

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE POLITICAL ATTITUDES OF
DEMOCRATIC VOTERS IN EASTERN OKLAHOMA¹

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The realignment of southern voters from the Democratic to the Republican Party has sparked considerable scholarly interest. Although Oklahoma is not one of the former Confederate states, it has experienced the same partisan realignment from the Democratic to the Republican Party. The exception is the far eastern section of the state where the 2nd Congressional District is located. This research focuses on that predominantly white region and its resistance to the partisan realignment. We argue that the reason eastern Oklahoma has not realigned with the Republican Party is because of a strain of populism among the population there.

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INTRODUCTION

From the Civil War era to the 1960s most white voters in the southern United States were loyal to the Democratic Party. The Republican Party was the party of Lincoln, the predominantly northern party that had imposed Reconstruction on the southern states after the Civil War.² Southern loyalty to the Democratic Party was not always a reflection of an ideological correlation between northern Democrats, who tended to be progressive and southern Democrats, who tended to be conservative. As early as the 1930s a conservative coalition of Republicans and southern Democrats frequently combined to defeat Democratic legislation that was deemed too progressive.³ Many southerners apparently remained loyal to the Democratic Party for non-ideological reasons—mostly stemming from the historical origins of the Republican Party and the Civil War.

In the 1960s, however, this loyalty began to wane. When President Kennedy, a Democrat, threw his party's support behind the Civil Rights Movement many white southerners were outraged. In 1968, Alabama's George Wallace, a life-long Democrat, ran for president as an Independent. His Independent candidacy was essentially a protest against the Democratic Party's support of civil rights for southern blacks. A large enough proportion of southern white votes were drawn away from the Democratic presidential candidate that a Republican, Richard Nixon, was able to win the presidency despite a large advantage of registered Democrats over registered Republicans among the two parties' electorates.⁴

Over the next four decades the defection of southern whites from the Democratic Party continued unabated. According to many scholars racial issues remained a major cause of white southern dissatisfaction with the Democratic Party (Glaser, 1994, 1996; Kuklinski *et al.*, 1997; Valentino and Sears, 2005), but other issues rose in importance as well.

² Grantham, 1.

³ Shelley, 4.

⁴ Aistrup, 26-29.

The most salient of the non-racial issues were matters of moral (or cultural) policy. Abortion was the most important moral issue, but the Democratic Party lost southern support for its positions on other moral issues as well, as more and more southerners turned to the Republican Party for representation of their views.⁵

Aistrup (1996) found evidence that Republicans have depended on a “southern strategy” that focused on racial and moral issues. He traced the beginning of the strategy to Senator Barry Goldwater’s emphasis on state’s rights in 1964 and on Nixon’s 1968 election assurance to southerners that, if elected president, he would support states’ rights and oppose certain key elements of the civil rights agenda. The strategy eventually progressed, according to Aistrup, so that by the Reagan Administration Republicans were offering to support the religious right’s conservative social agenda in exchange for winning the support of lower- and working-class southern whites. This strategy would be the key to a realignment of the southern electorate from the Democratic to the Republican Party.⁶ In April of 2010, Republican National Committee Chair Michael Steele seemed to confirm Aistrup’s hypothesis in a speech given at DePaul University. Speaking of the Republican Party, which at that time he still chaired, Steele said, “For the last 40-plus years we had a ‘Southern Strategy’ that alienated many minority voters by focusing on the white male vote in the South.”⁷

Scholarship has sought to explain the shift of southern voters to the Republican Party with three main hypotheses. One, as mentioned above, was an attitude of racial resentment on the part of southern whites. Glaser (1994), in his *Race, Campaign Politics, and the Realignment of the South*, argued that race-based issues tend to be what he calls “resentment issues.” Resentment issues define an in-group and an out-group and allow politicians to introduce situations in which policies regarding the out-group can be perceived as threatening to the in-

⁵ Aistrup, 47-59.

⁶ Aistrup, 18-19.

⁷ David Weigel. “Steele’s Biggest Gaffe So Far,” *The Washington Post* (April 22, 2010). http://voices.washingtonpost.com/rightnow/2010/04/steeles_biggest_gaffe_so_far.html (August 14, 2011).

group.⁸ Liberal policies regarding civil rights, criminal justice and welfare are perceived by many white southerners as threatening to their interests.

A second set of studies has focused on the role played by religion (Green *et al.*, 2003; Smith, 1997) in the realignment. Smith (1997), for example, charts the rise of the religious right as a political force, and of the realignment of southern evangelicals with the Republican Party. “There is no better illustration of realignment and the great porousness of American political parties,” Smith claims, “than the rise of the fundamentalist right. Once afraid of partisan politics, self-identified born-again evangelicals now make up almost half of the Republican primary vote, and a quarter of those are members of the Christian Coalition.”⁹ Although evangelical Christianity is not solely a southern phenomenon it is certainly more pronounced in those southern states that make up what is called the “Bible belt.”

