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The Election of African American State Legislators in the Modern South

This study is the most comprehensive analysis of the election of black state legislators in the American South. We start with the election of Leroy Johnson to the Georgia Senate in 1962, the first African American to win a state legislative seat in the modern South. We also document the election of all subsequent African Americans who were the first to enter their southern state legislative chambers. Next, we assess the factors influencing the election of southern black state legislators from the 1970s through 2015. Because of notable long-term changes to the southern electorate and alterations in the racial composition of legislative districts, there has been substantial variation in the likelihood of electing black lawmakers. Our final analysis highlights the undeniable reality and broader significance that the increasing share of southern African American state legislators has occurred at the same time that Republican representation has grown at a greater rate.

More than two decades after Reconstruction ended in the early 1900s, the curtain finally fell on black participation in southern politics (Woodward 2002). According to Kousser (1974), by 1910 only about 10% of southern African American males were registered to vote. With the suppression, if not outright purging of the black electorate, came the extinction of black lawmakers. For instance, in Georgia, with the forging of the Democratic Solid South, the last black state legislator to serve was Representative W. H. Rogers, a Republican from McIntosh County, who left office in 1907. Despite containing the lion's share of African

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Americans, the South¹ had become a white man's country for all matters political (Key 1949). This state of affairs was absolute until Leroy Johnson was elected to the Georgia Senate in 1962. Though we are not certain who was the *last* African American to serve in a southern state legislature prior to the 1960s, at least in the Peach State, more than half a century transpired between Rogers and Johnson.² Thus, Senator Johnson was the first African American to break Dixie's color barrier in what was for decades an all-white and practically all-male southern state legislative delegation.

In this article, we contribute to the literatures on state legislative politics, black politics, and partisan change in the American South.³ We present the most comprehensive assessment of the election of black state legislators since their return in the 1960s; analyzing longitudinal changes in the likelihood of electing black state legislators from the 1970s through the mid-2010s. In addition, and perhaps the most politically consequential feature of this study, is our examination of the relationship between the rise in black legislators and the corresponding ascendancy of Republican lawmakers. Although featuring prominently in congressional scholarship (e.g., Cameron, Epstein, and O'Halloran 1996; Epstein and O'Halloran 1999a, 2000; Hill 1995; Lublin 1997a, 1997b; Swain 1993), we are the first to show in state legislative contests how the increase in black lawmakers has directly and indirectly contributed to Republican statehouse victories, with data spanning four decades (1971–2015), and ending with every southern state legislature controlled by the Grand Old Party (GOP).

The study unfolds in the following order. We begin with a discussion of the return of black lawmakers to southern state legislatures. With a brief descriptive historical overview, we document considerable variation in the reemergence of black legislators across the southern states. Next, we consider the factors that influence the likelihood of electing black state legislators in the South from the 1970s to the mid-2010s. We then shift our focus to an examination of the relationship between growing southern black state legislative delegations and the even more impressive, but generally coincident, rise in Republican state lawmakers. Last, we conclude with a discussion of what the growth of black state legislators means for the past, current, and likely future state of southern party politics.

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Welcome Back: The Return and Rise of Southern Black State Legislators

Table 1 lists the African Americans who were the first(s) to enter the legislative chambers of their southern state capitols in the 1960s or later. Given the information in Table 1, it is safe to infer that the 55-year drought in black state legislative representation in Georgia was a common occurrence rather than an anomaly. Table 1 also documents the considerable regional variation in the return dates of black legislators to southern statehouses. For instance, three years separated trailblazer Georgia Senator Leroy

TABLE 1
Making History: The First Black State Legislators in the Modern South

State	Year Elected to State Senate	Year Elected to State House
Alabama	1974: U. W. Clemon Richmond Pearson	1970: Fred Gray Thomas Reed
Arkansas	1972: Jerry Jewell	1972: Richard Leon Mays William Townsend Henry Wilkins III
Florida	1982: Arnett Girardeau Carrie Meek	1968: Joe Lang Kershaw
Georgia	1962: Leroy Johnson	1965: Albert Thompson John Hood William Cox Joe Grier William Alexander Julius Daugherty Benjamin Brown Julian Bond ^a Grace Hamilton
Louisiana	1974: Sidney Barthelemey	1967: Ernest "Dutch" Morial
Mississippi	1979: Henry Kirksey	1967: Robert G. Clark
North Carolina	1974: Frederick Alexander John W. Winters	1968: Henry Frye
South Carolina	1983: I. DeQuincey Newman ^b	1970: Herbert Fielding
Tennessee	1968: Avon Williams	1964: A. W. Willis Jr.
Texas	1966: Barbara Jordan	1966: Curtis Graves Joe Lockridge
Virginia	1969: L. Douglas Wilder	1967: William Ferguson Reid

^aBond first won election in the 1965 special election but was denied his seat until 1966 when the U.S. Supreme Court decided in his favor (he was blocked from serving over Vietnam War protests, see Wielhouwer and Middlemass 2005, 79).

^bI. DeQuincey Newman won a special election to the SC Senate in 1983.

