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# Louisiana: Hot and Spicy

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## *Louisiana: Hot and Spicy!*

Jonathan O. Knuckey, Christine L. Day, and Charles D. Hadley

At the beginning of the 2004 presidential election campaign, Louisiana was considered a potential “battleground” state. While George W. Bush had won the Bayou State in 2000, his victory margin of just under eight percentage points was modest, and the smallest margin of any of the five Deep South states. Given that Bill Clinton had carried the state twice in the 1990s, and, given a Democratic advantage in party identification, Democratic strategists felt that the Kerry/Edwards ticket could at least make the Bush-Cheney ticket spend time and valuable resources defending the state, but it was not to be.

### **Political Context**

Democratic optimism in Louisiana was motivated by the fact that the party had won two closely contested statewide elections in the previous two years. In 2002, Democratic incumbent U.S. Senator Mary Landrieu defeated her Republican opponent Suzanne Haik Terrell, the Commissioner of Elections and former New Orleans City Councilwoman. Landrieu initially was elected by the narrowest of margins in 1996 when she defeated archconservative Louis “Woody” Jenkins by a margin of just 5,788 votes (Hadley and Knuckey 1997). In 2002, Landrieu received 46 percent of the vote in Louisiana’s unique open primary system—where all candidates run against each other regardless of party—compared to Terrell’s 27 percent. However, the combined vote for the Republican candidates totaled 51 percent, suggesting that Terrell could win if she were able to unite the Republican vote. Having regained control of the U.S. Senate in the 2002 midterm elections, Republicans were eager to add to their narrow majority, and consequently Republican leaders campaigned aggressively on behalf of Terrell, including President Bush, former President George H. W. Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, U.S. Senator Trent Lott of Mississippi, and U.S. Senator-elect Elizabeth Dole of North Carolina (Welch 2002). The election was given further national prominence when Landrieu and Terrell debated each other on NBC’s “Meet the Press.”

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Despite the efforts of Republicans to nationalize the election, Landrieu was able to defeat Terrell. Although the runoff remained close, Landrieu's margin in 2002 was more comfortable than in 1996, 52 percent of the vote compared to Terrell's 48 percent. Perhaps working in Landrieu's favor was the fact that control of the U.S. Senate did not depend on the outcome, as some pundits had predicted prior to the midterm elections. Thus, voters in Louisiana could support Landrieu in the knowledge that they would not be throwing the Senate to the Democrats. Indeed, Landrieu emphasized in the runoff that she shared many of President Bush's positions, although, unlike, Terrell, she would not simply be there to "rubber-stamp" the president's agenda.

Two other factors proved decisive in Landrieu's favor. First, she benefited from a strong get-out-the-vote effort among black voters by Congressional Black Caucus members who campaigned for her in New Orleans and around the state, especially in black churches (Online NewsHour 2002; cf. Sellers 2002). The mobilization of the Democratic base also was helped by automated telephone messages from former President Bill Clinton.

Second, in the last week of the campaign Landrieu focused on the issue of Mexican sugar imports and their impact on Louisiana sugar cane growers, accusing Terrell of supporting the White House in a "secret deal" that would double the flow of sugar coming from Mexico, a claim Terrell vigorously denied. These charges may have helped Landrieu in the crucial Acadiana region, the location of Louisiana's sugar cane producers. Here Landrieu received 52 percent of the vote, having lost the region with 48 percent six years earlier. Furthermore, of the thirteen parishes (i.e., the top quintile) where Landrieu's vote increased the most compared to 1996, nine parishes had a sizeable dependence on the sugar cane industry. (On the sugar issue, see Naresh 2002; Hockstader and Hossiter 2002.)

The 2003 gubernatorial election was regarded as an important test of statewide strength for both political parties, given that popular two-term Republican Governor Murphy J. "Mike" Foster was constitutionally prohibited from seeking a third term. Republicans, keen for an unprecedented third consecutive gubernatorial victory, united early behind Bobby Jindal, an acknowledged rising star in the party. Jindal at the age of 32 had already served in the Bush Administration as Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as well as Louisiana's Secretary of Health and Hospitals under Governor Foster. Moreover, in a state where race has often loomed large in statewide elections, Jindal, whose parents were immigrants from India, presented a different face for the Republican Party. On the Democratic side no clear favorite emerged, following the decision earlier in the year of popular U.S. Senator John Breaux to not run for governor.<sup>1</sup> Of the three serious Democratic

contenders, Lieutenant-Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco was considered to have an edge over Attorney General Richard Ieyoub and former member of the U.S. House of Representatives, Claude “Buddy” Leach.

In the Louisiana-style gubernatorial primary, Jindal finished first with 33 percent, the highest share of the vote for a candidate in the first round of a gubernatorial election with no incumbent running since 1987. Blanco finished second to claim the runoff spot, but her 18 percent of the vote was the lowest share of the vote a runoff candidate has received since 1971. Ieyoub and Leach received 16 and 14 percent of the vote, respectively. The remainder of the vote was split between 13 other candidates, the largest share going to State Senate President Randy Ewing, who received nine percent.

