

Measuring the Political Consequences of Residential Mobility

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Introduction

Americans move, a lot. Every year approximately, 15 percent of people in the United States move. Most moves occur locally; about 10 percent move within a county; another 3 percent move within a state but across county lines, and 2 percent move to another state.¹ And, migration disrupts the normal political ties and behavior of people. Anyone who moves must registering to vote anew, learn who their new elected officials are, establish new personal contacts in the community, and find out where to vote. Building connections to a new community takes time and requires personal adjustments that may lead many people simply to drop out, especially if, as recent research suggests, political engagement is a habit.² Mobility may have real political consequences to the extent that the movers differ systematically in the participation rates and political leanings than the non-movers.

Mobility is of particular importance in the United States because American elections are tied to geography. Members of Congress are elected from Congressional Districts; Senators, from states. Mobility across district boundaries and state lines ought

¹ U. S. Census Bureau, "Geographical Mobility: 2006 to 2007, Detailed Tables," <<http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/migrate.html>>.

² See Gerber, Green, and Shachar (2003)

to be particularly disruptive to the political engagement of individuals. In this paper we examine the 2006-2007 panel from the Cooperative Congressional Election Survey to measure the effects of mobility across political boundaries on engagement and the potential partisan slant among movers. Using these data we can ascertain which individuals moved across congressional districts but within states, across states, or remained within their district they lived a year earlier.

We show that mobility produces much lower levels of knowledge of citizen's representatives, but it does not have a particular partisan slant. We first examine the extent to which mobility across political boundaries affects the likelihood that an individual holds key opinions about his or her representatives. Intra-state moves are found to have a particularly strong negative effect; cross-district moves have more modest effects. Second we examine what correlates with mobility. We show that age, residential stability, and education predict migration, but partisanship and ideology do not. Democrats are not, for instance, more mobile than Republicans and thus more likely to be affected by the disruptive effects of a move. To the extent that migration may have political importance it is indirect, through age. Younger cohorts have tended Democratic in recent years and they are less likely to be engaged in politics because of their age.

Survey Methods

We are using panel study data from the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES). The Cooperative Congressional Election Study panel interviewed 10,000 respondents in 2006 and again in November 2007. The survey measured political participation, knowledge, and attitudes, as well as demographics, including state and

district of residence. The CCES was conducted over the Internet by Polimetrix. For further details see Ansolabehere and Jones (2008).

The advantages of the CCES compared with other studies used to gauge the political consequences of mobility lie in size and measurement. A 10,000 respondent panel is considerably larger than any other panel, giving this analysis greater power and precision than other studies. Size is of particular concern for this subject, as only about 10 to 12 percent of people move in a year, which would leave a very small number of movers in a typical survey. In addition, CCES measures geographical mobility using ZIP code level information, rather than self-reporting of movement. Self-reporting of movement may be subject to errors, and residential mobility itself is not quite the treatment factor of interest. Rather we are interested in the effects of mobility that changes an individual's political representatives.

The key variable of interest is whether the respondent changed legislative constituencies, either state or congressional district within a state. We created an indicator variable Move State which equal 1 if a respondent moved from one state to another between 2006 and 2007 and 0 otherwise. We created a second variable, Move CD, which equals 1 if a respondent moved from one congressional district between 2006 and 2007, either within states or across state boundaries.

The large majority of people in the CCES stayed put. Eighty-nine percent (8,866 people) remained within the same political jurisdiction between 2006 and 2007; 8 percent (778 people) moved between congressional districts, and 3 percent (355 people) moved across state lines.