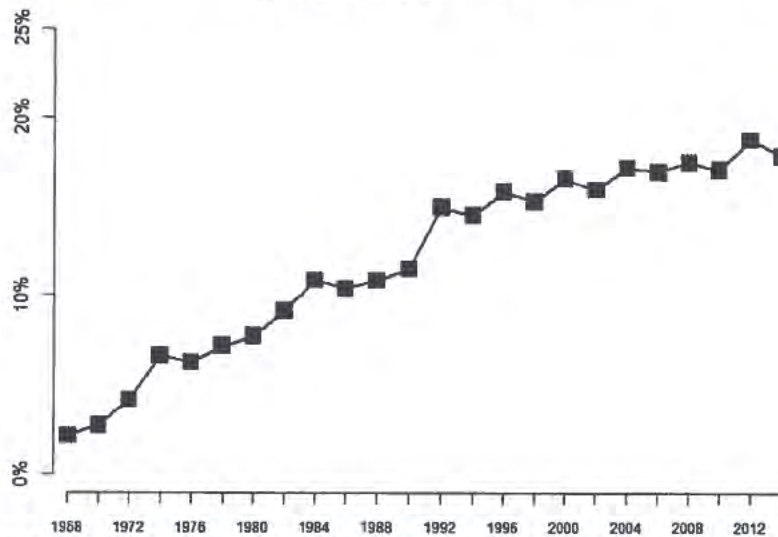
Johnson from the election of his black counterparts to the Georgia House, when nine African Americans won seats in the 1965 special elections. In contrast, three states (Florida, Mississippi, and South Carolina) had at least a dozen years transpire between the election of the first African American to the state house and the subsequent election of the first black to the state senate.

In most southern states, black integration occurred earlier in the more populous lower chamber. This was the case in eight of the 11 southern states (73%): Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. African American representation returned at the same time for both legislative chambers in Arkansas (1972) and Texas (1966). Hence, although Georgia Senator Leroy Johnson was a historic first, southern black representation in the state senate preceding African American representation in the state house was an aberration that resulted from the decision to redistrict the senate before the house in the immediate aftermath of *Baker v. Carr* (1962).⁴ Notice also in Table 1, the overall span in the election of the first African American to a southern state legislative delegation in 1962 to the last occurrence in 1983. Thus, a remarkable gap of 21 years separated the first black state senator in Georgia from the first black state senator in South Carolina (Senator Newman in 1983). This list of historic “first” black southern lawmakers contains several luminaries, who went on to have distinguished careers.⁵

Figure 1 displays the percentage of black state house representatives in two-year intervals for the entire southern delegation from 1968 to 2014. Because every state’s house delegation is larger than its corresponding senate delegation, and in most southern states the lower chamber has shorter terms and thus more frequent elections, we only display data on state representatives. (The dynamic regarding the election of southern black state senators over this same span of time is practically indistinguishable.) As shown in Figure 1, from the late 1960s and into the early 1980s, southern black legislators constituted under 10% of the South’s lower legislative chambers. By the mid-1980s, the share of African American lawmakers tops 10%, but then it jumps to roughly 15% in the early 1990s—a direct response to the increase in majority-minority districts following the 1986 *Thornburg v. Gingles* decision as enforced by the Department of Justice in the 1990’s redistricting cycle (Bullock 2010; Butler 2002; Cunningham 2001; King-Meadows and Schaller 2006; Washington 2012). The percentage

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FIGURE 1
Percentage of Black Legislators in Southern State House
Delegations, 1968–2014



Note: The data in Figure 1 terminate in 2014 because we calculate the share of black state house members based on elections taking place in the even-year while adding into the computation the elections that took place in the prior odd-year contests (e.g., Mississippi in 1971 was factored into the 1972 calculations).

of black lawmakers continues to increase after the early 1990s but at a more incremental pace, nearing 20% by the end of the time series.⁶

Black Representation and Republican Lawmakers

Having documented the return and growth of southern black state legislators, in this section we advance two claims regarding African American representation and then empirically test them in successive order. First, as so many scholars have assessed and determined with congressional data (e.g., Black and Black 2002; Canon 1999; Epstein and O'Halloran 2000; Lublin 1997a), African American descriptive representation is most efficiently and effectively advanced by the presence of blacks in election districts (Lublin 1999; Washington 2012). This relationship has been examined in state legislative contests too (Clark 2019; Epstein and

O'Halloran 1999b; King-Meadows and Schaller 2006; Menifield and Shaffer 2005), and recently by Lublin et al. (2009, 2019).⁷

However, no previous studies come close to evaluating the effect of the percent black district population on electing African American state legislators over such a long period of time (1970s–2010s), and this shortcoming matters since this relationship exhibits significant longitudinal variation. For instance, since the end of the 1960s civil rights movement, southern black enfranchisement has increased (Black and Black 1987; Bullock and Gaddie 2009; Thompson 1982), but as is true of all groups, voter turnout is dynamic (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980), and black participation is sensitive to various contextual factors (Brace et al. 1995; Fraga 2016a, 2016b; Gay 2001; Hayes and McKee 2012; Keele et al. 2017; Keele and White 2019). Additionally, throughout this period most southern whites had come to realign with the Republican Party (Hood, Kidd, and Morris 2012; Valentino and Sears 2005). Starting with data from the 1970s, we evaluate the relationship between the percent black district population and the likelihood of electing a southern black state legislator.

Second, we demonstrate that the notable growth in black representation in southern state legislatures has directly and indirectly contributed to the election of an even greater number of almost entirely white (nonblack), Republican lawmakers. We believe re-districting and the strategic use of majority-black districts explains some of this dynamic (Lublin 1997b). For example, we present evidence that since the 1970s Republicans have gained seats as the share of legislatures' majority-black districts increased, but only up to a point. Once the share of majority-black districts increased beyond roughly 25%, Republicans lost seats. This fits with the notion that mapmakers can increase the share of *possible* Republican seats by packing black voters into a smaller number of districts, assuming the number of majority-black districts does not become too large.

Of course, Hood, Kidd, and Morris' (2012) theory of relative advantage also explains some of this association. They argue that in those contexts where southern black mobilization (e.g., voter registration) is most pronounced so will be the growth in Republicanism. In other words, this is a theory of racial group conflict (Jackson 1993) that manifests electorally, so that increases in black Democratic voters and officeholders are met with even greater increases in white Republicanism because this latter group's response is a means to maintain political dominance.

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These explanations complement each other because Republican gains from majority-black districts require racial polarization in party affiliation and voting.