In the runoff election, the challenge for Jindal was to maintain his conservative support from the primary election while moderating his stance enough to capture the support of Ieyoub and Leach voters. Blanco faced the familiar challenge of a Democrat in a statewide race, the challenge of uniting the fractured party vote behind her. Further illustrating the Democratic divide was New Orleans Democratic Mayor Ray Nagin’s endorsement of Republican Jindal. Until the last week of the campaign, polls showed Jindal holding a consistent lead over Blanco; a poll released by the University of New Orleans found Jindal leading Blanco 44 to 40 percent with 16 percent “undecided” (Howell 2003).

In the final week of the campaign, however, Blanco unleashed a series of blistering negative ads against Jindal, accusing him of cutting costs and hurting patient care, particularly for the poor, when he was Secretary of the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals. She also portrayed Jindal as an extremist, contrasting his no-exceptions position on abortion (even with the mother’s life at stake) with her own slightly more flexible pro-life position. Jindal never adequately responded to these charges, allowing Blanco to close the gap on him going into the day of the election. With momentum now behind her, Blanco was able to win with 52 percent of the vote compared to Jindal’s 48 percent, thus becoming the first woman governor in Louisiana history and the only current Democratic governor of a Deep South state. Despite the close margin of victory, Blanco secured a majority of the vote in 52 of Louisiana’s 64 parishes, showing strength in many of the sparsely populated rural counties. This suggests the possibility of racial voting against Jindal, especially in the northern part of the state which has been fertile territory for racial protest candidates from Strom Thurmond in 1948 to George Wallace in 1968 (Howard 1972) and to David Duke in the early 1990s (see, for example, Rose 1992, Bridges 1994, and Howell 1994).<sup>2</sup>

In sum, Democratic candidates had won two highly visible recent statewide elections, giving the party some hope for the presidential race. At the same time, the idiosyncratic factors that swayed the outcome of both elections surely dampened the Democrats’ confidence.

## **General Election Results and Analysis**

### **Presidential Election**

As early as August, a month before the general election campaign had officially started, most polls showed incumbent President George W. Bush with a double-digit lead over U.S. Senator John Kerry, prompting the Democratic ticket to essentially pull out of the state by mid-September (AP 2004). Thus, the question was not whether Bush would carry Louisiana's nine Electoral College votes, but what would be the size of his victory margin over Kerry.

Voter turnout in Louisiana, based on the voting-age population, was 58.5 percent, the highest turnout rate of any of the eleven southern states, and slightly higher than the nationwide turnout rate of 56.2 percent. This represented an increase over the 2000 presidential election turnout (55.2 percent), although it was less than that in 1992 (59.8 percent), which remains the highest voter turnout rate for the state in the post-Voting Rights Act era. Among registered voters, turnout was 66.5 percent, with whites having a turnout rate of 70.4 percent and blacks 61.1 percent.<sup>3</sup> Overall, the total vote in Louisiana increased to just over 1.9 million in 2004 from 1.7 million in 2000. (See Knuckey and Hadley 2002 on the 2000 presidential election in Louisiana.) Interestingly, this increase was almost entirely a result of the increase of 174,298 in the Republican vote, compared to just a 27,955 increase in the Democratic vote. Contrary to the conventional wisdom of a higher level of voter turnout in 2004 being beneficial to the Democrats, it appears that a strong Republican mobilization effort helped the party's candidates in Louisiana just as it did nationally (Bumiller, Halbfinger and Rosenbaum 2004; cf. Alpert 2004).

As the polls had indicated, Republican Bush easily carried Louisiana's nine Electoral College votes, defeating Democrat Kerry by 14.5 percentage points, 56.7 to 42.2 (see Table 1). Bush's margin of victory was almost double that he enjoyed over Al Gore in the 2000 contest (7.7 percentage points), and it was the largest Republican margin of victory in the state since Ronald Reagan's re-election victory in 1984 (22.6 percentage points). Indeed the only other Republican presidential candidate who achieved a larger victory margin was Richard Nixon in 1972 (37.0 percentage points). Of course, both Reagan and Nixon carried the state in election years that were national landslides for the Republicans.

### **Geography**

An analysis of the presidential vote by parish (county) reveals the geographic breadth of Bush's victory. Bush carried a majority of the vote in

