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Factors Contributing to Continuing Democratic Victories in Some Southern House Districts, 1994–2008

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FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO CONTINUING DEMOCRATIC VICTORIES IN
SOME SOUTHERN HOUSE DISTRICTS, 1994–2008.

A Capstone Experience/Thesis Project Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree Bachelor of Arts
with Mahurin Honors College Graduate Distinction
at Western Kentucky University

By

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May 2020

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ABSTRACT

The American South went through a period of political transition in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. This transition reached its climax after the 1994 elections, after which Democrats ceased to hold the majority of House seats in the South, never to regain that strength. However, Democrats continued to win a decent share of House seats in the South after 1994, with about 40% of Southern House seats being won by Democrats until the 2010 elections, after which Democrats shrunk to a much smaller minority.

This paper analyzes the factors that allowed some Democrats to continue to be elected to the House from Southern districts between 1994 and 2010. I find that two of the same constituency factors that correlate to Democratic victories elsewhere in the country, namely a larger non-white population and a more urban population, correlate to Democratic strength in Southern House districts between 1994 and 2010. On the other hand, I find that races featuring incumbents (as opposed to open seat races) and the number of Democratic officials elected to other offices from the same state do not significantly correlate to Democratic strength in those House elections.

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INTRODUCTION

The South, for the bulk of American history, was dominated by the Democratic party. Arising from its opposition to Reconstruction, Democrats had total or near-total control of local, state, and federal offices from the 1870s until the 1960s. The Republican Party began to make political inroads into the region with Barry Goldwater's presidential run in 1964. Despite losing in a nationwide landslide, Goldwater won five states in the Deep South—the first time any Republican presidential candidate had done so since the end of Reconstruction. As the Democratic Party moved leftward, especially on civil rights and social issues, conservative southerners began to defect from the party. However, the huge institutional advantage the Democrats had amassed over nearly 100 years of complete dominance in the region allowed the party to maintain a majority of Southern offices up through 1980. Perman (2010) describes the process as a dealignment: that is, increasing numbers of Southerners began to no longer see themselves as Democrats, but had yet to positively identify as Republicans (335). After 1980, as Republicans ramped up operations in previously uncontested regions, a significant number of Republicans began to win office in the South. This *realignment* culminated with the Republicans' victory in the 1994 congressional elections, delivering Newt Gingrich (a Southern Republican) the speakership and marking the first time that Republicans held a majority of Southern House seats (335-6).

After the Democrats' defeat in 1994, many institutional advantages that compelled Southern conservative politicians to stay in the Democratic Party disappeared (see Campbell 1996, 8–9). Having lost their majority, Democratic Party membership no

longer conferred advantages such as committee chairmanship. And yet, despite the 1994 elections marking the beginning of Republican dominance in the south, many districts in the South continued to return Democrats to Congress for the next 20 years, until a series of heavy midterm losses during the Obama administration all but eliminated the Democrats in the South outside of urban cores and majority-black districts.

Fig.1

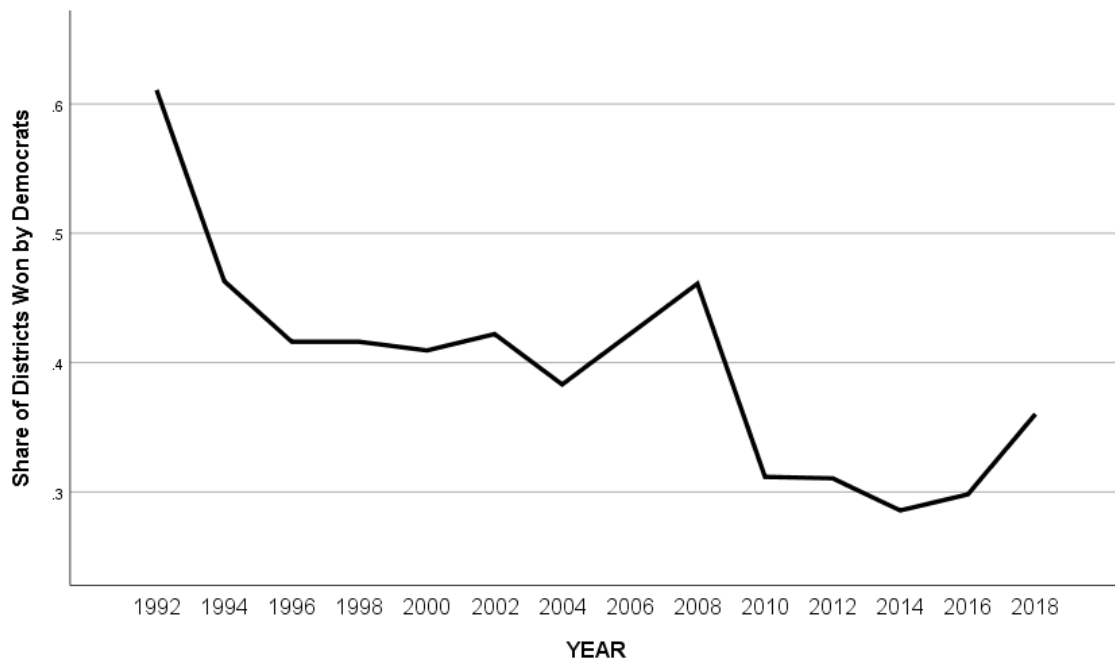


Figure 1 shows the share of Southern House districts that Democrats won across each general election between 1992 and 2018. In 1992, Democrats won over 60% of districts in the South. After the next election, Democrats held a minority of Southern seats. In 2014, Southern Democrats reached their nadir at under 30% of Southern seats, and in the two subsequent elections, Democrats have made modest gains. In the figure, two precipitous drops in Democratic success are evident: the elections of 1994 and 2010.

