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# National Survey Shows Half-Century Trend Away From Democrats

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The partisan realignment in the South is a well-known fact. The 20<sup>th</sup> century began with the South solidly in the hands of the Democratic Party. This was true because the Southern Democratic Party took positions congruent with the Southern electorate's public policy preferences; namely, a states-centered view of government and an opposition to more egalitarian racial policy.

This began to change in 1932 with the Great Depression and the election of Franklin Roosevelt. While Roosevelt maintained the Democratic Party's position on race, he was the chief architect for an expanded federal government that intervened in the economy and society (thus infringing on the sovereignty of U.S. states) in a way never before imagined. This led to a general realignment in the U.S. where the Democratic Party became the clear majority party.

The main action to upset the appellation of partisan attachments was the Democratic Party's embrace of more egalitarian racial positions. This was foreshadowed at the 1948 Democratic National Convention when Truman's platform included a progressive racial agenda, causing some Dixiecrats to split from the party and support Strom Thurmond's presidential candi-

dacy. The Democrats' new racial issue position became more concrete with President Kennedy and his decision in the final months of his administration that the federal government needed to work for greater racial equality. This was carried through by President Johnson and Congressional Democrats with the passage of various civil rights and social welfare bills.

Changing the course of racial politics in the U.S. also changed the course of partisan identification in the South as many, not supportive of greater racial equality, gradually switched to the less racially progressive Republican Party. While the electoral consequences for presidential elections were immediate (Southern states began voting solidly Republican for President), the consequences for more slow-moving partisan identification took longer to appear.

The consequences of this policy change are apparent. Before the Democratic Party embraced the more egalitarian racial positions, Democratic identification was high. The American National Election Study records that it reached its second-highest point in the presidential election of 1964, probably driven by an election in which the Republican Party fielded a presidential candidate out of the American ideological mainstream to an extraordinary degree. However, the decline in Democratic identification begins immediately following the 1964 election as Southerners, opposed to more racially egalitarian policies, began to evacuate the political party that was pushing for such reforms.

An inspection of the time series finds there are three occasions during which Democratic identification trends downward. The first is from 1964 to 1972. This was caused by the dramatic positions the Democratic Party took on racial issues. The second downward trend occurred from 1976 until 1992. During this time conservative Democrats were leaving the party, finding that it was genuinely solidifying behind racially progressive programs. This decrease in identification may also have also been caused by cultural considerations, with the Republican Party under Ronald Reagan more attractive to Southerners. The final decline began after 1996 and may still be continuing.

While Southerners increasingly got off the Democratic boat, they did not join the increasingly large flotilla known as the Republican Party. Instead, Southerners have increasingly not identified with either party. As one would expect, the incidence of increasing Independent party identification mirrors the

incidence of decreasing identification with the Democratic Party. It is important to note that while this seemingly portends the further decline in the strength of political parties in the electorate, many respondents who tell the ANES they identify as Independents actually "lean" toward one of the two political parties. These individuals vote and have the policy preferences of those who identify more strongly with the parties.

A possible cause of the increasing incidence of Independent identification may reflect a realignment. As Black and Black argue in their book *Politics and Society in the South*, Southerners may identify as Independents in the midst of their realignment toward the Republican Party. This brings us to a consideration of Republican identification.

What we see is a steady rise in members of the electorate identifying with the Republican Party. While Republican identification is not high, its slow and steady increase has mirrored the increased Republican electoral success. Mirroring the realignment that has taken place, the South has been transformed from a one-party system to a competitive two-party system, and the realignment tells part of the story. In the last election about 35% of the electorate identified as Democrats, 25% as Republicans, with the remainder identifying as Independents. ■

## Southern Party Identification in Presidential Years, 1952–2000

YEAR	DEM. %	IND. %	REP. %
1952	68.6	13.1	11.2
1956	62.2	14.9	17.2
1960	62.5	15.4	18.7
1964	67.1	18.5	12.5
1968	57.2	30.9	11.1
1972	49.9	32.6	16.7
1976	50.4	31.0	18.1
1980	47.5	31.6	19.8
1984	43.2	36.1	19.8
1988	41.1	36.6	21.5
1992	39.5	38.0	21.7
1996	42.3	32.9	24.4
2000	35.0	39.0	26.0
CHANGE	-49%	+198%	+132%

\* These results are from the National Election Service Poll conducted on Election Day each of these years. These percentages reflect how the respondents answered the first NES party identification question: "Do you typically think of yourself as a Democrat, Republican, or what?" Thus, strong and weak partisans are in the Democratic and Republican categories. All Independents, including those leaning to either the Democratic or Republican parties, are in the Independent category.

## Southern Party Identification in Off-Year Elections, 1958–98

YEAR	DEM.%	IND.%	REP.%
1958	62.7	14.9	16.7
1962	53.7	19.7	20.9
1966	52.9	29.3	16.1
1970	50.5	33.0	16.9
1974	51.0	31.9	14.9
1978	44.3	36.3	18.0
1982	52.8	27.3	18.8
1986	46.8	31.7	20.7
1990	42.8	38.8	17.0
1994	37.0	32.9	29.4
1998	37.8	32.0	29.4
CHANGE	-40%	+115%	+76%

\* These results are from the National Election Service Poll conducted on Election Day each of these years. These proportions reflect how the respondents answered the first NES party identification question: "Do you typically think of yourself as a Democrat, Republican, Incumbent, or what?" Thus, strong and weak partisans are in the Republican and Democratic categories. All Independents, including those leaning to the Democratic and Republican parties, are in the Independent category.