

VOTING BEHAVIOR IN THE 2012 ELECTIONS:
TOP-DOWN REALIGNMENT IN EASTERN OKLAHOMA

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We examine the voting behavior of voters in eastern Oklahoma in the 2012 elections. We focus on explaining why the top-down secular realignment in eastern Oklahoma is proceeding so much slower than in the rest of the state. With our exit polls of the elections of 2012, we examine which arguments on the causes and nature of top-down secular realignments have explanatory power in eastern Oklahoma. The results of the analysis suggest that several factors, including but not limited to the large percentage of American Indians and a populist disposition among the electorate, affect the slow pace of the realignment in eastern Oklahoma.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research is to examine how voters in eastern Oklahoma cast their ballots in the elections of 2012. In order to empirically investigate their voting behavior, we conducted exit polls on Election Day. Our exit polls (Appendix A) measured the voting behavior of respondents in the presidential, congressional, state senate and state house elections. Voters were asked for demographic information, questions designed to measure their attitudes on a range of economic, religious, and social policy matters, and the reasons why they voted the way they did. Because of monetary constraints we were only able to conduct our exit polls in twenty polling stations in two eastern Oklahoma counties: Adair and Cherokee. Forty pollsters covered the twenty polling stations in the two county areas that had the highest average turnouts.¹

Table 1 shows the split-level, or top-down, nature of the vote amongst exit poll respondents. Republicans garnered over 55 percent of the vote in the presidential² and congressional elections, while Democrats received more than 53 percent of the vote in the state legislative elections.³ Now that a Republican holds the seat in the second Congressional District (CD2), the GOP is not expected to lose it. Clearly a partisan realignment is working its way down in eastern

¹ Although our exit polls were conducted in the two counties, respondents shared similar socio-demographic features, such as partisan voter registration, income, poverty rate, age and the others, with the rest of the 2nd Congressional District (CD2), which encompasses eastern Oklahoma (To get details, see Oklahoma State Election Board, Voter Registration Reports at http://www.ok.gov/elections/Voter_Registration/Voter_Registration_Reports/index.html). Thus, the results of the analysis on voting behavior in this study could represent appropriately that of voters in eastern Oklahoma.

² Statewide, the Republican candidate Romney received 67 percent of the vote, compared to 58 percent in our exit polls of Adair and Cherokee counties. Oklahoma State Election Board, 2012 Election Results, General Election — November 6, 2012: Precinct Level Results. http://www.ok.gov/elections/The_Archives/Election_Results/2012_Election_Results/

³ Voters in the Adair and Cherokee counties have voted Republican in the last several presidential elections, but have voted Democratic in most congressional elections until 2012.

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Oklahoma, but has not reached the state legislative level yet. Or, more correctly, it is not strong enough at the state legislative level to allow Republicans to win. The fact that Republicans are able to do so well in a region where they are outnumbered by a 2 to 1 margin among registered voters is remarkable.⁴

Table 1
Vote Choice in the 2012 Elections

Election	Democratic Candidate	Republican Candidate
President	41.7%	57.6%
U.S. House	39.9%	55.7%*
State Senate	53.6%	45.1%
State House	53.3%	45.9%

Note: In CD2 as a whole, Mullin (R) received 57.3% and Wallace (D) 38.3% of the vote. Oklahoma State Election Board, 2012 Election Results, General Election — November 6, 2012: Precinct Level Results. http://www.ok.gov/elections/The_Archives/Election_Results/2012_Election_Results/

In this paper, we attempt to explain why voters in eastern Oklahoma have been so slow to abandon Democratic candidates in lower level elections. To do this, we empirically test several competing and potential explanations about top-down voting and show which arguments have explanatory power in regard to the vote pattern in eastern Oklahoma.

⁴ In CD2, 63 percent of voters are identified with the Democratic Party, while only 27 percent of voters are identified with the Republican Party. Oklahoma State Election Board, Voter Registration Reports. Accessed on January 8, 2013 at: http://www.ok.gov/elections/Voter_Registration/Voter_Registration_Reports/index.html

TOP-DOWN REALIGNMENT

There has been a well-documented partisan realignment occurring in the southern states for the past half-century (Aistrup 1996; Black and Black 2002; Lublin 2004). The once Democratic “solid south” (Grantham 1992) has become predominantly Republican (Black 2004; Knuckey 2006). The southern realignment has been characterized as both secular and top-down. V.O. Key (1955) originally made the distinction between critical realignments, which occurred quickly in dramatic fashion, perhaps in a single election, and secular realignments, which are gradual and occur over a series of elections. Previous research (Sundquist 1983; Aistrup 1996; Black 2004; Lublin 2004) has verified the secular, or gradual, nature of the southern realignment.

