

# Poverty, Populism, and Party Identification in Eastern Oklahoma

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*This study attempts to expand our understanding on why the Democratic Party has survived the realignment in eastern Oklahoma and eastern and southern Arkansas by examining the influence of poverty on party identification in eastern Oklahoma. We argue that the Democratic Party has remained the dominant party in eastern Oklahoma largely because of its poverty. Voters in this poor region are more likely to support the kind of government intervention in the economy that is generally associated with the Democratic Party. The findings suggest that support for government intervention in the economy is what differentiates Democratic from Republican identifiers in eastern Oklahoma and eastern and southern Arkansas, and accounts for the continued dominance of the Democratic Party in state and local politics in those regions.*

## **Introduction**

The southern realignment is a well-researched phenomenon. Beginning in the middle of the 20th century, and continuing until the present, a partisan realignment has been occurring in the southern United States. Most white voters in the south used to identify with the Democratic Party, but by the beginning of the 21st century most southern whites identified with the Republican Party.

Eastern Oklahoma and eastern and southern Arkansas represent three regions in the southern United States that have not completed this realignment. When we say that a region has resisted the southern realignment, we do not mean to imply that the region will not eventually realign with the Republican Party. Nor do we mean to imply, when we discuss Congressional districts, that a Republican cannot win the Congressional seat in these districts. We are saying two specific things: first, up until this point in time these regions have resisted realignment because

the Democratic Party still dominates state and local political offices and; second, even if these regions should eventually realign with the Republican Party, they will have done so at a much slower pace than most other regions in the south.

That the Democratic Party remains dominant in these areas is an empirical fact. Oklahoma's Second Congressional District (OK 2) is the only one of the state's five congressional districts to be held by a Democrat. Democratic control of OK 2 faces a serious threat in the 2012 elections. Even if Republicans capture the OK 2 congressional seat in 2012, however, the Democratic Party will remain dominant in state legislative representation in the region. For example, the Oklahoma State Senate has 48 seats. Of those, 33 (or 69%) are controlled by Republicans. In eastern Oklahoma, however, there are eight state senate districts within the area of OK 2. Of these eight, seven are controlled by Democrats. This means that 88% of eastern Oklahoma state senators are Democratic while, in the rest of the state, Democrats make up only 20% of the seats (8 of 40). Analysis of the Oklahoma House tells a similar story. Of the 17 House districts in eastern Oklahoma 13 of them (or 76%) are controlled by Democrats. Statewide only 31 of 101 House districts (or less than 31%) are controlled by Democrats. This means that, in the rest of the state, Democrats hold only 21% (18 of 84) of the remaining seats.

The situation is similar in Arkansas' 1st and 4th congressional districts which we designate as AR 1 and AR 4. Like OK 2, AR 4 was the only congressional district in its state to be held by a Democrat after the 2010 elections. And, like OK 2, there is a good chance a Republican will win the seat in 2012. A Republican already holds the congressional seat in AR 1. In state and local elections, however, both regions are dominated by the Democratic Party. In both AR 1 and AR 4, seven of the nine state senate seats (or 78%) are held by Democrats. In the rest of Arkansas, Democrats only hold 35% (6 of 17) of the state senate seats. In the Arkansas House of Representatives, 81% (17 of 21) of the seats within AR 1 and 71% (17 of 24) of the seats within AR 4 are held by Democrats. Democrats hold only 35% (19 of 55) of the House seats in the rest of Arkansas.

In this paper, we attempt to expand our understanding on why the Democratic Party has survived the realignment in eastern Oklahoma and eastern and southern Arkansas by examining the influence of poverty on party identification in eastern Oklahoma. We believe that the Democratic Party has remained the dominant party in these regions largely because of their poverty. Because of their poverty, voters in these regions are more likely to support the kind of government intervention in the economy that is

generally associated with the Democratic Party. Support for government intervention in the economy is what differentiates Democratic from Republican identifiers in the regions, and accounts for the Democratic Party's continued dominance in state and local politics.

To empirically test the influence of poverty on party identification in eastern Oklahoma, we employ a survey that was conducted to examine the political attitudes of voters in eastern Oklahoma, within the borders of OK 2. We use the survey to, first, examine how Democratic and Republican partisans in eastern Oklahoma differ socioeconomically and ideologically from each other. Then we compare the responses of Democratic and Republican identifiers on economic and religious issues to examine whether significant differences in political attitudes exist between them. In addition, partisan attitudes on economic and religious issues will be compared to those of southern voters in general. Finally, we examine which factors affect party affiliation in eastern Oklahoma. The analysis will show that income inequality plays a significant role in the realignment.

### **The Southern Realignment**

The American south, made up of the eleven former Confederate states, plus Kentucky and Oklahoma, has undergone a well-documented partisan realignment from the Democratic to the Republican Party. From the Civil War era to the 1960s, most white voters in the southern United States were loyal to the Democratic Party. The Republican Party was the party of Lincoln, the predominantly northern party that had imposed Reconstruction on the southern states after the Civil War (Grantham 1992, 1). In the 1960s, however, this loyalty began to wane. When President Kennedy, a Democrat, threw his party's support behind the Civil Rights Movement, many white southerners were outraged. In 1968, Alabama's George Wallace, a life-long Democrat, ran for president as an Independent. His Independent candidacy was essentially a protest against the Democratic Party's support of civil rights for southern blacks. A large enough proportion of southern white votes were drawn away from the Democratic presidential candidate that a Republican, Richard Nixon, was able to win the presidency despite a large advantage of registered Democrats over registered Republicans among the two parties' electorates (Aistrup 1996, 26-29).

