

"The Unsolid South"



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"THE UNSOLID SOUTH"

The South's politics have always attracted more notice than the politics of any other group of American states, primarily because this region has shown the strongest preference. The southern states traditionally have given democratic presidential candidates a high percentage of their votes. The South, long a stronghold of Jeffersonian democracy, has only gone Republican three times since 1876.

After the Democrats became the majority party in the nation in 1930, Southerners took a hard look at the trend in the party. Rifts appeared in the ranks of Southerners and in some instances open revolt flared.

The conflict centered around two major issues: (1) loyalty to state and national party; and (2) changes in the South brought on by "party bolting" in presidential elections.

The South, always conservative, noted signs of increasing liberalism in the two major national parties and turned from strictly party loyalty to a political image which reflected their point of view regardless of party affiliations.

At the 1948 Democratic Convention, the rift between northern and southern Democrats widened when the national party sought to strengthen the civil rights plank in the platform. Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina deserted the Democratic Party and went States' Rights Democrat. In all eleven southern states, States' Rights parties bit deep into the vote of the major parties. Prior to 1948, the voting pattern of the South was marked by a wide difference between the Democratic and Republican vote. After 1948, this difference narrowed to some extent.

From 1828 to 1960, the voting pattern of the South does not show a sharp departure from a solid South, but it is significant that beginning with 1948, the South began to show a not-too-solid attitude.

How the South Voted in Presidential Elections From 1828 to 1960

<u>State</u>	<u>Dem.</u>	<u>Rep.</u>	<u>States' Rights</u>
Alabama	30	2	1
Arkansas	29	2	
Florida	20	6	
Georgia	30	0	
Louisiana	27	3	1
Mississippi	28	1	1
North Carolina	27	3	
South Carolina	29	3	1
Tennessee	21	6	
Texas	24	3	
Virginia	26	5	

1948 marked the turning point in party ties in the South. Four states went down the line for States' Rights. Alabama, Mississippi, and South Carolina cast votes for independents in addition to the major parties and States' Rights Party.

The period from 1932 to 1948 marked the turning point in the national party system. The Democratic Party completely dominated the national political scene during this period. For 16 years the American people gave the nod to the Democrats. Only the death in 1945 of President Roosevelt prevented one man from serving an unprecedented 16-year term as President.

This period marked revolutionary changes in the social structure of the United States. A play for Negro votes brought increased pressure for strong Civil Rights legislation by Northern Democrats and the rift in party loyalty followed.

From 1828 to 1932 the country had been predominately Republican. This gave the South bargaining power with the Democratic Party because the Party needed the South. However, at the end of Roosevelt's regime, the Democratic Party faced a crisis. No longer did the Party court the Southerners as they had in the past. Immediately after 1932, Southern conservatives became increasingly more resentful of socialistic trends in the Party. Liberal labor, welfare, economic legislation, and the expanding authority of the national government under Roosevelt, big city machines and bosses, ethnic and racial minorities, including the Negro, proved to be a little too much for Southerners to stomach.

Prior to 1932, the South had great influence with the Democratic Party. The party went along with the South on views such as the race problem. Southern legislators held high positions on congressional committees. In the selection of presidential candidates, Southern strength within the party was relatively secure because of the convention rule that required a two-thirds majority for nomination.

The rise in political power of the Negro and the play by northern Democrats for Negro votes caused increasing unrest among Southerners. Then the federal judiciary became more receptive to Negro effort to achieve, what they called, legal equality. In the 1936 National Convention, the South opposed the elimination of the two-thirds rule that had been in effect since 1832. The so-called "court packing" reform of 1937 split the Democratic Party along Conservative-Liberal lines. In 1938, Roosevelt was unsuccessful in purging several Conservative Southern Democratic legislators by intervening in their bids for the primary nomination. The South opposed Roosevelt's move in the 1940 convention to place Henry Wallace on the slate as his running mate. In open revolt, three-fourths of the Southern States voted for a southern opposition candidate. In the 1944 convention, southerners cast 87 1/2% protest vote for Senator Harry Byrd of Virginia against Roosevelt for a fourth term.

