

# 5

## REPUBLICAN PRESENT

By the end of the 1980s, the southern Grand Old Party (GOP) was poised to take another major step in its top-down advancement as it became more competitive in U.S. House contests. Changes to redistricting would prove a major advantage to the Republican Party, and in 1992—the first elections held under new congressional and state legislative district boundaries—the GOP takeover of southern electoral politics began in earnest (McKee 2010).

This chapter begins with an examination of the changing demographics of U.S. House districts, which, to a large extent, were initially brought about by redrawing congressional boundaries in a manner that placed a greater emphasis on fostering minority representation. This development set in motion a swift increase in Republican electoral gains in district-based contests (i.e., U.S. House and state legislative contests), not only because minority voters, and especially African Americans, are decidedly Democratic in their voting behavior, but also because the incumbency advantage is rendered inoperable where Republican-leaning white voters are drawn into districts with an unfamiliar Democratic representative (Petrocik and Desposato 1998).

But the onset of Republican ascendancy in the early 1990s goes far beyond the electorally beneficial consequences of redrawing congressional and state legislative districts. Indeed, Republican success has been most impressive in statewide elections where boundaries are, of course, not subject to alteration. Simply put, the GOP has attained a dominant position in contemporary southern elections from the top of the political ladder to well near the bottom. Over the last quarter-century, Republican top-down advancement from presidential races to state legislative contests appears to have reached its completion. The only question now is whether the GOP can possibly squeeze any more electoral juice out of a southern political system that exhibits hints of a Democratic comeback; a subject broached in this chapter's concluding section. Whereas the previous chapter undertook a deep historical dive into the many events that moved the Democratic Solid South to a competitive two-party system, this chapter is heavy on data because the rise of southern Republicans is a remarkable story best told via the electoral record in federal, statewide, and state legislative contests.

## UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES?

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As alluded to in the last chapter, the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in the North Carolina case of *Thornburg v. Gingles* (1986) paved the way for a large increase in the number of congressional and state legislative districts that were drawn to further the election of minority candidates. The easiest way to ensure minority representation is to create districts with majority-minority voting populations (Lublin 1997, 1999). Because of the South's long history of racial discrimination, and the racially polarized voting behavior exhibited by its black and white citizens (Davidson 1984), in *Thornburg* the Court laid out a set of qualifications that, if met, would make it necessary to draw voting districts that encompassed a majority-minority electorate so that they would have a chance to elect a representative of their choosing. Sparing the details of the specific requirements needed to create a majority-minority district based on the *Thornburg* decision (see McKee and Shaw 2005 for a discussion of them), suffice it to say that the geographic concentration of a substantial minority population is the key ingredient for producing a majority-minority voting district.

Under the Civil Rights Division in the Department of Justice (DOJ), prior to the ruling in *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013),<sup>1</sup> all or parts (specific counties) of nine of the southern states (only Arkansas and Tennessee were exempt) were under supervision with respect to their drawing of voting districts. Specifically, under the Section 5 preclearance provision of the Voting Rights Act (VRA), most southern states had to receive DOJ approval of their proposed redistricting maps. On the eve of the 1992 elections, when most states would redraw their election districts, the DOJ pressured several southern states to maximize their creation of majority-minority districts (Cunningham 2001). For instance, in Georgia and North Carolina, the DOJ insisted that three majority black congressional districts be drawn in the Peach State (it had only one majority black district) and two new majority black districts in the Tar Heel State (it had no majority-minority congressional districts).

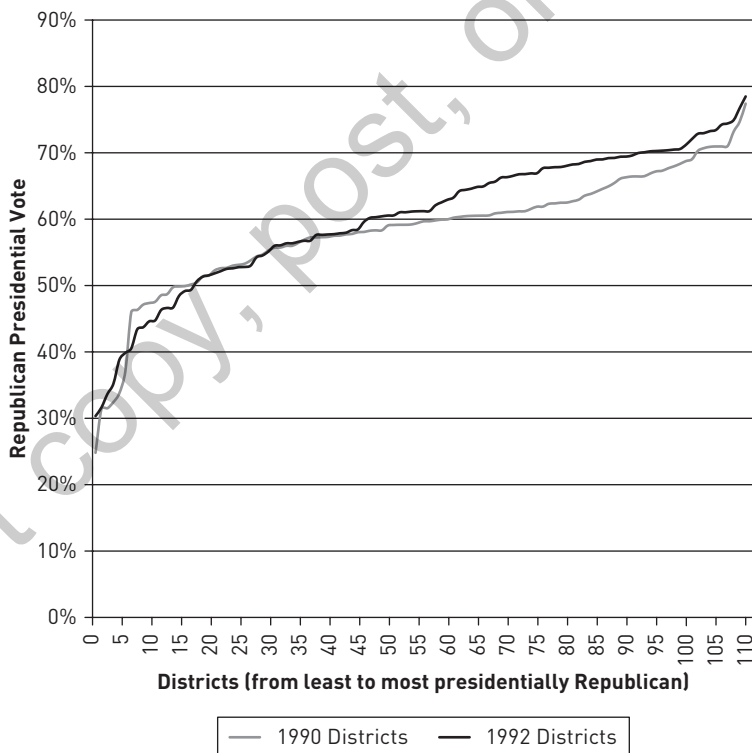
In southern states, as is still true in most states throughout the nation (Butler and Cain 1992; McDonald 2004), the state legislature is assigned the task of drawing not just their own district boundaries but also those of their congressional delegation. Before the 1992 elections, Democrats constituted the majority party in all southern state legislatures, and in only four states was the governor not a Democrat.<sup>2</sup> This meant that, barring a legal dispute (which was not uncommon), in most southern states the majority Democratic Party would draw the new congressional maps. But the DOJ placed a considerable check on what these plans would ultimately look like because it demanded an expansion in minority representation via the creation of majority-minority districts.

Because African Americans are the most Democratic voters, to the extent that this population is concentrated into a small number of majority black districts, it necessarily follows that neighboring district populations will have higher white

populations. And given white voting preferences, districts with increased white populations advantage Republicans. So in order to get approval from the DOJ while at the same time trying to minimize the electoral harm likely to stem from the increase in majority-minority districts, Democratic legislators drew congressional boundaries with incredibly complicated and bizarre shapes (Monmonier 2001). The objective was to draw these majority-minority districts in such a fashion that overall, at least based on a generally reliable indicator like presidential vote returns, neighboring majority white districts would still be competitive. But therein lay the Democrats' insoluble problem.

Figure 5.1 demonstrates the issue Democratic line drawers faced as a consequence of drawing several new majority-minority congressional districts in southern

**FIGURE 5.1** ■ Redistricting and the Change in the Distribution of the Republican Presidential Vote in Southern U.S. House Districts, 1990 and 1992



Source: Figure reproduced from Figure 3.1 in McKee (2010, 87).

Note: Data are the 1988 Republican share (two-party) of the district presidential vote for districts in 1990 and 1992. There are a total of 125 districts in the South in 1992, but only for 110 districts is it possible to record the 1988 Republican presidential vote in 1990 and 1992.

states. The figure is reproduced from McKee (2010) and the inspiration came from an article by political historian J. Morgan Kousser (1996), "Estimating the Partisan Consequences of Redistricting Plans—Simply." Among all the districts that retained enough of their previous boundaries to be compared before and after redistricting (this is not possible, for instance, in a state that adds a district through reapportionment because there is no district to compare it to under the previous map), the presidential vote for the most immediate contest before the redistricting can be compared for each district as it was drawn before and after being reconfigured. In Figure 5.1, the district-level 1988 Republican presidential vote is plotted from least to most Republican for the same set of districts as they were drawn in 1990 and 1992 ( $N = 110$ ). It is clear to the naked eye what Democrats were up against in 1992 because there was such a substantial increase in the number of districts that were drawn to be more presidentially Republican.

Based on the data in Figure 5.1, it is hardly surprising that Democratic intentions of crafting majority-minority districts to satisfy the DOJ and at the same time minimize the electoral damage from the attendant creation of more majority white districts were not realized (Cameron, Epstein, and O'Halloran 1996; Epstein and O'Halloran 1999a, 1999b, 2000). Indeed, as one scholar put it, the vast increase in the number of majority-minority districts blew up in their Democratic creators' faces (Bullock 1995).<sup>3</sup> To be sure, drawing majority-minority districts accomplished the objective of electing minority candidates. But that was about the only goal that was met. The bigger picture was trying to limit the electoral harm to the Democrats' majority position in southern congressional delegations, and in this respect, Democratic line drawers failed miserably.

It proved impossible to increase the number of majority-minority districts without jeopardizing the overall competitiveness of the Democratic Party because, by the 1990s, the party had become heavily reliant, in fact dependent upon, the support of black voters. But it was not just the direct impact of concentrating the most loyal Democrats into a smaller number of districts that weakened the Democrats' electoral fortunes (Hill 1995); it was more broadly the chain reaction that race-based reapportionment set off, which catalyzed Republican ascendancy in district-based elections (McKee 2010).

Consider the following scenario that played out repeatedly in southern congressional elections. First, drawing a majority-minority district displaced (Cain 1984) the sitting white Democratic incumbent. In other words, because the white Democratic incumbent correctly anticipated that a minority candidate would win the majority-minority district, it made more sense to either retire or seek reelection in a nearby district, with a majority white electorate. The problem with this proposition is twofold: (1) southern Democratic candidates, irrespective of their own racial background, are reliant upon the support of minority voters, and (2) Democratic incumbents lose their incumbency advantage among the voters

who were never represented by them in these reconfigured districts where these embattled incumbents sought reelection because they were displaced by the creation of majority-minority districts.

Hence, in most southern states, the infusion of more majority-minority districts endangered and doomed a select set of candidates: white Democratic incumbents, the perennial majority in southern politics. Indeed, redistricting was one of the culprits accounting for the historically high rate of incumbent retirements prior to the 1992 U.S. House elections (Jacobson and Carson 2016, 207). And for the many white Democratic incumbents who decided to seek another term, their chances of winning were greatly diminished the more their districts were altered to include constituents whom they never represented prior to redistricting (McKee 2010, 2013; Petrocik and Desposato 1998). The presence of a high percentage of redrawn voters (those new to the incumbent as a consequence of redistricting) was particularly electorally perilous for white Democratic incumbents because these voters, all else equal, were more inclined to vote Republican if they were not familiar with the candidates running in their district.<sup>4</sup> And the elite response was predictable; strong Republican challengers were more likely to run in districts with higher redrawn constituencies, which in turn made these voters even more likely to vote for GOP candidates.

Not long after the 1992 elections, in a series of southern cases (*Shaw v. Reno* in 1993; *Miller v. Johnson* in 1995; and *Bush v. Vera* in 1996), the U.S. Supreme Court determined that districts drawn expressly or primarily for the purpose of ensuring a majority-minority voting electorate would be deemed unconstitutional racial gerrymanders if their creation wholly ignored geographic considerations (Butler 2002). In other words, the byzantine cartography necessary to create *some* majority-minority districts was a violation of the *Thornburg* precedent because it was expected that the minority population was geographically concentrated, whereas in several of the majority-minority districts first created for the 1992 elections the minority populations meandered all across the state and/or were anything but a cohesive population in a given urban area.

