Growth in Party Competition and the Transformation of Southern Politics

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The political landscape of the South traditionally has been dominated by the monolith of the Democratic Party. In the last decades of the twentieth century, the political climate was reversed, with many southern states voting Republican, especially in national elections. This political shift is examined in the context of economic, social, and cultural shifts in the South, beginning in 1950, the end of V.O. Key's seminal work, and ending in 2000. This political shift is quantified with an adaptation of the Ranney Index of Party Competition.

The South is the most distinctive part of the nation because in so many ways life there has always been a contradiction of American values and ideals. It is a region replete with religious fervor and righteous conviction, and it is the place that held most doggedly to the institution of slavery. One-hundred years later, it was the American venue for the civil rights movement. Southerners know the best and worst of human qualities. The southern past is notorious for class-consciousness, white supremacy, poverty and isolation; yet it is also known for charity, family, humor and some of the best political oratory ever to touch a voter's ear. "History, like God and nature," wrote the poet Donald Davidson, "has been both generous and unkind to . . . the South" (Davidson 1972).

At the end of the Civil War, southern lineage was a political liability in races outside of the region. Earl and Merle Black write that Southerners were "junior partners" in national politics; it was 1912 before a southern candidate made a serious effort at a major party presidential nomination (Black and Black 1992, 85-86). Although Lyndon Johnson, a Texan, became president in 1963, it was the election of former Georgia governor Jimmy Carter in 1976 that finally ended this second class status for southern politicians. In the 2000 presidential election, both major party candidates were from the South. Indeed, of the four presidents to follow Carter in the White House, three hailed from southern states.

Daniel Elazar's traditional political culture defined the South as a place where government "played conservative and custodial roles, rather than

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initiatory roles" (Elazar 1984, 119). Even today, the political culture in the South stresses democratic participation with an emphasis on self-reliance. States south of the Potomac tend to resist federal centralization and direction; instead they advocate maximization of local control. These ideas were less popular in the time period from the 1930s through the 1960s when the mood of the country was for federal leadership from Washington (i.e., Roosevelt's New Deal and Johnson's Great Society). But when the attitude of the country shifted in 1980 with the election of Ronald Reagan, the South found itself in the political mainstream.

The individualism of the region's political culture has recently translated into economic prosperity. At the turn of the twentieth century, the South was an underdeveloped region in a developed country, but by 2000, if the eleven states of the Confederacy were a separate nation, they would have the world's fourth largest economy. The conception of the South as a separate subculture allows us to analyze the political culture of the region and compare it with the rest of the nation. We define political culture as a mixture of diverse elements including attitudes of legitimacy, beliefs and obligations, values and skills that culminate in the participation in politics.

The South has historically been dominated by one political party, and political participation was modest when restricted to just the activities of the Democratic Party. Economic development changed the social fabric of the South, and altered the participation and allegiance of voters in every southern state. To understand the shift in political fortunes in the South, we examine the complexity of the South's transformation, including the mixture of change and continuity.

To understand the transformation of politics in the South, we begin with a discussion of social, cultural and economic changes. Next, we examine shifts in government and political leadership. In this article, as in V.O. Key's original work, the South is comprised of the eleven states of rebellion in the Civil War: Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

Economic Change: Rich and Poor States

The history of the American South is forever bound to the rural, agrarian economy that was its original legacy. The past five decades of the twentieth century witnessed an unprecedented shift away from this base and toward industrialization and urbanization. In 1980, for the first time, a majority of white southerners—and a third of black southerners—worked in middle-class positions, such as professional, technical, managerial, administrative, sales and clerical jobs (Wheat and Crown 1995). By the end of the

century, the rural, small-town South was disappearing, replaced by neat suburbs along interstate highways outside of mid-sized cities.

Table 1 shows one measure of the economic growth that has taken place in the South. Average real median family income for the eleven southern states rose from just over 66 percent of the national average in 1950 to nearly 89 percent in 2000. In terms of rate of growth, median family income in all of the southern states increased at a greater rate than the national average during the half-century period as the South raced to close the income gap with the more developed regions of the country. In 1950, all but two of the southern states, Texas and Virginia, were ranked 40th and below among the United States in median family income. In 2000, all but five were ranked above forty, with Georgia in the top thirty and Virginia closing on the top ten. All but Louisiana, which fell to the 50th spot, moved up in the rankings.

The economic growth of the southern states is largely tied to the growth in population that occurred during the period. As seen in Table 2, southern population more than doubled between 1950 and 2000, with the proportion of United States' population living in the South increasing from 24 to 30 percent. This growth relative to the national average primarily occurred in the states of Texas, Florida, Georgia and Virginia; Florida exhibited the most dramatic increase—from 20th in the nation in 1950 to fourth in 2000. The old stereotype of Florida's swampland being a poor financial investment is not supported by the evidence. Beginning in the 1970s, population growth in all eleven states outstripped the nation as a whole.

The population and income gains in the years after 1950 were a consequence of several factors. First, the sharecropper-tenant farmer system collapsed and five million blacks left the South for jobs elsewhere. Second, the civil rights movement led to school integration, better education levels for blacks, and a climate of tolerance for the first time in history. Third, the federal government, as an enticement to desegregation, increased aid to public education, the military, and welfare. Federal dollars flowed into the region improving opportunity. Fourth, industries located in the region with higher average wage scales than those found in agricultural jobs. Fifth, as poor blacks and whites left the South, workers moved in who had educational levels substantially above the southern norm. "The result of these developments was a remarkable evening out of the educational (and economic) attainment among the nation's regions" (Wheat and Crown 1995, 3, 164). The improvement in educational attainment in the South relative to the national average can be seen in Table 3.

Table 1. Median Family Income for the Southern States, in 1996 Dollars

State	1950 Income	1950 % of U.S. Average	1950 National Rank	2000 Income	2000 % of U.S. Average	2000 National Rank	% Change Real Income
Alabama	$ 9,060	60.3%	47	$38,022	82.2%	44	320%
Arkansas	7,540	50.2	48	36,832	79.6	47	388
Florida	11,181	74.5	40	41,635	90.0	38	272
Georgia	9,427	62.8	46	43,636	94.3	27	363
Louisiana	10,378	69.1	42	35,964	77.8	50	247
Mississippi	5,894	39.2	49	36,687	79.3	48	522
North Carolina	10,688	71.2	41	42,126	91.1	36	294
South Carolina	9,444	62.9	45	40,809	88.2	40	332
Tennessee	10,029	66.8	44	41,267	89.2	39	311
Texas	13,033	86.8	34	42,311	91.5	35	225
Virginia	12,454	82.9	37	51,015	110.3	13	310
South Average	9,921	66.1		40,937	88.5		313
U.S. Average	15,017	100.0		46,255	100.0		208

Sources: 1954 U.S. Statistical Abstract, U.S. Census Bureau (Table 346);
Census 2000 Supplemental Survey <http://www.census.gov/c2ss/www/Products/Profiles/2000/index.htm> (Table 3).

