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Author
McNulty, John

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John E. McNulty

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Department of Political Science

University of California, Berkeley

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Republican Rise in the Rebel South

In 1949 the great political scientist V.O. Key averred regarding Southern politics, “In its
grand outlines the politics of the South revolves around the position of the Negro….Whatever
phase of the southern political process one seeks to understand, sooner or later the trail leads
back to the Negro.”¹ The object of this paper is to review events and issues that have affected
Southern politics since the formation of the New Deal coalition in 1932, in order to determine
how the politics of the South have changed and how they have remained the same.

DOMINANCE OF THE DEMOCRACY: THE FDR ERA (1932-1945)

For years the South had, in the form of the two-thirds rule in the Democratic national
convention, a veto on national (and thus sectional) race policy. A Presidential candidate needed
two-thirds of the delegates to be nominated; similarly, the party platform needed two thirds
approval. Thus, a candidate unacceptable to the South could not be nominated, nor a platform
unacceptable to the South adopted. In 1936, Roosevelt, at the height of his powers, determined
that with the expansion of the New Deal coalition’s non-Southern base, the South need no longer
be catered to. The convention replaced the two-thirds rule with a majority rule; the Southern
faction could then no longer impose their will on the national party. In future years this rule
change would shatter the fragile alliance between the Southern and Northern wings of the party.
Under the two-thirds rule, hard choices were impossible – general consensus had to be reached
on everything, including all but the most marginal factions. With majority rule, positions could
be adopted that were opposed by substantial blocs in the party – such as liberal racial policies. This would ultimately rend the Southern bloc asunder from the New Deal coalition.

Yet the coalition held under FDR. Roosevelt’s activist anti-poverty agenda, so urgently needed in the South, was the primary glue here, yet he further cemented the bond by assiduously courting the Southern leadership, as he had since the earliest part of his career in the Wilson Administration\(^2\). Roosevelt had long been a favorite of the Southern leadership; he represented a progressive Protestant alternative to Al Smith’s aggressive wet Catholic urbanism\(^3\). Early in his career he had been decidedly in the Smith camp; yet his personal charm and candor in explaining Smith while apologizing for the unfortunate behavior of Smith supporters at the fractious 1924 convention won many Southern delegates over; an Arkansas delegate even said he would have put Roosevelt’s name up for nomination had his physical condition allowed.\(^4\) After Roosevelt split with Smith during the 1928 campaign, when Smith tried to attract Eastern Republican votes to the explicit exclusion of the Southern agrarians, Roosevelt became the new champion of many Southerners in the battle for hegemony in the party by the Smith wing.\(^5\) Surprisingly, at the 1932 Democratic convention, most of Roosevelt’s support came from the South and West, so modulated were his positions as Governor of New York; his competition came from the tattered

\(^2\) Frank Friedel, *F.D.R. and the South* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1965) pp. 2-4
\(^3\) In 1928, Governor Smith lost five rim Southern states in the only significant Democratic losses between Reconstruction and the onset of the Cold War.
\(^4\) Friedel, page 5
\(^5\) Friedel, page 19, page 27. FDR wasn’t purely a candidate of the rurals, in the way that William Gibbs McAdoo was in 1924. Rather, he was a Northerner who had managed to make himself acceptable to the South, while still remaining positioned to capitalize on the Democratic base Smith had built in the North.
Smith camp, still entrenched in the urban North. When Speaker of the House John Nance Garner of Texas threw in behind FDR (in exchange for the Vice Presidency), it clinched his nomination. 6

Also, Roosevelt had an intimate appreciation of the Southern lifestyle through his adoption of Warm Springs, Georgia, as a second home. Initially, the estate was to be a resort for him to advance his recovery from polio; in time, he also established a working (if unprofitable) farm. 7 He would never actually become a Southerner, of course, but he had enough credibility to build alliances, and he learned enough in his time there to understand the Southern system intimately. 8

Finally, during the Depression all other issues were dominated by the economic crisis. On questions of economics Roosevelt was in harmony with Old Guard agrarians in his first term, and afterward more so with a new generation of New Dealer Dixiecrats. In 1925 Roosevelt said to an Iowa Democrat, “There is one common ground – Progressive Democracy – on which we can all agree.” 9 Even when he began to expand in different directions during his Presidency, this was still true, and it provided a strong underlying base of support. World War II provided another overarching issue on which Southerners were with Roosevelt one hundred percent. There were deep, deep ties of loyalty to the Democratic party, enduring throughout the lifetime of the oldest Southerner, back to the War Between the States. 10

Some economic stimulus programs in the late thirties which improved the fortunes of the poor disproportionately aided blacks in the South; conservative Southern white supremacists,

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6 Friedel, pp. 31-32
7 Friedel, pp. 5-17
8 Friedel, page 18
9 Friedel, page 19
10 Friedel, page 48
despite opposing the programs, declined to publicly go to battle. It was a strategic retreat; it was feared that an overt revolt would impair their future political influence. It was made clear to Roosevelt, particularly so by the senior Virginia Senator Carter Glass, that no serious encroachment on states’ rights or disruption of the closed Southern political system would be accepted by the Southern delegation; any legislation which might have such an impact would be filibustered or killed. Roosevelt, on his part, chose not to endanger his economic agenda for civil rights, seeing discretion as the better part of valor. 11 When finally Roosevelt lost patience with the obstructionism certain Southern dissidents and sponsored primary challenges designed to purge them in 1938, he failed in unseating them 12. An alliance of Southern conservatives and Republicans had already united against FDR during his 1937 attempt to pack the Supreme Court; this coalition was strengthened by the purge attempt. They would severely hamstring Roosevelt’s legislative proposals for the remainder of his tenure in office 13.

