J. Morgan Kousser

THE SHAPING OF

SOUTHERN POLITICS

Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South

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The Shaping of Southern Politics
Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment
of the One-Party South, 1880-1910

J. Morgan Kousser

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I dedicate this book to my mother, Alice Morgan Kousser, who is responsible for any virtue in me. My faults are mine alone.
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Note on Regression Estimation of Voting Behavior

Goodman’s ecological regression technique is explained more fully in my “Ecological Regression and the Analysis of Past Politics,”1 which should be supplemented by Eric A. Hanushek et al., “Model Specification, Use of Aggregate Data, and the Ecological Correlation Fallacy.”2 Nonetheless, I should briefly summarize here how the technique was used in this book. In most cases, I obtained the estimates of voting behavior by race by running linear least-squares regressions where the dependent or Y variable was the percentage of all adult males voting for a certain candidate, and the independent or X variable was the percentage of the adult males who were Negro. Using an equation of the form $Y = a + bX + e$, the percentage of whites voting for the candidate is given by a, while the analogous estimate for Negroes equals $a + b$. The $e$ represents measurement and mis-specification error.

I made estimates of voting by race for every presidential and gubernatorial contest and numerous referenda in the South from 1880 to 1910. To check the assumptions of linearity and constant error variance, I made scatterplots for each pair of independent and dependent variables. In cases where it seemed possible that one or both of the assumptions might have been violated, I tried fitting other equations, compared the resulting explained variance ($R^2$) with the variance explained by the simple linear estimates, and used the equation with the highest $R^2$ to obtain my estimate. Four different alternatives to simple linear equations were used to estimate voting behavior by race in various elections. First, when only a few counties deviated markedly from the regression line, I recalculated the coefficients after dropping the “outliers” from the data set. Thus, I dropped two extremely deviant black belt counties from my estimates of voting by race in the 1888 Arkansas gubernatorial election, one from the 1892, and three from the 1896 Florida governor’s contest. In the Georgia gubernatorial contests of 1900 and 1902, where linear

estimates of black nonvoting exceeded 100 percent, yet the linear fit seemed excellent, I used a second procedure. I set Negro nonvoting at 100 percent and calculated the estimates of white voting behavior by dividing the statewide number of votes for each candidate by the number of white adult males. Similarly, I set all below-zero estimates at zero and recalculated the other estimates in the following tables: 4.5, 5.4, 6.3, 6.4, 6.8, 6.11, 7.2, 7.5, 7.6, 7.10, and 7.13. Third, for the 1880 Presidential and 1884–1896 gubernatorial elections in North Carolina, and for the 1880 Presidential and 1881–1893 gubernatorial contests in Virginia, I divided the counties into those below and those above 30 percent Negro. I then ran separate linear regressions on each group and computed statewide averages of white and black voting behavior by weighting the estimates for each set of counties by the percentage of the state’s whites and blacks who resided in each group of counties. For the 1880 Presidential and 1880–1896 gubernatorial elections in Tennessee, I separated the state into two groups—East Tennessee and the other two sections—and then followed the same procedure as for North Carolina and Virginia to get statewide estimates. Fourth, I tried to fit linear equations after performing logarithmic transformations or squaring the independent variable. Equations containing logarithmic or quadratic terms produced lower R^2's than the equations for the grouped data for all elections in North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia, but a regression containing an X^2 term better explained opposition to the 1908 suffrage amendment referendum in Georgia. All other estimates in the text were computed by linear least-squares equations containing all available data.
Preface

“The South,” V. O. Key, Jr., noted in 1949, “really has no political parties.” Although Southerners voted overwhelmingly for Democratic candidates in national elections in the first half of the twentieth century, the internal politics of their states was in most cases utterly disorganized. Key found the Southern Democratic party of that era “merely a holding-company for a congeries of transient squabbling factions, most of which fail by far to meet the standards of permanence, cohesiveness, and responsibility that characterize the political party.” The combination of partyless politics with the notorious political apathy of the region’s white citizenry, the widespread disfranchisement of the blacks, and the malapportionment of the state legislatures produced a static political system where irresponsible rural demagogues competed in issueless campaigns.1

