

Bringing Together Spatial Demography and Political Science: Reexamining The Big Sort¹

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Scholars often express concerns that researchers are increasingly segregating themselves into silos – despite common concerns and interests, true interdisciplinary research is too often a rarity. Whether due to career incentives that promote research within disciplines but not across, discipline-specific nomenclature, or other factors commonly captured in the term “the sociology of science”, researchers too often miss opportunities for cross-disciplinary intellectual fertilization. Consider, for example, the issue of migration. Demographers have long been attuned to issues of migration, particularly international migration. Here, macro- and microeconomic conditions, age cycles, and community ties based on race or ethnicity have been found to play key roles in explaining why individuals migrate – and why they don’t. Contemporaneous with this burgeoning interest in migration in demography, political scientists have also been increasingly concerned with issues of migration. Here, the focus is on the political determinants or effects of migration – the sorting of individuals into distinct partisan locales, blue ones for Democrats and red ones for Republicans. The parallel, but separate, tracks of migration research in these two disciplines have thus far produced two principal conclusions: while individuals often migrate, ideas rarely do between disciplines. Mid-level theorizing in both

¹ We thank the editors of this volume for their very helpful comments and recommendations on this chapter.

disciplines could benefit from considering how demographers and political scientists can increasingly speak to each other over the shared concern of migration.

Bill Bishop's 2008 book, *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded America is Tearing us Apart* provides fruitful ground for promoting mid-level theorizing in these two disciplines by simultaneously taking seriously in a popular setting concerns that are central to both disciplines, but also leaving the nuts and bolts linkages between these two disciplines unexplored. As a consequence, a reexamination of *The Big Sort's* arguments and empirical claims that takes seriously the concerns of both demographers and political scientists can itself form a central and much needed bridge between these two disciplines. This chapter provides a bridge for promoting theoretical development and dialogue between these two disciplines by using Bishop's argument as a venue for exploring the shared interests of these disciplines and examining how work in both can be advanced by taking seriously the timely issue of politically-correlated migration in the United States.²

Our chapter is structured as follows. We first detail the central claims made by Bishop in *The Big Sort*. Next, we place Bishop's claims in context by examining the political science literature on political polarization and geography. Next we probe further on the role that migration may play in producing a geography-based political polarization. After examining critiques leveled by political scientists against the analysis in *The Big Sort*, we next examine the quite limited consideration of migration studies in Bishop's book. Here, we identify four central limitations in the book that are produced by this inattention to migration studies. We conclude by

² Lesthaeghe's Second Demographic Transition thesis provides an existing, critically important linkage between these two disciplines. Lesthaeghe (2010, 1-2) argues that in contrast to the First Demographic Transition (FDT) that occurred in Western countries beginning in the 18th century, the Second Demographic Transition (SDT) that began in the 1950s brought "sustained sub-replacement fertility, a multitude of living arrangements other than marriage, the disconnection between marriage and procreation, and no stationary population". Lesthaeghe and Neidert (2006, 2009) find a strong relationship between the SDT and the spatial patterns in voting that are the focus of Bishop's work, and particularly find that blue states and counties are more likely to exhibit features of the SDT than are red states and counties.

examining the opportunity that *The Big Sort* and its arguments provide for the movement away from research silos and toward greater interdisciplinary research on migration-induced political polarization.

The Big Sort

Bishop's book has drawn considerable interest from scholars and pundits alike. Tapping into provocative questions of political polarization and the electoral impact of migration patterns, the book has led no less a figure than former President Bill Clinton to regularly extol its importance in public speeches. At the 2008 Aspen Ideas Festival, for example, Clinton enthusiastically approved of the book's central argument that "we are growing more isolated in our communities because we are living more and more only with people we agree with," concluding that "this is not good in a democracy," ("A Conversation with President Bill Clinton" 2013).

At heart, Bishop (2008) merges concerns of demographers and political scientists, examining how politically-correlated migration is reshaping communities throughout the United States. The author argues that, in an increasingly mobile, affluent country, "prosperity and opportunity" allow people to order "their lives around their values, their tastes, and their beliefs," (12). This creates an "unconscious decision to cluster in communities of like mindedness" (15), thus perpetuating a "giant feedback loop" (39) of homogenizing political discourse.³ To buttress these claims, Bishop presents evidence showing that:

- The number of "tipped" counties, or counties that consistently voted for one party for President for decades, has increased since WWII
- Nearly two thirds of counties have become less competitive in Presidential elections since 1976

³ Research in political communication (Jamieson and Cappella 2008, Lee and Cappella 2001), indicates that this feedback loop may be further promoted by exposure to conservative talk shows such as Rush Limbaugh's.