The Election of Black Lawmakers

Our first empirical analysis asks a simple question: how does the size of a southern legislative district's black population shape its likelihood of electing a black lawmaker? Our discussion thus far implies two important characteristics about this relationship. First, we have strong reasons to believe that the association has changed over time, particularly as states have altered their legislative maps. If legislative maps three decades ago were drawn by state legislatures (or the courts) to disperse black populations more than they do today, we should find evidence that larger black populations were needed to elect black lawmakers in the 1970s, relative to the 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s.

Second, all else equal, we have strong reasons to believe that there are important subregional distinctions to this association (Hicks et al. 2018). If legislative maps tend to concentrate black populations in legislative districts more in the Deep South than in the Rim South, we should find evidence that larger black populations tend to elect black lawmakers in the Deep South relative to Rim South states. Further, it is also the case that there is markedly more racially polarized voting in the Deep South where whites are more Republican than their white Rim South peers (McKee and Springer 2015). Finally, African Americans permanently aligned with the Democratic Party in the 1960s (Black and Black 2002), while the realignment of most southern whites to the GOP was a secular process (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998); hence white support for black legislators has changed considerably with the passage of time (Grofman 2006; Lublin et al. 2009, 2019).⁸

To investigate these empirical patterns, we expose our large dataset to a series of multilevel logit models. We explore whether or not district i in election-year t elects a black lawmaker. Our dataset covers more than half of the southern states in the 1970s and all of the South's 22 legislative chambers for every election year in the 1980s to 2015 (see Appendix Table A2 in the online supporting information). Our dataset, then, represents repeated observations of districts within chambers, over an unbalanced period of time. Some chambers are up for reelection every two years, while others are up for reelection every four.

Multilevel models allow us to handle both the clustering of observations in larger units—e.g., districts within chambers—as well as the fact that our observations are unbalanced by including variance components that functionally segment residual variation along these different levels of aggregation. We can use variance components, in other words, to account for the fact that our observations are not independent and identically distributed. We fit variance components to each district and to each chamber. In effect, we conceive of our data as election years nested within districts, which are further nested within chambers. We also model directly the effect of time on the election of black legislators. We use a yearly time counter variable ($1971 = 0$, $2015 = 44$) and explore this variable using advanced polynomials. Modeling time this way enables us to account for autocorrelation, without strong parametric assumptions about the nature of the effect of time on the likelihood a district elects a black representative, and to test our expectation that larger black populations tended to elect black lawmakers in the 1970s relative to today. We present a very different approach to modeling these data in our online supporting information, located in Appendix C. In that analysis, we replicate the strategy of Hicks et al. (2018) by fitting separate models to each redistricting regime between 1970 and 2015. This analysis, while different, comes to very similar conclusions.

Our main covariate is the percent of each district's population that is black. We assume that the coefficient for this variable is strong and positively correlated with the election of African American state legislators. We also assume that the coefficient for this variable depends on geography. If we are right, this means that the population threshold required to elect a black lawmaker is higher in the five Deep South states. Beyond variation in the share of black populations in the Deep and Peripheral South, the history of more racially polarized voting in the former subregion (McKee and Springer 2015) also accounts for a higher threshold of African American district residents needed to elect a black legislator (see Hicks et al. 2018). Towards this end, we include in our models a covariate for the size of the black population (as a percentage), a dummy variable denoting whether or not a district is in a Deep South state, and an interaction between the two.

Instead of just measuring the size of the black population as a raw percentage, we also explored a dummy variable that divides districts into majority black (i.e., $x > 50\% = 1$) and nonmajority black. Is it possible that the percent black measure is needlessly

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rich, that we could capture the core dynamics with a much simpler dichotomy? Towards this end, we include a second model that replaces our continuous percentage of the African American population with a dummy variable that segments districts into majority black and nonmajority black.

We also control for whether districts had an incumbent running because it is plausible that black legislators are more likely to gain office in open seats. Additionally, we indicate whether elections were contested (meaning at least 1 major party candidate, be it Democrat or Republican, lost the election). We also control for upper versus lower chambers with a dummy variable for senate. Finally, we control for whether the district was an at-large, multimember district (MMD). Scholars have long debated the likely impact of MMDs on black representation (e.g., King-Meadows and Schaller 2006; Niemi, Hill, and Grofman 1985).⁹ Finally, to account for the fact that our dataset covers different redistricting regimes, we include a dummy variable that signifies whether or not each district has been redrawn since the previous election.

We present our findings from these models above in Table 2. These results reveal strong evidence that the size of a district's black population exerts a positive effect on the likelihood it elects a black legislator. Because we interact this variable with the Deep South dummy variable, the main effect reveals the effect of districts' black population on the likelihood Rim South districts elect black lawmakers. According to Model 1, for each 5% point increase in a district's black population, the likelihood it elects a black lawmaker increases by a factor of over 3.5. The interaction effect reveals that this effect is significantly smaller in Deep South states. To elaborate on how much this effect changes between these two subregions, and how much it changes over time, we include Table 3.

