

Profile a Race:

2014 Arkansas Gubernatorial Election

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Going into the 2014 General Election, it was time for the voters of Arkansas to elect a new governor. Gubernatorial elections in Arkansas are held every four years during the non-presidential Midterm Elections. Because the Arkansas State Constitution limits an individual from serving more than two terms as governor for life, current incumbent Democrat Mike Beebe was ineligible to run for reelection, making it an open seat. As a result, the Arkansas Governor's Mansion was "ripe for the picking" for both major parties. They saw this as an important opportunity to either maintain power or flip control of Arkansas' Chief Executive Office. In most cases, open seats like this one normally attract quality challengers that possess the resources and experience needed to run a competitive campaign. Subsequently, the Democratic and Republican Parties both nominated candidates that possessed the potential to win over the majority of Arkansas' electorate. Arkansas Democrats selected Mike Ross, while Republicans chose Asa Hutchinson.

This paper will provide an in-depth analysis of the 2014 Arkansas Gubernatorial Election. I will first examine the history of Arkansas' geographic constituency and present the current demographic composition of the state. Next, I will present the profiles and descriptions of the candidates competing in the race and how they were nominated in their respective party's primary election. Then, I will investigate the campaign strategies of both candidates and how they raised their campaign funds. Finally, I will assess the election results and compare them to the polling data that was furnished by pollsters leading up to Election Day. By writing this paper, I hope to provide scholars of political science a better understanding of the sequence of events that transpired in the 2014 Arkansas Governor's race.

Historically, Arkansas has always been dominated by the Democratic Party. V.O. Key, Jr. referred to the state as "Pure One-Party Politics."¹ It has been considered one of the most loyal

¹ V.O. Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, A new ed., Contributor Alexander Heard (Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 1984), 183.

states to Democrats. Since 1874, there have only been four Republican governors, including Winthrop Rockefeller and Mike Huckabee. However, Arkansas is home to conservative Democrats, especially on social and moral issues. As of the 1990s, 36% of Democrats considered themselves conservative.² Also, 78% of Democrats that were party activists supported prayer in public schools.³ Since the 1960s, conservative Democrats have been known to split-ticket vote, supporting Republicans for president and federal offices, while backing Democrats for state and local offices. As of recently though, the state has begun transitioning towards solid Republican control. According to Charles Bullock, 42% of Arkansas voters considered themselves Democrats back in 2000.⁴ This number declined to 31% by 2012.⁵ Republican presidential candidates have carried the state in every election since 2000.

Geographically, the state is divided into six major regions: the Ozarks, the River Valley, the Delta, the Central, the Ouachitas, and the Timberlands. The population of Arkansas is approximately three million people.⁶ White, non-Hispanics constitute 74% of the population, while blacks and Latinos only represent about 23%.⁷ A large plurality of the racial minority population is concentrated in the Delta and Timberlands regions. Republicans dominate in the Ozark Mountains, the Ouachita Mountains, and the River Valley (northwest & west) where the black population is small. In the Central region, the urban Little Rock area tends to be a Democratic stronghold, while Republicans typically command a strong reign in the suburbs. For any Democrat to win the state of Arkansas, he or she must form a biracial coalition of black and

² Diane D. Blair, "Chapter 1: Arkansas: Emerging Party Organizations," in *Southern State Party Organizations and Activists*, ed. by Charles D. Hadley and Lewis Bowman (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1995), 11-2.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Charles S. Bullock III, "Introduction: Politics in the South: Out of Step with the Nation Again," in *The New Politics of the Old South: An Introduction to Southern Politics*, 5th ed., edited by Charles S. Bullock and Mark J. Rozell (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 13.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ "State & County QuickFacts: Arkansas," *U.S. Census Bureau*, July 8, 2014, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/05000.html> (accessed November 30, 2014).

⁷ Ibid.

white voters, and he or she must target the eastern and southeastern parts of the state. With a small black electorate, a large proportion of the white vote is necessary for a Democratic victory.

