To Brendan and Darcy Green
and
Abigail Shea
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Preface

The first edition of this book originated from research coordinated at the Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics in 1993. The second edition reflected the impact of the 1994 elections, and the present, third edition, reviews the effects of the 1996 campaign. From the beginning our goal was to bring together party scholars from around the nation to discuss changes in American party politics and new avenues of research. On each occasion, we have been privileged to field a “dream team” of contributors. And although the roster is a little different this time, the team is just as strong, including a mix of veteran and emerging party scholars. Taken together, the essays in this volume offer insight into the “state of the parties” as the twentieth century ends.

The development of this volume was greatly aided by the staff of the Bliss Institute. Kimberly Haverkamp was not only instrumental in corresponding with authors, compiling the chapters, and managing the layout, but has honed the unique skill of putting up with the editors—no simple task, to be sure. Also giving a hand at the Institute were Shay Nicholson, Janet Donavan, and Terry Cope. We owe a debt of thanks to Jennifer Knerr and her associates at Rowman & Littlefield. Finally, we would surely be remiss if we did not acknowledge our families, principally Lynn Green and Christine Gatto-Shea. Without their unwavering support and encouragement The State of the Parties would not have been possible.

John Green
Dan Shea
The State of the Parties at Century’s End

John C. Green and Daniel M. Shea

What is the state of American political parties? This question has been asked repeatedly by scholars for a long time, but especially as the century draws to a close. And with good reason: political parties are crucial linkages between the governed and the government, and strong parties are commonly regarded as a prerequisite for a healthy democracy. There is, of course, considerable disagreement over what constitutes party strength and a healthy body politic, particularly in the American system of divided and limited government. Like anxious physicians, scholars regularly take the pulse of party politics, looking for signs of both frailty and vitality, then debating the diagnosis and potential remedies. And there has been much to debate on both counts in recent times. Party politics has been especially volatile in the 1990s, and the 1996 election is part of the puzzle.

This book is one such exercise in pulse taking, the third in a series (Shea and Green 1994; Green and Shea 1996). Here a mix of established and emerging scholars consider the state of the parties in a variety of ways and from a number of perspectives. While this volume arrives at no firm conclusions (indeed, many of the participants would insist on their disagreements), it is safe to conclude that the state of the parties is in flux. However, unlike our previous soundings, signs of strength appear to outweigh indications of weakness. While this balance of evidence may be temporary and the illness far from cured, a new stage in party politics may be developing. The evidence from 1996 can be usefully reviewed under four headings: the party system, major party activities, minor parties, and party values and programs.

The Party System in 1996

The first part of this book considers the role of the parties in the broader political system, beginning with A. James Reichley’s overview of the state of the major parties after the 1996 election (chapter 2). To account for the
political instability of the 1990s, he offers a view of partisan eras based on sixty- to seventy-year "supercycles" instead of the more common thirty-year generational cycles. From this perspective, the 1990s represent the end of one such era, and the flux in party strength reflects the transition to another. Central to understanding this flux is the dramatic Republican victories in the 1994 midterm elections and the GOP's failure to extend these gains to the White House in 1996. Although the results of this transition are far from clear, Reichley believes the GOP still has the best chance of forming a durable governing coalition. However, he is more certain about the future of the two-party system: since the present instability has not challenged its institutional foundations, the next political era is likely to be characterized by a two-party structure. Thus, the state of the major parties may be weak, at least for the moment, but the state of the party system is strong.

The next two essays consider both aspects of Reichley's assessment, first the content of the major party coalitions, and then the institutional basis for the two-party system. Paul Beck takes a careful look at party coalitions in the mass public over the past forty years (chapter 3). In contrast to the 1950s, he finds two electorates in the 1990s, one highly partisan and evenly divided, and another nonpartisan and highly volatile. The behavior of these two electorates helps account for the instability of the 1990s: the partisan electorate makes national elections potentially close, but the nonpartisan electorate makes dramatic vote swings possible. Beck finds the sources of these two electorates in the decline of public support for the Democrats and the absence of comparable Republican gains, and he identifies four groups (women, African Americans, southerners, and white fundamentalist Christians) as critical to these changes. The result has been a weakened state of partisanship in elections, a fact that presents party organizations with difficult challenges. Beck agrees with Reichley that one of the major parties may resolve this instability in the near future, but it is also possible that this instability will characterize the next political era.

David Ryden (chapter 4) considers challengers to the institutional structure of the two-party system in the form of recent Supreme Court decisions. In 1996, the Court issued three rulings with important implications for the legal foundations of the two-party system, which Ryden dubs "the good, the bad, and the ugly." One case changed the federal campaign finance laws to allow party committees to spend unlimited amounts of money in the form of independent expenditures. Another case upheld antifusion laws to the detriment of minor parties. Yet another case applied the Voting Rights Act to intraparty rules. While these decisions had an impact on the 1996 campaign (see chapters 5, 6, and 11), they may have an even greater impact in the future. Thus, the state of the two-party system may be altered as the next political era begins.
The second part of the book considers major party activities with a special focus on 1996. John Bibby (chapter 5) details the state of the major party organizations. He finds that the national party organizations have continued to gain strength as service agencies for their candidates, with several important developments. First, a heightened integration of national and state party organizations occurred in support of the national campaign. Second, there was an increase in the campaign efforts of interest groups allied with the major parties and a continued expansion of networks of issue-oriented activists within the major parties. Thus, the parties enjoyed an unusual degree of organizational cohesion and ideological differentiation in 1996. These tendencies made the parties especially important factors in the campaign and perhaps in the future as well. Parties have become very effective "vote maximizers" in campaigns but are also perhaps potent "policy maximizers" in government. So, the state of major parties is strong in both an organizational and ideological sense. Indeed, party politics in the next political era may revolve around the tensions between these strengths.

The remaining chapters in this section expand on these themes. Paul Herrnson and Diana Dwyre consider a new role for party organizations in congressional campaigns (chapter 6). They argue that a new "postreform" era of congressional campaigns began in earnest in 1996. The parties took advantage of a Supreme Court ruling (see chapter 4) to spend unusual amounts of money in support of their candidates (see chapter 5). Such "issue advocacy" allowed the parties to play an enhanced role in setting the agenda and tone of the campaigns—at the expense of the candidates themselves and in violation of the spirit, if not the letter, of the prevailing campaign finance laws. Herrnson and Dwyre conclude with a case study of party issue advocacy in 1996 and find that there was little substantive difference between these efforts and candidate communication, despite legal distinctions to the contrary. Thus, the state of parties in campaigns is likely to be strengthened in the future, with both negative and positive possibilities.

John C. Green, John S. Jackson, and Nancy Clayton consider the role of networks of issue-oriented activists in 1996 (chapter 7), employing surveys of party elites and partisans in the mass public. These data reveal stark differences between Democratic and Republican elites on a host of issues and overall a greater degree of polarization than in 1992. At the same time, party elites have far stronger and consistent views than their public constituents, with Democrats being markedly more liberal and Republicans more conservative. These differences are especially sharp when compared with nonvoters (see chapter 3). Interestingly, it is cultural factors, such as gender, race, region, and religion, rather than traditional economic differences that generated the polarization between party elites and between elites and the public.
Party elites staked out clear and consistent positions in 1996—even though their candidates and publics did not always follow.

The remaining chapters also describe signs of vitality in state and local parties. Noah Goodhart (chapter 8) surveys the use of modern information technology, from databases to the Internet, in state parties. He finds the use of computers to be widespread and that the major parties have fit these new technologies into traditional strategies: the Republicans focus on fund-raising and the Democrats on volunteer recruitment. John Frendreis and Alan Gitelson (chapter 9) show that local political parties were alive and well in 1996, performing many traditional grassroots activities. They find local parties to be “spokes in a candidate-centered wheel” and a major area of party innovation. Melanie Blumberg, William Binning, and John Green (chapter 10) offer a case study of the Democratic Coordinated Campaign at the local level, revealing the value of local parties even in presidential campaigns. Many local parties were clearly an integral part of the 1996 campaign, and their activities may be harbingers of the next partisan era.

Minor Parties in 1996

The third part of the book concerns minor parties in the two-party system. One of the interesting aspects of the 1996 campaign was the founding of the Reform Party by Ross Perot. To many observers, the Perot campaigns in 1992 and 1996 were signs of major party weakness and indications of major changes in the next political era. Theodore Lowi (chapter 11) argues that the Reform Party can be an instrument for not just revising the political order but replacing the two-party system. He first presents the case against the two-party system and in favor of a “more responsible three-party system.” Then he shows how a genuine “third” party would have a beneficial impact on national politics. Achieving this end will not be easy, however, and in the final part of the chapter, Lowi offers some pointed advice to the Reform Party—literally. The primary goal of a third party, he suggests, is to undermine the “two-party monopoly.” A crucial weapon in this struggle will be litigation aimed at undermining the legal substructure of the major parties (see chapter 4). Here Lowi strongly disagrees with Reichley’s assessment about the durability of the two-party system as well as many of the signs of party strength observed elsewhere in this book (see chapter 15).

Does the Reform Party have the means to follow Lowi’s advice? Walter Stone, Ronald Rapoport, Patricia Jaramillo, and Lori Weber explore this question with their survey of Reform Party activists (chapter 12). They argue that a crucial resource for the Reform Party is its activist corps, which they describe in some detail and compare with major party activists. Their findings suggest considerable potential. However, Reform Party activists face
State of the Parties at Century's End

some serious hurdles, including replacing Ross Perot as their standard­
bearer, differentiating themselves from the Republican Party on critical is­sues, and competing effectively at the subnational level. Meeting these chal­lenges will determine whether the Reform Party is a permanent force in the
next party era or just part of the transition to it.

The Reform Party was hardly the only minor party active in 1996. In
fact, the 1990s have seen a dramatic increase in minor party activity across
the political spectrum. John Berg describes the most active minor parties in
1996, including the Libertarian Party, the Green Party, the Natural Law
Party, the New Party, the National slate of Independent Progressive Can­
didates, and the Labor Party (chapter 13). These parties and their candidates
collectively had a considerable constituency in 1996, as Christian Collet and
Martin Wattenberg demonstrate in their study of the electoral impact of
minor party and independent candidates (chapter 14). They find that these
“alternative” candidates are strategic in their behavior and that support for
such candidates is significant and persistent in many local areas. Taken to­gether, the chapters in this section suggest that at least some Americans want
a more diverse and principled party system.

Major Party Values and Programs

The final part of this book concerns party values and programs, with an
emphasis on the impact of the major parties on the government. Gerald
Pomper begins with a provocative argument: the United States is developing
the equivalent of a parliamentary system in government (chapter 15). This
trend results not from formal constitutional changes but from the develop­
ment of hallmarks of parliamentary government, such as meaningful party
programs that overcome separation of powers, reasonable attempts to carry
out such programs by cohesive legislative leaders, and the involvement of
these leaders in campaigns and the recruitment of candidates for the execu­
tive. Pomper then demonstrates that in the 1990s the major parties have by
and large fulfilled these functions. Perhaps the strongest evidence regards
party programs, including the 1996 party platforms, the Republican “Con­
tract with America” and the Democratic “Families First Agenda.” This kind
of party “responsibility” has been rare in the United States, and its presence
may well signal the beginning of a new party era, bringing together organi­
zational prowess and ideological polarization. Certainly, it suggests that the
major parties are increasingly characterized by principle (see chapter 7), the
very thing that minor party activists demand (chapters 11 and 13).

Programmatic parties do not please everyone, however, even among
their own officeholders, as Robin Kolodny (chapter 16) shows in her study
of moderate party factions in the House of Representatives. The Tuesday
Group of liberal Republicans and The Coalition of conservative Democrats attempt to interject diverse views into an increasingly “parliamentary” Congress. These tensions raise a question: what do legislative parties mean to the participants? Samuel Patterson and Roger Scully (chapter 17) offer an answer in their study of the Ohio state legislature in the 1990s. They find that legislative partisanship is strongly informed by members’ ideology, and all the essential ingredients for “party government” are present in a fairly typical state legislature. So, the ideological differentiation that characterizes national party activists and the Congress may now be appearing in subnational government.

But can legislative programs survive the crucible of candidate-centered campaigning? Thomas Little offers evidence that perhaps they can (chapter 18). He reviews the fate of state legislative candidates in 1996 who offered state-level versions of the Contract with America in 1994. Republican legislators who had been elected under the aegis of a “contract” did not suffer at the polls, and the smaller number of state Republicans who developed “contracts” in 1996 did fairly well. This evidence suggests that under the right electoral conditions, something like “responsible parties” can compete successfully in the American system. Robert Boatright explores this same ground from the perspective of challenging congressional candidates in 1996, arriving at somewhat different conclusions (chapter 19). Some of these candidates valued their party for pragmatic reasons, as a source of votes or money, and others stressed issues and ideological coherence. Ironically, electoral success was most closely associated with pragmatism and poor outcomes with ideology, which suggests that depending on the circumstances, parties may be “vote maximizers” or “policy maximizers.”

John Coleman also examines this tension between candidates’ desires to maximize votes and party coherence on policy matters (chapter 20). He points out that from a strictly self-interested perspective, candidates frequently have incentives to distance themselves from their parties, particularly when the parties are highly polarized as in 1996. A chief vehicle for this differentiation is campaign spending. Coleman presents some evidence that supports this tendency: the public does indeed differentiate House candidates from their parties. But he also finds that the effects of campaigning are limited, especially where incumbent members of Congress are concerned. In 1996 at least, incumbent candidates rarely succeeded in disguising or distorting their record by means of campaign spending. An incumbent’s record apparently left a strong impression with voters that was not easily changed. In contrast, challenger spending did appear to have the capacity to distort the incumbent’s position and, presumably, the challenger’s own position vis-à-vis his or her party. These findings suggest that candidate-centered politics is not necessarily inconsistent with party responsibility. This pattern
may be especially true when party politics produces high levels of ideological polarization, as in the mid-1990s.

Unanswered Questions

In sum, the research presented here suggests that the state of the parties is in flux, as one might expect of linkage institutions in a period of change. Within this volatile mix are potent signs of strength: party organizations are increasingly capable and cohesive, ideologically distinct and coherent, and given to programs that can discipline both leaders and followers in government. Indications of weakness are also evident. For one thing, the major parties do not have the same type or level of influence they had a generation ago, even though they are key players in national politics. There is considerable disarray within the major party coalitions, from Bill Clinton’s strategy of “triangulation” to the disputes in the Republican Congress. The extensive work of party organizations seems to have resonated with fewer voters than in the past, with the nonpartisan and even antipartisan portion of the electorate growing. Most voters do not see aggressive parties as a good thing, regularly telling pollsters that the major parties are “part of the problem” rather than “part of the solution.” In this context, both the courts and minor parties threaten to reshape the two-party system.

These conclusions beg four questions central to any full diagnosis of the state of the parties and future prescriptions:

- What will the next political era look like? Will the next partisan era be characterized by a dominant and subordinate party in the context of two-party system? Or will the present volatility characterize the next party era?
- Will the increased organizational and ideological strength of the major parties eventually strengthen the role of partisanship in elections? Will expanded party activities increase political participation by the citizenry? If so, when and how? Will these efforts support greater policy coherence in government?
- How will the system cope with the challenge of minor parties? Will these efforts produce viable parties in the next political era, fundamentally altering the two-party system? Or will the constituencies of minor parties be integrated into the major parties?
- Is the increased policy coherence of the parties a passing phase or a long-term phenomenon? Will responsible parties create the functional equivalent of parliamentary government, or will candidate-centered politics eventually undermine these trends?
The Future of the American Two-Party System after 1996

A. James Reichley

The first edition of *The State of the Parties* included a chapter I wrote on the two-party system that concluded with the prediction “The most likely next major change in national politics, probably in a term or two, is a strong swing to the Republicans, potentially for an extended period” (Reichley 1994: 26).

The voters, it turned out, were well ahead of me. Only one year later, in the midterm election of 1994, the Republicans won control of the United States House of Representatives for the first time in forty years, regained the Senate majority they had lost in 1986 after a six year Reagan-era tenure, and made large increases in their share of state and local offices all across the nation.

Two years later, however, the swing to the Republicans appeared to lose momentum. Contrary to general expectations after the 1994 election, President Clinton decisively won a second term, and the Republican majority in the House was reduced. Had the potential realignment I had predicted been halted, reversed, or merely delayed? Or did realignment actually happen in 1994, with control of the presidency a lagging indicator, as some analysts now maintain (Tuchfarber et al. 1997)? Or are the scholars who argue that the concept of realignment is no longer functional for understanding American politics after all correct (Ladd 1991; Shafer 1991)?

I think we should first recognize the truly volcanic nature of the 1994 election. The significance of the Republican sweep of the South, continuing and growing at the state and local levels in 1996, has received wide attention. The dimension of Republican successes elsewhere in the nation has been less noted. In the industrial states of the Midwest, the old heartland of the Republican Party, Republican governors were reelected by astonishing majorities: 72 percent in Ohio, 62 percent in Michigan, 64 percent in Illinois, 67 percent in Wisconsin, and 63 percent in Minnesota. By smaller margins, Republicans held the governorship of California (written off as a probable
Democratic pickup a few months before the election), and won gubernatorial chairs previously held by the Democrats in the eastern industrial bastions of New York and Pennsylvania (added to New Jersey, which Republican Christine Todd Whitman had captured the year before). The number of state legislative houses controlled by the Republicans rose from thirty-three to forty-nine.

The 1994 election was truly a party election—something we have rarely witnessed in the United States in recent years. All across the country, swing voters were casting ballots for Republicans because they were Republicans—or against Democrats because they were Democrats—in contests for congressional, state, and even local offices. The vaunted advantages of incumbency, which many analysts had predicted would keep the House of Representatives Democratic for elections as far as the eye could see, were, though by no means negligible, insufficient to withstand forces working for partisan change.

I do not, however, agree with Alfred Tuchfarber and his colleagues that the 1994 election in itself represented critical realignment—which in my definition requires control of the presidency and meaningful change in policy direction, as occurred after the 1860 and 1932 elections, as well as control of Congress. If the Republicans had not taken over Congress in 1995, the pent-up force of dissatisfaction with the Democrats would probably have exploded in 1996, carrying the presidency and both houses of Congress solidly into Republican hands. As James Ceaser and Andrew Busch (1996) have convincingly argued, Clinton’s reelection would probably not have been possible without the Republican victory in 1994 and subsequent reaction against the Republican congressional leadership. But Clinton’s success in raising doubts about the Republicans within only a single congressional term seems to support the contention that we are now in a period of short-lived shifts back and forth across the political spectrum, rather than of stable realignment.

This does not mean that the Tuchfarber thesis is wholly wrong. The change that has taken place in the South is massive, deeply rooted, and probably irreversible (although the growing impact of Hispanic voters in Texas and Florida could critically alter trends in those key states, about which more later). As Thomas Cavanaugh (1997) and others have shown, trends toward realignment in other parts of the country, though less pronounced and perhaps less enduring, are acquiring consistency over time and across offices (Abramowitz and Saunders 1997; Niles 1997). The crucial question now before us is whether these shifts outside the South may yet come together to produce a lasting and historically significant realignment, or whether they are mere squalls in an increasingly unstable and unpredictable climate of continuing dealignment.

In this chapter on the future of the American two-party system after
1996, I will first briefly review whether American politics is likely to retain its two-party character (atypical though not unique among the world’s democracies) and whether the two major parties will remain the Republicans and the Democrats, as they have been since the Civil War; and then turn to discussion of whether one or the other major party will become normally dominant, as has sometimes happened for extended periods (though not recently) in our history.

A Durable System

Political scientists, journalists, and practicing politicians in recent years have often buried, or at least downgraded, parties as decisive actors in American politics (Polsby and Wildavsky 1988; Fiorina 1992; Phillips 1993; Keefe 1994). Considerable evidence supports this view. About one-third of voters now tell pollsters they regard themselves as political independents—up from 15 percent in 1942. A national survey in 1996 found 71 percent saying they usually split their tickets (vote for candidates of different parties for different offices), compared with 42 percent in 1942 (Dougherty et al. 1997: 91). The old patronage-based state and local party machines that used to play a dominant role in politics, at least in the Northeast and Midwest, are almost everywhere in ruins. The news media, interest groups, and political consultants have taken over many of the functions that used to be performed by parties. The startling 19 percent of the popular vote won by Ross Perot in 1992 was rightly interpreted as a sign of the declining appeal of the two traditional major parties.

Yet parties have endured. Party identification is still by far the best predictor of how voters will cast their ballots in most elections. Parties continue to supply most of the workers who do such political chores as stuffing envelopes, organizing rallies, distributing yard signs, serving as poll watchers, and driving voters to the polls on election day. Since Ronald Reagan was elected president in 1980, party unity on roll-call votes in Congress has steadily risen (partly as a result of reduction in the ranks of conservative southern Democrats and progressive northeastern Republicans). Parties have become more ideologically consistent, and voters are better able to identify parties with distinct ideologies (Abramowitz and Saunders 1997; Niles 1997). In contrast to the old one-party South, most states now maintain genuinely competitive party systems. National party organizations, including congressional campaign committees, have hugely increased their fund-raising and spending for party candidates.

We clearly are not going back to the condition of the late nineteenth century when the major parties were like great popular armies, almost churches, which fought in well-drilled and enthusiastic ranks in each campaign. There
American Two-Party System after 1996

is no reason for complacency among those who believe that strong parties make an essential contribution to democracy. But parties of some kind will continue to play important roles in national and state politics.

Will the United States, however, continue to operate under a predominantly two-party system? Most democratic polities, even in relatively homogeneous countries such as Sweden and the Netherlands, have tended to divide into three or more major parties. Maurice Duverger pointed out years ago (in his formulation known as Duverger’s law) that polities that maintain single-member, first-past-the-post systems of election, principally the United States and Britain and its dominions, tend to foster the development of two major parties. Systems including two rounds of election or using some form of proportional representation tend to produce a multiplicity of parties (Duverger 1954: 217).

Even polities such as Britain, Canada, and Australia, however, which, like the United States, use the first-past-the-post system, have generally had at least one significant minor party represented in parliament alongside the two major ones. Why have enduring minor parties with significant impact been so rare in the United States?

I have argued that American politics has usually been formed, at least loosely, around two great ideological traditions, which I have called the republican tradition and the liberal tradition. These are, roughly, the tradition descended from Alexander Hamilton and represented since the Civil War by the Republican Party on one side, and the competing tradition descended from Thomas Jefferson and represented since the time of Andrew Jackson by the Democratic Party on the other (Reichley 1992: 3–6). In this sense, a two-party system is thus natural to our politics.

I do not doubt, however, that without the shaping influence of electoral institutions, the political system of a nation so large and so economically and culturally diverse as the United States would long since have produced a substantial number of competing parties. The first-past-the-post system pushes us toward a two-party system. But the thing that really has kept this system locked in place has been the institution of the electoral college for selecting presidents.

Quite contrary to the Founders’ intention, the electoral college, as long as most states retain the at-large system for choosing electors (not required by the Constitution), effectively limits the presidential candidates with a real chance of winning to the nominees of the two major parties (or at least has done so since 1860). Ross Perot’s 19 percent of the popular vote did not earn him a single vote in the electoral college. This system even makes it improbable that a minor party could hold the balance of power between the two major parties, as has sometimes occurred in Britain and Canada. Constitutional change to eliminate the electoral college would entail a political effort that is unlikely to be forthcoming—at least until the winner in the popular
vote loses in the electoral college, as occurred several times in the nineteenth century and almost happened in 1976.

The high visibility of the presidential election shapes our entire political system. As long as the electoral college confines the real presidential competition to the candidates of the two major parties, the United States will probably continue to have a two-party system in most congressional and state elections.

This point does not, however, necessarily mean that the two major parties will continue to be the Republicans and the Democrats. Even in countries with institutionally fortified two-party systems, new parties have at times displaced one of the major existing parties, as the Republicans did the Whigs in the United States in the 1850s and the Labour Party did the Liberals in Britain in the 1920s.

It has seemed anomalous to many observers that the United States has never had a true left-wing party in the European sense, and some have predicted that the Democrats will eventually break up and give way to a socialist successor. The worldwide decline of socialism in recent years has perhaps made this less likely, but there is still the possibility that intraparty revolt against an unpopular centrist Democratic president might produce a serious break-away party on the left. On the other side, at low ebbs of the Republican Party, such as 1964 and 1976, some conservatives have proposed abandonment of the Republican label and creation of a new national conservative party. And there is recurring sentiment among the electorate that what we really need is a new centrist party, divorced from the extremes of the Republicans and Democrats, which Perot to some extent tapped in 1992 and 1996.

The difficulties of forming a new major party, nevertheless, are formidable. Perot, running as the candidate of his largely self-created third party in 1996, received 8.5 percent of the popular vote—still impressive, but less than half of his showing as an independent in 1992. It is no accident that no enduring new major party has emerged in American politics for more than 130 years. The existing major parties have proven adept at picking up issues attracting support to new parties, as the Democrats did with the Populists in the 1890s, the Republicans and the Democrats with the Progressives in the 1910s, the Democrats with various labor and socialist minor parties, and the Republicans with various states’ rights parties.

The representatives of the two major parties have taken pains to enact election laws that strongly favor major party candidates. Public financing of presidential election campaigns heavily advantages the Republican and Democratic nominees. At the state level, barriers against third-party candidates are even more severe. In Pennsylvania, for example, major party candidates for the state senate need only two thousand signatures on petitions to get their names on the ballot, whereas minor party candidates require twenty-nine thousand (reduced from fifty-six thousand by court order).
A major national disaster or conflict might lead to the creation of a new major party, as the struggle over slavery gave birth to the Republicans in the 1850s. Barring such a catastrophe, it is probable not only that we will continue to have a two-party system but also that the Republicans and Democrats will be the main competitors. After all, even the Great Depression of the 1930s failed to put enduring cracks in the existing two-party system, though for a time it spawned some successful third parties at the state level, such as the Farmer-Labor Party in Minnesota and the Progressives in Wisconsin.

Throwing the Rascals Out

Let us, then, concentrate on the two-party system as we know it and consider what appear to be its operational characteristics, particularly those that may give some clue to our likely political future. We still really do not have very extensive spans of experience for studying the long-range behavior of democratic party systems (two-party or otherwise): about two centuries in the United States and Britain; somewhat less in France, some countries of northwestern Europe, and the British dominions; only since World War II in Germany, Italy, Japan, and most of the other democracies; and only nine or ten years in Eastern Europe and the countries of the former Soviet Union.

Nevertheless, some characteristics of the electoral effects of party competition seem discernible. First, there seems to be a tendency for voters to grow disenchanted with a party in power, even if no major disasters occur, after eight to ten years. The normal result is for the incumbent party to be voted out, often by a large majority, and the former opposition installed. This tendency may be countered or outweighed by special circumstances, as when the fear of including Communist parties in government in France and Italy kept conservative parties in power for extended periods; or when voters' distrust of the opposition or lack of a fully developed party system produced long-lasting dominance by one party, such as the Socialists in Sweden from the 1930s to the 1970s, Labor in Israel from independence to the early 1970s, the Congress Party in India from the 1940s to the 1970s, the Liberal-Democrats in Japan from the 1950s to 1993, and the Party of Institutional Revolution (PRI) in Mexico during most of the twentieth century. Even in these instances, however, accumulation of voter discontent and stagnation or corruption within the incumbent party eventually led to change, or at least interruption, of party control.

The operation of the ten-year cycle appears particularly pronounced in countries with two-party systems, probably because this system inhibits formation of new coalitions through which incumbent parties sometimes are
able to hold onto power under multiparty systems. In the United States, the normal incumbency span translates into two or three presidential terms. From the 1950s to the 1990s, the Republicans and Democrats regularly alternated in control of the White House, with three two-term spans, one three-term (the Reagan-Bush years), and one that was confined to a single term (Carter).

Going back somewhat further, since the present party system was formed in the 1850s, the average duration of party control of the White House has been eleven years. The only markedly longer periods of party domination were the twenty-four-year tenure of the Republicans during and after the Civil War, and the twenty-year period of Democratic supremacy during and after the Great Depression.

Similar cycles appear to operate for the governorship in states with competitive two-party systems. In the seven most populous states with truly competitive systems, the average period of party control of the governorship from 1950 to 1996 was 8.7 years. In Pennsylvania, Ohio, and New Jersey, the two parties alternated in control of the governor's office with almost rhythmic regularity. In New York, Illinois, and Michigan, parties tended to hold gubernatorial dominance for somewhat longer periods, but alternation nevertheless occurred. In California, the two parties exchanged control of the governorship every eight years until Governor Pete Wilson in the 1990s stretched Republican supremacy to at least sixteen years. Cyclical party turnover now seems to be developing in some of the southern states where the Democrats used to enjoy one-party dominance, such as Texas, Virginia, and North Carolina.

The impulse of voters to "throw the rascals out" by changing party control at regular intervals is both understandable and rational. After two or three terms of party control of a nation or state, enough things are likely to have gone wrong to give voters a taste for change. This tendency may sometimes be unjust to the party in power, but it at least keeps incumbent parties on their toes, seeking to come up with policies and solutions that will cause voters to relent and give them "four more years." Moreover, under conditions of modern government, a party team that has held office for two terms or more is likely to be run-down, reduced to petty bickering, and bereft of new ideas. Henry Kissinger used to say that an administration begins to use up its intellectual capital from the day it takes office.

From 1954 to 1994, regular shifts in party control did not occur in Congress. Between the Civil War and the Eisenhower administration, control of Congress normally accompanied, or slightly preceded, the presidential cycle. In only four two-year periods did the president's party not control at least one house of Congress (under Hayes, 1879–1880; Cleveland, 1895–1896; Wilson, 1919–1920; and Truman, 1947–1948). From 1954 to 1994, however, the Democrats controlled the House of Representatives without inter-
ruption and the Senate for all but six years. As a result, Republican presidents during this forty-year span regularly confronted Congresses controlled by their partisan opposition, producing the famous deadlock that disrupted the policy-making process. After the 1994 election, the shoe was on the other foot, with a Democratic president facing a Republican Congress—creating even more spectacular instances of deadlock.

The failure of cyclical turnover in Congress from 1954 to 1994 had damaging effects on the entire political system. Even apart from the policy results of deadlock, the long dominance of Congress by the Democrats produced an impression among many voters that the system was impervious to electoral change, contributing to voter cynicism and disaffection. It was probably bad for the congressional Democrats themselves (as a party, though not of course in terms of individual careers). The results of long duration in power by one party that special circumstances have produced in the politics of, for example, Japan, Italy, and Mexico had become all too evident in Congress: arrogance, preoccupation with “perks,” outright corruption, and stagnation of ideas. Whether the 1994 turnover will lead to more normal alternation in party control remains to be seen.

Cyclical Theories

Beyond the normal two- to three-term alternation in party control of the presidency, the existence of party cycles (or ideological cycles) in national politics becomes speculative. However, such cycles, if they exist, are important and must be included in any overall consideration of parties. Probably the best known of the theories of long-term political cycles is that of the historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. (1986: 32–33), carrying on work begun by his father. Schlesinger’s theory is more closely related to ideology than to parties, but it also has party manifestations.

According to Schlesinger, throughout American history regular alternations between spans of liberalism and conservatism have occurred, each lasting about sixteen years or four presidential terms. The most recent spans have been the liberal one, launched by John Kennedy in 1960, and its conservative successor that began in the late 1970s. Right on time, Schlesinger claimed after the 1992 election, a new liberal span was initiated by Bill Clinton’s victory.

This theory—like almost all cyclical theories—requires some nimble tucking. The Civil War Republicans, “liberal” under Lincoln, somehow become “conservative” under Grant, though in many cases they were the same people, and hang on long beyond their allotted span; Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and Woodrow Wilson are lumped together in a liberal span, despite the fierce inter- and intraparty battles of the time; Richard
Nixon and Gerald Ford become part of a liberal span that began in 1960; and Jimmy Carter is designated a harbinger of the return of conservatism. The 1994 Republican landslide seemed to bring a premature end to the new liberal span that had begun only two years before—though perhaps Clinton’s reelection in 1996 could be interpreted as having got it back on track. Still the theory has enough resonance in history to suggest the presence of a real phenomenon. What Schlesinger is on to, I think, is the succession of phases in a much longer cycle, which I will describe below.

The most widely discussed cyclical theory developed in political science was introduced by V. O. Key (1955). It links cycles to “realigning” or “critical” elections, which, its advocates claim, have periodically purged American politics and government of accumulated detritus and opened the way to new growth. Key’s work has been carried on by, among others, Walter Dean Burnham (1970), James Sundquist (1982), Gerald Pomper (1970), and Paul Allen Beck (1974: 199–221). In most versions of this theory, realigning elections, ending the dominance of one political party and ushering in normal majority control by another, have occurred every twenty-eight to thirty-six years. The root of these cycles appears to be policy upheaval, coupled with generational change.

There is some dispute over which were the actual realigning elections, but general agreement places realignments at or just before the elections of Thomas Jefferson in 1800, Andrew Jackson in 1828, Abraham Lincoln in 1860, William McKinley in 1896, and Franklin Roosevelt in 1932. (Some scholars drop the elections of Jefferson and Jackson, on the ground that the party system did not achieve mature development until the 1830s.)

A puzzle for believers in the theory of realigning elections is the apparent failure of one to occur on schedule in the 1960s. Burnham deals with this problem by arguing that a realignment did occur with the election of Richard Nixon as president in 1968 and the creation of a new Republican majority in presidential politics. Certainly the shift of the South away from the Democrats at the presidential level after 1968 was a major change in national politics. But if this was a realignment, why did it not produce a change in control of Congress or of most of the major states, as previous realignments had done?

The elections usually identified as critical to realignments—1800, 1828, 1860, 1896, and 1932—were clearly times when something important happened in American politics. But were all of these major realignments in the sense of changing one majority party for another? The victories of the (Jeffersonian) Republicans in 1800, the Republicans in 1860, and the Democrats in 1932 certainly were. But what of the 1828 and 1896 elections, which are needed to maintain the thirty-six year cycle?

Jackson won in 1828 after a period of about ten years in which national politics had been in flux and the old hegemony of Jefferson’s party appeared
shaken. But Jackson was clearly in the line of the Jeffersonians, and was so recognized at the time. Martin Van Buren, one of Jackson’s principal lieutenants and his successor as president, wrote, “The two great parties of this country, with occasional changes in their names only, have, for the principal part of a century, occupied antagonistic positions upon all important political questions. They have maintained an unbroken succession” (Van Buren 1967: 2). Jackson carried every state Jefferson carried in 1800 and lost every state Jefferson lost. Jefferson’s narrow victory over John Adams in 1800 was converted into Jackson’s landslide triumph over John Quincy Adams in 1828 by the addition of new western states in which the Democrats were strong. So the 1828 election restored the dominance of the Democrats (under their new name) instead of bringing in a new majority party.

Similarly, McKinley’s victory in 1896 followed a period during which Republicans and Democrats had taken turns controlling the federal government, or dividing control, and in which there had been no clear majority party. The 1896 election represented a rallying of the forces, temporarily in eclipse, that had made the Republicans the clear majority party from 1860 to 1876. McKinley won through renewal of the coalition of northeastern and midwestern states on which the Republican Party had been founded. William Jennings Bryan, his Democratic opponent, swept the South, the Democrats’ principal stronghold since the end of Reconstruction. Bryan also tapped the farmers’ revolt and the silver issue in the West to win some of the normally Republican western states that had been admitted to the Union since the Civil War. But within a few years most of these were back in the Republican column where they normally remained until the Great Depression of the 1930s. The 1896 election, therefore, did not displace the former majority party but renewed and strengthened the party that became dominant after the last major realignment—a point also made by Pomper (1970).

What, then, do we have? Not five or six major realigning elections but three: 1800, 1860, and 1932. Each of these began a cycle in which one party was generally dominant, lasting not thirty-six years but sixty to seventy years. The climactic elections won by Jackson and McKinley, which I identify as 1832 (rather than 1828) and 1896, were in this scheme elections in which the dominant force of the cycle that had begun about thirty years before met and decisively defeated a force trying to turn back the clock to the prevailing ideological orientation of the preceding cycle (the conservative opposition directed by Nicholas Biddle in 1832 and the populist crusade championed by Bryan in 1896).

The mystery of why no true realignment occurred in the 1960s is thus explained: it was not due. What actually happened in the 1960s was the climax of the cycle dominated by liberalism and the Democratic Party that had begun in the 1930s. In 1964, Lyndon Johnson decisively defeated Barry Goldwater, representing a radical version of the laissez-faire economic doc-
trine that had prevailed during the preceding cycle. The movement of the South away from the Democrats at the end of the 1960s was an early sign of the breakup of the New Deal cycle—similar to the move of the Northeast away from the Democrats in the 1840s and the swing of major northern cities away from the Republicans in the era of Woodrow Wilson.

As shown schematically in Figure 2.1, each of the sixty- to seventy-year-long cycles moved through roughly similar phases: (1) a breakthrough election in which the new majority gained power under a charismatic leader (Jefferson, Lincoln, F. D. Roosevelt), followed by an extended period during which the new majority party changed the direction of government and enacted much of its program; (2) a period of pause in which the new majority lost some of its dynamism and forces that dominated the preceding cycle staged a minor comeback (J. Q. Adams, Cleveland, Eisenhower); (3) a climactic victory by the majority party over a more radical expression of the ideology of the preceding cycle (Jackson over Biddle, McKinley over Bryan, Johnson over Goldwater), followed by enactment of remaining items in the majority party’s program; and, finally, (4) the gradual decline and ultimate collapse of the majority party, opening the way for a new realignment and a new majority. Only three such fully developed cycles have occurred in our national history, though, as Figure 2.1 shows, the outline of an earlier cycle can be seen in the nation-building process that reached its climax with the American Revolution and went through its declining, though still institutionally fruitful, phase during the Federalist era.

The phases of the sixty- to seventy-year-long cycles correspond roughly to some of Schlesinger’s sixteen-year spans. The long-cycle theory, however, explains why the Jeffersonians after 1800, the Republicans after 1860, and the Democrats after 1932 held onto power for longer than Schlesinger’s theory would predict. These were all periods covered by the initial phase of the long cycle, during which the new majority is fresh and holds the support of the public through an extended series of elections. The separate cycles posited in the twenty-eight- to thirty-six-year theory correspond neatly to the rise and decline segments of the long cycle.

The possibility of a sixty- to seventy-year cycle has occasionally been glimpsed by political scientists and historians. It was first discussed, to my knowledge, by the political scientist Quincy Wright in 1942 (143–45). In recent years, William Riker (1982: 214–16) and Jerome Mileur (1989: 1–3) have suggested the possibility of a sixty- to seventy-year cycle. Political scientists have generally been reluctant to consider the possibility of sixty- to seventy-year party dominances largely, I think, because the limited time over which democracies have so far extended gives us little material against which to test such a hypothesis. Such skepticism is understandable and even reasonable. But the long-cycle theory fits the evidence better than any of the other cyclical schemes. There is also some indication that long cycles have
been at work in Britain and France, although this matter requires further study.

If such long cycles exist, what causes them? Perhaps to some extent they reflect cycles in the underlying economic system, such as the "long-wave" cycles suggested in the 1920s by the Russian economist Nikolai Kondratieff (1984: 32ff.) and discussed often since by futurist economists. Kondratieff and his followers have claimed to detect cycles lasting about fifty years in which market economies swing between booms and major depressions caused by "overbuilding of the capital sector." Kondratieff long waves correspond roughly to the long party dominance cycles in American history.

The economic expansion that started in the 1790s petered out through the 1840s and 1850s, and the expansion that began in the 1860s, though inter-
rupted by several pauses, did not truly collapse until the depression of the 1930s. According to Kondratieff theorists, we are now in the downswing of the expansion that began in the 1940s. Many of them have been predicting for some time that a new economic collapse is just around the corner.