Table 3 reports the population-averaged probability a district elects a black lawmaker conditional on region, the size of the district black population, and time.¹⁰ These probabilities are based on Model 1 in Table 2.¹¹ This table clearly reveals the persistence of subregion-based racial polarization as manifested in its effect on the likelihood of black representation. For example, with a 50% black population, the likelihood a Deep South district in 1984 elected a black legislator was 0.19. In contrast, with a 50% black population, the likelihood that a Rim South district elected a black lawmaker in the same year is much higher at 0.40, a difference

TABLE 2
The Election of Black Lawmakers, 1971–2015

Variable	Model 1	Model 2
% of Population Black	0.2521** (0.0082)	
Deep South	–1.1079* (0.6384)	0.2967 (0.3756)
Majority Black District		9.5428** (0.3661)
% of Population Black × Deep South	–0.0207* (0.0096)	
Majority Black × Deep South		–2.4731** (0.3961)
Open Seat	0.9083** (0.1141)	0.6936** (0.0958)
Contested Election	–0.1950* (0.1079)	–0.4551** (0.0907)
Multimember District	3.9509** (0.3183)	2.2219** (0.2410)
Senate	–0.6530 (0.4960)	–0.5420 (0.3746)
Redistricted	0.1412 (0.1001)	–0.0138 (0.0847)
Year Counter (1971 = 0)	0.1346** (0.0197)	0.1056** (0.0159)
Year Counter Squared	–0.0006 (0.0004)	–0.0006* (0.0003)
Constant	–14.8955** (0.5909)	–8.5890** (0.3785)
Var(Chamber)	1.2706** (0.4626)	0.5900* (0.2704)
Var(Year)	6.7424** (0.6238)	10.0028** (0.9330)
N	28,599	28,599
AIC	4952.148	6932.063
BIC	5059.542	7039.458

Note: This table presents the findings of multilevel logit models. The dependent variable for each model takes on a value of 1 if a district in chamber *i* election *t* elects a black lawmaker, otherwise 0. Var(Chamber) represents the variance component for chambers and var(District) represents the variance component for districts. Majority black districts are districts whose black population is equal to or greater than 50%.

* $p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

of over 20 percentage points. Interestingly, this subregional difference is even wider in 2014, when the likelihoods that Deep and Rim South districts with 50% black populations elected black

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TABLE 3
Probability Southern District Elects a Black Legislator given the
Black Population

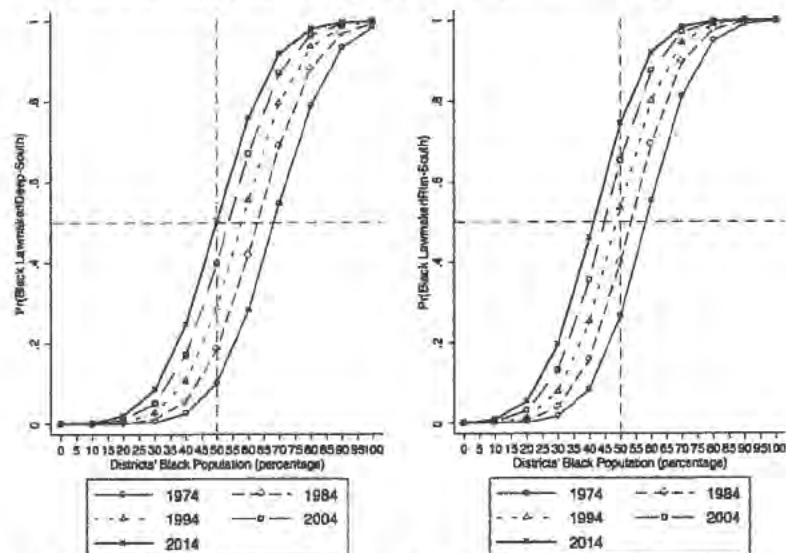
Black Pop %	1974	1984	1994	2004	2014
Deep South					
0	0.00001	0.00003	0.00008	0.00020	0.00046
10	0.00007	0.00024	0.00067	0.00164	0.00350
20	0.00064	0.00192	0.00494	0.01085	0.02048
30	0.00470	0.01239	0.02717	0.05118	0.08508
40	0.02606	0.05692	0.10639	0.17240	0.24768
50	0.10296	0.18633	0.28868	0.39885	0.50498
60	0.28232	0.41983	0.55580	0.67122	0.75994
70	0.54823	0.69023	0.79693	0.87099	0.91867
80	0.79160	0.88192	0.93586	0.96518	0.98065
90	0.93349	0.96895	0.98562	0.99328	0.99673
100	0.98495	0.99417	0.99771	0.99905	0.99957
Rim South					
0	0.00002	0.00008	0.00022	0.00056	0.00124
10	0.00025	0.00080	0.00215	0.00498	0.00997
20	0.00243	0.00678	0.01580	0.03127	0.05416
30	0.01750	0.03995	0.07775	0.13152	0.19632
40	0.08419	0.15775	0.25181	0.35587	0.45934
50	0.26561	0.39994	0.53542	0.65273	0.74408
60	0.55278	0.69419	0.80010	0.87337	0.92036
70	0.81187	0.89583	0.94443	0.97026	0.98370
80	0.94901	0.97697	0.98970	0.99533	0.99777
90	0.99076	0.99660	0.99871	0.99947	0.99977
100	0.99886	0.99963	0.99987	0.99995	0.99998

Note: The quantities are based on Model 1, presented in Table 2. These numbers represent population-averaged probabilities that incorporate the variance components by averaging the probabilities over the distribution of random intercepts via integration. Values reach exactly 1 or 0 only by rounding. We derive each probability by holding other variables at their median levels.

lawmakers increases to 0.50 and 0.74, respectively (also see Figure C2 of the online supporting information).

We accompany Table 3 with Figure 2. This figure details the same information but in graphic form. It also provides richer information, as it includes point estimates per 5 percentage point shift in the black population. Both Figure 2 and Table 3 reinforce two simple realities. The election of black legislators requires much larger black populations in Deep South states regardless of time. Second, over time, the election of black lawmakers requires *smaller* black populations in both regions. Over the past 20 years or so, the

FIGURE 2
Conditional Likelihood of Deep South and Rim South
Legislative Districts Electing Black Lawmakers
[Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]



Note: These probabilities are generated with reference to Model 1, in Table 2. The left panel contains probabilities of electing a black lawmaker by redistricting regime in Deep South states. The right panel contains the same for Rim South states.

election of Deep South African American legislators takes higher black district population thresholds in part because whites are substantially more Republican in this subregion (McKee and Springer 2015), and also because districts are drawn with notably higher black populations (see Appendix Figures B1 and B2 in the online supporting information). Also, the greater likelihood of electing African Americans from districts with intermediate black concentrations today probably indicates enhanced levels of black political activity (McAdam 1982; Shah, Marschall, and Ruhil 2013) and a more widespread willingness of non-Republican whites to vote for black candidates (Grofman 2006; Hicks et al. 2018; Lublin et al. 2009, 2019).