- “Strong Democrat” and “strong Republican” counties have markedly different demographics, religiosities, and opinions on the war in Iraq and homosexuality
- Differences between “strong Democrat” and “strong Republican” counties on educational levels, race, religiosity, and immigrant levels have been growing over time.

Bishop argues that “the sort” is driven by two factors. First, beginning with the social and political upheavals of the 60’s, there has been a “silent revolution,” where people began placing less trust in traditional institutions that have long moored American society: governments, traditional religious denominations, and civic organizations (drawing from Putnam 2000). At the same time, this thesis argues, people became less willing to participate in the “elite driven” politics of traditional parties and more inclined to espouse “a politics of self-expression” (Bishop 2008, 85). As a result, parties increasingly adopted social cleavages (most notably with the rise of the “religious right” in the late 70’s), and partisanship has increasingly become a reflection of self-expression.

Second, the geographic dimensions of this political sorting have been fueled by economic mobilization. Since the mid-1960s, America has witnessed a “post-materialist Tiebout migration based on non-economic goods, as people have sought out places that best fit their ways of life, their values, and their politics,” (199). Young, educated Democrats are pulled towards “high-tech” cities such as Austin, San Francisco, or Portland, while Republicans congregate in small towns or “low-tech” cities such as Birmingham and Cincinnati. Economically, “high tech” cities developed the social capital necessary to fuel what Richard Florida describes as “spiky” growth based on “creative class” innovations (cited in Bishop 2008, 131). Politically, these localities forged ever sharper distinctions based on culture and politics. Through this sorting “feedback loop,” the political consequences include gridlock in Washington, ideological “democratic

experiments” (300) at the local level, and targeted campaigns focused on rallying the base as opposed to swaying the other side. Bishop claims further that the effect goes beyond politics, as churches, advertising, and even philanthropy have become balkanized in a “sorted” America.

Polarization and Geography

Bishop’s concern for polarization, or the divergence of political elites and/or the public into distinct, ideologically homogeneous factions, is reflective of a growing concern in both popular and academic discourse. Mainstream news sources, as well as punditry of various political stripes, point to gridlock in Washington, election maps marked by “red” and “blue” states, and movements such as the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street to posit that the United States is becoming increasingly polarized. The result, the media say, is political dysfunction, intra-group homogeneity, disillusionment with politics, and even the erosion of familial and friend relations (Glass 2012).

Political scientists have long been interested in the concept of polarization; scholars paint a more nuanced picture, though, equivocating from the familiar line that America is irrevocably becoming a country divided into two political nations. There is a strong academic consensus that political elites today are increasingly separated into ideologically homogenous, distinct camps (Hetherington 2001, Bartels 2000, Fiorina 2005, Abramowitz and Saunders 2008). Some scholars have argued that this separation of elite politics has diffused into the polarization of public opinion. Abramowitz (2010, 594), for example, analyzes election and National Election Studies (NES) data to portray a “deepening red-blue divide” at both the state and county level. Campbell (2008) echoes the argument of Abramowitz, pointing to NES ideological and partisan self-identification measures to argue that the populace is deeply split, and political discourse will thus continue to be heated for some time to come. In addition to observational studies, both Levendusky (2009) as well as Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus (2013) provide experimental

evidence that elite polarization can create cues that cause move segments of the public to one ideological extreme or another.

Other scholars, however, have questioned the polarization thesis. Many suggest that current discourse looks polarized only when one takes in a narrow time frame, as opposed to the whole of American history (Fischer and Mattson 2009; Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder 2006). Others have questioned the extent to which elite polarization has diffused to the public. Fiorina (2005, 13), for example, argues that Americans are “closely but not deeply divided.” As political elites are separating ideologically, the public is, to a certain degree, shuffling parties without significantly changing ideological dispositions. Even the so-called “culture wars” are more a reflection of candidates, rather than the public, increasingly adopting divergent positions on social issues. Levendusky (2009) comes to a similar conclusion, drawing a distinction between the “polarization” of elites and the “sorting” of the public. As elites have become polarized, he argues, the masses respond to the clearer, sharper elite cues and “align their partisan and ideological beliefs accordingly” (2). Finally, Carsey and Layman (2002, 788) argue that “many, and perhaps most, citizens are unlikely to respond to political cues provided by party elites because they pay little attention to elite-level politics, because they have no ties or only weak ties to a political party, or both.”

