

Spring 5-2016

Factors of Political Party Competitiveness in Mississippi

Anna Kate Baygents
University of Southern Mississippi

Follow this and additional works at: https://aquila.usm.edu/honors_theses



Part of the [American Politics Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Baygents, Anna Kate, "Factors of Political Party Competitiveness in Mississippi" (2016). *Honors Theses*. 471.

https://aquila.usm.edu/honors_theses/471

This Honors College Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Honors College at The Aquila Digital Community. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of The Aquila Digital Community. For more information, please contact Joshua.Cromwell@usm.edu, Jennie.Vance@usm.edu.

The University of Southern Mississippi

Factors of Political Party Competitiveness in Mississippi

by

Anna Kate Baygents

A Thesis
Submitted to the Honors College of
The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirement for the Degree of
Bachelor of Arts
in the Department of History

May 2016

Approved by

Marek Steedman, Ph.D., Thesis Adviser
Associate Professor of Political Science

Edward Sayre, Ph.D., Chair
Department of Political Science

Ellen Weinauer, Ph.D., Dean
Honors College

Abstract

This research project examines the relationship between urbanization and political party competitiveness in Mississippi. Using elections results from the 2011 and the 2015 Mississippi House of Representatives races, this project seeks to find if there is a relationship between urbanization and competitiveness in Mississippi, and if not, which factors do affect competitiveness. Previous research indicates that as an area urbanizes, its elections become more competitive among different political parties. However, this study finds that there is no clear correlation between urbanization and party competitiveness in Mississippi elections, and that other factors, including race, education, and geographic location, may have more influential roles.

Keywords: competitiveness, political, party, urbanization, race, education, Mississippi

Dedication

To my family, friends, and professors
who've listened to me talk about this project:

It's finally finished.

Acknowledgements

I would never have been able to complete this thesis without the help of my advisor, Dr. Marek Steedman. You remained patient with my (often) poor time management skills and during the many times I said, “I don’t understand.” Thank you for giving your time and for caring.

Table of Contents

List of Figures	viii
List of Tables	ix
Introduction.....	1
Literature Review.....	3
Methodology.....	10
Results.....	14
Conclusion	24
Bibliography	28
Appendix.....	33

List of Tables

Table 1: Mean Percentages of Population Density, Race, and Education	15
Table 2: 2011 and 2015 Average Percentages of Competitive Groups	22

List of Figures

Figure 1: Competitiveness and Population Density, All Districts	14
Figure 2: Competitiveness and Population Density, Group 1	17
Figure 3: Competitiveness and Population Density, Group 2	17
Figure 4: Competitiveness and Education, All Districts.....	18
Figure 5: Competitiveness and Education, Less than 35%	19
Figure 6: Competitiveness and Race, All Districts.....	20
Figure 7: Competitiveness and Race, Greater than 50% Black	21

I. Introduction

2015 was a record setting year for lack of party competitiveness in elections across the country. Specifically for legislative elections, the percentage of general elections with two major party candidates running was at an all time low. Nation-wide, 407 out of 5,411 state representative seats were up for re-election, because only four states held state elections in 2015: Louisiana, Mississippi, New Jersey, and Virginia.¹ In Mississippi, out of the 122 House of Representatives races, 42 races had more than one party running, resulting in only 34.4% of Mississippi House of Representative races being multi-party competitive at all. Six out of those 42 races had a different party win, meaning 85.7% of the ‘competitive’ seats remained with the party who previously held them. Of the 42 races with multiple parties, incumbents won 64.3% of the seats. Only 17 out of the 122 races had candidates that received votes within 28% of each other.² What do all of those statistics indicate? Mainly, that Mississippi legislature elections are not very competitive at all. This study explores which factors influence competitiveness within state legislative races.

According to US Census Bureau data, the US has been urbanizing at an average rate of 1.76% each decade since the 1970s. Over the same time period, Mississippi has been urbanizing at a rate of 1.23% each decade, not far behind the national average. Previous research indicates that one of the leading causes of party competitiveness within states is urbanization. Many scholars have concluded that as an area—whether it be a

¹ “2015 state legislative elections analyzed using a Competitiveness Index,” Ballotpedia, accessed March 11, 2016, https://ballotpedia.org/2015_state_legislative_elections_analyzed_using_a_Competitiveness_Index.

² “Official 2015 Election Results,” Mississippi Secretary of State, accessed November 17, 2015, <http://www.sos.ms.gov/Elections-Voting/Pages/2015-General-Election.aspx>.

city, county or district—urbanizes, its elections become more party competitive. This study applies that theory to Mississippi, testing it on the 2015 Mississippi House of Representatives elections. This study seeks to find if urbanization and population density are indicators of competitiveness in Mississippi. It also explores if other factors are more influential on party competition than urbanization.

This study seeks to explain what role those factors play in Mississippi elections, and what the future implications are for Mississippi politics. It adds to the existing literature on urbanization and party competitiveness by using Mississippi state races as the case study and by adding different variables, including race, educational attainment, geographic location.

II. Literature Review

One of the first published studies examining the relationship between urbanization and party politics was by V.O. Key in his 1949 book, *American State Politics*. Key compared the voting behavior between metropolitan and non-metropolitan voting areas in several different northern states.³ Key's work is limited, however, because it noted that there were differences among voting behaviors in metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas, but did not attempt to explain the factors that could have affected the behaviors.

Stimulated by Key's study, Heinz Eulau conducted a study of urbanization and political parties in 1957. Eulau analyzed the relationship between Ohio's counties' ecological structures-- the pattern of the distribution of residential people-- and the political party system from 1946-1956. He concluded that there is a direct relationship between the ecological structures of the counties and the structure of the party systems; that both semi-competitive and truly competitive party systems correlate with urban ecological structures, while one-party systems correlate to rural structures; and that "increasing urbanization would seem to be conducive to the further development of a competitive party system as a structural requisite of the democratic political system."⁴

A few years later, other researchers conducted a similar study to Eulau's, but focused mainly on Iowa and used slightly different measurements, urbanization indexes, and definitions.⁵ Their results did not align with those of Eulau, and found that in Iowa,

³ V.O. Key, Jr., *American State Politics*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), 230-246.

⁴ Heinz Eulau, "The Ecological Basis of Party Systems: The Case of Ohio," *Midwest Journal of Political Science* 1, No. 2 (Aug., 1957): 125, accessed March 10, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2109076>.

⁵ David Gold and John R. Schmidhauser, "Urbanization and Party Competition: The Case of Iowa," *Midwest Journal of Political Science*, IV, (1960), 64, 72, accessed March 30, 2015, http://www.jstor.org.lynx.lib.usm.edu/stable/2108756?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents.

urbanization was not strongly associated with party competition.⁶ While these studies were some of the first to directly study urbanization and party competition, both studies only examined state, and neither study one accounted for factors besides urbanization that might have a greater influence on competition than urbanization, which may help to explain why each study concluded with different findings.

Another study by Phillips Cutright used both the Eulau and Gold studies, but applied standardized measures to the Ohio and Iowa cases, compared state-wide races rather than county-level races, and added eight other states to support the findings. Because this study only looked at races from one year, Cutright changed the percentage of votes a county must give a candidate of the two-party vote from 40% to 37% in efforts to help prevent one-time factors from affecting the results of the study. This threshold set the qualifications for what was considered ‘competitive.’ This study concluded, like Eulau, that “urbanization is positively associated with competitive party voting behavior” when standardized measures are applied.⁷ It also found that other factors, such as levels of manufacturing employment and levels of religious homogeneity, affect urbanization and must be controlled for the effect of competitive politics and “urbanization to persist.”⁸

This same hypothesis was later used again, but applied it to inter-party competition instead of multi-party competition, and introduced regional controls by examining states separately. It found that while urbanization may increase competition

⁶ Gold, 1960.