In one analysis we treat this as an independent variable to explain engagement with politics. Our outcome is engagement in the second period of the study (2007), which is not an election year. An obvious measure may be vote in the second period, and once the 2008 wave of the panel is completed we can analyze that component. Engagement encompasses much more than just participation; it also reflects knowledge of local political matters and development of opinions about political leaders and candidates. We measure engagement as presence of an opinion or attitude about the representative. Specifically, we use an indicator that equals 1 if the respondent has an opinion (favorable or unfavorable) about the job that a given representative is doing, and we asked that for the U. S. House member and for both U. S. Senators. We would like to measure how large an effect lack of mobility has on opinions, or to put it the other way around, how much those who move “lose” their opinions

In conducting this analysis we control for other features of mobility, including length of residence, and other factors that affect opinions, such as education. In particular, other factors correlated with mobility that may affect opinions include Education, Owning a Home, Income, and Marital Status. Other factors that may affect approval directly include Education, Interest in Politics, Partisanship (especially Independence from parties), and state level characteristics, such as political competition in the state and who the Senators are. OwnHome is a dichotomous variable that equals 1 if the person owns their home and 0 otherwise. Residence captures the number of years someone has lived at their residence as of 2006, ranging from 0 for those who have lived at their residence less than a year, 1 for those who have lived at their residence for 1 year; up to 5 for those who have lived at their residence 5 or more years. We measure

Education as a categorical variable: 1 means did not complete high school; 2, high school degree; 3, some college; 4, 4-year college degree; 5 graduate degree. Income has 14 categories, ranging from 1 for those making less than \$10,000 a year to 14 for those making in excess of \$150,000 a year. In addition, we include an indicator for those who did not answer the income question. Political interest is a three-category variable: 1 means not interested in politics; 3 means very interested in politics. We include an indicator for Democrats and an indicator for Independents; Republicans are the omitted category. Finally, all analyses contain state effects. These effects capture any factor that is constant within states but varies across states.

The second sort of analysis conducted in this paper is to measure what factors explain mobility. We look at the same variables as in the first analysis, but we use mobility as the dependent variable. Specifically, a mover is anyone who moves across political boundaries, state or CD within a state. We are interested in measuring political or partisan differences in movers and non-movers. To ensure that such observations are not spurious we control for the factors that we think likely explain mobility especially, residential stability, age and home ownership.

Literature Review

We are primarily concerned here with the effect that encountering a new member of Congress has on constituent approval, regardless of whether that representative was gained through migration or elections. The questions of how individual constituents deal with the information that they receive from getting a new member of Congress is primarily grounded within the sphere of political socialization. How constituents receive

and interpret information to make political decisions is central to how they will make decisions about a new or unfamiliar representative. In particular, is socialization something that remains static despite the introduction of outside forces and variables? Or rather does it follow along a path of life-long learning, adapting based upon political, sociological, and environmental shifts and changes?

The early classical literature on political socialization concerned the effects of pre-adult socialization, though the central questions were ones similar to those seen throughout the spectrum of socialization literature. Scholars initially contended that family and early environment were the primary causes behind one's political involvement and partisanship, contending that an individual's political dispositions and involvement were transferred from parent-to-child (Hyman 1959). The Hyman hypothesis assumes that political socialization are ingrained into the child from parental influence, determining and shaping them as they move forward in life, particularly in regards to their levels of tolerance and political predispositions. While much of this has been challenged by the findings of Jennings and Niemi, as seen below, others have continued to make the link between family and political socialization, with qualified restraints on the level of importance that generational transfer can have, in particular multiple transfers over a period of generations (Merelman 1980, Dalton 1980).³

The competing hypothesis came to fruition the form of a set of panel studies of high school seniors and their parents, conducted in 1967, and then re-tested in 1973 by M. Kent Jennings and Richard Niemi. With the first set of the panel, they were able to determine that such things as political involvement, cynicism, and knowledge were not

³ In fact, while the Jennings and Niemi work rejects the idea that partisanship is unchanging, they do cite the importance of influence of parental guidance, though this diminishes over time (Jennings and Niemi 1991).

part of the generational transfer (Jennings and Niemi 1968). With the second interviews of their panel, they established that party identification and other values can change throughout an individual's lifetime, shifting multiple times (Jennings and Niemi 1978). The reasons behind these shifts are the impetus for scholarly research into the shifting socialization hypothesis, ranging from the questions of how socialization is affected by campaign events (Sears and Valentino 1997), to how changes in policy preferences affected how one dealt with political information (Franklin 1984), to the effects of where one lives from an environmental standpoint (Gimpel et. Al 2003).

