

The One Thing You Need to Know About Political Parties*

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The one thing you need to know about political parties is just this: a competitive party system is necessary for effective democracy. This basic idea is rather simple. Competition between or among political parties in elections, which is to say, in their quest to win political office, leads the parties, once in office, to respect the concerns, needs, and aspirations of the public who elected them. Or, perhaps one might say it leads politicians to respond to the concerns of those who can toss them out of office the next time around.¹ In this way, competitive political parties yield political outcomes that seek to give benefits to all.² No other political system can be counted on to reward the mass public consistently.³ An absence of incentives to reward the full electorate is not only true for all non-democratic systems, but it is also true for putatively democratic systems over which there is no genuine competition for office. When there is no competition, the incentive for office holders to reward the public lessens. It is the desire for office – and more importantly, the consistent risk of losing office – that provides the equally consistent motivation for political elites to pay attention to the public.

Here, we examine this claim by looking closely at the American South as it transformed from a one (or no) party system to a competitive two-party system in the wake of the Voting Rights and the Civil Rights Acts of the mid-1960s. We will especially be looking to see if the

¹ As V.O. Key put it (1949, 310), “ruling groups have so inveterate a habit of being wrong that the health of a democratic order demands that they be challenged and constantly compelled to prove their case.”

² Certainly, some times it may be one set of voters who are aided more than another set (e.g. Cingranelli 1981; Gerber and Lewis 2004), but over time, those losers can become winners. Miller (1983) offers a formal discussion of this and related issues. The major point is that it is the need to seek ways to form majorities of the public that favors competitive democracies over other, non-majoritarian, that is non-democratic, systems.

³ Bueno de Mesquita and others argue that officeholders respond to the “selectorate,” those whose support is needed to attain and retain office. In this view, democracy is distinct in being the particular form of government with the broadest selectorate – the whole electorate, that is, as compared to non-democratic systems that are distinct in having a vastly smaller selectorate and thus being responsive to the few rather than the many. See Bueno de Mesquita, et al., (1999).

emergence of a competitive party system is, in fact, associated with better political and social outcomes for the general public.

Are Parties Necessary for Democracy?

Scholars have put this point thusly: Parties (in the plural) are “inevitable” (Sartori 1968), “desirable” (Dahl 2003, 30), “necessary” and “central” (van Biezen 2004, x), “critical” and “essential” (Levitsky and Cameron 2003, 1, 5) for, and “endemic” (Stokes 1999, 246) to democracy. Democracy is “unthinkable” (Schattschneider 1942, 1), or perhaps just “unworkable” (Aldrich 1995, 3) without political parties.⁴ There is also considerable support for the view that “parties create[d] democracy” (Schattschneider 1942, 1; see also Aldrich 2007, Levitsky and Cameron 2003).⁵

Politicians may claim to want to be independent of all political parties, abhor partisan “bickering,” and seek to “rise above” the partisan fray. American Founders warned of the “baneful effects” of political parties (Washington). But they very quickly discovered that they needed political parties to achieve the desired benefits of a democracy. So, let us take this notion seriously and see if competitive parties are indeed necessary to make democracy effective.

⁴ For a dissenting view, see Diamond and Gunther (2001, x): “It would be too much to argue that institutionally strong parties are a necessary condition for consolidating democracy or maintaining its vitality.” How would representative government work without parties? Some have argued that interest groups can perform many of the functions parties do, including interest articulation (Clemens 1997). For proponents of this view it was no accident that the reforms of the 1880s and 1890s that were intended to limit the role of political parties in elections coincided with an uptick in the creation and activity of interest organizations (Clemens 1997; Wiebe 2001). However, most would agree that while interest groups compete with parties, they do not offer a real alternative to them by fielding candidates for office (Schattschneider 1942). In our view, there may be times when interest groups serve as a substitute for parties, as Hansen (1991) argues, but these are specialized and likely transient instances. And, even so, a political organization to serve those needs proved necessary. More commonly, interest groups combine with parties to help create the conditions for parties to succeed, as the religious right aligned with the Republican Party and the unions and civil rights groups aligned with the Democratic Party.

⁵ “[T]he full development of the liberal democratic state in the West required that political criticism and opposition be incarnated in one or more opposition parties” (Hofstadter 1969, xii).

Necessity requires, first, that we should observe that there is a system of competitive political parties in every democracy and. Second, that in the absence of party competition we should also observe the absence of true, effective democracy. While we could spend considerable time following what all scholars have meant by “competitive party system” let us simply state it as meaning that there are at least two political parties competing over the full range of elective political offices for lengthy durations. By “competitive” we mean that no one party is given distinct advantage in elections by the laws of the nation and that every party that wins any given election has a realistic opportunity to lose that office to another party or parties in the near future. Under this definition, a party might win, say, the U.S. presidency repeatedly, but they would enter each election with a serious concern about losing. Here we will consider whether the presence or absence of party competition comes not so much with the presence or absence of “true” democracy but whether the level of party competition is related to the delivery of the fruits of democracy reaching the public.

We will examine this relationship in what we believe to be a promising but also difficult test case – the American South over the last half-century. This is a promising case, because the South was a one-party system (or even a no-party system (Key 1949)) for much of this period, before becoming the competitive two-party system it is today. Therefore, we can observe whether the change to a competitive party system is associated with change from the South lagging the North to a southern democracy that increasingly benefits the general public in some consequential ways. It is a potentially difficult case for us, however, because while the South itself was a one-party system, it was, of course, embedded within a national, two-party competitive system. We need first, however, to review the historical context of the Jim Crow South and its demise before turning to the evidence.

Parties, Competition, and the American South

Political competition in the South was formally restricted (that is, by law as well as by extra-legal means) throughout the “Jim Crow” era. This era began at the turn of the twentieth century, usually set as beginning in 1898.⁶ It lasted until the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, and is often dated as ending with the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act in 1965. These national laws, combined with Supreme Court decisions (especially *Brown v Board of Education*⁷) and administrative acts of the government (e.g., President Truman’s executive order integrating the military in 1948), effectively ended the ability of southern states to maintain formal discrimination as in the laws of Jim Crow. The legal structure of Jim Crow laws was backed by social and economic pressures that had, at their base, violence up to and including public lynchings. This combination of lawful and illegal structures made Jim Crow a fortified system by which an elite minority could hold tight to power in an otherwise putatively majoritarian system.

The immediate purpose of the Jim Crow laws was to ensure that Black Americans in the South were unable to be a serious threat politically, economically, and socially. These were also part of a political agenda designed to keep the white middle and upper class in political and economic power, that is, to have a minority hold power in a majority political system.

Disenfranchisement – often of poor whites as well as Blacks – helped accomplish that.

⁶ One event that some mark as the opening of the Jim Crow era was the Wilmington “race riot,” in which an organized, armed gang of whites took over Wilmington, NC by force, driving its elected political leadership from office, causing many Blacks to flee, and killing dozens in the streets. This was effectively a coup, or terrorist act, overthrowing an elected democratic leadership and replacing it by force with a non-elected leadership. The North Carolina government responded, in part, by enacting their first set of “Jim Crow” laws that disenfranchised Blacks politically and otherwise harmed their positions economically and socially. For more details see Cecelski and Tyson (1998).

⁷ 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

Arithmetically, a minority in the whole population is at least a larger minority, if not an outright majority, in a restricted electorate.

A second part of the political project was to reduce or eliminate organized opposition to that white minority, and that was to be accomplished by all but eliminating political parties that sought or might seek to contend for political office against the white-minority-controlled Democratic Party. That meant ensuring that the Republican Party did not grow – not that difficult a problem as the Party of Lincoln found attracting any but Black southerners next to impossible. That also meant ensuring that a party, such as the Populist Party, that sought to ally the poor, farmers, and the working class, regardless of race, did not survive to contest elections. That the Wilmington race riot as an origin of Jim Crow Laws occurred in North Carolina – a state (and Wilmington a city) in which the Populists had just swept into office in 1896 – is not a coincident. At the same time, elimination of competition at the state level across the South meant that almost the entire delegation from the South to the U.S. Congress would be white Democrats. This would maximize the influence of the South by virtue of its being a one-party block in Congress. In this sense, it was certain that as long as the poor and working class could not be mobilized behind a party banner, the South offered the national scene a solid block embedded in a “regular” two-party system in the nation as a whole. The block ordinarily voted (northern) Democratic but, on issues crucial to the region, was able to be wooed to whichever party supported southern interests.

