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## Race, crime, and Republican strength: Minority politics in the post-civil rights era <sup>☆</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

This investigation assesses the relationships between racial threat and partisan dominance in state legislatures with tests of interactive hypotheses. The findings show that historically contingent expectations derived from racial threat theory, Republican law and order campaign appeals, and fundamentalist strength account for Republican strength in the legislatures. Two-way fixed-effects estimates based on pooled time-series analyses of 799 state-years in the post-civil rights era show that the percentage of Republicans in the state legislatures grew after increases in African American presence and the violent crime rates. The combined effects of a growth in African American and fundamentalist populations also account for increased Republican seats in these bodies. Statements by Republican campaign officials on how they deliberately used mass resentments against minorities to gain votes provide evidence about the intervening links between minority threat, the menace posed by high violent crime rates, and increased Republican strength in the state legislatures.

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## 1. Introduction

What is the relationship between the threat to majority group dominance posed by underclass minorities and the strength of the most conservative U.S. political party? Additional votes for anti-minority candidates are likely in jurisdictions with larger minority populations (Heer, 1959; Giles and Buckner, 1993), but these studies assessed support for extremist candidates who were not reticent about their racist views. In the post-civil rights era Republicans have repeatedly emphasized race and street crime (Edsall and Edsall, 1991; Beckett, 1997; Garland, 2001), although not as conspicuously as extremists like George Wallace or David Duke. It thus is reasonable to wonder if the same racial threat conditions that produced greater support for racial extremists contributed to enhanced Republican political influence. This study tests political hypotheses based on the threat from minority presence and the most menacing crimes that whites blame on underclass minorities (Chambliss, 1994; Chiricos et al., 2004). We discover if racial divisions led to expansions in state offices held by the U.S. political party that has so vigorously campaigned on law and order and other racial issues (Edsall and Edsall, 1991; Mendelberg, 2001).

Close relationships between minority threat and Republican strength should be especially likely in this period after many Republicans followed Richard Nixon's successful example in 1968 and gained votes by stressing such issues. Some vivid quotes capture the spirit of these tactics: "John Erhlichman, special counsel to the president, described Nixon's campaign strategy in

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1968. 'We'll go after the racists. That subliminal appeal to the anti-black voter was always present in Nixon's statements and speeches'" (Beckett, 1997, p. 42 quoting; Erlichman, 1982, p. 233). "Kevin Phillips, another Nixon aid who was an 'expert on ethnic voting patterns' claimed to be a specialist in *'the whole secret of politics—knowing who hates who.'*" (as told to Wills, 1969, pp. 264–265; our italics). And appeals based on such antipathies continued. In a debate 26 years after the 1968 Nixon campaign "House Republicans seized on a minor provision that designated grants for midnight basketball. 29 Republican legislators spoke derisively... characterizing the program as 'hugs for thugs'" (Hurwitz and Peffley, 2005, pp. 99–100).

Although strong links between the arrangements that produce minority threat and severe criminal justice policies often have been detected (Liska, 1981; Jacobs and Carmichael, 2001, 2002), there is as yet little systematic research on whether such explanations account for partisan success. Throughout U.S. history, however, race relations have been exceptionally antagonistic. Although racial divisions now may be less prominent, these fissures still may be the most important division in U.S. politics. In his exemplary account of politics in the South, Key (1949) observed that despite severe economic disparities, debates about the allocation of public resources to the poor rarely occurred. Instead, racial appeals undermined policies that benefited the least affluent. Less prosperous whites were diverted from the pursuit of their economic interests because elites took advantage of poor white desires to maintain their position above African Americans in the racial caste system. In this study we gauge the explanatory power of a modernized version of this account to discover if it explains Republican strength in state legislatures.

Republican campaigns in the post-civil rights period also focused on street crime. Although few violent crimes are interracial, the public sees such acts as almost entirely the work of deprived underclass minorities who, it is erroneously believed, typically victimize whites (Chiricos et al., 2004). With the crime rates held constant, fear of crime is closely related to the size of minority populations (Liska et al., 1982; Quillian and Pager, 2002). In light of their emphasis on street crime and race, it is reasonable to expect that a growth in the most violent and threatening crimes should lead to increased Republican control over important state offices. This is so because whites mistakenly see themselves as the most likely victims of such crimes—which they blame on underclass minorities (Beckett, 1997; Chiricos et al., 2004). We test both additive and interactive hypotheses about racial threat and street crime to discover if such combined accounts affect Republican strength in the states.

It is unfashionable in political science to investigate partisan differences that may be unflattering (Bartels and Brady, 2003). These scholars seem to view research that uncovers unfavorable contrasts between the U.S. parties as less than objective and therefore unscientific. Although political scientists often have studied racial attitudes, they have paid less attention to threat effects based on the joint influence of larger minority populations and street crime despite repeated Republican emphasis on these issues (but see Giles and Buckner, 1993; Giles and Hertz, 1994; Mendelberg, 2001 for exceptions). While we assess attitudinal effects, this study focuses on a different gap in the literature. We seek to discover if the threat from larger minority populations and higher crime rates produces increased Republican representation. Our findings will show that it is a mistake to ignore race and street crime partly because Republican candidates have repeatedly used these conditions to increase their support.

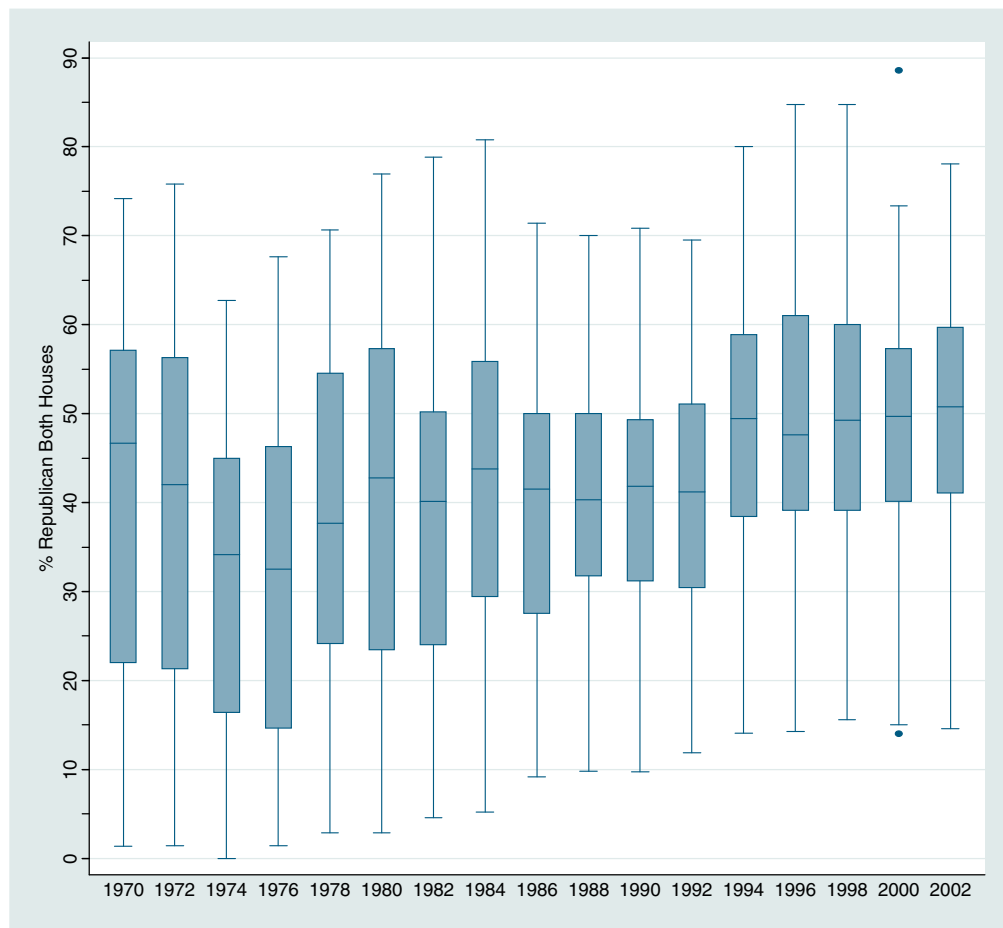
The outcome we study is not trivial. State legislatures decide many important redistributive policies including decisions about the presence of Right-to-Work laws that weaken unions, the generosity of welfare policies, and the distributive effects of state tax codes (Lenz, 2004). And these bodies influence national politics. The party that controls the state legislatures affects partisan strength in House of Representatives as a majority in the state legislature lets a party alter congressional districts to assist their candidates. We study this important dimension of partisan political influence with a pooled time-series approach that covers the post-civil rights era from 1970 to 2002. We present exhaustive and thus more accurate models (Johnston, 1984), but this strategy means the next section must discuss the rationale for multiple explanations. Fig. 1 shows shifts in this indicator of partisan strength. It is apparent that percentage of Republicans in these state legislative bodies has not remained constant.

