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The Political Nor'easter of 1992: A Northeastern USA Critical Election?

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Abstract

Nor'easters are storms that tend to hit New England and the Mid-Atlantic states. The political equivalent of one struck region in 1992, as Democrats ended years of Republican dominance of the Northeast by sweeping the region in the Electoral College. Moreover, after Bill Clinton's victory, the party has gone on to win all 11 states in the region in each election except for two states (New Hampshire in 2000 and Pennsylvania in 2016), a success rate in excess of 95%, after barely winning 20% of the Northeastern states in the 1970s and 1980s. The 1992 election also contains the two key elements of a critical election: a political realignment and durability in the new coalition, as well as other factors that political scientists have argued contribute to a critical election: a third party challenge, and high voting turnout. Three explanations for this turnaround are evaluated: economics, macropartisanship, and migration. Data is evaluated at the regional, state and substate level to determine whether these explanations account for this realignment, as well as which groups changed sides that generated the Northeast electoral shift.

A “Nor’easter” is a storm that combines a low pressure system along the East Coast of the United States with strong winds from the Atlantic Ocean, often striking the New England region and nearby states (Donegan 2017). The mixture of cold air from land and warm air from the sea can often have catastrophic results for the region. One deadly Nor’easter that struck the area in the Fall of 1991 was featured in the 1997 book and 2000 movie *The Perfect Storm* (Junger 1997). Another Nor’easter two years later in March of 1993 led to record snowfalls, floods and tornados, leading to hundreds of deaths, billions of dollars of damage, and the closure of the Eastern Seaboard. This event was event dubbed “The Storm of the Century” (Dove 2012).

Like a Nor’easter, the 1992 election hit New England and the Mid-Atlantic like a political storm, shifting states from the Republican column to the Democratic side in the Electoral College. In fact, Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton won all 11 Northeastern states in 1992, while the Democratic Party nominee, Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis, managed to take only three states in the area just four years earlier, despite his ties to the region. In 1984, Democratic candidate Walter Mondale, with New York Congresswoman Geraldine Ferraro on the ticket, was shut out of the Northeast.

Some of these states had voted Republican for decades, even centuries. Connecticut and Maine had not voted Democrat since 1968. New Hampshire had only voted for the Democratic nominee just once since 1948. And Vermont had chosen the Democratic nominee just once since 1856. Yet all 11 Northeastern states not only voted for Clinton in 1992, but also voted Democratic in every election since then, from 1992 to 2012. The exception was New Hampshire in 2000, when Bush won it by a hair (Scala 2018). Only one Northeastern state went Republican in 2016. “The East has replaced the South as the Democrats’ cornerstone” (*CQ Almanac* 1997).

Gelman (2014) adds that Democrats winning the Northeast is a relatively recent phenomenon, only occurring in the last 30 years.

This is the hallmark of a “critical election,” identified by V. O. Key as an electoral realignment, where party fortunes are changed by a key group (or groups) switching sides. And this “Nor’easter” certainly impacted the presidential contest nationwide. Democrats went from only prevailing in one presidential election between 1968 and 1988 to winning the popular vote in 6 of 7 subsequent contests, and a majority of elections in the Electoral College, from 1992-2016. Such an outcome seemed unthinkable, even in 1988 (Galston and Kamarck 1989).

Despite the excitement generated by the study of critical elections, the field has no shortage of critics, whose negative reviews led scholars to miss this shift of the Northeast to the Democratic Party (Bullock, Hoffman and Gaddie 2006). Those who admit such a change occurred tend to believe that the transition was perhaps a “secular realignment,” or a more gradual pace of change for the region. But this ignores the data showing Republicans won twice as many Northeastern states in the aftermath of the New Deal, from 1948 through 1988.² This article takes on the critics, as well as supporters, of critical elections, covering the debates over criteria used to classify such cases, to see if the 1992 ballot box contest really qualifies as one. It will examine three hypotheses for the possible realignment: economics, macropartisanship, and migration explanations. Data for the analysis will come from the region, the states, and even the counties in some cases within the Northeast, to determine why this event started so abruptly, and persisted for so long.

Criteria for Critical Elections

Critical elections were once an exciting field of research in American politics. The term came into existence with the work of V. O. Key, Jr. (1955) who wrote, “A concept of critical

elections has been developed to cover a type of election in which there occurs a sharp and durable electoral realignment between parties.” He found that in certain “critical elections,” these contests had the capacity to shape many future ballot box battles, guaranteeing one party’s relative dominance of the system so that in “subsequent elections, voters shift within outlines of broad divisions fixed,” from that pivotal contest. “Whatever the mechanism of its maintenance, the durability of the realignment is impressive (Key 1955, 7).”

Key’s article focused on the 1896 election (1955, 12-13), as well as the electoral contests around the time frame of 1928 and 1932 (1955, 4-6). His data came from New England towns. For Key, the transition coming from party realignment was the most important element, as well as its sustained impact across future elections.

Expanding upon Key’s work, Walter Dean Burnham called critical elections the “fundamental turning points in the course of American electoral politics (Burnham 1970, 1).” These contests, “short-lived but intense disruption of traditional voting patterns, are characterized by intense party nomination battles” and an upheaval of “the rules of the game” and “heavy voter participation for the time” (Burnham, 1970, 7-8).

Eras of critical realignment are marked by short, sharp reorganizations of the mass coalitional bases of the major parties which occur at periodic intervals on the national level; are often preceded by major third-party revolts which reveal the incapacity of “politics as usual” to integrate, much less aggregate, emergent political demand; are closely associated with abnormal stress in the socioeconomic system; are marked by ideological polarizations and issue-distances between the major parties which are exceptionally large by normal standard; and have durable consequences as constituent acts which determine the

outer boundaries of policy in general, though not necessarily policies in detail (Burnham 1970, 10).

Realignment scholars like Burnham, have tended to focus on four factors that make up a critical election. These are (1) timing, (2) third parties, (3) turnout, and (4) transition. Many of these analysts see critical elections as occurring within a certain time frame, characterized by strong third party candidates, high percentages of the public voting, and the shift of groups or regions that alter the balance of power between political parties, giving one side an advantage that persists through several subsequent contests.

Those who have studied critical elections tend to find many of these factors associated with these realignments. But as Mayhew (2002) has pointed out, there are cases that don't perfectly fit this broad mold. In his critique, he claims that there are cases where third parties have done well, or turnout has been high, in elections that aren't part of the "critical elections canon." He then argues that 1876, 1912 and 1948 should be considered as cases; 1876 had one of the highest turnouts, and is sometimes credited with ending Reconstruction (Shaw et. al. 2019). Furthermore, the 1912 election as well as 1948 election had strong third party showings.

Mayhew (2002, 32) concludes that there have been no critical elections since 1932, so that would invalidate the 1948 case that he proposes. Moreover, he also criticizes the 1932 election as a case for lacking a high turnout (Mayhew 2002, 32). He also claims that no critical elections have occurred recently because split-ticket voting and "deideologization" have undermined the party system.

Mayhew's critique has other problems. He is unsure about the 1932 election, establishing it as a case, while also undermining it with the turnout argument. He is actually correct about 1932 being a critical election, because evidence shows that 1932 was a stronger

turnout election than critics claim. The Voting Age Population percentage for turnout,³ as well as the Voting Efficiency Population percentage for turnout,⁴ show that 1928 and 1932 (which had identical numbers) had increased over prior years. The Northeastern area showed a very strong electoral turnout in 1932 (CQ Researcher 1936). Southern states, where the electoral disparity favored the Democrats so strongly that it undermined one's confidence in playing a role in the outcome, had terrible turnout numbers. Moreover, several states had measures designed to undermine turnout in 1932, in the South and in the North. Unemployed residents in Maine who sought municipal welfare within 90 days before the election became ineligible to vote (Ludwig 1964). Pennsylvania had one of the most stringent limits on registration with all kinds of narrow registration requirements to disenfranchise voters in 1932 (involving tax assessment and tax collection), in addition to Philadelphia's poll tax, a heavier than usual burden for voters during the Great Depression than four years earlier (Ludwig 1964). Texas' infamous "White Primary" was an attempt to circumvent Supreme Court rulings against the disenfranchisement of black voters (Katz 2004). In this election, Pennsylvania experienced one of the biggest declines in voting in 1932 (Ludwig 1964), while Texas and other Southern states were among the states with low voter registration and turnout in 1932. Even those who claim that 1928 and 1932 are relatively similar in turnout must account for the fact that the 1930 mid-term voting rate of 33.7 percent was one of the lowest turnout rates for such a cycle in its time period (Ragsdale 1998).

Mayhew contributes to the literature by focusing on what is really "canon" for critical elections, not just cases but for factors associated with their presence. Correctly noting how some of Burnham's factors are not always present, perhaps elements such as third parties and turnouts should not be required for the presence of a critical election. But transitions are the hallmark of an electoral realignment, and are a necessary condition of critical elections. It's the

same for the timing. Though Key may not use the exact words, his mandate that shifts be made durable cannot be assessed unless they persist for a given time period.

This is why Mayhew's cases of 1876, 1912 and 1948 cannot be considered critical elections. Each lacks the durable length of time necessary to show the group alignments endure for some period of time within the party structure. Electoral setbacks are already experienced within four years (1948) and eight years (1876, 1912) with narrow wins following the "critical" election. Given the importance Mayhew places on Key's work, these arguments cannot be overlooked.