In short, the DOJ had overstepped its authority by insisting that most southern states maximize their number of majority-minority districts irrespective of how they were drawn. So in 1996, before the ensuing elections, under court order, several southern states (Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas) redrew their congressional boundaries and some of the extant majority-minority districts were altered so that their new boundaries made them majority white (Voss and Lublin 2001). But unfortunately for the Democrats, the extensive electoral damage due to race-based redistricting had already been inflicted. After the 1994 elections, not only had Republicans achieved majority status in the southern U.S. House delegation for the first time since 1874 (Black and Black 2002), but for the first time in forty years the lower chamber of the U.S. Congress reverted back to GOP control.

### BOX 5.1 THE CREATIVE CARTOGRAPHY OF CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICTS

The large increase in majority-minority districts in the 1992 elections made for some extraordinarily byzantine maps. As mentioned in this chapter, the court case of *Thornburg v. Gingles* (1986) was the impetus for increasing the number of majority-minority districts. Department of Justice oversight of redistricting plans via Section 5 preclearance under the Voting Rights Act ensured that most of the Democratic-controlled southern legislatures would draw extremely convoluted district boundaries in the hopes that minority voters could be concentrated without incurring too much electoral damage in the surrounding districts that were necessarily more Republican because of their higher percentage of white voters. Figure 5.2 shows a selection of some of the more bizarrely shaped congressional districts that were newly created for the 1992 U.S. House elections. Five districts are displayed in the figure: North Carolina District 12 (NC 12), Louisiana District 4 (LA 4), Georgia District 11 (GA 11), and Texas Districts 6 and 30 (TX 6 and TX 30). Texas Districts 6 and 30 are displayed separately and then together (with TX 6 shaded black and TX 30 shaded gray) because these two districts intersect along portions of the border between Tarrant County (city of Fort Worth) and Dallas County. Based on the black voting age population (BVAP), four of these districts were majority or plurality black (NC 12: 53% BVAP; LA 4: 63% BVAP; GA 11: 60% BVAP; TX 30: 47% BVAP and 15% Latino VAP), and one was majority white (TX 6: 92% white VAP). All four predominantly black districts elected black Democratic Representatives: Melvin Watt in NC 12, Cleo Fields in LA 4, Cynthia McKinney in GA 11, and Eddie Bernice Johnson in TX 30. The redrawn majority white TX 6 reelected Republican Congressman Joe Barton (first elected in 1984).

NC 12 was nicknamed the “I-85” district because it was once quipped that an open car door would hit half the residents located along the skinny stretch of Interstate 85 as the district snaked its way from the black neighborhoods of inner-city Charlotte to the northeast along the path of I-85, picking up heavily African American areas in the cities of Winston-Salem, Greensboro, and Durham. LA 4 was dubbed the “Mark of Zorro” district as it crisscrossed its way along the upper part of the Pelican State’s boot-like shape from the Red River border with southern Arkansas, encompassing black sections of Shreveport in the northwest and then east to Monroe and then south along the Mississippi River (and border with Mississippi), turning back to the northwest to take in parts of Alexandria and then moving southeast to capture sections of Baton Rouge before finally bending southwest to Lafayette. GA 11 became known as “Sherman’s March to the Sea” district, in reference to a path somewhat reminiscent of the one taken by the notorious Union Army Civil War General William Tecumseh Sherman, who wreaked havoc all along the large swath of territory his troops covered on their way from Atlanta to Savannah. The district took in black neighborhoods in Atlanta and Augusta and less populated areas in between as it narrowed into a thin band that made its way down to the port city of Savannah. Rather than give TX 6 and TX 30 distinct names, because they were so remarkably convoluted, they came to be known as “bug-splattered” districts. The lower share of African Americans in the Lone Star State vis-à-vis the aforementioned districts in North Carolina,

**FIGURE 5.2** ■ Congressional Districts Shaped by Race-Based Redistricting



Source: District shapefiles of the 103rd Congress (1992 U.S. House Elections) are from Lewis et al. (2013).

Note: Figure created by the author.

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Louisiana, and Georgia partially accounts for the essentially indescribable contours of TX 6 and TX 30. The remainder of the reason for these districts resembling bug splats is because of the great efforts undertaken by Texas Democrats (under the direction of Congressman Martin Frost) to draw two predominantly black districts (TX 30 in Dallas and TX 18 in Houston) while minimizing the electoral harm to Anglo Democrats seeking reelection in 1992. In order to create a district in the shape of TX 30, neighboring districts like TX 6 (taking in parts of five counties in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex) also took on inexplicably complex boundaries. Displaying the districts together makes it evident that each district contains various sprawling sections and tentacles with no definitive core.

These districts (along with several others) did not survive in their current form because the Supreme Court, in a series of cases (*Shaw v. Reno* 1993; *Miller v. Johnson* in 1995; and *Bush v. Vera* in 1996) ruled them unconstitutional racial gerrymanders. NC 12 was the target of the Court in *Shaw v. Reno* when Justice O'Connor likened its construction and purpose to racial apartheid. The decision that these heretofore predominantly black districts were crafted primarily to create majority-minority electorates irrespective of their geographic shapes resulted in all of them being redrawn with boundaries that were made considerably less intricate/more compact, and the constituencies in these reconfigured districts were now majority white (NC 12 in 1998; LA 4 in 1996, GA 11 in 1996) or plurality white (TX 30 in 1996). LA 4 was significantly altered in 1994 (though it remained majority black until another redrawing in 1996), and after winning reelection, Representative Fields vacated the seat for a run at the governorship in 1995 (he was defeated by Republican Mike Foster). Throughout its multiple permutations, Congressman Watt finally retired from representing NC 12 in 2014 when he resigned to become Director of the Federal Housing Finance Agency. Georgia Representative McKinney endured a very rough tenure in the House of Representatives. She was twice defeated by fellow black Democrats in highly contentious primaries in 2002 and later in 2006. Congresswoman Johnson, a Texas State Senator prior to taking office in TX 30 in 1992, still represents the latest permutation of this Dallas-based district in the U.S. Congress. In 2018, Republican Congressman Barton retired from office in TX 6, a district that now barely resembles the bug splat originally drawn in 1992.

## Congressional District Demographics and Representation

Table 5.1 presents the percentage of southern congressional districts according to whether the district voting age population (VAP) is majority white, majority black, majority Latino, and plurality (those in which no single racial/ethnic group comprises the district majority VAP). In 1990, prior to redistricting, 91 percent of southern U.S. House districts were majority white. After redistricting in 1992, the percentage of majority white districts stood at 79 and the share of majority black districts jumped from 3 to 11 percent. Although there were not as many majority



Latino districts as majority black districts, the former went from 5 percent in 1990 to 7 percent in 1992. Moving forward to 2016, Table 5.1 shows that majority black districts are 8 percent and majority Latino districts are 9 percent of the southern total. The decline in the percentage of majority black districts since 1994 is primarily because of court-ordered redistricting that reduced some of these heretofore majority black district populations. By comparison, Latinos are the fastest growing minority in the South, and the steady increase in majority Latino districts has occurred exclusively in Florida and Texas, where all of these districts reside. Finally, notice that the percentage of majority white districts in 2016 was 76 percent and the portion of plurality districts has grown from only 1 percent in 1990 to 7 percent in 2016.<sup>5</sup>

To get a sense of the degree to which majority-minority districts favor the Democratic Party, Table 5.2 shows the number of U.S. House members, according to their race/ethnicity and party affiliation, who represent seats that are composed of a majority-minority district population. As the note under Table 5.2 explains, the definition of a majority-minority district is one in which the sum of the black and Latino VAP exceeds 50 percent. It is worth mentioning this because there was actually one additional majority-minority district in the South in 2016 that was not included in Table 5.2: Republican Pete Olson of District 22 in Texas represented a VAP that was 11.9 percent black, 22.1 percent Latino, and 16.1 percent Asian (50.1 percent majority-minority). In 1990 there were only 11 majority-minority districts based on the aforementioned definition; by 2016, there were 29 southern congressional districts that contained a majority-minority VAP based on the sum of black and Latino residents. This number is slightly down from the 32 majority-minority districts that existed from 2012 to 2014 because redistricting in Florida and Virginia reduced the number of majority-minority districts in these states. Demographic change in the form of a growing minority electorate is a principal feature of contemporary southern politics. Nonetheless, the single largest increase in the number of majority-minority districts took place not so much because of long-term demographic change, but due to the DOJ's insistence that southern states expand their number of majority-minority districts prior to the 1992 elections. Reflecting this political reality, the number of majority-minority districts went from 11 in 1990 to 26 in 1992.

Table 5.2 speaks to another reality of southern politics: with a handful of exceptions, minority politicians primarily represent district populations in which their racial/ethnic group is either the majority or plurality group (Lublin et al. 2009). And this is more often the case with Democratic Representatives because most Republicans, regardless of their race/ethnicity, represent majority white districts. For instance, in 2016 the four Latino Democrats listed in the table all represented majority Latino districts in Texas. Although there was only one additional Latino Democrat in the southern U.S. House delegation in 2016, he was the first of Puerto

**TABLE 5.1 ■ Percentage of Majority White, Majority Black, Majority Latino, and Plurality Southern U.S. House Districts, 1990–2016**

District	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016
% Majority White	91	79	79	82	80	80	80	80	81	81	81	75	75	76
% Majority Black	3	11	11	8	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	8	8	8
% Majority Latino	5	7	7	7	7	7	8	8	8	8	8	9	9	9
% Plurality	1	2	2	2	6	6	5	5	5	5	5	9	9	7
Total Districts	116	125	125	125	125	125	131	131	131	131	131	138	138	138

Source: Data compiled by the author from the U.S. Census Bureau.

Note: Majority for each racial/ethnic category is based on the district voting age population. Plurality districts do not contain a majority voting age population for a single racial/ethnic group.

**TABLE 5.2 ■ Race and Party of Representatives in Majority-Minority Southern U.S. House Districts, 1990–2016**

	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016
Majority-Minority Districts	11	26	26	22	25	25	26	26	25	25	25	32	32	29
Black Democrats	5	17	17	13	14	14	14	14	14	13	14	18	18	16
Latino Democrats	4	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	6	6	4	6	4	4
White Democrats	1	2	2	1	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	5	5	4
Black Republicans													1	1
Latino Republicans	1	3	3	3	3	3	4	4	3	3	4	2	3	3
Asian Republicans										1				
White Republicans											1	1	1	1
Percentage Democrats	91	88	88	86	88	88	85	85	88	84	80	91	84	83
Percentage Republicans	9	12	12	14	12	12	15	15	12	16	20	9	16	17

Source: Data compiled by the author from various editions of *The Almanac of American Politics* (1992–2016).

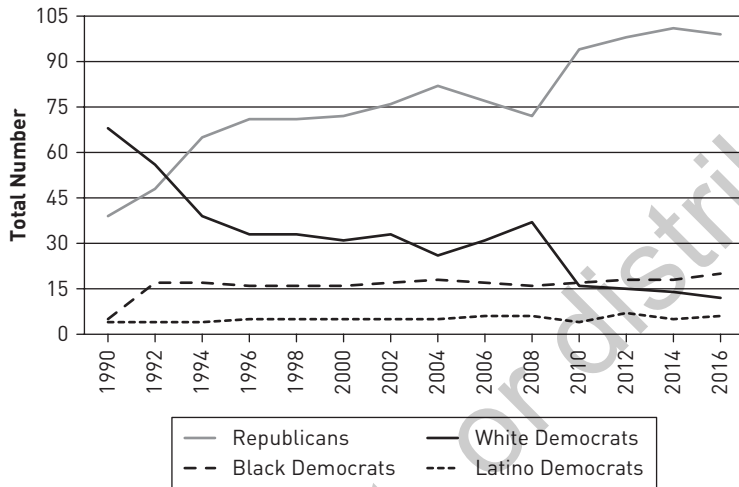
Note: Majority-minority districts are greater than 50 percent majority-minority based on the sum of the black and Latino voting age population.

