

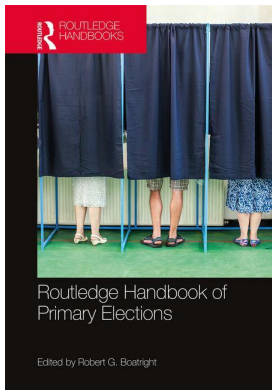
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5

SORTING DIXIE

The Changing Profile of Southern Presidential Primary Electorates

Seth C. McKee

This chapter takes a detailed look at changes in the demographic composition of voters participating in Democratic and Republican presidential primaries in the American South¹ from 1988 to 2016. Over this span of eight presidential elections, the sorting of southerners into the major party primaries has constituted one of the most palpable and electorally consequential political transformations in American history. The well-known contemporary realignment of white southerners to the Grand Old Party (GOP) is perhaps most evident through an examination of the demography of presidential primary voters. Likewise, the changing nature of the coalition of Democratic primary voters provides a stark contrast since many of these electorates are now majority black. With the use of exit poll data, the major changes to the composition of Democratic and Republican primary electorates are demonstrated and analyzed. The passing of the old Democratic Solid South to the new Republican-dominant Dixie emerges in plain sight by chronicling the vast alterations in the makeup of southerners who participate in presidential primary contests.

The partisan transformation of the South from a one-party Democratic bastion (persisting from roughly the late 1800s to the 1950s) to a Republican-dominant region (commencing around the 2000s; see Hayes and McKee 2008; McKee 2012) arguably has no parallel in American history (Bartels 2000; Black and Black 2002; Hood, Kidd, and Morris 2012). Curiously though, the bulk of scholarship chronicling and assessing this remarkable realignment is confined to general elections at various levels of officeholding (Black and Black 2002; Hood, Kidd, and Morris 2012; Lublin 2004; McKee 2010; Shafer and Johnston 2006; Valentino and Sears 2005). By comparison, studies of partisan change via primary contests are notably few (but see Clark 2014; Huffmon, Knotts, and McKee forthcoming; McKee and Hayes 2009, 2010; McKee 2017). This is surprising, since political transformations typically register first in primary elections (Stimson 2004). Indeed, it is perhaps fair to say that the best way to understand changes in the American electorate is to measure changes in the composition of the primary electorate. The American South has undergone the most pronounced changes in the composition of its primary electorate over the last several decades and this chapter makes it apparent that the transformation of the profiles of participants in Democratic and Republican contests is a telling case of why it is important to carefully study primary elections.

Since the start of the post-reform presidential primary era in 1972, when primaries became the main vehicle for nominating the major party presidential candidates, not until the 2000

election cycle did more southerners participate in Republican primaries than Democratic primaries (McKee and Hayes 2010). Figure 5.1 shows the percentage of Republican primary voters in southern states and South-wide for 1988, 2008, and 2016, the years examined throughout this chapter. Overall, in 1988, 35 percent of southern primary voters participated in the GOP contests. Except for South Carolina, where the Democratic Party held a caucus in 1988, in every southern state in this election cycle where both major parties held a presidential primary, more voters participated in the Democratic contest. Twenty years later in the 2008 election cycle, South-wide Republican participation was 40 percent of the two-party total. Primarily due to the greater excitement of the Democratic race between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama and perhaps to a lesser extent because of the absence of a high profile southern Republican (apologies to Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee), Democratic participation exceeded GOP primary voting in every state except Alabama and Florida. In 2016, however, the enthusiasm was clearly on the Republican side (see McKee 2017), and 61 percent of Dixie’s primary voters cast Republican ballots. Only in Louisiana were more votes cast in the Democratic presidential contest.

The relative share of the southern electorate participating in the major party primaries is worth noting for any given election cycle because short-term conditions can alter participation patterns. Some groups of voters, like political independents, are especially susceptible to the vicissitudes of more pressing events. Nonetheless, there has been a general trend in favor of more Republican participation in southern primaries and this is to be expected since the GOP has attained a hegemonic position in elections from president down to state legislative races

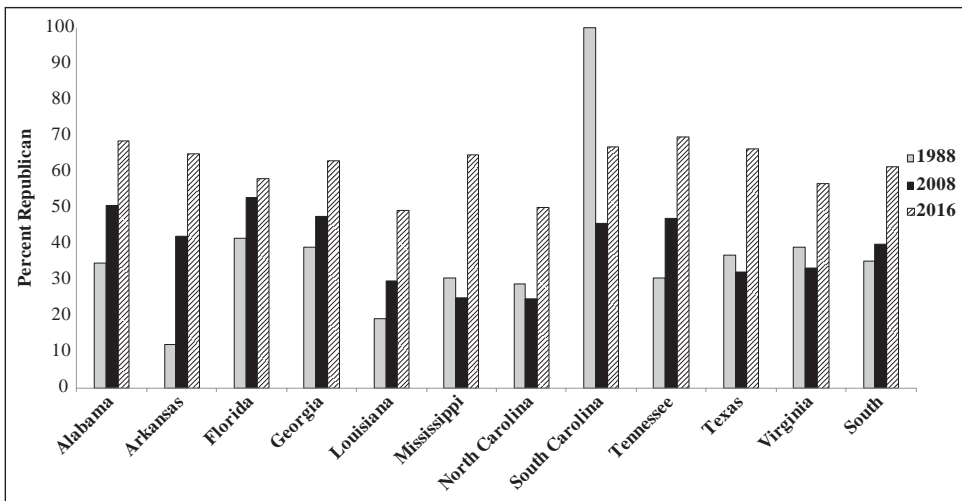


Figure 5.1 Republican Share of Southern Presidential Primary Votes: 1988, 2008, and 2016

Note: Data compiled by the author from Dave Leip’s *Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections* (<http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/>) for 2008 and 2016, and *CQ’s Guide to U.S. Elections* (Kalb 2016) for 1988. Republican share of votes is out of the total cast for both major parties (Democratic plus Republican). In 1988 in South Carolina, only the Republican Party held a primary (South Carolina Democrats held a caucus) and that accounts for the 100 percent Republican vote share. The total major party presidential primary votes cast in 1988, 2008, and 2016 were 10,994,342; 18,448,528; and 19,993,729. The Republican share of the two-party presidential primary vote cast in the South in 1988, 2008, and 2016 was 35 percent, 40 percent, and 61 percent.

(McKee and Yoshinaka 2015). Of course, it also matters whether there is a sitting incumbent seeking reelection to the White House. When this is the case, primaries are rarely competitive or even held for the party of the president running for another term. The 1988, 2008, and 2016 elections are singled out because they are open contests and therefore both parties hold presidential primaries. Finally, unlike voting behavior – which is highly sensitive to the choice of candidates in a primary contest, which in turn invariably changes as the primary season advances – the composition of primary electorates is more durable. Put another way, South Carolina has been the first state to hold its primary contests in the South for decades now (especially for the GOP, see Huffinon, Knotts, and McKee forthcoming), but even though this means that other southern states go later in the calendar when some candidates have exited, the profile of voters participating in later contests does not appear to change that much.²

This chapter unfolds in the following manner. First, state-level changes in the composition of southern Democratic primary electorates are examined. Next, state-level alterations of southern Republican primary electorates are detailed. For both Democratic and Republican primary electorates, the data cover the 1988, 2008, and 2016 presidential elections. The analysis then turns to an accounting of region-wide changes between 1988 and 2008. The data are presented for all primary voters and then according to party primary, in order to show overall changes and then how they have played out within each major party primary. For consistency in longitudinal comparisons, these data are confined to the eight southern states that held presidential primaries for both major parties in 1988 and 2008.³ The final analysis considers which factors condition the likelihood of being a Democratic primary voter as opposed to a Republican primary voter for 1988 and 2008. The chapter concludes with a brief summary statement of the significance of the substantial changes to southern presidential primary electorates. Primaries are a leading and durable indicator of tracking broader changes in American politics and the southern case is particularly notable for contributing to the contemporary state of political competition in a region now dominated by the Republican Party.

Democratic Primary Electorates in the South

In this section and the one that follows, four tables are shown and discussed in succession. All of the data are from state primary exit polls conducted in 1988, 2008, and 2016. The first two tables highlight state-level demographic changes; racial changes (percent white, black, and Latino) followed by alterations with respect to gender (percent female), age (percent over 44 years old), and education (percent with a college degree). The last two tables document changes in party identification (percent Democrat, independent, and Republican) and ideology (percent liberal, moderate, and conservative), respectively.

Table 5.1 displays the percentage of Democratic primary voters in southern states who were white, black, or Latino in 1988, 2008, and 2016. The most notable change over these three election cycles is the decline in white voters and the rise in African-American and Hispanic voters in southern Democratic primaries. Although the National Election Pool did not survey Louisiana voters in 2016, because the state has party registration and tracks registration according to race, it is possible to know the racial composition of Louisiana Democratic primary voters in 2016. In the 2016 Democratic primary in Louisiana, 61 percent of voters were black (McKee 2017). Hence, in every Deep South state in 1988 (South Carolina Democrats did not hold a primary) the Democratic primary electorate was majority white, whereas in 2016 all five of these states had majority black Democratic primary electorates, ranging from a low of 51 percent black in Georgia to a high of 71 percent African-American in Mississippi.

