Black and Latino socioeconomic and political competition: has a decade made a difference?

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Using 1980s data, McClain and Karnig (1990) examined the extent of socioeconomic and political competition between Blacks and Latinos in 49 cities that had a population over 25,000 with at least 10% Blacks and 10% Latino. That research found a positive correlation between Blacks and Latinos on socioeconomic indicators, but it discovered the emergence of political competition between the 2 groups. Using 1990s data, this article examines political and socioeconomic competition in the 45 cities from the earlier data set that still met McClain and Karnig’s criteria. The authors have found that although there is still a positive covariation on socioeconomic indicators, the intensity of this relationship has diminished. On the political dimension, Black and Latino competition now may be displaced by increasing competition between Whites and Latinos. We conclude tentatively that a decade has made a difference in terms of socioeconomic and political competition between Blacks and Latinos.

The changing racial population dynamics of urban politics has spawned research that focuses attention on the patterns of relationships between the various racial minority groups -- Blacks, Latinos, and Asian Americans -- in urban areas. Scholars have reached no consensus, however, on the dominant pattern of relationships. Some research characterizes it as one of cooperation, a "rainbow coalition" approach (Browning, Marshall, & Tabb, 1984, 1990; Henry, 1980; Henry & Munoz, 1991; Regalado, 1994; Saito, 1993; Sonenshein, 1990, 1993; Stewart, 1993). Others find little basis on which to build coalitions and identify competition as the emerging pattern (Bobo, Zubrinsky, Johnson, & Oliver, 1994; Cohen, 1982; Dyer, Vedlitz, & Worchel, 1989; Falcon, 1988; Freer, 1994; Johnson, Jones, Farrell, & Oliver, 1992; Johnson & Oliver, 1989; Meier & Stewart, 1990; Mollenkopf, 1990; Oliver & Johnson, 1984; Sec, 1986-1987; Tedin & Murray, 1994; Warren, Corbett, & Stack, 1986, 1990). Still others find elements of both patterns (Jennings, 1992; McClain, 1993, 1994; McClain & Karnig, 1990; McClain & Stewart, 1995; McClain & Tauber, 1994, 1995). The divergence of the research makes the retesting of previous work essential to identify consistency or changes in the nature and pattern of interminority group relationships.

In a 1990 American Political Science Review article, using data collected in the 1980s, McClain and Karnig examined the extent of socioeconomic and political competition between Blacks and Latinos in a set of U.S. cities. This article reexamines the same hypotheses tested in the 1990 article by using updated 1990s census and other data. The questions addressed are the following: Does the significant presence of one minority group affect the other minority group? Are political and economic outcomes complementary or do the successes of one minority come at the expense of the other? Using McClain and Karnig’s results on these questions as a baseline, we also explore the following added questions: How have things changed? How have they stayed the same?

RESULTS FROM THE 1990 AMERICAN POLITICAL SCIENCE REVIEW (APSR) ARTICLE

The results reported in the 1990 APSR article were based on data about the 49 U.S. cities greater than 25,000 in population containing at least 10% Blacks and 10% Latinos in 1980. Analyses of socioeconomic data -- income, education, employment, and percentage nonpoverty -- revealed no harmful competition overall between Blacks and Latinos. Results supported the positive covariation model. Where any group (Black, Latino, and White) prospered with respect to education, income, employment, and nonpoverty, the other groups did much better as well, the "rising tide lifts all boats" metaphor. Political outcome data -- percentage city council, proportionality of council representation, Black or Latino mayor -- presented a different picture. When either Blacks or Latinos gained politically, they did so at the expense of Whites. Political competition between Blacks and Latinos was evident only when controlling for White political outcomes. This suggested that as Black and Latino political successes increased, political competition between Blacks and Latinos may be triggered, especially as fewer Whites reside in minority-dominated cities.

Evidence also showed that competition did appear to occur as the size of the Black population increased, with negative consequences to Latinos, particularly on several socioeconomic measures. Increases in the Latino proportion of a city’s population, however, did not appear related to competition harmful to Blacks. Moreover, in a small sample of cities in which Blacks were a plurality or majority, Latinos seemed to fare less well socioeconomically and, in particular, politically.

