

Swinging in Place: New Hampshire's Presidential Elections, 1992-2016

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Abstract

While other swing states shifted drastically in 2016, New Hampshire maintained its bellwether status. This article examines the underlying dynamics of that steady balance. After the fast-growth decades of the 1970s and 1980s, population increases stalled. Underneath a calm surface, significant changes have altered the state's political geography. The state's voters are politically divided along lines of educational attainment: Residents with a college degree are more likely to lean Democratic, while residents without a college degree were much more ambivalent toward Democrats during the Obama era. Geographically, less densely populated exurban and rural areas have grown faster than urban and suburban areas, to the mild advantage of the state's Republicans. With Donald Trump at the top of the ticket, Republicans reversed declines in several parts of the state, thanks to his popularity among rural voters, but suffered losses in areas where more residents possessed college degrees.

The 2016 presidential election sent several swing states flying out of their traditional orbits. Republican nominee Donald Trump carried traditionally Democratic Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. Ohio shed its bellwether status and behaved like a strongly Republican state. New Hampshire was not immune to the unusual political weather, but its movement was a mere wobble in comparison. For the fourth consecutive election, the Democratic nominee carried the state's four electoral votes, though Hillary Clinton won by a razor-thin margin with less than 47 percent of the popular vote. The Granite State maintained a balance of partisan forces that has existed for a quarter-century.¹

Balance, however, should not be mistaken for inertia, let alone tranquility. For the past two decades, New Hampshire's Democrats and Republicans have fought a series of pitched battles, from the U. S. Senate to a seat in its 424-seat state legislature. This article examines the rough symmetry of recent changes in partisan forces that have reinforced the state's political equilibrium. At the level of the individual voter, working-class antipathy for liberalism and the Democratic Party has offset more liberal attitudes among the college-educated. At the municipal level, population growth has occurred, in sparsely populated rural and exurban towns that lean Republican, not in densely populated (and Democratic-leaning) urban areas. At the county level, Democrats' emerging advantage in downscale rural New Hampshire evaporated in 2016, while they held their own in suburban areas with higher levels of socioeconomic status.

In 2016, Clinton, aided by greater Democratic support among voters with higher levels of educational attainment, narrowly captured New Hampshire because of her strength in the densely populated areas of the state. But Republican strength in faster-growing exurbs and rural areas suggests that Democrats are reaching the limits of their electoral appeal and will struggle to become the dominant party in the state.

New Hampshire's Recent Political History

New Hampshire was once a solidly Republican state with a strong Republican tilt. From 1932 to 1988, the Democratic presidential nominee carried the state just four times, and only once after Franklin Delano Roosevelt. As recently as 1988, George H. W. Bush defeated Michael Dukakis by 26 percentage points, more than triple his advantage in the national popular vote. But Bush was the last Republican nominee to win a majority of the popular vote in the Granite State. Just four years later, he lost to Bill Clinton, with independent candidate Ross Perot attracting nearly 23 percent of the vote. Clinton won the state again in 1996 with a plurality of the popular vote, when Perot again appeared on the ticket. New Hampshire Democrats also began to enjoy consistent statewide success for other offices in the 1990s. They gained control of the State Senate in 1998, though they relinquished it just two years later. More importantly, State Senator Jeanne Shaheen won the governor's office in 1996, and kept it for two more 2-year terms. Shaheen's success was the beginning of a 20-year period in which Democrats won all but two gubernatorial elections.

Republicans still had the upper hand, however, in elections for federal offices. In 2000, George W. Bush put New Hampshire back in the Republican column.² Two years later, Democrats' hopes for a breakthrough moment were stymied. Shaheen fell short in her campaign for an open U. S. Senate seat against Congressman John E. Sununu.³ To compound that year's pain, the Democrats lost the governor's office in the open-seat contest. Republicans remained comfortably in control of all four congressional seats.

Just two years later, however, Democrats rebounded. New Hampshire was the only Republican state to flip to the Democratic nominee, Massachusetts Senator John Kerry. The 2006 midterms brought more good news. With Bush's approval numbers cratering, Democrats

won contests up and down the ballot, gaining control of both chambers of the state legislature. They also seized both seats in the House of Representatives, unseating two Republican incumbents. In the bellwether First Congressional District, an anti-Iraq war activist, Carol Shea-Porter, inspired a wave of progressive fervor that carried her to the party's nomination, and then to an upset victory in the general election.

At the time, progressives crowed that New Hampshire soon would become "Blue Hampshire." To be sure, Democrats have enjoyed significant success in the past decade. Barack Obama followed Kerry's success by carrying the state twice in 2008 and 2012. Democrats also took over other federal offices. In a rematch, Shaheen wrested the Senate seat from Sununu in 2008, and defended it against former Massachusetts Senator Scott Brown six years later. Governor Maggie Hassan followed Shaheen's path, serving two terms as governor before defeating first-term Senator Kelly Ayotte in 2016. Further downticket, Ann McLane Kuster has won three straight elections to represent the state's Second Congressional District, which borders Vermont and leans Democratic. In the First District, Shea-Porter has won and lost the seat several times.⁴

Over the last decade, New Hampshire Democrats have gained power via a series of close, hard-fought victories, but outright dominance has eluded them. The 2016 elections highlighted how small the margin of error is for both major parties. Hillary Clinton failed to win a majority of the popular vote as Obama did, although she managed to keep the state's four electoral votes in the Democratic column. Hassan also prevailed by a razor-sharp margin in a contest that was not called until the day after the election. And for the first time since 2004, Democrats lost control of the governor's office as Republican Chris Sununu, brother of the former senator and

son of the former governor, captured the open seat. Democrats now occupy the entire congressional delegation, but have lost control of multiple levers of power in state government.⁵

