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Bernard Grofman; Lisa Handley

Legislative Studies Quarterly, Vol. 16, No. 1. (Feb., 1991), pp. 111-128.

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BERNARD GROFMAN
University of California, Irvine
LISA HANDLEY
George Washington University

The Impact of the Voting Rights Act On Black Representation In Southern State Legislatures

In the period from 1965 to 1985 there was a dramatic increase in the proportion of black legislators elected in southern states. This did not result from a larger number of blacks being elected in white-dominated districts but rather from an increase in the number of districts with a majority of black population and an increase in the proportion of such districts that actually elected a black to the legislature. More specifically, it is the districts that are at least 60% black that are most likely to elect a black legislator. The increase in the proportion of districts having a black majority is largely the result of enforcement of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which led to greater use of single-member districts and the elimination of districting that diluted the black vote.

In this article we examine the reasons for the growth in the number of black state legislators between the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965, when virtually no blacks held political office in the South, and 1985 (after the last round of redistricting). The argument is currently popular that the recent election of blacks to prominent political positions indicates the coming of a new era in southern politics—an era of increased willingness on the part of white voters to cast their ballots for black candidates. We demonstrate that this argument is misguided. There is little evidence to suggest a widespread decrease in racially polarized voting in the South. Indeed, the one detailed study known to us, that of South Carolina (Loewen 1987), shows essentially no change in white willingness to vote for black candidates. The election of Douglas Wilder as governor of Virginia is the exception rather than the rule, and in fact even this gubernatorial contest was not devoid of racial bloc voting. According to exit polls, Wilder did not receive a majority of the white votes in his recent bid for office. An exit poll conducted by CBS/*New York Times* reported that only 39% of the whites voting in the Virginia gubernatorial contest voted for Wilder. If whites

alone had voted, the white Republican, Marshall Coleman, would now be the governor of Virginia (*Time* 1989).

This article focuses on black office holding in the South at the state legislative level and makes three key points. First, the number of blacks elected to office has increased because the number of majority black districts has increased, not because blacks are winning office in majority white districts. Second, even today, it seems that blacks need to constitute well above 50% of a district's population if they are to have a realistic opportunity to elect state legislative candidates of choice. Third, the number of black districts has increased not because of redistricting based on population shifts reflected in the decennial census, but primarily because of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and 1982 amendments to that act. Quite simply, had there been no intervention in the redistricting process in the South, it is unlikely that most southern states would have ceased their dilutive practices. The Justice Department forced many southern states to replace their multimember state legislative districts with single-member seats (especially in areas with black population concentrations) and also denied preclearance to single-member redistricting plans that appeared to fragment black voters unnecessarily. Federal intervention of this nature and voting rights suits brought by private litigants are primarily responsible for the significant increase in black office holding, at least at the state legislative level, in the South.

Are Whites Electing Blacks to Office in the South?

As Table 1 illustrates, blacks have been serving as state legislators in dramatically increasing numbers since 1965. In 1965, only three blacks served in the state legislatures of the 11 states of the former Confederacy; by 1985 that number had increased to 176. Blacks now hold almost 10% of the state legislative seats. Of course, blacks comprise almost 20% of the population in this region; hence, blacks are still not represented in proportion to their share of the population in the South.

To what can we attribute this substantial rise in the number of black officeholders in the South? A large part of the answer is that black participation increased following the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. But black participation rates have leveled off since the early 1970s; thus, more recent increases must be due to some other factors. Many have suggested that whites are more willing to vote for black candidates. If this were true, then we should see increasing numbers of

TABLE 1
 Black State Legislators as a Percentage of All State Legislators
 in the South, 1965–85
 (numbers of black legislators in parentheses)

Year	Percentage Black Population	Black State Legislators					
		Senate		House		Total	
1965	20.4	.2	(1)	.1	(2)	.2	(3)
1970	20.4	1.3	(6)	1.9	(26)	1.8	(32)
1975	20.4	2.4	(11)	6.2	(83)	5.3	(94)
1980	19.6	3.1	(14)	8.3	(110)	7.0	(124)
1985	19.6	7.2	(33)	10.8	(143)	9.9	(176)

blacks being elected from jurisdictions in which whites make up a majority of the voters. But, as Table 2 demonstrates, this is simply not the case. State legislative districts that are majority white in population are no more likely to elect black legislators now than they were 10 years ago. In the 1970s, approximately 1% of all state legislative districts that were less than 50% black elected black legislators. In the 1980s, the percentage remains equally low. Thus blacks still need to reside in districts with substantial black population percentages if they are to have a realistic opportunity to elect their candidates of choice—a fact that has not diminished over time.

