



HARVARD Kennedy School
JOHN F. KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT



RECLAIMING THE “SOUTHERN STRATEGY”

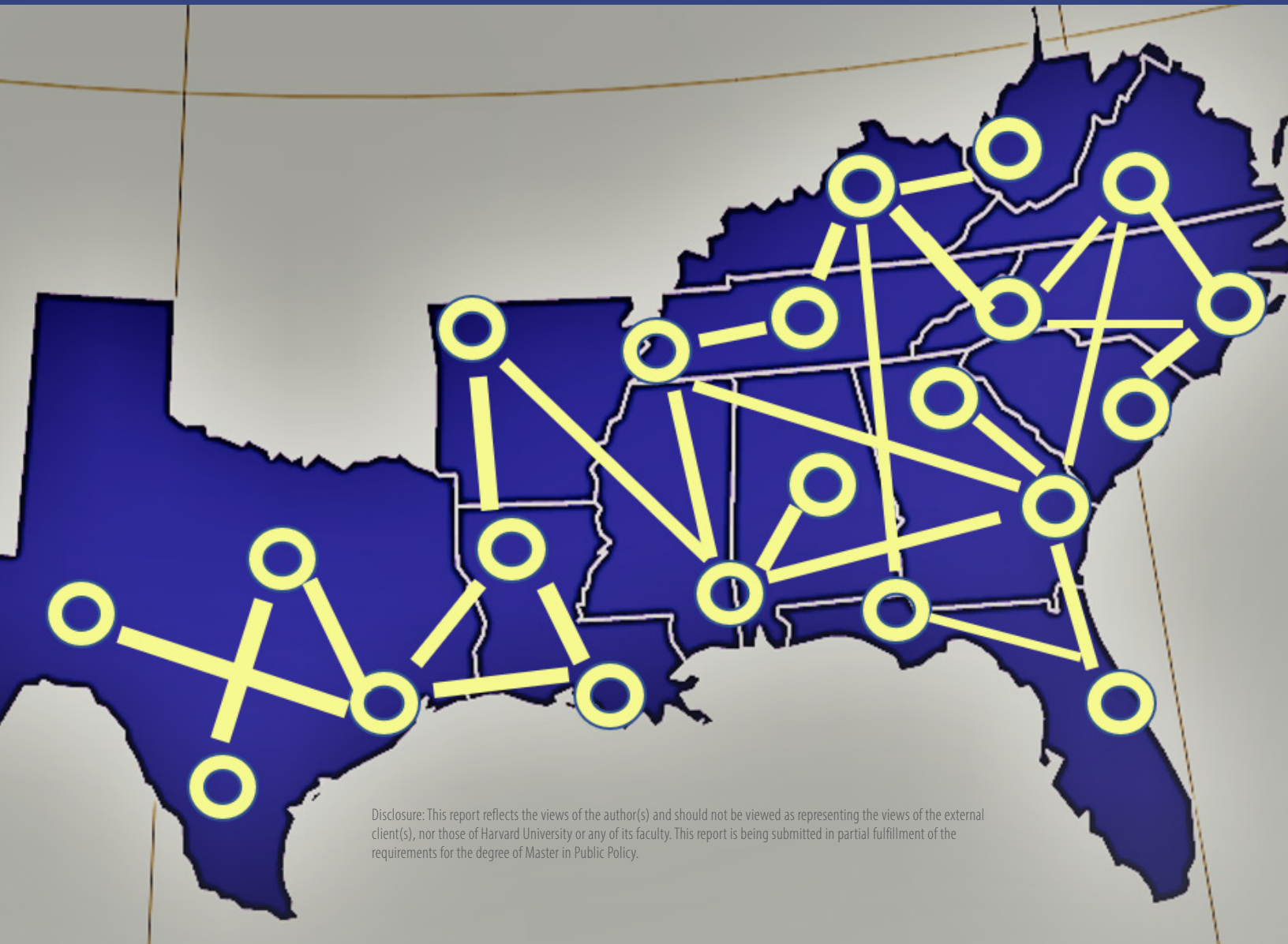
How Democrats Win Back the South in the 2020s

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Disclosure: This report reflects the views of the author(s) and should not be viewed as representing the views of the external client(s), nor those of Harvard University or any of its faculty. This report is being submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master in Public Policy.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY - 4

- 4 Context: The South is ripe for Democratic investments.
- 5 Problem Statement: Democratic donors are not investing effectively enough to sustain wins.
- 6 Key Findings: The GOP's Southern Strategy dominates Democratic donor decision-making.
- 8 Recommendations: Powering the New Southern Majority Fund can deliver wins for Democrats.

INTRODUCTION - 9

- 10 2020 is bigger than we think: It is a presidential election year and a Census year.
- 12 The Democratic Party can no longer be the Party that merely opposes Trump.

METHODOLOGY - 13

- 13 Field Interviews: 75+ leaders across 13 Southern states shape this report.
- 13 Donor Analysis: Democratic donors still do not look like Southern communities.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND CONSEQUENCES - 14

- 14 From Nixon to Trump: The GOP "Southern Strategy" exploits a gap in Democratic engagement.
- 16 Consequences of donor decision-making means donors discount the South's electoral potential.

CLAIMS THAT STILL STOP DEMOCRATIC DONORS FROM INVESTING IN THE SOUTH - 17

- 18 Overarching Claim: "The South is a deficit on America's political and economic future."
- 18 Overarching Reclaim: "The South is relevant and intertwined in the direction of our nation's democracy."
- 20 Claim #1: "It's too expensive to invest in the South. There's no infrastructure"
- 21 Reclaim #1: "Relationships matter. They form the South's organizing infrastructure."
- 23 What Southerners are Saying: Faith Matters.
- 27 Claim #2: "The South is a bastion of racism."
- 28 Reclaim #2: "The South is a ripe experiment for America's future majority-minority democracy."
- 29 What Southerners are Saying: Race Matters. Voters of Color Matter. Donors of Color Matter.
- 37 Claim #3: "Democrats only stay in cities."
- 39 Grassroots Reclaim #3: "There is tremendous, untapped potential in the exurbs."
- 40 What Southerners are Saying: Culture and context matter.
- 42 What Southerners are Saying: The climate crisis is a huge concern.

FUNDING THE DEMOCRATIC LONG GAME - 43

- 43 Funding the Democratic Long Game means funding the Third Reconstruction

RECOMMENDATIONS - 45

- 45 Fuel the New Southern Majority Fund.
- 45 How to operationalize the New Southern Majority Fund.
- 46 Potential: Reckon with the South's exorbitant capacity to deliver wins.
- 47 Power: Amplify Southern movement builders to deliver wins
- 49 Process: Advance collective accountability to deliver wins.

CONCLUSION - 50

APPENDIX AND BIBLIOGRAPHY - 51

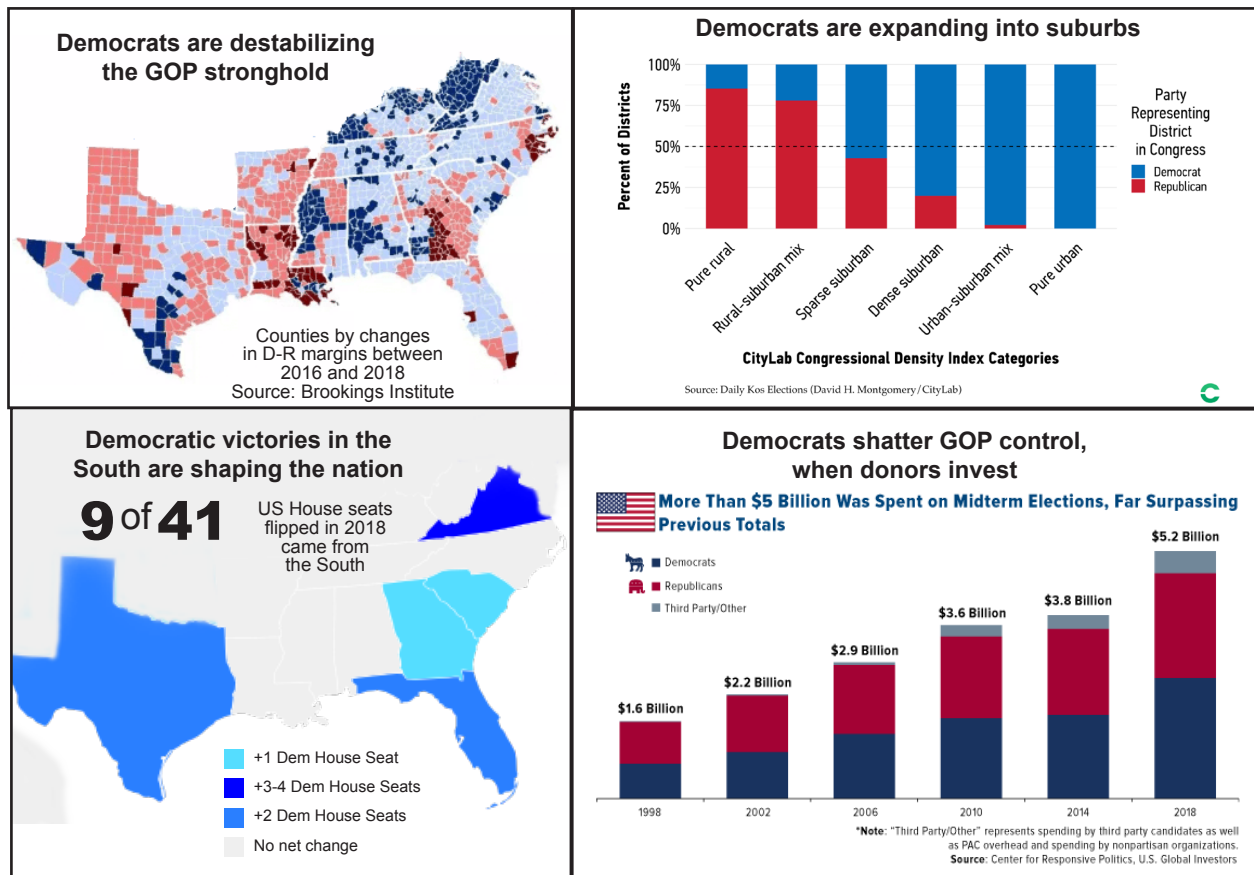
- 51 Notes on Campaign Financial Analysis
- 52 Endnotes
- 53 Bibliography

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CONTEXT: THE SOUTH IS RIPE FOR DEMOCRATIC INVESTMENTS.

Since President Trump's landmark victory in 2016, Democrats are building momentum to compete and win at the ballot box across the South. Democrats flipped a US Senate seat in Alabama in 2017; ran close calls across high-profile contests in Texas, Georgia, and Florida in 2018, and executed critical state-level wins across Kentucky, Louisiana, and Virginia in 2019.

These campaigns all signal tectonic shifts. They bring growing communities of color from the margins of electoral engagement toward the margins of electoral victory. More Americans are moving to the South than any other region, and communities of color are driving this growth. Nevertheless, these changes lay bare an untold story: the South is in play.



Democratic voters in the South exert significant influence: Southern states will elect over ¼ of pledged delegates in 2020.¹ The South will also likely gain 5 Congressional seats after the 2020 Census. Donors must not underestimate the potential of the South at their own peril.

2020's political landscape confronts seismic, unprecedented change: shifting campaign operations during the COVID-19 global pandemic; organizing a more diverse American electorate while facing backlash in the form of white supremacist terror; and building coalitions across issue-based, youth-led movements.



The South is at a crossroads: the region is the battleground to fight regressive policies and promote progressive policies to move the entire nation forward.

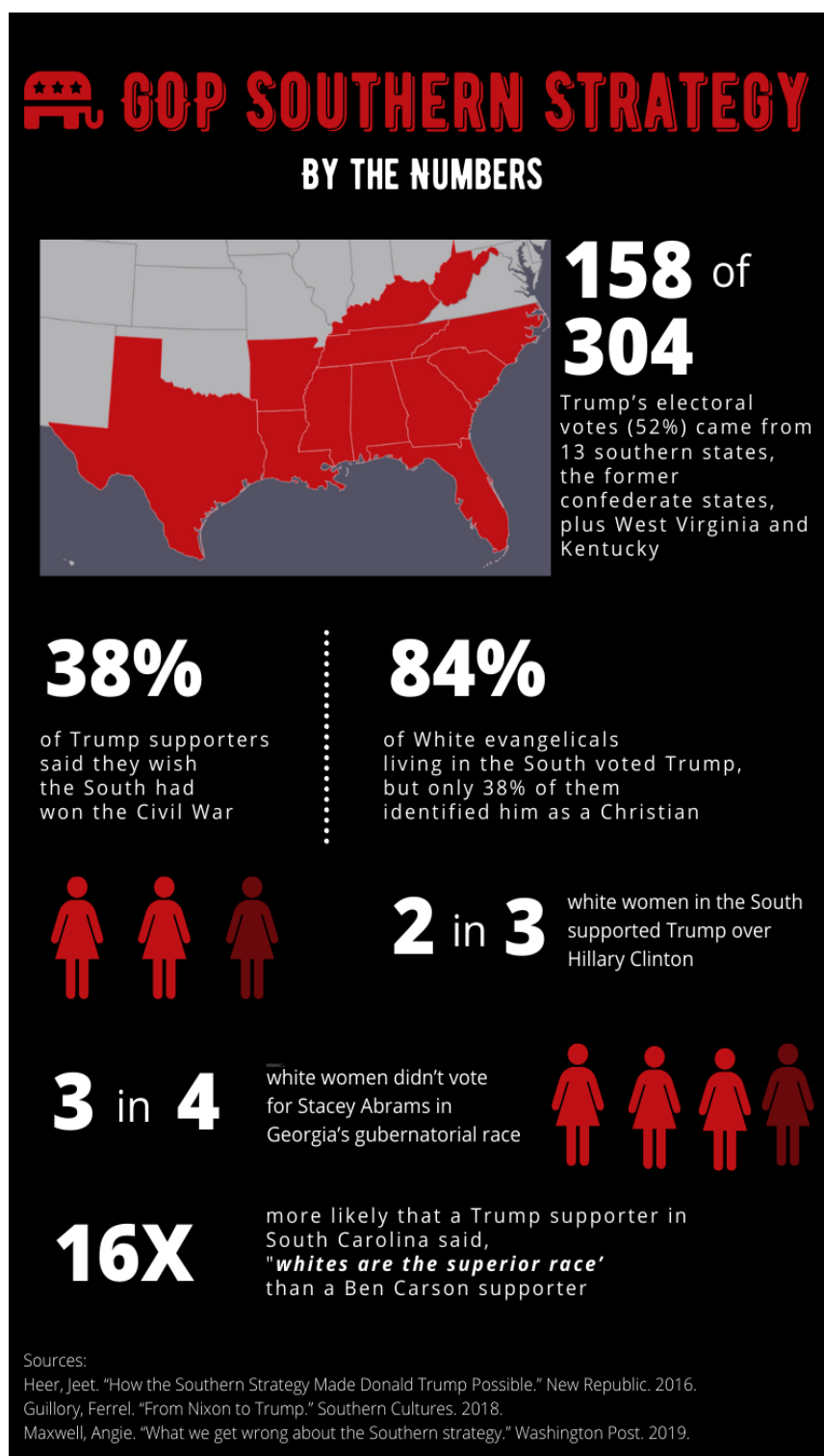
PROBLEM STATEMENT:

Despite momentum generated by the Democratic electoral wins across the South, Democratic donors are not investing effectively enough to build and sustain political power across the region in 2020 and beyond.

KEY FINDING:

The GOP “Southern Strategy” still dominates Democratic donor decision-making on funding races in the South.

Concocted during the Nixon years, the GOP “Southern Strategy” consolidated support among white voters across the South by exploiting racism against African Americans. The impact of this strategy resonates today through the language of white supremacy emanating from Trump’s White House. This political moment reinforces a false perception of the South as a deficit on America’s future. This political moment ultimately stunts Democratic donors from making bold, transformative investments in Democratic campaigns building movements to expand power across the South.



In our interviews, grassroots leaders lift up “reclaims” about the South to rebuke common misperceptions of the region, especially among donors.

“Deficit” Claims from Donors	Reclaims from Grassroots
<u>Overarching Claim:</u> "The South is an anomaly. It is a deficit on America's political and economic future."	<u>Overarching Reclaim:</u> "The South is both relevant and intertwined in the direction of our nation's democracy."
"It's too expensive to invest in the South. There's no infrastructure."	"In the South, relationships matter. They form the South's organizing infrastructure, which may not be familiar to donors."
"The South is a bastion of racism."	"The South is a ripe experiment for America's future majority-minority democracy."
"Democrats only stay in cities."	"There is enormous, untapped potential in rural and suburban areas."

RECOMMENDATION: To reclaim the Southern Strategy in 2020 and beyond, Democratic donors should invest in the NEW SOUTHERN MAJORITY FUND.

To effectively fund Democratic power-building in the long run, thereby shifting giving paradigms from moment to movement, Democratic donors should support the New Southern Majority Fund.

The New Southern Majority Fund extends individual giving by empowering donors to align electoral investments with community power. This approach broadens the scope of impact to support an expanding multiracial voter base in the short run, and a groundswell of collective power in the long run through:

- **Potential:** Reckoning with the South's exorbitant capacity to deliver wins.
- **Power:** Amplifying Southern Movement Builders to deliver wins.
- **Process:** Advancing collective accountability to deliver wins.

IN PRACTICE, THE NEW SOUTHERN MAJORITY FUND:

1. Primes donor literacy by setting the table for Southern leaders across race, geography and faith silos to capture how their giving reaches beyond the South.

Southern issue priorities guide donor literacy. Our fieldwork reveals key priorities across Southern communities: advancing racial justice, bridging the urban-rural divide, and building community resilience amidst the climate crisis.

2. Builds relationships across coalitions of donors and grassroots leaders to illuminate proximity-informed investments.

These decisions flip the formula from "return on Investment" to "return on organizing power." Democratic donors often restrict themselves to short-term, transactional "moment" metrics of success. Embracing long-term, transformative "movement" funding can catapult relational organizing systems to build power.

3. Extends individual giving through portfolios of districts across federal races.

These portfolios mitigate risks and maximize impact. Operationally, they support state-level coordinated campaigns and victory funds.

4. Holds itself accountable to Southern communities and their priorities.

Donors can provide critical care at a time of critical need. They should respond to communities at the crossroads of economic distress, the global pandemic, and the climate crisis.

