A Tale of “Two Souths”: White Voting Behavior in Contemporary Southern Elections

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Objective. We empirically demonstrate that the long-held political distinction between the Deep South and the Peripheral South persists to this day. Methods. Data from the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) are employed in logistic regression models to assess differences in the likelihood of voting Republican among Deep and Peripheral South whites in gubernatorial, senatorial, and presidential contests. Additionally, recent data on the partisan and racial composition of various elective offices document the sharp decline in Democratic officeholders. Results. In contemporary Southern elections, Deep South whites, after controlling for several factors such as partisanship, ideology, religion, and income, are consistently and significantly more likely to vote Republican than their Peripheral South peers. Conclusions. Race remains the most salient issue in Southern politics and it structures the alignment of whites and blacks into opposing parties. Because of this, whites are more Republican in their voting behavior in the more culturally conservative subregion where the proportion of African Americans is higher: the Deep South. Dixie is now dominated by the GOP, and especially in the Deep South, with grim representational implications for African Americans because they are no longer part of coalitional majorities at virtually every level of governance.

The heart of the southern black belt and of the southern way of life is found in five contiguous states: Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina. The six states of the Peripheral South . . . share memories of fellow membership in the Confederate States of America, but they are less distinctively southern. (Matthews and Prothro, 1966:169)

There is Southern and then there is Southern. Historically, the political heart of Dixie was its Black Belt region concentrated in the five Deep South states of Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina. So-called because of its rich dark soil, the Southern Black Belt counties supported the bulk of large-scale plantation agriculture and therefore contained the largest number of African Americans. Whites residing in this area of the American South were often in the minority, and were, therefore, the most militant and reactionary—since the reality of widening enfranchisement and fostering a more representative democracy would necessarily also empower blacks. Indeed, from the onset of Southern secession to the present day, the greater racial conservatism of whites in the Deep South can be seen in their political behavior.

In Southern Politics in State and Nation (1949), V. O. Key put forth the deceptively simple thesis that race is the drive-wheels of Southern politics. We would be remiss if we failed to quote from probably the most referenced passage of Key’s magnum opus: “In its grand outlines the politics of the South revolves around the Negro . . . Whatever phase of

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the Southern political process one seeks to understand, sooner or later the trail of inquiry leads to the Negro” (1949:5). Of course, tremendous changes have occurred in the more than 60 years since Key penned these words, and yet, they still hold true.

To be sure, the modernization of the American South, as assiduously documented by Earl Black and Merle Black (1987), makes it patently clear that the locus of power no longer resides with Black Belt whites and by extension the whites of the Deep South. Instead, with its much larger population and greater demographic diversity, the greatest regional transformations have transpired in the six Peripheral South states of Arkansas, Florida, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. Yet, amid palpable evidence of a “New South,” the vestiges of the past persist, particularly in the Deep South, the subregion that has experienced less political and demographic change. It is here where the issue of race overshadows everything else and has brought the Republican Party to a position of overwhelming electoral dominance.

Although it is no longer true that Black Belt whites “give the South its dominant political tone” (Key, 1949:5), it is still the case that “the character of the politics of individual states will vary roughly with the Negro proportion of the population” (Key, 1949:5). The cardinal feature of the Deep South states has long been their higher percentage of African Americans, and, therefore, white voting behavior should be more polarized in this subregion. In essence, power is distilled to a crude measure of which race is the numerical majority since blacks and whites are so politically divided. Because of the enduring importance of race, of the 11 ex-Confederate states we typically define as the American South, the five contiguous states of the Deep South have long displayed, and continue to show, a remarkable durability in their adherence to Key’s thesis.

The evolution of Southern politics illustrates the fundamental importance of race in shaping its party system. In this study we show that after controlling for several competing factors thought to advantage the contemporary Southern GOP (i.e., ideology, religion, and economics), compared to Peripheral South whites, Deep South whites are significantly more likely to vote for Republican candidates in high-profile statewide contests, and this division remains even when we narrow the focus to elections with an African-American Democratic candidate. We contend that this finding speaks to the enduring presence of “two Souths,” including a set of states that constitute the core of the region and are more “Southern” because they have not changed as much as the other states surrounding them.

Unlike previous research on this subject, we make use of the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES); a data set with a much larger number of cases that provides us greater leverage in testing statistical relationships. Further, by examining more recent voting behavior, we can assess the turning point in the relative strength of the Republican Party in the South’s subregions; an alteration in white voting behavior indicative of the more traditionalistic and racially conscious Deep South. Additionally, these data speak to the electoral dominance of the GOP throughout the South and the potentially dire representational consequences of this development for the region’s African-American residents. This examination of white voting behavior in the contemporary South challenges the recent view that race is diminishing in electoral importance in the region and that, as a result, Dixie is converging with the rest of the nation (see Shafer and Johnston, 2006). If anything, the marked racial polarization in voting behavior shown in this work assures that the South will remain an exceptionally Republican outpost for many years to come.

Our study proceeds as follows. First, we discuss the literature on racial politics in the Southern United States and highlight the distinctiveness of the Deep and Peripheral subregions as the Republican Party gained electoral prominence. Second, we explain the data and method we used to examine white voting behavior in recent Southern statewide
elections. Next, we display and discuss the findings from our vote-choice models. Then, we consider the implications of our results; focusing specifically on the ascendency of the GOP in statewide, congressional, and legislative elections and what this portends for the representation of African Americans. We conclude with some final thoughts on the enduring importance of race in structuring the modern Southern party system.

The “Two Souths”

In his seminal work, V. O. Key (1949) asserted that Southern politics was largely a product of attempts by whites to maintain political control. One of Key’s central contributions was the notion that as the racial concentration of African Americans grew, the more reactionary political behavior among whites became. Specifically, his racial threat hypothesis argued that efforts to maintain political control were more aggressive and pronounced in areas with higher concentrations of African Americans. Key further described several ways in which this struggle among whites to maintain power shaped the political climate in the Southern states, including limiting electoral competition throughout the region and fostering the continued stronghold of the Democratic Party.