Rican descent to serve in the Sunshine State (Anderson, Baumann, and Geras 2018, 296); Darren Soto, whose Florida District 9 in the Orlando area had a VAP that was 29.9 percent Latino and 11.2 percent black. Likewise, in 2016, of the twenty African American Democrats in the southern congressional delegation, sixteen (80 percent) represented majority-minority districts. Of the four white Democrats representing majority-minority districts in 2016, three were veteran Anglo incumbents presiding over majority Latino districts in Texas (Lloyd Doggett in District 35 with a 58 percent Latino VAP, Gene Green in District 29 with a 73 percent Latino VAP, and Beto O'Rourke in District 16 with a 78 percent Latino VAP) and the other was Jewish Congressman Steve Cohen, who represented the Memphis-based majority black District 9 in Tennessee (61 percent black VAP).

With respect to Republicans, more than half of the five representing majority-minority districts in 2016 were all Latinos, three Cuban-Americans who represented majority Latino districts in South Florida (Mario Diaz-Balart in the 75 percent Latino VAP District 25; Carlos Curbelo in the 68 percent Latino VAP District 26; Ileana Ros-Lehtinen in the 69 percent Latino VAP District 27). The two remaining Republicans, African American Will Hurd and Anglo Blake Farenthold, are both Texans who represent districts with substantial Latino populations. In fact, Hurd's District 23 has a 66 percent Latino VAP (3 percent black VAP), while Farenthold's District 27 has a 45.1 percent Latino VAP and a 5.1 percent black VAP. The takeaway from Table 5.2 is not just that the number of majority-minority districts has nearly tripled since 1990, but Democrats (and especially minority Democrats) are much more likely to occupy these seats in the southern U.S. House delegation; 83 percent Democrats versus 17 percent Republicans in 2016.<sup>6</sup>

Figure 5.3 presents a graphical display of the race/ethnicity of Democrats and all Republicans (regardless of their racial background) serving in the southern U.S. House delegation from 1990 to 2016. In 1990, the old southern pattern still prevailed, that is, white Democrats comprised a majority and there were hardly any minority Democrats. But due mainly to the direct and indirect electoral effects of race-based redistricting, the situation drastically changes in 1992, as the number of Republicans and black Democrats surges and the number of white Democrats plummets. In 2006 and 2008, back-to-back elections in which a strong national tide favored Democrats (Jacobson and Carson 2016), the long-term decline in white Democrats is temporarily reversed. But the Republican "tsunami" in the 2010 midterm produces an even stronger reduction in the number of white Democrats. In 2016, except for one African American and three Latinos, the rest of the 99-member southern Republican U.S. House contingent was comprised of non-Latino whites. By contrast, the 39-member southern Democratic opposition is remarkably diverse: consisting of 20 African Americans, 13 whites, 5 Latinos, and for the first time in the history of southern congressional politics, an Asian Democrat (not shown in Figure 5.3), Stephanie Murphy of Florida, who defeated veteran Republican Congressman John Mica in the redrawn Orlando-based

**FIGURE 5.3** ■ The Number of Republicans, White Democrats, Black Democrats, and Latino Democrats in the Southern U.S. House Delegation, 1990–2016



Sources: Data compiled by the author from various editions of *The Almanac of American Politics* (1992–2016). The 2016 data were compiled from the *New York Times* (<http://www.nytimes.com/elections/results/house>).

District 7. To reiterate an observation made by southern politics scholar Earl Black (1998), “the newest southern politics” still revolves around race, but now it consists of a diverse minority coalition of Democrats (Black 2004) who do battle with a much larger and overwhelmingly white Republican majority.

## REPUBLICAN CONTROL FROM TOP TO BOTTOM

The preceding foray into congressional politics is an appropriate way to start a chapter documenting Republican electoral gains in the South because the long-term shift in favor of the GOP is so palpable. Further, many of the dynamics that have played out in U.S. House contests are also present in other elections. Indeed, Republican dominance of contemporary southern politics is hardly limited to the House of Representatives. As will be shown in the sections that follow, GOP hegemony extends not just to federal elections (President, Senate, and House) but also to statewide and even state legislative races.

Table 5.3 shows just how far southern Republicans have come in the quarter-century transpiring between the 1990 and 2016 elections. Displayed is the percentage of seats won by the GOP in federal elections (Senate and House), statewide contests,

**TABLE 5.3 ■ Republican Electoral Gains in the South between 1990 and 2016**

Republican (%)	U.S. Senate (N = 22)	U.S. House (N = 138 [116])	Statewide (N = 74 [78])	State Senate (N = 457)	State House (N = 1,325)	Total (N = 2,016 [1,998])
After 1990	32	34	17	24	28	27
After 2016	86	72	88	67	65	67
Difference	+54	+38	+71	+43	+37	+40

Source: Data compiled by the author.

Notes: The second number displayed in brackets (for the U.S. House, Statewide, and Total columns) accounts for the number of U.S. House districts and statewide seats in 1990. Statewide elections include gubernatorial contests but exclude U.S. Senate races.

and state legislative races (state senate and state house) after 1990 and after 2016. In 1990, Republicans had their greatest presence in U.S. House elections where they comprised 34 percent of the southern delegation. By contrast, southern Republicans were least prevalent in statewide races, holding only 17 percent of 78 total seats in 1990. Overall, at the start of the decade in 1990, across the five types of elections presented in Table 5.3, Republicans controlled a meager 27 percent of these elective offices.

Two and a half decades hence, after the 2016 elections, the political terrain in Dixie had transformed. Now, southern Republican dominance is most impressive in statewide races where the GOP occupies 88 percent of the seats. Only slightly less impressive is that Republicans hold all but three of the South's U.S. Senate seats, which amounts to 86 percent. The U.S. House delegation has become a GOP fortress with a 72 percent Republican majority, and in state legislatures two-thirds of the seats belong to Republicans. In fact, after 2016, out of a total of 2,016 seats, spanning federal, statewide, and state legislative contests, just over two-thirds of them (67 percent) were occupied by Republicans. In the 1980s, it was accurate to describe southern electoral politics as a competitive two-party system (Lamis 1988). In the mid-2010s, such a pronouncement would be utterly false. Republicans currently dominate the southern political landscape (McKee 2012a).

Table 5.3 gives the student a telling overview of the historic gains southern Republicans have notched since the start of the 1990s. Now it is time to fill in the period between 1990 and 2016 with a detailed accounting of Republican representation in federal, statewide, and state legislative elections, respectively.

## FEDERAL CONTESTS

In part because they are higher profile (attracting greater attention from the media and scholars), but also because they are collectively more significant in shaping the current and future course of American politics, federal elections will be examined

first. As has been stated numerous times, top-down advancement (Aistrup 1996) is the general pattern of Republican success in southern politics. Not only have GOP gains been more substantial at the top of the electoral ladder, they have typically occurred earlier at the apex of the political food chain. In chapter 4 it was documented that southern Republicans have been the dominant party in presidential politics since the late 1960s. A quick look back at Table 5.3 shows how long it has taken for the southern GOP to consolidate their presidential gains in lower level offices. Even after 1990, it is apparent that southern Democrats still maintained a firm grip on every office except the presidency.

Despite the order of Republican progression going from presidential elections to senatorial races, and then finally to House elections, the assessment of top-down advancement in federal contests will begin with the lower chamber of Congress and then go back up. This order of presentation is preferable because House contests have already been discussed at length and the greater number of seats makes for a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics shaping these elections.

### House Elections

Any discussion of the dynamics of congressional elections should start with explaining the importance of the incumbency advantage. Some scholars have actually quantified how much of an electoral bonus is associated with being the current occupant of a congressional district (Gelman and King 1990; Jacobson 2009a). There are several reasons why it is to be expected that an incumbent will have an easier time winning when seeking reelection. In other words, the advantage of being the incumbent is multifaceted. Perhaps it is easier to start with what is not a component of the incumbency advantage. Most obvious is that the partisan connection between a representative and a voter is separable from the incumbency advantage because a Republican (Democrat) is expected to vote for a Republican (Democrat). Rather, an incumbent seeks an advantage that accrues from the benefits attached to holding office apart from party affiliation. Some refer to the incumbency advantage as a “personal vote” because it is not tied to party affiliation, but instead predicated on how representative behavior is exercised to earn the support of voters (Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987).

House incumbents engage in a variety of activities, most of which are done expressly for the purpose of winning reelection (Mayhew 1974). As Mayhew points out, keeping a high profile among constituents by advertising their activity, claiming credit for legislative accomplishments, and taking positions on issues that are expected to garner constituency support all further incumbents’ objective of winning reelection. In addition, most incumbents work very hard on casework (Fiorina 1977), which means dealing with problems brought to their attention by a voter in their district; typically, these entail mishaps with the federal bureaucracy (like an

undelivered Social Security check). Because incumbents are diligent in their cultivation of a personal vote on the basis of the aforementioned activities, it is no wonder that they enjoy high name recognition in their districts, and voters are much more likely to vote for the candidate they are more familiar with (Jacobson 2009a).

Ever since House members viewed their position as worthy of a political career (Polsby 1968), and probably even long before that (Carson and Roberts 2013), the basic formula for optimizing the incumbency advantage has not changed: engage in activities that attract votes. And in order to maximize the electoral advantages tied to holding office, members of Congress have designed their institution so that it can foster the goal of reelection (Mayhew 1974). This explains why most legislative activity is conducted between Tuesday and Thursday and there is essentially no budget for taking trips back to the district for the rest of the week. Likewise, the franking privilege gives members unlimited use of the postal service for mailing constituents at taxpayer expense. And finally, by dint of being the incumbent, it is much easier to raise the necessary funds to underwrite a reelection campaign because most political donors behave strategically and therefore place their financial bets on the more likely winner (the incumbent).

Since the end of World War II (specifically 1946 to 2014), in general elections House incumbents have been reelected at the impressive rate of 92 percent, whereas their Senate counterparts have won reelection 80 percent of the time (Sides et al. 2015). So obviously, the odds that an incumbent wins another term are very favorable. Nonetheless, considerable changes that have taken place since the 1970s have served to weaken the electoral bonus accruing from the incumbency advantage. Although in the short term, the electoral advantage tied to being an incumbent is highly variable (Petrocik and Desposato 2004), over time it has steadily declined because of the rise in partisan voting (Bartels 2000; Jacobson 2015; Levendusky 2009). In the 1970s, when the share of political independents in the electorate reached its post-war peak, the incumbency advantage was very high, and scores of Democrats and Republicans defected from their party identification by casting congressional votes for House incumbents of the opposing party (Cox and Katz 1996). By contrast, in the 2010s, the incumbency advantage is currently at a low point because there has been an increase in voters identifying with the major parties, and among those who do, their likelihood of voting their party affiliation in congressional elections is at a historic high (Jacobson and Carson 2016).