THE DIXIECRAT REVOLT, AND THEN QUIESCENCE (1946-1962)

After depression, war, and FDR, the unequal partnership within the party began to show strains. President Truman endorsed some aspects of civil rights reform put out by the President’s Committee on Civil Rights in October of 1947. Before any serious action had even been taken, Southern regulars were in an uproar. Truman held his ground, looking towards the 1948 election and seeking votes of urban blacks and Eastern liberals to counter the Henry Wallace challenge. In response, Southerners staged a walkout at the Democratic convention in Philadelphia. A rump

11 Friedel, pp. 79-81  
12 Friedel, pp. 99-100
group convened in Birmingham and nominated their own ticket of Southern Governors J. Strom Thurmond and Fielding Wright of South Carolina and Mississippi, respectively. Completely in keeping with Key’s formulation, the ticket did best in the Black Belt, those areas where the black population was highest and thus where an empowered black population would prove most threatening. The “Dixiecrat” or States’ Rights ticket won four states, in the deepest part of the South: South Carolina, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama.\(^{14}\)

Notwithstanding these revolts from the right and left, Truman and the Democrats held the White House in 1948, and regained control of Congress besides. Despite Truman’s continued advancement of an egalitarian agenda, notably his integration of the military, the Southerners returned to the party following the 1948 election. On the state and congressional levels, the revolt seemed to have done little to undercut the one-party system in the South. On the presidential level, however, some of the moorings holding the South to the national party had come undone. In 1952 the Republicans nominated Dwight Eisenhower; the moderate, nominally non-partisan war hero held great appeal for southern voters. Though Governor Stevenson was not particularly unacceptable, many voters simply “liked Ike”. Eisenhower won four rim states in

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\(^{13}\) Friedel, page 95

\(^{14}\) A common practice when discussing the South is to divide it into two groups, the Deep South and the Rim South. The initial distinction was from Key’s Black Belt formulation (Key, page 5); the states with the biggest Black Belts were the Deep South – in those states race was more salient due to the higher black population. They also tended to be more agrarian and economically stunted. The Rim States, with more diverse economies and a lower black population were less stereotypically “Southern” in their politics. The general division follows: Deep South – South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana; Rim South – Virginia, North Carolina, Florida, Texas, Arkansas, and Tennessee. Arkansas is occasionally included within the Deep South, and some recent work moves Georgia in the Rim as a result of the emergence of Atlanta as an economic powerhouse of international proportions.

\(^{15}\) Key, *Southern Politics*, pp. 329-344
1952 (Virginia, Texas, Florida, and Tennessee) and held them in 1956 while also narrowly taking Louisiana.\textsuperscript{16}

In 1960, when the Irish Catholic John Kennedy faced Ike’s Vice President Richard Nixon, the Solid South frayed both in its rim and its heartland. Nixon took the rim states Florida, Tennessee, and Virginia; further, he only barely lost Texas, and likely would have won had native Texan Lyndon Johnson not been Kennedy’s running mate. The Democratic Party held the rest, but Alabama and Mississippi, perhaps disaffected with Kennedy’s Catholicism and his sympathy (albeit moderate) for the civil rights movement, ran unpledged slates of Democratic electors who cast their votes for the conservative party boss of Virginia Senator Harry F. Byrd.

An important note is that the locus of growing support in the South for Nixon, Eisenhower and even Dewey was located in the emerging urban and suburban sectors.\textsuperscript{17} Notably in the rim states, regions like Tampa-St. Petersburg in Florida, Dallas-Fort Worth in Texas, and the Beltway suburbs in Virginia became quite hospitable to GOP Presidential candidates. Donald Strong, a political scientist of the time summed it up: “They’re acting like Yankees.”\textsuperscript{18}

**REALIGNMENT ON RACE (1963-1966)**

In the 1964 Presidential election, Senator Barry Goldwater in 1964 won only six states nationwide in a historic drubbing. Fascinatingly, however, five\textsuperscript{19} of these states were in the heart


\textsuperscript{18} Donald S. Strong, *The 1952 Presidential Election in the South*, page 382. Also, see Nelson W. Polsby, “A Revolution in Congress”, unpublished, from a lecture at Oxford University.

\textsuperscript{19} The sixth was Goldwater’s home state of Arizona; this was unexceptional.
of the Southern black belt\textsuperscript{20}: South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. This was an astonishing reversal, both for the lack of competitiveness in the Non-South and the success in the Solid South – against a son of Texas\textsuperscript{21}, no less.

The failure of the Republican presidential candidate in the Non-South is attributable to a deep party split in the GOP between the conservative wing, led by Goldwater, and a more moderate wing, typified to various degrees by retired President Eisenhower, Richard Nixon, and Governors Nelson Rockefeller of New York, William Scranton of Pennsylvania, and George Romney of Michigan. Goldwater’s nomination was poorly received by many in the party, and the traditional base in the East and Midwest largely deserted him. The more cogent aspect of this reversal of fortune, however, is the shocking Southern success.

African-Americans, where enfranchised, had been slowly drifting from the party of Lincoln to the Democratic Party, largely because the New Deal economic policies were attractive to them, but also because the national party had severed some of the ties to the Dixiecrat white supremacist agenda. The Republicans had not abandoned the Negro, however; in fact as a party they remained more supportive overall of civil rights than the Democrats prior to LBJ\textsuperscript{22}. Nevertheless, the economic policies of the Democrats combined with some small civil rights initiatives on their part was sufficient to make the black vote competitive. In the 1960 campaign, the civil rights planks of the two parties were nearly identical – progressive yet cautious. Indeed the main note of differentiation was one of symbolism, when JFK placed a

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\textsuperscript{20} Key, page 5, defines the Southern black belt as “those counties and sections of the Southern states in which Negroes constitute as substantial proportion of the population.” This was identified as the hard core of southern political unity because of “the problem…broadly considered, [of] the maintenance of control by a white minority.”

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\textsuperscript{21} Lyndon Johnson
phone call of support to the imprisoned Martin Luther King during the campaign. Nixon, on the advice of his handlers and against his own inclination, did not call.\textsuperscript{23}

When Lyndon Johnson succeeded the assassinated President Kennedy, the civil rights initiatives got bigger – much bigger. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, pushed through the Congress by Johnson, was anathema to the long standing system of apartheid prevalent in the old Confederacy. It unalterably changed the Democratic Party’s position on civil rights, becoming the driving force behind the advancement of equality between the races.\textsuperscript{24}

The Democratic Party had been tied to the South by the tether of being “safe” on the race issue. Only whites voted, and the Democratic Party was committed to preserving their hegemony\textsuperscript{25}. In 1948 that arrangement was breached by Truman, and the Southern political establishment put forward their own alternative. In 1964 the Republicans provided the alternative in Goldwater, who was amenable to the South in ways no previous Republican nominee had ever been.