After Roosevelt's death, Truman set up the committee on Civil Rights and urged congressional action on the committee recommendations. This gave Southerners the chance they needed. The revolt against the National Democratic Party began to develop rapidly.

The States' Right (Dixiecrat) rebellion in 1948, brought into sharp focus the widening rift in the ranks of Southern Democrats. The Dixiecrats felt reasonably sure that the national party platform would include a strong civil rights plank which would be totally unacceptable to them. The end result was a battle, within the framework of the party, for control of the party through the electoral system. The tag

of Dixiecrats was a facesaver which allowed Democrats to vote and not lose their status as Democrats. The States' Rights (Dixiecrats) move marked the beginning of the unsolid South. From a statistical point of view, four Southern states went Republican in 1952, five in 1956, and three in 1960.

The Dixiecrat revolt in 1948 posed many problems. Among the most important was the need to find a way for party members to exercise an independent vote within party framework without losing their vote. Would the party label be on the State ballot under the national symbol or the State symbol? Could presidential electors from a State attend the National Party Convention if they were free and unpledged? Would they be seated? Was a State delegation bound by the rules of the National Party?

The 1952 National Convention was, in effect, a strategy convention with the questions of party loyalty the principal issue. The future solidarity of the Democratic Party hung in the balance. How could the party maintain a solid front and at the same time satisfy southern delegates?

Southern states maintained they were not bound by National Party rules to vote for the nominee for President, but were bound by their own state laws. Southerners contended that the national party was like a confederation, in that a state party was entitled to participate on its own terms in the convention. On the other side, it was argued that the state party and the convention delegates were simply agents of the national party. From the controversy of party loyalty came a "Loyalty Pledge" resolution which passed over a determined fight by southern delegates. The loyalty pledge did, in effect, bind the delegates to support the nominees of the convention.

Against a backdrop of moves and counter-moves by northern party loyalists to maintain solidarity within the party, southern states did not relent in their fight for independence. In 1952, the Governor of Louisiana stated to the National Convention, that the Louisiana delegation could not conform to the party rule as amended because it was in conflict with state party instructions. The entire Louisiana delegation walked out of the convention with the exception of the Junior Senator from Louisiana who declared dramatically that he did not propose to leave the Convention, but would remain if all other delegates from Louisiana walked out. He condemned the Dixiecrat takeover of the Louisiana Democratic label in 1948 and stated, "it was not the correct thing to do." He reaffirmed his stand that the national ticket should be located under the state party emblem. Then, he concluded, that he was willing to abide by the majority rule of the Convention. This

brought prompt response from the Convention Chairman that the Senator's statement constituted compliance with the Convention rules.

The battle for the seating of Louisiana, South Carolina and Virginia proved to be one of the most time-consuming in Convention's history. Even after balloting for the presidential nominee began, the question of recognition of these three states caused confusion.

The conflicts resulted from grave doubts by party leaders as to the loyalty of Southern states. It became increasingly more evident that there was a dangerous unrest among the Southern states.

Not until party platforms began to liberalize their stand toward state sovereignty, home rule, and race relations did the "Solid South" show signs of cracking. Nine out of ten southerners were brought up as Democrats, yet, even though the South is a Democratic citadel because of tradition, the rift in party loyalty began to widen in the late 40's with the move by States' Rights groups. In the 1948 Democratic Convention, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and South Carolina walked out in protest of what they called Republican trends. The election in 1948 proved the South would not swallow any candidate the Convention nominated.

In 1952 and 1956, Eisenhower, a Republican, carried four of the eleven Southern states. The difference in total popular vote between the Republican and Democratic candidates in 1952 was 314,620, while in 1956 it was but 98,449.

It has been said that the heavy Republican vote in the South during these two elections was because Eisenhower seemed to rise above politics and reach out steadily to the men on the right. His success in cutting the electorate of the South almost in half on two occasions has caused much speculation on whether the end is in sight for the so-called "Solid South."

