

Why Did the Democrats Lose the South? Bringing New Data to an Old Debate[†]

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A long-standing debate in political economy is whether voters are driven primarily by economic self-interest or by less pecuniary motives like ethnocentrism. Using newly available data, we reexamine one of the largest partisan shifts in a modern democracy: Southern whites' exodus from the Democratic Party. We show that defection among racially conservative whites explains the entire decline from 1958 to 1980. Racial attitudes also predict whites' earlier partisan shifts. Relative to recent work, we find a much larger role for racial views and essentially no role for income growth or (non-race-related) policy preferences in explaining why Democrats "lost" the South. (JEL D72, J15, N42)

Recent events in the United States and Europe have rekindled interest in a long-standing political economy question: are voters driven primarily by economic self-interest or by less pecuniary motives such as ethnocentrism? Some scholars see economic dislocations fueling many voters' current rejection of the status quo, whereas others see racism or xenophobia as the chief factor.¹

In this paper, we reexamine one of the largest and most debated partisan shifts in a modern democracy: the exodus of white Southerners from the Democratic Party

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¹There is a lively debate among economists over what explains recent events such as the election of Donald Trump and the successful Brexit campaign. Larry Summers sees the "Brexit vote and Donald Trump's victory in the Republican presidential primaries [as evidence that] electorates are revolting against the relatively open economic policies that have been the norm in the United States and Britain since World War II." By contrast, Paul Krugman bluntly concludes: "Economic anxiety is not a very good predictor of who's a Trump supporter. Racial antagonism is a good indicator of who's a Trump supporter." See Lawrence Summers, "How to Embrace Nationalism Responsibly," *Washington Post*, July 10, 2016; and Alexander C. Kaufman, "Paul Krugman: Racism, Not Economic Anxiety, Drives Trump Voters," *Huffington Post*, August 16, 2016, respectively.

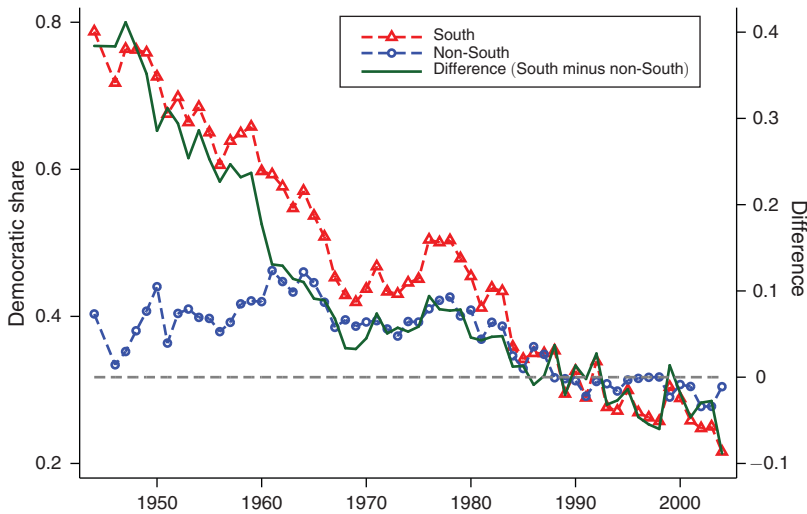


FIGURE 1. SHARE OF WHITES IDENTIFYING AS DEMOCRATS, BY REGION

Notes: South is defined throughout as the 11 states of the former Confederacy: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. Democratic identification is coded throughout as 1 if the respondent identifies with the Democratic Party and 0 otherwise (so independent is coded as 0). Here and throughout the paper, the Gallup data have been weighted to match (interpolated) Census cells defined by *South* \times *High school graduate*.

Source: Individual-level data derived from Gallup polls (see Section I for more detail).

in the second half of the twentieth century. Benefiting from recently released data, we offer new evidence on whether racial attitudes or economic factors best explain this political transformation.

As illustrated in Figure 1, at mid-century white Southerners (defined throughout as residents of the 11 states of the former Confederacy) were 25 percentage points more likely to identify as Democrats than were other whites. This advantage has since flipped in sign, with the most dramatic losses occurring during the 1960s. Despite the massive, concurrent enfranchisement of Southern blacks, who overwhelmingly favored the Democrats from 1964 onward, the resulting shifts in aggregate Southern political outcomes have been stark: to take but one example, in 1960, *all* US senators from the South were Democrats, whereas today all but 4 (of 22) are Republican.

As with the contemporary debate over the underlying causes of the recent rise of anti-establishment political movements, no clear consensus has emerged as to why the Democrats “lost” white Southerners, despite 50 years of scholarship.² On one side are researchers who conclude that the party’s advocacy of 1960s Civil Rights legislation was the prime cause.³ From the Civil War until the middle of the

²We only briefly review the literature in this version of the paper. For a more detailed review, please see the longer, working paper version of our paper (Kuziemko and Washington 2015).

³See Carmines and Stimson (1989) and Kousser (2010) for work that makes both a qualitative and quantitative (where data permit) case for the primacy of race in explaining why the Democrats lost white Southerners. The party’s shift on Civil Rights triggered the permanent defection of many white racially conservative Southerners, argue those researchers who posit Civil Rights as cause. Fryer and Levitt (2012) find a positive correlation between

twentieth century, the Democratic Party was based in the South and associated with white supremacy. But as early as the 1940s, the growing Northern wing of the party began to take positions in favor of racial equality. Eventually, Democratic presidents would introduce and sign the sweeping Civil Rights (1964) and Voting Rights (1965) Acts: outlawing, respectively, de jure segregation in public accommodations and racial barriers to voting, both of which, by the 1960s, existed only in the South.⁴

On the other side is a younger, quantitative scholarship, which emphasizes factors other than Civil Rights.⁵ These scholars most often argue that economic development in the South made the redistributive policies of the Democrats increasingly unattractive. From 1940 to 1980, per capita income in the South rose from 60 to 89 percent of the US average, which in principle should predict a movement away from the more redistributive party.⁶ Beyond economic catch-up, these scholars have argued that demographic change and the polarization of the parties on other domestic issues led to white Southern “dealignment” from the Democratic Party.⁷

That scholars have failed to converge toward consensus on this central question of American political economy may seem surprising, but data limitations have severely hampered research on this question. Until recently, consistently worded survey questions on racial attitudes, from both *before* and after the major Civil Rights victories of the 1960s, have not been widely available. For example, the standard dataset on political preferences in the US, the American National Election Survey (ANES), does not include a consistently repeated question on racial views until the 1970s, well after the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts (CRA and VRA). Similarly, the General Social Survey (GSS), another commonly used dataset on Americans’ political and social views, begins in 1972.

In this paper, we employ a little used data source that allows us to analyze political identification and racial attitudes back to the 1950s. Beginning in 1958, Gallup asks respondents “Between now and ... [election]... there will be much discussion about the qualifications of presidential candidates. If your party nominated a well-qualified man for president, would you vote for him if he happened to be a Negro?” Fortunately for our purposes, the wording has remained consistent and the question

membership in the Ku Klux Klan and the Democratic Party among whites in the South in the 1920s. Pre-Civil-Rights-era scholarship also emphasized the primacy of race in Southern politics. “Whatever phase of the southern political process one seeks to understand, sooner or later the trail of inquiry leads to the Negro,” Key Jr. (1949, p. 5) memorably wrote, though he was careful to emphasize how race interacted with other institutions. Similarly, Myrdal (1944, p. 430) writes: “[A]s a political issue, [the Negro people] have been an important factor in the very region where they have been disenfranchised, the South... The issue of ‘white supremacy versus Negro domination,’ as it is called in the South, has for more than a hundred years stifled freedom of thought and speech and affected all other civic rights and liberties of both Negroes and whites in the South. On this point there is virtual agreement among all competent observers.”

⁴Note that, somewhat confusingly, “public accommodations,” as defined in the legislation, refer in fact to *private establishments that service the public*, so would include stores and restaurants, not just, say, government buildings like libraries and post offices.

⁵Key academic citations in this school of thought include McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal (2006, p. 94) (“pocketbook voting is an important part of the story of the dramatic switch of partisan allegiances in the South”) and, especially, Shafer and Johnston (2009, p. 72) (“The engine of partisan change in the postwar South was, first and foremost, economic development”). An influential book in the popular press making this argument is Trende (2012, p. 28) (“[E]conomics, rather than race, was primarily driving the development of Southern politics at the time [the 1960s]”).

⁶Numbers are taken from Margo (1995).

⁷We use the term “dealignment” instead of “realignment” in this paper as we focus on Southerners *leaving* the Democratic Party: whether to join the Republicans, adopt independent status, or support third-party candidates such as Strom Thurmond or George Wallace.

has been asked repeatedly since that date.⁸ We refer to those who say they would not vote for such a candidate as having “racially conservative views.”

Having identified our measure of racial attitudes, we then define the pre- and post-periods by determining the moment at which the Democratic Party is first seen as actively pursuing a more liberal Civil Rights agenda than the Republican Party. Conventional wisdom holds that Democratic President Johnson famously “lost the South” with his signing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. However, analyzing contemporaneous media and survey data, we identify instead the Spring of 1963, when Democratic President John F. Kennedy first proposed legislation barring discrimination in public accommodations, as the critical moment when Civil Rights is, for the first time, an issue of great salience to the majority of Americans and an issue clearly associated with the Democratic Party.

Our main analysis takes the form of a triple-difference: how much of the pre- versus post-period decrease in Democratic Party identification among Southern versus other whites is explained by the differential decline among those Southerners with conservative racial attitudes? Democratic identification among white Southerners relative to other whites falls 17 percentage points over our preferred sample period of 1958–1980. This decline is entirely explained by the 19 percentage point decline among racially conservative Southern whites. These results are robust to controlling flexibly for the many socioeconomic status measures included in the Gallup data and is highly evident in event-time graphical analysis as well.

We complement this main result with a variety of corroborating evidence of the central role of racial views in the decline of the white Southern Democrat. Whereas Gallup only asks the black president question every one to two years, it asks its signature “presidential approval” question roughly once a month during our sample period. We can thus perform a higher-frequency analysis surrounding our key moment of Spring of 1963 by correlating presidential approval for President Kennedy in the South versus the non-South, with the daily count of newspaper articles that include the President’s name along with terms related to Civil Rights. The inverse correlation between these two series is visually striking. Even when we flexibly control for media coverage of other events and issues, allowing Southerners to have different reactions to news regarding Cuba, the Soviet Union, Social Security, etc., the number of articles linking Kennedy to Civil Rights retains its overwhelming explanatory power in predicting divergence in his popularity among Southern versus other whites.

As already noted, a key competing hypothesis is that robust economic development (the movement from an agrarian to a manufacturing- and service-based economy) in the South during the Civil Rights period and the decades that followed pushed Southern voters, now richer, away from the more redistributive Democratic Party. We recognize that it is impossible to cleanly separate individuals’ perceived economic self-interest and their views on racial equality (see, e.g., Edsall and Edsall 1992 and Gilens 1996 on how whites often view redistribution in racialized terms). We can show, however, that in regression analysis, individual markers of class, state-year level measures of economic development, or annual measures of

⁸Changes are very minor and are discussed in detail in Section I.

the parties' changing positions on economic policy have relatively little ability to explain white Southern dealignment. Indeed, even if we take the most generous estimate of how Democratic identification declines with household income, the effect of Civil Rights on racially conservative Southern whites' party identification is akin to a 600 percent household income increase over the course of two years.

The 1960s not only witnessed watershed moments for Civil Rights, but also other important political and social changes. For example, recent work argues the 1960s marks the end of a period of political consensus between Democrats and Republicans, especially on economic and redistributive issues (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006). If white Southerners were always more conservative, then rising polarization may explain why they differentially begin to leave the Democrats in the 1960s. Yet we find that, except for issues related to racial equality, whites in the South were, if anything, slightly to the left of whites elsewhere on domestic policy issues. Moreover, while the 1960s also saw the political organization of women and other minority groups, we find no evidence that white Southerners who have negative views of women, Catholics, or Jews differentially leave the Democratic Party in 1963: the exodus is specific to those who are racially conservative.

Finally, we make some progress on quantifying the role of racial attitudes in party identification during earlier decades. While our central data source begins in 1958, the evolution of the Democratic Party on Civil Rights has a longer history. As is evident in Figure 1, a substantial number of Southern whites leaves the party in the late 1940s and early 1950s. While our data from this earlier period are decidedly more limited and thus results should be viewed more cautiously, we provide several pieces of evidence that this decline is linked to racially conservative Southerners leaving the party after it takes its first pro-Civil Rights steps under Democratic President Harry Truman in 1948.

While better understanding the basis of individuals' partisan identity is of interest in its own right, shifts in political allegiance can have large policy consequences as well. Today, some policymakers fear that rising populist sentiment will have disruptive effects on economic policy, especially trade agreements. While scholars still disagree on its underlying causes, few discount the vast impacts of Southern dealignment on US domestic policy. As McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal (2006, p. 54) write, "had the Democratic Party maintained the allegiance of southern voters, the Republicans would have been denied an electoral majority for their low-tax and anti-regulation platform."

In finding that Southern dealignment was a product of racial issues, our work supports the view that racial attitudes are a powerful force in US politics and policy-making and thus relates to the literature arguing that racial fractionalization explains "American exceptionalism" in terms of limited redistribution relative to peer countries (Lipset 1997; Alesina and Glaeser 2004; Lee and Roemer 2006; Luttmer 2001).⁹

⁹While we focus on political outcomes, the question of the relative importance of racial views versus economic factors has arisen in other contexts. For example, Jackson (1985) was influential in arguing that American suburbanization was mostly due to postwar income growth, whereas more recently Boustan (2010) has shown that whites' reaction to black migration into cities explains at least one-third of total "white flight."

