

RACIAL TRANSITION AND WHITE-VOTER SUPPORT FOR BLACK CANDIDATES IN URBAN ELECTIONS

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ABSTRACT: *Traditional black threat theory predicts an inverse relationship between the size of a jurisdiction's black population and white crossover voting. Recently, a modified black threat theory suggests that it may be more reasonable to expect a curvilinear U-shaped relationship between black density and white crossover voting, due to changes in both racial composition and white group status. Using Gary King's Ecological Inference (EI) procedure to estimate white crossover voting at the election unit level through precinct-level data, this study examines the relationship between black density and white crossover voting across 29 biracial elections in New Orleans between 1977 and 1998. Results of our analysis support neither a negative, nor a U-shaped relationship. Rather, the shape of the relationship is an upward half-U. We explain this nonlinear relationship by suggesting that as blacks become a majority, white voters begin to cast votes for black candidates in a strategic manner.*

A major focus of research on racial politics during the last several decades has been the willingness of white voters to cast ballots for black candidates (see e.g., Bullock, 1985; Carsey, 1995; DeLorenzo, Kohfield, & Stein, 1997; Liu, forthcoming; Murray & Vedlitz, 1978; Perry, 1996; Reeves, 1997; Sonenshein, 1997; Voss & Lublin, 2001). Some of these studies examined the role of context in white crossover voting (e.g., Voss & Lublin, 2001; Carsey, 1995). Though the concept of context has varied meanings, scholars investigating the impact of context on racial politics have done so primarily along two dimensions, the structure of the local political economy and the racial makeup of a jurisdiction.

The political economy of a local area is important because it provides resources available to political elites that enable them to influence voters (Judd & Kantor, 1998; Peterson, 1981;

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Stone, 1989). Many scholars note that black mayors came to power in major cities during a period of reduced federal funding and increased economic competition between cities. These elected officials, therefore, needed to develop an effective economic agenda in order to increase local revenues (Judd & Kantor, 1988). The success of a city's economic agenda can depend upon the level of support given to local black officials by white voters, who are concerned about their area's economy (Howell, 1994). Problems of urban poverty, drug abuse and crime, however, can hinder a black incumbent's reelection chances (Howell & Marshall, 1988). Context has also referred to "the distribution of a population characteristic" (Huckfeldt, 1986, p. 14). The population characteristic that has received the most attention is the relative percentage of blacks within a given jurisdiction (Forbes, 1997; Oliver & Mendelberg, 2000). The field of candidates from which voters can choose is influenced by an area's racial makeup, as is candidate campaign strategy. Different racial contexts not only attract different types of candidates, but varying racial contexts also produce different levels of racial competition (Vanderleeuw & Utter, 1993).

Racial context has been a research focus also because of the controversies surrounding districting practices (Clark & Morrison, 1995). It has been argued that African Americans seeking office have traditionally relied on the creation of favorable majority black, single-member districts (SMDs) to gain their electoral victories (Clark & Morrison, 1995; Engstrom, 1995; Grofman & Davidson, 1994; Lublin, 1997). In several recent decisions, however, the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that if race is "the predominant factor" motivating the drawing of district lines and "traditional race neutral districting principles" are subordinated to race, strict scrutiny must be applied to determine whether the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution has been violated (*Miller v. Johnson*, 1995). To satisfy this test, the racial consideration in the design of a district must have been adopted to further a "compelling governmental interest" and be "narrowly tailored" to accomplish that purpose (*Shaw v. Reno*, 1993).

Strict scrutiny is popularly described as "strict in theory, fatal in fact" (see Engstrom, 1995, p. 323). Since 1993 several redistricting plans, in which majority-minority districts were created, have been ruled constitutionally invalid by the Supreme Court. With the creation of black majority SMDs now less likely, many have realized that to maintain, let alone increase, electoral success, more black candidates have to find a way to appeal to white voters (Persons, 1993; Reeves, 1997).

