

U.S. National Elections

17.263/264

Devin Caughey

MIT Department of Political Science

Week 3: Political Geography

Themes of the day

- 1 Geography matters.
 - Distribution of voters across space
 - Influence of geographic context
- 2 Geography misleads.
 - Ecological fallacy
 - Different patterns in different places

Tobler's First Law of Geography

“Everything is related to everything else, but near things are more related than distant things.”—W. F. Tobler

- **Segregation**: similar people **forced** to live together (e.g., black ghettos)
- **Homophily**: people **choose** to live near others like themselves (e.g., hipsters in Williamsburg)
- **Socialization**: people **become** more similar to those around them (e.g., Southerner moves north and loses drawl)

Political Implications of Tobler's Law

- Different kinds of people (voters) are not distributed evenly across space.
- Different areas have different political leanings.
- Especially consequential in systems with single-member plurality districts

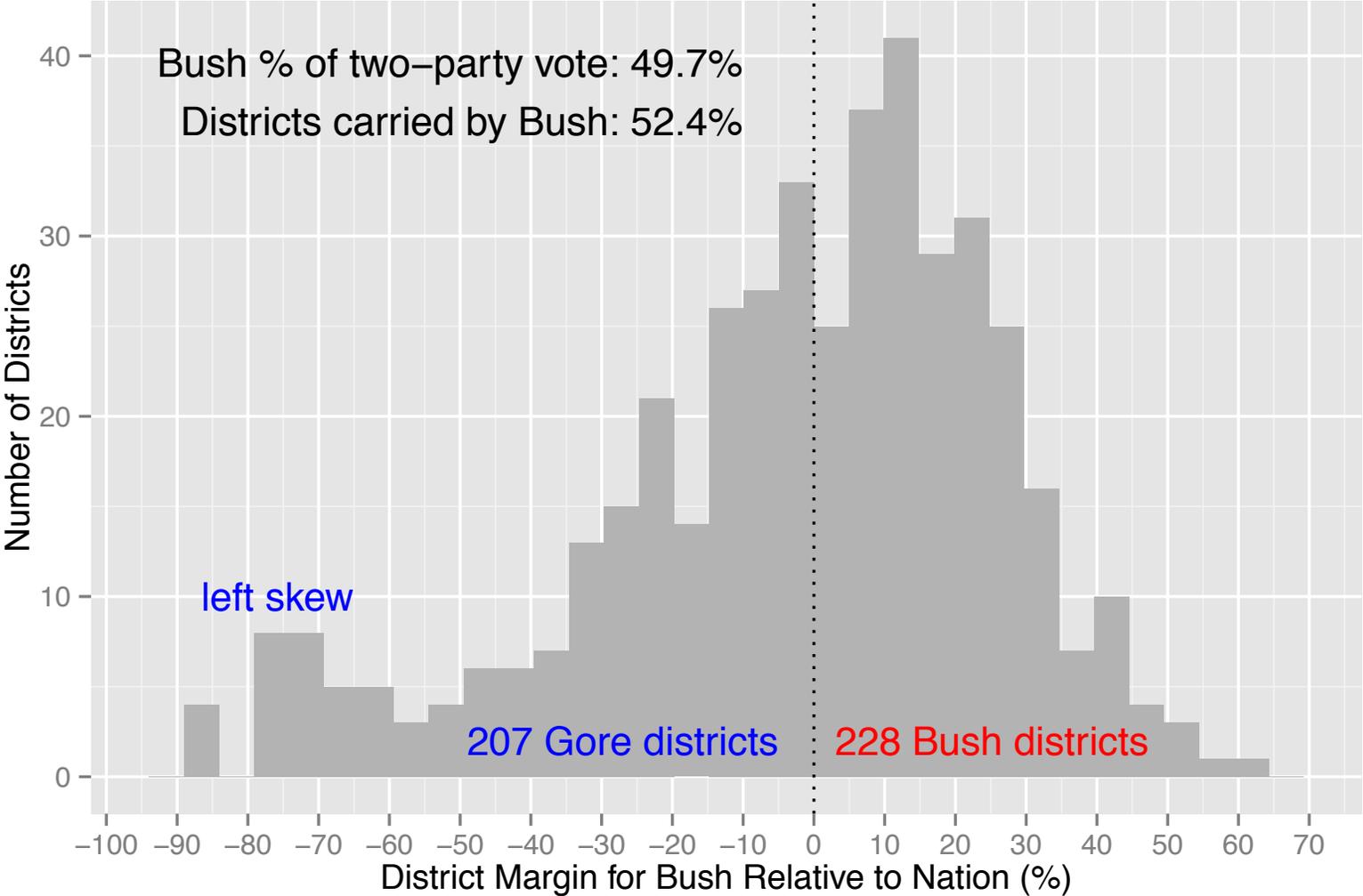
Liberals Cluster in Cities

Across industrial societies...

- Industrial working class concentrated in urban areas
→ **economic liberalism** (socialism)
 - Highly educated professionals attracted to urban culture
→ **social liberalism** (secular cosmopolitanism)
- ⇒ Liberals (US Democrats) are highly concentrated in cities.
- Also true of conservative-leaning groups (wealthy white suburbs, Mormon Utah), but less extreme.

Electoral Bias: Democrats Are Inefficiently Distributed

2000 Election



Erikson: Sources of Partisan Bias

Pre-1964: pro-Republican bias

- Natural **gerrymander**: Republican ++
- **Unequal** district population: rural + (no party advantage)

1964–1994: countervailing biases

- Natural **gerrymander**: Republican ++
- **Incumbency** advantage: Democratic +
- Low **turnout** in Democratic districts: Democratic +

1994–2002: pro-Republican

- Natural **gerrymander**: Republican ++
- **Incumbency** advantage: Republican +
- Low **turnout** in Democratic districts: Democratic +

Let's think more about variation across the United States.