## 2. Theory

U.S. history has been plagued by divisive conflicts about race (Tocqueville, 1948; Myrdal, 1944). Inasmuch as scholars claim that race continues to have powerful effects on politics in this exceptional nation (Goldfield, 1997; Marable, 2000) and since Republicans have campaigned so vigorously on this and on the closely related crime issue, theories about racial politics provide the conceptual impetus for this study. Yet the political consequences of the threat to white political and cultural dominance that is based on expansions in underclass minority proportions and violent crimes may be contingent. Historical outcomes often are conditional as they depend on the mutual appearance of multiple determinants that each must be present in sufficient strength for events to occur. We assess the explanatory power of hypotheses derived from a racial politics perspective by analyzing the interactive factors that jointly produce shifts in Republican strength in the states. This study departs from prior research by focusing on contingent hypotheses about the combined effects of minority threat and street crime that have been given little attention in the literature in political sociology.

### 2.1. Minority threat

Strong theoretical foundations for minority threat accounts exist (Key, 1949; Blumer, 1958; Bobo and Hutchings, 1996). Racial or ethnic threat theories suggest that a growth in minority presence leads to repression. Such expansions



**Fig. 1.** Box plots of median % Republicans in both Houses of State Legislatures by year (solid bars range from 25th to the 75th percentile; horizontal caps denote 5th and 95th percentiles, while points show outliers).

threaten the dominance of middle and working class whites who often respond with political efforts to maintain their position (Blumer, 1958; Blalock, 1967). Ethnocentric views that minorities are illegitimate trespassers and majority claims to their preexisting rights and privileges are sharpened by minority challenges to such supposedly incontestable arrangements (Bobo and Hutchings, 1996). The political struggles that result harden majority beliefs that conflicts over these rights and privileges constitute illegitimate threats to what is rightfully theirs (Blumer, 1958). Inasmuch as expansions in minority populations endanger their political and cultural ascendancy, a core assumption supported by findings (Giles and Hertz, 1994; Jacobs and Tope, 2007) is that *majority whites often react to such threats by voting for conservative Republicans who are more likely than their democratic rivals to support policies that will help whites retain their superior position.*

Conservatives have taken advantage of such reactions to overcome a critical electoral difficulty. Their support for policies that help the affluent (Hibbs, 1987; Brooks and Brady, 1999) inhibits conservative electoral success as income distributions are skewed. Such distributions mean that the affluent are sharply outnumbered by less prosperous citizens. But an emphasis on race and street crime can overcome this Republican electoral disadvantage.<sup>1</sup> Rhetoric that subtly emphasizes the moral degeneracy of a racial underclass can help a conservative party increase its votes from whites who are threatened by growing minority populations (Chambliss, 1994; Giles and Hertz, 1994; Hurwitz and Peffley, 2005). By emphasizing street crime and other problems readily blamed on minorities, conservatives can attract sufficient white votes (Edsall and Edsall, 1991) to win elections. Once these victories are secured, Republicans then can pursue policies that primarily benefit their affluent core supporters (Hibbs, 1987; Brooks and Brady, 1999). Journalists (Edsall and Edsall, 1991) and many scholars (Chambliss, 1994; Beckett, 1997; Garland, 2001; Mendelberg, 2001) claim that Republicans repeatedly have conducted political campaigns that

<sup>1</sup> Since voters need not declare their partisan affiliation in order to register in about half the states, political scientists use survey data to calculate the percentage of respondents who self-identify as Republicans or as Democrats to gauge citizen partisanship. The self-identified percentage of Republicans was larger than the percentage of self-identified Democrats in only a few of the years included in this analysis (Haynes and Jacobs, 1994; Kirkpatrick, 2006).

focused on street crime and public anxieties about the menace of underclass minority populations to appeal to such anti minority sentiments.

Additional quotes support this claim. Lee Atwater—who subsequently became perhaps the primary strategist in the 1988 Bush presidential campaign—described his political approach:

“You start out in 1954 by saying nigger, nigger, nigger. By 1968 you can’t say nigger; that hurts you. Backfires. You’re getting so abstract now [that] you’re talking about cutting taxes, and all these things you’re talking about are totally economic things and a by-product of them is [that] blacks get hurt worse than whites” (Lamis, 1999, 7–8).

And Republicans have repeatedly stressed the purported links between minorities and violent crime. Probably the most vivid example occurred during the first Bush presidential campaign in 1988 against Michael Dukakis who had been a governor:

“A Republican group ‘blanketed Cable News Network with an ad declaring that ‘Dukakis not only opposed the death penalty, he allowed first-degree murderers to have weekend passes from prison.’ . . . [as the] clearly black [offender]—Willie Horton stared dully into the camera. Forty-eight hours after the initial commercial, Bush supporters released a second, even more devastating radio advertisement featuring a [victim]. ‘Mike Dukakis and Willie Horton changed our lives forever. . . Horton broke into our home. For 12 h, I was beaten, slashed and terrorized,’ he told listeners. ‘My wife Angie was brutally raped’ ” Carter (1996, pp. 76–77).

These considerations suggest that a growth in violent crime also should help Republicans win elections because this growth should enhance mass perceptions about the menace of underclass minorities. If public beliefs about such a venal and predatory criminal underclass enhance white support for candidates from the conservative political party that has repeatedly stressed law and order, expansions in these well publicized street crimes coupled with a growth in the presence of underclass minorities should produce greater Republican strength in state offices.

