

*Understanding Tennessee's Racial Realignment and Political Polarization:  
An Examination of Tennessee Gubernatorial Elections, 1932-2018.*

by  
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A thesis presented to the Honors College of Middle Tennessee State  
University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from  
the University Honors College

Spring 2021

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to Dr. Jessica Hejny. When I had too many questions and was unsure of a path forward, you worked with me, helping me sort through ideas and strategies. Without your support, I would still be lost, and this would not have been possible.

I also had the great pleasure of learning from long-time political strategist Kent Syler. A person can look at newspaper articles all day. However, the value of having an experienced political veteran review for inaccuracies cannot be understated when trying to ensuring an accurate account of the historical-political landscape. Thank you for always providing your perspective.

Special thanks to Dr. Sekou Franklin, Chris Sanders, and Adam Haynes, who all helped provide valuable information and insight into the often-unaddressed factors that helped fill in the greater picture of Tennessee politics. You all have extensive political experience, so I thank you for providing much-needed perspective and guidance.

I am incredibly grateful to my friends and family who were supportive of me throughout the entire process, even when I tested their patience, often rambling about yet another political trend I was beginning to unravel. Thank you for letting me voice my ideas because it certainly made the entire research process more manageable.

Lastly, I cannot begin to express my deepest thanks to my father, Edwin Eblen Arnold Jr. Thank you for the love, wisdom, and encouragement you provided, all while trying to navigate as a single father. There is so much more I could say, but I think this puts

it best. You are my favorite hiking partner, a personal inspiration, and the best friend I will ever have. Thank you for everything, and I hope you never forget how much you are loved.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to compare Tennessee Gubernatorial Elections to overall political trends to explain further how Tennessee is unique compared to the rest of the south regarding its racial realignment and political polarization. Chapter 1 examines the individual dynamics of Tennessee gubernatorial elections. Gubernatorial elections are non-federal state-wide races, which provides a precise measure of Tennessee's political landscape. Chapter 2 looks at the evolving political atmosphere beyond gubernatorial elections to help highlight more overall shifts. Lastly, Chapter 3 provides an analysis of why politics in Tennessee is unique and explains the impacts. Tennessee avoided militarized control under the Reconstruction Act. Democrats continuously relied on black primary voters, and after *Brown v. Board* and the 1965 Voting Rights Act, Democrats pivoted toward desegregation. As Republicans advanced, the Tennessee Democratic Party failed to change its strategy. Tennessee's geography, racial toleration, and moderate desire make it unique in a landscape of southern states.

*Keywords:* Tennessee, Elections, Politics, Gubernatorial, Race, Realignment, Polarization

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## INTRODUCTION

The story of how the south went through its racial realignment and political polarization over the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries has been told numerous times, but the unique dynamics of Tennessee have often been overlooked. Tennessee has three grand divisions based on geographical characteristics that suggest a difference in political perspective that had to impact the perspective state-wide elections would reveal. Additionally, Tennessee was the last state to join the confederacy in the Civil War and the first to be readmitted into the Union. They also have a historical perception of being a moderate shift, and this research is needed to explain how that can be reconciled with the changing shifts one can notice living in the state itself.

Throughout my research, I continuously worked to answer the following question. What makes Tennessee specifically unique compared to the overall southern racial realignment and political polarization that occurred between the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries at the regional and national level. Tennessee gubernatorial elections were chosen to best reveal the influencing trends of these state-wide elections while avoiding the inherent local or national implications associated with other Tennessee elections.

In order to answer this question, I chose to break my thesis into three separate chapters. In the first chapter, I am working to explain what is happening within the individual Tennessee gubernatorial elections while also examining the overall trends that occur within four separate time periods. To analyze these trends, I relied on two main points of research. For sections prior to 1970, I relied on examining the academic literature on

candidates during their administrations and elections. However, after 1970 I pivot to conducting primary research using archival analysis of newspaper coverage of Tennessee gubernatorial elections and use secondary political science sources to build the larger historical narrative. Regarding Chapter two, I focus on building my overall national, southern, regional, and Tennessee specific narrative by using both secondary political science sources and published works to build a comprehensive explanation to show the reader what dynamics were occurring at higher levels to reveal how Tennessee is unique in the greater political context.

Tennessee was the first state to ratify the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment leading them to avoid militarized control of the state under the later passed Reconstruction Act. As a result, they faced less racial resentment, and while they still viewed the races as unequal, they provided less strict voter discrimination laws than the traditional Jim Crow Laws of the South. With fewer restrictions, Democratic Boss Edward Crump in West Tennessee was able to control the Democratic Primary by offering support to black republicans that voted for Crump's candidate in the primary and allowing them to vote again in the general election for whomever they want. With Crump offering support during the Great Depression, Crump was able to extend influence on who won the gubernatorial races by providing a paternalistic relationship Tennesseans grew to appreciate after little action left them distraught.

When Tennessee changed its constitution in 1953 to shift gubernatorial terms from unlimited consecutive two-year terms to unlimited non-consecutive four-year terms, this made the incumbent effect stronger in the state since a two-decade political partnership developed between Democrats Clement and Ellington. As Clement and Ellington



maintained their power and helped ingrain support for incumbents, they also both went against the positioning of other southern Democrats during the civil rights movement.

After the *Brown v. Board* Supreme Court decision and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Gov. Frank Clement and Buford Ellington both respectively flipped on their previous segregationist position to unapologetically accept and encourage the transition toward gradual integration. Paired with Gov. Ellington failing to build Democratic Party support when Republicans saw advancements with Richard Nixon and Shelby County development of a local party structure, Tennessee Republicans were well-positioned for the 1970 gubernatorial election. Former Democrat Winfield Dunn built up the Shelby County Republican Party leading him to win both the primary and the general election, given all the perfect factors for success.

As a competitive Republican Party emerges, Tennessee politicians largely avoid the issue of race moving forward. Seeing that neither party wants to risk losing the general election by taking a stance, Tennessee saw a focus on issues of business records, and accusations of scandal proved to be most salient. Unlike other southern states, both political parties were largely moderate in position, so they had few disagreements on the pure substance of policy. Moderate Republican Lamar Alexander, who was popular amongst both parties in his 1982 re-election campaign, and Tennessee Speaker of the House Democrat Ned McWherter, who ran for governor in 1986 on his record of supporting Gov. Alexander to help Tennesseans without partisan arguments, were able respectively to win in a period where conservative Republicans were dominating the south.

As Ronald Reagan pushed social culture war issues to the front of American politics, Tennessee gubernatorial candidates on both sides saw increased pressure to engage. Neither Phil Bredesen nor Don Sundquist in 1994 had sizable disagreements, but they tried to paint the other as a radical symbol. While Don Sundquist was successful, the 2002 election revealed Tennessee Republicans were catching up to the national desire for conservative candidates.

While the south and Tennessee increasingly became conservative, Bredesen proved that moderate candidates could continue to see success, especially if one party nominated an extremely conservative Republican. As Democrats started to step down as the Tea Party made advances in 2010, the conservatives were in the majority in Tennessee, giving Democrats little to no chance in general elections. However, in both 2010 and 2018, the moderate Republican was able to win the primary against a field of more conservative candidates splitting their factions vote.

Currently, Tennessee is a conservative Republican state where moderate Republicans have held success by allowing the conservative factions to divide their factions within their party. While conservatives have successfully gained control of the governorship in other states, Tennessee has avoided this and has yet to see their extreme conservative position represented.

In chapter one, I examine the unique dynamics with Tennessee Gubernatorial Elections between 1936 to 2018 at both the individual election level and looking at the trends of the period. The goal is to provide an understanding of what was happening across the state-wide political arena that shows the evolution of state-wide politics. In chapter two,

I provide a comprehensive national, regional, and state-specific perspective of the racial realignment and political polarization. The goal of this chapter is to help give context to what is happening beyond Tennessee's gubernatorial elections in order to put everything into perspective. In chapter three, I highlight the direct ways in which Tennessee's racial realignment and polarization developed in its own unique ways counter to that of other southern states. The goal of this chapter is to bring everything together and provide a direct narrative of how things progressed in Tennessee.

## **CHAPTER I: TENNESSEE GUBERNATORIAL HISTORICAL ANALYSIS**

### **Introduction**

The focus of this section will be examining Tennessee Gubernatorial elections from 1936 to 2018 in hopes of laying out a clear picture of the events that shaped the political culture within Tennessee. Gubernatorial elections are chosen specifically because of their unique position within the state's electoral body. Regional state elections, such as those for everything from local government to state legislature and federal representatives, only highlight the issues that the individuals in those communities face, without providing an analysis of the entire state as a whole political body. State-wide federal elections, such as U.S. Senate races, are inherently focused on Tennessee in relation to the rest of the United States and therefore see an increased amount of federal influence on the outcome and rhetoric used. Examining Governorship races reveal a picture of what is affecting the entire

state without having the conversation being about how Tennessee operates compared to the rest of the union. The gubernatorial race is not federal-focused, so it best provides an opportunity to examine the salient issues of state-wide Tennesseans.

After the Civil War ended and Reconstruction started, Tennessee re-entered the union, essentially avoiding the strict militarized oversight other former confederates faced after joining after Reconstruction had begun. Additionally, East Tennessee, having not wanted to enter the war in the first place, was less compelled to alienate black Tennesseans. They might not have seen them as their equal, but they did not go as far as many southerners did.

Republicans were able to maintain influence in Eastern Tennessee, and while they quickly lost control once ex-confederates were re-granted the right to vote, East Tennessee Republicans would remain an essential part of the unique dynamic of Tennessee elections. Into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Democrats in Tennessee depended on securing the black vote in the primary to help their side win. Democratic Political Boss Edward Crump was best able to do this over his years of providing patronage to members of the Shelby County Memphis area. Crump essentially promised the Republicans they could vote in the general election as long as they helped elect his candidate in the Democratic primary. While Crump maintained control for most of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, after World War II ended, the returning soldiers were ready to participate in a free and open election.

While these Republican voters were willing to support Gordon Browning to end the long rule of boss control in the state, they also wanted someone new who could represent all they wanted in a candidate; that person was Frank Clement. Clement was a

persuasive, compelling speaker and chose to tap into the fear of corruption many Tennesseans faced, charging Browning with claims of corruption and ineptitude while in office. This worked, and Clement secured the Democratic primary, essentially granting him the governorship. At this time, the Democratic candidate faced no formidable Republicans in the general election, leading Democrats to win as long as they win the primary battle.

After the *Brown v. Board* Supreme Court decision to require the integration of schools, Governor Clement chose to stand against the likes of fellow southern governors and support integration over time. The 1965 Voting Rights Act caused Buford Ellington, Clement's ally and placeholder Governor between terms, to also stand in support of the Act, seeking to gain the support of the newly expanded black voting population. While the actions of Clement and

Ellington sought to appeal to more voters, the fear of pro-segregationists and racially conscious conservatives led the period of complete democratic control to end in favor of a competitive election era.

In 1968, Nixon had won the presidency using a strategy later described as his "southern strategy," the core of this plan was to walk the line between appealing to the racial fears of southerners while not directly sounding racist as to scare moderate voters. Paired with a Democratic Gov. Ellington not building the party base support and Winfield Dunn, a former Democrat, building up the Shelby County Republican Party, the Republicans were able to drum up support and defeat the Democrat, John Jay Hooker, for the first time in roughly 50 years.

As Nixon had energized the Republican base in the late 1960s, Nixon's Watergate scandal had the opposite effect, alienating and scaring many members of the growing southern Republican coalition. In addition, Tennessee Democrats, divided into moderate and progressive ideologies, unified behind Blanton to defeat the Republican Lamar Alexander and capitalize on the anger many Americans faced in the wake of the violation of trust. However, the victory was merely a delay, with Lamar Alexander winning his 1978 campaign for governor. With both parties running candidates positioning themselves as business conservatives, Alexander sought to appeal to black voters. Tennessee gubernatorial elections were mostly focused on the candidates' experience leading a business or impacted by any surrounding political scandals.

Alexander won his election and showed the success of the growing Republican coalition. In his race for re-election, Alexander benefited from the incumbent effect, where the candidate in office is most favored in the odds to win reelection. Simply put, Alexander was a popular governor, and both parties recognized this fact. As Democrats became scared of Republican success, they tried to force party unity; however, Alexander won re-election in a landslide showing the Republican party expanding their overall success. Under Alexander, Democrat Ned McWherter, then-Speaker of the Tennessee House, worked across the aisle to get things done without letting political identification prohibit progress. Ned McWherter ran for governor in 1986 to succeed Lamar Alexander and was able to win in the midst of the Reagan Revolution, where conservatives Republicans were seeing success and winning all across the south. While McWherter would win his re-election in 1990, the Republican Party was moving increasingly more conservative, and the support only increased despite McWherter winning re-election at the height of this era.

Conservative Republicans, who were energized throughout the Reagan Administration, were working to capitalize on their energy in the 1990s. In 1994, the conservative movement had brought national issues into the Tennessee gubernatorial race. Specifically, the culture wars on issues of abortion brought up some differences between the candidates. While both Democrat Phil Bredesen and Republican Don Sundquist largely agreed on what needed to happen, both candidates attempted to paint the other as a radical extremist representing the far factions of both parties. However, the Republicans were organized, and Don Sundquist had built a network to secure support and won as a result.

In 1998, Republican Governor Sundquist faced John Jay Hooker after the Democratic Party failed to elevate the more appealing Michael Whitaker to win in the primary. However, given the party's lack of voter mobilization and the incumbency effect, the Democrats had little legitimate chance to defeat Sundquist in the General. However, after Sundquist finished his term and saw an open seat, the Democrats stood behind Phil Bredesen once again.

The 2002 Republican gubernatorial primary race saw the conservative Republicans surpass their moderate faction as primary voters chose to nominate conservative Van Hilleary over moderate Jim Henry. Internally, the conservative base became upset after Republican Governor Sundquist argued Tennessee should implement a state income tax, which was widely unpopular. The Republicans were divided in their next direction, leading Democrats to refocus on Bredesen's business conservative message. The 2002 Gubernatorial Election proved Democrats could still defeat Republicans if they remained organized, insured party unity, and appealed to moderates with a business-focused

message. However, the margin of victory was narrow, symbolizing the power behind the conservative movement and showing the passion conservatives felt to pull them to the polls.

Four years later, during the election of 2006, Incumbent Governor Phil Bredesen faced conservative Republican Jim Bryson. While benefited by the incumbent effect, Bredesen was also able to focus on his success as governor as opposed to the rhetoric his opponent used regarding Bredesen's more liberal positions on the issues within the growing culture war, on issues such as immigration, homosexual adoption, and abortion. Bredesen won re-election in a landslide not because the people agreed with him on the social issues but rather he was able to run on his popular record as Governor of Tennessee.

In 2008, Barack Obama was elected as the first black president of the United States. This event served as a reminder of the changing political culture across the country, and the racial resentment it inspired led to the rise of the Tea Party, or conservative faction of the Republican Party focused on reducing government spending, specifically targeting minorities as being unworthy of benefits.

The 2010 Tennessee Gubernatorial election occurred as the Tea Party gained increased prominence. By this point, the Tennessee Republican Party was making impressive gains in the state legislature and expected to regain control of the entire legislature in 2010. The Republicans were now in a similar position that Democrats had found themselves for most of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Their main challenge was dealing with the intra-party conflicts, and making it out of the Republican primary was the biggest hurdle.



Moderate Republican Bill Haslem positioned himself as a continuation of the popular business conservative Bredesen represented. With the other two Republican candidates identifying as Tea Party conservatives, they ultimately split the conservative electorate, giving Haslem the primary nomination. While the Democrats chose former Governor Ned McWherter's son, Mike McWherter, the Tennessee state party did not help raise name awareness to the point where he could run a competitive campaign. The presumption was the Democrats would lose, and ultimately Mike McWherter only won 5 counties on election day.

With escaping the Republican Primary being the biggest hurdle, Bill Haslem was well-positioned to win based on his popularity across the aisle and the internal Republican support coming from being the incumbent. The election of 2014 saw the Tennessee Democratic Party play a largely inactive role in helping to elect the preference of the leaders. While most vocal democrats supported John McKamey, Charles "Charlie" Brown received the nomination because of the Ballot Order Effect, when the first name listed on the ballot wins the election due to little knowledge or preference about the candidates. Brown had raised no funds in the primary, and Haslem won in a landslide.

In 2018, Tennessee elected a Republican candidate, Bill Lee, to succeed the sitting Republican Governor, Bill Haslem, for the first time since the 1800s. The election largely came down to the Republican Primary, where more moderate Bill Lee focused on his record as a business and family man, while the rest of the candidates were either splitting the conservative vote or becoming unattractive due to the increased personal attacks against one another. On the Democratic side, the party faced two distinct choices for where they could try to focus their messaging. While Craig Fitzhugh was the progressive former

minority leader of the Tennessee House, Karl Deal ultimately won the primary because it was believed a conservative was the best candidate to beat a Republican, especially with former Governor Phil Bredesen expected to carry moderates like Dean on his coattails during Bredesen's 2018 Senate Race. With Bill Lee winning the general election, it is apparent that Tennesseans are currently more willing to trust business Republicans over Democrats with the same positions.

Tennessee has faced four unique phases of political control since the 1930s. From 1936 to 1970, the Democrats saw the transition from the machine politics era of political boss Edward Crump to the growing desire for party reform and liberalism at large. From 1970 to 1990, Tennessee saw the emergence of an energized and growing conservative base, one in which Republicans were making the investment. From 1990 to 2010, the conservative Republicans became more influential in state politics, and issues became nationalized, influencing, but not pre-determining, how they would vote in the general election. Lastly, from 2010 to the present, Republicans have seen consistent success, winning the first consecutive gubernatorial terms for Republican nominees in over a century. The future of both parties in Tennessee is undetermined, but the trends would suggest continual Republican control unless either the Democrats find more appealing messaging or Republicans become too extreme and alienate the general Tennessee electorate.

### **Democratic Rule (1936-1970): Transition from Boss Control to Reform Candidates**

While Republicans in the eastern portion of Tennessee saw some regional success, Tennessee Democrats consistently won state-wide elections during this time. Throughout most of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Tennessee Democratic Political Boss Edward Crump held control of the gubernatorial elections by providing federal patronage or providing services in the community, both of which helped incentivize voters to support the Crump-backed candidate. While Edward Crump was able to maintain his control of state politics throughout the length of World War II, as soldiers came home from fighting a war on fascism, they wanted a fair democracy, and furthermore, they wanted a fresh face that represented the dreams and desires of the post-WWII era.

Between 1936 and 1970, we saw three main changes that occurred within Tennessee politics, the decline of boss influence, the introduction of an energized post-WWII electorate, and the Democratic shift away from pro-segregationist rhetoric. The state went from relying on Boss Edward Crump to provide paternalistic patronage to incentivize voter turnout to an expanded electorate desiring an end to the boss control of state politics. After World War II brought home many voting-age young men and women and the popularization of television, Tennesseans wanted candidates that were appealing, driven, and able to use rhetoric in a way that energized Tennesseans. With the democratic party nominee essentially guaranteed the win in the general election, there were few substantive policy disagreements during this period. While the rhetoric of anti-bossism used by Ellington to defeat Crump lost its appeal, the argument against corruption and mismanagement still held saliency and, when present, dominated coverage. After *Brown v. Board* and the 1965 Voting Rights Act, we saw both Clement and Ellington shift from pro-segregation to attempting to expand their political base by appealing to the recently

expanded political base to anticipate the changing tide of American politics. Lastly, as the Democratic governors attempted to appeal to black voters, the Republican Party was organizing and preparing to capitalize on the alienation of pro-segregationist democrats.

### *Edward Crump and Tennessee Politics Under Boss Control*

As this section is tasked with examining the trends and salient issues of gubernatorial races, it is essential to also understand the dynamics playing behind the scenes. Edward Crump is perhaps the most influential actor in Tennessee politics in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. While Edward Crump held several political offices representing the Shelby County area, he was mainly a political boss and held influence through offering endorsements and providing his voters' patronage for their support. While the gubernatorial candidates messaging and strategy do have an impact on the outcome of the race, political bosses control the political machines that turn out voters. Essentially, candidates needed to have boss support in order to build a coalition of voters strong enough to beat their opponent. Until the 1948 election of Gordon Browning, Crump would essentially be able to pick the ultimate next governor of Tennessee.

Crump existed between two transitional times in Tennessee Politics. "Crump was the modern heir of the old planter aristocracy and paternalistic toward society. He also symbolized Progressivism in Tennessee and the trend toward urbanization" (Majors 1969a, 180). Tennessee was changing from a state where the focus was rural and traditionalist to seeing a growing desire for individuals to live in cities and have a more progressive liberal

perspective on the role of government. Crump never held the governorship, but his control of Shelby County resources allowed him to maintain power and influence.

Edward Crump built a coalition that extended beyond class, sex, ethnicity, or gender because he understood he needed to have a wide tent to hold everyone under his wing to truly influence Memphis and, by extension, state politics (Dowdy 2005, 89-90). When citizens had an issue, they would turn to Crump because they knew he would get the issue resolved to the furthest extent possible without jeopardizing his political power and, in return, those individuals would offer their support when it came time to mobilize for his favored electoral candidate (Dowdy 2005, 90). Furthermore, Crump used his influence within his control of the Shelby County Democratic Party to extend his overall impact through their political machine. Under Crump's leadership, they would appoint ward captains and lieutenants, often consisting of city and county workers, to serve as a de facto campaign to turn out the vote, identify political leanings, and in return keep their jobs based on how well they identify and turn out Crump voters (Dowdy 2005, 91).

Edward Crump was also able to bring federal aid to Tennessee, and Crump's discretion of how to spend it enabled him to retain his political power. After the Memphis River Flood of 1927, the Crump machine, by means of influencing Mayor Overton, successfully requested President Hoover's help with job creation by "flood control projects" in response to the devastating Memphis River Flood of 1927; the project both provided jobs for the city and helped Crump strengthen his reputation over his ability to get things done for the people of Memphis (Dowdy 2002, 25).

In the aftermath of both the Memphis Flood and the Great Depression, Democrat Boss Edward Hull Crump made a name for himself in Memphis and Shelby County government as someone who could use his influence to help the people in his network in Tennessee shaping the outcomes of elections by increasing voter turnout, and across the nation becoming one of the most

powerful leaders of a political machine. By 1946, Crump appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine, describing him as 'the most absolute political boss in the U.S.' (Dowdy 2005, 95). The election of 1948 would ruffle that image of the Crump machine.

Edward Crump and the Crump political machine in Tennessee essentially picked the winner of most Tennessee state-wide offices, but specifically the governor. His ability incentivizes voters to elect his candidate in order to receive patronage while also using their stronghold over the voters to hand pick the governorship allowed Crump to be Tennessee's main political boss. However, as his list of enemies grew longer over the years and desires for fair representation grew after World War II, Crump could only hold his political power so long.

