Explaining Divided U.S. Senate Delegations, 1788-1996: A Realignment Approach

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*W*e maintain that the rise and fall in the number of states with divided Senate delegations can be explained primarily in terms of long-run forces of realignment/dealignment and staggered Senate elections. We test our model with election data from 1788–1996 rather than only the post–World War II period, which was common in previous research. We show that a large number of divided Senate delegations is not new; indeed, the highest percentage occurred in 1830. Exactly as predicted by our model, we find a cyclical pattern in divided Senate delegations that is tied to realigning epochs. Our analysis also calls attention to the recent decline in the number of such delegations, and we argue that this trend may well continue.

Divided government has become one of the most studied topics in political science in recent years, and it has even been suggested as an organizing principle of American politics research (Fiorina 1992, 3). Since World War II, from the state to the federal level, both parties have shared the channels of power the majority of the time (see, e.g., Fiorina 1992). In this article one particular aspect of divided government is closely examined—split Senate delegations, that is, states with two senators from different parties. An increase in their number after World War II has been observed. Perhaps the most widely known explanation for why split Senate delegations occur and for which types of voters are most likely to split their ticket in voting for senators is the policy balancing model of Fiorina (1992). Exposited and tested in Alesina, Fiorina, and Rosenthal (1991), it was further refined by Alesina and Rosenthal (1995). Fiorina (1992, 80–5) hypothesizes that sending a split Senate delegation to Washington may very well be a rational decision by some voters, namely, those (presumably moderate voters) whose policy position is closer to $(D + R)/2$ than to either $(D + D)/2$ or $(R + R)/2$. This dynamic creates what Fiorina calls an "in-party disadvantage."

While our focus is on our own model of realignment effects, rather than on critiquing/testing other explanations, whatever may be the power of the policy balancing model in accounting for House/president split voting patterns, we are skeptical of its underlying logic as applied to Senate delegations. That is, we doubt that moderate voters balance off senators from their state to arrive at a "ticket" closest to their own policy midpoint (see, e.g., Fiorina 1992, 82–5). If it is assumed that voters are concerned with policy outcomes and choose

a ticket accordingly, then what should concern them is the potential effect of their vote on control of Congress or on the partisan differences between Congress and the president, as in the Fiorina (1992) attempt to account for divided government (president versus Congress) in terms of policy balancing. If, for example, the president is a Democrat and one senator is a Republican, then, given the limited influence of any single senator on policy, a moderate voter who wishes to shift policies more toward the center still may have more reason to vote for a second Republican senator than to vote to seek to create a divided Senate delegation. In the logic of the policy balancing model, it seems to us to make no sense to consider the two senatorial seats without considering the overall political context, including which party controls the presidency. We should note that this article does *not* directly test or refute the policy balancing model. We are explaining the rise and fall of mixed delegations at the aggregate level.[1]

Segura and Nicholson (1995) tested Fiorina's strategic choice hypothesis and found little support for it. They propose and test a model to account for differences in senatorial outcomes within a given state that uses such independent variables as candidate quality and campaign spending, along with controls for position of the election in the presidential electoral cycle. They found that the level of challenger finances has a significant effect on the ability of the challenger to unseat the incumbent. They also found that senators facing a stiff primary challenger are more likely to lose in the general election (Segura and Nicholson 1995, 99). Segura and Nicholson (1995) also link the increase in split Senate delegations to the recent rise in candidate-centered politics (Wattenberg 1991), to the increase in the number of voters who consider themselves independents (Wattenberg 1994), and to the growing ability of incumbents to insulate themselves from national electoral tides (Cox and Katz 1996;

[1] In related unpublished research, however, we do provide an alternative explanation for why one state may be more likely to elect two opposing senators than another state. We suggest that the state's primary type (i.e., open versus closed) has a significant effect on the likelihood of electing a mixed Senate delegation as well as on the general ideological similarity of a state's Senate representation (Grofman and Brunell 1997).

Gelman and King 1990; King and Gelman 1991; Mayhew 1974). They argue that split delegations can be explained by factors specific to the individual Senate contests, without the need to posit an in-party disadvantage.

Previous research also has attempted to account for which states can be expected to have split representation in the Senate. One explanation for divided government is the so-called two constituencies thesis, that is, the notion that some states are sharply polarized, with senators of opposite parties drawing their principal support from two different and generally opposing constituencies of roughly comparable size; the potential for senators of opposite parties being elected in successive elections comes as a result of shifts among the remaining voters. Jung, Kenny, and Lott (1994) found strong support for this thesis. In related work, Bullock and Brady (1983) found evidence that the less homogeneous a state, the more likely it is to elect a split Senate delegation.

One consistency among the research on divided Senate delegations is that no analysis has been done on elections prior to 1940. In reading the literature, one might think that a high number of split Senate delegations is strictly a post–World War II phenomenon. Yet, the percentage of states simultaneously represented by a senator from each of the two major parties has varied greatly over time since the founding of this country, and very high levels of split Senate delegations are found in earlier political eras.