Table 2. Population of the Southern States, 1950 and 2000

State	1950 Population	1950 Percent of U.S. Population	2000 Population	2000 Percent of U.S. Population
Alabama	3,061,743	2.0%	4,332,380	1.6%
Arkansas	1,909,511	1.3	2,599,492	0.9
Florida	2,771,305	1.8	15,593,434	5.7
Georgia	3,444,578	2.3	7,952,631	2.9
Louisiana	2,683,516	1.8	4,333,012	1.6
Mississippi	2,178,914	1.4	2,749,243	1.0
North Carolina	4,061,929	2.7	7,795,432	2.8
South Carolina	2,117,027	1.4	3,876,974	1.4
Tennessee	3,291,718	2.2	5,541,334	2.0
Texas	7,711,194	5.1	20,290,713	7.4
Virginia	3,318,680	2.2	6,847,119	2.5
Total South	36,550,115	24.2	81,911,764	29.9
Total U.S. Population	151,325,798		273,643,274	

Sources: 1954 Statistical Abstract of the United States, U.S. Census Bureau (Table 10);
Census 2000 Supplemental Survey <http://www.census.gov/c2ss/www/Products/Profiles/2000/index.htm> (Table 1).

Table 3. Percent of Population Age 25 and Above With a Four-Year Degree or Better

State	1950	2000	% Change
Alabama	3.6%	20.2%	455%
Arkansas	3.1	16.6	432
Florida	6.3	23.4	273
Georgia	4.5	23.2	420
Louisiana	4.7	19.5	315
Mississippi	3.9	18.6	383
North Carolina	5.0	22.0	337
South Carolina	5.4	22.9	325
Tennessee	4.1	20.9	412
Texas	6.0	23.5	289
Virginia	6.3	30.2	381
South Average	4.8	21.9	356
U.S. Average	6.0	25.1	316

Sources: 1954 Statistical Abstract of the United States, U.S. Census Bureau (Table 136); Census 2000 Supplemental Survey <http://www.census.gov/c2ss/www/Products/Rank/EducAttain.htm>.

The South became more urbanized as the century aged. Individuals and new businesses poured into the region thanks to a complexity of several factors—a hospitable climate, the development of air conditioning, water reclamation projects, available real estate, and new technologies of communication and transformation. For most of its history the South was the least urbanized area of the nation. In 1950 no city in the South had a population larger than 600,000, and only twelve cities in the region had enough population to rank them in the top fifty cities in the nation. By the 2000 census, seventeen southern cities were ranked in the top fifty cities, all of which had more than one million in their metropolitan area. Small towns, which were once common, were replaced by sparkling new mid-sized cities like Charlotte, Knoxville, and Austin (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1950, 2000).

Table 4 shows the urbanization of the South between 1950 and 1990 (as of this writing, the 2000 numbers have not been released). "Urbanized Area" is defined as a place with a population of 50,000 or more, including central cities and fringe areas, based on population density. The authors believe this is the best measure of urbanization, as other methods of measurement, such as the Metropolitan Statistical Area, include areas that cannot be described as urban in character, including farmland and less heavily-developed residential communities.

Table 4. Urbanized Population in the South

State	1950 Percent of Population Living in Urbanized Area	1990 Percent of Population Living in Urbanized Area
Alabama	24.1	45.5
Arkansas	11.0	25.2
Florida	38.6	84.8
Georgia	27.2	50.3
Louisiana	35.4	52.8
Mississippi	4.6	24.0
North Carolina	12.7	37.9
South Carolina	11.4	40.9
Tennessee	29.8	45.5
Texas	36.5	67.0
Virginia	22.6	61.9
Non-South	52.5	66.0

Sources: 1950 U.S. Census (Table 9); 1990 U.S. Census (Table 1).

The rural character of the region is evident in the population figures. The percent of population living in urbanized areas has increased in all eleven states relative to the non-South average. While no southern state approached the non-South average in 1950, in 1990 two states, Texas and Florida, actually exceed it.

The economic base, labor market, and income levels in the South have improved and closed the gap between the region and the rest of the nation. The southern economy is now diversified with growing numbers of investments by international firms offering wage levels at the national average. With negligible employment in agriculture, new industries mirror the country-at-large with service and high-tech jobs fueling the expanding economy. Some states (e.g., Virginia, Florida, Georgia, and Texas) have attracted more new-economy industries and jobs than others (Alabama, Louisiana, South Carolina, Arkansas, and Mississippi). On the other hand, some of this latter group of states have gained the attention of multinational firms, for example the location of BMW in South Carolina and Mercedes-Benz in Alabama. These patterns, as we will demonstrate later, are important elements of the underlying conditions supporting sub-regional variations in shifts in political party allegiance.

Social and Cultural Transition

Slavery was once an integral assumption of life in the southern political system, protecting white, independent farmers from marketplace domination by northern capitalists. A central theme of southern politics was the political superiority of whites with an economic justification for the preservation of the "southern way of life" because the system was necessary for crop harvest and material survival. The social culture emphasized separation of the races and the political system was designed to keep blacks "in their place."

White hegemony and the importance of race defining politics is seen in V.O. Key's original work, with his portrait of Mississippi and South Carolina as ruled by racial politics, and his explanation of the disenfranchising effects of the poll tax and literacy test in the South (Key 1949 [1977]). Racial tensions were muted by the black exodus with a first wave in the 1910-1930 period, and a subsequent departure from 1940-1970. At the same time the South experienced a growth in the population of non-southerners moving in, but race remains a dominant force in politics to this very day. Part of this effect is evident in the high proportion of the population in each state that is African-American. While the black population remains sizeable, the out-migration of blacks over most of the past century and their dilution by new white residents makes the South today a very different place from what it was at the mid-twentieth century.