Over the next four decades, the defection of southern whites from the Democratic Party continued unabated. Today the southern realignment is almost complete. Republicans control most of the Congressional seats in the south. Only 40 of 142 congressional seats in the 13 southern states were controlled by the Democratic Party after the 2010 elections, and 24 of those

were minority/majority districts. Republicans control most state legislatures in the 13 southern states as well.

According to many scholars, racial issues remained a major cause of white southern dissatisfaction with the Democratic Party (Glaser 1994; Glaser 1996; Kuklinski et al. 1997; Valentino and Sears 2005), but other issues rose in importance as well. The most salient of the non-racial issues were matters of moral policy (Bass and DeVries 1995, 488-490; Black and Black 1987, 213; Black and Black 2003, 259-265). Abortion was the most important moral issue, but the Democratic Party lost southern support for its positions on other moral issues as well, as more and more southerners turned to the Republican Party for representation of their views (Aistrup 1996, 47-59).

Some recent literature, however, offers an alternative argument. Recent studies show the impact of poverty on the survival of the Democratic Party in the conservative south (Abramowitz and Teixeira 2008; Bartels 2008; Berard 2001; Gelman et al. 2010; Rorabaugh 2005; Shafer and Johnston 2009). Research by Abramowitz and Teixeira found that, "Republicans have been much more successful in attracting support from culturally conservative upper SES whites than from culturally conservative lower SES whites" (2008, 129). Bartels found that decline of identification with the Democratic Party is almost twice as fast among middle and upper income groups as among lower income groups in the south (2008, 77). He points out that "Republican gains have come not among 'poorer folks' but among middle- and upper-income voters – and even those gains have been concentrated almost entirely in the south" (2008, 80).

Berard (2001) as well as Shafer and Johnston (2009) make the argument that economic factors account for much of the southern realignment. Shafer and Johnston (2009), for example, argue that the south has experienced economic development and wealthier southerners are attracted to the Republican Party because of their resistance to welfare programs designed to aid the poor. Gelman et al. arrived at similar conclusions. Their analysis divided populations into three income levels: upper, middle and lower. They found that upper income groups have been much more likely to realign with the Republican Party since 1976, especially in the south (2010, 1204). More importantly, they found that, while in what have come to be called the "blue states," the partisan divide is based mostly on social and moral issues, in the "red states" it is based mostly on economic issues:

In poor states, income is associated with Republican voting much more than before, while in many rich states, the relation between income and vote

choice is nearly zero. One key difference between red and blue America is in the relation between income and social attitudes. In Republican states, rich and poor have similar views on social issues, but in Democratic states, the rich are quite a bit more socially liberal than the poor.” (Emphasis ours.) (1213-1214)

Although the southern realignment is almost complete, pockets of Democratic dominance still remain in parts of the south. Arkansas, for example, is one of the few southern states where the Democratic Party still controls the state legislature. One common factor among Democratic congressional districts in the south is poverty. Census data reveals that 65% of southern Democratic congressional districts have a median income below the national average. This is true of only 27% of southern Republican congressional districts. Accordingly, when it comes to the dominance of the Democratic Party in a region with few blacks or Hispanics, such as eastern Oklahoma, where blacks and Hispanics together make up less than 8% of OK 2’s population, or AR 1, where whites make up over 80% of the population, the existence of poverty could provide a more convincing explanation.

### **Poverty, Populism, and Party ID**

In this study, populism means a set of political attitudes similar to those involved in the populist movement of late 19th century America. In other words, the populism described by historians (Hofstadter 1955; Goodwyn 1978; Miller 1987; Kazin 1995). It consists of a combination of progressive attitudes in regard to government intervention in the economy and conservative attitudes in regard to religious and social issues.

Economically, the policy preferences of the historical populists bordered on socialism (Goodwyn 1978, 96), but culturally they were what we would think of today as members of the religious right. The late 19th and early 20th century populists were thus in favor of government intervention in areas related both to the economy and religion. Based on these descriptions, a modern populist would favor conservative positions on issues such as school prayer, while favoring liberal positions on government programs designed to provide citizens with healthcare at low cost or that are designed to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor. Berard (2001) associates this ideological perspective with rural southerners.

Historically, populists of this type have been rural, poor, and religious. The people of OK 2, AR 1, and AR 4 fit this description well. OK 2 is mostly

rural, and is one of the poorest Congressional districts in the United States. Among Oklahoma's five congressional districts OK 2 has the lowest median household income and the highest poverty rate. The only congressional districts with similar economic numbers in the surrounding region are Arkansas' 1st and 4th congressional districts.