A third explanation has been offered by more recent studies that have tested for a connection between the partisan shift and right-wing authoritarian attitudes of intolerance (Slocum, 2007; Slocum and Huffman, 2010) as defined by Robert Altemeyer (Altemeyer, 1981, 1988, 1996 and 2006). Altemeyer (1981) introduced a concept he called “right-wing authoritarianism,” which consisted of three components: a high degree of submission to perceived established authority, aggression against perceived dissidents, and conventionalism, or support for traditional social norms.¹⁰ Slocum and Huffman (2010) argue that “a disposition to extol and enforce social conformity and punish and suppress dissent and difference” have played a role, primarily among white southerners, in the realignment to the Republican Party.¹¹ An authoritarian disposition, according to Slocum and Huffman, is related to a tendency to “stereotype and denigrate minorities and outgroups . . . and support for force and violence in foreign policy and for social control.” Support for the death penalty,

⁸ Glaser, 121.

⁹ Smith, 99.

¹⁰ Altemeyer 2006, 9.

¹¹ Huffman and Slocum, 1.

for example, and other “get tough” measures in crime and punishment that, along with tougher stands on defense, and opposition to equal rights for outgroups, are more reflective of the Republican Party. All three of the above explanatory factors—racial resentment, social conservatism, and intolerance of non-conformity—have likely played some role in the realignment.

The shift of many white southern voters to the Republican Party has been so complete that in four of the past eight presidential elections (1984, 1988, 2000, 2004) Democratic candidates have received no electoral votes in the 13 southern states (the 11 former Confederate states plus Kentucky and Oklahoma)¹², carried only one southern state in 1980, only two southern states in Barak Obama’s win in 2008, and a minority of electoral votes in Bill Clinton’s wins in 1992 and 1996. After the 2010 Congressional elections Democrats controlled only 28 percent of southern House seats and only 15 percent of southern Senate seats.

Today only scattered pockets of the old “solid south” remain, and most of that is in state and local politics. The Democratic Party in Louisiana has had the most success at surviving the defection of southern conservatives to the Republican Party. Pockets of Democratic dominance remain in many other southern states as well. In Oklahoma, the eastern quarter of the state, roughly congruent with the 2nd Congressional District, is the only part of the state that has not completed the transition to Republican Party dominance. Many southern congressional districts that are still controlled by the Democratic Party are minority/majority districts. These are districts that have been gerrymandered so that the majority of voters are black. Very few southern Congressional districts are both predominantly

¹² Although there has always been disagreement about whether Oklahoma should be considered part of the south, the west, or the mid-west, we will treat it as part of the south for the purposes of this research. We believe that we have good reason for doing so since it has experienced the same pattern of Democratic Party dominance, followed by realignment to the Republican Party, that is peculiar to the eleven former confederate states and Kentucky.

white and lean Democratic. This makes Oklahoma's 2nd Congressional District somewhat of an anomaly.¹³

We focus on that predominantly white region and its resistance to the partisan realignment. Why have voters in Oklahoma's 2nd Congressional District stayed loyal to the Democratic Party up until the second decade of the twenty-first century despite the fact that the rest of the state and most of the south have experienced a realignment of voter loyalty from the Democratic to the Republican Party?¹⁴ We argue that the reason eastern Oklahoma has resisted this realignment as long as it has is a strain of populism among the population there, and that this populism is related to the fact that it is one of the poorest regions in the country.

POPULISM IN EASTERN OKLAHOMA

The term populism has been used in a variety of ways. Sometimes it is used to describe a particular ideological perspective. At other times it is used to describe a rhetorical strategy that seeks to appeal to an anti-elitist segment of the population. We use the term in the former sense because our study is concerned with the ideological attitudes of voters. Specifically, by populism, we mean the populism described by historians (Goodwyn, 1978; Hofstadter, 1955; Kazin, 1995), a set of political attitudes similar to those involved in the rural populist movement and the Populist Party in late 19th century America. It consists of a combination of progressive attitudes in regard to government intervention in the economy and conservative attitudes in regard to social and moral issues. As Michael Kazin explains, "A party

¹³ The southern half of the 2nd District is sometimes referred to as "Little Dixie," and Ronald Keith Gaddie traces its Democratic heritage to the fact that the ancestors of its current residents hail from the Deep South, particularly Mississippi. This helps to explain how the region became Democratic, but not why it has remained so, since most of the Deep South, including Mississippi, has experienced the realignment to the Republican Party. "Democratic Party," *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*. <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/d/dc013.html> (May 15, 2011).

