2011

Redistricting Effect in a Non-Partisan World: Toward a Theory of Reapportionment at the County Board Level of Government

Amy Uden
Illinois Wesleyan University

Redistricting Effect in a Non-Partisan World: Toward a Theory of Reapportionment at the County Board Level of Government

Abstract

Electoral redistricting shapes political scientists' perceptions of partisan polarization and incumbency. This paper examines the redistricting process at the county level of government, using the cases of McLean and Champaign Counties, Illinois. This research analyzes the McLean County board's voting cleavages in order to highlight considerations of nonpartisan electoral bodies. With Champaign County as a comparison, it also uses a series of linear regression models to analyze redistricting's effects on county incumbency and board composition. Redistricting impact proved insignificant, but the study demonstrates correlations between county electoral composition and state-level electoral trends, and also confirms the important influence of partisanship on redistricting and electoral outcomes.

REDISTRICTING EFFECT IN A NONPARTISAN WORLD:
TOWARD A THEORY OF REAPPORTIONMENT AT THE COUNTY BOARD LEVEL OF GOVERNMENT

Amy Uden

Abstract: Electoral redistricting shapes political scientists' perceptions of partisan polarization and incumbency. This paper examines the redistricting process at the county level of government, using the cases of McLean and Champaign Counties, Illinois. This research analyzes the McLean County board's voting cleavages in order to highlight considerations of nonpartisan electoral bodies. With Champaign County as a comparison, it also uses a series of linear regression models to analyze redistricting's effects on county incumbency and board composition. Redistricting impact proved insignificant, but the study demonstrates correlations between county electoral composition and state-level electoral trends, and also confirms the important influence of partisanship on redistricting and electoral outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

In February of 2007, the McLean County Board voted to take a stance regarding a legal ban of smoking indoors in Illinois, with eleven out of nineteen members voting against a board declaration of support for the ban. At a time when the issue was a contested topic at the state level of government, the board members, though not capable of directly impacting the state legislation's outcome, felt compelled to declare a position. Ideological and personal considerations undoubtedly played into this vote, which did not split cleanly along party lines, although the issue had partisan overtones at the state level. Significantly, such votes often occur on the McLean County Board, in spite of its reputation as a nonpartisan body. At other instances in the board's history, members have chosen to take similar stances on everything from video gaming to terrorism. For an ostensibly nonpartisan body, this behavior raises questions of a more nuanced background story of board interaction.

County governments receive very little attention from political scientists, and have been famously acknowledged to be the "dark continent of political science,"[1] although perhaps they deserve more attention than they generally stimulate. Political scientists often perceive county government as insignificant because of characteristics such as local specificity and nonpartisanship. Yet why, in a body with allegedly little partisan influence, would board members feel the need to act in such an ideologically driven fashion? Issue positions like those taken on the smoking ban could be harmful to board cohesion and personal interaction, and could also risk alienating state-level legislators whose work controls county intergovernmental constraints. Under these circumstances, the risks of the situation seem high compared to the psychological pay-off involved. This anecdote highlights just one instance of interest within county politics, suggesting the merit of further study in this area.

This study will examine one of the most highly contested issues in political science within the unusual framework of a county government—that of electoral redistricting. This research will use cases from central Illinois for an exploratory look at a largely ignored subject.

---

[1] Gilbertson 1917.

Reapportionment problems touch many aspects of political science, from incumbency to partisanship. In this exploratory study, the role of partisanship in McLean County Board voting is examined, as well as the applicability of redistricting theory to county government. A comparison of McLean County, a body with a reputation for little partisanship, to Champaign County, a more competitive body, as well as to other findings in the field, could provide a springboard for further research on the role of these political issues in all levels of government.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is little doubt that electoral redistricting is a hotly contested issue at federal, state, and local levels of government. Incumbency advantage, district competitiveness, and partisan competition constitute some of the concerns expressed by scholars and politicians with respect to redistricting. For purposes of this county government research, the most directly relevant issues are those of partisan competitiveness. Generally, scholars agree that the institutional arrangements for redistricting do impact partisan competitiveness.[2] Partisan and bipartisan plans pursue different ends, and deal with the often-competing interests of the party organization and individual incumbents. No definitive answers exist for these questions of seat efficiency and polarization. While some perceive redistricting as beneficial to democratic representativeness and responsiveness, others find that its impact is limited or diminishes over time.[3] Overall, the exhaustive redistricting literature emphasizes the importance of partisan competition in the reapportionment process, and the redistricting process's well-studied nature at the national and state levels far eclipses its examination within the context of counties.

Addressing the situation of county-level redistricting also implies examining urban-rural representation, bringing nonpartisan voting effects to the forefront. Regional voting patterns tend to be insignificant alongside partisan splits, unless they are somehow institutionally reinforced.[4] Even if a split based on non-partisan characteristics exists for a legislative body, its impact is less likely to hold up over time without the backing of some structural trait of the body, such as its electoral districts. At this point, McLean County's historically limited competitiveness becomes relevant to the discussion. Partisan competitiveness sparks interest most often when a formerly weak party becomes stronger, which seems to be the case in McLean County at this time, as two-party competition has only recently developed. For instance, in the case of post-war Southern realignment, as migration or social changes caused the growth of the Republican Party, the shift was aided by congressional redistricting, and incumbents had to adjust representation accordingly.[5] Southern realignment could provide a comparative example for the perceived strengthening of partisan competitiveness in McLean County. This case's progression of social change and gradual

---

[2] Mann and Cain, eds. 2005; Gelman and King 1994; Jewell 1955.
[3] Cain 1985; Squire 1998; Gilligan and Matsuska 1999.
[4] Robeck 1970; Broach 1972.
[5] Polsby 2004; Sundquist 1983; Shafer and Johnson 2006; Basinger and Ensley 2007.

electoral change can provide a springboard story for future research on county reapportionment.