Political cycles are also probably rooted to some extent in generational change. Schlesinger argues that his sixteen-year spans reflect the succession of political generations. Members of the political generation of John Kennedy, for example, were putting into effect values and attitudes acquired during their youth in the liberal environment of the 1930s. The Reaganites of the 1980s were applying views they had developed during the relatively conservative 1950s (though many of the Reaganites regarded themselves as revolting against Eisenhower moderate Republicanism). Members of the generation of the 1990s, in this theory, should have been eager to reintroduce the liberal values with which Kennedy inspired them during their college years in the 1960s (Schlesinger 1986: 33–34).

Schlesinger's analysis, like his larger cyclical theory, captures part of the truth. Genuinely major changes in political direction, however, seem to occur only after persons whose political values and party loyalties were formed by the realignment, including many who were in childhood at the time, have largely passed from the political scene. So long as generations whose party ties were shaped by the Civil War remained politically active, even voting in substantial numbers, the normal Republican majority in national elections was hard to shake. Similarly, party loyalties formed by the Great Depression and the New Deal have been exceptionally durable. In the 1990s, the generations whose attitudes were most deeply marked by the Depression and the New Deal, roughly those born from 1905 to 1930, have included a sharply declining share of the total electorate—already in 1996 less than 15 percent. This, I think, is a major reason for the presence of an increasing segment of voters who feel no particular loyalty to either major party.

The last two major realignments, in the 1860s and 1930s, came at times of massive traumas within the larger social system—namely, the Civil War and the Great Depression. The first realignment, in the 1800s, coincided with huge territorial growth and migration of population. Probably a major realignment requires both extraordinary social upheaval and an electorate in which ties to the existing party system have grown weak. We certainly now have the latter. If the Kondratieff theorists are right, we will probably soon encounter severe economic turmoil. But the causes of social upheaval need not be primarily economic—those of the 1800s and 1860s were not. Possibly an ecological crisis could trigger the next political realignment. Or continuation of current trends toward moral and social disorder and decay could bring it on. The point is that the political system is now open, as it was not in
the 1960s when the hold of the New Deal alignment remained strong, for transformation by a major economic or social shock.

**Possible Futures**

What, then, are likely scenarios for our near-term and longer-term political futures? Some analysts have interpreted President Clinton’s reelection in 1996 as representing—beside the effects of his undoubted personal political skills—a phenomenon going on through much of the West. After a spell of conservative reaction against the liberal, or social democratic, big government excesses of the 1960s and 1970s, this argument goes, voters have decided that they prefer not return to big government liberalism but administration by moderate liberal politicians of relatively conservative (promarket, low tax, fiscally responsible, small government) policies. In this way economic security and nonintrusive government can be achieved without giving undue influence to large corporations and wealthy individuals who, it is said, play a dominant role in setting public policy when conservative parties are in power. Conservative politicians holding office have hammered home this lesson by making clear that when governmental belt tightening is needed, it is not their wealthy contributors who must sacrifice. Quite the contrary, cutbacks in government services for the middle class and the poor under conservatives are likely to be accompanied by tax cuts for the rich. Disenchantment with conservative parties is augmented by the discovery that conservative government means not only fiscal moderation but also allegedly regressive social policies such as limitations on abortion, public support for church-operated schools, and abolition of affirmative action in employment and education for women and racial minorities. This shift in public attitudes has produced not only Clinton’s reelection but also the triumphs of Tony Blair’s New Labour Party in Britain, the miraculously revived Socialists in France, and a left-of-center coalition government in Italy, as well as the likelihood that a coalition of Social Democrats and Greens will take control of Germany after the 1998 election. We are thus at the beginning, this analysis concludes, of an era in which moderate liberals or social democrats will implement prudently conservative policies with a humanitarian face.

This scenario is not wholly implausible. Conservative parties sometimes have appeared determined through their actions to make it reality. Important factors, however, make it unlikely, at least in the United States. Liberals who steal conservative clothes in effect legitimize conservative arguments. As Harry Truman long ago said, “If the people want conservatives, they will vote for the real thing.” My doubt that liberal politicians applying conservative approaches can win enduring majority support is based in part on a policy conclusion: that most Western governments face impending fiscal crises
caused by benefit programs that cannot be financed on their present scale without taxing productive members of society far beyond levels now politically feasible or probably economically wise. If this is so, liberals in office cannot go far enough in pairing government programs, no matter how much cushioning they provide, without provoking revolts among their normal constituencies. Perhaps “leftish” parties can summon support from within their own constituencies for tax increases that will maintain programs at or near their present levels, as European socialist governments attempted in the 1960s and 1970s. But most Western polities as now constituted, including the United States, will then vote them out of office at the next election. The recent political successes of “new” liberals indeed represent reactions against the Reagan-Thatcher variety of conservatism. But without a practical and coherent agenda of their own, such governments will probably soon give way to revolts from within their own ranks, rejection by middle-of-the-road voters, or fiscal disaster—or perhaps all three at once.

Another popular scenario is founded on the conclusion that recent elections express not an enduring swing to the moderate left but continued churning within increasingly volatile electorates. In this view, durable party coalitions are simply breaking down. Most voters hold no strong loyalty to any party, and the reliable constituencies that used to sustain parties through good times as well as bad have lost all cohesiveness. The result is wild swings in party strengths from election to election, and a political system structured by personality and campaign gimmicks rather than substantive policy commitments. Evidences of this trend are the huge swing to Labour in Britain in 1997, the dizzying switches from left to right and back again in recent French elections, the virtual electoral wipeout of the previously governing Progressive Conservative Party in Canada, the disintegration of the Italian Christian Democratic Party that had dominated national politics since World War II, the rebound of the recently apparently moribund Liberal-Democratic Party in Japan, as well as Clinton’s swift recovery after the Republican landslide in 1994. The probable future, in this scenario, is an essentially rudderless politics, perhaps ending in an authoritarian takeover by a charismatic candidate with a skilled and well-financed public relations team, promising relief to a dispirited electorate.

This scenario seems to me more likely than the one predicting extended control by liberal parties wearing conservative clothes. Old anchors are indeed coming loose, and voters in many countries seem prepared to flock temporarily to almost any standard offering the appearance of change. Continued high levels of cynicism and distrust among voters toward their political system support this tendency. But I see no compelling evidence, again at least in the United States, that voters will not respond positively and with at least fairly long-term loyalty to a party offering genuinely effective means for dealing with current national problems. Volatility among voters now ap-
pears no greater than it was during the 1850s and late 1920s, preceding the last two enduring major realignments. Studies of electoral behavior actually show that voters in the 1990s have become increasingly consistent in their choice of parties (Cavanaugh 1997; Tuchfarber et al. 1997).

As in 1993, the Republicans still seem to me to have the best opportunity to form a durable governing majority. Though they were clearly outmaneuvered by President Clinton after they took control of Congress in 1995 and have been identified once again as the party of big business and the rich, and now of the religious right as well, they still have important political advantages that should equip them, at least potentially, to become the normal majority party at the beginning of the new century.

As the more conservative party on economic issues, the Republicans are more in touch with continuing voter preferences than the Democrats or any likely third party (Dougherty et al. 1997: 40). As John Green and his colleagues have shown, the Republicans’ firm base among religious and social “traditionalists” in Catholic and mainline Protestant as well as evangelical Protestant denominations carries them a long way toward assembling a majority coalition (Green et al. 1997: 31–40). Republicans pay a political price among social moderates for identification with the religious right, but this is at least partly offset by voter reaction against alignment of the Democrats with the militant secular left. Among age groups, the Republicans are strongest with the generations between twenty-five and forty-five, which will be around in elections for many years to come, while the Democrats’ greatest strength remains with the New Deal generations over sixty-five that inevitably will become a smaller share of the electorate. The Republicans continue to gain strength in the South and West, where populations are growing, and even appear to be moving toward normal majority status in formerly highly competitive industrial states such as Pennsylvania and Ohio. At the national level, the Democrats are now increasingly vulnerable to the tendency of voters to turn against the party holding the presidency during a second or third term.

Crucially, campaign money, which in congressional elections before 1994 usually tilted toward the Democrats, has now shifted heavily toward the Republicans (Dougherty et al. 1997: 148–55). Business interests always were more ideologically at home with the Republicans, but they felt compelled while the Democrats controlled Congress to give money that would preserve their access to the majority party. If the Republicans’ control of Congress appears reasonably secure, business will increasingly be motivated to give most of its money to its ideological allies. Even if some kind of meaningful campaign finance reform were enacted, it is hard to imagine circumstances under which the party with the larger campaign war chest will not have a sizable edge in American politics.

In seeking durable majority status, the Republicans have at least four
major problems, three primarily strategic, though with substantive aspects, and one primarily substantive. First, the party needs to maintain its role as the economically more conservative party while shedding some of its image as a party unduly partial to big business and the rich (Kessel et al. 1997). This can be done by promoting policies from which business will benefit as part of the common national economy, while avoiding sponsorship of measures that appear to favor big business or the wealthy at the expense of everybody else.

Second, the Republicans need to regain the ground they have been losing among the growing share of the population with Hispanic roots, particularly in California, Texas, and Florida. Loss of even traditionally Republican Cuban-American voters in Florida cost Bob Dole that state’s electoral votes in 1996. Republicans do not necessarily need majority support from Hispanics to remain competitive in California or to consolidate Texas and Florida as Republican strongholds, but they do need to win at least one-third of the Hispanic vote, as was done by Reagan and Bush in the 1980s, in contrast to Dole’s 20 percent in 1996. Polls show that a majority of Hispanics hold relatively conservative attitudes on many social and economic issues, and Hispanics have shown great willingness to vote for Republicans for state and local offices (Beinart 1997: 22–26). But they increasingly resent immigrant bashing and courting of nativist sentiments by prominent Republicans. The immigration issue is complex for Republicans, as for the nation at large; but it should be possible for the party to support prudent restrictions on immigration without playing the nativist card that naturally offends potentially Republican Hispanics.

Third, the Republicans must close the gender gap that has plagued the party since the 1980 election. The gender gap originated when men in the 1980s began moving strongly toward the Republicans while women remained more fixed in traditional Democratic loyalties. In the 1990s it has seemed to represent a stronger attachment among some women to liberal policy attitudes. Analysis has shown that there is little difference between male and female voters on so-called women’s issues such as abortion and women’s rights (Newman 1997: 102–6). Republicans are unlikely to attract a larger share of women by changing their position on abortion or disowning the religious right. They need, rather, to connect relatively conservative governmental policies with the values and interests of more women.

Finally, at a more clearly substantive level, Republicans need to produce a reasonably coherent agenda for dealing with the nation’s opportunities and problems in the new century. The Contract with America on which Republican congressional candidates ran in 1994, though few voters had any clear idea what it included, was symbolically effective as a sign of a united party determined to set about achieving governmental change. It contributed to the Republicans’ 1994 victory and gave some sense of direction to the new
majorities in Congress. It did not, however, provide a comprehensive set of policy objectives. Dole's 1996 campaign certainly did not fill that absence. Conservatives, who during the 1980s seemed more intellectually creative and confident than liberals, have recently appeared barren or divided on goals and strategies for governing. Neither the Republicans of the 1860s nor the Democrats of the 1930s were highly ideological in the sense of being wedded to rigid economic or social blueprints. Both, however, were reasonably united behind a core program of values, principles, and legislation. By my reading, the time is now ripe for a comprehensive program of reform—fiscal, moral, economic, educational, governmental, and even carefully conceived constitutional. To propose and carry out such a program, the more conservative party needs to forego some of its natural conservatism, in the sense of resistance against change. But at a broader, more philosophical level, the goals that should guide necessary reform spring from values that have always stood at the heart of American conservatism: freedom, opportunity, family, community, faith.

In looking to the future of the party system, we may discern the broad shape of some of the forces that are likely to affect political behavior. As we are regularly reminded, however, startling events that no one could have foreseen often burst upon us, altering public attitudes. As the new century approaches, available evidence continues to indicate that we are in the opening stages of a major realignment and that the Republicans are best positioned to make their party the instrument for this change. But, as in the years just past, history will have many surprises for us and will no doubt carry us in directions that only in retrospect will seem to have been inevitable.
The Changing American Party Coalitions

Paul Allen Beck

For several decades, the American electorate has been undergoing a secular realignment (Key 1959)—a slow but steady change in the composition of its Democratic and Republican Party coalitions. Some see the realignment as having emerged as early as the 1960s (Aldrich and Niemi 1995), whereas others believe that it was only fully consummated in the 1980s or even 1994 (Burnham 1996). By the 1990s, whatever its origin, this realignment had produced a more even balance in electoral strength between the two major parties than the nation has seen for at least a century and, importantly, a more substantial portion of the electorate who can be said to be dealigned (or lacking any standing partisan loyalties) than probably ever before.

The story of recent American electoral politics, then, involves both realignment and dealignment. It is a tale of two electorates—one partisan and ideologically polarized, the other nonpartisan, sometimes even antipartisan. In the partisan electorate, the parity in party strength makes election outcomes depend more than before on short-term factors involving the candidates and their campaigns. The substantial size of the dealigned portion of the electorate magnifies these tendencies by leaving a large pool of potential voters available for temporary mobilization, on behalf of either a major party candidate or a third party or independent candidate, or for demobilization into nonvoting (Aldrich 1995). The consequence of this kind of realignment has been unparalleled inconsistency and unpredictability in electoral outcomes.

Before this story is related in detail, the concepts and theory on which it depends need to be described more fully. The vote outcome of any election is best seen as the joint product of the long-term predispositions of the electorate toward the parties and short-term orientations toward the issues and candidates of the day (Campbell et al. 1966: chapter 2). Long-term predispositions are embodied in enduring party loyalties to favor a party and its candidates under most circumstances. Most voters possess these loyalties, even amidst the dealignment of recent decades. And most voters who have them
Changing American Party Coalitions

are readily aware of them, so much so that they report them more reliably than any other political orientations in responding to survey questions (Campbell et al. 1960: chapter 6; Converse and Markus 1979).

When the electorate-wide distribution of these enduring party loyalties changes in a significant way, so that the balance between the parties is altered or the coalitions of party loyalists are transformed (and typically the two go together), we speak of the electorate as having realigned (Key 1955; Campbell et al. 1966: chapter 4). The American electorate has realigned at regular intervals throughout much of American history (Burnham 1970; Sundquist 1973). When the share of the electorate professing such loyalties declines and more voters are basing electoral decisions necessarily on election-specific factors, the process is better described as a dealignment (Inglehart and Hochstein 1972; Beck 1977, 1992).

This theoretical perspective focuses on the distribution of party loyalties (including their presence or absence) as the fundamental characteristic of an electorate at any particular time and on changes in these distributions as its principal dynamic. It relegates actual votes to the background as consequences of enduring partisanship and immediate, and temporary, candidate or issue specific forces. Much of the confusion over the realignment concept (Shafer 1991) is the result of a failure to distinguish, first, between these enduring loyalties and temporary, election-specific forces and, second, between the dynamic processes of realignment and dealignment (Beck 1979).

This perspective also draws upon the long tradition of viewing party coalitions in social group terms (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Sundquist 1973; Petrocik 1981). Electoral politics is much more complicated than can be conveyed by a mere focus on social groups marching in lock step to the tune of one party or another or moving in lockstep from party to party. That realization was one of the principal contributions of The American Voter (Campbell et al. 1960) and of the rational choice approach (Fiorina 1981) that to some degree challenged it. Almost as important as groups' overall voting and party loyalties are their substantial intragroup variations in the American setting. Nonetheless, in analyzing changes in the party coalitions from one party system to another, a group approach can be highly useful. It often provides the lens through which more complicated changes can be seen, even if its intensive focus may blur some aspects of the full picture.

Finally, it is important to realize that votes are far more consequential for any single office at any time than is partisanship; the former is actual political behavior, the latter only an underlying attitude. Even so, votes across the long American ballot and over time add up to voting patterns that reflect the underlying anchor of that attitude we call partisanship. Therefore, in looking for trends in electoral behavior, attention necessarily focuses on partisanship and the more or less fixed partisan characteristics of an elector-
ate that define different electoral eras or party systems (Chambers and Burnham 1967). It is the nature of the contemporary electoral era, seen from this perspective, that will be the focus of this chapter.¹

**Changing American Partisanship: Realignment amidst Dealignment**

Since the mid-1960s, two important changes have taken place in the party loyalties of the American electorate (Miller and Shanks 1996). The first was the decay or dealignment of both parties, especially of the Democratic coalition that had dominated American electoral politics since the 1930s. The second, showing faint tendencies earlier but truly blossoming in the early 1980s, has been the reshuffling of the major party coalitions and the attendant slight growth of Republican loyalists. Together they have altered the social composition of the American parties, albeit in a way that has reduced the dominance of electoral politics by the two major parties.

Figure 3.1 reports the party identifications of the electorate biennially from 1952 to 1996. From relatively stable levels, at which Democratic identifiers outnumbered Republicans by a 5 to 3 margin during the 1950s and early 1960s, the partisan strength of both parties eroded after 1964. The GOP did not recover its 1950s level of partisans until 1994, only to fall off again in 1996. That Republican identifiers are no larger a portion of the electorate today than they were in the 1950s is ignored by those who have seen the recent years as a time of Republican realignment.

The major effect of the changes that began in the 1960s instead was felt by the Democratic Party. Erosion in its loyalist base first became visible in 1966, and, despite a few temporary surges in the direction of its old levels, the party has never recovered. The beneficiary of these declines in partisanship, of course, has been the amorphous category called “independence,” which approached a plurality of the electorate in the late 1970s and again in 1988, then claimed that plurality in the early 1990s, only to fall back in 1996. By 1996, these changes had produced an electorate that was almost evenly balanced among Democrats, Republicans, and independents—slightly more than one-third Democratic, one-third independent, and slightly less than one-third Republican. This may be as close to parity among the three major categories of partisanship as the American political system has seen.

As with all majority coalitions, the sources of the post-1964 decay in the Democratic Party were contained within the structural contradictions of its original formulation. The very successes of the New Deal welfare state in overcoming the problems of depression in the 1930s and in lifting disadvantaged minorities and workers into the middle class subsequently undermined the attraction of the Democratic Party to its beneficiaries—especially their children and grandchildren (Beck 1974). More fundamentally, though, the
New Deal Democratic majority was based on an alliance of white southerners and liberal northerners. It could remain intact only so long as the political agenda was dominated by depression-era economic issues and the South was left alone to pursue its traditional policies, most notably its segregation of blacks and whites.

By the 1950s, the Democratic alliance was unraveling. Southern autonomy on matters of racial policy had become untenable to many northern Democrats. Once the national Democratic Party moved to champion civil rights for southern blacks, as it did in the early 1960s, and the GOP took the opposite position, as it did for the first time in 1964 (Carmines and Stimson 1989), the die was cast: Racially conservative white southerners began to desert their party’s candidates in droves. This desertion was manifested first in voting for Republican candidates for president; Democratic candidates for state and local offices continued to reflect their region’s mores and to retain the support of its white voters. Steadily over the years Republicanism percolated down the ballot, as old-time Democratic officeholders retired and new, less conservative Democratic candidates emerged to replace them (Beck 1992).

It was not too long before the civil rights revolution in the South and the opposing postures of the parties toward it began to be reflected in party loyalties (see Figure 3.2). The erosion of Democratic loyalties within the white southern electorate already had begun by the 1950s, although the evidence suggests that the reasons had little to do with racial issues until the 1960s (Beck 1977). That erosion continued with only occasional and partial reversals through the early 1990s, then ended and somewhat reversed itself in 1996. The Democratic share of the southern electorate, though, is now about half of what it was forty years before. The days of a solidly Democratic South are gone.

Yet the GOP has not been able to convert its impressive electoral successes in the South into a solid base of party loyalists. Republicans have not even become the dominant party of identification among white southerners. Rather, the breakup of the solid South featured a surge of independents in the late 1960s, reaching levels that were to be sustained on average over the next twenty years. There was steady growth in Republicanism among white southerners too during this time, but it was slow. A 1994 increase in GOP identifiers, which seemed at the time to signal the arrival of the southern white Republican majority, proved to be short-lived as the pro-GOP trend returned to slow but steady growth that could be traced back to 1964 and perhaps even before. Republican advances have been especially pronounced within the new generations of white southerners, many of whom have rejected inherited Democratic loyalties (Beck 1977, 1982). If generational replacement proceeds unimpeded, the Republican share of the southern white electorate may continue to grow, although it may be approaching its upper
Figure 3.2 Party Loyalties of White Southerners, 1952-1996

Source: NES Cumulative Series.
Note: The South is the eleven-state former Confederacy.
bound. The undeniable result of the changes among white southerners through 1996 is a realigned southern party system—more Republican and more competitive than ever, but not dominated (yet?) by Republican loyalists.

The story of southern electoral change is a complex one (Black and Black 1987), and it is important not to accept too readily the monocausal racial politics explanations of it. The civil rights revolution opened southern politics to black involvement, and blacks did respond by becoming the most loyal members of the Democratic Party by the mid-1960s. Their mobilization initially offset to a significant degree the movement of white southerners away from the Democratic Party. As the Democrats became more hospitable to African Americans, however, the flight of the most racially conservative whites from it was accelerated. Yet many white southerners are drawn to the Republican Party for reasons that have little to do with race. Large numbers of northerners have moved to the South, bringing their traditional GOP loyalties with them. With the modernization of the southern economy also has come an expanding middle class, which as early as the 1950s was drawn to the GOP for many of the same reasons that middle-class northerners were. The return of religious fundamentalism to the political arena, with its focus on moral and social conservatism, also has been a part of the southern equation in recent years; more than elsewhere in the nation, it has further eroded the white working-class base of the Democratic Party in the South. In 1994, for the first time in history, in fact, a plurality of southern white Protestant fundamentalists were Republicans.

The changes in the South have had enormous consequences for party politics at the national level. Without a solid South, which had comprised the most loyal share of its New Deal base and given it a regional “lock” in the electoral college, the Democratic Party is no longer dominant in American politics. Important changes have occurred in the party coalitions outside of the South, to be sure, but they pale in comparison to the changes wrought in the South. The realignment of the southern electorate alone has been sufficient to realign the entire American party system, but it is not the only important change in the post-1950 party system.

Changes in four groups—African Americans, men and women, and white fundamentalist Protestants—have figured prominently in the party system realignment as well. Since 1952, African Americans inside of and outside of the South have become the most dependable Democratic loyalists (Gurin, Hatchett, and Jackson 1989; Tate 1993). As Figure 3.3 shows, they began the era with widespread Democratic loyalties, although they were not as devoted to that party as white southerners. Moreover, the early figures are somewhat illusory, for more than half of all African Americans lived in the South in the 1950s, and few of them were permitted to participate in elections because of the local registration laws and practices of that era (Mat-
Figure 3.3 Party Loyalties of Blacks, 1952-1996

Source: NES Cumulative Series.
thews and Prothro 1966). Not only were southern African Americans mobilized into politics in the 1960s, so that their Democratic loyalties became more consequential, but the positioning of the parties on opposite sides of the civil rights issue by the mid-1960s pushed most of the remaining black Republicans out of the GOP.

Discussions of the growth of black Republicanism in recent years seem to ignore the fact that the “party of Lincoln” enjoyed much more support in the black community a generation ago than it does today. Whatever growth there has been in the percentage of Republicans among blacks, and it is barely noticeable in the National Elections Studies (NES) data, has not even begun to recover the ground that was lost in the 1960s. Rather, the most significant trend in black party loyalties in recent years has been the growth of independents, who have become more numerous in the last decade or so than at any time since 1952.

Scholars and commentators also have discovered a widening gender gap in recent decades in both partisanship and voting (Klein 1984). Figure 3.4 shows the extent of this gender gap where partisanship is concerned. From almost identical (and superimposed) partisan distributions in the 1950s and 1960s, the partisan loyalties of men and women began to diverge in the 1970s and had become significantly different by the 1980s and 1990s, especially where the Democratic Party was concerned.

Comparison of the figures over time yields some insight into what has happened, although exactly why has defied simple explanation. Men and women joined in the post-1964 dealignment at very different rates, with Democratic loyalties eroding more among men than among women. By 1984, these gender differences began to extend to partisan change as well. Men exhibited higher levels of Republican loyalty than at any earlier time in the time series, and by the 1990s they were as likely to be Republicans as to be Democrats. Among women, by contrast, there has been no discernible GOP growth since the 1960s, and the Democratic advantage remains considerable. The gender gap, then, is the result of substantial pro-GOP change in the partisan orientations of men while women were resisting the movement away from the Democrats (Miller and Shanks 1996).

Another important change in group party loyalties since the 1950s is thought to involve white Protestant fundamentalists (Leege and Kellstedt 1993). As Figure 3.5 shows, they have moved increasingly into political independence, even if they were only slightly more likely to be Republicans in the 1980s than they had been in the 1960s and 1970s. Another significant growth spurt in Republican loyalties among this group appeared in 1994, but it could not be sustained into 1996. The real story of white Protestant fundamentalists, just as is the case for men, lies in the almost steady decay of their Democratic loyalties from the 1960s into the 1990s, albeit with a
Figure 3.4 Party Loyalties of Men and Women, 1952-1996

Source: NES Cumulative Series.
Figure 3.5 Party Loyalties of White Fundamentalist Protestants, 1960-1996

Source: NES Cumulative Series.
Note: Fundamentalists are coded from self-reported religious denomination or church.
Democratic upturn in 1996. For fundamentalists also, the story is of dealignment more than realignment—at least through 1996.

For all of its successes since 1968 at the presidential level and since 1994 with the Congress, though, the Republican Party has not been able to displace the Democrats as the dominant party for Americans. Even in the South, where the parties have unmistakably realigned, the GOP, while ascendant and increasingly victorious at election time, has yet to displace the Democrats as the leading party in terms of partisan loyalty. Nationwide, it has momentum on its side, which is important in politics because it heartens the winners and discourages the losers. Now that it controls majorities in the Congress and in the governors' mansions, the GOP also enjoys a strategic advantage in candidate visibility and money for future elections. Yet in terms of pure party loyalties, the Republicans have fallen far short of the gains expected for the ascendant party in a realignment, at least based on past experience. Nor have more voters been mobilized into politics by the realignment, as they always were in past realignments (Burnham 1970). Rather, with the exception of the Perot-induced boost in 1992 (Nichols and Beck 1995), turnout has continued its decline since 1960.

Instead of a decisive realignment, then, partisan changes in recent years have yielded a weakened Democratic Party, no longer in command of the loyalties of the dominant share of the electorate, and an enlarged group of political independents who are not dependable supporters of either party but rather are moved almost wholly by short-term electoral forces. Some Republican growth has occurred in recent years to be sure, but it has not been sufficient to recapture the levels of Republicanism of the 1950s, itself hardly a halcyon era for the GOP in terms of party loyalties.

Along with this dealignment, though, has come a significant reshuffling of the group bases of the party coalitions due to differential rates of dealignment and some partisan changes among key groups. The South of course leads the way, with its reconstituted party system—a Democratic Party with a distinctively African-American cast and a “lily-white” and conservative GOP. Scholars have gotten used to realignments that catapulted one party into dominance, as happened in the 1890s and 1930s, as well as rearranged the party coalitions. The contemporary realignment and the party system it has spawned clearly diverge from the norm.

In sum, these dealigning and realigning changes have produced an electoral system unlike any the United States has ever known. Its electorate of loyal partisans is divided almost equally between the two major parties and is increasingly polarized and combative. Its other electorate is nonpartisan (Wattenberg 1994), to some extent even estranged from the party system and antipartisan (Craig 1985), and equal in size to either of the parties' electorates. Its members refuse to make an enduring commitment to either party,
instead swinging back and forth between them and to third party or independent candidates from election to election, if they bother to vote at all.

In its near-parity between major parties within the partisan electorate, this period resembles the two decades after Reconstruction, when the nation witnessed a highly competitive politics nationwide fought out between two equally strong parties, from different regional strongholds (Sundquist 1973, chapters 5 and 6; Kleppner 1970). What is unique about the present era is the unprecedented size of the nonpartisan electorate and the spread of party competition to virtually all of the states (Bibby and Holbrook 1996). The result is a partisan equilibrium, if you will, in which neither party is dominant and a substantial nonpartisan dynamic or pendulum swing is apparent. This electoral arrangement has important consequences for both the American parties and the American political system.

Consequences for the Parties

Even if these changes have not yet produced a new dominant party, they have transformed the internal character of both the Democratic and Republican Parties. For one thing, as Figure 3.6 makes clear, both are more polarized in the electorate along ideological lines than they have been in years, maybe ever (Aldrich 1995).  

The GOP has steadily become a more conservative party. By the 1980s, ideological conservatives comprised a majority of its coalition, and about two-thirds of its identifiers were self-declared conservatives by the 1990s. The Democrats, never as ideologically pure as the Republicans during this time period, have become a more liberal party in recent years; their liberal members now outnumber their conservatives by more than two to one.

The balance of ideologues and nonideologues in the party coalitions and their changes over time have influenced both party politics in the government and the party organizations. In Congress, interparty conflict has become sharper in recent years, to the point that intraparty comity and cooperation have eroded (Rohde 1991). The ideological nature of the party electorates also affects the party organizations. Elsewhere in this volume, John Bibby (chapter 5) has described the dual nature of contemporary organizations in which technically sophisticated service-oriented political professionals work along side ideologically committed activists. Scholars have long documented the divergence in goals between election-oriented professionals and cause-oriented ideologues (Clark and Wilson 1961; Wildavsky 1965). As the parties’ loyalists become more ideological, it should not be surprising that purists have increased their influence in the party organizations, especially the Republican Party organization. Their growing influence in turn has intensified the loyalty of their ideological followers, but it also may have reduced
Source: NES Cumulative Series.
Note: Entries are percentage liberal and percentage conservative among Democrats and among Republicans.
the attractiveness of the parties to nonpartisans, and even some partisans, thereby heightening pressures toward dealignment. These data also show that the GOP continuously has been the more ideological of the major parties and is even more so in recent years.

The increasing ideological purity of the parties, especially the Republicans, is principally the work of a reshuffling of the southern electorate, with conservative whites moving out of the Democratic Party and into either independence or a new Republican home. But similar, if less earthshaking, changes have taken place in the North, particularly as social conservatism has become a more important force in electoral politics. As a consequence, by dint of their numbers, some groups have gained more powerful voices within the parties than before. These changes have important implications for how the parties perform their functions of selecting and nominating candidates for office, setting the issue agenda, and building majorities for the making of public policy.

Some appreciation for how the changes in group party loyalties may have influenced the internal politics of the party coalitions can be gained from comparisons of the sheer sizes of key groups within each. Of course, numbers are not the only resource in internal party politics, as successful and unsuccessful strategic maneuvers of some important groups have borne out. Nor, partially because of the direct primary system of nomination, are a party’s identifiers the only participants in a party’s internal politics. Yet numbers are important for politics within parties and for the building of interparty coalitions. What follows are illustrations of salient ways in which these numbers have changed, and occasionally not changed, as a result of recent reshuffling in the partisanship of the electorate.

Undeniably the most important alternations in Democratic loyalties since the 1950s are the opposite “hegiras” of African Americans and white southerners. The Democratic Party has come to monopolize the partisan loyalties of the former, while it has moved from monopolist to equal competitor for the latter. Because these movements were principally motivated by opposing reactions to the same realities, the positioning of the two parties on opposite sides of civil rights issues beginning in the 1960s, it makes sense to treat the two groups together in assessing how changes in their partisan loyalties have affected the Democratic coalition.

The changing percentages of Democratic Party identifiers who were blacks and white southerners, respectively, tell a remarkable story of the reshaping of a political party. From almost 30 percent of the Democratic coalition in the 1950s, the southern white share has more or less steadily shrunk to no less than 20 percent in the 1990s. The proportion of the Democratic coalition occupied by blacks doubled at the same time, from around 10 percent in the 1950s to over 20 percent in the 1990s. These divergent movements have produced a Democratic coalition that is now almost equally
black and southern white. Under these circumstances, it is difficult to imag­ine the Democrats turning their backs on the civil rights causes that moti­vated the changes in the first place.

With this change has come one of the great ironies of American presi­dential politics. When the South was a solidly Democratic region, giving its electoral votes dependably to its party, the Democrats did not need a southern native son (or daughter) as their presidential nominee. The South was faithfully Democratic as long as the party’s presidential candidate did not challenge southern control of their own internal affairs, as the states’ rights bolt in 1948 illustrated. From the emergence of the solid South in the after­math of the Civil War into the early 1960s, indeed, no southern resident re­ceived the Democratic nomination. Once the South had ceased to be solidly Democratic by 1964, on the other hand, a majority of the Democratic nominees for president—and its only successful candidates—have been southerners. Southerners may have become the “median” voters in American na­tional elections, the principal battleground for the White House.

Conversely, the white southern share of the Republican Party coalition has grown steadily since the 1950s, with a recent surge bringing it close to 30 percent of the party’s base electorate in 1996—and to the level of the white southern share in the Democratic Party four decades before. With Re­publican loyalists at about the same percentage of the electorate in the 1990s as they were in the 1950s, the increased Republicanism of white southerners has given them a more substantial voice in the party, a strategic position that is magnified by the bonus in delegates to their nominating convention given to states that vote Republican (Beck 1997). The dominance of southerners in the Republican Congress’s leadership positions and its more intense conserv­ativism in recent years are both tributes to the region’s growing importance in intraparty politics.

The growing gender gap in party loyalties also has had important conse­quences for the internal makeup of the party coalitions. Women were slightly more numerous in the Democratic coalition than were men throughout the 1952–1996 period, but their proportional share has grown, especially since the mid-1960s. In the 1990s, almost three Democrats in every five are women, making the party especially sensitive to women’s distinctive con­cerns, especially those of the liberal and moderate women who have tended to gravitate to the Democratic side. Conversely, although women typically have outnumbered men within the GOP, there have been disproportional­ately fewer women Republicans in the 1990s, and they now comprise a minority of the party. The GOP consequently, is more likely to be sensitive to the distinctive concerns of men than are the Democrats.

A third important change has occurred in the religious convictions of Republican identifiers. The presence of mainline nonfundamentalist Protes­tants in the Republican coalition has eroded steadily since the mid-1960s.
They dominated, maybe even defined, the GOP through the 1960s, comprising over 60 percent of its members as recently as 1966, only to fall to little more than one-third of its loyalists by the 1996 election—as their share of the adult population declined and the GOP captured the support of other religious groups through its embrace of conservative social issues. One of these other groups was Catholics, whose share of the Republican coalition increased rather steadily from 1970 to 1990, then stabilized at about 20 percent.

What is surprising is how little growth there has been in the percentage of Protestant fundamentalists among the Republicans. Once they had come onto the political stage in a noticeable way and the NES began to differentiate them from other Protestants (in 1964), they comprised an increasing share of the GOP coalition through 1970. After a decade of drift away from the GOP, they had only regained their earlier position by the 1980s and 1990s. Given the attention accorded to them by pundits and Republican candidates, it is puzzling that fundamentalist Protestants have not become a more substantial share of the party’s loyalists. Powerful organizations such as the Christian Coalition may have led political leaders to exaggerate their presence in the GOP or to falsely assume that fundamentalism and conservatism are synonymous. The mobilization of fundamentalists in Republican primaries and caucuses also may have magnified their influence. But the fact remains that white Protestant fundamentalists are more evenly divided between the parties than any other group we have considered (see Figure 3.5). They seem to be not the new foundation for the Republican Party but, rather, still “up for grabs,” an important “median voter” group in the contemporary electorate that the GOP dare not take for granted.

**Consequences for American Politics**

The unprecedented mix in recent times of dealignment and a realignment that has produced major-party parity has had an even more profound effect on American politics. It has significantly weakened the long-term partisan component in American voting behavior and thereby strengthened its short-term, candidate- and election-specific component. As a result, it has stimulated a series of behavioral changes in voting patterns that have transformed the American governmental process (see Figure 3.7). These behavioral consequences will be documented at the national level, where systematic data are most readily available. But evidence indicates that the same patterns also appear in state politics (see Fiorina 1996).

One sign of a weaker partisan component in voting is greater fluctuation in vote outcomes across elections than has been common in American politics. From 1964 to 1996, for example, the Republican candidate for president
Figure 3.7 Behavioral Consequences of Partisan Parity and Nonpartisanship, 1952-1996

Source: NES Cumulative Series.

Note: Entries = presidential-House split for major parties and all candidates; change in presidential vote from previous election; third-party presidential vote.
has obtained the following percentages of the popular vote: 38, 43, 61, 48, 51, 59, 54, 37, and 41. Compare this with the Republican totals in the period between the end of Reconstruction in 1876 and the realigning election in 1896 when the two major American parties were equally competitive but when few voters seemed to be independents; the Republican percentages of the popular vote then were 48, 48, 48, 48, and 43. This variation in presidential vote can be summarized statistically by the mean partisan swing from contest to contest (dashed line in Figure 3.7), where swing is the average difference in vote between the major party candidates (Burnham 1965).

An even more dramatic example of a weakly partisan, short-term-oriented electorate lies in the fate of recent incumbent presidents who have been eligible for reelection. If he completes his second term, Bill Clinton will have been only the second incumbent since Dwight Eisenhower (Ronald Reagan was the other) to have served two full terms. Johnson, Nixon, Carter, and Bush all were denied two terms owing to electoral defeat or withdrawal, in the face of virtually certain defeat in Johnson’s case or sure impeachment in Nixon’s. In a century during which only a handful of previous presidents had been denied a full two terms (Taft, Hoover, and Truman), the number of post-1960 “unseatings” is especially significant. Recent decades have truly become an era when presidential incumbency seems as much a disadvantage as an advantage.

A parallel characteristic of the contemporary era is the volatile popular standing of many presidents during a single term in office as measured by the Gallup Poll’s presidential approval question. Nixon plunged from the heights of landslide reelection (62 percent approval) to the depths of Watergate and resignation (24 percent approval) in two short years. Carter’s standing plunged from 50 percent to 30 percent approval in eighteen months. Bush set a modern record for popularity in the immediate aftermath of the Gulf War (89 percent approval), only to plummet to a low of 29 percent just eighteen months later (Mueller 1994). Clinton’s popularity has not shown such variability over time, perhaps because of his record-low approval ratings to begin with, but his 1996 reelection victory seemed all but impossible just two years before when the triumphant Republicans had seized control of the Congress for the first time in forty years. While presidential popularity levels reflect the unique character of particular presidencies, they also show a shift toward more variability within each presidential administration after the mid-1960s.

There also is evidence that partisanship has a weaker relationship to the vote than in the past. At the congressional level, scholars have stressed the power of incumbency and the personal vote (Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987), and the importance of these indicators of candidate-centered behavior reappeared in the next election after the Democrats had lost their control of Congress in 1994. Oddly, incumbency became such an asset in congres-
sional elections just as it seemed to be a liability in the more visible presidential contests. At the presidential level, moreover, third-party or independent candidates—Wallace in 1968, Anderson in 1980, Perot in 1992 and 1996—have been more successful during this period than at any other time in our history (Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus 1996). Figure 3.7 (dotted line) shows these independent and third-party surges—and in contrast to the more typical 1952–1964 period, how distinctive they are. Since the emergence of the present two-party system at the time of the Civil War, in fact, the only non-major party candidate to poll a higher percentage of the vote than Perot in 1992 was a former president—Theodore Roosevelt.

Party linkages across the ballot also have waned, as is characteristic of movement to a more candidate-centered (Wattenberg 1994) rather than party-centered electoral politics. Split-ticket voting, with voters casting votes for candidates from different parties on the same ballot, has reached unprecedented levels (compare Cummings 1966 with Beck et al. 1992 and Kimball 1997), even when only splits among major party candidates are considered (see the solid line in Figure 3.7). If votes for third-party presidential candidates are considered as necessarily split also, the levels of president-Congress ticket splitting soar in the 1960s and intermittently remain at a relatively high level into the 1990s, when a strict major party ticket-splitting measure suggests that ticket splitting had declined (see the dashed-and-dotted line in Figure 3.7).

