PARTY POLITICS VOL 6. No.1 pp. 5–22

 London ▪ Thousand Oaks ▪ New Delhi

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE DEMOCRATS IN THE SOUTH?

US House Elections, 1992–1996

Kevin A. Hill and Nicol C. Rae

ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the dramatic reduction in the numbers of white southern Democrats in the US House of Representatives since 1992. After 30 years of gradual erosion as a political force on Capitol Hill, the decline in white southern Democratic numbers has markedly accelerated during the 1990s. Georgia's House delegation includes not a single white Democrat, and Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi and South Carolina had only one as of 1998. Moreover, in many of the southern US House districts that they continue to hold, white Democrats are clinging onto office by precarious electoral margins. The reduction in southern white Democratic members became noticeable in the 1992 elections and escalated in the 1994 national Republican landslide. The underlying movement continued in 1996 despite a national trend toward the Democrats in the House elections. In this paper, several hypotheses of this decline are tested: (1) redistricting and the creation of majority-minority districts following the 1990 census; (2) retirement of white Democratic incumbents; (3) increasing levels of campaign spending by Republican challengers; and (4) Republican realignment. We find that a combination of race-based redistricting and the overwhelming success of GOP candidates in open-seat elections combined with favorable partisan tides to produce the southern Republican majorities of 1994 and 1996. We conclude that this is the culmination of a process of secular realignment, and there are no indications that this reversal of fortune for the Democrats will change anytime soon.

KEY WORDS ■ elections ■ House of Representatives ■ realignment ■ redistricting ■ US South

One of the relatively unnoted political developments in US politics in recent years has been the drastic attrition in the number of southern white

1354-0688(200001)6:1;5–22;011272

Democrats in both Houses of the US Congress. Much of the erosion in southern Democratic numbers is, of course, due to the major political realignment in favor of the Republican Party in the region since 1952, and the electoral fallout from the civil rights revolution (Petrocik, 1981; Carmines and Stimson, 1989). One of the most remarkable features of US politics in the period following the civil rights revolution of the mid-1960s, however, was the extent to which white southern Democrats were able to retain a predominant position in southern congressional elections – particularly in the US House (Scher, 1997). Districts that voted by landslide margins for Republican presidential candidates continued to send relatively conservative southern white Democrats to Capitol Hill because of massive ticket splitting on the part of southern whites (Lamis, 1990; Black and Black, 1992).

Figure 1 shows the four distinct phases of partisan alignment in the House for southerners in the 20th century. First, there is the classic and fabled 'Solid South' until about 1964. Second, is the emergence of a few southern Republicans, especially in the Deep South with the likes of Strom Thurmond and Floyd Spence (both of South Carolina) which took place in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This quickly melds into the 'ticket-splitting' South of the 1970s and 1980s, which produced solid majorities for Republican presidential candidates but continued to stock the South's House districts with Democrats in about 70 percent of the seats. Finally, we have the post-1992 debacle for the Democrats, which is the main subject of this paper.

Since the early 1990s, the situation of white southern Democrats in House elections has changed for the worse. Many southern states now have

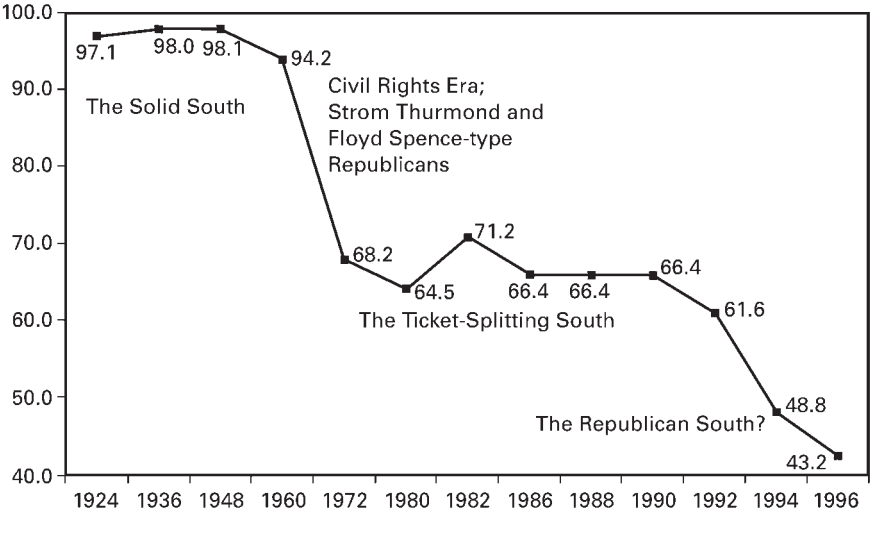

Figure 1. Percentage of Southern US House seats controlled by the Democratic Party, 1924–96

only a handful of white Democrats clinging on to their districts by precarious margins, and as a group they have all but disappeared as a political force within the House Democratic Party. The process began in 1992, when the Republicans picked up ten House seats, nine of them in the southern states. It assumed the proportions of a tidal wave in 1994 as the ratio of southern representatives in the House of Representatives went from 60:40 Democratic to a Republican majority. And, most worryingly for Democrats in the South, the southern swing towards the Republicans continued in 1996, while the rest of the nation was swinging toward the Democrats!

