



Ripe for Reform: Arkansas as a Model for Social Change

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On the cover:

Youth from across Arkansas meet with Governor Mike Beebe at the Capitol. Arkansas's small size makes it easy for grassroots people to access policymakers. Img. 1

The Southern Tenant Farmers Union, formed in 1934 in the Arkansas Delta, was the first racially integrated union in the United States. Img. 2

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A Record of Progress

In recent years Arkansas has made impressive progress on big challenges that have confounded leaders in other states. Under both Republican and Democratic leadership in the past decade, Arkansas has:

- Made a massive overhaul of its education system, including dramatically increased funding and enhanced educational standards;
- Avoided cutbacks to social safety net programs through raising revenue to fill budget shortfalls when necessary;
- Made the tax code more progressive for low-income families, while raising the minimum wage and passing other policies to expand economic opportunities for those in poverty;
- Largely avoided the divisive social issues of immigration, abortion, and LGBT-related policies that have dominated many other neighboring state agendas.

This document explores the factors creating Arkansas's record of progress. The history of populism and progressivism in the state, especially compared to its Southern neighbors, serves as a foundation on which modern progressive social change can be built. Moreover, excepting some very recent dynamics that threaten the overall trend, modern electoral success by relatively progressive candidates and for progressive causes on ballot initiatives exemplifies the openness of the state's citizenry to such ideals. The surprising success of progressive causes in the legislative arena in the state—despite limited outside support for that work—serves as additional evidence of the opportunities for lasting success in the state.

The report fleshes out this history and modern success stories. It also makes the case that the complex demography of the state that makes it both a “Southern” state and a “Midwestern” state means that political successes in Arkansas could be replicated in a wider array of states in those regions (and in rural America more broadly). In short, while many Southern states have become dominated by ideological polarization, Arkansas remains a more balanced political system that is, therefore, capable of progress on issues that will expand opportunities and social justice. Due to these unique characteristics, with additional investment from outside its borders, Arkansas has an enormous opportunity to continue tackling challenges of poverty and lack of opportunity to transform this small state and have broad ramifications beyond its borders.

Arkansas's Distinctive Political Culture

As political scientist Daniel Elazar and others have extensively documented, the political culture of American states is rooted, as is all culture, in the cumulative historical experiences of a people. As white settlers came to America, and then moved westward across the nation, they carried with them historical memories and ethnic and religious affiliations that were manifested in different orientations toward politics. Thus,

“lesser born” and “less fortunate.” Under this conception, political power is often inherited as a family right and obligation, and the major purpose of government is to protect and preserve the status quo. At least throughout the bulk of the nineteenth century, Elazar’s formulations place Arkansas squarely within the Traditionalistic pattern. There is a close fit between Elazar’s description of the hallmarks of the Traditionalistic political culture and the salient characteristics of nineteenth-century Arkansas politics:

Both because the landed aristocracy was less numerous in Arkansas and because the frontier with its antiaristocratic influences was much nearer, elitism never reached the apogee in Arkansas that it did, for instance, in South Carolina or Virginia.

important variations express themselves around the United States in perceptions of what politics should be, of what can be expected from the government, of the kinds of people expected to become active in politics, and of the actual ways in which government is practiced by citizens, politicians, and public officials.¹

According to Elazar, the Traditionalistic political culture, which developed in the Tidewater colonies of the southern coast and spread westward across the south, developed a paternalistic concept of government, with an obligation on the part of the plantation-owning elite to exercise political as well as economic decision-making responsibilities for the

Government tries to limit [its] role to securing the continued maintenance of the existing social order. To do so, it functions to confine real political power to a relatively small and self-perpetuating group drawn from an established elite who often inherit their “right” to govern through family ties or social position.... At the same time, those who do not have a definite role to play in politics are not expected to be even minimally active as citizens...the traditionalistic political culture is found only in a society that retains some of



¹ It is crucial to note that Rodney E. Hero recently has put forward a strong and thought-provoking critique of the Elazar political subculture model in *Faces of Inequality*. Hero argues that seeing the racial/ethnic diversity of a state as driving the political environment of a state is more insightful than Elazar’s framework because categorizations based on social diversity “are clearer, are more precise, and better incorporate change” (10). In Hero’s categorizations, Arkansas remains socially “bifurcated,” a structure that leads to many expectations about political outcomes in synch with Elazar’s traditionalistic political culture.

The Ozark people preferred taking care of their own needs, basically believing that government was an inconsequential nuisance.

Img. 3

the organic characteristics of the preindustrial social order...unless political leaders are pressed strongly from the outside they play conservative and custodial rather than initiatory roles.²

Both because the landed aristocracy was less numerous in Arkansas (it is estimated that less than one hundred Arkansans ever owned more than one hundred slaves) and because the frontier with its anti-aristocratic influences was much nearer, elitism never reached the apogee in Arkansas that it did, for instance, in South Carolina or Virginia. Unquestionably, however, the large landowners, because they had the wealth, the skill, the leisure, and the incentives within a political culture permitting and accepting their natural dominance, had extraordinary weight in setting the political agenda and selecting political leaders.

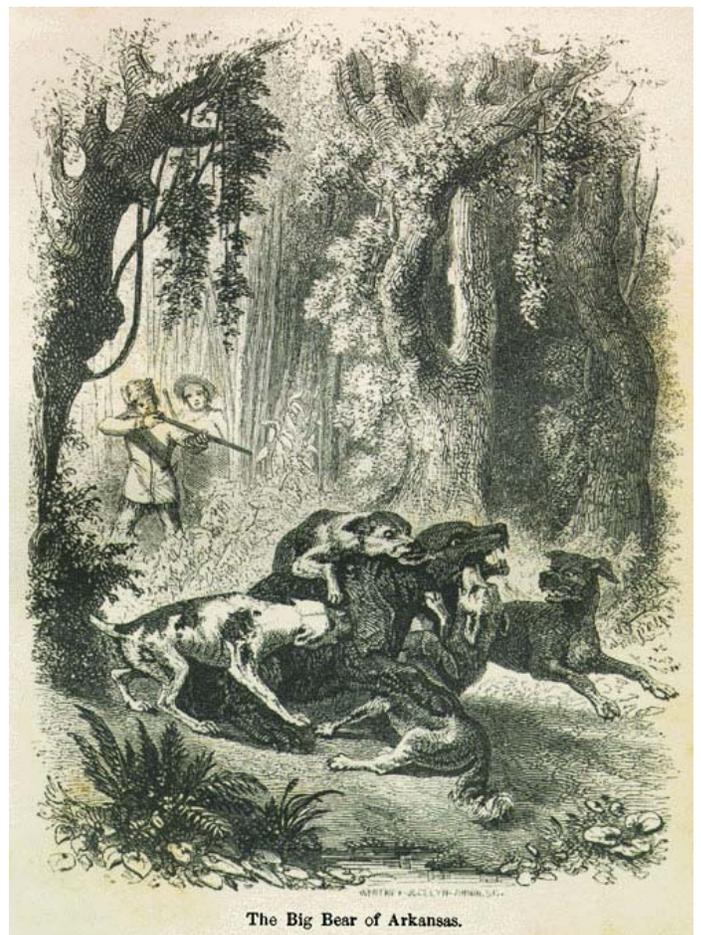
According to Elazar's mapping of political culture, only one small portion of Arkansas, the northwestern Ozarks, does not fall clearly within the Traditionalistic pattern. Both the fierce individualism of the hill people and their antipathy to elitism suggest that they cannot be fairly placed in the tidewater, paternalistic, Traditionalistic pattern. The aggressively independent and often fatalistic Ozark uplanders seem to have been more anarchistic than anything else, more motivated by a deliberate quest for remoteness than by any search for community of any sort.

These were people who preferred taking care of their own needs, basically believing that government was an inconsequential nuisance. If the elites who controlled the state's politics wanted to use government as their private playpen, this simply confirmed the basic belief of the nonpower-

2 Daniel J. Elazar, *American Federalism: A View from the States*, 2d ed. (New York: Crowell, 1972), 99-102. For further analysis—and a defense—of southern traditionalism, see Eugene D. Genovese, *The Southern Tradition: The Achievement and Limitations of an American Conservatism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).



The Traditionalistic political culture developed a paternalistic concept of government, with an obligation on the part of the elite to exercise political as well as economic decision-making responsibilities for the "lesser born" and "less fortunate." **Img. 4**



Shirley Abbot said of the Ozark highland culture: "[They were] the most independent people who ever lived...They did without doctors and lawyers and tried every way they could to do without tax collectors. Civic-minded they were not." **Img. 5**

It was the sharpening perception of favoritism for the few and neglect of the many that finally created the beginnings of organization, protest, and demands for change in the form of a populist movement.

ful in the state, pinpointed by Shirley Abbott, that “politicians are the source of all disillusionment.” According to Abbott, whose maternal ancestors were among the thousands of highlanders scratching their living off the stony hillsides, they were

the most independent people who ever lived, and I am convinced they went off into the woods of their own will, gladly, by preference, because they believed chiefly in themselves and wanted no truck with institutions.... What they produced was not for society but for themselves, and they took pride in their own dogged self-sufficiency....They did without doctors and lawyers and tried every way they could to do without tax collectors. Civic-minded they were not.³

It is only when all these elements of nineteenth-century Arkansas are considered together that one can begin to comprehend why the voices of the poor farmers, despite their numerical majority, were so rarely heard. The agrarian economy never provided either the surplus capital or the incentives for an interventionist and activist state government; and the influence of agrarianism was compounded by the effects of a nonparticipatory political culture, what modern day social scientists would call a deficit in social capital. The plantation-oriented Traditionalistic political culture of the lowlands prohibited participation by the African-American population and discouraged political activism except among the elite. The subsistence-style farming of the uplands produced suspicion about and contempt for the political process

rather than widespread participation in it. Economics, which is usually at the basis of political competition, provided a powerful incentive for the planters to protect their own interests but no counterincentives around which the yeoman farmers, whose economic self-sufficiency bred an equally fierce political self-sufficiency, could see themselves usefully organizing.

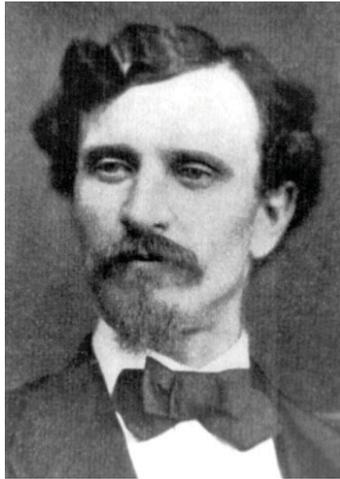
Finally, in the 1880s, the common people did arise, organize, and demand a more responsive and useful state government. The major outcome of this uprising, however, was a politics even less likely to address their basic interests than that which preceded it. The Redeemers—that coalition of Confederate war heroes, planters, and businessmen who had regained control of state government in 1874—shared a generally noninterventionist view of state government, with taxes, appropriations, and regulations kept to a minimum. What this meant in practice was



Arkansas's unique combination of populism and progressivism led to passage of a bill to allow Arkansas women to vote in primary elections in 1917. In 1919, Arkansas was the 12th state to ratify the 19th Amendment, giving women the right to vote in federal and state elections. Img. 6

3 Shirley Abbott, *Womenfolks* (New Haven and New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1983) 30, 59.

The 1888 congressional election in the central portion of the state nearly resulted in a Democratic loss, and did result in the murder of the Republican candidate, John Clayton. It exemplified the aggressive backlash by Democrats when one-party control was threatened. Img. 7



a free ride and beneficial treatment for the railroads, timber, and mining companies. It was the sharpening perception of favoritism for the few and neglect of the many that finally created the beginnings of organization, protest, and demands for change in the form of a populist movement. While the railroads charged exorbitant freight rates the small farmers could not even get their goods to local markets because of the dearth of decent roads, and the future looked no brighter for their children without adequate education. The oppressive credit system, the regressive tax system, the blatant and frequent misconduct of countless public officials, all finally became intolerable to the point of protest.

In 1888, a gubernatorial candidate of the dissident Union-Labor party, with Republican backing, came within an eyelash of electoral success. For those unaccustomed to genuine competition, this election was ominously close, especially because of the amount of fraud that had been necessary to secure even this narrow victory. A congressional election in the central portion of the state resulted in an even more marginal (and even more dubious) Democratic victory, one followed by the murder of the Republican candidate attempting to provoke a federal inves-



"It must be a source of much humiliation and chagrin to the well informed citizen to know that hundreds of millions of dollars worth of timber, stone, and other natural resources are being shipped out of state without the state's realizing any profit at all" - George Washington Donaghey, twenty-second governor of Arkansas (1909-1913). Img. 8



Republican Governor Winthrop Rockefeller was elected in 1966 as a moderate on race relations following the six-term governorship of Orval Faubus. Rockefeller enjoyed support from Democrats for Rockefeller who supported civil rights. He was a modernizing Governor not only on race relations but economic development and several other areas of good government reforms. Img. 9

tigation of the voting process.⁴ The 1888 election was a seminal event, producing two very contradictory patterns that strongly shaped Arkansas politics for the next seventy or eighty years. One reaction was viciously antidemocratic and that resulted in more paralysis than progress. Alarmed by the vigor of the threat to comfortable Democratic hegemony, the political establishment saw to the enactment of a series of electoral “reforms” that emasculated the opposition through disenfranchisement of large percentages of its supporters and forced the emerging populist temper to participate within a one-party, issueless, and ultimately unproductive mold.