The systemic result of less partisan and less stable voting is divided government, the prime institutional form of our times at both the national level and in the states (Sundquist 1988; Fiorina 1992). So prominent has divided government become that some pundits and scholars claim that it is a product of conscious decisions by voters to prevent either party from securing unchecked control of governmental institutions, although little empirical evidence supports their proposition (Kimball 1997). Even Democratic control of Congress, the lone constancy in the post-1964 sea of instability, became a victim of this antiparty sentiment, as it was lost in a paroxysm of anti-Democratic or anti-Clinton anger in 1994 and could not be restored once normal times and their proincumbent bias returned. As the 1995–1996 Republican Congress soon learned, the pre- and post-1994 continuities in party control, first Democratic and then Republican, were more attributable to incumbent-oriented voting, a personal vote resistant to long-term partisan forces, than any strong voter commitment to party government or party ideology.

Conclusion

This new electoral system may have reached its equilibrium state—a so-called sixth party system (Aldrich and Niemi 1995)—in the last decade or
so. If so, it is a highly dynamic equilibrium characterized by considerable election-to-election fluctuation between the parties. This volatility is the work of election-specific movements of a large nonpartisan electorate around the almost 50-50 “normal vote” baseline (Converse 1966) set by two almost equally balanced groups of partisans. It is these nonpartisans who hold the “balance of power” in contemporary elections as they vacillate from party to party and from involvement to apathy across elections in response to the prevailing short-term forces. It is they, more than the partisan electorate, who define our present era and hold the key to its future.

The coexistence of these two profoundly different electorates operating side by side in American politics makes predictions of the future difficult. Of course the current system could remain in place, as it has since the late 1960s. Yet it is easy to locate strong pressures toward disequilibrium on the contemporary scene. First, as the ascendant party in this system, the GOP might simply ride the wave of its current momentum into partisan dominance and a new more clear-cut realignment. Its continuing inability to turn its opportunities into more sizable gains in partisan loyalists, however, raises doubt about whether the GOP can turn a wary electorate into a Republican majority, even in the midst of heavy short-term advantages such as those that might result from scandal. Second, continued ideological polarization within the partisan share of the electorate threatens to increase popular disenchantment with the current system and deepen the dealignment. This would buoy the prospects for third-party or independent candidates and promote continued electoral volatility—unless, under the impetus of an economic depression or other national trauma, nonpartisans were mobilized into a new major party.

But we must be cautious not to substitute surmise about future trajectories for substance about the past and present in characterizing the contemporary electoral scene and the changes that produced it. So much speculation has been focused on the trajectory of recent trends that it has obscured the real story of our current party system, which can best be told in terms of the relative sizes, compositions, and electoral tendencies of its two electorates—one partisan, and evenly divided, the other estranged from the two parties. They define the unique characteristics of party politics and American politics in our time.

Notes

This chapter is a revision and extension of my Tuft Lecture at the University of Cincinnati in November 1996. I am grateful to my hosts in the Department of Political Science there for the opportunity to first present these ideas, to Steve Greene and Andy Tomlinson of The Ohio State University for their valuable assistance in the data analysis on which this essay is
based, and to the National Election Studies and the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research for making NES data available.

1. The data on partisanship come from the cumulative series of the National Election Studies under whose aegis national surveys of the American electorate have been conducted every two years beginning in 1952. The founders or what was to become the NES pioneered the now-conventional measurement of party identification based on answers to two questions (Campbell et al. 1960: chapter 6). The first question is “Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an independent, or what?” Democrats and Republicans are then asked whether their loyalty is strong or not so strong, and independents are asked whether they are closer to the Democratic or Republican Party. The analysis in this chapter relies solely on answers to the first question in dividing respondents into Democrats, independents, and Republicans. Analysis too extensive to be reported here suggests that, over the long haul, independents indicating closeness to a party behave much more as independents than partisans regardless of how partisan their behavior may be in any particular election.

2. Religious preference was coded from the denominational categories provided in the NES data. Prior to 1960, the codes were not adequate to differentiate fundamentalists from nonfundamentalists. A more detailed coding scheme was devised for the 1960 study, but, by 1988, it had become apparent that it was not detailed enough to adequately reflect differences among the various religious groupings that had emerged, so a new code was introduced for the 1990 and subsequent studies. Given these coding changes, representing improved conceptualization of religious differences in American society, comparisons across the years are difficult. The best we could do was use the “translation table” from the cumulative series codebook and incorporate the new codes for 1996. Our analysis omits the data from the 1950s and 1962 because religious denominations were not coded adequately to differentiate fundamentalists from nonfundamentalists.

3. Ideology is measured with a seven-point self-identification scale that goes from strong liberal to strong conservative with moderate in the middle (at position 4). A substantial portion of respondents declared that they never thought of themselves “in this way” and therefore could not be placed on the scale. Coded as ideologues were all respondents who saw themselves as fitting on the scale and placed themselves on either side of 4; those falling off the scale were treated as nonideologues.

4. From 1900 through 1964, the only other presidents who failed to serve a full two terms had either died in office (McKinley, Harding, and Kennedy) or chosen not to seek reelection even though they surely would have won (T. Roosevelt).

5. Some non-major-party candidates for president in recent decades have run as third-party nominees (Wallace in 1968, Perot in 1996), whereas others have run as independents (Anderson in 1980, Perot in 1992). This is a distinction without meaning, because all of them featured a presidential candidate without any significant “down-ticket” running mates. In contrast to third-party movements in earlier times, therefore, the recent incursions against the major parties at the national level have been candidate centered rather than party centered. Third-partyism too has been transformed in this antiparty age.
“The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly”: The Judicial Shaping of Party Activities

David K. Ryden

Party scholars overwhelmingly focus their attentions on the sufficiency of party performance, often to the neglect of the environment within which parties exist. Parties are “more the products of their environment than architects of it” (Keefe 1994: 319). Their activities are molded by overarching contextual forces that both limit and create opportunities for successful performance of party functions. One such constraint is a political culture steeped in public skepticism and disinterest. Another is an electronic and mass communications network marked by a proliferation of alternative sources of information and forums for political activity.

One of the most important, but frequently overlooked, contextual factors impacting parties is the legal environment. The constitutional framework divides and disperses power among various branches and levels of government and overlays upon them a system of checks and balances and other structural constraints. Statutory constraints complicate matters, as a maze of state laws directly and indirectly affects parties’ nominating powers, fund-raising capabilities, organizational autonomy, and other attributes.

With most eyes trained on electoral and campaign activities, 1996 provided an extraordinary reexamination of the legal context of party activities. Litigation yielded a series of Supreme Court decisions that could significantly reshape partisan organization and activities. Three cases in particular demonstrate in stark fashion the complexity of the legal contextual influences at work and the judicial uncertainty as to parties’ legal status. The mixed results conjure up Sergio Leone’s classic film, The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly, as the Court has struggled for a coherent jurisprudential approach to the constitutional handling of political parties. In the end, the cases contain seeds of future promise and peril for parties’ ability to fulfill traditional functions.

In Colorado Republican Committee et al. v. FEC, the Court came closest to achieving the “good,” weakening Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA)
restrictions on political parties. By declaring much of party spending to be beyond the reach of FECA’s spending limits, the ruling freed parties to spend almost unlimited amounts of unregulated “soft money” on issue advocacy ads and transfers to state committees. The national parties responded by spending unprecedented amounts of soft money (over $270 million) in the 1996 campaign cycle, bolstering party-building activities and financial support to candidates on all levels along the way. In the long run, the ruling could yield parties more integrated on the local, state, and national levels, better equipped to develop cohesive party agendas—in short, parties closer to the model envisioned by responsible party government theorists.

The “bad” is represented by *Timmons v. Twin Cities Area New Party* (1996), in which the constitutional standing of minor parties was subordinated to a poorly articulated deference to the two-party system. In rejecting minor parties’ resort to fusion (multiple-party nomination of the same candidate), the Court foreclosed a genuine opportunity for third parties to consolidate their electoral successes, recruit quality candidates, and gain leverage within the legislative system. The Court’s refusal to ease legal barriers for third parties virtually assures a continuation of the party duopoly and the status quo. Even more significantly, the ruling narrowly defines parties’ associational rights, setting a dangerous precedent that could lead to accelerating regulation of all parties.

The “ugliest” treatment of parties, however, came in *Morse v. Republican Party of Virginia* (1996), when the Court refused to defer to party rules that existed in tension with a federal statute. In *Morse*, the Court stretched the Voting Rights Act preclearance requirement to strike down a $45 registration fee required to attend the Virginia Republican Party’s statewide convention. The muddled opinion diminished parties’ freedom and autonomy to define how core associational activities are carried out. In equating political parties with the state and treating “party action as state action,” the decision could eventually lead to much broader state intrusion into future party activity.

**Parties, the Court, and the Constitution**

The relationship between political parties and the U.S. Supreme Court is one historically marked by ambivalence and ambiguity. Denounced by the Framers and absent from the Constitution and Bill of Rights, the American party system and the tradition of party government developed outside the constitutional framework, “an anomaly engrafted onto a constitutional system that did not plan for them” (Lowenstein 1995: 298). On one hand, party objectives are seemingly in opposition to fundamental principles underlying the Constitution. A constitutional design premised upon the pillars of feder-
andalism and the separation of powers made it more difficult for the newly constituted national government to achieve tangible results. Parties were and are a means of overcoming those constitutional barriers. In this sense, parties and the Constitutional structure point in opposite theoretical directions (Keefe 1994: 3).

On the other hand, the Constitution is only silent on parties, not explicitly hostile to them. First Amendment rights of expression, assembly, and association allowed parties to organize. Moreover, proparty scholars and theorists have held up parties as instrumental to the realization of such fundamental constitutional values as democratic responsiveness, consent, equality, public choice, and accountability. Party proponents view them as an indispensable means of building consensus across branches and levels of government, without which effective governance would be inconceivable (McSweeney and Zvesper 1991: 66). Hence, the argument emerges for a constitutional order that incorporates political parties, notwithstanding their absence from the text of the Constitution (Maveety 1991: 147).

This ambiguity has presented a dilemma for the Supreme Court. In recent years, it has considered the constitutional status of parties in a variety of contexts, from the propriety of party patronage and primaries to the parties’ role in drawing district lines, funding campaigns, and ballot access. The Court has been a powerful force in shaping the parties’ legal environment. In the process of melding the practical operation of the political system generally, the Court has been influential in determining how well or poorly parties function as channels of representative government.

At the same time, the parties’ extraconstitutional nature has deprived the Court of the means necessary to treat them in a doctrinally consistent or theoretically sound manner. Parties’ hazy constitutional standing means that “the party institution is unlikely to conform very neatly to lawyerly doctrinal categories” (Maveety 1991: 187). Indeed, the Court lacks a clearly accepted, normative understanding of parties, their role, and functions. Nor is there broad support within the legal and political science disciplines for a constitutionally grounded doctrine of “responsible party government” that might inform the Court’s jurisprudence. Finally, the general public is increasingly hostile to the role of parties and partisan organization in elections and government.

The consequence is a modern era of Supreme Court jurisprudence basically indifferent toward parties as institutional safeguards of representative democratic politics. In ballot and voter access issues, the Court has blurred obvious distinctions between independent candidacies and party organizations. It has actually subordinated parties to other political associations in carving out a group right to representation in gerrymandering disputes. In campaign finance, parties until recently were excluded from the discussion altogether. In severely circumscribing patronage, the Court has refused to
acknowledge that such practices might solidify the institutional foundations of partisan organizations or enhance their effectiveness as governing agents.

These judicial shortcomings have had practical ramifications for the effectiveness of modern parties. While a host of independent factors have contributed to party decline, the Court has reinforced a largely unfriendly legal environment. It has upheld states' power to regulate parties, confirming progressive reforms that badly weakened parties in their electoral, organizational, and governing capacities. It has contributed to undermining party influence in favor of an individualistic, unmediated, participatory politics. In sum, the constitutional environment erected by the Court has made more difficult the tasks frequently assigned to parties—including reversing their fortunes in national politics.

Parties at the Bar in 1996: Reversal of Fortune or Deepening Disregard?

The future of American political parties will depend in no small part on their standing in regard to the Constitution (Kesler 1993: 232). This point is manifest in recent cases with far-reaching implications for parties and the legal/constitutional framework within which they operate. These cases hold out the prospect of a friendlier legal environment for the future of parties. But it remains for the parties to take advantage of that promise to better perform critical democratic functions.

*Colorado Republican Committee et al. v. FEC*: Elevating the Role of Parties in Financing Campaigns

The evolution of the campaign financing system demonstrates how constitutional doctrine can fundamentally dictate and direct the activities of parties and other political actors. In twenty years of campaign financing decisions leading up to the 1996 elections, parties were almost completely ignored. Meanwhile, other political players realized expanded influence thanks in part to sympathetic Supreme Court decisions. Not until *Colorado Republican Committee et al. v. FEC* (1996) did parties successfully challenge legislative constraints on their role in financing campaigns.

The current state of campaign financing is traceable to the Court’s seminal decision in *Buckley v. Valeo* (1976). The FECA was substantially rewritten in 1974 in response to assorted sordid activities employed by President Nixon’s reelection committee. Among other things, the reforms limited what individuals, political action campaigns (PACs), and parties could contribute to, and spend on behalf of, their candidates. The Court’s judgment on those reforms in *Buckley* recast the entire campaign financing landscape. While
upholding the constitutionality of the contribution limits on both individuals and PACs, Buckley rejected independent spending caps. Meanwhile, the limits on coordinated spending by parties stood untouched. The result was a relative imbalance that allowed PACs and wealthy individuals to spend unlimited amounts of money on their candidates. Without cumulative independent spending caps, PACs could also dispense $5,000 checks to as many candidates as they could afford. PACs exploited the disparate rules to the fullest, increasing their influence as alternative, competing sources of money on that candidates could rely. The PAC explosion which ensued was a disastrous development to pro-party proponents who viewed the system as already too candidate centered and untethered from party control.

Doctrinally, Buckley and its offspring placed parties and PACs on equal constitutional footing regarding their associational rights to fund campaigns (Maveety 1991: 174). As the Court trampled further into the thicket of campaign financing, it altered the rules of campaign financing with virtually no consideration of the impact on parties. On the rare occasions when parties surfaced, the preoccupation with groups as conduits of individual speech left parties indistinguishable from, and even subordinate to, other politically active associations (Ryden 1996: 2). Although no case directly challenged the party provisions in the FECA, the Court reinforced the message that “parties were no more important to electoral representation than other political groups” (Maveety 1991: 174-75).

This constitutional broadening of group access to areas of electioneering traditionally considered the purview of party organizations freed groups to challenge the exclusive domain of parties. By the 1990s, the parties lagged well behind PACs in their financial support for candidates. Proponents of strong parties called for an elevated party position in campaign financing schemes. They argued that the prominence of PACs undermined any leverage parties might have to command party discipline in governance, allowing candidates to wander further from their party base. Politicians well served by the existing incumbent protection program were not inclined to act on such calls, and specific partisan interests further impeded legislative reform. Ironically, the best hope for improving the parties’ lot lay with a Supreme Court that previously had contributed significantly to their decline.

*Colorado Republican Committee et al. v. FEC* involved FECA limits on coordinated party expenditures invoked by the FEC against the Colorado Republican Party in connection with a general election campaign in the 1986 U.S. Senate race. The complaint arose out of radio ads run by the Republican committee attacking then-Congressman Tim Wirth, the presumptive Democratic candidate.

The Supreme Court sided with the Republican Party, in a fractured decision obscuring the potential consequences. A three-justice plurality relied on narrow, statute-specific grounds, determining that the limits on coordinated
party spending could not apply, since the Republicans had not yet selected a candidate and hence could not "coordinate" anything. Under the circumstances, the party spending resembled an independent expenditure more than a campaign contribution, and under *Buckley* it was entitled to greater First Amendment protection from Congress's regulatory efforts. The plurality took care to avoid any suggestion that parties might have special constitutional status, reserving for another day any wholesale challenge to party restrictions. In contrast, four of the justices were prepared to strike down the entire Party Expenditure Provision of FECA as an unconstitutional restriction on parties.³

The decision's impact was immediate. It created an "independent expenditure" category for parties that had not previously existed, freeing parties from any spending limits in the absence of coordination between candidate and party. Parties could engage in unfettered spending provided party committees insulated their spending and strategies from their candidates. Previously, the parties' difficulties in finding legal ways to spend large amounts of unregulated soft money acted as a built-in constraint on how much money they raised. The opening of the unlimited independent spending pipeline proved parties capable of raising and spending huge amounts. The result was a massive influx of party resources into the elections (Federal Elections Commission 1997: 9).

In short, the decision was decisive in elevating parties in the funding of the 1996 campaigns. The immediate beneficiaries were the two presidential candidates, who benefitted from a flood of thinly veiled generic party ads. But the increases also aided parties organizationally, allowing the national parties to step up party building activities and offer greater support to candidates at all levels (Corrado 1996). This contributed to the number of highly competitive congressional contests in 1996, helping both parties attract better candidates and fund more races. Less clear, however, is whether *Colorado Republican Committee et al.* will in the long run strengthen party cohesion and bring parties closer to the responsible party government model.

The Two-Party System Bias and *Timmons v. Twin Cities Area New Party*

The most uniquely American characteristic of our electoral system has been the stability, strength, and permanency of the two-party system. Yet serious chinks exist in the armor of the two major parties and in the two-party system itself. The attachment of voters to parties has weakened, leading to greater ticket splitting and crossing of party lines. As independent voters increase, so too do the opportunities for third-party challenges. Deep disillusionment with the major parties was evident in the Perot presidential candidacies of 1992 and 1996. Recent polls show sizeable majorities of voters either favoring the presence of a third-party candidate in the presidential
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race or desiring that candidates run without party label altogether (CQ Researcher 1995: 1140; National Journal 1996: 2514). The volume of minor party candidates and new parties forming in recent years has risen dramatically (Collet and Hanson 1996: 242). In short, large numbers of Americans appear ready to embrace an alternative to the two-party system.

Yet public misgivings with the major parties have not yielded minor party electoral success. Hurdles include the single-member districts and winner-take-all electoral arrangements at the core of the constitutional system, the difficulty of large-scale grassroots organization building, and voters who are deeply conditioned to the two-party system and disinclined to waste votes on unelectable candidates. State and federal election laws are overtly hostile to minor parties. Democratic- and Republican-controlled legislatures have severely disadvantaged minor and new parties in garnering access to the ballot, qualifying for public financing, and structuring primary laws. These constitutional, political, and legal biases have produced a virtually impenetrable set of barriers to the formation and maintenance of a multiparty system.

The legal entrenchment of the two-party system has been a frequent target of minor party litigation activity. Consequently, the Supreme Court has been central in delineating the extent to which the values underlying the two-party system are enshrined in the Constitution. In the past three decades, the Court has periodically considered minor parties’ legal status within the context of state restrictions on access to the ballot, with decidedly mixed results. The Court vacillated between outcomes that reflected (1) a desire to democratize the ballot laws to permit greater numbers of candidates, enhanced political participation, and increased voter choices (Williams v. Rhodes, Lubin v. Parrish, and Anderson v. Celebrezze) and (2) a constitutional preference for a stable two-party system, the avoidance of splintered parties and factionalism, and limited, narrowed electoral choices (Jenness v. Fortson, Storer v. Brown, and Burdick v. Takushi). As a rule, the Court’s consideration of political parties in these cases was sporadic and erratic, ignoring the functional attributes of parties or how ballot access rules might relate to them (Ryden 1996: 152–53). Despite some modest third-party successes, a state-sanctioned duopoly remained solidly in place.

In Timmons v. Twin Cities Area New Party (1996), the Court frontally addressed the constitutional balance between minor party rights and the state’s interest in a strong two-party system. The Twin Cities New Party nominated as its candidate for a state House seat the Democratic incumbent, who was running unopposed in the Democratic-Farmer-Labor (DFL) primary. Though neither the candidate nor the DFL objected, Minnesota election officials refused the party’s nominating petition, citing a state law prohibiting multiple-party nomination of the same candidate. The practice known as fusion is prohibited by some forty other states. The prohibition,
while neutral on its face, clearly burdens minor parties, since any candidate twice nominated will opt for the major party nomination if forced to choose. The New Party challenged the law as a breach of its First Amendment associational rights. In upholding the ban, the Court concluded that the Constitution allows states to protect “political stability . . . through a healthy two-party system.” Hence, they need not remove hurdles facing third parties in the American political arena.

The decision foreclosed a rare avenue for tangible minor party inroads into the two-party duopoly, depriving them of the competition-enhancing benefits of fusion. Fusion balloting is a potentially effective tool for minor parties to acquire bargaining leverage with the major parties. The prospect of two places on the ballot gives the twice-nominated candidate incentive to woo the new party’s voters and to take seriously the minor party agenda. The major parties may well move toward the policy positions of the minor party in an effort to co-opt its popularity. Fusion gives voice to the third party, a voice that may receive significant exposure and media coverage. A strong third-party showing could allow the party to claim credit for the electoral victory, thus warranting modest patronage, a cabinet position, or some other presence in the administration.

Fusion aids minor parties’ long-range electoral achievements by helping overcome their chronic inability to recruit a full slate of high-caliber candidates. Grassroots development may become much easier if the minor party can nominate for lower level offices major party candidates who have the chance to win. Fusion enables a new party to attract independents or weak-leaning Democrats and Republicans who would otherwise not waste a vote on an unelectable third-party candidate. This may generate incentives and enthusiasm for the party to organize and recruit members and to realize greater support for and participation in its activities and organization (Lowi 1996).

Timmons artificially insulates major parties from minor party challenges at a time when the public mood otherwise might be far more sympathetic to such challenges. Manufactured legal props distort the level of public support for the major parties and make significant voter shifts to third parties less likely. Timmons reinforces an oppressive legal regime, the effect of which is to discourage fresh interests or voices from seeking power through minor parties (Epstein 1986: 173).

Moreover, this endorsement of the two-party system may be an illusory victory for the major parties. Timmons can be characterized as antiparty based on its implicit invoking of the power of the state to regulate parties as it sees fit. It signals a reversal of the Court’s inclination in recent years to emphasize party autonomy and freedom from state regulation, even though in this instance the major parties are elevated by virtue of their regulated
status. The state’s power to constrain the New Party today may more easily evolve into regulatory action directed at all parties tomorrow.

Equally antiparty is the narrow construction given the partisan right of association. The majority asserted that the prohibition against fusion did not impinge on a “core associational” activity. Yet what activity goes more to the heart of party association than selecting the designated nominee on the ballot? That act involves the basic purposes for which parties exist: to advance a message by identifying a candidate who represents that message, nominating that candidate, and working to elect him or her to office. The fusion ban interferes with the basic right of a party to select that person who best reflects and embodies its collective identity. The Court’s cavalier dismissal of partisan association cannot bode well for any political party. It may weaken party autonomy to withstand a state regulatory machinery that invariably is exercised in an environment hostile to parties.

Finally, constitutional protection of the two-party duopoly may no longer be warranted but may only damage the well-being of the major parties (Lowi 1994: 51). Minor parties serve important democratic aims, as outlets for the disenchanted and alienated, luring dissident and frustrated citizens back into politics. The major parties have been increasingly lackluster in performing this democratizing function. Muffling legitimate alternatives will only amplify the disillusionment with the major parties and the system as a whole.

In the process, *Timmons* undermines reform within the major parties. Minor party competition, by highlighting important issues that the major parties would rather not address, produces more responsive and intellectually honed parties. The more diffuse the competition, the more dulled, conservative, and risk-averse the major parties become. Parties win elections by responding to the concerns of significant independent or third-party movements. Legal barriers that obfuscate sizable third-party support only entrench and ossify the major parties, rendering them less responsive and widening the breach between parties and an alienated electorate.

In *Timmons*, the Court proved a looming obstacle to party reform. With major party control of Congress and state legislatures, more sympathetic legal treatment of minor parties must begin with the Constitution and the Supreme Court. After *Timmons*, it is safe to assume the continuation of a constitutionally protected, state-sanctioned, party duopoly.

**Parties: Free Associations or Regulated Entities? The *Morse* Decision**

The judiciary is the primary referee of conflicts between autonomous party existence and their regulation by the state. Parties have endured a century of governmental regulatory action. From the 1890s to the 1920s, they suffered a barrage of progressive reforms designed to break the hierarchy of
party bosses and machines. The inexorable push toward participatory democracy has continued throughout this century, with parties revolting into quasi-public entities rather than purely private associations (Epstein 1986: 199). The propriety of governmental regulation has focused on two general questions. One pertains to party rules/state law conflicts regarding who can participate in primaries, conventions, or other party activities. The second involves state imposed requirements or constraints on the structure, organization, or internal operation of parties.

In recent years, the Court has generally deferred to party rules on both of these questions. Several key decisions rendered the party’s voice determinative in defining who could take part in selecting the party nominee, whether in establishing an open primary (Tashjian v. Republican Party of Connecticut 1986) or establishing convention delegate selection procedures (Cousins v. Wigoda 1975; Democratic Party of U.S. v. LaFollette 1980). Likewise, the Court in Eu v. San Francisco Democratic Committee (1989) unanimously rejected a California statute that dictated the composition of the state parties’ governing boards and stripped them of the ability to endorse candidates in primary elections. These cases gave solid constitutional protection to parties’ self-determination. Decisions on who votes in party elections, who carries the party banner forward, and how the party makes these decisions rested squarely in the hands of the parties themselves (Ryden 1996: 161). It was the party’s affair to “organize itself, conduct its affairs, and select its leaders,” not the state’s (Eu v. San Francisco Democratic Committee: 230–31, Marshall, J.).

Unlike earlier cases, Morse v. Republican Party of Virginia (1996) entailed a conflict with a federal statute rather than state law. As a precondition to participation in its convention to select its 1994 U.S. Senate nominee, the Virginia Republican Party imposed a $45 registration fee. The fee was challenged, and eventually struck down, as a violation of Section 5 of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, requiring that states with a history of racially discriminatory voting laws obtain preclearance from the U.S. attorney general before enacting new voting qualifications or prerequisites. In applying the Voting Rights Act to the fee, the Court equated the Republican Party with the authority of the state. Since the imposition of the fee restricted voters’ participation in the convention, it unconstitutionally undercut their ability to influence who would appear on the ballot.

The peculiar facts of this case and the badly fractured nature of the result (only Justice Ginsburg joined in Justice Stevens’s plurality opinion) leave it unclear how deeply it might affect state party rules and organization. Because Morse involved a federal statute, it may not disrupt earlier cases preferring party rules over state regulations. But it sets the outer boundaries to which earlier cases might be extended. Federal statutory and constitutional voting rights (of which attending a state party convention apparently is one)
trump the associational rights of state parties to define themselves in an exclu­sionary or limiting fashion.

The case is troublesome for the future of party activities, however. The plurality opinion explicitly relied on party activity as state action, including political parties within the meaning of “state” under the Voting Rights Act. It permits the government to thrust itself into fundamental party business, in this case “the selection of [that] party candidate” who “can best represent and advance the group’s goals” (Thomas dissent). A nominating convention is “the classic forum for . . . association with like-minded persons for the purpose” of advancing political views (Thomas dissent). Hence, the opinion condones a substantial intrusion into the freedom of parties to enact basic procedural or organizational rules.

Full constitutional recognition of associational freedom would entail reversing the doctrine of “party action as state action” and restoring the party’s prerogative to determine its own nominations (Epstein 1986). Morse does the opposite, reading that right narrowly and rejecting its importance as a tool for building organizational effectiveness. By subjecting parties to the Voting Rights policy of nondiscriminatory political participation, the Court subordinated the association of the committed party faithful to the right of peripheral “members” to have a say in integral party decision making. The fee, meant to dissuade meddling in a high-profile convention, was a logical measure to protect party integrity and safeguard an important party decision from sabotage.

Instead, the Court shrank the sphere of protected party association. The party’s freedom to identify or circumscribe those who constitute its association yielded to the ever-present impulse for more inclusive and “democratic” rules and expanded individual participation. By lowering the commitment necessary to enter into party association, the Court cast aside the party’s effort to assure that delegates have the requisite seriousness to pursue the party’s objectives in the optimal way.

The Parties in Tension with the Constitution: Looking Ahead

These decisions present promise and peril for political parties. At first glance, Timmons and Colorado Republican Committee suggest a more sympathetic constitutional environment for Democrats and Republicans. But the increasingly robust national party organizations stand in contrast to the growing irrelevance of parties to citizens and voters (Coleman 1994: 313–14). In a campaign finance system increasingly seen as illegitimate, party successes in the money business ironically may prove detrimental, even fatal, to their link to the voters. Unless parties use their influence to integrate and connect the party functions in ways that bring back the voters, it will be of little value to, and could harm, party institutions. Colorado Republican
Committee presents a window of opportunity for partisan organizations to demonstrate that they can govern effectively, and it hinges upon a series of important questions that bear watching.

Will greater party resources lead to intensified coordinated activities on an intraparty basis—that is, the melding of local, state, and national party organizations? State parties have benefited from the transfer of funds from national organizations to assist with various party-building functions (Corrado 1996: 78–81). Greater national-state-local party integration as a means to policy-oriented parties requires national organizations sufficiently committed to rebuilding the party presence at the grassroots level.

If the parties simply ratchet up the focus on national elections, it will only amplify the disparity of influence between national and local parties. Continued refinement of electronic and mass communications to the neglect of personal politics will widen the chasm between party organizations and the public. One important development to monitor, then, is whether enhanced national party financial strength will feed the top-down party system, with local parties even more dependent on the dictates of the national organizations. Ironically, stronger national organizations may complicate the widespread, grassroots rejuvenation of local parties needed to reconnect people to partisan organizations.

Will greater financial clout by the parties constrain interest group influence? Another anticipated benefit of enhanced party spending is a shift in the balance of power between parties and special interests. Pluralist theory presupposed group activity occurring within the framework of a strong two-party system. Instead, PACs have evolved into independent sources of financial support in a candidate-centered politics. The greater financial clout of parties intuitively should act as a countervailing damper on rampant interest group politics (Maveety 1991: 172–73).

This depends on the parties' regaining a competitive edge over, or parity with, well heeled interest groups. In 1996, however, the freedom of parties to spend more money produced a corollary need to raise more, a need satisfied by interest groups through the “soft money” conduit. As parties' influence grew, so too did that of interest groups that could sate the parties' thirst for greater resources. Parties proved adept in channeling additional interest group money into campaigns. But the balance of power between PACs and parties was unaltered. If this pattern persists, parties will be even more reliant on large soft money donations, more vulnerable to special interests, and have less incentive to pursue modest individual donors.

Will the parties' increased financial role lead to more programmatic, party-based campaigns and candidates? The responsible party model assumes candidates who are somewhat dependent on parties and willing to balance their constituency-driven interests with a degree of loyalty to a party agenda. But it is difficult to envision any amount of party spending breaking
the hold of candidate-centered politics, in an age of packaged candidates, incessant opinion polling, consultants, high-tech media, and the like. Refined, energized national party organizations may be empowered to perform better, but in a service mode for individual candidates within the candidate-centered universe.

Indeed, *Colorado Republican Committee* has created the perverse incentive for parties to engage in spending without consultation with their candidates, hardly a practice responsible party advocates would endorse. The "independence" requirement nullifies party and candidate working closely to develop partywide coherence and consistency of message, and it may even leave them working at cross-purposes. In contrast, if party resources were devoted to policy-generating endeavors and to recruiting candidates who were in agreement with those policies, parties could cultivate their programmatic dimension. For example, the congressional committees could more aggressively promote thematic campaigns akin to the Republicans' Contract with America. A more united and coherent party program (which the Republicans did achieve) would heighten the sense of responsibility among those who are elected for developing legislative programs consistent with that party platform (Keefe 1994: 248).

*Might the parties, having won this constitutional battle, end up losing the legal war by prompting destructive reforms?* There is seemingly universal agreement that the soft money funneled through parties into the 1996 campaigns was highly destructive to the elections. The dominant perception of these elections as the most scandalous in history has intensified demands for an overhaul of the campaign financing system. The various reform proposals may fall victim to the politicians' aversion to altering a system that serves them so well. But the reform with the greatest support is a ban on soft money, the unregulated funds ostensibly reserved for party-building activities. For officeholders disconnected from and unreliant on parties, soft money is an easy target to sacrifice to appease the hue and cry for reform. Such a ban would effectively nullify *Colorado Republican Committee*, rendering the victory in court a pyrrhic one.

*If parties successfully avoid the pitfalls of reform, to what end will the organizational revitalization of the national party committees be put?* Will parties use their financing strength as a lever of internal party control to generate attendant benefits in the form of responsible, coherent, disciplined parties? Will greater financial clout elevate and improve the substantive content of the campaign discourse? Will it advance the cause of programmatic party governance once candidates are in office? Will the improved financial wherewithal of parties enable them to better perform the traditional party functions for which they are known?

The political parties themselves hold the answers. How they exercise their newfound clout will determine their standing with a public disgusted
with parties and politics in a system awash in money. If they follow in the
mode of the 1996 elections, they will do so at their own peril. While actual
corruption through campaign financing has been largely anecdotal and with­
out empirical support, parties must acknowledge the appearance of impro­
priety and the public perception that money gives well-heeled interests
undue influence in politics (Corrado 1993). After the soft money chase of
1996 and the assorted fund-raising scandals that accompanied it, much of
the public has simply concluded that the system is hopelessly corrupt and
irredeemable. Increased spending by parties, combined with questionable
fund-raising practices and incestuous relations with soft money donors, will
intensify the mood of suspicion, distrust, and disgust with parties and poli­
tics. It confirms people’s perceptions that their influence is marginal, their
interests overwhelmed by the dominant presence of special interests. It
would be ironic if the enhanced role the parties have sought in the financing
of campaigns and that has already proven to be an organizational boon ulti­
mately leads to their permanent falling out with the American electorate.

The Future of the Party System: Rejuvenation or Decline?

The most important measure of a strong party is one that maintains
broad electoral appeal and the loyalty of the citizenry (Price 1984: 123). Ul­
timately, the state of the parties rests on their standing with the people. The
most energized organizations or cohesive governing parties are of little use
if people have dismissed them as insignificant or corrupt and have checked
out of the political process. Parties written off by much of the public as ine­
efctual and unnecessary cannot satisfy the constitutional goals of account­
ability, public choice, and the legitimization of democratic government
(Kesler 1993: 244–46). By this measure, today’s parties are at risk.

The failure of debilitated, enervated parties to serve as necessary con­
duits for republican values warrants, even compels, their constitutional
status. Too often, past Supreme Court decisions have eviscerated parties’ ca­
paCity to serve constitutional ends. But it is not for the courts to artificially
prop up parties through legal means. Party influence has been circumscribed
by a historical tradition of weak parties, constitutional indifference, and pub­
lic hostility. The Court can do little about the latter, nor should it. The laws
should not attempt what parties cannot achieve for themselves—namely, to
make them relevant to the electorate. While the Court can remedy its consti­
tutional indifference and create a permissive constitutional environment
within which parties can flourish, the parties themselves must meet that chal­
lenge.

The consequences of the latest round of decisions will ultimately be
known only when we have seen how the parties and other political actors
react and evolve in response to them. Nevertheless, several parting lessons can be garnered from the parties' recent activities in court. First, they remind us of the Court's determinative influence in creating an environment that is central to party activities. Second, they demonstrate with equal clarity how unrealistic it is to expect the Court to treat parties pursuant to a coherent, integrated jurisprudential theory of representative democratic governance. Pro- and antiparty cases will continue to emanate from the Court in a haphazard, even contradictory, fashion. Third, this pattern raises serious strategic doubts as to the advisability of continued rights-based appeals to the Court. Given the unpredictability of the judiciary, this approach may only further blur the constitutional lines between parties and PACs rather than account for their functional differences. Fourth, concerned political scientists and legal scholars need to be vigilant in advocating (through amici briefs, articles, and the like) the unique and unparalleled functional attributes of political parties. Finally and most important, the onus rests squarely on partisan entities themselves to reform their activities so that the benefits are apparent. Neither the legal favoritism the two major parties receive nor the heightened prominence in the realm of campaign financing will stem the decline of partisanship among the electorate or quell the public's lack of confidence in public institutions. The parties must apply their increased resources to sharpen their traditional and unique democratic functions and to demonstrate clearly that they are worthy of constitutionally protected freedom. If not, they may continue to gain organizational muscle at the national level, only to be further dismissed by the electorate.

Notes

1. Two other cases directly impacting parties have been omitted from this discussion. The Supreme Court decided a pair of patronage cases (O'Hare Truck Service v. City of Northlake; Board of County Commissioners, Wabaunsee County v. Umbehr) in the 1995-1996 term, both restricting the right of local parties to resort to party loyalty or affiliation in awarding city contracts to independent contractors. Those cases were an extension of earlier patronage cases narrowing parties' freedom to engage in patronage practices (Elrod v. Burns, Branti v. Finkel, Rutan v. Republican Party of Illinois). The practical consequences of the latest anti-patronage cases are marginal, since little patronage remains to disassemble. The Court has merely completed what progressive reforms long ago started, reducing patronage to a mere sliver of what it once was. These cases are troublesome, however, for the abject failure of the Court to even consider or weigh the possible representative, democratizing, and mediating functions of party systems. They cannot bode well for parties' hopes that the Court will recognize the functional attributes of parties that contribute to representative government.


3. Only Justices Ginsburg and Stevens voted to uphold the provision's constitutionality
on grounds that it was a legitimate attempt by Congress to avoid a party’s undue corruption of the candidate through excessive expenditures.

4. Historical and contemporary examples illustrate the capacity of minor parties to use fusion to effectively alter the dynamics of electoral politics. The practice was widely used with great success by the Greenbackers, Populists, and others at the turn of the century, an era when issue-oriented third parties flourished. More recently, the Liberal and Conservative parties have used fusion to gain an unusually prominent role in New York state politics (Lowenstein 1995: 405).

5. The origins of Morse can be traced to the White Primary cases, when the Supreme Court firmly established the public nature of party primary activity in overturning discriminatory rules of southern Democratic state parties that limited participation in primaries to white voters only (Smith v. Allwright, 321 U.S. 649 1944; Terry v. Adams, 345 U.S. 461 1953). Eventually, parties were viewed as the functional equivalent of the state with respect to other electoral activities, leading to additional regulatory action.

6. A separate question is whether a soft money ban would survive a constitutional challenge. Indeed, in dicta in Colorado Republican Campaign Committee, Justice Breyer gave reason to think that it might not. He concluded that the “opportunity for corruption posed by [soft money] is, at best, attenuated.” With four clear votes on the Court against any restrictions on political parties, Breyer’s vote would create a majority against the prohibition against soft money.
When viewed from the historical perspective of the immediate post-WWII years, American political parties at the end of the twentieth century show dramatic evidence of change. On two important dimensions, it is as if the immediate postwar era of a relatively strong party-in-the-electorate but weak party organizations has been turned on its head. Since the 1950s and into the 1990s, partisanship among voters has weakened (Wattenberg 1996), while at the same time scholars and journalists have documented national and state national party organizations’ enhanced capacity to provide their candidates with an array of sophisticated services (Herrnson 1994; Cotter et al. 1984; Bibby and Holbrook 1996). These strengthened party organizations, however, bear little resemblance to the traditional party organizations in that they do not control nominations and do not run their candidates’ campaigns.

Although national and state party organizations, especially national-level party units, have strengthened themselves in a way that has made them significant players in electoral politics, they are in reality service agencies to candidates, and they have not brought about a rebirth of party-centered politics. Instead, the current candidate service organizations reflect the parties’ capacity to adapt to electoral politics in a candidate-centered era (Aldrich 1995). So pervasive is a candidate-centered style of politics that partisan candidates now rarely stress or even mention their party affiliation in their campaign materials. By contrast, in the immediate post-WWII years, the national party committees, not the candidates’ personal committees, really did run presidential campaigns, and national party chairmen played a major role in dispensing patronage to the party faithful.

The decline of the party-in-the-electorate and the concomitant emergence of strengthened national and state party organizations as service agencies to candidates have now been the focus of political science and journalistic analysis for more than a decade. Other changes, however, have attracted
less attention, but they are also of substantial significance for the state of parties in America. These changes include (1) heightened national-state party integration that has resulted in state parties becoming an integral element in the implementation of national campaign strategies, (2) an expanded role for party-allied organizations that work closely with the parties in achieving mutual electoral goals, and (3) the development of party organizations as networks of issue-oriented activists.

