

Southern Partisan Changes: Dealignment, Realignment or Both?

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This paper draws on presidential and congressional surveys between 1952 and 1984 in order to survey the extent of southern partisan changes and to evaluate the electoral evidence for realignment or dealignment. The partisan balance in the South has shifted in recent years, but no consensus exists about whether these changes constitute realignment or dealignment. Native southern whites—both young and old—have accounted for the largest share of the changes. Settling on a single term to summarize the changes is an oversimplification since aspects of both realignment and dealignment have characterized the South. Southern Republicans have profited from the decreased importance of parties in a still-Democratic region, but since partisanship means less in some senses, Republican consolidation is constrained and the significance of the Democratic decline restricted.

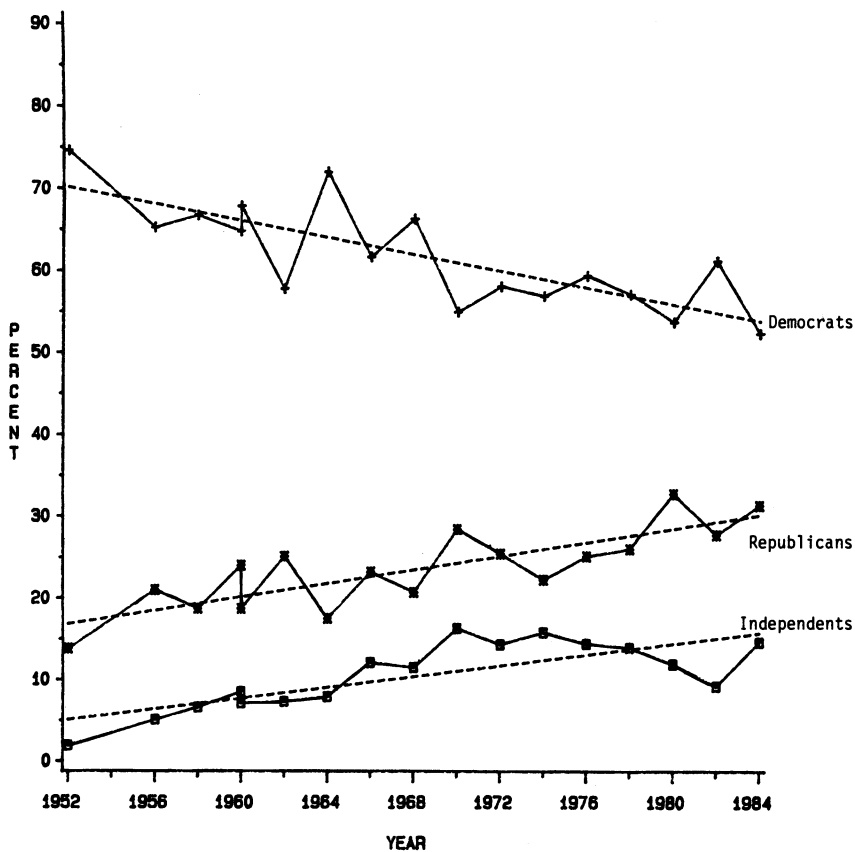
Students of realignment in the United States have a special concern with the eleven states of the former confederacy. The partisan changes inside the South have overwhelmed the changes outside the South. Between 1952 and 1984, Democrats in the South declined by 22 percentage points; in the rest of the nation by only five percentage points. Independents rose by 13 percentage points in the South but by only two percentage points in the non-south. Republicans in the South increased by 18 percentage points; in the nonsouth by only three percentage points.¹

There can be no doubt about southern partisan change (figure 1), but the significance of such change is uncertain. Do these changes signal realignment or dealignment? For the past two decades, scholars have come to strik-

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¹The gap in the South between the 22 percentage point drop by Democrats and the 31 percentage point gain by Republicans and Independents is attributable to the decline in the proportion of apoliticals, primarily southern blacks, since the 1950s. Following Keith et al. (1986), partisans are defined to include those who initially claim independence but later indicate they lean toward the party as well as those who claim strong or weak identification with a party.

FIGURE 1
PARTY IDENTIFICATION IN THE SOUTH, 1952-1984



Note: Partisans include weak and strong identifiers as well as independents who lean toward the party.

ingly different conclusions about southern partisan changes. Realignment, dealignment, and continued Democratic dominance have been argued by different scholars, often using the same data base.² More Republican victories and the increased Republican identification of recent years make arguments for continued Democratic dominance look increasingly weaker, but at the state and local levels this position has greater merit.

²Most scholars utilize the SRC/CPS survey data for presidential election years. The following is a partial list of scholars and positions taken on southern partisan changes: (1) the South has politically realigned (Bartley and Graham, 1975, pp. 196-97; Campbell, 1977a, p. 37 and

While some may see the realignment or dealignment debate as a dispute over mere labels, the labels reflect different understandings about what has occurred and what this portends (Beck, 1979). The concept of realignment can be defined to cover more than changes within the electorate (Clubb, Flanigan, and Zingale, 1980) but electoral changes alone constitute a common focus for analysis. Changes within the support coalitions for the parties, one strand of thinking about electoral realignment (Petrocik, 1981; Stanley, Bianco, and Niemi, 1986), are not explored here in order to concentrate on the components of partisan changes and the attitudes and behavior of partisans towards the parties. Here, "realignment" will signify durable alterations in the partisan balance of identifiers, "dealignment" a decline in the centrality of parties to citizen political orientations and behavior. Dealignment need not entail abandonment of partisanship. A weakening of party ties and of the significance of partisanship can suffice to suggest dealignment.

Definitions of the terms vary, but realignment and dealignment are often discussed as alternatives. Analysts of partisan changes typically conclude that either one or the other has occurred. Some view dealignment as a precursor of realignment, eroding partisan alignments, to make individuals more susceptible to realigning forces. Ultimately, events, issues and elite responses help determine whether a realignment actually occurs. Yet dealignment need not be followed by realignment (Burnham, 1969; LeDuc, 1985). A period of dealignment could endure for years or be followed by a reversion to the previous partisan alignments.

Moreover, realignment and dealignment need not be mutually exclusive (Schneider, 1982, p. 451). Realigning and dealigning forces can be simultaneously present. One could anticipate that Republican growth in identifiers adds less committed partisans to the party's base—unless the partisan zeal of new converts matches that of the old. Also, Democratic decline could mean the shedding of less committed partisans for a more intensely partisan base—unless those who remain Democrats share increased disenchantment with parties in general and the Democratic Party in particular. In brief, as the partisan balance shifts, the force and significance of partisanship may strengthen or weaken.