Over time, however, both the percentage and the number of majority black districts that elect black legislators has increased in the South. Let us turn first to changes in the proportion of black majority seats that return a black legislator. As Table 2 indicates, in the first election after the 1970s round of redistricting in each state only 59% of state house districts that were majority black had elected a black to office; by 1989, this proportion had increased to 77%. The increase is even more dramatic in state senate districts in the South: in the 1970s only 25% of the majority black senate districts elected a black to the seat; in the 1980s, 62% of these districts were represented by a black.

What the simple crosstabulation in Table 2 shows clearly is that the percentage of blacks being elected in majority white districts has not increased. (In fact, for state house seats, the proportion is lower in the 1980s.) The gain in the number of blacks serving in state legislatures is due almost entirely to blacks being elected more frequently from districts in which blacks comprise a majority of the population and to an increase in the number of such districts. In the 1970s there were 126

TABLE 2
 Percentage of Districts that Elected Black State Legislators
 in the South in the 1970s and 1980s
 (number of districts in each category in parentheses)

Type of District	Lower House		Upper House	
	1970s	1980s	1970s	1980s
Majority White	2 (637)	1 (1144)	1 (294)	1 (390)
Majority Black	59 (102)	77 (181)	25 (24)	62 (52)

Note: The percentages for the 1970s are based on Bullock's (1983) numbers, given in Table 3. Included in the calculations are Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina (senate only), South Carolina, and Virginia. The percentages for the 1980s are based on data provided by the Southern Regional Council; all 11 southern states are included. In Tables 2 through 5, the 1970s data in each state are from the first session elected after redistricting had been finalized, and the 1980s data are from the 1989 session.

majority black state legislative districts in seven southern states for which we have data; in the 1980s there were 182 such districts in the same seven states, an increase of over 44%.¹ Furthermore, almost 84% of the black legislators serving in the South in the 1970s represented majority black districts; in the 1980s, however, this proportion is even higher (90%).

We can directly compare the importance of changes in the number of majority black districts and the importance of changes in the likelihood that any district (majority black or majority white) would elect a black. To do so, we use an arithmetic identity developed independently by one of the present authors and by John Jackson of the University of Michigan (Jackson, personal communication, November 1989). The Grofman-Jackson decompositional effects formula allows us to decompose the increase in black representation from the 1970s to the 1980s into the sum of three effects: a composition effect (i.e., a change in the number of districts that are majority black), a behavior effect (i.e., a change in the likelihood that a black will be elected from either a black majority or a nonblack majority district), and an interaction effect (the multiplicative interaction between behavioral and compositional changes).² Using this formula, we found that, of the 5.1 percentage point gain in black representation between the 1970s and 1980s, 55% is due to composition, 26% is due directly to behavior,³ and 19% can be attributed to the interaction of behavior and composition.⁴ Thus, of the total percentage point increase in black representation from the 1970s to the 1980s, most can be attributed to compositional

changes (changes in the number of majority black districts). Moreover, any changes in behavior in majority white districts actually reduced black representation rather than increasing it.

The Color-Blind Versus the Racial Polarization Model of Voting

Some may argue that the vast majority of blacks are elected from majority black districts because the vast majority of blacks reside in such districts. We test two hypotheses—the color-blind hypothesis and the racial polarization hypothesis—to determine which in fact accounts for our findings (see Handley and Grofman 1989). The color-blind hypothesis predicts that the percentage of black legislators from a given group of districts will be equal to the mean proportion of blacks within that group of districts. Thus, if we divide southern legislative districts into two groups, those that are majority black and those that are not, this hypothesis predicts that the percentage of districts with black legislators will be equal to the mean percentage of blacks in the population of each set of districts. On the other hand, the racial polarization hypothesis posits that voting among whites is highly polarized. Therefore only those state legislative districts with black majorities will elect black legislators; districts in which a majority of the voters are white will not elect blacks to office.

