

# The New Politics of the Old South

An Introduction to Southern Politics

*Second Edition*

Edited by  
Charles S. Bullock III  
and  
Mark J. Rozell

# Contents

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Introduction: Southern Politics in the Twenty-first Century 1  
*Charles S. Bullock III and Mark J. Rozell*

## Part I: The Deep South States

1 South Carolina: The Heart of GOP Realignment in the South 23  
*John C. Kuzenski*

2 Georgia: Still the Most Democratic State in the South? 53  
*Charles S. Bullock III*

3 Alabama: Republicans Winning the Heart of Dixie 75  
*Harold W. Stanley*

4 Mississippi: A Study in Change and Continuity 95  
*David A. Breaux and Charles E. Menifield*

5 Louisiana: African Americans, Republicans, and Party Competition 113  
*Wayne Parent and Huey Perry*

## Part II: The Rim South States

6 Virginia: The New Politics of the Old Dominion 135  
*Mark J. Rozell*

7	North Carolina: The Development of Two-Party Competition <i>Charles Prysby</i>	153
8	Tennessee: Politics and Politicians That Matter beyond State Borders <i>John Lyman Mason</i>	177
9	Arkansas: Electoral Competition and Reapportionment in the "Land of Opportunity" <i>Gary D. Wekkin</i>	195
10	Oklahoma: The Secular Realignment Continues <i>Ronald Keith Gaddie and Gary W. Copeland</i>	223
11	Florida: Political Change, 1950–2000 <i>Michael J. Scicchitano and Richard K. Scher</i>	247
12	Texas: The Lone Star (Wars) State <i>James W. Lamare, J. L. Polinard, and Robert D. Wrinkle</i>	267
	Conclusion: The Soul of the South: Religion and Southern Politics at the Millennium <i>John C. Green, Lyman A. Kellstedt, Corwin E. Smidt, and James L. Guth</i>	283
	Index	299
	About the Contributors	313



## Alabama: Republicans Winning the Heart of Dixie

*Harold W. Stanley*

Republican voting at the presidential level and Democratic loyalties below the presidency characterized Alabama politics for decades. Alabama Republicans have made strong inroads, but lag behind the successes Republicans achieved in the other southern states. As table 3.1 shows, Republicans lined up behind George W. Bush in 2000, the sixth consecutive presidential victory for the GOP in the state known as the "Heart of Dixie." Republicans also won the last two Senate elections of the twentieth century, but in 1998 Democrats halted a three-time losing string in gubernatorial contests.

Recent Republican successes are all the more striking when placed in the context of Alabama politics since the 1960s. In the South, history lingers. As one Faulkner character reminds us, the past isn't dead, the past isn't even past yet. The following review of four decades focuses on three principal points. First, the political dominance of George Wallace throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s retarded the growth of the Republican Party in Alabama. Second, despite Wallace's dominance, Republicans did make inroads over these decades. Third, and again despite Wallace's dominance, Alabama blacks moved from political objects to political participants, from political exclusion to full-fledged political clout.

Table 3.1. Alabama General Election Voting, 1946–2000

	Republican Candidate	Vote	Vote (%)	Democrat Candidate	Vote	Vote (%)
<b>President</b>						
1948 <sup>a</sup>	Dewey	40,930	19.0	Truman	—	—
1952	Eisenhower	149,231	35.0	Stevenson	275,075	64.6
1956	Eisenhower	195,694	39.4	Stevenson	280,844	56.5
1960	Nixon	237,981	41.7	Kennedy	324,050	56.8
1964 <sup>b</sup>	Goldwater	479,085	69.5	Johnson	—	—
1968 <sup>c</sup>	Nixon	146,923	14.0	Humphrey	196,579	18.7
1972	Nixon	728,701	72.4	McGovern	256,923	25.5
1976	Ford	504,070	42.6	Carter	659,170	55.7
1980	Reagan	654,192	48.8	Carter	636,730	47.4
1984	Reagan	872,849	60.5	Mondale	551,899	38.3
1988	Bush	815,576	59.2	Dukakis	549,506	39.9
1992 <sup>d</sup>	Bush	804,283	47.6	Clinton	690,080	40.9
1996 <sup>e</sup>	Dole	769,044	50.1	Clinton	662,165	43.2
2000	Bush	941,173	56.5	Gore	692,611	41.6
<b>U.S. Senate</b>						
1946	—			Sparkman	163,217	100.0
1948	Parson	35,341	16.0	Sparkman	185,534	84.0
1950	—			Hill	125,534	76.5
1954	Guin	55,110	17.5	Sparkman	259,348	82.5
1956	—			Hill	330,182	100.0
1960	Elgin	164,868	29.8	Sparkman	389,196	70.2
1962	Martin	195,134	49.1	Hill	201,937	50.9
1966	Grenier	313,018	39.0	Sparkman	482,138	60.1
1968	Hooper	201,227	22.0	Allen	638,774	70.0
1972	Blount	347,523	33.1	Sparkman	645,491	62.3
1974	—			Allen	501,541	95.8
1978 <sup>f</sup>	Martin	316,170	43.2	Stewart	401,852	54.9
1978	—			Heflin	547,054	94.0
1980	Denton	650,362	50.2	Folsom	610,175	47.1
1984	Smith	498,508	36.4	Heflin	860,535	62.8
1986	Denton	602,537	49.7	Shelby	609,360	50.3
1990	Cabamiss	467,190	39.4	Heflin	717,814	60.5
1992	Sellers	522,015	33.1	Shelby	1,022,698	64.8
1996	Sessions	786,436	52.5	Bedford	681,651	45.5
1998	Shelby	817,973	63.3	Suddith	474,568	36.7
<b>Governor</b>						
1946	Ward	22,362	11.3	Folsom	173,962	88.7
1950	Crowder	15,217	8.9	Persons	155,414	91.1
1954	Abernethy	88,688	26.6	Folsom	244,401	73.4
1958	Longshore	30,415	11.2	Patterson	239,633	88.4
1962	—			Wallace	303,987	96.3
1966	Martin	262,943	31.0	Wallace, L.	537,505	63.4
1970 <sup>g</sup>	—			Wallace	637,046	74.5
1974	McCary	88,381	14.8	Wallace	497,574	83.2
1978	Hunt	196,963	25.9	James	551,886	72.6