The last several presidential elections display New Hampshire's long-term partisan deadlock (Figure 1). Over the past quarter-century, Republican presidential nominees in New Hampshire have performed slightly worse than they did nationally, according to one measure of partisanship, Cook's Partisan Voting Index.⁶ The GOP reached its nadir during the George W. Bush administration, but recovered slightly while Obama was in office. In 2016, Trump's vote share in the Granite State was almost dead even with his national vote share. Democratic performance improved markedly during the last 25 years. In 1992, Bill Clinton carried New Hampshire, but with a plurality of less than 40 percent; his performance in the state trailed his national vote share by almost seven percent. Just twelve years later, Democratic vote share in New Hampshire equaled national performance, and surpassed it in 2008—but 2008 has proven to be a peak, not a harbinger of a strong, permanent Democratic tilt. Obama's second term was not the disaster for New Hampshire Democrats that George W. Bush's last four years in office were for Granite State Republicans. But Obama and Clinton were unable to build on Kerry's success and take New Hampshire off the list of battleground states. In fact, after the most recent election, Democratic performance in New Hampshire has receded to almost-pure bellwether status.

Data

To explain the sources of the Granite State's political deadlock, the author examined a variety of data, both individual-level and area-level. The Cooperative Congressional Election Survey (CCES) is a national stratified sample survey which asks a battery of questions about demographic characteristics and political attitudes (Ansolabehere 2012; Ansolabehere and Schaffner, 2013; Schaffner and Ansolabehere 2015; Ansolabehere and Schaffner 2017). A total

of 1,026 New Hampshire residents were surveyed for this study from 2010 to 2014, and the individual-level analysis of their political attitudes and feelings toward Obama's job performance in this study is based on that subsample. In addition, the author analyzed 2016 CCES data on the determinants of Hillary Clinton's support.

New Hampshire electoral data at the municipal level from 1992 to 2012 were downloaded from an online database (ElectionStats 2018). Statewide and national electoral data were downloaded from another online database (Leip 2017); data from the 2016 New Hampshire elections were accessed from the New Hampshire Secretary of State's website. Data on municipalities' land area were provided by New Hampshire's Office of Energy and Planning. The United States Census Bureau's (2017) American Community Survey provided 5-year estimates (from 2010 to 2014) of educational attainment and median family income.

New Hampshire Voters' Educational Attainment and Political Attitudes

In a state in which fewer than one of 10 residents are minorities, differences among white voters are far more politically consequential than racial differences. Minority residents are increasing as a percentage of the population, up from 4.9 percent in 2000 to just under 10 percent today. Children, in particular, are much more diverse than the adult population (Johnson 2012; U. S. Census Bureau 2017). And nonwhite voters in New Hampshire vote strongly Democratic, as they do nationwide. Eight percent of voters in 2016 exit polls identified as nonwhite, and they favored Clinton, 58 percent to 33 percent—more than enough of a margin to swing a very close election. A more prominent political dividing line in the Granite State runs along levels of educational attainment. Even though New Hampshire's population is better educated than the nation at large, almost two-thirds of its residents do not possess a four-year college degree (Cohen and Barnes 2015). In past Democratic presidential primaries, for example, candidates

have often contended with the differing preferences and priorities of blue-collar white voters, versus those of well-educated, prosperous whites (Scala 2003).

During the Obama administration, Granite State voters without a college degree were less enthusiastic toward the president than their college-educated peers, according to CCES data (Table 1). Even in the midst of the severe economic downturn in fall 2008, only a minority of these voters supported Obama when he first ran for president. The same was true for his re-election bid in 2012: Obama's support among those without a college degree trailed his support among the college educated by 15 percentage points. Voters without a college degree also were significantly less likely to approve Obama's job performance than their college-educated peers.

As one might expect from their coolness toward Obama, those without a college degree were far less likely to identify themselves as liberals than their college-educated counterparts. But they also were no more likely to identify their ideology as conservative. Almost a third of them described their position as "middle of the road." In contrast, greater percentages of those with a college degree identified themselves strongly with a particular ideology, whether it be liberal or conservative. The same pattern emerged in respondents' party identification. These voters were significantly less likely than the college-educated to identify themselves as Democrats, but no more likely to describe themselves as Republican. Instead, they were more likely to identify themselves as independent of party.

Although those without a college degree were less likely to embrace liberalism than their college-educated peers, they were not significantly more conservative on matters of morality and religious belief. New Hampshire's citizens are among the very least religious in the country, according to various measures of belief and practice (Lipka and Wormald 2016). Only one of four college-educated residents described religion as a very important part of their lives. But

religiosity was no higher among those with lesser degrees of education—and by one measure, the lesser educated were even less religious. Both groups were equally likely to report that religion was very important to their lives. They were equally likely to state that they were “born again.” They also were as likely to report that they prayed daily. Those without a college degree, however, were significantly less likely than the college-educated to state that they attended church weekly.