⁷ Phillips Cutright, “Urbanization and Competitive Party Politics,” *The Journal of Politics* 25, No. 3 (Aug., 1963): 553, http://www.jstor.org.lynx.lib.usm.edu/stable/2127972?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents.

⁸ Ibid, 564.

among different parties, no significant associations exist between urbanization and inter-party competitiveness, and that little evidence exists of associations between socio-economic factors and inter-party competitiveness.⁹

While some researchers argue that urbanization is the most influential factor of party competitiveness, many researchers argue that gerrymandering is most important. Gerrymandering is “manipulating the boundaries of an electoral constituency to favor one party or class.”¹⁰ Typically, people view gerrymandering as a partisan political move to either intentionally “pack” a district with particular group of voters or to “crack” and divide a district to prevent a group from having a majority vote.¹¹ In efforts to prevent partisan gerrymandering, many states have passed legislation detailing more fair and objective ways to draw district lines. For example, Florida has mandates that require “newly drawn congressional and state legislative districts be compact and contiguous in shape.”¹² While initiatives such as those may help reduce intentional partisan gerrymandering, they create districts unintentionally gerrymandered by geography.

Previous research indicates that one of the main causes of this unintentional gerrymandering is urbanization. A 2013 study explored this idea that human geography plays a larger role in creating electoral bias than intentional gerrymandering does. This unintentional bias is produced by the asymmetric patterns of the voters’ residences. The

⁹Charles M. Bonjean and Robert L. Lineberry, “The Urbanization-Party Competition Hypothesis: A Comparison of all United States Counties,” *The Journal of Politics* 32, No. 2 (May, 1970): 305-321, accessed February 1, 2015, http://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/bitstream/handle/2152/24208/Bonjean_Lineberry_1970.pdf?sequence=1.

¹⁰ “Gerrymandering,” *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, <http://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/gerrymander>, accessed March 31, 2015.

¹¹ “Redistricting the Nation,” *Azavea*, last modified 2009, <http://www.redistrictingthenation.com/glossary.aspx>

¹² Jowei Chen and Jonathan Rodden, “Tobler’s Law, Urbanization, and Electoral Bias: Why Compact, Contiguous Districts Are Bad for the Democrats,” *The Society for Political Methodology*, accessed March 10, 2015, <http://polmeth.wustl.edu/node/314>.

study explains that “democrats live disproportionately in dense, homogenous neighborhoods in large cities that aggregate into landslide Democratic districts, or they are clustered into minor agglomerations that are small relative to the surroundings.”¹³ In contrast, Republicans live in geographically larger and less populated suburban and rural neighborhoods that are more “moderately Republican and politically heterogeneous.”¹⁴.

Other studies also support those conclusions regarding geography and gerrymandering. One researcher argues that a pro-Republican bias is found under all districting regimes, not just when partisans are drawing districts, and that asymmetric population distribution is a likely explanation for bias, but not the only potential cause.¹⁵ A study conducted on the voting patterns of metropolitan regions in the US concludes that there is an association between urban cities voting more for Democratic candidates and suburban areas voting more for Republican candidates.¹⁶ Another study concludes that any redistricting plan that creates relatively condensed, contiguous districts will typically produce bias against the urban party, regardless of which party it is.¹⁷

The most commonly known form of gerrymandering is partisan gerrymandering, where the lines are construed to benefit one political party over another. While some partisan gerrymandering is done illegally for party advantage, it is often times required by

¹³ Chen and Rodden, 264.

¹⁴ Ibid., 264.

¹⁵ Nicholas Goedert, “Gerrymandering or Geography?” How Democrats Won the Popular Vote but Lost the Congress in 2012,” *Research and Politics* (April/ June 2014): 7, accessed February 2, 2015, <http://sites.lafayette.edu/goedertn/files14/07/RP-2014-Goedert.pdf>.

¹⁶ Jen Nelles, “The Missing Metros: The Voting Patterns and Political Influence on Metropolitan Regions in US Presidential Elections, 1952-2012,” presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association in Chicago, Illinois, August 29- September 1, 2013.

¹⁷ Chen and Rodden, 241.

the courts and legislation in efforts to protect racial minorities.¹⁸ This type of gerrymandering is often used when all three parts—the Senate, House, and Executive—of the State government are controlled by the same party. One scholar argues that partisan gerrymandering is used when the party attempts to get rid of several of the opposing party’s incumbents. This may lower the probability of reelection for the majority’s party incumbents, but may increase the number of seats the majority held in expectation.¹⁹

More recently, bipartisan gerrymandering has become the most common form of gerrymandering. Unlike partisan gerrymandering where a specific political party is advantaged, this is helpful for both parties and, many scholars argue, helpful for incumbents and creates an “incumbency advantage.”²⁰ In most cases, members of both parties work on committees when redrawing district lines, often allowing legislators to choose their voters, which has been made easier by recent advances in technology.²¹ A 2009 study, however, argues that while bipartisan gerrymandering does play a role in incumbents’ reelections, the number of restraints on how redistricting can be done overshadows that. Efforts to create majority-minority districts and the creation of new

¹⁸ Adam B. Cox and Richard T. Holden, “Reconsidering Racial and Partisan Gerrymandering,” *The University of Chicago Law Review*, 78, No. 2 (Spring 2011):553-604, http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1837778##.

¹⁹ John N. Freidman and Richard T. Holden, “The Rising Incumbent Reelection Rate: What’s Gerrymandering Got to Do With It?” *Journal of Politics*, 71, No. 2 (Apr., 2009): 593-611, <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=5470108&fileId=S0022381609090483>.

²⁰ Friedman and Holden, 609.

²¹ Brace W. Kimball. “Technology and Redistricting: A Personal Perspective on the Use of Technology in Re- districting over the Part Thirty Years,” The Brookings Institute Conference on Congressional Redistricting, (April 26, 2004): 2, http://www.brookings.edu/~media/events/2004/4/16politics/crc_brace.pdf.

avenues for groups and individuals to challenge proposed plans, both limit the power of those who are redrawing the lines.

The limitations to all of these above studies on gerrymandering is that while they all touch on the effects of gerrymandering on voter behavior, they do not directly explore the relationship between gerrymandering and party competitiveness.

Other researchers use party competitiveness to help explain other electoral factors. One study examined gubernatorial races in the US from 1977-2005 and found that greater two-party competitiveness is associated with the greater success for third-party candidates.²² Another study compared party competitiveness and income representation among state electorates from 1980-2008. Its results found no correlation between competitiveness and how income biases were represented, and indicates that the effects of party competitiveness are not uniform across different states.²³ Another study examines the relationship between party competition and political contributions in the 2012 Presidential election. It finds that in most cases, the most competitive races received the most contributions, and that big businesses and corporations contribute nearly the same to both Republican and Democratic candidates.²⁴ These most recent studies on party competitiveness are limited, however, because they only consider the political

²² Robin E. Best and Steve B. Lem, "Electoral Volatility, Competition, and Third-Party Candidacies in US gubernatorial Elections," *Party Politics* 17, no. 5 (September 2011): 611-628, accessed March 28, 2016, <http://ppq.sagepub.com.lynx.lib.usm.edu/content/17/5/611.full.pdf+html>.