Centralization of Power and Heightened National-State Party Integration

If a proverbial but politically aware Rip Van Winkle of the immediate post-World War II era were to awake in late 1990s and survey party organizations, he would find many familiar names attached to party units, but he would also encounter major organizational changes. Of these changes, none would be greater than the heightened concentration of power in the national party organizations and the increased level of national-state party integration.

The Decentralized Parties of the Post-World War II Era

The predominant organizational characteristics of American parties during the postwar period were decentralization and organizational weakness at both the national and state levels. The extent of intraparty decentralization was noted by V. O. Key, Jr., the leading parties scholar of the era, as he concluded that state and local party organizations were so autonomous that “more than a tinge of truth colors the observation that there are no national parties, only state and local parties” (1964: 329).

Weak party organizations were also a feature of the postwar period. The Republican (RNC) and Democratic National Committees (DNC) were aptly characterized in a definitive analysis as “politics without power” (Cotter and Hennessey 1964). The weakness of the national committees derived to a significant degree from their lack of a base of support. Committee members were essentially ambassadors from their state organizations, but often times these ambassadors were cut off from political power within their own states. State party chairs were not even made members of the national committees until 1952 by the Republicans and after the post-1968 reforms by the Democrats. Another fundamental source of national committee weakness was a dependence on state parties for financial support. Without independent financial resources, the national committees were not in a position to engage in state/local party building activities or to support candidates within the states in a meaningful way. The national party structure was clearly confed-
erative in character with power flowing from state parties to the national level. In his classic study of campaign finance, Alexander Heard observed that

The financial dependence of the national units of party organization on units at other levels is symptomatic of the general distribution of power and activity throughout the parties. Not even in the Republican Party with its finance committee system sponsored from the top, does the national leadership have an independent source of funds sufficient for its purposes. (1960: 289)

The congressional and senatorial campaign committees were also pale shadows of their current selves. In the 1950s, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) operated out of a single room in the basement of the House Office Building with a staff of only five and spent only $57,050 in 1952. The operations of the Republican Hill Committees were similarly modest (Bone 1958: 130, 134, 148).

The organizational picture at the state level was little better except in some traditional organization states such as Connecticut, Indiana, and Rhode Island. Key concluded that most state central committees were “virtually dead,” with few having “continuing staffs active in the business of the party” (1956: 287) and that in the South “party organization as such plays no significant role” (1949: 392). State legislative campaign committees, which today serve as the principal party support mechanism for legislative candidates, did not even exist.

**Party Organization at the End of the Twentieth Century: Nationalization and Intraparty Integration**

**Strengthened National-Level Committees**

In striking contrast to the postwar era, the RNC and the DNC have been transformed into large-scale and well financed enterprises housed in party-owned modern office buildings, filled with high-tech equipment and professional personnel. With an ability to raise massive amounts of money—through using direct mail, soliciting donations from large givers, and putting the arm on unions, corporations, trade associations, and various groups for “soft money”—the national committees have become relatively autonomous bureaucracies in the business of aiding candidates (particularly presidential candidates) and assisting their state and local affiliates. During 1995–1996, the RNC raised $193 million in “hard money” (funds raised within FECA restrictions for federal elections) and the DNC $108.4 million (FEC 1997).

The traditional division of labor between the national and Hill committees has been maintained as the latter continue to assume primary responsibility for national party assistance to congressional and senatorial candi-
dates. The levels of expenditure by the Hill committees is substantial. During the 1995–1996 election cycle, the Democratic senatorial and congressional campaign committees combined spent in excess of $57 million, while their GOP counterparts spent more than $139 million (FEC 1997). The array of services that this level of expenditure can provide to targeted candidates includes campaign management, polling, issue and opposition research, campaign communications, and fund-raising (Herrnson 1995).

**National Committees as Support Agencies for State Parties**

With the ability to raise massive amounts of money, the national party committees have achieved a degree of autonomy and power that could not have been imagined in the late 1940s or 1950s. By providing financial and technical assistance to strengthen state/local party affiliates and assist candidates, the national committees have gained unprecedented intraparty leverage. National committee assistance programs operate in a manner similar to the federal government's grant-in-aid programs in that before state parties can receive aid, they frequently have to accept conditions—albeit flexible ones—imposed by the national party (Epstein 1986: 223). In the process, the state parties have been professionalized and have gained enhanced candidate support capabilities, but they also have become increasingly dependent on the national party for resources essential to organizational maintenance and participation in state-level campaigns. This dependency on national party largess has meant that state parties have lost some of their traditional autonomy, and the locus of intraparty power has shifted in favor of the national organizations.

In a perceptive insight, Heard observed in 1960 that “any changes that freed the national party committees of dependence on state organizations could importantly affect the loci of party power” and enable the parties to develop “a more cohesive operational structure” (294). The conditions that Heard envisioned have now become reality as the national party organizations have been strengthened in their campaign roles and state parties have become an integral element in national campaign strategies.

**Heightened Intraparty Integration**

The strengthened national party committees have been able to use their ample financial resources to achieve an unprecedented level of intraparty integration in implementing national campaign strategies. In this process, soft money—funds raised outside the restrictions of the Federal Election Campaign Act—has played a crucial role.

In 1995–1996, national-level Republican committees raised $161 million and Democratic committees raised $128 million in soft money. A por-
tion of this money was used for general party-building activities and "issue advocacy" by the national party organizations, while a substantial share of these funds were transferred to state and local parties (RNC transferred $48.2 million and the DNC $54.2 million [FEC 1997]) for spending on general party overhead, voter registration, get-out-the-vote drives, and state and local campaigns. These general party-building activities, under current interpretation of the Federal Election Campaign Act, are not considered to be in direct support of federal campaigns. The reality, however, is quite different. State/local party-building activities in actuality provide significant assistance in federal campaigns.

In allocating national party soft money funds to state parties, the national-level committees do so in a manner designed to implement a national strategy geared to winning critical states in the presidential race and maximizing the parties’ seats in the House and Senate. The scope of joint national-state party programs funded in significant degree by national parties is impressive. Thus, the RNC’s Victory ’96 direct voter contact program—including candidate specific mail, slate mail (84 million pieces of targeted mail), absentee ballots, voter identification phone calls, turnout calls (14.5 million calls to Republican households), volunteer phone centers, and collateral materials—was financed with $15.3 million in RNC money and $48.3 million in state party funds (Republican National Committee 1997: 9–10).

The DNC operated a program of comparable scope in 1996.

In effect, what has been happening through national party committee transfers of funds and assistance programs for state parties is that the national party has been using its superior resources to nationalize campaigns and integrate the national and state parties to an unprecedented extent. National party resources flow to state parties in accordance with the national party’s strategy and priorities.

Over and above helping fund and supervise voter mobilization operations as noted, the 1996 campaign provides examples of the wide array of techniques used by the national party organizations and presidential campaign organizations to integrate state parties into their campaign strategies.

- To avoid FECA restrictions, the DNC transferred $32 million to state parties in twelve key battleground states. These state parties then paid for television advertising that had been developed and placed in the media by the DNC’s media production company. The Republicans also funneled national party money to state affiliates to purchase television advertising developed under national party auspices (Marcus 1996: A4; Abramson and Wayne 1997).
- To get hard money into targeted congressional races, national party committees now swap excess soft money for hard money with their state parties. For example, the Michigan Republican Party sent
$100,000 in hard money to the RNC and received in return $150,000 in soft money that the Michigan party could use for party-building activities (Chinoy 1997; Dwyre 1997). Deeply in debt from the 1996 election and short of hard money for the 1998 campaign, the DNC engineered a much more extensive soft for hard money swap with its state parties. Over $1 million in DNC-raised soft money was transferred to the twelve state parties, each of which received a soft money commission of 10 to 15 percent on the hard money it sent to the DNC (Wilson 1998).

- Both the RNC and DNC channeled money to state parties by getting donors to contribute directly to state committees that were important in the national campaign strategy (Chinoy and Morgan 1997). In the case of the DNC, these major donor contributions channeled to state parties amounted to $3.6 million. Some of these funds involved contributions from tobacco, gambling, and other interests. Diverting these checks to state parties allowed the DNC to avoid criticism that it was accepting contributions from controversial businesses and helped protect some donors who did not want either the fact or the amount of their contributions known (Babcock and Chinoy 1997: A1, A18).

- The RNC’s communications director developed a newspaper ad critical of President Clinton’s judicial appointments. Space for the ad, which received widespread coverage, was then purchased by the Florida State GOP so that it would run concurrently with a presidential visit to the state (Balz 1996: A18).

- With Bob Dole assured the Republican presidential nomination but his campaign strapped for funds in May 1996, the Republican Party of Wisconsin picked up the tab for his expenses while making a campaign appearance in the state (Gilbert 1996: 2B).

The pressure on state parties and candidates from the national party to institute an integrated campaign structure can at times be quite direct and forceful. For example, a DNC brochure distributed to prospective 1998 candidates promised “More Money” for advertising, an additional way for “Donors to Give Money,” and economies of scale to those who participate in the party’s coordinated campaign. Candidates were warned, however, that they would have to “pay to play”; that is, they must contribute some of their own money to the joint national-state party campaign effort (Connolly 1997).

Coordinated activities of national and state parties such as those noted above blur the distinction between national and state organizations as nationally funded state parties engage in party campaign activities and issue advocacy that helps federal- as well as state-level candidates.

National-state party integration is mutually beneficial. The national party is able to skirt campaign finance laws by utilizing its state affiliates for
“party building,” while the state parties gain more professional staffing, high-tech equipment, and expanded and updated voter lists. Of course, the state parties also pay a price for this assistance. They suffer a loss of autonomy and become dependent upon national party largess. In some instances, state parties’ headquarters may be literally taken over by national party and presidential candidate operatives as the state party becomes little more than a check-writing mechanism for the national party. When such takeovers occur, national party priorities and strategies tend to prevail over those of the state parties. This can result in campaign resources being devoted primarily to the presidential or other high-profile races to the detriment of contests lower down on the ballot such as state legislative candidacies. This was one of the consequences of the Democrats’ coordinated campaign in New Jersey in 1992 and in Ohio in 1996 (Heldman 1996: chapter 9). Furthermore, national party largess that is granted in one election cycle can be withdrawn in the next depending on national party priorities.

**Integrating Congressional Candidate Organizations into the National Party Structure**

One of the most striking examples of intraparty integration has occurred between the congressional campaign committees and the personal organizations of incumbent House members. Led by Newt Gingrich, the NRCC in 1994 invented and instituted an “Incumbent Protection Fund,” a share-the-wealth program under which GOP incumbents “tithe” into a party campaign fund based on seniority, with the funds so collected going to those incumbents in tight races. In 1996, more than 85 percent of House Republicans participated and gave in excess of $10 million to the fund. So successful was this Republican innovation that the Democrats copied it and are assessing “dues” ranging from $5,000 to $20,000 (Wayne 1996: 14). In the present era of candidate-centered politics, this unprecedented mutual support operation among incumbent members of the House is testimony to the rising strength of national parties and their ability to integrate various party elements into a national campaign effort.

**Allied Groups: An Increasingly Important Resource within the Party Network**

Most analysis of American parties focus on the regular, legally recognized organizations of the parties—that is the national committees, congressional and senatorial campaign committees, state central committees, and so forth. It needs to be kept in mind, however, that concentrating on the official organizational units does not capture the true scope and nature of party orga-
organization. When an interest group has so mixed its activities with those of the party that it has taken over such traditional party functions as voter mobilization and campaign advertising, it makes little sense to consider that group to be outside the party structure. Party organization can, therefore, be likened to a network that includes regular party organizations as well as allied organizations, candidates’ personal organizations, and individuals working to win elections (Schwartz 1990: 4–5).

One of the earliest manifestations of allied groups being integrated into the party structure was the emergence during the 1940s of labor unions as a source of support on which the Democratic Party came to rely. Led by the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), unions provided campaign funds to candidates, mobilized voters, and sought to influence public opinion. Unions were so important to the Democratic Party that David Mayhew in his survey of party organization in the twentieth century concludes that “if one thinks in terms of structure and takes into account associated organizations ... [the] Democratic Party in the 1940s and 1950s [was] made up largely of machines and unions” (1986: 324). He also notes that there was an asymmetry in the kinds of organizations that the two parties had in their mix of associated groups. Unions were linked to the Democrats, while most corporations and newspapers had Republican leanings (1986: 324).

The National Federation of Independent Businesses (NFIB) is a 1990s example of a party-allied organization that is newly energized to support the GOP cause. With a director in each of the fifty states and six hundred thousand members, some of whom have been trained by Republican political consultants, the NFIB has been described by knowledgeable journalists as a “political party in miniature.” In 1996, it was involved in 245 House races and a limited number of Senate contests. Its political operations are headed by Marc Nuttle, a veteran Republican operative who ran Pat Robertson’s 1988 campaign. Its activities on behalf of House Speaker Thomas Foley’s (D–Washington) Republican opponent, George Nethercutt, in 1994 had all the earmarks of a party operation. The NFIB hired an experienced campaign manager to direct its operations; she developed a detailed campaign plan that was mailed to all NFIB members in Foley’s district. The plan called on members to nail down one Nethercutt voter a day during the last sixteen days of the campaign and then call them back on election day to make certain they voted (Weisskopf 1997: A1, A13).

Although close ties between organized interests and parties are hardly a new phenomenon, there has been in recent elections a striking increase in the involvement of party-allied groups in campaigns as the restrictions of the FECA have been stretched to their outer limits and in some cases rendered irrelevant. Indeed, allied group support for party candidates and interaction between these groups and the parties has become so heavy that the concept of party organization now requires a broad definition. The 1995–1996 elec-
tion cycle is replete with evidence of the important role allied groups play in party affairs and campaigns.

**Allied Group-Party Linkages**

In her insightful account of the 1996 campaign, journalist Elizabeth Drew reports that the chairman of the NRCC, Representative Bill Paxon (R-New York), stated that the most important people or groups behind the effort of the GOP to retain control of the House were Grover Norquist (head of Americans for Tax Reform), the Christian Coalition, the NFIB, the National Rife Association (NRA), and the National Beer Wholesalers Association (1997: 14). These organizations maintain close contact with each other and with Republican leaders. Thus, officials of the RNC, NRCC, and NRSC periodically attended Norquist’s weekly strategy sessions for allied groups at which they briefed the group leaders on the status of campaigns and on strategy (Drew 1997: 85, 207). Similarly, Ralph Reed, then the executive director of the Christian Coalition, was a participant in the weekly strategy sessions in RNC Chairman Haley Barbour’s office (Balz 1996: A18). Reed was also present with Speaker Newt Gingrich and other GOP congressional leaders when the party’s legislative agenda, the Contract with America, was announced in 1995 (Yang 1997: A3).

A similar pattern was evident between the Democrats and their allied groups. The pro-Democratic groups—AFL-CIO, EMILY’s List, National Education Association (NEA), Sierra Club, National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL), National Committee for an Effective Congress, and League of Conservation Voters—work together to help their preferred party and are in contact with Democratic leaders. In fact, the Clinton White House even went so far in integrating Democratic allied groups into the 1996 campaign that it put together a national steering committee that included representatives of the Clinton-Gore campaign, DNC, AFL-CIO, NEA, and EMILY’s List. This group met periodically at DNC headquarters to discuss which states should be given priority and which of the coalition’s partners were actively organizing, doing direct mail and get-out-the-vote drives in various states (Drew 1996: 74-77). As Drew has pointed out, given such tight webs of interconnections and shared information among leaders of the parties and allied groups “terms like ‘independent expenditures’ and ‘issue advocacy’ have no meaning” (1997: 78).

Additional evidence of the tight interconnection that exists among parties and allied groups involves the parties’ direct and indirect funding of group activities. The following are illustrative of this pattern of activity in 1996.

- In the last weeks of the campaign, Americans for Tax Reform flooded 150 House districts with seventeen million pieces of literature and
four million phone calls designed to counter Democratic and AFL-CIO ads claiming the GOP would cripple Medicare. This operation was funded by $4.6 million from the RNC (Drew 1997: 223).

- The RNC solicited and collected contributions of over $1 million for the National Right to Life Committee, Americans for Tax Reform, and the American Defense Institute, then bundled the checks and turned them over to these organizations, which engaged in voter mobilization and issue advertising to the benefit of GOP candidates (Marcus 1997).
- The RNC gave $650,000 to the National Right to Life Committee and $50,000 to a group backing a parental rights initiative in Colorado (Babcock 1996: A4).
- Native American and African American voter registration groups received $10,000 from the DNC (Babcock 1996: A4).
- The DNC solicited and referred large donors to Vote Now '96, a group whose purpose was to register voters among groups traditionally loyal to the Democrats. This group spent $3 million nationally (Carr 1997: 471; Babock, Chinoy, and Schmidt 1997).

Allied Group Campaign Activities

The scope and intensity of allied group involvement on behalf of the parties was unprecedented in 1996. Among the most striking evidence of this pattern of partisan involvement were the following.

- The AFL-CIO carried out a $35 million issue advocacy and grassroots organizing campaign designed to help the Democrats regain control of the House. This was in addition to the $1.2 million spent by its PAC, the Committee on Political Education, and the $49 million spent by affiliated union PACs (Drew 1997: 246; Marcus and Babcock 1997: A21).
- Alarmed by the AFL-CIO’s aggressive ad campaign, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce retaliated (belatedly) with its own issue ads costing $7 million (Marcus and Babcock 1997: A21).
- The Christian Coalition distributed forty-five million voter guides and operated enhanced phone banks in several races (Drew 1997: 223).
- The Sierra Club spent $750,000 in direct support of candidates, plus $3.5 million on advocacy ads and $3 million on voter guides distributed by tens of thousands of volunteers (Marcus and Babcock 1997: A21).
- Citizen Action, a consumer group, spent $7 million on ads, mailings, and telephone calls blasting the GOP record on Medicare, the environment, and education spending (Marcus and Babcock 1997: A21).
A flavor for the intensity with which party-allied groups descended upon targeted races in 1996 is illustrated by the special Senate election in Oregon to replace Republican Senator Bob Packwood. To assist the Democratic nominee, Representative Ron Wyden, the AFL-CIO fielded twelve full-time staff members from its Washington headquarters, and local unions provided twenty-five more (Kilborn 1996: A8); the League of Conservation Voters and Sierra Club joined together in a $200,000 independent expenditure campaign; the Human Rights Campaign (the largest gay and Lesbian PAC in the country) had a full-time operative in the state. These combined groups plus the Democratic Party and Wyden's own organization were engaged in a televised “air war” of commercials, door-to-door canvassing, direct mail, and neighborhood rallies. The Democrats' allied group support was countered by the Christian right, antiabortion forces, and property rights groups (Edsall 1996: A3).

Although party-allied groups are an increasingly important campaign resource of the parties and their candidates, it needs to be kept in mind that these partisan allies have their own agendas and normally maintain an autonomous organizational structure. Although the ties between the allied groups and parties are often close, the allied groups do not necessarily coordinate their activities with the candidates and parties they are seeking to assist. For example, the Washington Post reported that in Pennsylvania's twenty-first District during a twenty-hour period in 1996 there was a barrage of five hundred television ads by such groups as the American Hospital Association, the AFL-CIO, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Citizen Action, and the conservative Citizens for Republic Education Fund. Much of the advertising came without advance knowledge or involvement by the candidates (Gugliotta and Chinoy 1997).

Additional Components of the Party Network: Think-Tanks, Congressional Leadership PACs, and Consultants

In addition to groups such as the AFL-CIO, Sierra Club, Americans for Tax Reform, and NFIB, which actively support party candidates, the party organizational networks extend to the proliferation of Washington think tanks that provide policy research and initiatives. A prominent example is the Democratic Leadership Council’s think tank affiliate, the Progressive Policy Institute, which has been a source of policy proposals used by Democratic candidates, including President Clinton. Another favorite Democratic think tank is the Center for National Policy. The Republicans also have policy research institutes to assist them, notably the conservative Heritage Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute.

Additional allied organizations that provide essential resources to the parties and their candidate are the candidate’s own organizations, congres-
sional leaders’ PACs, and political consultants. In 1996, for example, Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott’s PAC, the New Majority Fund, distributed $1.3 million to GOP Senate and House candidates; and House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt’s PAC, the Effective Government Committee, collected $1.2 million to assist fellow Democrats (Wayne 1997: A12). An example of how close the linkage within the party network can be among allied groups, consultants, and candidates’ organizations can be found in New Jersey. Housed in one office building is a complex interlocking set of political organizations all geared to assisting GOP candidates. These organizations include the Committee for Responsible Government, a PAC dominated by Governor Christine Todd Whitman, which gives money to candidates in New Jersey and around the country; a political consulting firm headed by an individual who is the political director of Whitman’s PAC; and four political consulting, advertising, accounting, graphic design/printing companies with interlocking and overlapping leadership structures and ties to Whitman’s PAC (Pulley 1996: A1, A9).

As the example from New Jersey indicates, political consultants have become an essential element in the infrastructure of candidates’ campaigns for major offices. Campaign consultants have also become an integral part of the parties organizational networks. A substantial proportion (41 percent in a recent survey by Logan and Kolodny [1997]) of consultants serve an apprenticeship within party organizations before moving into the private sector. Once out on their own, they normally reinvent their relationship with the party organizations that trained them. In the world of campaign consulting, few practitioners can successfully pull off working for both parties in the manner of President Clinton’s and Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott’s former consultant, Dick Morris. To achieve their electoral goals, the parties need the technical/professional assistance and the personalized and comprehensive candidate services that consultants can provide. The party organizations, therefore, seek to retain the talents and knowledge of their former employees since they are already familiar with the party organization and its political network. Thus, all six of the national party committees regularly purchase the services of consultants (e.g., polling, research, candidate consulting). The consultants, of course, also benefit from their ties to the party organizations. Not only do the party committees hire consultants for specialized work that the parties cannot do themselves, the parties (especially the congressional campaign committees) also provide their candidates with a list of approved and reliable consultants. Sometimes hiring a consultant off the approved list can be a prerequisite to party funding. Rather than contributing to the weakening of party organizations, as some have suggested, available evidence indicates that consultants add essential resources to the parties’ organizational network—resources that the party organizations themselves are not structured provide (Logan and Kolodny 1997).
Parties as Networks of Issue-Oriented Activists

Since the post–World War II period, party organizations have been transformed from coalitions of state and local units that mobilized local electorates into national entities that target resources, recruit candidates, and supply expertise (Wilson 1995: xiii). Today the state parties have become integrated into the national party structure, which uses state affiliates to achieve its priorities, while providing the state/local units with money and expertise. To a significant degree, this development has been possible because of the ability of the national parties to raise large amounts of money through direct mail solicitations. This type of fund-raising is most effective when the addressees have ideological views or strong commitments to particular policies. With coaching from their national organizations, state parties and candidates also make similar issue-oriented appeals for funds.

This fund-raising technique reflects an emerging feature of American parties. They are becoming increasingly networks of “issue-based participatory activists” (Shafer 1996: 73–77). The sources of this trend can be found in a series of complex and interacting forces: the development of a postindustrial society in which noneconomic social/cultural issues have achieved heightened saliency (e.g., abortion, women’s rights, environmentalism, gay rights, law and order, gun control); sociological and economic changes that have created higher levels of educational attainment, reduced blue-collar employment, and increased numbers of white-collar workers; and a decline in the availability of patronage as an incentive to participate in politics (Shafer 1996: 34; 1997). Issue-oriented activists have also been aided by changes in the rules governing presidential nominations that have diminished the role of party organizations and their leaders in the process (Shafer 1988: 98–100).

Evidence of the extent to which parties are becoming networks of issue activists can be found in the gap between the issue and policy positions of delegates to national conventions and rank-and-file party voters (Shafer 1988: 100–7; Miller and Jennings 1988: chapter 9). As Byron Shafer, a close observer of national conventions, has observed, “one could find almost no anti-abortion delegates among the state delegations to the 1992 Democratic convention, while the pro-choice minority at the Republican convention felt constrained to hide its preferences.” This dramatic issue divide between the parties’ national convention delegates occurred in spite of the fact that public opinion studies showed that the abortion issue splits the mass voter base of each party almost identically (Shafer 1996: 32).

Of course, it is not surprising that such issue divisions exist because organized interests with strong policy commitments actively work to ensure that their members become national convention delegates of the party that is perceived to be closest to their preferred policy positions. In 1996, the Christian Coalition, for example, urged its members to sign on with various GOP
presidential aspirants to assure that the group’s views would be well repre-
represented at the San Diego convention (Drew 1997: 188). The National Educa-
tion Association has followed a similar strategy of urging its members to
become involved with various Democratic candidates across the board
(Shafer 1988: 119). Other white-collar unions with a decidedly liberal policy
orientation have also become increasingly involved in Democratic presiden-
tial politics, such as the American Federation of Teachers, the American Fed-
eration of State, County, and Municipal Employees, and the Communica-
tions Workers of America (Shafer 1988: 119, 129). Participants in state party
caucuses and conventions similarly show a “pronounced ideological tilt” to
a far greater extent than do either primary voters or party identifiers (Mayer
1996: 133).

It is not just in presidential nominating campaigns that the issue-oriented
activists have achieved influence out of proportion to their numbers. These
individuals and the organizations with which they are affiliated are also
firmly ensconced in the parties’ campaign and organizational structures.
Thus, a study of county-level presidential campaign organizations discov-
ered that among campaign workers the “true believers” significantly out-
numbered the “voter maximizers” (4.3 to 1 for the Republicans and 2.6 to 1
among Democrats). Since there was a significant proportion of the campaign
workers who were also county party chairs, the study’s authors concluded
that “advocacy politics” had permeated the parties’ organizational structure
and they noted that these Republican and Democratic activists with their di-
verging visions of the public good were “not fighting for the right to repre-
sent voters. They . . . [were] contending for the privilege of imposing their
own policy preferences on the public” (Bruce, Clark, and Kessel, 1991: 1103).

The extent to which issue-based groups are becoming well entrenched
in the party organizational structure is impressive. Campaigns and Elections
magazine reported in 1994 that the Christian Right was the dominant faction
in eighteen state GOP organizations and had substantial influence in thirteen
others (Wilcox 1996: 75–77). Thus, the Christian fundamentalists in South
Carolina and Texas have become power brokers and part of the party estab-
ishment (Guth and Smith 1997: 15; Bruce 1997: 36). In Oklahoma, a state
that was once a Democratic stronghold, the Christian right has played a criti-
cal campaign role in helping to elect a completely Republican delegation to the
U.S. House of Representatives in 1996. Five of the six GOP representa-
tives elected in 1996 openly affiliated with the Christian right and the other
successful candidate were acceptable to it (Bednar 1997). The Christian
right’s influence even extends to the Kansas state GOP, which once regularly
sent traditional economic conservatives such as Bob Dole, Nancy Kasse-
baum, James Pearson, and Frank Carlson to the Senate (Cigler and Loomis
1997). Evidence of Christian Coalition influence was also on display at the
1997 RNC meeting when Ralph Reed, then the coalition’s executive director, helped engineer a third ballot switch of votes by more than thirty religious right RNC members that enabled James Nicholson to be elected national chairman (Broder 1997: A21).

Of course, it is not just the GOP that is afflicted with interest group influence that makes it difficult to maintain the party’s core base of voter support. An analysis of Democratic Party–interest group relations concluded that

No one decided that the party would be the party of all these liberal causes at the expense of middle class voters. The Democrats became the party of these causes because it was effectively lobbied. (Berry and Schildkraut 1995: 29)

The increasing involvement of groups and individuals whose motivation to participate in party politics is based not on material rewards such as patronage and whose goal is not maximizing the vote but a commitment to policy and ideological concerns is creating intraparty conflicts and problems of serious proportions. Both parties face the difficult problem of appealing to their core voter constituencies while being pulled to more extreme positions by issue-based activists who provide essential campaign support. At times an almost schizophrenic party structure seems to be emerging. That is, elected officials requiring broad-based electoral support to win exist side by side with a growing body of organizational activists mainly concerned about ideology and principles. The conflicts inherent in this mix were apparent within the Minnesota Republican Party in 1994, when a Christian Right-dominated state party convention endorsed one of its own for the gubernatorial nomination, thereby rejecting the incumbent moderate GOP governor Arne Carlson. Carlson did go on to win the primary by an overwhelming margin and then coasted to a general election victory as well.

The Christian Right also caused Bob Dole problems at the 1996 Republican Convention when he sought to include conciliatory language in the platform regarding abortion as part of his effort to retain the support of pro-choice Republican women. However, he was rebuffed by the platform committee that refused, at the insistence of the Christian right, to go along with his preferred language (Drew 1997: 105–8).

President Clinton has also had his difficulties owing to the influence of Democratic-allied groups that have strong views on cultural issues and are in a position to exert a powerful influence on Democratic presidents. Even before he was inaugurated, Clinton found himself under fire for promising during the 1992 campaign to end the military’s ban on homosexuals. He was criticized for pandering to interest groups, while at the same time gay and lesbian groups demanded that he fulfill his campaign pledge. As Berry and Schildkraut’s insightful analysis of Democratic Party–interest group rela-
tions observed, Clinton's carefully cultivated image as a "new Democrat" became less credible, and "[t]he only thing that seemed new was that gay and lesbian organizations had been added to a long list of liberal groups that could now make demands on Democratic presidents" (1995: 1).

To the extent that the American parties have become increasingly networks of issue activists, elected official–party organization/allied group conflicts are likely to proliferate. There is also the problem created by the fact that issue-oriented activists tend to have stronger loyalties to preferred candidates who share their policy commitments than they do toward political parties (Miller 1988: chapter 2). Another consequence of the increasing role and influence exerted by issue-oriented activists on the parties and their candidates is that the policy differences between the Republican and Democratic parties are likely to become even wider (Aldrich 1995; Wright and Berkman 1986). Indeed, the traditional conception of parties as "vote maximizers" appears to be in need of some modification. Like interest groups, parties now contain an enlarged element that are mainly interested in achieving policy objectives; that is, the parties are heavily influenced by "policy maximizers."

**Parties as Integrated Networks of National-State Party Units, Allied Groups, And Issue-Oriented Activists**

American parties have undergone enormous changes since the 1960s. One of the most striking of these transformations has been the heightened level of intraparty integration and nationalization that has occurred. It is no longer possible to say, as did V. O. Key, Jr., in the last edition of his justly acclaimed textbook, that "no nationwide party organization exists. . . . Rather, each party consists of a working coalition of state and local parties" (1964: 315). State parties have now been integrated into national campaign strategies, though they retain much of their traditional autonomy in state elections. But even in strictly state races, the national party can become a big-time participant. For example, in 1996 a DNC-affiliated organization spent $80,000 in a Wisconsin State Senate special election that resulted in a shift of party control in the chamber to the Democrats (Bice 1996: 5B); and in 1997 the national GOP pumped $1 million into the Virginia governor's race and spent $760,000 on issue ads to help reelect Governor Christine Todd Whitman in New Jersey (Greenblatt 1997).

Interest groups have long been involved in electoral politics. However, in recent years an expanding number of groups have developed close ties with the Republican and Democratic Parties and become integral parts of the party network and campaign apparatus. Indeed, the links are so close that
the traditional lines of demarcation between parties and interest groups are no longer clear.

In the current postindustrial era, many of the interests now closely linked to the parties are concerned primarily with social/cultural issues, and the supporters of these causes have become ensconced in the regular party structure, thereby causing the party organizations to become increasingly networks of issue-oriented activists. As a consequence, serious tensions exist within each party between their activist “true believers” and the rank-and-file voters that are needed for election day victories. In addition, the activists are creating heightened policy differences between the parties that are affecting governmental policy making, as the intensity of interparty conflict within the House of Representatives during the 1990s demonstrates. Similarly, executive–legislative branch conflicts have been exacerbated in an era of divided party government by the sharp policy differences between the parties. Clearly, the “state of the parties” does matter. It affects elections and governance.
Party Issue Advocacy in Congressional Election Campaigns

Paul S. Herrnson and Diana Dwyre

The 1996 elections were among the most competitive held in the twentieth century. Control of both the House and Senate was at stake, as the Republicans sought to defend their recently won legislative majorities and the Democrats tried to reclaim their previous long-term dominance of Congress. As political organizations are wont to do under such circumstances, the major political parties searched for new ways to influence the elections. The federal courts made this relatively easy. The Supreme Court ruling in Colorado Republican Federal Campaign Committee et al. v. FEC (116 S. Ct. 2309, 1966) allowed parties for the first time to make independent expenditures in federal elections. Court rulings in FEC v. Massachusetts Citizens for Life (479 U.S. 246, 1986) and related cases freed both parties and interest groups to spend unregulated soft money to communicate with voters directly about candidates and issues as long as their advertisements did not expressly call for a candidate’s election or defeat and were not produced with the candidate’s cooperation.

Parties took advantage of these rulings by carrying out independent expenditures and issue advocacy campaigns. The availability of these two communications techniques changed the roles and strategies of parties and interest groups in elections. These changes have also led some political practitioners, reform advocates, and scholars to declare the demise of the regulatory regime that was created by the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1974 and its amendments (collectively referred to as the FECA). Apparent similarities in the television advertisements aired by parties and candidates in presidential and Senate races have led some political observers to argue that a new form of coordination between party committees and federal candidates—one that was formerly prohibited by law—is occurring at all levels.

This essay addresses the question, How different were the parties’ communications efforts in the 1996 congressional elections from previous contests? The first part examines the evolution of party campaigning since the
nineteenth century. The second part focuses on campaign ads and party issue advocacy ads. We consider whether there are significant differences in the ads purchased by candidates and parties by comparing the television and radio ads aired by candidates and parties in a competitive election: the 1996 rematch between Senator Paul Wellstone, Democrat of Minnesota, and his predecessor Republican Rudy Boschwitz. Our research question has important implications for congressional elections. Should the analysis reveal no significant differences among the candidate ads and party issue advocacy ads, it suggests a weakening of the candidate-centered style of congressional elections and forecasts a greater role for parties in congressional campaigns.

Party Communications in the Party-Dominated, Candidate-Centered, and Reform Eras

Party campaign activity can be divided into four eras. A first, "party-dominated" era began during the 1800s and lasted through the 1940s. During this era, local party organizations possessed a virtual monopoly over elections. They recruited the candidates, controlled the nomination process, mobilized the electorate, and provided the symbolic cues that informed the voting decisions of most citizens. Local party committees played a central role in campaign communications. The parties' ability to recruit armies of volunteers enabled them to dominate political communications during this era of grassroots politics (Sorauf 1980; Merriam 1923; Bruce 1927).

By the 1950s, the party-dominated campaigns had given way to a second, "candidate-centered" era of election politics. Candidates, not political parties, had become the major focus of congressional campaigns and bore responsibility for the outcomes of their elections (American Political Science Association, Committee on Political Parties 1950). The transition to the candidate-centered system was brought about by political reforms introduced by the Populists and the Progressives, the erosion of the traditional ethnic neighborhoods that formed the core of the constituency, increased educational opportunities, and social mobility (Key 1958: 559; Roseboom 1970: 263).

Technological innovations were also important. Modern polling, data processing, and direct mail and electronic advertising gave candidates tools to gather information about voters and communicate campaign messages. The emergence of professional political consultants enabled candidates to hire nonparty professionals to run their campaigns. Direct mail fund-raising techniques also helped candidates raise the money needed to pay campaign staffs and outside consultants. These developments helped to transform campaigns from party-focused grassroots affairs into money-driven events that
revolved around individual candidates and their campaign organizations (Agranoff 1972: 3-50; Sorauf 1980).

The Watergate scandal prompted Congress to pass new regulations governing the role of money in federal elections, initiating a third, "reform" era in congressional campaigns. The enactment of the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1974 marks the beginning of the reform era. The FECA, which was amended in 1976 and 1979 and altered by a series of regulatory decisions and court rulings, is composed of the most comprehensive set of federal campaign finance statutes enacted in the twentieth century.

Under the FECA, national, congressional, and state party campaign committees can each give $5,000 to a House candidate at each stage of the election (primary, general election, and runoff, if one is required). The parties' national and senatorial campaign committees can give a combined total of $17,500 in an election cycle to a Senate candidate. State committees can contribute an additional $5,000 to Senate candidates. Parties can also make "coordinated expenditures" on behalf of candidates, which are typically for campaign services that a congressional or senatorial campaign committee or some other party organization gives to an individual candidate or purchases from a political consultant on the candidate's behalf. Originally set in 1974 at $10,000 for all national party organizations, the limits for coordinated expenditures on behalf of House candidates are adjusted for inflation and reached $30,910 in 1996. The limits for national party coordinated expenditures in Senate elections vary by state population and are also indexed to inflation. In 1996 they ranged from $61,820 per committee in the smallest states to $823,690 in Texas. If an election had been held in the nation's most populous state—California—in 1996, the expenditure limit would have been set at $1,409,249. State party committees are authorized to spend the same amounts in coordinated expenditures in House and Senate races as the parties' national organizations. Monetary transfers between party committees are commonly used to ensure that party organizations can spend the legal maximum in close elections.

The FECA left intact the essential nature of the candidate-centered system of congressional elections, and it allowed parties and interest groups to continue to participate in that system. By the mid-1980s, party committees in Washington, D.C., and some states had made significant adaptations to the candidate-centered, high-tech, cash-based style of contemporary congressional elections. These organizations became wealthier, more professional, and capable of playing important roles in congressional elections. Interest groups had adapted somewhat earlier by creating political action committees (PACs) to support candidates for Congress (Sorauf 1980; Herrnson 1988).

National party organizations, especially the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC), Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee (DSCC), National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC), and
the National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC), provided competitive candidates with campaign expertise, in-depth research, and connections with political consultants, PACs, and other individuals and groups who possess the resources to conduct a modern campaign. They also helped recruit candidates and finance voter registration and mobilization efforts (Herrnson 1988: chapters 3 and 4).

National party organizations were more involved in campaign communications during the reform era than the candidate-centered era. They televised generic party-focused campaign ads. National party organizations also provided selected candidates with issue and opposition research, public opinion polls, and assistance with campaign advertising and image development. Most of these services were given to candidates in competitive elections, where they largely supplemented the candidates' campaign efforts. However, the candidates who received substantial party assistance considered it to have made a significant contribution to their campaigns. The FECA's contribution and coordinated expenditure limits and prohibitions against party-independent expenditures prevented party organizations from playing a larger role. Moreover, most party officials' belief that their organizations should play supporting, not dominant, roles in elections also limited party involvement (Herrnson 1988: chapter 4).

Party Communications in the Postreform Era

A fourth, "postreform" era began in earnest in 1996, but its seeds were laid when Congress passed the 1979 amendments to the FECA. These amendments allow state and local party committees to carry out voter registration and get-out-the-vote drives in connection with federal elections; distribute yard signs, bumper stickers, and other campaign materials associated with volunteer campaign efforts; and distribute party materials that make passing references to federal candidates without having those materials count against the FECA's contribution and spending limits. Although the amendments created a small window for nonfederal soft money spending intended to reinvigorate local parties, entrepreneurial politicians, party officials, and political consultants stretched the law to include national party and interest group soft money efforts.

The courts responded to these efforts in two important rulings. In Colorado Republican Federal Campaign Committee et al. v. FEC, the Supreme Court ruled that party committees can make independent expenditures that expressly advocate the election or defeat of federal candidates. In FEC v. Massachusetts Citizens for Life and related cases, federal courts held that parties and interest groups could make issue advocacy expenditures that do not expressly advocate the election or defeat of a federal candidate. Pre-
viously, only PACs and interest groups were permitted to make such expenditures. These rulings have weakened the regulatory regime created by the FECA. They opened the floodgates for parties and interest groups to spend huge sums on new forms of communications that appear to be intended to influence the outcomes of federal elections, despite the claims of their sponsors. The rulings drastically increased the roles of parties and groups in congressional campaign communications.