Goldwater was a vociferous opponent of the Civil Rights Act; he viewed it as an infringement on state sovereignty. This was in complete concordance with the Dixiecrat establishment reading of state sovereignty; this reading was a necessity to preserve the white stranglehold on power. Goldwater himself was far from a bigot; he was, rather, a genuine classical liberal, nearly an anachronism at that time\textsuperscript{26}. It just so happened that the classical

\textsuperscript{23} Carmines and Stimson, pp. 38-39
\textsuperscript{24} Carmines and Stimson, pp.43-44
\textsuperscript{25} Bernard Cosman, \textit{Five States for Goldwater} (University of Alabama Press, 1966), page 61
\textsuperscript{26} William Havard, "From Past to Future: An Overview of Southern Politics", page 714
liberal view arrived at the same conclusion that the tacit white supremacy of the Dixiecrats did; that the federal government ought not interfere in the internal affairs of the states.

Also, there was a political angle. Supporters of Goldwater believed that he could take the South in total away from the Democrats because of this concordance of opinion; the co-opting of the Southern Democratic base of support was seen as the key to victory. If the GOP could sweep the South’s 128 electoral votes, the theory went, while holding dependable Republican strongholds in the Midwest, Rocky Mountains, and northern New England, they could create a new winning coalition.

In 1964 this initial GOP “Southern strategy” failed nationally; LBJ swept the non-South (except for Goldwater’s Arizona). However, by taking the Deep South, Goldwater made the last bastion of Southern Democracy competitive. The rim states, less preoccupied with the racial question, had been competitive for the past several elections. Though Goldwater had not swept the South as he had hoped, by winning the states he did, he showed it was possible.

Further, the Republicans were consolidating support lower on the ticket. Here there began a steady advance at all levels of government for the GOP in the South: three Senate seats, two governorships, and a doubling of GOP representation in Congress and state legislatures. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate that throughout the South the GOP had achieved near parity with the Democratic Party on the Presidential level. (This would soon be supplanted by Republican dominance on the Presidential level.)

However, starting in the sixties, the GOP began to be competitive in senatorial and gubernatorial races as well. Figures 3 and 4 show a sharp increase in Republican voting in these elections across the South throughout the fifties, and then an equilibrium of sorts is reached at
roughly 60% Democrat—40% Republican. This equilibrium, which holds until the eighties, continues to be decidedly advantageous to the Democrats, but is close enough to enable the Republicans to begin to win a few races a year, as shown in Figures 5 and 6. Incumbency\(^{27}\) enters the picture, helping the GOP to retain seats won (particularly in the Senate, since most governors are term limited. Further, holding high office enables them to build state parties more effectively\(^ {28}\). In the eighties and nineties, the gap narrowed further; in recent years the GOP has enjoyed more success than the Democrats.

Figures 7, 8, and 9 look at officeholders in the U.S. House of Representatives and in the upper and lower houses of the state legislatures. The convergence of the two lines is slower here, no doubt as a result of district lines drawn by a century of Democratic legislatures\(^ {29}\). In the House, there are two points of rapid advancement for the GOP — the period between 1960 and 1980, where they climb from 8% to 36%, despite the Watergate setback; and the nineties, during the just-ended Gingrich era, when the Southern delegation became majority Republican. Figures 8 and 9 show the legislatures following a slow but steady path toward region-wide parity; here there is a great deal of differentiation between rim states where the Republicans have taken or are threatening to take control of the legislatures and heartland states where they have not made a dent.

Figure 10 is comprised of two charts taken from James Glaser’s book showing party identification for all Southerners and white Southerners, respectively. It is apparent that the

\(^{27}\) Incumbency is a double-edged sword; advantages of incumbency helped Democrats hold seats in Congress long after the constituencies of those seats began to lean Republican.

\(^{28}\) The fact that Democrats have maintained control of most grassroots political organizations has served to stymie party-building efforts a great deal. See Glaser, page 179

\(^{29}\) Glaser, page 183
white shift in identification is driving the overall shift. Numerous studies have identified party identification as an enduring trait, so the transformation we see here, culminating in parity among whites in 1992, translates all the more strongly to political behavior. The South over the last fifty years has become majority Republican among whites; the near-monopoly the Democratic Party has on blacks is the main factor that keeps the Democrats competitive at all.

Enfranchisement of African-Americans had picked up gradually across the South since World War II, particularly in the cities. After the Voting Rights Act of 1965 most barriers to black voting were outlawed. From this point forward, blacks have voted overwhelmingly Democratic, at rates approaching 90% in recent years. In the wake of the epochal civil rights bills of the sixties, this is unsurprising; the Democratic Party was aggressively pursuing policies favorable to their civil rights, while the Republican Party, the party of blacks from the time of Lincoln, opposed the policies on ideological and political grounds. With the Democratic Party having become the party of blacks in the South, whites shifted with increasing rapidity to the Republican Party. For a century it had been socially unacceptable to be a Republican in polite Southern circles; in the sixties, Republicanism lost its stigma. Today, Southern Democratic partisans encounter some of the same disapproval that Republicans once faced.

In summary, sometime before the 1964 election, civil rights and other racial questions, long consigned to a minor role in the national political debate, was thrust to the forefront. The salience of the race issue forced the major parties to transform themselves in response; where there was once concurrence, now stark difference loomed. The Republicans developed a

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30 Cosman, page 75
following among white Southerners through newfound fundamental conservatism, chartered in San Francisco in 1964. The once-segregationist Democrats completed their metamorphosis into the party of racial liberalism.  

**ENTRENCHMENT OF THE NEW SOUTHERN SYSTEM (1967-1972)**

The incorporation of the race question into the two party system gave the Republican Party a beachhead in the South. They were winning states on the presidential level, and were now beginning to have successes on the congressional level and in state government. Yet they were still just on the beach; the Democrats were holding the high ground. As the Democratic Party evolved to become the party of racial liberalism, however, they would gradually surrender their traditional base in the South. They would pick up new voters in the process (blacks, youth, urbanites), but it did not translate to the overwhelming majority they once had.