	Republican Candidate	Vote	Vote (%)	Democrat Candidate	Vote	Vote (%)
<b>Governor cont.</b>						
1982	Folmar	440,815	39.1	Wallace	650,538	57.6
1986	Hunt	696,203	56.3	Baxley	537,163	43.5
1990	Hunt	633,519	52.1	Hubbert	582,106	47.9
1994	James	604,926	50.3	Folsom	594,169	49.4
1998	James	554,746	42.2	Siegelman	760,155	57.8

Sources: Adapted from the *America Votes* series (*Congressional Quarterly Press*) and the Alabama Secretary of State homepage ([www.sos.state.al.us/index.cfm](http://www.sos.state.al.us/index.cfm)).

<sup>a</sup>The Democratic candidate did not appear on the Alabama ballot; States' Rights candidate Strom Thurmond won 171,443 votes, or 79.7% of the total.

<sup>b</sup>The Democratic candidate did not appear on the Alabama ballot; unpledged Democratic won 210,732 votes, or 30.5% of the total.

<sup>c</sup>George Wallace, running on the American Independent ticket, won 691,425 votes, or 65.9% of the total.

<sup>d</sup>Ross Perot won 183,109 votes (10.8%).

<sup>e</sup>Ross Perot won 92,149 votes (6%).

<sup>f</sup>Special election to fill a vacancy.

<sup>g</sup>The National Democratic Party candidate, John L. Cashin, won 125,941 votes (14.7%).

### GEORGE WALLACE

Although Republicans made inroads nationally by courting the discontented who backed Wallace in 1968 (Phillips 1969), Wallace's political dominance and longevity within Alabama retarded Republican development in the state (Bass and DeVries 1976), causing it to lag behind Republican growth in other southern states. Wallace's political presence on the state scene lasted from the 1960s through the 1980s with gubernatorial terms from 1963 to 1967, 1971 to 1979, and 1983 to 1987) and one for his wife (1967–1968). Thus, a Wallace was governor of Alabama for 17 of the 24 years after 1962. The only two individuals other than Wallace or his wife to occupy the governor's chair between 1963 and 1986 were Albert Brewer and "Fob" James. Only James was elected to the office in 1978, Brewer succeeded to the office upon Governor Lurleen Wallace's death in May 1968. Wallace, the firebrand segregationist of the 1960s, changed during the 1970s and 1980s, but the strident racial appeals that marked his rise to national political notoriety both secured a base of support and limited his ability to expand that base outside of Alabama and the South. Another southerner, Jimmy Carter, elected governor of Georgia in 1970, would turn back Wallace's national bid in 1976, presenting a markedly different stance on race and urging voters to "Send them a president, not just a message." As Wallace himself put it on the night of Carter's presidential nomination in 1976, "I had to do things—say things to get elected in Alabama, that made it impossible for me to ever be president" (Carter 1995, 458).

Wallace rose to political prominence with his election as governor in 1962. An earlier gubernatorial bid by Wallace had ended in failure, although he did make it to the runoff against Attorney General John Patterson (a majority of the vote was required for the nomination and Patterson led in the first primary, but failed to secure a majority of the vote). In 1958, Patterson defeated Wallace for governor. Wallace got the votes of black voters in the first primary. Patterson took a harsher line on race and lambasted Wallace as the candidate of black voters. Wallace over the next four years repeated the lesson he learned from his 1958 loss: "John Patterson out-niggered me and I'm never going to be out-niggered again." Wallace's 1962 campaign and his 1963 inaugural address ("Segregation today. Segregation tomorrow. Segregation forever.") marked him as a political leader who could and would milk the race issue for political advantage.