This paper essentially updates the analyses of Hill (1995) and Rae (1994). Our conclusion is that the long-term electoral prospects for white Democrats in the South are not at all promising, and that the changes in the balance of party support that took place during 1992–96 is likely to set a new pattern in southern congressional elections for some time to come.

Hypotheses, Data and Methods

What happened to the Democrats in the South? How did they go from thorough dominance in US House elections to minority status? Several answers to this question have been given by pundits, politicians and academics. Was it increasing Republican candidate professionalism? Over the years, did the Republicans start running more state legislators, county commissioners, mayors and statewide elected officials for office, instead of journalists, businessmen and the occasional kook? Did the GOP simply spend its way into the majority in the South's House seats, overwhelming Democrats in open-seat elections, and matching or exceeding the fiduciary prowess of Democratic incumbents? Did the 1990–2 redistricting processes simply create a climate more conducive to Republican successes? Specifically, were Republican voters 'unpacked' from supermajorities in relatively few districts and spread more evenly across the South's House districts, thus giving them a fighting chance in more and more elections (Bullock, 1995)? Moreover, what of the racial components of redistricting? Were the 1982 amendments to the Voting Rights Act, which sought to maximize black representation, responsible for 'bleaching' large numbers of districts held by white Democrats, taking Democratic partisans away and making these districts ripe for GOP picking? Finally, did the South-wide partisan tide gradually produce a secular realignment toward the Republican Party (Bullock, 1996)? Are Republicans now defeating Democrats in heavily conservative districts that had no business electing Democrats in the first place?

These are all logical, valid arguments that lend themselves to empirical scrutiny. We formalize these purported answers to our research question into the following four hypotheses.

- *Hypothesis 1*: Districts in which the Republicans field challengers and open-seat candidates who had held previous elected office will have a higher probability of electing a GOP candidate. Over the years, as the number of Republican professional candidates increases, their electoral successes South-wide increase.
- *Hypothesis 2*: As Republican challenger and open-seat candidate campaign spending increases, the probability of GOP success in elections increases.
- *Hypothesis 3*: The 'packing' of African-American voters into majority-black districts removed Democratic partisans from surrounding districts. Therefore, beginning with the 1992 election cycle, districts that lost significant numbers of black voters are more likely to produce Republican winners.
- *Hypothesis 4*: Over time, Republicans win more and more House elections in districts where the underlying partisan forces favored them all along.

There are several concepts here that need operationalization. Unless otherwise stated, all our data come from *The Almanac of American Politics* editions for 1990, 1992, 1994, 1996 and 1998 (Barone and Ujifusa, 1989, 1991, 1993, 1995, 1997). These volumes give us data for the 1988 to 1996 election cycles. First, electoral success is measured in two ways: the party that won the election and the percentage of the vote received by the Democratic candidate. We also have standard incumbency dummy variables: campaign spending for the election cycle by the Democratic and Republican candidates,[1] American Conservative Union (ACU) scores for incumbents from the previous Congress, and the percentage of the vote received by the Republican presidential candidate in the district in the most recent presidential election.[2] We also include a dummy variable for whether or not the district has a majority black population for that election cycle. An interval-level variable is also included for the percentage of a district's residents who live in rural areas, since any lingering 'yellow-dogism' among whites that remains would probably be concentrated in rural areas, traditionally a strength of conservative Democrats since the days of the Solid South.

We also include an interval-level variable measuring the percentage of a district that is black for that election cycle. This number in almost all cases changes (sometimes drastically) between the 1990 and 1992 election cycles, due to redistricting. It also changes in 1996 for some districts, particularly in Texas, Louisiana, and Georgia, due to *Shaw* v. *Hunt*-type 're-redistricting' orders by the federal courts. The only variable that needs further explanation, since it was constructed, is the candidate professionalism variable. Elaborating on Jacobson's operationalization (1987), we use a dummy variable for candidate professionalism, coded 1 for professional candidates and 0 otherwise. If a challenger or candidate in an open-seat election has ever

held elected or appointed political office, we code that candidate as a 'professional' candidate. For example, county commissioners, former members of the House, elected or appointed judges, state legislators, school board members and US ambassadors would be considered 'professional' candidates, while journalists, private-practice lawyers, grocery-store owners, and radio-talk-show hosts would be considered 'non-professional' challengers.[3] Eventually, we throw all these variables into our regression models of the Democratic vote for our five election cycles. First, however, we need to establish just what kinds of changes in election results happened between 1988 and 1996.