Budge and Farlie, in their 1983 book *Explaining and Predicting Elections*, seek to explain election outcomes by exploring the relationship between voters, issues, and parties. The relationship between the Democratic Party and the issues is known: the party

moved leftward over the course of the 20th century (Brookings 2013). The relationship between voters and issues is also known: conservative voters who had been willing to vote for conservative Democrats began to vote for conservative Republicans instead. In spite of the prevailing political winds in the region, what factors allowed some Southern Democrats to hang on through 2010? I analyze the effect that various demographic factors, along with state party strength, had in allowing these members of congress to remain in office—and explore how those same factors could be responsible for a resurgence of Democrats in Southern House races.

LITERATURE REVIEW

One possible explanation of continued Democratic success in the South post-1994 is the incumbency advantage. Ansolabehere and Snyder (2002) hold that in competitive elections, incumbent officeholders are more likely to win office than a non-incumbent candidate of the same party (24). For congressmen with a particularly strong personal brand, it is possible that their retirement was necessary for Republicans to win the seat, after which the prevailing political winds in the region were able to cement Republican control. Additionally, Jacobson (2015) notes that the incumbency advantage in U.S. House elections reached its zenith in the 1980s, and subsequently declined to historic lows by 2014 (862). As such, even in the absence of retirements, Democratic incumbents may have found that their incumbency yielded diminishing returns each election until they were finally defeated.

A second potential explanation of the successes and failures of Southern Democratic House members comes from the creation of majority-minority districts. Petrocik and Desposato (1998) address the theory that the creation of majority-minority districts after the 1990 redistricting cycle led to the massive defeats the House Democrats suffered in 1992 and 1994, by packing Black voters into few districts and reducing the reliably-Democratic Black vote share in other districts. The authors simulate the effects different racial compositions within a district would have on the outcome of its elections. They conclude that while larger proportions of Black constituents increase the Democratic margin in each district, it was the precipitous drop in white support for

Democratic candidates that sunk the election of many Democrats in the 1992 and 1994 elections. This suggests that a lower proportion of Black voters and a generally pro-GOP electoral environment were both necessary for these Democrats' defeat (616). The New York Times regularly publishes exit poll results for congressional elections. According to that data, over the 12 election cycles analyzed in this paper, an average of 89.8% of Black voters supported the Democratic candidate. For Hispanic voters, that figure was 66.1%, and for White voters it was 43%. As more white voters defect from the Democratic party, the threshold of minority voters necessary for a Democrat to win a majority-white district in the South rises. Some of the lingering Democrats in the South after 1995 could be explained by lower than average percentages of non-Hispanic White voters in their districts.

The strength of the state Democratic party, as seen through the results of simultaneous elections, could affect the results of U.S. House elections. The "coattails" effect, wherein a successful presidential candidate drives up the margins for other candidates of his party, has been observed for decades (see Calvert & Freejohn (1983); Moreland (1973), and Mondak (1990)). Election results in other offices reflect the strength of the party in the state, as quantified in the model developed by Ceaser and Saldin (2005). States with Democratic-controlled legislatures, governorships, and Senate seats would indicate a stronger organization for the Democratic party in that state. A strong state party organization helps candidates of the party by providing campaign resources and centralized fundraising (Herrnson 2009, 1210–1), thus prolonging Democratic victories in a district.

The shift away from Democrats in the South accompanied an urbanization and suburbanization trend in the region. Slocum (2011) explores the relationship between the growth of the Atlanta suburbs and the Republican vote, finding that beginning in the mid 20th century, nearly all the Republican growth in the state originated in the Atlanta suburbs. In fact, it was not until the 1990s that rural Georgia began to turn away from the Democratic party in gubernatorial and senatorial elections. (90). This trend was prevalent across the South during the same time period. However, as of the 116th Congress, nearly all Democratic members of the House, (including those in the South) are from urban and suburban areas, corresponding to the Democratic Party's increasing margins in urban and suburban areas (Hopkins 2019). New York Times exit poll data indicates that in 1994, 43% of rural voters supported Democratic candidates; by 2010 that figure had fallen to 36%. The percentage of a district's residents that reside in urban areas can affect the viability of a party's candidate in that district.

HYPOTHESES

My first hypothesis is that incumbent Democrats in the House were able to hold on to their seats after the 1994 Republican wave, but once they retired, they were replaced by Republicans. I predict that the null hypothesis is true in this case, given that some research has shown that the incumbency bonus seen in the 20th century declined over the course of the analysis period.

My second hypothesis is that districts in which Democrats survived between 1994 and 2008 had lower percentages of non-Hispanic white residents than districts that flipped Republican in 1994. Given that exit poll data shows white Americans are more likely than any other racial group to vote for Republican House candidates, a larger number of non-Hispanic white residents would correlate to greater success for the GOP in those districts. While most congressional districts in the South are majority-white, a larger population of racial minorities could have offset falling white support to some degree.