Therefore, a broad review of the evidence on partisan changes in the electorate is essential in order to assess the relative merits of realignment, dealignment, or a mixed verdict about southern partisan changes. The weight

1977b, pp. 755–56; Hadley and Howell, 1980, pp. 147–48; Petrocik, 1987; Schreiber, 1971, p. 161; Seagull, 1975, p. 18; Wolfinger and Arseneau, 1978, p. 206; and Wolfinger and Hagen, 1985, pp. 8–9); (2) no southern realignment has occurred, Democratic dominance continues (Converse, 1966, p. 212, and 1972, pp. 310, 315–16; Prysby, 1980, p. 125; and Scammon and Barnes, 1985); and (3) the South has undergone dealignment (Beck, 1977, pp. 480, 484; and Gatlin, 1975, p. 50). A discussion of these dissonant conclusions and the data management decisions behind part of them can be found in Hadley (1981).

of the evidence available should guide analysis. The fact and firmness of partisan identification can and should be supplemented by consideration of other indicators of the centrality of party to the individual. This raises the evidentiary requirements for a dealignment or realignment, but since realignment and dealignment have pervasive implications for parties in the electorate, evidence about the meaning of party in contexts other than identification is germane. If the partisan balance has shifted and partisanship remains central to the behavior and attitudes of partisans, then realignment is the sensible conclusion and dealignment can be ruled out. Yet if partisanship has become less significant for the behavior and attitudes of partisans than it was before the party balance shifted, the conclusion that both realigning and dealigning forces are present seems apt.

This paper draws on congressional and presidential surveys between 1952 and 1984 in order to survey the extent of southern partisan changes and evaluate the electoral evidence for realignment and dealignment. The issues to address go beyond partisan identification to include voting choices and general attitudes toward the parties. Such attitudes include likes and dislikes of the parties and candidates, feelings toward the parties, the sense of differences between the parties, and the sense that one's party is best able to handle the most important national problem. These indicators give more extended readings of attitudes toward the parties to help determine whether partisanship in the South means the same as it did prior to the changes.

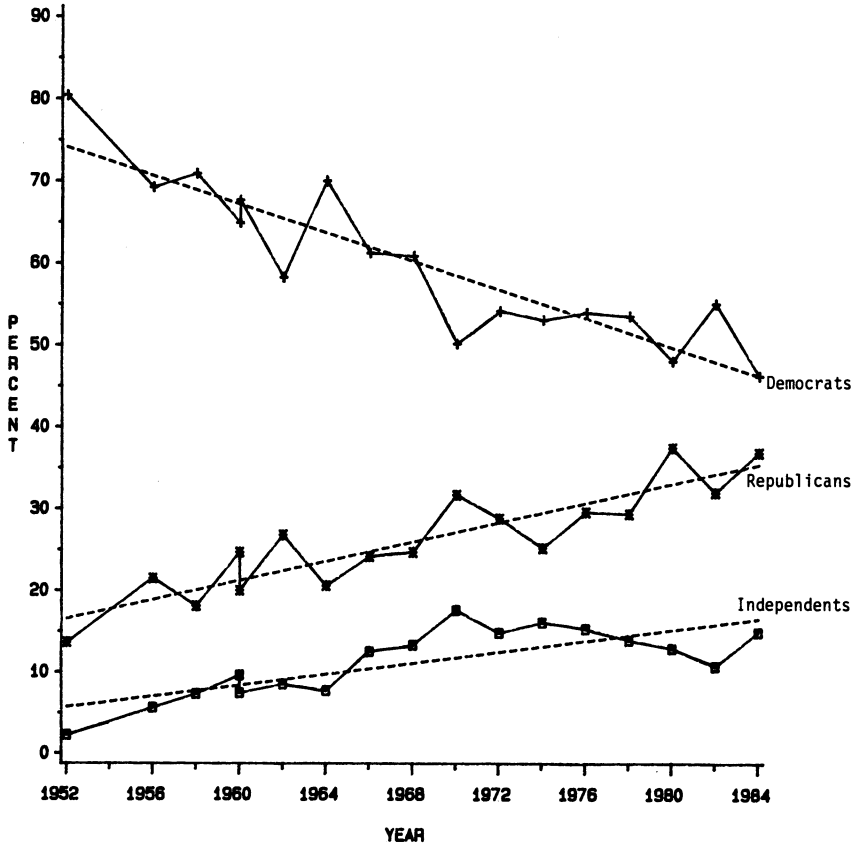
COMPONENTS OF SOUTHERN PARTISAN CHANGE

The partisan changes exhibited in figure 1 understate southern changes since whites and blacks have moved in opposite directions. In the aggregate, as blacks have moved to stronger Democratic sympathies, whites have displayed declining Democratic attachments (figure 2). Blacks were responding to the civil rights stances of the Democratic and Republican parties (Campbell, 1979, pp. 274–75). Some scholars have attributed the white drift from the Democrats to the same source but, as others have shown, this conclusion has little supporting evidence from the surveys.³

Rather than reopen this debate about causes, direct comparisons of the relative importance of the changes in partisan identification by blacks, whites, natives and migrants can shed helpful light on the components of the change. Three groups account for the major southern partisan changes. Rela-

³Lamis (1984) provides a provocative account of race and partisan change. Beck (1977, pp. 492–94) as well as Wolfinger and Arseneau (1978, pp. 200–202) provide thorough analyses of the available survey data, finding that racial backlash fails to explain the decline in Democratic identifiers. Even for 1984 when Jesse Jackson mobilized black voters and Ronald Reagan had special appeal to southern whites, two scholars concluded, "The 1984 NES data offer no support to the proposition that racial issues were an important feature of the election for southern whites" (Wolfinger and Hagen, 1985, p. 12). See also Stanley (1986).

FIGURE 2
PARTY IDENTIFICATION: WHITE SOUTHERNERS, 1952-1984



Note: Partisans include weak and strong identifiers as well as independents who lean toward the party.

tively more Republican individuals have migrated into the South. Native southern blacks have grown more partisan, particularly more Democratic, and native southern whites—both young and old—have grown less Democratic, more independent, and more Republican.⁴

⁴One can ask what southern partisanship would have been if blacks and whites who migrated out of the south had remained in the region, assuming the partisanship they hold in the non-South is what it would be had they remained in the South. The relatively small size of this group and its partisan similarity to those who actually remained in the South help make its impact on regional partisanship minor, accounting for only one-half to one-sixth of the impact of migrants into the South.

Measuring the contributions of changes by different groups to the regional changes follows in the steps of Beck, who calculated for 1972 the relative magnitudes of partisan changes by particular segments of the southern population. For example, consider the impact of partisan changes by native southern whites. The partisanship of the South is calculated for each year as if native southern whites retained their partisan loyalties of 1952. That reconstructed figure for each later year is compared with the actual regional pattern for each later year to reveal the difference made by partisan changes among native white southerners. Similar calculations are made as if native southern blacks retained their partisan patterns of 1952 in later years and as if migrants to the South had never arrived.⁵

For intelligibility, rather than chart the actual figures for all 14 election surveys through 1984, the trend lines from regressing the differences on time for each component of change are reported.⁶ This smooths the fluctuations that are inevitable in survey sampling (as well as the fluctuations attributable to special circumstances), but presents the trend line best describing the differences each group made between 1956 and 1984. Extrapolating from trend lines is easily done, but nothing restricts the future to resemble the past.

The trend lines are relative to what southern partisanship would have been in the later years without the particular change in question. Thus the baseline (a difference of zero) is not constant over the years but reflects the data points displayed in figure 1 which track Democratic decline and the Republican and independent gains. For the trend lines, negative differences indicate that the change in question reduced the size of a partisan category, positive differences indicate an increase.