The Granite State has long held a reputation for a libertarian brand of conservatism. Citizens place value on keeping government small and unobtrusive, so that they will be left alone to make their own decisions, both economically and morally. This “leave us alone” attitude was evident among both the college-educated and those with lesser amounts of education. For example, small majorities of both the college-educated and the lesser-educated supported gay marriage.⁷ The college-educated were somewhat more liberal on the issue of abortion. In the 2010 and 2012 CCES, they were more likely than their lesser-educated peers to support a woman’s right to choose an abortion, although the likelihood was not statistically significant.⁸

Voters without a college degree did deviate significantly from their college-educated counterparts on racial issues and attitudes. For example, while only a minority of the college-educated expressed support for affirmative action programs, an even smaller percentage of those with lesser amounts of education did so. Majorities of those with and without a college degree agreed with the statement that blacks should overcome prejudice and “work their way up” without “special favors,” just as the Irish, Italians, Jews and other minorities had done—but those without a college degree were significantly more likely to concur. Those without a college degree also were less likely to agree that slavery and discrimination had made it difficult for

blacks to escape the lower class, though the difference between the two groups was not statistically significant.

New Hampshire's college-educated exhibited greater willingness to use U. S. military force than those without a college degree. For instance, almost half of the college-educated said they supported the use of the military to prevent a genocide or civil war in another country, compared to a third of those without a college degree. Lesser-educated New Hampshire residents also were significantly less likely to support the use of the military to support allies, although 70 percent did support such use. On other potential military missions, however, the levels of support from the two groups were not statistically significant. They were similarly skeptical, for example, of deploying the military to aid in the spread of democracy, or to ensure the oil supply of the United States.

Media reports often depict working-class voters as especially hostile to illegal immigrants (Tankersley 2016). In New Hampshire, however, respondents without a college degree only occasionally took a more hardline stance than those with a degree. For instance, those without a degree were significantly more likely to support allowing police to question suspected illegal immigrants, although less than 50 percent approved of such tactics. Most were against granting legal status to illegal immigrants who had been employed, paid taxes, and had not been convicted of a felony. Most were in favor of increasing patrols on the border with Mexico, and penalizing businesses that hired illegal immigrants. On these questions, however, their attitudes were not significantly different from their college-educated counterparts.

To determine whether a respondent's level of education remained a significant factor in shaping political attitudes, even after controlling for a host of other variables, the author performed a logistic regression on the data from New Hampshire respondents in the 2010, 2012

and 2014 CCES (Table 2). The dependent variable was the respondent's approval of President Obama. The following variables were included: gender; age (whether the respondent was born in or before 1950); marital status; education (whether the respondent possesses a college degree); income (whether the respondent's annual family income was \$100,000 or greater); whether a member of the respondent's household belonged to a labor union at any time; religious attendance (whether the respondent attended religious services at least once a week); and Republican Party identification.

After controlling for these variables, educational attainment remained a significant factor. Respondents with a college degree were more likely to express support for Obama than those with less educational attainment. The only other variable that proved statistically significant was Republican Party identification.

In sum, New Hampshire Democrats enjoy a small political advantage because of the state's relatively high percentage of college-educated voters. But in a racially homogenous population, a key part of the national Democratic coalition, minority voters, is largely absent. As a result, the key political division in the Granite State runs along lines of educational attainment and socioeconomic status. Those voters without a college degree, while not ideologically conservative, nevertheless disapprove of liberals and the Democratic Party. As a result, Democrats' recent electoral advantage in New Hampshire has been modest and constrained.

New Hampshire's Electoral Geography: GOP Growth in Rural Exurbia

New Hampshire Democrats' precarious plurality is writ large in the state's political geography. Nationally, Democrats rely heavily on voters residing in large metropolitan cores and their surrounding suburbs, where voters are more likely to hold liberal attitudes and strongly identify with the Democratic Party. In 2016, Hillary Clinton kept pace with Obama's strong

performance in these areas. But New Hampshire lacks large metropolitan cores. Instead, the state contains a number of smaller, less diverse urban areas where residents are more ambivalent toward Democrats.⁹ In addition, the Granite State contains many rural “exurban” areas, where residents are quite friendly toward Republicans (Scala and Johnson 2017). New Hampshire has experienced the fastest growth over the past quarter-century in these less densely populated areas. Across the Northeast and Midwest, Clinton’s losses to Trump in rural and exurban areas led to defeat in 2016—and they almost led to the same outcome in New Hampshire.

New Hampshire’s population historically has been exceptionally mobile, and its mobility has played a key role in the state’s gradual, long-term “secular realignment” (Moore and Smith 2015). A recent study found that less than half of Granite State residents were born in the state, a percentage far below the national figure (Johnson, Scala, and Smith 2008). In 2016, more than three of 10 potential voters were new to the state’s presidential primary electorate, either because they lived elsewhere previously, or because they were not old enough to vote in 2008 (Johnson, Scala, and Smith 2016). Over the past quarter-century, however, New Hampshire’s population growth has declined markedly. In the 1970s and 1980s, the state added nearly 200,000 people a decade, mostly driven by migration into the state. In contrast, the state’s population only increased slightly more than 80,000 during the first decade of the twenty-first century as migration slowed markedly (Johnson 2012).

The growth that occurred in the last quarter-century has been geographically dispersed, rather than concentrated in already densely populated municipalities. This decentralized growth has enabled New Hampshire Republicans to remain competitive in recent elections. Less densely populated municipalities in the state have grown in population faster than more densely populated areas over the past quarter-century. As these rural or exurban areas increased in

population, they retained or enhanced their Republican tilt. Therefore, even though Democrats tend to perform modestly better in more densely populated areas of the state, Republican candidates have gained higher vote shares in municipalities experiencing higher rates of growth in population density. In short, a plethora of small, lightly populated New Hampshire towns has succeeded in restraining the statewide trend toward the Democratic Party.