My third hypothesis is that Democratic representatives fared better in states where Democrats retained control of statewide offices, namely governorships, senators, and state legislative chambers. Democratic control of statewide offices indicates a stronger party organization, which would help Democratic candidates for House seats.

My fourth hypothesis is that Democratic candidates fared better in districts where a higher percentage of the population lived in urban areas. As the rural vote shifted more Republican in relation to urban vote, Democrats with a higher level of urban population

in their districts would stand a better chance of retaining their seat by running up their margin in urban areas, even if the district was still predominantly rural.

DATA

I collected data on all House general elections beginning in 1992 in the South as defined by the Census Bureau: the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.

I did not collect data on House special elections, since these elections are characterized by low voter turnout and are not necessarily predictive of general election performance (Cohn 2018). This amounts to 2,159 elections used as cases in my analysis. A good deal of my analysis centers on the period between 1994 and 2008, for which there are 1,212 cases. While any definition of the region will inherently attract contention, the U.S. Census Bureau defines the South as the states that allowed slavery at the outset of the Civil War, minus Missouri and plus Oklahoma. Given that Census data forms the bulk of the evidence I use in this paper and that the slave state/free state cleavage informs much of the political differences between the South and the rest of the nation, I find that this definition suits the purposes of this paper.

Each case is listed as a specific election in a specific year: for example, the 1992 election in Alabama's 1st congressional district is one unit. Using congressional districts as a unit of analysis presents some challenges due to the impermanence of their borders. By law, they are required to change once per decade in order to maintain equal population between them. In addition, sometimes congressional districts are redrawn in the middle of a decade. This can be due to a court finding that the districts are unfairly

gerrymandered on a partisan basis (such as Florida's 2016 redistricting) (Klas 2015) or racial basis (Louisiana in 1994 and 1996) (*Hays v. State*, 1996), or a state party gerrymandering districts in their favor after taking control of the state legislature mid-decade (Texas in 2004) (Toobin 2006). Since every election could feature a different set of district boundaries, data needs to be collected on a district-year basis.

For demographic data, I relied on the 1990, 2000, and 2010 U.S. Censuses, as well as the American Community Survey, which has operated continuously since 2005. Before 2005, demographic data on congressional districts were only available for the 106th and 109th Congresses (elected in 1998 and 2004, respectively). Thus, I was unable to directly collect data for the 1992, 1994, 1996, 2000, and 2002 elections. I imputed the data where possible. Where there were at least two data points for a certain congressional district shape, I extrapolated the trend to fill in the missing data. For example, Tennessee's 4th Congressional district had an average increase in its high school graduation rate of 1.1% every two years between 2004 and 2010. Since I did not have data for the district in 2002, I subtracted 1.1% from the 2004 value and entered it for 2002. When a congressional district had only a single data point, I copied that point for the other elections under those same boundaries. While any imputed value will be imprecise to some degree, the demographic figures tend to change very little year-over-year, so it is unlikely that imputed value greatly differs from the actual value.

After these corrections, 156 cases (7.2%) do not have urbanization data and 160 cases (7.4%) do not have racial data. These missing values are due to mid-decade redistricting events that happened in Georgia (1996), Louisiana (1994, 1996), North Carolina (1998), and Texas (1996, 2004) The additional four cases of missing racial data

are due to omissions in the Census Bureau datasets. Since these redistricting events occurred before the American Community Survey began collecting continuous demographic data, no demographic data was ever collected for those district shapes. The missing data is distributed randomly with respect to the values—whether a district had high or low levels of urbanization, education, or white population has no bearing on whether the data is missing. I do not believe these omissions significantly hamper my analysis.

For each case (where possible), I collected the following data:

1. Whether the Democratic candidate won the race
2. Whether the race featured one or more incumbent members of the House
3. Whether the election was the first held after the state was redistricted
4. Whether the state’s governor was a Democrat
5. Whether the state legislature was wholly or partially controlled by Democrats
6. Whether the state’s U.S. Senators were Democrats
7. Whether the state voted for the Democratic candidate in the most recent presidential election
8. The district’s Democratic Party Strength (DPS) score (explained below)
9. The percentage of the district’s residents who identified as non-Hispanic whites
10. The percentage of the district’s residents who lived in census tracts defined as “urban” by the Census Bureau

Categories 1–3 relate to the characteristics of the election itself. Categories 4–7 relate to the strength of other Democrats in the state in which the election was held. Categories 8–11 relate to the demographic features of the district.

For category 1, I used the “Congressional Election Statistics” reports that the Clerk of the House of Representatives publishes following each general election. These reports detail the number of votes each candidate received in all 435 House elections for the given election year. I retrieved the data for category 2 by cross-referencing the names of the candidates in the election reports with the names in the previous Congress’s “Official Alphabetical List of the House of Representatives”, a report also published by the Clerk of the House on the “Congress Profiles” page. This allowed me to determine whether the candidate in any given election was already a member of the House when the election took place.