As one would expect from racial threat theory, negative views about African Americans are widespread where the percentage of blacks is most substantial (Fosset and Kiecolt, 1989; Quillian, 1996; Taylor, 1998). And Republicans have both profited from these preexisting racial divisions and probably enhanced them (Beckett, 1997) by using claims carefully crafted to take advantage of this perceived menace (Hurwitz and Peffley, 2005). Mendelberg (2001) provides multiple examples of Republican victories in state elections after their candidates used racially coded appeals that emphasized street crime and welfare. Despite overwhelming African American support for candidates with liberal voting records, but in accord with threat expectations, legislators in the House of Representatives were likely to support conservative measures if these members represented jurisdictions with larger minority populations and higher murder rates (Jacobs and Tope, 2007). Other supportive findings indicate that white Republican registration was especially likely to increase in southern counties after a growth in African American populations (Giles and Hertz, 1994).

These considerations lead to both additive and interactive hypotheses about the links between minority presence, street crime, and Republican strength in the states. We begin with three additive hypotheses. If this minority threat explanation for Republican success is correct, the relationship between minority presence and Republican strength in legislatures should be positive. Hence: *Expansions (or decreases) in African American populations should produce a growth (or a reduction) in the percentage of Republicans in the state legislatures.*<sup>2</sup> In some states, the underclass minority that inspires the greatest majority hostility is Hispanic. The same logic suggests that: *Expansions (or reductions) in Republican seats in state legislatures can be expected in states that have experienced a growth (or as decrease) in Hispanic presence.* The prior discussion also suggests that higher violent crime rates should produce greater support for this political party that, starting with the Nixon presidential race 1968, placed such a heavy emphasis on street crime. Hence: *Expansions (or reductions) in violent crime rates should produce increased (or decreased) Republican representation in state legislatures.*

But political outcomes often are contingent as they depend on the effects of more than one determinant. In light of the intense emphasis Republicans placed on both minority threat and violent crime, it is plausible that when both of these explanatory factors become stronger, Republican representation in the legislatures should increase. The repeated Republican stress on the links between race and street crime suggests that their electoral support should expand particularly after a growth in White fears of African Americans triggered by increases in violent street crimes. We thus expect that: *Expansions in both the African American population and the violent crime rates should produce additional Republican seats in the state legislatures.* This hypothesis suggests that coefficients on an interaction term based on violent crime rates and African American presence should take a positive sign after other factors are held constant.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> In the italicized hypotheses that stipulate the relationships we will test, these effects are stated in change form because the fixed-effects estimator we use only captures whether within case differences in explanatory variables affect within case differences in the dependent variable. Associations based on cross-sectional covariances are automatically eliminated in fixed-effects models.

<sup>3</sup> Republican campaign tactics that link race and crime still appear in electoral contests for seats in state legislatures. In Ohio in 2006 according to the Newark Advocate, for example, Republican candidate Bill Hayes used a TV advertisement in his campaign against Democrat Dan Dodd showing “a black man who the announcer said raped and murdered a 14-year old girl. . . [the advertisement goes on to say that] ‘Dodd’s liberal plan would spare his life.’” <http://64.233.187.104/search?q=cache:SFQIgvMOLb0J:www.newarkadvocate.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article%3FAID%3D/20061028/NEWS01/610280336+republican+commercial+black+man+ohio+death+penalty&hl=en&gl=us&ct=clnk&cd=9> (accessed 12-18-05).

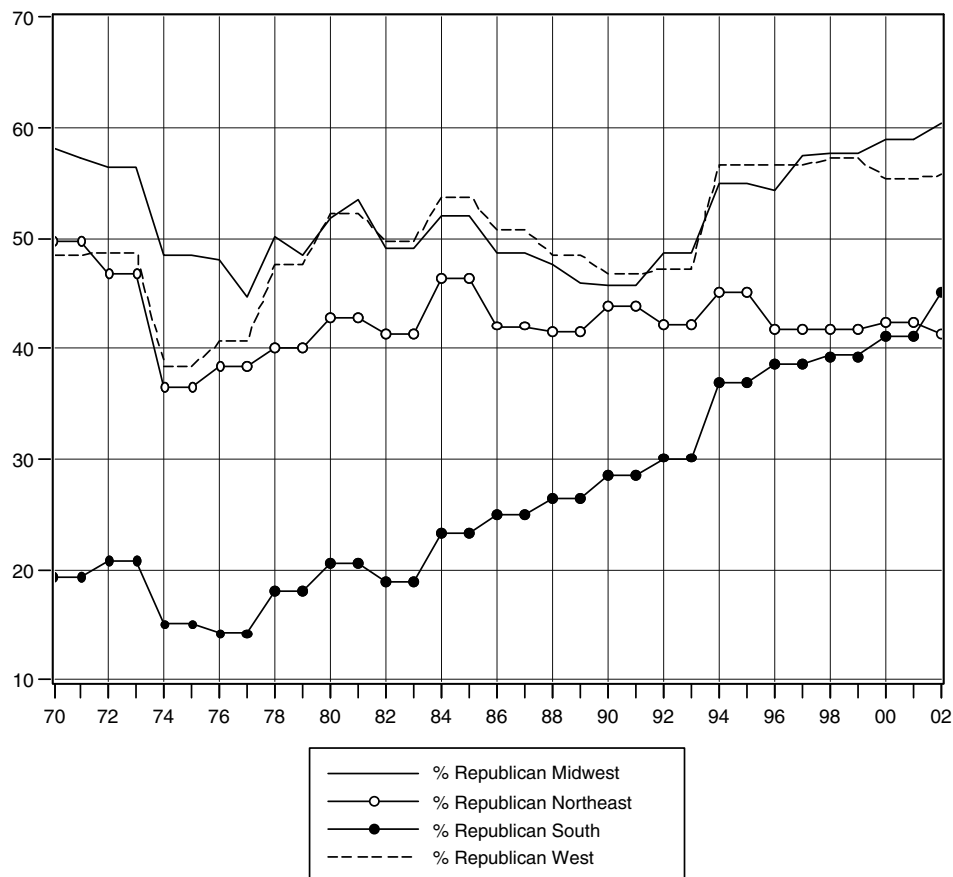


Fig. 2. Yearly changes in mean % Republicans in both Houses of State Legislatures by region.

### 2.1.1. The deep south and African American presence

We can derive two additional interactive hypotheses from this threat perspective on politics. The most virulent racial repression occurred in the ex-Confederate states. It is plausible that the menace provided by expansions in the African American population should have its greatest effect on Republican political strength in this region. The harsh racial history of the deep South and the greater disdain for African Americans that is still present in this region should make southern voters especially hostile to this threat to their cultural and political dominance. After the Democrats supported the 1964 and 1965 civil rights laws that legally eliminated the Jim Crow racial caste system, white voters in the deep South responded to this party's racial liberalism by altering their partisan allegiance. Conservative southern Democrats had dominated elective offices in the deep South, but after the passage of these laws, southern voters began a long secular retreat from the Democratic party (Lamis, 1999). Fig. 2 supports such claims as it shows that most of the growth in Republican representation in the state legislatures occurred in the South after 1970.

