What Drives Partisan Turnout?

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Abstract

Though campaign strategy often, and perhaps increasingly, emphasizes the mobilization of core supporters, we know little about whether the partisan complexion of the electorate changes and what factors produce such changes. We examine whether the balance of Democratic and Republican voters depends on the balance of campaign activity, the popularity of the incumbent president, and the state of the economy. Drawing on time-series cross-sectional data from state exit polls, we demonstrate that the partisan composition of voters does vary over time and, in particular, depends both on campaign activity and on presidential approval. Our results suggest that favorable political conditions and an advantage in campaign resources help parties mobilize their supporters on Election Day.

The question of partisan mobilization—did more Democrats or Republicans vote in the last election?—is central to election outcomes. The lore of campaigns has long divided the electorate into "base" voters, who are reliable supporters but must be mobilized to vote, and "swing" voters, who are likely to be at the polls but must be persuaded to support the campaign. Mobilizing the partisan base has therefore always been part of campaigns, but interest in the subject has grown in recent years. Campaigns have assembled large databases of information about voters, better enabling them to target specific voters who are predisposed to support them and get those voters to the polls. Many commentators attributed Al Gore's surprisingly strong performance in 2000 to an eleventh-hour mobilization of union supporters, and likewise attributed Republican successes in 2002 and 2004 to the Republican get-out-the-vote operation, or "72 Hour Plan."

Despite this interest in partisan turnout, we know very little about what affects the composition of the electorate. Is the relative proportion of Democrats or Republicans variable across elections? If so, why does it vary? Does it depend on the so-called "fundamentals" that are known to influence election outcomes? For example, do more Democrats vote when a Democratic president is popular and presiding over a healthy economy, and fewer when the opposite is true? Does partisan turnout also depend on the campaign itself—that is, does the money spent by candidates and parties actually mobilize their base?

Answers to these questions speak first to debates about the scope and magnitude of "campaign effects." While it is clear that some kinds of campaign activities can get out the vote, it is less clear which voters "get out." Is mobilization an important consequence of campaigns, or do campaigns exert their influence, if at all, through the persuasion of swing voters? The answer has implications for the substance of politics, because campaigns that pursue a

mobilization strategy may have to take more ideologically extreme positions to appeal to the party faithful. The answer also sheds light on other dynamics of American elections. In particular, partisan turnout is commonly cited to explain presidential coattails and other examples of voting consistency across offices. Political events mobilize partisans to the polls, the story goes, and they vote a straight ticket. But for this account to be true, partisan turnout must respond to short-term political forces. If a popular president does not energize the base, then coattails are more psychological than physical: they depend not on bringing bodies to the polls but on creating a link among offices in the minds of voters who are already certain to vote.

Political Mobilization and Partisan Turnout

Much research has investigated whether turnout is sensitive to factors specific to an election year, above and beyond its well-known relationship to individual-level attributes (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). Simple excitement about the campaign is one such factor: races higher on the ballot (such as president or governor) can be a draw for voters (Arcelus and Meltzer 1975; Campbell 1960; Gilliam 1985), as can competitive races further down the ballot (Cox and Munger 1989). Campaigns, parties, and interest groups can also mobilize voters to vote (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Caldeira and Patterson 1982; Cox and Munger 1989; Jackson 2002; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). Although some of the relevant evidence is ambiguous (Herr 2002), and the effects of mobilization are often difficult to distinguish from simple excitement, the best efforts to separate the two suggest that certain mobilization techniques increase turnout (Green and Gerber 2004).

Our focus is not on the total number of people who voted, but rather the partisan complexion of those voters. We are interested in what proportion of voters identifies as

Democrat or Republican, and how that proportion changes in response to short-term forces. Despite the received wisdom that campaigns mobilize partisans, systematic studies of partisan turnout have been rare. The most relevant study is Holbrook and McClurg's (2005), which identifies the "mobilization of core supporters" as a central contribution of the 1992, 1996, and 2000 presidential campaigns. In particular, spending by the parties themselves—specifically transfers by the national parties to the states—affects partisan turnout. Shaw (1999) also finds evidence of mobilization in his study of the 1988-1996 presidential campaigns, but his measures are indirect; he interprets campaign activity as mobilizing voters when its effect on one party's vote share increases as a state's partisan balance tilts more in favor of that party. Finally, Campbell (1997) has argued that partisan turnout helps explain why presidents almost always lose seats and votes in midterm elections: a "surge" in loyal partisans in presidential years is followed by a "decline" of those partisans in midterm elections, a phenomenon exacerbated by current events and presidential popularity. But his evidence comes from self-reports of turnout in the National Election Study, which could be inflated by over-reporting driven by the excitement of the election. Moreover, his analysis sets aside the question of campaign influence on turnout, at least beyond the mobilizing effects of the presidential race writ large.

Thus, evidence for short-term shifts in partisan turnout is tentative, even as turnout effects loom large in political science theories and popular accounts of elections. Our approach helps fill this gap in two key ways. First, we expand the scope of previous analyses to include both presidential and midterm elections from 1988-2006. The inclusion of midterm elections allows us to consider a broader range of campaign activity—including contests for governor and Congress independent of a presidential race—which helps us gauge the impact of lower-salience campaigns. Second, we explicitly consider the impact of "fundamentals" such as the state of the

economy and the approval ratings for prominent political leaders. These broader political trends might actually produce the apparent campaign effects others have found, since a promising political environment makes it easier to recruit quality candidates, raise money, and mount campaigns that will attract sympathetic partisans to the polls. Indeed, considering the modest effects of campaigns in the existing literature, we cannot ignore the possibility that mobilization efforts simply "piggy-back" on these broader political trends. By expanding the theoretical perspective and empirical analysis, we can better describe partisan turnout and better identify its origins.