Table 5.1 Racial Composition of Democratic Primary Electorates: 1988, 2008, and 2016

| Race | Year | AL | AR | FL | GA | LA | MS | NC | SC | TN | TX | VA |
|--------|------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|----|----|----|-----|----|
| White | 1988 | 55 | 86 | 80 | 64 | 62 | 54 | 71 | – | 72 | 66 | 64 |
| | 2008 | 44 | 80 | 66 | 43 | 47 | – | 62 | 43 | 67 | 46 | 61 |
| | 2016 | 40 | 67 | 48 | 38 | | 24 | 62 | 35 | 63 | 43 | 63 |
| | Difference | –15 | –19 | –32 | –26 | –15 | –30 | –9 | –8 | –9 | –23 | –1 |
| Black | 1988 | 45 | 13 | 17 | 35 | 37 | 45 | 29 | – | 27 | 23 | 34 |
| | 2008 | 51 | 17 | 20 | 51 | 48 | – | 34 | 55 | 29 | 19 | 30 |
| | 2016 | 54 | 27 | 27 | 51 | – | 71 | 32 | 61 | 32 | 19 | 26 |
| | Difference | +9 | +14 | +10 | +16 | +11 | +26 | +3 | +6 | +5 | –4 | –8 |
| Latino | 1988 | <1 | 1 | 1 | <1 | <1 | 1 | <1 | – | <1 | 10 | <1 |
| | 2008 | 4 | 2 | 12 | 3 | 4 | – | 2 | 1 | 3 | 32 | 5 |
| | 2016 | 1 | 3 | 20 | 7 | – | 1 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 32 | 7 |
| | Difference | <+1 | +2 | +19 | +6 | +3 | 0 | +2 | +1 | +1 | +22 | +6 |

Note: Data compiled by the author. The 1988 (CBS News/*New York Times*) and 2008 (National Election Pool) raw exit poll data were made available through the Roper Center, and I thank Peter Enns, Rachel B. Schlass, and Brandon Cruz (all of the Roper Center) for helping me procure the data. The 2016 (National Election Pool) summary exit poll data were made available online via the following CNN website: <http://www.cnn.com/election/primaries/polls>. In 1988 the South Carolina Democratic Party held a caucus (hence no primary exit poll). In 2008 there was no National Election Pool exit poll for the Mississippi Democratic primary. In 2016 there was no National Election Pool exit poll for the Louisiana Democratic primary. In this table and all those after, the 1988 and 2008 data were weighted based on the weight variable in each exit poll.

Only in Virginia has the white share of the Democratic primary electorate remained essentially the same since 1988. Compared to 1988, in the other nine southern states the decline in the percentage of white voters goes from a low of 9 percentage points in North Carolina and Tennessee to a high of 32 percentage points in Florida. Florida and Texas have declining white Democratic primary electorates primarily because of the increase in Hispanic voters. In fact, only Texas and Virginia have a lower percentage of African-American voters in 2016 vis-à-vis 1988, and in both states, there has been substantial Latino growth (especially in Texas). The Deep South states remain overwhelmingly white and black in their composition of residents and thus the increase in Latino Democratic primary voters is relatively small, with the exception of Georgia, where Hispanic Democratic primary voters went from less than 1 percent in 1988 to 7 percent in 2016. The share of Latino Democratic primary voters has remained modest in 2016 in the Rim South states of Arkansas (3 percent), North Carolina (3 percent), and Tennessee (2 percent). In 1988, every southern Democratic primary electorate was majority white. In 2016, seven of the 11 southern states had majority-minority Democratic primary electorates.

Table 5.2 shows the percent female, percent older than 44 years, and the percent college graduates in Democratic primaries in the southern states for 1988, 2008, and 2016. Since 1988, there is a clear trend in more women participating in Democratic primaries in the South. To be sure, women constituted the majority sex in every Democratic primary in 1988, but their majority status has only solidified since then. In every Deep South state for which there is polling data in 2016 (excluding Louisiana), women voters comprise 60 percent or more of the Democratic primary electorate. The main reason why the female percent of voters is higher in

Table 5.2 Gender, Age, and Education of Democratic Primary Electorates: 1988, 2008, and 2016

| Race | Year | AL | AR | FL | GA | LA | MS | NC | SC | TN | TX | VA |
|--------------|------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|----|-----|-----|-----|
| Female | 1988 | 53 | 52 | 53 | 52 | 52 | 53 | 52 | – | 53 | 52 | 52 |
| | 2008 | 60 | 60 | 59 | 63 | 60 | – | 57 | 61 | 58 | 57 | 57 |
| | 2016 | 60 | 57 | 58 | 62 | – | 64 | 58 | 61 | 58 | 58 | 57 |
| | Difference | +7 | +5 | +5 | +10 | +8 | +11 | +6 | 0 | +5 | +6 | +5 |
| > 44 Years | 1988 | 53 | 57 | 63 | 49 | 52 | 55 | 56 | – | 52 | 49 | 52 |
| | 2008 | 61 | 67 | 72 | 53 | 68 | – | 65 | 61 | 61 | 56 | 59 |
| | 2016 | 61 | 65 | 65 | 64 | – | 60 | 61 | 65 | 64 | 58 | 59 |
| | Difference | +8 | +8 | +2 | +15 | +16 | +5 | +5 | +4 | +12 | +9 | +7 |
| College Grad | 1988 | 27 | 20 | 33 | 35 | 30 | 23 | 34 | – | 33 | 32 | 42 |
| | 2008 | 35 | 39 | 46 | 53 | 34 | – | 44 | 37 | 35 | 43 | 57 |
| | 2016 | 51 | 44 | 48 | 54 | – | 43 | 58 | 40 | 56 | 51 | 64 |
| | Difference | +24 | +24 | +15 | +19 | +4 | +20 | +24 | +3 | +23 | +19 | +22 |

Deep South Democratic primary electorates is tied directly to race. As mentioned, all of these electorates are now majority black, and it is also the case that black women far outnumber black men in their Democratic primary participation (see McKee 2017). In 2016, the share of female Democratic primary voters is 57 percent or higher in every southern state.

Minorities and women are two fundamental components of the vaunted Obama coalition that took shape in 2008. The increase in these Democratic primary subgroups is obvious in the southern states, but perhaps surprisingly, southern Democratic primary electorates have aged considerably since 1988. Compared to 1988, in 2016 the share of older voters (older than 44) has increased in every southern Democratic primary electorate. In 1988, only in the retirement mecca of Florida were more than 60 percent of Democratic primary voters over 44 years of age. In 2016, only the Texas and Virginia Democratic primary electorates contained a share of older voters that amounted to less than 60 percent of all voters. In short, there has been a notable graying of southern Democratic primary electorates.

One of the most impressive alterations in southern Democratic primary electorates is the increase in college graduates. In 1988, in no southern Democratic primary electorate were a majority of voters also college graduates. Virginia had the most with 42 percent, and Arkansas the least with 20 percent. Almost three decades later, six southern Democratic primary electorates were comprised of a majority of voters with a college degree. Virginia still led the way with 64 percent college graduates and South Carolina had the lowest number of college graduates (40 percent).

Table 5.3 presents data on the party identification of southern Democratic primary electorates in 1988, 2008, and 2016. Fortunately, the primary exit polls ask party identification. Just as party registration does not necessarily indicate party identification, nor should it be assumed that only Democrats (Republicans) participate in Democratic (Republican) primaries even if a primary is limited only to party registrants (e.g., Florida, Louisiana, and North Carolina administer closed primaries limited only to party registrants). In the late 1980s it should be expected that a lower share of Democratic identifiers participated in Democratic primaries if only because Republican participation in Republican primaries was so much lower. Nonetheless, in the southern states holding Democratic primaries in 1988, the share of Democratic identifiers was impressive.