Church Attendance

Church Attendance by State

Data from Gallup's 2009 polling

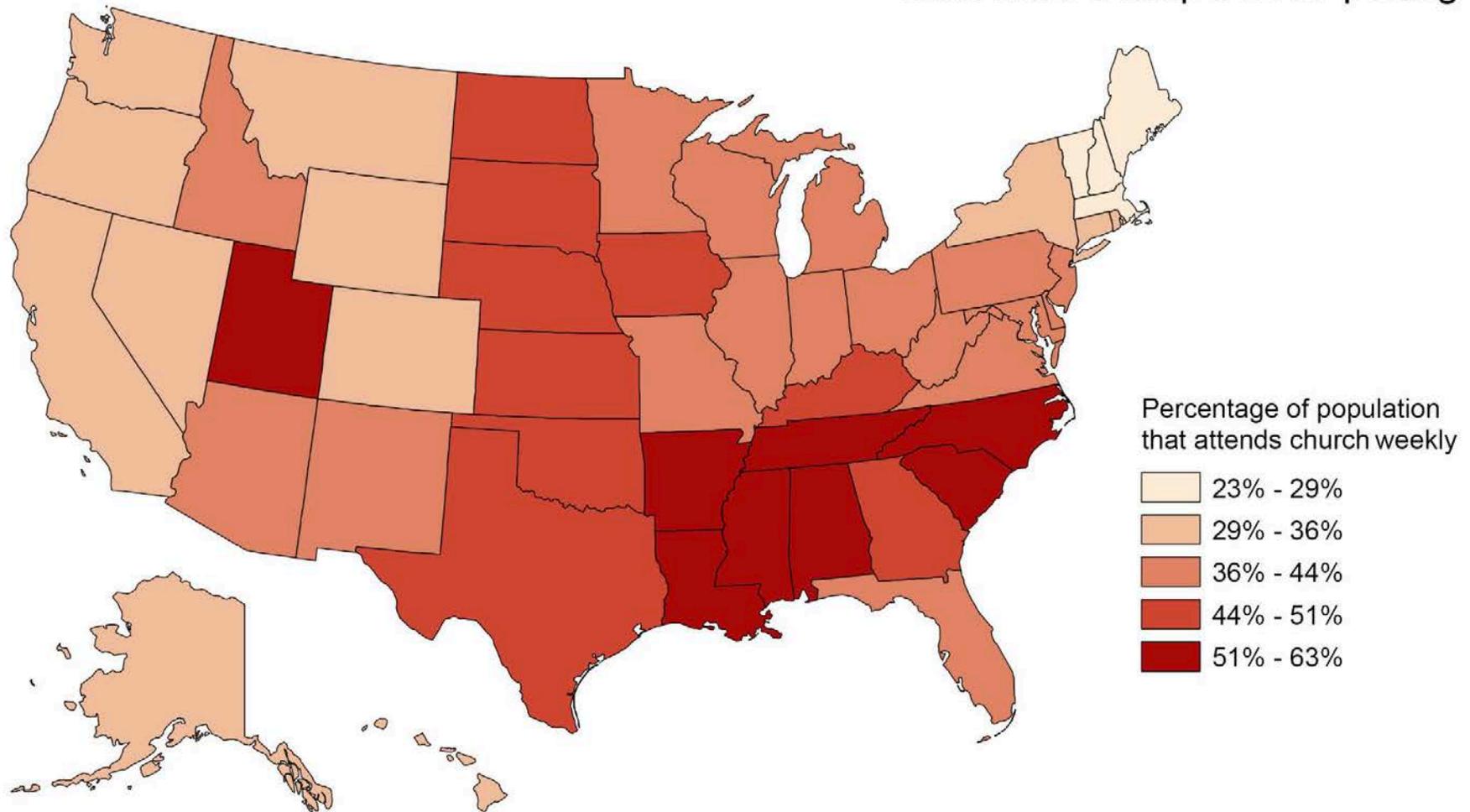


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Median Household Income by State

