Voter Migration and the Geographic Sorting of the American Electorate

Wendy K. Tam Cho [a] , James G. Gimpel [b] & Iris S. Hui [c]

[a] Departments of Political Science and Statistics and National Center for Supercomputing Applications, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

[b] Department of Government and Politics, University of Maryland

[c] Department of Political Science, University of California at Los Angeles

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Wendy K. Tam Cho,* James G. Gimpel,[†] and Iris S. Hui[‡]

*Departments of Political Science and Statistics and National Center for Supercomputing Applications, University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign
[†]Department of Government and Politics, University of Maryland
[‡]Department of Political Science, University of California at Los Angeles

Questions have been raised in recent years about the extent to which the nation is segregated by the political preferences of its electorate. Some have argued that internal migration selects either directly or indirectly on political criteria and thereby produces increasingly one-sided Republican and Democratic neighborhoods. We are among the first to empirically examine voter migration on a large scale. Relying on data for millions of partisan migrants across seven states, we show that partisans relocate based on destination characteristics such as racial composition, income, and population density but additionally prefer to relocate in areas populated with copartisans. This tendency is stronger among Republicans but is also true of Democratic registrants. Whether the role of partisanship is central or ancillary, if it is any part of the decision process it has the potential to make important imprints on the political landscape of the United States. *Key Words: migration, political polarization, residential sorting.*

近年来兴起有关国家被选民政治倾向分裂程度的问题。部分学者主张, 国家内部的迁徙会直接或间接地挑选政治准则, 因而逐渐产生全面倾向共和党或民主党的邻里社区。对选民迁徙进行大尺度的经验研究方面, 我们是先驱之一。我们倚赖横跨七州的数百万政党支持者之迁徙资料, 显示政党支持者乔迁新居时, 会基于目的地的特征如种族组成、收入与人口密度等考量, 但亦将进一步倾向落脚于支持同一政党者群聚的区域。此一倾向对共和党支持者而言较为显著, 但对民主党支持者而言亦是如此。不论支持特定政党扮演着核心或从属的角色, 若它是决策过程的一部分, 便具有对美国政治地景产生重要影响的潜力。关键词: 迁徙, 政治分歧, 住宅分类。

Desde no hace mucho, se cuestiona la amplitud con la que se ha segregado la nación por las preferencias políticas de su electorado. Hay quienes sostienen que la migración interna selecciona de manera directa o indirecta los criterios políticos, produciendo así vecindarios en donde cada vez más predominan o los republicanos, o los demócratas. Nosotros figuramos entre los primeros en examinar empíricamente la migración de votantes a gran escala. A partir de los datos sobre millones de miembros de partidos políticos que migran a través de sietes estados, mostramos que su relocalización se basa en algunas características del lugar de destino, tales como la composición racial, el ingreso y la densidad de población, pero notando que adicionalmente ellos prefieren reubicarse en áreas pobladas por copartidarios. Esta tendencia es más fuerte entre los republicanos, aunque también ocurre entre quienes se registran como demócratas. Así sea que el papel de la afiliación partidista sea central o secundario, en cuanto hace parte del proceso de decisión tiene el potencial para marcar de manera significativa el mapa político de los Estados Unidos. *Palabras clave: migración, polarización política, selección residencial.*

The geographic pattern of partisanship in the United States is spatially nonrandom. Red or Republican states are starkly evident across most of the land, whereas blue or Democratic areas pervade the most densely populous regions (Shelley et al. 1996; Glaeser and Ward 2006; Morrill, Knopp, and Brown 2007, 2011; McKee and Teigen 2009; Brunn et al. 2011). Also strikingly, these patterns appear to be self-perpetuating and intensifying over time. Election after election, barring startling scandals, Democratic and Republican strongholds bear true to our expectations that their voters adhere to past partisan loyalties. In 2008, despite Barack Obama's lopsided presidential election victory in many parts of the country, the geographic expression of rival partisan preferences appears to have heightened over previous elections (Baldassarri and Bearman 2007; Bishop and Cushing 2008; Gelman et al. 2008; Lesthaeghe and Neidert 2009; Brunn et al. 2011). The counties that previously favored one party awarded even greater victory margins to their preferred

party, and the distribution of party registrants became increasingly askew across more locations.

The potential consequences of these patterns compel further study. Among individuals, Bishop (2009) lamented how the geographic clustering of the like-minded breeds narrowness of viewpoint. He argued that heterogeneous communities teach their members to compromise by providing a neighborly forum for opposing opinions, whereas homogeneous communities promote extremism and ideological intensity because differing viewpoints are regularly dismissed without discussion or consideration. If we continue on this present course, Bishop admonished, this cultural evolution will foster an increasingly intense intolerance that will tear the country apart at its seams. There are also consequences at the institutional level, where geographic patterns of partisanship foster less responsive representatives—politicians simply spend less time courting constituents in noncompetitive homogeneous communities. Ironically, constituents reward, rather than penalize, like-minded representatives, because they place a higher premium on ideology than on responsiveness. The result, some bewail, is a polity wherein citizens are deeply divided, parties are polarized, and political discourse is stifled.

We can speculate but we cannot know the precise future implications of geographic sorting. Although some might consider Bishop's account to be sensationalized, it is also believable enough to cause one to take pause. We do not take a position on the political consequences of the geographic sorting of the electorate, but we acknowledge that consequences exist and that they might have implications for democratic practices and traditions. We focus, instead, on whether geographic sorting in the electorate is occurring at all, our interest in this phenomenon fueled by theories about its ramifications.

The aggregate patterns of partisanship are clear when it comes to presidential preference. We are diffident about the consequences because we are unsure of the roots of the phenomenon. What creates, defines, and sustains these geographic patterns of partisanship that shape the political behavior of individuals as well as politicians? Bishop (2009) presented evidence that the American electorate has been sorting itself through decades of internal migration. His primary evidence comes from presidential voting data at the county level. Over three decades, he showed that counties that voted for the Democratic candidate have produced even more solid Democratic support and Republican counties have become more reliably Republican. The maps,

although remarkable in this regard, fall short of definitive; Abrams and Fiorina (2012) contended that a similar analysis with county-level party registration fails to illustrate the increasingly one-sided pattern that Bishop touted.