For category 3, I used the congressional district shapefiles created by Lewis et al. (2019). These shapefiles are published for each congress, and so by comparing the shapes between congresses I was able to determine whether a district’s boundaries had changed. While it is customary for states to shift district boundaries according to the results of each decennial census, there were several mid-decade redistricting events in many states across the South between 1992 and 2018, making a careful analysis of district boundaries necessary.

For category 4, I used the lists of former governors that the National Governors Association published for each state, accompanied by the dates that their terms began and ended, to determine the result of the most recent gubernatorial election for each case. For category 5, I used the “Timelines of Partisan Composition” published by the National Conference of State Legislatures to determine the partisan composition of each state legislature following each election. For category 6, I used the U.S. Senate’s chronological

list of Senators. For category 7, I used the election results published by Dave Leip on uselectionatlas.org.

Using the data from categories 4 through 7, I gave each district a Democratic Party Strength (DPS) score, ranging from 0 to 4. In each of categories 4 through 7, I assigned Democratic control a value of 1, split control (in the case of the state's Senators or state legislature) a value of 0.5, and Republican control a value of 0. The DPS score is a simple sum of the four values from categories 4 through 7. This is a simplified version of the Ceaser and Saldin's model mentioned above: I use the same four elections, but rather than average the share of the vote each party received in those elections, I use win/split/lose categories. To implement their model exactly, I would have had to aggregate thousands of election results across nearly three decades, and the constraints of this project did not allow me to embark on such a massive data collection project for a single variable. Since all of the elections I use to calculate the district's DPS score are held statewide, all districts within a given state will have the same DPS score as the other districts in that state for that election cycle.

For categories 9 and 10, I used the American Community Survey and U.S. Census data available through the Census Bureau's American Fact Finder application (AFF has since been decommissioned, with the data being moved to a new application on the Census Bureau's website). For each Congress, beginning with the 109th (elected in 2004), the American Community Survey publishes demographic figures, including race, aggregated by congressional district. Before the 109th Congress, demographic data on congressional districts was published only for the 106th Congress. For congressional elections for which there was not exact demographic data on the district, I imputed the

data as described above. These demographic figures are published as raw population numbers. Because there is some variance in population between congressional districts, I converted the population figures to percentages by dividing them by the total population of the congressional district as reported by the Census Bureau. As mentioned above, mid-decade redistricting led to there being no demographic data available for some congressional districts.

The data for category 10 is determined by the Census Bureau following each census. Like the racial data in category 9, the Census Bureau published figures for congressional districts for the 106th Congress and for every Congress since the 109th. The Census Bureau defines urban population as those living within a continuously built-up area of 50,000 or more people, along with those living in incorporated places of 2,500 or more people. This somewhat generous definition of “urban” encompasses those living in cities, suburbs, and small towns. The Census Bureau only updates this data decennially, unlike the demographic data which has updated annually since 2005; however, they have revised figures for mid-decade redistricting events since 2005.

CASE STUDY

The phenomena at play in Southern House districts can be illustrated by comparing Kentucky's 1st congressional district (hereafter referred to as KY-1) and Arkansas's 1st congressional district (AR-1). KY-1 takes the far western reaches of Kentucky, snaking around Bowling Green to also include some counties in the south-central part of the commonwealth. The primary population centers in the district are Paducah, Henderson, and Hopkinsville, the last of which is the only city in the district with over 30,000 people (Census Bureau Quickfacts). AR-1 centers on the northeast corner of Arkansas, and in 2010 grew to encompass the entire eastern border of the state. The largest city in the district is Jonesboro, home to Arkansas State University, with a population of nearly 70,000; however, like Hopkinsville, Jonesboro is the only city in the district to surpass the 30,000 mark in population (Quickfacts). The districts are separated by less than 40 miles at their nearest points to one another and both are the only districts in their respective states to border the Mississippi River. According to a report published by the US Department of Agriculture in 2017, the districts are both heavily agricultural and have a large number of family farms, indicating similar ways of life for citizens of the two districts.

Currently, the two districts also resemble one another politically. As of 2020, one would characterize both Kentucky and Arkansas as deeply Republican states on nearly all levels, and the districts themselves haven't been considered competitive for several cycles. The Cook Political Report gives KY-1 a Partisan Voting Index score of R+23,

and AR-1 a PVI of R+17. The PVI measures how a district is expected to vote relative to the entire nation, so these scores mean that in a hypothetically tied national election, the Republican candidate would be expected to win KY-1 by 23 points and AR-1 by 17 points (Wasserman & Flinn 2017).

These districts share a common political history. From Reconstruction until the end of the 20th century, these districts elected an unbroken string of Democrats (Kentucky Historical Society; CSPAN, 2010). In 1994, this changed with Republican Ed Whitfield beating one-term incumbent Democrat Tom Barlow in KY-1 by less than one percentage point. Meanwhile in AR-1, one-term Democratic incumbent congresswoman Blanche Lincoln (née Lambert—she married and changed her name sometime between 1994 and 1996) won reelection by about seven percentage points. KY-1 has been in the Republican column ever since the 1994 elections, while AR-1 continued to elect Democratic representatives until the 2010 election, when Republican Rick Crawford won by about eight percentage points after incumbent Marion Berry retired. Although the districts share many features, they have several differences that could explain this 16-year divergence in their political behavior.