Falling off the Table: The Democratic Slide

Before moving into an analysis of why the Democrats have done so poorly in southern congressional elections in recent years, we must first appreciate the magnitude of their electoral slide. Table 1 presents data since 1988 on Democratic electoral success, both in retaining House seats and in the average percentage of the vote they receive South-wide. One fact is plainly obvious – the Democrats have experienced an electoral disaster, especially since 1992. In 1988, Democratic candidates won 67.2 percent of all House races in the South. In every election since then, they have continued to lose seats; since their apex in 1988, the Democrats have lost 36 seats in the 11 states of the former Confederacy. Whereas they had an overwhelming 78–38 seat advantage in 1988, after the 1996 election they were on the short end of a 54–71-seat breakdown. Such data cannot possibly give aid and comfort to the Democrats, who, if these trends were to continue, could face the

Table 1. The decline and fall of Southern Democrats, 1988–96

Votes and seats	*1988*	*1990*	*1992*	*1994*	*1996*
Actual seats won by Democrats (%)	67.2	64.7	61.6	48.0	43.2
Change in actual seats won by Democrats from previous election (%)	+1.7	–2.5	–3.1	–13.6	–4.8
Net change in number of seats	+2	–3	–5[a]	–17	–7[b]
Actual Democratic vote (%)	60.5	55.2	52.8	43.2	44.4
Change in actual Democratic vote percentages from previous election	–2.0	–5.3	–2.4	–9.6	+1.2
Gap between seat and vote percentages	+6.7	+9.5	+8.8	+4.8	–1.2

[a]This is a net loss of 5 seats for the Democrats, in light of the gaining of a net of 9 seats for the South due to reapportionment. In raw numbers, the Democrats gained 2 seats, while the Republicans gained 7 seats in these first elections held after reapportionment.

[b]Between the 1994 and 1996 elections, Louisiana 3 Democrat Billy Tauzin, Georgia 9 Democrat Nathan Deal and Mississippi 4 Democrat Mike Parker switched to the Republican Party, and ran successfully for re-election in 1996. They are included as three of the seven Republican pick-ups in 1996.

possibility of wandering in the same type of partisan wilderness the Republicans found themselves in South-wide from the end of Reconstruction to just a few years ago.

The second half of Table 1 continues the bad news for Democratic partisans, this time shifting the focus from seat wins to the average Democratic vote South-wide in these House elections. Up to 1996, the Democrats enjoyed the fruits of a rather steep seats/votes curve, and an underlying partisan bias in districting arrangements. In 1988, for example, the Democrats controlled 67.2 percent of all House seats with a system-wide average vote of 60.5 percent. This 6.7 percent 'bonus' in having 'too many' seats as a function of aggregate vote percentage is a well-known property of first-past-the-post, majoritarian, single-member-district electoral systems. By 1990, when their seat percentage had slipped to 64.7, the Democrats had lost almost 5 percent of their aggregate vote percentages from 1990. By 1992, the first post-redistricting election, they still held 6 out of 10 House seats in the South, but with a South-wide average district vote of only 52.8 percent. But if you live by a steep seats/votes curve, you can also die by it. In the 1994 election cycle, the Democrats lost 13.6 percent of the seats they had held in 1992, while only losing 9.6 percent in their aggregate vote totals. In 1996, a converse phenomenon was operating that may be the most ominous part of this table for Democrats. While the Democrats actually *improved* slightly on their average district vote percentage over 1994 (they won about 1.2 percent more of the vote on average in 1996 than in 1994), they actually *lost four seats* in electoral competition. Now, the Republicans are the ones with a slight advantage on their end of the seats/votes curve, since they won 56.8 percent of the South's House seats with an average district vote of 55.6 percent. The Democrats have been bleeding since 1988, and there is no reason to expect this bleeding will stop, much less be reversed, in the next few election cycles.

Where Did the Republican Takeover Occur?

Now that we know the gravity of the electoral situation of the 1990s for the Democrats, the next question to ask is: where did this debacle occur? Were Republican successes found in beating incumbents or taking open seats away from the Democratic Party? Table 2 answers this question. The top half examines incumbent survival rates for Democrats and Republicans since 1988, while the lower half assesses the parties' abilities to retain districts in the absence of an incumbent (open seats).

Incumbent survival rates (as measured by the percentage of incumbents re-elected) are remarkably high in all cases. This is a well-established fact in American politics (Jacobson, 1987). For each party, in no year does the incumbent survival rate drop below 89 percent. Section 2 of the table elaborates on this fact, showing the actual number of incumbents losing for

Table 2. Where did the Republican takeover occur?