Party-independent expenditures, like those made by PACs, can only be made with "hard" money that is raised within the confines of the federal campaign finance system. Issue advocacy expenditures can be made using soft money that is raised and spent outside the federal campaign finance system. Whether issue advocacy expenditures can be coordinated with individual candidates' campaigns is still under consideration by the courts, but evidence indicates that some coordination took place in the 1996 elections. For example, in the Wellstone-Boschwitz contest, the same media consultant produced Wellstone's campaign ads and the issue advocacy ads purchased by the state's Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party (DFL—Minnesota Democratic Party).

Independent expenditures and issue advocacy had significant effects on party strategy and activity in 1996. The vast majority of party independent expenditures were made by the DSCC and NRSC to influence Senate elections. The Republicans made nearly $10 million of these: $4.7 million was spent to advocate the election of fifteen Republican Senate candidates and another $5.2 million was spent to advocate the defeat of fourteen Democratic Senate candidates. The Democrats spent nearly $1.4 million against six Republican Senate candidates and another $50,000 advocating the election of three Democrats. Virtually all of the independent expenditures were made in races decided by twenty points or less.

Party committees made less than $68,000 in independent expenditures in the 1996 House elections. These were made by state party committees, and Republican state committees accounted for 88 percent of them. DCCC and NRCC officials report that they did not make independent expenditures in 1996 because they were too involved in their competitive candidates' campaigns for this spending to be considered independent. The committees were also unprepared to hire new personnel who could claim to have no knowledge of these campaigns or party strategy in them—a requirement for independent expenditures. Finally, committee officials believed that issue advocacy provided them with a better alternative.

Both parties' national, senatorial, congressional, and some state party campaign committees spent large sums of soft money on issue advocacy in 1996. Most of these expenditures took the form of television or radio advertisements, but some were made for direct mail. The Democrats were the first to spend money on issue advocacy. The DNC began televeising ads in mid-
October 1995 to boost President Clinton’s standing in the polls and characterize the Republicans’ congressional majority as extremist and in favor of helping large corporations and wealthy individuals at the expense of working people. The Democrats’ ads focused on GOP proposals such as reducing the growth of Medicare and Medicaid and cutting taxes for the wealthy. They were primarily intended to improve Clinton’s reelection prospects, but the $42.4 million that the DNC spent on issue advocacy ads over the course of the election helped set the tone for many House and Senate campaigns (Jackson and Clayton 1996: 238). The Democratic congressional, senatorial, and some Democratic state campaign committees ran issue advocacy campaigns that complemented the DNC’s ads. The DCCC and DSCC transferred $8.5 million and $10 million, respectively, to Democratic state committees to help finance television ads that were aired in sixty House districts and fourteen states that hosted marginal Senate races.

The Republicans waited until late March to begin their issue advocacy campaign. The RNC spent $20 million between March and its August national convention to boost Bob Dole’s campaign for the presidency and try to set a campaign agenda that was favorable to the Republican Party (Herrnson 1998: 97–98). The NRCC televised six issue advocacy ads in thirty competitive districts. The first three ads, which cost $7 million, were designed to clarify for the public the GOP’s positions on welfare reform, congressional reform, and Medicare. They were aired from the third week in July through Labor Day. The second three ads, which cost roughly $20 million and were cosponsored by the RNC, were aired during the last month of the election. They were designed to remind voters in fifty-eight marginal districts of some of the Clinton administration’s policy failures. One ad, named “Crystal Ball” by party operatives and referred to as “Blank Check” by the press, was particularly controversial because it virtually conceded the presidential race to Clinton and encouraged voters to reelect a Republican Congress to prevent Democrats from controlling both Congress and the White House. The NRSC spent only about $2 million on issue advocacy ads in 1996, having spent most of its money on independent expenditures that focused on welfare reform and the Republican budget plan and spending priorities. However, some early ads attacked specific Democratic candidates.

The national parties used independent expenditures and issue advocacy campaigns to influence the national political agenda, help shape the agendas in individual congressional contests, and attack their candidates’ opponents late in the election when some of these individuals no longer had the resources to mount a defense or counterattack. One high-powered Republican operative who was responsible for the NRSC’s issue advocacy and independent expenditure ads compared his role to that of a chef who prepares a meal. The expenditures allowed the committee “to set the place settings and let others select from what was already on their plate.” Once the party had set
the agenda with issues and themes that worked to the advantage of their candidate, the operative explained, “the candidate could select what he preferred from among them and force them down the opponent’s throat” (Herrnson 1998: 99). Sometimes, particularly when a candidate was short of cash, the party would do the force-feeding itself.

As the 1996 elections demonstrate, parties have greater opportunities to influence congressional races in the postreform era than in the reform era that preceded it. The FECA’s contribution and coordinated expenditure limits continue to impose a ceiling on the funds that parties can contribute directly to a congressional candidate’s campaign, but the rulings on party-independent expenditures and issue advocacy have enabled the parties to spend unlimited amounts on campaign communications designed to have a direct impact on the candidate’s election prospects.

Some political observers have argued that the requirement that these expenditures be made independently of a candidate’s campaign is more fiction than reality. They point to the close relationships that exist among parties, candidates, and political consultants and argue that the extensive web of communications that links these groups makes it impossible for party expenditures to be truly independent of candidates’ campaign efforts. Although the law makes distinctions between campaign ads that are aired by candidates and parties, in practice these distinctions may be inconsequential. Legal prohibitions may prevent issue advocacy ads from including key words, such as vote for, vote against, elect, and defeat, and they may prevent candidates from participating in the development of the ads, but the ads can be similar to candidate-sponsored and party-independent expenditure ads in virtually every other way. Party issue ads are aired during the campaign season and feature commentary about candidates who are running for office. Moreover, candidates’ campaign communications often mention issues and do not always expressly advocate the election or defeat of a candidate (West 1997: 45, 192). The degree to which these two types of ads have converged in content and style is addressed in following analysis.

**Data and Methods**

Are candidate-sponsored campaign ads and party issue advocacy ads systematically different from each other, as the law assumes them to be, or are they essentially the same? We address this question by using content analysis to compare the candidate and party ads broadcast in connection with the Wellstone-Boschwitz race in Minnesota in 1996.

The Wellstone-Boschwitz race was an ideal case study for examining the role of parties in the postreform era. The race was predicted and turned out to be competitive. Wellstone had defeated Boschwitz, then the incumbent,
by 2 percent of the vote in 1990, and both candidates were well known to Minnesota voters in 1996. The final outcome of the election, a 50 percent to 41 percent Wellstone victory, ranks the contest as tied for fifteenth place in the U.S. in terms of competitiveness. The two parties responded to the anticipated closeness of the contest by spending substantial sums in the state. The Republican Party spent more than $628,400 in direct contributions, coordinated expenditures, and independent expenditures to help Boschwitz. Democratic Party spending for Wellstone amounted to about $158,000. It is impossible to determine exactly how much money each party spent on issue advocacy in Minnesota because the reporting requirements for soft money expenditures are lax. However, national party organizations distributed nearly $4.6 million in hard and soft money to state and local party committees and candidates (FEC 1997). Some of these funds undoubtedly had an impact on the Minnesota Senate race.

Thus, the Minnesota contest was typical of most Senate elections in which both parties had an incentive for significant involvement. The contest was not so close that the parties were willing to make the massive financial commitments that they had made in some other states, such as Michigan. Nor was it so uncompetitive that they were willing to virtually ignore it, as they did in West Virginia. Rather, the stakes were high enough for both parties to invest moderate sums in helping their candidates and reaching out directly to voters. This suggests that other party activities, including their campaign communication efforts, would also be typical of those they carried out in other moderately competitive states.

We performed a content analysis on fifty-one candidate and party advertisements broadcast between May 7 and November 5, 1996. The sample included thirty-three candidate ads and eighteen party ads: nineteen ads paid for by the Wellstone campaign; fourteen paid for by the Boschwitz campaign; five advocacy ads paid for by the DFL; and thirteen issue advocacy advertisements paid for by the NRSC. Much of the money for the DFL issue advocacy ads came from the almost $1.6 million in soft money transferred to the DFL from national Democratic Party committees. All of the Boschwitz and DFL spots were television ads; two of the ads, one Wellstone and one NRSC ad, were radio spots. The NRSC also spent almost $188,200 on independent expenditures against Wellstone, but the committee was unwilling to release these ads to us because of a pending legal challenge.

The content analysis focuses on whether the ad (1) expressly advocated the election or defeat of a candidate; (2) featured the candidate speaking; (3) made any reference to the upcoming election; (4) was candidate or opponent focused; (5) was a promotional, comparative, or attack ad; (6) was positive or negative in tone; (7) used emotionally loaded code words such as trust, liberal, radical, or lie; (8) highlighted issues or policies; and (9) used positive or negative visuals and audio.
Are candidate ads and party-sponsored issue advocacy ads different from one another? We first consider the distinctions between the ads that have been imposed by the courts. Given that the party-sponsored ads cannot directly advocate the election or defeat of a candidate or be made with the candidate’s cooperation, legal reasoning would predict that substantially more candidate-sponsored than party-sponsored ads would contain express advocacy, discuss the upcoming election, or feature the candidate directly addressing voters. If, however, the substance of the two types of ads are not as distinct as the courts have suggested, we should find little variation on such factors.

There were more similarities than differences in the campaign orientation of the ads broadcast in connection with the Wellstone-Boschwitz race. As one would expect, given the legal prohibitions, none of the party issue advocacy ads had any express advocacy or featured the candidate addressing voters (see the first two columns of Table 6.1). However, very few of the candidate ads possessed these characteristics, despite the fact that they could have legally included all of them. Only 18 percent of the candidate ads contained express advocacy, and only 24 percent of them featured the candidate addressing voters. Similarly, only 21 percent of the candidate ads made any reference to the upcoming election.

Some differences existed between the foci of the two kinds of ads. The party ads were more opponent focused, whereas the candidate ads focused on the candidate himself or compared the two candidates. There were also some partisan differences on campaign orientation. First, the Boschwitz ads and Republican Party issue ads focused more on the opponent, whereas Wellstone and Democratic Party ads focused more on Wellstone or compared the two candidates (see columns 3–6 of Table 6.1). This difference reflects the candidates’ relative positions in the race. Boschwitz and the GOP were challengers, were behind in the polls, and needed to gain ground fast, so they chose to invest more money in negative ads. Attack ads are effective against incumbents, who must defend their performance in office, and attack ads move poll numbers more quickly than do positive appeals (Salmore and Salmore 1989: 159). Political observers who closely monitored the Minnesota Senate race assert that Boschwitz’s attacks did diminish Wellstone’s early lead (Smith 1996).

Boschwitz’s ads also expressly advocated Wellstone’s defeat and made more specific references to the election than did Wellstone’s. Most of Wellstone’s ads focused on the senator’s issue positions or voting record and ended with a variation of this assertion: “Paul Wellstone: Standing Up for
Table 6.1 Indicators of Campaign Orientation in Candidate and Party Issue Advocacy Advertisements

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<td>Boschwitlz</td>
<td>Democrats</td>
<td>Republicans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Express Advocacy:*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$X^2$</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate Addressed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$X^2$</td>
<td>3.51*</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.66**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any Reference to Election</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>36</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$X^2$</td>
<td>2.83*</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus of Ad:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate-focused</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opponent-focused</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both (comparative)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$X^2$</td>
<td>13.03***</td>
<td>12.06***</td>
<td>17.99***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n)</td>
<td>(33)</td>
<td>(18)</td>
<td>(19)</td>
<td>(14)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Express advocacy refers to the legal definition that classifies advertisements as campaign ads or as issue advocacy. The Supreme Court ruled in Buckley v. Valeo (1976) that express advocacy is identified by the use of "magic words": vote for, reelect, support, cast your ballot for, vote against, defeat, and reject.

**Significant at .10.
***Significant at .05.
****Significant at .01.

95
Minnesota's Working Families." None of the Wellstone ads made any reference to the election.

By contrast, over one-third of Boschwitz's ads advocated his election, Wellstone's defeat, or made some other reference to the election. However, most of these references were subtle. One ad featured Minnesota Governor Arne Carlson stating, "I'm going to be enthusiastic in my vote for Rudy Boschwitz." The Governor did not call on voters to cast their ballots for the Republican candidate. In fact, none of the ads, whether candidate or party sponsored, contained any of the words or phrases spelled out in the law as words that indicate express electoral advocacy: "vote for," "reelect," "support," "cast your ballot for," "vote against," "defeat," "reject." The ads that came closest to an outright appeal to elect or defeat one of the candidates were a few Boschwitz spots that included the text "Rudy Boschwitz for Senate" but had no audio reinforcement.

Instead, the candidate ads used veiled electoral appeals to gain voters' support. The Boschwitz ads told voters that Rudy Boschwitz has "Minnesota values" and is a "responsible, independent voice who makes us proud" and that Paul Wellstone was "embarrassingly liberal and decades out of touch" or "embarrassingly liberal and wasting our money." The Wellstone ads noted that Paul Wellstone is a "teacher, father, and fighter for our kids," that he "fought the effort to gut the Environmental Protection Act," that Rudy Boschwitz "voted seven times against the minimum wage," and that "Rudy Boschwitz and Newt Gingrich share the same philosophy." Thus, the distinctions between the substance of party issue ads and candidate ads had more relevance for legal theory than practical politics.

We expected to find some differences in the type of ads used by candidates and parties and the tone of those ads. Candidates were often reluctant to criticize their opponents personally for fear that the negative attacks could backfire, making themselves appear mean-spirited (West 1997: 45). In the 1996 Minnesota Senate contest, the candidates appear to have decided to leave the negative campaigning to party committees and interest groups that wish to broadcast television and radio ads. This enabled the candidates to receive the benefits of negative campaigning without getting their own hands dirty.

In fact, there were some significant differences in the type and tone of candidate and party communications (see Table 6.2). More party ads than candidate ads included comparative or attack messages. All of the party issue ads contained at least some negative components, whereas over 45 percent of the candidate ads were purely promotional, and almost half contained no negative content.

The party spots were also more vicious in their attacks than either candidates' ads. For instance, while both the Boschwitz ads and the Republican Party issue ads repeatedly used the emotionally charged code word liberal,
Table 6.2 The Type and Tone of Candidate and Party Issue Advocacy Advertisements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of ad:</th>
<th>Candidate Ads (in percentages)</th>
<th>Party Issue Advocacy Ads (in percentages)</th>
<th>Candidate Ads (in percentages)</th>
<th>Party Issue Advocacy Ads (in percentages)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wells e one</td>
<td>Boscliw</td>
<td>lz</td>
<td>lemecrais</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>46</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X²</td>
<td>16.03***</td>
<td></td>
<td>12.06***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tone of ad:</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X²</td>
<td>16.47***</td>
<td></td>
<td>12.38 ***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used emotionally loaded code words: *</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>58</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X²</td>
<td>11.14***</td>
<td></td>
<td>13.01***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues highlighted:</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X²</td>
<td>3.50*</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.52**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(n) | (33) | (18) | (19) | (14) | (5) | (13)

*Commonly used code words are liberal, radical, trust, lies, and proud.
*Significant at .10.
**Significant at .05.
***Significant at .01.
or variations on it such as embarrassingly liberal or ultraliberal, many of the Boschwitz spots used humor to soften the punch. One Boschwitz ad showed successive still shots featuring text and an audio voice-over to describe the images:

Image 1: a cartoon picture of a circus big top tent accompanied by text and a narrator stating, “Big Top.”

Image 2: a photograph of the New York City skyline accompanied by text and a narrator stating, “Big Apple.”

Image 3: an unflattering photograph of Paul Wellstone accompanied by text and a narrator stating, “Big Spender.”

Image 4: the same unflattering photograph of Wellstone accompanied by text and a narrator stating, “Paul Wellstone: Embarrassingly Liberal, wasting our money.”

The Republican Party issue advocacy spots, by contrast, were straightforward attacks on the Democratic incumbent’s record. One NRSC issue ad attacked Wellstone’s record on welfare:

... liberal Paul Wellstone votes repeatedly against requiring welfare recipients to work for their checks. Wellstone even votes for billions more in welfare spending. That’s wrong. ... Call liberal Paul Wellstone. Tell him he’s wrong to spend billions more on welfare. ...

Party issue advocacy ads made greater use of emotionally loaded code words such as liberal, trust, radical, lies, or proud than did the candidate ads. Moreover, as the above example suggests, the parties incorporated these words into forceful messages, whereas the candidates utilized a more subtle approach.

There are only small differences in the extent to which candidate ads and party ads highlight issues. By definition, one would expect all of the party issue advocacy ads to focus on issues. The same expectation does not hold for candidate ads. Nevertheless, over three-quarters of both kinds of ads focused solely on one or more policy issues.

There were some partisan differences in the type and tone of the ads. Only Boschwitz and the Republicans used pure attack ads, reflecting his and his party’s need to tear down the opposition in order to move up in the polls (see columns 3–6 of Table 6.2). Wellstone and the Democrats delivered their criticisms using comparative ads that portrayed Wellstone positively and Boschwitz negatively on the same issues. Boschwitz also aired fewer issue ads than Wellstone, choosing instead to air seven personal attacks that criticized Wellstone’s character or called him a “big spender” or “liberal” but made no specific references to policy issues.
Another set of measures record the use of traditional campaign visual and audio production techniques. Campaign commercials use images, sound effects, and music to convey and reinforce messages about candidates and their opponents. Campaign ads generally associate their candidate with positive symbols, such as the flag, and link their opponent to viscerally noxious things, such as the murder of innocent people (Jamieson 1992: 44). The opponent is often presented in unflattering images, including caricatures, grainy or blurry pictures, or black and white instead of in color. We compared candidate and party ads with respect to who was pictured in the ad, whether the opponent was presented in an unflattering or neutral manner, and whether positive, negative, or neutral background music was used.

The Wellstone-Boschwitz race showed that party issue advocacy ads used the same visual and audio techniques as candidate campaign commercials (see Table 6.3). Both candidate and party communications featured mostly unflattering visual images of the opponent. The candidates presented these images in comparative ads, whereas the parties were more likely to display unflattering images of the opponent in opponent-focused attack ads. One Boschwitz ad featured slow-motion, black-and-white, blurry footage of Wellstone giving a speech while pounding his fist and apparently shouting, conjuring up an image of a crazed demagogue—a powerful visual attack indeed. The original audio, which might have changed the message, was muted. Instead, a female announcer accused Wellstone of “attacking,” being “embarrassingly liberal,” and “throwing mud.”

Over half of the party ads also used visual and audio techniques to convey powerful negative images. Many of the Republican issue advocacy ads used grainy and fearful images that implied Wellstone was unsympathetic to crime victims. Pictures of Wellstone were shown next to a picture of a gang member, a criminal, and a bloodied stabbing victim. The use of visuals to suggest guilt by association is a time-honored technique of campaign commercials (Jamieson 1992: 54–63). The use of such a technique by the parties in issue advocacy ads gives those ads a distinctly campaign-like flavor, further confirming their intent to influence the outcome of an election rather than merely to educate voters about some policy issue.

Significant partisan differences existed in the candidates’ and parties’ use of visual and audio techniques. Boschwitz and the Republican Party produced more ads that focused solely on their opponent than did Wellstone and the Democratic Party (see columns 3–6 of Table 6.3). Moreover, the ads broadcast by Boschwitz and the GOP featured more unflattering visuals and audio accompaniments than did those broadcast by Wellstone and the Democrats. These differences, like those reported previously, reflect Wellstone’s lead in the polls and Boschwitz’s need to catch up.

Finally, we turn to the substance of the ads. Did the parties use issue advocacy ads to set the agendas in individual races? The evidence from the
Table 6.3 The Visual and Audio Techniques Used in Candidate and Party Issue Advocacy Advertisements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wellstone</td>
<td>Boschwitz</td>
<td>Democrats</td>
<td>Republicans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Visuals of:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate only</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opponent only</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n)</td>
<td>(32)</td>
<td>(17)</td>
<td>(18)</td>
<td>(14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$X^2$</td>
<td>12.438***</td>
<td></td>
<td>14.98***</td>
<td>17.00***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Images of opponent:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unflattering</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n)</td>
<td>(14)</td>
<td>(12)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$X^2$</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.62**</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Background music:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral or none</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n)</td>
<td>(33)</td>
<td>(18)</td>
<td>(19)</td>
<td>(14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$X^2$</td>
<td>8.86**</td>
<td></td>
<td>15.53***</td>
<td>13.00***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*None of the DFL issue advocacy ads featured any images of the opponent.

** Significant at .05.

***Significant at .01.
Minnesota Senate race indicates that they did. The NRSC began running issue advocacy ads in Minnesota more than six months before election day. These ads attacked Wellstone on three sets of issues: taxes, government spending, and a balanced budget; welfare and welfare reform; and crime. Boschwitz, Wellstone, and the Democratic Party committees responded to the NRSC's attacks by running ads that addressed the same issues. Over three-quarters of the Boschwitz ads highlighted at least one of the three issues used in the NRSC issue advocacy ads, and many of the Boschwitz ads mentioned more than one of those issues (see Table 6.4). These ads also featured the same themes and code words as did the Republican Party's ads. Both sets of ads cast numerous aspersions on Wellstone's liberalism, saddling him with an unpopular label that has been shown to be harmful to Democratic candidates.

The GOP's early issue advocacy ads forced Wellstone and his party to address issues that comprised a pro-Republican campaign agenda. All of the DFL issue advocacy ads concentrated on these issues. Moreover, they all featured video footage taken from the NRSC's ads and provided audio and text such as: "More attack ads from Rudy Boschwitz and the Republicans." Wellstone was also forced to dedicate almost half of his ads to these pro-Republican issues. Thus, both Wellstone and the Democrats spent a great deal of campaign money responding to the Republican attacks.

Conclusion

The roles of parties in elections have evolved through four eras over the course of American history. Legal, technological, and broad societal changes have contributed to this evolution. Federal court rulings that allowed parties to make independent expenditures and spend money on issue advocacy ads constitute the most recent changes. They influenced the communications strategies of party organizations during the 1996 elections, resulting in national and state party campaign committees spending significant sums on independent expenditures and issue advocacy in Senate elections.

Party committees used independent expenditures and issue advocacy campaigns to influence the national political agenda, help shape the agendas in individual congressional contests, and attack their candidates' opponents. These communications challenged the candidates' abilities to control the political agendas in their elections. They have also added to the negativity of congressional campaigns.

Critics of the court rulings that allowed party committees to expand their communications activities have argued that the distinctions that the courts drew between candidate ads and party issue advocacy ads were artificial and based on a flawed understanding of campaign communications. This study
of the 1996 Senate election between Paul Wellstone and Rudy Boschwitz supports their argument and demonstrates that there are more similarities than differences between candidate ads and party issue advocacy ads. The major difference between the candidate ads and the party ads is that the party ads are more negative and focus more on the opposing candidate. Negative party issue ads enable the candidates to avoid having to take complete responsibility for election mudslinging. Candidates also might find themselves campaigning on a political agenda that has been set by a party organization rather than by themselves or their opponents.

The findings further demonstrate that party issue advocacy advertisements can help to set campaign agendas in individual congressional races. The Republican Party played a major role in setting the agenda for the 1996 Minnesota Senate contest. The NRSC’s issue advocacy campaign “set the table” with pro-Republican campaign issues, such as welfare, crime, tax cuts, and a balanced budget. This approach enabled Boschwitz to select from among those issues and attempt to “force them down Wellstone’s throat.” The Republicans’ success in setting the agenda in the Minnesota Senate elections forced Wellstone and the Democrats to campaign on Republican issues for much of the race.

Party issue advocacy advertising has the potential to change the nature of congressional campaigns dramatically, and we expect it to increase in the future. Congress is unlikely to pass legislation that restricts party or interest group issue advocacy in elections. Even if it did, the courts would probably

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues Used:</th>
<th>Wellstone (in percentages)</th>
<th>Boschwitz (in percentages)</th>
<th>Democratic Party (DFL) (in percentages)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NRSC Issues</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Issues</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n)</td>
<td>(19)</td>
<td>(14)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[X^2 = 6.48^{**}\]

Note: The NRSC issue advocacy advertisements consistently referred to three issues: taxing and spending, crime, and welfare.

**Significant at .05.
find that such laws violate First Amendment rights to free speech. As such, some speculation about the impact of party issue advocacy is appropriate. First, party influence in congressional elections is likely to grow, along with the influence of interest groups that undertake issue advocacy campaigns. Given funding disparities among candidates, parties, and interest groups, it is likely that party and interest group communications will set the agenda, tone, and issue content of some future elections, drowning out the communications of candidates. This scenario is especially likely to emerge in competitive congressional districts and states.

Second, increased party issue advocacy and agenda-setting efforts may lead to a greater nationalization of American politics. The NRCC's Crystal Ball ad and other party issue advocacy and independent expenditure ads were broadcast in numerous states and congressional districts, forcing the House and Senate candidates campaigning in these locales to respond to them. Campaign communications have an impact on the expectations of voters and congressional policy making. Thus, party issue ads and other communications efforts may lead to greater party unity in Congress (Cantor and Herrnson 1997).

Third, issue advocacy ads are likely to drive up the costs of elections. The fact that parties can now spend soft money on issue advocacy ads and hard money on independent expenditures means that they will. These new campaign approaches are expensive. Party leaders and operatives will feel tremendous pressure to raise the money necessary to fund them. Candidates, especially powerful incumbents, who fear that they could become the latest victims of party attacks and agenda-setting efforts will step up their fundraising efforts to have the financial wherewithal to defend themselves. The growing pressures associated with fund-raising will undoubtedly increase the political access and clout of the individuals and groups who finance campaigns.

It is risky to speculate about political change without considering all of the groups that are involved in elections. The same rulings that unleashed the parties to broadcast issue advocacy also freed interest groups to engage in the same form of activity. Given the tremendous resources that corporations, trade associations, and labor unions have at their disposal, and given their willingness to spend billions of dollars on political activities, it is likely that interest group spending on issue advocacy will also grow. Although it is impossible to predict whether parties or interest groups will experience the greatest increase in political influence, surely the introduction of expensive new campaign techniques will increase the clout of wealthier and better-organized sectors of society over poorer and less well-organized segments.

Regardless of whether our speculations are fully borne out, this study has demonstrated that court rulings have increased the parties' roles in campaign communications, changed the dynamics of agenda setting in some
campaigns, and contributed to the negativity of congressional elections. The parties and the courts may continue to claim that issue advocacy ads are not campaign communications, but the evidence demonstrates the contrary. These ads have the potential to change the nature of congressional elections.

Notes

We wish to thank Rick Reed of Reed, Curcio and Company, Mandy Grunwald of Grunwald Communications, and Tom Kelly of the Minnesota Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party for providing us with copies of the campaign advertisements analyzed in this study. Portions of sections on party communications are drawn from Herrnson (1988).

1. These are considered separate elections under the FECA. Party committees usually only give contributions to general election candidates.
2. Coordinated expenditure limits for states with only one House member are $55,240.
3. The ratio of soft money to hard money that a national party can spend in a state, including funds spent on issue advocacy, is determined by the number of state and federal elections held in the state in a given election year.
4. This amount includes only expenditures made in connection with general election candidates. A small amount was made in connection with primary candidates who did not make it to the general election.
5. The GOP spent $424,000 in the Rhode Island Senate race in which Democratic Representative Jack Reed defeated State Treasurer Nancy Mayer by 27 percent of the vote. Only state and local parties in Louisiana, Maine, and Texas made independent expenditures in connection with Senate races in their states.
6. For reasons of cost, the ads were broadcast on radio rather than television in the Los Angeles and Philadelphia media markets. They were also broadcast on radio rather than television in Portland, where the television airwaves were already saturated with campaign ads.
7. The RNC contributed $8 million toward this ad campaign.
The 1996 national party conventions starkly revealed a tension that lies at the heart of contemporary party politics. On the one hand, the public face of the conventions was congenial, relatively issueless, and candidate centered. Speakers and events were carefully scripted to serve as advertisements for the fall campaign, offering a positive, centrist image to the citizenry. Republican managers were determined to avoid the negative press of the 1992 campaign, when Pat Buchanan proclaimed a “culture war,” and Democrats were eager to distance themselves from “big government,” a controversy in the 1994 congressional elections.

On the other hand, the private face of the conventions was contentious, issue oriented, and party focused. Republicans struggled over abortion, while “old” and “new” Democrats argued about welfare reform. Debates over the meaning and purpose of each party—whether it was a “bridge to the past” or a “bridge to the twenty-first century”—took place away from the TV cameras, in platform battles, rallies, and rump sessions. Journalists covering the conventions noticed this tension. Which were the “real” parties, they asked, the carefully scripted moderation on television or the barely contained passions on the convention floor (Shafer 1988)?

Here we explore this tension by reviewing the attitudes of four groups of partisans in 1996: Democratic and Republican convention delegates, donors to presidential primary campaigns, partisan voters, and nonvoters in the mass public. We find both consistency and confusion. As in the past, party elites had consistent and opposite positions on ideology, economic, and social issues. These differences were exacerbated by diverse and distinctive issue networks among party elites, which often moved the parties away from their followers in the public. Paradoxically, clear policy stances by party elites seemed to engender confusion among the citizenry and at the ballot box.
The tension between the instrumental and substantive purposes of American political parties is as old as the parties themselves, but it was especially evident in the 1990s. For three decades, the instrumental capacities of the major parties have expanded so that these organizations, especially their national committees, have become significant players in a candidate-centered age (Aldrich 1995). In 1996, both President Bill Clinton and his Republican opponent, Senator Bob Dole, owed much to these enhanced capacities. The parties provided each candidate with extraordinary levels of funding, conducted extensive “issue advocacy” and “grassroots” campaigns on their behalf, and rescued each candidate at critical junctures in the campaign (Pomper 1997). By any standard, the parties superintended impressive efforts in 1996, in the face of a cynical and apathetic electorate.

However, there was no shortage of criticism of the 1996 campaign because of its perceived lack of issue focus (Wattenberg 1998: chapter 12). Pundits and scholars alike were dismayed by the campaign’s policy incoherence, with Clinton retreating from traditional Democratic issues and Dole claiming not to have read the Republican platform. Another problem was the devaluing of party symbols by the candidates, who ran largely as individuals rather than as party leaders. Along these lines, the “split-ticket” character of the campaign was problematic, including Clinton’s strategy of “triangulation” (running against both congressional Republicans and Democrats), and the GOP congressional candidates’ decision to abandon Dole in the last days of the campaign. To these observers, the low level of turnout—49 percent—was only the most obvious cost of such a campaign.

Ironically, the major parties were engulfed by intense issues debates in 1996. Fundamental questions about the role of government in the economy and social life were raised in many quarters. And political actors were responding to these questions: there was ample evidence of issue polarization among officeholders, party leaders, and even the most attentive elements of the electorate (see chapters 3 and 15). Furthermore, issues were a prime source of the energy and money that provided support for electoral politics, including the enhanced capacities of the national party committees. Indeed, over the last three decades issue development and promotion has become so central to contemporary parties that some scholars have labeled them as “advocacy parties” (Bruce, Clark, and Kessel 1991), dominated by diverse networks of issue activists. It has long been known, for instance, that party elites have more intense and consistent opinions than partisans in the mass public (McClosky, Hoffman, and O’Hara 1960; Jackson, Brown, and Bositis 1982).

Of course, these comments reflect a long-standing debate among party scholars. At the broadest level, scholars who appreciate the pragmatism of
the major parties could find much to admire in the efficiency and moderation of the 1996 campaign. In contrast, advocates of responsible parties could only be disappointed by these very same features (White and Mileur 1992). These perspectives turn on the narrower question of the role of issue activism among party elites (Beck 1997: 116–19).

Admirers of pragmatic parties are suspicious of issue activism because it can burden the parties with messages unpopular with the general public. Put bluntly, “amateurs” and “purists” among party elites risk alienating the electorate in general. Interest group and social movement activists have been the focus of these fears for over two decades (Kirkpatrick 1976), but recently campaign contributors have been added to the list of suspect elites (Borosage and Teixeira 1996). Tempering issue-oriented activism is thus essential for electoral success. In 1996, it was thus desirable for the GOP to ignore opponents of abortion and for the Democrats to bypass supporters of “big government.”

The advocates of responsible parties see things differently. Issue-oriented activists are central to the success of the parties because they bring crucial issues to the fore and offer the electorate real choices (White 1995). Put bluntly, it is the “professionals” among party elites who risk alienating the electorate by avoiding issues, especially those from interest groups and social movements central to the party (Baer and Bositis 1988). So, the problem lies with the excessive tempering of issue-oriented activism. According to this school of thought, in 1996 Republican social issue conservatives and Democratic advocates of the welfare state should have had a greater voice in the campaign.

These rival perspectives raise important empirical questions about the 1996 campaign. First, where did the national convention delegates stand on the issues of the day? Second, how did they compare with other party elites, such as campaign contributors? Third, how well did these elites represent their partisans in the mass public, both the citizens who voted and those who stayed home on election day? Finally, what were the most significant issue networks among party elites, and what effects did they have on the issue postures of the parties?

The Studies

We will use three data sets to answer these questions. The first study is the 1996 installment of the Party Elite Study (PES) conducted by John S. Jackson and colleagues at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale since 1976 (Jackson and Clayton 1996). A random sample of one thousand delegates to the Democratic and Republican National Conventions was mailed
questionnaires in the fall of 1996. The return rates were 52.5 percent for Democrats (525 cases) and 45 percent for Republicans (451 cases).

The second study was a survey of campaign contributors to 1996 presidential primary campaigns conducted at the University of Akron. A stratified random sample of donors of $200 or more to all the major Republican and Democratic presidential primary campaigns was mailed questionnaires in the spring of 1997. The return rate for the entire sample was 50.0 percent (1,094 cases). The final study is the 1996 National Election Study (NES) conducted at the University of Michigan.

The PES data are the focus of our analysis; we will compare the attitudes of Democratic and Republican delegates to their copartisans among campaign contributors and in the mass public. The public was divided into voters and nonvoters based on self-report.1 The questions asked in the PES and NES were comparable; the items asked in the campaign contributor survey were very similar in structure and content.

Issues and Party Elites in 1996

Where did national convention delegates stand on the issues in 1996? A good place to begin is with self-identified ideology, presented in Table 7.1.2 As one might expect from past research (Jackson and Clayton 1996), there was considerable difference between Democratic and Republican delegates, with the former more liberal and the latter markedly more conservative. Note, however, that nearly one-half of the Democratic delegates described themselves as “moderate” compared with less than one-fifth of the Republicans. So, there was a sharp ideological divide between party activists in 1996, but it was between a center-left and a consistently right-wing party.

Does this division extend to other elements of the party? First, Democratic donors were actually more liberal than Democratic delegates, which suggests that donors are not always a conservative force in party politics. The Republican donors more closely resembled GOP delegates in this regard. Turning to voters, Democratic delegates were only modestly more liberal than their copartisans, matching the numbers of moderate or nonideological responses. Much the same can be said for Republicans: the delegates were only slightly more conservative than GOP voters. However, the most interesting figures were for the partisans who did not vote. In both camps, nonvoters were markedly more moderate or nonideological than voters or party elites. It could well be that the ideological consistency that brings some voters to the parties discourages others from participating at all. This is an interesting reversal of some long cherished beliefs by the more ideological activists in both parties who have advocated “a choice not an echo” as the route to party-building and electoral success.
So, party delegates were divided in an expected fashion on ideology in 1996, and they appeared to represent the views of their donors and voters fairly well. What about the issue priorities? Table 7.2 reports the kinds of issues named as most important by party elites and masses.\(^3\) As might be expected, Democratic delegates give the most emphasis to social welfare issues, followed closely by general economic/foreign policy questions, with only a small minority stressing social/moral matters. Here the Democratic delegates match their party's donors, voters, and nonvoters fairly well.

In contrast, Republicans showed much deeper divisions on priorities. More than one-half of delegates stressed general economic/foreign policy issues, almost as many, two-fifths, emphasized social or moral concerns. Interestingly, few delegates gave priority to social welfare matters. Once again, the GOP donors resembled their delegates, but there were some sharp differences with their copartisans in the mass public. Republican voters displayed a more muted version of the economic/social issue divide, and more than one-quarter mentioned social welfare issues. This pattern is even stronger among nonvoters, among whom a plurality listed social welfare as a priority. Hence, Republican delegates did not appear to represent the priorities of their followers as well as the Democrats.

What about specific issues? Table 7.3 reports attitudes on two salient
Table 7.2 Party Elites and Masses in 1996: Priorities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>Democrats:</th>
<th>Republicans:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Delegates</td>
<td>Donors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic, Foreign Policy</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Welfare</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social/Moral Issues</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Surveys by the authors; 1996 National Election Study.

Among delegates, the government services issue revealed greater polarization than ideology: some four-fifths of Democratic delegates favored continuing the level of public services, whereas better than four-fifths of their Republican counterparts wanted reduced public services. Democratic donors were modestly more moderate, and Democratic voters and nonvoters were markedly so. Republican donors and voters more strongly favored fewer government services, although there was also a tendency toward moderation, with nonvoters being the most moderate of all.

A very similar pattern held for health insurance, with Democrats, especially delegates and donors, favoring government insurance programs, and Republicans, especially delegates and donors, preferring private insurance. Thus, the parties were strongly polarized on the role of government in the economy. On these issues, Republican delegates appeared to represent their voters somewhat better than the Democrats represented theirs. In fact, these data belie somewhat the “moderate” self-image of Democratic delegates reported above.

What about social issues? Table 7.4 reports on two controversial matters, abortion and government aid to minorities. Democratic delegates and donors were overwhelmingly prochoice on abortion (with the donors somewhat more) and much more so than Democrats in the mass public. Just a bare majority of Democratic voters had a prochoice position, a figure that fell to less than one-half among nonvoters. Republicans showed more division.
Table 7.3 Party Elites and Masses in 1996: Economic Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Delegates</th>
<th>Donors (in percentages)</th>
<th>Voters</th>
<th>Non-Voters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Government services:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue Services</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral, no opinion</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce Services</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrats</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republicans</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral, no opinion</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce Services</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrats</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republicans</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Health insurance:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government insurance</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral, no opinion</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private insurance</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrats</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republicans</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral, no opinion</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private insurance</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Surveys by the authors; 1996 National Election Study.

among elites: while GOP delegates were strongly prolife, they were more diverse in their views than their Democratic counterparts. Republican donors were even less prolife, as were Republican voters and nonvoters. Note, however, that Republicans in the mass public were almost mirror images of their Democratic counterparts. So, both parties face elite-led divisions on abortion.

A somewhat different pattern occurred for government aid to minorities. Although Democratic delegates strongly favored such policies, they were more moderate than their Republican counterparts. Interestingly, both party's donors were even more moderate than their delegates, especially the Republican donors. In contrast, voters and nonvoters in both parties opposed aid to minorities. Democrats in the mass public were less opposed—reflecting, no doubt, the greater presence of minorities in their ranks. Once
Table 7.4 Party Elites and Masses in 1996: Social Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Delegates</th>
<th>Donors</th>
<th>Voters</th>
<th>Non-Voters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(in percentages)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abortion:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-Choice</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate, no opinion</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-Life</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republicans</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-Choice</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate, no opinion</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-Life</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aid minorities:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favor aid</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral, no opinion</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppose aid</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republicans</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favor aid</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral, no opinion</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppose aid</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Surveys by the authors; 1996 National Election Study.

Again nonvoters had the most moderate position. These findings reflect historical partisan divisions over race in American society.

Overall, these patterns show only modest changes from comparable data in 1992 (Jackson and Clayton 1996). In general, Democratic delegates became somewhat more moderate while the Republican delegates became more conservative. The mass public in both parties moved modestly to the right, especially the voters. In some respects, then, party elites represented their copartisans better in 1996 than in previous elections. It may be, however, that the respective presidential campaigns represented partisan publics more accurately in 1996 than in 1992 (Keeter 1997).