To say that the realignment has progressed in a top-down, or split-level, fashion means that this gradual realignment of southern voters to the Republican Party began at the highest national office—the presidency—and only gradually worked its way down to electing Republicans at the Congressional level, and even later to Republicans at the state and local levels. The majority of southern votes have not been cast for a Democratic presidential candidate since Jimmy Carter in 1976. Democrats, however, managed to hold on to the majority of southern Congressional seats until the 1994 midterm elections. Republicans have dominated southern Congressional elections since then, today controlling 108 of the 149 Congressional seats in the south.⁵ At the state and local level, some Democratic areas remain but, for the most part, scholars feel confident in concluding that the southern realignment is complete (Lublin 2004, 2; Black 2004, 1006).

⁵ By southern states we mean the eleven former Confederate states plus Oklahoma and Kentucky. Although Oklahoma did not achieve statehood until 1907, and thus was not one of the original Confederate states, it is nonetheless, in three main respects, southern. First, during the Civil War most Indian Tribes owned black slaves and sided with the Confederacy (Spencer and Hook 2006). Second, racial relations in the post-Civil War era mirrored those of the southern states. Even after statehood, the use of Jim Crow laws and incidents of racial lynchings in the state were similar to those in such southern states as Mississippi, Alabama and Texas. Third, in terms of partisan loyalties and realignments, Oklahoma followed the same pattern as other southern states in that it was part of the “solid south” post-Civil War attachment to the Democratic Party and is also part of the realignment of southern states from the Democratic to the Republican Party that began in the 1960s.

Of those few areas of the south where Democratic dominance has survived, many are minority-majority districts and most have a relatively high percentage of either African- or Hispanic-American voters. Eastern Oklahoma is somewhat of an anomaly in this regard. Less than 8 percent of the population of CD2 is African- or Hispanic-American⁶ and yet the Democratic Party has managed to survive there much longer than it has in other parts of the south, or of Oklahoma, that have relatively small percentages of African- or Hispanic-Americans. As of October 30, 2012, CD2 had the following partisan registration breakdown according to the Oklahoma State Election Board: 260,436 Democrats (63 percent), 110,170 Republicans (27 percent) and 39,751 unaffiliated/other (10 percent).⁷ While the rest of the state,⁸ and most of the predominantly white regions of the south, had completed the realignment, CD2 had a Democratic member of Congress until 2012, and is still represented in the Oklahoma state legislature by mostly Democrats.

We have little doubt that eastern Oklahoma will eventually follow the rest of the predominantly white areas of the south and complete the realignment to the Republican Party. We are intrigued, however, with why the pace of the realignment is so slow in this region. If we consider just those Oklahoma State Senate and State House seats that are located at least partially within the boundaries of CD2, we find that 88 percent (7 of 8) of Oklahoma State Senate seats are held by Democrats, while only 20 percent (8 of 40) of State Senate seats are held by Democrats in the rest of the state. In the Oklahoma State House, we find a similar story: 76 percent (13 of 17) of State House seats within CD2 boundaries are held by Democrats while Democrats hold only 21 percent (18 of 84) of State House seats in the rest of Oklahoma.

⁶ 2011 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates. <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/searchresults.xhtml?refresh=t>

⁷ Oklahoma State Election Board, Voter Registration Reports. Accessed on January 8, 2013 at: http://www.ok.gov/elections/Voter_Registration/Voter_Registration_Reports/index.html

⁸ Minus CD2, the rest of Oklahoma was 45 percent Republican, 43 percent Democratic and 12 percent Independent.

WHY THE TOP-DOWN VOTE IN EASTERN OKLAHOMA?

INCOME AND AGE

Previous research has pointed out that CD2 is the Oklahoma congressional district with the lowest median household income, the highest poverty rate, and the lowest percentage of college graduates (Min and Savage 2012). We suspect that the slow pace of eastern Oklahoma's realignment could be related to its relatively low socio-economic status. There is some evidence that lower income southerners are the slowest to realign (Abramowitz and Teixeira 2008; Bartels 2008; Berard 2001; Gelman et al. 2010; Rorabaugh 2005; Shafer and Johnston 2009). We will examine whether income affected the slow pace of eastern Oklahoma's realignment.