	1988	*1990*	*1992*	*1994*	*1996*
1. Incumbent survival rates[a]					
Republicans	94.4	95.0	100.0	100.0	95.3
Democrats	98.6	97.1	93.4	89.1	100.0
2. Number of incumbents lost to the opposition					
Republicans (7)	2	2	0	0	3
Democrats (14)	1	2	4	7	0
3. Open-seat retention rates[b]					
Republicans	50.0 (4)	–(0)	75.0 (8)	100.0 (4)	100.0 (4)
Democrats	83.3 (6)	83.3 (6)	64.3 (14)	25.0 (12)	68.4 (19)
4. Number of open seats lost to the opposition					
Republicans (4)	2	0	2	0	0
Democrats (22)	1	1	5	9	6

[a]% of incumbents re-elected.
[b]% of elections in which a party retains control of a seat without an incumbent; total number of open-seat elections in parentheses.

each party during a given election cycle. The Republicans have seen 7 incumbents defeated since 1988 (3 in 1996 alone), while the Democrats have lost 14 (11 in 1992 and 1994 alone). This is a net bonus of 7 seats to the Republicans, and although no political party is ever going to scoff at any type of pick-up in legislative seats, clearly the Republican takeover was not pulled off merely through defeating vulnerable incumbent Democrats.

This leaves the open seats, and this is where the Republicans shine in a manner that cannot be overestimated. Since 1988, the GOP has lost only 4 open seats that they previously controlled. Since 1988 there have been only 20 elections with an open seat with a retiring Republican incumbent, and the GOP has only lost 4 of them, for an open-seat 'batting average' of .800. For the Democrats, however, there is a nightmare in these data. Since 1988, the Democrats have lost to the Republicans 22 open seats that had retiring Democratic incumbents. Further, there were 57 of these open-seat elections in districts previously controlled by Democratic incumbents. This yields a Democratic open-seat 'batting average' of .614.

Taken together, these results hint that Democratic incumbency, a legacy of the old Solid South, was holding back the GOP in districts all over the South. In fact, Democrats still usually retain over 90 percent of their incumbents. But as more and more Democrats have retired (45 since 1992 alone), the Republicans have somehow been successful at turning a large proportion of these seats their way. Even if the Republicans had not defeated *one*

single Democratic incumbent in these five election cycles, they would still have had enough open-seat wins to take a majority of these southern congressional seats, though by 1996 instead of 1994.

A Multivariate Model of the Democratic Debacle

In order to assess our four hypotheses jointly, we need a multivariate model. Further, we would like a model that not only explains what happened accurately, but allows us to speculate as to what may have happened under different electoral systems. We would also like to use a model that treats a large electoral system realistically, allowing for both system-wide variation and the specification of within-district variation. Such a model can be found in Gary King and Andrew Gelman's 'JudgeIt' program.

Models of the electoral consequences of redistricting and other electoral forces usually concern themselves with one of several quantities: the seats/votes curve and the related assumption of the 'swing ratio' (Gelman and King, 1990); the expected vote in each district given political or demographic assumptions (Cain, 1985); and, more recently because of the nature of post-1964 politics, the incumbency bias in elections (Mayhew, 1974; Fiorina, 1977; Jacobson, 1987). Further, King and Browning (1987) and King and Gelman through several papers have been concerned with the separate, though related, phenomena of majoritarian responsiveness (the steepness of the seats/votes curve), and partisan bias (the shift of the seats/votes curve to the 'left' or 'right') in legislative districting arrangements. The interest of this paper is focused on district-level seat and average vote predictions, given some set of partisan effects (incumbency, previous election results, district-level presidential votes, candidate professionalism and campaign spending) and demographic effects (percentage black and change in percentage black as a result of redistricting). The model used here is based on the recent work of Gelman and King (1994), which is the culmination of an attempt to create an omnibus method of evaluating electoral systems. Full details of this model can be found in the appendix, but suffice it to say that the *results* (though not the mechanics) of this model can basically be interpreted as an elaboration of the ordinary least squares regression model.

Table 3 presents these models for the 1988–96 election cycles in the South. These yearly models generally contain the same broad characteristics in the structures and significance of their coefficients, though we can pick out trends over time and some idiosyncrasies, especially in the 1992 and 1994 election cycles. All these models fit their data well, with R^2 values ranging from .76 to .86. The dependent variable in all these models is the percentage of the vote received by the Democratic candidate in the district.

Incumbency, as measured by two dummy variables (one for Democratic incumbents and one for Republican incumbents), is almost always a

Table 3. Models of the Democratic vote, 1988–96

Variable	*1988*	*1990*	*1992*	*1994*	*1996*
Constant	.93*	.89*	.59*	.38*	.64*
Democratic vote in previous election cycle	.11	.08	.14*	.41*	.12*
Democratic incumbent?	.23*	.16*	.12*	.08	.13*
Republican incumbent?	–.42*	–.41*	–.20*	–.28*	–.11*
Republican candidate a professional?	.03	–.04	–.01	.01	–.03
Democratic candidate a professional?	.001	.10*	.02	–.01	.05*
Republican % of presidential vote in most recent election	–.64*	–.59*	–.49*	–.35*	–.50*
% district black	–.04	–.05	.20*	.14	–.03
Majority black district?	–.06	–.06	–.01	.03	.04
% district rural	–.09	.04	.07	–.05	.02
Democratic challenger spending	.0004*	–.0001	.0003*	.0002*	.0001*
Republican incumbent spending	.0002*	–.0004*	.00001	.0001*	–.00001
Democratic incumbent spending	–.0001	–.0001	–.0001	–.0001	–.0001
Republican challenger spending	–.0004*	–.0003*	–.0003*	–.0001	–.00001
ACU score in previous Congress for incumbent Democrats	.001	.0003	.001	.001*	.0004
n	116	116	115	125	125
R^2	.81	.76	.76	.86	.76

* = Coefficient significant at $p < .05$ level.