**Table 1. Results of the 2004 Louisiana  
Presidential and Congressional Elections**

Candidate (Party)	Percent of Vote	Vote Totals
<b>President</b>		
George W. Bush / Dick Cheney (R)	56.7	1,102,169
John Kerry / John Edwards (D)	42.2	820,299
Ralph Nader / Peter Camejo (I)	0.4	7,032
Michael Peroutka / Charles Baldwin (C)	0.3	5,203
Michael Badnarik / Richard Campagna (L)	0.1	2,781
Walt Brown Brown / Mary Alice Herbert (S)	0.1	1,785
Amondson / Pletten (P)	0.1	1,566
David Cobb / Patricia LaMarche (G)	0.1	1,276
James E. Harris, Jr. / Maggie Trowe (SW)	0.1	985
Total Presidential Vote		1,943,096
<b>U.S. Senate</b>		
David Vitter (R)	51.0	943,014
Chris John (D)	29.3	542,150
John Kennedy (D)	14.9	275,821
Arthur A. Morrell (D)	2.6	47,222
Richard M. Fontanesi (I)	0.8	15,097
R.A. "Skip" Galan (I)	0.7	12,463
Sam Houston Melton, Jr. (D)	0.7	12,289
Total Senate Vote		1,848,056
<b>U.S. House of Representatives</b>		
<b>First District (Greater New Orleans Suburbs)</b>		
Bobby Jindal (R)	78.4	225,708
Roy Armstrong (D)	6.7	19,266
M.V. "Vinny" Mendoza (D)	4.4	12,779
Daniel Zimmerman (D)	4.2	12,135
Jerry Watts (D)	3.5	10,034
Mike Rogers (R)	2.8	7,975
Total District Vote		287,897
<b>Second District (New Orleans)</b>		
William J. Jefferson (D)*	79.0	173,510
Arthur L. "Art" Schwertz (R)	21.0	46,097
Total District Vote		219,607
<b>Third District (New Iberia-Houma)**</b>		
Charles Melancon (D)	50.2	57,611
W.J. "Billy" Tauzin, III (R)	49.8	57,042
Total District Vote		114,653
<b>Fourth District (Shreveport-Bossier City)</b>		
Jim McCrery (R)*	Unopposed	

table continues . . .

**Table 1** (continued)

Candidate (Party)	Percent of Vote	Vote Totals
U.S. House of Representatives (continued)		
Fifth District (Monroe-Alexandria)		
Rodney Alexander (R)*	59.4	141,495
Zelma "Tisa" Blakes (D)	24.6	58,591
John W. "Jock" Scott (R)	16.0	37,971
Total District Vote		238,057
Sixth District (Baton Rouge)		
Richard H. Baker (R)*	72.2	189,106
Rufus Holt Craig, Jr. (D)	19.4	50,732
Edward Anthony "Scott" Galmon	8.4	22,031
Total District Vote		261,869
Seventh District (Lake Charles-Lafayette)**		
Charles Boustany, Jr. (R)	55.0	75,039
Willie Landry Mount (D)	45.0	61,493
Total District Vote		136,532

Key: \* = incumbent; R = Republican Party; D = Democratic Party; I = Independent; C = Constitution Party; L = Libertarian Party; S = Socialist Party; P = Prohibition Party; G = Green Party; SW = Socialist Workers Party; \*\* = Runoff election held December 4, 2004.

Note: Louisiana operates under an open electoral system in which all candidates run in a primary election. If no candidate secures a majority of the vote in the primary election, the top two contenders, regardless of party, face each other in a runoff election. Runoffs were necessary for the Third and Seventh Districts, and thus these are the results reported, rather than those for the primary election.

Source: Compiled by the authors from election returns obtained from the Louisiana Secretary of State Elections Division; see [www.sec.state.la.us/elections/elections-index.htm](http://www.sec.state.la.us/elections/elections-index.htm).

54 of Louisiana's 64 parishes, winning all of the parishes he had carried in 2000 plus four parishes won by Gore. The ten parishes carried by Kerry were those with majority or near majority black populations, mostly the old plantation parishes along the Mississippi River.

Overall, Bush built on the foundations of his 2000 victory in the state, as evidenced by the near perfect parish-by-parish correlation of his 2000 and 2004 vote ( $r = .98$ ). By dividing the state into four geographic regions (Greater New Orleans, Acadiana, Florida Parishes, and North-Central), one can discern areas of Republican strength and areas where Bush was most successful in increasing his vote totals in the state (Table 2).<sup>4</sup>

Only in the Greater New Orleans area did Kerry lead Bush, albeit by the narrowest of margins, 49.6 to 49.5 percent. However, this was due to Kerry's vote in overwhelmingly black and Democratic Orleans Parish (New Orleans), where Kerry bested Bush 77.4 to 21.7 percent. Bush made up this

**Table 2. Louisiana 2004 Presidential Vote by Region (in percent)**

Region	Proportion of State Vote	Bush	Kerry	% Change in Republican Vote 2000-2004
Greater New Orleans	27.3	49.5	49.6	+2.7
Acadiana	30.9	58.2	40.5	+5.1
Florida Parishes	15.8	58.9	40.1	+4.3
North-Central	25.9	61.2	37.7	+4.5
Total	100.0	56.7	42.2	+4.1

Note: See endnote 4 for a definition of the parishes that constitute each region.