The other response, a democratic or majoritarian one, was the first, feeble recognition of the legitimacy of at least some of the dissidents’ demands. While the legislature ignored or defeated most of their requests it was the start of a persistent spirit of populism as opposed to patricianism in the state. The populist impulse regularly surfaced from that

4 For the most thorough analysis of biracial Republican/Populist coalition politics at the local level in Arkansas, the bizarre case of the 1888 congressional election and its murderous outcome, and the long-term ramifications of the political violence and disfranchisement, see Kenneth C. Barnes, *Who Killed John Clayton? Political Violence and the Emergence of the New South, 1861-1893* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998).

time on in gubernatorial elections. Governors Daniel Jones, Jeff Davis, George Donaghey, Charles Brough, Carl Bailey, Sid McMath, and Orval Faubus were all originally elected against the wishes of the economic establishment, and all pushed (with varying degrees of enthusiasm and success) for some programs for the common people. Senators Joseph T. Robinson, William Kirby, Thaddeus and Hattie Caraway, and Congressmen Otis Wingo, Clyde Ellis, and Brooks Hays all reflected (again with various degrees of consistency) a populist-progressive orientation. It was this impulse that led to the adoption of an initiative and referendum amendment to Arkansas’s Constitution in 1910, to early support for the election rather than appointment of U.S. senators, and to enfranchisement of women even before the national suffrage amendment was ratified. Populism also showed itself in the decades that followed in actions such as the formation of the Southern Tenant Farmers’ Union—begun in the Arkansas Delta—in the 1930s and environmental movements in the 1960s and 1970s that resulted in the protection of the Buffalo River as the nation’s first National River. As will be discussed, it continues to have modern day manifestations in this state that is an outlier in its region.



Img. 10

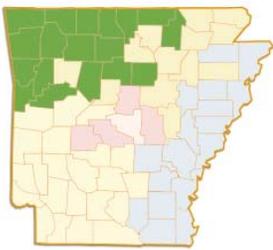


Img. 11

Populism also showed itself in actions such as the formation of the Southern Tenant Farmers’ Union, begun in the Arkansas Delta in the 1930s—an example of Arkansas’s progressive history that many are unaware of.

Six in One: The Complex Demography of a Small State

As noted earlier, the uplands and lowlands of Arkansas were socially, economically, and politically at odds from early in Arkansas's history. In modern times, additional demographic diversity has developed across the state's 53,182 square miles. While a small state, Arkansas is now arguably six states in one in terms of important demographic characteristics that have political manifestations.



Northwestern Arkansas

Northwestern Arkansas, containing the prototypical Ozark counties, has become reliably Republican in its voting patterns. Republicans have had a base here since the uplanders' opposition to secession. Significantly reinforcing and expanding this base, however, has been extraordinary recent population growth in that portion of Arkansas, due in large part to in-migration. Many of these in-migrants are retirees, exchanging the higher taxes and harsher winter climates, especially of the Midwest, for the lower taxes, milder climates, and plentiful natural recreational resources of northern Arkansas. And many of these in-migrants have brought their politically conservative preferences with them. In recent years, much more of Northwest Arkansas's growth was stimulated by rapidly expanding economic



Crowds gathered for opening day of the first Wal-Mart in 1962. Wal-Mart and Tyson Foods—both founded in Northwest Arkansas—now rank as the state's second and third largest employers behind state government. Img. 12

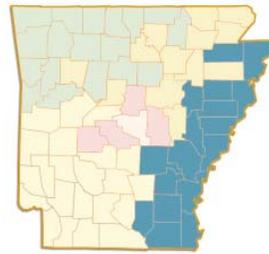
At present, the Latino population remains relatively unpoliticized and, because much of the population is young or not yet nationalized, it is a growing but still underrepresented part of the electorate.

development in the counties of the region. Wal-Mart (the world's largest retailer) and Tyson Foods (the nation's largest poultry producer), both founded in the region decades earlier as were major trucking firms (led by the nation's largest, J.B. Hunt Trucking), now rank as the state's second and third largest employers behind state government. As a result of this economic and population growth, historically inherited Ozark Republicanism and retiree Republicanism have been augmented by the Republicanism that has accompanied the "metropolitanization" of northwest Arkansas counties, especially the more northern ones, strung together by Interstate 540 along Arkansas's western border. Benton, Washington, Crawford, and Sebastian counties have nearly merged into one urban-suburban entity with many along the corridor living in one county, working in another, shopping, "schooling," or recreating in another. This area is almost prototypical examples of the white new middle-class suburban Republicanism described most clearly by Earl Black and Merle Black in their works.⁵

In the aftermath of the Censuses since 1980 and subsequent reapportionments, the northwest section of Arkansas obtained additional seats in the legislature, and future reapportionments are expected to be equally advantageous as a base for potential Republican growth. One demographic trend does create a significant question mark about the future politics of a northwest Arkansas, however. That is the dramatic growth of the area's Latino/Latina population in recent years. Other communities in the state have also evidenced dramatic increases in immigrants from Mexico, but it is northwest Arkansas where the Latino presence is most sizable and growing the most steadily (According to 2010 Census data, the Fayetteville-Springdale-Rogers metropolitan area was 14.9

5 Earl Black and Merle Black, *Politics and Society in the South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

percent). Originally, these immigrants had direct connections to the area's poultry industry, but in time have grown beyond this niche. At present, the Latino population remains relatively unpoliticized and, because much of the population is young or not yet nationalized, it is a community underrepresented in the electorate. For instance, no state legislative district is yet majority Latino.⁶ But, if neighboring states such as Texas are a guide, it is progressives whose pro-government message is more likely to be a draw to these new and prospective voters.



Delta

At the other extreme from northwest Arkansas—geographically, economically, and politically—lie the Delta counties. During the nineteenth-century settlement period, cotton—with its attendant slavery—reigned supreme in this plain (and, to a lesser extent, in the neighboring West Gulf Coastal Plain), and the



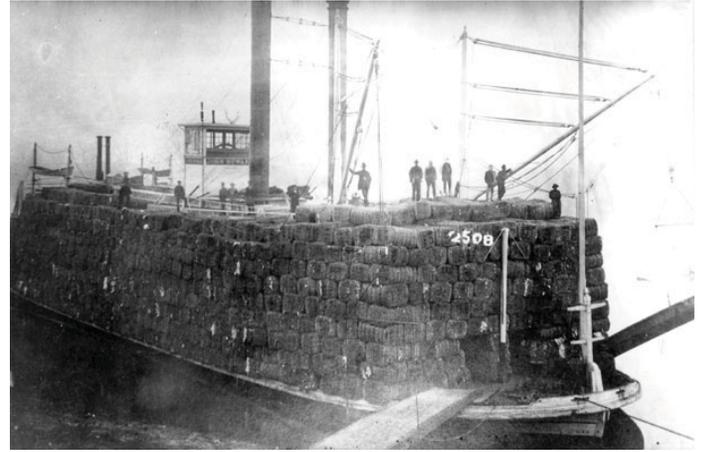
Many of the problems that plagued the old south continue in the Arkansas Delta, but some bright spots are emerging. Img. 13

6 However, following the 2010 Census, a state House district (District 89) was created in which, together, Latinos and Marshallese citizens compose a majority of the population; whites remain a majority of the voting age population in the district.

bulk of Arkansas's African-American population still resides primarily in the old cotton kingdom. Today it is the site of vast soybean, rice, and cotton plantations (owned by an increasingly small number of corporations), limited diversification of the economy beyond that with accompanying low incomes (the Arkansas Delta includes some of the poorest counties in the country), and significant disparities of wealth. Since Reconstruction, the Delta has been the area of staunchest Democratic strength, but the demographic basis of that strength has totally changed from that of whites, seeing in Democratic solidarity the most certain security for continued white supremacy, to African-Americans, responding favorably to the more egalitarian programs of the Democratic party. Two

Cotton was the economic engine of the Delta for decades.

Img. 14



During the nineteenth-century settlement period, cotton—with its attendant slavery—reigned supreme in this plain, and the bulk of Arkansas's African-American population still resides primarily in the old cotton kingdom.

features of the contemporary African-American vote in Arkansas are especially noteworthy. First, it tends to be monolithic, giving 90 percent or greater margins to candidates who have found favor in African-American communities. Second, since the early 1970s, the African-American vote has tended to be thoroughly Democratic at all levels of politics. However, the state's African-American population is not large enough to have created a white "backlash" like that seen in other southern states with larger and more "threatening" (to whites) black populations.⁷

The Delta counties, then, together with the urban African-American precincts in Pulaski County (Little Rock) and Jefferson County (Pine Bluff) have become a significant source of Democratic strength, provid-

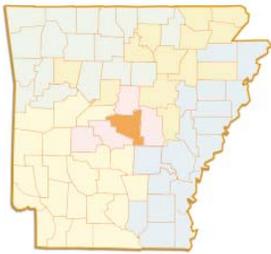


Arkansas produces almost half of the rice grown in the United States.

Img. 15

⁷ African-American voters were a key part of the electoral coalition of Arkansas Republican Governor Winthrop Rockefeller, a racial progressive elected governor in 1966 and 1968.

ing hefty majorities and sometimes winning margins to statewide Democratic candidacies, and capturing a number of offices in legislative districts and communities with substantial African-American populations (particularly after the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1982). Several factors, however, make the Delta counties a less impressive base for the Democrats than the Ozark counties are for the Republicans. First, the Delta counties are generally slow-growth to absolute-loss counties. Second, voter turnout is usually much less in the Delta counties than in the Ozarks.



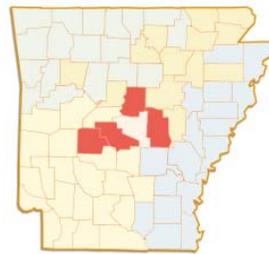
Pulaski County

The most urban county in the state, Pulaski County, contains the state's largest and third largest cities (Little Rock and North Little Rock), and it is justifiably a "region" unto itself in understanding contemporary political patterns in the state. Little Rock is not only the largest city in Arkansas, it is also the economic, governmental, and communications center of the state, home of the sole statewide newspaper, the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, and of television stations reaching



Little Rock, the largest city in Arkansas, is the economic, governmental, and communications center of the state Img. 16

almost all Arkansas viewers. Its cultural, commercial, and medical resources attract huge numbers of business professionals, visitors, and shoppers who enjoy its amenities and appreciate its services. While the more affluent neighborhoods in the county increasingly favor the more conservative candidates, who are most often Republicans, the county also serves as a strong electoral base for more progressive candidates who have relied upon it in recent election cycles. It is also crucially important to note that Pulaski County is a relatively slow-growing county in Arkansas in terms of population, with a population increase of 5.9 percent between 2000 and 2010, just over one-half of the state population growth rate during the period. Therefore, the state's largest county—while still highly relevant in determining election outcomes—is becoming comparatively less important.

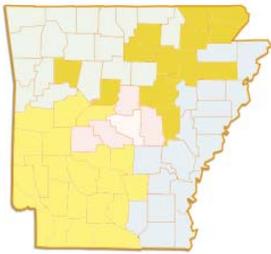


Suburban Counties

On the other hand, the remainder of the Little Rock metropolitan area joins Northwest Arkansas as the fastest growing (and the most overwhelmingly Republican) parts of the state. Three suburban counties—Faulkner (31.6 percent), Saline (28.2 percent), and Lonoke (29.4 percent)—grew at rates akin to the booming counties of the northwest corner of the state in the first decade of the 2000s. Moreover, like those counties, they contain disproportionate numbers of the new middle-class citizens overwhelmingly accepting of Republicanism. They are also overwhelmingly white, with large numbers of these counties' residents

Pulaski county also serves as a strong electoral base for more progressive candidates who have relied upon it in recent election cycles.

having taken “flight” from Little Rock’s perceived troubled public schools and high crime rates. This reflects the patterns seen throughout the contemporary South (a strongly Democratic central city surrounded by Republican suburbs). The shift in Saline County, whose (now mostly dead) aluminum industry provided a reliably Democratic union-influenced voting based for decades, is particularly remarkable.



Rural Swing Counties

With these four regions fairly equal in their voting power, it is vital to understand the remaining large “region” in Arkansas: the “Rural Swing” counties.⁸ These counties run along a northeast to southwest diagonal line and vary in their African-American populations depending on which side of the diagonal line they lie (but all majority white); they thus clump in two groups, one in the northeast quadrant of the state and one in the southwest. Together, they have a potent voice in Arkansas’s near-term political future. The average percentage of urban areas in these twenty-six counties is well under half of the statewide average. Even more graphically, as late as 2000, sixteen of these twenty-six counties had no towns with a population of more than 5,000, and none possessed a town with more than 25,000 people. Most all of the Rural Swing counties remain dry, another indication of traditional rural values in a state where local option elections have turned many

⁸ For a more detailed discussion of the “rural swing” dynamics, see Diane D. Blair and Jay Barth, *Arkansas Politics and Government: Do the People Rule?*, Second edition (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), Chapel Four and for an analysis of the importance of these counties in the 2004 elections in the state, see Jay Barth and Janine Parry, “Arkansas: Still Swingin’ in 2004.” *American Review of Politics* (2005) 26: 133-154.