Table 5.3 Party Identification of Democratic Primary Electorates: 1988, 2008, and 2016

| Race | Year | AL | AR | FL | GA | LA | MS | NC | SC | TN | TX | VA |
|-------------|------------|----|----|----|----|----|-----|-----|----|----|----|----|
| Democrat | 1988 | 77 | 66 | 73 | 76 | 76 | 75 | 76 | – | 72 | 69 | 73 |
| | 2008 | 83 | 79 | 80 | 80 | 84 | – | 78 | 76 | 80 | 70 | 72 |
| | 2016 | 77 | 72 | 79 | 76 | – | 86 | 70 | 82 | 75 | 71 | 76 |
| | Difference | 0 | +6 | +6 | 0 | +8 | +11 | –6 | +6 | +3 | +2 | +3 |
| Independent | 1988 | 18 | 27 | 22 | 19 | 15 | 15 | 18 | – | 21 | 26 | 21 |
| | 2008 | 11 | 17 | 15 | 16 | 11 | – | 17 | 20 | 16 | 21 | 20 |
| | 2016 | 20 | 24 | 18 | 20 | – | 13 | 28 | 16 | 23 | 26 | 22 |
| | Difference | +2 | –3 | –4 | +1 | –4 | –2 | +10 | –4 | +2 | 0 | +1 |
| Republican | 1988 | 5 | 7 | 5 | 5 | 10 | 10 | 6 | – | 7 | 6 | 6 |
| | 2008 | 6 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | – | 5 | 4 | 3 | 9 | 8 |
| | 2016 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | – | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 |
| | Difference | –2 | –3 | –2 | –1 | –5 | –8 | –3 | –1 | –5 | –3 | –3 |

At 66 percent, Arkansas had the lowest share of Democrats voting in a Democratic primary and Alabama had the highest at 77 percent. Compared to 1988, in 2016 the percentage of Democratic identifiers was the same or higher in every southern Democratic primary except for North Carolina. Driven by racially based partisan sorting, Mississippi now has the highest percentage of Democrats voting in its Democratic primary (86 percent) and North Carolina has the lowest (70 percent), due in part to a substantial increase in independent voters (+10 percentage points).

It makes more sense to compare the percentage of partisans than independents because the latter group exhibits the most variability in primary participation (e.g., in 2016 it appears that independents were drawn more to southern Republican primaries because of the candidacy of Donald Trump, see McKee 2017). With this in mind, between 1988 and 2016, there is a consistent drop in the percentage of Republican voters in southern Democratic primaries. Whereas in 1988 Louisiana and Mississippi each had 10 percent of their Democratic primary electorates comprised of Republican voters, in 2016 every southern Democratic primary electorate has a Republican share of identifiers below 5 percent.

Table 5.4 concludes this section with a look at the changing ideological composition of southern Democratic primary electorates. The compositional changes between 1988 and 2016 speak loudly to the remarkable ideological sorting occurring among Democratic primary voters. One should never lose sight of the fact that over an almost thirty-year period many older voters with more conservative views have exited the electorate and have been replaced by a more liberal generation of Democratic primary voters. In other words, over multiple decades, sorting of this nature is not just because the same voters have realigned their party identification with their ideological self-identity (Levendusky 2009), but also because of a voter replacement effect in which younger voters hold more politically congruent partisan and ideological identities (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998).

In 1988, in no southern Democratic primary electorate were even a third of voters liberal in their self-identification. At 32 percent, Virginia had the highest share of liberal Democratic primary voters and Arkansas had the least, at 16 percent. Interestingly, in 2016 Virginia still had the highest share of liberal Democratic primary voters (68 percent) and Arkansas still had the least (50 percent), but now at least half of every southern Democratic primary electorate was liberal – a remarkable transformation. Between 1988 and 2016, seven states underwent an

Table 5.4 Ideology of Democratic Primary Electorates: 1988, 2008, and 2016

| Race | Year | AL | AR | FL | GA | LA | MS | NC | SC | TN | TX | VA |
|--------------|------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Liberal | 1988 | 24 | 16 | 27 | 26 | 25 | 24 | 23 | – | 23 | 24 | 32 |
| | 2008 | 38 | 36 | 50 | 47 | 31 | – | 42 | 44 | 41 | 38 | 50 |
| | 2016 | 57 | 50 | 54 | 56 | – | 51 | 56 | 54 | 61 | 59 | 68 |
| | Difference | +33 | +34 | +27 | +30 | +6 | +27 | +33 | +10 | +38 | +35 | +36 |
| Moderate | 1988 | 42 | 46 | 48 | 46 | 41 | 40 | 45 | – | 43 | 45 | 48 |
| | 2008 | 45 | 49 | 37 | 41 | 48 | – | 37 | 42 | 43 | 40 | 38 |
| | 2016 | 32 | 34 | 37 | 36 | – | 40 | 35 | 35 | 32 | 34 | 29 |
| | Difference | –10 | –12 | –11 | –10 | +7 | 0 | –10 | –7 | –11 | –11 | –19 |
| Conservative | 1988 | 34 | 39 | 25 | 27 | 33 | 36 | 32 | – | 34 | 31 | 20 |
| | 2008 | 17 | 15 | 13 | 12 | 22 | – | 21 | 15 | 17 | 22 | 12 |
| | 2016 | 11 | 16 | 9 | 9 | – | 10 | 9 | 11 | 7 | 7 | 3 |
| | Difference | –23 | –23 | –16 | –18 | –11 | –26 | –23 | –4 | –27 | –24 | –17 |

increase in their share of liberal Democratic primary voters that was 30 percentage points or higher. Conversely, between 1988 and 2016 there has been an across-the-board drop in the share of conservative Democratic primary voters. In 1988 conservatives outnumbered liberals in every Democratic primary but Florida and Virginia. In 2016 conservatives are the smallest ideological category in every Democratic primary electorate and liberals are the most prominent. Simply put, between 1988 and 2016, southern Democratic primary electorates have undergone a dramatic ideological sorting. The surge in liberal identifiers has been offset by a concomitant decline in moderates and conservatives.

Republican Primary Electorates in the South

The contemporary southern Republican Party is distinguished by its overwhelmingly white constituency. Table 5.5 displays the racial composition of southern Republican primary electorates in 1988, 2008, and 2016. As the South has become more racially diverse, even the Republican primary electorate has become somewhat less white. In 1988, whites constituted over 90 percent of Republican primary voters in every southern state.⁴ In 2016, four states had Republican primary electorates whose share of white voters was under 90 percent: Florida (78 percent), Georgia (88 percent), Texas (82 percent), and Virginia (86 percent).⁵ Florida and Texas stand out because of the substantial increase in Latino voters, from 5 to 16 percent in the Sunshine State and from 3 to 10 percent in the Lone Star State. Interestingly and admittedly surprising, the reduction in the white share of voters in Georgia and Virginia is due primarily to an increase in black voters, from 2 to 7 percent in Georgia and from 2 to 9 percent in Virginia. Even accounting for the relatively larger decline in white voters in the aforementioned states, overall, in 2016, white voters still dominate southern Republican primary electorates.

Unlike the wholesale shift in greater female participation in Democratic primary electorates, there is no discernible pattern regarding the gender balance in Republican primary electorates (see Table 5.6). In 1988, half of the southern state Republican primary electorates were majority male and the other half majority female. In 2016, those states that had majority male Republican primary electorates in 1988 (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Tennessee, and Texas) are

Table 5.5 Racial Composition of Republican Primary Electorates: 1988, 2008, and 2016

| Race | Year | AL | AR | FL | GA | LA | MS | NC | SC | TN | TX | VA |
|--------|------------|----|----|-----|----|----|----|----|----|----|-----|-----|
| White | 1988 | 98 | 96 | 93 | 97 | 96 | 98 | 97 | – | 97 | 93 | 97 |
| | 2008 | 92 | 95 | 83 | 94 | 90 | – | – | 96 | 94 | 87 | 93 |
| | 2016 | 93 | 96 | 78 | 88 | – | 93 | 94 | 96 | 94 | 82 | 86 |
| | Difference | –5 | 0 | –15 | –9 | –6 | –5 | –3 | 0 | –3 | –11 | –11 |
| Black | 1988 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 | – | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| | 2008 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 4 | – | – | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| | 2016 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 7 | – | 6 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 9 |
| | Difference | +2 | –1 | +2 | +5 | +1 | +4 | –1 | –1 | 0 | 0 | +7 |
| Latino | 1988 | <1 | <1 | 5 | <1 | 1 | <1 | <1 | – | 1 | 3 | 1 |
| | 2008 | 2 | 2 | 12 | 2 | 5 | – | – | 1 | 3 | 10 | 2 |
| | 2016 | 1 | 1 | 16 | 3 | – | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 10 | 2 |
| | Difference | <1 | <1 | +11 | +2 | +4 | <1 | <1 | 0 | 0 | +7 | +1 |

Note: In 1988 there was no CBS News/*New York Times* exit poll for the South Carolina Republican primary. In 2008 there was no National Election Pool exit poll for the Mississippi and North Carolina Republican primaries. In 2016 there was no National Election Pool exit poll for the Louisiana Republican primary.

now majority female. And some of the states that were majority female are now majority male (Arkansas, Virginia, and Louisiana in 2008 versus 1988). Overall, there is a fairly equal gender balance in Republican primary participation with just Arkansas and Virginia deviating more than a percentage point from a 50/50 split in the 2016 contests.

Like their Democratic primary counterparts, there has also been a clear graying of Republican primary participants since 1988. In 1988, only in Florida were more than 60 percent of Republican primary voters 45 or older (66 percent). By 2016, Alabama had the lowest share of voters over 44, at 66 percent; now five Republican primary electorates had a portion of over 44-year-old voters that exceeded 70 percent of the entire electorate (Arkansas, Florida, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Tennessee). Relative to Democratic primary voters, the aging of the GOP primary electorate is more notable. In nine of the Republican primary electorates the percentage increase in the older segment of voters between 1988 and 2016 is ten points or higher.