This does not mean that third parties and turnout do not play a contributing role. They may not be necessary conditions for the presence of a critical election, but they help facilitate the transition. Some third parties can wrench a group away from its traditional voting pattern, leading voters to consider the new alternative, and then perhaps the rival party if it has moved in the direction of the new party. Turnout can be a reflection of greater interest in the electoral contest, or because the voters want change. In the latter case, the expanded electorate is ripe for a political shift, as their increased likelihood of voting could reflect dissatisfaction with the status quo. But in other cases, third parties have ephemeral support or turnout is more about hype than change. This is why both can be called contributing factors.

Another Mayhew contribution is the encouragement to break the rigidity of the old critical elections mold that may have strait-jacketed the study. One way this could be done is to go beyond the demands for national variation to capture the strength of regional variation, as Bullock, Hoffman and Gaddie (2006) have done in their research.⁵ By focusing on partisan preferences instead of party identification, they have uncovered a series of regional trends,

including the collapse of the GOP in the Northeast, in their study of legislative critical elections (Bullock, Hoffman and Gaddie 2006, 494).⁶

Does 1992 Qualify as a Critical Election? If So, Why Did It Occur?

We have identified several factors which make up a critical election. Two conditions are necessary for critical elections, involving (1) a transition of one group from a political party to another, which lasts (2) a period of time, to show that the transition has a degree of durability. Critical elections may have other contributing factors, not necessary conditions, but those that facilitate the realignment and its resilience. Critical elections may also be characterized as (3) having a strong third party running for office, and (4) experiencing a high electoral turnout compared to other preceding elections (or in some cases, subsequent contests).

The 1992 election has the presence of all four factors, which include necessary conditions and contributing circumstances. The transition took place as the Northeast states shifted from giving only 21.8 percent of their Electoral College votes from 1972 to 1988 to awarding 97.4 percent of their Electoral College for the Democrats from 1992 to 2016.

As for the presence of a third party, independent candidate H. Ross Perot had the second highest share of the popular vote in the 1990s, and one of the strongest in American electoral history (Ladd 1993). The turnout for the 1992 election was stronger than prior cases, and set the stage for a rebound in voting, as the era surrounding the Great Depression and New Deal did (Ragsdale 1998). The 1992 contest ended a long slow decline in turnout from the late 1960s, jumping up from its 1988 numbers. Moreover, the Voting Eligible Population numbers show that the turnout may have been stronger than expected, a trend that continued in subsequent elections.⁷

And the timing of the 1992 contest shows 24 years before and afterwards, long enough to show the durability of the transition. This trend has persisted through the 2016 contest, and could continue for more years, if the Democrats hold their Northeastern advantage.

This transition has not occurred in a bubble. This swing in Northeastern states from Republican to Democrat has had an impact on national politics as well. Buoyed by this transition, Democratic Party nominees have fared better than before the early 1990s. After losing five of six contests from 1968 through 1988, the party rebounded to win a majority of races, as well as six of the last seven popular vote contests, a regional shift that has had national implications.

But why did the change occur, and so suddenly? Did a group shift its allegiance from one party to another? There are several hypotheses to be tested on what accounted for this abrupt partisan shift in the Northeast. In addition to exploring the literature for answers, I will analyze broader regional trends, as well as state maps and substate data from counties to determine which of the explanations best apply, or contribute to our understanding of the transition in any way.

Economic Voting

“Are you better off than you were four years ago?” This question, often linked to Ronald Reagan, was actually coined by Paul Simmons, assistant to successful Illinois gubernatorial candidate “Big Jim” Thompson in 1976 (Burrell 2003). But Reagan was able to use this line to great effect, first against President Jimmy Carter when the economy was suffering from hyperinflation and a recession in 1980, as well as four years later against Democratic nominee Walter Mondale when the economy appeared to have recovered (Reagan 1986).

In scholarly terms, this is known as retrospective voting, where voters pick their candidates based upon economic performance, rewarding presidents for good economic times, and punishing them for bad ones (Campbell, Dettrey and Yin 2010). Ansolabehere, Rodden and Snyder (2006) find that voters factor in economics when determining their choice. Fair (1996) adds that voters will not only evaluate prior economic performances, but who may also provide the best expected utility for them in the future.

Such support will likely even cut across party labels, as “Reagan Democrats” were known to support the GOP president for good economic times, just Barack Obama may have received votes from Republicans upset about the recession at the end of the George W. Bush presidency because of the poor economic performance of the GOP.

In fact, evidence will show that there was an economic recession before the 1992 election. Additionally, while this recession may not be as famous as the Great Depression or the Great Recession, the evidence will reveal that this recession in the early 1990s was worse for the Northeast than either its strong early 1980s counterpart, or even the Great Recession itself, for the region.

The National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) (1992) confirmed that a recession occurred in the 1990s, with the peak of economic activity being July 1990 and the trough officially occurring in March of 1991. Additionally, the real personal income trough was charted at November of 1991 and the employment trough happening after that, in January of 1992.

Many may not know much about this recession, and those that are aware of it consider the case to be a mild one. But that’s not the case for the Northeast United States. “By most economic measures, the 1990-1991 downturn was mild compared to previous contractions... Yet several factors united to this recession and its aftermath made its impact on the U.S. workforce

quite severe” (Gardner 1994). And the effects were especially damaging to the Northeast United States.

Dzialo, Shank and Smith (1993, 32) reveal that the 1990-91 recession was a bicoastal affair. In addition to affecting the Pacific states, this recession began in New England, moving to the Mid-Atlantic States. “New England States led the nation into recession,” the authors write. The region faced the most severe job losses after the rapid construction, hi-tech manufacturing, services and finance boom of the prior decade. The collapse of the construction industry spread to trade, finance, insurance, and real estate (Dzialo, Shank and Smith 1993, 34).

This recession was unique in that it pummeled the service industry, unlike earlier recessions which hit manufacturing (Dzialo, Shank and Smith 1993, 35 and 38). While economists found that other areas of the United States were less affected, the New England labor market bottomed out in 1991. The recession next visited the Mid-Atlantic in 1992 (Dzialo, Shank and Smith 1993, 37).

Though the trough may have come in 1991 or early 1992, the economic pain continued. Nardone et.al. (1993, 3-4) found that unemployment increased in 1992 over its 1991 numbers, as real GDP lagged from earlier years. The Index of Consumer Confidence was slow in its recovery. Real personal income was flat, as adult and teen unemployment grew and earnings could not surpass inflation (Nardone et al. 1993, 4, 10 and 12).

Those layoffs hit certain Northeast industries and workers particularly hard, as white collar workers from finance, insurance and real estate hit the unemployment line, or confronted the real possibility of joining them (Gardner 1994, 3). Terms like “discouraged workers,” and “involuntary part-time” status, as well as “permanent job losses” emerged during this time (Gardner 1994, 10). This economic slump was particularly painful for women workers, the first

recession to affect them so severely (Gardner 1994, 7). For teens, unemployment rates were above 20 percent for this time frame (Gardner 1994, 8). I will test to see if these groups would alter their political preferences later in this paper.

Though the labor market was recovering in 1993, the largest employment gains were in the South and Midwest, not the Northeast (Gardner, Hipple and Nardone 1994, 8). Defense cutbacks, export slumps, and poor consumer demand along with skittish employers still kept the region’s unemployment numbers high (Gardner, Hipple and Nardone 1994, 3) while the “underemployed,” and partially employed numbers were on the rise (Gardner, Hipple and Nardone 1994, 11), leading to the phrase “jobless recovery” (Burton 1998).

Figure 1: Employment in the Boston, Cambridge, Newton MA Region, 1990-2018 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2018a)

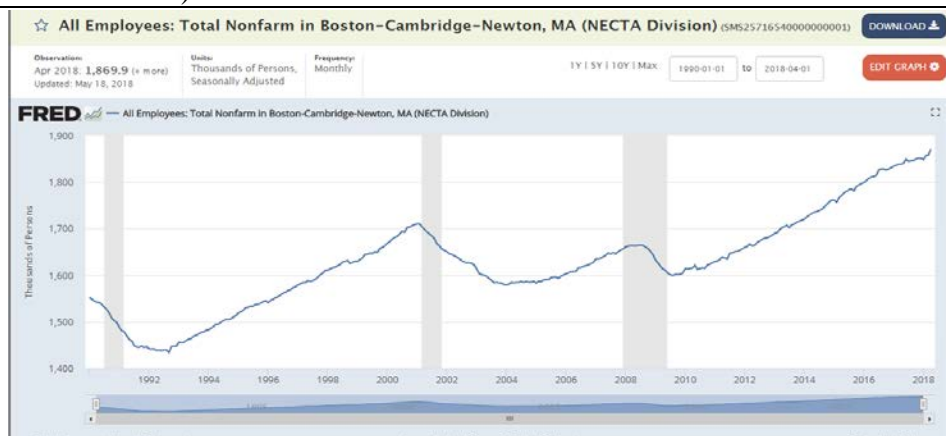


Figure 2: Employment in New York City, Newark, Jersey City and Pennsylvania MSA, 1990-2018 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2018b)



Klein (2016) compares the recession of 1990-1991 to the Great Recession, finding the former case much worse for the Northeast, as this downturn was concentrated in New England and the Mid-Atlantic. He discovered the Great Recession to be sharper but the post-crisis gains to be better than the early 1990s. For Boston and the New York Metro Area (including New Jersey and Connecticut), for example (see Figures 1 and 2), it took a lot longer for the economy to recover (Klein 2016). It was a similar story for smaller areas like Northern Delaware (see Figure 3). “It’s wrong to dismiss the early 1990s recession—the first ‘jobless recovery’ as mild, even if booms in certain parts of the country masked depressions elsewhere” (Klein 2016). Klein credits this economic recession for giving rise to the insurgency campaigns of Pat Buchanan and H. Ross Perot, and Bill Clinton’s victory in 1992 (Klein 2016).