²³ Amber Wichowsky, "Competition, Party Dollars, and Income Bias in Voter Turnout, 1980-2008," *The Journal of Politics* 74, no. 2 (April 2012): 446-459, accessed March 28, 2016, <http://ppq.sagepub.com.lynx.lib.usm.edu/content/17/5/611.full.pdf+html>.

²⁴ Thomas Ferguson, Paul Jorgensen, and Jie Chen, "Party Competition and Industrial Structure in the 2012 Elections: Who's Really Driving the Taxi to the Dark Side?" *International Journal of Political Economy* 42, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 3-41, accessed March 29, 2016, <http://web.b.ebscohost.com.lynx.lib.usm.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=df447cc5-27ff-4bd4-87ae-4b41f21f8763%40sessionmgr102&vid=11&hid=109>.

effects that competitiveness creates rather than the factors that create competitiveness within a race.

Most recently in urbanization studies, many researchers have been examining the role of race within urbanization, finding that one common effect of urbanization is racial residential groupings and racially polarized voting patterns. Research indicates that urban areas have high black populations,²⁵ which tends to create a segregated voting block.²⁶ The limitations to these recent studies are that while researchers do examine urbanization and some of its political effects, urbanization is not studied as a factor of multi-party competitiveness.

Despite much study of urbanization and party competitiveness separately, there is surprisingly little research that considers the relationship between the two. The studies in which urbanization and party competitiveness is explicitly examined are outdated and fail to include other factors that could better explain competition. Furthermore, there is no research to date on urbanization and party competitiveness in Mississippi. Combining the implications from this literature, I seek to first find if there is correlation between urbanization and party competitiveness in Mississippi, and second, if there are other factors that are more influential on competition than urbanization.

²⁵ Adam S. Vaughan, Eli Rosenberg, Luke Shouse, and Patrick Sullivan, "Connecting Race and Place: A County-Level Analysis of White, Black, and Hispanic, HIV Prevalence, Poverty, and Level of Urbanization," *American Journal of Public Health* 104, No. 7 (July, 2014): 77-84, accessed March 28, 2016, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4056233/>.

²⁶ Russell Weaver and Sharmistha Bagchi-Sen, "Racially Polarized Voting in a Southern US Election: How Urbanization and Residential Segregation Shape Voting Patterns," *The Review for Regional Studies* 45, no. 1 (September 2015): 15-34, accessed March 28, 2016, <http://journal.srsa.org/ojs/index.php/RRS/article/view/45.1.2/pdf>.

III. Methodology

As mentioned in the literature review, there many different ways to measure and define urbanization, and each study tends to do it differently. Urbanization is “the process by which towns and cities are formed and become larger as more and more people begin living and working in central areas.”²⁷ Since industrialization, urbanization has been a growing phenomenon, not only in the United States, but also around the world. Over time, the qualifications for what makes a city or town have changed, and still continues to evolve.

With each new census, the Census Bureau modifies its definition of ‘urban.’ For interpreting the 2010 census:

an urban area will comprise a densely settled core of census tracts and/or census blocks that meet minimum population density requirements, along with adjacent territory containing non-residential urban land uses as well as territory with low population density included to link outlying densely settled territory with the densely settled core. To qualify as an urban area, the territory identified according to criteria must encompass at least 2,500 people, at least 1,500 of which reside outside institutional group quarters.²⁸

An urban area consists of 50,000 or more people, or has a population density of at least 1,000 people per square mile. Census results are reported on the tract level, which is typically the size of neighborhood and includes 2,500-8,000 people. In order for a tract to be considered urban, it must have a population density equal to or more than 500 people per square mile.²⁹ While different scholars use different definitions for ‘urban’ and

²⁷ Merriam- Webster, “Urbanization,” accessed March 31, 2015, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/urbanization>.

²⁸“2010 Census Urban and Rural Classification and Urban Area Criteria,” United States Census Bureau, last modified 2010, accessed March 31, 2015, <https://www.census.gov/geo/reference/ua/urban-rural-2010.html>.

²⁹Ibid.

‘rural,’ the majority of previous studies on urbanization have used the guidelines from the Census Bureau because the most often used information on population comes from the census. For consistency and clarity, this study will follow the same definitions as provided by the Census Bureau.

As the primary case study for this project, I used the 2015 Mississippi House of Representatives election, as all 122 seats were up for reelection. I chose the House of Representative races over the Senate and other state-wide races because there are more of those races, and I wanted to have a larger sample for more measurements. I used the official election results from both the primary and general elections from the Mississippi Secretary of State’s website,³⁰ and calculated the percentage of votes the winning candidate received. I used that percentage as the measurement of competitiveness among the districts.

For each house district, I collected data on its population density of people per square mile. I then took that number and the percentage of winning votes, and found the summary statistics and regression line information for those variables. Originally, I only ran regression for population density (urbanization) and percentage of votes the winning candidate received (competitiveness). However, the results seemed to produce no correlation or pattern between the two, so I decided to also collect data on other factors that one could assume would affect party competition in elections. Because of what data was available, I decided to add education and race as variables. For education, I found the percentage of people over 25 years of age with a bachelor’s degree within each House

³⁰ “Official 2015 Election Results,” Mississippi Secretary of State, accessed March 10, 2016, <http://www.sos.ms.gov/Elections-Voting/Pages/2015-General-Election.aspx>.

district, and for race I used the percentage of the population that is black. Those numbers and statistics were found online from the US Census Bureau's 2010 census.³¹

Once I had all of these numbers, I ran regression lines for each factor and the percentage of votes the winner received (competitive factor), as well as a multiple regression line including all four factors. These regression lines, however, did not yield much with which to work. I then created scatter plots comparing the percentage of votes the winning candidate received with the other three factors. Once I saw there were really no linear correlations among any of the data sets, I then decided to see if there were patterns among different levels of competitiveness.

I separated the 122 House districts into three groups: most competitive, semi-competitive, and not competitive. For the most competitive group, candidates had to have received between 50 and 60% of the total votes; semi-competitive received between 60.1 and 99.9 % of total votes; and non-competitive received 100% of votes (only one party ran a candidate). Within each group, I then calculated the mean population density, the mean percentage of black population, and the mean percentage of people over 25 years of age with a bachelor's degree. I examined each variable against each district's competitiveness to see if any patterns occurred.

I also created scatterplots comparing the percentage of votes the winning candidate received with the population, race, and education factors, but only using the competitive groups and excluding races where the winner received 100% of the votes, in effort to better explain competitiveness. From that data, I examined the patterns among each of the three different groups.

³¹ Statistical Atlas, Cedar Lake Ventures, updated April 28, 2015, <http://statisticalatlas.com/United-States/Overview>.

Because such a large portion of the literature suggested redistricting as a possible influence on competitiveness, I wanted to see if a relationship between redistricting and party competitiveness existed in Mississippi. For that, I collected election results from the 2011 Mississippi House of Representatives elections. In the same way I did for the 2015 election results, I calculated the percentage of votes each winning candidate received, and categorized them into three groups, ranging from most competitive to least competitive. I then compared the number of competitive races from 2011 to those of 2015 to see if redistricting in 2010 affected the number.

