Chapter 9 - Black Incumbents, White Districts: A Georgia Analysis

The civil rights community made a serious tactical blunder when the U.S. Supreme Court began striking down "racial gerrymanders" in the mid-1990s.[1] Filled with dismay after watching majority-minority districts fall one by one at the Court's hands, activists got carried away with their rhetoric, foretelling a doom destined not to descend. NAACP Legal Defense Fund attorney Theodore Shaw prophesied, for example, that minority members of Congress "eventually" would be able to "meet in the back seat of a taxi cab" (Charen 1996).[2] Deval Patrick, the assistant attorney general for civil rights, went even further: he said the *Shaw v. Reno* line of court decisions portended "a return to all-white government" (*Baltimore Sun* 1996).

Other activists borrowed ugly images from Southern history. U.S. Rep. Cynthia McKinney, whose Georgia district traded away heavily black precincts for much whiter Atlanta suburbs (Tucker 1995), threatened that African-American legislators would face "the same level of extinction" as they did after Reconstruction (Applebome 1994). Elaine Jones, head of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, summoned memories of lynchings; she said the Supreme Court was "closing the noose" on black legislators (Savage 1996). Not to be outdone, the Rev. Jesse Jackson reached beyond U.S. history for his metaphor–calling the rulings (in an oft-quoted line) "a kind of ethnic cleansing" (Tilove 1996). "The fact that 1996 looks more like 1896 every day cannot be ignored."

No matter how restrained, all implied an immediate and direct threat to congressional diversity.

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[1] The line of Supreme Court decisions began with *Shaw v. Reno* 509 U.S. 630 (1993). Other major cases include *Miller v. Johnson* 115 S. Ct. 2475 (1995), *Bush v. Vera* 116 S. Ct. 1941 (1996), and *Shaw v. Hunt* 116 S. Ct. 1894 (1996).

[2] Sleeper (1996) attributes a similar statement to Laughlin McDonald, voting-rights specialist with the ACLU. I do not know if both made the same comment, or if one of my sources is in error.

The claim, as summarized in a Supreme Court brief filed by the Justice Department, was that racially polarized voting "would make it nearly impossible for blacks to win in the newly drawn districts" (Savage 1996). This overheated rhetoric may have paid off in the short term by attracting sympathizers or donations,[3] but it backfired after the 1996 elections because the purge failed to materialize (Page 1996). All five black incumbents who tried to retain their Southern congressional seats–Cynthia McKinney and Sanford Bishop in Georgia, Eddie Bernice Johnson and Sheila Jackson Lee in Texas, and Corrine Brown in Florida–succeeded despite losing their majority-black voter base.[4]

These "nearly impossible" victories cast a foolish light on all the dire predictions, one that racial redistricting's critics were quick to exploit (Baxter 1996; Bullock 1991, 834; DLC 1996; Garrett 1996; Smart 1996; *Tampa Tribune* 1996; *USA Today* 1996). "Racial-Bloc Politics?" an Atlanta headline chuckled (Williams 1996), "Don't Look at White Voters." Abigail Thernstrom, one of the best-known opponents of race-conscious governmental policies, saw the elections as a sign that "white America has changed" (Savage 1996). "They needed white votes, and they got white votes," she declared (Lehrer 1996). Jim Sleeper (1996, 1997) similarly used the victories as a centerpiece of his case that, contrary to the expectations of "liberal racism," black politicians can win white votes. "Their stunning success has opened a new front in the heated battle over black election districts," reported a front-page *Washington Post* analysis (Fletcher 1996), "shattering old assumptions about racial voting patterns, especially in the South."

However, none of the gloating communicated exactly which "old assumptions" about Southern voting behavior were at stake in the 1996 contests, or how they managed to shatter those

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[3] Mansbridge (1986, 118-22) offers a concise discussion of how the institutional needs of pressure groups can drive them to embrace self-defeating political strategies.

[4] I do not discuss the two Texas elections again in this chapter, because both districts were still majority-minority strongholds. The black precincts were replaced with Mexican precincts, not white precincts, forming the sort of multiracial congressional district in which African-American candidates often thrive (Lublin 1997b, 51). They represent less of a surprise.

assumptions. That analysis is the task of this chapter. I show that the "white backlash" hypothesis so central to Southern politics research has direct and observable implications that failed to materialize in Georgia. To construct this case, I analyze white voting behavior in detail, across multiple years (1992 and 1996), across multiple levels (district and precinct), and across multiple offices (president, senator, representative). I also look briefly at Brown's contest in Florida, to validate the main comparisons. If whites are responsive to the local context in which they live, we expect those in heterogeneous communities to fight for white privileges more than those with little interracial contact. The results are consistent, however. Neither Georgia whites nor the Florida whites in Corrine Brown's Third District *ever* follow a backlash pattern in response to their area's demographics. This is the "old assumption" about Southern voting behavior that fails to appear in the data, and therefore accounts for the surprising ease with which three black Democrats managed to win reelection.

Racial Redistricting and White Backlash

Scholars know that racial conservatism often thrives in the presence of a numerically large minority, but they are not entirely sure why (see Chaps. 2-3). White backlash could represent a genuine struggle for power, as early researchers thought. On the other hand, it could represent ossified prejudices, or indirect hostility generated by other sorts of conflict. The court-induced redistricting that shook up Georgia's electoral map allows a contemporary test among these competing hypotheses. Between 1994 and 1996, when the demographics, economics and culture of particular Georgia precincts could not have changed very much, whites went from an isolated minority with no hope of electing a white representative to a slight majority easily able to prevail if they pulled together. If the white-backlash patterns of Southern behavior really are fueled by the desire to maintain political power, then the new districts presented a golden opportunity for

backlash. Whites rightly should have smelled blood, because the racial distribution of voting resources had changed radically. They should have mobilized at a notably high rate, and they should have voted cohesively against the black candidates of choice (Blalock 1967, 150-52). That those candidates were themselves African American presumably only heightened the prospects for backlash.[5] The first section below, however, does not find evidence of a district-level backlash against the black incumbents.

Backlash behavior also might operate at the precinct level. Voters in mixed-race precincts exist in an integrated social and economic world that other whites do not share. This purportedly spurs competition between races. Even if white voters in mixed neighborhoods otherwise might have been more likely to abstain or vote for Democrats, racial hostility would undercut their natural inclinations; they should cohere against the black party of choice (Huckfeldt and Kohfeld 1989, 80-83). A precinct-level backlash finding would be ambiguous, of course. The rivalry obviously could not operate at a predominantly electoral level, since precincts are not meaningful venues of political competition, but a handful of other explanations introduced in Chapter 5 might have accounted for a localized backlash response. As it turns out, though, I need not adjudicate among these hypotheses with similar observable implications–because the second section below shows consistent evidence against any precinct-level backlash pattern.