Racial resistance typified Wallace's political stance and public appeal, but to reduce Wallace's political support to the single issue of race underestimates him. V. O. Key, Jr., had noted a strong populist streak of defiance in Alabama politics. Unlike Virginia, where deference to the upper orders prevailed, in Alabama "a wholesome contempt for authority and a spirit of rebellion akin to that of the Populist days resist the efforts of the big farmers and 'big mules'—the local term for Birmingham industrialists and financiers—to control the state" (Key 1949, 36). Wallace, who epitomized this populist rebellion, spoke up for the little guy against the moneyed interests and added to the mix resistance to federal authorities over racial matters. Over the 1960s, this mix proved potent as it catapulted Wallace onto the national political stage. Beginning in the 1970s, Wallace sought to leave his racial baggage behind, but times had changed and his physical debilitation after the assassination attempt in 1972 limited his political prospects.

At the University of Alabama in June of 1963, Wallace stood in the schoolhouse door to block the registration of two black students and thus defied federal court orders to integrate the University. President John F. Kennedy federalized Alabama National Guard troops to carry out the court order and Wallace stepped aside. In 1964 Wallace entered Democratic presidential primaries to carry his message to voters, outside the state of Alabama. His campaign resonated among voters in Wisconsin, Indiana, and Maryland (Carter 1995, 201–15). His prospects for taking the nomination from Lyndon Johnson, the incumbent president, were nil, but Wallace rallied would-be supporters with cries of "Send Them a Message"—an all-purpose catch-all for politically discontented voters seeking a champion.

Unable to succeed himself in office as governor in 1966 (his attempts to repeal that prohibition having failed), Wallace offered his wife, Lurleen Wallace, as a proxy candidate. She won handily, bettering her closest challenger by 54 to 19 percent in the primary and trouncing James Martin, the near-victor over Senator Lister Hill in 1962, by 63 to 31 percent. In the general election of 1966, other Alabama Democrats also turned back Republican contestants who were seeking to expand on the victories secured in 1964 with Goldwater's popular candidacy (discussed further on). Her death from cancer in May 1968 meant Lieutenant Governor Albert Brewer, a former Wallace ally, became governor. This set up a political showdown when Brewer and Wallace squared off in the 1970 gubernatorial primary.

Wallace's 1968 presidential bid on the American Independent Party ticket swept Alabama and other states in the Deep South. Within the state, Nixon and Humphrey trailed considerably.

In 1970 Brewer led Wallace in the first primary, but the runoff campaign was marked by a viciousness exceptional even for Alabama politics. Race mattered and Wallace forces pulled out all the stops. Wallace himself warned about the danger of electing a governor beholden to the "bloc vote." Distributed among the barber shops, beauty salons, and similarly apt locations around the state were Wallace campaign literature pieces that hit hard at the race issue. An example: one featured a young white girl surrounded by young black boys and urged readers to vote Wallace to prevent the worst. Targeted mobilization campaigns registered and turned out white voters for Wallace (Stanley 1987). Some Brewer gambits backfired. A prominent Brewer campaign aide was embarrassed when an attempt to secure photographs of Wallace's brother's home and grounds came to grief with a helicopter malfunction that forced landing on the grounds. Press coverage was extensive but not helpful to Brewer in the closing days of the campaign. During the Watergate investigations it became known that Nixon forces had contributed mightily to the Brewer campaign coffers. Wallace eked out a narrow runoff victory (51.6 to 48.4 percent).<sup>1</sup>

True to his post-1958 vow, Wallace showed in 1970 that he remained the master at riding the race issue. Subsequent events as governor suggested that after the 1970 race-baiting win, Wallace decided to move away from racial stridency. His near-brush with death due to an assassination attempt, particularly the awareness that black ministers were praying for his well-being, continued the softening of his harsh stance on racial issues. In 1974, in a state where football is serious business, the governor crowned the first black homecoming queen at the University of Alabama. In other ways Wallace signaled his transformation on race.

A Wallace administration was energized more by the demands of the next campaign than by the demands of governing. Even as Wallace laid the groundwork for presidential bids in the 1970s, an increasing share of state policy was being challenged successfully in the federal courts. Matters in which federal judicial decisions struck down state policy in the 1970s included prisons, mental health, property tax, highway patrol hiring, and redistricting, among others (Bass 1993).

In 1974, state law having been changed, Wallace was a shoo-in when he sought reelection. A serious challenger failed to emerge among Democrats or Republicans. Wallace's 1976 presidential bid proved politically deflating, as fellow southerner Carter secured the Democratic nomination and the general election win. Wallace's political future revolved around whether he would seek a Senate seat in 1978 when he would be ineligible to run for governor again (the prohibition on gubernatorial succession now limited an individual to two consecutive terms). Insiders were certain that Wallace would seek to make his mark on the U.S. Senate. As Wallace delayed an announcement about his intentions, Chief Justice Howell Heflin of the Alabama Supreme Court, a prominent public figure because of his efforts at court reform, boldly announced that he would run for the U.S. Senate seat. (The death of U.S. Senator James B. Allen meant two U.S. Senate seats were up in 1978. The shorter-term seat had already attracted several candidates, but the six-year term seat was avoided because of Wallace's looming presence.) Heflin's declaration ensured that Wallace would have a hard campaign if he announced. Whether that prospect deterred him is unclear, but Wallace decided not to seek a Senate seat. Heflin won handily, and in a surprise, Donald Stewart, a former state legislator, defeated more prominent politicians for the other U.S. Senate seat.