Over time, Key’s framework inspired several studies across an array of disciplines on the relationship between racial interactions and political behavior in the South (see, e.g., Blalock, 1967; Blumer, 1958; Bobo, 1983; Kousser, 1974; Quillian, 1995; Tajfel et al., 1971), and a number of scholars demonstrated that political environments grow more hostile to minority groups as their respective numbers increase in size (see, e.g., Avery and Fine, 2012; Giles and Hertz, 1994; Glaser, 1994; Hill and Leighley, 1999; Krueger and Mueller, 2001; Matthews and Prothro, 1963). However, evidence supporting Key’s racial threat hypothesis on voting behavior in the contemporary South has been inconclusive. For example, studies of racial threat in elections held in Louisiana during the 1990s yielded conflicting findings (see Giles and Buckner, 1993; Voss, 1996). Indeed, the work of Voss (1996) and Voss and Miller (2001) even showed an absence of racially polarized voting in urban settings where whites live in close proximity to large numbers of blacks.

In this work, Key’s (1949) racial threat hypothesis provides a backdrop for an admittedly related, but somewhat different, story—the important, and enduring, notion of “two Souths” in contemporary Southern politics. In particular, the distinction between the Deep South and the Peripheral South, analyzed by both Key (1949) and Black and Black (1987), and informed by countless works on racial hierarchy and race relations in the region, continues to shape electoral politics in the South—and by extension national politics—today. As this work demonstrates, the enduring relevance of “two Souths” is guided by important changes to the region’s electoral landscape.

The connection between Key’s (1949) racial threat thesis and the notion of “two Souths” invokes a caricature of a bifurcated region. In brief, the Deep South is viewed as being more reflective of the Old South—more rural, more black, more Black Belt counties—where the significance of race persisted, and some might even argue, dominated, political considerations. It follows that prior to the civil rights movement the states in the Deep South were the most Democratic because the race issue figured so centrally into its political (and social and economic) calculations (Key, 1949; Black and Black, 1987). By contrast, Republicans had a political foothold in parts of the Peripheral South for some time (see Heard, 1952) and were able to further capitalize on, and build support in, the more variable politics of the Peripheral South because the race issue often took a backseat to economic concerns (see Bartley and Graham, 1975).
FIGURE 1

David's Index of Republican Strength in the Deep and Peripheral South

NOTE: David's Index is a composite of party strength based on calculating election returns across selected offices. This version of the index is in Composite B form, which consists of the Republican Party's performance in gubernatorial, senate, and U.S. House elections. The measure is calculated as follows: (percentage Republican Vote [Gubernatorial Election] + percentage Republican Vote [Senate Election] + percentage Republican Vote [Average Republican U.S. House Vote])/3. The GOP vote is out of all votes cast, not just the two-party vote. The data for this figure have been subjected to a 10-year moving average, which helps smooth out any short-term conditions that greatly favor one of the major parties.

In Figure 1, we present graphical evidence of the different rates of GOP growth in the Deep South and Peripheral South using David’s Index of Republican Party strength from 1950 to 2012 (David, 1972). The calculation of Republican strength in the Southern subregions is based on an equally weighted combination of Republican percentages of the vote in gubernatorial, senatorial, and U.S. House races. Clearly, until the 1990s, Republican strength was markedly greater in the Peripheral South. However, this changed in the late 1990s, when the subregions attained rough parity, and then, after 2004, the Deep South became more Republican than the Peripheral South. The end of this pattern, from 2006 to the present, provides a palpable preview of the argument we put forth and empirically test in this study pertaining to the lasting and consequential within-region differences that continue to shape Southern electoral politics.

Despite Shafer and Johnston’s (2006) view that the political distinction between the Deep South and Peripheral South is conceptually and empirically a “myth,” we contend that even today, the significance and relevance of the “two Souths” persists, and race continues to

1Many studies of Southern politics use David’s Index (see Hayes and McKee, 2008; Hood, Kidd, and Morris, 2004, 2012; Lamis, 1988, 1999). The note below Figure 1 explains the computation of the index. Similar to Hood, Kidd, and Morris (2012), we employ a 10-year moving average. A substantial part of the initial GOP advantage in the Peripheral South was due to traditional/mountain Republicanism found in Appalachia (i.e., east Tennessee and western North Carolina). Dating back to the Civil War, large sections of Appalachia, which primarily reside within the boundaries of Peripheral South states, were populated by whites who did not own slaves and thus were more reluctant to secede from the Union and later on resisted allegiance with the Democratic Party since its fierce protection of white supremacy was not a relevant concern to a segment of the Southern electorate that consisted of hardly any African Americans.

2As Black and Black (2012:404) point out, “[f]rom the beginning of the twentieth century until the 1964 elections, every [italics original] member of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives from the Deep South was a Democrat.” We can add that there were also no Republican governors in the Deep South.
TABLE 1

Percentage of Republican Seats in the Deep South and Peripheral South After the 2006–2012 Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Deep South</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Peripheral South</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Governor</td>
<td>80 (4)</td>
<td>100 (5)</td>
<td>100 (5)</td>
<td>100 (5)</td>
<td>33 (2)</td>
<td>33 (2)</td>
<td>67 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Senate</td>
<td>90 (9)</td>
<td>90 (9)</td>
<td>90 (9)</td>
<td>90 (9)</td>
<td>67 (8)</td>
<td>50 (6)</td>
<td>58 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>87 (13)</td>
<td>93 (14)</td>
<td>93 (14)</td>
<td>93 (14)</td>
<td>56 (10)</td>
<td>44 (8)</td>
<td>61 (11)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The N of Republican seats appears in parentheses. The total number of seats is 15 in the Deep South and 18 in the Peripheral South. Data are compiled by the authors from The Almanac of American Politics (Barone and Cohen 2007, 2009; Barone and McCutcheon, 2011) for 2006–2010, and from U.S. Senate and state governor websites for 2012.

factor centrally into the defining features of Southern politics. Specifically, we demonstrate that the realignment of Southern whites in favor of the Republican Party is now more pronounced in the Deep South states where (in line with Key’s racial threat hypothesis) the African-American population is larger and the general population is more insular (e.g., less population growth, less urban, and more rural)3 than in the Peripheral South states; however, our argument is not that the Peripheral South is not Republican. Both subregions are now more Republican than any other section of the United States (Black and Black, 2007).