CD2 is also the Oklahoma congressional district which has the largest percentage of population over the age of 65. To the extent that the slow pace of the realignment is partially explained by the generational effect (Bullock, Hoffman, and Gaddie 2005; Black 2004) then the older average age of eastern Oklahomans may have something to do with the slow pace of the realignment. We will examine whether age affected the slow pace of eastern Oklahoma's realignment.

AMERICAN INDIANS

It is appropriate to ask what affect the relatively large percentage of American Indians in eastern Oklahoma has on voting behavior in the region. According to the 2010 census, American Indians made up 18.8 percent of the population of CD2. This compares with 8.6 percent of the population of Oklahoma as a whole. No other congressional district in Oklahoma had an American Indian population of greater than 6.9 percent. Because our exit polls were conducted in Adair and Cherokee counties, the two counties with the highest percentage of American Indians in the state, we include a much higher percentage of American Indians among our respondents. In regard to race, 64 percent of our respondents were non-Hispanic white and 32 percent were American Indian. Thus only 4 percent were African-, Hispanic-, or Asian-American. One of the anomalies associated with eastern Oklahoma is its slowness to abandon the Democratic Party despite the small

percentage of African- and Hispanic-Americans in its population. Counting American Indians, however, close to 30 percent of the population of CD2 is non-white.⁹

Studies have found that more Indians see themselves as Democrats than as Republicans (DeLoria 1985; Turner 2002; Wilkins 2002) and that American Indians are more likely to identify with the Democratic Party than are whites, but are less likely to identify with the Democratic Party than are African- or Hispanic-Americans (Ritt 1979). We will investigate whether American Indians voted more Democratic than whites in the region, and whether their presence had an effect on the top-down nature of the vote.

POPULISM

Another possible explanation for the slow pace of the partisan realignment in eastern Oklahoma is the region's populism. By populism we are referring to a set of political attitudes similar to those involved in the populist movement of late 19th century America. In other words, the populism described by historians (Hofstadter 1955; Goodwyn 1978; Miller 1987; Kazin 1995). It consists of a combination of liberal attitudes in regard to government intervention in the economy and conservative attitudes in regard to religion. Historically, populists of this type have been rural and poor. The people of eastern Oklahoma fit this description well. The region is mostly rural, and is one of the poorest congressional districts in the United States. Among Oklahoma's five congressional districts, CD2 has the lowest median household income and the highest poverty rate.¹⁰ In our exit polls, we asked respondents their attitudes in regard to economic and religious

⁹ <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-02.pdf>.

¹⁰ CD2's 15.4 percent poverty rate is 60 percent higher than the national average of 9.6 percent. Of Oklahoma's 77 counties, 34 had a median household income of less than \$30,000. Of those 34 counties, 21 (or 62 percent) were located in just one of Oklahoma's five congressional districts: CD2. Thus, just 20 percent of the state's population accounted for 62 percent of its poorest counties. <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/40000.html>.

statements. We investigate whether populism affected the slow pace of eastern Oklahoma's realignment.

RESULTS

INCOME, AGE, AND TOP-DOWN VOTE

In Table 2 we examine how income affected the vote within our polling area. As we can see, the Democratic vote was related to income, with Democrats winning all the elections except for the Congressional race among the lowest income group. The split-level nature of the vote can be seen clearly in the two middle income ranges, with respondents favoring Republicans in national elections and Democrats in state elections. Only the highest income level voted straight Republican at both the national and state levels. Thus the high level of poverty in the region may play a role in preserving loyalty to Democratic candidates, especially in state and local elections.

Table 2
Percentage of the Democratic Vote by Income

Income	<u>Vote</u>			
	President	U.S. House	State Senate	State House
Less than \$25,000	52.45% (150)	47.16% (133)	61.65% (172)	60.95% (167)
\$25,000 – 59,999	41.48% (219)	40.65% (213)	54.06% (273)	52.60% (263)
\$60,000 – 99,999	39.57% (110)	36.56% (102)	52.57% (143)	55.02% (148)
More than \$100,000	28.57% (34)	32.20% (38)	39.47% (45)	38.32% (41)
Total	(513)	(486)	(633)	(619)
χ^2	22.241	10.372	16.479	16.404
<i>P-value</i>	0.000	0.016	0.001	0.001

Note: the number of observations is in the parenthesis.