This test of the backlash logic is an important addition to the last chapter's Louisiana analysis. It addresses two flaws in that analysis. First, David Duke was running for statewide office. While it's plausible that whites in racially mixed parishes would have felt most favorably toward his stands and rhetoric, simply because of resentment they might have felt toward their minority neighbors, the electoral competition really was not localized. Black votes within one's parish are no more likely to counterbalance one's preferences than black votes from the other end of the state, and any race-

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[5] The white backlash literature says little about black candidates, presumably because the possibility seemed so remote before the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

based issue operating at the state level (such as university governance or racial quotas for state contracts) implicates whites everywhere in Louisiana.[6] By contrast, the Georgia and Florida congressional districts include whites whose cohesion (or lack of it) directly impacts the representation for that particular area. The second, and more obvious, advantage of this new analysis is that it allows a replication of the Louisiana precinct-level results in another state. The lack of a neighborhood backlash pattern across Georgia's congressional districts should add confidence that my Louisiana results are not a peculiar New Orleans phenomenon unseen elsewhere in the South.

A District-Level Analysis: 1992 and 1996

The 1990 census allotted Georgia 11 congressional districts. Three were black-majority districts from 1992-96: an Atlanta district represented by civil-rights stalwart John Lewis, the "Sherman's march" district running from Atlanta to Savannah represented by Cynthia McKinney, and a rural district in southwest Georgia represented by Sanford Bishop. Georgia's other districts, bleached and destabilized by the 1990 round of redistricting (Lublin and Voss 1998; Petrocik and Desposato 1998), and buffeted by a 1994 swing in white voter preferences (Burnham 1996, 363-65; Stanley 1996, 191), were by 1996 entirely Republican.

The 1996 election introduced a new map, eliminating McKinney and Bishop's black majority districts. White voters therefore gained adequate leverage to cast out the black candidates of choice, politicians who were themselves African American. Several districts held by the GOP, meanwhile, gained large numbers of African-American voters, making them vulnerable as well. Freshman Rep. Saxby Chambliss' was suddenly 27% black. Freshman Rep. Charlie Norwood faced a one-third black constituency. The contests seemed ripe for challengers, yet when the dust settled every

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[6] The choice of policy examples is not accidental. Louisiana has had a long-running controversy over what to do with the Southern University system, a predominantly black higher education structure left over from segregation days, and Republican Gov. Mike Foster was embroiled in a controversy early in his first term because he wanted to end a minority and women's business assistance program (Redman 1996).

incumbent returned to Congress.

Analyzing the district-level results for a white backlash pattern requires knowing how whites

voted. Georgia reports both election returns and racial registration by precinct, but of course votes

are not collected by race.[7] Obtaining the quantities of interest therefore requires "ecological"

inference from the aggregate data.[8] I use for this purpose Gary King's (1997) method of ecological

inference. (Chapter 7 provides an intuitive description of the method, as well as evidence that it is

particularly useful for studying Southern voting behavior.) As a first step, I estimated racial

voting–turnout, then vote choice–for each congressional race in 1992 (Table 9-1) and 1996 (Table

9-2).

The 1992 estimates indicate exactly how much trouble black Democrats face among white

Southerners. Bishop, for example, barely managed to attract a fifth of registered whites (33.9% of

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[7] Voter registration is broken into two categories, black and non-black. For convenience, the term "white" represents the latter category.

[8] Another option, of course, would be to analyze exit polls. My understanding is that no exit poll data exist for the House elections studied here. The Voter News Service did conduct exit polls in both Georgia and Florida during the 1996 general election, but inexplicably chose not to ask respondents about their House vote even though such a question was included in certain other states (Voter News Service 1997). Furthermore, the samples in any one congressional district tend to be tiny. For example, only 34 people from one precinct appear in the exit-poll data for Bishop's district, making the sampling error enormous. McKinney's district gets slightly more coverage: four precincts with a combined 151 people. So the estimates produced in this chapter are unique.

I would not prefer exit polls to ecological inference in this instance, even were they available. Exit polls have serious problems, including sampling error inherent in the choice of precincts to poll, response bias caused when some people refuse to cooperate, and the unequal reluctance of whites to admit voting against minority candidates (Campbell and Palmquist 1998, 3-5; Traugott and Price 1992). The Georgia VNS exit poll, for example, did a wonderful job predicting the statewide presidential vote once data were weighted: 45.7% Clinton, 46.9% Dole, 6.3% Perot. When estimates are broken up by congressional district and by race, though, they are quite poor. The non-black vote for Clinton, after weighting, is supposed to be the following by congressional district (in order): 34.3, 39.2, **22.4, 41.4,** 45.3, **23.3,** 37.6, **21.1, 23.2, 21.6,** 34.0. The six estimates in bold face are *impossibly* low (and the others survive in large part because the bounds are wider there).

These errors are consistent, not random, and therefore extremely unlikely to result from sampling error alone. Clinton simply could not have won as many votes as he did in these congressional districts if so few non-blacks supported him, and the errors are worst in the districts where we have the most aggregate information–that is, in the whitest districts. In Gingrich's Sixth, for example, the exit poll sample of 143 whites (when weighted) reported giving 23.3% of the vote to Clinton. However, looking at the precinct distribution of whites and votes, at least 29.1% of white voters must have done so. In the lily-white Ninth, the exit poll estimate drawn from 99 whites is 23.2% for Clinton, when the actual white vote clearly was within half a percentage point of 34%. Ecological estimates, while imperfect, are clearly better than any alternative.

Table 9-1: The 1992 Congressional Elections in Georgia

DISTRICT Georgia	Candidates	Vote %	% black	Black Two-Party Vote %	ESTIMATES FOR WHITES Democrat	GOP	No Vote	Two-Party %
1	Barbara Christmas - D	42.2	11.9	85.0	23.8	42.3	33.9	36.0
	Jack Kingston - R	57.8		(3.9)			(.4)	(.6)
2	**Sanford Bishop - D**	63.7	47.5	97.5	21.1	41.2	37.7	33.9
	Jim Dudley - R	36.3		(1.5)			(1.0)	(1.4)
3	Richard Ray - D*	45.2	9.9	92.3	27.9	42.7	29.5	39.5
	Mac Collins - R	54.8		(1.7)			(.6)	(.2)
4	Cathey Steinberg - D	49.5	6.6	96.6	34.6	40.7	24.7	46.0
	John Linder - R	50.5		(4.8)			(.9)	(.3)
5	**John Lewis - D***	72.1	49.8	98.6	34.4	39.7	25.9	46.4
	Paul Stabler - R	27.9		(.3)			(.4)	(.3)
6	Tony Center - D	42.3	2.6	89.3	29.8	43.3	26.9	40.8
	Newt Gingrich - R*	57.7		(5.5)			(.5)	(.2)
7	George Darden - D*	57.3	8.4	93.5	37.6	32.6	29.8	53.6
	Al Beverly - R	42.7		(1.3)			(.3)	(.9)
8	Roy J. Rowland - D*	55.7	12.7	94.5	35.5	32.0	32.5	52.6
	Robert F. Cunningham - R	44.3		(7.4)			(.7)	(.7)
9	Nathan Deal - D	59.2	2.4	97.2	37.8	27.3	34.9	58.0
	Daniel Becker - R	40.8		(2.3)			(.1)	(.1)
10	Don Johnson - D	53.8	8.9	88.8	35.0	34.3	30.7	50.5
	Ralph Hudgens - R	46.2		(9.8)			(.3)	(.9)
11	**Cynthia McKinney - D**	73.1	59.5	97.5	23.3	36.0	40.8	39.3
	Woodrow Lovett - R	26.9		(.5)			(3.0)	(.5)

Note: Racial voting estimates were produced using Gary King's EI. The two-party percentages represent levels of Democratic support. Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. African-American voting percentages in several districts are based on very little information, as indicated by their huge standard errors, and are included only for the purposes of full disclosure. Black candidates are in **bold** face. An asterisk indicates an incumbent.

those who turned out). McKinney trailed right behind him, only pulling in 23.3% of the Eleventh

District's registered whites. No white Democrat, incumbent or challenger, performed this badly

among the potential voting population–not even the Democratic challenger in Newt Gingrich's Sixth

District. Three white Democrats in open-seat contests, by contrast, attracted more than a third of

those registered, and two won a majority among white voters. The only black candidate with decent

white support was incumbent John Lewis, although he still barely managed a third of registered

whites, and lost among white voters.