Moreover, most of the models proposed to account for patterns of divided government simply do not apply to the period before passage of the 17th Amendment. It was ratified in 1913 and required that senators be popularly elected rather than chosen by the state legislature. Given the nature of mass politics in America today—many people express no strong partisan identification, elections are largely candidate centered, and turnout rates vary tremendously between on-year and off-year elections—there is good reason to expect that the likelihood of consistent partisan Senate elections should decrease, ceteris paribus.

THE REALIGNMENT MODEL

Our explanation looks to long-run factors and applies to both before and after 1913. Our analysis of data going back to the first Congress will show that the rise and fall in the number of split Senate delegations can be attributed in large part to periods of realignment in American politics.[2] Yet, our data analysis also contrib-

utes to analysis of contemporary trends. While authors such as Fiorina (1992, 42) focus on why there has been a general increase in the number of split delegations compared to earlier decades after World War II, our analysis calls attention to an important phenomenon that seems unnoticed, namely, that divided Senate delegations have been *decreasing since 1978*. Indeed, we argue that this trend is likely to continue in 1998, although it is unlikely we will ever return to the low number of divided Senate delegations observed in previous eras.

Our argument is quite simple. A realignment can be thought of as a sustained and durable change in the partisanship and voting behavior of the electorate overall.[3] But, given the staggered election cycle of senators, any radical transformation of the upper chamber is simply not possible in any *single* election. Unlike the House of Representatives, in which every member must face reelection every two years, senators are elected to six-year terms, and no two senators from the same state face the electorate the same year (barring a resignation or death).

A realignment is a multistage process. First, the number of divided Senate delegations increases as the party in whose direction the realignment is moving makes gains in states previously under the unified control of the opposition. Second, the number of unified delegations grows as the realignment eventually sweeps away incumbents of the opposite party and/or finally captures the second Senate seat in the state when it becomes open. Third, as the force of realignment becomes exhausted, idiosyncratic factors and short-run forces regain importance, and there is the slow building of momentum toward a new realignment. Once again, the number of divided Senate delegations rises, with a new inflection point (local maximum) occurring at (or near) the next critical realigning election. Over the course of each realignment era, there should be a clear cyclic shift in the extent to which Senate delegations are unified.

This process occurs relatively slowly. Even when the realigning trend is strong, unseating a well-known senator is not easy. Today, for example, one must raise millions of dollars and generate extensive media coverage and interest before a serious challenge can be mounted (see, e.g., Jacobson and Kernell 1983, 44). Thus, some time elapses before the full ramifications of a realignment are realized in the upper chamber of Congress in the form of unified party control of state delegations.

Table 1 presents an idealized version of the dynamic we propose. A hypothetical realignment is taking place over six states, each with two senators with differing election classes. The Republicans initially control a majority of the seats. As Democratic support grows, the percentage of split states rises. Then, as the remain-

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[2] In terms of the debate about whether divided government should replace realignments as the organizing principle of American politics research (Fiorina 1992, 3), we argue that divided government cannot be understood except in the context of realignment, and that this is true for the contemporary period as well as for earlier periods. Of course, the fact that there are long-term trends in the number of split delegations does not mean that outcomes in individual Senate contests cannot be modeled primarily in terms of factors specific to those elections, as was done by Segura and Nicholson (1995), nor does the existence of long-term trends vitiate the accuracy of the Bullock and Brady (1983) findings about which states were most likely to have split delegations. We must always remember the need

for multiple levels of analysis and for care about exactly what question we are trying to answer.

[3] While we do not discount the importance of approaching realignments in terms of critical elections, we prefer to think of them as multiple-election phenomena involving a clear direction of change rather than as a single critical election (see Burnham 1970).

TABLE 1. Changes in Senate Delegations during a Hypothetical Realignment

State	Classes	Senators	Divided?
A	1,2	RR	No
B	2,3	RR	No
C	1,3	DR	Yes
D	1,3	DD	No
E	1,2	RR	No
F	2,3	RR	No
Percentage divided: 16.6			
Class 1 up for election			
A	1,2	DR	Yes
B	2,3	RR	No
C	1,3	DR	Yes
D	1,3	DD	No
E	1,2	DR	Yes
F	2,3	RR	No
Percentage divided: 50			
Class 2 up for election			
A	1,2	DD	No
B	2,3	DR	Yes
C	1,3	DD	No
D	1,3	DR	Yes
E	1,2	DR	Yes
F	2,3	DR	Yes
Percentage divided: 66.7			
Class 3 up for election			
A	1,2	DD	No
B	2,3	DD	No
C	1,3	DD	No
D	1,3	DD	No
E	1,2	DR	Yes
F	2,3	DD	No
Percentage divided: 16.6			

ing senator from these states comes up for reelection, there is a reunification of the senators, only this time with two members of the opposite party.

Because our model emphasizes the cyclic nature of split Senate delegations, it suggests that what goes up will come down. In the next section we provide strong historical evidence that cyclical patterns exist, with critical inflection points in the number of divided Senate delegations corresponding to critical (realigning) elections. Moreover, the evidence suggests that 1980 was a critical election in the South, the culmination of more than fifty years of declining Democratic hegemony and a critical point in what we propose should be called "glacial, top-down" realignment in the South.[4]

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[4] The realignment is "glacial" in that only now are the remnants of the Civil War realignment waning in the South, and no one "critical election" can define the change. The change is "top-down" insofar as we agree with Aistrup (1996, particularly chapter 9) that the pattern of Republican success in the South begins with the highest office (the presidency), moves downward to Senate and House elections, and then to state and local elections.