The South, however, is taking a hard look at trends in both national parties. The trend in the Democratic Party toward liberalism began with the New Deal of Roosevelt. The Party began to pay special attention to the interest of the urban, working masses. When it became the party of northern Negroes, civil rights, organized labor, high taxes, big spending and the reform-minded, it became a direct affront to the conservative South.

The states of Texas and Tennessee, no longer down-the-line Democrats, attempt to hammer out workable compromises, while

old-line Democrats in both North and South tread softly hoping to mend the rift that grows wider each year.

There is actually at the national level, two parts to each major party: A party that controls the Convention and nominates men for the Presidency, and a party that, having lost effective control of the Convention years before, still manages to exercise conservative leadership in Congress. This, then, raises the question: What is the difference between Democrats and Republicans? It has been said recently that the only noticeable difference is in tendencies rather than principles. Both parties have fallen into certain patterns which seem to follow a parallel road. Each overlaps the other in practically every appeal in the scramble for votes. Both parties have been described as "loose alliances to win the stakes of power embodied in the Presidency."

The unrest in the South is not peculiar only to this region -- it prevails to some degree in the North. In the South, resentment over the emergence of the Northern Democrats as the party of agitation and reform has driven the wedge deeper into the rift in the Democratic Party. Northern Democrats are distrustful of the trend toward ultra-liberalism which prevails in the Party. The South, long the stronghold of Conservatism, has turned from strictly a solid South Democratic voting pattern to the habit of voting more independently in Presidential elections. For example, in the 1958 Congressional elections, the South cast 25,641,104 for Democrats and 19,763,773 for Republican candidates. Outside the South, the count was 22,816,060 to 19,166,960. In the eleven Southern legislatures, 61 Republican members are serving in the Senate or House.

Three Southern states have gone Republican in the last three Presidential elections (Florida, Virginia and Tennessee). Texas went Republican twice and Louisiana once.

All across Dixie business and professional men are desirous of a means for the South to have more of a voice in national politics. Sparked by young, energetic leadership, Republican organizations outclass Democratic organizations in many areas. There are those who contend that the rise of Republicanism in the South is but a flash in the pan. Others point to the move as the beginning of an end to the solid Democratic South. Most southern political experts rule out a third party move simply because it defies every rule of American politics. The pattern set in the South since 1952 in voting Republican in national elections indicates a revolt against the liberal trends in the Democratic Party. In state and local elections, voting has usually been under the Democratic party label. There are growing signs of shattering this custom, however.

Southern conservatives have shown their displeasure with liberal trends in both major national parties. The fact that there is unrest will bring about a re-alignment. The Republican position on race does not agree with that of Southern conservatives, but the Republican attitude toward centralization and property rights is sufficiently conservative to provide a basis for re-alignment.

The not-too-solid attitude which prevails in Southern states was summed up recently by an eminent educator who heads the Department of Government of a large southern university when he said, "The South is not solidly Democratic anymore, but neither is it solidly conservative." "I do believe," he continued, "that the conservative faction in the South is now dominant numerically and strategically, but it is a faction which may or may not remain dominant."

Across the South a third element has emerged. Realizing that if the Conservative voice of the South was to be heeded again in national politics, southerners came up with a plan to place unpledged electors on state ballots. The plan simply provided that voters would have a choice between the national party nominee or electors unpledged to a national party nominee. Since the President of the United States is elected by the electoral college and not by popular vote of the people, the South would have bargaining power. With 128 electoral votes in the southern states and 269 required to elect the President, it is evident that this represents a powerful bloc. It would be difficult for a party to gain a majority in the nation without the bulk of these 128 electoral votes.

In a region which has almost one-fourth of the population of the country, the South since 1876 has segregated itself from the rest of the nation by its faithfulness to the Democratic Party. With the break with tradition in 1948, the South has wrestled with the problem of finding a means of political expression which reflects the traditionally conservative thinking of the region.

The South seeks to restore the proper balance in the national government as prescribed in the Constitution. The region believes in government run by the people. It believes that government exists for the good of all the people.

The South believes in the sovereignty of the states. To find a way to reverse the trend in the national government, southerners are moving steadily toward political independence instead of political dependence, and toward a political image that reflects those Jeffersonian principles that are a historic part of the states of the South.