I analyzed several data points for KY-1 and AR-1 between 1992, the last election in which both districts elected Democrats, and 2010, the first election in which both districts elected Republicans. The two districts differ in urbanization. An average of 37.1% of the population of KY-1 lived in urban areas, compared to an average of 45.0% of the population of AR-1. The districts also differ in their racial composition. The average percentage of the population that identified as non-Hispanic white was 90.1% for KY-1 and 80.2% for AR-1. The two districts' DPS scores differed greatly. Over the

course of the analysis period, KY-1 had an average DPS score of 1.95, while AR-1 had an average score of 2.7. This indicates that the Democratic party was much stronger in Arkansas than it was in Kentucky between 1994 and 2010. Indeed, the only Republican win in Arkansas before 2010 was Tim Hutchinson's successful Senate campaign in 1996, and he lost his first reelection bid to Democrat Mark Pryor in 2002. On the other hand, Kentucky's state legislature was split between a Democratic House and Republican Senate following the 1996 elections, Kentucky's last Democratic U.S. Senator left office in 1998, and Republican Ernie Fletcher was in the Governor's Mansion between 2003 and 2007.

This data gives insight into possible reasons why AR-1 stayed in the Democratic Column for a decade and a half after KY-1 flipped Republican. With higher urban and nonwhite populations, AR-1 contains more voters who are considered part of the Democratic base. Additionally, results in other Arkansas elections during the analysis period indicate that the Arkansas Democratic Party was in a stronger position than the Kentucky Democratic Party, which may have helped Representatives Lincoln and Berry stay in office. In 2020, any Southern congressional district like AR-1 that is both majority-rural and over four-fifths white would be predicted as safely Republican, and with good reason. However, during the transitional period between 1994 and 2010, AR-1's slightly higher concentration of typically-Democratic voting blocks may have been able to sustain the Democrats' hold on the seat.

ANALYSIS

The simplest hypothesis for the lingering Democratic strength in Southern House elections after 1994 is that incumbent Democrats maintained their seats due to their personal relationship with their districts. Without an incumbent in the race, voters might rely more heavily on the image of the party each candidate represents, rather than the candidates' personal brands, when making their decision at the ballot box. In the South during this time period, this would benefit the Republicans. However, this hypothesis is not borne out by the data.

I analyzed 1,212 individual House elections in the south between 1994 (the year Republicans took control of the chamber) and 2008 (the last election before the decimation of Southern House Democrats in 2010). Of these elections, 1,090 featured at least one incumbent candidate, while 122 races featured no incumbent (commonly referred to as “open seats”). I define incumbent candidates as those who held office in the House of Representatives at the time of the election. Due to redistricting, sometimes two incumbent Representatives ran against one another in the general election: these are put into the same classification as elections featuring only one incumbent.

Fig. 2

Democratic Win by Incumbency

Count		Type of Race		Total
		Open Seat	Featuring Incumbent(s)	
Party of Winning Candidate	GOP	75	623	698
	Dem.	47	467	514
Total		122	1090	1212

Democrats won 467 of the races featuring at least one incumbent, about 42.8%. Democrats won 47 of the open seat races, about 38.5%. While the data shows that for this time period incumbent Democrats won more often than Democratic candidates for open seats, a Pearson's Chi Square analysis of the crosstab yields a p value of .360, indicating that incumbency and a Democratic victory are not significantly correlated. Even though Democrats did perform slightly better in races featuring incumbents during this time period in the south, the data are not conclusive enough to determine whether this is actually due to some kind of incumbency bonus or simply the result of random chance.

My second hypothesis is that higher levels of nonwhite voters in a district led to some Democrats being able to maintain their seats for a few election cycles, until the increasingly Republican white vote became too big an obstacle to overcome. Thus, a Southern Democrat in a district that was only 60% non-Hispanic white would be able to last longer in Congress than one in a district that was 75% non-Hispanic white.

Fig. 3

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
WHITE	1054	.126	.985	.67726	.213856
Valid N (listwise)	1054				

Fig. 4a

Elections 1994-2008

	Party of Winner	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Non-Hispanic White	GOP	601	.75384	.151161	.006166
	Dem.	453	.57566	.240979	.011322

Fig. 4b

		Independent Samples Test									
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances					t-test for Equality of Means			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper	
Non-Hispanic White	Equal variances assumed	234.323	.000	14.694	1052	.000	.178177	.012126	.154383	.201972	
	Equal variances not assumed			13.820	712.645	.000	.178177	.012892	.152866	.203489	

As shown in Figure 3, between 1994 and 2008, the mean House election in the South took place in a district that was 67.7% non-Hispanic white, ranging from a minimum of 12.6% (Texas’s 9th district in 2008) to a maximum of 98.5% (Kentucky’s 5th district in 1994). The standard deviation between the districts was 21.4%. Figure 4 shows the difference between districts won by Democrats and those won by Republicans regarding the mean percentage of non-Hispanic white residents. The mean percent non-Hispanic white in districts won by the Democratic candidate during that time period is 57.6%—for elections won by the Republican, 75.4%. An independent samples t-test of the data yields a p-value of .000, indicating that between 1994 and 2008, Republicans definitively won more often in districts with higher percentages of non-Hispanic white residents.