Governor George Wallace of Alabama, a pro-segregation populist Democrat who had received enormous press attention for his defiance in the face of federal integration efforts, made an independent run for the Presidency in 1968. His presence in the race exemplified the split that had taken place in the Democratic party – the Democratic nominee, Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey, had been perhaps the main proponent for civil rights reform dating back to the 1948 party split. Thus, both extremes of the old New Deal coalition were represented; indeed, on economic policy, Wallace and Humphrey were not particularly far apart.

32 Carmines and Stimson, page 58
33 Havard, page 714
34 Ladd and Hadley, page 135
The Republican nominee was Richard Nixon, who had edged his civil rights stance rightward to reflect the new realities in his party and the new opportunities in the South (which had for so long been written off as unattainable). Nixon had written off the black vote following Goldwater, so it was in his interest to get all the white Southern votes he could; any bones he threw to African-Americans could only endanger that effort. It is important to note here that the successful implementation by the Republican party of a “Southern strategy” for success began to inextricably intertwine the success in the South with the nationwide success of the party; the creation of a Southern base meant that such a base needed to be catered to in the future.

The results in 1968 were instructive. Wallace carried Deep South states, where race was the most conspicuous issue: Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, Louisiana, and the traditional rim state of Arkansas – where federal troops had enforced integration in the fifties. Nixon won most of the modernizing rim states – Florida, Tennessee, Virginia, North Carolina, and the more conservative South Carolina, where the most prominent Southern Republican, party switcher Strom Thurmond, lent his support. Humphrey barely eked out a victory over Nixon in the biggest prize, Texas, with Wallace well behind. One might generalize that general conservatism was of greatest value in the rim states, while racial conservatism was of greatest value in the deep South states. In the absence of Wallace, Nixon would have carried both mantles.

In 1972 he did, with gusto. This was in no small part because of his opponent. Senator George McGovern of South Dakota was associated from a emerging New Left wing of the Democratic Party. Walter Dean Burnham describes the Democratic Party in 1972 as being split into thirds. One-third was on the left, led by McGovern, one-third was on the right with

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35 Carmines and Stimson, page 58
Governor Wallace (who was running in the Democratic primaries until an assassination attempt left him unable to continue the race), and the middle third, or “vital center”, was represented by Humphrey, Senator Henry “Scoop” Jackson, the rest of the major party leadership structure, and organized labor.\textsuperscript{36} When McGovern gained the nomination, the traditionally conservative South was lost to the Democratic party. Nixon swept the Southern states by wide margins. Just as in 1964 when the Republican Party moved so decisively right that their overall base of support was radically altered, in 1972 the Democratic Party moved so far left their overall base of support was altered as well. Labor, once wholly the province of the Democrats, decisively shifted to Nixon and has been in play ever since. Any social conservatives, particularly Southern Dixiecrats, who had not yet voted Republican did so in 1972. This may have carried down the ticket further had not Democratic candidates consciously dissociated themselves from McGovern. Also, Nixon’s campaign, openly supported by many conservative Southern Democrats in Congress, determined not to damage this newfound alliance by aggressively targeting these seats.\textsuperscript{37}

The realignment that had begun in 1964 reached full fruition here. The best evidence that a shift was underway was coming from the lower levels of the parties. Candidates were beginning to filter up the ranks that reflect the new partisan composition of the parties (i.e. Goldwater’s New Right and McGovern’s New Left) rather than the former positions of the parties, when race was ignored by the divided Democrats, and the Republicans cautiously advanced the civil rights agenda\textsuperscript{38}, usually from the minority\textsuperscript{39}.

\textsuperscript{36} Walter Dean Burnham, \textit{American Politics in the 1970’s: Beyond Party} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975) page 343
\textsuperscript{37} Burnham, page 322
\textsuperscript{38} Carmines and Stimson, page 62
In the Republican Party, Southern Republicanism, such as it was, had typically been a liberal alternative to the Dixiecrats – more liberal than even their non-Southern counterparts\textsuperscript{40}. Way back in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century the GOP was electing blacks to Congress in the South (before they lost suffrage throughout most of the region). The Republican party overall was to the left of the Democratic Party on race; the non-South was safe ground for enlightened positions on race. Starting in the 1950’s, ideological conservatives began to emerge from the grass roots, creating the momentum that carried Goldwater to the nomination in 1964. This has continued unabated until the present, when Republican liberals and moderates are condignly confined to New England and the Middle Atlantic states. Throughout the rest of the country they were gradually replaced by younger firebrand conservatives as state parties shifted right.

The emergent Goldwater ideology made racially conservative positions respectable in the Republican Party and in the non-South\textsuperscript{41}. Interestingly, this issue realignment (as termed by Carmines and Stimson) coincided with a large migration of African-Americans to the non-Southern states, principally to urban centers in the Northeast and Midwest\textsuperscript{42}. Where in the South the race issue had been traditionally handled by legalized discrimination and tacitly sanctioned intimidation, in the non-South the new salience of race resulted in nothing so overt. What happened was “white flight”, a geographic partition of territory by race. Certain areas, especially

\textsuperscript{39} On the few occasions when the Republicans did have control, notably Eisenhower’s first Congress, they did fail to act aggressively. The biographer Stephen Ambrose, in Eisenhower: Soldier and President (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991) attributes this to Eisenhower’s reluctance to back his own party in Congress.
\textsuperscript{40} Carmines and Stimson, page 69
\textsuperscript{41} Carmines and Stimson, page 73
small to mid-size cities, were simply ceded to the African-American migrants, as whites moved to the newly developed suburbs.\textsuperscript{43}