The absence of organized partisan opposition did not mean that there was no competition for political office within the South. Competition might be reserved to be held within the Democratic Party, but individuals continued to aspire to compete for office. Because competition was confined to be within that single party, though, it was disorganized competition

among individuals. This was the “system” (or lack thereof) that V.O. Key, Jr. (1949) so brilliantly described – a circumstance of chaotic infighting among individual contenders that undermined electoral accountability and cut off the competition for office from the use of office for democratic purposes. In short, Key argued (as we detail below) that the absence of political parties organizing competition for office and organizing the conduit between governing elite and the general public was an equation that yielded an absence of democracy.

The Emergence of a Competitive Party System in the South

The Jim Crow system survived into the middle of the twentieth century. It took the combination of the extended protest of the Civil Rights Movement from “below” and the eventual active intervention of the federal government from “above” to force southern states to dismantle the legal and informal apparatus of Jim Crow in the mid-1960s. That, of course, was the culmination of much else, but it marked, for our purposes, only the beginning of the end for the solid South (that is, the lock of the Democratic Party on elective office in the region). In this context, the formation of a competitive, multi-party system meant the rise of the Republican Party to become a serious competitor for a wide variety of offices in, eventually, each of the states of the former Confederacy. Republicans had long held a toe hold in the South, particularly in mountain regions of Virginia, Tennessee, and North Carolina. While they might have held a few such congressional seats, they could rarely win any state-wide elections. But by the mid-twentieth century in America, there was nothing akin to the Populist or Progressive Parties to turn to, so opposition would be from the GOP or there would no organized opposition at all.

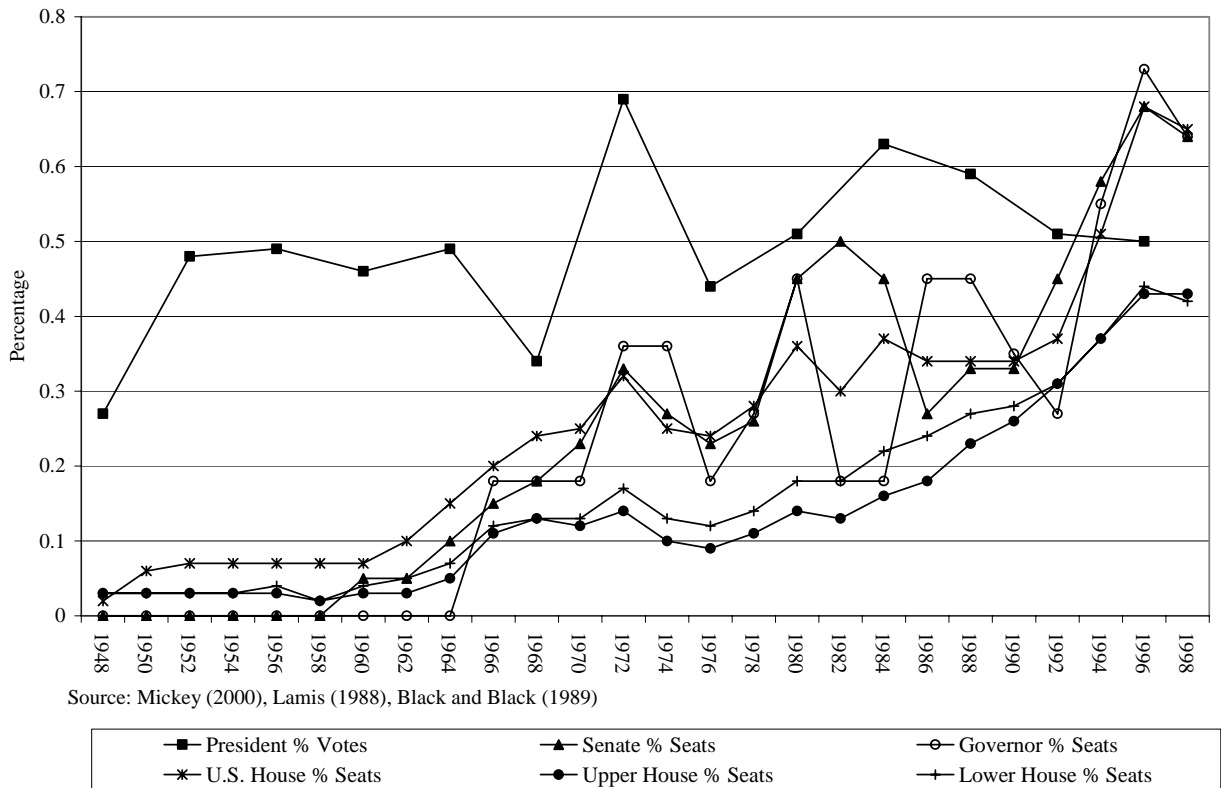
The first big break came in the 1964 presidential election. The Democratic President, Lyndon B. Johnson, a Texan, had championed civil rights, asking for passage of what would

become the Voting Rights and the Civil Rights Acts in honor of the recently assassinated President, John F. Kennedy. Perhaps the leading opponent of this move was a Republican Senator from Arizona, Barry Goldwater, soon to be the Republican nominee. Goldwater opposed passage on the grounds of state's rights, and while his actions alienated the socially liberal wing of his party (and helped lead him to massive defeat), that position was music to southern Democratic ears. Goldwater was able to carry only his home state and five of the deepest of Deep South states, the latter something no post-Reconstruction Republican had ever done. Also, a few prominent southern Democrats, most notably Senator Strom Thurmond (SC), switched to the GOP that fall and assisted Goldwater's campaign in the South. In 1968, Republican presidential nominee Richard Nixon followed what came to be known as the "southern strategy" for the GOP, yielding a substantial bounty of southern electoral votes to win a very close election. While southern Governor George Wallace (AL) ran as an American Independent Party candidate and carried most of the states Goldwater had four years earlier (plus Louisiana), Nixon won all the rest of the South except Texas, while retaining South Carolina like Goldwater. The southern abandonment of the Democrats at the presidential level was now well set in place. We show this point in Figure 1 for the states traditionally defined as the South – those that seceded to form the Confederacy (Key 1949). Note that, while 1964 was not a breakthrough for the popular vote for President, the concentration of the vote in the Deep South yielded an Electoral College bonanza heretofore untapped. Then, as Figure 1 illustrates, in the fullness of time, the GOP did gain increasing success in the South, pretty much across the board of major offices. By the 1990s, the Republicans had cemented their position as a major party in the region and, indeed, as one that often won majorities. To be sure, the gains came a bit faster for national and gubernatorial offices than for the state legislative offices, Still, by a century

after the Wilmington race riot, the GOP was competitive for all of those offices and held clear majorities for the U.S. Congress and state Governor's offices.