Instead, we move beyond the more common discussion about the differences between electoral politics in the Southern and non-Southern states, and make a more specific within-South claim. Like the recent large-N study by White (2014), which finds significant differences in the political behavior of Deep and Peripheral South whites, and building on the work of Key (1949) and Black and Black (1987), we emphasize the continued presence of subregionalism in the contemporary South, and show that Deep South whites are more Republican than their neighbors in the Peripheral South. The presence of a subregional distinction as evidenced by different patterns of voting behavior in the Deep South and Peripheral South is central to our “two Souths” argument.

This claim finds support in the striking differences between the subregions in the level of Republicanism found in recent statewide election results. Indeed, both Table 1, comparing the percentage of GOP seats held in the Deep South and the Peripheral South, and Table 2, highlighting voting behavior among Southern whites, offer evidence for the existence of “two Souths” in the modern period. Further, the subregional trends presented in these tables highlight that the Deep South has become the Republican bastion. Particularly in statewide elections for the U.S. Senate and in gubernatorial races, the GOP presence in the Deep South is practically absolute—with Republicans holding 14 of the 15 offices since 2008 (Table 1).4 And not surprisingly, as shown in Table 2, greater Republican

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3 Due to space limitations, we do not show the marked demographic differences between the Southern subregions and their individual states, on a variety of indicators. Suffice it to say that the most recent U.S. Census data demonstrate notable subregional distinctions that highlight the Deep South’s greater demographic insularity with respect to differences in the African-American percentage (much greater in the Deep South), Hispanic percentage (much lower in the Deep South), percentage born in the South (much higher in the Deep South), percentage born in the North (much lower in the Deep South), percentage born abroad (much lower in the Deep South), population growth percentage (much lower in the Deep South), and county density (less dense in the Deep South). These data will be made available upon request.

4 At the time of this writing, Louisiana Senator Mary Landrieu is currently the only Democratic exception to Republican rule.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Deep South</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Peripheral South</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>76 (1,127)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>75 (1,675)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>62 (2,883)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>61 (3,920)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governor</td>
<td>67 (689)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>72 (948)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>52 (1,469)</td>
<td>61 (371)**</td>
<td>63 (2,962)</td>
<td>67 (912)**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Senate</td>
<td>74 (73)*</td>
<td>73 (1,074)</td>
<td>80 (1,261)</td>
<td>77 (216)*</td>
<td>52 (1,841)</td>
<td>59 (1,764)</td>
<td>76 (2,016)</td>
<td>60 (3,084)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All contests</td>
<td>68 (762)</td>
<td>74 (2,201)</td>
<td>76 (2,209)</td>
<td>75 (1,842)</td>
<td>52 (3,310)</td>
<td>61 (5,018)</td>
<td>67 (4,978)</td>
<td>61 (7,613)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total votes</td>
<td>1,128</td>
<td>2,958</td>
<td>2,901</td>
<td>2,453</td>
<td>6,385</td>
<td>8,232</td>
<td>7,392</td>
<td>12,491</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 2**
Republican Percentage of the Two-Party Vote Cast by Deep and Peripheral South Whites in the 2006–2012 Elections

**NOTE:** The N of Republican votes appears in parentheses. Total votes equals the sum of votes cast for Democrats and Republicans in all offices (president, governor, and U.S. Senate). Data are from the 2006, 2008, 2010, and 2012 CCESs.

*Only accounts for voters in Mississippi; the only Deep South state with a U.S. Senate contest in 2006 and 2012.

**Only accounts for North Carolina voters because no other Southern state holds its gubernatorial election in a presidential year.
office-holding dominance is reflected in the voting behavior of Deep South whites, who are much more supportive of Republican candidates. From 2006 to 2012, at least 68 percent of Deep South whites voted Republican, whereas 67 percent Republican voting is the high-water mark for Peripheral South whites in the 2010 midterm (with 52 percent Republican voting being the low point in 2006).

The “two Souths” thesis is a multifaceted tale about the impact of race on changing partisan ties in the modern era. This has played out in a number of ways in the Southern states. First, by evaluating presidential election returns during both the pre- and post-civil rights periods, it seems that race guided white political behavior more outwardly in the Deep South than in the Peripheral South (Key, 1949; Black and Black, 1987, 1992); yet, the partisan evolution of the subregions was a dynamic process, to be sure. Namely, as white Deep South Democrats resisted their national party’s liberal shift in favor of black civil rights (Black and Black, 2002), and race became a driving component of the Republican Party’s platform (Carmines and Stimson, 1989), the Deep South moved to support the GOP (Hood, Kidd, and Morris, 2008, 2012) and eventually eclipsed the Peripheral South in its level of Republicanism. At the same time, we see Southern Democratic demagogues being replaced by centrist white Democrats and liberal black Democrats (Lamis, 1988), whereas the GOP calcified into a white and conservative party (see McKee and Hayes, 2009). The greater realignment of Deep South whites into the Republican Party has further weakened the Democratic Party in this subregion because now the black electorate often controls Democratic nominations, and when an African American is the Democratic candidate, securing the GOP nomination is tantamount to winning the election in statewide contests (Hayes and McKee, 2008).

Taken together, this work offers a systematic assessment of the subregional partisan transformation of contemporary Southern politics and its corresponding representational implications for African Americans. In the following section, we detail the data and method we employ to determine whether Deep South whites remain more Republican in their voting behavior even after a rigorous multivariate analysis.