Fig. 5a

		Elections 1992				
		Party of Winner	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Non-Hispanic White	GOP		58	.81531	.141201	.018541
	Dem.		89	.66891	.218433	.023154

Fig. 5b

		Independent Samples Test									
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances					t-test for Equality of Means			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper	
Non-Hispanic White	Equal variances assumed	23.362	.000	4.523	145	.000	.146400	.032370	.082423	.210378	
	Equal variances not assumed			4.936	144.996	.000	.146400	.029662	.087774	.205027	

Fig. 6a

Elections 2010

	Part of Winner	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Non-Hispanic White	GOP	106	.66806	.154984	.015053
	Dem.	48	.42392	.209823	.030285

Fig. 6b

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Non-Hispanic White	Equal variances assumed	10.574	.001	8.074	152	.000	.244140	.030237	.184402	.303878
	Equal variances not assumed			7.219	71.148	.000	.244140	.033820	.176707	.311573

To understand how this finding relates to the effect non-Hispanic white population had on Democratic success in Southern House districts on either side of the main partisan transitional period, I analyzed the mean non-Hispanic white populations in districts won by each party in both 1992, when Democrats still held a majority of Southern seats, and in 2010, when nearly all Southern Democratic House members had been wiped out. As illustrated in figure 5, the mean percent non-Hispanic white in districts won by Democratic candidates in the 1992 elections was 66.9%, compared to 81.5% for Republican-won districts. The difference in the means between the two parties is significant, meaning that Republican-won districts in the South were whiter than Democrat-won districts even before the Republican Revolution in 1994. However, the average percentage of white residents in Democratic-won districts in 1992 was much higher than in the period between 1994 and 2008. Figure 6 shows the same figures for the 2010 House elections, where Democrat-won districts averaged 42.4% non-Hispanic white, and Republican-won districts averaged 66.8%. This shows a much larger racial

gap between Democrat- and Republican-won districts and the average percent non-Hispanic white in Democratic districts falling below 50%.

Fig. 7

Share Non-Hispanic White in Districts won by Democrats

WHITE			
YEAR	Mean	Minimum	Maximum
1994	.62848	.198	.972
1996	.62837	.198	.972
1998	.62873	.198	.972
2000	.62152	.198	.972
2002	.57577	.148	.963
2004	.51040	.141	.958
2006	.51563	.131	.948
2008	.52855	.126	.947
Total	.57566	.126	.972

Knowing that information, the question remains as to whether the percentage of non-Hispanic white residents in districts won by Democrats significantly decreased within the transitional period of 1994–2008. As seen in Figure 7, the mean percentage of non-Hispanic white residents in district won by Democrats declined from 62.8% in 1994 to 52.9% in 2008, even as the total number of Democrats elected stayed in a narrow range during those years.

Fig. 8

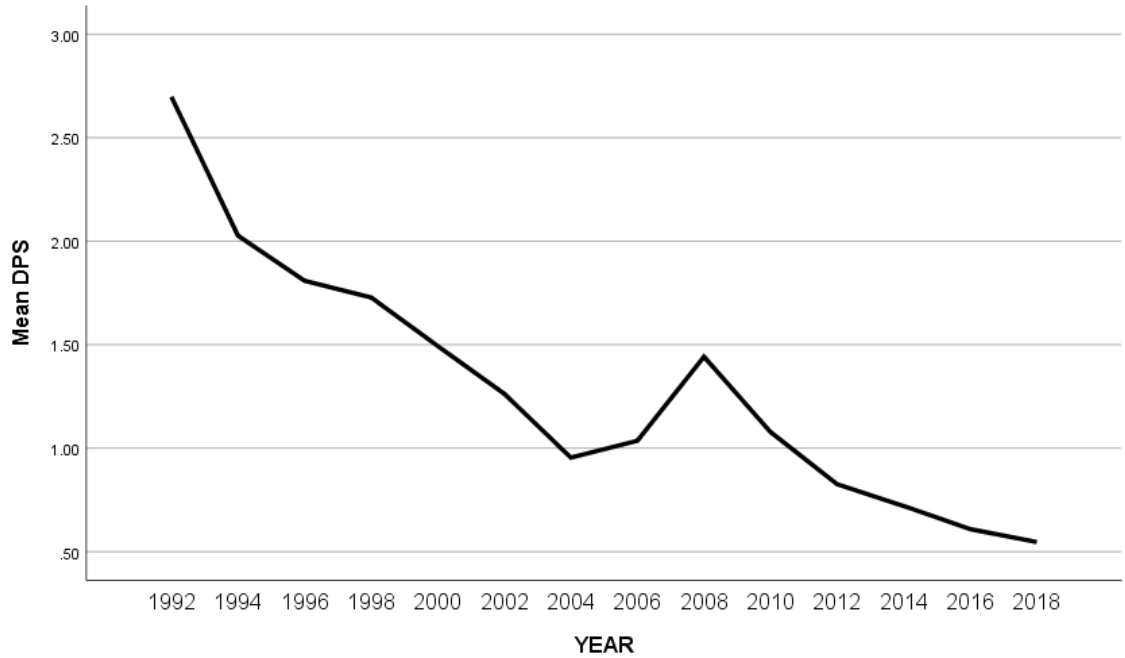
ANOVA

WHITE					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.206	7	.172	3.063	.004
Within Groups	25.042	445	.056		
Total	26.248	452			