The brutality used to maintain white dominance and the enthusiasm for harsh legal measures used to enforce the racial caste system in the deep South from the end of the civil war until the civil rights acts in the 1960s suggest that racial antipathies in this region may be sufficiently strong to retain their political influence today (Wacquant, 2000, 2001). Republican presence in the state legislatures therefore should be driven by African American threat resulting from shifts in the size of this minority population particularly in the ex-Confederate states. If this logic is correct, another interactive hypothesis is likely: *Republican seats in the ex-Confederate state legislatures should expand (or decrease) after increases (or reductions) in African American presence in this region.* An interaction term that captures white political reactions to the threat produced by the growth in African American populations in some deep southern states after 1970 should have a positive relationship with Republican representation.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The mean difference from 1970 to 2002 in the percentage of African Americans in the eleven Confederate states was .47%. In this period the percentage of African Americans grew by 3.1 percentage points in Louisiana, 2.9 in Georgia, and by 1.5 in Virginia. In part because changes in explanatory variables can be modest and need only occur in some cases (Wooldridge, 2002, p. 266) if an explanatory variable is to be significant in fixed effects models, such differences will be sufficient to help explain increases in the percentage of Republicans with seats in these legislatures.

### 2.1.2. Religious fundamentalism

Christian fundamentalists have become a constituency whose support is crucial for Republican electoral success in many states (Edsall and Edsall, 1991). These voters may be particularly likely to support Republicans because they are offended by what they see as depraved minority underclass lifestyles they believe produce social evils such as out of wedlock births, street crime, and other deviant acts they find abhorrent (Edsall and Edsall, 1991). Fundamentalism's rejection of many activities the public perceives as a core aspect of underclass lifestyles gives these believers strong reasons to support the political party that endorses a socially conservative agenda that has been tailored to fit their values. Expansions in the presence of a racial minority commonly regarded as "rootless and vile" (Wacquant, 2000) therefore should enhance fundamentalist support for the party that denounces acts these believers regard as degenerate. Hence: *Republican strength in the state legislatures should be greater in states dominated by fundamentalists that also have experienced a growth in African American populations.*

## 2.2. Additional factors that should be held constant

### 2.2.1. Economic explanations

Although the primary reason for undertaking this analysis involves gauging the effects of racial threat on state politics, a statistical study that ignores important economic explanations for partisan strength would be implausible (Hibbs, 1987). We therefore include five economic explanations in the models: First, expansions in union strength should have a negative relationship with the percentage of Republican office holders in the states largely because, in contrast to their Democratic rivals, Republicans have resisted labor's endeavors in multiple ways (Greenstone, 1977; Freeman and Medoff, 1984). But the negative relationship we anticipate should be restated as union strength has not been expanding. The percentage of Republican representatives in the state legislatures therefore should become greater as the percentage of workers in unions declines. This relationship also ought to become stronger at the most extreme values of union strength, so a nonlinear relationship should be assessed.

Second, Republicans have been far more likely than their democratic opponents to support small business interests. Because small enterprises often exist in an intensely competitive environment, their profits are modest (Scherer and Ross, 1990). In comparison to larger firms, small enterprises cannot benefit from economies of scale, so their costs are higher than those of their larger rivals (Scherer and Ross, 1990). Such factors make it difficult for these enterprises to survive after their labor costs increase. The operators of such enterprises and their Republican political allies—who historically have been much less sympathetic to labor than Democrats—resist policies such as liberal minimum wage provisions and laws that facilitate unionization (Jacobs and Dixon, 2006). Hence, increases (decreases) in Republican office holders can be expected after a growth (decline) in the proportion of small enterprises.

And particularly after the presence of small enterprises is held constant, reductions in a state's labor force that is employed in agriculture should lead to increased support for Republican candidates. This outcome is plausible because wages in agriculture are not as substantial as those in other industries. A decrease in the low wage employment that occurs as this industrial sector shrinks can be expected to lead to increased votes for Republican representatives because representatives from this party are considerably less likely than Democrats to support policies that benefit low wage agricultural workers.

Fourth, since the Democratic party has been far more responsive than Republicans to policies employed women regard as critical (Brooks, 2000), women who work outside of their homes exhibit strong tendencies to vote Democratic. Hence, decreases in Republican office holders can be expected after expansions in the percentage of women in the labor force. Finally, the Democratic party has repeatedly favored the economic interests of the less affluent over those of the prosperous while Republicans have adopted an opposite stance (Hibbs, 1987; Brooks and Brady, 1999). It follows that Republican political strength should be reduced in states that have experienced income declines. Yet this positive association between Republican strength and a growth in family incomes may diminish in those states with the most substantial growth in incomes, so we discover if a nonlinear relationship is present.

### 2.2.2. Self-identification as a Republican and or a Conservative

Many political scientists who specialize in voting adopt a psychological perspective and view voting as primarily driven by socially inherited party identification (for a summary, see Keith et al., 1992). According to this predispositional account, such primordial partisan identifications persist despite non trivial shifts in social or economic conditions. If this explanation is correct, respondent partisan self-identification should help explain Republican strength in the state legislatures. It follows that racial threat, street crime, and the interactive or combined effects of these explanations ought to have diminished influence after self-identification as a Democrat or a Republican is added to the models. And Republican politicians exhibit a greater propensity to endorse conservative policies than their Democratic rivals. This fact suggests that a growth in the presence of self-identified conservatives should produce increases in the percentage of Republicans in state legislatures.

## 3. Methods

### 3.1. Sample

Inasmuch as data from state legislative districts are unavailable in the earlier years in our sample and since frequent redistricting makes a pooled time-series analysis based on such electoral districts impossible, we analyze state level data.

Nebraska had a non partisan legislature, so Republican strength in that state's legislature is immeasurable. Two other states were eliminated because majority-minority group relations are so idiosyncratic in these jurisdictions. The largest minority populations in Alaska and Hawaii are neither African American nor Hispanic (although in models not shown the theoretical implications persist if these two states are retained in the analyses).

Only minute changes in the partisan makeup of the state legislatures occur in odd years when there were no national elections (see Fig. 2). We therefore remove all odd years when such shifts were nonexistent or extremely unusual and restrict this pooled time-series analysis to even years. This sampling decision is statistically beneficial because it sharply reduces serial correlation. Using every other year, moreover, reduces measurement error effects in fixed-effects analyses (Johnston and DiNardo, 1997). The sample starts in 1970 and ends in 2002. This 17 year sample after all even years are removed together with the elimination of three states (Nebraska, Alaska, and Hawaii) produces analyses based on 799 state-years—or 17 years times 47 states—in all models but the last. The data for the state-specific survey based self-report indicators that gauge the proportion of state residents who self-identify as Republicans or as conservatives are restricted to years from 1978 to 1998 leaving 517 state-years in this final model.<sup>5</sup>

### 3.2. Estimation

In contrast to the random-effects approach used in almost all panel analyses in sociology (Halaby, 2004), the fixed-effects alternative holds constant any unchanging case attributes by entering separate case-specific dummy variables in models. Such estimates are unbiased when unmeasured, time-invariant state characteristics that are associated with the explanatory variables influence the dependent variable. For example, unmeasured but stable explanatory factors such as culture that differ between states yet do not change cannot bias fixed-effects results. Compared to random-effects, considerably stronger claims can be made that omitted variable bias is not present in fixed-effects models (Johnston and DiNardo, 1997; Wooldridge, 2002; Kennedy, 2003; see these sources for other advantages).