“Polarization” can take on many forms: polarization between parties, between age groups, between ethnicities, etc. One prominent variant of the debate is whether America is exhibiting geographic polarization, captured in popular imagination by the divide between “red” and “blue” states or counties. Many argue that geographic polarization is more hype than reality. For example, Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder (2006) as well as Fiorina (2005) point to NES data showing that respondents in “red” states are very similar in ideological self-placement and

opinions on issues to respondents in “blue” states (across both economic and social issues). Likewise, Evans (2003) finds that, while ideological and issue attitudes among Democratic and Republican identifiers have diverged, political attitudes across geographic regions have actually converged. Relatedly, Morrill, Knopp, and Brown (2007, 549) argue that “while the polarization version of electoral geography is accurate, it is misleading,” showing that there is significant nuance to the picture of rural “red county” and urban “blue counties”.

Nivola and Galston (2008, 236), however, point to bitterly contested primaries and the decline of split ticket voting to suggest that the electorate is “clustering in ‘red’ and ‘blue’ counties, if not states or regions.” This argument is picked up by Gimpel and Schuknecht (2003, 1), who argue that, since the founding of America, federalism “acts against unity, making a political system a barrier to homogeneity”. Through an examination of voting trends across 12 states, the authors show that political opinions, political cultures, and even epistemologies of words like “Democrat” or “conservative” vary greatly both between and, importantly, within states. They also posit that opinion change in a locality is driven by four factors that interact to varying degrees in different locales: conversion of opinion, mobilization of a previously inactive public, generational change, and in or out-migration.

Migration and Politics

Gimpel and Schuknecht argue that this last factor, migration, “has been the most important force shaping the political identity of regions,” (27). Acknowledgement of the political effects of migration has a deep history, drawing the attention of researchers such as V.O. Key and Phillip Converse. However, some scholars have suggested that migration effects are currently too often overlooked in the public opinion literature (Gimpel and Schuknecht 2003; Jurjevich and Plane 2012; Robinson and Noriega 2010). Given the decline in fertility rates in the

United States, “population redistribution trends are increasingly dependent on migration,” (Johnson et al. 2005, 791). Thus, trends in electoral change may be increasingly dependent on migration; moreover, with the influx of migrants to states like Florida and North Carolina, the potential for migration to redraw the electoral map may continue in the future (Jurjevich and Plane 2012, 429-430).

Scholars studying migration posit two distinct approaches through which migration could contribute to local political opinion change – compositional and contextual approaches. A compositional approach suggests that opinion is determined by specific demographic characteristics in a locality – age, race, income, etc. Thus, the political effect of migration can be determined by tallying changes in a myriad of relevant demographic variables.⁴ A contextual approach, on the other hand, accounts for political socialization and “neighborhood effects,” which exert influence beyond the demographic makeup of individual migrants. While not denying the effect of place, Gimpel and Schuknecht focus primarily on compositional effects of political migration, as they are directly observable and do not rely on vague or untestable notions of “context.” Using this compositional approach, they argue that most political variation between localities can be explained by 1) ideology and issue salience, 2) economic stratification, 3) ethnicity and religion, and 4) race. Likewise, Jurjevich and Plane adopt the compositional approach, critiquing past electoral studies researchers for their a) inability to disaggregate migration from broader demographic change, b) inattention to migrant origins as well as destinations, and c) assumption that migrants are predominantly Republican.⁵ Using US Census data from 1995-2000, they show that migration leads to “increased, but varied ‘political

⁴ Of course, it is impossible to determine and measure every demographic characteristic that contributes to political opinion. The compositional approach only suggests that these sort of variables, if they all could be measured, could perfectly explain change in public opinion (without relying on “socialization” or “contextual” effects).

⁵ Examples of this argument date back to Campbell et al’s *The American Voter* (1960).

purpleness” at the state level,” with streams of migrants contributing to both the strengthening and diluting of the parties’ strength across states in complex ways,” (442).

