

Partisan Realignment in the South

David A. Hughes, Ph.D.

Auburn University at Montgomery

david.hughes@aum.edu

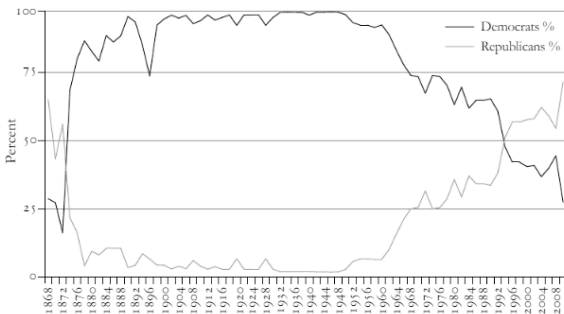
November 11, 2020

Introduction

- The Voting Rights Act of 1965 helped lead to a massive mobilization of southern black voters.
- Overwhelmingly, these newly enfranchised individuals joined the Democratic Party.
- Local black mobilization and national party machinations helped to begin a decades' long process of southern white realignment into the Republican Party.

Southern realignment

Figure 1. The Percentage of Democrats and Republicans in the Southern U.S. House Delegation, 1868–2010



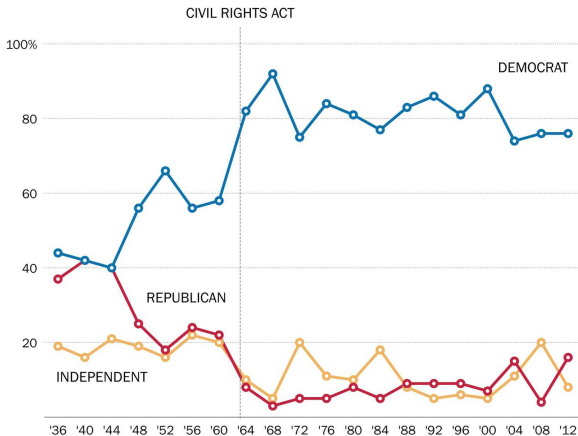
NOTE: The U.S. House data from 1868 to 2004 were compiled by the author from CQ Press, *Guide to U.S. House Elections: Volume II, 5th Edition* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2005). Data from 2005 to 2009 are from Michael Barone and Richard E. Cohen, *The Almanac of American Politics 2006–2010* (Washington, D.C.: National Journal, 2005–2009); the 2010 data are from Michael Barone and Chuck McCutcheon, *The Almanac of American Politics 2012* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

Source: Seth McKee

Southern Realignment

Black party identification

Data compiled by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies from a variety of sources.



White and black realignment in the South

- Why realign?
- Critical or secular?
- Top-down or bottom-up?

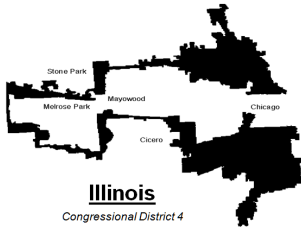
Top-down realignment: National figures

- National Democrats and civil rights
- Goldwater and his coat-tails
- George Wallace's POTUS runs
- Nixon and the Southern Strategy

Top-down realignment: Redistricting

- The redistricting revolution
- Mandates from the DOJ following 1990 Census
- Affirmative action or racial gerrymandering?
- The “unholy alliance”

Race and redistricting



...graphics from *1990s Supreme Court Redistricting Decisions*, Peter S. Watson
www.senate.leg.state.mn.us/departments/scr/REDIST/red907.htm

Issues relating to top-down theories

- Homogeneity in the treatment effect
- Heterogeneity in partisan realignment in the South

Bottom-up realignment: Class

- Economic changes as the driver of GOP growth
- Changing southern economy after the Depression and WWII
- Changing class-structure creates more of an appetite for fiscal conservatism (i.e., Republicanism)

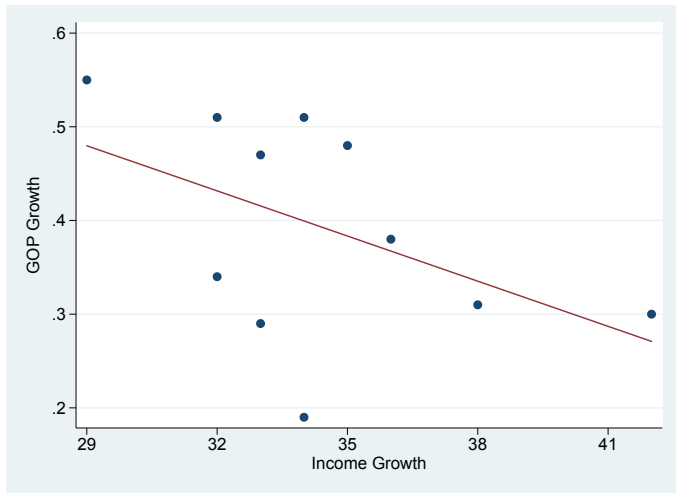
Bottom-up realignment: Social factors

- The rise of evangelicalism in southern politics
- Massive in- and out-migration
- Cohort replacement

Issues related to some bottom-up theories

- Class: Partially supported by data
- In-migration: Only really works during a specific snap-shot
- Religion: Does the tail wag the dog?

Economic change and Republicanism



Source: Hood et al.

The logic of partisan realignment

- When does it make sense for a group to change parties?
- Why would the GOP be a more attractive option than, say, a third party?
- What role does the out-group play in this process?

Bottom-up realignment: Race

- Hood, Morris, and Kidd's theory of "relative advantage"
- Which party will blacks join during this critical juncture?
- When do whites profit from switching parties?

A timeline of relative advantage and realignment

Top-down or bottom-up: hard to disentangle the two

1. National GOP moves left on civil rights (Eisenhower)
2. Southern African Americans move toward GOP
3. National Democrats move left on civil rights (JFK/LBJ)
4. Southern whites flirts with independents ('48, '60, '68)
5. National GOP moves right on civil rights (Goldwater/Nixon)
6. Southern African Americans move toward Democrats
7. Southern whites move toward Republicans

Conclusion

- By the late 1960s, southern elections had become free and fair for the first time since the twilight of Reconstruction.
- Unlike with Reconstruction, newly enfranchised African American voters flocked to the Democratic Party while the Republican Party moved right on the issue of civil rights.
- In response, white voters began leaving the Democratic Party in droves, resulting in a secular realignment across the South that would transform politics in state and nation for decades to come.