What Affects Partisan Turnout?

Turnout is conditional for many voters, who shift in and out of the electorate from election to election (Sigelman and Jewell 1986). Because these voters comprise only a portion of the total electorate, shifts in partisan composition will be evident but not necessarily large. For partisan composition to shift, voters of one party must increase relative to voters of the other party. What might create asymmetries in enthusiasm or motivation of partisans?

The explanation that has received the most scholarly attention is mobilization by political campaigns. Candidates and parties have an incentive to spend their money efficiently, and mobilization of partisans may prove more efficient than other ways of winning votes, such as the persuasion and mobilization of non-partisans (see Holbrook and McClurg 2005). Campaign mobilization should increase participation for two reasons. First, it provides loyal partisans who are "marginal" voters—that is, whose participation is not assured but is at least possible—with a variety of useful resources: information about the candidates, assistance in registering to vote and getting to the polls, and reminders to turn out on Election Day itself. Thus, mobilization helps to

reduce the well-documented costs of voting (Verba et al. 1995). Mobilization also gives voters a reason to care about the outcome, usually by contrasting their party's candidate with the opposition. This can increase general excitement about the race, thereby boosting the psychological benefits of voting. Thus, asymmetries in the parties' spending may lead to differences in partisans' perceived costs and benefits, both real and psychological. The party that spends more will increase its share of the electorate.

A second short-term effect on partisan turnout is an "activation" that derives from the "nature of the times," to borrow a phrase from Converse (1964). The mechanism here again involves the psychological benefits of voting. Some partisans are similar to sports fans, who are more likely to attend games when their team is winning (e.g., Coates and Humphreys 2005). When things are going well for their party, these partisans will be more enthused, and enthusiasm foments participation (Marcus et al. 2000). By contrast, when things are going poorly, they will become fair-weather fans and maintain their party identification but fail to act on it.[1] This effect should be independent of the quality of the party's candidates or the strength of its campaigns—conceptually, at least, it derives only from the broader political context. Fans will watch a winning team even if they dislike some of its players.

How do we know if a party's fortunes are waxing or waning? We focus our attention on two indicators: general approval of a party's incumbent office-holders, and the health of the economy. Each of these variables figures prominently in the literature on forecasting elections (e.g., Lewis-Beck and Rice 1992), suggesting that they serve as focal points for voters. We expect that when a party's leaders, such as Senators or the president, are well-liked, the partisan composition of the electorate will tilt in favor of that party. The effect of the economy should

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[1] Of course, many people maintain loyalty to a group even when it is chronically unsuccessful. This is why even Wrigley Field can sell out. Diehard fans, like habitual voters, are likely to participate even when their team's prospects are dim.

also depend on the party of the incumbent. When the economy is healthy, the partisan composition of the electorate should shift in favor of the incumbent's party. An unhealthy economy will similarly benefit the out-party.

Both mobilization and activation have similar effects on the turnout calculus of individual voters; for instance, both influence the purely psychological sense of enthusiasm. The difference between mobilization and activation is less about voter psychology than about elite control. Mobilization is far more open to short-term manipulation by political actors, while the fundamentals that drive activation are almost entirely outside the control of any individual campaign. Indeed, some of the most prominent theories of activation downplay the role of campaigns, at least beyond the presidential contest (Campbell 1997; Campbell 1960). By contrast, mobilization derives from the influence of campaigns, even if its exact impact depends on the effectiveness of each side's mobilization efforts.

Thus, it matters to our understanding of campaigns and campaign influence whether mobilization has an independent effect on turnout and how large that effect is likely to be. If campaigns do have some independent impact, then it makes sense for them to cater to the party faithful, which could entail a more ideological party platform, among other things. If campaigns do not affect partisan turnout, then it makes sense for parties to cater to swing voters and moderate their platform, as the turnout of the party's base will depend more on the broader forces of American politics, which they cannot control. Addressing this issue requires looking at both activation and mobilization in the same analysis. The two are entwined because a popular party is likely to have strong campaigns as well (Jacobson and Kernell 1983). This means that the apparent effect of campaigns on partisan turnout might instead be the product of forces

beyond the campaign's control. Only an analysis that examines both simultaneously can assess their independent effects and develop a more complete picture of campaign influence.

Partisan Turnout in the States, 1988-2006

To evaluate these expectations, we measure change in the partisan composition of state electorates over time, and demonstrate how this change is related to incumbent approval, economic health, and campaign activity. States differ across all of these dimensions, not only cross-sectionally but temporally, thereby providing us more analytical leverage than a single time-series at the national level or within a single state could provide. This is particularly true with regard to campaign activity, which varies widely among states because of differences in the competitiveness of races. Aggregating campaign activity to the national level would wash out this variation by obscuring the differences in campaign activity between, for example, battleground and "blackout" states (see Gimpel et al. 2007; Shaw 2006).

We measure partisan composition with state-level exit polls. State-level polls were first conducted in 1988 and have been conducted in every almost election year since. The exception is in 2002, when the exit poll was exclusively a national sample. In midterm election years, exit polls were typically conducted only in a subset of states, ranging from 24 states in 1988 to 41 in 1998. In 2002, the national sample contained respondents from 42 states, but in many cases there were not enough respondents for reliable state-level estimates. As a starting point for the analysis, we included only those 8 states in which the sample numbered at least 600; this was the approximate minimum sample size in the 2000 and 2004 state-level exit polls. This leaves us with a total sample size of 360 state-years. Appendix 1 lists the states included in each year.

