

**Racial Redistricting and the Election of African-American
County Supervisors in Mississippi**

David Lublin
American University

Cheryl Lampkin
American University

David Lublin is Associate Professor of Government, School of Public Affairs, American University, 4400 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20016.

dlublin@american.edu.

Cheryl Lampkin received her Ph.D. Candidate in Political Science in 2004 from the School of Public Affairs, American University, 4400 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20016. ct9917a@american.edu.

Abstract

Contrary to the findings of many recent studies of U.S. House elections, we find that the creation of black-majority districts remains crucial to the election of African Americans to the Board of Supervisors in Mississippi counties. Like several studies of national politics, we show that racial redistricting facilitates the election of greater numbers of Republican. However, unlike these studies, we find little evidence that racial redistricting has greatly undermined black substantive representation by promoting the election of many new Republicans on the Board of Supervisors in most Mississippi counties. Black supervisors, usually elected from black-majority districts, served in 61 of Mississippi's 82 counties. In contrast, Republicans won election in only 22 counties despite the concentration of black voters into black-majority districts. Only seven mostly heavily-white counties had a Republican majority on the Board of Supervisors. These findings suggest the continuing necessity of analyses specific to offices and jurisdictions in order to correctly apply recent Supreme Court rulings on racial redistricting.

Political scientists have clashed over the percentage of blacks needed to make possible the election of black-preferred candidates to political office. The crux of the debate centers on whether significant numbers of African Americans can win election from white-majority districts. This empirical question has important legal implications. In a series of decisions beginning with Shaw v. Reno (1993), the Supreme Court signaled that jurisdictions could not draw majority-minority districts with ever more complex boundaries as part of the effort to continue increasing minority representation. In a more recent decision, Georgia v. Ashcroft (2003), the Supreme Court held in a 5-4 ruling that courts need to consider the impact of a redistricting plan on substantive as well as descriptive representation. In writing for the majority in Georgia v. Ashcroft, Justice O'Connor stated that:

In considering the other highly relevant factor in a retrogression inquiry—the extent to which a new plan changes the minority group's opportunity to participate in the political process—a court must examine whether the plan adds or subtracts "influence districts" where minority voters may not be able to elect a candidate of choice but can play a substantial, if not decisive, role in the electoral process.

In Georgia, Justice O'Connor considered the substitution of multiple "influence districts" for individual majority-minority districts especially justifiable because this substitution would help keep the Democrats, the party overwhelmingly favored by blacks, in the majority and thus preserve African-American influence in the legislature.

Justice Souter's dissent in Georgia strenuously disagreed with the majority's conclusions regarding the importance of considering substantive representation in voting

rights cases. However, justices in both the majority and the minority appeared to agree that states did not need to increase the percentage of minorities in a district above the percentage required to elect a minority-preferred candidate. States should focus on the number of districts above the effective percentage of minorities needed to elect minority candidates rather than on the number of majority-minority districts. For example, if a district that is 42% black will allow for the election of a black-preferred candidate, states can create a district that is 42% black instead of a majority-minority district. Conversely, states may need to increase the share of minorities in a district above 50% if a narrowly majority-minority district is insufficient to elect a candidate of choice.

The Supreme Court's decision in Georgia v. Ashcroft highlights the continuing relevance of political science debates over (1) the percentage of blacks required to make possible the election of a black-preferred candidates, and (2) the impact of racial redistricting on black substantive representation. This study examines these two questions in the context of county supervisor elections in Mississippi in 1999. Recent scholarship has become more optimistic about the possibility of black candidates winning election from districts less than 50% black. Is this true even for local elections in Mississippi – a state that elects more black officials than any other but also has a history of racial polarization? Several scholars have concluded that racial redistricting may hinder the adoption of policies favored by blacks because the creation of new majority-minority districts results in the election of greater numbers of Republicans opposed to policies supported by most blacks. However, almost all of these studies have focused on federal elections. Does racial redistricting have an adverse impact on the election of

Democratic county supervisors? Does it reduce net black substantive representation at the local level in Mississippi as well as the federal level?

We find that racial redistricting remains critical to the election of black county supervisors in the Magnolia State. African-American candidates in Mississippi still often require districts greater than 50% black in order to win election. Despite requiring supermajority districts in order to gain election, we find little evidence of a negative impact of racial redistricting on black substantive representation. The creation of new majority-minority districts has rarely resulted in Republican control of the Board of Supervisors in Mississippi counties. Indeed, Republicans are most likely to win control in counties with few blacks and it is more difficult to create majority-black districts in these counties. Although these results stem from analyzing local elections in one state, they are important because they caution a growing body of political science literature which has been highly influential on the judiciary. Contrary to recent findings by several scholars, racial redistricting remains necessary for the election of black officials and does not appear to adversely impact the local dominance of the Democrats, the party overwhelmingly supported by African Americans. Grofman, Handley, and Lublin's (2001) caution that it is important to conduct local analyses before reaching conclusions on the impact of redistricting plans on black representation in a specific jurisdiction and for a particular type of office appears all the more crucial.