¹⁴ Some observers speculate that Democratic dominance in the 2nd Congressional District is due merely to the name recognition of its current U.S. Congressional Representative Dan Boren. This, however, would not explain why, despite Republican dominance of the state legislature, Democrats still dominate the eastern quarter of the state in the state legislature.

based among evangelical rural churchgoers could not help speaking about banishing all agents of corruption—saloon keepers as well as plutocrats.”¹⁵ The late 19th and early 20th century populists were thus in favor of government prohibition of alcoholic beverages as well as government control or ownership of the railroads.¹⁶ They were the opposite of what we think of today as libertarian, favoring government interference in both economic and moral matters. Based on this description a modern ideological populist would favor conservative positions on issues such as school prayer and abortion, while favoring progressive positions on government programs designed to provide citizens with healthcare at low cost or that are designed to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor.

Historically populists of this type have been rural, poor and religious (Goodwyn, 1978). Eastern Oklahomans fit this description well. The 2nd District is mostly rural and is one of the poorest predominantly white Congressional districts in the United States. Its median household income of \$35,990 in 2010 is only 70 percent of the national median of \$52,175. By contrast, Oklahoma’s 1st Congressional District, which borders the 2nd, has a median household income of over \$47,000, or 90 percent of the national average. In fact, Oklahoma’s 2nd District has the lowest median household income and the highest poverty rate of any of the five Oklahoma Congressional Districts. The 2nd District’s 15.4 percent poverty rate is 60 percent higher than the national average of 9.6 percent. The only Congressional District with similar economic numbers in the surrounding region is Arkansas’ 4th Congressional District, which coincidentally, was the only district in that state to go Democratic in the 2010 Congressional election.¹⁷

While most of the southern districts that voted Democratic in 2010 are poor, most also have relatively large minority populations. Few southern congressional districts without significant black populations still elect Democrats to Congress, or elect Democrats to state legislatures. Even those Democratic leaning districts with

¹⁵ Kazin, 39.

¹⁶ Kramnick and Lowi, 801-807.

¹⁷ <http://elections.nytimes.com/2010/house/oklahoma/2> (August 14, 2011).

predominantly white populations, such as Tennessee's 5th Congressional district (around Nashville), still have a significant percentage of blacks. Tennessee's 5th District is 24 percent black, for example, while Oklahoma's 2nd District is only 4 percent black. According to *The Southern Political Report* each of the 21 southern congressional seats lost by Democrats in the 2010 Congressional elections was held by a white, while every district that had a black incumbent returned a Democrat to Congress.¹⁸

We believe that the reason eastern Oklahomans have resisted realignment from the Democratic to the Republican Party, unlike most predominantly white districts in the south, is because of its populism. We also believe that its populism is, in turn, directly related to its poverty. A higher percentage of people in the 2nd District are on some kind of government financial assistance than in Oklahoma's other Congressional districts. In 2010 the 2nd Congressional District's 690,131 citizens made up 18 percent of the state's population. This 18 percent, however, accounted for 24 percent of the state's Social Security recipients and 29 percent of its Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients. If we count those individuals who received both Social Security and SSI, the 2nd District's 18 percent accounted for 32 percent of the state's recipients. In addition, the district's 18 percent made up 30 percent of the state's citizens covered by SoonerCare, the Medicaid and state funded healthcare provider for low income Oklahomans.¹⁹

This greater dependence on public assistance makes it more likely that voters in the 2nd District will support government intervention in the economy. What makes 2nd District Democrats populist, however, rather than simply liberal, is the fact that this economic progressivism is combined with social conservatism. Oklahoma is one of the most socially and religiously conservative states in the union. According to a Gallup Poll, 47 percent of Oklahomans identified themselves as conservative and the state of Oklahoma was placed as one of the top

¹⁸ http://www.southernpoliticalreport.com/storylink_21_1808.aspx (August 14, 2011).

¹⁹ Social Security information is available online at http://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/factsheets/cong_stats/2010/ok.html (August 14, 2011). SoonerCare information is available online at <http://www.okhca.org/WorkArea/linkit.aspx?LinkIdentifier=id&ItemID=12750> (August 14, 2011).