Within each state's poll, we calculated the proportion of voters who identified as Democrat, Republican, or Independent, using the sample weights in generating these proportions. Our primary measure of partisan composition is the relative balance between Democrats and Republicans, operationalized as the percent Democratic minus the percent Republican (see also Holbrook and McClurg 2005). Figure 1 presents that figure for each of the 50 states in each available election year.

[insert Figure 1 about here]

An important feature of Figure 1 is the sheer diversity among states, not only in terms of the average Democratic or Republican advantage (which was expected) but also in terms of the trends in this advantage. Some states, such as Florida, are quite evenly balanced and change little over time. Others, such as Alabama and Louisiana, manifest clear trends in favor of the Republican Party, while states such as New Jersey and Illinois trend toward the Democrats. In other cases, such as Arkansas, the trend is not completely monotonic.[2] Thus, although party identification is itself a fairly stable attribute (Green et al. 2002), the partisan composition of the electorate does exhibit significant variation over time in many states. The next task is to explain this variation.

To do so, we operationalize the three concepts discussed previously, beginning with campaign activity. Because our estimate of the partisan composition is at the state level, we need to capture as best as possible the various kinds of campaign activity in that state, both in midterm and in presidential years. To do so, we computed the total general election spending of all House candidates as well as that of gubernatorial, and senatorial candidates when applicable.[3] In

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[2] Despite a sample size of 1,088 in New York in 2002, the estimate is still a notable outlier. This may be an artifact of the sampling procedure of this national poll.

[3] House spending data from 1988 through 1998 were graciously provided by Gary Jacobson of the University of California at San Diego. The remaining House spending data and all the Senate spending data come from the

addition, we included the total television advertising of the presidential candidates (in gross rating points) in each state, as well as the total number of visits that the candidates made to each state (see Shaw 1999, 2006). Finally, for presidential years from 1992 through 2004, we also included spending by the state parties on voter mobilization.[4] To measure the balance of campaign activity between the parties, we first standardized each of these measures so that it ranged from -1 (complete Republican advantage) to +1 (complete Democratic advantage).[5] We then averaged these standardized measures to make an overall index of the partisan balance of campaign activity, and multiplied the index by 100 to make it comparable to the measures described below. We refer to this measure as "campaign advantage."[6]

To provide an initial depiction of this measure and its apparent effect, Figure 2 displays the bivariate relationship between campaign advantage and the Democratic partisan advantage in each of the 50 states. The datapoints in each scatterplot correspond to election years. The least squares fit line and confidence intervals indicate whether the overall relationship is, as we expect, positive. In most cases (37 out of 50), the slope of the fit line is positive, suggesting that Democrats increase their share of voters as their campaigning increases relative to Republicans'. This confirms our expectation, although of course a more rigorous test is necessary.

Federal Election Commission. Gubernatorial spending data from 1988 through 2004 come from the Gubernatorial Campaign Expenditures database (Beyle and Jensen 2007); the data for 2006 come from the websites of the various states.

[4] Ray La Raja of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst graciously provided these data. They are calculated as dollars per 1000 eligible voting persons. Since we do not have data for 1988, the campaign balance measure for that year does not include this measure.

[5] For example, to compute the balance of campaign spending for Democrats (D) and Republicans (R), we calculated: (D-R)/(D+R). This has the advantage of generating comparable measures even though the underlying indicators (spending, ads, visits, etc.) are on different metrics.

[6] Although this measure combines different types of campaign activities by different campaigns, some sort of combination is necessary in order to consider both presidential and midterm elections in the same analysis. Of course, mobilization might respond to specific types of campaign activities or activities by certain campaigns, rather than the sum of campaign activity in general. Thus, if anything, this measure imprecisely measures our construct of interest and understates the effect of campaigns.

The second concept is the partisan advantage in incumbent approval. We drew on polling data from the U.S. Officials' Job Approval Ratings Project (Niemi et al. 2007), extracting the percent who approved of the sitting governor, senators, and president in the state poll taken closest to the election. Thus our estimates of approval, including approval of the president, are from state samples. Presidential approval is our primary measure. We suspect that the president's visibility as a party leader makes his approval rating more consequential for the behavior of partisans, although we will investigate approval of governors and senators as well. We multiplied the approval rating by -1 if the incumbent was a Republican. The resulting measure's theoretical range is -100 (unanimous approval of a Republican incumbent) to +100 (unanimous approval of a Democratic incumbent). These approval measures capture the "nature of the times" by isolating each incumbent's relative overall popularity in each state.

The chief limitation of the presidential approval measure is missing data. Because some states do not have presidential approval data specific to a particular election year, the resulting sample size is 270 state-years instead of the 360 for which we have exit poll data. Most of the missing data occur in 1988 and 1990, when the state-level polling data are spotty. Thus, we constructed a second measure of presidential approval that imputed approval for these missing cases. For each state, we computed the average deviation between that state's presidential approval and presidential approval in the nation as a whole (in both cases, drawing on the polls closest to the election). Then we imputed state-level approval, when necessary, as the national approval minus the average difference between state and national polls. For the cases that did have valid state-level approval data, the correlation between the imputed measure and the actual measure is r=0.98, suggesting that this imputation strategy creates reasonably plausible values for these missing cases. We employ both the original and imputed measures in our analysis.

The final concept is the health of the economy. To construct a state-specific measure, we tabulated the percentage change in each state's per capita disposable income (in 2006 dollars), comparing the election year to the previous year. Similar kinds of measures feature prominently in predictive models of election outcomes. This measure was also multiplied by -1 if the incumbent was a Republican. The key question is which incumbent office-holder is more likely to be held accountable for the performance of the state's economy. We constructed two versions, one based on the party of the incumbent governor and another based on the party of the incumbent president. Both measures range from roughly -20 to +20.