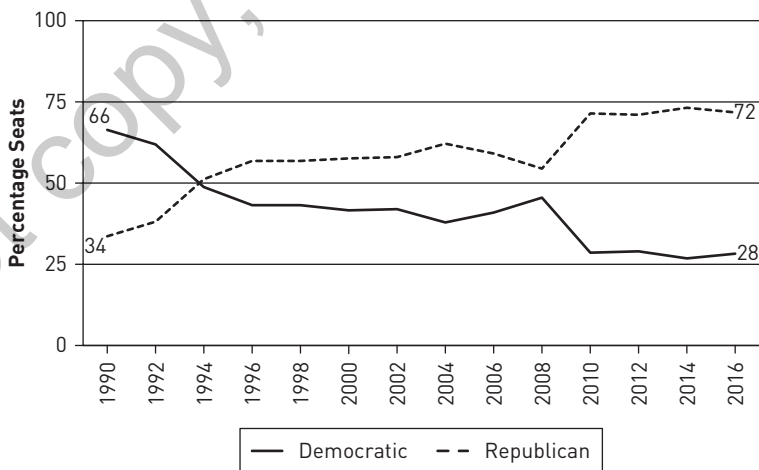
In the American South, a region that was thoroughly dominated by Democrats from the end of the 1800s into the early 1960s, perhaps never before or since has the incumbency advantage proved so electorally consequential in American politics. As assiduously documented by Earl and Merle Black (2002), the primary reason why there was a three-decade delay in Republican presidential success filtering down to congressional contests was principally due to the active resistance exercised by southern Democratic House and Senate incumbents, who did all they could to impede Republican advancement. But the Democratic incumbency advantage invariably



weakened as more and more of the white southern electorate aligned with the GOP (Stonecash 2008) and the emergence of viable Republican candidates gave these voters a reason to stick with their party when voting in congressional elections (Bullock, Hoffman, and Gaddie 2005). With the onset of the 1990s, the split-level alignment of a Republican presidential South and a Democratic South for every election below the top electoral rung (Lublin 2004) would finally come to an end.

Figure 5.4 displays the percentage of Democrats and Republicans in the southern U.S. House delegation from 1990 to 2016. In 1990, Democrats were two-thirds of the delegation; in 2016 they were down to 28 percent. Put another way, at the beginning of the 1990s, Republicans held just a third of southern congressional districts and in 2016 the GOP occupied 72 percent, which was even better than the two-thirds of seats their Democratic opponents controlled a quarter-century earlier. The reasons behind the initial Republican surge in seat pickups between 1990 and 1992 have already been discussed, but notice that the GOP's rapid rise in southern House elections continues through 1996 and then levels off until a slight uptick in 2004. In 1992, there were twice as many open seats vacated by Democratic incumbents ( $N = 10$ ) while Republican members and redistricting produced an additional 16 open seats. All else equal, it is easier to win an open seat because by definition the incumbency advantage is absent, and over the three election cycles (1992–1996) when the GOP surged to its majority position, Democrats left open 39 seats versus

**FIGURE 5.4** ■ Southern U.S. House Seats Controlled by the Major Parties, 1990–2016



Sources: Data compiled by the author from *The Almanac of American Politics* (1992–2016 editions). The 2016 data are from the *New York Times* (<http://www.nytimes.com/elections/results/house>).

Note: The percentage of Democratic and Republican seats is out of the total southern U.S. House seats.

14 for Republicans. From 1992 to 1996, Republicans netted a total of 32 southern House seats, and 59 percent of them were won in open-seat districts vacated by Democratic incumbents.

A new Republican electoral equilibrium seems to have set in after the 1996 House elections, and it was only slightly altered in 2004 because of events that took place in one southern state: Texas. After the 2002 elections, for the first time since the end of Reconstruction, the Texas GOP had majority control of both chambers of the legislature and occupied the governorship. With their newfound political monopoly, Republican U.S. House Majority Leader and Texas Congressman Tom DeLay (TX-22) urged his fellow Republicans in the Texas Legislature to undertake a “re-redistricting” of its congressional map (as per the decennial census, the districts were redrawn before the 2002 midterm contests). They obliged after a cumbersome delay, courtesy of Texas Democratic legislators who absconded from the state on two occasions rather than face the music of a new congressional plan designed solely to increase the number of Texas U.S. House Republicans (McKee and Shaw 2005).

The Republican remap was highly effective because it concentrated on demolishing the incumbency advantage of several Anglo Democratic incumbents by greatly altering their congressional districts (McKee 2010). In addition to overloading targeted Democrats with redrawn constituents whom the GOP knew (as did their Democratic opponents) were inclined to vote Republican (presidential vote returns made this clear), two Texas Democrats (Martin Frost and Charles Stenholm) were displaced in a manner so that their only chance of winning reelection was by defeating Republican incumbents who, of course, retained a much higher percentage of their old voters under the new plan. In the lead-up to the 2004 elections, one Democratic incumbent switched to the GOP (Ralph Hall), one retired (Jim Turner), and four of the Anglo Democratic incumbents in the GOP’s crosshairs were defeated: Martin Frost, Nick Lampson, Max Sandlin, and Charles Stenholm. In sum, the 2004 Republican gerrymander in the Lone Star State accounts for the southern GOP’s half-dozen seat increase in this election cycle.<sup>7</sup>

Although the South is, in many ways, distinct from the rest of the United States, it certainly is not immune to the electoral shockwaves produced by national conditions (Pryby 2014). Democrat Bill Clinton won the presidency in 1992 with essentially no coattails; in fact, his party lost 10 seats (Jacobson and Carson 2016), 9 of which the Democrats lost in the president-elect’s native Dixie. In Clinton’s first midterm, the national Democratic seat loss was 52 (Jacobson and Carson 2016), enough to relinquish Democratic control of the House of Representatives for the first time since the Eisenhower Administration in 1954. Similarly, in the strong Democratic tides running in the 2006 midterm, when Republicans lost their national congressional majority, and in 2008 with the historic election of Democrat Barack Obama,

Figure 5.4 indicates a slight drop in the number of southern Republican House seats (a 10-seat pickup for the Democratic opposition since 2004). And in the Republican wave election of 2010, fueled by an agitated and burgeoning Tea Party movement (Jacobson 2011), President Obama acknowledged that his party endured a “shellacking.” The 63-seat Democratic midterm loss was the largest suffered by a President’s party since President Roosevelt’s Democrats hemorrhaged 71 in 1938. The reversal in 2010 was easily enough for Republicans to take back a national House majority, and in the South it seems that an even higher GOP electoral equilibrium was attained, with the party holding more than 70 percent of Dixie’s congressional districts. As the electoral record indicates, in Dixie, the House GOP is much better off when a Democrat occupies the White House.

Table 5.4 shows the number of House Republicans in each southern state’s delegation from 1990 to 2016. By presenting the data in this more fine-grained detail, one gets a better sense of where and when GOP gains occurred. Bracketed numbers denote a 50–50 partisan split in a state’s House delegation (e.g., Louisiana in 1990), while a number in bold indicates a Republican majority. A subregional pattern of GOP advancement is evident in the table (more on this in chapter 8). With the exception of Mississippi, the Deep South has been majority Republican since the 1996 elections (Georgia and South Carolina have been since 1994). The primary explanation for this subregional pattern is the greater electoral impact of race-based redistricting on furthering Republican success in these states containing the highest percentage of African American voters. Among the Peripheral South states, Florida was already majority Republican in 1990 and has been ever since. Although North Carolina achieved a Republican House majority in 1994, it was lost in 1996, then the GOP regained control for the next four elections (1998–2004), then the Democrats had the majority from 2006 to 2010, and for the last three elections the Tar Heel State is again majority Republican. Tennessee has also experienced a similar pattern of multiple partisan reversals of majority control. The laggards to the Republican congressional takeover are Virginia, Texas, and Arkansas. Since 1990, the first Republican majority in Virginia takes place in the 2000 elections; the 2004 elections for Texas Republicans, and not until 2010 do Arkansas Republicans take a majority of the Natural State’s four-member House delegation. Since 2012, the South has witnessed a Republican blackout—all of the eleven states have majority Republican House delegations since President Obama was reelected.

The ascendancy of southern U.S. House Republicans is worthy of considerable ink because it is a political transformation on par with the 1930s Democratic New Deal realignment. The contemporary southern Republican realignment also happens to share some of the same dynamics driving the rapid partisan takeover that occurred in the North in the 1930s. First, seat gains were unusually large and took place in a short span of time (a handful of election cycles). Second, because of the

**TABLE 5.4 ■ The Increase in Republican U.S. House Representatives, 1990–2016**

Republicans	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016
Alabama	2	3	3	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	6	6	6	6
Arkansas	1	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	1	1	1	1	1	3	4	4	4
Florida	10	13	15	15	15	15	18	18	16	15	19	17	17	16
Georgia	1	4	7	8	8	8	8	7	7	7	8	9	10	10
Louisiana	[4]	3	3	5	5	5	4	5	5	6	6	5	5	5
Mississippi	0	0	1	3	2	2	[2]	[2]	[2]	1	3	3	3	3
North Carolina	4	4	8	[6]	7	7	7	7	6	5	6	9	10	10
South Carolina	2	[3]	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	6	6	6
Tennessee	3	3	5	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	7	7	7	7
Texas	8	9	11	13	13	13	15	21	19	20	23	24	25	25
Virginia	4	4	5	5	5	7	8	8	8	5	8	8	8	7
Total	39	48	64	71	71	72	76	82	77	72	94	98	101	99
N	116	125	125	125	125	125	131	131	131	131	131	138	138	138
Republican %	34	38	51	57	57	58	58	63	59	55	72	71	73	72

Sources: Data compiled by author from various issues of *The Almanac of American Politics* (1992–2016 editions). The 2016 data are from the *New York Times* (<http://www.nytimes.com/elections/results/house>).

Note: Numbers in bold indicate a Republican majority and bracketed numbers indicate a split delegation.

swift jump in electoral success, neither ascending party (northern Democrats in the 1930s and southern Republicans in the 1990s) had enough politically experienced candidates to contest most of the promising districts at the height of electoral upheaval (Canon 1990; McKee 2010). Hence, in the short term, patterns of candidate emergence were significantly altered. For instance, there was an abnormally high rate of party switching candidates (northern officeholders who switched from Republican to Democrat in the 1930s, and southern officeholders who switched from Democrat to Republican in the 1990s; see McKee et al. 2016). But perhaps even more important, because party switching among incumbent politicians is a rarity even when it ramps up (McKee and Yoshinaka 2015), was the extraordinarily high number of political amateurs who decided to make a run for Congress and actually were successful. From 1992 to 1996, when the southern GOP made its greatest gains in U.S. House contests, 56 percent of newly elected Republicans had no previous elective officeholding experience (McKee 2010, 132). As discussed, after 1996 a new Republican electoral equilibrium set in, and with this greater certainty and electoral stability, the behavior of ambitious politicians returned to a more typical pattern in which the most viable candidates (typically gauged in terms of money and previous elective experience) behaved strategically (Jacobson and Kernell 1983) by winning the lion's share of the most electorally promising congressional districts (i.e., open seats and those with vulnerable incumbents).<sup>8</sup>

### BOX 5.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF PARTY SWITCHING TO THE GOP

Party switching among officeholders in the United States is an exceedingly rare phenomenon. Nevertheless, this uncommon event has been much more prevalent in the American South than in the rest of the nation because of the pronounced partisan realignment from Democratic hegemony to Republican dominance. At higher rungs up the electoral ladder, it is even more seldom that a sitting lawmaker will commit the ultimate act of partisan betrayal by defecting to the opposite party or going from a party affiliation to political independence. Table 5.5 displays the population of sitting members of Congress representing southern states who switched parties, from 1964 to the last occurrence in 2009. There has been a total of 17 southern congressional party switchers over this period; 3 Senators and 14 House Representatives. One of the evident distinctions in southern party switching is subregional. All of the 9 Deep South legislators switched from Democrat to Republican (D to R), whereas two of the 8 Peripheral South legislators at least initially switched from Democrat to Independent (D to I), while the other half-dozen switched from Democrat to Republican. From 1964 to 1989, 5 of the 7 switches were undertaken by Peripheral South lawmakers (the 2 Deep South switches took place

