts with the highest percentage of Hispanic residents as of the 98th Congress. There are no Hispanic representatives other than those representing districts listed above.

*Represented by a black congressman.

Hispanic victory but in the number of districts in which such a percentage could be found (these data are not shown).

CONCLUSIONS

We have shown how a black plurality and a combined minority population just barely above 50 percent are sufficient to create a congressional district in which a black candidate has a realistic opportunity to be elected to Congress and how a 65 percent district creates a virtual certainty of black success.

Except in a few states, such as California and New Mexico, congressional districts with a clear Hispanic plurality and a combined minority population greater than 55 percent are needed to offer a Hispanic candidate a realistic opportunity to be elected. A district with a 60 percent Hispanic population and a combined minority population close to 70 percent creates a virtual certainty of Hispanic success (except perhaps in areas where a very high proportion of Hispanics are noncitizens).

Using 1980 population figures, we see that the congressional representation of Hispanics and blacks relative to their populations is quite comparable. Hispanics have a congressional representation of 2.3 percent, compared with a

population of 6.4 percent, for a representation/population ratio of .36 (2.3/6.4). The ratio for blacks is .50 (5.7/11.5). The difference in representation ratios for blacks and Hispanics essentially vanishes when we take into account the Hispanic noncitizen or the nonvoting-age population. However, the ratio of each is less than half of what the population strength would suggest because many minorities are dispersed in rural areas and smaller cities.⁵ As noted earlier, single-member districts generally will not provide congressional representation proportional to minority population.

Black and Hispanic congressional representation has been a matter of widespread concern. We believe we have demonstrated the importance of urban concentration in accounting for the relative success rates of blacks in the South as compared with the non-South and of Hispanics as compared with blacks.

NOTES

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1. For a further discussion of these points and of the mathematics underlying the "65 percent rule," see Kimball Brace, Bernard Grofman, Lisa Handley, and Richard Niemi, "Minority Voting Equality: The Sixty-Five Percent Rule in Theory and Practice," *Law and Policy*, January 1988, pp. 43–62.

2. There is no single "magic number" of minorities that is appropriate to all times, places, and types of elections. For a more detailed discussion of this point, see *ibid.* and Bernard Grofman, Michael Migalski, and Nicholas Noviello, "Effects of Multimember Districts on Black Representation in State Legislatures," *Review of Black Political Economy*, Spring 1986, pp. 65–78.

3. Black residential segregation in most urban areas is quite stark. See Carl E. Tubner, Annemette Sorensen, and Leslie J. Hillingsworth, Jr., "Indexes of Racial Segregation for 109 Cities in the United States, 1940 to 1970," *Sociological Focus*, vol. 17, 1984, pp. 328–35.

4. Not only are there differences in citizenship rates, but there are also important differences in the age structure of Hispanics, blacks, and Anglos. In 1980, 35.5 percent of the Hispanic population was below the age of 18, compared with 36.0 percent of the black population and 26.6 percent of the white population.

5. However, as noted above, representation for minorities in single-member district systems can not be expected to be proportional to population strength in any case.