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## Research Note: The Emerging Socio-Economic Cleavage of Mississippi Republicanism

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The growth of Republicanism in the "Solid" South is a political development which promises major implications for the region and the nation. An authority on this subject, Donald S. Strong, has argued that the growing popularity of the GOP in the South represents a conservative reaction to the economic, rather than racial, policies of the national Democratic Party.<sup>1</sup> To support his thesis, Strong shows that Republicans tended to draw from the same counties in the Presidential elections of 1952, 1956, and 1960. In addition, his factor analysis of the 1968 Presidential election indicates that a "high-status-urban" factor showed the most consistent pro-Nixon relationship in all eleven states of the former Confederacy.

His thesis is extremely persuasive, but the nature of Southern Republicanism may be more precisely defined if extensive analysis is undertaken in one state. This research will evaluate Strong's argument in terms of the electoral cleavage supportive of GOP voting in Mississippi. Even today, Mississippi's internal politics remain in the hands of Democrats, and Republican grass roots organizational efforts have begun only since the 1960's.<sup>2</sup> In this light, Republican prospects in Presidential elections are probably shaped largely by national political forces rather than by any partisan realignment within the state's electorate.<sup>3</sup>

Strong's thesis will be studied from two perspectives. First, the votes cast for Republican Presidential candidates from 1952 to 1972 will be correlated to those cast for ultra-conservatives who openly championed the cause of racial separatism. They were Strom Thurmond in 1948, unpledged electors in 1956 and 1960, and George Wallace in 1968. If racial motivations were not salient to GOP voting, it is hypothesized that the Republicans should draw from counties which did not support those racists.

Second, the socio-economic composition of the counties voting for Barry Goldwater, George Wallace, Richard Nixon, and Gerald Ford will be determined. Also, those Republican candidates in Senatorial (1972) and Gubernatorial (1967 and 1975) elections will be studied in terms of similar socio-economic variables to determine the consistency of GOP voting patterns. If economic motivations are primary to Republican voting, it is hypothesized that Republicans tend to draw from counties of upper socio-economic status. In contrast, George Wallace should draw disproportionate votes from counties of lower SES composition. Simple and partial correlations are used, so the "ecological fallacy" applies.<sup>4</sup> While the counties may be characterized by

<sup>1</sup> Donald S. Strong, "Further Reflections on Southern Politics," *The Journal of Politics*, 33 (May, 1971), 239-256. Also see his *Urban Republicanism in the South* (University, Alabama: Bureau of Public Administration, University of Alabama, 1960); "Durable Republicanism in the South," in Allan P. Sindler, ed., *Change in the Contemporary South* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1963).

<sup>2</sup> See the discussion of Republican emergence in Mississippi in the following: Charles N. Fortenberry and F. Glenn Abney, "Mississippi: Unreconstructed and Unredeemed," in *The Changing Politics of the South*, ed. William C. Havid (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972).

<sup>3</sup> By the late 1960's one study indicated movement of Democrats to an Independent stance, but it found no wholesale defection by Mississippians to the Republican identification. See F. Glenn Abney, "Partisan Realignment in a One-Party System: The Case of Mississippi," *The Journal of Politics*, 31 (November, 1969), 1102-1106.

<sup>4</sup> See W. S. Robinson, "Ecological Correlations and the Behavior of Individuals," *American Sociological Review*, 15 (June, 1950), 351-357.

socio-economic variables, inferences about individual voting behavior cannot be extrapolated from such data.

A matrix of correlations for ten Presidential candidates is provided in Table 1. As indicated, the same Mississippi counties tended to support Thurmond, the 1956 and 1960 unpledged electors, and Goldwater. The elections of Eisenhower in 1956 and of Nixon in 1960 and 1968 were not statistically related to the first grouping. To this extent, the first hypothesis is confirmed. The elections of Eisenhower in 1952, of Goldwater, of Wallace, and of Nixon in 1972 need further clarification, however.

It would seem that Ike's first election was transitional. It correlates to the elections of Strom Thurmond in 1948 and of unpledged electors in 1956, but it is also related to Eisenhower's re-election and to Nixon's 1960 campaign. In 1952 the Mississippi electorate was denied an ultra-conservative alternative to the major parties, but the voters may have harbored an anti-Democratic sentiment from the 1948 Dixiecrat revolt. In this light, even though his views on race were not well known, Ike's candidacy may have seemed preferable to many Mississippians than that of Adlai E. Stevenson.

Goldwater's election does not correlate significantly to any election by a Republican during the period. As noted also by Donald S. Strong, and affirmed by the data here, Barry Goldwater was not typical of Republicans in his electoral appeal. Though not a racist, Goldwater campaigned at a time when his conservatism may have been linked to the racial issue by Mississippians. His election came two years after the "Ole Miss" incident and one year after a gubernatorial campaign dominated by segregationist rhetoric.