Mississippi redistricts every decade after the census. In Mississippi, the Joint Legislative Commission on Reapportionment and Redistricting is responsible for creating these lines. The committee consists of the chair and vice chair of both the House and Senate election committees, two state Representatives from each congressional district appointed by the Speaker of the House, and two state Senators from each congressional district appointed by the Lieutenant Governor.³² New state legislative district lines have to be approved as a joint resolution, and are free from the possibility of a gubernatorial veto.³³ The State Constitution requires that districts be compact, contiguous, and cross political boundaries as little as possible. Other constraints may be altered by statute.³⁴ Previous research suggests, however, that these constraints often make maps resemble Republican gerrymanders, even when drawn by the opposite party.³⁵

³² Miss. Code Ann. §§5-3-91, 5-3-121.

³³ Miss. Constitution, Article XIII S 254.

³⁴ Miss. Constitution, XII 254, MS code §5-3-1010.

³⁵ David Lublin, *The Paradox of Representation: Racial Gerrymandering and Minority Interests in Congress*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999.)

IV. Results

Overall

The first data set I plotted was the percentage of votes the winning candidate of each district received and the population densities of each district (Figure 1). The purpose of this study was to see if, as suggested by the literature, as a legislative district became more urban (the population density increased), the district would become more competitive (the percentage of votes winner received would decrease). The results of the scatter plot indicate that in Mississippi, no positive correlation exists between population density and competitiveness.

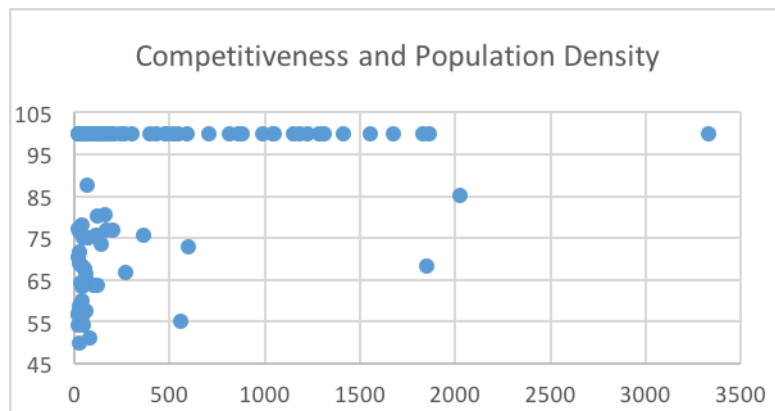


Figure 1: Competitiveness and Population Density, All Districts

To better examine the results, I separated the 122 House districts into three groups: Group 1, most competitive, where winning candidates received 50%- 60% of the total vote; group 2, semi-competitive, with 60.1%- 99.9%; and group 3, non-competitive, where the candidate ran unopposed and received 100% of the vote. Group 1 contained 12 districts, group 2 had 30 districts, and group 3 had 80 districts. Out of 122 state legislative districts, 9.8% were highly competitive, 24.6% were semi-competitive, and 65.6% were not competitive. Within the three groups, I created new, separate scatter plots

for groups one and two, and those plots also showed no clear patterns between population density and competition.

Because population density did not yield much explanation as to what influences competitiveness, I collected data on two other possible variables that seem likely to affect elections in Mississippi: race and education. These numbers include the percentage of blacks per district and the percentage of people over 25 years of age who hold a Bachelor's degree. I kept the districts separated into the three groups based on competitiveness, and ran summary statistics on each group. I then found the mean population density of people per square mile, the mean percentage of blacks, and the mean percentage of people over 25 with at least Bachelor's degree. Below is a table showing those results for each group.

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Population Density	80.83	486.15	399.56
% Black	24.95	28.74	42.49
% Bachelor's	16.7	19.83	20.72

Table 1: Mean Percentages of Population Density, Race, and Education

These summary statistics presented some surprising results. First, the most competitive races, those in group one, had the lowest mean population density at only 80.83 people per square mile, classifying them as mostly rural. This is interesting because it is the exact opposite of what I expected to find from the trend that was suggested in the literature. Not only is group 1 the lowest population density, but it is lowest by a significant difference. Group 3, the not competitive group, had the highest percentage of blacks, by a fairly large percentage. This finding led me to further examine the

relationship between race and competition specifically in those districts, the results of which will be discussed later in the paper. I was also surprised to see that the percentage of people with a bachelor's degree did not vary much among the groups; all three groups were between 16% and 20%. I initially thought that increased percentages of education would have resulted in increased competitiveness, but these results neither a positive nor a negative correlation between the two.

By running statistical summaries on each of the three groups individually, I found results that revealed patterns among groups with similar population densities, rather than results that provided clear linear correlations between different factors.

Population Density

The semi-competitive districts, in group 2, had the highest average population density with 486.15 people per square mile. Group 3 was close behind, with an average of 399.56 people per square mile. As I mentioned earlier, the fact that the least competitive districts have the highest population densities is surprising because it diverges from the 'norm.' After examining the districts within groups 2 and 3, I noticed there were a couple of districts with extremely high population densities that were skewing the means of each group. I removed the two highest extremes of population density from each group—all over 1800—and I then recalculated the mean densities. For group three, the average decreased to 343.6 people, not much of a significant decrease. Group two, which had the highest density, decreased to 109.19 people, a quite significant drop. New scatter plots were created to reflect the districts with the two extremes removed.

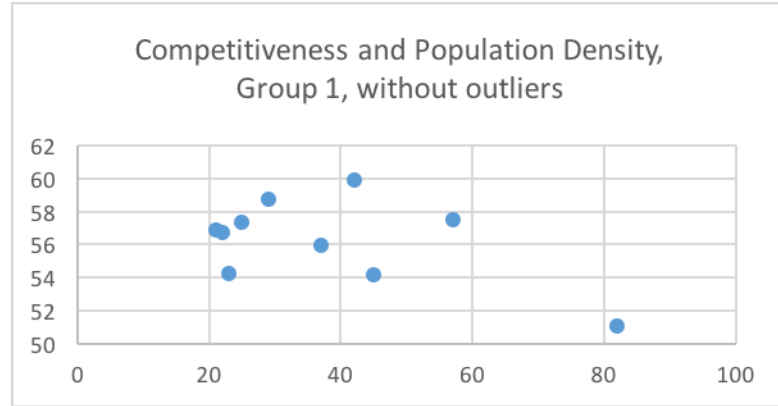


Figure 2: Competitiveness and Population Density, Group 1

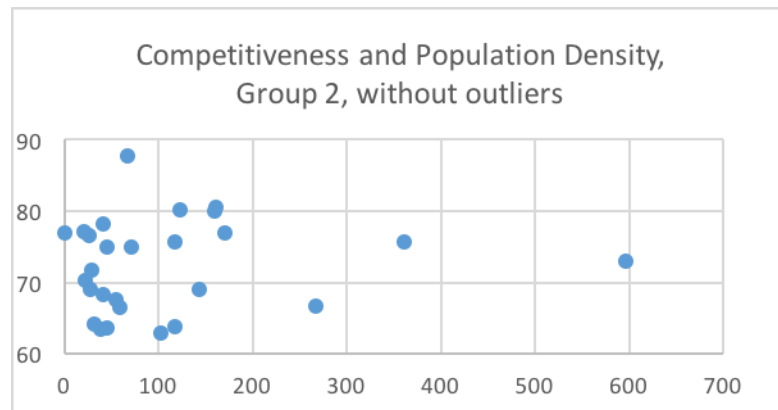


Figure 3: Competitiveness and Population Density, Group 2

When districts are grouped together by competitiveness, one can see different patterns. Figure 2 indicates that among the competitive districts, districts do tend to become more competitive as the density increases. While that does align with the original hypothesis, the correlation is insignificant because the range of the densities is small. The populations are not different enough to indicate a clear correlation. Figure 3 indicates no clear correlation between competitiveness and population density. The ranges of all three groups are worth noting. Group one has a range of 539, while group two has a range of 2,005, and group three has one of 3,313. The range matters because the lower the range,

the more similar the districts are in population density. If competitiveness drastically changes among districts with very similar densities, density becomes more of a constant and rather than a factor of competitiveness.

