

Partisan Influence and Race in Congressional Elections

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Motivation

- Theories of racial politics in congressional elections assert that the ethnic group comprising a majority of the electorate will almost always be able to elect a co-ethnic in the district, because ethnic groups vote as a bloc.
- This assumption of *racial bloc voting* underlies our understandings of the Voting Rights Act, enshrining the majority or near-majority threshold as necessary to achieve minority representation.

However, these theories do not incorporate two critical factors that we know to be highly relevant in U.S. elections: The single most important determinant of vote choice, **partisanship**, and the necessary precondition for election to Congress, **nomination by a political party**.

Project Strategy:

I use data on the ethnic background of all Democratic and Republican party nominees for **2006, 2008, and 2010**, combined with party registration statistics broken down by ethnic group, to quantify the influence each ethnic group has within each party (or *partisan influence*) for all available congressional districts. Then, I examine how changes in the influence an ethnic group holds determine rates of co-ethnic, co-partisan nomination.

Quantifying Partisan Influence

I calculate partisan influence with the following generalizable model:

$$\gamma_{pg} = \frac{\bar{a}_{pg} r_g N}{\sum_1 \bar{a}_{pg} r_g N}$$

Notation:

γ = influence
 g = ethnic group
 p = party
 a = partisanship
 r = population proportion
 N = total population size

For each jurisdiction (states and congressional districts) I calculate a given group g 's influence (γ) in each party p . The result is a number from 0-1, that corresponds to the group's proportion of (in this analysis) all registered Democrats (Republicans) within a jurisdiction.

Based on past literature, I hypothesize that influence will have the following impacts on candidacy:

H1: As the influence an ethnic group has within a party increases, the likelihood of candidacy via said party by a group co-ethnic also increases.

H2: When the proportion of influence an ethnic group has within a party reaches 0.5, the probability of candidacy by said party will also be approximately 0.5.

Data

I use a combination of two datasets in the analysis:

1. Comprehensive Voter Registration Database

- Nationwide voter registration database acquired from Catalist, LLC, consisting of **185.5 million currently registered voters**.
- Race of registrants coded via name matching and contextual data.
- Party affiliation of all individuals in the 30 states (265 districts) with party registration systems.

