

**UCLA**

**UCLA Electronic Theses and Dissertations**

**Title**

Return of the Solid South: Republican Success in Southern State Legislatures

**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7td1w8t6>

**Author**

Brown, Knox Hudnall

**Publication Date**

2017

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Return of the Solid South:  
Republican Success in State Legislatures

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of  
Philosophy in Political Science

by

Knox Hudnall Brown

2017

© Copyright by  
Knox Hudnall Brown  
2017

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Return of the Solid South:  
Republican Success in Southern Legislatures

by

Knox Hudnall Brown

Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

University of California, Los Angeles, 2017

Professor Kathleen Bawn, Chair

In this study, I explore how Democrats maintained majorities in state legislatures long after the Republicans came to dominate federal elections in the South. In the years following the national Democratic party's embrace of civil rights in 1964, Republicans rapidly made progress in federal elections in the South. This began with Presidential elections in 1964 when Barry Goldwater won all five Deep South states, and gained momentum in later election cycles. Despite the GOP's momentum in national elections, Democrats maintained control of state legislatures well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the immediate wake of the Civil Rights Act, Southern Democrats resisted Republican growth by defying the national Democratic party's position on civil rights. As African Americans became part of the Democratic coalition, later generations of Democratic party leaders in the South carefully managed the legislative agenda to avoid splitting their coalition of African Americans and moderate white voters.

I argue that Republicans finally overcame Democratic legislative majorities as national political forces came to dominate state legislative elections. Why were these wave elections so powerful? Because, by highlighting national Democratic policies that were locally unpopular, Republican challengers turned the Democratic legislators' incumbency into a liability. As I demonstrate, the most significant Republican legislative gains in the South occurred in national wave elections. This started in 1972, when Republicans won prominent federal offices and continued in later blowout elections. The landslide election that first brought Republican Congressional majorities in 1994 eventually came to the state legislatures, culminating in the 2010 Republican sweeps.

The new Republican majorities have changed the policy output, legislative organization, and culture of southern state legislatures. In the era of Democratic majorities, party label had little effect on the operation of government. Committee chairmanships were awarded across party lines, straight-party voting was rare, and party organizations were built largely around the personal organizations of party leaders. With the rise of Republican majorities, Washington-style partisanship has arrived in the state legislatures. With African American legislators and moderate whites no longer part of majority coalitions, the legislative output has taken a sharply conservative turn, particularly on social issues. Although Southern Democrats have long been more conservative than their national counterparts, much of the high-profile legislation to emerge out of the Republican-controlled legislatures would have been unlikely in even the most conservative of Southern Democratic majorities. Finally, party organizations are no longer built as they were under Democratic leaders; to varying degrees they now have professionalized structures.

In sum, my dissertation demonstrates how national political tides have changed the

partisan composition and organizing principles of Southern state legislatures. Gone is the old Southern politics where personal and regional factions controlled the legislatures. For better or for worse, Washington-style partisanship has arrived in Southern state capitols.

The dissertation of Knox Hudnall Brown is approved.

Daniel Lowenstein

David Sears

John Zaller

Kathleen Bawn, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2017

*To the memory of Norman D. Stiegler Sr., who inspired me to study politics*



## Table of Contents

Chapter 1 The Return of the Solid South: Republican Success in Southern Legislatures .....	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.4 Plan of the Dissertation.....	3
1.2 Racial politics, partisan change, and local responses.....	4
Democrats adapt to Republican momentum .....	6
2.3 Local elections become nationalized .....	10
The role of governors.....	13
1.4 A New Era in Southern Politics .....	17
Southern legislatures and national debates .....	17
Original interviews: sourcing, protocols, and limitations .....	22
Chapter 2 Charting Republican Growth in the South .....	27
2.1 Introduction.....	27
Empirical overview .....	29
Chapter 3 Arkansas Turns Deep Red.....	48
3.1 Introduction.....	48
3.2 Charting Partisan Trends in Arkansas.....	49
3.4 The Governor’s influence .....	53
The rise and fall of the Rockefeller machine .....	56
The Seeds of Republican Growth .....	60
3.6 2010 and Beyond: Arkansas Turns Deep Red .....	62

Looking Ahead: Long-Term Transformation?.....	66
Chapter 4 North Carolina: Death of a Purple State?.....	71
4.1 Intro.....	71
4.2 The long tug-of-war in North Carolina.....	72
Growth and division within the GOP.....	76
2008 and beyond: Republicans sweeps.....	82
New Republican majorities.....	86
Chapter 5 Haley Barbour and the Rise of the Mississippi Republicans.....	89
5.1 Intro.....	89
5.3 Charting Republican Growth in Mississippi.....	90
5.4 The “Off-Off-Cycle” and its Effect.....	93
5.5 Republicans Win the Governor’s Mansion.....	97
Barbour on the Campaign Trail.....	98
“Lollipops and Ass-Whippings”: Barbour in Office.....	100
5.2 Party Culture in Mississippi: then and now.....	108
Chapter 6 Looking Ahead: New Majorities, New Coalitions.....	110
Appendices.....	115
Bibliography.....	117

## List of Figures

1: Republican seat share in state senates, Deep South.....	32
2: Republican seat share in state senates, Peripheral South.....	33
3: Republican Presidential vote share, Deep South .....	39
4: Republican Presidential vote share, Peripheral South .....	40
5: Republican Congressional delegation by state, Deep South.....	41
6: Republican Congressional delegation by state, Peripheral South.....	43
7: Contestation rates in the Deep South.....	45
8: Contestation rates in the Peripheral South.....	46
9: Republican progress in Arkansas.....	50
10: Contestation rates in Arkansas.....	52
11: Contestation rates in North Carolina .....	73
12: Republican progress in North Carolina .....	75
13: Republican progress in Mississippi .....	91
14: Contestation rates in Mississippi .....	95
15: Haley's PAC contributions to the Mississippi GOP .....	102

## **List of Tables**

Table 1: Republican Success in State-level Offices .....	30
Table 2: Party of the Governor, by state, Deep South 1960-2016.....	35
Table 3: Party of the Governor, by state Peripheral South 1960-2016.....	37
Table 4: US House delegations in the Deep South Percent GOP, 1960-2016.....	43
Table 5: US House delegations in the Peripheral South Percent GOP, 1960-2016.....	44

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the diligent guidance of Kathleen Bawn, my dissertation chair. Daniel Lowenstein and David Sears provided incisive criticism of my writing, which saved me from many stylistic and substantive errors. John Zaller deserves special thanks for suggesting that I study Southern legislatures. John Ray and Jeff Newberry gave me helpful feedback at various points. Finally, my case studies were enriched by the many sources, named and unnamed, who were willing to be interviewed for this project.

## VITA

- 2016-2017 Teaching Fellow. University of California Center for American Politics and Public Policy
- 2015-2016 Teaching Fellow. Department of Political Science. University of California, Los Angeles.
- 2014-2015 Will Rogers Memorial Fellowship. University of California, Los Angeles.
- 2012-2015 Teaching Assistant. Department of Political Science. University of California, Los Angeles
- 2011-2012 First Year Grant. Department of Political Science. University of California, Los Angeles.
- 2011 B.S. (Political Science), *Summa Cum Laude*  
Auburn University

# Chapter 1

## The Return of the Solid South: Republican Success in Southern Legislatures

### *1.1 Introduction*

After Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, voters in the once-reliably Democratic Southern states began abandoning their support for Democratic presidential candidates. This started in 1964, when the five states of the Deep South elected a Republican for the first time ever. In later election cycles, Republican momentum expanded to other states, and by 1972 Republicans were winning federally-elected offices across the South. Despite these gains, Democrats in state legislatures held onto their majorities for decades. Even in deep-red states like Alabama and Mississippi where Democrats had not really competed a Presidential race for decades, Democrats retained their majorities until 2010. In this study, I investigate how Southern Democrats maintained their legislative majorities in the South long after the rest of the party had left the South.

The answer, as I demonstrate in the pages and chapters that follow, recalls Tip O’Neill’s famous maxim that “all politics is local.” Although O’Neill hailed from Boston, his adage was especially applicable for Southern Democrats in the wake of the national party’s embrace of civil rights. In the decades following the national party split on Civil Rights, Democratic incumbents shielded themselves from national Republican momentum by distancing themselves from the national Democratic party. “We’re not national Democrats” was the mantra of Mississippi Senators Jim Eastland and John Stennis, both of whom enjoyed unassailable electoral security until their respective retirements in 1978 and 1988. As segregationist Democrats like Eastland and Stennis retired, later generations of Democratic leaders maintained majorities with a

different strategy. Instead of openly opposing the civil rights platform of the national Democratic party, which would have alienated their African American voters, they focused on statewide issues and avoided national issues that would split their coalitions of moderate whites and African Americans.

The case studies that follow demonstrate the various ways in which national forces helped break up Democratic majorities in state legislatures. In broad terms, Republican challengers were most successful when national electoral tides allowed GOP insurgents to highlight national policies that were locally unpopular. In Arkansas, a popular backlash over the Affordable Care Act produced an unprecedented reaction against Democrats down the ballot, and a disorganized Democratic party was ill-equipped to respond. In North Carolina, a similar reaction against national Democratic policies produced a grassroots uprising against the incumbent Democratic administration, and the resulting Republican majorities upended the state's long tradition of moderate governance. In Mississippi, a governor with national experience and resources helped bring Washington-style discipline into the state legislature, which produced Republican majorities and transformed the state legislature.

The effect of the Republican takeovers is twofold. First, new partisan majorities have used their power to enact aggressively conservative legislation. The conservative turn is partly because, unlike even the most conservative Democratic majorities before them, African American and moderate white legislators are not part of the Republican majorities. Second, Republican majorities have ended the traditions of awarding chairmanships across party line and voting across party lines. The new Republican majorities have created a legislative climate whose partisanship mimics that of the national legislature.



## *1.2 Plan of the Dissertation*

In the remainder of this chapter, I describe how Southern Democrats adapted to the national party split over civil rights. Although the civil rights realignment produced major growth for Republicans in federal elections, Democrats down the ballot held onto their majorities through a mixture of rhetorical and institutional strategies that isolated state legislative elections from national politics. Republicans finally broke through when national political debates overwhelmed the power of Democratic incumbents to maintain a distinct party image. As I demonstrate in Chapter 2, this usually happened in national wave elections. The largest Republican gains happened in national blowout elections like 1972, 1994, and 2010. This is consistent with recent evidence that national forces are the biggest driver of state legislative elections (Rogers 2016).

In Chapters 3 through 5, I describe the partisan transformations of three southern states: Arkansas, North Carolina, and Mississippi, respectively. There are parallels across states, and each highlights a different way in which national political forces helped erode Democratic majorities. In Arkansas, a backlash against the Obama presidency sparked an unprecedented emergence of Republican challengers across the state. Because they never lacked serious electoral competition, the Democratic party was ill-prepared to coordinate a response. North Carolina, long an exemplar of a competitive Southern state, experienced a similar statewide reaction against Obama in 2010. In Mississippi, a disciplined effort led by Haley Barbour modernized the Republican party and decimated the Democrats' longstanding legislative majorities.

### *1.3 Racial politics, partisan change, and local responses*

Repeated episodes in Southern politics demonstrate the power of racial issues as a catalyst of large-scale change in voting behavior (Key 1949; Osborne, Sears, and Valentino 2011). For the long period when the Democratic party was associated with opposition to civil rights, Democrats enjoyed a virtual monopoly on the South. In the context of partisan competition, large-scale changes in voting behavior occur when parties take opposing positions on a critical issue for the first time (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Niemi et al. 2010; Sundquist 1983). After Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act in 1964, five southern states immediately abandoned Johnson, voting for Barry Goldwater by wide margins. Later Republican efforts to court Southern voters hinged on coded racial appeals, notably Richard Nixon's 1972 "Southern Strategy" emphasizing law and order, and Ronald Reagan's commitment to states' rights in 1980. Although the civil rights realignment is the most recent example, party splits on highly salient issues have frequently stimulated long-term changes in voting behavior:

Political change in the South is part of the regular turning of the wheel in which a new issue seizes the electorate and propels changes in the political bases and strength of the parties. Recent GOP successes can thus be placed in the context of the past upheavals in party fortunes, such as the demise of the Whigs and the rise of the Republicans in the 1850s (Lublin 2007, 9)

For Southern Democrats, the national party's embrace of civil rights in 1964 created a basic problem: the national party was now associated with a position that both they and their constituents opposed. While Southern Democrats lacked a coordinated strategy to fight the Republican insurgency, they all emphasized one thing: that they were not national Democrats. Mississippi Senators Jim Eastland and John Stennis, two segregationists Democrats who enjoyed

virtually unassailable incumbencies until their retirements in 1978 and 1988, exemplify this.

Haley Barbour, whose electoral career began in 1982 with an unsuccessful Senate race against Stennis, describes this dynamic in his home state:

Lots of [Democrats] would say “I’m a Mississippi Democrat.” The Democrats kept their party together for a long time [by saying], “We’re not national Democrats; we’re Mississippi Democrats... we’re not with the Kennedys, we’re not with Lyndon Johnson,” starting with Jim Eastland and John Stennis.<sup>1</sup>

The fact that both Eastland and Stennis, while remaining Democrats their entire careers, never altered their positions on segregation, demonstrates their commitment to programmatically defying the national Democratic party. Lee Atwater, a South Carolina Republican who started his political career working for Strom Thurmond in 1970, describes the strategy from the other side of the aisle:

Republicans in the South could not win elections simply by showing various issues and talking about various issues. You had to make the case that the other guy, the other candidate is a bad guy and I'm a good guy. You simply could not get out in a universe where 60% of the people were Democrats and 28% Republican, and win by talking about your issues. The more you can make a Democrat a 'national Democrat' and a symbol of the national Democratic Party, the better off you are (in Edsall and Byrne 1991; 221-22)

Although there are few state-level analogues to the 1964 national party split on civil rights, the 2001 controversy over the Georgia state flag illustrates the sustained power of race as

---

<sup>1</sup> This is a notable contrast with South Carolina, where the popularity of the Republican party grew quickly after Senator Strom Thurmond declared his party switch in 1964. Republicans gained their trifecta in South Carolina ten years before Mississippi did.

a driver of partisan change in the electorate. In 2001, the NAACP pressured Democratic governor Roy Barnes to remove the Confederate emblem from the state flag, which Democrats had added to the state flag in 1956 to protest *Brown v. Board of Education*. State business leaders, fearing the economic impact of a boycott, joined the campaign to change the flag. Barnes and the Democrats moved the bill through the legislature rapidly and secretively, and upon its passage the bill generated an uproar among white rural voters. The backlash helped the GOP mobilize white voters in rural counties that were traditional strongholds for statewide Democratic candidates. Six months later, Republican challenger Sonny Purdue handed Barnes a stunning defeat, becoming Georgia's first Republican governor since 1872.<sup>2</sup> Shortly after the election, Purdue recruited several Democratic state senators to switch parties, giving the GOP a narrow majority in the upper house (Bullock 2015). In the same cycle Purdue was elected Governor, Republicans gained a majority in the Georgia state senate. By 2004 the Georgia state House turned over to Republican control, completing the GOP's sweep.

#### *Democrats adapt to Republican momentum*

Despite Nixon and Reagan's successes, Republicans down the ballot were largely unable to translate this momentum into legislative victories. As I describe more fully in Chapter 2, Republican victories in federal elections had little effect on state legislative elections. As one Republican strategist recalls, the founders of the Republican Party in Mississippi "used to levitate off their chair getting so frustrated" at the enduring ability of Democrats to separate themselves from the national party. Democrats' personal connections with constituents were enough to keep them in office. The "friends and neighbors" effect described by Key (1949)

---

<sup>2</sup> There were other reasons for Barnes' downfall: his efforts for school reform alienated teachers' unions and his proposed highway construction angered many Atlanta suburbanites (Bullock 2015).

helped Democrats well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In their definitive history of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Mississippi politics, Taggart and Nash (2009) describe how local legislators overcame the power of party-based voting:

For many white Mississippi voters, there is an inverse relationship between the distance to a candidate's front door and the importance of a candidate's party affiliation. The closer a candidate is to a voter, the less party matters to the voter. In local or state legislative campaigns, on the other hand, the average Mississippi voter has some personal or secondhand knowledge of the candidate, and more often than not, that familiarity is more important than party affiliation.

Consequently, the average white voter in rural Mississippi will consider voting for a Democrat based on some degree of acquaintance with the candidate (317)

Beyond rhetoric and representational style, the nature of the political cleavages in the states kept national political debates away from state legislatures. In his book *Parties, Politics, & Pressure Groups* (1964), V.O. Key, Jr. describes why state legislative parties tended to follow a different tack than their national counterparts:

It is difficult to build a well-organized politics solely around the issues of state government. Isolation of state politics from national politics inherent in the one-party system removes the opportunity for the easy projection into the state arena of national political organization... Transfer of the great issues to the federal sphere deprives state politics of many questions that form voters into antagonistic groups and compel the organization of politics (310-311)

In some states, this isolation was built into the election rules. Mississippi Democrats had an institutional feature that insulated them from national Republican momentum: the state's off-

cycle election schedule. Because legislative elections in Mississippi occur the year before a Presidential election, Democrats did not have to contend with the national waves that impelled Republican growth elsewhere. In down-ballot races across the South, the biggest GOP legislative gains occurred in national wave elections, especially during the 1980s Reagan boom and in the 1994 GOP sweep. Because of the election timing, Republicans in Mississippi did not have the benefit of these waves. This started as early as 1964, as Haley Barbour explains. “When Alabama in 1964 elected 5 Republican Congressmen in the Goldwater sweep, we didn’t have elections,” he says. “We had one guy that ran, and he won. Then he got beat 2 years later because he tried to run for senator.”

Further complicating the picture for Mississippi Republicans was the state’s primary rule requiring voters to select only one party’s primary ballot. Although many states have this provision, in Mississippi it made it difficult for the GOP to attract viable candidates to qualify as Republicans because most voters opted for the Democratic primary ballot. Dick Hall, a conservative Democrat elected in 1975, switched parties in 1983, describes the immediate aftermath of his party switch:

When I switched and ran as a Republican in 1983, the Republican primary ballot, on that ballot was my race and a local constable’s race. That was the only thing on the ballot. Over on the other ballot is the governor, lieutenant governor, every other state office, attorney general all of ‘em, all the members of the legislature beside me, all the local supervisors in all the races.

In Arkansas, a vestige of the whites-only primary impeded Republican efforts to recruit candidates. In a rule originally used by Arkansas Democrats to prevent black candidates from qualifying, candidates were required to pay filing fees to the state party organization instead of

the secretary of state. This rule survived the civil rights movement and made it more difficult for the Republican party to finance its primary nominating conventions. This discouraged would-be Republican voters from participating in party activities (Blair and Barth 2005).

As African Americans came into the Democratic voting coalitions, the segregationist wing of the Southern Democratic party faded. Part of Democrats' ability to adapt involved the retirement of the old guard Southern Democrats like Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus, who gained nationwide notoriety for his defiance of the Supreme Court's order to integrate the Little Rock school districts. In 1972, Faubus ran in the Democratic primary in the race to succeed the Republican governor Winthrop Rockefeller, but ran against Dale Bumpers, a pro-civil rights attorney. Bumpers won, and segregationist wing of the party would never again achieve prominence in Arkansas.

Even as a new generation of Democrats took office, maintaining a biracial coalition of white and black Democrats required careful triangulation. For Democratic legislative leaders, keeping these factions together required avoiding polarizing racial issues like busing, fair housing, and voting-rights issues (Aistrup 1996). For Democratic governors, courting African American support often involved making symbolic gestures to black voters while avoiding legislative efforts that would offend white voters. Writing about Democrat Jim Hunt, North Carolina's longest-serving governor, Christensen (2008) describes this balancing act in a broader context:

Democrats survived by becoming ideological centrists and artful coalition builders. To win the backing of African Americans, teachers' groups, and party liberals, the Democratic candidates pushed education improvements and supported black initiatives. To hold the support of moderates of both parties, the

Democrats allied themselves with business, pushed economic development, and stressed law-and-order issues, such as support for the death penalty. The Democrats largely avoided cultural issues and attempted to put distance between themselves and the national ticket (235-236)

#### ***1.4 Local elections become nationalized***

The forces that finally overcame the power of Democratic incumbency were national political tides, starting with the party switches of Southern Democrats. An early example was the party-switch of Strom Thurmond, which catalyzed the GOP growth in South Carolina. Schaller and Lublin (2012) describe in detail:

Though southern states began to grow weary of national Democrats by the early 1960s, they were hesitant to make an immediate party swap, and when they did they found greater short-term comfort in the third-party presidential bids of Thurmond in 1948 and George Wallace in 1968 and 1972. What Senator Thurmond's pathbreaking defection to the Republicans in 1964 did was provide a safer harbor for party-switching in South Carolina than the rest of the Deep South. Notably South Carolina is the only southern state to vote for the Republican presidential nominees in both 1964 and 1968. Governor Carrol Campbell's successful two terms and efforts at party-building also greatly aided Palmetto State Republicans. (224-225)

Although Thurmond's coup failed to drive any other major party switches down the ballot in South Carolina, it encouraged many to switch parties (Schaller and Lublin 2012). It also catalyzed a shift in among the state's business community, which at the time was dominated by textile barons (Buchanan 2017). Since Thurmond's coup, South Carolina voters have been more



receptive to Republicans. In North Carolina, the long career of Jesse Helms helped convert many old Southern Democrats in North Carolina to Republicans. In addition to these newly-converted “Jessecrats,” Helms and his advisers create the National Congressional Club, a conservative PAC that funded televised ads and direct mail pieces for Helms’ targets (Christensen 2008).

Although national party leaders like Thurmond and Helms helped drive Republican identification among voters, the largest Republican pickups were driven by the increasing nationalization of down-ballot races (Jacobson 1996; Aldrich et al. 2014). On the campaign trail, challengers link incumbents to unpopular policies associated with the national party (Jacobson 1996). In Republican wave elections, GOP challengers turned incumbency into a liability by connecting constituent service with big government (McKee 2009; Fiorina 2005; Jacobson 2001). In the Southern context, Republicans emphasized national Democratic policies that were unpopular in the South. This echoes the strategy taken by successful challengers in presidential campaigns: to emphasize an issue on which the incumbent is constrained to take an unpopular position (Vavreck 2009). Writing about the 1994 Congressional elections, Jacobson’s description foreshadows the GOP strategies in the 2010 state legislative elections:

All politics was not local in 1994. Republicans succeeded in framing the local choice in national terms, making taxes, social discipline, big government, and the Clinton presidency the dominant issues. They did so by exploiting three related waves of public sentiment that crested simultaneously in 1994. The first was public disgust with the politics, politicians, and government in Washington. The second was the widespread feeling that American economic and social life was out of control and heading in the wrong direction. The third was the visceral rejection of Bill Clinton by a crucial set of swing voters - the Reagan Democrats

and the supporters of Ross Perot. (1996, 205)

In the wake of the Obama presidency, a similar story played out in state legislative elections. In Arkansas, the 2010 cycle brought an electoral windfall that observers on both sides of the aisle failed to anticipate. With an ailing economy and a locally unpopular incumbent President, Republicans relentlessly tied down-ballot Democrats to the national policy agenda in every office they contested, from the gubernatorial races to the state legislative contests. Because several of the state's Congressional delegation had voted for the Affordable Care Act, Democrats down the ballot had a hard time distancing themselves from the national party.

As I describe in the case studies, firsthand testimony underlines the degree to which Republicans attached local Democrats to Obama and his policies. "Everywhere I went [in 2010], it was about healthcare," recalls Shane Broadway, a veteran of the Arkansas state legislature who ran for lieutenant governor in 2010. In his general election race, he ran against Mark Darr, an electoral novice who threatened to sue Congress over the Affordable Care Act. He defeated Broadway with 51.9% of the vote. Two years later, Republican candidates in Arkansas adopted a similar refrain: "Save America. Vote Republican. Every Democrat Elected Helps Obama" (Barth 2012). Describing the atmosphere in nearby Alabama, one journalist says: "the Republicans were able to bring [Nancy] Pelosi and Obama and Harry Reid into the state. You thought when you walked on the street you were going to bump into them" (White 2010).

Sometimes it is not just rhetoric that drives partisan growth; national resources have also helped Republicans in recent cycles. The aggressive campaign of Americans for Prosperity (AFP) in Arkansas in the 2010 and 2012 cycle is a noteworthy example. To coordinate their efforts in Arkansas, the organization recruited Theresa Oelke, a veteran conservative activist in Little Rock. With Oelke's help, AFP funded a statewide tour against the unpopular Obama

policies. A *Washington Post* profile of AFP's efforts underscores how their national rhetoric helped undo Democratic incumbent advantages:

Democrats in state government are on the defensive, reacting to widespread distrust of the president. Daniel Ray, for example, got fired up at the rally in Paragould, saying he's sick of federal government spending. "I don't think this election term I could vote for any Democrat," said Ray, 35, who is "ashamed to say" he took a state government job for the benefits it offered for his family. Ray, the father of four boys, knows Thompson and helped vote him into office, but said he'll support the challenger this time, out of frustration with Democrats in Washington and Thompson's refusal to denounce them (Farnam 2012)

AFP continued to use this strategy in their successful push to unseat Mark Pryor in Arkansas in 2014. On the Democratic side, the inpouring of national LGBT groups into the successful 2016 campaign to defeat North Carolina Republican Governor Pat McCrory exemplifies the power of national political resources in a statewide race. Because donations typically flowed to incumbents, Republican challengers typically faced fundraising disadvantages (e.g. Taggart and Nash 2009). One of the ways Republicans overcame this was through leadership from nationally-experienced governors, as I describe in the next section.

### *The role of governors*

Although national electoral tides are the most important driver of state legislative turnovers, governors can play an important role in mediating the effects of national tides. The most successful Democratic governors have kept national politics out of state elections in two ways. In Arkansas, celebrity governors used their personal characteristics to connect with voters who might otherwise be inclined to vote Republican. In North Carolina, a long line of moderate

Democratic governors emphasized consensus-driven policies of healthcare, education, and infrastructure and avoided issues that would polarize the black and white factions within the Democratic voting coalition.