After briefly reviewing some of the key racial redistricting literature with a particular emphasis on findings regarding Mississippi, we present the theory and data analysis that supports these conclusions.

Literature Review

Scholars have greatly debated the effective percentage of blacks required for a district to elect a black official. Many factors can influence the percentage of blacks needed to elect an African-American candidate. Studies have noted that black candidate success can be sensitive to racial differences in the voting-age population as well as registration and turnout rates. The number of black candidates, the electoral system, the degree of party cohesion and the level of racial polarization can also influence the success of black candidacies for public office (Abney 1974; Canon 1999; Grofman et al. 1992; Grofman and Handley 1989; Grofman and Handley 1998, Handley et al 1998; Lublin 1997; Parker et al 1998, Swain 1995).

Despite the multiplicity of factors that influence whether or not a district elects an African-American candidate, scholars have primarily divided over whether or not black-majority districts are required to assure the election of more than token numbers of black officials. In his path-breaking study of the impact of the Voting Rights Act on Mississippi politics, Parker (1990) argues that 65% black districts may be required to assure the election of black officials. According to Parker (1990), racial polarization in Mississippi elections is extremely high, rendering it difficult for black officials to win election from majority-white districts. The relatively higher percentage of African Americans who are not of voting age combined with relatively low black voter registration and turnout rates explain why districts greater than majority black are required to elect black officials in Mississippi (Parker 1989, 1990). Mary Coleman's (1993) analysis of post-1990 Mississippi legislatures similarly concluded that African-

American legislators usually win election from districts with a black-voting age population of greater than 60%.

Coleman (1993) and Parker (1989, 1990) are not alone in claiming that majority-black districts are vital to the election of black officials. Grofman and Handley (1989) argue that racial redistricting and black-majority districts are crucial to the election of significant numbers of African Americans to Congress. Handley, Grofman, and Arden (1998) come to similar conclusions in their examination of southern state legislative and congressional elections (see also Handley and Grofman 1994). Their examination of the Mississippi legislature in 1992 revealed that not a single district without a black majority elected either a black state representative or black state senator (Handley, Grofman, and Arden 1998: 21-2). Lublin (1997) finds that a 55% black majority district has an 86% chance of electing a black representative to Congress in most areas of the country. In their 1989 study of Mississippi cities with populations greater than 1000, Parker, Colby, and Morrison (1994) found that racial redistricting was critical to the election of large numbers of black city council members. Davidson and Grofman's (1994) survey of the election of blacks to city councils around the South reached similar conclusions.

Other scholars however, argue that non-majority-minority districts (sometime referred to as "minority-minority districts") frequently elect black candidates (Cameron, Epstein, and O'Halloran 1996; Swain 1995; Thernstrom 1987; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997). Cameron, Epstein, and O'Halloran (1996) suggest that there is a 50% chance of electing a black representative in the south when the black voting-age population is as low as 40.3%. They conclude: "It is rarely necessary for minority voters to be a clear majority within a district to have a good chance of electing a minority

representative, and the 65% rule enforced by the courts certainly seems excessive” (Cameron, Epstein, and O’Halloran 1996: 804). However, other scholars argue that the failure to take into account the share of Latinos in the non-black portion of the electorate leads to erroneous conclusions. For example, Grofman, Handley, and Lublin (2001: 1393) state: “[f]ailing to take Hispanic percentages into account will lead to regression estimates that understate the proportion of black population needed to provide black votes with an opportunity to elect black-preferred candidates in districts where the non-black voters are largely or entirely non-Hispanic” (see Grofman and Handley 1995; Kennedy 1993; Lublin 1999 for similar critiques, and Epstein and O’Halloran 1999 for a response).

Recently, scholars who in the past have contended that blacks rarely win outside of majority-minority districts conceded that blacks can win in majority-white districts under certain circumstances. Grofman, Handley, and Lublin (2001) argue that Republican gains among whites can allow black voters to dominate the Democratic primary even if blacks form only a minority of the district’s population. In districts dominated by Democrats, African-American Democratic nominees can win the general election if sufficient numbers of white Democrats continue to support their party’s nominee. Grofman, Handley, and Lublin (2001) conclude that the percentage of blacks needed to elect a black candidate varies according to local circumstances (see also Voss and Lublin 2001). While some areas may not need black majorities in order for black-preferred candidates to win, others may need districts greater than 50% black.