Our findings further highlight empirical complications in applying the median voter theorem (Meltzer and Richard 1981). The model's first prediction is that enfranchising poorer voters will increase support for redistribution, whereas our findings suggest that adding poorer (black) voters in the South flipped the region to the Republicans (the party more hostile to redistribution). But if, as we demonstrate in the Civil Rights context, political preferences of the majority group are endogenous to the political inclusion of ethnic minorities, then enfranchising poor minorities can have aggregate political effects opposite to what the model predicts.¹⁰ The model's second prediction is that, all else equal, demand for redistribution rises with increases in inequality, whereas in fact redistribution in the US has declined since inequality began to rise in the 1970s. But our results suggest that not all else was held equal: a large voting bloc left the more redistributive political party in the 1960s and 1970s over largely non-economic issues, reducing political support for redistributive policies just when the model would predict that they should become more popular as inequality began to rise.

The paper proceeds as follows. In Section I, we introduce the Gallup microdata, and in particular our key question on racial attitudes. In Section II, we justify our use of the Spring of 1963 as the key moment that separates the "pre-" and "post-periods." In Section III, we present our main results. In Section IV, we address the alternative arguments to race as cause of dealignment. In Section V we conclude.

I. Data

Although both large and contentious, the literature on the cause of dealignment has a clear gap: due to the limitations of standard datasets, existing quantitative work is unable to examine racial attitudes before Civil Rights was a key political issue (and often not until several years after that).¹¹ Due to this limitation, a standard econometric decomposition of the share of dealignment accounted for by those with conservative racial views has not been possible.

This section introduces a little used data source that allows for such an analysis. The source is repeated cross-sectional surveys from Gallup that each have the following key variables: a consistently worded question on racial views, party identification, state of residence, and race.¹² In later years, we can supplement these data with the restricted-access version of the GSS.

¹⁰For further evidence that enfranchising blacks makes white voters more conservative, see Ang (2017), who uses county-level variation in the requirements of the Voting Rights Act to show that strengthening enforcement of black voting rights increases black turnout, but in fact increases *Republican* vote share because white voters in these areas shift their political allegiances.

¹¹Even Shafer and Johnson (2009), the book perhaps most associated with the argument that economic development and not Civil Rights triggered dealignment, write: "Introducing racial attitudes... will prove more difficult... because there is less substantive consistency in the opinion items asked by the [A]NES in the realm of race policy for the full postwar period." While the deficiencies of ANES racial views questions are well documented, we revisited the ANES ourselves, hoping that past scholars had given up too quickly. Our hopes were dashed. For interested readers, our own analysis of ANES racial views questions from the 1950s and 1960s is available at: scholar.princeton.edu/sites/default/files/kuziemko/files/online_app_b.pdf.

¹²The Gallup data are only recently available, thanks to the efforts of the nonprofit Roper Center (currently housed at Cornell). Roper has posted over 20,000 surveys (as of this writing) from Gallup and other outlets, dating back to 1935. Online Appendix Section B describes how to access the data and provides details about survey quality. We hope our paper might increase awareness of Roper's resources.

As noted in the introduction, beginning in 1958 Gallup repeatedly asks respondents whether they would vote for a qualified man (person, in more recent years) who happened to be Negro (black).¹³ For ease of exposition, we refer to this survey item as the “black president question.” By contrast, while the ANES has racial views questions from the 1950s (which we use later) and 1960s, no single question spans the key mid-1960s Civil Rights moment. In addition to consistency, a second advantage of the black president item is that Gallup fielded it frequently: on nine separate surveys between 1958 and 1972. While the question is asked less frequently after 1972, we are fortunate that in 1974 the GSS begins including the exact same black president question (plus the additional variables we need in our regression analysis) in its geocoded restricted-use version of the GSS. As such, between 1958 and 1980 (2000), the black president item (as well as the other variables we need for the analysis) was collected by either Gallup or GSS on 14 (29) separate occasions.¹⁴

A final strength of the black president item is its specificity: it refers to a single, hypothetical (at least during our key sample period) concept. By contrast, the GSS, for example, often asks whether the government should “help” blacks, which is not only vague but also might be interpreted differently in 1972 than in 2000. Gallup also asks white respondents, much less frequently than they do about a black president, whether they would move if blacks came to reside next door or in their neighborhoods in great numbers.¹⁵ But responses might vary not only by racial views but also by the actual integration of one’s present neighborhood, not to mention housing density (“next door” is a different concept in an apartment building versus a farm community). The black president question suffers from no such contextual bias: it should be interpreted similarly for Southerners and non-Southerners, urban and rural, etc. Nonetheless, we show in online Appendix Table A.1 that whites’ views toward a black president are highly predictive (in both the South and non-South) of views on other racial matters (e.g., interracial socializing, school integration) in the GSS.

While the Gallup data have allowed us to make an important step forward in answering the question at hand, they have some limitations. During our sample period, Gallup does not often ask respondents’ household income or place of birth, important omissions in our context given the arguments that Southern income growth and in-migration from the North played key roles in dealignment. We can partially address the lack of income data by using education and occupation (both included in Gallup) as proxies. We also turn to other data sources to rule out these alternative hypotheses, most frequently the ANES, a nationally representative repeated cross-sectional survey of the political and social opinions of voting-age Americans conducted in the fall of presidential (as well as most midterm) election years.

Online Appendix Table A.2 provides summary statistics for our basic Gallup analysis sample (whites ages 21 and above who live in the continental US) from

¹³ We have made available online the exact wording of this item (as well as the party ID question) separately by survey date, as well as the wording of the question preceding it. See scholar.princeton.edu/sites/default/files/kuziemko/files/online_app.pdf. Variations from year to year are minor.

¹⁴ The GSS fields this question in 1972, but state identifiers only become available in 1974. See the URL in footnote 13 for the exact wording (variation from year to year is minimal).

¹⁵ Gallup also poses, again less frequently than the black president question, questions on school integration, but only to parents of school-aged children, greatly reducing sample sizes.

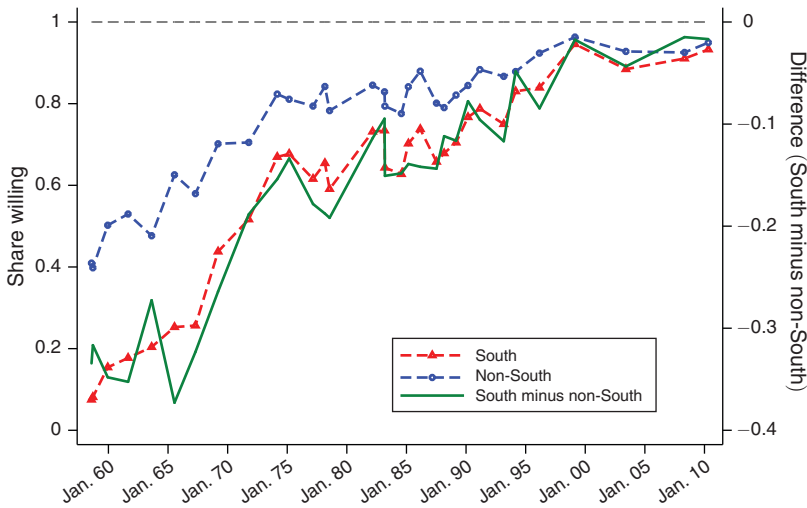


FIGURE 2. SHARE OF WHITES WILLING TO VOTE FOR A BLACK PRESIDENT, BY REGION

Notes: Here and throughout the paper, we code “yes” as 1 and “no” and (rare) “don’t know” as 0. Here and throughout the paper we use provided survey weights for the GSS data.

Source: Data come from Gallup (1958–2003) and GSS (1974–2010).

1958 to 1980, our focal period, separately by region and time period.¹⁶ Not surprisingly, we see an increase in education in both regions. The table also compares the Gallup demographics to those in the Census. While differing variable definitions make perfectly precise comparisons difficult for some variables, the levels and trends by region are generally similar. Traditionally, Gallup undersampled the South and oversampled the well-to-do, though by 1950 most of these biases have disappeared (Berinsky 2006; Farber et al. 2018). Nonetheless, we weight the Gallup data so that they match (interpolated) Census *South* \times *Highschoolgrad* shares. We demonstrate robustness to other weighting schemes or to not weighting at all.¹⁷

Figure 2 depicts the evolution of our key explanatory variable: acceptance of a hypothetical black president.¹⁸ At the start of the time series, only about 10 percent of white Southerners say they would be willing to vote for a qualified black candidate nominated by their party, compared to just under 40 percent of whites elsewhere. These shares increase at roughly the same rate through about 1970, after which point there is more substantial (though never complete) Southern catch-up.¹⁹

¹⁶To avoid compositional changes, we exclude those under age 21 as well as residents of Alaska and Hawaii, as they were not eligible to vote in early years of our sample period.

¹⁷In the relatively few cases where we combine data from Gallup and the GSS, we continue to use our Census-derived weights for Gallup and use the provided survey weights for the GSS.

¹⁸In this focal sample we have roughly 2,000 (1,200) observations per survey in the Gallup (GSS) data.

¹⁹The Gallup questions noted earlier on whether you would move if blacks moved into your neighborhood also show the same pattern of substantial (but incomplete) Southern convergence. Graphs available from the authors.

II. Methodological Approach

A. Defining the Pre- and Post-Periods

As noted in the previous section, before 1958, we do not have any consistently worded, frequently repeated measure of racial attitudes. Thus, our main analysis is restricted to 1958 and beyond. (Section IVC analyzes in detail, but with more imperfect data, earlier episodes of Southern dealignment.) To define pre- and post-periods for our main analysis sample, we need to identify the moment during this period when the party's position on Civil Rights undergoes its most substantial change in the eyes of voters.

Evidence from the ANES: The Shift Occurs between 1960 and 1964.—To pin down the point during our sample period when views on the parties' positions most significantly shift, we would ideally employ a consistently worded and frequently repeated survey question that asks respondents which party they believe will do more to promote equality between whites and blacks. Unfortunately, we were unable to find such a question. We come close, however. Using the ANES, we can compare a 1960 item asking "which party is more likely to stay out of the question of whether white and colored children go to the same schools" with 1964 and 1968 items asking which party is more likely to "see to it that white and Negro children go to the same schools." Figure 3 shows that in 1960, only 10 percent of Southern whites see the Democrats as the party pushing for school integration, 17 percent say Republicans, and the rest see no difference. Non-Southern whites see essentially no difference between the parties on this issue.²⁰

A dramatic shift occurs sometime between 1960 and 1964. By 1964, 45 percent of Southern whites now see the Democrats as more aggressively promoting school integration, whereas the share seeing Republicans as more aggressive has fallen to 16 percent. Non-Southerners' assessment shifts similarly. The large gap in voters' perception of the parties on school integration that emerges in 1964 holds steady in 1968.²¹

Evidence from Congress: The Shift Occurs between 1960 and 1964.—Between 1960 and 1964, a shift occurs in the voting patterns of Congressional Democrats on Civil Rights issues, even in the South. Civil rights legislation was voted on in 1957, 1960, and 1964. As we demonstrate in online Appendix Table A.3, in the South and even within states in the South, Democratic partisanship predicts "no" votes on the 1957 and 1960 legislation, but, importantly, "yes" votes in 1964. As such, even by 1964, a white Southerner surveying the local political landscape would have seen Democratic lawmakers as more hostile to racial conservatism than a local politician

²⁰This result from the 1960 ANES echoes patterns from a Gallup question in the Spring of 1960: the plurality of voters (28 percent) said the Republican Party was "doing the most for Negroes." But only tabulations (not micro-data) are available, so this result includes non-whites as well.

²¹The ANES also asks which party is doing the most to combat employment and housing discrimination. While we prefer the school integration question because it is worded more consistently, we find an essentially identical pattern as in Figure 3. Graphs available from the authors.

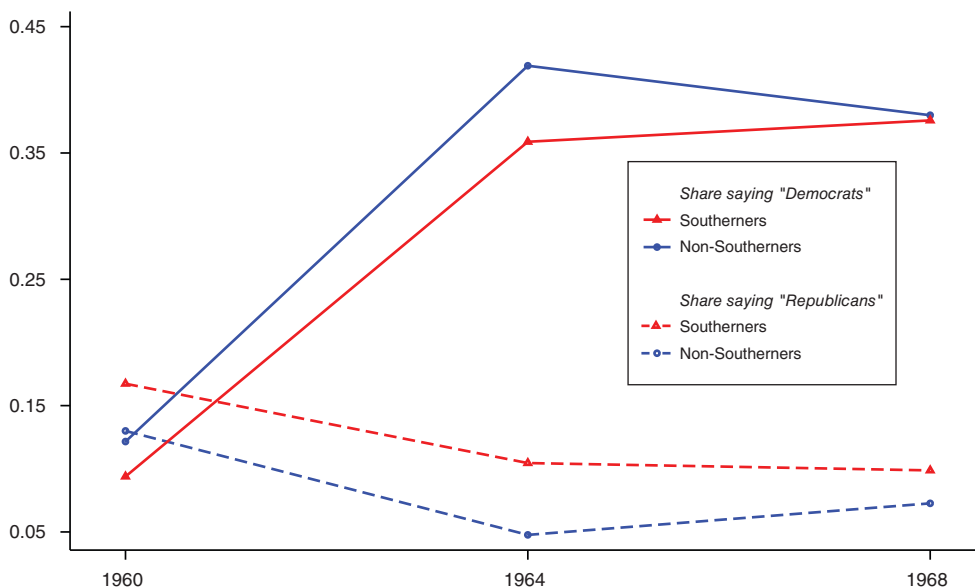


FIGURE 3. WHITES' VIEWS OF WHICH PARTY WILL PUSH FOR SCHOOL INTEGRATION, BY REGION

Notes: Responses to the 1960 question, which asks "which party is more likely to stay out" of school integration, are reoriented so that answers align with the 1964 and 1968 questions, which ask which party "is more likely to want the government to see to it" that white and black children go to the same schools. We have dropped missing observations, so *Dem* + *Rep* + *No difference between the parties* (not plotted) sum to 100 percent.

