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Canary in the Coal Mine: The Democratic Party and Split-Ticket Voting in West Virginia

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Abstract

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It is widely accepted that partisan polarization has increased significantly across the United States in the last several decades. Such a change has affected the ability of minority parties to win elections in seats not carried by the presidential candidate of the same party, regardless of office or level of government. West Virginia in recent years has presented an unusual exception. Despite voting for Donald Trump twice by some of the largest margins in the country, Democrats have demonstrated a unique ability to continue to win state legislative districts in the state. This paper is a case study of one of the last states in the country where polarization has not fully taken its toll at the state level. I examine three hypotheses that seek to explain its atypical behavior. First, I compare West Virginia to other ancestrally Democratic states across the South to demonstrate its unique racial history. Second, I explore the extent to which ideology and party registration has an effect on persistent Democratic strength. Third, I assess whether the 2020 elections marked the end of split-ticket voting in the state. Through a variety of analytical designs, I conclude that race and ideology are major reasons that the West Virginia Democratic Party remains consistently able to outperform the national Democratic Party in the state. In addition, I utilize interviews with elected officials and an exclusive set of data from the 2020 election to conclude that, though split-ticket voting is decreasing in West Virginia, it remains surprisingly robust.

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“There are no permanent towns that survive on mining alone. When the tide goes out, when the boom is over, the debris is all that is left... When the town fades, those with money, talent, and initiative generally depart quickly, leaving behind the diehards, the outcasts, the mavericks, or those too old or too sick to move on.”

— U.S. Senator Harry Reid
Searchlight: The Camp That Didn't Fail (1998)

Introduction

Nestled in the far corner of West Virginia's jagged Eastern Panhandle lies the town of Harpers Ferry. When measured by population, it makes little impression—upon last measure, it was the permanent residence of fewer than 300 individuals (U.S. Census Bureau 2019a). Its position of importance in the American historical memory, contrarily, lingers long. In 1859, the eyes of a tense nation rested on the town—then Virginian—as news of an attempted insurrection spread rapidly. John Brown, aided by a small cavalry of men, had sought to storm the Harpers Ferry Armory with the hope of seizing munitions to begin a series of slave revolts across the South (Floyd 1909). Quelled rapidly by U.S. Army General Robert E. Lee, little of Brown's abolitionist vision came to immediate fruition. Regarded today as a "Tragic Prelude" to the infamous bloody conflict which would follow a mere two years later, the raid also underscores the unique political circumstances that led to the birth of the state of West Virginia. In 1863, just four years after Brown's raid, 50 counties—including Harpers Ferry's own Jefferson County—declared themselves independent from Virginia and established an unusual Union haven in what was once Confederate territory. This is, ultimately, a state in a state of confliction—ever straddling the line between North and South.

In modern times, the drive from Washington, D.C., to Harpers Ferry takes hardly over an hour. Well past brilliant city lights and spacious suburban mansions, the small town is preparing to enter its seventh consecutive decade of population loss. As the geographical terrain changes, so too does its economic foundation. To make the brief journey from the nation's capital into Harpers Ferry is to force a confrontation with a painful reality: this state, which lies in the immediate shadow of one of the wealthiest and most powerful cities in the world, is home to some of the most staggering levels of poverty that can be found in the United States.

Poverty's roots in West Virginia are so long that for decades some have posited the occurrence of a blending between poverty and the state's culture (Lohmann 1990). Manufacturing and mining—most prominently of coal—gave the burden of dangerous jobs and low-paying wages performed by men nearly as rugged as the terrain in which they worked. Those industries, along with the state's population, peaked in the 1950s. Their decline has served two principal functions: first, it has brought West Virginia into an almost-constant state of economic depression, with one-fifth of the state's youngest generation today living below the poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau 2019b). Contradictorily, the internal economic struggle—and the external stigma associated with it—has enriched the state's culture, or at the very least accentuated it (Steele and Jeffers 2020).

The broader culture of Appalachia, a region which includes portions of 12 states in addition to the entirety of West Virginia, has been studied by both academics and non-academics extensively. Nearly all of these examinations acknowledge the fundamentally distinct character of the region. My interest, and the pursuit of this paper, is in extrapolation. More specifically, I desire to understand how West Virginia's culture manifests itself in its politics. Elections are, at their core, decisions. One would expect, then, that a state with an outlying culture would produce abnormal political results. Even a mildly close look at electoral data within the state indicates that such a surmise is indeed accurate. With regard to party politics, West Virginia violates a great many rules of the modern political playbook, to which there has never been such great adherence.

West Virginia's Democratic strength was, for nearly fifty years, unmatched on the national scale. In presidential elections from 1932 to 1996, the state voted Republican on only three occasions: during the nationwide Republican landslides of 1956, 1972, and 1984 (Leip

2019). As late as 1996, the thought of a Republican presidential candidate winning West Virginia by 40 points would have seemed nonsensical. In 2020, it was an expectation. At the presidential level, West Virginia is one of the least competitive states in the country, no doubt attributable to its overwhelmingly White and non-college educated population—two groups that have become key to the modern Republican coalition (Morgan and Lee 2018).

Yet as recently as 2018, Democratic life not only persisted there—it thrived. At the state legislative level, no single political party was as capable of winning elections in a state so solidly carried by a presidential candidate of the opposing party. Heading into 2020, Democrats maintained control of the State Treasurer’s office and held one of West Virginia’s two United States Senate seats. Forty-one percent of members of the West Virginia House of Delegates were Democrats, even as just one of 67 districts voted for Hillary Clinton in 2016. As this paper will demonstrate, the numerical differential between said federal and state election results was so anomalous to modern party trends that there could be no denying a distinct regional factor in play.

2020, however, marked a dramatic transformation in West Virginia party politics. Down-ballot, Democrats faced their worst election cycle in nearly a century. Republicans made massive inroads in the state legislature and crushed Democratic challengers for statewide elected offices, including the governor’s mansion (McElhinny 2020). The fact that such a resounding defeat occurred a mere two years after Joe Manchin’s impressive reelection to the United States Senate stands as a testament to the changing nature of the state’s political coalitions. Party polarization appears to have damaged the Democratic brand in the Mountain State. But with nearly a quarter of the State House on track to be represented by Democrats in the next legislative session, it is

evident that there remains at least some level of Democratic overperformance in the state. The question, then, is by how much.

When any part of the United States exhibits voting behaviors that stand in contrast to national trends, it is worth studying. This is particularly true in the twenty-first century's political climate, when national politics increasingly dictates down-ballot success (Jacobson 2016). Appalachia as a whole, and West Virginia most specifically, exhibit voting characteristics atypical enough to beg the question: Why has the Democratic Party retained such a strong foothold at the state level in West Virginia when the Appalachian region has moved exceedingly toward Republicans in national elections? And to what extent is that Democratic power in decline as we enter a new decade of American politics? Attempting to find a meaningful cause of such longtime dominance—and to explain why it has begun to collapse—is the goal of my paper. Perhaps if we can understand what has caused the occurrence of such strange voting behavior in West Virginia, it can provide some insight into what possibilities might exist to cure our excessive national polarization—if there is any indication it can be cured at all.

This thesis will break down the question along historical lines. First, I will explore why the West Virginia Democratic Party in particular maintained dominance after most other Southern Democratic parties experienced periods of rapid decline following the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. With race as my driving factor, I will examine the role of the mass enfranchisement of Black voters in the decaying of Southern states' centuries-long one-party authoritarian rule by Democrats. Then, I will transition to an explanation of how the West Virginia Democratic Party was capable of maintaining competitiveness in elections as recently as 2018, when the party made gains throughout the state. Finally, I will attempt to explore the extent to which Democrats struggled in the 2020 elections and whether or not their party

continues to exhibit a unique state-level strength. Through both quantitative and qualitative methods, including interviews with state legislators, this paper will engage in a detailed exploration of this complex political phenomenon.

Historical Background

Crucial to understanding West Virginia's anomalous behavior in the present is its distinctly different historical relationship with the Democratic Party from other Southern¹ states. Prior to the Civil War, support for pro-slavery Democrats was nearly unanimous across the South. In 1856, every Southern state but Maryland supported Democrat James Buchanan for president (Leip 2019). The Republican Party—which had been created in 1854 on the basis of the abolition of slavery—was so immediately toxic that hardly any Southern state allowed them to be placed on the ballot in presidential contests (Leip 2019). This was true through the election of 1860, though parties that opposed Democrats were routinely left off ballots through the mid-twentieth century. Of course, it is worth reemphasizing the South's troubled definition of "democracy." In this era, no election could capture the voices of the millions of African Americans who remained in bondage.

As the Civil War began, the state of Virginia became enmired in its own internal conflict over the institution of slavery. In May of 1861, 425 legislators from the western part of the state convened in Wheeling to propose the formation of a new state from the rib of Virginia (Fones-Wolf 2007). Heavily mountainous, West Virginia's secession from Virginia had been inspired by a lack of interest in preserving the institution of slavery. This was common throughout much of Appalachia, where hilly terrain made plantation agriculture nearly impossible (Foner 1988). Accordingly, following the state's admission, it abolished the institution of slavery within its

¹ "Southern," in this paper, follows the definition of the United States Census Bureau. It includes the following states and districts: AL, AR, DC, DE, FL, GA, KY, LA, MD, MS, NC, OK, SC, TN, TX, VA, and WV.

borders. From the very moment of its founding, West Virginia’s distinction from other Southern states on the issue of race becomes immediately apparent. The dominant pro-slavery culture in the South was not only absent in West Virginia, but opposition to such a tradition actively spurred it into statehood.

Table 2.1
Presidential Election Results in the South, 1896–1928

Year	AL	AR	FL	GA	KY	LA	MS	NC	SC	TN	TX	VA	WV
1896	D	D	D	D	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	R
1900	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	R
1904	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	R
1908	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	R
1912	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
1916	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	R
1920	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	R	D	D	R
1924	D	D	D	D	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	R
1928	D	D	R	D	R	D	D	R	D	R	R	R	R

When Reconstruction concluded in 1877, every Southern state—including West Virginia—returned to backing the Democratic Party by wide margins (Foner 1988). Among White southerners, support for Democratic candidates was unanimous in these states in the four presidential elections between 1880 and 1892 (Leip 2019). Undeniably, at least part of this return in support was a function of Jim Crow legislation that stripped Black Americans of their right to vote, which had previously been granted in accordance with the Fifteenth Amendment (Black 2004). After a brief flirtation with Democratic control, however, West Virginia quickly abandoned the party, becoming once again solidly Republican. The state voted Republican in eight of the nine elections between 1896 and 1928. In such an overwhelmingly White state, the need to rally behind Democrats—known as the party of White racial superiority in the South—was not nearly as strong as in neighboring states with higher Black populations. As a result,

economic issues—especially with regards to the state’s burgeoning manufacturing industry—became more dominant. As Table 2.1 demonstrates, West Virginia consistently abandoned the Democratic Party during the Fourth Party System, while many Southern states did not.

During that time period, other states overwhelmingly backed Democratic presidential candidates on the basis of their continued support for racial segregation. What ultimately brought West Virginia back into Democratic hands was not the issue of race, but rather of class. Manufacturing and mining had produced a strong working-class union culture within the state, a perfect fit for Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal message in 1932. Impoverished and in desperate need of federal economic assistance during the Great Depression, West Virginia went from backing Republican Herbert Hoover by 17 points in 1928 to Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt by 10 in 1932—a massive 27-point swing in just four years (Leip 2019). Roosevelt’s pro-worker, economic-centered message resonated with the state’s sizable poor population. With the United Mine Workers having grown substantially in strength as a political force, much of the southern part of the state quickly shifted to becoming resoundingly Democratic (Thomas 1998). This electoral pattern was solidified as coal miners were substantially relieved by a number of Roosevelt’s economic initiatives, including the passage of the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933 (Thomas 1998). Contrarily, other Democratic states in the South continued to support Democrats *in spite* of Roosevelt’s big government message. Some of the most ardent opponents of his New Deal programs in Congress were Southern Democratic members of the Conservative Coalition, who largely decried these as federal overreaches (Patterson 1966). Still, the Democratic brand remained strong across the South due to Roosevelt’s general unwillingness to push for national civil rights initiatives.

In the study of American history, the term “Solid South” has been coined to describe the phenomenon of Southern states’ unwavering support for Democratic presidential candidates between the Civil War and the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (Irish 1942). West Virginia, having been dominated by Democrats for much of its history, is often named among those other Southern states that comprised the Solid South. As I have attempted to demonstrate in this section, such a labelling is not necessarily accurate. West Virginia did not have the same shared racial history as other Southern states, dating to its disinterest in slavery. It enacted segregationist policies, but not to the same extreme degrees as in other Southern states because the Black population was so minute. And it consistently broke with the Democratic Party for a lengthy part of its history, returning in 1932 primarily for economic reasons, in contrast to the vast majority of Southern states. While West Virginia may well have been both Southern and Democratic, it often behaved as an independent actor rather than as a member of the traditional Solid South (Hazen 2018).

Theoretical Framework

Scholarly research on Appalachian party strength is, to put it mildly, minimal. This is markedly truer the more distant one ventures from national politics. However, from previous studies on polarization, we can draw conclusions about the historic and current state of political polarization in West Virginia. Any theory that seeks to explain the persistent strength of the West Virginia Democratic Party must first understand its exceptional nature. Literature is nearly unanimous in its agreement that the Democratic and Republican parties have become increasingly polarized at the national level (Carothers 2019). This partisan polarization has been decades in the making, the result of a longtime political, economic, and racial realignment. Accordingly, both parties have moved toward ideological extremes (Hopkins and Sides 2015).

This extremism is particularly stark in Congress, where party polarization is most pronounced—today, even the most conservative Democrat is more ideologically liberal than the most liberal Republican, and vice versa (DeSilver 2014).

Historically, polarization between parties was significantly lower down-ballot than it was at the national level (Abramowitz 2018). One might argue that the frequency of split-ticket voting means it is therefore logical for Democrats to be overrepresented in the West Virginia Legislature. In reality, though the practice of split-ticket voting occurred frequently for much of American history, since 2010 its prominence has sharply declined—a function of increasing negative partisanship (Abramowitz and Webster 2015). While split-ticket voting does still occur at the state level, the amount of it within West Virginia has until quite recently occurred at a rate far greater than in other states, as I will demonstrate later in this paper. A robust mapping of the ideologies of political parties within state legislatures found West Virginia’s polarization levels to be far lower than most other states (Shor and McCarthy 2011). Both West Virginia’s atypically high rate of split-ticket voting and its lack of legislative polarization are present within the data, and are indicative that there is a distinct regional factor that keeps this phenomenon in occurrence.

I propose that a lack of resistance to increasing Black political power is the most influential factor that kept the West Virginia Democratic Party in power into the 2000s, even as most other Southern states dominated by Democrats quickly transitioned to Republicans after 1965. There is significant reason to believe racial dynamics were instrumental to the persistent political dominance of the West Virginia Democratic Party, which lasted into the beginning of the twenty-first century. The role of the Democratic Party in the American South was, for decades, closely intertwined with White racial superiority, an ideology that was abundantly

present in the South following the Civil War (Irish 1942). As mentioned in the previous section, race has long been a less influential factor in West Virginia politics, particularly when compared to other Southern states. With little national intervention to promote any meaningful attempt at democracy throughout the rest of the South, White rule flourished until the 1960s, and was nearly synonymous with the majority party in power. As late as 1952, just shy of 80% of White southerners continued to identify with the Democratic Party, an astonishingly high percentage (Black 2004).

The emergence of an ideological split between the national Democratic Party and southern state Democratic parties tested that longtime strength. By the 1930s, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's had assembled an electoral coalition that was significantly more class-based than the party had been in the South. Southern White evangelicals, northern White ethnics, and nonwhites all backed the president in his quest to overcome the economic depression which had affected the vast majority of the poorest Americans (Irish 1942). As the Democratic Party at the national level grew increasingly diverse, there was greater frustration among Southern Whites. President Lyndon B. Johnson's support for the Voting Rights Act of 1965 marked an important turning point. Not only did the law grant Southern Blacks the opportunity to participate in elections for the first time, but it also sparked a significant White racial reaction that began a period of rapid decline for the Democratic Party in the South.

I theorize that this racial reaction among Southern Whites is what most immediately contributed to the rise of the Republican Party in the South. Likewise, I expect that in states with higher proportions of Black residents, I will find that the Democratic Party at the state level fell out of power quicker than in Whiter states. There is an abundance of reason to believe that race led White voters to flee the Democratic Party in Southern states, thus causing its rapid decline in

the later half of the twentieth century. Jardina (2019) finds evidence that large segments of White voters have historically viewed—and still view—Black political strength as a threat to their societal dominance. As Black voters exercised newfound might following the civil rights legislation of the 1960s, the threat of their power led to the beginnings of a unification of White support behind Republicans. “The story of Nixon’s ‘Southern strategy,’” for instance, “is undoubtedly one rooted in out-group animus” (Jardina 2019). This political change within southern states was not immediate; for years after the passage of the Voting Rights Act, many Democratic candidates attempted to run what some have called “segregated campaigns,” wherein they essentially ran two campaigns—one for their White constituents and one for their Black constituents (Franklin and Block 2020).