Lastly, Table 5.6 shows a consistent increase in the education of Republican primary electorates. In 1988, no Republican primary electorate had a majority of college graduates. In 2016, more than half of the voters in seven southern state Republican primary electorates were college graduates (less than half of the voters were college educated in Alabama, Arkansas, and Mississippi in 2016; and most likely Louisiana too, despite the absence of exit poll data). Obviously, the upward trends in age and education are not specific to one of the major party primary electorates in the South – this is a general trend among the entire southern presidential primary electorate.

Changes in the party identification of Republican primary voters are documented in Table 5.7. Even in 1988, the share of Democratic identifiers participating in GOP presidential primary contests was not substantial, except in the case of Georgia and Mississippi where Democrats accounted for 11 and 18 percent of these GOP primary participants, respectively (also the GOP primary in Arkansas in 2008 drew a significant share of Democrats, at 10 percent). By 2016, the Virginia Republican primary electorate contained the highest share of Democrats, at

Table 5.6 Gender, Age, and Education of Republican Primary Electorates: 1988, 2008, and 2016

| Characteristic | Year | AL | AR | FL | GA | LA | MS | NC | SC | TN | TX | VA |
|----------------|------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|----|-----|-----|-----|
| Female | 1988 | 47 | 55 | 49 | 49 | 51 | 53 | 50 | – | 48 | 48 | 51 |
| | 2008 | 47 | 49 | 44 | 48 | 49 | – | – | 49 | 47 | 49 | 47 |
| | 2016 | 51 | 48 | 51 | 51 | – | 50 | 50 | 49 | 50 | 50 | 47 |
| | Difference | +4 | –7 | +2 | +2 | –2 | –3 | 0 | 0 | +2 | +2 | –4 |
| > 44 Years | 1988 | 56 | 56 | 66 | 47 | 46 | 57 | 52 | – | 56 | 47 | 51 |
| | 2008 | 67 | 65 | 75 | 61 | 68 | – | – | 67 | 60 | 64 | 63 |
| | 2016 | 66 | 74 | 74 | 69 | – | 71 | 67 | 73 | 75 | 68 | 68 |
| | Difference | +10 | +18 | +8 | +22 | +22 | +14 | +15 | +6 | +19 | +21 | +17 |
| College Grad | 1988 | 41 | 38 | 35 | 41 | 39 | 27 | 32 | – | 38 | 41 | 48 |
| | 2008 | 42 | 42 | 50 | 51 | 43 | – | – | 51 | 44 | 49 | 57 |
| | 2016 | 44 | 45 | 53 | 53 | – | 44 | 51 | 54 | 51 | 53 | 60 |
| | Difference | +3 | +7 | +18 | +12 | +4 | +17 | +19 | +3 | +13 | +12 | +12 |

a modest 6 percent – in every other GOP primary electorate Democratic affiliates comprised 5 percent or less of the total participants. The change in political independents reveals no crisp pattern between 1988 and 2016, and, as mentioned, this is partly due to a shift of independents in favor of GOP primaries in some states because of the allure of Donald Trump. By contrast, compared to 1988, in 2008 there is a consistent drop in the share of independent voters participating in Republican primaries. Despite the increase in independent voters after 2008 in several Republican primary contests, there is a general trend of more Republican identifiers since 1988. For instance, in 1988 three states had a portion of Republican affiliates under 60 percent (Arkansas, Georgia, and Mississippi). In 2016, every southern state Republican primary electorate was 60 percent Republican identifiers or higher, ranging from a low of 63 percent in

Table 5.7 Party Identification of Republican Primary Electorates: 1988, 2008, and 2016

| Characteristic | Year | AL | AR | FL | GA | LA | MS | NC | SC | TN | TX | VA |
|----------------|------------|-----|----|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|----|----|----|----|
| Democrat | 1988 | 6 | 4 | 3 | 11 | 7 | 18 | 2 | – | 6 | 4 | 5 |
| | 2008 | 4 | 10 | 3 | 5 | 2 | – | – | 2 | 4 | 2 | 3 |
| | 2016 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 5 | – | 5 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 6 |
| | Difference | –2 | +1 | 0 | –6 | –5 | –13 | 0 | 0 | –2 | –1 | +1 |
| Independent | 1988 | 36 | 34 | 18 | 31 | 18 | 24 | 20 | – | 24 | 27 | 25 |
| | 2008 | 16 | 19 | 16 | 14 | 9 | – | – | 17 | 19 | 18 | 18 |
| | 2016 | 27 | 32 | 22 | 25 | – | 20 | 30 | 22 | 33 | 27 | 29 |
| | Difference | –9 | –2 | +4 | –6 | –9 | –4 | +10 | +5 | +9 | 0 | +4 |
| Republican | 1988 | 58 | 62 | 79 | 59 | 75 | 58 | 78 | – | 70 | 69 | 70 |
| | 2008 | 81 | 71 | 81 | 81 | 88 | – | – | 81 | 77 | 81 | 79 |
| | 2016 | 69 | 63 | 75 | 70 | – | 76 | 69 | 76 | 63 | 70 | 65 |
| | Difference | +11 | +1 | –4 | +11 | +13 | +18 | –9 | –5 | –7 | +1 | –5 |

Table 5.8 Ideology of Republican Primary Electorates: 1988, 2008, and 2016

| Characteristic | Year | AL | AR | FL | GA | LA | MS | NC | SC | TN | TX | VA |
|----------------|------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Liberal | 1988 | 5 | 5 | 9 | 5 | 8 | 10 | 6 | – | 8 | 6 | 4 |
| | 2008 | 7 | 7 | 11 | 9 | 9 | – | – | 7 | 7 | 8 | 8 |
| | 2016 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | – | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| | Difference | –3 | –3 | –6 | –2 | +1 | –9 | –4 | –6 | –6 | –4 | –1 |
| Moderate | 1988 | 31 | 38 | 39 | 32 | 30 | 29 | 30 | – | 30 | 33 | 35 |
| | 2008 | 21 | 26 | 29 | 25 | 20 | – | – | 24 | 20 | 20 | 27 |
| | 2016 | 20 | 17 | 27 | 18 | – | 15 | 19 | 17 | 16 | 17 | 25 |
| | Difference | –11 | –21 | –12 | –14 | –10 | –14 | –11 | –7 | –14 | –16 | –10 |
| Conservative | 1988 | 64 | 56 | 52 | 63 | 62 | 61 | 63 | – | 61 | 61 | 60 |
| | 2008 | 72 | 67 | 61 | 66 | 71 | – | – | 69 | 73 | 72 | 65 |
| | 2016 | 78 | 82 | 70 | 79 | – | 84 | 79 | 81 | 82 | 82 | 72 |
| | Difference | +14 | +26 | +18 | +16 | +9 | +23 | +16 | +12 | +21 | +21 | +12 |

Arkansas and Tennessee to a high of 76 percent Republicans in Mississippi and South Carolina. Short-term conditions will alter the share of independent voters and hence the portion of Republican identifiers, but this has little bearing on the portion of Democratic voters since now they comprise such a small share of GOP primary participants.

Like the previous section, the ideological sorting of Republican primary electorates is truly an eye-opener (see Table 5.8). Whereas southern Democratic primary electorates have taken on a pattern that is conceptualized primarily as “sorting” (see Levendusky 2009) since the vast increase in liberals comes mainly from the decline of conservatives, the ideological alteration of Republican primary electorates shows a higher degree of polarization. If the ideological sorting of voters is primarily driven by a reduction in the portion of moderates (as opposed to coming from a reduction in liberals/conservatives), then this is considered a polarized pattern. This is the case with respect to Republican primary electorates throughout the South. To be sure, since 1988 there has been a wholesale reduction in liberal voters participating in GOP primary contests, but this decline has been greatly surpassed by the larger decline in moderate voters. In other words, by 2016, the impressive increase in the share of conservative voters in GOP primary elections is due mainly to the reduction in moderate voters participating in these contests.

Although every Democratic primary electorate in the South in 2016 was at least 50 percent liberal in its voter composition, in only two states did liberals constitute more than 60 percent of the electorate (61 percent in Tennessee and 68 percent in Virginia, see Table 5.4). By contrast, in 2016, every Republican primary electorate was at least 70 percent conservative, and in at least five Republican primary electorates, conservatives were more than 80 percent of GOP primary participants (Arkansas, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas).⁶ Southern voters in both major party primaries have aligned their ideological identity with the appropriate partisan contest, and this is especially true with respect to conservative identifiers voting in GOP presidential primaries.