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ten conservative states.²⁰ The highest percentage of self-identified conservatives in the poll was 49 percent of Alabamans. The Cook Partisan Voting Index shows only two states with a more conservative ranking than Oklahoma (Utah and Wyoming).²¹ Although this conservatism is a major factor in the realignment of the state to the Republican Party (Copeland, *et al.*, 2007) we believe this social conservatism has been partially offset in the 2nd District by its economic progressivism.²²

HYPOTHESIS, DATA, AND METHOD

To empirically test our hypothesis that populism has influenced eastern Oklahomans' loyalty to the Democratic Party, we use a survey instrument that measured the attitudes of Democratic voters in Eastern Oklahoma. A group of political science students called randomly selected registered Democrats in eastern Oklahoma between September and December of 2010. The total number of respondents of the survey is 140. A copy of the survey can be found in "Appendix A."

Respondents were asked their gender, race, income, and education. The survey also included questions designed to determine the attitudes of eastern Oklahoma Democrats on economic and social issues, racial resentment, and intolerance. The survey thus consisted of four indices. The economic index asked questions designed to determine each respondent's attitudes in regard to the government's role in the economy. The social index asked questions designed to measure each respondent's level of social conservatism. The racial resentment index was designed to determine non-black respondent's attitudes toward blacks. And finally, the toleration index was designed to test respondent's level of toleration for groups with whom they disagreed or of which they disapproved.

²⁰ January-June 2009 Gallup Daily Tracking Poll at www.gallup.com (May 15, 2011).

²¹ <http://cookpolitical.com/node/4201> (August 14, 2011).

²² Jim Bissett, in his *Agrarian Socialism in America: Marx, Jefferson, and Jesus in the Oklahoma Countryside, 1904-1920*, makes the argument that there was a direct connection between Oklahoma's evangelical Christianity and its economic populism (85-104).

Our analysis of the results of the survey will, first, look to see how ideologically different eastern Oklahoma Democrats are from Democrats in the nation generally. We then use three of the indexes to compare the attitudes of eastern Oklahoma Democrats to southerners in the areas corresponding to the three major hypotheses given by scholars for the southern realignment, i.e., racial resentment, social conservatism, and intolerance. To examine the differences between eastern Oklahoma Democrats and southern voters this study employs the 2009 Winthrop University/South Carolina Educational Television poll, which was taken in the 11 former confederate states.²³ This survey reveals southern voters' attitudes on social and economic issues. In addition, American National Election Study (ANES) and Gallup Poll data will be used to examine the ideological differences between eastern Oklahoma Democrats and all voters in the nation.²⁴ The results of the analysis will show where eastern Oklahoma Democrats stand ideologically in relation to other voters and may help us understand why Democratic Party dominance has survived as long as it has. Finally, we will use the economic and social conservatism indices to see whether populism (economic progressivism & social conservatism) is found among eastern Oklahoma Democrats. The findings may allow us to develop some implications about why eastern Oklahomans have been an outlier in voting behavior.

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of eastern Oklahoma Democrats. Whites (56 percent) and American Indians (32 percent) make up the majority of the respondents of the survey (88 percent). The 2010 U.S. Census confirms that whites (68 percent) and American Indians (19 percent) are the two major races residing in Oklahoma's 2nd Congressional District (87 percent). Regarding education, 24 percent of the respondents answered that they had completed a college education. This is slightly lower than the national average of 27.2 percent reported by the 2010 census.²⁵ In regard to household income, 43 percent of respondents make less than \$25,000 a

²³ <http://www.winthrop.edu/winthropoll/> (May 15, 2011).

²⁴ http://electionstudies.org/studypages/download/datacenter_all.htm (May 15, 2011) and <http://www.gallup.com> (May 15, 2011).

²⁵ Census data indicates that only 14.6 percent of people in the 2nd District have a bachelor's degree or higher.

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year and 69 percent of them make \$50,000 or less annually. Only 26 percent of respondents claimed to make more than \$50,000 a year. Considering that the national median income is \$52,175 in 2010, the findings support the above data that showed Oklahoma's 2nd Congressional District to be one of the poorest predominantly white districts in the country.

TABLE 1

Socio-demographic Characteristics of Eastern Oklahoma Democrats

<u>Race</u>		<u>Education</u>		<u>Income</u>	
White	78 (56%)	Some H.S.	6 (4%)	Less than \$25,000	60 (43%)
American Indian	45 (32%)	H.S. Graduate	25 (18%)	\$25,000- 50,000	36 (26%)
Hispanic	6 (4%)	Some College	74 (53%)	\$50,000- 75,000	19 (14%)
Black	3 (2%)	College Graduate	23 (16%)	More than \$75,000	17 (12%)
Other	8 (6%)	Post Graduate	11 (8%)	Omit	8 (6%)
		Omit	1 (1%)		
Total	140	Total	140	Total	140

