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All Politics is Local: How the South Became Republican

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Abstract

From 1876 until 1964, the Democratic Party held virtual dictatorial control over the American South. Beginning after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and that year's presidential candidacy of anti-Civil Rights Act Republican Barry Goldwater, the South shifted reliably into the Republican column for presidential elections. Democrats still held a majority of all other offices in the region until the mid-1990s. This paper examines public opinion data in the American South, as well as partisan change in four Southern states, with an emphasis on the first time each state elected a Republican governor. I find that in each state, local issues played a major role in the election of the first Republican governor, and that one or several powerful statewide Democrats could stave off the party's decline in the state.

Executive Summary

In American politics, the Solid South refers to the dominance of the Democratic Party in the American South following the end of Reconstruction. The region was for all intents and purposes a one-party region, voting Democratic at levels that were virtually dictatorial. Beginning in 1964, the South began to undo a generation of this dominance, and rapidly voted just as reliably for Republican presidential candidates as they once had for Democrats. However, at this same time, Democrats held a majority of the region's congressional seats, Senate seats, and governor's mansions – a majority they would hold until the mid-1990s. This raises an interesting question – why did Southerners split their tickets for so long, and when they stopped doing it, what caused them to?

To examine this problem, I look at four Southern states with differing partisan histories – Alabama, Arkansas, South Carolina and Virginia. I examine events in the states' politics following the candidacy of Barry Goldwater, and pay close attention to the events surrounding the first time each state elected their first Republican governor. While existing scholarship on the South's partisan change talks a great deal about how the Republican Party became dramatically more conservative, I hypothesize that there were other issues at play in these elections. I refer to these issues as “local issues,” and define them as issues that cannot be neatly placed on a liberal-conservative scale. I find that many of these issues were present in each state's first election of a Republican governor – in some states, the Democratic Party had a primary election that left the party divided into factions, and in some the Republican appealed to voters by running as a “reformer” against the entrenched Democratic machine.

To support my hypothesis that focusing on the role the region's ideology played in its eventual partisan change, I examined public opinion data of the South from the 1960s until the present. Southerners were asked what political party they considered themselves aligned with, and what ideology they considered themselves – liberal, moderate, or conservative. Over time, many more Southerners began to self-identify as Republicans. However, there was no corresponding dramatic shift in Southerners considering themselves conservatives – the numbers stayed fairly stagnant, and the percentage considering themselves conservatives never rose above 40 percent. My argument is that because of the lack of an ideological shift, and the lack of a conservative majority in the South, the partisan shift cannot be purely attributed to the Republican Party becoming more conservative.

When examining the four states, I found one common thread. Each state had one or several popular Democrats who held power in the state for a significant amount of time – figures I refer to as “party bosses.” In Arkansas and Alabama, the Democratic bosses faded from the political scene late in the 20th century, in the 1980s and 1990s. In Virginia and South Carolina, the Democratic bosses either became a Republican in the 1960s, elevating the party in the state, or died around the same time, creating a power vacuum. I then examined state legislative control in the four states and found that in the states that had a boss present for a longer amount of time, Democrats did not lose their control of the state house and senate until the 21st century. In those where the boss became a Republican or died in the 1960s, Democrats lost control in the 1970s or 1980s. I hypothesize that what this means is that the presence of a powerful, popular Democrat could improve the party's brand in the state.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

On Election Night 1994, the Republican Party swept the nation, winning 54 seats in the House of Representatives and eight in the Senate. For the first time in 40 years, the Grand Old Party controlled the House and the Senate. The next day, Alabama Senator Richard Shelby, a conservative Democrat, stood beside the next Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole, and announced that he was switching parties – and becoming a Republican.

“I thought that there was room in the Democratic Party for a conservative Southern Democrat such as myself representing my people from Alabama and other areas in the South,” said Shelby. “But I can tell you that there is not.”¹

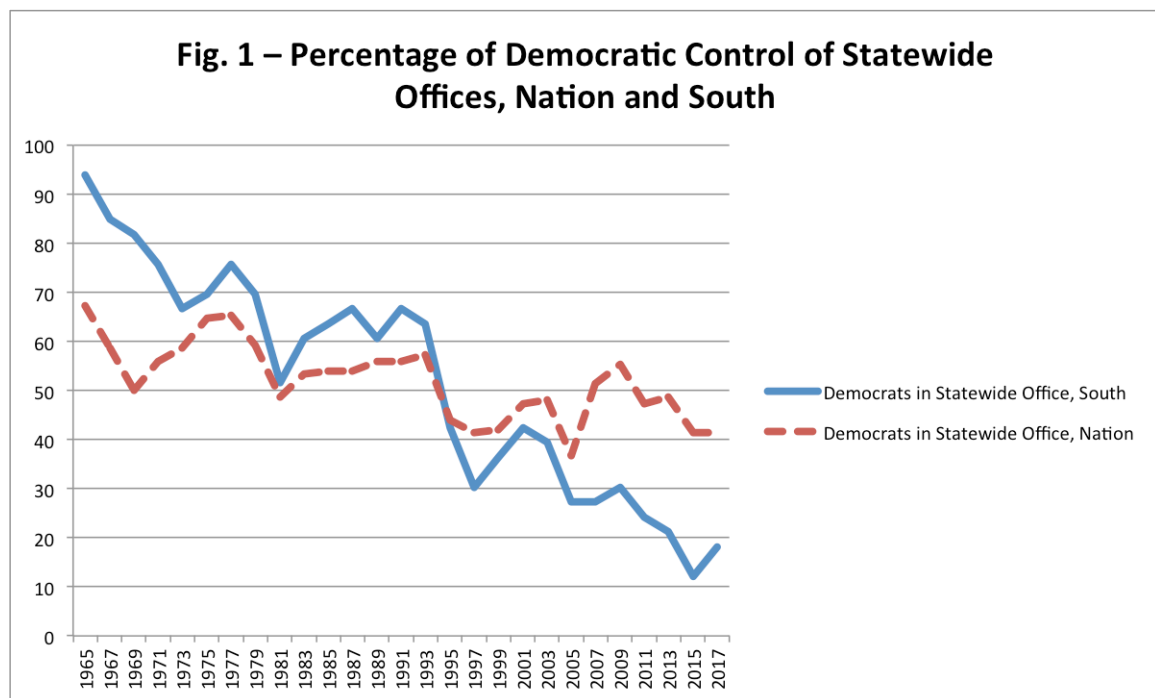
From Reconstruction until the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Democrats dominated presidential elections in the former Confederacy. While Republican presidential candidates occasionally won states in the Outer South, the Deep South stood solidly in the Democratic column.² The South’s loyalty to the Democratic Party was so reliable that the region was known as the “Solid South.” Beginning in 1948, when third party candidate Strom Thurmond won four states in the formerly impenetrable Deep South, the presidential Solid South began to crack. In 1952 and 1956, Dwight D. Eisenhower captured the Outer South. In 1964 and 1968, Republican and third-party candidates won several states in the Deep South. Then, Richard Nixon won the entire South, along with most of the country, in his 1972 landslide victory.

¹ CSPAN Transcript, Senator Shelby Switch to the Republican Party, November 9, 1994

² The Outer South is generally defined as Texas, Tennessee, North Carolina, Florida and Texas, while the Deep South is known as South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi and Louisiana.

Between then and 2004, no Democratic presidential candidate carried a Southern state except for native Southerners Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton.

A comparable decline of Southern Democratic strength in other political offices did not occur until much later. Before the 1964 Civil Rights Act, dominance by the Democratic Party in the South in state and local offices was even more extensive than it was in presidential contests. In 1950, every single Southern governor and U.S. Senator was a Democrat, along with 98 percent of the members of Congress.³ While dominance in state and local offices waned from the virtual unanimity once displayed, majority Democratic control was present in the South as late as 1990. In that year, Republicans controlled only 30.3 percent of the region's statewide offices (governor and U.S. Senator) and 33.6 percent of the region's U.S. House seats.⁴



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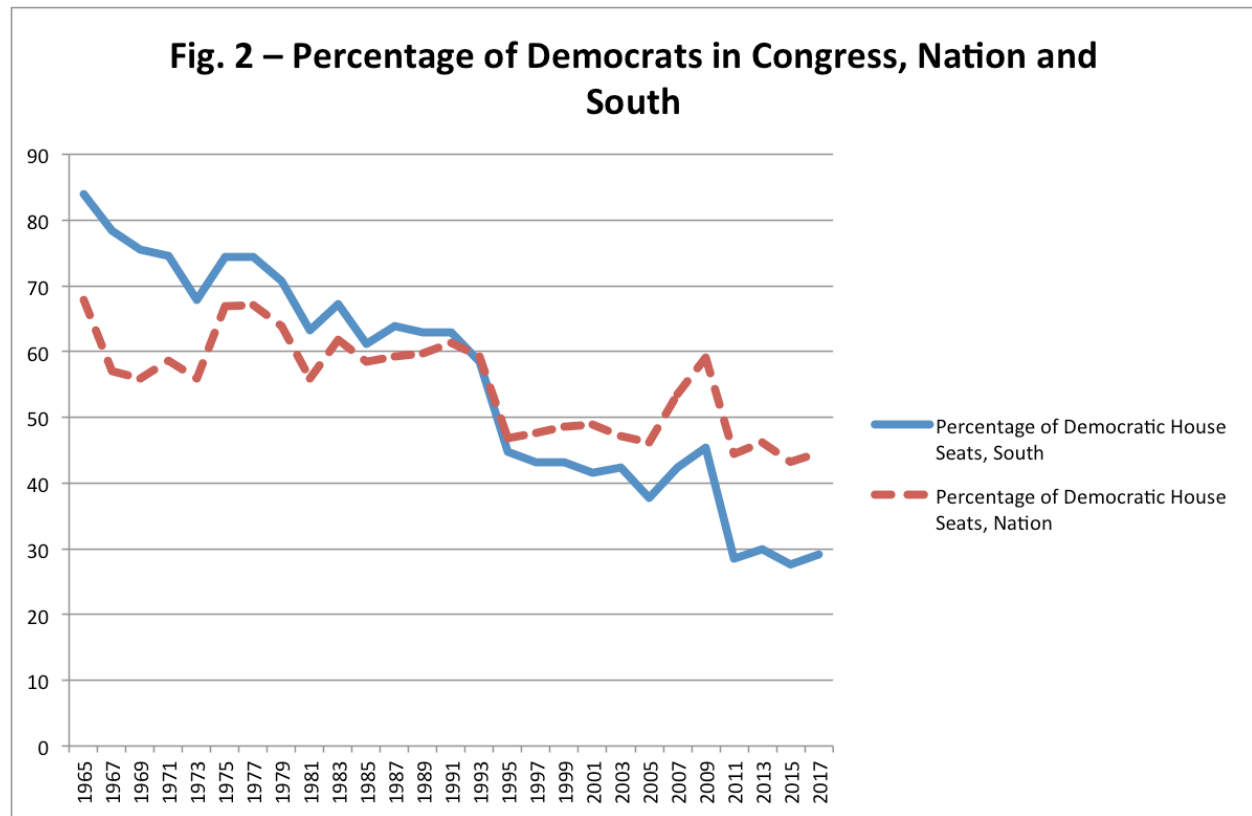
³ Merle Black, "The Transformation of the Southern Democratic Party," *Journal of Politics* 66, no. 4 (November 2004)