Franklin and Block (2020) focus extensively on the decline of the Democratic Party in Tennessee, a Southern state that had once experienced heavy domination by Democrats, much like in West Virginia. Tennessee, however, is significantly more diverse, with a far higher proportion of Black residents. In the years after the mass enfranchisement of Black voters within the state, Republicans were able to “exploit the racial fragmentation of the Democratic Party,” directly contributing to that party’s decline (Franklin and Block 2020). In examining several statewide election results since 2000, they come to the conclusion that one of the most important factors in the decline of Democratic strength in the state is racial polarization. This study is in line with my theory; the lack of racial diversity in West Virginia (where over 92% of the current population is non-Hispanic White) would likely have contributed to a more robust Democratic Party not plagued by internal ethnic divisions.

Others have nonetheless attempted to argue that class was the primary cause of Southern political fragmentation, rather than race (Stonecash and Mariani 2000). There may have been

more reason to adhere to this theory in the immediate aftermath of the mass enfranchisement of Black voters across the South, when Democrats briefly acted as the party of both poor Whites and poor Blacks (Nadeau and Stanley 1993). However, Franklin and Block (2020) push back against this being a major contributing factor for down-ballot polarization, finding that, over time, race came to bisect Southern state politics significantly more than class. Their findings complement others, including my own, which demonstrate that Deep South Whites are more likely to vote Republican than in peripheral South states. This is directly attributable to the counteracting proportion of African Americans within the state (McKee and Springer 2015). Such conclusions provide further grounding for my hypothesis regarding race and the persistent strength of West Virginia's Democratic Party.

Race may have been an important reason why the West Virginia Democratic Party held the bulk of political power through 2000, but it does not alone explain why Democrats remained a forceful minority party in many parts of the state until 2018. For this question, I will be looking to find what distinct cultural factors keep polarization so low in the state compared to other parts of the country. Appalachia has been heavily studied from a cultural perspective, but politically many questions remain about its character—including whether it is a unique political region at all. One study looking at 2004 presidential election data found that there is no data supporting a distinct Appalachian voting pattern (Bickel and Brown 2008). While relevant to my topic, I take issue with a number of aspects of their research. First, their paper emphasizes one national election, while I am mostly looking state legislative and non-federal races, for which I have explained there is often a difference in voting patterns. Second, their study is now quite outdated. At the time it was being written, West Virginia's Democratic strength was not nearly as anomalous as it is now. Several states still had opposition parties that exercised significant power

in state legislatures. Today, that is highly unusual. Politics was far less polarized in 2004, making most of its findings relatively obsolete. Lastly, the study did not focus exclusively on West Virginia, but rather on the Appalachian region as a whole. Though the phenomenon of down-ballot Democratic strength does persist in other parts of Appalachia today (such as in eastern Kentucky), it is far less profound or prominent than it is currently in West Virginia. My study is focusing specifically on the West Virginia example, where the data is much clearer than elsewhere.

Another more recent examination of Appalachian voting patterns, however, did find a distinct set of behavior in the region during the 2008 election (White 2018). They conclude that both race and, importantly, religiosity played a role in Barack Obama's struggles within the region. It is worth pointing out (in relation to my previous theoretical point regarding racial backlash), that despite making gains nationwide in 2008, Obama lost ground from 2004 in two particular regions: Appalachia and the Ozarks, two mountainous areas full of non-college educated Whites. Their finding of the significance of religiosity in Appalachian vote patterns lines up with my expectation that social conservatism is a key player in West Virginia politics—even among Democrats. Thus, one would expect that Democratic candidates who emphasize religiously conservative positions would have uniquely strong appeal within the region. This paper will explore whether or not there is a meaningful difference between the ideology of Democrats in West Virginia and in other state legislative chambers across the South. It will also compare whether there is an ideological difference among legislators in more ancestrally Democratic West Virginia districts where there is now a significant split between the national and state parties in terms of electoral success.

Studies more in line with my theory emphasize looking at regional sub-groups. For instance, since older West Virginians have spent much of their lives during a period of Democratic dominance (and in many cases remain registered Democrats), some studies have found Appalachian identification to be stronger among older voters (Cooper et al, 2010). Exit poll data indicates there is some reason to believe age is a factor; U.S. Senator Joe Manchin's two best groups in his remarkable 2018 win were senior citizens and younger voters (CNN 2018). Earning the backing of senior citizens, a traditionally Republican group in federal elections, is certainly of note.

Though all of these may play a role, I posit that there is a unique "coal culture" that persists throughout the state. Coal was once West Virginia's economic engine, but its presence in there has long delineated the stark lines between coal corporations and miners' unions. Today, West Virginia's low proportion of college-educated residents results in a high number of people who work blue-collar, union-oriented jobs. The result is a distinct ideology—one that unusually combines liberal economic policies with conservative social views due to the strong role of religion among residents.

I theorize that, since many of these conservative voters remain registered as Democrats, they exercise an outsized role on primary elections in the state. Accordingly, the Democratic primary electorate within West Virginia is substantially more conservative than in other states. As I will demonstrate later in the paper, this results in Democratic state legislators who are, on average, some of the most conservative for any state Democratic Party in the country. Appalachia's strong culture of community and mountainous topography breed a distinctly personal brand of conservative Democratic politics that, when coupled with the state's high rates of poverty and union membership, result in an appealing alternative to the more fiscally

conservative Republican Party. Though the 2020 elections represented a major setback in Democratic Party successes, the party has demonstrated a continuing ability to attract ticket splitters to an unusual extent.

Hypotheses and Methods

This paper will consist of three hypotheses that test different aspects of the West Virginia Democratic Party's performance in state legislative elections. First, my goal is to explore how distinct the historical strength of West Virginia's Democratic Party was from other Southern state Democratic parties between the period of 1968 and 2014. My hypothesis is based on the aforementioned theory that West Virginia's shift toward Democrats is rooted in economics rather than a racial backlash, seeing as the state never intertwined itself with slavery to the same extent as other Southern states. My first hypothesis is therefore:

H₁: Southern states with higher Black populations will have experienced a more rapid decline in Democratic Party control of state legislatures following the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

To test this hypothesis, I will perform a cross-cutting analysis in which I compare several Southern states across political and demographic characteristics. I will focus on six southern states in my analysis. Two of these (Georgia and South Carolina) will be from the Deep South region, in which the reliance on slavery had historically been most significant, and where the Black population was the highest as a percent of statewide totals. These two states were selected because of their demographic and regional similarities, but Georgia also acts as a control for urbanization. Atlanta is by far the largest of the cities in the Deep South. If Democratic strength decayed in Georgia at a similar rate as South Carolina, then we can assume the presence of a large, dominant metropolitan area did not immediately act as a factor on party slippage.

The second set of states I wish to compare are Arkansas and Tennessee, which have more “medium” levels of Black population relative to other Southern states. Lastly, I will include two states with “low” levels of Black population (where the Black population is less than 10%): Kentucky and West Virginia, where one would expect Democratic strength to have lasted the longest over the given period of time. All six states are historically White-dominated and deeply Christian, but my expectation is that racial issues have been particularly more salient in the states with greater Black populations than in the Whiter ones.

In order to measure Democratic decline at the state level, my comparison will mostly focus on performance in state legislative elections between 1966 and 2014, as measured by the proportion of seats held within each state’s legislature. I will look at five midterm election years over twelve-year intervals (1966, 1978, 1990, 2002, and 2014) to explore how the Democratic Party continued to perform within state legislatures over time. Midterm years are more informative because presidential election years tend to be more politically polarized with the top of the ticket. In midterm years, state legislative elections get significantly more attention, making these years a more accurate indicator of party strength in legislatures. By comparing across the same years for each state, we can control for the effects of partisan wave elections, since all six states would be equally affected by a national wave. Attempting to compare across distinct years for each state would make this test significantly more difficult to perform, seeing as no two election years are identical. The dependent variable—the percentage of Democrats holding state legislative districts—can be easily compared among states over the time period, and the rate of decline within each state can be calculated. Statistics regarding the number of seats held in state legislatures over the years are easy to find in databases that agglomerate election data, such as Klarner (2018).

I also theorize that Democrats in West Virginia significantly outperform national polarization trends today as a result of ideological characteristics. Though social issues dominate national politics, West Virginia Democrats have retained a distinctly conservative character, coupling economic progressivism with social conservatism. I expect that the lack of a meaningful leftward shift within the party is a result of a Democratic primary electorate that remains significantly more conservative than in other states. The persistence of a Democratic registration plurality in the state until early 2021 is indicative of this point, even as many of those registered Democrats functionally vote in general elections as Republicans. I expect that West Virginia Democrats remain significantly less polarized than other U.S. states, but also that such low polarization—particularly on social issues, such as gun rights and abortion—makes the state’s poorest voters willing to back relatively conservative Democratic candidates. My second hypothesis is as follows:

H₂: The Democratic Party in West Virginia has remained significantly more ideologically conservative than in other states, contributing to higher crossover support among conservative voters.

I will analyze the extent to which this is true by focusing on the same six Southern states as previously mentioned (AR, GA, KY, SC, TN, WV). Cross-comparisons rely on Shor and McCarty’s (2020) extensive database of ideological measurements of state legislature chambers and individual state legislators, which has been updated annually since 1993. This data will provide insight into the extent to which state Democratic parties have moved to the ideological left in the last several decades, complicating their ability to win the conservative voters who were once the backbone of the Southern Democratic Party. Shor and McCarty’s (2020) ideological scores, which are easily quantified, allow for these ideologies to be mapped across the states. I

can use their data to calculate the difference in ideological changes in state legislatures since their dataset began. I also wish to determine where within the state of West Virginia the phenomenon of electing conservative Democrats is most applicable. The Statistical Atlas provides easily accessible data on a variety of demographic and economic characteristics associated with state legislative districts, making comparisons within the state of West Virginia easy to perform. This data can help explain where the phenomenon has persisted in West Virginia, and where it has not.

Lastly, it is worth exploring to what extent the elections of 2020 marked the end of the distinctive West Virginia Democrat. On November 3, the state party endured a significant number of losses in both chambers of the West Virginia Legislature. Republicans picked up 18 seats in the House of Delegates (enough for a 76-seat supermajority) and three seats in the Senate. This is most likely a reflection of the state catching up to national partisanship. However, Democrats continued to outpace Joe Biden in most districts, resulting in a substantially higher share of elected representatives that one might expect in other states.

H₃: Despite national polarization causing down-ballot losses in 2020, West Virginia continues to see atypically high rates of split-ticket voting for Democrats in state legislative elections.

Here, a qualitative assessment can be most insightful. By interviewing Democratic legislators who achieved varying degrees of success in the 2020 elections, my goal is to understand the extent to which national politics complicated the ability of state-level politicians to run independent campaigns, with which the West Virginia Democratic Party has been most historically successful. Such interviews will seek to answer how Democrats navigated the increasing difficulties of party polarization in the state, and will provide insight into what

particular factors they expect resulted in such dramatic statewide losses. These interviews will be supplemented by a statistical analysis of the extent to which Democratic legislative candidates in the state managed to outperform Joe Biden and other national Democratic figures. Both the qualitative and quantitative elements of this section are geared at understanding the current amount of party polarization at the state level. If the parties are moving toward opposite poles in West Virginia, then there is little doubt that state legislative chambers across the United States will only continue being more ideologically divided in the upcoming decade. The Savicki dataset (Appendix B) is crucial for this piece, as it calculated the 2020 presidential election results by state legislative district. This allows for me to easily compare between state level candidates and the top of the ticket, both in West Virginia and in other states.

Testing the Race Hypothesis

One does not need to be an expert in political science to be aware of the precipitous decline Democrats suffered across the South in the wake of the Voting Rights Act. By the time of its passage, the Solid South had been unflinchingly partisan for nearly an entire century. The policies of the Radical Reconstructionist Congresses that followed the dramatic end to the Civil War brought about a blistering racial reaction across nearly all of the South. The policies implemented in the wake of the Civil War were received with a unanimous opposition that exceeded even levels of White support for the Confederacy across the region. As Dewey W. Grantham writes in *The Life and Death of the Solid South* (1988):

“Southern white unity was more apparent after the war than it had been during that drawn-out conflict. The divisions over secession were a source of continuing irritation and bitterness among southerners, and during the war years islands of disaffection developed in various parts of the Confederacy.”

The federal policies of Reconstruction, meanwhile, were opposed vigorously across nearly all segments of the White South. Increasing Black political power was viewed as an

eminent threat. In 1870, the Mississippi Legislature appointed Hiram Rhodes Revels to the United States Senate, making him the first African American to serve in the chamber (U.S. House of Representatives 2021). The rapid ascent of Black individuals to political power in a state where fewer than 10 years earlier they had been held in bondage was perceived by many as a clear challenge to White authority. As is often the case in politics, it is substantially easier to organize in opposition. Grantham (1988) writes:

“Most white southerners feared and resented the basic features of Radical Reconstruction, which they viewed as the source of harsh and vindictive policies, of Republican abuse and corruption, and of black effrontery and southern privation. Southern Democrats set about uniting as many whites as possible in the party of opposition. They made use of economic pressure and social ostracism, chicanery and fraud, intimidation and violence, and a shrewd campaign of racial propaganda, as well as more traditional political appeals.”

As mentioned previously, the conclusion of Reconstruction in 1877 led to a stunningly rapid shift in power across the South. This included West Virginia, where racial issues were substantially more mixed than in other parts of the Deep South but which retained at least somewhat of a Southern character in its independence from Virginia. Backlash to the Fifteenth Amendment in particular helped the Democratic Party seize control of the state in 1870 (Frymer 1999). That year, the party flipped the offices of governor, attorney general, auditor, treasurer, and U.S. senator in addition to both chambers of the state legislature (Frymer 1999). Despite rapid gains, the state quickly returned to Republican control in the 1880s.

Because the historical evidence is clear that the Solid South was formed and persisted on the strength of White opposition to Black equality, one would expect that its decline was as a result of racial dynamics as well. In determining why West Virginia Democrats have retained such strength until recently, it is worth comparing the historical patterns of party control in that state with other ancestrally Democratic states across the American South. I hypothesize that

those states with higher Black populations witnessed the Democratic Party experience a more rapid decline than substantially Whiter states—what I posit to be a “theory of racial backlash.”

To explore whether states with higher Black populations witnessed the Democratic Party experience a swifter defeat, I have chosen to compare party strength across state legislatures for the period of 1966 to 2014. Beginning this analysis in 1966 gives us a framework for where state party strength stood in the immediate wake of the Voting Rights Act. The five elections I examine between those years (1966, 1978, 1990, 2002, and 2014) are all on equal intervals and are all midterm election years. This is deliberate—focus on state legislative elections is heightened in midterm years, whereas often presidential elections dominate down-ballot patterns when they are on the ballot. Considering that this paper attempts to explore how distinct *state* Democratic parties performed in the period after the Voting Rights Act, it makes more sense to rely on non-presidential election cycles as a source of measuring state partisan success.

It is borderline useless to examine political party strength in West Virginia independently. To gather any insight as to the unusual behavior of the Democratic Party in recent elections, it must be compared with states that exhibited similar voting patterns in the preceding several decades. As with West Virginia, much of the rest of the South remained Democratic at the state and local levels between 1966 and 2014. Comparing the rates of Democratic atrophy in state legislatures can provide an initial—though not total—insight into how quickly the party declined across each state.

To assess this change within the context of a racial backlash, analyzing across Southern states with differing proportions of the Black electorate is a necessity. I have chosen six historically Democratic states to compare across the given time period, chosen primarily based on their racial demographics: Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, South Carolina, Tennessee, and

West Virginia. These have been categorized in Table 4.1 as “high,” “medium,” and “low” in terms of overall proportion of the state’s population that is Black. Using Census data from the 1960s to the 2010s, the Black populations of these states can be categorized. Gibson and Jung (2002) have agglomerated this data by state for the period between 1960 and 1990. The U.S. Census Bureau (2010) itself provided the data for 2000 and 2010.

Table 4.1
Black Share of Selected U.S. States by Percent, 1960–2010

State	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	Black %
Georgia	28.5	25.9	26.8	27.0	28.7	30.5	High
South Carolina	34.8	30.5	30.4	29.8	29.5	27.9	High
Arkansas	21.8	18.3	16.3	15.9	15.7	15.4	Medium
Tennessee	16.5	15.8	15.8	16.0	16.4	16.7	Medium
Kentucky	7.1	7.2	7.1	7.1	7.3	7.8	Low
West Virginia	4.8	3.9	3.3	3.1	3.2	3.4	Low

With at least one-quarter of their populations being African American throughout the entirety of the time period, Georgia and South Carolina have been selected as the states with “high” Black populations. Not coincidentally, these states saw some of the harshest implementation of Jim Crow policies across the South prior to 1965. Race was the driving factor in politics through that period, and in both states the Democratic Party retained an iron grasp on political power at nearly all levels of government into the 1960s. South Carolina and Georgia also complement each other nicely for the purposes of this study. For one, South Carolina lacks a metropolitan area that is as sizable or dominant as Atlanta. If rates of decline for Democrats among White voters are generally mirrored between the two states, then we can expect rates of urbanization (and suburbanization) to be a relative non-factor in explaining party transformation over time.