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The results of the analysis show, in Table 3, that the generational effect does not significantly affect the slow pace of the realignment in eastern Oklahoma. The second youngest group (30-44) voted the most Democratic among all the age groups. In addition, younger generations (18-44) voted more Democratic than older counterparts (45 or older) in the presidential and U.S. House elections. They also voted more Democratic in the state legislative elections than their older counterparts.

Table 3
Percentage of the Democratic Vote by Age

Age	<u>Vote</u>			
	President	U.S. House	State Senate	State House
18-29	45.96% (91)	39.29% (77)	51.79% (101)	49.48% (95)
30-44	46.86% (142)	44.04% (133)	59.25% (173)	59.38% (171)
45-64	39.84% (196)	41.60% (203)	53.77% (257)	53.39% (252)
65 or Older	35.57% (90)	31.73% (79)	48.75% (117)	49.36% (116)
Total	(519)	(492)	(648)	(634)
χ^2	9.413	9.716	6.262	6.858
<i>P-value</i>	0.024	0.021	0.100	0.077

Note: the number of observations is in the parenthesis.

AMERICAN INDIANS AND TOP-DOWN VOTE

Table 4 shows the percentage of whites, American Indians, and other racial and cultural groups that voted for Democratic candidates in the 2012 elections.¹¹ American Indians were more likely to vote

¹¹ As for the racial composition of the respondents in our exit polls, 64 percent of respondents were white, 32 percent identified themselves as American

Democratic than were whites in all of the elections. Even though a majority of American Indians voted Republican in the presidential and U.S. House elections, they were still significantly more likely to vote Democratic in those elections than were the white respondents. In the state legislative elections, the American Indian Democratic vote was between 11 and 14 percentage points higher than the white Democratic vote.

Table 4
The Democratic Vote by Race

Race	<u>Vote</u>			
	President	U.S. House	State Senate	State House
Whites	37.9% (308)	37.3% (300)	49.5% (385)	48.0% (366)
Indians	48.4% (195)	44.1% (177)	60.6% (240)	62.2% (243)
Others	53.9% (28)	49.0% (25)	64.0% (32)	64.0% (32)
Total	(531)	(502)	(657)	(641)
χ^2	18.351	20.232	21.587	30.234
<i>P-value</i>	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.000

Note: the number of observations is in the parenthesis.

In addition, top-down voting was particularly evident among American Indians because over 60 percent of them voted Democratic in the State Senate and State House elections. The gap between the percentage of American Indians who voted Democratic in the U.S. House election (44.1 percent) and the Oklahoma State House election (62.2 percent) was 18.1 percentage points. Similarly when we measured the percentage of voters who voted Republican in the presidential election but

Indian, and the remaining 4 percent consisted of all other racial or cultural backgrounds.

Democratic in the Oklahoma State House election we found that 41 percent of American Indians did so, but only 12 percent of whites. The findings suggest that the large percentage of American Indians in eastern Oklahoma is related to the slow pace of the region's realignment.

POPULISM AND TOP-DOWN VOTE

We first examine voters' attitudes on economic and religious issues. In regard to government intervention in the economy, we asked respondents to express approval or disapproval of three statements: "Government should help Americans get doctors and healthcare at low cost," "The government ought to take steps to make sure that the gap between the rich and the poor in America is reduced," and "The government should provide fewer services in areas such as health and education in order to reduce spending." We consider agreement with the first two statements, and disagreement with the third, as liberal positions. As we can see in Table 5, 58 percent of our respondents took a liberal position on the first statement, 54 percent on the second statement, and 59 percent on the third statement, while only 31 percent, 34 percent, and 26 percent took conservative positions on the three statements, respectively.

Table 5
Voters' Attitudes on Economic and Religious Issues

Issue	Favor	Oppose	Neutral
Government should help Americans get doctors and healthcare at low cost.	57.8%	31.0%	11.2%
The government ought to take steps to make sure that the gap between the rich and the poor in America is reduced.	53.7%	34.3%	12.0%
The government should provide fewer services in areas such as health and education in order to reduce spending.	25.9%	59.4%	14.7%
Public schools should be allowed to start each day with a prayer.	65.1%	17.0%	17.9%
Religion is a private matter that does not belong in the public schools.	30.6%	55.2%	14.2%
We all will be called before God at the Judgment Day to answer for our sins.	77.1%	11.2%	11.8%

Regarding religious issues, we asked respondents their attitudes on three statements: “Public schools should be allowed to start each day with a prayer,” “Religion is a private matter that does not belong in the public schools,” and “We all will be called before God at the Judgment Day to answer for our sins.” We consider agreement with the first and third statements, and disagreement with the second statement, to be conservative positions. As we can see in Table 5, 65 percent of our

respondents took a conservative position on the first statement, 55 percent on the second statement, and 77 percent on the third statement, while only 17 percent, 31 percent, and 11 percent took liberal positions on the three statements, respectively.

