

Black Mobilization and Republican Growth in the American South:

The More Things Change the More They Stay the Same?

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Abstract: Over the last sixty years, the South has undergone a dramatic transformation. One of the most prominent aspects of this transformation—the growth of the Republican Party and the development of a competitive two-party system in the region—lacked a compelling political explanation until very recently. In Hood, Kidd, and Morris (2004), we provide that explanation—our theory of *relative advantage*—and present evidence consistent with this explanation for the last forty years of the 20th century. We revisit our earlier work, and examine whether or not the dynamic of relative advantage continues to explain 21st century Southern partisan dynamics. Using a pooled time series methodology to simultaneously examine the implications of our theory, as well as the effect of economic and demographic factors traditionally associated with GOP growth, we again find evidence consistent with the expectations of *relative advantage* theory. Similarly, we still find little support for economic or demographic explanations of Republican growth.

A region once characterized as the “Solid South” because of its consistent and overwhelming support for Democrats at all levels of government has now become the epicenter of 21st century Republicanism. A unique laboratory for the examination of representation and electoral dynamics in the 21st century America, no region has undergone a more dramatic political transformation than the South. The single party politics in the “solid South” have been replaced by an intensely competitive two-party system. Republicans have become increasingly dominant in a region once ruled by Democrats, but this increasing dominance did not prevent Barack Obama from winning three Southern states in a region where blacks were denied the ballot not that long ago.

The roots of this political transformation extend far deeper than the 1965 passage of the Voting Rights Act (VRA), but this legislation did signal the end of an era in Southern politics. As Black and Black argue, the VRA “was the grand turning point in modern times for the reentry of blacks into Southern politics” (1987:136). One of the most important suffrage documents in American history, the VRA provided the opportunity for disenfranchised black Southerners to return to the political fold from which they were banished at the end of Reconstruction. Similarly, the VRA was a milestone in the development of the Republican Party in the South. Prior to the passage of the VRA the South had one post-Reconstruction Republican Senator (John Tower – TX); however at this writing, 15 of the 22 Senate seats are held by Republicans. According to the *American National Election Studies*, Southern Democrats outnumbered their Republican counterparts by a margin of 6-1 in 1952. By the early 21st century, that advantage had all but disappeared.

Our own previous work (Hood, Kidd, and Morris 2004) provided the first fully political explanation for the state-level growth in Southern Republicanism. We developed the theory of relative advantage to understand the concomitant growth of black mobilization and Republican growth, and we found evidence consistent with this theoretical perspective during the final decades of the 20th century. But the early 21st century has seen its own dramatic changes; not least of which was the election of the first African American president. Is it possible that the political dynamics that characterized the end of the last century still hold a decade into the new century? That is the question we ask (and answer) in this paper. In short, the full realization of the theory and analysis presented in that work has since manifested

itself in 21st century southern politics: Regardless of the variety of demographic, economic, and social changes which the South has undergone in the past half-century, the growth of Southern Republicanism is primarily a function of racial and political dynamics. That was the story from 1960-2000, and that is still the story today. The next section provides a discussion of our theory of relative advantage. Subsequent sections describe the data which we analyze, the methods we use to conduct the analysis, our results and conclusions, and a discussion of potential directions for future research.

Theory and Background: The Significance of Relative Advantage

The transformation of the Southern party system, the mobilization of the black electorate, and the rise of Republicanism have been prominent research topics for decades. As Stanley and Castle realize:

. . . one hallmark of scientific research, cumulative knowledge, has not characterized the study of Southern partisan change. Indeed, scholars disagree not only about the overall trends but also about the impact of the . . . processes capable of producing shifts in Southern partisanship (1988:240).

As we noted in 2004, this research failed to fully address a number of significant substantive questions. In particular, there was an incomplete understanding of the extent to which the *mobilization* of Southern blacks (as Democrats)—and not just the presence of large concentrations of blacks in the “black-belt” region (see Giles and Hertz 1994)—foster an increase in Republican voting behavior. Black mobilization influenced roll-call voting patterns of both House and Senate members from the region (Hood, Kidd, and Morris 1999); did this mobilization also (albeit indirectly) bolster Republican ranks?

There is good reason to accept the contention that the increasingly liberal orientation of the national Democratic Party on the issue of civil rights clearly engendered the dissatisfaction of white Southern Democrats with their own party. But while national party dynamics may have provided the initial impetus for the region-wide growth of Republican voting behavior (see Black and Black 1987 and 2002 and Carmines and Stimson 1989), it is also obvious that the rate of growth varied considerably among the states, and such variance cannot be explained by national party politics alone. To explain sub-regional differences in Republican growth, previous work focused on a variety of disparate demographic and economic factors such as in-migration, economic growth and transformation, the waning significance

of agriculture, religious conservatism, and racial context among others.¹ While it is often necessary in social science research to employ demographic variables as proxies for political phenomena, we would argue that a greater effort needs to be undertaken in Southern politics to incorporate more precise measures of theoretically salient political correlates. Continuing along this train of thought, we developed a model to directly test the supposition that the variation in state-level Republican growth in the South is fundamentally itself a byproduct of political change.

—*The Theory of Relative Advantage*

We argue that the size of the Republican Party in the South grew, over the time period of our analysis, because the benefits of voting and identification with the Republican Party for whites, in comparison to Democratic affiliation, increased.² So, from a political standpoint, the *relative advantage* of the Republican Party increased over this time period, but the extent of this relative advantage for the GOP varied considerably across the Southern states.

In their work *Party Systems and Voter Alignments* Lipset and Rokkan (1967) provide a useful framework for discussing social cleavages and a possible association with relative advantage theory. Especially relevant for the present study is the idea that various cleavage structures can lead to certain advantages for a specific party, relative to another party or parties (see for example Sundquist 1983). While not all cleavages may relate to the concept of relative advantage, the racial dichotomy in the South certainly produced a context in which a defunct Republican Party once again became a viable party alternative in the wake of the political disturbance brought about by the enfranchisement of blacks in the region (Katz 2001).