TRADITIONAL BLACK THREAT THEORY

Changes in racial context can produce changes in voters' choices. One finding numerously reported in the literature on racial politics is an inverse relationship between the relative size of a jurisdiction's black population and white racial tolerance (see e.g., Giles & Buckner, 1993; Giles & Hertz, 1994; Glaser, 1994). Black threat theory, suggested as far back as 1949 by V.O. Key, has been adopted to explain this relationship. Using voting records, Key (1949) found that white racial tolerance toward blacks in the South was negatively related to the black density of the county in which whites resided. As explained by Key, this was because a high level of black concentration threatened "the maintenance of control by a white minority" (Key, 1949, p. 5).

It is important to note that Key's original analysis of black threat was based on the 1940s South and the preservation of white hegemony. This situation, however, is no longer applicable in many American cities. Due to the landmark Voting Rights Act of 1965, which effectively protected the rights of African Americans to cast ballots, and the growth in black political power in many major cities (e.g., Atlanta, Birmingham, and New Orleans) (see Eisinger, 1980; Perry, 1997; Stone, 1989; Vanderleeuw, 1990), we can no longer say, as Key did, that "a real

problem of politics . . . is the maintenance of control by a white minority” (Key, 1949, p. 5). If the mayor and majority of city council members are black, for instance, there is no white hegemony to protect; a theory based on a black threat to white hegemony cannot explain this city’s politics. All of this, though, is not to suggest that Key’s classic study lacks theoretical utility in explaining contemporary urban politics. The growth of black political power within many urban political systems is, in fact, compatible with the basic assumption underlying Key’s theory—a racial group’s political behavior is related to its group status. Group status may vary in response to different contexts. When we apply Key’s theory to a setting such as the city of New Orleans, where there have been changes in both racial composition and white group status, it may be more reasonable to expect a nonlinear rather than a linear relationship between black density and white voter support for black candidates.

Modified Black Threat Theory

When whites comprise the numerically dominant group, they typically occupy major elected offices. In this racial context, whites are unlikely to perceive much of a political threat from blacks. Therefore, when they conclude that a particular black candidate is qualified and sufficiently friendly to white interests, whites on occasion may support a black candidate for elective office. If this context is changed, however, to a situation where numerically blacks and whites are roughly equal (what we refer to as a racially competitive context), the likelihood of blacks gaining major elective office increases and white voters may perceive a black threat. Accordingly, the level of white crossover voting in this context may be lower than in the context of a dominant white majority. If we posit a dynamic process, a transition from majority white to majority black, then to this point the relationship between black density and white crossover voting is negative, as suggested by traditional black threat theory.

To follow this transition further, when blacks comprise a significant numeric majority and become the dominant force in the electoral arena, there is no longer a white hegemony to protect. In this context, the chance of white candidates winning elective office is more limited. Elections with a white candidate would probably be biracial because it is unlikely that in a black-dominated political context African American candidates would fail to compete for elective office. Assuming relatively few white candidates with a reduced chance of gaining elective office, white voters might be expected to vote strategically to protect their interests. From a strategic political perspective, it makes sense that many whites would cast a ballot for the black candidate perceived to be least threatening to white interests, even over a white opponent. In this situation, white voters might perceived the black candidate as having the better chance of being elected. Casting a ballot for a white candidate, therefore, may be considered a wasted vote. The level of white crossover voting in this setting is expected to increase above its level in the racially competitive context.

Based on the modified black threat theory, the relationship between black density and white crossover voting is expected to be U-shaped, rather than negative and linear. Compatible with this particular expectation, Vanderleeuw (1990) found a curvilinear relationship between the racial makeup of New Orleans’ city council districts and racially divided voting. Voting was most polarized in racially competitive contexts, but less so when blacks were the dominant electoral force. Vanderleeuw’s study, however, focused on racially divided voting, of which white crossover voting is one aspect.

DATA

To test the traditional black threat theory as applied to white crossover voting (an inverse relationship) and its modification (a U-shaped relationship) we examine 29 biracial mayoral

and city council elections in New Orleans between 1977 and 1998. Twenty-two of these are primary elections, seven are runoffs. Louisiana employs a bipartisan primary system. All party candidates for the same office appear on the same ballot. A runoff between the top two candidates is held if neither candidate receives a majority of the primary vote. Voter returns were obtained from the Orleans Parish Board of Supervisors. We obtained information on the race of candidates seeking municipal office from New Orleans' local newspaper, the *Times-Picayune*. Along with the contextual variable, factors identified in prior research as likely determinants of white crossover voting, such as incumbency and newspaper endorsements, are included in our analysis.