While upper-class groups found it easy to block change, it was virtually impossible for lower-class citizens to sustain a political organization long enough to use the government to fulfill their needs. Urban groups were usually politically impotent, but politicians from the “black belt” farming areas, as the Negro-majority counties were called, wielded power totally out of proportion to their counties’ populations. Inequities, intolerance of dissent, racial discrimination, and extremes of wealth and poverty flourished as nowhere else in America. Shackled by a political system that largely prevented even minimal, gradualist responses to its grave socioeconomic problems, the South had to wait for national forces—the courts, Northern immigration, civil rights and social welfare laws—to compel it to begin again the process of social and political reconstruction.

This book is an attempt to explain the origins of the political system Key described. A complex topic with wide ramifications, it has received less attention than it deserves. As Sheldon Hackney remarked in a recent review article, “One of the unsolved, even unposed riddles of twentieth-century southern politics is why a two-party system did not

develop after disfranchisement.”2 The solution to this riddle, I suggest, lies not in the period after disfranchisement and the establishment of the direct, statewide white primary, but in a study of the movements which sought to bring about those electoral changes. If so, then questions about the genesis of the electoral changes are important to political scientists and historians investigating not only the nineteenth century but also the twentieth.

I have attempted in this book to cover in detail the movements for suffrage restriction in each of the eleven ex-Confederate states. I have also treated intensively the changes in Northern opinion toward suffrage and the South, the identity and objectives of the restrictionists and their opponents, and the purposes and efficacy of the particular alterations in the political rules. My interpretation of the change from the post-Reconstruction Southern political system to the twentieth-century system rests on a thorough analysis of election statistics using a technique heretofore rarely used by historians—Leo Goodman’s ecological regression method.3 By employing Goodman’s method, I have been able to obtain estimates of the percentages of blacks and whites who voted for each candidate, as well as the proportion who did not vote, in every presidential and gubernatorial election and in many primaries and referenda in the South from 1880 to 1910. For most of these elections, these are the first estimates based on a relatively sophisticated statistical procedure that have ever been made. These statistics allow the most firmly based answers that we have so far to such questions as: to what extent did blacks and whites, respectively, favor the Populists? What percentage of voters from each party favored disfranchisement in the various referenda? To what extent did the massive declines in votes turnout represent only the disfranchisement of blacks? To what extent did whites also stop voting?

The ecological regression technique is central to this book in two ways. First, it allows a direct confrontation with the gravest problem

2. “Origins of the New South in Retrospect,” Journal of Southern History 38(1972): 205. After skeptically examining several possible explanations, Hackney suggests that “It may be that a homogeneity of economic interests and culture among whites was the real perpetrator of the Solid South.” Thus, while praising C. Vann Woodward’s Origins of the New South, Hackney seeks to replace its emphasis on class conflict with a consensus version of Southern history.

facing political historians who have to analyze aggregate data, the so-called "ecological fallacy." To state the problem briefly as it arises in the study of elections: it is fallacious to estimate the way individuals voted if all one has is voting totals at the precinct or county level. As I explain more fully in my article on the subject, ecological regression was developed precisely to deal with the ecological fallacy. It is therefore usually preferable to techniques using correlation or shaded maps, the more familiar methods of analyzing relationships between variables. Second, it turns out that to run tests on the data using Goodman's technique, one must closely analyze data from all counties. Such close analysis often uncovers little-noticed trends, and it forces one to explain why the behavior of certain counties deviated from either their past behavior or from the statewide pattern of voting in a certain election. In perusing the data from elections in Florida, for example, I discovered that only a few of the black-majority counties deviated from the typical pattern of statewide Florida voting behavior in the early 1880s, but that the number of such deviant counties increased steadily during the decade. As a consequence, I was not only forced to offer an explanation of the Florida trend, but I was also alerted to the possibility that similar trends existed elsewhere. Carefully employed, then, the ecological regression technique can lead to new hypotheses as well as provide answers to the questions with which the historian begins.