1990s DATA AND METHOD
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This article uses a 1990s data set collected by using the same criteria as the McClain and Karnig (1990) 1980s set. Data were collected on the 96 U. S. cities with more than 25,000 in population containing at least 10% Blacks and 10% Latinos in 1990. (This is nearly a 100% increase in the number of cities [n = 49] meeting these thresholds in McClain and Karnig’s 1980 data.) Nevertheless, for comparability purposes, we confine this analysis to the 1980 cities that met the McClain and Karnig criteria in 1990. Forty-five of the original 49 cities appeared in the 1990 data; thus, this analysis is on those cities (n = 45). (3) Socioeconomic indicators include median education, median income, percentage nonpoverty population, percentage employed, and Black-Latino ratios of nonpoverty, income, education, and employment. (5) Political measures concerned elective municipal office: whether Blacks (Latinos) hold mayoral offices, what percentage of the city council is Black (Latino), and the proportionality of Black (Latino) council representation when standardized by the size of the Black (Latino) population in the city. In keeping with the techniques of the 1990 article, we use simple and partial correlations to retest the propositions. Our intent is not to discuss all of the results from the 1990 data compared with the 1980 data but to highlight instances where 1990 outcomes contrast with 1980 outcomes.

FINDINGS

The first and third columns of Table 1 test directly whether Black and Latino success in the 1980s and 1990s are complementary or come at the expense of each other or at the expense of Whites. Columns 2 and 4 test for spuriousness in the zero-order case, which could result from differences in salary and opportunity structures in cities by controlling for the standard in each community, that is, outcomes for Whites. The fifth column signals whether a statistically significant reduction or increase in the strength of association of Black and Latino successes has occurred during the interval. (6)

[TABULAR DATA 1 NOT REPRODUCIBLE IN ASCII]

The 1990 results of the socioeconomic outcomes continue to support, for the most part, McClain and Karnig’s (1990) positive covariation model. This is particularly true for Black and Latino income levels, which covary more highly in 1990 than in 1980, even when we introduce controls for White income. Where Blacks (Latinos) earn higher incomes, so do Latinos (Blacks) and Whites. On the other hand, the strength of the positive association for Black and Latino nonpoverty levels, and Black and Latino employment levels, has decreased substantially, a change that is statistically significant. When we introduce controls for White outcomes, the relationship for Black and Latino nonpoverty levels becomes insignificant in 1990, a change that also is statistically significant from 1980. Of particular interest is the current nonsignificance of the relationship of educational outcomes between Blacks and Latinos, a pattern that continues to hold when controls for White educational outcomes are introduced. This contrasts notably and statistically significantly with the 1980 findings, where Black and Latino educational outcomes covaried positively — where one group did better educationally, so did the other. This intimates that by 1990, Black and Latino educational outcomes are almost independent of each other, at least in the cities in our sample.

Whereas competition between Blacks and Latinos for mayoral posts is still not significant, the decrease in competition between Blacks and Whites for mayoral posts from 1980 to 1990 is statistically significant. The pattern of the changes in the political variables, although nominal, is noteworthy. Competition between Blacks and Whites for city council seats has decreased, whereas the competition between Whites and Latinos has increased. Both of these are statistically significant in 1990, as is the decrease in competition between Blacks and Whites during the interval. Noteworthy as well is the decrease to zero heading toward competition of the earlier complementary relationship between Black and Latino council proportionality. Also important is the corresponding increase in the negative relationship between Latino and White council proportionality, and the decrease in the negative relationship between Black and White council proportionality. Whereas the latter 1980 to 1990 decrease is not statistically significant, the increase in the negative relationship between Latino and White council proportionality is statistically significant. Nevertheless, despite these changes, these results still suggest neither widespread direct political competition nor mutual support between Blacks and Latinos. For obvious reasons, when we control White outcomes, strong and negative links between Black and Latino election to city council and mayoral posts remain. Yet, the competition no longer appears, as evidenced by the decrease in the partial correlation, to be exclusively between Blacks and Latinos. Clearly, if Blacks and Latinos are to win political office, they still do so at the expense of Whites, but to a slightly lesser and statistically significant degree in 1990 than in 1980.

Table 2 tests the proposition that an increasing proportion of one minority negatively affects the socioeconomic and political outcomes of the others. The results, as in 1980, are mixed. For the most part, increases in the proportion of a city’s Latino population do not appear related to competition with Blacks socioeconomically. Yet, increases...
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in Latino population size now significantly negatively affect Black educational opportunities. Moreover, the significance of increases in Latino population size on the ratio of Black education to Latino education supports the noncomplementary nature of Black and Latino educational outcomes. Once we introduce controls for White outcomes, Black and Latino nonpoverty, income, and employment are positively and significantly related. It appears that, with the exception of education, Latino population increases are still not harmful to Black socio-economic development.

[TABULAR DATA 2 NOT REPRODUCIBLE IN ASCII]

Only one of the zero-order correlations of increasing Latino population size on Black political outcomes is significant -- a significant and positive relationship to Black mayoral outcomes. However, when we introduce controls for White mayoral outcomes, the relationship drops to zero. The emergence of a significant positive effect on Black mayoral outcomes from increases in the size of the Latino population in 1990 is in marked contrast to the absence of any effect on Black mayoral aspirations in 1980. Also, the significant negative effect of increasing Latino population size on Black council representation, once controls for White council outcomes are introduced, that was present in 1980 drops to zero in 1990. (This change is statistically significant.) Despite evidence of individual examples of Black and Latino competition for city council seats (e.g., Houston, TX), it is possible that the last decade the ability of Latinos to affect Black political outcomes has decreased, and the competition has abated. Yet, it is also possible that the emerging competition McClain/and Karnig (1990) observed in 1980 is masked by the presence of other racial groups, for example, Asian Americans, in urban politics today but not included in the analyses of the original McClain/Karnig cities.