Although in questionable health, Wallace did not acquire a taste for political retirement and ran for governor again in 1982. He turned back a strong challenger in the Democratic primary and then won 58 percent of the vote in the general election against well-organized and equally well-financed Montgomery mayor Emory Folmar. In 1986 the prospect of another gubernatorial term for Wallace loomed large. But rather than seek reelection, in April 1986 Wallace announced his retirement from politics: "I have climbed my last political mountain." In a seven-minute statement, Wallace indicated that he had wanted to seek reelection but his friends and family had prevailed upon him to retire because of his health. Wallace biographer Dan T. Carter relates that as Wallace rode back to the governor's mansion with his son, he uttered

only one sentence: "I hope the rich and powerful don't take over now" (Carter 1995, 463).

Key's masterful work *Southern Politics in State and Nation* argues that in the absence of political party competition, dominant political figures such as Huey Long in Louisiana or Gene Talmadge in Georgia provide rallying points, imposing a degree of coherence on what would otherwise be a kaleidoscopic, confusing mishmash of factions. Long and Talmadge left a lasting mark and generated enduring opposition, giving their states a degree of political coherence lacking in most other southern states where one party dominated. Wallace endured and generated opposition, but that opposition seldom enjoyed much sustained political success. Democrats loyal to the national party led by Robert Vance and George Lewis Bailes warred with Wallace and his supporters over control of the state Democratic Party. In 1971 a majority of the state Senate united in opposition to Wallace's legislative program and delayed its passage. Eventually, Wallace's political leverage created opportunities some opposition senators saw and seized, leading them to drop their opposition. Challenging Wallace did not prove an effective way of gaining statewide office. Wallace's hold on Alabama voters stifled political competition in the state.

### THE REPUBLICAN RISE

Although Republicans made headway in the rest of the nation by courting discontented voters who were sympathetic to Wallace, in Alabama Republicans were stymied by Wallace's presence. In the 1960s and later, the Republican presence and prospects were looming, but Republican electoral success materialized only sporadically. Growth was not so much consistent and steady as explosive.

At the presidential level, Alabama's electoral votes were cast for Republicans eight times, beginning in 1964, with Democrats winning only in 1976 and Wallace in 1968. The state was presidentially Republican; at the lower level, Republican development was much more slowly taking hold.

As early as 1948 the loyalty of Alabama voters to the Democratic Party proved less than absolute when Strom Thurmond's third-party candidacy in opposition to President Harry S. Truman's civil rights agenda garnered the state's electoral votes. (Truman and the national Democrats were not even officially on the ballot as Thurmond's States Rights Party usurped the Democratic line. To back Truman, Alabama voters had to write in the vote. In Alabama, a Democratic vote was a vote for Thurmond and States

Rights.) Alabama voters liked Ike, but not enough to give his Republican presidential candidacy the state's electoral votes in 1952 or 1956. In 1960, Governor Patterson cast his lot with Senator Kennedy's presidential bid, but the state's electoral votes were split with Senator Harry Byrd of Virginia (although Byrd had not been on the ballot in November).

The first strong inkling of Republican electoral appeal in Alabama came with Martin's near-upset of U.S. Senator Hill in 1962. Hill edged out Martin by only 50.9 to 49.1 percent. Republicans were a political threat to Democratic hegemony, a threat enhanced by Goldwater's 1964 presidential candidacy. Goldwater swept the state and carried into office most candidates the Republicans had bothered to nominate, including five members of Congress.

By carrying the state, Goldwater showed that white Alabamians would vote Republican and Democratic loyalties could not be taken for granted at the presidential level. Presidential coattails and political conservatism could aid down-ballot Republicans. Yet Republican gains among southern whites were offset by solidly Democratic trends among southern blacks who were gaining an effective right to vote in the mid-1960s. In the years ahead, southern Democrats would turn back Republican challenges with newly loyal black voter support (Bass and DeVries 1976).

If Goldwater's 1964 victory showed the potential for Republicans, the 1966 debacle showed that Republicans had a long way to go before they could consolidate their gains. In 1966 Alabama's gubernatorial election would provide an opportunity for Republicans to advance and U.S. Senator John Sparkman was up for reelection, too. Republicans eagerly anticipated continuing their winning ways. In a much questioned move, Republicans nominated Party chairman John Grenier to run against Senator Sparkman and Congressman Martin, the near-winner over Senator Hill in 1962, against Lurleen Wallace for governor. Sparkman was considered politically the more vulnerable, but Grenier had little statewide visibility. Wallace and Sparkman easily turned back the Republican challengers. Internal squabbling among Republicans added to the dismay of defeat.<sup>2</sup> Democrats also reclaimed two of the five U.S. House seats lost in 1964.

Republicans struggled to recover. Richard Nixon's election as president in 1968 meant a Republican White House would be the target for discontent over federal initiatives on civil rights and other policies. Nixon's popularity in Alabama failed to promote Republican Party development. Republican growth was hampered when Nixon assigned higher priority to working with entrenched, senior Democratic members of Congress such as Senator Sparkman than to electing Republicans. When Alabama Re-

publicans nominated a member of the Nixon cabinet, Winton "Red" Blount, to challenge Sparkman, the Republican White House provided no help. The White House released a letter praising Sparkman for his strong support of the president. Once when Sparkman was campaigning in Alabama, President Nixon sent a presidential plane to whisk the senator back to Washington to cast a vote in support of the president. When pressed, White House press secretary Ron Ziegler refused to say the president supported Republican Blount against Sparkman: "Well, he doesn't oppose him" was the best Ziegler could offer (Bass and DeVries 1976).