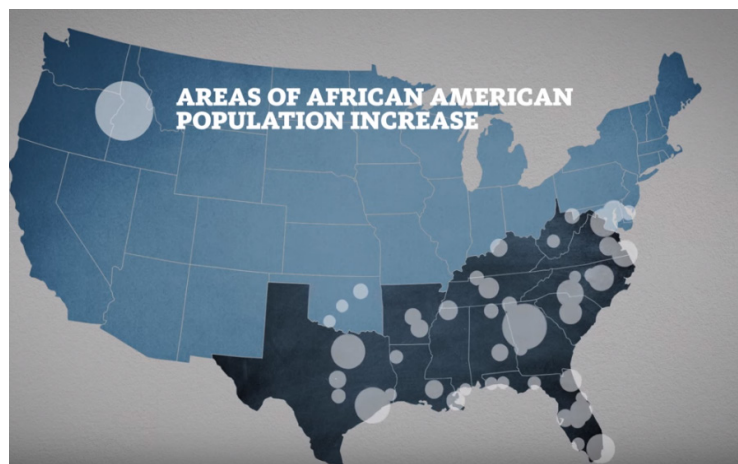
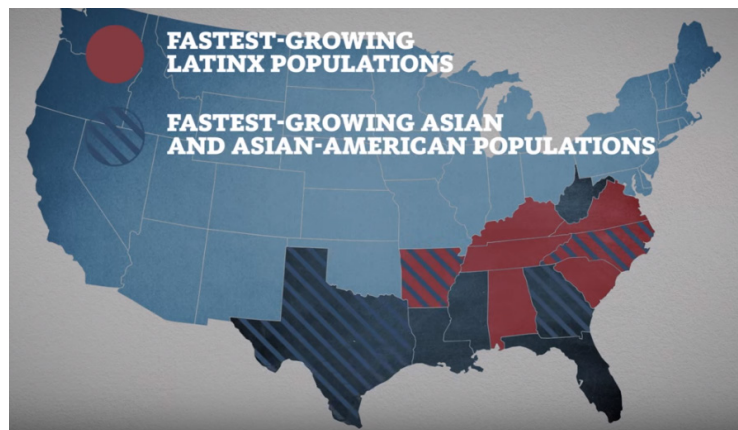
2020 offers a critical juncture, a kairos moment. The New Southern Majority Fund creates space that reinforces the need to protect our democracy. This report lays out how Democratic donors can reclaim the GOP's Southern Strategy through tangible action steps. Doing so will empower Democratic donors to expose false claims that stunt Democratic powerbuilding and to fuel a rising South that is already shaping the future of American politics in the decades ahead.

INTRODUCTION

THE SOUTH IS RIPE FOR DEMOCRATIC INVESTMENTS.

The American South is home to both America's struggle and America's promise. While the region still confronts enduring legacies of slavery and segregation, which are often imagined as distinctively Southern,² **the South is ripe for Democratic change:**

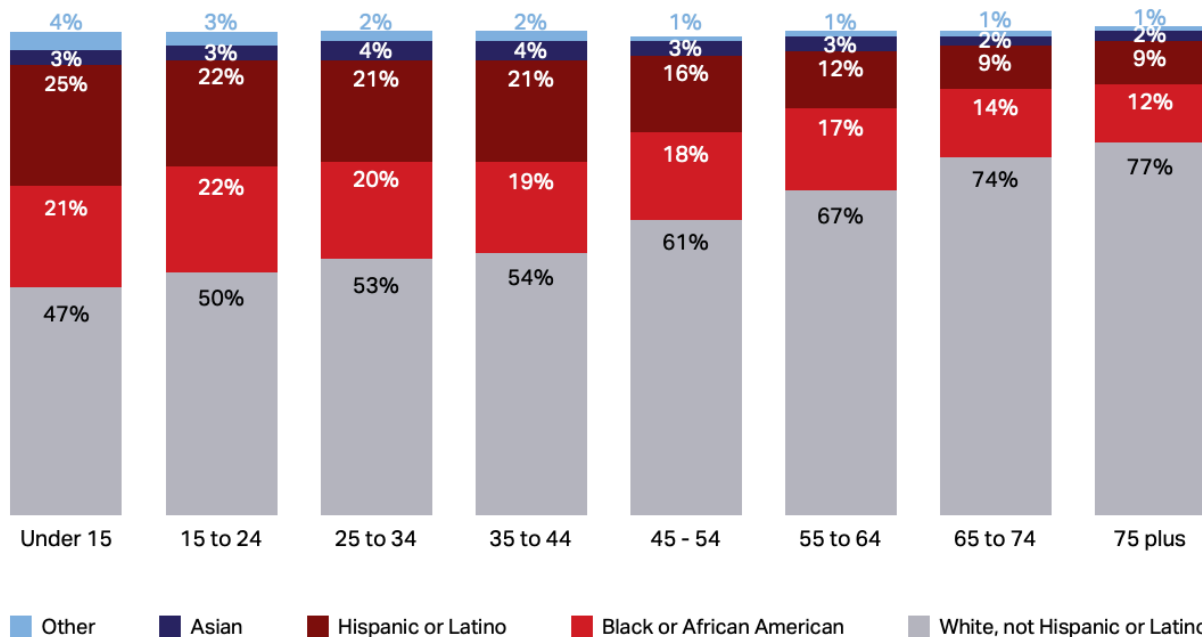
- **One out of three Americans lives in the South.** The South already boasts 1/3 of Electoral College votes, and more people are moving to the South than any other region in the US.
 - Southern cities are the fastest-growing in the US, with younger, more college-educated, and more voters of color driving this growth.³
 - **After the 2020 Census, the South may gain five Congressional seats,** more than any other region.⁴
- **More communities of color are moving to the South** to pursue both economic opportunity and to improve quality of life.
 - Over 50% of Black Americans live in the South, and these numbers are growing.⁵
 - 7 out of 10 states with the fastest-growing Latinx populations are in the South.⁶
 - 4 out of 10 states with the fastest growing Asian populations are in the South.⁷
- Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, and Texas will be 4 of the 8 states that will have 50% of the US population by 2040.⁸



Source: Ford Foundation

Rising Generations in the South are more Racially and Ethnically Diverse

Increase in residents of color leading to an increasingly diverse South.



Source: MDC calculation of 2016 data using Economic Modeling Specialists International (Q1.2017)

2020 IS BIGGER THAN WE THINK: IT IS A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION YEAR AND A CENSUS YEAR.

Since 2016, our democracy has faced grave threats to its capacity to endure. The gravity and intensity of these tectonic political shifts reveal what is at stake in a larger “battle for the soul of our nation.” Our democracy confronts:

- **Constitutional Crises:** President Trump committed impeachable offenses that obstructed justice and abused the power of his office.
- **Political Infrastructure Shifts:** With the emergence of the global pandemic, campaigns must reimagine face-to-face organizing in the digital domain.
- **Political Party Reorganization:** Intra-party polarization has reached an all-time high, and factionalization has distanced the progressive left from those at the center.⁹
- **Demographic Shifts:** There are undeniable trends of a diversifying electorate that cannot go unnoticed.
- **Rise of White Supremacy:** Once on the fringes of mainstream politics, white supremacist agendas and actions have gained prominent attention.
- **Mass Mobilization through Protest Politics:** Americans have taken to the streets to show their strength in numbers. From Black Lives Matter demonstrations to the Climate Strikes to the Women’s March, Americans have rallied to show their frustration with the current Administration’s disregard for their concerns.

Democrats across the South responded powerfully to these threats in 2018, when they organized and executed 9 “Blue Wave” Congressional wins.¹⁰ These wins, though groundbreaking, fail to capture how Democratic wins across the South intersect with movement building across Southern issue priorities . . . all on shoestring budgets.

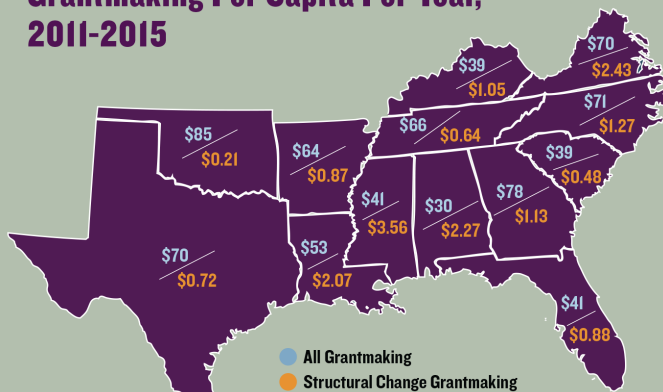
Despite groundbreaking wins, Southern movement building remains woefully under-funded.

Traditional Philanthropy: Missing in Action

Between 2011-2015, foundations invested **56¢ per person in the South for every dollar-per-person invested elsewhere.**

Structural change work received 11¢ per person for every dollar-per-person nationally. Our extensive regional research suggests that individual donor support is similarly disproportionately low.

Grantmaking Per Capita Per Year, 2011-2015



Source: National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy

When Democratic donors do not invest in the South, enormous power remains untapped. The maps above demonstrate that Southern leaders generate tremendous social change on shoestring budgets. Southern leaders generate such power by aligning civic powerbuilding and electoral campaign efforts to their communities' issue priorities. Southern communities leverage parallel institutions that draw from centuries-long organizing traditions that push the rest of this nation towards justice. In the context of 2020, as the nation grapples with a global pandemic while conducting a decennial Census count, Southern power-building is showcasing its resilience, yet again. As a result, the entire nation benefits.

POWER

is the ability to change the rules.

- Rashad Robinson, Color of Change

As the South grows, so grows the nation.¹¹ The South is where America can find redemption and reconciliation. Despite lack of investment, Southern communities of color have always been "at the forefront of reshaping our nation into a more equitable, more just, and more inclusive democracy."¹²

STRUCTURAL CHANGE

refers to efforts that extend beyond service delivery and address the root causes of social inequity and human suffering.¹³

Democratic donors must seize this opportunity. Otherwise, Democrats underestimate the potential of the Southern electorate at their own peril.

"2020 Census will mean everything for where the nation is in 2030".

- Howard Franklin, Georgia

"There was a serious deficit in the 2010 count."

- Courtney Patterson, North Carolina

"If the Midwest is the future of the Republican Party, then the South is the future of the Democratic Party."

- Stacey Abrams aide, Georgia

"Elections are signs to describe the willingness of the people. The Blue Wave is a real indicator that people are ready for principled leadership."

- Mayor Chokwe Lumumba, Mississippi

"The outliers are actually trend-setting."

- LaTosha Brown, Alabama

THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY CANNOT BE THE PARTY THAT MERELY OPPOSES TRUMP.

It must also have a long-term vision that rejects racism, centers multiracial coalitions, and empowers Southern communities to heal and organize around their interwoven struggles.

This vision is the antidote to the GOP's Southern Strategy.

If Democrats work to reclaim the Southern Strategy and reimagine the demographic dividend of the South, then they must not see the region as a deficit or a drag on America's political future. A segregated spatial landscape of the South, one defined by rigid state lines and gerrymandered district boundaries, does not have to be the future image of the region.

After all, the salvation of America rests on the South.

THIS REPORT DISPELS THE MYTH THAT THE SOUTH IS DISCONNECTED FROM THE REST OF THE NATION.

With guidance from Ms. LaTosha Brown, co-founder of the Black Voters Matter Fund, which seeks to expand Black voter engagement and build progressive power, this report:

- **Reveals the gravity of the GOP Southern Strategy** and how that disinformation campaign continues to stifle Democratic donor decision-making.
- **Provides recommendations for Democratic donors** to maximize investments to beat Trump and Trumpism in 2020 and beyond.
- **Offers avenues for Democratic donors to reclaim a Southern Strategy** by breaking existing donor silos and building a framework for deploying dollars in the region.

"Darkness came in the Party after Dr. King's assassination and no one stepped in to fill the void of leadership. There is very real fear on the ground from Democrats of color in rural areas today: 'Why should we vote Dem [sic]? Why don't we form our own party?'"
- Party Leader, South Carolina

"The South is up for debate in the Trump era."
- Zack Carroll, South Carolina

"It will be the Southern states that lead us to the White House."
- John Easterling, North Carolina

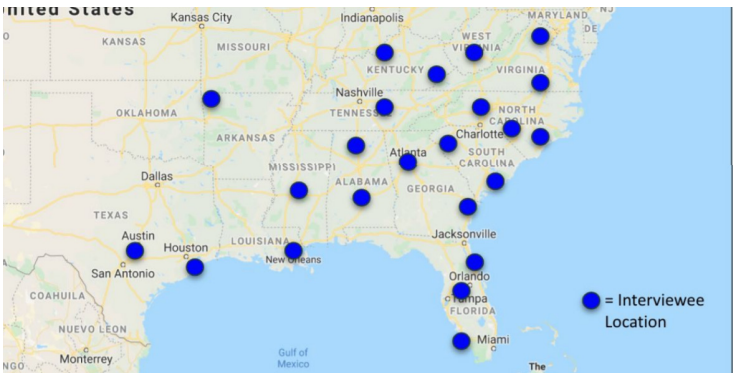
"The confluence of the presidential election and the 2020 census will be a catalyst for voter engagement."
- Stacey Abrams aide, Georgia

"As we aim to reconcile with our growing pains as a party and a people, this experiment is not about going back, it is about evolving. Evolution requires a deep understanding of the false and incomplete narratives that have been injected into the South."
- LaTosha Brown, Alabama

METHODOLOGY

We conducted 76 field interviews across all 13 Southern states.

This report elevates political and community leaders building power to promote healing, reconciliation, and equity. The 76 interviewees include elected officials, candidates, political operatives, grantmakers, nonprofit executives, as well as faith, and community organizers.



This report builds upon the work of leaders mapping powerbuilding across the South. From reports like the As the South Grows series of Grantmakers for Southern Progress and the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy and Divided by Design, spearheaded by former New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu’s E Pluribus Unum Fund, there are important thematic areas of focus that emerge across the regions and ground this report.

POLITICAL POWER	RACIAL JUSTICE	CITIES
CLIMATE CONCERNS	FAMILIES	FAITH

This report reveals linkages between voter base-building and donor base-building by pairing social science research on voter value systems from the voter database, Catalist, with campaign finance data from Congressional and gubernatorial races during the past decade. This multidisciplinary approach not only assesses who campaign donors look like and the degree to which they reflect the changing hue of today’s South, it also gauges the extent to which campaigns are leveraging deep-rooted giving traditions across communities of color.

Congressional campaign finance data stems from the Federal Election Commission, while gubernatorial campaign finance data draws from the National Institute on Money in Politics. This report draws from both federal- and state-level races, as 2020 marks both a presidential election year and a census year after which state governments are charged with allocating public resources to their constituents.

The report leverages 2010 US Census data on the racial distribution of surnames to infer the racial distribution of donors to US Congressional and state gubernatorial races across the South. ¹⁴For each surname, the data set provides the percent of census respondents with that surname who are White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, etc. ¹⁵

To arrive at racial distributions of campaign contributors, the research team first identifies unique individuals - records with a unique combination of first name, surname and zip code. Then, the team sums the racial probability distributions across individuals with the same surname. ¹⁶

More detailed information on campaign financial analysis is available in the Appendix.

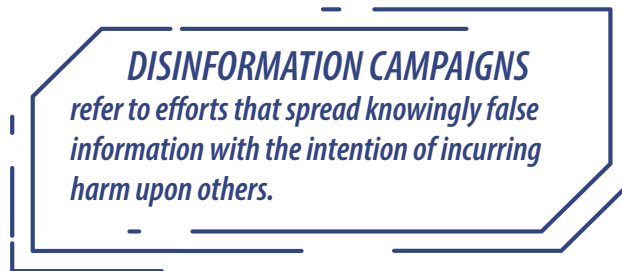
This report draws from research on donors of color, to help shift prevailing narratives and biases that treat donors of color like “anomalies, rather than animators of a field of giving that is hiding in plain sight.” ¹⁷

Ultimately, investing in the South does not come at the expense of other regions. This report underscores how Democratic donors face rising opportunity costs if they overlook a region that will shape the trajectory of American politics in the decades ahead.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND CONSEQUENCES

GOP “SOUTHERN STRATEGY” DOMINATES DEMOCRATIC DONOR DECISIONS

The GOP manufactured one of the most effective disinformation campaigns in US history: the GOP’s Southern Strategy. Democrats need to reckon with what happened.



Once the GOP centered racial backlash, there was no turning back. Incubated and executed during the Nixon years, the GOP “Southern Strategy” consolidated political support among white voters across the South by exploiting racism against African Americans. The GOP solidified ‘top-down’ narratives of political realignment and employed dual ‘bottom-up’ narratives in the form of a nationwide “suburban strategy.” This presented a “de facto segregation in the suburbs rather than overt resistance to racial integration.”

“We just lost the South for a generation!,” said President Johnson after the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which outlawed racial discrimination in voting and endangered the Democratic ‘Solid South.’ Strategic racists and GOP operatives capitalized on the racial anxieties of white Southern voters, who for years had been beyond the reach of the Republican Party. They built political power by exploiting racial fears at a time when the Southern electorate was diversifying.¹⁸

For far too long, GOP efforts have been strategically racist and socially extractive. It is both incomplete and inadequate to imagine Democrats building power in the South absent a thorough autopsy of the Southern Strategy. The GOP “Southern Strategy” ultimately still operates to legitimize white pain, energizes the GOP’s white voter base through coded language, and fuels racial divisions to deliver GOP wins. The Southern Strategy is part and parcel to forging a deficit-driven narrative that the South is the bastion of America’s sin rather than the bastion of America’s democratic reimagination. It normalizes dog-whistle politics, a coded racist appeal, makes it one of the key levers for the strategy to remain resilient and adapt over decades.

*“Republicans can win the vote of racists without sounding racists themselves: “You start out in 1954 by saying, “N*****, n*****, n*****. By 1968, you can’t say “n*****” —that hurts you, backfires. So you say stuff like, uh, forced busing, states’ rights, and all that stuff, and you’re getting so abstract.”*

- Lee Atwater, Nixon’s political strategist

“From now on, the Republicans are never going to get more than 10% to 20% of the Negro vote and they don’t need any more than that...but Republicans would be shortsighted if they weakened enforcement of the Voting Rights Act. The more Negroes who register as Democrats in the South, the sooner the negrophobe whites will quit the Democrats and become Republicans. That’s where the votes are.”

- Lee Atwater, Nixon’s political strategist

“Trump wielded the GOP’s Southern playbook with precision...Trump, in many ways, is no anomaly. He is the very culmination of the GOP’s long Southern strategy.”

- Angie Maxwell, Arkansas

The impact of this strategy has been far-reaching and manifests in Trump's racist, white supremacist agenda. Trump does not represent an innovation of the Southern Strategy, but rather its coming of age. Trump entices the base, feels their rage, and doesn't hide his bigotry or his defense of white status, while giving the GOP plausible deniability on coded appeals to racism by masking it as "campaign strategy."¹⁹ Over the past decade, the number of domestic terror events tied to white supremacy has spiked ten-fold.²⁰

The GOP's Southern Strategy inflames urban-rural divides. While racially diverse cities are trending bluer, more rural, whiter areas are trending redder. Per research groups like the Southern Poverty Law Center and the Anti-Defamation League, which map trendlines in white supremacy ideology and terror in the United States, white terror groups are thriving in the rural South. In the absence of Democratic support, these hate groups are building a kind of parallel institutions to organize around and reanimate white racial fears of a diversifying South.