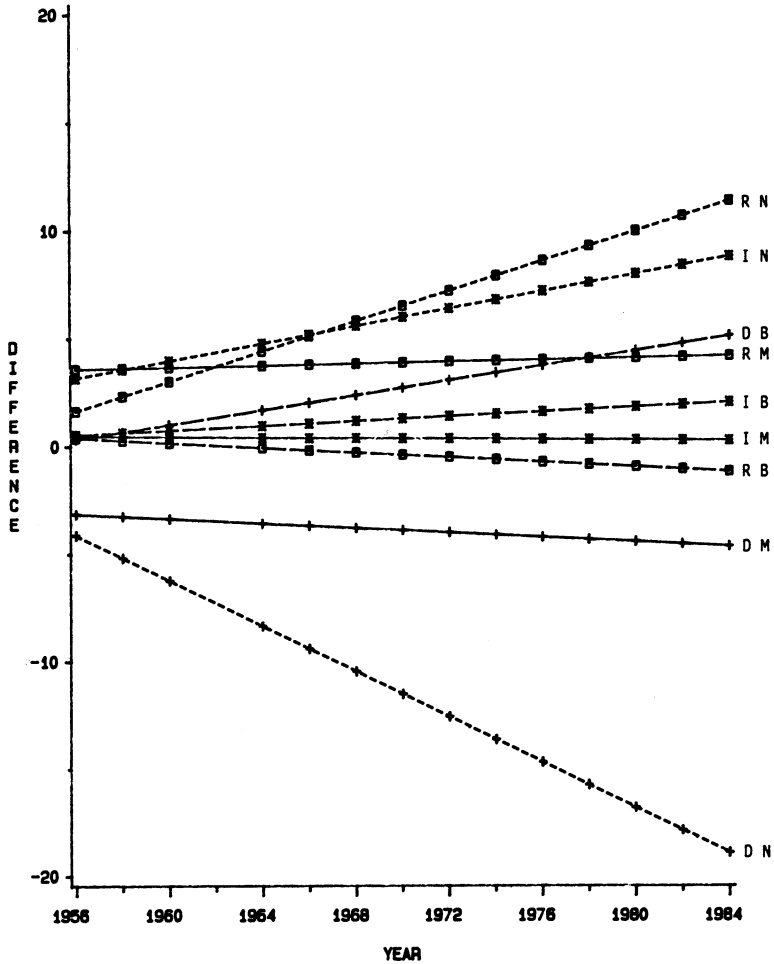
The results clearly convey the significance of partisan changes by native southern whites to the regional changes (figure 3). Since native southern whites make up about two-thirds of the southern voting-age population over this period, even small changes by this group would have large regional ramifications. Native southern blacks and white migrants each now make up about half of the remaining third of the southern voting-age population. Since the early 1970s, the movement by blacks toward the Democrats has offset the Republican boost attributable to in-migration.

⁵ Following Beck (1977), migrants include blacks as well as whites who moved into the South. Thus the three groups in figure 3 contain all southerners. Blacks made up fewer than 4% of all migrants into the South between 1952 and 1984.

⁶ The 1962 survey does not report where respondents were born or grew up, thus cannot be used to analyze changes by natives and migrants. The trend lines in figure 3 accurately reflect the data points, the correlation coefficients for the trend lines averaging 0.7. In figure 4 the correlation coefficients average 0.4, indicating that the trend lines display far more regularity than the data contain. Yet replacing the trend lines with the actual data points would complicate the figure without altering the conclusion—partisan changes within each generation have made roughly similar contributions to the overall changes.

FIGURE 3

BLACK AND WHITE PARTISAN CHANGE AND MIGRATION:
IMPACTS ON SOUTHERN PARTISANSHIP, 1956-1984



Note: The lines indicate the estimated trends for the difference between the region's actual partisan levels each year and what the region's partisanship would have been without the partisan changes since 1952 for each group. In the case of migrants, the calculations involve removing the migrants from the population.

D = Democrat
I = Independent
R = Republican

B = Native Southern Black
M = Migrant
N = Native Southern White

Migrants, particularly migrant whites, have been considered a key force in southern partisan changes. While this was true in earlier years, it recently has become a relatively smaller force for changes in partisan identification. In-migration made little difference to the growth in independence, but without the migrants Republican identification would have been three to four points lower and Democratic identification higher by the same margin over the 1956 to 1984 period. These flat trends figured prominently in partisan changes in the early years, but the trends by native southern whites soon surpassed them. The migrants may have mattered more than these figures suggest. If the greater Republican propensity of the in-migrants proved infectious, restricting analysis to the partisan difference their presence produced underestimates the effect of migrants on southern partisan changes.

Native southern whites have accounted for most of the decline in Democratic identification. Democratic identification was 20 percentage points lower in 1984 than it would have been if native southern whites retained their 1952 Democratic loyalties. Likewise, native southern whites accounted for the bulk of the movement toward the Republicans and toward independence: the region would have been 7 percentage points less independent and 16 points less Republican in 1984 if native southern whites had retained their 1952 partisan ties.⁷

Changes among native southern whites account for the greatest partisan changes, but which native southern whites have contributed more to the changes? Are the younger generations acquiring patterns of partisanship different from the ones displayed by their elders, suggesting generational replacement is a substantial explanation of southern partisan change? Or are the older generations changing the most, suggesting without proving that conversion accounts for the largest chunk of the native southern white change?

To answer these questions, a similar procedure calculates what regional partisanship would have been without the changes by the younger and the older native southern whites. Unfortunately, young and old are not precise terms, suggesting particular categories. Scholars have divided the generations differently. For instance, Beck used 1946 as the dividing line, demarcating Solid South and Postwar generations. Wolfinger and Arseneau distinguished those who acquired the vote in 1960 and before with those whose first vote for president occurred in 1964 or later (Wolfinger and Arseneau, 1978). The latter alternative is followed here. Events surrounding the presidential election of 1964 marked a watershed in terms of the parties and the South (Pomper, 1972). The Solid South was built around the identification of

⁷The Republican figure is an outlier since the trend line approximates only a ten percentage point difference for 1984. If similarly large changes occur subsequently, native white southerners will be registering an accelerating rate of change toward the Republicans.

the Democratic party with the cause of white supremacy. Events before 1964 gave white southerners pause about the linkage between the Democratic party and white supremacy, but the 1964 election, passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 altered in the minds of most the positions of the national parties on racial issues.⁸

If we split native white southerners into generations as discussed, we find that both generations have contributed substantially to partisan changes (figure 4). The analysis producing figure 4—again, following Beck—involves separate calculations holding each generation to its 1964 level of partisanship, then recalculating the resulting regional partisanship. The differences between the actual regional partisanship and the recalculated regional partisanship in a later year are the changes attributable to partisan changes within each generation. Because the relative sizes of the generations change over the years, a separate calculation takes the partisanship of each generation in the later years, reweighted to reflect the proportion of the population constituted by that generation in 1964, then calculates the difference between the actual regional partisanship and that of the reconstruction. This difference reflects the partisan changes attributable to the shifting size of the generations within the population.