The idea of relative advantage encompasses more than the notion of transformative partisan cleavages. Transformation also requires a catalyst, and this catalyst often takes the form of policy orientations and/or ideological positions held by existing political structures. Citizens identify with and

¹See Nadeau and Stanley (1993), Shafer and Johnston (2001), and Terrel (2000) for general overviews of this literature.

²While we recognize the difference between partisan identification and voting behavior, the two are very closely related in the South during this period of time.

vote for candidates of political parties for a variety of reasons. Among the factors that influence peoples' decisions to support one party or the other are (1) the relative competitiveness of the party in a wide variety of political arenas and (2) the relative consistency of each party's political objectives with a citizen's own political objectives. In the Southern context, Republican Party support (relative to Democratic Party support) became more valuable because:

1. Republicans were fielding increasing numbers of candidates for political office at all levels, causing the traditional Democratic Party monopoly over party nominations to dissipate, and
2. The mobilization of the black population—an almost uniformly Democratic electorate—made it increasingly difficult for Southern conservative whites to maintain control of the local Democratic Party machinery. As the local Democratic Party became more difficult to control, the party apparatus became less valuable.

—*Two-Party Emergence*

A viable Republican Party is a relatively new aspect of Southern politics. One of Key's (1949) primary criticisms of the Southern party system of his time was the absence of active and significant party competition in the region. Key hypothesized that it was this decided lack of inter-party competition that, in turn, stunted the development of viable party organizations in the region.³ During the last four decades, however, the Southern GOP has become an organizational equal of, and sometimes superior to, the Democratic Party in the region (see for example Maggioto and Wekkin 2000).

Scholars have been preoccupied with the pattern of two-party emergence in the South for at least forty years. One prominent theory posits that two-party competition in the region began as a product of support for Republican presidential candidates (see Lamis 1988 or Aistrup 1996 for support of this theory of party change). Success at the presidential level then **filtered** down to state-wide offices (i.e. governor, U.S. Senator), which, in turn, lead to increased levels of voting for GOP congressional candidates. Finally, this *top-down* process culminated in GOP viability at the sub-state level (i.e. state legislative seats). In *The Rise of Southern Republicans* Black and Black (2002) highlight the importance of presidential campaigns, especially Reagan's, in producing a realignment at the congressional level in the

³Lipset and Rokkan (1967) also highlight the significance of the development of competitive local party organizations for long-term partisan growth.

region. Likewise, other research has uncovered a linkage between GOP state party election strategies and recruiting candidates to run in legislative districts with a tendency to vote for Republican presidential candidates (Bullock and Shafer 1997).

Recently, however, Aldrich (2000) and Aldrich and Griffin (2000) have challenged the *top-down* theory of party change in the region. Using a series of Granger causality tests, these studies demonstrated that GOP electoral successes at the national level is a direct product of, or is caused by, prior victories at the state level. Likewise, success in state legislative races was a precursor to winning U.S. House elections, so there is evidence that state GOP party-building efforts were the result of a highly complex process operating at multiple levels.

As theorized, state-level Republican Party strength relative to that of the Democratic Party is in part associated with the ability of the GOP to offer an alternative platform for nomination and election of candidates to pursue policy objectives. The mechanisms of inter-party competition are paramount to explaining the rise of the GOP in the South. Given the prior emphasis on, and disagreement about, Republican Party formation in the post-war South it is imperative that we properly model this political dynamic at work. In an effort to examine the device(s) that induced two-party competition, and as a result viable Republican Parties at the state-level, we include measures designed to test the import of party competition at various office-holding levels.

A full understanding of party politics in the South depends upon an appreciation for the role that race has played and continues to play in the region. For many years white conservatism was directly related to the size of the black population. As proximity to blacks increased, the racial threat perceived by whites increased. This dynamic, what Key (1949) called the “black-belt hypothesis,” resulted in greater support for conservative candidates in areas with proportionately more blacks. A number of subsequent analyses uncovered evidence that supports this hypothesis (see Aistrup 1996; Black 1976; Black 1978; Giles 1977; Giles and Buckner 1993 and 1996; Giles and Evans 1986; Giles and Hertz 1994; Glaser 1994; Matthews and Prothro 1966; and Wright 1977). As the Republican Party was increasingly viewed as the party of conservatism—especially racial conservatism—it became an increasingly desirable alternative to the Democratic Party. Some limited evidence indicates that black context is directly related to growth in Republican partisanship (see for example Giles and Hertz 1994).

Support for the Key hypothesis, while strong, is not unequivocal (see Combs, Hibbing, and Welch 1984; Bullock 1985; Voss 1996; and Whitby 1985). A number of practical issues make the attribution of Republican growth to black racial context problematic. First, though white voters may have stopped voting for Democrats in place of Republicans, blacks were overwhelmingly supportive of Democrats. So, in those areas where white “flight” is most likely, the black Democratic base will be most numerous. Thus, in areas with large black populations there is both a very real ceiling placed on potential Republican support and a very real floor placed on the loss of Democratic support. Also, Republican growth has come during a time when the size of the Southern black population has decreased. So, how is it possible to attribute substantial Republican growth to black context when the relative size of the black population has not grown at all, and in some areas has experienced a relative decline?

We (2004) argued that white voters reacted not to black context, as Key (1949) argued, but instead to black mobilization. Since the passage of the Voting Rights Act, the mobilization of Southern blacks has been extensive (Grofman, Griffin, and Glazer 1992), and there is evidence that the mobilization of Southern blacks has had systemic political implications (Hood, Kidd, and Morris 1999). Initially, Southern conservatives opposed the development of the Republican Party. However, once

disenfranchised black voters returned to the political arena, Southern conservatives shifted strategies and began to build a local Republican Party that would serve as an organized political alternative to the Democratic Party, which was increasingly the party of choice for black Americans (see Aistrup 1996; Aldrich and Griffin 2000; Maggioto and Wekkin 2000 and Rhodes 2000). As blacks moved into the Democratic Party in significant numbers, conservative white Southerners were forced to seek an alternative vehicle for their political ambitions and objectives. Similarly, to the extent blacks were perceived as a threat, we would expect to see the conservative white reaction to this perceived threat to be greatest in those areas in which blacks actually became a major force in local and state politics. We test this hypothesis, as well as the more traditional, and competing, “black belt” hypothesis.