These New Orleans data provide important advantages in testing these theories. Voter registration data from New Orleans provide racial identity information, which certainly gives us a better idea of who votes than population figures. We, therefore, use voter registration figures, obtained from the Orleans Parish Registrar of Voters, as our measure of an election unit's racial makeup. Citywide, there were 428 precincts in 1977; of these 80 were at least 90% black and 143 were at least 90% white. There were 445 precincts in 1998, of which 130 were at least 90% black and 76 were at least 90% white. Precinct population size is relatively small. The city limits the number of registered voters within a precinct to about 1,000; beyond this threshold, a precinct is divided.

During the last three decades the racial makeup of the electorate and political leadership changed dramatically. Nine biracial mayoral elections took place during the time period under study. The percentage of registered voters citywide who were black ranged from 41.9 to 63.2, with a mean of 51.6. Council district elections (council districts are officially labeled A through E) provide relatively more variation in racial composition across election units. District A has been a white dominant election unit for a long time. The mean percentage of black registered voters across the three District A elections covered in our study was 28.7 (with a range from 22.9 to 35.3). District B has been a predominantly black district, in which the mean percentage of black registered voters in the three elections for that district seat was 64.7 (with a range from 59.7 to 67.9). District C experienced racial transition. The percentage of black registered voters across the four biracial District C contests increased from 31.9 in 1977 to 50.8 in 1994, with a mean of 48.2. Districts D and E both completed the transition from the racially competitive to the black dominant context. The percentage of black registered voters exceeded 55 in both of these districts by the 1990s. The mean percentage of black registered voters across the three contests for the District D seat was 53.3 (ranging from 50.9 to 58.0); the mean percentage of black registered voters in the six biracial District E contests was 58.1 (ranging from 50.2 to 77.9).

The city's first black mayor was elected in 1977, and black candidates have won all subsequent mayoral elections. The city has also seen a black majority on the city council since 1986, as well as on the school board since 1988 (see Engstrom & Caridas, 1991).

MEASUREMENT

Previous research has measured racial crossover voting in two ways. Some research has relied on survey data (e.g., Carsey, 1995; Reeves, 1997). Survey results, however, may be unreliable in racially sensitive contexts (see Kuklinski, Cobb, & Gilens, 1997; Traugott & Price, 1992). Other research has measured racial crossover voting through analysis of aggregate (i.e., precinct-level) data. In some aggregate analyses data from racially homogeneous precincts have been used to estimate crossover voting at a higher (e.g., city) level (see Herring & Forbes, 1994). This particular approach, though, does not provide an adequate basis for testing contextual effects because it excludes racially mixed precincts. To take into account the full vari-

ation in racial density across precincts, an alternative aggregate approach has been the use of double regression. A problem with double regression in contextual research, however, is the assumption that the parameters of interest (e.g., white crossover voting) are constant across observations (i.e., precincts), whereas they may be different (King, 1997).

Gary King (1997) proposed a method for estimating electoral behavior that incorporates the deterministic method of bounds with maximum likelihood probabilities. The Ecological Inference (EI) procedure first computes turnout rates for each racial group both at the election unit and at the precinct level. Three precinct-level variables are used to estimate white turnout: 1) the number of registered voters, 2) the proportion of black registered voters, and 3) the proportion of registered voters who signed in to vote in each precinct. After white turnout is computed, the percentage of votes received by black candidates is used to calculate the level of racial crossover voting. In addition to point estimates, King's EI procedure also provides standard errors for those estimates.

We will employ King's procedure in the following analysis. We acknowledge, though, some disagreement among researchers concerning the EI procedure. Freedman, Klein, Ostland, and Roberts (1998) provide a strong criticism of King's EI approach. Compared with their own "neighborhood model" proposed in 1991, Freedman et al. argued that King's EI method "produces results that are far from truth . . . while the neighborhood model is more accurate" (p. 1516). However, in a response to this criticism, King argued that the problem with Freedman et al.'s criticism is that their own empirical tests were based on two artificial datasets, and they "presented a biased sample of estimates and datasets that supported their approach" (King, 1997, p. 352; also see Grofman, 1991; Lichtman, 1991 for further criticisms of the neighborhood model).