Crump represented the machine era of politics within Tennessee, where candidates won and lost through their ability to gain the support of the controlling political boss. As Crump entered politics, the society needed guidance during the aftermath of a great flood and the Great Depression. However, he ultimately lost his influence as the desire for paternalistic leadership shifted toward a post-WWII generation focused on fair and equal representation. The shifts changed, but it is essential to understand Edward Crump to better understand the placement of governorships in both 1936 and after 1948.

### *Gordon Browning Shift: 1936 To 1948*

As is true with most elections during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Democratic candidates in Tennessee faced little competition outside of their own party. The same is true for Gordon Browning. Gordon Browning started his term as governor in 1936 and won with the help of Shelby County Political Boss Edward Crump. However, as Browning fought against corruption, his relationship with Crump deteriorated. With Crump backlashing against Browning and supporting his Democratic challenger Prentice Cooper in 1938, Gordon Browning lost his primary and was unable to win re-election. After World War II ended, men and women came home from the war, and a new class of voters emerged. With a new electorate that just finished fighting fascists a few years prior, Browning ran again in 1948 to a younger audience more receptive to desires for equality and unbridled democracy.

Boss Edward Crump held influential control of Tennessee for more than 30 years, but the changing culture and prior-successful tactics lost their weight once the Crump political machine's image was shattered in 1948. Browning successfully established the beginning of the end of boss rule in Tennessee, specifically that of Edward Crump. Additionally, the aftermath of World War II leaves Tennesseans, many of whom fought in the war, feeling proud of their home and want fair and democratic representation with candidates that are willing to fight against corruption. Browning was able to mobilize Crump's enemies from across Tennessee, and this coordination yielded an impressive result. My research identifies Browning as the start of the political shift away from political

boss control due to his successful victory over Boss Edward Crump. While the realized shift was manifested in 1948, we will contextualize the difference between his 1936 and 1938 campaigns.

Gordon Browning, elected Governor of Tennessee in 1936 and 1948, grew up in a community of small-town rural farmers who taught him the value of caring for everyday Tennesseans (Majors 1969b, 166, 180). In 1936, Edward Crump endorsed Browning and helped

him win because of Browning's support of the Tennessee Valley Authority, but that relationship only extended so far since Browning campaigned on a message of cleaning up corruption in the state government (Majors 1969a, 59-60).

During Gov. Browning's first term, the Governor and Crump maintained a contentious but neutral stance on handling Crump's political machine (Majors 1969a, 61-64). Browning, planning to seek re-election for Governor in 1938 and a bid for Senate in 1940, realized he needed a plan to deal with his Crump-led political opposition (Majors 1969a, 64). Beyond conflicts on issues of corruption and reform, Browning was willing to reduce his reforms in order to continue political control.

While Crump had other state-wide candidates he supported, Browning sought to offer Crump a strategy where they both could succeed without any strife with other Crump-supported candidates. Governor Browning initially pitched a plan where Crump would run for Senate in 1940 and, in return, support Browning's 1938 bid to challenge Sen. McKellar, a close friend and successful candidate of the Crump machine (Majors 1969a, 64). Edward



Crump declined, showing little interest in the role, causing Gov. Browning to reevaluate and choose a path to fight the Crump political machine (Majors 1969a, 64-65). Now that Browning realized his long-term strategy of cooperation would not be beneficial for himself, Browning actively sought to limit Crump's influence.

Seeking to weaken the Crump machine, Browning called a special session of the General Assembly in 1937 and sought to implement a county unit system in order to limit Crump's power from being able to determine the outcome of elections simply by controlling one or two large urban areas (Majors 1969a, 65; Majors 1969b, 166). It often did not matter what Democrats wanted at the state level because it was Crump's choice over the losing candidate. While passed, the courts ultimately ruled that the bill violated the 14th amendment because it discriminated against Shelby County voters, ultimately costing him the election to a Crump-backed Democratic Primary candidate, Prentice Cooper (Majors 1969a, 66).

While Gov. Browning acted with the common intent of maintaining and growing political power, he represented a desire for decreased urban patronage and increased fair and representative officials. However, the size of the Shelby County electorate, in addition to a cooperative East Tennessee, prevented the conversation to center around anything other than who Crump was willing to support.

While Browning lost his re-election in 1938 after Edward Crump urged his base to not support him again, Gov. Browning was able to reenter as Governor after serving in World War II. In 1948, Browning ran on the message of reform against Edward Crump (Majors 1969b, 166). The issue was not viable in 1938; however, World War II changed

the Tennessee electorate. After World War II, Tennesseans started to receive greater wealth, a better quality of life, and an increase in the literacy rate, making them desire better political representation (Majors 1969b, 166). Additionally, they just finished fighting a war to protect democracy making the issue of fair and open election salient. Browning, whose base again consisted mostly of rural Tennesseans, drew in members all across the state in part with his coordination with Congressman Estes Kefauver, who had the support of urban Tennesseans (Majors 1969b, 167). While their plan worked and Tennesseans elected Browning in 1948, much of his support came not from his policies as a state's rights candidate but rather from the consolidation of both reform messaging against political machines and anti-crump supporters coming together to take down the Memphis political machine (Majors 1969b, 167). Crump failed to successfully determine the outcome of the election because Browning mobilized all the groups that Crump had disturbed over the years. Crump's failure to have Browning defeated signified the end of the definitive control Crump had over Tennessee.

Once re-elected in 1948, Gov. Browning worked on everything from expanding teachers' salaries, expanding education access, reducing bureaucratic inhibitors to improving rural roads. The main policy Gov. Browning fought to alter was the Tennessee election laws. As he sought to do during his first term, Browning succeeded in reducing the power and influence political bosses had to shape the outcome in Tennessee politics. Gov. Browning succeeded in abolishing the primary election poll tax, exempting women and veterans from the general election poll tax, and establishing a system that would make it easier for urban Tennesseans to register to vote (Majors 1969b, 168). However, Gov. Browning failed to amend the Tennessee constitution preventing him from abolishing the

poll tax, making the constitution more amendable, implementing population-based reapportionment, establishing four-year term limits for governors, and adopting property assessment standards. When the issue of race started to become increasingly debated, voter suppression laws disincentivized candidates from pandering for the support of the black vote. While Browning realized that change is necessary to meet the needs of a growing democracy, he fell back to the southern position of states' rights regarding segregation and supporting the retention of current racial relations (Majors 1969b, 179).

Since Browning established his victory against traditional machine politics, the Governor lacked the detailed network and organization to maintain his control (Majors 1969b, 171). While Tennessee elected him again in the election of 1950, Gov. Browning's third term administration is often described as overall complacent (Majors 1969b, 172). Browning reflected the incoming divide between the desire to maintain the status quo now that he held control over the political machinery and also acknowledging the needs of the developing state by working to modernize the Tennessee Constitution (Majors 1969b, 172).

Governor Gordon Browning entered politics when boss control remained supreme, but his 1948 Gubernatorial Election showed the Crump political machine less powerful than previously perceived. Even with Browning winning mainly from building a coalition of Crump's longest enemies, the damage was done, and Crump's influence, perceived and real, began to dwindle. While Browning had successfully fought against Crump and the Tennessee political machine, Frank Clement entered the 1952 Democratic Primary with a new vision and style for Tennessee beyond boss control.

*Frank Clement Shift: 1925 To 1962*

Frank Clement's main objective to win the governorship was to defeat Gordon Browning in the 1952 Democratic Primary. Since Republicans failed to win state-wide elections, Tennesseans saw their toughest fight for the governorship in the Democratic Primary. Clement ran against Browning as a reform candidate on the issues of corruption, ill-representation and argued for an overall message of "honesty, decency and morality" (Davis 1976, 86). While they did not have much to disagree regarding the issues themselves, the main point of difference came when making accusations of wrongdoing and the changing rhetorical presentations to the voting base. Clement also changed his tune after *Brown v. Board* and slowly started catering his messaging from southern protection to gradual integration. My research highlights Clement's introduction of oratory skills and popularity into the political equation while also showing the evolution of race during his political control of Tennessee.

Frank Clement's impressive oratory skills, youthful popularity, and carefully structured backstory reflect the changing desires of Tennesseans after World War II. From the age of ten, Clement worked to shape his life in such a way to best position himself for his desired role as the eventual Governor (Davis 1976, 83-81). Clement received public speaking training, a Vanderbilt law degree, an F.B.I. position, and eventually made the political choice to join the Army during World War II to secure a service record to bolster his political reputation (Davis 1976, 84). While continuing leading varying organizations within Tennessee, Clement's connection with Leslie Hart of the Nashville Banner and G. Edward Friar would hold massive impacts on his future political career (Davis 1976, 85).

Hart would give him the attention needed within the press, and Friar, a lawyer, was determined to see that Clement become Governor in 52', gain national attention at the 56' Democratic Convention, seek the U.S. Senate in 58', and become the presidential nominee by the election of 1960 (Davis 1976, 85). Given the growth within Tennessee after World War II, Frank Clement presented himself as a proud example of a candidate that represented the desires of the people.

Clement announced his bid for the 1952 Tennessee Gubernatorial Race in 1950, citing his active military service. He maintained a strong connection to the community establishing offices in every county (Davis 1976, 85). As Clement traveled to each of the counties, Political Boss Edward Crump, a longtime rival to Governor Browning, went and expressed his support for Clement, leaving Browning a reason to argue for continued anti-boss rhetoric within the 1952 Tennessee Gubernatorial election (Davis 1976, 86). Browning had successfully won his 1948 campaign on the message against Crump's corruption, but his power had reduced, and few people saw Crump as the threat of corruption as they once had.

Frank Clement was a powerful orator and was able to build excitement through his stump speeches (Majors 1969b, 176). As television coverage became mainstream, the charming preacher-sounding rhetoric of Clement allowed for the young candidate to charm the voters and surpass Browning (Davis 1976). Gov. Browning continued arguing against bossism but simply replaced Crump with the vision of Clement (Majors 1969b, 176). While Browning failed to recognize bossism was not a salient issue against a charming Clement, the Browning scandals had a role to play in the outcome of the 1952 gubernatorial election

(Majors 1969b, 176). The interest in anti-boss rhetoric declined due to an increased voting base, having had less experience with boss control.

Clement had a 10-point indictment against Gov. Browning focused on negligence, wasteful spending of state funds, and corrupt actions that harm the legitimacy of the governor's office (Davis 1976, 86-87). Clement focused on Browning's decision to use the Memorial Apartments as an office building and his performance at the Democratic National Convention (Majors 1969b, 173). Since the Tennessee Assembly needed to compensate with the needed office space, Gov. Browning authorized the lease-purchase between the state and Cumberland Properties (Majors 1969b, 173). Browning faced accusations of overstepping granted authority and corruption to support a friend of the Governor. Clement ran on this message, but the real downfall appeared to come from Browning's 1952 DNC convention performance (Majors 1969b, 174).

Senator Kefauver, then a contender for the 1952 Democratic nomination, defended adding a "loyalty pledge" toward the nominee at the convention. While Virginia chose not to sign the pledge, there was a push within the party to seat them regardless (Davis 1976, 88; Majors 1969b, 174). On behalf of Tennessee, Gov. Browning, listening to the advice of Kefauver, voted on national television as the only southern state to stand against the seating of Virginia (Majors 1969b, 174-175). According to the *Press-Scimitar*, Clement supporters started expressing 'Frank Clement loves the South' and Browning received further allegations of corrupt behavior, all but ended Browning's campaign (Davis 1967, 88; Majors 1969b, 175). The general election victor, at this point in history, was essentially whomever the Democratic nominee became; however, the primary election revealed the

division within the party and the changing nature of elections. The continued fight against corruption remained a salient point; however, fear of southern betrayal also started to resonate with the voting population.

In 1952, Governor Frank Clement won the Democratic nomination for Governor against the incumbent Gordon Browning. While the two had little disagreement on issues or substantive policy disputes, the main determining factors were the arguments of government mismanagement and a desire for change. Prior to 1953, Tennessee gubernatorial elections occurred every two years, and terms could be held consecutively. Clement won reelection in 54' defeating Browning by a larger margin who ran on the same platform as the prior election. However, changes to the Tennessee constitution allowed governors to serve unlimited 4-year terms as long as they are not consecutive. This meant that, while Clement was granted an exception to run again in 1954, he needed someone else to take his place and run in 1958 to maintain his influence.

Between 1953 and 1971, Frank Clement and Buford Ellington held control over the state. With the endorsement of Clement, Buford Ellington won the governorship in 1958, being an ally to Clement, and they were able to maintain control over the governorship for close to 20 years (Rhodes Cook 2018). Clement finished out his time as Governor after winning his last election in 1962, receiving only 50.8% of the vote (Rhodes Cook 2018). Davis (1976, 91) explains Frank Clement's youthful appeal and persuasive voice lost its punch over the decade as he lost his outsider perspective.

Clement had also evolved over the years on segregation. On the issues of race during the aftermath of *Brown v. Board*, Tennessee Governor Frank Clement opposed

segregationists' call to reject the decision and instead worked to ensure a gradual approach of integration (Franklin and Block 2020, 5-6). Clement's move to allow the full implementation of school desegregation made him stand out against the backdrop of other southern segregationist governors (Franklin and Block 2020, 49).

Overall, Clement represented a shift of appeal toward populist rhetoric that spoke of taking care of many. His skillful use of rhetoric paired with his impressive background and youthful appeal served him well. As the years progressed, the voters became used to his style and again searched for something new. However, Clement had forced future candidates to pay more attention to style due to the increased demands of the modern voter and represented the first Tennessee Democratic governor to stand in affirmation of accepting change regarding desegregation.

#### *Buford Ellington Shift: 1958 To 1966*

The Tennessee constitution prevented consecutive terms as governor, leading Gov. Frank Clement to coordinate with Buford Ellington to ensure they are able to continue control. While they essentially held control of the Democratic party between 1952 and 1970, they also changed represented the Tennessee Democratic Party's reaction to civil rights policy. Ellington went from being racially intolerant regarding integration to switching after the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to support integration against the likes of fellow southern states. Given the expanded electorate, Gov. Ellington chose to seek out both traditional southern Democrats and new black voters. As Clement and Ellington sided



with integration, the Tennessee Republican Party started organizing and became powerful enough to win the newly alienated segregationist southern Democrat in the election of 1970.

Buford Ellington worked with Frank Clement to establish a relationship that allowed the two of them to maintain control over the governorship for nearly two decades. After Frank Clement put his endorsement behind Ellington, Buford Ellington won the governorship in the election of 1958 (Rhodes Cook 2018). Governor Ellington chose to appeal to the new black voter and led the Democratic Party in Tennessee to stand out in its support for racial moderation when so many fellow southern states chose to dig their heels in and maintain their segregationist rhetoric.

With the issue of race being openly addressed amidst the early part of the Civil Rights Movement, Ellington was forced to reexamine issues pre-supposed to salient in favor of segregation. During his first term in office, Buford Ellington declared himself a segregationist, and he was not going to change his position because racial integration is now popular (May 1997, 280). While unable to run again until 1966, Ellington worked to position himself and his ally, Frank Clement, in a suitable position on the issue of race. In March of 1960, Gov. Ellington accused C.B.S. of having a role in planning a demonstration encouraging both blacks and whites to perform and take violent action for media coverage (Sumner 1991, 541). For context, Nashville saw students from "black institutions of higher education" hold four public sit-ins in the city starting on February 13 (Sumner 1991, 541). While those eventually halted for negotiations, students resumed their peaceful protest the same week C.B.S. came to film about the prior demonstrations (Sumner 1991, 542). Gov.

Burford Ellington stated choosing to film the sit-ins was reckless and a danger to our community by encouraging the incidents to reoccur (Sumner 1991, 543). C.B.S. President, Frank Stanton, responded saying how he looked into the matter and there was no legitimacy to the claim and argued for an apology (Sumner 1991, 543). Rev. James Lawson, a black student at Vanderbilt Divinity School, told the Tennessean that C.B.S. simply contacted them to see training on how these events are trained. There was not coordinated communication to plan any event (Sumner 1991, 544). Overall, Ellington had little incentive to cooperate with those provoking racial issues; however, the narrative would change with the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

Re-elected in 1966, Gov. Buford Ellington's 2nd administration was harshly judged by the inability to respond to the new needs of the era. While Clement put his support behind Ellington, Ellington failed to build the party in the midst of republican growth, as Richard Nixon helped motivate southern republicans with a message that appealed to their racial resentments while portraying it as just protecting regular people (May 1997, 280).

According to Vaughn May, the scholarly consensus around Buford Ellington is inaccurate. They argue Ellington was able to appropriately change his messaging in order to deal with the "volatile integration problems that shook the South" (May 1997, 280). Additionally, Ellington changed his tone and opted to support a policy of racial moderation (May 1997, 280). Governor Ellington made a bet by supporting integration, one that would ultimately alienate many of the Democrats' southern white segregationists.

Two years prior to Ellington's re-election, the 1965 Voting Rights Act forced elected officials to cater their campaign stances to secure the support of the expanded

electorate (May 1997, 280). In a timely fashion, Ellington unapologetically declared support for the end of segregation (May 1997, 280). Ellington chose to avoid the rhetoric of fellow southern governors and run against segregation to be a more inclusive campaign (May 1997, 282). He chose to focus on further developing regional educational opportunities while avoiding race as a talking point to not alienate the black vote (May 1997, 283, 285). Ellington respected the Tennessee education commissioners' autonomy, which revealed unity, thus limiting the authority of any resistance movement allowing Tennessee to head in a progressive direction (May 1997, 285).

Ellington was forced to walk a tight line between appealing to the expanded electorate of black voters and alienating the traditional support system of southern Democrats, segregationist whites. Ultimately, Gov. Ellington chose to seek the expanded voting pool. Gov. Ellington promoted integration through his work with both the Democratic Party and the Southern Regional Educational Board (SREB).

The SREB worked to "maximize educational and job opportunities for black graduate and professional students" (May 1997, 285). As chair from 1969-1970, Ellington worked hard to promote SREB efforts, and it became clear he would be seen nationally as an "efficient and competent governor" (May 1997, 285-286). However, Ellington's commitments increasingly appeared to go against southern values and increased anger amongst segregationists desperate to prevent additional integration initiatives. Additionally, when southern states started to distance

from the Democratic party in the late 1960s, Gov. Ellington continued to support the racial policies of long-time friend Lyndon Johnson and stood in firm support of integration and promoted the Civil Rights Act of 1964 across the south (May 1997, 286).

While re-elected to defend the values of the Old South, Ellington moved to ignore the conservative whites and began to look for other options for the election of 1970 (May 1997, 287). According to the Nashville Banner, Ellington played a key role in saving the "deeply-splintered [democratic] party' (May 1997, 287). When Gov. Lurleen Wallace of Alabama, who ran to extend Gov. Wallace's influence beyond state term limits, called for the 1967 Montgomery conference and Gov. Lester Maddox of Georgia called for a 1969 conference on race, Ellington denied both, stating that Tennessee would continue to deal with our education system in a manner that benefits all Tennesseans (May 1997, 289). According to the historical record, Ellington disliked the use of demagogic language to heighten people's emotions; therefore, he avoided the racial tensions to show he was siding with the good side. However, under Ellington's administration, the Republican Party began to organize and became powerful enough to oust both Ellington and other democrats.

### **Party Competition (1970-1990): Race, Watergate, and Reagan**

Prior to 1970, Democrats were all but guaranteed the victory in southern state-wide elections. The gubernatorial election of 1970 challenged that notion and saw the Republican Party take advantage of Nixon's Southern Strategy. The subtly racialized rhetoric worked in Tennessee, and Republicans were able to make a move. As the national Democratic party slowly embraced more and more civil rights issues, the traditional

southern Democrats began to feel alienated. Tennessee was slowly leaving the Democratic brand and heading toward the more conservative Republicans, and the primaries slowly revealed this fact. However, when it came down to getting the candidates elected, the primary electorates on both sides often chose the moderate business-focused candidate as opposed to the extremes of either faction.

The Republicans had taken advantage of the success of Nixon's 1968 presidential campaign, and Winfield Dunn was able to build up a strong base in Shelby county which both secured the nomination and powered his victory in the 1970 general gubernatorial election. Winfield Dunn's victory revealed Democrats no longer could elect just anyone and expect the general electorate to support them regardless of the Republican alternative. This was the first time a Republican candidate had won the governorship in over 50 years, and it sent a message loud and clear within the Democratic Party. They needed to unify and secure their support across the state.

Fearing another Republican win, the Tennessee Democratic Party quickly worked to unify around Ray Blanton in the 1974 Tennessee gubernatorial election. While Blanton won the primary by allowing the divided progressive voters to give him a narrow victory, he was helped by two main factors. First, the Watergate scandal of Richard Nixon had made the Republican brand temporarily toxic, giving a sedative to the growing Tennessee Republican Party. Second, the fear of another Republican victory was so strong that it led Democrats to throw their support behind Blanton. It is not necessarily that person resonated with Blanton's message, but rather it was the fear of continual defeat and Republican corruption that ultimately elevated Blanton to the governor's office.

In 1978, Republicans, who had nominated Alexander in 1974, were again fully behind Alexander, this time without the criticism of Watergate corruption in the minds of all voters.

Alexander made an attempt to appeal to black voters by arguing making the election more competitive would benefit black voters due to their seeking of the black vote, so therefore they should vote for Alexander to increase competition.

Alexander, following in the footsteps of fellow democrats and republicans alike, tried to court the untapped black voter while maintaining the support of the conservative white voters, who did not support civil rights. With both candidates trying to walk the line of the issue of race, the general election focused on business and past political scandals. Unfortunately for the Democrats, Gov. Blanton and Democratic gubernatorial nominee Jake Butcher both were accused of corruption and poor business practices. While Democrats were still the preference for many voters, Republicans could defeat either a Democratic party that was severely divided or a corrupt or inept Democratic candidate.

With the state's constitution changed to allow Governors to run consecutively for a total of two four-year terms, Republican Gov. Lamar Alexander was one of the first candidates in recent Tennessee history to receive the benefit of the Incumbency effect. Alexander was popular and had appealed to both Democrats and Republicans over his prior four years. Afraid of the continued losses, the Tennessee Democratic Party forced party unity down the ballot; however, this had little effect, and Republican Lamar Alexander won reelection in a landslide.

The Tennessee Democrats, mainly Tennessee Speaker of the House Ned McWherter, had accepted the success and appeal of Alexander and decided to switch and support the governor's office while still holding control of the Tennessee State Legislature. While Ronald Reagan had brought about a conservative movement all across the south, McWherter was able to use his record of bipartisanship as Tennessee Speaker to his advantage in the 1986 gubernatorial election. As the Republicans attempted to re-elect Gov. Winfield Dunn, Dunn had lost his sense of appeal and didn't represent the growing conservative platform Reagan had turned the Republican Party into. Ultimately, McWherter was able to win his election by avoiding the growing social issues that were occurring during the beginning of the culture wars, and instead, both parties decided to focus on comparisons of their business record in the general elections.