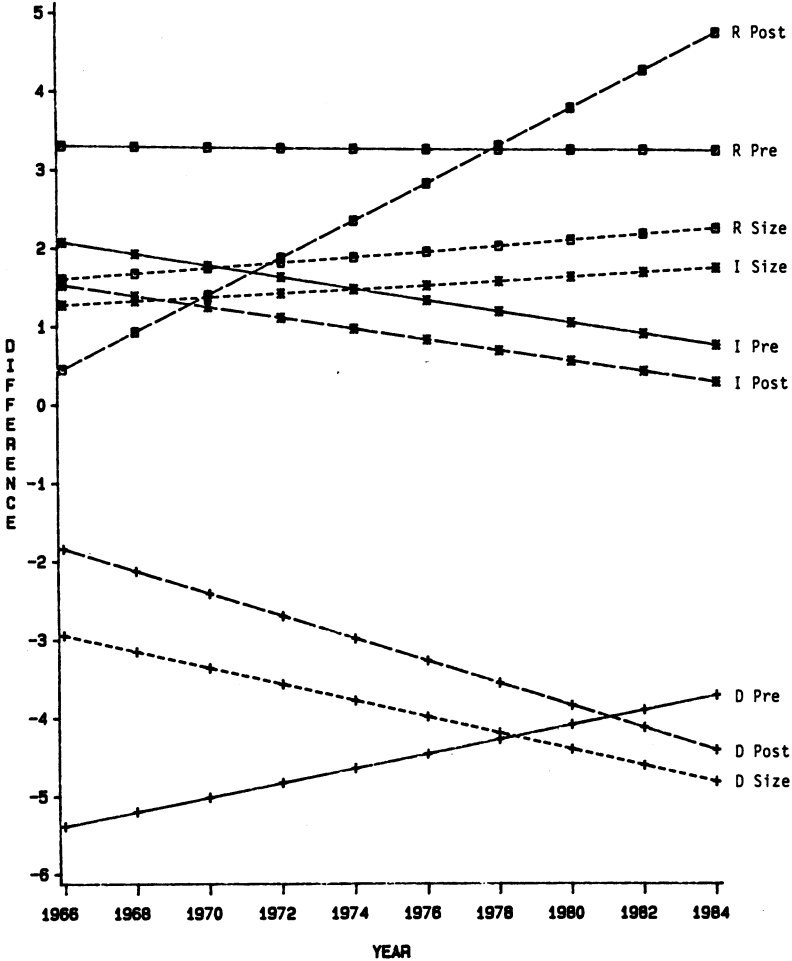
Changes by those native whites entering the electorate before 1964 have made the region more Republican by slightly more than three percentage points. Those changes have made the region four to six points less Democratic, although this impact has declined over the years. Native white southerners entering the electorate in 1964 and later have made an increasingly larger contribution to Republican identification in the region and to the decline in Democratic identification. The trend lines suggest somewhat different impacts, but do not support the conclusion that partisan changes within one generation have made a greater contribution to the overall changes than another.

The effects of within-generation partisan change may be similar in size, but generational replacement has produced additional partisan shifts. The younger generation of native southern whites, even in 1964, has been less Democratic, more independent and more Republican than its elders. By 1984, generational replacement made the South five percentage points less Democratic and two percentage points more Republican. As the younger generation has made up more of the population, the partisan impact of its increasing size has reinforced the effects of its partisan changes after 1964. Thus, region-wide partisan change among southern whites derives in large measure from the younger generation.

⁸Dividing the generations into those of voting-age before 1964 and those coming-of-age in 1964 and later understates the impact produced by events of 1964 and 1965. Older voters (the younger, the more impressionable) were also affected. As Beck shows, the partisanship of the postwar generation of white southerners differed dramatically from that of the Solid South generation (Beck, 1977, p. 488).

FIGURE 4

PARTISAN CHANGE AMONG YOUNG AND OLD NATIVE SOUTHERN WHITES:
 IMPACTS ON SOUTHERN PARTISANSHIP, 1956-1984



Note: The lines indicate the estimated trend for the difference between the region's actual partisan levels each year and what the region's partisanship would have been without the partisan changes since 1964 for each generation. For the impact of the shifts in the relative size of the generations, the calculations involve holding each generation to their 1964 proportion of the population. The young are those who first voted for president in 1964 or later. The old are those who first voted for president in 1960 or earlier.

D = Democrat
 I = Independent
 R = Republican

Pre = Able to vote for President before 1964
 Post = Able to vote for President in 1964 or after
 Size = Pre and Post held to 1964 proportions

DEALIGNMENT, REALIGNMENT, OR BOTH: PARTISAN IDENTIFICATION

Partisan changes are prominent in the South, but what should they be called? Is realignment or dealignment the appropriate conclusion? Trends in partisan identification (figures 1 and 2) seem to support both dealignment and realignment readings: since 1952 the percentage of Democrats has declined, the percentages of Republicans and independents have risen. Yet these trends for 1952 to 1984 mask the more recent pattern. Since 1966, the Democratic percentage has continued to decline, the independent share has remained essentially flat, and only the Republican percentage has increased. Naturally, counting independent leaners with partisans makes the share of independents smaller, but the flat trend since 1966 holds true whether or not we include leaners with partisans. Thus, even though independence—however defined—is greater than it was prior to the 1960s, dealignment seems an inappropriate description of southern partisan changes since 1966.

Discounting dealignment makes realignment look more reasonable. Yet shifts in partisan identification are only one indication pertinent to the realignment or dealignment debate. A larger question concerns the centrality of parties to the political orientation of citizens. Even if more individuals identify as partisans, identification may mean less in terms of evaluating the relative merits of the parties and candidates and voting for party nominees. This underscores the need to go beyond identification to consider voting choices and general attitudes toward the parties: partisan voting loyalties, the perception of general party differences, preferences for partisan handling of the respondent's most important national problem and relative feelings for the parties and candidates.⁹

Should the analysis be extended to all southerners or only a subset? The previous discussion of the components of southern partisan changes suggests the appropriateness of a concentration on all southern whites. Migrants and native whites, young and old, have become more Republican and Independent as well as less Democratic. Blacks stood apart from these trends. Southern blacks have acquired stronger partisan ties since the 1950s and have shown strong Democratic voting loyalties. For this and other reasons, blacks can be considered to have realigned (Campbell, 1979, pp. 274–75). Consequently, the subsequent consideration of the evidence for realignment and dealignment will focus on southern whites.

⁹If different shares of individual partisans identify strongly with a party over the years, differences in the measures explored later may result not from the changing meaning of partisan identification, but from a simple shift in strength of identification. Among southern whites, the proportion of strong identifiers in each party between 1952 and 1984 shows some fluctuations but no shift among Republicans. Among Democrats, strong identifiers are more frequent prior to 1964 (approximately 45%) than afterwards (approximately 33%). This difference suggests the need for caution in comparing the 1950s with later years for the Democrats.

Voting Loyalties of Partisan Identifiers

Whether partisans vote for their party's candidates is one measure of the meaning of partisan identification. Partisan voting by identifiers in presidential, congressional, and gubernatorial elections since 1952 is displayed in table 1. Except for the special circumstances of the three-way race of 1968 and the Carter candidacy in 1976, self-identified Republicans have cast over 90% of their votes for the Republican presidential candidate. Southern white Democratic identifiers have shown far less loyalty to the Democrat at the top of the ticket. The support of white Democratic identifiers peaked at 76% with the Johnson candidacy of 1964. Democratic loyalty dipped to 40% in the face of the 1968 Wallace candidacy and then to 29% in 1972 with McGovern's candidacy. In other years, southern white Democratic identifiers have cast 59% to 69% of their votes for the Democratic presidential candidate.