Whites in 1992 had almost no chance of preventing African-American voters from installing their congressional candidate of choice, and therefore had little incentive to mobilize or to coalesce behind a Republican. Some therefore registered discontent not by voting for opposition candidates, but by staying away from the polls altogether. Estimated white turnout in McKinney's Eleventh District (59.2%) and Bishop's Second District (62.3%) were the lowest observed across the state. The balance of power changed radically in 1996, however, especially in Bishop's district. Discontented whites could make a real difference if they unified. The voters in the new Second District did not respond to their sudden electoral strength by trying to cast Bishop out, however. Far from it. When he was vulnerable in 1996, Bishop's performance actually improved. His estimated two-party vote rose more than 3 percentage points; his absolute vote stayed roughly the same (compare tables 9-1 and 9-2). McKinney, meanwhile, only slipped four percentage points among voters between the two elections. Running in Georgia's Eleventh District in 1992, she won the support of 23.3% of registered whites (Table 9-1); her Fourth District vote in 1996 was 19.3% (Table 9-2). District racial composition certainly does not fuel a serious backlash to regain power.

The McKinney and Bishop figures reported in Table 9-2 resemble previously reported estimates.[9] However, the comparison presented in the table with other Georgia congressional districts is new and more interesting. Second District Rep. Sanford Bishop outperformed every Democrat in the state among white voters except for cookie magnate Michael Coles.[10] Bishop's *overall* vote percentage also topped the winning margins of two GOP freshmen, Chambliss and Norwood, who faced reconfigured, more hostile districts, and did not fall far short of GOP freshman

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[9] Reporters seemed to draw their figures from two sources: estimates from the Associated Press based upon homogeneous precinct analysis, and estimates from David Bositis, senior political analyst at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, based upon Goodman's ecological regression. Bositis (1997, 2-3) pegged McKinney's white support at 30.1% for the general election; our figure is within a standard error of that. His estimate for Bishop is 35%, ours 37.2%–not substantively different.

[10] Coles was a well-financed candidate who performed better against his Republican opponent, Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, than Democratic U.S. Rep. Ben Jones did in 1994 (36% of the vote).

Table 9-2: The 1996 Congressional Elections in Georgia & Florida

| DISTRICT | | | | Black Two- | ESTIMATES FOR WHITES | | | |
Georgia	Candidates	Vote %	% black	Party Vote %	Democrat	GOP	No Vote	Two-Party %
1	Rosemary D. Kaszans - D	31.8	23.5	75.4	9.1	40.3	50.6	18.4
	Jack Kingston - R*	68.2		(1.9)		(0.5)	(0.8)	(0.5)
2	**Sanford Bishop - D***	54.0	26.8	97.6	21.5	36.2	42.4	37.2
	Darrel Ealum - R	46.0		(0.3)		(0.3)	(0.8)	(0.3)
3	Jim Chafin - D	38.9	13.2	94.1	18.6	42.8	38.6	30.3
	Mac Collins - R*	61.1		(1.9)		(0.3)	(0.5)	(0.3)
4	**Cynthia McKinney - D***	57.8	39.6	98.8	19.3	44.1	36.6	30.5
	John Mitnick - R	42.2		(0.6)		(0.5)	(0.8)	(0.5)
5	**John Lewis - D***	100.0	n/a	n/a				n/a
6	Michael Coles - D	42.2	3.2	94.8	27.1	40.3	32.7	40.2
	Newt Gingrich - R*	57.8		(12.8)		(0.4)	(0.1)	(0.4)
7	Charlie Watts - D	42.2	8.9	95.0	21.8	37.5	40.7	36.9
	Bob Barr - R*	57.8		(3.7)		(0.5)	(0.7)	(0.5)
8	Jim Wiggins - D	47.4	24.3	84.6	18.3	33.4	48.3	35.4
	Saxby Chambliss - R*	52.6		(2.1)		(0.6)	(0.8)	(0.6)
9	Ken Poston - D	34.5	2.3	76.4	18.2	36.7	45.1	33.2
	Nathan Deal - R*	65.5		(9.9)		(0.2)	(0.8)	(0.2)
10	David Bell - D	47.7	26.4	97.0	17.4	40.3	42.4	30.1
	Charlie Norwood - R*	52.3		(0.7)		(0.2)	(0.2)	(0.2)
11	Tommy Stephenson - D	35.7	5.2	92.7	20.2	42.5	37.4	32.2
	John Linder - R*	64.3		(3.1)		(0.2)	(0.1)	(0.2)
Florida Cross-Validation								
3	**Corrine Brown - D***	59.0	39.0	97.4	20.5	38.1	41.4	35.0
	Preston Fields - R	41.0		(0.3)		(0.4)	(0.5)	(0.4)

Note: Racial voting estimates were produced using Gary King's EI. "% Black" reports the estimated racial demographics of district *voters*. The two-party percentages represent levels of Democratic support. Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. African-American voting percentages in several districts are based on very little information, as indicated by their huge standard errors, and are included only for the purposes of full disclosure. Black incumbents are in bold face. An asterisk indicates an incumbent.

Rep. Bob Barr's total support in the overwhelmingly white Georgia Seventh. Compared with either other Democrats or other incumbents, Bishop did well. In fact, with these numbers he would have won in any district with a voting population that was more than 21% black.

Rep. Cynthia McKinney's performance among whites was certainly less impressive than Bishop's, but her campaign was unlikely to impress wavering white Georgians. She portrayed

herself as under attack by "the holdovers from the Civil War days, the relics" (Toner 1996). "What

I represent is the fresh face of the New South," she boasted, then drew on a hackneyed stereotype

to explain her misfortunes, "Unfortunately, that's too much for some of our good old boys to take"

(Applebome 1994). Near the end of the campaign, her father called opponent Republican John

Mitnick a "racist Jew" (Nichols 1996). This ugly instance of anti-Semitism, following on rumors

of a connection between McKinney and Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan (Janofsky 1996),

played into any hateful stereotype that voters were inclined to project onto her.[11]

Nevertheless, McKinney's estimated white vote still outperformed that of Democratic

challengers in the First, Third and Tenth districts, and did not fall far short of many others. Voting

was racially polarized in McKinney's district, since with these numbers she would have lost had

blacks composed fewer than 31% of the districts's voters. However, given the demographics of the

district, neither McKinney's race nor her strident liberalism united whites sufficiently to evoke a

backlash against her.   Whites do not appear randomly across communities. Some are more open

to Democrats than are others, and these may appear more frequently in racially mixed districts. It

is worthwhile, therefore, to add a second set of estimates: presidential voting in these same

districts.[12] Clinton's vote provides a measure of Democratic sympathies that is constant across all

of Georgia's precincts. Table 9-3 reports estimated white voting behavior in the 1992 presidential

contest for each congressional district; Table 9-4 adds the same estimates for 1996. This additional

baseline of comparison does nothing to alter my conclusions.