Even as scholars continue to debate the impact of racial redistricting on the descriptive representation of African Americans, a parallel debate rages over its impact on substantive representation. A variety of scholars have concluded that racial

redistricting undermines the representation of black interests (Swain 1993; Cameron, Epstein, and O'Halloran 1996; Lublin 1997). According to this argument, creating new black-majority districts requires reducing the percentage of blacks in other districts which results in the election of more Republicans. Republicans tend to be less supportive of black interests than either white or black Democrats, so racial redistricting actually undermines overall support for black interests.

Other scholars argue that racial redistricting either had little impact on support for black interests or increased black substantive representation. Petrocik and Desposato (1998) suggest that a "pro-GOP surge" rather than redistricting efforts actually caused the election of more conservative representatives in 1992 and 1994. Shotts (2003a) finds that although racial redistricting in the late 1980s to early 1990s produced a sharp decline in the number of House Democrats elected from the South, it nonetheless promoted liberal policy outcomes favored by blacks. In their study of southern state legislatures, including Mississippi, Lublin and Voss (2000) find that racial redistricting was much less important than shifts in voter support in explaining Republican gains.

Theory

Most studies of racial redistricting focus on the U.S. House of Representatives which is currently closely divided between Democrats and Republicans. Even when Democrats exercised firm control prior to 1994, the Republicans presented a viable and solid opposition. Ideological divisions between northern and southern Democrats have steadily declined over several decades to the point where they are largely insignificant (Poole and Rosenthal 2001; Black and Black 2002; Lublin and Voss 2003; Lublin 2004;

but see Shotts 2003a; 2003b). Consequently, if racial redistricting results in the election of greater numbers of Republicans, it reduces the total number of relatively liberal representatives available to support policies favored by blacks.

The situation in local politics in Mississippi could hardly be more different. Despite Republican success in federal elections in Mississippi, Democrats continue to overwhelmingly dominate local government. This success can be attributed to both demographics and the ideology of Democratic politicians in Mississippi. African Americans, who overwhelmingly support the Democrats, compose a higher share of the population in Mississippi than any other state. White Democratic politicians in Mississippi have historically taken conservative positions on issues (Black and Black 2002). This conservative approach makes it difficult for Republicans to make inroads with the Mississippi electorate at the local level. While Republicans also take a conservative approach, the failure of many white Mississippi Democratic politicians, especially at the local level, to shift toward liberalism, provides little incentive for white voters to abandon the Democrats. Additionally, local politics provide less occasion for the sorts of issues that have caused white Mississippians to massively shift toward the Republicans to arise. If nationally divisive social issues, such as school prayer or gun control, do arise, there is such a conservative consensus among both blacks and whites in Mississippi that politicians of both races often take similar positions and no partisan distinctions arise to promote realignment to the Republicans.

This political background has important implications for the impact of racial redistricting in Mississippi. As white Mississippians have remained more loyal to the Democrats below the federal level, blacks are less likely to control the Democratic

primary when they do not form a majority of the total electorate. Consequently, relatively few blacks should win election from majority-white districts to the office of county supervisor in Mississippi. Moreover, the history of extreme racial polarization combined with somewhat lower participation rates among blacks as compared to whites (Parker 1990) suggests that districts greater than 50% black may be required for black candidates to win election to local office in Mississippi. Lower rates of participation among Mississippi blacks are not especially surprising due to the racial gap in education and the strong relationship of education to voter turnout (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). The average black citizen of Mississippi is younger than the average white citizen, so African Americans are also more likely to be below voting age and less likely to participate due to the positive relationship between age and participation (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Parker 1990; U.S. Census 2000).

As Democrats continue to heavily dominate Mississippi local politics, the creation of new majority-black districts should rarely shift control of the five-member Board of Supervisors to the Republicans. Race remains closely related to voting behavior with whites being much more likely to vote Republican than blacks. However, even if the concentration of blacks into black-majority districts results in the election of another Republican, it should rarely shift control of the Board of Supervisors away from the Democrats. Republicans are most likely to win seats and control of the Board of Supervisors in heavily white counties where the creation of a black district does not make the difference between Democratic and Republican control. Even if Democratic supervisors are more responsive than their Republican colleagues to African-American interests, advancing descriptive representation through the creation of black-majority

districts should only rarely result in the party which is less responsive winning control of the county legislative body.

One can additionally make the case that partisanship may be less relevant at the local level than in at the state legislative or congressional level. The conservatism of many white Mississippi Democrats facilitates continued Democratic dominance of local government in Mississippi. However, it suggests that one cannot quickly extrapolate the findings from the studies of the U.S. Congress to Mississippi county government. There may be little difference between Democrats and Republicans at the local level. If this is the case, a shift from Democratic to Republican control may have little or less significance for the representation of black interests than at the federal level.