As we stated above, for the purpose of this study we define populism as a combination of liberal attitudes in regard to government intervention in the economy and conservative attitudes in regard to religious issues. The overall findings on voters' attitudes on economic and religious issues suggest that the majority of our respondents are economically liberal and religiously conservative and, thus, populist. A closer look at our respondents' choices on the economic and religious indexes confirms this.

Table 6
Ideological Distribution of Respondents

Ideological Positions	Economic Conservative	Economic Liberal
Religious Conservative	Conservative (12.6%)	Populist (31.46%)
Religious Liberal	Libertarian (1.77%)	Liberal (15.97)

Note: Respondents are labeled populist if they took a liberal stand on the economic statements and conservative on the religion statements; conservative if they took a conservative stand on both sets of statements; liberal if they took a liberal stand on both sets of statements; and libertarian if they took a conservative stand on the economic statements and a liberal stand on the religion statements.

When we separate our respondents into populist, liberal, conservative and libertarian categories in Table 6, based on their responses on the economic and religion indexes, we find almost twice as many respondents took populist positions as any other ideological position.

Populists accounted for 31 percent of respondents; liberals for 16 percent; conservatives for 13 percent; and libertarians for 2 percent. The remaining 38 percent of respondents could be categorized as moderates or centrists and they took stands on the six statements that did not fall consistently into any of the four ideological categories.

Next we look at how these economic and religious attitudes were related to respondents' votes, in general, and specifically to the top-down nature of the vote. We distinguished those who took liberal from those who took conservative positions on the economic and religious issues. We then compare the percentage of the votes respondents cast for Democratic candidates in the presidential election and in the state legislative elections.

As we see in Table 7, unsurprisingly, voters who took liberal positions on the economic issues voted more Democratic than those who took conservative positions. For example, 62 percent of respondents who took a liberal position on the first economic statement (D/H) supported Barack Obama, while only 7 percent of voters who took a conservative position voted for him. More importantly, we find top-down voting exhibited between the Democratic vote at the national and state levels. For instance, 62 percent of respondents who took a liberal position on the second economic statement (Gap) supported Barack Obama at the national level, while 74 percent of them voted for the Democratic candidate in the State House election. Just as revealing, however, was the fact that, among those respondents who took conservative positions on the three statements, more than twice as many voted Democratic at the state level as at the national level. These findings suggest that economic liberalism affected the Democratic vote in eastern Oklahoma in the 2012 elections.

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Table 7
Voters' Attitudes on Economic Issues and the Democratic Votes (%)

D/H	Democratic Vote			Gap	Democratic Vote			H/E	Democratic Vote		
	Pres.	SS	SH		Pres.	SS	SH		Pres.	SS	SH
Con.	7.1	18.3	18.4	Con.	7.8	21.0	20.3	Con.	15.8	28.9	29.0
Mod.	34.1	48.1	47.3	Mod.	46.6	59.7	59.8	Mod.	32.0	46.8	46.8
Lib.	61.9	74.1	73.5	Lib.	62.4	73.4	73.5	Lib.	55.7	66.3	65.8
N	1235	1192	1174	N	1233	1194	1175	N	1228	1188	1170
χ^2	312.2	304.0	292.9	χ^2	317.7	279.0	282.7	χ^2	152.5	124.9	118.1
<i>P</i>	.000	.000	.000	<i>P</i>	.000	.000	.000	<i>P</i>	.000	.000	.000

D/H: Government should help Americans get doctors and hospital care at lower cost.

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

H/E: The government should provide fewer services in areas such as health and education to reduce spending.