Trump exposes the "Southern Strategy" as the GOP's last lifeline. Conservative commentator Steven Teles posits that, "A party built on demonizing and attacking marginalized people is a party that will have to disenfranchise those same people if it is to survive." Otherwise, the GOP will remain "chronically underfunded" to respond to the "recurrent tensions on race," making it vulnerable for Democrats to seize the racial anxieties with their messaging.²¹

CONSEQUENCES OF DONOR DECISION-MAKING

The South has enormous political power. However, Democratic donors have a strong bias: the “Southern Strategy” still shapes their decision-making. This lack of investment exacerbates intergenerational trauma by reinforcing perceptions of the South as a deficit on America’s electoral future.

The South is strapped for resources on an unsustainable “starvation cycle,” as one youth organizing collective’s leader in rural Georgia describes. Measuring success cannot be relegated to singular cycles, where disinvestment or late-term investments is more frequent than not. The following deficit claims paint a story of the South that has been told for far too long, which all stand in stark contrast to the lived realities of today’s Southern changemakers.

Southerners are punching above their weight with scant resources while donors risk underinvesting in the nation’s fastest-growing region. Funders overlook parallel institutions that Southerners have always built for themselves in their narrow search to maximize returns on investment. SuperPACs, PACs and donors lose out on engaging with lower propensity voters and activating communities of color.

The following section begins to unpack the deficit claims that still shape the mindset of the Democratic donor class.

“The community knows what the community needs.”

- Joy Webb, Georgia

“Democratic donors do not financially support African Americans and others who don’t look like them.”

- Dr. Robbie Akhere, North Carolina

“Fragmentation on the lines of race is the greatest threat in the donor community. Funders need to address their own racism.”

- Jermaine McNair, North Carolina

“If we need to expand the base, then we also need to expand the donor base.”

- Nicole Boucher, California

“We need to ask folks of color not just to cast their votes but also to cast their dollars. How do we enlist them to give their time, talent and treasure?”

- Darryl Lester, North Carolina

CLAIMS THAT STILL STOP DEMOCRATIC DONORS FROM INVESTING IN THE SOUTH

Cycle after cycle, the South, for Democrats, is painted as “close but not quite there yet.” The region remains stuck in its electoral (im)possibility due to narratives of betrayal, inadequacy, and deficiency. Despite the best efforts from grassroots to grassstops groups to illustrate a new arc, there remains a “perverse tendency” mystifying the South as “less than” rather than seeing it for its sheer resilience and resistance to antiquated and anachronistic models of power.

Funding could be catalytic if donors shift their giving paradigms. Civil rights icon, Rev. Durley of Atlanta says, “We need a transformation of the mind.” In other words, LaTosha Brown clarified, “We need to deal with our baggage.”

“Deficit” Claims from Donors	Reclaims from Grassroots
Overarching Claim: “The South is an anomaly. It is a deficit on America’s political and economic future.”	Overarching Reclaim: “The South is both relevant and intertwined in the direction of our nation’s democracy.”
“It’s too expensive to invest in the South. There’s no infrastructure.”	“In the South, relationships matter. They form the South’s organizing infrastructure, which may not be familiar to donors.”
“The South is a bastion of racism.”	“The South is a ripe experiment for America’s future majority-minority democracy.”
“Democrats only stay in cities.”	“There is enormous, untapped potential in rural and suburban areas.”

“People have their biases on what the South is... but the white progressive vision of the South is so wrong... [folks of color] are at the root of it all. We are ground-focused. The threat, the terror, the promise, the South comes with all of that.”
 - Labor organizer, Georgia

“We’ve reached a ceiling of who we need to connect with and persuade, especially among non-college educated white voters in the Midwest. We are still on the floor in terms of engaging with expanding voters of color across the South. There is so much room for growth.”
 - Donor advisor, Texas

“The absence of affluent, high net worth, and ultra-high net worth people of color in conversations about philanthropy perpetuates a false narrative that opportunity has only one color and results in a lack of understanding of the complex interaction of race, ethnicity, wealth, and philanthropy in the United States. The lack of research on the multifaceted stories of the giving traditions, practices, and philanthropic leadership of people of color is a symptom of this false narrative.”
 - Urvashi Vaid, New York

Overarching Claim:
The South is an anomaly. It is a deficit on America's political and economic future.

Overarching Reclaim:
The South is both relevant and intertwined in the direction of our nation's democracy.

GOP power brokers hail from the South. Their reach into domestic and foreign affairs extends into the highest rungs of leadership. For decades, the GOP has made strategic investments in the South, exploiting a gap in Democratic engagement. GOP leadership has been vision-focused on promulgating the Southern Strategy. However, Democrats have had tunnel-vision, responding to GOP consolidation of power rather than proactively building power and a robust, parallel pipeline of leadership. While the GOP has been on the offense, Democrats have retreated to defense, blocking GOP supermajorities in state legislatures rather than gaining chambers across the region. **Across all three branches of government, Southern leaders in the Trump Administration wield tremendous power over the direction of public policy.**

<p>Nikki Haley</p>  <p>South Carolina</p> <p>Highest Office: Former US Ambassador to the United Nations</p>	<p>Rick Perry</p>  <p>Texas</p> <p>Highest Office: Former Secretary of Energy</p>	<p>Jeff Sessions</p>  <p>Alabama</p> <p>Highest Office: Former Attorney General</p>	<p>Mitch McConnell</p>  <p>Kentucky</p> <p>Highest Office: Senate Majority Leader</p>	<p>John Cornyn</p>  <p>Texas</p> <p>Highest Office: Senate Majority Whip</p>
<p>Steve Scalise</p>  <p>Louisiana</p> <p>Highest Office: House Minority Whip</p>	<p>Gina Haspel</p>  <p>Kentucky</p> <p>Highest Office: Director of the Central Intelligence Agency</p>	<p>Sonny Perdue</p>  <p>Georgia</p> <p>Highest Office: Secretary of Agriculture</p>	<p>Mark Meadows</p>  <p>North Carolina</p> <p>Highest Office: Acting White House Chief of Staff</p>	<p>Dan Brouillette</p>  <p>Louisiana</p> <p>Highest Office: Secretary of Energy</p>
<p>Robert Wilkie</p>  <p>North Carolina</p> <p>Highest Office: Secretary of Veterans Affairs</p>	<p>Mick Mulvaney</p>  <p>Virginia</p> <p>Highest Office: Former Acting White House Chief of Staff</p>	<p>Clarence Thomas</p>  <p>South Carolina</p> <p>Highest Office: Associate Justice of the Supreme Court</p>	<p>Chad Wolf</p>  <p>Mississippi</p> <p>Highest Office: Acting Secretary of Homeland Security</p>	

The policy choices made by the cadre of Southern leaders circling Trump's inner orbit render dire consequences for the daily lives of the American electorate. For instance, 8 out of 14 states that refused to expand the Medicaid after the passage of the Affordable Care Act are Southern states.

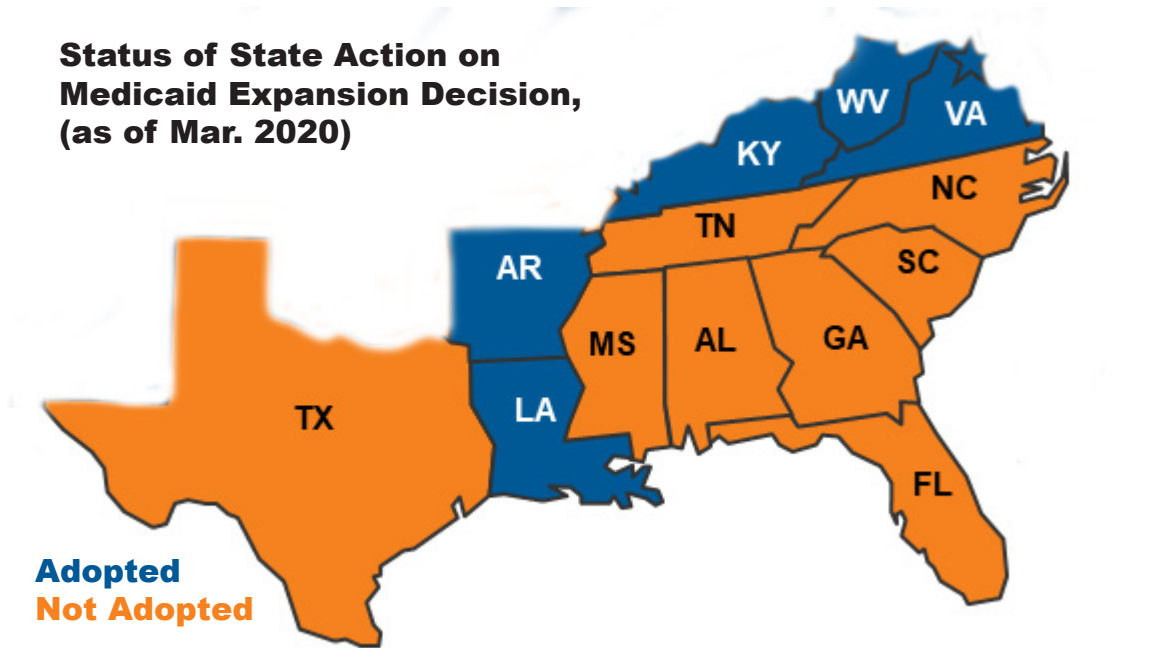
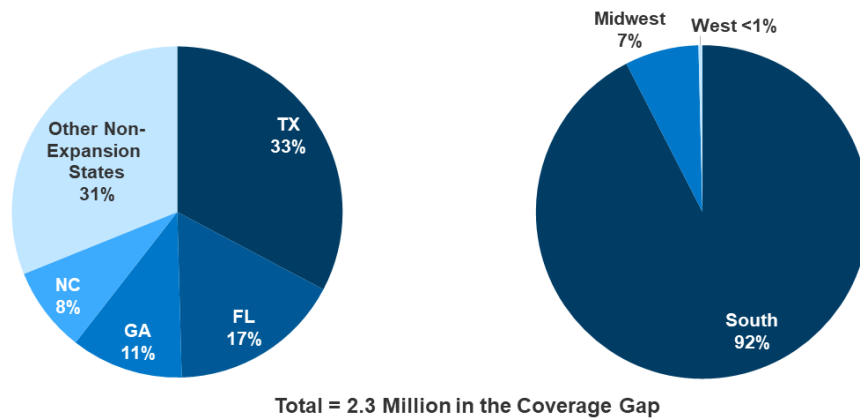


Figure 2

Distribution of Adults in the Coverage Gap, by State and Region, 2018



NOTE: Totals may not sum due to rounding. There are no individuals in the coverage gap in the Northeast as all states in the Northeast expanded Medicaid.
SOURCE: KFF analysis based on 2019 Medicaid eligibility levels and 2018 American Community Survey.



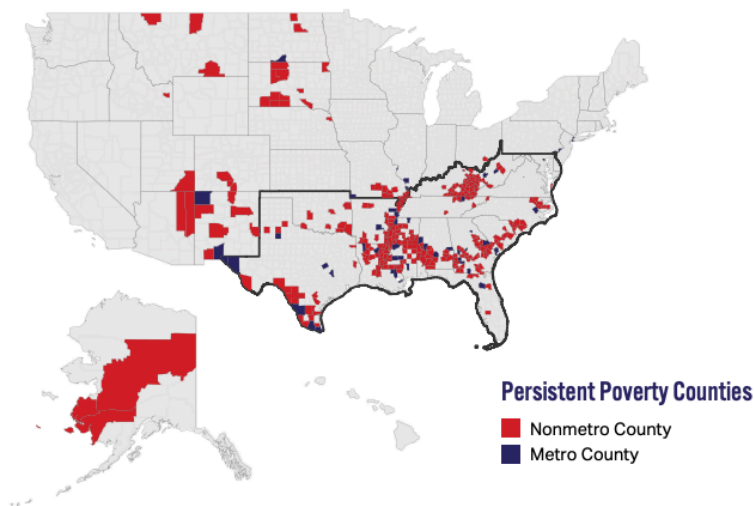
The costs of ceding opportunities to build power across the South are too severe for Democratic donors to discount.

CLAIM #1: *"It's too expensive to invest in the South. There's no infrastructure."*

Faulty risk perceptions among Democratic donors erase the civic and leadership infrastructure that Southerners have built for themselves for generations. Despite higher rates of intergenerational poverty, Southerners build power often outside of conventional electoral targets.²² When donors assess returns on investments based on metrics like campaign contributions, donors face opportunity costs in failing to realizing Southerners' inherent organizing power.

Most Persistently Poor Counties are in the South

Counties with Persistent Poverty



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Historical County Level Poverty Estimates Tool (1960-2010); U.S. Census Bureau/ American Fact Finder. Selected Economic Characteristics. 2012-2016 American Community Survey

"Money has been moved from communities of color at the Democrats' own peril."

- Donor advisor, Texas

"Economic models of humiliation have been far too prevalent and pervasive in the South, making folks who live there to be less generationally prepared to pass along wealth and resources."

- Robert Blaine, Mississippi

"The South is daunting, but its secrets to success lie in the ground. It is the ground. Our communities might be smaller, but they cross rural and urban landscapes. To navigate those, you need to be grounded. No outsider nonsense. If you are not strategic or rooted, you will not succeed here."

- Labor organizer, Georgia

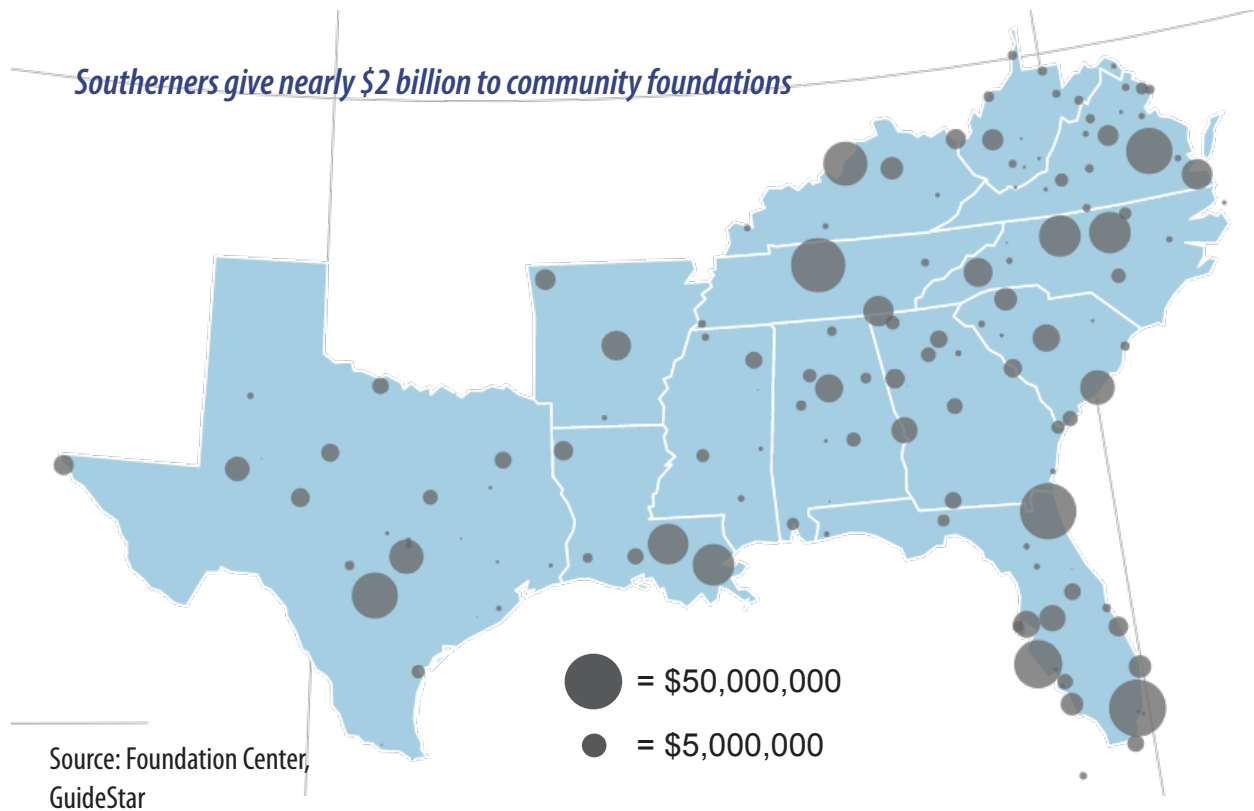
"Historically, the South has functioned as an engine for growth and prosperity for the entire country. The South was the Amazon distribution hub for the entire country. We had wealth."

- Boyd Stevens, Alabama

RECLAIM #1: *"In the South, relationships matter. They form the South's organizing infrastructure, which may not be familiar to donors."*

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Southerners drive investments in Southern organizing power.



Southerners are bridge-builders. They break silos and build power across race, gender, immigration status, and class. Southerners build solidarity through their own civic infrastructure grounded in community networks.

Community foundations, for instance, serve as one proxy to gauge the scale of Southern movement-building efforts. They allocate crucial funds in ways that are directly accountable to their neighbors and the welfare of the movements they seek to support.

Funder networks and watchdog groups like Grantmakers for Southern Progress and the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy have identified 10 structural change grantmaking organizations.²³ These organizations ground their giving in repair, which empowers grassroots leaders to address the harmful legacies of regressive policies. This democratizes control over the management of financial resources between granters and grantees.²⁴

Structural Change Grantmaker	Grantmaker HQ (State, (City)	Grant Allocation (2017-2018 Form 990s)	Grantee HQ States	Issue Priorities
Appalachian Community Fund	Tennessee (Knoxville)	\$50,000	Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia	Community Development
Baptist Community Ministries	Louisiana (New Orleans)	\$8 million	Louisiana, Texas	Criminal Justice, Education
Contigo Fund	Florida (Fort Lauderdale)	\$100,000	Florida	LGBTQIA+ Justice, Racial Equity
Foundation for Louisiana	Louisiana (Baton Rouge)	\$2 million	Louisiana	Housing , Climate Justice
Greater New Orleans Foundation	Louisiana (New Orleans)	\$23 million	Louisiana	Arts, Climate Justice
Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation	North Carolina (Raleigh)	\$24 million	Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina	Civic Engagement, Health Equity
Southern Partners Fund	Georgia (Atlanta)	\$7 million	Georgia, Florida, North Carolina	Racial Equity, Economic Justice
Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation	Arkansas (Little Rock)	\$4 million	Arkansas	Workforce Development
Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation	North Carolina (Winston-Salem)	\$12 million	North Carolina	Civic Engagement, Climate Justice

In a volatile political environment like 2020, Atlanta-based political operative Howard Franklin notes that progressives face “a boom or bust economy.” This volatility creates a kind of “myopia” among funders regarding the movement work to be done. Franklin laments how donors believe navigating this environment “requires recruiting and funding expertise from outside of the region, especially larger, more expensive, brand-name groups from the DC Beltway.” Ultimately, this dilutes the key flavors of Southern organizing work: hospitality, community, trust.