Descriptive Representation

The 82 counties in Mississippi are all divided into five single-member districts. Each district, or “beat,” in a county elects one of the five supervisors who collectively make up the Board of Supervisors for each county. Supervisors are elected to four-year terms with no term limits. The Board is the governing body of the county and has both legislative and executive power as well as some judicial power, such as the right to impose fines and subpoena witnesses. Mississippi counties have “home rule” which generally means that counties have the authority to regulate their own affairs. With regard to redistricting, a majority vote of county supervisors can change the boundaries of the districts, provided that the changed boundaries conform to natural boundaries such as streets and waterways. All of Mississippi is a “covered jurisdiction” under the Voting Rights Act, so all Mississippi counties must gain preclearance from either the U.S.

Attorney General or the D.C. District Court before their redistricting plans for the Board of Supervisors take effect.

Figure 1 is a histogram which breaks down the 410 county supervisor districts in Mississippi by black voting-age population (BVAP) and shows the percentage of African-American supervisors elected in 1999 from each BVAP category. The histogram reveals that the percentage of black supervisors rises with the BVAP with a dramatic increase in the black share of supervisors once the BVAP rises above 50%. None of the 137 districts less than 20% BVAP elected an African-American supervisor; only 5% of the 97 districts 20-40% BVAP elected black supervisors. While 19% of 31 districts 40-50% BVAP had black supervisors, slightly more than one-half (53%) of the 45 supervisors elected from districts 50-60% BVAP were African American. Slightly fewer than 70% of the 48 supervisors elected from 60-70% BVAP districts were African American. Over 85% of the 52 supervisors representing districts greater than 70% BVAP were African American.

(Figure 1 about here)

The election of some black supervisors from white-majority districts gives hope that perhaps the importance of race is declining in local elections in Mississippi. Eleven of the 114 black county supervisors represent districts with a black-voting age population under 50%. However, five of these eleven districts have black population majorities even if they lack BVAP majorities. Put another way, 90% of black supervisors represent districts with a BVAP majority and 95% serve in districts with a black population majority. It seems unlikely that there would be many black county supervisors in Mississippi if there were no black-majority districts.

Figure 2 shows the predicted probability of a district having an African-American supervisor after the 1999 elections. This figure is based on a probit analysis with race of supervisor as the dependent variable and BVAP as the sole independent variable. This figure suggests that African Americans have some possibility of winning in white-majority districts, though the probability drops rapidly as the BVAP sinks below 50%. Districts with a BVAP of 45% have a 23% chance of having a black supervisor while districts with a BVAP of 40% have a 14% probability of electing a black supervisor. Districts with a BVAP of less than 30% have less than a 5% likelihood of electing an African American; districts with a BVAP of under 20% have less than a 1% probability of being represented by an African American.

(Figure 2 about here)

The results presented in figure 2 further suggest that the creation of districts with a BVAP greater than 50% is critical to the election of African-American supervisors. Districts with a BVAP of 50% have only a one in three chance of electing a black county supervisor. One needs to raise the BVAP to 57% before a district has an even chance of electing a black supervisor. In order to make the election of a black supervisor more likely than not, one has to further increase the BVAP. A 63% BVAP district has a two-thirds chance of electing a black supervisor; a 76% BVAP district has a 90% probability of being represented by a black supervisor. These percentages are notably higher than the findings of many scholars for U.S. House elections (e.g. Cameron, Epstein, and O'Halloran 1996; Grofman and Handley 1989; Lublin 1997). However, they are consistent with Parker's (1990) and Coleman's (1993) findings that districts with bare

population majorities often insufficient to assure the election of black officials for city, state legislative or congressional office in Mississippi.

Racial Redistricting and the Election of Republicans

Racial context continues to have a huge influence on Republican candidacies and success in Mississippi county supervisor elections. Figures 3 and 4 show the probability of the Republicans fielding a candidate and winning the election, respectively, based on the racial composition of the district. These figures are based on a biprobit model with Republican candidate and Republican winner as the dependent variables and percent black of the voting-age population as the only independent variable. In both figures, the solid line presents the results based on all districts. The dotted line presents the results excluding the highly anomalous case of African-American Republican Charles Evers's victory in a district that is over 90% BVAP. (Evers was the only black Republican supervisor and the only Republican to win in a black-majority district.)

The probability of any Republican seeking election as a county supervisor declines as the BVAP rises (see figure 3). Republicans have a 55% probability of fielding a candidate in a district with no African Americans, but a 43% probability in a 20% BVAP district and a 31% probability in a 40% BVAP district. The probability of a Republican actually serving as supervisor declines even more rapidly as the BVAP rises (see figure 4). Based on the biprobit model excluding Evers, a district with no black residents has a 39% chance of having a Republican supervisor. The probability of a Republican representing a district drops to one in four as the BVAP rises to just 10%. Republicans have only a 15% chance of holding a district with a 20% BVAP. The

probability of a Republican supervisor falls below one in ten in 30% BVAP district and below one in twenty in a 40% BVAP district.