Pres.: Presidential Election; SS: State Senate Election; SH: State House Election

P: *P*-value

Table 8
Voters' Attitudes on Religious Issues and the Democratic Votes (%)

R/P	<u>Democratic Vote</u>			God	<u>Democratic Vote</u>			Pray	<u>Democratic Vote</u>		
	Pres.	SS	SH		Pres.	SS	SH		Pres.	SS	SH
Con.	26.7	42.2	42.6	Con.	32.9	47.3	47.7	Con.	29.6	43.7	44.8
Mod.	48.6	57.2	56.0	Mod.	59.6	66.9	63.6	Mod.	56.6	64.3	62.2
Lib.	66.1	72.8	71.9	Lib.	83.3	83.1	82.0	Lib.	73.0	79.8	76.5
N	1234	1191	1172	N	1229	1187	1169	N	1234	1193	1174
χ^2	158.6	89.9	79.7	χ^2	147.6	72.2	61.3	χ^2	153.3	98.0	72.7
<i>P</i>	.000	.000	.000	<i>P</i>	.000	.000	.000	<i>P</i>	.000	.000	.000

R/P: Religion is a private matter that does not belong in the public schools.

God: We all will be called before God at the Judgment Day to answer for our sins.

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

Pres.: Presidential Election; SS: State Senate Election; SH: State House Election

P: *P*-value

Table 8 shows, not surprisingly, that voters who took conservative positions on the religious statements voted less Democratic than those who took liberal positions. For instance, only 33 percent of respondents who took a conservative position on the second religious statement (God) voted for the Democratic candidate in the presidential election (Barack Obama), while 83 percent of those who took a liberal position on the statement voted for him. As with the economic statements, we also find evidence of the top-down nature of the vote between the Democratic vote in the presidential election and the state legislative elections. For example, 27 percent of respondents who took a conservative position on the first religious statement (R/P) voted for the Democratic candidate at the national level, while 43 percent of them picked the Democratic candidate in the state Senate election.

DETERMINANTS OF THE TOP-DOWN VOTE IN EASTERN OKLAHOMA

We run a logistic regression analysis to examine more rigorously which factors have explanatory power in understanding the top-down nature of the vote in eastern Oklahoma. The dependent variable of the logistic regression analysis is top-down voting. Taking into account that CD2 is still represented by mostly Democrats in the Oklahoma state legislature, but vote for Republican candidates at the national level, the top-down vote is measured with a dichotomous variable: 1 is assigned if a respondent voted for the Republican presidential candidate (Mitt Romney) and the Republican candidate for U.S. House (Markwayne Mullin) but voted for the Democratic candidates in the Oklahoma State Senate and House elections, 0 if otherwise. According to the results of the analysis, 11.9 percent of the respondents (147/1233) showed the top-down vote in the elections of 2012.

The competing and potential explanations for the top-down vote consist of the main independent variables of the analysis: income, age, American Indians, and populism. For American Indians, 1 is assigned if a respondent identified him/herself as an American Indian, 0 if otherwise. Regarding populism, we employ voters' attitudes on economic and religious issues. For the variables, Economic Issues and Religious Issues, we create an economic index and a religion index. We

create the economic index by accumulating scores on three questions, in Table 7, on government intervention in the economy. A respondent chose one of five categories (1 – 5) for each question and the scores of the index range from 1 to 15. A smaller value of the index indicates that a respondent is more economically conservative. We also create a religion index by accumulating scores on three questions, in Table 7, about religion issues. A respondent selected one of five categories (1 – 5) for each question and the scores of the index range from 1 to 15. A smaller value of the index indicates that a respondent is more religiously conservative.

Following the findings of the past several decades of voting behavior research, several other variables are also employed to examine their effects on the vote: education, ideology, presidential approval, issues of the election (Economy & Federal Debt), and party identification. For ideology, three numerical values are assigned (3 = Conservative, 2 = Moderate, 1 = Liberal). To measure the influence of election year issues on the vote, we include two variables, Economy and Federal Debt, in the model. The variable, Economy, is coded 1 if a respondent chose ‘Economy’ as the most important issue facing the country and 0 if otherwise. The variable, Federal Debt, is coded 1 if a respondent answered that ‘Federal Debt’ was the most important issue. Finally, we also include a variable, State Connection, to measure the influence of a candidate’s connection to the local community on the top-down vote at the state level. It is coded 1 if a respondent responded that ‘The candidate’s connection to the local community’ mattered most in deciding his/her vote in the state legislative elections and 0 if otherwise. Table 9 presents the results of the logistic regression analysis.

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Table 9
Logistic Regression Analysis on the Determinants of the
Top-Down Vote

	b	Odds Ratio
Economy	.308	1.361
Federal Debt	.727***	2.068
Approval	-.634***	.531
Age	.174	1.190
Ideology	.149	1.160
Income	.046	1.047
American Indian	.460**	1.583
Economic Issues	.079**	1.083
Religious Issues	-.135***	.874
Party Identification	-1.519***	.219
State Connection	.889***	2.432
Education	.142	1.152
Constant	-2.636***	-
N		1032
Model chi-square		120.11
Pseudo R2		.152

***: Statistically significant at .01 level.

**: Statistically significant at .05 level.

*: Statistically significant at .1 level.