Model 2 in Table 2 reveals that majority-black districts are much more likely to elect black legislators than nonmajority-black districts, in the Deep South and in the Rim South. Model-fit

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statistics in the bottom of the table, that is, the BIC and AIC, both reveal that this method of capturing districts' racial demographics is less desirable than just using a raw percentage for district black population, which makes sense because it includes less information.

Our control variables reveal some interesting findings, as well. Model 1 indicates that open seats are more than twice as likely to elect black lawmakers than seats with an incumbent. Black legislators are slightly less likely to be elected in contested elections. Finally, multimember districts were much more likely to elect black lawmakers. We also fail to find evidence that other control variables matter. For instance, we find no evidence that black legislators' fortunes are tied to the type of chamber: senate versus house. We also find no evidence, net of other variables, that newly redistricted seats are more or less likely to elect black lawmakers.

Black Legislators and the Growth of Southern GOP Delegations

We now turn our focus to assessing the growth of GOP lawmakers in southern state legislative chambers. As previously mentioned, we are interested in evaluating empirically the extent to which the election of black legislators contributed to the enlargement of Republican legislative delegations. Although Republican gains clearly came at the cost of many erstwhile white Democratic seats, we argue that GOP fortunes were also reliant upon expanding the number of majority-minority districts with the effect of diminishing the electoral prospects of white Democrats (Epstein and O'Halloran 1999b; Lublin and Voss 2000). In the early 1970s, Republicans represented just over 10% of southern state legislative seats. By 2016, the GOP accounted for nearly 70% of seats.¹²

To investigate the relationship between black representation and the rising share of Republican districts, we created a dataset that includes the percentage of GOP lawmakers for each chamber and election year between 1970 and 2015. Hence, we have a panel of 22 state/chambers and an unbalanced number of observations over time. Some chambers contribute more to our dataset because they have more frequent elections. For example, the Virginia House had 23 elections between 1970 and 2015, while the Alabama House and Senate only had 13 over the same time period.

There are a variety of techniques we could use to model dynamic, clustered data like these. Our task in its simplest form is to

document whether or not there is an association between the rise of GOP delegations and an increase in the number of majority-black districts. In Appendix D in the online supporting information, we provide strong dynamic evidence of this relationship with reference to general error correction models. That being said, we want to explore this association using a more flexible approach that enables us to include both interesting control variables and to investigate the extent to which the relationship between majority-black districts and GOP legislators is nonlinear. Towards this end, we report the results of a series of growth curve models. These models include variance components for each state chamber, to account for the fact that we have repeated election years for each state chamber, and advanced polynomials for time to account for autocorrelation. Using advanced polynomials for time enables us to relax the assumption that the effect of time on the size of chambers' GOP delegations is strictly linear. Yes, we have theoretical and empirical reasons to believe that GOP seats increase with respect to time, but we also have strong reasons to believe that the rate of increase has likely changed, if for no other reason than there has to be some point of saturation. Finally, we also present a model that includes a variance component for the effect of time itself. We report these findings in Table 4.¹³

In these models, we measure our primary variable of interest as the proportion of districts with majority black populations in each chamber year. We prefer this measure over the percentage of legislators who are black for three reasons. First, our supplementary models in Appendix D in the online supporting information document a strong, positive correlation between the percentage of black legislators and the percentage of GOP lawmakers. This table also shows that the percentage of majority-black districts exerts a very similar effect on the percentage of Republicans. Second, theory leads us to believe that, in this case, the share of majority-black districts is more relevant than the share of black legislators. The idea that Republicans benefited from the election of black legislators hinges on the understanding that redistricting maps concentrated black populations in a small number of districts. Thus, whether or not these districts elected black legislators is a secondary issue (although we showed in the prior analysis that the overwhelming majority do). Finally, we also provide complementary models in Appendix D in the online supporting information that replicate Table 4, but use the percentage of black lawmakers in lieu of the percentage of majority-black districts. These models reveal,

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TABLE 4
Growth Curve Models for % GOP Lawmakers in a
Chamber-Year

Variable	M1	M2	M3
Yearly Counter (0 = 1971)	-0.1713 (0.3617)	-0.1371 (0.3652)	-0.0085 (0.3670)
Yearly Counter Squared	-0.0240 (0.0179)	-0.0271 (0.0179)	-0.0303 ⁺ (0.0179)
Yearly Counter Cubed	0.0008** (0.0003)	0.0008** (0.0003)	0.0009** (0.0003)
% Districts Majority Black	0.2264* (0.0885)	-0.2230 (0.3483)	-0.4540 (0.3378)
% Districts Majority Black (Squared)		0.0439 (0.0271)	0.0653* (0.0263)
% Districts Majority Black (Cubed)		-0.0010 ⁺ (0.0006)	-0.0015** (0.0006)
% States' Population Black	-0.4560** (0.1146)	-0.4770** (0.1188)	-0.4530** (0.1211)
Mass Social Liberalism ($t-1$)	13.4295** (1.8614)	13.3077** (1.8726)	13.9477** (1.7542)
Mass Economic Liberalism ($t-1$)	-8.4017** (2.9396)	-7.8890** (2.9400)	-7.7354** (2.8641)
% of Republican State Citizens ($t-1$)	1.7770** (0.1334)	1.7906** (0.1407)	1.7236** (0.1495)
constant	-0.3293 (3.8460)	0.5215 (4.5132)	0.7567 (4.4370)
var(Chamber)	5.5022** (1.3614)	4.5066** (1.2414)	0.0168** (0.0058)
var(Year)	45.7029** (1.7632)	45.6519** (1.7656)	43.3776** (1.7291)
var(Beta Yearly Counter)			26.4771** (6.9000)
Corr(Yearly Counter, Chamber)			-0.9585** (0.0545)
<i>N</i>	361	361	361
AIC	2449.963	2450.800	2447.697
BIC	2492.740	2501.355	2506.030

Note: Dependent variable is the percent of legislators in chamber i and year t who are GOP. Var(Chamber) represents the chamber-level residual, var(Year) represents variability through time, within chambers, var(Beta Yearly Counter) represents variability between chambers in the effect of time, Corr(Yearly Counter, Chamber) represents the correlation between the chamber variance component and the variance component for the effect of time.