Wallace's election is strongly correlated to Nixon's 1972 campaign. This datum suggests that Nixon's re-election may not confirm Strong's thesis. Given the "radical" image surrounding the candidacy of George McGovern, many Mississippians may have voted Republican for reasons other than economic self interest. But the elections of Wallace in 1968 and of Nixon in 1972 are unrelated statistically to *all* their predecessors. Such departure in the historical pattern is especially curious for Wallace, whose racial views appeared so compatible with those ultra-conservatives who preceded him. This discontinuity may be explained by the changing nature of the Mississippi electorate. By 1968 substantial numbers of Blacks were registered to vote.<sup>5</sup> And evidence shows that white hostility to civil rights has been greatest in those areas of the South populated by huge concentrations of Blacks.<sup>6</sup> If it may be assumed that such counties gave disproportionate support for rightists in 1948, 1956, 1960, and 1964, the entrance of Blacks into the electorate by 1968 would have the effect of diluting Wallace's support in those areas. The same distortion in the statewide distribution of white votes would apply to Nixon's 1972 election. This speculation, obviously, presumes that Blacks did not vote for either Wallace or Nixon in extraordinary numbers.

At this juncture, it should be noted that Republicans drew extraordinary support in 1952, 1964, and 1972, but they did poorly in 1956, 1960, and 1968.<sup>7</sup> In the first three elections, only Republican and Democratic alternatives were given to the electorate. In the second three campaigns, however, ultra-conservatives stood to the right of both parties. In 1956, 1960, and 1968, therefore, Mississippians were able to sort themselves out ideologically to a greater extent. For that reason, the linkage between these elections is especially pronounced.

<sup>5</sup> The percent of voting age Blacks registered to vote in Mississippi jumped from 6.7% in November, 1964 to 32.9% in October of 1966. See Congressional Quarterly, *Revolution in Civil Rights* (Washington: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1965), p. 74.

<sup>6</sup> This was the major conclusion by Donald R. Matthews and James W. Prothro in their major study, *Negroes and the New Southern Politics* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966).

<sup>7</sup> The percent of the vote obtained by Republicans in these years follows: 1952 — 39.6%, 1956 — 24.5%, 1960 — 24.7%, 1964 — 87.1%, 1968 — 13.5%, 1972 — 78.2%.

The ecological data to be analysed here was drawn from the 1970 Census, the year nearest to the contemporary elections under study. The variables used are as follows.

1. percent of families above the poverty line
2. median age
3. median family income
4. percent nonwhite
5. percent completing high school
6. percent employed in manufacturing
7. percent employed in white collar occupations
8. percent urban
9. percent rural
10. percent born outside Mississippi

In all elections studied, the percent nonwhite is controlled for in the partials derived. As shown in Table 2, the correlations are not statistically significant in every instance, but most tend in the expected direction.

Republican candidates for President in 1968 and 1976, for Senator in 1972, and for Governor in 1967 and 1975 consistently relied on a socio-economic cleavage markedly different from that supportive of Wallace and Goldwater voting. All five Republicans tended to draw votes from counties typified by high school graduates, urban dwellers, and higher income families. Also, such counties were characterized by white collar rather than manufacturing employment. All these variables are positively inter-related at significant levels, so it appears that Republicanism does thrive in a milieu upper SES in character. The upper socio-economic cleavage supportive of all five Republicans is confirmed even when the variable nonwhite is held constant. These findings also verify Strong's argument, and the hypothesis offered.

On the other hand, voting for Wallace and Goldwater increased with the percent of counties' population in rural areas and in manufacturing employment. Both men also tended to rely on counties populated by few people of non-Mississippi origins. Goldwater tended to do poorly in counties with a degree of affluence, as indexed by the percent of families above poverty and by the median family income. And though statistically insignificant, both tendencies are sustained by the partials derived. On these same indices of income, Wallace's simple correlations do indicate an upper SES bias, but they are reduced to insignificant levels by the partial correlations. Overall, therefore, both Wallace and Goldwater did not rely so exclusively on an upper SES cleavage, as did GOP candidates for President in 1968 and 1976, for Senator in 1972, and for Governor in 1967 and 1975. Counties populated by poorer Whites would exhibit more hostility to Black demands than would counties dominated by upward mobile, middle class Whites. Also, racism probably would not have helped Nixon's campaign against George Wallace in 1968.

Nixon's 1972 election also was not so clearly linked to an upper socio-economic cleavage. The simple correlations do show significance on many upper SES variables, but that electoral cleavage is undermined when percent nonwhite is held constant. In contrast, most upper SES simple correlations are sustained by the partials in the elections of Nixon in 1968, of Ford in 1976, and of Republican Senatorial (1972) and Gubernatorial (1967/1975) candidates.

In 1972, only two partial correlations had statistical significance for Nixon's election. That is, the control for nonwhite did not undermine the tendencies for Nixon to draw disproportionate votes in counties inhabited by rural dwellers and by Mississippi-born citizens. Other partial correlations are extremely weak, and three even show lower socio-economic tendencies. It appears, therefore, that the racial

variable had substantial impact on Nixon's 1972 vote distribution in Mississippi but that purely socio-economic indicators did not. This data adds credence to the argument that Mississippians were reacting against George McGovern's candidacy when they voted Republican for President in 1972. Certainly his appeal to minorities, his advocacy of welfare programs, and his opposition to Vietnam would hardly endear McGovern to the mass of Mississippi's electorate. In this light, it is more comprehensible that Nixon's great popularity did not extend to the GOP Senatorial contender in 1972, Gil Carmichael. Carmichael's electoral support was more limited to counties of upper socio-economic status.