Using these measures, we estimated time-series cross-sectional models of the balance between Democratic and Republican partisans (i.e., the measure in Figure 1), including each of these independent variables.[7] Our models employ panel-corrected standard errors (Beck and Katz 1995) and also take into account both heterogeneity across the cross-sectional units (states) as well as time-series dynamics in the dependent variable (see Wilson and Butler 2007). Table 1 presents three different specifications: a fixed-effects model that accounts for unit heterogeneity, that is, differences among the states; a fixed-effects model that includes an auto-regressive component (an AR(1) term); and this same model, but substituting the imputed measure of presidential approval. Each model was estimated in Stata 10.0. Table 1 displays the results.

[insert Table 1 about here]

In the first fixed-effects model, both campaigning and presidential approval have statistically significant effects that confirm the hypotheses discussed above. Democratic partisans are more prevalent, relative to Republican partisans, when Democrats have an advantage in campaigning and when presidential approval favors their side—that is, when a

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[7] Our models also include a dummy variable for the party of the president, coded -1 (Republican) and +1 (Democrat), which accounts for the coding of the economy and presidential approval variables.

Democratic incumbent is popular or when a Republican incumbent is less popular. The magnitude of these effects suggests that a shift from a complete Republican campaign advantage (the sample minimum of -100) to a complete Democratic advantage (the sample maximum of +100) would increase the Democrats' relative share of voters by 10.8 percent. A similar shift in presidential approval, from the sample minimum to maximum (-91 to +72), would produce a 13-point increase. Of course, these large shifts in each variable are implausible. A more reasonable shift in campaigning—say, one standard deviation—would increase the Democrats' share by approximately 2 points. A 30-point decrease in approval of a Republican incumbent—approximately the difference between President Bush's approval in November 2002 and November 2006, would also shift the Democratic Party's share by 2 points.

By contrast, the economy has no statistically significant impact in these models. It could be argued that the economy's effect works mainly through presidential approval, but even if approval is excluded from the second model, the effect of the economy is not significant. The "nature of the times" affects partisan turnout primarily through evaluations of political leaders.

Table 1 also demonstrates that these results are largely robust to alternative specifications and measures. In the second model, accounting for potential time-series dynamics, specifically an auto-correlation of order 1, has little effect on the results. The third model employs the imputed measure of approval, thereby increasing the sample size to the maximum number of cases for which we have exit polling data. The effects of campaigning are robust and the effect of approval declines only slightly.

We also estimated alternative specifications to gauge the impact of additional factors (data not shown). First, we replaced presidential approval with approval of the governor or either of the senators. None of these measures of approval had significant effects, suggesting

that presidential approval is the main motivator (or inhibitor) of partisan turnout. In these models, the effect of campaigning was robust. Second, we estimated models that included a measure of the state of the national economy (change in per capita disposable income) and a measure of macro-partisanship at the national level (Erikson et al. 2002). The former tests the expectation that voters respond more to national economic dynamics than to the economic health of their state. The latter captures any secular trends in the balance of Democrats and Republicans, which could then be reflected on Election Day. Neither variable was significant and the other results remained unchanged. Finally, we estimated models interacting each variable with a dummy variable distinguishing presidential and midterm elections; none of these interaction terms was statistically significant, suggesting that the effects of campaigning, presidential approval, and the economy do not vary systematically across these two types of elections.

A disadvantage of these models is that we have combined Democratic and Republican campaigning, as well as the proportion of Democratic and Republican voters, into single measures. Thus, we cannot discern any asymmetries in the effects of campaigning or presidential approval. Do Democratic or Republican voters respond more strongly to either of these influences? Is campaigning's effect primarily one of mobilization—for example, Democratic campaigning encourages Democrats to vote—or one of de-mobilization—where Democratic campaigning discourages Republicans from voting?

To answer these questions, we rely on different dependent variables: the percentage of Democrats among voters and the percentage of Republicans among voters. These are computed based on the combined number of Democrats, Republicans, and Independents. Second, we disaggregate the campaign advantage measure into separate measures of Democratic and

Republican campaign activity.[8] We then estimated two sets of models. The first uses the original campaign advantage measure, but disaggregates voters into Democrats and Republicans. The second disaggregates the campaign advantage measure as well. The models are identical in every other respect to Model 1 of Table 1.

[insert Table 2 about here]

Table 2 presents the results. Overall, these models reveal little evidence of asymmetry in the correlates of partisan turnout. In the first pair of models, the effect of campaign advantage and presidential approval is identical in magnitude among both Democrats and Republicans, once the coefficients and standard errors are rounded to the nearest hundredth. As Democratic campaigning increases relative to Republican campaigning, the Democratic share of the electorate increases (b=.03) and the Republican share of the electorate decreases (b=-.03). The effects of presidential approval are similarly symmetrical. In the second set of models, the separate measures of Democratic and Republican campaign activity also have nearly equal and opposite effects on the proportion of Democrats and Republicans. Again, the effects are not exactly equal, but the differences disappear after rounding. Thus, this second analysis confirms the role of campaigning and presidential approval and suggests that voters in each party respond in similar ways to each factor, and in similar ways to each party's respective campaign activities.

Discussion

Thus far we have shown that the partisan composition of the electorate shifts is associated with the partisan balance of campaign activity and with the popularity of the incumbent president. Two issues may complicate this story, however—the first concerning the apparent

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[8] More specifically, for each party, we standardized each of the measures that comprise this index (spending on various races, presidential ads and visits, and party expenditures) and then combined those into an index.

effect of campaign activity and the second concerning the interpretation of any shifts in partisan turnout. Because both issues are central to our empirical story, we dwell on them at some length.