But fixed-effects is not perfect. Compared to its random-effects counterpart, this estimator exhibits greater sensitivity to measurement error (Johnston and DiNardo, 1997). And because fixed-effects models ignore any cross case or between state variation, such models only capture the effects of within case changes (but these changes need not be constant from one year to the next). This means that all time invariant effects are automatically eliminated and thus held constant in fixed-effects models (Johnston and DiNardo, 1997, p. 397; Wooldridge, 2002, p. 266). Note also that each element in an explanatory variable need only vary over time in some cross-sectional units. If, in a panel of adults a researcher wishes to use education level as an explanatory variable, for example, education need change only for some of the sampled adults (Wooldridge, 2002, p. 266). Yet all regression coefficients we report meet this criterion. If any did not, the coefficient on such an explanatory variable could not be estimated in the reported fixed-effects analyses.

We hold constant any period-specific shocks that affect all states by including dummy variables coded "1" for each year. For example, Figs. 1 and 2 show that reductions in Republican strength in the state legislatures occurred in 1972 and 1974 during and shortly after the Watergate scandal; yet Republican presence in state legislatures sharply increased in 1994 when national support for this party grew sharply and Republicans took control of Congress. The effects of such changes in national politics are removed by including year-specific dummies. Hausman tests provide another reason for estimating with fixed-effects as they show that random-effects estimates are inconsistent. To eliminate heteroskedasticity, the standard errors are corrected with the Huber-White approach in Stata (version 9.2).

### 3.3. Measurement

We gauge minority presence with the percentage of African American and with the percentage of Hispanic residents. Data on state Hispanic populations is unavailable during non Census years from 1971 to 1989. We estimate these values between census years with linear interpolations, but values for all years after 1989 are based on actual measurements. We follow Blacklock (1967) and stipulate a nonlinear relationship between African American presence and Republican strength. To capture this modest departure from linearity, the percentage of African Americans is in log (to the base e) form (nonlinear transformations of the Hispanic presence variable do not alter its effects). The violent crime rates are measured with Uniform Crime Rate statistics.

The African American presence variable and the violent crime rates we use to create an interaction term are mean centered. In models that gauge interactions, the coefficient on a mean centered main effect represents a variable's additive relationships with the dependent variable when the alternative mean centered main effect is equal to its mean. Absent centering, the coefficient on each main effect depicts the additive relationship between that main effect and the dependent variable when the value of the alternative main effect is zero. Centering makes theoretical sense as the interactive version of one of the most important threat hypotheses we test suggests that higher violent crime rates are unlikely to produce increased Republican dominance if there are no African Americans in a state. Centering also reduces colinearity (Cohen et al., 2003).

<sup>5</sup> All of our models but the last are based on the sample that includes the most possible years because longitudinal analyses that cover a longer period will produce findings that provide an increasingly accurate picture. In this instance, both historical coverage and the number of included cases are increased by our decision to analyze data from the entire post-civil rights period in all models but one.

Fundamentalism is gauged with a scale created by Morgan and Watson (1991) based on the percentage of state residents who were members of such churches. This scale is available only for 1979 and 1980, but Newport (1979) claims that church affiliation in large units like states is extremely stable. These fundamentalism scores thus remain constant throughout the sampled period although they differ across states. Fixed-effects models, however, cannot estimate the effects of variables whose values are time invariant. But interactions between such time invariant explanatory variables and variables whose scores do change can be estimated in fixed-effects models as these product terms will not be time invariant. Note that the state-specific dummy variables included in fixed-effects models automatically hold constant the main effects of any explanatory variables that do not change, but the coefficients on these main effects cannot be directly estimated in fixed-effects models. The interaction effect between status as an ex-Confederate state and the percentage of African Americans is governed by the same mathematical rules. Hence, fixed-effects models that include interactions based on time-invariant and a non time-invariant explanatory variables cannot explicitly include the main effect for the time invariant explanatory variable in the reported models, but this main effect is automatically held constant in analyses based on fixed-effects estimation.

To summarize, three interaction effects will be tested in the most complete models: The interaction between African American and the violent crime rates will use product terms computed with variables that do not remain constant. But the interaction between the percentage of African Americans and fundamentalism and the interaction between the percentage of African Americans and state participation in the Confederacy each will be created with one variable that does not change. Hence, the coefficients on the non changing main effects will not appear in the tables although both will be automatically controlled by the state-specific dummy variables included in these models.

#### 3.4. Measurement of controls and the dependent variable

Survey measures based on individual samples of state populations are available. These state-specific surveys conducted by CBS News/New York Times provide data on the proportion of respondents who self-identify as a Republican and the proportion who self-identify as conservatives. But these state-specific surveys only cover a subset of years from 1978 to 1998 (see Erikson et al., 1993 or McIver et al., 2001 for analyses); hence, the final model that includes these two explanatory variables will be restricted to an analysis of 517 state-years.<sup>6</sup> We measure state affluence with real median household income (in 2000 dollars), and we gauge the percentage of woman in the workforce, and the percentage employed in agriculture with statistics from the Census.<sup>7</sup>

The presence of small enterprises is assessed with the percentage of enterprises with 19 or less employees. Union strength is gauged by the percentage of non agricultural employees in labor unions. This variable is in reciprocal form to correct for a skewed distribution and to reduce heteroskedasticity.<sup>8</sup> Although this nonlinear transformation is somewhat unusual, compared to alternatives with similar properties (such as a log transformation that produces non significant coefficients), this reciprocal maximizes model explanatory power, but it produces a reverse coded explanatory variable; a positive coefficient thus will indicate that states with stronger unions have fewer Republicans in their legislature. Finally, the dependent variable is calculated with the mean of the percentage of Republicans in each house of the state legislature.<sup>9</sup>

#### 3.5. Specification

A general specification of these two-way fixed-effects models that correct for heteroskedasticity is:

$$\begin{aligned} \%REPUBLICANLEG = & \mathbf{b}_0 + \mathbf{b}_1\%UNION + \mathbf{b}_2\%SMALENT + \mathbf{b}_3\text{MEDIANINC} + \mathbf{b}_4\text{MEDIANINC}^2 + \mathbf{b}_5\%FEMALELABFC \\ & + \mathbf{b}_6\%BLACK + \mathbf{b}_7\text{VCRM RATE} + \mathbf{b}_8(\%BLACK \times \text{VCRM RATE}) + \mathbf{b}_9(\%BLACK \times 1\text{ifCONFED}) \\ & + \mathbf{b}_{10}(\%BLACK \times \text{FUNDAMENTALISM}) + \mathbf{b}_{11}\text{RESPONDENTPARTYID} \\ & + \mathbf{b}_{12}\text{RESPONDENTIDCONSERV} + \mathbf{b}_{13-58}(47\text{STATEDUMMIES}) \\ & + \mathbf{b}_{59-71}(17\text{YEAR DUMMIES}) + e. \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

<sup>6</sup> The standard question used to gauge partisanship in these state-specific surveys is: "Generally speaking, do you usually consider yourself a Republican, a Democrat, an independent, or what?" The ideology question is: "How would you describe your views on most political matters? Generally, do you think of yourself as a liberal, moderate, or conservative?" These data were found at <http://socsci.colorado.edu/~mciverj/wip.html>.