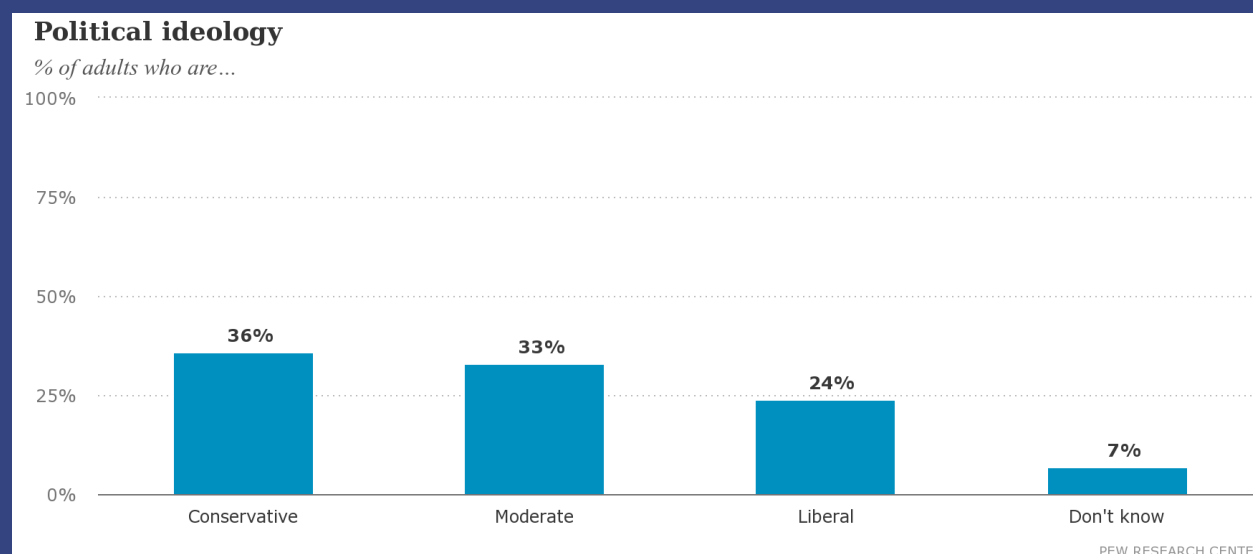
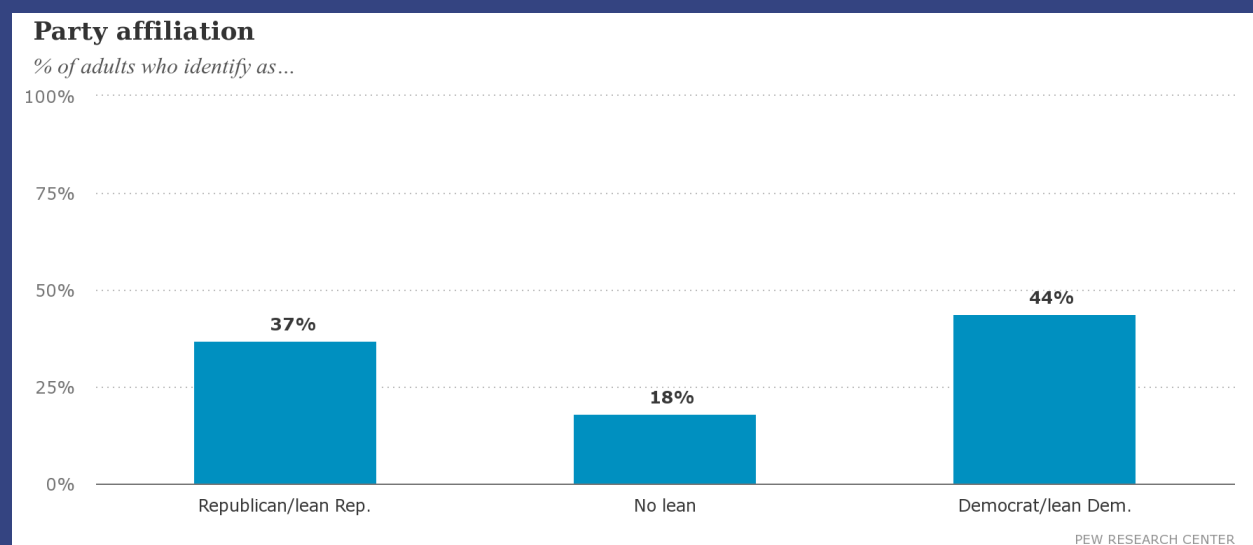
Franklin claims that, “Powerbuilding must focus on the ability to direct or influence the behavior of others.” Powerbuilding must also “build the capacity of under-served and marginalized communities—many of them of color or low income—by helping them acquire and leverage political, economic and cultural power.”

WHAT SOUTHERNERS ARE SAYING: FAITH MATTERS.

Faith institutions form the bedrock of Southern organizing culture.

Southerners are more religious than Americans in the rest of the country.²⁵ Nearly half of Southerners self-identify as members of two Protestant Christian traditions: Evangelical Protestant, dominated by the Southern Baptist Convention, and the Historically Black Protestant Church. These traditions reflect the region's racialized political histories.

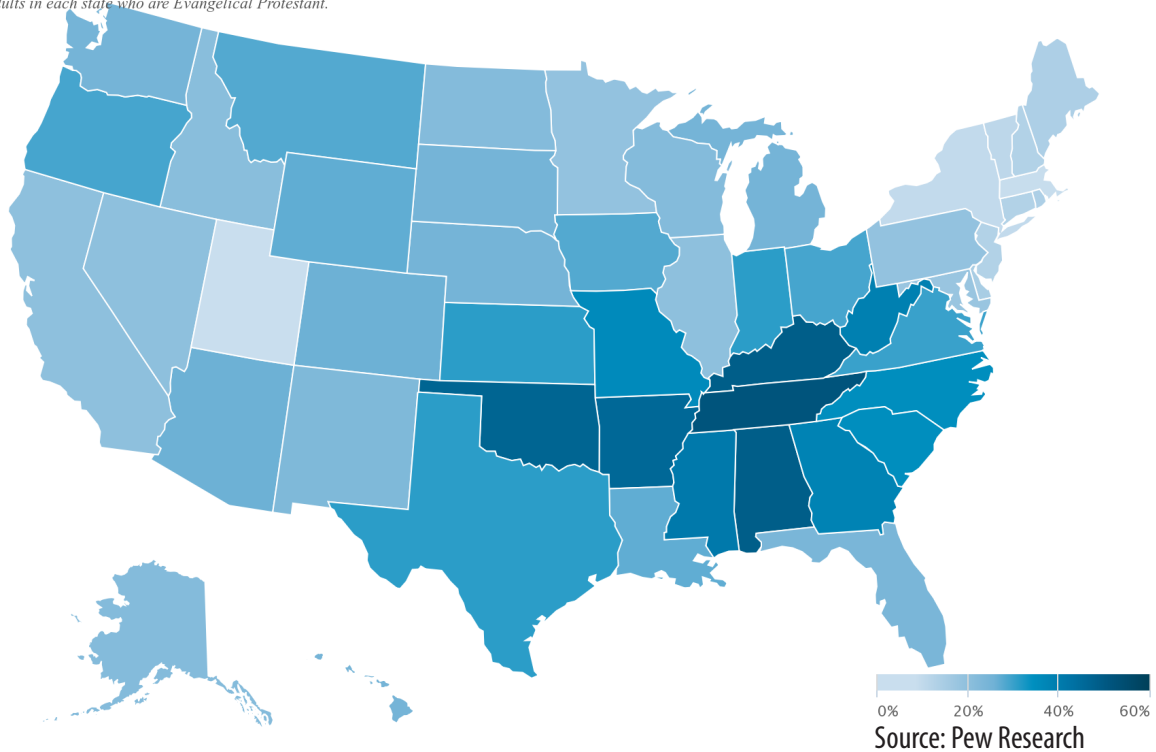
THE GOP DOES NOT HAVE A MONOPOLY ON FAITH.



EVANGELICAL FAITH TRADITIONS DOMINATE IN THE SOUTH

Evangelical Protestants by State

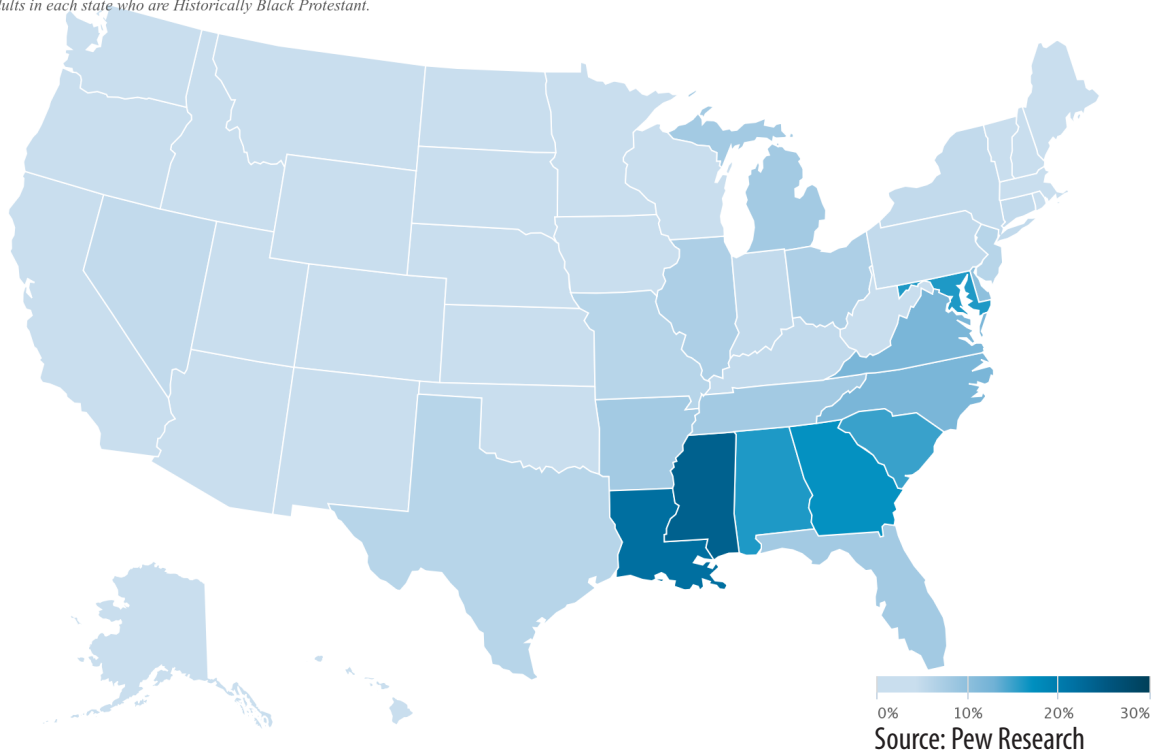
% of adults in each state who are Evangelical Protestant.



FAITH IN THE SOUTH IS STARKLY DIVIDED ON RACIAL LINES.

Members of the Historically Black Protestant Tradition by State

% of adults in each state who are Historically Black Protestant.



The Historically Black Protestant tradition resists racialized systems of oppression. African Methodist Episcopal (AME) churches and faith spaces often served as stops on the Underground Railroad in the South. On the northern side of the Mason Dixon line, AME churches helped codify anti-slavery resolutions into law. The blurred lines between religion and politics in the context of Black liberation in the nineteenth century helped generate the organizing traditions that shaped the Civil Rights movement in the twentieth century. And the civic powerbuilding that threads Historically Black Protestant spaces with movement-building work has ultimately rendered the Black Church a conduit to Black mobilization.²⁶

The GOP “Southern Strategy,” however, distorts religiosity and generates cognitive dissonance along racial lines. As mentioned above, 84% of White evangelicals living in the South voted Trump, but only 38% of them identified him as a Christian.²⁷ Trump’s exceptionalism represents how racial identities overpower faith-based identities. Stated another way, Trump’s whiteness becomes sacrosanct and worth protecting in ways that reflect how “Southern Strategy” evangelists sought to protect a social order that benefited white Americans at the expense of Black Americans. Ultimately, the racial anxieties underpinning the GOP “Southern Strategy” still shape how many Southern communities organize themselves.

To reckon with the legacies of the GOP’s “Southern Strategy” in faith spaces, faith leaders should frame faith principles to address the ills of the past and the promise for a more moral, multiracial community. Religious leaders in the South can respond courageously to racial wrongs without reducing the humanity of those who may want to join in solidarity.

Still, faith spaces like churches, mosques, gurdwaras, and temples provide social capital networks that cultivate political power building and relationship-building across different communities. For example, Latinx Catholic traditions have started peppering the “Bible Belt,” creating places that foster both spiritual growth and civic engagement in ways that model historically Black faith traditions. With an ever-evolving and diversifying South, faith-based linkages offer an avenue to coalesce around shared values. Given the relatively high density of the Muslim community in the South, Muslim donors are well-positioned to align their religious giving with priorities that resonate with them in the Democratic agenda.

With an ever-evolving and diversifying South, faith-based linkages offer an avenue to convene different communities around shared values and priorities. Faith systems create spaces where communities pool resources to build collective solutions, repair collective harm, and build collective power grounded in reconciliation, redemption, and healing.

“It is in the hottest fire where God does his best work.”

- Rev. Kevin Muriel, Georgia

It is within faith communities where the power concentration is.”

- Mariah Parker, Georgia

“We need more than a superficial analysis of engagement because there is a heightened sense of need to engage in the political process. Avenues of engagement can’t just be boiled down to the ballot.”

- Imam Khalid Griggs, North Carolina

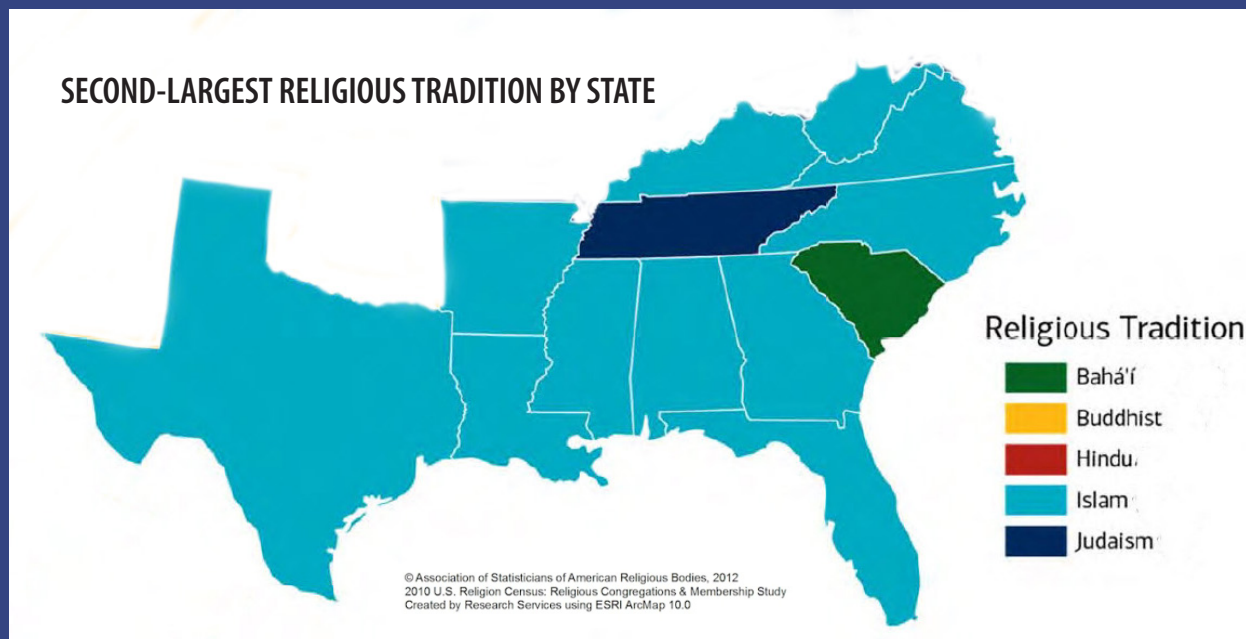
“The New South is interfaith and makes for cultural dialogue.”

- Rev. Gerald Durley, Georgia

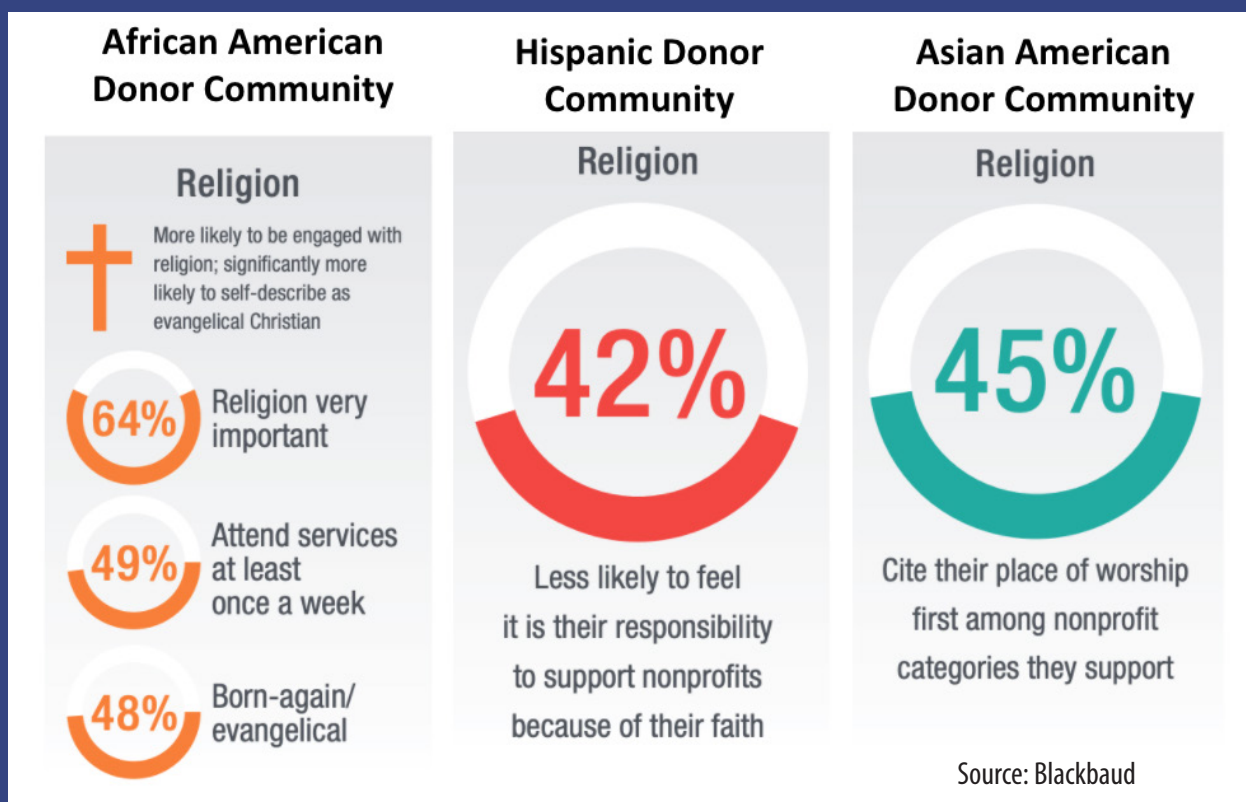
“Churches are the civic highways to hard to count communities.”