Figure 3: Unemployment Rates in New Castle County, Delaware (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2018c).



Macropartisanship

MacKuen, Erikson and Stimson (1989) used the term “macropartisanship” to describe people changing their party affiliation to respond to events such as presidential popularity, political scandals, or wars. For example, FDR’s New Deal may have swung a number of people toward the Democratic Party, the way the Reagan Revolution convinced many Americans to join the GOP. One can see why macropartisanship would be tied to critical elections, given that party

switching might be related to these realigning events. According to this view, voters will switch rapidly in party identification or registration in response to these events.

It is important to note that this is different from one candidate defeating another because of a recession, or prevailing due to good economic times. In macropartisanship, people would not just vote for the candidate, but also switch their partisan allegiance because of that economic event. For a macropartisan argument to occur, voters would not just cast their ballots against Herbert Hoover in 1932 as a result of the Great Depression. They would also abandon the Republican Party as well, in party identification, registration, support for down-ticket races, and perhaps future candidates as well, shifting over to the Democrats.

Macropartisanship lays a strong claim to explaining the 1992 critical election because supporters claim Clinton's win rebounded party strength. Erickson, MacKuen and Stimson (2008, 1) contend that Clinton's economic success restored the party fortunes for the Democrats, though they also find that his personal actions later wiped out those gains in his second term. By the 2008 election, Democratic Party power returned to pre-Reagan Revolution numbers (Erickson, MacKuen and Stimson 2008, 1), a finding that Winneg and Hall Jamieson (2010) also reach, as party identification numbers appear to follow the fortunes of the party itself. They echo Fiorina (1981) who points out that party identification is always updated in evaluations of party performance.

Franklin (1992, 297) illuminates the macropartisanship debate between the revisionist view that argues that party identification is responsive to other political factors. It is opposed by the traditionalist view where party identification involves a lot of loyalty, resistant to external factors. He rejects the null hypothesis that issue evaluations have no effect on party identification (Franklin 1992, 305). "While parents set the stage, demonstrating the importance

of socialization, adjustment continues throughout all the first 16 years out of the nest,” contends Franklin (1992, 308).

Dyck, Johnson and Wasson (2012, 452) find that “state-level factors potentially affect national politics and, although this story is Californian, these findings are potentially exportable to other states undergoing rapid demographic changes, especially those where the ballot initiative is used.” Similarly, Korey and Lascher (2006) compare the state trends to the national trends (again, in California). They find that a series of key events, ballot initiatives like Proposition 187, Proposition 209 and Proposition 227 (Korey and Lascher 2006) are linked to macropartisanship. In other work of theirs, they discover that few voters really decline to provide partisanship responses (Korey and Lascher 2009).

Migration

This argument contends that this shift occurred due to migration patterns. Made famous by Bill Bishop and Robert G. Cushing’s book *The Big Sort*, the authors contend that people are increasingly moving to places where there are like-minded people present, or staying with people with similar beliefs (2008, 6). It’s not a conscious decision that people who might vote Democrat move to blue states and liberal locales. But they might move to a place where there are good coffee shops, or the public schools are considered first-rate, just as conservatives might relocate to places with lax gun laws or strong evangelical churches. These factors, correlated with behavior of their respective parties, have the effect of clumping liberals with other liberals, and conservatives with fellow conservatives. “When people move, they also make choices about who their neighbors will be....Those are now political decisions...having a profound effect upon our nation’s public life.” (Bishop and Cushing 2008, 5).

This is why Bishop and his co-author Robert G. Cushing find the number of uncompetitive counties increasing between 1976 and 2004. “In 1976, less than a quarter of Americans lived in places where the presidential election was a landslide. By 2004, nearly half of all voters lived in landslide counties (Bishop and Cushing 2008, 6).” Landslide counties, or those won by one party by more than 20 percentage points, are becoming politically homogenous, according to Bishop and Cushing (2008). “This wasn’t an increase in political partisanship, but a more self-perpetuating, self-reinforcing social division. The like-minded neighborhood supported the like-minded church, confirming the image and beliefs of the tribe (Bishop and Cushing 2008, 6).”

These two authors even make the case that their factors may have influenced other events in the early 1990s. “This trend—one that was particularly strong in the 1990s—had escaped the attention of those who study and write about politics (Bishop and Cushing 2008, 11).” However, little of the book is connected to the Northeast, a region that seems to have been by-passed in interest for the authors. One of the only exceptions is to document how whites fled Pittsburgh, Buffalo, Providence, Jersey City and Newark, as well as New York and Philadelphia, while Blacks have moved to Philadelphia, Boston and New York (Bishop and Cushing 2008, 132-33). Nor do they write about the 1992 election. One of their only political examples from the Northeast notes cases of straight ticket voting being on the rise, where popular GOP Senator Lincoln Chafee was ousted in Rhode Island and New Hampshire Republicans were ousted in straight ticket voting, all events that occurred in the 2006 election that went well for Democrats (Bishop and Cushing 2008, 272-73).

Bishop and Cushing’s theory is easy to grasp, and the landslide county evidence sounds pretty solid...until one looks at the number of landslide counties before 1976. Of course we are

supposed to remove “landslide elections” of 1964 and 1972, according to the authors’ logic. But in the closely contested election of 1968, there were 37.2 percent landslide counties. In 1988, there were 41.7 percent of counties considered landslide counties. Given that no election showed less than 30 percent of all counties being landslides since 1948, the 26.8 percent number from the 1976 election seems more like an outlier, and less like the starting point of an upward trend.

Bishop and Cushing’s argument is also disputed by scholars. Abrams and Fiorina (2012) challenge the thesis of *The Big Sort*, as they find political segregation is lower than it was a generation ago. When looking at voter registration, there are fewer landslide counties. Counties are actually more politically heterogeneous than they are homogeneous. Moreover, they cite data from Robert Putnam’s *Bowling Alone* book (2000) that claims Americans are less likely to know their neighbors. How, then, can one “stifle” dissent in the neighborhood if one does not know what the other residents are thinking?

Enten and Silver (2014) also find interstate migration to be down since the 1980s. They agree that blue states are getting bluer, and that attitudes are hardening, but they do not attribute the results to migration or events like “the Blue State Diaspora,” (Gebeloff and Leonhardt 2014) where liberals move from Democratic Party states to Republican Party states to make them bluer.

Another popular migration theory is that residents from high tax areas, like the Northeast, will flee to low tax areas, like the South or elsewhere (Laffer and Moore 2018). But Frank (2018) finds evidence against this, showing that few millionaires move for tax purposes. Disputing a California Republican state legislator’s claim that nothing is more flexible than a millionaire, Frank cites work from Young et al. (2014). They conduct the most comprehensive analysis of millionaires (as opposed to other studies which narrow subsets like athletes, who can be traded to other locations, confounding these analyses). Young et al. (2014) find that non-

millionaires are more likely to move than millionaires, as the latter are “embedded elites,” reliant on family ties, personal ties, and business ties that make them more reluctant to pack up and head for, say, some Prairie state. Millionaires already have a fortune, and do not need to move elsewhere to seek it, despite a few high profile cases of some who tout their relocation for political purposes (Frank 2018).

Research Design

Economics

Sources have already showed that the New England and Mid-Atlantic states suffered from the economic recession of 1990-1991; the effects extended into 1992 and beyond. But did the voters agree with this assessment? To test this, I look at the CNN exit polls from the 1992 election, looking at each Northeastern state’s response to whether they felt the economy had improved since 1988, or was worse than four years ago. I also look at the percentage of voters in the exit polls from Northeastern states who rate the economy as “poor.” These Northeastern states include Connecticut (CT), Delaware (DE), Maine (ME), Maryland (MD), Massachusetts (MA), New Hampshire (NH), New Jersey (NJ), New York (NY), Pennsylvania (PA), Rhode Island (RI), and Vermont (VT).

It is also helpful to have something to compare to the Northeastern states in their evaluations of the economy. Therefore, I compiled a list of 11 non-Northeastern states, from around the country, matching each Northeastern state within an Electoral College vote or two at most. This second sample includes South Carolina (SC), Alaska (AK), New Mexico (NM), Missouri (MO), Georgia (GA), Wyoming (WY), Indiana (IN), Texas (TX), Ohio (OH), Idaho (ID) and South Dakota (SD). In tables comparing the two regions, these are lined up by Electoral College vote size for easier comparisons.⁸ This non-Northeastern sample is also

geographically diverse as well as relatively diverse in their support for Democrats and Republicans in 1992.

To evaluate whether voters believe the economy had recovered or not in the Northeast, I look at the CNN Exit Polls from the 1996 election as well, comparing their evaluation of whether things had improved or not.

Finally, I incorporate data from *The New York Times* exit polls to see whether the groups identified in the economic recession literature as having suffered from the early 1990s downturn switched their allegiance to the Democratic Party candidate, and subsequent nominees.

Macropartisanship

To assess whether the macropartisanship argument is supported, I also look at responses by voters in the CNN exit polls of 1992 and 1996. The same 11 Northeastern states, as well as sample of 11 non-Northeastern states are compared for their responses to questions about what the voter considers himself or herself (Democrat, Republican, Independent) as well as comparing Democratic Party membership to voting behavior for candidate Bill Clinton (D-Arkansas). Support for the Republican Party is also assessed. I also compare party membership over time in the Northeast, using data from *Washington Post* polls on party identification.

