

*Introduction: The 2004 Presidential Election
and Southern Politics*

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We are pleased to serve as guest editors of this special double issue of *The American Review of Politics*. The articles which follow all relate to how the 2004 presidential election played out in the eleven states of the Old Confederacy and, at least by implication, to how partisan change in these states has impacted national politics.

This series of articles largely reflects the concept and format of the series of five volumes, all published by Praeger Publishers, which we began with the 1984 presidential election. The first three of these volumes were coedited by us together with our friend and colleague, the late Tod A. Baker, with the last two volumes edited by us after Tod's retirement.¹ In all five volumes in the series, our contributors sought to place southern politics in the context of national politics, and they worked to provide insights into a politically increasingly important region of the country where partisan change since the 1960s has been pervasive across the region and where it has had powerful implications for the Republican Party and, in turn, our nation's politics.

The articles which follow detail the 2004 presidential election in the South in the context of the massive political, economic, and social changes which have characterized the region since V.O. Key's seminal work at mid-century, *Southern Politics in State and Nation*. Our contributors are distinguished, published scholars with nearly all of them specializing in some combination of southern politics and presidential politics. We are more than appreciative that Praeger published the five preceding volumes in the series, but since that publisher's recent changes in editorial policy have precluded continuing the series with them, we are especially grateful to Brinck Kerr, the Editor of *The American Review of Politics*, for giving us this extraordinary opportunity to continue the series for 2004 in the pages of this distinguished journal.

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The Importance of the 2004 Presidential Election in the South

The 2004 presidential election—while nationally competitive, even close, in terms of electoral votes—was one that was largely uncontested in the South, except for Florida (and the Democrats’ hopes of carrying even that state faded as election day approached). Nevertheless, what happens in the South is important, even critical, to national politics. A fairly persuasive case can be made that the current state of national partisan politics—that is, a near parity nationally with attendant divisiveness and an unending relentlessness as each party jockeys for even the slightest advantage—can be traced to the rise of the Republicans in the South and their seeming entrenchment as the dependable and normal winners virtually region-wide in presidential politics. Indeed, in a region where Republican presidential candidates generally did not win in the first half of the 20th century (the exception being 1928 when five rim South states voted for the Republican Herbert Hoover rather than the Democratic—and Catholic—Al Smith), the Republican Party began to grow in the latter half of the century, eventually reaching a dominating position by the 1990s. In the seven presidential elections since 1980, Republican presidential candidates swept all eleven states of the old South in four of them. In a fifth (1980), Republicans carried ten of the eleven southern states (Jimmy Carter, in his reelection bid in 1980, carried only one southern state, his home state of Georgia). Only the all-southern tag team of Bill Clinton (of Arkansas) and Al Gore (of Tennessee) managed to buck a 25-year trend by prying off four of the eleven southern states in both 1992 and 1996. But the Democrats were unable to capitalize on these inroads as George W. Bush returned the South to the Republican fold by carrying all eleven states in both 2000 and 2004.

Why then is southern politics of interest or importance to the nation at large? If electoral contests in the South, at least at the presidential level, are mostly Republican affairs, why bother keeping current with political developments in the region? The answer lies in the implications of Republican success in the South for national politics, and the remainder of this introduction will examine the importance of southern politics and its implications for national politics together with some attention as to how southern voters differ from voters in other regions in the context of the 2004 presidential elections.

The Rise of the South in Presidential Politics

What happens in the South is important, particularly for presidential elections, for three reasons. First, the South plays a disproportionate role in the primary process which ultimately results in the selection of presidential

nominees. Second, the success of the Republican “southern strategy” has resulted in a large and often unified bloc of electoral votes that works against the election of Democratic presidents. Third, the South’s increasing share of presidential electoral votes elevates and enhances the position of the South in influencing the direction of national politics.

Southern Presidential Primaries

The idea of a southern regional primary dates to at least 1975, an idea spearheaded by the Southern Legislative Conference (one of four regional legislative groups, operating under the Council of State Governments, which encourages intergovernmental cooperation at the state level) (see especially Stanley and Hadley 1987; see also Bullock 1991; Clark and Haynes 2002). Beginning to push the idea seriously in 1985, the Southern Legislative Conference succeeded in getting the regional primary concept implemented in 1988. Mostly promoted by Democrats who thought it would help shift attention to the South as well as smooth the way for a moderate candidate from the South to obtain the Democratic presidential nomination, ten of the eleven southern states (plus Kentucky and five non-southern states) participated in the first of the Super Tuesday events, held early in the primary season (in early March 1988).

South Carolina, however, chose not to participate in the regional Super Tuesday but instead eventually succeeded in scheduling a primary on the Saturday before Super Tuesday. Although the Iowa caucuses and the New Hampshire primary, both held in January of presidential years, continued to attract enormous media and candidate attention, the South Carolina primary became known as the “gateway to the South.” Unlike Iowa and New Hampshire, South Carolina has a large minority population, important for Democratic candidates; in addition, the state was often seen as a precursor for what might happen a few days later on Super Tuesday. For candidates who did not do well in either Iowa or New Hampshire, South Carolina became—and remains—a crucial, “firewall” state, almost essential to maintaining a candidacy. For example, in 1988, George H.W. Bush virtually assured his nomination (over Senator Robert Dole) by winning South Carolina’s “gateway” primary, then sweeping the remaining ten states of the old Confederacy. Similarly, in 2000, after a surprise loss to Senator John McCain in the New Hampshire primary, Governor George W. Bush stopped the bleeding by winning South Carolina’s bitterly fought primary, going on to win the other southern primaries and the nomination (and, eventually, the general election) (see Clark and Haynes 2002).

Today, the influence of southern primaries has been somewhat dissipated by each party’s tweaking of its primary season by rescheduling both

southern and nonsouthern primaries so that the primary season is now front-loaded, which generally works to the advantage of pre-primary frontrunners. For example, in 2004 South Carolina shared its primary date with five other (non-southern) primary states and one caucus state (a GOP caucus in Virginia).