–Alternative Explanations for GOP Growth

Several studies have suggested that a driving force in the growth of the Republican Party in the South has been the influx of Republican-minded migrants from other regions of the country and the exit of Southern blacks—a consistently Democratic constituency (see Bass and De Vries 1976). The out-migration of blacks—particularly during the decades of the 50’s, 60’s, and 70’s—prevented the relative growth of the Southern black population and, thus, the growth of this component of the Democratic Party in the region. To the extent that this out-migration enabled Republican growth, it will be captured by the variables tapping black context and black mobilization. However, the in-migration of whites from other regions—and most in-migrants have been white (see Scher 1997 and Stanley and Castle 1988)—requires further elaboration.

An increasingly large body of research indicates that the bulk of Southern in-migrants during the past fifty years were white and middle-class and that these migrants have become integral components of the Southern GOP. While it is difficult to argue with the contention that in-migration has had some impact on the relative strength of the two major political parties in the South, the magnitude and extent of this effect remains unclear. For example, some suggest that the impact of in-migration on Southern partisanship has ebbed in the last two decades, a time period in which the party loyalties of Southerners differed little (and were actually somewhat more Republican) than the party loyalties of Americans in

other regions of the country (Stanley 1988). Still others argue that cohort replacement and conversion of existing voters, as opposed to in-migration, explains the growing tendency among Southerners to identify as Republicans (Petrocik 1987). In light of these alternative points of view we seek to re-examine the role of in-migration and its effect on the growth of the Republican Party in the South.

Historians have long pointed to the transformation of the South's economy following the Second World War as a watershed event for the region (see Cobb 1999 and Sosna 1987 for a discussion of this event). In a matter of decades the region's economy was completely reoriented. Political scientists highlighted the potential political consequences of this economic transformation. As far back as 1949, Key mentioned the possible political ramifications associated with what he termed the *dilution* of the region's agricultural economy. Key stated that a natural outgrowth of this economic transformation would include "industrial and financial interests that have a fellow feeling with northern Republicanism (1949:674);" thus creating a stronger, and in some ways, more natural linkage between Southerners and the GOP. More recently, Shafer and Johnston (2001) credit economic development as the driving engine behind partisan change in the Southern U.S. House delegation, and they argue in a recent book (Shafer and Johnston 2006) that class, not racial dynamics, drove the growth of Southern Republicanism in the second half of the last century.

To examine the effect of economic transformation on the growth of Southern Republicanism, we incorporate measures tapping employment in the agricultural sector and per capita income into our analysis. We would expect to find a negative relationship between Republican growth and the relative importance of agriculture in a state's economy. In relation to relative income growth and the size of the GOP we expect the conventional relationship to hold true for our sample—gains in income should be accompanied by increases in Republican partisanship.

Finally, scholars studying the intersection of religion and politics note that white, Evangelical Protestants have become increasingly more likely to identify with, and vote for, the Republican Party (see Kellstet 1989; Green et al. 1996; Green et al. 1998). Individual-level survey data indicates that white Evangelicals are more likely than those of other religious traditions to hold conservative views, especially

in regard to social issues (Wilcox 2000). Over the last several decades, Evangelicals have become increasingly drawn to a Republican Party identified as the standard bearer for social conservatism. Specific evidence of this trend is plentiful. For example, white Evangelicals comprised half (50%) of the combined vote for Presidential contests in the 1990's (Green et al. 1998). In the pivotal 1994 Congressional elections three-quarters of this group (75%) voted Republican. In the same year, white Evangelicals comprised a plurality of the GOP, making up 30% of Republican Party identifiers nationwide (Green et al. 1996).

Data and Methods

As we did in our earlier work, we utilize a pooled time series methodology that provides us with the leverage to distinguish between the various temporal and cross-sectional forces that might have shaped the growth of the GOP in the South. Analyses of the entire region preclude the examination of sub-regional demographic, economic, and political dynamics that might influence Republican growth. Likewise, analyses based on individual states—even when grouped with other one-state studies—tend to ignore region-wide trends that played important roles in partisan development. We take a middle-of-the-road approach in order to avoid the shortcomings of these two, more limited, methods.⁴

Parameter estimates of state-level Republican strength are generated using OLS, while we control for autocorrelation via the inclusion of a lagged dependent variable in the model. Even in the presence of this control, some residual autocorrelation remained. For this reason, we also estimate an IV (instrumental variables) model, as Beck and Katz (1996) and Greene (2000) suggest.⁵ We present both sets of findings and note that the primary substantive result—the impact of black mobilization on GOP

⁴The time series cross sectional framework, while relatively uncommon in studies of Southern politics, is becoming an increasingly important and prominent analytical tool within the literature (see for example Hood et al. 1999).

⁵Although the use of instrumental variables (IV) to address potentially problematic serial correlation is a common practice in conventional time series analysis, its use in panel data is somewhat less common. The rationale for the use of IV, however, is the same in both cases. The IV approach is employed when serial correlation remains even after the inclusion of a lagged dependent variable. Both Ostrom (1978) and Gujarati (1988) provide a somewhat less mathematically complex discussion of the intuition behind the IV method and the procedure for its implementation in the single time series framework.

growth is fully consistent across the set of estimates. The issue of heteroskedasticity is addressed by the use of panel-corrected standard errors (see Beck and Katz 1995 and 1996) in the OLS models.⁶

Multicollinearity is not a problem in either the original OLS models or IV models.⁷

For this study, the Southern state serves as our unit of analysis, producing a total of 11 cross-sections over a 46-year period—from 1962 through 2008.⁸ The dependent variable, *Republican Strength*, is measured at the state level utilizing a method developed by David (1972).⁹ General election vote percentages for Republican candidates in gubernatorial, senate, and congressional elections were utilized to create a composite state-level index of GOP strength.¹⁰ Following the construction of each GOP state index, a 10-year (5-time point) moving average was applied to smooth any sharp variations present in each series.¹¹ The David Index of Party Strength was the method of choice for Lamis (1988) in his detailed study of party change in the South.