⁺ $p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

statistically, that the use of majority-black districts outperforms the use of the percentage of black legislators.

The first model in Table 4 assumes the effect of majority-black districts on Republican seats is linear. To the extent that this assumption is accurate, the model demonstrates a strong positive relationship: per 10 percentage point increase in the percent of majority-black districts, the percentage of GOP seats increases by over 2.2 percentage points, other things being equal. Of course, the next two models (M2 and M3, respectively) show that there are some reasons to believe that the relationship is nonlinear. These models weaken the linearity assumption by adding cubic effects for the percentage of majority-black districts in a chamber year. The significant cubic effects reveal that the association between majority-black districts and GOP delegations change as the share of majority-black districts increase.

Because these growth curve models do not include fixed effects for states (although we do in Appendix D in the online supporting information), it is important to include critical control variables that may simultaneously explain the number of majority-black districts and the number of GOP legislators elected to a chamber. We control for three important variables that may explain differences between these chambers and time. First, we include two variables to capture public opinion liberalism. These public opinion estimates were developed by Caughey and Warshaw (2018). They estimate public opinion liberalism on social and economic policy for each state from 1936 to 2014 using annual group-level (e.g., state, race, urban residence) item-response models. They fit their models to more than a thousand polls and include hundreds of domestic policy questions. Importantly, their research shows that these public opinion estimates influence state policies and parties.

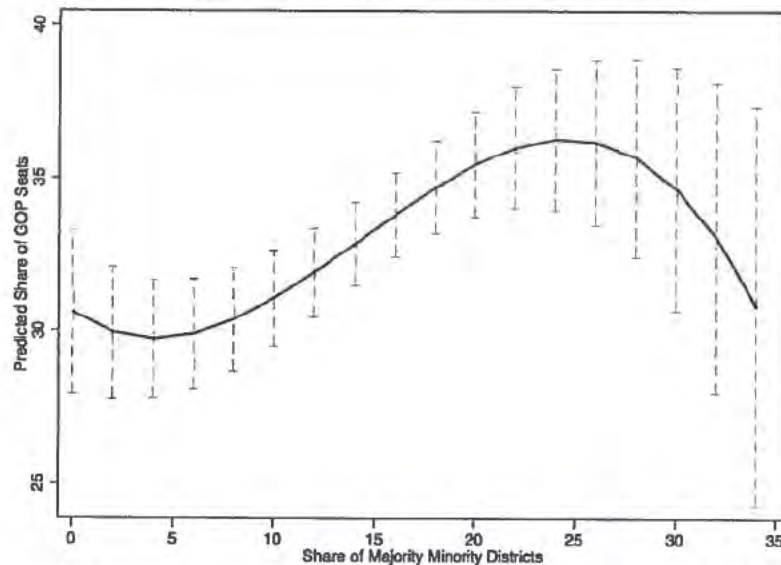
In addition, we also include estimates similarly developed by Caughey and Warshaw (2018) to measure the share of each state's citizenry that identifies as Republican. Obviously, southern states with more Republican identifiers likely elect more Republican legislators. Finally, we also include the statewide percentage of citizens who are non-Hispanic black.¹⁴ The size of states' black population (not just their distribution) shapes the number of majority-minority districts and GOP lawmakers. Importantly, we lag party identification and public opinion by a year to account for the fact that the effect of these variables likely takes time.

Table 4 reveals that these control variables affect the share of GOP legislators in a given election year and chamber. Southern

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states with more African Americans, other things being equal, elect fewer GOP lawmakers. Of course, we also know that the district-level distribution of African Americans can counterbalance this effect. Southern states with more Republican residents are also more likely to elect more Republican chambers. In fact, this relationship exceeds 1-to-1: per 1 percentage point increase in states' Republican identifiers, the percentage of the chamber that is GOP increases by over 1 percentage point. Finally, public opinion drives the share of chambers' GOP lawmakers but in conflicting ways. While more economically liberal states elect smaller GOP delegations, more socially liberal states elect larger Republican delegations, other things being equal. We encourage future researchers to further pursue this final, somewhat counterintuitive, finding. We suspect one explanation for the relationship between social liberalism and the size of chambers' Republican delegations is that increases in social liberalism may mobilize socially conservative citizens and elites. This makes sense particularly when one considers that our sample consists exclusively of southern chambers.

FIGURE 3
The Effect of Majority Black Seats on GOP Seats



Note: The quantities presented in this figure are generated with reference to M3, in Table 4. Other variables are set to their median values.

We include Figure 3 below to demonstrate specifically how majority-black districts influence GOP seats. This figure is based on Model 3 in Table 4. The only difference between Model 2 and Model 3 is that the latter allows the effect of time to vary between chambers. We provide useful information related to this random effect in the bottom of the table, for example, $\text{var}(\text{Beta Yearly Counter})$ represents the variance parameter for the random effect of time measured as a yearly counter.¹⁵ Both Models 2 and 3 entail a similar effect between majority-black districts and GOP seats, although the results from Model 3 are a little stronger. Figure 3 reveals that majority-black districts increase the share of Republican seats only up to a point. The association between these variables is strongest and positive for chambers whose percentage of majority-black districts is between 10% and 25%. However, the plot also shows increases of majority-black districts beyond 25% reduce GOP seat shares. This association of diminishing returns makes sense since there are a finite number of state legislative seats.