Data and Method

After a half-century of consecutively surveying the American electorate during presidential and midterm election years, the American National Elections Studies (ANES) no longer had the financial resources to continue evaluating the preferences of the American voter in 2006, or during any future midterm contests. Fortunately, the CCES stepped in to fill this void. Funded by a consortium of academic institutions and a select number of academics affiliated with these universities, the CCES has enabled scholars to tailor subsets of surveys to evaluate more particularized research questions while at the same time allowing the broader academic community access to an unusually large national data set.

The CCES is a web-based nationally representative survey of the American electorate administered by YouGov (formerly Polimetrix) that provides numerous questions that tap into the political behavior of voters in congressional, gubernatorial, and presidential elections. Although the battery of CCES questions is dwarfed by the number previously asked in the ANES, many of the standard questions asked by the ANES are also asked in the CCES (i.e., the seven-point party identification question), and this provides some important continuity across survey platforms. Further, and for our purposes, the most relevant advantage of using the CCES data is the atypically large samples. For instance, whereas the ANES usually include about 200 to 300 Southern respondents in any given
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election year, the CCES includes several thousand Southerners, providing robustness even
when we parse the data by race and subregion (e.g., the Deep South and Peripheral South).
The vastness of the CCES essentially eliminates concerns about the representativeness of
our subset of white Southern voters, and also affords us nearly complete coverage of the
senatorial, gubernatorial, and presidential elections between 2006 and 2012.\(^5\)

Because we contend that the collections of states comprising the Deep South and Pe-
ripheral South have forged discernable subregions, and thus distinct subcultures (Matthews
and Prothro, 1966:169–73; Reed, 1986), our primary variable of interest is a dummy indi-
cating whether a respondent resides in the Deep South (\(=1\)) or Peripheral South (\(=0\)). By
controlling for other leading factors that influence voter preferences, we expect to find that
whites in the Deep South will still be more likely to vote Republican in recent senatorial,
gubernatorial, and presidential elections than whites in the Peripheral South.

To provide the most leverage on our central question about subregional variation in
voter preferences, and because of state-level differences in the scheduling of gubernatorial
contests\(^6\) (e.g., North Carolina is the only Southern state to hold its election during a
presidential year), we pooled the CCES data across the 2006 through 2012 elections in our
analyses of voting in senatorial and gubernatorial races. All of the statistical regressions are
limited to non-Hispanic whites residing in a Southern state. We use logistic regression to
estimate the models. The dependent variable is coded 1 for a Republican vote, and 0 for a
Democratic vote. We include only those races that had both a Republican and Democratic
candidate (there was one uncontested Senate race over this span of elections; see the note
under Table 3).

In the first two regression models, we estimate the likelihood of casting a Republican
vote in all contested and regularly scheduled senatorial and gubernatorial elections held
during midterm and presidential election years from 2006 to 2012. This accounts for 26
southern U.S. Senate races (11 in the Deep South and 15 in the Peripheral South), and
16 gubernatorial contests (6 in the Deep South and 10 in the Peripheral South). In both
models we include contextual controls for the black voting-age population percentage in
the respondent’s county (\(\text{County BVAP}\)) and the population density of the respondent’s
county (\(\text{County Density}\)).\(^7\)

There are a number of other variables that are consistently shown to have an effect on vote
choice, and their inclusion in the analyses is necessary to determine whether a respondent’s
subregion has an independent effect on the probability of casting a Republican vote. For
example, economics (Lublin, 2004; Shafer and Johnston, 2006), religion (Black and Black,
2002, 2007), and political ideology (Abramowitz and Saunders, 1998; Hayes and McKee,
2008) are often posited as leading explanations for the rise of Southern Republicanism
in contemporary elections. We include decent proxies for these variables in the form of

\(^5\)The CCES data sets are even markedly larger than national exit polls and include finer measures of many
fundamental variables known to affect voter preferences, such as partisanship and political ideology. In sum,
due to their large size, detailed questions about critical variables, and extensive coverage of various political
offices, the CCES data are the best available in the public domain for testing our claim that Deep South whites
now harbor more Republican proclivities than their Peripheral South neighbors in contemporary statewide
elections.

\(^6\)We do not have data on gubernatorial elections in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Virginia because these states
hold their elections in odd-numbered years (Louisiana and Mississippi in the year after a midterm and Virginia
in the year proceeding a presidential election). Incidentally, this is an interesting remnant of the past wherein
state election processes were designed to give Southern elites the ability to better control the outcomes of
lower-participation elections.

\(^7\)These county-level data are from the 2010 U.S. Census. There is no expectation that the county BVAP
percentage will affect vote choice, but it is a necessary control for racial context. We do, however, expect that
respondents residing in denser counties will be less likely to vote Republican.
TABLE 3
Southern White Voter Preferences in Senatorial and Gubernatorial Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Senate</th>
<th>Governor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deep South</td>
<td>0.288 (0.099)**</td>
<td>0.519 (0.114)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County BVAP</td>
<td>0.217 (0.295)</td>
<td>0.093 (0.392)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County density</td>
<td>−0.0001 (0.0000)***</td>
<td>−0.0001 (0.0001) ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party ID</td>
<td>0.903 (0.020)***</td>
<td>0.887 (0.026)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>1.126 (0.044)***</td>
<td>1.259 (0.058)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born again</td>
<td>0.487 (0.067)***</td>
<td>0.278 (0.084)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family income</td>
<td>−0.049 (0.011)***</td>
<td>−0.028 (0.014)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>−0.019 (0.062)</td>
<td>0.047 (0.078)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.002 (0.002)</td>
<td>−0.002 (0.003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>0.260 (0.069)***</td>
<td>0.197 (0.088)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican incumbent</td>
<td>0.801 (0.077)***</td>
<td>1.774 (.154)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican open</td>
<td>0.620 (0.090)***</td>
<td>1.963 (0.152)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic open</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>2.983 (0.181)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010 election</td>
<td>0.730 (0.085)***</td>
<td>−0.020 (0.081)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>−7.749 (0.201)***</td>
<td>−9.505 (0.300)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo $R^2$</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$N$</td>
<td>15,097</td>
<td>9,067</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Logistic regression estimates with standard errors in parentheses. Dependent variable is $1 = \text{Republican vote}$ and $0 = \text{Democratic vote}$. Data are pooled from the 2006, 2008, 2010, and 2012 CCES. Data are limited to white voters living in the South. The 2008 Arkansas Senate race is omitted from the analysis because Democratic incumbent Mark Pryor ran unopposed. This was the only uncontested Senate election. There were two Senate elections in Mississippi in 2008, but these data include only the regularly scheduled contest between Republican Thad Cochran and Democrat Erik Fleming. The other contest was between Republican Roger Wicker and Democrat Ronnie Musgrove. In December 2007, Governor Haley Barbour appointed Wicker to the Senate seat vacated by Republican Trent Lott. All gubernatorial races were contested by the major parties. Democratic incumbent is the base category for the dummies indicating party and status of seat; there was only one Democratic open seat in Senate elections and hence this race (2012 Virginia Senate) is collapsed with the Democratic incumbent base category.