Desegregation of Little Rock schools fueled the growth of suburban communities around the city. Img. 17

EVER HEARD OF MENA

THE CITY OF THE OZARK MOUNTAINS
ELEVATION 1200 FEET

Cool Summers
Mild Winters
Pure Soft Water
Beautiful Scenery
Pretty Homes

No Mosquitoes
No Blizzards
No Malaria
No Drouth
No Negroes

Flyer advertising Mena, Arkansas as an exclusively white town, circa 1920s. Img. 18

Arkansas counties wet (including almost all urban and Delta counties). Thus, neither Ozark nor Delta, and certainly neither urban nor suburban, they make up their own two political regions. In recent election cycles, the winner of the majority of these counties has almost always won statewide. The white voters of these counties are archetypically conservative populists—deeply traditionalistic when it comes to cultural values, but seeing a proactive role for government in the economic arena. While the voters of these counties almost always elect Democrats at the county and legislative levels, nearer the top of the ballot these counties “swing” to the candidate who comes closest to expressing conservative populist values. For instance, both Republican Mike Huckabee and Democrat Mike Beebe, the last two elected governors of the state, have thrived in these counties.

Policy Diffusion

The complexity of Arkansas clearly makes social change work in the state challenging. A single social change strategy cannot be effective across the state’s 75 counties. But, an important benefit of this complexity shows itself for those considering an investment in social change work in the state. A long line of political science research has investigated the forces that shape how policies adopted at the state level spread throughout the country, i.e. “policy diffusion.” This research has shown, while variations show themselves across different policy areas, states are likely to learn the advantages of such policies most quickly from states that are similar to them in important demographic and social characteristics.

Thus, because portions of Arkansas are “like” different portions of the country—the Delta like large portions of Deep South states, the fast-growing Northwest portion of the state and suburbs around Little Rock like similar areas in other southern and Midwestern states, the “rural swing” counties like heavily white rural portions of the South, Midwest, and Great Plains states, and Pulaski County like midsized metropolitan areas all over the country—successful strategies for progressive social change employed in Arkansas could be applied to very different portions of the United States. This enhances the value of an investment in such efforts in Arkansas.⁹

The white voters of the Rural Swing counties are archetypically conservative populists—deeply traditionalistic when it comes to cultural values, but seeing a proactive role for government in the economic arena.

9 On the force of regionalism in policy diffusion, see Christopher Z. Mooney. “Modeling Regional Effects on State Policy Diffusion.” *Political Research Quarterly* (2001) 54: 103-124.

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The Arkansas Delta is similar to large portions of Deep South states, the fast-growing Northwest portion of the state and suburbs around Little Rock like similar areas in other southern and Midwestern states, the “rural swing” counties like heavily white rural portions of the South, Midwest, and Great Plains states, and Pulaski County like midsized metropolitan areas all over the country. Img. 19

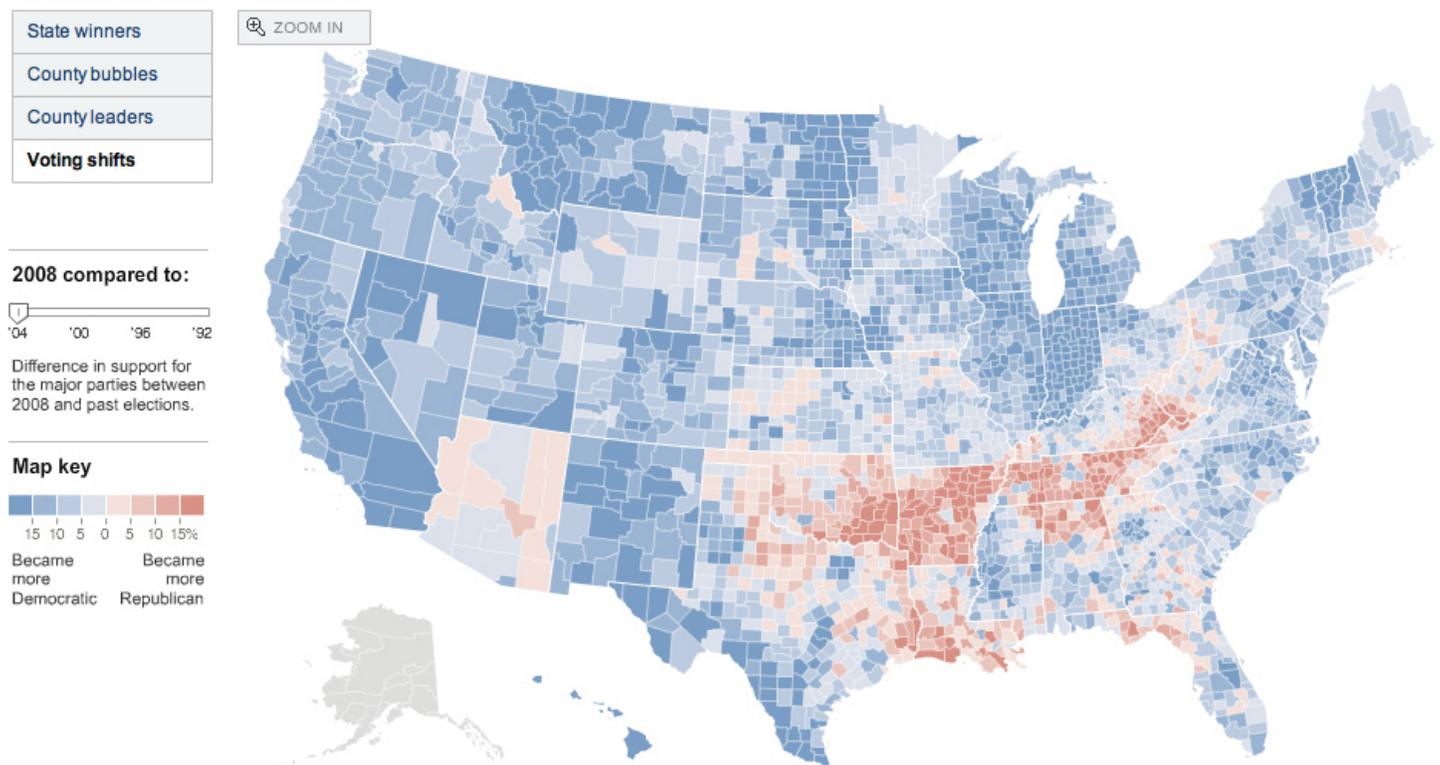
Contemporary Electoral Patterns

A prominent Arkansas historian concludes that, “Arkansas history can best be viewed as a tug of war between two polar opposites, modernizers on one side and traditionalists on the other.”¹⁰ In the electoral arena in modern years, the “modernizer” side of that battle has generally been victorious as relative progressives have had success in statewide elections in Arkansas that is surprising until one recognizes the progressive elements of the Arkansas political tradition, even among the white rural voters who are so crucial in determining electoral outcomes. This success contrasts starkly with the rise of conservative Republicanism in neighboring southern states during this same era. While Democrats elected in Arkansas—particularly at the local and legislative levels—are decid-

edly more conservative than Democrats elsewhere in the United States, the fact that they have not evolved to identify with the Republican party means that progressives have a point of entry with these elected officials which provides an opportunity to progressive policy implementation. In other Southern states where conservative Republicans now dominate, such opportunities are completely absent for progressive activists.

Undeniably, since 1964, progressive candidates not named Carter or Clinton have found tough sailing in presidential politics in Arkansas cementing Arkansas’s reputation as a “red” state. Democrats McGovern, Mondale, Dukakis, Gore, Kerry, and Obama all were soundly defeated in Arkansas as Republicans were able to place an emphasis on the Democratic candidates’ cultural disconnect with Arkansas voters. In examining geographical patterns, all of these candidates had difficulty in rural swing counties in particular. For example, despite his linkages

10 Michael B. Dougan, *Arkansas Odyssey: The Saga of Arkansas from Prehistoric Times to Present : A History* (Little Rock, AR: Rose Publishing Company, 1995).



While race was clearly one component of white rural Arkansans’ rejection of Obama, the dynamics of the 2008 election in the state are more complex than traditional racial explanations, including the state’s loyalty to the family whom he defeated to win the Democratic nomination.

to the Clinton Administration, Al Gore’s advocacy of greater gun control caused Gore difficulty in 2000, especially in the most rural parts of the state. In 2004, there is evidence the dynamics surrounding the campaign for Amendment 2 to the state constitution, barring state recognition of same-sex marriages or other legal relationships between same-sex individuals “identical or substantially similar to marital status,” were crucial in handing President George W. Bush a surprisingly comfortable win in the state.¹¹

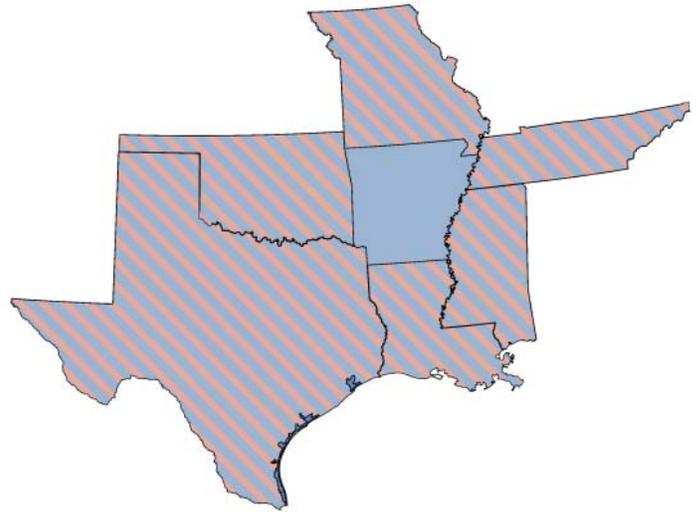
While Democratic presidential candidates before him have faced challenges in Arkansas, it is clear that Barack Obama’s candidacy created an especial challenge for Arkansans, particularly white, rural Arkansans. Indeed, Arkansans charged more emphatically away from Obama and toward Republicanism, compared with 2004, than any other state in the country. In rebuffing Barack Obama’s Democratic Party, with its emphasis on social diversity so clearly exemplified in the candidate himself, many Arkansas voters—particularly those residing in homogenous, rural areas (the Rural Swing counties)—demonstrated their emphatic discomfort with the “change” that inspired so many others nationwide. This rejection of outsiders and their ideas, an abiding provincialism, has been a central tenet of the Arkansas political experience across time. While race was clearly one component of white rural Arkansans’ rejection of Obama, the dynamics of the 2008 election in the state are more complex than traditional racial explanations, including the state’s loyalty to the family whom he defeated to win the Democratic nomination.¹²

11 David Firestone, “Voters’ Doubts About Gore Grow on Home Turf,” *New York Times* (October 15, 2000), A20; Jay Barth and Janine Parry. “Arkansas: Still Swingin’ in 2004.” *American Review of Politics* (2005) 26: 133-154.

12 Jay Barth, Janine Parry, and Todd Shields, “Arkansas: He’s Not One of (Most of) Us.” In *A Paler Shade of Red: The 2008 Presidential Election in the South*, ed. Branwell DuBose Kapeluck, Laurence W. Moreland, and Robert P. Steed. (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 2009).

Change in Partisan Composition of State Legislatures from 2000 to 2010

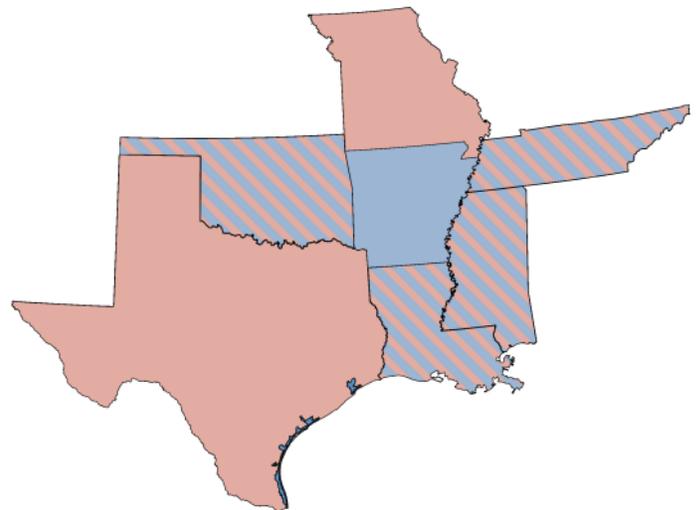
Lower House



According to 2011 Gallup data, Arkansas is now the most politically competitive state in the country.

Img. 21

Upper House



- Republican control in 2000 and 2010
- Democratic control in 2000 and 2010
- Changed from Democratic control in 2000 to Republican control in 2010.