While acknowledging the value of the compositional approach in elucidating the intersection of migration and opinion, Brown (1988) argues that the “contextual” approach is too often ignored in the literature. Critical of past literature that ignores the effect of migration on the migrant, as well as assumes that migrants have a degree of “psychological immunity” to countervailing political messages (14), he argues that “few (migrants) ever have the resources to remain steadfast on their partisan and political beliefs when everything around them has changed” (15). Comparing the effect of “political environment” to migrants’ voting behavior and opinion, he shows that a migrant’s current, not previous, political environment is the primary driver of voting decisions and partisanship. Likewise, Huckfeldt et al (1995) argue that the effect of a migrant’s political environment is mediated through the “weak” social ties he or she develops. As an individual interacts with others outside his or her immediate social cohort, the authors empirically demonstrate that his or her political opinion will more closely match that of the larger community. Furthermore, McKee and Teigen (2009) ascribe importance to the contextual effect of “place,” viewing it as a conduit through which specific, measurable location characteristics impact opinion (485). Using 2000 and 2004 Presidential election data, they show that population density (measured as “urban,” “rural,” or suburban) and region both independently influenced voting behavior; the effect of population density varied by region, and the effect of region varied by level of population density.

Struggling with *The Big Sort*

If Bishop (and Bill Clinton) are correct, the effects of internal migration (be they compositional or contextual) are creating a “post-materialist” polarization. The consequences

are dire:

“balkanized communities whose inhabitants find other Americans to be culturally incomprehensible; a growing intolerance for political differences that has made national consensus impossible; and politics so polarized that Congress is stymied and elections are no longer just contests over policies, but bitter choices between ways of life,” (Bishop 2008, 14).

To be fair, some scholars see some potential positives in this sort of “sorting;” Levendusky (2009), for example, argues that partisan “sorting” helps voters “participate more effectively” as democratic citizens by giving them clear, meaningful choices at the ballot box (140). Whether positive or negative, though, the significant impact of an alleged “Big Sort” necessitates careful scrutiny of the argument provided by Bishop.

Unfortunately, a number of methodological and conceptual issues can be raised, drawing from both political science and demography literatures. From the political science literature, first, a number of scholars have taken issue with the time frame Bishop uses, suggesting that Bishop’s focus on the post-WWII era, and particularly 1976 to 2004, paints a misleading picture, as the mid-20th century was a unique time of party heterogeneity and relative political détente (Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder 2006; Abrams and Fiorina 2012; Glaeser and Ward 2006). Second, as discussed previously, many scholars argue that divergent voting behavior does not necessarily indicate real ideological differences in public opinion. For example, Abrams and Fiorina (2012) argue that looking at Presidential election data (as Bishop does), in the context of political *elites* polarizing, skews the perception of *public* polarization upward. Instead, these authors look at county level *voter registration* data in 21 states that record partisan affiliation with registration (a more stable measure over time, they argue). These data show that the number of independents has increased dramatically since 1976, suggesting that the public is not echoing polarization at the elite level. McGhee and Krimm (2009) likewise analyze county-level

registration data and come to a similar conclusion.

Third, Bishop focuses almost exclusively on culture and lifestyle as factors driving polarization in contemporary America. He is not alone in arguing the increased salience of “post-materialist” social issues; popular books, such as Thomas Frank’s *What the Matter with Kansas?* and David Brooks’s *Bobos in Paradise*, argue that rifts in culture, religiosity, and lifestyle - not economic issues - drive liberal and conservative opinion apart in the 21st century. Abramowitz (2008), moreover, points to NES data to make the claim that “the religious divide is now much deeper than the class divide” (although he limits his analysis to white voters) (550). For many (perhaps most) other academics, however, the consensus is that economic concerns still hold sway over public opinion. Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder (2006), as well as Gelman et al. (2008), point to evidence suggesting that economic issues are still top of mind for most Americans, with social issues only having a secondary effect on opinion. Fiorina (2005) likewise argues that religious and social cleavages in society have become salient in addition to, not at the expense of, economic cleavages. Social issues have furthermore only come into salience due to candidates adopting increasingly opposed stances, not due to an increased divergence in public opinion.

Migration Critiques

Bishop addresses some of the potential critiques leveled by political science scholars in his work; for example, he acknowledges that it is “certainly the case” that sorting would look less pronounced if one took a longer view of American history (25), and he draws from the work of Abramowitz and others to suggest that Fiorina is mistaken in his claim that the United States is “closely, not deeply” divided (25-8). However, even though his thesis *hinges on migration*, he fails to engage migration scholarship in a serious way. Instead, he presents county and metropolitan level data over time, assuming that “post-materialist” migration is

fueling the political and cultural sorting he observes. This results in four central limitations of the book: 1) unquestioned assumptions regarding the drivers of migration, 2) inattention to the mechanism that fuels political change, 3) a focus on internal migration to the exclusion of international migration, and 4) an inappropriate level of analysis for studying migration.