The apparent effect of campaign activity could be an artifact of endogeneity. In other words, the balance of campaign activity in a particular state may anticipate, rather than affect, the partisan complexion of the electorate. This could occur in one of two ways. First, the balance of campaign spending might simply tilt in favor of the party that dominates a state's electorate. Indeed, at the bivariate level, there are statistically significant correlations between the partisan balance of campaigning and the macro-partisanship of a particular state.[9] However, the relationship between macro-partisanship and campaigning becomes statistically insignificant once the other attributes of states are controlled for via state-level fixed effects. This suggests that our fixed-effects models in Tables 1-2 account for this species of endogeneity. Moreover, our results are robust when state-level macropartisanship is included in the model.[10]

While this first kind of endogeneity is "spatial" in character, there are two sorts of "temporal" endogeneity as well. First, campaigns may steer their resources toward states whose electorates are changing in a favorable direction. For example, if the underlying partisanship of a state shifts toward the Democrats, Democratic candidates in that state may invest more resources. Second, both campaign activity and partisan turnout might respond to additional unmeasured variables that reflect the broader political climate in any given election year. We tested for the first possibility by regressing the change in the state's balance of campaigning on

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[9] On state-level macropartisanship see (Erikson et al. 1989). These data, calculated for 1988-2003, are available at http://php.indiana.edu/~wright1/.

[10] State-level macropartisanship is available for only a portion of our data, essentially 1988-2000 given the endpoint of the macro-partisanship data (2003) and the paucity of good state-level exit poll samples in 2002, When we estimated models using only this subset of our data, both campaign activity and presidential approval were statistically significant, with substantive effects comparable in magnitude to those reported in Table 1. There is also, unsurprisingly, a statistically significant association between state-level macro-partisanship and partisan turnout. Finally, it is worth noting that the effects of campaign activity are statistically significant when we measured partisan turnout as the deviation between the exit poll percentages and the underlying macro-partisanship of the state.

the change in the underlying macro-partisanship of the state. Change was measured from one election to the next—i.e., we first-differenced both campaign activity and macro-partisanship. In this model, there was no statistically significant relationship, suggesting that campaign activity is not necessarily so sensitive to shifts in the underlying partisanship of states. Thus, this kind of endogeneity may not be prevalent.

To address the second form of temporal endogeneity, we added a series of dummy variables for election year to the models presented in Table 1. This approach assumes that any omitted variables that capture the broader political climate have a similar effect on all states. It also addresses the first form of temporal endogeneity to the extent that any shifts in underlying partisanship have been uniform across states.[11] Again, the effect of campaign activity was unchanged.

Finally, to address both spatial and temporal endogeneity, we leveraged the presence of divided Senate delegations. Although relatively few states have divided delegations, these states enable us to better isolate the effect of campaign activity. Adjacent elections that feature incumbent Senators of opposite parties allow us to hold many state-level attributes constant. Moreover, the schedule of the races themselves is exogenous, and while a Senator's decision to run for reelection is partly endogenous to factors such as any underlying shifts in the partisan complexion of the state, most of the difference in the balance of campaign activity between two such incumbents and their challengers likely reflects the advantages of incumbency. We also chose to compare Senate incumbents in sequential midterm elections, to avoid the confounding effects of presidential campaigning in the states. The most significant limitation of this approach is the small number of cases. Relatively few states in these years had divided senate delegations,

[11] We previously examined this possibility when we included national-level macropartisanship in the model, which, as noted above, had no significant effect. These year dummies represent an alternative, if cruder, strategy.

and often there is no midterm exit poll in states without a Senate race.[12] This left us with only 7 races to examine. Nevertheless, the relationship between changes in Senate incumbency and changes in partisan turnout is in the direction we would expect: a change in Senate incumbency is associated with a shift of about 6 points in partisan turnout. In other words, if a Democratic Senator ran in 1998 after a Republican Senator had run in 1994, we would expect the partisan complexion of the electorate in 1998 to shift 6 points in the Democrats' favor, compared to 1994. We also expanded this analysis to include years when there was an open-seat Senate race or no Senate race in a particular state, assuming that partisan turnout in a year with, say, a Republican incumbent should tilt more toward the Republicans than it does in years with an open-seat race or no race. This brings the total number of races examined to 17, and again the shift in the partisan turnout is in the direction of the incumbent's party; the average shift is 8 points. Of course, an analysis of so few races is far from conclusive, but, in combination with our central analysis, it suggests that the effects of campaign activity on partisan turnout are real.

The second question concerns how we interpret the effect of campaign activity on partisan turnout. Thus far, we have framed its effect as one of *mobilization*—that is, of getting friendly partisans to the polls. But could the effect be one of *conversion* rather than mobilization? In other words, could partisan turnout vary because people actually change their party identification? If the frequency of conversion were high enough, then any changes in partisan turnout could actually reflect changes in partisanship among an unchanging population of voters, in which case no mobilization would be occurring.

In some sense, either effect, mobilization or conversion, would represent a notable and important consequence of campaign activity or factors such as presidential approval. However,

[12] This analysis is somewhat in the spirit of Levitt (1994), who also sought to mitigate endogeneity by focusing on a small subset of races with fortuitous but relatively rare characteristics (in his analysis, races which featured the same opposing candidates more than once).

we suspect that mobilization is by far the more important. First, individual-level stability of party identification is more impressive than its malleability or endogeneity (Brody and Rothenberg 1988; Green et al. 2002; Jennings and Markus 1984; Markus 1982) But even if we take apparent shifts in party identification at face value, genuine defections from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party, or vice versa, are extremely rare. Much more common are shifts in the strength of partisanship (e.g., from strong Democrat to weak Democrat) or movement in and out of the "Independent" category.