Independent variables representing possible explanations for Republican Party growth in the South can be classified into three groups: political, economic, and demographic. Variables designed to tap political concerns include *Black Electoral Strength*, *% Black*, *Sub-State Party Competition*, as well as two sets of variables designed to represent the effects of presidential campaigns. The first of these variables taps into the potential influence that the political mobilization of blacks had on Republican growth. *Black Electoral Strength* is calculated at the state level as the number of black registered voters

⁶ Unfortunately, panel corrected standard errors are not available for the fixed effects instrumental variables option.

⁷ All variance inflation factors were below 4.

⁸ Only even years are included in the analysis (i.e. 1960, 1962, ... 2008).

⁹ We examined the possibility that the dependent variable—*Republican Strength*—is nonstationary. Using the Levin-Lin-Chu (2001) unit root test, specifically designed for panel data, we were able to reject the null hypothesis of nonstationarity (t-star statistic = -6.88; p < .001).

¹⁰ Estimates from 1960 through 1970 are obtained from David's work, while estimates for the remaining years are calculated by the authors.

¹¹ Comparisons between our measure of Republican Party strength and actual party registration data from Louisiana and Florida from 1950-2000 (the only two Southern states that did track party registration during the time of our study) indicate a high level of congruity ($r = .94$ for LA and $.94$ for FL) [Data available from the authors upon request].

divided by the total number of registered voters. Operationalized as it is, our measure of black electoral strength places blacks within the context of the existing electorate—a much more precise method for estimating the potential influence of blacks as an electoral presence than alternative indicators (i.e. the percentage of blacks registered to vote).

To control for the size of the overall black population in each state, we include a variable taping the number of blacks in the population divided by the total state population in the model (*% Black*). While blacks are a ubiquitous presence in the Southern political scene, their numbers are not uniform throughout the region. Most studies of Southern politics, therefore, include some control for the relative size of the black population (see for example Nye and Bullock 1993).

In order to examine competing claims that two party emergence in the region was a product of a different set of distinct processes, we include a number of specific indicators in an effort to differentiate between the effects of party competition at the national level with those at a more localized, grass-roots level. Given the important emphasis on presidential campaigns and state-level party growth in the South, we include two distinct sets of variables in an effort to capture this dynamic. The first indicator was based on the actual percentage of a state's vote captured by the Republican presidential candidate.¹² A second set of models was also estimated using a set of n-1 dummy variables designed to measure the effects of specific presidential campaigns. These variables were coded one during the presidential election year as well as for the subsequent off-year election (i.e. Goldwater 1964, 1966).

In order to directly test the effects of sub-state party competition on state-level GOP growth, we include a measure designed to capture this process in both of the models presented in Table 1. The viability of the Republican Party at the sub-state level in the South varied greatly both over time and among states. In order for our model to account for this fact, an index was created to measure the relative level of competitive strength for the GOP among the eleven states in our sample.¹³ In creating such a

¹²These presidential vote percentages were duplicated for time points containing off-year elections (i.e. 1962, 1966).

¹³It should be noted that while we can gauge inter-party competition directly, there is no equivalent way to measure the relative strength of party organizations in the region during the time period under study. The most comprehensive study of party organization to date is the Cotter et al. (1984) *Party Transformation Study*. This study

measure we draw directly from the work of Aistrup (1996) and Anderson (1997), making some modest alterations to their measures of GOP competitiveness.¹⁴

In a given election cycle, *Sub-State Party Competition* is calculated by summing the percentage of seats contested by the GOP in both the upper and lower houses in a state's legislative body along with the percentage of seats won by GOP candidates, again in both houses. This figure is then divided by four to yield an index ranging from zero to one—with the former an indicator of essentially no two-party competition and the latter a sign of complete Republican dominance. In the models presented in Table 1, *Sub-State Party Competition* is lagged behind the dependent variable by one election cycle—with the idea that competitive gains made by the GOP at the sub-national level will not translate into concomitant Republican Party gains at the state level until the following election cycle.

A competing explanation for growth of the Republican Party focuses on the extensive economic changes that forever altered the region. In order to examine the Southern transformation from an economy based intensively in agricultural production to one increasingly dominated by manufacturing and today, information, we include a measure tapping the percentage of the workforce employed in the agricultural sector. *Agricultural Employment* is measured as the number of a state's workers employed in the farming and agricultural sector of the economy divided by the total workforce of the state. According to the economic transformation theory, one should expect to see increases in GOP strength in states where the percentage of workers employed in agricultural pursuits is declining. A second variable designed to model economic change is also included in the analysis. *Per Capita Income* measures the changes in a state's relative income level over time. Operationalized as the nominal income of a state in relation to the

measures Party Organizational Strength or POS by administering a detailed questionnaire to a multi-part sample of party officials at both the state and county level. In this manner, Cotter et al. were able to create a composite measure of POS using responses from a variety of items dealing with such issues as budget, staff, and candidate recruitment activities. While the Cotter et al. measure is a proven and highly reliable indicator of party organization strength at the subnational level, a number of issues prevent its use in this analysis. To begin, the POS measures were only calculated at the state-level from 1960 through 1984, and within this time frame only every five years. In addition, some state parties are missing from their analysis. In conducting a model over time with panel data, the use of the Cotter et al. POS measure would produce unacceptable gaps both over time and across states.

¹⁴ Given that our dependent variable is a composite index derived from vote percentages, we do not include a legislative vote component, in contrast to Aistrup (1996), in our index of sub-state party competition.

size of its population, this measure of wealth is a direct correlate with the growth of the Southern economy. Rapidly expanding income levels should translate into ever increasing numbers of Republican Party loyalists.

As indicated, our model also includes a set of demographic factors thought to be associated with GOP growth in the South. *In-migration* is measured as the proportion of a state's population that is comprised of white residents born outside the Southern region. To the extent that Republican growth is at least partially driven by the in-migration of white Republican sympathizers, it should be captured by this variable. A final demographic variable is designed to represent the proportion of a state's population who are members in an Evangelical Protestant denomination.¹⁵ Specifically linked to GOP growth, *Evangelical Protestantism* is hypothesized to be positively related to the Republican strength at the state level (see the Technical Appendices for more detailed information concerning variable construction and data sources).