Nixon's Watergate troubles further eroded Republican development. Carter's presidential bid in 1976 revived Democratic fortunes in the South, even in Alabama where, statewide, the path to elective office still required the Democratic nomination. Indeed, the winning candidates for the top offices in 1978 were both former Republicans who had recently become Democrats. "Fob" James, governor, had been on the state Republican executive committee, and Charles Graddick, attorney general, had served on the Mobile County Republican executive committee.<sup>3</sup> The Democratic Party was a catch-all coalition, containing everyone who had aspirations for higher electoral office. Coalitional strains among this all-encompassing collection of interests was considerable. For politically ambitious Alabamians, the Republican Party had some appeal, but elective office was not strong among them. Initial Republican electoral advances below the presidential level would be more in the nature of flukes than of solid preparation. Republicans broke into double digits in the state House only in the mid-1980s; in the State Senate a decade later (table 3.2). By 2000, Republicans constituted a third of the lower House.

The shortcomings of the Carter presidency led many Alabama voters to reconsider the desirability of supporting Republicans. A "friends and neighbors" vote was not sufficient for the Georgian in 1980 as Reagan eked out a 49-48 win in Alabama. That year also saw Republicans score their first statewide success for an office other than president. U.S. Senate candidate Jeremiah Denton, a certified war hero who had spent over three decades in the U.S. Navy, including seven-and-a-half years as a prisoner of war in North Vietnam, won just over 50 percent of the vote.

Denton, like other 1980 southern Republican Senate winners, proved incapable of holding his seat, losing a reelection bid in 1986. Self-confident, and not given to grassroots politicking in a state that had come to expect it by virtue of Senator Jim Allen's extensive town meetings and travels, Denton explained his absence from the state by claiming that he had more important things to do than "to come to Alabama and kiss babies' butts"

**Table 3.2. Partisan Composition of Alabama State Legislature, 1958–2000**

	House		Senate	
	Democrats	Republican	Democrats	Republicans
1958	106	0	35	0
1962	104	2	35	0
1964	104	2	35	0
1966	106	0	34	1
1968	106	0	34	1
1970	104	2	35	0
1972	104	2	35	0
1974	105	0	35	0
1976	103	2	34	0
1978	101	4	35	0
1980	100	4	35	0
1982	97	8	32	3
1984	87	12	28	4
1986	89	16	30	5
1988	85	17	28	6
1990	82	23	28	7
1992	82	23	28	7
1994	74	31	23	12
1996	72	33	22	12
1998	69	36	23	12
2000	68	37	24	11

Sources: 1958–1994: *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, annual editions; 1996–2000: unpublished data from the National Conference of State Legislatures ([www.ncsl.org](http://www.ncsl.org)).

Note: Vacancies account for totals that sum to less than 105 for the House after 1974 and 35 for the Senate.

(Ingram 1996b).<sup>4</sup> Alabama Republicans lost the Senate seat, but gained the governor's chair when Guy Hunt, former Cullman County probate judge, defeated Bill Baxley after months of Democratic wrangling over who their party nominee should be. Democrats self-destructed and Hunt was the beneficiary. Other Republicans who had passed up the opportunity to run for governor, once the degree of Democratic destructiveness became apparent, magnanimously suggested that perhaps Hunt should step aside for stronger, more viable candidates such as themselves. Hunt declined.

Democratic troubles began when neither Baxley nor Graddick garnered a majority of the primary vote. Graddick, as attorney general, ruled that voters who had taken part in the Republican first primary could indeed switch over and vote in the Democratic runoff. Observers expected former Republican Graddick to benefit if erstwhile Republican primary voters participated in the Democratic runoff. Baxley lost the runoff, but won a court order that overturned Graddick's narrow victory. With the general election looming, the Democratic Party decided not to restage the runoff

and instead declared Baxley the Democratic nominee. Enraged Graddick supporters launched a write-in campaign that the candidate ended just days before the general election when he endorsed Hunt.

Hunt governed in ways that would strengthen the Republican Party, leaving vacancies rather than appointing a Democrat to local office. Hunt was reelected in 1990, but encountered legal problems when the Democratic attorney general investigated the governor's finances and activities. Hunt was ultimately convicted of illegally diverting funds raised for his inauguration and using state aircraft when, as a lay minister, he spoke to congregations around the state and received love offerings. Upon Hunt's resignation, Lieutenant Governor "Little Jim" Folsom, son of former governor "Big Jim" Folsom, became governor.

In the 1992 elections two moderate southerners headed the national Democratic ticket, but Democrats were still unable to crack the Republican hold on Alabama's electoral votes. The 1994 elections saw a Republican tide in Alabama as well as the rest of the nation (Shribman 1995). Republican electoral prospects were brightening, and the politically ambitious began to switch parties. Whereas the Democratic Party had been the catch-all label for those seeking election, the Republican label was looking better for election prospects. Senator Richard Shelby, who defeated Denton in 1986, switched to the Republicans a few days after the 1994 election (Shribman 1995). Shelby's move made it easier for conservative Democratic officeholders to go Republican and over the next few years many elected Democrats in Alabama followed his lead. The Republican majorities in the House and Senate following the 1994 elections no longer meant a loss of congressional influence if Republicans were elected to Congress.