Source: Data are from the ANES 1960, 1964, and 1968 individual year files.

from the nascent Southern wing of the Republican Party, a dramatic change from even four years prior.

Evidence from Newspapers: The Shift Occurs in Spring of 1963.—The ANES and voting records data cannot tell us at what point between 1960 and 1964 the Democrats are first viewed by voters as the party of Civil Rights. To further pinpoint that moment, we use higher-frequency data, but these data admittedly provide less direct evidence.

The leader of the Democratic Party during most of the 1960 to 1964 period was President John F. Kennedy. Kennedy was not a consistent supporter of Civil Rights throughout his presidency. Just as his Republican predecessor Eisenhower sent federal troops to forcibly integrate Little Rock Central High School, Kennedy intervened to end the violence against both the Freedom Riders, the protesters who organized to integrate interstate bus service in the Spring of 1961, and James Meredith, who integrated the University of Mississippi in the Fall of 1962. But Kennedy also disappointed movement leaders with his inaction, including a January 1962 press conference pledging not to move ahead of public opinion on Civil Rights and his appointment of segregationist federal judges in the South. Thus, it is unlikely that voters would have predicted his June 1963 proposal of sweeping Civil Rights legislation, even a few months before that date.

Unfortunately, we do not have high-frequency polling data that directly speak to the evolution of voters' perception of Kennedy's commitment to the issue. Instead we

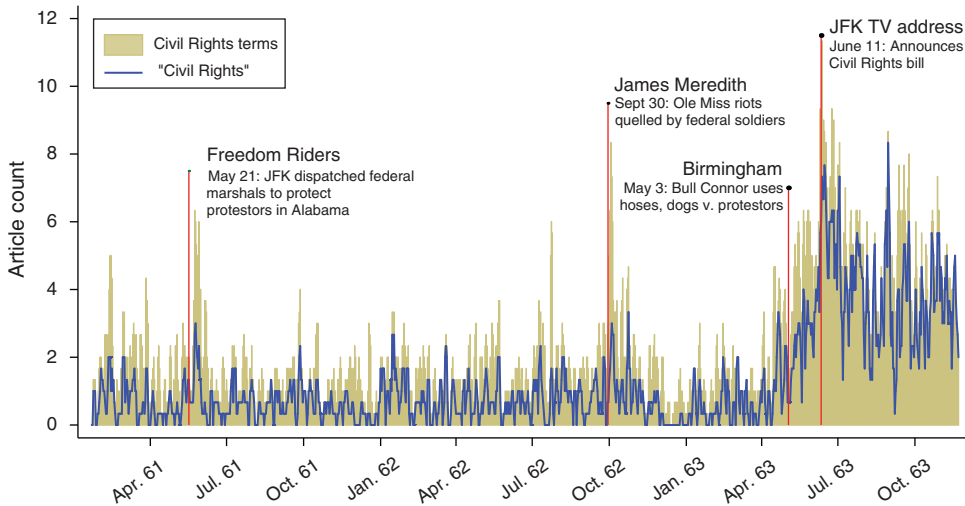


FIGURE 4. COUNT OF *NYT* ARTICLES MENTIONING “PRESIDENT KENNEDY” AND CIVIL RIGHTS TERMS

Notes: The “Civil Rights” search counts the number of articles that include the phrase “President Kennedy” and “Civil Rights.” The “Civil Rights terms” search counts articles that include the phrase “President Kennedy” and any of the following: “Civil Rights,” any form of the word “integrate” and any form of the word “segregate.” We highlight key moments in the Civil Rights movement.

turn to the *New York Times* (*NYT*) to track his progression on the issue. Specifically, in Figure 4 we tally daily counts of articles in which (1) “President” and “Kennedy” and “civil rights” appear or (2) “President” and “Kennedy” and any of the following terms: “Civil Rights,” “integrat*,” “segregat*,” where the asterisk is a wildcard.²²

The two series tell similar stories. Outside of two short-lived spikes (when the administration intervenes on behalf of the freedom riders and later Meredith), the first two years of Kennedy’s administration see few mentions of his name alongside Civil Rights terms. But then the number of articles begins a steep rise in the Spring of 1963, when the nation’s attention turned to Birmingham. Local black activists had organized a shopping boycott of the city’s segregated stores in the weeks leading up to Easter. By early April, Martin Luther King arrived in the city and the movement grew into a series of marches and sit-ins aimed at overrunning the local jails to force the city into negotiations to integrate employment and public accommodations. Controversially, King enlisted children in these protest activities. By early May, Birmingham police chief “Bull” Connor responded with beatings, water hoses, and dogs, attacks that did not spare children and that were captured live for a television audience. These events drew Attorney General Robert Kennedy and other administration officials to Birmingham, a move interpreted by local whites as intervention on behalf of the protesters.²³

²²We searched for words “President” and “Kennedy” to exclude articles that *only* mention Robert Kennedy, though in practice there is little difference. We employ both a more narrow (President Kennedy and “civil rights”) and a broader search (President Kennedy and Civil Rights terms) to address Type I and Type II error concerns.

²³Hailey Foster, “The Birmingham Story,” *New York Times*, May 26, 1963. It provides a contemporaneous summary of events.

The number of articles reaches its pinnacle the following month when President Kennedy holds a nationally televised address to announce his plans to introduce sweeping Civil Rights legislation to Congress (“The events in Birmingham and elsewhere have so increased the cries for equality that no city, or State, or legislative body can prudently choose to ignore them”). And while the number of articles drops slightly from that mid-June high, it remains elevated above pre-May 1963 levels throughout the remainder of his presidency.

While the *NYT* is useful because of its national prominence and its convenient search interface, its articles may reflect the views of a narrow, elite group of East Coast editors and may not reach, much less reflect the views of, Southern voters. Online Appendix Figure A.1 presents analogous results from the two Southern papers for which we can do textual analysis, the *Dallas Morning News* and the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*. Again, we see Spring (in particular June) of 1963 as the moment when articles including “Civil Rights” and “President Kennedy” skyrocket.

Further Corroborating Evidence.—A related concern is that newspapers, regardless of their regional focus, reflect the decisions of editors, not the sentiment of the general public. We thus complement our newspaper analysis with polling data. In the years 1950–1980, Gallup asks over 100 times, “What do you think is the most important problem facing this country today?” Unfortunately, as we detail in the notes (online Appendix Figure A.2), there are nontrivial inconsistencies with the coding from one survey to the next, so we are cautious in interpreting these data points. Nonetheless the figure demonstrates that 1963 marks the beginning of a large (but temporary) swell in the share of Americans calling Civil Rights the country’s most important issue.

In summary, the ANES data show that views on the parties’ racial policies shift dramatically between 1960 and 1964, consistent with within-region changes in the voting patterns of representatives. Media coverage of Civil Rights (and in particular the Democratic president’s involvement in the issue) during this period was mostly flat until a dramatic and sustained increase beginning in the Spring of 1963, and we thus conclude that this moment was the key turning point when voters would first see the Democrats as the party on the more liberal side of the Civil Rights issue.

An implicit assumption we will make in the regression analysis is that the moment the post-period begins is plausibly exogenous. While untestable, the historical record supports this assumption. As Schickler (2016, pp. 230–31) writes, “Kennedy’s personal commitment to civil rights was limited at best... but the dramatic violence in Birmingham, AL... forced Kennedy to change his approach.” Moreover, King had limited personal contact with Kennedy and certainly did not consult with the administration in planning strategy (indeed, Kennedy would unsuccessfully lobby to cancel King’s August 1963 March on Washington). We have come across no evidence that Kennedy’s move was long in the making. In fact, just weeks before he introduced Civil Rights legislation, he had instead considered addressing the violence in Birmingham with a bill that would limit the rights of Southern blacks to protest.²⁴

²⁴See Perlstein (2009, ch. 11).

B. Estimating Equations

Having defined a pre- and post-period for our 1958 to 1980 sample period, the empirical strategy for our main set of results is straightforward. We first estimate the total amount of decline from the pre- to post-period in Democratic identification among white Southerners relative to other whites via the following regression:

$$(1) \quad D_{ist} = \beta_1 South_s \times After_t + \gamma \mathbf{X}_{ist} + \lambda_s + \mu_t + \epsilon_{ist},$$

where D_{ist} is an indicator for person i identifying as a Democrat (so, Republican, Independent, and other all coded as 0), $South_s$ is an indicator for residency in a Southern state, $After_t$ is an indicator for being observed in the post-period, \mathbf{X}_{ist} includes controls (which we will vary in robustness checks), and λ_s and μ_t are state and survey-date fixed effects, respectively.

We then estimate a companion regression:

$$(2) \quad D_{ist} = \tilde{\beta}_1 South_s \times After_t + \tilde{\beta}_2 South_s \times After_t \times NoBlackPrez_i + \tilde{\gamma} \tilde{\mathbf{X}}_{ist} \\ + \lambda_s + \mu_t + \epsilon_{ist}.$$

In equation (2), the $South_s \times After_t$ interaction is now interacted with $NoBlackPrez_i$, an indicator variable for being unwilling to vote for a black president. The vector $\tilde{\mathbf{X}}$ includes *all lower-order terms* of this triple interaction and the remaining notation follows that in (1). The estimate of $\tilde{\beta}_2$ reflects the dealignment coming from those with conservative racial views, and comparing the estimate of β_1 in (1) with that of $\tilde{\beta}_1$ in (2) allows us to measure the share of Southern dealignment accounted for by those with conservative racial views.

For the most part, our outcome is Democratic identification, which Gallup asks much more frequently (especially in non-election years) than vote choice (e.g., for presidential, Senate, or House races). Even beyond availability, party identification has some key advantages over vote choice: it is likely more robust to variation in the quality of local candidates (e.g., a scandal-plagued incumbent running for reelection should affect a voter's decision in a particular election more than her overall party ID) and voter turnout (e.g., a blow-out or highly negative race might deter individuals from voting in or even following a particular election). Nonetheless, we present results using vote choice whenever the data permit.

III. Results

We first present the main results from estimating equations (1) and (2) and then provide corroborating evidence using other Gallup data.

A. Results Using the “Black President” Question

Regression Results.—Table 1 presents the main results of the paper. To provide a baseline, column 1 replaces state fixed effects with a *South* dummy and uses only Gallup (as opposed to adding GSS) data from 1958 to 1980. Whereas Democrats

TABLE 1—DEMOCRATIC PARTY IDENTIFICATION AMONG WHITES AS A FUNCTION OF REGION AND RACIAL VIEWS

	Respondent identifies as a Democrat (all other responses coded as 0)							
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
<i>South</i>	0.210 [0.0484]	0.0520 [0.0694]						
<i>South</i> × <i>After</i>	-0.131 [0.0639]	0.0288 [0.0654]	-0.143 [0.0645]	0.0336 [0.0579]	0.0047 [0.0628]	-0.112 [0.0899]	-0.148 [0.0628]	0.0242 [0.0577]
<i>NoBlackPrez</i>		0.0147 [0.0182]		0.0005 [0.0169]	-0.0120 [0.0163]	-0.0067 [0.0161]		0.0013 [0.0170]
<i>South</i> × <i>NoBlackPrez</i>		0.175 [0.0735]		0.203 [0.0682]	0.178 [0.0676]	0.175 [0.0880]		0.208 [0.0674]
<i>NoBlackPrez</i> × <i>After</i>		-0.0213 [0.0244]		-0.0138 [0.0247]	-0.0136 [0.0211]	-0.0169 [0.0215]		-0.0093 [0.0236]
<i>South</i> × <i>NoBlackPrez</i> × <i>After</i>		-0.175 [0.0877]		-0.197 [0.0834]	-0.174 [0.0856]	-0.190 [0.0997]		-0.186 [0.0798]
Mean, dependent variable	0.458	0.458	0.458	0.458	0.457	0.457	0.444	0.444
State fixed effects	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Interactions	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
GSS	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Observations	18,289	18,289	18,289	18,289	17,942	17,942	23,332	23,332

Notes: Survey date fixed effects included in all regressions and the sample period for each column is 1958–1980. *After* is an indicator variable for being surveyed after April 1963. *NoBlackPrez* is an indicator variable for reporting unwillingness to vote for a qualified black presidential candidate (“don’t know,” which is rare, and “no” are both coded as 1). “Controls” indicate that fixed effects for age (in ten-year intervals), gender, education categories (6), city-size categories (12), and occupation categories (13) have been added. “Interactions” take age, and dummies for living in a city with greater than 50,000 people, finishing high school, having a high-skill occupation (business manager or professional), and being a farmer or farm laborer and interacts each of these variables with *South*, *After*, and *South* × *After*. “GSS” indicates where GSS data have been added to the regression. For Gallup, we use weights that match Gallup to interpolated Census cells and for GSS we use provided weights (see text for detail). Note that, strictly speaking, one cannot directly compare the *South* × *After* coefficients in columns 5 and 6 to that in column 3, as the sample changes slightly. We omit this specification in the interest of space, but the coefficient on *South* × *After* using the column 3 specification on the column 5 and 6 sample is -0.148 [0.0603]. Standard errors clustered by state.