Sources of Geographic Patterning and Political Sorting

Bishop's analysis is suggestive of a highly compelling story, but it would be premature to state that either Abrams and Fiorina or Bishop have presented an unimpeachable case. They both present evidence with data at the county level despite making claims about individual behavior. We have long been aware that making inferences about individual behavior from data that are aggregated at some other level (like the county) is problematic (Robinson 1950; Openshaw 1984). Although county-level results might look suggestive, their relationship with individual-level tendencies might not be in the same direction or of comparable magnitude. Indeed, county-level data provide an unreliable and possibly misleading picture of individual behavior. To obtain reliable information about individual behavior, one needs to examine individual-level data. We obtain individual-level migration data for our analysis to overcome this hurdle. At the same time, we acknowledge that teasing out the relevant relationships remains a complex task.

Surely, many factors contribute to geographic variation in the balance of partisanship. Population migration is one obvious force, but other factors, such as the polarization of the national parties and the evolution of individual attitudes, would have a similar effect. If the national political parties pull apart on social and economic policy issues, this type of party polarization could trickle down to the electorate and create clearer connections between a voter's policy preferences and his or her party identification (Fiorina and Levendusky 2006; Levendusky 2009). As a result, ideologically murky groups such as "Reagan Democrats," or blocs that are "socially liberal but economically conservative," gradually disappear and a less cross-pressured, purified pattern of party support results. In a two-party system, when the elite spurn centrist positions, voters move away from the center and toward the political party that lies most proximate to their partisan preferences, a phenomenon that has been termed *party sorting*.

Geographic patterns might also have their roots in social processes. Single-party politics in specific localities can be reinforced by information biases in the social environment (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Orbell 1970; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; Burbank 1997; Beck 2002). The greater the frequency of expression of a particular viewpoint within a bounded space, the higher the probability that an individual will encounter those who have that viewpoint and come to share it as well. Individuals might also gravitate toward attitudes, perhaps without full awareness, that are consistent or compatible with their social setting (Cox 1970; Boyd and Iversen 1979; Brown 1981; MacKuen and Brown 1987). Although few would make drastic changes, smaller movements in the pursuit of amity are presumably more common (Brown 1988).

Social life is complex and aptly characterized as the interplay of multiple forces. Both party sorting and geographic sorting (whether through migration or individual changes among nonmigrants) are likely occurring simultaneously. A country's internal migration clearly reconfigures its economic, social, and political landscape (Brown 1988; Gregory 1989, 2007; Kodras 1997; Pandit and Withers 1999; Lieske 2010), especially in a country like the United States, the most highly mobile society in the history of the world, where 45 percent of the population over age five has lived somewhere else just five years prior (Perry 2003, 2006).

Examining the interaction between these various sources of political change is important but beyond the scope of this study, especially because we have yet to determine whether individuals do indeed sort geographically. Hence, we focus simply on individual mobility patterns. Does internal migration contribute to the sorting of partisans into distinctive neighborhoods? Specifically, is the partisan voter who is migrating to a new residence more likely to choose a neighborhood with a higher concentration of like-minded partisans? We examine this question by tracking the migration of millions of partisans from their origin to their destination, within and across state lines.[1] We analyze the variation in these movements and seek to discern the factors that guide destination choice.

Migration Destination Determinants

People care greatly about the characteristics of the local community where their everyday lives and routines are carried out and the majority of their social interactions take place (Agnew 1987, 1996). These en-

vironments shape opportunities, and residents gravitate toward the ones that offer better prospects for themselves and their children. No one would argue that relocation destinations are determined entirely by partisanship, but the partisan composition of an area might still be one part of the destination calculus. If relocation decisions are at least partly related to partisan preference, then change might be slow, but the potential to remake the sociopolitical landscape is real, and the process is in motion. Consistent with previous research in geography and economics, we view relocation decisions as the product of constrained choice (Clark 1976; Desbarats 1983a, 1983b; Clark, Deurloo, and Dieleman 1984; Huff 1986; Cadwallader 1989, 1992). Migration choices are not random but, rather, driven by particular preferences subject to basic economic constraints associated with employment availability and housing. If migrants also sort geographically based on a desire for homophily, or the tendency of individuals to favor the company and presence of others who are similar to themselves, then the landscape could also develop increasingly homogeneous pockets of political support.

Some findings suggest that partisanship would not be a factor in choosing among relocation destinations. For instance, one strand of literature suggests that people are not especially polarized in their political opinions. Rather, citizens are largely inattentive to politics, and intermittent elections provide only episodic opportunities for politically polarizing thought (Campbell et al. 1960; Lewis-Beck et al. 2008). Moreover, others have drawn on survey data to show that there has been no appreciable increase in liberal–conservative polarization on a variety of controversial issues over a generation or more (DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson 1996; Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope, 2006; Fiorina and Abrams 2008). This work undercuts the idea that one impetus for geographic sorting is greater ideological polarization at the mass level. If Republicans and Democrats are currently no further apart than they have been in the past, there is no reason for them to now begin avoiding each other's presence.

In addition, previous migration research has generally not highlighted the effect of political composition on destination choice for migrants in the United States. Instead, research has focused on economic pull factors and the streams of migration away from rural and urban locations and toward suburban areas (Carlino 1985; Plane and Rogerson 1994; Gordon, Richardson, and Yu 1998). This research suggests that suburbs are attractive because they offer good schools, lower crime rates, and a particular type of low-density housing development.

These studies emphasize economic necessity as the primary force directing migration streams. Although the political leanings of migrants or of the suburbs are not generally considered in these studies (Frey and Korbin 1982; Frey 1985; Baldassare 1992), some have noted that these preferences for suburbs and particular neighborhood characteristics do have an associated political effect but not in the direction of homogeneous communities. Instead, the mixing of racially and socioeconomically diverse populations in suburbs creates politically competitive jurisdictions (Hale 1995; McKee and Shaw 2003; Lang, Sanchez, and Berube 2008; Hanlon 2009; Hopkins 2009).