The states with “medium” Black populations—Arkansas and Tennessee—likewise look similar demographically yet different with regard to population distribution. As with Georgia and South Carolina, the Democratic Party in both “medium” states was dominant at the non-federal level well into the 1990s. In Tennessee, however, there remained a strong Republican element in the eastern part of the state, a historical function of pro-Union sentiment during the Civil War. The terrain of east Tennessee was too mountainous for plantation agriculture, and many Whites thus saw little rationale for defending slavery in that region (Foner 1988). Not only is Tennessee more urbanized than Arkansas (due to the presence of Memphis and Nashville), but its Black population is as well. Comparing these states therefore also provides a way to control for urbanization as a potential factor on party transformation. Additionally, the presence of the ancestrally Republican White voters in the east allows for an easy in-state comparison with ancestrally Democratic voters throughout the rest of Tennessee. If Whites throughout the state begin converging in their voting habits to the point where all Whites in Tennessee begin voting similarly (regardless of region), we can expect that race will have played a key role in any newly strengthened partisan-racial split.

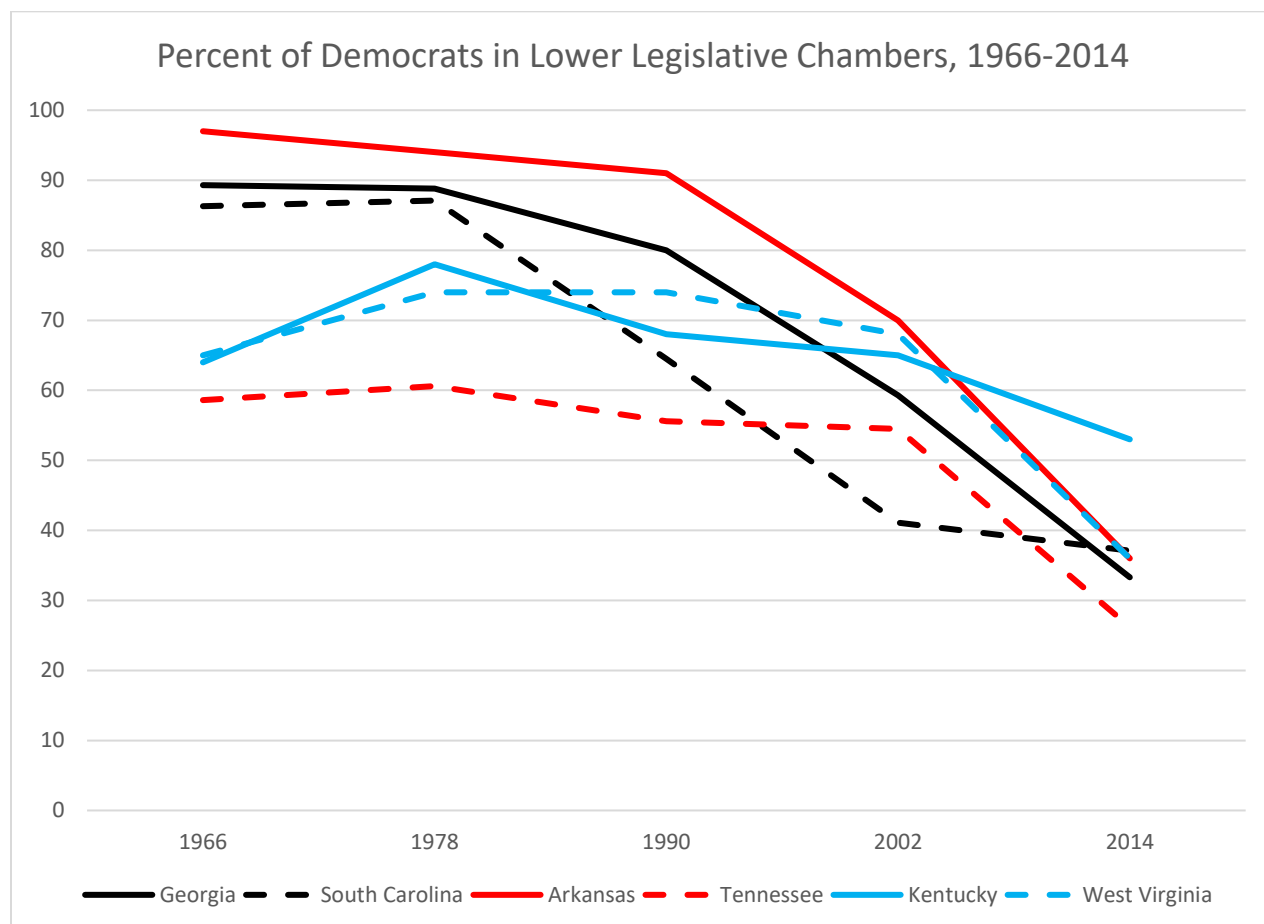
Lastly, the states with “low” Black populations are Kentucky and West Virginia, the focus of this paper. With Black populations consistently less than 8% between 1960 and 2010, the two states bear striking demographic similarities. Additionally, both states are home to an Appalachian, ancestrally Democratic population heavily influenced by coal mining. Politics in Kentucky and West Virginia has historically been distinct from much of the rest of the South—though race was an element in the rise of the Democratic Party to power initially, racial animosity was far less intense than in the Deep South. Accordingly, and in line with my theory, these states will have seen a slower decline among White voters than in the “high” and

“medium” states. Therefore, one would expect to continue to see an element of strength among White Democrats persist in these states well beyond others, such as Georgia and South Carolina.

Table 4.2
Democratic Seats as a Share of Total Seats in Lower Legislative Chambers

<u>State</u>	<u>1966</u>	<u>1978</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>2002</u>	<u>2014</u>	<u>Black</u>
Georgia	89.3	88.8	80	59.3	33.3	High
South Carolina	86.3	87.1	64.5	41.1	37.1	High
Arkansas	97	94	91	70	36	Medium
Tennessee	58.6	60.6	55.6	54.5	26.2	Medium
Kentucky	64	78	68	65	53	Low
West Virginia	65	74	74	68	36	Low

Figure 4.3
Graph of Democratic Share of Seats in Selected State Houses, 1966–2014



State legislative party composition is the measurement utilized to determine state level strength for each party. When looking at tables and figures 4.2 through 4.5, it is immediately apparent how dominant the Democratic Party was in state politics as the Jim Crow era in the South came to its conclusion. With majorities in every state legislature (upper and lower) across all six states, there was hardly any meaningful Republican opposition during the preceding several decades. Among states with greater Black populations (those in the “high” and “medium” categories), that begins to visibly change in the 1990s, and then rapidly accelerate following the election of President Barack Obama. This data was easily obtainable through the Klarner (2018) database. Figure 4.3 provides a visual demonstration of the data displayed in Table 4.2.

This trend is true of both upper legislative chambers (“state senates”) and lower legislative chambers (“state houses”). Table 4.4 and Figure 4.5 demonstrate that the realignment was similarly pronounced in upper chambers. Figure 4.5 provides a visual demonstration of the data displayed in Table 4.4.

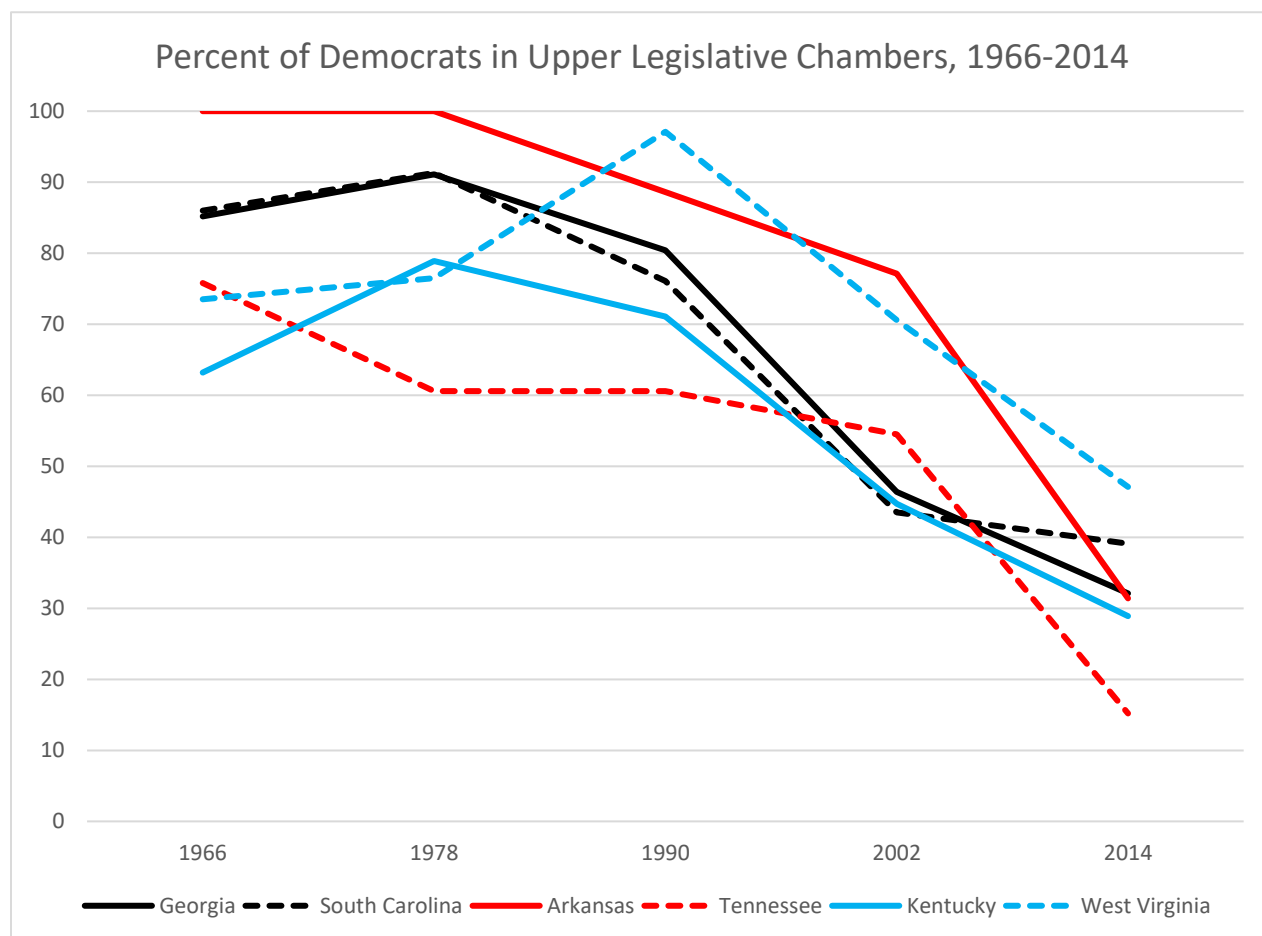
Table 4.4
Democratic Seats as a Share of Total Seats in Upper Legislative Chambers

<u>State</u>	<u>1966</u>	<u>1978</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>2002</u>	<u>2014</u>	<u>Black %</u>
Georgia	85.2	91.1	80.4	46.4	32.1	High
South Carolina	86	91.3	76.1	43.5	39.1	High
Arkansas	100	100	88.6	77.1	31.4	Medium
Tennessee	75.8	60.6	60.6	54.5	15.2	Medium
Kentucky	63.2	78.9	71.1	44.7	28.9	Low
West Virginia	73.5	76.5	97.1	70.6	47.1	Low

When looking at tables and figures 4.2 through 4.5, several elements are worth discussing. Note that in 1966 the states with “high” Black populations began with more Democratic seats in upper and lower legislatures than those in the “low” categories. This provides support for the notion that the Solid South was more “solid” the further into the Deep

South one went. This makes sense; slavery peaked in these states, and they also saw the greatest element of racial strife in the century after the Civil War (Foner 1988). Additionally, while Arkansas and Tennessee initially begin with a rather hefty gap between them, they ultimately converge in 2014 as Southern politics became substantially polarized along racial lines. The similar share of Republican dominance in these states indicates that both Whites who were ancestrally Democratic and Whites who were ancestrally Republican (as in the case of East Tennessee) have split heavily along racial lines. The racial-partisan split in the South has become quite strong over time (Valentino and Sears 2005). This is especially true in the Deep South, providing support for my hypothesis (Valentino and Sears 2005).

Figure 4.5
Graph of Democratic Share of Seats in Selected State Senates, 1966–2014



But these charts are also somewhat misleading. Upon a brief glance, one might be initially tempted to argue that there is evidence that would disprove my hypothesis. This mainly arises from the fact that the states all saw Democratic Parties decline to relatively similar low points by 2014. There are two factors which must be considered that correct this false interpretation. First, the rates of decline in Arkansas, Georgia, South Carolina, and Tennessee were noticeably faster than in Kentucky and West Virginia, where Black individuals are each less than 10% of the population. In the Georgia House of Representatives, Democrats experienced a staggering decline. They went from holding 89.3% of seats following the 1966 midterms to just 33.3% after 2014, a decline of 56 points. In Arkansas' lower chamber, the decline was similar—approximately a 61-percentage point drop. Though Tennessee appears to be an exception, its decline is actually perhaps the most precipitous. Democrats there started out holding hardly over half of the seats in the chamber but fell still by more than 30 points between 1966 and 2014, to a lower proportion than in any other state.

This phenomenon is almost exactly mirrored in upper chambers, indicating that partisan changes down-ballot were widespread and not simply the result of a few exceptional races. The overall share of Democratic seats in the State Senates of South Carolina, Georgia, and Arkansas declined by 47, 53, and 69 percentage points, respectively. Again, the Tennessee Senate was perhaps the most painful decline for Democrats; after holding almost 76% of seats in 1966, they held hardly over 15% of seats in 2014. As with the lower chambers, in no states did Democrats hold a smaller share of the vote in 2014, and indication of the intense racial polarization of the electorate across the South.

Yet in Kentucky and West Virginia, where Black populations had a significantly more limited influence in politics, the declines are substantially less sharp. Both states had a significant

Democratic presence, but they were less influenced by race than in the more heavily Black states. As a result, these two states were less Democratic from the beginning and saw less rapid declines, though the parties did experience losses (as is expected). In the Kentucky House of Representatives, Democratic seats fell by only 11 percentage points between 1966 and 2014. It was the only legislative chamber of the ones examined where Democrats retained full control throughout the entirety of the period studied. The party's decline in the Kentucky Senate was larger, falling by 34 points. But that remains significantly smaller than the losses suffered by the party further South. In West Virginia, the declines were also less severe over the time period studied. Though this is partially attributable to the fact that Democrats in West Virginia simply had less room to fall than in Arkansas, Georgia, and South Carolina, the party maintained quite impressive strength—especially in the West Virginia Senate, where Democrats held almost 50% of the seats in 2014. Their 29-percentage point decline in the West Virginia House of Delegates was also the second-smallest one examined, after Kentucky's.

Looking at how Democrats fell across these states from 1966 to 2014 provides a clear picture of just how significant the losses were for the party down-ballot in the wake of the Civil Rights Act. Comparing across the six states according to the Black share of the population reveals that Whiter states, where racial issues tended to be less salient, saw slower rates of decline than more racially bifurcated states. While it is clear that the Deep South became racially polarized at a faster rate than outside the South, this data still does not provide the robust evidence needed to conclusively assess the extent to which ancestrally Democratic White voters were willing to back the party down-ballot over the given period. After all, these states have markedly different demographics. If Democrats held an equal share of legislative seats in 2014 across all six states, it would not in fact provide evidence of clear racial differences across them.

In order to break this divide down further, it is necessary to assess the frequency of ticket-splitting in the six states studied in 2014, when the realignment has been most completed. Black voters, after all, have remained steadfastly loyal to Democrats in elections since receiving the franchise. Whites, on the other hand, have defected in sweeping fashion. In line with my theory, one would also expect that more racially diverse states would experience greater political polarization along racial lines. If confirmed, it would provide significant support for my hypothesis that West Virginia's high White population plays a role in its persistent down-ballot Democratic strength. After all, if Southern states shared similar levels of racial polarization, one would expect that the vast majority of Democratic-held legislative districts in the South would be in majority-minority districts. Accordingly, West Virginia's state legislature would under this scenario have little-to-no Democratic representation.

To test this, I will compare what percent of legislative districts held by the parties across these states in 2016 corresponded with national political success. This will be done by measuring the proportion of districts in each state that voted differently for president and state legislature in 2016. Such data has been extensively calculated by Daily Kos (2021), who have recorded 2016 presidential election results by state legislative district across every state. My hypothesis implies that Georgia and South Carolina, being the most racially diverse states, would experience noticeably lower split-ticket voting than would White states such as Kentucky or West Virginia. All six states voted for Donald Trump. Only Georgia was a single-digit race. Table 4.6 displays the five states for which data could be collected (they were unable to capture data on this statistic for Arkansas).