While Democrats elected in Arkansas are decidedly more conservative than Democrats elsewhere in the United States, the fact that they have not evolved to identify with the Republican party means that progressives have a point of entry with these elected officials.

Img. 22



"During Clinton's campaign I showed his youth by drawing him in a baby carriage. While attending the Diamonds & Denim Inauguration, the new Governor asked to be removed from the carriage. The following day, Clinton was drawn wheeling about on a new tricycle!" - George Fisher, cartoonist. Img. 23

Despite these progressive difficulties in presidential elections, a different pattern had clearly been shown in state elections in Arkansas until 2010. Between 1966 and 1994, Arkansas held thirteen gubernatorial elections. In twelve of the thirteen, voters showed a clear preference for the progressive candidate. The single exception was Bill Clinton's upset loss in 1980. How many states can claim such a record? Like the rest of the South, Arkansas now has a viable two-party system. Importantly, however, the new partisan competitiveness has not produced a clear rise in victories for unadulterated traditionalism in the state. Instead, almost all candidates elected to statewide office in the last two decades—Democrat and Republican alike—have run campaigns and have subsequently governed more as modernizers than traditionalists.

That said, the disconnect between the state's cultural traditionalism and its political progressivism is not

nearly as stark as two decades ago during the heyday of Bill Clinton, Dale Bumpers, and David Pryor. While assuredly the "progressives" almost uninterruptedly in positions of power regularly engaged in symbolic actions that showed their respect for and celebration of the state's traditions, the Democrats who have succeeded statewide in this new environment are more substantively conservative than their immediate predecessors in party leadership roles. Bumpers proudly defended his votes against amendment after amendment to the U.S. Constitution during his time in the Senate (and accused one political opponent of walking around "with a pocketful of amendments" that would "pillage this precious document, our nation's Bible"), but his successor, Blanche Lincoln, immediately signed on as a co-sponsor of an amendment allowing desecration of the American flag to be outlawed; Clinton celebrated his success as President in passing the Brady Act to require background checks on handguns and promoted additional controls on weapons, but Mike Beebe emphasized his opposition to any intrusion into Second Amendment rights in his successful 2006 race for governor; Bumpers succeeded in passing legislation to have the Buffalo River protected as the first national river, but Congressman Marion Berry waged nonstop political war on the Environmental Protection Agency. However, on civil rights, on the fundamental role of government as a force for protecting the economically disadvantaged, and on the government's role in providing education, health care, and benefits to the aged, more contemporary Arkansas Democrats remain in step with those whom they replaced. And, such "moderate" Democrats remain advantaged in Arkansas; polling by the campaign of Mark Pryor at the beginning of the 2002 campaign for U.S. Senate revealed that Arkansas voters would support "a moderate Democrat over a conservative Republican" by a seven point margin.¹³

13 Polling data from author interview with Paul Johnson, senior advisor, Mark Pryor for Senate campaign, 18 November 2002.

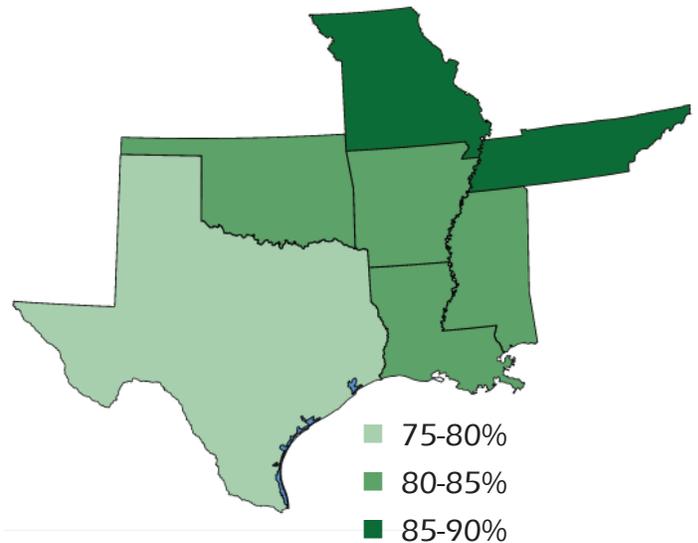
Arkansas Republicans were distinctly more progressive than their GOP brethren throughout the South on issues related to taxes and the role of government and on matters such as legitimate outreach to the African-American and Latino communities.

While Republicans were elected to the governorship and lieutenant governorship of the state in both 1998 and 2002, they both were the only two Republicans elected statewide in those elections. More significantly, these Arkansas Republicans were distinctly more progressive than their GOP brethren throughout the South on issues related to taxes and the role of government and on matters such as legitimate outreach to the African-American and Latino communities. While fervently protective of gun rights and endorsing most all elements of a “family values” agenda (for instance, opposition to abortion rights and to the expanded rights of gay men and lesbians), Huckabee consistently promoted modernizer positions on a wide range of issues. A governor who within a several week period in late 2002 and early 2003 spoke expansively on his belief in prisoner rehabilitation through “restorative justice,” proposed a significant tax increase so as to protect social service programs, and historically advocated the elimination



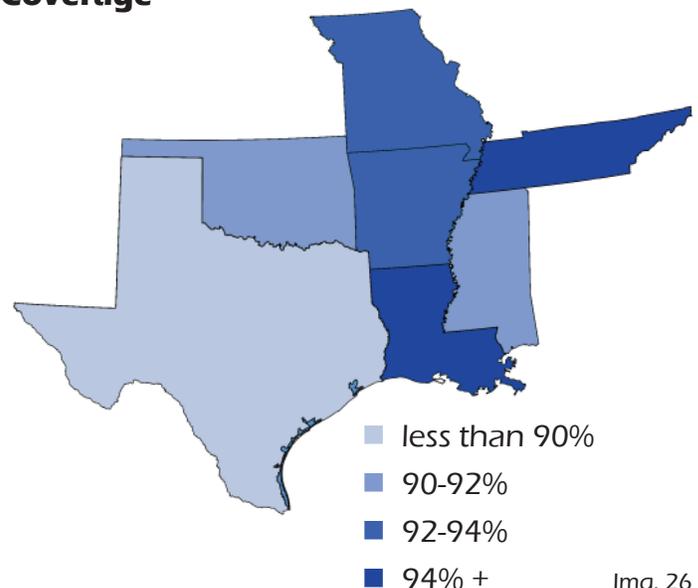
Republican Governor Mike Huckabee signing the bill to increase Arkansas’s minimum wage in 2006, before the federal minimum wage increase. Img. 24

Percent of Residents with Health Insurance Coverage, 2010



The 2004 Arkansas Poll showed 80 percent support for increased health insurance coverage, and 63 percent said they would “be willing to support increased taxes to support a health insurance plan.” Img. 25

Percent of Children with Health Insurance Coverage



Img. 26

of nearly two-thirds of the state's high schools through consolidation, comparing the need to give up small-school "traditions, mascots, identities" for a greater good to the "extraordinary pain and the incredible sacrifice" created by black school closings in the desegregation era "by many African-American families who wanted to taste the quality and opportunity," can certainly not be categorized as a traditional-

Governor's seat, but that loss was part of a "clean sweep" of the constitutional offices by the Democrats.

In 2010, however, the tide shifted significantly in the Republicans direction. Beebe expanded on his electoral dominance winning every one of the state's 75 counties in his reelection as governor. Republicans, showing their traditional weakness in fielding

Progressives do not sit at the head of the table, but do have a place at the table where public policymaking occurs in Arkansas.

ist. During the Huckabee era, when states throughout the South faced budget shortfalls, the Governors of Texas, Mississippi and Alabama all cut Medicaid services for critical health programs, even though it meant the loss of the federal match dollars. Republican Huckabee, however, joined the legislature in raising taxes to preserve the needed health services.¹⁴

The 2006 elections in the state only served to re-emphasize the modernizer advantage in the state. When Huckabee's replacement as the Republican standard bearer in 2006 was the markedly more conservative Asa Hutchinson, Hutchinson was beaten by 15 points by Democrat Mike Beebe who emphasized his work to pass a state minimum wage higher than the federal one and his support for maintaining enhanced school standards in his campaign. The post-Huckabee Republican party not only lost the

statewide candidates, failed to contest three other constitutional offices which Democrats easily won over Green Party opponents. However, in three other races for open constitutional offices, Republicans eked out close wins over better funded and more experienced Democratic candidates. While the anti-Obama sentiments—present nationally and more emphatic in Arkansas—drove these 2010 outcomes, the results did mark a significant shift in the state's politics. The 2010 cycle also marked the defeat of incumbent U.S. Senator Blanche Lincoln and saw the replacement of two retiring Democratic members of the U.S. House with Republicans.

The 2010 election cycle also showed a significant uptick in GOP support in the legislature as the Democratic dominance was reduced to a slight Democratic majority in each house of the legislature. Still, compared to other Southern states, any Democratic advantage in the legislature is significant as Arkansas is presently the only Southern state with both houses of the legislature controlled by Democrats. Most of the Republican gains came in Rural Swing counties, areas that will continue to be battlegrounds moving forward. While the state GOP has clear momentum, the sharp advantage of social and economic conservatives in the still small Republican party enhances the

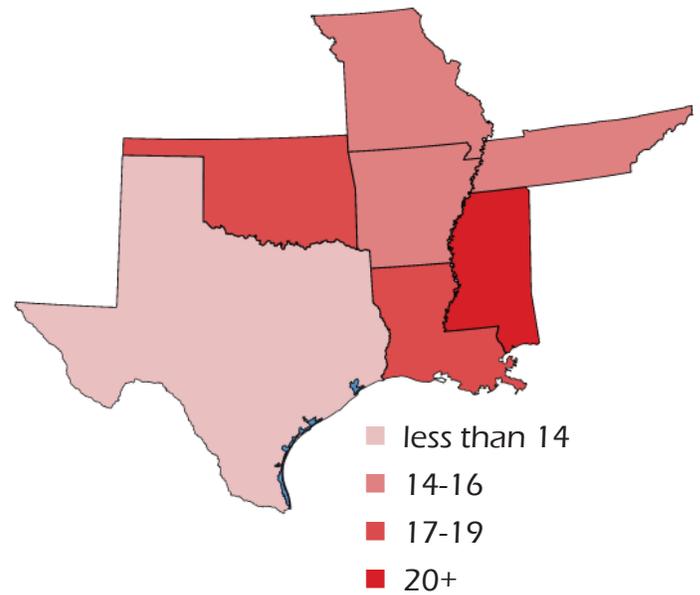
14 On Huckabee's views on restorative justice, see Michael R. Wickline, "Huckabee: Answerable to God on Clemencies," *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, 6 December 2002. On tax increase proposal and the public reaction to it, see John Brummett, "Labels Collide in Little Rock," *Arkansas News Bureau*, 19 November 2002; Elizabeth Caldwell, "Callers Hot About Huckabee's Proposed Sales Tax Increase," *Arkansas News Bureau*, 5 December 2002; Michael Rowett, "Tax-Angry Callers Give Governor Grief," *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, 5 December 2002. On school reform, see Governor Mike Huckabee, "State of the State Address," 14 January 2002, <http://www.accessarkansas.org/governor/stateofstate.html>, INTERNET.

likelihood that the party will nominate candidates out of step in a state that consistently rewards moderates who see a role for government in improving citizens' lives. Finally, in striking contrast to other Southern states, young persons who aspire to political futures are as likely to become active in Democratic party campaigns and operations in Arkansas because of the party's historically dominant role in politics.

It is crucial to emphasize that these elected policymakers in the executive and legislative branches in Arkansas are not consistent progressives. But, it is also important to note that those elected as Democrats statewide do rely upon gaining progressive votes and do interact with progressives in the Democratic party on an ongoing basis. These officeholders are conscious of the fact that, in statewide Democratic primaries, when one viable candidate is identifiably more progressive than his/her opponent(s), that candidate is advantaged. In the state legislature, a chunk of legislators—primarily from Pulaski County and the Delta—are indeed progressives and the Democratic losses in 2010 actually “purified” the party to some extent. Analysis of legislative voting records in the 2011 session of the General Assembly showed a much more united Democratic caucus than has traditionally been the case. Thus, because of the continued Democratic vibrancy in state politics in Arkansas, progressives do not sit at the head of the table, but do have a place at the table where public policymaking occurs.