Compared with behavior toward the top of the ticket, southern white Democrats have shown greater loyalty to Democratic candidates for U.S. senator, governor, and U.S. representative, while southern white Republicans have been much less supportive of Republican nominees.¹⁰ The lack of serious Republican contenders in some cases undoubtedly accounts for some of the early Republican defection, just as the continued preponderance of Democratic incumbents works to increase Republican defections (Hutcherson, 1975). Consider the figures for the years starting with 1970, years marked by greater Republicans contesting and success. Since 1970, the voting loyalty of Democrats to their party's Senate candidate averaged 81%; the Republican average was a similar but lower 76%. The corresponding averages for gubernatorial voting widen in favor of the Democrats: 88% for Democrats and 81% for Republicans. In partisan voting for the House, the gap is even more pro-Democratic: 82% for Democrats but only 63% for Republicans. This wide gap can be misleading since southern white Democrats have clearly declined in partisan voting for House candidates. In 1966 and before, over 90% of southern white Democrats cast votes for the Democratic candidate. Between 1968 and 1978, 84% to 89% did so. Since 1980, only 72% to 76% have voted Democratic. Even so, these lower figures for the later

¹⁰Comparable figures for nonsouthern whites reveal that, as in the South, Republicans are more loyal supporters of the party's presidential nominee. However, the gap is much greater in the South. Southern Democratic whites have averaged 15 percentage points lower voting loyalty than their nonsouthern counterparts since 1952. Republican whites in the South have averaged five percentage points more loyalty than those in the non-South. For the lower offices (House, Senate, Governor), the reverse generally holds—southern white Democrats show greater voting loyalty than northern ones, southern Republicans show the same or lower loyalty. Consider voting in gubernatorial elections. Since 1970 Democratic whites have averaged 88% voting loyalty in the South, 74% in the non-South. Republicans in the two regions averaged a similar intermediate loyalty level of 81%.

TABLE 1
PARTY LOYALTY OF SOUTHERN WHITE PARTISAN IDENTIFIERS
IN VOTING FOR PRESIDENT, HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SENATE AND GOVERNOR, 1952-1984

| | | President | | | | | |
|--|--|-----------|----------|-------|------------|-------|--|
| | | Year | Democrat | | Republican | | |
| | | 1952 | 59 | (139) | 96 | (24) | |
| | | 1956 | 67 | (162) | 98 | (42) | |
| | | 1960 | 67 | (196) | 91 | (64) | |
| | | 1964 | 76 | (381) | 93 | (126) | |
| | | 1968 | 40 | (224) | 86 | (100) | |
| | | 1972 | 29 | (164) | 95 | (96) | |
| | | 1976 | 69 | (343) | 87 | (226) | |
| | | 1980 | 60 | (119) | 94 | (86) | |
| | | 1984 | 66 | (129) | 98 | (118) | |
| | | Mean | 59 | | 93 | | |

| Year | House | | | Senate | | | Governor | | |
|--------------------------------------|----------|------------|----|----------|------------|-------|----------|------------|------|
| | Democrat | Republican | * | Democrat | Republican | * | Democrat | Republican | * |
| 1952 | 96 | (105) | * | 94 | (51) | * | 93 | (76) | * |
| 1956 | 96 | (149) | 76 | (33) | 98 | (102) | 70 | (23) | n.a. |
| 1958 | 96 | (111) | * | | 94 | (51) | * | | 98 |
| 1960 | 94 | (171) | 73 | (60) | 92 | (153) | * | | n.a. |
| 1962 | 95 | (79) | 76 | (42) | * | | * | | n.a. |
| 1964 | 92 | (348) | 70 | (111) | 82 | (183) | 62 | (78) | 92 |
| 1966 | 91 | (70) | 78 | (27) | 89 | (44) | * | | 83 |
| 1968 | 88 | (194) | 73 | (82) | 81 | (124) | 74 | (62) | 65 |
| 1970 | 89 | (132) | 68 | (94) | 93 | (108) | 83 | (72) | 93 |
| 1972 | 89 | (122) | 68 | (71) | 68 | (137) | 74 | (66) | 79 |
| 1974 | 84 | (130) | 67 | (60) | 92 | (78) | 80 | (40) | 94 |
| 1976 | 88 | (289) | 64 | (193) | 84 | (132) | 70 | (111) | 92 |
| 1978 | 85 | (93) | 40 | (58) | 66 | (83) | 76 | (71) | 84 |
| 1980 | 72 | (102) | 65 | (77) | 67 | (46) | 84 | (44) | * |
| 1982 | 76 | (92) | 70 | (57) | 94 | (34) | 72 | (43) | 84 |
| 1984 | 73 | (120) | 63 | (105) | 82 | (109) | 66 | (94) | n.a. |
| Presidential Year Mean Since 1970 | | | | | | | | | |
| | 81 | | 65 | | 75 | | 74 | | 86 |
| Nonpresidential Year Mean Since 1970 | | | | | | | | | |
| | 84 | | 61 | | 86 | | 78 | | 89 |

Note: The table entries are the percentage of the southern white partisan identifiers (strong, weak, and leaning) who vote for the candidate of their party. The sample size for voting partisans is given in parentheses. The sample sizes in this and subsequent tables for 1958, 1960, 1964, 1968, 1970, 1974 and 1976 are weighted figures.

An asterisk in lieu of a percentage indicates the unweighted number of respondents fell below twenty. N.A. indicates the pertinent question was not asked in a particular survey.

years compare favorably with the peak points of House voting loyalty by Republican identifiers. Yet given the almost two-to-one preponderance of Democratic House incumbents, comparing only favorably is a sign of weakness, not of strength. If the trend continues, the voting loyalty of southern white Democrats to House candidates will soon be on a par with that toward Democratic presidential candidates.

The effect of incumbency on partisan voting loyalty can be considered more explicitly. Although small subsample sizes counsel against year-to-year comparisons which would support an analysis of trends, an overview of the 1970 to 1984 period confirms that incumbency partially accounts for lower Republican party loyalty.¹¹ The presence of relatively more Democratic incumbents translates into higher Democratic loyalty and higher Republican partisan defection because of pro-incumbent voting. Table 2 reveals high partisan support for incumbents of one's own party and (except for Democrats in gubernatorial elections) significant erosions in party loyalty when the incumbent is of the opposite party. Yet Republican voters find Democratic incumbents more attractive than Democratic voters find Republican incum-

TABLE 2
INCUMBENCY AND THE AVERAGE PARTY LOYALTY OF
SOUTHERN WHITE PARTISANS IN VOTING FOR HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES, SENATE, AND GOVERNOR, 1970-1984

| Office (Partisanship of Voter) | Democratic Incumbent | | Open | | Republican Incumbent | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------|------|-------|-------------------------|-------|
| House | | | | | | |
| Democrat | 94 | (582) | 81 | (64) | 42 | (165) |
| Republican | 35 | (278) | 92 | (72) | 90 | (183) |
| Senate | | | | | | |
| Democrat | 89 | (216) | 76 | (245) | 69 | (107) |
| Republican | 59 | (150) | 82 | (185) | 92 | (87) |
| Governor | | | | | | |
| Democrat | 92 | (150) | 85 | (216) | 87 | (31) |
| Republican | 58 | (59) | 88 | (137) | 88 | (33) |

The table entries are the average percentages of the southern white partisan identifiers (strong, weak and leaning) who vote for the candidate of their party. The sample size for voting partisans, summed across years, is given in parentheses. The times Senator Byrd of Virginia ran as an Independent are excluded.