⁴ Alexander P. Lamis, *Southern Politics in the 1990s* (Louisiana State University Press, 1999), p. 31

⁵ Data from US Census, US Senate

Following the 1994 elections, Democratic control plummeted to 30.3 percent of statewide offices (Fig. 1) and 43.2 percent of House seats (Fig. 2).⁶ Even with native Arkansan Bill Clinton running at the top of the ticket, support for Southern Democrats for down-ballot offices decreased, and the number of Southern Democrats in office fell dramatically from 1990 to 1996. However, this decline in Democratic state and local control in the South came more than 20 years after the trend had emerged in presidential elections. This means that for two decades, Southern voters were splitting their tickets, voting for Republicans for president, but Democrats for most other offices. This trend raises two important questions: why did Southerners split their tickets for so long, and why did the ultimate shift – the delayed transition – to Republican control at all levels eventually occur?

⁶ Lamis, *Southern Politics in the 1990s*, p. 32



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My hypothesis is twofold. First, I believe that an overlooked factor in scholarship of the Southern realignment is ideological tension. While the South was effectively a one-party region for many years, it was not and is not a one-ideology region. Vigorous policy debates took place in the politics of the Southern states – they just took place within the Democratic primaries rather than in general election contests.⁸ Because of the broad ideological spectrum within the Democratic Party during its years of dominance, I argue that the ultimate shift could not have been driven purely by ideology.

Secondly, I believe that local issues played a key role in the South's shift. In the context of my argument, "local issues" are issues in a state that did not become the subjects

⁷ Source: US House of Representatives

⁸ Numan Bartley and Hugh Graham, *Southern Politics and the Second Reconstruction* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 25

of national ideological debates. For example, busing and school desegregation were Southern issues that became polarizing national debates. Scholars such as Black, Valentino and Sears cite these issues as motivating factors for the South's partisan shift. Fighting busing and integration were causes near and dear to the hearts of Southern Democrats, and in the 1960s, some national Republicans seized them in an effort to win over the South. In doing so, these issues were laid fairly neatly on an ideological scale: those who were generally liberal could be expected to support integration and busing, those who were generally conservative could be expected to oppose them. Additionally, demographics are credited with speeding up the shift. As Northerners moved into Southern cities and the region became less agrarian, Republicans found more fertile ground for their economically conservative message.

Then there are issues that are present in nearly every campaign, but don't fit neatly on an ideological or partisan scale. Sometimes a party primary may include unusually intense intra-party squabbling. Sometimes a candidate may run against a corrupt governor or a corrupt governor's chosen candidate on a pledge to "clean up government." In the South, sometimes there are heated debates over whether to fly a Confederate flag on state property. All of these issues are local or state issues that don't always fit neatly into a Republican-Democrat paradigm. In the South, no ideology has enough support to win an election all by itself (see page 21). Because of this, I believe non-ideological issues could have been an important and even decisive factor in the South's ultimate partisan shift. Viewing the South's shift through a national lens tells only part of the story. Instead, I propose a case study of four Southern states with different partisan histories to look more

closely at how local issues and ideological tension shaped the partisan shift, and to see if any regional patterns emerge.

The four states I intend to look at are Alabama, Arkansas, South Carolina and Virginia – one state from the Outer South and three from the Deep South. Each state was a reliable Democratic vote in presidential elections. However, Virginia was decidedly less so, voting Republican in several landslide elections after Reconstruction. In 1964, two of the four – South Carolina and Alabama – voted for Republican Barry Goldwater, while Virginia and Arkansas stayed with Democrat Lyndon Johnson. None of the four voted Democrat in 1968, as Alabama and Arkansas voted for third-party candidate George Wallace and Virginia and South Carolina supported Republican Richard Nixon.

First Republican Victories in Each State:⁹

	Alabama	Arkansas	South Carolina	Virginia
President	1964	1972	1964	1928
Senator	1980	1996	1966	1972
Governor	1986	1966	1974	1969

Down the ballot, the states varied in when they elected their first Republican senator and governor. Virginia elected a moderate Republican governor in 1969 following the demise of the Byrd Organization, similar to Alabama first electing a Republican governor after the last term of George Wallace. Arkansas also elected a moderate Republican in the 1960s, while South Carolina took until 1974 following a controversial

⁹ Post-Reconstruction

Democratic primary. In the Senate, South Carolina was the first to support a Republican when it reelected former Democrat Strom Thurmond. Virginia followed in 1972, again as the state's Democratic Party struggled to rebuild itself. Alabama elected one Republican in 1980 during the first Reagan landslide, while Arkansas took until 1996 following the retirement of popular Democrat David Pryor.

South Carolina saw party switching begin much earlier than other states, as Senator Strom Thurmond became a Republican in 1964. In the years that followed, Democrats dominated other offices, but fighting within their own ranks as well as weak and controversial candidates allowed Republicans to make inroads in conservative, rural, traditionally Democratic counties.¹⁰ Virginia saw the decline of the powerful Byrd organization, which fractured the Democratic Party and led to the election of Republican Governor Linwood Holton in 1969, followed by a moderate, biracial Democratic coalition developing in the 1980s.¹¹ Virginia was also the first Southern state to swing noticeably back into the Democratic column, as it is currently represented by two Democratic senators and a Democratic governor. Additionally, the Commonwealth voted for President Obama twice, and was the only Southern state to vote for Hillary Clinton in 2016.

In Alabama, the Democratic Party, and therefore the state, was unquestionably ruled by one man: Governor George Corley Wallace. However, the former segregationist moved with the times, as in his 1982 reelection campaign he repudiated his former views, winning 90 percent of the black vote in the general election.¹² Arkansas was dominated statewide by Democrats as late as 2008 – and voted for native son Bill Clinton twice for president.

¹⁰ Lamis, *Southern Politics in the 1990s*, p. 59

¹¹ Lamis, *Southern Politics in the 1990s*, p. 15

¹² Lamis, *Southern Politics in the 1990s*, p. 22

However, it was controlled for years by local county organizations as well as organizations of the “Big Three” politicians of the state – Democrats Dale Bumpers, David Pryor and Bill Clinton – rather than strictly by a party organization.

In the presidential elections that chipped away at the Solid South, these four states voted differently. 1948 saw Alabama and South Carolina cast their votes for Dixiecrat Strom Thurmond – who was listed on the ballot as the Democratic Party candidate – while Virginia and Arkansas stayed with Harry Truman. Alabama, Arkansas and South Carolina never voted for the Republican Eisenhower, while Virginia voted for him both times. Barry Goldwater captured South Carolina and Alabama, but lost Virginia and Arkansas in 1964, becoming the first Republican candidate post-Reconstruction to win in the Deep South. Finally, George Wallace won Alabama and Arkansas in 1968, while Virginia and South Carolina voted for Richard Nixon. That year, none of the four states voted Democratic.

Chapter 2

The South as a Whole

When examining Southern political history, it is important to recognize that there were indeed Southern Republicans even in the age of the Solid Democratic South. Outer South states supported Republican presidential candidates in strong Republican years, such as 1952 and 1956, when the Eisenhower-Nixon ticket carried Virginia, Texas, Florida and Tennessee.¹³ The base of Southern Republicans was a group known as “mountain Republicans” – farmers in the Outer South whose ancestors during the Civil War had opposed secession.¹⁴ As urbanization led to an increase in migrants to the South, many middle- and upper-class suburban and urban dwellers swelled the ranks of the minority party. Ironically, in recent years Southern states such as Virginia and North Carolina have experienced another surge of new residents fitting this profile. This time, however, it has led to increased support for Democratic candidates in those states. Successful Republican candidates were often moderate, particularly on the racial issues that traditionally plagued Southern politics.¹⁵ The ideological makeup of the party began to change in 1964 with the candidacy of Barry Goldwater.

Goldwater, running on a staunchly conservative platform that opposed the Civil Rights Act, was the first Republican to ever win the Deep South. With the exception of Georgia, which Thurmond lost, Goldwater’s Southern victories were a mirror image of Strom Thurmond’s 1948 Dixiecrat candidacy. At the same time as Republicans achieved unprecedented success in the

¹³ Jack Bass and Walter Devries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics* (University of Georgia Press, 1995), p. 26

¹⁴ Bass and Devries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics*, p. 25

¹⁵ Bass and Devries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics*, p. 26

Deep South, their support declined among their traditional base in the mountains.¹⁶ As Southern Republicans began to find success, eschewing moderate coalitions to become more uniformly conservative, Southern Democrats began to shift ideologically as well. This shift and the impact of Barry Goldwater on Southern Republicanism is demonstrated by votes to renew the 1965 Voting Rights Act, which was opposed by Southern Democrats during its original passage. In 1975, two-thirds of Southern Democratic representatives voted for the law's extension. At the same time, two-thirds of Southern Republicans voted against it.¹⁷ The two parties in the South had realigned.