Source: Computed by the authors from election returns obtained from the Louisiana Secretary of State Elections Division; see [www.sec.state.la.us/elections/elections-index.htm](http://www.sec.state.la.us/elections/elections-index.htm).

deficit in the suburban—and predominantly white—parishes of the Greater New Orleans area by winning 66 percent of the vote compared to 33.2 for Kerry. In the other three regions Bush won by landslide margins. The Florida Parishes and the parishes in the North-Central part of the state have become Republican strongholds, and in 2004 Bush won 58.9 and 61.2 percent, respectively. Interestingly Bush built on the breakthrough he had made in 2000 in Acadiana, which consists of those parishes in the southern part of the state with high proportions of French-Catholic Cajuns, a group that has historically exhibited a tendency to be more Democratic than other white voters in the state.<sup>5</sup> Bush increased his vote in Acadiana to 58.2 percent in 2004 from 53.1 percent in 2000, suggesting an on-going realignment of party preferences in “Cajun Country.” The causes of such realignment cannot be probed here, although cultural issues and the “values” divide appear to be prime candidates in producing this pro-Republican shift in voting preferences at the presidential level.<sup>6</sup>

### **Race, Gender, Age, and Income**

Racial polarization characterized the vote choice in Louisiana as in prior presidential elections (e.g., Knuckey and Hadley 2002; Hadley 1994) and as in the rest of the South. According to exit polls (Table 3), Bush received 75 percent of the white vote, while Kerry secured 90 percent of the black vote. (Unless otherwise indicated, data on various demographic and other voter groups are drawn from the exit poll data from the 2004 National Election Pool, conducted by Edison Media Research and Mitofsky International.) The rule of thumb in a statewide election in Louisiana is that a Republican needs approximately two-thirds of the white vote, which Bush

**Table 3. Demographic and Political Factors  
in the 2004 Presidential Vote (in percentages)**

Voter Characteristic/Attitude	Bush	Kerry	Percent of Category
<b>Race</b>			
White	75	24	70
Black	9	90	27
<b>Gender</b>			
Men	60	39	45
Women	54	45	55
<b>Gender (controlling for race)</b>			
White men	77	23	33
White women	74	25	38
Black men	14	83	12
Black women	13	87	17
<b>Age</b>			
18-29	53	45	20
30-44	56	42	30
45-59	53	47	27
60+	66	34	20
<b>Income</b>			
Under \$15,000	39	60	13
\$15-30,000	49	50	19
\$30-50,000	56	44	23
\$50-\$75,000	69	29	19
\$75-\$100,000	65	34	11
Over \$10,000	68	31	13
<b>Party Identification</b>			
Democrat	21	78	42
Republican	95	5	40
Independent	58	39	18
<b>Ideology</b>			
Liberal	25	74	17
Moderate	51	47	44
Conservative	80	19	40
<b>Bush Job Approval</b>			
Approve	92	8	58
Disapprove	8	91	41
<b>Religion</b>			
Protestant	59	39	49
Catholic	68	31	38
Other	23	76	6
None	23	76	5

table continues . . .

**Table 3** (continued)

Voter Characteristic/Attitude	Bush	Kerry	Percent of Category
Religion and Frequency of Church Attendance			
Protestant/weekly	73	25	14
Protestant/less often	63	37	10
Catholic/weekly	71	29	19
Catholic/less often	64	34	17
All others	40	60	35
White Evangelical/Born Again			
Yes	85	15	27
No	47	52	73
Most Important Issue for Vote			
Terrorism	84	15	22
Moral values	86	12	21
Economy/Jobs	24	74	18
War in Iraq	34	65	14
Taxes	62	35	6
Health care	33	66	6
Education	28	70	5
Most Important Candidate Quality			
Strong leader	86	14	20
Will bring change	5	94	20
Clear stand on issues	73	23	15
Cares about people	37	63	14
Religious faith	94	5	10
Honest/trustworthy	78	21	10
Intelligent	36	64	5

Source: Edison/Mitofsky Exit Polls (Louisiana), November 2, 2004.

easily achieved. Likewise, Kerry fell far short of the one-third of the white vote he would have needed to secure a victory. Indeed, the 24 percent of the white vote that Kerry won was two percent lower than the white vote Al Gore received in 2000, and the lowest share any Democratic presidential nominee has received since Walter Mondale in 1984.<sup>7</sup> In 2004, this meant that the black vote again accounted for over half (58 percent) of the total Democratic presidential vote. Likewise, the Republican vote in Louisiana remains an overwhelmingly white vote, Bush having only increased his percentage among blacks by 3 percentage points.

As in the rest of a nation, a gender gap was evident in the presidential vote, with Bush having a 21 percentage point lead among men, but just a

nine point lead among women. However, this lead among women was actually greater than in 2000, when Bush basically split the women's vote with Gore, 50 to 49 percent. When race is controlled for, the gender gap virtually disappears, with both white men and white women giving landslide levels of support to Bush, 77 and 74 percent respectively. White women are often viewed as a group that might be more prone to an appeal by Democrats in the South—at least when compared to white men. On the basis of the 2004 results, they remain well out of reach for any Democrat at the presidential level in Louisiana.