#### *1970 – Winfield Dunn vs. John Jay Hooker*

Prior to the Tennessee gubernatorial election of 1970, Democrats were all but a given victory in southern elections. However, as the Republican Party grew in Tennessee under Shelby County's Winfield Dunn and the Democrats failed to prepare to counteract, the Republicans were well-positioned to challenge the Democrats. Nixon's success in implementing his Southern Strategy allowed Republicans to find clear rhetoric that could start to pull conservative democrats over to vote for a southern Republican. They focused primarily on using language that appealed to the racial prejudice of southerners but doing so with rhetoric that conveyed a more palatable target of addressing crime that northern republicans could get behind.

John Jay Hooker unsuccessfully challenged incumbent Buford Ellington for the Tennessee Democratic Gubernatorial Primary back in the 1966 election (Bartley and Graham 1975, 153; Fontenay 1970). Hooker was an attractive and wealthy Nashville attorney with a more liberal persuasion (Bartley and Graham 1975, 153). In the 1970 Democratic Primary, Hooker faced a six-person primary, leading him to win the primary with only 44.7 percent of the vote (Bartley and Graham 1975, 153). Given the Voting Rights Act of 1965, race directly played a role in the Democratic primary, and the rhetoric shifted toward the cover of states' rights in the 1970 general election.

In the Democratic Primary of 1970, John J. Hooker, Stanly T. Snodgrass, and Robert L. Taylor were the three candidates considered viable in the race for nomination (Fontenay 1970). While Snodgrass was a Nashville attorney, state senator, and Hubert Humphrey's Tennessee Campaign Manager, who focused on saying Hooker's failed business interests hurt his ability to lead the business of Tennessee, he held similar positions to John Jay Hooker on policy (Fontenay 1970). On the other hand, Robert L. Taylor, a State Court of Appeals justice, ran a conservative platform calling for law and order (Fontenay 1970). Given the context of the Nixon campaign's successful messaging two years prior, Taylor's law-and-order messaging shows the conservative wing of the Tennessee Democratic Party trying to reposition from segregationist views towards those of making communities safe, a traditional signifier of a more passive anti-racial rhetoric. Overall, Democrats were divided on the issue of race at this time, and Hooker focused on business and captured the nomination by avoiding the issue and calling for unity. Hooker said this race is "the first time in 50 years we are going to elect a governor in November instead of August," further emphasizing that while all his primary candidates are qualified,



he is the only one who can successfully prevent a Republican victory in November (Daughtrey 1970d). On August 9, 1970, 3 days after the Primary elections, it was clear the Democrats nominated Hooker, and the Republicans nominated Winfield Dunn for the November election.

Winfield Dunn, who left the Democratic Party in 1960, citing his opposition to Medicare, worked to build the Shelby County Republican Party and proved to be an inspiring and leading presence in the growing Republican Party (Daughtrey 1970b; Sutherland 1970; Thompson 1970). Dunn's ability to grow the Shelby County GOP is what put him over the edge and beat the then Tennessee Speaker of the House, William Jenkins.

After the Primary, issues of scandal began to surface and change the narrative. Due to problematic accounting on behalf of John Jay Hookers' Minnie Pearl franchise, he spent much of the campaign defending his reputation (Bartley and Graham 1975, 153). With the country going under a recession, Hooker unsuccessfully tried to make this a central issue of the campaign, but the energy of the 1968 victory of Richard Nixon still ever clear, Winfield Dunn was able to secure a state-wide win for the TN GOP (Daughtrey 1970a, 1970b, 1970c).

In Dunn's victory speech, he said, "Tennesseans deserve [...] a choice between the bureaucrats imposing their big government and experimentation on us, and we as free individuals making our own decisions and managing our own lives as we see fit-within the law" (Daughtrey 1970b). Democratic disenchantment began to grow, with Hooker being another liberal Democrat in support of social issues (Bartley and Graham 1975, 153). In the end, Dunn would win both Knoxville and Chattanooga in East Tennessee and see the

fruits of his labor organizing the Shelby County Republican Party with the victory of his home city of Memphis.

While the Democratic Party chose a candidate that faced scandal, the Republican ran a candidate that used to be a Democrat and represented the growth of the republican party. Even though the Democratic Party was not forecasted to lose complete control anytime soon, this did show the Tennessee state party they can't just elect anyone with the Democratic label.

#### *1974 – Ray Blanton vs. Lamar Alexander*

The election of Republican Winfield Dunn to Tennessee's governor's office in 1970 directly challenged the prior success of Tennessee Democrats, who were used to consistent victories in general elections. The emergence of a viable Republican party caused the Democratic party to look inward. In 1974, the Tennessee Democratic Party had many competing visions for their message moving forward and who should lead it. Blanton was called 'conservative with a tinge of populism' (Daughtrey 1974a). The Democratic Primary was in no way unified under Blanton's message. However, with both the fear of continual democratic defeat and Tennesseans trusting republicans less after the Watergate scandal, the Democrats had an opportunity to win in a low period for an emerging Republican electorate. While Blanton was viewed with hesitancy and negativity amongst liberals, labor groups, and black voters, he won the Primary, facing a split progressive wing of the party, receiving only 22% of the vote, making him the Democratic nominee (Daughtrey 1974a).

With Richard Nixon having stepped down after narrowly avoiding an impeachment trial regarding the Watergate Scandal, Republicans lost the ability to see continual success down the ballot. Due to the Tennessee constitution prohibiting consecutive administrations, Winfield Dunn could not run for another term leaving the fight without an incumbent. In the general election, Blanton would go against Republican nominee Lamar Alexander. The main fight in the general election was not about race as one might expect after the 1970 election; however, fear of continual democratic decline and the scandals of both parties were the primary issues of saliency during the campaign.

Alexander was a calculated and driven politician determined to get what he desires with eyes on politics and the governorship from an early age (Haile 1974c). Lamar Alexander was elected Governor of Boy's State in the '50s and talked about his campaign desires while at Vanderbilt; his political experience started working on Howard Baker's 1966 U.S. Senate campaign, then working as an executive assistant in the Nixon Administration, to finally organizing for Gov. Dunn in his successful 1970 gubernatorial bid (Haile 1974c). Viewers watching Alexander on television saw a candidate 'cool but innocent', 'firm, but not aggressive,' who argued for 'restoring confidence in Washington' amidst the fallout of the Nixon Watergate Scandal (Haile 1974c).

Shortly after Blanton and Alexander received their respective nominations, Blanton used Alexander's role in the Nixon White House to his political advantage. Blanton argued Alexander needed to explain to Tennesseans his role in the Nixon Administration so the public could understand his role and why the Nixon Administration contributed \$1 million to the Dunn Campaign in 1970 (Shaw 1974). On October 7, The Tennessean wrote that

Blanton focused on corruption and the mismanagement of public funds happening within Tennessee. In reporting, it became clear Watergate was having an effect on the voters. "I am going to vote for the Democrat. You know that Watergate thing was on so long it made me sick. We've got to have a Democrat" (Haile 1974a). By October 10, polls showed only 17% of voters were unsure who to vote for, and 54% of voters told Gallup they would support the Democratic candidate (Haile 1974a).

Towards the end of the 1974 campaign, Alexander increased calls for Blanton to explain his own allegations of campaign finance violations (Thompson 1974). Alexander understood that unless he could change the narrative and shift attention from the national party toward themselves as individual candidates, he would have little chance of winning the election.

Blanton had built a coalition of scared loyal Democrats and ashamed Republican voters to push him to victory. Having lived under the first Republican Governor in 50 years, Democrats fell in line to prevent such disunity moving forward (Daughtrey 1974b). While disheartened Republicans either stayed home or voted against the G.O.P., Blanton brought labor workers, blacks, urban liberals, rural populists, and the poor together in a growing desire for Democratic unity (Haile 1974b). Blanton became Governor, delivering 72 of the 95 counties in Tennessee with 56 percent of the vote (Daughtrey 1974a). With Blanton choosing not to seek re-election, the democratic party needed a new nominee in the 1978 election.

*1978 – Lamar Alexander vs. Jake Butcher*

The election of 1978 came after the Tennessee State Constitution was changed from non-consecutive 4-year terms to a total of two 2-year terms. Democrats were divided but only focused on which candidate would best win against a Republican. Republicans were already behind Alexander, leading him to court-divided Democratic voters. While Alexander was able to encourage black voters to vote Republican, both parties were attempting to both keep their traditionally racially sensitive white voters while appealing to the unsecured black electorate. The general election focused again on issues of business and political scandal, which ultimately allowed Alexander and the Republican Party to win the governorship for the second time in 50 years.

On the Democratic side, Bob Clement, Jake Butcher, and Richard Fulton became the clear, viable choices for the 1978 Democratic nomination (Ivey 1978). Mayor Richard Fulton of Nashville started growing closer in the polls toward the end as his name recognition increased (Ivey 1978). Jake Butcher argued his success as a Knoxville banker would make him uniquely qualified to be Governor over fellow candidates who simply wanted to 'run for another office' (1978. 'Butcher Outbuys Fulton). Butcher avoided any serious criticisms against his opponents and instead talked about the need for a unified party if they were to win in November (Daughtrey 1978b). On August 1st, 1978, The Tennessean reported that a statewide poll showed Jake Butcher with 27 percent, Bob Clement with 25 percent, and Richard Fulton with 24 percent of the Democratic primary support. Jake Butcher won the Democratic nomination arguing a message of a unified party while faced with the reality of needing to gain the Clement supporters (Daughtrey and Hall

1978a). While few substantive disagreements existed, the main focus of the primary rested on who could best flip Tennessee Democratic again.

Being well known and liked after his 1974 gubernatorial race, Lamar Alexander soundly won the Republican primary, and both candidates increased their attacks heavily. Lamar Alexander attacked with claims that Butcher conducted his banking practices in an unsafe and financially irresponsible manner, and Butcher argued Alexander skirted the law by using a church charter to allow the selling of liquor at Ruby Tuesday's Restaurant in the dry community of Gatlinburg (Hall 1978b). These issues would be talked about for the remainder of the campaign; however, Alexander chose to make a pitch to black Tennesseans.

Alexander worked to gain the support of Black Tennesseans, especially those in Memphis. Lamar Alexander argued Tennessee Democrats take black voters for granted while not helping to provide any actual representation or social mobilization (Hall 1978a). "The Republican Party may have at one time ignored black voters, but [...] You're going to be better off if you have two candidates competing for your vote" (Daughtrey 1978a). Additionally, toward the end of the race, Alexander began to erode Democratic support in the Nashville area, which is crucial to prior Democrat success (Daughtrey and Hall 1978b).

T. McN. Simpson (1978), a political science associate professor at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, highlighted that Democrats are campaigning to win over disenchanted Republicans and vice versa. "Tennessee politicians, it seems, are in and out of a new bed with every other election" (Simpson 1978). Essentially, both parties are still trying to figure out who best to court. The well-to-do Alexander projects an image of an

everyday country boy, and Butcher presents a well-off demeanor (Simpson 1978). With the introduction of a newly competitive Republican Party, both parties were trying to figure out their new role. Democrats and Republicans both were conflicted with embracing black votes while consoling disenfranchised southern whites. In the end, Lamar Alexander won the election in a landslide and proved to be the second Republican elected to the office in over 50 years.

*1982 – Lamar Alexander (I) vs. Randy Tyree*

After the constitution was changed in 1978, the governor is allowed to serve two 4-year terms, consecutive or not. The incumbent Republican, Lamar Alexander, was popular in 1982, and the people had little reason or incentive to change the direction of the state. The Tennessee Democratic Party, in a late pitch effort to force party cohesion amongst a period of republican growth, forced Democrats to support the entire party ticket. While the Democrat challenger argued against Alexander and Reaganomics, the incumbency effect, or the tendency to elect those already in office, ultimately allowed Alexander to win re-election.

After the Democratic Primary proved Randy Tyree to be the Democratic Nominee, he campaigned as a Democratic referendum against Reaganomics (Vande Berg 1982b). Tyree asserted Alexander primarily won in 1978 due to the scandals surrounding Democratic candidate Jake Butcher and former Governor Blanton, not due to his appeal to voters (Vande Berg 1982b). Alexander was popular, and even most Democrats liked what

he was doing, leaving even the competing Democratic candidates without any substantive room for salient policy opposition.

With no primary challenger and unified Republican support, Alexander made a pitch to Democrats who voted for Anna Belle Clement O'Brien, the unsuccessful Democratic primary candidate, asking for their support (Vande Berg 1982a). To disincentive split party voting, the Tennessee Democratic Party Executive Committee voted unanimously to deny party affiliation to any future candidate who fails to support all Democrats running for office (Sherborne 1982). However, some former Democratic party leaders pushed back and spoke on behalf of Alexander, citing his reasonable achievements and upstanding character (Sherborne 1982). With Democrats facing an attractive and overall popular governor in a growing political party, the leadership drew an ultimatum within the party, saying support all or none. However, Lamar Alexander won with 60 percent of the vote (Lewis and Fisher 1982). In reflection, Democratic Party leaders internalized the outcome and the States support of Gov. Alexander (Lowe 1982). Ned McWherter, then-Speaker of the Tennessee House, expressed that Democrats need to acknowledge Alexander's popularity and work together to solve issues Alexander won on (Lowe 1982).

#### *1986 – Ned McWherter vs. Winfield Dunn*

In the midst of the Regan Era, Democrat Ned McWherter was able to secure a victory for southern democrats. While the Republicans tried to re-elect the once-popular



Gov. Winfield Dunn, Dunn no longer has the appeal he once had after scrutiny and scandal from his prior years in office. Ned McWherter won because of his experience and reputation of cooperation when he served as Tennessee Speaker of the House under Gov. Lamar Alexander.

With the gubernatorial election of 1986, the Democrats saw Jane Eskind, Richard Fulton, and Ned McWherter compete for the nomination. McWherter gained the support of all but one Democrat district Attorneys General (Daughtrey and Graham 1986). At the Democratic Primary debate, Eskind faced increased scrutiny from her fellow underdog, Fulton, which slowed her prior growth in momentum (Daughtrey 1986a). While Fulton also delivered several shots to McWherter, McWherter benefited overall due to the takedown of Eskind (Daughtrey 1986a). As the campaign accelerated into late July, Eskind started a negative ad campaign describing McWherter as being influenced by conflicts of interest (Daughtrey and O'Hara 1986). McWherter took an earnest approach, simply voicing disappointment for the negative campaigning of Eskind while continuing his positive primary platform (Daughtrey and O'Hara 1986). McWherter proved successful in his strategy and looked to the general election with optimism that his opponent would run a positive campaign (Daughtrey and O'Hara 1986).

On the Republican side, Lamar Alexander was term-limited, and the Republicans were unsure of whom to nominate as a replacement other than someone with high name recognition and eligibility. Former Republican Governor Winfield Dunn won the nomination with roughly 90 percent of the Republican primary. The expectation was they could simply continue the popular path Alexander paved over his prior eight years in office.

In the general election, McWherter branded himself as a relatable grandfatherly persona who avoided theatrics. In October, McWherter ran an expansive ad campaign, spending double of what Dunn spent, to show McWherter entertaining children, grieving with his family, but also being tough when things needed to get done (Daughtrey 1986b). McWherter worked to gain Republican support in East Tennessee by supporting projects such as the long-desired opening of a medical school at East Tennessee State University (O'Hara 1986b, 1986c). Furthermore, McWherter asked directly for the support of 'independent-thinking Republicans' to join his campaign, especially those who were disappointed with the decisions of Gov. Dunn from 1971 to 1975 (O'Hara 1986c). Dunn labeled McWherter a partisan politician who has only promoted democrats to committee chairmanships (O'Hara 1986b). Additionally, Dunn faced scrutiny because under his first term, 1971-1975, he failed to appoint any women or black people out of the 46 judicial state court appointments (O'Hara 1986a).

Both Dunn and McWherter claimed the other to have conflict of interests that would affect their decision-making as Governor. Dunn claimed McWherter, owning both bank stock and state-regulated businesses, While McWherter retorted that Dunn was a hypocrite having over one million owed to First American Bank, yielding his own set of conflicting influences (O'Hara 1986d).

McWherter went on to win 76 of the 95 state counties and received 54 percent of the statewide vote (O'Hara and Pratt 1986). McWherter held control of the democratic strong holds in the middle and west and even remained close in East Tennessee (O'Hara and Pratt 1986). Representative Harold Ford, a Democratic congressman from Memphis,

explained McWherter was able to win the election due to his commitments to expanded health care and housing opportunities for poor Tennesseans (O'Hara and Pratt 1986). McWherter also worked far in advance, reaching out to the traditionally republican communities and expressing his explicit want to be Governor (O'Hara 1986e).

Larry Daughtrey explained that McWherter represented the growing resurgence of the Tennessee Democratic Party, further stating, "Tennessee is still a Democratic state if there is nothing wrong with the Democratic candidate" (November 5, 1986). The preference with many voters was that of supporting the party they grew up with, but as the electorate changed, so did the voting issues that paved the future of politics in Tennessee.

### **Party Competition (1990 – 2010): Nationalization of TN Politics and Rise of Culture Wars**

During the 1990s, conservative Republicans were capitalizing on their success in the south that accumulated during the Reagan Administration. However, Democratic Governor Ned McWherter was able to win re-election in a state growing more and more conservative. While this is because of his success in office and his reputation for being bipartisan, focusing mostly on Tennessee, Ned McWherter is most benefited by his position as an incumbent candidate. Throughout this period, the party not holding the governor's office decided not to seriously challenge the incumbent candidate due to an extreme likelihood of defeat in the general election. McWherter won re-election due to

being a popular incumbent; however, the nation was battling a culture war, one the candidate in 1994 would clearly see in their race for the gubernatorial seat.

In 1994, the culture war on sensitive issues regarding everything from abortion to homosexuals became mainstream political discourse and infiltrated the gubernatorial race. However, both candidates agreed on the majority of issues, and on this issue, they disagreed on it was slight enough to blur lines. The rhetoric of a business conservative was explicit; however, both candidates attempted to radicalize the other as the extreme example of the opposition party. Ultimately, the Republicans were united, and Bredesen suffered from a lack of party-building success.

With the incumbency effect internalized within the Democratic party, the Tennessee Democratic Party failed to elevate the more viable candidate over the other. Michael Whitaker had

the support of the traditional party base but ultimately lost to John Jay Hooker in the primary due to little party efforts to raise name awareness. The Tennessee Democratic Party all but conceded the election without putting up a fight in the general election.

As the Republican conservative faction grew across the state, the 2002 Primary can be examined as an apex moment where the energized conservative base chose Van Hilleary over the moderate Jim Henry. Bredesen, who ran in 1994, faced no primary challenger allowing him to build his base as a business conservative. While the state was trending conservative, Republican Gov. Sundquist had repositioned in favor of a state income tax, a widely unpopular position in Tennessee, leading the moderate conservatives to look

toward the Democrat this election cycle to avoid an increase in taxation. While Republicans were often best positioned to win elections during this time, if they faced scandal or became unpopular, the voting base would be willing to vote Democrat as long as they are a business conservative. However, since the margin of victory was slim, it should be remembered that the conservative base was growing stronger, with an electorate more willing to support a conservative message.

While the incumbent effect helped Phil Bredesen win against Republican challenger Jim Bryson, Jim Bryson revealed the boldness of the conservative movement moving forward in the state of Tennessee. Bryson had run on a message directly addressing national culture war issues such as immigration, abortion, and homosexual adoption. While Bredesen won the election in a landslide, this should best be attributed to his status as a successful incumbent rather than an agreement with Bredesen on the national social issues.

#### *1990 – Ned McWherter (I) vs. Dwight Henry*

Gov. Ned McWherter was re-elected Governor of Tennessee for a second term in 1990. In a period where conservative Republicans were winning across the south, McWherter was able to maintain his success given his past record of working with Gov. Alexander as the then Tennessee Speaker of the House. Paired with McWherter being an incumbent Tennesseans trusted to lead in the best interest of the state, Dwight Henry had little chance or expectation of defeating McWherter. Similar to when Democrats face an incumbent candidate, the Republican party essentially conceded the election before the

general election results tallied. When the party in the governor's mansion runs for re-election, credible candidates hid as not to become the sacrificial lamb for the election's sake.

Gov. McWherter would win re-election as Governor against Republican Nominee Dwight Henry. Dwight Henry, former Cookeville mayor and then-freshman in the Tennessee House, sought the Republican nomination seeing no better-known republican running (Daughtrey 1990c). Henry was significantly underfunded, largely unknown, and was the clear underdog even to his own acknowledgment (Daughtrey 1990c). The odds were perceived so low that the focus in July started to shift towards prospective candidates for the 1994 gubernatorial election (Daughtrey 1990a). After receiving the nomination in August, Henry lacked the support of Republican leadership and was seen as ill-prepared for the office (Daughtrey 1990d).

The focus Dwight Henry hit against Gov. Ned McWherter rested on the argument against the implementation of a state income tax. McWherter refused to rule out establishing a state income tax citing a possible need to fund his \$700 million education reform package (Williams 1990; Williams and McKnight 1990). McWherter further responded, "I really think Mr. Henry's problems with an income tax probably are going to be more with the Internal Revenue Service," referring to a bankruptcy filed by Henry in 1981 (Mansfield 1990). McWherter ultimately won re-election, receiving 91 out of the 95 counties and received 61 percent of the statewide vote (Daughtrey 1990b).

*1994 – Don Sundquist vs. Phil Bredesen*

The election of Don Sundquist represented the introduction of culture wars, such as abortion, into the Tennessee gubernatorial election conversation. While Tennessee saw Democratic Governor Ned McWherter led the state through the height of the Regan Era because of his record of cooperation with moderate Republicans, the election of 1994 saw the candidates more closely branded with their national party identification. Both candidates agreed on all the major issues but painted the other as a radical extreme. The race ultimately came down to who could best represent the interests of the state. While Bredesen appealed to the business conservative, he failed to unite the democratic party, especially black voters in Shelby county and labor workers. Sundquist ultimately won not on policy differences but rather his years of political experience combined with his network across the state in which many Tennesseans knew him.

With Gov. McWherter being term-limited, both the Democrats and Republicans had an open seat in the 1994 gubernatorial race. Republican Don Sundquist, then six-term Congressman for the 7th District, and Nashville Mayor Phil Bredesen were the two front runners as early as February 1994 (Smothers 1994; Daughtrey 1994a).

Don Sundquist had a sizable lead in the polls against his Republican primary opponents (Daughtrey 1994a). Sundquist ran a quiet campaign in the Primary, mostly avoiding all the mudslinging that within the primary (Daughtrey 1994e). While Bredesen held the lead in the Primary, Shelby County Mayor Bill Morris and Tiptonville Public Service Commissioner Frank Cochran remained competitive (Daughtrey 1994d). Sundquist and Bredesen both won their respective primaries (Ferrari 1994).