Correlation of Partisanship and Migration Determinants

There is ample evidence that partisan considerations are not foremost in relocation decisions. Even if individuals do not consciously contemplate partisan factors, however, we might observe some type of partisan geographic sorting if the principal determinants of destination decisions are correlated with partisanship. For instance, neighborhood income levels and housing stock are regarded as primary considerations in a migrant's choice of destination (Clark and Ledwith 2007). If Republicans are wealthier and prefer newer housing and expansive acreages, then the geographic preferences of Republicans and Democrats might be artifacts of the income distribution and the expression of the purchasing power of the rival partisan groups (Bartels 2008). Relatedly, planners have highlighted a partisan association with sprawl and development whereby liberals are drawn to compact development in urban settings, whereas conservatives prefer more expansive, less planned spaces in suburban and rural areas (Walks 2006; Williamson 2008; Lewis and Baldassare 2010). Similarly, residents might take stock of local tax levels and public services (Tiebout 1956). As in the case of income, housing stock, and sprawl and development, attitudes toward taxes and public services have long been a source of cleavage between the major parties.

Racial composition is also regarded as an important guide in a migrant's destination decision. Whites will not only flee mixed-race neighborhoods in central cities but will relocate to all-white suburban neighborhoods in an effort to insulate themselves from the encroachment of minority populations though the erection of institutional barriers, including the creation of wholly new governments (Burns 1994). Blacks, on the other hand, because of persistent discrimination, might be less able to translate income gains into choices to live in predominantly white suburban neighborhoods (Massey and Denton 1993; South and Deane 1993; Emerson, Chai, and Yancey 2001; Sampson and Sharkey 2008). Self-segregation studies indicate that some blacks prefer neighborhoods with considerable black concentrations, although mainly out of fear of white hostility (Ihlanfeldt and Scafidi 2002; Krysan and Farley 2002). Other minority and immigrant groups might cluster geographically as a consequence of in-group preference, solidarity, social and economic support, and ethnic resources (Fong and Chan 2010). Racial residential segregation might have implications for the political composition of places, as race can be associated with partisanship. Black voters, in particular, are known to be lopsidedly Democratic in their partisan affiliation, and Latinos identify with the Democratic Party by, typically, a two to one margin. Contingent on the proximity, income, and salience of specific attitudes, surrounding white communities might reflect the other extreme (Giles and Hertz 1994).

Sorting by race or income can be seen as part of a larger phenomenon whereby migrants are driven by homophily. From a psychological standpoint, moving is a norm-guided search behavior motivated, in part, by the desire for acceptance. Choices reflect an assessment of values held by local populations, the acceptability of their routines, habits, and customs. People are drawn to particular places because they think they will fit in well among the locals (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001; Florida 2008; Gosling 2008; Van Ham and Feijten 2008). Visual inspection of residential areas provides preference information about housing type, dress, lawn care, automobiles, favorite stores, Christmas decorations, backyard playground equipment, and American flags flying from front porches, to name but a few (Baybeck and McClurg 2005; Gosling 2008). Such associations presumably send signals about preferences that prospective residents might use to discern the extent to which the current residents are like themselves. Dissonance-reducing selection criteria might not be directly related to politics, but if they are sufficiently associated with political preference, either or both could generate geographic sorting that produces increasingly like-minded locales.

Support from Surveys

Data from the YouGov *Cooperative Congressional Election Study* (CCES) support the claim that many relocation considerations are associated with partisanship.

Table 1. Percentage of survey respondents ranking each destination criterion above 5 on a 1 to 10 scale of importance

	Democrats	Independents	Republicans	Total
Job	32.7	37.0	39.1	35.8
Retirement	41.3	36.5	46.7	41.4
Housing	49.5	45.3	43.5	46.6
Affordability	63.7	56.3	59.2	60.3
Schools	32.0	28.6	35.9	32.1
Church	18.9	19.3	34.8	23.4
Safety	60.5	56.3	64.1	64.1
Climate	28.1	26.6	28.8	27.9
Stores	46.6	34.4	38.6	38.6
Friends	41.3	39.6	44.0	41.6
Family	46.3	46.4	44.0	45.7
Quiet	66.2	65.1	68.5	66.5
Excitement	38.1	29.7	40.2	36.2
Democrats	28.5	10.9	5.4	16.9
Republicans	11.4	15.6	39.1	20.4

Note: Respondents are recent movers. $N = 657$.
Source: Cooperative Congressional Election Study (2008, 2010).

The CCES (2008, 2010) queried a national sample of recent movers about the importance of fifteen different considerations in their choice of destination, asking them to rank each item on a scale from 1 (no importance at all) to 10 (very important). Of nearly 700 respondents, 3.5 percent ranked living near copartisans above an 8 in importance, and 39.1 percent of Republicans and 28.5 percent of Democrats ranked copartisan composition at 5 or higher. We can also see in Table 1 that these percentages are much larger than the percentages that care to live among members of the opposite party. Certainly political criteria are not of foremost importance, at least as acknowledged by respondents to survey interviewers. Nevertheless, if 30 percent of migrants consider partisanship in their decision, the effect can be substantial. Between 2000 and 2004, Los Angeles County, California, lost an estimated 95,000 people to net outmigration (Perry 2006). Thirty percent suggests that about 28,500 migrants considered the political character of alternative destinations as they completed their moves.

Moreover, other decision criteria identified in Table 1 are associated with partisanship. Friends and family, for instance, are important considerations for many migrants and are often copartisans. In addition, those who valued proximity to stores also valued proximity to Democrats. Republican composition rankings were positively correlated with retirement, church, and neighborhood safety rankings. Hence, even when par-

tisanship is not explicitly identified as a consideration, partisan sorting by neighborhood can result by virtue of the relocation criteria that are related to party preference.

Finally, overwhelming percentages of the mobile population need not consider partisan leaning as a primary consideration in destination choice for it to remake the political terrain over the course of decades or a generation or two. A chief lesson of the Schelling (1969, 1971) segregation model is that residents need only have mildly homophilous preferences to extinguish integrated neighborhoods within a limited time horizon. Moreover, as Schelling argued, once a cycle of "partisan movement" has begun, the sorting could have a self-sustaining momentum. Thus, even if only a small fraction of voters sort, the accumulation of these actions over time could alter the partisan composition of neighborhoods.