In Arkansas, a long line of skilled Democratic governors cultivated a distinct reputation from the national party leaders. Elections in Arkansas revolved around personality more than substance, which helped Democrats win elections in cycles when Republican performed well nationally. “If they connect with you and feel they know you, they’ll vote for you,” says Mike Beebe, who in 2010 was almost the only Democrat in Arkansas to survive the electoral earthquake. In a state with no professional sports team or major metropolitan area, the governor enjoys celebrity status. “These [were] extraordinarily talented people who managed to make people feel comfortable with them even as they maybe took positions that in any other place at that time, and by anybody less talented than them, would have threatened their political viability,” says a Democrat in Little Rock. Roy Barnes, Georgia’s last Democratic governor, offers a similar assessment of how Georgia Democrats maintained majorities. In my conversation with him, he quoted O’Neill’s “all politics is local” mantra, and described various ways in which personal ties with constituents was crucial to maintaining office. He attributes the success to “personal organizations that built up among long-serving incumbents.” For Barnes, one way of maintaining personal connections was his annual Christmas card to his supporters.

Conversely, the most successful Republican governors used their resources to help bring national Republican momentum to the state legislative elections. As a result of Strom Thurmond’s public embrace of the Republican party in 1964, voters in South Carolina were more favorable to the GOP than voters in other states (Woodard 2013). In 1986, Carroll Campbell became the state’s second Republican governor of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and he used his national

political experience to grow Republican ranks. Campbell, who served 4 terms in the US House before becoming governor in 1987, undertook an effort at party recruitment that helped South Carolina become the first state to cede its Democratic legislative majority.

In Mississippi, Haley Barbour's skill and resources helped break the Democrats' longstanding hold on the legislative majorities. Although Mississippi, like South Carolina, has an overwhelmingly conservative electorate that quickly abandoned Democratic presidential candidates, the off-cycle legislative electoral helped insulate Democratic legislators from national GOP waves. Barbour, whose two decades of Washington experience culminated in his 1993-1997 tenure as chairman of the Republican National Committee, used his national fundraising network in his 2003 gubernatorial campaign. His \$13.5 million fundraising record more than quadrupled the previous record, and he used that money after his election to help whip his own party. In addition to creating a party-discipline mentality among Republicans for the first time, Barbour and the GOP in Mississippi used the money to target incumbent Democrats and expose their votes, which helped erode the traditional ability of Mississippi legislators to avoid being exposed for some of their liberal votes (Hederman 2016, Nash and Taggart 2009). Barbour also pressured incumbent Democrats to switch parties, further weakening the Democratic majority. Arnie Hederman, executive director of the state GOP during Barbour's tenure, describes how Barbour leveraged incumbent Democrats:

Haley had the ability to use the Mississippi Republican party [and] the tools to be able to get those votes out in those districts, which threatened a lot of those legislators because they would come back home and explain why they were voting that way with the Democrat party. So then you would have switchers, and then you would also have some of those Democrats that would move away from

the Democrat leader jump ship and say ‘I’ve got to vote this way because back home I’ll get crucified over this.’ Which used to not happen; they used to get whatever they want. Republicans didn’t have the money; we always fought for the governor’s office or some recognition.

Because of Republicans’ successful efforts to nationalize down-ballot elections, the nature of gubernatorial elections has changed. Historically, Southern gubernatorial elections were largely immune to national political debates, as Black and Black (1987) discuss:

[S]outhern gubernatorial elections are far more 'protected' from the conservative contagion of national politics than are contests for the Senate... whereas gubernatorial campaigns only cover a fairly small range of issues and hence expose a more limited number of potential Democratic liabilities to Republican attack, senatorial elections are based on the entire domestic and foreign policy agenda and thus invite conservative Republican attacks on a broad array of controversial topics (283-284).

The success of Mike Beebe, Arkansas’ overwhelmingly popular Democratic governor, embodies the way in which Southern gubernatorial elections were isolated from national forces. Beebe, a political veteran with a rags-to-riches personal story, won all 75 counties in Arkansas in his 2010 re-election campaign, defying the statewide and national trends. The 2014 Arkansas gubernatorial election in Arkansas did not play out this way. In the 2014 campaign to succeed Beebe, Democrats nominated Mike Ross, formerly a member of the state’s Congressional delegation, to run against Asa Hutchinson. Hupp, a strategist for the Ross campaign, describes the Democrats’ thought process in nominating Ross:

[Ross] was a good ole boy. He was a south Arkansas guy; he was a hunter. He was someone that these voters we thought we had lost should be able to connect to. I think what we saw was that none of that really mattered. What we had in the state at the time was a tremendous influx of national money coming in mainly in the Cotton/Pryor race. All they tried to do was to tie Mark Pryor to Barack Obama... the Republicans here in Arkansas did what Republicans around the county were doing at the time, which was [to] link our rural, white, moderate, conservative Democrats to Barack Obama, and therefore draw away those middle-of-the road bases that would otherwise have supported them.

The down-home Arkansas appeal that worked for Beebe in 2010 did little for his would-be successor. Hutchinson beat Ross by a large margin and Pryor lost his highly-contested Senate re-election campaign. As Hupp points out, Hutchinson's win is especially ironic given Hutchinson's role as a lead prosecutor in the Clinton impeachment trial.

### ***1.5 A New Era in Southern Politics***

#### *Southern legislatures and national debates*

The changes brought by the new Republican majorities encompass more than just a new party in control. Lopsided partisan majorities are hardly new to the South; what is different is that the state's political debates, including some of the legislative battles, are now dominated by national political issues. Before obtaining majorities, Republican legislators used cultural issues to pressure incumbent Democrats in conservative districts (Edsall and Byrne 1991). Newly empowered with governing majorities, Republicans have turned these issues into legislative action. The most prominent example is North Carolina's House Bill 2, which restricted rights of transgender individuals to use the bathroom of their choice. Observers on both sides of the aisle

agree that HB2 was driven by an aggressively conservative leadership in the state senate (Jensen 2016; Schumaker 2016; Stam 2017). The bill spawned imitations in thirteen state legislatures including Alabama, Arkansas, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas (National Council of State Legislatures 2017). Immediately after obtaining a majority, Arkansas Republicans passed a 20-week abortion ban, which was vetoed by the Democratic Governor and eventually struck down in federal court.

In a broader context, these episodes illustrate the changing nature of political cleavages in the South. Black and Black, in *The Rise of the Southern Republicans* (2002), describe the changes brought about by the Republican ascendancy in the region:

Old-fashioned sectional conflict has dissipated, but sectional considerations continue to pervade national politics through the conservative agenda pursued by Republican congressional leaders from the South. As it has been in Presidential politics for some time, the South is now at the epicenter of Republican and Democratic strategies to control Congress. In order to comprehend national political dynamics, it is therefore more important than ever to understand the changing South (404)

Although Black and Black were writing primarily about the impact of the Southern delegation in the House of Representatives, recent efforts in Southern state legislatures highlight their point. There are numerous examples of conservative legislation that likely would not have seen the light of day under Democratic majorities, even conservative Democratic majorities. Consider a sampling: immigration-crackdown bills Alabama (2011), Georgia (2011), and South Carolina (2011); 20-week abortion bans in Alabama (2011), Georgia (2011), Arkansas (2013), and Texas (2013); and expansive pro-gun laws in Florida (2005) and Georgia (2014). Although



these issues provoke debate in Congress, the most important policy changes surrounding these issues are driven by state legislatures.

Part of the conservative turn in the legislatures is a byproduct of the new Republican coalition. Unlike the Democratic majorities of the past, new Republican majorities do not have African Americans or moderate whites in their voting coalitions. Without these groups in the majority caucus, the most conservative wings of the Republican majorities are now empowered to turn their goals into legislation. It is difficult to imagine even the most conservative of Democratic majorities passing the voter ID laws that have been recently passed in Virginia, Georgia, Mississippi, and Tennessee. Equally unlikely is another Republican governor like Mike Huckabee who, facing Democratic majorities in both legislative chambers, undertook a number of progressive measures: he appointed a League of United Latin American Citizens leader to his staff, helped finance a \$3,000 increase in teachers' pay, and resisted a school vouchers program (Blair and Barth 2005).

Beyond their policy impact, the new Republican majorities' control over districting, voting rules, and election procedures will have national implications. Districting authority has long been a strategic goal of state legislative majorities, but not until the 2010 did Republicans finally achieve their goals. Hoping to influence the redistricting following the 1980 census, the Republican National Committee poured resources into Southern legislative elections in 1980 (Aistrup 1996). Although the RNC failed in that goal in the Reagan years, in 2010 GOP took over both chambers in three Southern states, which gave them control of district lines in 30 Congressional seats. Districting authority is all the more important because these efforts often (but not always) fly under the radar of national media exposure. Contemporary Democrats serving in southern legislatures often complain of unfairly drawn lines. Jamie Harrison, chair of

the South Carolina Democratic party, recently lamented: “If Jesus Christ came back and ran in some of these districts as a Democrat, he couldn’t win.”

Southern states’ administrative authority will become all the more consequential given the Southern states’ newfound sovereignty after *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013), which granted states the right to change their voting procedures without pre-clearance from the Department of Justice. Ongoing court battles in Southern states illustrate the continuing relevance of districting issues. The district lines in North Carolina are under a pending court order to hold elections again in 2017 because of charges of unfair districts. North Carolina Democrats’ complaints about partisan districting have considerable basis in the 2016 legislative elections results, in which Democrats received considerably more votes than Republicans across the state, but netted no gains in the legislature.

Perhaps the most profound change in the era of Republican majorities is the rise of partisan voting caucuses. For the long era of Democratic dominance in the legislatures, party label had little effect on legislative debates (Key 1964). Within the Democratic majorities, there were divisions of various kinds. The most obvious was the biracial coalition created by the national Democratic party’s support for civil rights. Among white voters, a number of sectional divisions persisted: conflicts between delta and the hills in Mississippi (Woodard 2013), urban and rural districts in Arkansas on food stamps, and cultural divisions between upstate and downstate South Carolinians (Buchanan 2017; Winthrop 2017).

Debates on important bills rarely occurred along party lines. “We had very vigorous floor debates. It was really a fun place to be, because people would listen,” recalls one legislator who served in the Arkansas legislature in the early and mid-1990s. “Your bitter enemy on the previous bill might be your best bud on this bill.” In most Southern states, committee

appointments were based not on seniority, not party affiliation. “Once the election was over, it was over,” was the mantra of one North Carolina state house speaker who awarded chairmanships across party lines in the era of Democratic majorities. Ronnie Musgrove, whose career began in the Mississippi state senate in 1991 and took him to the Governor’s mansion in 1999, says: “There was no designation as to Democrat or Republican. In fact, there were 4 Republicans in the senate, but you did not know who the Democrats and who the Republicans were, unless they told you.” Bobby Moak, a Democrat who served from 1984 to 2016, describes the party culture at the beginning of his career: “There were some Republicans in the legislature, but quite honestly you couldn’t pick ‘em out. You didn’t need to pick ‘em out. Because they were committee chairmen; they were involved in the process.”

As Republicans threatened the Democratic majorities, state legislative chambers in the South have abandoned traditions of party-less governing norms. In South Carolina, the rapid growth of the Republican party in the 1990s saw the end of two relics: the abandonment of the “gentlemen’s rule” that incumbents did not campaign against one another, and the tradition of seating state senators by seniority. Now legislators sit on two sides arranged by party (Schaller and Lublin 2012). After the 2007 legislative elections in Mississippi, a failed Republican effort to oust the Democratic House Speaker immediately ended the speaker’s tradition of giving chairmanships across parties (Breux and Shaffer 2012). In 2003, a 60-60 tie in the North Carolina house led to a split-speakership compromise (Cooper and Knotts 2008). According to Democrats serving today, the era of working across parties is a distant memory. Jeff Jackson, a young leader of the Democratic Senate Caucus, likens the position of a minority-party legislator to being locked in the basement while the business of governing happens upstairs with the majority party (Jackson 2016).

In the era of Republican majorities, different kinds of tensions have emerged in Republican majorities in the South. Even before the GOP obtained a majority in Arkansas, Mike Huckabee clashed with his own party on issues like health care entitlements and provisions for undocumented residents. Although intra-party conflict is a long tradition in South Carolina (Buchanan 2013, Woodard 2013), today's divisions are now sharply ideological in ways that they were not previously. Since Republicans gained control of both legislative chambers and the governor's mansion in 2002, fiscally hawkish Republican governors have clashed with legislators seeking investment in their districts (Huffmon 2017). This began with Mark Sanford, and continued in Nikki Haley's administration. In Haley's administration, her commitment to avoiding revenue increasing measures like a gas tax were likely driven by national ambitions. Even incumbent Republicans who might otherwise be inclined to support more spending resist such measures to avoid attracting a primary challenger from one of the state's Tea Party organizations (Huffmon 2017).

In response to the Republican turn in the legislatures, grassroots activism has taken up the resistance efforts in ways that the old institutional Democratic party did not. In Arkansas, Be The Change, a national progressive alliance lead by women, has a statewide presence. This organization mirrors the "Moral Monday" protests in North Carolina that arose as a response to the wave of conservative legislation enacted after Republicans gained a trifecta in 2012. On both sides of the aisle, southern states now have the markings of a modern, professional party culture, with all the partisanship that entails.

#### *Original interviews: sourcing, protocols, and limitations*

Like Fenno's classic study on Congressional representation, much of my data come from original interviews. Although charting the empirical trends in state legislative changes yields

important insights about the evolution of the legislatures, speaking to firsthand witnesses illuminates the interpretation of the empirical trends. For example, my interviews reveal that the Republican party in North Carolina began contesting legislative races in the 1980s, which makes the GOP's lack of progress in that period noteworthy. As I discuss in Chapter 4, North Carolina Republicans made their biggest legislative gains under Democratic governorships, first in 1994 and later in 2010. This suggests that the biggest impetus for party growth is wave elections, not well-orchestrated party efforts. Likewise, data on legislative competitiveness in Mississippi indicates that, despite Republican momentum in federal elections, state legislative elections remained largely uncompetitive. By speaking to a number of Republican veterans in Mississippi, including former legislators, I find that the off-cycle election timing discouraged viable candidates from qualifying as Republicans.

Unlike Fenno's style of unstructured observation of Congresspersons in their districts, my interviews were semi-structured and time-delimited. Relative to Fenno's "soak and poke" style, which allowed him to observe how members of Congress relate to various constituencies within their districts, my approach is limited to obtaining details about the history of their involvement in state's politics. Moreover, Fenno conducted his research while the representatives were still in office. In my study, interviewees describe events that occurred in the past, sometimes in the distant past. This heightens the possibility of misremembered history, which highlights the need for independent corroboration.

To source my interviews, I used a mixture of referrals and cold contacts. Almost all my interviews with former elected officials with statewide experience, including Haley Barbour, Roy Barnes, Mike Beebe, Mark Pryor, came from personal referrals. For each interview, I prepared a list of questions based on prior interviews or background research, but the interviews

never followed a script. Interviews varied in length from 5-90 minutes, but most lasted in the range of 20-40 minutes. All sources agreed to be recorded, and most agreed to be quoted by name. For subjects who preferred to be quoted anonymously, I have preserved their anonymity by describing their position, e.g. “a Democratic official in Little Rock,” or “a veteran Republican strategist.”

Because I obtained many interviews through personal references, the referral networks were often concentrated in a single party. This was most pronounced in Mississippi, where I was introduced to the state’s political network through a Republican strategist and incumbent Republican Congressman Gregg Harper. Although I later spoke with high-level Democrats including the last Democratic governor and a longtime Democratic legislator, I obtained considerably more interviews with Republicans than Democrats. Although this is partly because, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there are more Republicans than Democrats in Mississippi, my referral network is largely responsible for the imbalance in my sources. Despite reaching out to as many Democrats as possible, I had more success with the personal referrals from Republican sources. As such, the bulk of my chapter on Mississippi describes Republican efforts, not the Democratic response.

Another limitation in obtaining interviews was imposed by geography. Although I conducted field visits to each state, the bulk of my interviews were conducted during my residence in Washington, DC. Accordingly, most of my in-person interviews were with nationally-experienced veterans of state politics, and most of my interviews with state-level veterans were conducted over the phone. Had I conducted research in proximity to a state capitol, I would have likely obtained more interviews from former and current state legislators.

Although my interviews contain details about state legislatures before and after Republican takeovers, I likely would have gotten more details with closer proximity to the state capitols.

Perhaps the biggest missing piece was my inability to speak with state-level activists. In Arkansas, for example, Americans for Prosperity hired a longtime activist in Little Rock to coordinate their efforts in the 2010 state legislative elections. Although journalistic accounts have emphasized the organization's role in the 2010 and 2012 races (e.g. Farnamn 2012), details about their efforts are difficult to obtain. This is especially true for an organization like Americans for Prosperity, which is not required to disclose its donors and does not list the contact information of its state-level activists.

Beyond the limitations of access, interview data present unique interpretive difficulties. Fenno's discussion in *Home Style* is worth quoting at length:

One characteristic of the interview data is that it is nonstandardized and hence, not quantifiable. Questions are tailored to particular individuals and are posed in dissimilar contexts... That is the reason so much of it has been presented in the form of quotations. Some are lengthy and complicated. Altogether they may become tedious. But they need to be struggled with, like any other kind of data. Data analysis, of course, will have to be done by making non-numerical assessment of meaning, appropriateness, consistency, context, and importance. Readers should not think not think of the quotations and anecdotes herein as any less worthy of serious examination than other kinds of data. They are, of course, primarily discovery data and should be viewed in this light. (1978, 289)

My general principles of assessing interviewing data are the same as used by journalists: seek independent corroboration for any important information and prioritize firsthand witness to

the events described. This is especially important for my project, because many of the events I describe happened in the distant past. Before detailing my interview data, I describe the empirical trends that characterize the Republican growth in my next chapter.



# Chapter 2

## Charting Republican Growth in the South

### *2.1 Introduction*

Of all the political changes in the last century, the transformation of the “Solid South” to Republican control has been one of the most consequential (Black and Black 2002; Shafer and Johnston 2006; Bullock and Gaddie 2009; McKee 2009; Sears et al. 2011). Southern influence on national political trends has a long history, as Ira Katznelson notes: “The most significant shifts in the central tendencies of American politics in the past six decades -- the New Deal, the civil rights revolution, and the sharp turn toward conservatism and Republicanism -- all have had the South at their core.” (1999, 238). With over 30% of the country’s population, the South is a critical part of the Electoral College calculus (Moreland and Steed 2012). In Congress, the Southern delegation, now almost entirely Republican, has a major impact on the agenda and policy outcomes (Berard 2012). Although the forces that drove the Republican conversion of the South began in the 1930s (Shickler 2016), the exodus of Southern whites from Democratic presidential candidates accelerated after the national Democratic party embraced the civil rights movement in 1964 (Carmines and Stimson 1989). Later Republican efforts, notably Richard Nixon’s “Southern Strategy” in 1972 and Reagan’s appeal to states’ rights in 1980, solidified the GOP’s hold on the region.

The final dominoes to fall in the South’s transition to Republican control were the state legislatures. After thirty years of Republican growth in federal elections in the South, when one political scientist described the region as a partisan graveyard for Democrats (Schaller 2006), Democrats still held majorities in almost half of Southern state legislative chambers. In Arkansas, Democrats held supermajorities in both chambers and the most popular Democratic

governor in the country going into the 2010 election. In North Carolina, the 2008 election of Democratic Governor Beverly Purdue marked the 5<sup>th</sup> straight win gubernatorial win for Democrats, on top of their majorities in both legislative chambers. Even in Mississippi and Alabama, where John McCain won 56% and 60% of the votes, respectively, Democrats held onto their majorities in both chambers after the 2008 election.

This chapter provides an empirical overview of the regional trends that produced the Republican takeovers. Taken together, the picture that emerges is that down-ballot elections in the South have increasingly come to mirror Presidential elections. Across the South, Presidential elections have long trended together on the same year-to-year swings. Increasingly, state legislative elections have come to mirror Presidential election in their year-to-year swings. If Republican legislative takeovers were a result of factors like fundraising, party building, or candidate recruitment – each of which varies across states – we would see Republican growth moving in different directions in the same cycles. Although there are regional disparities between the Peripheral South and Deep South, the tendency of states to trend together indicates that national tides, not state-level factors, is the most important impetus of state legislative elections. This is consistent with recent evidence that, across the nation, state legislative elections follow national trends (Rogers 2016).

Discussing the 2010 wave elections in North Carolina, Carter Wrenn, a 40-year veteran GOP strategist who began his career in Jesse Helms' 1972 US Senate campaign, offers this commentary: "Republicans won in 2010 not because they suddenly out-campaigned the Democrats. They won because it was a Republican year. The national wave is the explanation for the change in power; it's not any unique thing an individual did." Gary Pearce, Wrenn's Democratic counterpart in North Carolina, who has advised Democratic candidates since the

1970s, adds: “Political consultants, operatives, or even politicians, are like ants on a log going down on a river. The ants say, ‘Man I’ve really got this log going. This thing is moving. I am really in control!’”

## *2.2 Empirical overview*

I obtain data on the partisan composition of legislatures from Klarner (2013), who charts the partisan balance of state chambers going back to 1937. Klarner’s data also allow me to measure the level of contested races. State-level data on Congressional and Senate delegations, as well as presidential voting returns, are available from the America Votes database. To compare Republican momentum at the national and statewide levels, I chart Presidential vote shares for each state against Republican seat shares in each state senate.<sup>3</sup> Because of the large number of races in which there was only one candidate, using vote shares creates a distorted picture of party competition. Moreover, comparing Presidential vote shares with vote shares across all state legislative elections treats the legislative elections as one single-member district election, which they are not.

---

<sup>3</sup> Seat shares in the state houses, which closely resemble state senate shares, are included in the Appendix.

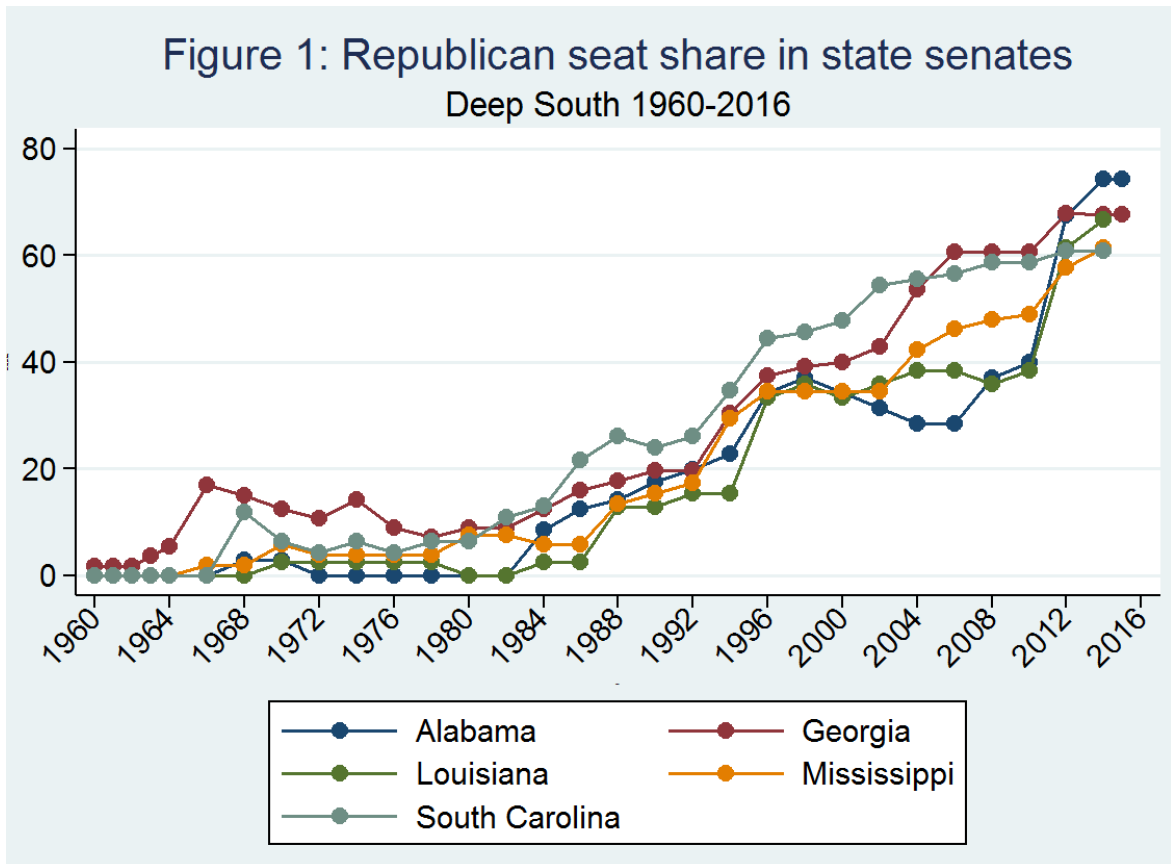
<b>Table 1.1: Republican Success in State-level Offices</b>						
	Governor		State House		State Senate	
State	Year 1 <sup>st</sup> Rep	Dem gov. since	GOP 1 <sup>st</sup> majority	Dem wins since	GOP 1 <sup>st</sup> majority	Dem wins since
AL	1988	1/6	2010	0/2	2010	0/2
AR	1966	8/11	2012	0/1	2012	0/1
FL	1966	5/9	1996	0/9	1994	0/10
GA	2002	0/3	2004	0/5	2002	0/6
LA	1979	5/7	2011	0/2	2011	0/2
MS	1991	1/3	2010	0/2	2010	0/2
NC	1972	2/6	1994	8/10	2010	0/2
SC	1974	2/6	1994	0/10	2000	0/7
TN	1970	3/6	2008	0/3	2004	0/5
TX	1978	2/6	2002	0/6	1996	0/9
VA	1969	6/11	1999	0/7	1997	3/8

Table 1 shows the first post-Reconstruction year in which each Southern state elected a Republican governor, a majority-Republican state House, and a majority-Republican state Senate. It also shows the number of elections of each type won by Democrats in each election after the first Republican victory. In Mississippi, for example, Republicans first won the governor's mansion in 1991, and only 1 of the 3 governors since then has been a Democrat. The Republicans took over both chambers in 2010, and Republicans have retained their majorities in both subsequent elections. As I show below, a large portion of these races went uncontested, and this continues to be the case.

The chart also demonstrates the well-established finding that Republicans tended to win

at higher level offices before penetrating the lower level offices (Aistrup 1996). In every state but Georgia, Republicans won the governorship before attaining a majority in either state legislature. “You would think that to build a political structure, you start at the grassroots and go up,” says one Republican strategist in Mississippi. “We tried that for years, and couldn’t ever break the nut. Ronald Reagan, Thad Cochran, Trent Lott. We were actually pushing it down from the top and finally found some success.” A similar story played out in Arkansas, where Democrats maintained control of both legislative chambers for 46 years after the state elected its first Republican governor.