New Hampshire is comprised of 10 counties (Figure 2). The two most populated, Hillsborough and Rockingham, straddle the border with Massachusetts and together contain more than half of the state's voters. Merrimack County (home to the state capital of Concord) and Strafford County (containing the state university) each contribute another 10 percent. Population growth over the last quarter-century was concentrated in the southern half of the state amongst the counties that already led New Hampshire in population. Median growth among New Hampshire's municipalities was 35 percent from 1992 to 2016, measured by votes cast in presidential elections. Along the seacoast, the median municipality in Rockingham and Strafford counties exceeded the statewide rate. The same was true of the median municipality in Hillsborough and Merrimack counties, in the center of the state along the Merrimack Valley. Meanwhile, the rural periphery of the state, already lightly populated, grew more slowly, with northernmost Coos County lagging the most. The only exception to this rule was Belknap County in the Lakes region. Within most of New Hampshire's counties, municipalities with lower population density have grown at faster rates than those with higher density.

The Southern Tier

New Hampshire's Republicans are now concentrated in the state's more densely populated southern tier, while the rural north, once dominated by the GOP, has moved in a Democratic direction, especially in the Connecticut River Valley bordering Vermont (Scala

2011). While other counties in New Hampshire have significantly changed their political complexion during the past two decades, Hillsborough has remained a bellwether county with a slight Republican tilt. Merrimack County, the home of the state capital of Concord, was a robust source of Republican strength three decades ago, but has long since stabilized as a Democratic-leaning area. In both counties, municipalities with lower populations grew at faster rates than more densely populated areas. And in both counties, faster rates of municipal population growth were positively correlated with stronger Republican partisanship (Table 3).

Along the seacoast, Rockingham's relatively fast growth has little changed its partisan tilt. At the beginning of George W. Bush's first term in office, the county inclined slightly Republican. Unlike other parts of New Hampshire, Rockingham did not move in a markedly Democratic direction during the Bush Administration. Then, during the Obama Administration, the county became slightly more Republican—a significant boon to the GOP, given the size of the county's population. Once upon a time, New Hampshire Republicans were typified by the wealthy who lived on the county's seacoast. More recently, however, residents of its rural interior have been a key line of support for the GOP. These low-density towns have grown faster than municipalities of higher density, and simultaneously became increasingly Republican over the last quarter-century.

To the north of Rockingham, Strafford County has long been one of the most Democratic counties in the state, largely because of the presence of the state university in the town of Durham and its environs. The growing (and gentrifying) city of Dover also is a bright spot for Democrats. Over the past decade, however, Strafford's Democratic tilt no longer is the most acute in the Granite State, in large part due to Republican strength in the county's rural north

and in Rochester and Somersworth, two working-class cities experiencing slow growth and revitalization.

The Connecticut River Valley

The Connecticut River Valley counties of Cheshire, Sullivan, and Grafton border Vermont, and their politics increasingly resemble those of the liberal Green Mountain State. This area, on the periphery of the Granite State, is now central to the Democratic Party's success statewide. In 2004, for instance, Kerry managed to carry New Hampshire on the strength of his showing in the Connecticut River Valley, despite losing the state's two largest counties, Hillsborough and Rockingham. In the 1980s, all three of these counties tilted toward Republican candidates to varying degrees. Cheshire County, in the southwest corner of the state, was a bellwether county by the end of the Reagan Administration. It moved firmly into the Democratic column in the 1990s, and became the strongest Democratic area in the state by 2000. Further north, Grafton County veered strongly left. It voted almost 10 percentage points more Republican than the nation in the 1980s, but then reversed course and became strongly Democratic during the Obama era. Grafton and Cheshire now possess the strongest partisan tilt in the state. In both counties, areas centered around educational institutions (such as Keene in Cheshire and Hanover in Grafton) anchor the Democratic advantage. Grafton is the one county in New Hampshire where the more densely populated municipalities grew faster than areas with less density. Grafton's growth also correlated with swings toward the Democratic Party.

Northern New Hampshire

Northern New Hampshire is the ancestral home of the Yankee Republican, but the days of Republican dominance are long gone. Belknap County, which contains much of the state's Lakes region, remains the strongest vestige of Republican strength in rural New Hampshire.

Carroll County, which borders Maine in northeastern New Hampshire, was the most Republican county in the state in the 1980s. Its move to bellwether status in the past three decades is emblematic of how a rural county's economy can transform its politics. Rural counties whose economic well-being are based on recreation (as opposed to more traditional economies such as farming or mining) tend to be more Democratic than other parts of rural America. These types of counties tend to attract retirees drawn to areas with amenities, as well as younger people who work in service industries (Scala, Johnson and Rogers 2015). Carroll County's recreation economy is centered in the north around the town of Conway, as is the county's source of Democratic strength.

Coos County, at the northern tip of the state, is an example of another type of rural county, one whose economy disappeared without adequate replacement. Although it remains a must-visit destination for politicians seeking statewide office, the county continues to lag in economic and population growth. During the last decade, Coos seemed well on its way to becoming another source of rural strength for New Hampshire Democrats. But Donald Trump's message of renewing America's greatness apparently resonated sharply here, as it did in other parts of New Hampshire's rural periphery.