RESULTS

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS AND IDEOLOGY

Table 2 shows the ideology of eastern Oklahoma Democrats. Thirty percent of respondents answered that they were liberal, 38 percent moderate, and 29 percent conservative. To examine how ideologically different eastern Oklahoma Democrats are from Democrats in the

nation generally, we compare the ideology of eastern Oklahoma Democrats with that of all Democrats in the nation in a 2009 Gallup poll.²⁶

TABLE 2

Ideological Composition of Eastern Oklahoma Democrats

	All Democrats	Eastern OK Democrats	All OK Voters	Southern Voters
Liberal	37%	30%	13%	20%
Moderate	39%	38%	31%	25%
Conservative	22%	29%	50%	51%
Omit	2%	3%	6%	3%
Total	100%	100%	100%	99%

The results find that eastern Oklahoma Democrats are more conservative than Democrats in the nation generally. Twenty-two percent of all Democrats answered that they were conservative compared to 29 percent of eastern Oklahoma Democrats. Thirty-seven percent of all Democrats said that they were liberal compared to only 30 percent of eastern Oklahoma Democrats.

Because Oklahoma's 2nd Congressional District is poor, our belief is that the greater conservatism of eastern Oklahoma Democrats is social, rather than economic. As we saw above, the median household income of Oklahoma's 2nd Congressional District is much lower than the national average and a higher percentage of people in the 2nd Congressional District are on some kind of governmental financial assistance than in Oklahoma's other congressional districts. We would

²⁶ <http://www.gallup.com/poll/123854/conservatives-maintain-edge-top-ideological-group.aspx> (May 15, 2011).

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expect those who are low income and dependent on government aid to be more economically progressive than those who are not. We also saw above, according to both a Gallup tracking poll and the Cook Partisan Voting Index, Oklahoma is one of the most conservative states in the nation. If our hypothesis is correct regarding eastern Oklahomans' economic progressivism, we expect eastern Oklahoma Democrats to be socially, not economically, conservative. The ideological combination between economic progressivism and social conservatism would suggest that populism is the ideology of many eastern Oklahoma Democrats.

TABLE 3

Attitudes on Social Conservatism

	<u>Defense Spending</u>			<u>Church Attendance</u>			
	EOKD	SD	AS	EO KD	SD	AS	
Spend Less	38%	33%	22%	Not Attend	35%	7%	7%
Keep Same	33%	21%	20%	Attend Occasionally	34%	33%	33%
Increase	29%	38%	51%	Attend Regularly	30%	54%	57%
Omit	1%	8%	8%	Omit	1%	6%	3%
Total	101%	100%	101%	Total	100%	101%	100%

Note: EOKD (Eastern Oklahoma Democrats); SD (Southern Democrats); AS (All Southerners).

Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

PARTISAN REALIGNMENT AND
EASTERN OKLAHOMA DEMOCRATS

To examine whether the signs of partisan realignment can be found among eastern Oklahoma Democrats, we investigate the attitudinal differences between eastern Oklahoma Democrats and southern voters in the areas of social conservatism and racial resentment.²⁷ To measure how eastern Oklahoma Democrats are different from southern voters in the area of social conservatism, two questions about defense spending and church attendance are employed. As in Table 3, eastern Oklahoma Democrats (38 percent) are less likely to favor an increase in defense spending than both all southern voters (22 percent) and southern democrats (33 percent). Meanwhile, 30 percent of eastern Oklahoma Democrats attend church regularly, while 54 percent of southern Democrats and 57 percent of southern voters attend religious service regularly. These findings suggest that social conservatism is not found among eastern Oklahoma Democrats as much as it is found in southern voters generally.

TABLE 4
Attitudes on Racial Resentment

	Eastern OK Democrats	Southern Democrats	All Southerners
<u>Racial Resentment</u>			
Agree	26%	43%	48%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	23%	6%	11%
Disagree	50%	46%	34%
Omit	1%	5%	7%
Total	100%	100%	100%

²⁷ The 2009 Winthrop University/ETV poll did not measure intolerance and, thus, it is not plausible to compare eastern Oklahoma Democrats and Southern voters on that issue.

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In order to measure racial resentment, the following question is used: “It’s really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if blacks would only try harder, they could be just as well off as whites.” As in Table 4, eastern Oklahoma Democrats show far less racial resentment than southern Democrats and southern voters in general: 43 percent of southern Democrats and 48 percent of southern voters agreed with the statement, while only 26 percent of eastern Oklahoma Democrats agreed with it. Fifty percent of eastern Oklahoma Democrats disagreed with the statement, while 46 percent of southern Democrats and 34 percent of southern voters disagreed with it.