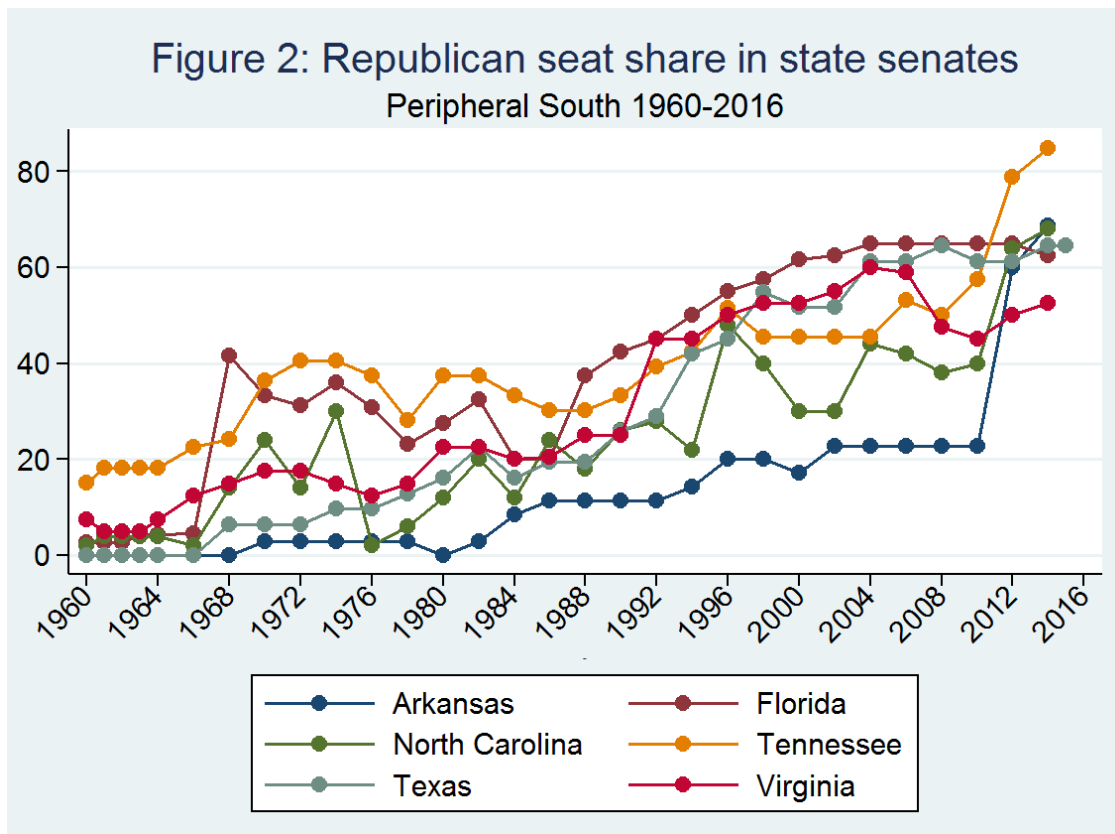
Table 1 also shows that while Democrats have continued to win gubernatorial races after the first Republican victory, GOP victories in the legislature have generally translated into sustained majorities. This is partly because the majority will use its districting authority to draw favorable district lines. North Carolina is a noteworthy example this. In 2010 Republicans first gained majorities in both chambers, and their districts have made it much more difficult for Democrats to win. In the 2016 legislative races, North Carolina Democrats got hundreds of thousands more votes than Republicans in both chambers, but failed to make a net gain in either chamber.



1: Republican seat share in state senates, Deep South

Figure 1 shows the evolution of state legislatures in detail, with a focus on the Deep South. Despite steadily decreasing Democratic identification among Southern voters in subsequent elections, the 1964 election had little initial effect on the balance of state legislatures, (Petrocik 1987). While the GOP made dramatic pickups in national elections in the 1970s and 1980s, Republicans made no significant gains in the legislature. Second, Republicans made pronounced gains in the 1994 midterms, but do not attain majorities. Third, with the exception of Georgia, Republican progress stalled in the 2000s, and even in one state Democrats gained seats.

This is true of the 1984 Reagan blowout and the Congressional windfall ten years later. Even the 1994 midterm elections, in which House Republicans gained a majority of Congressional seats for the first time (McKee 2010), left solid Democratic majorities in nearly every Deep South state legislature.



2: Republican seat share in state senates, Peripheral South

Figure 2 shows the patterns in the Peripheral South. Although, like the states in the Deep South, the GOP began with almost no presence in most legislatures, Republicans made significant gains in several states beginning in the 1960s. Virginia and Tennessee stand out in this regard, although Democrats regained ground after the GOP wave in 1972. Beginning in the 1980s, while Arkansas Republicans made no progress, Republicans in Virginia, Texas, and Tennessee slowly grew their ranks. In the 1990s, three states in the Border South cede their

Democratic majorities: North Carolina, Texas, and Florida. In comparison with the Deep South, there is greater sub-regional variation in the Border South. For most of the 1960 through the 1980s, the states generally did not trend together as closely as they did in the Deep South. This began to change in the 1994 wave election, where Republicans made gains in every state. In 2010, there was even more pronounced movement together, when Republicans picked up seats in Arkansas, North Carolina, and Tennessee.



**Table 2: Party of the Governor, by state,  
Deep South 1960-2016**

	AL	GA	LA	MS	SC
1960	D	D	D	D	D
1964	D	D	D	D	D
1968	D	D	D	D	D
1972	D	D	D	D	D
1976	D	D	D	D	R
1980	D	D	R	D	D
1984	D	D	D	D	D
1988	R	D	D	D	R
1992	R	D	D	R	R
1996	R	D	R	R	R
2000	D	D	R	D	D
2004	R	R	D	R	R
2008	R	R	R	R	R
2012	R	R	R	R	R
2016	R	R	D	R	R

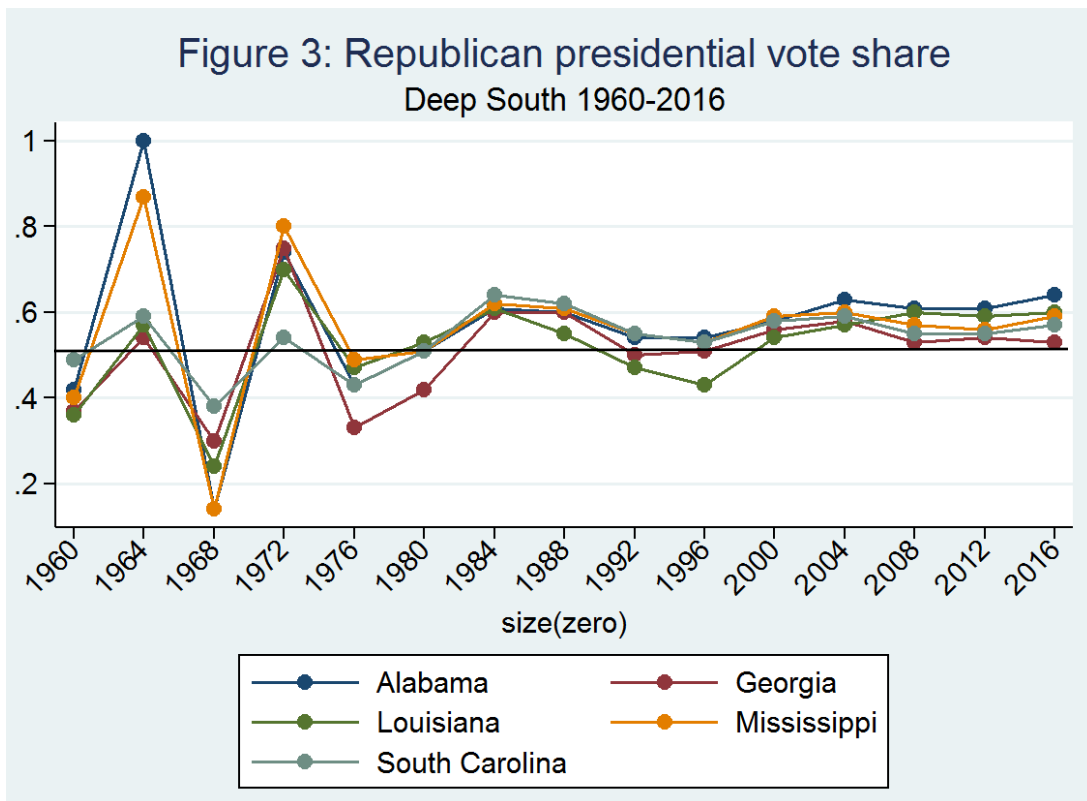
Table 2 charts the history of gubernatorial party control in the Deep South. As we see, Democrats maintained governorships for over a decade after Barry Goldwater swept the region's

electoral vote in 1964. The first GOP win in the region was James Edwards' 1976 breakthrough in South Carolina, where Strom Thurmond's public party switch in 1964 impelled many Democrats to change their party affiliation (Woodard 2013). Louisiana was the next state to break through in the Reagan wave election of 1980, although Democrats regained the governor's mansion for the rest of the decade after 1984. Georgia was one of the Democrats' last holdouts, and not until Roy Barnes' series of unpopular moves, including his role in the 2001 removal of the Confederate symbol from the state flag, did Republicans break through to Georgia's highest statewide office in 2002. In all but one state, Republicans won in the 2000s and have not since lost a gubernatorial election. The exception was Louisiana, where Bobby Jindal's departure enabled the house minority leader John Bell Edwards to win the 2015 gubernatorial race.

**Table 3: Party of the Governor, by state  
Peripheral South 1960-2016**

	AR	FL	NC	TN	TX	VA
1960	D	D	D	D	D	D
1964	D	D	D	D	D	D
1968	R	D	D	D	D	D
1972	D	D	R	R	D	R
1976	D	D	D	D	D	R
1980	R	D	D	R	R	R
1984	D	D	R	R	D	D
1988	D	R	R	D	R	D
1992	D	D	D	D	D	D
1996	D	D	D	R	R	R
2000	R	R	D	R	R	R
2004	R	R	D	D	R	D
2008	D	R	D	D	R	D
2012	D	R	R	R	R	R
2016	R	R	D	R	R	D

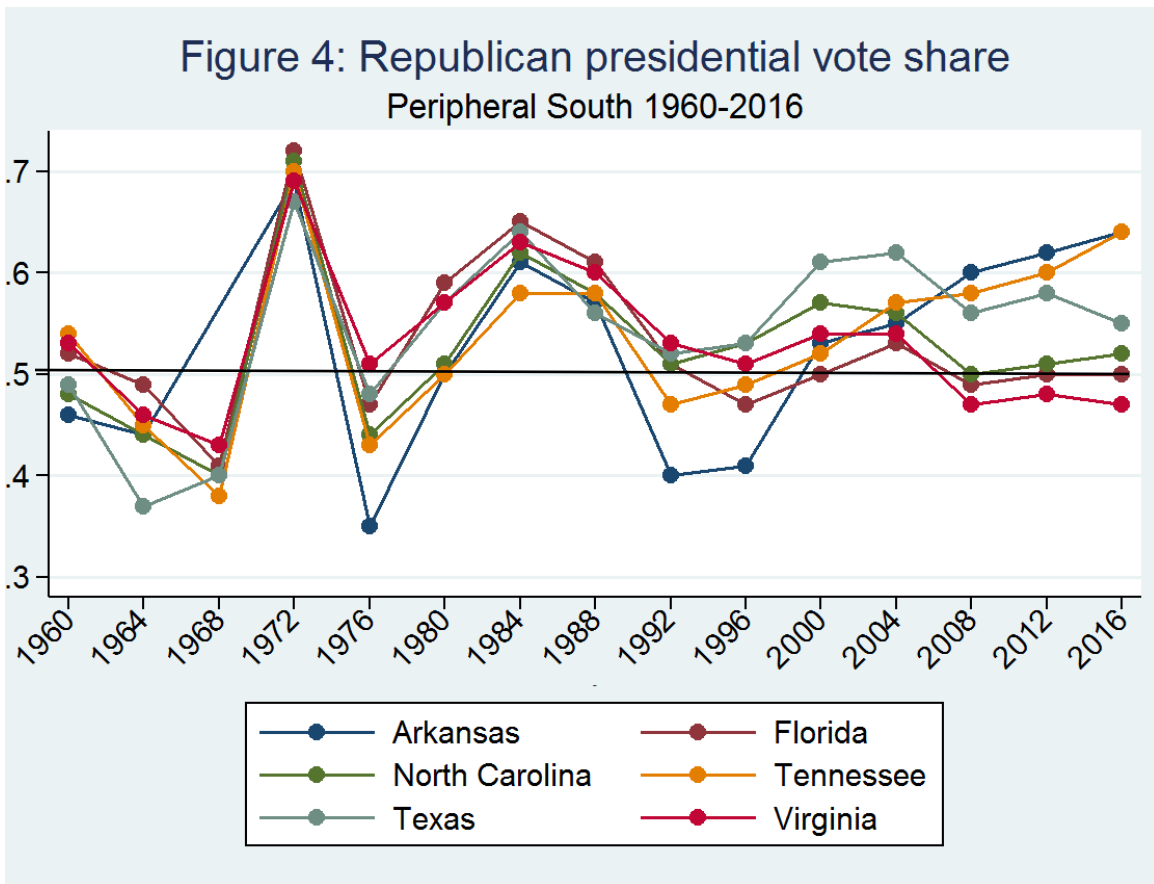
Table 3 shows the trends in the Peripheral South, where the GOP won governorships earlier than the Deep South. In Arkansas, described by Key (1949) as the purest example of a one-party state, Republicans won their first governorship in the South. In the GOP wave election of 1972, Republicans extended their momentum to other states, and expanded their presence in North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. After these GOP breakthroughs, a back and forth ensued throughout the region. Unlike the Deep South, where Republicans maintained the offices upon their initial victories, there was no such trend in the Peripheral South region.



3: Republican Presidential vote share, Deep South

Figure 3, which shows the trends in two-party presidential vote share in the Deep South, shows the striking similarities in the year-to-year swings across the region. This underlines the central argument of this paper, that state legislative elections were driven by national year-to-year swings. In 1960, John F. Kennedy won every state in the Deep South, although South Carolina nearly casted its votes Republican Richard Nixon, Strom Thurmond having already made a public stand against the Democratic party. Although George Wallace’s 1968 independent candidacy swept the region, Republicans regained momentum with Richard Nixon’s 1972 “Southern Strategy,” the first Republican wave that produced substantial GOP growth down the

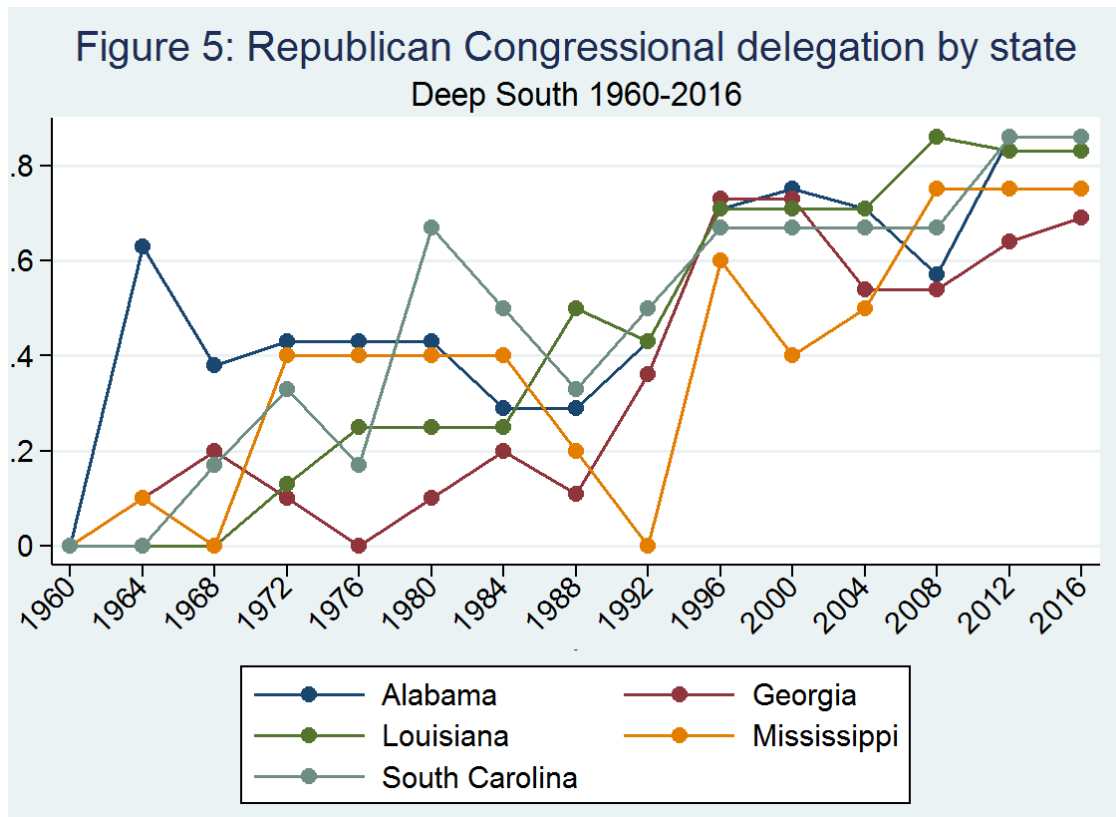
ballot, although this was not unique to the South. Later efforts by Ronald Reagan to court Southern voters generated Republican gains throughout the region, in 1980 and beyond.



4: Republican Presidential vote share, Peripheral South

As we see from Figure 4, voting patterns in the Peripheral South generally trended together. Although some states had a greater Republican presence before the 1964 party split, the ebbs and flows trended together. Tennessee and Virginia had Republican majorities even in 1960, followed by North Carolina and Texas with 47% and 49% Republican vote share, respectively. Notwithstanding the different starting points, the states moved together throughout the time series. The notable exception was Arkansas, which helped elect its native son Bill Clinton in 1992 and 1996. After Clinton’s departure, a contrast emerged between two groups of

states: Virginia, Florida, and North Carolina appeared to move in a slightly more Democratic direction. Arkansas, Texas, and Tennessee have moved more comfortably into the Republican column.

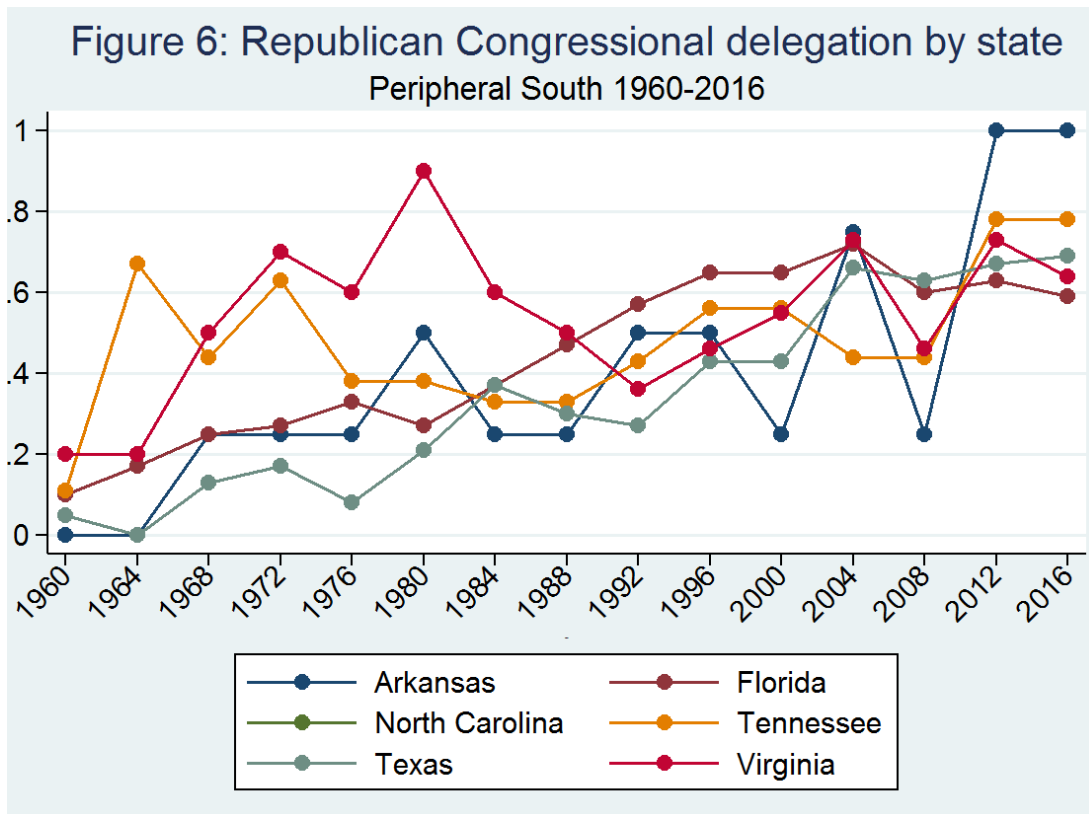


5: Republican Congressional delegation by state, Deep South

We see similar regional parity in the trends in US Congressional elections across the South. As Table 3 shows, the GOP had no Congressional delegation in the Deep South before 1964. Republican pickups occurred in 1964 after Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act, the same year that all five Deep South states casted their electoral votes for Goldwater. Republican growth stalled in the next cycle, with the sweep of Alabama Dixiecrat George Wallace. In the 1980s, as Ronald Reagan solidified the GOP's hold over the South in Presidential elections, the party's

progress halted in several states: Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and South Carolina. The first regional GOP windfall comes after the 1994 midterm elections, when Newt Gingrich and the GOP ran on a nationwide platform against the Clinton presidency. This was the first time the GOP gained a majority in the Southern Congressional delegation, and since 1994 Republicans have widened their leads in the Southern Congressional delegation. After the 2016 elections, the Democratic Congressional presence in the Deep South was limited to the majority black districts: New Orleans, the Mississippi Delta, central Birmingham, urban Atlanta, and downstate South Carolina.

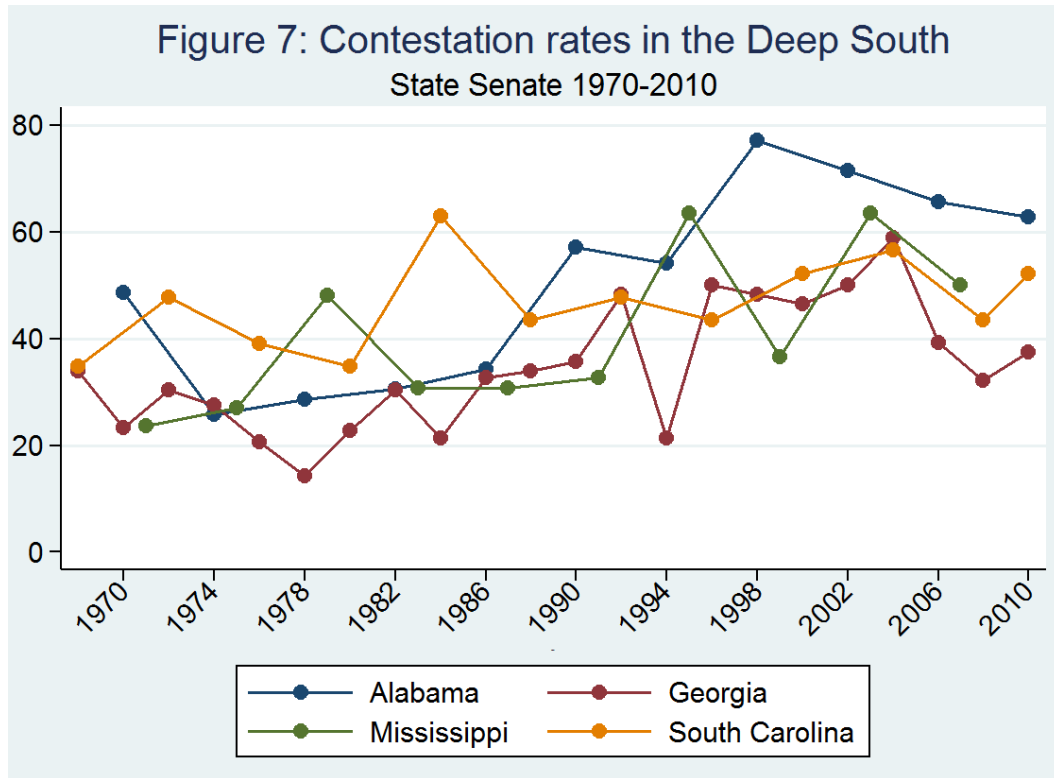




6: Republican Congressional delegation by state, Peripheral South

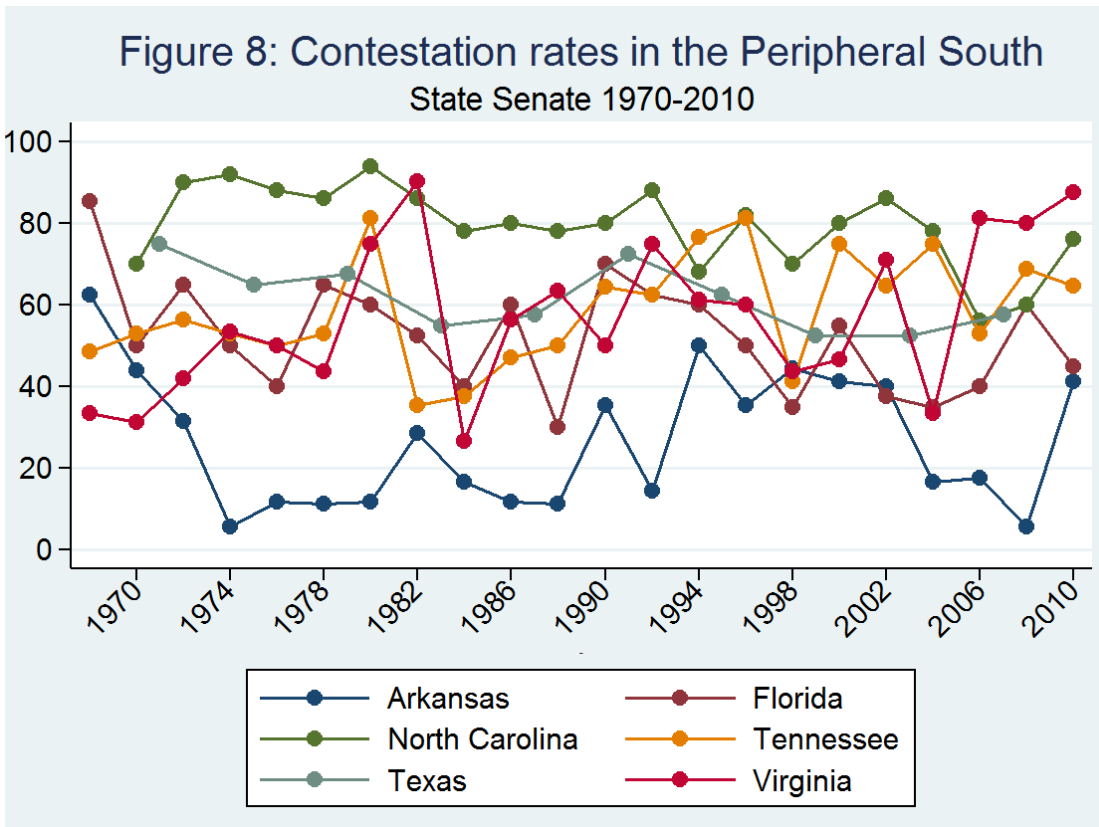
Figure 6 shows the GOP Congressional delegations in the Peripheral South. We see an early Republican presence in the Border South, especially the states with a legacy of Mountain Republicans. Like the Deep South, Republicans in the Peripheral South made gains in the 1964 elections. Unlike the Deep South, Republicans expanded on their 1964 pickups in subsequent elections. Like the Deep South, the 1980s were a mixed bag for Congressional Republicans in the Border South: they expanded their presence in Florida but lost ground in Arkansas, Tennessee, and Virginia. Although the 1994 midterms produced large Republican gains in the Deep South, Republicans in the Peripheral South made relatively marginal gains. Arkansas

Republicans made no progress during the Clinton years, and Republicans in Virginia and Texas made some gains without obtaining a majority. During the 2000s in the Bush years, Republicans widened their majority, although Democrats regained seats in the 2008 election. After the 2010 sweep, Republicans overtook Arkansas' Congressional delegation.