Bredesen expressed the importance of women in the election and defended a woman's right to choose regarding abortion (Daughtrey 1994a). With a similar goal, Sundquist positioned himself as a moderate candidate (Kerr 1994). Sundquist announced his plan to address domestic violence in coordination with pro-choice N.Y. Rep. Susan Molinari and also talked about his record of entrusting women to serve as both the majority of his staffers and Campaign Managers (Kerr 1994).

In the general election, the two quickly painted narratives of the others. Bredesen called Sundquist an 'ultraconservative' and an 'extremist' who has failed to protect women and families (Humphrey 1994; Kerr 1994). Sundquist labeled Bredesen as an urban liberal who is also an extremist because he supported taxpayer-funded abortions (Humphrey 1994; Kerr 1994). As in most elections, Bredesen faced a divided post-primary party and needed to do what McWherter did in 1986 and re-unite post-primary (Ferrari 1994). While Bredesen appealed to business conservatives, Bredesen needed to secure the support of black voters in the Shelby County area and energize the organized labor in the state by showing the state he is a southern 'good ol' boy' (Daughtrey 1994b).

Bredesen and Sundquist agreed on most of the issues, but the focus on the race focused on the qualification of the candidate. Bredesen was a wealthy political newcomer who was relatively unknown, while Sundquist had built up decades of experiences working across the aisle (Daughtrey 1994b). In the last month of the race, both sides began increasing their attacks on the other. Bredesen faced attack ads saying he would support an income tax, and Sundquist faced scrutiny for his vote for a congressional pay raise (Daughtrey and Loggins 1994). Sundquist accused Bredesen of being untrustworthy



because of two prior company lawsuits settled out of court (Daughtrey and Loggins 1994). In the end, Sundquist won with overwhelming support in the rural counties and an overall majority in East and West Tennessee (Daughtrey 1994f). In a post-election analysis, Sundquist was seen to win because he consistently campaigned early enough to both traditional Democrats and Independents, built personal relations in rural communities, repaired previously severed relations in East Tennessee while the Democrats acted too slowly to develop support behind a candidate to give them adequate publicity (Daughtrey 1994f).

#### *1998 – Don Sundquist (I) vs. John Jay Hooker*

As with all incumbents of this period, there is little traditional incentive for the challenging party to launch a viable and fully funded campaign to unseat the current governor, given little prior success. Traditionally, any viable candidate that might have wanted to run has little incentive to do so because of the incumbency effect. However, this race represents a failure of the Tennessee Democratic Party choosing to remain neutral in the primary. Michael Whitaker, the more viable candidate, received little more press coverage than the well-known non-viable John Jay Hooker, who had run many times prior. Facing a divided state, the Democrats chose inaction leading to a less competitive primary and general. When hooker received the nomination, he focused on issues of financial reform, essentially conceding any of the social issues as a non-starter.

In 1998, Gov. Sundquist had \$5 million dollars in his re-election fund (Cheek 1998c). Fearful of facing the Sundquist war chest, most establishment Democrats avoided running (Daughtrey 1998). Out of seven Democratic candidates, the primary choice for the democrats was between Michael Whitaker, a Covington attorney, and John Jay Hooker, the unsuccessful nominee from the 1970 race for the governorship (Cheek 1998c). While seen as unrealistically idealistic within the Democratic Party, John Jay Hooker's message speaks an age-old attractive narrative of fighting special interest influence and corruption in politics (Daughtrey 1998). Hooker refused to talk about any issue other than campaign finance reform and requiring Tennessee appellate court justices to be elected by popular elections (Cheek 1998a). When Hooker won the nomination in August, it was attributed to name recognition gained in the late-sixties early-seventies and public friendships with celebrities, including the Kennedys (Cheek 1998b).

Democratic leaders faced scrutiny for inaction in the 1998 gubernatorial election. The decline of the Democratic Party was first seen with the defeat of John Jay Hooker in the election of 1970. Nearly three decades later, the party failed to propel a preferred candidate for office, leaving Democrats with the choice between Hooker and Michael Whitaker (The Tennessean 1998). Given the two predominant choices, the Tennessee Democratic Party remained neutral and faced scrutiny for choosing not to endorse Whitaker (The Tennessean 1998). Hooker did not care about having the support of the party establishment and chose not to reach out to black communities and advocate on behalf of labor (Cheek and de la Cruz 1998). The undercurrent within the race was the incumbency deterrent. The most viable candidates expressed a desire to wait until the 2002 election, where Democrats

would face an open seat to possibly flip (Cheek and de la Cruz 1998). In the end, Sundquist won re-election, winning all but 2 of the 95 counties (Pinkston 1998).

### *2002 – Phil Bredesen vs. Van Hilleary*

In 2002, The Republican Primary saw a divided party split between an energized conservative movement backing Van Hilleary and their traditional moderate base supporting Jim Henry. The energy of the newly emboldened conservative coalition pushed Van Hilleary to take the nomination. By this point, the conservative faction of the Tennessee Republican Party had proven to be in control. While Bredesen faced no serious challenger in the primary, his main appeal was to the moderates who felt alone in a Republican Party growing more and more conservative. The past Republican governor pushed in his second term for a state income tax, leaving many Tennesseans upset about the threat of increased state taxation. While the Tennessee Republican Party faced an intra-party battle between the moderate and conservative factions, Bredesen won by keeping the Democratic coalition together while also appealing to the values of Tennessee moderates. However, Bredesen's margin of victory was narrow, signifying a Tennessee electorate more open to the growing conservative message.

The Republican party had two viable candidates for their gubernatorial nomination, Jim Henry and Van Hilleary (Daughtrey 2002). Henry represented the traditionally moderate faction, while Van Hilleary represented the growing far-right faction of the republican party, pushing candidates to compete in the primary for who is the most

conservative (Daughtrey 2002). Gov. Don Sundquist expressed his distaste for Van Hilleary, expressing Hilleary "would make a horrible governor" (Daughtrey 2002). In response, Hilleary attacked in an ad stating Henry supported an income tax and would be another pro-tax Governor like Sundquist (Cheek 2002b). However, Hilleary outraised Henry, and with a deficit in the polls, it became increasingly challenging for Henry to surpass Hilleary (Cheek 2002a).

In the Democratic primary race, Phil Bredesen faced several primary challengers but no truly competitive competition for the nomination (Daughtrey 2002). Bredesen had outraised his opponents and had a clear advantage in the polls (Cheek 2002a). Bredesen credited his success to his positive primary campaign and an overall focus on "education, TennCare reform and job growth" (Cheek 2002a).

Van Hilleary and Phil Bredesen both won their primaries with a decisive majority and entered the general election with a key desire, winning over the supporters of moderate Jim Henry (de la Cruz and Shiffman 2002). With the Republican Party divided after the extremely contentious primary race, Bredesen focused on appealing to the moderates who otherwise would feel isolated in a far-right Republican party (de la Cruz and Shiffman 2002). Bredesen pushed his successful business record and believed his experience would help appeal to moderates in favor of improving education, creating new jobs, and better state management (de la Cruz and Schrade and Shiffman 2002).

Despite both candidates openly opposing an income tax, Hilleary expressed that Bredesen is avoiding the issue and would be a pro-taxation candidate (Shiffman and de la Cruz 2002). Republican Governor Don Sundquist lost popularity and became controversial

after he switched positions and turned in favor of a state income tax (Johnson and de la Cruz 2002). Both Bredesen and Hilleary opposed Sundquist's income tax proposal; however, Hilleary attacked Bredesen for failing to completely refuse any possibility. While an income tax was heavily addressed in the campaign, the race came down to other more salient factors.

Phil Bredesen beat Van Hilleary, receiving slightly over fifty percent of the votes, with Knox County being the seat that put Bredesen over the top (de la Cruz, et al. 2002). Bredesen invested in East Tennessee early on in the campaign, spending a majority of his time there to make up for the devastating defeat in that part of the state in the 1994 election against Sundquist (de la Cruz 2002b). Phil Bredesen made a point to connect with Republicans, Democrats, and Independents in East Tennessee and was viewed as successful because he made direct connections (de la Cruz 2002a). Likewise, the Republican Party was damaged in the wake of the primary, and those wounds did not completely heal. Hilleary's aggressive and conservative campaign alienated the more traditional moderate Jim Henry supporters to either vote for Bredesen, the moderate Democrat or to become apathetic and not voting (Johnson 2002).

#### *2006 – Phil Bredesen (I) vs. Jim Bryson*

Phil Bredesen started the race with a clear advantage, having both high name recognition as the incumbent and his record as Governor (Seibert 2006). Bredesen announced his re-election campaign using his gubernatorial record over the past four years.

Jim Bryson, having little opposition in the primary, ran on a conservative platform talking about the culture war issues, everything from abortion, illegal immigrants and same-sex adoption. The conservative Republicans were front and center, launching a full-fledged culture-war-focused counter-campaign. The issues addressed in the campaign were nationalized; however, ultimately, Bredesen was able to still win a landslide victory by focusing not on the issues but rather on his record and experience as governor.

On the other hand, Jim Bryson was then a first-term state senator with little name appeal and a more conservative legislative record (Seibert 2006). Bryson ran in the primary as both a businessman, having worked as C.E.O. of a marketing company, and as the only active G.O.P. officeholder out of the seven candidates for the Republican nomination (Wickham 2006). On the record, Bryson had a conservative record of pushing the creation of 'Choose Life' license plates, referring to the anti-abortion movement, and worked to prevent homosexual couples from adopting (Siebert, April 5, 2006). After steadily winning the nomination, Bryson focused on appealing to conservative Tennesseans.

Throughout the General, Bryson mainly disagreed with Bredesen regarding the detaining of illegal immigrants when stopped by the Tennessee Highway Patrol (Wickham 2006). Bryson claimed that Bredesen had made Tennessee a mecca for illegal immigrants (Anne September 21, 2006). In response, Bredesen signed an executive order barring businesses that employ 'illegal immigrants' from gaining state contracts (The Tennessean 2006). Bredesen also faced criticism from Bryson for his decision to cut two-hundred thousand from TennCare, but Bredesen used the saved money to both fully fund those still enrolled and created a new program to assist with those cut from access (The Tennessean

2006). Bryson had made a political bet that this issue was popular across the state; however, little saliency was shown in the end.

In the end, Bredesen won in a landslide and promised to continue fighting for education, job creation, and reform the public healthcare system (Schrade 2006a). While Bredesen faced some scrutiny on the issues brought up by Bryson, they were either non-impactful or only important to the extreme factions of both parties, particularly one's liberal Democrats were upset about (Schrade 2006b). Bryson lost because he was unable to build name recognition and focused too much on liberal issues without appealing to the Republican base.

### **Republican Rule (2010 – Present): Moderate vs. Conservative Republicans**

In 2008, the United States of American elected its first black president, Barack Obama. While this moment generated hope for many, it also energized racial resentment. In his first two years, Obama pushed forward the Affordable Care Act in 2010, and as a result, the Tea Party grew and argued against the presidency of Obama and used rhetoric about government overreach to justify it.

By 2010, the Tennessee Republican Party had successfully established control over the state and the outcomes of the elections. The true battle being fought shifted toward the Republican primary. While the Democrats still fought to win the election, the Tennessee Democratic Party failed to either recruit or promote serious candidates to run against a Republican when the odds were seeming insurmountable.

Moderate Bill Haslem was able to take the Republican nomination by presenting himself as a similar type of businessman to Phil Bredesen, the then-popular Governor. The conservatives had more supporters in the primary; however, they split the vote having two Tea Party candidates competing for the same primary voters. Meanwhile, the Democratic candidate, Mike McWherter, ran off the name recognition being the son of former Governor Ned McWherter and ultimately faced no primary opponents. He received little political press coverage, minuscule financial support and ultimately lost the race, only receiving five counties.

In-office, Bill Haslem was popular, and this led most viable Democrats to avoid running for the 2014 gubernatorial race. In addition to the incumbent effect, the once-popular southern Democrats saw fewer opportunities to win elections, and when they ran, they were doing worse in each following election. Ultimately, the Ballot Order Effect, or when the positioning of candidates on the ballot affects a low-energy election, allowed Charles “Charlie” Brown to receive the nomination with no structural support and zero primary funds. Brown focused on trying to appeal to the religious nature of Tennesseans; however, Haslem ultimately won in a landslide.

While this era is still ongoing, and the outcome of the 2022 Tennessee Gubernatorial election could change the ultimate direction of the state, the election of 2018 was the first time a Republican succeeded a Republican Governor since the 1800s. Bill Lee accomplishes this by allowing his more conservative opponents to attack one another while sitting back and talking about his experience as a business leader and family man. While the Democrats elected moderate Karl Dean over progressive Craig Fitzhugh believing the senate race of former governor Phil Bredesen would carry him over, Bredesen and all the



formerly successful moderate democrats lost their elections and revealed a time where unless the Democrats change their strategy, they will have to wait for Republicans to go so extreme, that the Democrat happens to win as an alternative evil. However, with Bill Lee winning the general election, Tennesseans are currently more willing to trust business Republicans over democrats.

### *2010 – Bill Haslem vs. Mike McWherter*

In 2010, an open gubernatorial seat opened once again. The nationalization of state politics, including the gubernatorial race, would have a large play. Two years prior, Barack Obama was elected the first black President of the United States. This caused white anxiety and emboldened a conservative Republican group later known as the Tea Party, primarily focused on preventing the government from giving federal assistance to undeserving groups, particularly minorities (Williamson, Skocpol, and Coggin 2011, 26). In the Republican Primary, Haslem was able to win by running as a Bredesenesque business moderate while allowing his two Tea Party opponents to split the overall conservative vote. Democrats ran Mike McWherter, son of Gov. McWherter, with no primary challenger or any organized effort to make sure he received enough publicity and funding. In a year without an incumbent, the Democratic Party had their viable candidates run for other offices while failing to adequately promote McWherter in the general election. Ultimately, Haslem won the election by outraising Mike McWherter and branding himself to the popular Gov. Bredesen.

While several candidates considered entering the race for the Democratic nomination, Mike McWherter, son of former Gov. Ned McWherter, faced a primary unopposed on election day, with several other top candidates choosing to instead run for other offices (Sher 2010). Bredesen, holding a 70 percent approval rating, endorsed Mike McWherter. Chair Chip Forrester of the Tennessee Democratic Party expressed their faith that the endorsement from Gov. Phil Bredesen and McWherter's record as a small-business owner will resonate in November (Targeted News Service 2010).

On the Republican side, Lieutenant General Ron Ramsey, U.S. Rep. Zach Wamp, and Knoxville Mayor Bill Haslam proved to be the top candidates for the nomination (Kerr 2010a). They are mainly divided in terms of ideology between a moderate coalition and a growing conservative preference. Ron Ramsey and Zach Wamp both represented the tea-party-aligned conservative faction of the party, standing in support of restoring 'Judeo-Christian values' and supporting pro-gun efforts (Isenstadt and Taylor 2010; Sisk 2010). With the two candidates splitting the conservative vote, the moderate wing standing with Bill Haslam was able to win the nomination (Isenstadt and Taylor 2010). Bill Haslam painted himself as a Bredesenesque candidate focused on his business experience (Kerr 2010b).

Both candidates were experienced businessmen. Haslam's family owns half of Pilot Travel Centers L.L.C. while McWherter owned a small beer distribution business (Broden 2010; Sher 2010). While McWherter argued his small business would better meet the needs of Tennesseans over that of big business, Haslam called to focus on experience to handle the needed focus on employment, jobs, and quality education (Locker 2010).

Despite the well-received performance of Governor Bredesen, the Republican party held a clear advantage in the gubernatorial race leading by double digits in early June (Schrade 2010). Bill Haslam soundly defeated Mike McWherter, winning all but five counties and receiving 65 percent of the vote (Chattanooga Times Free Press 2010). McWherter attributed this devastating defeat to his lack of name recognition, both from being outspent, spending \$2.7 million to Haslam's \$16 million, and having no primary challenger to draw attention (Chattanooga Times Free Press 2010; Humphrey 2010).

*2014 – Bill Haslem (I) vs. Charles “Charlie” Brown*

In 2014, Bill Haslem was the popular incumbent governor of Tennessee, and few Democrats wanted to compete for the Governor's seat if not in the open 2018 election. While John McKamey was viewed as the front-runner in the Democratic Primary, the Tennessee Democratic Party had failed to energize the Democratic base, and therefore he had little funds or name recognition. Since there was little base building in this election, the Ballot Order Effect played an influence. The Ballot Order Effect helped elevate Charles “Charlie” Brown to secure the democratic nomination raising no money in the primary. After securing the nomination, Brown made an appeal to the religious right, but to no avail. Haslem was a popular governor, and his creation of new jobs and expanded education access made both Democrats and Republicans like him. The Democratic Party had failed to promote or fundraise adequately for the candidate, and therefore, Haslem faced a symbolic race for re-election.

John McKamey had the Democratic momentum behind him with both his record as a retired schoolteacher, coach, Sullivan County commissioner, and eventually mayor (Sisk 2014a). However, McKamey entered the race, citing the lack of any viable candidate with name recognition (Sisk 2014a). Many of the perceived viable candidates appeared to be waiting until the 2018 election to reach for the open seat (Sisk 2014a). While Charles "Charlie" Brown appeared unprofessional and failed to provide a clear campaign message, the Ballot Order Effect worked to his advantage, being at the top of voters' ballots (Sisk 2014a). The Ballot Order Effect is the phenomenon where a candidate's placement on the ballot affects their odds of being selected (Kroppell and Steen 2004, 267-281). McKamey himself expressed when primary voters do not know the candidates on the ballot; they tend to vote for the candidate at the top (Sisk 2014a). Charlie Brown won the Democratic nomination raising no money in the primary and ignoring interview requests (Sisk 2014c).

In Haslam's first four years as Governor, he pushed for free community college, struck a deal to expand employment at the Chattanooga Volkswagen plant while cutting costs and reducing taxes, making him popular with both Democrats and Republicans alike (Sisk 2014b). While Haslam had two primary challengers, he received almost 90 percent of the vote (Sisk 2014c).

Once the general election began, Brown focused on education reform, civil service protection, and returning the bible to schools (Cass 2014). However, Brown was never viewed

with any serious possibility of defeating Haslam. Haslam maintained the perception of being a business-focused moderate, progressive on education, and a push back against the far-right radical conservative wing of the Republican Legislature (Stroud 2014).

For many, Brown's nomination represented a failure of the Tennessee Democratic Party. While having a strong candidate helps lay the groundwork for future campaigns, long-time Democratic political strategist Kent Syler states 'It's hard to convince a credible candidate to get in the race and take a beating" (Cass 2014). While many understand the party needs to nominate quality candidates to stand a chance, no viable candidate wants to be the sacrificial lamb. With few hopes of victory, Democrats began expressing the need to change their message. Democrats began arguing they need a candidate who can explain to Tennesseans that voting for the Republican is a vote for wealthy corporate elites and against their own interests (Cass 2014). A few minutes after the polls closed, the results declared Haslam the victor, winning all 95 counties in a landslide victory (Boucher 2014; Garrison 2015).

#### *2018 – Bill Lee vs. Karl Dean*

Bill Lee was the first Republican to follow a sitting Republican Governor since the 1800s. The Democratic Primary had two competing visions for how best to re-win the governor's mansion. Karl Dean, the former mayor of Nashville, ran on a moderate business message while Craig Fitzhugh, Former TN House Minority Leader, entered the race on a progressive platform. While Fitzhugh represented the growing progressive wing of the

party, Fitzhugh entered the race late, and by that point, Dean had outraised him and won the nomination. The Democrats essentially made a bet that a moderate business candidate, similar to Bredezen in 2002, is the best way to win office. The Republicans, on the other hand, were again divided between several candidates representing either moderate business republicans or conservative candidates. Tennesseans do not like the perceived nastiness of politics, so as the race heated up and blood was drawn, Bill Lee positioned himself as a businessman of faith and was able to win by focusing on his message of who he was and what he represented. While Dean had the qualifications to be a suitable candidate, his campaign lacked the organization or energy needed to create a viable race. Bill Lee won the general election and revealing the growing trust Republicans have amongst most Tennesseans.

The 2018 gubernatorial race presented yet another open election. The two candidates most viable in the Democratic Primary were Craig Fitzhugh and Karl Dean. Former Tennessee House Minority Leader Craig Fitzhugh ran on a progressive message arguing he was willing to remain partisan when needed (Garrison 2018c). Former Nashville Mayor Karl Dean pitched himself as a pragmatist who will be the moderate pro-business candidate (Garrison 2018c). Fitzhugh had political experience, but Dean outraised Fitzhugh 15 to 1, and it showed on election day when Dean received nearly 80 percent of the vote (Ebert 2018c; Garrison 2018a).

In the Republican Primary, Randy Boyd, Diane Black, Beth Harwell, and Bill Lee were the viable candidates (Buie 2018a). Randy Boyd worked as the Economic and Community Development commissioner under the Haslam administration and had various

large-scale business interests (Ebert 2018d). U.S. Rep. Diane Black was a former state legislator and served as chair on the House Budget Committee (Ebert 2018d). Beth Harwell served as the Speaker for the Tennessee House of Representatives (Ebert 2018d). Bill Lee had no prior political experience, and he focused on touting his business experience (Ebert 2018d).

With many experienced viable candidates in the Republican field, the race became intense quickly. Boyd attacked Black on being part of the Washington 'swamp' as an establishment politician (Ebert 2018a). However, Black responded with an ad showing Boyd disavowing Trump and declared that Boyd and Bill Lee are moderates who are not truly conservative (Ebert 2018b). While Boyd and Black continued to launch attack ads against the other, Bill Lee chose to avoid a negative campaign and focused on his message (Buie 2018c). In the Primary, Bill Lee talked about how the loss of his first wife impacted him and eventually empowered him to rebuild his life, and his leadership at Lee Company helped him understand he could make life better for everyone (Buie 2018b). With little prior name recognition, Lee focused on making sure Tennesseans know who he is and what has shaped him (Buie 2018b).

Despite prior expectations and momentum behind candidates Black and Boyd, Bill Lee ultimately won the Republican nomination receiving 37 percent of the vote (Buie 2018c). While the outcome surprised many, Lee won by allowing his competitors to attack each other while he ran a positive campaign (Buie 2018c).

Lee entered the general with an advantage running as the republican in an increasingly conservative state; however, others believed a Bredesen boost could help

Dean and other Democrats across the state (Garrison and Boucher 2018). In 2018, the once-popular Gov. Bredesen ran for the open U.S. Senate seat against U.S. Rep. Marsha Blackburn (Garrison and Boucher 2018). Given his popularity, it was believed a victory for Bredesen could mean victory down the ballot (Garrison and Boucher 2018).