FIGURE 1

THE EMERGENCE OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY IN THE SOUTH, 1948-1998



Evidence of the Necessity of Party Competition

We begin our empirical study by looking at the non-competitive South through the eyes of Key (1949). He makes a two-fold argument. First, the absence of party competition leads to bad politics in general. Second, he argues, this bad politics had the additional, intended effect that it rewarded the economic elite of the South, the top of the remnants of the plantation economy, or in short, the “haves” over the “have nots.” That is, the elite were disposed to accept

disorderly and demagogic government because they benefited from it, in comparison to the poor and working class whites (to say nothing of the totally excluded blacks). But let us let him say it in his own words. V.O. Key, Jr. described the South as “one-party factionalism” (1949 p. 302) or sometimes as “pulverized factionalism” (303), emphasizing their changing shape in each election and thus their discontinuity in appeal. This discontinuity “both confuses the electorate and reflects a failure to organize the voters into groups of more or less like-minded citizens with somewhat similar attitudes toward public policy.” In a system of “transient factions...it is impossible to have even a fight between the ‘ins’ and the outs’.” (303) “Individualistic or disorganized politics places a high premium on demagogic qualities of personality that attract voter attention” (304) and “... make a government especially ... disposed toward favoritism” (305) while “a cohesive faction has the power to discipline wild-eyed men” (306). “A loose factional system lacks the power to carry out sustained programs of action, which almost always are thought by the better element to be contrary to its immediate interests.” (308) “All in all, the striking feature of the one-party system, the absence of organized and continuing factions with a lower-bracket orientation, is but one facet of an issueless politics.” (309)

As competitive democracy emerged, we should observe increasing beliefs in democracy among the public, and more democratic behavior by the public, and we should also observe the improved delivery of more goods and services to that public. Generally, we will look specifically at the South, comparing attitudes, behavior, and conditions in the South to those in the North (usually among the white electorate, given the paucity of observations of blacks by region in the typical national survey).⁸

⁸ While we compare North and South in most that follows, there are two objections that might be made. First, it could be that the changes we find are due more to migration from the North to the South than from change among southerners (Lublin 2004; Black and Black 2003). To address this concern, we also

Democratic Attitudes

In this section we compare a number of political attitudes usually associated with democracy in the North and South over time. These include average levels of party identification, support for free speech, expectations about government responsiveness, support for equality, and external efficacy.

Partisan identification is often taken as the core orientation of the public to the competitive party system. Below, we start by looking at its opposite. How do those excluded from engagement in politics relate to the system of party competition?

Freedom of expression is often cited as a prerequisite of democracy (Dahl 1971; 1998), or at least as a “procedural minimum” of democracy (Collier and Levitsky 1997, 433). Support for freedom of expression may also tend to coincide with support for democracy.⁹ Freedom of expression permits citizens to convey their policy preferences to government, and to criticize government decisions with which they disagree. Curtailing freedom of expression also gives some citizens an advantage in their efforts to influence policy. We compare the support for controversial free speech in each region.

Another attitude that is characteristic of democracy is an expectation by citizens that their policy preferences will play an active role in the shaping of the government’s actions. For

performed all our regional comparisons of attitudes and behavior using a Southern and Northern native sample. In no case did these analyses refute the conclusions we reach below.

Second, because our time series are relatively short, we present bivariate comparisons. Where possible we repeated our analyses comparing the Southern states with the Border states, Missouri, Kentucky, Maryland, and Delaware, West Virginia, and Oklahoma. These states share many of the conditions in the South that might suggest an alternative mechanism is at work, but differed in having competitive parties. With what comparisons were possible, we found that Southern democracy started each time series as less effective than democracy in border states and that the gap in that effectiveness narrowed over time.

⁹ A belief in the desirability of democracy does not exist in isolation from other beliefs. For most people it is a part of a cluster of beliefs. Included in this cluster is the belief that freedom of expression . . . is desirable in itself” (Dahl 1998, 50-51).

instance, Griffin and Flavin (2007) show that there are racial and income differences in the extent to which citizens prioritize some kinds of representation, such as policy representation, over others, such as obtaining government monies. We will compare how much citizens in each region prioritize the representation of their preferences in government decisions as opposed to other roles of government.

Equality, too, “is central to any conception of democracy” (Verba and Orren 1985, 8). Democracy may depend on a certain amount of actual equality. The amount of equality that exists, though, will depend on how much citizens value it. So, we will compare attitudinal support for equality in each region.

As V.O. Key famously contended, “unless mass views have some place in the shaping of policy, all the talk about democracy is nonsense” (Key 1961, 7). That is, do citizens perceive that elected officials are attentive to their preferences and concerns? This is simultaneously an attitude that reflects the quality of democracy, or how effective the democratic process is working, and supports democracy, because citizens who feel “efficacious” or that they are heeded, are more likely to engage themselves in politics. So, we will compare the reported level of political efficacy in each region.

Party Identification

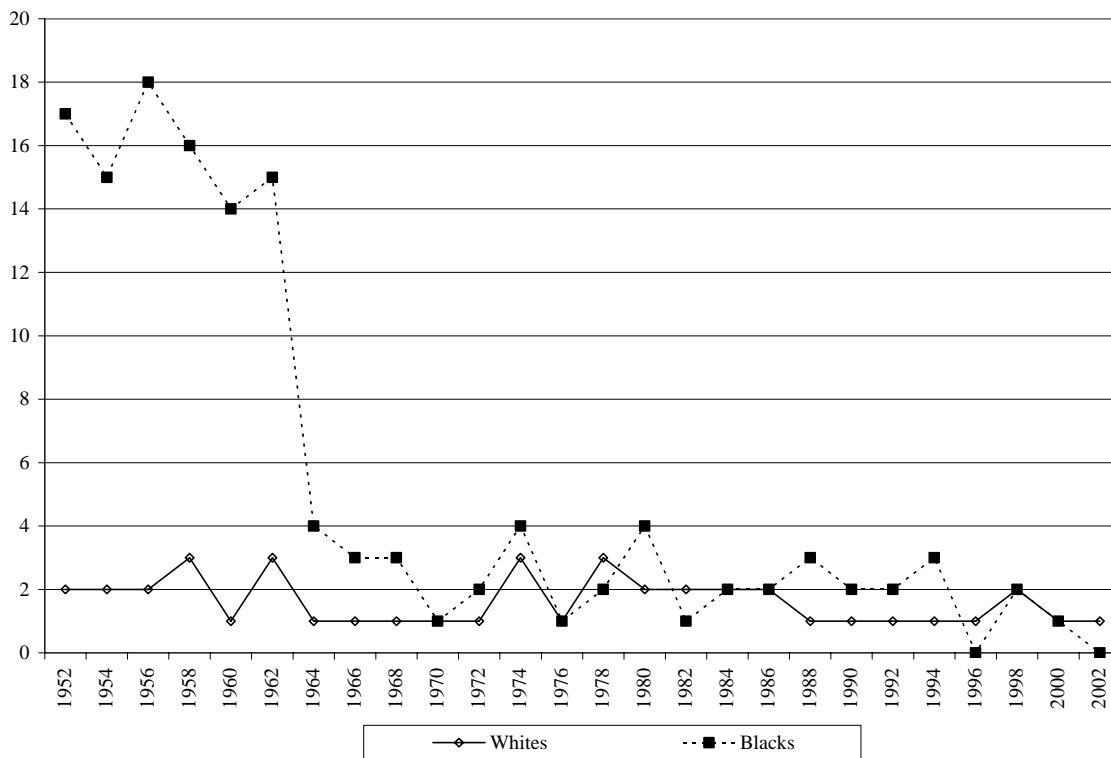
We begin our empirical study with an observation of the full electorate, comparing whites and blacks, the level of “apoliticals” by race, that is those unable or unwilling to respond meaningfully to the battery of questions about partisanship.

The distribution of partisanship should, of course, alter as the competitive standing of the two parties alters. In some sense, this is simply demonstrating the development of the

Republican Party in the South, in concert with its development with respect to voting in Figure 1. However, we begin by looking at the national responses to the party identification questions, and in particular the level of “apolitical” responses (inability to respond to the party identification battery). We do so for the nation as a whole, primarily to be able to include enough blacks to be able to analyze their responses, survey by survey. It is, of course, also the case that northern blacks were often less securely included into the electorate than their white counterparts.