Existing scholarship on the shifting partisan identification of the South largely focuses on ideology and demographic trends. Earl and Merle Black cite a diversifying economy as driving the development of two-party competition. As the South urbanized, many city-dwelling middle to upper class voters found a home with the Republican Party, giving it newfound life in the region.¹⁸

Additionally, they cite Ronald Reagan as a powerful influence. While Richard Nixon swept the South in 1972, his Watergate scandal and subsequent resignation allowed much of the South to swing back into the Democratic column in 1976 – voting for native Southerner Jimmy Carter. Under President Reagan, Black and Black find that under Reagan, more and more conservative and moderate white Southerners began to consider themselves Republicans – the number nearly doubled.¹⁹ Many who still considered themselves independents or conservative

¹⁶ Bass and Devries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics*, p. 28

¹⁷ Bass and Devries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics*, p. 38

¹⁸ Merle Black and Earl Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans* (Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 23

¹⁹ Black and Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans*, p. 26

Democrats nonetheless supported Reagan. Reagan's impact continued in 1988, as George H.W. Bush carried the entire South – all by larger margins than Reagan in 1980.²⁰

Another issue that saw a great deal of change in the South, and in turn affected partisan realignment, was race. Race issues are credited with driving Southern whites out of the Democratic Party. An old story, possibly apocryphal, says that after President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, he turned to an aide and said “we just lost the South for a generation.”²¹ The enfranchisement of Southern blacks via the Voting Rights Act of 1965 changed the party's face. Following the VRA, Southern blacks reliably supported the Democratic Party, while at the same time, the percentage of Southern whites, particularly men, who identified as Democrats began to plummet.²² Sears and Valentino conclude, “Racial conservatism has become more tightly linked to both Republican presidential voting and party identification in the South.”²³ Southern Democrats in Congress responded to the influx of black Southern Democrats accordingly. While only a third of House Southern Democrats supported federal voting rights legislation in 1965, that number had skyrocketed to over 90 percent by 1981 – far outpacing Southern House Republicans who supported the same legislation.²⁴

²⁰ Black and Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans*, p. 26

²¹ Nichols, When the Republicans Really Were the Party of Lincoln, *The Nation*

²² Merle Black, “The Transformation of the Southern Democratic Party,” *Journal of Politics* 66, no. 4 (November 2004)

²³ Nicholas A. Valentino and David O. Sears, “Old Times There Are Not Forgotten: Race and Partisan Realignment in the Contemporary South,” *American Journal of Political Science* 49, no. 3 (July 2005)

²⁴ James Lea, *Contemporary Southern Politics* (Louisiana State University Press, 1988), p. 187

Chapter 3

The Southern Strategy

In the 1968 presidential election, Richard Nixon and the Republican Party made a conscious effort to appeal to Southerners on racial issues. Nixon promised to maintain Goldwater's "state's rights" policies on racial issues while meeting with South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond in Atlanta.²⁵ With the staunchly segregationist Wallace showing surprisingly broad appeal, Nixon made a play for his voters, speaking in favor of "slow-walking" busing and school desegregation while touting "law and order" issues.²⁶ This campaign, as well as the Republican Party's "Operation Dixie" effort to recruit more segregationist candidates, was the beginning of what was known as the Southern Strategy.

The Southern Strategy was a top-down push for the Republican Party to become competitive in the South. It was a strategy made up of both rhetoric and policy. Astrup characterizes it as a two-pronged approach to appeal to two powerful voting blocs in the South. Republicans advocated conservative economic values on taxes and spending to appeal to the burgeoning group of wealthy, educated, city-dwelling Southerners – a group known as the New South, which geographically was mostly concentrated in the Outer South. At the same time, Republican candidates spoke out in favor of racially and socially conservative values – "family values" issues such as abortion and prayer, and racial issues such as busing and school desegregation – in an effort to win over the traditionally

²⁵ Joseph Astrup, *The Southern Strategy Revisited* (The University Press of Kentucky, 2015), p. 18

²⁶ Reg Murphy and Hal Gulliver, *The Southern Strategy* (Scribner, 1971), p. 24

Democratic, working class, and less educated Southerners – the Old South, which was almost synonymous with the Deep South.²⁷

In 1964, Barry Goldwater made a strong push for Old South voters, remarking “we’re not going to win the Negro vote, so we might as well go hunting where the ducks are.”²⁸ In that election, the ducks were in Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Georgia and Alabama, all of which supported Goldwater after never voting for a Republican before.²⁹ However, Goldwater was unable to forge a winning coalition with New South voters, losing the Outer South. In the following presidential election, Republican Richard Nixon, while winning the election, had the reverse problem in the South; he won over New South voters, but the presence of the segregationist Southerner Wallace prevented him from winning the Old South.³⁰ Once in office, however, Nixon opposed busing, spoke out in favor of “law and order,” and criticized the welfare system – all of which had the effect of implicitly invoking the issue of race.³¹ The strategy worked – Nixon unified the Old and New South in an electoral landslide in 1972. It continued through the Reagan years, as Reagan announced his candidacy in Philadelphia, Mississippi – the town where three civil rights activists were murdered. Reagan said, “I believe in states’ rights,” and campaigned on a solidly conservative economic platform, while at the same time appealing to religious groups on conservative social issues, continuing the success of Nixon.³²

²⁷ Astrup, *The Southern Strategy Revisited*, p. 22

²⁸ Astrup, *The Southern Strategy Revisited*, p. 30

²⁹ “Never before” here refers to modern political history, as some of the states voted Republican while under military governorship during Reconstruction

³⁰ Astrup, *The Southern Strategy Revisited*, p. 32

³¹ Astrup, *The Southern Strategy Revisited*, p. 36-37

³² Astrup, *The Southern Strategy Revisited*, p. 48-49

The top-down effort extended beyond merely running candidates. In 1970, national Republican officials courted segregationist Georgia Governor Lester Maddox, a Democrat, to switch parties and become a Republican.³³ Maddox ultimately declined. When the wave finally trickled down to local offices in the 1994 Republican wave, Lamis credits national Republicans like Newt Gingrich, a Southern congressman, for emphasizing conservative economic issues and attacking President Clinton's failed health care overhaul, as well as blaming the "counterculture. Both of these, Lamis argues, appealed to Southern voters, who generally speaking were culturally and economically conservative.³⁴

³³ Murphy and Gulliver, *The Southern Strategy*, p. 4

³⁴ Lamis, *Southern Politics in the 1990s*, p. 43

Chapter 4

Congressional Power

Congressional Southern Democrats had a practical reason to remain within the party of their fathers for so long. Over the years, thanks to the seniority system in the House and the Senate, Southerners had built up clout and influence in Congress far beyond the area's comparatively meager population and representation. The lack of serious general election challenges meant that for the most part, when Southern Democrats went to Congress, they stayed in Congress. These Southerners therefore developed seniority, and the opportunity to chair powerful committees. In the 1960s, when Democrats consistently held a majority in the House and Senate, Southerners never held fewer than 57 percent of congressional committee chairs – yet at the same time, they never held more than 40 percent of the seats in the House Democratic Caucus.³⁵

In the early 1970s, this strong influence began to wane for two reasons. The first was a series of congressional reforms that decentralized and redistributed power from committees to subcommittees, and subsequently limited the number of subcommittee chairmanships any one member was allowed to hold.³⁶ At the same time, those Southern Democrats who had built up such seniority and power in Congress began to retire, lose primaries, or die off. Therefore, new entrants into politics in Southern states had another factor to consider: both in the South and once in Congress, being a Democrat simply did not carry as much weight as it once did.

³⁵ C.S Bullock III, "The South in Congress," *Contemporary Southern Politics* (Louisiana State University Press, 1988), p. 179

³⁶ Bullock, "The South in Congress," *Contemporary Southern Politics* (Louisiana State University Press, 1988), p. 181

Chapter 5

Partisan vs. Ideology Self-Identification

An important distinction must be made when discussing historical partisan identification – both in the South and elsewhere. Democrat did not always necessarily mean liberal, and Republican did not always necessarily mean conservative. For years, both parties had a rich tradition of differing ideologies – the Republicans had a strong foothold with liberal New Englanders, and the Democrats with conservative Southerners. Data from the General Social Survey demonstrate how ideology and partisanship historically have not necessarily overlapped.³⁷ From 1972 until 1986, a majority of the country – 53.6 percent – said that they thought of themselves as Democrats.³⁸ Yet only 25.7 percent said that their political views were liberal. An overwhelming majority – 69.4 percent – described themselves as either moderate or conservative.³⁹ The country's majority party may have been Democratic, but the majority ideology in the country and in the party was certainly not liberal.

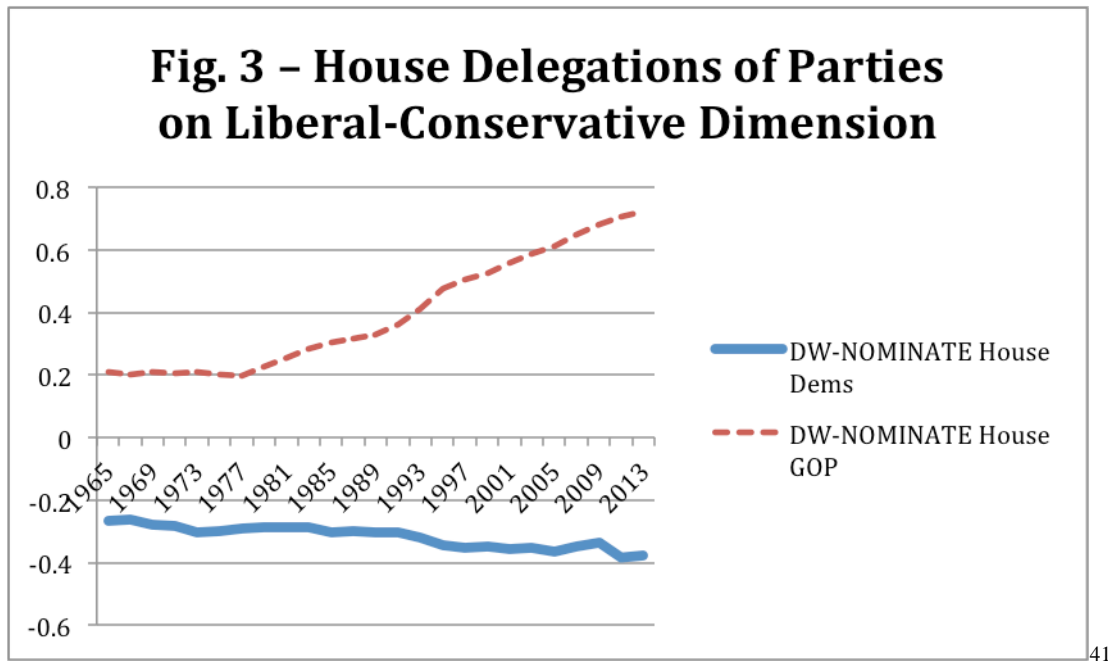
Over time, polarization of the two parties increased. On a liberal-conservative dimension (Fig. 3), the DW-NOMINATE scores for each party's House delegation steadily marched toward the political poles, although the Republican Party moved much further to

³⁷ The GSS is an annual sociological survey in the United States that asks, among other things, questions about individuals' political ideology and partisan affiliation.