On election day, Bill Lee received 59 percent of the vote and became the first Republican candidate to win following a Republican incumbent since the 19th century (Jeong 2018).

Tennessee Democrats were left disheartened and divided, thinking either moderate democrats no longer appeal to Tennesseans over the choice of a republican or Democrats are not doing enough to represent the progressive left of the party (Garrison 2018b).

## **CHAPTER II: THE OVERALL POLITICAL SHIFTS**

### **Introduction**

The focus of this chapter will be to explain both the racial and political realignment of political parties in the United States and the partisan polarization that occurred afterward to the present day. While my research examines everything from the success of campaign strategies, unintended reactions to political moves, and the cultural shifts beyond inherently political actions, the main focus is not on any one factor but, rather, the larger shifts and evolution of the American political body. Connections are made to highlight the unique



regional trends in both the South at large and Tennessee to provide the additional context of these changes.

While the chapter at large is addressing the overall shift, it is important to understand Tennessee faced unique dynamics from its position within the Civil War and how Tennessee's three grand divisions provided varying perspectives on how Tennessee positioned itself on the issue of race, given the historical context of state politics. While ex-confederate states experienced strict militarized federal intervention, Tennessee was able to avoid this by ratifying the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment prior to the Reconstruction Act. As a result, Tennessee has traditionally been more racially tolerant than other southern states. While discrimination still was present, it was largely lesser than those who built resentment after dealing with militarized federal control. In addition, the Republican mountainous areas of East Tennessee did not support secession, and West Tennessee had a strong black population making the state still influenced by the actions of Republican leaders.

After the Civil War, ex-confederates were prevented from voting allowing the Republican Party to maintain control over Tennessee for a short number of years. After the state quickly restored the ex-confederate's right to vote in 1870, Democrats regained control of the state. However, East Tennessee remained Republican in the vast majority of elections. While Republicans won the governor's office in the 1880s after the Democrats became divided on state debt repayment, they pushed for election reform, trying to ease the burden of black voters so they could help Republicans see electoral success. However, the attempt backfired, causing new leadership to take control and follow the Lily-white East Tennessee faction.

The Lily-white movement wanted black people to vote Republican, but they worked to decrease their involvement in party leadership as they sought to court more white voters. While Lily-white Republicans led in East Tennessee, West Tennessee Democrats relied on the Republican Black-and-Tan organization, the Republican faction that allowed direct control by black leaders. Into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Democrats would consistently win in general elections; however, the Democratic Primary was often contentious in who ultimately received the nomination. Edward Crump, a political boss in Tennessee, would be able to determine the outcome of most elections by using his relationships and offering patronage to the Republican Black-and-Tan organization out of West Tennessee led by Robert Church Jr.

As the Great Depression worsened, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal acted as a safety net and employment remedy. As the New Deal saw sizable benefits, Democrats saw it advantageous to identify with his economic relief policies. While he focused on getting everyone out of the economic depression, he gained black voters' support because his actions were the first time a political party actively improved their financial situation. Paternalism was accepted during this time because they saw how a lack of federal action to address the crisis made the situation worse. However, as the crisis calmed, southerners began to push back against Franklin Delano Roosevelt as he worked to do even more to protect American workers because they were worried about a massive expansion of the federal government.

World War II, and the fighting against fascism and oppression, led younger American soldiers to praise the ideals of fair and equal representation. As the electorate

realized the value in their vote, political bosses like Edward Crump of Tennessee started to see a greater opposition toward the paternalistic nature of their political machines. The growing desire for representation paired with the Democrats reclaiming liberalism to include protecting the rights of all created a starting point for the next logical step, racial liberalism.

Between 1948 to 1968, both Democrats and Republicans were uncertain of how best to expand their electorate to ensure as much control as possible moving forward. The main divisions materialized at the intra-party level, with both parties disagreeing over whether they should focus on their traditional electorate or use the changing racial population to try and grow their coalitions. In 1948, Democrat Strom Thurmond challenged his party by running for president as the Dixiecrat candidate, supporting segregation as states' rights, and ultimately proved the deep south was receptive to this issue. President Eisenhower was able to make ground in the outer/upper south by recognizing the white anxiety toward black people while also standing in soft opposition to segregation. While southern democratic inaction on civil rights forced the national party to go further and commit to civil rights, this ultimately led to the isolation of southern Democrats in an increasingly pro-civil rights national party. As Republicans began making investments in the south, conservatives like Barry Goldwater used the party infrastructure to grow the conservative movement. However, no candidate had been able to appeal to the racially sensitive southerner while also keeping control of a more moderate Republican base.

In 1968, Richard Nixon's campaign for President established an effective strategy to appeal to southern conservatives by using racially suggestive rhetoric to both win

moderates and conservative southerners. While the prior 20 years provided a roadmap for what rhetoric is useful in what region, Nixon followed the roadmap and provided a strategy for Republicans to see overall national success while also securing the growing conservative electorate. While the Watergate scandal prevented the continual growth of the conservative movement, the southern strategy served to guide the party after the public started trusting Republicans again. Jimmy Carter won in 1976, not because of his appeal to the voters as a southern democrat but rather as a retaliation candidate against the Republicans after Nixon.

The 1980s saw cultural differences, such as disagreements on abortion, same-sex marriage, develop into a partisan culture war. As conservative religious fundraisers realized they could raise more money by increasing public outrage, Republicans began using more extreme rhetoric, painting Democrats as amoralistic. Former Republican Governor of California, Ronald Reagan, ran to appease the animosities social conservatives felt during a cultural change while also ensuring traditional party support by using Nixon Era rhetoric of reducing crime, taxes, and regulation. This strategy was extremely effective, so much so that by the end of the 1980s, the religious conservatives were a vital part of the Republican electorate. Ronald Reagan was able to energize this growing group, ultimately helping him secure the presidency in 1980. If Nixon started a competitive southern Republican strategy, Reagan was the realized leader of the captured Republican south and leader of the conservative coalition in power.

While the electorate was already changing, racial gerrymandering increased isolation and partisanship with the creation of majority-minority-required electoral

districts. This has since led to the hyper-isolation of racial populations. Polarization intensified, which gave candidates and officials less incentive to diversify their rhetoric to appeal to a more comprehensive diverse population. As Republicans increased rhetoric condemning Democratic positions on social issues, Republicans saw their base increasingly isolated, giving them less incentive to cooperate because they could continue winning elections by inciting the anger against these social issues.

During the 1994 Republican Revolution, Republicans gained a majority of congressional seats and governorships in the south. The Republican Revolution, spurred by opposition to Bill Clinton's healthcare expansion program, saw conservatives appeal to middle-class families, who increasingly felt they were paying more than their fair share of taxes in order to support undeserving individuals. While Democrats could still win in the south if they ran on a message of conservatism, the Republican party was growing and making serious gains in the south.

In the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election, Barack Obama became the first black President, which caused an increase in racial tensions, showing itself during the mid-term elections of 2010. After the Affordable Care Act passed in 2010, the Tea Party, those against the federal government supporting those who are undeserving, mobilized to stand in opposition to the prior years of change. The Tea Party was a reactionary group that's membership consistently used xenophobic language, hoping that society would return to eras of the past. Furthermore, Barack Obama's elevation to President felt like a direct threat to many white American's traditional statuses in society, and the Tea Party exposed this anxiety. Additionally, 2010 redistricting spearheaded by Republican state legislatures led to more districts with increased racial uniformity. The gerrymandering that occurred led to

increased polarization because if your voting electorate agreed with the issues, why would you work with those your constituents are opposed to. Currently, if a Democrat runs in the south, even as a moderate to conservative and they are branded as a liberal, they are extremely unlikely to see success in a southern election. As the south experienced racial realignment over the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, the once Democratic state, focused on intra-party power conflicts, is now a Republican state divided into fiscal and conservative values.

While the future is unknown, Donald Trump's 2016 election shows worsening economic conditions in rural America, which are predominantly Republican strongholds, that see higher poverty, lower median incomes, worsening GDP growth, and lower education rates are seeing more reception to arguments of xenophobia and racial intolerance.

### **Tennessee Historical Context: Reconstruction into the Great Depression (1860s – 1931)**

Tennessee's post-reconstruction history directly impacts the progression of racial attitudes and partisan shifts throughout the state's future. While most southern states faced high levels of strict federal intervention and militarized control, Tennessee avoided this outcome by quickly ratifying the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment to their constitution. While Tennessee has not been racially sensitive, the state has carried out racial discrimination to a lesser extent than other southern states. Additionally, East Tennessee, being mostly mountainous without a need for a great number of enslaved people, disfavored the war and held resentment against the rest of the state for getting involved in the first place. These voters,

in addition to the large black population in West Tennessee, were inclined to support the Republican Party of Lincoln.

As ex-confederate Tennesseans, mostly of Democrat persuasion, lost their right to vote, the Republican Party was able to gain control for a number of years. However, as black Tennesseans were given the right to vote, even white Republicans felt compelled to grant ex-confederates the right to vote again. While Republicans, especially those in East Tennessee, were opposed to slavery as a financial system, they maintained the idea of racial inferiority.

When the right to vote was restored, Democrats restored control of the Tennessee Legislature and most state-wide offices. However, East Tennessee, with its traditionalist mindset and geographical isolation, was able to continue electing Republicans to regional offices. As the state debated how the Democrats would address the debt, Republicans were able to win in the 1880s. While in office, they worked to implement election reform to make it easier for blacks to vote across the state; it ultimately backfired and led the defeated and alienated Republican Party to allow for a Lily-white movement in East Tennessee.

The Lily-white movement meant Republicans would no longer directly involve black voters in the leadership or decision-making process to try and appeal to racially sensitive white voters while still expecting black voters to support them due to the limited options with a pro-confederate Democratic party. However, the Democrats in West Tennessee relied on the regional Republican Black-and-Tan operation or the faction of the Republican Party with the direct influence of control of black leaders. While the Democrats

would win almost every general election, the Democratic Primary would often require the most mobilization for victory.

Democratic Boss Edward Crump would be able to determine the outcome of most elections due to his relationship and offer of patronage to the Republican Black-and-Tan organization led by Robert Church Jr.

While Democrats remained in control, they could not ignore the minds of Republican voters if they wanted to win in the general election. They would either have to seek out Republican voters to vote in the Democratic Primary or work with the Republicans elected in Eastern Tennessee. While black voters were pushed out of the Republican leadership with the introduction of Lilly-white leadership, the Republican Party was still able to turn black voters out to the polls by offering local patronage.

Unlike other southern states, Tennessee never faced the same level of federal intervention other states faced during reconstruction (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 288). Tennessee ratified the 14th Amendment, a precondition to rejoining the Union, in July of 1866 (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 288). Since Tennessee was already back in the Union, they were not subjected to the expansive federal military control when Congress passed the Reconstruction Act of 1867 (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 288). While racial resentment remained, Tennessee did not have the United States military controlling their every action, and as a result, they did not build up as much resentment on the lines of race.

While Republicans were the minority in Tennessee, they still had success in the mountainous areas of the state into the 20th Century (McKinney 1975, 515-516). Republicans had the advantage of the traditionalist mindset, commonly found in



mountaineers due to the isolation and less aggressive denial of black voters. Mountain Republicans, heavily present in East Tennessee, initially opposed the introduction of black enfranchisement; Republicans found a powerful supporter in the black community after the Tennessee GOP extended their voting rights (McKinney 1975, 495). However, the Radical Republican government in Tennessee lasted only a short time after a divided party saw Governor Brownlow, who had been elected to the U.S. Senate, replaced by Dewitt Clinton Senter, who pushed for granting ex-Confederates the right to vote (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 288-289). Brownlow replaced the election commissioners with officials who would ignore the legal prohibition and allow ex-Confederate (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 289). This would ultimately win Senter the governorship, where, in power, he would grant Democratic control by establishing ex-Confederate enfranchisement (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 289).

Southern Mountain Republicans yielded sizable influence during the period of reconstruction due to the relationship between white and black voters in the area (McKinney 1975, 493). Those who lived in the southern mountains lived in isolation which established a clear desire for tradition that carried over into their political loyalties (Phillips 1969, 253). Ex-Confederates, having lost the right to vote after the Civil War, left much of the Democratic Party barren (McKinney 1975, 494). Mountain Republicans, who bore much of the physical cost of the war, retaliated against the pro-confederate lowland areas and pushed for “Congressional Reconstruction” and their opponent's political disenfranchisement (McKinney 1975, 494-495). While mountain-dwelling whites in the upper south did not support slavery for financial gain, the generational belief of black inferiority prevented any true notion of innate equality (McKinney 1975, 495). However,

Republicans in the upper south begrudgingly courted black voters to secure political control against the Democrats (McKinney 1975, 493-494).

Black voters became increasingly valuable to the Republican Party, but intra-party pressure for universal male suffrage grew in the face of a black voting class (McKinney 1975, 496). Those in favor of renewing ex-Confederate suffrage won, and the restored Democratic electorate punished Republicans for Reconstruction (McKinney 1975, 496-498). As mountain Republicans lost elections having little cohesion in the mid-1870s, they responded by militarizing their strategy to leverage success (McKinney 1975, 498). The Republican organization created a clear line of command, and each mountain party member had clear responsibilities to ensure their voters were prepared to mobilize (McKinney 1975, 498-499).

The Republicans saw another opportunity to win office again when the Democratic party was trying to determine what to do with the state debt from bonds. Tennessee saw sizable growth in the amount of debt accumulated both during the Civil War and after as Governor Brownlow pushed the state to issue more bonds in order to create the infrastructure needed for the state to recover and grow (Jones 1974, 50). While the Democratic Party successfully reduced the size of the debt by thirteen thousand, the Democratic Party saw two different perspectives when it came to strategies to handle the state debt (Jones 1974, 50). Some leaders believed Tennessee needed to pay off the debt the state had accumulated because if Tennessee wanted to have any future financial respect and integrity (Jones 1974, 50-51). Others argued that the debt should not be upheld and the actions of Gov. Brownlow should be dismissed (Jones 1974, 51). Democrats were divided

on the issue, and it allowed a party split, causing the Republicans to see some success (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 291). While Democrats enacted black disenfranchisement laws in the late 1880s, including 'secret ballots' and 'poll taxes,' these laws were less severe as opposed to the harsher Jim Crow laws passed in the following decades (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 289). To expand the electoral success, Southern Mountain Republicans began supporting federal election policy reform (McKinney 1975, 505). While they believed reducing voting barriers would increase black voter turnout, thus helping mountain Republicans, it alienated white voters leading to losses in the 1890s and increased rejection of federal intervention (McKinney 1975, 505-508).

While many Lily-White Republicans eliminated the black voter from participation, Tennessee Lily-White leaders, predominate in the eastern grand division, faced a powerful Black-and-Tan organization in the west (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 255). Due to white backlash against Republicans passing election reform, the party reacted through a turnover of Republican leadership with a new focus of white recruitment seeking control of the upper south (McKinney 1975, 508-509). Increased segregation, lynchings, and Democratic ignoring of the black electorate allowed republicans to abandon black voters and work to decrease their participation except to vote Republican. As the black population increased in a community, fewer white voters were willing to vote Republican; likewise, the reverse is also true (McKinney 1975, 502). While mountain Republicans of the upper south used redistricting and other tactics to limit the power of the black vote in the GOP, the southern Lily-White Movement and voter disenfranchisement allowed republicans to ignore black voters (McKinney 1975, 510-516). While Mountain Republicans in the Upper South were able to maintain, the south overall saw an essential elimination of electoral power.

However, the disenfranchisement of the black voter from the GOP paved the way for white voters to consider voting Republicans and eventually allowed for control of the south (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 4-5).

After the end of Reconstruction, southern Republicans had little power in electing GOP candidates to the office (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 3). However, their inability to determine the outcome of southern general elections did not mean they were without political power. (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 11). While some GOP leaders were frustrated with the south's ability to affect the primary without contributing to the general, the national GOP still relied on southerners at the Republican National Convention in terms of delegates (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 3, 11-12). While they were unable to provide electoral votes in the general, leadership would provide local GOP leaders federal patronage to secure their candidates' support at the convention (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 3-4).

As GOP candidates for President were essentially required to pander the southern vote, they increasingly became invested in promoting the revitalization of the Republican organization in the South (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 4). Essentially, the south held power in deciding the nominee for the national Republican Party (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 4).

Unlike most southern states, Tennessee never saw complete Democratic control because of the Republican sections of East Tennessee (Bullock and Rozell 2017, 215-216). Tennessee was simply less Democratic, but given the small scope of the Eastern GOP, the state still overall favored the Democrats (Bullock and Rozell 2017, 216). Additionally, Tennessee has always cared about race to a lesser degree than other southern states. When

Gov. Clement saw segregationists burnt down Clinton High School, an integrated school after *Brown v. Board*, he responded by saying the court case would be firmly enforced (Bullock and Rozell 2017, 219).

In the eastern grand division, Republicans tended to be white former union supporters (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 290). While they would use racist language during campaigns, Eastern Lily-White Republicans realized the importance of coordinating with the Black-and-Tan organization in the western grand division (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 290-291). While white Republicans held the majority of the local leadership seats in certain urban cities, black Republicans were able to secure political positions (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 291).

While Lily-white republicans were more than glad to leave black voters out of the party, they still needed their vote. In an attempt to win over former Whigs in the late 1870s, President Hayes and the national GOP provided political patronage to former Whigs instead of mountain Republicans (McKinney 1975, 499). Receiving little support from the national party, the local GOP again returned to seeking the support of the black Republicans (McKinney 1975, 499). Intra-party decisions would often come down to who had secured the black Republican support.

As black voters used this power to advocate for increased equality, racist whites used fear and violence, such as lynching, to prevent black voters from becoming too ambitious (McKinney 1975, 501). Their coordination proved effective in the late 1870s and 1880s as they started winning elections in both mountainous and state-wide positions across the south (McKinney 1975, 503-505). To expand the electoral success, Southern

Mountain Republicans began supporting federal election policy reform (McKinney 1975, 505). While they believed reducing voting barriers would increase black voter turnout, thus helping mountain Republicans, it alienated white voters leading to losses in the 1890s and increased rejection of federal intervention (McKinney 1975, 505-508).

While the Democratic machine would have the ultimate authority when it came to electoral power, they often worked with Republican Black-and-Tan organizations to settle intra-party primary disputes (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 286-287). The Democratic Party continued to face internal divisions and, as a result, Tennessee Republicans were able to leverage the black vote as a bargaining chip for interested Democrats (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 290). As Democrats took control of the state government in the late 1880s, the primary reason their black disenfranchisement laws failed to eliminate the black electorate came down to intra-party divisions (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 291). Tennessee's Black-and-Tan organization gave the Democratic leaders reason to keep black voters.

Robert R. Church, Jr. pushed for racial solidarity through his creation of the Lincoln League and organized a western Black-and-Tan Republican coalition to compete with the Lily-White factions (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 292). The Black-and-Tan Republicans were inclusive of black voters and saw success in populations with large black electorates. While Church led the Black-and-Tan GOP coalition in the west, he did so by building a relationship with Democrat political boss and pro-segregationist Edward Crump (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 292; Franklin and Block 2020a, 48). Crump was able to determine the outcome of Democratic Primaries with the help of Church's Republican mobilization of the black vote, and Church could justify this by ensuring his coalition could "vote any way

they liked in state and national elections” (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 292). However, when it actually came time to vote, the Crump supporting poll workers would alter the votes being cast (Franklin and Block 2020, 49).

Without East Tennessee, Church would not have been such a powerful force, but his work with 2nd Congressional District Representative J. Will Taylor allowed the Tennessee GOP to grant federal patronage (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 292). Additionally, the profitable relationship between Church and Crump stopped Rep. Taylor from appointing justices who would “threaten the Crump machine” (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 292). While West Tennessee Republicans were by no means cohesive, the relationship supporting the Crump machine prevented many of the attempts to hinder the Black-and-Tan organization from being successful (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 293).

While powerful throughout the 1910s to mid-1920s, coordination with Church became increasingly irrelevant. The prior success of the Crump machine led candidates in the 1930s to no longer challenge the Crump-backed candidate in the primary (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 293). However, this shifted ground in West Tennessee politics and the black voter no longer held power to decided the Democratic primary nominee as Democrats saw steady Presidential victories after Franklin Delano Roosevelt won in 1932 (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 293).

### **The New Deal and the Following Racial Realignment (1932 – 1967)**

In the midst of the Great Depression, Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s pushed for his New Deal to the American public to help assist the economic recovery. The main focus

was to help Americans stay healthy and find jobs through various social programs and government initiatives. FDR's New Deal provided much-needed economic assistance to black voters who, under the Republican Party, had received little to no help to elevate in society. Franklin Delano Roosevelt was able to bring black voters into the Democratic Party while also seeing support from southerners who directly benefited from programs like the Tennessee Valley Authority. The American public was okay with the paternalistic nature of government because most were suffering when the federal government chose to do nothing at the beginning of the Great Depression. Franklin Delano Roosevelt also was able to re-define liberalism toward fighting for fair economic opportunity, with labor unions and a more inclusive America moving forward.

As the country recovered, Franklin Delano Roosevelt began to see more pushback amongst southerners, who appreciated the support of work programs but were worried about the expansion of the federal government to too large a scale. World War II saw American citizens going off to fight a war against fascism and oppression in favor of the ideals of fair and equal representation. Moving into the following decade, the political bosses, who essentially controlled the outcome of elections by granting patronage, saw more challenges as individuals wanted a direct say in their representation, no longer accepting a passive role in a paternalistic political society. Additionally, the issue of expanding civil rights quickly became salient to a growing group of post-WWII Americans. Franklin Delano Roosevelt had avoided an immediate withdraw of southern Democrats, who were opposed to efforts to increase racial equality, by avoiding the issue of race. However, the growing desire for fair representation and the Democratic positioning toward progressive liberalism created a base for the next logical progression, racial liberalism.



From 1948 to 1968, Democrats and Republicans both were trying to figure out what the best move would be for the future of their electoral success. Both parties faced sizable intra-party divisions on how best to address the growing debate between appealing to southerners while also courting the growing black electorate. Segregationist Democrat Strom Thurmond challenged his party leadership in 1948 and ran as a Dixiecrat favoring states' rights, showing that the issue was powerful enough to win him parts of the deep south. Eisenhower acknowledged the racial anxiety of the south while standing in soft opposition to segregation, which allowed him to make ground in the outer/upper south showing a softer tone allowed greater success. *Brown v. Board* caused President Eisenhower to step in with federal action after Democratic Governor of Arkansas, Orval Faubus, refused to de-escalate the situation, causing a slowdown in Republican southern advancements. Additionally, Democrats reacted to Gov. Faubus, expressing the Democrats were committed to civil rights, leading to increased national alienation of southern Democrats opposed to civil rights.