Movement, as a possible variable in the nature of political socialization, also falls within the argument over whether socialization is a static or shifting concept. The primary focus within the static argument focuses upon the increasing level of partisanship within American elections, arguing that drastic increases in the number of counties that are overwhelmingly voting for one Presidential candidate over another signifies the "sorting" of individuals into like-minded counties and districts (Bishop 2008). Other research, while not explicitly discussing the question of the static political socialization of moving, assumes that movers will bring their political predispositions with them to a new district. In these cases, the reasons for the static hypothesis vary. Some cite the economic costs of moving, which can potentially affect the demographics of the types of individuals moving, leading to the movement of individuals with more means, who tend to be more Republican (Gimpel and Schuknecht 2001). Other cases assume this as part of their presupposition for movement, assuming that certain demographic groups of migrants will tend towards one party.⁴

⁴ Campbell (1977) presupposes, using Converse (1966) that white migrants who move to the South will tend to be more Republican than the areas that they are moving to, though Campbell does find some

The argument for the shifting hypothesis in moving draws itself from the shifting hypothesis within political socialization literature. As something changes (political events, policy positions, or, for our case, an individual moving from one place to another), they encounter new cues and information. As a result of this, individuals adapt to their surroundings, adapting and changing where necessary (Brown 1988). The effects seem to primarily occur in those areas where individuals are interacting with new environments; in more homogenous moves, the effects in moving from one place to another are not as apparent, as scholars have found that individuals are more likely to keep the political preferences that they have when moving between similar regions (Hanson 1991). One other possible effect of moving is that individuals may just not get or be involved. Having moved and become removed from their previous environment, individuals may need time to adjust to their new surroundings, whether as a result of the issues that may come up when one goes to re-register at their new address (Squire et al. 1987) or there may be other, more environmental factors at play.

The changes in neighborhoods, and the need to recreate new connections, while discounted by some versus the difficulties in re-registration (Highton 2003), may also play a role in the process. The environmental role being played is two-fold: first in whether people get involved when they first move into a new environment, and second in what sort of shifts occur and whether individuals remain informed and partisan after they move and establish themselves within the new districts. Scholars have delved into the question of the effect of neighborhoods, particularly in regards to turnout, finding that different types of neighborhoods do have an effect on whether or not individuals get

significance, but not as significant as the white conversion to the Republican Party following the 1948 Presidential election.

involved in the political process, or even turn out to vote (Cho et. Al. 2005, Gimpel et al 2004). If neighborhood effects occur, it would be as a result of a variety of factors, whether within the connections with family and friends within communities, whom tend to have similar political leanings or dispositions⁵, possibly a situation where turnout is depressed due to being in a neighborhood hostile to ones political identification (Gimpel et al 2004), or, as cited by Cho et al., where neighborhood effects could occur as an effect of an individual's type of community.

To study the effects of migration on voter choice, and the political identifications of individuals who are moving from one place to another, we need contrasting cases where the effect that is created when one moves from a known district and member of Congress to an unknown one. Open seat races are ideal for this sort of study, for a variety of reasons. Most importantly, they lack the presence of an incumbent, and by definition, lack the incumbency advantage, which derives from the advantage an incumbent has in elections versus the vote for the party in the district (Gelman and King 1990). Incumbents have a variety of advantages that have been identified by researchers, ranging from higher name recognition due to their status as the Congressional representative to the use of their Congressional resources to expand their reach to their constituents⁶, both of which lead to incumbents facing less experienced and less effective opponents (Cox and Katz 1996). In the case of open seat elections, this advantage no longer exists, instead replaced by candidates who do not have the level of exposure that incumbents had, thereby being new to individuals in the district similarly to the way

⁵ Using the 2000 NES and independent research, Gelman (2008, 134) found that when asked about the political dispositions of family members and friends, that the respondents more than likely shared similar political beliefs as those who they discussed politics with.