Note: Table entries are unstandardized regression coefficients. The dependent variable is the percentage of the vote received by the Democratic candidate in the general election.

significant predictor of the Democratic vote. However, the magnitude of these coefficients is always higher for Republican than for Democratic incumbents (sometimes more than twice as high). This indicates that Republican incumbency is more valuable than Democratic incumbency when it comes to predicting the percentage of the vote won by Democratic candidates, all else being equal. In 1996, the absolute values of these two coefficients are roughly equal, and in 1994 Democratic incumbency actually is *not* a significant predictor of the Democratic vote, thus indicating that the general electoral calamity of 1994 did not even significantly protect Democratic incumbents over open-seat candidates or challengers. Likewise, the Democratic vote in the previous election cycle is only significant in 1992,

1994 and 1996, indicating that redistricting between 1990 and 1992 may have over-concentrated Democratic partisans. Before 1992, the previous percentage of the vote received by Democrats was not a significant predictor of the following year's vote percentage, indicating that Democrats were widely spread throughout the whole system.

In our multivariate model, we see a pattern for candidate professionalism: the dummy variable for Republican candidate professionalism is never a significant predictor of the percentage of the vote received by the Democrats. However, Democratic challenger and open-seat candidate professionalism *is* a significantly positive predictor of the Democratic vote in 1990 (where professional candidates buy an additional 10 percent of the vote for the Democrats on average) and 1996 (quality candidates give the Democrats a bonus of 5 percent in that election). All other things being equal, then, rising levels of Republican challenger professionalism cannot explain the surging GOP tide of the past decade.

There is another story, however, attached to the influence of underlying partisan forces. The percentage of the vote the Republican presidential candidate receives in a district is always a significant negative predictor of the Democratic House candidate's percentage of the vote. As the percentage of the vote George Bush or Bob Dole receive increases, the percentage of the vote garnered by the Democratic House candidate significantly decreases. For example, in 1996, for every percentage point more of the vote Bob Dole received in a district, the Democratic House candidate received half a percentage point less of the vote, all else being equal. One must add, however, that there is no discernible rising pattern of the significance of this variable's coefficient as time goes by.

Our multivariate models in Table 3 show that, holding all other variables constant, percentage of the population in a district that is black was only a significant predictor in 1992, the election immediately after redistricting. Additionally, whether or not a district is majority-black, as measured by a dummy variable, is never on its own a significant predictor of the Democratic vote, holding other variables constant. Although the racial make-up of a district is neither a constantly significant predictor of the Democratic vote, nor does it express any trend over time, the significance of this variable for the 1992 election cycle is an important factor in as many as 9 districts, as will be seen in Table 4.

Democratic and Republican challenger campaign spending against incumbents are usually significant predictors of the Democratic vote across districts. Further, the magnitude of these coefficients, while differently signed in the appropriate direction, is usually quite similar. This indicates that while challenger spending itself is an important predictor of the Democratic vote, the party doing this spending is not. Therefore, increasing levels of Republican *challenger* spending alone, when considering all the other variables in the model, is not itself a highly influential predictor of the Democratic vote. Democratic incumbent spending is never a significant predictor of the

Democratic vote. This is to be expected, in light of Abramowitz's (1991) assertion that incumbent spending is almost always reactionary to challenger spending, and is not itself a driving force in an election but an endogenous one that responds to challenger threats. Since the effects of challenger spending for the two parties are similar, this is not a compelling factor in explaining increasing Republican success.

Finally, what about conservative Democrats? Do they do any better from election to election than do more liberal incumbents in the South? The models in Table 3 include the American Conservative Union (ACU) scores for Democratic incumbents. In no instance except 1994 were these significant predictors of the Democratic vote, and in that momentous election, being a more conservative Democrat slightly improved one's showing at the polls. In the other four elections, however, the relative conservatism of Democratic incumbents neither helped nor significantly hurt the party's electoral fortunes.

Overall, then, these well-fitting models show the consistent power that underlying partisan forces, incumbency (especially Republican incumbency) and, to a lesser extent, campaign spending have on the successes of Democratic candidates for Congress in the South. These effects are fairly consistent, though there are no readily apparent trends over time. There are some idiosyncrasies from election to election, especially the direct role of race-based redistricting in the 1992 election cycle. This is all puzzling, since over this same period the Republicans captured almost three dozen House seats from the Democrats. Then again, if we take the cumulative effect of all this, combined with a much higher rate of Democratic than Republican retirements, we are left concluding that a true secular realignment has taken place in the South. The usefulness of these models, and the real power of the JudgeIt program used to estimate them, is in our ability to study hypothetical electoral scenarios under several different assumptions. By doing this, we can more directly assess whether or not the GOP simply benefited from short-term, idiosyncratic phenomena in the South, or whether Dixie has just witnessed the culmination of a realignment process.