enjoy a 21 percentage point advantage among whites in the South relative to the rest of the country during the pre-period, the negative and significant coefficient on *South* × *After* indicates that the advantage falls by over 60 percent in the post-period. In column 2, we show that the *South* × *After* coefficient actual flips sign (but is small and insignificant) once we add the triple interaction term, which is itself negative, large in magnitude, and marginally significant. This indicates that the 17.5 percentage point relative decline among Southerners with conservative views slightly *overpredicts* the decline in Democratic partisanship among white Southerners. The lower-order terms of the triple interaction are of interest in their own right. The positive, significant coefficient on *South* × *NoBlackPrez* highlights the strongly conservative racial views that characterize the pre-period Southern Democratic Party. Note also that the small and statistically insignificant coefficients on *NoBlackPrez* and *NoBlackPrez* × *After* indicate that racial conservatism did not strongly predict Democratic identification among non-Southern whites before 1963, nor did it predict an exodus from the party afterward. Non-Southern whites’ seeming indifference to the Democrats’ mid-1960s Civil Rights legislation is not surprising, given that the practices outlawed by the CRA and VRA did not then exist outside the

South (voting rights discrimination had never been widespread outside the South and de jure public accommodations discrimination had mostly disappeared by the 1950s).²⁵ Readers, of course, should not take this “non-result” to mean that race, racial views, or integration policy have not had political repercussions outside of the South. But Civil Rights policies in other parts of the country were far more scattered across time and place and even branches of government, so whites’ reactions in these areas would be unlikely to line up with the introduction of the Civil Rights Bill in 1963.²⁶

In the remainder of Table 1, we explore the robustness of the results in columns 1 and 2. In columns 3 and 4 as well as all remaining columns, we add state fixed effects which leave results largely unchanged. However the triple interaction of column 4 is now larger and significant at conventional levels. In column 5 we show this result is robust to the inclusion of controls for fixed effects for gender, age (in ten-year bins), city-size (12 categories), educational attainment (6 categories), and occupation (13 categories). Note that controlling for occupation fixed effects picks up the differentially large Southern decline in the agricultural share of the labor force over this period. In column 6, we add interactions of *South* \times *After* with age, a high school completion dummy, a dummy for living in a city with greater than 50,000 people, a dummy for high-skill occupation, and a dummy for being a farmer or farm laborer (as well as all lower-order terms of these triple interactions). This specification tests whether the strong, negative coefficient on *South* \times *After* \times *NoBlackPrez* is merely picking up differential trends in the South along these other dimensions. For example, we might worry that rural and small-town Southerners (or farmers, or the high-school educated, etc.) differentially turn against the Democrats in the post-period for reasons independent of Civil Rights. If these Southerners happen to have more conservative racial views, we would estimate a negative coefficient on *South* \times *NoBlackPrez* \times *After* even absent any true reaction to Civil Rights. In fact, even after allowing all these variables to have different effects in the South, different effects in the post-period, and different effects in the South in the post-period, the coefficient on *South* \times *After* \times *NoBlackPrez* is qualitatively unchanged. (Note that adding the additional triple interactions means that the coefficient on *South* \times *After* no longer has any natural interpretation.)²⁷ In the remaining columns, we add the GSS data (as control variables are not consistent across the two datasets, we do not include them). Comparing columns 7 and 8 to columns 3 and 4 shows that the results are nearly identical in this larger, pooled dataset.

Graphical Results.—Figure 5 shows the variation underlying our regression results in an event-time figure. The plotted coefficients $\hat{\beta}_t$ are based on the following linear probability regression model (estimated separately for Southern and

²⁵ See Sugrue (2008) for a historical treatment on racial discrimination outside the South in the 1940s and 1950s and see Collins (2003) on the political economy of anti-discrimination laws in non-Southern states. Despite many states outlawing de jure employment discrimination, Boustan (2016) provides empirical evidence of severe occupational segregation in Northern labor markets.

²⁶ How these various local Civil Rights laws and court orders affected whites’ party identification outside the South is in fact the subject of a concurrent project.

²⁷ In the interest of space, we do not report coefficients on these additional double and triple interactions, but in fact, of the 15 estimated coefficients, only one is significant at the 5 percent and one more at the 10 percent level, roughly what would be expected by pure chance.

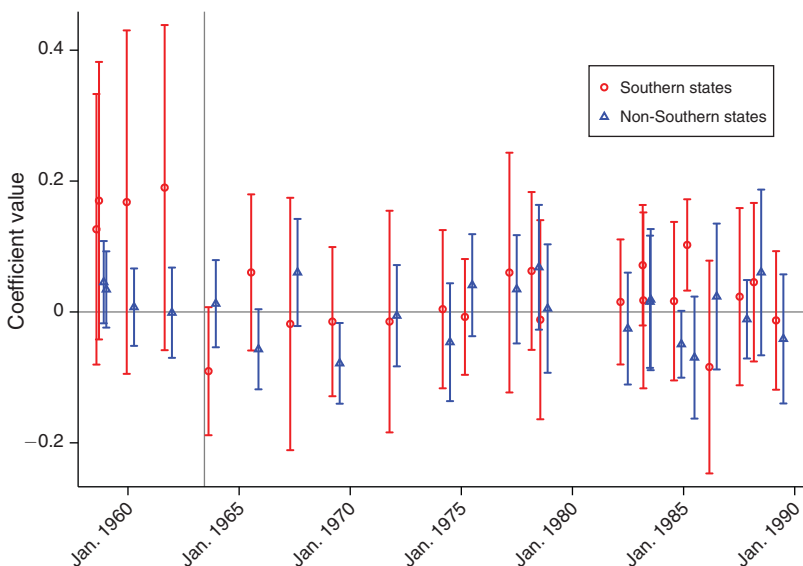


FIGURE 5. RELATIONSHIP OVER TIME BETWEEN *DEMOCRATIC ID* AND *NoBlackPrez* (Whites Only)

Notes: The plotted coefficients $\hat{\beta}_t$ are based on the following linear probability regression model (estimated separately for Southern and non-Southern states): $Dem_{ist} = \sum_t \beta_t NoBlackPrez_{ist} \cdot \mathbf{I}_t + \lambda_t + \mu_s + e_{ist}$, where i indexes the individual, s the state, and t the survey date, Dem_{ist} is an indicator variable for identifying as a Democrat (all other responses, including independent, coded as 0), $NoBlackPrez_{ist}$ is an indicator variable for the respondent saying they would not vote for a qualified black candidate nominated by their party, \mathbf{I}_t is an indicator variable for being surveyed at date t , and λ_t and μ_s are survey-date and state fixed effects, respectively. Confidence intervals are based on standard errors clustered at the state level.

Source: Data taken from Gallup and GSS.

non-Southern states): $Dem_{ist} = \sum_t \beta_t NoBlackPrez_{ist} \cdot \mathbf{I}_t + \lambda_t + \mu_s + e_{ist}$, where i indexes the individual, s the state, and t the survey date. As we would expect, the figure echoes the regression results (conservative racial views strongly predict Democratic Party identification in the South in the pre-period, an association that is wiped out in the post-period). But unlike the table, the figure can demonstrate that the shift, while certainly noisy, is better described as a one-time decline, occurring sometime between the 1961 and 1963 survey dates, and not a secular trend. While our preferred regression sample ends in 1980, we extend the period through 1990 in the graph so readers can see that there is no reversal in the coefficient pattern in later years.

The event-time analysis indicates that Democratic identification among those Southerners with racially conservative views declines by 17 percentage points in the course of a few years. To give a sense of the enormity of this shift, today, one would need to have household income increase by over \$300,000 (or 600 percent) to have predicted Democratic identification fall by 17 percentage points.²⁸

Note that, while indeed large, the shifts documented in Table 1 and Figure 5 do not indicate that Civil Rights caused the complete extinction of the white Southern

²⁸Those income elasticities are based on GSS data from 1990 to 2012.

Democrat. This fact should not come as a surprise. On the one hand, at least by our measure, fewer white Southerners held racially conservative views over time (and indeed, though rare, some Southern Democratic politicians such as Jimmy Carter engineered winning black-white coalitions in the region). On the other hand, not all racially conservative white Southerners left the party. These voters may have stayed because of inertia (individuals tend to retain a single party ID over adulthood) or because of the remaining racially conservative Southern white Democratic politicians or because of other issues.²⁹ In the 1966 Senate race, for example, a racially conservative Southern white in Georgia or Mississippi could still vote for two of the most unabashed supporters of segregation (Richard Russell and Jim Eastland, respectively), both of whom retained decades of seniority and powerful committee assignments by officially remaining Democrats. Moreover, as we demonstrate in Section IVB, Southern whites were somewhat to the left of whites elsewhere on some key domestic policy issues. To the extent not all of them were single-issue voters, some racially conservative voters would remain in the party because it better represented, for example, their economic interests.

Note also that our results so far do *not* imply that Southern dealignment from the Democrats led to a simultaneous one-for-one embrace of the Republicans, as captured in the null of our Democratic dummy are Independent and other parties, George Wallace's segregationist party being an important example. In fact, as we demonstrate in online Appendix Table A.6, the Southern increase in Republican identification is about one-third the *decrease* in Democratic Party allegiance over our sample period.

Our key conclusion from the analysis so far is that a significant number of racially conservative Southern Democrats left the party just at the moment its national leaders proposed sweeping Civil Rights laws.

B. Robustness of the "Black President" Results

Perhaps the central concern about our approach so far is that while the black president question is worded consistently, as shown in Figure 2 the composition of whites stating agreement is changing over time, differentially in the South and elsewhere. A related issue is that the question becomes a poorer marker of true attitudes over time, as having racially conservative views becomes less socially acceptable. For example, suppose that post-period Southerners feel cowed by national public opinion and become less truthful in answering the black president question, adding noise.³⁰ We might then worry that the large decline in its positive correlation with Democratic identification is *not* because racially conservative Southerners had bolted, but is instead due to attenuation bias in the post-period driving the correlation toward zero. (Of course, given the pattern in Figure 5, the decline in its

²⁹ Political scientists have found partisanship, like religion or ethnicity, to be a stable part of an adult's identity, at least in the US. The canonical reference is Campbell et al. (1960), with a more quantitative treatment by Green, Palmquist, and Schickler (2004).

³⁰ Empirical evidence supports this concern. Kuklinski, Cobb, and Gilens (1997) use a clever between-subject approach whereby the racial views of any one individual cannot be detected but the racial views of large groups can be. These "unobtrusive" measures of racial attitudes show white Southerners to have significantly more conservative racial views than other whites, whereas standard survey questions (subject to social desirability bias) show much smaller differences.

informational content would have to be highly discontinuous.) We address this concern by showing that our results are robust to using *predicted* measures of racial conservatism, instead of the actual measures. Specifically, we use pre-1963 data³¹ to predict conservative racial views and then substitute this predicted black president response for the actual response for all observations in our regression sample. Put differently, we ask, *is Southern dealignment driven by the type of person who would have given racially conservative answers in the pre-period*, regardless of how that person answers the black president question in later, more politically correct years. Unlike actual views, predicted views follow parallel trends in the South and non-South (see online Appendix Figure A.3, which also provides more detail on the various prediction equations we use). Our regression results hold when we use *predicted* racial views (see online Appendix Table A.4).

While the analysis in the online Appendix Table collapses the “predicted black president” question to a 0/1 variable to match the actual black president question, Figure 6 uses the full variation in predicted views toward a black president.³² Those in the South who we predict would be most against a black president are also the most likely to be Democrats in the pre-period, but the relationship completely flips in sign during the post-period, consistent with our hypothesis. Outside the South, predicted views toward a black president have, as expected, little explanatory power in either period.

Readers might also question our use of a binary pre-post measure, dividing the sample in the Spring of 1963. We thus show that our results are robust to a *continuous* measure of the Democratic Party’s position on racial issues: DW-Nominate, developed by McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal (2006). The authors create two scales, DW-Nominate-1 and DW-Nominate-2, measures of a legislator’s position on economic policy and racial and regional policy, respectively. Both measures are increasing in conservatism. We find that our results hold when we substitute our (binary) *After* “turning-point” variable with a (continuous) measure of the average Democratic House members’ DW-Nominate-2 measure, which varies at the Congress level (e.g., 100th Congress, 101st Congress, i.e., every two years).³³ Consistent with our main results, online Appendix Table A.5 shows that white Southerners with racially conservative views are significantly more likely to identify as Democrats as the party as a whole votes in a more racially conservative manner in the House. In fact, we can include the full set of interactions with the DW-Nominate-1 measure, to run a horse-race between House Democrats’ votes on racial versus economic matters, and only the former has the ability to explain Southern whites’ party allegiance.³⁴

³¹ Variables used in the prediction equations are listed in the table notes.

³² To generate these predictions, separately for each region (South and non-South) and using only pre-period data, we regress *NoBlackPrez* on the following covariates: education, demographics, and background controls (age-in-decades fixed effects; female dummy; education-category dummies) and geography controls (state fixed effects, rural/city-size category fixed effects). For each region, we then project the estimated β vector onto data from the pre- and post-period.

³³ Consistent with the Democratic Party’s increasing liberalism on the issue, its legislators’ average DW-Nominate-2 decline substantially during our sample period (the measure is increasing in conservatism). Results available upon request.

³⁴ As the table shows, results are similar using Senate votes, but with less precision. There is substantially less variation over time in DW-nominate scores in that chamber. Further, the DW-Nominate-1 and DW-Nominate-2 scores are very highly correlated in the Senate sample.