This is particularly important to note because the exit poll measure of party identification does not capture strength of partisanship but merely allows respondents to categorize themselves as a Democrat, Republican, Independent, or something else. Thus, if shifts in partisan turnout are attributable to conversion, these shifts will most likely involve Independents' moving into the party who is favored by fundamental conditions or who dominates the campaign. We tested this possibility by modeling the fraction of exit poll respondents who identify as Independent. If campaign activity leads some Independents to switch to a party, then the absolute value of the partisan balance in campaigning should be negatively associated with the fraction of Independents in the exit poll sample. That is, the more campaign activity favors one party over the other (regardless of which party it is), the fewer Independents there should be. We tested similar hypotheses involving both presidential approval and the state of the economy, again taking the absolute value of the relevant measures in our original models.[13] A fixed-effects model of the fraction of Independents, including these three measures, produced no statistically

[13] Recall that both measures were scaled such that negative values indicated conditions more favorable to the Republican Party and positive values indicated conditions more favorable to the Democratic Party. Thus, as the absolute value of these measures increases, one of the two parties is advantaged, which should lead to a decline in the number of Independents if some of them are switching parties.

significant relationships. This finding, combined with the accumulated evidence from research on party identification, suggests that variation in partisan turnout is due mostly to mobilization.

Conclusion

Does the partisan composition of the electorate respond to short-term forces? Our findings suggest that it does. In particular, both campaign activity and presidential approval motivate groups of partisans to participate. The more one party dominated the campaign, the greater the proportion of its supporters who went to the polls. The effect of presidential approval supports the notion that partisans are stimulated by "good times." When their party's president is popular, they make up a larger fraction of the electorate, and when he is unpopular, the opposite is true. Notably, the president's popularity appears more consequential than that of governors or senators and than the state of the economy. To the extent that partisan turnout is conditional on political events, it seems more a referendum on the president than anything else.

Our findings thus confirm previous research that emphasizes the mobilizing effects of campaigning on partisans (Holbrook and McClurg 2005; Shaw 1999). To date this kind of partisan mobilization has received little systematic attention, perhaps because political scientists have often been skeptical that campaigns have much of an effect on electoral behavior. Because we have extended previous analyses—both across time (1988-2006) and across political "space" (including both presidential and other races)—this mobilizing effect of campaigns rests on even firmer footing. Perhaps most important, we are able to show that campaigning matters over and above other political conditions, such as presidential approval and economic health.

One implication of these findings is that electoral behavior depends both on the "fundamentals" and on the strategies and resources of the parties and candidates. Often times,

these two factors are juxtaposed as competitors, as scholars debate the effects of campaigns versus the prevailing political and economic climate in the country. Our story is not one of "either-or" but one of "both-and." The effect of presidential approval demonstrates that the "fundamentals" do matter, and in this sense parties and candidates are constrained by things over which they have limited, if any, control. However, the one thing that parties and candidates can control also matters: the time, energy, and money they invest in speaking to voters and encouraging them to participate. These efforts do not simply capitalize on the fundamentals already in place—at least not the ones we account for—but have an effect of their own. Moreover, their effects do not appear only amidst the pomp and circumstance of presidential campaigns but during midterm elections as well. Our results also suggest that campaign resources can both mobilize fellow partisans and "de-mobilize" enemy partisans.

Obviously, our data do not allow us to determine how much was spent on mobilization per se, and how exactly these monies were allocated to different sub-groups of voters. Nor do our data illuminate the individual-level psychological mechanisms that undergird these aggregate-level relationships. But the overall results suggest that campaign activities do alter the partisan complexion of voters. Simply put, if you want to more of "your people" at the polls, you need to spend and do more than your opponent.

There is, however, an important caveat, if not an irony, to this finding. The ability of campaigns to mobilize their partisans depends on this asymmetry of resources and effort. But large asymmetries are only likely to exist in races that are fairly uncompetitive to begin with. In competitive races, the expenditures of the opposing sides will be closer to parity. It will be the hardest to obtain a competitive advantage through partisan mobilization precisely in those races where such an advantage would be most crucial to the overall outcome.

The relationships we identify are generally modest in size, though consistent with estimates using other surveys (Campbell 1997). Thus, campaigning and presidential approval are likely to affect partisan turnout by a few percentage points at most. But even subtle shifts in the composition of the electorate can matter, since the fair-weather fans behind them are probably reliable supporters of their party's candidates when they choose to go to the polls. A useful extension of this analysis would be to estimate the impact of shifts in partisan complexion on election outcomes. Moreover, these shifts in the partisan complexion of voters might coincide with shifts in *ideological* complexion--i.e., a changing balance of moderates and ideologues within each party. Shifts of this kind cannot be measured with the data we have, but future research might identify such patterns.

The movement in partisan turnout that we have found here suggests an important role for short-term turnout effects in contemporary American politics. As many have long suspected, elections are about more than just convincing voters. They are also about mobilizing the voters who have already been convinced.