Even so, the South Carolina primary, as the first in the region and one of the first in the nation, retains great potential for candidates as they try to move successfully through the “gateway” to the South. To be sure, the 2004 South Carolina Democratic primary was something of an anomaly, since it was won by Senator John Edwards. Edwards’ victory in the state appeared attributable to the fact that he was born in the state, represented a neighboring state in the U.S. Senate, and gave the state a very high priority in terms of time and money. Senator John Kerry, however, could not be stopped as he moved toward the nomination without much serious challenge after the Super Tuesday primaries. However, South Carolina’s high priority status for presidential aspirants has already received early confirmation for the 2008 nominations: in the first eight months of 2005 nine potential Republican and Democratic candidates had visited the state at least once (Frank 2005).

Even without the once stronger impact of Super Tuesday, the South retains generally significant influence in the presidential nominating process, as eight of the eleven states hold presidential primaries or caucuses within less than six weeks of the first-in-the-nation New Hampshire primary.

The Republican Southern Strategy

In a well-chronicled history (see Steed and Moreland 2006), southern politics underwent dramatic changes during the 20th century. The 1960s saw the evolution of a strategy—almost inadvertent in 1964 but shrewdly calculated by 1968—that has famously become known as the Republican “Southern Strategy.” Although the Southern Strategy was ridiculed by many as a bankrupt idea when it was embraced by Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona in 1964, Goldwater’s candidacy laid the groundwork for Richard Nixon’s overt appeal to the South in 1968.

Aided by his shrewd and perceptive chief elections and campaigns analyst, Kevin Phillips, Richard Nixon in his 1968 campaign courted the (white, Protestant) South in almost every way possible. He promised to appoint a southerner to the Supreme Court (not that the South was unrepresented as Alabama’s Hugo Black famously sat on the Court in 1968), and he used code phrases such as a return to “law and order” and getting “welfare cheats” off the rolls, phrases which in the South of the 1960s were taken as unsympathetic references to race and the civil rights movement. Richard Nixon carried five southern states in 1968; the Democrats and Hubert

Humphrey carried only one, Texas, the home state of Humphrey's erstwhile sponsor, Lyndon Johnson, while the other five states were carried by the third-party candidacy of George Wallace of Alabama, an important transition for many white southerners as they moved from the Democrats to the more palatable racial policies of the Republicans.

Nixon's 1968 Southern Strategy was subsequently published by Kevin Phillips in his remarkably prescient *The Emerging Republican Majority* (1969) where he argued that support from southern whites combined with other factors would soon result in a new electoral alignment, one in which Republicans would be highly competitive if not dominant. Phillips was eventually proven to be right, of course, but not as soon as he expected; Watergate certainly slowed, but did not stop, the shift of southern whites to the Republican Party. The task of completing the development of the Southern Strategy fell to Ronald Reagan, whose efforts at wooing the white South were without peer. (For an excellent account and interpretation of these events see Black and Black 2002; see also Aistrup 1994, a very useful update of Phillips' work.)

How do we explain the extraordinary shift of southern whites to the Republican Party? The reasons are too numerous and too complex to examine here. But a quick catalog of them would include the following: the pressures of the civil rights movement and the white backlash to it, non-union industrialization (the South has long been the region least sympathetic to unions and union organization), rapid urbanization and suburbanization (Republican strength, as elsewhere, was first strongest in southern suburbs), a reduction in the black proportion of the region's population through immigration of middle-class whites (often wealthy retirees), the characterization of the Democratic Party as too ideologically left, too tied to minority interests, too out-of-touch with everyday family values, and too unsupportive of defense and security measures (the South probably has more military posts than any other region), and the targeting of the South by Republicans who shrewdly anticipated that these changes throughout the region represented a long-term opportunity for the party. Republicans concentrated on quickly growing suburban areas and relentlessly took advantage of the Democratic party's failure to resolve the racial issue in a way satisfactory to many whites as well as its failure to rationalize the leftward turn of the national Democratic party in a way that would appeal to a (white) culture that was highly traditional in morals, religion, and patterns of social behavior. While it took nearly four decades for the region to move from one dominated by Democrats to one dominated by Republicans, a critical period was the 1980s, when the popularity of Ronald Reagan served to legitimize the Republican Party among whites in the South.

The Growing Strength of the South in the Electoral College

Along with the growth of Republican voting strength in the South, particularly in presidential elections, the South's population has grown as well, resulting in an increased clout in the Electoral College. With each decennial census, Electoral College votes are redistributed to reflect population shifts and growth within the nation. In Table 1, the regional comparisons of the Electoral College vote indicate, in the period from 1960 to 2004, that several trends are evident: of the four national regions, the South has climbed from third place to first (29.9 percent) in terms of its contribution to the total Electoral College vote; the Northeast has dropped from second to fourth; the Midwest has dropped from first to second, but with the West climbing to within striking distance. In short, strength in the Electoral College has shifted from the Northeast and Midwest to the South and West. Incidentally, the 2000 Census resulted in a shift of 11 electoral votes for the 2004 presidential election, with the South gaining seven (Florida +2, Georgia +2, Texas +2, and North Carolina +1) but losing one (Mississippi) for a net gain of six; the West gained the other five electoral votes (Arizona +2, California +1, Colorado +1, and Nevada +1). The Northeast lost five electoral votes (New York -2, Pennsylvania, -2, Connecticut -1), and the Midwest lost six (Ohio -1, Oklahoma -1, Wisconsin, -1, Illinois -1, Indiana -1, and Michigan -1). Had the electoral vote distribution of 2004 been in effect for the 2000 election, George Bush would have gained seven electoral votes.

The implications of this shift are striking. If southern states remain unified in casting their electoral votes—as they did in 1972, 1980 (except for Georgia), 1984, 1988, 2000, and 2004 (that is, six of the last nine presidential elections)—then the task of Republicans is much eased in terms of winning presidential elections. First, valuable resources are freed up if the Democrats do not contest Republican presidential candidates in the South (Florida being the only exception in 2000 and 2004).