Data from the US Census Bureau, 2013

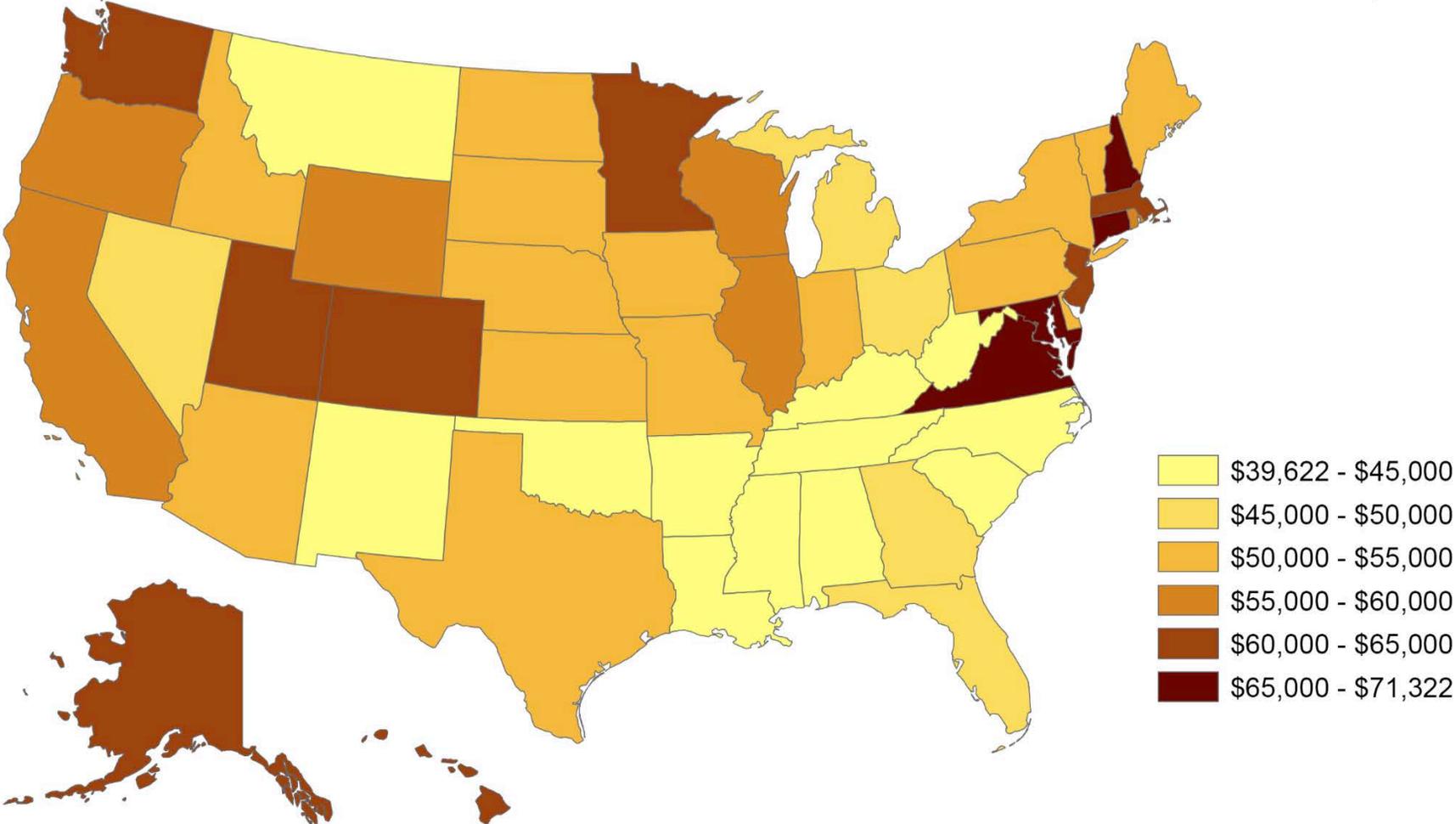