(Figures 3 and 4 about here)

At first blush, these results would seemingly support the conclusion that racial redistricting harms Democrats and potentially undermines black substantive representation by undercutting the party preferred by most African Americans. Creating new black-majority districts requires making other districts more white which encourages Republicans to seek office and renders it more likely that they will win the election. For example, according to the predictions (excluding Evers) presented in figure 4, reconfiguring two 35% BVAP districts into one 60% BVAP district and one 10% BVAP district, reduces Republican chances of victory by only 5% in the new black-majority district but increases them by 20% in the new “bleached” district. The election of additional Republican supervisors should make it easier for Republicans to win majority control of the Board and to adopt policies opposed to the wishes of blacks even if there is additional African-American representation on the Board.

While racial redistricting may sometimes aid the election of additional Republicans, it does not appear to have significantly aided Republican efforts to win control (i.e. three of five seats) of county boards in Mississippi. African Americans gained representation, primarily from black-majority districts, on 61, or 74%, of the 82 county boards in Mississippi. In contrast, only 22, or 27%, of Mississippi counties had even one Republican serving on the five-member board after the 1999 elections. Seven, or 9%, of Mississippi counties had Republican majorities on the Board of Supervisors. Democrats still swept the elections in many counties despite the presence of black-

majority districts. In the vast majority of counties, the existence of black-majority districts did not prevent Democrats from winning a majority on the Board of Supervisors. Blacks were a minority of the population in 41 of the 61 counties with black supervisors but the concentration of blacks into black-majority districts did not prevent Democrats from retaining control in most cases.

Republicans were most likely to win control in heavily white counties. Figure 5 shows the probability of Republican or African-American control of the Board of Supervisors based on the BVAP of county. (The figure is based on probit models of Republican/Black majority as the dependent variables and BVAP as the independent variable.) Republicans are most likely to control the Board of Supervisors in heavily white counties in which it is not possible to create a black-majority district. In a 10% BVAP county, the lowest percentage at which it is even theoretically possible to draw one black-majority district, the probability of a Republican majority is only 30% -- 20% less than when there are no blacks in the county. As the BVAP of a county rises from 10% to 20%, the probability of Republican majority halves to only 15%.

(Figure 5 about here)

Examining the actual seven counties with Republican majorities after the 1999 elections reinforces these conclusions. All but one county (Madison) were under 20% BVAP. Several counties were also bastions of suburban or urban Republican support (e.g. DeSoto, Harrison, Jackson, Madison and Rankin). Republican partisanship may be so strong among whites in these heavily Republican counties that it would likely be very difficult to elect more Democrats even if black voters were not concentrated into black-majority districts. In three (DeSoto, Pearl River and Rankin) of the seven counties,

Republicans hold four or five of the five seats on the Board of Supervisors. African Americans hold no seats in one (Lamar) of the four counties where Republicans have a three-seat majority. As a result, there are only three counties (Harrison, Jackson and Madison) where it is even conceivable that dismantling of a black-majority district might make it possible for Democrats to win control of the Board of Supervisors. All three are urban or suburban counties whose whites have been trending heavily Republican.

African Americans only win control of the county legislative body in counties with substantial black majorities. The probit model of black majority on the Board of Supervisors indicates that African-American supervisors have an even probability of controlling the Board once a county is 63% BVAP (see figure 5). The same model suggests that black supervisors have only an 11% chance of forming a majority in a 55% BVAP county. The chance of African-American supervisors controlling the Board rises to 2/3 at 67% BVAP and to 90% at 76% BVAP.

Discussion

Racial redistricting remains vital to the election of significant numbers of black county supervisors in Mississippi. Indeed, unlike in national elections, African Americans may often require districts greater than 50% in black voting-age population in order to have an even chance of electing their preferred candidate. Only a small percentage of black county supervisors win in white-majority districts.

As in national politics, racial redistricting may aid Republican efforts to win more seats on county boards in Mississippi. Creating additional black-majority districts inevitably requires reducing the number of African-American voters in other districts.

Republican chances of both recruiting a candidate and winning the election rise dramatically as the share of blacks declines, so racial redistricting should improve their electoral prospects in some districts.

Nevertheless, racial redistricting has thus far had little overall impact on Democratic dominance of Mississippi county government. African Americans have obtained representation on nearly three-quarters of county boards in Mississippi. Most of these black supervisors were elected in black-majority districts. In the vast majority of cases, Democrats nevertheless continue to retain control of the Board of Supervisors. Only in three counties is it even theoretically possible that dismantling a black district could aid in the election of an additional Democrat who would allow the Democrats to recapture the Board. High levels of racial polarization and strong attachment to the Republicans among whites in these three counties would make this outcome far from certain even if the Voting Rights Act were interpreted to permit this reduction in black descriptive representation.