Second, the bloc of electoral votes in the South is substantial. Of the 270 electoral votes necessary to elect a president, the eleven states of the Confederacy plus Kentucky contribute 161 electoral votes—three-fifths (60 percent) of the total needed. Add the 55 votes from dependable Republican states in the Midwest (Ohio, Indiana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, and Oklahoma) plus 27 votes from dependable Republican states in the mountain and far West (Alaska, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, and Utah), and the result is 243 electoral votes (90 percent of the total needed). From there, a handful of states that have voted Republican in various recent elections (some combination of Iowa, Missouri, Arizona, New Mexico, West Virginia, and Nevada) can rather handily put the Republican candidate over the top.

Table 1. Regional Proportions of Electoral Votes in Presidential Elections, 1960-2004 (in percent)

Election	Region*				U.S. Totals
	South	Northeast	Midwest	West	
1960	25.7 (138)**	28.5 (153)	30.0 (161)	15.8 (85)	100.0 (537)
1964/1968	25.5 (137)	27.7 (149)	29.2 (157)	17.7 (95)	100.1 (538)
1972/1976/1980	25.8 (139)	26.8 (144)	28.4 (153)	19.0 (102)	100.0 (538)
1984/1988	27.3 (147)	25.1 (135)	27.0 (145)	20.6 (111)	100.0 (538)
1992/1996/2000	28.8 (155)	23.6 (127)	25.5 (137)	22.1 (119)	100.0 (538)
2004	29.9 (161)	22.7 (122)	24.3 (131)	23.0 (124)	99.9 (538)

*For the purposes of Table 1 and Table 2, the South consists of the 11 states of the Confederacy (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia) plus Kentucky; the Northeast consists of Connecticut, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, and West Virginia; the Midwest consists of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, and Wisconsin; the West consists of Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

**Total electoral votes for each region are indicated in parentheses. U.S. percentage totals may not add to 100.0 because of rounding error.

Source: Compiled by the authors from data from the Office of the Federal Register, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration. (The Office of the Federal Register is the official administrator of the Electoral College.) See www.archives.gov/federal_register/electoral_college.

Of course, the Democrats have their own areas of strength, including the Northeast, the West coast, and the industrial Midwest, although margins can be close in states such as Wisconsin (especially), Michigan, Minnesota, New Hampshire, and Pennsylvania. Even so, the result is that Democrats have a more difficult task than Republicans, as Democrats must come close to winning nearly all of the competitive, “battleground” states.

As Earl Black and Merle Black noted in their final sentence in *The Vital South*, an especially useful analysis in understanding the importance and impact of southern politics, “Above all, this is a portrait of a *vital* South,

a region once again at the center of struggles to define winners and losers in American politics” (Black and Black 1992, 366). To be sure, Democrats can win without the South, as Al Gore nearly did in 2000 (if he had carried just one more state, even New Hampshire with its three electoral votes, he would have won). Indeed, the voting patterns of the last four presidential elections suggest that Democrats can achieve presidential victories by supplementing their base states with a handful of southern states, but the strategy as to how to appeal successfully to southern white voters continues to be one that eludes Democratic leaders, as it involves (a) uniting the party faithful (blacks and core white voters), (b) crafting a balanced message with both conservative and liberal elements attractive to southern white swing voters, and (c) finding a candidate who can deliver that message persuasively (Black and Black 1992, 357).

The 2004 Presidential Election in the South: Comparing Southern Voters with Non-Southern Voters

On November 2, 2004, George W. Bush was reelected President with 50.7 percent of the vote (286 electoral votes) to John Kerry’s 48.3 percent (251 electoral votes). As is evident from Table 2, the South was Bush’s best region where, regionwide, he carried all eleven states of the old Confederacy with nearly 57 percent of the vote. Within the South, although Bush won all eleven states of the Confederacy, there were variations, ranging from landslide victories in Alabama (62.5 percent) and Texas (61.1 percent), his best states in the region, to narrower, but still decisive victories, in his two closest states, Virginia (53.7 percent) and Florida (52.1 percent) (Table 3). Bush won all of the South’s 153 electoral votes (all 161 if Kentucky is included). Not including Kentucky, these southern electoral votes constituted 56.7 percent of the total (270) needed to win the presidency.

How different, if at all, are southern voters from non-southern voters? Does the South remain a region distinctive from much of the rest of the country? These are questions that have attracted the ongoing attention of demographers, political scientists, editorial writers, and others who have wrestled with the puzzle of southern politics. While the homogenizing effects of population movement into the South, mass media, mass culture, national political campaigns, and other factors would seem to suggest diminishing differences with the rest of the nation, there is still evidence that the South retains elements of its distinctive history and culture. (See especially Rice, McLean, and Larsen 2002; see also Steed, Moreland, and Baker 1990; Botsch 1982; Jelen 1982; Beck and Lopatto 1982.)

Before we examine southern voters as compared with voters elsewhere, we must pause for a methodological note. The voter data reported in the

Table 2. 2004 Presidential Vote, by Region (in percent)

Candidate	South	Northeast	Midwest	West	U.S.
George W. Bush	56.9	43.4	51.4	48.7	50.7
John Kerry	42.3	55.5	47.7	49.9	48.3
Other candidates*	0.8	1.2	0.8	1.4	1.0
Regional totals	100.0	100.1	99.9	100.0	100.0
Totals (actual votes)	36,906,400	27,176,748	32,403,898	25,808,299	122,295,345
Percent of total vote	30.2	22.2	26.5	21.1	100.0

*Ralph Nader, the best performing third-party candidate, won only 0.3 percent of the vote in two regions (the South and the Midwest, 0.4 percent in the West, and 0.7 percent in the Northeast.

Source: Compiled by the authors from data from the Federal Election Commission. Accessed at www.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2004/federal_elections2004.pdf. Regional column totals may not total to 100 because of rounding error. The data presented in this table represent the final update by the FEC (accessed on August 31, 2005). Specific vote totals in individual states in the articles which follow may vary slightly because of earlier access dates.