While the EI approach has invited scholarly scrutiny, it has been used in a number of academic disciplines and in industry and public policy, several scholars have used actual election data to test EI model and suggest that this method can provide more accurate aggregate-based estimates of individual-level behavior than previously available statistical procedures (e.g., see Burden & Kimball, 1998; Voss & Lublin, 1998, 2001).

Schuessler (1999) suggested that "EI's estimation is remarkably robust . . . more importantly still, its general approach—combining statistical and deterministic means—has set a new methodological direction for ecological inference" (p. 10581). Palmquist (1999) did a more thorough study of the advantages and disadvantages of the EI method. He suggested that although EI's basic model may provide biased results if the datasets violate the EI's assumptions, it does have several useful graphic diagnostics and procedures that allow researchers to model aggregation bias and use covariate(s) in extended models (see King, 1997).

Furthermore, based on known election turnout data by race, several scholars have used Louisiana election data to test the accuracy of EI estimates. The results suggested that precinct-level data support accurate ecological inferences (Palmquist, 1999) and that "(s)ome characteristics of the Louisiana precinct data [such as small sizes of precincts, high level of racial segregation, and low Inflation Factors] make them well-suited for the estimation of voting rates" (Palmquist & Voss, 1997, p. 27). The Palmquist and Voss study was based on the 1990 open primary for a US Senate seat in Louisiana, and Voss (2000) provided further evidence of small estimation errors when predicting white voting behavior based on 1991 and 1992 Louisiana precinct-level data (also see Liu, 1999 for a verification study using New Orleans election and registration data).

Because of these advantages, we utilize King's Ecological Inference procedure to estimate our dependent variable, white crossover voting, at the election unit level (i.e., citywide or council district). Our analysis employs votes cast within precincts for various candidates as well as data reflecting the racial makeup of these precincts. All estimates of precinct-level white cross-

over voting in the 29 elections under investigation were checked for possible aggregation bias based on King's recommended diagnostics. Extended models were employed for 18 of our elections. The EI software is provided by King through his web page at <http://Gking.harvard.edu>.

FINDINGS

Context and White Crossover Voting

Table 1 reports descriptive statistics on the level of white crossover voting for each of the election units under investigation, organized by context and ordered by the racial makeup of

TABLE 1

White Crossover Voting by Context and Election Unit Racial Makeup

Context	Office	Year	% Black	% White Crossover
White Dominant	Dist. A	1986	22.9	1.6
	Dist. A	1980	27.8	1.3
	Dist. C	1977	31.9	4.1
	Dist. A	1994	35.3	1.6
	Mayor	1977	41.9	5.8
	Mayor*	1977	42.8	19.9
Mean (SD) = 5.7 (7.2)				
Racially Competitive	Mayor	1982	45.2	22.5
	Dist. C	1986	46.0	5.7
	Mayor*	1982	46.4	14.4
	Dist. C	1990	47.9	9.2
	Dist. C*	1990	47.9	19.1
	Dist. E	1977	50.2	17.1
	Dist. C	1994	50.8	18.8
	Dist. D*	1981	50.9	17.1
	Dist. D	1981	51.0	11.1
	Dist. E	1982	51.1	6.6
	Mayor	1986	51.3	51.3
	Dist. E*	1982	51.6	3.4
	Mayor	1990	54.4	22.5
Mean (SD) = 16.1 (12.3)				
Black Dominant	Dist. D	1982	58.0	78.7
	Dist. E	1986	58.9	31.1
	Dist. E*	1986	59.1	8.0
	Mayor	1994	59.4	10.2
	Mayor*	1994	59.5	7.3
	Dist. B	1982	59.7	78.1
	Mayor	1998	63.2	37.5
	Dist. B	1994	66.4	95.6
	Dist. B	1990	67.9	91.0
	Dist. E	1994	77.9	44.4
Mean (SD) = 48.2 (35.0)				

Note. * Designates a runoff election. % Black is the percentage of registered voters within an election unit who are black.

election units within each context. The highest level of white crossover occurred in the 1994 District B election (95.6%); the lowest level was in the 1980 District A contest (1.3%). This range in white crossover voting across our election units provides sufficient variance in the dependent variable to identify conditions under which white voters cast ballots for black candidates.