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[11] It especially may have cost her among the new district's many Jewish voters, who otherwise would make
a natural addition to a Democratic coalition and are hardly "relics" of antebellum Georgia.

[12] An alternate possibility would have been party registration. On its face, this seems the better measure since
voting swings from election to election while party identification remains relatively stable (Green and
Palmquist 1990, 1994; Green, Palmquist and Schickler 1998). However, in Southern states registration figures
are known to be unreliable measures of partisanship, since many voters register strategically to participate in
local election primaries. Such data would not capture any underlying probability of voting for the Democratic
party in national elections (Giles and Hertz 1994, 319), and the noise such a proxy introduces would not be
random since the pressure is especially strong in rural communities.

Table 9-3: White Voting in 1996 Statewide Elections

DISTRICT Georgia	PRESIDENCY				SENATE				IMPROVEMENT	
	3-Party %	Democrat	Other	No Vote	2-Party %	Democrat	GOP	No Vote	Clinton	Cleland
1	32.0	19.0	40.5 (0.1)	40.5 (0.9)	38.0	21.0	34.4 (0.1)	44.6 (0.4)	+13.6	+19.6
2	31.2	18.5	40.9 (0.2)	40.6 (0.6)	44.0	25.7	32.6 (0.3)	41.7 (0.6)	-6.0	+6.8
3	31.2	19.3	42.8 (0.3)	37.9 (0.3)	36.0	22.6	40.3 (0.2)	37.1 (0.4)	+0.9	+4.9
4	44.7	29.7	36.8 (0.4)	33.6 (0.6)	45.6	29.9	35.7 (0.2)	34.4 (0.9)	+14.2	+15.1
5	47.5	29.5	32.7 (0.2)	37.8 (0.6)	47.0	28.0	31.5 (0.3)	40.5 (0.5)		
6	29.7	19.8	46.8 (0.2)	33.4 (0.8)	32.6	21.9	45.4 (0.2)	32.7 (0.1)	-10.5	-7.6
7	33.1	19.9	40.2 (0.2)	40.0 (0.7)	40.1	24.2	36 (0.7)	39.8 (0.5)	-3.8	+3.2
8	30.2	16.5	38.1 (0.4)	45.4 (1.1)	43.7	23.9	30.8	45.3 (0.8)	-5.2	+8.3
9	33.6	19.6	38.8 (0.1)	41.6 (0.1)	36.1	20.7	36.8 (0.1)	42.5 (0.2)	+0.4	+2.9
10	28.6	17.5	43.8 (0.6)	38.7 (0.6)	37.6	22.3	37.1 (0.4)	40.6 (0.9)	-1.5	+7.5
11	33.0	21.4	43.4 (0.5)	35.2 (0.8)	37.2	23.9	40.2 (0.1)	35.9 (0.2)	+0.8	+5.0

Florida Cross-Validation

DISTRICT Georgia	PRESIDENCY				SENATE				IMPROVEMENT	
3	36.3	21.9	38.5 (0.2)	39.6 (0.7)					+1.3	

Note: Racial voting percentages are estimates from Gary King's EI, with standard errors in parentheses. The "Improvement" columns report how each candidate performed among voters compared to the district's Democratic congressional candidate. The "other" category represents votes for either Bob Dole or Ross Perot. Because two stages of estimation are required for each election to estimate the three quantities in this table, only two standard errors are reported; the standard error for GOP and Democratic support is the same. Districts with black incumbents are in bold face.

Bishop barely topped Clinton's two-party white vote in the 1992 Georgia Second, despite a decent year for the state's Democratic candidates. He was the only Democrat running for Congress who fell below Clinton's support among registered whites (see Table 9-3). Two out of three whites who went to the polls did so to vote against Bishop, despite being mere "filler people" with little chance of influencing the results.

Armed with new power in 1996, whites responded by endorsing Bishop at *higher* relative rates

than they did previously, an accomplishment all the more impressive in light of the realignment against Democrats that struck in Georgia's other congressional districts (see Table 9-4). Bishop beat Clinton by an estimated 3 percentage points among the entire Second District white constituency, and by 6 percentage points among white voters. Only Michael Coles, running in a district held by Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, managed to outperform the president so well among registered whites. The table also reduces one apprehension about comparing Bishop to the Democratic challengers, which is that they may not have been credible or competitive. All but one attracted about the same electoral support as Clinton. In addition to Coles, Charlie Watts and Jim Wiggins even beat the incumbent president. The Democratic challengers therefore were not leaving a huge reservoir of likely Democrats untapped. Georgia simply contained few of them by 1996.

My findings regarding turnout similarly discount a district-level backlash phenomenon. Bositis (1997) argues that white Democrats, unwilling to vote for a black candidate yet finding Republicans distasteful, decided to sit out the 1996 contests. My 1996 estimates reveal the empirical pattern Bositis describes: atypically high black mobilization in the House contests, coupled with dropping white turnout rates. White turnout fell, from the presidential to the congressional contests, by an estimated 2 percentage points in Bishop's district, and 3 percentage points in McKinney's. This behavior, however, is not exceptional; voters typically roll off the ballot after participating in high-profile elections. The white roll off in Bishop's contest was lower than found in six House districts, and only the Gingrich-Coles contest was a much stronger draw. The McKinney race also exhibited unexceptional roll off. They were not abandoned by whites who otherwise would have voted.

The only indicator that points to a possible backlash against black candidates is the 1996 white vote for McKinney. She attracted only two-thirds of Clinton's support among her white constituency, and fell 15 percentage points short among those who turned out, a weaker performance than in 1992. Judging from McKinney's liberal record and aggressive 1996 campaign, however, this

Table 9-4: White Voting in 1992 Presidential Election

DISTRICT Georgia	PRESIDENCY				IMPROVEMENT	
	3-Party %	Democrat	Other	No Vote	2-Party	Absolute
1	28.8	19.8	49.0 (.6)	31.2 (.4)	-7.2	-4.0
2	32.4	22.4	46.8 (.4)	30.8 (.9)	-1.5	1.3
3	30.6	22.7	51.6 (.4)	25.7 (.3)	-9.0	-5.1
4	37.3	28.8	48.3 (.9)	22.9 (.1)	-8.7	-5.9
5	41.3	31.6	44.9 (.3)	23.5 (.4)	-5.1	-2.8
6	27.5	20.5	54.0 (.6)	25.5 (.1)	-13.3	-9.3
7	34.1	25.3	48.8 (.4)	25.9 (.2)	-19.4	-12.3
8	32.4	22.6	47.3 (.8)	30.1 (.7)	-20.2	-12.9
9	33.2	22.6	45.6 (.2)	31.8 (.1)	-24.9	-15.1
10	32.3	23.0	48.3 (.5)	28.6 (.2)	-18.2	-12.0
11	30.4	20.9	47.8 (.6)	31.3 (.9)	-8.9	-2.4

Note: Racial voting percentages are estimates from Gary King's EI, with standard errors in parentheses. The "Improvement" columns report how Clinton performed among whites, both voters (2-party) and all registered adults (absolute), compared to the district's Democratic congressional candidate. The "other" category represents votes for either George Bush or Ross Perot. Because two stages of estimation are required for each election to estimate the three quantities in this table, only two standard errors are reported; the standard error for GOP and Democratic support is the same. Districts with black incumbents are in bold face.

