

## The Southern Elections Fund

**Abstract:** The prevailing political wisdom has it that progressive policies cannot “win the day” in the South. The Southern Elections Fund (SEF) has examined the numbers, and we know otherwise.

SEF is the spiritual successor to Julian Bond’s organization of the same name, which funded a tidal wave of victories for black elected officials throughout the South in the early 1970’s. It has been reincarnated to accelerate the electoral impact of the rapidly changing demographics of the South. We believe that people of color and progressive whites represent the South’s political future, and our purpose is to make that future come faster. Simply put, the power of SEF is in our ability to combine big vision and big data to produce big results for progressives in the most conservative region in the country.

SEF combines a well-researched understanding of demographic change, a clear plan, and a uniquely experienced team prepared to change the South – and the United States – forever.

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### The Problem

The future our movement has always envisioned is coming in the South, but a newly emboldened right wing is trying to make it come slower. They are doing so by attacking the very right to vote.

The South is at a moment of great demographic change. In recent years, African American remigration and Latino and Asian immigration has significantly outpaced the growth of the white population below the Mason-Dixon Line. From 2000 to 2010, the non-Hispanic “White” population grew by only 4%, while the so-called “minority” population grew by 34%, and this trend is likely to continue.

Right-wing leaders are aware of these facts – and they are intimidated. They know that African Americans have for some time now been the backbone of the progressive vote in the United States. They understand that increases in the African American vote, boosted by increases in the Latino vote, have made Southern states like Florida, Virginia and even North Carolina competitive every four years. They know that Georgia, South Carolina and other states are not far behind.

The right wing's response has been to attack the most basic civil rights of people of color in the region. Out of 13 Southern states historically considered "Black Belt" states<sup>1</sup>, nine states have passed strict photo voter ID laws and eleven states<sup>2</sup> have passed restrictions on the right to vote (including curtailing early voting or making it harder to register) meant to limit the political power of voters of color.

### What This Means for Progressives

The attack on the African American vote is at its heart an attack on progressive change. For progressive policies to become law – whether on the environment, women's rights, civil rights, immigrant rights, LGBT rights, labor rights, health care or corporate accountability – there must be a strong and unfettered African American vote. (The same holds true for the Latino vote).

So what is the status quo that the right wing is fighting so hard to maintain? Among the 13 "Black Belt" states:

- 11 states have passed "right to work" laws meant to stop organizing by unions.
- Nine states have governors who elected not to expand Medicaid in the wake of the Affordable Care Act, effectively denying health care to millions of their citizens.
- Six states rank in the top 15 in the country for carbon dioxide emissions.
- Ten states received a grade of "D" or lower on the Center of American Progress' "State of Women in America" report, indicating poor performance on economic opportunities, leadership opportunities, and women's health.
- 11 states still ban same-sex marriage, even as many other states have moved to expand marriage equality and LGBT rights in general.

Importantly, the impact of voter suppression and political disempowerment in Southern states is felt beyond state borders. From the make-up of the U.S. Congress to the math behind the Electoral College, the "Old South" mentality has national implications for progressives.

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<sup>1</sup> The "Black Belt" includes: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia. The Black Belt earned its nickname for two reasons: the dark soil that made the region ideal for farming, and the legacy of plantation slavery that the fertile soil enabled. Since the days of the transatlantic slave trade, the region has been home to a varying but always sizable percentage of the country's African American population. Today each of the states is at least 10% African American.

<sup>2</sup> Maryland and Delaware, at 30% and 22% African American respectively have for some time now passed more progressive policies and the African American vote has been essential to that reality.

