

## White Democrats Lose More Ground in South

By CAMPBELL ROBERTSON  
Published: November 6, 2010

It was less than 50 years ago that a young man named Lewis McAllister Jr. won a special election to become a Mississippi state representative.

[Enlarge This Image](#)



John Fitzhugh/SUN HERALD, via Associated Press

Supporters of Representative Gene Taylor of Mississippi watching election results on Tuesday.

[Enlarge This Image](#)



Chuck Burton/Associated Press

Mr. Taylor and Representative John M. Spratt Jr. of South Carolina, both Southern Democrats, lost their bids for re-election.

“We were, of course, pretty excited about that,” said Wirt Yerger Jr., who at the time was the chairman of the state [Republican Party](#). They had a right to be: Mr. McAllister was the first Republican of the 20th century to sit in the Mississippi Legislature. Being a Republican in the South, Mr. Yerger recalled, “was pretty lonesome at first.”

Things are looking a little different now.

A political realignment that has been taking place for decades hit overdrive in last week’s elections, leaving Republicans at a stronger position in the South than at any time since Reconstruction. And with Republican control of so many legislatures on the eve of redistricting, white Democrats, who once occupied every available political office in the region, are facing near extinction in some states.

“The [Democratic Party](#) as we know it in Alabama is dead,” boasted Philip Bryan, the spokesman for the state’s Republican Party, which gained control of the legislature for the first time in more than a century. “We just killed it.”

The degree of one-party control Republicans have just achieved in much of the South has broad implications for future campaign strategies. But it also provides a laboratory to study the internal debates of the Republican Party, the effects of undiluted conservative policy and a nearly one-to-one relationship between party preference and race, at least in national contests in the Deep South.

Of the nine Democratic representatives that remain from the states of the Deep South, only one, John Barrow of Georgia, is white. Of the 28 Republicans, only one, the newly elected Tim Scott of South Carolina, is black.

Republicans now hold at least 93 of the 131 House seats from the states of the old Confederacy. Less than 20 years ago they did not even hold half. With the defeat of long-serving fiscally conservative Blue Dogs like Representatives Gene Taylor of Mississippi and John M. Spratt Jr. of South Carolina, Southern white Democrats in Congress have become as rare as a Dixie blizzard.

Republicans, however, say their job is not finished. The South is often thought of as red to its core, but it is not as simple as that. The preference for Republicans has trickled down over the decades, with voters first supporting Republican presidential candidates, then Republican congressmen — who often simply switched parties — and more recently Republican state legislators.

State Republican Party officials say they are now looking at local officials like sheriffs and chancery clerks who still often run as Democrats.

“That’s the last bastion,” said Brad White, the chairman of the Mississippi Republican Party.

The enduring allegiance to the Democratic Party among Southern whites comes from a fondness for incumbents, an enduring populist streak, lingering gratitude for the New Deal

RECOMMEND

TWITTER

SIGN IN TO E-MAIL

PRINT

SINGLE PAGE

REPRINTS

SHARE