7: Contestation rates in the Deep South

As Figure 7 indicates, a major impediment to Republican growth in state legislatures was that so many seats were uncontested. For most of the region’s history, fewer than half of the races were contested. Although this is consistent with nationwide averages of contestation rates (Rogers 2016), such uncompetitiveness would hamper a Republican party that began from a considerable numerical disadvantage, especially in the Deep South. As Republicans made major gains in the US house elections in the 1990s, more seats were contested.



8: Contestation rates in the Peripheral South

As we see in Figure 8, the Peripheral South was generally more competitive, especially in the Mountain Republican states of North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. North Carolina, the focus of Chapter 4, has a tradition of competitive elections, and the contestation rates reflect this. The most prominent outlier in the Peripheral South region was Arkansas, a state with a long history of weak parties and Democratic dominance (Blair and Barth 2005). As I demonstrate, the lopsided Democratic majorities created a nearly party-less culture in the legislature, and the Republican party in Arkansas struggled for decades to make gains in the legislature. Not until the national Republican wave of 2010 did Democrats face a serious electoral threat in the legislative

elections. In this and the cycles following, Republicans swept statewide offices. I describe these events in the next chapter.

# Chapter 3

## Arkansas Turns Deep Red

### *3.1 Introduction*

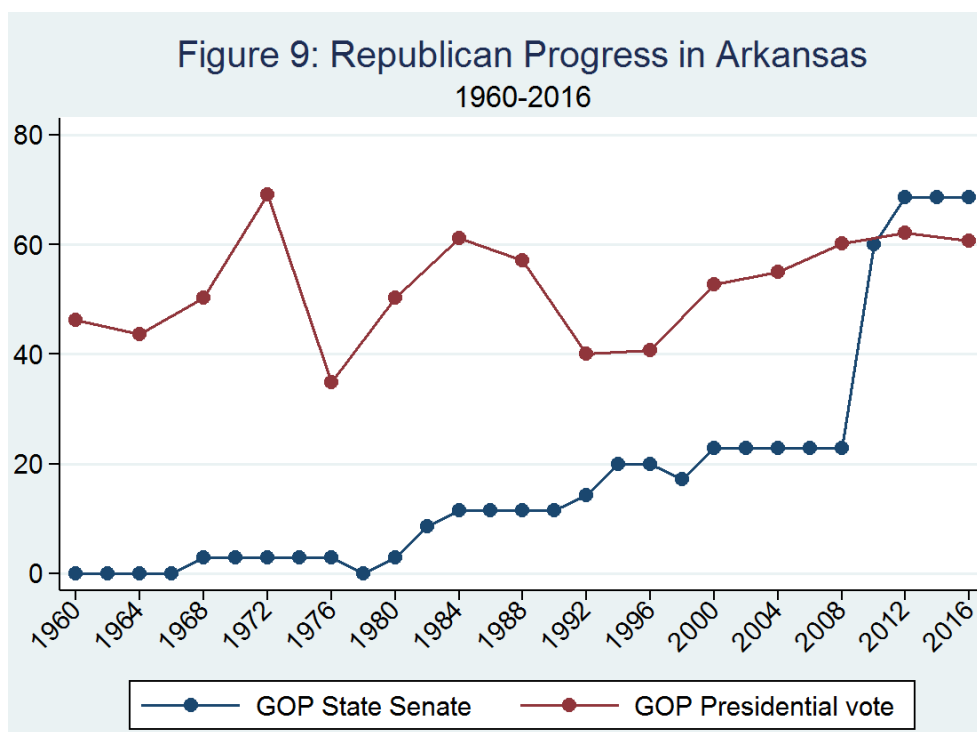
The theme of this study, Democrats' ability to maintain their majorities through the separation of state politics from national politics, is nowhere better exemplified than Arkansas. This is partly owing to the independent streak of the voters, one of the state's defining political characteristics (Blair 1988, Nelson 2015). The 1968 election is the classic illustration of this: George Wallace won the state's electoral votes, liberal New York Republican Winthrop Rockefeller won the governor's race, and William Fulbright, veteran Arkansas Democrat, was re-elected to the US Senate. The other major reason is the towering influence of the state's celebrity governors. The "Big Three" of Arkansas politics – Dale Bumpers, David Pryor, and Bill Clinton – helped maintain the strength of the Democratic party and to keep the national growth of the Republican party away from Arkansas (Blair 1996).

In this chapter, I describe the recent history of party development in Arkansas. As a byproduct of the state's insulation from national politics, Democrats in Arkansas maintained majorities while Republicans were making gains in most other Southern states. In 1972, when Republicans won high-profile victories in North Carolina and Arkansas, Arkansas elected Dale Bumpers governor, who would go onto two terms as Governor and 24 years in the US Senate. In the 1980s, during the Reagan boom years, Bill Clinton was rising to power in Arkansas. While Arkansas Democrats long benefitted from the insulation from national political tides, the 2010 backlash hit the state harder than anywhere else in the South. As I describe in the remainder of this chapter, the national wave impelled an unprecedented Republican sweep, which brought a new kind of partisanship to Arkansas.

### 3.2 Charting Partisan Trends in Arkansas

Table 1, which compares the partisan milestones of each southern state, puts Arkansas' history in broader context. The table shows the first post-Reconstruction year in which each Southern state elected a Republican governor, a Majority-Republican state House, and a majority-Republican state Senate. It also shows the number of elections of each type won by Democrats in each election after the first Republican victory. While Republicans enjoyed early wins in Arkansas, Democrats held onto their majorities longer than elsewhere in the South. Even the 2010 landslide election did not give Republicans a majority; not until 2012 did the GOP win control of both chambers.

<b>Table 4: Republican Successes in State-level Offices</b>						
	Governor		State House		State Senate	
State	Year 1 <sup>st</sup> Rep	Dem gov. since	GOP 1 <sup>st</sup> majority	Dem wins since	GOP 1 <sup>st</sup> majority	Dem wins since
AR	1966	8/11	2012	0/1	2012	0/1
FL	1966	5/9	1996	0/9	1994	0/10
VA	1969	6/11	1999	0/7	1997	3/8
TN	1970	3/6	2008	0/3	2004	0/5
NC	1972	2/6	1994	8/10	2010	0/2
SC	1974	2/6	1994	0/10	2000	0/7
TX	1978	2/6	2002	0/6	1996	0/9
AL	1988	1/6	2010	0/2	2010	0/2
MS	1991	1/3	2010	0/2	2010	0/2
GA	2002	0/3	2004	0/5	2002	0/6



9: Republican progress in Arkansas

Figure 9, which tracks the Republican percent of the 2-party state in each Presidential election, highlights the degree to which legislative elections were isolated from Presidential elections. Although the trends in the legislature follow the trajectory of national Republican growth, the magnitude of Republican growth in Arkansas legislative elections is smaller in national Republican wave elections than other states highlighted in this study. Until the Reagan years, Republicans had virtually no presence in the state Senate.

This highlights the problems facing the state’s Republican governors, from Winthrop Rockefeller to Mike Huckabee. Rockefeller, who from 1967-1971 served as the state’s first Republican governor of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, clashed bitterly with a Democrat-dominated legislature. Although he had spent almost a decade building up a GOP infrastructure in the state, Rockefeller arrived in the governor’s mansion with virtually no Republican colleagues. The same was true for Republican Governor Frank White, whose term from 1981-1983 produced only a marginal

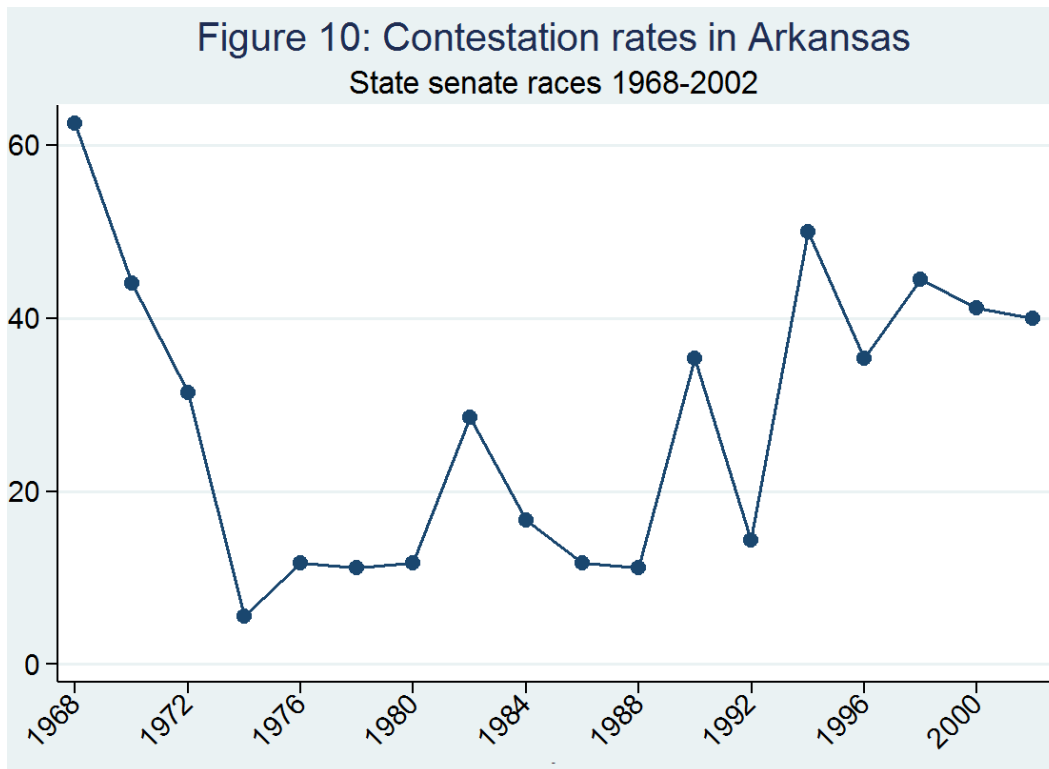


increase in Republican presence. A career businessman with no prior electoral experience, White's aggressively conservative legislative agenda made few friends in the overwhelmingly Democratic legislature. Particularly noteworthy was his decree that creationism be taught in schools, which was overturned by a federal judge.

For nearly four decades, Presidential elections in Arkansas exhibited the characteristics of a swing state. Both the 1960 and 1964 elections were close wins for Democrats, although in 1968, George Wallace won the state.<sup>4</sup> From then on, the patterns in Arkansas resemble the rest of the region: Nixon wins by a wide margin in 1972, and after a Democratic win in 1976, Reagan wins the state twice. Republicans have won by wide margins since Clinton's departure, while Democrats still had success down the ballot. In 2002, Mark Pryor unseated Republican Senator Tim Hutchinson, even as Mike Huckabee was re-elected governor. Two years after George W. Bush comfortably won the state, Democrat Mike Beebe reclaimed the governor's mansion for the Democrats, bringing with him supermajorities in both legislative chambers.

---

<sup>4</sup> Because Figure 7 charts the two-party vote total, the 1968 result does not show George Wallace's win in Arkansas.



10: Contestation rates in Arkansas

The stability of Democratic majorities is due in large part to the low rates of competition for legislative seats, as Figure 10 shows. The y-axis measures the percentage of state senate seats in each year with more than one candidate in the general election. Notwithstanding the swings, the most noteworthy pattern emerges is that for much of the state’s recent history, a majority of the seats were uncontested. First, we see the relatively high rates of contested seats in 1968, on the heels of Winthrop Rockefeller’s arrival in the governor’s mansion. Even as Rockefeller was still in office, the rates of contestation dramatically decline. After his departure, Republicans become virtually non-existent in state senate races, contesting fewer than 10% of the races for almost the entire decade. Even while the Reagan Revolution swept the state, state legislative races remained mostly uncompetitive during the 1980s. As we see, more seats are contested in

the 1982 cycle, but afterward the state returns to its prior levels of competition. As term limits took effect in the mid-1990s and Mike Huckabee became governor, Republicans make some headway in contesting more seats. GOP momentum receded Huckabee left office in 2006, after which Democrats strengthened their positions in the legislature.

The trends in legislative competition illustrate the way in which the parties in Arkansas are closely attached to the governor's personal organization. Barth (2003), in his survey of the state's political activists, describes the state's party culture:

The long tradition of weak party organizations in Arkansas, exceptional even by the standards of the one-party South, joins the candidate centered nature of modern Arkansas politics in limiting the development of Arkansas' political parties as organizations. All successful candidates in Arkansas in the modern era – Democrat or Republican – have developed ongoing campaign organizations almost totally independent of their state parties. (347)

Despite more seats being contested, Republicans made very little progress in growing their ranks, as Figure 7 shows. They make modest gains in 1994, but this small increase does not produce a steady trajectory of Republican growth. Like other Southern states, developing the party organizationally was not enough to add to the state's legislative presence. Republicans in Arkansas needed national momentum, which would not come until 2010. In the next section, I describe how Arkansas governors played a critical role in keeping the Democratic party strong despite growing Republican organization.

### ***3.3 The Governor's influence***

The Arkansas governor has historically sustained his party's infrastructure, and popular Democratic governors have helped maintain the popularity of the Democratic party in Arkansas

when the party was losing elsewhere in the South. In the post-Civil Rights era, the line of Democratic lions in the governor's mansion includes Dale Bumpers, Bill Clinton, and David Pryor. Between 1970 and 1994, these three collectively were on the ballot 36 times, and won 34 times (Blair 1995). This was due largely to the political skill of these three, most famously embodied in the career of Bill Clinton, whose skill for retail politics mirrors the types of political savvy of his Democratic predecessors in the governor's mansion. "These [were] extraordinarily talented people who managed to make people feel comfortable with them even as they maybe took positions that in any other place at that time, and by anybody less talented than them, would have threatened their political viability," says one state legislator in Little Rock.

While Mississippi Senators Jim Eastland and John Stennis, whose tenures in the US Senate began in the 1940s, avoided national Republican momentum by defying their national counterparts' position on race, the Big Three represented how the next generation of Democrats successfully incorporated African Americans into the Democratic coalition. Part of this involved retail political skill, part of it involved managing the legislative agenda, and part of it involved avoiding taking controversial stances that would split the coalition. Blair and Barth elaborate:

The popularity, presence, and political skills of the Big Three presented a formidable bulwark against any significant trickle-down effects of Republican presidential popularity. The moderately progressive positions they took helped mediate what many Arkansas voters deemed the ideologically inappropriate stances of the national party during the Reagan years. Their extensive campaign organizations ensured a healthy turnout by those most likely to vote Democratic. Additionally, Arkansas governors make approximately five hundred appointments annually to various boards and commissions. Thus, the gubernatorial years of the

Big Three translates into at least ten thousand appointees, who likely extended some loyalty to their Democratic benefactors (2005; 64-65)

Beyond the personal resources of the state's governors, there are underlying cultural reasons for the governor's outsized influence in the state's politics. One veteran journalist in Little Rock describes: "[Arkansas is] a state without an NFL team, without a major-league baseball team, without an NHL team or an NBA team, it's a state where you don't have a bunch of movie stars around, you don't have much of a recording industry. Your governor, along with the head football coach of the University of Arkansas," are the most important figures. While the governor has always taken the reins on defining the state's party brand, the gubernatorial campaigns tend to revolve around personality, not substantive platforms. This is why, as Blair and Barth argue, many of the state's successful governors, including Rockefeller, Bumpers, and Huckabee, were able to win without prior electoral experience. When asked how he won twice by wide margins, Mike Beebe says, "If they connect with you and feel they know you, they'll vote for you."

Without the constraints of a durable institutional party, Arkansas governors enjoyed latitude to define the direction of their party Arkansas. After Barry Goldwater ran his 1964 campaign on his opposition to the Civil Rights movement, Winthrop Rockefeller won a majority of the black vote to become the state's first Republican governor of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the 1990s, Mike Huckabee's legislative agenda, which included expanding healthcare for children and providing in-state tuition for undocumented immigrants, foreshadowed the "compassionate conservatism" that later defined George W. Bush's 2000 presidential race. In his 1992 campaign for the Democratic rose to fame as a "New Democrat" promising to move the party to its more populist roots, away from the Dukakis/Mondale era. In 2010, while Democrats were reeling

nationally, incumbent governor Mike Beebe enjoyed the highest approval ratings of any governor in the country.

Because the governor's personal organization has substituted for a party organization, the governor's party has often suffered upon the incumbent's departure. This first happened in the mid-1970s, when Winthrop Rockefeller's death left the GOP without its leader and benefactor. Starting in the 1960s, Rockefeller hired a staff to run his campaign, which became the basis of the state party. Without the leadership of their founder, the state GOP descended into factional bickering. A similar dynamic played out upon the 1992 election of Bill Clinton, when much of the state's best political talent moved to Washington and Clinton's replacement became mired in the Watergate scandal (Barth 2008). Even during the Beebe administration, the Democrats lacked an effective strategy to coordinate against the Republican tidal wave.

#### *The rise and fall of the Rockefeller machine*

The racial upheavals that would define the national party split in 1964 arrived early in Arkansas and paved the way for the state's first Republican governor of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In a 1957 ruling the Supreme Court unanimously ordered the integration of Little Rock Central High, which sparked a standoff between state and national power. In the conflict that became known to history as the "Little Rock Crisis," Democratic Governor Orval Faubus attempted to use the National Guard to block integration. In response Eisenhower deployed the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division to protect the "Little Rock Nine." Although he lost the standoff with President Eisenhower, Faubus went on to serve six terms as Governor. In his final election in 1964, he even garnered 81% of the black vote.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> The 1861 Arkansas constitution created a two-year term for governors. It was amended in 1984 to lengthen that term to four years, and again amended in 1992 to limit the governor to two terms.

Two years before the integration firestorm, Faubus appointed a New York businessman to lead the Arkansas Industrial Development Commission. Winthrop Rockefeller, who moved to Arkansas in 1953, had considerable business experience from his days in New York. Upon his appointment, he immediately got to work addressing the state's population drain and economic stagnation. Rockefeller's Commission oversaw the creation of 90,000 jobs statewide, and by the 1960s Rockefeller was setting his sights beyond the jobs commission. In preparation for a 1964 challenge to the man who appointed him, Rockefeller hired Faubus' best pollster and personally oversaw the party's development (Kirk 2016). Although his first campaign fell short, his gaining 43% of the vote suggested that two-party competition might be a possibility in Arkansas. After the 1964 electoral scare, Faubus announced that he would not run for another term.

With Faubus no longer on the ticket in 1966, Rockefeller was favorably positioned for a successful run. Although Rockefeller did not aggressively court the black vote in 1966, his background with the National Urban League and his appointment of an African American to head the Industrial Development Commission gave him credibility with black voters. Rockefeller's Democratic opponent Jim Johnson was a leader in the Arkansas White Citizens Councils and was known in the campaign for his refusal to shake hands with black voters (Blair 1988). Rockefeller won biggest in the northwestern region of the state, historically the state's largest base of Republican voters. He also did well among African-Americans in the delta areas. Unlike Faubus' success with the black vote in 1964, Rockefeller's favorability with minorities became something of a durable coalition. Rockefeller was re-elected in 1968, this time winning 88% of the black vote, up from 81% in his first victory.

Despite his success at the ballot box, Rockefeller faced an uphill climb with the overwhelmingly Democratic state legislature. The party organization he built did little to move

the needle for Republicans in the legislature, and he faced a strong resistance from the Democrats in the state legislature. As a relative newcomer to a state historically dominated by personal networks, he was unable to assemble a legislative coalition of his own (Kirk 2016). With only 3 Republicans in the 135-member legislature, his second term became embroiled in partisan conflict with the overwhelmingly Democratic legislature. An unpopular tax increase further alienated supporters in the electorate (Blair 1988).

Rockefeller's woes opened the door for Democrats to reclaim the governor's mansion in 1970. Given the Democratic headwinds, the party's nominee would have lasting implications on the direction of the party. The man who would rise to the occasion had echoes of JFK: an upstart young leader with a good face for television and a gift for speaking. The 1970 Democratic primary between Faubus and Dale Bumpers represented a showdown between the Old South Dixiecrats and a new brand of Southern Democrats. Although Bumpers was an electoral newcomer, he had developed a reputation with the state bar, and had played a role in the school integration in his home county. With \$100,000 from family donations, he put his oratorical skills to good use in a statewide television ad campaign. Faubus maintained his hardline racial rhetoric, this time with a strong anti-busing stance.

Bumpers won the 1970 Democratic gubernatorial primary in a runoff, and in the November general election he defeated Rockefeller. He would go on to serve four years as Governor and 44 years in the US Senate, and his career exemplifies Southern Democrats' ability to successfully incorporate African Americans into the party. By winning a majority of the black vote, Bumpers reclaimed the coalition that propelled Rockefeller's victories. In urban areas with concentrated African-American support, he cut into Rockefeller's base while maintaining the white moderates he would need for a majority. Bumpers was re-elected two years later, and for



the next seven general electoral cycles, Republicans failed to crack over 40% of the vote (Lamis 1984, 124). Bumpers' victory signaled a long-term shift in the Democratic party away from its segregationist roots. Bumpers' courting of the black vote was crucial, because of the increased turnout for African-Americans. African-American turnout rates increased from around 20% to over 50%, largely in step with the rest of the country (Blair 1988).

On the Republican side, Rockefeller's death in 1973 left the GOP without the man who had singlehandedly assembled and financed the GOP in Arkansas (Blair 1988). With almost no Republican presence in the legislature, the institutional party was almost defunct (Barth 2016). In Rockefeller's absence, conflict arose between the moderate and conservative wings of the state party. This came to a head in the 1980 nomination of Ronald Reagan, in which hard-right Republicans drove the Rockefeller wing out of the party (Barth 2009). On the other side, the Democrats maintained their coalition of blacks and moderate whites by softening their tone on race. Lamis (1984), interviewing a Bumpers staffer who described the problems within the GOP in the Reagan years:

Some of the ultra-conservatives are ripe to be picked off by a Republican party with a strong personality, but until they are able to recruit a few of those persons, they can't hope to pick them... we'll keep those; the Republicans aren't going to beat us there. Tradition is important to rural people. They are looking for ways to stay with the Democratic party; they have to be run off. (126)

Although Rockefeller's tenure was short-lived and did not threaten the long-term viability of Arkansas Democratic candidates, his success at courting the newly-incorporated African Americans highlights how important it was for Democrats to be able to adapt to a changing electorate. To retain black and white voters, party leaders in Arkansas had to tailor

their rhetoric and the legislative agenda to avoid splitting this coalition. Their ability to maintain their majorities until 2010 testifies to their sustained success

### *The Seeds of Republican Growth*

In the mid-1990s a confluence of factors revitalized Republican fortunes, the first of which was the passage of term limits in 1992. Passed the same day Bill Clinton was elected president, many say that term limits had a bigger influence on the state than Clinton's presidency (Nelson 2015, Barth 2015). At the time of the Amendment's passage, increased turnover was not a concern for Democrats because so few seats were contested. Term limits, which began taking effect in 1996, eroded the base of institutional expertise of long-term Democratic incumbents and highlighted the need for a recruitment system. "There wasn't an incubator program in Drew County," says a Democrat in Little Rock. "[Democrats] never really built out a farm team... they had no need to go out and recruit people," he says. In 2000, when term limits first took effect, Republicans in the 100-member House won 11 seats previously held by Democratic incumbents, and House Democrats only won 1 such Republican seat. In the 35-member Senate, Republican progress was slower, but still pronounced: the GOP converted 1 seat in 2000 and 3 seats in 2004.

Although the 1992 election elevated the state's native son into the White House, his departure created problems for Democrats in Arkansas. The national Republican party poured money into the state hoping to capitalize on national reaction against the Clinton presidency in 1994. More importantly, the exit of the state's most potent Democratic machine opened the door for Republicans to capitalize on the vacuum of leadership. Barth (2008) elaborates:

[A] good deal of the Republican success during [the 1990s] is, somewhat ironically, connected to Clinton's election. Clinton's move to Washington removed the best-developed Democratic electoral organization from the state.