  We emphasize that the classification of 1980 in realignment terms is not crucial for our more general argument about the importance of cyclical trends in the number of split Senate delegations.

DATA ANALYSIS

Longitudinal Patterns in the Percentage of Split Senate Delegations

To understand why and when split Senate delegations occur, we look at the makeup of the Senate by state for all 105 Congresses from 1788–1996.[5] Figure 1 is a time series depicting the percentage of states with split Senate delegations from 1788 to 1996. It shows that divided delegations are not a new phenomenon in the United States. Contrary to our expectations before examining the data, even when state legislatures were electing senators, divided delegations were common.[6] While the percentage of states with split Senate delegations was at an extremely high mark in 1978, it was not the highest in history. The all-time high was 60% of states in 1830.[7]

Regional and Temporal Variations in the Percentage of Split Senate Delegations

There are interesting differences in the pattern of split Senate delegations not only over time but also among regions. Table 2 shows some clear long-run differences among the West, Midwest, South, and Northeast.

Two particular details are evident from Table 2. First, beginning early in this century, there is a long-run generally upward trend in the percentage of divided delegations as compared to earlier periods. In 1906, the percentage was at an all-time low—only 4% of states had a nonunified Senate delegation. From 1906 to 1924 the trend increased nearly monotonically each year (refer to Figure 1). After that, the overall proportion never falls below 20%. One plausible explanation for this pattern is ratification of the 17th Amendment in 1913, which changed how senators are elected. Indeed, we find that the percentage of divided delegations is negatively correlated with year for the period 1788–1912 ($r =$ minus .32, $p < .01$) but positively correlated with year from 1914 to 1996 ($r = .70, p < .01$). The second detail is that the South has experienced by far

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[5] These data were gathered from *Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections*, 3d ed. (1994), supplemented with data on the 104th and 105th Congress.

[6] Obviously, if a state legislature remained in the same hands, then two senators from the same party could be expected. Yet, legislative choices were not always this straightforward. For example, some legislatures were so deadlocked as to whom the next senator should be that they left the seat vacant. Between 1891 and 1905, this occurred no less than fourteen times, including California 1899; Delaware 1895, 1899, both seats in 1901 and 1905; Kentucky 1896; Louisiana 1892; Montana 1893; Oregon 1897; Utah 1899; Washington 1893; and Wyoming 1893 (Haynes 1960, 92). On at least two occasions, states controlled by one party elected a senator from the other party. In 1893, Kansas and North Dakota, both dominated by the Republicans, sent Democrats to the Senate (although, at the time, party lines in both states were "badly blurred"; see Haynes 1960, 92).

[7] A divided delegation has two senators from different parties—any two parties. While we are very confident about partisan identification of members in the modern era, there are inconsistencies among reference books regarding the "true" party of members of Congress in the early periods of the Republic. We use the partisan identification from *Congressional Quarterly* (1994).

FIGURE 1. Divided Senate Delegations, 1788–1996
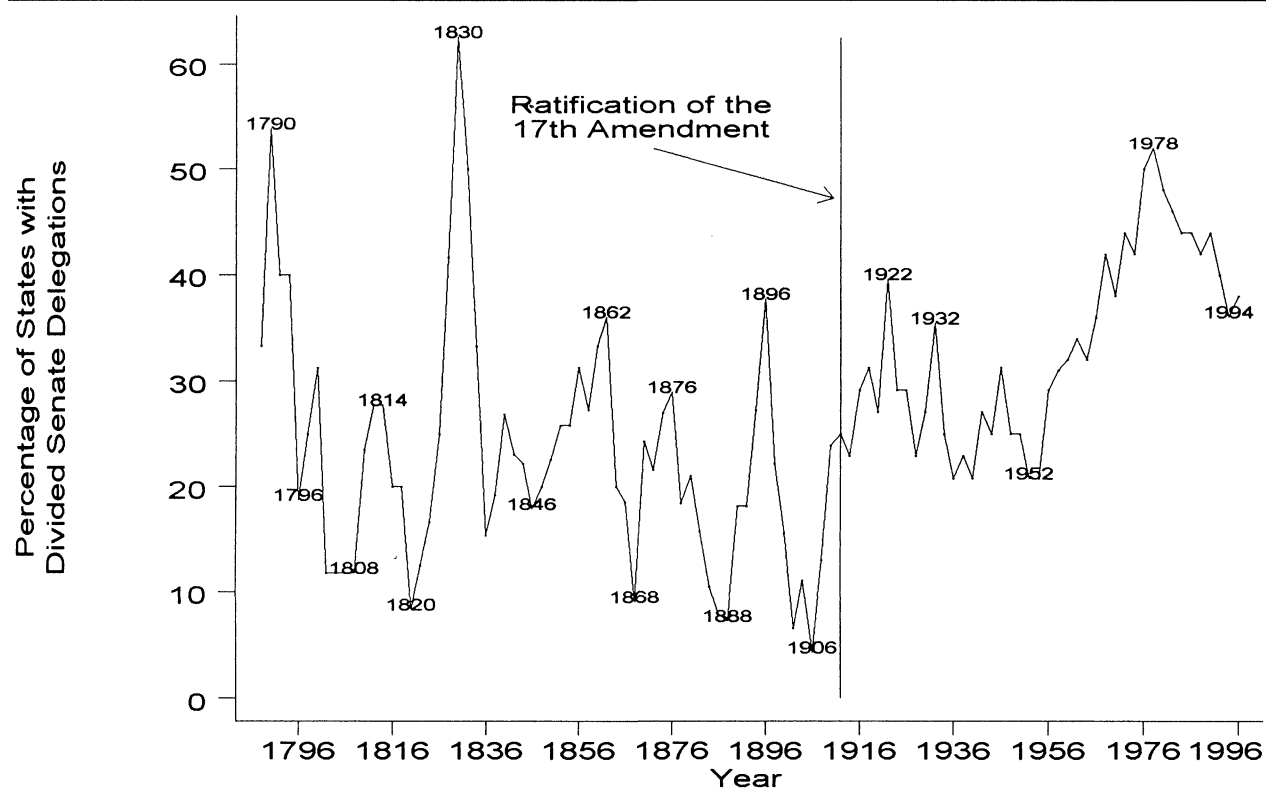
Note: A divided Senate delegation has senators from different parties.