*(Continued)*

(Continued)

**TABLE 5.5 ■ Congressional Party Switchers in the South, 1964–2009**

Legislator	State	Chamber	Year of Switch	Direction of Switch
Strom Thurmond	SC	Senate	1964	D to R
Albert Watson	SC	House	1964	D to R
Harry F. Byrd, Jr.	VA	Senate	1970	D to I
Phil Gramm	TX	House	1983	D to R
Andy Ireland	FL	House	1984	D to R
Bill Grant	FL	House	1989	D to R
Tommy Robinson	AR	House	1989	D to R
Richard Shelby	AL	Senate	1994	D to R
Nathan Deal	GA	House	1995	D to R
Greg Laughlin	TX	House	1995	D to R
Billy Tauzin	LA	House	1995	D to R
Mike Parker	MS	House	1995	D to R
Jimmy Hayes	LA	House	1995	D to R
Virgil Goode, Jr.	VA	House	2000; 2002	D to I; I to R
Ralph Hall	TX	House	2004	D to R
Rodney Alexander	LA	House	2004	D to R
Parker Griffith	AL	House	2009	D to R

*Source:* This table has been modified from Yoshinaka (2016, 11) to show only the data on southern members of Congress.

in 1964 by South Carolinians Strom Thurmond and Albert Watson). From the 1990s to the most recent switch in 2009, when the turn to the GOP hastened in all contests below the presidential level, 70 percent (7 out of 10) of defections were carried out by Deep South lawmakers.

Recent scholarship on party switching has revealed many of the factors conditioning the likelihood of defecting. First, as mentioned, the broader political milieu in which Dixie has made a hard shift in favor of the GOP accounts for why the bulk of party switching has taken place in this region (McKee et al. 2016) and why it has overwhelmingly been of the D-to-R variety (more than 90 percent among members of Congress and state legislators; see Yoshinaka 2012, 2016; and this D-to-R defection rate almost certainly holds among southern politicians representing other offices, too). In the case of state legislators, which is a much higher number than members of Congress (more than 250 state legislative party

switchers from 1980 to the present; see Yoshinaka 2012), in the narrower context of the district environment where most of these switchers find themselves, a D-to-R switch is more likely if the percentage of the minority population (black and Latino) is lower, average household income is higher, and the percentage of residents who attended college (but did not graduate) is lower (McKee and Yoshinaka 2015; Yoshinaka 2012).

In addition, expressly political factors have also played a role in the decision to switch parties. The election of a Republican governor increases the number of D-to-R switchers, and in fact, there have been several occasions when the number of switches occurring after a Republican wins the governorship has been enough to turn a Republican legislative minority into a GOP majority (some examples of this so-called pivotal switch, as dubbed by Yoshinaka 2012, 358–359, occurred in the Georgia Senate in 2002; the South Carolina House in 1994 and the South Carolina Senate in 2001; the Tennessee Senate in 1995; the Mississippi Senate in 2007; the Louisiana Senate in 2011). Party switches are also more likely to take place if the lawmaker is not a member of the majority party (McKee and Yoshinaka 2015) and during a redistricting (McKee and Yoshinaka 2015; Yoshinaka 2012).

As stated above, more than 250 state legislators have switched parties in the South since 1980, and the rate of switching picked up considerably in the 1990s, when thereafter almost 200 of these switches occurred. Similar to the dynamic found among the much smaller number of congressional party switchers, Deep South state lawmakers comprise a clear majority of defectors from 1980 onward—roughly 80 percent of all D-to-R switches (Yoshinaka 2012, 362). This subregional difference reflects the reality that in more recent decades the GOP has become much stronger in the Deep South (see chapter 8), and many of these Democratic legislators rightly realized that barring a switch they would be left behind. Further, because the southern GOP has become so dominant at most levels of elective officeholding, not surprisingly, politicians with progressive ambition (wanting to hold a higher office) are notably more likely to switch from the Democratic Party to the GOP (Yoshinaka 2012). There are numerous examples of southern politicians climbing the electoral ranks who at one time switched from Democrat to Republican (e.g., Governors Rick Perry of Texas, Sonny Perdue of Georgia, David Beasley of South Carolina, Mike Foster and Buddy Roemer of Louisiana). Indeed, prior to the 1990s when the rarity of party switching became more frequent, Canon and Sousa (1992, 358) estimate that more than 40 percent of southern members of Congress and state officeholders affiliated with the Republican Party were, at one time, Democrats.

Party switching is an infrequent occurrence because it generally comes at a considerable electoral price. Switchers are much more likely to lose vote share and reelection, compared to nonswitchers (Grose 2004; Grose and Yoshinaka 2003), as a consequence of the backlash incurred by voters who feel betrayed, and perhaps to a lesser extent because voters of the party the switcher defects to are not entirely welcoming of the newly minted party member. Perhaps former Democratic Alabama Congressman Glen Browder (not a party switcher) said it best: “switchers have a difficulty. Democrats are mad at them for leaving, Republicans fault them because they’re a Johnny-come-lately. Their old friends hate them and their new

*(Continued)*

(Continued)

friends don't trust them" (Glaser 2001, 75). Nevertheless, some politicians take the plunge, and most likely because a long political career in southern politics has become more and more promising under the GOP label, especially if one wants to climb to the top of the electoral ladder (i.e., governor, senator) where Republicans are most dominant. Party switching is a phenomenon that is worthy of greater examination, and particularly in the context of southern politics where Yoshinaka (2012, 357) rightly claims that it is a fundamental feature of Republican "party building in the South."

## Senate Elections

It is somewhat surprising to see that in Table 5.3, after 1990, the Republican share of southern U.S. Senate seats is lower than the percentage of Republican U.S. House districts (32 percent versus 34 percent). But with a much smaller total number of Senate seats ( $N = 22$ ; there were 116 southern congressional districts in 1990), if several are up for election in the same cycle and it proves to be a favorable year for one party (e.g., Republicans in 2004), then the overall partisan composition of the Senate delegation can change markedly. Also, in keeping with the dynamic of Republican top-down advancement, historically, southern Republicans have had more success in races for the upper chamber versus those for the U.S. House (Black and Black 1987).

When Republican Ronald Reagan was elected President in 1980, he brought in a U.S. Senate majority. But the GOP majority was short-lived; when many of the 1980 freshman class stood for reelection in 1986, they were defeated and Democrats regained control. In the South, Republicans accounted for 45.5 percent of the Senate delegation in 1980 (10 total); there were 11 Democratic Senators (50 percent) and one independent, Virginia Senator Harry F. Byrd, Jr. In 1986, seven southern states (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina, and South Carolina) had U.S. Senate contests and the GOP lost all seven! After the Democrats' clean sweep in the 1986 elections, the southern U.S. Senate delegation consisted of just 27 percent Republicans (6 out of 22). Thus, the reason the GOP held a slightly higher share of U.S. House seats than U.S. Senate seats heading into the 1990s was the unusually poor performance in the 1986 midterm.

Although the incumbency advantage also factors into Senate elections, it is not nearly as important as in House contests. Recall that from the end of World War II through 2014, House incumbents had a 92 percent reelection rate versus an 80 percent reelection rate for Senate incumbents. There are some easily identifiable reasons for why it is more difficult to maintain a Senate seat. First, Senators are more likely to face stiffer competition because most ambitious contenders would rather be U.S. Senators (1 out of 100) than U.S. House Representatives (1 out



of 435). Simply put, Senators have more visibility and more power in the workings of the federal government. There is a joke that when a Senator wakes up in the morning she sees a president of the United States. Not many House members feel this way, and if they do, then they better find their way to the Senate because many more presidents have entered the White House via the Senate (most recently, Barack Obama).

Second, state boundaries are constant and, as a general rule, a state's population will be more demographically diverse than any given congressional district. With greater demographic diversity comes more variability in voter preferences, and therefore it is a taller task to satisfy the demands of a state's electorate than a district's electorate. In the South, there is not a single state in which the population is so small that it contains an at-large congressional district, which means that the district is equivalent to the boundaries of the state (there are currently seven states with at-large districts because their state populations are so small). In states with multiple congressional districts, when one party controls redistricting (like Texas Republicans in 2004), the districts can be drawn in a multitude of ways, but a common strategy for the party in charge is to concentrate the minority party opposition into a smaller number of districts where they can easily win and then maximize the number of winnable districts for the majority party. Under this scenario, the minority party casts many more "wasted" votes because their districts could still be won if their share of supporters were spread more evenly across a greater number of districts (what the majority party does with its voters). All this is to say that district boundaries are easily manipulated, and numerous House incumbents have safe districts because they are purposely drawn so that one party's voters dominate the district. As much as Senators might prefer an alteration to their constituency, it is whatever the state voting electorate happens to be when they run for reelection.

Finally, because of their higher profile, it has proven more difficult for Senators to distance themselves from the positions taken by their national party. This is a two-edged sword, and more recently it has definitely worked to the electoral advantage of southern Republicans. On the one hand, if the positions of the national party are popular and/or the election cycle is favorable to a Senator's party, then reelection is almost assured. On the other hand, and this has played out in Dixie, if one party is generally favored over the other, then association with the more unpopular party makes it much more difficult to win election. Nationally, the Democratic Party has a liberal persona and the GOP opposition is correctly characterized as very conservative (Theriault and Rohde 2011). Over the last several decades the parties have grown increasingly ideologically polarized in Congress (Fleisher and Bond 2004; Hetherington 2001), and this makes it more difficult for voters to evaluate any given Senator separately from their opinions of the incumbent's party affiliation.

In Dixie, which party a Senate candidate associates with is decidedly more important than the incumbency advantage. Incumbency matters less in southern

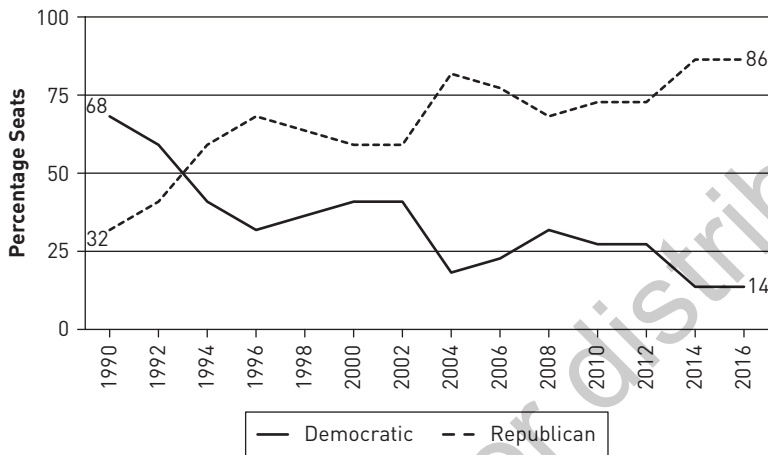
Senate contests because the GOP dominates most states in the region (Hayes and McKee 2008). Similar to presidential contests, which are statewide affairs, because the contemporary parties are now so ideologically differentiable (Democrats are liberals and Republicans are conservatives; Levendusky 2009), if a state clearly tilts in favor of one party, then Senate candidates of the preferred party will be advantaged irrespective of incumbency. In contemporary southern politics, there exist only a handful of battleground states, those in which statewide contests (usually thought of in terms of presidential elections) are consistently competitive. For instance, in the 2016 presidential election in the South, most political observers only considered Florida, North Carolina, and Virginia to be swing states. And in hindsight, Virginia was more aptly classified as a Democratic-leaning state than as a battleground. The remaining eight southern states were appropriately viewed as Republican locks.