As shown in Figure 8, I conducted a One-Way ANOVA test among all elections that Democrats won in the South between 1994 and 2008 for which the racial makeup of the district was available. This test was to determine whether the distribution of the percentage of non-Hispanic white residents in these districts was significantly different across each election cycle (8 cycles in total). The test yielded a p-value of .004 and thus determined the differences in the distributions to be significant. Between 1994 and 2008, as whiter districts fell to Republicans, they were replaced by Democratic pickups in less-white districts. The results of the 2010 election, when Democrats went from holding 71 seats in the House to just 48 and the average percent non-Hispanic white in Democratic districts fell precipitously, indicates that this process of Democrats exchanging whiter districts for less-white districts failed as whites stopped voting for Democratic House candidates en masse. These findings support the hypothesis that lower non-Hispanic white populations helped Democrats to continue to be elected in certain districts.

My third hypothesis is that superior party infrastructure led to the maintenance of Democratic seats in some states while states with weaker Democratic Party infrastructure shed their Democratic House seats more quickly. A stronger state Democratic Party (in terms of candidate recruitment, fundraising, and field operations) would logically be able to deliver wins in other offices in addition to House elections. As discussed above, I created a Democratic Party Strength (DPS) score for each district in each election year using data from concurrent elections in the state to measure state party strength.

Fig. 9



To give a general picture of Democratic party strength in the South between 1992 and 2018, figure 9 shows the mean DPS score for all congressional districts over the course of the analysis period. The trend somewhat mirrors that of the percentage of seats won by Democrats in the South shown in figure 1: dwindling sharply after 1992, then a resurgence peaking in 2008, followed by another sharp decline. However, the percentage of seats won by Democrats largely plateaued between 1994 and 2008, while the average DPS score in the South declined steadily except for a brief uptick following the 2006 and 2008 elections.

Fig. 10a

Elections 1994-2008

	Party of Winning Candidate	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Average DPS	GOP	698	1.4155	1.08730	.04116
	Dem.	514	1.5302	1.19639	.05277

Fig. 10b

		Independent Samples Test								
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
DPS	Equal variances assumed	7.220	.007	-1.739	1210	.082	-.11468	.06596	-.24409	.01472
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.714	1042.866	.087	-.11468	.06692	-.24600	.01663

Figure 10 shows the mean DPS scores for districts won by Democrats versus those won by Republicans between 1994 and 2008. Democratic-won districts have a slightly higher mean DPS score than Republican-won districts, at 1.53 vs 1.42. With a significance of .082, the difference between the means approaches, but does not reach, statistical significance. This indicates that between 1994 and 2008, the DPS scores of Democratic-won and Republican-won districts were not significantly different, and that DPS as expressed through the results of other simultaneous elections did not have much impact on Southern Democratic House candidates' success.

Fig. 11a

Elections 1992					
	Party of the Winning Candidate	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Mean DPS	GOP	58	2.6983	.82685	.10857
	Dem.	91	2.6978	.88154	.09241

Fig. 11b

		Independent Samples Test								
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Mean DPS	Equal variances assumed	.091	.763	.003	147	.997	.00047	.14462	-.28533	.28628
	Equal variances not assumed			.003	127.217	.997	.00047	.14257	-.28165	.28260

Fig. 12a

Elections 2010

	Party of the Winning Candidate	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Mean DPS	GOP	106	.9009	1.08764	.10564
	Dem.	48	1.4688	1.46377	.21128

Fig. 12b

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Mean DPS	Equal variances assumed	7.395	.007	-2.683	152	.008	-.56781	.21163	-.98592	-.14970
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.404	71.440	.019	-.56781	.23622	-1.03876	-.09686

Knowing this about the transitional period between 1994 and 2008, I move to analyze the elections immediately preceding and following that timeframe. As illustrated in figures 11 and 12, the difference in mean DPS score for districts won by each party was not significant in 1992, but it was significant in 2010. In 1992, the mean DPS score of districts won by each party was nearly identical, indicating that just as many House Democrats won in states where the Democratic Party was relatively strong as in states where it was relatively weak. By 2010, with the average DPS score of Southern states being so low, more Democratic House candidates held on in the few states where the Democratic Party had even mild success.

This analysis indicates that there is not a strong relationship between state Democratic Party strength as expressed through simultaneous election results and individual Democrats' fortunes in House elections between 1994 and 2008, although the relationship between DPS score and Democratic victory in House districts became more significant after the number of Southern Democrats in the House greatly decreased. This

could be due to my calculation of DPS scores not accurately reflecting state party strength, or because state party strength had little bearing on House elections in the South during the analysis period. Further research would be necessary to answer that question.

My fourth hypothesis is that Democrats performed better in districts where a larger share of the population lived in urban areas. As the rural voting block began to support Republicans at a higher rate, Southern Democrats with larger urban populations in their districts may have been able to hold on longer than their fellow Democrats with less-urban districts.