the lowest amount of split delegations compared to the other three regions, which comes as no surprise given the Democratic domination there. The West has had the highest incidence of divided representation in the Senate.

TABLE 2. Split Senate Delegations: Regional and Longitudinal Differences

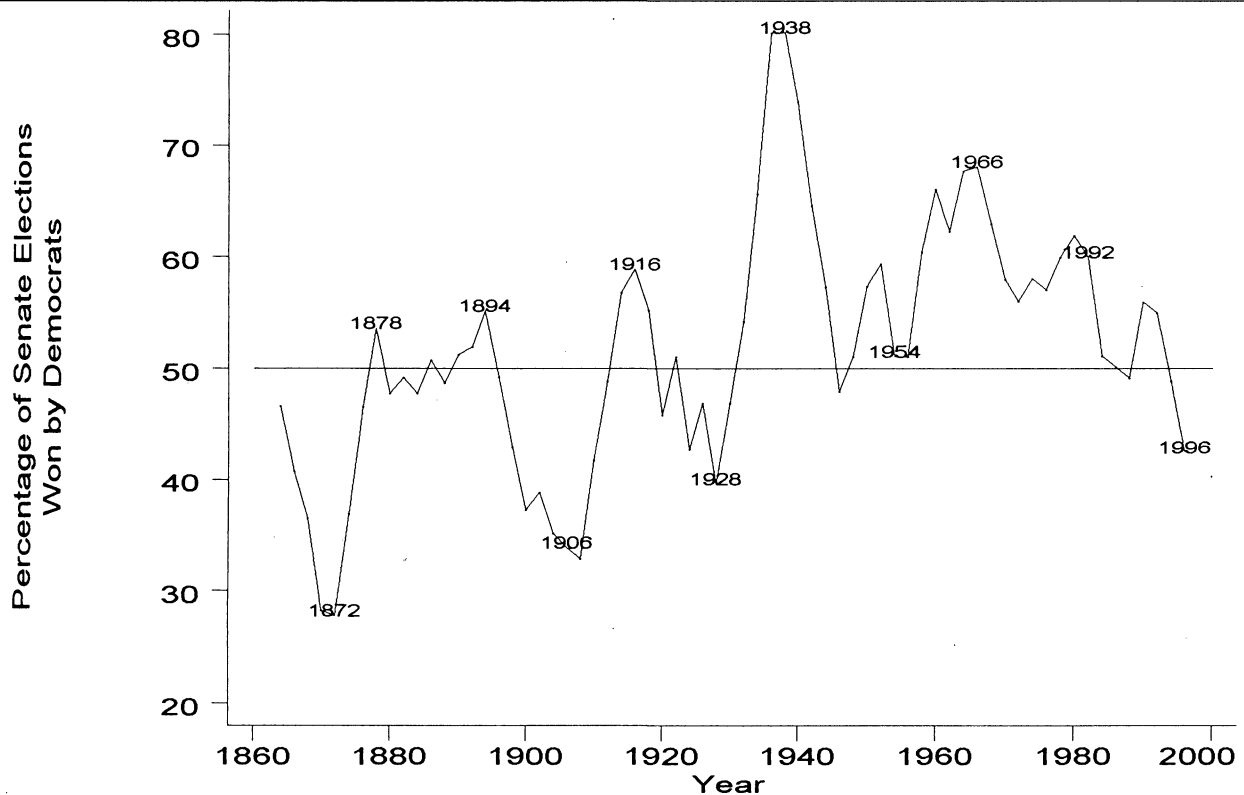| Region	Average Percentage
West	38.9
Midwest	28.2
South	15.4
Northeast	29.5
Period	
1788–1828	23.4
1830–70	26.3
1872–1912	18.2
1914–54	26.5
1956–96	40.2
Overall	28.0

Note: Average percentage is the number of states with nonunified Senate delegations among the total number of states in that region or time period. West: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. Midwest: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, Oklahoma, and Wisconsin. South: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia. Northeast: Connecticut, Delaware, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Vermont, and West Virginia.