Southern Democrats became isolated from the party, leading segregationist George Wallace to unsuccessfully challenge Lyndon Johnson in the Democratic primary. Republican conservative Barry Goldwater used the infrastructure created by Eisenhower's Operation Dixie and the attempt Republicans made to inspire and elevate new candidates to build a moderate base in the south, to organize new southern conservatives to run Republican. The Republican Party invested in the south and recognized the legitimacy of southerners' racial grievances in a period of change. While Republicans were making ground with southern conservatives, no Republican nominee had found the balance to

appeal to both southerners against racial equality and the broader American public opposed to blatant expressions of racism.

### *FDR's New Deal and World War II*

Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal was implemented to address the Great Depression, but it ultimately introduced many social programs that appeal to voters all across the country, especially to black voters. While hesitant to pass any policy to advance civil rights, the very fact that it helped black voters out more than any policy a republican proposed allowed FDR to gain the support of the black voters. FDR's popularity in the south grew, with states like Tennessee benefiting directly from the Tennessee Valley Authority's employment expansions, and his administration was able to successfully re-brand Liberalism to symbolize a proactive federal government fighting for inclusion and protectionism that helped the country out of the great depression.

However, as the economic situation improved and FDR's plans became more ambitious to include protections against employment discrimination and more federal intervention, conservative Democrats started to feel weary and skeptical. Paired with World War II and the fight against fascism in Europe, the country became increasingly aware of the inconsistencies between fighting for freedom and not defending racial equality in the United States. While FDR avoided a withdraw of southern conservative Democrats by not directly addressing race, the programs he implemented paired with the growing desire for representation led to both the decrease in control of political bosses and the Democratic positioning toward liberalism and the next logical step, racial liberalism.

In response to the Great Depression, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal focused on providing federally sourced "social welfare programs" and numerous additional assistance to reduce the impact of the economic crisis (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 165). While the Republican Party had enjoyed the support of the black voter since Reconstruction, FDR's New Deal coincidentally brought black voters into the Democratic Party, not because of any civil rights focus, but merely for improving the lives of Americans, which includes black voters (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 165). The New Deal showed both the Democratic and Republican Party the black vote was not inherently committed to the GOP (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 166). To be clear, the New Deal was not planned to attract black supporters (Lowndes 2008, 13). While Republicans believed they had black voters secured, black voters moved up north and received the benefits of the New Deal on industry destabilized GOP reliance (Lowndes 2008, 13). However, when FDR won re-election in 1946, with a majority of black support, the national Republican Party stopped seeing the south as a place the GOP could secure (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 167).

Those who lived in the southern mountains lived in isolation over the years, which established a clear desire for tradition that carried over into their political loyalties (Phillips 1969, 253). While southern New Deal programs, such as the Tennessee Valley Authority, benefited regional players to a great extent and were widely welcomed, Democrats only saw a few cases of increased support from southern mountaineers (Phillips 1969, 256).

When Franklin Delano Roosevelt worked to create the Tennessee Valley Authority, WPA, CCC, FERA, and more, black East Tennesseans started interacting more with the

Democratic Party due to the possibility of securing some of those jobs (Franklin and Block 2020, 45). While southern states saw an effective effort to decrease black voters, black voters in the area surrounding Memphis found themselves able to still exert influence because the Democratic control by Crump prevented their removal from the system and allowed them to keep their vote (Franklin and Block 2020, 45).

Roosevelt's New Deal reclaimed Liberalism, branded as 'progressive liberalism' evolved, calling for more "modernization, national economic coordination, and political inclusion" (Lowndes 2008, 12). While intra-party factions were fighting on both sides regarding the expansion of federalism over that of state rights, the only argument that became salient was that of opposition founded against vague social programs, increased organized labor, and a more nationalized state (Lowndes 2008, 12). The New Deal brought new membership within the Democratic Party; however, two factions were now in contrast with one another (Lowndes 2008, 12). The progressive wing advocated for expanding the coalition through enfranchisement programs and extending social programs (Lowndes 2008, 12). In contrast, Southern Democrats pushed a message of exclusion, exploitation, and complete control of the social atmosphere (Lowndes 2008, 12).

The popularity of the New Deal expanded the Democratic reach across the country, giving the Party increased scope on whom to advocate on behalf of (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 170). While an expanded electorate is beneficial for national electoral success, Southern Democrats began to feel deprioritized as they were just one portion of the party (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 170; Lowndes 2008, 13).

Essentially, Crump used his political weight to attack Church and force him to leave the state because he no longer needed Church to mobilize the black Republican vote, because after FDR rolled out his New Deal, black voters shifted their support to the Democratic ticket (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 293). While the Black-and-Tan would continue into the 1930s and 1940s, the 1950s saw a new GOP challenger in the New Guard Republican movement (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 293). As Crump continued to gain power and control, his candidates would easily win the primary and, given the nature of the state, win in the general election (Bullock and Rozell 2017, 217). One undeniable fact is that Crump controlled Memphis, as Crump had supported Gov. Browning in his 1936 run and provided approximately 50 thousand Memphians; after they felt out a few years later, Crump reduced his votes to fewer than 10 thousand (Bullock and Rozell 2017, 217).

By 1937, the New Deal resentment had grown as FDR pushed for more federal intervention (Lowndes 2008, 14). The Conservative Coalition saw the increase of push back, but it wasn't till the 1944 election till Southern Democrats began to consider a withdrawal (Lowndes 2008, 14-15). Roosevelt's plan to create the Federal Employment Practices Commission, which prevented racial discrimination for federal contracts and encouraged federal investigations of workers' discrimination, felt to many an over-intrusion of federal control and created a sympathetic relationship between conservative Republicans and Southern Democrats (Lowndes 2008, 23-24).

The New Deal changed the composition of the Democratic Party, but FDR's hesitancy to advance on civil rights, paired with his southern popularity, prevented the immediate withdrawal of southern white conservatives (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 170-

171). However, the conflict between Southern Democrats and a national party moving left on civil rights would only continue to grow.

World War II played a large role in linking democracy to the belief that racial equality was an inherent right because soldiers were fighting a war against racial fascism (Lowndes 2008, 17). Paired with the growing understanding that nothing innately dictated black people as inferior beyond the desire for self-preservation, WWII exemplified that shift and would help elevate the leadership, which would ultimately lead the cultural shift regarding race (Lowndes 2008, 19-22). The eventual inclusion of civil rights into the platform of liberalism made sense as their racial elevation coincided with the expansion of federalism (Lowndes 2008, 22).

#### *1948 to 1968: Intra-Party Leaders Divided On Strategy*

Both political parties were unsure of the most beneficial strategy for the future of their party. Between 1948 and 1968, Democrats were trying to capitalize on the civil rights movement and increase the electorate of black Democrats while also facing a more conservative, racially sensitive base in the south that felt increasingly at odds with the national party. Democrat Strom Thurmond, who ran as the Dixiecrat Nominee in 1948 on a message of states' rights and supported segregation, was a direct threat to the traditional southern democrat. While Truman won the presidency, the Dixiecrats carried a few states in the deep south, revealing a candidate could win if they ran against civil rights in favor of desegregation and in favor of states' rights. In 1952, Eisenhower was able to gain traction in the outer south by stating that he stood against segregation, but the government shouldn't

force integration. However, the Republicans lost ground on this after Eisenhower mobilized the Arkansas National Guard to allow the peaceful integration of Little Rock Central High when Democratic Governor Orval Faubus took no action against segregationist protesters. While the national Democratic Party supported civil rights, southern Democrats could still win re-election as the national party essentially ignored their actions. However, after Gov. Faubus, the Democrats decided to express civil rights was a fundamental part of the national platform. In 1964, after Kennedy had sided with civil rights and Johnson argued for the continued fight for equality, As Southern Democrats became increasingly alienated, pro-segregationist George Wallace unsuccessfully challenged Johnson in the primary. In the Republican Party, conservative Barry Goldwater used the southern Republican infrastructure created by Operation Dixie, an initially abandoned attempt to excite new candidates and build a moderate republican base in the south, to mobilize new conservatives to run for office. As the Democrats turned to seek out the black voter, they had the advantage of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his progressive liberalism. As Southern Democrats felt increasingly alienated, they increasingly considered the Republican Party as the party invested in the south and recognized their racial grievances. However, while the Republican Party was making an appeal to southern conservatives, no candidate had yet to identify a means to appeal to both southern, racially-concerned conservatives and a broader electorate fearful of direct expressions of racism.

In 1948, President Harry Truman had become increasingly unpopular after replacing FDR three years prior, providing the Republican Party an opportunity to make an advancement (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 167-169). In a successful attempt to further secure Democratic control of the north, Truman was able to win by establishing the

advancement of civil rights into the party platform (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 169). From a speech delivered at the 1947 NAACP annual conference where Truman expressed “we can not, any longer, await the growth of a will to action in the slowest state or the most backward community” to his creation of the Committee on Civil Rights, Truman worked to secure the black vote (Lowndes 2008, 27). Realizing Republicans also sought to regain the black voter, Truman’s advisor pushed him to do everything he needed to secure the black vote because they would be the difference between victory and defeat (Lowndes 2008, 27).

The Presidential election of 1948 saw Democrat Truman, who replaced Franklin Delano Roosevelt after his passing, the Republican Thomas Dewey, and Dixiecrat Strom Thurmond competing for the United States Presidency. While Truman had secured most of the Northern Democratic by the time of the convention, many delegates from the south decided to walk out (Lowndes 2008, 28). The Dixiecrat Revolt saw the nomination of Strom Thurman for the Dixiecrats (Lowndes 2008, 29). When Strom Thurman ran as the Presidential Candidate for the Dixiecrat Party in 1948 and picked up traction in parts of the Deep South, it revealed a growing schism within the Democratic Party between Northerners in favor of civil rights and the racially intolerant Southern Democrat (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 169-170). While the Dixiecrats had left due to increased black advocacy, they used the rhetoric of protecting states’ rights (Lowndes 2008, 30). After Truman won re-election, Thurman and the Dixiecrats, who showed a poor showing outside of the south, the Democratic Party cut all ties with them to limit their influence moving forward (Lowndes 2008, 31).



In February 1952, RNC Chairman Guy Gabrielson spoke to both Dixiecrats and Republicans at a Lincoln Day rally pitching the same message the national party was pitching across the south; the Republican Party is the states rights party (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 171-172). Entering into the 1950s, Truman had continued pushing for economic protections, and several Supreme Court cases were limiting the scope of segregation (Lowndes 2008, 34-35).

When Eisenhower took the Republican presidential nomination in 1952, he argued that while he did not support segregation, government interference forcing integration would only make tensions and situations worse (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 172-173). It was his focus on southern voters and former Dixiecrats paired with this sympathetic rhetoric with the white Southerner that allowed him to see progress in 1952, with the reception of the outer south, and in 1956, with the expansion of his positive southern reception (Lowndes 2008, 46). Eisenhower expanded support in the Tennessee general election from voters who had prior voted for the Dixiecrat candidate (Phillips 1969, 263). With Eisenhower winning Tennessee post-war urbanites and black Republicans, his victory led the GOP to develop an interest in Tennessee, specifically the middle and west (Bullock and Rozell 2017, 220).

Around the same time, The Republican National Committee pushed Operation Dixie, an effort to encourage more people, especially younger individuals, to run for office, which helped establish a competitive structure in the growing market of young conservatives not yet loyal to the Democratic Party (Lowndes 2008, 47). As Republican Chairman Guy Gabrielson pushed the Republican Party further to the right in their attempts

to appeal to southern voters, President Eisenhower's reinforced the switch by deciding to avoid government-mandated integration and weakened the party plank on civil rights at the 1956 GOP Convention (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 173-174). As Eisenhower continued to see increased popularity in the south due to his moderate position on civil rights, the RNC established Operation Dixie to organize speaking events in southern states to further encourage candidates to run for office (Heersink, Jenkins 2020d, 175). This mission established a base political structure for Republicans in the south and eventually would be effectively used by a more conservative leadership (Lowndes 2008, 60).

In 1957, President Eisenhower nationalized the Arkansas National Guard when Democratic Governor Orval Faubus failed to stop segregationists, in violation of *Brown v. Board of Education*, from preventing the integration of Little Rock Central High (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 174-175). While Eisenhower argued he only took action in order to re-establish order, this justification was dismissed by supporters of segregation which viewed his reaction as a federal overstep (Lowndes 2008, 47).

Tennessee Governor Frank Clement opposed segregationists' calls to reject *Brown v. Board* and instead worked to ensure a gradual approach (Franklin and Block 2020, 5-6). Clement's move to allow the full implementation of school desegregation made him stand out against the backdrop of other southern segregationist governors (Franklin and Block 2020, 49).

Democrats continue to see success running as southern democrats during the 1950s because they were able to avoid scrutiny from the national party (Black and Black 2002, 324). As the national Democratic brand saw success in their commitments to racial

equality, southern democrats found themselves comparatively more conservative and at opposition (Black and Black 2002, 326). The actions of Gov. Faubus worried Democrats in the northeast, who believed their southern faction would begin to cost them black support, so much they decided to push for civil rights through the Democratic National Committee (DNC) (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 176). Toward the late 1950s, Democrats and Republicans alike were attempting to appeal to the black voters while retaining as much support in the south as possible (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 176).

The Presidential Election of 1960 had Republican Richard Nixon running against John F. Kennedy and his Vice-Presidential nominee, Lyndon Johnson, a well-known Southern Democrat (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 176-177). While Kennedy and Johnson won, Nixon was able to show support for his message in the Southern states of Florida, Tennessee, and Virginia (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 177). While Nixon made promising advancements in the south, the Republican Party became faced with an option of two strategies (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 177). Moderate Republicans, looking at Nixon's predominant loss in major cities, argued the GOP should re-focus on urban cities to win back black voters (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 177). Conservative Republicans, looking at Nixon's southern growth, believed the best bet for a competitive GOP is to prioritize the south (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 176). As Democrats maintained control of Congress through southern support, Republican leaders started believing they would never have control "without turning the South into a competitive two-party system" (Heersink, Jenkins 2020d, 178).

While President Kennedy was nervous about how civil rights policy might affect his chances of re-election in 1964, he ultimately decided to push for the legislation as the public opinion started to shift towards taking action to advance civil rights (Gruyter 2017, 643). However, as Kennedy was assassinated and Lyndon Johnson took his place, Alabama Governor George Wallace decided to run a primary campaign against Johnson.

Alabama Governor George Wallace, during his 1964 run for the Democratic presidential nomination, argued Americans at large are not unlike southerners, where in both areas, the federal government is both intervening too often and not actually protecting ‘average’ people (Lowndes 2008, 78-79). Wallace argued the majority of Americans are often left unheard, and those in power are not just people with differing positions, but people who are morally wrong and alien (Lowndes 2008, 79-80). Wallace continuously used “racial coding” in his speeches to inflame southerners in the memory of the cultural battle on race (Lowndes 2008, 81). His use of racially charged rhetoric, especially in terms of securing freedom and democracy, was effective in establishing a link in the minds of Americans who might not otherwise support his campaign (Lowndes 2008, 82). Wallace knew if he was able to argue the white man was being attacked, he could tap into the racial resentment fluid within American Politics (Lowndes 2008, 80-83).

Wallace knew the message against desegregation would not be effective in the north; however, he could argue that the federal government is talking too much control and make links to anti-communist resentment (Lowndes 2008, 84). At public rallies, Wallace would encourage tension between opposing demonstrators and his supports (Lowndes 2008, 88). He allowed the audience to express their societal resentments and used their

anger to elevate his anti-government populism (Lowndes 2008, 88). While his aggressive manner was used in the media as a means of reducing his credibility, they ultimately gave a platform for Wallace to grow his conservative movement (Lowndes 2008, 90). However, Wallace struggled with developing a national political infrastructure and therefore was plagued with a strong connection made between him and his racist rhetoric (Lowndes 2008, 91). He lost the 1964 primary; however, he performed well in northern state primaries on the key fears of a national government growing too powerful while avoiding the dangers in their local communities (Lowndes 2008, 92-93).

Looking at the Republican side of the 1964 Presidential election, Barry Goldwater was the candidate of choice. However, in order to understand Goldwater's run for the 1964 Republican nominee for president, it is essential to look at the prior decade. As the Republican Chairman in 1952 pushed the Republican Party further to the right in their attempts to appeal to southern voters, President Eisenhower's reinforced the switch by deciding to avoid government-mandated integration and weakened the party plank on civil rights at the 1956 GOP Convention (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 173-174). As Eisenhower continued to see increased popularity in the south due to his moderate position on civil rights, the RNC established Operation Dixie to organize speaking events in southern states to further encourage candidates to run for office (Heersink, Jenkins 2020d, 175). This mission established a base political structure for Republicans in the south and eventually would be effectively used by a more conservative leadership (Lowndes 2008, 60). While the GOP established its plan for expansion, Eisenhower scared away much of the same Dixiecrat support after his actions in Little Rock, Arkansas (Heersink, Jenkins 2020d, 176). The greatest challenge preventing the Republican Party from taking majority control

was the divisions between Conservatives, who wanted small-government and opposed the New Deal, and Moderates, who supported a welfare state and open to a more inclusive market (Lowndes 2008, 48). However, publications with a deeply conservative base, such as the National Review, pushed anti-statism rhetoric and pushed the Republicans further against the notion of a large government (Lowndes 2008, 48-51).

The Southern Republican voter was moving more conservative, granting Goldwater momentum behind his 1964 presidential campaign (Lowndes 2008, 54). Clarence Manion, a former member of the Eisenhower administration and conservative political operative, pushed for Democrats and Republicans to both run states' rights candidates and, after they lost their primaries, have them form a coalition party preventing either mainstream political party from winning the general (Lowndes 2008, 55). Claiming the desires for states to exert their own freedoms from certain issues, they argued issues of race should be "handled by the people directly concerned" (Lowndes 2008, 57).

While initially, the moderate belief guided the Republican party, in 1961, after success with the more conservative wing, William E. Miller became the GOP Chair and re-focused efforts to appeal to disenchanted Southern Democrats (Heerskink, Jenkins 2020d, 178). As the Republican Party implemented their strategy and saw success in the south, young northern Republicans saw their movement as a cheap appeal to southerners while betraying black voters (Heerskink, Jenkins 2020d, 180).

However, Goldwater tried to maintain a balance between the two factions of his party, pushing for increased states' rights while making nods to the segregationist south (Lowndes 2008, 67). Toward the end, Goldwater decided to harshen his rhetoric around

civil rights in an attempt to prepare for his nomination (Lowndes 2008, 66). Goldwater appealed to anti-civil rights southerners and used the support of Thurmond to accelerate the perception of his agenda (Heerskink, Jenkins 2020d, 182). By the 1964 Republican Convention, it was clear the conservative wing had gained ground against the moderate Republicans, and Goldwater, having the votes needed, unapologetically pushed the base further right (Lowndes 2008, 72). While Goldwater was clearly seen as the candidate against civil rights, he tried to drop this narrative after entering the general (Lowndes 2008, 74-75). Goldwater lost across the nation and only performed well in the South; however, as the GOP moved forward, there was a clear path to victory if you could capture those voters while keeping your base (Lowndes 2008, 75-76).

While Goldwater lost the presidential election by a landslide, Goldwater saw his success primarily in the south (Heerskink, Jenkins 2020d, 183). His strong showing revealed the south was, in fact, competitive, and that supporting states' rights and appealing to segregation brought success in the south (Heerskink, Jenkins 2020d, 183). However, it also showed that these direct and clear racist appeals caused them losses everywhere else (Heerskink, Jenkins 2020d, 183). As moderate Republicans began to refocus on recapturing black support, segregationists were using the former structure from Operation Dixie to organize the growing conservative base in the south (Lowndes 2008, 60-62).

As Goldwater released *Conscience of a Conservative* as an expression of states' rights justification, Democrats pushed for expanded civil rights into their party plank, which positioned Southern Democrats with a choice (Lowndes 2008, 58). However, once

it became clear Richard Nixon would be the nominee, Goldwater urged his supporters to “grow up” and help Nixon win (Lowndes 2008, 59).

### **Nixon’s Southern Strategy and Conservative Growth under Reagan (1968 – 1993)**

Nixon’s 1968 campaign for President of the United States paved the way for conservative rhetoric for decades following. Nixon was able to appease southern conservatives by using rhetoric with racial connotations without overtly making statements that offended moderates that might be off-put by language that is clearly and directly racist in nature. While the prior decades provided the roadmap of what rhetoric is useful in what region, Nixon followed the roadmap and provided a strategy for Republicans to see national success while securing the growing conservative vote.

Richard Nixon had secured a way for the Republicans to walk the line on race to both appeals to disenchanted southern Democrats through racially suggestive rhetoric while also avoiding alienating of the moderate Republicans they depended on to perform well nationally. However, Nixon’s Watergate scandal temporarily halted the advancement of party development in the south. While Jimmy Carter was able to win in 1976 as a southern Democrat, this should best reflect the reactionary fear and distaste of Republicans after Nixon.

While cultural differences, such as disagreements on abortion, same-sex marriage and adoption, and other social issues, had been around since the 1960s, the 1980s saw the disagreement turn into a full culture war. As Republican political fundraisers realized they could increase donations if they increased fear and outrage, the party at large began using



more extreme rhetoric, painting their Democratic opponents as amoral and essentially evil in action. This effort was so successful that by the 1980s, the economic conservatives that had long argued for fiscal responsibility were equally matched with a religious coalition of cultural conservatives. Reagan was successful in mobilizing this group, and ultimately they enabled him to win the 1980 Presidential Election.

Ronald Reagan, former conservative Republican Governor of California, ran on a platform of both campaigning on behalf of the animosities social conservatives felt amidst a changing nation while also securing internal party support by using Nixon Era rhetoric of addressing law and order and reducing taxes and regulation. If Nixon was the start of a competitive southern Republican Party, Ronald Reagan was the symbolic leader of the fully alive conservative coalition in control of the national party.

### *Nixon's Southern Strategy*

Nixon's 1968 campaign for President of the United States paved the way for conservative rhetoric for decades following. Nixon was able to appease southern conservatives by using rhetoric with racial connotations without overtly making statements that offended moderates that might be off-put by language that is clearly and directly racist in nature. While the prior decades provided the roadmap of what rhetoric is useful in what region, Nixon followed the roadmap and provided a strategy for Republicans to see national success while securing the growing conservative vote.

Goldwater helped redefine the southern political situation in the 1960s, George Wallace forced Democrats to make a choice, and Nixon was able to build on their work in a way that would dominate Republican Party politics forward (Lowndes 2008, 160). Additionally, over the course of the 1960s, the Democratic electorate shifted in the following ways: Democrats saw a shift from white to non-white voters, experienced losses in farming communities, and saw an education shift toward mostly “college-educated elite[s]” (Phillips 1969, 31).