Could the Democrats Have Avoided This? Two Alternative Scenarios

The JudgeIt program uses two error terms, and thus we do not have to assume that every district will respond to a constant South-wide partisan swing in the dependent variable (percentage of the vote received by the Democratic candidate) when we manipulate some of the independent variables. This is a very powerful quality of the underlying statistical model, allowing us to assess the effects of hypothetical changes in the electoral system and conditions more realistically, both in the past and in predictions for future elections.

Table 4 presents the results of two alternative scenarios that could have occurred in the South in 1992, 1994 and 1996. In the first part of the table, we run the same models as in Table 3, but this time assuming that the 1990–2 redistricting did not take place. Specifically, we substitute percentage black in *1990* for percentage black in *1992, 1994, and 1996*, to see what would have happened without race-based redistricting.[4] We identified 'old' districts at the census tract level. Further, we assume that the incumbents who retired in 1992, 1994 and 1996 would have remained in these elections. This is a reasonable assumption given the stated reasons of some of these incumbents for retiring in the first place: that their districts had changed too much. If the 1992 elections had been run with the old districts, a net of three of these districts would have stayed with the Democrats, all other things (except incumbency and percentage black) being measured identically to the models in Table 3. The districts that could have been either saved by the Democrats or taken from the Republicans were predicted to be Florida 22 (the old Florida 19th; Republican incumbent Clay Shaw retained this district in 1992), Georgia 1 and Georgia 3 (these districts went Republican in 1992). The effect of race-based redistricting, according to this counterfactual model, would not have stopped in 1992. Had the 1994 elections been run with the old district lines and 1990 incumbents, four other districts were predicted to stay Democratic: Georgia 3, Georgia 8, North Carolina 2 and North Carolina 3. Finally, if we are willing to assume that percentage black in 1990 and incumbency from 1990 could be imputed to the 1996 elections, then our model concludes that Alabama 4, Georgia 6 and Louisiana 5 would have gone Democratic.

Table 4. Democratic electoral fortunes under two alternative scenarios, 1992–6

Scenario	*1992*	*1994*	*1996*
1. Using the Old Districts			
Predicted Democratic seats using old districts' racial make-up (%)	64.0	51.3	45.2
Net change in number of seats	+3 Dem	+5 Dem	+3 Dem
Predicted Democratic vote percentage using old districts' racial make-up	51.6	43.2	42.3
2. Under a 'fair' electoral system			
Predicted Democratic seats under a 'fair' electoral system with no incumbency or spending advantages(%)[a]	68.4	49.6	43.2
Net change in number of seats	+8 Dem	+2 Dem	None
Predicted Democratic vote percentage under a 'fair' electoral system.	53.1	48.0	46.8

[a]To simulate a 'fair' electoral system, we constrain our model to assume all elections are without incumbents (all open seats), and that each party spends an identical amount of money in the general election. Further, we assume that no seats under these 'fair' conditions would be uncontested.

Notice that these counterfactual models predict that eventually the Republicans would have taken the majority of southern seats despite race-based redistricting, but the change would have happened in 1996 rather than 1994. Another intriguing factor is that, had the 1994 elections been run in the 1990 districts and with 1990 incumbents, the Democrats would have won 51.3 percent of the South's House seats in 1994 with only 43.2 percent of the vote system-wide. This is powerful testimony to the fact that, in the pre-redistricting configurations, Republicans were over-packed into relatively few districts, while Democratic partisans were spread across a much larger set of districts. By 1996, however, even with the old districts, the overall partisan tide would have given the Democrats only 45.2 percent of the seats with 42.3 percent of the vote South-wide, indicating that by then, the Republican tide had advanced so much that even a steep seats/votes curve could not have saved the Democrats. This does not minimize the importance of the creation of majority-minority districts in undermining Democratic fortunes across the South (Hill, 1995), but does place it within a more appropriately broader partisan context.

Another alternative scenario run for the 1992–6 election cycles is shown in the second half of Table 4. Here we are interested in what would have happened under a 'fair' electoral system, meaning a system in which there are no incumbency or spending biases. To operationalize this, we constrain the models from Table 3 to assume that all elections are without incumbents and that campaign spending for the Democrats and Republicans is identical. What we do *not* mean by 'fair' is an electoral system in which districts contain identical or even proportionate numbers of Democratic and Republican partisans. We stick with the actual district lines from 1992, 1994 and 1996; we just assume that all the incumbents died and no one outspent anyone else.