Mean white crossover among all 29 biracial elections was 25.0 with a standard deviation of 27.9. Comparing the three racial contexts, we observe that the mean level of white crossover voting was lowest, 5.7%, in the white dominant context (i.e., in election units where less than 45% of the registered voters were black) and highest, 48.2%, in the black dominant context (election units where more than 55% of the registered voters were black). In the racially competitive context (where blacks comprise 45 to 55% of the registered electorate) the mean level of white crossover was 16.1%. These descriptive findings do not appear to support black threat theory as applied to white crossover voting; neither do they lend support to the modified black threat theory.

The estimated effect of racial context at the election unit level, based on an ordinary least squares model, is reported in Table 2 (OLS is used for interpretive purposes, see Burden & Kimball, 1998; equations based on a weighted least squares model, weighted by the inverse of the standard error, yielded very similar results and are available from the authors). As shown in Equation 1, contrary to what traditional black threat theory predicts, the relationship between black density and the level of white crossover voting is positive. For every one percentage point increase in black density, there is an almost one-and-a-half percentage point increase in white crossover voting. Findings reported in Equation 2 fail to support the prediction of a U-shaped relationship (a U-shaped relationship was predicted by the modified black threat theory). The quadratic term is not statistically significant at the .05 level. Thus, neither the traditional black threat theory nor its modification explain the observed pattern in white crossover voting across these 29 biracial elections.

Time and White Crossover Voting

The descriptive data reported in Table 1 suggest a temporal relationship between the year of an election and the level of white crossover voting: most elections in the white dominant context took place earlier than those in the black dominant context. For instance, three of the six contests in the white dominant context were held in the 1970s. Six of the ten elections in

TABLE 2

The Effect of Election Unit Racial Makeup on White Crossover Voting

	Equation 1	Equation 2	Equation 3
% Black	1.45 (0.35)***	-1.63 (1.71)	1.56 (0.41)**
% Black Squared		0.03 (0.02)	
Time			-1.20 (2.38)
Intercept	-48.93	21.96	-48.70
R Squared	.39	.46	.39
Adjusted R Squared	.36	.42	.35

Note. % Black is the percentage of registered voters within an election unit who are black. The coefficients for % Black, % Black Squared, and Time are unstandardized regression coefficients. The standard error is reported in parenthesis.

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

the black dominant context occurred in the 1990s, the earliest occurring in 1982. This temporal relationship may provide an explanation for the positive relationship between black density and white crossover voting. If racial attitudes among white voters became more liberal over time, resulting in increased white crossover voting, the relationship between black density and white crossover voting would be spurious.

To test whether the increase in white crossover voting is attributable to time, a counter variable reflecting the year of the election was added to the regression analysis. The time period under investigation encompasses eight election years, accordingly the value of the time variable ranges from 1 to 8. As shown in Equation 3 of Table 2, the effect of time is not statistically significant. Black density continues to be a reliable predictor of white crossover voting. The empirical evidence fails to support the notion that greater crossover voting across these New Orleans elections was a function of time.

A Curvilinear Relationship Between Black Density and White Crossover Voting

Findings reported in Table 3 indicate that the relationship between black density and white crossover voting is more accurately modeled as an upward sloping half-U than as a straight line. The quadratic term in Table 2, Equation 2, expressed the relationship as a full U-shape, but was not statistically reliable. The least squares fit for this upward sloping half-U curve is calculated in the following manner: $Y = a(\%BlackVoters^b)$ where a and b are constants. The dependent variable, white crossover voting, is a power function of the independent variable black density. Results indicate that this curvilinear model, reported in Equation 1 of Table 3, performs better ($R^2 = .60$) than the simple linear model ($R^2 = .39$) reported in Equation 2.