Blair and Barth, in *Arkansas Politics and Government* (2005), tell us, not only that populism is the dominant ideology in the region, but also that, "[p]opulists . . . strongly favor sufficient governmental intervention to . . . balance excessive concentrations of wealth on behalf of the 'little guy.' In that sense, they are economic activists, or 'liberals.' On such issues as school prayer or women's liberation or penal reform, however, they tend to be profoundly preservationist, or 'conservative' (102)."

**Table 1 Nine Oklahoma and Arkansas Congressional Districts Ranked by "Median Household Income" (MHI)**

Congressional District	MHI (\$)	Poverty Rate (%)	White (%)	College Graduate (%)	Over 65 (%)	Party S & L
OK 4	47,310	9.9	77.4	16.1	12.9	Rep.
OK 1	47,305	10.6	73.3	20.5	12.6	Rep.
AR 2	44,379	11.2	74.6	17.2	13.4	Rep.
OK 3	42,458	11.0	80.6	14.2	14.4	Rep.
OK 5	42,046	13.2	69.4	18.6	12.3	Rep.
AR 3	41,615	12.0	86.4	14.9	12.9	Rep.
OK 2	37,268	15.0	67.5	10.6	16.2	Dem.
AR 4	35,424	15.2	70.8	9.4	16.8	Dem.
AR 1	35,025	15.9	80.7	10.2	16.0	Dem.

Source: 2011 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates. U.S. Census.

As we can see in Table 1, of the nine congressional districts in Oklahoma and Arkansas, three congressional districts with the lowest median household income (OK 2, AR 4, AR 1) are the only three in which the Democratic Party dominates state and local political offices. They also consist of three congressional districts with the highest poverty rates, the lowest percentage of college graduates and the highest percentage of people over the age of 65.

In regard to social conservatism, Arkansas and Oklahoma are two of the most socially and religiously conservative states in the union. According to a Gallup Poll, 47% of both Arkansans and Oklahomans identified themselves as conservative. Arkansas was the 6th most conservative state and Oklahoma was 7th. Although religious conservatism is considered to be a major factor in the realignment of southern states to the Republican Party (Copeland et al. 2007), we believe that the importance of religious

conservatism has been partially offset in these districts by the economic progressivism of their populace.

Considering that eastern Oklahoma and eastern and southern Arkansas are both economically poor and evangelically Christian, we believe that Democratic identifiers in these regions are, by-and-large, populist. We expect that they favor government intervention in the economy – in order to help the working class and poor – but also favor government intervention in religious matters, such as promoting Christianity in the public schools. Because of this, we do not expect to see much difference between Democratic and Republican respondents in regard to religious questions. We do, however, expect to see significant differences between Democratic and Republican identifiers in regard to economic questions. Our expectations fit well with what Blair and Barth (2005) predicted when they said that, “because the Arkansas Democratic Party is more likely to yield populist, personalistic candidates than is the GOP, Arkansas will distinguish itself from its southern neighbors by disproportionately electing candidates who label themselves Democrats in the early decades of the twenty-first century.”

Empirically, in our eastern Oklahoma survey, we anticipate that we will find significant differences between Democratic and Republican respondents in regard to the economic statements, while we do not expect that we will see much difference between Democratic and Republican respondents in regard to religious questions. To the degree that political attitudes are based on economic self-interest, there ought to be a correlation between income and respondent’s attitudes to propositions regarding government intervention in the economy. We expect, for example, that support for propositions such as “The government ought to help people get doctors and hospital care at low cost” and “The government ought to take steps to make sure that the gap between the rich and the poor in America is reduced,” will be greater among survey respondents with lower incomes than among survey respondents with higher incomes.

We also expect that those who identify with the Democratic Party will be more likely to support these statements than those who do not in the survey. The Democratic Party is associated with New Deal entitlement programs, Great Society welfare programs and tax policies that seek to shift a greater portion of the tax burden onto the upper class. The Republican Party, on the other hand, is associated with a pro-business, laissez faire approach to economic issues. Republican officeholders tend to oppose many New Deal and Great Society programs, and oppose tax policies that seek to tax the wealthy at higher rates. To the degree, therefore, that voters are influenced

by economic self-interest, they should be more inclined to support the Democratic Party if they are poor, and to support the Republican Party if they are wealthy.

Although we believe that economic self-interest remains the most important issue for many voters in the region, we know that party identification in the region may also be based on religious or social issues. According to Frank (2004), many Kansas Republicans are poor people who vote against their own economic interests because of their greater concern for moral or religious issues. Prasad et al. (2009) also found evidence that working class Republicans were influenced primarily by moral issues. In light of the fact that Savage et al. (2011) found that a large proportion of eastern Oklahomans are evangelical Christians, we expect that our survey respondents will support such propositions as “Public schools should be allowed to start each day with a prayer,” and oppose such propositions as “Religion does not belong in the public schools, but rather should be taken care of by the family and the church.”

We argue that the survival of Democratic Party dominance in state and local politics in eastern Oklahoma is based on economic class. Republicans in the region are conservative on both religious and economic issues, while Democrats are conservative on religious issues, but liberal on economic issues. We believe that this economic progressivism primarily accounts for the survival of the Democratic Party in eastern Oklahoma and eastern and southern Arkansas.