*∗∗∗p ≤ 0.001; **p ≤ 0.01; ∗p ≤ 0.05 (two-tailed).

We also included indicators of the party and status of each seat being contested, with the omitted category being an election with a Democratic incumbent. Over the span of elections we examine there was one open-seat Senate race in which the most recent officeholder was a Democrat (Virginia in 2012) and hence in the Senate model the omitted category includes

the following: (1) Family Income ($1 = \text{less than $10,000 to 12 = $150,000 or more}$) for a class-based argument, (2) whether someone is Born Again ($1 = \text{yes}, 0 = \text{no}$) because this constitutes a much finer indicator of religiosity in a region where Protestantism is so prevalent, and (3) one’s Political Ideology ($1 = \text{very liberal}, 2 = \text{liberal}, 3 = \text{moderate}, 4 = \text{conservative}, 5 = \text{very conservative}$) because of the tight relationship between worldview and political preferences. Additionally, we included one’s Party ID ($1 = \text{strong Democrat} to 7 = \text{strong Republican}$), which, since the groundbreaking work of Campbell et al. (1960), remains a fundamental predictor of vote choice. Further, due to evidence of a gender gap in vote choice, age-related differences in party support, and a greater propensity for married individuals to support Republicans, we also included these variables in the models; they are coded Male ($1 = \text{male}, 0 = \text{female}$), Age (18 to highest), and Married ($1 = \text{yes}, 0 = \text{no}$), respectively.

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Among those respondents who answer “not sure” for the ideology question, we reclassified them as moderates. This is common practice in much of the voting behavior literature, and it does not alter our substantive findings.
this contest with elections where a Democratic incumbent sought reelection. Finally, we include a dummy for the 2010 midterm election.9

After presenting the estimates for the U.S. Senate and gubernatorial elections held in the South in 2006, 2008, 2010, and 2012, we further test our expectation that the Deep South is now more Republican because of the enduring salience of racial politics by estimating vote-choice models for only those contests with an African-American Democratic candidate. In our data set, no black Democratic candidates won their party’s nomination in Southern gubernatorial elections,10 but in Senate races there were seven: five in the Deep South (Erik Fleming in Mississippi 2006 and 2008, Vivian Davis Figures in Alabama 2008, Michael Thurmond in Georgia 2010, and Alvin Greene in South Carolina 2010) and two in the Peripheral South (Harold Ford in Tennessee 2006 and Kendrick Meek in Florida 2010). In addition to this model11 of Senate races limited to contests with a black Democrat running, we ran regressions for the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections. Whereas one can rightly claim there are complications with the Senate analysis because of variation in the quality of these African-American Democrats and the different dynamics within these state-level contests,12 in the presidential elections all voters had the same choice between Democrat Barack Obama and Republican John McCain in 2008 and Obama versus Republican Mitt Romney in 2012.

Results

Table 3 presents the regression estimates for the likelihood of white respondents voting Republican in Southern senatorial and gubernatorial contests held in 2006, 2008, 2010, and 2012. In both models the control variables generally work in the expected direction, especially in the case of party ID, ideology, and whether the respondent is born again. Whereas all of these variables are statistically significant and positively affect the probability of voting Republican, family income is unexpectedly negative and significant. In both models gender and age have no impact on vote choice, while married voters are more likely to support Republican candidates. And, as expected, compared to a contest with a Democratic incumbent seeking reelection, the propensity to vote Republican is higher in all other types of races. We also see that in Senate elections, 2010 proved to be the strongest Republican year, even after controlling for the other independent variables. The 2010 dummy is negative and not statistically significant in gubernatorial contests. As for the county-level variables, respondents residing in denser counties were significantly less likely to vote for the Republican Senate candidate.

9We cannot include a dummy for 2008 and 2012 because North Carolina was the only state that held a gubernatorial election in those years. Similarly, in Senate races, Mississippi is the only Deep South state holding an election in 2006 and 2012.
10In 2011, for the first time since African-American L. Douglas Wilder won the 1989 Virginia gubernatorial election, an African American (Democrat Johnny L. Dupree) won a Southern Democratic gubernatorial nomination in Mississippi; ultimately, however, during the general election, Dupree lost the open Mississippi governor’s race to white Republican candidate Phil Bryant, 39 percent to 61 percent (uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS).
11Unlike the first two models of senatorial and gubernatorial voting, in the Senate model confined to the seven races with an African-American Democrat, we cannot include year and incumbent/party controls because in 2008 both contests with a black Democratic candidate are in the Deep South (Alabama and Mississippi), and the only contests that do not include a Republican incumbent are the two Republican open-seat races in the Peripheral South (Tennessee in 2006 and Florida in 2010).
12For instance, Alvin Greene was an especially weak candidate (Bafumi et al., 2012) and Kendrick Meek finished third in a three-person race that included the Republican victor Marco Rubio and the independent runner-up, but formerly Republican, sitting governor, Charlie Crist.
Finally, with regard to our variable of interest, whether a respondent resides in the Deep or Peripheral South, in both models, after controlling for the aforementioned factors, the coefficient for Deep South is positive and significant. In senatorial and gubernatorial elections, Deep South whites are significantly more likely to vote Republican ($p < 0.01$ in Senate contests; $p < 0.001$ in elections for governor; two-tailed tests).