When measuring partisan competition, scholars look to the attitudes of both candidates and voters within elections.[6] In state legislatures, parties both provide a default cleavage structure and help with institutional and ideological organization.[7] While that approach examines electoral impact of partisan competitiveness, party formation and competitiveness may apply differently at the local level where legislative indicators are not fully developed. When applying this to county or local party context, past research often stresses both the importance of a "trickle-up effect" of party, and points out that although variations exist in county-level party organizations, even without a clear chain of command, local parties undergird electoral process.[8]

However, little of the existing research deals with the shape and make-up of partisan competitiveness within county government. While Beck discusses county demographics in relation to party, even his work does not explicitly examine county governments.[9] This provides another basis for comparing the constituent make-up and partisan competitiveness of counties. Although party organization may not be directly tied to the redistricting process in the county, the connections between these fields of study suggest that vibrant partisan competitiveness has significant implications in the electoral redistricting process. As more intense competitiveness arises, the level of partisanship in redistricting will also likely rise. MacManus extends these studies with a compilation of county make-up survey responses dealing explicitly with board elections and partisanship. Although she notes a trend toward increased competition reported in board elections, she also suggests at several points that the effects of term structures and other generally influential institutional electoral arrangements have received no empirical testing at this level.[10]

Intertwining these several different bodies of scholarship will add to the scholarly conversation by linking these fields to the "dark continent." The county can provide a venue through which to examine the variance of electoral competition and party development in a different ideological environment. The states have often been dubbed "laboratories of democracy" by political scientists, and by similar logic, local governments can bring experimentation to new levels and throw structure of government into even sharper relief.[11] While reviewing the scholarship on redistricting, Theodore Arrington discusses the multiplicity of issues touched by redistricting questions, including party, race, representativeness, local boundaries, and decision making in the face of competing criteria.[12] Less weighed down in bureaucratic and federal limitations, local governments can be uniquely situated to embrace

---

[6] Basinger and Ensley 2007.
[7] Wright and Schaffner 2002.
[8] Frendreis et al. 1990; Dyck, et al. 2009; Eldersveld and Walton 2000.
[9] Beck 1974.
[10] MacManus 1996.
[11] *New State Ice Co. v. Liebmann* 1932.
[12] Arrington 2010.

future redistricting questions by implementing different plans and experimenting with new technologies. Connecting local partisan competition to redistricting politics, along with applying these principles to the county level of government in both McLean and Champaign counties, may provide new perspective to our knowledge of electoral redistricting and partisanship.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

The use of theoretical approaches that examine incumbency and partisan advantage in conjunction with redistricting has been supported by a wealth of empirical evidence, particularly at the national level. Most research distinguishes between partisan, bipartisan, and nonpartisan redistricting processes.[13] County governments experience electoral reapportionment in a similar manner to those at state and national levels of government, yet application of redistricting theory to counties has seldom occurred. Conversely, normative theory suggests that, particularly when we emphasize democratic representation, local governments provide for citizen-government interaction in unique and more direct ways. Moreover, local context can also indirectly play a significant role at high levels of government, due to mixed influences such as perceived competition, ideological similarity, and complacency effects.[14] In addition to partisan representation, constituent-based representation, such as urban-rural interest splits, can play an important role at this level, though perhaps only if institutionally reinforced in the county legislative body.[15] Therefore, applying redistricting theory to county governments has potential normative significance. The approach here will be, to the greatest extent possible, to apply the theoretical frameworks surrounding redistricting to the county level of government in an exploratory type of study.

Based on this foundation, redistricting will be examined through the implications of partisan competitiveness, or lack thereof, in the county environment. McLean County is historically a one-party Republican county, but has experienced a strong trend toward increased two-part competition over the last generation. Historically, the political divisions in the county were more likely to be urban-rural than Democratic-Republican. McLean County's urban-rural divisions are also somewhat similar to the up-state versus down-state split of Illinois at large. As the county has become more competitive, the county board's "nonpartisan" reputation has increasingly been called into question. This does not, however, indicate that Democratic considerations have replaced urban ones on the McLean County Board, because party lines have not necessarily coincided cleanly with urban and rural areas thus far.

This research also examines Champaign County as a useful electoral comparison and control. Champaign County and McLean County are similar in size and close in proximity.[16]

---

[13] Gelman and King 1994.

[14] Dyck 2009.

[15] Broach 1972.

[16] According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2009 estimates, Champaign County's population is 195,671, and McLean County's population is 167,699.

Both counties have twin-cities at their center, with influential universities, high mobility, and parallel urban-rural divisions. The county board structures of the two also have similar features, with relatively large elected bodies and staggered terms. Despite these similarities, Champaign County has a reputation for being a much more partisan. An examination of the voting margins for election to the Champaign County Board as compared to those of McLean County provides empirical evidence supporting this claim (See Figure 1 below). Since questions of partisanship play so heavily into redistricting, these two cases supply a controlled comparison of the state of partisanship within counties.