Data and Methods

To understand the effects of migration on the political landscape, we identify and track migration flows through voter files from 2004, 2006, and 2008 from seven states: New Jersey, Maryland, Delaware, and Pennsylvania in the East; and California, Oregon, and Nevada in the West. These states were selected for their adjacency, because they register voters by political party and, importantly, because they maintain accessible, high-quality voter registration records. Using first name, last name, and day, month, and year of birth, we identified migrants in the four-year time span from 2004 to 2008 who moved outside their ZIP codes but either stayed within the state or moved to adjacent states (e.g., Oregon to California, California to Nevada, Nevada to Oregon).[2] Utilizing names and complete birth dates in this manner amounts to a conservative matching procedure that helps us avoid false positives. We examined the four-year period knowing that many migrants do not resurface on the registration rolls until a high-stimulus event such as a presidential election occurs.[3]

To be sure, migrants identified using these voter files do not represent all migrants. In Table 2, we use the U.S. Census Current Population Survey from March 2008 to describe the total migration flow within counties, across counties within the same state, and across state lines into an adjacent state. There is an impressive volume of migration among the residents of our seven states. Among all migrants, more than half move within a county. The percentage migrating to a

Table 2. Migration, by state and type of move, 2008

State	Migrant % of population	Type of move				Migrants from out of state				
		% within county	% to different county	% from different state	% from abroad	% from CA	% from NV	% from OR		% from other
California (CA)	11	67	19	8	6	—	7	3		90
Nevada (NV)	14	83	1	15	1	51	—	4		45
Oregon (OR)	16	59	23	16	2	21	7	—		72
						% from NJ	% from MD	% from PA	% from DE	% from other
New Jersey (NJ)	8	66	15	15	4	—	3	12	[a]	85
Maryland (MD)	9	51	25	23	1	3	—	11	[a]	86
Pennsylvania (PA)	9	56	22	21	1	16	10	—	[a]	74
Delaware (DE)	8	63	5	30	2	11	7	48	—	34

Note: Universe is adults at least 18 years of age.
[a]CPS sample does not have any respondents in this category.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2008 March Supplement.

different county but within the state varies from just 1 percent in Nevada to 25 percent in Maryland. The share of migrants moving from outside the state is lowest in California (8 percent) and highest in Delaware (30 percent). Of those crossing state lines, substantial shares of Nevada's and Oregon's migrant flow originated from California—at 51 percent and 21 percent, respectively. About 3 percent of California's out-of-state migration was from Oregon and 7 percent from Nevada. Among the Eastern states, Pennsylvania provides about 12 percent of New Jersey's cross-state migrants and about 48 percent of Delaware's cross-state migrants. Consistent with findings from classic migration studies, the bulk of moves were quite local in nature (Long 1988; Cadwallader 1992).

In Table 3, we present the summary information for in-state migration from 2004 to 2008 that we gleaned from the voter files. To gauge the relative size of these populations, we compute their percentage of the total registered voter population in 2008. For instance, the total number of migrants moving within California but to a different ZIP code was 12.2 percent of the total number of 2008 registered voters. Of that group, about 32 percent were Republicans, 43 percent were Democrats, and 26 percent were independent or unaffiliated with any political party. The largest migratory population as a share of registered voters was in Oregon, at 12.9 percent. The smallest was in Delaware, at 6.5 percent. Generally, Democrats were a larger share of migrants as well as a larger share of registrants.[4] Notably, when Republicans moved, they were more likely than Democrats to leave a county or a state entirely.

The migrants identified from the voter files amounted to 20 to 35 percent of the total in-state migrants estimated by the annual U.S. Census Current Population Survey annual migration studies (U.S. Census Bureau 2008). Because we rely only on voter registration lists, our data do not represent all migrants. Instead, our subset of migrants is likely more politically interested and active, as indicated by their rapid reregistration on relocation. Importantly, registered voters make up the population that we are most interested in because the political landscape is most heavily influenced not by the population as a whole but by the registered voters. Moreover, although our data have some limitations, they also exhibit critical advantages: Party registration and geographic information on the migrant's origin and destination are available in the voter files. The geographic identifiers allow us to merge in other relevant information on the partisan composition and the sociodemographic makeup of these areas. In contrast, housing surveys and the Census Current Population Survey studies are valuable but contain no political information (Schachter 2001). Hence, although these other sources provide information on migrants, they would not allow us to examine the effect of migration on the political landscape.

Movement Patterns

We now proceed to an examination of the extent to which a partisan gap actually appears in the residential destination choices of migrants. One notable difference is that Democrats generally prefer urban

Table 3. Calculations based on data from state voter files (2004, 2008)