## The Opportunity: Making the Future Come Faster

The South will become more progressive in the future: that is a demographic inevitability. However, the right wing's campaign to make the future come *slower* merits an equally persistent response from the left. We believe that the antidote to voter suppression is in our hands. Our research shows that **aggressive voter registration combined with inevitable demographic changes in the South can trump the effect of restrictive voter registration laws.**

### The Numbers

There are still millions of people of color in the South who remain unregistered to vote, and they represent an opportunity. As a snapshot, let's take a look at a number of Southern states, and consider what would happen if 60% of the currently unregistered voters of color were to get registered – and *then* vote at the relatively low rates that occur for other voters of color during midterm elections (a more conservative approach than looking at higher presidential-year turn out). Let's start with Georgia:

Georgia	
How many new voters if 60% of unregistered African Americans registered? / If they then turned out at 70.3% <sup>3</sup> ?	415,000/ 292,000
How many new voters if 60% of unregistered Latinos registered? / If they turned out at 62.2% <sup>4</sup> ?	71,000/ 44,000
How many new voters if 60% of unregistered Asians registered? / if they then turned out at 64.7% <sup>5</sup> ?	51,000/ 33,300
<b>Total new potential people of color participating in elections (after factoring in turnout rates)</b>	<b>369,200</b>

But would those 369,200 new voters impact progressive policies? One way that elected officials make policy decisions is to look at whether a certain voting bloc could make a difference in the next election. So let's compare this number to recent elections in Georgia:

<b>Total new potential people of color participating in elections</b>	<b>369,200</b>
<b>Average net margin of victory in last 3 gubernatorial elections</b>	<b>260,703</b>
<b>2012 presidential election margin of victory</b>	<b>258,821</b>

Clearly, an effective voter registration campaign targeting people of color and progressive whites has the ability to generate progressive change in Georgia. Now let's use that same formula and look at how it would impact two other Southern states, South Carolina and Virginia:

<sup>3</sup> Numbers are averages based on African American community during last two midterm elections in Georgia

<sup>4</sup> Numbers are averages based on Latino community during last two midterm elections in Georgia

<sup>5</sup> Numbers are averages based on Asian community during last two midterm elections in Georgia

<b>South Carolina</b>	
New voters if 60% of unregistered African Americans registered? / If turnout at 75.1%?	156,000/ 117,000
New voters if 60% of unregistered Latinos registered? / If turnout at 49.7%?	17,000/ 8,000
New voters if 60% of unregistered Asians registered? / If turnout at 61.9%?	N/A
<b>Total new potential people of color participating in elections</b>	<b>125,000</b>



<b>Average net margin of victory in last 3 gubernatorial elections</b>	<b>79,021</b>
2012 presidential election margin of victory	59,990

<b>Virginia</b>	
New voters if 60% of unregistered African Americans registered? / If turnout at 67.8%?	282,000/ 191,000
New voters if 60% of unregistered Latinos registered? / If turnout at 59.7%?	65,000/ 39,000
New voters if 60% of unregistered Asians registered? / If turnout at 46.0%?	61,000/ 28,000
<b>Total new potential people of color participating in elections</b>	<b>258,000</b>



<b>Average net margin of victory in last 3 gubernatorial elections</b>	<b>58,168</b>
2012 presidential election margin of victory	56,494

Again, registering a significant amount of unregistered voters of color could shake up state politics in a way that benefits the progressive community. See the appendix to this document for data on the remaining "Black Belt" states.

For a textbook case of how this could work, look to Florida in 2012. Leading up to the November 2012 election, Florida's governor and legislature passed a number of measures meant to restrict the African American vote. Though some non-profits responded by reducing their voter registration operations, a few major civil rights organizations doubled down, and succeeded in registering over 115,000 people in heavily black communities. President Obama wound up winning Florida by 73,000 votes.

We believe that this success is replicable, and that the Southern Elections Fund is uniquely positioned to help local organizations repeat it.

## How We Get There

We need to build an organization capable of creating much greater voter participation by people of color across the South, and thus greater progressive power. The success of this organization will be the result of four things: a clear plan, a strong team, the right tools, and the requisite financial resources.

### A Clear Plan

The Southern Elections Fund has completed an analysis of all of the Black Belt states, reviewing the numbers of unregistered voters of color, the margins of victory in key races, and the pace of demographic change. We are now at the stage where we are putting together state-by-state analysis to make determinations about the order in which investments should be made in state electoral programs and the speed at which this will begin to impact local, state and federal elections as well as progressive policy in state legislatures. Our goal will be to support and enhance local progressive power-building operations and organizations in Southern states, and to complement on-the-ground work with narrative-building and communications capacity on the national stage.