³⁸ The General Social Survey, 1972-1986, p. 134

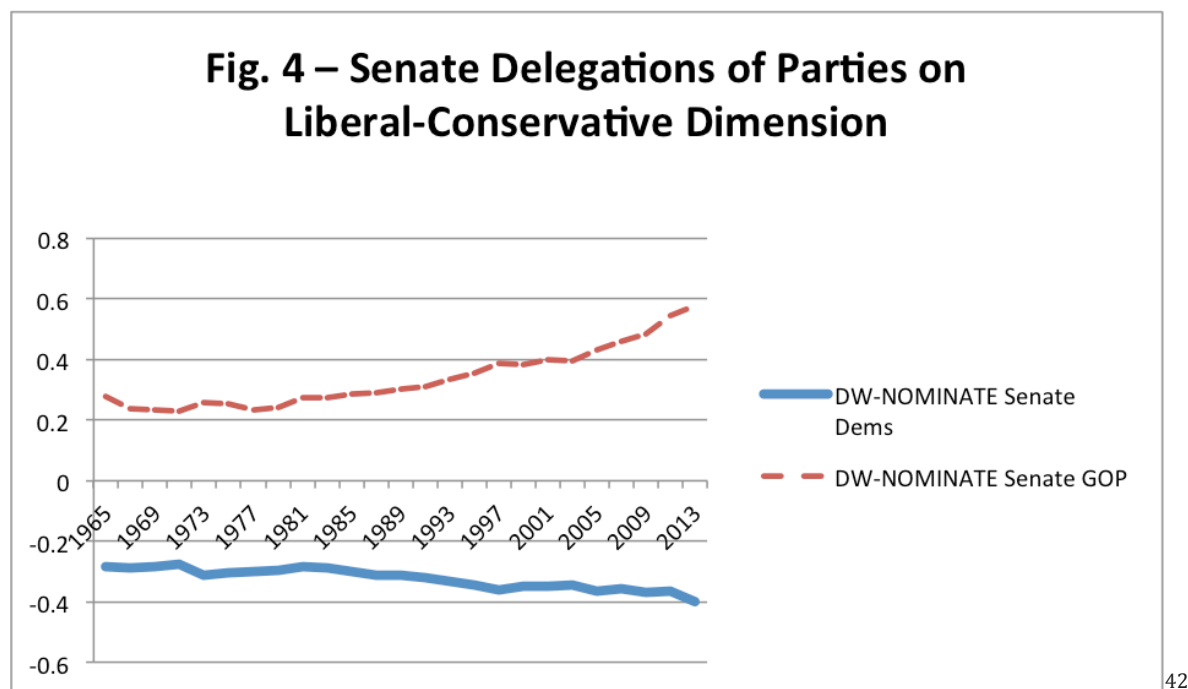
³⁹ General Social Survey, 1972-1986, p. 135

the right than the Democratic Party did to the left. The parties' Senate delegations saw a similar trend (Fig. 4).⁴⁰



⁴⁰ On a scale of -1 to 1, can be interpreted as an ideological scale. A DW-NOMINATE score of -1 is very liberal, a score of 1 is very conservative.

⁴¹ Data Source: "The Polarization of the Congressional Parties." VoteView.com, <http://voteview.com/Political Polarization 2014.htm>



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When examining trends of Southern Democrats over the same time period, an interesting trend emerges. While Southern Democrats also became decidedly more liberal, both in the House (Fig. 5) and Senate (Fig. 6), they have also consistently been more conservative than the national Democratic Party, particularly in the Senate. In other words, what was true in 1965 remained true over time – a Southern Democrat does not always look like a national Democrat. However, an important caveat demonstrated by the data is that while Southern Democrats remained more conservative than the national party, over time their ideology moved far closer to that of the national party.

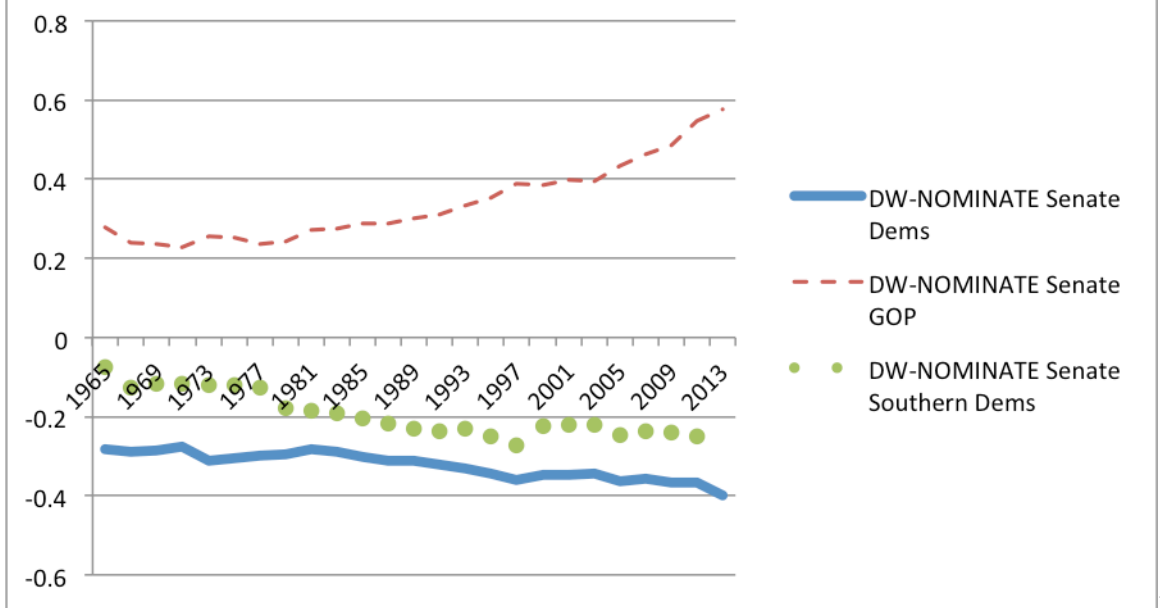
⁴² Data Source: “The Polarization of the Congressional Parties.” VoteView.com, <http://voteview.com/Political Polarization 2014.htm>

Fig. 5 – House Southern Democrat Ideology



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Fig. 6 – Senate Southern Democrat Ideology

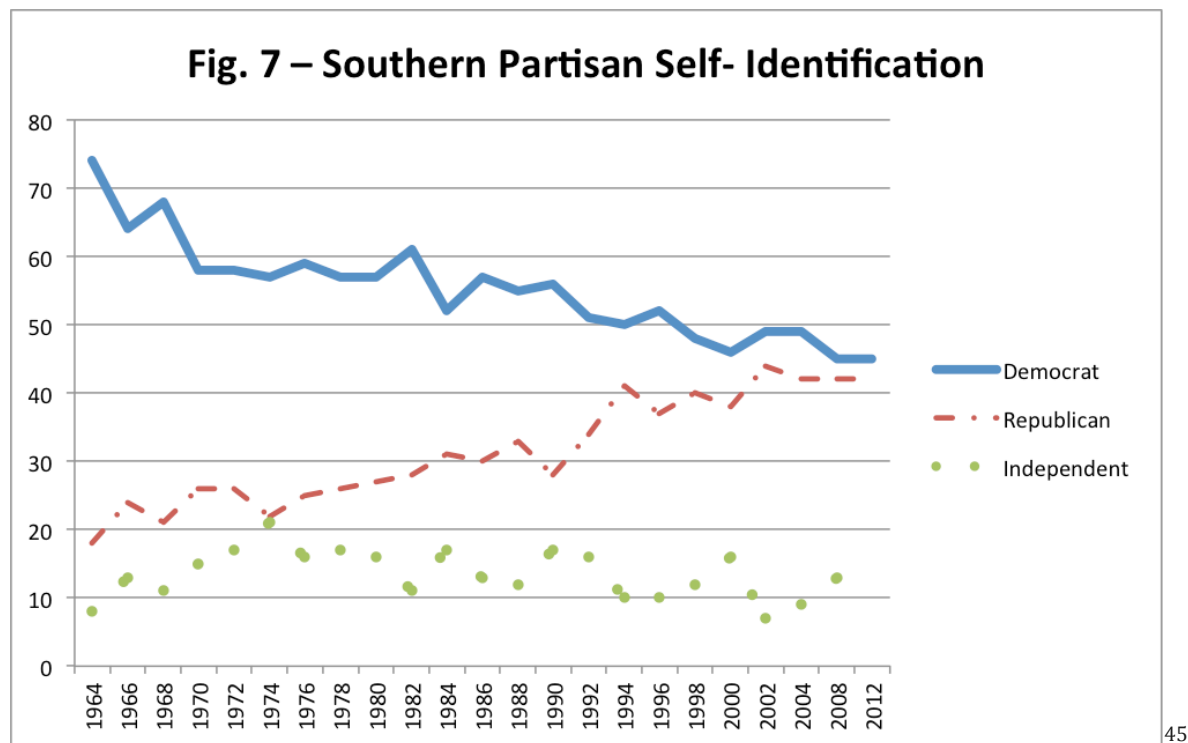


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⁴³ Data Source: "The Polarization of the Congressional Parties." VoteView.com, <http://voteview.com/Political Polarization 2014.htm>

⁴⁴ Data Source: "The Polarization of the Congressional Parties." VoteView.com, <http://voteview.com/Political Polarization 2014.htm>

At the same time that elected Southern Democrats were becoming more liberal, while remaining more conservative than national Democrats, a shift in partisan identification was taking place among Southerners. Southerners were rapidly leaving the Democratic Party, and more and more were identifying as Republicans (Fig. 7).