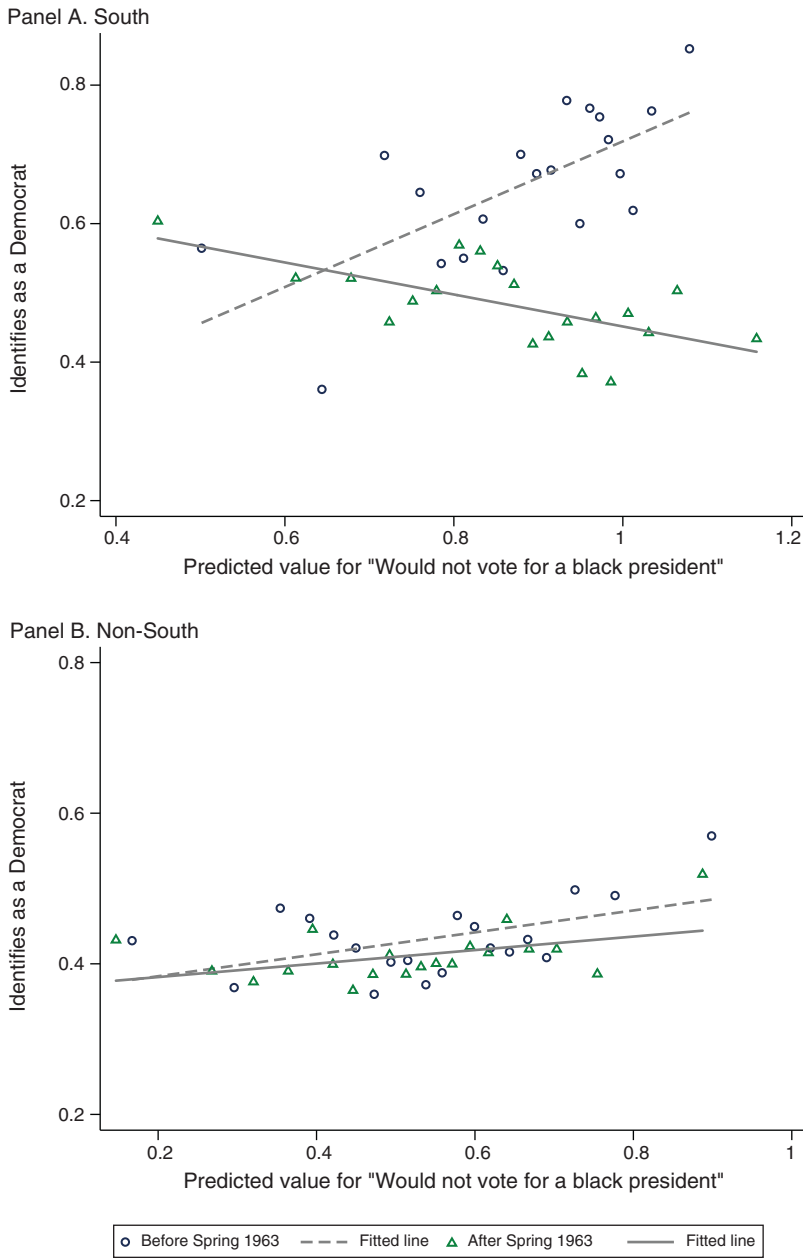


FIGURE 6. DEPENDENCE OF WHITES' DEMOCRATIC IDENTIFICATION ON PREDICTED ANSWERS TO THE *BLACK PRESIDENT* QUESTION

Notes: The x-axis is predicted values for the *NoBlackPrez* variable. To generate these predictions, separately for each region (South and non-South) and using only pre-period data, we regress *NoBlackPrez* on the following covariates: education, demographics, and background controls (age-in-decades fixed effects; female dummy; education-category dummies) and geography controls (state FE, rural/city-size category FE). For each region, we then project the estimated β vector onto data from the pre- and post-period. The first series in panel A is a scatter plot of *Democratic identification* against *predicted answers to NoBlackPrez* among white Southerners in the pre-period, aggregated into vingtiles for readability. The second series in panel A is identical, except it depicts the same relationship for post-period Southern whites. Panel B is the non-Southern analogue to panel A. Online Appendix Figure A.4 is identical to this figure, but uses a less parsimonious set of predictors.

In online Appendix Table A.6, we perform several more robustness checks for the main Table 1 results. While we prefer linear probability models for ease of interpretation, our results hold using probit instead. We vary the group of non-Southern states that serve as our control and in fact find that our results hold regardless of which region of the country we compare to the South. Similarly, our results are robust to other definitions of “South”: for example, those states singled out by the Voting Rights Act (1965) for pre-clearance. As noted, Gallup does not have family income as a control during much of our sample period. For this reason, online Appendix Table A.7 shows that the results are robust to adding state-year economic controls (including average income, Gini coefficient of household income, and the employment-to-population ratio), as well as additional state-year demographic controls (total population, the share with a college degree, and the share black). This table also shows robustness to a variety of *time* \times *geography* controls: state linear time trends; linear time trends in *South*, *NoBlackPres*, and *South* \times *NoBlackPres*; and saturating the model with *South* \times *SurveyDate* and *NoBlackPres* \times *SurveyDate* fixed effects. We also show, in the final column, that one cannot reject that the effect of *South* \times *NoBlackPres* are identical across five-year segments of the post-period, again suggesting that the relationship between racial views and party allegiance among whites in the South is roughly described as a step function, not a slow evolution. Online Appendix Table A.8 shows that the main results are robust to a variety of weighting schemes (including not weighting at all) as well as alternative clustering (by survey date instead of state). While we do not typically have the power to exploit state-by-state differences within the South, online Appendix Figure A.5 shows that states with the largest share of whites against a black president in the pre-period were those that exhibit the greatest declines in white Democratic identification (a relationship that is highly significant despite only 11 observations).

C. *Effect of Race-Based Realignment on Election Outcomes*

Our paper focuses almost exclusively on *partisan identity*, but in this section we use stated election preferences as our outcome and attempt to simulate the effect of racially motivated realignment of Southern whites on actual election outcomes. As online Appendix Table A.9 shows, when respondents’ reported votes in past presidential elections or their preferred party in Congress are used as outcomes, we find the same pattern of results as in Table 1, in particular a highly significant and negative triple interaction term, even though sample sizes are much smaller as Gallup asks these questions much less frequently, especially for Congress. Online Appendix Figures A.6 and A.7 are the event-time analogues of this analysis.

While the focus of the paper is *whites’* preferences, election outcomes depend on the choices of all voters, and especially in the post-period blacks become an important segment of Southern voters. A question we have yet to answer is the importance of changes in white attitudes next to the largely concurrent entrance of black voters into the Southern electorate.

Online Appendix Section C provides detail on how we simulate, for each of the 11 Southern states, the share of the total change (post-period relative to pre-period) in the Democratic share of the presidential vote our model of whites’ preferences can explain. For the median state (online Appendix Table C.1), our model explains

45 percent of this change. Importantly, if we set the coefficient on the triple-interaction term to 0 (so, assume that racially conservative Southern whites have the same presidential preferences in the post- as in the pre-period), we explain none of the change (−20 percent of the change, in fact). As such, the shift among racially conservative Southern voters, the phenomenon at the heart of our analysis, is an important factor in explaining the shift in actual vote outcomes. As we explain in online Appendix Section C, our preferred outcome is party identification, given the large literature on problems with voters' recalling their past votes, but online Appendix Table A.9 and the analysis in the online Appendix shows that our main result is robust to using election candidate preferences and that the coefficients yielded by these estimations suggest that the effects are quantitatively important in explaining actual election outcomes.

D. Higher-Frequency Results from Gallup

The results of Figure 5 point to a sharp decline in the association of conservative racial attitudes and white Southern identification with the Democratic Party between the summers of 1961 and 1963, the last pre-period and first post-period surveys that include the black president question, respectively. Gallup does not ask the black president question at a sufficiently high frequency that we can pin the key shift to the Spring of 1963, the moment when, we earlier argued, voters first firmly connect the Democrats to Civil Rights. We now turn to alternative Gallup questions and a modified empirical strategy to more finely pinpoint the transition moment of white Southern Democratic allegiance. We lose the ability to stratify the analysis by racial attitudes, but we gain higher-frequency measures of Americans' responses to political news.

Presidential Approval.—During the 1960s, Gallup asked the following question roughly every month: “Do you approve or disapprove of the way President _____ is handling his job as President?”³⁵ Figure 7 tracks Kennedy's approval among whites, separately for the South and non-South, as well as the difference. The most striking element of the figure is the 35 percentage point drop in Southern approval between the April 5 and June 23 surveys in 1963, more than one-half of which occurs between the two polls (May 25 and June 23) that surround Kennedy's televised June 11 Civil Rights address. By contrast, non-Southern white approval is flat during the same period.³⁶ Thus, these high frequency data provide evidence to pinpoint Spring 1963 as a critical moment for dealignment. Note, however, that even the smaller events in the Civil Rights timeline noted earlier (the Freedom Riders and James Meredith) create wobbles in Kennedy's relative popularity in the South.

Table 2 presents related regression results. In column 1, we regress respondents' approval on the average number of articles per day mentioning Kennedy and “Civil Rights” during the week of the survey, allowing the effect to differ for Southerners and non-Southerners. The point estimates suggest that if a week were to average an additional article per day mentioning Kennedy and Civil Rights than some baseline

³⁵ In most surveys the possible valid responses are only “approve” or “disapprove.”

³⁶ Black approval slightly increases, but is subject to ceiling effects as Kennedy is already extremely popular among blacks. Results available from authors.

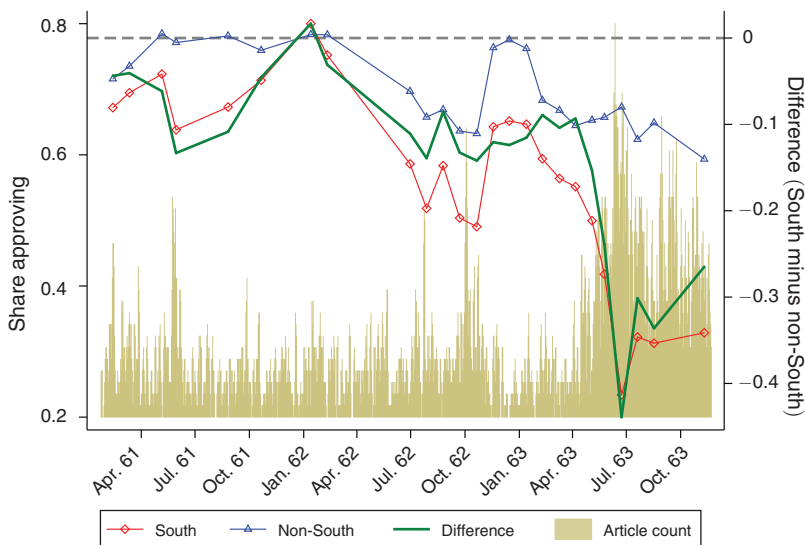


FIGURE 7. WHITES' APPROVAL OF KENNEDY VERSUS ARTICLES LINKING HIM TO CIVIL RIGHTS

Notes: Article count is identical to the Civil rights terms series in Figure 4 (to limit clutter we suppress the axis for this variable). Approval (from Gallup) is coded as 1 if a respondent approves of Kennedy and 0 if he disapproves or (rare) has no opinion. We define the survey date of each Gallup poll as the midpoint of the period it is in the field. The figure maps approval on a given survey date to the number of *NYT* articles three days before through three days after (as the modal survey is in the field for six days and we do not know a respondent's exact interview date).

period, then we should expect non-Southern white approval to fall by 1.6 percentage points and white Southern approval to fall by 7.00 percentage points relative to their baseline levels.³⁷

Are the results in column 1 driven by other events occurring around the same time as Kennedy's Civil Rights actions? In column 2, we add survey date fixed effects and a vector of interaction terms between *South* and article counts of Kennedy alongside nine "control" issues (the main effects of the number of articles on these control issues as well as the Civil Rights article count are absorbed by the survey-date fixed effects). While Southern whites appear to react more positively (toward Kennedy) upon news related to the USSR, the coefficient is small and there is essentially zero response to news on Cuba, making it hard to discern a consistent pattern on international relations or Communism. White Southerners react more positively to news linking Kennedy and agricultural policy (perhaps not a surprise given its differential importance in the South), but the coefficient is less than one-third the size of our Civil Rights interaction. The lack of large divergent responses to issues other than Civil Rights foreshadows results we present in Section IVB that in the pre-period, whites in the South had few policy disagreements with whites elsewhere except for Civil Rights. More important to the question at hand, adding these controls leaves

³⁷We have explored robustness of our results to varying respondents' memories. The coefficient on *South* × *Article count* and its significance increases as we add previous days to the window up to about two weeks, and then starts to fall. When we include additional lags of search terms, the association of hits and approval is smaller in magnitude in lagged weeks.

TABLE 2—APPROVAL OF KENNEDY AS FUNCTION OF CIVIL RIGHTS COVERAGE (*Whites in Gallup*)

	Search terms employed: “President Kennedy” and ...				
	“Civil Rights”		Civil Rights terms		“Negro”
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
<i>Article count</i>	−0.0160 [0.00658]				
<i>Article count</i> × <i>South</i>	−0.0540 [0.00560]	−0.0577 [0.00396]	−0.0454 [0.00424]	−0.113 [0.00827]	−0.0584 [0.00621]
<i>South</i> × foreign policy, war articles		0.00537 [0.00721]	0.0145 [0.00636]	0.00185 [0.00774]	0.0102 [0.00964]
<i>South</i> × crime, drugs articles		0.0125 [0.0191]	0.00628 [0.0290]	0.0373 [0.0213]	0.00756 [0.0177]
<i>South</i> × USSR articles		0.0191 [0.00537]	0.0297 [0.00603]	0.0140 [0.00568]	0.0166 [0.00763]
<i>South</i> × Cuba, Castro articles		−0.00665 [0.00688]	−0.000914 [0.00719]	0.0147 [0.00820]	0.00182 [0.00779]
<i>South</i> × communism, socialism articles		−0.00902 [0.00637]	−0.0172 [0.00554]	−0.0199 [0.00802]	−0.00941 [0.0104]
<i>South</i> × taxes, budget articles		0.0122 [0.00715]	0.0155 [0.00697]	−0.0140 [0.00947]	0.0111 [0.0108]
<i>South</i> × employment articles		0.0129 [0.00904]	−0.0106 [0.0121]	0.0230 [0.0104]	−0.00539 [0.0126]
<i>South</i> × Social Security articles		0.00116 [0.0121]	0.0145 [0.0105]	0.0413 [0.0144]	0.0162 [0.0181]
<i>South</i> × agriculture articles		0.0137 [0.00574]	0.0154 [0.00559]	0.0136 [0.00643]	0.0156 [0.00836]
Mean, dependent variable	0.670	0.670	0.670	0.670	0.670
Survey date fixed effects	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
RA coding	No	No	No	Yes	No
Observations	65,012	65,012	65,012	65,012	65,012

Notes: Dependent variable is a dummy coded as 1 if respondent approves of Kennedy’s performance (all other responses coded as 0). State fixed effects in all regressions. “Civil Rights” denotes the frequency of *NYT* articles containing “President Kennedy” and “civil rights.” “Civil Rights terms” adds to that count articles that contain “President Kennedy” and any form of the word “segregate” or “integrate.” “Negro” refers to the frequency of articles containing “President Kennedy” and “Negro.” We also control for article counts on other topics, articles containing “President Kennedy” and terms related to the coefficient labels. We average these daily count over seven days centered on the midpoint of the time the survey is in the field. In column 4, we use data generated by two research assistants reading each article and judging whether it painted Kennedy as pro-Civil Rights (and average their determinations so that coefficients are comparable to other columns). Online Appendix Section D provides additional detail on the newspaper searches and RA hand-coding procedures

the coefficient on the interaction between *South* and Civil Rights articles unchanged. In column 3, we repeat the column 2 analysis using the more expanded Civil Rights terms search. The interaction term remains negative and significant, though is about one-fourth smaller.