To summarize, the data for Mississippi confirm two hypotheses which relate Republican gains in the South to economic rather than racial factors. In terms of historical antecedents, GOP Presidential candidates in 1956, 1960, and 1968 exemplify modern Republicanism. They are not linked to those racial separatists who campaigned in 1948, 1956, and 1960. In terms of electoral cleavage, Nixon in 1968 and Ford in 1976 relied on counties of upper SES attributes; similar SES variables correlated to the campaigns of Republican Senatorial (1972) and Gubernatorial (1967 and 1975) candidates. But when Republican Presidential contenders obtained extraordinary voter support in Mississippi, their upper socio-economic cleavage was either weakened (Nixon in 1972) or undermined entirely (Goldwater in 1964). In these instances, the marked shift to the GOP may be related to the "status" anxieties of the White mass who live amongst huge concentrations of Blacks rather than to the economic "class" interests of the middle class White community.

TABLE 1. Matrix Showing Pearson Correlation Coefficients for Voting By Mississippi Counties in Ten Presidential Elections.

	Thurmond, 1948	Eisenhower, 1952	Eisenhower, 1956	Unpledged, 1956	Nixon, 1960	Unpledged, 1960	Goldwater, 1964	Nixon, 1968	Wallace, 1968	Nixon, 1972
Thurmond, 1948	X	.433	-.023*	.585	.014*	.587	.728	-.261	-.445	-.431
Eisenhower, 1952		X	.616	.677	.496	.126*	.162*	.353	-.591	-.494
Eisenhower, 1956			X	-.008*	.465	-.394	-.327	.602	-.220	-.006*
Unpledged, 1956				X	.133*	.553	.611	-.100*	-.672	-.632
Nixon, 1960					X	-.333	-.126*	.548	-.267	-.059*
Unpledged, 1960						X	.795	-.580	-.092*	-.352
Goldwater, 1964							X	-.508	-.133*	-.276
Nixon, 1968								X	-.371	.110*
Wallace, 1968									X	.840
Nixon, 1972										X

\* Indicates statistical insignificance. All others are significant at least at the .05 level.

TABLE 2. Simple and Partial (Control NonWhite) Pearson Correlation Coefficients Between Ten Socio-Economic Variables and Votes for Republican Presidential, Senatorial and Gubernatorial Candidates and for George Wallace in Mississippi Counties\*

	<i>President 1964</i>	<i>President 1968</i>	<i>President 1972</i>	<i>President 1976</i>	<i>Senator 1972</i>	<i>Governor 1967</i>	<i>Governor 1975</i>	<i>Wallace 1968</i>
above poverty	-.437 (-.094)	.435 (.481)	.667 (-.010)	.508 (.492)	.218 (.120)	-.005 (.419)	.446 (.633)	.710 (.112)
median age	-.203 (.584)	-.226 (-.936)	.735 (-.133)	.167 (-.028)	.239 (.285)	-.144 (.426)	-.099 (-.209)	.987 (.909)
median income	-.366 (-.144)	.486 (.468)	.511 (.072)	.541 (.489)	.261 (.231)	.262 (.573)	.534 (.624)	.456 (.007)
non- white	.496 ( )	-.177 ( )	-.862 ( )	-.280 ( )	-.126 ( )	.367 ( )	-.083 ( )	-.866 ( )
high school	-.219 (.026)	.586 (.581)	.382 (-.077)	.666 (.632)	.323 (.303)	.245 (.461)	.711 (.775)	.264 (-.349)
manufac- turing	-.181 (.118)	-.349 (-.535)	.466 (.005)	-.170 (-.395)	.018 (-.057)	-.457 (-.336)	-.359 (-.480)	.590 (.294)
white collar	-.195 (-.177)	.693 (.691)	-.000 (-.143)	.485 (.479)	.295 (.288)	.479 (.556)	.751 (.749)	-.236 (-.621)
urban	-.266 (-.258)	.665 (.663)	.023 (-.103)	.420 (.404)	.190 (.179)	.505 (.586)	.730 (.729)	-.262 (-.850)
rural	.268 (.211)	-.698 (-.688)	-.052 (.202)	-.420 (-.404)	-.292 (-.277)	-.405 (-.514)	-.730 (-.729)	.273 (.865)
non-Missis- sippi	-.468 (-.351)	.554 (.534)	.198 (-.263)	.200 (.106)	-.029 (-.081)	.254 (.460)	.310 (.302)	-.057 (-.819)

\* Simple correlation coefficients are given first for each variable; partial correlation coefficients are given in parentheses. In this table all simple and partial correlations with a value of .200 or above are statistically significant at least at the .05 level.