FIGURE 2

APOLITICALS BY RACE, 1952-2004



And, the point of this can be seen quickly in Figure 2. There, with passage of the two rights acts in the mid-1960s, the fact of legal incorporation (whether yet effective locally or not) is immediately apparent. Before 1964, a much larger proportion of blacks than whites were

scored as apolitical. Immediately upon passage of those acts (and whatever else of relevance happened in those few years), blacks responded and the proportion of apoliticals precipitously declined to levels essentially similar to those of whites and remained there. A more dramatic, step-change response can hardly be imagined.

Freedom of Speech

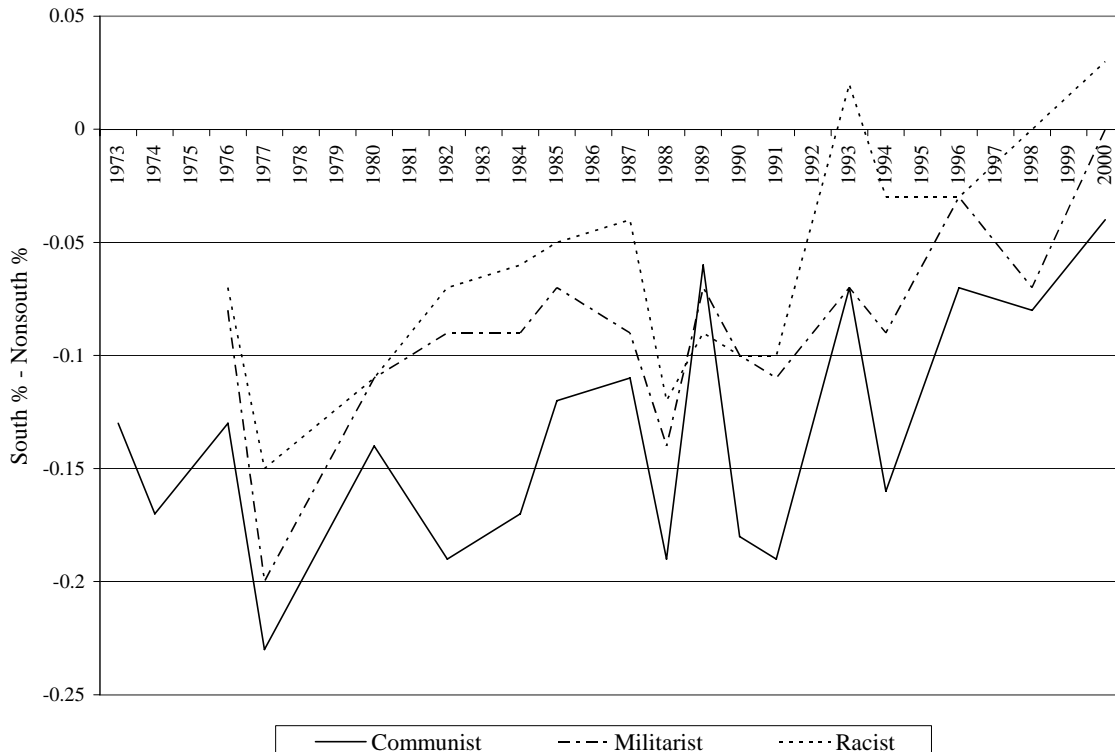
For an early, Jim Crow era, comparison of support for free speech protections, we used a June 1949 survey by the Gallup Organization which asked the following, “Do you believe in freedom of speech for everybody – that is, for example, permitting anyone to say anything at any time about our government or our country?” Among Nonsouthern whites, a clear majority (54.5%) answered affirmatively, while a majority of Southern whites (45.9%) answered negatively.

Using data from the General Social Survey over the period 1973 to 2000, Figure 3 shows how this regional difference waned over the same years as the Republicans grew to be competitive. This figure reports the difference in the percentage of Southern and Nonsouthern white residents who supported allowing an “admitted Communist,” a person who “advocates doing away with elections and letting the military run the country,” or someone who “thinks that blacks are genetically inferior” to make a speech in their community. Negative values in the Figure indicate weaker support for free speech protections inside the South than outside the South. For all three series, Nonsouthern whites were initially much more often supportive of free speech protections than Southern whites. For instance, in the 1970s between 13 and 23% fewer Southern than Nonsouthern whites thought that a Communist should be allowed to speak in their community. Smaller regional differences existed for the free speech rights of militarists

and racists. By the year 2000, though, Southerners were just as likely as Nonsoutherners to back free speech protections for militarists and racists, while Southerners were nearly as likely to support the free speech rights of Communists.

FIGURE 3

SUPPORT FOR FREE SPEECH PROTECTIONS AMONG SOUTHERN AND NON-SOUTHERN WHITES, 1973-2000



Source: General Social Survey, various years

Note that this was due primarily to more rapid growth in support for free speech in the South. For instance, while only 51% of Southern whites supported allowing a Communist to speak in their community in 1973, 67% supported allowing this in 2000, more than double the increase outside the South (where support grew from 64 to 71%). The increase in Southern support for the free speech rights of militarists over this period was of nearly identical size (17

percentage points), compared to just 9 points for Nonsouthern whites. The increase in Southerners' support for the free speech rights of racists was only 8 percentage points. However, absolute support for the free speech rights of racists outside the South was virtually unchanged over this period. In sum, Southern support for free speech protections has increased considerably in the last quarter of the 20th Century, making the South indistinguishable from the remainder of the country by Century's end.

Expectations of Government

Next, we compare citizens' expectations of government in each region. There is some early evidence that Southern whites had different expectations of their representatives. In August 1939, the Gallup Organization asked, "Should members of Congress vote according to their own best judgment or according to the way the people in their districts feel?" In the South, 55% of the Gallup respondents replied that members of Congress should vote according to the way their constituents feel; 63% of the Nonsouthern white respondents held this view.

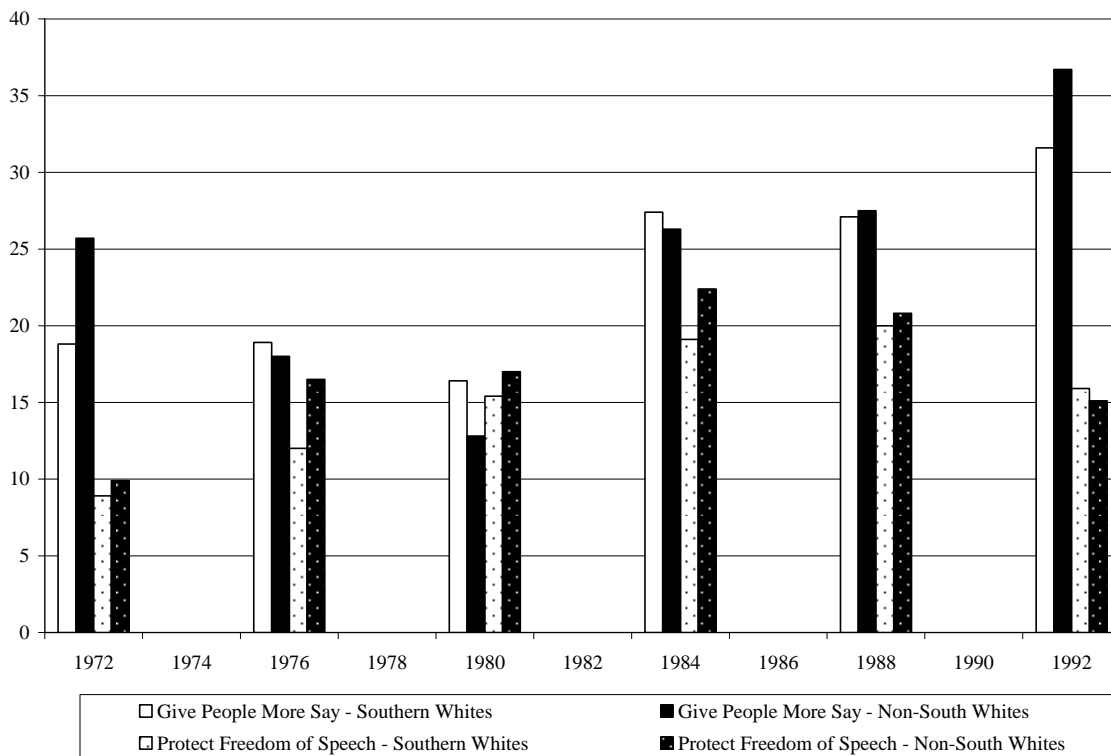
From 1972 to 1992, the National Election Studies (NES) asked Americans which of the following four government goals was "most desirable" – 1) maintaining order in the nation; 2) giving people more say in important political decisions; 3) fighting rising prices; and 4) protecting freedom of speech. Figure 4 reports the percentage of Southern and Nonsouthern whites who identified either representing citizens' preferences in political decisions or protecting free speech as the most desirable goal.