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shortfall reflects the winning coalition she chose to construct. Candidates may select a racial or ideological appeal that puts off whites desiring representation (Metz and Tate 1995), including one that singles out a subset of whites such as Jewish or male voters (Nichols 1996). The gambit can pay off, especially given the white backlash McKinney apparently anticipated, because it mobilizes blacks.

Black turnout in Bishop's contest was only 39.3% (standard error of 1.4), at best slightly higher than typical in rural Georgia. McKinney, on the other hand, mobilized 59.3% of eligible blacks,

more than 10 percentage points higher than voted for president in Rep. Lewis' neighboring Fifth

District, and much higher than found in any other congressional contest (analysis not shown). This

black mobilization rate almost certainly compensated for the white votes her polarizing strategy

sacrificed.

Making a few assumptions, we can estimate the effect of the strategy. In particular:

1. Turnout for a conventional Democrat would have been the presidential turnout found in the urban Fifth District,
2. The voters gained or lost would have had the same political preferences as those who stayed, and
3. She would have lost the typical number of whites through roll off.

All three are conservative assumptions, since a conventional Georgia Democrat for Congress may

not have enjoyed Clinton's pull among urban blacks; it's unlikely McKinney was mobilizing blacks

who especially *opposed* her; and some of these white voters may have been hostile to McKinney

regardless of strategy because of her voting record. These assumptions allow the following

computation:

Effect   = Black votes gained - White votes lost

    = [Black proportion of district * Extra black voting rate * McKinney's marginal gain]

        - [White proportion of district * Lost white vote * (House turnout / Presidential turnout)]

    = .41 * (4th District turnout - 5th District turnout) * (.988 - .012)

        - .59 * (Clinton vote - McKinney vote) * (.63 / .66)

    = .41 * 11.1 * .976 - .59 * 10.34 * .955

    = 4.44 - 5.83 = roughly a 1.4 percentage point loss.

Readers can explore the effect of assumptions different from those I have made here, but it seems

safe to conclude that McKinney's slippage among whites made little practical difference.

Georgia's 1996 elections also featured a competitive campaign for the U.S. Senate between

Vietnam veteran Max Cleland, a Democrat, and wealthy Republican Guy Millner. The Senate race therefore allows one additional baseline for comparison, one without a major third-party candidate to match Perot, but instead a greater focus on Georgia. Our estimates of his white vote, drawn from ecological inference, again suggest that voters were not particularly oriented against black preferences in districts where minority voters are stronger.

Cleland, who won his Senate contest, clearly did better among white voters than any other Democratic candidate for national office in Georgia (see Table 9-4). He topped both Clinton and the black incumbents.   His estimated white vote in Bishop's Second, for example, beat Clinton's by almost 13 percentage points and Bishop's by almost 7. This estimated gap between Cleland and Bishop, though, is typical of that seen in other congressional districts–less than found in three others (not counting McKinney's), and within a percentage point of that found among registered voters in two more. Max Cleland simply attracted a lot of voters who, otherwise, either favored Republican candidates for national office or supported Ross Perot's maverick presidential bid. Notably, however, Cleland was closest to Clinton among whites in the Fourth District–within a percentage point among voters, and only 0.3% higher among all registered whites. Considering that Cleland topped the president by more than 6 percentage points among white voters in the average district, these results suggest that McKinney's relative failure there was less extraordinary than Clinton's relative success.

A Florida Cross-Validation

Florida offers a promising opportunity to validate the Georgia results. Rep. Corrine Brown's campaign message was neither as confrontational as McKinney's nor as openly conservative as Bishop's. Her district also changed drastically, forcing her to take on a strange electorate–although the Florida legislature purposively made her district congenial to Democrats, and thus indirectly

friendly for Brown as the incumbent (Lublin and Voss 1998, 774). My data for Florida are more

limited than for Georgia, embracing only Brown's district plus the presidential returns from those

same precincts in 1996. They nevertheless allow me to replicate the main analysis from the Georgia

portion.

Estimated white turnout declined fewer than two percentage points between the presidential and

congressional contests, from 60.4% to 58.6%, illustrating neither white mobilization to defeat Brown

nor massive defections by white Democrats (see the bottom rows of Tables 9-2 and 9-4). Similarly,

her support among white voters fell just over a percentage point below Clinton's (35% to his 36.3%

among voters, 20.5% to his 21.9% among all registered adults), fairly impressive given the

president's relative popularity in Florida.[13] Little of Brown's difficulty among white voters,

therefore, represents Democratic loyalists who deserted the nominee in response to the district's

racial demographics. Meanwhile, black turnout may have been slightly higher in the congressional

race. Whereas an estimated 50.3% of registered blacks voted in the presidential contest (standard

error of 0.9), 51.2% voted in Brown's election (standard error of 1.1), in both cases supporting the

Democrat more than 97% of the time.[14] Brown's campaign therefore seems most effective of the

three; she mobilized blacks without alienating whites.

Summary

Two of the three black Democratic incumbents studied here, Sanford Bishop and Corrine

Brown, offered white voters an inclusive message after losing their black majorities. Neither

candidate experienced a measurable defection of likely white voters. White turnout was comparable

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[13] Clinton positioned himself in 1996 as a centrist protector of middle-class entitlement programs (Morris 1997, 173; Weko and Aldrich 1998, 281-86), a tactic that contributed to his surprising success in normally Republican Florida.

[14] Obviously these results are not statistically distinguishable. I call this "mobilized" only because my prior would be a 2-3 percentage-point roll off for the congressional contest, which is more than two standard deviations away from my estimate.

to that found in other congressional districts, and their voting support comparable to that received

by a presidential incumbent of the same party. The Georgia moderate did about as well, relative to

a popular and well-funded Senate candidate, as other Democratic candidates for Congress, and

performed as well in his reconfigured district as did Republican incumbents facing equivalent

instability in theirs. Only Cynthia McKinney's divisive campaign experienced notable white

defections from Clinton's coalition (partly because he did remarkably well in the district). The

strategic impact of McKinney's slippage was minor, however, since those same campaign themes

mobilized a large and supportive black constituency. Her lower white support hardly suggests

reaction against black voting power. Overall, it's hard to see how this evidence could comport with

more than a negligible district-level backlash. Whites simply were impervious to the racial balance

of their congressional districts.

Searching for White Backlash in Georgia: A Precinct-Level Analysis

Racial hostility supposedly concentrates among whites in mixed-race neighborhoods. The

closest electoral equivalent to a neighborhood is the precinct, which in Georgia averages about 1,500

registered voters.[15] Precinct-level analysis allows a closer test of the backlash hypothesis in white

voting behavior, but the results reported below consistently refute that expectation. Neither Georgia

whites nor the Florida whites in Corrine Brown's Third District followed a backlash pattern against

nearby black voters. If anything, whites in mixed-race locales are more likely to vote with black

majorities for the Democratic party than are segregated whites.