Additionally, I conduct a county-level analysis of states like Delaware to determine if party registration is at least somewhat matching the vote totals achieved by Democratic, Republican and Independent candidates.

Migration

Assessing whether migration patterns explain the big changes of 1992 requires multiple methods. First, experts on the subject of states are needed to assess when the population shifts occurred and if they had any political effect. In addition to looking at state-level data on whether

states are experiencing migration, and how such moves might have had a political impact, I also look at county-level data (Deming 1996, Perry 2006, U.S Census Bureau 2007) on which counties are experiencing in-flows or out-flows, from Maine and Vermont to Connecticut, Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

Results

Economics

Table 1: CNN Exit Polls Compare Northeastern Voter Evaluations Of The Economy In 1992 As Compared To The Economy In 1988.

	Better Than 1988	Worse Than 1988
CT	20%	44%
DE	19%	34%
ME	17%	42%
MD	26%	39%
MA	20%	41%
NH	17%	42%
NJ	23%	35%
NY	19%	43%
PA	25%	42%
RI	12%	57%
VT	18%	40%
	19.63636%	41.72727%

$t = -10.23, p < .0001$

Arguments that claim the Northeast suffered greatly during the recession of 1990-1991 and thereafter are generally supported by the CNN exit poll data for each state from the 1992 election. An average of 19 percent of residents from the Northeastern states thought the economy was better than it was in 1988, while more than 41 percent on average thought the economy had worsened over the last four years (see Table 1).⁹ This 22 point swing in evaluations of the economy was also statistically significant.

To establish whether the economic recession was worse than other regions, I needed to compare voter views of the recession to those of other states. My sample of data from eleven

non-Northeastern states reveals that an average of 26.91% rated the U.S. economy better in 1992 than in 1988. This sample of non-Northeastern states also had 32.55% of voters considering the 1992 economy as worse than in 1988. That 5.64 percentage point gap was far less than the 22-point gap between New England and Mid-Atlantic states in their retrospective evaluation of the economy.

Table 2: CNN Exit Polls Compare Northeastern Voter Evaluations Of The Economy From 1988 To 1992 As Compared To A Sample Of Non-Northeastern Voters.

Region	Poll Question	Mean Response	Mean Difference & T-Statistic
Northeastern	Better Than 1988	19.64%	Mean Δ = 7.27%
Non-Northeastern	Better Than 1988	26.91%	t = -4.51, p <.0001
Non-Northeastern	Better Than 1988	26.91%	Mean Δ = 5.64%
Non-Northeastern	Worse Than 1988	32.55%	t = -4.8, p <.0001
Northeastern	Worse Than 1988	41.73%	Mean Δ = 9.2%
Non-Northeastern	Worse Than 1988	32.55%	t = 4.95, p <.0001

When comparing the two samples directly, I find that fewer Northeastern state voters rated the economic past as better than the present. Moreover, Northeastern voters were more likely to find things had worsened over the years than voters from other states (see Table 2).

All of the Northeastern states in the study had voters rating the current economy as not good or poor, and not just in comparison to four years ago. As you can see in Table 3, the Northeastern states rated the economy as poor (with no more than 1% rating it as excellent and little more than 10% rating it as good). This was nearly ten percentage points higher than the results from voters in non-Northern states in exit polls.

Table 3: CNN Exit Polls Compare Northeastern Voter Evaluations Of The Economy In 1992 (Poor), As Compared To A Sample Of Non-Northeastern Voters.

	Poor Economy 1992		Poor Economy 1992
CT	40%	SC	29%
DE	30%	AK	25%
ME	45%	NM	27%
MD	35%	MO	33%
MA	44%	GA	28%
NH	42%	WY	29%
NJ	32%	IN	28%
NY	38%	TX	29%
PA	34%	OH	29%
RI	35%	ID	29%
VT	37%	SD	26%
	37.45455%		28.36364%

t = 5.71, p < .001

In addition to the results being statistically significant (see Table 3), they also show New England state voters as feeling the brunt of the recession more than the Mid-Atlantic states, as the economists had hypothesized.

Table 4: CNN Exit Polls Compare Northeastern Voter Evaluations Of The Economy In 1992, Rating The Economy As Either Not Good Or Poor.

	Economy Not Good 1992	Poor Economy 1992	Total
CT	45%	40%	85%
DE	52%	30%	82%
ME	43%	45%	88%
MD	49%	35%	84%
MA	45%	44%	89%
NH	46%	42%	88%
NJ	53%	32%	85%
NY	46%	38%	84%
PA	48%	34%	82%
RI	54%	35%	89%
VT	49%	37%	86%
	48.18182%	37.45455%	85.63636%

In case one is wondering whether only a third of Northeasterners had a rough economic time, I included another table showing the results of voters in 11 states from Maine to Maryland, rating the economic as “not good” or “poor.” More than 85% of Northeast voters sampled felt

upset about the economy (see Table 4). Democrats were quick to use this data against the Bush Administration to win in 1992 after losing so many elections, nationwide and in the Northeast.

Table 5: CNN Exit Polls Compare Northeastern Voter Evaluations Of The Economy In 1996 As Compared To The Economy In 1982.

Better Than 1988		Better Than 1992	
CT	20%	CT	32%
DE	19%	DE	40%
ME	17%	ME	31%
MD	26%	MD	38%
MA	20%	MA	39%
NH	17%	NH	37%
NJ	23%	NJ	35%
NY	19%	NY	30%
PA	25%	PA	33%
RI	12%	RI	37%
VT	18%	VT	32%
19.63636%		34.90909%	

$t = -9.62, p < .001$

Finally, I ran an additional test on retrospective voting and the economy. Comparing evaluations of the economy between 1988 and 1992 to results from 1992 to 1996 in Table 5, we can see that Northeastern voters had felt the economy had improved under the Clinton Administration, in comparisons of CNN exit polls from 1992 and 1996.

In addition, I ran a separate test of all Northeastern states, comparing the percentage which regarded the economy as poor in 1992, as well as those regarding the economy as poor in 1996. Unfortunately, CNN did not include the states of Delaware, Maryland, Rhode Island, and Vermont in the 1996 in this question of how the economy was doing in 1996. Nevertheless, the number of voters from these Northeastern states that rated the economy as poor was only 7.85 percent, down nearly 30 percentage points from their 1992 numbers.¹⁰

Typically, analyses of critical elections note the swing of a group from one political party to the other. “Realignment is not necessarily a change in the actual partisan identification of individuals, but of the composition of partisan preferences and choices made by the electorate in

constituencies or groups” (Bullock, Hoffman and Gaddie 2006, 497). The literature on the economic recession of the early 1990s indicated that the recession was particularly harsh for several groups: (1) the Northeast,¹¹ (2) women,¹² and (3) younger workers.¹³ As data from *The New York Times* exit polls (“National Exit Polls” 2008) show, each of these groups realigned with the Democratic Party during the 1992 election, more than nearly every other group analyzed by the *Times* (see Table 6).¹⁴ Other groups showed no party switch, or only a brief change in support for one party, but nothing durable past 1-2 elections.

Table 6: New York Times Exit Polls Analyze How All Northeastern Voters, Northeastern White Voters, Women, 18-29 Year Olds, And First-Time Voters Switched From The GOP To Democrats, 1972-2008.

Northeast	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008
Democrat	39	51	42	47	49	47	55	56	55	59
Republican	59	47	47	53	50	35	34	39	43	40
Independent			9			18	9	3		
Northeast Whites	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008
Democrat	34	49	38	42	45	44	51	52	50	52
Republican	65	50	52	57	54	36	37	44	49	46
Independent			10			19	19	4		
Women	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008
Democrat	37	50	45	44	49	45	54	54	51	56
Republican	61	48	47	56	50	37	38	43	48	43
Independent			7			17	7	2		
18-29 Age	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008
Democrat	46	51	44	40	47	43	53	48	54	66
Republican	52	47	43	59	52	34	34	46	45	32
Independent			11			22	10	5		
1st Time Voters	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008
Democrat				36	47	46	54	52	53	69
Republican				61	51	32	34	43	45	30
Independent						22	11	4		

This evidence from all of the tests shows not only why Northeastern voters abandoned the Republican Party in 1992, but also why they stayed with the Democrats thereafter. This applies not only to the region, but groups like women and younger voters as well. Both the mild

economic recession leading into the beginning of the new century, coupled with the Great Recession of 2007-2009 (18 months) at the end of the George W. Bush presidency had Northeasterners convinced that the Democrats had the better answer, much more than the non-Northeastern states from the Midwest, South, and West of the United States of America, where support for the Democrats was not as uniform.

Macropartisanship

For macropartisanship to matter, the results should show two things. Voters should be updating their support for a political party (and not just a candidate) in response to events, like excitement over a candidate, or a reaction to poor economic times. Moreover, voting patterns should at least come close to matching party identification or registration. If voters are excited about President Ronald Reagan, the Republicans should be getting more people to register Republican. Meanwhile, if the GOP struggles to maintain economic growth, voters should be abandoning the Republican Party and signing up to be a Democrat.

Table 7: CNN Exit Polls Show Northeastern State Party Registration In 1992 And 1996, For The Democratic Party And Republican Party.