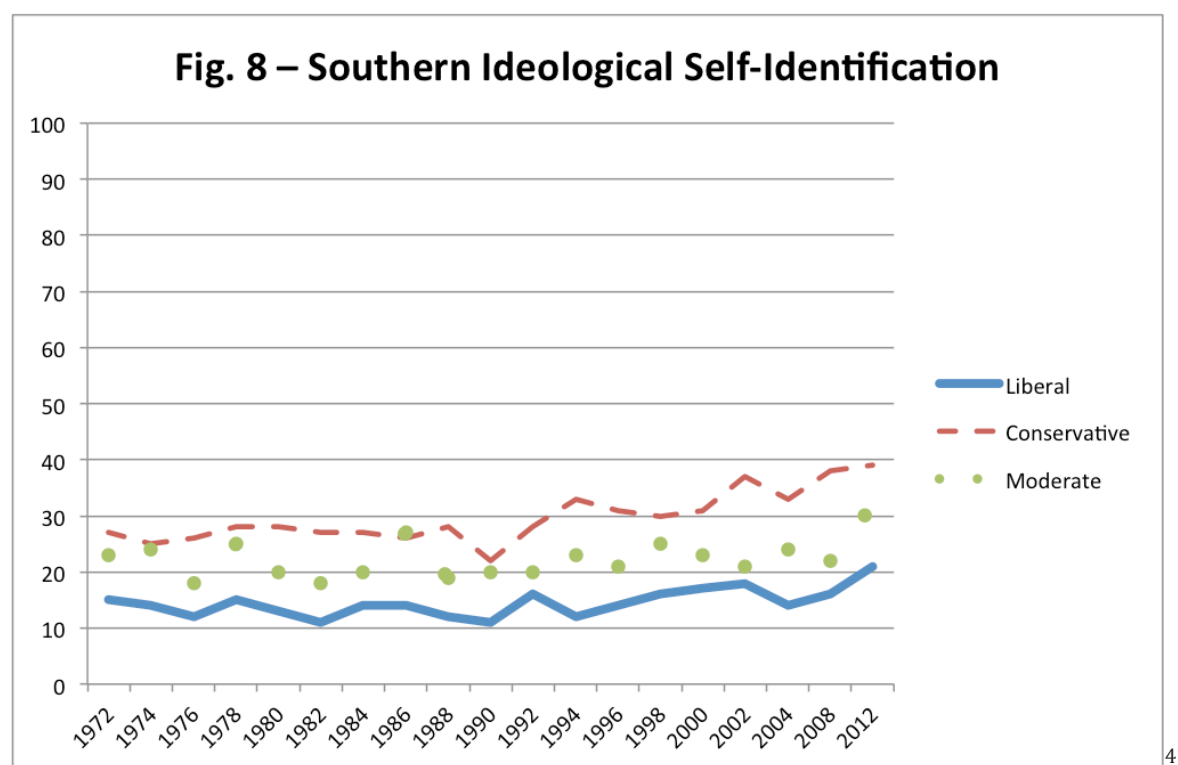
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It is important to note, and I believe is usually overlooked, that this major partisan shift was not accompanied by a major ideological shift. Even as Southerners became dramatically more Republican, ideologies among Southerners remained relatively consistent (Fig. 8). Additionally, a plurality of Southerners still claims allegiance to the Democratic Party.⁴⁶ Despite a strong culture of organized religion and economic conservatism from its politicians, the South is not, and has never been, a majority

⁴⁵ The American National Election Studies (www.electionstudies.org). THE ANES GUIDE TO PUBLIC OPINION AND ELECTORAL BEHAVIOR. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, Center for Political Studies

⁴⁶ The American National Election Studies (www.electionstudies.org). THE ANES GUIDE TO PUBLIC OPINION AND ELECTORAL BEHAVIOR. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, Center for Political Studies

conservative region. Generally speaking, the GSS has found a plurality of Southerners calls themselves conservative, though the number identifying themselves as moderates has occasionally outpaced conservatives. While that plurality increased over time, it did not do so dramatically. In fact, during the 1990s, the decade in which Southern Democrats suffered their most significant down-ballot losses, the percentage of Southerners self-identifying as moderates or liberals rose, while the percentage self-identifying as conservatives actually went down. In other words, Southerners did not become more Republican because they became more conservative. The people were not changing, but their partisan identification was.



⁴⁷ The American National Election Studies (www.electionstudies.org). THE ANES GUIDE TO PUBLIC OPINION AND ELECTORAL BEHAVIOR. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, Center for Political Studies

Without a shift in ideology among Southerners, there are two possible explanations for this partisan shift. One is that as the Republican Party became dramatically more conservative (Figs. 3, 4), Southerners saw that it better represented their ideological views. Another is that other, non-ideological factors affected the region's partisan shift – in other words, what I refer to as “local issues.” It is difficult to prove definitively which of these hypotheses explains the partisan shift of the South. However, I argue that a flaw in the ideological consolidation theory is that according to the GSS, conservatives have never been a majority in the South. In fact, they have never made up more than 40 percent of Southerners. Additionally, the fact that elected Southern Democrats have remained more conservative than their national counterparts suggests that they were not necessarily voted out of office on the basis of their ideology.

Chapter 6

Ideological Tension

Each state I profile had ideological tension within the Democratic Party during the days of the Solid South – tension that continued as the states moved toward competitive two-party systems. In the days before George Wallace formed a white, conservative Democratic Party in the state, Alabama had a remarkable populist streak, in part driven by organized labor. Their congressional delegation in the 1930s mostly supported Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal, none more ardently than Senator and future Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black.⁴⁸ In the 1940s, outspoken populist Jim Folsom was elected governor. Standing six feet, eight inches tall, “Big Jim” was known as “the little man’s big friend,” and bear-hugged labor en route to a surprising victory.⁴⁹ Despite this populist tradition, Alabama’s

⁴⁸ Robert J. Norrell, “Labor at the Ballot Box: Alabama Politics from the New Deal to the Dixiecrat Movement,” *The Journal of Southern History* 57, no. 2 (May 1991) p. 206

⁴⁹ Norrell, *Labor at the Ballot Box*, p. 230

appetite for liberalism had its limits. While in office, Folsom made a concerted effort to register black Alabamians to vote.⁵⁰ This played a significant role in his later defeat at the hands of his protégé George Wallace, who vowed after an earlier losing campaign to “never be out-niggered again.”⁵¹ Even in Wallace’s own career there was ideological tension. Early on, his coalition resembled a traditionally conservative, white Southern Democratic one. Toward the end, notably after passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, he brought liberals and African Americans into the fold.⁵²

While the Big Three of Arkansas politics (see page 26) could be accurately described as moderate, New South Democrats, they were by no means representative of the entire state. Arkansas’ Democratic Party, like that of other Southern states, boasted successful politicians who ran the ideological gamut from the populist progressive Dale Bumpers, who cast votes in the Senate against bills allowing school prayer and outlawing flag burning, to the segregationist Governor Orval Faubus, whose defiance of *Brown v. Board of Education* plunged Little Rock into violent racial unrest. In Arkansas, this ideological tension was also historically sectional tension. Dividing the state in a diagonal line from the northeastern to southwestern corners produces the two distinct regions of Arkansas politics. Voters in the southern part of the state – the Delta region – tended to be much more conservative.⁵³ This was the area of the state that prior to the Civil War was dotted with sprawling cotton

⁵⁰ Norrell, *Labor at the Ballot Box*, p. 231

⁵¹ Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (Simon & Schuster, 1995)

⁵² Bass and Devries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics*, p. 69

⁵³ Robert L. Savage and Richard J. Gallagher, “Politicocultural Regions in a Southern State: An Empirical Typology of Arkansas Counties

plantations. In the north, in urban areas like Little Rock as well as the Ozark Mountains, progressive populism found fertile ground where cotton did not.

Perhaps more than any other state, Arkansas voters saw no issue electing officials from broadly differing, even diametrically opposed points of view. They simultaneously elected and reelected Senator J. William Fulbright who, while a relatively quiet segregationist, was also a liberal internationalist, and the archconservative, race-baiting Faubus. The best example of this came in 1968. That year, Arkansas reelected the Democrat Fulbright, reelected Republican Governor Winthrop Rockefeller, and cast its presidential votes for Independent George Wallace.

Virginia is a curious case, ideologically speaking, and it is that way partially due to in-migration. In recent years, it has seen the migration of a large number of transplants from outside the South into the Washington, DC suburbs. Less than half of Virginians today were born in the Commonwealth, and only an additional ten percent were born in other Southern states – compared to 1960, when 82 percent of Virginians were native Southerners.⁵⁴ This change in backgrounds of the residents has corresponded with a change in the Commonwealth's politics – Virginia is the only Southern state to boast a Democratic governor and two Democratic senators. The result of this is ideological tension between the metropolitan, liberal suburbs of Washington, DC and conservative rural areas, but the tension is nothing new. The suburbs were already growing during the era of Harry Byrd's "Massive Resistance" to integration, and they had no appetite for shutting down

⁵⁴ Aisch, Gregor, Robert Gebeloff and Kevin Quealy. "Where We Came From and Where We Went, State by State." *New York Times*, August 2014.

their schools rather than integrating them.⁵⁵ These suburbs, and the other cities that made up the “urban corridor” of the state, routinely voted for conservative Byrd Organization candidates at far lower rates than the rest of the state, creating a political problem for Byrd, and ideological tension for the Democratic Party.⁵⁶

Chapter 7

Alabama

Alabama’s politics from the 1960s onward can be divided between pre- and post-George Wallace eras. From 1962 until 1986, Wallace controlled the governor’s mansion of the state in his own right or by proxy – in 1966, unable to succeed himself due to term limits, his wife Lurleen ran in his stead on a platform to “let George do it.” The power and popularity of Wallace meant that little opposition could gain a foothold – both within the Democratic Party and the virtually nonexistent Republican Party in the state.⁵⁷ This stymying of electoral competition is the chief explanation for the long delay in Alabama’s Republican Party’s rise to prominence. In the years bookended by Wallace’s terms as governor – between 1963 and 1987 – only two Republicans were elected as Governor or

⁵⁵ J. Harvie Wilkinson III, *Harry Byrd and the Changing Face of Virginia Politics* (University Press of Virginia, 1968), p. 172

⁵⁶ Wilkinson, *Harry Byrd and the Changing Face of Virginia Politics*, p. 197

⁵⁷ Bullock and Rozell, *New Politics of the Old South*, p. 73

Senator in Alabama. Republican Senator Jeremiah Denton served one term after winning in the 1980 Reagan landslide, and Guy Hunt was elected Governor to replace Wallace in 1986. Of the 11 statewide elections won by Democrats during this time period, the average margin of victory was 41.43 points.⁵⁸

The role of Wallace's influence in Alabama's partisan identification cannot be overstated. Following 1964, conditions appeared ripe for Republicans to become competitive in Alabama. Barry Goldwater won the state with nearly 70 percent of the vote, making significant gains among rural and conservative whites – groups in the state that were traditionally Democratic.⁵⁹ In the years that followed, Wallace shifted his political tactics and, ultimately, his political coalition. He curried favor with labor unions, and even began a process of racial reconciliation, earning endorsements of several black elected officials.⁶⁰

When the state ultimately elected a Republican senator, it came in 1980 on the coattails of Ronald Reagan's impressive performance in carrying the state. Yet the election of Republican Jeremiah Denton led to another example of local events shaping the election. Denton was defeated for reelection after being criticized for long absences from the state – he explained he “had more important things to do than to come back to Alabama and kiss babies' butts.”⁶¹

At the same time, Republican Guy Hunt was elected to the governor's mansion. Much like South Carolina's first elected Republican governor, this came after a bitter Democratic primary had fractured the party. Attorney General Charles Graddick had won,

⁵⁸ Data from US Election Atlas

⁵⁹ Bass and Devries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics*, p. 79

⁶⁰ Bass and Devries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics*, p. 69

⁶¹ Bullock and Rozell, *New Politics of the Old South*, p. 77

but after the election it was discovered that he had encouraged Republicans to vote in the Democratic Primary. As a result, the state committee nominated the runner-up – Lieutenant Governor Bill Baxley.