The racial polarization hypothesis predicts that none of the majority white districts will elect a black legislator and that all of the majority black districts elect a black. These results should occur for every state if voting is completely racially polarized.

The percentages predicted by the color-blind hypothesis vary because the average percentage black in the majority white districts and the majority black districts differs by state. These percentages have been calculated for each state and are presented in parentheses in Table 3. These calculations also establish that most blacks do not reside in majority black districts: in no state did a majority of the blacks even live in districts that had a black population of 50% or more. The proportion of blacks living in nonmajority black house districts ranged from 50% in Alabama to 95% in North Carolina.⁵

Table 3 displays the actual percentage of majority white and majority black districts that elected black legislators and the percentage predicted by the color-blind hypothesis. (Recall that the racial polarization hypothesis predicts that 0% of the majority white districts and 100% of the majority black districts will elect a black legislator.) The actual results for the majority white districts in every state are more in line with the racial polarization model than the color-blind model. In

TABLE 3
 Percentage of State Legislative Districts that Elected
 a Black Legislator in the 1980s
 (numbers predicted by the color-blind model in parentheses)

State	Lower House Districts		Upper House Districts	
	Majority White	Majority Black	Majority White	Majority Black
Alabama	0 (16)	100 (71)	0 (18)	83 (65)
Arkansas	0 (11)	55 (59)	0 (14)	50 (56)
Florida	3 (11)	100 (60)	3 (13)	100 (65)
Georgia	1 (18)	74 (71)	0 (19)	78 (66)
Louisiana	0 (21)	83 (70)	0 (25)	100 (63)
Mississippi	0 (24)	67 (66)	0 (27)	15 (62)
North Carolina	4 (19)	100 (62)	3 (22)	100 (61)
South Carolina	0 (22)	59 (60)	0 (23)	50 (56)
Tennessee	1 (10)	100 (79)	0 (10)	100 (73)
Texas	3 (9)	100 (64)	3 (11)	100 (53)
Virginia	0 (15)	78 (63)	3 (18)	100 (69)

Note: These percentages were calculated from data provided by the Southern Regional Council.

most southern states, no majority white districts elected a black legislator; in no state did more than 4% of majority white districts elect a black. The results for the majority black districts are more problematic, however.

The racial polarization hypothesis, although clearly applicable to the results in majority white jurisdictions, does not adequately describe what occurs in the majority black districts. The racial polarization model does fit the data for the black districts extremely well, however, when we use a cut-off point (or “tipping point”) somewhat higher than 50% black population. For example, if we examine only those districts with a black population of 65% or more, we find that all such districts elected black legislators in every state except Mississippi. This result suggests that not all majority black districts are equal; that is, districts that are heavier in black population are more likely to elect a black to office than districts with slight black population majorities.

How “Black” Does a District Have to Be to Elect a Black Legislator?

Not all majority black districts elect black legislators, as Table 4 makes evident. Table 4 presents rates of black success in majority black state legislative districts, broken down into categories of black popula-

TABLE 4
 Percentage of Majority Black Districts that Elected
 Black State Legislators in the South in the 1970s and 1980s
 (number of districts in each category in parentheses)

Percentage of District Black	Lower House		Upper House	
	1970s	1980s	1970s	1980s
50–54%	11 (18)	30 (30)	0 (6)	27 (14)
55–59%	42 (19)	57 (21)	0 (7)	55 (11)
60–64%	36 (14)	76 (42)	0 (3)	64 (11)
65% or more	88 (65)	98 (88)	75 (8)	94 (16)

Note: The percentages for the 1970s are based on Bullock's (1983) numbers, given in Table 3. Included in the calculations are Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina (senate only), South Carolina, and Virginia. The percentages for the 1980s are based on data provided by the Southern Regional Council; all 11 southern states are included.

tion density. In the 1980s majority black districts that were less than 60% black elected black legislators only about 40% of the time. Districts that were 60% black or more, however, selected blacks to serve in office almost 90% of the time. Thus the higher percentage of black legislators cannot be attributed to increases in majority black districts across the board, but only to increases in those districts with a black population above 60%. First, the number of such districts increased considerably between the 1970s and 1980s, while the number of seats changed little in districts with black populations between 50 and 60% (see Table 5 below for the raw numbers of black districts in each category). Second, the probability of electing a black increased considerably in districts that were 60% or more black in population but did not change nearly as dramatically in districts with 50 to 60% black population.