### A Strong Team

The team behind the Southern Elections Fund has decades of electoral experience as well as a commitment to civil rights in the South. This includes the following key team members:

**Ben Jealous (Board Chairman)** : Former President and CEO of the NAACP, President of the Rosenberg Foundation, Executive Director of the National Newspaper Publisher Association and director of the US Human Rights Program at Amnesty International. He led the NAACP during its largest and most successful voter registration drive in 2012 when the association registered over 360,000 African Americans.

**Julian Bond (Founder, Board Member)**: Julian Bond is Chairman Emeritus of the NAACP and a civil rights icon with experience building progressive power in the South. A co-founder of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Bond served as co-founder and first president of the Southern Poverty Law Center and served in the Georgia legislature for decades. In 1969, he founded the Southern Elections Fund to assist in electing progressive local and state-level candidates for office in the eleven states of the old confederacy. Between 1970 and 1975 the SEF contributed campaign funds and technical advice to over 800 candidates, 70 percent of whom were elected to office as part of a grass roots process that changed the nature and color of Southern politics.

**Marvin Randolph (President and CEO)**: A nationally recognized expert in voter registration, voter contact and Get Out The Vote operations, Randolph has worked on over 120 campaigns in 31 states. Past work includes: Senior Vice President for Campaigns at the NAACP; Director of Organizing and Politics at the Center for Community Change; DNC Political Mail Consultant at the Baughman Company; Western Regional Political Director, SEIU; Southern California Field Director, AFL-CIO Labor '98 Campaign; National Executive Director, 1994 Project Vote; and Managing Partner at Urbanomics Consulting Group.

**Andrew Wong (Board Member)**: Co-founder of PowerPAC.org and Vote Hope, Wong has run political campaigns since the mid-1980s beginning in the San Francisco Bay Area, electing people of color and gay community activists. His background in applied mathematics and computer data systems has enabled him to support numerous campaign infrastructures, including for Prop 54, targeting voters for effective campaigning by using a myriad of techniques for empowering niche constituencies.

**Steve Phillips (Board Member):** A pioneer in political innovation, Steve created the country's first Super PAC in 2007, and he is the founder and chairman of PowerPAC+, a social justice political network that was the first national group to back Senator Cory Booker and Texas gubernatorial candidate Wendy Davis. He serves on the Board of The Democracy Alliance, the country's largest network of progressive major donors.

**Jotaka Eaddy (Board Member):** As the former Senior Advisor to the President and CEO and Senior Director for Voting Rights for the NAACP, Eaddy has vast experience directing external affairs and strategic initiatives on a variety of issues. Most recently she has lead the NAACP's strategy to defend and expand access to the ballot box. Before working at the NAACP, Eaddy served as the Senior Field Manager for USAction and the USAction Education Fund, and also served as Domestic Program Director for the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty, among other roles.

**Derrick Johnson (Board Member):** Derrick Johnson serves as Founder and Executive Director of One Voice, Inc and State President for the Mississippi State Conference NAACP. He founded One Voice Inc. in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, in order to improve the quality of life for African Americans and other disenfranchised communities by increasing civic engagement in the formation of public policy. One Voice sponsors an annual Black Leadership Summit for elected and appointed officials and runs the Mississippi Black Leadership Institute, a nine month program to support local leadership development for emerging and established community leaders between the ages of 25 - 45.

**Stacey Abrams (Advisor):** Stacey Abrams is the House Minority Leader for the Georgia General Assembly and State Representative for the 89th House District. She is the first woman to lead either party in the Georgia General Assembly and is the first African-American to lead in the House of Representatives. In 2014, Abrams launched the New Georgia Project with the goal of registering 120,000 voters of color in Georgia in 2014, as well as building the organizational infrastructure to strengthen local groups working with voters of color. By the end of September, the New Georgia Project will have achieved its 2014 registration goals.