Arkansas is a fairly poor state compared to the American average. The median household income is \$40,500, \$13,000 lower than the national average.⁸ 19% of the population lies below the poverty line, which is 4% higher than the national average.⁹ However, the state is overwhelmingly Protestant, with the Baptist denomination constituting the largest. As a result, many of Arkansas' citizens place social conservatism over fiscal progressivism. The state is also getting younger, with a quarter of the population represented by individuals less than eighteen years of age, compared with 15.4% of the population being older than sixty-five. This means 25% of the population isn't eligible to vote yet. Consequently, a contemporary candidate must target older voters until the young generation becomes eligible to vote.

Because the Democrats currently held the governorship, they needed to recruit a candidate that could easily win election in order to maintain power. The Democratic Party knew it couldn't afford to lose this valuable seat. Many names were circulated for the nomination, including former Congressman Mike Ross, Attorney General Dustin McDaniel, and former Lieutenant Governor Bill Halter. Initially, the frontrunner for the Democratic nomination was Dustin McDaniel. In early May of 2012, Mike Ross declined to run for governor and took a position as Senior Vice-President for Governmental Affairs and Public Relations at *Southwest Power Pool*.¹⁰ However, rumors started spreading that McDaniel had a sexual affair with Hot Springs lawyer Andrea Davis.¹¹ Consequently, McDaniel dropped out of the race in January of

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ "Mike Ross Says He Won't Run for Arkansas Governor," *The Associated Press*, May 14, 2012, <http://www.4029tv.com/Mike-Ross-Says-He-Won-t-Run-For-Arkansas-Governor/14696298> (accessed November 28, 2014).

¹¹ "Attorney General Dustin McDaniel dropping out of 2014 governor race," *The Associated Press*, January 25, 2013, <http://www.thv11.com/news/article/244965/2/AP-source-AG-McDaniel-dropping-out-of-gov-race> (accessed November 28, 2014).

2013.¹² Seeing that McDaniel had withdrawn from the race, Mike Ross resigned from his position at *Southwest Power Pool* and declared himself a candidate for governor in April of 2013. Bill Halter withdrew from the race early as well and endorsed Ross. One other Democrat filed to run against Ross, Lynette Bryant of Little Rock.¹³ However, she didn't have a lot of name-recognition or resources. She has lost every election she has ever filed to run in. In the Arkansas Primary held on May 20, 2014, Ross defeated Bryant with 84% of the vote, carrying every county.¹⁴

Mike Ross is probably one of the most interesting individuals still active in Arkansas politics. After graduating college, Mike married his wife, Holly, in 1983 and started a pharmacy with her.¹⁵ He served on the Arkansas State Democratic Executive Committee and as Lieutenant Governor Winston Bryant's Chief of Staff.¹⁶ In 1990, Ross was elected to the Arkansas State Senate, where he served until 2001. By 2000, Ross decided to run for the U.S. House of Representatives in Arkansas' 4th Congressional District. He defeated incumbent Republican Jay Dickey. As a Congressman, Ross was a member of both the *Committee on Energy and Commerce* and the *NATO Parliamentary Assembly*. He served a total of six terms in the U.S. House before choosing not to seek reelection in 2012.

Mike is known for being a very conservative Democrat, some even referring to him as an outcast within his own party. While serving in Congress, he was a member and co-chair of the Blue Dog Coalition, a small caucus of fiscally conservative Democrats.¹⁷ He fought against

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Roby Brock, "The Battle For Arkansas Governor," *Talk Business & Politics*, September 9, 2014, <http://talkbusiness.net/2014/09/the-battle-for-arkansas-governor/> (accessed November 29, 2014).

¹⁴ Mark Martin, "2014 Arkansas Preferential Primary Elections and Nonpartisan Elections: May 20, 2014," *Arkansas Secretary of State*, <http://results.enr.clarityelections.com/AR/51266/133405/en/summary.html> (accessed November 29, 2014).

¹⁵ Beth Hunt, "One-on-one with Mike Ross' wife Holly," *KATV 7*, October 30, 2014, <http://www.katv.com/story/27159938/one-on-one-with-mike-ross-wife-holly> (accessed November 29, 2014).