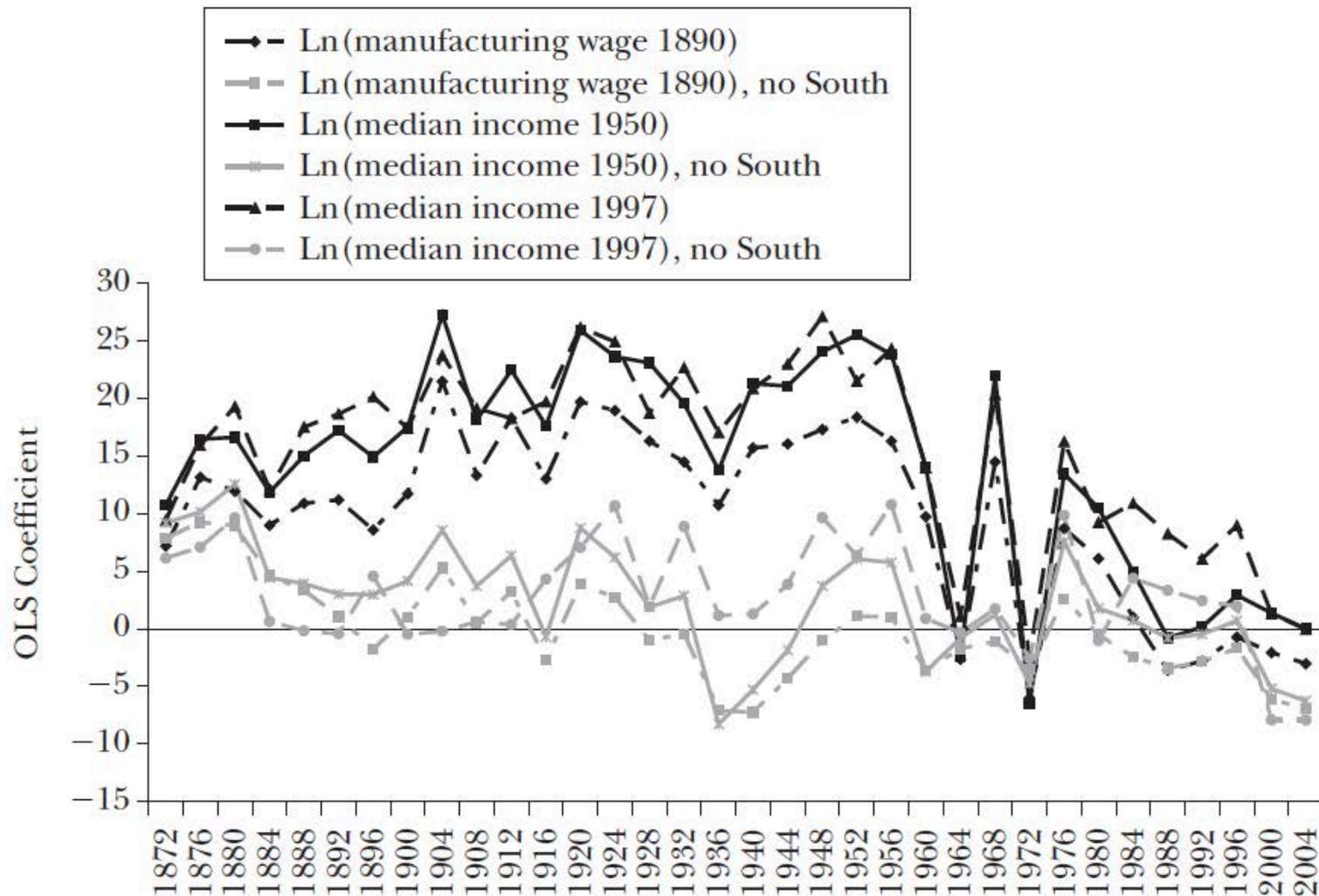