Since 1950 decisive political developments modified everyday life in the South. Social changes, such as those emanating from the United States Supreme Court's school desegregation rulings in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 and the massive resistance of many white southerners to that decision, along with the expansion and success of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, undermined the super-ordinate/subordinate pattern of race relations. The subsequent participation by black voters in politics, the rise and decline of George Wallace's movement, and the growth of the Republican Party, have dramatically altered the makeup of southern elections. That conversion began with the landmark Supreme Court decision of *Smith v. Allwright* (1944) which outlawed the white primary. It continued with a massive legal assault by the NAACP that culminated in the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision prohibiting racial discrimination in the schools. The modern civil rights movement is dated from that decision which empowered blacks to address housing segregation and general second-class citizenship as well as educational segregation. In 1940 only 5 percent of the black electorate was registered to vote, two years after *Brown* one-fourth of eligible southern blacks were enrolled on voting lists.

The decisive influence on black enfranchisement and participation was the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965. This law suspended preconditions to voter registration such as the literacy tests that had been used by white local registrars to bar blacks from the polls, challenged the poll tax (the 24th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, adopted in 1964, outlawed the poll tax in federal elections) as a state suffrage requirement, and gave the president the authority to send federal examiners into the South to register African-Americans. The immediate effects of the Voting Rights Act were dramatic, with black voter registration more than doubling in many states (Hamilton 1973). Unimagined possibilities for African-Americans became reality at the end of the twentieth century. In 2002, sixteen blacks from the region serve in the U.S. House of Representatives as Democrats; collectively they have changed the texture of politics in every Southern state. The liberal populism of black voters, and their tendency to vote together, makes them a crucial part of state political governance.

Historically, the South has been called the most "native" region of the country. Today the region is less homogenized than the myth of white men in overalls sitting on country store porches drinking RC Colas and eating Moon Pies. But the southern landscape has not been altered uniformly. Change has been most rapid in cities, least rapid in rural areas, with ethnic Hispanics gathered in pockets of south Texas, the tip of Florida, and in urban areas throughout the South. The influx of new non-white newcomers has already transformed politics in South Florida, and its impact is being felt in Texas. In the twenty-first century, Hispanics and Asians will become prominent political actors in a growing number of southern communities and states.

Church attendance is related to the innate conservatism of the South. With 30 percent of the population, the eleven southern states contain 41.6 percent of the communicant, confirmed full members of churches in the United States. South Carolina for example has about the same population as Connecticut, but it has nearly two and one-half times as many churches (Bradley et al. 1991). Church attendance and activities play a prominent role in family and community life, and since the 1970s religion has begun to influence politics as well.

In 1976 Jimmy Carter was an unapologetic, "born again" Southern Baptist Christian. In 1980 the New Christian Right surged into national prominence to support the candidacy of Ronald Reagan, and its leaders became severe critics of Democratic president Bill Clinton in the 1990s. In 2000 George W. Bush openly invited the southern evangelicals into his camp when he declared in an open forum that Jesus Christ was the single most important person to influence his public philosophy. The Southern

Baptist Convention is the largest single Protestant denominational body in the United States. Along with other Bible-believing denominations, it unites an otherwise fiercely independent constituency around a set of key values. Churches reinforce southern culture and ideals of economics, politics, morality, and race. Although religion and the church are as important in the lives and politics of southern blacks and whites, the New Christian Right is almost exclusively a movement of white southerners (Bruce 1988, 181).

In the late 1950s and 1960s the civil rights movement drew heavily on the institutional and ethical resources of the black church to appeal to the conscience of the white Christian establishment. Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., a Baptist, brought the moral traditions of religion to the attention of the nation with his dream of a Promised Land, a paradise regained. The movement, squarely planted in the black church, confronted and challenged the contradictions in white Christian morality and white supremacy for its maintenance of segregation and black inferiority.

The religious affection of white southerners is the most tangible component in the cultural struggle over the emotional issues of abortion, legalized gambling, women's rights, homosexual rights, and the role of prayer in public schools. These conflicts are symptomatic of larger cultural struggles to shape and define the fundamental assumptions of American public and private life. The configuration of partisan allegiances in the South has led to a rebirth in the conservative view of the role of government and the qualifications of individuals who should occupy positions of political leadership.

Shifts in Government and Political Leadership

Government in the South has traditionally been more the home of showmen than the expression of rigorous, accountable, and informed government. The roots of southern inefficiency were planted in the "Bourbon" era after Civil War Reconstruction, when carpetbagger extravagances were corrected with lower budgets, reduced credit, and minimal taxation. Salaries for public officials were fixed at absurdly low levels, and political power was vested in state legislatures instead of the executives.

Until the 1950s, most southern legislatures met only in biennial sessions; thirty years later annual sessions are the norm. The greatest change in state government was in membership, where judicial decisions on reapportionment stemming from the *Baker v. Carr* Supreme Court ruling in 1962, combined with the Voting Rights Act of 1965, to produce single-member districts for African Americans and white suburban representatives. The stereotype of a southern state legislator as a lawyer bumpkin railing

against Yankee capitalism and spouting racial slurs is far in the past. Members in southern legislatures today are more professional and tend to pursue pragmatic approaches toward lawmaking, stimulated in part by increased demands for accountability and federal spending mandates.

The basic constitutional framework in the South calls for constraining political power, limiting the scope of government, and protecting individual rights. Southern state constitutions have typically had several revisions, numerous amendments, and are often quite lengthy. They were among the earliest colonies, and their Civil War recalcitrance led to frequent administrative replacements. They rewrote their constitutions during Reconstruction, revised them after the end of Reconstruction, and altered them again following World War II, particularly during the reapportionment revolution of the 1960s. Beginning in the 1970s many revised or amended their constitutions again in order to strengthen the institutional powers of the governor and permit four year and consecutive terms. These changes are displayed in Table 5. Three states changed the length of the governors terms and all but Virginia allow for consecutive terms. Five states adopted new constitutions in the period between 1950 and 2000. Virtually every state in the region grants the governor a line item veto.

Southern governors often came to office with unusual personal power to offset their limited institutional or constitutional power. They had exceptional control over their personal appearances, daily schedule, administrative jobs, roads, purchasing, and public improvements. The office has attracted strong, flamboyant personalities who governed, as V.O. Key described, a loose factional system of issueless politics (Key 1949 [1977], 302-310). The office itself was notoriously weak, so occupants compensated for their lack of official power with rhetoric and behavior appropriate for the poverty, illiteracy, and racism of their state. Even so, a 1998 study found that in only North Carolina and Virginia the governor's personal power index score was above the 50-state average. The study's 1998 ranking of the composite scores of governor's personal and institutional powers found all but two of the southern states (Virginia and Tennessee) in the bottom half of the ranking. Southern governors have frequently had: (1) a restricted power of appointment, (2) a shared power of budget development, and (3) an inability to succeed themselves. It was not unusual to find the administrative structure of southern states full of political appointees without professional training, earning lower salaries, and in systems without merit than in other areas of the country (Gray et al. 1999, 218).