Moreover, any number of prospective candidates for political office in the state traveled to Washington with him, leaving behind (at least for eight years) their own electoral ambitions in Arkansas (2008, 347)

Further straining the Democratic infrastructure was the retirement of US Senator David Pryor in 1996, which opened the door for the election of Tim Hutchinson. Hutchinson, a Congressman from the state's traditional Republican stronghold area, became the state's first Republican Senator since 1879.<sup>6</sup>

After Bill Clinton's vacancy promoted Jim-Guy Tucker to the Governor's mansion, a special election was held in 1993 to elect a new lieutenant governor. "The Democrats were coming off a tremendous high in Arkansas," recalls a Democratic veteran. "At the time, nobody thought there was any doubt that a Democrat would probably take that office. The Democrats didn't pay any attention to the race; they didn't think the nominee needed any help. Everyone was kind of focused on Washington." Mike Huckabee won the special election with 51% of the vote, and became governor upon the resignation of Jim Guy Tucker amid the Whitewater scandal.

Although Huckabee created momentum for his party with a slew of administrative appointments, his tenure as a party leader was a mixed bag. Because Huckabee was not a product of the traditional state party culture, he was ill-positioned to work with the state GOP's ringleaders. Most of the Republican leadership and money came from Northwest Arkansas, but Huckabee hailed from Southwest Arkansas. He first gained a statewide profile in 1989 when he was elected to the Arkansas State Baptist Convention, and three years later unsuccessfully

---

<sup>6</sup> Senator Dale Bumpers also retired in 1998, but Democrats retained that seat with the successful campaign of Blanche Lincoln.

challenged Dale Bumpers for a US Senate seat. He did little to build up the party caucus in the legislature and even provoked fights with Republicans in legislature.

As a legislative leader, his populist leanings caused public friction in his own caucus, most notably when Republicans in the state senate passed a bill denying benefits to undocumented immigrants. Huckabee expressed his disapproval for his Republican colleagues by decrying the bill as “race-bating” and “demagoguery,” famously declaring, “I drink a different kind of Jesus juice” than his Republican colleagues in the Senate (Fausset 2007). Huckabee made no significant efforts to convert some conservative Democratic legislature (Barth 2016), and by the end of his second term, Huckabee had overseen only a modest increase in his party’s legislature. Moreover, the increasing unpopularity of the Bush presidency created a favorable climate for Democrats in 2006. The GOP in Arkansas was sufficiently in disarray that incumbent Democratic Senator Mark Pryor ran unopposed in 2008.

By the end of Huckabee’s tenure, a Democratic leader in the mold of Clinton and Bumpers was preparing to take the reins of the Democratic party. Mike Beebe was a political veteran, having served in the state senate from 1983-2003 and as Attorney General from 2003-2007, where he served a single term. So formidable was his stature within the Democratic party that he ran unopposed in his 2006 Gubernatorial primary race, and defeated Republican Asa Hutchinson in the general election with 55% to Hutchinson’s 41%. In addition to Beebe’s commanding win, Democrats swept all Constitutional offices and increased the size of their legislative majorities in both chambers.

### ***3.4 2010 and Beyond: Arkansas Turns Deep Red***

Upon Beebe’s election, the Democrats in Arkansas enjoyed their strongest statewide position in decades. Their incumbent Democratic governor enjoyed high approval ratings, and in

2008 Democrats widened their legislative majorities. What the Democrats and even Republicans failed to anticipate, however, was the degree to which the reaction to Obama and his policies would dominate elections in 2010 and beyond. For the first time, Democrats in Arkansas were unable to avoid the impact of national political tides.

Barack Obama and his signature legislation were immensely unpopular in Arkansas, and Republicans used this against Democrats across the state. Barack Obama's 37% approval rating in Arkansas was the 2<sup>nd</sup> lowest of any other state behind Kentucky (Good 2010). Both Senators Blanche Lincoln and Mark Pryor voted for the Affordable Care Act, as did Congressmen Vic Snyder and Marion Berry and Republican challengers used this against all Democratic incumbents in the 2010 cycle. "Obama was now the Democratic party" in 2010, says one Republican strategist. "Obama-Pelosi-Reid" was the battle cry for GOP candidates, says another. Republicans also primed policy issues associated with the Obama administration: the Keystone pipeline, cap-and-trade, and Nancy Pelosi also marked the campaign atmosphere in 2010.

As evidenced by firsthand accounts from both sides of the aisle, neither party fully appreciated the magnitude of the electoral groundswell. What happened was not the result of party engineering; it was the culmination of a grassroots political uprising that neither party anticipated. Even after the 2010 wave election threatened Democratic majorities, the lack of Democratic coordination persisted. "There's just not a history of Democrats acting in a partisan interest in Arkansas," says Robert Thompson, the Democratic State Senate majority leader in the 2011-2012 session. For the long period of Democratic control, the party was "so large and so dominant that it was full of divisions," says Thompson. From his perspective, the opposite was true for the Republicans: the small size allowed them to coordinate more effectively in 2010 and 2012, when they increased their numbers in both chambers.

As a group, Democrats lacked a coordinated plan to combat the Republican insurgency. “There’s a Democratic caucus in the Senate, but it rarely met; when it met, the meetings were poorly attended,” says Robert Thompson, who was the Democratic senate majority leader in 2011-2012. When I asked Beebe if there was a group effort among Democrats in 2010, he responded, “I’m not a member of an organized party, I’m a Democrat.” The last Republican wave election was in 1994, when native son Bill Clinton was the leader of the Democratic party. Democrats had little to worry about in 1994, and the small gains Republicans made in that cycle did not endanger Democrats’ majority. Shane Broadway, who served in the legislature from 1997-2015, describes the relationship between party and candidates:

I didn’t count on the state Democratic party when I ran for office, and most candidates didn’t. People, especially at the legislative level, elected the person and not the party. During that time, the politics were not nationalized; we were able to keep the distance from what was happening in DC versus what was happening in Arkansas, and how you could relate to people in the state. When Governor Beebe got elected, everything was about the state of Arkansas, not what was happening in DC.

As Thompson explains, the lack of coordination affected the party’s capacities as an electoral caucus:

Legislative elections from the Democratic party’s standpoint were an afterthought. No staff, very little money. No grassroots effort, no field organization. These sorts of basic things that parties do in legislatures had never been done in Arkansas. This began to change within the caucus, within the senate, it was still very difficult to get the caucus to act as a party caucus, asking senators

to do things like fundraising for the caucus was like pulling teeth, most of them didn't wanna do it.

The 2010 election marked the first time in which a popular governor was unable to extend his popularity down the ballot. In the leadup to the election, Beebe enjoyed the highest approval ratings of any governor in the country (Jensen 2010), and in the election he won all 75 counties. Although he campaigned statewide for fellow Democrats in 2010, Democrats in the legislature suffered considerable losses, nearly losing their majorities. One Democratic strategist recalls:

A lot of Democrats wrongly assumed that the national assault on Obama and the national party and the Affordable Care Act wouldn't lap up on the shores of Arkansas Democrats, so we don't need to defend him. We'll just let it go. People will say these things about death panels, but that won't do anything to hurt us... At that point, it became, 'Well, we gotta vote against all these Democrats. They're all in league with this guy who creates death panels.' People like [Democratic Congressman] Ross, people like Beebe, should have done more, but they wrongly calculated that it wouldn't affect them.

Although Democrats failed to appreciate the extent of the tidal wave coming, Republican reflection on the 2010 election suggests that even the GOP failed to anticipate the magnitude of the wave in 2010. "We missed an opportunity in 2010, if we had run more candidates," says Ann Clemmer, part of the Republican leadership team in 2008. "There's a good chance to win in places Republicans hadn't won before," she notes. Although the Affordable Care Act fueled much of the Republican resistance, its passage came after the filing deadline. Had the deadline occurred after the ACA's passage, Republicans probably would have fielded even more

candidates. Clemmer's candid reflections on the 2010 election indicate the degree to which the results surprised her own party: "I don't know what happened that night, but I know that we were expecting minimally 56, but we got 51."

*Looking Ahead: Long-Term Transformation?*

The recent upheavals laid the groundwork for a long-term change away from Arkansas' traditions of political independence. National politics drives statewide elections in Arkansas, starting with the gubernatorial elections. With the new Republican majorities, the old traditions of a party-less legislature are gone. Perhaps the most important was the tradition of awarding committee chairmanships by seniority, not partisanship. In Congress, the majority party appoints committee chairs who agree to manage the agenda to ensure that only bills favored the party make it to the floor (Cox and McCubbins 2005). The factions within the Senate were based on personality and geography, not party loyalty. Mark Pryor, whose political career started in the State Senate in 1991 and eventually took him to the United States Senate in 2002, recalls the climate in his early days:

People will say that was a one-party system. The truth is, the ideological fights were in the Democratic party. You had really conservative Democrats, mostly then moderate Democrats. A few liberals, but not much. The party affiliation was completely secondary. We didn't organize ourselves into caucuses, we didn't pick committees based on that. It was all on seniority. That was actually good, I didn't realize how spoiled I was at that time because you actually talked about issues, not your party affiliation.

None of these traditions have survived the Republican takeovers. Upon obtaining majorities in both chambers, Republicans in the legislature began pursuing a sharply



conservative agenda. Instead of using “God, guns, and gays” as wedge issues against conservative Democratic incumbents, Republican legislators could now pass laws that reflected their goals.<sup>7</sup> One of the first and most controversial was the 20-week abortion ban passed in 2013 during Beebe’s last term. Upon the governor’s veto, the legislature overrode his veto, and the bill was eventually struck down in federal court. During the 2015 lead-up to the Supreme Court’s decision on gay marriage, the state became embroiled in a controversy about its Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which was designed to give protections to people of faith who refuse to comply with nationwide dictates on gay marriage. Under considerable statewide and national pressure, most notably from Walmart, Republican governor Asa Hutchinson signed an amended version. The House recently passed legislation allowing guns on campuses, even if the university rules forbid guns. Another 2017 proposal mimicked North Carolina’s HB2, the “bathroom bill” limiting the rights of transgendered individuals, but that bill was withdrawn.

On budgetary matters, GOP majorities are constrained because the state constitution gives little leeway for an aggressive budget-slashing agenda. Like all states, Arkansas’ constitution requires a balanced budget, but it also includes mandatory allocations for education spending. This gives little room for aggressive tax cutting and austerity policies, and has limited the scope of any such measures since the GOP takeover. As such, Hutchinson’s economic accomplishments have been modest in scope: in 2015 he signed a bill that created 1% tax cut for people earning between \$21,000 and \$75,000 and reduced the capital gains tax to 40%.

A comparison of the 2010 and 2014 gubernatorial elections illustrates the ways in which statewide campaigns no longer revolve around personality. In 2010, Mike Beebe defied the statewide and national trends with a resounding win over his Republican opponent. The 2014

---

<sup>7</sup> This expression was used by a source at the state capitol.

campaign played out much differently. The Democrats nominated Mike Ross, formerly a member of the state's Congressional delegation, to run against Asa Hutchinson. The party's old strategy of relying on personal connections between the candidate and voters failed to insulate them from the national conditions in a Republican year. Dillon Hupp, a senior official with the state Democratic party and strategist for the Ross campaign, describes the thought-process of Ross' campaign:

[Ross] was a good ole boy. He was a south Arkansas guy; he was a hunter. He was someone that these voters we thought we had lost should be able to connect with. I think what we saw was that none of that really mattered. What we had in the state at the time was a tremendous influx of national money coming in mainly in the Cotton/Pryor race. All they tried to do was to tie Mark Pryor to Barack Obama... the Republicans here in Arkansas did what Republicans around the county were doing at the time, which was [to] link our rural, white, moderate, conservative Democrats to Barack Obama, and therefore draw away those middle-of-the road bases that would otherwise supported them.

In a fitting reversal of fortunes, Hutchinson defeated Ross by 55% to 41%, the same margin Beebe defeated Hutchinson by 8 years earlier. Mark Pryor, a two-term incumbent with one of the most famous last names in Arkansas politics, lost his Senate seat to Tom Cotton. As Hupp points out, Hutchinson's win is especially ironic, given Hutchinson's role as a lead prosecutor in the Clinton impeachment trial. Unlike his Republican predecessor, Hutchinson's ascent occurred through the traditional power party channels, which better positioned him to build his party once in power. Unlike any previous Republican governor in Arkansas, Hutchinson hails from northwest Arkansas, which has the biggest concentration of Republican

voters in the state. First elected to Congress in 1996, he served two terms until he earned an executive appointment with the DEA, and then became an undersecretary for the Bush Department of Homeland Security.

On the Democratic side, a new wave of progressive activism suggests that the resistance to Republican majorities is also defined by national political rhetoric. Two groups have sprung up in the wake of the Trump presidency that have the potential to provide a grassroots progressive network akin to the 2010 Tea Party. Be the Change, a national progressive alliance led by women, arose as a grassroots response to the Trump presidency. After organizing the 2017 Arkansas Women's March attended by over 7,000 (Nero 2017), the group uses its 1,300-member mailing list to keep its members informed about progressive causes at the federal, state, and local level (Combs 2017).

The Democratic party, which in the past was not institutionally strong because it never had to be, appears have learned its lesson about the importance of local infrastructure. Hupp, currently interim executive director of the state Democratic party, summarizes his party's evolution in recent years:

While we still had some relevance in terms of elected officials [in 2012], our internal structure, our grassroots structure, the structure of our county party organizations across the state, was in complete and total shambles. We had been operating as basically a one-party state for so long, [that] what we had was a network of social clubs across the state. We didn't have a working arm of the Democratic party of Arkansas to work to get people elected across Arkansas. What we have now is a huge shift away from that. We have dedicated a lot of

time and resources to revamping those county parties in the last 2 years especially. We have a full-time staff position that focuses on that.

The recent changes in Arkansas mirror recent developments in national politics, particularly the rise of legislative polarization (Ansolobehere, Rodden, and Snyder 2006). On both sides of the aisle, the state now has the markings of a modern, professional party culture, with all the partisanship that entails. Gone is the Arkansas of old, a state dominated by personable governors and opportunistic legislative alliances. Gone are the politics of moderation that set Arkansas apart from the rest of the South. Moreover, the Republicans have used their majorities to legislate on some of heated national political debates: guns, abortion, and LGBT issues. Washington-style politics has finally arrived in Arkansas.

# Chapter 4

## North Carolina: Death of a Purple State?

### *4.1 Intro*

In a region characterized by one-party dominance throughout its history, North Carolina has a tradition of political competition dating back to the union-sympathizing “Mountain Republicans” who had little stake in the slavery economy (Christensen 2008). Because of North Carolina’s traditionally close voting margins, the state has a long tradition of governors who emphasized the politics of consensus by focusing on education, infrastructure, and healthcare (Christensen 2008; Eamon 2014). Despite the close margins in the electorate and relatively well-organized parties, North Carolina has a history of blowout elections in the state legislatures. Like elsewhere in the South, the biggest swings in North Carolina legislative elections have occurred in national wave elections, and the 2010 election is the most recent example of this.

Although Democrats’ win in the 2016 gubernatorial race suggests that the state’s tradition of competitive elections is here to stay, the changes brought by the new Republican majorities will have long-term consequences. The Republican takeover gave the GOP control of the 2010 legislative maps, which they have used to their advantage. Additionally, Republican majorities have produced a slew of conservative legislation including HB2, which sparked a national debate about transgender rights.

In the remainder of this chapter, I describe the recent history of the state’s partisan back and forth. As I demonstrate, most of the state’s biggest legislative upheavals have occurred on the heels of national wave elections. Even in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Republican party had a presence in North Carolina, well ahead of many of its Southern neighbors. The sustained GOP presence continued into later decades, but failed to produce long-term Republican

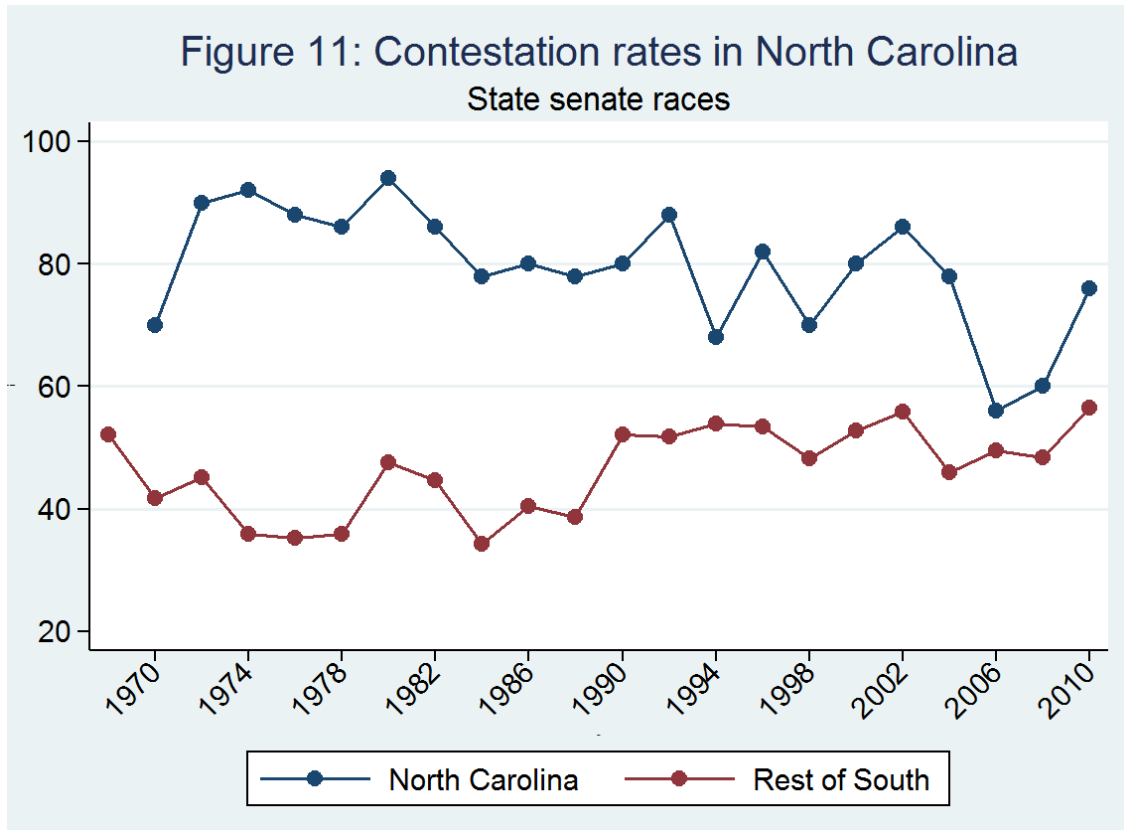
majorities. If party growth were the driver of Republican legislative sweeps, we would expect GOP takeovers well ahead of the rest of the South, given the North Carolina GOP's earlier presence in the state. Instead, Republican growth in North Carolina follows the pattern of other states, occurring primarily in the national wave elections that propelled Republican growth across the South. For Democrats, maintaining majorities have hinged on the ability of governors and legislative leaders to emphasize local issues and avoid issues that might have split its coalition (Pryby 2005; Eamon 2016).

#### ***4.2 The long tug-of-war in North Carolina***

North Carolina's tradition of competitive elections persists to the present day, and its reputation as a "purple state" reflects this (e.g. Fausset 2014). The state ranks near the national median in state-level ideological scores, and presidential elections in the state have been closely contested in recent decades (Saad 2014). In 2008, North Carolina was Obama's narrowest win, and the result was certified several days after the election. In 2012, North Carolina was one of two states to flip to the Republican column, and in 2016, the state elected Trump as president and sent a Democrat to the governor's mansion.

Unlike other states in the South, early Republican victories in North Carolina did not augur a transition to permanent Republican majorities. North Carolina is the only Southern state in which Democrats regained control of the legislature after losing it to Republicans. In the national wave election of 1994, Republicans gained a slim majority in the state House and came within a single vote of capturing the state senate. This was the beginning, not the end, of a partisan tug of war for the state legislature. Democrats regained their majority in 1996, and would hold onto their majority for another 14 years. So close were the margins following the 2002 elections that that the position of House Speaker was shared by a Republican and

Democrat. Many Republicans considered this an act of betrayal, and the Democratic speaker eventually was eventually convicted for bribery (Prysby 2005, Stam 2017).

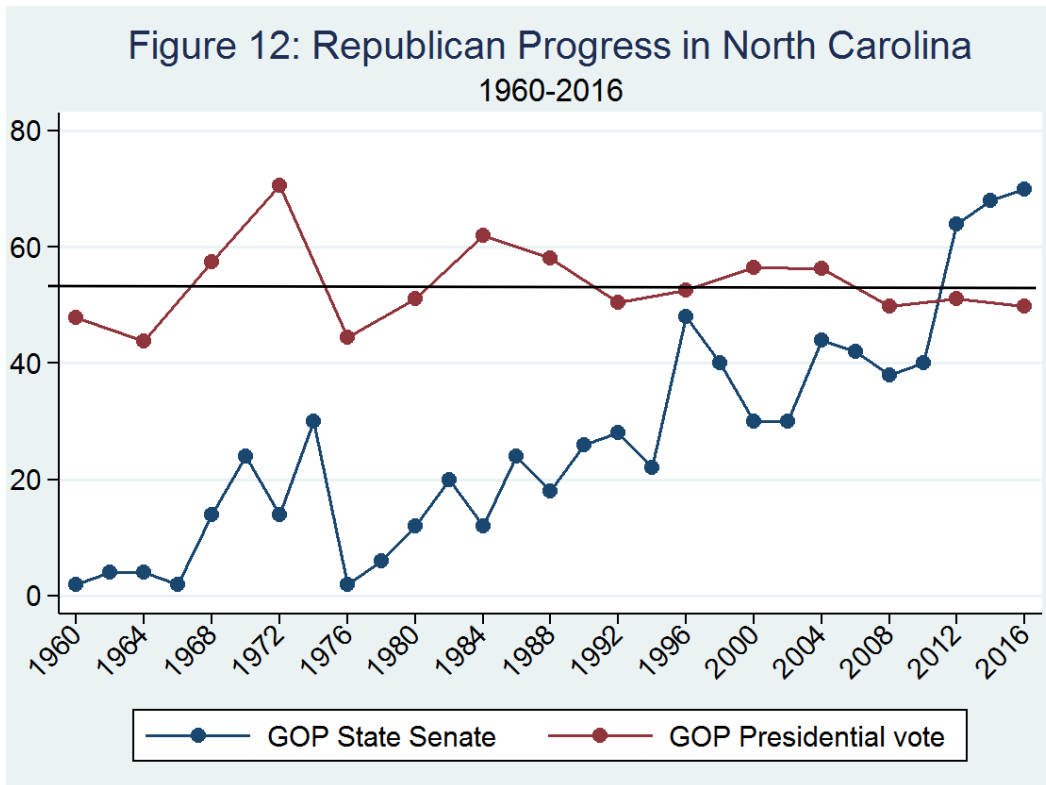


11: Contestation rates in North Carolina

Despite higher rates of contestation, North Carolina Republicans fail to make gains before other Southern states. As Figure 11 shows, more seats were contested in North Carolina than elsewhere in the region, yet Republicans did not achieve a majority in North Carolina until 2010. The y-axis measures the percentage of state senate races in each cycle with more than one candidate in the general election. Beginning with the Republican wave election of 1972, contestation rates hover at around 80%, which is roughly 40% higher than the average across the

rest of the region. While the rest of the South became more competitive in the 1990s, Republicans in North Carolina were already competing at high rates. In the early 2000s, fewer races were being contested, just before Republicans made major gains leading to their majority. Despite more races being contested, Republican growth in North Carolina mirrors that of other Southern states. This underscores the central argument of this study, that the most important driver of legislative growth for Republicans is national waves, not the presence of an organized party organization as reflected by contestation rates.





12: Republican progress in North Carolina

Figure 12 compares Republican growth at the presidential and national levels. The red line shows the two-party Presidential voting percentage, and the blue line shows the percent of the state Senate that was occupied by Republicans. The Presidential voting patterns show why North Carolina has enjoyed the reputation as a purple state. In the 1964 Goldwater sweep of the South, Johnson won North Carolina with 56% of the vote. After the 1972 blowout election, the state never had another lopsided victory for either party. After the Reagan years, the margins tighten, and this continues to be the norm for Presidential elections in North Carolina.

As Figure 12 shows, the biggest electoral wings happening in national waves. For example, the decade and a half of Republican progress from 1960 onward was wiped away in the

1976 Democratic landslide. Likewise, although Jim Hunt spent considerable resources and energy toward party building in his 1985-1993 tenure as governor, Republican gains in the 1994 sweep nearly equaled the cumulative GOP growth of the Reagan years. Finally, the 2010 windfall, although coming on the heels of a discipline Republican campaign effort, exceeded even the best expectations of the leaders of the GOP caucus. I address this later in the chapter.

The general pattern of punctuated Republican growth suggests that the 2010 pickups could augur a long-term shift in partisan control of the legislature. Although Democrats made pickups in national wave elections, the overall trajectory of partisan change in the legislatures favored Republicans. The most sustained period of Democratic growth occurred in the late 1990s and early 2000s, a period of Republican disarray in North Carolina. If Democrats are to make the legislature more competitive, they will likely need a well-organized party operation and a national Democratic wave.

#### *Growth and division within the GOP*

The trajectory of Republican growth in North Carolina demonstrates that, despite GOP efforts to grow its ranks, the biggest moments of party growth occur in the national waves. In comparison to the national wave election of 1972, the party-building efforts of the 1960s did little to add to the GOP legislative presence. Likewise, Republican Governor Jim Hunt's efforts to capitalize on the Reagan years by growing the GOP's presence in the legislature did not produce nearly as much of a boom as the 1994 elections. On the Democratic side, the 20 years of growth following their losses in 1994 did not shield them from the Republican tidal wave of 2010.

Although early Congressional wins in the 1950s and 1960s signaled a growing Republican presence in the state, Republicans did not have their first breakthrough until the 1972

wave election, starting with the governor's race. The GOP gubernatorial primary pitted two candidates who represented the party's two wings. Jim Gardner attracted many conservative Democrats who were alienated by the party's national embrace of civil rights (Eamon 2016; Christensen 2008). Gardner was originally a Democrat from the eastern part of the state, which did not have the early presence of the Mountain Republicans. Upon switching his party affiliation, Gardner quickly gained attention as an effective campaigner. In 1964 he ran against 15-term incumbent Harold Cooley, the long-serving Chairman of the House Agriculture Committee. Gardner's 48% vote share shocked many, and in the next cycle he prevailed by a stunning 13 percentage points in what was one of the state's biggest upsets of the decade.