Table 4.6
Split Ticket Voting in the 2016 Elections (Presidential and Legislative)

State	Chamber	Split districts	Total districts	Percent of split ticket districts
Georgia	House	16	180	8.89%
	Senate	3	56	5.40%
South Carolina	House	8	124	6.45%
	Senate	5	46	10.87%
Tennessee	House	5	99	5.05%
	Senate	1	16	6.25%
Kentucky	House	20	100	20.00%
	Senate	4	19	21.05%
West Virginia	House	27	67	40.30%
	Senate	6	17	35.29%

Unsurprisingly, Georgia and South Carolina see startlingly low rates of split-ticket voting. In both states' lower legislative chambers, more than 90% of districts voted the same way in the presidential and legislative contests. In the South Carolina Senate, slightly more than 10% of districts were split, hardly a significant difference from the Georgia State Senate.

Interestingly, the Tennessee House of Representatives experienced a lower proportion of split-ticket districts than in any of the 10 legislative chambers studied. This is not altogether unsurprising; outside the Deep South, Tennessee is considered the most racially polarized Southern state (Franklin and Block 2020). Uncontested districts do exist in the data, but they were included in this examination because leaving a seat uncontested is itself a glaring sign of weak party organization within the region. Rates of uncontested districts were also substantially higher in the Deep South states, where levels of polarization are greater.

One look at the Kentucky and West Virginia data indicates that polarization is dramatically different. The Kentucky House of Representatives and Kentucky Senate both had more than one-fifth of districts split between the presidential candidate and legislative

candidates. In the West Virginia Senate, more than one-third of districts up for election voted for Donald Trump and then for down-ballot Democrats. The West Virginia House of Delegates is more complicated to measure because of its use of multi-member districts, but 27 of the state's 67 House districts voted for Trump and then chose to elect at least one Democrat to Charleston. Additionally, 36 of 100 members of the West Virginia House of Delegates were in districts carried by the opposing party (every one of these legislators was a Democrat in a Trump district).

This data lays out the clear pattern I have emphasized throughout this paper: the rates of split-ticket voting in West Virginia are abnormally high compared to other ancestrally Democratic Southern states. It still, however, does not paint a full picture of how race influences party strength. To determine this, I examined what share of Democrats' victories in legislative districts occurred in majority-White districts. My expectation is that fewer majority-White districts in the Deep South chose to elect Democrats when compared with the substantially Whiter states of Kentucky and West Virginia. Using data from the Statistical Atlas—which, through compiling Census data, has calculated racial statistics for every legislative seat in the United States of America—I have determined the extent to which race affects propensity of split-ticket voting across these six states.

The data regarding how each state legislative seat voted for president and state legislature, plus its status as a majority-minority district, was calculated with the assistance of Daily Kos (2021), the West Virginia Secretary of State (2016), and the Statistical Atlas (2021). I have summarized the racial statistics for each seat in Table 4.7, which reveals extensive support for my hypothesis regarding racial animosity being a driving factor in Southern ticket splitting. Arkansas was included in this examination because I will still be able to determine whether districts were majority-minority and whether or not they elected Democrats to office simultaneously.

Table 4.7 is perhaps the most compelling compilation of data in this section.

Table 4.7
Democratic Victories in Majority-Minority Districts in the 2016 Elections

State	Chamber	Dem maj.- min. wins	Dem wins	% of Dem wins in majority-minority districts
Georgia	House	68	68	100.00%
	Senate	17	18	94.44%
	Total	85	86	98.83%
South Carolina	House	34	44	77.27%
	Senate	13	18	66.67%
	Total	47	62	75.81%
Arkansas	House	14	27	51.85%
	Senate	1	4	25.00%
	Total	15	31	48.39%
Tennessee	House	15	25	60.00%
	Senate	1	1	100.00%
	Total	16	26	61.54%
Kentucky	House	5	36	13.89%
	Senate	1	8	12.50%
	Total	6	44	13.64%
West Virginia	House	0	37	0.00%
	Senate	0	6	0.00%
	Total	0	43	0.00%

Already, it has been demonstrated that the Democratic Party in the Deep South declined at a noticeably faster rate than in the Upper South. Likewise, it is clear that split-ticket voting occurs at a remarkably higher rate outside the more racially bifurcated Deep South. Table 4.7, however, conveys the true extent to which Democratic persistence in state legislative elections in West Virginia can be explained by racial factors. In Deep Southern states like Georgia and South Carolina, the Democratic Party—once the principal vehicle for Southern Whites to express their grievances—has become almost completely racially polarized. In Georgia, one single legislator represents a majority-White seat. The diversity of Georgia Democrats’ coalition is well-known

and has been the focus of extensive attention, especially in the 2021 U.S. Senate runoff elections that highlighted the emphasis Democrats now place on racial minorities to carry them to victory. Even in rapidly suburbanizing Atlanta, race is an incredibly dominant force in party politics. In 2016, nearly 100% of state legislators who won did so in majority-minority districts, an incredible indictment of the extent to which racial polarization continues to drive politics in the state. In South Carolina, though the numbers are not as staggering, there remains an enormous gulf between races in state politics. More than three-quarters of Democrats won their seats in majority-nonwhite districts, most of which were majority-Black. There can be no denying the profound influence of racial issues on Whites' migration to the Republican Party.

In the states with “medium” Black populations (Arkansas and Tennessee) the number of Democrats elected in majority-White districts is noticeably higher. In Arkansas, several Democrats managed to win majority-White seats. Parts of majority-White Pulaski County (home to Little Rock) demonstrated a willingness to back Democrats. This was similarly true of Tennessee. Nashville, for example, is a crucial area of support for Tennessee Democrats. The city and its metropolitan area are not nearly as diverse nor as racially polarized as in Deep South cities, such as Atlanta. Democrats managed to win in 2016 in several majority-White legislative districts in the Nashville area. Still the bulk of “medium” state Democrats' legislative victories in 2016 did come from minority-heavy areas, especially in and around the Mississippi River Delta in Arkansas and in Memphis, Tennessee.

The numbers out of Kentucky and West Virginia, where Blacks are hardly significant players in state politics, contrast starkly. In Kentucky, nearly 87% of Democratic legislative victories that occurred happened in majority-White districts. Many of these went heavily for Trump simultaneously, and voters revealed a shocking willingness to split their tickets. Kentucky

State House District 99, a 96% White seat located in the ancestrally Democratic mountains in the eastern part of the state, backed Donald Trump for president 67.88% to Hillary Clinton's 28.36% (Daily Kos 2021). On the same day, House District 99 voted for longtime incumbent Democrat Rocky Adkins by a 66.00% to 34.00% margin. In most parts of the country, such levels of ticket-splitting (an almost 70% gap between races) in this polarized era is unthinkable. This is especially true of states like Georgia, where nearly every single Democrat comes from a majority-nonwhite district.

Lastly is West Virginia, whose levels of split-ticket voting in 2016 are unparalleled. That year, Hillary Clinton only carried 1 out of 84 legislative districts in the state (Daily Kos 2021). Yet Democrats pulled off an astonishing 37 wins in the House of Delegates and six wins in the Senate. Every single one of their victories occurred in majority-White districts. In fact, no legislative district in West Virginia is less than 60% White. The only district in the state that backed Clinton—House District 37 in Charleston—is still 61.5% White (Statistical Atlas 2021). House District 20, located in ancestrally Democratic coal country, backed Trump 81.80% to Clinton's 15.85% while simultaneously reelecting Democratic State Delegate Justin Marcum with 66.65% of the vote (Daily Kos 2021). These results provide powerful evidence that White voters in West Virginia are substantially less influenced by racial issues when compared with more racially diverse states.

The data obtained throughout this section paint a vivid picture of how race has played a substantial role in causing Southern Whites to defect to the Republican Party after a century of unbreakable Democratic support. But these changes have not been uniform. In Georgia, South Carolina, and the rest of the Deep South, the overwhelming support for the Democratic Party today is concentrated among racial minorities, and especially African Americans (Black 2004).

Split-ticket voting occurs extremely infrequently, as race is one of the most predictive factors in determining which party has the upper hand in an election. This is undeniably affected by the long legacy of racial injustice in these states. Beyond the horrors of slavery and lynching, the implementation of less violent tactics such as poll taxes, segregation, and housing discrimination have been at the core of these states' policy decisions for decades (Black 2004).

Further, the notion of stronger racial polarization in the South has long been upheld by qualitative and quantitative arguments. Modern theories of electoral decision-making now heavily factor race into their equations. Candidates who appear to threaten the social status of White individuals tend to scare White identifiers out of supporting them and into supporting White candidates more frequently (Jardina 2019). This explains the rapid fall of Southern Democrats among Whites in the Deep South before, and especially during, the Obama presidency. The contrast is stark in West Virginia, where nonwhite candidates are so rare that they hardly ever occur. The White identities that may exist in West Virginia—which are not as strong as those in the Deep South to begin with—are hardly ever strongly challenged by minority candidates. The clear difference in this regard between West Virginia and other ancestrally Democratic Southern states examined in this section highlights the state's “contested Southernness” (Hazen 2018). It also explains—as this section has demonstrated through scrutiny of electoral statistics over a 50-year span between 1966 and 2016—why West Virginia's politics are so tangibly distinct.

In 1968, George Wallace's presidential campaign was the last gasp of segregationist politics on the national stage. Running a campaign that hoped to throw the election to the House of Representatives, he campaigned heavily in Southern states. His overtly racist campaign had special resonance in the South. While Georgia, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Arkansas each

gave Wallace over 30% of their state's vote, the more peripheral Southern states were less moved by his message (Leip 2019). West Virginia gave Wallace not even 10% of its vote (Leip 2019). The Wallace example is a fitting end to this section by reiterating that explicitly racist policy tactics were simply not as salient in West Virginia as in the rest of the states studied, where African Americans were far greater shares of the voting electorate.

Testing the Ideology Hypothesis

One factor that could explain why Democrats in West Virginia persist in their strength down-ballot is that they retain an ideologically distinct character from the national Democratic Party. Though polarization has reached new heights along national fault lines, the high occurrence of split-ticket voting in the state demonstrates that there is something unique about West Virginia Democrats when compared to national Democrats. This difference allows the state party to maintain its appeal among conservative White-working class voters who comprise the vast majority of the state's electorate, and who have swung enormously toward Republicans at the federal level in recent years.

From a theoretical perspective, it is logical that a significant state-level ideological variance could provide a meaningful explanation for the phenomenon in question. For one, Democrats were ardent supporters of the coal industry through 2015, when they lost control of their legislative majorities (Martinson 2014). During their more than 80 years in power in the state, they defended coal miners' jobs, in addition to other traditionally conservative public policies. Democratic trifectas (the simultaneous control of both chambers of a state's legislature and its governorship) took steps to protect gun rights, oppose same-sex marriage, and restrict access to abortion, even as the national party took opposite stances on these issues. As recently

as 2020, Democratic candidates for the West Virginia Senate ran ads touting their pro-gun and anti-abortion stances (Rodighiero 2020).

I hypothesize that the Democratic Party in West Virginia retains, even today, an atypically conservative character. I also suggest that this ideology is propelled by a Democratic primary electorate that is unusually conservative, causing more conservative candidates to emerge in general elections. In turn, such conservative Democratic candidates will be especially appealing to longtime party affiliates, who retain their partisan identity despite the leftward shift of the national Democratic Party. I expect that the state's semi-closed primary system plays at least some role, as it requires that registered Democrats vote in Democratic primaries.

Party registration in West Virginia is a poor predictor of vote share in federal elections. Despite six consecutive Republican presidential victories in the state, Republicans only assumed a plurality of registered voters in the state in early 2021 (Raby 2021). As of February 2021, Republican registrants comprise 37.05% of West Virginia's voters, while Democrats trail closely behind with 36.26% (West Virginia 2021). Because of West Virginia's aging population and historical legacy of Democratic strength, several communities in the state—especially among older voters—have been slow to change their party registration from Democratic to Republican. In Boone County, located in the state's southern coalfields, Democrats continue to nearly double Republicans among party registrants (West Virginia 2021). Despite this, Boone County voted for Donald Trump by more than 50 points in 2020, giving him 75.6% of the vote to Joe Biden's 22.7%. The high occurrences of ancestral party registrants are persistent especially throughout regions where the Democratic Party had historical strength. It should be noted that Boone County voted Democratic in every presidential election between 1976 and 2008 (Leip 2019). Similar examples can be found throughout the state. In fact, Democrats currently retain a voter

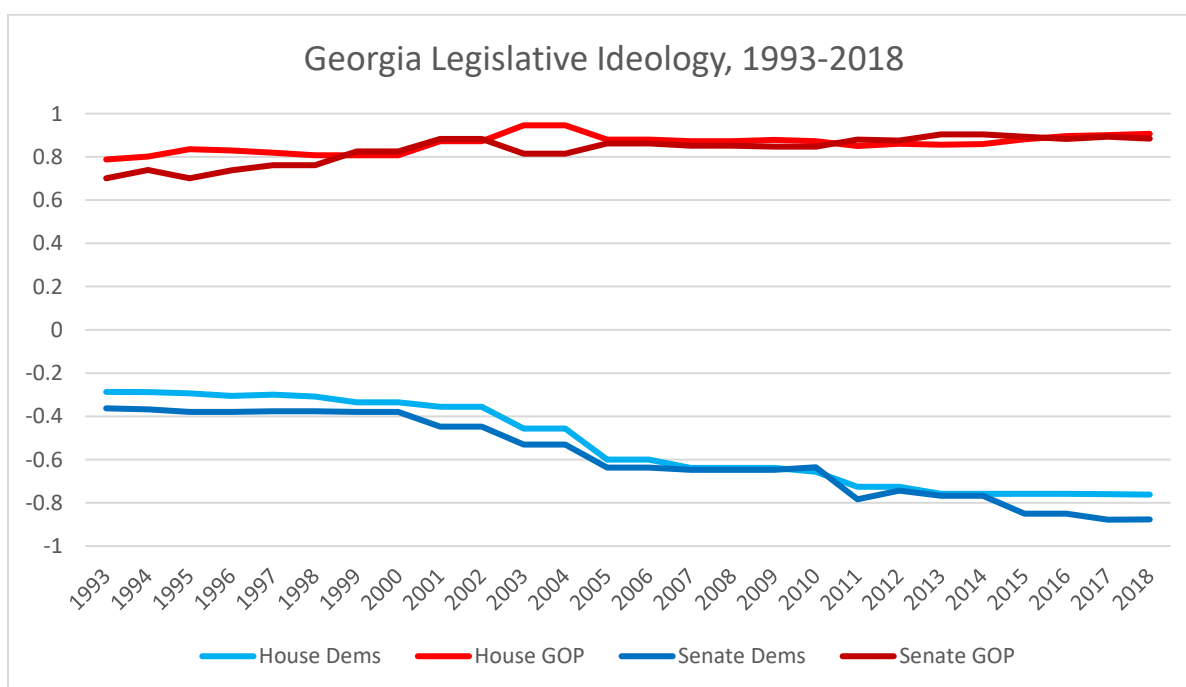
registration advantage over Republicans in 26 of the state's 55 counties—just shy of half (West Virginia Secretary of State 2021).

I will analyze the extent to which this hypothesis is true by comparing ideological scores of West Virginia's legislators across several of the states examined in the previous section. This can be done thanks to the extensive ideological mapping of state legislators done by Shor and McCarty (2020). Through rigorous, extensive analysis of roll call votes, Shor and McCarty (2020) have published annual updates of the ideologies of state legislative chambers, state legislative party caucuses, and individual state legislators in nearly every state since the 1990s. This allows for a comprehensive, chronological comparison both across and within states that determines the extent to which ideological transformation has occurred since the 1990s (Shor and McCarty 2011).

As the previous section demonstrated, Democrats continued to hold majorities in Southern state legislatures in the 1990s, albeit by reduced margins from preceding decades. Over the last 25 years, their declines have occurred dramatically. Southern White voters leaving the Democratic Party for the Republican Party caused a substantial shift in the ideological leanings of state legislatures. In most states, the parties have sorted along ideological lines, such that Democrats have moved noticeably to the left while Republicans have moved heavily to the right. The question being assessed in this section is whether such a same pattern has occurred in West Virginia, where I hypothesize Democrats retain a uniquely conservative set of policy positions, particularly on social issues. I call this phenomenon “coal culture”—one that continues to support more mainstream Democratic positions on economic issues while rejecting more socially conservative ones at a higher rate.

Across the South, the parties' demographic and ideological transformations were stark. Georgia provides a clear example of this rapid shift. In 1993, when Shor and McCarty began tracking legislative ideology data, Democrats held 69.6% of seats in the Georgia State Senate and 71.1% of seats in the Georgia House of Representatives. Over time, as Southern White voters became the backbone of the GOP, Democrats' coalition became substantially more reliant on minorities and educated liberals. The ideological makeup of both parties shifted rapidly, as evidenced by Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1



Both parties in Georgia have moved further toward the extremes since 1993. However, this trend did not happen evenly. Georgia House Republicans had a median ideological score of 0.788 in 1993 as measured by Shor & McCarty (with a score of “0” implying the ideological center). By 2018, the Georgia House Republican Caucus had moved right, averaging an ideology of 0.907. This pales in comparison to the Democrats, whose ideological leanings have shifted to the left with the loss of scores of rural conservatives. Georgia’s House Democrats were hardly

left of center in 1993, measuring an ideology of -0.287 . At the time, Democrats governed a far more moderate coalition than the GOP. The heavy losses of their conservative members in the 2000s meant that liberal minorities and educated urbanites became the new backbone of the Democratic Party. Accordingly, legislative Democrats shifted rapidly to the left.