Fig. 13

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Share Urban	1097	.212	1.000	.72227	.209414
Valid N (listwise)	1097				

Fig. 14a

Elections 1994-2008

	Party of the winning Candidate	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Share Urban	GOP	635	.70710	.194221	.007707
	Dem.	462	.74312	.227222	.010571

Fig. 14b

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Share Urban	Equal variances assumed	51.751	.000	-2.822	1095	.005	-.036027	.012765	-.061074	-.010980
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.754	897.057	.006	-.036027	.013083	-.061704	-.010351

Figure 13 shows the range of urbanization among Southern congressional districts between 1994 and 2008. The mean percentage of the population of a congressional

district living in urban areas is 72.2%, with a minimum of 21.2% (Kentucky's 5th district between 1992 and 2000) and several districts being 100% urban. The standard deviation between the districts was 20.9%. Figure 14 compares the mean urban population of Republican-won and Democratic-won districts between 1994 and 2008. The mean percent urban of Republican-won districts is 70.7%, and for Democratic-won districts it is 74.3%. The difference between the two means is significant at the .01 level, meaning that the data supports the hypothesis that Democrats did better in districts with higher urban populations.

Fig. 15a

Elections 1992

	Party of the Winning Candidate	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Share Urban	GOP	41	.77083	.175915	.027473
	Dem.	65	.67645	.231596	.028726

Fig. 15b

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Share Urban	Equal variances assumed	8.378	.005	2.233	104	.028	.094383	.042264	.010571	.178195
	Equal variances not assumed			2.374	100.325	.019	.094383	.039749	.015526	.173241

Fig. 16a

Elections 2010

	Party of the Winning Candidate	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Share Urban	GOP	106	.68121	.191005	.018552
	Dem.	48	.82723	.203651	.029395

Fig. 16b

		Independent Samples Test								
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances			t-test for Equality of Means				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Share Urban	Equal variances assumed	.289	.592	-4.304	152	.000	-.146022	.033926	-.213048	-.078995
	Equal variances not assumed			-4.201	85.807	.000	-.146022	.034759	-.215123	-.076920

I also analyzed the elections immediately preceding and following the analysis period in order to gauge the importance of urbanization on Democratic performance in Southern House elections before and after the partisan transitional period. Figure 15 compares the mean urban population share of Republican-won and Democratic-won districts in the 1992 election cycle. Interestingly, the mean urban population share for Republican districts was 77.1%, nearly ten percentage points higher than the Democratic mean of 67.4%. This is the inverse of the pattern seen between 1994 and 2008. However, the difference between these means does not reach statistical significance, and so the evidence is inconclusive. Figure 16 shows the same data for the 2010 election cycle. In this election, the mean urban population share for Republican districts was 68.1%, about 15 percentage points lower than the Democratic mean of 82.7%. This result is significant at the .05 level. This is a much wider gap than what was seen between 1994 and 2008.

Fig. 17

**Share of Total District Population
Living in Urban Areas in Democratic
Districts**

URBAN			
YEAR	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
1994	.70075	53	.235674
1996	.76195	56	.224848
1998	.74648	62	.224921
2000	.74362	61	.222756
2002	.71550	44	.235809
2004	.75222	50	.234744
2006	.76363	65	.223606
2008	.74848	71	.226638
Total	.74312	462	.227222

Like with the non-Hispanic white variable mentioned earlier, I investigated districts won by Democrats between 1994 and 2008 to determine if these districts became more urban over the course of the analysis period. Figure 17 shows the mean share of district residents living in urban areas for each election cycle. While there was an increase from 70.1% in 1994 to 74.8% in 2008, the change in the figure between each election cycle ranged from a 6.1% increase between 1994 and 1996 to a 2.8% decrease between 2000 and 2002.

Fig. 18

ANOVA

URBAN					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.183	7	.026	.502	.833
Within Groups	23.619	454	.052		
Total	23.801	461			

To determine the significance of the differences in the distributions of urban resident percentage, I ran a one-way ANOVA test of all Democratic-won districts across the 8 election cycles between 1994 and 2008, as seen in figure 18. The test resulted in a p value of .833, strongly indicating that there is not a significant difference in variation of the distributions of urban population among these districts. This shows that the urban population share in Democratic districts in the South remained relatively stable between 1994 and 2008, in contrast to the decreasing non-Hispanic white population share seen in Democratic-won districts over the same time period.

CONCLUSION

Out of the four hypotheses, the second and fourth hypothesis have the most support. Districts in the South that were less white and more urban were more likely to continue to elect Democrats to the House after 1994. Incumbency and state party strength do not seem to factor heavily into Democratic success in the South after 1994.

Although much of the history of the South is one of political unity, this investigation into a key period of political transition for the region can shed some light on the coalitions that create the South's current political reality. Nonwhite voters and urban voters are seen as important to Democratic electoral success across the entirety of the United States, and while those voters are not numerous enough to deliver victories for Democrats in much of the South, it is important to acknowledge their importance in prolonging Democratic strength in some pockets. Additionally, the findings of this paper indicate that while the South has long been seen as politically distinct from the rest of the country, in the last few decades the political coalitions in the region have come to more closely mirror those found nationwide. With increasing Democratic success in suburban districts, regardless of the region of the country, the era of the "Solid South" may be drawing to a close.

In the future, further analysis on the Democratic Party's performance in Southern House districts could investigate how other factors such as education, candidate ideology, or subregions within the South affect electoral outcomes. The time frame of the study could also be shifted to determine how the variables explored in this paper or other factors contributed to Southern electoral outcomes during other times in history.

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