Figure 1: McLean and Champaign Counties' County Board
Average Margins of Victory, 1980-2009
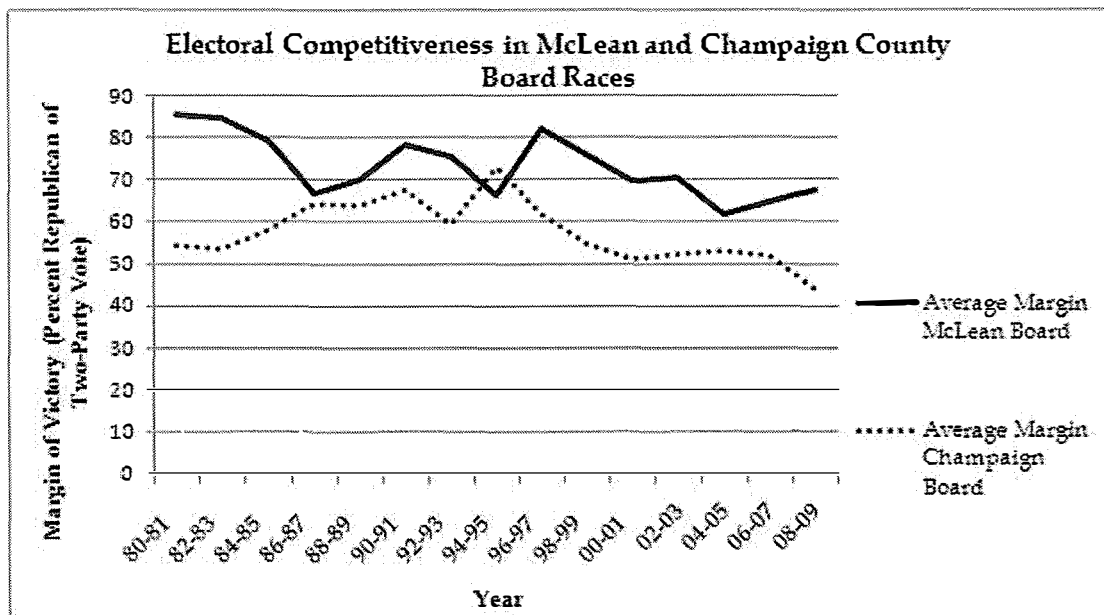
Since partisan composition of electoral districts plays such a vital role in the redistricting process, the existence or lack of existence of partisan competitiveness in the county has key significance. This solidifies the rationale for examining partisan competitiveness in conjunction with electoral redistricting in McLean County and other counties. Furthermore, the increasing population of McLean County, fueled by migration to the twin cities of Bloomington-Normal may be intensifying two-party competition. It may also be producing higher levels of partisanship in its elected legislative body. Empirical confirmation for these trends would assist in applying the standard theories of redistricting to the county level of government. If this is the case, partisanship could be expected to be the most salient in the politics of redistricting. The hypotheses will therefore include the following:

H₁: As partisan competition in the county electorate increases, partisan decision-making in the county board also increases.

H₂: As the role of partisan competitiveness in the county board increases, standard electoral trends accompanying redistricting will also become more evident in the county.

These hypotheses focus primarily on the existence of, or increased growth of, partisan competitiveness. This phenomenon is not always active at the county level, but plays a strong role in determining redistricting plans' outcomes and effects. Because of the role of competitiveness in redistricting theory, its place in McLean County must be established. The questions concerning redistricting theory are contingent upon this first descriptive aspect of research concerning the nature of county representation, so only after uncovering this relationship should the other hypothesis be pursued.

EMPIRICAL MODEL AND FINDINGS: HYPOTHESIS 1

This study uses a number of basic linear regressions to test its theoretical framework. A very limited level of compiled data exists at the county level of government, so measures had to be created. For the first hypothesis, the model aims to discover the impact of partisan competitiveness in the county electorate as a whole on county board decision-making considerations or cleavages. Board decision-making splits will be measured based on a comparative group cohesion score, defined as the average percentage of each groups' cohesion over the percentage of average total board cohesion.[17] These cohesion scores were based on aggregated roll call voting patterns for pairings of individual members across time. Roll call votes are a standard measure of legislator behavior. Although increasingly less common in recent years for the McLean County Board, roll call voting occurs at the county level for controversial or procedurally significant votes. These votes can potentially explain members'

---

[17] To construct these cohesion scores, individual board members' roll call voting histories were initially established. Then, pairs of individual members were matched up to create member to member cohesion scores for each pair of members on the board. Cohesion can be described as the number of votes together out of the total number of votes on which both member voted. Once these scores were compiled, group averages were calculated, i.e. Republicans voting with Republicans, Democrats voting with Democrats, and so on. Again, because some board members did not vote in every roll call, either due to absence from meeting, abstention, appointment to the board mid-year, or (in the case of the chair) procedure, the cohesion scores for each pair of members come from the percentage of votes "together" out of votes in which both members voted. Unanimous votes always remain within the set, because although they elevate the scores slightly, members did have opportunity to vote non-unanimously and chose not to do so. In the case of some members who voted only on one or two votes in the course of the year, their scores were outliers that skewed the average. Accordingly, if an individual member votes on less than one third of the roll call votes, their percentages do not make up a part of the board average scores. One third of the votes functioned as the threshold because it minimized the number of cases that would be removed while still accounting for the problem of outliers. However, in order not to haphazardly remove nuance from the voting patterns, this rule only took effect in situations for which theoretical justification existed, such as in the case of board chairpersons or members with partial-year terms.

actions based on their ideological framework better than any other measure. Using this measure of the comparative frequency with which members of different groups on the board vote together will serve as a proxy measure for how important the different considerations of party and regional interest are to board decision-making. If board members vote together by group substantially differently from how they vote as an overall body, movement across time or in comparison to county electorate trends may be revealing about partisan competitiveness and its role in the board as a legislative body.

Independent variables in the model include the state of Illinois' presidential and gubernatorial margins (Republican vote minus Democratic vote), McLean County presidential and gubernatorial models, the change in composition of the county board in the previous election year, the number of uncontested seats in the previous election year for each party, and the number of incumbents reelected in the election of the year before the cohesion scores. Each of these variables demonstrates the strength of partisan competition in the electorate, as opposed to the existence of an electorate not dominated by only one party or ideological framework. Furthermore, since this study also attempts to uncover the impact of redistricting on county boards, it controls for redistricting with a variable indicating the number of years since the last redistricting process.

The model examines the McLean County Board's roll call voting back to 1982, the year when the current County Board ten-district structure came into place. Within the data set, each case covers a two-year time span, including election data from only election years and board decision-making data from the election year and the following year. This time lag provides a built-in attempt to gauge the effects of competition in the county at large, measured through various election results, on the board's decision-making cleavages. Using the two-year span as the unit of analysis presumably meshes the actual outcome of the various elections with county board actions. Previous studies on electoral redistricting also examine the impact of redistricting on incumbent security and partisan composition over an extended period of time, strengthening the rationale for using two-year intervals as opposed to the one-year intervals common in roll call analyses.[18]

In terms of other measures, the presidential and gubernatorial votes measure the strength of partisan competition in the county as compared to a control of the state for macro-level trends. State-level data serve as the control because factors that impact McLean County will presumably be more likely to parallel those of impacting Illinois more closely than those at the national level. Including a variable representing the strength of local parties, such as those from each party who filed to be precinct committeemen, may also have been beneficial, but the data for this component were not available.