Causes of Migration: Bishop's focus on culture and lifestyle as a driver of *migration* (not just geographic polarization, as Abramowitz (2008) would assert) is particularly questionable. He contends that, by the 1990's, "there was a surge of people who wanted to live in cities for what could only be social – or even aesthetic – reasons," (152). As a result, fostering a particular "lifestyle" has become the city's modus operandi and key to economic development, in order to lure a fair share of the nomadic, wealth-producing "creative class" (Florida 2002).⁶ As evidence, Bishop cites growing differences in "high tech" versus "low-tech" metropolitan areas with regard to race, age, income, occupation, patent creation, and the "social capital" indicators developed by Putnam (2000).

What Bishop does not sufficiently allow for, however, is the possibility that these demographic indicators, or other indicators suggested by migration scholars, are the potential primary drivers in migration patterns. While recent research in US internal migration patterns

⁶ In addition to being a spurious driver of migration, "post-materialist" lifestyle positioning has also been called into question as a driver of local economic development. For a particularly strong critique of the "creative class" thesis, see Peck (2005).

has been somewhat sparse⁷, there are studies that suggest that this could be the case. Johnson et al. (2005), for example, examine migration patterns by age cohorts and conclude that there is “a striking consistency in the overall migration signatures of particular types of countries” based on age and life cycle (808). Lee, Oropesa, and Kanan (1994) also find that age, in addition to other individual factors such as tenure in neighborhood and homeownership status, play a much stronger role in predicting migration out of a neighborhood than characteristics (real or perceived) of the neighborhood itself. Other factors, such as migration distance, unemployment, or other economic concerns are not central to Bishop’s analysis, yet may play important roles in shaping the political migration that he documents. Greenwood (1988), for example, cites the growth of the labor force as well as the increasing concentration of employment opportunities in the South and West regions to argue that the population growth of these regions during the 1970’s and 1980’s was fueled, in part, by domestic migrants seeking work. As another example, Pandit (1997) analyses data from 1949 to 1993 to show that economic conditions interact with the sizes of age cohorts to determine a period’s overall migration rate. (This focus on age effects on migration mirrors Parker’s (2014) insightful analysis of age-specific rates of out-migration among the Karen in Thailand in this volume). The effect of both “cohort size” and economic conditions is stronger for long-distance (interstate), as opposed to shorter (intrastate), migrations.

Furthermore, race and ethnicity can also play a critical role in migration. The “Great Migration” of African Americans out of the rural South in the first half of the 20th century, in part to escape racial prejudice, is well documented (Price-Spratlen 2008; Tolnay, Adelman,

⁷ Despite the research discussed here, demographers have perhaps not examined patterns and effects of internal migration in the US as fully as they could. Ellis (2012), for example, laments the fact that migration scholars have focused on international migration into the US in lieu of internal migration, and discusses way migration scholars can both transfer international-level analytical tools to internal migration studies as well as link internal and international migration together. Skeldon (2006, 17) also recognizes this shift, arguing that, in migration research, “the word ‘migration’ has come to mean ‘international migration’...”

and Crowder 2002). As another example of the intersection of ethnicity and migration, South, Crowder, and Chavez (2005) show that the propensity of Latinos to move to neighborhoods with a large percentage Anglo population depends upon the migrant's human and financial capital as well as his/her English language proficiency with important variations in these broad trends for Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban subgroups. In sum, important individual-level correlates of migration are deemphasized in Bishop's analysis, but are likely to have an important impact on political migration. By looking only at correlations between demographic patterns of "polarized" counties or "high tech" cities, however, one cannot determine a causal relationship.

Effects of Migration: If migration is indeed driven by desire to live in culturally "like" communities, the mechanism of geographic political change is still left unspecified. As discussed earlier, a key distinction in the migration literature is between "compositional" factors of migration-induced change, or political change resulting purely from demographic change, and "contextual" factors, such as the effect of "place" or "political environment" on the new migrants' attitudes (Gimpel and Schuknecht 2003; Brown 1988). Determining when and where "compositional" or "contextual" effects take precedence with political migration is key to making predictions of changes in political geography. As migration into the South and West is predicted to continue into the future (and, by 2030, Florida, California, and Texas account for nearly one half of the US population) (U. S. Census Bureau 2013), will migrants take their politics with them, or will their new environment influence their opinions? The answer to this question is key to anticipating changes in the electoral landscape; however, the observational data presented by Bishop is silent in this regard.