|	Across ZIPs within state	Across county within state	Across state
California, total 2008 voters: 15,828,265			
Total migrants (% 2008 registered voters)	1,937,147 (12.2)	632,944 (4.0)	107,824 (0.7)
Republican (% migrants)	611,730 (31.6)	200,010 (31.6)	39,620 (36.7)
Democrat (% migrants)	831,032 (42.9)	266,133 (42.0)	39,535 (36.7)
Unaffiliated/independent (% migrants)	504,385 (26.0)	166,801 (26.4)	28,669 (26.6)
Delaware, total 2008 voters: 580,860			
Total migrants (% 2008 registered voters)	38,023 (6.5)	5,780 (1.0)	42,647 (7.3)
Republican (% migrants)	12,177 (32.0)	1,965 (34.0)	15,413 (36.1)
Democrat (% migrants)	17,247 (45.4)	2,513 (43.5)	17,498 (41.0)
Unaffiliated/independent (% migrants)	8,599 (22.6)	1,302 (22.5)	9,736 (22.8)
Maryland, total 2008 voters: 3,202,481			
Total migrants (% 2008 registered voters)	387,829 (12.1)	144,186 (4.5)	74,238 (2.3)
Republican (% migrants)	105,414 (27.2)	39,831 (27.6)	27,141 (36.6)
Democrat (% migrants)	212,860 (54.9)	77,130 (53.5)	32,837 (44.2)
Unaffiliated/independent (% migrants)	69,555 (17.9)	27,225 (18.9)	14,260 (19.2)
New Jersey, total 2008 voters: 4,986,947			
Total migrants (% 2008 registered voters)	362,043 (7.3)	140,783 (2.8)	73,173 (1.5)
Republican (% migrants)	51,896 (14.3)	20,083 (14.3)	10,617 (14.5)
Democrat (% migrants)	72,559 (20.0)	26,880 (19.1)	11,874 (16.2)
Unaffiliated/independent (% migrants)	237,588 (65.6)	93,820 (66.6)	50,682 (69.3)
Nevada, total 2008 voters: 1,416,965			
Total migrants (% 2008 registered voters)	173,476 (12.2)	11,863 (0.8)	26,887 (1.9)
Republican (% migrants)	63,531 (36.6)	5,808 (49.0)	11,248 (41.8)
Democrat (% migrants)	71,103 (41.0)	3,703 (31.2)	10,181 (37.9)
Unaffiliated/independent (% migrants)	38,842 (22.4)	2,352 (19.8)	5,458 (20.3)
Oregon, total 2008 voters: 2,586,966			
Total migrants (% 2008 registered voters)	332,653 (12.9)	109,538 (4.2)	24,842 (1.0)
Republican (% migrants)	106,332 (32.0)	35,534 (32.4)	7,843 (31.6)
Democrat (% migrants)	126,493 (38.0)	41,892 (38.2)	9,692 (39.0)
Unaffiliated/independent (% migrants)	99,828 (30.0)	32,112 (29.3)	7,307 (29.4)
Pennsylvania, total 2008 voters: 8,422,504			
Total migrants (% 2008 registered voters)	561,760 (6.7)	221,093 (2.6)	139,806 (1.7)
Republican (% migrants)	180,706 (32.2)	78,970 (35.7)	50,568 (36.2)
Democrat (% migrants)	288,753 (51.4)	101,354 (45.8)	61,889 (44.3)
Unaffiliated/independent (% migrants)	92,301 (16.4)	40,769 (18.4)	27,349 (19.6)

Source: State voter files (2004, 2008).

locations more than Republicans. As an example, Figure 1 shows migration into and out of Portland, Oregon. The top map displays the movement of Democrats and the bottom map shows Republican movement. Strikingly, in the Democratic map, the arrows primarily point toward Portland, whereas in the Republican map, the arrows point away from Portland. The pattern is unmistakable. There is some movement into Portland by Republicans, but the vast majority of the movement into Portland is by Democrats. This is just one example of many we could present that is illustrative of typical geographic sorting where migration to a particular area is favored by loyalists of one party, and migration away from that same location is dominated by the adherents of the other party. Simply, Democrats and Republicans

do not exhibit either random or similar migration patterns. Democrats prefer densely populated areas more than Republicans. This might be a manifestation of "partisan attraction" because Portland (and many large cities) already has a high concentration of Democrats. Moreover, Democrats might be perpetuating their dominance by either attracting more Democratic voters or converting those who live there into more habitual Democratic ways of thinking.

Figure 2 presents another facet of Republican–Democratic differences. Each plot shows the mixing and sorting tendencies at different relocation distances. The leftmost figure includes moves of less than 10 miles. A move is counted as "Democratic favor" if partisan registration at the destination favors the Democrats more
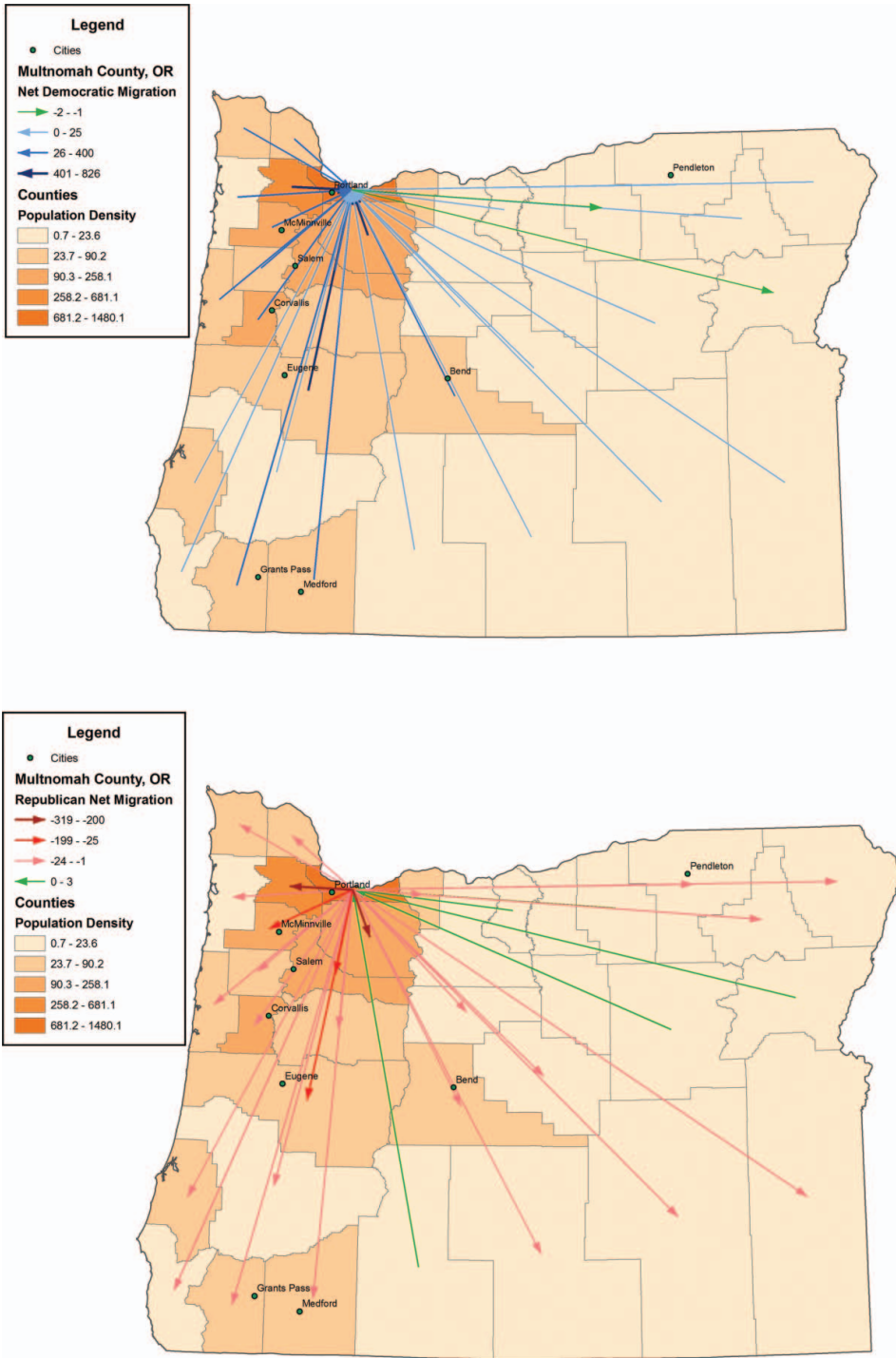
Figure 1. Migration in and out of Portland, Oregon, by political party registration. (Color figure available online.)