The whys and hows of racial conservatism, as Carmines and Stimson describe the race philosophy of the dominant Goldwater-Reagan axis of the Republican party\textsuperscript{44}, get murky. It is obviously not the overt racism of the Dixiecrat white supremacists. Studies by David Sears and Donald Kinder, among others, claim to have identified racial resentment\textsuperscript{45} (Kinder’s term) or symbolic racism\textsuperscript{46} (Sears’s conception) as a modern mutation of old-fashioned racial prejudice, with important distinctions, but also fundamental similarities in outcome\textsuperscript{47}. Conversely, another perspective on this is championed by Paul Sniderman, who argues that racial conservatism can represent a genuine difference in political outlook, rather than covert racism\textsuperscript{48}. Whatever the nature of the motivation behind it, the adoption of doctrine of racial conservatism by the Republican party creates a home for conservatives in the South who are disaffected with the Democratic party; in short order it would supplant open segregationism as the preferred policy on race among Southerners themselves (at least in polite society).\textsuperscript{49}

\textsuperscript{43} Lewis Killian, \textit{White Southerners} (Amherst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1985) pp. 147-148
\textsuperscript{44} Carmines and Stimson, page 82
\textsuperscript{46} David O. Sears, et al., “Is it Really Racism?: The Origins of White Americans’ Opposition to Race-targeted Policies”.
\textsuperscript{47} Byron M. Roth, in “Social psychology’s racism”, \textit{The Public Interest}, volume 98, 1990, pp. 26-36, argues that the Sears-Kinder measure of symbolic racism is really nothing more than a measure of conservatism. Sniderman has made similar points.
\textsuperscript{49} In an article for \textit{Esquire} in August 1971, Joseph B. Cumming, Jr., writes that southern racism “has grown close enough to the national style of racism, as described by the Kerner Report, to lose its value as a national news story. See Cumming, “Been Down Home So Long It Looks Like Up to Me”, page 85.
The realignment within the Democratic party was just as stark, but might be best described as coming in two stages. The first stage came just after World War II, when a new generation of Democrats who came of age in the Depression under Franklin Roosevelt began to question the justice of the system of segregation in the South. Prominent among these was Hubert Humphrey, but the Happy Warrior was just the first to challenge the status quo; many would follow him (most importantly Lyndon Johnson). The ideology of this generation of leaders was very progressive on civil rights, but more or less compatible with the South on other issues. By this calculus, candidates of this generation would have a hard time in the heartland states of the South, but might be competitive in the less race obsessed Southern rim states. This is a good description of what happened in 1964 with LBJ.\(^{50}\)

Almost as soon as this group took control of the Democratic Party, they lost it, amid the maelstrom of Vietnam and the emergence of the baby boomers. This vital center\(^{51}\) of the new Democratic party was forced to confront the vestiges of the conservative wing on the right and the emerging postmodern movement on their left. In 1972, McGovern and the postmodernists wrested control from the progressive-yet-mainstream vital center, just as the vital center had swung the party away from the segregationist Southerners a few short years before. The conservatives completely abandoned the party at that point, as the postmodern ideology was entirely incompatible with theirs; suddenly the vital center was the moderate right wing of the Democratic Party. In the South the cross-cutting cleavages of race and general conservatism

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\(^{50}\) Ladd and Hadley, pp. 154-155
\(^{51}\) Burnham, page 343
converged in opposition to McGovern; what followed was a clean sweep of the South, and for that matter, the country.

There is an interesting generational effect happening among the regulars of the Democratic party in this period. First the pre-WWII generation, the segregationists and the oldest of the New Dealers, step aside (or die) when their time comes in favor of the next generation of politicians, the “greatest generation”, as they are popularly called. The cohorts that supported these groups evolve much the same way. But suddenly, the baby boomers become a huge political force before their time, and wrest much of the control of the Democratic party away from their parents. This is a result of several unique factors about this group. The first is, obviously, their sheer size; in a democracy, there is strength in numbers. The second is their unprecedented level of education, which increased their political awareness and effectiveness. The third was the existence of extraneous circumstances, like the Vietnam War and civil rights, which served as a catalyst for political mobilization and action. Their electoral impact was even sped along three years by the ratification of the 25th Amendment granting eighteen year-olds the right to vote. This accelerated generational shift that took place left some Democrats adrift; some of them left the party – and many of those ended up with the GOP.

A brief discussion of postmodernism is needed here. Postmodernism is one of those terms that gets abused by being tossed about without ever being properly defined. Ronald Inglehart is probably the most prominent proselytizer of the concept of postmodernism (also called at various times postmodernization or postmaterialism); his definition will be adopted

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52 Ladd and Hadley, pp. 155-156
here. He describes postmodern values as emphasizing self-expression and quality of life; this is to be contrasted with traditional, modernist values incorporated into our culture around the time of the industrial revolution, which focus on economic and physical security above all. Thus the postmodern issue agenda is a far different one than its predecessor; the abortion question is a major point of contention, as is a broader vision of civil rights, including not just blacks but also other oppressed ethnicities, women, religious groups, minority sexual orientations, the differently abled, the very old or very young, et cetera. Environmental concerns are of great importance. Above all, a sense of self-actualization is valued; the presumption is that since material wants and desires are completely fulfilled in an advanced industrial society, one is free to pursue more personal, ephemeral goals. Inglehart describes a two-dimensional continuum. One dimension contrasting traditional values (including, importantly, religious values) embodying materialism against secular/rational/legal values embodying postmodernism. The other contrasts the survival (physical needs) ethos of modernism with the well-being (emotional and intellectual wants) ethos of postmodernization. See Inglehart’s graph, attached as Figure 11.

Some reflection allows us to identify the disconnect between the New Left, represented by McGovern’s nomination in 1972, and the South. On the survival—well-being dimension, it is important to remember that the South has long lagged behind the non-South in terms of industrial development. The South remained a predominantly agrarian society for generations

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53 The GOP did not suffer the same generational shift; there was not the same sort of activism among Republican baby boomers as there was among Democrats.
55 Inglehart, page 82
56 This may be a bit of a bum rap on McGovern. While he was certainly the most liberal candidate across the board who had ever captured the Democratic nomination, he was certainly not quite as far left as the most radical elements of the party. He was embraced by those elements, however, and became tainted by the association.
after the non-South had modernized; per capita income and education was much lower as well. Consequently, Southern citizens still did not possess the same degree of economic security as their non-Southern brethren. Without such economic security, it is typical to remain in a materialist mindset. In earlier writings Inglehart alluded to Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs as a model of how people’s political interests changed as more basic needs were satiated\textsuperscript{57}. In the South those needs have generally been satiated for a much smaller portion of the population due to the widespread poverty there. On the traditional—secular/rational/legal dimension, the South’s abiding reverence for its heritage and its higher religiosity quotient will lead the average righteous Southern gentleman to consider those who embrace the postmodern mindset as impudent, unredeemable libertines. Therefore, by Inglehart’s own reckoning, the South’s fundamental conservatism and economic insecurity\textsuperscript{58} made it impracticable for the postmodern movement to take root there in 1972\textsuperscript{59}.