To the extent that lower-level elections have come to take on the dynamics of presidential elections, this development is referred to as *nationalization*. American politics is currently experiencing a heavy dose of nationalization (Jacobson and Carson 2016), and this is especially true in the South. In fact, Republican top-down advancement in southern electoral politics is just a specific variant of nationalization. Southern Senate elections, in particular, have become extremely nationalized affairs. This explains why in 2002, with a popular Republican President George W. Bush, fellow Texan Republican Senate nominee John Cornyn boiled down his candidacy matter-of-factly: a vote for him was a vote for the president. Likewise, in 2014, when Louisiana Democratic Senator Mary Landrieu went down to defeat (the last Democratic Senator in the Deep South's delegation until Doug Jones prevailed in the 2017 special election in Alabama), it was impossible for her to escape from underneath the massively unfavorable impression that most (white) Louisiana voters harbored with respect to President Obama.

Figure 5.5 displays the percentage of southern Senate seats held by Democrats and Republicans from 1990 to 2016. The short-term Republican surge from 1992 to 1996 is reminiscent of the pattern observed in southern U.S. House elections (see Figure 5.4), but then the next notable GOP jump takes place in 2004 when there were seven contests (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina, and South Carolina—the same seven states that proved disastrous for southern Republicans in 1986) and Republicans only lost one (Arkansas), to go from 59 percent of the southern Senate delegation in 2002 to 82 percent in 2004. Southern Republicans are reduced to 68 percent of the delegation in the 2008 Democratic tide and then recover one seat in 2010 (73 percent) and hold this number until netting 3 more seats in 2014—an 86 percent southern Senate majority maintained through 2016.

Similar to Table 5.4 for southern U.S. House elections, Table 5.6 shows the number of Republican Senate seats according to each southern state from 1990 to

**FIGURE 5.5** ■ Southern U.S. Senate Seats Controlled by the Major Parties, 1990–2016



Sources: Data compiled by the author from *The Almanac of American Politics* (1992–2016 editions). The 2016 data are from the *New York Times* (<http://www.nytimes.com/elections/results/senate>).

Note: The percentage of Democratic and Republican seats is out of the total southern U.S. Senate seats.

2016. It is more intuitive to make sense of the numbers in Table 5.6 as compared to Table 5.4 because there are, of course, only two U.S. Senators in every state. Therefore, a 0 denotes two Democratic Senators, a bracketed 1 indicates a split delegation (1 Democrat and 1 Republican), and a boldface 2 means that both Senators are Republicans. In 1990, only in the Deep South state of Mississippi are both Senators Republicans (Thad Cochran and Trent Lott). Five states have split delegations (Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia), and in the five remaining states, Democrats have a monopoly (Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, and Tennessee).

After 1990, the Republican advance is set in motion. There are perhaps several different ways to discuss the rise in southern Senate Republicans in the table, but once again, the subregional distinction is useful, as is simply the general competitiveness of a state. Viewed in subregional terms, with the exception of Louisiana, where a split delegation lasts from 2004 to 2012, the other four Deep South states have been exclusively Republican in Senate elections since at least 2004: Georgia and South Carolina in 2004, Alabama in 1996, and Mississippi back in 1988. With proportionally larger African American populations and a more racially polarized electorate that has sorted along partisan lines (Hood, Kidd, and Morris 2012), contemporary Deep South politics essentially comes down to a battle between a minority Democratic Party controlled by African Americans and a majority

**TABLE 5.6 ■ The Increase in Republican U.S. Senators, 1990–2016**

Republicans	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016
Alabama	0	0	[1]	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Arkansas	0	0	0	[1]	[1]	[1]	0	0	0	0	[1]	[1]	2	2
Florida	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	0	0	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Georgia	0	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	0	[1]	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Louisiana	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	2	2
Mississippi	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
North Carolina	[1]	2	2	2	[1]	[1]	[1]	2	2	[1]	[1]	[1]	2	2
South Carolina	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Tennessee	0	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Texas	[1]	[1]	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Virginia	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	2	2	2	[1]	0	0	0	0	0
Total	7	9	13	15	14	13	13	18	17	15	16	16	19	19
N	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22
Republican %	32	41	59	68	64	59	59	82	77	68	73	73	86	86

Sources: Data compiled by the author from various issues of *The Almanac of American Politics* (1992–2016 editions). The 2016 data are from the *New York Times* (<http://www.nytimes.com/elections/results/house>).

Note: Numbers in bold indicate a Republican majority and bracketed numbers indicate a split delegation.

Republican Party that is overwhelmingly white (Black and Black 2012; McKee and Springer 2015). Under these conditions, it is very difficult, absent a political scandal, for Deep South Republican Senators to lose to Democratic challengers, especially when the challenger is African American (a more likely occurrence in Deep South Senate races).<sup>9</sup>

The much greater attachment of Deep South whites to the GOP consequently makes these five southern states much less competitive than most of their Peripheral South counterparts. With respect to competitiveness, Tennessee and Texas have been Republican redoubts for a long time in presidential elections and therefore, not surprisingly, these states have both consisted of strictly Republican Senate delegations since the 1994 “Republican Revolution” (Glass 2007). For most of the period under examination, Senate contests in Arkansas have been fairly competitive, but of late the state has moved in an increasingly deep red direction (Dowdle and Giammo 2014; Parry and Barth 2014). This leaves Florida, North Carolina, and Virginia; the three southern states that Democrat Barack Obama won in 2008. Due in part to the considerable northern in-migration of Democrats from the Northeast (McKee and Teigen 2016), the changing demographics in these states appear to favor the Democratic Party and they are the most competitive in statewide elections. In 2014 and 2016, the most recent elections in Table 5.6, Florida had a split Senate delegation (the typical outcome in the Sunshine State), both Virginia Senators were Democrats, and although both North Carolina Senators are Republicans, in the 2016 election the Republican incumbent Richard Burr won 53 percent of the two-party vote.

## Presidential Elections

Because the GOP has dominated southern presidential politics going back to the late 1960s, there necessarily is not a notable dynamic evident in these contests from 1992 to 2016. This said, as the GOP has risen in electoral prominence below the presidential level, presidential elections since the early 1990s have actually become slightly more competitive. After two southern sweeps in 1984 and 1988, the Democratic Arkansan Bill Clinton managed to win four southern states in 1992 and 1996. But then the Republican Texan George W. Bush ran the table in Dixie in 2000 and 2004. Despite being a northerner, or as so many Republicans mistakenly believe, a Muslim and a foreigner (Jacobson 2011), but undoubtedly an exotic species of candidate for the typical southern voter, with impressive minority support, Barack Obama picked off three southern states in 2008 and two more in 2012. In 2016, the most unconventional major party nominee in American history, Republican Donald Trump, won every southern state but Virginia.

The presidency is the most politically influential office in shaping the American political system, and what happens in presidential elections has international, national, and regional implications. Because the presidency is the grandest political

stage, the positions that the major party nominees take on the most important issues of the day not only guide voters in the short run, but over the long term, the party coalitions are altered as a result of the agendas pursued and championed by presidential hopefuls. For instance, the Republican southern strategy of appealing to the racial conservatism of southern white voters (Phillips 1969) began with Goldwater in 1964 and with few exceptions, it has been a winner in Dixie's presidential politics ever since. The GOP finally put down its anchor in southern electoral politics because of its success in courting the majority white electorate in presidential elections. And as the national profiles of the major parties began to reverse course on the issue of civil rights and then later on social issues, candidates for lower level federal offices and state and local offices began to adjust their positions accordingly so that presidentially induced nationalization of American politics is pervasive. Now, if a southern Democrat tries to convince a given electorate that he is more conservative than his Republican opponent it is unlikely to be a credible argument. Conversely, a southern Republican would probably be laughed at for claiming to be more liberal (or at least moderate) than her Democratic opponent. Presidential elections have been the primary driver of this contemporary partisan sorting of voters into their respective and opposing ideological camps (Levendusky 2009).

Table 5.7 presents southern presidential outcomes from 1992 to 2016 based on Electoral College (EC) data. As the Republican South was just starting to flex its muscles in elections below the presidential level, the Democrat Bill Clinton turned in two impressive political showings in 1992 and 1996. In 1988, Republican President George H. W. Bush won the EC votes of all eleven southern states, but in his 1992 reelection, Clinton defeated Bush in his home state of Arkansas, his

**TABLE 5.7 ■ Electoral College Votes in the South, 1992–2016**

Election	Democrat	Republican	Rep % (Votes)	Winner
1992	B. Clinton	G. Bush	74 (147)	Democrat
1996	B. Clinton	B. Dole	65 (147)	Democrat
2000	A. Gore	G. W. Bush	100 (147)	Republican
2004	J. Kerry	G. W. Bush	100 (153)	Republican
2008	B. Obama	J. McCain	64 (153)	Democrat
2012	B. Obama	M. Romney	74 (160)	Democrat
2016	H. R. Clinton	D. Trump	91 (160)	Republican

Source: Data compiled by the author from Dave Leip's *Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections* (<http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/>).

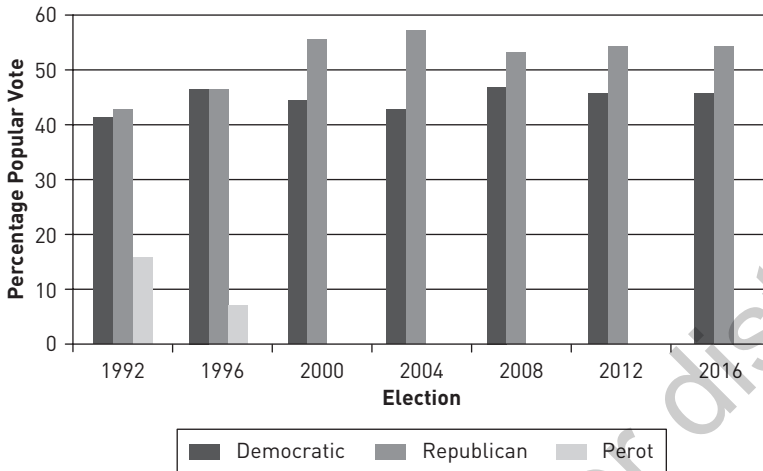
Note: In 2016, there were two unfaithful Trump electors in Texas; one cast his presidential vote for John Kasich and the other for Ron Paul.

running mate Al Gore's native Tennessee, and also in the Deep South states of Georgia and Louisiana. Four years later, President Clinton held onto Arkansas, Tennessee, and Louisiana, but he lost Georgia while picking up the largest and hence most coveted battleground state: Florida. Bush Senior's son George W. Bush emerged as a natural fit for the white southern electorate in 2000, defeating Al Gore in every southern state, including Tennessee. In 2004, with his approval rating still high but steadily receding from the historic boost from his response to the terrorist attacks on 9/11/01 (Jacobson 2007a), President Bush easily dispatched his Yankee Democratic opponent, Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts. The Texan made history for being the only Republican to ever sweep Dixie's EC votes in both of his successful presidential runs.