A comparison of data for the 1970s and the 1980s indicates that 60% was not always the "magic number." In the 1970s districts needed to be at least 65% black in population to ensure the election of a black legislator. In fact, the percentage of blacks being elected has increased most dramatically in the last decade in districts that are 60 to 64% black. Therefore, the growth in the number of blacks serving in state legislatures is largely due to an increase in the number of blacks being elected from districts in which over 60% of the population is black.

We must be sensitive to state by state variations, however (see Brace, Grofman, Handley, and Niemi 1988). In particular, Mississippi is a major outlier; the proportion of black majority districts there that elect black candidates is much lower than that in virtually any other

TABLE 5
 Number of Majority Black State Legislative Districts
 in Seven Southern States in the 1970s and 1980s

Percentage of District Black	Lower House		Upper House	
	1970s	1980s	1970s	1980s
50–54%	18	25	6	12
55–59%	19	15	7	11
60–64%	14	28	3	7
65% or more	51	69	8	15
Total	102	137	24	45

Note: The table includes the seven states for which there are comparable data for the 1970s and 1980s: Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina (senate only), South Carolina, and Virginia. The numbers for the 1970s are based on Bullock (1983), and those for the 1980s are based on figures from the Southern Regional Council.

state; perhaps because of lower rates of black participation in Mississippi (see *Operation PUSH v. Allain* 1989). In contrast, in Alabama virtually all majority black districts elect blacks, including those that are less than 60% black.⁶

Table 5 presents the increase in the number of black districts between the 1970s and 1980s. The number of districts that were more than 60% black increased by 57%. The increase in the number of districts between 50 and 60% black was considerably lower (26%), indicating that those drawing the districts (or, more likely, those approving the districts under Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act) are aware that districts need heavy black majorities if black candidates are to be elected.

Although the number of blacks elected to state legislative office has clearly increased, there is no evidence that this rise is the consequence of increasing white support for black candidates. As our data clearly indicate, blacks are no more likely to be elected from majority white jurisdictions now than they were 10 or 15 years ago. States are drawing more majority black districts, however, and these districts have higher black concentrations than in the 1970s and are more likely to elect blacks. Below we present evidence that these changes are due to Justice Department intervention under Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act and, more recently, of Section 2 lawsuits (such as that in North Carolina in 1982) and/or to legislators anticipating probable Section 5 pre-clearance denials or Section 2 litigation challenges.

Why Are More Black Districts Being Drawn?

Above we demonstrated that the principal gains in black legislative representation came as a result of increases in the number of black majority districts and in the likelihood that blacks would be elected from such districts (especially districts with 60% or greater black populations). Now we turn to the question of how these changes came about. In particular, we wish to account for the increase in the number of seats with substantial black populations.

Three factors might be expected to affect minority candidates' success. First, as registration and turnout of blacks increases (relative to whites), we should see more blacks elected in black majority districts. (However, a smaller proportion of blacks than of whites is generally of voting age; hence the proportion of black voters within a district is unlikely to equal the proportion of blacks in the population, even if blacks are registering and voting at the same rate as whites. See Brace, Grofman, Handley, and Niemi 1988.) Increases in black participation rates can largely be ruled out as an explanation of black electoral gains from the 1970s to the 1980s, however, because the differences between black and white turnout rates remained relatively constant during this period.⁷ Even more important, as we have shown using the Grofman-Jackson decompositional effects method, the change in southern black representation over the past decade must be attributed mostly to changes in the number of majority black districts rather than to changes in voter behavior.

Another factor that might be expected to increase the number of majority black districts is growth in black population and/or a change in the degree to which the black population is concentrated. That is, if the black population has shifted, forming more majority black districts, then the number of blacks holding office might increase (Grofman and Handley 1989). In this instance, we can rule out the former factor, since the percentage of blacks in the South has actually declined over the past decade. This is true for the entire region and for 9 of the 11 states; only in Georgia and North Carolina has the percentage black in the population increased, very slightly. As for changes in black population concentrations, the evidence does not suggest much change over the time period in question. Indeed, the majority black counties in the delta area of the Deep South have been losing population (Black and Black 1987).