- Former Fair Count staffer, Georgia

THE SOUTH BOASTS RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY OUTSIDE OF CHRISTIANITY.



FAITH LIES AT THE NEXUS OF ISSUES THAT MOTIVATE GIVING AMONG DONORS OF COLOR.



CLAIM #2: *"The South is a bastion of racism."*

"Race remains this nation's most traumatic issue."²⁸ From building its economy on the backs of enslaved peoples for centuries to launching the bloodiest war on US soil to date, the South often operates as a gauge against which the rest of the US can measure its own social progress.²⁹ This "Southern Exceptionalism" has arguably become more salient in recent years.

In the South, racism still materializes into hate that inflames domestic terror across the region. White supremacist terror has spiked ten-fold over the last decade.

"90% of Black Americans lived in the South after Emancipation and still nearly 60% of Black community lives in this region."
- Equal Justice Initiative, Alabama

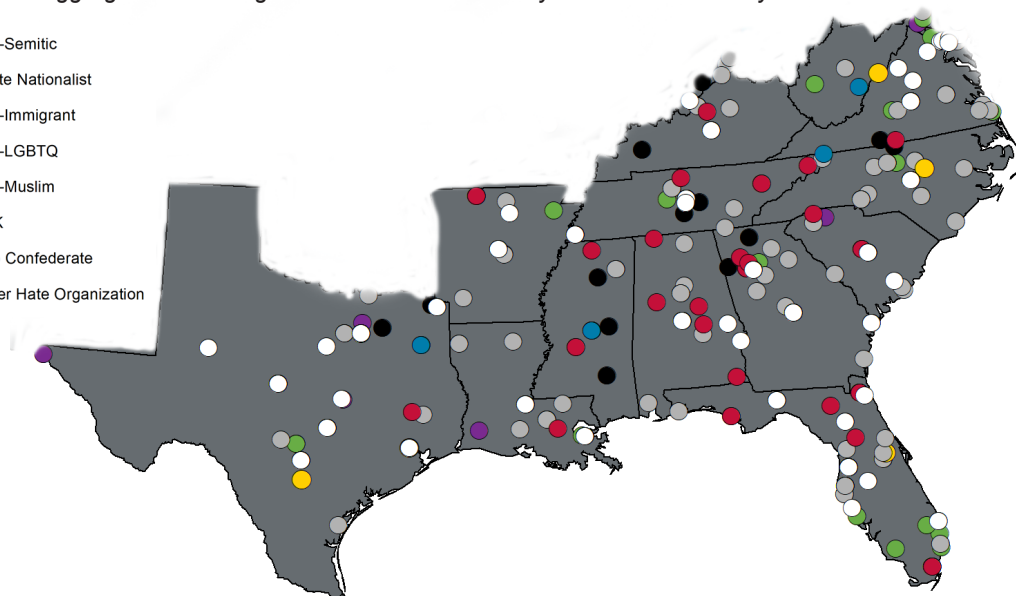
"Intimidation is still a thing here and fear is a huge factor in the South."
- Party Leader, South Carolina

"Racism is a huge barrier to building collective power."
- Attica Scott, Kentucky

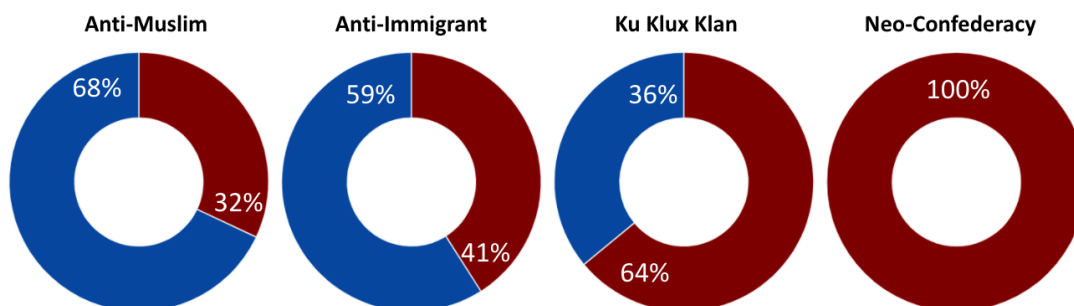
Hate Organizations in the USA, 2018

Aggregated Hate Organizations Documented by the Souther Poverty Law Center

- Anti-Semitic
- White Nationalist
- Anti-Immigrant
- Anti-LGBTQ
- Anti-Muslim
- KKK
- Neo Confederate
- Other Hate Organization



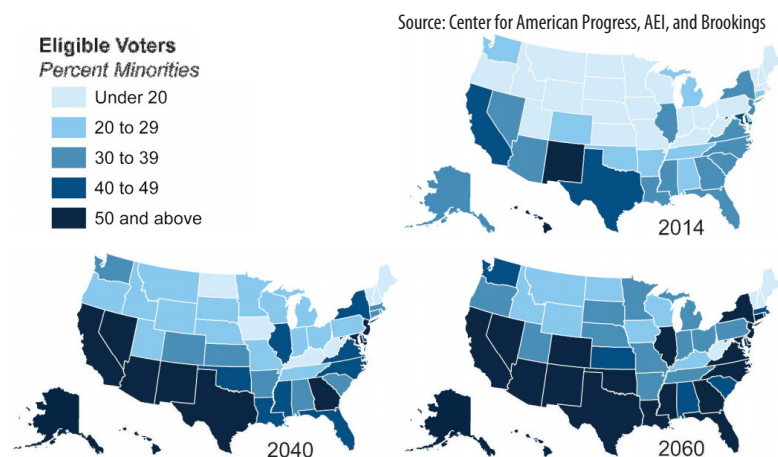
South Non-South



RECLAIM #2: *"The South is a ripe experiment for America's future majority-minority democracy."*

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Texas is already a majority-minority state, and within a generation, four more states will become majority-minority: Louisiana, Florida, Georgia, and Mississippi.



"In the South of the future, it will be voters of color supported by white voters, not the other way around," postulates a Stacey Abrams aide.

"Whether or not you accept Georgia as a battleground, is if you accept the premise that a coalition of voters of color is a viable pathway to victory."

Faulty assumptions about organizing voters of color, like they will vote for Democrats no matter what, risk resurfacing intergenerational trauma and ultimately: voter depression.³⁰ If voters of color already form the base of the Democratic party and the future majority of the American electorate within a generation, then Democratic donors can play a pivotal role in building Democratic power that lasts. Courtney Patterson says, "Southern [white] democrats think they don't have to worry about black voters." **Democratic donors cannot afford to take these voters for granted in 2020.**

"Rather than focusing on empire-building, we need to focus on base building. We need multiracial coalitions to build power, and building the Democratic Party of the future requires base expansion."

- Donor advisor, Texas

"The Democratic Party can't marginalize the very people who will be taking care of us."
- Dr. Michael Bitzer, North Carolina

"Democratic party leaders in states like South Carolina claim that activating the state's booming Latinx population, for instance, could have led to winning the Governor's seat; however, political operatives in the Palmetto state might look past Latinx engagement because of an impression that Latinx communities "do not have papers" to vote. This has forged a mistrust between Latinx voters and other party leaders and donors of color."
- Party Caucus Chair, South Carolina

"I used to give to more local grassroots groups. But now I'm more interested in funding groups that address the more structural causes of poverty and inequity. I use a racial lens for everything."
- High net worth African American male donor

WHAT SOUTHERNERS ARE SAYING: RACE MATTERS. VOTERS OF COLOR MATTER. DONORS OF COLOR MATTER.

There is untapped potential in building coalitions between and among communities of color in the South, but these relationships are tenuous. From the Heart of Dixie in Alabama, east to Georgia and north through both Carolinas, political operatives and grassroots leaders repeatedly identify a lack of trust and collaboration between communities of color.

Southern voters of color are grounded in faith, family, and future. Nearly three out of five Southern voters of color are driven by values grounded in faith and family to build a better future, despite potential mistrust in political institutions. This finding draws from the DC-based political data firm, Catalist, and its Peoria Values Clusters Model, a social science dataset on values systems motivating hundreds of millions of US voters. The Peoria Values Clusters Model pushes beyond a linear, left-right axis of voter identity and maps voters around an amorphous, interactive set of attitudes to shape their political belief systems.

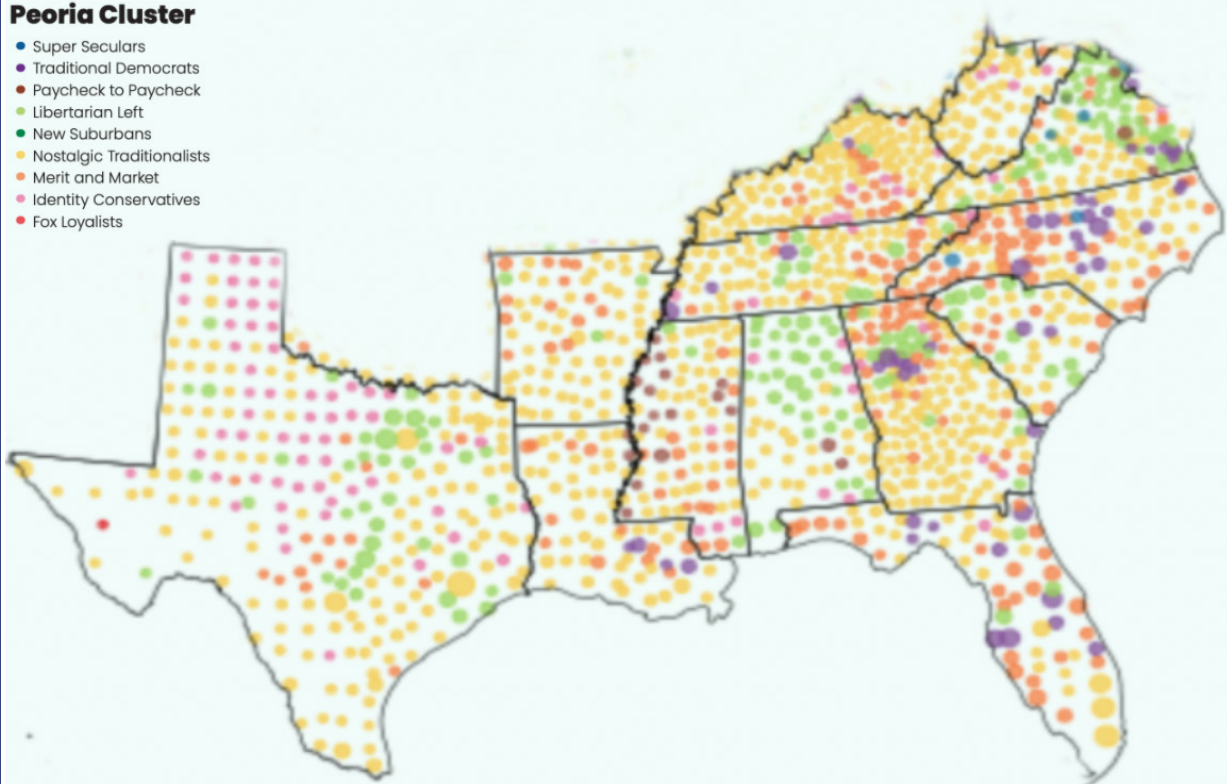
Younger Southern voters of color are more skeptical of political institutions. Across Asian, Black and Latinx voter groups in the South, voters under 40 years old demonstrate higher levels of mistrust in the formal US political process, which may stem from economic insecurity. Their engagement might not be immediately visible at the ballot box but this does not mean they are not poised to engage in different ways.

Apart from traditional voters, the largest pockets of growth by voter value cluster are those tied to value clusters grounded in faith, family, and future.³¹

Most Common Value Cluster by County

Peoria Cluster

- Super Seculars
- Traditional Democrats
- Paycheck to Paycheck
- Libertarian Left
- New Suburbans
- Nostalgic Traditionalists
- Merit and Market
- Identity Conservatives
- Fox Loyalists



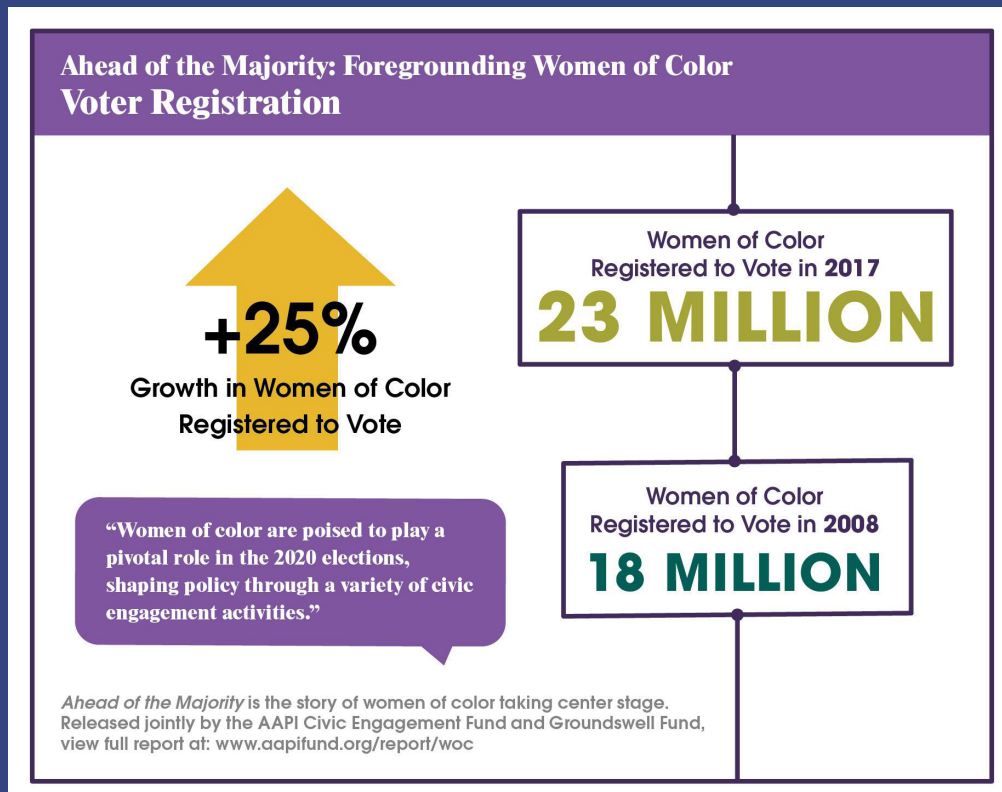
Source: Catalist, Peoria Project

Southern voters organize around the “linked fate” between their own welfare and the welfare of their communities. “Linked fate” refers to a phenomenon where individual choice rests on the wellbeing of a community, even if that choice is not advantageous to the welfare of that individual. In US politics, “linked fate” helps explain the cohesiveness among voter choice across communities of color, a cohesiveness that stems from a need to combat regressive policy by consolidating collective power.

LINKED FATE
*refers to tying individual welfare to
the welfare of a larger group,
such as race.³²*

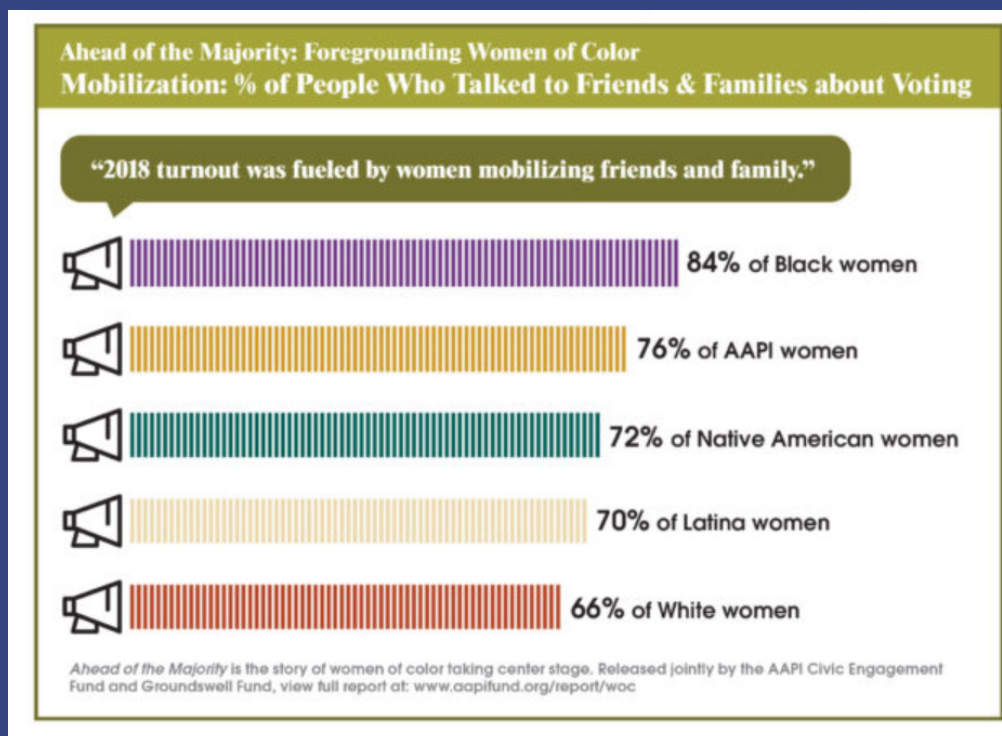
Southern women of color lift up their communities at the ballot box. Per Catalist data, Southern women voters of color outnumber their male counterparts by a 14-point margin. Overall, Southern women voters of color across the entire region are driven by the vision to build better futures for themselves and their loved ones, regardless of whether or not the government steps in. Southern women of color are uniquely positioned to leverage histories of “linked fate” to organize their communities and advance a collective vision of equitable powerbuilding..

When women of color vote, they lift up their communities with them.