## **Research Design**

To empirically test our arguments, we rely on a survey that measured the political attitudes of voters in Eastern Oklahoma. A telephone survey of voters in eastern Oklahoma was conducted between the fall of 2011 and the spring of 2012. A group of political science students at Northeastern State University (NSU) in Oklahoma called randomly selected potential voters in eastern Oklahoma. As landlines are not commonly used by younger voters, a small number of surveys were also given to students in American Federal Government classes to broaden the data pool. For the student survey, we asked a respondent's state and county of permanent residence. We added only respondents whose hometown belongs to OK 2 to our data set. The total number of respondents of the survey is 712. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix A.



The survey examined the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents in eastern Oklahoma. Respondents were asked their gender, race, age, income, and education. The survey also included questions designed to determine the attitudes of eastern Oklahomans on economic and religious issues. The economic index asked questions on each respondent's attitudes in regard to government interference in the economy. The religious index asked questions about each respondent's level of religious conservatism.

We, first, examine how partisans in eastern Oklahoma differ socioeconomically and ideologically from each other. Then we compare the responses of Democratic and Republican identifiers on economic and religious issues to examine whether significant differences in political attitudes exist, and whether these differences can help explain continued support for the Democratic Party. In addition, those partisans' attitudes on economic and religious issues will be compared to those of their southern counterparts. To measure southern partisans' attitudes on economic and religious issues, the 2010 General Social Survey, made available by ICPSR (Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research), is employed. A dummy variable is employed to measure whether a respondent lives in the south. It is scored 1 if a respondent lives in the south, 0 if otherwise.

Finally, we will examine what factors affect party affiliation in eastern Oklahoma. The dependent variable of the analysis is party affiliation. Two dichotomous variables, Democrat and Republican, are employed to measure party affiliation. For the Democrat variable, 1 is assigned if a respondent identifies as a Democrat, 0 if otherwise. For the Republican variable, it is scored 1 if a respondent identifies as a Republican, 0 if otherwise. To examine the impact of economic and religious issues on party affiliation in eastern Oklahoma, an economic index and a religious index are employed. For the economic index, we accumulated scores on three questions, in Table 4, on government intervention in the economy. A respondent chose one of nine categories (1 – 9) for each question. A smaller value of the index indicates that a respondent is more economically conservative. For the religious index, we accumulated scores on three questions, in Table 6, about religious issues. A respondent selected one of nine categories (1 – 9) for each question. A smaller value of the index indicates that a respondent is more religiously conservative. Seven socio-economic variables are also employed as control variables: gender, education, income, age, ideology, white, and American Indian. The analysis will show that poverty (along with religious conservatism) significantly affect populism and the dominance of the

Democratic Party in eastern Oklahoma. The overall results will suggest that income inequality plays a significant role in the realignment.

## Results

### Socio-economic Features of Partisans in Eastern Oklahoma

Our survey data find that almost twice as many eastern Oklahomans identified themselves as Democrats (55%) as Republicans (28%), while 17% of them identified themselves as Independents.

**Table 2 Partisans' Level of Education and Household Income in Eastern Oklahoma**

Party ID	<u>Education</u>				Party ID	<u>Income</u>			
	1	2	3	4		1	2	3	4
<b>Dem.</b>	61%	49%	54%	50%	<b>Dem.</b>	62%	56%	45%	43%
<b>Ind.</b>	18%	20%	12%	10%	<b>Ind.</b>	19%	16%	16%	14%
<b>Rep.</b>	21%	31%	34%	40%	<b>Rep.</b>	19%	28%	39%	43%
<b>Total</b>	100%	100%	100%	100%	<b>Total</b>	100%	100%	100%	100%
<b>N</b>	701				<b>N</b>	665			
<b><math>\chi^2</math></b>	17.408				<b><math>\chi^2</math></b>	25.828			
<b>P-value</b>	0.008				<b>P-value</b>	0.000			

Education: 1=H.S. Graduate; 2=Some College; 3=College Graduate; 4=Post Graduate

Income: 1=Less than \$25,000; 2=\$25,000-50,000; 3=\$50,000-75,000; 4=More than \$75,000

Dem.: Democrat; Ind.: Independent; Rep.: Republican

Table 2 shows the distribution of Democratic and Republican identifiers among education and income groups. The results trend in the expected direction. Although all education levels are more likely to identify with the Democratic Party, as the level of education increases so does identification with the Republican Party. We suspect this reflects the higher average income of those with higher levels of education. In regard to income, there is a correlation between income and party identification. Those with lower incomes are more likely to identify with the Democratic Party. Those in the lowest income group are more than three times as likely to identify with the Democratic Party (62%) as with the Republican Party (19%). Those in the highest income group are as likely to identify themselves as Democratic (43%) as Republican (43%).