Fiscal Peril

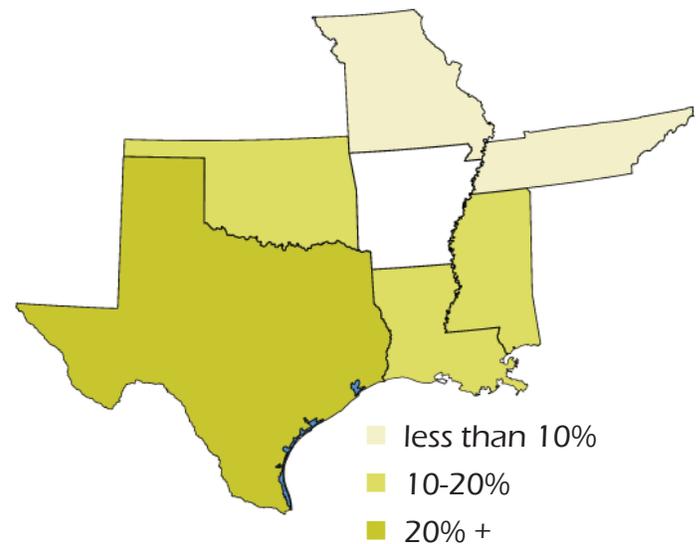
(30-point scale, 30 being imminent fiscal peril)



During the Huckabee era, when states throughout the South faced budget shortfalls, the Governors of Texas, Mississippi and Alabama all cut Medicaid services. Republican Huckabee, however, joined the legislature in raising taxes to preserve the needed health services. Democratic Governor Beebe has managed the state's budget through the recent recession without significant cuts to social services, and while increasing funding for education. Img. 27

Total Fiscal Year 2011 Budget Gaps

(Total Shortfall as a Percent of FY2011 General Fund)



*Note: AR has no deficit

Img. 28

A Depoliticized Arkansas Judiciary



Arkansas's Supreme Court declared the public school system of the state inadequate and inequitable until the legislature made many improvements; overturned the state's ban on same-sex sodomy in advance of action by the U.S. Supreme Court; and overturned the state's ban on foster parenting by same-sex or unmarried cohabitating couples. Img. 29

be discussed more fully later, the Court declared the public school system of the state inadequate and inequitable and maintained control of the case over a several year period. Such matters would have been expected to be fodder for attacks against the judges who handed down those decisions. Despite U.S. Supreme Court rulings protecting judicial candidates' right to introduce issues into campaigns before any of these decisions were made, this has not occurred with Arkansas's depoliticized judiciary. Since the ruling in *Republican Party of Minnesota v. White* (2002), some Arkansas judicial candidates have been more willing to introduce issues into the debate during elections, but, it is important to recognize the degree to which

Arkansas's state Supreme Court has been more of a partner than an adversary of progressives on major issues.

In a number of other states, when progressives do find success through the democratic process, they have to fend off defeat in state courts which have become increasingly politicized with conservatives employing a financial advantage in elections for the posts. Despite the fact that Arkansas has, according to one analysis, the most elected state judiciary in the nation (i.e. the highest percentage of judges who first reach the bench through election rather than appointment), this has not occurred in the state.¹⁵ Indeed, Arkansas's state Supreme Court has been more of a partner than an adversary of progressives on major issues. For example, the Court overturned the state's ban on same-sex sodomy in advance of the action by the U.S. Supreme Court, overturned the state's ban on foster parenting both by gay men or lesbians and by unmarried cohabitating couples, and as will

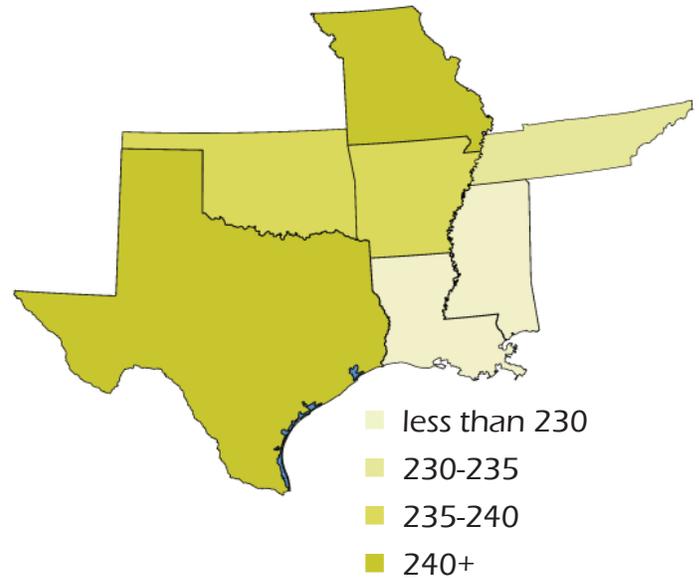
the overwhelming majority of candidates for judge have continued to assiduously avoid any conversation about issues while on the campaign trail. In doing so, they often specifically cite their respect for the judicial canon. Moreover, it is important to note that there has yet to be a race in which more than one candidate has engaged in a lively discussion of issues; therefore, there has yet to be a true issue-based "campaign" for judge in the state. The tradition of avoiding issues in judicial races in Arkansas still appears to have some time left in it, although it will inevitably erode when judicial candidates begin to show success at the ballot box through the discussion of substantive matters. Thus, the type of combative judicial politics shown in Arkansas's neighboring states will eventually express itself, probably to progressives' disadvantage. For now and the near future, however, the Court is anything but a barrier to progressive change in Arkansas.

15 See John Paul Ryan, Allan Ashman, Bruce D. Sales, and Sandra Shane-DuBow, *American Trial Judges*, (New York: Free Press, 1980), 122. The fact that the Arkansas constitution does not allow those appointed to judgeships to run for a full term enhances the elected nature of Arkansas's judicial branch.

The Public Opinion of Arkansans

Arkansas is often stereotyped as a consistently conservative state, thus making progressive social change in the state seem like a longshot endeavor. But, just as Arkansas has had a surprising streak of electing relatively progressive candidates (especially at the statewide level), the attitudes of Arkansans on important public policy matters also show a surprising progressivism. The populist tradition in the state discussed earlier has resulted in a strong belief in Arkansans that government has an appropriate role in bettering citizens' economic opportunities. Perhaps even more surprising, while the traditionalistic political culture of the state means that Arkansans are emphatically conservative on social issues, the libertarianism emanating out of historic backwoods lifestyle means that Arkansans are queasy to have government enforce these conservative views if it intrudes into the liberties of others.

NAEP Scaled Average Mathematics Scores, 2009, Grade 4



The series of significant reforms to the state's education system have begun to have payoff on the "Nation's Report Card."

Img. 31

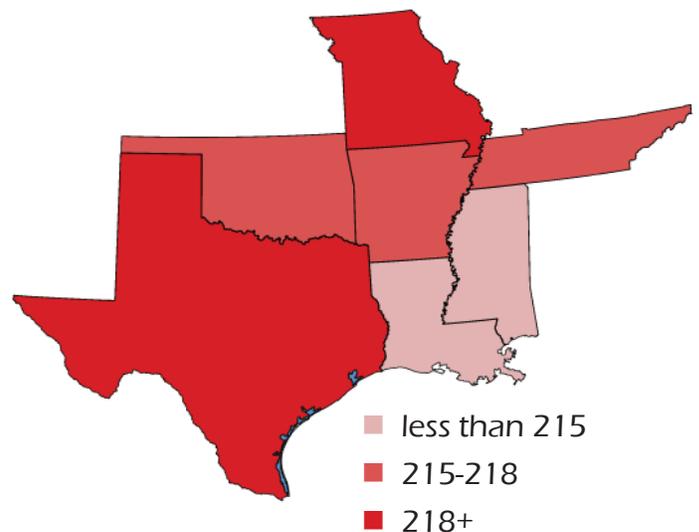
Arkansans are queasy to have government enforce their conservative views if it intrudes into the liberties of others.



The Arkansas Finish Line Coalition works towards health insurance coverage for all children. Through ARKids First, Arkansas has dramatically expanded health care to the state's children in the past 15 years.

Img. 30

NAEP Scaled Average Reading Scores, 2009, Grade 4



Img. 32



Throughout its decade of polling, the Arkansas Poll has consistently cited education as one of the state's most pressing issues and also has shown a willingness among Arkansans to increase taxes for education improvement in the state. *Img. 33*

While many want to simplify analysis of public opinion by employing the traditional liberal-conservative continuum, it is clear that citizen ideology in the American states does not operate on a single left-right axis. Two and a half decades ago, Maddox and Lilie challenged the traditional division of voters into a dichotomy between liberals, who favor govern-

rights and liberties. Populists, for example, strongly favor sufficient governmental intervention to regulate giant corporations and utilities, to balance excessive concentrations of wealth in behalf of the "little guy." In that sense, they are economic activists, or "liberals." This populism describes the dominant ideological mix of that group—white rural Arkansans—who have disproportionate influence on the state's politics. A more recent analysis by William D. Schreckhise, Janine A. Parry, and Todd G. Shields, employing 1999 Arkansas Poll data, captures the presence of a populist ideological strain in the Arkansas electorate.¹⁷

Additional evidence for an essential populism in the Arkansas citizenry—as compared to other Americans—is shown in data culled from the General Social Survey (GSS) by Paul Brace and his colleagues.¹⁸ In this data, for instance, Arkansans show themselves to be decidedly in favor of increased welfare spending compared to other Americans ranking ninth out of the 44 states included in the analysis. Throughout its decade of polling Arkan-

Again and again, Arkansans in the modern era have shown their belief in the need for an activist government to better the lives of its citizenry.

ment intervention in the economy and who also favor expansion of civil rights and liberties, and conservatives, who oppose government intervention in the economy and also oppose expanded civil rights and liberties.¹⁶ Maddox and Lilie suggested that when the two continua are separated, two ideological types emerge in addition to the traditional Liberals and Conservatives: Populists, who favor economic intervention but oppose expansion of civil rights and liberties; and Libertarians, who oppose government involvement in the economy but support expansion of civil

sans, the University of Arkansas's Arkansas Poll has consistently cited education as one of the state's most pressing issues and also has shown a willingness among Arkansans to increase taxes for education improvement in the state. Aside from the economy, the other common most pressing problem for the state was identified as health care reform.

16 William S. Maddox and Stuart A. Lilie, *Beyond Liberal and Conservative: Reassessing the Political Spectrum* (Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute, 1984).

17 William D. Schreckhise, Janine A. Parry, and Todd G. Shields, "Rising Republicanism in the Arkansas Electorate? A Characterization of Arkansans' Political Attitudes and Participation Rates," *MidSouth Political Science Review* (2001) 5:5-19.

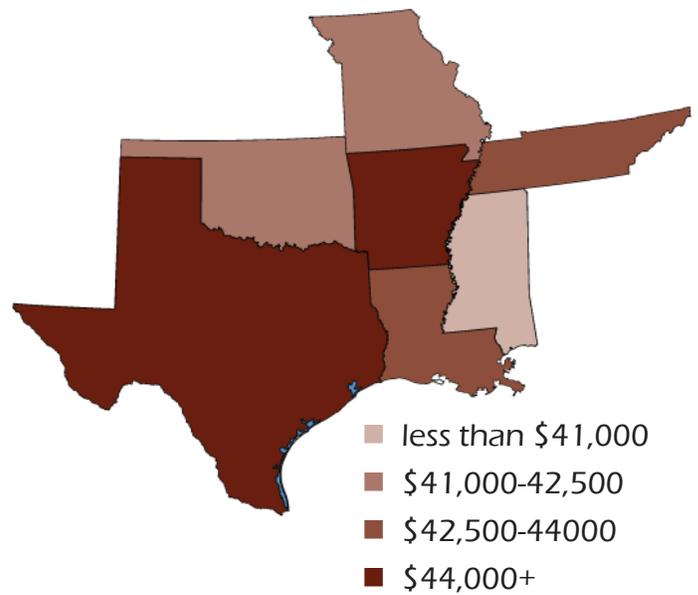
18 Table 1 in Paul Brace, Kellie Sims-Butler, Kevin Arce-neaux, and Martin Johnson, "Public Opinion in the American States: New Perspectives Using National Survey Data," *American Journal of Political Science* 46 (2002): 173-189.