Changes in board composition also play a large theoretical role in explaining the variance in the dependent variable. This research tracks board composition as it changes in election years by measuring the number of Democrats elected out of the total number of

---

[18] Gelman and King 1994.

available seats, including those for unexpired terms that were up for election. Especially in the case of McLean County, increasing Democratic presence on the board would suggest a more competitive body, in a fashion that may parallel the growth of Democratic competition in the county over time. The number of uncontested seats from each party could work in opposite directions, as Republican uncontested seats would indicate less competition, but Democratic uncontested seats may mean the opposite in a generally Republican county context. The average margin of victory for McLean County Board seats serves as a final indicator of competition. To measure this margin, Republican percentage of the two-party vote is used. The average of each Republican candidate's strength across all of the districts shows the electoral strength, and therefore measures change the same way as the mathematical margin. Greater margins of victory indicate a less competitive county, and in the model, should be negatively related to the expected outcome of movement in cohesion scores based on increased party competitiveness.[19] The controls for incumbent reelection and redistricting also attempt to incorporate redistricting theory, by taking into account the potential for the board to have its partisan composition influenced by these factors.

As explained above, the models separate the board into Republican, Democratic, rural, and urban groups, in order to uncover the strength of each of these cleavages as considerations for board decision-making. More fit in a model indicates that board group cohesion moves in relation to changes in county partisanship. In other words, increased group cohesion suggests possible increased prevalence of group association in members' decision-making. The model tests whether or not movement in board group considerations occur based on the impact of increased partisanship within the county electorate. Significant results indicate that a group on the board votes more cohesively with increase of county partisanship.   Practically speaking, the shape of McLean County's efforts to redistrict in 2011 may be determined by whether or not urban-rural considerations remain consistent. Therefore, in order to explain which group votes together most strongly in conjunction with the level of partisan competition in the county, the model has been run with each group's cohesion scores individually serving as dependent variables. Results of each model appear as follows:

---

[19] In 1998 for McLean County, and in 2002 for Champaign County, incomplete election records left out some of the districts. Accordingly, a margin that averages the preceding and following years' election margins has been created as a substitute measure, in order to preserve all possible cases.

Table 1: Models of McLean County Partisan Competitiveness and
Average Board Roll Call Vote Cohesion, by Group, 1982-2009

Dependent Variable: McLean County Board Average Group Cohesion Compared to Average Total Cohesion
(with increased group cohesion suggesting possible increased prevalence of group association in members' decision-making)

Independent Variable	Republican Cohesion	Democratic Cohesion	Rural Cohesion	Urban Cohesion
Constant	62.430 (47.428)	4.165 (204.299)	-149.789 (266.206)	137.214 (86.509)
State Presidential Margin	-.614 (.903)	1.323 (3.889)	-1.030 (5.075)	5.830 (1.647)
State Gubernatorial Margin	-2.892** (.186)	2.410 (.800)	.220 (1.045)	-.780 (.339)
McLean Presidential Margin	1.092 (.805)	-1.587 (3.467)	.938 (4.524)	-5.426 (1.468)
McLean Gubernatorial Margin	3.057** (.243)	-2.939 (1.048)	-.285 (1.368)	-.429 (.444)
Board Composition (Percent Democrats Elected)	-1.215** (.214)	.960 (.921)	.365 (1.202)	-1.175 (.390)
McLean Uncontested Races-Republican	.339 (.145)	-.322 (.625)	-.796 (.816)	-.638 (.265)
McLean Uncontested Races- Democratic	-.138 (.226)	.315 (.972)	.554 (1.268)	.338 (.412)
McLean County Board Average Margin (Rep. Vote)	-1.132* (.334)	.342 (1.437)	.753 (1.875)	-1.253 (.608)
McLean Incumbents Reelected	-.189 (.062)	-.043 (.269)	.551 (.351)	-.202 (.114)
Redistricting Year	-.287 (1.218)	.278 (5.246)	.388 (3.589)	.088 (2.221)
N	14	14	14	14
Adj. R-squared	.751	.030	-.942	-.589
F-Test	4.917	1.040	.369	.518

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; * p ≤.1, ** p ≤.05, ***p ≤.01

Table 1 presents the results for each of these models, although none are statistically significant overall. Interestingly, the model explains the most for Republican group cohesion and the least for rural group cohesion. By this logic, rural-urban splits on the board could be influenced least by changes in the partisan composition of the county. While this may suggest that these considerations vary less over time in board decision-making, it also may suggest that urban-rural groupings' importance to the board simply moves inconsistently as compared with county partisanship. On the other hand, the random variance in cohesion scores based on member personality, along with the limited number of cases, could be interfering with or diminishing the effects of any discernible trend. Within the models, some of the variable's

correlations are significant, but the findings are mixed in terms of their movement in the direction anticipated. The number of cases limits possibility for significance in these models, as well as others throughout the study. However, this limited "N" comes from the fact that the current board structure did not come into place until 1982, so cases before this time would cause internal inconsistency within the model.

The model for Republican group cohesion on the board had the greatest explanatory power. When the average margin of victory for board seats increased, meaning that Republicans were more secure, they voted together less frequently. This suggests that insecurity, or increased competitiveness, would impact board decision-making along partisan lines. The significance of this model of increased county competitiveness on Republican voting cohesion suggests that party may be becoming more important to board process. On the other hand, as the board becomes more Democratic (Board Composition Change), Republican cohesion also decreases. Bivariate correlations between the various indicators of partisan competition and board cohesion measures also present mixed findings. In most cases, cohesion scores across years waver around a central score, but do not trend in any particular direction. This creates difficulty in identifying the overall strength of voting cleavages on the board, and distinguishing partisan or urban-rural considerations from those of particular members' voting habits and personalities. In McLean County's specific case of redistricting, to rule out institutionally reinforcing urban and rural considerations in the board decision-making process may at this point be empirically unsupported.