This curved, upward sloping half-U relationship is largely due to voting in the election units where black density was lowest. Mainly these were elections for the District A council seat which occurred in three of the four lowest levels of black density among all election units and yielded the three lowest rates of white crossover (see Table 1). To determine whether the curvilinear relationship between black density and white crossover voting was due to these three District A elections, Equation 3 of Table 3 reports the results of a curvilinear model when these particular elections are excluded. Based on a comparison of the power function reported in Equation 3 with that reported in Equation 1, we conclude that these three District A elections were largely responsible for the overall curvilinear relationship. The R-squared for the power function when District A contests are excluded (.38), reported in Equation 3, is 22 percentage points less than the R-squared for the power function for all 29 elections (.60), reported in Equation 1.

We also note that when the three District A elections are excluded, a linear model ($R^2 = .36$, Equation 4) is virtually as good as the curvilinear model ($R^2 = .38$, Equation 3). Because the low levels of white crossover voting in District A were the source for the curvilinear re-

TABLE 3

Curvilinear and Linear Models of White Crossover Voting

Equation 1	Equation 2	Equation 3	Equation 4
$y = 2E - 05x^{3.5156}$ $R^2 = .60$	$y = 1.4513x - 48.931$ $R^2 = .39$	$y = 3E - 05x^{3.33372}$ $R^2 = .38$	$y = 1.7927x - 68.215$ $R^2 = .36$

Note. Equations 1 and 3 are power functions. Equations 3 and 4 exclude the three District A contests.

relationship between black density and white crossover voting, a closer examination of these three contests is in order.

White Crossover Voting in a White Dominant Election Unit

If the level of white crossover voting reflects the level of white perception of black threat, as traditional black threat theory suggests, results thus far indicate that among white voters those in District A had the strongest perception of black threat. This brings up a perplexing question. Given the relatively low black density level in District A (this district was the only election unit dominated by white voters across the entire time-period under investigation), how might whites in this district have had a strong perception of black threat? According to traditional black threat theory, black threat should have been stronger, hence white crossover lower, in electoral units with a comparatively larger black cohort.

One possible explanation is that the black threat for District A white voters reflected a generalized rather than a district-specific threat. It may be the case that the citywide transition from white to black political control enhanced the racial sensitivity of white voters in District A, thereby keeping crossover voting among whites in this district low in elections to all offices, citywide as well as for the District A seat. This was not the case, however. In the 1986 District A council election, for example, an estimated 1.6% of white voters crossed over. In the simultaneous mayoral primary, white voters in District A crossed over at a rate of 35.7%. Though white voters in this district were less supportive of the black mayoral candidate than were white voters generally (overall, white crossover voting in the 1986 mayoral primary was 51.3%), the 34.1 percentage point difference in the level of crossover voting between the mayoral and council contest among District A whites voters suggests that the low level of crossover in elections for the District A council seat likely was related to the candidate choices offered to voters rather than to any generalized perception of black threat. During the last two decades only four black candidates competed for the District A seat, all in three open-seat elections. While none of these candidates received more than an estimated 0.6% of the white vote, they also did poorly among black voters, receiving as little as 1.3%, and no greater than an estimated 16.6% of the black vote. Though strategic voting by blacks in these elections cannot be dismissed (i.e., these candidates may have been the preferred candidates of black voters but did not receive many of their votes because these candidates were viewed as having little chance of being elected), the low level of support for these candidates may be due at least in part to candidate characteristics.

White Crossover Voting in Racially Competitive and Black Dominant Contexts

When we turn to elections in the racially competitive context, we note that the evidence is inconsistent with the modified black threat theory. White voters in this context exhibited a higher, not lower, level of support for black candidates by comparison to white voters in the white dominant context. Greater than predicted white crossover voting in the racially competitive context, relative to the white dominant context, suggests that white voters in the competitive setting accommodated to the fact that black candidates were now more likely to win.

Elections in the black dominant context tended to exhibit the highest levels of white crossover voting. This indicates that at least some whites voted in a strategic way for a black candidate when there was little realistic chance of electing a white candidate. If white voters decided to strategically cast ballots for particular black candidates, how did these voters distinguish among black candidates to ascertain the one most favorable? We address this question by considering the effect of newspaper endorsement and incumbency.