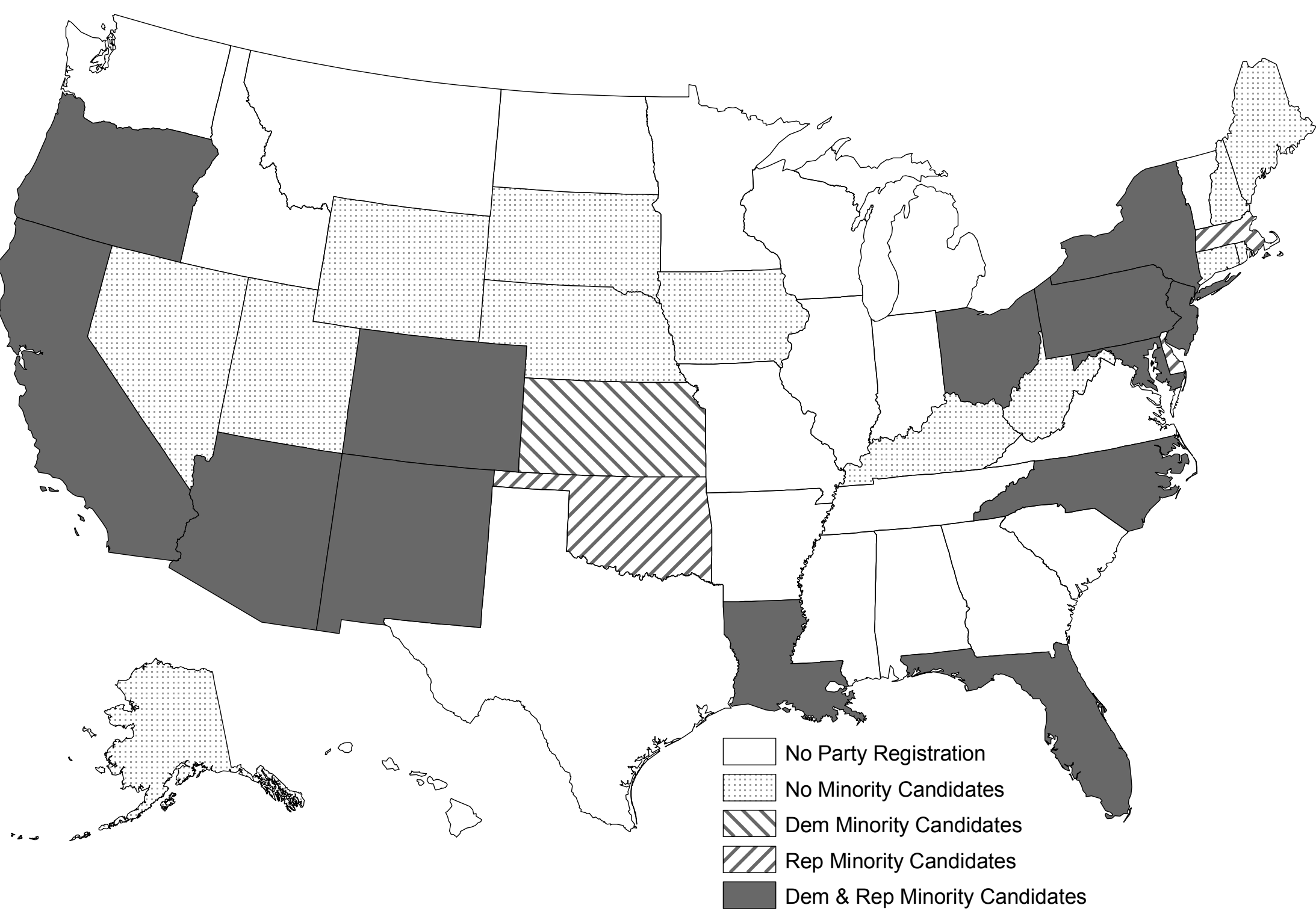
To quantify the partisan influence an ethnic group holds, I apply the formula above, using party registration data in my calculations as the measure of partisanship. In this way, partisanship is imputed directly from voluntary affiliation with a political party by citizens via party registration.

2. Congressional Candidate Demographics

- Compilation of major party general election House and Senate nominees for 2006, 2008, and 2010, with about **1,600 total nominees** in states with party registration.
- Race of each candidate as either **White, Black, Latino, or Asian**, collected using statements made by candidates, membership in ethnic caucuses or organizations, ethnic advocacy foundations, news articles, and candidate websites.