The same is true of South Carolina and Tennessee (Shor and McCarty 2020). In 1993, Democrats in the South Carolina House of Representatives registered a median ideology score of -0.121 , indicating the caucus was just to the right of center. By 2018, this had become noticeably more liberal, with a median score of -0.699 . South Carolina Senate Democrats shifted to the left as well, from -0.204 to -0.643 . Republicans shifted right in tandem. Though already very conservative, South Carolina House Republicans went from a score of 0.870 to 0.951 , a clear move rightward. This shift was even more stark in the South Carolina Senate, with Republicans going from an initial score of 0.669 in 1993 to an incredibly high score of 1.03 in 2018. South Carolina Senate Republicans have quickly become one of the most conservative legislative caucuses in the entire United States, a dramatic shift from twenty-five years prior. Similar patterns can be examined in Tennessee, where both State House and State Senate Democrats moved substantially to the left while State House and State Senate Republicans moved further to the right.

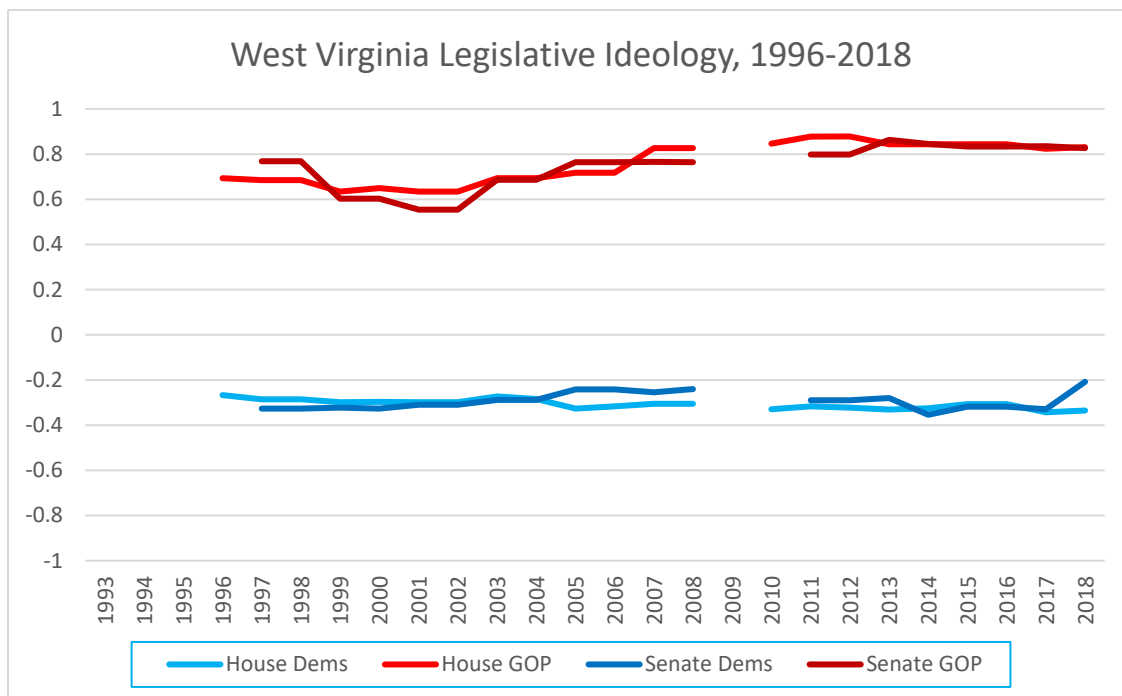
This evidence shows that White Southerners' party switches toward Republicans in the wake of the Voting Rights Act took a substantially longer time to occur down ballot than it did at the top of the ticket. Even as Georgia, South Carolina, and Tennessee had begun voting Republican at the presidential level with fairly high consistency by 2000, there remained a significant presence of conservative Democrats at the state level. Polarization lagged down-ballot across the country, but especially so in the South, where self-professed "yellow dog Democrats"

had clung to their party identification for decades afterward. Once these conservative Democrats began retiring, dying, switching parties, and being defeated in large numbers, they were typically succeeded by Republicans who were similarly or, often, more conservative than the Democrats whom they had replaced. Black voters, who were a key element of conservative Democrats' coalitions in the South through the 1990s, became irrelevant to the Republican Party as it unified right-of-center White support. The result in most Southern states was a political polarization along racial lines that led to Black voters becoming the overwhelming majority of the Democratic Party in the region. This made Democrats rapidly become more liberal and Republicans more conservative while denying African Americans the significant influence they had as majority-makers in Southern politics for nearly three decades.

What has been made clear in the previous section of this paper is that race—and therefore racial realignment—was not as important in the political evolution of West Virginia down-ballot. Though West Virginia voted similarly to the rest of the South between 1932 to 1992, its demographic differences dictated that certain issues became more resonant among longtime Democratic voters than other issues. Split-ticket voting continued (and continues) to occur at a far higher rate in West Virginia than in the other states examined, and Democratic candidates for state legislature proved (and have proven) to be substantially more capable of winning elected office in White-majority districts than in the rest of the South. This has induced a cyclical pattern in West Virginia politics: conservative Democrats continue to be nominated in heavily White, Trump-supporting districts, and are able to stick around because they have not been pulled to the left by more liberal influences in their state party. The result is one of the most unusual examples of party voting in modern-day American politics.

Polarization is one of the most definitive forces of electoral politics today. Studies are unanimous that elected officials—regardless of the cause—have become substantially more politically polarized across the country, regardless of region. Yet Figure 5.2 indicates that such unanimity may not necessarily be warranted.

Figure 5.2



When compared to figure 5.1, two changes are immediately clear. The most obvious is that, over the studied time period, Democrats in West Virginia did not shift to the ideological left to nearly the same extent as in the Georgia General Assembly. Although some data is missing for West Virginia from the dataset (specifically the period before 1996 and between 2008 and 2010), the overall difference is undeniable. In 1996, Georgia House Democrats and West Virginia House Democrats were almost ideologically identical. That year, the median ideological score in the Georgia House Democratic caucus was -0.306 . West Virginia's House Democratic caucus was only slightly more conservative, measuring at -0.267 . By 2018, the last year for which data

is available, Democrats in Georgia had shifted to a score of -0.762 , while in West Virginia the caucus remained only at -0.335 , moving left only barely. The trend indicates that the leftward shift that has occurred across the South (including in South Carolina and Tennessee) simply has not occurred to nearly the same extent in West Virginia.

Likewise, West Virginia's ideological score was not merely constant, it was constantly moderate. When examining all 49 upper state legislative chambers, West Virginia House Democrats measured as the third-most conservative in 2018, after only Arkansas and Oklahoma—two other states with significant ancestral Democratic populations. With a median ideology of -0.208 in 2018, West Virginia Senate Democrats actually shifted to the right from when scores for the chamber were initially calculated in 1997. This is extremely unusual. Across every region and chamber, regardless of ideological extremity, Democrats tended to shift to the left in state legislatures over the period studied by Shor and McCarty (2020). That West Virginia was one of the only exceptions further reinforces its atypical status in twenty-first century American electoral politics.

Shor and McCarty (2020) lack several years of data for Kentucky, but the patterns they show nonetheless point to a distinct difference between Upper South states and Deep South states on the question of ideological measurement. In fact, Kentucky Senate Democrats were among the only legislative chamber caucuses to join West Virginia Senate Democrats in becoming more conservative between 1996 and 2018. With an ideological median of -0.336 in 2018, Democrats in the Kentucky Senate were fairly centrist, an indication that they retained support among more conservative White voters. As we know from data collected in the previous section, this is borne out by evidence. Split-ticket voting continues even today at a more rapid rate in Kentucky and West Virginia than elsewhere in the South.

The data laid out in this section provides support for the initial part of my hypothesis. Democrats in West Virginia have remained substantially more ideologically conservative than other Southern states, in large part because it lacks a more liberal Black base when compared to the Deep South. There is at least some evidence to support the notion that ideology plays a role in Democratic success in the state. However, I also posit that this conservative ideology plays a role in causing White voters to be more willing to vote Democratic down-ballot in West Virginia. Because many Democrats who seek elected office in West Virginia are ideologically conservative, they are difficult to tie to the more liberal national party and therefore can attract a broader swath of voters.

I believe there is a crucial causal mechanism that demonstrates why such a pattern could be possible: party registration. Specifically, West Virginia is a semi-closed primary state. Under state law, an individual affiliated with a political party “may only vote that party’s ballot or the non-partisan ballot” (West Virginia Secretary of State 2021). This prevents Democratic voters—many of whom are now functionally Republicans in West Virginia, as evidenced by party registration statistics—from being able to cross over and vote in Republican primary contests without formally changing their registrations. Party registration is one of the most lagging indicators of true party identification because of the effort required to make the change official. Often, it results in individuals retaining a formal affiliation with a political party even after they no longer personally identify with it. Because West Virginia was essentially a “one-party state” just twenty years ago (Grossback and Hammock 2003), there continues to be a staggering mismatch between party registration and identification in the state. Accordingly, the conservative nature of West Virginia Democratic primary voters should lead to more conservative nominees

for state legislative office—and provide a more electable form of Democrat than in national races.

Under such a theory, there would be an expectation that regions with higher ancestral Democratic populations (where registration with that party continues to be significant) would therefore see more conservative Democratic candidates for office than elsewhere in the state. To determine the extent to which this hypothesis is true, I will rely on two metrics. The first is Shor and McCarty's (2020) ideological dataset of individual state legislators. Using the same guidelines and parameters as their legislative caucus dataset, they have scored every sitting member of the West Virginia Legislature over the same period since the 1990s. I will break this down by determining whether or not each legislator represents a district that is “ancestrally Democratic.”

To measure whether or not a legislator represents a district that is ancestrally Democratic, I rely on a metric of ticket-splitting. While party registration by legislative district would have been quite useful, the West Virginia Secretary of State's office only publishes registration data by county. Instead, I came up with an alternative way to measure how ancestrally Democratic a region is. Utilizing data from Daily Kos (2021), I have measured the percentage-point difference between Democratic legislative candidates' share of the popular vote in 2016 and the two-party vote share of Hillary Clinton in that same legislative district in the 2016 presidential election. Once data is calculated and compared, it is my expectation that more ancestrally Democratic districts should produce more conservative Democratic legislators where they exist than districts where shares of the vote are more evenly matched between state-level candidates and Clinton. I expect that if there is a substantial difference between the performance of a state legislative

candidate and Clinton, they almost certainly come from a historically Democratic region where the state party remains strong yet the national party does not.

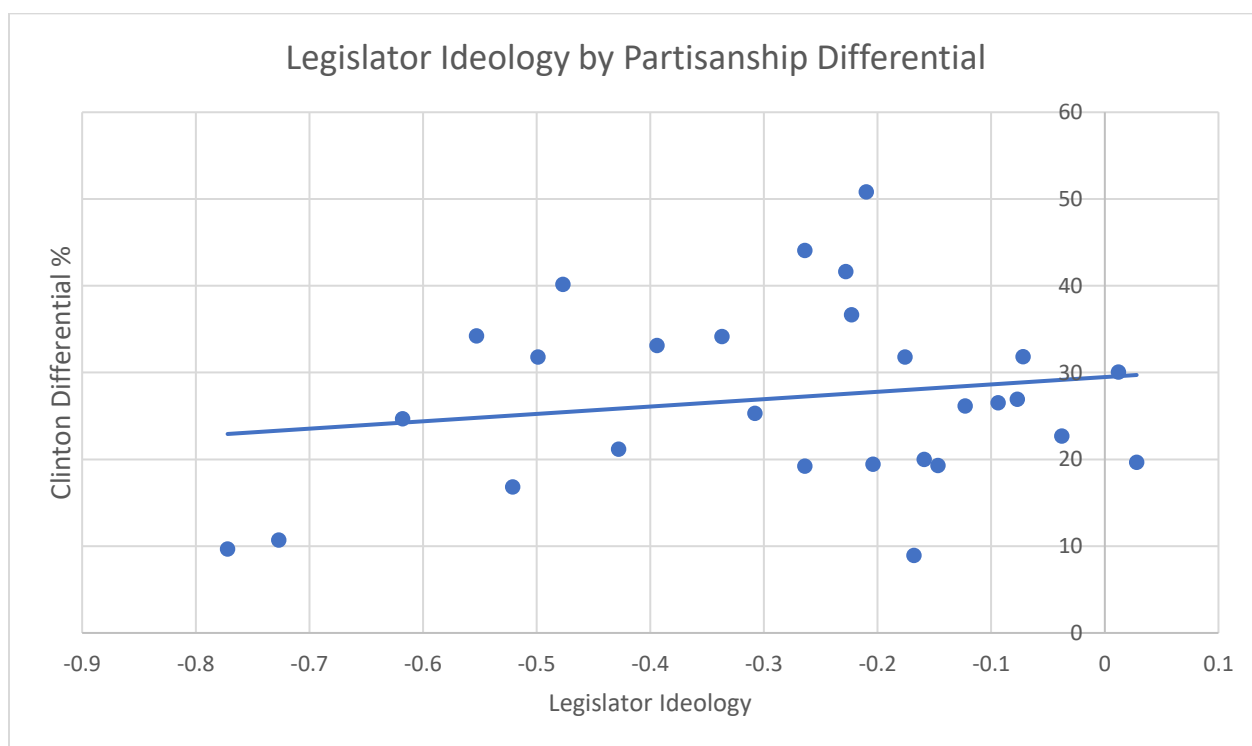
A quick glance over 2016 election data ensures this is at least theoretically sensible. Several districts in coal country, where partisan identification most mismatches national presidential vote share, split their tickets by enormous margins. Take State Senate District 7 as an example, containing parts of Boone, Lincoln, Logan, Mingo, and Wayne Counties. As Democrat Richard Ojeda claimed victory in the district by a 17.64% margin of victory, the legislative seat simultaneously voted for Republican Donald Trump by a 58.92% margin (Daily Kos 2021). The more than 75% spread between these two races is indicative of the massive amount of ticket-splitting that continues to occur in ancestrally Democratic regions throughout the state. Meanwhile, in districts where fewer ancestral Democrats exist, there is far less ticket-splitting. State House District 37 demonstrates this well: legislative candidate Mike Pushkin won by 50.34%, as Hillary Clinton carried the seat by a 34.40% margin (Daily Kos 2021). Though there was still substantial split-ticket voting in HD-37, it was far smaller than the amount that occurred throughout the more ancestrally Democratic regions in the state.

In testing this hypothesis, I was forced to overcome two major measurement hurdles. First, the West Virginia House of Delegates makes use of some multi-member districts, which can complicate my ability to compare individual legislative performances with that of Hillary Clinton. As a result, I did not include multi-member districts in my examination, instead focusing on State Senate districts (for which only one member was up for election in 2016) and on single-member State House districts. Additionally, only candidates who won an election to the Legislature at some point in their careers were entered into the Shor & McCarty database. This meant that unsuccessful legislative candidates did not receive an ideological score. Delegate

Brent Boggs, a Democrat who ran uncontested in a Trump+44.41 district, was also not included in the examination. As a result, I was left with a sample size of 28 Democrats who appeared in single-member races in 2016 and who had earned an ideological score from Shor & McCarty for their legislative careers. This sample was deemed substantial enough in size to study and gain inference from.

The data for both the differential share of the vote between Clinton and the state legislators and the legislator ideology are included in Appendix A and visually demonstrated in Figure 5.3.

Figure 5.3



This data demonstrates some remarkable findings. For one, all 28 legislators captured in this data outpaced Hillary Clinton in 2016, the vast majority of them by double digits. Such unanimity provides strong evidence that there remains a significant distinction for many voters between the state party and the national party in terms of their brands. However, the data

gathered does not provide immediate support for my hypothesis regarding party registration. Though legislators who outpaced Hillary Clinton were slightly more conservative ideologically than those who did not, it was not by any significant margin. With a correlation coefficient of $r = .178$, there is little support for the idea that more conservative legislators were capable of meaningfully outpacing less conservative ones, even in districts where there was a substantial amount of split-ticket voting. It does not appear that regions with high ancestral Democratic populations produce more conservative candidates than those where state party share meaningfully matches up with Clinton's share of the vote.

Though it undermines my hypothesis, this finding makes sense in the context of comparisons across states. Arkansas, for example, is an open primary state that lacks party registration altogether. Yet its Democratic legislative caucuses have remained even more conservative than West Virginia's over the same studied period. Arkansas Democrats were actually so conservative in Shor and McCarty's (2020) ideological dataset for the year 2018 that they were measured at 0.016, ideologically right-of-center. Though highly unusual for a Democratic Party, it provides yet more evidence that party registration does not have an influence on individuals' willingness to nominate (and therefore elect) more conservative Democratic candidates in legislative primaries.