¹⁶ Roby Brock, "The Battle For Arkansas Governor," *Talk Business & Politics*, September 9, 2014, <http://talkbusiness.net/2014/09/the-battle-for-arkansas-governor/> (accessed November 29, 2014).

¹⁷ Richard G. Clemens, *Rescuing America: The Bipartisan Path* (Mustang, Oklahoma: Tate Publishing & Enterprises, 2007), 234-44.

wasteful spending and advocated for balancing the budget to reduce the national debt.¹⁸ One of his most memorable actions was his fight against the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare. He voted against the latest version of the bill when it came on the House floor.¹⁹ He also voted to repeal it as well. As a member of the Methodist community, Ross also holds a strong socially conservative platform. He is adamantly against gay marriage, and he voted in favor of a U.S. Constitutional Amendment banning it. Moreover, he is pro-life and an advocate against gun restrictions. He was given an A rating by the *National Rifle Association*.²⁰

On the right side of the aisle, the Republicans needed a candidate capable of overcoming the high popularity and approval ratings of the incumbent Democratic governor. Many names were tossed around, including U.S. House member Tom Cotton, Speaker of the Arkansas House of Representatives Davy Carter, State Representative Debra Hobbs, and former gubernatorial candidate Asa Hutchinson. Tom Cotton, however, chose to challenge Democrat Mark Pryor for the U.S. Senate seat. Speaker Davy Carter declined the offer to run for governor and took the position as CEO of Centennial Bank.²¹ Initially, Representative Hobbs filed to run for governor. But, due to the fact that she couldn't raise enough funds, she dropped out of the race and entered the race for lieutenant governor.²² Asa Hutchinson filed to run for governor and stayed in the race through its entirety, making him the only declared Republican at that time. However, many Tea Party Patriots thought Hutchinson was too moderate for the Republican Party and backed

¹⁸ Ibid., 256-63.

¹⁹ Roby Brock, "The Battle For Arkansas Governor," *Talk Business & Politics*, September 9, 2014, <http://talkbusiness.net/2014/09/the-battle-for-arkansas-governor/> (accessed November 29, 2014).

²⁰ "Mike Ross (Democratic Governor Challenger, district 4)," *OnTheIssues.org*, http://www.ontheissues.org/House/Mike_Ross.htm (accessed November 29, 2014).

²¹ Lance Turner, "Davy Carter Named Regional President of Centennial Bank, Will Oversee Liberty Bank Deal," *Arkansas Business Publishing Group*, July 9, 2013, <http://www.arkansasbusiness.com/article/93440/davy-carter-named-regional-president-of-centennial-bank-will-oversee-liberty-bank-deal> (accessed November 29, 2014).

²² Rob Moritz, "Republican candidate switches to lieutenant governor's race," *Arkansas News Bureau*, February 12, 2014, <http://arkansasnews.com/news/arkansas/republican-candidate-switches-lieutenant-governor-s-race> (accessed November 29, 2014).

another candidate to run against him, Curtis Coleman.²³ Coleman was the founder of a food safety company, and he ran for the U.S. Senate in 2010, losing in the Republican Primary.²⁴ When the Republican Primary for governor occurred on May 20, 2014, Hutchinson won in a landslide, receiving 73% of the vote and carrying every county, excluding Baxter County.²⁵

Asa Hutchinson has had a long career in public service. After graduating from law school and operating his own practice for some time, President Reagan appointed him as the U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Arkansas.²⁶ After two unsuccessful campaigns for U.S. Senate in 1986 and Attorney General in 1990, Hutchinson became the co-chair of the Arkansas State Republican Party.²⁷ In 1996, Congressman Tim Hutchinson (Asa's brother) of Arkansas' 3rd District decided to run for the U.S. Senate. In response, Asa ran for his brother's now open congressional seat and won.²⁸ While serving in Congress, President George W. Bush recommended a job for him. Subsequently, Hutchinson resigned and took the position as head of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration.²⁹ Asa went on to become the Undersecretary of Border & Transportation Security in the Department of Homeland Security.³⁰ By 2006, Asa Hutchinson made the decision to run for Governor of Arkansas and lost to Democrat Mike Beebe. Since his loss to Beebe, Hutchinson has been practicing law as an attorney.³¹

²³ Andrew Demillo, "Curtis Coleman Announces Bid for Arkansas Governor," *The Associated Press*, February 22, 2013, <http://www.memphisdailynews.com/news/2013/feb/22/curtis-coleman-announces-bid-for-arkansas-governor/> (accessed November 29, 2014).