**Table 3 Party Identification by Race and Ideology in Eastern Oklahoma**

Party ID	<u>Race</u>			Party ID	<u>Ideology</u>		
	White	Indian	Other		Lib.	Mod.	Cons.
<b>Dem.</b>	54%	52%	69%	<b>Dem.</b>	75%	61%	40%
<b>Ind.</b>	14%	22%	22%	<b>Ind.</b>	14%	24%	13%
<b>Rep.</b>	32%	26%	10%	<b>Rep.</b>	11%	16%	47%
<b>Total</b>	100%	100%	100%	<b>Total</b>	100%	100%	100%
N	703			N	702		
$\chi^2$	14.983			$\chi^2$	103.067		
<i>P</i> -value	0.005			<i>P</i> -value	0.000		

Dem.: Democrat; Ind.: Independent; Rep.: Republican

As we suspected, blacks and Hispanics, who make up only a small percentage of the eastern Oklahoma population, are more likely to identify with the Democratic Party than are whites (Table 3). The party identification of those who identified themselves as ideologically conservative and moderate, however, is far more interesting. Almost as many ideological conservatives identified with the Democratic Party (40%) as with the Republican Party (47%), and four times as many ideological moderates identified with the Democratic Party (61%) as with the Republican Party (16%). The fact that 40% of those who identified themselves as conservative also identified themselves as Democratic is consistent with our hypothesis that religious conservatism in the region is offset by support for government intervention in the economy. Meanwhile, 66% of those who identified themselves as moderate or liberal identified with the Democratic Party.

### **Partisans' Attitudes on Economic and Religious Issues**

In Table 4 we label as "liberal" those responses that support the proposition that the government ought to help people get doctors and hospital care at lower cost; that the government ought to take steps to make sure that the gap between the rich and the poor in America is reduced; and that oppose the proposition that the government should provide fewer services in areas such as health and education in order to reduce spending. Conservatives held the opposite view on each question, and moderates were neither supportive nor in opposition. There is a statistically significant difference between Democratic and Republican identifiers on these

questions. As we can see, 82% of Democratic identifiers supported government intervention to provide lower cost health care (43% of Republicans did), 65% supported government intervention to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor (27% of Republicans did), and 73% opposed cutting spending on healthcare and education in order to cut government spending (51% of Republicans did). This supports our hypothesis that the continued strength of the Democratic Party in the region is due to support for its economic policies.

**Table 4 Partisans' Attitudes on Economic Issues in Eastern Oklahoma (%)**

D/H	Party ID			Gap	Party ID			H/E	Party ID		
	Dem.	Ind.	Rep.		Dem.	Ind.	Rep.		Dem.	Ind.	Rep.
<b>Con.</b>	12	17	41	<b>Con.</b>	23	24	59	<b>Con.</b>	18	16	37
<b>Mod.</b>	6	9	16	<b>Mod.</b>	12	17	14	<b>Mod.</b>	9	21	12
<b>Lib.</b>	82	74	43	<b>Lib.</b>	65	59	27	<b>Lib.</b>	73	63	51
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	<b>Total</b>	100	100	100
<b>N</b>	697			<b>N</b>	694			<b>N</b>	695		
<b><math>\chi^2</math></b>	93.128			<b><math>\chi^2</math></b>	90.490			<b><math>\chi^2</math></b>	41.567		
<b>P-value</b>	0.000			<b>P-value</b>	0.000			<b>P-value</b>	0.000		

D/H: The government ought to help people get doctors and hospital care at lower cost.

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

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

Dem.: Democrat; Ind.: Independent; Rep.: Republican

The responses of self-identified Republicans are noteworthy. Although far fewer Republicans expressed support for liberal positions on economic issues, as many Republicans supported government invention to provide health care at lower cost as opposed it. A slight majority (51%) opposed cutting spending on health care and education. Only on the question of government intervention to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor were Republican identifiers clearly opposed. This suggests that even among those potential voters who identify with the Republican Party significant support for government intervention remains in this poverty stricken region.

As in eastern Oklahoma, we also find a correlation between income and party identification generally in the south. Those with lower incomes are more likely to identify with the Democratic Party. Those in the lowest income group, making less than \$25,000 annually, are more than three times

as likely to identify with the Democratic Party (64%) as with the Republican Party (19%). Meanwhile, those in the highest income group, making more than \$75,000 a year, are equally likely to identify themselves as Democratic (45%) as Republican (45%). These results show that the impact of poverty on party identification is almost identical in eastern Oklahoma and in the south in general.

**Table 5 Partisans' Attitudes on Economic Issues in the South**

D/H	Party ID			Gap	Party ID		
	Dem.	Ind.	Rep.		Dem.	Ind.	Rep.
<b>Con.</b>	7%	15%	25%	<b>Con.</b>	18%	21%	36%
<b>Mod.</b>	19%	13%	17%	<b>Mod.</b>	17%	13%	7%
<b>Lib.</b>	41%	37%	19%	<b>Lib.</b>	35%	35%	18%
<b>N/A</b>	33%	35%	39%	<b>N/A</b>	30%	31%	38%
<b>Total</b>	100%	100%	100%	<b>Total</b>	100%	100%	100%
<b>N</b>	309			<b>N</b>	309		
<b><math>\chi^2</math></b>	190.828			<b><math>\chi^2</math></b>	90.490		
<b>P-value</b>	0.000			<b>P-value</b>	0.000		

D/H: It is the responsibility of the government in Washington to see to it that people have help in paying for doctors and hospital bills.

Gap: The government in Washington ought to reduce the income differences between the rich and the poor, perhaps by raising the taxes of wealthy families or by giving income assistance to the poor.