Yet, the election of governors, who are expected to lead and manage state government, and legislators, who take a pragmatic approach to lawmaking, have produced a new breed of state government officials. State

Table 5. Southern State Constitutions

State	Number of Constitutions	Effective Date of Most Recent	Governor's Terms				Line Item Veto
			1950	2000	Year Changed	Consecutive Terms	
Alabama	6	1901	4	4	N/A	2	Yes
Arkansas	5	1874	2	4	1984	2	Yes
Florida	6	1969	4	4	N/A	2	No
Georgia	10	1983	4	4	N/A	2	Yes
Louisiana	11	1975	4	4	N/A	2	Yes*
Mississippi	4	1890	4	4	N/A	2	Yes
North Carolina	3	1970	4	4	N/A	2	Yes
South Carolina	7	1896	4	4	N/A	2	Yes
Tennessee	3	1870	1	4	1954	2	Yes
Texas	5	1876	2	4	1974	No limit	Yes
Virginia	6	1971	4	4	N/A	1	Yes

*For appropriations only
Source: Stanley, Harold W., and Niemi, Richard G. 2000. *Vital Statistics on American Politics: 1900-2000*. Washington, DC: C.Q. Press, pp. 288-297.

governments in the South are more representative, professional, and policy-oriented than they were 50 years ago.

From time to time symbolic issues, especially those evocative of traditional southern values, like the flying of the Confederate flag above public buildings and honoring Confederate soldiers, or social issues, such as gambling, prayer in schools and limiting abortions, enter and sometimes dominate the public agenda. The agenda of social conservatives sometimes clashes with a demand for economic progress. Many state officials in the South are busy reforming public education, attracting higher wage industries, providing job opportunities for welfare workers, balancing economic development and environmental concerns, and in general taking a pragmatic approach to government within the context of the limited role demanded by economic conservatives. The South today is marked by change and continuity in political culture, economic structure, social configuration, and government and political leadership. The interactive relationships between the values of the past and forces of modernization or progress have redefined the fault lines for partisan politics.

The Transformation of the One-Party South

The absence of a viable, well-defined system of party competition in the South created a political system where political power was more personal than partisan. Reconstruction, the disenfranchisement of the black population, and the occasional appeal of third party movements decimated political participation. Democrats monopolized state offices and deterred serious opposition in general elections. Primary competition was fierce, but participation in the general election was almost non-existent. Today the South still lags behind the rest of the nation in terms of political participation, but the gap is nothing like what it was previously.

A comparison of voter participation in presidential elections is shown in Table 6. The table shows registration and voter turnout in 1952 and 2000 for each southern state, and these states are compared to the remainder of the nation. A comparison of the votes cast, and the voting age population in 1952, shows an abysmal rate of participation by citizens in these states. These differences, while enormous at mid-century, have moderated by the year 2000. One-party domination by the Democratic Party was the rule at mid-century, with the first defections to the Republican Party occurring when Dwight Eisenhower ran for president. In that election Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia voted Republican. Two Democratic United States senators represented each of the eleven southern states. Every member of the

Table 6. Political Participation and Voting, 1952 and 2000 Presidential Elections

State	1952		2000	
	Percent of Voting Age Population Voting*	Percent of Registered Voters Voting**	Percent of Voting Age Population Voting*	Percent of Registered Voters Voting
Alabama	24.8	N/A	50.0	65.9
Arkansas	38.3	73.0	47.8	59.2
Florida	50.4	73.8	50.6	68.1
Georgia	30.5	50.7	43.8	66.9
Louisiana	40.3	61.7	54.2	64.7
Mississippi	24.3	N/A	48.6	57.1
North Carolina	52.6	N/A	50.3	56.9
South Carolina	29.4	60.1	46.6	64.3
Tennessee	45.2	N/A	49.2	65.3
Texas	42.3	N/A	43.1	62.4
Virginia	31.4	92.3	53.0	74.0
Non-South	69.6	N/A***	52.7	68.7

*Note: Voting age includes citizens 21 and over prior to 1971 (except for GA) and 18 thereafter.
**Registration not reported in some states (marked N/A), for lack of either record or requirement for voter registration. Numbers reported as of: AR, FL, GA, and LA, 1952; SC, 1950; VA, 1949.
***Not relevant due to large number of states either not requiring or not reporting voter registration.
Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 1953 U.S. Statistical Abstract (Table 356);
Federal Election Commission <http://www.fec.gov/pages/2000turnout/reg&to00.htm>.

United States House of Representatives from the region, except two from east Tennessee, belonged to the Democratic Party.

The party composition of state elected officials confirmed one-party rule. Democratic Party allegiance was total at the state level. Every one of the eleven states had a Democratic governor. The state senates were 100 percent Democratic, except Georgia, North Carolina, and Virginia—they were 90 percent. Tennessee was the most competitive two-party state, and it was still 85 percent Democratic. The Democrats dominated state lower houses: Florida, Mississippi, Louisiana, South Carolina, and Texas were exclusively one-party Democratic in their lower legislative chambers. The partisan make-up of the remaining lower house legislatures in the South was at least 90 percent Democratic, with the single exception to the monolith again being Tennessee, and it was 77 percent.

Fifty years after Key's seminal study, the partisan allegiance in the South, with a more affluent and diverse electoral base, is completely transformed. In the 2000 presidential election, every one of the eleven southern states voted in the majority for Republican George W. Bush. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, only seven of the twenty-two United States senators were Democrats, a drop from unanimity 50 years ago to a ratio of about one-third (32%). The only states with at least half Democratic representation in the United States House of Representatives delegations were: Arkansas (50%), Virginia (55%), Texas (57%), and Mississippi (60%). The other seven southern states were majority Republican in representation in the U.S. House of Representatives, and Republican (GOP) prospects were good with the expectation of additional Republican gains after redistricting following the 2000 census.