¹¹The extent of pro-incumbent voting for the U.S. House of Representatives is apparently overstated in these surveys for 1978 and later. For a discussion of this bias, see Gow and Eubank (1983, 1984). Such bias might account for part of the recent Democratic decline in loyalty as Republican incumbents become more numerous but does not explain the failure of Republican loyalty levels to rise for the same reason.

TABLE 3
STRAIGHT PARTY VOTING BY SOUTHERN WHITE PARTISANS IN
STATE AND LOCAL ELECTIONS, 1952-1984

| Year | Democrats | Republicans |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| 1952 | 80 (131) | 44 (23) |
| 1956 | 89 (157) | 44 (41) |
| 1958 | 88 (93) | * |
| 1960 | 84 (182) | 60 (63) |
| 1962 | 73 (88) | 33 (51) |
| 1964 | 71 (372) | 40 (120) |
| 1966 | 73 (85) | 35 (34) |
| 1968 | 43 (220) | 46 (96) |
| 1970 | 70 (152) | 45 (102) |
| 1972 | 34 (157) | 37 (85) |
| 1974 | 64 (128) | 27 (68) |
| 1976 | n.a. | n.a. |
| 1978 | n.a. | n.a. |
| 1980 | 39 (115) | 43 (81) |
| 1982 | 59 (106) | 33 (61) |
| 1984 | 55 (126) | 39 (117) |
| Presidential Year Mean Since 1970 | | |
| | 43 | 40 |
| Nonpresidential Year Mean Since 1970 | | |
| | 64 | 35 |

Note: The table entries are the proportion of the southern whites in each party who report voting a straight ticket for their party's candidates in state and local elections other than gubernatorial or congressional. The weighted sample size for voting partisans is given in parentheses.

bents, so the pull of incumbency is not the only reason for lower levels of Republican loyalty for these offices.

Southern white Democratic identifiers have become much less likely to vote a straight ticket in state and local elections (table 3). Prior to 1962, over 80% did so. This proportion declined, taking abrupt dives in 1968 and 1972. Figures are unavailable for 1976 and 1978, but the 39% of 1980 has been followed by 59% in 1982 and 55% in 1984, well below the levels of the 1950s and early 1960s. A majority of Republicans, perhaps because of partial contesting at the state and local level, voted a straight Republican ticket only once, in 1960. If a pro-Republican realignment has occurred, it has not boosted straight party line voting by Republicans in state and local elections.

The presidential and non-presidential years made a difference in these partisan voting patterns. A few cases based on small samples pose the risk of overinterpretation, but the figures in tables 1 and 3 show Republicans

tended to be more loyal in presidential election years than in off-years, but the reverse was true for the Democrats.¹²

The patterns of partisan voting in presidential, gubernatorial, congressional, and state and local elections support mixed readings of southern partisan change. At the presidential level, southern white Democrats in 1976 and later are as loyal as they were in the more Solid South years between 1952 and 1960. Below the presidential level, Democrats have shown greater loyalty to Democratic candidates, but in voting for the House of Representatives, Democrats may be converging toward the lower levels of presidential loyalty. Republicans have shown overwhelming loyalty to the top of the ticket but have not behaved the same toward Republican candidates for lesser offices. Election results reflect these patterns, with Republicans making headway at all levels but unable to replicate the gains at the presidential level in congressional or state and local contests. The behavior of Republican identifiers to candidates below the top of the ticket indicates that the growth in Republican identifiers has not raised Republican loyalty levels toward nonpresidential candidates.

The relative loyalty levels mean that despite the 20-point Democratic lead in party identification in 1984 (figure 1), the Republican Party can be considered the majority party in the South for presidential voting. To demonstrate this, assumptions about the expected loyalty of Democrats and Republicans as well as the expected Republican vote of Independents are combined with the size of each group in 1984 to produce rough estimates of vote shares. In 1984, for example, white and black Democratic identifiers made up 52% of the voting-age population, Independents 15%, and Republicans 31%. (Taking turnout into consideration makes only a minor difference: for shares of voters, the percentages were 53, 13, and 33, respectively.) These group sizes along with the share of the vote Reagan received from each in 1984 (25%, 71%, and 95%, respectively) or the Republican presidential average for each election from 1952 to 1984 (26%, 60%, and 90%, respectively), mean Republicans can be expected to overcome a 20 percentage point gap in identifiers to reap a majority of the presidential vote in the South. This expected Republican majority is a thin one, ranging from 51% to 53% of the vote. A future Democratic candidate who would attract solid black support while gaining over 40% of the white vote—not even Carter in 1976 secured a majority of the southern white vote—could upset these expectations of a Republican presidential majority in the South.

¹²Presidential years have favored Republican prospects. Of those southern Republicans serving in Congress in 1985, 6 of 10 Senators and 22 of 36 Representatives were originally elected in presidential election years. At the gubernatorial level, the tendency to shield gubernatorial elections from presidential tides by scheduling elections in off-years has meant that only three of the thirteen Republican governors elected in the South between 1961 and 1984 initially won office in a presidential election year.

This expected Republican regional lead for presidential races does not carry over to the lesser offices. Similar calculations for the expected Republican share of the vote for nonpresidential offices generally yield, not an expected majority in the low fifties, but a total in the low forties. Even if we assume a Democratic defection rate similar to that for presidential elections, the generally lower levels of support from Republican identifiers make it tough to marshal Republican majorities. Of course, Republican incumbents can typically expect solid Republican backing and a high rate of Democratic defections (table 2), but electing more Republicans requires inroads into support levels for Democratic incumbents and a rather pro-Republican partisan blend in open seats contests.

Some defection by Democrats remains critical for most Republican electoral successes. In pockets of the South, if the relative party proportions are less pro-Democratic or if the partisan turnout differential is sufficiently skewed to favor the Republicans, Republican candidates will be in a position to win without Democratic crossovers. Otherwise, future Republican gains below the top of the ticket turn in large part on the success of two opposite tactics: courting Democratic voters to defect by downplaying party ties while stressing party ties to encourage less loyal Republican voters to be more faithful. The growth in Republican identifiers has not been accompanied by raised Republican loyalty levels toward nonpresidential candidates. Republican electoral prospects would be brighter after further dealignment among Democrats if such dealignment did not also affect Republican partisans.

General Party Differences and Party Better Able to Cope with the Most Important National Problem

Among southern whites, more Democratic and Republican identifiers have seen important general differences between the parties in the 1980s (table 4). Except for Republicans in 1964 (64%), from 1960 to 1976 only 40% to 49% of each party's identifiers perceived important general differences between the parties. But these proportions rose dramatically in 1980 (60% of Democrats, 72% of Republicans) and remained high in 1984 (67% and 72%, respectively).