Of the competing explanations for the top-down nature of the vote, Table 9 shows that American Indians and populism significantly influenced the top-down vote in eastern Oklahoma in the 2012 elections. If a voter was an American Indian, he/she was more likely to vote Republican at the national level and vote Democratic at the state level. Voters' attitudes on the economic and religious issues also affected their vote decisions: to the extent respondents took the liberal position on the economic issues and the conservative position on the religious issues—in other words, to the extent they were populist—they were more likely to vote in a top-down manner. In addition, some control variables, such as the election year issue (Federal Debt), presidential approval, state connection, and party identification, also influenced the top-down nature of the vote in the region. If a voter considered the debt of the federal government as the most important

issue facing the country, disapproved of Barack Obama's job performance, or if the candidate's connection to the local community mattered most for voters' choice in the state legislative elections, he/she was more likely to vote in the top-down manner. Meanwhile, a voter's loyalty to his/her political party affected negatively the top-down vote.

The overall findings suggest that several factors affected the top-down vote in eastern Oklahoma. Voters' concern about the federal debt and disapproval of the job of the president contributed to their decision to vote for Republican candidates at the national level even though they voted for Democratic candidates at the state level. However, the main reasons voters in the region are resisting realignment to Republican candidates at the state level are related to their populist attitudes. In addition, the large percentage of American Indians significantly contributes to the slow pace of the realignment in the region. Over 60 percent of American Indian respondents voted Democratic in the state Senate and state House elections even though the majority of them voted Republican at the national level. These factors, in combination, help to explain why, despite the fact voters in the region vote Republican in national elections, 63 percent of them still register with the Democratic Party and still vote predominantly for Democrats in state legislative elections.

CONCLUSION

We examined how voters in eastern Oklahoma voted in the 2012 elections with exit polls conducted on Election Day at twenty polling stations within Oklahoma's 2nd Congressional District. CD2 is experiencing a secular, top-down realignment from the Democratic to the Republican Party, but it is doing so at a much slower rate than the rest of the state. Respondents to our polls gave a solid majority of votes to Republican candidates in the national elections (President and U.S. House) but still gave a solid majority of votes to Democratic candidates in the state level elections (Oklahoma State Senate and Oklahoma State House).

Our findings suggest several factors that help explain why eastern Oklahoma has been slower to realign than the rest of Oklahoma, and

the rest of the south in those regions with relatively small numbers of African- and Hispanic-Americans. First, the Democratic vote in the region is related to income, with lower income voters more likely to vote Democratic, although we did not find a strong relationship between income and the top-down nature of the vote. We suspect, however, that income could have an indirect relationship with the top-down vote since it affects voters' attitudes on the economic issues. In our exit polls, poorer respondents were more likely to take liberal positions on the economic issues, while all income levels took equally conservative positions on the religious issues. This suggests to us that income could influence indirectly the top-down vote by affecting the region's populist attitudes.

Meanwhile, populism significantly affects the top-down nature of the vote in the region. In the 2012 elections, those who took liberal positions on the economic statements, but conservative positions on the religious questions, were significantly more likely to vote a top-down split ticket. They tended to vote for Republicans in the presidential and congressional elections and Democrats in the state legislative elections.

Finally, the high percentage of American Indians in the region also proved to be a significant factor, both in the tendency to vote Democratic and in the tendency to vote a top-down split ticket. American Indian voters were much more likely than whites to vote for Democrats in state level elections even when they voted for Republicans at the national level. Taking into account that American Indian respondents have lower average incomes than whites, and those with lower incomes are more likely to take liberal positions on the economic issues, i.e., are more likely to be populist, then income, American Indian, and populism may all be inter-related. It is appropriate to conclude, accordingly, that these factors together have contributed to the slow pace of the top-down realignment in eastern Oklahoma.