There is an important point to be made here about the differing nature of the 1964 and 1972 elections. In 1964, the victory of Goldwater in the Deep South, the region in which racial concerns were preeminent, underscored the dominance of race in that contest. Though Goldwater was offering an across-the-board menu of conservative positions, the conservatism of racial issues, contrasted with the Democratic party’s sudden strong stance in opposition to long-standing Southern practices, created the conditions for the Republican success in the South. The question of civil rights dominated the domestic political agenda in the period following

\textsuperscript{57} See Inglehart, “Postmaterialism in an Environment of Insecurity”, \textit{American Political Science Review}, volume 75, page 881
\textsuperscript{58} The economic performance of the South has improved substantially in recent years; it has been on the upswing since World War II, but there was a time lag between economic growth and tangible effects on quality of life.
\textsuperscript{59} Grantham, pp. 311-319
Kennedy’s assassination; the boycotts, demonstrations, sit-ins and freedom rides of the late fifties and early sixties gave the issue a visibility it had never before had for a sustained period. This rose to a crescendo with the 1963 March on Washington and the Nobel Prize award to Dr. King. The federal government debated appropriate response to this new pressing issue, and the two party candidates had diametrically opposed positions.

The new development of the party of Lincoln, and of Reconstruction, taking up the mantle of racial conservatism gave the Democrats the opportunity, which they would not have otherwise had, to firmly grasp the initiative on civil rights. If the Republicans had remained racially progressive, Southern whites would have voted for the Democrats out of habit, or simply sat out the election. The GOP nomination of Goldwater freed the Democrats from the burden of catering to that base; instead it gave them another, blacks – both Southern and non-Southern.

The election of 1972, conversely, was an election where race was largely absent from the issue agenda. McGovern, like Goldwater in 1964, offered a programmatic ideological agenda, although his was liberal. But the civil rights waters had calmed since the sixties, and other issues, such as Vietnam and a roiling economy, were most prominent. Thus race was not a large reason for the further advancement of the Republicans in the South.

The racists had already moved in 1964 to Goldwater. Some clearly remained with the Republican party, as the gains in lower level offices clearly indicate. However, any that shifted away from the Republicans in 1968 shifted no farther than Wallace; thus there was little

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60 Carmines and Stimson, page 189
61 Carmines and Stimson, page 117
62 Carmines and Stimson, page 118
63 Carmines and Stimson, pp. 122-123
psychological barrier to shifting back to the Republicans. The bonds of party identification had been torn asunder for nearly a decade.

1972, rather, was the year when the Democratic party was rejected throughout the South not for its racial policies, but for its liberal, and particularly New Left, policies overall; it was out of step with the traditional culture of the South. The break on race in 1964 sundered the strongest and most enduring link between the Democratic Party and the South; that had to happen before the 1972 break on ideology in general was possible.

**REPUBLICANS FITFULLY ADVANCE IN DIXIE (1973-1998)**

Following the huge triumph of Nixon in 1972, the Republicans initially took some steps backwards. The fallout from the Watergate scandal resulted in large congressional losses in 1974, and in 1976 Gerald Ford’s blanket pardon of Nixon likely cost Ford a narrow victory which would have legitimized his accidental Presidency. A large part of Ford’s loss was attributable to his failure to hold the South against Jimmy Carter. Carter was a surprise nominee in 1976 of the still-fractured Democratic Party, and, importantly, a former governor from a Deep South state (Georgia). His unexpected ascendency was a source of great pride to Southerners; he was one of them, a peanut farmer, a man of the rural South in speech, religion, and character. He won ten of the eleven states of the old Confederacy, losing only Virginia.

Yet Carter’s winning coalition in 1976 was not the old Dixiecrat coalition. In fact, Carter lost the Southern white vote to Ford, 46 percent to 53 percent. He won, rather, by being

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64 Carmines and Stimson, page 52
competitive with the white votes, especially working-class white who are lured to the Democratic line by economic incentives, while claiming an overwhelming minority of the black vote. Carter was a racial liberal who rejected the politics of the old South in favor of a new brand of inclusiveness. Far from refuting the new political alignment in the South, the results of the 1976 election ratified it – the Democratic Party was the overwhelming favorite among African-Americans, but a minority party among whites.\textsuperscript{66}

The old-style segregationists in the Democratic party were beginning to disappear. In large part this happened without great fanfare because their departure from the scene was primarily a function of natural attrition; having come of political age in the Depression or World War II, they retired or died\textsuperscript{67}. Their replacements were either coming from the Carter wing of the Democratic Party, or the seats were going Republican – the Democratic party was not replacing the anachronistic Dixiecrats with like-minded successors; and the Republicans were willing and able to provide their own conservatives to fill the void\textsuperscript{68}.

The addition of African-Americans to the voter rolls following the epochal civil rights acts of the mid-sixties are the primary reason why. Nearly all blacks identified with and voted for Democrats once they received the franchise; the Democratic party, after all, was championing the cause of civil rights\textsuperscript{69}. Old style Dixiecrats, who were able to drum up support among whites with an appeal to bigotry prior to the Voting Rights Act, now dared not risk losing a major part

\textsuperscript{65} The Byrd political machine, which had run Virginia politics for about a half century, dissociated from the Democratic Party in 1970, opening the door to big Republican advances.\textsuperscript{66} Carmines and Stimson, page 52\textsuperscript{67} Carmines and Stimson, page 73\textsuperscript{68} Polsby, page 18\textsuperscript{69} Though turnout among blacks did remain comparatively low.
of the Democratic electoral base with such appeals. Upon the retirement of old bull Dixiecrats, the party nominated racial moderates to replace them for similar reasons. If a Southern Republican was so inclined, however, he could make an indirect or veiled overture to white resentment – the Republicans had lost the blacks anyway. Thus the Republicans were able to seize the loyalties of the dwindling but still substantial number of hard core bigots in the populace without any opposition from the Democrats.