Chapter 8

Arkansas

Of the four states profiled, Arkansas had perhaps the strongest Democratic tradition. It did not vote for a Republican until 1972. Its first Republican senator did not come until the mid 1990s, and its state legislature did not fall to the GOP until the 2000s. One office where Republicans did have early success was the governor's mansion, as Republican Winthrop Rockefeller captured the office in 1966. Winthrop Rockefeller, however, was no typical Republican, and 1966 was no typical race. In the first place, while Arkansas, like much of the South, was ancestrally Democratic and viewed Republicans as outsiders and carpetbaggers, Rockefeller undercut this narrative. He had already been in business in the state for a decade, and had created hundreds of businesses and thousands of jobs for the

state.⁶² Additionally, the 1965 Voting Rights Act left the state's black population eligible to vote, and over 70 percent supported Rockefeller.

To the extent that Rockefeller's win can be credited to issues, they were quintessentially local ones. Polls in the state showed voters were concerned about education, roads and bridges, and employment.⁶³ There was a fourth issue at hand, as well. Rockefeller's likely Democratic opponent at first was former Governor Orval Faubus, who had served six terms in office and was infamous for his role in the Little Rock integration crisis. While Faubus ultimately did not run, Rockefeller successfully cast himself as running against his Democratic machine, which voters worried had sown racial unrest and could harm the state's image and community.⁶⁴ Years later, Rockefeller would attribute his victory to Arkansans "voting against a system that they had wearied of."⁶⁵ After being reelected over another segregationist Democrat, Rockefeller's time in office came to an end as voters tired of his fights with the legislature and his alcoholism.⁶⁶ His loss came in a landslide at the hands of Dale Bumpers, and a new era in Arkansas politics began.

The next several decades in Arkansas were marked by the power of the "Big Three" – Democrats Bumpers, Bill Clinton, and David Pryor. The Big Three were not invincible – they lost several races, including some crushing upsets. In general, however, they were highly effective governors and senators, and formidable politicians. In a 24-year span during which many of the other states profiled here saw the gradual shift to Republican control, the Democratic Big Three ran for statewide office 36 times and won 34 times,

⁶² Diane D. Blair and Jay Barth, *Arkansas Politics and Government* (University of Nebraska Press, 1988), p. 67

⁶³ John L. Ward, *The Arkansas Rockefeller* (Louisiana State University Press, 1978), p. 52

⁶⁴ Ward, *The Arkansas Rockefeller*, p. 56

⁶⁵ Ward, *The Arkansas Rockefeller*, p. 65

⁶⁶ Blair and Barth, *Arkansas Politics and Government*, p. 68

capturing an average of over 60 percent of the vote each time.⁶⁷ This came even as Arkansas began to reliably vote Republican for president, save for native son Clinton in 1992 and 1996. Blair suggests that the personal popularity of the Big Three helped to continue the popularity of the Democratic brand for many other Arkansas Democrats.⁶⁸

Chapter 9

South Carolina

Among the four states under consideration here, South Carolina experienced perhaps the earliest and eventually most thorough shift toward the Republican Party. In 1964, former Governor and then-Senator Strom Thurmond became the first Southern statewide elected official to switch parties and become a Republican. Popular memory of this seismic political event says that Thurmond – the former nominee of the segregationist States' Rights Democratic Party in 1948 – was motivated by two national events: the passage of the Civil Rights Act and the presidential candidacy of Senator Barry Goldwater.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Diane D. Blair, “The Big Three of Late Twentieth-Century Arkansas Politics: Dale Bumpers, Bill Clinton, and David Pryor,” *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (Spring 1995), p. 65

⁶⁸ Blair, “The Big Three of Late Twentieth-Century Arkansas Politics: Dale Bumpers, Bill Clinton and David Pryor”

⁶⁹ Charles Bullock and Mark Rozell, *New Politics of the Old South* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), p. 27

This is partially true, as Thurmond consulted Goldwater on his eventual decision and bitterly denounced the Civil Rights Act on numerous occasions.⁷⁰

However, local considerations in South Carolina both influenced Strom Thurmond's decision and prevented other Southern Democrats who shared his philosophy from also joining the Republican Party, even as Alabama and Mississippi's delegations walked out of the 1964 Democratic National Convention. Thurmond was up for reelection in 1966, and expected to face popular Governor Donald Russell in the Democratic primary. At the same time, the state legislature passed a bill that essentially banned Republicans and those attending Republican precinct events from voting in the Democratic primary.⁷¹ At a time when Goldwater fever was sweeping the state, the result would have been a Democratic primary electorate that was much less conservative, and therefore more hospitable to the moderate Russell. It was simply easier for Thurmond to be reelected by running as a Republican.

While Thurmond was unable to bring his fellow Southern senators with him into the GOP, he did bring many of his fellow South Carolinians into the fold to support his reelection. He was not, however, able to bring many elected officials in the state into the GOP along with him – a majority of the state's congressional delegation remained Democratic, another Republican senator wouldn't be elected until 2004, and a Republican governor wouldn't be elected for a decade. Many voters in South Carolina supported Thurmond while continuing to vote for local Democrats due to the stranglehold the Democratic "courthouse crowd" ⁷² had on local offices.⁷³ While it was easier for him to win

⁷⁰ Joseph Crespino, *Strom Thurmond's America* (Hill and Wang, 2013), p. 178

⁷¹ Crespino, *Strom Thurmond's America*, p. 180

⁷² Crespino, *Strom Thurmond's America*, p. 179

reelection as a Republican, he could not rely solely on Republican votes. As a result, Thurmond had to do some rather awkward political maneuvering as practically the only high-profile Republican in the state. This included encouraging local Republican candidates in the 1964 election to focus on winning the state for Goldwater rather than on trying to win office themselves – a move that ensured no animosity toward Thurmond among the “courthouse crowd” Democrats, but irritated the small but growing contingent of South Carolina Republicans.⁷⁴

Thurmond continued to be easily reelected, and Richard Nixon carried the state in his 1972 landslide. Other South Carolina Republicans, however, were unable for quite some time to gain a foothold in elected office. In fact, Republicans did not even hold a statewide primary until 1974.⁷⁵ This was largely due to the ability of the state Democratic Party to knit together a coalition keeping working-class, racially conservative whites in the party while at the same time expanding their outreach to the state’s substantial black population.⁷⁶ In 1974, the state elected its first Republican governor since Reconstruction – yet this was less due to Republican ascendancy than to Democratic incompetence. The state Supreme Court ruled that the Democratic nominee – Charles “Pug” Ravenel – did not meet the state’s residency requirements, struck his name from the ballot and ordered a new candidate chosen. In a convention, Democrats chose William Jennings Bryan Dorn as a

⁷³ Crespino defines this as the Democratic network of local elected officials and activists.

⁷⁴ Crespino, *Strom Thurmond’s America*, p. 182

⁷⁵ Gregory Berke Sampson, *The Rise of the New Republican Party in South Carolina* (Proquest Dissertations Publishing, 1984), p. 652

⁷⁶ Sampson, *The Rise of the New Republican Party in South Carolina*, p. 673

replacement candidate. This process fractured the party and led to the election of Republican Governor James Edwards.⁷⁷

In the mid-1980s South Carolina again elected a Republican governor, Carroll Campbell, after a bitter and divisive Democratic primary. He proved to be a popular, conservative governor, and was easily reelected. Yet this reelection was also driven in part by local concerns. Democrats nominated Theo Mitchell, a black state senator. Beyond the implicit racial issue of a black nominee, he made public comments about blacks supporting Campbell – calling them “house Negroes” and “uncle Toms,” explicitly injecting race into the campaign.⁷⁸ The state’s last Democratic governor, Jim Hodges, was elected in 1998, following Republican incumbent David Beasley’s mishandling of a local issue – the Confederate flag flying over the state Capitol. First Beasley said it should remain flying, then said it should be taken down, then said it should be taken down but put back up above a Confederate memorial. On this truly local issue, Beasley managed to anger nearly all sides – with the NAACP threatening a boycott and angry whites selling bumper stickers reading “Dump the Governor – Keep the Flag.”⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Sampson, *The Rise of the New Republican Party in South Carolina*, p. 680

⁷⁸ Bullock and Rozell, *New Politics of the Old South*, p. 31

⁷⁹ Bullock and Rozell, *New Politics of the Old South*, p. 35

Chapter 10

Virginia

At first glance, Virginia appears to be a bit of a paradoxical case. More than any other state, it had a powerful, top-down Democratic organization – even more so than Wallace’s Alabama. The Byrd Organization held a stranglehold of control on virtually all state offices for decades, handpicked nominees, and enjoyed little opposition within the party.⁸⁰ Yet at the same time, it cast its presidential votes for the Republicans more often than many other Southern states. While these factors may seem to be contradictory, they actually reinforced

⁸⁰ Ronald Heinemann, *Harry Byrd of Virginia* (University Press of Virginia, 1996), p. 97

one another. Harry Flood Byrd, Sr., the dean of Virginia politics during the 1940s and 50s, controlled the state's Democratic Party, and reliably shepherded Democratic gubernatorial and senate candidates to victory.

At the same time, however, Byrd displayed a "golden silence" on presidential races beginning with Harry Truman in 1948.⁸¹ In doing so, he gave Virginia Democrats tacit approval to split their tickets, and support a Republican presidential nominee. In fact, from 1952 until 2004, only one Democratic presidential candidate would carry the Commonwealth of Virginia – Southerner Lyndon B. Johnson.

Byrd's opposition to Truman and other national Democrats was borne largely out of his opposition to civil rights legislation. He took a leading role on the issue, infamously urging "massive resistance" and closing several county school districts in response to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. The presence of the hot-button race issue allowed the Byrd Organization to hold onto control of the state through much of the 1960s.⁸² By the end of the decade, however, the death of the senior Byrd and the reluctance of his son to take over led to an exceptionally weak Democratic Party.