Although Bush carried every age group in Louisiana, there was a noticeable difference between the youngest group (18-29), where Bush's margin over Kerry was eight percentage points, and the oldest group (60 and over), where Bush's margin was 32 percentage points. Interestingly, this represents a reversal of the pattern in 2000, where the youngest age group was Bush's most supportive group, and the oldest group was his weakest. Indeed, in 2000, the over-60 group was the only age group carried by Gore. Bush's support fell among the youngest cohort, but only by four percentage points (Knuckey and Hadley 2002, 90-92).

A modest degree of social class-based voting was evident in Louisiana, with Bush easily carrying those with a household income of at least \$50,000, and Kerry winning a large vote among those earning under \$15,000. However, all income groups—except for those earning \$30-50,000—registered an increase in support for Bush compared to 2000. Indeed, the largest increases in support were among those with an income below \$15,000 (up 13 percent) and those earning \$15-30,000 (up 15 percent). This suggests issues or political forces other than social class were at work in Louisiana in 2004.

### **Religion and Religiosity**

One possible explanation for social class being less important to the vote in 2004 than in 2000 was the increased salience of religion and religiosity. Bush received a majority of the vote among both Protestants and Catholics, but it was among the latter that he registered a large increase in his vote, up 11 percentage points compared to 2000, while his vote among Protestants remained the same. In contrast, Kerry won over three-quarters of the vote among both respondents of other denominations and those with no religious preference. This yielded little support for Kerry given that these groups comprise only 11 percent of the total Louisiana electorate. It appears, however, that it was among religiously committed Protestants and Catholics—those who attend church at least once a week—that Bush resonated most, winning 73 and 71 percent of the vote respectively. Thus the Catholic-Protestant cleavage that has often loomed large in the politics of Louisiana

(e.g., Howard 1971, ch X) seems to have been replaced by a religiosity cleavage, one that may reflect a more general cultural values divide evident in the South and, indeed, the nation. Such a development may also help explain the pro-Republican movement noted above in the heavily Cajun-Catholic parishes of the Acadiana region.

A further point to note about the effects of religion in 2004 is that those respondents who identified themselves as white evangelicals or “born-again” Christians constituted the base of the Republican vote. Indeed, this group now exhibits levels of Republican loyalty in their voting behavior that rivals that found among blacks toward the Democrats. Based on the size and cohesiveness of the white evangelical vote, approximately 40 percent of Bush’s statewide total came from this group although it comprises only 27 percent of the state population.

### **Party Identification and Ideology**

As in 2000, the 2004 presidential election produced a “loyalty gap” with Bush winning 95 percent of Republican identifiers, compared to Kerry’s 78 percent among self-identified Democrats. Indeed, the 21 percent of the vote Bush secured from Democrats was the largest Bush received in any of the eleven southern states. Perhaps most interesting was the fact that Democrats in Louisiana now have a party identification advantage of just two percentage points over Republicans. Although Louisiana was one of only two southern states—the other being Arkansas—where there was *any* Democratic advantage, this two-percentage point lead compares to a 14-point advantage in 2000. While this finding has less effect on presidential elections (given the ability of Republican candidates to cut into the Democratic base and sweep independents), it has enormous consequences for party competition below the presidential level (see below) where Democrats traditionally relied on a partisan advantage over Republicans.

The voting behavior of respondents based on ideology also reflects the fact that both candidates appealed to the electoral bases of their respective parties, with Bush winning 80 percent of the vote among conservatives and Kerry 74 percent of the voter among liberals. Of course, as conservatives vastly outnumber liberals in Louisiana, such an ideologically polarized vote benefited Bush. As in 2000 (e.g., Black and Black 2002, ch. 8), Bush also won a majority of the vote among moderates. This is a crucial swing group in Louisiana, as it is throughout the South. In 2004, moderates remained virtually unchanged in the support they gave to both candidates compared to support received by Bush and Gore in 2000 (52 and 46 percent, respectively).

### **Short-term Political Factors**

In terms of important short-term factors influencing the presidential vote in Louisiana, Bush clearly had an advantage on both the issues and candidate qualities. Terrorism and moral values were cited as the most important issues in Louisiana, issues where Bush had an overwhelming advantage over Kerry. While Kerry had a solid lead over Bush among those respondents who cited domestic policy issues, i.e., the economy, health care, and education, as the most important reason for their vote choice, only 30 percent of the electorate said that these traditional Democratic issues were the most important issues in 2004.

Bush also benefited from positive retrospective evaluations of his first term, with 58 percent of respondents approving of his job performance; Bush won 92 percent of their vote. Voters in Louisiana may have made prospective evaluative judgments between Bush and Kerry, with Bush favored over Kerry as the candidate most trusted to handle the economy (56 to 39 percent) and terrorism (59 to 35 percent). Again, those who said they trusted Bush more than they did Kerry voted overwhelmingly for Bush.

Lastly, Bush had an edge over Kerry on candidate qualities, with leads among those respondents who cited “strong leadership,” “taking a clear stand on issues,” “religious faith,” and “honesty” as the most important qualities. Collectively, 55 percent of respondents cited these qualities as most important. Kerry led Bush as the candidate that would bring change, cared about people and who was viewed as intelligent, but only 39 percent of the respondents cited these qualities as being most important.