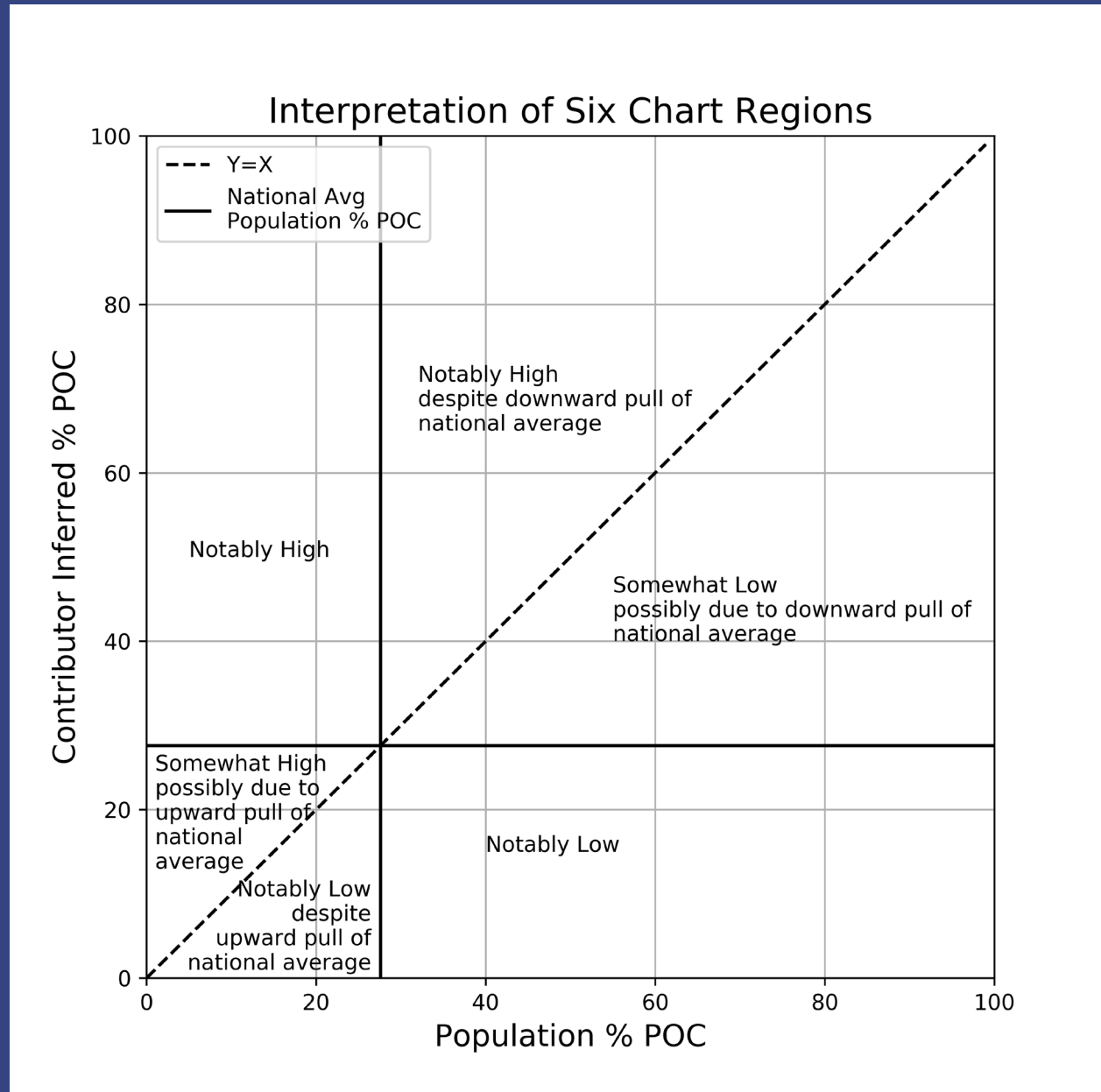
Source: AAPI Civic Engagement Fund, Groundswell Fund.

Though communities of color are the Democratic voter base, the donor base funding political campaigns in the South is disproportionately white. Attica Scott in Kentucky says, “the Democratic Party should not be our only choice. It should be OUR choice. Women of color are leading everywhere, from urban centers to rural communities. Let’s elevate those already at the forefront of building community power.”



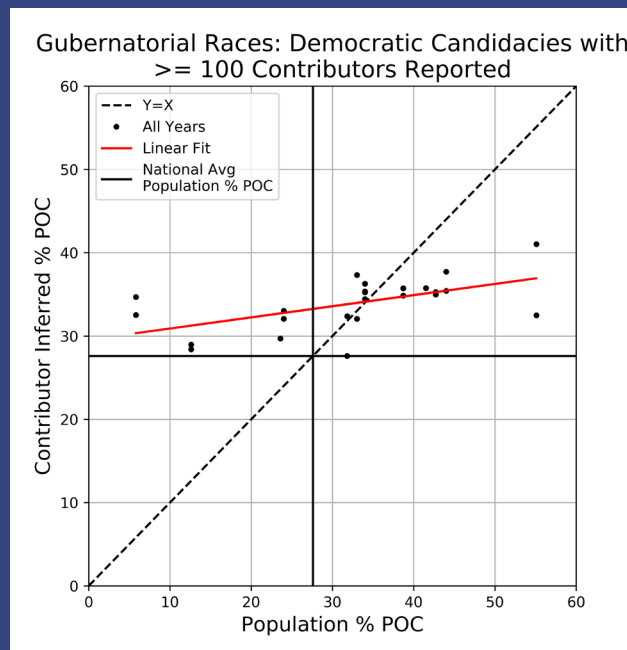
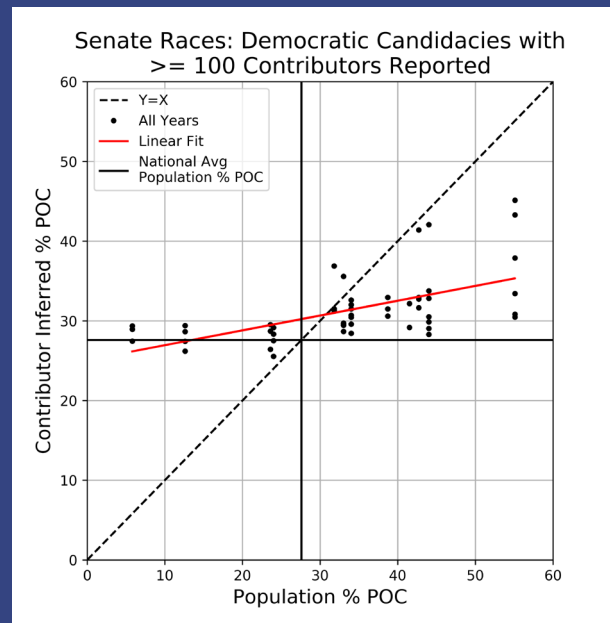
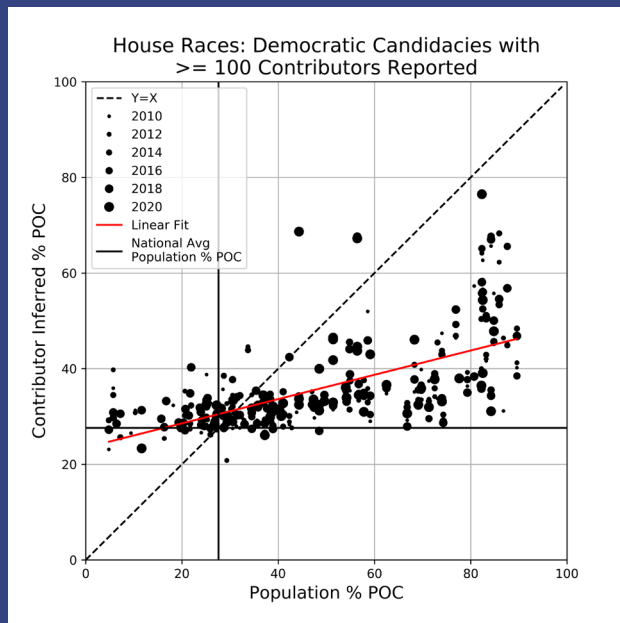
By analyzing surnames reported from 2010 US Census records, this report infers the racial distribution of campaign contributors for US House, Senate, and governors' races across all 13 Southern states. Examining 1,700 races from 2010 onward across 13 states, ultimately attempts to assess the extent to which donors of color are over- or under-represented in campaign funding, with the national average population percentage of people of color from the latest Census count, 27.3%, as a reference point.

Lines of best fit indicate whether or not inferred donors of color are over- or under-represented among campaign contributors.



Source: Rebecca W. Perry, PhD.

Based on our regression analyses, political campaign donors are likely whiter than their districts or states.

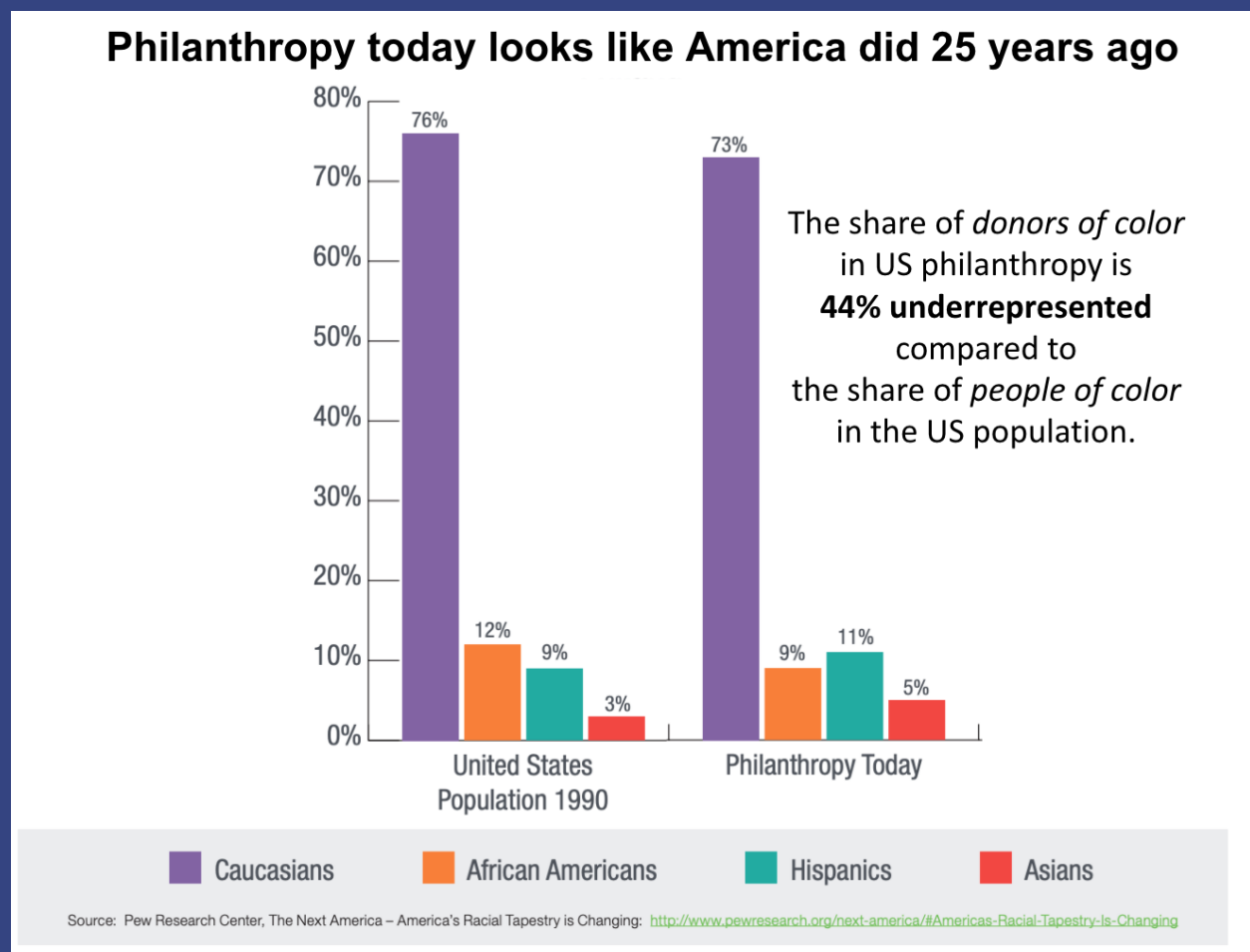


Data Sources: Federal Election Commission, National Institute on Money in Politics

Democratic campaigns are not fully leveraging the power of donors of color. Per the above graphics, inferred POC donors are largely underrepresented in political campaigns across the South. This report recognizes the role that the racial wealth gap between white and Black, Latinx, and AAPI communities might play in creating such a disparity.³³ However, these trends reveal the potential for Democratic campaigns to include communities of color in campaigns, building power that reflects the changing hue of the South.

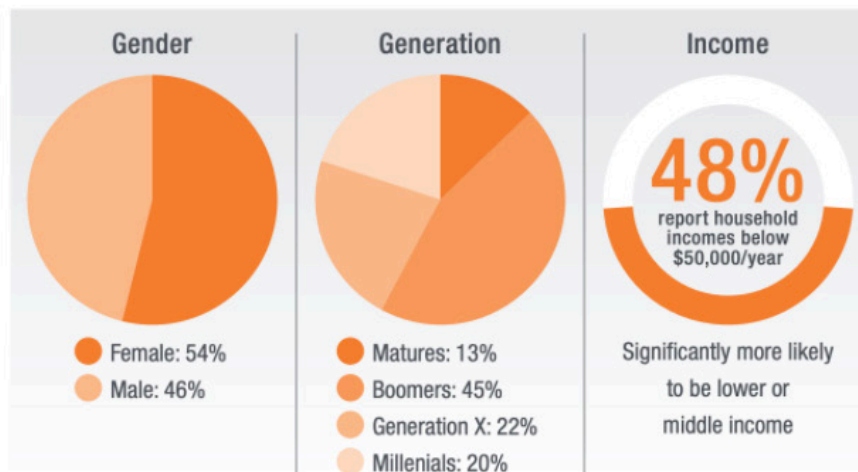
Shared values can break down the silos between voter base-building and donor base-building. The same values that underscore building strong futures for family, faith, and community play pivotal roles for both voters and donors. Churches, for instance, play fundamental roles in pooling resources among Black, Latinx and Asian communities. And outside of Christian contexts, institutions like mosques, madrassas, and temples also pool resources. These places of worship empower people of color to donate over the long-run and feel more fulfilled through their contributions.³⁴

Shattering silos between voter- and donor-base building enables Democratic campaigns to shift from a predominantly white donor landscape to one that reflects today's America.

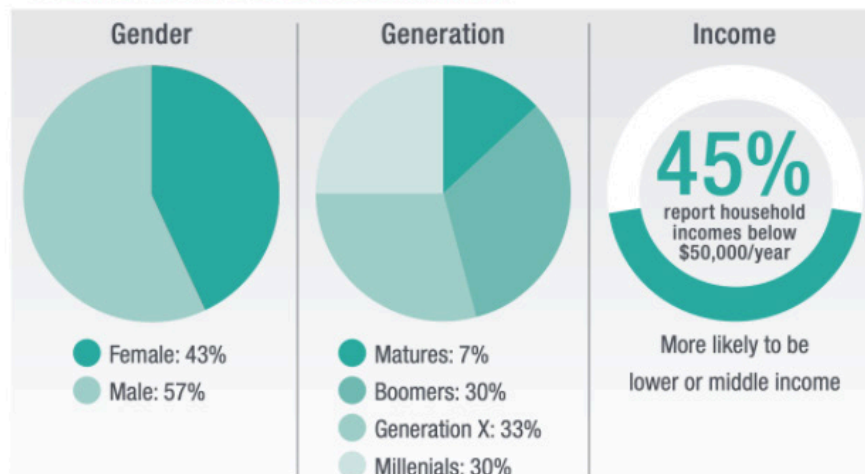


Gender, generation, and income shape giving practices among African American, Hispanic, and Asian communities.

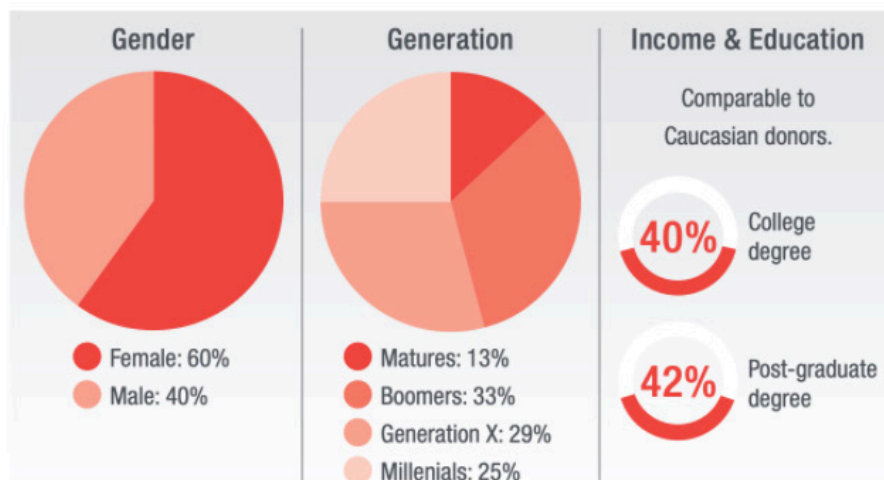
THE AFRICAN AMERICAN DONOR COMMUNITY



THE HISPANIC DONOR COMMUNITY




THE ASIAN DONOR COMMUNITY



Source: Blackbaud.

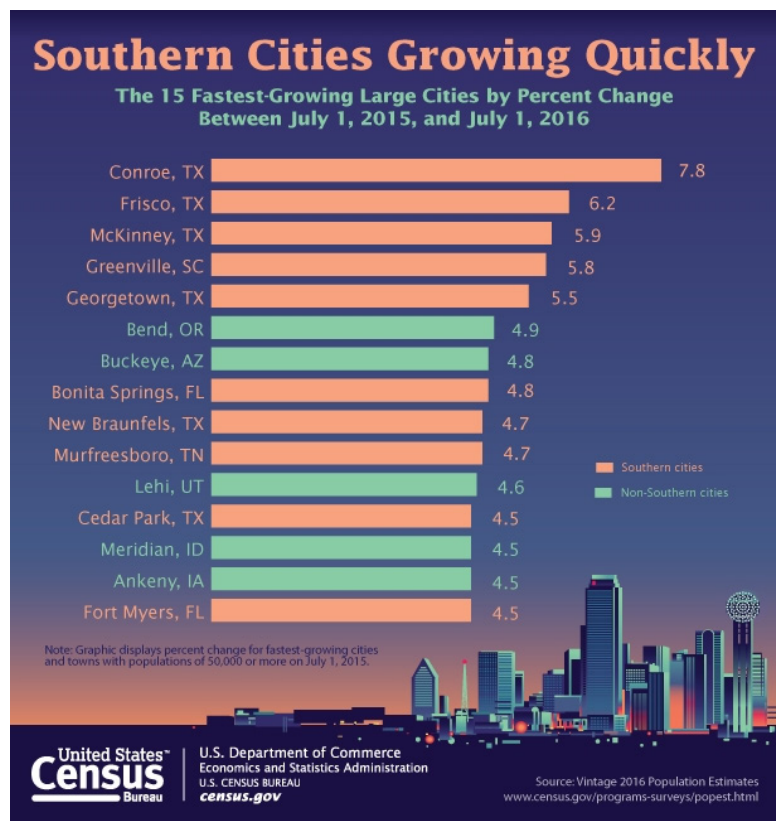
There is plenty of room for growth to engage new segments of donors. To fully leverage the donor power of growing communities of color, Democratic campaigns should expand their fundraising strategies to highlight donor segmentation and tailored messaging, grounded in values of faith and family.