Discussion and Conclusion

In 2005, Menifield and Shaffer published their edited volume, *Politics in the New South*, the most comprehensive accounting of black representation in southern state legislatures. The contributors provided a thorough assessment of the status of black representation in statehouses from the 1980s to 2000, providing separate chapters on five states and a summary chapter covering the other six. The emphasis was centered on two objectives: chronicling changes in descriptive representation (the growth in black legislators) and evaluating the legislative influence/success of black lawmakers with respect to substantive representation (via positions of leadership, committee chairs, and enactment of policies preferred by black caucuses in these southern states). In the decade since this publication, the share of southern black state legislators has continued to climb and the even more palpable ascension of Republican lawmakers (almost none of whom are black) has reached the point that by 2015 (the last year in our dataset), all 22 southern state legislative chambers had majority GOP delegations. Though an examination of black legislative influence is beyond the scope of our study, suffice it to say that African American legislators historically (since their return to southern statehouses in the 1960s) and presently have never been frequent

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coalitional partners with their white Republican colleagues (Clark 2019; King-Meadows and Schaller 2006).

Prior to the Republican takeovers of southern statehouses, the rise in black descriptive representation was, in various settings, a fundamental factor in fostering effective black substantive representation (Clark 2019; Davidson and Grofman 1994; Haynie 2001; Menifield and Shaffer 2005; Parker 1990; Walton 1972). At least for now, those days are over. Not only is it likely that black substantive representation has been severely undermined and diminished by GOP control of southern legislatures (King-Meadows and Schaller 2006), but the growing racial separation between the mass of Democratic and Republican voters, especially in the Deep South (Black and Black 2012; McKee and Springer 2015), makes it even less enticing for GOP leaders to consider the views and input of their black Democratic counterparts. Furthermore, with state legislative data scaled to assess the ideological distance between Democratic and Republican lawmakers in statehouses across the United States, the scholarship of Shor and McCarty (2011, 549–50) demonstrates that similar to the dynamic found in the US Congress (Fleisher and Bond 2004; Hetherington 2001; Theriault 2008), increasing ideologically driven polarization between Democratic and Republican state legislators “appear[s] to follow the national pattern of high and growing polarization.”

Finally, the partisan polarization of southern lawmakers coupled with the racially driven sorting of blacks and whites into opposite and opposing parties (Hood, Kidd, and Morris 2012) is clearly reflected in the racial compositions of southern Democratic and Republican state legislative delegations. At present, African Americans comprise the majority of the minority Democratic delegations in all 10 Deep South state legislative chambers (Bositis 2011; McKee and Springer 2015). In addition, the Rim South states of North Carolina and Tennessee have minority Democratic delegations (state senate and state house) that are majority African American. This reality may not be as surprising in the case of North Carolina because its black population is the largest in the Peripheral South (at 21.5%). But Tennessee, with the South’s fourth lowest percentage of African Americans (at 16.8%), still has majority black but minority Democratic delegations.¹⁶

Our study shows the impressive gains that African Americans have made in winning seats in southern state legislatures from the early 1970s to the mid-2010s. And even with African Americans’

increasing share of seats, the percentage black in these districts has dropped considerably over time (especially since the 1980s). But black legislative gains have also come at a steep representational price. As our analysis indicates, the increase in black representation has directly contributed to an increase in the number of Republican lawmakers, who comprised the partisan majority in every southern legislative chamber by the end of our study. Thus, we cannot ignore the upshot that the rise in black legislators has exacerbated the significance of race in southern politics. The contemporary resegregation (Bositis 2011) and racialization (Gilens 1995) of party politics in the American South appears to have undermined the benefits accruing from black substantive representation.

With an overwhelmingly white and conservative GOP dominant in most of the South (McKee 2012), there is “little incentive to accommodate the preferences of black voters, much less to promote active programs on their behalf” (Wright 2013, 257). We seriously doubt Republicans’ desire to broker legislative deals with the majority black but minority Democratic opposition in most southern states. But African Americans prefer coracial representation (see Tate 2003). At what cost? At least for now, the relationship between a growing African American state legislative delegation and the rise of Republican lawmakers in the South has, on net, negatively impacted black representational influence (Hicks et al. 2018). But all is not lost. Moving forward, we agree with Wright, that for southern Democrats to lessen this suboptimal condition, “the only realistic response is to build sustainable multiracial coalitions that can compete politically in these states” (2013, 257). And this is happening on a smaller scale in many parts of the South, including Virginia, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Texas.¹⁷ Indeed, throughout Dixie, demographic changes of a racial/ethnic and generational nature are already turning the tables, if somewhat slowly, in favor of Democratic gains (Bullock et al. 2019; McKee 2019). As time passes, expect the partisan trade-off between black representation and Republican electoral success to continue to abate.

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NOTES

1. Throughout, we define the American South as the 11 ex-Confederate states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. We also employ the common subregional definitions of the Deep South: Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina; and the Rim/Peripheral South: Arkansas, Florida, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

2. It is most likely the case that Tennessee Senator Avon Williams and Tennessee Representative A. W. Willis Jr. were the first African Americans ever elected to the Tennessee Legislature since there were no black state legislators in the very brief time that Tennessee was subject to Reconstruction (see Foner 1993, xvi).

3. Regarding our contribution to black politics, we are adding to a rich literature that has proven increasingly insightful and ambitious since Walton's (1972) impressive and sweeping examination of multiple facets of the black experience in American political life. We thank an anonymous reviewer for strongly suggesting we pay homage to Walton's work.