Realignment Periods in U.S. Electoral History and Trend Directions

Another very important point can be teased out of Figure 1. The upward and downward movement in the percentage of divided Senate delegations exhibits a greater number of runs (i.e., continuously upward or downward movement) than would be expected by chance from a normal distribution with the same mean and variance.[8] As we shall see, these runs can be linked to realigning periods.

The standard analyses of U.S. party systems posit five historical epochs (Key 1955; Sundquist 1983). (1) The first party system ended in 1828–32 with the victory of Jacksonian democracy. (2) The second party system lasted until 1858–60 and the coming of the Civil War. (3) The third party system lasted from the end of the Civil War to the election of 1896, in which the power of western mining and agrarian interests in the Democratic Party strengthened, but the Republican Party remained dominant. (4) The fourth party system, also a period of Republican strength, lasted from 1896 until 1932 and the rise of the New Deal coalition. (5) The fifth party system, forged by Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Republican opposition to his policies, arguably persists. Many scholars claim that a long period of

[8] With a mean of .27 and a standard deviation of .11, our random simulation exhibited no runs of length greater than 4 and only one run of that length. In contrast, the actual data have two runs of length 4, three runs of length 5, and one run of length 6.

FIGURE 2. Democratic Tide Moving Average

Note: The graph is a three-election moving average of the percentage of Senate elections won by the Democrats. Every point then is the percentage of elections in which the Democrats win for that year averaged with the same data for the two prior elections.

dealignment began in 1964 or so, perhaps even earlier. Our analyses will bear on this controversy.

Realignment-Related Historical Inflection Points

For present purposes, there are two important aspects of Figure 1. One is the cyclical nature of change in the number of divided Senate delegations that it reveals. The other is that, even though the key long-term patterns are somewhat obscured by features of the data not directly related to realignments (e.g., women's suffrage in 1920), with a little care one can discern the starting date of the five realignments as inflection points in the data. That is, divided delegations peak around the same time that a major realignment brings about massive transformations of the American electorate (1830, 1858, 1896, and 1932) and at the beginning of the first era of American electoral politics (1790).

The first period of interest. is around 1828. The percentage of mixed Senate delegations rises from a low of .083 in 1820, peaks at .625 in 1830, and returns to a low of .192 in 1838. During this realignment we see states deunifying their delegation as they elect one Democratic senator; only later do they reunify their delegation with two Democrats.

Next, during the Civil War realignment around 1860, we see a rise in split delegations beginning in the late

1840s, with the number increasing throughout the next decade until it peaks in 1862. It then begins to fall as more and more states reunify their senators, only this time it is the Republicans in control. To establish that the partisanship is moving in the hypothesized direction, we plot the Democratic tide in Figure 2, which is the percentage of the Senate controlled by the Democrats since the beginning of the modern party system in 1860. Thus, around 1860 and shortly thereafter, we expect a low percentage of Democrats to be in office, and this expectation is met. The number of Democrats falls from 1860 until the early 1870s, when it reaches a local minimum.

There is another local peak in the number of divided Senate delegations, shown in Figure 1 for 1896, as the Republicans reassert their electoral dominance over the Democrats. Again, we would expect the Democrats to do very poorly in Senate elections near the realignment of 1896. In 1894 the Democrats held a majority of the seats in the Senate, but in 1896 and continuing until 1906 the Republicans regained control of the Senate, and the Democratic tide ebbed.

Figure 1 also shows mixed delegations rising before the 1930s, peaking in 1932, and then receding for most of the elections shortly thereafter. Yet, the local maximum around the New Deal realignment occurred in the early 1920s. While we cannot explain with certainty why this peak occurred then, one possible reason is the

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TABLE 3. Modeling Longitudinal Changes in the Percentage of Divided Senate Delegations, 1788–1996

Intercept	9.52*** (5.00)
Percent divided ($t - 4$)	.521*** (7.18)
Percent divided ($t - 2$)-($t - 8$)	.266*** (5.10)
Post-1912 dummy	6.16*** (4.03)
Realignment 1830	12.49*** (5.50)
Realignment 1862	8.31*** (3.90)
Realignment 1896	7.49** (3.43)
Realignment 1932	2.67 (1.26)
R^2	.69
Adjusted R^2	.67
N	101.00

Note: Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients with t-statistics in parentheses. The dependent variable is the percentage of divided Senate delegations for each Congress from 1788 to 1996. **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

introduction of women into the electorate.[9] The direction of partisan change in Senate elections given in Figure 2 and with the pattern of divided delegations in Figure 1 support our theory about divided delegations and partisan realignments.