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[15] The standard deviation is about 1,000 voters, indicating that much larger precincts are not rare. The largest
holds more than 11,000 registered voters, and those with up to 2,500 registered voters are common. However,
I still believe that most precincts overlap fairly well with what most people would consider residential
developments, since they tend to center around schools or fire stations that serve discrete neighborhoods.

A 1996 Precinct Analysis

Gary King's (1997) ecological-inference method allows precinct estimates to vary across locales with differences in white voting behavior, an unprecedented opportunity (see Chap. 7 for a discussion). Armed with these responsive estimates, we can observe the extent to which white behavior tracks a precinct's racial mix. Table 9-5 reports how much each district's white turnout and white Democratic vote rate changed, on average, as precinct black density increased. The steeper this slope, determined by regressing the precinct estimates on their black density, the more aggregation bias EI perceives. For example, Georgia's First District congressional election has a relatively steep turnout decline of -.36. As the black percentage increases 10 percentage points in a precinct, other things being equal, the estimated white turnout declines 3.6 points. Similarly, the 0.21 coefficient for the presidential election means that Clinton's support increased among whites in mixed-race precincts. As the black percentage increases 10 percentage points in a precinct, other things being equal, Clinton's estimated white vote climbs 2.1 points. Substantively, this means that whites in mixed-race precincts voted at a rate equal to their segregated peers in the presidential contest, and backed Clinton more heavily, but in the congressional race were more likely to abstain or vote for the Republican incumbent.

Notably, most districts show at least sporadic aggregation bias, illustrating the importance of using EI for these estimates. In almost every congressional district, the Democratic vote *rose* among whites as precincts became more diverse. Simply put: There was no neighborhood-level backlash against the Democratic nominee, invariably the black candidate of choice. White turnout, meanwhile, tended to drop in mixed precincts, especially in the congressional contests–integrated whites were not especially mobilized. One exception, though, is Bishop's Second District. Whites in mixed precincts there did not drop off disproportionately after voting in the presidential contest. Since this is a departure, it might have represented white backlash–were it not for the voting bias

Table 9-5: Aggregation Bias in 1996 Turnout and Vote

DISTRICT

Georgia	House		Presidency		Senate	
	Turnout	*Vote*	*Turnout*	*Vote*	*Turnout*	*Vote*
1	**-0.36**	0.01	0.01	**0.21**	0.01	**0.06**
	(.02)	(.01)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)
2	-0.00	**0.20**	-0.00	**0.14**	-0.01	0.01
	(.01)	(.02)	(.01)	(.02)	(.01)	(.02)
3	-0.01	**0.39**	**-0.04**	**0.31**	**-0.07**	**0.13**
	(.02)	(.03)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)
4	**-0.12**	0.01	-0.01	**0.11**	**-0.06**	0.01
	(.01)	(.03)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)
5			-0.00	**0.19**	**-0.21**	**0.06**
			(.01)	(.03)	(.01)	(.02)
6	**-0.34**	**0.73**	**-0.53**	**0.52**	**-0.46**	**0.23**
	(.07)	(.08)	(.05)	(.06)	(.05)	(.06)
7	0.00	-0.09	-0.00	0.03	0.00	0.00
	(.03)	(.05)	(.03)	(.04)	(.03)	(.04)
8	**-0.08**	**-0.07**	**-0.18**	0.02	**-0.06**	0.02
	(.03)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)
9	**-0.21**	-0.00	-0.05	**0.32**	**-0.16**	0.06
	(.07)	(.07)	(.06)	(.07)	(.07)	(.08)
10	**-0.04**	**0.04**	-0.01	**0.14**	**-0.05**	**0.09**
	(.01)	(.02)	(.01)	(.02)	(.01)	(.02)
11	**-0.33**	**0.13**	**-0.20**	**0.30**	**-0.36**	**0.08**
	(.03)	(.06)	(.03)	(.04)	(.03)	(.04)
Florida Cross-Validation						
3	-0.01	**0.36**	**-0.05**	**0.18**		
	(0.01)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)		

Note: All estimates are slopes from a precinct-level linear regression; they represent how much each district's white turnout or white Democratic vote rate changed, on average, as black density increased. For example, in Georgia's First District congressional election, as the black percentage increased 10% in a precinct, the white turnout declined 3.6%. Similarly, as the black percentage increased 10%, Clinton's white vote climbed 2.1% in that district. The figures in parentheses are coefficient standard errors; coefficients that are twice their standard error are presented in bold face.

estimate right next to it. That 0.2 coefficient means that the Second District whites who lived in racially mixed precincts were significantly *more* likely to support Bishop than others. He mobilized them, but not in opposition!

The pattern in McKinney's district is more ambiguous. Whites in mixed precincts did not

mobilize to defeat her, nor roll off the ballot at atypical levels (coefficient: -0.12). McKinney failed

to retain Clinton's advantage among whites in these mixed-race neighborhoods, but she did not

perform worse there than elsewhere. Whites in McKinney's mixed precincts therefore voted roughly

the same way as anybody else–perhaps forgetting their "class interests," as some would have it, but

hardly coalescing into a movement to take back the district.

Many previous studies of the "white backlash" hypothesis focused on presidential elections.

Whites in mixed areas supposedly exhibit greater cohesion, and more hostility to the racially liberal

party. Do we see a white backlash against Clinton in heterogeneous precincts? Quite the contrary.

Clinton attracts greater estimated support among desegregated whites in every Georgia congressional

district, a result that is statistically significant in all but two. Not knowing the class background of

voters in each precinct, I have no measure of how much voters "should" have backed the Democrats,

but these results discount any but an extremely watered-down incarnation of the backlash hypothesis.

The white backlash hypothesis also fails to materialize in the Georgia Senate election. As

shown in Table 9-5, whites in mixed-race precincts did not mobilize against Cleland, even though

he was the preference of more than 9 in 10 black voters (analysis not shown). Unlike Clinton and

Bishop, Cleland apparently failed to attract notable support among these whites–but he did not

attract as much black support either, so there's no reason to assume this represents a racial backlash.

Cleland's campaign themes simply did not play as well in the mixed-race precincts.

The precinct-level pattern in Florida discounts a backlash as well. Whites in mixed precincts

were slightly less likely to vote, but only in the presidential contest; Brown faced neither white

desertion nor hostile mobilization. Most remarkable is the strong Democratic voting pattern in

mixed-race precincts. Clinton enjoyed an advantage among desegregated whites; as black density

increases 10 percentage points, the president's estimated white support climbed almost 2 points.

Brown's relative advantage in these precincts is even stronger. Her white vote rose 3.6 percentage

points, on average, for each 10-point increase in the black population from precinct to precinct.

Figure 9-1, located at the end of the chapter, offers an alternative look at the contextual effects of race on white voting behavior. In each scatterplot, the X axis reports a precinct's black density, while the Y axis shows the estimated proportion of a precinct's white voters who picked the black Democrat for Congress. Some dots fall at extreme values because they contain very few white voters. Each solid line represents the typical change in Democratic support as black density increases; their slopes are therefore the same as reported in Table 9-5. The top scatterplot includes precincts from the Second District in Georgia. It shows clearly that, as black density increases, whites were more likely to support Sanford Bishop. The middle scatterplot, from Georgia's Fourth District, does not indicate any contextual effects in the vote for Cynthia McKinney. The bottom scatterplot, finally, reveals that Corrine Brown's vote increased significantly among whites as a precinct became more heavily minority. In all three cases, voting patterns rule out a white backlash effect at the precinct level, nor do the patterns suggest a non-linear backlash dynamic that the previous analysis would have missed.