Findings and Discussion

We returned to the data from our 1960-2000 analysis and updated each variable through 2008. The updated results presented in Table 1.

<Table 1 about here.>

Though the last decade has witnessed a significant transformation in racial and ethnic politics, the results are quite similar across the two sets of analyses. From the standpoint of results which are consistent across the various models, the results are substantively identical to our earlier findings. There is some limited evidence of a black context effect, but the results are not consistent across the models. More generally, we again find little evidence that factors such as presidential elections, income growth, immigration, or size of the agricultural sector significantly influenced the state-level variation in the growth of southern Republicanism. There would appear to be some evidence for an evangelicalism effect, but this result is limited to the fixed effects IV model. We would not conclude that these factors

¹⁵While undoubtedly some blacks are included in this measure, most of the denominations that collectively yield the total number of Evangelical Protestants have very few black adherents.

played no role in the broad partisan transformation of the South, but we certainly see very little evidence that they acted as an engine directly driving Republican growth in the region. The state-level growth of the southern Republican Party was a function of two primary factors: sub-state party competition—the increasing development of competitive Republican candidates at the sub-state level—and black mobilization. Again, the evidence strongly supports the contention that black electoral mobilization led directly to Republican growth in the South. The results of our extended models also provide strong empirical support for the bottom-up theory of two-party development in the South over that of the top-down school. We can conclude the state-level GOP growth was, in part, propelled by Republican success at lower office-holding levels.

In subsequent research on the relationship between black mobilization and Republican growth (Hood, Kidd, and Morris 2008), we assessed the robustness of the time series-cross section (TSCS) results presented in our original article. Employing a Granger causality test especially tailored for TSCS data, we evaluated the extent that black mobilization *causes* Republican growth for both the deep South and the rim South and, subsequently, each of the eleven Southern states.¹⁶ We found strong evidence of a direct causal relationship where black mobilization leads to Republican growth across both subregions and within all states in the region. We also found evidence of a feedback loop in the deep South where Republican growth produces further black mobilization. This reciprocal relationship is not present, however, in the peripheral South.¹⁷

The results of our Granger analysis in the *Political Analysis* article (2008) and the subsequent results for the 1962-2008 time frame suggest a partisan political dynamic leading to state-level Republican parties that are significantly larger than they have perhaps ever been and increasingly of comparable size to the Democratic parties of the middle of the 20th century. Black mobilization and increasing sub-state party competition have provided the catalyst for Republican growth in the last 40-

¹⁶The deep South is composed of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia and South Carolina and the rim or peripheral South is comprised of Texas, Arkansas, Tennessee, North Carolina, Florida, and Virginia.

¹⁷The single exception to this pattern is North Carolina, the rim South state with the highest proportion of African Americans.

years.¹⁸

As there is evidence of a feedback loop in the deep South [$Black\ Mobilization_{t-1} \rightarrow Republican\ Growth_t \rightarrow Black\ Mobilization_{t+1} \rightarrow Republican\ Growth_{t+2}$], we would expect to see an explosion of Republican growth in this subregion. To some extent this has been the case—certainly enough to move this set of states ahead of those in the rim South in terms of the relative extent of Republicanism (see Figure 1). However, because the relative size of the black population has a dampening effect on the growth of Republicanism—historically providing a ceiling for the growth of the Republican Party in each state because of the overwhelming support of African Americans for the Democratic Party—our model suggests that the maximum size of the Republican Party in any southern state is something less than 60% of the *entire* voting population. In the rim South, where the ceiling set by the relative size of the black population is relatively higher than it is in the deep South, the extent of black mobilization is also significantly less, producing, in turn, less pressure for Republican growth. Empirically, these dynamics have resulted in a significant growth in the Republican Party in every southern state (since the 1960s) and a dramatic decrease in the variation of state-level Republicanism over the same time period.

Figure 1A depicts the range and distribution of the growth of state-level Republicanism over the period extending to 2008. What we see is a relatively low maximum (slightly more than 30 percent of voters) and significant variation (nearly 30 points between the maximum and minimum values) for the Republican Party early in the time period. As we move forward in time, we see an increase in the maximum level for state-level Republicanism and an even larger increase in the smallest state-level Republican Party. By the end of our time period, the largest state-level Republican Party is nearly twice the size of the largest Republican Party in the early 1960s, and the smallest Republican Party is nearly *twenty* times the size of the smallest such party. The data plainly illustrate the dramatic growth and the significant drop in state-level variation that we should expect to see.

<<Figure 1A about here>>

¹⁸ Results from an update of our earlier Granger analysis of the consistency of the effect of black mobilization on GOP growth in each of the Southern states confirm our earlier findings. These results are available from the authors.

Though the data reflect the dynamics predicted by the theory of relative advantage introduced in our 2004 article, we still lack a full understanding of the relationship between black mobilization and Republican growth. Data limitations make it difficult (but not impossible) to examine this dynamic at the sub-state level, so further work remains to be done on this issue. And we still lack a full characterization of the individual-level dynamic, or dynamics, that produce the aggregate-level results we find. Just what is at work at the individual level that ties black mobilization and Republican growth—and, in some states, Republican growth and black mobilization—in the South? We are simply not sure at this point.

--The Future of the Republican Party in the South

It is hazardous to make predictions in politics. That said, we can look at some current trends and project where these may lead in the near future. First, again looking at Figure 1 we can make some projections concerning GOP growth in the near future. First, it is notable that in 2006 the GOP strength index for the deep South overtook the same measure for the rim South for the first time. From 2004 to 2008 GOP party strength managed about 2.1 points of positive growth, while the rim South experienced a decline on the order of about 2.5 points. These trends are notable because both in the deep and rim South GOP growth has essentially been monotonic since approximately 1960.

<Figure 1B about here>

The deep South that was fifty years ago the bastion of the solid Democratic South is now more Republican than its subregional counterpart. There are still gains that can be realized for the Republican Party in these states; however, these are also the five states in the region that contain the highest numbers of black citizens as well. These overwhelmingly Democratic demographics place a real ceiling on the degree to which the Republican Party can expand in this part of the region.