While our model rests on a shift in electoral outcomes from one party to another, we are not saying that partisan realignments (past or present) are strictly unidirectional. Indeed, much of the literature has argued that these shifts, while massive, are still local affairs. Nardulli (1995, 10) states "that critical realignments are subnational phenomena that vary considerably in form, [and] not the majestic national movements some believed them to be." Nardulli also finds that only the realignment in 1932 involved more than half the country. Clubb, Flanigan, and Zingale (1980) also argue that the New Deal shift was atypical in that it involved more of the nation than previous realignments. Thus, while we posit a clear shift from one party to the other, we do not expect one party to win all Senate elections in any particular year; indeed, we know this is not the case.

A Multivariate Model of Divided Senate Delegations

We offer in Table 3 a model to explain the cyclical variance in split Senate delegations from 1788 to 1996. The dependent variable is the percentage of divided Senate delegations in all states.[10] We model results in terms of the following.

1. A four-year lag ($t - 4$) on the dependent variable. This lag is not contaminated by those states whose status as unified or divided has not yet had an

opportunity to change. Over a four-year period, at least one seat in each of the 50 states experiences a new Senate election.
2. A ($t - 2$) − ($t - 8$) lagged difference on the dependent variable to pick up a directionality. Recall that the percentage of divided Senate delegations is predicted by our realignment approach to be consistently moving, on average, in a given direction over a series of elections. Sometimes that direction will be upward, sometimes downward, depending upon the phase of the realignment cycle.[11]
3. Realignment-specific trend variables for each of the recognized realignment eras.[12]
4. A dummy variable to capture the putative effect of the 17th Amendment, which is coded +1 for elections after 1912 and 0 for earlier elections.

As can be seen in Table 3, the lagged terms are highly significant. Of the four realignment terms, all have the correct sign, and 1932 is the only election that is nowhere near statistically significant. Finally, as expected, the post–1912 variable is positive and statistically significant. The coefficient on this term is 6.16, which means the introduction of popular elections to the Senate added, on average, about three states (6% of 50) to the overall number of states with divided party delegations. Since there are 101 observations, an adjusted R^2 of .67 with only seven variables is a quite reasonable performance for our model.[13]

The Modern Era: The Realignment/Dealignment Controversy

Students of realignment dispute exactly what kinds of changes the American political landscape has been undergoing recently. If the pattern is a shift every 32 years or so, then there should have been a realignment long ago, certainly by the end of the 1960s. Absent any sustained change in party control at all levels of government, some political scientists began to question the utility and explanatory power of realignment theory and its application to modern American politics (see Ladd 1991). We agree with others (e.g., Burnham 1991; Nardulli 1995), however, that realignment theory still offers important insights and testable hypotheses.

If there has been a realignment since World War II,

[9] The 19th Amendment was ratified in 1920. For a discussion of its effect, see Brown (1991, chapter 6). Figure 2 indicates a revival of Republican strength in Senate elections during this time.

[10] Since we use the percentage of states with divided representation each year as the dependent variable, we cannot use a two-year lag. Since Senate elections are staggered, one-third of the states exhibit no electorally based change in representation from $t - 2$ to t. By using a two-year lag, we would in part be using the dependent variable to explain itself.

[11] Because each of the three cohorts is only partly overlapping in terms of the states holding elections in any given year, even lags such as $t - 2$ and $t - 4$ are not fully autoregressive. Strictly speaking, only a $t - 6$ (or $t - 12$) lag would be fully autoregressive. We have not used those lags.

[12] Operationalizing each of the realigning period variables reported in Table 3 involves coding values of 1 for the three elections preceding a realignment, −1 for the three elections following a realignment, +2 for each critical election year, and 0 for all other years. We experimented with a variety of operationalizations and found this to be marginally best. Yet, little explained variance is lost by simply using realignment year dummy variables for peak elections (1830, 1862, 1896, 1932).

[13] This is especially true since we are using no explanatory factors that are truly election specific, other than realignment periodization. We should note that the same model was run on the data with the southern states removed. The only difference worth noting is that the coefficient for the post–1912 variable rose to 8.21. The coefficients for all other variables were nearly the same as reported in Table 1.

it is unlike any experienced previously. While the number of people identifying themselves as Republican has increased considerably, the magnitude of this change has been too small for most authors to conclude that a partisan realignment has taken place (see, e.g., Wattenberg 1994), especially since the most dramatic recent change in party identification is the rise in the number of voters identifying themselves as independent. Nonetheless, the ratio of self-identified Democrats and Republicans has gone from about 3:2 to a more nearly even balance. Similarly, while Figure 2 shows that the general trend in Democratic electoral success in the Senate has been downward since the 1960s, the secular trend is not clear, and we would not conclude that a Republican realignment has taken place. Moreover, there has been no critical election, financial disaster, or world war to spawn the political earthquake normally associated with a realignment.

We argue below, however, that *in the South* there is evidence of a regional realignment whose contours were masked by the dramatic rise in Democratic Party loyalty among black voters in the 1960s and the growth in black enfranchisement since then (Alt 1994). Furthermore, the shift occurred from the top (i.e., the presidential level) down (see Aistrup 1996; Bullock 1988) and moved at a glacial pace.

A New Era of Realignment?