## The Right Tools

The Southern Elections Fund team has broad experience in modern voter registration and get out the vote tools, and has administered multi-million dollar election programs targeting people of color and progressive whites. We believe firmly that the following are some of the tools essential to a successful program in the South:

- A strong voter file with consistent frequent updates and accurate modeling on race and ethnicity.
- An effective direct mail voter registration program as this method of contacting important segments of the Rising American Electorate is now well researched and established.
- A paid field program in targeted neighborhoods with high population density.
- A commitment to evaluation and a data driven approach to all decision-making and resource allocation.

- Culturally sensitive voter engagement that addresses community norms and language preferences.

### Financial Resources and Sustainability

The Southern Elections Fund team has a long track record of raising significant funds for voter programs – both Jealous and Bond have years of experience raising significant funds from grassroots donors.

There is significant potential to engage donors and activists in this effort across generations, channels and communities, and the team has set a clear achievable goal of raising \$20 million by December 31, 2015.

These donations will be used for two purposes: first, for immediate investments in voter education and engagement; second, for long-term investments to create a sustainable fund. We’ve partnered with one of the most successful direct fundraising firms in the country to develop a sustainable investment plan. Below is a mock-up that indicates how an initial investment of \$4 million in a sustainable fund will help us maintain a source of income for years. By 2024 we will have an evergreen fund sustained by small grassroots donors.

2015 Investment	2015 Net Income	2015 Donors	2024 Net Income	2024 Donors	2024 Activists	% Net from Monthly Giving
\$3,758,364	(\$1,059,320)	64,208	\$9,852,288	364,568	2,371,429	67%

### The Bigger Picture

Though our focus at SEF will be on the ground in the South, we believe that this work will have national implications.

First, the ability to influence governors’ races in the next few years is crucial. We are only six years away from the next round of redistricting. We saw what happened in 2010 when right wing leaders were in charge of drawing district lines in many Southern states: as one example, 50% of the African American population in North Carolina was gerrymandered into 20% of the legislative and congressional districts. If we want to undo some of the damage and build the ability to pass progressive legislation, we will need to build progressive power in Southern states before the lines are redrawn again in 2020.

Second, if we build progressive power in the South, we can put more states in play for future presidential elections. We have already seen how changing demographics and increased African American voter turnout resulted in North Carolina, Florida and Virginia being in play in both 2008 and 2012. This increased competitiveness has two advantages: it opens up the electoral possibilities for a progressive president, and it also forces the right wing to invest resources in protecting these states.

## **Conclusion**

**It is possible to change the South, and thus to change our country. This change needs to begin now. Demographic trends in the South provide us with a real opportunity to shift the critical mass of the Southern electorate in a way that will result in the election of more progressive officeholders at all levels of government. This expansion of progressive power will not be limited to the South. More progressive federal officeholders from the South will make national change more likely and speed its arrival.**

**Why the Southern Elections Fund? Because our progressive future depends on it.**



## Appendix

The chart below shows how many potential new voters of color would be created in each Black Belt state if 30%, 60% or 90% of eligible voters of color were registered to vote. Data is provided for both presidential election year turnout rates and midterm election year turnout rates. All data comes from the report "True South: Unleashing Democracy in the Black Belt 50 Years After Freedom Summer", Center for American Progress, June 2014.

<b>Alabama</b>		Percent registered		
Average margin of victory: 145,460		30%	60%	90%
Presidential election year average	New black voters	73,600	147,100	220,700
	New black, Hispanic, and Asian voters*	76,700	153,500	230,200
Midterm election year average	New black voters	51,200	102,500	153,700
	New black, Hispanic, and Asian voters	53,900	107,900	161,800

  

<b>Arkansas</b>		Percent registered		
Average margin of victory: 100,425		30%	60%	90%
Presidential election year average	New black voters	31,400	62,800	94,100
	New black, Hispanic, and Asian voters	38,100	76,300	114,400
Midterm election year average	New black voters	23,900	47,800	71,600
	New black, Hispanic, and Asian voters	30,900	61,700	92,600

  