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Mark Martin, "2014 Arkansas Preferential Primary Elections and Nonpartisan Elections: May 20, 2014," *Arkansas Secretary of State*, <http://results.enr.clarityelections.com/AR/51266/133405/en/summary.html> (accessed November 29, 2014).

²⁶ Roby Brock, "The Battle For Arkansas Governor," *Talk Business & Politics*, September 9, 2014, <http://talkbusiness.net/2014/09/the-battle-for-arkansas-governor/> (accessed November 29, 2014).

²⁷ Jay Barth, Diane D. Blair, and Ernie Dumas, "Chapter 6: Arkansas: Characters, Crises, and Change," in *Southern Politics in the 1990s*, edited by Alexander P. Lamis (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), 171, 173, 179.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 184-7.

²⁹ Roby Brock, "The Battle For Arkansas Governor," *Talk Business & Politics*, September 9, 2014, <http://talkbusiness.net/2014/09/the-battle-for-arkansas-governor/> (accessed November 29, 2014).

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Roby Brock, "The Battle For Arkansas Governor," *Talk Business & Politics*, September 9, 2014, <http://talkbusiness.net/2014/09/the-battle-for-arkansas-governor/> (accessed November 29, 2014).

There were also two third-party candidates that filed to run in the governor's race. The Libertarian Party nominated DeKalb Township Constable Frank Gilbert to challenge the two major parties.³² Because the Libertarians advocate for fiscal conservatism, their candidates tend to pull away a portion of the Republican vote. This was a problem for Asa Hutchinson. The other third-party candidate represented the Green Party. The Green Party selected Josh Drake as its candidate. Ironically, Drake previously challenged Democrat Mike Ross in 2008 for the 4th Congressional District seat. Ross won that election in a landslide. However, many liberal Democrats that thought Ross was too conservative for the party jumped ship and supported Drake. Josh Drake was the "thorn in the flesh" for Mike Ross. Both Hutchinson and Ross were threatened by alternative candidates that could possibly "steal" some of their voters.

Both major candidates operated similar, yet distinct campaigns. Beginning with Mike Ross's campaign, his strategy was mainly concentrated on attracting new voters. His campaign focused on registering new voters and micro-targeting unlikely voters using phonebanking and canvassing efforts.³³ Ross also pursued to attract the elderly voters by introducing a "Senior Bill of Rights," which made seven promises to seniors for things like affordable healthcare and food security.³⁴ Because there are more women in Arkansas than men, Ross promoted a plan to enforce equal pay for equal work.³⁵ Since the Democratic Party is known for owning the issue of education, Mike Ross labeled himself as the "Education Governor" on the campaign trail.³⁶ With

³² "Election 2014: Libertarian Frank Gilbert Announces Bid For Arkansas Governor," *Arkansas News Bureau*, October 17, 2013, <http://swtimes.com/news/politics/election-2014-libertarian-frank-gilbert-announces-bid-arkansas-governor> (accessed November 28, 2014).

³³ Roby Brock, "The Battle For Arkansas Governor," *Talk Business & Politics*, September 9, 2014, <http://talkbusiness.net/2014/09/the-battle-for-arkansas-governor/> (accessed November 29, 2014).

³⁴ Hunter Schwarz, "Arkansas Democrat proposes 'senior bill of rights,'" *The Washington Post*, August 8, 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/govbeat/wp/2014/08/08/arkansas-democrat-proposes-senior-bill-of-rights/>

³⁵ John Lyon, "Election 2014: Ross Unveils Equal-Pay Plan, Slams Hutchinson Over Apparent Plagiarism," *Arkansas News Bureau*, October 3, 2014, <http://swtimes.com/elections/election-2014-ross-unveils-equal-pay-plan-slams-hutchinson-over-apparent-plagiarism> (accessed November 28, 2014).