This economic populism has also been shown in Arkansans electoral behavior on a series of ballot initiatives. In 1994, the legislature increased the soda pop tax in the state to fund the maintenance of certain Medicaid services. The bottlers interest succeeded in collecting petition signatures to have the tax referred to the people and then funded the campaign against the tax. Showing their commitment to expanded health services, the people of the state voted to retain the tax in a 55%-45% vote. The voters showed their desire to maintain state and local governmental services as well in 2002 when a constitutional amendment was placed on the fall ballot to eliminate the sales tax on groceries. While progressives had long fought for removal of the regressive tax, the Axe the Food Tax proposal lacked any provisions for recouping the lost revenues. Thus, somewhat ironically, a number of progressive interests became leaders in the battle against the amendment, joining with traditional opponents of food tax repeal in filing a suit to have the expansive amendment struck from the ballot by the supreme court and, failing that, in a shockingly successful battle to defeat the provision at the ballot box. In short, the need for funds for necessary state services supported ardently by those education, library, police, and social services interests trumped a desire to promote progressivity



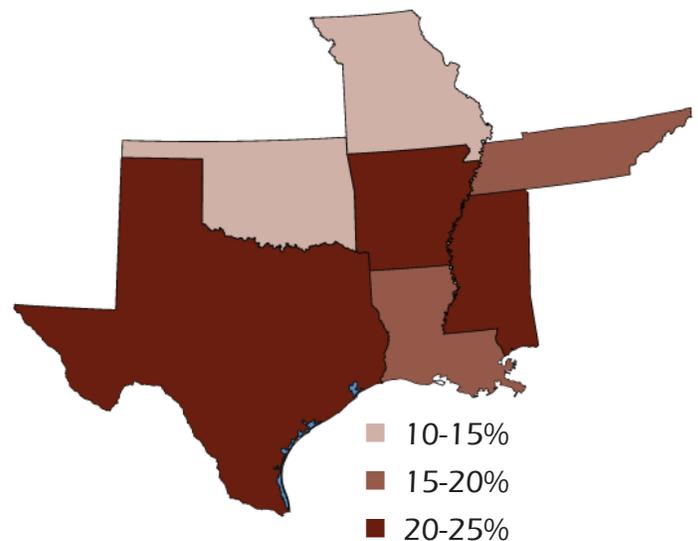
Arkansas's libertarian tradition often allows progressives to successfully defend against conservatives who wish to employ the government to limit rights of others. Img. 34

Public Teachers' Average Salaries, 2007



One of the most significant changes resulting from the series of court cases of education was a dramatic increase in teacher pay in Arkansas. Img. 35

Percent of Legislative Seats Held by Women



Arkansas's US Senator from 1932-1945, Hattie Caraway, was the first woman elected to the United States Senate. Img. 36

in the state tax structure because of their realization that it would be essentially impossible to gain resources to offset that lost from the tax cut because of Arkansas's constitutional provisions making most any tax increase except the sales tax exceedingly difficult to accomplish. Again and again, Arkansans in the modern era have shown their belief in the need for an activist government to better the lives of its citizenry. Therefore, there is much evidence that Arkansas is a good environment for progressive social change related to economic matters

Clearly, the attitudinal atmosphere in Arkansas is more welcoming for progressive social change on economic matters than on social issues as will be shown in the following section of this paper. However, the libertarian tradition of the state also shows itself on social issues; this allows progressives to often successfully play defense against conservatives who wish to employ the government to limit rights of others. For instance, polling has indicated that Arkansas is the third most “pro-life” state in the country (i.e. in terms of voters who define themselves as “pro-life” rather than “pro-choice”). Yet polling also consistently has shown that a majority of Arkansans disfavor any governmental action that would limit legal access to abortion beyond present restrictions.¹⁹ And, in 1986, when the “Unborn Child” amendment was placed on the ballot for voters’ consideration, opponents were successful in employing libertarian rhetoric in a close vote (a similar amendment was successfully added two years later).²⁰ A similar pattern shows itself on issues related to LGBT citizens. The 2005 Arkansas Poll shows that the state’s citizens remain

deeply uncomfortable about same-sex sexual relations with nearly two-thirds of Arkansans deeming such sexual relationships as “always” being wrong. Thus, by this gauge, traditionalism reigns on Arkansans’ views of sexual mores that deviate from the perceived norms. (In contrast, the California Field Poll conducted just months after the Arkansas Poll, found that only 32 percent of Californians view same-sex sexual relations as “always wrong.”) Yet, on a variety of gay-related policies (e.g. gays serving openly in the military and gay men or lesbians adoption children or foster parenting), a majority of Arkansans expressed more libertarian views. This apparently contradictory set of attitudes would be surprising absent the explication of the state’s political culture presented earlier. The exception to this pattern of progressive views about what public policy should be is, of course, the matter of legal recognition of same-sex partnerships which, in the eyes of Arkansans, would be a de facto governmental endorsement of same-sex relationships. So, on social issues, progressive social change efforts in Arkansas will be an uphill battle. But, the libertarian streak in the state’s political culture does present an entry point in that battle.

19 On the “pro-life” issue, see <http://www.surveysusa.com/50State2005/50StateAbortion0805SortedbyProLife.htm>. See the Arkansas Poll on the issue of enhanced legal restrictions on abortion; this question has been asked annually since the creation of the Poll.

20 See chapter 1 of William Saletan, *Bearing Right: How Conservatives Won the Abortion War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 9–30.

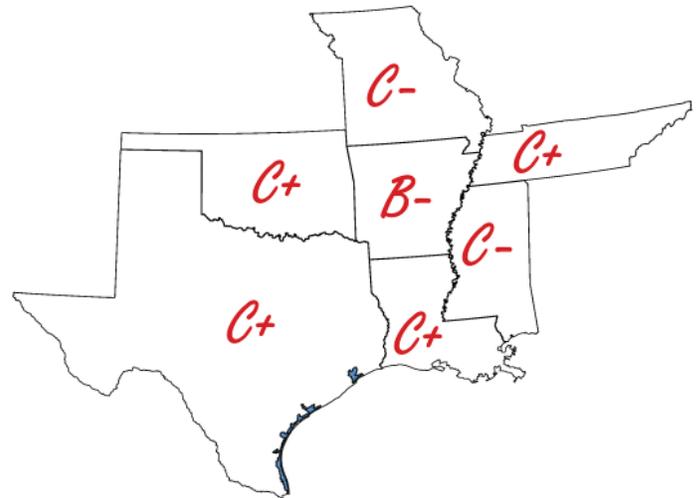


In 2001, the Arkansas Supreme Court declared the public school system of the state unconstitutionally insufficient and unequal. Since then, Arkansas has shown remarkable gains. Img. 37

Progressive Successes in Recent Years in Arkansas Policy-Making

During this decade, Arkansas progressives have had some significant victories, particularly on issues related to economic equity and equality of opportunity, in Arkansas. Such political successes provide a base for future progressive efforts. However, because of the lack of progressive economic capital in the state, it is crucial for additional investments to be made by outside entities if progressives are to build on these successes in Arkansas.

Overall Education Grades from "Quality Counts 2012"



Arkansas progressives have had some significant victories, particularly on issues related to economic opportunity, education and equity.

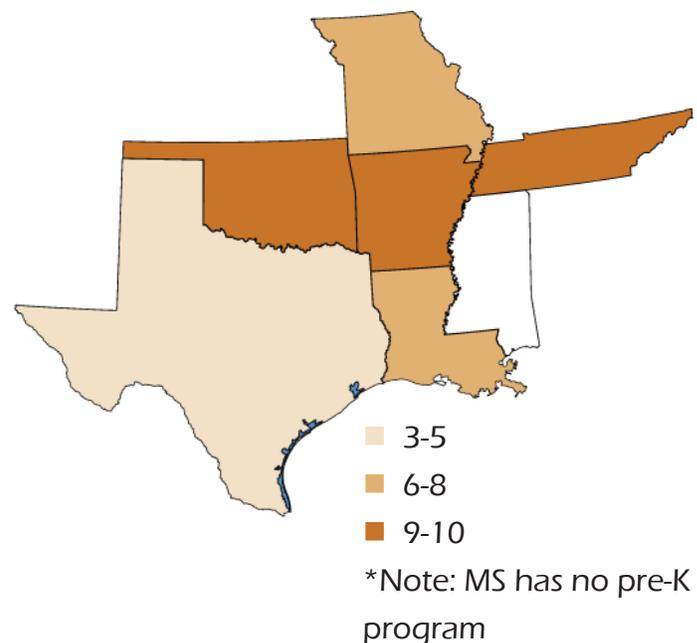
Education

Since the state Supreme Court's first ruling on the constitutionality of the state's public school system, reform of public education in Arkansas has been at the forefront of policy debates in the state. This intensified during the first decade of the century with the series of new Court rulings in the *Lake View* cases. Following the 2002 *Lake View II* decision, Governor Mike Huckabee proposed enhancement of school offerings, sharpened assessment of student performance, enlargement of a publicly funded pre-K program for poorer students, a tax increase to pay for the reforms, and dramatic consolidation of school districts to enhance the efficiency of the delivery of education in the state. Huckabee allowed the sales tax increase to become law without his signature in protest of the inaction on wholesale district consolidation. After these reforms, the Supreme Court remained unconvinced that the other two branches of government had met their obligation on school adequacy. In a 2005 case, the Court once again ruled against the state, em-

The benefits of the increased attention to public education have already begun to manifest themselves with *Education Week's* 2012 Quality Counts study ranking Arkansas 5th in the nation for overall educational quality. Img. 38

Pre-K Quality Ratings

(10-point scale)



Following the 2002 *Lake View II* decision, Arkansas went beyond the mandate of the Court to dramatically expand the publicly funded pre-K program to reach nearly all low-income students. Img. 39



Advocacy coalitions have been surprisingly successful at moving reform to help children, low-income people and other vulnerable communities. Img. 40

phasizing that it had not done enough to improve the educational facilities of the state, among other deficiencies. Using about half of a large state budget surplus, the legislature in its 2007 regular session fully funded the state portion of facilities' needs and exceeded minimum funding per pupil for adequate education. The benefits of the increased attention and investment to public education have already begun to manifest themselves with *Education Week's* 2011 Quality Counts study ranking Arkansas 6th in the nation for overall educational quality and achievement scores for students in the state improving markedly. For instance, in 2002, just 12% of Arkansas third graders scored at proficient levels on the math portion of the Arkansas Benchmark Exam; by 2006, 67% were proficient on an even more difficult test. Despite this success story, brought about by political leaders and progressive entities working in partnership with the Court keeping the issue at the top of the agenda, significant achievement gaps continue to show themselves in the state between white and African-American students, white and Latino students, and richer and poorer students. That is the next great challenge on the Arkansas education horizon.²¹

21 Jay Barth and Keith A. Nitta, *Arkansas Education in the Post-Lake View Era: What Is Arkansas Doing to Close the Achievement Gap?* (Little Rock: Arkansas Advocates for Children & Families and the Arkansas Public Policy Panel, 2008).

Taxes

Arkansas's tax structure remains sharply regressive, particularly because of the state's dependence on the sales and use tax as a primary sources of revenues for general expenditures, and is also inadequate to fund the expanded state programs needed for investment in the people of a historically poor state. Using data available in 2007, it was estimated that Arkansans with the lowest 20 percent of income, pay 12.1 percent of that income in state and local taxes while the wealthiest 1 percent of the state's residents pay less than half that percentage (5.9 percent).²² Both the general sales tax and, to an even greater extent, the selective sales tax are quite regressive. This inequity in the system is enhanced by the flatness of the personal income tax for anyone making more than \$31,000 annually, as of 2009, paying the same 7 percent income tax rate. During this decade, however, the tax structure of the state has been made more progressive through the removal of over half of the sales tax on groceries, the removal of all Arkansans at or below the poverty level from the income tax rolls, the first index-



Along with improving Arkansas's children's health insurance program, ARKids First, Governor Mike Beebe has signed into law many progressive tax reforms, including the removal of all Arkansans at or below the poverty level from the income tax rolls. Img. 41

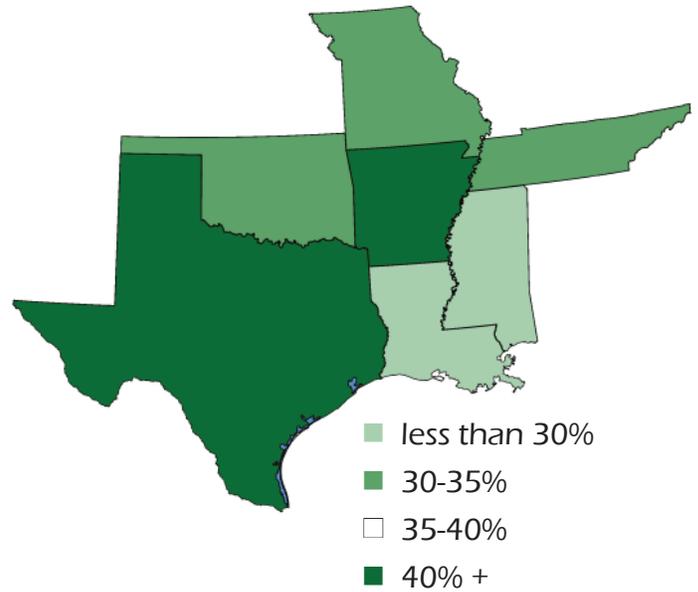
22 Institute on Taxation & Economic Policy. 2009. *Who Pays? A Distributional Analysis of the Tax Systems in All 50 States*, 3rd edition.

ing of income tax brackets to inflation, and the first increase in the state severance tax on natural gas since 1957. All of these have been accomplished through the hard work of Arkansas-based advocacy groups working in coalition and working in unison with political leaders. It is crucial to emphasize that Arkansas's constitutional rules, particularly an amendment that makes the increase of taxes besides the sales tax politically difficult because of supermajorities needed to raise those other taxes, are forces that have shaped and maintain this regressive structure. Thus, the rules of the game must change for significant attacks on the inequity of the system to take place and for the state's already poor residents to face a more favorable tax environment. Still, the creation of a state Earned Income Tax Credit, the closing of corporate tax loopholes, and the reinstatement of a state estate tax would both create enhanced equity and, together, would create a more adequate revenue stream less susceptible to economic downturns.