Education

The next potential factor examined was education. For this, I used the percentage of people over 25 years of age who had a Bachelor's degree or higher in each district. I believed that education would be a factor in competitiveness, and that as the percentage of people with an education, specifically those who held at least a Bachelor's degree, increased, so would the amount of competition. However, the summary statistics the showed little variation between groups; group one had 16.7%, group 2 had 19.83%, and group 3 had 20.72%. Overall, that is only a 4% change, and there seems to be a slightly negative correlation between the two. Below, figure 4 shows the results from the first two groups. Group three was excluded in efforts to examine the trend among 'competitive' districts.

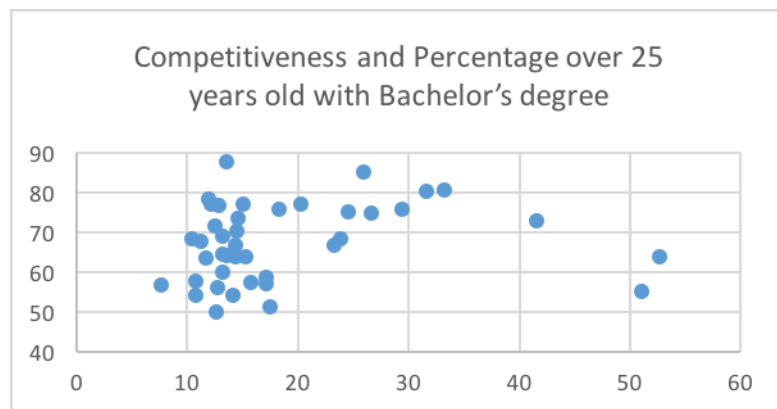


Figure 4: Competitiveness and Education, All Districts

To have a closer look at the indicated pattern, I made a new scatter plot examining the left side of the chart, or those districts with less than 35% of people with a Bachelor's degree. Figure 5 shows a slight correlation that as the percentage of people over 25 years of age with a Bachelor's degree increases, competitiveness tends to decrease. However, much like with population density, the correlation is not strong enough to be considered very statistically significant.

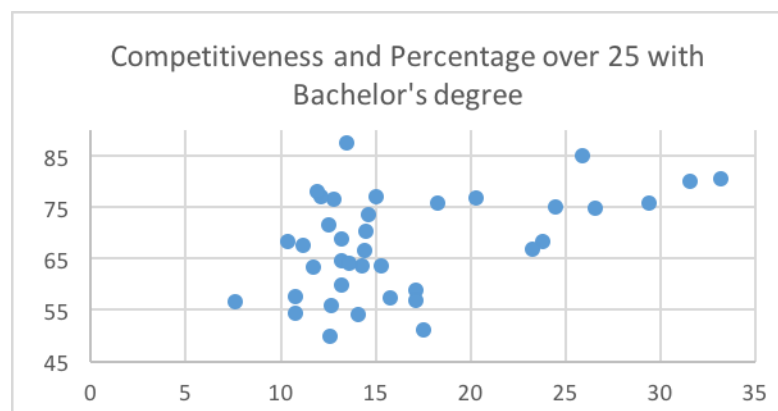


Figure 5: Competitiveness and Education, Less than 35%

Race

For each group, I also calculated the percentage of the population that was black. According to the 2010 census, Mississippi is comprised of 37.5% of African Americans.³⁶ The competitive groups—1 and 2—both had lower percentages than the state average; group 1 had 24.95% and group 2 had 28.74%, while group 3 had 42.49%. The ranges for the districts within each group varied as well. For group 1, the range was 33.1%. That may seem like a large variation, but the other two group ranges were much

³⁶ “Quickfacts: Mississippi,” United States Census Bureau, accessed March 25, 2016, <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/28>.

higher; group two's range was 72.8%, and group three was 82.7%. From this, one could conclude that the higher percentage of a black population a district has, the less competitive it is. While the scatter plot below does not fit that conclusion very well, one can see that out of all of the factors examined, race seems to be the most influential and provides the best indicator of how competitive an area will be.

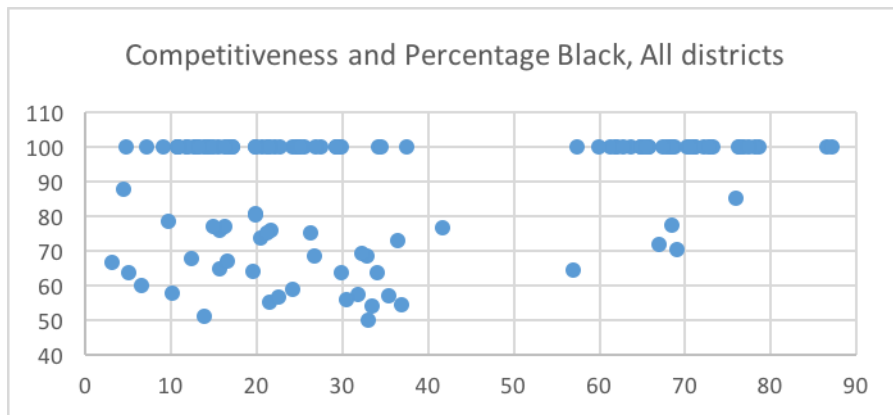


Figure 6: Competitiveness and Race, All Districts

Figure 7 indicates several different things. First, the number of non-competitive districts is split almost in half between populations with less than 50% blacks, and those with more than 50%. Second, while there is no linear correlation for all of the data, there is a correlation for districts with black populations over 50%. Below, I graphed just the competitive districts with black populations over 50%. After a threshold of about 55%, one can conclude that as the percentage of the black population in a district increases, the competitiveness decreases.

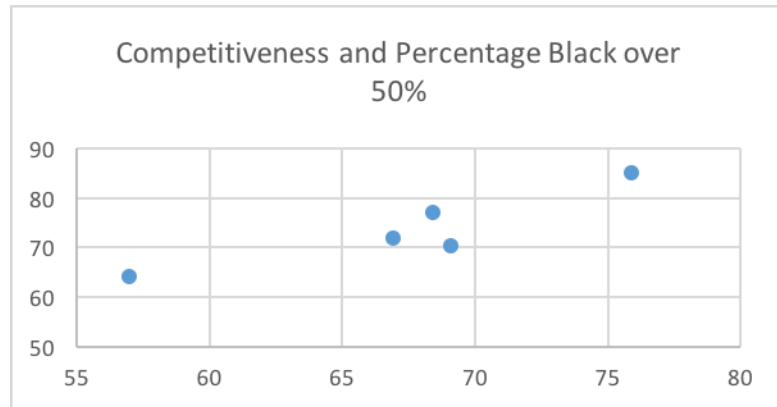


Figure 7: Competitiveness and Race, Greater than 50% Black

After looking into these five districts, I found that four of the five representatives were black themselves, and all five were members of the Democratic Party. This indicates a relationship between race and party affiliation. It also indicates that if the candidate is the same race as the majority, competitiveness decreases. In a state like Mississippi with a long racial history, it seems correct that of the three factors examined, race seems to be the most influential, and that future studies could focus on the voting patterns of different races to help determine competitiveness.