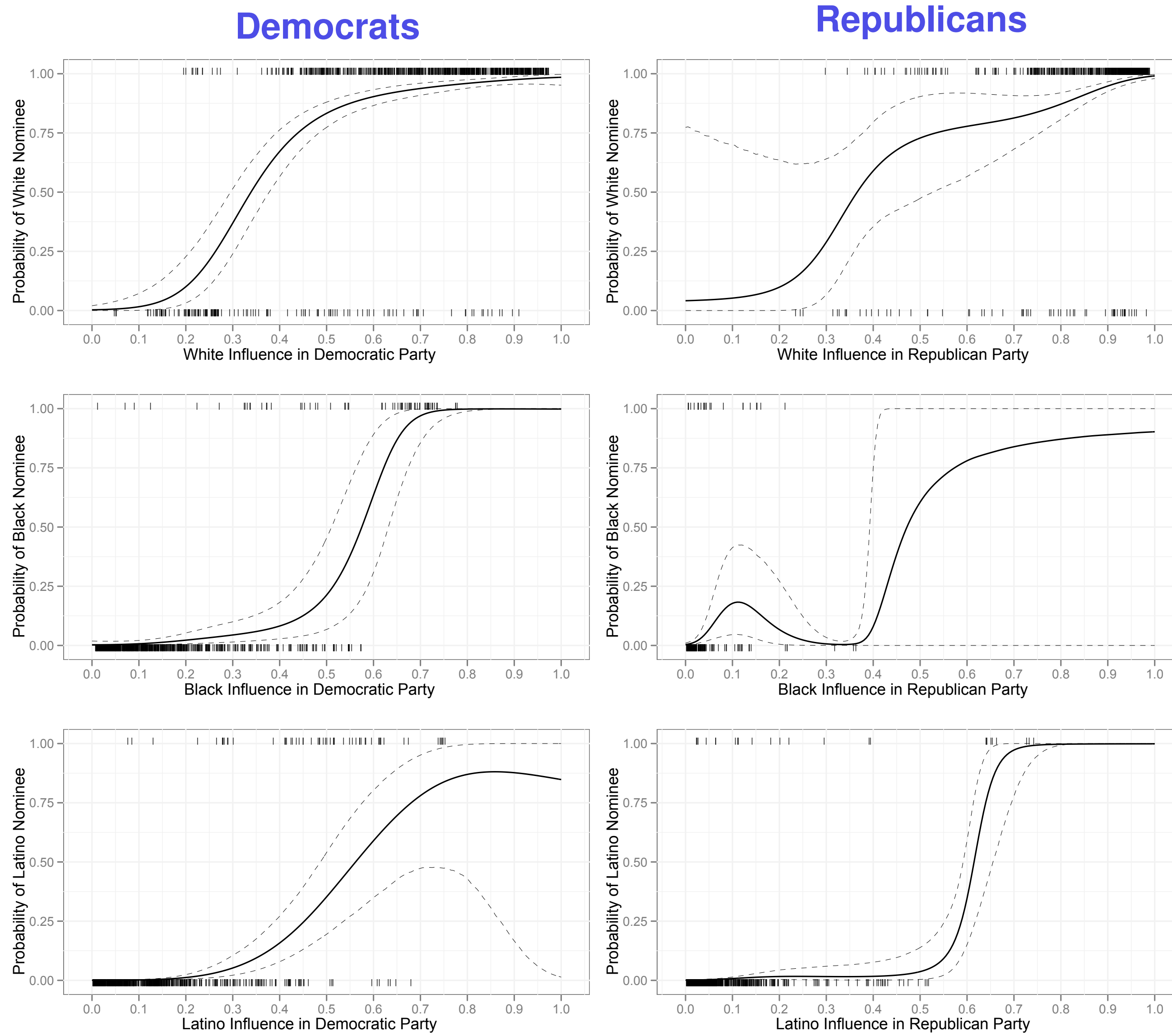
From 2006 to 2010 there were a combined 1,100 unique candidates from either party, **4.7%** of whom were Black, **4.1%** Latino, and **2.4%** Asian. There are sizable partisan differences in rates of minority nomination, despite the fact that parties nominate candidates to the *same* districts and have the *same* general election constituency. The figure below provides the geographic distribution of minority nominees to Congress.

States with Minority Candidates, 2006-2010



Results

The below figures represent the **change in probability of co-ethnic candidate nomination while varying the level of partisan influence** a group holds in a hypothetical district, holding other variables at their means.



We see a positive relationship between partisan influence and likelihood of getting a co-ethnic nominee from your party.

However, the thresholds necessary to achieve a 50% probability of co-ethnic candidate nomination vary across three groups, with Whites needing to comprise only **34%** of Democrats and **37%** of Republicans, Latinos **56%** of Democrats and **62%** of Republicans, and African-Americans at **58%** of Democratic registrants in a jurisdiction.

Causes

- Strategic voting?**
But we don't get better predictions when using district CVAP
- Turnout differentials in primary elections?**
Among registered partisans?