Jim Holshouser hailed from the mountainous western part of the state and represented the state's old-guard Republicans. A lifelong Republican, he was first elected to the state house in 1962, where he quickly achieved the rank of minority leader. In 1966 he became state party chairman, and his political experience gave him a broader network of political contacts than Gardner (Hood 2015). In 1968 he was the GOP's nominee for governor, and underperformed the national Republican party, losing to his Democratic opponent Robert Scott.

In the 1972 gubernatorial primary between Holshouser and Gardner, the first round went into a runoff, which was decided by just under 1,800 votes. In the general election, Holshouser succeeded by doing what Gardner would have likely had a difficult time doing in the general election: targeting black voters (Christensen 2008). As governor, Holshouser's emphasis on education and environment mirrored his Democratic predecessors. He also appointed African-Americans and women to state government and expanded funding for rural health care (Christensen 2008; Eamon 2016).

Although Gardner lost the primary, Jesse Helms' election in the same cycle gave institutional recognition to many of the voters and activists who supported Gardner. Although he did not switch his party affiliation to Republican until 1970, Helms had a long career inveighing against the values of the national Democratic Party. He earned his reputation as a conservative mouthpiece in state media outlets and never lost his skill for political flare. It was Helms, not any Republican governor, who became the state's most prominent spokesman for conservative principles (Luebke 1990), and his 30-year career accelerated the polarization in the state's political climate.

Jesse Helms' success underscores the contrasting strategies for Republican growth and Democratic majority maintenance. Helms did not just embody firebrand conservative rhetoric, he used his influence to fund like-minded candidates. Helms and his lieutenants formed the National Congressional Club, which financed his later campaigns and like-minded conservative candidates for over two decades. Thanks to his rhetoric and his fundraising, Helms' brand of conservatism shaped the conservative movement both statewide and nationally (Thrift 2014). On the Democratic side, the governors held together their coalition of moderate whites and African Americans by avoiding the red-meat conservative issues about which Helms inveighed.

As the GOP's statewide presence grew, tensions within its factions escalated. This arose partly out of divisions between newcomers and old-timers, and partly out of tensions between party loyalists and ideological purists. Carter Wrenn, who helped launch Jesse Helms' 1972 Senate race, describes the growth of the party tensions:

The Piedmont was more Republican, and the east was very heavily Democratic. It was also very heavily conservative. What happened in the late 60s and 70s is that the conservative tradition [of the] Democratic party shifted allegiance and started

voting Republican. Helms was a classic example; he had been a Democrat all his life and switched parties. When that happened and all these new people, these Democrats, started moving into the Republican party, the old traditional Republicans didn't greet 'em with open arms and say, 'This is wonderful, welcome.' They basically said, 'Go to the back of the line.'

On the Republican side, the party developed an institutional presence to combat the longstanding Democratic legislative majorities. This culminated in the high-profile 1984 Senate race between Helms and former governor Jim Hunt. Helms won the race and Republican Jim Martin won the governor's race. Despite these high-profile wins, Democrats still controlled both legislative chambers. From the start, Martin and the Democratic-controlled legislature had an adversarial relationship, and at the time did not have the veto power.<sup>8</sup> Martin and his lieutenants responded by developing a modernized party operation (McCorkle 2016). In the 1986 cycle, Martin aggressively campaigned for Republicans in legislative races, making over 100 stops in total. Although his efforts did not produce a Republican majority, the GOP had developed an infrastructure of political professionals that became the next generation of Republican leadership (Hood 2015). Using a donor base cultivated during the governorship of Jim Martin, the state party channeled its resources into a professional political effort: voter mail, and television ads.

After Republicans came within a single vote of a majority in 1994, the Democrats modernized their party operations. The man in control of the Democrats' legislative caucus was Marc Basnight, a folksy Democrat from the Outer Banks region. He arrived to power in 1993 as president pro tem of the State Senate, a position that is much more powerful in the NC Senate

---

<sup>8</sup> The gubernatorial veto was added in 1995; Democratic governor Jim Hunt signed the bill after the Republican house passed the law.

than the same position in the US Senate.<sup>9</sup> Basnight would eventually become, by many accounts, the most powerful elected official in the state (Eamon 2016). “Basnight moved from being disdainful of all of that and kind of having an old-school country retail politician viewpoint, to a very sophisticated [one],” says Mac McCorkle, who was hired by the Democratic caucus in 1995. With Basnight in command, the Democrats leveraged their fundraising advantage more efficiently than ever before.

Like the most successful Southern Democratic governors, Basnight’s most important contribution was to keep the Democratic party’s various coalitions together. Basnight was a masterful political persuader, and he managed to keep his party in good graces with the state’s most powerful interest groups: the universities, the textile industry, and the tobacco industry. Christensen (2008) describes his influence as follows:

[B]y 1993 he was leading the Senate. He worked to protect the coast’s fragile environment, championed a \$3.1 billion higher-education bond issue, and got so many state offices and jobs put in his northeastern district that people joked that it might sink into the salt marshes. The Basnight organization was the last political machine in North Carolina that was still operating by 2007 (247)

Aside from Basnight, the other giant in the North Carolina Democratic party was Jim Hunt, who served three terms as governor, first from 1977-1985 and then 1993-2001. Like other successful Southern Democratic governors, Hunt maintained broad support from his caucus and voters with a pro-business and a moderate racial platform. He maintained the backing of the

---

<sup>9</sup> The current President Pro Tem, Republican Phil Berger Sr., has a similar influence over the state GOP that Basnight had over the Democratic party. I discuss this further in my next section.

state's business community by allying himself with state's tobacco industry, leading the charge against an aggressive federally-funded anti-tobacco campaign that targeted North Carolina.

Hunt made racially progressive symbolic gestures as governor without alienating his white Democratic voting base. Early in his political career, he stood with African-Americans in marches and rallies in the wake of MLK's assassination. Upon his election to governor in 1976, Hunt made some high-profile cabinet and judicial appointments to African-Americans, which was a first in the state. He took other actions to signal progressive stances on race: releasing a wrongfully-sentenced African-American from prison and establishing a minority affairs office in his administration. This caution was most prominently exercised in the most controversial racial issue of the 1970s, the integration of the school system. Amid federal pressures to integrate the states' university system, Hunt stalled (Grimsley 2003). This did not cost him the long-term support of African Americans, and his education and economic development were successful.

Hunt's successful strategy of coalition maintenance mirrors the Big Three's success in Arkansas, and more broadly the way in which Southern Democrats stay in power by holding together the various coalitions within their party. Prysby describes Hunt's success in a larger context:

Hunt represents the way in which Southern Democrats have been able to retain a majority of the voters by putting together a biracial coalition that includes, most importantly, moderate whites. Hunt essentially provided a model that other southern Democrats, such as David Breaux in Louisiana, Bob Graham in Florida, Fritz Hollings in South Carolina, Zell Miller in Georgia and even Bill Clinton in Arkansas, used to win statewide office even as Republicans were repeatedly winning presidential elections in the region (2007, 181)

*2008 and beyond: Republicans sweeps*

Basnight's success and that of Mike Easley, Hunt's Democratic successor, put the party in a very strong position. As Republicans descended into factional conflict for much of the early Easley years (Stam 2017), Democrats grew their majorities in both legislative chambers. The election of Beverly Purdue in 2008 gave Democrats their fifth straight win in gubernatorial elections. Unfortunately for Purdue and the Democrats in the legislature, Basnight's departure created leadership gap that Democrats were unable to fill. In the late 2000s, just before the Republican sweeps of 2010, Basnight was diagnosed with ALS. As his health waned, so did his party's control over the state legislature. For all of his attention to the various political players in the state, Basnight neglected one of the most critical components of a long-term legacy: a succession plan. Furthermore, some activists and legislators of the younger generation felt ignored by Basnight (Campbell 2016). Making matters worse, the Democratic leadership core surrounding Basnight left around the same time Basnight retired. The subsequent Democratic decline recalls the problems created by the departure of Arkansas governors. Rick Glazier, a Democrat who served 13 years in the House including a stint as whip, describes the leadership gap:

All of them left within a 12-month period: Senator Rand, Senator Basnight, Senator Hoyle, Senator Soles, David Weinstein. That was the core of who ran the senate. There was this huge gap both in fundraising capacity, organizational capacity. The Democrats were hurt badly by the lack of that succession planning.

Beyond the leadership gap in the legislature, the political fallout from the 2008-2009 recession fell squarely on the Democrats. The state's economic base in manufacturing was hit particularly hard, and unemployment soared to over 20%. In the first four months of Democrat



Beverly Purdue's gubernatorial tenure, the state's budget surplus of \$800 million almost completely disappeared (Glazier 2016). Declining state revenues from the economy coupled with the state's balanced budget amendment required austerity measures across the board, including on education spending. Teachers, of whom there are over 110,000 in the state, were especially vocal in their opposition.

To compound problems from the recession fallout, Perdue's administration endured self-inflicted public relations blows. She had problems with her staff and with her own leadership: the federal and state investigation of her campaign that led to a \$30,000 fine and the indictment of three staffers, her unpopular plan to increase sales taxes to rebuild the state's educational coffers, and her public suggestion that Congressional elections should be suspended. Although these issues were a sideshow to the more immediate fallout from the recession, they helped fuel the disarray in the state Democratic party. She would eventually become the most unpopular governor in the country (Wing 2012), and in June 2012 she announced that she would not seek re-election.

With an unpopular governor and Obama's declining approval ratings in the state, Republicans were busy organizing a disciplined caucus operation. Their goal was to turn a groundswell into an electoral wave, and they assembled a caucus effort to that end. The mastermind of this effort was Tom Tillis, a 2<sup>nd</sup> term state representative who became the GOP caucus chair in 2009. He quit his consulting job at IBM to devote his energies to bolstering his party's fortunes. Tillis, with the help of his state senate counterpart Phil Berger Sr., instilled business-like discipline in the caucus organization, transforming a party arm equivalent of the NRCC. Tillis personally oversaw the caucus operation and travelled across the state to recruit candidates to help them campaign and raise money.

Candidate recruitment efforts were the first part of their push. Tillis and Paul Stam, a 4-term incumbent GOP house member, teamed up for their efforts at recruitment and fundraising efforts. Stam describes this process:

[We would] check with the local Chamber of Commerce, check with local activists, wrote all the party chairs, and said, ‘If you don’t find somebody, we will. And if you find somebody good we’ll go seem ‘em and tell ‘em how we can support ‘em. A new person running against an incumbent democrat is not going to be able to raise much money, and not many of our candidates had personal money. So we would promise ‘em the moon and if they would run, we would raise money statewide and help ‘em in their district, which we did.’”

As a minority party, the Republican caucus faced skepticism from would-be donors. Tillis, a former consultant, brought an analytics-based approach to his work. Tillis and Stam closely monitored campaign activities within the caucus. They kept close tabs on the fundraising and canvassing efforts of all candidates. They were using these numbers to appeal to would be donors. Scott Laster, who was hired by Tillis to direct the house caucus effort, describes the fundraising pitch that their team made to prospective supporters:

We would go and sit with you as a potential supporter and say: here’s the top ten seats we’re looking at. Let’s go through these districts one by one. Here’s Tom Murry of Lee County. Tom’s an attorney, he’s also a pharmacist. Tom has hit on 5,000 doors because we’ve asked him to report and we’ve confirmed that. Tom has raised this amount of money. We feel very strongly that Tom Murry can win this seat for us. We would go to each one and make that case. Because we had the

analytics behind what we were saying, it gave us credibility for somebody that we were seeking to help us out.

Beyond logistical assistance, Tillis and his team transformed the collective mindset of Republicans in the legislature. This is a large reason why the GOP gains in 2010 have endured for longer than the brief Republican takeover of the state House in 1994: in the previous takeover, Republicans lacked a major caucus leader (Eamon 2016). Tillis filled in the leadership gap for Republicans, convincing his colleagues to think of themselves as part of a caucus rather than freewheeling campaigners. As one GOP strategist summarizes, the insurgent uprising against Obama and Perdue was strong, but in order for it to become something impactful it “needed a general... that one person who says, ‘Hey, the goal is not just for you to win, it’s for you to win, it’s for him to win... and for us to win the majority.’”

By 2012 the Democrats had lost both chambers of the legislature, and the sitting Democratic governor was one of the most unpopular governors in the country. Seeing the writing on the wall, she announced that she would not run again. With no state party leader, the party was in shambles, and former Charlotte mayor Pat McCrory, who unsuccessfully ran in 2008, secured the GOP nomination. McCrory handily won, solidifying the GOP’s control over the state. In 2014, incumbent Democratic Senator Kay Hagan was defeated by Tom Tillis, the hero of the 2010 Republican sweep in the state.

As quoted in Chapter 1, the state’s most veteran political observers attribute the Republican sweeps to the national wave, not the GOP efforts, disciplined as they were. As I demonstrated in Chapter 2, Republicans made similar pickups across the South in 2010, with varying levels of party organization. Ferrel Guillory, one of the state’s most respected nonpartisan political experts, adds that the missteps of the Perdue administration have been

overstated in terms of their impact on the 2010 elections (Guillory 2016). Much like the elections in Arkansas, the impact of the 2010 wave exceeded the expectations of the Republican leadership at the time. Paul Stam, Thom Tillis's top lieutenant in the 2010 GOP caucus operation, says: "We had no idea we'd get as big of a majority as we did."

### *New Republican majorities*

The newly empowered Republican legislative leadership pursued aggressively conservative legislation that departed from the state's tradition of prioritizing education and economic growth. Most famously, Republican Governor Pat McCrory signed into law House Bill 2, which, among other things, required people to use the bathrooms assigned on their birth certificate. In the national uproar that followed McCrory's signing the law, both the NCAA and the NBA announced that it would not be hosting basketball tournaments in the state, and Deutsche Bank recalled a plan to bring over 250 employees to the state. Polls showed that this legislation only had a 30% approval rating, but HB2 was not the only bill passed without widespread public support (Jensen 2016). A sampling of the other bills to come out of the unified Republican government since 2012: the state cut unemployment benefits, repealed a state law allowing for appeals of the death penalty on racial grounds, passed a voter ID law, and opted out of the Affordable Care Act's Medicaid expansion.

The slew of conservative legislation did no favors for McCrory's image, says Republican representative Stam: "He was not a right-winger, or anything like that, but no matter what he did, he was portrayed as in the hands of troglodytes wanting us to take us back to the stone age." Evidence suggests that the public felt the same way; statewide polling in 2013 and 2014 showed that a plurality of the state's respondents believed that the legislature, not Governor McCrory, that drove the agenda (Jensen 2013, 2016).

Although the legislation bears McCrory's signature, observers on both sides of the aisle attribute the spate of conservative legislation to Senate President Pro Tem Phil Berger.

"[McCrory] never figured out how to reign in the legislature," says Gary Pearce, one of the state's most senior Democratic strategists. "So he ended up being seen by most people as part of what the legislature was doing, which was being seen with a pretty hard-right agenda." Paul Stam, who served from 2005-2017 and served under Tillis as majority leader, goes further: "Before [McCrory] even took office, our state senate, which was then in its second term in majority/supermajority, declared war on 'em, putting him in his place, sort of like a dog pees on a fire hydrant."

In the buildup to the 2016 elections, Democrats expressed confidence about their party's prospects (Luebke 2016), and the results of the elections show that they had some basis for their confidence. Although they only gained one seat in the legislature, they won the hard-fought governor's race by the slimmest of margins. How could Democrats win the governor's mansion in 2016 and make virtually no gains in the legislature? There are a few explanations. First, much of the Democrats' resources were poured into the campaign against McCrory, not in support of Democratic legislative campaigns. Finally, the district lines drawn by the Republican majority in 2010 insulated the majority from electoral competition. Democrats have blamed unfair district lines on their inability to regain a majority, and there is evidence supporting this claim. In both the state senate and state house races, Democrats won far more votes than Republicans in 2016. In the Senate, Democrats got 258,675 more votes than Republicans; in the House, Democrats got 346,976 more votes.<sup>10</sup> In the wake of the elections, a civil rights advocacy organization filed a

---

<sup>10</sup> I obtained vote totals from the North Carolina Secretary of State's office.

lawsuit against the state, and a lower court issued an order for the state to hold an election in 2017. The order has currently been halted and is under review by the Supreme Court.

The long back-and-forth in North Carolina echoes Sides and Vavreck's (2013) dynamic equilibrium theory of national presidential elections. In their telling, presidential races pit two candidates campaigning with roughly equal skill, such that the effects of the campaigns roughly cancel each other out, thereby throwing the outcome in the direction of the national tides. North Carolina's party history tends to follow the same story: in the 1994 elections, Republicans came within a vote of taking a majority, more than the GOP gains elsewhere in the South. Likewise, the 2010 Republican wave eroded 20 years of Democratic majorities and ushered in a new era of Republican governance.

McCrory's 2016 loss suggests that, notwithstanding conservative surge in the McCrory years, the electorate in North Carolina is still closely divided. Moreover, the rapid decline in his popularity following his commanding 12-point win in 2012 suggests that voters in North Carolina experienced a similar "buyer's remorse" with McCrory in 2016 that they did with Obama after he narrowly won the state in 2008. Looking ahead, the question remains: will North Carolina return to its decades-old tradition of moderate, consensus-driven governance, or will the current divided government produce a North Carolina legislature that resembles the fragmented, gridlocked politics of Washington, D.C.?

# Chapter 5

## Haley Barbour and the Rise of the Mississippi Republicans

### *5.1 Intro*

The story of Mississippi politics underscores the theme of this study: in an overwhelmingly conservative and white state where Republicans won by wide margins since 1964, Democrats held onto their state legislative majorities well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Democrats' ability to maintain their majorities until 2011 testifies to their enduring ability to maintain a distinct party brand, and the power of institutions to isolate state politics from national waves. Like elsewhere in the South, Mississippi Republicans overcame the power of Democratic incumbency through the influence of national political forces. Unlike the other cases in this study, Republican growth in Mississippi was not primarily impelled by national wave elections. Because the electoral calendar insulated Mississippi Democrats from Republican wave elections, Republicans could not capitalize on blowout election cycles as Republicans did in Arkansas and North Carolina. Instead, the growth of the GOP in the legislature was orchestrated by the efforts of Haley Barbour, whose national experience and resources brought Washington-style discipline and organization to Mississippi.

The current Republican dominance marks a dramatic turnaround from the state's environment 60 years ago. For the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the institutional Republican party was nonexistent in Mississippi. Although the GOP organized in the mid-1950s, Republicans did not win significant federal offices until 1972. In 1968, only 2 of the state's 174 legislators were Republican, and 6% of the state's voters identified as Republican. The phrase "phone booth Republicans" mocked the GOP's tiny presence in the state; suggesting that there were so few

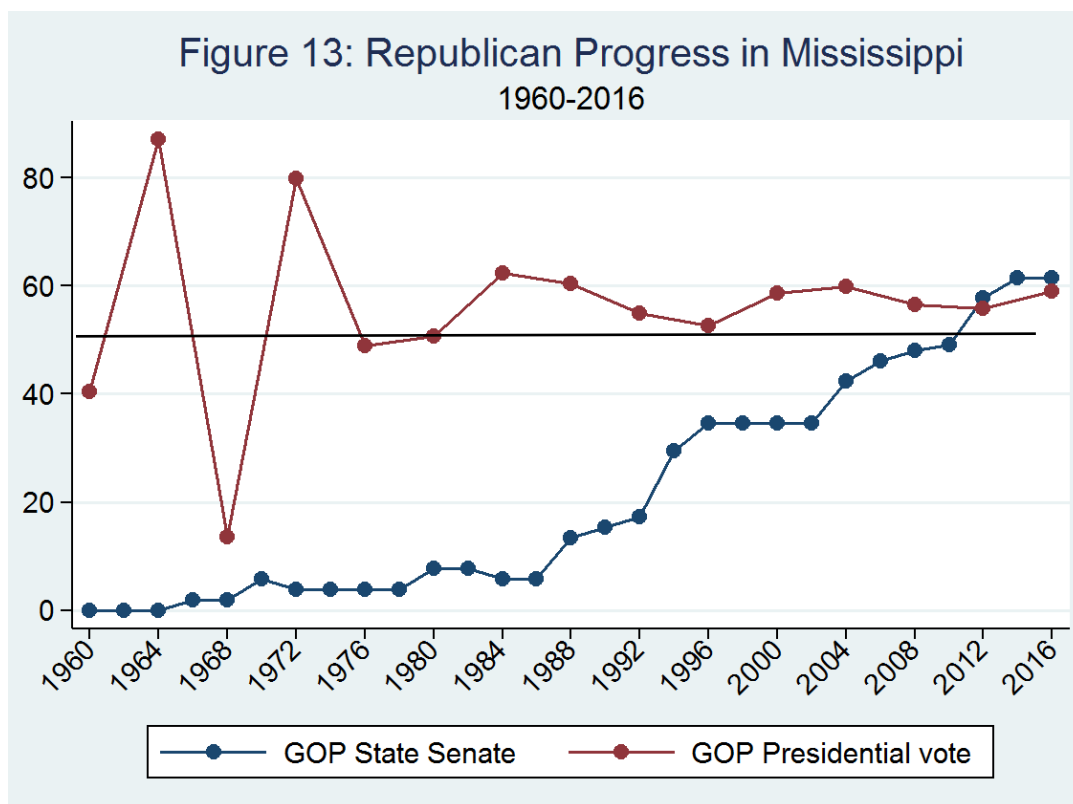
Republicans, they could fit in a phone booth. Haley Barbour, who started as a county organizer for Richard Nixon's 1968 campaign, says with a touch of understatement, "You had to be an optimist to be a Republican in 1968." In the remainder of this chapter, I describe how Democrats held onto their majorities for so long, and the catalyzing moments in the Republican breakthrough. Although, as Barbour says, Republican growth in Mississippi was "evolutionary, not revolutionary," the most important player in the evolution was Barbour himself.

## *5.2 Charting Republican Growth in Mississippi*

Every Republican milestone in Mississippi was preceded by long periods of party growth and party building. Like other Southern states, the impetus for Republican wins was national wave elections, starting with the US House races of 1972. Thad Cochran and Trent Lott's victories created institutional momentum for the Republicans in Mississippi, and their districts became the starting point for growing the party's grassroots. To expand from their 1972 wins, Republicans recruited Mississippi voters who had never been canvassed by either party. Lanny Griffith, who became statewide director of the GOP in 1979, describes his outreach efforts in the 1972 campaign and beyond:

I was chairman of one of the districts in Northwest Mississippi. We went to people I'd met in DeSoto County who had never been involved in anything, because nobody had paid any attention to them. It looked like, 'Gosh, this is a growing county. Almost every person moving in here is a potential Republican voter.' We went up there and organized there, and Thad [Cochran] went up there a couple of times. And they just loved them, because nobody had ever been to see them before. Even the Democrats [didn't] pay much attention to them.





13: Republican progress in Mississippi

Figure 13, which charts the Republican vote for President alongside the GOP’s seat share in the state senate, illustrates the degree to which the Republican vote share in federal elections lagged GOP progress in the state legislature. Republicans had been organizing in the state since Wirt Yerger and Clark Reed founded the Mississippi Republican party in the 1950s, which translated into some success in the Presidential elections, but no legislative victories. In 1960, when Republicans were nonexistent in the state senate, Richard Nixon won 40% of the vote. In 1964, when Barry Goldwater’s vote share doubled that of the last Republican presidential candidate, Democrats retained a monopoly on the legislature. In these landslide Republican cycles, “federal Republicans outnumbered real Republicans by a mile,” says Barbour. He

contrasts “federal Republicans,” those who split their ticket between a Republican Presidential candidate and Democrats down the ballot, with “real Republicans,” who would vote Republican all the way down the ticket. Real Republicans were hard to find, because voting in the GOP ballot required voters to skip the Democratic primary, where most of the candidates were. Even as the state’s Republican Congressmen rose to the US Senate, Thad Cochran in 1978 and Trent Lott in 1988, Democrats maintained a firm grip on the legislature. Not until the 1990s do Republicans make headway in legislative elections.

Recalling Lee Atwater’s strategy as quoted in Chapter 1, Mississippi Republicans tried for decades to tie incumbent Democrats to their national counterparts. One longtime GOP strategist describes the efforts of his colleagues to try to nationalize local elections: “All my political career, in several ways, we basically tried to lampoon [Mississippi Democrats]. ‘These people are in there with Teddy Kennedy, Jesse Jackson, and Walter Mondale, and that whole crowd.’” The founders of the Republican Party in Mississippi “used to levitate off their chairs getting so frustrated” at the enduring ability of Mississippi Democrats to separate themselves from the national party. Democrats credibly emphasized that they were not allied with the party that had embraced civil rights in the 1960s.

This was especially effective at lower levels of elected office, where Republicans did not have the resources to pressure Democrats and personal connections between incumbents and voters outweighed partisan considerations (Nash and Taggart 2009). Because of the isolation of Mississippi politics from national forces, Republican growth in Mississippi followed the “top-down” pattern that occurred elsewhere in the South (Aistrup 1996). One observer summarizes: “You would think that to build a political structure, you start at the grassroots and go up. [Republicans] tried that for years, and couldn’t ever break the nut. Ronald Reagan, Thad

Cochran, Trent Lott. We were actually pushing it down from the top and finally found some success.” Much of the GOP’s difficulty in breaking into down-ballot races can be traced to the state’s tripartite electoral cycle, as I explain in the next section.