Geography

Another interesting finding was the geographic location of the group 1 competitive districts. When located on the Mississippi House of Representatives district map, all but one of the 2015 competitive districts is adjacent to another competitive district (See Map 1). This is pattern is also consistent in the 2011 House of Representatives races, with the exception a a few races (See map 2). All of those pairs are not located in the same area in Mississippi, but in different clusters around the state. To me, that suggests that certain local factors, even down to the county or neighborhood

level, may play a more influential role in increasing competitiveness than state-wide factors.

Redistricting

Competitiveness within a district is largely determined by the types of voters within a particular district. The voting population in a specific district is largely determined by how the district lines are drawn through redistricting, making it hard to study competitiveness without considering redistricting. The latest Mississippi House of Representatives district lines were adopted in May of 2012. To see if redistricting affected competitiveness, I used the 2011 Mississippi House of Representative elections and categorized them into three groups like I did with the 2015 races. Below is a chart comparing the number of highly competitive, somewhat competitive, and not competitive races in both cycles, using the same percentage definitions of each, where 50% - 59.9% is highly competitive, 100% is not competitive, and between 60% and 99.9% is somewhat competitive.

	2011	2015
Highly competitive	16.39%	9.84%
Somewhat competitive	25.41%	24.59%
Not competitive	58.2%	65.57%

Table 2: 2011 and 2015 Average Percentages of Competitive Groups

These percentages show that after redistricting in 2012, the number of competitive districts decrease, and the number of not competitive districts increased, both by substantial amounts. However, the district lines changed significantly between the two cycles, and several of the districts are in completely different locations. This made the data I have from the two election years nearly incomparable because the other factors—race, density, and education—would be different because of the change of location. Due to that discrepancy, this study cannot conclusively say how or if redistricting affected competitiveness among parties. It can, however, point out that redistricting did occur between the two election cycles, and that the latter resulted in lower percentages of competitiveness. Redistricting seems to be an important factor, and should be noted for future studies.

V. Conclusion

Political scientists categorized 2015 as a year with record low competitiveness among different political parties.³⁷ Previous research on party competitiveness found a correlation between urbanization and competition: that as an area urbanizes, its races become more competitive.³⁸ The purpose of this study was to apply that hypothesis to Mississippi and see if it remained true in a state with low urbanization. Using the 2011 Mississippi House of Representatives races as the main case study, this study concluded that there is no positive correlation between urbanization and party competitiveness in Mississippi.

Because that hypothesis did not seem to apply to Mississippi, I then sought to find which factors are most influential on party competitiveness, specifically education and race. After gathering the data for those categories in each House district, I concluded that of the different factors examined, the percentage of blacks in a district was the best indicator of party competitiveness. Specifically, the higher the black population, the less competitive a district tends to be.

That leads to the question of why a high black population correlates with lack of competitiveness. I believe it can be explained by party affiliation. In Mississippi, African American voters tend to vote similarly as a race. Typically, this voting bloc identifies most closely with the Democratic Party.³⁹ Elections in districts with high black

³⁷ “2015 state legislative elections analyzed using a Competitiveness Index,” Ballotpedia, accessed March 11, 2016, https://ballotpedia.org/2015_state_legislative_elections_analyzed_using_a_Competitiveness_Index.

³⁸ Bonjean and Lineberry, 1970.

³⁹ Frank Newport, “Democrats Racially Diverse; Republicans Mainly White,” *Gallup*, February 8, 2013, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/160373/democrats-racially-diverse-republicans-mostly-white.aspx>.

populations typically result in strong Democratic Party wins, and label those districts as low competitive districts.

Of the twelve districts in group 1 that were considered most competitive, all of the general elections were between two white candidates. This is interesting because it further helps show how race affects competitiveness. Districts were most competitive when the races were not split racially, with one black and one white candidate, but when the candidates were of the same race, specifically white. Most of these districts were not all white constituencies either; black populations ranged from 6.5% to 36.8%. I believe this indicates that the African American vote is quite influential, specifically in races where their voter behavior must be party affiliated rather than race affiliated.

As discussed earlier, the most competitive districts have similarities: they are more white and more rural than the others. I think those similarities exist for a few reasons. First, while many white voters do identify as Republican, it is not nearly as strong as the black voter identification with the Democratic party.⁴⁰ In some of these dominantly white districts, party affiliation is split between both Democrats and Republicans, where as in dominantly black districts, the electorate is typically overwhelmingly Democratic. Second, the ‘rural’ aspect is important. According to the US Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, rural places are usually poorer than urbanized areas.⁴¹ Research also suggests that poorer people tend to affiliate more often with the Democratic party.⁴² So in these districts that are white and rural, which I

⁴⁰ Newport, 2013.

⁴¹ Tracey Farrigan, “Geography of Poverty,” United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Services, December 17, 2015, <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/rural-economy-population/rural-poverty-well-being/geography-of-poverty.aspx>.

⁴² “The Politics of Financial Insecurity: A Democratic Tilt, Undercut by Low Participation,” Pew Research Center, January 8, 2015, <http://www.people-press.org/2015/01/08/the-politics-of-financial-insecurity-a-democratic-tilt-undercut-by-low-participation/>.

initially assumed would be the strongest Republican districts, competition tends to increase because the votes are split between parties.

This study added a new dimension to existing research on urbanization and political party competitiveness because little research had been conducted on the two together in the past several decades, and no research had been conducted specifically on Mississippi races. This project also produced further research opportunities for future projects, specifically regarding the sections on the effect redistricting has on party competitiveness and the role in which race and party affiliation play in determining the competitiveness of a district.

I believe multi-party competition is an important aspect of a democracy for two main reasons. First, the competitiveness of a race increases voter turnout because voters believe their votes are more important in close races.⁴³ Voters are more likely to vote if they believe their vote matters. Second, if a seat is competitive, politicians will have to work harder to win that seat, and as a result, will be more likely to try to better represent the constituency because it is more likely they will be voted out of office. If competitiveness promotes increased voter turnout and better constituency relations, it seems that competitiveness within a district is a good. However, for candidates and their campaigns, a more competitive seat often means more effort and money put into the campaign, while also creating more uncertainty about winning reelection for incumbents. Competitiveness can also be a negative for state governments who want to keep the current party in power. No politician would want to increase competition if he or she knew that it would result in his or her party losing certain offices. Whether one believes

⁴³ What affects Voter Turnout Rates?" FairVote, March 2013, http://www.fairvote.org/what_affects_voter_turnout_rates.

party competitiveness is positive or negative, understanding the factors that increase or decrease competition is imperative for better controlling the outcomes of elections. This study steps in the direction of understanding those factors.