³⁶ "Mike Ross 'Shocked' by Asa Hutchinson's Response on Ross Becoming the Education Governor," *Nexstar Broadcasting, Inc.*, June 13, 2014, <http://www.arkansasmatters.com/story/d/story/mike-ross-shocked-by-asa-hutchinsons-response-on-r/77202/uW7vTuum4ku8X8b028oySw> (accessed November 28, 2014).

the promise of improving public schools and career technical education, teachers supported Ross and pledged their votes to him.

In the final month of the campaign, Ross did a lot of traveling around the state. He went on what he entitled the “Jobs First Tour.”³⁷ He visited several cities, including Dardanelle, Malvem, Jacksonville, and the Arkansas State University Mountain Home tech center.³⁸ On this tour, he promoted himself as a man that could reach across the aisle and accomplish bipartisanship because of his work with the Blue Dog Coalition.³⁹ Most of all, he emphasized how he was against outside money influencing state politics.⁴⁰ The Monday before Election Day, Ross made a trip to El Dorado to promote his agenda of improving education and cutting taxes.⁴¹ Many Democrats wanted Ross to campaign with Arkansas native-son Bill Clinton. However, Ross tried to stay away from Clinton as much as possible because Asa Hutchinson was the prosecutor during President Clinton’s impeachment.⁴²

From the Republican side of the aisle, Hutchinson harnessed a campaign that targeted social conservatives. Many of his television ads emphasized family values, including one that showed his granddaughter.⁴³ Although both candidates considered themselves pro-life, Hutchinson received the endorsements of both the *National Right to Life* and the *Arkansas Right to Life*.⁴⁴ Even though Ross received the endorsement of the *National Rifle Association* (NRA), Hutchinson has also been known for his support of the 2nd Amendment. Back in 2013,

³⁷ Joseph Price, “Mike Ross: ASUMH a model for state,” *The Baxter Bulletin*, October 15, 2014, <http://www.baxterbulletin.com/story/news/local/2014/10/14/mike-ross-visits-asumh/17275445/> (accessed November 28, 2014).

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Jeané Franseen, “Mike Ross Visits El Dorado for Last Minute Campaigning,” *Nexstar Broadcasting, Inc.*, November 3, 2014, <http://www.myarklamiss.com/story/d/story/mike-ross-visits-el-dorado/10350/svtIovlIM0yyhddwPhsY2Q> (accessed November 28, 2014).

⁴² Roby Brock, “The Battle For Arkansas Governor,” *Talk Business & Politics*, September 9, 2014, <http://talkbusiness.net/2014/09/the-battle-for-arkansas-governor/> (accessed November 29, 2014).

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Steven Ertelt, “Pro-Life Groups Back Asa Hutchinson for Governor in Arkansas,” *LifeNews.com*, September 12, 2014, <http://www.lifenews.com/2014/09/12/pro-life-groups-back-asa-hutchinson-for-governor-in-arkansas/> (accessed November 28, 2014).

Hutchinson led an effort supported by the NRA to have a 225-page school safety report passed that advocated having armed guards at every school in the United States.⁴⁵ This plan was called the “NRA National School Shield Initiative.”⁴⁶ Hutchinson also attempted to prime himself as the “Jobs Governor” with his support for tax cuts for businesses and corporations.⁴⁷ To counter the fact that Ross was calling himself the “Education Governor,” Hutchinson proposed a plan that would require all students in grade school to take a computer science course.⁴⁸

On the campaign trail, Governor Chris Christie and former presidential candidate Mitt Romney came to Arkansas and spoke on behalf of Asa Hutchinson.⁴⁹ Having these well-known and charismatic speakers come to the state attracted many citizens and possible donors to Hutchinson’s rallies. Hutchinson also spent the last month of the election season campaigning in the northwestern corner of Arkansas. Because this is the home turf of Mountain Republicans in Arkansas, Hutchinson made a smart move by energizing his base in this region. Some of the notable cities he visited included Bentonville, Rogers, Springdale, and Fayetteville.⁵⁰