Newspaper Endorsement, Incumbency, and White Crossover Voting

Previous research indicates that the strength of black candidates can influence the candidate choices of white voters (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 1997). The media strongly influence biracial elections through newspaper endorsements. Black candidates who have an endorsement from a major newspaper are likely to enjoy higher levels of white support (Bullock, 1985; Llorens, Parsons, & Perry, 1996; Watson, 1984). Evidence suggests that incumbency also is important for black candidates. Black incumbents are likely to have more opportunities to engage in credit-taking activities and are more likely to have resources through which to attract white support by comparison to black nonincumbents (Bullock, 1985; Watson, 1984).

There were 81 black candidacies among the 29 biracial elections under investigation. Seven of these were incumbents, and 11 had an endorsement from New Orleans' major newspaper, *The Times-Picayune*. Mean white crossover for the seven black incumbents was 32.6; for the 74 black nonincumbents, 7.0. A t-test for equality of means indicates a statistically significant difference ($t = 6.29, p < .001$). This suggests that black incumbency enhanced the level of white crossover voting. Mean white crossover voting for the 11 black candidates with an endorsement was 30.5; for the remaining 70 black candidates, 5.8. A t-test reveals that these means are significantly different ($t = 4.40, p < .001$). This suggests that newspaper endorsement of black candidates increased the level of white crossover voting. Table 4 reports results of two regression equations, based on an ordinary least squares model, that estimate the effects of black density and black candidate strength, measured by incumbency status and endorsement by the *Times-Picayune* (estimates based on a weighted least squares model, weighted by the inverse of the standard error, were very similar and are available from the authors). Because six of the seven black incumbents were endorsed by the *Time-Picayune*, black incumbency and endorsement were entered into separate equations. In addition, white incumbency status, a measure of white candidate strength, was entered into these equations. A variable measuring election type, whether primary (coded 0, $N = 22$) or runoff (coded 1, $N = 7$) was introduced as a control because the level of white crossover voting is reported to be lower in runoff, than in primary elections (Bullock, 1985).

The effect of incumbency is statistically significant, as is the effect of endorsement. The findings indicate that newspaper endorsement may be somewhat more important in increasing

TABLE 4

The Effect of Newspaper Endorsement and Incumbency on White Crossover Voting

	Equation 1	Equation 2
% Black	-1.23 (0.33)**	1.14 (0.33)**
Black Incumbent	19.90 (9.23)*	
Endorsement		21.24 (8.31)*
White Incumbent	-5.87 (11.50)	-3.76 (11.27)
Election Type	-16.29 (8.90)	-16.80 (8.65)
Intercept	-37.75	-35.68
R ²	.57	.59
Adjusted R ²	.49	.52

Note. % Black is the percentage of registered voters within an election unit who are black. Endorsement is the *Times-Picayune* endorsement of a black candidate. Election Type is primary or runoff. The coefficients for % Black, Black Incumbent, Endorsement, White Incumbent and Election Type are unstandardized regression coefficients. The standard error is reported in parenthesis.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

crossover voting among whites than is incumbency. The equation with black incumbency (Equation 1) yields an adjusted R-squared of .49; the equation with newspaper endorsement (Equation 2) yields an adjusted R-squared of .52. The evidence strongly suggests that black density is a reliable, positive predictor of white crossover in both equations.

Arguably, the level of white crossover voting for black candidates also may be dependent upon issue positions taken by black candidates. Though the present study does not incorporate a direct test for the effect of issue positions, because of the inherent difficulty in identifying an issue variable that would enable us to measure all 81 black candidates across a 22 year period, previous studies have shown that a deracialized campaign strategy can be used effectively by black politicians in biracial elections to attract white voter support (see Perry, 1990, 1991; Pierannunzi & Hutcheson, 1991; Winn, 1990).