In 1980, Carter had become an unpopular president, and was defeated by Ronald Reagan. The Democrats also lost the Senate and a substantial part of the House majority. In the South, Carter was unable to duplicate his success, winning only his home state of Georgia. Many of the gains in Congress came here as well. Of six Southern Democratic seats up in the Senate, four went Republican – two of which unseated incumbents seeking reelection. The House had an eight-seat swing Republican, which seems insubstantial until you consider that only thirty-two races out of one hundred eight were even remotely close. Reagan was the first Republican candidate to run an avowedly conservative campaign since Goldwater. Where in 1972 Southern conservatives voted against McGovern, by 1980 they were voting for Republicans. The Southern political system by then had started producing young political talent that was seeking and winning offices as Republicans, and the South was growing into an important and influential part of the national Republican base.

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70 Carmines and Stimson, page 74
71 See also Glaser, page 12.
72 I picked, arbitrarily, a margin of thirty points to determine if the election was ever in doubt; i.e., whether it was or was not a safe seat.
73 Though Reagan, like Goldwater was no bigot; he simply opposed federal intervention in the issue under most circumstances. See Carmines and Stimson, page 54.
74 See Polsby, page 18
Throughout the eighties, through the Reagan and Bush landslides (which swept the Southern states in 1984 and 1988), the Southern Republican minorities in Congress stayed roughly the same; the Democrats maintained a slight but decided advantage\textsuperscript{75}. Much the same was true when looking at Southern governors. In the legislatures, however, Republicans began a steady upward climb. They had nowhere to go but up; as late as 1982 they held less than one-fifth of the available seats. From that point they began a steady climb to forty percent today; they even hold a few legislatures today.

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In 1992, Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton emerged from national obscurity and won the presidency from George Bush. As a dark horse, moderate Southern governor, Clinton is eminently comparable with Carter. Thus the comparison on performance in the South is stark. While Carter very nearly swept the South, Clinton could only manage to win four out of the eleven states of the old Confederacy in either of his victories – two of which are represented on the ticket. They were his own home state of Arkansas, Vice President Al Gore’s home state of

\textsuperscript{75} The Senate reverted to Democratic control in 1986; the class of 1980, including the Southerners, performed poorly in their reelection bids.

\textsuperscript{76} See Bibliographic note
Tennessee, Louisiana\textsuperscript{77}, Georgia in 1992 only\textsuperscript{78}, and Florida in 1996\textsuperscript{79} only. Despite regional advantages, luck with the economic cycle, and unrivaled campaigning skills, Clinton was unable to make a major breakthrough in the South. It remains strong GOP ground for 2000, with about half the leading contenders for the nomination hailing from Southern states.\textsuperscript{80}

Additionally, the pace of Republican gains in the South increased during the last decade. The 1994 election was especially noteworthy, in that both houses of Congress were captured by Republicans. Even though big gains were made in 1994, the gains made in 1996 were just as important to the GOP; the continued success in the South helped compensate for some backsliding in other areas of the country. It was in this period that the Republicans finally pulled away from Democrats in the South on the state and congressional level. The GOP now commands a 71-54 seat edge in the House of Representatives, has a six seat lead in the Senate, and holds governorships in seven of the eleven states of the Confederacy. The electoral strength they have exhibited on the Presidential level for nearly half a century has, at long last, trickled down the ticket.

\textsuperscript{77} In 1992, Louisiana got an unusual amount of campaign attention by candidate Clinton. This is because he was frequently back in Arkansas to perform his duties as governor, and would swing through the neighboring state on short campaign trips. See Robert P. Steed, Laurence W. Moreland, and Tod W. Baker, editors, \textit{The 1992 Presidential Election in the South} (Westport, CT, and London: Praeger, 1994), page 54. Also, the state GOP has been constantly battling to repress former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke, causing organizational disarray and distraction (cf. Steed, Moreland, and Baker, pp.51-62)

\textsuperscript{78} By only six-tenths a percentage point in 1992.

\textsuperscript{79} Protecting the Medicare benefit was a big issue with Florida’s elderly population.

\textsuperscript{80} Governor George W. Bush from Texas, Elizabeth Dole from North Carolina, Lamar Alexander from Tennessee, and Gary Bauer and Patrick Buchanan from Virginia (albeit greater DC)
The growth of the GOP in the South has taken so long in large part for structural reasons. It takes time to build a party, and the Republican party was all but non-existent on the state level in the South as recently as 1960. One Republican campaign manager was quoted as comparing it to building a pyramid from the top down. That is precisely what the GOP has been doing; they have been leveraging their success in presidential elections toward advances on the state and local levels. Since this is opposite the natural progression of things, it is harder, and takes more time. Conversely, the continued entrenchment of the Democratic party in the local level of politics in the small burghs and bureaucracies of the rural South provides an organizational base for parties in local politics, which sustains the state organizations.