### **U.S. Senate Election**

The central concern in the U.S. Senate election was whether Republican David Vitter would be forced into a runoff election against a Democrat, most likely U.S. Representative Chris John. Most observers did not believe that Vitter would be able to secure a majority of the vote in the primary and would then likely face a strong challenge in a runoff where a moderate candidate like John could brand Vitter as an ideologically extreme conservative. This had been the formula that Democrats had employed in most statewide contests in Louisiana over the past two decades (Lamis 1990, ch. 8; Renwick, Parent, and Wardlaw 1999). In 2004, this strategy did not work, and Vitter became Louisiana’s first Republican U.S. Senator since the Reconstruction era, taking 51 percent of vote with John trailing far behind on 29.3 percent.

Perhaps Vitter’s biggest asset was the coattail of President Bush, but he also had built a statewide grassroots organization, “a great grass-roots net-

work with local Louisiana folks in every parish” said Vitter. In fact, “The list of people . . . paid to coordinate volunteers [took] up dozens of pages of his 760-plus page campaign finance report” (Alpert 2004). A parish-by-parish analysis of the presidential and Senate elections shows a high correlation between the Bush/Vitter vote ( $r = .86$ ). At the same time, Table 4 shows the breakdown of the Senate vote by region and demonstrates a similar structure to the pattern of support exhibited in the presidential contest.

Vitter was able to emerge from the Greater New Orleans area with a majority of the vote, sweeping the suburban parishes around New Orleans that constituted much of his congressional district, which offset his vote deficit in the city of New Orleans. Like Bush, Vitter also swept the traditional Republican regions of the Florida and North-Central parishes. Perhaps the biggest surprise was his ability to win a plurality (47.1 percent) of the vote in the Acadiana region. This was surprising, given that southwestern part of Acadiana was the location of John’s congressional district. Indeed, in the parishes that constituted John’s Seventh district, Vitter narrowly out-pollled John, 45.4 to 45.1 percent. Even assuming that the entire vote from the third place candidate John Kennedy had gone to John, this still would have left the Democrat winning a bare majority of 51.0 percent on his home turf. Again, the success of Bush in securing a landslide vote in Acadiana, an organization of paid grassroots organizers, and the willingness of voters to cast a straight-ticket party vote, appears to have help Vitter and hurt the Democrats’ prospects of forcing a runoff election in the U.S. Senate race.

Exit poll data provide further support for a presidential coattails effect favoring Vitter in the Senate. For example, Vitter was able to secure most of the Republican base, winning 88 percent of the vote from self-identified Republicans, as well as 53 percent of the votes from independents, and

**Table 4. Louisiana 2004 U. S. Senate Vote by Region (in percent)**

Region	Proportion of State Vote	Vitter	John	Kennedy
Greater New Orleans	27.6	50.1	25.1	17.9
Acadiana	31.0	47.1	37.8	11.3
Florida Parishes	16.1	54.4	25.5	16.1
North-Central	25.3	54.7	26.0	15.4
Total	100.0	51.0	29.3	14.3

Note: See endnote 4 for a definition of the parishes that constitute each region. Row percentages do not add up to 100 because data for minor candidates are excluded.

Source: Computed by the authors from election returns obtained from the Louisiana Secretary of State Elections Division; see [www.sec.state.la.us/elections/elections-index.htm](http://www.sec.state.la.us/elections/elections-index.htm).

even 16 percent of the vote from Democratic identifiers. The prospects of party-line voting in statewide elections in Louisiana must be troublesome for the Democrats, especially given that the party's advantage in party identification has now disappeared.

Vitter also benefited from his party's unified support (Walsh 2004, A-26). Although both major parties in Louisiana are factionalized, Vitter was the only serious Republican to enter the Senate race, and even former Governor Foster endorsed him. The Democrats, in contrast, divided their support among three viable candidates, all of whom attacked each other during the primary, wounding each other's chances of forcing Vitter into a runoff.

### **U.S. House of Representatives Elections**

Sparks flew in the 2004 U.S. House of Representatives elections in Louisiana, with open-seat elections in three of the seven districts, a party-switching incumbent in yet another, and mud-slinging all around. When the dust had settled, the Republican advantage in House seats had gone from 4-3 to 5-2, as each party lost one seat and gained another while one incumbent switched from the Democrats to the Republicans.

Incumbents under Louisiana's open elections system tend to enjoy opposition-free reelection campaigns because there are no separate opposition-party primaries. Thus, most of the state U.S. House delegation—William Jefferson in District 2, Jim McCrery in District 4, Richard Baker in District 6, and even the party-switching Rodney Alexander in District 5—faced no more than token opposition. Alexander's switch to the Republican Party was highly controversial initially. He had registered to run as a Democrat in August and then, two days later and only one half hour before the end of the official qualifying period, Alexander withdrew and re-registered as a Republican. The maneuver drew heated criticism from Republican opponent John "Jock" Scott, who saw his official Republican party endorsement disappear as soon as the party had an incumbent to support; it drew equally heated criticism from Democratic opponent Zelma "Tisa" Blakes, who hoped to win over the district's Democratic voters with the help of high-profile endorsements from Maya Angelou and civil rights activist Joseph Lowery. Democratic contributors to Alexander's campaign also were hopping mad after his last-minute party swap. In the end, however, voters in the Fifth District, "rural and Protestant . . . part of the Bible Belt [and] ardently pro-guns, anti-abortion and against gay marriage" gave Alexander 59 percent of their votes in the first primary, to Blakes's 25 percent and Scott's 16 percent (Ballard 2004).