In 2008 and 2012, with respect to his share of EC votes, the Democrat Barack Obama was as competitive as his southern Democratic predecessor Bill Clinton was. But unlike Clinton, a southerner capable of appealing to a nontrivial share of white southerners, the emergence of Barack Obama ushered in a more polarizing dynamic with respect to the southern presidential electorate. Whereas Bill Clinton made deep inroads with southern white rural voters (McKee 2007), this population could not stomach Barack Obama (Arbour and Teigen 2011). Instead, Obama forged a formidable coalition among minorities, women, the young, the highly educated, and Democratic-inclined northern transplants. In 2008 this political formula proved successful in southern states with an abundance of these groups: Florida, North Carolina, and Virginia. Four years hence, Obama carried Florida and Virginia, but he came up short in North Carolina, a true battleground state that has nonetheless experienced a hard-right turn in its state and local politics.

With the presidential election open for the first time in eight years, former first lady, New York Senator, and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton did her best to reassemble the vaunted "Obama coalition," but in a year in which a very disgruntled and active Republican opposition mobilized for change, she came up short against the Republican (and erstwhile Democrat) real estate mogul and celebrity entertainer Donald Trump. In the South, Clinton only managed to carry her running mate Tim Kaine's Virginia, which makes sense because in statewide elections it has emerged as the most competitive southern state (Rozell 2018). Indeed, the Old Dominion is best characterized as light blue and getting darker. Trump's 91 percent haul of Dixie's 160 EC votes is reminiscent of the more typical dominant showing turned in by Republican presidential nominees.

Because, in every state but Maine and Nebraska, EC votes are awarded in a winner-take-all fashion, it is necessary to examine the popular vote breakdown to get a more accurate sense of how competitive southern presidential elections have been from 1992 to 2016. Figure 5.6 presents the South-wide popular vote cast for the major party presidential candidates for the aforementioned span of elections, and because of Ross Perot's impressive popular showings in 1992 and 1996, the popular vote is parceled three ways in these two contests.<sup>10</sup> In 1992, Perot won 16 percent of

**FIGURE 5.6** ■ Popular Presidential Vote in the South, 1992–2016

Source: Data compiled by the author from Dave Leip's *Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections* (<http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/>).

Note: The popular vote is the percentage of Democratic and Republican out of the two-party vote total except for 1992 and 1996. In these elections, the vote is out of the total cast for the Democrat (Clinton), Republican (Bush/Dole), and Independent/Reform Party (Perot).

Dixie's presidential votes and thus denied either major party candidate of coming close to a majority (Bush was the plurality winner with 43 percent). Perot was no longer the darling outsider in 1996, and his decline in the popular vote reflects this (7 percent), but a generally overlooked fact in Clinton's reelection (but see Lamis 1999) is that although Clinton won just 35 percent of Dixie's EC votes, he was actually the plurality popular vote winner (outperforming his Kansan Republican opponent Bob Dole by a sliver: 24,229 votes separating the two candidates out of over 24 million cast).

The competitiveness of the 1992 and 1996 presidential elections receded in 2000 and 2004 when Republican George W. Bush not only twice swept the South's EC votes, but in doing so he won 56 and 57 percent of the popular vote in these respective years. Although in 2000 Bush easily won the popular vote in most southern states, the presidency hung in the balance, based on the outcome in Florida (Ceaser and Busch 2001). Whoever won the Sunshine State would become the next President because its 25 EC votes would be enough to deliver an EC majority (a minimum of 270 EC votes). In a bitterly disputed vote recount followed by a Supreme Court decision (*Bush v. Gore*) that halted the counting of presidential ballots in the Sunshine State, a month after Election Day George W. Bush was declared the winner with a jaw-dropping 537 two-party popular vote margin that gave the Republican 271 total EC votes.



In 2008 and 2012, Democrat Barack Obama managed to reduce the southern Republican popular presidential vote shares in these contests (Republicans John McCain won 53 percent in 2008 and Mitt Romney won 54 percent in 2012). And interestingly, in 2016, in terms of the percentage of the popular presidential vote, Donald Trump virtually mirrored Romney's 2012 performance. Of course, 2016 was anything but a typical year in presidential politics. The rise of Trump took the entire political class by surprise. And with respect to election outcomes, 2016 will go down as another one of those rarities where, as was true in 2000, the popular vote winner (Gore in 2000; Clinton in 2016) was not the EC victor (Bush in 2000; Trump in 2016). Unlike Bush before him, Trump did not owe his election to the South; it was made possible by a surprising Republican shift in three states that had not been won by the GOP since the 1980s (Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin). However, the fairly competitive popular vote in the South is not really a sign of Republican vulnerability, if viewed through a national lens. Although Trump won 57 percent of the total votes cast in the EC, Clinton won 51 percent of the national popular two-party vote. So, even though Trump's national popular vote share was underwater (below 50 percent), in Dixie he outperformed his overall popular vote share by 5.5 percentage points.

## STATEWIDE CONTESTS

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Although not as nationalized as U.S. Senate elections have become (McKee and Sievert 2017), southern gubernatorial contests clearly exhibit the impressive forward march of the contemporary GOP. As the most important and politically influential office in the context of state politics, the governorship is sort of like a miniature version of the American presidency. With its executive role and command over the laws in each state, perhaps it is no wonder that the most promising path to the White House has been via the governor's mansion, and several southern chief executives have made this transition (e.g., Jimmy Carter in 1976; Bill Clinton in 1992; George W. Bush in 2000).

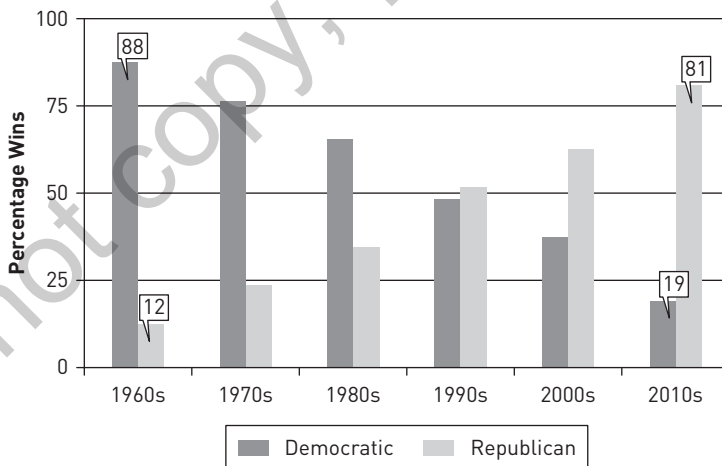
Primarily due to the electoral threat that Republican presidential success would have in boosting the performances in down-ballot races like gubernatorial elections, the timing of most of these contests has served as a barrier to the possible contagion effects of presidential politics. Thus, in the 1960s to 1980s, southern Democratic leaders understood that holding gubernatorial elections in "off-years" was a wise idea (Black and Black 1987). In fact, North Carolina is the only southern state to hold its governor's race in a presidential year; the rest either hold their contests in even-numbered midterms (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas), odd-numbered midterms prior to presidential years (Louisiana and Mississippi), or odd-numbered midterms after presidential years (Virginia). The length of term for all southern governors is four years (this has not always been true;

e.g., Arkansas used to have two-year terms for governor) and except for Virginia, which has a one-term limit, the other ten southern states allow for a consecutive two-term limit.<sup>11</sup> Texas is the only southern state without a gubernatorial term limit, and most recently, Republican Governor Rick Perry served from 2000 to 2014, the longest serving executive in Lone Star State history.

There are such a large number of southern congressional districts that it is sensible to present data on them for every two years when all U.S. House seats are up for election. And with 22 southern U.S. Senate seats, displaying changes in two-year increments is feasible even though only a third of the seats are up because of the equal staggering of these six-year term offices. However, there are only 11 southern governorships and therefore, in Figure 5.7, Republican success rates are displayed according to decade, starting with the 1960s. The ascendancy of the GOP is palpable as the percentage of Democratic wins exhibits a step-down pattern in each decade while the share of Republican victories steps upwards over the same period. Out of a total of 32 southern gubernatorial elections in the 1960s, the GOP came away with only 5 victories. By contrast, in the 2010s (through 2016), out of 21 governor's races, Republicans have won all but 4.

Currently, in the eleven-governor southern delegation, there are three Democrats: Louisiana's John Bel Edwards, North Carolina's Roy Cooper, and

**FIGURE 5.7** ■ Partisan Wins in Gubernatorial Elections by Decade, 1960s–2010s



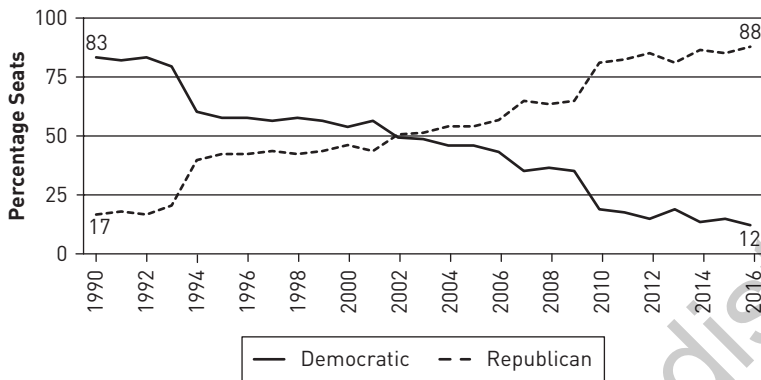
Source: Data compiled by the author.

Notes: For each decade, the total number of contests is as follows: 1960s = 32; 1970s = 34; 1980s = 26; 1990s = 31; 2000s = 24; and 2010s = 21. The data run through 2016, and thus the Democratic gubernatorial victory in 2017 in Virginia is not included in the 2010s data displayed in the figure.

Virginia's Ralph Northam. Although not accounted for in the figure, in the first southern gubernatorial election since Trump was elected President in 2016, in Virginia's 2017 open-seat contest, Northam handily beat his Republican opponent Ed Gillespie by 9 percentage points (54.5 to 45.5 percent of the two-party vote). Whereas Virginia is clearly trending blue, the election of Edwards and Cooper, however, speak to the importance of short-term political conditions that aided these Democrats. Particularly in the deep red Pelican State, it now takes a situation very favorable for Democrats to be competitive in statewide elections. This was so in 2015 when Edwards triumphed because, by all accounts, the departing Republican Governor Bobby Jindal was one of the main reasons why the state was reduced to financial ruin. In addition, Edwards' Republican rival was the highly unpopular and scandal-plagued Senator David Vitter.<sup>12</sup> Likewise, in the Tar Heel State, Cooper was the benefactor of running against the polarizing and controversial incumbent Republican Pat McCrory who, among several missteps, provoked national outrage over his defense of a "bathroom bill" that made it a crime for transgendered persons to use a facility that did not match the sex on their birth certificate.

Usually examinations of statewide elections start and end with the gubernatorial office. Fortunately, there are numerous other statewide nonjudicial elective offices that are up for election at the same time as the governorship.<sup>13</sup> And the range in the number of offices is considerable. For instance, in Tennessee the governorship is the only statewide elective office, but every other southern state has at least three statewide elective offices (the modal number is seven); and with a total of ten, North Carolina has the most. Because of some changes (like changing an elective position to appointed, as was the case for Florida's Secretary of State position in 2002), the total number of southern statewide elective offices has slightly varied from 1990 to 2016, but the sum has never been less than 74.