To clarify some of these models' mixed findings the bivariate relationships between Board Composition Change, Average Margin of Republican Victory, and each of the cohesion scores were examined. Interestingly, the only correlation that achieved significance, aside from those measuring similar phenomena, was that of Democratic Cohesion and Board Composition Change. Since Board Composition Change measures the increase in the percentage of Democrats elected to the board, the expected positive correlation (.458*) occurred. For this correlation only to achieve significance among the other measures suggests that Democrats, as the smallest group on the board, tend to experience the effects of partisan competition the most. Accordingly, their voting patterns on the board, including their relative tendency to vote together as a group, move significantly with their strength in the board composition. This finding has interesting implications for board voting patterns if the board's composition continues to become more competitive, as predicted.

A graphical representation of two of these group cohesion measures, Republican and rural, as compared to McLean County's presidential vote margin, displays some of the ambiguity surrounding groups' cohesion scores. Depicted visually below in Figure 1, contrary to the hypothesis, rural voting patterns have stayed equally cohesive and even discernibly increased as partisan competition has increased (shown in terms of a decreasing Republican margin of victory over time). Republican voting cohesion, on the other hand, seems to neither trend upward nor downward over time, though it may be in the process of increasing slightly. In spite of statistical insignificance, this trend, at least in McLean County up to the present, would seem to indicate that partisan decision-making on the board has not necessarily become

a more salient cleavage even as the partisan competition of the board changes. These findings emphasize the benefit of maintaining the urban-rural split in McLean County's board, and the type of decisions faced by board members, concerning issues like zoning, may support this emphasis.

Figure 1: Republican and Rural Board Members' Average Cohesion and
McLean County Presidential Voting Margins, 1982-2009
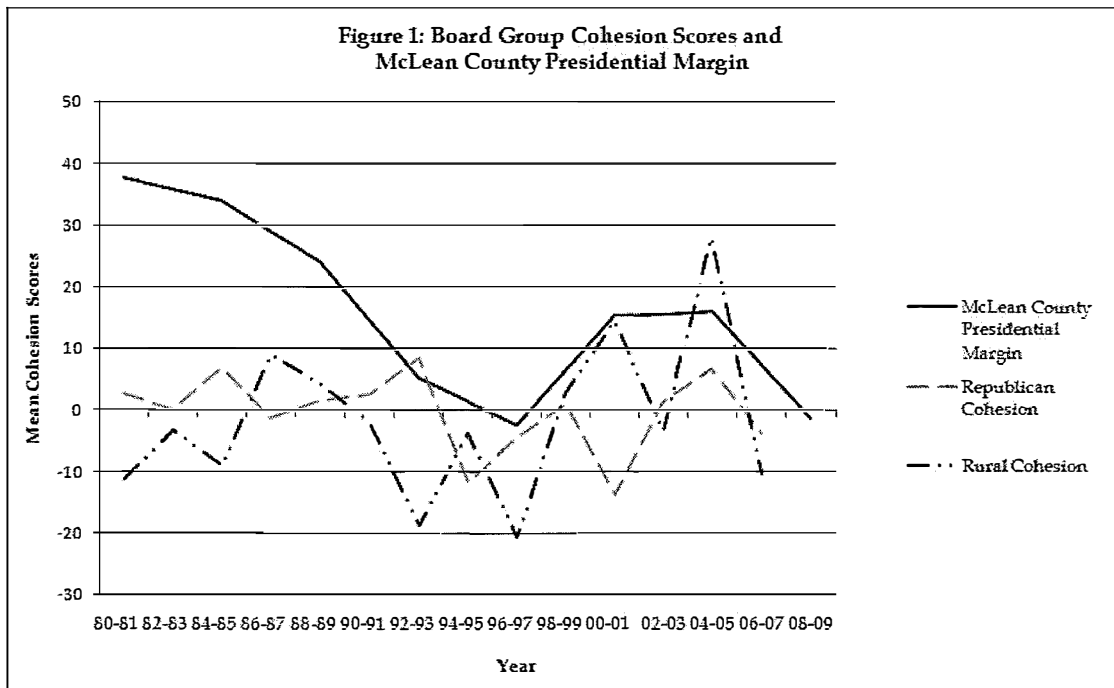
Significance issues for all of the data supporting this hypothesis again make it difficult to draw substantive conclusions. Perhaps, however, this reinforces a different aspect of local government and partisanship. Because of its face-to-face nature, partisan competitiveness may have a less overt impact on county government. Alternatively, these measures may not be the best depiction of the interactions that take place within county government. For instance, more qualitative or content-based analysis could better represent the influence of different voting considerations on the county board.

EMPIRICAL MODELS AND FINDINGS: HYPOTHESIS 2

This study has also hypothesized that in counties with greater partisan competitiveness, electoral redistricting has a greater impact on county board composition. This model utilizes variables similar to those that made up the independent variable set in the previous model. This portion of the studies deals with the effects of redistricting on various measures of board security and incumbent advantage. Table 2 presents the data from Champaign County, an adjacent jurisdiction with a history of much higher partisan competition.

The first regression uses as its dependent variable the composition of the counties' respective boards, measured in terms of percent of Democrats elected. While this variable does not measure total board composition because it accounts only for those elected in each election cycle and county board members have staggered terms, its change from year to year captures the shape of change in board composition. By looking at this measure first, one can gauge whether or not redistricting has any influence on board composition at the county level.

The model's independent variables consist of multiple controls, including state and county presidential and gubernatorial margins of victory. Controlling for the overall change in the political or partisan forces impacting the county will allow for any effects of redistricting to be distinguished from the general pattern of board composition change that might have occurred even without redistricting. In this model, the logic of including uncontested races has shifted slightly from that in the first model of this study. Here, uncontested races contribute a general control for the tone of the board in terms of its normal trend of competition, and accounts for local electoral patterns in specific districts. The percentage of incumbents reelected also serves as a control in this situation. Incumbency advantage and redistricting effects are often tied to one another in the literature. Yet if the counties experience robust incumbency advantage effects from year to year, their impact would skew the perception of redistricting effects, and for this reason, incumbency also serves as an independent variable.