The partisan transformation at the federal level is not duplicated at the state level where Democratic domination lingers. Still, it has diminished from its mid-twentieth century heyday. Democratic governors are found in six states: Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. Three states—South Carolina, Florida, and Texas—have Republican majorities in their state senates. Most state senates are competitive between typically white suburban Republicans and minority-urban or rural Democrats. The only exception to this pattern is Arkansas, which continues to be 80 percent Democratic. The lower houses of the state legislatures have changed dramatically as well; those in North Carolina and South Carolina are run by the Republicans. The other southern states are two-party competitive at this level, with only Louisiana and Arkansas being more than 75 percent Democratic.

The change since 1950 from a region dominated by one-party Democratic allegiance with a diminished electoral base to one that is competitive

two-party, even slightly Republican, with all citizens eligible to vote and playing a broker role in national politics is our focus in the remainder of this article. We wonder how the changing social and economic base for politics resulted in the corresponding change in partisanship. We want to show partisan change in numerical measures in each state, these figures will register the conversion at both the federal and state level—but we do not want to limit our analysis to summary statistics. Our explanations for partisan transformation involve more than numbers. The political culture of the South is the context for shifts in economic and social conditions, but it is also the source for the continuity between the past and today. In many respects it is the underlying stimulus for changes in political party fortunes.

V.O. Key's classic state-by-state analysis of southern politics confirmed one-party rule founded on three distinct southern institutions: the near total dominance of the Democratic Party, disenfranchisement of black voters, and the pervasive ethos of Jim Crow rule. In a chapter entitled, "Is There a Way Out?," Key indicated future two-party competition might be rooted in the factions within the Democratic Party.

> A single party . . . dominates the South, but in reality the South has been Democratic only for external purposes, that is, presidential and congressional elections. The one-party is purely an arrangement for national affairs. . . . The Democratic Party in most states of the South is merely a holding company for congeries of transient squabbling factions, most of which fail by far to meet the standards of permanence, cohesiveness, and responsibility that characterize the political party (Key 1949 [1977], 16).

The rudimentary elements of party competition, which would subsequently become the Republican Party, existed within the factions of the Democratic Party. Key argued "the extent to which the Democratic Party divides into two party-like factions or veers toward a splintered factional system in the various states" was discerned by examining the percentage of the total vote polled by the two leading candidates for governor in the first Democratic primary (Key 1949 [1977], 16-17). Key found that Tennessee, Virginia, and Georgia were bifurcated, while Florida had a multiplicity of factions. Arkansas, South Carolina, Texas, and Mississippi had multiple Democratic factions too, which he characterized as "friends and neighbors" associations within one party. North Carolina, Alabama, and Louisiana occupy a middle ground between the bifurcated state Democratic parties and the states of multiple factions.

Key's analysis at mid-twentieth century showed in the single-party South, where victory in the Democratic primary was tantamount to election, a latent factionalism that was more the rule than genuine party competition.

The splintering of the Democratic primary vote is used as an indicator of party division. Fifty years ago Key showed that Virginia stood alone as a state where one faction, "The Byrd Machine," dominated. Arkansas, South Carolina, Texas, Mississippi, and Florida were wide-open systems where the strongest factional candidate could not expect much more than a third of the primary vote (Key 1949 [1977], 277-316).

In the 1970s the institutional forces Key identified as maintaining Democratic Party dominance in the South began to crumble (Bass and DeVries 1976, 4). The civil rights movement and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 granted full citizenship and political rights to previously disenfranchised blacks and removed the restrictions to voter registration that excluded most of them from political office. The reapportionment revolution after *Baker v. Carr* (1962) recast the rural white Democratic domination of state legislative and congressional districts. Economic, social, and demographic changes began to sweep the South, challenging its distinctive regional qualities and these changes undercut one-party Democratic dominance.

The level of Republican identification in the South began to change at the national level with the election of 1952, and by 1980 the trickle had become a tide. Republican growth came from newcomers, conservative rural Democrats, and suburban middle and upper class voters who changed their political allegiance. Bass and DeVries commented in 1976, "[T]he forces of social and economic change that have stirred political trends in the South will continue to exert pressure toward two-party political competition" (p. 405).

The close connection between the federal government and the Democratic Party transformed the southern social base of the state parties. The change in the status of blacks from political objects to political participants, especially in Democratic Party politics, drove a political wedge in the party. The Republican Party pursued a "southern strategy," with a subtle—and not so subtle—rhetoric fashioned to lure southern white voters from their traditional Democratic allegiance.

William C. Havard argued that during the decade of the 1970s, for the first time since 1948, regional antipathy toward the national Democratic Party by southern white voters coalesced around the 1968 presidential candidacy of George Wallace and began a shift in Democratic Party loyalty. Alabama Governor Wallace originally captured the national spotlight in fiery opposition to civil rights. That image, however, overshadowed his more lasting legacy as a spokesman for white working-class resentment and general opposition to big, intrusive government.

Republicans built on these anti-federal sentiments in their "southern strategy," and Ronald Reagan exploited them fully in 1980. Democrats

continued to flourish at the state and county level, but southern states turned Republican at the federal level. Havard wrote in 1972 that, "with the Republican Party increasingly competitive in the evolving and wavering South, with the defection from the Democratic Party fluctuating wildly in the Deep South, and with the general decimation of state Democratic organizations throughout much of the region, it would be hard to categorize the politics of the South as anything but a 'no-party' system" (Havard 1972, 690-691).

The polarizing element in southern politics was the sledgehammer effect of the newly enfranchised black voters. As more and more blacks became loyal supporters of the national Democratic Party, white southerners broke their traditional Democratic allegiance. The wedge between blacks and whites not only transformed the social base of the Democratic Party, but also contributed to sub-regional variations in emergent Republicanism. Tennessee and North Carolina had part of their history in the Republican Party. South Carolina immediately had a viable Republican Party when Strom Thurmond switched parties in 1964, while GOP growth in Georgia and Arkansas was much slower. Havard (1972, 729) concluded that the South might ultimately divide into two groups: a majority white Republican Party opposed by a black minority party.

Earl and Merle Black announced in the 1980s that, "Democratic monopolization of southern politics has ended, and Republicans now vigorously contest most major elections." A caveat followed, as the authors noted that Republicans were not yet competitive for all types of offices, or in all parts of the South (Black and Black 1987, 259). Since the Great Society of the 1960s, Republican presidential candidates have fared well among white southerners, especially those of the middle and upper classes. It took longer for southern Republicanism to "trickle-down" to non-presidential statewide elections, but Black and Black confirmed in 1987 "the traditional Democratic domination of statewide elections in the South has vanished" (Black and Black 1987, 291).