Another question concerning party differences asks which party is best able to cope with what the respondent identifies as the most important national problem. The rising perception of general party differences noted above does not characterize white Democratic southerners in their thinking about which party is best able to handle the most important national problem. Respondents identify different national problems as the most important, but if realignments are issue-based and require opposing stands by parties to which voters respond (Sundquist, 1983), such a question should uncover greater partisan commitment caused by realignment. Southern

TABLE 4
 GENERAL PARTY DIFFERENCES AND PARTY BEST ABLE
 TO HANDLE MOST IMPORTANT NATIONAL PROBLEM,
 SOUTHERN WHITE PARTISAN IDENTIFIERS, 1952-1984

| Year | General Party Differences | | Party Best Able to Handle Most Important Problem | |
|------|---------------------------|-------------|--|-------------|
| | Democrats | Republicans | Democrats | Republicans |
| 1952 | 38 (247) | 35 (43) | n. a. | n. a. |
| 1960 | 49 (235) | 42 (84) | 44 (197) | 62 (81) |
| 1964 | 49 (573) | 64 (165) | 36 (603) | 54 (177) |
| 1968 | 40 (320) | 44 (144) | 21 (384) | 65 (154) |
| 1972 | 41 (134) | 48 (64) | 25 (122) | 48 (64) |
| 1976 | 47 (626) | 49 (344) | 43 (480) | 35 (280) |
| 1978 | n. a. | n. a. | 21 (256) | 45 (148) |
| 1980 | 60 (156) | 72 (104) | 13 (169) | 72 (108) |
| 1982 | n. a. | n. a. | 43 (185) | 58 (110) |
| 1984 | 67 (81) | 72 (81) | 33 (186) | 64 (156) |

Note: The table entries are the proportion of the southern whites in each party who see important general differences between the parties (or think their party is best able to handle the most important national problem they have mentioned). The weighted sample size for partisans is given in parentheses.

white Democratic identifiers have been far less likely than their Republican counterparts to think their party is best able to cope with the most important national problem (the sole exception is 1976—table 4). The Democratic highs are in 1960, 1976, and 1982; the Republicans peaks are in 1968, 1980 and 1984. From 1960 to 1968 and in 1980 and afterwards, clear majorities of Republican identifiers think their own party is best able to cope with the most important national problems.

The greater perception of party differences in the 1980s by southern white identifiers of both parties is echoed in the willingness of a majority of Republicans to see their party as the one best able to cope with the most important national problem, a tendency not evident among Democrats.

Parties and the Candidates: Likes, Dislikes, and Feeling Thermometer Scores

When invited to reveal likes and dislikes about the parties and the presidential candidates, the typical southern white Democrat made fewer comments about the parties in 1976 and later than he had previously, but approximately the same number of comments about the candidates (table 5).

TABLE 5
EVALUATION OF PARTIES AND PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES
BY SOUTHERN WHITE PARTISAN IDENTIFIERS, 1952-1984

| Year | Average Number Mentioned | | Net Direction | | N |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------|---------------|-------|-----|
| | Party | Cand. | Party | Cand. | |
| Southern White Democrats | | | | | |
| 1952 | 4.4 | 3.9 | 0.9 | -0.1 | 254 |
| 1956 | 3.5 | 4.3 | 1.9 | 0.0 | 245 |
| 1960 | 3.2 | 4.5 | 1.3 | 0.1 | 267 |
| 1964 | 3.1 | 4.4 | 1.2 | 1.3 | 603 |
| 1968 | 3.8 | 4.5 | 0.4 | -0.1 | 384 |
| 1972 | 2.4 | 3.1 | 0.5 | -1.4 | 304 |
| 1976 | 2.8 | 4.3 | 1.1 | 1.0 | 626 |
| 1980 | 2.5 | 4.4 | 1.0 | 0.8 | 206 |
| 1984 | 2.8 | 4.7 | 1.4 | 1.7 | 235 |
| Southern White Republicans | | | | | |
| 1952 | 5.1 | 3.9 | -2.8 | -2.5 | 43 |
| 1956 | 2.8 | 3.8 | -1.5 | -3.1 | 76 |
| 1960 | 3.8 | 5.3 | -2.8 | -3.4 | 100 |
| 1964 | 3.7 | 4.9 | -2.3 | -2.7 | 177 |
| 1968 | 4.7 | 5.9 | -3.3 | -4.4 | 156 |
| 1972 | 2.3 | 3.8 | -0.6 | -2.2 | 162 |
| 1976 | 3.4 | 5.2 | -1.6 | -2.5 | 344 |
| 1980 | 3.7 | 6.1 | -1.6 | -2.6 | 121 |
| 1984 | 3.5 | 5.5 | -2.0 | -3.5 | 188 |

Note: Table entries give the average number of likes and dislikes mentioned about the two parties and presidential candidates and the net direction of those comments. The latter is calculated by summing pro-Democratic responses and subtracting pro-Republican ones. Thus the net direction can range from -10 (pro-Republican) to 10 (pro-Democratic). In 1972 the SRC/CPS coded only the first 3 mentions. Rather than restrict all years to 3 mentions (in some years 10 percent of the respondents had fourth or fifth mentions), all 5 mentions are used for other years, and 1972 results are presented even though 1972 is not strictly comparable.

Comparable figures for white Republican identifiers show greater fluctuation but support the same reading: the average number of comments in 1976 and later for the party are near the low end of the 1952 to 1984 range but the average number of comments about candidates are at the high end of that range. The tendency of southern partisans to be more voluble about the candidates than the parties has grown since 1952. By the 1980s the average partisan made two more comments about the candidates than the parties. This

is consistent with political evaluations becoming more candidate-based and less party-based, a trend Wattenberg (1985) has documented for the nation.¹³

The net partisan directions of all comments about the parties and the candidates indicate that the average white Republican identifier exhibits a stronger Republican bias in his comments about the presidential candidates than in his comments about the parties (except for 1952). The reverse holds true for the average white Democratic identifier. Except for 1964 and 1984, Democrats commented more favorably about their party than their candidate. Such differences for Democrats are greater prior to 1976 than in 1976 or 1980.

This description of attitudes toward the parties and candidates should be checked with measures more reflective of the intensity of feelings. Open-ended questions about likes and dislikes solicit a number of comments about the parties and candidates, but weighting each comment equally is a convenient but possibly misleading step.

The feeling thermometer ratings offer such a measure of intensity. Starting in 1964, SRC/CPS survey respondents have been asked to rate the parties on a feeling thermometer, ranging from zero (cold, unfavorable) through 50 (neutral) to 100 (warm, favorable). In 1968, similar questions about the presidential candidates were introduced. In recent years the average southern white Democrat has felt less warmly toward the Democratic party than he did in 1964 and 1966 (table 6). The partial recovery of 1982 proved short-lived, receding as it did in 1984. Even so, the relative ratings of the parties are only slightly less favorable to the Democrats in the 1980s than they were in 1964. Except for 1976, white Democrats favored their own party over the Republican party to a much greater degree than they did their party's presidential nominee relative to the Republican candidate.

Trends among Republicans resembled those among Democrats except that Republicans favored the Republican nominee over the Democratic one to a greater extent than they favored the Republican party over the Democratic party. Although white Republican identifiers evaluate their party less warmly in absolute terms in the 1980s than in the mid-1960s, the leads over the Democratic party in 1980 and 1984 nearly matched those of the mid-1960s and exceeded those of the 1970s. On average, white Republican identifiers rated Republican presidential candidates warmly and the Democratic one negatively, opening up a consistently greater gap between the candidates than the parties. More polarized feelings for the presidential candidates than the parties caution that despite the growth in Republican identification, when candidate evaluations for elections below the presidency fail to

¹³A logit analysis of the connection between presidential vote choice, partisanship, and feelings toward the parties and candidates in the South showed candidate evaluations typically had stronger impacts on the vote than did party evaluations between 1968 and 1984.