A further advantage of ecological regression is the convenience of the form of the estimates it produces. Every political observer is used to reading survey results which give the percentages of such and such a candidate. Ecological regression estimates are in the same form. Although the statistical procedures used in obtaining both survey and ecological regression estimates of population behavior are seldom perfectly straightforward, the estimates themselves can be presented in a clear, simple manner. It is possible, therefore, to relegate most technical matters to footnotes and appendixes and to keep methodological intrusions in the text to a minimum; I have attempted to do so in this book. One need not be an initiate in the rites of statistics to understand my analysis of Southern politics.

In addition to analyzing election statistics and the crucial roll calls on disfranchisement and related matters in all of the key legislative and constitutional convention sessions, I have read extensively in published
and unpublished sources, including legislative and convention journals and minutes, newspapers, M.A. and Ph.D. theses, and, of course, published books and articles. My examination of the extensive collections of private papers has been limited to the considerable information contained in scholarly writings on Southern history in this period. Given the state of scholarship in the field, it seemed that a large investment in the study of election statistics would earn greater dividends than further investigation of manuscript sources, which have already been extensively mined. I have attempted to cross-check the validity of any single historian’s account by comparing it with other secondary analyses and with newspapers and published government documents. A close comparison of this study with other secondary works will demonstrate that I have not accepted others’ interpretations of primary sources or other data uncritically.

I could not have completed a task as extensive as writing this book without the assistance, often far beyond what I have any right to expect, of many people. The Historical Data Archives of the Inter-University Consortium for Political Research provided me with the election returns on which this book is primarily based. The staffs of the Yale and Caltech libraries greatly facilitated my work by making available numerous and sometimes obscure books, theses, and other documents. The state librarians of nine Southern states forwarded data to me on wealth statistics which I could not have otherwise obtained. The computer centers at Yale and Caltech provided programming assistance and granted essential computer time. The Research Committee of the Humanities and Social Sciences Division at Caltech gave me funds so that my undergraduate research assistant, Bruce Bennett, could help me finish the computations. The secretaries in the division, Joy Hansen, Margaret Robison, Malvine Baer, Edith Taylor, and Connie Viancour, typed most of the preliminary drafts, and all of the final draft.

Several of my then fellow students at Yale gave me helpful comments, especially Jim Green, John McCarthy, and Cam Walker. I also profited from the remarks of Professors Howard Lamar and Douglas Rae during my dissertation colloquium, and from the comments of Professor Michael Holt on the completed dissertation. Three of my colleagues at Caltech, Robert H. Bates, Lance J. Davis, and Daniel J. Kevles, read much of the preliminary drafts, and provided encourage-
ment as well as useful suggestions. Edward Tripp of Yale University Press saw within a too-flawed manuscript the germ of a better one, and encouraged and guided me in the elimination of at least some of those flaws. My copy editor at Yale Press, Nancy Paxton, has a passion for clarity which has, hopefully, overmatched my penchant for obscure constructions. Parts of the book have appeared in different form in *The Political Science Quarterly*, whose editor, Demetrios Caraley, provided several helpful comments.

Like all of his other students, I owe a great debt to C. Vann Woodward. His work provided the stimulus and inspiration for this book, he read and commented on an earlier draft and led me to new insights as well as saved me from errors. Naturally, neither he nor any of the others who read parts of the present work should be held responsible for the mistakes and inadequacies which remain.

Finally, my wife, Sally Ward Kousser, assisted with computations and proofreading, read and criticized the innumerable versions of various sections, and supported me when the burdens of Southern politics seemed least bearable.