Dem.: Democrat; Ind.: Independent; Rep.: Republican

Con.: Conservative; Mod.: Moderate; Lib.: Liberal, N/A: No Answer

Table 5 reports partisans' attitudes on economic issues in the south. We label as "liberal" those responses that support the statement that it is the responsibility of the government in Washington to see to it that people have help in paying for doctors and hospital bills, and that the government in Washington ought to reduce the income differences between the rich and the poor. Conservatives held the opposite view on each question, and moderates were neither supportive nor in opposition. Clearly those who identify with the Democratic Party took a liberal position on both economic questions. For instance, those who identified themselves as Democrats are about six times more likely to take a liberal position on government intervention to help people pay for doctors and hospital bills (41%) than take a conservative position (19%). Democratic identifiers were twice as likely to support liberal positions on these two questions as were Republican identifiers. These

findings suggest that, like eastern Oklahoma, southerners' attitudes on economic issues significantly affect which party they support.

**Table 6 Partisans' Attitudes on Religious Issues in Eastern Oklahoma (%)**

R/P	Party ID			God	Party ID			Pray	Party ID		
	Dem.	Ind.	Rep.		Dem.	Ind.	Rep.		Dem.	Ind.	Rep.
<b>Con.</b>	56	58	71	<b>Con.</b>	81	80	92	<b>Con.</b>	71	70	84
<b>Mod.</b>	11	13	10	<b>Mod.</b>	9	8	4	<b>Mod.</b>	12	11	8
<b>Lib.</b>	33	29	19	<b>Lib.</b>	10	12	4	<b>Lib.</b>	17	19	8
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	<b>Total</b>	100	100	100
<b>N</b>	695			<b>N</b>	691			<b>N</b>	686		
<b><math>\chi^2</math></b>	14.751			<b><math>\chi^2</math></b>	15.197			<b><math>\chi^2</math></b>	15.793		
<b>P-value</b>	0.005			<b>P-value</b>	0.004			<b>P-value</b>	0.003		

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

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

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

Dem.: Democrat; Ind.: Independent; Rep.: Republican

Table 6 shows partisan responses to survey questions dealing with religious issues in eastern Oklahoma. We label as "liberal" those responses that support the proposition that religion is a private matter that does not belong in the public schools, that oppose the statement that we will all be called before God at a judgment day in order to answer for our sins, and that oppose the proposition that public schools should start each day with a prayer. As we expected, a majority of all party identifiers responded in a conservative fashion. For instance, Democratic identifiers are more than four times as likely to support public school prayer (71%) as oppose it (17%). This supports our hypothesis that Democratic identifiers in eastern Oklahoma are populists. Although they overwhelmingly identify with liberal positions on economic questions, they identify with conservative positions on religious questions. Even though Republican identifiers are more likely to be conservative on religious issues, the majority of Democratic identifiers also support conservative positions on each survey question.

**Table 7 Partisans' Attitudes on Religious Issues in the South**

<b>God</b>	<u>Party ID</u>			<b>Pray</b>	<u>Party ID</u>		
	<b>Dem.</b>	<b>Ind.</b>	<b>Rep.</b>		<b>Dem.</b>	<b>Ind.</b>	<b>Rep.</b>
<b>Agree (Cons.)</b>	54%	42%	54%	<b>Disapprove (Con.)</b>	49%	37%	52%
<b>Disagree (Lib.)</b>	40%	42%	40%	<b>Approve (Lib.)</b>	19%	27%	20%
<b>N/A</b>	1%	16%	6%	<b>N/A</b>	32%	36%	28%
<b>Total</b>	100%	100%	100%	<b>Total</b>	100%	100%	100%
<b>N</b>	309			<b>309</b>	309		
<b><math>\chi^2</math></b>	127.493			<b><math>\chi^2</math></b>	14.015		
<b>P-value</b>	0.000			<b>P-value</b>	0.300		

God: Those who violate God's rules must be punished. Do you agree or disagree with the statement?

Pray: Supreme Court has ruled that no state or local government may require the reading of the Lord's Prayer or Bible verses in public schools. Do you approve or disapprove of the ruling?

Dem.: Democrat; Ind.: Independent; Rep.: Republican

Con.: Conservative; Lib.: Liberal

N/A: No Answer

Table 7 reports partisan attitudes on religious issues in the south. We label as "liberal" those responses that disagree with the statement that those who violate God's rules must be punished, and that approve of the Supreme Court ruling that no state or local government may require the reading of the Lord's Prayer or Bible verses in public schools. As we expected, we find more party identifiers who responded in a conservative fashion on religious issues than those who answered in a liberal fashion. For example, Democratic identifiers are more likely to agree with the statement (54%) that those who violate God's rules must be punished than disagree with it (40%), and they are more than two times as likely to support public school prayer (49%) as oppose it (19%). Likewise, Republican identifiers are more likely to agree with the proposition (54%) that those who violate God's rules must be punished than disagree with it (40%), and they are more than twice as likely to support public school prayer (52%) as oppose it (20%). These findings show that there are little noticeable difference between southern Democrats and southern Republicans when it comes to their attitudes on religious issues.