Of course, this situation could evolve over time. If Republicans begin to make substantial inroads into local politics in Mississippi, the creation or protection of black-majority districts may begin to cost Democrats control of more county boards. Based on information from 75 of Mississippi's 82 counties on the outcome of the 2003 elections, Republican gains are occurring only slowly. Republicans experienced a net gain of seven seats, or 1.8%, in 2003 in the 75 counties for which data was available.¹ Democrats lost control of one additional Board in 2003; in 38% BVAP Lowndes County, Republicans

¹ No information was available on the outcome of the 2003 elections in Chickasaw, Harrison, Holmes, Itawamba, Perry, Rankin, and Sharkey Counties. Democrats held all the seats in Chickasaw, Holmes, Itawamba, Perry, and Sharkey Counties after the 1999 elections. Republicans held all of the seats in Rankin County and three of the seats in Harrison County after the 1999 elections.

captured a 3-2 majority on the Board of Supervisors. If partisanship is strongly related to support for pro-black policies, African Americans might begin to pay a greater cost for descriptive representation in terms of substantive representation if Republicans win more seats and control of a greater share of county boards. In short, county boards might become less likely to adopt policies endorsed by most Mississippi blacks.

However, even if racial redistricting cost the Democrats control of more county boards, efforts to protect black substantive representation at the expense of black descriptive representation may remain misguided. Unlike their national counterparts, local southern white Democrats may be more likely to take conservative positions closer to those held by many Republicans than to adopt positions similar to those taken by an African-American supervisor. It is critical to ascertain whether white county supervisors are substantially supportive of positions favored by blacks before assuming that a Board with a Democratic majority but little or no black representation would be more sympathetic to African-American concerns than a board with greater black representation and a Republican majority. Unlike in national politics, removing even one black district may completely eliminate black representation from a county board, so African Americans would naturally want to be extra careful about giving up hard-won gains in descriptive representation.

Local politics may also be fundamentally different from national or state politics in that supervisors often focus to an even greater extent on distributive politics. As a result, having a representative at the council table may be more important than having some influence over several representatives. For example, Mississippi county supervisors are in charge of deciding which roads to improve in their county. The Board

usually addresses the problem of dividing up funding for roads by allotting to each supervisor control over one-fifth of the budget (Gabris 1992; Hicks 1993). Gerald Gabris (1992: 234), an expert on local government in Mississippi, states that: “supervisors have total control over personnel decisions, contracting, and equipment purchases within their beats and do not usually have to answer to the board as a whole.” The presence of black supervisor who depends heavily on black votes may be more helpful to African Americans than a pair of white supervisors who are most concerned with white swing voters. While it is in the black supervisor’s interest to make sure that the black community’s interests are protected and that some money is directed toward roads in black neighborhoods, white supervisors may find it politically more expedient to direct funds toward white neighborhoods home to the voters who they need to fend off black primary or general election challenges. Black supervisors may also simply be more aware of the needs of the black community.

If nothing else, this study indicates that case-by-case analyses within a particular jurisdiction and for a specific office of the impact of racial redistricting on descriptive and substantive representation remain vital to the correct implementation of the Supreme Court’s standards for applying the Voting Rights Act. Several studies have found it unnecessary to create districts with sizeable black majorities in order to make likely the election of an African-American candidate to the U.S. House. However, this study concludes that super-majority districts often remain vital to black electoral prospects at the county level in Mississippi. At the same time, racial redistricting is currently less likely to undermine black substantive representation at the county level in Mississippi than in national politics.

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Figure 1: Percent Black Supervisors by District Racial Composition