A final factor to be considered is action (or threat of action) under the Voting Rights Act. We will show that it is Justice Department action, as well as action taken by private litigants (particularly in the 1980s—see Grofman, Migalski, and Noviello 1985), that accounts for

most of the growth in black legislative representation in the South. This action usually took one of two forms. First, the state might be required to change its election system from multimember districts to single-member districts (at least in the areas of the state with large concentrations of blacks). Second, if the state already employed single-member districts, it may have been required to redraw its lines so as not to fragment black voters.

The former of these two actions had the greater effect on black state legislative success. The Justice Department has expressed a decided preference for single-member districts and has refused to preclear state legislative plans that employed multimember districts, at least in the areas of the covered states that contained substantial black populations. For example, in the 1970s preclearance denials under Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act reduced or eliminated the use of multimember districts in the legislative chambers of Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina. (Although an objection was rendered to plans for both chambers in South Carolina, the state successfully challenged the objection to the senate plan in court.) More recently, in 1981–82 a series of Justice Department objections also eliminated multimember legislative districts in the covered area of North Carolina.

Voting rights litigation has also forced states to adopt single-member districts. For example, in Texas in the early 1970s, multimember districts were eliminated as a result of a lawsuit brought by private litigants under the Fourteenth Amendment (*White v. Regester*). In North Carolina, multimember districts in a number of areas of the state not covered by Section 5 were eliminated as a result of a Section 2 lawsuit brought by the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund (*Gingles v. Edmisten* 1984, heard sub nom *Thronburg v. Gingles* 1986; see Grofman 1985).

Table 6 lists the types of election system used in each of the 11 southern states between 1965 and 1985. In 1965 almost all of the states employed multimember districts; by 1985 no southern state had a pure multimember election system, although Arkansas still employed some multimember house districts. (Many multimember districts in Arkansas have been eliminated since 1985 as the result of the very recently decided *Jeffers v. Clinton*.)

The Voting Rights Act has not merely replaced multimember districts with single-member districts; states using only single-member districts have also been subjected to Justice Department intervention. For example, the Justice Department has objected to legislative plans in Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi because of the fragmentation of black voters across single-member districts.

TABLE 6
Type of Election System and Number of Black State
Legislators in Southern States
(numbers of black legislators in parentheses)

State	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985
<i>Upper House</i>					
Alabama	MMD (0)	MMD (0)	<i>SMD</i> (2)	SMD (2)	SMD (5)
Arkansas	MMD (0)	MMD (0)	SMD (1)	SMD (1)	SMD (1)
Florida	MMD (0)	MMD (0)	MMD (0)	MMD (0)	<i>SMD</i> (2)
Georgia	<i>SMD</i> ^a (2)	<i>SMD</i> ^a (2)	SMD (2)	SMD (2)	SMD (6)
Louisiana	MMD (0)	MMD (0)	<i>SMD</i> (1)	SMD (2)	SMD (4)
Mississippi	MMD (0)	MMD (0)	MMD (0)	<i>SMD</i> (2)	SMD (2)
North Carolina	MMD (0)	MMD (0)	MMD (2)	MMD (1)	<i>SMD</i> ^a (3)
South Carolina	MMD (0)	MMD (0)	MMD (0)	MMD (0)	<i>SMD</i> (4)
Tennessee	MMD (0)	<i>SMD</i> (2)	SMD (2)	SMD (3)	SMD (3)
Texas	SMD (0)	SMD (1)	SMD (0)	SMD (0)	SMD (1)
Virginia	MMD (0)	MMD (1)	<i>SMD</i> ^b (1)	<i>SMD</i> ^b (1)	SMD (2)
<i>Lower House</i>					
Alabama	MMD (0)	MMD (0)	<i>SMD</i> (13)	SMD (13)	SMD (19)
Arkansas	MMD (0)	MMD (0)	MMD ^c (3)	MMD ^c (4)	MMD ^c (4)
Florida	MMD (0)	MMD (1)	MMD (3)	MMD (4)	<i>SMD</i> (10)
Georgia	MMD (0)	MMD (12)	<i>SMD</i> ^a (19)	<i>SMD</i> ^a (21)	<i>SMD</i> ^a (21)
Louisiana	MMD (0)	MMD (1)	<i>SMD</i> (8)	SMD (10)	SMD (14)
Mississippi	MMD (0)	MMD (1)	MMD (1)	<i>SMD</i> ^d (15)	<i>SMD</i> ^e (18)
North Carolina	MMD (0)	MMD (1)	MMD (4)	MMD (4)	<i>SMD</i> ^a (13)
South Carolina	MMD (0)	MMD (0)	<i>SMD</i> (13)	SMD (14)	SMD (16)
Tennessee	MMD (0)	MMD (6)	<i>SMD</i> (9)	SMD (9)	SMD (10)
Texas	MMD (0)	MMD (2)	<i>SMD</i> ^a (9)	SMD (13)	SMD (13)
Virginia	MMD (0)	MMD (2)	MMD (1)	MMD (4)	<i>SMD</i> (5)