Connection between immigration and internal migration: The domestic migration that Bishop focuses on does not happen in a vacuum, as international migration has a profound effect on internal population flows. For example, African American migration to the North in

the 20th century was partly a response to slowing European immigration, and the flight of agricultural workers to Northern factories during World War II was the impetus for the “Bracero” program, which brought in 4 million Mexican immigrants to work on southwestern farms (Ellis 2012, 198). Citing these historical examples, Ellis argues that a fuller account of internal migration would incorporate “linked-flow studies” of domestic and international migration interactions (197).

The “linked flow” between immigration and internal migration, discussed by Ellis and others (Baines 1985; Ley and Tutchener 2001; Card 2001) has clear political import, as immigration drives political changes along both “compositional” and “contextual” lines. While new immigrants are often restricted from political participation through either legal means (Logan, Oh, and Darrah 2009) or discouraged through a lack of political socialization or English proficiency (Cho 1999), they nonetheless harbor views that contribute to the political zeitgeist of a community. Also, with certain electoral conditions and issue cleavages in place, foreign-born immigrants can at times have a significant impact on elections (Barreto 2005; Pantoja, Ramirez, and Segura 2001). Moreover, second and third generations of immigrants can have tremendous effects on the political composition of a community – the continuing influence of the Cuban community in Miami and Florida state politics is just one indicator of this (Moreno 1997). Compositional effects may be felt away from “immigration gateways” as well, as areas not host to new immigrants, Frey argues, “are becoming more conservative and more likely to vote Republican,” (1999, 97). This, he argues, is driving a “demographic balkanization” (78). In contrast to Frey, however, Lichter and Johnson (2006, 109), find little evidence of balkanization and conclude that “immigrants are less concentrated today than in the past and they are less segregated from other population groups, including their own racial group and whites.”

As a “contextual” effect, there is a deep historical precedent for international immigration provoking political antipathy and anger in “traditional” native-born communities, dating back to the 19th century Know-Nothing party. Recently, Parker and Barreto argue that the rise of the Tea Party, part and parcel with this “Know-Nothing” tradition, is driven by a perceived loss of power to a political “Other.” This “Other” includes, among other groups, foreign immigrants. In fact, their polling shows that a majority of Tea Party sympathizers feel that immigrants (regardless of legal status) are “too powerful” and “increase crime in America,” (2013, 171). The geography of this antipathy consists of “red” states that have received a recent influx of immigrants, such as Arizona, Texas, and the Deep South states (Donato et al. 2008); many of these states have channeled this nativist sentiment into passing stringent anti-immigrant legislation (Parker and Barreto 2013, 165; Sabia 2010). Conversely, these states have been an increasing locus for advocacy by groups supportive of immigrant rights as well⁸. As immigrants increasingly move to “non-traditional” destinations (Massey and Capoferro 2008; Hall 2013), reactionary politics in some of these destinations may continue into the future.

International migration also plays a role in Lesthaeghe and Neidert’s (2006) analysis of the second demographic transition in the United States, and particularly the seemingly anomalous patterns of demographic transition in the United States vs. many other Western industrial countries. In contrast to the first demographic transition, in which declines in fertility and mortality marked many Western countries beginning in the 18th century, the second demographic transition that begin in the 1950s and has spread to many Western industrial countries has been marked by, among other characteristics, a focus on post-materialist concerns and higher-order needs including self-actualization (Inglehart 1970,

⁸ A recent example of this is the "DREAMer" movement pushing Republican lawmakers to vote for federal immigration reform (Parker 2013)

Maslow 1954, both cited in Lesthaeghe and Neidert (2006, 669)), sub-replacement fertility, and the development of living arrangements outside of marriage (Lesthaeghe and Neidert 2006, 669; Lesthaeghe 2010, 1-2).