Figure 1. Democratic Advantage among Exit Poll Voters, by State and Year

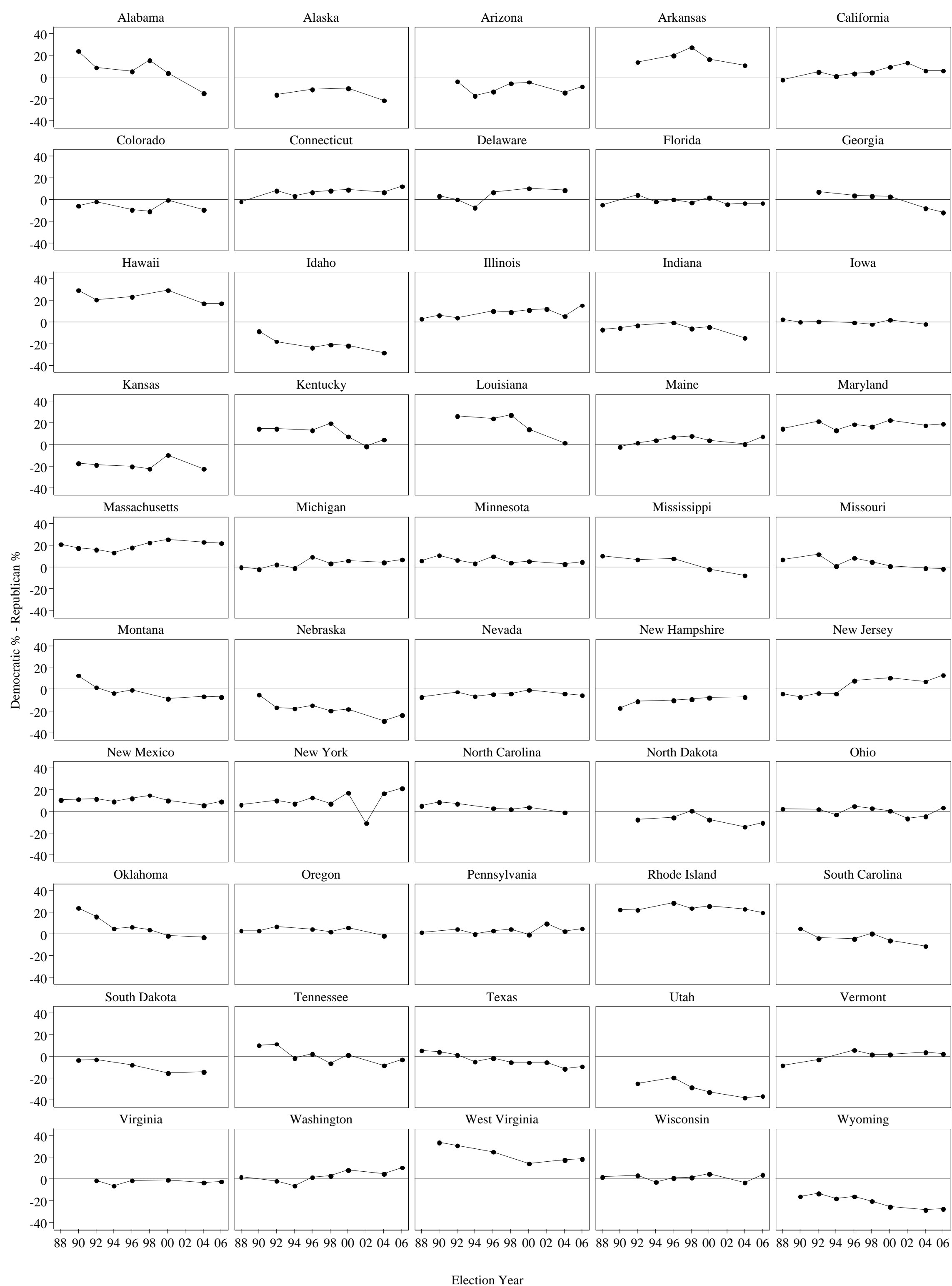

Figure 2. Democratic Advantage in Partisan Turnout and Campaigning, by State

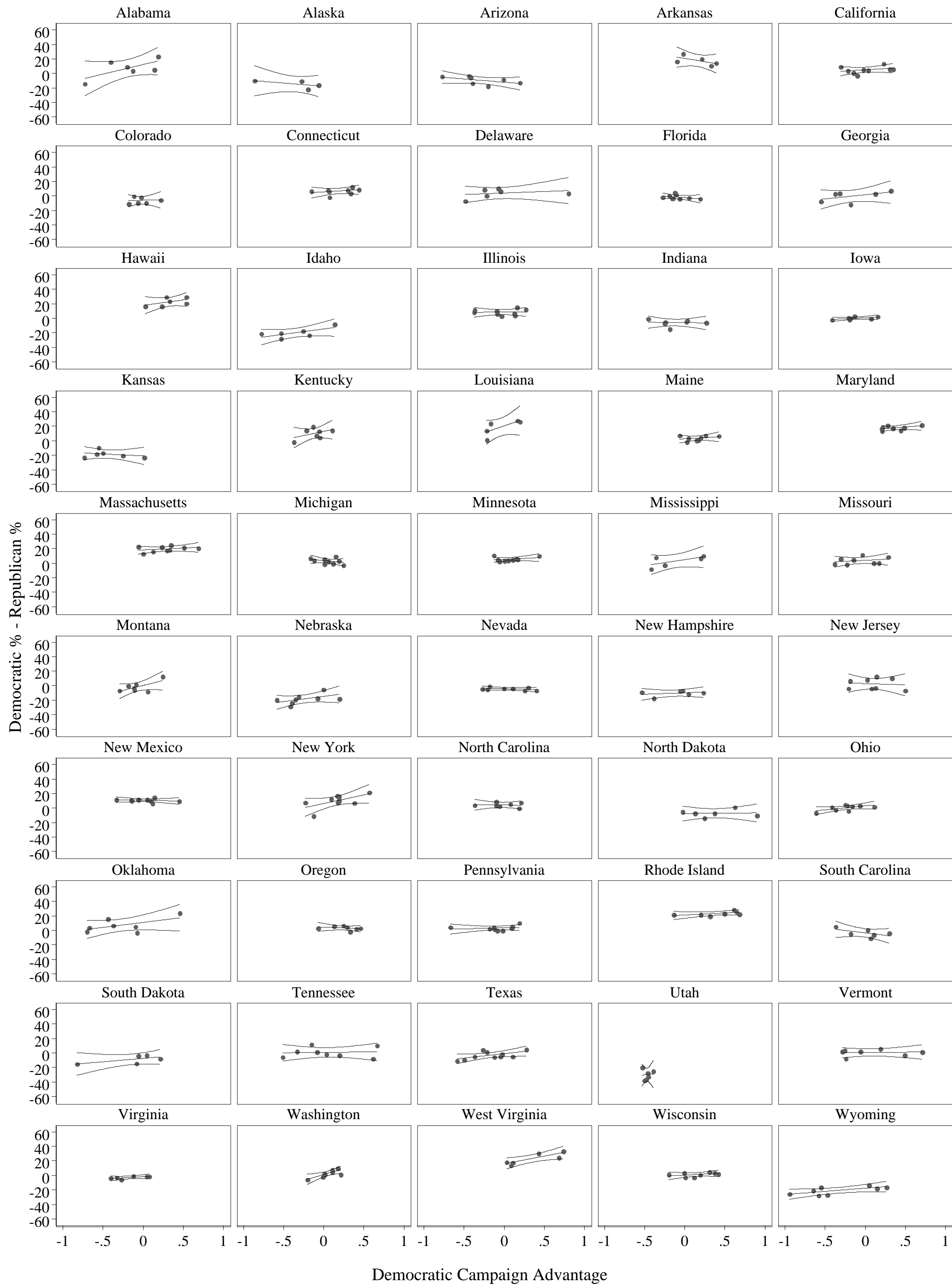

Table 1. Time-Series Cross-Sectional Models of Partisan Turnout, 1988-2006

	(1) Fixed Effects	(2) Fixed Effects and AR(1)	(3) FE and AR(1), with imputed approval
Campaign advantage	0.06** (0.01)	0.05** (0.01)	0.06** (0.01)
Presidential approval	0.07* (0.04)	0.07+ (0.04)	0.06 (0.04)
Economy	0.10 (0.25)	0.11 (0.25)	0.09 (0.15)
President's party	-2.99 (1.91)	-2.88 (1.97)	-2.42 (1.98)
Constant	9.70+ (5.02)	9.44+ (5.17)	8.23+ (4.55)
R^2	0.85	0.84	0.82
N	270	270	360

Cell entries are least squares coefficients, with panel-corrected standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is the difference between the percentage of Democrats and Republicans in the exit poll in each state-year, coded such that higher values indicate a Democratic advantage. +p<.10; *p<.05; **p<.01.

Table 2. Models of Partisan Turnout, with Disaggregated Measures of Partisan Turnout and Campaign Activity

	(1)		(2)	
	Dem %	Rep %	Dem %	Rep%
Campaign advantage	0.03**	-0.03**		
	(0.01)	(0.01)		
Democratic campaign activity			0.01**	-0.01**
			(0.003)	(0.002)
Republican campaign activity			-0.01**	0.01**
			(0.003)	(0.002)
Presidential approval	0.04+	-0.04**	0.04**	-0.04**
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Economy	-0.02	-0.12	-1.6	1.93**
	(0.13)	(0.14)	(1.04)	(0.98)
President's party	-1.34	1.65+	-0.03	-0.12
	(1.04)	(0.96)	(0.12)	(0.13)
Constant	42.91**	33.21**	42.54**	33.72**
	(1.82)	(3.21)	(1.99)	(3.49)
R^2	0.84	0.88	0.84	0.88
N	270	270	270	270

Cell entries are least squares coefficients, with panel-corrected standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is the difference between the percentage of Democrats and Republicans in the exit poll in each state-year, coded such that higher values indicate a Democratic advantage. These models also include fixed effects for states, as in Model 1 of Table 1.
+p<.10; *p<.05; **p<.01.

Appendix 1. Distribution of States in Exit Poll Data

State	1988	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006	Total
Alabama	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	6
Alaska	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	4
Arizona	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	7
Arkansas	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	5
California	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	9
Colorado	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	6
Connecticut	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	8
Delaware	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	6
Florida	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	9
Georgia	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	6
Hawaii	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	6
Idaho	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	6
Illinois	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	9
Indiana	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	7
Iowa	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	7
Kansas	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	6
Kentucky	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	7
Louisiana	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	5
Maine	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	8
Maryland	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	8
Massachusetts	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	9
Michigan	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	9
Minnesota	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	9
Mississippi	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	5
Missouri	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	8
Montana	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	7
Nebraska	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	8
Nevada	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	8
New Hampshire	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	6
New Jersey	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	8
New Mexico	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	9
New York	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	9
North Carolina	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	7
North Dakota	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	6
Ohio	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	9
Oklahoma	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	7
Oregon	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	7
Pennsylvania	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	9
Rhode Island	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	7
South Carolina	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	6
South Dakota	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	5
Tennessee	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	8
Texas	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10
Utah	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	6
Vermont	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	7
Virginia	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	6
Washington	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	8
West Virginia	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	6
Wisconsin	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	8
Wyoming	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	8
Total	24	29	50	26	50	41	50	8	50	32	360

Note: 1 indicates a state-level sample in that year.

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