<b>Delaware</b>		Percent registered		
Average margin of victory: 106,979		30%	60%	90%
Presidential election year average	New black voters	10,900	21,800	32,800
	New black, Hispanic, and Asian voters	14,400	28,700	43,100
Midterm election year average	New black voters	9,700	19,300	29,000
	New black, Hispanic, and Asian voters	12,600	25,300	37,900

  

<b>Florida</b>		Percent registered		
Average margin of victory: 352,841		30%	60%	90%
Presidential election year average	New black voters	161,600	323,200	484,700
	New black, Hispanic, and Asian voters	354,800	709,700	1,064,500
Midterm election year average	New black voters	134,200	268,300	402,500
	New black, Hispanic, and Asian voters	301,700	603,500	905,200

<b>Georgia</b>		Percent registered		
Average margin of victory: 260,703		30%	60%	90%
Presidential election year average	New black voters	147,600	295,100	442,700
	New black, Hispanic, and Asian voters	200,100	400,200	600,300
Midterm election year average	New black voters	146,000	292,000	437,900
	New black, Hispanic, and Asian voters	184,600	369,200	553,900

  

<b>Louisiana</b>		Percent registered		
Average margin of victory: 302,916		30%	60%	90%
Presidential election year average	New black voters	61,000	122,000	183,000
	New black, Hispanic, and Asian voters	65,000	130,000	195,000
Midterm election year average	New black voters	46,400	92,800	139,200
	New black, Hispanic, and Asian voters	51,300	102,600	153,900

  

<b>Maryland</b>		Percent registered		
Average margin of victory: 106,429		30%	60%	90%
Presidential election year average	New black voters	74,100	148,200	222,300
	New black, Hispanic, and Asian voters	104,100	208,200	312,300
Midterm election year average	New black voters	82,800	165,600	248,400
	New black, Hispanic, and Asian voters	111,000	221,900	332,900

  

<b>Mississippi</b>		Percent registered		
Average margin of victory: 124,808		30%	60%	90%
Presidential election year average	New black voters	26,900	53,900	80,800
	New black, Hispanic, and Asian voters*	28,600	57,100	85,700
Midterm election year average	New black voters	39,300	78,700	118,000
	New black, Hispanic, and Asian voters	39,300	78,700	118,000

  

<b>North Carolina</b>		Percent registered		
Average margin of victory: 24,288		30%	60%	90%
Presidential election year average	New black voters	84,000	168,100	252,100
	New black, Hispanic, and Asian voters*	103,000	206,000	309,000
Midterm election year average	New black voters	91,400	182,700	274,100
	New black, Hispanic, and Asian voters	102,800	205,700	308,500

<b>South Carolina</b>		Percent registered		
Average margin of victory: 79,021		30%	60%	90%
Presidential election year average	New black voters	58,200	116,400	174,600
	New black, Hispanic, and Asian voters	62,100	124,300	186,400
Midterm election year average	New black voters	58,500	116,900	175,400
	New black, Hispanic, and Asian voters*	64,400	128,800	193,100

  

<b>Tennessee</b>		Percent registered		
Average margin of victory: 80,628		30%	60%	90%
Presidential election year average	New black voters	62,600	125,200	187,800
	New black, Hispanic, and Asian voters*	78,600	157,100	235,700
Midterm election year average	New black voters	54,300	108,500	162,800
	New black, Hispanic, and Asian voters	61,100	122,300	183,400

  

<b>Texas</b>		Percent registered		
Average margin of victory: 616,807		30%	60%	90%
Presidential election year average	New black voters	131,600	263,100	394,700
	New black, Hispanic, and Asian voters	629,100	1,258,200	1,887,300
Midterm election year average	New black voters	119,900	239,800	359,700
	New black, Hispanic, and Asian voters	392,300	784,700	1,177,000

  

<b>Virginia</b>		Percent registered		
Average margin of victory: 58,168		30%	60%	90%
Presidential election year average	New black voters	77,500	154,900	232,400
	New black, Hispanic, and Asian voters*	109,700	219,400	329,100
Midterm election year average	New black voters	95,600	191,100	286,700
	New black, Hispanic, and Asian voters	129,000	258,000	387,000

\* For populations with small sample sizes, nationwide turnout rates are used as a baseline.