	Democratic Party Registration 1992	Democratic Party Registration 1996		Republican Party Registration 1992	Republican Party Registration 1996
CT	36%	33%	CT	27%	26%
DE	35%	40%	DE	36%	33%
ME	32%	31%	ME	30%	25%
MD	50%	49%	MD	29%	30%
MA	36%	36%	MA	20%	18%
NH	26%	25%	NH	38%	35%
NJ	38%	38%	NJ	44%	30%
NY	42%	42%	NY	37%	29%
PA	42%	42%	PA	38%	39%
RI	41%	43%	RI	20%	14%
VT	28%	35%	VT	31%	29%
	36.90909%	37.63636%		31.81818%	28%

t = -.025, p > .10

t = 1.21, p > .10

One might assume that after the devastating economic recession that hit the Northeast many voters would have signed up for the Democratic Party in 1992. But they did not, according to CNN exit polls from 1992 (see Table 7). Nor did these Northeastern voters jump on the Democratic Party bandwagon when the economy recovered by 1996. In both cases, support for the political parties changed little over this span of time. The results show no statistical significance in party change among Northeastern voters over this tumultuous time.

That cannot be said for votes for a party candidate. In fact, candidate Bill Clinton picked up more votes than Democratic Party identification scores would lead us to believe, running eight percentage points ahead of party membership. Four years later, he ran a whopping 16.64 points ahead of party registration numbers, showing that the party registration numbers did not mean as much in the 1996 race, according to CNN exit polls (see Table 8). And the difference between political party identification and votes for the candidate were statistically significant in 1992 and 1996 (see Table 8).

Table 8: CNN Exit Polls Show Northeastern State Party Registration In 1992 And 1996, For The Democratic Party, And Votes For Bill Clinton In 1992 And 1996.

	Democratic Party Registration 1992	Votes For Bill Clinton In 1992		Democratic Party Registration 1996	Votes For Bill Clinton In 1996
CT	36%	43%	CT	33%	52%
DE	35%	44%	DE	40%	52%
ME	32%	39%	ME	31%	52%
MD	50%	50%	MD	49%	54%
MA	36%	48%	MA	36%	62%
NH	26%	39%	NH	25%	50%
NJ	38%	43%	NJ	38%	53%
NY	42%	50%	NY	42%	59%
PA	42%	46%	PA	42%	49%
RI	41%	48%	RI	43%	60%
VT	28%	46%	VT	35%	54%
	36.909095	45.09091%		37.63636%	54.27273%

t = -3.45, p < .01

t = -7.04, p < .0001

For the sample of voters from non-Northeastern states, there was a similar lack of difference between the Democratic Party registration in 1992 and 1996, as voters again failed to change their party registration in response to the recession and recovery. In fact, neither case deviated more than a percentage point over four years, according to exit polls from CNN in two elections. But like the findings for party identification and picking a candidate, the gap between the two was statistically significant for the non-Northeastern sample of cases (see Table 9).

Table 9: CNN Exit Polls Show Non-Northeastern State Party Registration In 1992 And 1996, For Democrats And Republicans, And Votes For Bill Clinton In 1992 And 1996.

Poll Question	Mean Response	Mean Difference & T-Statistic
Democratic Party Registration 1992	35.91%	Mean Δ = 0.5455%
Democratic Party Registration 1996	35.36%	t = 0.18, p > .10
Republican Party Registration 1992	38.09%	Mean Δ = 0.7273%
Republican Party Registration 1996	38.82%	t = -0.35, p > .10
Democratic Party Registration 1992	35.91%	Mean Δ = 2.5%
Voted for Bill Clinton In 1992	38.45%	t = -0.94, p > .10
Democratic Party Registration 1996	35.36%	Mean Δ = 7.36%
Voted for Bill Clinton In 1996	42.73%	t = -2.87, p < .01

Even as party support inched down for the Democratic Party among the non-Northeastern state voters in exit polls, and Republican Party registration crept up incrementally, you wouldn't know it from the results. Exit polls showed Clinton running slightly ahead of Democratic Party registration among these states in 1992, and surged ahead of party numbers in 1996. The latter was statistically significant.

What the data shows is that voter registration did not change much for the economic recession and the economic recovery, in both the Northeast states and in the non-Northeastern states in the exit polls. Moreover, the Democratic candidate Bill Clinton ran well-ahead of his own party's registration numbers in the Northeast in 1992 and 1996, and in non-Northeastern states in 1996. Democratic Party identification crept up incrementally over time. But the voting data shows a sharp, critical realignment in terms of voter choice in the Northeast. When looking at county maps, one can see the overnight shift of Northeastern counties into the Clinton column in 1992, while party ID statewide remained flat.

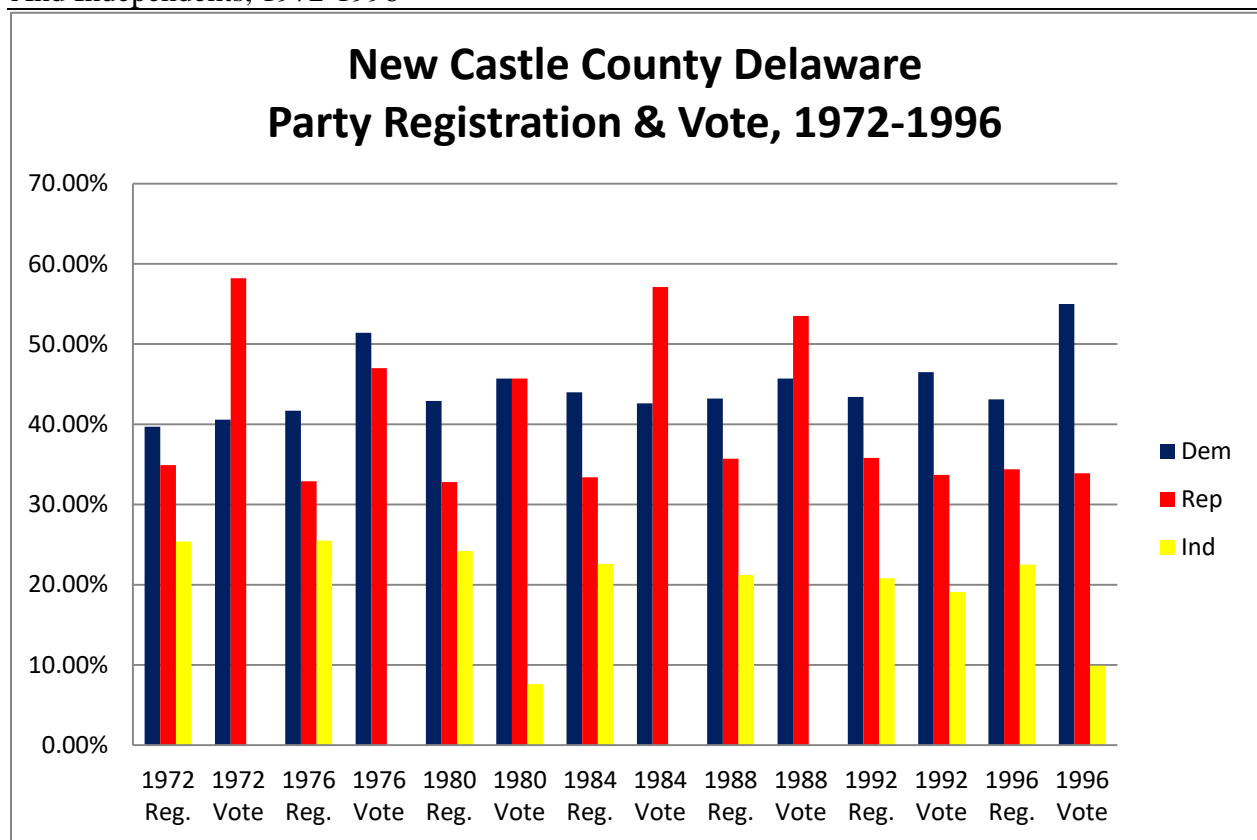
Not all states gather data on party registration by county, and fewer still publish that data electronically on counties if at all), and with consistency across time and elections. An exception is Delaware, which will be the subject of a substate analysis.

What we can learn from Delaware's northernmost county is the limited importance of party registration in picking a president in the Northeast (see Figure 1). Like the statewide study, the data shows that Republicans outperform their voter registration numbers by a wide margin on Election Day in New Castle County in the 1970s and 1980s, until 1992, when it is Bill Clinton's turn to do much better than voter registration numbers would indicate.

Like New Castle County, we can see that the vote for candidates does not closely match party registration numbers for Kent County in Delaware's middle (see Figure 2). With the exception of 1976, Democrats lag behind their party registration numbers. Republicans perform much better than their Democratic Party counterparts during this time, until 1996, though the 1992 statistics are too close to call. Like New Castle County, the registration numbers remain almost oblivious to strong political events that should have greatly benefitted one party or the other.

Sussex County, the state’s southernmost County, shows more support for Republicans, but similarly represents a disconnect between (a) key events which should have altered party registration, and (b) vote share for the party (see Figure 3). Sussex County, in fact, does something unusual. As Democratic Party registration declines from 1980 to 1996, Democratic candidates wind up doing a little better at the ballot box at the end of the slide, eventually winning this county (with Dover Air Force Base and NASCAR events) in 1996 for the first time since 1976 (despite a close call in 1992).