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County Income and Republicanism, North vs. South

Relationship between Income and Voting Republican, 1876–2004



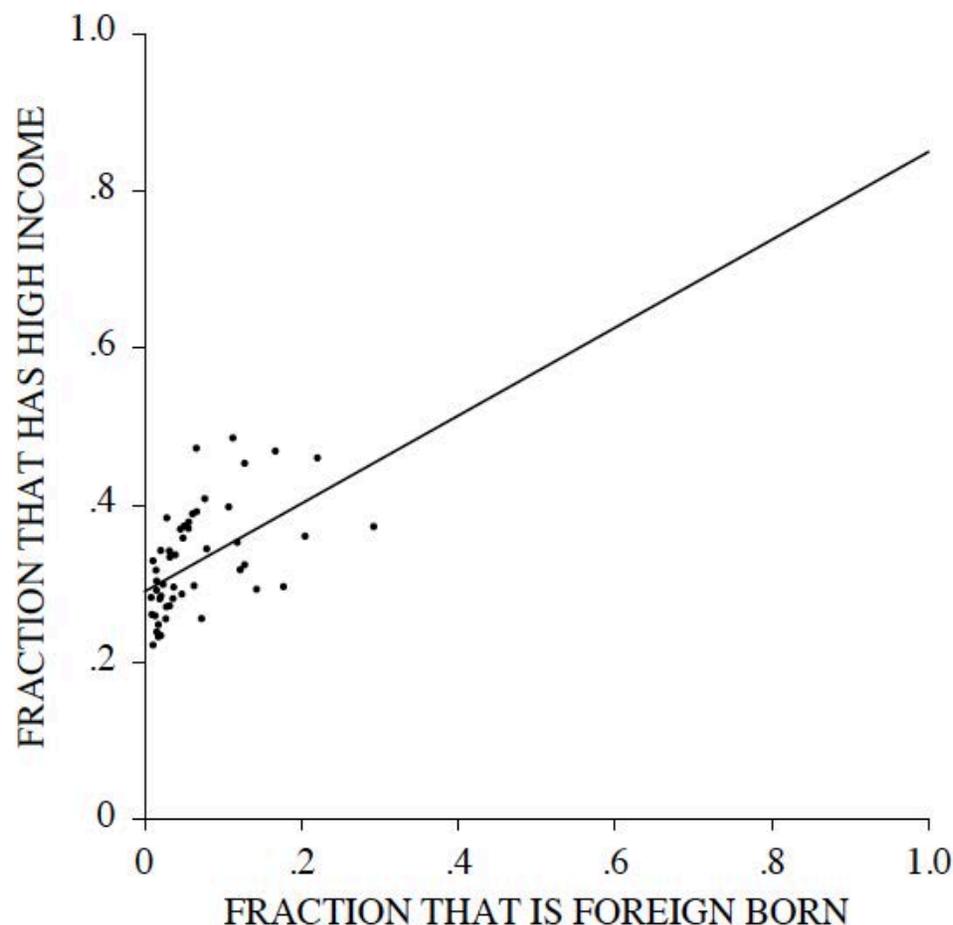
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The Ecological Fallacy

- Geography matters, but it also **misleads**.
- The “**ecological fallacy**”: inferring relationships (correlations) among individuals from relationships among geographic units.
- Patterns or behaviors may also vary by context.
→ Southern “black belt” (racial threat)