We now take the analysis a step further by turning to the models of vote choice that are limited to contests with an African-American Democratic candidate—the pooled seven Senate races and the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections. If we are right that, ultimately, the Deep South is now more Republican because of the enduring salience of racial politics, then we should find that Deep South whites exhibit a greater likelihood of voting Republican when the Democratic candidate is black.

Table 4 displays the results for the Senate and presidential vote-choice models when these elections include an African-American Democratic candidate. Party ID, ideology, and born again remain statistically significant and positively influence Republican voting. Family income is not statistically significant in any of the models. Age is positive and significant in the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections, whereas marital status is positive and significant in the 2012 presidential contest. Once again, we find no evidence of a gender gap in vote choice among white Southerners. County BVAP percentage is not statistically significant in any of the models, while respondents living in denser counties are more likely to vote for Democrat Barack Obama in 2008 and 2012. County density had no effect on vote choice in the Senate model.

Most importantly, we find Deep South whites are more likely than Peripheral South whites to vote for the Republican candidate in senatorial contests with a black Democrat running ($p < 0.01$, two-tailed), and this is also true in the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections ($p < 0.001$, two-tailed). So, even after controlling for the numerous variables that often influence vote choice, Deep South whites are significantly more likely to vote for Republican candidates in recent Senate elections, gubernatorial contests, senatorial races where the Democratic nominee is black, and the last two presidential elections, which, of course, featured the first African-American Democratic nominee.
To provide a clearer picture of the effect of the Deep South indicator, we compute the predicted probabilities of voting Republican for Deep and Peripheral South whites at the 95 percent confidence level when the remaining variables are set at their mean values.\textsuperscript{13} First, in the Senate model in Table 3, the likelihood of voting Republican is 0.75 for Peripheral South whites versus 0.80 for Deep South whites. In the second model in Table 3, the probability of casting a Republican vote for governor is 0.67 for Peripheral South whites and 0.77 for Deep South whites. Turning to the model with an African-American Democrat running for the Senate (Table 4), here we find the only instance where the subregional distinction in voting behavior is not significant at the 95 percent level of confidence,\textsuperscript{14} a 0.93 likelihood of casting a Republican vote for Peripheral South whites versus a 0.96 probability of voting Republican among Deep South whites. In the 2008 presidential election, the Republican vote probability was 0.78 for Peripheral South whites compared to 0.86 for Deep South whites. Finally, in the 2012 presidential election Peripheral South whites’ likelihood of voting Republican was 0.79 versus 0.87 in the case of Deep South whites.

Overall, Deep South whites consistently cast more Republican votes in contemporary elections for senator, governor, and president. The current Republican fealty of whites in the Peripheral South is, of course, impressive too, but in a departure from the recent past, it now trails that of their Deep South peers. The striking loyalty to Republican candidates in those contests where an African American was the Democratic nominee speaks to the greatest problem the contemporary Democratic Party has—it is seldom electorally viable in those circumstances where black candidates win the nomination, which is becoming a common occurrence in the Deep South. And in both subregions, the tremendous racial polarization in voting behavior has serious repercussions for the representation of Southern blacks, as we demonstrate in the next section.

Implications of the Southern Racial Divide

In no other section of the United States do we find the two major parties so divided by race as we do in the Deep South. As Black and Black (2012:403) point out, African Americans and white conservatives constitute over 60 percent of the Deep South electorate, and in the Peripheral South their combined percentage is under 50 percent. More importantly, because of the large share of African Americans and white conservatives in the Deep South, coupled with their acute partisan polarization, this is the only place in the country where these groups account for majorities of their respective parties.

In 2008 white conservatives accounted for 62 percent of Deep South Republicans, while African Americans made up 62 percent of Deep South Democrats. Thus the two rival social groups function as the bedrock constituencies of the competing political parties. The Deep South continues to be a setting for persistent, widespread, and enduring conflicts between white conservatives and African Americans. (Black and Black 2012:421)

\textsuperscript{13}For ease of interpretation we set all of the other independent variables at their mean values in order to provide an estimate of the “typical” white Southern voter. We have also generated predicted probabilities based on the observed value approach (see Hanmer and Kalkin, 2013) and will make them available upon request. The predicted probabilities discussed in the text were generated using the Clarify software program in Stata (see Tomz et al., 2003).

\textsuperscript{14}Even in this case where white voting for the Republican is practically unanimous, the 95 percent confidence interval for the upper bound for Peripheral South whites (.947) and the lower bound for Deep South whites (.946) barely intersect. For all of the other reported predicted probabilities the subregional differences are significant at the .05 level.
TABLE 5
The Racial Composition of Southern Presidential Primary Electorates in 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Party of Primary</th>
<th>Black Percentage</th>
<th>Latino Percentage</th>
<th>White Percentage</th>
<th>Other Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deep South</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peripheral South</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Data are from CNN’s website: ⟨www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/primaries/results/epolls/⟩. Selected states were chosen based on the dates of their primaries; on or prior to Super Tuesday, which took place on February 5, 2008 (South Carolina Republican primary was January 19, 2008; South Carolina Democratic primary was January 26, 2008; Florida [both parties] was January 29, 2008; Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, and Tennessee [both parties] primaries were February 5, 2008). After Super Tuesday, Republican John McCain was the prohibitive favorite and thus the participation in primaries after this date may have been affected by the reality that only the Democratic race was still undecided.