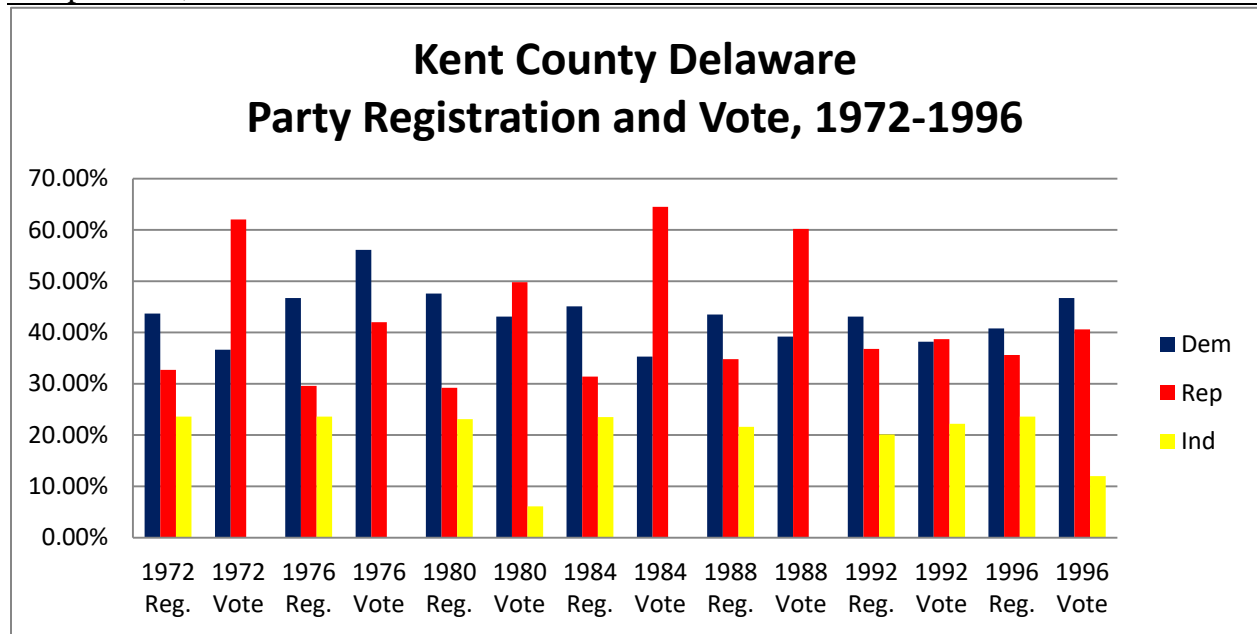
Figure 4: New Castle County Delaware Party Registration And Vote For The Political Parties And Independents, 1972-1996



Analysis of the Delaware political party registration by county, for all three counties (New Castle, Kent and Sussex) from 1972 through 2016 reveals an average Democratic Party

registration of 44.6%, with an average vote total of 49.7% for Democrats in the elections. This difference of 5.08 percentage points is statistically significant ($t = -2.78, p < .01$).

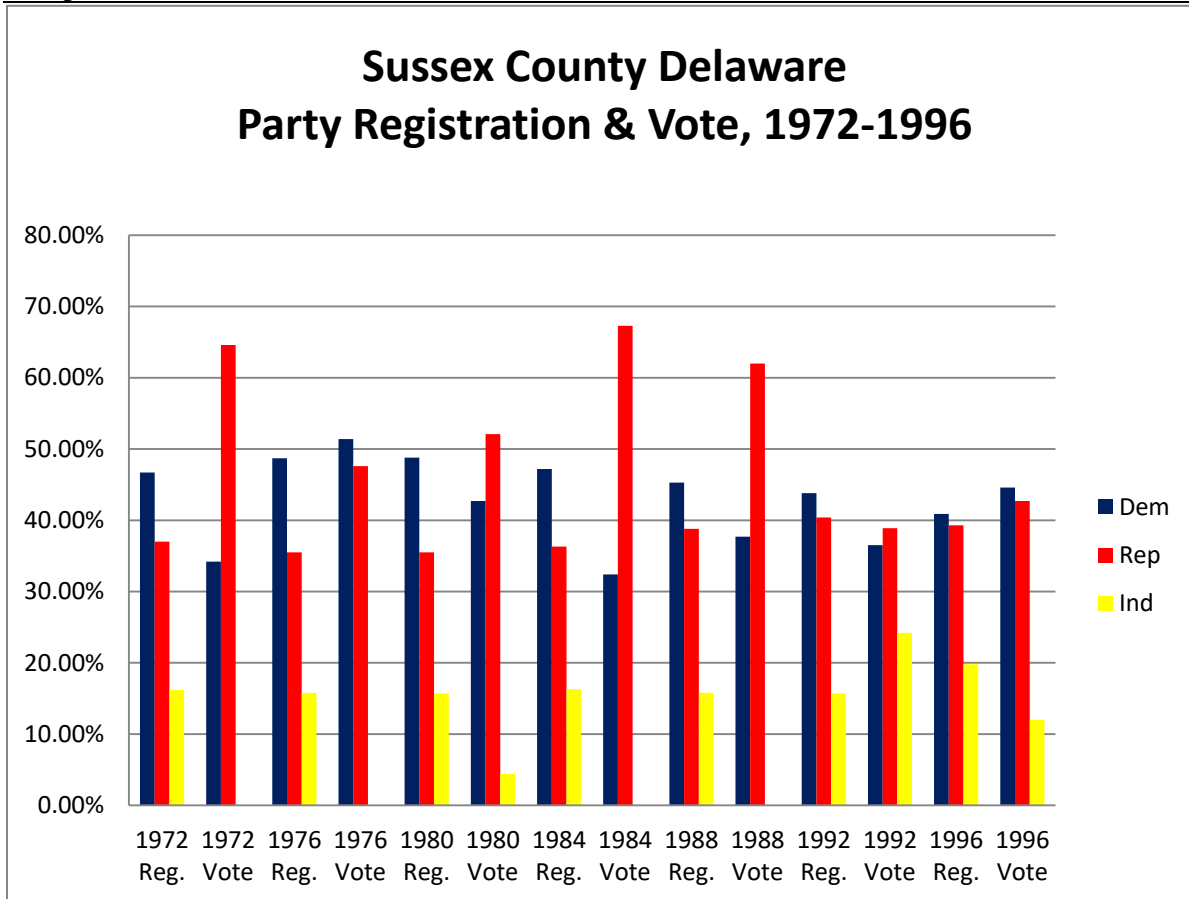
Figure 5: Kent County Delaware Party Registration And Vote For The Political Parties And Independents, 1972-1996



These results show surprising weakness of the macropartisanship argument for explaining the 1992 critical election.¹⁵ Voters may respond to political events after the Vietnam War, Watergate, the Reagan Revolution, and even the early 1990s recession, in who they vote for. But they do not update their party identification or registration in response to these events, which changes only incrementally. And this occurs at the state level, as well as the county level, in these cases. Given the reversal of Democratic fortunes at the national level and state level and county level, one would expect party identification or registration to reflect that over time, but it does not. As Democratic Party fortunes rebound in the Northeast after 1992, Party ID remains high for Democrats in the Northeast in subsequent contests.¹⁶ The theory cannot explain voting patterns before 1988, or why a transition took place, or why, with a double-digit lead in party

identification, Northeastern state voters now prefer Democrats now when they failed to do so before 1992 with a similar preference in party ID for Democrats.

Figure 6: Sussex County Delaware Party Registration And Vote For The Political Parties And Independents, 1972-1996



Migration

The theory Bishop and Cushing (2008) offer is that Americans are sorting themselves. That would mean that Republicans would move toward other Republicans, and Democrats would move in near other Democrats. This would be an example of “The Big Sort,” where people move to be next to their ideological kin. All of this would have to take place in a short period of time, between the late 1980s and early 1990s, to explain the rapid shift of Northeastern states from the Republicans to the Democrats, to account for the critical election of 1992.

Deming (1996) analyzes population shifts from 1983 to 1995 across the United States. None of the Northeastern states show negative population growth. New York, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island all report low population growth (between zero and six percent) with New Jersey reporting moderate population growth (6%-12%). Vermont, Maine, and Maryland have population growth rates between 12 and 20 percent, with New Hampshire and Delaware sporting population increases in excess of 20 percent.

Table 10: Northeastern States: Does Migration In The 1980s And Early 1990s Influence Elections From 1992 To 2016?

States	Migration: 1980s-1990s (-1 = 0-5% Loss, 1 = 0-6% Gain, 2=6-12% Gain, 3=12-20% Gain, 4=20%+ Gain)	Elections 1992-2016 Won By Democrats
CT	1	7
DE	4	7
ME	3	7
MD	3	7
MA	1	7
NH	4	6
NJ	2	7
NY	1	7
PA	1	6
RI	1	7
VT	3	7
	2.1818	6.8182

$t = -11.7, p < .0001$

Table 10 shows the relationship between Deming's data on migration, and how the states voted in the 1980s, 1990s, 2000s and beyond. As you can see in Table 10, the relationship is statistically significant. States with an increase in migration are more likely to vote for the Republican Party, while those experiencing out-migration opt for the Democratic Party.

Yet all of these states voted for Reagan in 1984 and 73% for Bush, as well as for Clinton in 1992 and 1996, despite the wide variances in population growth. Despite the statistical significance, we can see only two states voted Republican, and only one (New Hampshire) was a fast growing state. Delaware, another state with strong population growth, voted Democratic

each time in our analysis. Among the decliners, only one (Pennsylvania) voted Republican; both victories by Republicans (New Hampshire in 2000 and Pennsylvania in 2016) were barely a percentage point, if that, offset by Democratic victories in these and other states by double-digits throughout the next three decades. A state-level analysis of overall population growth does not reveal a consistent pattern that could explain the rapid change.

A substate analysis or group analysis would provide more data points to analyze for the impact of migration. It also might reveal additional details, as well as where the old voters went to, and the new voters are heading. As Bishop and Cushing (2008) look at counties, so will this study, when it comes to migration.