TABLE 6
 FEELINGS OF SOUTHERN WHITE PARTISAN IDENTIFIERS
 TOWARD THE PARTIES AND PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES, 1964-1984

| Year | Parties | | | Pres. Candidates | | | N |
|----------------------------|---------|-----|-----|------------------|------|------|-----|
| | Dem-Rep | Dem | Rep | Dem-Rep | Dem | Rep | |
| Southern White Democrats | | | | | | | |
| 1964 | 30 | 81 | 51 | n.a. | n.a. | n.a. | 603 |
| 1966 | 19 | 80 | 61 | | | | 147 |
| 1968 | 21 | 75 | 54 | -2 | 60 | 62 | 384 |
| 1970 | 25 | 77 | 52 | | | | 356 |
| 1972 | 10 | 75 | 65 | -22 | 45 | 67 | 304 |
| 1974 | 20 | 76 | 56 | | | | 320 |
| 1976 | 15 | 71 | 56 | 20 | 75 | 55 | 626 |
| 1978 | 22 | 73 | 51 | | | | 282 |
| 1980 | 24 | 73 | 49 | 16 | 70 | 54 | 206 |
| 1982 | 27 | 79 | 52 | | | | 196 |
| 1984 | 26 | 75 | 49 | 17 | 70 | 53 | 235 |
| Southern White Republicans | | | | | | | |
| 1964 | -32 | 50 | 82 | n.a. | n.a. | n.a. | 177 |
| 1966 | -35 | 49 | 83 | | | | 58 |
| 1968 | -28 | 49 | 77 | -39 | 39 | 78 | 156 |
| 1970 | -22 | 55 | 77 | | | | 210 |
| 1972 | -17 | 56 | 73 | -53 | 29 | 82 | 162 |
| 1974 | -21 | 53 | 74 | | | | 152 |
| 1976 | -20 | 50 | 70 | -31 | 44 | 75 | 344 |
| 1978 | -21 | 48 | 69 | | | | 155 |
| 1980 | -27 | 45 | 72 | -33 | 41 | 74 | 121 |
| 1982 | -19 | 52 | 71 | | | | 114 |
| 1984 | -32 | 44 | 76 | -48 | 36 | 84 | 188 |

Note: Table entries are the mean feeling thermometer ratings for the parties and candidates and the differences between Democratic and Republican figures. Only the presidential candidate ratings are included.

mirror the pro-Republican evaluation of presidential candidates, the high levels of Republican voting loyalty that typify presidential voting cannot be expected to prevail below that level.

CONCLUSION

Southern partisan changes have been conspicuous. Native southern whites have accounted for the largest share of the changes. Both younger—those first reaching voting age in 1964 or later—and older native southern whites

have contributed to these changes, although the younger generation has made the greater contribution. Settling on a single summary term to describe southern partisan changes is an oversimplification. Aspects of both realignment and dealignment have characterized the South. A review of the current evidence confirms such a mixed reading.

Lately, a larger share of white southerner partisan identifiers have seen important general differences between the parties, fewer have considered themselves Democrats and more have thought of themselves as Republicans. The percentage who claim independence from the parties has neither increased nor decreased since 1966. For most offices, both Democratic and Republican white identifiers have recently supported their party's candidates at rates resembling those of the 1950s. Both loyalty and defection rates have fluctuated, but neither has increased notably for partisan identifiers during the years of partisan change. Although southern white identifiers are less warmly disposed to their parties in the 1980s than in the 1960s, the relative gap between the ratings of one's own party and the opposing party have nearly recovered in the 1980s to the levels that prevailed in the 1960s.

Such signs suggest realignment rather than dealignment insofar as realignment covers an altered balance of partisan identifiers, identifiers remaining loyal in voting, and an increased perception of important, general party differences. Moreover, the partisan patterns of southern blacks, largely excluded from this analysis, add another component to the case for realignment.

Yet these signs coexist with others signaling dealignment. The willingness of white identifiers to vote a straight party ticket in state and local elections has declined, as has the level of Democratic loyalty to their party's House candidates. Although Republican loyalties to Republican congressional and gubernatorial candidates have not declined, Republican loyalty levels for these offices remain well below the corresponding levels of Democratic loyalty as well as the Republican loyalty toward the presidential candidate. Recently individuals have had fewer favorable or unfavorable comments about the parties than previously, but comments about the candidates are as frequent as ever. The tendency of Republicans to view the presidential candidates in more polarized terms than the parties has remained strong despite the growth in Republican identification. The tendency of Democrats to view the parties in more polarized terms than the candidates declined in 1976 and 1980 and was reversed in 1984 (table 5). If realignment calls for an enduring orientation towards the parties as groups, an orientation based largely on feelings towards the current candidates suggests dealignment.

Such signs suggest dealignment insofar as dealignment covers decreasing or low levels of partisan loyalty in voting and greater emphasis on candidates than parties.

In sum, *both* realignment and dealignment are the unequivocal conclusion to draw from recent southern partisan changes. The partisan balance

changed, and the meaning of partisanship strengthened in some ways but weakened in others. Time may reinforce one tendency and reduce the other, but even if the pro-Republican trends continue (figure 1), the significance of party to citizen's political orientations may not increase. Consequently, evidence of both dealignment and realignment does not signify simply an unconsummated realignment (LeDuc, 1985).

Recent elections provide grounds for caution about extrapolating current trends into the future. The sour economy during the second year of Reagan's presidency helped bring about an upturn in Democratic fortunes in the South and in the nation, both in terms of identification and electoral victories. The Democratic resurgence of 1982 after the setback of 1980 is a potent reminder of the forces capable of arresting and reversing trends, just as the election results of 1984 seemed to restore trends to pre-1982 conditions. The Virginia elections of 1985 led to a Democratic sweep including a female attorney general and a black lieutenant governor (Sabato, 1986). The Virginia results indicate in part that politically astute, well-financed Republican campaigns cannot be assumed, nor are the racial divisions within the Democratic party beyond reconciliation or a reason for inevitable decline. In the 1986 elections, Republicans picked up four governorships in the South, but these gubernatorial gains were offset by the loss of four U.S. Senate incumbents.

Partisan changes have left the Republican party in a much improved position in the South. This improvement is not devalued by noting that the position of the Republican party during the Solid South era could hardly have been weaker. The decline in Democratic identification, the surge in independence in the 1960s, and the more recent increase in Republican identification have ended the previous Democratic domination. Further Republican advances are likely. Although dealignment has helped Republicans cope with a dwindling Democratic majority in identifiers, the value of recent gains in Republican identification has been devalued by that same dealignment. The high loyalty levels of Republican identifiers toward the presidential nominee have not been reflected in support of candidates below the presidency, and raising those lower levels of loyalty will require making parties more central to citizen evaluations. The volatility of partisan electoral outcomes one associates with dealignment can, in a context of change from a one-party system, take on the appearance of realignment away from the previously dominant party. Republican gains alone do not prove that realignment rather than dealignment has characterized the electoral process.

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