The impact of the election of the nation's first black president in 2008 on southern politics deserves some degree of attention. While black southerners have traditionally voted Democratic in presidential elections at overwhelming rates, the Obama candidacy is a story more about mobilization and turnout. There is little doubt that Barack Obama's candidacy helped to bring huge numbers of black registrants into the electorate in the South while, at the same time, reinvigorating the existing black

electorate. Black turnout in the 2008 general election was not conditioned on the state-level competitiveness of the presidential contest. The additional degree of black mobilization beyond that which can be explained by electoral competitiveness and standard sociodemographic factors has been labeled the *Obama Effect* and is related to the draw for black Americans specific to Obama's historic candidacy (McKee and Hill 2009). Obama's victories in Florida, North Carolina, and Virginia are, in part, explained by this additional mobilization. Virginia last went to the Democratic presidential column in 1960 and North Carolina in 1976, both considerable periods of time.

It is informative to compare white (non-Hispanic) and black registration and turnout from the 2004 and 2008 general elections in Georgia, which tabulates registration and turnout data by race. These two groups account for over 90% of registrants in the state. From 2004 to 2008 the share of white registrants as a proportion of the electorate dropped by about 6 percentage points, from 69% down to 63%. Conversely, the share of black registration over the same period rose by 2.8% points from 27% to 30%. At the same time, among blacks, voter turnout rates across these two elections increased approximately 4 percentage points compared to a drop of almost 3 percentage points for whites. These effects are even more pronounced when one looks at voters in the 18 to 29 range. Voter turnout among younger whites dropped 6.5 points from 2004 to 2008, compared with a 5 point increase among black voters in the same age category.¹⁹

In the deep South we have demonstrated that increases in the size of the black electorate are related to future gains in state-level Republican strength. If this relationship is still valid, it is quite possible that recent gains in black registration, which obviously benefit the Democratic Party, may also lead to a concomitant expansion in Republican identifiers. The jury is also out, however, on whether these mobilized black voters, especially younger first-time registrants, will continue to participate at similar rates in the future in the absence of a black Democratic candidate at the top of the ticket .

Conversely, one might also ask what fortunes lie on the horizon for the GOP in the peripheral South. Is the downturn evident over the most recent election cycles likely to continue? What is the chance that the trend line might level-off or even increase? Two long-term demographic shifts make

¹⁹Data Source: Georgia Secretary of State. Retrieved from <http://sos.georgia.gov/elections/>.

continued Republican growth somewhat problematic in the rim South. These are the growing Hispanic population in the region, especially in Texas and Florida, and the changing nature of immigration to these areas.

First, let us turn our attention to the Hispanic question. Texas is currently one of only four states where Anglos (non-Hispanic whites) do not represent the majority racial/ethnic group. By 2015 it is predicted that Hispanics will become a majority in Texas (Lone Star Rising 2009). Though Hispanics are not monolithic, in political or other terms, Hispanics outside of those of Cuban origin in south Florida tend to identify and vote Democratic more than a majority of the time.²⁰ Given the growth in this segment of the population this trend should be troubling to the Republican Party in the region.

Many Hispanics are conservative on social issues but fairly liberal on economic matters. The former should tend to benefit Republicans and the latter Democrats. So, unlike the black electorate, there does appear to be some maneuvering room for Republicans with this particular group. However, the party's current stance on the immigration issue has proven to be a stumbling block for the GOP's effort to court Hispanics. For a population segment with comparatively higher degrees of poverty and lower levels of educational attainment, the draw from economic issues would also seem to benefit the Democratic Party. Party registration figures from North Carolina indicate that approximately 40% of Hispanics identify as Democrats, compared to 28% for the Republican Party, and 32% who chose no party affiliation (Bullock and Hood 2006). In short, the jury is still out on which camp a majority of Hispanics may choose in terms of partisan affiliation.

A number of factors will work to mute the influence of Hispanics in the region for several decades into the future, even in Texas and Florida. Figure 1C presents the Hispanic share of the population for each Southern state along with the Hispanic voting age population using data from the 2000 Census (which most certainly underestimates the size of this group at the end of the decade). For every state except Texas, Florida, and Georgia, Hispanics comprised less than 5% of the total population in 2000. It should be noted that even these small percentages represent substantial growth in a region where Hispanics were a negligible presence in many states before 1990. Total population estimates for

²⁰Data Source: *America Votes 2004*.

2008 show an increase in the number of states with a Hispanic population over 5% increasing to six, all of which are located in the rim South with the exception of Georgia. These 2008 estimates place the Hispanic population in Florida and Texas at 21% and 36.5% respectively.

<Figure 1C about here>

Despite a growing presence throughout the region, recent research indicates Hispanics will be slow to reshape the politics of the South. One recent study estimates that it could be the 2030s before growth in the Hispanic population alone would help Democrats to reach parity with the GOP in Texas (Stanley 2008). A number of factors currently work to constrain the political influence of Hispanics in the region. One of these is the fact that the Hispanic population is, on average, currently younger than the non-Hispanic population. In Texas where Hispanics make up more than a third of the state's total population, this group comprises only about a fifth of the voting age population. A second limiting factor relates to the issue of citizenship. A large percentage of Hispanics who have migrated to the South (with the exception of Florida and Texas) are non-citizens and, therefore, cannot vote. Census estimates from the 2008 election cycle indicate that Hispanics comprised only 16.0% of the citizen voting age population in Florida, compared to a 20.7% share of the VAP.

The potential for Hispanic political influence is also limited by the fact that Hispanic citizens in the South register and vote at lower levels than blacks or whites. For the 2008 election, the Census Bureau put Hispanic registration among citizens to be to be 54.3% in Texas, compared to 73.7% for blacks and 73.6% for whites. The same source indicates that 37.8% of Hispanic citizens voted in the 2008 general, far below 64.9% and 64.7% for blacks and whites, respectively. In Georgia, where we do not have to rely on estimates, Hispanic turnout in the 2008 general was 59.6%. Again, this figure is far below turnout rates for blacks at 75.8% and whites at 77.4%. The bottom line is that until such disparities dissipate, Hispanics will not reach their full political potential in any southern state, despite their growing population base.