One-party politics characterized the solidly Democratic South for decades after Reconstruction. Alabama was no exception. Some observers conclude that the state may become one-party again, only this time one-party Republican. In light of recent Republican electoral successes, it's hard to recall exactly how far the Republican Party has come in Alabama. One eighty-year old Alabamian, when asked in the late 1970s to comment on the major political changes he had witnessed over his lifetime, asserted that he now lived in a two-party area. This was strange since no Republican had been elected in the area since Reconstruction. The interviewer feared the interviewee was senile or at least powerfully disconnected from reality. Not so. When pressed, the elderly gentleman recalled that in 1928 one local businessman had been unable to support Democratic Al Smith for president and had voted for Republican Herbert Hoover. The



businessman almost had to shut down his business and leave town for his political heresy. The conclusion? Now, we have two-party politics; you can vote Republican if you like.

### BLACK POLITICAL CLOUT

Two of the more momentous moments in the civil rights struggle occurred in Alabama. In Birmingham, in the spring of 1963, Bull Connor and his police dogs and fire hoses confronted demonstrators. In Selma in 1965 Sheriff Jim Clark and law enforcement officials beat up demonstrators once they crossed the Edmund Pettus bridge, seeking to march to the state capitol in Montgomery to protest the inability of blacks to vote in Dallas County.

Wallace contributed to making Alabama a battleground for civil rights, gaining political notoriety in the process. The constant harassment of peaceful protesters, punctuated by the bombing that killed four little girls at Sunday school, helped jolt Congress into action and produced the sweeping 1964 Civil Rights Act. The Voting Rights Act of 1965, a response to the Selma March, gave blacks in hard-core, defiant areas of the South an effective right to vote. Voting rights drives and the federal registrars assigned to the most resistant areas, as well as the cooperation of local officials in areas desiring to avoid the assignment of federal registrars, led to great strides in the number of blacks registered to vote. Black political influence at the ballot box was evident. In Dallas County, the more moderate Police Chief Wilson Baker defeated Sheriff Jim Clark with black voter support. Politicians learned to count votes, and black and white votes counted the same once they were in the ballot box.

Within Alabama, registration rates among blacks of voting age rose from 5 percent in 1952 to 14 percent in 1960, then to 51 percent by 1966 and to 64 percent in 1970.<sup>5</sup> Restrictive registration practices were reduced, and white voter registration rose as well. While some of the rise in white political participation can be attributed to white voter backlash to black political gains, less offputting registration practices, increased political competition, and other nonracial political and socioeconomic factors also played a role (Stanley 1987, 37, 52, 67, 98).

Black political clout was organized through the Alabama Democratic Conference, headed by Joe Reed, and the New South Coalition, started up by Birmingham mayor Richard Arrington. These organizations proved potent in politics. In 1984 Mayor Arrington endorsed Walter Mondale for

the Democratic nomination over Reverend Jesse Jackson. Arrington's support proved vital in capturing a large share of the black vote and helping Mondale carry the state of Alabama.

Black political gains were evident over the decades. Although the share of elected officials who were black lagged behind the black share of the voting-age population, Alabama led the states in terms of the share of elected officials who were black. Voting rights challenges prompted counties and towns to adopt single-member districts in which blacks constituted more than a majority of the voting-age populations. The 140-member state legislature had 3 blacks before and 15 after the 1974 election. Beginning in 1984, 5 black state senators and 19 black House members served in the Alabama legislature (table 3.3).<sup>6</sup> These numbers swelled in the 1990s so that a quarter of the legislature is now black in this state that is 26 percent black

**Table 3.3. Black Elected Officials in Alabama, 1971–2001**

	Total	State Legislative		
		Senate	House	Both Chambers
1971	105	0	2	2
1973	149	0	2	2
1974	149	0	3	3
1976	171	2	13	15
1977	201	2	13	15
1979	208	—	—	16
1980	238	—	—	15
1981	247	—	—	16
1982	269	3	13	16
1983	309	3	15	18
1984	314	5	19	24
1985	375	5	19	24
1986	403	5	19	24
1987	448	5	19	24
1988	442	5	19	24
1989	694	5	18	23
1990	705	5	18	23
1991	706	5	19	24
1992	702	5	19	24
1993	699	5	19	24
1995	—	8	27	35
1997	726	8	27	35
1999	725	8	27	35
2001	—	7	7	35

Sources: 1971–1997: Joint Center for Political Studies, *Black Elected Officials: A National Roster*, annual editions; ([www.jointcenter.org](http://www.jointcenter.org)); and *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, annual editions; 2001: Alabama state legislature website ([www.legislature.state.al.us](http://www.legislature.state.al.us)).

