

ON POPULARITY REVIVING IN SOUTH

President's Visit to 3 States and Republican Efforts

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The backslap against the press and the broadcasters is the severest since the civil rights movement of the nineteen-sixties.

Some of the unexpected beneficiaries of the Watergate scandal seem to be Governor George C. Wallace of Alabama. Apparently anticipating an eventual shift toward Mr. Nixon, Mr. Wallace has steadfastly refused to discuss Watergate, even privately. He has sat quietly in Monticello, and word of his inactivity came to him only last week when he was invited to the annual convention of the Citizens' Party.

Mr. Nixon, the conventional wisdom holds, is the South's best hope for the future. He has been the most popular man in the South since the end of the Vietnam war. He has been the most popular man in the South since the end of the Vietnam war.

When his national approval dropped to 45 per cent during the South's 1974 election, he still commanded 65 per cent in the South.

Change seems clear. Although no scientific polls have been taken in recent days, it is reasonably certain that his standing here has begun to erode again. A number of informal polls across the South have indicated a reversal of his declining popularity.

Radio station WJDX in Jackson, Miss., asked its listeners one day last week to call and say whether they favored Mr. Nixon's remaining in office. Of 177 callers, 340 said yes.

The Jackson Daily News printed a Page 1 column with a similar question and got an even higher return in Mr. Nixon's favor.

An informal poll by the Republican party in Fort Smith, Ark., last week showed Mr. Nixon with a solid majority in the state. A comparable poll by the Annual Banner gave Mr. Nixon a majority in Alabama and the Evening News a majority in Georgia.

Except in a few instances, they probably mean such as Alabama, where the state editor says the South has begun to turn heavily in Mr. Nixon's favor.

It is Mississippi's liberal moderates who are most worried about giving now, but our state contributors have increased 10 per cent since Watergate.

Nixon, there seems to be little evidence of permanent damage to state Republican parties in the South.

Watergate has had little effect on Republican candidates in the handful of elections in the South this year. The party lost the gubernatorial administration of Louisville, Ky., but kept the governorship of Virginia. It lost two mayors in small towns in Mississippi, but it gained two more.

The Republican state convention in North Carolina two weeks ago set a record of 100 per cent turnout. It was held in Raleigh, N.C., the state's capital. The Republican party of that state held its state convention in a field in North Carolina that a basketball court could hold.

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Leaders are active.

Refusing one reason for the party's past damage to the South is the rallying of state leaders in recent weeks. The governor of California, former Gov. John B. Ford of Texas, and George Bush of Texas, who is the Republican national chairman, have all made public visits to the South.

Sen. John Tower, Texas, has led a number of successful and highly diverse trips. One state party chairman, George Wallace of Oklahoma, has led a campaign to reverse President Nixon's lagging popularity in his state and now a number of other states are doing the same thing. Several new state parties are under way with support of Mr. Nixon.

"I went to 200 cities in just three weeks," Mr. Warner said of the President's popularity in his state after the beginning of his campaign. "We've turned it into an ongoing campaign. We're putting ads in the papers. We're having people write their congressmen. We're putting out the addresses of the television network presidents. It's really spreading. I've had letters from 25 states."

Another of reasons are offered to explain the apparent reversal of Mr. Nixon's and the Republicans' fortunes in the South.

"Southerners are stronger in their loyalties," said Jim Boyce, the Louisiana Republican chairman. "People down here stay. But the President," said Mr.

Patricia Dehan, the Mississippi Democratic national committee woman. "Southerners are used to having an authority figure."

The main reason for the reversal seems to be a renewed disenchantment of Southerners with the national news media. J. Wesley Watkins, a liberal Mississippi Democrat, traces it to the civil rights movement of the nineteen-fifties when white Southerners in large numbers lost faith in television network news and in national newspapers and magazines. Now, he said, when President Nixon says one thing and the news media say another, Southerners assume the President is right.

Anti-media feeling has risen strongly in recent weeks. Hundreds of letters to the editors of major newspapers sound like they are from the same Westmoreland in The Memphis Commercial Appeal last Sunday.

"It seems to me that the greatest reason for the decline is not so much an eroded Supreme Court or an ineffectual President as it is a disillusioned state and local leadership. The minds of the people of the South are still with the party, but too indifferent to look out themselves."

Analysis Continued

Television station WVEF in New Orleans reported that it logged 180 telephone calls last Saturday night after Mr. Nixon's appearance before The Associated Press Managing Editors meeting at Disney World, Fla. None of the callers criticized the President, the station said. All 180 of them assessed the "instant" analysis of Mr. Nixon's performance by correspondents of the Columbia Broadcasting System.

For months, reporters have tried without success to get Governor Wallace to comment on Watergate. Charles S. Underhill, chairman of the organizing Wallace campaign here, which apparently is a side of the 1976 presidential party, made a fairly firm defense of the President in an interview this week. That could be an indication of Mr. Wallace's recognition that Southern voters are ready to rally around Mr. Nixon.

Watergate should not overshadow the many, many things that Mr. Nixon has accomplished, such as expanding dealings with China and ending the Vietnam war, Mr. Underhill said.

Mr. Wallace's mail and other contributions have increased dramatically in recent months and some of that is due to Watergate, Mr. Underhill said. People are sending \$15,000 to \$20,000 a day to Mr. Wallace, he said.

One letter with a L. D. Pearson of Monterey Park, Calif., said "In view of Agnew, in view of Watergate, in view of the economy, etc., etc., here is yet another donation to encourage Governor Wallace and the campaign. He enclosed \$10."

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