4. A handful of factors strongly contributed to the 1962 election of Leroy Johnson to the Georgia Senate. First, among the five Deep South states of Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina, Georgia had the highest enfranchised black electorate prior to the 1965 Voting Rights Act (VRA) (Bullock and Gaddie 2009; McKee 2017). Second, among southern state senates, with a total of 56 seats, Georgia has the largest. Third, the concentration of a large minority population in the Atlanta metropolitan area made it possible to draw a compact and overwhelmingly black state senate district. Hence, in the early 1960s, the Peach State had the necessary and sufficient factors for attaining black representation in a state senate election.

5. Texas Senator Barbara Jordan was the first black woman elected to a southern state senate and then made history again as the first African American congresswoman in a southern state (in 1972). In 1992, Senator Carrie Meek became one of two (Corrine Brown was the other) black women to be the first elected to the US House of Representatives in Florida. Civil rights activist and Georgia Representative Julian Bond became Chairman of the NAACP (1998–2010), Louisiana Representative Dutch Morial became the first black mayor of New Orleans (in 1977), and Virginia Senator Douglas Wilder remains the only African American popularly elected to a southern governorship (in 1989).

6. Additional descriptive data on the rise of southern black state legislators is found in Appendix A in the online supporting information.

7. Lublin et al. (2009) consider the relationship between the black district population and the election of black lawmakers in state legislatures and the US House for all states with at least a 10% black population, but their analysis only includes data from 1990 to 2007, with an emphasis on comparing changes between 1992 and 2007. In a more recent related article, Lublin et al. (2019) add several analyses with 2015 data.

8. See the boxplots for the five-number summary distribution of the state legislative district percent black for state houses and state senates in the South, Deep South, and Rim South for 1973–75, 1983–85, 1993–95, 2003–05, and 2013–15 in Appendix B in the online supporting information.

9. The practice of using MMDS in southern chambers effectively ended by the time that southern governments implemented their 1990s legislative maps except in the Georgia House where they were resurrected and survived until the court redrew districts following the *Larios v. Cox* (2004) decision. This variable is excluded from our analysis for 1990, 2000, and 2010 districts. We should mention that in the late 1960s after the *Baker v. Carr* (1962) ruling, subsequent legal decisions striking down the use of MMDS led to some localized spikes in black representation due to greater concentrations of African American voting populations (King-Meadows and Schaller 2006).

10. Population averaged probabilities incorporate the variance components by averaging subject-specific probabilities over the distribution of random intercepts via integration.

11. Other variables in the model are set to their median values: i.e., $mmd = 0$, $open\ seat = 0$, $contested = 1$, $redistricted = 0$, and $senate = 0$.

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12. See Figures A1 and A2 in the online supporting information for a state-by-state time series of the percent Republican legislators and percent black legislators in all 11 southern state houses and state senates, respectively, from the 1970s to the mid-2010s. We are indebted to Adam Myers for producing these figures for us.

13. All of these models estimate directly an unstructured error covariance matrix, and our estimates are derived via maximum likelihood estimation.

14. Our statewide population estimates are derived from Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, IPUMS, (Ruggles et al. 2017), and use the 1970, 1980, 1990, and 2000 decennial census estimates. The 2000–15 estimates are derived via IPUMS using the Census Bureau's American Community Survey. Missing data, for example, 1971 through 1979, are replaced by the most recent, prior observation, for example, the 1970 Census.

15. We fit a random effect for the main effect of our yearly counter variable, but not its higher-order counterparts (i.e., its squared or cubic version). This approach assumes there is variability between chambers in terms of the slope of time, but not the location of its curvature. Rabe-Hesketh and Skrondal (2012), among others, show that this is a reasonable approach for longitudinal data. Figure E1 in Appendix E in the online supporting information plots the expected share of Republican seats across time based on this model.

16. The black percentage of the state population in North Carolina and Tennessee comes from the 2016 American Community Survey (one-year estimate) one-race calculation.

17. Though outside the scope of our analysis, for the first time in a quarter-century the 2019 elections in Virginia yielded a Democratic trifecta, with the party now controlling the governorship and majorities in both legislative chambers. In 2018, African American Lucy McBath won election to the US House in Georgia District 6, which contained a 69% white population (14% black, 13% Latino, and 11% Asian; data are from the 2013–17 five-year American Community Survey).

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher's web site:

Figure A1. Percent Republicans and Percent Black Legislators in Southern State Houses

Figure A2. Percent Republicans and Percent Black Legislators in Southern State Senates

Appendix A: Documenting the Rise of Black Lawmakers in the South (pp. 2–8)

Table A1. Percentage of Black State Legislators in Southern State Houses, Late 1960s to Mid-2010s

Table A2. Inventory of Percent Black State Legislative District Data in the Southern States, 1970s–2010s

Appendix B: Boxplots of the State Legislative District Percent Black (pp. 9–10)

Figure B1. Box Plots of Black Population in House Districts by Election Regime

Figure B2. Box Plot of Black Population in State Senate Districts by Election Regime

Appendix C: Alternative Model Specifications for the Election of Black Lawmakers (pp. 11–5)

Table C1. The Election of Black Lawmakers in the South, 1970s–2010s

Figure C1. Conditional Likelihood of Electing Black Lawmakers in the South

Figure C2. Likelihood African American is Elected by Subregion if SLD is 50% Black

Appendix D: Alternative Model Specifications for the Share of Republican Lawmakers (pp. 16–21)

Table D1. General Error Correction Models for Proportion GOP Lawmakers

Table D2. Alternative Growth Curve Models for % GOP in Chamber-year

Appendix E: Additional Plot from Table 4 (p. 22)

Figure E1. The Effect of Time on GOP Seats

Appendix F: References (p. 23)