Looking first at support for giving people more say in decisions, except for a slight dip in 1980, the percentage of Southerners choosing this alternative increased every year the item was queried, rising from about 19% in 1972 to 32% in 1992. In addition, increased support in the South for giving people more say did not come at the expense of support for protecting freedom

of speech, which rose from about 9% among Southern whites in 1972 to 20% in 1988 before dipping to 16% in 1992. As we saw above in the GSS data, Southern support for protecting free speech has grown over time in the NES. Outside the South, white citizens have also placed more emphasis on giving people more say in decisions. The proportion of Nonsoutherners identifying this goal as the most desirable (26%) was 7% larger than the proportion within the South in 1972. This proportion had increased to 37% (5% more than the South) by 1992.

FIGURE 4

MOST DESIRED GOVERNMENT GOAL, 1972-1992



Source: National Election Studies, various years.

Outside the South, prioritizing free speech first increased in likelihood, and then decreased, such that over the entire period the proportion of Nonsoutherners prioritizing free speech grew just 5 percentage points, from 10% in 1972 to 15% in 1992. Given this modest

growth, combined with the sharper uptick in support for free speech in the South, support for free speech in the South has overtaken support for free speech in the North.

Equality

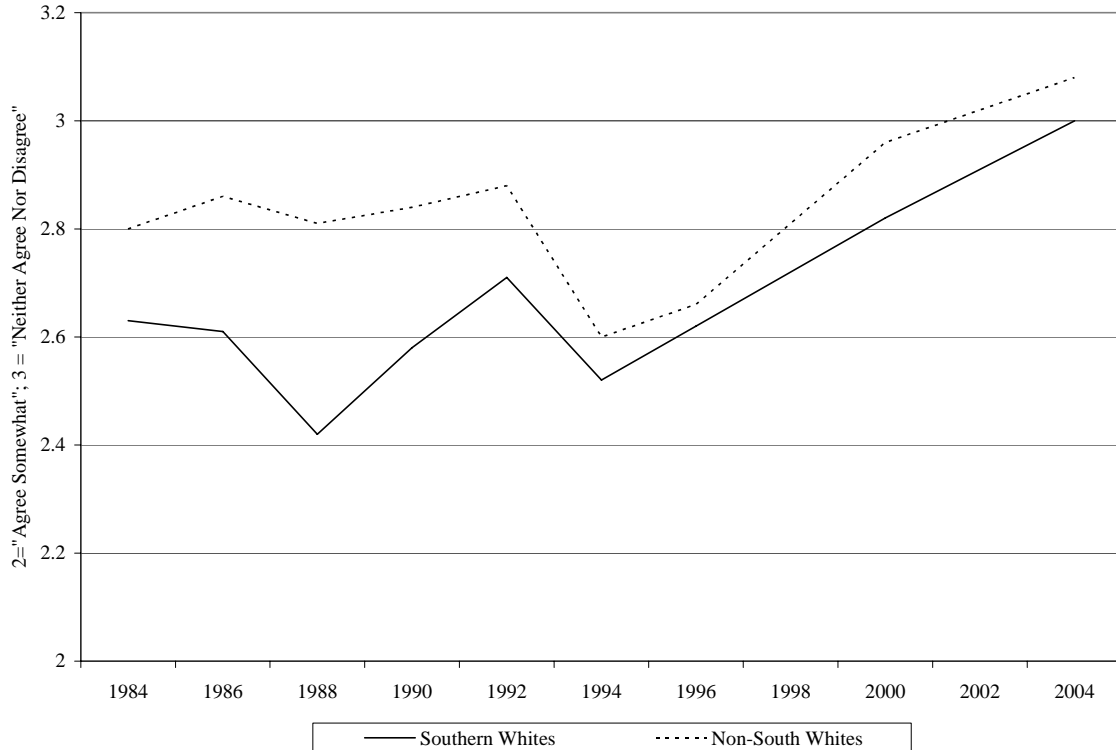
To gain an early perspective on attitudes about equality, we turned to a 1948 survey by the Gallup Organization. That survey contained an item that asked the following, “One of Truman’s proposals concerns employment practices. How far do you yourself think the Federal Government should go in requiring employers to hire people without regard to their race, religion, color, or nationality?” Among Southern whites, 83% replied that the federal government should not be involved in this at all. Outside the South, a narrow majority of whites (51%) held this view.

One measure of attitudes about equality that we have access to over time is NES responses to the item “Do you strongly agree, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or strongly disagree that the country would be better off if we worried less about how equal people are.” Figure 5 reports the mean response to this item among Southern and Nonsouthern whites from 1984, when the item was first introduced by the NES, to 2004.

According to the figure, Southerners have become more supportive of equality over time. Moreover, Southerners were considerably less concerned than Nonsoutherners with equality from 1984 until 1992, whereas since 1994 the attitudinal gap between the regions has narrowed significantly. Today, the South’s support for equality appears to rival support for this value in the rest of the country.

FIGURE 5

“THE COUNTRY WOULD BE BETTER OFF IF WE WORRIED LESS ABOUT HOW EQUAL PEOPLE ARE,” 1984-2004



Source Data: National Election Studies

Efficacy

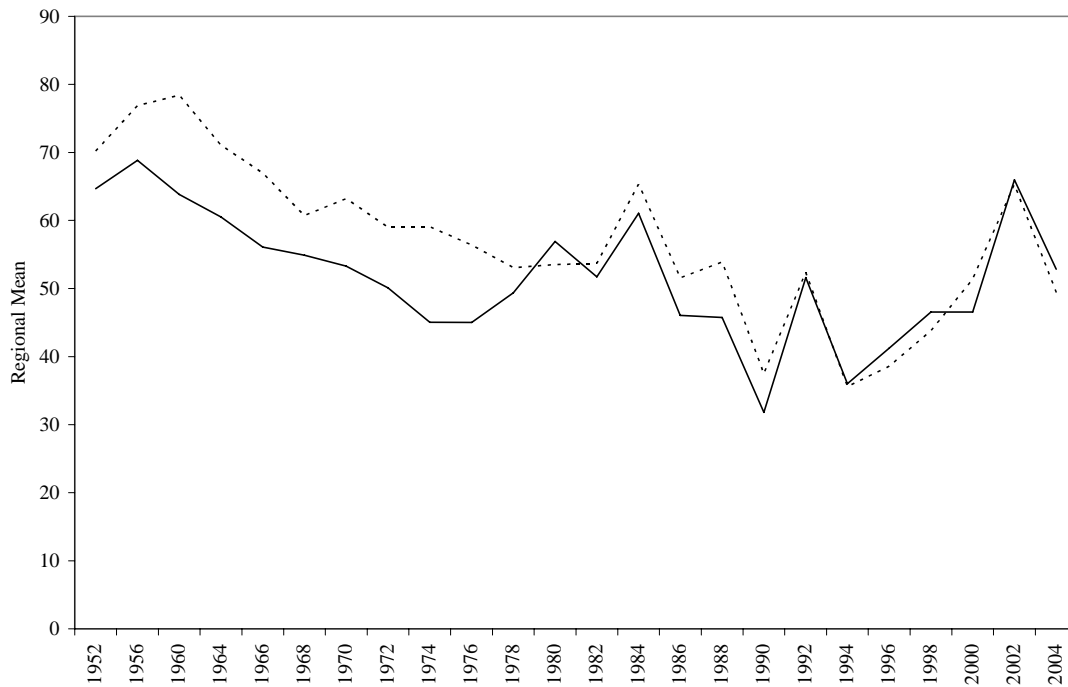
The National Election Studies has been asking its respondents two items that relate to external political efficacy since 1952. These items ask respondents to indicate their level of agreement with the following statements: 1) “I don’t think public officials care much what people like me think”; and 2) “People like me don’t have any say about what the government does.” Figure 6 reports the mean indexed (0-100) response for these items among Northerners and Southerners from 1952 to 2004.