⁶ See Mann and Wolfinger (1980);

individuals find themselves with new members of Congress through migration. At the same time, there are definite differences between individuals in open seat races and those who have moved from one district to another. Primarily, the effect of the campaign on open seat races gives candidates increased exposure through a spirited general election campaign that allows the eventual winner of the seat to increase their name recognition and for individuals to more easily learn about their new member. Furthermore, the change in open seat races does not significantly alter neighborhood effects, as the only variable change comes within the member themselves rather than any major individual shift.

Redistricting also offers us an opportunity to see the effects of receiving a new member of Congress, in particular a new member who has been well-established in an area, as the case is for individuals who move into a new district. The primary difference between migration and redistricting can be found in how the individual gets the new member of Congress: rather than the individual moving to a new district, the new congressman is given to them through the redrawing of district lines. When individuals find themselves in a new district and with a new member of Congress, their support for that member is not as strong as it was for their previous member, a result of not being guided by the representative's incumbency for their county or area (Ansolabehere et. al. 2000). However, while newly elected members do start out in new counties without the same level of support that previous incumbents received, they do eventually begin to establish themselves; they do begin to gain that incumbency, though not immediately to the extent of the county's previous member (Ansolabehere et al. 2000)⁷.

⁷ See also Zaller (1992) Ch. 10, Figure 10.1, pg 225-226 analysis.

Migration and Engagement

What affect did mobility within the CCES sample have on opinionation, that is, whether the respondents had opinions of their representatives? Table 1 presents the Percent of Respondents who offered an opinion on the question “Do you approve of the job that your representative is doing?” Responses for House Members and Senators are reported down each column. The rows correspond to different categories of mobility. The baseline group are those who do not move, and the percent with opinions (favorable or unfavorable) of Senators and House members ranged from 91% to 96%, depending on the post among those who stayed put. The difference between the movers and this group is the effect of migration on engagement, in the sense of opinionation.

Movement within states has little or no effect on engagement, but movement across states lowers engagement noticeably. Those who moved across CD boundaries but within states exhibited only slightly lower rates of opinionation than those who did not move. Between 89% and 94% percent of in-state movers had opinions on the question of job approval. The in-state movers did not change their Senators, and we expect little change in percent saying that they have an opinion of their Senators as a result of moving within state. Pooling two types of Senators, we find that the moving within state corresponds to only a slightly lower rate of opinionation, only about 2 percentage points lower than among non-movers. Interestingly, the rate of opinionation for House Members is only about 3 points lower (92 versus 89) among those who moved across CDs in state.

Moving out of state has a substantial effect on opinions. Rates of opinionation are 12 to 17 points lower for those who move across state lines compared with those who do

not move. The effect is roughly constant across all offices, suggesting that interstate moves are much more disruptive of people's sense of political engagement than within state moves, and within state moves have little effect on opinions.

Table 1. Movers, Non-Movers, and Opinions of Representatives

	Has Opinion Of...			N of Cases
	House Member	Senator 1 (elected in 06)	Senator 2	
Non-Mover	92.0%	95.8%	90.5%	8,899
Move CD (in state)	89.0%	93.6%	91.9%	765
Move State	77.1%	77.1%	78.9%	336

Table 2 presents a multivariate analysis that holds constant other factors to estimate the relationship between moving and having an opinion of your representative's performance in office. The magnitudes on the coefficients for Move State are very large and highly significant for all analyses, while the coefficients on Move CD are modest and not significant.

The other very important variables are Age and Interest in Politics. Age (in years) has a small coefficient, but that owes to the scale of the variable, which has a standard deviation of 13. A one-standard deviation increase in age corresponds to a 7 point increase in opinionation. Interest in politics has a much larger coefficient, but smaller standard deviation; a one standard deviation change in interest corresponds to a 3 percentage point difference in opinionation. Although mobility across state is quite strong and significant, home ownership and length of residence, often used as proxies, have much smaller impact and are often insignificant. Interestingly political orientation

does not matter, suggesting relatively small direct political consequences. To that we now turn.

Migration and Partisanship

An immediate concern with disruptive effects of migration on politics is that it may affect one party more than another. In particular, if groups who move a lot, such as younger people, are also more likely to be Democrats, then we might see a significant difference in partisanship of movers and non-movers.

