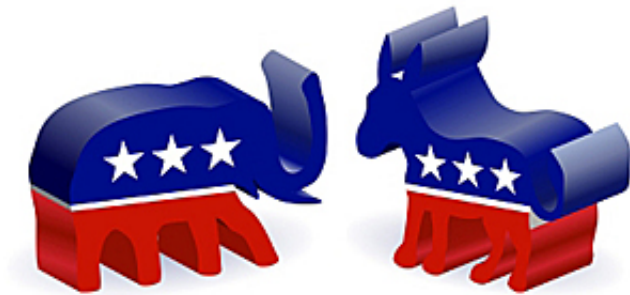


Can black Republicans win black votes? Not likely, study finds

September 9 2015, by Rachel Richardson



Credit: Image courtesy of nirots at Freedigitalphotos.net

Are black voters more likely to vote for black candidates, regardless of political party affiliation?

A new study by a University of Cincinnati researcher presents discouraging news for Republican leaders hoping to win over this Democratic stronghold by nominating black Republican candidates for political offices.

"There are some very successful African-American Republicans, but those folks don't attract African-American votes," said the study's author, David Niven, a University of Cincinnati professor of political science. "Party matters so much more than race."

In the wake of the 2012 election in which black Americans overwhelmingly cast ballots for President Barack Obama over Republican challenger Mitt Romney, big-tent Republicans sought ways on how the GOP could make inroads with black voters. From that soul-searching emerged a concerted effort to aggressively recruit black and Hispanic candidates as a way to change the stereotype of a heavily white party that's out of touch with a fast-growing electorate.

"Republicans pinpointed a demographic crisis coming. They win white votes, but those votes are shrinking," said Niven.

The Study

But is simply changing the demographics of the party's candidates enough to sway the demographics of its supporters? In examining that question, Niven found a site ripe for study in Ohio's Franklin County, which includes Columbus.

There Niven found what he calls a "fluke" of the electoral map in which overlapping political boundaries create micro-precincts, 28 of which are made up exclusively of black voters. That localization of voters by race allows for the analysis of how they voted at the polls, which Niven was able to test in a pair of county-wide races in the 2014 general election.

That year, two black candidates ran for county offices: Clarence Mingo, the incumbent county auditor, and Rita McNeil Danish, who ran for an open seat on the county common pleas court. In Ohio, the political affiliation of a party running for county auditor is listed on the ballot, but no party affiliation is listed for judicial elections.

Niven randomly assigned the 28 precincts to one of two studies, each of which were subject to one of three experimental conditions, with each conditional subgroup consisting of about 40 voters.

In two of the conditions, Niven mailed a 5.5x8.5 inch glossy flyer to every household with a registered voter. Both mailers contained a photo of the candidate and listed the office they sought, but one mailer included the headline, "Endorsed by the Republican Party" while the other did not. A third subgroup acting as a control group received no mailer.

Niven, who timed the mailings to arrive within the three days prior to the election, examined the results relative to support for the top of the Republican ticket—incumbent Ohio Gov. John Kasich who won re-election that year.

The Results

In both races, Niven found that voters who received mailers of the candidate without the party label were more likely to vote for the candidate than for the top of the Republican ticket. The results were even more heightened in the judicial race, where the candidate's party affiliation was also omitted from the ballot.

In that case, voters were nearly three times as likely to vote for the candidate when they didn't know her party affiliation. By contrast, voters who received a mailing listing the party label or no mailing at all, were considerably less likely to support the candidates than top of the Republican ticket, Niven found.

Niven believes the results indicate that while race matters to black voters, it's not their primary political influence. In short: Black voters were more likely to vote for black candidates - unless they knew the candidates were Republicans.

"Simply knowing the candidate was African-American did almost nothing for Republicans," said Niven. "If voters knew the candidates

were Republican, they finished below the top of the ticket. If voters didn't know the candidates were Republican, they outperformed the top of the ticket."

Republicans will continue to face an uphill climb in its minority-outreach efforts largely because GOP responses to issues like civil rights and immigration alienate black voters, said Niven.

He points to House Majority Whip Steve Scalise, R-Louisiana, who came under fire in December after it was reported that he spoke at a white supremacist gathering in 2002. Republicans circled the wagons to defend him, including Rep. Mia Love, the newly elected Republican from Utah who is black.

"The kind of African-American Republicans who have advanced to high office seem disconnected or even dismissive of African-American issues and concerns," said Niven. "Republicans have this image that they want to exclude people. If they have that image, nobody cares about your economic or school plans. It's really quite toxic," he said.

Niven acknowledges the study's limitations: The midterm election attracted a notably low voter turnout and given the lower profile of the county races, fewer votes were cast in these races than for the top of the ticket. And the study only examined voting patterns by voters in one region and election.

However, Niven says his findings from those who did vote suggests that building a Republican rainbow coalition is more complicated than simply recruiting black candidates.

And given the rising influence of black voters - Obama's 2012 re-election was powered, in part, by historic black voter turnout - Republicans with an eye on 2016 should take notice, Niven said.

"There are places where Democrats are competitive on the strength of African-American votes, like North Carolina. In Ohio, the African-American vote is the Democrat's base that literally makes them relevant. You take that vote out and Ohio goes from the swingiest of swing states to Oklahoma in terms of national value," he said.

"The bottom line is: For Republicans, it would help if they have some Colin Powell-style Republicans running for office and not Ken Blackwell or Mia Love," said Niven.

Niven presented his research Saturday at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association in San Francisco.

More information: www.apsanet.org/

Provided by University of Cincinnati

Citation: Can black Republicans win black votes? Not likely, study finds (2015, September 9) retrieved 21 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-09-black-republicans-votes.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--