<sup>7</sup> State data on median incomes are missing from 1981 to 1983, so we used linear interpolation to estimate these values. When we restrict analyses (not shown) only to data after 1989, the theoretical implications of the results that involve Hispanics are identical to those shown in the tables, so the necessity to estimate between census year values for this explanatory variable before 1990 with linear interpolation is unlikely to have altered the results.

<sup>8</sup> Heteroskedasticity tests in fact show that in contrast to the untransformed union variable, this problem is reduced we include the reciprocal of this explanatory variable in the models.

<sup>9</sup> The findings probably are not biased by the 0 to 100 mathematical limits in the range of this percentaged dependent variable. If we follow Allison (1978) and convert these percentages to proportions and apply a logistic transformation, this transformation produces a dependent variable that can vary between minus and plus infinity, but results with identical theoretical implications persist in analyses not shown.

**Table 1**  
Expected signs, means, and standard deviations ( $N = 799$  state-years)

Variable	Expected sign	Mean	SD
% Republicans in legislature		41.716	18.028
% Workers in unions	–	17.268	7.946
% Enterprises $\leq$ 19 employees	+	87.576	1.646
% Employed in agriculture	–	3.862	3.257
Real median household income	+	34,471.27	6,172.61
% Females in labor force	–	43.860	3.012
% Hispanic	–	5.379	7.769
Ln % Black	–	1.600	1.420
Violent crime rate	+	437.504	238.863

where the variables are measured as described above. All main effects are held constant in models that assess statistical interactions. Because theoretically derived expectations about signs have been stipulated, significance tests on all coefficients save the intercepts are one-tailed.<sup>10</sup>

## 4. Analyses

### 4.1. Descriptive statistics, and fixed-effects analyses

Table 1 restates the expected signs, and presents the means and standard deviations while Table 2 lists the intercorrelations. These associations are relatively modest for data aggregated at this level.

To provide a comparison, we begin the multivariate analyses with a model that does not test either quadratic or interactive specifications. Model 1 in Table 3 includes small enterprise presence, the percentage employed in agriculture, real median household income, the percentage of women in the labor market, and the percentage of African Americans and Hispanics. In Model 2 we add the square of median income and the violent crime rate. In Model 3 we add an interaction term based on the product of the violent crime rate and African American presence.

The results in Model 1 show that as expected the coefficients on the two measures of minority presence, female labor market participation, and the percentage employed in agriculture have negative signs, but higher real median incomes lead to greater Republican strength. This evidence also shows that expansions in the percentages of small enterprises and violent crime rates have the same effects. When we add the interaction term calculated by multiplying of the percentage of African Americans and the violent crime rates in Model 3, the coefficient on this explanatory variable also is both significant and positive. This finding supports our contingent hypothesis based on racial threat theory and Republican political tactics. Increases in Republican strength were particularly likely in those jurisdictions with expanding African American populations if such jurisdictions also experienced a growth in violent crime rates. Although the coefficient on the African American main effect is significant and negative in these models, this result may not persist in the results from the most definitive models.

Other implications of the minority threat explanation for partisan strength have not been tested. We next report analyses that discover if African American presence is positively associated with Republican strength in the ex-Confederate states and if Republican political strength expands after a growth in the percentage of African American residents when it is combined with larger fundamentalist populations.

#### 4.1.1. More comprehensive fixed-effects models

In Model 4 of Table 4 we add the interaction between the percentage of African Americans and state membership in the Confederacy. In Model 5 we add the interaction between fundamentalist strength and African American presence to the explanatory variables in the prior models. Finally, in Model 6 we include the two state-specific survey based measures that assess respondent self-identification as a conservative and as a Republican, but missing values reduce the yearly cross-sections analyzed in this model.

The results in Model 4 show that the variables with explanatory power in the prior models continue to account for Republican strength. Yet the significant coefficient on the interaction term based on the product of the percentage of African Americans and a dummy coded “1” if a state had been in the Confederacy supports our contingent expectations about racial threat. This evidence suggests that a growth in African American populations produced even greater Republican dominance in the

<sup>10</sup> Sociologists may question the number of regressors in these models, but econometricians (Johnston, 1984; Wooldridge, 2002; Kennedy, 2003) state that exhaustive specifications produce greater accuracy. Johnston writes “[I]t is more serious to omit relevant variables than to include irrelevant variables since in the former case the coefficients will be biased, the disturbance variance overestimated, and conventional inference procedures rendered invalid, while in the latter case the coefficients will be unbiased, the disturbance variance properly estimated, and the inference procedures properly estimated. This constitutes a fairly strong case for including rather than excluding relevant variables in equations. There is, however, a qualification. Adding extra variables, be they relevant or irrelevant, will lower the precision of estimation of the relevant coefficients” (1984, p. 262). Hence, the comprehensive specifications we use and our fixed-effects models that also include year-specific dummy variables produces estimates that are less likely to be biased, but the resulting significance tests will be comparatively conservative.

**Table 2**  
Correlation matrix (N = 799 state-years)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 % Republicans in legislature	1.000							
2 % Workers in unions	.029	1.000						
3 % Enterprises ≤ 19 employees	.182	-.084	1.000					
4 % Employed in agriculture	.090	-.048	.569	1.000				
5 Real median household income	.325	-.037	-.402	-.553	1.000			
6 % Females in labor force	.153	.403	-.344	-.414	.473	1.000		
7 % Hispanic	.098	.164	-.078	-.269	.167	.025	1.000	
8 Ln % Black	-.558	.172	-.628	-.391	.058	.147	.026	1.000
9 Violent crime rate	-.223	.186	-.437	-.507	.182	.242	.422	.616

**Table 3**  
Two-way fixed-effects analyses of the percentage of Republicans in state legislatures (N = 799 state-years; coefficients on the state and year dummies not shown)<sup>a</sup>

Explanatory variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE
% Enterprises ≤ 19 Employees	92.851	56.830	133.009*	58.289	106.105*	59.992
% Employed in agriculture	-141.242***	34.699	-131.643***	36.181	-134.355***	36.311
Real median household income	.063***	.011	.168***	.053	.154**	.053
Real median household income <sup>2</sup>	-	-	-.001*	.001	-.001*	.001
% Females in the labor force	-.832***	.269	-.728**	.256	-.731**	.253
% Hispanic	-.469*	.265	-.335	.255	-.342	.256
Ln % Black	-27.256***	2.314	-24.816***	2.299	-22.661***	2.486
Violent crime rate	-	-	.012***	.003	.008*	.003
Ln % Black × violent crime rate	-	-	-	-	.005*	.002
Intercept	-19.333	50.102	-76.680	52.678	-50.912	54.374
R <sup>2</sup> (adjusted)	.876***		.879***		.880***	

Significance: \* ≤ .05 \*\* ≤ .01 \*\*\* ≤ .001 (1-tailed tests save for intercepts).

<sup>a</sup> Coefficients on median income and its standard errors have been multiplied by 100 and coefficients on median income squared and its standard errors have been multiplied by 100,000.