The raw differences are slight. Non-movers are about equally split between Democrats and Republicans. Movers are somewhat more Democratic than Republican. The net partisan difference between movers and non-movers is about 7 points in the Democratic direction.

Table 3. Partisan differences across Categories of Residential Mobility

	Party Identification in 2006			Cases
	Republican	Independent	Democrat	
Non-Mover	31.8% [2,641]	37.9% [3,143]	30.3% [2,511]	8,295
Move CD (in state)	27.5% [193]	37.0% [259]	35.5% [249]	701
Move State	31.9% [99]	32.3% [100]	35.8% [111]	310

That partisan difference appears to be spurious. It is a function of other factors and not directly a partisan effect. Table 4 offers a probit analysis that predicts the probability that the respondent is a Stayer (non-mover) versus a mover of either type. By far the strongest predictors are Age, Home Ownership, and Length of Residence. Those

who are older, own their own home, and have stayed in their residence longer are much less likely to move in a given year. This suggests that there are two types of people in society – movers and non-movers. Income and Education also exhibit significant effects, albeit weaker.

After controlling for other factors, politics seems to bear no relationship to mobility. The coefficients on Democrat and Independent are quite small and statistically insignificant. Political Interest also has a relatively small coefficient that is of marginal significance.

These results suggest that any partisan consequences of mobility are indirect, rather than direct. They operate only through other factors such as Age and Home Ownership, and only to the extent that those strong predictors of mobility are correlated with partisanship. The correlation in the CCES sample between Party ID (3 point scale) and Age is $-.09$ and between PID and Home Ownership is $-.10$. These show slight Republican tilt, but probably not enough to create a noticeable partisan difference between movers and non-movers.

One caveat to that finding is that generational change often comes glacially. Every election since 1992 has seen more Democratic Identifiers among 18-24 year olds than Republicans. And the 18-24 year olds are the most mobile. As these generations settle down sociologically they will gradually begin to pull politics in the Democratic direction. Year to year these changes may seem slight, as documented here, but over the course of a decade or two, their cumulative effects maybe substantial. Documenting that is grist for a much broader analysis than that presented here.

Table 2. Probit Estimates of Effects of Mobility and other factors on Having Opinions about Representatives

	Has Opinion of ...		
	House Member Coef (SE)	Senator 1 Coef (SE) [Elected 2006]	Senator 2 Coef (SE)
Move State	-.572 (.116)**	-.743 (.118)**	-1.117 (.135)**
Move CD (in state)	-.108 (.078)	.135 (.082)	-.171 (.100)
Length of Residence	.056 (.013)**	.012 (.014)	.100 (.018)**
Own Home	.045 (.057)	.024 (.053)	.005 (.072)
Age	.010 (.002)**	.006(.002)**	.018 (.002)**
Income	.009 (.008)	.019 (.007)**	.025 (.011)**
Income Missing	-.102 (.089)	.076 (.084)	.106 (.119)
Married	.075 (.048)	.069 (.045)	.112 (.063)
Interest in Politics	.563 (.032)**	.341 (.031)**	.824 (.043)**
Education	.016 (.015)	.053 (.014)**	.028 (.021)
Independent	-.056 (.051)	.024 (.049)	.131 (.072)
Democrat	.037 (.052)	.061 (.045)	.052 (.067)
State effects	not reported	not reported	not reported
Loglikelihood	-2209.65	-2558.84	-1167.19
Pseudo-R-square	.108	.058	.259
Sample Size	8583	8619	8482

Table 4. Probit Analysis of Stayers (versus Movers).

	Coeff (SE)
Age (in Years)	.008 (.002)**
Own Home	.275 (.052)**
Length of Residence	.090 (.013)**
Income	-.016 (.007)**
Income Missing	-.168 (.088)
Married	.049 (.044)
Education	-.038 (.014)**
Interest in Politics	.067 (.034)*
Independent	.029 (.047)
Democrat	-.045 (.049)
State effects included	
Loglikelihood	-2663.23
Pseudo-R-square	.06
Number of Cases	8546

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