Bibliography

- “2010 Census Urban and Rural Classification and Urban Area Criteria.” United States Census Bureau. Last modified 2010. Accessed March 31, 2015.
<https://www.census.gov/geo/reference/ua/urban-rural-2010.html>.
- “2015 state legislative elections analyzed using a Competitiveness Index.” Ballotpedia. Accessed March 11, 2016.
https://ballotpedia.org/2015_state_legislative_elections_analyzed_using_a_Competitiveness_Index.
- Best, Robin E. and Lem, Steve B. “Electoral Volatility, Competition, and Third-Party Candidacies in US gubernatorial Elections.” *Party Politics* 17, no. 5 (September 2011): 611-628. Accessed March 28, 2016.
<http://ppq.sagepub.com.lynx.lib.usm.edu/content/17/5/611.full.pdf+html>.
- Bonjean, Charles M. and Lineberry, Robert L. “The Urbanization-Party Competition Hypothesis: A Comparison of all United States Counties.” *The Journal of Politics* 32, No. 2 (May, 1970): 305-321. Accessed February 1, 2015.
http://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/bitstream/handle/2152/24208/Bonjean_Lineberry_1970.pdf?sequence=1.
- Chen, Jowei and Rodden, Jonathan. “Tobler’s Law, Urbanization, and Electoral Bias: Why Compact, Contiguous Districts Are Bad for the Democrats.” *The Society for Political Methodology*. Accessed March 10, 2015.
<http://polmeth.wustl.edu/node/314>.

- Cox, Adam B. and Holden, Richard T. "Reconsidering Racial and Partisan Gerrymandering." *The University of Chicago Law Review*, 78, No. 2 (Spring 2011):553-604. Accessed March 8, 2016.
http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1837778##.
- Cutright, Phillips. "Urbanization and Competitive Party Politics." *The Journal of Politics* 25, No. 3 (Aug., 1963): 552-564.
http://www.jstor.org.lynx.lib.usm.edu/stable/2127972?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents.
- Eulau, Heinz. "The Ecological Basis of Party Systems: The Case of Ohio." *Midwest Journal of Political Science* 1, No. 2 (Aug., 1957): 125-135. Accessed March 10, 2015. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2109076>.
- Farrigan, Tracey. "Geography of Poverty." United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Services. December 17, 2015.
<http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/rural-economy-population/rural-poverty-well-being/geography-of-poverty.aspx>.
- Ferguson, Thomas Paul Jorgensen and Chen, Jie. "Party Competition and Industrial Structure in the 2012 Elections: Who's Really Driving the Taxi to the Dark Side?" *International Journal of Political Economy* 42, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 3-41. Accessed March 29, 2016.
<http://web.b.ebscohost.com.lynx.lib.usm.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=df447cc5-27ff-4bd4-87ae-4b41f21f8763%40sessionmgr102&vid=11&hid=109>.
- Freidman, John N. and Holden, Richard T. "The Rising Incumbent Reelection Rate: What's Gerrymandering got to do with it?" *Journal of Politics*, 71, No. 2 (Apr.,

2009): 593-611. Accessed March 8, 2016.

<http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=5470108&fileId=S0022381609090483>.

Goedert, Nicholas. "Gerrymandering or Geography?" How Democrats won the popular vote but lost the Congress in 2012." *Research and Politics* (April/ June 2014): 7. Accessed February 2, 2015. <http://sites.lafayette.edu/goedertn/files14/07/RP-2014-Goedert.pdf>.

Gold, David and Schmidhauser, John R. "Urbanization and Party Competition: The Case of Iowa." *Midwest Journal of Political Science*, IV, (1960), 62-75. Accessed March 30, 2015. http://www.jstor.org.lynx.lib.usm.edu/stable/2108756?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents.

Key, V.O. Jr. *American State Politics*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956.

Kimball, Brace W. "Technology and Redistricting: A Personal Prospective on the Use of Technology in Re- districting over the Part Thirty Years." The Brookings Institute Conference on Congressional Redistricting, (April 26, 2004): 2. Accessed March 12, 2016.

http://www.brookings.edu/~media/events/2004/4/16politics/crc_brace.pdf.

Lublin, David. *The Paradox of Representation: Racial Gerrymandering and Minority Interests in Congress*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999.

Nelles, Jen. "The Missing Metros: The Voting Patterns and Political Influence on Metropolitan Regions in US Presidential Elections, 1952-2012." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association in Chicago,

Illinois, August 29- September 1, 2013.

http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2301012.

Newport, Frank. “Democrats racially diverse; Republicans mainly white.” *Gallup*.

February 8, 2013. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/160373/democrats-racially-diverse-republicans-mostly-white.aspx>

“Official 2015 Election Results.” Mississippi Secretary of State. Accessed November 17,

2015. <http://www.sos.ms.gov/Elections-Voting/Pages/2015-General-Election.aspx>.

“Quickfacts: Mississippi.” United States Census Bureau. Accessed March 25, 2016.

<http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/28>.

“Redistricting the Nation.” *Azavea*. Last modified 2009.

<http://www.redistrictingthenation.com/glossary.aspx>.

Statistical Atlas. Cedar Lake Ventures. Last modified April 28, 2015. Accessed March

28, 2016. <http://statisticalatlas.com/United-States/Overview>.

“The Politics of Financial Insecurity: A Democratic Tilt, Undercut by Low

Participation.” Pew Research Center. January 8, 2015. <http://www.people-press.org/2015/01/08/the-politics-of-financial-insecurity-a-democratic-tilt-undercut-by-low-participation/>.

Vaughan, Adam S., Eli Rosenberg, Luke Shouse, and Patrick Sullivan. “Connecting Race

and Place: A County-Level Analysis of White, Black, and Hispanic, HIV

Prevalence, Poverty, and Level of Urbanization.” *American Journal of Public*

Health 104, No. 7 (July, 2014): 77-84. Accessed March 28, 2016.

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4056233/>.

Weaver, Russell and Sharmistha Bagchi-Sen. "Racially Polarized Voting in a Southern US Election: How Urbanization and Residential Segregation Shape Voting Patterns." *The Review for Regional Studies* 45, no. 1 (September 2015): 15-34. Accessed March 28, 2016.

<http://journal.srsa.org/ojs/index.php/RRS/article/view/45.1.2/pdf>.