Much of the migration may have occurred years before the critical election, as well as afterwards (Gale 2016). New York City had 1.5 million leave between 1970 and 1980, during the era of city bankruptcy and decay. Such numbers were far worse than the 1980-1990 domestic migration of 340,000 from the city. Another 1.722 million departed the city from 1995 to 2000, ruling out the argument that most of the people left just before the 1992 election (Gale 2016).

Not all of the movers fled to the South to be linked up with conservative voters. In fact, among the leading states where the domestic migrants went, their destination was as likely to be a neighboring state (New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Connecticut) than a Southern one (Florida, North Carolina) or a Western one (California). As for those coming in, almost as many blacks moved into New York City (60,000) between the years 1970 and 1980 as moved out over the next five years. Similarly, New York City was a top location for those leaving New Jersey (Gale 2016).

If migration helped New York flip from Republican to Democrat in a short period of time, most of the people should be leaving close to the four years preceding the election.

Instead, most migration occurs long before or after it, confusing the link between the movement of people and rapid electoral change. And their moving destination is also more likely to be nearby than far away, neutralizing the argument that conservatives are moving away down South, and remaining residents link with new migrants forming an electoral coalition that shifted the state in a short time.

New Jersey presents another interesting case, this one involving race. According to the Office of State Planning (New Jersey Department of Treasury 1993) whites left the old metro areas for the exurbs; the former declined while the latter grew. These whites moved to Monmouth, Ocean, Gloucester, Camden, and Atlantic counties. But if one expected “white flight” to lead to more Republican votes in these exurb counties (Shaw et.al. 2019), one would be sadly mistaken. Every one of these exurb counties voted for Clinton in 1996. Though Ocean and Monmouth returned to their GOP roots, Atlantic, Camden and Gloucester voted Democrat from 1992 to 2012.

As for blacks, many moved to Camden, Willingboro Township (in Burlington County) and Jersey City (in Hudson County), according to the New Jersey Department of the Treasury (1993). All three counties voted Democrat, but Hudson had voted for the Democratic Party already (in 1980 and 1988). Camden saw blacks and whites moving in, and the county became a “landslide county” for Democrats (a 20-point margin of victory, using Bishop’s definition). Blacks also moved out of Newark, in Essex County, during this time frame, yet the county voted Democrat before and afterwards.

Moreover, counties like Bergen, Cumberland, Mercer, Middlesex, Passaic and Union shifted to the Democrats in 1992, and remained in this party’s camp, without large scale migration by any group (all New Jersey counties can be found in Table 11). Further research by

the New Jersey Department of Treasury (1993) showed that Asian and Hispanic immigration had already occurred before 1980; both groups were pretty evenly distributed across the state and counties. Migration does not seem to have impacted the 1992 election in ways we would have expected. Most group migrations long predate the time frame in question, are evenly distributed, or do not conform to the expectations of the “white flight” argument of sorting, and cannot explain the rapid change by counties unaffected by migration.

Table 11: New Jersey Counties, Migration (Black And White) And Which Party Won The County In The Election

New Jersey	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016
Atlantic	R	D	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
Bergen	R	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D
<i>Burlington</i>	R	D	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
Camden	R	D	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
Cape May	R	R	R	R	R	R	D	R	R	R	R	R
Cumberland	R	D	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
<u>Essex</u>	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
Gloucester	R	D	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	R
<i>Hudson</i>	R	D	D	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
Hunterdon	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R
Mercer	R	D	D	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
Middlesex	R	D	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
Monmouth	R	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	R	R	R	R
Morris	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R
Ocean	R	R	R	R	R	R	D	R	R	R	R	R
Passaic	R	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D
Salem	R	D	R	R	R	R	D	D	R	D	D	R
Somerset	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	R
Sussex	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R
Union	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
Warren	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R

Key: Bold = White In-Migration, Italics = Black In-Migration, Underline = Black Out-Migration. The New Jersey Treasury (1993) listed whites leaving cities, but did not specify which ones or which counties this applied to, so white out-migration is not coded here.

Vermont is another state that does not quite fit the migration hypothesis. It is believed that newcomers from elite schools in Boston and New York City moved to the Green Mountain State, making the state more liberal (Phillips 1969). If supported, this could help explain why the state abandoned its century of support for Republicans to embrace the Democrats in 1992.

But as Speel (1999) points out, such migration from New York and Massachusetts long predated the 1992 election, occurring in the 1960s and 1970s. Such newcomers did not necessarily even vote for Democrats upon their arrival, perhaps preferring Reagan tax cuts to liberal support for policies like environmentalism (Speel 1999). Vermont’s political party shift is not even due to the arrival of migration; Speel (1999) claims this is an elitist, almost sneering argument by outsiders that fails to consider political attitude changes among locals.

In fact, as Table 12 shows, the counties that are gaining in population are more likely to vote Republican (Caledonia, Essex, Orleans, etc.). Other Vermont counties which have not experienced such “in-migration” (like Chittenden, Rutland and Windham) voted Democratic. Migration data comes from Perry (2006) and election data on counties comes from Leip (2016).

Table 12: Vermont Counties, Migration (Any) And Which Party Won The County In The Election

Vermont	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016
<i>Addison</i>	R	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
Bennington	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
<i>Caledonia</i>	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	R	D	D	D	D
Chittenden	R	R	D	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
<i>Essex</i>	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	R	R	D	D	R
<i>Franklin</i>	R	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
<i>Grand Isle</i>	R	R	D	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
<i>Lamoille</i>	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
<i>Orange</i>	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
<i>Orleans</i>	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	R	D	D	D	D
Rutland	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
Washington	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
Windham	R	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
<i>Windsor</i>	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D

Key: Italics = Net In-Migration. No Italics = Net Out-Migration.

Connecticut behaves a lot like Vermont. Instead of having liberals move to the state to make it more liberal, away from its 1972-1988 GOP leanings, we see the county with the greatest

in-migration vote Republican in the 1992-2016 era. Counties most loyal to the Democrats have also been places which have seen more out-migration than in-migration (Perry 2006).

Table 13: Connecticut Counties, Migration (Any) And Which Party Won The County In The Election

Connecticut	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016
Fairfield	R	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D
Hartford	R	D	D	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
<i>Litchfield</i>	R	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	R	D	R	R
<i>Middlesex</i>	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
New Haven	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
New London	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
Tolland	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
Windham	R	D	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	R

Key: Italics = Net In-Migration. No Italics = Net Out-Migration.

However, the majority of Connecticut counties (like Middlesex, with in-migration, and New Haven, New London, Tolland and Windham with out-migration) switched to the Democrats after voting Republican the majority of the time from 1972-1988, and persisted voting Democrat at least the next 20 years, with Fairfield making the transition during the next election cycle, and staying Democrat for another 20 years (see Table 13). Like Vermont, New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut, the state almost went entirely Democratic starting in 1992 (Leip 2016).

Maine displays the exact opposite result of others, in terms of growth. Counties that grew in population are more likely to support the Democratic Party nominee (such as Cumberland, Hancock, Lincoln and York), while those that lost population (like Penobscot, Piscataquis and Washington) were more likely to go with the Republican Party choice (see Table 14). This complicates the argument that assumes counties with in-migration are more likely to go with the Republicans, with out-migration cases choosing the Democrats, with county data on migration coming from Perry (2006) and electoral analysis of counties from Leip (2016).

Table 14: Maine Counties, Migration (Any) And Which Party Won The County In The Election

Maine	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016
Androscoggin	D	D	D	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	R
Aroostook	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	R
<i>Cumberland</i>	R	D	D	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
Franklin	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	R
<i>Hancock</i>	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
Kennebec	R	D	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	R
<i>Knox</i>	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	R	D	D	D	D
<i>Lincoln</i>	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
<i>Oxford</i>	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	R
Penobscot	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	R	D	D	D	R
Piscataquis	R	R	R	R	R	I	D	R	R	R	R	R
<i>Sagadahoc</i>	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
<i>Somerset</i>	R	D	R	R	R	I	D	D	D	D	D	R
<i>Waldo</i>	R	R	R	R	R	I	D	R	D	D	D	D
Washington	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	R	R	D	D	R
<i>York</i>	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D

Key: Italics = Net In-Migration. No Italics = Net Out-Migration.

As for Pennsylvania, it resembles Maine when it comes to migration. The Western part of the state and Philadelphia used to be the only sources of votes for Democrats during the mid-1970s and 1980s (Frey and Teixeira 2008). But since the 1990s, the population has grown in the Philadelphia suburbs, as have the Democratic Party votes. Out-migration has occurred in the Western part of the state, along with North and South parts of Pennsylvania. This is where the Republican Party has picked up votes, even as they have lost the Eastern suburban counties, from Philadelphia (such as Bucks, Chester, and Montgomery counties) to the Scranton area in Northeast Pennsylvania (Lackawanna, Luzerne and Monroe) counties (Frey and Teixeira 2008).

Conclusion

Electoral fortunes rapidly shifted in the early 1990s, in a move eerily reminiscent of critical elections of years past, like 1800, 1828, 1860, 1896, 1932 and 1968. Northeastern states, which had voted for Republicans more than 70 percent of the time from 1972 to 1988 quickly

and uniformly defected to the Democratic column in 1992 and 1996. The wholesale move of these 11 states and their electoral votes helped the party win the Electoral College in a majority of cases between 1992 and 2016 (taking more than 97 percent of these statewide contests), and the popular vote in six of seven cases, a far cry from the 1970s and 1980s when the Democrats were being crushed in most elections, with one exception (1976) that proved to be a nail-bitter.