It is difficult to overstate the representational consequences associated with the extreme racial polarization of partisan politics in the modern South, and especially the “heightened version” of this in the Deep South (Black and Black, 2012:403). Unlike the days of the solid Democratic South when black participation was legally curtailed (Key, 1949; Kousser, 1974; Woodward, 2001), today there are few restrictions on the franchise; and yet limitations to the representation of black interests are considerable because of the dissolution of biracial coalitions as whites continue to move to the GOP. In this current Republican-dominant system (McKee, 2012), the Democrats are literally and figuratively the minority party throughout much of the region.  

Consider Table 5, which displays the racial composition of a sample of Southern state presidential primary electorates in 2008. These six states held their contests on or before Super Tuesday (February 5, 2008) when both parties had yet to determine a nominee. In all three Deep South Democratic primaries, African Americans comprised a majority; whereas in the Peripheral South, the largest share of African Americans was 29 percent (in Tennessee). In all of the Republican primaries, non-Hispanic whites had a dominating presence; ranging from 84 percent in Florida to 96 percent in South Carolina.

Descriptive representation of black interests is not as prohibitive in lower-level contests such as state legislative elections where there is more territory to craft districts that aid minority constituencies. But the carving out of majority-minority districts has had a detrimental effect on the aggregate fortunes of the Democratic Party (Epstein and O’Halloran,

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15 For an insightful assessment of the problem facing Southern Democrats, see Merle Black’s (2004) analysis of the social groups accounting for the core of the contemporary Southern Democratic Party. As he explains the predicament of Southern Democrats, the growing minority presence in the party further marginalizes white Democratic officeholders who feel increasing pressure to switch to the GOP in those local contexts where they find it hard to explain being a white representative in a party controlled by African Americans.
Table 6 documents a sea change in partisan fortunes in Southern state legislatures and the corresponding precipitous decline in the influence of African-American legislators. The data show changes in Southern state legislative delegations separated by subregion before the 2010 elections and prior to the 2014 elections. Further division is made in terms of the chamber: state house and state senate. Five statistics are presented: (1) percentage of majority Republican chambers, (2) percentage of Republican legislators, (3) percentage of black legislators who are Democrats, (4) percentage of Democratic delegations composed of black majorities, and (5) the percentage of black legislators who serve in the majority of their respective chamber.

Table 6 highlights an extraordinary shift in partisan power and African-American representational clout between the two time periods. Before the 2010 elections, Democrats and Republicans exhibit parity in their control of state legislative chambers with a Peripheral South GOP advantage of 67 percent in House chambers being the exception. Even more equitable is the percentage of Republican and Democratic legislators, which hovers around the 50 percent mark. Almost all black legislators in both chambers are affiliated with the Democratic Party. And only in the Deep South are there Democratic chamber delegations that consist of black majorities (three of five Deep South state houses and one of five Deep South state senates). Finally, with the exception of Peripheral South state houses, most African-American legislators serve in the majority.

Yet, a notable change occurred as the 2014 midterm elections approached. Namely, Republicans had state legislative majorities in all but one of the 22 Southern chambers; with the Virginia senate split evenly between 20 Republicans and 20 Democrats. GOP legislators made up more than 60 percent of each subregional legislative chamber and comprised 65 percent of the Deep South’s state senates; and, again, black legislators were almost all Democrats. But the most striking feature of the racial divide in the South’s state legislative politics is that in every Deep South state house and senate, African Americans comprised a majority of the minority Democratic delegation. Lastly, only a few black legislators served in the majority and this small contingent consists entirely of African-American Republicans.

As we move up the electoral ladder to U.S. House districts, and especially statewide races, the larger electorates in these types of contests make Republican candidates prohibitive favorites because most white voters have realigned to the Republican Party. For instance, there is only one white Democratic congressman in the Deep South, John Barrow of Georgia 12—and the other eight Deep South Democrats are all African Americans. Every Southern state’s U.S. House delegation is majority Republican. After the 2012 election the total number of black Democrats (N = 18) in the Southern House delegation outnumbered white (non-Hispanic) Democrats (N = 16). Overall, 71 percent (98/138) of Southern House members are Republicans, including 76 percent (29/38) in the Deep South and 69 percent (69/100) in the Peripheral South.

Perhaps even more striking is the progression of GOP growth in statewide contests. Figure 2 presents the Republican share of statewide offices in the Deep and Peripheral South from 1990 to 2013. It may come as a surprise that in 1990, Republicans held less than 20 percent of these offices. Since then, the upward trajectory is remarkable and from 2006 onward, GOP gains in the Deep South have soared past the Peripheral South. At present, of the 39 statewide elective offices in the Deep South, Republicans hold all but one (97 percent)! The lone Democrat is white Mississippi Attorney General Jim Hood. Republicans occupy 22 of 35 statewide offices in the Peripheral South (63 percent).

16 After 2012 there were also six Hispanic Democrats, five in Texas and one in Florida.
17 The U.S. Senate is the only office we exclude from the analysis because it is a federal election.
### TABLE 6
The Dramatic Decline in Black Representational Clout in Southern State Legislatures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region Percentage</th>
<th>Majority Republican Chambers</th>
<th>Republican Legislators</th>
<th>Blacks Who Are Democrats</th>
<th>Majority Black Democratic Delegations</th>
<th>Blacks Serving in the Majority</th>
<th>Majority Republican Chambers</th>
<th>Republican Legislators</th>
<th>Blacks Who Are Democrats</th>
<th>Majority Black Democratic Delegations</th>
<th>Blacks Serving in the Majority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DS State Houses</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PS State Houses</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South State Senates</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DS State Senates</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PS State Senates</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** The data prior to the 2010 elections are from Bositis (2011); the authors compiled the data preceding the 2014 elections from online Southern state legislature websites.