Changes to the Southern Primary Electorate: 1988 versus 2008

Unfortunately, because of the recency of the 2016 exit polls the data are not accessible in raw form. In the previous two sections of the chapter, the 2016 data were made available in summary

form compatible for presentation with the 1988 and 2008 data shown in Tables 5.1–5.8. In this section, summary data are shown for the entire South, but this means that the data consist only of the 1988 and 2008 election cycles. Since I have the raw exit poll data for 1988 and 2008, it is possible to pool all of the southern primary data together.⁷ This said, there are some caveats that should be mentioned before proceeding. First, in some states exit polls were conducted in 1988 but not for 2008 (e.g., no Mississippi exit polls for both party primaries in 2008 and there was no North Carolina GOP primary exit poll in 2008). The common data source for 1988, the CBS News/*New York Times* exit polls, did not produce a poll for the South Carolina Republican primary (and recall there was no South Carolina Democratic primary for this year). Given these discrepancies that impact three southern states between 1988 and 2008, the pooled data for southern presidential primaries exclude all primary voters in Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina. In other words, the pooled data are from the eight southern states that conducted exit polls for both major party primary voters in 1988 and 2008: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

It is highly unlikely that the exclusion of primary voters in Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina would significantly alter any conclusions regarding political behavior that is drawn from a very large sample of primary voters residing in the other eight southern states. Henceforth, southern primary electorates *in toto*, are confined to the above-mentioned eight states in which longitudinal comparisons are possible for both major party primary electorates surveyed in 1988 and 2008. It is useful to examine changes in southern primary electorates at the state-level, as was done in the last two sections. Likewise, there is value in assessing changes at the regional level, as will be the case in the two tables presented in this section. Further, because of the possibility of trends over time in the southern primary electorate, irrespective of party contest, it is prudent to show the data for all primary voters before showing the data with regard to voters participating in Democratic or Republican primary contests, respectively.

Table 5.9 presents data in 1988 and 2008 for all southern primary voters, Democratic primary voters, and then Republican primary voters for the same demographic characteristics highlighted in Tables 5.1–5.2 and 5.4–5.5 (race, gender, age, education for Democratic and Republican primary voters, respectively). In addition, there is one more characteristic highlighted because it is available for 1988 and 2008 (not currently available in the publicly released 2016 exit polls): the religion of primary voters. Although the religion question actually offers five response options (1. Protestant/Other Christian; 2. Catholic; 3. Jewish; 4. Something Else; and 5. None), for simplicity and given the prevalence of voters classified as such, only data from the “Protestant/Other” category are shown.

Starting with the racial characteristics of southern primary voters, overall, the share of whites has declined from 79 percent in 1988 to 71 percent twenty years later in 2008. Given the racial sorting among voters participating in Democratic and Republican primary contests, as expected, the portion of white voters has dropped considerably more among the more racially diverse southern Democratic primary electorate. White voters were 68 percent of Democratic primary voters in 1988 and they dropped to 56 percent in 2008. Interestingly, the increase in black voters in the southern Democratic primary electorate amounts to only 2 percentage points over the same period of time (from 29 to 31 percent).⁸ The largest South-wide gain is found among Latino voters, who go from 2 percent of the southern Democratic primary electorate in 1988 to 10 percent in 2008. Although there is a six percentage-point drop in the share of white voters comprising the southern GOP electorate, this group remains 90 percent of all Republican primary participants. And between 1988 and 2008, the share of black voters in the southern Republican primary electorate inches up from 2 to 3 percent. The largest increase is again due to Latino voters, who go from 2 percent of the southern GOP primary electorate in 1988 to 5 percent twenty years later.

Table 5.9 Demographic Changes in Southern Primary Electorates: 1988 and 2008

| <i>Characteristic</i> | <i>1988</i> | <i>2008</i> | <i>Difference</i> |
|-----------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------|
| All Voters | | | |
| White | 79 | 71 | -8 |
| Black | 18 | 19 | +1 |
| Latino | 2 | 8 | +6 |
| Democratic Primary | | | |
| White | 68 | 56 | -12 |
| Black | 29 | 31 | +2 |
| Latino | 2 | 10 | +8 |
| Republican Primary | | | |
| White | 96 | 90 | -6 |
| Black | 2 | 3 | +1 |
| Latino | 2 | 5 | +3 |
| All Voters | | | |
| Female | 51 | 54 | +3 |
| Democratic Primary | | | |
| Female | 52 | 59 | +7 |
| Republican Primary | | | |
| Female | 50 | 47 | -3 |
| All Voters | | | |
| > 44 Years | 53 | 64 | +11 |
| Democratic Primary | | | |
| > 44 Years | 53 | 62 | +9 |
| Republican Primary | | | |
| > 44 Years | 53 | 66 | +13 |
| All Voters | | | |
| College Graduate | 35 | 45 | +10 |
| Democratic Primary | | | |
| College Graduate | 32 | 43 | +11 |
| Republican Primary | | | |
| College Graduate | 40 | 47 | +7 |
| All Voters | | | |
| Protestant/Other | 70 | 68 | -2 |
| Democratic Primary | | | |
| Protestant/Other | 68 | 61 | -7 |
| Republican Primary | | | |
| Protestant/Other | 74 | 77 | +3 |

Note: The data presented in this table and Table 5.10 are confined to the eight southern states that conducted presidential primary exit polls for both major parties in 1988 and 2008: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

Despite the common perception that gender is roughly a 50/50 proposition, women have become more participatory than men in contemporary American elections (Ansolabehere and Hersh 2012), and this has been the case specifically in the southern primary electorate. In 1988, women were slightly more prevalent than men (51 percent), but in 2008 female voters accounted for 54 percent of all southern primary voters. Women are now on the precipice of dominating the southern Democratic primary electorate, going from 52 percent of voters in 1988 to 59 percent twenty years hence. By contrast, there was an equal gender balance in the

southern GOP primary electorate in 1988 but in 2008 women have become a slight minority of Republican primary voters (47 percent).

As evident from the state-level data already presented, the graying of the southern primary electorate is a major development. In 1988, 53 percent of the southern primary electorate was over 44 years old. In 2008, 64 percent of the southern primary electorate was over 44 years old. There is a 9 percentage-point increase in the older share of the southern Democratic primary electorate between 1988 and 2008 (from 53 percent over 44 in 1988 to 62 percent over 44 in 2008). The increase in the portion of older voters is even more pronounced among the southern Republican primary electorate, which was also 53 percent over 44 years old in 1988, but vaults to 66 percent over the age of 44 in 2008 (a 13 percentage-point increase).

Similar to an upward trend in older southern primary voters, there is a notable increase in the level of education possessed by southern primary participants. Overall, 35 percent of the southern primary electorate had a college degree in 1988. Twenty years later, 45 percent of the southern primary electorate had graduated from college. The increase in college graduates has been more notable among the southern Democratic primary electorate (going from 32 percent to 43 percent), but the percentage of college graduates remains higher among Republican primary voters (who go from 40 percent in 1988 to 47 percent in 2008).

Finally, changes in the portion of Protestant/Other Christian (POC) primary voters are insightful. Over this twenty-year span, the decline in POC southern primary voters is modest, going from 70 percent in 1988 to 68 percent in 2008. Nonetheless, there has been a partisan sort among POC voters (Green et al. 2014) and this is evident in Table 5.9. Within the southern Democratic primary electorate, the share of POC voters declines from 68 percent in 1988 to 61 percent in 2008. The so-called Religious Right in American politics (Wilcox and Robinson 2010) consists of a large share of Protestants of various Christian denominations and among the southern Republican primary electorate the portion of POC voters increases from 74 percent in 1988 to 77 percent in 2008.

Turning from demographic characteristics to more politically based features of the southern primary electorate, Table 5.10 presents data on party identification and ideology in 1988 and 2008. Starting with party identification, it is interesting to find that the share of Democratic identifiers has not changed, 45 percent of the southern primary electorate in 1988 and 2008. What has changed is the considerable 7 percentage-point reduction in the share of independents (from 23 to 16 percent) along with a commensurate 7 percentage-point increase in Republican affiliates (from 32 to 39 percent) between 1988 and 2008. To the extent that the southern primary electorate has moved from a dealigned pattern (a considerable portion of independents) to a realigned pattern (moving from political independence to a party affiliation), the southern GOP has clearly been the beneficiary. Nonetheless, in 2008 Democrats still outnumbered Republicans in the southern primary electorate.

With respect to partisan sorting into the appropriate party primary, there has clearly been more of this taking place within the southern Republican primary electorate. Whereas the portion of Democratic identifiers goes from 73 percent in 1988 to 78 percent in 2008 (+5 percentage points) within the southern Democratic primary electorate, on the Republican side, GOP affiliates were 69 percent in 1988 and increase to 80 percent of voters in the Republican primary electorate in 2008 (+11 percentage points). In 2008, there are hardly any mismatched partisans, meaning Democrats participating in the southern Republican primary (4 percent of the total) or Republicans voting in the southern Democratic primary (6 percent of the total). But the decline in independents in both major party primary electorates is significant, going from 21 percent in 1988 to 16 percent in 2008 in the southern Democratic primary and dropping from 26 percent independents in 1988 to 16 percent independents in 2008 in the southern GOP primary.