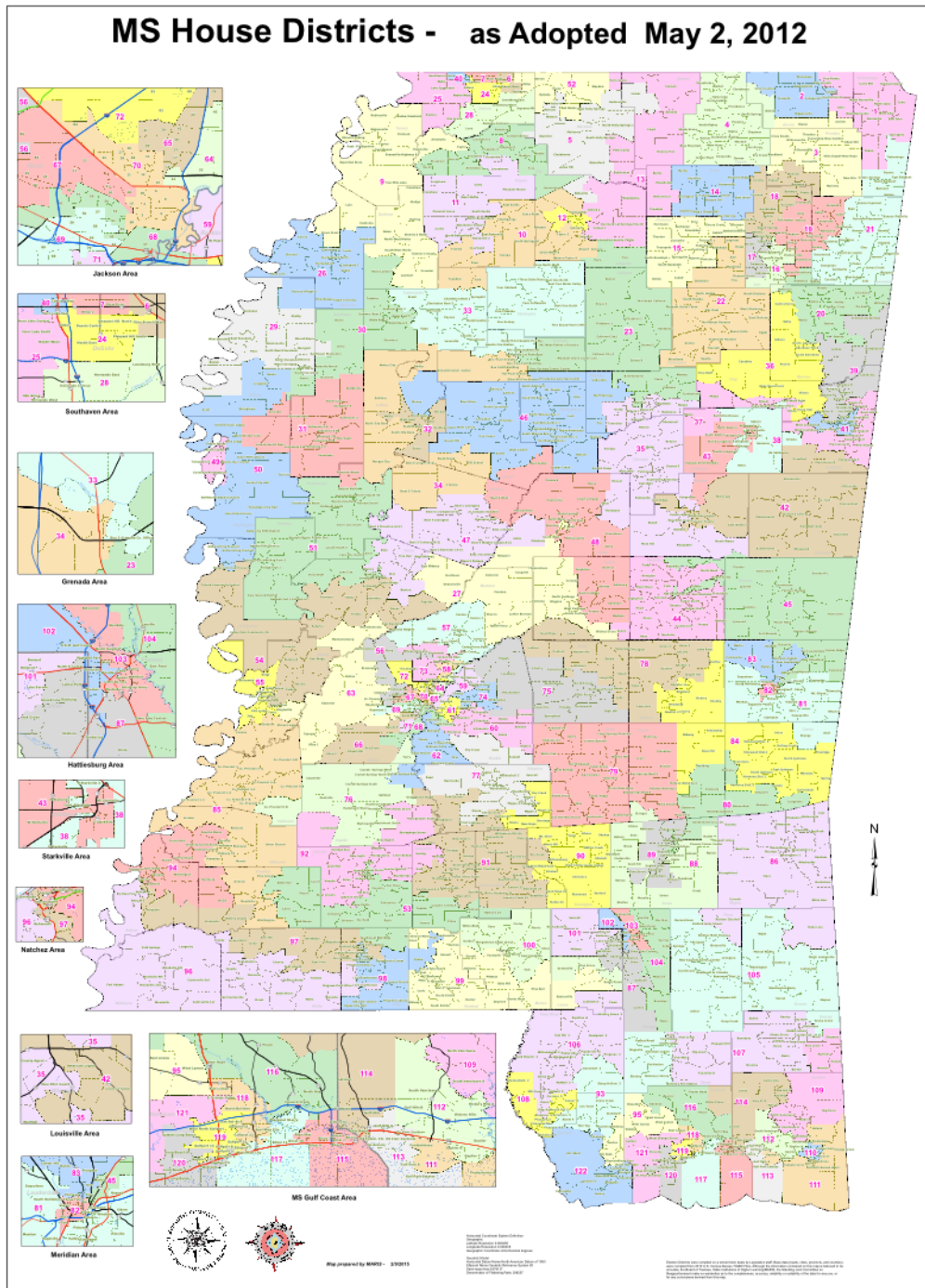
"What affects Voter Turnout Rates?" FairVote. March 2013.

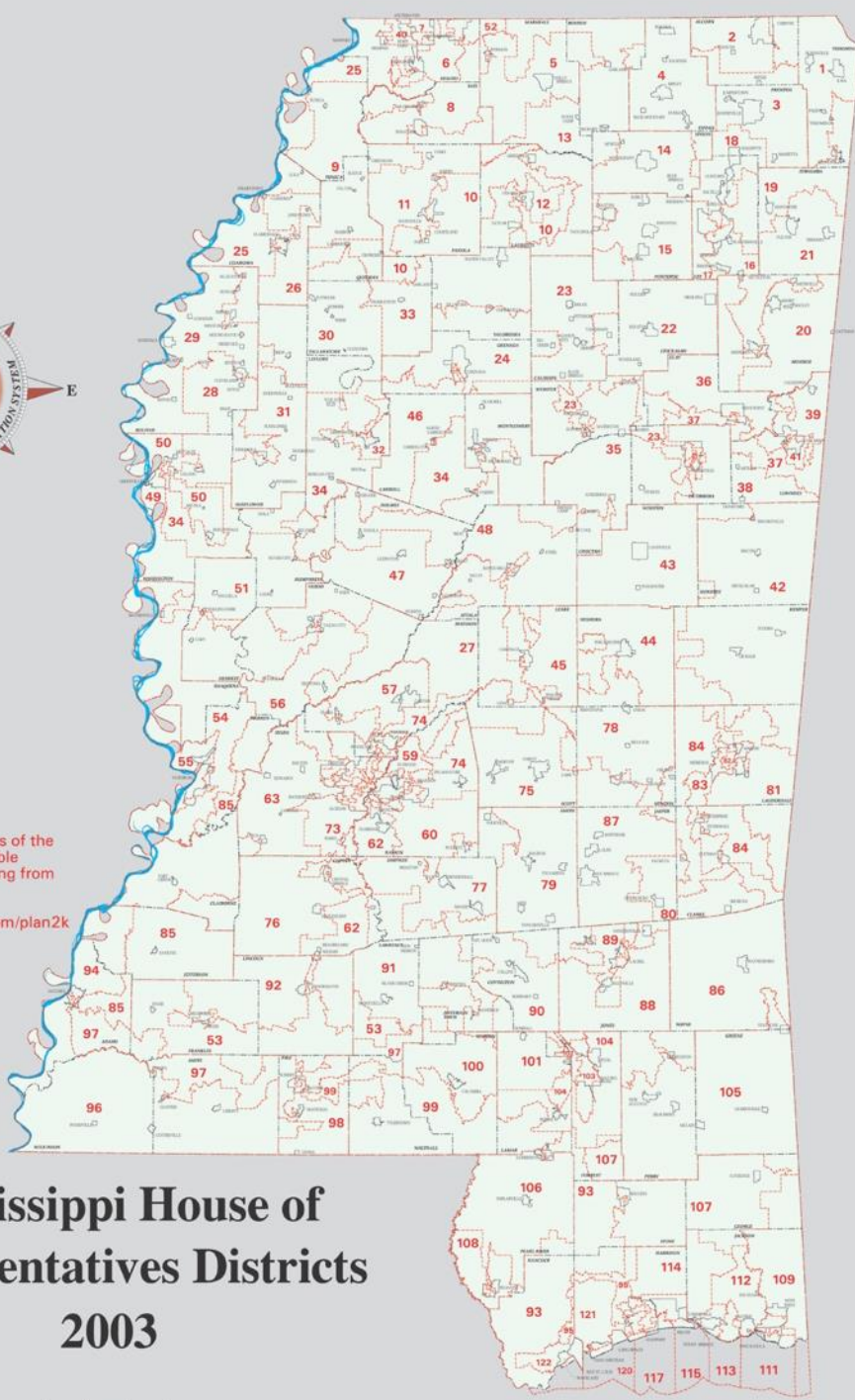
http://www.fairvote.org/what_affects_voter_turnout_rates.

Wichowsky, Amber. "Competition, Party Dollars, and Income Bias in Voter Turnout, 1980-2008." *The Journal of Politics* 74, no. 2 (April 2012): 446-459. Accessed March 28, 2016.

<http://ppq.sagepub.com.lynx.lib.usm.edu/content/17/5/611.full.pdf+html>.

Appendix





Detailed county and city maps of the Legislative districts are available for viewing and/or downloading from the MARIS website at:
www.maris.state.ms.us/custom/plan2k

Mississippi House of Representatives Districts 2003



Source of Data
Mississippi House districts were developed by the Mississippi Legislature.
County boundaries and 2000 municipal corporate limits were taken from the U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census "post census" TIGER files.

Map Prepared By MARIS -- February 2003.