Table 3. Presidential Vote in the South, by State (in percent)

State (in order of Bush percent)	Bush	Kerry	Other Candidates
Alabama	62.5	36.8	0.7
Texas	61.1	38.2	0.7
Kentucky*	59.6	39.7	0.8
Mississippi	59.5	39.8	0.8
South Carolina	58.0	40.9	1.1
Georgia	58.0	41.4	0.7
Tennessee	56.8	42.5	0.7
Louisiana	56.7	42.2	1.1
North Carolina	56.0	43.6	0.4
Arkansas	54.3	44.5	1.2
Virginia	53.7	45.5	0.8
Florida	52.1	47.1	0.8

*Although Kentucky did not secede from the Union and was therefore not a member of the Confederacy, the state is included here as additional information since it is also included in the South as a regional group in Tables 1 and 2. However, the state is not included in the articles which follow.

Source: Compiled by authors from data from the Federal Election Commission. Accessed at www.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2004/federal_elections2004.pdf. Rows may not total to 100 because of rounding error.

tables in this article as well as many of the tables in the articles which follow are drawn from the 2004 National Election Pool (NEP) exit polls, the successor to Voter News Service (VNS) which was disbanded in the wake of a plethora of problems after the 2002 elections. VNS exit poll functions were assumed by a consortium of news organizations (including the Associated Press, ABC News, CBS News, CNN, Fox News, and NBC News). The NEP was led by the Associated Press in association with the research firms of Edison Media Research and Mitofsky International; Edison/Mitofsky conducted the actual exit polls. As with any exit poll/sampling plan, there may be inaccuracies. For example, with the 2004 NEP, it has been argued that urban Hispanics were underrepresented. The NEP reported that a perhaps surprisingly high proportion of Hispanics, 44 percent, voted for George Bush. Ian Jobling and others have contended that this number was too high because rural and suburban Hispanics were oversampled as compared with urban Hispanics, and this resulted in an exaggeration of the Hispanic vote for Bush (Jobling 2004). Similarly, David Leal and colleagues have concluded that “the pre-election data provide little evidence that President Bush received the 44 percent level of support from Latinos estimated by the 2004 exit polls” (Leal, Barreto, Lee, and de la Garza 2005, 47). Nevertheless, the NEP data provide the best information available for analysis of voter backgrounds, attitudes, etc. Since Ralph Nader and other third party candidates received such a small proportion of the vote both regionally and nationwide (about 1 percent), they are excluded from the analyses in this and the articles which follow. Finally, for its regional groupings, the NEP uses the same groupings as those described in the note to Table 1, except that Oklahoma is included with the South instead of the Midwest. (For additional information about the NEP, see www.exit-poll.net.)

Demographic Characteristics of the 2004 Presidential Vote

Table 4 reports various demographic characteristics of the vote by region. In each row, the region where Bush received the highest percentage of the selected characteristic is printed in boldface. It can be readily seen that, no matter how one slices the vote, Bush received his highest percentages in the South. Thus, Bush did better in the South than anywhere else among males, females, whites, Latinos, Asians, gays, all age groups, almost all income groups, those who did not graduate from high school and those who attended or graduate from college, marrieds, gun owners, and big city, small city, suburban, and rural residents. In the South, Bush carried all of these groups (except for gays and for those earning under \$50,000). In most cases, he carried them easily (for example, 72 percent of white males, 68 percent of white females, 60 percent of those aged 30 to 59, 65 percent of

Table 4. Demographic and Other Characteristics of the 2004 Vote for President, by Region (in percent)*

Characteristic	South		Northeast		Midwest		West		U.S.	
	Bush	Kerry	Bush	Kerry	Bush	Kerry	Bush	Kerry	Bush	Kerry
Gender										
Male (48)**	62	37	45	53	55	44	54	44	55	44
Female (54)	54	46	42	57	48	51	45	54	48	51
Gay, lesbian, or bisexual?										
Yes (4)	32	67	8	92	19	81	25	75	23	77
No (96)	59	40	46	53	52	47	51	47	53	46
Race										
White (77)	70	29	50	50	56	43	54	45	58	41
African American (11)	9	90	13	86	10	90	18	80	11	88
Latino (8)	64	35	28	68	32	64	39	58	44	53
Asian (2)	54	46	43	57	*	*	37	63	44	56
Other (2)	56	33	16	76	*	*	43	57	40	54
Race and Gender										
White males (36)	72	27	52	47	60	39	60	39	62	37
White females (41)	68	32	47	52	53	46	49	50	55	44
Non-white males (10)	33	65	23	75	27	72	38	57	30	67
Non-white females (12)	26	74	21	77	16	82	31	69	24	75
Age										
18-29 (17)	52	47	32	67	47	52	47	51	45	54
30-44 (29)	60	39	43	55	54	45	51	47	53	46
45-59 (30)	60	39	45	54	48	51	46	52	51	48
60 and older (24)	58	42	50	49	55	45	51	48	54	46
Income										
Under \$15,000 (8)	43	57	34	66	32	68	33	66	36	63
\$15-30,000 (15)	45	54	29	71	44	56	45	54	42	57
\$30-50,000 (22)	55	44	38	61	48	51	54	46	49	50
\$50-75,000 (23)	65	35	48	50	57	43	51	46	56	43
\$75-100,000 (14)	64	35	46	54	55	44	51	49	55	45
\$100,000-150,000 (11)	73	27	47	52	54	45	50	47	57	42
\$150,000-200,000 (4)	62	38	55	45	66	34	46	54	58	42
\$200,000 or more (3)	67	32	61	37	69	31	59	41	63	35
Education										
No high school (4)	60	39	26	74	48	52	52	45	49	50
High school graduate (22)	56	43	45	54	48	51	58	42	52	47
Some college (32)	60	40	48	51	50	49	54	45	54	46
College graduate (26)	61	38	42	56	55	44	47	50	52	46
Postgraduate study (16)	54	46	37	62	50	48	35	63	44	55
Married										
Yes (63)	65	35	49	50	57	42	55	43	57	42
No (37)	46	53	34	64	40	59	39	59	40	58

table continues . . .