Under these hypothetical conditions, the Democrats would have made a net gain of eight more seats in 1992 than they did in actual practice. This is indicative of the skewed advantages of Republican over Democratic incumbency revealed in Table 3; being a Republican incumbent in the South on average buys one more of a bonus in an election than being a Democratic incumbent. For example, the 1992 coefficient from Table 3 for Republican incumbency was –.41, while the coefficient for Democratic incumbency was .16. Further, a 'fair' electoral system without incumbents and unequal spending would have given the Democrats 68.4 percent of the South's seats (versus the 61.6 percent they actually got that year) with only 53.1 percent of the vote on average South-wide (versus the 52.8 percent they actually got). This is an enormous seats/votes gap of 15.3 percent, which is nearly double the actual seats/votes gap of 1992. Term limits and strict campaign finance laws, therefore, would have rocked the GOP in 1992.

By 1994, under these 'fair' conditions, the GOP would have still taken a majority of the seats in the South, due to the overwhelming partisan shifts that year, but the margin would have been razor-thin (50.4 percent, or one

seat). Remember that we are controlling for incumbency and spending by setting their coefficients to zero, so the overwhelming partisan forces that favored the Republicans in that election were real. Notice also that in 1994 the seats/vote curve under these hypothetical conditions would have been even flatter: a gap of only 1.8 percent, versus a real gap of 4.8 percent in favor of the Democrats that year. Perhaps the most interesting part of this table comes from our results for a hypothetically 'fair' 1996 election. Here, our model tells us that there would have been *no net changes* in the number of seats won by either party, even when incumbency and spending advantages are controlled.

In the final analysis, the direct influences of race-based redistricting probably brought the Republican takeover of the South's House districts one election cycle too early, but it would have happened anyway. Likewise, even in an electoral system with absolutely no incumbency advantages for either party, our JudgeIt models tell us that the GOP would have taken the majority of the South's House seats 'on schedule' in 1994. The overwhelming GOP tide was *truly* overwhelming; it seems that the Democrats were doomed by secularly realigning forces, and neither a turning back of the clock to the old districts, nor an anti-incumbent biological weapon, could have stopped it.

Conclusion: Two-party Competition or a New One-party South?

There is no mistaking this fact: the Democratic Party in the South is in serious trouble, and the 1994 election result did not occur by chance. Taking into account all our analyses here, especially our counterfactual and predictive analyses, we can only conclude that the South has experienced a secular realignment toward the Republicans. Underlying partisan forces, buried for decades by a lingering hostility toward the party of Lincoln and a huge Democratic incumbency bias, have finally shaken loose and broken into plain view. Since 1988, the Republicans have defeated 14 Democratic incumbents, while losing only 7 seats themselves. Further, they have wrested 22 of 57 Democratically held open seats into their camp, while losing only 4 of their own to the other party. Race-based redistricting, and the effect it had on some Democratic incumbents, probably gave the GOP the prize 2 years too early, but the Republican takeover would have happened at least by 1996 under any reasonable circumstance.

As our models consistently show, even if the Republicans had not defeated a single Democratic incumbent in this entire time period, the open seats they took from the Democrats would have alone been enough to produce a GOP majority in the South's 125 House seats. If all the incumbents in the region suddenly died or decided to retire, and if everyone spent the same amount of money in elections, the GOP would still have taken control of the region's House delegation 'on schedule' in 1994.

There is just no positive spin one can place on all this for the Democrats. The old Conservative Coalition in the House is much less necessary now, with the Republicans in charge of that body. Therefore, the pivotal power white southern Democrats have enjoyed in the past is waning. Likewise, as our models show, Republican incumbency has consistently been more powerful than Democratic incumbency in delivering the fabled 'incumbency advantage' in House elections. With so many GOP incumbents now freshmen and sophomores, and with no term limit legislation in sight, this cannot be encouraging to Democratic partisans, who may well be looking at years, if not decades, of wandering in the electoral wilderness. Further, as the few remaining conservative Democrats retire, their districts are just as ripe for GOP picking as those that saw retirements in 1992 and 1994.

One cannot help but be struck by the fact that something of truly historical proportions has happened in the South in the past few years. The region that was once about as likely to elect Republican representatives as it was to declare the Pope the head of the Southern Baptist Convention, now has a solid Republican majority in both the House and the Senate. On top of all this, a dramatic and ironic reversal of roles has taken place in a Congress that used to see boll weevil Democrats in top leadership positions throughout the two chambers. In 1998, the House of Representatives was run by a Georgian Speaker, with Texans as majority leader and majority whip, yet another Texan as Ways and Means chairman, a Louisianan as head of Appropriations, and a South Carolinian overseeing the military committee. On the other side, a Mississippi senator was majority leader, a venerable South Carolinian was President Pro-Tempore and chairman of the Armed Services Committee, and a North Carolina firebrand chaired Foreign Relations. Any southern politician who had been frozen in ice in the 1950s and who was thawed out in 1998 would have at first blush seen this as all too familiar. After all, those southern Democrats stuck around forever and, due to the seniority system, got themselves put in charge of really powerful committees and made their way into leadership positions. But our hypothetical ice man would probably have to be given a stiff shot of his favorite bourbon when he found out that all these powerful southerners were – gasp!! – Republicans.