Negative campaigning was utilized by both candidates. When it came to taxes, both Ross and Hutchinson attacked each other’s plans. Hutchinson proposed cutting \$100 million in income taxes for middle-class families.⁵¹ Ross felt this was too much too soon and would hurt

⁴⁵ Lucy Madison, “NRA ‘school safety’ plan calls for trained, armed school staff,” *CBS News*, April 2, 2013, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/nra-school-safety-plan-calls-for-trained-armed-school-staff/> (accessed November 28, 2014).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Roby Brock, “The Battle For Arkansas Governor,” *Talk Business & Politics*, September 9, 2014, <http://talkbusiness.net/2014/09/the-battle-for-arkansas-governor/> (accessed November 29, 2014).

⁴⁸ “Ross vs. Hutchinson: A Closer Look at the Gubernatorial Candidates,” *Nexstar Broadcasting, Inc.*, October 16, 2014, <http://www.nwahomepage.com/story/d/story/ross-vs-hutchinson-a-closer-look-at-the-gubernator/41687/h5UECH1oJ0iLvZg51PaE5Q> (accessed November 28, 2014).

⁴⁹ Alex Lazar, “Mitt Romney, Chris Christie To Campaign For Asa Hutchinson In Arkansas,” *The Huffington Post*, July 21, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/07/21/chris-christie-mitt-romney_n_5605974.html (accessed December 1, 2014).

⁵⁰ “Asa Hutchinson Campaigns in NWA,” *Nexstar Broadcasting, Inc.*, October 23, 2014, <http://www.nwahomepage.com/fulltext-news/d/story/asa-hutchinson-campaigns-in-nwa/28836/7iyJcWmWSUWIhEyjpa2MjQ> (accessed December 1, 2014).

⁵¹ Andrew Demillo, “Ross, Hutchinson get final digs in on tax cuts,” *The Associated Press*, October 20, 2014, <http://cnsnews.com/news/article/ross-hutchinson-get-final-digs-tax-cuts> (accessed November 28, 2014).

state programs.⁵² In response, Ross proposed cutting \$575 million in income taxes as the budget allowed; Hutchinson said it was too vague of a plan.⁵³ Ross went on to criticize Hutchinson for supporting the right of people and corporations to donate campaign contributions from outside the state, which Hutchinson believes is protected by freedom of speech in the U.S.

Constitution.⁵⁴ After Mike Ross proposed his equal pay for equal work plan, he accused Hutchinson for plagiarizing the sources in a paper released by his team.⁵⁵ With the support of the Republican Governors Association (RGA), Hutchinson ran television ads against Ross, attacking his voting record while serving as a U.S. Congressman.⁵⁶ The ads accused Ross of supporting big government spending, labeling him as a progressive liberal.⁵⁷ At the same time, they featured pictures of Ross with Nancy Pelosi and President Obama.⁵⁸ The RGA also asserted that Ross violated ethics laws when he sold his pharmacy back in 2007.⁵⁹ To counter these attacks, Ross assaulted Hutchinson's record when he worked at the Department of Homeland Security.⁶⁰ Moreover, Ross attacked Hutchinson in television ads, accusing him of claiming multiple homestead tax credits.⁶¹

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Joseph Price, "Mike Ross: ASUMH a model for state," *The Baxter Bulletin*, October 15, 2014, <http://www.baxterbulletin.com/story/news/local/2014/10/14/mike-ross-visits-asumh/17275445/> (accessed November 28, 2014).

⁵⁵ John Lyon, "Election 2014: Ross Unveils Equal-Pay Plan, Slams Hutchinson Over Apparent Plagiarism," *Arkansas News Bureau*, October 3, 2014, <http://swtimes.com/elections/election-2014-ross-unveils-equal-pay-plan-slams-hutchinson-over-apparent-plagiarism> (accessed November 28, 2014).

⁵⁶ Alexander Burns, "Arkansas governor race 2014: RGA goes after Mike Ross," *Politico, LLC.*, February 10, 2014, <http://www.politico.com/story/2014/02/mike-ross-arkansas-governor-race-103325.html> (accessed November 28, 2014).