Table 4 (continued)

Characteristic	South		Northeast		Midwest		West		U.S.	
	Bush	Kerry	Bush	Kerry	Bush	Kerry	Bush	Kerry	Bush	Kerry
Ever served in the military?										
Yes (18)	59	39	48	51	61	39	59	37	57	41
No (82)	58	41	41	59	49	50	45	53	49	50
Gun owner in household?										
Yes (41)	71	28	55	42	58	41	58	41	63	36
No (59)	45	54	41	59	46	54	38	61	43	57
Size of Community										
Big city (39)	59	40	34	65	27	73	35	63	39	60
Small city (19)	56	43	40	59	37	62	49	49	49	49
Suburb (45)	57	42	48	51	55	44	48	51	52	47
Small town (8)	47	52	28	70	56	44	64	33	50	48
Rural (16)	66	34	37	60	60	39	61	38	59	40

*Only percentages for George W. Bush and John Kerry are reported. For purposes of regional comparisons, highest Bush percentage is bolded in each row.

**Proportion of total sample (in percent).

Note: Regional groupings are the same as those identified in Table 1 and Table 2 except that the NEP data (reported in this table and all following tables) include Oklahoma as a southern state rather than as a midwestern one.

Source: 2004 National Election Pool exit polls, accessed through CNN at www.CNN.com/ELECTION/2004/pages/results/epolls.

marrieds, and so forth). The only groups where Bush did not do as well in the South as in other regions were African Americans (whether male or female), high school graduates, residents of small towns, and those earning over \$150,000 (although his percentage of high income voters in the South was close to the percentages of those living elsewhere). The pattern, overall, is striking: Bush was clearly much more popular among southerners than among voters in other regions.

A caution is in order, however. These regional groupings are quite large, and in two of them (the Midwest and the West) the variations within the regions are much more extreme than in the South. For example, Bush's very best state was in the West (Utah, where he received almost 72 percent of the vote); on the other hand, also in the West, he decisively lost California (where he received 44 percent). However, these data do tend to point up the fact that the South can still continue to be seen as a distinctive region of the country and that study of the South as a discrete political, social, and cultural region continues to be a useful analytical tool.

Religion and the 2004 Presidential Election

Although fundamentalist Protestantism has long been associated with the South and, more recently, with conservative Republican politics in the South (see Jelen 2006; Baker, Steed, and Moreland 1983), religion has come to be a key factor in election analyses, regardless of region. While it is much, much too simplistic to argue that the “churched” voted Republican and the “unchurched” voted Democratic, there is nevertheless a tendency for those with higher levels of religiosity (as measured by church attendance) to vote Republican.

Table 5 presents NEP exit poll data that shows that, *regardless of region*, a majority of those who attended church weekly or more than weekly voted for Bush. This phenomenon was weakest in the Northeast (Kerry’s strongest region), but still apparent. In the South, a Republican tendency also characterized those who attended church monthly or only a few times a year; in the three other regions, these groups tended to favor Kerry (except in the Midwest where those who attended monthly split almost evenly). Although Protestants and Catholics followed an irregular pattern in the non-South (Kerry winning among Protestants in the Northeast, Bush winning among that same group in the Midwest and West and, of course, the South, and so forth), the pattern is clearer in the South. There, Bush carried approximately two-thirds of both groups (64 percent of Protestants and 67 percent of Catholics).

About three-fourths of Jews, traditionally among the most reliable of Democratic support groups, voted for Kerry, regardless of region. However, their small proportion (about 3 percent) of all voters reduced their voting clout, although they can potentially be significant factors in those states with large concentrations of Jews (New York, Florida, Illinois, and California), although in 2004 the races were not close in any of these states.

Ideology and Party Orientation in the 2004 Presidential Election in the South

Table 6 reports voters’ self-identified ideological positions and confirms the conventional wisdom that southern voters are more conservative than voters in other regions. Two-fifths (40 percent) identified themselves as conservative, more than in any other region (26 percent in the Northeast, 33 percent in the Midwest, and 31 percent in the West). Similarly, in the four regions, southerners are least likely to identify themselves as either moderate or as liberal. Even so, 35 percent of southerners identify with the Democratic Party; however, most of these Democratic identifiers without doubt are African Americans. Examination of the state exit polls tends to confirm this. In

Table 5. Religion and the 2004 Vote for President, by Region (in percent)*

Characteristic	South		Northeast		Midwest		West		U.S.	
	Bush	Kerry	Bush	Kerry	Bush	Kerry	Bush	Kerry	Bush	Kerry
Vote by Church Attendance										
More than weekly (16)*	65	34	51	48	66	33	69	28	64	35
Weekly (26)	64	35	52	47	58	52	57	42	58	41
Monthly (14)	54	45	49	51	51	49	44	54	50	49
A few times a year (28)	55	45	39	61	44	55	43	56	45	54
Never (15)	46	53	24	74	37	61	36	62	36	62
Vote by Religious Denomination										
Protestant (54)	64	36	45	54	58	41	61	37	59	40
Catholic (27)	67	33	52	47	50	49	39	60	52	47
Jewish (3)	26	74	24	75	28	72	26	74	25	74
Other (7)	29	70	17	82	31	69	19	75	23	74
Vote by Religion and Attendance										
Protestant/weekly (16)	77	23	52	47	65	34	76	23	70	29
Protestant/less often (15)	63	36	43	56	56	44	58	41	56	43
Catholic/weekly (11)	70	29	57	42	53	47	40	59	56	43
Catholic/less often (14)	63	37	49	51	47	52	37	61	49	50
All others (39)	45	55	29	70	43	56	40	58	40	59

*Proportion of total sample (in percent).

Note: For purposes of regional comparisons, highest Bush percentage is **bolded** in each row.