Table 2 does suggest continued negative effects of Black population size on some aspects of Latino socioeconomic development -- nonpoverty, education, and employment levels -- but to a lesser extent for nonpoverty and employment than was present in the 1980 data. (These changes, however, are not statistically significant.) Put differently, increases in Black population size still have significant negative consequences for Latino nonpoverty, educational, and employment levels vis-i-vis Black levels on these outcomes. Increasing Black population size no longer significantly negatively affects Latinos' income levels. Nevertheless, when we introduce controls for White outcomes, Black population size no longer continues to influence significantly negatively any of the socioeconomic outcomes. Simple correlations of the ratio measures continue to suggest a complementary relationship between increases in Black population size and statistically significant increases in Black income versus Latino income, Black nonpoverty versus Latino nonpoverty, and Black education versus Latino education. The change in the relationship of the negative effect of increasing Black population size on the ratio of Black nonpoverty versus Latino nonpoverty in 1980 to the significant positive effect in 1990 is statistically significant.

On the political indicators, overall no significant negative consequences to Latino mayoral aspirations, city council representation, and council proportionality occur from increases in Black population size. Likewise, when we introduce controls for White outcomes, the partial correlations suggest the absence of a significant negative effect on Latino mayoral elections, Latino council representation, and Latino council proportionality from increases in Black population size. All three suggest a lessening of political competition between Blacks and Latinos for elective office in 1990 than was present in 1980, although the magnitude of the change is not statistically significant.

To examine more satisfactorily the hypothesis that once a group reaches "majority minority" status it begins to obtain a disproportionate share of favorable outcomes, especially with respect to other minorities, we partitioned the sample into cities with and without Black majorities and pluralities. (Given that McClain and Karnig [1990] did not partition their 1980 data into Latino majority or plurality cities, we do not do so on the 1990 data.) Five cities qualified as having Black majorities or pluralities;(7) this is down from six in the 1980 data.(8) With so few majority or plurality cases, testing for statistically significant differences is difficult. However, although providing only modest exploratory information, focusing on the data displayed in Table 3 may be instructive.

[TABULAR DATA 3 NOT REPRODUCIBLE IN ASCII]

Examination of the means indicates, contrary to the pattern in the 1980 data, that Latinos do as well as, or occasionally better than, Blacks on two of the socioeconomic indicators -- employment and income -- in cities with Black majorities or pluralities. Nevertheless, Latinos fare less well in education and nonpoverty levels. On the other hand, Latinos do even better on most dimensions in cities with Black minorities. The picture is markedly different on the political dimension. In Black majority/plurality cities, Blacks overwhelm Latinos on all political measures, with Blacks increasing their dominance on city councils and exceeding their proportionality of city council representation during the interval. Yet, Latinos have made, however marginal, some political gains.
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Despite the inroads, Latinos still do better politically and have increased their political outcomes in Black minority cities.

CONCLUSION

Our purpose was a limited and narrow one -- to retest McClain and Karnig’s (1990) hypotheses and to see how the results may have changed or stayed the same from 1980 to 1990 in the same set of cities. The 1990 socioeconomic data confirmed, in many aspects, McClain and Karnig’s results of the 1980 data -- no harmful competition overall. Where one group does better socioeconomically, so does the other group. Nevertheless, the “rising tide” is not as high or as even as in 1980 and, on one indicator, does not rise at all. The positive covariation model no longer holds for educational outcomes. Increased educational opportunities for either group have no beneficial effect for the other. Black and Latino educational outcomes are essentially independent of each other. Political outcome data presented a dissimilar picture. When either Blacks and Latinos gain politically, they still do so at the expense of Whites, although to a lessening degree. The competition between Blacks and Whites for mayoral posts, city council seats, and proportionality of council representation has decreased. Simultaneously, competition between Whites and Latinos for city council seats and council proportionality has increased significantly. Political competition between Blacks and Latinos is evident only when we introduce controls for White political outcomes. Yet, competition when controls for White outcomes are introduced is no longer solely between Blacks and Latinos, as indicated in the 1980 data. Given the increasing size of other racial groups, particularly Asian Americans, in many cities, the reduction in competition between Blacks and Latinos may be the result of increasing competition between Blacks and Asian Americans and Latinos and Asian Americans.