The Ecological Fallacy: Immigration and Income

% Immigrant \times % Wealthy, by State

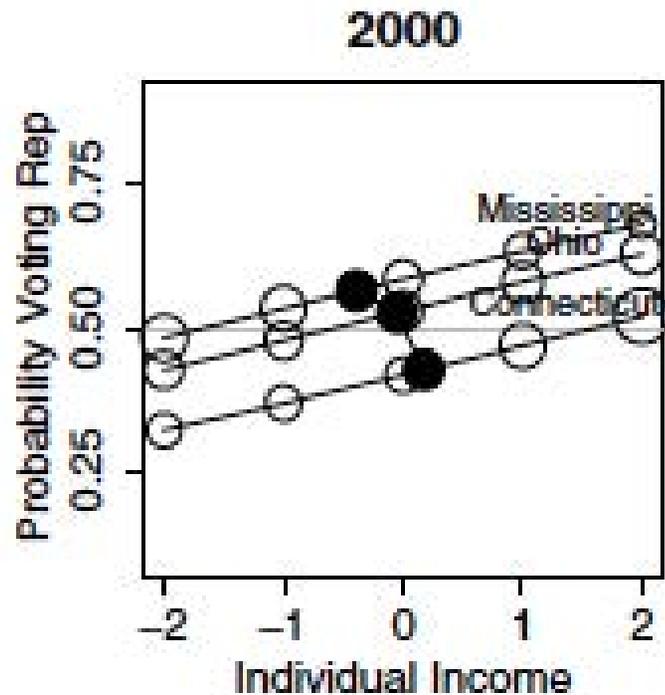


- Correlation across states: +0.52
- Correlation across people: 0.05
- How can this be?

The Ecological Fallacy: *Red State, Blue State...*

- What ecological fallacy do Gelman et al. dispute?

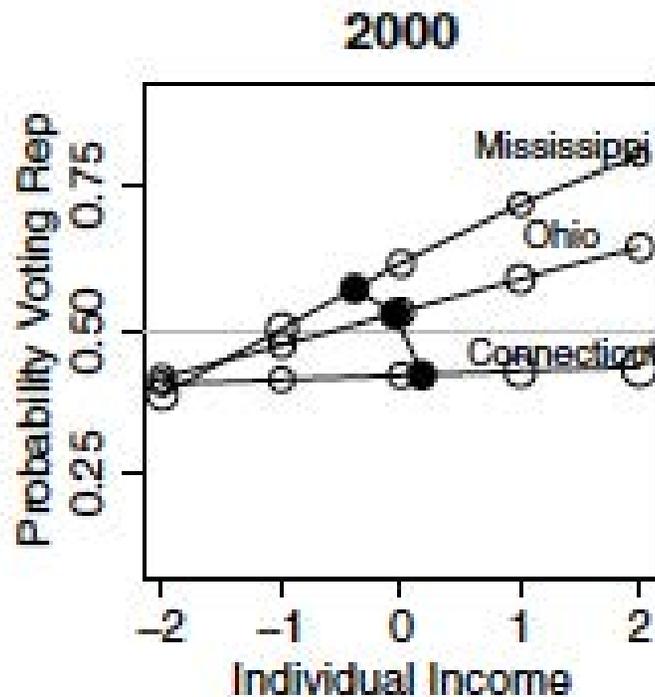
Income and Republicanism: Individuals vs. States



- Richer **people** vote more Republican (hollow dots)
- Richer **states** vote more Democratic (solid dots)—culture
- Income **variation** is much greater within states than across, so national relationship is positive.
- What about **context**?

Originally published in Gelman, Andrew, Boris Shor, et al. "Rich State, Poor State, Red State, Blue State: What's the Matter with Connecticut?" *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 2, no. 4 (2008): 345-67. Used with permission.