Note: — indicates data not available.

by population. Statewide, blacks hold more than 700 offices so that by the end of the 1980s, black officeholding in Alabama "approached the level of proportional representation" (McCrary et al. 1994, 54). Redistricting, the move to single-member districts, and the creation of majority-minority districts boosted the numbers of blacks elected. Congressional redistricting in the 1990s led to the creation of a black majority congressional district that elected Earl Hilliard as the first black member of Congress from Alabama since Reconstruction.

### THE 1996 ELECTIONS

The retirement of U.S. Senator Heflin in 1995 considerably brightened Republican prospects. Several statewide judicial contests also provided targets of opportunity seized upon by Republicans. Although Bill Clinton appeared to be more viable than any Democratic presidential nominee since Jimmy Carter, he ultimately lost the state 50-43 percent. Democrats also lost the Senate seat, giving Republicans both Alabama seats in the U.S. Senate for the first time since Reconstruction days. Republican Jeff Sessions replaced Heflin. Ironically, Sessions, previously nominated to a federal judgeship by Reagan, had his nomination fail when Heflin cast the critical vote against him in the Judiciary Committee (Associated Press 1996).

Republicans won five of the seven U.S. House seats up for election, a net gain of two. In addition, Republicans swept the State Supreme Court, State Court of Civil Appeals, State Court of Criminal Appeals (places 1, 2, and 3), and the Public Service Commission presidency.

In the aftermath of the election, for the first time since Reconstruction Republicans controlled a majority of major state offices. The count was Republicans 20, Democrats only 17 (Alcorn 1996a). Statewide gains came as part of an effort that saw Republicans contest far more offices in 1996, with 320 Republican candidates in the 461 county races. This doubled the number of seats Republicans contested the last time these seats were up (Hetzner 1996).

Despite GOP gains, Democrats still outnumbered Republicans (44 to 41 percent) among Alabama voters in the 1996 general election. Twelve percent of the voters were former Democrats who had become Republicans over the previous two years (Alcorn 1996b). Among white voters, 30 percent backed the Democrats; among black voters, 90 percent did so (Ingram 1996a).

Party switching by Democratic elected officials continued with Secretary of State Jim Bennett the most prominent convert to the Republicans. Between 1994 and 1997, Democrats suffered fifty major defections to the Republicans. (But that number dwindled to only three between 1998 and early 2000—Firestone 2000).

### 1998

In Alabama, as in several southern states, 1998 witnessed a pause if not a reversal in the slide toward the GOP. Democrats, who had lost three consecutive gubernatorial elections in Alabama and South Carolina, adopted a campaign theme that had worked in Georgia, the one state the two bordered on. There Zell Miller's proposal to use lottery proceeds to fund education had proved widely popular (see discussion in the Georgia chapter), and Georgia border towns attracted a steady stream of Alabama and South Carolina dollars. Democrat Don Siegelman's challenge to Fob James's reelection bid featured a promise to bring the lottery to Alabama to help fund education. In a reversal of a pattern that has frequently foreshadowed Democratic defeat, Republicans and not Democrats failed to unite after a divisive primary.

Governor James limped to the general election starting line following a bruising primary challenge that had forced a runoff—always a troubling sign for an incumbent seeking renomination. The governor's stand against teaching evolution pleased religious conservatives, but alienated moderates. The business community opposed him for his "goofiness and his opposition to tort reform" (Beiler 2000, 140). Challenger Winton Blount, son of the 1972 challenger to Senator Sparkman, ran well in the business community, but trailed the governor by 22,000 votes in the primary. Blount won what seemed to be a bidding war with James for the endorsement of Richard Arrington, with the expectation that the Birmingham mayor could deliver enough black voters—Democrats had no statewide primary to entice these staunch partisans.<sup>7</sup> The endorsement backfired as James showed that the race card could still be played effectively. Claiming that Blount would be a tool of liberal Democrats, James mailed 300,000 pictures of Arrington and Blount to white rural voters (Beiler 2000).

Race baiting inflamed rural passions in the runoff, canceling out the black votes Arrington delivered. In November, however, James saw his support among middle-class voters implode as he lost by 200,000 votes.

Exit polls show that from 1994 to 1998, James's vote share among voters earning \$30,000–\$50,000 fell from 63 to 40 percent and among those earning \$50,000–\$75,000 the drop was from 55 to 43 percent. College graduates gave James 54 percent of their votes in 1994, but went against him by a 3:2 margin when he sought reelection.

Republicans did, however, enjoy a modicum of success as Steve Windom won election as lieutenant governor and three more Republicans joined the state house. Senator Shelby, who faced the voters for the first time as a Republican, ran almost as well as he had in 1992, taking more than 60 percent of the vote.

### TROUBLE ON THE HOME FRONT

Even though Democrats held solid majorities in the legislature, the Siegelman administration encountered problems. As the first Democratic governor to have a Republican understudy, Siegelman sought to neuter the lieutenant governor by stripping him of power to appoint Senate committee chairs. Prior to Guy Hunt's election, Democratic governors had named committee chairs and the speaker of the House; thereafter, the Democratic leadership of the two chambers had selected committee chairs. Lieutenant Governor Windom, who presided over the Senate, reclaimed that power on a contested voice vote, but then refused to leave the rostrum, fearing that Democrats would regain the upper hand. In prolonged sessions, Windom began relieving himself in a can discretely positioned out of public view while continuing to preside over the Senate. This tawdry farce finally ended when Windom agreed not to keep legislation, including the governor's lottery legislation, bottled up in committees and not to decide voice votes. In return, Windom gained control over some committee assignments and got pork barrel projects for his supporters.