Table 5.10 Party Identification and Ideology of Southern Primary Electorates: 1988 and 2008

| <i>Characteristic</i> | <i>1988</i> | <i>2008</i> | <i>Difference</i> |
|-----------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------|
| All Voters | | | |
| Democrat | 45 | 45 | 0 |
| Independent | 23 | 16 | -7 |
| Republican | 32 | 39 | +7 |
| Democratic Primary | | | |
| Democrat | 73 | 78 | +5 |
| Independent | 21 | 16 | -5 |
| Republican | 6 | 6 | 0 |
| Republican Primary | | | |
| Democrat | 6 | 4 | -2 |
| Independent | 26 | 16 | -10 |
| Republican | 69 | 80 | +11 |
| All Voters | | | |
| Liberal | 17 | 27 | +10 |
| Moderate | 40 | 34 | -6 |
| Conservative | 42 | 40 | -2 |
| Democratic Primary | | | |
| Liberal | 25 | 41 | +16 |
| Moderate | 45 | 42 | -3 |
| Conservative | 30 | 16 | -14 |
| Republican Primary | | | |
| Liberal | 6 | 8 | +2 |
| Moderate | 34 | 23 | -11 |
| Conservative | 60 | 68 | +8 |

Finally, ideological sorting into the proper party primary is impressive between 1988 and 2008. Overall, the share of political moderates has declined from 40 percent in 1988 to 34 percent twenty years later. Even more substantial and a bit unexpected (since there has been no change in the ideological distribution of general election voters in the South over the same span of time, see McKee forthcoming), is the increase in liberal primary voters. Most of the decline in moderate voters is due to the 10 percentage-point increase in liberal primary voters who were 17 percent in 1988 and rise to 27 percent in 2008. The portion of conservative voters has changed only slightly between 1988 and 2008 – going from 42 percent to 40 percent over these two decades.

Of course, much more interesting is the alteration of the ideological distribution of voters participating in the major party primaries between 1988 and 2008. Among voters in the southern Democratic primary electorate, the sorting pattern jumps out. The share of moderates declines 3 percentage points over twenty years (from 45 to 42 percent). But the percentage of liberals goes from 25 percent in 1988 to 41 percent in 2008. Such a large increase in the portion of liberal voters is primarily due to the decline in conservatives, who go from 30 percent in 1988 (outnumbering liberals at this time) to a distinct minority of the southern Democratic primary electorate at 16 percent in 2008. In comparison, there were hardly any liberals participating in the southern Republican primary in 1988 (6 percent) or 2008 (8 percent). Rather, the sort comes primarily from a reduction in moderate voters (-11 percentage points) and an attendant increase in conservatives (+8 percentage points). Unlike the southern Democratic primary electorate, which enjoys a more equitable balance of moderate and liberal voters,

the conservative dominance of the southern Republican primary electorate accounts for why the GOP occupies a far-right ideological position versus a center-left position in the case of the Democratic opposition.

Likelihood of Being a Democratic Primary Voter: 1988 and 2008

In this final section, multivariate analysis is employed to assess the likelihood that a southern primary exit poll respondent voted in the Democratic primary or the Republican primary for the eight southern states administering both major party primaries in 1988 and 2008. The dependent variable is coded 1 for a Democratic primary voter and 0 for a Republican primary voter. There are two pooled models, one for 1988 and another for 2008. The pooled models for these respective elections include data on the Democratic and Republican primary participants in the eight southern states. Given the existence of state-specific variation, in the pooled models there are state dummies included for seven of the eight states (Alabama is the omitted reference category, but the coefficients for the state dummies are not shown in the table) to serve as fixed effects. Also, all the models include robust standard errors and the data are weighted in accordance with the appropriate exit poll weight variable. Given the dichotomous coding of the dependent variable, probit regression is the method of choice. In addition to the pooled models for 1988 and 2008, separate regressions are run for each state primary electorate (e.g., Alabama primary voters in 1988). Thus, a total of 18 regressions have been estimated for the 1988 and 2008 presidential primary elections, the two pooled models for these respective years and then two models for each of the eight southern state primary electorates for 1988 and 2008.

The variables of interest consist of the same voter characteristics highlighted throughout the chapter: race, gender, age, education, religion, party identification, and ideology. All of these factors have been coded as dummy variables. Starting with race, the reference category is white and the models include dummies for black, Latino, and other. There is a clear expectation that compared to white respondents, black respondents are much more likely to be Democratic primary voters (as opposed to Republican primary voters). Gender is coded so that female equals 1 and male equals 0. It is expected that women are more likely to be Democratic primary voters in 2008, based on the descriptive data shown earlier. Next, with regard to age, respondents older than 44 are coded 1 and respondents younger than 45 are coded 0. Education is accounted for with a dummy for college graduates. In the case of religion, a dummy is coded 1 for Protestant/Other Christian and therefore anyone not identifying as such is coded 0.

For income, there is a dummy coded 1 for those making \$50,000 or more and 0 if less than this amount. This is the first time an income variable makes an appearance since it does not make much sense to show over-time changes with a variable not adjusted for inflation. By contrast, even though this dollar amount is not nearly as substantial in 2008 versus 1988, the variable is included in order to see if higher income earners are more likely to be Republican primary voters. Turning to the more directly political variables, for party identification there are dummies included for Democrat and independent, with Republican the omitted comparison category. Similarly, for ideology, the dummies consist of liberal and moderate self-identifiers with conservative the omitted comparison category. With regard to party identification, it is clearly expected that Democrats and independents are more likely to be Democratic primary voters vis-à-vis Republicans. And likewise, compared to conservatives, liberal and moderate voters should be more likely to have participated in the Democratic primary.

Tables 5.11 and 5.12 show the results for all 18 models; the two pooled models followed by state-specific regressions for Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, and Georgia in Table 5.11 and the models for Louisiana, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia in Table 5.12. The model results are

Table 5.11 Likelihood of Being a Democratic Primary Voter: 1988 and 2008

| Variable | Pooled | | Alabama | | Arkansas | | Florida | | Georgia | |
|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| | 1988 | 2008 | 1988 | 2008 | 1988 | 2008 | 1988 | 2008 | 1988 | 2008 |
| Black | .99*** (.08) | .86*** (.08) | 1.18*** (.21) | 1.07*** (.18) | .66 (.41) | .82* (.34) | .73*** (.20) | .10 (.20) | 1.15*** (.15) | 1.62*** (.25) |
| Latino | .17 (.10) | .23*** (.07) | -.42 (.46) | .41 (.40) | 1.47* (.64) | -.13 (.29) | -.45* (.20) | .03 (.11) | .07 (.63) | .51# (.27) |
| Other | .12 (.19) | .08 (.12) | 1.15* (.49) | -.14 (.18) | .30 (.61) | -.39 (.40) | 1.09 (.73) | .13 (.20) | -.53 (.40) | .30 (.38) |
| Female | -.07# (.04) | .19*** (.04) | -.03 (.10) | .09 (.12) | -.24 (.15) | .25* (.10) | -.16# (.09) | .13 (.09) | -.02 (.09) | .25* (.11) |
| > 44 Years | -.10** (.04) | .07# (.04) | -.21* (.10) | .10 (.12) | -.24 (.15) | .06 (.10) | .01 (.09) | -.03 (.09) | -.03 (.09) | .04 (.12) |
| College Grad | .07# (.04) | .07# (.04) | -.11 (.11) | .20 (.13) | -.14 (.16) | .26* (.10) | .00 (.09) | -.18* (.09) | .11 (.10) | .22# (.11) |
| Prot./Other | -.05 (.04) | -.18*** (.04) | -.09 (.16) | -.07 (.16) | -.08 (.21) | -.36** (.12) | -.13 (.09) | .11 (.09) | .26* (.12) | -.40** (.13) |
| > \$50K | -.09# (.05) | -.12** (.04) | -.06 (.12) | -.14 (.13) | -.28 (.22) | -.32** (.11) | .16 (.12) | -.15# (.09) | -.07 (.11) | -.11 (.13) |
| Democrat | 2.62*** (.05) | 2.71*** (.05) | 2.53*** (.15) | 2.61*** (.16) | 2.70*** (.19) | 2.44*** (.13) | 3.17*** (.13) | 3.15*** (.11) | 2.26*** (.11) | 2.46*** (.14) |
| Independent | 1.26*** (.04) | 1.32*** (.04) | 1.03*** (.12) | 1.09*** (.13) | 1.19*** (.17) | 1.32*** (.13) | 1.60*** (.10) | 1.49*** (.11) | 1.11*** (.11) | 1.40*** (.13) |
| Liberal | .58*** (.06) | .79*** (.05) | .70** (.25) | 1.10*** (.16) | .29 (.22) | .95*** (.14) | .44*** (.13) | .61*** (.11) | .77*** (.15) | 1.08*** (.15) |
| Moderate | .25*** (.04) | .59*** (.04) | .26* (.10) | .97*** (.13) | .03 (.19) | .67*** (.11) | .07 (.10) | .30** (.11) | .57*** (.10) | .58*** (.13) |
| Constant | -1.37*** (.08) | -1.72*** (.09) | -1.14*** (.20) | -1.97*** (.20) | -.52# (.28) | -1.63*** (.20) | -1.44*** (.14) | -1.70*** (.15) | -1.82*** (.16) | -1.89*** (.21) |
| Pseudo R ² | .49 | .62 | .50 | .67 | .40 | .54 | .58 | .63 | .46 | .69 |
| Observations | 13,752 | 15,320 | 1,692 | 1,485 | 1,105 | 1,572 | 2,314 | 2,532 | 1,891 | 1,674 |

Note: In this table and Table 5.12 the dependent variable is 1 = Democratic primary voter, 0 = Republican primary voter. Probit coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. The pooled models include state primary dummies with Alabama as the omitted category. Data were weighted. # $p \leq .10$, * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$ (two-tailed).

presented in pairs for 1988 and then 2008 so that the reader can see what if any variation exists for any of the independent variables across these two election cycles. Most of the emphasis will be placed on the dynamics present within each of the pooled models since they provide a comprehensive picture of political behavior in the entire region as opposed to for a certain southern state. This said, the factors that consistently register an effect on whether a respondent was a Democratic primary voter are race, party identification, and ideology. These three voter characteristics are consistently statistically significant in 1988 and 2008 for the pooled models and most of the state-specific models.