The overall findings about social conservatism and racial resentment suggest that eastern Oklahoma Democrats are not as socially conservative and racially resentful as southern voters in general. Lower degrees of social conservatism and racial resentment may be reasons why the signs of party realignment are not found in eastern Oklahoma as much as they are found in the rest of the south. These findings help us to partially understand why the Democratic Party has been able to survive the defection to the Republican Party in Oklahoma’s 2nd Congressional District.

TABLE 5

Attitudes of Eastern Oklahoma Democrats on Economic Issues

	<u>Health Care</u>	<u>Income Gap</u>	<u>Govt. Service in Health and Education</u>
Liberal	73%	59%	71%
Moderate	13%	21%	16%
Conservative	14%	19%	14%
Omit	0%	1%	0%
Total	100%	100%	100%

POPULISM AND EASTERN OKLAHOMA DEMOCRATS

In regard to the question of economic progressivism our survey seems to suggest that it has a lot of merit. Specifically, in response to the question of whether government should help people get doctors and hospital care at low cost, 73 percent of eastern Oklahoma Democrats responded in the affirmative. When a similar query was put to all American voters by the ANES poll in 2008, only 43 percent answered affirmatively.²⁸ Meanwhile, more than half of eastern Oklahoma respondents (59 percent) expressed agreement with the statement that “The government ought to take steps to make sure that the gap between the rich and the poor in America is reduced.” Finally, when asked whether government should provide fewer services in health and education in order to cut spending, 71 percent of eastern Oklahoma Democrats were opposed to this in some degree. In the 2009 Winthrop University/ETV poll of the eleven former confederate states, 63 percent of southerners in general opposed such cuts.²⁹ The results show that eastern Oklahoma Democrats are more supportive of government intervention in the economy than, not only southern voters, but all American voters. The findings thus support our hypothesis that eastern Oklahoma Democrats are economically progressive.

To examine whether the economic populism of eastern Oklahoma is related to its poverty, we investigate the relationship between income and attitudes of eastern Oklahoma Democrats on economic issues. The findings clearly show, in Table 6, that income has a relationship to economic attitude: respondents with a higher income are less likely to support government intervention in the economy. In addition, this relationship applies to respondents regardless of whether they described themselves as being conservative or liberal in the survey. The findings demonstrate that the economic conditions of eastern Oklahoma Democrats affect their attitudes on government intervention in the economy.

²⁸ <http://www.electionstudies.org/nesguide/gd-index.htm#4> (May 15, 2011).

²⁹ http://www.winthrop.edu/uploadedFiles/wupoll/may_21_2009_findings.pdf (May 15, 2011).

TABLE 6

The Relationship between Income and Economic Issues

	<u>Health Care</u>		<u>Income Gap</u>		<u>Govt. Service in Health and Education</u>	
	Cons.	Lib.	Cons.	Lib.	Cons.	Lib.
<u>Income</u>						
Less than \$25,000	43% (13)	43% (47)	36% (17)	46% (42)	44% (11)	43% (49)
\$25,000- 50,000	23% (7)	26% (29)	28% (13)	25% (23)	28% (7)	25% (29)
\$50,000- 75,000	20% (6)	12% (13)	17% (8)	12% (11)	16% (4)	13% (15)
More than \$75,000	10% (3)	13% (14)	13% (6)	12% (11)	12% (3)	12% (14)
Omit	3% (1)	6% (7)	6% (3)	5% (5)	0% (0)	7% (8)
Total	99% (30)	100% (110)	100% (47)	100% (92)	100% (25)	100% (115)

Note: The number of respondents is listed in parentheses.

In regard to the question of social conservatism, the results of the analysis find that eastern Oklahoma Democrats lean toward conservatism on religious issues. In order to measure religious conservatism the question about school prayer is used. When asked whether public schools should be allowed to start each day with a prayer, 49 percent of respondents agreed with the statement, while 38 percent of them did not agree with it. This suggests that eastern Oklahoma Democrats are religiously conservative.

TABLE 7

Attitudes of Eastern Oklahoma Democrats on Social Issues

	<u>School Prayer</u>	<u>Defense Spending</u>	<u>Immigration</u>
Liberal	38%	38%	43%
Moderate	14%	33%	21%
Conservative	49%	29%	35%
Omit	0%	1%	1%
Total	101%	101%	100%

Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

However, the analysis finds inconsistent results on other social issues such as defense spending and immigration. When asked whether defense spending should be increased, 38 percent of respondents disagreed with the statement while 29 percent of them agreed. When asked whether police officers should be given more authority to ask for the documents of a person who looks like he or she could be an illegal alien, 35 percent of respondents agreed with the statement while 43 percent of them did not. In comparison with the 49 percent who favored prayer in school, these relatively lower conservative results may show that the conservatism of eastern Oklahoma Democrats is primarily religious in nature.