Finally, the redistricting variable should, according to the hypothesis, influence the board composition. As the years since a redistricting process occurs lapse, the redistricting's effects on board elections should decline. The table below presents the results of this model for both Champaign County and McLean County:

Table 2: County Board Redistricting and Board Composition Measure, 1982-2009
Dependent Variable: Board Composition (Percent Democrats Elected)

Champaign County		McLean County	
Independent Variable		**Independent Variable**	
Constant	-37.730 (41.370)	Constant	83.406 (102.756)
State Presidential Margin	1.192 (1.005)	State Presidential Margin	.740 (2.094)
State Gubernatorial Margin	1.021 (.185)	State Gubernatorial Margin	-.344 (.430)
Champaign Presidential Margin	-.634 (.998)	McLean Presidential Margin	-.530 (1.872)
Champaign Gubernatorial Margin	-2.107* (.366	McLean Gubernatorial Margin	-.057 (.569)
Champaign Uncontested Races-Republican	-1.224* (.550)	McLean Uncontested Races-Republican	-.587 (.308)
Champaign Uncontested Races- Democratic	2.033** (.881)	McLean Uncontested Races- Democratic	.460 (.474)
Champaign County Board Average Margin (Rep. Vote)	-1.190 (.824)	McLean County Board Average Margin (Rep. Vote)	-.423 (.730)
Champaign Incumbents Reelected	.435 (.156)	McLean Incumbents Reelected	-.102 (.144)
Redistricting Year	.609* (1.802)	Redistricting Year	.341 (2.633)
N	14		14
Adj. R-squared	.744		.291
F-Test	5.192*		1.591

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; * p ≤.1, ** p ≤.05, ***p ≤.01

In this model, a positive relationship exists between the lapse in years after redistricting and change in board composition, although it is only significant for Champaign County. One feasible explanation hinges on the Republican strength. As more time passes from the redistricting more Democrats are elected, so perhaps redistricting favors board Republicans. Yet another possibility is that the relationship between these two variables does not capture redistricting effects within the right time span or type of measurement. Especially in Champaign County, where the board is more competitive and composition may be more stable, a simple measure of board composition change may not reveal the full story of redistricting effects. Again, the problem of a small sample size surfaces as well, since various races' individual characteristics may impact board composition more, especially at the county level.

Because of the ambiguity accompanying an exploratory study such as this, it was necessary to measure redistricting effects in terms of other dependent variables as well. Board Composition may only suggest one part of the total impact redistricting has on a county board. The next model examines the effect of redistricting on incumbent reelection rate. If county government parallels other governmental bodies, redistricting may be used to make incumbents safer. Therefore, using incumbent reelection rates as a measure of the impact of redistricting on the nature of the county board ultimately meshes with the logic of the question. The construction of the incumbency dependent variable was similar to that used in other studies, and consists of a percentage of incumbents reelected out of the total number of seats up for reelection. In some instances, this may not account for the fact that incumbents chose not to run for reelection. However, eliminating these instances from the possible pool of seats up for election may remove some of the data's descriptive power because the fact that incumbents chose not to run for one reason or another could also be an effect of redistricting. Therefore, retaining the total number of possible seats in which incumbents could have run and won for the basis of comparison in the variable contributes to its theoretical power to explain. With the logic of this variable set forth, the findings of the impact of redistricting on incumbent reelection rates for McLean and Champaign Counties are listed in Table 3 below:

Table 3: County Board Redistricting and Board Member Security Measures, 1982-2009
Dependent Variable: Incumbent Reelection Rate

Champaign County			McLean County		
Independent Variable			**Independent Variable**		
Constant	77.936 (110.366)		Constant	147.788 (372.386)	
State Presidential Margin	-1.657 (2.578)		State Presidential Margin	.000 (7.227)	
State Gubernatorial Margin	-1.224 (.534)		State Gubernatorial Margin	-.940 (1.445)	
Champaign Presidential Margin	1.173 (2.487)		McLean Presidential Margin	.126 (6.442)	
Champaign Gubernatorial Margin	2.659* (1.056)		McLean Gubernatorial Margin	.586 (1.931)	
Champaign Uncontested Races-Republican	1.289 (1.884)		McLean Uncontested Races-Republican	.744 (1.096)	
Champaign Uncontested Races- Democratic	-1.948 (3.848)		McLean Uncontested Races- Democratic	.077 (1.804)	
Champaign County Board Average Margin (Rep. Vote)	-1.041 (2.595)		McLean County Board Average Margin (Rep. Vote)	-.548 (2.560)	
Board Composition Change (Percentage of Democrats Elected)	.811 (1.036)		Board Composition Change (Percentage of Democrats Elected)	-.261 (1.689)	
Redistricting Year	-.801* (4.873)		Redistricting Year	-.449 (9.256)	
N	14			14	
Adj. R-squared	.522			-.815	
F-Test	2.576			.351	

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; * p ≤.1, ** p ≤.05, ***p ≤.01

For McLean County especially, this model has the least explanatory power of any of the models put forth in this study, and is also not significant. However, this could be more indicative of a truth about the county level of government than it would appear. In other levels of government, one would expect measures like redistricting, the composition of a legislature, and the partisanship of the surrounding district to play a significant role in explaining incumbency advantage. Interestingly, only in the Champaign model did redistricting play a statistically significant role in explaining the movement in incumbency reelection rates. Furthermore, in Champaign County, redistricting did impact incumbency in the expected direction, since as time since redistricting increased, incumbent advantage decreased. The findings of this model, therefore support the second hypothesis, although the models achieved only mixed levels of significance.

The final model presented below follows a similar logic in terms of controls to that of the two preceding models. Here, however, average election margin of county board races serves as the dependent variable. This shuffling of variables attempts to test the different directionality of effects on various measures of redistricting effect in order to uncover the most useful way of examining these questions at this level of government. Cycling dependent variables in this way allows for more discovery of what measures function best as controls or capture variation the most. Average Election Margin for county board races depicts the level of safety that victors experience in the election, along with the general competitive nature of the county. This would estimate redistricting effects on the general competitiveness of the county board races which would potentially be linked to each county boards' composition in the long run.