Note: Type of election system is designated as follows: "MMD" is a multimember system, "SMD" is a single-member system. If the election system type is in italics, there has been a change in election system since the last time period reported. The number in parentheses is the number of black legislators serving at that time.

^aPredominantly single-member districts in areas of black population, some multimember districts elsewhere in the state.

^bSingle-member districts with the exception of a court-ordered multimember district in the Norfolk, Virginia area.

^cArkansas has one black majority multimember district and one majority black single-member district.

^dSingle-member district system but with black fragmentation.

^eReduced black fragmentation in single-member district system.

Recent critics of the Voting Rights Act (see, for example, Thernstrom 1987) have claimed that, in many instances, the Justice Department is completely unwarranted in interfering with the autonomy of state legislatures drawing redistricting plans. We disagree, however. In fact, absent such federal interventions, there is little evidence that white-dominated southern legislatures would have drawn majority black districts. On the contrary, southern legislatures have fought, often bitterly, to avoid such changes. For example, in the 1970s Mississippi succeeded in delaying (by a variety of legal maneuvers) the creation of majority black districts until 1979.

Even if white legislators were reluctant to draw districting plans that created majority black districts, one could argue that such districts were inevitable due to shifts in black population. Our analysis, however, will demonstrate that major shifts in black representation were the result almost entirely of Justice Department intervention or voting rights litigation.

The Shift from Multimember Districts to Single-Member Districts

We shall first look at the changes in black representation that came about as a result of changes from multimember to single-member districts. In Table 7 we examine the bivariate relationship between the use of single-member districts and black representation, comparing black representation in states that used only single-member districts with black representation in those states that did not. The table begins with 1975, because that was the first year in which more than a couple of southern state legislative chambers employed single-member districts. This table parallels and updates analyses done by Jewell (1980, 1982) and Grofman, Migalski, and Noviello (1986).

As Table 7 demonstrates, in 1975 black representation in state houses was 9.3% in states using predominantly single-member districts; in the remaining states it was only 2.1%. The comparable figures are 10.7% and 3.4% in 1980 and 11.3% and 4.0% in 1985. The identical pattern was found for state senates in the South; in every year the percentage of black senators in states with single-member districts was higher than in states with multimember districting plans.

This finding is further supported by a simple bivariate correlation between the dummy variable "use of single-member districts" and the variable "number of black legislators." This analysis was performed using 44 data points—observations for each of the 11 southern states in four different years: 1970, 1975, 1980, and 1985. (See Table 6 for the

TABLE 7
 Percentage of Black State Legislators in the South,
 by Whether the Electoral System Is Primarily
 Single-Member or Primarily Multimember

Year	Lower House		Upper House	
	Single-Member System	Multimember System	Single-Member System	Multimember System
1975	9.3	2.1	3.4	1.3
1980	10.7	3.4	4.2	1.2
1985	11.3	4.0	7.6	2.9

raw data.) For the lower chamber, r is .80; for the upper chamber, r is .52. Thus there is obviously a strong relationship between the use of single-member districts and the election of blacks to state legislative office.

Of course, it might be argued that this relationship is misleading; there may be other reasons why states with multimember districts have a lower percentage of blacks serving in their legislatures. (For instance, states with multimember district systems may have fewer blacks than states with single-member election systems.) This criticism can be countered with before-and-after analyses in the states that shifted election systems and by comparing changes in black representation for states that changed election systems and in those that did not.