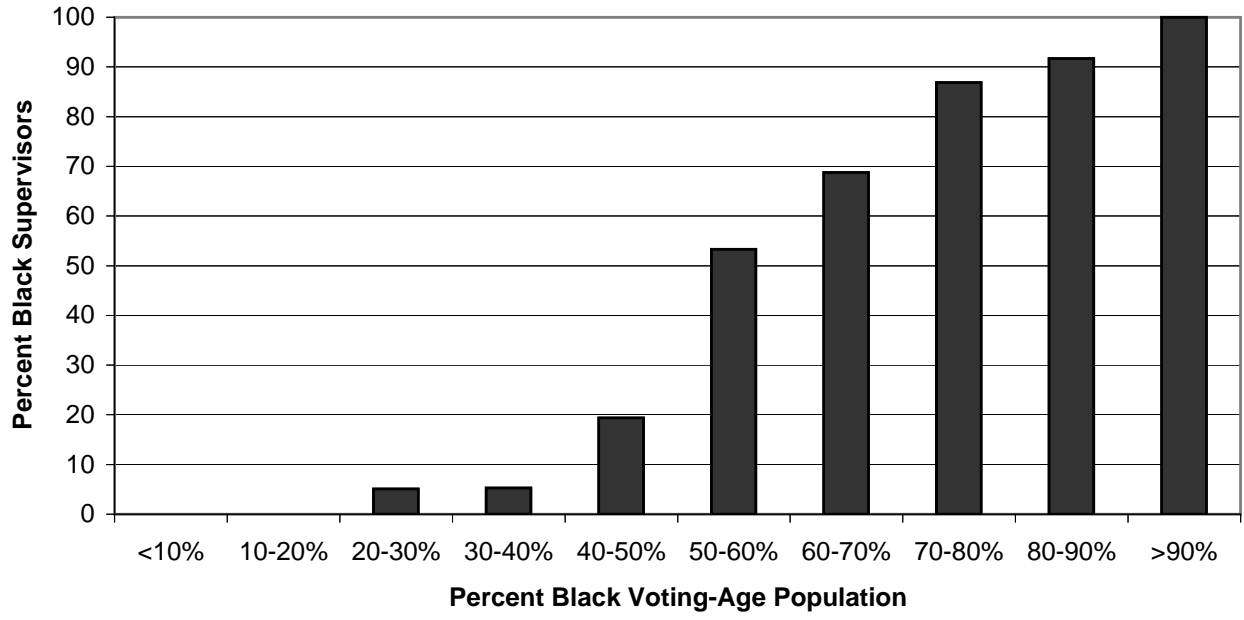


Figure 2: Probability of Black Supervisor

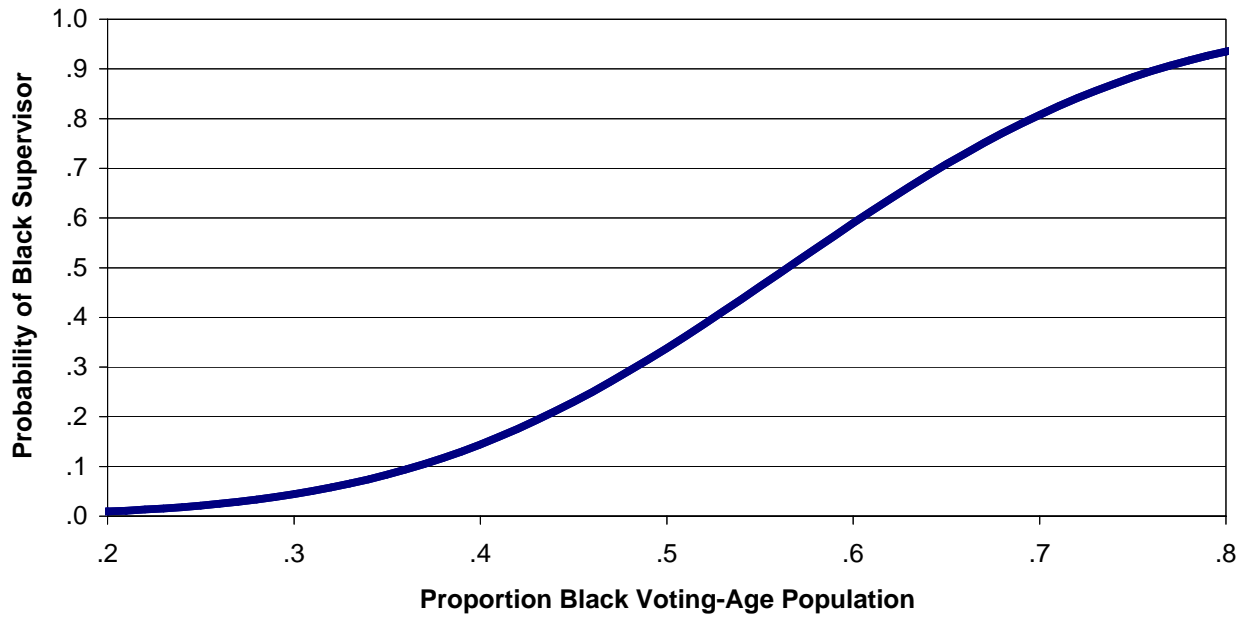


Figure 3: Probability of Republican Nominee