A 1992 Precinct Analysis

Bishop and McKinney faced Republican opponents in 1992 as well, yet in districts highly unlikely to swing behind the GOP. The precinct-level analysis, reported in Table 9-6, also fails to reveal white-backlash behavior. Whites in mixed-race precincts usually were more likely to back Democrats than other whites, judging from our estimates. In Bishop's contest, as the black percentage among registered voters increased by 10 percentage points, whites supported the African-American Democrat by an extra 2.4 percentage points. McKinney, meanwhile, enjoyed an extra 1.7 percentage points of support from whites, on average, as the black percentage in a precinct increased 10 points. Only the Seventh District bucked this trend. Thus a systematic geographical pattern

appears across two dissimilar election years: whites in mixed-race neighborhoods are significantly more likely to back the black candidate of choice than whites in more segregated locales, regardless of the district's balance of voting strength. Results were similar for Clinton.

In sum, neither the 1992 nor the 1996 congressional elections analyzed here provide evidence in favor of the traditional white-backlash pattern. Sanford Bishop's experience contradicts every observable implication of the hypothesis that could be tested in these data. White voters did not mobilize heavily against him when the district lost its black majority. He attracted greater white support when he was vulnerable (numerically) than he did when victory was almost guaranteed. And whites in mixed-race precincts were never more likely to mobilize against him than those in homogeneous precincts. Racial conflict clearly has spread out over a more cluttered geographical terrain, with different provocateurs manning different social and cultural barricades, than once was true. White voters simply do not exhibit an electoral backlash against their African-American neighbors, when they have any.[16]

The Incumbency Advantage

All five African-American candidates were incumbents.[17] They took office in districts where a minority Democrat was almost certain to win, and enjoyed several years in Congress before facing electoral districts dominated by whites. The sort of "minority opportunity" district that initially sponsored them may never appear again, since the Supreme Court has ruled they are unconstitutional

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[16] Whites may be more tolerant in mixed-race neighborhoods as a result of their residential decisions (Giles and Buckner 1996). Nevertheless, selection bias in residential choice does not provide any defense for the white backlash hypothesis. Racial preferences that follow people from context to context violate the spirit of the concept (Voss 1996b). Furthermore, migration cannot explain the district-level results. District borders have been changing too quickly for people to move in response, and surely no one picks residences according to racial makeup of entire congressional districts.

[17] A black challenger in Indiana, Julia Carson, also won in a majority-white congressional district. I chose not to discuss that instance since her district was outside the South, and precinct racial data unavailable.

Table 9-6: Aggregation Bias in 1992 Turnout and Vote

District	House		Presidency	
	Turnout	*Vote*	*Turnout*	*Vote*
1	-0.02	**0.21**	0.00	-0.01
	(.02)	(.03)	(.01)	(.03)
2	0.00	**0.24**	0.00	**0.07**
	(.02)	(.03)	(.02)	(.02)
3	**-0.21**	**0.11**	0.01	**0.13**
	(.02)	(.05)	(.02)	(.04)
4	**-0.25**	**0.51**	-0.05	**0.83**
	(.04)	(.10)	(.04)	(.12)
5	0.00	**0.05**	-0.01	**0.13**
	(.01)	(.02)	(.01)	(.02)
6	**-0.33**	**0.69**	**-0.23**	**1.32**
	(.08)	(.10)	(.08)	(.10)
7	**-0.17**	**-0.10**	0.04	-0.07
	(.03)	(.04)	(.03)	(.04)
8	-0.05	0.09	**-0.20**	0.03
	(.04)	(.07)	(.03)	(.04)
9	-0.06	-0.04	**-0.22**	**-0.12**
	(.10)	(.08)	(.10)	(.06)
10	**-0.09**	0.11	**-0.20**	0.03
	(.03)	(.06)	(.03)	(.04)
11	0.01	**0.17**	-0.01	0.03
	(.02)	(.03)	(.01)	(.02)

Note: All estimates are slopes from a precinct-level linear regression; they represent how much each district's white turnout or white Democratic vote rate changed, on average, as black density increased. For example, in Georgia's Fourth District congressional election, as the black percentage increased 10% in a precinct, the white turnout declined 2.5%. Similarly, as the black percentage increased 10%, Clinton's white vote climbed 8.3% in that district. The figures in parentheses are coefficient standard errors; coefficients that are twice their standard error are presented in bold face.

racial gerrymanders. Future minority candidates running in white-majority Southern districts may

not enjoy the generous campaign contributions, free media coverage, record of constituency service

and tacit acceptance from the party elite that the current batch of black Democrats held. Before

moving to the next empirical analysis, it is worth considering whether the absence of backlash traces

directly to incumbency status.

This concern is especially important in Bishop's district, because it's possible he held on to his seat as a result of incumbency. Political scientists have estimated the average incumbency advantage using methods developed by Gelman and King (1990). Gary Jacobson, for example, estimates that the incumbency advantage was 6.9% in 1996 (cited in Epstein and O'Halloran 1999, 189), and 7.1% of the vote for Democrats in 1994 (Jacobson 1996). If applied to the 1996 contests at face value, those figures would mean Sanford Bishop won because of the incumbency advantage, but Cynthia McKinney and Corrine Brown did not. However, this quick-and-dirty comparison is not sufficient to defend the white backlash hypothesis for two reasons. First, the general incumbency advantage estimate does not apply to three extraordinary cases. Second, incumbency could only wash out a white backlash effect if it applied to precincts unevenly.

Outlying Cases

One cannot assume that general estimates, computed primarily from a pool of white incumbents, would apply to the extremely rare case of black incumbents in white districts. It is possible, of course, that incumbency especially helps such candidates. An African-American candidate may need the advantages of incumbency to overcome unique obstacles. Black politicians may face prejudice, such as an assumption she hates white people or an expectation he is corrupt, that holding office dispels. The ability to apply congressional perks and attract outside PAC money also might make more of a difference to a black candidate than to a white, perhaps because they tend to live in expensive media markets, and because local donors are less able or less willing to help them out (Corey 1998). They also, as with Bishop, may be able to convince white voters of their moderation–important since much of the prejudice against black candidates is an assumption that they are too liberal (Sigelman et al. 1995).

Equally likely, incumbency could provide little extra push to black candidates (Epstein and O'Halloran 1999, 189n). They may seem more vulnerable, even after serving several terms in office, than comparable white candidates because of their race. Relatively strong opponents therefore may spring up at a faster rate (Comer Yates, one of McKinney's 1996 primary challengers, had already run a congressional campaign against Republican John Linder in the old Fourth District, garnering more than 40% of the vote). Their local news coverage may be more critical than usual, denying the benefit of a free propaganda outlet (Corrine Brown's 1998 reelection campaign, for example, was troubled by scandal). Local party elites may feel less personal loyalty to the candidate than white incumbents typically enjoy, and therefore be less willing to chase off potential challengers or to appropriate "party building" expenditures for shoring up the incumbent.