**Table 4**  
Additional two-way fixed-effects analyses of the percentage of Republicans in state legislatures (N = 799 state-years in Models 4 and 5; 517 state-years in Model 6; coefficients on the state and year dummies not shown)<sup>a</sup>

Explanatory variable	Model 4		Model 5		Model 6	
	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE
% Workers in unions (reciprocal)	62.519***	20.499	66.310***	20.811	-2.557	22.447
% Enterprises ≤ 19 Employees/100	94.795	58.868	93.250	58.708	135.894*	68.204
% Employed in agriculture /100	-116.817**	38.661	-97.519**	38.747	-155.740*	70.433
Real median household income	.107*	.051	.118*	.051	.018	.062
Real median household income <sup>2</sup>	-.001	.001	-.001	.001	.000	.001
% Females in the labor force	-.493*	.260	-.444*	.256	-.436	.331
% Hispanic	-.179	.252	-.182	.252	-.170	.301
Ln % Black	-20.750***	2.454	-6.822	6.163	-6.212	9.200
Violent crime rate	.007*	.003	.007*	.003	-.003	.005
Ln % Black × violent crime rate	.004*	.002	.004*	.002	.015***	.003
Ln % Black × 1 if Confederate State	65.161***	18.507	55.378**	19.029	60.055**	23.387
Ln % Black × Fundamentalism	-	-	3.701**	1.468	4.842*	2.123
Self-identification as Republican	-	-	-	-	5.331*	2.537
Self-identification as Conservative	-	-	-	-	.659	3.200
Intercept	-68.844	53.748	-72.992	53.758	-82.862	63.217
R <sup>2</sup> (adjusted)	.884***		.885***		.918***	

Significance: \* ≤ .05 \*\* ≤ .01 \*\*\* ≤ .001 (1-tailed tests save for intercepts).

<sup>a</sup> Coefficients on median income and its standard errors have been multiplied by 100 and coefficients on median income squared and its standard errors have been multiplied by 100,000.

legislatures in these deep southern states with such a unique racial history. The findings in Model 5 also indicate that Republican strength in the legislatures expands in states with higher percentages of fundamentalists when this presence is interacted with the percentage of African American residents. The inclusion of the two respondent self-identification measures in

the last model shows that the proportion of respondents who self-identify as Republicans explains Republican strength in the state legislatures, but self-identification as a conservative does not.<sup>11</sup>

#### 4.1.2. Sensitivity tests

Claims that our controls for time-invariant state factors that are automatically provided by fixed-effects estimation are unnecessary are difficult to believe. The F-test values on these unchanging state effects exceeds 41 in all six models thus indicating that these state fixed-effects are jointly significant to well beyond the .0000 level. If we estimate these fixed-effects models with the panel corrected standard error approach suggested by Beck and Katz (1995) that eliminates serial correlation, heteroskedasticity, and cross-sectional correlated errors, the theoretical implications remain.

We tested other accounts in analyses not shown using the specification in Model 5. If we include four linear time-trends for the four census defined regions—including a time-trend calculated for the South—and we drop the year dummy variables to estimate such models, we find that the core findings persist. The coefficients on the three racial interaction terms remain significant in these analyses. Interactions based on the product of a dummy for the states that border Mexico and the percentage of Hispanics or the product of Hispanic presence and violent crime rates have no explanatory power. The inclusion of other explanatory variables such as an ideology indicator based on congressional role-call votes, unemployment rates, or manufacturing employment also does not alter the theoretical implications.<sup>12</sup> The substantial controls in these interactive analyses that include both state- and year-specific effects give reasons to think that these models have captured the most important determinants of Republican strength in these legislative bodies. Three interactive and historically contingent hypotheses deduced from minority threat theory and Republican political tactics therefore seem to provide robust explanations for Republican influence in these legislative bodies.<sup>13</sup>

## 5. Conclusions

### 5.1. Results

The interactions between minority threat and other conditions test the primary theoretical impetus for this analysis, but other determinants explain partisan strength in the legislatures. Growth in both real median incomes (up to a point) and the percentage of small enterprises led to expansions in Republican seats, but Republican legislative dominance was reduced in states that experienced increases in the percentage of women in the labor market or in agricultural employment. Although respondent self-identification as a Republican had the predicted positive effect, self-identification as a conservative did not. And the inclusion of these two self-report measures based on the psychological identification approach to partisanship in political science left the explanatory power of the racial effects intact although the reduction from seventeen to eleven years in this final model affected the precision of some estimates.

As expected in light of the Republican party's focus on law and order, the threat gauged by the additive (or main effect) version of the violent crime hypothesis had a positive relationship with Republican representation in the state legislatures. Consistent with the new political emphasis in studies of criminal justice outcomes (Jacobs and Helms, 1996; Jacobs and Carmichael, 2001, 2002; Stucky et al., 2005; Western, 2006), our findings thus show that expansions in the most menacing crimes produce a growth in Republican seats in the state legislatures. This finding is consistent with claims that Republicans transformed the mass hostility against what the public sees as the predatory acts of the minority underclass (Chiricos et al., 2004) into increased support for their candidates.<sup>14</sup>

But our primary focus was on hypotheses about minority politics that involved contingent relationships assessed with statistical interactions. In accord with theoretical expectations, Republican presence in the state legislatures expanded in

<sup>11</sup> Note that the effects of the interaction between African American presence and fundamentalist strength are almost identical in Model 5 and Model 6 although the years before 1978 are eliminated in Model 6. This convergence suggests that the comparative absence of change in fundamentalist church memberships in the states means that using this explanatory variable to explain Republican strength in the earlier part of the post-civil rights era probably does not lead to biased results.

<sup>12</sup> State level data on employment in the service sector apparently do not exist for all years in the sample, but even if we could include such an explanatory variable, it is not clear what any effects it might have would mean. This sector is extremely heterogeneous. Earnings range from handsomely rewarded professionals to store clerks who often receive only meager wages.

<sup>13</sup> In fact, both published findings and as yet unpublished results strongly suggest that minority threat explanatory factors have similar relationships with conservative roll-call votes in the House of Representatives (Jacobs and Tope, 2007), and with the presence of Republican governors in the states (unpublished manuscript). Although particulars differ, these theoretically similar findings provide added reasons to conclude that racial politics has made a strong contribution to the conservative Republican resurgence after the 1960s.

<sup>14</sup> Readers may be bothered by the contrast between the larger absolute value of the negative coefficient on the percentage of African Americans main effect compared to the absolute value of the positive coefficient on the violent crime rate–African American interaction term in models 3 and 4. Yet the interaction variable's mean is much larger than the main effect mean, so it is unlikely that the absolute value of the unstandardized coefficient on the interaction term will be as substantial. To provide a better comparison, we compute elasticities (which adjust for differences in the measurement of explanatory variables by transforming regression coefficients so they indicate the percentage change in a dependent variable if independent variables change by 1%). These transformations show that the absolute value of the elasticity of the interaction term is considerably greater than the absolute value of the elasticity of this main effect. Our conclusion that the significant positive coefficient on this interaction term is theoretically meaningful is strengthened as well by the non significance of this main effect in the two most comprehensive models (see Model 5 and 6) compared to the continued significance of the interaction term in those models.

those states that experienced a growth in *both* African American populations *and* violent crime rates. The standardized coefficient on this interaction term is .28 in Model 6 indicating that a standard deviation change in this explanatory variable would produce a substantial increase in the percentage of Republicans in the state legislatures. The explanatory power of this interaction term supports a political version of threat theory because it shows that the *combination* of a growth in violent street crime together with increases in the African American population helped Republican candidates win elections. It is possible that many citizens are not responding to racial concerns when they vote for law and order Republican candidates. Yet the robust finding that Republicans do better in state elections after expansions in both African American presence and the violent crime rates and makes a claim that Republican voters are ignoring race and responding only to legitimate concerns about violent crime difficult to believe.