Table 5.11 indicates that only in Arkansas in 1988 and Florida in 2008 is it the case that African-Americans are no more likely to be Democratic primary voters than are their white counterparts. In all of the remaining models, black voters are significantly more likely to be

Table 5.12 Likelihood of Being a Democratic Primary Voter: 1988 and 2008

| Variable | Louisiana | | Tennessee | | Texas | | Virginia | |
|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| | 1988 | 2008 | 1988 | 2008 | 1988 | 2008 | 1988 | 2008 |
| Black | 1.46*** (.19) | .76*** (.21) | .77# (.42) | 1.02*** (.24) | .72*** (.17) | .81*** (.15) | 1.01*** (.16) | 1.12*** (.18) |
| Latino | -.50 (.56) | -.13 (.31) | -.41 (.74) | -.05 (.25) | .59*** (.18) | .45*** (.14) | -.12 (.46) | .51# (.28) |
| Other | 1.05** (.35) | -.05 (.35) | - (.28) | -.15 (.28) | -.44 (.35) | .33 (.21) | -.20 (.37) | -.15 (.29) |
| Female | -.14 (.09) | .21 (.13) | .19 (.17) | .26* (.10) | .01 (.08) | .16# (.09) | -.08 (.09) | .11 (.10) |
| > 44 Years | .02 (.10) | .22 (.14) | -.37* (.17) | .11 (.11) | -.11 (.09) | .08 (.09) | -.01 (.09) | .09 (.10) |
| College Grad | .26** (.10) | -.03 (.14) | .12 (.21) | -.10 (.12) | .13 (.10) | .15 (.09) | .03 (.09) | .14 (.11) |
| Prot./Other | -.12 (.10) | .02 (.13) | -.29 (.24) | -.17 (.14) | .19# (.10) | -.22* (.10) | -.10 (.10) | -.41*** (.11) |
| > \$50K | -.03 (.12) | .00 (.14) | -.29 (.22) | -.09 (.11) | -.24* (.11) | -.05 (.10) | -.08 (.10) | .03 (.15) |
| Democrat | 2.50*** (.12) | 3.36*** (.16) | 2.56*** (.24) | 2.76*** (.13) | 2.86*** (.12) | 2.68*** (.13) | 2.45*** (.12) | 2.58*** (.14) |
| Independent | 1.19*** (.12) | 1.79*** (.15) | 1.16*** (.20) | 1.44*** (.13) | 1.43*** (.10) | 1.11*** (.10) | 1.13*** (.11) | 1.22*** (.12) |
| Liberal | .12 (.20) | -.06 (.19) | .26 (.27) | 1.16*** (.13) | .90*** (.14) | .65*** (.13) | 1.06*** (.14) | .80*** (.15) |
| Moderate | .08 (.10) | .27# (.14) | .30 (.19) | .81*** (.12) | .21* (.09) | .74*** (.10) | .48*** (.10) | .43*** (.12) |
| Constant | -1.11*** (.12) | -1.76*** (.23) | -1.10*** (.28) | -2.04*** (.20) | -1.55*** (.13) | -1.42*** (.15) | -1.39*** (.14) | -1.26*** (.19) |
| Pseudo R ² | .51 | .71 | .47 | .66 | .51 | .57 | .52 | .58 |
| Observations | 1,813 | 1,598 | 623 | 2,007 | 2,420 | 2,884 | 1,893 | 1,568 |

Note: Probit coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. Data were weighted. # $p \leq .10$, * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$ (two-tailed).

Democratic primary participants. Although in the pooled model for 2008 the Latino coefficient is highly significant, it is insignificant in the 1988 pooled model. In the separate state models, Hispanic voters are more likely to participate in the Democratic primaries of Arkansas in 1988, Georgia in 2008, Texas in 1988 and 2008, and Virginia in 2008. Most likely pointing to the significance of more Republican aligned Cuban-Americans in 1988, Latinos in Florida are significantly less likely to be Democratic primary voters.

Party identification displays its hefty effect in all of the regression estimates displayed in Tables 5.11 and 5.12. For the pooled models and those of every state and each year, Democrats and independents are much more likely to vote in the Democratic primary as compared to Republican identifiers. In the case of ideology, liberal and moderate voters are more likely than conservatives to participate in Democratic primaries except for the null findings in Arkansas and Louisiana for the 1988 election, and no significant differences in the case of liberal Louisiana voters in 2008, moderate voters in Florida in 1988, and liberal and moderate Tennessee voters in 2008. Outside

of race, party identification, and ideology, there is considerable variation in the impact of the remaining independent variables for any given state and election cycle. Furthermore, as will be shown, these other demographic variables, even when they are statistically significant, register very small substantive effects on the likelihood of being a Democratic primary voter.

Turning specifically to the pooled models in 1988 and 2008, there is a lot of longitudinal continuity and in some cases notable changes in the factors affecting primary participation. Starting with effects that persist and register in the same direction for both election cycles, are the following variables: black, college graduate (though only marginally significant in 1988 and 2008; $p < .10$), income, party identification, and ideology. All of these voter characteristics operate in a manner that is expected. African-Americans, the highly educated, lower income, Democratic, independent, liberal, and moderate voters are more likely to participate in Democratic primary contests in 1988 and twenty years later this is still the case, in the 2008 election.

Now, turning to changes, as mentioned, Latinos were not any more likely to be Democratic voters in 1988 but they were more likely to participate in the 2008 Democratic primary contests. Whereas women were slightly less likely to vote in the 1988 Democratic primaries, they were significantly more likely to vote in the 2008 Democratic primaries. In 1988, older voters were more likely to be Republican primary voters, but in 2008 they were somewhat more inclined to participate in Democratic primaries. Finally, in line with the strong shift of religious conservatives to the southern GOP, in 1988 Protestant/Other Christians were not any more or less likely to be Democratic primary voters, but twenty years later these voters are much more likely to be Republican primary participants.

As is always the case with limited dependent variable models, the interpretation of effects warrants a discussion of predicted probabilities. Utilizing the observed-value approach (see Hanmer and Kalkan 2013), Table 5.13 displays the predicted probability that a voter participated in the Democratic primary contest in 1988 and 2008 based on those characteristics that registered statistical significance in the pooled models from Table 5.11. The first entered probability shows the likelihood of being a Democratic primary voter for the selected variable of interest and the second probability (on the same line) is the corresponding probability when the first variable does not take on its value (e.g., for 1988 in the first row is shown the likelihood of an African-American voter being a Democratic primary voter and the next probability is the likelihood of being a Democratic primary voter if the participant is not African-American). After displaying the probabilities for the specific variable of interest when it does and does not take on its value, the third (bracketed) entry in each row for 1988 and 2008 is the difference between the two probabilities. For instance, in 1988, black voters had a .75 probability of participating in the Democratic presidential primary as compared to a .56 probability for voters who were not African-American and this difference was 19 percentage points higher for black voters.