DS = Deep South, PS = Peripheral South.
The exodus of whites from the Southern Democratic Party has resulted in a de facto segregated party system that is starkly detrimental to the representational interests of African Americans (Bositis, 2011). In the 1980s, when Earl Black and Merle Black (1987:Chapter 6) spoke of “the limited leverage of a franchised minority” because whites continued to control political power, Democrats still dominated contests below the presidential level. This meant that African Americans were often a critical part of the ruling Democratic coalition in Southern politics (see Parker, 1990:Chapter 5). Now, with Southern Republicans commanding majorities, and often supermajorities, in statewide and district-based offices, the neglect of black interests in the law-making process is likely to reach a level not witnessed since the 1960s.

Discussion and Conclusion

There is a widely held sentiment among scholars that the partisan transformation of the South is one of the most important developments in contemporary American politics (see Bartels, 2000; Black and Black, 2002; Valentino and Sears, 2005). The restructuring of party loyalties in Dixie plays an outsized role in the national balance of electoral power (Black and Black, 2007), having driven partisan re-sorting at both the elite and mass levels. In the words of Hood, Kidd, and Morris (2012:187), “the level of ideological polarization in the American party system is simply inconceivable in the absence of the disintegration of the Solid South and the partisan transformation of Southern politics.”

But what explains the Southern transformation? There needs to be an impetus, a trigger, for altering the relative strength of political parties (Sundquist, 1983), and in the South this came in the form of the 1964 presidential election and the 1965 Voting Rights Act (VRA). The issue evolution story of race demonstrates that when the major party presidential candidates take opposing positions on one of the most salient issues in American politics
(by far the most salient in the South), mass political behavior will adjust accordingly (Carmines and Stimson, 1989). President Lyndon Johnson’s championing civil rights and the stark opposition of Republican Barry Goldwater—who as an Arizona senator voted against the 1964 Civil Rights Act—prompted a critical realignment of African Americans in favor of the Democratic Party. As a result, blacks have been a Democratic bloc in terms of both party identification and vote choice since the 1964 election. Likewise, Southern whites immediately shifted their support in favor of Republican presidential candidates, but it took generations for a majority of the white electorate to completely realign both its partisan preferences and political affiliations with the GOP (Black and Black, 2002, 2007).

Yet, all 11 of the former Confederate states did not move uniformly, or evenly paced, toward the Republican Party and it is incorrect to portray the South, even the contemporary South, as a homogenous region. Instead, we contend that the conception of “two Souths” endures, and has important representational consequences for partisan politics in the United States. As we have shown (see Figure 1), Republican growth was considerably swifter and stronger in the Peripheral South than in the Deep South until the mid-1990s. But since the mid-2000s, GOP strength has been notably greater in the Deep South. This pattern is primarily due to the overriding role of race in structuring Southern electoral politics (Hood, Kidd, and Morris, 2012). The evolving political response to race accounts for why the Deep South clung to the Democratic Party longer and yet now is much more Republican.

As Black and Black put it, the “Republicans’ exceedingly slow rise cannot be understood without appreciating the tenacity, resilience, and profound transformations of their Democratic opponents” (2002:38). Indeed, instead of caving on the civil rights issue and embracing the stance of their national party, for years after the 1964 election and passage of the VRA, Deep South Democrats dug in their heels and reaffirmed their resistance to legally enforced racial equality (Black and Black, 2002). Deep South Democrats’ refusal to concede the conservative position on race placed their Republican opponents in a box. In the Deep South, race was much more important than economics, but the latter issue had more sway among Peripheral South whites (and hence led to greater Republican gains; see Black and Black, 1987). Deep South Democrats, however, were running a race against time, and time eventually won. With racial issue evolution firmly established in national politics in the 1964 presidential election, and the massive reintroduction of African Americans into the Deep South electorate following passage of the VRA (Bullock and Gaddie, 2009), the strategic incentive for Deep South whites to switch to the Republican Party grew more urgent and more powerful (Hood, Kidd, and Morris, 2012).

Nonetheless, it took decades for the Southern partisan transformation to run its course due to a number of factors; namely, Deep South Democrats’ initial resistance to their national party’s liberal position on civil rights, a white registration advantage that persisted into the 1990s (Alt, 1994), the medium-term electoral success of Democratic biracial coalitions in the 1970s and 1980s (Browder and Stanberry, 2010; Glaser, 1996; Lamis, 1988), and the slow cycle of a more Democratic electorate being replaced by a more Republican one (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler, 2002). But eventually, by the 1990s the Reagan generation had reached a critical mass and the secular realignment of Southern whites in favor of the Republican Party made it evident to strategic politicians that the relative advantage of affiliating with the GOP was undeniable.18 The extreme racial polarization in Deep South voting behavior now ensures white dominance in Deep South politics for

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18 According to the theory of relative advantage, as developed and articulated by Hood, Kidd, and Morris (2012), because of the proportionally larger share of the black population in the Deep South, their one-sided...
the foreseeable future. The Peripheral South, on the other hand, because of its greater prevalence of those factors that favor the Democratic Party (more northern in-migration, a larger Hispanic population, higher urbanization), is likely to take a different path, back toward a revival of two-party competition (McKee, 2010). Nonetheless, because of the current state of Republican electoral hegemony in both subregions, black interests will be increasingly neglected until the Democratic Party once again proves viable.

To be sure, given the tumultuous political history of the American South, we are hardly the first to recognize the enduring differences between its subregions, but we are the most recent to subject the “two Souths” thesis to a rigorous empirical test spanning multiple offices and elections with a data set large enough, and containing the proper controls, to determine if this delineation is in fact a myth. In Politics and Society in the South, Earl Black and Merle Black offer a lasting piece of advice to observers of southern politics: “[i]mportant subregional differences, with the Deep South responding in a markedly more traditional fashion than the Peripheral South, should be anticipated whenever racial phenomena are involved” (1987:14). Over a quarter-century later, our findings reaffirm that dividing the southern states into “Deep” and “Peripheral” still holds political significance, and has lasting implications for representation in the region.

REFERENCES


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