Appendix

For the probability density functions from which these estimates and results are derived, please refer to Gelman and King (1994). District vote outcomes are estimated by the regression model:

$$V = X\beta + \gamma + \epsilon$$

where V is the Democratic proportion of the two-party district vote, X is a vector of explanatory variables, β is a vector of parameters for the effects of X on predicting the Democratic proportion of the vote; and γ and ϵ are independent error terms,

normally distributed with mean zero and standard variances. The parameter λ is calculated as the proportion of total variance due to γ. The parameters λ and σ^2 (the total error variance) are hyperparameters to be estimated and then taken as 'known' in future analyses. σ^2 is simply estimated from the variance of the residuals resulting from regressing V on X. Further, λ is estimated by regressing $V_{(t+1)}$ (the election following V) on V and our original explanatory variables X. As King and Gelman point out in their discussion of these parameters, one can think of λ as an estimate of our uncertainty of how much V actually predicts $V_{(t+1)}$, given the explanatory variables X. Thus, λ is our concession to the fact that, even though we have specified our model as well as we can theoretically, given the data available, there are still non-random effects in the electoral system we cannot observe which lead to different districts having different shifts in the Democratic vote, given some system-wide partisan swing. In this way, Gelman and King take on the static assumption of 'uniform partisan swing', instead of allowing each district to vary in its own partisan swing, given a system-wide swing of, say, 3.5 percent toward the Republicans. The importance of relaxing the uniform partisan swing assumption is important in the evaluation of the 1992–6 elections, and in specifying which districts would *not* have swung Republican under certain electoral conditions.

More accurate estimates of λ and σ^2 can be obtained by pooling several election results, which we have done from 1986–96. Once these hyperparameters have been estimated, we take their average and use them in subsequent district-level analyses. For the following analyses of all 11 Southern states, the parameters are fixed as $\sigma = .1294$ and $\lambda = .1382$.

Because this paper (1) evaluates the 1992–6 elections and (2) evaluates what would have happened had the 1992–6 elections been run with the same partisan features *and* the 1990 districts, we want a model that allows simulation of district vote outcomes under these assumptions. For these reasons of flexibility, Gelman and King use simulation analysis based on Bayes' Theorem, in order to calculate what would happen under various hypothetical conditions:

$$V^{(hyp)} = X^{(hyp)}\,\beta + \delta^{(hyp)} + \gamma + \epsilon^{(hyp)}$$

where the new parameter δ is a known constant used to simulate system-wide partisan swing. This parameter is initially set to zero for evaluation of the 1992–6 elections and counterfactual analysis of these elections under alternative electoral conditions; it can be set to various values in the final analysis below to model various South-wide swings to the Republicans in future elections. Thus, λ, σ^2 and β are, in Bayesian parlance, used to obtain the posterior distribution of hypothetical election outcomes $V^{(hyp)}$, given the system-wide average of V. Please see Gelman and King (1994) for further details on how to take random Bayesian draws and the distributions from which these draws are taken, and for a more thorough explanation of point estimates and standard deviations for the quantities above.

Notes

1 Campaign spending is measured in hundreds of thousands of dollars.
2 For 1988 and 1990, we use George Bush's vote in the 1988 election. For 1992 and 1994, we use his vote in the 1992 election. For 1996, we use Bob Dole's vote in the 1996 election.

3 Jacobson (1987) and others have tried to construct ordinal measures of candidate quality. Further, some measures of candidate quality used in the past have excluded appointed officials from their operationalizations of challenger quality. We include these appointed officials (e.g. judges, gubernatorially appointed cabinet officers, and US ambassadors) as quality candidates, since they too have held political office. Anyone wishing to inspect our list of quality candidates for these five election cycles may request the list from the authors.
4 Of course by substituting percentage black in 1990 for percentage black in 1992, we have to discard the newly created districts in Florida (4), Georgia, Virginia, North Carolina (1 each), and Texas (3) from the analysis.

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KEVIN A. HILL is an associate professor in the Department of Political Science at Florida International University in Miami, Florida. His most recent publication is *Cyberpolitics: Citizen Activism in the Age of the Internet* (1998), co-authored with John E. Hughes. His research interests are in the fields of parties and interest groups.

NICOL C. RAE is an associate professor in the Department of Political Science at Florida International University in Miami, Florida. His most recent publication is *Conservative Reformers: The Republican Freshmen and the Lessons of the 104th Congress* (1998). His research interests are in the fields of legislative politics, the presidency, and political parties.
ADDRESS: Department of Political Science, Florida International University, Miami, FL 33199, USA. [email: khill@fiu.edu and raen@fiu.edu]

Paper submitted 5 August 1998; accepted for publication 2 December 1998.