After falling in the period following the New Deal realignment, the percentage of divided Senate delegations began to rise in the early 1950s and continued to do so reasonably steadily for nearly thirty years. From Figure 1 it looks like the New Deal shift never quite culminated, since the percentage of split Senate delegations did not return to the lows reached both before and after earlier realignments. Yet, this may be due simply to a long-term shift caused by the change in the mode of electing senators. Moreover, the percentage of divided Senate delegations peaked in 1978 and then began to decrease.

This feature of the data can be regarded as purely accidental, but it suggests a possible realigning trend. In particular, the model projection shown in Table 3 for the 1998 election predicts a decrease of a few points in the percentage of divided Senate delegations, from 38% in 1996 to 33% in 1998, which equates to two or three fewer states with a mixed delegation. If this occurs, then it will be the seventh decrease in the last ten elections (one of which involved no percentage change. Thus, one important point not mentioned in the recent literature (see, e.g., Fiorina 1992; Segura and Nicholson 1995) is that the most recent trend in split Senate delegations is clearly downward.[14] Nonetheless, even if the downward trend continues, a return to the previous historic lows in the number of divided

Senate delegations is unlikely, given the increased volatility in the electorate, the decline in party loyalty, and the rise in the number of independents.

Glacial, Top-Down Realignment in the South

Although the overall percentage of states with divided Senate delegations may not fall much farther, it is plausible to believe that the South is experiencing a prolonged top-down Republican realignment, despite occasional temporary reversals in the pattern in some southern states. It is primarily this development that accounts for the decline nationally in mixed Senate delegations.

Our finding are fully consistent with other research on the South. Aistrup (1996) documents a "Southern Strategy" initiated in the 1960s by the Republican Party to transform the South into a GOP stronghold through a "top-down advancement" of Republican candidates. Similarly, Bullock (1988, 562) found that "the share of GOP Senate seats in the South grew by 40 percentage points between 1960 and 1980." He also found that while the general trend in the South is toward the Republicans, there have been setbacks (such as the 1986 Senate elections), and that the general progression has been a top-down realignment.

In Figure 3 the percentage of divided Senate delegations is shown separately for the South and non-southern states. We see a clear upward tendency in the number of divided Senate delegations since 1960. Indeed, comparing the two trends, we see that much of the change has occurred in the South. Yet, we also see that this upward trend in the South may be reversing as the Democrats lose their historical strength in the region and the Republicans gradually become the dominant party. Given recent events (particularly the 1994 elections), we might expect a continuing Republican realignment in the South and thus a period in which many of these states elect two GOP senators.[15] As previously noted, we consider this movement in the South glacial, since the time frame is like none of the past realignments in the American political experience.[16]

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[14] We think of this dealignment as a combination of many small events, or tremors, that are generally but far from completely moving the political landscape toward the Republican Party, with the most important evidence of long-lasting change coming from the South (see below).

[15] Further evidence of a slow realignment in the South comes from within-state correlations for the vote share in Senate elections. First, we ran the correlation for the Democratic percentage of the vote for the same Senate seat (Senator A's vote share in 1990 correlated with Senator A's vote share in 1996) and found that the correlations were at an all-time low ($r = .10$) for the elections of the late 1980s and early 1990s. After running a second set of correlations are for the vote share between the two different senators in a state (Senator A's vote share in 1992 correlated with Senator B's vote share in 1994 or 1996), we found that in the late 1980s the correlation was negative ($r = -.4$), and only for the most recent elections was it positive. We interpret this as a slow shift from all Democrats to what eventually will be a nearly unified Republican South. Currently, only Louisiana is represented by two Democrats. This is remarkable since as late as 1960 all ten southern states were represented by unified Democratic delegations in the Senate.

[16] In the patterns we observe, small to moderate gains made by one party or the other in any given election may quickly be wiped away, even in the very next election. In contrast, past partisan realignments have been portrayed as involving massive unidirectional change (see,

