Stanley P. Berard. *Southern Democrats in the U.S. House of Representatives*. (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), pp 272. $24.95 ISBN 0806133058

Politics in the South has rarely been dull, and has been the object of a great deal of sustained scholarly investigation, perhaps best illustrated by V.O. Key's magisterial *Politics and Society in the South* (1949). Generations of political scientists have attempted with varying success to reconcile southern politics and its many frankly undemocratic impulses within the larger context of American politics. Changes in party strategy and voting patterns portend significant changes for the role of the South in national politics, and for the very nature of southern politics. Stanley Berard's book, *Southern Democrats in the U.S. House of Representatives*, attempts to explain the changing behavior of southern Democratic representatives to the House of Representatives and the changing nature of the southern constituencies that elect Democrats.

Berard is writing about two distinctive worlds. First, Berard relies extensively on National Election Survey data to track changes in the primary and reelection constituencies of southern Democrats between 1973 and 1997. The second world is the legislative world of Congress, where southern Democrats have occupied a distinctive and influential niche from the earliest days of the Republic. That *Southern Democrats* is a doctoral dissertation helps explain its narrow focus and the heavily empirical methodology. Drawing substantially on the work of David Rohde, James Glaser, Earl and Merle Black, and Nicol Rae among others, Berard focused his study on a few empirically testable hypotheses: first, that legislators share voting dispositions with one another based on a confluence of policy preferences; second, that such

confluences of policy preferences among legislators are correlated with similar constituent preferences; and third, that southern Democrats have begun acting in a manner similar to their northern Democratic counterparts can be explained by a growing similarity between northern and southern constituencies.

The principal causes of change in the behavior of southern Democrats are well known; the themes of urbanization, the mobilization of African-American voters, and the rise of competitive two-party competition have been familiar to scholars of southern politics over the past half-century. However, scholars who predicted that the South would follow the same evolutionary path as the North have largely been mistaken, as Berard competently notes. Part of the value of Berard's book is his attempts to link empirically changes in political attitudes and voting behavior to survey data. For example, while Key hypothesized that urbanization would interact with African-American voter mobilization to produce a more liberalized electorate, Berard correctly notes that Key's hypothesis has been only partially born out: the blend of urbanization and large African-American concentrations has displaced but not eliminated traditional southern conservatism that historically characterized traditional southern politics.

Political analysis of the South must inevitably confront the issue of race. Historically, whichever party too closely aligned themselves strategically with African-American interests has found themselves on the losing end of electoral contests. However, the patterns that have manifested themselves in the past may or may not persist. Today, for example, low levels of education and relatively low rates of electoral participation have persisted in the "black belt." The "black belt" is the region running through the center of South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. The black belt is so-named because of the rich soil that facilitated cotton planting and for the high concentrations of African-American population. This persistence in the black belt in combination with redistricting attempts to create majority-minority districts have worked, to some extent, to the favor of African-Americans and Republicans and to the detriment of traditional (that is to say, white) Democratic interests. For those untutored in the intricacies of U.S. electoral politics, "majority-minority" refers to attempts by various state legislatures to draw district boundaries with a majority of African-American populations. While urbanization has produced greater

educational attainment and higher median incomes—and typically more liberal attitudes on certain social issues—southern suburban and urban voters continue to embrace more conservative economic views.

Berard also confirms previous scholarship suggesting that while African-Americans represent the most liberal wing of the Democratic Party on some issues (e.g. economic and civil rights issues), collectively African-Americans reflect conservative attitudes on many social issues (e.g. school prayer, abortion, and civil liberties). Consequently, predicting that the enfranchisement of African-Americans would result in the liberalization of the South confuses the liberalism of African-Americans, and underestimates the degree to which African-Americans are also distinctively "southern" in many of their attitudes.

Berard's analysis of roll-call votes in the House indicates a progressive liberal trend in certain issue areas. Berard aptly notes factors that account for this leftward tilt: redistricting, the realignment of issue-centric partisan activists, the intensification of partisanship in foreign affairs and military policy, an enhancement of the House leadership's ability to offer "cover," and incentives to members on certain votes all figure prominently. At the same time, Berard concludes that predictions of a return to one-party politics—with the Republican Party replacing Democrats—is unlikely. While Republicans will replace conservative Democrats, in all likelihood the South will increasingly reflect the diversity of interests that have always laid dormant in the South, which suggests that neither Republicans nor Democrats can safely rely on the "Solid South" to confer a consistent advantage in electoral politics.

Frankly, Berard does not dare greatly, and this book illustrates some of the troubles associated with converting a dissertation to a book. Berard's use of statistics and national survey data is sound, and he clearly appears to understand the complexities of party politics and the conditional role political parties play within government. That said, the most disappointing aspect of the book is the lack of context that would render the text more accessible to a wider audience. For example, Berard notes that the Democratic leadership has been able to use a number of tactics to persuade southern Democrats to support more liberal policies than their constituencies might have supported; for example, using the amendment process to provide "cover" for members in conservative districts that may look unfavorably on a representative's positive vote.

A few examples of how these sorts of legislative maneuvers are accomplished would have aided a less knowledgeable reader.

In conclusion, the world of southern politics demands an expansive canvas, and the narrow focus of the book seems unduly confining. In particular, the transformation of role of southerners within the Democratic Party deserves more contextual analysis. Attempting to track the vicissitudes of electoral politics with survey data and roll call votes obscures much of what passes for politics in the South. Consequently, while recommending the text for scholars specializing in legislative process and voting behavior, the text seems too narrowly focused and limited for a wider audience that may not be particularly interested in arcane discussions of the nexus between constituencies, representatives, and public policy.

Kenneth S. Hicks
Rogers State University