Still, I do not believe it to be accurate to completely reject the notion that legislator ideology cannot influence success rate in general elections. Gerber and Morton (1998) concluded that semi-closed primary systems are ultimately the most successful in producing moderate political candidates because of the need to simultaneously capture independents. Their findings are applicable in this context; it should be again reminded that the majority of West Virginia's Democratic legislators included in my examination still measured somewhere ideologically to

the right of -0.300 (center-left). Meanwhile, only five of the 28 included legislators had ideologies that were left of -0.500 . Nearly all elected West Virginia Democrats, regardless of district location, are relative conservatives. Following the 2016 West Virginia Democratic primary between Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders, a CNN exit poll conducted determined that 55% of that party's primary voters defined themselves as ideologically "moderate" or "conservative" (CNN 2016). In fact, it was the only state they polled in that cycle where Democratic primary voters self-identified as either "moderate" or "conservative" in numbers exceeding 50% of the electorate. (CNN 2016). It is plausible that if the state abandoned the semi-closed primary system, less conservative—and therefore less electable—candidates for office would arise, diminishing the amount of split-ticket voting that occurs in legislative elections (Gerber and Morton 1998). The Manchin–Swearengin comparison I describe later in this section provides further support for this notion.

Likewise, the broad ideological score from Shor and McCarty (2020) does not make distinctions between what issues these legislators are more compromising on. Take, for example, Richard Ojeda, the Democrat who represented State Senate District 7 from 2016 to 2019. Ojeda made national headlines as a candidate for Congress in 2018, when he sought to flip an open congressional seat that Donald Trump had carried by a 73% to 23% margin over Hillary Clinton in 2016. Although Ojeda's ideological score of -0.477 is among the more liberal scores of Democratic legislators, he admitted to voting for Donald Trump in 2016 (Bradner 2018). He also expressed his strong personal disdain for Nancy Pelosi repeatedly in advertisements, passionately defended the presence of coal in the state, and described himself as "pro-life" with room for reasonable exceptions (Bradner 2018). On economic issues, Ojeda expressed substantially greater support for the Democratic agenda, reflecting a more populist mentality. He leaned

heavily into his work as an organizer of teachers' unions. Ultimately, his strategy was at least somewhat successful. Ojeda was elected to the West Virginia Senate in 2016 in a heavily Trump district and came within 13 points of flipping West Virginia's 3rd congressional district in 2018, narrowing the gap from Hillary Clinton by more than 35 points. It is highly possible that ancestral Democrats in West Virginia are more liberal on economic issues as opposed to social ones. Put differently, the overall legislative ideology score may matter less to these voters as opposed to a select few issues where being conservative is a necessity.

Other examples of this abound. State Delegate Ralph Rodighiero was a conservative Democrat who served in the State House from 2006 to 2012 and again from 2018 to 2020. His ideological score was left-of-center, at -0.231 . Yet during his run for State Senate in 2020, Rodighiero's only advertisement touted his endorsement by the National Rifle Association and featured him firing his gun at a sign reading "Abortion is still legal in West Virginia" (Rodighiero 2020). Though few national Democrats would ever take such an ideological position in a campaign, it is a fairly common stance in ancestrally Democratic regions of the state. Given the established importance of religiosity in the state as found by White (2018), socially conservative stances border on necessity in such regions. Though the ideological scores established by Shor and McCarty (2020) are by far the most thorough in measuring legislative ideology, they are far from perfect. In a region where culturally conservative and fiscally progressive positions tend to play well, their scores may not present an entirely accurate picture. Future studies seeking to examine this question would do well to attempt to score state legislators distinctly on social and economic issues to determine whether or not they play an influential role in general elections throughout West Virginia.

The 2018 and 2020 U.S. Senate elections provide a timely and relevant additional case study to further explore how vital conservative ideology is to split-ticket voters in the state. In 2018, incumbent U.S. Senator Joe Manchin ran for a second full term against Republican State Attorney General Patrick Morrisey. Manchin's race was one of the most competitive in the country that year, with many forecasters expecting him to face tough odds but nonetheless sharply outperform Hillary Clinton's showing from two years earlier. Manchin had decades of political experience in the state, between serving in the State House (1982–1986), State Senate (1986–1996), as secretary of state (2001–2005), and as governor (2005–2010). Well-known as a compromising centrist, Manchin ran as the model conservative candidate—one who focused on bread-and-butter economic issues rather than flashy social ones. Anti-abortion, “A”-rated by the National Rifle Association, and a critic of the Environmental Protection Agency, Manchin epitomized the disappearing “West Virginia Democrat” studied in this paper (Kamisar 2017). In the 2018 primary, Manchin faced a challenge from progressive activist Paula Jean Swearengin, a supporter of Bernie Sanders and star of the anti-establishment film *Knock Down the House*. Swearengin vigorously opposed Manchin and decried him as too forgiving to Republicans (Kamisar 2017).

It is common for progressive candidates to unseat overly moderate incumbents in primary elections. But the 2018 Manchin–Swearengin primary contest demonstrated what much of this section has articulated: West Virginia Democrats are, at their core, quite conservative. Manchin expectedly obliterated Swearengin in the primary, defeating her with nearly 70% of the total vote (Leip 2019). Her defeat demonstrated that the party base in West Virginia is substantially different from Democratic Party bases elsewhere in the country. In few other states could such a

culturally conservative candidate win a primary election for the U.S. Senate. West Virginia, of course, is not like most other states.

Manchin went on to claim a narrow three-point victory over his Republican opponent in the general election, even as other incumbent Democratic senators were defeated in red states. Though a diminishment from his 2012 U.S. Senate victory when Manchin won with over 60% of the vote, his 2018 win was perhaps even more impressive. After all, it was a state President Trump not only carried by 42 points in 2016, but where he spent a substantial amount of time and resources attempting to unseat Manchin in 2018. Manchin was successful in bringing back ancestral Democrats who had openly despised Hillary Clinton. He rocked coal country, carrying McDowell County—where Trump had gotten almost 75% of the vote in 2016—as well as more industrial regions in the north. In all, Manchin flipped 24 counties from red to blue that Hillary Clinton had failed to carry. Incumbency was undeniably a key variable in his success. But statistical studies have made clear that the power of incumbency has declined in recent years in favor of partisanship (Morris 2017). It is certainly possible that Manchin's incumbency advantage was higher than Morris' (2017) calculation of eight percent, but even still, that far from covers the 45-point gap by which he outpaced Trump.

The 2020 U.S. Senate election provides further confirmation of this. That year, Swearingin returned to run for Senate a second time, hoping to defeat Republican Senator Shelley Moore Capito. A near-even split in a three-way Democratic primary enabled the progressive Swearingin to become the Democratic nominee for Senate despite only claiming 38% of the vote. Her stark contrast in policy positions to Manchin and only two-year gap between election cycles make her race an easy and strong comparison. Ultimately, Swearingin lost the Senate election by the widest margin of any Democratic Senate candidate since the

passage of the Seventeenth Amendment, obtaining only 27% of the vote (Leip 2019). Even when controlling for Capito's incumbency (an estimated advantage of about eight points) and the differential in partisanship of 2020 compared to 2018, Swearengin still performed approximately 30 points worse than Manchin in terms of expected outcomes. Much like Obama in 2012, Clinton, and Biden—all of whom ran traditional Democratic campaigns—Swearengin failed to carry even a single county in the state. Her stark underperformance is undeniably at least partially a function of her more liberal, anti-coal attitude.

This section of the paper demonstrated generally supportive findings of my hypothesis regarding a how ideology affects ticket-splitting. The evidence makes clear that it does not appear that legislators in ancestrally Democratic districts are any more ideologically conservative than legislators in present-day Democratic districts. This can eliminate the possibility that party registration and the state's semi-closed primary system has an influence on the ideology of legislators and their ability to win in more conservative regions of the state. However, exit polls provide strong evidence that West Virginia Democratic voters are substantially more conservative when compared to other state Democratic parties. The findings of Gerber and Morton (1998) likewise indicate that semi-closed primaries may be effective in producing conservative candidates across the state, rather than simply in specific regions as my theory predicts. Accordingly, West Virginia's Democratic legislators appear to match their constituents' ideologies, measuring as relative centrists in Shor and McCarty's (2020) data. Because the vast majority of legislators are so ideologically conservative when compared to other states, there is at least some evidence to support that a potential "coal culture" does have some effect on legislators' ideologies. This is evidenced by both campaign platforms of candidates running in

ancestrally Democratic districts and by the dramatic differences in performances between centrist Joe Manchin and progressive Paula Jean Swearengin from 2018 and 2020.

Though a score that breaks up legislator ideology along socially and economically progressive lines would be useful in providing further insight, it would also be excessively challenging to calculate and is beyond the capabilities of this paper. However, the fact that split-ticket voting continues to occur at significantly higher rates in ancestrally Democratic regions of the state is indicative that legislators who meet a broad set of generally moderate criteria are capable of claiming victory even in difficult wave elections. Likewise, that every single Democrat in the state outran Hillary Clinton in 2016 provides more evidence that the state party is viewed in a distinct ideological vehicle from the national party. Specific individual legislator ideologies may matter less than I expected before performing this analysis, but it is nonetheless clear that the West Virginia Democratic brand remains strong at a more general level in the state, and that ideology continues to be important in continuing the trend of split-ticket voting.

The 2020 Bloodbath and Beyond

The 2020 elections appeared to cause a significant setback in Democratic hopes across West Virginia. Though Joe Biden was the first Democratic presidential candidate to make improvements in the state since 1996, he still lost it by a crushing 39 points (Leip 2019). For the third consecutive election cycle, the Democratic presidential nominee failed to carry even a single county in the state. Down-ballot, matters were even worse. Governor Jim Justice, who had been elected as a Democrat in 2016 but switched parties in 2017, was reelected by a 34-point margin, also carrying every county (Leip 2019). Democrats' last statewide elected official, Treasurer John Perdue, was defeated by double digits despite having held the post for more than

two decades. The results in the West Virginia Legislature perhaps the most crushing for Democrats; they lost 17 seats in the House of Delegates alone, nearly half of their caucus.

It appears likely that national trends are taking their toll on West Virginia at long last. Split-ticket voting declined rapidly and sharply throughout the state, with a significant share of Republican gains occurring in ancestrally Democratic regions where Donald Trump performed historically well. To try and gain a better appreciation of the causes of these losses and the future of the state party, I interviewed two Democratic state legislators who represented districts carried by Trump. The first, Michael Angelucci, represented State House District 50 in Marion County for two years. He flipped the seat blue in 2018, but was unseated in 2020, losing by a 53-vote margin. The second, Kayla Young, was a community organizer who overcame stark odds and was elected to represent State House District 35 in Kanawha County (a four-member seat) in 2020. Our interviews, which took place virtually as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, were insightful in trying to understand what happened to West Virginia's Democratic legislative candidates in 2020, how they ran their campaigns, and what the path looks like for the party going forward.

The two delegates shared a number of attributes, despite representing starkly different regions of the state and holding distinct political philosophies. Firstly, both were native West Virginians. In a small state where, as Delegate Young explained, "we all know each other, for the most part," having longstanding ties to the communities being represented was emphasized as a necessity. Second, their respective districts had historically industrial backbones. HD-35, which is located in Kanawha County (home to the state capital of Charleston) had for decades been a center for chemical production. HD-50, represented by Delegate Angelucci, was and continues to be significantly more oriented around coal. Finally, the legislators were both

unflinching Democrats. “I have always been a lifelong Democrat, and so has the majority of my family,” Angelucci shared, “but it’s unique to see how the party has changed over the years.” Unprompted, he dove into the dichotomy between the state and national parties this paper analyzes. “When I was growing up, the Democratic Party stood for the values of the working-class people. And now, somehow the Republicans seem to have gotten a hold of that message.” He was certain not to leave the sentence on that note: “But they don’t produce. They don’t produce at the end of the day.”

Politically, the two differ ideologically. Their distinctions were eerily reflective of the split between the more liberal national wing of the party and the more centrist state wing. Delegate Young was a self-described progressive whose involvement in politics was spurred on by a 2014 water crisis that left her and her newborn son without safe drinking water for nearly a month. When Donald Trump was elected president in 2016, she dedicated herself to community activism, eventually becoming a lobbyist for the West Virginia Environmental Council. Navigating the fault lines of a conservative state as a staunch progressive has meant a complicated relationship with some of her party’s most senior officials. Senator Manchin, for instance, “supported my campaign, but we’ve also been screaming at each other in public before.” Her hesitant support of the senator is common among progressives in the state who find themselves both thankful for his partisan affiliation and frustrated by his swingy nature. “I do think he’s a good representation of the views of the state overall,” being a radical moderate in a state where split-ticket voting is a frequent occurrence. But she qualified: “Is that my personal views all the time? No.”

Delegate Angelucci was less explicitly progressive, had warmer praise for Joe Manchin (who he has known since childhood), and avoided more contentious national issues. When asked

who he supported for president on the campaign trail, his typical response was, “I’m not worried about that at the moment. I’m worried about what I can do to help you.” His background, unlike Delegate Young’s, was not in activism. Instead, his political career began with an unsuccessful run for magistrate judge in 2016. He was subsequently recruited by the state party to run for House of Delegates in 2018.

My goal in meeting with the two candidates was to get an anecdotal understanding of the 2020 elections from individuals who were on the front lines. They presented an excellent counterbalance to one another. One was from an urban area, the other was from coal country. One was a proud progressive, the other was more moderate. One was victorious, the other was defeated. Yet despite representing districts with different demographics, industries, and where Trump performed quite differently, they had a similar understanding about the causes of their respective fates—and the fate of the state party.

Early in our conversations, I asked about partisan polarization. West Virginia, after all, had seemed to avoid it until 2020. What had changed? Both expressed similar sentiments—national effects were unhelpful. “I do think that Trump was responsible,” Young commented, and that “a lot of older people realized that they identified more with Trump and his economic policies and his social policies.” These top-down messages led to a high number of party defectors, many of whom decided to vote a straight Republican ticket for the first time in their lives. In order to run a successful campaign in a conservative district (Trump carried State House District 35 by more than four points in 2020), Young felt obligated to abandon her party label. “I never said Democrat anywhere or Republican anywhere... I just wanted my name and the office I was running for on everything.”

Delegate Angelucci perhaps felt these effects more tangibly. He lost his race by a painfully small 53 votes out of more than 62,000 cast. Trump carried HD-50 by a 28-point margin, forcing him to confront significantly stronger headwinds. Even the slightest ties to the national party hurt him. Just two weeks before the election, his opponent sent out a postcard to voters that contained “a photo of a Facebook post that I made in 2012—eight years prior,” he felt obligated to remind me. It wrote: “I am not against owning guns, but we have to talk about gun control.” They quickly spun the message to attempt to portray Angelucci as a gun-grabbing liberal. “What wasn’t told was that was the day after 35 kids were killed at Sandy Hook.” Another mailer featured a single tweet Angelucci had liked by Joe Biden, which they used to tie him to the unpopular presidential candidate and declare him “anti-Trump.” With an only 53-vote margin of defeat, the delegate was nearly certain that such vitriolic mailers played at least some role in costing him the race.

Angelucci was also unafraid to confront both the state party and national party’s messaging on coal. On one hand, he accepted the reality of coal’s decline. “Studies have shown that coal in West Virginia has a 25- to 30-year future.” While he was very clear about his desire to “continue to utilize coal and support all coal miners,” he also was adamant about the need to “invest in renewable energy so that in 25 or 30 years, when we have the end of coal, we have something to fall back on.” The state party’s inability to successfully sell that message, in his view, was another explanation for their bloodbath 2020 election cycle. Still, he emphasized the significant burden the national party has been on Democratic candidates running in coal country. “I need our president to stop saying he’s trying to hurt coal jobs. We get it with climate change—I believe in climate change.” It wasn’t just Biden he took issue with: “The same thing with Obama, the same thing with Hillary, and now with Biden... Why can’t you come out with a

message that says, ‘I understand there’s going to be an end date to fossil fuels when they run out?’” There was little question in his mind that such a statement “would have saved so many Democrats in West Virginia.” Because Biden performed substantially better in Young’s district than in Angelucci’s, ties to the national party in his seat were more effective.

The candidates also both generally avoided social issues throughout the campaign, instead largely choosing to emphasize kitchen-table economic issues. Young explained that “social issues weren’t really what I ran on because, while it’s important to me, it’s never been my very top priority.” She went to describe the issues that she felt were more salient in HD-35—the economy, the environment, and, most personally, unemployment (Young herself was unemployed before being elected). Focusing on issues related to COVID-19 similarly allowed her to appeal to voters across the ideological spectrum. “I didn’t hide social issues, but I didn’t bring them up because they are so volatile.” Now a member of the Legislature, she went on to stress that the bulk of her work there revolves around legislation that she feels have a more tangible impact on people’s economic well-being. Her general desire to avoid hot-button issues provides anecdotal support regarding the distinctions among West Virginia voters on economic and social policies. By mostly avoiding the latter, she demonstrated that an economically progressive message can be successful even in a Trump district.