Minimum Wage

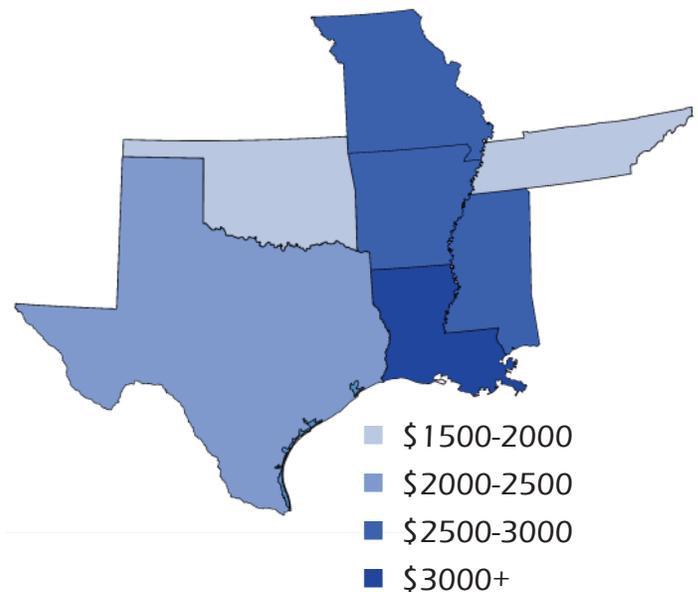
In another action that has bettered the lives of low-income Arkansans until a federal minimum wage increase, the state passed a minimum wage above the federal wage in 2006. Late in 2005, a coalition of labor and social justice groups (Give Arkansas a Raise Now) came together to investigate the feasibility of and to collect signatures for a initiated act campaign to raise the minimum wage in the state with a cost-of-living increase provision. The polling funded by the group that indicated overwhelming support for the proposal was startling to business entities opposed to the measure. This led to the call for a special session of the legislature to enact a sales tax increase absent the cost-of-living increase mechanism. The \$6.25/hour minimum wage was easily passed during the April special session with political leaders citing the activities of the coalition as the key force in producing the action.

Education Expenditures as a Percentage of Total State Expenditures, 2009



Img. 42

Increase in Education Expenditures per Student from 2001-2002 to 2007-2008



In 2007, the legislature used a large budget surplus to fully fund the state portion of school facility needs and exceed minimum funding per pupil for adequate education. Img. 43

Agriculture

Until 2005, Arkansas—a state with an economy still centered around agriculture—stood out as the sole state without an independent Department of Agriculture. This was because agribusiness and its key lobbying organization, the state Farm Bureau, had argued successfully that it needed freedom from regulation in a challenging farm economy and had fought off efforts for a new department across a number of legislative sessions. Regulatory authority over agriculture was left, therefore, entirely with a variety of industry-controlled boards like the state Plant Board, which regulates matters such as chemicals used in farming. With a variety of smaller farmers and ranchers serving as key lobbyists, in the 2005 legislative session the Farm Bureau was unable to stop the creation of a new Department of Agriculture. While the new department is insufficiently staffed and empowered to effectively control the still powerful agribusinesses, the action served as a key first step towards a more equitable agriculture system in the state.

Social Issues

On social issues, as noted earlier, progressives in Arkansas have often been forced into defensive roles in the legislative arena. But, through coalitional work, these defensive efforts have been highly successful. While aggressive anti-immigration legislation has been passed in other states in recent years, a wide-ranging coalition (the Friendship Coalition) has fended off similar efforts in Arkansas. In addition, across several legislation sessions, bills were introduced to

bar gay men and lesbians from serving as foster parents in the state. In 2007, following a state Supreme Court ruling overruling a regulatory ban on foster parenting on separation-of-powers grounds, a broader bill (SB959) was introduced to ban both foster parenting and adoption. A broad coalition of civil rights, child advocate, and health care organizations came together and employed an insider strategy in killing the bill in a House committee. An even broader coalition worked against a proposed ballot initiative to bar all cohabitating unmarried individuals from adopting or foster parenting in the state in 2008; the initiative succeeded at the ballot box but was shot down in the state Supreme Court in 2011. It is clear that such defensive efforts will be necessary in the near future, but on LGBT, immigration rights, and other social issues, groups have begun to strategize about proactive efforts in the years ahead recognizing that such efforts will be long-term in a traditionalistic state.



Arkansas—a state with an economy still centered around agriculture—stood out as the sole state without an independent Department of Agriculture until a coalition of farmers and grassroots groups waged a successful seven-year campaign to create one. Img. 44

In Arkansas the mobilization of several hundred citizens to contact their citizen legislators can have a significant impact. Moreover, in this small pond, successful social change efforts are noticed and noted.

The Success of Progressive Coalitions in a Small State



The ability of Arkansas progressive organizations to work together effectively—and peacefully—is striking. Img. 45

As suggested in the last section, successful social change efforts (and defensive actions) in Arkansas in recent years have increasingly relied upon coalitional work by progressive organizations. What is striking, compared to other states, is the ability of these groups to work together effectively—and peacefully—in Arkansas. In all likelihood, it is the small scale on which politics in Arkansas operates that promotes this successful coalitional work. While its regions are demographically complex, Arkansas is a relatively small state both in physical size (27th largest) and in population size (32nd largest). This scale makes social change easier because it is feasible for those involved in the efforts to coordinate with one another and to have necessary face-to-face meetings. While expensive media campaigns may be necessary in larger states to put issues on the agenda of legislators, in Arkansas the mobilization of several hundred citizens to contact their citizen legislators can have a similar impact. Moreover, in this small pond, successful social change efforts are noticed and noted.

This small size promotes perhaps the most distinctive feature of Arkansas politics and society: its strongly personal, indeed familial, character. All political at-

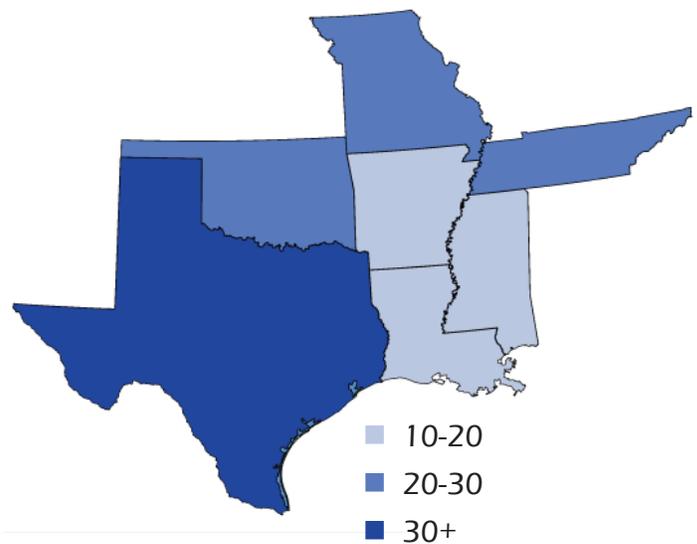
Anti-Bullying Laws by State

	Bullying Law	Enumerates Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity	Includes "cyber-bullying"	Includes electronic harassment	Criminal Sanction	School Sanction	Requires School Policy
AR	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
LA	X					X	X
MS	X			X		X	X
MO	X			X	X	X	X
OK	X			X			X
TN	X			X	X	X	X
TX	X					X	

On social issues, progressive social change efforts in Arkansas will be an uphill battle. But, the libertarian streak in the state's political culture does present an entry point in that battle.

Img. 46

Total Number of Immigration Laws Enacted from 2007 to 2011



While aggressive anti-immigration legislation has been passed in other states in recent years, a wide-ranging coalition (the Friendship Coalition) has fended off similar efforts in Arkansas.

Img. 47

tentives in the state begin their day with the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*. By midmorning telephones and political blogs are buzzing over the possible political implications of a bankruptcy announcement or divorce proceeding or social event. State political party conventions are like family reunions where intimacy between the party's leading lights and grassroots loyalists is easily established and sustained. And the small staffs of the state's constitutional officers are peppered with members of their colleagues' families. This personalism also expresses itself in the way that the leaders of the state's progressive social change organizations—most headquartered within a few miles of each other in downtown Little Rock—interact with one another. While, as in families connected by blood, occasional hurt feelings and perceived snubs show themselves, it is hard for last-

ing factionalism to be maintained because the groups and their leaders must work together to survive in the advocacy arena. The benefit for outside funders is that their investment will not be wasted on operations that are bogged down by internal strife.

These two realities about Arkansas—its small size and its internally peaceful progressive movement—make social change more feasible in Arkansas. Those who are investing in such social change will see the manifestation of that investment and will have it noticed by those inside the state and will allow it to be made noticeable to those outside the state. The history of positive interaction across progressive organizations in Arkansas should make national funding entities more comfortable to make investments in work in the state that funds those organizations directly or the coalitions of which they are a part.

These two realities about Arkansas—its small size and its internally peaceful progressive movement—make social change more feasible in Arkansas.

Arkansas
friendship coalition



The small scale on which politics in Arkansas operates promotes successful coalitional work.

The Challenges to Progressive Social Change in Arkansas

While aspects of the social and political context of Arkansas make it a place ripe for progressive social change, such change has clearly not happened as quickly or as emphatically as is needed. The absence of social change has been a long-term frustration for Arkansans committed to making their state better for all its citizens. Nearly two decades ago, the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation began an initiative “to attempt to determine why positive social change seems so difficult to obtain in Arkansas.” The result was a report *Building Constituency in Arkansas*, issued in 1989. In explaining the absence of effective social change in Arkansas, that report centered on historic social divisions (especially race-based), Arkansans’ inferiority complex that resulted in an absence of self-confidence that change could be brought about, the absence of strategic long-term planning by progressives, an inherent distrust of organizing and organizations, and a deep provincialism that isolated Arkansans from outside ideas.²³

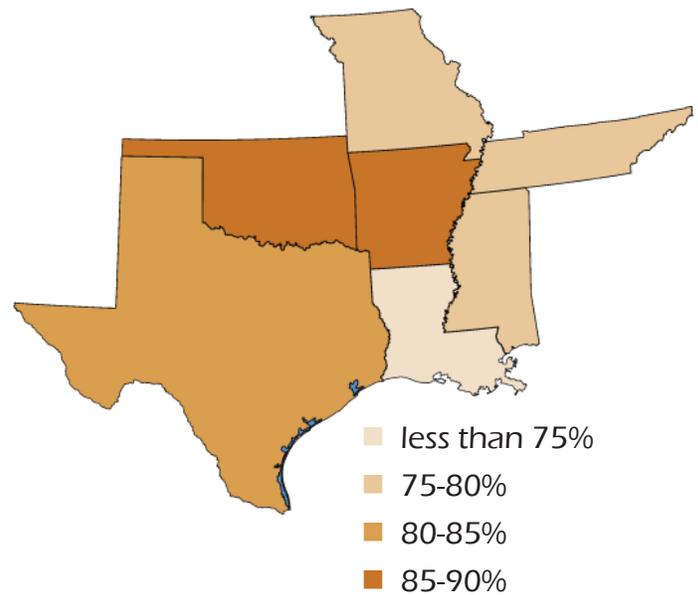
In the past two decades, while arguably remaining more provincial than other parts of the country, Arkansas has become a less isolated place. In the not too distant past, it was not uncommon to hear the boast that Arkansas was the only state that could survive even if a fence were built around it to prevent anything from coming in or going out. This was taught as “fact” in most public schools in the state and reinforced the imagined virtues and viability of autonomy and self sufficiency.²⁴ The isolation and provincialism that bred suspicion and fear of outsiders have been dissipated by extensive communications from and contacts with the outside world. The construction of the Clinton Presidential Library in downtown

23 Grassroots Leadership, *Building Constituency in Arkansas* (Charlotte, NC: Grassroots Leadership, 1989).

24 Blair and Barth, 261.

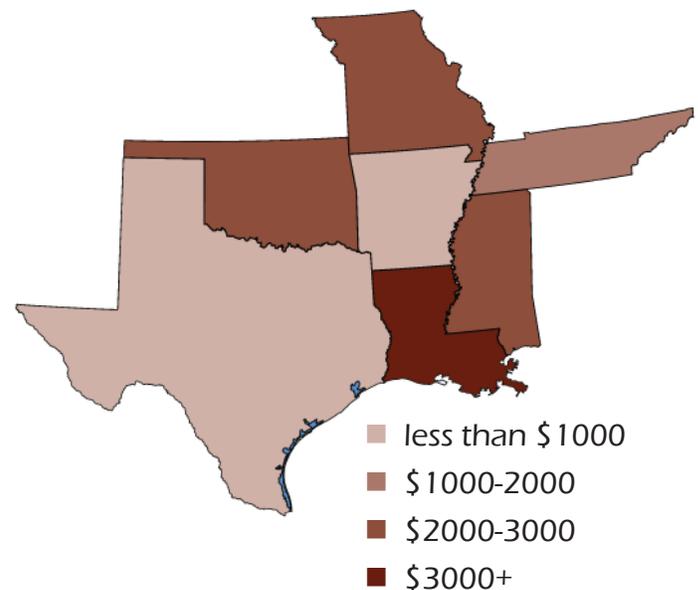
Gender Income Gap 2009

(Women’s Earnings as a Percentage of Men’s – Full Time Workers)



The populist tradition in the state has resulted in a strong belief in Arkansans that government has an appropriate role in bettering citizens’ economic opportunities. Img. 49

Increase in Black-White Income Gap from 1999 to 2010



Arkansas, despite its problems, is still considered generally more supportive of minority equality than much of the region. Img. 50

Because of the gains by conservatives in the state's electoral environment since 2008, now is a crucial time that will shape the state's politics for the next generation.