2016: Political Divisions Deepen Along Lines of Educational Attainment

Although Hillary Clinton carried New Hampshire, she did so with the smallest plurality since her husband's in 1996, and by the smallest margin (2,736) since her husband's victory in 1992. For the first time since 2000, the Democratic nominee's vote share in New Hampshire dipped below the percentage of the national popular vote. Trump's performance in the Granite State was practically equal to Mitt Romney's, but his statewide vote share almost equaled his

national percentage, the best relative performance by a Republican in New Hampshire in a quarter-century.

An examination of exit poll and CCES data, as well as voting totals at the municipal level, strongly suggests that the most recent presidential election deepened New Hampshire's political divisions along lines of educational attainment. Clinton improved on Obama's performance among those voters with a post-graduate degree (Figure 3), but fell short among those with lesser levels of educational attainment, including college degree-holders, according to exit polls. She fared especially poorly among high-school educated voters ("New Hampshire President Exit Polls" 2016). At the municipal level, Trump outperformed his most recent Republican contemporaries, Romney and McCain, in rural areas and other municipalities with lower levels of density. But Trump underperformed other recent Republican nominees in municipalities with higher levels of socioeconomic status.

At the county level, several areas on the state's periphery shifted dramatically as Democrats suffered a plethora of small cuts to its rural base (Table 4). The effects were especially stark in Sullivan County, which sits between Cheshire and Grafton counties in the Connecticut River Valley. During George W. Bush's administration, the county lurched to the left and remained there during the Obama years. But Trump carried Sullivan in 2016, as the county leaped in a Republican direction. Northernmost Coos County also swung 13 percentage points Republican after moving in a Democratic direction during the previous decade. Cheshire and Merrimack counties were two more examples of Democratic-tilting areas that shifted toward the Republicans in 2016. The combined effect of these Republican gains in northern and western New Hampshire had downticket effects, leaving incumbent Congresswoman Kuster with an

unexpectedly close race against an underfunded, unheralded opponent in the Second Congressional District on the western side of the state.

Despite these setbacks, Clinton managed to carry the state because she held her own in the state's most densely populated counties. Although Trump carried both Hillsborough and Rockingham, he only did so narrowly, unable to increase his margin compared to Romney's in 2012. Municipal-level voting in Hillsborough and Rockingham indicated that Trump's presence at the top of the ticket polarized voters with different levels of educational attainment. On the one hand, Trump outperformed Romney in less densely populated places with lower levels of educational attainment. In more densely populated areas where the population had higher levels of education—including many strongly Republican towns—Trump's vote share fell behind Romney's.

This trend held statewide. One veteran observer of the state's politics noted that at the municipal level, the level of educational attainment of a city or town (measured by the percentage of residents 25 and older with a college degree, according to the Census Bureau's 2010-2014 American Community Survey) was more highly correlated with partisan shifts from 2012 to 2016 than median household income (Tucker 2016). Further analysis of the data supports this observation. In 2012, when Mitt Romney was the Republican nominee against Obama, the weighted¹⁰ correlation between the educational attainment of a municipality (again, as measured by the percentage of residents 25 and older with a college degree) and the percentage of the Republican vote was negative, though modest ($r = -0.13$). In 2016, this correlation climbed steeply ($r = -0.58$). In contrast, the correlation between the median family income of a municipality and the Republican vote share in that municipality declined from 2012 ($r = 0.51$) to 2016 ($r = 0.10$). Although Trump failed to sweep New Hampshire into his collection

of swing states on Election Night, he did succeed at least temporarily in changing the Republican coalition in the Granite State and deepening voter divisions along lines of educational attainment.

Analysis of CCES data from 2016 confirms the educational divide. To determine whether a respondent's level of education remained a significant factor in support for Hillary Clinton, even after controlling for a host of other variables, the author performed a logistic regression on the data from New Hampshire respondents in the 2016 CCES¹¹ (Table 5). The dependent variable was the respondent's self-reported vote for Clinton. The following variables were included: gender; age (whether the respondent was born in or before 1950); marital status; education (whether the respondent possesses a college degree); income (whether the respondent's annual family income was \$100,000 or greater); whether a member of the respondent's household belonged to a labor union at any time; religious attendance (whether the respondent attended religious services at least once a week); and Republican Party identification. After controlling for these variables, educational attainment remained a significant factor: Respondents with a college degree were more likely to vote for Clinton than those with less educational attainment.

Conclusions

A quarter-century ago, New Hampshire abruptly shifted from a strongly Republican state to a bellwether in presidential elections. Since 1992, Democratic presidential nominees have carried New Hampshire all but once. Their relative strength, however, has remained almost frozen in place. Their advantage grew during the George W. Bush administration, but then receded during the Obama Administration. The Granite State has remained stuck in place because the modest population growth over the past quarter-century has not strongly favored either political party. Rural and exurban areas of the state have grown faster than more densely

populated municipalities while retaining their Republican tilt. Democrats have benefited from growth in areas anchored by institutions of higher education, most notably in Grafton and Sullivan counties.

In 2016, Trump exploited a preexisting political fault line among voters of differing levels of educational attainment, and nearly carried the state for Republicans for the first time since 2000. Survey data compiled during the Obama Administration indicate that those without a college degree were significantly less likely to express approval of Obama's job performance. They were also more likely to describe themselves as independents, rather than ideologically liberal or conservative. Compared to their college-educated counterparts, they were somewhat more conservative on issues of immigration, and significantly more likely to express racial resentment. They also were more cautious about the use of American military force overseas.