Twenty-five years ago Republican strength was more advanced in the Peripheral South than in the Deep South. Since Ronald Reagan's presidential victory in 1980, Republicans are competing better across the entire South for a wider range of offices than ever before; by the mid-1990s substantial majorities of the southern white vote was cast for Republicans in both presidential and congressional races (see Bullock and Rozell 1998). Gains among traditional white voters are offset by African-American losses; in presidential elections Republicans seldom attract more than 10 percent of the black vote.

Since the 1940s the social, economic and racial landscape of the South has been transformed by the emergence of a two-party system, economic growth, multinational corporations, and an expanding middle class. The splintering of the Democratic monolith was begun by inroads made by the Republican Party at the presidential level, then statewide offices with more modest Republican gains in sub-statewide positions.

To track the rate of change we employ the most widely used measure of interparty competition in state politics: the Ranney Index of Party Competition. The Ranney Index first appeared in 1965 and has been updated six times since. The index, based entirely on state offices (governor, state senator, state representative), is a good indicator of the rise of two-party politics in the South during a period of rapid demographic, economic, and racial change.

The Ranney Index of Party Competition confirms that the largely one-party Democratic South has been transformed in the last 50 years into a region defined by two-party competition. The Ranney Index appeared in each of the seven editions of *Politics in the American States* (Jacob and Vines 1965). Ranney authored the chapter on political parties that contained his index for the first three editions of the book. All subsequent editions of the book have contained party competition analyses derived from the Ranney Index, but the chapters are authored by various other scholars. In the 1965 edition, the Ranney Index of Party Competition covered state offices (governors, state representatives, and state senators) in the 1946-1963 period (Ranney 1965, 63-70). Ranney found that eight southern states (South Carolina, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, Alabama, Arkansas, and Florida) were Democratic-dominant states. The three other states (Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee) were modified Democratic-dominant. In the 1971 edition of the text, Ranney found that during the 1956-1970 period, an extension of the earlier period with some overlap, seven southern states (Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, South Carolina, Texas, Georgia, and Arkansas) were solid one-party Democratic in allegiance (Ranney 1971, 84-90). Four states (North Carolina, Virginia, Florida, and Tennessee) were classified as modified one-party Democratic states. The third edition of Jacob and Vines presented the Ranney Index for the period from 1962-1973 (Ranney 1976, 58-65).

In later years, the application of the Ranney Index revealed that more and more states in the region were moving from the one-party Democratic column to the modified one-party Democratic category. For example, in the fourth edition of *Politics in the American States* (Bibby et al. 1983, 65-69; the Ranney Index was used to analyze the years 1974-1980) six states (Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas, and North Carolina) were

classified one-party Democratic. Four states (South Carolina, Texas, Florida, Virginia, and Tennessee) were modified Democratic. By the text's fifth edition (1981-1988 period), only Mississippi was identified by the Ranney Index as one-party Democratic (Bibby et al. 1990, 90-93). All of the remaining southern states, except Tennessee, were designated modified one-party Democratic. Tennessee was the South's lone two-party competitive state.

In subsequent editions of the text, the use of the Ranney Index revealed major party shifts. For example, in the sixth edition in 1996 the Ranney Index covered the 1989-1994 period and that the transformation from one-party dominance was complete (Bibby and Holbrook 1996, 103-109). Not one southern state was found to be one-party Democratic. Five states (Arkansas, Louisiana, Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama) were the only modified one-party Democratic states. Six states (Tennessee, North Carolina, Texas, Virginia, Florida, and South Carolina), the majority, were two-party competitive. In the seventh edition (Bibby and Holbrook 1999, 91-98) which covered the 1995-1998 period, only Arkansas, Georgia, and Louisiana were found by the Ranney Index to be modified one-party Democratic. (No southern state was one-party Democratic.) The remaining eight states, according to the Ranney Index, were classified as two-party competitive.

Notwithstanding some overlap in periods covered in some of the seven editions of *Politics in the American States*, the trend in party competition is unmistakable. The Ranney Index reveals significant erosion of Democratic dominance emerging by the mid-1970s and by the 1990s one-party Democratic dominance was over. With few exceptions, at the close of the twentieth century, politics in the South was increasingly two-party competitive at the state level.

Measures of Party Competition in 2000

The measure of party competition developed by Austin Ranney (1965) is adapted for use in our analysis. The original measure required an examination of two different aspects of competition: interparty competition for control of government (the governor and state legislature) and electoral competition (the percentage of votes won in state elections). The widely used, and long-standing, Ranney measure is a composite of competition for control of government and uses Democratic and Republican allegiance as a base measure. The actual measure has several components:

1. *Proportion of Success*: the percentage of votes won by the parties in gubernatorial elections and the percentage of seats won by the parties in each house of the legislature.
2. *Duration of Success*: the length of time the parties controlled the legislature.
3. *Frequency of Divided Control*: the proportion of time the governorship and the legislature were divided between the two parties.

The major limitation of the Ranney Index is that it has only been used for state offices; here we adapt it for federal elections too. We use the same dimensions Ranney defined for state party competition, but extend the analysis to federal offices. Each state has a single state party system.

Our assumption is that party competition at the federal level (United States senate races, the presidency, and congressional seats) influences competitiveness for gubernatorial, state senate, and state house races. In addition, we assume in our measures that the growth of party competition in a state cannot be divorced from national trends.

The presence of television imports national issues to the state level and forces local politicians to take positions on issues of national importance. A large part of the growth of the Republican Party in the South is due to the aversion white voters have to the perceived liberal trends of the national Democratic Party. Our view is that voters do not clearly distinguish between national and state issues, and that votes for a party at the national level can be a prelude to votes at the local level. We adapt the Ranney Index to national politics with the following measures:

1. *Proportion of Success*: the percentage of votes won by the parties in presidential elections and the percentage of seats won by the parties in the United States Senate and House of Representatives;
2. *Duration of Success*: the length of time the parties controlled the national legislative delegation;
3. *Frequency of Divided Government*: the proportion of time the presidency, House and Senate were divided between the two parties.

Like the measure for state party competition, the federal measure, calculates the dimensions of interparty competition for select years between 1948 and 2000. The index is a measure of the control of government, with a score of 0 indicating complete Republican control and a score of 1.0 indicating absolute Democratic control. At its midpoint, between .3500 and .6499, control of government is evenly split between the two parties, indicating a highly competitive environment. When we extend the Ranney Index to

federal elections we can then compare it with the traditional measures for state elections.