APPENDIX A

This poll is being conducted by the *Political Science Program at Northeastern State University*

YOUR ANSWERS ARE CONFIDENTIAL

Please check only one response for each question

1. Who did you vote for in the Presidential Election?
[] Barack Obama (Dem) [] Mitt Romney (Rep)
[] Other: Who? _____

2. Which **ONE** of the following mattered most in deciding your vote for President?
[] He cares about people like me
[] His positions on the issues
[] He has the right experience
[] He shares my values
[] Party affiliation of the candidate
[] The status of the economy
[] Other: Specify _____

3. Which do you most identify yourself as?
[] American Indian [] Asian
[] Black [] Hispanic/Latino
[] White [] Other

4. If you are an **American Indian**, which, if any, of the following most influenced your vote for President?
[] your tribal affiliation
[] the endorsement of tribal leaders
[] issues involving tribal sovereignty
[] the party affiliation of the candidates
[] the economic policies of the candidates
[] None of the above

5. Are you:

Male Female

6. Who did you vote for in the 2nd District Congressional Election?

Rob Wallace (Dem) Markwayne Mullin (Rep)

Other: Who? _____

7. Which **ONE** of the following mattered most in deciding your vote in the 2nd District Congressional Election?

My concern about big government

My concern about Medicare and Social Security

My concern about Oklahoma's water resources

My concern about gun rights

Whether the candidate shares my moral values

Party affiliation of the candidate

Other: Specify _____

8. If you are an **American Indian**, which, if any, of the following most influenced your vote for the 2nd District Congressional Election?

your tribal affiliation

the endorsement of tribal leaders

issues involving tribal sovereignty

the party affiliation of the candidates

the economic policies of the candidates

None of the above

9. To which age group do you belong?

18-29 30-44

45-64 65 or Older

10. In the Oklahoma State Senate Election I voted for the:

Democratic Candidate Republican Candidate

Other: Who? _____

11. In the Oklahoma State House Election I voted for the:

Democratic Candidate Republican Candidate

Other: Who? _____

12. Which **ONE** of the following mattered most in deciding your vote for the State Senate and House?

- The candidate's connection to the local community
- The candidate's positions on the issues
- The candidate's experience
- The candidate's moral values
- The candidate's party affiliation
- The endorsement of someone I respect
- Other: Specify _____

13. If you are an **American Indian**, which, if any, of the following most influenced your vote in the State Senate and House elections?

- your tribal affiliation
- the endorsement of tribal leaders
- issues involving tribal sovereignty
- party affiliation of the candidates
- economic policies of the candidates
- None of the above

14. On most political matters, do you consider yourself:

- Liberal Moderate
- Conservative

15. My household's combined income is:

- Under \$15,000 \$15-24,999
- \$25-39,999 \$40-59,999
- \$60-79,999 \$80-99,999
- \$100,000 or More

16. What was the last grade of school you completed?

- Did Not Complete High School
- High School Graduate
- Some College or associate degree
- College Graduate
- Post-Graduate study

17. Do you think the condition of the nation's economy is:

- Excellent
- Good
- Not so good
- Poor

18. Compared to four years ago, is your family's financial situation:

- Better today
- About the same
- Worse today

19. Which comes closest to your feelings about the Obama administration?

- Angry
- Dissatisfied, but not angry
- Satisfied, but not enthusiastic
- Enthusiastic

20. Which ONE of the following issues is the most important facing the country?

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Abortion | <input type="checkbox"/> Federal debt |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Economy | <input type="checkbox"/> Healthcare |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Energy policy | <input type="checkbox"/> Terrorism |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: Specify _____ | |

21. Government should help Americans get doctors and healthcare at low cost.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree | <input type="checkbox"/> Agree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree |

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

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree | <input type="checkbox"/> Agree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree |

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

- Strongly agree Agree
 Neutral
 Disagree Strongly disagree

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

- Attend Church Regularly
 Attend Church Occasionally
 Do Not Attend Church

25. Religion is a private matter that does not belong in the public schools.

- Strongly agree Agree
 Neutral
 Disagree Strongly disagree

26. We all will be called before God at the Judgment Day to answer for our sins.

- Strongly agree Agree
 Neutral
 Disagree Strongly disagree

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

- Strongly agree Agree
 Neutral
 Disagree Strongly disagree

28. Marriages between same-sex couples should be recognized by the law as valid, with the same rights as traditional marriages?

- Strongly agree Agree
 Neutral
 Disagree Strongly disagree

29. Immigrants who are currently living in the U.S. illegally should be provided with a way to gain legal citizenship if they pass background checks, pay fines and have jobs.

- Strongly agree Agree
 Neutral
 Disagree Strongly disagree

30. The decision of whether or not to have an abortion should be left up to individual women.

- Strongly agree Agree
 Neutral
 Disagree Strongly disagree

Please fold questionnaire and put it in the box. Thank you.

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