than it did at the origin. Similarly, a move is in "Republican favor" if party registration at the destination is more Republican leaning than it was at the origin.

A few patterns are apparent in these figures. First, relocation is aptly characterized as both mixing and sorting of partisans. Although some are moving to locations that are more politically friendly, plenty of others are moving to areas that are less politically friendly. One process is not occurring to the exclusion of the other. Second, the tendency of Republicans to sort is stronger than their tendency to mix. In each of the four plots, the red bar on the right, indicating sorting, is higher than the red bar on the left. For Democrats, the tendency appears to be the opposite. More Democrats mix than sort.
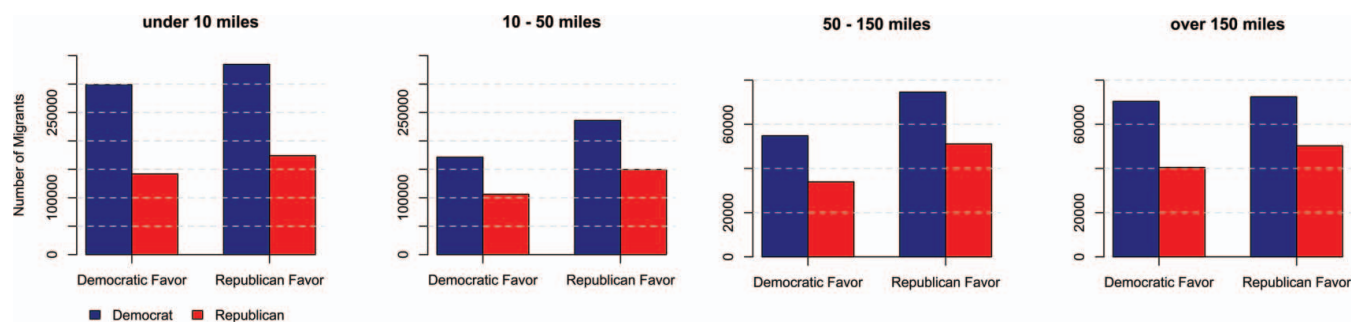
Figure 2. Partisan sorting and mixing. (Color figure available online.)

Like Republicans, Democrats move to destinations that are more Republican friendly than their origin. This is especially true at the shorter distances, although the mixing tendency wanes and is roughly equivalent to the sorting tendency at the largest distance range.

Partisan Patterns in Residential Relocation

The patterns we have noted thus far are interesting but only anecdotal about the roots of the variation in movement. Many relocate, potentially altering the political landscape in the process, but we are unsure of whether the movement is linked to political factors, controlling for the usual social and economic variables known to be associated with relocation. To untangle these complex relationships and to separate the effects of partisan preferences from salient factors such as upward mobility, we turn to a multivariate analysis.

Table 4 shows the results from a set of hierarchical linear models where the dependent variable measures the change in partisan spread between the origin and the destination of an individual's move. The spread is defined as the difference between Republican and Democratic registration rates. To compute the change in spread, we first compute the spread for both the destination and the origin. We then compare these two values to one another to determine whether the change in the spread from the origin to the destination favors the Republicans or the Democrats. If this value is positive, then the destination favors Republicans more than the origin. A negative value indicates that the spread has moved toward the Democrats' favor. As the change in the spread increases, the gap between Republican and Democratic registration grows. So, if Republican registration at the origin is at 45 percent and Democratic registration is at 55 percent, then the raw spread at the origin is –10. If this individual moves to a destination where Republican registration is at 60 percent and Democratic registration is at 40 percent,

then the raw spread at the destination is +20. The change in the raw spread from origin to destination is a 30-point movement in the Republicans' favor.

Finally, we realize that all changes in the raw spread are not substantively meaningful from a political perspective. If an individual moves from a heavily Democratic origin (say, 80 percent Democratic and 20 percent Republican) to a destination that remains heavily Democratic (say, 83 percent Democratic and 17 percent Republican), that individual has chosen to remain in a heavily Democratic area. The political climates are substantively identical. The difference in the raw spread has moved by 6 points in a Democratic direction, but the change itself is not substantively interesting. Accordingly, we do not use the raw change in spread figure as our dependent variable. Instead, we create a dependent variable that captures substantively meaningful changes in political climate. In particular, the raw change in partisan spread is placed in one of sixteen categories. If the change is in favor of the Democrats by more than 60 percentage points, then we code it with a value of 1. If it is between 40 and 60 points in the Democrats favor, then the change is given a value of 2. The other categories are 3 (Democrats favor between 20 and 40), 4 (Democrats favor between 14 and 20), 5 (Democrats favor between 8 and 14), 6 (Democrats favor between 4 and 8), 7 (Democrats favor between 2 and 4), 8 (Democrats favor between 0 and 2), and so on to 16 in a symmetric fashion favoring the Republicans. Our dependent variable is this ordinal variable that measures substantive movement toward the direction of Republican or Democratic concentration.