FIGURE 3.   Percentage of Divided Senate Delegations in Southern and Nonsouthern States
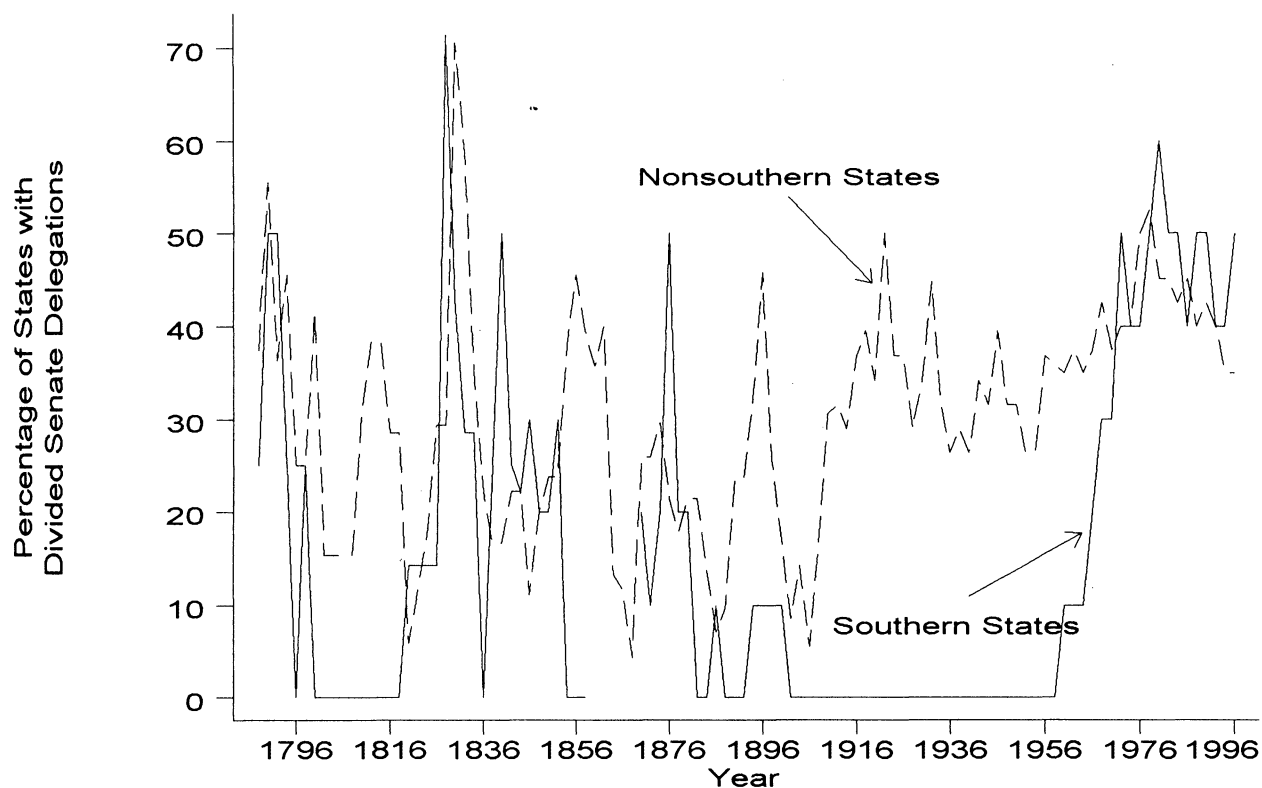
Note: Divided Senate delegations are those with senators from different parties. The South is defined as Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia. The break in the trend line for the southern states (1860–66) is due to the Civil War and the expulsion of senators from these states.

DISCUSSION AND ISSUES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Split Senate delegations are not merely a result of the modern era of divided government. There have been long-run cyclical patterns in the percentage of nonunified delegations since 'the beginning of the Republic, and in much earlier political eras there was a high percentage of states represented by senators of opposing parties. We argue that the rise and fall in the number of divided Senate delegations can be tied to periods of electoral realignment in American politics. As a realigning trend begins, the number of divided delegations increases and peaks in (or near) some critical election. As the realigning wave works its way through the six-year senatorial election cycle, the number of divided delegations declines, as one party begins to dominate electoral politics. Then, a new wave begins and starts the cycle all over again. We have provided convincing empirical evidence and a clear theoretical rationale for the existence of such repeated patterns.

Also, focusing on longitudinal patterns in split Senate delegations provides a new perspective on an old debate about exactly when realignments take place. The standard approach, dating back at least to Key's

e.g., Brady and Lynn 1973). Our finding is consistent with Bullock's (1988, 569) statement that "unlike realignments of the latter half of the 19th century, the changes of the last generation have been more gradual and less persistent."

(1955) classic article, is to date realignments from the critical election in which one party's dominance for the next period is established. Thus, the realignment of 1896 is followed by the realignment of 1932. But it may be even more meaningful to think about realignments not from peak to peak (e.g., 1896 to 1932), but from trough to trough (e.g., from 1846 to 1888, from 1890 to 1906, from 1908/1922 to 1950, from 1952 to ??). What has been regarded as *the* critical election becomes a high point (maximum point of inflection, or near to one) of a realigning trend, somewhere in the middle of our new definition of a realigning era.

From this perspective we see the realigning wave as being visible long before the actual critical election. This approach largely sidesteps controversy as to whether it is 1928 or 1932, 1828 or 1832, say, which should be taken as the "defining" election. It also suggests very different answers to the question of how best to periodize the changing epochs of American party politics. Yet, full resolution of this question requires us to look at a variety of other types of data on the pace of realignment across different levels of government.

Unfortunately, there are other questions for which our data (and theory) cannot yet provide a fully satisfactory answer. In particular, did a national realignment emerge in or around 1980? Here the evidence is mixed, but the probably answer is "no." If not,

is a realignment taking place, but only in the South? We believe the probable answer is "yes." Will we ever return to the previous low levels of divided Senate delegations? While definitive evidence is lacking, the answer is likely to be "no," given the fundamental change in 1913 to popular election of senators.

Our results are important to students of American politics and not just to specialists on Senate elections. First, we show the usefulness of time-series data in helping to develop less time-bound explanations. Second, our results contribute to the ongoing revitalization of realignment theory (Aistrup 1996; Bullock 1988; Burnham 1991; Nardulli 1995; cf. Ladd 1991). Third, our model predicts a future decline in the number of divided Senate delegations that flatly contradicts the established wisdom (Fiorina 1992).

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