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Southern Strategy all but Complete

White southern Democrats near extinction

(AP)—The white Southern Democrat — endangered since the 1960s civil rights era — is sliding nearer to extinction.

After this week's elections, the Democratic Party barely holds a presence in the region outside of majority-black urban areas such as Atlanta and Memphis. The carnage for the party was particularly brutal in the Deep South, where just one white Democrat survived across Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia and South Carolina.

The Republicans' effort to win over the South, rooted decades ago in a strategy to capitalize on white voters' resentment of desegregation, is all but complete.

"Right now in most of Dixie it is culturally unacceptable to be a Democrat. It's a damn shame, but that's the way it is," said Dave "Mudcat" Saunders, a campaign strategist for conservative Democrats such as Jim Webb of Virginia, one of the few remaining Southern Democratic senators.

The losses were particularly disappointing for the party after the baby steps it made in the South in 2006 and 2008, when it picked up a host of Republican-leaning House districts and won Senate seats in North Carolina and Virginia. Many thought the party had learned its lessons and had begun to reverse recent history by nominating conservative candidates who hit the right notes on divisive social issues such as abortion and smaller government.

None of it mattered last Tuesday.

Democrats didn't just see most of their recent gains obliterated, they lost at least 19 Southern House members and a senator, Blanche Lincoln of Arkansas. Even some of the most conservative Democrats such as four-term Rep. Jim Marshall



Rep. John Spratt, D-S.C.

of Georgia and 10-term Rep. Gene Taylor of Mississippi couldn't withstand the wave. It also snared such veterans as John Spratt of South Carolina, the 14-term chairman of the House Budget Committee, and 14-term Rep. Rick Boucher of Virginia.

When the new Congress convenes in January, there will be at most 16 white Southern House members out of 105 seats in Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, the Carolinas, Virginia, Tennessee and Kentucky. Two races in Virginia and Kentucky were still too close to call, so the total could be as low as 14.

The setback continues a four-decade decline for Democrats in the South, where they once dominated. The slide began after the civil rights movement, when Republicans under President Richard Nixon began employing a Southern strategy to retake the region by appealing to white anger over desegregation. The GOP later highlighted liberal Democratic positions on social and welfare issues.

Most of the losing Democrats this year were moderates representing Republican-leaning districts. And the challenges could get even tougher for Southern Democrats as legislatures begin redrawing congressional districts from the 2010 census.

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