#### ***5.4 The “Off-Off-Cycle” and its Effect***

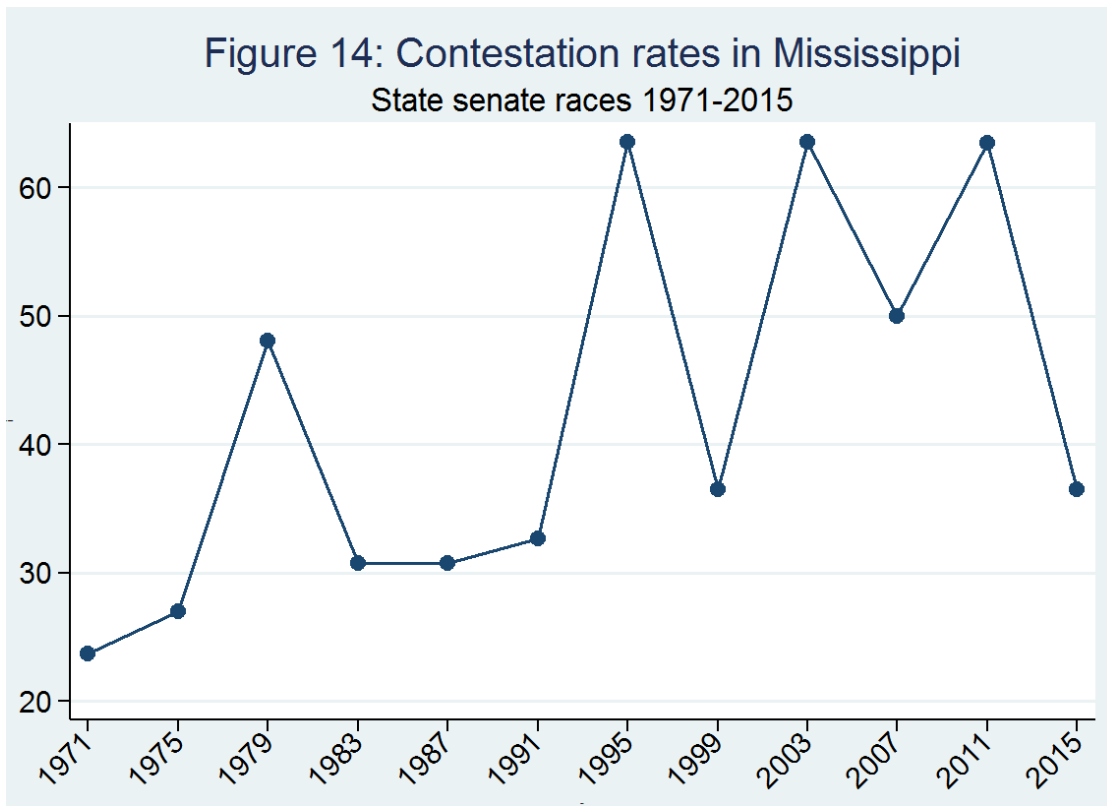
As I demonstrated in Chapter 2, the largest Republican legislative gains since 1964 have occurred in national wave years, but Mississippi’s election calendar isolated Democrats in the state legislatures from the national wave elections. For Mississippi Republicans, the “off-off-cycle” electoral calendar meant that state legislative elections happened a year before the national presidential elections. The rising tide that lifted Republicans elsewhere in the South skipped Mississippi. When Barry Goldwater won the state with 87% of the vote, down-ballot Republicans did not have a chance to ride these coattails.

Compounding the difficulty for Republicans was the primary rule requiring voters to select the primary ballot for one party. Because elections are held the year before the Presidential elections, Republicans had difficulty fielding serious candidates in statewide cycles. If the state legislative elections would have occurred along with Presidential elections, the “federal Republicans” might have selected the Republican ballot. “If 40 of the 50 candidates are Democrats [in the primary], that’s where the action is,” Barbour explains. Gregg Harper, a 40-year GOP veteran who now represents central Mississippi in Congress, explains the problem from voters’ perspective: “All your friends were running as Democrats. If you wanted to vote, you had to vote in the Democratic primary.”

The problem was not that voters were unwilling to pull the lever for a Republican in the general election. By 1972, the GOP was winning at the Presidential and federal level in Mississippi. The problem was that, because most of the competitive primary races in the off-

cycles occurred in the Democratic party, the most viable candidates were reluctant to qualify as Republicans. Therefore, even in races where Republicans challenged Democratic incumbents, the challengers tended to be weaker candidates. In the off-cycle, the inertia of Democratic incumbency discouraged Republican growth. This is why Republicans made more progress in elections held during Presidential elections, as Barbour explains:

It was a lot harder for a guy to say, "I'm gonna run for the legislator as a Republican," than it was to say, "I'm gonna run for mayor," or "I'm going to run for city councilman." The city council ran separate from everybody else. If you voted Republican for city council, in the general election particularly, it had no effect for you for the county government ballot the state government ballot. We elected some strong popular mayors in '65, '69, '73.



14: Contestation rates in Mississippi

Consequently, many Democratic incumbents went unchallenged. Figure 14 shows the contestation rates in the state senate in the last four decades. The y-axis measures the percent of the state's 50 senate races in which more than one candidate ran in the general election, for each election year. Like elsewhere in the South, the state was relatively uncompetitive in the two decades after the national split on civil rights. Two unusually competitive cycles stand out: the first in 1995, Kirk Fordice's first term. Second, the 2003 elections, in which Republican Haley Barbour unseated incumbent Democrat Ronnie Musgrove. Although a low level of contestation is the norm for state legislative elections nationwide (Rogers 2016), the large number of uncontested seats in the Democratic-dominated legislature made Republican growth difficult,

even in a state where Republicans were winning in federal elections by wide margins. The contestation rate spikes in 2011, when Republicans finally gained a majority. With firm Republican majorities in place, the 2015 election cycle was much less competitive.

To encourage more voters to select the Republican primary ballot, Trent Lott changed the Mississippi's Presidential convention to a primary system in 1980. His hope was that by encouraging voters to select the GOP primary ballot in federal elections, they would be more likely to select the Republican primary ballot in off-cycle races. Lott's strategy echoes Ronald Reagan's remark on the 1980 campaign trail, "I know what it's like to pull the Republican lever for the first time, because I used to be a Democrat myself, and I can tell you it only hurts for a minute" (Dole 1998). Despite Lott's best intentions, Republicans still had difficulty recruiting candidates in legislative races. Dick Hall's experience as an early party-switcher illustrates the problems facing would-be Republican qualifiers. He began his career in the state house a Democrat in 1975 and switched his party affiliation before the 1983 elections. Although he knew there were only 4 Republicans in the 122-member house when he switched, he did not anticipate how the primary ballot system would affect his chances.

Hall's party-switch had little effect on his career in the legislature, and he went on to chair the appropriations committee. However, he suggests that he could not have won as a recent party-switcher without having built up the advantages of incumbency. As Barbour notes, the GOP's success in municipal elections, which were held during the presidential years rather than the "off-off cycle," indicates the extent to which the electoral timing impeded Republican growth:

The fact that we had some mayors, [and] a couple of them were very prominent, made it easier for us to recruit candidates. But the hardest to recruit was the

candidate who ran in the state election year, where it's governor down to county government, because if I run as a Republican and if someone runs against me for county government, everybody else on the ballot is running the Democratic primary. And my friends don't wanna give up voting for governor.

### ***5.5 Republicans Win the Governor's Mansion***

After Trent Lott's 1988 win in the US Senate, Republicans solidified their position at federal elections, but they still struggled in statewide elections. This changed with the surprise success of Kirk Fordice. In 1991 Fordice defeated an establishment Republican candidate in the primary and defeated an incumbent Democrat to become the state's first Republican governor of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>11</sup> Despite Fordice's success, Democrats still far outnumbered Republicans in the legislature, and as an electoral novice Fordice assumed office without an extensive network. Although conflict between the governor and legislature is the norm in Mississippi (Taggart and Nash 2009; Griffith 2016), Fordice was the first post-Reconstruction governor to face a legislature controlled by the opposing party.

Fordice's rough-hewn personality did little to change the traditionally strained relationship between the governor and the legislature. He treated the legislature "like a construction crew," says Barbour, and others compare his combative disposition to Donald Trump (Griffith 2016; Hall 2017). With no prior electoral experience, he arrived at the state capitol with no allies. During Fordice's tenure, the GOP failed to make significant gains in either chamber of the legislature. In 1999, Fordice's would-be Republican successor lost narrowly to Ronnie Musgrove. Despite wide popularity in the electorate, he lacked the political know-how to bring about long-term change in the state's party culture. In 1999, Democrat Ronnie Musgrove

---

<sup>11</sup> Thad Cochran had won his Senate race in 1978, and Trent Lott won ten years later.

defeated Fordice's would-be Republican successor with 49.6% of the vote to Michael Parker's 48.52%.

In Haley Barbour, Mississippi Republicans found a player with the resources and savvy to transform their party into a disciplined and professional operation. Barbour combined all the elements of a political mastermind: decades of campaign experience, national fundraising networks, wonkish policy knowledge, and down-home political skill. Barbour's had an extensive political resume: after an unsuccessful bid for the US Senate race in 1982, Barbour moved to Washington to work for the Reagan and Bush administrations and eventually became chairman of the Republican National Committee from 1993-1997. This gave him an extensive fundraising network that he brought to his 2003 campaign to unseat Ronnie Musgrove.

#### *Barbour on the Campaign Trail*

One of the features of the 2003 campaign that garnered scholarly attention was a controversy over the state flag (e.g. Crespino 2007). Adopted in 1890, the flag prominently features the Confederate battle flag. In 2001, the NAACP targeted Mississippi and other Southern states to remove the Confederate symbol from state flags. The issue quickly became a political fireball that almost everyone in the state capitol tried to avoid. Incumbent Democratic governor Musgrove tried to build momentum for a flag change but found few allies. According to Musgrove, when he approached the party leadership in the legislature, the leadership rebuffed him.<sup>12</sup> Musgrove refused to sign a bill keeping the old flag, and the resulting compromise was to send it to a ballot proposition in April 2001. The vote to change the flag was rejected by over 64% of the state's voters.

---

<sup>12</sup> I tried unsuccessfully to contact Billy McCoy, who was the Democratic Speaker of the House at the time.



Barbour carefully primed the voters about the issue. “I’m proud of both of those flags,” he said, wearing a flag pin with both the American and Mississippi flag on his coat. Although Musgrove did not take a strong public stance in favor of the flag change, Barbour reminded voters that it was “Musgrove’s Commission” that drafted the new flag. This could have had an impact in northeast Mississippi, which typically has the most votes up for grabs, and is also most dominated by rural whites. Barbour’s commanding 53.6% vote share in the 2003 election exceeded his Democratic predecessor’s margin in 1999, Musgrove having won by a 49.6% plurality.

Although a similar controversy in Georgia contributed to incumbent Democrat Roy Barnes’ defeat, in Mississippi the Democratic party failed to take a clear stand on the issue. To the degree that voter realignment is driven by racial motivations, long-term change occurs when two parties take clearly distinguished positions on a high-profile racial issue for the first time (Carmines and Stimson 1989). Observers on both sides of the aisle told me that there was no clear delineation of the parties on the issue. Moak, a Democrat, says that “you had as many Democrats and Republicans who were politically scared of that issue at that time.”

Far more important than the flag controversy was Barbour’s deep fundraising network, which changed the state’s politics long after his election. Before running for governor, Barbour had two decades of experience in Washington, including work in the Reagan and George H.W. Bush administrations and culminating in his tenure as chairman of the Republican National Committee from 1993-1997. Using his considerable fundraising clout, he raised \$13.5 million dollars, more than triple the previously most expensive race to date at the time. About half of this money came from out of state, say multiple members of Barbour’s team (Barbour 2016; Hederman 2016). Henry Barbour, the Governor’s nephew and a key member of Barbour’s 2003

campaign, adds that the off-cycle timing of gubernatorial election, which historically worked against Republican legislative candidates, gave Haley Barbour an advantage because he did not have to compete with other candidates who would have been raising money in a Presidential cycle. Barbour also adopted tort reform as a platform in his campaign, which attracted businesses and doctors eager to limit their liability potential from trial lawyers (Salter 2016). By attracting business donations that would have otherwise been reluctant to donate against an incumbent, Barbour deepened his already formidable fundraising base.

*“Lollipops and Ass-Whippings” : Barbour in Office*

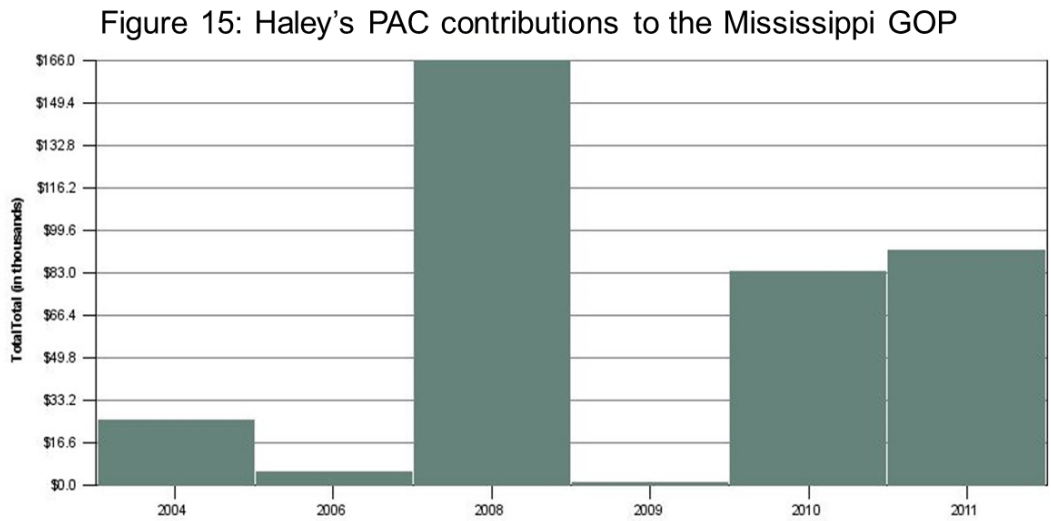
Despite Barbour’s success in the 2003 election, the GOP was undeveloped when he assumed office in 2004. Republicans left 12 of the 34 Democratic seats uncontested in 2003, and many of the GOP candidates that did run were significantly underfunded (Taggart and Nash 2009). Once in office, Barbour pursued a twofold strategy to grow his party: enforce discipline within Republican ranks and pressure moderate Democrats to switch parties. Because Democrats still maintained majorities in both chambers, a straight-party vote would be a bad tradeoff for his legislative agenda. Accordingly, his goal was to foster a party mentality among Republicans without alienating conservative Democrats.

In recruiting Democrats to switch parties, Barbour’s strategy was two-pronged: first, persuasion from Barbour himself. As one Barbour surrogate says, much of this was done with “hand to hand, face-to-face combat. [Barbour would] get a member in, glass of whiskey between them, and say, ‘Here’s why I need you. Here’s why it’s better for you. Here’s why it’s better for your constituents.’” Barbour converted almost a half a dozen Democrats. “While it wasn’t enough to make a majority, it was enough to make a statement,” says Democrat Moak. Part of that statement was that, among the new Republicans, party discipline was expected. “After they

were in the party, they found out that you had to go along to get along, more than the Democrats would ask you to do,” Moak says. Henry Barbour explains from a different vantage point:

Haley did organize the Republicans in the legislature, but it was not to a point where he didn't work with Democrats. He worked with Democrats and he would invite them over to the governor's mansion all the time. To socialize with them, to talk to them, to visit with them. He was very aggressive in dealing with the Democrat lieutenant governor, and dealing with the speaker, and [other] Democrat leaders. (2016)

As governor, Barbour used his campaign money to whip his party. Barbour and the party used his fundraising mechanism, aptly named Haley’s PAC, to funnel money into GOP state legislative candidates. Figure 15 shows the allocation amounts over time. The y-axis measures the dollar amount, in thousands, of Barbour’s contributions to the statewide committee, which then targeted that money into districts ripe for Republican conversion. The most noticeable spike occurs around 2007, when Barbour was up for re-election and seeking to grow Republican ranks in the legislative elections.



15: Haley’s PAC contributions to the Mississippi GOP

Beyond his fundraising clout, Barbour used the prestige of the office to pursue a carrots-and-sticks strategy to enforce discipline within his party’s ranks. This broke the longstanding tradition in Mississippi that governors typically stayed out of the legislative elections (Taggart and Nash 2009). “Most legislatures in Mississippi already start with that as a given, that we don’t like the governor,” says Lanny Griffith, but Barbour turned a traditionally weak office into a basis for party growth. Barbour’s innovation was to use his office to build his party in the way

that Presidents have done nationally (see Galvin 2009). Sid Salter, the state's most senior political journalist, memorably describes Barbour's carrots and sticks approach to party-building:

[H]ere comes Haley Barbour, and he starts handing out lollipops and ass-whippings in his own party. If they stick with him, lollipops, if they don't, ass-whippings. It was everything from a ride on the state plane to an event, or being seated on stage or not being recognized at an unveiling of some public works thing. It was like the national party, and that had never happened in Mississippi politics. The message to those Republicans in the legislature was, 'By God, you better get in line, or you're gonna get left behind.'

As the Republicans' numbers in the state capitol grew, the parties began behaving as rival teams for the first time. After the 2007 election, Republicans mounted a failed attempt to replace House Speaker Billy McCoy with a Republican. McCoy responded by ending his traditional practice of giving Republicans some committee chairmanships, which effectively dissolved the long tradition of partisan comity in the legislature. Taggart and Nash (2009) describe how the party cultures evolved during the Barbour years;

During the first five years of Barbour's tenure, on virtually all critical issues, the Senate became an extension of the governor's office, representing the Republican position on public policies, while the House, led by its Democratic Speaker, Billy McCoy, came to represent the Democratic position. . . . At the end of Barbour's first year as governor, reporters were observing that 'potentially disruptive partisanship is brewing at the Capitol.' Four years later, a member's party affiliation is becoming the best predictor of that member's votes at the state capitol building (9)

Barbour's efforts did not just affect Republicans. Democratic representative Bobby Moak, who served in the House for 32 years, describes how Barbour's efforts created a new culture: "The Republicans organized better into duck-step, if you will, with that way of leading, because Democrats never had to. They were always just there espousing, to a large degree, their independent position. When Governor Barbour came in, he pushed that more and more, and put the framework for a modern two-party system." One longtime strategist describes Barbour's influence on the GOP caucus in Mississippi:

Never before had there been anything in the nature of party discipline... It mattered when Haley Barbour asked a member to stand with him on a veto, for example, or had the possibility of appointing a member or a members' family to a nice plum position. All the sudden it was not just "I'm a Republican there are 30 of us in the 122-member House, I'll hang my with guys when I can, but if I don't, what are you going to do, dance on my grave?" When it became close, when we were down by 6 or 8 or 10 votes, and you had Haley Barbour's personal magnetism and charisma and strong-arming, it mattered for every single Republican to stay in harness for every single vote. He really did bring a sense of party loyalty and discipline that had not previously been the case.

When his efforts to convert Democrats fell short, Barbour and the party used expenditures in the Democratic districts with the most conservatives. Using Barbour's money, the GOP finally had a realistic chance to undo the decades-old pattern of voters electing Democrats based on geographical proximity (Nash and Taggart 2009). The rising Republican tide presented a problem for Democrats in the legislature: for the first time, they were being pressured on their votes. By targeting Democratic incumbents, Barbour and the GOP broke down

the Democrats' claim that they were not national Democrats. Arnie Hederman, executive director of the state GOP during Barbour's tenure, led this effort. He describes their strategy:

You could be a Democrat in a conservative district, and you ran as a Democrat all those years... When you were voting with the Democrat leadership in Jackson, nobody was really exposing you. Haley had the ability to use the Mississippi Republican party, the tools, to be able to get those votes out in those districts, which threatened a lot of those legislators because they would come back home and explain why they were voting that way with the Democrat party. So then you would have switchers, and then you would also have some of those Democrats that would move away from the Democrat leadership and say 'I've got to vote this way because back home I'll get crucified over this.' Which used to not happen, they used to get whatever they want. Republicans didn't have the money; we always fought for the governor's office or some recognition. Till that point, that's when Democrats really started getting called out for their votes.

Like other state Democratic parties in the South, the Democrats in Mississippi lacked a disciplined response to the Republican efforts. "The state [Democratic] party wasn't as active as it should have been, nor was it as organized as it should have been," says Democrat Moak. "Republicans had done a pretty good job of setting up their structure." Because they had never been confronted with serious electoral competition, they had never developed the institutional capacity to behave like a professional party. As was true elsewhere, state Democrats were ill-prepared to mount an effective response to the rising Republican tide in the state. Says one Republican observer:

There was no systematic response... it was literally every man or woman for himself. Some were able successfully to say, "You know me, I'm not for Obamacare... Hillary Clinton, give me a break! I'd never support anyone like that!" Lots of them pulled that off, because it was true... but because there was no systematic effort to do that, the Democrats just took it to the chin in 2007.

Democrats faced problems beyond a disorganized caucus. Barbour's legislative agenda drove a wedge within an already fraying Democratic caucus. Salter describes the problems within the Democratic party in Mississippi as it was holding onto its majorities in the late 1990s and 2000s:

You ended up with a sort of three-legged stool. You had the Democratic party which was increasingly embodied by the black caucus, you had the Republicans, and then you had the rural white Democrats. Putting together a coalition to actually rule made the [Democratic] House speaker Billy McCoy increasingly dependent on balancing the interests of the black caucus with the rural white Democrats. What happened is that it became increasingly difficult for the rural white Democrats to hold serve in the elections, because the positions they had to take in order to do business with the black caucus got increasingly untenable to the constituencies back home. Republican challengers capitalized on that by pointing out the number of times that incumbent white Democrats were voting with the black caucus, or what was perceived, for good or ill, to be the interests of the national Democratic party.

Barbour's success illustrates a theme of this study, that keeping the Democratic party in power relied on careful management of the agenda. The success of the Big Three in Arkansas



and the long line of moderate Democratic governors in North Carolina exemplify this. In North Carolina, governors emphasized education, infrastructure, and healthcare, all of which enjoyed support among rural white Democrats, African Americans, and liberals. The Big Three in Arkansas pursued a similar strategy, and kept their majorities until 2012. With a Republican governor in charge, Mississippi Democrats no longer had control over the agenda, and Barbour was savvy enough to press the issues that most divided Democrats in Mississippi. Moreover, Barbour's resources helped to expose the votes of incumbent Democrats on those wedge issues.

The policy issues that drove a wedge within the Mississippi Democratic coalition were issues that have divided Republicans and Democrats nationally for decades. First, the funding of Medicaid and Medicare. Rural white Democrats were attracted to the anti-government rhetoric of the national GOP, and Republican challengers (aided by Haley Barbour's money) pressured the incumbent Democrats on this issue. Salter's description of these rural voters recalls Bartels' argument in "Homer Gets a Tax Cut" (2005): they "voted GOP in national/Congressional politics, liked the anti-government rhetoric, but when it got down to it, they wanted Memaw's nursing home bill paid, and they wanted that to be paid," says Salter. Second, tax policy. National political groups tried to force candidates into a no-new-taxes pledge, which forced some conservative Democrats to take uncomfortable positions. Finally, a constellation of social issues: "Politically, it was easier for Republican challengers to equate Democratic political affiliation with beliefs in positions on religions, on abortion, and on guns that, honestly didn't really reflect where these rural white Democrats were," Salter says. "It was easy for Republican challengers to tar them for that, and it was hard for the Democrats to defend." Like Republican majorities in other states, new Republican majorities have turned these wedge issues into legislative action. I describe this in the next section.

In hindsight, Democrats have concluded that their party was cursed by its own success. The Democratic party was not strong because they never had to be. Ronnie Musgrove describes this dynamic:

Our Democratic party hasn't operated in Mississippi kinda like the Democrat party in a lot of other states. For so long, the whole state was Democrat. So the party wasn't used as an apparatus to either promote, defeat, object to, support, any issue. Because at that point in time, let's say that all 52 senators are Democrats. If some senators wanted one thing, other senators wanted something else, if the party got in the middle of it, they were going to be criticized by one side. So the party never developed an apparatus to be a force to make things happen.

#### ***5.6 Party Culture in Mississippi: then and now***

The Republican takeover has produced a different kind of politics in Mississippi, and the changes encompass more than just a new party in charge. Ronnie Musgrove, whose career took him from the state senate in 1991 to the Governor's mansion in 1999-2003, describes the parties in his early days: "There was no designation as to Democrat or Republican. In fact, there were 4 Republicans in the senate, but you did not know who the Democrats and who the Republicans were, unless they told you." Bobby Moak, a Democrat who served from 1984 to 2016, describes the party culture at the beginning of his career: "There were some Republicans in the legislature, but quite honestly you couldn't pick 'em out. You didn't need to pick 'em out. Because they were committee chairmen; they were involved in the process." As noted in the previous section, traditions of partisan comity, including committee chairmanships being awarded across party, ended after the 2007 election.

Although Democrats in Mississippi have always been more conservative than their national Democratic counterparts – having campaigned for Eisenhower in the 1950s and for Reagan in the 1980s – the legislative output under unified Republican government underscores the impact of the new majorities. Haley Barbour, who never had a Republican majority in either chamber, relied on courting Democratic votes to get his legislation passed. Now that Republicans have wide majorities in both chambers, they have used their power to create legislation that would have been difficult to pass with a Democratic legislature. In 2012, Republican Governor Phil Bryant signed a law restricting abortion providers to facilities with admitting privileges, which resulted in the closing of all but one abortion facilities in the state.<sup>13</sup> Renewed nationwide attention to the Confederate flag in 2015 lead to demands to change Mississippi’s flag, but Bryant opposed any efforts to change the state’s flag. In 2016 he declared April Confederate Heritage Month. In the wake of *Obergefell vs. Hodges*, the legislature passed the Religious Liberty Accommodations Act in 2016, which gave businesses and state employees the right to refuse certain services to the LGBT persons.

As Republicans built up a modern political party in Mississippi, the longstanding Democratic legislative majorities finally succumbed. This is not to overstate the impact of the GOP strategy. The state’s demographic climate had long been favorable to Republicans, as evidenced by Republican Presidential candidates’ near unbroken record of success in the state since 1964. But the Democrats’ tradition of holding onto their seats by maintaining a separate party culture was not sustainable in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. With the help of a native son, Mississippi Republicans finally overcame a century and a half of Democratic dominance.

---

<sup>13</sup> The law, and similar laws in three other states, was struck down in 2016 by the Supreme Court (Phillips 2016).

## Chapter 6

# Looking Ahead: New Majorities, New Coalitions

The preceding chapters illustrate how national political forces have changed state legislatures in the South. As I have shown, national tides not only ushered in new majorities, but re-organized Southern state legislatures. In this concluding chapter, I consider how Southern legislatures have changed national politics. By passing legislation on some of the country's most divisive social issues, Southern state legislatures have superseded the national legislature as the nexus of political struggle. I also discuss the prospects for a Democratic revival in the legislatures. To regain a footing in Southern state capitols, Democrats will need a favorable national wave to threaten the well-established Republican majorities. Even if Republicans retain their legislative majorities, the composition their governing coalitions will have nationwide consequences.