Figure 5.8 documents the percentage of southern Democrats and Republicans in statewide elective offices from 1990 to 2016. Including gubernatorial contests along with all the other statewide elective positions reveals an astounding partisan transformation. As late as 1990, Republicans held only 17 percent of statewide elective offices and their Democratic opposition controlled the other 83 percent. The first Republican seat majority surfaces in the 2002 midterm, and the GOP has not looked back since. In 2016, the GOP had reached its apex in southern statewide elective officeholding—88 percent of 74 positions, thus leaving Democrats with a total of nine seats. Of all the data presented in this chapter, the partisan reversal in southern statewide elective officeholding are the most remarkable. Among the current Democratic total of nine seats, seven of them reside in the Peripheral South. In the entire 39-seat Deep South delegation, prior to John Bel Edwards' Louisiana gubernatorial victory in 2015, for the previous four years, Mississippi Democratic Attorney General Jim Hood was the only statewide-elected Democrat.

**FIGURE 5.8** ■ The Rise of Southern Republicans in Statewide Offices, 1990–2016

Sources: Data collected by the author from Secretary of State websites and *The Green Papers* ([www.thegreenpapers.com/](http://www.thegreenpapers.com/)).

Notes: From 1990 to 2001, there were a total of 78 statewide offices (40 in the Deep South and 38 in the Peripheral South). Florida and Louisiana altered their number of statewide elective offices after 2001, so that there were 75 in 2002 (40 in the Deep South and 35 in the Peripheral South). Since 2003, there are a total of 74 statewide offices (39 in the Deep South and 35 in the Peripheral South). A list of all statewide offices for each state will be made available by the author upon request.

## STATE LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS

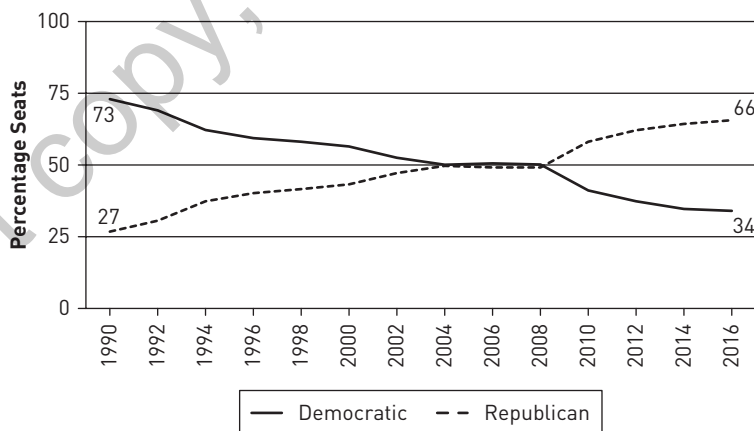
Outside of truly local elections like county commissioner, state legislative contests are often considered the bottom rung of the electoral ladder for those politicians who harbor progressive ambition (Schlesinger 1966). But in the aggregate, these elections are very important because they are a perennial stepping stone to other offices (Yoshinaka and McKee 2017), and particularly the U.S. House, where typically half of that body's members come from state legislatures (Jacobson 2009a). In the heyday of the Democratic Solid South, there was never a fear in any southern state legislative delegation that the GOP would wrest majority control of the seats. And this viewpoint was correct; it took many years after southern Republicans won majority control of U.S. Senate and U.S. House seats for southern state legislative seats to follow suit. Specifically, it was not until the 2010 midterm that southern Republicans managed to win a resounding majority of state senate and state house seats. State legislative elections were the last political domino to fall into the hands of southern Republicans.

Although there is considerable variation in statutory provisions applicable to state legislative elections (e.g., the timing of elections, term lengths, term limits, multimember/single-member districts, number of legislators in the upper and lower chambers), the sheer size of the southern state legislative delegation (1,782 total

seats) makes it easy to justify looking at the data in even-year two-year increments despite the fact that, as pointed out with regard to gubernatorial elections, many states hold these contests in odd years. As shown in Figure 5.9, southern Democrats in 1990 controlled 73 percent of state legislative seats (upper and lower chambers combined) versus just 27 percent for the GOP. It was not until the new millennium that Republican electoral parity materialized, and thereafter the two major parties held an almost even number of seats until a Republican margin opened up in 2010. Since 2010, the GOP has expanded upon its state legislative seat majority with 66 percent in 2016 as compared to 34 percent for Democrats.

In line with the data displayed for U.S. House seats (Table 5.4) and U.S. Senate seats (Table 5.6), Tables 5.8 and 5.9 show the number of Republican state legislators in each southern state legislative delegation from 1990 to 2016 for the state senate and state house, respectively. Once again, bracketed numbers indicate a split delegation and boldface numbers denote a GOP majority. Beginning with the southern state senate delegation, in 1990 there was not a single state with a Republican majority. The Florida GOP led the way to a majority, achieving a split delegation in 1992 and then Republican control in 1994. In 1996, Texas Republicans were the next to topple the Democratic state senate majority. Virginia Republicans followed in 1998, but their Democratic opponents won back a senate majority for two cycles and then there was a split delegation in 2012 that finally reverted back to GOP control in 2014. The

**FIGURE 5.9** ■ Southern State Legislative Seats Controlled by the Major Parties, 1990–2016



Sources: Data compiled by the author from various issues of *The Almanac of American Politics* (1992–2016 editions). The 2016 data are from the National Conference of State Legislatures (<http://www.ncsl.org/research/about-state-legislatures/partisan-composition.aspx>).

Note: The percentage of Democratic and Republican seats is out of the total southern state legislative seats.

**TABLE 5.8 ■ The Increase in Republican State Senators, 1990–2016**

Republicans	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016
Alabama	7	8	12	12	12	11	10	10	12	13	22	23	26	26
Arkansas	4	5	7	7	6	8	8	8	8	8	15	21	24	26
Florida	17	[20]	21	23	25	25	26	26	26	26	28	26	26	25
Georgia	11	15	21	22	22	24	30	34	34	34	36	38	38	38
Louisiana	6	6	7	14	14	14	13	15	15	15	20	24	26	25
Mississippi	9	14	15	18	18	18	23	24	27	25	27	32	32	32
North Carolina	14	11	23	20	15	15	22	21	19	20	31	32	34	35
South Carolina	11	16	18	20	22	24	25	27	26	27	27	28	28	28
Tennessee	14	14	15	15	15	15	15	17	[16]	19	19	26	28	28
Texas	8	13	14	17	16	16	19	19	20	19	19	19	20	20
Virginia	10	18	18	[20]	21	21	23	24	23	19	18	[20]	21	21
Total	111	140	171	188	186	191	214	225	226	225	262	289	303	304
N	457	457	457	457	457	457	457	457	457	457	457	457	457	457
Republican %	24	31	37	41	41	42	47	49	49	49	57	63	66	67

Sources: Data compiled by the author from various issues of *The Almanac of American Politics* (1992–2016 editions). The 2016 data are from the National Conference of State Legislatures (<http://www.ncsl.org/research/about-state-legislatures/partisan-composition.aspx>).

Note: Numbers in bold indicate a Republican majority and bracketed numbers indicate a split chamber.

**TABLE 5.9 ■ The Increase in Republican State Representatives, 1990–2016**

Republicans	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016
Alabama	23	23	32	34	36	37	42	42	43	43	66	66	72	72
Arkansas	8	10	12	14	25	30	30	28	25	28	45	51	63	76
Florida	46	49	57	<b>61</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>79</b>
Georgia	35	52	66	74	78	75	73	<b>99</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>118</b>
Louisiana	18	16	17	27	27	34	34	37	41	50	52	58	58	60
Mississippi	18	27	31	36	37	33	35	47	47	48	50	<b>63</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>72</b>
North Carolina	38	42	<b>68</b>	<b>61</b>	54	58	[60]	57	52	52	<b>67</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>74</b>
South Carolina	42	50	<b>63</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>80</b>
Tennessee	42	36	40	38	40	41	45	46	46	49	<b>64</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>74</b>
Texas	57	59	61	68	72	72	<b>88</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>94</b>
Virginia	39	41	47	46	49	<b>52</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>66</b>
Total	366	405	494	528	555	579	626	661	650	651	773	818	843	865
N	1,325	1,325	1,325	1,325	1,325	1,325	1,325	1,325	1,325	1,325	1,325	1,325	1,325	1,325
Republican %	28	31	37	40	42	44	47	50	49	49	58	62	64	65

Sources: Data compiled by the author from various issues of *The Almanac of American Politics* (1992–2016 editions). The 2016 data are from the National Conference of State Legislatures (<http://www.ncsl.org/research/about-state-legislatures/partisan-composition.aspx>).

Note: Numbers in bold indicate a Republican majority and bracketed numbers indicate a split chamber.

Deep South states of South Carolina and Georgia registered Republican state senate majorities in 2000 and 2002, respectively. Tennessee in 2004 and then Mississippi in 2006 experience their first taste of GOP state senate control, which is then temporarily lost in the next election cycle and then regained thereafter. Not until 2010 do state senate Republicans in Alabama, Louisiana, and North Carolina assume majority control. And finally, pulling up the rear is Arkansas, which first attains a Republican state senate majority in 2012. After 2012, every single southern state senate delegation is majority Republican.

Although the state patterns of Republican advancement in southern state house delegations in Table 5.9 are somewhat different from those prevailing in the southern state senate elections displayed above, the generally steady and gradual rise is very similar. As was the case in the state senate, from 1990 to 1992 there is no southern state house delegation with a Republican majority. Rather than systematically discuss the order in which each southern state attains majority Republican status in the South's lower legislative chamber, notice that the overall percentage of state house Republicans closely tracks the share of their GOP state senate colleagues for every given two-year increment (e.g., 67 percent of southern state senators are Republicans in 2016 and 65 percent of southern state house representatives are Republicans in 2016). Since 2012, Republicans comprise the majority of state house members in all eleven southern states.

## THE PEAK OF REPUBLICAN HEGEMONY?

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In the 1980s, the cigarette company Virginia Slims placed billboards along Interstate 95 that showed an attractive female sunbather enjoying a nice smoke, with the headline "You've Come a Long Way, Baby." And since then, so have southern Republicans. As discussed in chapter 4, the deep GOP inroads paved by the likes of presidential hopefuls and presidents-elect, from Barry Goldwater in 1964 to Ronald Reagan in 1980, led to the rise of southern Republicans in all manner of lower level elective offices chronicled in this chapter. Simply put, the electoral evidence of GOP dominance in contemporary southern politics is incontrovertible. In fact, it makes one question whether GOP hegemony has finally reached its apex. Of course, only time will tell, but considering the general demographic trends in the southern electorate, in some states at least (like the battlegrounds of Florida and North Carolina and Democratic-leaning Virginia), there is reason for Democrats to be optimistic about their prospects for reclaiming a competitive position in district-based contests (U.S. House and state legislative elections).

But before considering the extent to which demographic changes can translate into a Democratic advantage (a subject explored in chapter 9), let us first consider why the southern GOP has come to dominate the political landscape. Mortality is



a universal condition and it can be the primary driver contributing to the rise and decline of political parties. In the South, as the national parties reversed themselves on civil rights in the 1960s and then later battled over other salient issues of concern to voters (e.g., abortion in the 1970s), the natural passing of each generation of southerners proved a major problem for the ruling Democratic Party. As will be demonstrated in the next chapter, as early as the 1950s, subsequent generations of southerners loosened their attachment to the Democratic Party, and eventually a critical mass of white southerners came to identify with the GOP. The manifestation of a southern white Republican voting majority via the process of generational change made it possible for the party to capture overwhelming political majorities in the various offices featured in this chapter, and that is the dynamic to which we now turn.

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