False positives could attenuate results. We thus had two research assistants (RAs) code, based on their own judgment, whether each article put Kennedy on the liberal side of the Civil Rights issue, on the conservative side, was mixed, or whether the article was a false hit.³⁸ Column 4 suggests that, relative to baseline, an additional

³⁸In fact, the RAs on average classify just over one-half of the expanded Civil Rights terms search as false hits, 32 percent as pro-Civil Rights, 7 percent as against, and 6 percent mixed. In debriefing the RAs after they submitted

article per day placing Kennedy on the liberal side of Civil Rights (as judged by our RAs) reduces his relative support among white Southerners by over 11 percentage points, consistent with substantial attenuation bias in column 3. Finally, in another attempt to address false positives but without relying on labor-intensive and potentially subjective hand-coding, in column 5 we show that our column 3 specification is robust to using the search term “Negro” instead of Civil Rights terms.

In online Appendix Table A.10, we demonstrate robustness to normalizing the number of Civil Rights articles by total number of articles and to including a *South* linear time trend. The Appendix table also shows that, beyond approval of Kennedy, *Democratic identification* among Southern whites also falls relative to others upon news linking Kennedy to Civil Rights (though as party identification is a more stable outcome than presidential approval, the magnitudes are smaller and the estimate is not significant at conventional levels, $p = 0.144$).

Figure 8 displays the remarkable predictive power of (media coverage of) Kennedy’s Civil Rights initiatives, graphing predicted approval using variants of the column 3 and 4 specifications of Table 2 (i.e., the broad Civil Rights search terms, with and without RA coding: see figure notes for more detail) alongside actual approval, by region and survey date. Our predicted series captures 51 percent (56 percent with RA coding) of the actual variation.³⁹ When we perform the same exercise with each control issue, the best performing issue (Social Security) captures 20 percent and seven of the nine capture less than 5 percent. The overwhelming predictive power of Civil Rights in explaining regional differences in approval for Kennedy undercuts the argument that other issues were triggering dealignment during this key period.

Were Southerners reacting to Kennedy’s *policies*, as we argue, or were they merely blaming the incumbent for events that they found objectionable? Perhaps white Southerners would have graded poorly any executive who presided over the country during the unrest in Birmingham, regardless of the executive’s actions.⁴⁰ If Kennedy’s actual involvement was not pivotal, then the coefficients of interest in Table 2 should be sensitive to simultaneously controlling for interactions with *South* and article counts for Civil Rights news that does *not* necessarily mention Kennedy. In fact, as we show in online Appendix Table A.10, adding this control barely affects our coefficient of interest. Similarly, the Appendix table shows that results are also robust to using “Civil Rights” *and* “Martin Luther King” or “Civil Rights” *and* “Republican” in the same manner.

Hypothetical Presidential Matchups.—Another familiar Gallup question asks voters whom they would prefer in hypothetical election matchups. Roughly once a month beginning in February 1963, Gallup asks respondents for whom they would

their scores, we concluded that they were quite conservative in judging an article to be pro-Civil Rights. A common “false positive” was Kennedy discussion of NATA and “European integration.” See online Appendix D for further details, including the instructions we gave to the RAs. Both were blind to our hypothesis of Spring 1963 as the turning point.

³⁹Predictions using the narrow Civil Rights search and the Negro search terms capture 51 percent and 54 percent of the actual variation, respectively.

⁴⁰See, e.g., Achen and Bartels (2012) on voters punishing incumbents for shark attacks (as well as subsequent papers on natural disasters). Similarly, Southern whites may have punished Kennedy even if in reality he did nothing to promote Civil Rights.

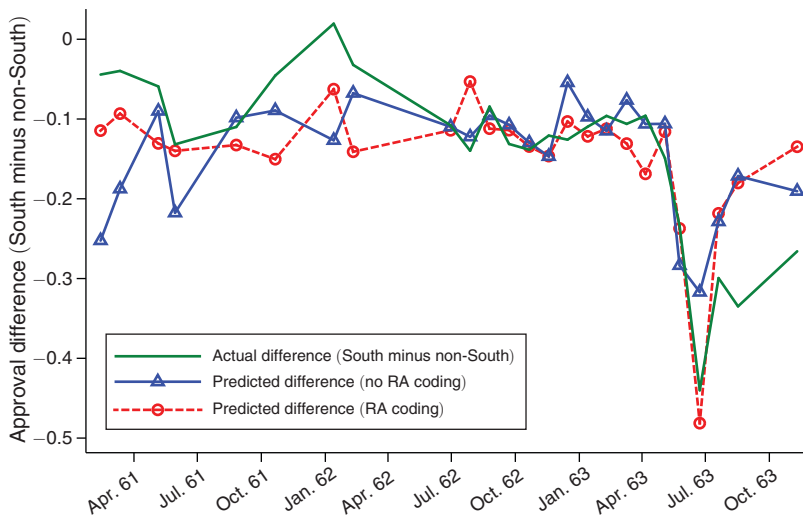


FIGURE 8. PREDICTED VERSUS ACTUAL REGIONAL APPROVAL DIFFERENCES FOR KENNEDY (*Whites in Gallup*)

Notes: The actual difference is identical to that in Figure 7. Predicted (no RA coding) and predicted (RA coding) come from predicting Kennedy's approval based on *NYT* articles linking him to Civil Rights (in the latter case using research assistants' assessment of whether the article clearly suggests that Kennedy was pushing for Civil Rights). Specifically, for the second series, we collapse by region and survey date the predicted approval values generated from regressing approval on state fixed effects, "Civil rights terms and President Kennedy" search hits by survey date, and that term interacted with *South*. For the third series, we regress approval on state fixed effects, search hits that our RAs judge as putting Kennedy on the *pro*-Civil-Rights side, search hits that our RAs judge as putting Kennedy on the *anti*-Civil-Rights side, and these search hit terms interacted with *South*. We do not include survey-date fixed effects and the interaction of South with search hits for "control" issues as we do in Table 2 so as to only use our key Civil Rights variables to generate the prediction. See text for further detail.

vote, Kennedy or Senator Barry Goldwater (R-AZ), with the final poll less than two weeks before Kennedy's assassination. While earlier in his career Goldwater appeared open to Civil Rights, by as early as 1959 he had become one of the most vocal Republican opponents.⁴¹

Figure 9 shows Goldwater's support among white Southerners at around 30 percent through the first week of March. Goldwater then enjoys a steady increase in Southern support through the Spring of 1963, reaching a plateau of around 60 percent in July. During our key period of the Spring of 1963, Kennedy goes from having a healthy, 30 percentage point lead over Goldwater in the region to being 30 points behind him. White non-Southerners, by contrast, remain rather aloof toward Goldwater over this entire period.

The result from the presidential matchups suggests that Kennedy's decline in approval documented in the previous subsection did not reflect mere short-term annoyance. As Kennedy began to intervene on the side of Civil Rights, *half* of his Southern white supporters rapidly shifted their backing to a candidate from a party they had shunned for a century but who opposed Civil Rights. As noted in the introduction, those arguing for Civil Rights as the trigger for Southern dealignment

⁴¹ See Schickler (2016, ch. 10). For example, he opposed Eisenhower's dispatching federal troops to integrate Little Rock High School and campaigned throughout the South in the late 1950s calling the *Brown* decision illegal.

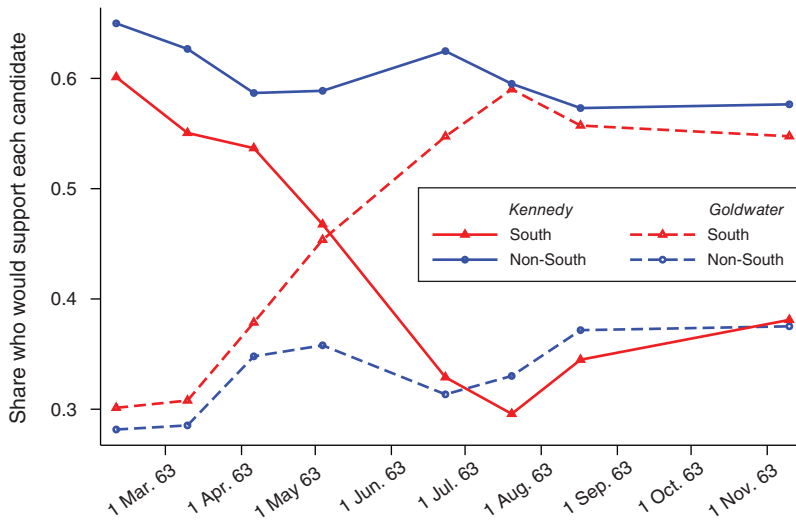


FIGURE 9. SUPPORT FOR KENNEDY VERSUS GOLDWATER (*Whites in Gallup*)

Notes: Data come from Gallup polls asking individuals whom they would support in the upcoming 1964 presidential election, if the Democrats nominated Kennedy and the Republicans nominated Barry Goldwater. We count “lean toward” a candidate as supporting that candidate.

typically point to Johnson as the catalyst: our results suggest that Kennedy has been given too little credit (or blame?) for losing the South for his party.

IV. Addressing Alternative Hypotheses

In the previous section, we made our positive case for Civil Rights as the prime mover of Southern whites out of the Democratic Party. In this section, we more directly address the alternative hypotheses raised in the introduction.

A. Can Economic Development or Changing Demographics Explain Dealignment?

During our study period, the South grew faster than the rest of the country, and as household income varies negatively with Democratic identification, Southern economic development is an important and plausible alternative mechanism for dealignment, as we noted in the introduction.⁴² For this reason, we showed in

⁴²Interestingly, economists who have studied Southern economic development often lay out a reverse chain of events, arguing that both major Civil Rights victories and large-scale dealignment preceded and in fact *helped cause* major economic catch-up in the region. Wright (2013) contends that desegregation accelerated economic growth by allowing businesses to hire from larger pools of workers and serve larger pools of customers. Besley, Persson, and Sturm (2010) argue that political competition brought on by the 1965 Voting Rights Act made the region’s politicians propose more pro-growth economic policies. Similarly, both Margo (1995) and Acemoglu and Robinson (2008) argue that Civil Rights was a key factor in sparking Southern economic growth. Relatedly, the common view that mobilization for World War II helped jump-start economic modernization has been challenged by recent work, both for the US in general (Fishback and Cullen 2013) and for the South in particular (Jaworski 2017). Moreover, as Margo notes, a key component of the region’s post-1960 growth was economic catch-up *among blacks*, and thus

Section IIIA that our main results were robust to flexibly controlling for individual-level measures for education, occupation, age, and urbanicity; controlling for observable economic and demographic measures at the state-year level; and controlling flexibly for *geography* \times *time* fixed effects to pick up unobserved economic and demographic changes. We also showed that changes in Democratic legislators' position on *racial equality* is a much stronger predictor of the timing of realignment than changes in their *economic policy*.

However, as Gallup has limited controls for household income, we turn to the ANES to further explore the relationship between economic development and dealignment. From 1952 onward, the ANES has the needed state identifiers as well as a consistent income measure which groups households by where they fall in the US income distribution (bottom 16 percent, between the 17th and 33rd percentiles, the middle third, between the 67th and 95th percentiles, or the top 5 percent). Column 1 of Table 3 estimates the differential decline in whites' Democratic identification in the South versus elsewhere, using ANES data from 1952 to 1980 and retaining our usual 1963 pivot point (so 1964 is the first post-period year in the ANES). We find a 14 percentage point relative decline in Southern Democratic identification (similar, as we would expect, to the analogous results from Gallup, column 3 of Table 1). The remaining columns attempt to explain away the large, negative coefficient on *South* \times *After*. Column 2 adds fixed effects for the five ANES income categories. Some authors (see, e.g., Lassiter 2013 and Black and Black 1987) point to urbanization in the South as a reason whites leave the Democrats, so column 3 adds fixed effects for the three urbanicity categories in the ANES. Column 4 adds interactions for each of the urbanicity and income categories with both *South* and *After*. In none of these columns does the coefficient on *South* \times *After* appreciably change. In short, economic development, even broadly and flexibly defined, cannot explain why Southern whites leave the Democratic Party after 1963.