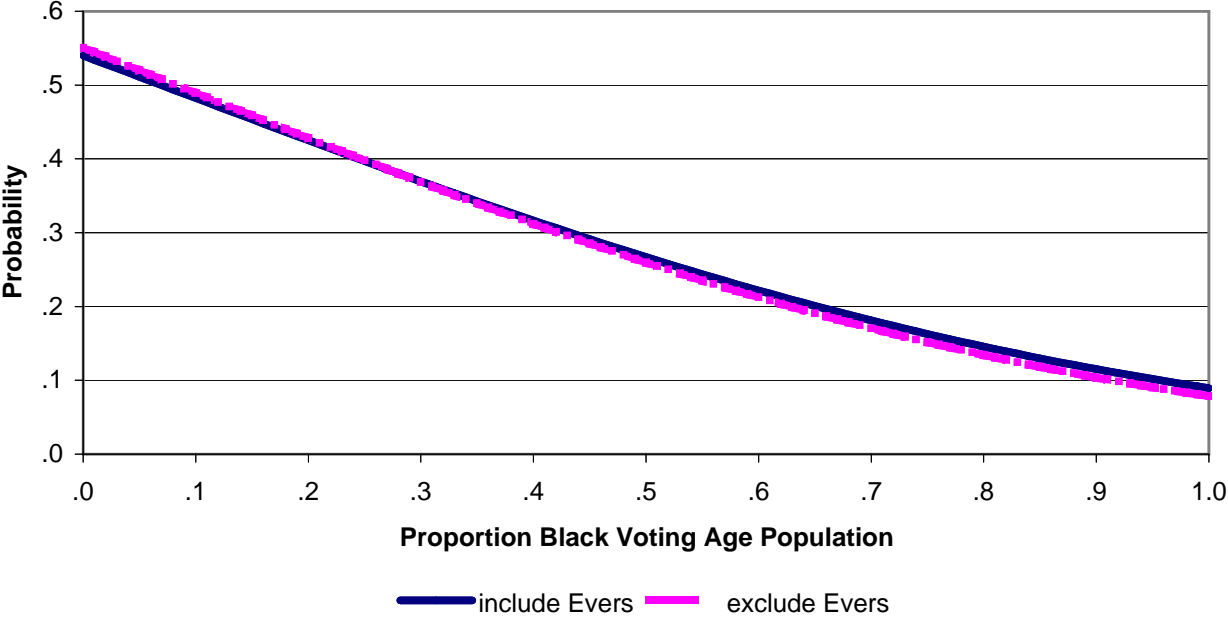


Figure 4: Probability of Republican Supervisor

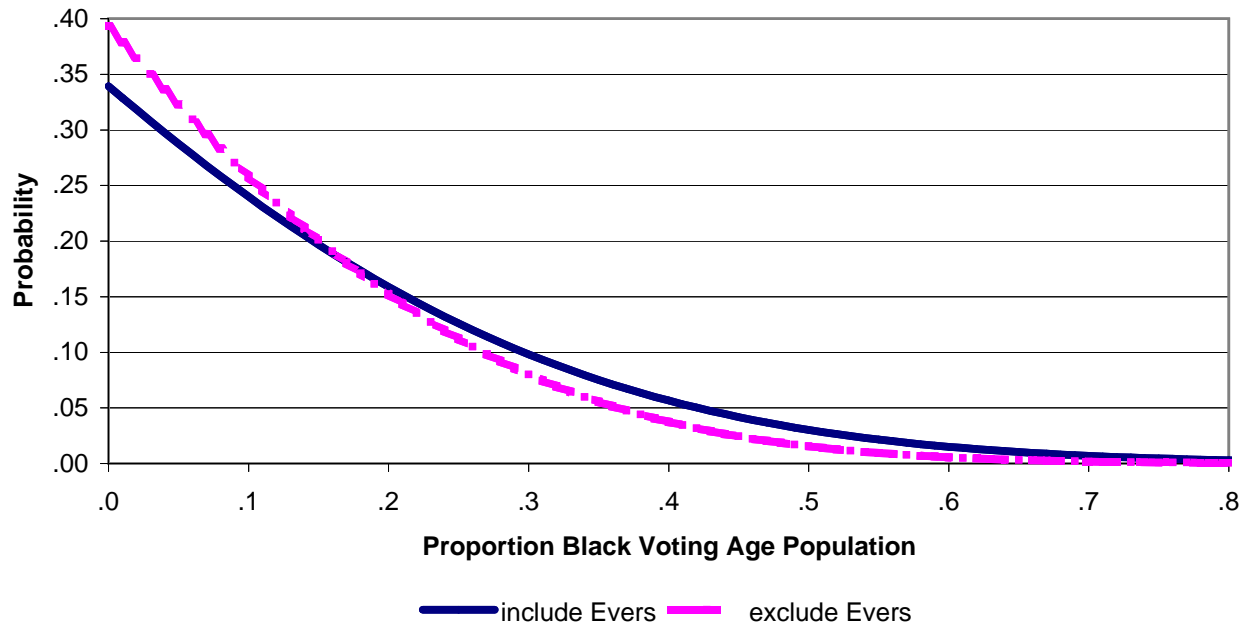


Figure 5: Probability of Republican or Black Majority on Board