Another disconcerting demographic pattern for Republicans involves recent in-migration patterns, especially in the peripheral South. While in-migration at one time boosted GOP fortunes with an influx of

non-Southern Republican identifiers, the latest trends are not nearly so advantageous. The 2000 Census reports that less than half of Floridians (45.7%) are native Southerners, with a fifth of the Sunshine State's population having been born in the northeast. Recent scholarship points to in-migration patterns as one of the chief culprits for declining success of Republican congressional candidates in the rim South compared to those running in the deep South (see McKee 2009).

Other research demonstrates that Obama's narrow win in the Tar Heel state can be, in part, explained by an ever increasing stream of non-Southern migrants from the rust-belt and northeastern states. One analysis found that the most recent growth in voter registration is among those not claiming a specific party affiliation, and it is among this category where non-Southern in-migrants dominate. These in-migrants were also linked to higher rates of voting for Barack Obama (Hood and McKee 2009). In a state won by the Democrats by only about a third of a percentage point, the message is clear that this new breed of in-migrant contributed to that razor-thin margin. The influx of non-Southerners into the region, especially the rim South, may be indicative of a long-term pattern benefiting the Democratic Party.

As of this writing many have lamented the downfall of the national GOP beginning with the Democratic takeover of Congress in 2006. For the first time since 1996 the Democratic Party made major gains outside the region propelled by an unpopular Republican president presiding over an unpopular war and later an economic recession. Many also call attention to the Republican congressional caucus, which was dominated by a very conservative southern delegation as being yet another culprit for this downfall. Ironically, the growing southern Republican majority that allowed the GOP to take control of Congress in 1996 may have inadvertently also led to its rather quick demise by pulling the party ideologically too far to the right for mainstream America.

In the more immediate future the effects linked to the election and subsequent presidential administration of Barack Obama on the southern political landscape remain to be seen. Obama's victories in Florida, North Carolina, and Virginia signaled potential new inroads for the Democratic Party in the region. It is no surprise that the states that Obama won were rim South states, but whether or not the Democratic Party can build on these results from a single election is still an open question. As McKee

(2009), President Obama may be a president of “reconstruction” along the lines of Lincoln, Franklin Roosevelt, and Reagan (see Skowronek 1993 and 2008), and if that is the case, then his presidency might result in a new partisan transformation of southern politics. However, if our current economic difficulties are more serious than we realize (or more difficult for the Obama administration to address), then the Obama presidency may be a presidency of preemption, in which case its lasting impact on southern politics (and American politics more generally) will be far more limited.

So, what might be the GOP’s future in the South? With a strong cadre of white social and economic conservatives, short term trends continue to favor the GOP. For this group the Republican Party will likely remain the party of choice for some time to come. Short-term growth may even continue at the substate-level in the deep South. Longer term trends, as mentioned, are much more difficult to pin down. Secular patterns, especially a growing Hispanic citizenry and in-migration from traditional Democratic areas are not likely to help the GOP continue to expand or even maintain ground in the region. Control of redistricting can help blunt some of these forces in the near term, but not if these trends continue unabated. Republican influence nationally has also been crippled by a Democratic juggernaut in the 2006 and 2008 election cycles. It is doubtful, however, that this situation will last, despite claims from pundits regarding the death of the Republican Party. As any observer of American politics knows, partisan advantages can change almost overnight. As long as the black-white dichotomy persists in Southern politics it seems imperative that the GOP reach out to the fastest growing racial/ethnic group (Hispanics) in the region in order to remain competitive in the future.

Conclusion

As we found in our earlier study of the late 20th century South, political factors begat political change well into the 21st century. While there is no doubt that regional in-migration and economic transformation were ongoing phenomenon during the period of time under study, these factors—along with other demographic variables such as black context and evangelicalism—do not appear to have a consistent impact on the growth of Southern Republicanism over the time period analyzed. We find no

reason to believe then, that economic or demographic change alone, however profound, would have broken the long held constant in Southern politics of one party, Democratic dominance, absent political changes. Our findings and conclusions contrast sharply with the body of existing literature on the growth of the Republican Party in the South. While the role of race in Southern politics is not the same as Key (1949) described sixty years ago, African American context (in the modern era, mobilized African Americans) still influences white political behavior (Republican growth).

Even with a basic understanding of the political dynamics of the growth of Southern Republicanism, a number of important questions remain. First, what factors fostered (or constrained) the mobilization of the black electorate? To what extent did political organizations such as the NAACP boost mobilization, and did the efforts of extremist whites (e.g. civil rights violations) restrict black political mobilization? And how can we explain the wide variance in sub-state Republican competitiveness? Did a variety of local factors boost competitiveness in specific regions, or did national party efforts in particular locales boost competitiveness? Or is it some mixture of the two? In addition, an exhaustive effort should be undertaken to understand the linkage between the effect of economic and demographic change in the region and the corresponding political alterations that led to two-party formation. To fully understand the transformation of the Southern party system—and party systems more generally, we must find answers to these important questions.

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²¹Common Name: Asiatic Elephant

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Appendix: Data Sources

State-Level Republican Strength (Dependent Variable)/Presidential Vote:

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Newspapers:

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Table 1. Explaining State-Level GOP Party