As noted in the introduction, other authors argue that demographic changes in the South drive dealignment. For example, the South experienced net in-migration after 1960. Given the large Democratic advantage in the South during much of the twentieth century, in-migrants from the non-South would tend to be more Republican (see, e.g., McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006; Gimpel and Schuknecht 2001; and Trende 2012). Age has also been considered as a dimension of dealignment that weakens the Civil Rights case: Wattenberg (1991) argues that Southern whites who came of age since Jim Crow, and should have less allegiance to segregation, have in fact driven the dealignment. In column 5, we drop individuals who were Southern residents at the time of the ANES interview, but were born elsewhere, which serves to slightly increase the coefficient of interest. Dropping younger voters (column 6) reduces the coefficient somewhat, but it remains highly significant.⁴³ In column 7,

could not help explain why whites left the Democrats. In fact, Alston and Ferrie (1993) argue that certain aspects of Southern economic development, in particular, the mechanization of cotton production, should have made whites, especially white elites, *more* open to Democratic policies, by changing labor relations in a way that made a government-provided social safety net more attractive.

⁴³These results support the arguments of Stanley (1988) and Osborne, Sears, and Valentino (2011) that any effect of migration or cohort-replacement would have simply been too small to explain such a large shift in party identification.

TABLE 3—EXPLANATORY POWER OF INCOME AND URBANICITY IN EXPLAINING WHITE SOUTHERN DEALIGNMENT (ANES, 1952–1980)

	Respondent identifies as a Democrat						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
<i>Panel A. (Diff-in-diff spec.)</i>							
<i>South</i> × <i>After</i>	−0.140 [0.0389]	−0.140 [0.0374]	−0.150 [0.0400]	−0.141 [0.0372]	−0.164 [0.0497]	−0.0943 [0.0389]	−0.126 [0.0473]
<i>Panel B. (Diff. trend spec.)</i>							
<i>South</i> × (<i>Year</i> /100)	−0.945 [0.159]	−0.933 [0.155]	−0.992 [0.165]	−0.921 [0.166]	−0.984 [0.184]	−0.733 [0.184]	−0.777 [0.207]
Dependent variable mean	0.518	0.518	0.518	0.518	0.522	0.526	0.530
Income fixed effects	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
City-size fixed effects	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Interactions	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Ex. migrants	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Ex. new voters	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Observations	19,543	19,543	19,543	19,543	16,520	16,263	13,523

Notes: The 14 coefficients above are each from a separate regression. Regressions from panel A take the form $Dem_{its} = \beta South_s \times After_t + \gamma X_{its} + \mu_s + \eta_t + e_{its}$ and regressions in panel B take the form $Dem_{its} = \beta South_s \times Year_t + \gamma X_{its} + \mu_s + \eta_t + e_{its}$. $South_s$ is an indicator for residing in one of the states of the former Confederacy; μ_s and η_t are state and year fixed effects, respectively; $After_t$ is an indicator variable for being surveyed after April 1963; $Year_t$ is a linear time trend; interaction terms are coded naturally; and X_{its} is a vector of controls that we vary to test robustness. Income (five categories) and city-type (three categories) fixed effects are included where specified in the table footer. Where “Interactions” are specified, income and city-type fixed effects have each been interacted with *South* and (separately) with *After* (when *South* × *After* is the explanatory variable of interest) or *Year* (when *South* × *Year* is the explanatory variable of interest). Migrants are defined as current Southern residents who were not born in the South (these specifications, therefore, exclude those with missing values for place of birth). “New voters” are those younger than 21 in 1963. Standard errors clustered by state.

we drop both of these groups and add the column 4 controls, and again the coefficient retains nearly all of its original magnitude.

The regressions in panel A of Table 3 impose our preferred turning point of 1963, but a distinct question is whether economic development can explain dealignment more generally over our sample period. Our current specification allows Southern and non-Southern voters to have different preferences in the pre- and the post-periods, but assumes that within these two periods, their preferences are stable. In panel B, we instead interact *South* with a linear time trend, to explore whether economic variables have more success “explaining away” this alternative functional form. Not surprisingly, the coefficient on the *South* linear time trend is highly negative and significant (Democratic identification falls roughly one percentage point per year on average over the sample period, in the South relative to elsewhere). However, just as with *South* × *After*, almost none of the Southern linear time trend is explained by any of the specification checks described above.⁴⁴ Online Appendix Tables A.11 to A.14 show that the patterns in Table 3 hold when instead of party ID we use votes in presidential and congressional races as outcome variables.

⁴⁴In fact, not only does economic development not explain overall Southern dealignment, but richer and non-rural Southerners (the so-called New South) did not drive dealignment (see online Appendix Table A.12).

B. *Rising Party Polarization*

Over the past 50 years, the Democratic and Republican parties have moved further apart on most issues, in particular redistribution and social insurance (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006). If Southern whites have always been more conservative, especially economically, than other whites, then rising polarization could lead to differential exodus of Southern whites from the increasingly more liberal party. Moreover, if our “black president” question is merely acting as a proxy for general conservatism, then our results could be an artifact of polarization that we mistakenly attribute to reaction to Civil Rights. We investigate both of these claims.

Were White Southerners More Conservative than Whites Elsewhere?—We focus on the 1956 ANES, which asks more than a dozen policy questions (some are repeated in 1958 and 1960 and in those cases we pool surveys) scored on a scale from 1 to 5 (strongly agree to strongly disagree). The first panel of Table 4 focuses on economic policy preferences, providing both means and the fraction agreeing or strongly agreeing for each of five questions. White Southerners are somewhat to the left of whites elsewhere, significantly so on the question of public health care (which would arise as a key issue in 1965, with the introduction of Medicare and Medicaid) and (marginally) the influence of big business. Our read of the first panel is that differences on domestic economic policy between whites in the two regions is marginal, though if anything the few significant differences are in the direction of Southerners leaning slightly more to the left.

The second panel shows some significant regional differences on foreign policy, but in no consistent direction (Southern whites want soldiers overseas to fight communism while also preferring politicians focus on domestic instead of foreign policy issues). Moreover, it is hard to categorize foreign policy positions as Democratic or Republican in the late 1950s, as both parties fought to be viewed as the more hawkish. The third panel reports large and significant differences, as expected, on Civil Rights.⁴⁵

While Southerners’ (non-race-related) policy preferences are not to the right of other whites in our pre-period, a related question is whether *changes* in policy preferences from the pre- to post-period can explain dealignment (though, as scholars point out, such changes may be endogenous to Civil Rights initiatives and thus difficult to interpret).⁴⁶ The ANES does not have a question on policy preferences that is worded consistently throughout our sample period; the question that comes closest to meeting that criterion asks respondents their views on the governments’

⁴⁵Note that we include questions of federal aid for local school construction in this category because after the *Brown* decision federal funds could only be used for integrated schools and indeed every federal education bill from the mid-fifties to the mid-sixties explicitly included language to that effect (and indeed never passed Congress, due to opposition by Southern legislators). Adam Clayton Powell (D-NY) added his so-called Powell Amendment to every school construction bill during this period. Indeed, he was once punched in the face by segregationist Cleveland Bailey (D-WV) on the House floor, with Bailey charging him with “trying to wreck the public school system” with his amendment (see John D. Morris, “Powell Is Punched by House Colleague,” *New York Times*, July 21, 1955).

⁴⁶See, e.g., Kousser (2010) and Lee and Roemer (2006), who argue that Civil Rights legislation, by giving blacks access for the first time to the federal social safety net in Southern states, would presumably reduce support for these programs among some racially conservative whites.

TABLE 4—PRE-PERIOD POLICY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WHITES IN SOUTH AND NON-SOUTH (ANES)

	South	N	Non-South	N	Diff.
<i>Panel A. Economic policy</i>					
Gov't should guarantee jobs	3.59	777	3.56	2,791	0.03
Agree that gov't should guarantee jobs	0.62	777	0.60	2,791	0.02
Gov't should help ppl get medical care at low cost	3.66	541	3.52	1,845	0.14
Agree gov't should help with medical care	0.64	541	0.59	1,845	0.05
Gov't should limit pol. influ. of big business	4.03	257	3.83	938	0.20
Agree that gov't should limit infl. of business	0.74	257	0.69	938	0.05
Gov't should *not* limit pol. influ. of unions	2.19	258	2.21	985	-0.02
Agree gov't should *not* limit infl. of unions	0.25	258	0.25	985	-0.01
Gov't should *not* leave utilities, housing to priv. biz.	2.36	643	2.44	2,371	-0.08
Agree that gov't should *not* leave ... to priv biz.	0.28	643	0.30	2,371	-0.03
<i>Panel B. Foreign policy, communism</i>					
Gov't cannot fire suspected communists	3.72	306	3.78	1,090	-0.06
Agree gov't cannot fire susp. communists	0.65	306	0.68	1,090	-0.03
Keep soldiers abroad to help countries fight comm.	4.22	745	4.05	2,566	0.17
Agree we should keep soldiers abroad ...	0.81	745	0.76	2,566	0.04
Country better off if focus domestically	2.34	777	2.16	2,782	0.18
Agree that country better of if focus domestically	0.29	777	0.24	2,782	0.05
Should give aid to poor countries even if can't pay back	3.39	766	3.43	2,645	-0.04
Agree we should give aid to poor countries	0.57	766	0.56	2,645	0.01
Give forgn. aid even if country not anti-communist	2.75	267	2.85	934	-0.10
Agree give forgn. aid even if country ...	0.38	267	0.40	934	-0.02
Best way to deal with commun. countries is get tough	4.06	277	4.14	1,056	-0.08
Agree best way is to get tough	0.75	277	0.77	1,056	-0.01
<i>Panel C. Civil Rights</i>					
Gov't should enforce fair jobs/housing for Negroes	3.28	756	3.91	2,691	-0.63
Agree that gov't should enforce fair ...	0.56	756	0.73	2,691	-0.17
Fed gov't should get involved in sch. integration	1.84	607	3.13	1,994	-1.29
Agree that fed gov't should get involved ...	0.19	607	0.50	1,994	-0.31
Fed gov't should help finance local school construction	3.59	801	3.79	2,783	-0.21
Agree fed gov't should help finance schools	0.63	801	0.68	2,783	-0.06

Notes: If the ideological orientation of an economic policy question is obvious, we reorient the question if needed so that answers are *increasing* in the *liberal* position. The wording we use to label each question has been lightly edited to limit total characters while retaining the meaning of the question. Each question is presented in two ways: first, as continuous agreement with the statement from 1 to 5 and second, as a binary variable indicating agreement or strong agreement. "Don't know" responses are dropped. Sample sizes vary because while all questions appear in 1956, only some are repeated in 1958 and 1960.

Source: All questions taken from the 1956, 1958, and 1960 ANES.

role in guaranteeing jobs and a basic standard of living. As we show in online Appendix Table A.15, no matter how flexibly we allow this variable to enter our equation, it explains essentially none of the large decline in Democratic identification in the South (see table notes for how we harmonized this question across years).

Overall, the analysis in this subsection provides no hint that, absent Democrats' introduction of Civil Rights legislation in 1963, white Southerners were on the verge of abandoning the Democratic Party because of policy disagreements. Especially on economic policy, any differences between whites in the South and elsewhere would have predicted, if anything, an increasing loyalty to the Democratic Party as it pushed public medical insurance.

Is “No Black President” Merely Proxying for Conservatism?—Until now we have been interpreting our black president question as a measure of racial views, and indeed we showed in online Appendix Table A.1 that it is highly correlated with other questions on racial equality in the GSS. There are at least two complications to address. First, recall that until 1960, all US presidents had been white, Protestant men. As such, discomfort with a black president may simply be proxying for social or cultural conservatism (a desire to adhere to past norms), not opposition to racial equality per se. Second, recall that the question specifies that “your party” nominates a black man: a white Southerner would surely have assumed that had the Democrats nominated a black man, he would have been from the Northern, liberal wing of the party. As such, a white Southerner may have feared a black Democratic president would have been dismissive of regional issues beyond segregation (e.g., agricultural policy).

In many surveys in which Gallup asks the black president question, it also asks whether respondents would vote for a qualified female, Catholic, or Jewish nominee from their party. In the 1960s, a president from any of these groups would have been a large break from tradition and thus refusal should correlate with social conservatism (perhaps especially for a female candidate). Moreover, had the Democratic Party nominated a Jewish or Catholic candidate during this period, Southern whites could be very sure he would come from the Northern wing of the party. If our black president is merely proxying for social conservatism or regionalism, then our coefficient of interest should be quite sensitive to simultaneously controlling for views toward these three groups.

For each group $G \in \{Female, Jewish, Catholic\}$, online Appendix Table A.16 shows the results from four regression specifications. We begin by estimating our standard equation (1) on the subsample of observations that include the “black president question” *as well as* the “president” question for group G , to estimate total pre- versus post-period white Southern dealignment for this subsample of our main regression sample (in all cases, the estimate is similar to that of the baseline estimate in column 3 of Table 1).

In the second column, we then estimate a version of equation (2) where we instead measure the share of total dealignment accounted for by white Southerners opposed to a candidate from group G . The third specification is our usual “black president” triple-interaction equation *on the subsample that includes the president question for group G* . The final specification performs a “horse-race” to see if the decline is better explained by those Southerners against voting for blacks or those against voting for the other group.