Angelucci felt similarly regarding the importance of social issues. Abortion, for instance, was tricky to navigate in the instances when it came up. As a pro-choice Democrat committed to the belief that abortion “should be a decision that’s made privately with a woman and her medical doctors,” he never lied when the topic presented itself. But he wasn’t especially keen to advertise it either, and refrained from bringing it up himself on the trail. Instead, he reminded voters of his successes in the Legislature. His proudest accomplishment was not some showy,

headline-making piece of legislation, but rather his sponsoring of a bill that put a cap on insulin costs. As a result, insurance companies in West Virginia cannot charge more than \$100 a month to a subscriber to get insulin. In a state with one of the highest rates of obesity in the country, he felt it had a particular impact on voters. His hope that these issues would have stronger resonance among the public than social ones was not necessarily realized; recall the mailers sent out by his opponents emphasizing Angelucci's support for background checks on guns.

The campaign experiences of Delegates Young and Angelucci underscore the challenges of running as a Democrat in a state where the very identification with the term applies differently to different people. When asked about the party's direction in 2022, they each expressed the need for Democrats to unite around better messaging. They were emphatic that victories require them to present a meaningful contrast with the Republicans, who have had unified control of state government since 2017. Angelucci named several actions taken by the Republican-controlled Legislature that he viewed as problematic and potential targets. Frustrated by their proposals to eliminate the Promise Scholarship (which pays for thousands of students to attend school), raise sales tax to a staggering 10.6%, and eliminate the tax on corporate planes, he decried their recent initiatives as being harmful to working families. "Why are Democrats not jumping on this? That should be our message." Young was in agreement. "Right now, we're facing a tax plan... from the governor that is going to hurt middle- and lower-class families," she added. "Our caucus is working really hard to make our message and our values and our votes reflect that we care about the people of this state." She also endorsed supporting nontraditional candidates, like herself, in a state where establishment politics is heavily unpopular. Her conclusion to our conversation reflected the frustration of many Democrats with their party's 2020 approach. "I just hope this was a wake-up call to a lot of people." As for 2022? "We can really only go up."

Whether or not Young's final statement stands true depends on a number of factors. Even if the party is able to establish a coherent message that cycle that presents a stark contrast to legislative Republicans, it remains questionable as to whether that will be effective enough to win over the votes of many social conservatives. Emphasizing economic issues was not entirely successful in Angelucci's case in 2020, even if he did work hard to craft his own brand separate from the national party. And though Trump will not be on the ballot in 2022—a factor with questionable significance, considering the same was true of 2016 when West Virginia Democrats performed far better—a number of Democrats will still be up for office in seats he carried by wide margins.

As the party approaches 2022 and Angelucci and Young prepare for their own electoral battles, it is worth asking whether or not the phenomenon of split-ticket Democratic voters in West Virginia continues to persist. This paper pointed out how common it remained through 2018. But in 2020 Democrats lost nearly half of their caucus and every statewide election on the ballot. Are legislators in heavily conservative seats like Michael Angelucci hopeless in future races? Has polarization finally caught up to the West Virginia Legislature in the same way it has in almost every other state?

To answer these questions, I have obtained a rare set of data that has yet to be published: the 2020 presidential election results by state legislative district in West Virginia. Presently, only the 2016 presidential election has been broken down by such a metric. With the help of electoral analyst Drew Savicki, who utilized precinct data to calculate each result district-by-district, I am able to determine if the mysterious conservative West Virginia Democrat is now wholly gone, or still present. This can provide an answer about the current state of polarization in West Virginia politics and its comparisons to the United States more broadly.

In 2020, 24 Democrats won elections to the House of Delegates and three won elections to the Senate. Joe Biden carried only three of 67 State House districts (4.5%)—HD-37 in Kanawha County, HD-51 in Monongalia County, and HD-67 in Jefferson County. This was a small increase from Hillary Clinton’s performance in 2016, when she carried only HD-37. At the Senate level, Biden performed exactly the same as Clinton, carrying zero of the state’s 17 upper chamber districts. If state politics were completely polarized along national fault lines (as is the case in more racially divided states, such as Georgia), our expectation would be that Republicans hold a 93-7 advantage in the State House and a 34-0 advantage in the State Senate. Considering that the post-election makeup of the chambers was 76-24 in the State House and 23-11 in the State Senate, it is undeniable that there remains a substantial level of ticket-splitting in the state—though it has declined considerably.

In 2020, according to the Savicki dataset, which is included in Appendix B, 18 of the 24 Democrats (75%) who won seats in the state House and all three Democrats (100%) who won seats in the State Senate did so in districts that were simultaneously carried by Donald Trump. Likewise, only three of those districts were ones Trump carried by only single digits. Seventeen of the 27 Democrats (63%) who won seats to the Legislature in 2020 did so in double-digit Trump districts. Although fewer Democrats were able to pull off legislative victories than in 2016 (when 37 were elected to the State House and six were elected to the Senate), the 2020 results still demonstrate that there are a staggering number of districts where the party can be competitive.

Take, for example, the extraordinary victory of Delegate Nathan Brown in State House District 20, a seat in the heart of coal country. Brown is a fairly conservative Democrat with a 43% conservative rating from the American Conservative Union (2019) and only a 9% score

from the West Virginia chapter of the Sierra Club (2020). He pulled off what was, in all likelihood, the most extraordinary overperformance of any state legislator in the country. Although Trump carried Brown's seat by a massive 83.17% to 15.98% margin over Joe Biden, Brown won his race by 11 points. The more than 75-point spread between their respective victories is enormous. A number of other Democratic legislators pulled off stunning upsets—Brent Boggs of State House District 34 won his race in central coal country with more than 70% of the vote, even as Donald Trump carried HD-34 by almost 50 points. His district, which contains multiple active coal mines, continues to show a strong willingness to split their tickets. In regions of the state where coal persists, it is clear that the Democratic brand down-ballot remains strong. The party's only issue: the parts of the state where coal remains a large industry are constantly decreasing.

Of the 84 state legislative districts in West Virginia, 20 split their tickets in 2020 and elected legislators of a different party than the presidential candidate who carried it. These 24% nearly all voted for Trump and down-ballot Democrats. Only HD-51, a five-member district in Monongalia County, elected a Republican while voting for Joe Biden. The share of split districts in 2020 is a visible decrease from 2016, when 39% of West Virginia districts split their tickets. The concerns expressed by Delegates Angelucci and Young about the increasing nationalization of West Virginia legislative elections appear to be endorsed by evidence from the 2020 elections. While the phenomenon of split-ticket voting is undeniably in decline, comparisons to other states can provide insight into the unusual rate at which it still occurs.

The only other state for which I could obtain reliable 2020 presidential election results by state legislative district was Kansas (Dave's Redistricting 2021). Though Daily Kos (2021) has calculated the 2020 election by congressional district, they have not yet published the 2020

results by legislative district. Nonetheless, Kansas is a reasonable state for cross-picture comparisons. It has been solidly Republican for decades and is substantially more reflective of typical national partisan voting behavior than West Virginia or Kentucky. Through an examination of 2020 election results, I have successfully determined the rates of split-ticket voting in the Sunflower State. They reveal that West Virginia is still far less polarized at the state level than elsewhere in the country.

Kansas was won in 2020 by Donald Trump, who carried the state by a 14.65% margin over Joe Biden (Leip 2019). In all, only 14 of the state's 165 total state legislative districts (40 in the Senate and 125 in the House) split their tickets between a presidential candidate of one party and a legislative candidate of another. One district, State House District 87, saw an exact tie between Biden and Trump. Even if State House District 87 is considered a split, only 9.1% of legislative districts saw split tickets. Kansas, like West Virginia, is overwhelmingly White. Despite their similar racial characteristics, White voters in Kansas did not display nearly the same willingness to split their tickets as in West Virginia. This provides further evidence that West Virginia is an anomalous state with a distinct "coal culture" that makes certain types of Democrats uniquely appealing to White voters.

Comparing West Virginia's 2020 results to only one other state is certainly not conclusive on its own. However, it does provide at least one comparison that indicates that ancestral Democrats are not yet dead in West Virginia. The interviews with Delegates Angelucci and Young paint a picture of how nationalization of elections and political polarization have affected the Democratic brand in the state. Likewise, the West Virginia data from 2020 shows that split-ticket voting has declined sharply in recent years. Yet despite this, the party still heavily relies on legislators from conservative coal- and industrial-oriented seats for their limited

but important political power. Polarization shows no sign of slowing, and that could affect the party's prospects in 2022, but the very fact that so many conservative Democrats remain standing at all is a remarkable testament to the fact that the West Virginia Democratic Party is perhaps different from any other in the United States.

Conclusion

As the Democratic Party grapples with the perils of the narrowest of majorities in the United States Senate, the eyes of the world have turned to West Virginia in an effort to better understand the chamber's swingiest vote. By most metrics, Joe Manchin is the last true Blue Dog left standing in Congress, and one of a diminishing number in his home state. That Manchin, a conservative Democrat from coal country, has been thrust into the national spotlight at the same time that this paper is being written is merely a coincidence. It nonetheless provides a rich complement to this work that visibly underscores its significance and relevance. The Democratic majority today rests on a man capable of winning in one of the single most conservative states in the country, an extraordinary political outlier. As this paper has indicated, Manchin—the model West Virginia Democrat—is unlikely to be his party's 50th vote for abortion rights, or LGBT rights, or gun control. But while Manchin's presence in the Senate has caused headaches for progressives in his state and far outside it, his presence in the chamber has been extraordinarily crucial for Democrats. Without Manchin, Obamacare would almost certainly have been repealed in 2017—he cast a deciding vote to save it. The same is true for the \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 stimulus bill that passed through the chamber earlier this month. Not to mention that without him Mitch McConnell would have continued as Majority Leader, providing a certain death to any major Biden initiative, economic or not.

The West Virginia Democrat, as this paper has articulated, is a product of a number of conflicting factors that occur nowhere else in the country. The state's mountainous geography, coupled with its ties to both the Union and the South, meant that it avoided slavery altogether. Its heavily industrial, union-focused working-class population made it a welcome supporter of Franklin D. Roosevelt's economically-focused New Deal programs and his Democratic Party. Its overwhelmingly White population ensured that racial fights were not as bitter as in the Deep South, and that Black candidates were virtually incapable of scaring White Democrats into the Republican Party. Its generally poor, highly religious population produced uniquely conservative Democratic politicians capable of winning in districts that became deeply Republican at the national level. And its Democratic candidates who are willing to buck the national party—even criticize it—in order to emerge victorious have allowed the state party to retain its own distinct brand capable of holding onto support among ancestral party members. In few other states could this combination of factors have come together and produced the same effect as in West Virginia. On a political scale, its uniqueness is nearly unmatched, aside from a few small portions of eastern Kentucky and rural Arkansas where the last ancestral Democratic stragglers remain.

This paper also does not provide an optimistic outlook on the state of political polarization in American legislatures. West Virginia Democrats' ability to win in conservative districts is all but certainly diminishing as a result of national realignment. No longer can the state party win majorities in the State Legislature on the backs of split-ticket voting. Assuming recent political trends continue, the party looks poised to endure further losses as legislators retire or are defeated. If 2022 is a fine year for West Virginia Democrats, 2024 almost certainly will not be, regardless of which presidential candidates are on the ballot. What West Virginia

Democrats are capable of doing in their state is almost impossible to be replicated by candidates elsewhere. In few other regions of the country could pro-life, pro-gun, or anti-environment candidates make it through a primary. In West Virginia, it is a prerequisite for statewide victory.

As the Mountain State remains one of only two in the nation to bleed population, its economy shows little sign of improvement. Most legislators, regardless of party, recognize that the streets of the state are in worse condition than ever before. It suffers from some of the highest rates of poverty, obesity, and drug abuse in the United States. But in this high corner of the United States—one so often overlooked—a story beckons to be told. It is, more than anything, a story of tradition: a story of residents who live in the same towns in which they were born, who know one another, and who care for each other. It is a state that dreams of the future yet clings to the past—economic and political.

Appendix

Appendix A

WV Legislator Ideology Scores, 2016 Legislator Performance, and 2016 Clinton Comparison

	Score	Leg Share	Clinton Share	Difference
Barrett	-0.168	51.49	42.57	8.92
Bates	-0.176	66.96	35.16	31.8
Blackwell	-0.123	40.43	14.28	26.15
Campbell	-0.094	47.25	20.73	26.52
Diserio	-0.553	61.03	26.82	34.21
Evans	-0.337	60.29	26.16	34.13
Facemire	-0.618	50.13	25.47	24.66
Jeffries	-0.521	53.08	36.28	16.8
Lynch	-0.394	52.08	18.98	33.1
Marcum	-0.21	66.65	15.85	50.8
Miller	-0.264	66.06	21.99	44.07
Moye	-0.072	50.77	18.95	31.82
Ojeda	-0.477	58.82	18.66	40.16
Palumbo	-0.147	55.39	36.1	19.29
Perry	-0.204	45.27	25.84	19.43
Pethtel	-0.228	62.96	21.34	41.62
Plymale	-0.077	60.24	33.31	26.93
Prezioso	-0.159	59.6	39.62	19.98
Pushkin	-0.727	75.17	64.48	10.69
Shaffer	-0.264	40.46	21.26	19.2
Skinner	-0.772	47.21	37.53	9.68
Smith	-0.038	41.95	19.26	22.69
Sponaugle	-0.499	53.81	22.04	31.77
Walker	0.012	49.02	18.96	30.06
White	-0.223	47.79	11.15	36.64
Williams	0.028	41.93	22.28	19.65
Yost	-0.428	48.93	27.77	21.16
Young	-0.308	43.71	18.43	25.28

Appendix B

Savicki Dataset – 2020 U.S. Presidential Election by WV State Legislative District

HD	County	Biden	Trump	Total	Biden%	Trump%
1	Brooke (pt.)	876	2,318	3,238	27.05%	71.59%
	Hancock	3,790	9,806	13,800	27.46%	71.06%
1 Total		4,666	12,124	17,038	27.39%	71.16%
2	Brooke (pt.)	2,071	5,227	7,418	27.92%	70.46%
	Ohio (pt.)	71	237	315	22.54%	75.24%
2 Total		2,142	5,464	7,733	27.70%	70.66%
3	Ohio (pt.)	6,730	11,082	18,107	37.17%	61.20%
3 Total		6,730	11,082	18,107	37.17%	61.20%
4	Marshall	3,455	10,435	14,080	24.54%	74.11%
	Ohio (pt.)	422	1,035	1,476	28.59%	70.12%
4 Total		3,877	11,470	15,556	24.92%	73.73%
5	Monongalia (pt.)	74	343	419	17.66%	81.86%
	Wetzel	1,539	4,993	6,667	23.08%	74.89%
5 Total		1,613	5,336	7,086	22.76%	75.30%
6	Doddridge	435	2,619	3,101	14.03%	84.46%
	Pleasants (pt.)	27	141	171	15.79%	82.46%
	Tyler	631	3,226	3,922	16.09%	82.25%
6 Total		1,093	5,986	7,194	15.19%	83.21%
7	Pleasants (pt.)	672	2,601	3,320	20.24%	78.34%
	Ritchie	586	3,649	4,283	13.68%	85.20%
7 Total		1,258	6,250	7,603	16.55%	82.20%
8	Wood (pt.)	2,400	6,506	9,052	26.51%	71.87%
8 Total		2,400	6,506	9,052	26.51%	71.87%
9	Wirt	466	2,134	2,653	17.57%	80.44%
	Wood (pt.)	1,149	4,623	5,856	19.62%	78.94%
9 Total		1,615	6,757	8,509	18.98%	79.41%
10	Wood (pt.)	7,377	16,073	23,854	30.93%	67.38%
10 Total		7,377	16,073	23,854	30.93%	67.38%
11	Jackson (pt.)	298	1,363	1,693	17.60%	80.51%
	Roane	1,455	4,213	5,763	25.25%	73.10%
11 Total		1,753	5,576	7,456	23.51%	74.79%
12	Jackson (pt.)	1,867	6,228	8,226	22.70%	75.71%
12 Total		1,867	6,228	8,226	22.70%	75.71%
13	Jackson (pt.)	1,042	2,502	3,589	29.03%	69.71%
	Mason (pt.)	1,135	4,242	5,454	20.81%	77.78%
	Putnam (pt.)	1,771	5,213	7,114	24.89%	73.28%
13 Total		3,948	11,957	16,157	24.44%	74.01%
14	Mason (pt.)	1,391	4,249	5,749	24.20%	73.91%
	Putnam (pt.)	438	1,397	1,870	23.42%	74.71%
14 Total		1,829	5,646	7,619	24.01%	74.10%
15	Putnam (pt.)	3,133	7,101	10,451	29.98%	67.95%
15 Total		3,133	7,101	10,451	29.98%	67.95%
16	Cabell (pt.)	7,296	9,795	17,425	41.87%	56.21%
	Lincoln (pt.)	414	1,065	1,505	27.51%	70.76%
16 Total		7,710	10,860	18,930	40.73%	57.37%
17	Cabell (pt.)	5,175	6,213	11,585	44.67%	53.63%