Increases in Black population size continue to have negative consequences for most of the Latino socioeconomic development indicators. On the other hand, increases in Black population size no longer have negative consequences for Latino political outcomes, at least in this set of cities. Moreover, although Blacks in Black plurality or majority cities still control the political outcomes, they no longer have the socioeconomic edge they did in 1980. Latinos do as well as, or sometimes better than, Blacks in those cities. Research suggests that minority resources of one kind have implications for other types of resources (Karnig, 1979; Karnig & McClain, 1985; Robinson, England, & Meier, 1985). Diminished Black socioeconomic resources coupled with what may be increasing Latino resources may contribute to increased political competition or to a dissipation on of competition.

McClain and Karnig (1990) contended that as Black and Latino political successes increased, political competition between Blacks and Latinos would be triggered, especially as White political successes decreased. This article both confirms and fails to confirm their initial findings. Yet, we would be remiss if we did not express a note of caution in concluding that the emerging political competition between Blacks and Latinos identified by McClain and Karnig in the 1980s has dissipated. The 1990s data set contains twice the number of cities identified by McClain and Karnig in the 1980s. Analyses of the total set (n= 96) may produce a different set of findings. What we are comfortable in concluding is that in this limited set of cities a decade has made a difference in the socioeconomic (education) and political competition between Blacks and Latinos. The prospects for the formation of Black and Latino political coalitions continue to be problematic, and the conditions that lead to socioeconomic and political competition continue to intensify.

NOTES

(1.) The cities are Bakersfield, Carson, Compton, Daly City, Gardena, Hawthorne, Inglewood, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Lynwood, Pasadena, Pomona, Richmond, Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Francisco, and Stockton, CA; Denver, CO; Bridgeport and Hartford, CT; Miami, FL; Aurora, Chicago, Chicago Heights, and Waukegan, IL; East Chicago, IN; Las Vegas, NV; Camden, Elizabeth, Hackensack, Jersey City, Newark, New Brunswick, Passaic, and Paterson, NJ; Freeport, and New York, NY; Lorain, OH; Austin, Bryan, Dallas, Fort Worth, Galveston, Houston, Kileen, Midland, Temple, Texas City, and Waco, TX.

(2.) Information on socioeconomic indicators was taken from the U.S. Bureau of Census (1990). Data on Black elected officials were drawn from the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies (1993), and information on Latino elected officials was drawn from the National Association of Latino Elected and appointed officials (1993). The Municipal/County Executive Directory (Ruane et al., 1991) was the source of data on city council size and type of governmental and electoral structure; phone calls were made to collect information on cities that were not listed and to verify data on which there were questions.

(3.) The four cities that no longer met the criteria in 1990 are Bakersfield, Daly City, and Stockton, California, and Midland, Texas.
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(4.) The U.S. Bureau of the Census no longer provides median years of education; the measure is the percentage of the population 25 and over that completed high school. The median years of education used here were estimated from grouped data reported in the U.S. Bureau of the Census 1990 (Healy, 1990, pp. 63-66).

(5.) The ratios were constructed by dividing Latino outcomes into Black outcomes, for instance, Black income divided by Latino income. When Black and Latino outcomes are equal, the ratio is 1.0; when Blacks do better, the ratio exceeds 1.0; where Latinos are more successful, the ratio is below 1.0.

(6.) To test for statistically significant differences between the 1980 and 1990 correlations, we transformed each correlation into a z score using the formula (Bohrnstedt & Knoke, 1988, pp. 284-285):

$$z = (0.5) \times \ln \left( \frac{1 + [r_{sub.xy}]}{1 - [r_{sub.xy}]} \right)$$

We then derived z obtained with the formula:

$$[z_{sub.obtained}] = \left( z_{sub.1980} - z_{sub.1990} \right) / SQR (1/(N - 3)).$$

To test the null hypothesis, we used a significance level of p [is less than] .05 for a two-tailed test. There are only three possible outcomes: a statistically significant increase (;++), a statistically significant decrease (–++), and no statistically significant change (nsc). We should note that it was not possible to use the formula with correlations of 1.00. Thus, in order not to ignore or overlook important changes, we computed all 1.00 correlations as .99.

(7.) The Black majority/plurality cities in 1990 are Compton, Inglewood, and Richmond, CA; and Camden and Newark, NJ.

(8.) The Black majority/plurality cities in 1980 are Compton, Inglewood, and Richmond, CA; Chicago, IL; and Newark and Camden, NJ. Interestingly, Chicago, which was a Black plurality city in 1980 with a Black population of slightly over 40%, no longer meets our threshold because its Black population percentage dropped to 39 in 1990. Compton, CA, which in 1980 had a Black population of 74% in 1980 and was the city with the largest percentage of Black residents, experienced a drop to 55% in the Black population proportion.

REFERENCES


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