Source: 2004 National Election Pool exit polls, accessed through CNN at www.CNN.com/ELECTION/2004/pages/results/epolls.

Table 6. Ideological and Party Orientation of Voters in the 2004 Vote for President, by Region (in percent)

Issue	South	Northeast	Midwest	West	U.S.
Ideological Position					
Liberal	17	26	20	23	21
Moderate	43	48	47	45	45
Conservative	40	26	33	31	34
Party Orientation					
Democrat	35	41	37	34	37
Republican	42	30	38	36	37
Independent	22	30	25	30	26

Source: 2004 National Election Pool exit polls, accessed through CNN at www.CNN.com/ELECTION/2004/pages/results/epolls.

South Carolina, for example, nearly eight out of 10 whites voted for George Bush while nearly nine out of ten African Americans voted for John Kerry.

Issues and the 2004 Presidential Election in the South

Table 7 reports data roughly identifying the issues that most concerned voters in the 2004 elections. A figure that has probably attracted more interest than any other in all of the NEP exit polling data is the first one, the data indicating that, nationwide, 22 percent of the voters considered “moral values” to be the most important election issue (with the figure slightly higher in the South and Midwest at 24 percent in each state). While the economy/jobs, terrorism, and Iraq all closely followed, these issues, together with “moral values,” represented nearly 80 percent of the issues that voters listed as the ones most important to them. Issues such as health care, taxes, and education lagged far behind. Unhappily, the meaning of “moral values” was not defined in the exit polling questionnaire, and this presents substantial problems in trying to divine just what voters might have been thinking about. Much of the speculation has centered on moral values relating to gay marriage, abortion, pornography, marital fidelity, and the like—all values promoted by the Christian Right. Consequently, there has been much speculation in the mass media that this somewhat surprising “moral values” percentage tapped into an underlying uneasiness with the moral directions of contemporary society, which, if true, is thought to have aided Republican candidates (such as George Bush) who have often talked of the (conservative) religious influences on their political lives. On the other hand, it is

Table 7. Most Important Issue Concern of Voters in the 2004 Vote for President, by Region (in percent)

Most Important Issue	South	Northeast	Midwest	West	U.S.
Moral values (22)	24	16	24	22	22
Economy/jobs (20)	20	20	21	17	20
Terrorism (19)	21	21	16	19	19
Iraq (18)	12	17	13	20	15
Health care (8)	9	8	8	7	8
Taxes (5)	4	6	6	5	5
Education (4)	4	5	5	4	4
Other	6	7	7	6	7
Total	100	100	100	100	100

*Proportion of total sample (in percent).

Source: 2004 National Election Pool exit polls, accessed through CNN at www.CNN.com/ELECTION/2004/pages/results/epolls.

possible that that some voters for whom “moral values” were an issue might have had a completely different set of values in mind (values embracing racial equality and justice, an end to poverty, an end to exploitation of women and children around the globe, to name just a few).

Of the four top issues, Bush outscored Kerry on two of them (moral values and terrorism) while Kerry scored with voters on the remaining two (economy/jobs and Iraq). Even though each candidate “won” two of the four issues, Bush nevertheless held a slight advantage (Table 8), because, first, nationally more voters listed Bush’s two winning issues as “most important” over Kerry’s two winning issues (41 percent to 35 percent), and, second, because (Table 9) the margin of advantage was smaller for Kerry on Iraq (73 to 26 percent) than it was for Bush on terrorism (86 to 14 percent).

On these four most important issue categories, in general, the patterns of regional difference are not consistent, although Bush generally did as well in the South, or almost as well, as any region in the country.

Table 8 operationalizes general issue concerns by looking at a series of a dozen issues, roughly replicating specific issues related to moral values, the economy, terrorism, etc. Generally, Bush won a majority of voters who believed that abortion should be mostly illegal or always illegal, that gay marriage should be given no legal recognition or should be recognized through civil unions (although voters were nationally fairly narrowly divided on this), that the economy is in excellent or good condition, that terrorism is not something to be “very worried” about, that Bush can be trusted to handle terrorism, that the decision to go to war in Iraq was a good one, that the war in Iraq is part of the war on terrorism, that the Iraq war has made the U.S. more secure, that the availability and cost of health care is something to be only somewhat (or less) concerned about, that the tax cuts were good for the economy, and that the U.S. is headed in the right direction. Conversely, Kerry won majorities of voters who believed that abortion should be legal or mostly legal, that gays should be allowed to legally marry, that the economy is in not so good or poor condition, that we should be very worried about terrorism, that Bush cannot be trusted to handle terrorism, that the decision to go to war was the wrong one, that Iraq is not part of the war on terrorism, that the Iraq war has not made the U.S. more secure, that we should be very concerned about the availability and cost of health care, that the Bush tax cuts were bad for the economy or made no difference to the economy, and that the U.S. is not headed in the right direction.

Regionally, the data reported in Table 8 suggest that Bush found the highest levels of support in the South, regardless of issue. Of the 40 rows of voter responses in Table 8, Bush had his highest percentages on 31 of them in the South. (On Table 8, the highest Bush percentage in each row is bolded.) It should not be surprising, therefore, to see bumper stickers in states such as South Carolina that “South Carolina is Bush Country.”