The overall findings about southerners' attitudes on economic and religious issues suggest that, as in eastern Oklahoma, political attitudes regarding government intervention in the economy are what differentiate Democratic from Republican identifiers. Although southern Democrats overwhelmingly identify with liberal positions on economic questions, they identify with conservative positions on religious questions. Meanwhile, southern Republicans are likely to be conservative on both economic and religious issues.

### **Poverty, Populism, and Party Affiliation in Eastern Oklahoma**

In Table 8 we examine which factors affect party affiliation in eastern Oklahoma. As we can see, respondents' attitudes on economic and religious issues significantly influence their party affiliation after controlling for socio-economic variables in the model. If a respondent supports government intervention in the economy and takes a more conservative position on religious issues, he/she is likely to identify as a Democrat. Meanwhile, if a respondent is conservative on economic issues and takes a less conservative position on religious issues, he/she is likely to identify as a Republican. It is striking to note that Democratic identifiers actually tend to take a more conservative position on religious issues than their Republican counterparts after controlling for other determinants of party affiliation. Considering that our previous findings show that Republican identifiers are economically and religiously more conservative than Democratic identifiers in eastern Oklahoma, however, it is more reasonable to conclude that a majority of all party identifiers are religiously conservative in the region.

The results also find that income affects respondents' party identification. Those who have lower incomes are more likely to identify as Democrats, while those with higher incomes are more likely to identify with the Republican Party. These findings suggest that economic considerations primarily account for which party the public identifies with in eastern Oklahoma. Finally, we can find the relationship between age and party identification. The older a respondent is, the more he/she is likely to identify as a Democrat. Although such a relationship bears more research, it can probably be explained by the generational effect (Mannheim 1952) or the impressionable years hypothesis (Osborne et al. 2010), which argue that people's attitudes are subject to long-lasting effects of events that occurred when they were coming of age politically. Eastern Oklahoma voters who lived through the Great Depression are probably more likely to be loyal to the Democratic Party, which they associate the New Deal and FDR.



**Table 8 Logistic Regression Analysis on the Determinants of Party Affiliation in Eastern Oklahoma**

	<u>Democrat</u>		<u>Republican</u>	
	b	Odds Ratio	b	Odds Ratio
Gender	-.201	.818	.055	1.056
Education	.026	1.026	.131	1.140
Income	-.156*	.856	.201**	1.223
Age	.522***	1.685	-.425***	.654
Ideology	-.690***	.502	.924***	2.519
White	-.285	.752	1.111**	3.036
American Indian	-.225	.799	.867	2.380
Economic Issues	1.024***	1.407	-.440***	.644
Religious Issues	-.513**	.843	.236**	1.267
Constant	-.108	-	-2.503**	-
N	650		650	
Model $\chi^2$	146.44		189.86	
Pseudo R2	.163		.243	

Note: The variable of Other dropped because of collinearity.

\*\*\*: Statistically significant at .01 level.

\*\*: Statistically significant at .05 level.

\*: Statistically significant at .1 level.

The overall findings support our argument that Democratic identifiers in eastern Oklahoma are populists. They take a liberal position on government intervention in the economy and take a conservative position on religious issues. The findings also support the hypothesis that the partisan divide in eastern Oklahoma is based on economic class. In eastern Oklahoma, Republican identifiers are wealthier and are conservative on both economic and religious issues, while Democratic identifiers are poorer and are progressive on economic issues and conservative on religious issues. This economic progressivism thus primarily explains the continued dominance of the Democratic Party in eastern Oklahoma.

## **Conclusions and Discussions**

The purpose of this study was to seek an explanation for the continued dominance in state and local politics of the Democratic Party in eastern Oklahoma and similar regions in southern and eastern Arkansas. Why did loyalty to the Democratic Party survive in these areas despite the realignment with the Republican Party, not only in most of the south, but in most of the regions surrounding OK 2, AR1, and AR 4? Most surviving Democratic regions in the south are characterized by two phenomena: the presence of a large percentage of blacks or Hispanics and the existence of poverty. Because OK 2 has a combined black and Hispanic population of less than 8%, and AR 1 has a white population of greater than 80%, we hypothesized that the existence of poverty was likely the main cause of continued identification with the Democratic Party.

As we saw, arguments by Frank (2004), and other research focusing on the realignment (Prasad et al. 2009), have stressed the dominance of religious or moral issues over economic concerns, with Frank going so far as to say that Kansans would willingly sacrifice their economic self-interest in order to vote their religious conscience (2004, 168). We argue that this predominantly white southern region still identifies with the Democratic Party for economic reasons, namely because the region's poor see the economic policies of the Democratic Party as being in their interest. If true, this finding would shed light on voting behavior outside of the region of eastern Oklahoma and can provide insight into southern, and perhaps mid-western, voting behavior in general.

What we found was that respondents to our survey reflected the political attitudes we have associated with populism. We defined populists as voters who favored liberal economic policies, such as those associated with the Democratic Party, and conservative religious policies, such as those associated with the Republican Party. The question remained whether these potential voters were more likely to identify with the Democratic Party because of its support for government intervention in the economy, or with the Republican Party because of its support for government intervention to promote traditional Christian values. We found that the political behavior of eastern Oklahomans is determined more by their economic interests than by their religious values. This was similar to the findings of Shafer and Johnston who concluded that, "Republican progress over time occurred almost entirely among those with conservative preferences on social welfare, while the . . . Republican Party scored hardly any gains at all among those with liberal preferences (2009, 29).