Table 4: County Board Redistricting and Board Race Competitiveness Measures, 1982-2009
Dependent Variable: Average County Board Election Margin (Republican Percentage of Two-Party Vote)

Champaign County		McLean County	
Independent Variable	Average Margin	Independent Variable	Average Margin
Constant	37.623 (7.699)	Constant	124.039 (34.778)
State Presidential Margin	-.638 (.455)	State Presidential Margin	3.070 (1.042)
State Gubernatorial Margin	-.471 (.097)	State Gubernatorial Margin	-.322 (.275)
Champaign Presidential Margin	.340 (.449)	McLean Presidential Margin	-2.618 (.967)
Champaign Gubernatorial Margin	1.167* (.170)	McLean Gubernatorial Margin	-.223 (.363)
Champaign Uncontested Races-Republican	.789*** (.165)	McLean Uncontested Races-Republican	.153 (.216)
Champaign Uncontested Races- Democratic	-1.175** (.368)	McLean Uncontested Races- Democratic	-.227 (.326)
Board Composition Change (Percent Democrats Elected)	.384 (.165)	Board Composition Change (Percent Democrats Elected)	-.291 (.300)
Champaign Incumbents Reelected	-.180 (.078)	McLean Incumbents Reelected	-.147 (.090)
Redistricting Year	-.309 (.912)	Redistricting Year	-.294 (1.676)
N	14		14
Adj. R-squared	.917		.512
F-Test	17.022***		2.516

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; * $p \leq .1$, ** $p \leq .05$, ***$p \leq .01$

The significance of the Champaign County model with average margin as the dependent variable causes it to stand out from among other models in the study. Problematically, most of this significance and explanatory power could come from the uncontested seats variables, which are among the only independent variables also significant in this model. This suggests that collinearity may also have occurred, discrediting the model. For example, in Champaign County, these variables most likely move together with the average margin of victory because there are fewer contested seats, so they pull the average more severely and the movement is thus more significant. The logic behind retaining the uncontested seat variables, however, was an attempt to control for local effects, wherein a board member may remain unchallenged for years because of his or her high name recognition in the community. Alternatively, in McLean County, even these measures do not have a significant correlation with the dependent variable. In addition to the uncontested races variables, the Champaign County gubernatorial margin achieves significance in this model, though the opposite is true for McLean County. The most plausible explanation here comes from Champaign's more competitive county make-up, which causes it to move more in line with the pattern of the state.

In this model, redistricting does not have a significant correlation with Republican electoral strength. Again, this insignificance possibly results from the small number of cases available here. Theoretically, with a larger number of cases, if a negative correlation were sustained, it would suggest that as time passes after a redistricting, the gap between Republican and Democratic electoral strength shrinks. In some ways, this could be opposed to the hypothesis that redistricting will directly impact board composition by altering the status quo of electoral districts, potentially improving prospects for change. On the other hand, redistricting could strengthen the majority party, causing its electoral strength to increase most when the time lag since redistricting is at its least, so this negative correlation could also have some theoretical justification.

With models that have so little statistical strength due to their small number of cases, the overall picture of these findings may be more important than the predictive success of the individual variables. The fact that greater explanatory power and more instances of significance occurred in Champaign County models than in McLean County models provides insight into redistricting theory on a broader level. McLean County's board has been demonstrated by Hypothesis 1 and Table 1 to be the much less competitive body. Interestingly, it shows less overall tendency to fit the basic tenants of redistricting theory in political science literature, such as expected redistricting effects on incumbency, electoral safety, and board composition. Perhaps redistricting's impact only arises in a more partisan political culture, where electoral competition provides more of an impetus in the redistricting process. Champaign County's models' comparatively high levels of explanatory value in some ways confirm the expectation that McLean County's redistricting issues are much less centered on partisan lines.

CONCLUSIONS

In spite of statistical significance issues that followed from the data's limited number of cases, the findings presented in this study fill a gap in the existing literature. Although an increased number of cases could provide more conclusive statistical evidence, the expectations of increased partisan strength in county board decision-making in McLean County have thus far failed to surface. The findings of this study are exploratory and suggest possible patterns in electoral politics of county redistricting and board members' decision making. For example, the number of roll call votes taken by the county board decreases dramatically within the sample time frame from 1982-2009. As the board increased its reliance on committee structure in government, its partisanship may not surface in roll call voting as reliably as in previous years. The discussion of voting cleavages within the McLean County Board would therefore necessitate further examination, although in general it would seem that increasing partisan competition has the most correlation with the cohesion of the Republican group of board members, and the urban-rural group cohesion patterns do not seem to vary in a specific direction over time. A final note on this segment of the study draws attention also to the significant bivariate correlation between board composition change and Democratic voting cohesion, which again may indicate that future increases partisan competition could continue to impact the strength of party as a mechanism for the formation of voting blocs on the county board. Because of Republican model strength and the seemingly contradictory picture of continuing urban-rural group cohesion, I also find it likely that the impact of partisan influence in McLean County may be increasing, but just as in the case of Southern realignment, may not yet be fully iterated in the legislative body of the county board.

The models comparing the impact of partisan competition on redistricting trends suggest that a more competitive partisan county government follows trends of electoral politics and redistricting more closely than a less partisan body. However, the redistricting process itself has minimal discernible impact in both communities, at least in terms of measurement used in this model. Although results were mixed within the models, the McLean County data's lack of significance in the relationships between standard measures of electoral competition and board composition, incumbency, and member security all suggest that units of government with strong two-party competition have more consistent patterns of electoral behavior. This broad finding may assist public administrators and managers in understanding the principles behind different redistricting schemes.