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81 See Bibliographic note
82 Harry F. Byrd, Jr., who succeeded his late father as Senator from Virginia, left the Democratic Party in 1970 and declared himself an Independent. He remained in the Senate until 1983,
83 Glaser, page 179


**DISCUSSION**

Does Key’s race-centered formulation of Southern politics still hold? The civil rights struggles from 1948 to 1968 certainly maintained race as the issue looming above all others in the South. Yet until about 1964 the civil rights debate had largely been debated solely within the Democratic party; the Republican party was a complete irrelevancy in the Deep South, and held little sway in the rim states outside of historic Mountain Republican\(^{85}\) enclaves and emerging urban centers. In the early sixties, events in both the major parties changed this. Within the Democratic party, the forces favoring full equality and civil rights for the Negro resolved to act on these beliefs despite the objections of segregationists within the party. Simultaneously, the classical liberal philosophy of the newly anointed standard-bearer of the Republican party, Barry Goldwater, dictated that the GOP endorse a policy of restraint in government action on racial issues, aligning the Republicans with the Dixiecrats in approach to the race question, if not in motivation. These developments in the parties had the biggest impact in the Southern states where race mattered most, the heartland. Prior to 1964, when a candidate was wholly unacceptable in this region, they ran their own candidate, such as Thurmond, or nominated a slate of unpledged Democratic electors, as Alabama and Mississippi did in 1960\(^{86}\). But in 1964 the question of race was no longer debated within the Democratic party, but entered the two-party system, and left voters with a stark ideological choice on the matter. If the Republicans had

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84 Glaser, page 182
85 Political districts that remained loyal to the Union during the Civil War had local GOP organizations and allegiances. These were mostly located in the Appalachian regions of the South; hence the name. See Key, pp.280-285 for a full definition.
86 Unpledged slates of Democratic electors were nominated in 1964 in AL and MS as well, but the unpledged slates lost decisively to Goldwater.
nominated a progressive, or if Johnson had retreated on civil rights, the race debate would have remained within the Democratic party rather than being waged in a national campaign.

This can be juxtaposed with the stark ideological choices faced on other issues. Johnson was promising to expand the New Deal, while Goldwater wanted to roll much of it back. The New Deal economic policies had a great deal of historic support in the South; the challenges of the backward agrarian economy persisted. Johnson’s redistributionist principles should have been enormously popular in the South, particularly within the Southern Democratic party. But they were not; this owes to the fact that the Democratic party in the South, especially in the Deep South, was first and foremost the party of segregation – literally nothing else mattered. The abrogation of the national party from the commitment to protect racial segregation in the South, and the emergence of a new Republican party platform which offers a viable shield against reform, was the decisive issue in moving the deep South to Goldwater. Class-based presidential voting was almost absent in the Deep South.

In 1968, the candidate most aligned with segregation, Wallace, split the South with Nixon, who had largely adopted the Goldwater philosophy of racial conservatism. Again, class-based voting vanished; Southerners were not voting their pocketbooks – and this time the difference between the Deep South states and the rim states vanished. This trend continued in 1972 when McGovern was swept in the South. Yet in the rim South the race issue was not the

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88 Lamis, page 18
89 Lamis, page 28
90 Lamis, page 28
all-encompassing issue it was in the Southern heartland – why then was class-based voting being supplanted?

Conservatism on race had become commingled with general conservatism. When segregation ceased to function as the *raison d’être* of the Democratic party, the two-party, class-based politics of the non-South which defined the New Deal era began to operate in the South. However, the race issue did not disappear, but rather became intertwined with class. Class was already highly correlated with race, of course – the unjust system that had held for a generation had repressed blacks economically – so this is unsurprising. In 1964 racial conservatives adopted the role of the upper class in the South; after 1964, racial conservatism gradually merged with traditional economic and civic conservatism until they were fully consonant. At the same time racial liberalism merged with economic liberalism, as the activist, redistributionist policies of the Great Society were supported by Democrats and opposed by Republicans on *both* economic grounds and racial-ideological grounds. The natural conservatism of white Southerners favored the new Republican coalition here – when faced with a clear choice between a liberal and a conservative, white Southerners choose the conservative practically every time.

This new conservative philosophy, with race policy as an aspect but not a centerpiece, has become cemented in the Republican party through the successes of Ronald Reagan and his putative heirs. Race had receded as a prominent political issue since the sixties, in no small part because the respective camps had become so clearly demarcated. But when you trace the

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91 Lamis, pp.24-25
92 Lamis, page 26
93 By racial-ideological, I mean that the Democrats favored reparations toward blacks for past wrongs such as affirmative action, while the Republicans supported color-blind national policy. This is a difference in philosophy on the race question.
existing political arrangement backward, to its genesis, the catalyst driving the realignment was the race question in 1964. Once again, Key’s formulation is substantiated, “sooner or later the trail leads back to the Negro.”

So today, we have a partisan breakdown in the South where a slim majority of whites vote Republican and a coalition of the remaining whites and nearly all the blacks vote Democratic. This breakdown allows both parties to be, for the most part, competitive, depending on the particular state or district in question. What might eventually break this equilibrium?

One possibility is the eventual emergence of a substantial black middle class. Such a group could tip the scales in either direction. If they retained their now-traditional allegiance to the Democratic party, and if their participation and political power (read: voter turnout and money) grew to the levels of the white middle class, the Democratic party could reap enormous benefits. However, conservatism tends to grow with affluence; this hypothetical black middle class might be lured to the Republican party. If the Republicans were to make inroads into the black vote this way, while retaining their majority of the white vote, they would become an unstoppable force throughout the region.

Thus, both parties would be well-served to focus on the African-American vote in the South. As the economy soars and racial attitudes become increasingly egalitarian over time, the arrival of a black middle class is inevitable. Winning their loyalties will require that class and race be disentangled; fidelity to the party of civil rights will pull them toward the Democratic

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94 Glaser, pp. 185-186
95 Polsby, pp.12-13, describes this phenomenon, though he does not focus exclusively on the South.
96 Some would debate this, but it is at the very least true on a superficial basis.
party, while their new financial wherewithal will induce them to skew Republican. The outcome of this upcoming struggle will be the next test of Key’s enduring theory of Southern politics.
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Any errors or omissions in this paper are solely my responsibility.

Bibliographic note

The data in the graphs prepared was pulled from several different sources. Much of the information on elections at the presidential, congressional, and gubernatorial levels came from Congressional Quarterly’s Guide to U.S. Elections (Washington: Congressional Quarterly, 1997). Data from the most recent round of elections was obtained from The World Almanac and Book of Facts 1999 (Mahwah, New Jersey: Primedia Reference Inc., 1998).

The data on the state legislatures was obtained from several different editions of The Book of the States (Chicago: Council of State Governments, 1945-1997). For the most recent round of elections, I consulted The Almanac of Politics and Government, On-line Edition (http://www.polisci.com/).
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