Drawing on our earlier analysis of economic and social change, we classify the eleven southern states into three groups as we examine their political importance. The first category is for those states that have a measure of economic and social development approaching that of the rest of the country. These states are at, or above, the national median in per-capita income. They have a substantial, professional and urbanized labor force. The rankings in 2000 show that four states: Virginia, Florida, Georgia, and Texas are classified as **national** states, meaning they are similar to other states in the rest of the country. To say it differently, they have more in common with their Yankee neighbors than their Rebel cousins.

These states have gained congressional seats after every census since 1980 and are also bellwether states for registering national trends. Their size makes them targets in any presidential campaign. Texas has produced two recent presidents, and Florida was crucial in the 2000 election. Both these states have a sizeable Hispanic population to complement a relatively low proportion of blacks. Georgia's economy is carried by the city of Atlanta, while Virginia lives on federal dollars and technology-based industries in an urban crescent that stretches from the Washington, DC, suburbs, through Richmond to the military bases in Virginia Beach. We classify these states as **national** because they are more similar than different from other states outside the South.

Our second grouping is for states that have moved from the economic backwaters and are well on their way to achieving national status, but are still below the national average in per-capita income. We classify them as **emergent national states** because they are still behind their national cousins in terms of economic development. Two states, North Carolina and Tennessee, are classified as emergent national states. These states are near the regional average in the proportion of black population. Each state has several dynamic and growing urban sectors, but each also has numerous pockets of rural poverty that retard the development record.

The final group is composed of states that still lag behind the national average in income and retain some of the rural poverty so typical of the South fifty years ago. The racial, economic, and demographic divisions of these states, despite five decades of effort, have not substantially changed. The **traditional southern states** are South Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Arkansas. All of the Deep South states except Georgia fall into this category. They are five of the last ten states in the United States in terms of per-capita income. Each has a historically high proportion of blacks and a strong agricultural tradition.

The Ranney measure of party competition is calculated for each state in the three classifications. Table 7 measures party competition for the federal races of president, U.S. Senator, and the U.S. House of Representatives. Table 8 examines the traditional Ranney offices of governor, state senator, and state legislator. The final composite measure is used to classify states as to party control for *both* federal and state elections (Table 9). The following classifications and categories are appropriate for our study.

.8500 or higher: one-party Democratic
.6500 to .8499: modified one-party Democratic
.3500 to .6499: two-party
.1500 to .3499: modified one-party Republican
.0000 to .1499: one-party Republican

The values of the Ranney Party Control Index are initially calculated for federal offices from the years 1948 to 1998 in six-year increments to accommodate the four-year presidential elections. Before calculating these values for state elections, we must explain how their importance has changed for national politics since Key's book was published in 1949.

The Ranney measure of state party competition is applied to federal elections from 1948 to 2000 period. These races for U.S. Senate, House of Representatives, and President and are shown in Table 7. The numbers in the table show that two party competition arrived for federal offices in the 1964-1970 period with Tennessee, Texas, Florida, Virginia, and South Carolina slipping below .6500 into the two party competition columns and North Carolina nearly there with a score of .6579. By the Reagan election of 1980 **every** southern state was two-party competitive at the federal level except Virginia and North Carolina which were now modified one-party Republican (.3499 or lower). This means that southern states were shifting their allegiance to the Republican Party during the decade of the 1970s, when native son Jimmy Carter was in the White House.

Beginning with the second Clinton administration in 1996, three of the four southern states in the national category (Texas, Georgia, and Florida) were recording scores below the .3500 range, meaning they were becoming modified Republican in allegiance. Virginia was a curious case, shifting from modified Republican during the 1980s to two party competitive in the 1990s. Both **emergent** states of Tennessee and North Carolina were modified Republican at the federal level by the second Clinton administration. Two of the **traditional** southern states, Mississippi and South Carolina, were the only states in that category that changed in their political allegiance to modified Republican by the year 2000 (below .3500). Louisiana, Arkansas,

Table 7. Federal Measures of Southern Party Competition, 1948-2000

State	1948-1954*	1956-1962	1964-1970*	1972-1978	1980-1986*	1988-1994*	1996-2000
National States							
Texas	0.7629	0.7288	0.6088	0.5092	0.4010	0.3968	0.2512
Georgia	0.7881	0.7861	0.6720	0.4883	0.4883	0.4975	0.3070
Florida	0.7344	0.7852	0.6077	0.6533	0.4153	0.3958	0.3320
Virginia	0.7078	0.6818	0.5950	0.1976	0.1843	0.4299	0.4991
Emergent States							
North Carolina	0.7545	0.7265	0.6579	0.5171	0.3031	0.3157	0.2871
Tennessee	0.6975	0.6805	0.4691	0.3726	0.4621	0.5135	0.2311
Traditional States							
Mississippi	0.7371	0.7431	0.6574	0.5490	0.3944	0.3249	0.2978
South Carolina	0.6873	0.6833	0.5571	0.4339	0.3546	0.3573	0.3183
Louisiana	0.7320	0.7374	0.7143	0.6626	0.5346	0.6211	0.4514
Arkansas	0.7720	0.7534	0.6863	0.6353	0.6385	0.5888	0.5090
Alabama	0.7058	0.7666	0.8659	0.6194	0.4330	0.6367	0.4839

*Figures do not reflect votes for independent candidates (Strom Thurmond in 1948, George Wallace in 1968, John Anderson in 1980, and Ross Perot in 1992).

Source: Compiled by authors.

Key:
.8500 to 1.000: one-party Democrat
.6500 to .8499: modified one-party Democrat
.3500 to .6499: two-party competition
.1500 to .3499: modified one-party Republican
.0000 to .1499: one-party Republican

and Alabama retained enough Democratic allegiance to be classified as two-party competitive at the federal level.

The transformation from Democratic to Republican Party allegiance was much slower at the state level. Table 8 reveals the transformation of party allegiance at the grassroots by using the same unit of analysis examined by Ranney and other scholars using the Ranney Index in *Politics in the American States*. These states were originally solidly Democratic, some were monoliths—meaning that *every* state office was in the hands of one party—in the years when V.O. Key wrote *Southern Politics*. The findings 50 years later show that every state but Georgia and North Carolina have scores between .3500 and .6499, making them two-party competitive by the year 2000. Georgia and North Carolina remained modified one-party Democratic in the face of this change. Overall, the scores in Table 8 show deterioration in Democratic dominance over time, with the figures decreasing from left to right in the table.