Several examples drawn from the elections covered in our study reveal that black candidates who used deracialized campaign strategies garnered a relatively high level of white support. Unlike Ernest Morial (New Orleans' first black mayor) who had a "problematic relationship with the business community," and "made whites feel uncomfortable with majority black political leadership in New Orleans," Sidney Barthelemy (New Orleans' second black mayor) was very popular within the city's white community (Perry, 1997, pp. 185). As the leader of a biracial coalition, Barthelemy was perceived to be "less threatening" to white interests than his major opponent William Jefferson, another black candidate who had heavy support among New Orleans' black voters (see Perry, 1997). Some scholars have argued that Barthelemy employed a deracialization strategy in this 1986 mayoral campaign (Persons, 1993). Based on the EI procedure, Barthelemy received about 42% of the white votes, which was almost 28 percentage points higher than the share of the white vote received by Morial in his successful 1982 mayoral reelection bid (for a further discussion of Barthelemy's appeal to white voters see Hirsch, 1997; Perry, 1997; Persons, 1993). Another example of a successful black candidate, who adopted a biracial coalition strategy and openly reached out to white voters, was Jim Singleton, a five-term black councilman. Based on the EI model, Singleton had never received less than 30% of the white vote.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Our goal was to test traditional black threat theory as well as its modern modification as applied to white crossover voting. To do so we examined white crossover voting across 29 biracial elections for municipal office in New Orleans from 1977 through 1998. Black density does matter. Our empirical analysis demonstrated that black density influenced the level of crossover among white votes. Contrary to prediction based on traditional black threat theory, the relationship between black density and white crossover voting was not inverse: As the black density of the election unit increased, white voters voted in greater proportions for black candidates.

Our analysis uncovered a nonlinear relationship between black density and white crossover voting. Contrary to prediction based on the modified black threat theory, the shape of this relationship was an upward half-U, instead of a full U-shape. It is plausible to argue that white voters strategically voted for black candidates in the black dominant context because the chance to elect a white candidate was relatively small. The modified black threat theory predicted high white crossover in the black dominant context, but it did not accurately predict for the other contexts. Our findings showed that the level of white crossover voting was lowest in the white dominant context (instead of in the racially competitive context as predicted by the modified black threat theory).

One explanation for the low level of white crossover in the white dominant context is that white strategic voting for a black candidate is unnecessary in this setting, given the small chance that a black candidate will be elected. Furthermore, our investigation into white crossover voting in District A suggests that low white support for black candidates in the white dominant context may be due, at least in part, to the lack of strong black candidates—only one black candidate in the white dominant context received newspaper endorsement, and there were no black incumbents. This particular context may dissuade many otherwise viable blacks from seeking elective office. Contrary to a confrontational political style suggested by black threat theory, the upward curved relationship between black density and white crossover voting points to an accommodative and strategic adjustment of white voters to a changing racial context. In the racially competitive context, the likelihood of a black candidate being elected increased. Stronger black candidates competed for office: five black candidates competing in this context received newspaper endorsement and three black candidates were incumbents. Correspondingly, the likelihood of a white candidate being elected in this context decreased. In this setting, white voters may seek out those black candidates perceived as most friendly to white group interests. As previously noted, Sidney Barthelemy, New Orleans' second black mayor, was considered such a candidate in the 1986 mayoral election.

Black density, certainly, is not the sole factor that stimulates white strategic crossover. In order to strategically protect group interests through supporting a black candidate, white voters need to be able to distinguish among black candidates. They, therefore, need information. White strategic crossover is facilitated by newspaper endorsement as well as by incumbency status, with endorsement likely being the more influential. Casting a ballot for a white candidate who lacks a realistic chance of winning can be considered a wasted vote, and newspaper endorsements can identify the black candidates friendliest to white group interests.

Our findings based on New Orleans, a black empowerment area (Bobo & Gilliam, 1990), support white strategic voting as an explanation for white crossover. Arguably, variation in the level of white crossover voting may be related to differences among individual white voters, such as the differences in socioeconomic status (Howell, 1994). Future research may also improve our understanding of the effects of racial context by employing both macro and micro-level analyses that allow researchers to examine the extent to which the socioeconomic status of black voters affects the level of white crossover voting. Finally, our analysis utilized data for one city. The normal limitations of a case study apply, particularly in that New Orleans is a large southern city. White voters in the South, as well as in urban areas, may possess certain characteristics or be subject to the influences of particular cultures more than white voters in other regions or in rural areas. The white strategic voting model supported by our findings deserves to be tested in other settings.

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