Income and Republicanism: State Context Matters



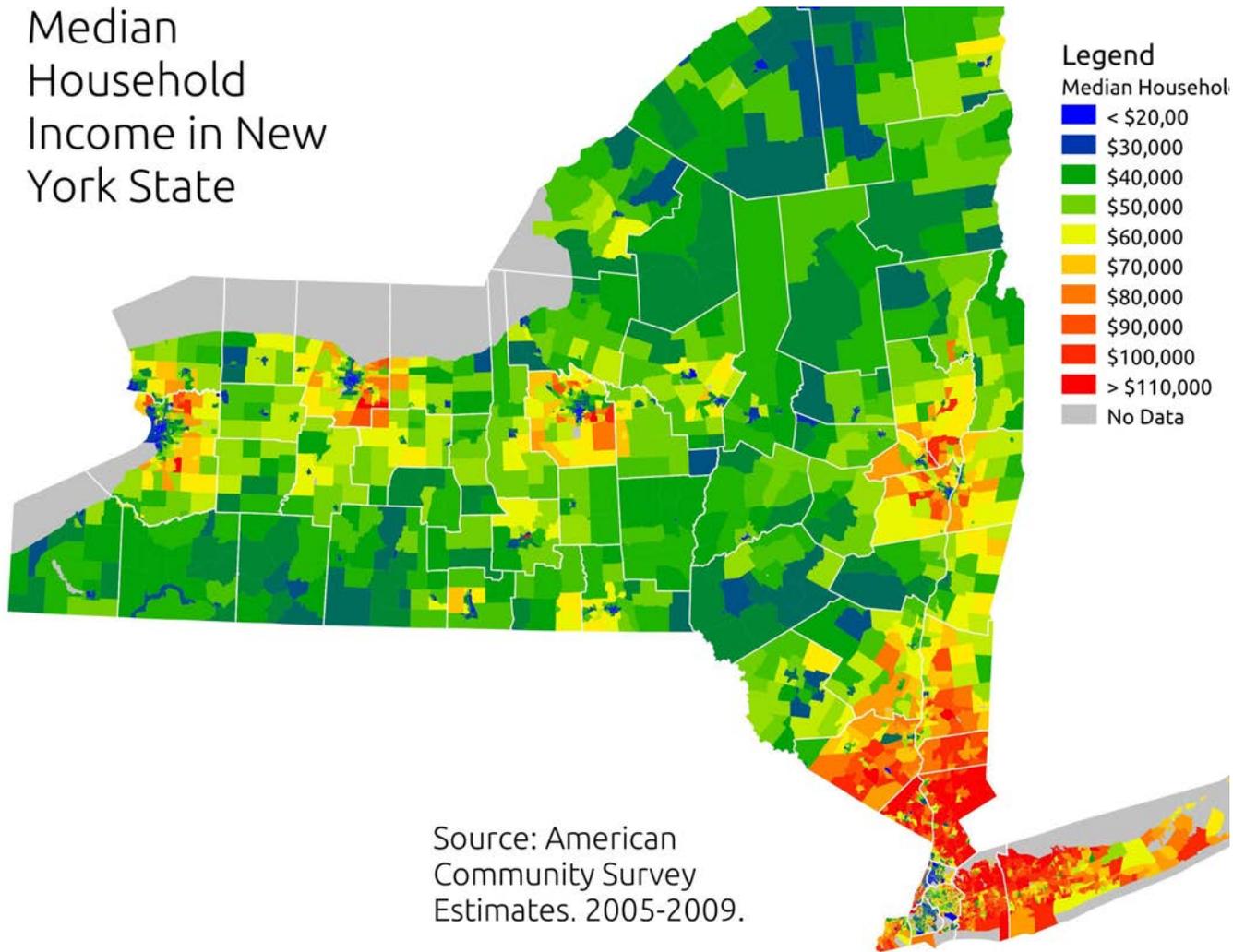
- Income matters more in rich states than poor states.
- It is the rich whose voting differs across states, not the poor, probably because the cultural/religious attitudes of the rich vary more (homophily?)

Originally published in Gelman, Andrew, Boris Shor, et al. "Rich State, Poor State, Red State, Blue State: What's the Matter with Connecticut?" *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 2, no. 4 (2008): 345-67. Used with permission.

Causal Effect of Income?

- Is the relationship between income and Republicanism a causal one?
- What else might be causing (“confounding”) the relationship?
- How do Gelman et al. address the problem of confounding?
- Suppose it were not causal. Why might we still care?

Median Household Income in New York State



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