Open-seat elections in Louisiana, as elsewhere, are generally candidate free-for-all as congressional hopefuls scramble to replace the departing

incumbents. True to form, two of the open-seat races, those in Districts 3 and 7, were vigorously contested and descended into mud-slinging brawls as candidates smeared each other with simplistic and personal attacks. District 1, on the other hand, was different. The conservative suburban New Orleans district had been Republican David Vitter's before he ran for the Senate. Safely Republican, it provided an attractive opportunity for well-known conservative politicians such as State Representative Steve Scalise. But when Bobby Jindal, the loser in the previous year's gubernatorial runoff, moved from Baton Rouge into the district and subsequently jumped into the race, he scared off virtually all of the seriously viable opposition. Parlaying his high name recognition, high-level government experience, and conservative credentials into district-wide support—and this time not having to face rural voters reluctant to vote for a non-white—Jindal defeated an ill-funded and little-known field of five by winning 78 percent of the vote in the first primary held simultaneously with the presidential general election.

The contests in Districts 3 and 7 produced no outright winner in the first primary, and thus both went into early December runoff elections. Louisiana is the only U.S. state with an open election in November followed by possible runoff elections in December; every other state is finished by early November. Therefore, the eyes of Congress-watchers nationwide were on Louisiana as the last two congressional elections in the nation would determine the size of the House Republican majority. What they saw was a flurry of attack ads, personal smears, partisan bickering, and intra-party infighting (e.g., Brown 2004a; cf. Johnson-Cartee and Copeland 1991; Lau, Sigelman, Heldman, and Babbitt 1999; and Lau and Pomper 2002). Combining the total party vote from the primary election suggested a Republican advantage in District 3, where Republican candidates received 59 percent of the primary vote. On the other hand, it was the Democrats with an edge in District 7, where the combined party vote was 52 percent. It should be noted, however, that George W. Bush received a landslide vote in both districts in the presidential election, 58 percent in District 3 and 60 percent in District 7.

Neither race, in fairness, was devoid of serious policy discussion over national and local issues. Candidates debated proposals on issues ranging from tax policy and job growth to international trade and the steady erosion of Louisiana's coastline and fragile wetlands. Further, as the runoff campaigns descended into lowbrow negativity, it was not just local politicians and consultants who spewed dirt. Both national parties created advertisements that added to the smear-fest. Local politicians and national party officials alike had understood the lesson from the previous year's gubernatorial campaign: negative advertising wins elections (Courreges 2004a, 2004b, and 2004c; Brown 2004b; Maginnis 2004).

In District 7, Chris John's former district encompassing most of Acadiana, the primary was marred by Democratic infighting, as candidate

Don Cravins, an African-American State Senator, railed against state and national party officials for backing State Senator Willie Mount, and refused to endorse her in the runoff. The runoff campaign between Mount and her Republican rival, retired heart surgeon Charles Boustany, Jr., featured attack ads galore. Boustany's campaign characterized Mount as a tax-loving anti-business friend of John Kerry, one who wanted to make it easier to get the "morning-after" contraceptive pill; Mount's campaign portrayed Boustany as an inexperienced, over-privileged aristocrat who disdained the charity health system and who once aspired, unsuccessfully, to British royalty. Partisan and personal differences notwithstanding, both candidates held similar positions on most of the issues, and the campaign ended amicably when Boustany captured 55 percent of the vote to become the district's first *elected* Republican U.S. Representative (Courreges 2004c; Courreges and Simoneaux 2004).<sup>8</sup>

The campaign in District 3, running along Louisiana's southeastern coast and encompassing parts of suburban New Orleans, also began with intra-party scuffles plaguing both parties. Rising from the fray to make the runoff were Republican Billy Tauzin III, enjoying instant name recognition by virtue of the district's popular retiring U.S. Representative Billy Tauzin, Jr., and Democrat Charlie Melancon, a former president of the American Sugar Cane League. Attack ads during the runoff campaign depicted Melancon as a man ready to raise taxes and fees while promoting third-grade sex education, and Tauzin as an immature and inexperienced scofflaw hoping to capitalize on his daddy's fame. Melancon captured the district for the Democrats by a razor-thin margin of some 500 votes. Sugar, as in Mary Landrieu's 2002 Senate victory, may have tilted the scales toward Melancon, the sugar cane executive who pledged to block international trade agreements that might threaten Louisiana sugar farmers' livelihood. (See Courreges 2004b, 2004c; Nichols 2005; Brown 2004c; Brown 2004d.)