<u>African American Donor Community</u>	<u>Latinx Donor Community</u>	<u>Asian Donor Community</u>
 <p>Faith is an important driver of philanthropic giving.</p>	 <p>Youth development is a core issue that drives giving.</p>	 <p>More likely to give through digital channels relative to other donor groups.</p>
 <p>Relative to other donor groups, supporting heritage is a notable driver of</p>	 <p>Faith is an important driver of philanthropic giving.</p>	 <p>Youth development is a core issue that drives giving.</p>
 <p>Youth development is a core issue that drives giving.</p>	 <p>Latinx donors are less likely to be asked to contribute.</p>	 <p>Emergency relief is a core issue that drives giving</p>
Source: Blackbaud		

CLAIM #3: *“Democrats only stay in cities.”*

Rapidly growing Southern cities boast Democratic gains across the South. In 2019, multiracial campaigns in diverse urban communities led to key gubernatorial wins. Louisville voters were key in delivering Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear’s historic win,³⁵ and New Orleans’ voters were fundamental for holding the Louisiana governor’s seat for Governor John Bel Edwards.³⁶ Even voters in Jackson, Mississippi, led the 2019 Democratic nominee for governor to the margins of victory.³⁷

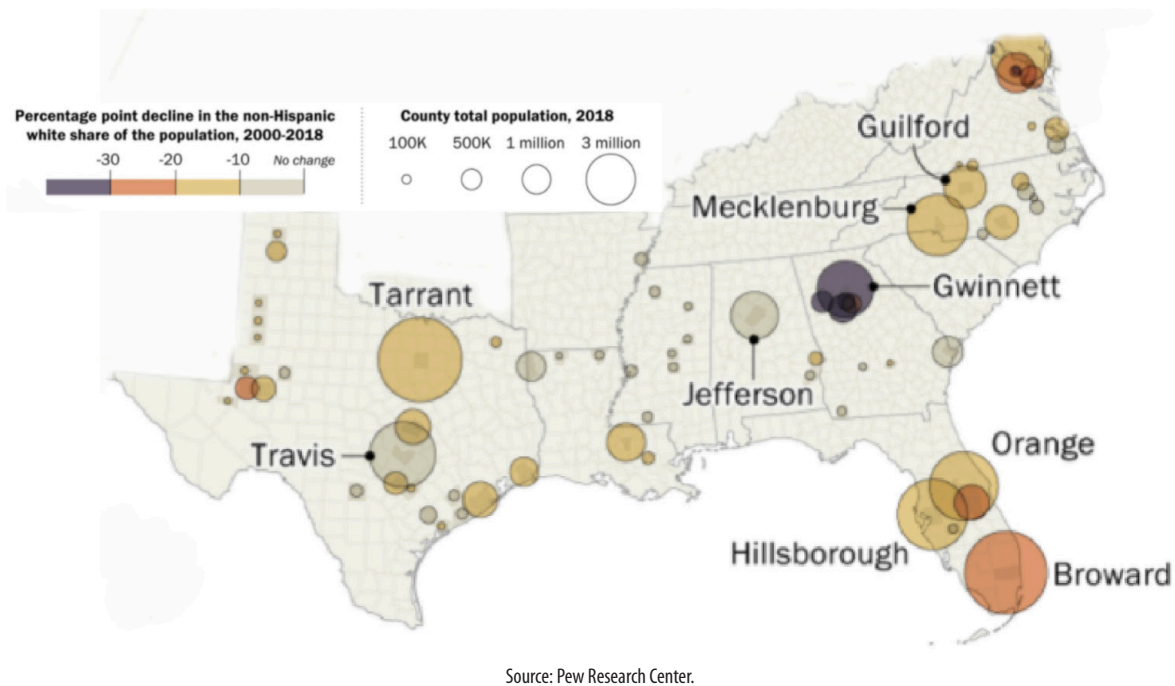
The South boasts all 5 of the nation’s fastest-growing cities. Ten of the 15 fastest-growing cities in the entire country are in the South.³⁸



Urban Growth in the South is sprawling. Cities are growing out, not just up.



Out of the 109 US counties that became majority-minority since 2000, nearly two-thirds (69 counties) are in the South. According to Census data, exurbs around Southern cities represent the vast majority of the top 100 fastest growing counties in the fastest growing region in the country.



Urban expansion in the South signals tremendous opportunities for Democratic donors to invest in powerbuilding. Without such support, long-standing fractures across the urban-rural divide will continue to expand. Southern cities have already trended bluer in recent years, while surrounding rural communities have trended redder.³⁹

RECLAIM #3: *“There is enormous, untapped potential in rural and suburban areas. The frontier is in the exurbs.”*

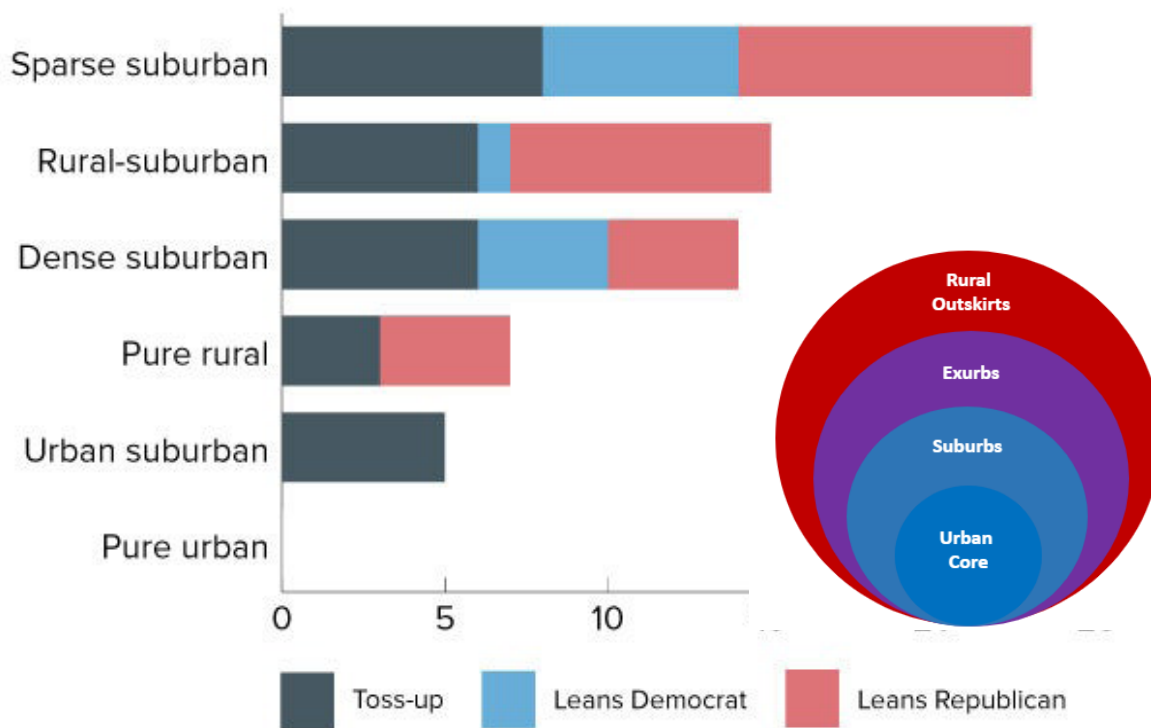
As Southern cities sprawl, the majority of toss-up races are where suburban and rural communities intersect: the exurbs. For the future of Democratic campaigns in the South, these shifts are both exciting and destabilizing.

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Exurbs are in play.

Where are Republicans on the defensive?

A look at the races for 64 House seats currently held by Republicans in rural, suburban and urban districts



Source: CityLab and the Cook Political Report

Democratic donors should consider funding campaigns at the margin of the South's urban growth: the exurbs. North Carolina political science researcher and political blogger Michael Bitzer examines voter registration trends and how they correspond with the experiences of grassroots community leaders.

By showing up and building authentic relationships with rural communities, Democrats illuminate shared value systems spanning rural corridors and reaching into the core of booming cities. Even if rural communities might articulate these values more conservatively through faith, faith systems ground rural communities amidst massive demographic change. And from these roots, rural communities are ripe to grow authentic, inclusive, and sustainable political power.

WHAT SOUTHERNERS ARE SAYING: CULTURE AND CONTEXT MATTER.

By centering people and relationships, Democratic donors may realize remarkable returns in organizing power when they invest in rural and exurban districts. This means fighting for key progressive issues like universal healthcare and climate change, but also being in tandem with community needs.

Context is key. Executive Director of the Kentucky-based Center for Rural Strategies, claims that excluding rural communities politically risks resurfacing trauma tied to longstanding economic exclusion. And the changing nature of our increasingly global, digital economies only risks amplifying this trauma. Davis states:

Showing up makes the difference or bears a cost. The Alabama-based organizing coalition, Hometown Action, attributes various policy wins to showing up and centering the needs of traditionally excluded rural communities across the state. Hometown Action Executive Director Justin Vest states:

“Democrats risk relinquishing large swaths of our country to reactionary politicians who are putting extremist policies into place. Consider Alabama’s abortion ban, which forces rape survivors to carry their pregnancies to term. Left unchecked, these politicians will only amass more power.”

Southern leaders understand how to bridge the gap between “People” and “Party.” Nourishing relationships between community and party means investing in existing leadership networks, rather than investing in outside “experts.” By organizing networks across isolated communities, Democrats center the work of community-building in rural spaces.

Investing in rural districts does not come at the expense of investing in urban strongholds. A dollar in rural communities could go much farther than a dollar in the cities or suburbs.

“What they don’t understand, though, is that elections are a cultural phenomenon. Showing up, being part of the community that shows everyone who you are. It shows that you care about people, not just issues.

Context matters. Take industries like coal. Coal miners for instance were pro-union because they celebrated their work as a way of life. It was their cultural identity and community identity. In the midst of economic transformation, many are leaving coal country, and with them, public services. So when we go into these places and people don’t trust big government swooping in...are we surprised?”
- Dee Davis, Kentucky

WHAT SOUTHERNERS ARE SAYING: THE CLIMATE CRISIS IS A HUGE CONCERN.

Southern communities build resilient leadership networks to combat severe threats to the places they call home. Specifically, they are on the frontlines of the climate crisis.

Cities in the South could incur up to \$1 trillion from negative impacts of storm surges alone in one year. The ongoing financial and health crises associated with COVID-19 are already disproportionately impacting the South. This environmental threat further compounds stressors on an already fragile economy.

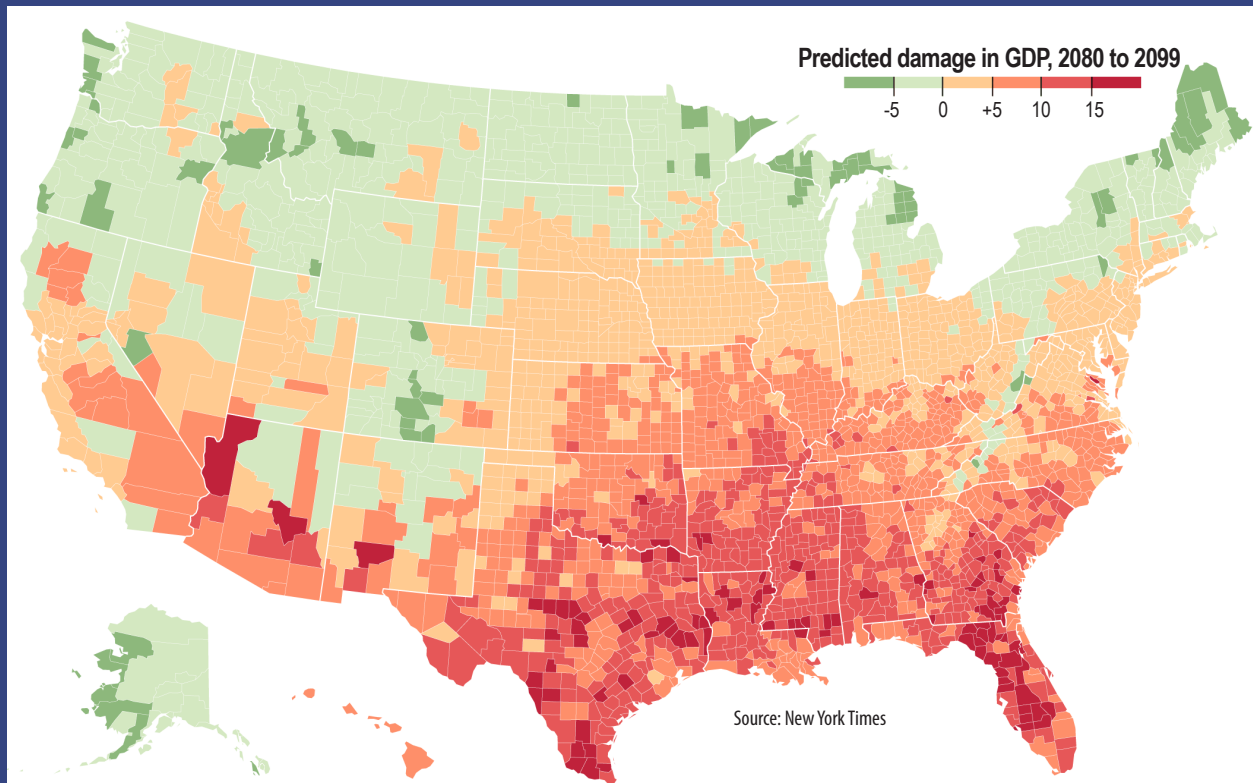
Top 15 Metropolitan Areas for Storm Surge Risk

Single-Family Residential

Source: CoreLogic 2019 Storm Surge Report

Rank	Metropolitan Area	Total (SFR) Homes at Risk of Storm Surge	Total Estimated RCV (U.S. Dollars)
1	Miami, FL	791,775	157,655,742,246
2	New York, NY	731,137	283,259,625,660
3	Tampa, FL	465,644	84,105,724,978
4	New Orleans, LA	399,403	100,885,703,624
5	Virginia Beach, VA	391,365	94,788,719,403
6	Fort Myers, FL	329,479	67,566,133,518
7	Houston, TX	294,188	63,808,381,696
8	Bradenton, FL	262,745	53,758,207,871
9	Naples, FL	187,205	42,188,030,857
10	Jacksonville, FL	176,809	41,085,669,981
11	Philadelphia, PA	166,444	43,298,808,979
12	Charleston, SC	155,740	40,866,143,180
13	Myrtle Beach, SC	131,083	24,380,388,112
14	Boston, MA	126,196	34,922,252,450
15	Beaumont, TX	121,710	22,075,159,912
Total		4,730,923	1,154,644,692,467

The South will face the greatest harm from climate change. The costs of climate change will, yet again, transfer wealth from South to North.⁴⁰



Coastal regions are home to large, diverse communities of color stepping up to confront the century's greatest challenges to our climate, but their efforts are bootstrapped. North Carolina-based community organizer Courtney Patterson in the low-country town of Kinston said that after Hurricane Matthew decimated huge corridors of eastern North Carolina and killed 28 people, he brokered a funding mechanism with ActBlue that provided ground organizations with emergency funds, no questions asked, to advance community healing. Patterson leveraged this relationship-building to increase voter participation and civic engagement across North Carolina's rural low-country.

When Democratic donors support campaigns that center climate resilience, they ultimately invest in an inclusive, multi-generational, participatory democracy.

FUNDING THE DEMOCRATIC LONG GAME

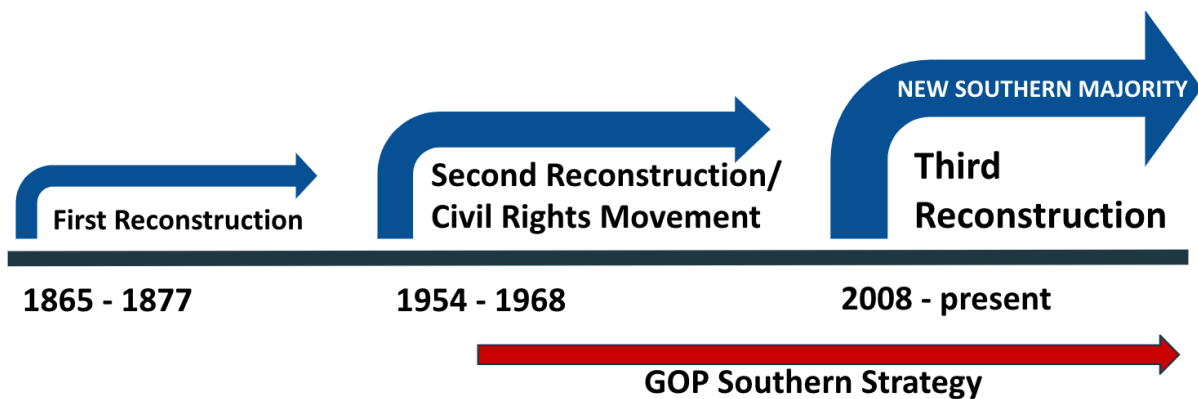
Democratic donors face a rare opportunity to win back the generation that LBJ said we lost — reclaiming the very playbook that altered the Solid South. Considering the 2020 Census, 2020 presidential election, and the 2022 redistricting.

The South has always been a “springboard for visionary thinking” and the “birthplace of movements that have transformed the country.”

The GOP’s Southern Strategy clearly is not the only story of the South’s future. The GOP’s Southern Strategy should no longer stunt Democratic donors from believing in and supporting an alternative vision for the road forward in the South.

Democratic donors play a fundamental role in reclaiming this Southern Strategy by supporting an alternative vision: the Third Reconstruction.

The Ford Foundation shares, “the South is entering what could be described as a Third Reconstruction...some of the most innovative social justice campaigns in the country . . . are conceived and led by local organizers in the South. A region of immense promise and potential that, with the right investments, could drive a period of profound change for the entire country.”⁴¹



The moment of the Third Reconstruction calls for bold, urgent action from Democratic donors to fund a New Southern Majority.