Our hierarchical linear model is a three-level model where individuals (Level 1) are nested in ZIP codes (Level 2), which are nested in states (Level 3). We employ a varying intercepts model where the intercept is allowed to vary by ZIP code as well as by state.[5] Some of our ZIP codes are more densely populated than others,

Table 4. Influence of partisan composition on migration choices

	<10 miles	10–50 miles	50–150 miles	150+ miles
Intercept	8.360*	8.297*	7.789*	8.020*
	(0.039)	(0.039)	(0.094)	(0.194)
Age	0.030*	0.052*	0.116*	0.127*
	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.004)
Republican	0.227*	0.308*	0.410*	0.633*
	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.013)	(0.017)
Democrat	−0.054*	−0.065*	−0.077*	−0.103*
	(0.004)	(0.006)	(0.012)	(0.015)
Republican switch	0.105*	0.208*	0.317*	0.523*
	(0.014)	(0.016)	(0.030)	(0.037)
Democrat switch	−0.039*	−0.033*	−0.003	0.012
	(0.012)	(0.015)	(0.027)	(0.032)
Percentage white change	0.063*	0.078*	0.083*	0.060*
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.001)
Percentage black change	−0.061*	−0.048*	−0.030*	−0.065*
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Percentage elderly change	0.148*	0.227*	0.321*	0.396*
	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Median age change	−0.070*	−0.162*	−0.215*	−0.229*
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Density change	−0.045*	−0.137*	−0.140*	−0.119*
	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Median income change (per $10K)	0.611*	0.461*	0.302*	0.275*
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.004)
Park miles per capita Change (per 100 sq. miles)	−0.003	0.010*	0.010*	0.004*
	(0.013)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.002)
N (Level 1)	1,654,093	1,318,359	350,698	251,010
N (Level 2)	4,113	4,698	4,419	3,650
N (Level 3)	7	7	7	6
Akaike's information criterion	7,346,594	6,278,671	1,734,777	1,270,482
Log-likelihood	−3,673,281	−3,139,320	−867,373	−635,225

Note: Dependent variable is change in partisan spread between origin and destination. The results are separated by distance of move. Observations are individual moves. Hierarchical linear model was used. Positive values indicate that the partisan spread changes in favor of Republicans. Negative values indicate that the partisan spread changes in favor of Democrats. Standard errors are given in parentheses.
*$p < 0.05$.

so this is one way to incorporate population variance in the model. We are also able to allow state-level differences such as unique registration laws, electoral climate, and taxation schemes to influence the results. Although our main interest is in individual-level variables, indicators of place provide relevant and useful information and can be incorporated in a hierarchical linear model with multiple levels.

Our independent variables include measures of party affiliation. Republican and Democrat are dichotomous variables that indicate that the individual was registered with that party before the move and reregistered with that same party after the move. We also include dichotomous variables for party switchers, both switches from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party and vice versa.[6] In addition to these variables that measure

partisan registration, our other independent variables tap the characteristics of location. The change in the percentage white variable measures the change in the percentage of the non-Hispanic white population between the destination and the origin locations. A positive value indicates that the destination has a higher percentage of non-Hispanic whites than the origin location. We have a similar variable for the percentage of blacks, the percentage of elderly, the median age, the population density, the median income, and the number of square miles of parks per capita. To calculate this last variable, we used a geographic information system (GIS) to measure the extent of park land available within a radius of 3 miles of both origin and destination ZIP code centroids, gauging the total square mileage of parks.

For geographic sorting to be occurring, we should see evidence that Republicans move to areas that are more favorable to Republicans than the locale from which they moved. Similarly, Democrats should migrate toward areas that are more favorable to Democrats. To examine whether there is evidence of this phenomenon, we separated the data into four subsets: moves of under 10 miles, moves between 10 and 50 miles, moves between 50 and 150 miles, and moves of greater than 150 miles. We separated the data in this fashion to examine whether the characteristics of different types of moves might exert unique influences on migration patterns. Such a hypothesis would seem fitting because local movers (under 10 miles) are qualitatively distinct in a number of important respects from migrants relocating from farther flung locations (Golledge and Stimson 1987; Cadwallader 1992). The selectivity of migration operates differently across distance, generating flows that are distinct by information levels, income, and motivations for relocation.

As we expected, and consistent with past migration research, factors such as racial composition, income, population density, and age all display a consistent relationship with destination choices. There is, moreover, a strong tendency for individuals to move toward neighborhoods that are more white, less black, less dense, and with higher incomes. These are not surprising findings because many view residential relocation to be a form of upward mobility (Sampson and Sharkey 2008).

There is some variation in the coefficients as the distance of the move changes although the sign of the coefficients remains constant. The variation is interesting and exposes some distinct patterns. In particular, although moves in each of the distance ranges are related to upward mobility, as measured by change in median income, this relationship is more pronounced for moves involving shorter distances. Possibly, this is because local movers have substantial information about their destination options and are primarily concerned about neighborhood quality and housing. For intraurban migrants, the short-distance move to a higher income neighborhood is an effort to make their level of achievement meet their level of aspiration (Golledge and Stimson 1987, 275–76).

These patterns across migration distances also appear in the coefficients for the partisanship variables. Unlike the variables that measure forms of upward mobility, we were unsure whether a relationship would exist for the indicators of partisan composition. Because characteristics of destination choices might be associated with partisanship, we also wondered whether the change in

political climate would have any remaining association after all of these other factors have been controlled for and included in an analysis. The models indicate that partisanship is significant even after other neighborhood characteristics are taken into account, suggesting that partisan sorting does occur for apparently political reasons. Specifically, Republican migrants show a preference for moving to areas that are even more Republican, and this tendency increases monotonically as the distance of the move increases. Democrats display a similar preference for their own, although the tendency is not as strong as it is for Republicans. The same tendency is also evident among party switchers and, again, more for Republicans than Democrats.

Interestingly, several of the other variables have coefficients that either monotonically increase or monotonically decrease as the distance of the move increases. For the age and partisanship variables, the coefficients increase in magnitude as the distance of the move increases. Intuitively, it makes sense for coefficients at greater distances to increase as a larger distance radius encompasses more area and thus almost certainly larger variation in destination choices. Because one would expect coefficients to increase, the pattern for the median income variable is particularly striking, as it decreases with distance. This might be showcasing the distinct nature of moves in various distance ranges. Local moves are distinct in that they are more about upward mobility. The local population continuously sorts and re-sorts itself as opportunities present themselves. Local movers have more detailed information about their destination even if they have a smaller range of choices than long-distance movers. Long-distance migration, on the other hand, tends to be less specifically about upward mobility than about job transfers or life changes.