The idea that party politics "trickles down" from the national races to state elections is apparent when the figures in Tables 7 and 8 are compared. The transition of party allegiance at the national level began in the 1964-1970 period, but it was not until after 1996 that state government experienced a similar transformation. The emergent states of Tennessee and North Carolina showed two-party competitiveness in 1990, but over time we find that by 2000 North Carolina reverted to its Democratic roots. Texas, Virginia, and Tennessee have experienced dramatic change in state party competition since Key wrote at mid-century.

Several states showed a consistent Republican emergence *after* Ronald Reagan's election in 1980. By the time George Bush took office in 1988, Texas, Virginia, and Florida were all two-party competitive in statewide offices in the national state category classification. The effects of two-party competition were apparent in the emergent states as well. North Carolina and Tennessee share a border and a mountainous Republican Party heritage. Both these states were two-party competitive at the state level in the Reagan-Bush years.

South Carolina, Mississippi, and Alabama, in the traditional southern states classification, were competitive at the state level by 1988. Most southern states were competitive two-party later, in the 1988-1994 period. In this period only Louisiana, Arkansas, and Georgia resisted the Republican trend.

Table 9 shows the combined measures of state party competition by adding the figures in the previous tables together and dividing the combined score by two. This table shows the transformation of all voting in the southern states between the years of 1948 and 2000 in races for Democratic and Republican candidates in federal and state elections. The consistent pattern

Table 8. State Measures of Southern Party Competition, 1948-2000

State	1948-1954*	1956-1962	1964-1970*	1972-1978	1980-1986*	1988-1994*	1996-2000
National States							
Texas	0.9772	0.9296	0.8956	0.7704	0.6452	0.5760	0.3664
Georgia	0.9907	0.9920	0.7407	0.8668	0.8673	0.7913	0.6922
Florida	0.9440	0.8960	0.6493	0.7370	0.6855	0.5766	0.4923
Virginia	0.8846	0.8716	0.7641	0.4692	0.6920	0.6391	0.3694
Emergent States							
North Carolina	0.7889	0.6719	0.8117	0.7704	0.6684	0.6009	0.8321
Tennessee	0.8579	0.8228	0.6819	0.5467	0.4887	0.6313	0.3807
Traditional States							
Mississippi	0.9956	1.0000	0.9108	0.9047	0.8677	0.6156	0.4545
South Carolina	1.0000	0.9995	0.9024	0.7178	0.7647	0.4523	0.4543
Louisiana	0.9950	0.9756	0.9421	0.9390	0.7355	0.8228	0.4724
Arkansas	0.9461	0.9362	0.7518	0.8539	0.7984	0.8413	0.6393
Alabama	0.9587	0.9651	0.9393	0.9325	0.7942	0.5227	0.5934

*Figures do not reflect votes for independent candidates (Strom Thurmond in 1948, George Wallace in 1968, John Anderson in 1980, and Ross Perot in 1992).

Source: Compiled by authors.

Key:
.8500 to 1.000: one-party Democrat
.6500 to .8499: modified one-party Democrat
.3500 to .6499: two-party competition
.1500 to .3499: modified one-party Republican
.0000 to .1499: one-party Republican

Table 9. Combined Measures of Southern Party Competition, 1948-2000

State	1948-1954*	1956-1962	1964-1970*	1972-1978	1980-1986*	1988-1994*	1996-2000
National States							
Texas	0.8699	0.8292	0.7522	0.6398	0.5231	0.4864	0.3088
Georgia	0.8894	0.8891	0.7062	0.7967	0.6778	0.6444	0.4996
Florida	0.8392	0.8406	0.6285	0.6954	0.5504	0.4862	0.4122
Virginia	0.7962	0.7767	0.6796	0.3242	0.4382	0.5345	0.4343
Emergent States							
North Carolina	0.7717	0.6992	0.7348	0.6380	0.4883	0.4583	0.5596
Tennessee	0.7770	0.7547	0.5755	0.4597	0.4764	0.5724	0.3059
Traditional States							
Mississippi	0.8664	0.8716	0.7841	0.7267	0.6311	0.4703	0.3762
South Carolina	0.8437	0.8414	0.7298	0.5989	0.5597	0.4048	0.3863
Louisiana	0.8635	0.8565	0.8282	0.8008	0.6350	0.7219	0.4619
Arkansas	0.8591	0.8448	0.7191	0.7446	0.7185	0.7147	0.5727
Alabama	0.8323	0.8614	0.9026	0.7760	0.6135	0.5797	0.5387

*Figures do not reflect votes for independent candidates (Strom Thurmond in 1948, George Wallace in 1968, John Anderson in 1980, and Ross Perot in 1992).

Source: Compiled by authors.

Key:
.8500 to 1.000: one-party Democrat
.6500 to .8499: modified one-party Democrat
.3500 to .6499: two-party competition
.1500 to .3499: modified one-party Republican
.0000 to .1499: one-party Republican

in every southern state is the deterioration in voter allegiance to the Democratic Party. In the 1950s five states were one-party Democratic (higher than .8500), and the remaining six were modified one-party Democratic (between .6500 and .8499). By 2000 nine states were two-party competitive (between .3500 and .6499), and two—Texas and Tennessee—were modified one-party Republican.

The combined measures show an erosion in the 1970s and 1980s for Democratic candidates and a more competitive Republican Party. The final figures show full party competition by the year 2000. The Ranney measures confirm that the Reagan years of the 1980s are critical in explaining voter realignment and the emergence of the Republican Party in the region. During the preceding years, only Virginia, Florida, and Tennessee were decidedly two-party. By the beginning of the Bush presidency of 1988 *every* state was two-party competitive in this summary measure.

Conclusion

Fifty years ago, V.O. Key described the Republican Party this way: "it scarcely deserves the name of party. It waves somewhat between an esoteric cult on the order of a lodge and a conspiracy . . . "(Key 1949 [1977], 277). How different things are today in terms of party competition. In most southern states the competition is keen between the two parties for statewide offices, and the South has become a home not only for party competition, but also as a breeding ground for viable national presidential candidates. The last three presidents came from states that are the subject of this article. Disentangling the change and continuity in the region's traditional political culture, social and economic development, government reforms, and a new breed of political leaders is the key to understanding the transformation in party politics that is sweeping the South. Equally important is the struggle between traditional conservative southern political values and more moderate political forces. In the new southern political landscape, the Democratic Party has been largely displaced as the holder of traditional southern conservative affection.

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