Table 8. Presidential Vote by Issue Position and Region (in percent)

Issue	South		Northeast		Midwest		West		U.S.	
	Bush	Kerry	Bush	Kerry	Bush	Kerry	Bush	Kerry	Bush	Kerry
Most Important Issue										
Moral values	89	10	66	31	84	15	71	26	80	18
Economy/jobs	21	77	14	85	17	82	22	74	18	80
Terrorism	89	11	83	17	87	13	83	17	86	14
Iraq	36	64	19	80	28	72	24	76	26	73
Health care	24	76	18	82	27	72	23	77	23	77
Taxes	69	31	43	57	53	46	63	34	57	43
Education	36	64	13	85	32	67	22	78	26	73
Abortion should be—										
Always legal (21)*	27	71	26	73	24	74	24	75	25	73
Mostly legal (34)	26	62	36	63	35	65	43	56	38	61
Mostly illegal (26)	80	19	68	32	69	31	70	27	73	26
Always illegal (16)	79	21	78	21	79	21	67	30	77	22
Policy toward same sex couples										
Legally marry (25)	26	73	20	79	23	77	22	77	22	77
Civil Unions (35)	55	44	54	46	51	49	49	50	52	47
No legal recognition (37)	72	28	64	36	68	31	72	26	70	29
National Economy										
Excellent (4)	88	12	**	**	86	14	93	7	89	11
Good (43)	87	12	84	15	91	9	83	16	87	13
Not good (35)	31	67	20	78	27	72	26	73	26	72
Poor (17)	8	90	1	99	6	93	8	87	6	92
Worried about terrorism										
Very worried (22)	49	50	38	62	37	62	48	52	44	56
Somewhat worried (53)	63	36	49	50	57	43	53	45	56	43
Not too worried (19)	58	41	42	53	46	52	53	46	51	47
Not at all worried (5)	56	42	**	**	48	52	47	47	50	48
Trust Bush to handle terrorism?										
Yes (58)	87	12	85	15	85	15	82	17	85	14
No (40)	6	92	3	96	5	94	4	93	4	94
Decision to go to war in Iraq										
Strongly approve (29)	96	4	90	9	91	9	94	4	94	6
Somewhat approve (23)	80	20	70	28	74	25	76	22	75	24
Somewhat disapprove (15)	27	71	22	77	28	70	21	77	25	73
Strongly disapprove (31)	7	93	5	94	6	93	4	94	5	94
Is Iraq War part of war on terrorism?										
Yes (55)	83	16	80	19	80	20	81	18	81	18
No (42)	14	95	7	92	15	84	8	90	11	88
Iraq War made U.S. more secure?										
Yes (46)	90	10	87	12	88	12	93	6	90	10
No (52)	21	77	19	80	20	79	14	83	19	80

table continues . . .

Table 8 (continued)

Issue	South		Northeast		Midwest		West		U.S.	
	Bush	Kerry	Bush	Kerry	Bush	Kerry	Bush	Kerry	Bush	Kerry
Availability and cost of health care										
Very concerned (70)	48	51	36	63	42	58	35	63	41	58
Somewhat concerned (23)	76	23	65	35	73	26	69	31	71	28
Not very concerned (5)	93	7	**	**	90	10	76	20	84	15
Not at all concerned (2)	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	83	15
Bush tax cuts were—										
Good for economy (41)	91	8	96	4	93	6	91	8	92	7
Bad for economy (32)	10	89	4	94	7	93	5	92	7	92
No difference (25)	50	47	39	59	43	56	42	55	44	54
Is U.S. going in right direction?										
Yes (49)	91	9	91	8	88	12	86	12	89	10
No (46)	17	81	6	92	12	87	11	86	12	86

*Proportion of total sample (in percent).

**Sample size too small.

Note: for purposes of regional comparisons, highest Bush percentage is **bolded** in each row.

Source: 2004 National Election Pool exit polls, accessed through CNN at www.CNN.com/ELECTION/2004/pages/results/epolls.

Candidate Orientation and the 2004 Presidential Election

Table 9 reports data on voter perceptions about the personal characteristics of the two candidates. The four top characteristics—“will bring change,” “strong leader,” “clear stand on issue,” and “trustworthy/worthy”—were listed aggregately by 69 percent of the voters as the “most important” candidate characteristic. On these four top characteristics, Bush nationally held the advantage on three of them (“strong leader,” 87 to 12 percent; “clear stand on issues,” 79 to 20 percent; and “honest/trustworthy,” 70 to 29 percent). Only on “will bring change” did Kerry have the advantage (95 to 5 percent).

Regionally, Bush did best in the South on six of the seven characteristics (although, overall, he won a majority on four of the characteristics, irrespective of region). Regardless of region, Bush did best among voters (8 percent of the total) for whom “religious faith” was the most important quality and poorest among voters (7 percent of the total) who chose “intelligence” as the most important quality they sought in a president, with the result that voters with these two perceptions tended to cancel each other out.

Table 9. Candidate Orientation of Voters in the 2004 Vote for President, by Region (in percent)

Most Important Quality	South		Northeast		Midwest		West		U.S.	
	Bush	Kerry	Bush	Kerry	Bush	Kerry	Bush	Kerry	Bush	Kerry
Will bring change (24)	8	92	3	96	4	96	4	94	5	95
Strong leader (17)	88	11	86	14	86	13	86	11	87	12
Clear stand on issue (17)	81	18	73	26	81	17	76	23	79	20
Honest/Trustworthy (11)	79	20	56	44	72	27	68	31	70	29
Cares about people (9)	23	76	26	73	25	74	23	75	24	75
Religious faith (8)	93	7	92	7	92	7	86	14	91	8
Intelligent (7)	15	85	7	92	5	95	8	91	9	91
[Other (7)]	nr*	nr	nr	nr	nr	nr	nr	nr	nr	nr

*nr = not reported.

Note: for purposes of regional comparisons, highest Bush percentage is **bolded** in each row.

Source: 2004 National Election Pool exit polls, accessed through CNN at www.CNN.com/ELECTION/2004/pages/results/epolls.

Conclusion

In 1964, in a burst of hype, hope, and emergent strategy, Barry Goldwater and the Republican National Committee sought to turn the Republican Party's weakest region, the South, into an asset. Republicans have achieved that end and more, as the South has become the party's most unified and reliable region. Indeed, the Goldwater Republicans of 1964 would likely gaze in wonderment at the success of their party in the South. No doubt, though, they would be especially pleased that the southern Republicans' reward for their success is that they have come to dominate the party ideologically, although the southern brand of conservatism lacks at least some of the libertarian elements of Goldwater's conservatism. At the national level, the moderates and even liberals who called themselves Republicans in the mid-20th century are now mostly gone, and the party draws much of its leadership from the South rather than the Northeast or the Midwest. Newt Gingrich (Georgia), Dick Armey (Texas), Tom DeLay (Texas), Trent Lott (Mississippi), Bill Frist (Tennessee), George H.W. Bush (Texas), and George W. Bush (Texas) are only the most prominent names of southern Republicans who have recently held or hold today important leadership positions in Washington. Indeed, to broaden a comment of Dan T. Carter, what we have seen over the last several decades in our politics is the "Americanization of Dixie and the Southernization of America" (Carter 1995, 14).