The results also find, however, that the number of conservatives on social issues is significantly greater than that of conservatives on economic issues. For the three economic issues, in Table 5, conservatives account for less than 20 percent of the respondents, while the portion of conservatives on social issues, in Table 7, ranges between 29 percent and 49 percent. In addition, when combined, attitudes of eastern Oklahoma Democrats on social issues are almost evenly split between liberal and conservative. On average, 37.7 percent of respondents expressed social conservatism, while 39.7 percent of them answered that they were liberal on social issues. These findings

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suggest that eastern Oklahoma Democrats are religiously conservative but that they are in the middle of the road on social issues as a whole.

TABLE 8

**Attitudes of Eastern Oklahoma Democrats on
Social and Economic Issues**

	<u>Health Care</u>		<u>Income Gap</u>		<u>Govt. Service in Health and Education</u>	
	Cons.	Lib.	Cons.	Lib.	Cons.	Lib.
<u>School</u>						
<u>Prayer</u>	53%	51%	49%	52%	60%	50%
Cons.	(16)	(56)	(23)	(48)	(15)	(57)
Lib.	47%	49%	51%	48%	40%	50%
	(14)	(54)	(24)	(44)	(10)	(58)
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	(30)	(110)	(47)	(92)	(25)	(115)

Note: The number of respondents is listed in parentheses

We next examine how attitudes of eastern Oklahoma Democrats on economic issues are associated with their attitudes on the issue of school prayer to test more rigorously if a strain of populism is found in eastern Oklahoma. In Table 8 we see that the majority of respondents who support government intervention in the economy agree to the statement that public schools should be allowed to start each day with a prayer. For example, 52 percent of eastern Oklahoma Democrats who agree that government should intervene to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor are also in favor of prayer in the public schools. Similarly, 51 percent of respondents who support government intervention to help people get doctors and hospital care at low cost are also in favor of prayer in the public schools. These findings demonstrate that a strain of populism, which is the combination of economic progressivism and social, or at least religious, conservatism is found among eastern Oklahoma Democrats.

Based on the findings about the ideology of eastern Oklahoma Democrats, we conclude that there is a strain of voters among eastern Oklahoma Democrats who are more in favor of government intervention in the economy while, at the same time, are more conservative on religious issues. It supports our belief that the religious or social conservatism of eastern Oklahoma has been partially offset by the district's economic progressivism. The combination of religious conservatism and economic progressivism may explain why the 2nd Congressional district has been able to remain loyal to the Democratic Party as long as it has in spite of the fact that the rest of the state, and most of the south, has defected from the Democratic to the Republic Party.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Why has Oklahoma's 2nd Congressional district, or eastern Oklahoma as a whole, survived defection from the Democratic to the Republican Party? We argue that eastern Oklahoma has resisted realignment as long as it has because many eastern Oklahomans are populists. To empirically test our hypothesis, we investigated the political attitudes of eastern Oklahoma Democrats through a survey designed to measure the attitudes of Democratic voters in the district. The results of the analysis found that eastern Oklahoma Democrats are more conservative than Democrats in the nation as a whole. We also found that, while eastern Oklahoma Democrats are less conservative than Oklahoma voters and southern voters on issues like defense spending and immigration, they are conservative in regard to religious issues. In addition, the findings on racial resentment suggest that eastern Oklahoma Democrats are not as racially resentful as southern voters are in general. Finally, the results of the analysis show that eastern Oklahoma Democrats are economically progressive while being conservative on religious issues. The findings support our argument that a strain of populism has influenced eastern Oklahoma Democrats' loyalty to the Democratic Party.

The findings of this research may also shed light on the impact of the ideology of constituents on the voting records of members of Congress. The populism we find among eastern Oklahoma voters can also be found in the voting records and issue stands of its Congressional representative. The voting records and issue stands of Dan Boren, the current U.S. Representative for Oklahoma's 2nd

congressional district, for example, suggest that he is a populist.³⁰ Similarly, according to the 2005 American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) ratings, which placed members of Congress from 0 (extremely conservative) to 100 (extremely liberal) by their voting records, the score for Dan Boren was 60. This progressive score on labor issues seems to reflect his constituents' populism. In contrast, the current representatives for Oklahoma's 1st, 3rd, and 4th Congressional districts received very low scores from the AFL-CIO, which reflect their constituents' conservative ideology that we found in Table 2.³¹ These findings suggest that the elected officials know well where their constituents stand ideologically and have tried to please them when they cast ballots on policies on the floor. Will the 2nd Congressional district continue to be loyal to the Democratic Party? Nobody knows. Based on the findings of this study, however, we may argue that, at least ideologically, the Democratic Party will be able to survive in the 2nd Congressional district as long as it represents its electorate's populist ideology better than its opponents. If our hypothesis is correct, even if a Republican replaces Boren in the 2012 elections, his Republican replacement will have to take populist policy positions in order to be reelected.