To test longitudinally a shift from multimember districts to single-member districts affected black representation, we examined both chambers in all 11 states for each of three time periods: 1970–75, 1975–80, and 1980–85. Thus, we had a total of 33 observation points for each legislative chamber. (See Table 6 for the raw data.) We then added a dummy variable to indicate whether there had been a shift from multimember districts to single-member districts within the specified time period for each of the data points. Regressing change in black representation on this dummy variable revealed the extent to which changes in black representation occurred in the period in which states switched to single-member districts. (For states that did not change their election system, we anticipated little change in black representation. We included these states in our dataset because, if we still find that a change to single-member districts has a major effect on change in black representation, we have even stronger evidence than we would had we excluded those states.)

For the lower chambers of the 11 state legislatures, we found a bivariate correlation of .74 between change in black house representa-

tion and shift to single-member districts. Such a shift is associated with a gain of 6.3 black representatives in the state. In state senates, the corresponding correlation is .37, and the change to single-member districts is associated with a gain of 1.1 black senators.⁸

For comparison purposes, we then considered a “census redistricting year” dummy variable to test for the simple effect of redistricting (assigning a 1 for the periods 1970–75 and 1980–85, and a value of 0 for 1975–80). Regressing this dummy variable against change in black representation, we obtained a correlation of .17 in the house and .31 in the senate, neither one statistically significant. Moreover, the correlation was not significant when we entered a dummy for “shift to single-member district” into the equation. Thus, we believe it fair to characterize the switch to single-member districts as a primary cause of the increase in black representation in southern state legislatures.⁹

With very few exceptions, states did not eliminate their multi-member districts voluntarily; they did so because the Justice Department refused to preclear state legislative plans that employed multi-member districts or because voting rights litigation challenged multi-member districts as dilutive. Tennessee and Florida—neither of which is subject to the preclearance provisions of the Voting Rights Act—were the only states that clearly shifted election systems voluntarily. Every other southern state was required, either by the court or by the Justice Department, to adopt single-member districts in at least one of their legislative chambers.

Seven southern states are entirely covered by the preclearance provisions of the Voting Rights Act: Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia. North Carolina is partially covered by the provisions. The bivariate correlation between the number of black legislators and a dummy variable for section 5 coverage is .43 for the lower chamber and .21 for the upper chamber. Thus the automatic trigger incorporated into the act has clearly made a difference in black representation in the South. The difference is not as important as the type of election system itself, however, as is indicated by a multivariate analysis that includes both dummy variables—“use of single-member districts” and section 5 coverage. The multiple correlation coefficient is .82 for state houses, and both variables are statistically significant (although section 5 coverage is significant only at the .05 level). Use of single-member districts is associated with an increase of 9.4 black representatives on average; coverage under the Voting Rights Act is associated with a gain of 2.8 black representatives on average. The relationship is not as strong for state senates; the multiple cor-

relation coefficient is .53, and only the dummy variable “use of single-member districts” is significant.

We have also included a variable for time in our analysis. Time alone might account for the increase in the number of blacks being elected to state legislative office in the South. What we actually expect, however, is that this increase can be attributed to black successes in some majority black districts that did not previously elect a black to office.¹⁰ The simple bivariate correlation between a variable for time and the number of black legislators in state houses is .38. When we include all three variables—time, use of single-member districts, and Section 5 coverage—within a single-multiple regression, two of the three variables are significant (time is not statistically significant) and the multiple correlation rises to .83. The use of single-member districts is associated with an increase of 8.8 black representatives on average; coverage under the Voting Rights Act is associated with a gain of 2.8 black representatives on average.

The bivariate correlation between the time variable and the number of black senators is much higher than the correlation between time and the number of black representatives; r is .56 in this case. Including all three variables within a single multiple regression produces a multiple r of .67; the variables “use of single-member districts” and time are statistically significant (Section 5 coverage is not significant). The use of single-member districts is associated with an increase of 1.2 black senators on average, and time is associated with a gain of .8 black senators on average.

Conclusion

As we have hypothesized, the number of black legislators increases as states shift to single-member districts and is higher in those states covered in whole or in part by Section 5 than in those states not covered (even with controls for the use of single-member districts). Moreover, there is a slight, long-term, upward time trend in black representation (especially for state senates), even with controls for the use of single-member districts and for jurisdictions covered by Section 5.