Such research complements the findings of legislative realignments that Bullock, Hoffman and Gaddie (2006, 494) found. “The collapse of Republican hegemony in the Northeast...has gone largely unnoticed, buried in the intense examination of the growth of the Republican Party in the South,” the authors found. We now know this applies to presidential contests, in addition to Congress.

This paper has sought to understand why this change happened, and how Democrats could capture more than 90 percent of Northeastern state votes during this era. Of the three explanations, the economic theory appears to be the strongest candidate to explain why the election was critical. The sudden and serious downturn in the economy devastated the Northeast, leaving a lot of unemployed workers, stagnant wages, scaring those who had not yet received the pink slip. Northeasterners, who had backed Eisenhower, Nixon, Reagan and Bush in recent years, and even served as the lonely opposition to the New Deal, as well as the backbone of the Republican Party in the 1800s, finally shifted toward the Democrats, backing a non-Northeasterner (Bill Clinton) more strongly than the local candidate (Michael Dukakis) four years earlier.

Evidence showed that the New England and Mid-Atlantic voters not only regarded the economy as bad in 1992, but worse than 1988, and punished George H. W. Bush at the polls. Further research showed that Northeastern voters also felt the economy had improved

dramatically in 1996, much better than in 1992. These voters rewarded Clinton and his successors (Al Gore, John Kerry, Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton) with near unanimous support. Further economic events such as the Great Recession, occurring during the Bush Administration, further reinforced for these voters who was a better choice.

It was not just the region that shifted into the Democratic Party column. Women were stung by the 1990-1991 recession in numbers that had not been previously seen in prior economic downturns. Women as a whole have subsequently backed the Democrats in each election since 1992. Young voters were also punished by the poor economy of the early 1990s; they shifted away to the Democrats in the 1992 election and thereafter.

Macropartisan changes cannot provide the same level of explanation. Despite the economic changes, voters did not significantly alter their party identification during this time, even as they swung from the Nixon-Reagan-Bush coalition to Clinton in the 1990s. Party identification remained static, even as voter preferences for candidates changed. This applied to the statewide level, as well as party registration in a substate case.

Migration did occur in the Northeast, but evidence seems to suggest that such moves happened long before 1992, and did not alter the political landscape then. For substate analyses that looked at subsequent migration, the results were mixed. Some states were more likely to have counties that shifted to the Republican Party when there was an influx of persons (like Vermont and Connecticut). Others, like Maine and Pennsylvania, had the counties with the new migrants go to the Democratic ticket, while population losing counties chose the GOP. Furthermore, when racial data was available, we saw whites leaving urban areas in New Jersey for the exurbs, and these new destinations voted Democrat, not Republican. Black in-migration and out-migration did not alter sharply how these counties voted.

Over the last few decades, we have come to accept that the Northeast has become Democratic territory, and assume it has always been, or presume that any change was gradual. Such thoughts are not supported by the longstanding support the region gave the Republican Party consistently, whether part of the dominant coalition (from Whigs to Civil War era Republicans, through the 1896 critical election) to an area often serving as the lonely opposition to the New Deal, against the trend of the nation.¹⁷ Even after the 1960s, the region went Republican more than 70 percent of the state cases. A glance through Tables 11-14 reveal that most counties did so as well during this time. But a strong as painful economic recession, and its effect on the region, women and younger voters changed the calculus for the Democrats, leading to the critical election of 1992. And the shift had dramatic national consequences, reversing poor party showings in the 1970s and 1980s, giving the party a base of support to capture the popular vote in 86% of presidential elections from 1992 through 2016, and a majority of Electoral College victories. Such an important realignment cannot be ignored any longer.

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² Data shows that Democrats won 40 states in the 1948, 1952, 1956, 1960, 1964, 1968, 1972, 1976, 1980, 1984 and 1988 election, with almost half of these coming from just two elections (1960 and 1964). During this time (1948-1988), Republicans won 81 Northeastern states in the Electoral College. Additionally, most of the only states to oppose FDR and the New Deal coalition were Northeastern states. Before FDR, the Northeast represented the backbone of Whig and Republican coalitions after the Civil War, up to the Great Depression. Nor can the pre-1992 results be written off to the success of the "Reagan Revolution," as the Northeast provided more states to Eisenhower, Nixon, and Bush Sr. than to Democrats.

³ Even when one looks only at the voting age population, you can see that the elections of 1928 and 1932 (tied for turnout) were the first increase in voting since 1916, and also reflect the first real reversal from the peak voting age population percentage of 1896, with 1924 serving as the "trough" in this trend (Ragsdale 1998). Subsequent years show strong turnout, a legacy of the 1932 contest.

⁴ "A decline voting efficiency in the U.S., which began in the Nineties, was sharply reversed in the presidential elections of 1928 and 1932," write the authors at CQ Researcher (1936). "More than 70 percent of the qualified voters went to the polls – as compared with less than 57 percent in 1920 and 1924" (CQ Researcher 1936).

⁵ Bullock, Hoffman and Gaddie find (2006, 495) "The analysis showed that while political trends showed little variation nationwide in support for the parties since the 1960s, a regional examination revealed substantial and lasting changes in partisan balance in presidential and legislative elections."

⁶ Bullock, Hoffman and Gaddie find (495) "The analysis showed that while political trends showed little variation nationwide in support for the parties since the 1960s, a regional examination revealed substantial and lasting changes in partisan balance in presidential and legislative elections."

⁷ In addition, the 1996 election numbers reveal that New England and Mid-Atlantic states had above-average voter turnout in that contest, while other regions had lower turnout numbers, with the exception of several Prairie states (Casper and Bass 1998).

⁸ The Northeastern states have 119 Electoral College votes, while the non-Northeastern state sample has 115 Electoral College votes.

⁹ It is also useful to note that generally New England states rated the economy worse than the Mid-Atlantic states did at this time. As the economists noted earlier in this paper, the recession hit the New England region first, with the recession moving through the Mid-Atlantic later in the recession.

¹⁰ A separate comparison of just the seven Northeastern states included in the study (CT, ME, MA, NH, NJ, NY, and PA) revealed a 32 percentage point drop in voters rating the economy as "poor" from 1992 to 1996.

¹¹ It can sometimes be difficult to assess support for a party when there is a strong third party presence in election, as was the case in 1992. But exit polls from *The New York Times* (2014) show votes for Congress in the 1992 election. Democrats won the East region 55%-45%, making it difficult to conclude that Perot voters from the region were really Republicans and that the Texan's candidacy split the GOP vote (Ladd 1993).

¹² Burrell (2005) writes of how the Clinton Administration worked hard to appeal to women voters, and not just on economic issues. This included backing the Violence Against Women Act against its critics, supporting female

health issues, the Family Medical Leave Act, reversing the “gag” rule, opposing attempts to outlaw partial birth abortions, and a variety of issues in education, pensions, health care, employment and gun control.

¹³ First-time voters and younger voters picked the Democrats in 1992 and again in 1996. And this trend has persisted through 2018 (Teixeira 2010). Even as this cohort got older and perhaps had priority changes (though still backing the party through the Obama years), Democrats and under-30 voters clearly found a mutual alliance. Republicans were in charge when bad economic times hit for younger voters (Nardone et al. 1993). Democrats did a better job of reaching younger people via the media, through entertainment shows watched by these voters, appearances that were overlooked by other politicians (Baum 2005). Democrats also sought more policies to help these younger working voters, via AmeriCorps, health policies designed to cover younger workers, expanding support for college opportunities (Begala 2014). The younger voters evidently rewarded the party with votes in subsequent elections.

¹⁴ Reviews of other 58 other categories sampled by *The New York Times* polls show no other shifts in party allegiance among any other groups, except for two cases: 1) Western voters, also identified by Dzialo, Shank and Smith (1993) and Gardner, Hipple and Nardone (1994) as suffering disproportionately from the economic recession of the early 1990s, and 2) those voters with a post-graduate education. Given that the recession disproportionately targeted the service industry, such as banking, finances, insurance (Gardner 1994), it is likely that those with a post-graduate degree were more likely to face the brunt of this economic downturn than those in manufacturing, mining, agriculture, etc. who were hurt by earlier types of recessions. Evidence for these voters backing Democrats after 1992 is further supported by the Pew Research Center (2016).

¹⁵ This is not to say that macropartisanship is a poor theory, or has little explanatory power in general. *Washington Post* polls on partisanship in the Northeast reveal that voters responded to the Watergate scandal, as Republican Party ID fell by 12 percentage points between 1972 and 1976 (from 38 percent to 26 points) and rebounded during the Reagan years to 32 percent by 1988, while Democrats dropped from 43 percent to 39 percent in *Washington Post* polls (2007). But the theory fails to explain why Democrats, with a huge lead in party ID in these polls, failed to capitalize, and voters became “Reagan Democrats” and supporters of Bush during these times. Democrats had a seven point advantage in the region in 1988, but only won 3 of 11 states during this contest.

¹⁶ Party ID in favor of the Democrats was an eight point advantage in 1992, and remained an advantage for the party by more than 10 percentage points in each presidential election since that time, according to *Washington Post* polls (2007).

¹⁷ As Raymond Moley, Presidential Advisor, said of the GOP “If I were to describe on a map the strength of the Republican Party, I should indicate its strongholds as New England, New Jersey, and Delaware, with what may be called a Republican ‘sphere of influence’ extending into New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Indiana and Illinois (CQ Researcher 1936).”