**Issue Networks in 1996**

What about the role of issue network in 1996? A crude answer can be had by identifying the variety of interest groups to which the delegates
claimed to belong. These groups fell into two broad categories in the PES survey:

- **Economic groups.** These groups were traditional economic organizations. One key group was organized labor, including teachers unions, a traditional mainstay of the Democratic Party. Another key group was business and professional organizations, a traditional constituency of the GOP but also active in Democratic circles.

- **Cultural groups.** These groups were associated with liberal or conservative social movements and related public interest organizations. One kind might be labeled “progressive” and includes civil rights, gay rights; ethnic, environmental, and nonpartisan reform groups (such as Common Cause). An especially important type of progressive group was women’s organizations (feminist, prochoice, and general women’s groups). Yet another kind of cultural group might be called “moralist” and includes antiabortion and religious-based organizations. Progressive groups have been most active among Democrats and moralists among Republicans, but there were exceptions.

Reported membership in these types of groups was combined to produce seven categories in each party, which are listed in Tables 7.5 and 7.6. The relative size of the categories is given in the first columns of these tables, and the remaining columns report some key demographic characteristics: female gender, minority status, Southern residence, and religious background (membership in evangelical Protestant or non-Protestant denominations). A “no group” category completes the list, made up of delegates who reported no group memberships. Interestingly, more than twice as many Republicans as Democrats were in the “no group” category. This approach reveals diverse and complex issue networks in both parties that often combine economic and culture features. Among the Democrats, the largest group was the “feminists,” accounting for one-fifth of the delegates (Table 7.5). These delegates all belonged to one or more women’s groups, and most also belonged to other progressive organizations. Not surprisingly, these activists were overwhelmingly female, and in addition, more than one-half were non-Protestants, more than one-quarter were minorities, and few resided in the South. Another large group was “progressive labor,” members of labor unions who also belonged to one or more progressive groups, including women’s groups. Progressive labor made up one-sixth of the delegates and also contains many women, minorities, and non-Protestants. Interestingly, about one-third reside in the South. Another large group was “progressive business,” members of business and professional organizations as well as progressive or women’s groups. The “progressive business” activists ac-
counted for almost one-fifth of Democratic delegates and were also substantially female and non-Protestant.

The remaining Democratic groups were smaller. The "pure progressives," members of progressive organizations but not women’s, business, or labor groups, made up about one-sixth of the Democratic delegates and contained the most minorities. Another group was "pure labor," members of labor unions only. Accounting for one-sixth of the sample, this group contained relatively few minorities but the largest number of evangelical Protestants. The final group, "mixed business," was an amalgam of business and moralist groups. These delegates were the least numerous, making up less than one-tenth of the total.

The Republican delegates were similarly diverse (Table 7.6). The smallest group was "progressive business" delegates, at one-eighth of the total. This group and a related one, the "pure progressives," with one-sixth of the delegates, were defined the same way as their counterpart among the Democrats. Women’s groups were especially important here, and not surprisingly, both categories had a majority of women. Note that these groups contained few southerners, evangelical Protestants, or non-Protestants. Instead, these categories were made up of northern, mainline Protestants, a traditional Republican constituency. The largest single group was the "pure business" delegates, making up about one-fifth of the Republican delegates. These delegates represent the backbone of the GOP: they contained few women or minorities, were common in the South (and indeed throughout the country), and were religiously diverse.

The remaining three groups of Republicans belong to moralist organiza-
Table 7.6 Issue Networks among 1996 Republican Delegates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Republican Delegates (in percentages)</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Minority</th>
<th>Southern</th>
<th>Religion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive Business (6)</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pure Progressives (13)</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pure Business (21)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive Moralists (12)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Moralists (17)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pure Moralists (16)</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Group (16)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Surveys by the authors.

In sum, the Democrats were characterized by networks of feminists and various kinds of progressives, some drawn from the labor movement and the business community. Smaller groups of conservative Democrats were also present, including labor, business, and moralist delegates. Meanwhile, the Republicans were characterized by the business and moralist networks, with smaller groups of progressives.

Did these crudely defined issue networks matter politically? Table 7.7 suggests that they did. This table reports the relative liberalism or conservatism of all these categories on self-identified ideology and indices of economic (including government services and health care) and social issues (including abortion and aid to minorities). The coefficients are mean standardized scores, in which positive signs indicate greater liberalism than...
the party average and a negative greater conservatism. It is important to stress that these were relative measures within each party: in absolute terms, Democratic delegates were more liberal and the Republicans more conservative on all these measures.

Among Democrats, the feminists and progressive labor delegates were most likely to identify as “liberal,” and the mixed business delegates were most likely to identify as “conservative.” The remaining groups—progressive business, pure progressives, and pure labor—were all slightly right of center compared with their copartisans. A more variegated pattern occurred on economic issues. Here the feminists, progressive labor delegates, and pure progressives were the most liberal, and, not surprisingly, progressive business and mixed business delegates were more conservative. More surprising was the position of the pure labor delegates: almost dead center with respect to Democratic delegates as a whole. Social issues showed a more consistent pattern. The feminists and progressive labor delegates were again the most liberal. However, the pure progressives were modestly conservative on these issues. Progressive business and pure labor delegates
bracketed the center, the former slightly to the right and the latter slightly to the left. Mixed business was the most conservative group.

The Republican delegates had similar patterns. The pure progressive and progressive business delegates were the farthest left of center in ideology, where they were joined, interestingly enough, by the pure business category. In contrast, the three moralist categories were solidly to the right compared with other Republicans, with the pure moralists being by far the most conservative. As with the Democrats, the pattern for economic issues was more variegated. Interestingly, the pure progressives were the most liberal on economic issues and the pure moralists the most conservative. All of the business groups tended toward the center, with the pure business category coming closest to a centrist position. Once again, social issues showed more consistent patterns. Here the progressive business, pure progressive, and pure business delegates were to the left of Republicans as a whole, while the three moralist categories were to the right. The pure moralists were again the most conservative.

Thus, the traditional economic constituencies of the major parties, the pure labor and pure business delegates, were found near the center of their respective parties on ideology, economic, and social issues. If the 1996 national conventions had been made up of just these delegates, party elites would have more closely matched their partisans in the electorate. Thus, it was the newer cultural groups that by and large created the strong ideological tendencies within each party. Feminists and various kinds of progressives tended to pull the Democrats to the left of their followers in the mass public, especially on social issues but also on economic matters. In contrast, moralists of various sorts tended to push the Republicans to the right of their followers on abortion, but also on the size of government. In 1996, the potential counterweights to the dominant issue networks, the mixed business Democrats and progressive Republicans, were too small to make much of a difference.

**Consistency and Confusion**

We can now answer our original questions. In 1996, party delegates were deeply polarized in terms of ideology, economic, and social issues. Despite a tendency to label themselves “moderates,” Democratic delegates were strongly liberal, and Republicans consistently conservative on the specific issues studied. Interestingly, the delegates closely resembled their party’s campaign contributors. Thus, it is unlikely that donors were a special source of division among party elites. However, donors may well have reinforced the divisions between delegates and their copartisans in the mass public. Here there were substantial and systematic differences: the mass voters were
consistently more moderate than their copartisans among delegates and donors. This gap was even wider for nonvoters in each party, who tended to be much less ideological and perhaps less interested in politics also. At one point or another, each party’s delegates failed to represent their constituents accurately. For instance, the Republicans missed the social welfare priorities of their voters, and the Democrats were out of step on government services. But it was equally true that the delegates often reflected the general tendencies of their party’s voters.

Finally, both party’s elites were characterized by diverse and distinctive issue networks, some representing traditional economic constituencies and others relative new cultural constituencies. These networks may have moved their parties to the left or right but often away from their copartisans in the mass public. The dominance of feminists and other progressive groups among Democratic delegates was especially evident in 1996 and was no doubt part of the gender gap that characterized the 1996 campaign. Similarly, the pervasiveness of business and moralists in the GOP was impressive and was surely linked to ongoing debate over abortion and other personal conduct issues which divide the Republican Party. We now see echoes of that debate taking place among the various contenders for the Republican nomination for 2000.

What can we make of the role of issue-oriented party elites in 1996? These data reveal something for everyone. Advocates of pragmatic parties may find support for the instrumental campaign in 1996: the candidates may have been closer to the voters than most party elites. Certainly the campaigns largely succeeded in avoiding issues that divided each party’s coalition. Apostles of responsible parties can take some comfort in these findings as well: the major parties really do stand for different policy alternatives. The biggest differences were found among elites, but there were often parallel, if smaller, divisions among voters. And the dominant issue networks in both parties pushed toward greater issue clarity.

It is equally clear, however, that the tension between the instrumental and substantive purposes of the major parties remained unresolved. Indeed, the findings on nonvoters should give scholars pause. Greater issue clarity by party elites may well demobilize large segments of the citizenry, yet a lack of issue clarity may well enfeeble the government as an instrument of the public will and risk alienating the activists who are so important in the leadership echelons of both parties. This palpable tension between two competing concepts of what the major parties should be and should do is part of a classic struggle in American political history. Our findings indicate that the struggle continued and even intensified somewhat in both parties in 1996.

Notes
1. Because of the overreport of voting behavior by survey respondents, the data presented here may understate the differences between voters and nonvoters. Independent leaners
were counted as partisans for the purposes of this analysis. The 1996 National Election Study was made available by the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research and were originally collected at the University of Michigan. The interpretations offered here are the responsibility of the authors.

2. The standard seven-point ideology scale was recoded so that “extremely liberal” responses were counted as “very liberal” and “liberal” and “slightly liberal” responses were counted as “liberal.” A similar pattern was followed for “very conservative” and “conservative” designations. The middle category includes nonideological responses as well as moderate responses. This was done because so many nonvoters gave nonideological responses. Excluding the nonideological responses produces similar, though less dramatic findings.

3. The issue mentions were coded straightforwardly with two exceptions. Two small categories were combined with larger categories for purposes of presentation. Political process mentions (corruption, complaints about officeholders) were put in the social issue category, and foreign policy mentions were put with general economic questions.

4. Here seven-point scales were recoded so that the three responses on either side of the midpoint were counted together. Nonresponses were included in the “moderate” categories.

5. On abortion, “prochoice” was defined as allowing women to choose an abortion for any reason, and “prolife” included prohibition of all abortions as well as allowing abortions under limited circumstances. Other responses were in the “moderate, no opinion” category. The government aid to minorities items was recoded in the same fashion as the government services and health insurance items.

6. The GOP donors response on aid to minorities is the one instance in which the donors were significantly out of step with the delegates. However, this item in the donor survey was the least comparable to the delegate survey.

7. This combination of groups was guided first by factor analysis that revealed significant overlap among progressive and moralist groups. The actual categories used were calculated by first creating every possible combination of the major kinds of groups (labor, business/professional, progressive, women’s, and moralistic groups), and then combining groups that had very similar ideological self-identifications. Some kinds of groups were excluded because they cut across the more significant categories; these included community and veterans groups, and formal and informal party organizations. Many alternative combinations of groups produced very similar results. For other analyses of issue networks among party elites, see Baer and Bositis (1988) and Baer and Dolan (1994).

8. The categories were chosen for two reasons. First, these items are markers for important cultural groups important in the public (see chapter 3). Second, economic characteristics of the delegates were less salient and largely captured by the economic interest group designation. As with past surveys, the conventional delegates have relatively high socio-economic status.

9. But do these delegates think of themselves as representing the groups they belonged to in party politics? Overall, 46 percent reported thinking of themselves in this fashion. However, there was a major partisan difference on this item: 61 percent of Democrats thought of themselves this way, but only 28 percent of Republicans. This difference and the higher percentage of Republicans who claimed not to belong to a group fit with the cultural differences between the Republicans and Democrats (Freeman 1986).

10. These indices were produced as follows. For ideology, the item was simply standardized for each party. The economic and social issues scales are factors scores produced by factor-analyzing six items (government services, health insurance, defense spending, abortion, aid to minorities, and school vouchers). Each party was analyzed separately, and each analysis produced an economic and social issue factor with eigenvalues greater than one.

11. For instance, 38 percent of the Pure Labor delegates claimed to be “liberal,” and 51 percent claimed to be “moderate” compared with 35 percent and 46 percent of Democratic voters, respectively. Similarly, 63 percent of pure business donors claimed to be “conservative” and 19 percent “moderate” compared with 64 percent and 26 percent of Republican voters, respectively.
During the 1992 presidential campaign, Bill Clinton used the CompuServe computer network to participate in on-line chat sessions with voters and to answer constituent E-mail. This political foray into computer-based information technology received abundant media coverage and began to provoke discussion about a new era of interactive digital campaigning. Although 1992 may have marked one of the first times that a political campaign widely used computers in the public arena, it certainly was not the beginning of computerized politics. As early as the 1950s, campaigns began experimenting with computers and looked for ways to harness the electronic power for electoral gain. In the ensuing decades—as they became smaller, more powerful, and less expensive—computers became increasingly useful to political campaigns. Today, of course, computers have become a ubiquitous mainstay in political operations, and it would be difficult to find any campaign—even at the local level—that does not depend heavily on computers.

This chapter explores the relationship between political parties and computer-based information technology. I focus on two information technologies—databases and the Internet—that have become increasingly important to campaign operations. The results of a survey of state political parties provide insight into the future direction of campaign innovation. The findings from the survey suggest a new theoretical approach to evaluating information technology within political operations.

Early Approaches to Computerized Politics

Political scientists began to seriously examine the impact of computers on politics in the early 1970s. At that time, many observers predicted that the biggest casualty of the new form of computer politics would be the political parties. Robert Agranoff wrote that "the primary factor in the rise of new
campaigning is the atrophy of political party organizations” (1976a: 10). This prediction was mainly predicated on the notion that computers would displace the raison d’être of political parties—centralized political organization. Before the introduction of computers into the electoral process, candidates depended on parties to serve as the primary repository of voter information. However, computers gave individual campaigns the ability to centralize the collection of information on their own and enabled workers to store, sort, and analyze large amounts of voter data without party intervention. Furthermore, the rise of broadcast media technologies gave campaigns the ability to communicate directly with the electorate. The combination of these technological developments—the spread of computers and the availability of large-scale broadcast media—threatened to reduce candidate dependence on parties and led observers to warn of the imminent decline of the party organizations (Agranoff 1976a: 3–47).

As it turned out, however, the threat of technology to political parties was overblown. Rather than scorning the new technologies and relegating them to an adversarial role, both the Republican and Democratic national parties began to adopt and integrate such innovations into their own operations. The introduction of computer technologies into the parties helped significantly strengthen and revitalize the organizations, particularly the Republicans. National parties used technology to bolster their own internal organization and in the process gained enough experience and expertise to be able to offer technology services to others. By the late 1980s, the national parties had developed the technological capacity to raise millions of dollars (primarily through direct mail) and offer polling, fund-raising, and database development services to their candidates and state party counterparts. Reoriented as service providers and brokers of campaign innovation, party organizations flourished. Political observers began to suggest that from an institutional and organizational standpoint, the technology-charged parties had become the strongest in their history. This institutional durability (a surprise to many scholars) has been the focus of much of the literature on parties over the last decade (Herrnson 1988).

While many studies have concluded that the adoption of modern campaign technology was a central factor in the revitalization of the party organizations, the process of adopting technology was certainly not uniform throughout the parties. Both the Democratic and Republican Parties integrated computer technology into their operations, but each party did so with varying degrees of interest and success. The Republican organization was the first party to achieve widespread success in the 1970s with the most profitable partisan technology—direct mail—and has reaped the benefits ever since. Huge profits derived from Republican direct mail programs have enabled the party to dominate political fund-raising to the current day. In contrast, the Democratic Party has continually struggled to develop a profit-
able direct mail program, and party finances have suffered as a result. In 1984, Benjamin Ginsberg encapsulated the disparity when he declared emerging campaign technologies “the weapon of the right” and found that “the chief devotees and principal beneficiaries of the new campaign methods” are political conservatives (1984: 173, 174).

State Parties and Information Technology

The relationship between state and national parties has changed in recent decades. Throughout the days of machine politics, state parties were the main intermediaries with voters, and as such, power originated at the state level and emanated to the national level. As Bibby (1990: 37–38) has noted, when national parties emerged as financial powerhouses (as a result of direct mail) and began rebuilding the weakened state organizations, the flow of money and power was reversed. For both national parties, control over a large pool of funds and experience with campaign technologies has given them some influence over their state organizations. Thus, observed Huckshorn and colleagues, “state parties are constituent units of a national party, influenced by national party performance norms, and capable of coordinated effort to influence the party’s electoral standing” (1986: 990).

On the one hand, technology developments at the national party level reverberated at the state party level as well. Republican state parties, like their national counterparts, were generally more successful at implementing technology. Huckshorn and colleagues (1986: 983) found that Republican state parties were organizationally stronger than their Democratic counterparts. Similarly, Bibby (1990: 29) found that Republican state parties provided more assistance to candidates in areas such as fund-raising, polling, and training. Despite the disparities, however, most Republican and Democratic state organizations successfully entered the 1990s as viable organizations, capable of providing services and assistance to their candidates (Bibby 1990: 39–40).

On the other hand, each state organization is able to operate with significant autonomy on a day-to-day basis. Strategic decisions, such as whether to make investments in campaign technology, are made by state officials. An assessment of state party technology is particularly illuminating not only because it enables comparisons of Democratic and Republican operations but also because successful technology at the state level may be a precursor to national party technology. In a survey of approximately thirty-seven top political consultants, conservative polling firm Frank I. Luntz found that 75 percent felt campaign technology “filtered up” from the state and congressional level, while only 6 percent suggested that technology “filtered down” from the national and presidential level (1988: 200). In many in-
stances, state campaigns may provide an ideal setting from which new tech­
niques can be tested and improved. Technologies that are successful at the
state level are likely to surface quickly in nation elections. For instance, the
success of the Republican National Committee’s national voter file (a data­
base containing information about 142 million registered voters) rests on
thorough and comprehensive data collection and analysis by participating
state parties. In some cases, therefore, a party’s technological strength at the
state level may be a rough indicator of the potential technological strength
of the national organization.

Survey Description and Methodology

To better understand the role of information technology within political
parties, and because information about state-specific technology is relatively
rare, data for this essay were gathered by conducting a survey of state par­
ties. A questionnaire of thirty-nine items—with questions pertaining to the
state party’s experience during the 1996 campaign cycle with two leading
information technologies—database and Internet¹—was mailed to the Dem­
ocratic and Republican organizations in all fifty states.

The survey was mailed to the executive director for the most state par­
ties, but where the office was vacant, the survey was sent to the party chair.
Accurate and complete responses were encouraged by assuring respondents
of the individual anonymity of their states. The initial mailing yielded forty­
one responses. Two and a half weeks after the first mailing, a second copy
of the survey was sent to the nonrespondents. The second mailing produced
seventeen more responses. Of the fifty-eight total responses, thirty were
Democratic and twenty-eight were Republican. In sixteen states, responses
were received from both parties, and the response of at least one party was
received from forty-two states. Within each party label, respondents were
geographically distributed in a relatively equal manner by region. However,
the size of the sample and the even geographic distribution of responses pro­
vides an adequate basis from which to make general comparisons of the Re­
publican and Democratic respondents.

Survey Results and Analysis

Databases and Direct Mail

All of the Republican respondents and 93 percent of the Democratic re­
pondents reported using some form of computerized voter database for po­
litical operations (see Table 8.1). This result suggests that database technol­
ogy had gained widespread acceptance within the state organizations of both parties by the 1996 campaign cycle. Possessing the technology itself, however, did not mean that party staff members had the necessary operating expertise. Among the Republican respondents with databases, 96 percent reported that their databases were operated on a day-to-day basis by in-house staff, while 71 percent of Democratic respondents who used databases relied on in-house staffers to operate them. Twenty-nine percent of the Democratic parties with databases used direct mail and database consultants to operate their computers.

More of the Republican parties had developed in-house computer expertise and did not have to hire consultants. This finding is significant because the ability to sustain a successful technological operation over a long-term basis may be questionable when outside consultants—and not party officials—are in the controlling position. In many cases, consultants retain proprietary control over any information stored in their databases, and therefore state parties who depend exclusively on consultants may be putting themselves at a significant disadvantage.

Perhaps in an effort to make up for the “expertise” gap with Republican parties, many of the Democratic respondents had recently made large investments in their databases (see Table 8.2). During 1996, 43 percent of the Republican parties invested less than $25,000 in their databases, whereas 76 percent of the Democratic parties with databases spent more than $25,000. A possible explanation for this finding is that many of the Republican state parties already had well-functioning and sophisticated databases that did not require large annual investments. In contrast, Democrats had to make larger payments to consultants to maintain their database technology.

As Table 8.3 shows, most Republican respondents—but less than one-

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Table 8.1 Database Technology and Experience in State Parties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Republicans (in percentages)</th>
<th>Democrats (in percentages)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Used a computerized voter database</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had in-house database experience</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey by author.
Table 8.2 State Party Spending on Database Maintenance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount Spent</th>
<th>Republicans (in percentages)</th>
<th>Democrats (in percentages)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than $25,000</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$25,001-$50,000</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,001-$100,000</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,001-$250,000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than $250,000</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey by author.

Half of the Democratic respondents—received technological assistance from their national organization. Of the Republican state parties surveyed, 82 percent reported receiving help from the Republican National Committee (RNC), and 7 percent said they received database development assistance from the National Republican Campaign Committee (NRCC) or the National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC). Among the Democratic parties with databases, 46 percent received help from the DNC, and 14 percent received assistance from either the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) or Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee (DSCC). In addition to receiving more help, the Republican state parties rated the quality of help they received higher than did the Democrats. The Republican parties

Table 8.3 Database Assistance From National Party

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Received database assistance from their national organization (RNC or DNC)</th>
<th>Republicans</th>
<th>Democrats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>82%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rating of help

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating of help</th>
<th>Republicans</th>
<th>Democrats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.05</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The rating scale had the following number-word pairs: 5-crucial, 4-important, 3-helpful, 2-slightly helpful, and 1-useless.

Source: Survey by author.
that had received help from the RNC rated it an average of 4.05 on a five-point scale, while the Democratic parties rated their help an average of 3.45.

This finding—that the RNC provided more help to its state parties than did the DNC—concurs with other studies of state parties (Huckshorn et al. 1986: 981). With the significant funds that it has been able to raise, the RNC has made large investments in its state and local organizations. As a result, Republican state parties can operate more effectively and provide more assistance to their candidates than can their Democratic counterparts.

Perhaps learning from the financial successes of the national parties, many state parties used their databases for direct mail fund-raising. Among the state parties with databases, 96 percent of the Republicans were engaged in direct mail fund-raising, compared with 68 percent of the Democrats. In their direct mail pursuits, the Republican state parties tended to fare better. As Table 8.4 shows, a majority of the Democratic respondents that engaged in direct mail fund-raising received less than five thousand donations and raised less than $100,000. In contrast, a majority of the Republican respondents received at least five thousand donations, and 71 percent raised more than $100,000 with direct mail.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 8.4 Direct Mail Fund-Raising by State Party Respondents, 1996</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Donations:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0–5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,001–10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,001–20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20,001–40,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40,001–60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60,001–100,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey by author.
The direct mail fund-raising disparity between the Democratic and Republican respondents can partly be explained by the different approaches the parties have taken in utilizing their databases. As Table 8.5 shows, Republican respondents perceived fund-raising as the most important application of their databases, whereas Democratic respondents found their databases most useful for directly contacting voters and providing them with election reminders and information. Direct mail fund-raising was less important to most Democratic respondents. Indeed, the Democrats regarded volunteer recruitment as the most important use of party data bases, while the Republicans regarded it as the least important of the activities listed. Democrats also gave somewhat greater emphasis to voter registration, but, interestingly, the Republicans gave more emphasis to mobilizing for campaign rallies.

The results summarized in Table 8.5 are particularly revealing because they demonstrate a fundamental difference in the way each party approaches campaign technologies. Republicans used databases primarily to raise funds, and all other uses are secondary. For the Democrats, however, technology is used primarily as a tool for recruiting volunteers. In many ways, this Democratic strategy of using technology to mobilize activists harkens back to the old-fashioned style of labor-intensive politics that was well suited to the successful functioning of the Democratic Party in earlier decades.

While the Republican and Democratic respondents reported different uses for their databases, both parties regarded databases as important to their organization. Republicans rated the overall importance of their databases

Table 8.5 Most Important Uses For Databases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Republicans</th>
<th>Democrats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct mail fund-raising</td>
<td>(4.63)</td>
<td>Volunteer solicitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election day reminders</td>
<td>(4.48)</td>
<td>Election day reminders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informative mailings</td>
<td>(4.20)</td>
<td>Informative mailings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter mobilization for rallies</td>
<td>(3.75)</td>
<td>Direct mail fundraising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter registration</td>
<td>(3.67)</td>
<td>Voter registration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer solicitation</td>
<td>(3.19)</td>
<td>Voter mobilization for rallies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The lists, starting at the top, are in order of importance as rated by respondents. The number in parentheses is the average of the five-point “importance rating” that each activity received. The rating scale had the following word-number pairs: 5-crucial, 4-important, 3-helpful, 2-slightly helpful, and 1-useless.

Source: Survey by author.
4.75 on a five-point scale, while Democratic parties rated their databases 4.48. Several respondents from both parties included laudatory comments about their databases; one respondent wrote that their computerized list of names was the party’s “most valuable asset.”

The wealth of information contained in state party databases makes them appealing to national party organizations as well as candidates. As Table 8.6 shows, 86 percent of Republican respondents reported that they generally gave the RNC access to the information in their databases and 96 percent gave access to Republican candidates. On the Democratic side, only 29 percent of the state parties with databases generally gave the DNC access, and 79 percent gave access to Democratic candidates.

The fact that less than 30 percent of the Democratic respondents gave the DNC access to their databases while nearly 90 percent of Republican respondents gave database access to the RNC is very significant. By pooling information from state databases, the national parties are able to build national databases without duplicating the efforts of the state parties. The RNC has taken this approach in the construction of its national voter file. Without access to state databases, any attempt by the DNC to build a nationwide database would incur significantly more expenses. The DNC’s limited access to state databases is not necessarily a result of state party insularity. Several Democratic respondents reported that the DNC has never asked for database access.

The RNC’s relatively open access to state databases reflects the strong and mutually beneficial relationships that the RNC has formed with many of its state parties. Through the cooperative efforts orchestrated by the RNC, both the state and national organizations derive important benefits. By con-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 8.6 Access to State Party Databases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republicans (in percentages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrats (in percentages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gave database access to their national</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organization (RNC or DNC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gave database access to candidates from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>their party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Survey by author.*
contrast, the survey suggests that significantly less coordination occurs within the Democratic Party. The apparent willingness of Democratic state parties to share their valuable information with the DNC if only they were asked suggests the absence of vital communication within the party.

**Internet Technologies**

Although the technology was relatively new and largely experimental during the 1996 campaign cycle, the survey suggests that the Internet is widely used by state parties. As Table 8.7 shows, all Democratic respondents and 79 percent of Republican respondents indicated that their organizations had an E-mail address, and nearly 70 percent of respondents from both parties had Web sites during the 1996 campaign cycle. Among the state parties that did not maintain a Web site, 78 percent of the Republican respondents and 80 percent of the Democratic respondents reported that they had plans to develop one in the near future.

Interestingly, 79 percent of the Republican Web sites had customized Internet addresses, while only 40 percent of the Democratic sites had this feature. A customized Internet address (or “domain name,” in technological terms) is roughly equivalent to a vanity 800 telephone number such as 1-800-BOB-DOLE. (For instance, http://www.democrats.org is a customized domain name.) Although the actual political significance of an address may be small, organizations that are able to create and register a customized address may have a fuller understanding of Internet technology.

While more Republican parties had their own Internet addresses, more Democratic respondents had begun the process of including voter E-mail addresses in their databases. Among Republican respondents, 18 percent re-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Had a party E-mail address</th>
<th>79</th>
<th>100</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uses an electronic mailing list</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had a party Web site presence</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had integrated voter E-mail addresses into their databases</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey by author.
ported that they had integrated E-mail addresses into their databases, compared with 25 percent of Democratic respondents. Presumably E-mail databases will be used by parties to enhance their ability to reach and communicate with voters over the Internet. Although most state parties had made an initial foray into Internet campaigning by the 1996 elections, for the majority it was a very low-budget operation. As Table 8.8 shows, more than half of the respondents from both parties spent less than $1,000 on the development of their Web sites. The costs of taking advantage of the capabilities of the Internet for political purposes will certainly increase, so it remains to be seen whether state parties will make the necessary investments.

A majority of respondents from both parties used the Internet to cultivate new members and volunteers, with 74 percent of Republicans and 85 percent of Democrats who had developed Web sites reporting that the Internet helped them sign up volunteers (see Table 8.9). These results suggest that the Internet may be an effective tool for converting political interest into political participation. The survey clearly indicates that state parties used the Internet to solicit volunteers and citizens responded. Rather than depersonalizing the political process, technology in these instances helped to engage and activate citizens. New media columnist Jim Buie (1997) reported that during the 1996 campaign season, many presidential, senatorial, and congressional campaigns were inundated with requests from Internet users who wished to volunteer with a campaign. In their professionalized and capital-intensive structures, however, most modern campaigns were not able to fully use volunteer efforts. Nonetheless, the ability of the Internet to lower the “opportunity cost” of contacting and volunteering in campaigns is an encouraging trend from the perspective of citizen participation.

Table 8.8 State Party Spending on Web site Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Republicans (in percentages)</th>
<th>Democrats (in percentages)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than $1,000</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1,001–$5,000</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$5,001–$10,000</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10,001–$25,000</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than $25,000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey by author.
The survey also suggests that some respondents from both parties used the Internet to solicit donations. The findings summarized in Table 8.10 indicate that a significantly higher percentage of Republican parties attempted to use the Internet for fund-raising purposes. Approximately one-third of all respondents with Web sites (from both parties) received some donations over the Internet (see Table 8.10). Still, donations were small; virtually every party that engaged in Internet fund-raising amassed a total amount of less than $5,000. Nonetheless, these initial activities suggest that political fund-raising over the Internet may become increasingly popular.

The earlier observation—that Republicans emphasize the fund-raising potential of new technologies far more than Democrats—is supported by the results in Table 8.10. More than one-third of the Republican respondents used the Internet for fund-raising, compared with only 20 percent of the Democrats. A large majority of Democratic parties used the Internet for volunteer recruitment. Overall, Republican respondents rated the importance of the Internet to their organization an average 2.69 (on a five-point scale), and Democratic respondents rated it an average 3.03. Thus, Democratic parties found the Internet somewhat more useful than the Republicans. This finding presents an interesting counterpoint to the previous finding that direct mail databases were more important to the Republicans than the Democrats.

Divergent Technological Strategies

The aggregate results of the survey indicate that the vast majority of both Democratic and Republican state organizations are using database and Internet technology in some form. The survey revealed, however, noticeable differences in the role and relative importance of each of the two technolo-
Table 8.10 State Party Internet Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Respondents who Used the Internet for the Activity (in percentages)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Republicans:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer/member solicitation</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fund-raising</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasion mailings</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election day reminders</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobilization for rallies</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter registration</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrats:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer/member solicitation</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobilization for rallies</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election day reminders</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasion mailings</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter registration</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fund-raising</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey by author.

gies within the parties. On the whole, Republican parties had a lead in direct mail database technology and found databases more important than did the Democratic parties. In contrast, the Democrats exhibited somewhat stronger Internet technology and regarded the Internet as more important than did their Republican counterparts. Republicans were more likely to use these technologies for fund-raising, and Democrats were not likely to stress volunteer recruitment. This finding suggests that at least in its early incarnation, Internet technology was better suited to the Democratic strategy of voter outreach and volunteer recruitment, while database technology remained paramount to the Republican fund-raising approach.

The traditional proclivities of the parties help explain the Republican affinity for fund-raising technology and the Democratic attachment to participation-enhancing innovations. The Democratic Party has benefitted most from the grassroots labor-intensive mode of operation because the party’s ideology appealed to working-class voters who had the time to volunteer with their local campaigns. With the labor-intensive approach, Democrats could more easily reach their heterogeneous and less affluent constituents. In contrast, the Republican Party’s interests have been best served by the
capital-intensive political structure because Republican constituents on the average are wealthier individuals who would rather donate money than time to their political causes. The traditional campaign styles of the parties are strongly reflected in their approaches to technology. Indeed, each party’s degree of interest and success with a particular technology may have more to do with the function and suitability of the technology relative to the party’s overall strategic characteristics than any other factor.

The characterization of partisan technology assessment as dependent on functional considerations represents a departure from common interpretations of partisan technology that rely on quantitative fund-raising inequalities to establish differences between the parties. For instance, the Republican Party’s ability to raise more direct mail money with fund-raising technology has been interpreted by some observers to mean that the Republicans have better technology overall. This approach to analyzing partisan technology has generally been valid in the past since partisan technology has largely been the domain of direct mail fund-raising. As technology takes on different forms and functions, however, this approach will have to be modified. It may no longer be true that the Republican hegemony in fund-raising technology will easily translate into dominance in other political applications of technology. Rather, it is plausible that technologically savvy Democrats could exploit to great effect the participation-enhancing qualities of the new breed of interactive technologies. The Democrats could potentially use the new technology to overcome some of the obstacles it has traditionally faced in its efforts to reach its heterogeneous and less affluent constituents.

Although the survey results presented here provide initial indications of the direction of partisan technology, much remains to be seen as the expanding role of information technology in parties introduces new dynamics into the political process. Unlike broadcast technology, which is suited only to one-way mass communication, new information technology enables targeting and interactivity. Already interactive technology is being used to facilitate political dialogues and debates, and the time when some degree of actual decision making occurs over the Internet may be quickly approaching. Invariably, both parties will have to adjust their strategies to capitalize fully on the opportunities created by the new technology. Democrats may find that building a technological infrastructure for mobilizing and energizing their core constituency for grassroots political action best serves the party’s interests, whereas Republicans are likely to continue to be effective by furthering the development of potent fund-raising technology, only this time using the Internet—rather than the mail—as the basis for transactions. Of course, neither party would be wise to totally ignore any of the information technologies that hold campaign potential. Whatever the direction of partisan technology, it is clear that assessing innovation must consider the function—not
just the form—of the technology in order to explore fully the new realm of party “machines.”

Notes

This chapter would not have been possible without the contributions of several individuals and organizations. I would like to thank Theodore Lowi for his wise counsel and tremendous insight throughout the research and writing process; John Green for his invaluable editorial suggestions and steadfast encouragement; David Lytel for introducing me to the fascinating field of political technology; Elizabeth Sanders, Jeremy Rabkin, and Richard Bensel for their helpful comments on various incarnations of this essay; and Walter Mebane for his advice on designing the survey questionnaire. I am indebted to Christina Yick, Adam Chazan, Jackie Pastore, and Kimberley Shultz for their help in administering the survey and to Kim Haverkamp for graciously tolerating my many revisions. I want to express my sincere gratitude to all of my family and friends who have supported me in my efforts. Finally, I would like to thank the Department of Government at Cornell University for providing funds for the survey and the Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics at the University of Akron for its overall commitment to this project.
Local Parties in the 1990s:
Spokes in a Candidate-Centered Wheel

John Frendreis and Alan R. Gitelson

The collective research on political campaigns over the past twenty-five years has firmly established that candidate-centered organizations are the vehicles through which most campaigns are waged for electoral offices. The significance of candidate-centered politics has been chronicled for presidential (Agranoff 1972; Wattenberg 1991, 1995), congressional (Herrnson 1988), and even state legislative races (Frendreis et al. 1994; Frendreis and Gitelson 1995a, 1995b). In general, these candidate-centered organizations—along with campaign consultants, PACs, and interest groups—are thought to have grown in importance at the expense of political parties. Although the object of a growing body of research in the last decade, there is still much to know about the contemporary role and relevance of U.S. political parties in the context of candidate-centered politics.

Despite a number of institutional and legal changes in the political system, including the widespread adoption of the primary system, changes in campaign finance laws, the decline in strong voter partisanship, and the concurrent rise in candidate-centered campaigning in the United States over the last several decades, considerable evidence indicates that political party organizations are increasingly active at the national, state, and local levels and that they have adjusted to the changing political environment through a process of adaptation. Party organizations profess to engage in traditional grassroots activities such as voter registration drives and get-out-the-vote efforts and, according to party activists, have expanded their efforts to include candidate recruitment, campaign strategy, and fund-raising (Cotter et al. 1984; Gibson et al. 1985; Gibson, Frendreis, and Vertz 1989; Frendreis et al. 1994).

However, candidates for elective office, one critical consumer of the party symbol and services in the United States, offer conflicting reports concerning the importance of party organizations in their campaigns. Although party activists claim they are increasingly active, candidates for office rarely rate party organizations as any more than “slightly important” for the assis-
tance they provide in most aspects of campaigning (see Herrnson 1988; Frendreis et al. 1993).

The discrepancy between candidates’ and party activists’ evaluations of party organization activities makes it difficult to discern the relevance of parties in contemporary elections (see Coleman 1994). Although a number of studies over the past decade have revealed the range of activities in which contemporary party organizations are involved, these surveys of candidates and party activists have, for the most part, been analyzed separately. At the same time, while party organizational studies have examined contemporary parties at national (Herrnson 1990), state (Gibson et al. 1983), and local levels (Gibson et al. 1985, 1989; Frendreis and Gitelson 1993a; Frendreis et al. 1993), our knowledge of candidates’ views is essentially based on trends in national politics and a few systematic studies of congressional candidates by Herrnson (1988) and Kazee and Thornberry (1990). Relatively little is known about the relationship between parties and candidates for the vast array of offices below the congressional level.

As we have argued elsewhere, greater focus on lower-level offices and parties is warranted for four reasons. First, the vast majority of elected and party officials are drawn from these levels. Second, lower-level offices, such as state legislative and county offices, are responsible for public policy that is substantively important and collectively represents hundreds of billions of dollars in annual expenditures. Third, what happens at these levels is relevant for electoral and partisan politics at higher levels. For example, that the incomplete development of the Republican Party in many parts of the South is more a function of what has or has not happened at the local level than it is of national and statewide politics (e.g., see Frendreis, Gibson, and Vertz 1990: 231-32). Finally, local party leaders themselves believe their organizations are most relevant and effective with regard to lower-level offices (Gibson et al. 1989).

During the three most recent U.S. national elections, we surveyed all county party chairs and all major party general election candidates for the upper and lower houses of the state legislatures in nine states. The states included—Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Missouri, Ohio, South Carolina, Washington, and Wisconsin—vary by region, party organizational strength, and competition in the United States. In each year, over 1,500 candidates for state legislative office and over 1,000 county party leaders were surveyed. Approximately 60 percent of all candidates and 65 percent of all chairs responded to the 1992 and 1994 surveys; the 1996 response rates were about 5 percent lower. Responses were relatively evenly distributed between Democrats and Republicans and, among candidates, between those who won and those who lost the election.

Our analysis proceeds in three steps. First, we report on the structural strength and activity levels of local party organizations. Second, we examine
the contemporary electoral environment from the perspective of candidates, paying special attention to their assessments of the role and relevance of party organizations to electoral politics. Finally, we suggest how research should proceed to better understand the interrelationships among voters, candidates, and party organizations within the evolving U.S. electoral system.

**Party Organizational Strength and Activity: Evidence of Continuing Vitality**

Recent research on the role of party organizations in contemporary elections has presented an alternative to earlier conclusions concerning the diminishing importance of political parties.

Party organizations at all levels are increasing their budgets and staffs and using these expanded resources to engage in a broad range of campaign activities. The Party Transformation Study, a national survey of state and local party organizations conducted by Cotter, Gibson, Bibby, and Huckshorn during the 1980s (Cotter et al. 1984; Gibson et al. 1985), revealed that parties have adapted to the changing nature of modern campaigns. Both this study and later studies have found that parties in the United States undertake a range of activities used to increase voter turnout and build support for their candidates. These activities include literature drops, voter registration drives, telephone campaigns, lawn sign distribution, and get-out-the-vote efforts (Cotter et al. 1984; Gibson et al. 1985, 1989; Lawson, Pomper, and Moakley 1986).