A more detailed look at redistricting impact or a comparison of redistricting processes from county to county could be valuable additions to future research. For instance, covering a broader range of counties would assist in minimizing the small N issues with the model and would add greater confidence to the findings of this exploratory study. Furthermore, measuring redistricting only in terms of time lapsed since the last redistricting process most likely limits the measure of the impact of this variable. One useful addition would be a measure that included the impact of the redistricting on different districts and their partisan makeup. This would require an in-depth examination of individual counties' redistricting processes year by

year. Again, the impact of having this improved measure would help scholars isolate the impact of redistricting at the county level.

Other measures could generate more explanatory power about the workings of partisan competition within county boards themselves. For instance, including committee votes and action would be relevant in a situation with more cases. Analyzing the use of party as a decision-making mechanism for board members through a content analysis of divisions on issues at board meetings could also be insightful. One additional possibility for measuring the strength of local party organizations would be the percentage of precinct committeemen chairs filled by parties.

This study strengthens the framework of the literature, applying it to a new level of government with the suggestion that bodies that are traditionally less partisan experience less well-defined impact of redistricting and national party-strength trends. In linking the study to the literature, Broach's ideas of institutional reinforcement of non-partisan divides parallel the research of this study.[20] Interestingly, the conclusions from these models also bolster his claim that redistricting effects apply more clearly in two-party systems than elsewhere. Even in the face of insignificant findings, this exploratory study has attempted to lay the groundwork for a fresh method of applying party development, competition, and redistricting theory to America's "dark continent." County government directly impacts the lives of citizens in tangible ways. The role of electoral competition in its operations, although it varies from county to county, is important for developing an understanding of politics in the most neglected level of government.

---

[20] Broach 1972.

WORKS CITED

Arrington, Theodore S. 2010. "Redistricting in the U.S.: A Review of Scholarship and Plan for Future Research." *The Forum* 8(2).

Basehart, Harry, and John Comer. 1991. "Partisan and Incumbent Effects in State Legislative Redistricting." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 16(1): 65-79.

Basinger, Scott J. and Michael J. Ensley. 2007. "Candidates, Campaigns, or Partisan Conditions? Reevaluating Strategic-Politicians Theory." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 32(3): 361-394.

Beck, Paul Allen. 1974. "Environment and Party: The Impact of Political and Demographic County Characteristics on Party Behavior." *The American Political Science Review* 68(3): 1229-1244.

Broach, Glen T. 1972. "A Comparative Dimensional Analysis of Partisan and Urban-Rural Voting in State Legislatures." *The Journal of Politics* 34(3): 905-921.

Cain, Bruce E. 1985. "Assessing the Partisan Effects of Redistricting." *The American Political Science Review* 79(2): 320-333.

Calvo, Ernesto. 2009. "The Competitive Road to Partisan Representation: Partisan Biases and Electoral Regime Change under Increasing Party Competition." *World Politics* 61(2): 254-295.

Champaign County, Illinois: Champaign County Clerk. Election Results. http://www.champaigncountyclerk.com/elections/results/index.html.

Eldersveld, Samuel H. and Hanes Walton Jr. 2000. *Political Parties in American Society* 2nd ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 124-147.

Frendreis, John P., James L. Gibson, and Laura L. Vertz. 1990. "The Electoral Relevance of Local Party Organizations." *The American Political Science Review* 84(1): 225-235.

Gelman, Andrew, and Gary King. 1994. "Enhancing Democracy Through Legislative Redistricting." *The American Political Science Review* 88(3): 541-559.

Gilbertson, Henry S. 1917. *The County: The 'Dark Continent' of American Politics.* New York: National Short Ballot Organization.

Jewell, Malcolm E. 1955. "Constitutional Provisions for State Legislative Apportionment." *The Western Political Quarterly* 8(2): 271-279.

Krehbiel, Keith. 2007. "Partisan Roll Rates in a Nonpartisan Legislature." *Journal of Law, Economics, & Organization* 23(1):1-23.

Mann, Thomas E. and Bruce E. Cain. Eds.2005. *Party Lines: Competition, Partisanship, and Congressional Redistricting.* Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.

MacManus, Susana. 1996. "County Boards, Partisanship, and Elections." In *The American County: Frontiers of Knowledge*, edited by Donald C. Menzel. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press.

McGillivray, Alice and Richard Scammon. *America Votes: Election Results by State*. Nos. 15-28. Elections Research Center. Congressional Quarterly Press, Washington, D.C.

McLean County, Illinois. McLean County Board Proceedings (1992-2009). www.mcleancountyil.gov/boardnotes (September 28, 2010).

McLean County, Illinois. McLean County Board Proceedings (1983-1991). McLean County Clerk's Office, Bloomington, Illinois.

McLean County, Illinois. Previous Election Results (2004-2009). www.mcleancountyil.gov/CountyCler/ PreviousElections.htm (September 28, 2010).

McLean County, Illinois. Previous Election Results (1980-2003). McLean County Clerk's Office, Bloomington, Illinois.

New State Ice Co. v. Liebmann, 285 U.S. 262 (1932) (dissenting opinion).

Polsby, Nelson W. 2004. *How Congress Evolves: Social Bases of Institutional Change*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Robeck, Bruce W. 1970. "Urban-Rural and Regional Voting Patterns in the California Senate before and after Reapportionment." *The Western Political Quarterly* 23(4): 785-794.

Shafer, Byron E., and Richard Johnston. 2006. "The Long Good-Bye of the Good Old Boys: Structure and Agency in the Partisan Reconstruction of the American South." *Conference Papers -- Southern Political Science Association*: 1-34.

Shotts, Kenneth W. 2001. "The Effect of Majority-Minority Mandates on Partisan Gerrymandering." *American Journal of Political Science*. 45(1): 120-135.

Squire, Peverill. 1995. "The Partisan Consequences of Congressional Redistricting." *American Politics Quarterly* 23(2): 229-240.

Sundquist, James L. 1983. *Dynamics of the Party System: Alignment and Realignment of Political Parties in the United States*. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution.

Wright, Gerald C. and Brian F. Schaffner. 2002. "The Influence of Party: Evidence from the State Legislatures." *The American Political Science Review* 96(2): 367-379.