The results of our analysis show, first, that lower income respondents are more likely to support the Democratic Party than higher income respondents. Second, that the main distinction between Democratic and Republican identifiers is their agreement, or lack of agreement, with the economic statements on the survey. Specifically, those who approve government intervention in the economy to make health care available at lower cost or to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor, are significantly more likely to identify with the Democratic Party. In regard to the religious questions on our survey, however, the difference between Democratic and Republican identifiers is far less significant.

We conclude that Democratic identifiers in eastern Oklahoma express a strain of populism. They take a liberal position on economic issues and a conservative position on religious issues. They are liberal on economic issues largely because of their poverty. As both Democratic and Republican identifiers are conservative on religious issues, we conclude that the reason eastern Oklahoma has remained Democratic must be greater support in the region for government intervention in the economy. When forced to choose between their economic interests and their religious preferences, poor voters in the region put their economic interests first.

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**Appendix A****Research Project**

We are working on a research project by conducting a survey of potential voters in eastern Oklahoma.

The purpose of the study is to measure political attitudes and may involve what some may consider controversial issues. The entire survey should take around ten minutes. Strict confidentiality will be maintained. The results of the survey will only be presented in summary form. Do we have your permission to continue with the survey?

What is the state and county of your permanent residence?

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1. What is your gender?
  - a) Male
  - b) Female
  
2. Which of the following best describes your race or ethnicity?
  - a) White/Caucasian
  - b) Black/African American
  - c) Hispanic/Latino
  - d) Asian/Pacific Islander
  - e) American Indian
  - f) Other
  
3. Which statement best describes your education?
  - a) Some H.S.
  - b) H.S. Graduate/GED
  - c) Some College
  - d) College Graduate
  - e) Post Graduate
  
4. Which statement best describes your household income?
  - a) Less than \$25,000
  - b) \$25-50,000
  - c) \$50-75,000
  - d) More than \$75,000
  
5. Which statement best describes your age?
  - a) 18 to 29 yrs of age
  - b) 30 to 44 yrs. of age
  - b) 45 to 64 yrs. of age
  - c) Over 65 years of age

6. Are you a registered voter?

- a) Yes
- b) No

7. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an independent or what? (IF REPUBLICAN OR DEMOCRAT) "Would you call yourself a strong or a not very strong REPUBLICAN/ DEMOCRAT?" (IF INDEPENDENT, OTHER OR NO PREFERENCE) "Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican or Democratic party?"

- a) Strong Democratic
- b) Weak Democratic
- c) Independent Leaning Democratic
- d) Independent
- e) Independent Leaning Republican
- e) Weak Republican
- f) Strong Republican

8. Which candidate did you vote for in the 2010 Congressional election?

- a) Dan Boren
- b) Charles Thompson
- c) Other
- d) Did not vote

9. Which one factor mattered most in deciding who you voted for in the last election?

- a) Party loyalty
- b) Candidate's name recognition
- c) Candidate's issue positions
- d) Candidate's character
- e) Other- specify: \_\_\_\_\_

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

- a) Attend church regularly
- b) Attend church occasionally
- c) Do not attend church
- d) Prefers not to answer

11. With 1 being extremely liberal and 7 being extremely conservative, how would you describe your political beliefs?

Now I am going to read you some statements. Please tell me on a scale of 1-9 (with 1 meaning you very strongly disagree and 9 meaning you very strongly agree) what your attitude is in regard to each of the following statements.

12. The business man and the entrepreneur are much more important to society than the artist and the professor.



13. The government ought to help people get doctors and hospital care at lower cost.
14. Immigrants who are currently living in the U.S. illegally should be provided with a way to gain legal citizenship if they pass background checks, pay fines and have jobs.
15. Religion is a private matter that does not belong in the public schools.
16. The government ought to take steps to make sure that the gap between the rich and the poor in America is reduced.
17. The right of Americans to own guns is more important than the need to control gun ownership.
18. We have gone too far in pushing equal rights in this country.
19. I have traditional values about family and marriage.
20. Books that contain dangerous ideas should be banned from public school libraries.
21. The government should provide fewer services in areas such as health and education in order to reduce spending.
22. We all will be called before God at the Judgment Day to answer for our sins.
23. Poverty among African-Americans is really a matter of them not trying hard enough; if they would only try harder, they could be just as well off as whites.
24. Freedom of speech should not extend to groups that may be sympathetic to terrorists.
25. Public schools should be allowed to start each day with a prayer.
26. All Americans should be responsible for their own economic well-being and government should not interfere in order to help those less well off.
27. Police officers should be given more authority to ask for the documents of a person who looks like he or she could be an illegal alien.
28. Women should have an equal role with men in running business, industry and government.
29. Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for African-Americans to work their way out of the lower class.
30. School boards ought to have the right to fire teachers who are known homosexuals.

31. The use of torture against suspected terrorists in order to gain important information can sometimes be justified.

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

33. The U.S. should spend more on education and less on defense.

Thank you so much for participating in our survey.