Little Rock with its economic and cultural benefits to the city and state, mostly from dollars spent by non-Arkansan tourists and visits by non-Arkansan scholars and political leaders, provides an ongoing tangible proof of that link to the rest of the nation and world.

However, many of the other obstacles identified in the 1989 report remain in place. Perhaps most damaging is Arkansans' inherent distrust of the efficacy of coming together in common cause, what Robert Putnam would term a social capital deficit. Locales with higher levels of social capital (evidenced by civic engagement, norms of social trust, and work in voluntary associations) are more likely to be more thoroughly democratic, procedurally and in public policy outcomes. Those who have studied the issue of social capital in the United States have noted the relationship between the traditionalistic political culture and low levels of social capital. The combination of traditionalism and anarchism that provided the cultural basis for Arkansas's political development were a one-two punch against the development of a healthy civic culture. In a recent analysis, Arkansas is ranked 39th in "civic culture" (i.e. social capital) among the states.²⁵

All Arkansans are not equally deficient in social capital. There is strong evidence that African-American Arkansans are particularly challenged in levels of social capital, as gauged by levels of social trust. According to data collected by the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, it is clear that a major "trust gap" has developed between white and black residents in

the state's largest county. Trusting one's fellow citizens is a crucial component of a healthy democracy in that it leads to the cooperation between neighbors and ultimately to higher trust in civic leaders. Even controlling for income, African-Americans in Pulaski County are less likely to trust their neighbors, their co-workers, their policemen, and even their fellow church members. There is little reason to believe that the data does not hold for areas of Arkansas outside of Pulaski County. Despite the fact that Pulaski County's African-American residents participate in an array of voluntary organizations (in the view of many researchers, a key source of social capital and social trust), this community glue is problematically absent for a disproportionate number of African-Americans. The enhancement of social capital and social trust is a crucial step for consistent and lasting social change to occur in Arkansas.

The low levels of *social* capital in the state help explain part of the problem for progressive social change in Arkansas, but also debilitating to those working for social change in Arkansas is the absence of *financial* capital in the state to invest in the development and enhancement in progressive organizations. In particular, these progressive organizations need long-term institutional support that will allow them to develop and carry out strategic planning for sustainability rather than continuing the legacy, identified in the 1989 report, of being reactive and short-term in their thinking. The true grassroots organizing that pays benefits in the personalistic state also takes time and significant staffing to develop and technical assistance to effectively train leaders.

25 Tom W. Rice and Alexander F. Sumberg, "Civic Culture and Government Performance in the American States," *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 27 (1997), 99-114.

Ripe for Reform: A Critical Turning Point

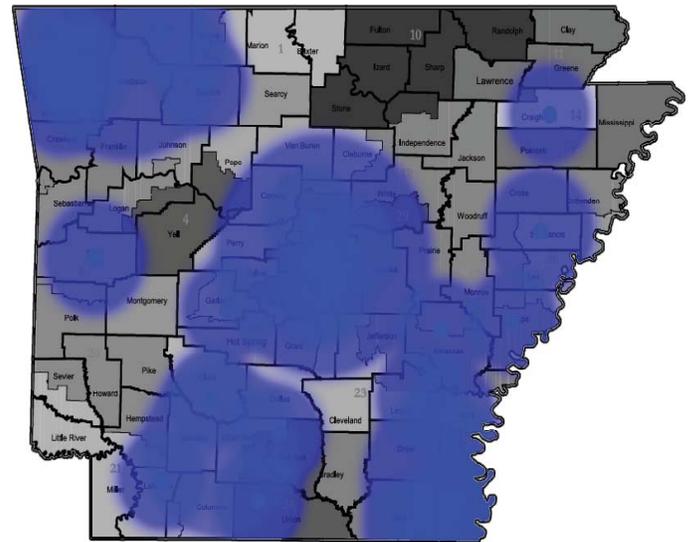
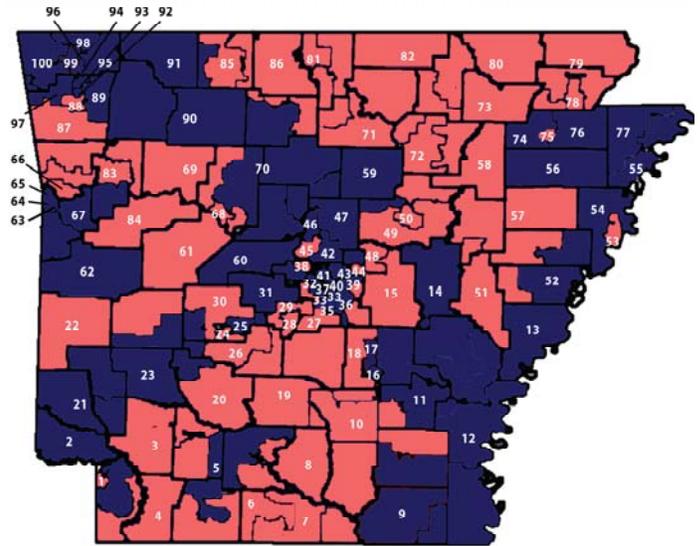
As this analysis has argued, there are true opportunities for progressive social change that expands economic well being and enhances social justice for Arkansans. This capacity to tackle the state's big challenges is a strategic advantage rooted in the historical foundation of populism and progressivism in Arkansas, along with the momentum of recent successes across a range of issues, initiated by leadership of both political parties. Moreover, Arkansas can serve as a model for carrying out social change in other environments in the United States which are perceived—rightly or wrongly—to be difficult turf for progressive social change.

The question remains whether this advantage can be maintained against opposition rooted in the more traditionalist elements of our political history.

Arkansas is at a critical turning point. Undeniably, further progressive change in the state will not come easily or consistently despite the momentum of recent accomplishments. Capital investment in reform efforts in the state are in short supply and Arkansas-based progressive organizations leading these reforms are stretched to capacity. This resource shortage threatens the likelihood that such efforts will succeed in the long term. We risk backward momentum that could reinforce Arkansans' doubts that such change can come to their state and deepen their lack of consistent and robust civic engagement. Moreover, because of increased political polarization and the gains by conservatives (of both parties) in the state's electoral environment since 2008, now is a crucial time that will shape the state's politics for the next generation.

Arkansas remains ripe for reform, but that position depends upon our capacity to build upon and sustain our recent successes.

Constituency Matters



When constituents are mobilized, legislators tend to vote in line with what those constituents want. The top map shows the 2005 Arkansas House of Representatives vote to create an Arkansas Department of Agriculture (yes votes in blue). The bottom map shows the 2005 membership of the Arkansas Citizens First Congress, who was leading the campaign. The Department of Agriculture passed by a single vote, and got most of its support from legislators whose constituents were involved in the campaign. Img. 51

Image and Data Sources

1. Arkansas Citizens First Congress.
2. Photograph by Louse Boyle. Kheel Center, Cornell University.
3. Lithograph of painting by Edward Payson Washbourne. Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Central Arkansas Library System.
4. From *The Hive of "The Bee-Hunter," A Repository of Sketches, Including Peculiar American Character, Scenery, and Rural Sports*. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1854.
5. Arkansas History Commission.
6. Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Central Arkansas Library System.
7. Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Central Arkansas Library System.
8. Arkansas Secretary of State's Office and the Old State House Museum.
9. Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Central Arkansas Library System.
10. Photograph by Louse Boyle. Kheel Center, Cornell University.
11. Photograph by Louse Boyle. Kheel Center, Cornell University.
12. Rogers Historical Museum (Neg. #N009034).
13. Arkansas Public Policy Panel.
14. Murphy Library, University of Wisconsin—La Crosse.
15. U.S. Department of Agriculture.
16. Bruce W. Stracener.
17. Photo by Will Counts. Arkansas History Commission.
18. Courtesy of James Loewen.
19. Arkansas Public Policy Panel.
20. New York Times.
21. Arkansas Public Policy Panel.
Data: State Vote 2011: NCSL.
22. Arkansas Public Policy Panel.
Data: State Vote 2011: NCSL.
23. George Fisher.
24. Arkansas Citizens First Congress.
25. Arkansas Public Policy Panel.
Data: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.
26. Arkansas Public Policy Panel.
Data: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.
27. Arkansas Public Policy Panel.
Data: Pew Center: State of the States 2010.
28. Arkansas Public Policy Panel.
Data: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.
29. Arkansas Judiciary.
30. Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families.
31. Arkansas Public Policy Panel.
Data: National Center for Education Statistics.
32. Arkansas Public Policy Panel.
Data: National Center for Education Statistics.
33. Arkansas Public Policy Panel.
34. Arkansas Citizens First Congress.
35. Arkansas Public Policy Panel.
Data: U.S. Census Bureau.
36. Arkansas Public Policy Panel.
Data: National Conference of State Legislatures.
37. Vic Harville, Stephens Media Group.
38. Arkansas Public Policy Panel.
Data: Pre-K Now Resource Center.
39. Arkansas Public Policy Panel.
Data: *Education Week: Quality Counts 2012*.
40. Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families.
41. Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families.
42. Arkansas Public Policy Panel.
Data: U.S. Census Bureau: State Government Finances 2009.
43. Arkansas Public Policy Panel.
Data: National Center for Education Statistics: Common Core of Data "National Public Education Financial Survey (State Fiscal)".
44. Arkansas Citizens First Congress.
45. Arkansas Citizens First Congress.
46. Arkansas Public Policy Panel.
Data: Cyber-Bullying Research Center, NCSL, GLSEN, Act 907 - Arkansas General Assembly.
47. Arkansas Public Policy Panel.
Data: NCSL: Immigration Legislation Database.
48. Arkansas Friendship Coalition, Arkansas Out of School Network, Arkansas Kids Count Coalition, Arkansas Finish Line Coalition, Arkansas Opportunity to Learn Campaign, Arkansas Citizens First Congress, Arkansas's Water Future.
49. Arkansas Public Policy Panel.
Data: New York Times/Bureau of Labor Statistics.
50. Arkansas Public Policy Panel.
Data: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 American Community Survey, 110th Congressional District Summary File.
51. Arkansas Citizens First Congress.
Data: Arkansas General Assembly, Citizens First Congress.

The Arkansas Public Policy Panel is a statewide organization dedicated to achieving social and economic justice by organizing citizen groups around the state, educating and supporting them to be more effective and powerful, and linking them with one another in coalitions and networks. The Panel seeks to bring balance to the public policy process in Arkansas.

Special thanks to the thousands of grassroots Arkansans across the state who give their time and their donations to the growing movement of Arkansans working for a better state.

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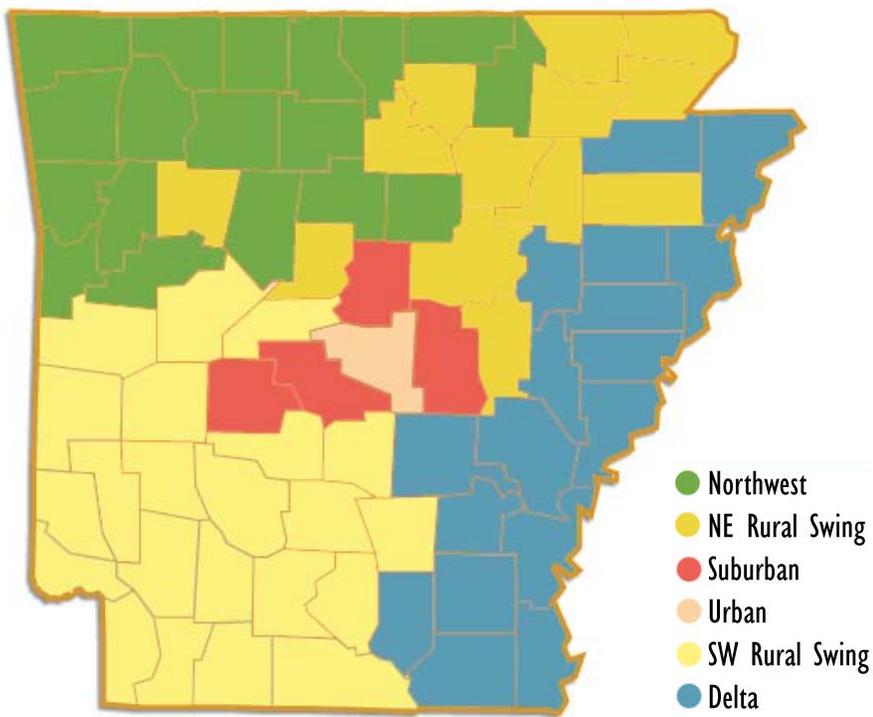


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Six in One: The Complex Demography of a Small State:

The Arkansas Delta is similar to large portions of Deep South states, the fast-growing Northwest portion of the state and suburbs around Little Rock like similar areas in other southern and Midwestern states, the “rural swing” counties like heavily white rural portions of the South, Midwest, and Great Plains states, and Pulaski County like midsized metropolitan areas all over the country.