In 2008 and 2012, Republican presidential nominees McCain and Romney seemed tailor-made for the New Hampshire general electorate: Fiscally conservative, strong on national security, less willing to emphasize social conservatism. Yet neither was able to move the Granite State into the Republican column. Trump came closer to accomplishing this than either of his predecessors because of a message that appealed to the state's working-class voters, especially in New Hampshire's rural periphery. The result was a political map that at once looked familiar, yet oddly distorted—perhaps a one-time aberration, perhaps a sign of things to come in the Granite State. One possibility is that going forward, rural New Hampshire aligns politically with the rest of rural America, and ceases to be a source of local Democratic strength. The other possibility is that voters in the Granite State's upscale suburbs distance themselves from Trump and the Republican Party. These scenarios are not mutually exclusive.

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Table 1 Political Attitudes Among New Hampshire Respondents, By Levels of Education, 2010-14

	Without A College Degree	With A College Degree
Ideology		
Liberal	15***	31***
Middle of the road	34***	31***
Conservative	34***	37***
Not sure	16***	1***
Party Identification		
Democrat	34*	47*
Independent	26*	15*
Republican	36*	38*
Obama job approval	36**	50**
Religiosity		
Religion very important	27	26
Pray daily	36	40
Attend church weekly	14*	26*
“Born again”	17	17
Moral Issues		
Gay marriage	53	54
Pro-choice, abortion	48	60
Racial Attitudes		
Approve affirmative action	30*	37*
Blacks should overcome prejudice without special favors.	71***	57***
Slavery, discrimination have kept Blacks in the lower class.	28	38
Use Of Military		
Protect allies under attack	70**	82**
Intervene in genocide or civil war	33*	46*
Assist spread of democracy	17	19
Ensure supply of oil	25	27
Help United Nations uphold international law	45	51
Illegal Immigration		
Allow police to question suspected illegal immigrants	45*	33*
Increase border patrols	67	60
Fine businesses that hire illegal immigrants	69	73
Allow illegal immigrants to acquire legal status	34	41

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. All numbers in percentages.
Source: Cooperative Congressional Election Survey, 2010-2014

Table 2: Predictors of Obama job approval among New Hampshire residents

	Obama approval
Male	-0.30 (-1.27)
Born 1950 or earlier	-0.19 (-0.77)
Married	-0.40 (-1.64)
College degree	0.86*** (3.59)
Family income \$100,000 or more	0.03 (0.08)
Union household	0.24 (0.89)
Weekly religious attendance	-0.60 (-1.73)
Republican identification	-2.96*** (-8.99)
Constant	0.157 (0.70)
<i>N</i>	1,016

t statistics in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Source: Cooperative Congressional Election Survey, 2010-2014

Table 3 Population Growth and Partisanship in New Hampshire’s Counties

County	Number of voters, 2016	Median municipal growth, 1992-2016	Republican partisan voting index, 2016	Weighted* correlation between municipal density (1992) and growth (1992-2016)	Weighted* correlation between municipal growth (1992-2016) and change in GOP partisanship (1996-2016)
Northern New Hampshire					
Belknap	35,604	49 %	R + 7	-.84*	.74*
Carroll	30,021	35 %	R + 3	-.12	.11
Coos	15,851	5 %	R – 1	-.84*	-.15
Connecticut River Valley					
Cheshire	42,526	22%	R - 9	-.26	.52*
Grafton	51,904	33%	R – 10	.19	-.27
Sullivan	22,957	30%	R – 2	-.63*	-.66*
Southern Tier					
Hillsborough	217,917	40%	R + 1	-.75*	.46*
Merrimack	84,993	42%	R – 3	-.43*	.30
Rockingham	184,000	48%	R + 4	-.73*	.24
Strafford	70,077	43%	R – 5	-.51	-.13

* $p < 0.05$

Sources: New Hampshire Secretary of State; New Hampshire’s Office of Energy and Planning; New Hampshire Public Radio

*Correlation weighted by presidential votes cast, 2016.

Table 4 Changes in Republican Vote Share, 2012-2016

County	Romney vote share as percentage of all votes cast	Trump vote share as percentage of all votes cast	Weighted* correlation of municipal change in GOP vote share with percent college-educated
Northern New Hampshire			
Belknap	52	55	-.77*
Carroll	50	49	-.84*
Coos	40	51	-.70*
Connecticut River Valley			
Cheshire	37	40	-.75*
Grafton	37	37	-.92*
Sullivan	42	48	-.95*
Southern Tier			
Hillsborough	49	47	-.84*
Merrimack	43	45	-.88*
Rockingham	52	50	-.87*
Strafford	42	42	-.83*

* $p < 0.05$

Sources: New Hampshire Secretary of State; U. S. Census Bureau; New Hampshire Public Radio; Dave Leip's Atlas of U. S. Presidential Elections

*Correlation weighted by presidential votes cast, 2016. N. B. Dixville, Pinkham's Grant and Wentworth's Location were dropped from the Coos County portion of the dataset because of missing Census data on the education or income of their residents.