The most striking thing about the figure is the substantial and lengthy gap between the efficacy of Southerners and Nonsoutherners. From 1952 to 1978, the efficacy gap between the

regions averaged almost 10 points. By comparison, from 1980 to 2002 the average gap in the efficacy of the regions was less than two points.¹⁰ On this measure of democratic attitudes, too, the South has caught up with the rest of the country (even if the political efficacy of Southerners has declined in absolute terms).

FIGURE 6

EXTERNAL EFFICACY INDEX AMONG WHITES, 1952-2004



Source: National Election Studies, various years

One concern about reaching the conclusion that the democratic attitudes of Southerners and Nonsoutherners have converged is that Southerners may simply have become more likely to dissemble. For example, one study has shown that the apparent convergence in the racial attitudes of Southerners and Nonsoutherners is misleading; when Southerners are permitted to

¹⁰ The timing of this change is consistent with Black and Black's emphasis on Ronald Reagan's candidacy on the politics of the South (Black and Black 2002).

reflect their true preferences without them being known to the interviewer a gap in racial attitudes persists (Kuklinski, Cobb, and Gilens 1997). This behavior may extend to democratic attitudes as well; that is, Southerners may have “learned” the democratic response to these items, even if this isn’t their true attitude. Because behavior presumably is less susceptible to this strategy, we turn to this topic next.

Democratic Behavior

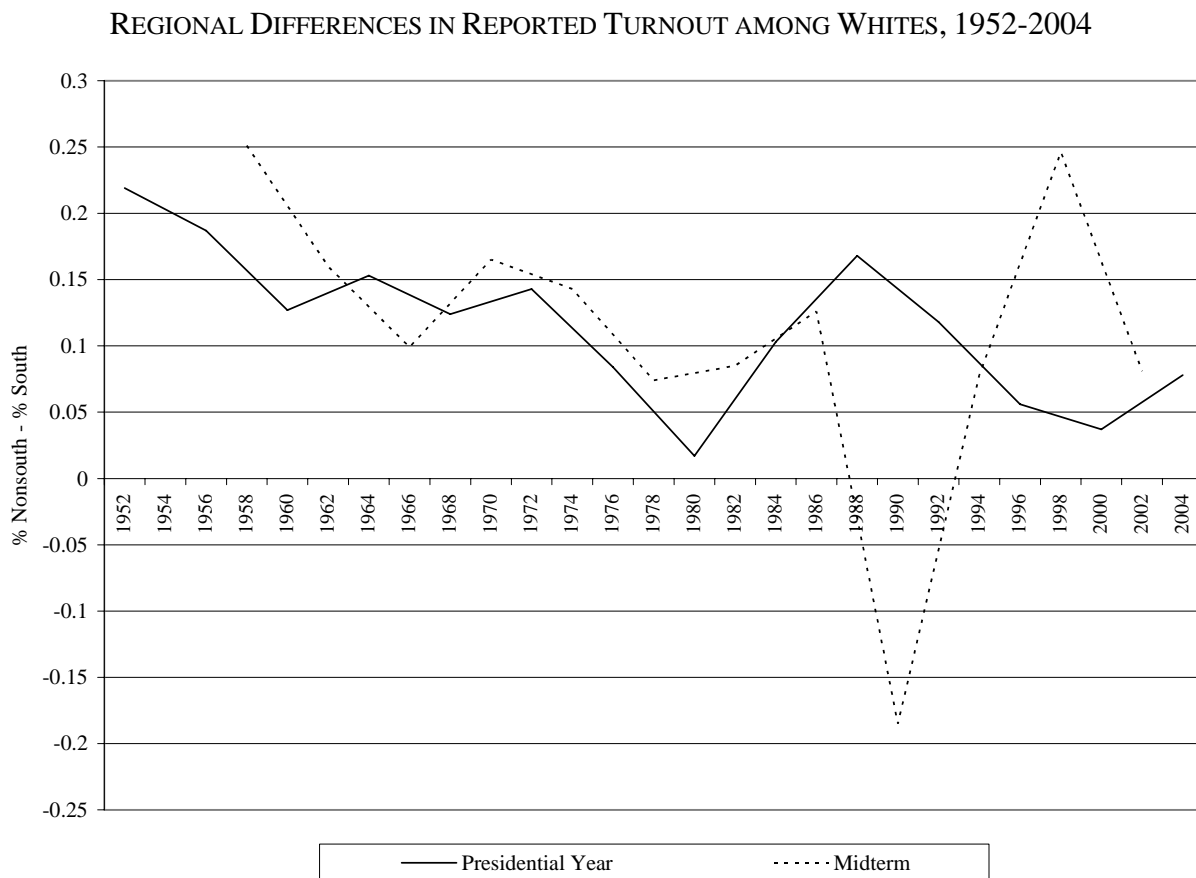
A second way we assess the quality of democracy is to compare the involvement of citizens in political decision making (Dahl 1998; Verba and Nie 1972; Altman and Perez-Linan 2002). According to Seymour Martin Lipset, “[d]emocracy in a complex society may be defined as a political system which supplies regular constitutional opportunities for changing the governing officials, *and a social mechanism which permits the largest possible part of the population to influence major decisions by choosing contenders for office*” (1959, 27 (emphasis added)). Moreover, we might care if this “social mechanism” not only permits political participation but actively encourages or facilitates it such that a large portion of the population actually does participate in elections.

Electoral Participation

According to Lijphart (1999, 284), “voter turnout is an excellent indicator of democratic quality” (see also Moon et al. 2006). Figure 7 reflects the regional difference in reported turnout in presidential-year (1952-2004) and midterm (1958-2002) elections by region. Comparing the regions, other than the 1976 and 1980 elections (in which a Southerner led the Democratic ticket), in every election from 1952 to 1992 reported turnout outside the South exceeded reported

turnout in the South by at least 10 percentage points. In 1996, 2000, and 2004, however, the turnout gap fell to about 3-7 percentage points. The regional turnout gap in midterm elections eroded from about 25 percentage points in the 1950s and 1960s to about 10 points in the 1980s. Thereafter, it has remained about the same and fluctuated greatly.

FIGURE 7



Source: National Election Studies, various years

It is also notable that in presidential years reported turnout *within* the South increased over this period from about 60 percent to 77%. Meanwhile, reported turnout outside the South

remained essentially unchanged. In midterm years and within the South, reported turnout increased from 44.6% in 1958 to 66.9% in 2002. Outside the South, turnout in midterm elections has increased much more modestly, from 69.7% in 1958 to 75% in 2002.

Figure 8 reports the mean level of non-voting presidential election campaign activity among whites in each region. Campaign activities include trying to influence others' votes, attending political meetings, working for a party or candidate, displaying a candidate button or sticker, and donating money to a party or candidate. The first thing to notice from the Figure is that the average level of campaign activity among Southern whites increased from 1956 to 2000, with most of the growth taking place in 2004. This is more impressive when we consider the trend in campaign activity outside the South, which from 1956 to 2000 was decidedly downward.

FIGURE 8

REPORTED CAMPAIGN ACTIVITY IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS
AMONG WHITES, 1952-2004



Source: National Election Studies, various years

Taken together, these trends have led to a convergence in the prevalence of campaign activity across the regions. Other than in 1964, in every presidential election from 1956 through 1988 Nonsouthern whites were more active in campaigns than Southern whites. However since 1992 Southern whites have matched the activity of whites outside the region.