Bernard Grofman is Professor of Political Science, School of Social Sciences, University of California, Irvine, California 92717. Lisa Handley is a Lecturer of Political Science, George Washington University, Washington, DC 20052.

NOTES

Much of the data used in this paper was drawn from the previous work of Bull-ock (1983). We would like to thank him as well as the Justice Department and the South-ern Regional Council for collecting the information used here.

1. These numbers are for the seven southern states for which there is compara-ble data in the 1970s and 1980s: Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Caro-lina (senate only), South Carolina, and Virginia.

2. Let P_1 be the proportion of all districts that are majority nonblack and P_2 be the proportion of all districts that are majority black. Further, let B_1 be the proportion of majority nonblack districts that elect a black legislator and B_2 be the proportion of major-ity black districts that elect a black legislator. The Grofman-Jackson decomposition-effects formula is

$$\begin{aligned} \Delta &= \sum \Delta P_i B_i \text{ (composition effect)} \\ &+ \sum \Delta B_i P_i \text{ (behavior effect)} \\ &+ \sum \Delta B_i \Delta P_i \text{ (interaction effect)} \end{aligned}$$

3. The behavioral effect is positive because majority black districts are much more likely to elect blacks to office in the 1980s than in the 1970s, outweighing the nega-tive effect of majority white districts being less likely to elect blacks in the 1980s than in the 1970s.

4. The interaction effect is positive because the number of white majority seats has gone down but, since those seats are less likely to elect black candidates than previ-ously, we have a positive contribution of the interaction term; similarly, the number of black majority seats has gone up, but so too has the probability that those seats will elect a black—giving rise to another positive interaction effect.

5. The percentages of the black population that did not reside in majority black house or senate districts for each of the states are as follows:

	Senate	House
Alabama	57	50
Arkansas	81	60
Florida	88	75
Georgia	61	54
Louisiana	73	59
Mississippi	56	50
North Carolina	95	79
South Carolina	60	57
Tennessee	58	55
Texas	86	68
Virginia	91	70

6. We are indebted to Laughlin McDonald for calling this point to our atten-tion (personal communication, February 25, 1990).

7. According to census surveys (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Voting and Registration in the Election of 1988*, Series P-20, No. 440, Table A), the percentage of adult blacks and whites who voted in presidential elections in the South from 1972 until 1988 are as follows:

	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988
White	57.0	57.1	57.4	58.1	56.4
Black	47.8	45.7	48.2	53.2	48.0

8. Since not all legislatures are of equal size, we have replicated these regressions with changes in black representation expressed as a percentage of all legislators in a chamber rather than in terms of the actual number of legislators, but our conclusions are essentially identical and we have chosen to present our results in terms of raw numbers for ease of exposition. We have also replicated these regressions with a control for the size of the black population in the state but, since this control did not have a significant effect on our findings, we have also omitted these results from the paper.

9. A look at the raw data in Table 7 will also confirm that a shift to single-member districts inevitably results in an increase in the number of black legislators elected. For example, the elimination of multimember districts between 1970 and 1975 led to a gain of 13 black representatives in the Alabama house, a gain of 7 black representatives in both Georgia and Louisiana, a gain of 13 black legislators in South Carolina, and a gain of 7 black representatives in the Texas house. Similar gains were made in state senates following a change from multimember districts to single-member districts, although the gains are of a lesser order of magnitude. (Because state senate districts are larger than state house districts, it is, in general, more difficult to create majority black seats in the senate than in the house. That fact, combined with the fact that there are fewer seats in the senate to be filled, means that the effects of electoral system change on black representation is much less pronounced for state senates than for state houses.)

10. The number of majority black single-member districts is actually the proximate cause of the gain in black representation. (The increases in black representation brought about by changes to single-member districts are mediated by the change in the number of majority black seats that are drawn following the elimination or reduction in the number of multimember districts.) Exactly as we would expect, there is a very strong correlation (r is .82) between the number of black majority seats and the number of black state representatives across the various states and various five-year time intervals. This correlation is even further strengthened as we enter an additional variable for the number of black majority districts with a 60% or greater black population (r is .84). In the state senate, the correlation is lower but the relationship is still statistically significant (r is .47 between the number of black state senators and the number of majority black districts; r is .52 between the number of black state senators and the number of districts with black populations greater than 60 percent).

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