Democrats have yet to find the key to success in the South. Indeed, Democrats nationally appear to be floundering in terms of successfully defining themselves to American voters. While the Republicans have successfully created an enduring image (or, more positively, a set of issue concerns and policy proposals), the Democrats are finding it difficult to articulate a competing set of issue concerns and policy proposals. In an op-ed piece in *The New York Times*, former Senator Bill Bradley has recently—and succinctly—analyzed key strategic differences between Republicans and Democrats by recognizing that Republicans have created a policy-driven structure while Democrats have created a candidate-driven structure, a development which has worked to the Democrats’ detriment (see Bradley 2005). Republicans, Bradley contends, have built a pyramid-like organization with (at the bottom) a broadly-based structure of conservative foundations and rich individual donors (the first level), of conservative research centers like the Heritage Foundation (the second level), of shrewd political analysts like Karl Rove who craft messages which will appeal to the broadest possible groups of voters (the third level), of partisan news media with relentlessly on-message commentators such as Rush Limbaugh (the fourth level), and, finally, at the fifth level (the top), the president. Since the pyramid is broadly-based, stable and ongoing, replacing the candidate at the top is a simple matter and does not endanger the success of the whole enterprise. Democrats, on the other hand, have little in the way of any kind of continuing structure; instead, campaigns are candidate-oriented. As Bradley puts it, “Democrats choose this approach, I believe, because we are still hypnotized by Jack Kennedy, and the promise of a charismatic leader who can change America by the strength and style of his personality.” Consequently, success depends wholly on that candidate, who must in a short time construct his own pyramid, which is nearly guaranteed to be inferior to the Republicans’ ongoing, routinely-funded, concern-and-issue driven, stable structure, supported by a highly active year-round advocacy aimed squarely at Democrats. On the other hand, as Bradley concludes, the Democratic pyramid is “inverted,” resting so very precariously on its tip.

While a national ticket of two southerners did win four southern states in both 1992 and 1996, their success was indeed to some extent charismatic (dependent on the larger-than-life Bill Clinton) and, therefore, not enduring or transferable to other candidates who would follow, even including Bill Clinton’s own running mate, the charisma-challenged Al Gore. (Indeed, both Clinton and Gore have pretty much abandoned the South now that they no longer hold national office.) The failure of the Democrats to win even one southern state in 2000 and 2004 plus their minority status in every southern delegation to Congress has resulted, not only in a near collapse of the Democratic Party in the South, but also in a near parity of the parties nationally, a

parity that has seemingly made every competitive contest for Congress a must-win election and therefore an anything-goes kind of struggle.

This introduction has hinted at the extraordinary success of the Republicans in the South, at least in presidential contents. (For what is likely to remain the definitive work on this subject, see Earl Black and Merle Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans*, 2002.) On the other side of the coin, the Democrats in the South face daunting odds. Southern white voters have for the most part abandoned the Democratic Party. In 2004, the Bush presidential ticket won at least three-fourths (or nearly so) of the white vote in seven of the eleven southern states: Mississippi (85 percent), Alabama (80 percent), South Carolina (78 percent), Georgia (76 percent), Louisiana (75 percent), Texas (74 percent), North Carolina (73 percent). In three of the remaining four, Republicans won at least 63 percent of the white vote (Virginia, 68 percent; Tennessee, 65 percent; and Arkansas, 63 percent). Only in Florida did white voters provide only a modest landslide (at 57 percent) for the Bush-Cheney ticket. Of course, Democrats had their own landslides, doing even better among African Americans (with percentages ranging from a high of 94 percent in Arkansas to a “low” of 83 percent in Texas) than Republicans did among whites. However, African-American voters constituted a minority of voters in all southern states (ranging from a high of 34 percent in Mississippi to a low of 12 percent in Florida and Texas). To be sure, the picture is not completely hopeless for the Democrats, as the increasing proportions of minorities (especially Hispanics) in many southern states offer at least the potential of a solid base on which to build. For example, in Texas, minorities (mostly African Americans and Hispanics) now make up a majority of the population; of course, Republicans as well as Democrats are actively and aggressively seeking their votes.

In presidential elections, the stakes are high. The role of the South has become a pivotal one—not because it is a region that is competitive and contested, but precisely because it is not. A unified South (including Kentucky) contributes 60 percent of the electoral votes needed to win the presidency. Consequently, the South has had (and will likely continue to have) a profound effect on the type of party the Republican Party has become and in turn on who holds the nation’s top leadership.

NOTES

¹The volumes in the series are as follows: Robert P. Steed, Laurence W. Moreland, and Tod A. Baker (eds.), *The 1984 Presidential Election in the South: Patterns of Southern Party Politics* (New York: Praeger, 1986); Laurence W. Moreland, Robert P. Steed, and Tod A. Baker (eds.), *The 1988 Presidential Election in the South: Continuity Amidst Change in Southern Party Politics* (New York: Praeger, 1991); Robert P. Steed, Laurence W. Moreland, and Tod A. Baker (eds.), *The 1992 Presidential Election in the South:*

Current Patterns of Southern Party and Electoral Politics (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994); Laurence W. Moreland and Robert P. Steed (eds.), *The 1996 Presidential Election in the South: Southern Party Systems in the 1990s* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997); and Robert P. Steed and Laurence W. Moreland (eds.), *The 2000 Presidential Election in the South: Partisanship and Southern Party Systems in the 21st Century* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002).

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