Table 5: Predictors of Hillary Clinton support among New Hampshire residents

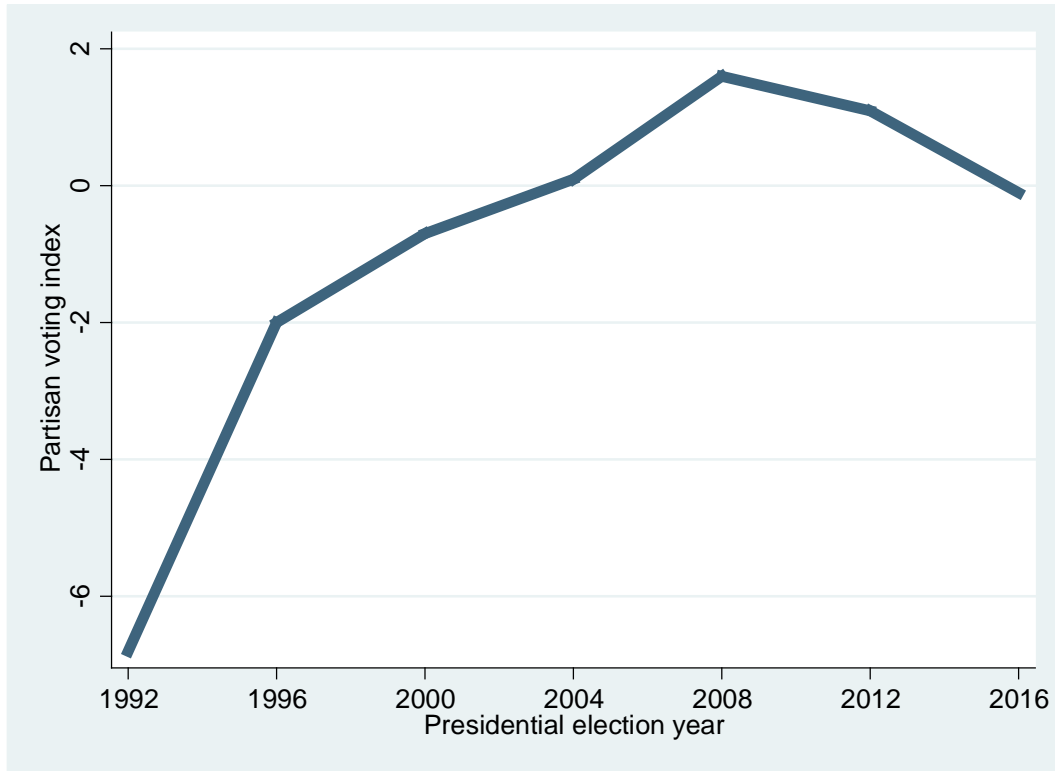
	Clinton vote
Male	-0.33 (-0.87)
Born 1950 or earlier	-0.88* (-2.35)
Married	-0.06 (-0.14)
College degree	1.02** (2.82)
Family income \$100K /more	0.73 (1.66)
Union household	0.59 (1.14)
Weekly religious attendance	-0.33 (-0.77)
Republican identification	-3.04*** (-5.20)
Constant	-0.08 (-0.20)
<i>N</i>	376

t statistics in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Source: Cooperative Congressional Election Survey, 2016