In addition, party organizations have adapted to candidate-centered campaigning, accommodating—rather than competing with—new electoral actors such as PACs and campaign consultants (Cotter et al. 1984; Gibson et al. 1985). A greater number of party organizations are engaged in campaign activities, and parties have become involved in more and more types of activities. In addition to the traditional grassroots efforts aimed at boosting turnout, parties recruit candidates, coordinate PAC activity, and in many cases contribute financially to candidates, even at the local level (Cotter et al. 1984; Gibson et al. 1989). Parties also appear to have integrated their efforts at various levels, establishing a number of cooperative links between the national, state, and local party organizations.

The results from our three surveys continue to show this pattern of organizational vitality among local party organizations. Table 9.1 reports the percentages of Democratic and Republican county chairs reporting that their party organizations possessed a variety of structural attributes and engaged in an array of direct campaign activities during the 1992, 1994, and 1996 elections. As a baseline for comparison, we include comparable percentages reported in Gibson et al. (1985) for the 1979–1980 PTS nationwide survey.
Table 9.1 Structural Attributes and Direct Campaign Activities of Local Party Organizations in 1980, 1992, 1994, and 1996

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Has complete set of officers</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>95</td>
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<tr>
<td>Has constitution, rules, or bylaws</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>78</td>
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<tr>
<td>Has formal annual budget</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has some paid, full-time staff</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has some paid, part-time staff</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has year-round office</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Has telephone listing</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>30</td>
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<td>59</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>56</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distributes campaign literature</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>86</td>
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<td>Arranges fundraising events</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizes campaign events</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributes money to candidates</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>75</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organizes telephone campaigns</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>59</td>
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(continued)
(Table 9.1, continued)

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buys newspaper ads for party and candidates</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>63</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distributes posters or lawn signs</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>93</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinates county-level campaigns</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>58</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Prepares press releases for party and candidates</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>69</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sends mailings to voters</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>58</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducts registration drives</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organizes door-to-door canvassing</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buys radio/tv time for party and candidates</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilizes public opinion surveys</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchases bill board space</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinates PAC activity</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducts get-out-the-vote effort</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>70</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum N</td>
<td>1,872</td>
<td>1,984</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>340</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a n/a = not asked in this year.

Sources: 1980 data reported in Gibson et al. (1985); 1992, 1994, and 1996 surveys by authors.
Two results are apparent in Table 9.1. First, there is no general pattern of decline from the 1980 baseline to the 1992, 1994, and 1996 data; if anything, the party organizations are as structurally developed and a bit more active programmatically in the 1990s than they were in 1980. The only notable declines are in the conducting of voter registration drives (although there was a marginal upswing for Democrats in 1996) and the purchasing of TV/radio time and billboard space by party organizations on behalf of candidates. Offsetting this pattern are increases of similar magnitude for a number of other activities. This finding that party organizations are at least as programmatically active in the 1990s as they were in 1980 extends the findings of Gibson, Frendreis, and Vertz (1989) for the 1980–1984 period and our own earlier reports for the 1992 election (Frendreis et al. 1993, 1994).

The second pattern evident in Table 9.1 is that the essential parity between the parties seen in the two earlier time points (see also Norrander 1986) eroded, to some degree, in the 1994 and 1996 election cycles. In addition to a continuation of the long-standing moderate structural advantage for the Republicans⁴ the 1994 figures for campaign activities show small to moderate advantages for the Republican organizations for a number of the direct campaign activities, gains that were only partially reversed in the 1996 cycle.

In 1992, there was a mixture of Republican-Democratic differences among the seventeen direct campaign activities that t-tests showed to be statistically significant (p < .05): Republican organizations were more likely to contribute money to candidates, while Democratic organizations were more likely to conduct registration drives, buy radio/TV time, coordinate PAC activity, and conduct get-out-the-vote efforts. Each of these differences was significant overall, and advantages in particular areas accrued to both parties.

By 1994, however, this had changed. The only significant differences were all in the Republicans’ favor: contributing money to candidates, using public opinion surveys, and purchasing billboard space. Moreover, important shifts in some key areas—notably voter registration and get-out-the-vote efforts—had replaced Democratic advantages with Republican ones (although the latter are not statistically significant differences).

In 1996, as in 1992, advantages in specific areas once again accrued to both parties. Republican organizations were more likely to have year-round headquarters, an annual budget, and to purchase billboard space. Democratic organizations were more likely to conduct voter registration drives and to coordinate PAC activity. These differences were statistically significant (p < .05).

The basis for the changes between 1992 and 1994 is seen in Table 9.2, in which a careful comparison of the responses from those organizations responding in both elections show a general pattern of small increases in campaign activities by Republican organizations and small decreases by Demo-
Table 9.2 Change in Structural Attributes and Campaign Activities of Local Party Organizations, 1992–1994

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Republicans</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Democrats</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structural attributes:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has complete set of officers</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>+4*</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has constitution, rules, or bylaws</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>+10*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has formal annual budget</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has some paid, full-time staff</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has some paid, part-time staff</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has year-round office</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has telephone listing</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has campaign headquarters</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>-7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Campaign activities:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributes campaign literature</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arranges fund-raising events</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>-7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizes campaign events</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>+6</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributes money to candidates</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizes telephone campaigns</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>-7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buys newspaper ads for party and candidates</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>+8*</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributes posters or lawn signs</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinates county-level campaigns</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepares press releases for party and candidates</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>-7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sends mailings to voters</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducts registration drives</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>-14*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizes door-to-door canvassing</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>+4</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buys radio/TV time for party and candidates</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Uses public opinion surveys</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>+5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>-1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Purchases billboard space</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinates PAC activity</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>+4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducts get-out-the-vote effort</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>+11*</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>-6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>223</td>
<td></td>
<td>213</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Figures shown are paired comparisons for organizations responding in both 1992 and 1994.

*Difference is significant at .05 level (two-tailed), paired t-test.

Sources: Survey by authors.
ocratic organizations. However, two 1992–1994 changes are much larger (and statistically significant): Republicans increased their level of get-out-the-vote efforts, while Democrats decreased their voter registration efforts—in both cases erasing what had been Democratic advantages in these areas in 1992. Given the role that turnout apparently played in the widespread gains by Republicans in the 1994 midterm elections, these shifts in local-level party activity may have played a role in the shift in electoral fortunes between these two elections.

The basis for the changes between 1994 and 1996 is seen in Table 9.3, in which we see the parties reversing the pattern of increases and decreases in campaign activities. Although Republicans continue to outperform the Democrats overall in structural attributes and direct campaign activities (see Table 9.1), comparisons between 1994 and 1996 show small increases over time by Democrats and small decreases over time by Republicans in overall campaign activity. In a comparison with the 1992–1994 changes, we found that changes between 1994 and 1996 show a small decline by both parties in get-out-the-vote efforts but a conspicuous increase in voter registration efforts by Democratic organizations and a decline in voter registration efforts by Republican organizations (although the differences are not statistically significant). The 1996 increase in voter registration activity by the Democratic organizations may very well have been a response to their 1994 losses and a recognition of the importance of registration efforts.

Tables 9.2 and 9.3 also present a systematic comparison of local party structure and activity between presidential and midterm election cycles. Political party organizations—particularly at the local level—are often ephemeral institutions that go through life cycles matched to the electoral cycle. A reasonable supposition might have been that these organizations would reach a peak of structural strength and activity level during the presidential election. However, the results show that this is not entirely the case. Republican organizations show no drop-off between the 1992 and 1994 elections; if anything, these organizations were more active in 1994 than in 1992. Democratic organizations clearly do show a decline in activity levels, although these are fairly modest; the 1994 activity levels for Democrats still compare favorably with the levels reported fourteen years earlier during the 1980 presidential election year.

Changes in structural and campaign activities of local party organizations between 1994 and 1996—moving between a midterm and presidential cycle—suggest that despite some increases in campaign activity favoring the Democratic organizations, most markedly in the conducting of voter registration drives, overall activity levels for both parties remained close to 1994 levels. Given the limited longitudinal nature of our data, we cannot know whether these levels of activity over election cycles are unique to this period or reflective of more general patterns across a number of election cycles.
Table 9.3 Change in Structural Attributes and Campaign Activities of Local Party Organizations, 1994-1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Republicans</th>
<th>Democrats</th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>1994-1996</td>
<td>Level</td>
<td>Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(in percentages)</td>
<td>(in percentages)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structural attributes:</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has complete set of officers</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has constitution, rules, or bylaws</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has formal annual budget</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>+7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has some paid, full-time staff</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>+1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Has some paid, part-time staff</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has year-round office</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has telephone listing</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>+5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has campaign headquarters</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>+5</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>+5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Direct campaign activities:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributes campaign literature</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arranges fund-raising events</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizes campaign events</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>+3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributes money to candidates</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizes telephone campaigns</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buys newspaper ads for party and candidates</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributes posters or lawn signs</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>+4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinates county-level campaigns</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepares press releases for party and candidates</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>+5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sends mailings to voters</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>+5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducts registration drives</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>+5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizes door-to-door canvassing</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buys radio/TV time for party and candidates</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses public opinion surveys</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchases billboard space</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinates PAC activity</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>+3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducts get-out-the-vote effort</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>247</td>
<td></td>
<td>249</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Figures shown are paired comparisons for organizations responding in both 1994 and 1996.

* Difference is significant at .05 level (two-tailed), paired t-test.

Sources: Survey by authors.
The Contemporary Electoral World: The View from the Candidates

Surveys of candidates for elective office provide an alternative perspective on the contemporary electoral environment, including the role and relevance of party organizations. The few recent studies of candidates have focused almost exclusively on candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives. Herrnson (1986, 1988) found that candidates for Congress rated local party organizations as most important for voter registration drives and get-out-the-vote efforts. Several categories of congressional candidates, particularly Republicans, even rated national party organizations as more important than PACs and labor unions for assistance with campaign fundraising in the 1984 election (Herrnson 1986). At the same time, a later study suggested that parties are not extensively involved in recruiting candidates for Congress, even in the case of open seat races, which are traditionally the most competitive contests (Kazee and Thornberry 1990).

Despite evidence of party activity, however, the electoral relevance of party organizations remains unclear (Coleman 1994; Hames 1994). Congressional candidates rate local, state, and national party organizations as only “slightly” important, if important at all, for the assistance they provide with most campaign activities. A party’s organizational strength is only moderately related \( r = .46 \) to election results (Cotter et al. 1984). In multivariate analyses, party organizational strength increases the percentage of explained variance in election results by only 2 to 3 percent (Frendreis et al. 1990; see also Gibson and Smith 1984). Moreover, the causal relationship among party organizational strength, election results, and the political characteristics of a state, county, or congressional district is a complex one. Election results and party strength may both be a consequence of the underlying partisan leanings of the state, for example, making it difficult to discern the unique impact of party activity (Pomper 1990).

Our surveys of state legislative candidates in 1992, 1994, and 1996 asked candidates to assess the roles of parties (and other actors) in their decisions to run for office and in various phases of their campaigns. Since the 1992, 1994, and 1996 data essentially display the same results, we only present the 1996 results in tabular form (noting any changes between the three election years, where they occur [see also Frendreis and Gitelson 1995a]).

According to these candidates, family and friends have the greatest influence over the decision to run for office, a pattern that strongly resembles results reported by Kazee and Thornberry (1990) for the “emergence” of congressional candidates. Table 9.4 presents candidates’ mean responses, on a scale ranging from 1 to 5, concerning the importance of family and friends, party organizations at the various levels, and other groups when making their decisions to run for office. Other officeholders and state and county party
Table 9.4 The Influence of Family, Friends, Parties, and Political Groups on Candidates’ Decisions to Run for Office in 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>House Candidates</th>
<th>Senate Candidates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incumbents</td>
<td>Challengers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family and friends</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>3.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(308)</td>
<td>(246)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County party</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>2.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(306)</td>
<td>(245)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State party</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>2.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(305)</td>
<td>(244)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National party</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(304)</td>
<td>(245)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other officeholders</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>2.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(300)</td>
<td>(242)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State legislature</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>2.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>campaign committee</td>
<td>(305)</td>
<td>(244)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor unions</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>1.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(306)</td>
<td>(246)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PACs</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>1.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(303)</td>
<td>(245)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other groups</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>1.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(304)</td>
<td>(244)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Entries are the mean of the scores provided by candidates, for each listed group, in response to the question “How important do you believe each of the following groups were in influencing your decision to run for the state legislature in 1996?” Responses range from 1 (not important) to 5 (extremely important). Figures in parentheses are the number of responses used in computing each mean score. Source: Survey by authors.
organizations also appear to be of modest importance, although still substantially lower than family and friends. In 1994, there was a modest tendency for the county and state party organizations (including the state legislative campaign committee) to be of somewhat greater influence in decisions by challengers to run, which is consistent with the idea that party units are more likely to play a role in recruiting candidates for difficult races.

By 1996, however, a closer investigation of the differences between incumbent, challenger, and open seat candidates revealed more mixed findings. Party organizations were often as aggressive, and in some cases more aggressive, in influencing an incumbent’s decision to run for office as they were in influencing challengers and open seat candidates. This finding may be compatible with the idea that local and state party organizations, challenged by the relatively high turn-over rates of state legislators in 1994, sought to play a greater role in both supporting and preserving incumbent candidates and in recruiting strong challengers in difficult races and filling the candidate vacancies left by a larger than expected defeat of incumbents.

The candidate surveys also provide a set of evaluations concerning the importance of the various party organizations and other groups to the candidates’ campaigns across a range of campaign activities, including the development of campaign strategy, organizing campaign events, recruiting volunteers, fund-raising, and voter registration and get-out-the-vote efforts. The mean responses, in 1996, for House and Senate candidates, grouped by party and the candidates’ position in the race (incumbents, challengers, or open seat) are presented in Table 9.5. The italicized scores are the highest given by each type of candidate within each category of the various campaign activities.

According to the candidates we surveyed in 1992 (results not shown; see Frendreis et al. 1993; Frendreis and Gitelson 1993a), party organizations—particularly county parties—were moderately important in several campaign activities, but they were overshadowed by PACs and interest groups in other areas, particularly for assistance with fund-raising. Candidates consistently scored county parties highest for two kinds of grassroots activities, voter registration drives and get-out-the-vote efforts, while state parties were highest for developing overall strategy. Parties were also scored higher for recruiting volunteers and organizing campaign events.

At the same time, the 1992 state legislative candidates’ evaluations of parties and other political organizations including PACs, labor unions, and interest groups, were overall quite low. The average score given to any group for any type of campaign activity rarely achieved a rating of “moderately important” (a score of 3 on a scale ranging from 1 to 5). An overwhelming majority of the mean scores fell between the two lowest possible ratings, “not important” and “slightly important.” In short, in 1992 state legislative
candidates rarely saw political organizations and political parties as a major factor in their election campaigns.\textsuperscript{6}

Exactly what (or who) plays a major role in these candidates’ campaigns became clearer in 1994 and again in 1996, when we added two additional groups.organizations to the set of questions asked of candidates, their family and friends and their party’s state legislative campaign committee. Our 1996 findings (Table 9.5), validate the 1994 data, indicating that in nearly every phase of campaign activity, candidates view their family and friends as the most important assets to their campaigns. This is true across the board—for both parties, both levels of office, and all types of candidates. The only exception is for registering voters, where, not surprisingly, local parties rival family and friends in importance. Although it is not surprising that family and friends are of greatest importance in areas such as campaign strategy and organizing campaign events, their importance throughout the campaign (e.g., for get-out-the-vote efforts) is unexpected. At this level of electoral politics, the “candidate-centered” electoral coalition is centered on the candidate in a very personal way; while candidates have created their own organizations to contest elections, they clearly are not the larger, more bureaucratic organizations visible at the higher levels of electoral politics.

Beyond this identified centrality of family and friends to candidates’ campaigns, the 1994 and 1996 results mirror the earlier 1992 results. County-level parties and, to a lesser extent, state parties are modestly important to candidates, particularly in “grassroots” aspects of campaigning such as voter registration, providing volunteers, and get-out-the-vote efforts. National party organizations are essentially irrelevant to state legislative candidates. PACs, other interest groups, and legislative campaign committees are most important for fund-raising; labor unions are, of course, only important for Democrats. Finally, as was true for candidate emergence, party organizations are somewhat more important to challengers—the candidates who are least likely to receive PAC contributions, the most likely to lose, and consequently the candidates who need the most help.

With the exception of the extreme significance of family and friends, the results presented in Table 9.5 are similar to Herrnson’s (1988) survey of 1984 congressional candidates. Both congressional and state legislative candidates view party organizations as most important for grassroots activities like voter registration and get-out-the-vote drives, while both sets of candidates see PACs, labor unions, and other groups as more important in the area of fund-raising.

**Parties, Candidates, and State Electoral Politics**

Our data show that local party organizations in the United States are far from atrophied; on the contrary, they continue to be structurally developed
Table 9.5 Candidate Evaluations of the Role of Parties and Other Groups in Their State Legislative Campaigns in 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>House Candidates</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Senate Candidates</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Democrats I C O</td>
<td>Republicans I C O</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Democrats I C O</td>
<td>Republicans I C O</td>
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<tr>
<td>Campaign Strategy:</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family and friends</td>
<td>3.75 3.60 4.07</td>
<td>3.46 3.70 3.67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.94 3.75 2.91</td>
<td>3.78 3.26 3.53</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2.10 2.11</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State party</td>
<td>2.01 2.21</td>
<td>2.07 2.07 2.35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.24 2.44 2.50</td>
<td>2.28 2.48</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>National party</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislative campaign</td>
<td>2.23 2.53</td>
<td>2.41 2.40 2.23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.24 2.44 2.50</td>
<td>2.28 2.48</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>committee</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>PACs</td>
<td>2.23 2.53</td>
<td>2.41 2.40 2.23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.24 2.44 2.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interest groups</td>
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<td>3.53 3.78 3.98</td>
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<td>3.84 3.82 3.86</td>
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<td>State party</td>
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<td>2.15 2.02 2.62</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2.14 2.00 2.76</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Legislative campaign</td>
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<td>2.65 2.23 2.52</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2.42 2.35 2.68</td>
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<td>committee</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>PACs</td>
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<td>3.28 2.01 3.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.00 2.32 3.00</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2.32</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.57 2.41 3.86</td>
<td>2.00</td>
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<td>2.32</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>2.00 2.14 2.29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family and friends</td>
<td>2.54 2.13 2.54</td>
<td>2.00 2.29 2.19</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2.25 2.20</td>
<td>2.11</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County party</td>
<td>2.46 2.58 2.77</td>
<td>2.67 2.20 2.40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.03 2.50 2.62</td>
<td>2.60 2.00 2.71</td>
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<tr>
<td>State party</td>
<td>2.07 2.25 2.39</td>
<td>2.56 2.22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.65 2.04 2.38</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>2.50</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>National party</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislative campaign</td>
<td>2.20 2.60</td>
<td>2.65 2.22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.46 2.19 3.00</td>
<td>2.32</td>
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<td>committee</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PACs</td>
<td>2.40 2.62 2.43</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.46 2.19 3.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor unions</td>
<td>2.07 2.28 2.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest groups</td>
<td></td>
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Note: Entries are means of the scores provided by candidates, for each listed group (rated at least 2.0, slightly important), in response to the question "How important were the following groups in assisting the campaign with ——?" Responses range from 1 (not important) to 5 (extremely important). Scores are provided separately for incumbents (I), challengers (C), and open seat candidates (O). Italicized scores are the highest given by each type of candidate within each category of campaign activity.

Sources: Survey by authors.
and programmatically active. At the same time, our research confirms the conflicting perceptions that candidates and party leaders have regarding the role of party organizations in the campaign process. While the party chairs we surveyed in the nine states claim a significant role in the campaign process (see Frendreis et al. 1994), state legislative candidates almost uniformly perceive local and state party organizations as playing a secondary role in their campaigns, which they see as being fundamentally dependent on their own circle of family and friends. We found two important exceptions to this finding. Candidates attribute significant roles to the county party organizations regarding two key grassroots activities: voter registration drives and get-out-the-vote efforts.

One explanation for the differences in the perception of party activists and candidates may be found in the candidates' perception of the appropriate distribution of functions and responsibilities in the campaign process. Candidates appear to view the parties as having an important role in indirect, broad-based, nonspecific campaign activities, such as voter registration and get-out-the-vote efforts. They perceive their own role as being focused on direct, candidate-specific activities—devising campaign strategy, attracting volunteers, and scheduling campaign events. Apparently, state legislative candidates rarely see any politically oriented organizations as dominant forces in these direct or candidate-specific campaign activities.

In effect, local party organizations are regarded as neither more nor less important than other political agents by local political candidates when it comes to supporting direct campaign activities. At the same time, while the direct impact of party activity on election results appears to be slight, the indirect role of parties—through voter registration drives and get-out-the-vote activities—is perceived as potentially important by state legislative candidates.

Overall, these results suggest that the continuing structural development and activity levels of political party organizations can and do play a role in state legislative campaigns. At the same time, it needs to be remembered that not only has campaigning become increasingly candidate centered, but the choices being made by voters are probably significantly structured by candidate attributes.

**Toward a Model of Parties and Contemporary Electoral Politics**

The subtitle of this chapter on local parties in the 1990s, emphasizing the "spokes in a candidate-centered wheel," underscores one of the central conclusions of our research: that neither a party-centered nor candidate-centered campaign model accurately reflects the role of parties in local contemporary elections.
Indeed, our initial expectation when we commenced this research was that party organizations—specifically, local party organizations—would be more important for lower-level candidates than they are for candidates for higher-level office. Although we knew that candidate-centered campaigning had become the norm for higher-level offices, we suspected that parties remain a major vehicle for lower-level office seekers. While this may yet be true for candidates for even more local offices (e.g., county, municipal, or special district offices), a pure party-centered model is obviously not the case for candidates for the state legislature. But neither is Ehrenhalt’s (1991) claim candidate-centered campaigning has diffused extensively throughout contemporary American electoral politics. The image of the “spokes in the wheel” suggests a more realistic and diffuse model of local electoral politics, one in which an increased role by a candidate-centered organization, marked more by very personal contacts rather than the larger, more bureaucratic organizations visible at the higher levels of electoral politics, is moderated by an important role played by parties as well as interest groups, PACs, labor unions, and business interests.

Our results add further depth to an emerging portrait of contemporary American parties as indirect, rather than direct, forces in electoral politics, a role that should not be underestimated relative to its importance in the electoral system. In general, while local party organizations play a relatively minor role in the self-recruitment of candidates and in campaign strategy and fund-raising, parties can make a difference in drawing candidates into hard races (see Frendreis et al. 1990), and providing financial resources (Frendreis and Gitelson 1995a). Parties provide a crucial boost in key areas such as voter mobilization—specifically, registering voters and getting-out-the-vote drives—tasks that take on added importance since more often than not they are efforts targeted at actual and potential party-specific supporters.

Given our analysis regarding the 1992, 1994, and 1996 state legislative elections, we can conjecture on some of the consequences of election-year events on the future of the party’s role in local elections. Certainly, both local parties and candidates are likely to be more cognizant of the impact of national election trends on local election outcomes. In 1994, and again in 1996, more than at any other time in recent history, congressional candidates focused not just on “home-style” issues and problems but also on national issues and trends. The spill-off effect from these congressional campaigns on local state legislative campaigns is likely to be measurable in future elections given the apparent “nationalization” of local elections.

Whatever the long-term impacts of the 1992, 1994, and 1996 elections on state legislative campaigns, it is clear that party organizations will not disappear from the U.S. electoral scene. Indeed, the old dictum that democracy is “unthinkable” without parties still stands—particularly at the local
level. If parties are no longer the only players, they remain significant actors in the electoral drama.

What do the trends we have discussed portend for the new century? The general view of many recent studies is that party organizational behavior conforms to what we have termed an adaptive brokerage model (Frendreis and Gitelson 1993b). In this view, party organizations respond to changes in their environment—legal, technological, and organizational—by developing new capacities and altering the electoral roles they perform. Whereas general party organizations once were the main campaign organizations for many candidates, these organizations now serve as one of a growing number of organizations in local campaigns, a pattern that will likely continue to do so well into the next century. Within this changed electoral environment, party organizations often serve as brokers, facilitating the connection between candidate organizations and pools of necessary resources, such as money, expertise, and volunteers.

This description of parties as adaptive organizations provides us with a powerful image, one that will be subjected to extensive empirical examination. It is clear that the next phase of research must extend our empirical understanding beyond this static portrait into the dynamic realm. The adaptive brokerage model of parties takes as its starting point the idea that the contemporary electoral world includes a number of distinct actors, including candidates (and their organizations), general party organizations (i.e., geographically defined organizations that perform multiple activities), other party organizations (principally, finance committees), campaign consultants, PACs, and voters. Ultimately, electoral outcomes are a function of the attributes and activities of all of these actors. To some extent, all of these actors are interconnected, but some linkages are more direct than others.

In terms of this formulation, three fundamental changes have occurred in American electoral politics in the postwar period: (1) the most direct connection with voters has shifted from a general party organization-voter linkage to a candidate-voter linkage; (2) the connection between the parties and electoral outcomes (the decisions of the voter) has become more indirect, with party efforts directed more toward candidates than the voters (although direct party voter contact has far from disappeared); and (3) additional actors have developed that are potential and real competitors to general party organizations.

A number of research questions emanate from this view of parties and electoral politics. In what way are the activities of local party organizations affected by other electoral actors, such as consultants and other party organizations? How are candidates and parties affected by contextual factors such as the overall degree of party competition or changes in electoral fortunes? To what extent are mass electoral outcomes a function of party activity, can-
didate attributes, and changes in the broader electorate? In this chapter, we have begun to answer some of these questions.

Notes

The authors would like to thank Shannon Jenkins and Jason Scott for their important contributions to this research project, including data collection and analysis.

1. Chairs and candidates from Ohio were only included in the 1994 and 1996 surveys.

2. The nine states included in the survey were selected so that at least two states fall into each of four categories of relative state and local party strength based on each state's Democratic and Republican Party organizational strength (Cotter et al. 1984: chapter 3). The states are also representative in terms of recent measures of state legislative competition. At least one state falls into each quintile of competitiveness, as measured by Aistrup (1993), and at least one state falls into each quartile of competitiveness, as measured by Holbrook and Van Dunk (1993).

3. We are employing the earlier PTS data as a baseline because both the PTS and 1992/1994/1996 data sets are based on surveys of all types of county organizations, whereas the 1984 survey of county organizations by Gibson et al. (1989) oversampled major party organizations. Comparisons over time based on Table 9.1 must be tentative, since they are between the eight states surveyed in 1992 and the nine states surveyed in 1994/1996 versus all fifty states surveyed by the PTS researchers. As we note in note 1, however, the 1992/1994/1996 sample of states is representative with respect to both party organizational strength and inter-party competition.

4. In 1994, for example, the Republican organizations report levels for seven of the eight structural attributes (all except the operation of a headquarters during the campaign season) that are higher than for the Democratic organizations. In 1996, the Republican organizations report levels for six of the eight structural attributes (all except for having some full-time paid staff and the operation of a headquarters during the campaign season) that are higher than for the Democratic organizations.

5. Our 1994 survey expanded on both our own 1992 survey and the Kazee and Thornberry survey by including "Other Office Holders" and "Your Party's State Legislative Campaign Committee" as possible influences on the decision to run for office. The 1996 survey replicated the 1994 survey.

6. The results were the same—the mean rating rarely exceeded 3.0 for any type of organization or any type of activity—when scores were computed separately for only those candidates who reported their races were "moderately" or "very" competitive.

7. For example, a relationship between electoral setbacks and party innovation has been proposed and partially tested for state party organizations in two states by Appleton and Ward (1994).
The Center for Public Integrity (CPI), a government watchdog group, was quick to attack pork barrel politics during the 1996 campaign. Of special note was a visit by Secretary of Transportation Federico Pena to Youngstown, Ohio, less than a month before election day, where he announced an $11.5 million Federal Aviation Administration grant to expand the Youngstown-Warren Regional Airport. The delivery of this rich patronage plum was long in the making. CPI obtained a letter from Dale Butland, an aide to Ohio Democratic Senator John Glenn, to Don Fowler, chair of the Democratic National Committee, that stated, "The President’s reelection—or at least his carrying of Ohio—is seriously jeopardized by the situation in the Youngstown area" (Galvin 1997). Glenn lobbied the White House, and Fowler wrote administration officials urging them to "address the major problem" in Youngstown (Galvin 1997). In his letter to Fowler, Butland suggested that an appropriate response was "best determined in consultation with Mahoning County Democratic Chair, Mike Morley" (Galvin 1997). Ironically, Morley was both a source of and a solution to the President’s “problem” in Youngstown.

Soon after his stunning overthrow of Ohio’s last party “boss” in May 1994 (Binning, Blumberg, and Green 1995, 1996), Michael Morley warned President Clinton that the administration must “deliver federal jobs or grants to the region” (Niquette 1994: A1), or, as Morley stated bluntly, he could not ensure local support for Clinton’s reelection bid in 1996. Morley and other local Democrats steadfastly refused to make a commitment to the Clinton campaign until the president made a tangible response to the area (Niquette 1995). And, when the Clinton administration delivered the airport funds, Morley and the local party delivered too: Armed with presidential patronage, the local party helped turn out the vote. Mahoning County gave
Clinton almost a 62 percent majority, fifteen points higher than his statewide margin and more than a ten-point increase from 1992 (Niquette 1996b).

This story illustrates the influence local political parties can wield in the 1990s, influence commonly believed to be a thing of the past. Because the president needed a high turnout in Mahoning County, the "mother lode" of Democratic votes in the crucial state of Ohio, the local party chair was able to pressure the Clinton administration to make a financial commitment to the region. But, in the 1990s, the power of the grassroots operates through a highly sophisticated party effort, in this case, the Democratic Coordinated Campaign. Indeed, the Mahoning County Democratic Party and other vital local parties were critical to Clinton's successful reelection campaign.

This chapter describes the 1996 Ohio Democratic Coordinated Campaign from the perspective of the Mahoning County operation. The case allows us to address the following questions: How did the Coordinated Campaign function? Did the Coordinated Campaign integrate national, state, and local party organizations? Did the Coordinated Campaign strengthen the local parties? The answers are relevant to a final and overarching question, that is, Do grassroots politics matter?

Understanding the Coordinated Campaign

The Coordinated Campaign is "an infrastructure designed to mobilize the vote" (Corrado 1996: 69), and it developed as part of the Democratic National Committee's (DNC) modernizing efforts in the 1980s (Heldman 1996; Herrnson 1990). Former DNC Chair Ron Brown is credited with instituting the Coordinated Campaign, building on programs initiated by his predecessors, which, in turn, his successors have expanded (Margolis and Green 1993: 52–54). Its original objectives were to strengthen the national party and create a dynamic campaign organization, establish stronger links between the national committee and the fifty state parties, and focus intently on winning elections (Corrado 1996: 67). The idea was to complement individual campaigns by providing in-kind services too costly or labor-intensive for candidates to do on their own (Bibby 1990). Given its origins with the DNC, the Coordinated Campaign had a special focus on presidential elections because Democrats were having trouble winning the White House, while doing quite well in congressional, state, and local contests. The Coordinated Campaign has since been advanced as an effort beneficial to all levels and elements of the party (Margolis and Green 1993: 52–54).

Central to the Coordinated Campaign was the provision of services by DNC to state and local party organizations, especially in support of traditional local party activities such as voter registration drives, telephone banking, and get-out-the-vote (GOTV) efforts. But it also involved pooling the
resources of candidate organizations, from the “courthouse to the White
House,” to produce a unified party campaign (Corrado 1996; Sorauf 1992).
The Coordinated Campaign developed in tandem with the introduction of
“soft money,” funds raised by parties under state law and otherwise illegal
under federal law (Bibby 1990). By 1996, aggressive soft money fund-raising
by the DNC allowed for an elaborate and sophisticated campaign effort.
Thus, the Coordinated Campaign sought to integrate party and allied organi-
zations at all levels to maximize the chance of victory at the polls. In return
for the pooling of resources, local party organizations and their candidates
and constituencies benefit as well. In many respects, the Coordinated Cam-
paign involved old-fashioned grassroots politics, but now it was stimulated
from the “top down” rather than the “bottom up.”

It is unclear, however, that the Coordinated Campaign has lived up to
these expectations. For example, Heldman argues in her case study of the
1992 New Jersey Democratic Coordinated Campaign that the attempt at
party integration has been a dismal failure:

[The] reform efforts of the Democratic Party have engendered power struggles
between state and national organizations, caused disjunction in communication
and coordination between state and local party organizations, and caused grass-
roots disaffection among party activists. (1996: 1)

Heldman argues that the local party faithful remain unconvinced that the
DNC is capable of providing meaningful services to local office seekers be-
cause GOTV plans include only those precincts with a Democratic Perform-
ance Index (DPI) of 65 percent or greater. State and local officials indicated
that a significant amount of the funding the local party organizations re-
ceived from the DNC “comes with the explicit proviso that it be spent on
party-building activities to benefit a specific candidate or candidates, as
identified by the national party organization” (Heldman 1996: 14–15). Added
to this, modern media-driven campaigns tend to place a low priority
on volunteer mobilization, the traditional strength of local parties.

The implication is that Coordinated Campaigns are less “coordinated”
than “directed” from the top, reducing the autonomy for state and local
party organizations (Bibby 1990; Epstein 1986; Trish 1994). This loss of
autonomy robs state and local parties and their candidates of incentives to
cooperate with the national effort. The danger is that state and local parties
will receive few tangible, long-term gains in return for the pooling of re-
sources in the Coordinated Campaign. After the election, local organizations
may not be any stronger, local candidates may not occupy more offices, and
local constituents may not receive any more attention from national office-
holders than in the past.

In her study of party integration in Indiana and Ohio during the 1988
and 1992 presidential campaigns, Trish (1994) describes the circumstances under which Coordinated Campaigns are likely to overcome these problems and live up to expectations. A necessary condition is a “vital party apparatus” at the state and especially the local level. Vital parties can be full partners and stakeholders in an integrated campaign, providing invaluable expertise and organizational infrastructure to the national effort in return for services, finances, and, presumably, attention from successful officeholders. Put another way, vital local party organizations are capable of using national resources effectively for a variety of national and local purposes. And, such vital organizations may be best able to secure tangible benefits from participating in the Coordinated Campaign. Ironically, vital local organizations may be the least in need of strengthening from the broader perspective of party building. Trish (1994: 236) identifies Mahoning County, where Youngstown is located, as one of the places in Ohio where a vital party apparatus exists at the local level. It is just such a place where the Coordinated Campaign could reach its full potential, especially in a close, hard-fought campaign as in 1996.

The Ohio Democratic Coordinated Campaign in 1996

Broad generalizations about the Coordinated Campaign are difficult to make because the relationship of the DNC to individual state parties varies, as do the relationships between state and county parties even within the same state. According to David Leland, chair of the Ohio Democratic Party (ODP), some state organizations and, in turn, some county parties were given more autonomy than others. The degree of independence appears to be linked to how higher-level officials viewed their lower-level counterparts’ ability to run efficient and effective operations. The DNC, according to Leland, allowed the ODP a high degree of autonomy; in turn, he granted approximately 70 percent of the county parties considerable leeway.

Organization

The Ohio Coordinated Campaign headquarters was staffed with twenty-one individuals, only four of whom were sent to Ohio to work on the campaign (the campaign director, the women’s vote director, the deputy press secretary, and a communications/opposition specialist). Heldman (1996) assumes that Coordinated Campaigns assign outsiders to maintain national control over state campaign operations, but this pattern did not occur in Ohio in 1996, where nearly 81 percent of the staffers were state residents. As shall be explained, the national and state campaigns did exercise a high degree of
control in Ohio, but as Trish (1994) argues, vital local parties were critical players in the process.

The state was divided into eight regions, each with a field office staffed by three full-time workers paid with Coordinated Campaign funds, and there were five additional offices concentrated in the Cleveland area. The field office staff were mostly selected on the basis of recommendations made by county chairs and local political activists. ODP Chair Leland described the selection process as an “integrated team effort.” In Mahoning County, two staff members were selected by the county chair and approved by the state party, and one staff member was selected by the Youngstown chapter of the Ohio Legislative Black Caucus (OLBC) and approved in consultation with the ODP Coordinated Campaign Minority Constituency director. This process dissipated potential tensions between the national campaign and local party officials, tensions that have plagued the Coordinated Campaign elsewhere in the past.

Some field offices were operated from rented offices, and others were housed in county party headquarters. Those operations that were run from party offices, such as the one in Mahoning County, enjoyed a staffing advantage. The Mahoning County Democratic Party, for example, had a full-time director of operations, a field coordinator, a general office person, and a college intern, all of whom dovetailed their efforts with those of the Coordinated Campaign field staffers.

Because field offices were charged with overseeing the operations in multiple counties, it was extremely difficult to coordinate campaign activities such as telephone banking and literature drops. The problem appeared to be threefold: First, most small county party chairs were part time and, by necessity, had to place other obligations ahead of party business. Second, the lack of an official party headquarters and at least one full-time office worker made communication difficult at best. Finally, many of the smaller county chairs often felt distanced from the Coordinated Campaign and routinely complained that the larger county parties received a disproportionate amount of the state headquarters’ attention.

In an effort to integrate the smaller counties into the campaign, as well as to provide assistance to the field offices, the Coordinated Campaign sent “auxiliary staff” to help in the local trenches. These workers included some paid operatives as well as Clinton administration “volunteers”—that is, political appointees who took vacation time to work on the campaign and administration interns. The northeastern Ohio region was given one paid staff person with extensive campaign experience plus four full-time “volunteers” (three Clinton administration appointees and a White House intern). This assistance proved invaluable because the auxiliary staff provided the necessary link between both the smaller county parties and the field office, and the smaller county parties and the state headquarters.
Approximately two hundred local volunteers and slightly more than two hundred election-day workers paid by the OLBC rounded out the campaign personnel in Mahoning County. Although the size of the volunteer corps was impressive, it was small by historical standards and extremely difficult to mobilize. All unions, most Democratic women's groups, various community organizations, every area high school, and all local Democratic candidates were asked to provide volunteers. Chair Morley urged local precinct committee people to work on the campaign, and he also asked the party's district leaders to be responsible for filling the telephone bank for one evening. The majority of these individuals failed to respond.

**Grassroots Activities**

Three principal elements comprised the Democratic effort in 1996: ongoing activities, outreach programs, and GOTV.

**Ongoing Activities**

In addition to routine administrative duties, the Coordinated Campaign engaged in a number of ongoing campaign activities including, among others, telephone banking, voter registration, literature drops and mailings, news monitoring, surrogate speakers, debate parties, and letter-writing programs.

The primary purpose of early telephone banking was twofold: Undecided voters first had to be identified and then convinced to vote for the Democratic ticket, and enthusiastic supporters had to be kept excited about the election. The state party identified 2.3 million voters, or 1.5 million households, that could make a difference in the election. Precincts with a DPI of 65 percent were especially targeted. A telephone match yielded 900,000 numbers, and volunteers were expected to make 150,000 calls, with a vendor completing the balance. Mahoning County was responsible for making 22,252 calls prior to the final four days of the campaign. Respondents who were considered "persuadable"—undecided voters—received three separate mailings before the election, including both issue-based and multicandidate information. Such lists were bar coded to facilitate the data processing and shorten the turnaround time.

The specific candidates mentioned on the telephone scripts were chosen by the state headquarters and the state legislative party caucuses. The field offices were then given a choice of which countywide offices to include on the "questionnaire," with technically "nonpartisan" judicial races excluded until later in the campaign. Prior to inserting a particular local candidate's name in the script, the field staff consulted the county party chair. Particularly hotly contested countywide races generally were kept on the script with other names rotated. Because of the difficulty in getting volunteers to work the telephones, candidates who supplied volunteers were allowed to have
their names read by their supporters. Clinton accomplishments were added to the telephone scripts nearer to the election, but many had to be replaced on the Mahoning County version because of local sensitivities. All changes, however, had to be approved by state headquarters.