In 1969, after a three-way war for control of the Democratic Party among liberals, moderates and organization conservatives, Linwood Holton became the first Republican in a century to win Virginia's governorship.⁸³ Holton's win came on the back of what was at the time the third largest turnout in state history, as well as a strong performance in the growing urban corridor.⁸⁴ Continued Democratic infighting and increased influence of

⁸¹ Heinemann, *Harry Byrd of Virginia*, p. 262

⁸² Heinemann, *Harry Byrd of Virginia*, p. 335

⁸³ Neal Peirce, *The Border South States* (Norton, 1975), p. 57

⁸⁴ Weldon Cooper and Thomas R. Morris, *Virginia Government and Politics* (University Press of Virginia, 1976), p. 132

liberals led to many elected officials and voters loyal to the organization jumping ship to the Republican Party. Ultimately, Republicans controlled Virginia's governorship, both Senate seats and a majority of the House delegation.⁸⁵

In 1981, Chuck Robb provided a blueprint for Democratic success in Virginia by winning the governorship running as a fiscal conservative and social progressive. Robb's success in the governor's mansion, particularly on intrinsically local issues such as a prosperous state economy and increased investment in educations, provided a pathway for Democrats to dominate Virginia's governorship in the 1980s, even as the popularity of President Ronald Reagan pulled the country to the right. This stable of Democrats included L. Douglas Wilder – the first African American ever to be elected governor in the United States.⁸⁶

However, in the 1993 governor's election, Republican candidate George Allen put an end to the Democrats' monopoly. In the campaign, he repeatedly attacked former governors Wilder and Robb, who had each grown less popular in later years.⁸⁷ At the same time, Democratic candidate Mary Sue Terry faced an image problem of her own. As an unmarried woman, she was subject to implications from Republicans in the state that she was a lesbian, which harmed her reputation with the state's generally conservative population. Among voters who said the most important quality in a candidate was a "good family life," the married father Allen won over 90 percent of the vote.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Bullock and Rozell, *New Politics of the Old South*, p. 126

⁸⁶ While P.B.S. Pinchback was appointed Governor of Louisiana during Reconstruction, Wilder was the first African American governor to be popularly elected

⁸⁷ Bullock and Rozell, *New Politics of the Old South*, p. 132

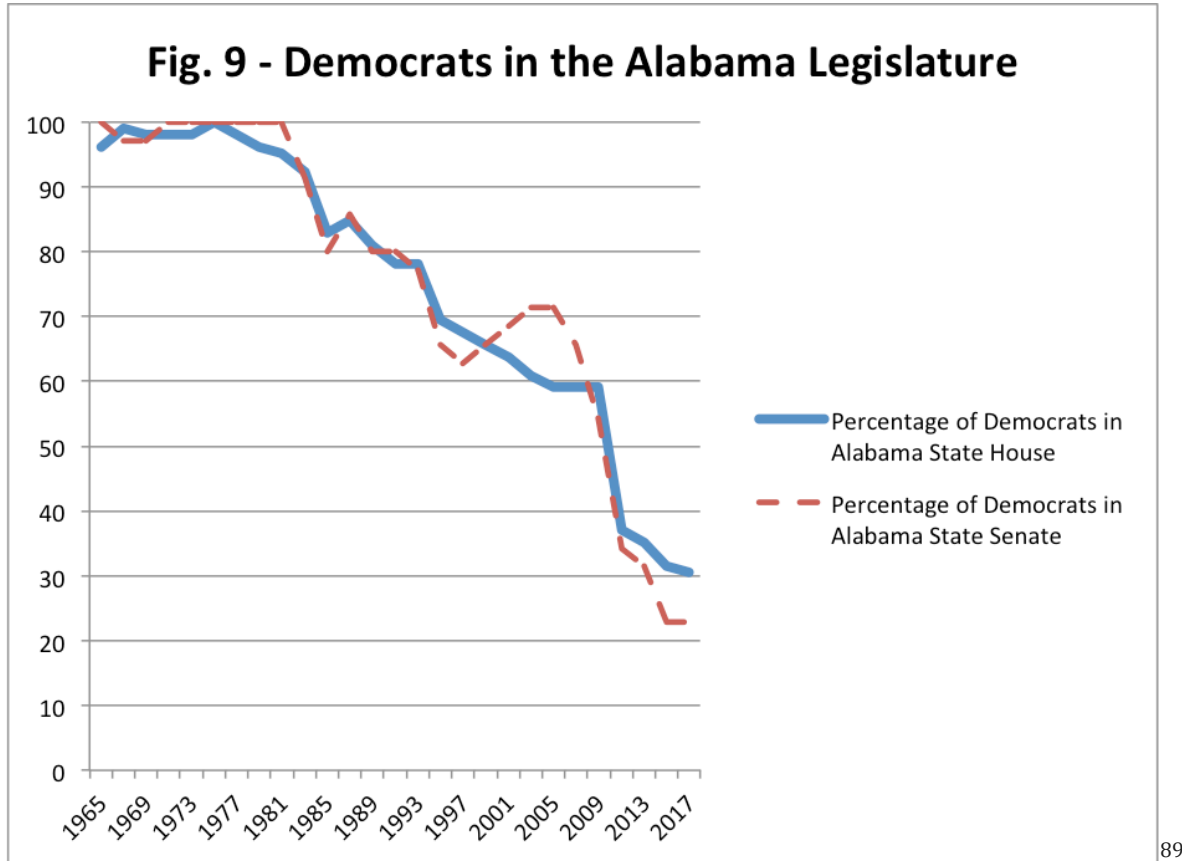
⁸⁸ Larry Sabato, *Virginia's 1993 Elections: The 12 Year Itch Returns*, University of Virginia News Letter, Vol. 70, No. 2

Chapter 11

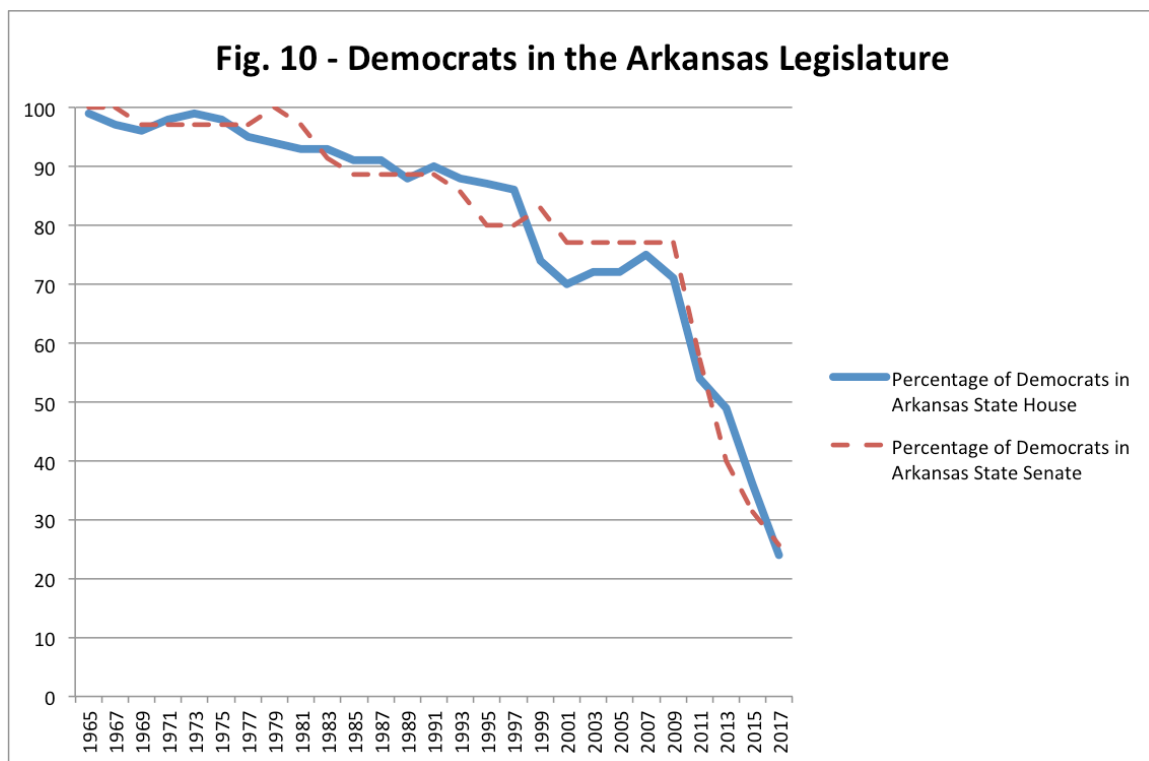
Commonalities and Differences

When examining the partisan composition of legislatures in each of the four states, some key differences in patterns emerge. The most important takeaway is that the ultimate decline of Democrats in these legislatures does not match that of the decline of Southern Democrats in Congress. As discussed above, the Alabama Democratic Party under George Wallace had a virtual stranglehold on the state. This is reflected in the composition of the legislature (Fig.9). Democratic control hovered near 100 percent until the 1980s. Arkansas

saw a similar level of sustained dominance (Fig. 10).



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Yet in both of these legislatures, the 1994 Republican wave did not produce a major shift in Democratic strength. In Alabama, the number of Democrats sharply declined, but soon stabilized and even improved in the state Senate. In Arkansas, the wave barely registers on the chart of Democratic strength. In both Alabama and Arkansas, Republican control of the legislature did not come until the late 2000s, with a precipitous decline in both states during the 2010 Tea Party wave.

Now, let us compare these two states – states that took until the 1980s or later to demonstrate sustained two-party competition – with South Carolina (Fig. 11) and Virginia (Fig. 12). One of these states saw its most powerful politician become a Republican early on in the South’s partisan evolution; the other saw the backbone of its state’s Democratic Party break in the late 1960s.