Figure 1 New Hampshire's Democratic Partisan Voting Index, 1992-2016



Source: Dave Leip's Atlas of U. S. Presidential Elections

Figure 2 County Map of New Hampshire

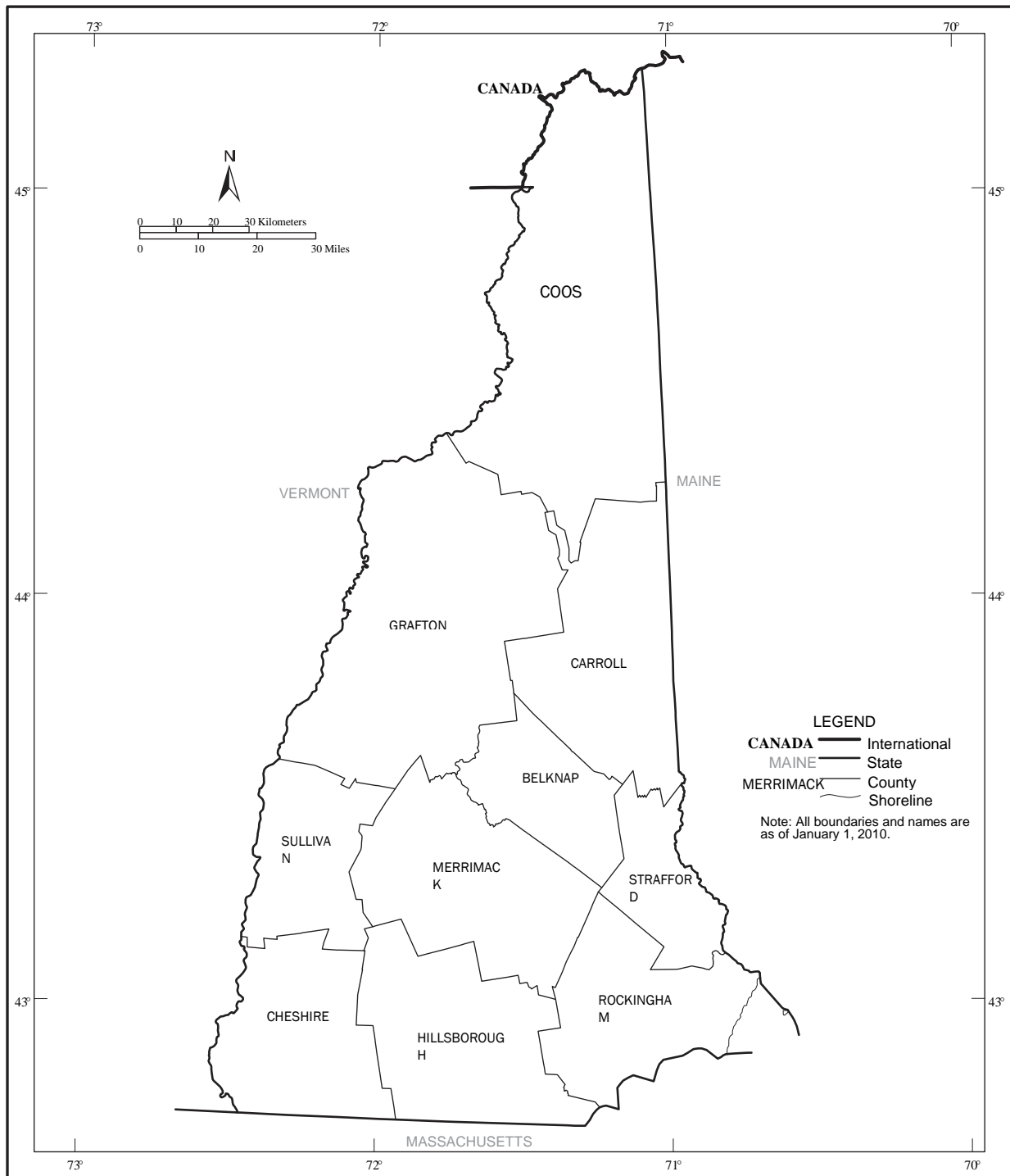
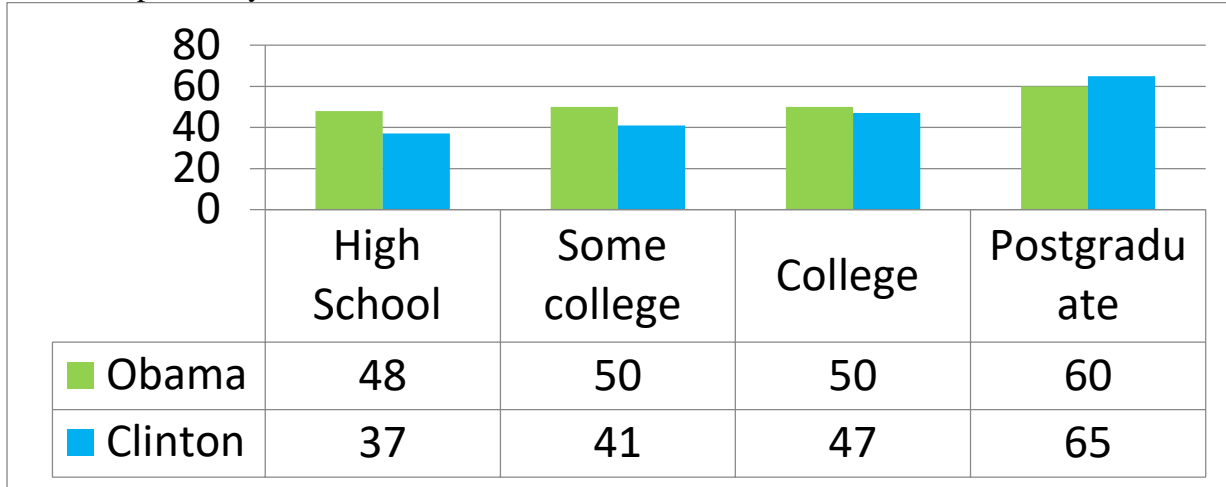


Figure 3 Hillary Clinton’s 2016 Performance vs. Barack Obama’s 2012 Performance in New Hampshire, by Levels of Education



Source: Edison Research, National Election Pool

¹ The author gratefully acknowledges research and editorial assistance from Patrick Baga. Thanks also to Professor Louise Buckley, Government Information/Reference Librarian at the University of New Hampshire, for locating Figure 2.

² Bush defeated Vice President Al Gore by just over 7,200 votes, while Green Party nominee Ralph Nader garnered approximately 22,000 votes.

³ Sununu defeated controversial incumbent Bob Smith that year in a primary to become the Republican nominee.

⁴ Shea-Porter faced Republican Frank Guinta four consecutive times in the general election for the First Congressional District seat, losing in 2010 and 2014 and winning in 2012 and 2016.

⁵ Besides losing the governor’s seat, Democrats are now in the minority in both chambers of the state legislature, as well as the Executive Council, a five-member body that supervises the executive branch.

⁶ To calculate an area’s partisan voting index for a given area (such as a state, a county, or a congressional district), one compares the average political party’s share of the major-party presidential vote in that area to that political party’s average share of the national major-party presidential vote, over two consecutive elections. See <http://swingstateproject.com/diary/4753/cook-releases-2008-pvis-with-a-change-sspers-will-like> (February 26, 2017).

⁷ The New Hampshire legislature approved a measure to legalize gay marriage in 2009, which Democratic Governor John Lynch signed into law.

⁸ CCES changed its questions regarding abortion for the 2014 survey, which made use of those questions problematic for the dataset constructed here.

⁹ New Hampshire’s largest cities, Manchester (population: 110,000) and Nashua (87,000) are quite modest by metropolitan standards. Other municipalities are designated as cities, but in terms of population, are no bigger than large towns. In 2016, Clinton carried Manchester and Nashua, but with less than 55 percent of the vote in each—a far cry from her performance in major metropolitan areas with much greater racial diversity.

¹⁰ Correlations weighted by number of votes cast in the municipality in that election year. N. B. Three small Coos County municipalities (Dixville, Pinkham’s Grant and Wentworth’s Location) were dropped from the analysis because of missing Census data on the education or income of their residents.

¹¹ The author analyzed an earlier version of the 2016 CCES dataset, prior to vote validation.