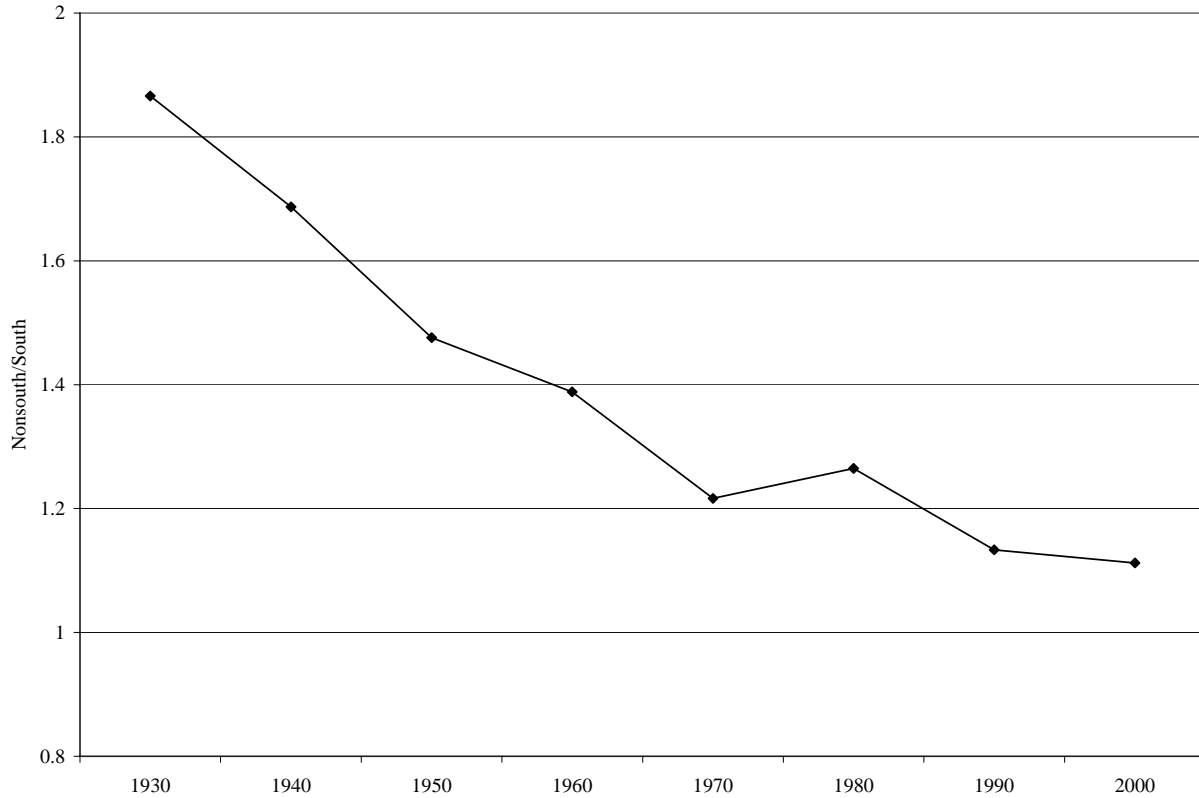
Democratic Conditions

How might this all add up? If people believe and act more democratically, does this matter to their lives? One way to compare the effectiveness of partisan competition is to compare whether citizens are, for example, economically secure, healthy, educated, and safe from crime with than they were without democratic competition (Dahl 1998; Lijphart 1999). A healthy party system may promote government performance by building a bridge between the executive and the legislature (Levitsky and Cameron 2003), or competitive parties simply may improve government performance by increasing the likelihood of removal from office in the event of poor performance. For example, scholars have long observed that economic and democratic performance go hand in hand (Lipset 1959). Some emphasize the influence of economic development on democracy (Burkhart and Lewis-Beck 1994), others the effect of democracy on economic growth (Leblang 1997).

Figure 9 reports the ratio of the mean per capita income of Nonsouthern states each decade from 1930 to 2000 and the mean per capita income in the South each decade. So, a value of 1.0 reflects equal mean per capita income in the regions, 2.0 indicates mean income in the Nonsouth twice that in the South, and so on. According to this Census data, the mean per capita income outside the South was nearly twice the mean in the South in 1930. This ratio has steadily

declined since, most sharply before 1970, such that by 2000 the mean income outside the South was just 111% of the mean income in the South.

FIGURE 9
PER CAPITA INCOME RATIO, 1930-2000



Source: U.S. Census.

The ability of Southern governments to protect the safety of the region's citizens also has improved in both absolute and relative terms. In 1960, the murder rate per 1000 persons in the South was 10.4. In 2005, it was 6.9. By comparison, over this period the murder rate outside the South has fallen very little – from 3.5 to 2.9. Taken together, the difference between the murder rates of the regions has dropped from nearly 7 to approximately 4. See Figure 10.

FIGURE 10

MURDER RATE PER 1000 PERSONS, 1960-2005

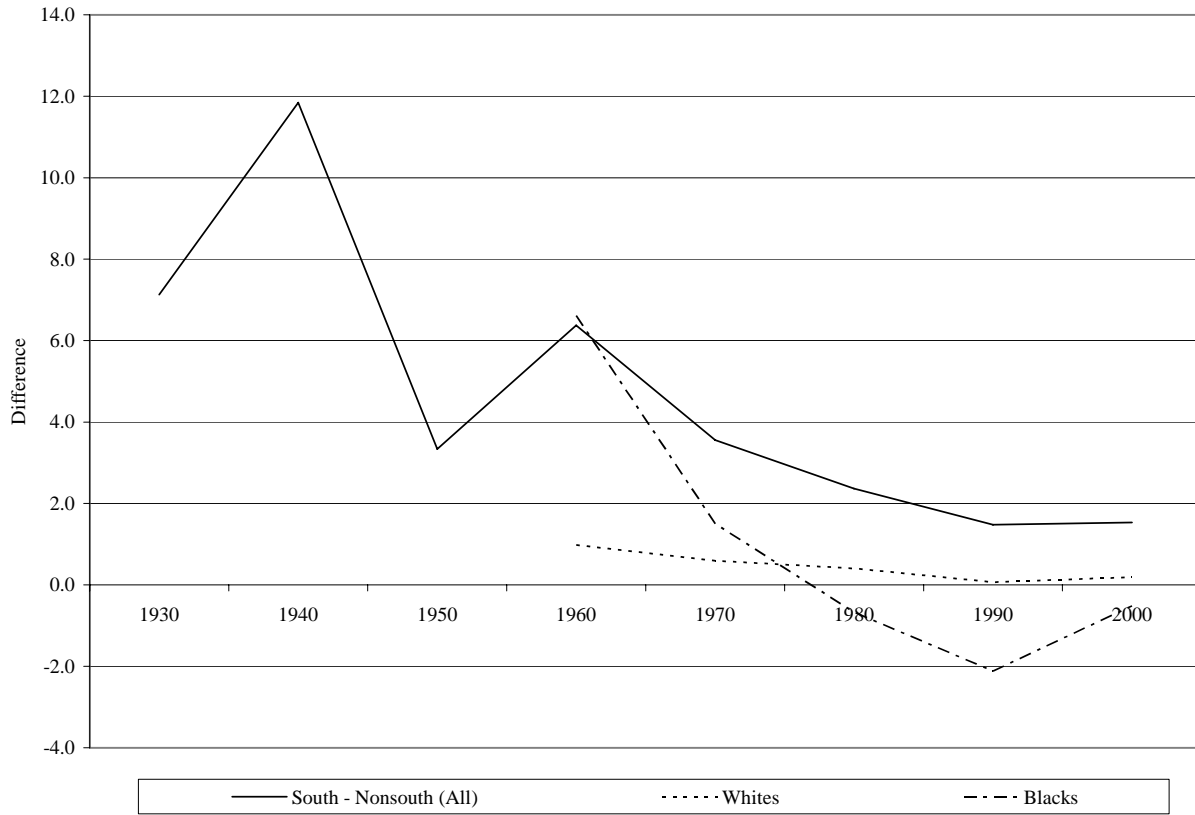


Source: U.S. Census.