The confusion is only compounded in the Georgia and Florida elections, since the candidates were not really running in their districts as full incumbents. They were campaigning in many precincts for the first time, and did not enjoy a history of constituency service in these locales. While I hesitate to claim that they were incumbents in name only in these precincts, certainly they did not possess the same entrenched position that many congressional candidates enjoy (Petrocik and Desposato 1998). Meanwhile, activists (including McKinney) advertised the vulnerability of black incumbents while stumping for racial redistricting, undercutting the intimidation that a sitting member of Congress usually enjoys against potential opponents. On balance, I see little reason to suspect incumbency was strong enough to wash out a white backlash.

Something Old, Something New

The main reason why incumbency does not redeem the white backlash hypothesis is that most sources of advantage apply to all precincts equally–especially the ability to run off high-quality candidates (Cox and Katz 1996). Nevertheless, some components of the incumbency advantage are

selective, including name recognition and a history of constituency service, and might have smoothed over any voting patterns caused by precinct racial demographics. The logic would run as follows: (1) Whites in precincts carried over from the 1992 districts may have supported the black incumbents more than those in newly added precincts, (2) Older precincts may be more likely to contain integrated whites than the newer precincts, and (3) The stronger incumbency advantage in these old, mixed precincts may have swamped a backlash that nevertheless appeared.

I can test the first premise by checking whether Bishop and McKinney, in 1996, performed better among whites from their old districts than among newcomers with no previous exposure.[18] The results do not support this expectation for either candidate, however. Bishop did no better in the old precincts, relative to Clinton, than he did in the new ones. Rather, Bishop enjoyed a surge in relative popularity among all white voters after four years of service. McKinney's white vote, meanwhile, follows just the opposite pattern from the hypothesis would lead one to expect. Whether I look among registered whites, or only among those who voted, McKinney was better off with the newcomers. She won 30.5% of the white vote in the new precincts (19.7% of all registered whites), compared to 28.9% (16.9%) in her old ones. Of course, these are estimates with some uncertainty, so I am not confident that there was a real difference—but McKinney clearly did not win any more white support in the precincts she previously represented. Furthermore, her old precincts were much more Democratic. Whites in the old precincts gave Clinton 57.8% of the vote, compared to 45.5% elsewhere (33.8% vs. 29.1% among the registered populations). Barely managing to do *as well* among such a heavily Democratic voter pool hardly constitutes a unique electoral advantage, and certainly did not cause the failure of the white backlash hypothesis.
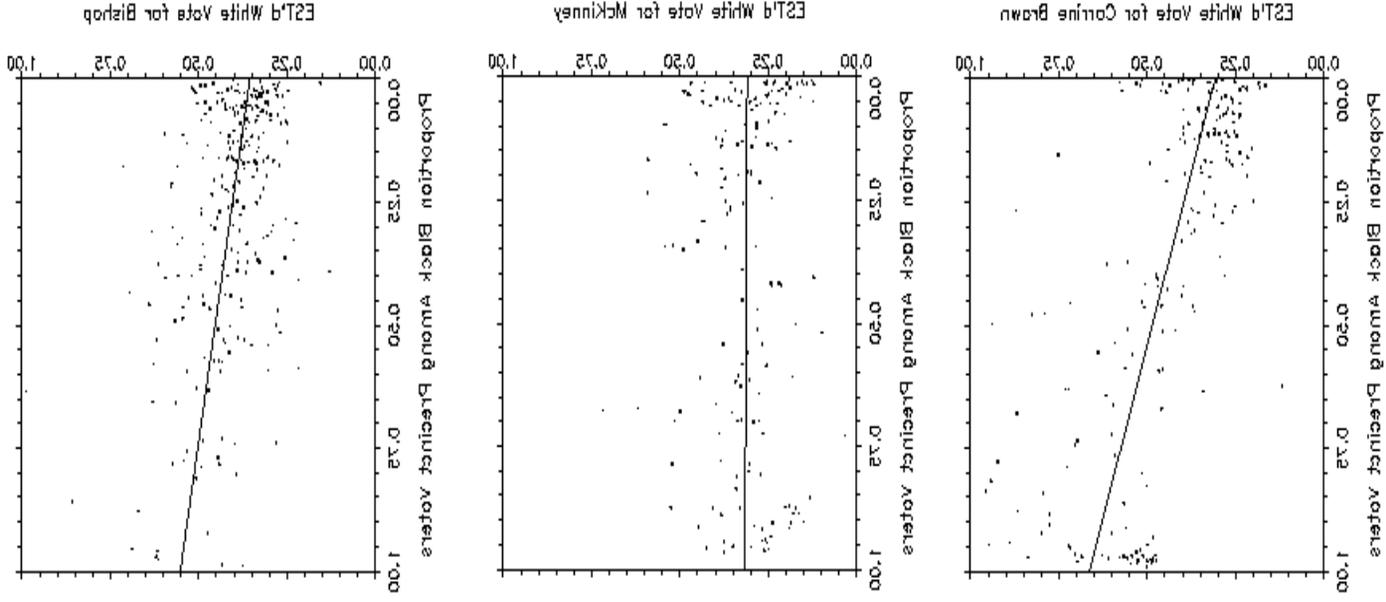
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[18] The genealogy of precincts is difficult to trace. For this comparison, I simply matched precincts by their names. That is, when a precinct in McKinney's Fourth matched the name of a precinct in McKinney's old Eleventh, I counted it as one of her old precincts. No doubt a few of these precincts changed composition.

Conclusion

Any electorally oriented incarnation of the white backlash hypothesis would imply that whites in mixed-race districts should oppose black political interests more than cloistered whites. White cohesion would be especially likely in congressional districts where voting resources are only slightly tipped against blacks. If economic or cultural competition drove a wedge between whites and blacks at the neighborhood level, meanwhile, white voter cohesion against the black candidate of choice would be especially likely in precincts where blacks held numerical strength. This racial polarization furthermore would be greatest in congressional elections that brought race to the forefront, such as those featuring strong black candidates–but presumably could appear anywhere, including presidential and senatorial races.

The elections studied here allowed tests every one of these various hypotheses. They featured black candidates in districts that had just changed dramatically, mitigating the concern that migration patterns might be swamping white-backlash behavior that otherwise exists. This is important, because my test of the Migration Hypothesis in Chapter 8 was excessively blunt. It addressed another problem with my Chapter 8 analysis as well: that the unit of analysis used there did not correspond to the electoral unit being contested. Between 1992-1996, Georgia contained districts that ran from lily-white to majority black, and in most districts contained precincts of all racial mixes. The evidence is consistent, however, across dozens of comparisons–using different years, different elections, and different levels of analysis. Georgia whites show no immediate cognizance of the racial balance in their congressional districts, and if anything appear less cohesive against the Democratic party when they share precincts with black voters–even with black candidates present to catalyze racial polarization. The white-backlash hypothesis once again fails to describe Southern voting behavior in the modern period.

Figure 9-1: Contextual Effects on Precinct-Level White Voting

Note: In each scatterplot, the X axis reports a precinct's black density, while the Y axis shows the estimated proportion of a precinct's white voters who picked the black Democrat for Congress. Some dots fall at extreme values because they contain very few white voters. Each solid line represents the typical change in Democratic support as black density increases; their slopes are therefore the same as reported in table 3.