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Andrew Demillo, "Ross, Hutchinson spar over tax cuts, ads in debate," *The Associated Press*, September 20, 2014, http://www.couriernews.com/view/full_story/25812907/article-Ross--Hutchinson-spar-over-tax-cuts--ads-in-debate-- (accessed December 1, 2014).

⁶⁰ Roby Brock, "The Battle For Arkansas Governor," *Talk Business & Politics*, September 9, 2014, <http://talkbusiness.net/2014/09/the-battle-for-arkansas-governor/> (accessed November 29, 2014).

⁶¹ Andrew Demillo, "Ross, Hutchinson spar over tax cuts, ads in debate," *The Associated Press*, September 20, 2014, http://www.couriernews.com/view/full_story/25812907/article-Ross--Hutchinson-spar-over-tax-cuts--ads-in-debate-- (accessed December 1, 2014).

When it came to campaign contributions, Mike Ross outraised Asa Hutchinson by a substantial amount. Ross raised approximately \$6.366 million.⁶² The largest industries that contributed to Ross included lawyers and lobbyists, health professionals, other political candidates, commercial banks, real estate, and crop production and farmers.⁶³ Ross received donations from companies like Madison County Telephone Company (\$16,000), AT&T (\$4,000), McDonald's (\$4,000), and Wal-Mart (\$4,000).⁶⁴ At the end of the month of July, Ross reported purchasing \$1.1 million worth of television airtime and had \$344,000 cash on hand.⁶⁵ Hutchinson didn't fare as well as Ross, only raising about \$4.541 million in total.⁶⁶ Like Ross, Hutchinson received a plurality of his campaign contributions from lawyers and lobbyists.⁶⁷ However, he received much of his contributions from gas and oil companies, investment firms, and construction contractors.⁶⁸ At the start of August, Hutchinson had bought \$485,000 worth of television airtime and had \$830,000 cash on hand.⁶⁹

Throughout the election season, the polls overwhelmingly suggested the race was lopsided heavily in favor of Hutchinson. Between February and December of 2013, the polls had Hutchinson leading by an average of approximately four points.⁷⁰ In the early months of 2014, Ross led several key polls: *Rasmussen Reports* +3, *Opinion Research Associates* +6, and *Talk Business Poll* +1.⁷¹ After April, however, Hutchinson began to widen the gap. Between April and

⁶² "Follow the Money: Mike Ross," *National Institute on Money in State Politics*, <http://www.followthemoney.org/entity-details?eid=22025551> (accessed May 13, 2015).

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Roby Brock, "Hutchinson, Ross Spending Money Down The Homestretch," *Talk Business & Politics*, August 15, 2014, <http://talkbusiness.net/2014/08/hutchinson-ross-spending-money-down-the-homestretch/> (accessed December 1, 2014).

⁶⁶ "Follow the Money: Asa Hutchinson." *National Institute on Money in State Politics*, <http://www.followthemoney.org/entity-details?eid=3938800> (accessed May 13, 2015).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Roby Brock, "Hutchinson, Ross Spending Money Down The Homestretch," *Talk Business & Politics*, August 15, 2014, <http://talkbusiness.net/2014/08/hutchinson-ross-spending-money-down-the-homestretch/> (accessed December 1, 2014).

⁷⁰ "Arkansas Governor- Hutchinson vs. Ross," *RealClearPolitics 2014*, http://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/2014/governor/ar/arkansas_governor_hutchinson_vs_ross-3726.html (accessed November 28, 2014).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

August, Hutchinson averaged a five point advantage over Ross. It wasn't until late August that Ross finally won a poll that was conducted by the *Rasmussen Reports*, in which he led by two points.⁷² From August until Election Day, almost every single poll had Hutchinson leading. Even the liberal leaning *Public Policy Polling* had Ross trailing by ten points in late October.⁷³ Overall, Hutchinson averaged an eight point lead over Ross going into Election Day.⁷⁴ Three polls conducted by *Opinion Research Associates* in the latter stages of the campaign recorded Ross leading by an average of three points.⁷⁵

When Election Day came on November 4, 2014, the polls were correct in predicting that Asa Hutchinson would win. However, they were way off in projecting how much Hutchinson would win by. On average, the polls suggested Hutchinson would win by around eight points.⁷⁶ To the contrary, Hutchinson ended up winning by fourteen points. In other words, Mike Ross stood no chance against the power of the Republican candidate. When all the ballots were counted up, Hutchinson received 470,429 votes to Ross's 352,115 votes.⁷⁷ The third-party candidates didn't spoil the election. When combined, Drake and Gilbert only accounted for three percent of the vote, not enough to sway the election one way or the other.⁷⁸ Most importantly, Hutchinson's 55% insured that he was the winner by an outright majority.