If national electoral trends continue to drive state legislative elections, a Democratic comeback in states like Mississippi with a long history of Republican voting at the federal level is unlikely. Moreover, today's Democratic minorities face well-organized majority parties throughout the South, which Republicans did not have to contend with in their days as an insurgent minority. Not only do the Republicans have a party apparatus to support their majorities, they enjoy advantages of fundraising and name recognition that flow to incumbents in any context. This is not to overstate the impact of party organization on the GOP takeovers, nor do I suggest that incumbency advantages are unbreakable. In Arkansas, the GOP made major gains without a fully organized caucus, and even in North Carolina where the GOP was better organized, Republican gains in 2010 exceeded the magnitude of even the most hopeful Republican strategists.

A survey of the Republican majorities across the South highlights the difficulties facing Democrats. In North Carolina, which has a tradition of close electoral margins and two-party competition, Republicans used their power over the 2010 districting to cement their legislative majorities. Despite the successful effort to unseat Republican Governor Pat McCrory in 2016, Democrats made no headway in the state legislature. In Mississippi, the old phrase “phone booth Republicans” could now be applied to Democrats, who face Republican supermajorities in both legislative chambers. In addition to their control over both legislative chambers, Mississippi Republicans hold every statewide office, and the Democrats’ only federally elected office is Bernie Thompson’s majority-black US House district. In Arkansas, where Democrats maintained unified government as recently as 2010, Republicans hold all seven statewide offices and all four US House districts.

If Democrats are to regain their majorities in Southern state legislatures, they will need strong national electoral headwinds in their favor. There is historical precedent for this, most recently the 2006 election that expanded Democratic majorities in North Carolina, Virginia, and even Alabama. In Mississippi, where legislative elections are held in the off-cycle, Democrats will need someone with the resources and skills of Haley Barbour to threaten Republican majorities. Given that much of the political talent in Mississippi is in the Republican party, this is a tall order.

For the next round of redistricting, the 2020 elections loom large for the long-term prospects of both parties. The perfect storm that created Republican majorities in 2010 and beyond could not have come at a better time for the GOP. The recession and statewide reaction against the Obama presidency impelled a Republican surge, giving Republicans state legislative majorities for the 2010 redistricting rounds. In 2016, Democratic state legislative candidates

received more votes than Republicans statewide in North Carolina, but failed to add to their numbers in either chamber. Although mapmaking authority is consequential in every state, it is particularly important to the partisan balance of a state like North Carolina with a history of close voting margins in the electorate.

Even if Republicans retain their majorities, the composition of the GOP governing coalitions will have a major impact on future legislation. As I have argued, a critical component of the new legislative climate is that Republican majorities no longer negotiate with African Americans and moderates to pass legislation. In the era of unified Republican governments, socially conservative factions within the GOP have used their power to pass bills that would not have been possible under even the most conservative Democratic majorities. The new Republican majorities are by no means free of division, as evidenced by the recent failure of some replicas of North Carolina's HB2. In Arkansas, conflicts have sprung up between fiscally hawkish Republicans who oppose any spending increases and Republicans more willing to invest in state services. One state legislator in Arkansas derides the fiscal hawks as the "Hell No" caucus.

In South Carolina, the era of unified government has produced constant tension between fiscally hawkish governors and state legislators seeking investment in their districts. This began with Mark Sanford in 2002, the first GOP governor to preside over unified Republican government, and persisted through Nikki Haley's administration. In a memorable episode from the early days of unified GOP government, Mark Sanford protested the legislature's budget proposal by arriving at a press conference with a pig on each hand, one labeled "pork," and the other "barrel." The stunt ended unfortunately for Sanford when one of the pigs defecated on his suit (Bauerlein 2004).

The balance of power within Republican majorities will have far-reaching consequences. Recent legislation from Southern state capitols has driven polarization nationally, as exemplified by the fallout from HB2 in North Carolina. Although the Supreme Court’s 2015 ruling on gay marriage was the culmination of a long debate on gay rights, the passage of HB2 pushed the debate into new territory. Up until the passage of HB2, the debate about LGBT rights centered around same-sex marriage. By taking a strong stance on transgender rights, HB2 heightened the nationwide salience of transgender rights for the first time, prompting leaders around the country to take a stance on the issue. The national response to HB2 illustrates Carmine and Stimson’s issue evolution theory (1989) from a bottom-up perspective. In their account, voters respond when national parties offer competing stances on a salient issue. In HB2, a state legislature brought an issue into the national consciousness for the first time, prompting a nationwide response.

Even on issues that have long divided the national parties, Southern state legislatures have taken the lead on legislation. This is especially true in an era of Congressional gridlock, and no issue better illustrates state legislative leadership than gun rights. Although episodes of gun violence often trigger nationwide debate, most recently a filibuster on the House floor in 2016, almost all recent legislation on gun laws has come from state legislatures. In 2017, pro-2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment groups are setting their sights on passing statewide campus-carry bills and “permitless carry” laws. A survey of 2017 legislative efforts underscores how gun-rights groups are concentrating their efforts in Southern state legislatures:

Campus-carry bills are percolating in at least four states: Florida, Arkansas, Georgia, and South Carolina. Another was proposed in Wisconsin, then shelved while its sponsor builds support for it. The measures (and those

likely to join them as lawmakers get down to work in other states) come at what could be a pivotal stretch in the fight over firearms on college campuses.

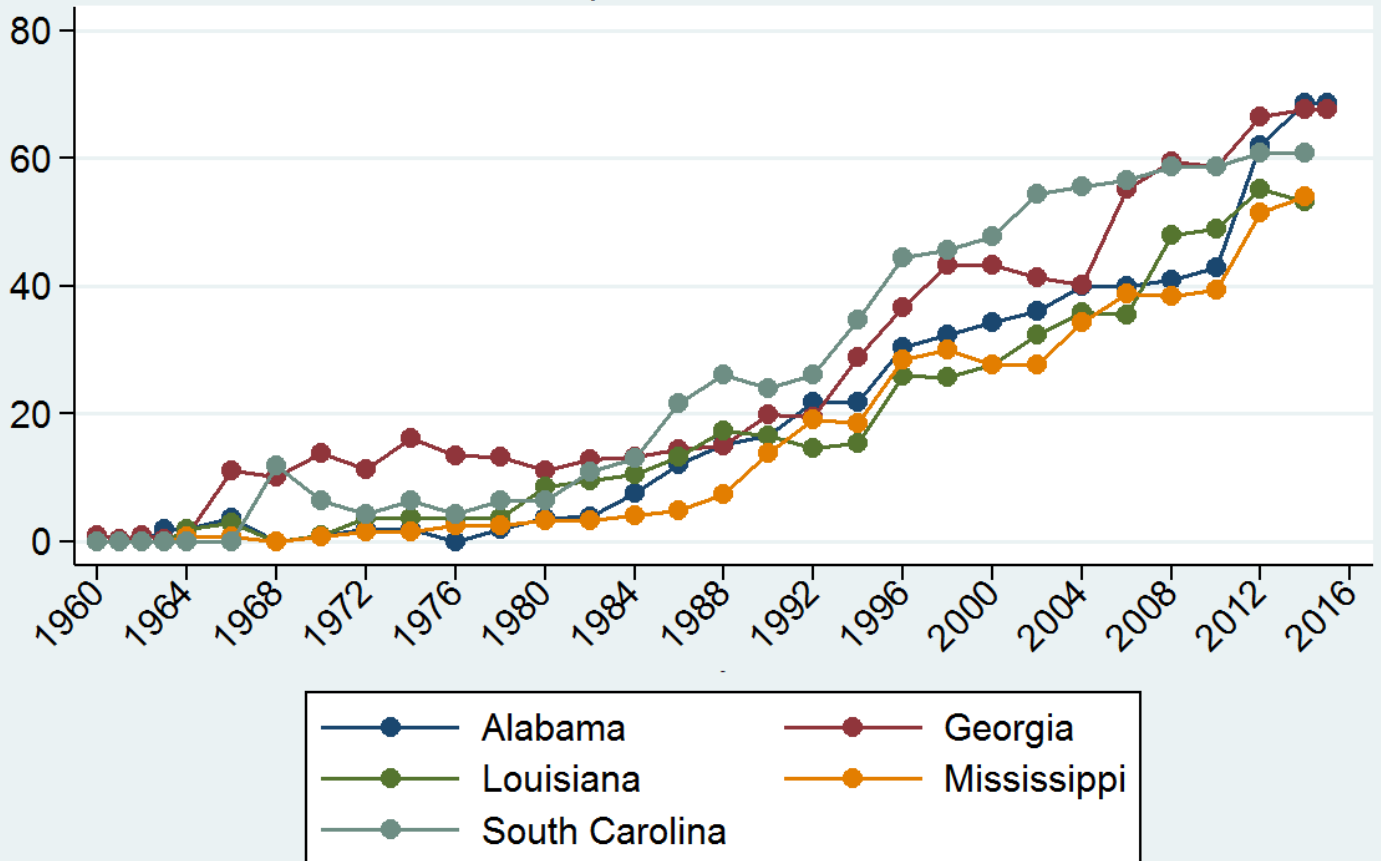
Republican state lawmaker Charlie Collins is a key campus-carry booster in Arkansas. “The purpose is to deter these crazy killers who choose college campuses to murder a bunch of people,” he said. (Spies 2017)

Such conflicts illuminate the national consequences that followed the transformation of Southern state legislatures. Although many scholars have highlighted the way in which down-ballot campaign rhetoric follows national political debates (e.g. Aldrich et al. 2010, Jacobson 2014), the changes in Southern state legislatures encompass more than just a different kind of campaign rhetoric and more than just a new party in power. The controversies surrounding the legislation reverberate beyond the state borders. No longer do state politics merely reflect national debates. On many of this country’s most divisive issues, states now drive the debate.

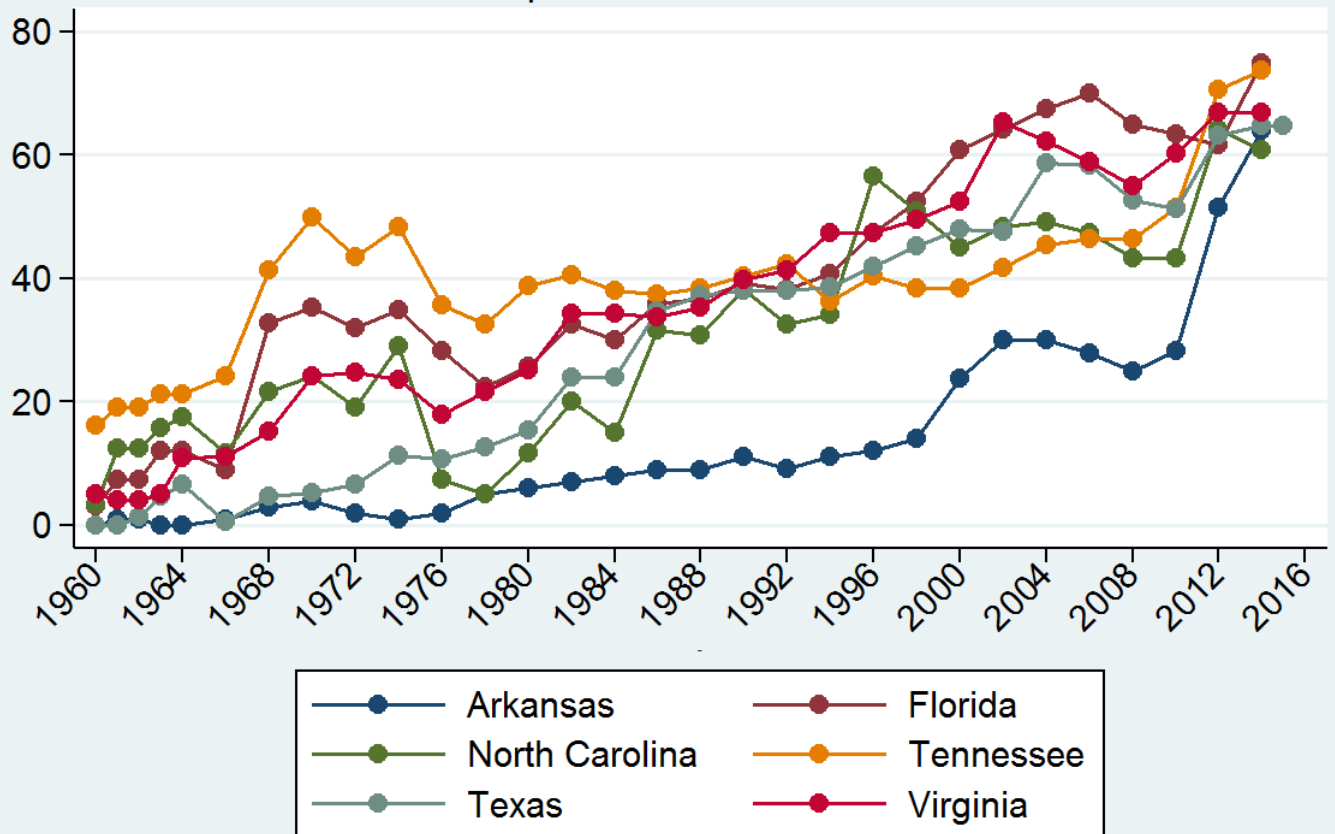


# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Republican seat shares in state houses Deep South 1960-2016



## Appendix 2: Republican seat share in state houses Peripheral South 1960-2016



# Bibliography

- Aistrup, Joseph A. 1996. *The Southern Strategy Revisited: Republican Top-Down Advancement in the South*. Lexington, Ky: University Press of Kentucky.
- Aldrich, John H., Bradford H. Bishop, Rebecca S. Hatch, D. Sunshine Hillygus, and David W. Rohde. 2014. "Blame, Responsibility, and the Tea Party in the 2010 Midterm Elections." *Political Behavior* 36 (3): 471–91. doi:10.1007/s11109-013-9242-4.
- Ansolabehere, Stephen, Jonathan Rodden, Snyder Jr, and James M. 2006. "Purple America." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 20 (2): 97–118. doi:10.1257/jep.20.2.97.
- Barbour, Haley. 2017. Interview with the author.
- Barbour, Henry. 2017. Interview with the author.
- Barnes, Roy. 2015. Interview with the author.
- Bartels, Larry M. 2005. "Homer Gets a Tax Cut: Inequality and Public Policy in the American Mind." *Perspectives on Politics* 3 (1): 15–31. doi:10.1017/S1537592705050036.
- Bartels, Larry M., and Steven Rogers. 2016. "National Forces in State Legislative Elections." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 667 (1): 207–25. doi:10.1177/0002716216662454.
- Barth, Jay. 2017. "Arkansas: Still Swingin' in 2004." *ResearchGate*. Accessed May 13. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292401897\\_Arkansas\\_Still\\_swingin'\\_in\\_2004](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292401897_Arkansas_Still_swingin'_in_2004).
- Barth, Jay. 2012. "In Arkansas, Dixie's Last Democratic Legislature Faces a Red Tide." *New Republic*. October 29. <https://newrepublic.com/article/109294/arkansas-dixies-last-democratic-legislature-faces-red-tide>.

- Barth, Jay. 2017. "The Big Three of Late Twentieth-Century Arkansas Politics: Dale Bumpers, Bill Clinton, and David Pryor." ResearchGate. Accessed May 16.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/274795609\\_The\\_Big\\_Three\\_of\\_Late\\_Twentieth-Century\\_Arkansas\\_Politics\\_Dale\\_Bumpers\\_Bill\\_Clinton\\_and\\_David\\_Pryor](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/274795609_The_Big_Three_of_Late_Twentieth-Century_Arkansas_Politics_Dale_Bumpers_Bill_Clinton_and_David_Pryor).
- Beebe, Mike. 2015. Interview with the author.
- Black, Earl, and Merle Black. 1989. *Politics and Society in the South*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Black, Earl, and Merle Black. 2003. *The Rise of Southern Republicans*. Belknap Press.
- Blair, Diane D. 1988. *Arkansas Politics and Government: Do the People Rule?* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Buchanan, Scott E., Patrick R. Cotter, Stephen D. Shaffer, David A. Breaux, Wayne Parent, Huey Perry, Charles Prysby, et al. 2013. *The New Politics of the Old South: An Introduction to Southern Politics*. Edited by Charles S. Bullock III and Mark J. Rozell. 5 edition. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Bullock, Charles S. and Ronald Keith Gaddie. 2009. *The Triumph of Voting Rights in the South*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Bullock, Charles S., and Mark J. Rozell. 2007. *The New Politics of the Old South: An Introduction to Southern Politics*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Bullock, Charles S., Donna R. Hoffman, and Ronald Keith Gaddie. 2006. "Regional Variations in the Realignment of American Politics, 1944–2004\*." *Social Science Quarterly* 87 (3): 494–518. doi:10.1111/j.1540-6237.2006.00393.x.
- Bump, Philip. 2017. "How Arkansas' Religious Freedom Bill Differs — and Doesn't — from the Controversial One in Indiana." *Washington Post*. Accessed May 13.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/03/31/how-arkansas-religious-freedom-bill-differs-and-doesnt-from-the-controversial-one-in-indiana/>.

Carmines, Edward G., and James A. Stimson. 1989. *Issue Evolution: Race and the Transformation of American Politics*. Reprint edition. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.

Christensen, Rob. 2008. *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics: The Personalities, Elections, and Events That Shaped Modern North Carolina*. 1st Edition edition. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.

Combs, Gwendolyn. 2017. Interview with the author.

Cooper, Christopher A., and H. Gibbs Knotts, eds. 2008. *The New Politics of North Carolina*. 1 edition. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.

Dole, Robert. 2000. *Great Political Wit: Laughing (Almost) All the Way to the White House*. Updated edition. Three Rivers Press.

Downs, Anthony. 1957. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. 1st edition. Boston: Harper and Row.

Eamon, Tom. 2016. Interview with the author.

Edsall, Thomas Byrne, and Mary D. Edsall. 1991. *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics*. Third Edition edition. New York: W W Norton & Co Inc.

Farman, T.W. 2017. "Americans for Prosperity Puts Big Money on Legislative Races in Arkansas."

*Washington Post*. Accessed May 15.

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/decision2012/americans-for-prosperity-puts-big-money-on-legislative-races-in-arkansas/2012/10/01/5169598a-0686-11e2-a10c-fa5a255a9258\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/decision2012/americans-for-prosperity-puts-big-money-on-legislative-races-in-arkansas/2012/10/01/5169598a-0686-11e2-a10c-fa5a255a9258_story.html).

Fausset, Richard. 2007. "Huckabee Breaks the GOP Mold with Idiosyncratic Stands." *Los Angeles Times*, December 2. <http://articles.latimes.com/2007/dec/02/nation/na-huckabee2>. \

- Fausset, Richard. 2014. "North Carolina, in Political Flux, Battles for Its Identity." *The New York Times*, September 23. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/23/us/north-carolina-in-political-flux-battles-for-its-identity.html>.
- Fenno, Richard F. 2002. *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts*. Longman Classics edition. New York: Pearson.
- Fiorina, Morris P. 2017. "The (Re)Nationalization Of Congressional Elections." *Hoover Institution*. Accessed May 13. <http://www.hoover.org/research/renationalization-congressional-elections>.
- Glazier, Rick. 2016. Interview with the author.
- Griffith, Lanny. 2016. Interview with the author.
- Harper, Gregg. 2016. Interview with the author.
- Hederman, Arnie. 2016. Interview with the author.
- Hood, John. 2015. *Catalyst: Jim Martin and the Rise of North Carolina Republicans*. Winston-Salem, North Carolina: John F. Blair, Publisher.
- Hupp, Dillon. 2017. Interview with author.
- Jackson, Jeff. 2016. Interview with the author.
- Jacobson, Gary C. 1996. "The 1994 House Elections in Perspective." *Political Science Quarterly* 111 (2): 203–23. doi:10.2307/2152319.
- Jacobson, Gary C. 2015. "It's Nothing Personal: The Decline of the Incumbency Advantage in US House Elections." *The Journal of Politics* 77 (3): 861–73. doi:10.1086/681670.
- Jensen, Tom. "2016 Close in North Carolina." 2017. *Public Policy Polling*. Accessed May 13. <http://www.publicpolicypolling.com/main/2014/06/2016-close-in-north-carolina.html>.

- Jensen, Tom. "In North Carolina, McCrory and Republicans Continue to Fall." 2017. *Public Policy Polling*. Accessed May 13. <http://www.publicpolicypolling.com/main/2013/09/in-north-carolina-mccrory-and-republicans-continue-to-fall.html>.
- Katznelson, Stanley B., and Theda Skocpol. 1999. *The New Majority: Toward a Popular Progressive Politics*. Yale University Press.
- Key, V. O., and Alexander Heard. 1984. *Southern Politics in State and Nation*. New edition. Knoxville: Univ Tennessee Press.
- Kirk, John. 2016. Interview with the author.
- Klarner, Carl. 2017. "State Partisan Balance Data, 1937 - 2011 - Carl Klarner Dataverse." Accessed May 15. <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=hdl:1902.1/20403>.
- Ladd, Donna. 2017. "Mississippi Governor Declares April 'Confederate Heritage Month,' No Slavery Mention." Accessed May 13. <http://www.jacksonfreepress.com/news/2016/feb/24/mississippi-governor-declares-april-confederate-hi/>.
- Laster, Scott. 2017. Interview with the author.
- Lott, Trent. 2017. Interview with the author.
- Lublin, David, and Thomas F. Schaller. 2012. "Gerrymandering and the Republican Conversion of Southern State Legislatures," February. <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195381948.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780195381948-e-10>.
- Lublin, David. 2007. *The Republican South: Democratization and Partisan Change*. Princeton University Press.
- Lublin, David and Thomas Schaller. 2012. "Gerrymandering and the Conversion of Southern State Legislatures." In *The Oxford Handbook of Southern Politics*.

- Luebke, Paul. 1990. *Tar Heel Politics: Myths and Realities*. 1st Edition. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Luebke, Paul. 2016. Interview with the author.
- McKee, Seth C. 2002. "Majority Black Districts, Republican Ascendancy, and Party Competition in the South, 1988-2000." *American Review of Politics* 23 (0): 123–39. doi:10.15763/issn.2374-7781.2002.23.0.123-139.
- McKee, Seth C. 2009. *Republican Ascendancy in Southern U.S. House Elections*. 1<sup>st</sup> edition. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Moak, Bobby. 2017. Interview with the author.
- Musgrove, Ronnie. 2016. Interview with the author.
- Nash, Jere, Andy Taggart, and John Grisham. 2009. *Mississippi Politics: The Struggle for Power, 1976-2008, Second Edition*. 2 edition. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
- National Council of State Legislatures. "Bathroom Bill' Legislative Tracking." 2017. Accessed May 13. <http://www.ncsl.org/research/education/-bathroom-bill-legislative-tracking635951130.aspx>.
- Nelson, Rex. 2015. Interview with the author.
- Nero, Charmaine. 2017. "Thousands Support Arkansas Women's March." 2017. Accessed May 31. <http://www.arkansasmatters.com/news/local-news/thousands-support-arkansas-womens-march/643829474>.
- North Carolina State Senate Results. 2017. Accessed May 16. [http://er.ncsbe.gov/?election\\_dt=11/08/2016&county\\_id=0&office=NCS&contest=0](http://er.ncsbe.gov/?election_dt=11/08/2016&county_id=0&office=NCS&contest=0).
- Niemi, Richard G., Herbert F. Wiesberg, and David Kimball. 2010. *Controversies in Voting Behavior*. 5th edition. Washington, D.C: CQ Press.



- Osborne, Danny, David O. Sears, and Nicholas A. Valentino. 2011. "The End of the Solidly Democratic South: The Impressionable-Years Hypothesis." *Political Psychology* 32 (1): 81–108. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9221.2010.00796.x.
- Pearce, Gary. 2016. Interview with the author.
- Petrocik, John R. 1987. "Realignment: New Party Coalitions and the Nationalization of the South." *The Journal of Politics* 49 (2): 347–75. doi:10.2307/2131305.
- Prince, Bill. 2017. Interview with the author.
- Randall, James G.. 1969. *The Civil War And Reconstruction - 2nd. Ed.* 2nd edition. D. C.: Heath Publishing
- Saad, Lydia. 2017. "Not as Many U.S. States Lean Democratic in 2013." *Gallup.com*. Accessed May 13. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/167030/not-states-lean-democratic-2013.aspx>.
- Osborne, Danny, David O. Sears, and Nicholas A. Valentino. 2011. "The End of the Solidly Democratic South: The Impressionable-Years Hypothesis." *Political Psychology* 32 (1): 81–108. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9221.2010.00796.x.
- Schaller, Thomas F. 2006. *Whistling Past Dixie: How Democrats Can Win Without the South*. 1St Edition edition. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Schickler, Eric. 2016. *Racial Realignment: The Transformation of American Liberalism, 1932–1965*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Shafer, Byron E., and Richard Johnston. 2009. *The End of Southern Exceptionalism: Class, Race, and Partisan Change in the Postwar South*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Spies, Mike. 2017. "Here Are the Two Pro-Gun Issues That States Will Be Fighting Over This Year." *The Trace*. January 9. <https://www.thetrace.org/2017/01/state-republicans-pro-gun-bills-concealed-carry-campus-carry/>.

- Stam, Paul. 2017. Interview with the author.
- Sundquist, James L. 1983. *Dynamics of the Party System: Alignment and Realignment of Political Parties in the United States*. Revised edition edition. Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution Press.
- Talhelm, Jennifer and Valerie Bauerlein. "From 2004: Sanford's Pigs Leave Lawmakers Squealing." 2017. *The State*. Accessed May 23. <http://www.thestate.com/latest-news/article14425196.html>.
- Trust, Diane D. Blair Irrevocable. 2005. *Arkansas Politics and Government, Second Edition*. 2 edition. University of Nebraska Press.
- Walsh, Joan. 2017. "At a Friendly DNC Debate, Candidates Stress Common Strategies and Goals." *The Nation*. Accessed May 15. <https://www.thenation.com/article/at-a-friendly-dnc-debate-candidates-stress-common-strategies-and-goals/>.
- White, David. 2017. *The Birmingham News*. "Updated: Democrats' Dominance of Alabama Legislature Nears End." *AL.com*. Accessed May 15. [http://blog.al.com/spotnews/2010/11/democrats\\_dominance\\_of\\_alabama.html](http://blog.al.com/spotnews/2010/11/democrats_dominance_of_alabama.html).
- Woodard, J. David. 2013. *The New Southern Politics*. 2nd edition edition. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc.
- Wrenn, Carter. 2017. Interview with the author.