Windom did not block Siegelman's lottery legislation, but the statewide referendum on the lottery failed. Conservative state religious leaders, who often could be found at the forefront of Republican campaigns, preached on the evils of gambling. In a stunning upset that showed that in Alabama, morality took precedence over this new source of education funding, 54 percent of the electorate rejected the necessary legislation despite a well-funded campaign by the governor. As in Georgia a decade earlier, strongest support for the lottery came from affluent white suburbs and the black

community.<sup>8</sup> Conservative forces proved stronger in Alabama than in Georgia or South Carolina, and early in his term Siegelman lost what he had hoped would be the defining achievement of his administration. With no lottery approved, Siegelman, later facing an economic downturn, proposed cutting education spending, targeting higher education for the deepest cuts. The State Supreme Court overruled the governor, equalizing the cuts among all levels of public schools at just over 6 percent. (Rodriguez 2001).

### THE 2000 ELECTION

Republicans continued their winning ways in the presidential election as George Bush almost matched his father's 1988 showing and took 56 percent of the vote. He managed this feat by getting 72 percent of the white vote. He won 82 percent of the vote of individuals who identified with the religious right, while narrowly losing to the larger share of the electorate who did not identify themselves as religious conservatives. Bush attracted the support of virtually every voter who had backed Bob Dole four years earlier and added to this base 15 percent of the voters who had sided with Bill Clinton in 1996.

Below the presidency, Republicans fared very well. Twelve statewide offices were up for election—eleven judicial and one executive. Republicans swept all but one of these. Each U.S. House incumbent won reelection (five Republicans, two Democrats).

The 2000 election also offered Alabama voters a chance to remove constitutional language long rendered moot by court decisions: Amendment Number 2 proposed changing Alabama's state constitution to abolish the prohibition of interracial marriages. It passed, 59 to 41 percent.

Despite Bush's strong showing and other recent Republican successes, the Alabama electorate contains approximately equal numbers of Republicans and Democrats. The 2000 exit poll showed Democrats with an advantage smaller than the margin of error, with a 41–37 lead, while the remainder of the electorate did not identify with either party.

### CONCLUSION

Political Scientist Carl Grafton may have provided the soundest assessment: Alabama "is a two-party state with a Republican tendency."

Keeping Alabama competitive between the parties and away from becoming a one-party solid Republican state are the significant number of blacks who vote in state and national races and the strong populist tendency among some whites (Alcorn 1996a). Blacks made up 25 percent of the voters at the polls in 2000 and went 11 to 1 for Gore over Bush. By contrast, whites who considered themselves members of the religious right constituted 23 percent of the voters and broke over 4 to 1 for Bush.

Even so, Republican prospects have never been brighter. Dimming that brightness is the realization that far more Republicans than Democrats are now the incumbents. Whatever ire voters focus on incumbents will rebound to the detriment of Republicans more than to Democrats. Moreover, although Republicans have gained voter support, party ties generally mean less than they once did, with voters having less faith in either party. Newfound Republican loyalties may well prove fleeting.

#### NOTES

1. Ted Pearson, "Wallace Rides Backlash to Narrow Comeback," *Birmingham News*, June 3, 1970, 1, 12: "The principal factor that moved Wallace from a deficit of nearly 12,000 against Brewer on May 5 to a commanding majority [33,881 votes] in the space of four weeks clearly was his hammering away at Brewer's black voter support in the first primary. It had as its purpose a consolidation of a white backlash, and in the hands of a master at this kind of political maneuvering, it worked."

2. Republican internal strife was not limited to the 1960s. Congressman John Buchanan of Birmingham, a Methodist minister, was challenged as too liberal by Albert Lee Smith, a former John Birch Society member. Smith's candidacy fell short in 1978, but he won the 1980 rematch with the aid of the Moral Majority.

3. Sonny Callahan, who succeeded the retiring Republican Jack Edwards in the First Congressional District in 1984, had been a Democratic state senator and a Democratic candidate for lieutenant governor in 1982. When he ran for Congress, he became a Republican. Both parties wooed him, both convinced that Callahan could win on either party's label.

4. Bob Ingram, "Was '62 Race Really Tight?" *Montgomery Advertiser*, October 13, 1996, 1F.

5. David J. Garrow, *Protest at Selma: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Voting Rights Act of 1965* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 7, 11, 189, 200.

6. Women elected to the Alabama legislature lagged. After the 1998 elections, women held 3 seats in the state senate and 8 in the house, constituting only 7.9 percent of the legislative seats. This percentage ranked Alabama last in the nation (Center for American Women and Politics, [www.rci.rutgers/~cawp/](http://www.rci.rutgers/~cawp/)).

7. While Democratic rules bar those who voted in the Republican primary from voting in a Democratic runoff, the GOP has no such prohibition.

8. Michael Barone with Richard E. Cohen, *The Almanac of American Politics*, 2002. Washington, DC: National Journal, 2001, p. 58.

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