Discussion

We have long been aware that differences in the degree of partisan concentration exist across the national landscape, but we were unsure whether individual migration choices contribute to and exacerbate these partisan differences. Here, we have shown that the relocation patterns of a significant subset of the population exhibit geographic sorting by a number of neighborhood characteristics. We have also provided evidence that partisanship is also considered in selecting a relocation destination. As well, variables that are associated with partisanship are part of the decision process, bolstering partisan sorting even while

partisan considerations are not explicit. Although remaking the sociopolitical landscape might not be a rapid process, if these patterns hold over time, the change could be slow, even unnoticeable from year to year, but ongoing and of longer-term consequence.

We do note that many movers each year are relocating among populations that are less politically agreeable than the ones they left behind. Some of this flow can be attributed to the influence of economic concerns on migration. Heavily lopsided Democratic locations, situated mainly in big cities, offer little economic opportunity or are plagued by social problems that many residents would like to leave behind. The most Republican locations are often rural areas where employment prospects are limited. Sustained outward movement from rural and urban areas almost necessarily ends in more competitive partisan environments. Plainly, not all partisans exhibit the same tendency to sort geographically and partisan preference is regularly trumped by economic concerns. At the same time, our analysis indicates that partisan sorting is significant for both Republicans and Democrats even after a whole host of neighborhood characteristics have been taken into account.

Although we have gauged these movements over a short period of time, our study is notable as the first to demonstrate geographic sorting effects over any time period. We do not know what impact the observed patterns have on public opinion or the propensity for mass opinion to polarize. Apparently, policy preference and political ideology are increasingly lining up with political party identification, thereby augmenting partisan intensity at many levels of political life, heightening partisan commitment and opinion polarization (Fiorina and Abrams 2008; Levendusky 2009).

Certainly, migration is never only about politics or even principally about it. We hypothesized and our data contained evidence that jobs and family concerns remain the most important factors in the migration decision. Nonetheless, once the major decisions about relocation have been made, that a move is going to occur, that it will be to this state, to this metro area, and to this county, then more micro decisions are made about specific neighborhoods, streets, and dwellings. At this level, the remaining potential locales often still sport a significant amount of partisan variation. It is at this point that considerations might be more proximate to political values and where partisanship might play a more prominent role in the decision process. Whether the role of partisanship is central or ancillary, if it is part of the decision process, it has the potential to recast the political landscape of the United States. Moreover, if partisan considerations are injected at this final stage of choosing a destination, then they are highly consequential even if they were not the primary factors fueling the move.

We conclude with a familiar call for continuing work to be done. Although our effort involved tracking millions of voters, the entire country is considerably larger, so there is plenty of room to augment the database. Tracking voters throughout the country involves substantially more data and considerably greater computational resources but becomes increasingly possible in an age of big data, open data, and the exponential rise in computing resources. Some efforts will be hampered by state practices that do not include partisan registration (currently more than twenty states), but there is room to grow nonetheless. In addition, an examination of state-level variation might reveal interesting patterns related to unique state variation in density, racial diversity, registration laws, primary type, and the like. The political parties in socioeconomically and racially diverse states are probably more ideologically diverse, generating greater variation in the extent of Republican and Democratic dominance across cities, towns, and neighborhoods.

Finally, although there is some evidence that the partisan composition of destinations matters, it is not overwhelming. Movers consider a range of factors, and economic motivations loom largest. Other significant factors, such as consumption choices, natural environments, attitudes about mass transit, and access to certain amenities, however, are associated with political preferences and help to create a partisan sorting without having been driven by overtly political considerations. Politics matters for residential choices, both directly and indirectly. There is evidence that politics matters for residential choices, both indirectly and directly. If this effect persists over a long enough period of time, it could not only change the political landscape but also create new environments for the socialization of citizens.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. McDonald (2011) finds support for this idea at the level of congressional districts with survey evidence that movers' destinations are a closer ideological match to their own preferences than their place of origin.
2. At this point a question arises as to whether we should evaluate individual movement or household movement, because many voters move together with family members (e.g., spouses, adult children), as a part of a household unit, not as individuals, suggesting clustering or dependence across individual observations. But after estimating alternative models, it quickly became clear that with the large number of cases in this research there was no substantively significant difference in estimates resulting from using households as observations or from clustering standard errors by household. We therefore present straightforward models of individual movement, although the alternatives are available.
3. ZIP codes appear to be good proxies for neighborhoods. They are geographically compact for purposes of mail delivery, and they are typically constructed at the appropriate scale at which a socioeconomic or political environment might be evaluated by someone looking to relocate. ZIP codes are similar in size to census tracts, which sociologists have long used to measure residential poverty, concentration, and segregation (Jencks and Mayer 1990; Massey and Denton 1993). ZIP code data are also commonly reported on the Web sites of realtors and in real estate marketing efforts, suggesting that they are sometimes directly relevant to relocation decisions.
4. The principal exception is New Jersey, where a peculiar registration law encourages voters to register as unaffiliated but then declare a political party once they vote in their first primary election.
5. Our model includes an intercept (that can vary by ZIP code and state), coefficients for the Level 1 independent variables, and a stochastic term ($Y_{ijk} = b_{0jk} + b_p X_{pi} + r_{ijk}$, where the indexes $i, j,$ and k denote individuals, ZIP codes, and states, respectively).
6. These types of party switches are more common than one might think largely because individuals do not commonly reregister with a different party at their place of residence if their official registration does not preclude them from casting a ballot for the candidate of their choice. Migrating and the necessity to reregister, however, lessens the cost of registering with their favored party or new allegiance. In this way, migration offers a voter an opportunity to reveal updated and more true party preferences that have evolved over time.

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Correspondence: Department of Political Science, University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign, 420 David Kinley Hall, 1407 W. Gregory Dr., Urbana, IL 61801, e-mail: wendycho@illinois.edu (Cho); Department of Government and Politics, 3140 Tydings Hall, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742, e-mail: jgimpel@umd.edu (Gimpel); Department of Political Science, University of California at Los Angeles, Room 3264, Bunche Hall, Los Angeles, CA 90095, e-mail: iris.hui@ucla.edu (Hui).