As expected, Ross carried every county in the eastern Delta region bordering Tennessee and Mississippi.⁷⁹ At the same time, Ross won a majority of the counties in the southern Timberlands region.⁸⁰ As mentioned previously, these areas have large concentrations of African-American voters. Moreover, Congressional Districts 1 and 4 encompass these regions

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Mark Martin, "November 4, 2014 Arkansas General Election and Nonpartisan Runoff Election Official Results," *Arkansas Secretary of State*, <http://results.enr.clarityelections.com/AR/53237/149537/Web01/en/summary.html> (accessed November 27, 2014).

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

where Ross performed the greatest. Pulaski County, home to Little Rock, was the essential epicenter for Ross. He received 71,804 votes there compared to Hutchinson's 53,050 votes.⁸¹ However, Ross performed very poorly in the Ozark and Ouachita regions, where Mountain Republicans maintain a strong majority. Hutchinson also earned a major chunk of his votes from the Central region, which surrounds the 2nd Congressional District and parts of the 1st. Saline, Garland, Faulkner, White, and Lonoke Counties awarded Hutchinson a substantial percentage of his overall total vote count.⁸² The northwestern corner of the state was a Republican stronghold for all statewide candidates. This corner is included in the 3rd Congressional District. Four counties in the 3rd Congressional District (Benton, Washington, Crawford, & Sebastian) contributed approximately 106,000 votes and 22.5% of Hutchinson's overall statewide vote total.⁸³

In conclusion, Democrats are currently struggling to stay afloat in Arkansas politics. Nominating a conservative, like Mike Ross, didn't even help Democrats to win the governor's race. With a small minority population and a strong conservative white voting bloc, the Democratic Party needs a plan for energizing its base and attracting unaffiliated voters. Did Ross really scare away and discourage many liberal Democrats with his conservative agenda? I don't believe this was the defining factor. In my opinion, fundamentals were the major catalysts that caused Democrats, like Mike Ross, to lose in Arkansas. With an unpopular Democrat serving as President of the United States, many citizens blame all of the country's problems on the incumbent president's political party. As a result, all Democrats down ballot suffer the consequences of a disliked president with an approval rating hovering in the mid to low 40s. Ross and other Arkansas Democrats bear the burden, even though they can't control what the president does or does not do. With national Democrats inching further and further to the left on

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

social and moral issues, Arkansas conservatives are flocking to the Republican Party. So, what does this all mean for the future of Arkansas politics?

With 25% of the population being under the age of 18, Arkansas Democrats and Republicans must find a way to woo over the young people when they join the electorate. Arkansas Democrats are going to need to find a way to separate themselves from the national party. Comparatively, they also must make inroads in attracting voters from the Ozark and Ouachita Mountains. With 22.5% of Hutchinson's overall vote coming from four counties in the Ozarks, it is imperative that Democrats reach out to Arkansas citizens in the northwest. Because the minority population is so small, Democrats can't just rely on the black electorate anymore. It's going to take moderating the entire state party's platform in order to lure in mountain conservatives. At the same time, Arkansas Republicans are going to have to moderate their platform as well for the future. Because the state has a poverty rate above the national average, Republicans will eventually need to embrace some fiscal populism. If they refuse to do this, conservative whites in poor, rural communities might turn against the Arkansas Republican Party. In summary, both parties in Arkansas are going to have to come towards the middle on the political spectrum to be successful for the future. Extremism from both sides of the aisle will likely anger and discourage Arkansas voters. If an unpopular Republican is elected as president in 2016, will this lead Arkansas voters to turn against the Republican Party?

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