Viewed in the context of other Western nations' trends, the United States' demographic transition has seemed like an outlier, marked as it is by a fertility rate that actually increased between 1981 and 2001, placing it just above replacement level (Lesthaeghe and Neidert 2006, 670). Lesthaeghe and Neidert (2006, 693-694) trace this higher comparative fertility rate in the United States to the particularly high fertility rate among Hispanics in the country. International immigration of Hispanics who are just completing their first demographic transition has produced a total fertility rate that masks the second demographic transition that has occurred in many areas in the United States (Lesthaeghe and Neidert 2006, 694). They demonstrate that blue states and counties are marked by their sharing many of the attributes of the second demographic transition while red states and counties are marked by a stronger support for the religious right and a lesser reflection of the second demographic transition (Lesthaeghe and Neidert 2006, 684-693).

In sum, international migration has substantial, complex effects on both patterns of political "sorting" and "linked" internal migration flows. By failing to take the international context into account, Bishop misses an important layer of the story that would only strengthen his argument.

Levels of Analysis Problem. A key limitation of Bishop's analysis is the use of *aggregate* county and metropolitan statistical area (MSA) analyses to infer *individual* migration decisions.⁹

⁹ If Bishop were to limit his inferences to those at the aggregate level, his analysis would suffer from the modifiable areal unit problem (MAUP), the fact that aggregate-level findings depend upon the aggregate-level areal units used for analysis. Even limiting one's interest to the aggregate level, there is little reason to believe that counties as arbitrary units drawn for purposes of governmental administration are the appropriate areal units for a study of citizens' chosen local contexts. For discussions of MAUP see Openshaw and Taylor (1979, 1981).

First, these geographic units are too large; it is well-known that counties are not viewed by most citizens as their principal social, political, or economic communities. As such, this level of analysis lacks face validity; in making a migration decision, individuals may be motivated to move to Austin or Raleigh, but they would not be motivated to settle in Travis County or Wake County. Bishop's analysis thus operates at a theoretically inappropriate level of aggregation, which could bias his results. Second, because individual-level factors are likely to play a critical role in migration decisions, a causal analysis of migration patterns at any level must incorporate individual level data, or else it runs the risk of erroneously imputing individual-level motivations on migrants.

Recognizing the need to use individual level data to study migration patterns, McDonald (2011) uses 2006 Cooperative Congressional Election Study Data, change-of-address data from the US Postal Service, and Presidential Election data to show that conservative individuals tend to migrate to "Republican" districts, and liberals to "Democratic" districts. In his paper, he correctly argues that:

"The granularity of locations (studied) will affect any prediction of sorting or convergence. When we examine relatively small area units, such as neighborhoods, or even the suburban component of a metropolitan area, we may find sorting that is undetectable within and between large regions, counties, or states. Our ability to observe and evaluate either sorting or convergence depends completely on the unit of analysis, and the particular consequences also depend completely on how we choose to aggregate."

(517).

Despite this statement, though, his dependent variable for migration destination is measured at

The Congressional District level, which is often *larger* than the county-level data used by Bishop and *more* prone to ecological fallacy. Thus, while he offers an improvement by examining individual-level migrants, his reliance on district-level data weakens his results.

A methodological “gold standard” for research into political migration is offered by Cho, Gimpel, and Hui (2012). These authors argue that though “county-level results might look suggestive, their relationship with individual-level tendencies might not be in the same direction or of comparable magnitude,” (2). As a consequence, these authors examine individual migrant voter registration records to show that a ZIP code’s political makeup (measured by differences in Republican and Democratic registration rates) plays a modest role in migration decisions, with secondary factors that are related to individual-level partisanship such as income, race, and population density playing a larger role. Political makeup plays a stronger role in migration for Republicans, as well as those moving longer distances. Cho, Gimpel, and Hui (2012, 12) argue that these processes, albeit gradual, have the potential to “not only change the political landscape but also create new environments for the socialization of citizens.” In many ways Cho, Gimpel, and Hui’s analysis does present a gold standard in the current literature because it links both individual- and aggregate-level data, recognizing that a focus solely on the latter will run into the ecological fallacy if we are interested in explaining individual-level migration decisions while a focus solely on the former will run into the atomistic fallacy if we ignore the effects of factors above the individual level that shape migration patterns. Because of the critical roles that interactions between individual-level and aggregate-level factors are likely to play in influencing migration, multi-level modeling presents a fruitful modeling approach for examining cross-level effects shaping migration patterns.¹⁰

¹⁰ It is important to incorporate both origin and destination characteristics when modeling migration decisions. If

Incorporating Space into *The Big Sort*

Political geography is central to Bishop's *The Big Sort* argument and yet, paradoxically, spatial concerns play only a minor role in his account. Although, as discussed above, his county level of analysis has drawbacks, it also is helpful in moving scholars away from the blunt "red state-blue state" dichotomy that ignores substate variation in partisan voting. But in employing a county level of analysis, Bishop too often treats these counties as atomistic entities, ignoring the important question of substate partisan regions (see, e.g., Nardulli 1995).