We have to acknowledge that our 2010 survey has lots of room to improve. Our survey had only 140 observations. In addition, our survey

³⁰ A web site plots the ideological positions of members of Congress by determining their position on twenty policy questions. The result places members of Congress on a four-cornered ideological grid that distinguishes liberal, conservative, populist, and libertarian positions. In their assessment of Dan Boren, the Democratic Representative for Oklahoma's 2nd Congressional District, he is shown to be a populist. Available online at <http://www.onthecissues.org/> (May 19, 2011).

³¹ According to the 2005 AFL-CIO ratings, John Sullivan, the Republican Representative for Oklahoma's 1st Congressional district, received a score of 13, Frank Lucas, the Republican Representative for the 3rd Congressional district, also received 13, and Tom Cole, the Republican Representative for the 4th Congressional district, received 14. Available online at http://www.votesmart.org/issue_rating_detail.php?r_id=3202 (May 19, 2011).

measured only registered Democratic voters in eastern Oklahoma. Finally, our survey did not have enough questions to measure respondents' attitudes on social and moral issues adequately, and the toleration index provided inconclusive results. We plan to conduct another survey on all voters of eastern Oklahoma in the fall of 2011. Our 2011 survey will ask questions of Democrats, Republicans, and Independents in the region and include a larger variety of questions designed to measure respondents' attitudes on economic and social issues. Although our 2010 survey and research have some limitations, they do not overshadow its contribution.

Appendix A

Introduction: My I speak to _____. Hello, my name is _____ and I am a student at Northeastern State University in Tahlequah. Political science students, under the supervision of faculty, are doing research by conducting a survey of registered Democratic voters. The purpose of the study is to measure political attitudes and involve what some may consider controversial issues. The entire survey should take around ten minutes. I assure you that strict confidentiality will be maintained and that the results of the survey will be presented in summary form only. Do we have your permission to continue with the survey?

1. Which of the following best describes your race or ethnicity?

- a) White/Caucasian
- b) Black/African American
- c) Hispanic/Latino
- d) Asian/Pacific Islander
- e) American Indian
- f) Other

2. Which statement best describes your education?

- a) Some H.S.
- b) H.S. Graduate/GED
- c) Some College
- d) College Graduate
- e) Post Graduate

3. Which statement best describes your household income?

- a) Less than \$25,000
- b) \$25-50,000
- c) \$50-75,000
- d) More than \$75,000

4. With 1 being extremely liberal and 10 being extremely conservative, how would you describe your political beliefs?

5. Which statement best describes the frequency with which you attend church?

- a) Attend church regularly
- b) Attend church occasionally
- c) Do not attend church

Now I am going to read you some statements. Please tell me on a scale of 1-10 (with 1 meaning you very strongly disagree and 10 meaning you very strongly agree) what your attitude is in regard to each of the following statement.

6. The government ought to help people get doctors and hospital care at low cost.

7. Religion does not belong in the public schools, but rather should be taken care of by the family and the church.

8. The government ought to take steps to make sure that the gap between the rich and the poor in America is reduced.

9. Women should have an equal role with men in running business, industry and government.

10. Defense spending should be increased.

11. The government should provide fewer services in areas such as health and education, in order to reduce spending.

12. Poverty among African-Americans is really a matter of them not trying hard enough; if they would only try harder, they could be just as well off as whites.

13. Public schools should be allowed to start each day with a prayer.

14. The religion of a presidential candidate could affect my vote.

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15. All Americans should be responsible for their own economic well-being and government should not interfere.

16. Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for African-Americans to work their way out of the lower class.

17. Police officers should be given more authority to ask for the documents of a person who looks like he or she could be an illegal alien.

Now, I'd like to ask you about certain groups that some people feel are threatening to the social and political order in America. Would you please select from the following list the one group or organization that you think poses the greatest threat?

1. Atheists
2. Communists
3. Feminists
4. Hispanic Immigrants
5. Homosexuals
6. Muslims
7. Neo-Nazis
8. Other
9. Prefer not to choose

Yes, or no; do you think that a [NAME LEAST-LIKED GROUP JUST IDENTIFIED] should be allowed to:

1. Build a community center in your town?
2. Become a public school teacher in your town?
3. Lead a protest march or demonstration in your town?

Thank you so much for participating in our survey.

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