In 1968, Wallace ran for president again; however, this time, he ran as the American Independent Party candidate (Lowndes 2008, 94). Wallace was able to appeal to average Americans, and while he would often mock those in authority, he was able to maintain his legitimacy as a candidate for the people due to his use of linguistics, slowing down and mispronouncing words to appeal to a less-educated audience (Lowndes 2008, 95). While Wallace would only win parts of the deep south, his strategy of using questionable language in such a way everyone could pull something from proved to reshape the direction of party rhetoric (Lowndes 2008, 100-105). Wallace mostly attracted voters from the Democratic Party; however, conservative Democrats were now abandoning their party loyalty (Phillips 1969, 462).

After the losses in the 1964 presidential election, Ray Bliss became the RNC Chair and pushed the party back toward focusing on investing in urban cities (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 184). While this strategy continued and saw success in urban areas during the 1966 elections, Nixon began to plan his second run for the presidency (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 184).

In 1968, Nixon's strategy was to avoid alienating anyone by appealing to the conservative base leading his party forward and the general electorate that is fearful of the radical right (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 184). The growing conservative movement was now ready to support a candidate, who might not meet all their preferences, but nevertheless, was able to win a general election putting the conservative movement in political power (Lowndes 2008, 106). While Goldwater had worked to balance between the moderate and conservative wings, Nixon was not pre-labeled an extremist at the national level (Lowndes 2008, 106-107). The southern conservative movement realized their vehement support for Nixon could backfire in his perception, as had happened with Goldwater in 1964 (Lowndes 2008, 112).

However, Gov. George Wallace prevented both Democrat Humbert Humphrey or Richard Nixon from remaining competitive in the Deep South (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 186). Instead, Nixon chose to focus on winning those urban areas in the south that preferred slow and moderate action as opposed to quick reform of segregation policies (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 186). Nixon focused on using language, arguing he would be tough on crime, big on jobs, and brought ease to the subliminal-racial-stresses found by whites (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 191). In the wake of the riots at the 1968 Democratic Convention and numerous other American cultural tensions, Nixon expressed that his same strategy the Republican party used to unify the base at the GOP national convention is the same thing he would do for the country in the general election (Lowndes 2008, 113). Nixon balanced himself in the middle, using different speech writers for different audiences, ensuring the voters heard what they most appealed to (Lowndes 2008, 115-116). As the election neared, worries of George Wallace splitting the Southern vote and giving the election to Humphrey

only increased (Lowndes 2008, 118). Furthermore, Nixon supporters quickly shared this idea, and as Nixon focused on the likelihood of party splitting, his support in the south grew (Lowndes 2008, 119). While unsuccessful, the Wallace camp could have successfully prevented any candidate from getting the nomination had Humphrey performed better (Phillips 1969, 35).

Nixon had won the election, but his victory came slim with not a complete domination of the south (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 187). The only southern state Humphrey won in the presidential election was Texas (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 186). Kevin Phillips, Nixon advisor and architect of the Southern Strategy, best explains the rhetoric that allowed Republicans to make southern advances when he says, “The Democratic Party fell victim to the ideological impetus of a liberalism which had carried it beyond programs taxing the few for the benefit of the many (the New Deal) to programs taxing the many on behalf of the few (the Great Society)” (Phillips 1969, 37).

As the southern coalition became less vital to the Democratic Party, the conservative movement worked to attract those disenchanted voters away to the Republican Party. Nixon represents the first conservative president in modern history. He was able to unify southern voters, specifically both racially-sensitive voters in the Deep South and moderates in the Outer South, under one tent and built a steady balance in the use of effective political rhetoric (Phillips 1969,

36). While George Wallace represented the movement to withdraw support from the Democrats, Nixon would have completely dominated the south with Wallace voters (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 186).

While some had argued the GOP should focus their efforts on the black voters in the Northeast, the Southern Strategy proved successful and solidified the GOP's investment in the south (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 163). Seeing they were able to win without catering to urban black voters, the Republican Party leadership concentrated their efforts towards continuing the successes of Nixon and the growing fluid southern electorate (Phillips 1969, 468).

Throughout his first administration, Nixon continued to push conservative values, and while they would often fail to pass, the conservative movement accepted this because they consistently faced such defeats (Lowndes 2008, 126-127). The 1972 presidential election saw Nixon go further and fully embrace the conservative wing of the party, dropping his populist positions (Lowndes 2008, 135). He started drawing more on the rhetoric of Wallace and pushed rhetoric that there was something wrong with those who held differing political beliefs (Lowndes 2008, 136). Nixon won with roughly 60 percent of the vote, winning all of the states in the former confederacy (Lowndes 2008, 137). This was the first time a candidate won the presidency, winning all but two states, and it was the first time the Republicans had seen such a large victory (Kabaservice 2012, 337).

### *The Watergate Delay on a Competitive Conservative South*

Richard Nixon had secured a way for the Republicans to walk the line on race to both appeals to disenchanted southern Democrats through racially suggestive rhetoric while also avoiding alienating of the moderate Republicans they depended on to perform well nationally. However, Nixon's Watergate scandal temporarily halted the advancement

of party development in the south. While Jimmy Carter was able to win in 1976 as a southern Democrat, this should best reflect the reactionary fear and distaste of Republicans after Nixon.

While Nixon's victory in 1968 did not secure the south for the Republicans, the Republicans became increasingly dependent on Southerners for Presidential victories (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 187). Since 1972, Republicans have not won the presidency without at least ten Southern states (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 187). Amidst the Watergate scandal of 1974, moderate Southern Democrat Jimmy Carter won the presidency over Gerald Ford. However, this should in part be attributed to the perceived clear slate provided by Carter over the scandalous Nixon Republican Party (Lowndes 2008, 160). The Watergate scandal ultimately turned off many conservative southerners who were open to the Republican Party under the pre-scandal Nixon Administration (Black and Black 2002, 25). Overall, Watergate caused most Americans to trust the government less, seeing percentages of confidence in government decrease close to twenty percent (Kabaservice 2012, 342). However, the conservative base was still continuing to experience long-term growth. Eventually, the Reagan Revolution would drastically expand the Republican electorate (Black and Black 2002, 25).

While Democrats continued to see success after Nixon's Southern Strategy started, a more important understanding developed being that Republicans saw their support increase among white southerners as they distanced themselves from their prior dependency on the black voter (Bullock and Rozell 2017, 223). Ultimately, with federal intervention proving useful, even southern Democrats saw little to gain from taking a more

conservative approach (Black and Black 2002, 34). However, this southern delay could only last so long, so with several open positions, Republicans were able to make the case (Bullock 2017, 4). The Southern Republican Candidates were “aggressive, energetic, and well-financed Republican candidates” (Black and Black 2002, 273). The Republican Party found itself consisting of everyone from inspired young white politicians, big business executives to fundamentalist Christians (Lamis 1999, 391). While southerners tended to be more conservative, moderate Democrats were well-positioned to withstand the shift due to the traditional trust of incumbent leaders (Bullock 2017, 4).

While Nixon had symbolized an effective effort on the Republican Party to bring southern conservatives into the party, Watergate led to the alienation of the electorate and left his presidency destroyed (Kabaservice 2012, 340). As Watergate created a national hesitancy toward the GOP, when Lamar Alexander ran for the governorship in 1974, he was unable to get past the scandal, and Ray Blanton captured the victory (Bullock and Rozell 2017, 223). Two years later, Jimmy Carter was able to win the presidency, partly because of his southern heritage coming from serving as the Governor of Georgia (Bullock and Rozell 2017, 223).

As the 1976 presidential campaigns started, Reagan announced he would challenge fellow republican Ford in the fight for the Republican Nomination (Kabaservice 2012, 347). In the Republican Primary, Reagan's extreme rhetoric on issues of busing, government expenditures, abortion, prayer, and other social issues drove Ford to follow Reagan's lead and move further to the right against the wishes of moderates (Kabaservice 2012, 347). While Reagan's 1976 presidential campaign saw several stumbles out of the

gate and ultimately lost the primary, his campaigns revealed how conservative rhetoric energized the Republican voting block through the use of emotional appeals (Kabaservice 2012, 348). While Ford narrowly won the Republican primary, Reagan showed that the organized energized conservative is more likely to go vote in the primary if a campaign is conducted well, rather than a moderate republican voter who is only voting to maintain the status quo of the party platform (Kabaservice 2012, 348).

Democrats revealed their initial success in the Peripheral South. The primary reason why they were able to do better was the different racial demographics of the states (Black and Black 2002, 293). “Democrats could still win [...] in the Deep South by appealing to African Americans and sufficiently large numbers of moderate and liberal whites” (Black and Black 2002, 295). With Watergate fresh in the minds of most voters, Jimmy Carter was able to build up a coalition of everyone from union workers, liberals to southerner voters upset after the Watergate investigation (Kabaservice 2012, 340). While the Democrats won the presidency, the conservative Republicans were now positioned for success moving forward since Ford was the last defense of the moderate stronghold of Republican party affairs (Kabaservice 2012, 348).

As the country moved into the late 1970s, the overall culture began to shift in America. While Democratic tax policy was structured to best protect poor individuals, the average middle-class American saw inflations, increased unemployment and saw their taxes increase while there might not be any seen benefits (Kabaservice 2012, 353). The American middle class was being put in a tight position where they were paying more taxes, seeing less economic opportunity, and were not well off enough to use the loopholes rich Americans used to avoid paying higher taxes (Kabaservice 2012, 353).



### *Growing Conservatism and the Reagan Revolution*

While cultural differences, such as disagreements on abortion, same-sex marriage and adoption, and other social issues, had been around since the 1960s, the 1980s saw the disagreement turn into a full culture war. As Republican political fundraisers realized they could increase donations if they increased fear and outrage, the party at large began using more extreme rhetoric, painting their Democratic opponents as amoral and essentially evil in action. This effort was so successful that by the 1980s, the economic conservatives that had long argued for fiscal responsibility were equally matched with a religious coalition of cultural conservatives. Reagan was successful in mobilizing this group, and ultimately they enabled him to win the 1980 Presidential Election.

Ronald Reagan, former conservative Republican Governor of California, ran on a platform of both campaigning on behalf of the animosities social conservatives felt amidst a changing nation while also securing internal party support by using Nixon Era rhetoric of addressing law and order and reducing taxes and regulation. If Nixon was the start of a competitive southern Republican Party, Ronald Reagan was the symbolic leader of the fully alive conservative coalition in control of the national party.

The two main factions of Republicans in the 1980s were the Economic Conservatives and the Cultural Conservatives, who cared more about right-wing social and religious positions perceived as being under attack by the liberal Democrat (Lamis 1999, 382). Reagan brought the culture wars to the forefront of American politics. By the end of his administration, he had managed to convince most of America that the Democrats were out of touch with the values of most Americans (Carter 1996, 80). In Reagan's eyes, the

Democrats should be viewed as the party for black people, homosexuals, and poor people who didn't want to do their fair share (Carter 1996, 80).

Southern Republicans used rhetoric about abortion, homosexuals, and school prayer to secure the religious right into their base supporters (Black and Black 2002, 8). Cultural issues, such as abortion and law and order, had been a sensitive subject since the 1960s; however, the Republican Party found that increasing fear of Democratic extremists would turn out the religious community to vote Republican (Carter 1996, 92). Richard Viguerie, a conservative political fundraiser, changed their rhetoric to use more extreme language to create counter-responses of outrage against the "baby killing" Democrats (Carter 1996, 92).

The Republicans in 1980 saw moderate candidates such as George H. W. Bush, Gerald Ford, but on the conservative side, Ronald Reagan had the energy and perception of a front-runner advantage which prevented success amongst conservative challengers (Kabaservice 2012, 356). However, Reagan was best positioned given his conservative record governing California in a political electorate desiring more conservative values with a greater desire to have state leadership (Bullock and Rozell 2017, 224).

Serving as the representation of the growing conservative movement and running on his record as Governor of California, Ronald Reagan ran to be the 1980 Republican Nominee (Lowndes 2008, 160). Reagan's message was clear. He acknowledged the southern desire for a conservative candidate who valued small-government and states' rights while also subtly acknowledging the racial animosity in American culture (Lowndes 2008, 160). For Reagan, he ignored the liberal presumption that politics mandated respect

and a sensitive approach to politics and accepted Americans are willing to listen to the more extreme positions (Lowndes 2008, 161).

As Reagan started winning the primaries, he quickly realized while he might not have Republican cohesion on issues of abortion, the death penalty, and gun restrictions, moderates could agree on efforts to decrease taxation, industrial deregulation, and increased tax incentives that encourage business investment and economic growth (Kabaservice 2012, 358). As Reagan received the Republican nomination, the southern strategy was fully in control of the Republican Party. Black voters were now all but pushed out of the Republican Party due to the focus on using racial resentment as their mobilizing political issue (Kabaservice 2012, 361).

If a Republican was going against an incumbent southern Democrat, the Democrat was all but sure to win (Black and Black 2002, 343). Democrats continued to hold two-thirds of the political incumbents, implying a trust with those elected officials on their side until the late 1980s (Black and Black 2002, 340). Ultimately, Ronald Reagan proved extremely useful in pulling conservatives from the Democrat to the Republican Party (Black and Black 2002, 174). Southern conservative Democrats, who were essentially kept from receiving leadership positions in Congress, found themselves increasingly at odds with the national party (Black and Black 2002, 179-181). As young conservative politicians grew up and saw the lack of opportunity in the Democratic Party, they might as well side with the Republicans to best position themselves for political mobility in terms of leadership (Black and Black 2002, 181).

For a long time, incumbent Democrats were able to easily win re-election; however, as they began to step down, Republicans saw their opportunity (Black and Black 2002, 181). However, the 1980s saw little initiative on behalf of the Republicans to prepare for the vacancies (Black and Black 2002, 185).

After the 1984 re-election of Ronald Reagan, the 1986 midterm election saw Democrats make their last sizable gains in the state because Reagan had energized the electorate, who were now open-minded to identifying with the Republican Party (Bullock and Rozell 2017, 227). While some might be less willing to directly identify with either political party, the partisan divisions were ever-clear with expressed members (Black and Black 2002, 294). Deep South conservatives were unapologetically Republican and would simply express statements such as ““We just don’t vote for no damn Democrats” (Black and Black 2002, 294). The realignment of conservatives to the Republican Party expanded their overall white electorate, allowing them to cater less to minorities and moderate positions (Black and Black 2002, 327). Conservative Democrats were increasingly becoming the minority in a liberal national party, and the futures after the 1994 Republican Revolution only became more clear (Black and Black 2002, 304). Likewise, as conservatives lost power in the Democratic electorate, Democrats could now focus mostly on the progressive liberal ideologies (Black and Black 2002, 326-327).

## **Clinton, Racial Gerrymandering, Culture Wars, & The Republican Revolution (1994 – 2009)**

Racial gerrymandering established the creation of majority-minority electoral districts, and the Bush Department of Justice implemented a policy preventing these districts from seeing a reduction in the percentage of its minority population. While it was justified by ensuring black representation, it ultimately led to the hyper-isolation of races in independent districts. Polarization intensified as a result, given the candidates and elected officials had little incentive to diversify their rhetoric to appeal to a broader electorate. As Republicans increased rhetoric condemning Democratic positions on issues such as abortion and homosexuals, they saw their base increasingly isolated, meaning they had little incentive to cooperate because they could continue winning elections by inciting the anger against these social issues.

The increased polarization fueled the rhetoric that Democrats only focused on helping minority communities, and by the Republican Revolution in 1994, the Republican Party gained a majority of southern governorships and congressional seats. The Republican Revolution, spurred by a backlash against Bill Clinton and his healthcare expansion program, saw conservatives court middle-class families that felt they were paying more than their fair share of taxes to support individuals unwilling to work. While the Republicans saw gains in the south, Democrats could still win if they positioned themselves as a conservative candidate. However, the election of Barack Obama, the first black president of the United States, would later incite those same southern tensions with an increased focus on cultural changes.

As conservative Democrats either left or were voted out of office, young southerners were joining the ranks of the Republican Party, and young Democrats expressed their desire to continue increasing racial diversity as a priority and foundational condition of the future of the Democratic Party (Black and Black 2002, 175). This shift in the narrative was finally seen in the 1990s. By the late 1990s, black people consistently voted Democrat, while white people voted Republican (Lamis 1999, 379). Republicans were not attracting black voters because they did not need to when they could rely instead on southern whites (Lamis 1999, 384). Racial gerrymandering in the 1990s made the racial divide in politics only worsen.

While racial gerrymandering was initially an effort to prevent political actors from drawing districts that reduce black electoral power by spreading their votes across several districts, the courts eventually ruled that the redistricting process cannot adversely affect the black community (Lamis 1999, 387-388). Civil rights activists argued that spreading black voters across multiple districts essentially prevented their ability to receive office holding political power (Black and Black 2002, 332). Under President Bush, the DOJ established a requirement to force state legislatures to create as many "majority-minority districts" to ensure black and minority representation (Black and Black 2002, 332). As black voters were concentrated into independent districts, white Republicans no longer needed to determine the outcome of the non-majority-minority communities (Black and Black 2002, 333-334).

Black Tennesseans have often been the source of much of the political discourse impacting the political process at every level (Franklin and Block 2020, 2). The use of

racial dog whistles to inflame racial issues without using blatantly racist rhetoric became increasingly common throughout the first decade of the 2000s (Franklin and Block 2020, 17). Mailers and radio advertisements would darken the skin color of black candidates, photoshop photos of national democratic party leaders with local candidates on animals, specifically black birds, to further incite the racial resentment that white voters could relate to (Franklin and Block 2020, 17-18).

As the redistricting process was required to maintain black-majority districts, white-majority districts became increasingly common (Bullock 2017, 16). The suburbs around urban cities proved to be key in securing white republicans in the electoral process (Black and Black 2002, 6). Democrats are now moving further toward supporting social programs because the redrawing of districts had only pushed representative's constituents further to the left (Bullock 2017, 16). Therefore, there is no reason for the Democrats in a black majority area to consider the impact regarding the white population (Bullock 2017, 16). The polarization of the American voter takes many forms in American politics; however, it increases the number of barriers outsiders face before participating in the electoral system (Franklin and Block 2020, 3). While white voters left the Democratic Party due to an increase in black party leadership and electoral redistricting, this is primarily a withdrawal due to the promise of security in a racially polarized world (Franklin and Block 2020, 29-31). Additionally, there is a link between party identification and ideological sorting where individuals are no longer bringing their own beliefs into the equation, but rather, their partisanship is growing stronger because of the connected meaning between party and ideology (Lupton and McKee 2020, 933). Majority-minority districts actually helped Republicans win in the long run by isolating the Democratic

support base and segregating the electorate. By 1992, Republicans saw success in Georgia, where the Senate election went into a runoff where the Republican Nominee Coverdell won, sending a message across the Deep South that Republicans could win (Black and Black 2002, 297). A combination of the growing conservatism, racial redistricting, and a more aggressive strategic strategy allowed the Republican Party to advance in the 1990s (Black and Black 2002, 330).

While Republicans steadily increased their victories over the following 15 years, the victories of the Republican Revolution showed a change in the narrative (Lamis 1999, 391). Ultimately, redistricting led to fewer incentives for Democrats to take moderate positions because their electorate was more uniform in belief and attitude (Black and Black 2002, 34). However, this delay of the southern shift toward conservatism had arrived, so with several open seats, Republicans were ultimately able to see their return on the southern investment (Bullock 2017, 4).

While some might be less willing to directly identify with either political party, the partisan divisions were ever clear with expressed members (Black and Black 2002, 294). Conservatives in the Deep South conservatives were unapologetically Republican and became offended if you proposed they vote for a Democrat (Black and Black 2002, 294). As the districts became increasingly racialized, Conservative Democrats were essentially pushed from the liberal national party (Black and Black 2002, 304). Likewise, as conservatives lost power in the Democratic electorate, Democrats only needed to focus on the progressive liberal ideologies of their mostly minority communities (Black and Black 2002, 326-327).



While Ronald Reagan introduced the serious narrative around culture wars into the mainstream American political dialogue, it continued to impact people's voting behavior. Many Americans were told and believed that Democrats were supporting the wrong values that went against the desires of most Americans (Carter 1996, 80). The Republicans had successfully used rhetoric about abortion, homosexuals, and school prayer to court the growing faction of faith-based conservative votes who cared mostly about these social issues (Black and Black 2002, 8).

In 1994, the Republican Party gained control of the majority of Southern Congressional seats and governorships (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 188-189). Bill Clinton spent most of his time balancing between conservative and liberal principles (Black and Black 2002, 1). However, when President Clinton sought to push forward a federal health care insurance program, many people saw this as a move to greater dependency on big government (Black and Black 2002, 28). Fear of an expanding federal government led Southern Republicans to get energized and take action, which ultimately revealed itself in 1994 (Black and Black 2002, 28). However, the win was unexpected, and saw the new majority in the House Republicans take control without any prior experience leading that role (Black and Black 2002, 9). Newt Gingrich and the newly elected Republican leadership could push the party messaging further to the right without worrying about a possible internal election upset (Black and Black 2002, 395).

Gingrich and many conservatives during the Republican Revolution targeted the growing uneasiness of Americans middle class (Carter 1996, 106). Generally, middle-class Americans wanted to live in a developed area where they could have greater influence

in how their valuable money is spent while also ensuring their children are growing up in an area with “good schools and safe streets” (Carter 1996, 106). The Republican Revolution essentially saw plenty of conservative candidates run against the expansion of big government for poor people unwilling to work for a living (Carter 1996, 106-107).

The success of the Republican Party in expanding their Southern control came from their ability to elect candidates to open seats and then depending on the incumbent effect to maintain the success (Black and Black 2002, 231). However, most of the success Republicans saw was not through challenging incumbent Democrats but instead waiting for incumbents to step down to battle it out in an open seated election (Black and Black 2002, 346). As Democrats became increasingly liberal or moderate, conservative Democrats found themselves at greater odds against their national party (Black and Black 2002, 348).

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The 1994 Republican Revolution, where conservatives saw sizable gains in Congress, hurt moderates like former Tennessee Gov. Lamar Alexander from creating a resonating message in the 1996 presidential nomination process (Bullock and Rozell 2017,

231). The perfect storm came on election night of 1994, appealing Republican candidates, lackluster Democratic candidates, paired with resentment against the first two years of the Clinton Administration (Ashford and Locker 1999, 193). Most of the seats were being released by the incumbents and allowed the battle to be extremely damaging to the Democrats (Ashford and Locker 1999, 207). Additionally, Participation in the primaries had been steadily trending toward the Republican Party, and 1994 saw roughly one-hundred thousand more votes on the Republican ballot (Ashford and Locker 1999, 209). The outlier to the 1994 Republican Revolution was the race between Bredesen and Sundquist (Ashford and Locker 1999, 213). Both candidates ran on similar issues, presented a similar business-political story, and it came down to Bredesen and his record of increasing taxes as Mayor of Nashville (Ashford and Locker 1999, 213-214). The 1996 election saw Democrats make some recovery efforts; however, while other southern states saw the shift of power come in the mid-nineties, Tennessee surveys revealed a withdraw from the Democratic trend as early as the 1980s and that the political landscape of Tennessee was changing (Ashford and Locker 1999, 217).