A critical question regarding *The Big Sort* is the spatial dimension of this sort. What is the spatial structure of this partisan sorting? Are adjacent counties exhibiting similar patterns of polarization toward the Democratic or Republican Party? Do substate regions of adjacent counties serve as regional magnets for the in (or out-) migration of Democrats and Republicans? Are patterns of migration marked by spatial dependence and if so, what is the source of this spatial dependence?

All of these questions are important for developing middle-range theory in spatial demography. The sources of any spatial dependence in partisan migration and polarization are particularly consequential. Regions comprised of adjacent counties with similar patterns of partisan polarization may exhibit this spatial dependence for either of two principal reasons. On the one hand, citizens in neighboring counties may exhibit similar movement toward the Democratic or Republican Party due to a process of behavioral diffusion, in which political conversations promote political polarization. If such behavioral diffusion occurs across neighboring counties, this would produce a spatial lag process that should be modeled via a spatially lagged dependent variable. Alternatively, it may be that the neighboring counties

only the latter are modeled, a common flaw in the existing literature, we will be limited in our understanding of how individuals drawn from particular origin locales are drawn to particular destination locales. See Pelligrini and Fotheringham (1999) for an important discussion of this concern (see also Farmer 2011).

exhibit little interaction, but instead are serving as magnets for the in- or out-migration of Democrats or Republicans due to exposure to common external shocks, such as the decay of old industries or the rise of a knowledge economy. If so, these shared external shocks would be modeled via a spatial error model. Determining which of these processes is producing spatial dependence in partisan polarization among neighboring counties is critically important for understanding how migration is spurring partisan polarization in the United States.

Conclusion

Bill Bishop's book, *The Big Sort*, is an interesting, provocative read, a compelling tale of warring "red" and "blue" communities, driven apart the decline of traditional institutions, "creative class" migration patterns, and the growth of a culture and politics of "self-expression." This chapter is not necessarily arguing that Bishop is incorrect; America could possibly be fragmenting, and this fragmentation could, as Bishop (2008, 199) argues, possibly be driven by a "post-materialist Tiebout migration based on non-economic goods." However, the evidence provided by Bishop – aggregate, county or MSA-level trends in demographics, partisanship, and public opinion – is not enough to give us a definitive answer. It opens the door for political scientists, such as Fiorina and Abrams (2012), to challenge his thesis that America is increasingly polarized.

Further, it opens the door for migration scholars to offer other causal factors for "sorting" established in literature, including age, economic factors, and race or ethnicity. More broadly, to draw a valid causal inference concerning the political effect of migration, one cannot employ broad, aggregate data. One must match individual, migrant-level data with data on the "destination" political environment below the county level. Cho, Gimpel, and Hui's work (2012), which combines individual level migrant data with zip code political environment data, is an example in this regard.

The Big Sort gives us the opportunity to reflect on the “silos” academics often find themselves in, as well as opportunities to benefit from interdisciplinary inquiry. The phenomenon of migration is a perfect example of this. Gimpel and Schucknect (2003, 27) argue that although migration has long been overlooked in political science studies of local politics, it plays a critical role in shaping these politics. Bishop’s work likewise sees migration driving local politics; indeed, for him, it is creating a dangerous level of geographic polarization. Greater engagement with the work of migration scholars could allow him to make stronger, and more nuanced, claims regarding the causes, and process mechanisms (compositional or contextual), driving migration-fueled polarization. Given the dearth of recent research in internal migration (see Ellis 2012), one intriguing possibility would be to look into *international* migration research, seeing what concepts, methodological tools, or interconnections can be appropriated for the study of domestic movement and political change.

In the end, all those that study polarization, be they demographers, political scientists, or those from other fields, could benefit from approaching polarization from an interdisciplinary perspective. If it is true, as Bishop states in his title, that “the clustering of like-minded Americans is tearing us apart,” the need for this is dire. Ironically, the clustering of like-minded scholars – demographers and political scientists engaging in a closer, more fruitful dialogue – may provide us with insights that can help remedy the negative effects of geographic polarization.

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