The findings, however, do not support claims that Hispanic threat matters. Such contrasting findings about the explanatory power of African American and Hispanic threat should not be surprising in light of the sharp conflicts about race throughout U.S. history (de Tocqueville, 1948; Myrdal, 1944) that should make race more important. Yet measurement problems and the fact that only a few states had substantial Hispanic populations particularly in the earlier years in the sampled period worked against this hypothesis. The size of Hispanic populations may not have been large enough to trigger threat responses that were as strong as those based on African American presence. Subsequent studies may provide greater support for this ethnic threat account because the Hispanic population recently has expanded so rapidly.

And racial threat mattered in other ways: The findings indicate that a growth in African American presence produced increased Republican seats in the legislatures in the ex-Confederate states even though African Americans overwhelmingly vote democratic. The findings also show that expansions in Republican representation in legislatures can be expected in states with larger fundamentalist populations that experience a growth in African American populations. This relationship probably cannot be attributed to African American fundamentalists. Regnerus et al. (1999) do not find an association between the propensity to vote for Republicans and an interaction between self-identification as an African American and respondent statements that their vote was influenced by Christian political organizations. In any event, three interactive findings support claims that the Republican party's ability to win state offices at least partly depends on a growth in African American populations especially when such increases are combined with particularly menacing conditions such as increased violent crime rates or when this threat to white dominance occurs in the ex-Confederate states or those with large fundamentalist populations.

## 5.2. Wider implications

The approach we use has methodological implications. There is no reason to believe that statistical procedures can replace the rich, theoretically stimulating insights generated by interpretive historical studies. Yet the analyses reported in this paper show that statistical approaches can be used to detect otherwise hidden contingent relationships that scholars who use historical methods have emphasized so much. These results and the other studies that detected historically contingent relationships with interactive specifications suggest that scholars who have criticized statistical methods because they ignore the contingent nature of historical change may have been guilty of overstatements. Our results showing that models designed to capture relationships that only occur after multiple explanatory factors become sufficiently strong suggest that statistical approaches can provide a useful compliment to the fruitful insights offered by historical studies. In any case, this investigation has used interactions to detect relationships that are based on the combined influence of historical forces that in isolation either would not matter or would have different relationships with these political outcomes.

The empirical strength of these interactive hypotheses about the links between minority presence and Republican political strength suggests as well that minority threat explanations for Republican success should not be overlooked. The concomitant finding that there are strong positive interactive relationships between the most menacing crimes that majorities blame on underclass minorities and Republican electoral victories increases the plausibility of such racial threat accounts for democratic representation in the United States. While these results may be controversial, they are robust in part because the models contain such a formidable list of controls. In light of the explanatory power of these relationships and the apparent absence of any prior statistical analyses of the threat determinants of Republican control over these important state offices, we hope that this analysis will stimulate new research on such issues.

Much of the research on racial politics has concentrated on attitudes (Carmines and Stimson, 1989; Gilens, 1999; Mendelberg, 2001; Hurwitz and Peffley, 2005).<sup>15</sup> But a focus on racial attitudes without paying close attention to the social arrangements that provide the foundation for these attitudes can be misleading. "If racism is not regarded as society-wide but as a property of individuals who are 'racist' or 'prejudiced,' then (1) social institutions cannot be racist and (2) studying racism is simply a matter of clinically surveying populations to assess the proportion of 'good' and 'bad' individuals" (Bonnilla-Silva, 2001, p. 34). And since relationships between racial attitudes and behavior have been both weak and inconsistent (see Pager

<sup>15</sup> Many studies of racial attitudes (Kinder and Sears, 1981; Gilens, 1999; Sears et al., 2000) have appeared in the political science literature but only a modest number of these studies have used these attitudes to explain voting. We are aware of only one study that assessed the links between racial attitudes and governmental outcomes. Miller and Stokes (1963) report a strong relationship between constituency attitudes about civil rights and Congressional roll-call votes on civil rights provisions, but the number of surveyed respondents in each of the House districts in their analyses was modest so their results may not be reliable. The multiple findings (Pager and Quillian, 2005) on the weak or nonexistent associations between racial attitudes and behavior suggest that the inclusion of such racial attitude measures, if any plausible measures exist (and we have not located any), would not alter our results.

and Quillian, 2005 for a literature review), we instead gauged minority threat hypotheses by focusing on changes in the size of minority populations and other acts that are likely to be perceived as menacing by white majorities.

Our threat results and the quotes from Republican operatives in the prior theoretical discussion about how Republican campaigns took advantage of majority antipathies against minorities have additional implications. One is that in contrast to the courteous institutionalized disputes about economic interests that seem to be given the most attention in political science, partisan success appears to be at least as responsive to primordial racial divisions (Key, 1949; Wacquant, 2000) that retain their explanatory power even though they are largely based on events that occurred long ago. Our findings do not contradict claims that the whole secret of politics “is knowing who hates who” (see the complete quote in on p. 1). Perhaps such considerations should be given greater weight when we seek to understand political representation in a nation with a history of such bitter racial conflict.

Another implication concerns the importance of overlooked alliances. As long as students of social movements and political sociologists focus on the short-lived political coalitions between the dispossessed in exceptional periods such as the 1930s or the early 1960s and largely ignore the political effects of racial divisions, the dominance of conservatism after the 1960s is likely to remain incomprehensible. Clearly alliances between economic conservatives and less affluent social conservatives who find underclass lifestyles so distasteful have had a greater influence on politics in the post-civil rights era than the fleeting alliances between dispossessed groups so often studied in sociology. Perhaps we could better understand why recent Republican presidents got so many votes from the less prosperous if we paid greater attention to “wedge” issues such as race and street crime that Republicans repeatedly used to weaken the New Deal and Great Society voting coalitions. In any case, these findings strongly suggest that racial threat and the robust political alliances that have been built on the resulting antipathies explain a substantial part of the growth in Republican strength in the states after the 1960s.

These results also underscore the political effects of an exceptionally divisive and violent history. Particularly in the ex-Confederate states but elsewhere as well, politics in the United States still seems to be heavily influenced by the virulent nineteenth century conflicts about slavery and the current unequal relations between the races that are a residue of this “peculiar institution.” If this extraordinary past has finally become irrelevant, the recent political effects of race should be weak or nonexistent. Yet our findings show that multiple racial effects continue to have substantial explanatory power when partisan control of the state legislatures is at issue. Such results support Wacquant’s (2000, 2001) insightful essays on how the prior racial caste system persists but in socially altered and less conspicuous forms. Findings that document the resilient political effects of these fierce racial struggles that occurred so long ago imply that the harsh methods used to maintain slavery and the subsequent Jim Crow caste system still help us understand why U.S. politics remains so exceptional.

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