Republicans saw southern advancements in both the subsequent 1996 and 1998; however, northern losses in 1998 caused Newt Gingrich to step down from his House leadership role (Black and Black 2002, 328-329). While no Democrat was ever as conservative as a conservative republican, there is only so far a candidate can go while maintaining visibility (Bullock 2017, 17).

Toward the end of the 20th Century, it was clear that the best shot for Southern Democrats was a moderate cultural message leaning toward conservative (Ashford, Locker

1999, 220). While Republicans saw sizable gains in the 1990s, the 2010 midterms saw rural incumbent democrats stepping down, allowing Republicans to flip rural areas like those in Tennessee (Bullock and Rozell 2017, 236).

Governor Phil Bredesen represented a moderate lean liberal brand of Democratic politics that sought to turn out rural and traditionally republican districts (Franklin and Block 2020, 16). In a 2002 Tennessee survey on taxation, they found while the majority opposed an income tax, if required, non-white participants tended to favor a progressive income tax system as opposed to white participants who advocated for a flat tax (Franklin and Block 2020, 11). Bredesen supported some social policies to advance equality; however, he tended to be a fiscal conservative, very much pro-business (Franklin and Block 2020, 16). Since Bredesen was known as a moderate governor of Nashville, the Tennessee voters granted him their traditionalist support; however, the party overall was headed in the conservative direction (Franklin and Block 2020, 16). While Bredesen won his 2002 race, Tennessee Democrats have continued to perform worse and worse, with Tennessee slowly losing its status as a swing state (Franklin and Block 2020, 65).

The Democrats reclaimed House control in 2006; however, the majority of their gains were outside the south (Bullock 2017, 7). While Obama had channeled a vision of 'Hope' and promise for a more tolerant society, The Tea Party and other conservative groups yielded a powerful mid-term referendum on President Obama after his 2008 victory (Franklin and Block 2020, 76).

This trend of Republicans dominating electoral success carried down into the state legislature when republicans achieved roughly 40 percent of control and secured when, due

to the midterm response to the Obama Administration, the 2010 election saw a GOP control of two-thirds control (Heersink and Jenkins 2020, 189). The Tea Party movement saw success after Obamacare because of fear of a large expanding federal government (Bullock 2017, 8).

### **2010 – Southern Republican Control and Democratic Demonization**

In 2008, Barack Obama was elected the first black President of the United States, causing a massive increase in racial tensions, hitting an apex during his mid-term elections. He had passed the Affordable Care Act of 2010, which expanded access to healthcare, causing the mobilization of the Tea Party against the increase in federal assistance programs for the undeserved. Unlike the Republican Revolution in 1994, the Tea Party tended to be more reactionary in nature, containing more directly xenophobic language, wishing society to return to how it was in the past. Unfortunately, Obama caused anxiety in Americans who perceived his election as a direct threat to their relative status in society, and the Tea Party represented this growing divide.

Additionally, the federal redistricting on racial lines ultimately led to more districts with increased racial uniformity, causing white people to vote predominantly for Republicans and minority voters supporting Democrats. This carried into the issues the party's focused on, emboldening the claim Democrats do not represent American values, which was especially effective in the south. Currently, if a moderate to conservative Democrat is branded as a liberal, they are essentially doomed from winning an election in the south. While the future of both party's remain uncertain, the election of Donald Trump in 2016

reveals that worsening conditions in rural communities, which are predominantly Republican, such as higher poverty, lower median income, worsening GDP growth, and lower education rates are seeing an increase in the saliency of positions of xenophobia and racial intolerance.

Spurred by the 2008 election of the first black President Barack Obama and his signing of the Affordable Care act in 2010, the Tea Party used rhetoric arguing against the expansion of social welfare programs for people who didn't need it (Williamson, Skocpol, and Coggin 2011, 25-26). Government spending is the identified main issue the Tea Party focuses on; however, many of the protestors themselves either receive some combination of disability assistance, Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, which seems to go against their opposition to government social programs (Williamson, Skocpol, and Coggin 2011, 32). They focused not on all social programs but rather were angered with giving federal assistance to those whom they determined undeserving (Williamson, Skocpol, and Coggin 2011, 26). They see themselves working for the benefits they are receiving from the government, but they argue we don't want to pay to support those who are not willing to support themselves (Williamson, Skocpol, and Coggin 2011, 33).

Looking back at Nixon's Southern Strategy and the racial rhetoric that came in the decades prior, the Tea Party is yet another Republican effort to incite the fears of racially conscious Republicans to make them passionate to vote Republican and return things to the way they were before this social change occurred (Williamson, Skocpol, and Coggin 2011, 35). While past conservative movements had underlying messages of racial resentment, this is commonly seen as made worse by the election of Obama. The Tea Party

Republicans were assisted by Fox News and its extensive coverage of the Tea Party efforts, which had a legitimizing effect (Williamson, Skocpol, and Coggin 2011, 29).

The election of Obama represented a change in the social positioning for many Americans, which, for the tea party republicans, caused an introduction of anxiety due to the perceived threat to their status in society (Williamson, Skocpol, and Coggin 2011, 35). While the overall rhetoric is focused on fiscal policy, their membership focuses on the cultural aspects of the danger of the Obama administration (Parker and Barreto 2014, 2).

The Republicans who won on the Tea Party brand have not shown allegiance to the traditional republican party, beyond identifying as one in elections (Williamson, Skocpol, and Coggin 2011, 36). Tea Party conservatives are reactionary in nature, fearing the social changes that are occurring and wanting things to return to the past (Parker and Barreto 2014, 6).

While moderate candidates allowed southern democrats to win for quite a while, the 21st century has shown the toxification of the Democratic Brand (Bullock 2017, 9). Alongside this, party identification changes show fewer people identify as Democrats, and more southerners are identifying as independents, with less consistent growth amongst Republicans (Bullock 2017, 11). Overall, fewer people are comfortable openly identifying with a particular political party (Bullock 2017, 11). If Republicans are able to brand the Democrat as a Liberal, they would essentially be doomed in the general election (Bullock 2017, 17). In the 2018 Senate election, Bredesen faced Republican candidate Marsha Blackburn while running on the same conservative, business-focused, moderate Democrat

he presented in his governorship race; however, he saw an extremely devastating defeat (Franklin and Block 2020, 197).

While the Democratic Party worked to prevent southern moderate and conservative Democrats from holding leadership positions, the Republicans welcomed them with the possibility of leadership (Bullock 2017, 19). In 2010, the Republicans gained control of the Tennessee General Assembly for the first time in over a century (Franklin and Block 2020, 66). For both 2008 and 2012, state and local Tennessee Democrats were negatively impacted by the candidacy of Obama in a racially conscious society (Franklin and Block 2020, 78). While the future is still flexible regarding the future of the Democratic and Republican Parties, Democrats will likely see some victory, not because they are the preferred candidate, but because they are against a Republican candidate that won the primary but was unable to secure the base (Bullock 2017, 10).

Lastly, between the 2016 and 2020 Presidential Elections in Tennessee, both parties are seeing their support stem from areas that are becoming increasingly polarized and further in favor of their beliefs (Dobie 2020). As the population increases, the residents are more likely to be liberal or more Democratic; however, the population itself is likely not the voting issue but rather a common theme between shifts in these communities (Dobie 2020). While there is little proof of causation, it is true that we see a correlation trend between higher population rates and reduced poverty, increased median income, increased GDP growth, lower uninsured, and higher education levels (Dobie 2020). Likewise, the opposite is true in regards to less densely populated areas. “We watched many, many factories and opportunities move out of these rural counties [...] Republicans have done a



good political job of capitalizing on that [economic] distress” (Dobie 2020). There is clearly a positive relationship between increased opportunity and increased population size, so until the Democratic Party is able to present an appeal to the struggling rural communities, the Republican Party has the clear advantage of fueling the resentments of a group feeling largely unheard.

According to Charles S. Bullock in *The New Politics of the Old South*, Southern Republicans will likely keep a majority status after the 2021 redistricting process; however, Democrats will begin winning state wide elections, and unless Republicans focus on expanding their base of support, Democrats will begin making advancements (2017, 21). As the south continues to see migration and immigration due to an increased desire to live in the south, the overall diversity is inherently increasing (Black and Black 2002, 403).

### **CHAPTER III: ANALYSIS OF TENNESSEE’S UNIQUE DYNAMICS**

I asked what makes Tennessee unique compared to the southern racial realignment and increased polarization that occurred during the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries as opposed to the overall southern and national dynamics. While much is documented about the larger shifts on the regional and national level, the unique dynamics of Tennessee often lacked focus. My goal was to focus specifically on the state-wide dynamics while avoiding any federal

elections which might have Washington directly in mind. To achieve this goal, I focused on Tennessee Gubernatorial Elections. The remainder of this chapter will focus on answering my research question directly. Tennessee is unique in how the racial realignment and following polarization occurred, and Tennessee Gubernatorial Elections help reveal this.

While Tennessee is within the upper south and is often lumped together with fellow southern states, Tennessee has its own unique position with how it progressed as opposed to national and regional trends. This section is intended to frontline the main events and reactions of Tennessee that led the state to go through its own form of political realignment and polarization.

After the Civil War, most ex-confederate states were required to ratify the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment prior to re-introduction to the Union. The following period of reconstruction saw most southern states have militarized control of the state, leading to increased racial tensions afterward. The same people who lost a war standing up for the freedom to own people were now without voting privileges and being controlled by a national government that just defeated them in battle. Tennessee avoided falling under the Reconstruction Act because they quickly ratified the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment after the war had ended. People in East Tennessee, where there was a significantly less financial incentive for slavery due to the mountainous terrain, were opposed to secession in the first place, leaving a strong desire to re-join the union after the war ended. This is an unusual case in Reconstruction Era U.S. history, and ultimately it led to Tennessee having less racial resentment due to the lack of national military control.

Democratic Tennessee Gubernatorial candidates needed to rely on the support of black voters in the primary to make it to the general. As was true with most southern states during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Democrats would easily win almost every state-wide election, so the primary battle was always the toughest. Let it be clear, Tennesseans did not believe that black and white people were equal, even in the anti-slavery regions of the east. However, the state as a whole was less inclined to enact backlash against black people because a sizable portion of the state lacked a serious financial loss due to their freedom. Tennessee enacted voter discrimination laws in the state legislature, but the state did so earlier than most southern states and to a lesser degree. Tennessee was less connected to the general southern mindset of completely preventing black people from voting because they lost comparatively less when compared to other southern states.

Tennessee Democrats, being divided not on issues but control of political power, were able to use the black voters in ways other southern states avoided. With the voter laws in place, many black voters were forced to pay poll taxes or have someone allow them to vote against the law. Democratic Political Boss Edward Crump worked with Black Republican Robert R. Church, Jr to mobilize the black voter in West Tennessee to support the chosen Crump candidate in the Democratic Primary, and the Crump machine would allow you to freely vote for their candidate in the general election. Shelby County, containing the Memphis area, had the most weight in state-wide elections, making securing that electorate essential for Tennessee Gubernatorial Candidates. While most southern states simply worked to eliminate the black voter, the Tennessee Democratic Party allowed black voters in order to help the candidate they preferred to defeat their opponent in the primary.

Edward Crump came of prominence as Franklin Delano Roosevelt sold Americans the promise of a better future, leading the overall Tennessee electorate to become persuaded by the paternalistic nature of the Crump political machine. Crump provided support for those struggling as long as they voted for his candidate in the Democratic primary, which ultimately allowed him to control the governor's race for most of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Tennessee Valley Authority, which worked to expand access to electricity in the south east providing many jobs for Tennesseans, helped secure support for the Democratic candidates. Tennesseans became increasingly accepting of a paternalistic government, especially after Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal provided many people a latter to escape the poverty they were faced with after little government intervention.

Towards the 1940s, most southerners were starting to push back against Franklin Delano Roosevelt's more progressive reforms in his New Deal, but Tennessee still remained supportive. However, World War II made Tennesseans realize the hypocrisy happening at home where their governor and other state-wide elections were essentially under control by a paternalistic political boss, Edward Crump. The change in perspective after World War II allowed Gordon Browning to win in 1948 on an anti-Crump message and furthermore allowed Frank Clement to run against claims of Gov. Browning's corruption. While the intra-party dynamics were few in substance, most of the challenge in Tennessee arose by arguing the other candidate is corrupt.

In 1953, Tennessee changed its constitution to switch governors from serving unlimited two-year terms to unlimited non-consecutive four-year terms. This election change shifted under Gov. Frank Clement, which forced him to re-evaluate his long-term

political plan and how he could remain in control after his term ended. Buford Ellington proved to be the answer, proving to be a suitable placeholder before Clement could run again in the following election. Together, they held control of the governorship for close to two decades. Tennesseans became used to electing the same individuals, and this continued until they became unfavorable to the general electorate. Tennessee would furthermore become used to re-electing successful incumbents, delaying the national and regional shifts till the election featured an open seat.

Regarding the Civil Rights Movement in Tennessee, both Clement and Ellington ultimately decided to go against their pro-segregationists positions to adopt a supportive position toward a gradual acceptance of the changing electoral landscape. While Tennessee governors were not outwardly supportive of advancing civil rights, they respected the changes and pushed for gradual implementation of civil rights in direct opposition to fellow southerners. *Brown v. Board* required the integration of public schools, and while most southern states pushed back and refused, Clement ultimately moved for the full integration of public schools in Tennessee. Likewise, his political partner Gov. Buford Ellington, who was re-elected a year after the Voting Rights Act secured the right to vote for black individuals, decided to flip from segregationist to ultimately support gradual integration and the Voting Rights Act by expressing an unapologetic commitment toward supporting the end of segregation.

As governors Frank Clement and Buford Ellington respectively flipped on the issue of civil rights, they did so while the rest of the south stood in opposition against any form of reform. Additionally, Ellington failed to help encourage the growth of the Tennessee

Democratic Party in a period where both the National Republican Party saw success with Nixon's Southern strategy, the messaging to appeal to both southern whites and everyone else, and the Tennessee Republicans were organizing and making inroad in communities such as Shelby County. While other southern Democratic Party's were focused on building up their base of support and stood in firm negation of civil rights policies, Gov. Ellington failed to do so and made a losing bet he could win over the black vote in favor to expand the party electorate.

Tennessee saw Buford Ellington make a bet on courting the black voter. He failed to build the party under his leadership as governor and chose to accept the changes regarding civil rights policy. While he tried to avoid talking about race during his re-election campaign, it was too late. His bet was a poor one, which allowed Republican Winfield Dunn to win the 1970 gubernatorial election. While Richard Nixon provided rhetoric that allowed candidates to do well in areas like the upper south, Tennessee's 1970 gubernatorial election had a former Democrat running on the Republican ticket. Winfield Dunn had been a Democrat only ten years prior, allowing him to have trust and respect that many republicans lacked.

Tennessee Democrats saw success in 1974 after Watergate allowed them to elect Ray Blanton to the governorship; however, 1978 would see the continual success of moderate Republicans that was occurring across the south with the election of Republican Lamar Alexander in 1978. While most states were still heavily divided on the issue of race in the south, Tennessee chose to largely ignore the issue in order to remain competitive. An open election race, one without an incumbent running, would see all gubernatorial

candidates in Tennessee purposely avoiding the issue of race in order to not alienate any prospective voter. Instead, the races typically focused on either their record as a business professional or speculations of scandal from wrongdoing or general malpractice in their past. Largely the candidates agreed on all the same issues; however, they often needed to find a way to divide the electorate in the general election.

As the 1980s arrive and Ronald Reagan excited an already growing conservative movement, most southern states start electing more conservative leaders that reflect this change in ideology. However, Tennessee Republican Lamar Alexander was extremely well-liked with his success as governor, that he faced no primary challenger and successfully won many democrats to vote for him in his 1982 re-election campaign. Tennesseans knew Lamar Alexander and his respect allowed him to be liked by both Democrats and Republicans.

Former Tennessee Speaker of the House, Democrat Ned McWherter, was able to win the 1986 gubernatorial election because of his record of cooperation with popular governor Lamar Alexander. As most Southern states were firmly conservative at this point, Democrat Ned McWherter was able to win by positioning himself as a moderate who had a proven track record of supporting policies that were best for all Tennesseans regardless of partisan preference. Ned McWherter was able to win the governorship in the height of the Reagan Revolution, the period in which conservative values came to dominate the Southern Republican Party, because of his positioning against the growing Democratic distaste.

Generally, a trend of strong, moderate candidates was able to prevent and delay the conservative domination of the Republican Party. Even during the 1994 Republican Revolution, where both moderate candidates agreed on the issues, they both tried to paint the other as an extreme candidate on culture war issues, such as homosexuality and abortion. While they understood the race had been nationalized, they have very few substantive differences in how they would serve as Tennessee Governor. However, Don Sundquist was well known, organized, and furthermore did a better job of painting Bredeesen as an extremist in favor of taxes.

While political parties overall tend to perform worse against an incumbent candidate, by the 1980s, the Tennessee political party's both essentially decided to succeed in the election when challenging the incumbent in the general election. Simply put, both parties noticed a trend of the opposite party winning the following open election, so therefore it became seen as wasteful and impractical to nominate a strong candidate for sacrifice when they would wait four years for a viable election. This allowed the years in which they did challenge the incumbent to see the more fringe factions of either party make a shot.

While Phil Bredeesen lost his election in 1994 because he was less organized across the state, he was able to win in 2002 after conservative Van Hilleary scared the moderate Republican base leading them to vote for the moderate Democrat Bredeesen. Bredeesen ran on a message of business conservative and was able to win the election. Tennessee was not ready for a fully conservative candidate; however, the race became super close in the general election. While the rest of the south went conservative earlier in history, Tennessee



saw this occur later due to the preference for familiar moderate candidates who had a record of succeeding. Even traditionally salient culture war issues, which were the focus in most open gubernatorial elections, became non-impactful when challenging an incumbent who had successfully improved life for Tennesseans. While Tennessee was becoming more conservative, the state did not hold that ideological standard to be the determining voting issue in most elections.

As these moderate Democrats began to step down from Tennessee politics around 2010, the Tennessee Democrats failed to find a viable messaging strategy moving forward. The Tennessee Democratic Party had essentially given up on either building a base of candidates or supporting the candidates running. As 2010 saw a Republican Party voting more for conservative candidates, the moderate Bill Haslem would win both in 2010 and 2014. Bill Lee would do the exact same in his 2018 election by allowing the conservative voters to split the extreme conservative position while allowing Bill Lee to secure the nomination on a more moderate message. Conservative leaders still wanted a republican over a democrat, but conservatives have only grown in the state, leading moderate candidates to win against a more conservative preferences electorate. Tennessee is firmly a conservative Republican state at this moment, and moderate Republicans have found a successful strategy to secure their own control. As more extreme conservatives continue to make advancements and win the governorship in fellow southern states, Tennessee has yet to elect a true representative of the extremist conservative position.

## **CONCLUSION**

Tennessee has gone without extensive research into how the south and its racial realignment and political polarization over the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries is different from the unique dynamics in the state that make it unique. Tennessee has three grand divisions with different cultural perspectives; it was the last state to join the confederacy and the first to rejoin the union. Unlike other southern states, it is essential to understand the progress of the tri-star state to witness how the state might progress in the future.

Through my research, I searched to figure out the answer to this question. What makes Tennessee specifically unique compared to the overall southern racial realignment and political polarization that occurred between the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries at the regional and national level? I ultimately chose to look at Tennessee gubernatorial elections because they highlighted the main political issues across the state without getting bogged down in local or national issues.

Tennessee avoided military control over the state by being the first to ratify the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment and rejoin the union. This allowed them to develop less white racial resentment, which positioned the state well to have less strict voter intimidation laws. As the decades' progress, this allowed Democratic Boss Edward Crump to use this to his advantage and encouraged black voters to participate in the Democratic primary to help Crump elect his preferred candidate in the primary. Crump extended his control during the Great Depression because he was able to provide patronage to those who helped his candidate.

As Tennessee saw a constitutional change in 1953, gubernatorial terms shifted from unlimited consecutive two-year terms to unlimited non-consecutive four-year terms.

Ultimately this made Tennesseans more favorable toward incumbent officials, especially after Democrats Clement and Ellington, who partnered to ensure political control, governed over the state for close to twenty years.

After the *Brown v. Board* Supreme Court decision and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Gov. Frank Clement and Buford Ellington both respectively changed their position from segregationist to supporting gradual integration. Once combined with Gov. Ellington failing to build support within the Democratic Party and Republicans advancing with Nixon's presidency and party building in Shelby County of a Republican party structure. Former Democrat Winfield Dunn ran for the Republican nomination and was able to win the general election given all the cards falling into place for a growing Republican Party.

As conservatives gained influence in the Republican Party, Tennessean political candidates avoided the issue of race altogether. Neither party wants to alienate, so they both focus on issues of either business records or accusations of scandal. Standing against most southern states, both political parties were largely consistent with moderate candidates, which meant they saw little substantive disagreements. Republican Lamar Alexander, who had become popular after his first term, and Democrat Ned McWherter, the former Tennessee Speaker of the House, who supported Gov. Alexander's work, were both able to win in a period where conservative Republicans held the political power in most of the south.

As Ronald Reagan pushed culture, Tennessee gubernatorial candidates tried to make the other look radical. Neither Phil Bredesen nor Don Sundquist had sizable policy disagreements, but each tried to alienate the other. While Don Sundquist succeeded, 2002

revealed Tennessee Republicans were becoming increasingly interested in actual conservative candidates.

While southern Republicans became increasingly conservative, Bredesen showed moderate candidates could continue to win, especially if the other party was viewed as extreme. As Democrat incumbents started to step down in 2010, conservative Republicans gained the majority, essentially signaling Republican domination moving forward. While Republicans had control over Tennessee and the south, Tennessee proved challenging, with Tea Party Republicans splitting the vote and leading the moderate to get elected.

Tennessee is clearly a conservative state; however, moderates continue to win re-election in the state because the conservative faction remains divided in the primary on who would be the best representative. While Tennessee will likely continue to be conservative, they stand out against other southern states that are increasingly radical, and Tennessee has yet to elect a conservative candidate that truly represents the intentions of the growing base.

Looking forward, I urge future researchers to examine how the 2022 gubernatorial election changes moving forward. While I would say it safe to predict the Republicans' win, there are several key areas to look at. The Republican Party is divided in the primary, but I am curious to see how this impacts the 2022 Republican primary. The Democratic Party is seemingly unorganized in the state, but what message they take to advance at their lowest point in recent history. The future is not set in stone, but it looks as if Tennessee is entering a period of Republican control for the upcoming future.

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