Growth in the South, 1962-2008

	Model 1		Model 2	
	OLS	IV	OLS	IV
Constant	.0096 (.0120)	.1748** (.0442)	.0195* (.0098)	-.0896* (.0070)
<i>Political:</i>				
Republican Strength _{t-1}	.8892** (.0217)	.7458** (.0280)	.9273** (.0228)	.7594** (.0306)
Sub-State Party Competition _{t-1}	.0667** (.0141)	.1323** (.0180)	.0306* (.0129)	.0963** (.0204)
Presidential Vote	.0002 (.0001)	.0003* (.0001)	-----	-----
Black Electoral Strength	.1623** (.0361)	.1342** (.0423)	.1336** (.0340)	.1268** (.0360)
% Black	-.0881** (.0340)	.3324* (.1502)	-.0684* (.0328)	.2748 (.1486)
Goldwater 1964	-----	-----	.0095* (.0044)	-.0101 (.0157)
Nixon 1968	-----	-----	.0159** (.0054)	-.0056 (.0137)
Nixon 1972	-----	-----	.0090 (.0057)	-.0042 (.0120)
Ford 1976	-----	-----	-.0178** (.0061)	-.0195 (.0117)
Reagan 1980	-----	-----	-.0045 (.0064)	-.0079 (.0112)
Reagan 1984	-----	-----	-.0022 (.0066)	-.0042 (.0108)
Bush 1988	-----	-----	-.0013 (.0073)	-.0030 (.0103)
Bush 1992	-----	-----	-.0088 (.0079)	-.0123 (.0098)
Dole 1996	-----	-----	.0016 (.0084)	-.0011 (.0092)
Bush 2000	-----	-----	.0033 (.0094)	.0174* (.0073)
Bush 2004	-----	-----	-.0048 (.0990)	-.0138* (.0070)
Bush 2008	-----	-----	-.0231* (.0104)	-----

Demographic:

In-Migration	.0178 (.0264)	-.0158 (.0470)	.0034 (.0247)	-.1321* (.0567)
Evangelical Protestants	.0200 (.0207)	.5607** (.1164)	.0146 (.0193)	.4390** (.1203)

Economic:

Per Capita Income (\$1,000)	-.0005 (.0003)	.00006 (.0003)	----- ^a	----- ^a
Agricultural Sector Employment	.0642 (.0576)	-.1670 (.0876)	-.0061 (.0515)	-.1943* (.0974)

R² .981 .974 .984 .977

N 264 253 264 253

Notes:

OLS Coefficients with Panel Corrected Standard Errors in parentheses.

*p<.05 (two-tailed test) **p<.01 (two-tailed test)

^a*Per Capita Income* was eliminated from Model 2 due to extreme multicollinearity.

Figure 1A. Republican Growth in the South—State Boxplots, 1960-2008

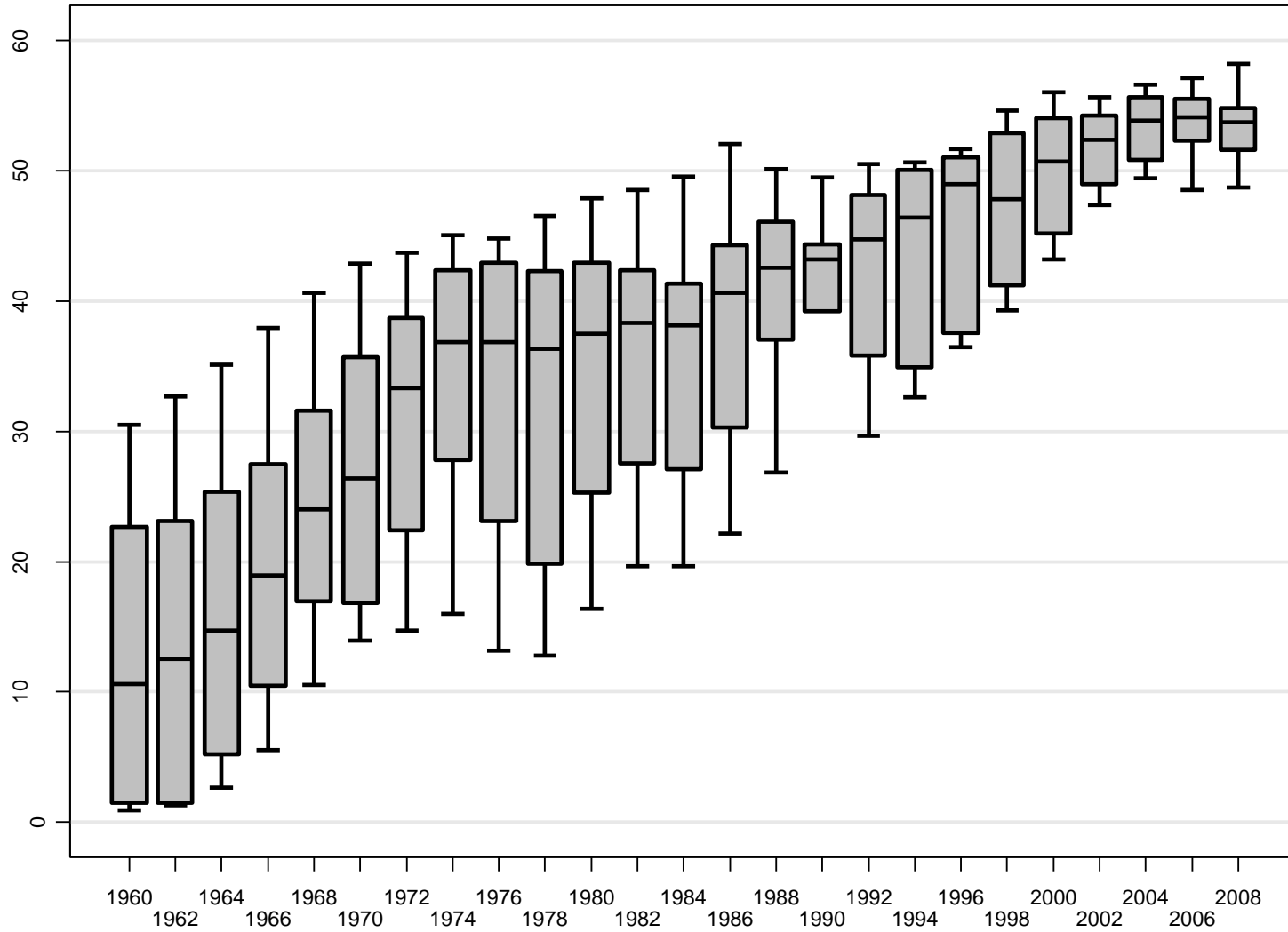


Figure 1B. GOP Growth by Subregion, 1950-2008



Figure 1C. Hispanic Population by State