The results of these exercises are very similar regardless of whether women, Jews, or Catholics are the group G of interest. Comparing the first and second specifications for each group shows that almost none of the total Southern dealignment is explained by differential movement among Southerners unwilling to vote for members of these other groups. Dealignment among racially conservative (i.e., anti-black) white Southerners remains large for all three subsamples that also include the “president” question for the group in question (the third specification). Moreover, comparing the third and fourth specifications, when we simultaneously control for views toward blacks and views toward the other group (our “horse-race” specification), the coefficients on our racial conservatism variables retain their statistical

significance and in fact barely move. As such, Southern dealignment during the post-period is driven by those with conservative views on racial *equality toward blacks*, even after we control for (highly correlated) views toward women and religious minorities.⁴⁷

C. Does the Timing of Dealignment Undermine Civil Rights as the Cause?

As Figure 1 shows, while white Southerners continue to trickle out of the Democratic Party after 2000, much of the damage was complete by 1970.⁴⁸ Between 1960 and 1970, Democrats lost on average over 2 percentage points per year among white Southerners relative to other whites, whereas there was no additional loss between 1970 and 1980 and the aggregate 1970–2004 rate was below 0.4 percentage points per year. This pattern is broadly consistent with the shock of the Democrats' 1960s Civil Rights engagement leading many racially conservative Southern whites to switch immediately and some amount of inertia that led others to switch later or to die out and be replaced by future non-Democrats.

What is, at first glance, less consistent with our story of 1963 as the turning point is the *earlier* evolution of party identification. We address two key questions. First, why did Kennedy's weakness in the South pre-date his 1963 Civil Rights moves? Second, what caused the (slower, but certainly substantial) pre-1960 dealignment among white Southerners?⁴⁹

What Drove Kennedy's Pre-1963 Weakness in the South?—In his razor-thin 1960 election victory, Kennedy significantly underperforms in the South relative to past Democratic candidates. Some authors argue that this dismal showing suggests that Civil Rights cannot explain 1960s Southern dealignment, as Kennedy had essentially no Civil Rights agenda until 1963. Below we provide a variety of quantitative evidence showing that his Catholicism substantially depressed his support among whites in the South while *raising* it elsewhere.⁵⁰

In a 1958 Gallup poll, 48 percent of Southern whites state unwillingness to vote for a Catholic president, compared to only 22 percent of whites elsewhere. In the 1960 post-election portion of the ANES, 29 percent of whites in the South said the *most important reason* they did not vote for Kennedy was his Catholicism, compared to 15 percent elsewhere. These percentages *include* (in the denominator) all those who *did* vote for him, suggesting anti-Catholic sentiment was a major factor in suppressing his Southern vote total.⁵¹

On the other hand, Catholic voters (94 percent of whom lived outside the South) mobilized in support of Kennedy, further shrinking the South-versus-non-South

⁴⁷Correlations between the black president question and, respectively, the female, Jewish, and Catholic president questions are 0.447, 0.402, and 0.455.

⁴⁸See online Appendix Figure A.9 for a version of Figure 1 zooming in on the period 1958–1970.

⁴⁹Despite the earlier dealignment, which we analyze in detail in this subsection, the coefficient on *South × After* in columns 1 and 3 of Table 1 remains negative and significant after adding a Southern linear time trend (results available upon request).

⁵⁰Southern opposition to a Catholic president during this era was so substantial that Kennedy delivered a now-famous speech to Southern ministers committing himself to secular government.

⁵¹Note that the only other time before 1960 that Democrats fielded a Catholic candidate (Al Smith, in 1928), Democrats lost six Southern states, five of which had not voted Republican since Reconstruction.

advantage Kennedy received relative to non-Catholic Democratic nominees.⁵² While in the other presidential elections from 1952 to 2000, white Catholics, relative to other whites, favor Democrats by roughly 11 percentage points, the advantage in 1960 was a huge outlier at over 45 percentage points (see online Appendix Figure A.10). We can use the ANES to “correct” for this pro-Catholic effect by dropping all Catholics. In online Appendix Figure A.11 we plot the South-versus-non-South difference in Presidential vote share for all white voters and for white *non-Catholic* voters. Consistent with past work, we find that Kennedy performs poorly in the South relative to previous Democratic candidates, among all white voters. But once we exclude Catholic voters, the candidate’s 1960 performance is similar to previous Democratic nominees and the clear trend break emerges between the presidential elections of 1960 and 1964, consistent with our hypothesized 1963 turning point. As this graph can correct only for the pro-Catholic bias (almost entirely outside the South) and not for anti-Catholic bias (concentrated in the South), even the non-Catholic series in online Appendix Figure A.11 almost surely understates how well Kennedy would have done among whites in the South versus elsewhere but for his religion.

While the 1960 presidential election has been a focus of the dealignment literature, the focus of our paper is party identification. In that regard, more concerning than Kennedy’s 1960 election performance is that, if one looks carefully at Figure 1 (or the zoomed-in version in online Appendix Figure A.9), the steep period of the relative decline in white Southern Democratic *Party* identification begins in 1961, not 1963, as our hypothesis would predict. Unless white Southerners actually changed their party identification (as opposed to merely their presidential vote), at least temporarily, then the Democrats fielding a Catholic nominee in 1960 cannot explain why we see Southern *party* dealignment beginning in 1961 instead of 1963.

In fact, anti-Catholic sentiment indeed led Southerners to temporarily switch party identification in the early years of Kennedy’s administration. In online Appendix Figure A.12, we plot the coefficients from regressing, separately for the South and elsewhere, Democratic identification on a *No Catholic Prez* variable for each survey date (i.e., the “no Catholic president” analogue to our main Figure 5). Indeed, 1961 (the first poll following his election) is a huge outlier in the South: those with anti-Catholic views are roughly 27 percentage points less likely to identify as Democrats than in a typical year. While anti-Catholic sentiment is often noted in the 1960 election, our analysis demonstrates that it also temporarily reduced Southerners’ Democratic Party identification.⁵³

What Drove Pre-1960 Southern Dealignment?—As shown in Figure 1, between 1948 and 1952, the Democrats’ Southern advantage shrinks by nearly ten points, before slowing its decline for the remainder of the decade.

It is not hard to fashion an historical account whereby Democrats’ positions on Civil Rights can explain the timing of this early dealignment and its eventual

⁵² State residence of Catholic voters is based on authors’ calculation from the 1960 ANES.

⁵³ Not surprisingly, given that online Appendix Figure A.12 shows that the connection between anti-Catholic sentiment and party identification is a one-off effect, anti-Catholic specific dealignment explains only (a statistically insignificant) 15 percent of total dealignment.

slowing. The Democrats' traditional support for (or at least tolerance of) white supremacy in the South softens by the late 1940s as Northern liberals gain power in the party.⁵⁴ On February 2, 1948, President Truman delivers the first-ever Civil Rights message to Congress, introducing a legislative package that the NAACP calls "the most uncompromising and specific pronouncement" made by a president on racial equality. Northern liberals then secure a strong Civil Rights plank in the party platform at the July convention that year, leading many Southern delegates to follow Senator Strom Thurmond (D-SC) in walking out of the convention and forming the States' Rights Democratic Party (often referred to as the Dixiecrat Party). A week later, Truman issues executive orders to desegregate the military and federal workforce.

Truman would nearly lose the election after Thurmond wins four states of the Deep South, and a nascent Southern Republican Party would begin to form in the early 1950s. Democrats do their best to reassure Southerners by nominating Adlai Stevenson in 1952 and 1956 (a moderate on Civil Rights), choosing vice presidential nominees from the South, and softening the party platform on Civil Rights, and are able to stem the Southern losses they incurred under Truman.

But do the data support this historical narrative? While data are decidedly more limited during the 1940s and early 1950s (exacerbated by Gallup's tendency to undersample the South until it adopted more modern sampling procedures in 1950), what data do exist indeed support this chronology.

We begin in online Appendix Figure A.13 by graphing Truman's relative approval among whites in the South versus elsewhere as a function of articles linking him to Civil Rights, the analogue to the Kennedy analysis in Figure 7. The media does not link Truman to Civil Rights until February 1948, timed exactly to his Civil Rights action on February 2, and his connection to Civil Rights remains elevated the rest of his administration. Online Appendix Figure A.13 shows that his relative white approval in the South falls 15 percentage points between December 1947 and September 1949, the last survey before and the first survey after February 1948, respectively. While consistent with the hypothesis that Civil Rights led to Truman's unpopularity in the South, the lack of any approval questions from 1948 itself obviously limits how tightly we can link his approval to his Civil Rights involvement.⁵⁵

We thus turn to another measure we expect to move at somewhat high frequency: vote intention for the 1948 presidential election, for which we have five surveys in 1947 and 1948. As online Appendix Figure A.13 shows, support for Truman collapsed in the South just after his Civil Rights message and does not recover within the time period of data availability. Finally, online Appendix A.15 graphs Democratic identification during Truman's administration. Democratic identification is difficult to interpret during the 1948 election season, as Strom Thurmond's third party was called the States' Rights *Democratic* Party (our emphasis) and in Gallup data 89 percent of those saying they will vote for Thurmond call themselves Democrats. Nonetheless, the Democrats' Southern advantage in party identification

⁵⁴In concurrent work, we investigate to what extent black migration out of the South led Northern politicians to support Civil Rights, especially in areas where blacks were swing voters.

⁵⁵See online Appendix Section B for more detail on survey quality from the 1940s.

declines after the Civil Rights message and continues to do so after the 1948 election (with some noise during the Korean War).

While the timing suggests that Civil Rights caused this early episode of dealignment, was it in fact racially conservative Southern whites leading the exit? Had “the Dixiecrats of 1948... loosened the inhibition against bolting the Democrats” and voting Republican or Independent was “the only vehicle for a protest vote against the national Democrats?” (Tindall 1972, p. 52). Or were these “earliest steps of the Southern realignment... an outgrowth of economic development?” (Trende 2012, p. 26). Lacking racial attitudes questions in the Gallup data that span our key 1948 date, we turn instead to the ANES.

The 1952 ANES not only has a question on racial views but also several questions we can use to proxy *defection* from the Democratic Party. In online Appendix Table A.17 we ask whether conservative racial views predict defection among white Southerners (consistent with the “protest vote” story). Being against ensuring fair employment opportunities for Negroes predicts both intragenerational defection (i.e., having once identified as a Democrat but now identifying as a Republican or Independent) and intergenerational defection (having grown up with parents who were Democrats but now identifying as a Republican or Independent), though has little predictive power for defection in terms of current Democrats voting for Eisenhower. In most cases, these correlations retain statistical significance after controlling for fixed effects for the age, gender, education, urbanicity, and income categories provided in the ANES. Despite the larger sample sizes, online Appendix Table A.18 shows that racial views are typically *insignificant* predictors of Democratic defection among whites *outside* the South, again consistent with the effects in the South being due to lingering anger at the party’s 1948 Civil Rights actions.

In online Appendix Table A.19 we explore whether richer Southern whites were differentially leaving the Democratic Party. While richer respondents indeed tend to defect from the Democrats (perhaps not surprising, given its redistributive policies), this tendency is often insignificant and moreover is no more marked than in the North. In short, we find evidence that, in the waning days of the Truman administration, it is conservative racial views, not income, that predicts the differential decline in Democratic identification among whites in the South versus elsewhere. Republican Dwight Eisenhower succeeds Truman as president in January 1953. It has been argued that any movement among Southerners toward Republicans under Eisenhower repudiates racial views as the primary trigger of Southern dealignment because Eisenhower was a progressive on Civil Rights (Trende 2012). While historians continue to debate Eisenhower’s Civil Rights legacy, we put that discussion aside and instead focus on white respondents’ contemporaneous reaction to moments during his administrative when he was linked with Civil Rights.⁵⁶ Online Appendix Figure A.16 and online Appendix Table A.20 are the Eisenhower analogues to the Kennedy analyses in Figure 7 and Table 2, tracking his relative popularity in the South alongside newspaper articles linking him to Civil Rights. As with Kennedy,

⁵⁶ See, e.g., Schickler (2016, ch. 10), for arguments that Eisenhower pulled the Republican Party in the direction of racial conservatism. Eisenhower was the first Republican in decades to campaign in the South, often alongside strict segregationists. While he signed the 1957 and 1960 Civil Rights Acts, he did not campaign for them nor did they have any enforcement provision.

even small increases in media mentions lead to wobbles in his support in the South, and his sending of federal troops to integrate Little Rock High School in September 1957 led to a cratering.

In summary, we find no evidence that income growth was pushing Southern whites out of the Democratic Party. Moreover, their (non-race-related) policy preferences from the late 1950s and early 1960s suggested no coming rift. While data from the 1940s and 1950s are more limited, we find that racially conservative whites were leaving the party in the early 1950s, just after Democratic President Truman advocated for some Civil Rights initiatives in the late 1940s. Just as with Truman, Southern whites reacted negatively toward Eisenhower whenever he put himself on the side of Civil Rights.

V. Conclusion

The exodus of Southern whites from the Democratic Party is one of the most transformative, and controversial, political developments in twentieth-century American history. Using newly available data, we conclude that defection among racially conservative whites just after Democrats introduce sweeping Civil Rights legislation explains virtually all of the party's losses in the region. We find essentially no role for either income growth in the region or (non-race-related) policy preferences in explaining why Democrats "lost" the South.

A large literature explores the relative importance of economic versus ethnocentric concerns in determining how individuals form partisan loyalties, develop policy preferences, and decide whether and how to vote. We expect this literature to grow, given recent political developments, and we hope that future scholars find our paper useful. However, important differences, both in methodology and context, would likely arise between our study and research on, say, current politics in many wealthy democracies. While data on racial attitudes are of much higher quality today (both in terms of frequency and question consistency), so, we suspect, is the social desirability bias against admitting racially conservative views. We benefitted from high-frequency variation in media coverage of race-related events; today, media coverage can be measured at even higher frequency, but the media landscape has become more fragmented. While racial divisions in our context were binary, in developed countries today they are often multipolar. The traditional black-white divide still exists, but the rise of immigration in both the US and Europe has created new concerns (whether perceived or real) among native residents: competition over scarce jobs, loss of "national culture," and, especially in Europe, the possibility of domestic terrorism.

Nonetheless, examining these more modern political settings will still face the central challenge—that we attempted to address in this paper—of separating the effects of these and similar sentiments from that of a changing economic landscape.

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