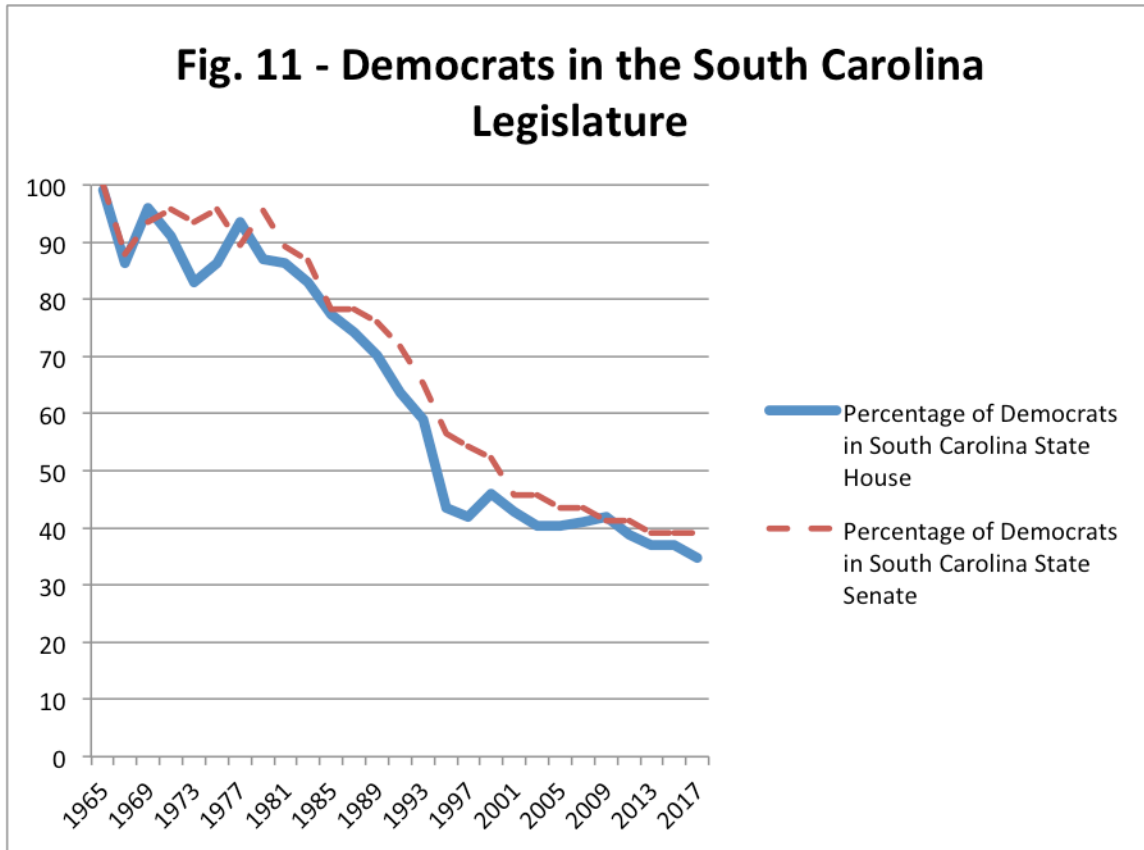


Fig. 11 - Democrats in the South Carolina Legislature

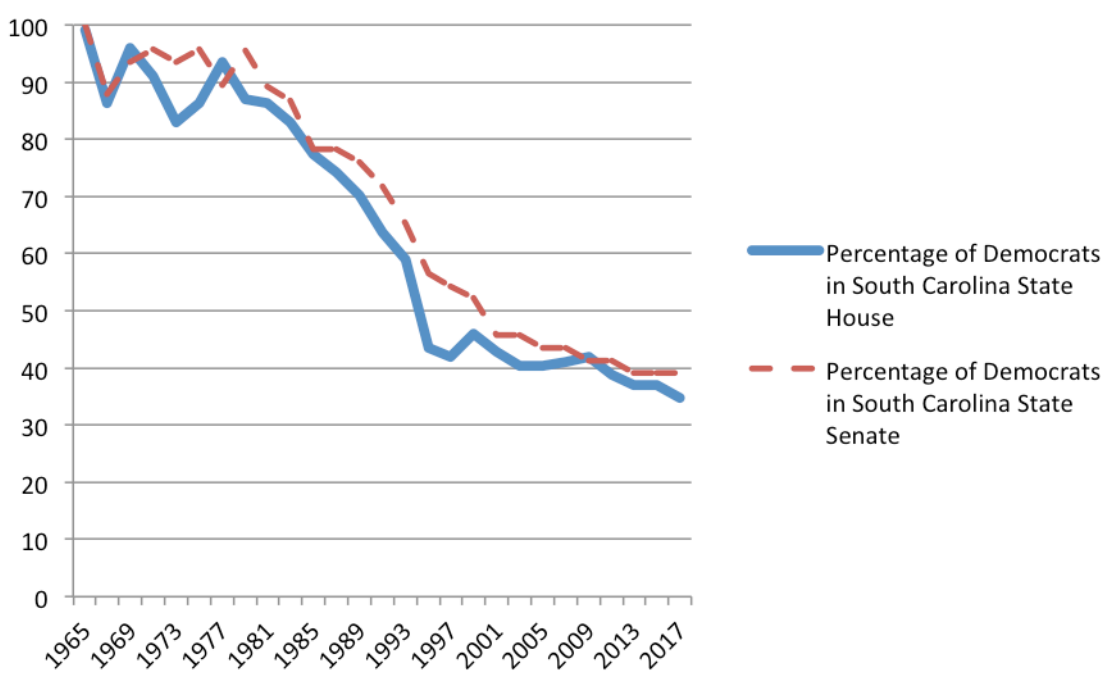
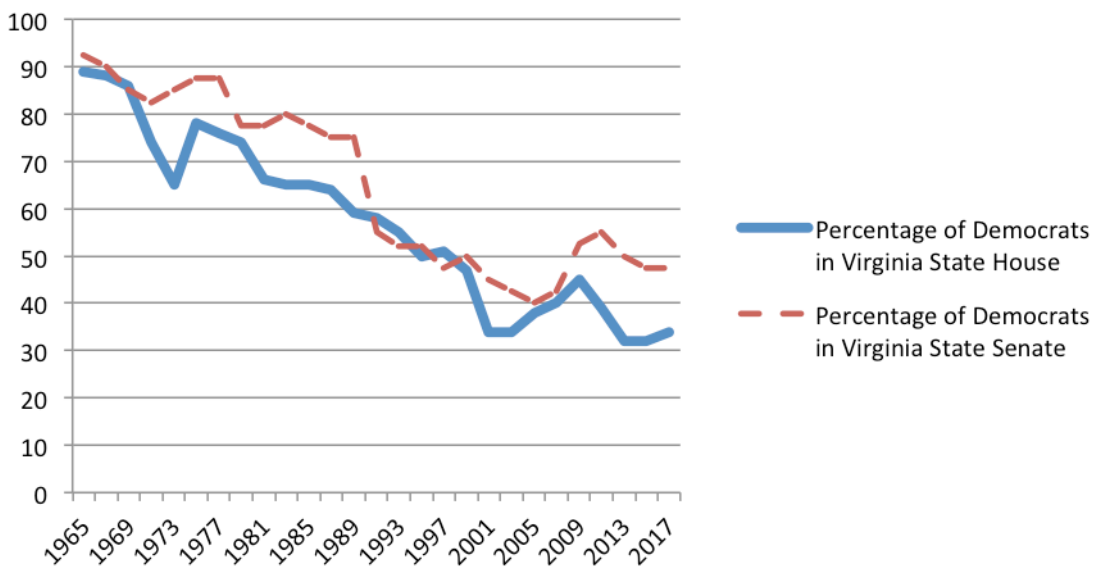


Fig. 12 - Democrats in the Virginia General Assembly



We see a much different trend emerging. While the overall trend of all four legislatures is one of declining Democratic strength, in Virginia and South Carolina this trend comes much sooner and faster. This speaks to one commonality that the examined states exhibit: the effect that the presence of a single dominating political figure – a “party boss” – has on the state parties. Harry F. Byrd, Sr. kept the Democratic Party in near-autocratic control of the levers of Virginia’s government for years (Fig. 12). After his death, with the absence of a strong leader (his son, Harry, Jr., showed little interest in party politics, and eventually left the Democratic Party, becoming the first Independent senator to be popularly elected) the party’s control of the state quickly evaporated, as Virginia elected its first Republican governor since Reconstruction, and its legislature’s composition changed dramatically (Fig. 12). The vacuum created by the demise of the Byrd Organization was the launching pad from which the Republican Party seized control of the Commonwealth.

In South Carolina, perhaps the state’s most powerful and well-known Democrat was also one who was eager to buck the party line. Strom Thurmond may not have committed the ultimate Southern sin of becoming a Republican before the candidacy of Barry Goldwater, but he did run as a third-party candidate over a decade before the Civil Rights Act, cracking the Solid South in the process. It is hard not to imagine that without Thurmond, the nascent South Carolina Republican Party would have had a much harder time getting started, and they might not have had the early success relative to other Southern states that they did.

To see a possible alternative reality had South Carolina’s Republican Party not had the early support of the state’s most prominent elected official, we need look no further

than Alabama. George Wallace effectively controlled the state's politics from the day he was first elected governor until he left the governor's mansion for the final time in the late 1980's. The presence of such a charismatic, powerful, singular political figure had a profound impact not only on the state's Republican Party – which, despite having some ancestral members in isolated pockets of the state, languished under Wallace's boot. It also affected the state's Democratic Party in that, similar to Virginia, shortly after Wallace retired from politics, they were rudderless. We can see in Fig. 9 how quickly after Wallace's final term Democrats began seeing substantial losses in the state legislature.

Chapter 12

Conclusion – The Democratic Brand

There are numerous hypotheses as to why the South ultimately shifted to the Republican Party. Demographics and racial issues clearly played a role, as did increasing urbanization in some states. It is difficult if not impossible to say for sure which factor, if any, was the deciding factor. Rather, I hope to have engaged in some informed speculation on how local issues and events could have affected individual states' partisan shifts.

While we cannot definitively say why the South ultimately became Republican, I argue that the ideological tension of the region and each individual state means that the principal factor cannot be ideological. While the Republican Party became dramatically more conservative at the same time that Southerners became dramatically more Republican, those same Southerners saw almost no change in ideological breakdown – where neither liberal, nor moderate, nor conservative Southerners made up a majority. Each state profiled had a rich tradition of ideological tension between areas of the state – from Alabama's Southern Unionists and conservative gentry, to Arkansas' Ozark farmers and cotton planters, to Virginia's northern suburbs and rural Southside. There was and is no ideology that was definitively Southern, and therefore the South's partisan change could not have been a primarily ideologically driven shift.

I believe the common thread in the four states examined here is the presence of a party boss or bosses who held the Democratic "brand" together. In Alabama and Arkansas, where either one or three powerful Democrats ruled the roost, the state stayed strongly Democratic. When they did cross the aisle and support statewide Republicans, it was

driven in no small part by concerns with specific Democratic candidates – not the Democratic Party in general. When these bosses stepped off the political stage, Democratic decline was not far behind.

In South Carolina and Virginia, a similar dynamic unfolded decades earlier than in Arkansas and Alabama. South Carolina's most powerful politician was also the first truly prominent Southern Democrat to become a Republican. While the state did not immediately thereafter become loyal to the Republican Party, it did so far sooner than other states. In Virginia, the domineering organization of the state fractured and died in the late 60s, and the Democratic Party largely did with it. If a state had one or several strong, popular Democratic politicians – party bosses – they could delay the state's total shift to the Republican Party.

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