	Wayne (pt.)	879	1,558	2,482	35.41%	62.77%
17 Total		6,054	7,771	14,067	43.04%	55.24%
18	Cabell (pt.)	2,523	5,713	8,350	30.22%	68.42%
18 Total		2,523	5,713	8,350	30.22%	68.42%
19	Wayne (pt.)	3,209	11,027	14,465	22.18%	76.23%
19 Total		3,209	11,027	14,465	22.18%	76.23%
20	Logan (pt.)	152	636	796	19.10%	79.90%
	Mingo (pt.)	920	4,945	5,914	15.56%	83.62%
20 Total		1,072	5,581	6,710	15.98%	83.17%
21	McDowell (pt.)	80	1,176	1,266	6.32%	92.89%
	Mingo (pt.)	477	3,599	4,108	11.61%	87.61%
	Wyoming (pt.)	152	1,204	1,366	11.13%	88.14%
21 Total		709	5,979	6,740	10.52%	88.71%
22	Boone (pt.)	160	900	1,078	14.84%	83.49%
	Lincoln (pt.)	1,297	4,947	6,325	20.51%	78.21%
	Logan (pt.)	223	1,102	1,343	16.60%	82.06%
	Putnam (pt.)	1,391	3,495	5,007	27.78%	69.80%
22 Total		3,071	10,444	13,753	22.33%	75.94%
23	Boone (pt.)	1,593	4,866	6,580	24.21%	73.95%
23 Total		1,593	4,866	6,580	24.21%	73.95%
24	Boone (pt.)	288	1,050	1,354	21.27%	77.55%
	Logan (pt.)	1,958	8,796	10,887	17.98%	80.79%
	Wyoming (pt.)	11	392	404	2.72%	97.03%
24 Total		2,257	10,238	12,645	17.85%	80.96%
25	McDowell (pt.)	74	615	691	10.71%	89.00%
	Mercer (pt.)	137	1,051	1,202	11.40%	87.44%
	Wyoming (pt.)	818	4,543	5,415	15.11%	83.90%
25 Total		1,029	6,209	7,308	14.08%	84.96%
26	McDowell (pt.)	1,179	3,357	4,570	25.80%	73.46%
	Mercer (pt.)	167	1,040	1,227	13.61%	84.76%
26 Total		1,346	4,397	5,797	23.22%	75.85%
27	Mercer (pt.)	5,252	17,146	22,705	23.13%	75.52%
	Raleigh (pt.)	94	415	514	18.29%	80.74%
27 Total		5,346	17,561	23,219	23.02%	75.63%
28	Monroe (pt.)	1,107	4,343	5,516	20.07%	78.73%
	Raleigh (pt.)	1,322	5,733	7,145	18.50%	80.24%
	Summers (pt.)	1,355	3,783	5,197	26.07%	72.79%
28 Total		3,784	13,859	17,858	21.19%	77.61%
29	Raleigh (pt.)	1,674	6,304	8,075	20.73%	78.07%
29 Total		1,674	6,304	8,075	20.73%	78.07%
30	Raleigh (pt.)	3,167	4,609	7,913	40.02%	58.25%
30 Total		3,167	4,609	7,913	40.02%	58.25%
31	Raleigh (pt.)	1,030	5,211	6,321	16.29%	82.44%
	Wyoming (pt.)	176	1,214	1,407	12.51%	86.28%
31 Total		1,206	6,425	7,728	15.61%	83.14%
32	Clay (pt.)	78	487	573	13.61%	84.99%
	Fayette	5,063	11,580	16,862	30.03%	68.68%
	Kanawha (pt.)	98	69	169	57.99%	40.83%
	Nicholas (pt.)	82	365	455	18.02%	80.22%
	Raleigh (pt.)	695	2,401	3,138	22.15%	76.51%
32 Total		6,016	14,902	21,197	28.38%	70.30%
33	Calhoun	568	2,364	2,971	19.12%	79.57%

	Clay (pt.)	563	2,192	2,792	20.16%	78.51%
	Gilmer (pt.)	299	1,210	1,534	19.49%	78.88%
33 Total		1,430	5,766	7,297	19.60%	79.02%
34	Braxton	1,457	4,120	5,664	25.72%	72.74%
	Gilmer (pt.)	300	802	1,128	26.60%	71.10%
34 Total		1,757	4,922	6,792	25.87%	72.47%
35	Kanawha (pt.)	15,176	16,510	32,356	46.90%	51.03%
35 Total		15,176	16,510	32,356	46.90%	51.03%
36	Kanawha (pt.)	8,797	12,790	21,959	40.06%	58.24%
36 Total		8,797	12,790	21,959	40.06%	58.24%
37	Kanawha (pt.)	4,066	1,759	5,935	68.51%	29.64%
37 Total		4,066	1,759	5,935	68.51%	29.64%
38	Kanawha (pt.)	2,197	3,433	5,745	38.24%	59.76%
	Putnam (pt.)	1,145	2,828	4,059	28.21%	69.67%
38 Total		3,342	6,261	9,804	34.09%	63.86%
39	Kanawha (pt.)	2,129	5,908	8,146	26.14%	72.53%
39 Total		2,129	5,908	8,146	26.14%	72.53%
40	Kanawha (pt.)	1,881	5,929	7,934	23.71%	74.73%
40 Total		1,881	5,929	7,934	23.71%	74.73%
41	Greenbrier (pt.)	79	260	348	22.70%	74.71%
	Nicholas (pt.)	1,596	6,131	7,811	20.43%	78.49%
41 Total		1,675	6,391	8,159	20.53%	78.33%
42	Greenbrier (pt.)	4,576	10,665	15,502	29.52%	68.80%
	Monroe (pt.)	238	725	974	24.44%	74.44%
	Summers (pt.)	93	291	388	23.97%	75.00%
42 Total		4,907	11,681	16,864	29.10%	69.27%
43	Pocahontas	1,047	2,895	4,008	26.12%	72.23%
	Randolph (pt.)	3,336	8,557	12,058	27.67%	70.97%
43 Total		4,383	11,452	16,066	27.28%	71.28%
44	Nicholas (pt.)	548	1,783	2,364	23.18%	75.42%
	Randolph (pt.)	26	116	142	18.31%	81.69%
	Upshur (pt.)	161	931	1,112	14.48%	83.72%
	Webster	610	2,759	3,402	17.93%	81.10%
44 Total		1,345	5,589	7,020	19.16%	79.62%
45	Upshur (pt.)	1,872	6,057	8,082	23.16%	74.94%
45 Total		1,872	6,057	8,082	23.16%	74.94%
46	Lewis	1,538	5,782	7,457	20.62%	77.54%
	Upshur (pt.)	223	783	1,027	21.71%	76.24%
46 Total		1,761	6,565	8,484	20.76%	77.38%
47	Barbour	1,457	5,116	6,677	21.82%	76.62%
	Tucker (pt.)	245	1,101	1,367	17.92%	80.54%
47 Total		1,702	6,217	8,044	21.16%	77.29%
48	Harrison	9,215	20,683	30,465	30.25%	67.89%
	Taylor (pt.)	140	445	594	23.57%	74.92%
48 Total		9,355	21,128	31,059	30.12%	68.03%
49	Marion (pt.)	150	485	646	23.22%	75.08%
	Monongalia (pt.)	352	609	980	35.92%	62.14%
	Taylor (pt.)	1,656	5,032	6,789	24.39%	74.12%
49 Total		2,158	6,126	8,415	25.64%	72.80%

50	Marion (pt.)	8,751	15,815	25,148	34.80%	62.89%
50 Total		8,751	15,815	25,148	34.80%	62.89%
51	Monongalia (pt.)	19,856	19,851	40,673	48.82%	48.81%
51 Total		19,856	19,851	40,673	48.82%	48.81%
52	Preston (pt.)	1,817	5,840	7,783	23.35%	75.04%
52 Total		1,817	5,840	7,783	23.35%	75.04%
53	Preston (pt.)	1,346	5,350	6,789	19.83%	78.80%
	Tucker (pt.)	693	1,740	2,477	27.98%	70.25%
53 Total		2,039	7,090	9,266	22.01%	76.52%
54	Grant	607	4,871	5,509	11.02%	88.42%
	Mineral (pt.)	357	2,093	2,479	14.40%	84.43%
	Pendleton (pt.)	136	900	1,043	13.04%	86.29%
54 Total		1,100	7,864	9,031	12.18%	87.08%
55	Hardy	1,381	4,859	6,331	21.81%	76.75%
	Pendleton (pt.)	684	1,882	2,616	26.15%	71.94%
55 Total		2,065	6,741	8,947	23.08%	75.34%
56	Mineral (pt.)	1,965	6,428	8,515	23.08%	75.49%
56 Total		1,965	6,428	8,515	23.08%	75.49%
57	Hampshire (pt.)	1,199	5,155	6,429	18.65%	80.18%
	Mineral (pt.)	338	1,519	1,878	18.00%	80.88%
57 Total		1,537	6,674	8,307	18.50%	80.34%
58	Hampshire (pt.)	740	2,878	3,657	20.24%	78.70%
	Morgan (pt.)	1,243	3,973	5,315	23.39%	74.75%
58 Total		1,983	6,851	8,972	22.10%	76.36%
59	Berkeley (pt.)	2,125	5,281	7,568	28.08%	69.78%
	Morgan (pt.)	755	2,564	3,380	22.34%	75.86%
59 Total		2,880	7,845	10,948	26.31%	71.66%
60	Berkeley (pt.)	2,505	6,838	9,547	26.24%	71.62%
60 Total		2,505	6,838	9,547	26.24%	71.62%
61	Berkeley (pt.)	3,553	3,807	7,525	47.22%	50.59%
61 Total		3,553	3,807	7,525	47.22%	50.59%
62	Berkeley (pt.)	2,978	6,424	9,577	31.10%	67.08%
62 Total		2,978	6,424	9,577	31.10%	67.08%
63	Berkeley (pt.)	3,324	5,023	8,535	38.95%	58.85%
63 Total		3,324	5,023	8,535	38.95%	58.85%
64	Berkeley (pt.)	2,701	5,906	8,783	30.75%	67.24%
64 Total		2,701	5,906	8,783	30.75%	67.24%
65	Jefferson (pt.)	4,216	4,846	9,260	45.53%	52.33%
65 Total		4,216	4,846	9,260	45.53%	52.33%
66	Jefferson (pt.)	3,082	5,636	8,873	34.73%	63.52%
66 Total		3,082	5,636	8,873	34.73%	63.52%
67	Jefferson (pt.)	4,829	4,551	9,570	50.46%	47.55%
67 Total		4,829	4,551	9,570	50.46%	47.55%
Grand Total		235,984	545,382	794,652	29.70%	68.63%

SD	County	Yes	No	Total	Yes%	No%
1	Brooke	2,947	7,545	10,656	27.66%	70.81%
	Hancock	3,790	9,806	13,800	27.46%	71.06%
	Marshall (pt.)	334	1,375	1,723	19.38%	79.80%
	Ohio	7,223	12,354	19,898	36.30%	62.09%
1 Total		14,294	31,080	46,077	31.02%	67.45%
2	Calhoun	568	2,364	2,971	19.12%	79.57%
	Doddridge	435	2,619	3,101	14.03%	84.46%
	Gilmer (pt.)	354	1,393	1,776	19.93%	78.43%
	Marion (pt.)	1,222	3,540	4,870	25.09%	72.69%
	Marshall (pt.)	3,121	9,060	12,357	25.26%	73.32%
	Monongalia (pt.)	2,948	4,812	7,936	37.15%	60.64%
	Ritchie	586	3,649	4,283	13.68%	85.20%
	Tyler	631	3,226	3,922	16.09%	82.25%
	Wetzel	1,539	4,993	6,667	23.08%	74.89%
	2 Total		11,404	35,656	47,883	23.82%
3	Pleasants	699	2,742	3,491	20.02%	78.54%
	Roane (pt.)	506	1,656	2,197	23.03%	75.38%
	Wirt	466	2,134	2,653	17.57%	80.44%
	Wood	10,926	27,202	38,762	28.19%	70.18%
3 Total		12,597	33,734	47,103	26.74%	71.62%
4	Jackson	3,207	10,093	13,508	23.74%	74.72%
	Mason	2,526	8,491	11,203	22.55%	75.79%
	Putnam (pt.)	6,006	14,640	21,099	28.47%	69.39%
	Roane (pt.)	949	2,557	3,566	26.61%	71.70%
4 Total		12,688	35,781	49,376	25.70%	72.47%
5	Cabell	14,994	21,721	37,360	40.13%	58.14%
	Wayne (pt.)	2,193	4,894	7,211	30.41%	67.87%
5 Total		17,187	26,615	44,571	38.56%	59.71%
6	McDowell (pt.)	1,184	4,715	5,939	19.94%	79.39%
	Mercer	5,556	19,237	25,134	22.11%	76.54%
	Mingo (pt.)	1,041	5,677	6,769	15.38%	83.87%
	Wayne (pt.)	617	3,475	4,145	14.89%	83.84%
6 Total		8,398	33,104	41,987	20.00%	78.84%
7	Boone	2,041	6,816	9,012	22.65%	75.63%
	Lincoln	1,711	6,012	7,830	21.85%	76.78%
	Logan	2,333	10,534	13,026	17.91%	80.87%
	Mingo (pt.)	356	2,867	3,253	10.94%	88.13%
	Wayne (pt.)	1,278	4,216	5,591	22.86%	75.41%
7 Total		7,719	30,445	38,712	19.94%	78.64%
8	Kanawha (pt.)	15,610	20,105	36,364	42.93%	55.29%
	Putnam (pt.)	1,872	5,394	7,402	25.29%	72.87%
8 Total		17,482	25,499	43,766	39.94%	58.26%
9	McDowell (pt.)	149	433	588	25.34%	73.64%
	Raleigh	7,982	24,673	33,106	24.11%	74.53%
	Wyoming	1,157	7,353	8,592	13.47%	85.58%
9 Total		9,288	32,459	42,286	21.96%	76.76%
10	Fayette	5,063	11,580	16,862	30.03%	68.68%
	Greenbrier	4,655	10,925	15,850	29.37%	68.93%
	Monroe	1,345	5,068	6,490	20.72%	78.09%
	Summers	1,448	4,074	5,585	25.93%	72.95%
10 Total		12,511	31,647	44,787	27.93%	70.66%

11	Grant (pt.)	458	3,578	4,056	11.29%	88.21%
	Nicholas	2,226	8,279	10,630	20.94%	77.88%
	Pendleton	820	2,782	3,659	22.41%	76.03%
	Pocahontas	1,047	2,895	4,008	26.12%	72.23%
	Randolph	3,362	8,673	12,200	27.56%	71.09%
	Upshur	2,256	7,771	10,221	22.07%	76.03%
	Webster	610	2,759	3,402	17.93%	81.10%
11 Total		10,779	36,737	48,176	22.37%	76.26%
12	Braxton	1,457	4,120	5,664	25.72%	72.74%
	Clay	641	2,679	3,365	19.05%	79.61%
	Gilmer (pt.)	245	619	886	27.65%	69.86%
	Harrison	9,215	20,683	30,465	30.25%	67.89%
	Lewis	1,538	5,782	7,457	20.62%	77.54%
12 Total		13,096	33,883	47,837	27.38%	70.83%
13	Marion (pt.)	7,679	12,760	20,924	36.70%	60.98%
	Monongalia (pt.)	14,456	11,671	26,795	53.95%	43.56%
13 Total		22,135	24,431	47,719	46.39%	51.20%
14	Barbour	1,457	5,116	6,677	21.82%	76.62%
	Grant (pt.)	149	1,293	1,453	10.25%	88.99%
	Hardy	1,381	4,859	6,331	21.81%	76.75%
	Mineral (pt.)	974	2,405	3,434	28.36%	70.03%
	Monongalia (pt.)	2,878	4,320	7,341	39.20%	58.85%
	Preston	3,163	11,190	14,572	21.71%	76.79%
	Taylor	1,796	5,477	7,383	24.33%	74.18%
	Tucker	938	2,841	3,844	24.40%	73.91%
14 Total		12,736	37,501	51,035	24.96%	73.48%
15	Berkeley (pt.)	8,036	20,181	28,786	27.92%	70.11%
	Hampshire	1,939	8,033	10,086	19.22%	79.65%
	Mineral (pt.)	1,686	7,635	9,438	17.86%	80.90%
	Morgan	1,998	6,537	8,695	22.98%	75.18%
15 Total		13,659	42,386	57,005	23.96%	74.35%
16	Berkeley (pt.)	9,150	13,098	22,749	40.22%	57.58%
	Jefferson	12,127	15,033	27,703	43.78%	54.26%
16 Total		21,277	28,131	50,452	42.17%	55.76%
17	Kanawha (pt.)	18,734	26,293	45,880	40.83%	57.31%
17 Total		18,734	26,293	45,880	40.83%	57.31%
Grand Total		235,984	545,382	794,652	29.70%	68.63%

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