Rev. Barber has frequently said we are “in the adolescent growing pains of a Third Reconstruction.”⁴² Drawing from the lessons of the first Reconstruction, he has lifted up that poor blacks and poor whites were in a “moral coalition, a fusion coalition.”⁴³ To reclaim our nation’s moral imagination, we must envision fusion politics — “a brand of coalition building that centers power building among black, brown, and white communities.”

The Third Reconstruction will accelerate a paradigm shift that fully reckons with the South’s relevance, influence, and significance in shaping policy and legislative agendas for the entire country. Democratic donors should align their support with organizing power that reflects the changing hue of the nation.

“Until the lion is hunted, the history of the hunter will always be told.”

- Black Lens Symposium, North Carolina

“We need to build systems and processes of realities that we won’t even see right now.”

- Rev. James White, North Carolina

“We need a “strategic timeline”

- AAPI advocate, Georgia

“We need a “two-generation strategy.”

- Robert Blaine, Mississippi

“The path to progress and prosperity depends on location. We need to be investing in spaces where the economy and the electorate intersect.”

- Jermaine McNair, North Carolina

RECOMMENDATIONS

To effectively fund the Democratic power-building in the long run, Democratic donors should support the NEW SOUTHERN MAJORITY FUND. This entity would be the Emily's List of the South, created to advise donors, assess regional needs, and invest in electoral potential. The New Southern Majority Fund would be a strategic partner to both campaigns and community. By grounding its work in movement-building across the region, the New Southern Majority Fund would chart a new vision of the South, underscoring how investments in the South have tangible externalities for the rest of the nation.

The New Southern Majority Fund is that vehicle to put the Third Reconstruction into motion. The Fund would extend individual giving by empowering donors to align electoral investments with community organizing power. This approach would broaden the scope of impact to support an expanding, multi-racial voter base in the short run, and a groundswell of collective power in the longer-run.

Amid the global pandemic, looming economic recession, and climate crisis, this critical juncture should empower Democratic donors to expand their giving paradigms from moment to movement. Traditional organizing strategies are evolving, and these seismic changes to our Democratic processes should compel donors to look beyond crisis moments and toward catalyzing movement-building.

To operationalize the New Southern Majority Fund, donors should ground their support in:

1. Potential: Reckoning with the South's exorbitant capacity to deliver wins.
2. Power: Amplifying Southern movement builders to deliver wins.
3. Process: Advancing collective accountability to deliver wins.

POTENTIAL: Reckon with the South's exorbitant capacity to deliver wins.

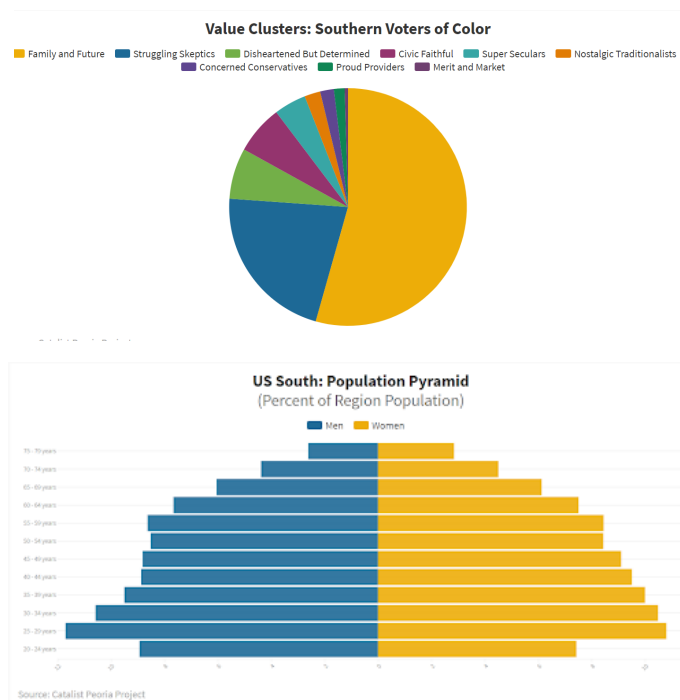
First, the New Southern Majority Fund would prime donor literacy as a foundation to illuminate how donor giving patterns are intertwined with the rest of the nation. The Fund would:

- Map interlocking systems of injustice that extend beyond the South and manifest across the entire country to move levers of political power
- Examine how donors contribute to addressing nationwide challenges by lifting up Southern voices
- Ensure value alignment when equipping grassroots groups with resources
- Incorporate time-sensitive and context-specific messaging to align giving with community priorities and knowledge

Donors often work in silos, which limits their giving. By engaging white donors with Black donors, urban donors with rural donors, coastal donors with delta donors, donors across faith traditions, and donors across generations, the would create an equalizing space where donors could learn from and alongside communities at the forefront of what powerbuilding looks like amid new normals.

Donor relations cannot succeed without meaningful donor literacy. The absence of organized networks that link traditional donors and donors of color renders political giving less powerful and effective.⁴⁴

The New Southern Majority Fund would build these networks based on the prevailing value systems that help voters navigate an increasingly unpredictable political landscape.



"To transcend racial tensions, Southerners must organize around each other's struggles. This requires that Democratic donors listen and learn from those on the frontlines of building community power."

"One space where there is ample room for powerful, cross-sector organizing is the LGBTQ movement. It's important to understand class within that movement. When we make connections, we realize there is a reality that hits when we organize. Contrary to what we might see in the LGBTQ movement, that history has not been white male-dominated. While there may be lines of contention that cross intersecting identities, the thread of oppression is the same. The target is only stronger when we fight together. Another example is labor. You can't talk about a case against a janitor for instance, and not exclude a case against the pregnant immigrant woman. You need to thread these stories together."

- Labor organizer, Georgia

"When dollars are cast, sometimes, donors of faith and of color can confuse and conflate access with influence."

- Imam Khalid Griggs, North Carolina

POWER: Amplify Southern movement builders to deliver wins.

Second, the New Southern Majority Fund would build relationships across coalitions of donors and grassroots leaders to illuminate proximity-informed investments.

Donors should regard “proximity to community” at the forefront of their pledge decisions. DeJuana Thompson of Think Rubix and Woke Vote underscores that enabling people of color to choose the direction of their dollars could go a long way in addressing systemic inequities that perpetuate in this domain. She adds that they can see their singular dollar as “100 pennies” and know how to best allocate and distribute their funding to ensure that the most people are included in their investment. This approach to resource allocation is a norm practiced widely by leaders of color. This approach also maximizes the impact of donors’ electoral dollars by reaching communities on the peripheries of electoral engagement.

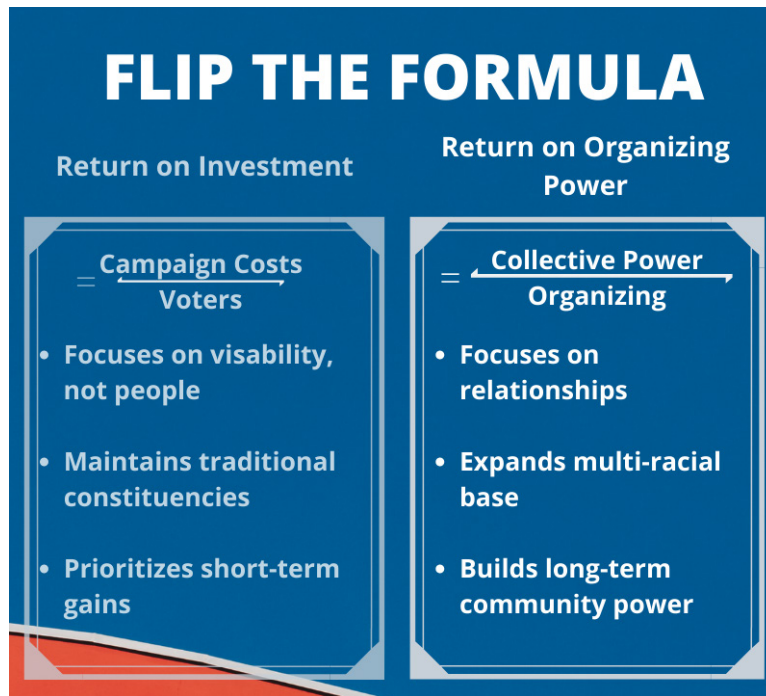
By aligning electoral and community powerbuilding, the New Southern Majority Fund could “flip the formula” of how donors devise and communicate metrics of success. By moving towards benchmarks and milestones that assess intent and impact, relationships and resources, base-building and base-expansion, the New Southern Majority Fund would present a way forward that would not stifle individual gains that are made, but rather channel them into a broader narrative.

It moves beyond transactional, short-term metrics of impact like “return on investment” because these metrics are not designed to capture the giving traditions, nor the organizing prowess, that Southerners have always modeled for the nation.

“We need to democratize who we imagine donors to be by expanding the ways we imagine investing in social change and community power through giving circles.

For instance, donations might involve an introduction to or a relationship with someone who might meet a critical need for community powerbuilding. Grounding capital in relationships and community renders philanthropy more accessible to Southerners, while accurately reflecting local culture and context. Promoting collective giving also works to advance accountability grounded in the community.”
- Joy Webb, Community Investment Network, Georgia

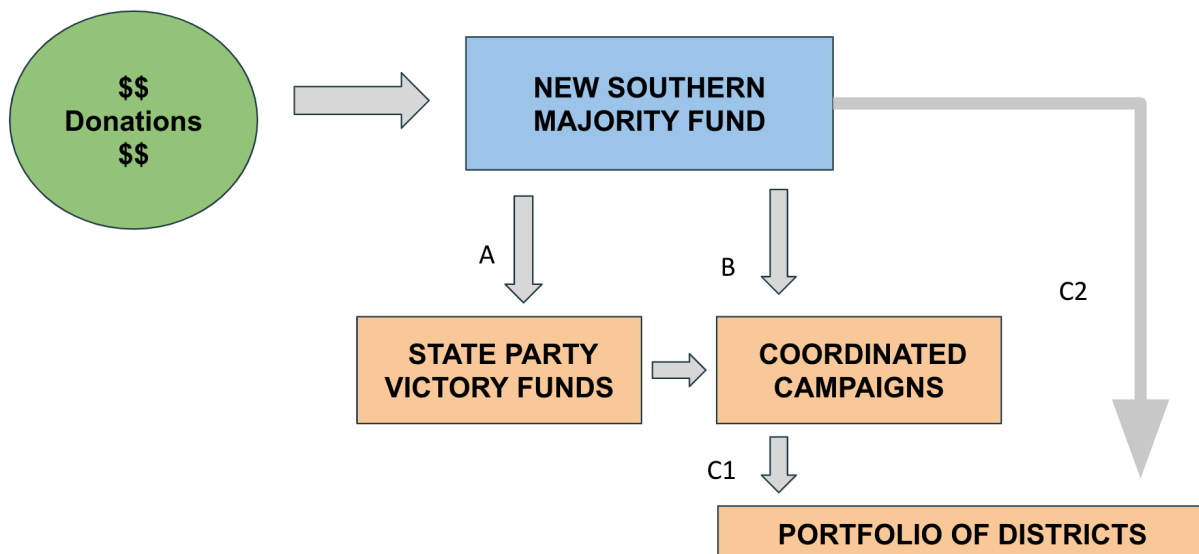
“Realizing organizing power in the South is about having people who know people who know where people are is what moves people.”
- Courtney Patterson, North Carolina



When campaign contributions align with Southern priorities, expected returns reach \$115 to \$1.⁴⁵ Our field interviews illuminate several Southern issue priorities: advancing racial justice, bridging the urban-rural divide, and building community resilience in the face of the climate crisis to consolidate power that lasts.

Third, the New Southern Majority Fund would extend individual giving by promoting a portfolio of districts across federal races. Deploying dollars across portfolios manages risks while also ensuring Democratic powerbuilding, informed by Southern community need and issue priorities. Taking lessons from financial markets, certain investments yield greater returns than others. The political space is not different. By leveraging portfolios of districts, donors expand the geographic scope of their electoral engagement from blue to purple districts, but also expand their ability to collaborate with broader donor networks, bringing in donors of color.

Operationally, the New Southern Majority Fund would exist as a mechanism in support of state-level coordinated campaigns and victory funds, spaces where credible candidates can get the resources they need to scale their campaigns.



PROCESS: Advance collective accountability to deliver wins.

Fourth, the New Southern Majority Fund would hold itself accountable to Southern communities and their priorities. To build meaningful accountability, the New Southern Majority Fund would pair convenings with multimedia campaigns, uplifting powerbuilding work narrated by Southern voices to continue centering community need. It would underscore transparency as a core tenet of accountability. Beyond simply convening donors and community leaders multiple times annually, the Fund would work alongside watchdog and monitoring NGOs to publish open-source research across local media platforms.

Priorities certainly change during uncertainty. Donors can provide critical care at a time of critical need. Centuries of regressive policy in the South intensify the harm wrought by health, economic, and climate crises, which would ultimately bear tremendous costs for the rest of the nation. Democratic donors could help alleviate pain by restoring capacity and adapting to a new normal.

6 of the Top 10 states with the highest projected COVID-19 deaths will be in the South.

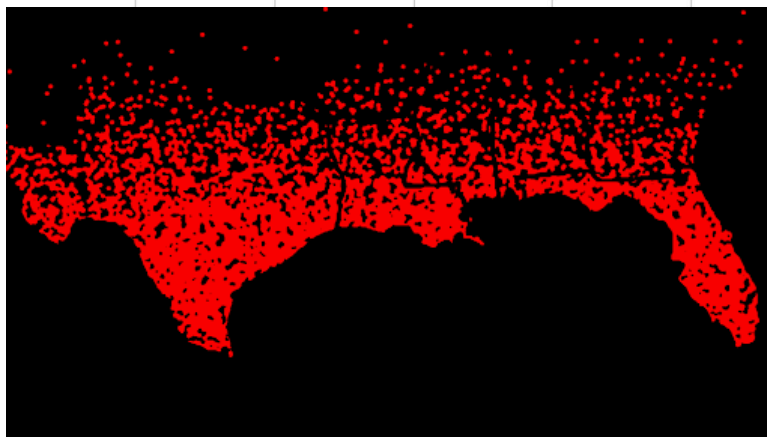
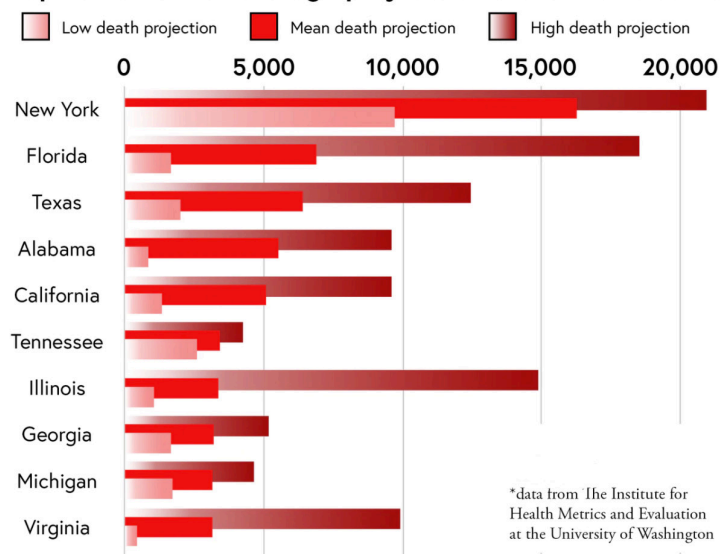
As campaigns become more physically isolated, building relationships across digital spaces to keep 2020 in clear sight becomes more important than ever. Donors to the New Southern Majority Fund, ultimately, would be accountable to Southern communities, so this work remains open and accessible to leaders across race, class, faith, and generation. This two-way dialogue would enable donors to be attuned to the needs of the communities that find themselves at the crossroads of a distressed economy, global pandemic, and volatile climate.

With so much at stake, Democratic donors cannot afford to sit on the sidelines and relinquish power in a region that shapes the political and moral direction of our nation.

"It is important to include black donors into decision-making because those who fund your politics, control your policies and we need to ensure that donors of color are not left out and sidelined from the very conversations that could dictate the course of our communities."

- Melanie Campbell, National Coalition for Black Civic Participation and the Black Women's Roundtable

Top 10 states for average projected coronavirus deaths



CONCLUSION

One out every three Americans live in the South. If Democrats ignore the most populous region of the US, divert resources or under-invest in electoral infrastructure, they do so at their own peril.

This report makes the case for why Democratic donors should allocate resources across America's South, in ways that transcends transactional short-term funding. This report assesses the costs of *not* meaningfully investing in the South: destroying the gains made in the last few cycles and stifling efforts to build political power over the next decade. The COVID-19 pandemic is a sobering reminder for the critical need for Democrats to reclaim "the Southern Strategy."

**The South
is the only place America can find truth and reconciliation—
not because it's where slavery was largely enacted,
not because it's where Jim Crow was codified,
not because of any of the ways in which we haven't lived up to our founding creed,
but because in spite of all that,
it's where Americans,
particularly communities of color who had the greatest reason to hate America,
loved it and worked to perfect it instead.**

APPENDIX

Notes on Campaign Financial Analysis

With guidance from Rebecca W. Perry, PhD., the research team analyzed contributor surnames by using aggregate data on the racial distribution of surnames reported in the 2010 U.S. Census to ultimately infer the distribution of races present among candidacies' contributors.

The relevant datafile is available here: <https://github.com/kosukeimai/wru/tree/master/data>.

For each surname, the dataset provides the percent of census respondents with that surname who are "White," "Black," "Hispanic," "Asian," or "Other." To arrive at racial distributions of contributors summarized at the candidacy level, the research team first identifies unique individuals, then pairs that record with the racial probability distributions of each individual's surname. Finally, the research team sums the probabilities across individuals. For the purpose of this analysis, an individual donor is considered to be "unique" if they have a unique combination of first name, surname, and zip code.

We compare the inferred racial distribution of each campaign's contributors to the racial distribution of the relevant district or state. Despite uncertainties, the analysis still reveals notable contributor demographic trends.

Analyzing the contributors of these races using nationally aggregated data will skew the data towards national population averages since more common surnames likely have different racial distributions in across states. The 2010 Census reports that the US population is 27.6% people of color (POC). So any states or districts whose populations have less than 27.6% POC, we expect the inferred POC contributor percentage to be somewhat inflated, and for any states or districts with more than the national population average of POC, we expect the inferred POC contributor percentage to be underestimated. In both instances, the inferred values skew towards the national mean.

Yet, the data still show that as a district's POC population increase, the percentage of inferred campaign donors of color also increases across House, Senate and gubernatorial races.

The slopes of the lines of best fit for the regression analyses are:

- Senate: 0.19;
- Gubernatorial: 0.13;
- House: 0.25.

See red linear fit lines for reference.

A slope of 1.0 represents an exact match of the population's percentage of people of color and the percent of inferred campaign contributors of color.

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