### **Conclusion: A Republican Future?**

The 2004 elections in Louisiana must be considered one of the best in the state's history for the Republican Party. At the presidential level, a state that some observers speculated could be in play in the general election produced a landslide victory for President George W. Bush. Regardless of the candidates nominated by both parties in 2008, Louisiana should be considered a safe state for the GOP, especially now that the Acadiana region, the one region of state that offered some hope for the Democrats in winning white support, appears to have moved decisively in a pro-Republican direction. At the same time, the congressional elections produced an historic U.S. Senate victory for the Republicans, with David Vitter becoming the first

Republican senator from the state since the Reconstruction era. That Vitter was able to accomplish this without being forced into a runoff election should be worrying for Louisiana Democrats. In competition for U.S. House seats, Republicans now hold a 5-2 majority. Perhaps the only welcome news, and hardly enough to offset the presidential and Senate results, was the fact that the Democrats won two congressional districts. However, given that their newly won district voted heavily for Bush in 2004, the Democratic incumbent Charlie Melancon may face a strong Republican challenge in 2006. It is not beyond the realm of possibility that Melancon may follow the example of other conservative Democrats in the state and switch parties.

The next major statewide elections are not until 2007, when Governor Kathleen Blanco faces re-election. While Blanco now possesses an incumbency advantage, a unified Republican party could still mount a formidable challenge if voters engage in the same type of party-line voting that characterized the 2004 elections. Republicans may also begin to make advances in the state legislature. Currently, Democrats hold a solid majority of seats in both the State House of Representatives (65 percent) and State Senate (67 percent). However, Republican advances here and in other elections at the state and local level appear likely if voters continue to engage in partisan voting. Still, Louisiana's free-for-all open elections system, the large supply of moderate to conservative Democrats ready to support guns and oppose abortion and gay marriage, and local issues from sugar to coastal erosion to Saints football may all conspire to keep the state competitive in the foreseeable future.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>While Breaux, had he run, would undoubtedly have been the odds-on favorite to have won, his decision not to maybe was influenced by considerations concerning the tight balance of power in the U.S. Senate. Breaux would have had to give up his Senate seat to run for governor, meaning that Republican Governor Mike Foster could appoint a Republican as a replacement.

<sup>2</sup>A correlation analysis of the parish-by-parish vote certainly suggests a different structure to her vote as compared to that for other statewide Democratic candidates. For example, the correlation coefficient between Blanco's vote and that for U.S. Senator Mary Landrieu in the 2002 Senate race and Al Gore in the 2000 presidential race were fairly modest,  $r = .60$  and  $.49$ , respectively. For a thorough discussion of possible racial backlash voting against Jindal, see Skinner and Klinkner 2004.

<sup>3</sup>Turnout rates that are based on the voting age population were taken from [www.uselectionatlas.org](http://www.uselectionatlas.org). Turnout data based on voter registration were taken from the Louisiana Secretary of State Elections Division, "Voting Registration and Statistics" [www.sec.state.la.us/elections/elect-votereg-stats.htm#votestats](http://www.sec.state.la.us/elections/elect-votereg-stats.htm#votestats).

<sup>4</sup>Regions were defined as follows: *Greater New Orleans* includes Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, and St. Tammany Parishes. *Acadiana* includes

Acadia, Ascension, Assumption, Avoyelles, Calcasieu, Cameron, Evangeline, Iberville, Jefferson Davis, Lafayette, Lafourche, Pointe Coupee, St. Charles, St. James, St. John the Baptist, St. Landry, St. Martin, St. Mary, Terrebonne, Vermilion, and West Baton Rouge Parishes. *Florida Parishes* include East Baton Rouge, East Feliciana, Livingston, St. Helena, Tangipahoa, Washington, and West Feliciana. *North-Central* includes Allen, Beauregard, Bienville, Bossier, Caddo, Caldwell, Catahoula, Claiborne, Concordia, De Soto, East Carroll, Franklin, Grant, Jackson, La Salle, Lincoln, Madison, Morehouse, Natchitoches, Ouachita, Rapides, Red River, Richland, Sabine, Tensas, Union, Vernon, Webster, West Carroll, and Winn Parishes.

<sup>5</sup>On the previously strong Democratic loyalties of white voters in Acadiana, see Renwick, Parent, and Wardlaw (1994, 303). On the importance of abortion and other cultural issues to Republican support in Acadiana, see Parent 2004, 53.

<sup>6</sup>See “How Louisiana Voted” 2004 for the parish by parish presidential vote.

<sup>7</sup>The estimate of Mondale’s white vote is taken from Black and Black (1992, 335). Based on this analysis, George McGovern was the only other Democratic presidential nominee to receive a lower share of the white vote in Louisiana, winning an estimated 15 percent in 1972.

<sup>8</sup>The Republicans had held District 7 for two years when Democrat Jimmy Hayes switched parties following the 1994 midterm elections. Hayes gave up the seat for an unsuccessful U.S. Senate bid in 1996, and it was recaptured for the Democrats by Chris John.

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