For variable categories with multiple entries because of more than one classification, like race, party identification, and ideology, it makes sense to examine the probabilities in descending order for each year. For example, in 2008 the likelihood of being a Democratic presidential primary voter was: .68 for blacks, .59 for Latinos, and .54 for whites. As mentioned above, outside of the race variable, the other demographic variables register very small (though statistically significant) effects on the probability of being a Democratic primary voter. In 1988, the differences in probabilities between women and men, older and younger voters, college graduates versus those with less than a college degree, and voters with incomes above and below \$50,000 are never more than 2 percentage points. In 2008, for these same demographic characteristics, the probability difference exceeds 2 points only in the case of gender. Women in 2008 had a .57 probability of being Democratic primary voters, whereas the likelihood for their male counterparts was .54. The religion variable was significant in 2008, but in substantive terms, this meant

Table 5.13 Probability of a Democratic Primary Voter: Pooled Models 1988 and 2008

| Characteristic | 1988 | 2008 |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| <i>Race</i> | | |
| Black vs. non-Black | .75, .56 [+19] | .68, .54 [+14] |
| Latino vs. non-Latino | n.s. | .59, .55 [+4] |
| White vs. non-White | .56, .57 [-1] | .54, .56 [-2] |
| <i>Gender</i> | | |
| Female vs. Male | .57, .58 [-1] | .57, .54 [+3] |
| <i>Age</i> | | |
| > 44 Years vs. < 44 Years | .56, .58 [-2] | .56, .55 [+1] |
| <i>Education</i> | | |
| College Grad vs. Not Graduate | .58, .57 [+1] | .56, .55 [+1] |
| <i>Religion</i> | | |
| Prot./Other vs. Otherwise | n.s. | .55, .57 [-2] |
| <i>Income</i> | | |
| > \$50K vs. < \$50K | .56, .58 [-2] | .55, .57 [-2] |
| <i>Party ID</i> | | |
| Democrat vs. non-Democrat | .95, .27 [+68] | .93, .24 [+69] |
| Independent vs. non-Independent | .72, .48 [+24] | .71, .49 [+22] |
| Republican vs. non-Republican | .17, .57 [-40] | .18, .56 [-38] |
| <i>Ideology</i> | | |
| Liberal vs. non-Liberal | .67, .56 [+11] | .66, .52 [+14] |
| Moderate vs. non-Moderate | .60, .55 [+5] | .61, .52 [+9] |
| Conservative vs. non-Conservative | .54, .57 [-3] | .49, .56 [-7] |

Note: Predicted probabilities were generated from the results of the 1988 and 2008 pooled models shown in Table 5.11. The probabilities were computed based on the observed-value approach (see Hanmer and Kalkan 2013). “n.s.” means the variable is not statistically significant at $p < .10$ (two-tailed) or less. Brackets show the percentage point difference for each set of probability entries.

that Protestant/Other Christian voters had a .55 likelihood of participating in the Democratic primary versus a .57 probability for voters not classified as Protestant/Other Christian.

Since the main drivers of voter sorting into presidential primaries are party identification and ideology, it follows that these variables register the greatest effects. In 1988, with respect to party identification, the likelihood of being a Democratic primary voter was .95 for Democrats, .72 for independents, and just .17 for Republicans. These probabilities are essentially the same for each party affiliation category twenty years later in 2008 (.93 for Democrats, .71 for independents, and .18 for Republicans). The probability differences for ideology categories are notable, although not nearly as large as the differences tied to party identification. In 1988, the likelihood of voting in the Democratic primary was .67 for liberals, .60 for moderates, and .54 for conservatives. In 2008, the only notable change in ideology probabilities is found among conservatives. At .49, conservative voters were now more likely to vote in the Republican presidential primary.

Conclusion

In contemporary southern politics, the last three decades have witnessed a tremendous alteration in the demographic and political profiles of voters who participate in Democratic and Republican presidential primary contests. The partisan transformation of the South from a one-party Democratic stronghold to a Republican bastion has been one of the main storylines of

American politics. Given the importance of this massive alteration to the party system in the nation's largest region, it remains perplexing that the vast literature examining this realignment concentrates primarily on general election contests. When parties shift course or positioning on major issues, the trigger point tends to be presidential contests (Carmines and Stimson 1989). But after an alteration in position-taking occurs (e.g., the GOP taking the conservative position on civil rights and the national Democratic Party moving to the liberal side on the same issue), the gradual sorting of the electorate in response to a change in party positioning is typically most palpable in the political behavior of primary voters. It is in these contests where voters receive the strongest signal from political elites of what the latest direction the party is taking on salient issues. With the party label held constant, many voters differentiate between their candidate choices on the basis of where these contenders position themselves on high profile, "easy" issues (Carmines and Stimson 1980). And those candidates who are not in line with the general direction of the party with regard to major issues (e.g., Rudy Giuliani was a pro-choice Republican whose candidacy never got off the ground in the 2008 GOP nomination contest), are essentially dead on arrival.

By dint of their preferences, primary voters can veto the positions of some candidates by voting for their opponents. Viewed in a different light, the preferred candidates are in a sense having their political agendas validated. But if the national Democratic and Republican parties chart a course that many primary voters oppose, then it is likely we will see substantial movement of certain groups in and out of the major party primary contests. The American South is ground zero for such a development. As the national parties have reversed themselves on salient issues like race/civil rights, and taken opposing stands with respect to moral issues, the general trend of a more liberal stance by Democrats and a more conservative position embraced by Republicans has spurred the sorting of southern presidential primary voters. The evidence of this transformation is patently obvious in the exit poll data examined in this study.

The Democratic Party has become much more racially diverse, and in every Deep South Democratic primary electorate African-American voters are now the majority group. Despite some increase in Latino participants (at least in Florida and Texas) and even African-Americans (in Georgia, Mississippi, and Virginia, see Table 5.5), in 2016 southern Republican primary voters remain an overwhelmingly white constituency. In addition to race, southern primary voters have sorted with respect to gender and religion. Women are on the brink of dominating southern Democratic primary electorates and in particular black women in Deep South Democratic primaries. Protestant and other Christian voters are drawn more to the Republican primary contests compared to voters of another faith or those who claim no religion. As the major parties have distinguished themselves on religious issues in a manner such that the GOP appears more devout and the Democratic Party more secular, this religious-based sorting makes sense.

Finally, because the Democratic and Republican parties have polarized in opposing ideological directions and this development has not escaped the notice of voters (Hetherington 2001), the most impressive transformation in the composition of southern presidential primary electorates is tied to ideological self-identification. In 1988, conservatives outnumbered liberals in most southern state Democratic primaries (see Table 5.4) and in every Democratic primary, moderates were the plurality group. By 2016, liberals comprise half of the Democratic primary electorate in every southern state, and their ascent has primarily come with a substantial decline in conservative participants. By comparison, even in 1988, only a small share of Republican primary voters identified as liberals. What has changed is the considerable decline in moderate voters in Republican presidential primaries. Now, every southern state Republican primary electorate is dominated by conservative voters (see Table 5.8). Contemporary southern Democratic primary electorates are racially diverse, majority female, more secular, and substantially more liberal

than they were in the late 1980s. By contrast, southern Republican primary electorates are now markedly conservative, more Protestant/Christian, and remain overwhelmingly white in their racial composition.

Although both Democratic and Republican primary electorates have experienced a graying effect and an across-the-board increase in education, these characteristics hardly translate into strong political dispositions. The main dividing lines between most Democratic and Republican primary voters are firmly grounded in distinctions that resonate in the realm of politics. Gender, religion, and especially race and ideology, are characteristics that clearly drive political differences, and in the South, these deepening cleavages go a long way toward explaining the impressive sorting of its presidential primary electorates.

Notes

- 1 Throughout, the South is defined as the eleven former Confederate states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. Further, in referring to southern subregions, the Deep South consists of Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina and the Peripheral/Rim South includes Arkansas, Florida, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. The cardinal distinction between the Deep South and Peripheral South is the higher percentage of African-Americans in the former subregion and this primarily accounts for the greater racial polarization in political behavior among black and white voters residing in the Deep South (Black and Black 2012; McKee and Springer 2015).
- 2 Southern states typically go earlier in the primary calendar than non-southern states and, historically, this goes back to the creation of “Super Tuesday” in 1988, when southern Democratic elites (state lawmakers) conspired to place their state primary dates on the same day with the intention of shifting power in favor of the selection of a southern candidate (Stanley and Hadley 1987, 1989). In 1988, the South Carolina GOP held its primary on March 5 and all the remaining southern states held their major party presidential primaries on Super Tuesday March 8. In 2008, the southern states were much more spread out in conducting their primaries, with only four holding theirs on Super Tuesday February 5 (Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, and Tennessee) and North Carolina was the last southern state to go on May 6. In 2016, the southern states were much more bunched together with six holding their primaries on Super Tuesday March 1 (Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia) and Florida and North Carolina the last southern states to go on March 15.
- 3 The states are Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.
- 4 According to the 1988 ABC News exit poll of South Carolina Republican primary voters, over 97 percent were white and less than 2 percent were African-American (author’s analysis of the data).
- 5 In Louisiana, 96 percent of the 2016 Republican presidential primary voters were white (author’s examination of Louisiana Secretary of State’s post-election statistical report).
- 6 I say at least five Republican primary electorates in 2016 because it is very likely that over 80 percent of Louisiana voters in the GOP primary self-identify as conservatives (a confident expectation in the absence of exit poll data).
- 7 Unfortunately, I do not have raw exit poll data for all state primaries held for these years (South and Non-South) and therefore I cannot make comparisons between the changes occurring in the South vis-à-vis those taking place in the rest of the nation.
- 8 Of course, in certain states the racial composition is considerably different, as all five Deep South-state Democratic primary electorates are now majority black (as mentioned in the discussion of Table 5.1).

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