Figure 11 reports the difference in infant mortality rates in each region, for all citizens from 1930 to 2000 and by race from 1960 onward. Comparing all citizens, 7 more deaths occurred in the South than outside in 1930, and 12 more in 1940. This difference dropped to less than 2 additional deaths by 2000. Most of the decline after 1960 is attributable to improved outcomes for blacks in the South. Indeed, since 1980 the infant mortality rate for Southern blacks has been better than the rate outside the South. Finally, there has been steady erosion in the difference in infant mortality between Southern and Nonsouthern whites, from 1.0 in 1960 to 0.2 in 2000.

FIGURE 11

REGIONAL DIFFERENCE IN INFANT MORTALITY (PER 1000 LIVE BIRTHS), 1930-2000



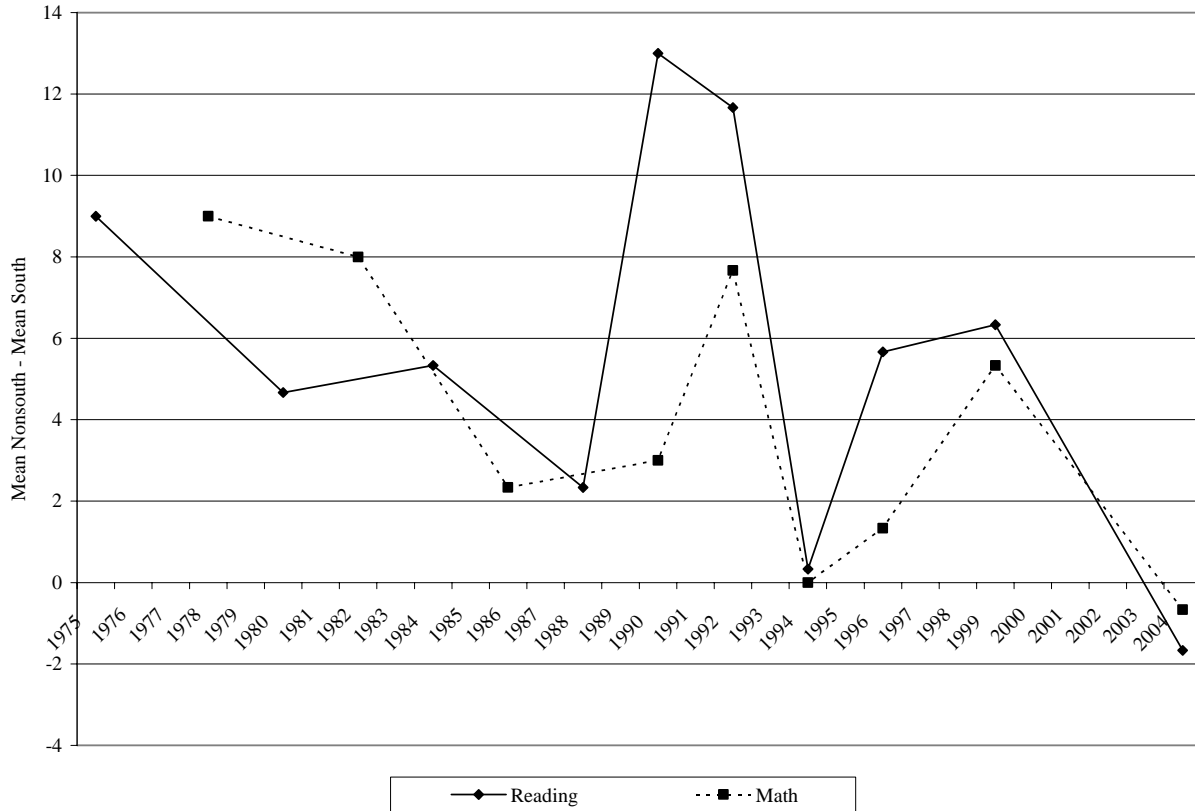
Source: U.S. Census.

Finally, scholars have used a government’s ability to educate its citizens as a benchmark of democracy (e.g. Neubauer 1967). We compare the NAEP test scores of 9th grade students in the South and the remainder of the country using data from 1976 to 2004.¹¹ Figure 12 reports the regional difference among whites. As the Figure shows, this difference was about 9 points for both reading and mathematics in 1976. By 2004, students in the South were performing slightly better than students in the rest of the country.

¹¹ NAEP data is reported regionally; we compare the scores in the “Southeast” with the mean scores of the remaining three regions. NAEP defines the Southeast as the 11 states of the Confederacy, less Texas, plus Kentucky and West Virginia.

FIGURE 12

REGIONAL DIFFERENCE IN NINTH GRADE TEST SCORES AMONG WHITES, 1976-2004



Conclusion

What we have argued here is that the presence of a competitive party system is associated with the development of democratic attitudes and behaviors in the general public and with the provision of broadly distributed public goods to that public. The first set of associations reflects, we presume, the comfortable acceptance on the part of the public that the political system is, indeed, more nearly a government of, by, and for the great body of the people (as *Publius* might say) than any system lacking a competitive party system. The second set of associations reflects,

we presume, the reason why the people might have such an acceptance, the system actually does deliver goods and services to them.

We tested these presumptions in what we believe to be a fair but difficult test. The South had flirted with having a competitive party system in the 18th and 19th centuries, but had failed to sustain such a competitive system even then. The Federalist-Republican-Democratic Party system was short lived everywhere. The Democratic-Whig Party system was established, according to most historical accounts (see Aldrich, 1995 for details) in 1840 and collapsed in or about 1854. The Republican Party did not emerge in the South, and the confederacy chose to be non-partisan. And, it was the threat of the rise of an opposition to party to the newly “redeemed” Democratic Party in the late nineteenth century that led to the undermining of the ability of democracy and a competitive party system to emerge for much of the 20th century, throughout the Jim Crow era. Of course, while the southern system was not a democracy, it was embedded in a national democracy with a competitive party system. It was not, then, until the late 20th century that the South genuinely integrated into the national political system.

The evidence suggests that this account is in fact the case. We can summarize the evidence in Table 1 by looking at each measure presented above in which a difference between North and South could meaningfully be formed. We report the result of regressing time on each measure (combining the multiple measures of free speech, turnout, and educational test scores into one average measure each). These are scored so that a negative slope with time is indicated (that is, the difference is declining with time), and we report both the estimated decline in the difference per year and the estimated difference at the end of each data series. In every case the difference has declined significantly and in every case, the difference has become very small, non-existent, or even negative (that is, the South scoring “better”) for efficacy and for the test

scores. And, thus, we conclude that the one thing that one really needs to know about political parties is that a system of competitive political parties is necessary for democracy.

TABLE 1

DECLINING DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE SOUTH AND THE NORTH WITH A
COMPETITIVE PARTY SYSTEM IN THE SOUTH

<i>Condition</i>	<i>Estimated Change in Difference Per Year</i>	<i>Difference at Series End</i>
Free Speech (Average)	-.004***	0.0 (2000)
Worry Less About Equality	-.01*	.08 (2004)
External Efficacy	-.25***	-3.4 (2004)
Turnout (All years)	-.002**	.035 (2004)
Campaign Activity	-.003*	.016 (2004)
Per Capita Income	-.01***	See note
Infant Mortality	-.12**	1.5 (2000)
Murder Rate	-.07***	2.9 (2005)
9 th Grade NAEP (Average)	-.23**	-1.2 (2004)

* denotes $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$. The ratio of North to South per capita income was regressed on a year counter. At series end, the per capita income in the North was 111% of the per capita income in the South.

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