Voter registration drives were one of the most important grassroots activities because of the potential to create a net increase in turnout. Three drives were specified by the state headquarters, but the OLBC held events every weekend until the registration deadline. The first Coordinated Campaign drive occurred in a predominately white city ward and was not very successful. It was extremely difficult to get volunteers to canvass neighborhoods and much easier to go to places where large numbers of people were found. The OLBC recognized this fact and, on weekends, would set up tables at community events. The local Coordinated Campaign and OLBC combined efforts to register approximately five thousand voters. New registrants were sent local party literature and assisted with an absentee ballot, if they wanted one. Local district leaders were instructed to call all new registrants and welcome them to the party.

Literature drops and mailings also were important. Literature drops were scheduled for three separate weekends, but the local party decided to cover all precincts at once, a move not opposed by the state headquarters. The Mahoning County Democratic director of operations oversaw the activity, making district leaders responsible for their own precinct committee people. And, the OLBC coordinated its part of the literature drop, paying forty youngsters to work the predominately African-American precincts. Coordinated Campaign, local party, and candidates’ literature were included in the packets delivered to all residential addresses. The local party initially ordered ninety thousand sample ballots and had another hundred thousand pieces printed for use through election day. All party candidates, in both contested and uncontested races, appeared on the campaign literature.

In addition to the sample ballot paid for by the Coordinated Campaign and the local party, a direct mail piece also was sent to every voter sixty-two years of age or older with a request for an absentee ballot. All individuals who had requested an absentee ballot received a party mailing, the sample ballot with pictures of the entire Democratic slate, including the technically “nonpartisan” judicial candidates. The county party also had active seniors visit nursing homes and ask residents whether they wished to vote absentee. Immediately prior to the election, the local party sent at its own expense another direct mail piece, this time to 35,297 “hard-core” Democratic households that had voted in both the 1992 and 1994 elections. The local party also ran a full-page, color ad in the local newspaper the Sunday before the election, the cost of which was charged to the local candidates.

News monitoring involved reading local newspaper articles, watching the three local network affiliates’ news broadcasts, and listening to two popular radio talk shows. Volunteers watched the local noon and evening news
and were asked to report to a local project coordinator if anything requiring immediate attention arose. The volunteers were required to keep detailed records of the political stories: city, date, channel, time, story subject, story length, story focus, and reporting bias. These summaries were faxed daily to state headquarters. Radio monitoring was much the same. There are two extremely popular radio talk shows in the Mahoning Valley, and they often become forums for political debate. Chair Morley employed the "rapid response" method by supplying cell phones to party activists who regularly listen to the programs so they could rebut critics without lengthy delays.

A network of approximately twenty local surrogate speakers was created to fulfill requests for speakers at group meetings, retirement communities, and high schools. Much of the work, in reality, fell on two individuals who were effective and informed party activists, a union lobbyist and a retired teacher. The surrogates were asked to focus on national campaign themes—community, opportunity, and responsibility—rather than become embroiled in "unwinnable" local disputes. The state headquarters, if requested, provided fact sheets and informational packets tailored to particular audiences.

All field offices were required by the national campaign headquarters to host three parties associated with the presidential debates, events designed to rally local supporters and attract local media attention. Prior to the presidential and vice presidential debates, "prebuttals" were faxed to the local offices with information that could be used to answer questions posed by the local media. Close to the end of each debate, "rebuttals" were faxed with information to counter Republican charges, so all spokespersons would base their remarks on the same information. Field staff were prohibited from speaking with the press unless cleared by the state headquarters, so that the Coordinated Campaign could speak with one voice and stay on message. State headquarters staff designated Mahoning County Commissioner David Engler as the primary local spokesperson.

Letter writing was another program. The state headquarters staff responsible for media-related activities sent packets of "Letters to the Editor" to the field offices that, in turn, were distributed to volunteers who "wrote" them to their local newspapers. This tactic was deemed more efficient than individualized letters. Only a small number were printed in the local paper, perhaps because local newspaper editors spotted these thinly veiled attempts at propagandizing.

**Outreach Programs**

Outreach programs included efforts to build support among African Americans, union members, women, and the gay community. The OLBC handled outreach to the African-American community, and much of its work was independent of the local Coordinated Campaign. The OLBC had a sepa-
rate GOTV budget, office space, and workers (five in all), paid with Coordinated Campaign funds and money earmarked for minority GOTV. However, there were times that these parallel organizations operated in tandem: some voter registration drives, literature drops, and poll worker placement. The OLBC also assumed responsibility for providing rides to the polls for nearly all city residents.

Unions are strong in Mahoning County, but attempts to tap their resources were mostly unsuccessful. There was a general lack of enthusiasm for the national ticket by labor, attributed in part to local hostility toward the North American Free Trade Agreement. Rather than focusing on the presidential contest, most local union efforts were centered on congressional and state legislative contests. The local field staff called all unions to request volunteers to work the telephone with very little success. The unions requested material for mailings and literature drops, but refused to use cards printed by the Coordinated Campaign because labor supported only one of two Ohio State Supreme Court endorsed Democratic candidates pictured on the literature. The local campaign staff volunteered to remove the objectionable name, but the unions declined the offer.

Other outreach efforts were not as elaborate. The Women’s Vote Director, who worked on the Women’s Outreach Program at the DNC, was headquartered in Columbus. She developed voter contact literature to target over two hundred thousand non-college-educated women in Ohio, part of the 2.3 million Ohio women who did not vote in the 1994 election. The local party may have done almost as much as the state campaign to mobilize women. For example, Chair Morley hosted an event for all area Democratic women’s clubs to thank them for the work they had done throughout the year. He also made sure that candidates received regular updates on community events, including those of various women’s organizations, and Democratic women’s clubs were encouraged to hold meetings at party headquarters.

In mid-October, the Coordinated Campaign launched an outreach program for gays and lesbians. Two local party activists—a party officer and a district leader—headed the area effort and took directions from a coordinator in Columbus. Overall, the effort was sporadic.

**GOTV**

The Mahoning County Democratic Party doubled the Coordinated Campaign’s 1992 GOTV effort. This gain resulted in part from Chair Morley’s decision to broaden the campaign to include all precincts, not just the targeted ones with a DPI of 65 percent or better. Two field staffers and the local party’s director of operations shared the responsibilities for implementing GOTV strategies designed by the national and state party headquarters. There were six additional coordinators who supervised telephone canvass-
In preparation for the last four days of the campaign, arrangements had to be made to rent telephones for the final canvassing. This meant that the local party had to find 101 telephones in addition to the 15 at campaign headquarters. A telephone bank coordinator was named, and she arranged for fourteen supervisors to staff the sites, which included six law firms, two travel agencies, two physicians’ offices, a florist shop, a candidate’s headquarters, a women’s center, and a union hall. Calling began in high-priority precincts the Saturday morning preceding the election and continued until the polls closed, with some lists being called up to four times.

The field office was prepared to send volunteers door-to-door on foot—“foot pulls”—if bellwether precincts indicated a low voter turnout. Volunteers were positioned in the bellwether precincts to check the 11:00 A.M. and 4:00 P.M. postings and report the information to the field staff, and floaters checked the polls periodically, monitoring poll workers and canvassers as well as turnout at bellwether polling places. Because of a high turnout, the foot pulls were not used.

The OLBC had six vans that provided rides to city polling places, and the field staff arranged for another six volunteers to cover the suburban ones. All calls for rides went through campaign headquarters, and one person wrote separate orders for each request, including the person’s name, address, telephone number, and polling place. Telephone bankers were instructed to ask voters whether they needed rides as well, and the information was then relayed to the field office.

Every polling place was covered with a combination of precinct committee people and candidates’ supporters, and, in some instances, OLBC paid workers. Precinct committee people received challenge slips in case they expected vote fraud, and an election day attorney was on call in the event any problems arose. The Mahoning County director of disaster services and emergency management took vacation time to coordinate the election day setup to feed poll workers. There were seven food pickup sites, and candidates’ campaign committees were responsible for delivering the provisions to specific polling places to avoid any overlap.

Finances

Coordinated Campaigns require substantial funding, particularly in battleground states. While the total cost of the Ohio effort is unknown, the lion’s share, some $5.5 million, came from DNC transfers. The funds sent to Ohio accounted for 7.4 percent of all DNC transfers, with only California, Pennsylvania, and Florida receiving more (Federal Election Commission Data Disclosure Base 1995–1996). Nearly 73 percent of the funds trans-
ferred into Ohio, or some $3.4 million, was soft money. According to reports filed by the Democratic National Committee (Unincorporated Association) with the Ohio Secretary of State, the vast majority of this money was from out-of-state donors. This suggests that the DNC centralized control over much of the nonfederal funds because it passed through the national party before it reached the state parties rather than the past practice in which contributors were asked to give money directly to the state party organizations. Such financial arrangements gave the DNC a great deal of influence over the state and local operations. Overall, these funds represented a $3.5 million increase in Ohio’s Coordinated Campaign budget between 1992 and 1996 and a 135 percent increase in soft money.

According to ODP Chair Leland, states were allocated money on a priority basis, and within Ohio, counties were given money based on factors such as the need for sample ballots and free-standing headquarters. The Coordinated Campaign, for example, provided Mahoning County with the following services:

1. Absentee ballots and Democratic Party slate cards were mailed to everyone 62 years of age or older.
2. Sample ballots were mailed to 71,768 households in the county.
3. Telephone bank equipment was provided for local volunteers to make 22,252 calls to persuadable voters.
4. All undecided voters then mailed three separate pieces of campaign literature.

In total, the Coordinated Campaign spent $71,867 in Mahoning County, with $49,843 coming from the state and national levels (69 percent) and the Mahoning Country Democratic Party paying $21,924.31 (31 percent). The Coordinated Campaign also assumed the payroll costs of the three field staffers, approximately $12,000. In addition, the OLBC’s local budget was $16,746, with the majority of it given to individuals who worked election day, a small number of whom were local precinct committee people. Chair Morley divided Mahoning County’s share of the costs of the Coordinated Campaign among the nineteen local candidates, asking them each to write a check to the local party. Added to the Coordinated Campaign cost for the candidates were local party activities (i.e., sample ballot printing, election day setup, and four campaign events), which added another $813 to their total assessment.

The Coordinated Campaign spent less than 1 percent of its budget on Mahoning County, a critical Democratic county. And this experience certainly was not unique: the funds spent by local parties made up a very small part of the total Coordinated Campaign Ohio budget. For example, only 5.8 percent of the “Administrative/Generic Account” (the soft money that could
not be spent directly on behalf of candidates) was spent on GOTV and related activities, and another 24.8 percent was spent on staff and overhead, some of which supported the local effort. The remaining 69.4 percent was spent on media and media-related expenditures, the bulk of which was issue advocacy television ads indirectly supporting the reelection of President Clinton. Even the “Exempt Account,” which contained the hard money that could be used to support individual candidates, contributed heavily to the media effort (43 percent of the funds were spent on media consultants).

The vast majority of the massive funds for the Coordinated Campaign went for a “treetop” media campaign rather than a “grassroots” GOTV campaign. Postelection analyses suggest that Ohio was typical in this regard (Abramson and Wayne 1997). In the five states with the most DNC transfers, the bulk of the funds was spent on media advertising. Although news reports maintain that such contributions “came with specific instructions on how to spend it” and that the issue ads “were scripted, directed and produced” (Abramson and Wayne 1997: A1, A8) at the national level, Ohio state and local officials claim they were closely consulted about this activity.

These financing patterns support Heldman’s (1996) contention about the national direction of the Coordinated Campaign. Such spending certainly contradicts traditional notions of party building. However, these patterns also support Trish’s (1994) point about the value of vital local parties, which can do much work with modest funds. In addition, this media-oriented campaign is a good example of the kind of “services” parties can provide in a candidate-centered politics.

Conclusion

In 1996, President Clinton carried Mahoning County with 62 percent of the vote, his largest margin among all Ohio counties. In itself, this result is not very impressive because Democrats have almost a 5 to 1 registration edge locally. In addition, the federal grant airport grant, the issue advocacy campaign, and more traditional campaigning, such as Vice President Gore’s late-October visit to Youngstown no doubt yielded positive results, perhaps convincing many voters not to stay home on election day. However, the county provided the national ticket with its third highest plurality in the state, only bested by Cuyahoga and Lucas counties, despite its ranking tenth among Ohio counties in population and ninth with respect to the number of registered voters (Niquette 1996a).

A good indication of its success was almost across-the-board increases in both targeted and untargeted precincts as well as in all city wards. For example, there were increases in 76.7 percent of targeted precincts and 80.2 percent of untargeted ones between 1992 and 1996, a testament to the effec-
tiveness of the grassroots effort. More telling are the comparisons between the 1988 and 1996 elections: there were slight increases in 92.1 percent of the targeted precincts and 92.8 percent of the untargeted precincts, a difficult feat given that Mahoning County gave Michael Dukakis his fourth highest vote margin in the nation in 1988. In 1996, the combined OLBC and local party effort produced gains in all city wards, with the two predominately black wards posting increases of 5.3 percent and 3.7 percent, another accomplishment given that, in 1992, all First and Second Ward precincts gave Clinton between 80 and 96 percent of the vote. (All figures are based on the two-party vote.) Election results were sweetened with Democratic wins in all countywide contested races.

The Coordinate Campaign was quite effective in Mahoning County, and the local party played a major role in its success. What about party integration? Integration of the Democratic national presidential campaign and Ohio state and local parties was extremely high in 1996. It resulted in part from the substantial autonomy given to state and local officials. For example, the Mahoning Country chair became a stakeholder in the Coordinated Campaign. He was empowered to select paid staff in his region, and the staffers, in turn, had to report their activities both to the state headquarters and to him. Chair Morley integrated local candidates into the campaign and also instituted a number of local innovations that proved fruitful.

This pattern represents a dramatic departure from John Fenton's classic description of Ohio politics: "There was, in fact, no statewide Democratic Party in Ohio. The state's Democratic Party was an aggregation of city machines" (1966: 38). Nearly three decades later, there was a statewide Democratic Party, and, more than that, the ODP and its vital local organizations were willing agents of the DNC and the presidential campaign. The national and state headquarters centralized decision making in many ways, setting specific limits on local activities and closely supervising the local field workers. Most important, the DNC provided the majority of funds for the Coordinated Campaign and, in the process, centralized control of the finances. These facts suggest that the national campaign made key decisions and maintained tight control over the implementation of the campaign at both the state and local levels. Clearly, the national and state party leaders focused most of their resources on a television campaign, perhaps to the detriment of effective grassroots politics. There were also some limits to integration: The separate field offices and OLBC organizations and the difficulties with labor unions and local party officials were all problematic. These problems aside, the Coordinated Campaign achieved a rare degree of integration in Ohio in 1996.

But did the Coordinated Campaign strengthen local parties? The answer is mixed. It is doubtful if the weak local organizations gained anything from the Coordinated Campaign, mostly because they were not in a position to be
full participants. Here is where just a fraction of the issue advocacy spending could have made a long-term difference, by providing weak local parties with equipment and training they simply cannot afford on their own. Local Democratic candidates did not fare especially well in these areas, and local constituencies apparently felt isolated from the rest of the party. Vital local parties, as in Mahoning County, did not receive much in the way of long-term, tangible resources either, since the bulk of the funds were spent on the election itself and the Coordinated Campaign organization was dismantled immediately after the election. But, no doubt, there was some organizational residue, if only in the form of new and newly experienced activists. There were also electoral gains: local candidates won and won big. Moreover, the local party leadership cemented its ties to the state and national parties and officeholders. As the CPI expose on the airport grant suggests, such ties are not inconsequential in contemporary politics, and a local party chair can be enormously influential. Apparently, grassroots politics still matter in an age of big money and big media.

Notes

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1. Local polling data strongly suggest that the airport grant improved Clinton's ratings in the Youngstown area. The local Democrats were, of course, instrumental in arranging for the federal funds.
Toward a Responsible Three-Party System: Plan or Obituary?

Theodore J. Lowi

One of the best kept secrets in American politics is that the two-party system has long been brain-dead—kept alive by support systems such as state electoral laws that protect the established parties from rivals and by public subsidies and so-called campaign reform. The two-party system would collapse in an instant if the tubes were pulled and the IV were cut. The current parties will not, and cannot, reform a system that drastically needs overhauling. The extraordinary rise of Ross Perot in the 1992 election and the remarkable outburst of enthusiasm for his ill-defined alternative to the established parties, coupled with his actual formation of the Reform Party in 1996, should have removed all doubt about the viability of a broad-based third party in the United States. Although the Perot vote dropped off between 1992 and 1996, he left quite an organization base for 2000 and beyond in a number of states, and there is a stronger inclination than ever to test in court some of the most anti-third-party state laws. Other third-party efforts from left and right are beginning to show signs of expressing themselves.

At the same time, any suggestion of the possibility of a genuine third party receives the cold shoulder from the press and bored ridicule from academics. This reaction should surprise no one. Like the established parties themselves, social scientists are rarely given to innovation; they are almost always on the side of conventional wisdom, proven methodology, and the prevailing canon of their disciplines. Political scientists may call two-party doctrine a paradigm rather than canon, but they are no less loyal to it. With almost religious zeal, the high priests of the two-party system have preached the established faith, and their students who became leading journalists have perpetuated the two-party dogma. Thus, impetus for reform is about as unlikely to come from professors as from precinct captains.

To be sure, a great deal of scholarly analysis has been advanced to explain why third parties quickly disappear and why the two-party system is both natural and virtuous. Political scientists who believe this hold that the
traditional Anglo-Saxon electoral system—based on first-past-the-post, single-member districts—produces the two-party system by routinely discouraging new parties. They reason that since there can be only one victor in each district, even voters who strongly favor the candidate of a third or fourth party will ultimately vote for one of the two major candidates to avoid wasting their vote and also to avoid contributing to the victory of the least preferred of the major candidates. (This idea has been elevated to the status of a physical law, called Duverger’s law after its most prominent purveyor.) A two-party system is the best of all possible worlds, they hold, because it produces automatic majorities, enabling the victorious party to govern effectively for its full term of office.

Interestingly enough, although many scholars present the two-party system as being inevitable, it has never been left to accomplish its wonders alone. It has been supplemented by primary laws, nomination laws, campaign finance laws, and electoral rules that are heavily biased against the formation and maintenance of anything other than the two-party system. And even with all that nourishment, two-party systems have prevailed in only a minority of all electoral districts in the United States since 1896. Most of the districts, from those that elect members of state legislatures up to the state as a whole in presidential elections, have in fact been dominated by one-party systems. During the past century, most of our larger cities and many counties, especially those governed by political machines, were admired by social scientists for their ability to overcome governmental fragmentation and to integrate immigrants into electoral politics even as they preached the gospel of the two-party system. While crusading reformers attacked the machines, most political scientists continued to defend them, even while they criticized specific abuses. Although academics are often aware of the deficiencies and strengths of parties, their commitment to the present system prevents them from considering a new one.

It is now time for a frank, realistic discussion of alternatives. No amount of tinkering, adjustment, reorganization, or aggressive public relations campaigns can bring back to life a party system that on its own devices would surely have crumbled a long time ago and that remains vibrant only in the hearts of party practitioners and political scientists. It is becoming increasingly clear that the usual scapegoats—divided government, campaign practices, scandals—are not the problem. The problem is, and always was, to be found within the two-party system itself.

The Constituent Function of American Parties

Much of the reluctance on the part of scholars to jettison myths surrounding the two-party system stems from a fundamental misconception re-
Toward a Responsible Three-Party System

Regarding the true function of American parties. As I have argued elsewhere and at some length (Lowi 1975), parties perform a constituent or constitutional role in the American polity. Because this notion bears directly on my argument concerning the need for a responsible three-party system, a brief summary is in order.

By stating that parties perform constituent functions, I am not suggesting simply that they represent certain groups or individuals—all parties at least try to represent some segment of the public. Instead, I am using the term in a much broader sense, meaning “necessary in the formation of the whole; forming; composing; making as an essential part.” Constituent means that which constitutes. Constitution is the setting up of the way in which a political regime is organized and the laws that govern its organization. Parties have played a crucial role—intended or not—in “constituting” the American political regime by providing much of the organization and rules by which it is structured, staffed, and operated.

This view of party rests on the distinction between constituent processes on the one hand and policy processes on the other. Political parties may perform both constituent and policy functions; such parties have been labeled as “responsible.” American parties have almost never been responsible, policy-making parties, and most reform efforts to make them so have failed. On the other hand, political parties may perform only constituent functions; such parties have been variously called “pragmatic” or “rational-efficient.” American parties have nearly always been constituent based, and attempts to improve their organizational capacity in this regard have often succeeded. Indeed, the genius of the American party system, if genius is the right word, is that it has split the regime from policy, keeping the legitimacy of the government separate from the consequences of governing.

One important effect of constituent parties has been the lack of development of American political institutions, even as the society grew and modernized dramatically. A careful review of American history reveals several important regularities of the two-party system. First, the formation of new parties (or the dissolution or reorganization of existing ones) produces changes in the nature of the regime, while the functioning of established parties does not. In fact, the shift from new to established parties has been accompanied by a parallel shift in the effects of party, from liberal to conservative, from innovation to consolidation, or from change to resistance to change.

Second, new ideas and issues develop or redevelop parties, but parties, particularly established ones, rarely develop ideas or present new issues on their own. Party organizations are thus vehicles for changes in policy originating in other places, but they are not often incubators of policy alternatives. Once a system of parties is established, the range and scope of policy discussion is set, until and unless some disturbance arises from other quarters.
Third, the key feature of the functioning of constituent parties has been the existence of competition and not so much what the competition was about. The more dynamic and intense the level of competition, the more democratic parties become, often in spite of themselves. But the more regularized and diffuse the competition, the more conservative the parties become. The key to understanding the two-party system, and the current necessity of a genuine third party, lies in understanding these regularities.

During the first party period, roughly from 1789 to 1840, parties served a liberating, democratic role. To begin with, the new parties helped democratize the presidency. The first great organized effort to carry an opposition candidate, Thomas Jefferson, into office in the campaign of 1800 was a giant step toward the plebiscitary presidency—namely, the pledging of electors. By such means the election of the president was decentralized and popularized by the parties. The growth of parties directly checked or reversed tendencies toward a “fusion of powers” at the national level, mainly through the influence that the new parties exerted upon recruitment and succession of leaders.

The new parties also helped disperse national power by encouraging the formation of local organizations. The election of Andrew Jackson, the first rank “outsider,” and the nominating, organizing, and campaigning of professional politicians around Martin Van Buren increased participation in the regime. The existence of vibrant organizations dedicated to the pursuit of many offices provided the raw material for opposition and debate. Grand alliances of these organizations made it possible to coordinate the activities of officeholders in a fragmented governmental system.

Finally, the new parties helped democratize the electorate. This effect is easiest to document by the sheer expansion of political activity at local levels. As a result of the expansion of organized political activity, individual involvement also spread greatly, and mass participation in nominations and elections became highly visible at all levels of public office. The spread of political activity helped increase the size of the electorate and produced increasingly large turnouts. None of these consequences of the emerging parties were particularly policy oriented, of course, but the process of party development linked elites to masses around the key issues of the day.

By the 1840s, however, the national party system seemed to pause in its development. Parties would henceforth monopolize all important elections and party machinery would dominate, if not monopolize, all nominations. Parties would also monopolize the procedures and administration of Congress as well as virtually all of the state legislatures. The schemes of party organization and procedure were to remain about the same for decades to come. Parties no longer served a liberating or democratic role but rather a constricting, conservative one. With a few exceptions, the two-party system has functioned this way ever since.
The tendencies of established parties were as nearly opposite to those of new parties as is possible in a dynamic, modernizing society. For one thing, the established parties contributed to the status quo in government structure. For example, they helped maintain the centrality of federalism, even as the national government and the Constitution expanded to meet the problems of a nationally integrated country. Political leaders, including members of Congress, developed a fundamental stake in the integrity of the state boundary because it was the largest unit for electoral office. This force has had a powerful impact on the substance of much important national legislation throughout the last century, from social insurance to environmental protection. Parties have participated in a silent conspiracy to prevent policy innovations from departing too far from eighteenth-century constitutional structure.

The established parties also made elective offices less democratic by resisting leadership change and policy innovation. From the courthouse to the White House, the parties have not of their own accord brought new elites to the fore or offered powerful checks on existing elites. Neither do they regularly bring new issues to the fore. It has been rare for the two major parties to take opposite stands on new controversies; it is much more common for new cleavages to develop within the existing parties, providing incentives to avoid addressing these controversies.

Finally, little evidence suggests partisan competition has any real impact on electoral mobilization. In many instances closely balanced parties appear to have actively resisted further democratization of the electorate. Expanding the franchise to new voters and mobilizing existing ones often threatens existing party coalitions, and thus established parties have reasons to ignore or actively oppose such expansions. Along these lines, established parties have an investment in existing social cleavages and no real interest in building a consensus across the myriad of ethnic, religious, and regional groupings that characterize American society.

Of course, there have been a few important instances since the 1840s when the established parties have been programmatic and innovative. At such times—most clearly in 1856–1860, 1896–1900, 1912–1914, and 1933–1935—significant differences appeared between the parties, and they became innovative rather than conservative. Each period was ushered in by the “redevelopment” of one of the established parties after an earlier political disaster. Such reorganization made the party oligarchies more susceptible to direction from interest groups with strong policy commitments. Party leaders also became more susceptible to mass opinion, partly as the result of the mobilization of new social movements but also because of increased competition from rivals. And in these periods, the appearance of a third party was a powerful force in implementing these changes. Of course, these third parties eventually faded, once the major parties stole their message and followers, and reestablished a new, conservative equilibrium.
Back when the federal government was smaller and less important, the two-party system could carry out its constituent functions without much regard to ideology or policy. Its unresponsiveness produced major political blunders from time to time, but the system was able to right itself after a brief period of reorganization. But with the New Deal and the rise of the welfare state, the federal government became increasingly vulnerable to ideological battles over policy. Even then, such problems were not particularly noticeable while the government and the economy were expanding, but in the early 1970s class and ideological conflicts began to emerge more starkly, and the two-party system was increasingly unable to offer productive competition.

Thus were born the familiar “wedge” issues—crime, welfare, prayer, economic regulation, social regulation, taxes, deficits, and anticommunism. No matter what position party leaders took on such issues, they were bound to alienate a substantial segment of their constituency. While the Democrats were the first to feel the cut of wedge issues, particularly concerning race, Republicans are now having their own agonies over abortion, crime, foreign policy, and budget deficits. Wedge issues immobilize party leadership, and once parties are immobilized the government is itself immobilized.

Party leaders have responded to this gridlock not with renewed efforts to mobilize the electorate but with the strategy of scandal. An occasional exposure of genuine corruption is a healthy thing for a democracy, but when scandal becomes an alternative to issues, leaving the status quo basically unaltered, it is almost certain that all the lights at the intersection are stuck on red. In fact, the use of scandal as a political strategy has been so effective that politicians have undermined themselves by demonstrating to the American people that the system itself is corrupt.

The established parties have atrophied because both have been in power too long. In theory, a defeated party becomes vulnerable to new interests because it is weaker and therefore more willing to take risks. But for nearly forty years, both parties have in effect been majority parties. Since each party has controlled a branch of government for much of that time, neither is eager to settle major policy issues in the voting booth. Voters find it difficult to assess blame or praise, making accountability judgments and partisan affiliation difficult. A very important aspect of the corruption of leadership is the tacit contract between the two parties to avoid taking important issues to the voters and in general to avoid taking risks.

Even a brief look at the two established parties reveals the urgency of the need for fundamental reform, and any remaining doubt will be removed before the end of the Clinton administration. The established parties do not lack for leadership, and with briefing books a foot thick and plenty of econo-
mists for rent, they certainly do not lack for programs. Here Ross Perot cer­
tainly was right: Washington is full of plans—good plans—that the two par­
ties turn into useless parchment. The Republican and Democratic Parties are
immobilized by having to promise too many things to too many people.

Republicans say that they consider government to be the problem, not
the solution, particularly in economic matters. Yet, to attract enough voters
to win elections, they have also pushed measures designed to make moral
choices for all citizens; for example, restrictions on abortions are hardly the
mark of a party that distrusts government action.

The Democrats like government action: the commitment of government
to new programs with grandiose goals and generous budgets is, for them,
tantamount to solving problems. President Clinton, for example, took bold
stands on a multitude of issues during the campaign, but he conveyed no
sense of priority among them. Once in office, Clinton quickly conceded the
impossibility of the task he had defined. As the New York Times put it in a
headline on its front page, “Clinton, after raising hope, tries to lower expec­
tations.” And, with the exception of the vain health care effort of 1994,
which contributed to the return of Republicans to power in Congress, Clinton
remained on the low side of expectations, becoming a Republican in New
Democrat clothing.

As in the past, the present two-party system functions to keep leadership,
succession, and governmental structure separate from the actual settlement
of issues. The tendencies of the established parties to preserve institutional
structure, avoid issues, and stifle competition are too far advanced for easy
reversal. It is time for a new party organization, championing new ideas, to
make the party system more competitive, as the original American parties
did. A genuine third party would shatter this conservative alliance, jump­
start the development process, and once again make parties agents of libera­
tion, democracy, and innovation.

The Impact of a Genuine Third Party

Predictably, defenders of the two-party system have devoted consider­
able energy to shooting down any suggestion that the status quo can be im­
proved upon.¹ They have produced all sorts of scenarios about how a third
party could throw presidential elections into the Congress, with the House
of Representatives choosing the president and the Senate choosing the vice
president. Worse yet, if it survived to future elections, a third party would
hold the balance of power and, as a result, wield an influence far out of pro­
portion to its electoral size. It might, by its example, produce a fourth or a
fifth party. And if it elected members to Congress, it might even inconve­
nience congressional leaders in their allocation of committee assignments.
There is a great deal of truth in these scenarios: a genuine third party might well cause such things and as a consequence help reconstitute the American regime.

With three parties, no party needs to seek a majority or pretend that it is a majority. What a liberating effect this would have on party leaders and candidates, to go after constituencies composed of 34 percent rather than 51 percent of the voters. When 51 percent is needed, a party or candidate has to be all things to all people—going after about 80 percent of the voters to get the required 51 percent. A three-party system would be driven more by issues, precisely because parties fighting for pluralities can be clearer in their positions. Third parties have often presented constructive and imaginative programs, which have then been ridiculed by leaders of the two major parties, who point out that third-party candidates can afford to be intelligent and bold since they cannot possibly win. But that is the point. In a three-party system, even the two major parties would have stronger incentives to be more clearly programmatic, since their goal would be more realistic and their constituency base would be simpler. Thus, each party could be a responsible party.

Two factors would help prevent the fragmentation that multiparty systems sometimes cause abroad, as in Israel. First, the American electoral system is not based on pure proportional representation. That system, allowing a party garnering a small number of votes to send at least one representative to the legislature, benefits the smallest of parties. Second, the fact that voters formally elect the chief executive provides incentives for splinter parties to coalesce behind one candidate. In a classic parliamentary system, even a party that has elected only a few representatives can exert a disproportionate influence on the selection of a premier.

Flowing directly from three-party competition, voting would increase, as would other forms of participation. Virtually our entire political experience tells us that more organized party competition produces more participation. And we already know that genuine three-party competition draws people into politics—not merely as voters but as petition gatherers, door knockers, envelope lickers, and $5 contributors—making the three-party system an antidote to the mass, “capital-intensive” politics that virtually everybody complains about nowadays.

Even defenders of the two-party system criticize the candidates’ reliance on television, computerized voter lists, mass mailings, and phone banks—which dehumanize politics, discourage participation, replace discourse with ten-second sound bites, and reduce substantive alternatives to subliminal imagery and pictorial allusion. And the inordinate expense of this mass politics has led to a reliance on corporate money, particularly through political action committees, destroying any hope of collective party responsibility.

These practices and their consequences cannot be eliminated by new
laws—even if the laws did not violate the First Amendment. A multiparty system would not immediately wipe out capital-intensive mass politics, but it would eliminate many of the pressures and incentives that produce its extremes because third parties tend to rely on labor-intensive politics. Third parties simply do not have access to the kind of financing that capital-intensive politics requires. But more than that, there is an enthusiasm about an emerging party that inspires people to come out from their private lives and to convert their civic activity to political activity.

Finally, the existence of a genuine third party would parliamentarize the presidency. As I noted earlier, once a third party proves that it has staying power, it would increase the probability of presidential elections being settled in the House of Representatives, immediately making Congress the primary constituency of the presidency. Congress would not suddenly "have power over" the presidency. It has such power already, in that the Constitution allows it complete discretion in choosing from among the top three presidential candidates, as well as the power to make the laws and the power to impeach the president. But if Congress were the constituency of the president, the president would have to engage Congress in constant discourse. The president might under those circumstances have even more power than now, but he would have far less incentive to go over the head of Congress to build a mass following. Even now, with two parties based loosely on mythical majorities, a president cannot depend on his party to provide a consistent congressional majority. The whole idea of an electoral mandate is something a victorious president claims but few members of Congress accept, even for the length of the reputed honeymoon. Thus, current reality already forces the president to bargain with members of the opposition party.

Confronting three parties in Congress, each of whose members were elected on the basis of clear policy positions, the president's opportunities for bargaining for majority support would be more fluid and frequent. In our two-party environment, issues are bargained out within the ranks of each party and often never see the light of day, particularly during the session prior to a presidential election. A third party with a small contingent of members of Congress would ensure a more open and substantive atmosphere for bargaining to take place—before and after the election.

A genuine third party would play the role of honest broker and policy manager because it would hold a balance of power in many important and divisive issues. There would be little fear of the tail wagging the dog because, unlike European parties, Democrats and Republicans are not ideologically very far apart—they have simply not been cooperating with each other. The presence of a third-party delegation gives the president an alternative for bargaining, but if the new party raised its price too high it would simply give the president a greater incentive to bargain with the other major party. Another important myth in the United States is that policy making is a matter
of debate between the affirmative and the negative. But simple yea versus nay on clearly defined alternatives is a very late stage in any policy-making process.

Over time, a three-party system would alter the constitution of the American regime. Very quickly and directly, the entire pattern of recruitment and succession would change. The separation of powers would begin to recede until the presidency and both houses of Congress had become a single institution. The function of the cabinet and the very purpose of cabinet officers would change. These patterns would develop whether the lead issues were crime, economic development, health care, or foreign affairs. The parties would inevitably be more policy oriented and responsive to the public will.

The point here is that the third party is a liberating rather than a confining force, a force for open debate on policies. Just as the rise of the two-party system fundamentally altered the constitutional structure of our government appropriately for the nineteenth century, so a three-party system would alter the structure appropriately for the twenty-first century.

A genuine third party must be built from the bottom up. It cannot be an ideological party. It must be an opportunistic party, oriented toward the winning of elections. It must nominate and campaign for its own candidates at all levels and not simply run someone for president. Building a party that is not merely a momentary social movement called a party is an extremely difficult thing. It requires mobilizing a large number of people and resources, including a large number of regular Democrats and Republicans, by nominating some of its own candidates to run independently with only the third-party nomination but also some Democratic and Republican candidates jointly nominated by the third party. Joint sponsorship has been practiced by the Liberal and Conservative Parties in New York for decades. The easiest task of a third party is to present a party platform with clear and well-designed policy planks. But it must be made clear that electoral victory and the implementation of those policies is not the goal of a new third party. A third party is not a governing party in the same sense of the two major parties. The most important goal of the third party within a two-party system is to put an end to the two-party system and to find a whole new calculus of voting and a whole new theory of representation.

Beyond 1996: Toward a Genuine Third Party

The following conversation actually took place, two weeks before the Reform Party conference in Nashville, Tennessee, January 25, 1997, between the author and Russell Verney, Ross Perot’s majordomo.

Verney: Hello. Professor Lowi, this is Russ Verney calling from Dallas. The Reform Party will be meeting in Nashville in a couple of
weeks, and I'd like to ask you your thoughts on what we ought to be discussing and where you think the Reform Party ought to be going.

**Lowi:** Thanks very much for calling. I've been trying for five years to make direct contact with you guys. I once even got Mr. Perot's fax number from Tom Luce [Perot's former legal adviser] who said it reached virtually into his bedroom. But I got no response from that or from any other of my messages. That's why I took to the op-ed pages, and in the process I learned something I had never realized before—that one turns to the media not because one has influence but because one lacks it.

**Verney:** Well, let's give it a try now. We are concerned about what we are doing in Dallas and how best to relate to the state organizations. As you probably know, we got on the ballot in all the states, and we have some pretty good organizations in a number of states. We hope to pull all that together in Nashville and work toward 2000.

**Lowi:** I am very pleased about all that. Mr. Perot has made a major contribution to American politics and could continue to do so. I consider it an important victory for the future that Mr. Perot finally became convinced that he should convert United We Stand-America from a civic consciousness movement to a genuine political party. We who have been seeking this all along could not get to first base with him for 1992. Tom Luce, in April or May of 1992, in my one substantive conversation with anyone close to Perot, told me flatly that Mr. Perot was absolutely against forming a political party. That's why we went on with our efforts to do it without him, with the formation of the Independence Party, which became, briefly, the Federation of Independent Parties.

**Verney:** You can say he has changed his mind now, and that's what we're up to in Nashville, getting into some new territory, at least for us.

**Lowi:** Well, you're already too late for a serious presidential run in 2000. That's the trouble with virtually all third parties and independent candidacies. They are inspired to action fifteen months to two years before presidential election, as major parties and their candidates show themselves and begin to heat up the issues and define the points of division. By then it's already too late—so there is a frenzy of activity, sometimes impressive, as was the case with Perot in 1992 and to a lesser extent, but still impressively, in 1996. At least you are four years in advance this time, but still too late for an effective presidential run. On the other hand, if you organize and focus your party properly now, the 2000 presidential race won't be so important.

**Verney:** Let's take this a step at a time. Being a third party, we have to be concerned with the party's program. We've already had a great impact because of our program, and our future, it seems to me, is tied to what brought us all together in the first place.
Lowi: That's exactly what's wrong, now as before. You should not have been so closely tied to that program in the past, and, whatever value it has had, it is not much good to you now, precisely because of your success. As is true of virtually all important third-party efforts this century, the influence you've had is on one or both of the two major parties. They've taken over your program, lock, stock, and barrel—deficits and the balanced budget, the national debt and its burden on future generations, and so forth, even the concept of the "radical center," which became Clinton's "vital center." That is even more true of the Republican Party. In fact, by the time Tom Golisano ran for governor of New York in 1994, on the Independence Party line (now a Reform Party affiliate), he looked and sounded just like a clone of Republican Governor George Pataki. It doesn't matter that he had been committed to these causes before Pataki was even heard of as a serious contender for the governorship. By then, in the eyes of the New York voters, these issues belonged to Pataki and the Republican Party. I said as much in an op-ed piece in USA Today a few days after the 1994 election, with this closing line: "Tom, you might as well have stuffed [your] $10 million in your pipe and smoked it." Golisano has not spoken to me since that time.

Verney: But what's the alternative? Party and purpose go together, and what's ours is ours. And without us, the two major parties would not have been such true believers.

Lowi: That doesn't make it right for now. Let's take it step by step, as you asked. The first step has already been taken. You have at last founded a party. The second step has also been taken, at least tentatively: you have formed parties at the state level.

But you've floundered at the third step: you've not been willing to let go; you have not let each state party have the freedom of maneuver to take programmatic stands as they see fit, and, especially, to nominate candidates for elective office. I grant that there has to be some central direction if you are to have a national party, but, according to numerous reports from inside the Reform Party ranks (as there had been inside United We Stand—America), Dallas is heavy-handed, some say dictatorial. As soon as local organizations started taking initiatives and acting on their own, a Dallas representative would show up and try to take the situation in hand. That has to stop, in reality and in the impression conveyed. The serious third party must follow the two major parties. It must be real from the bottom up and as opportunistic as the devil about local worries, local conditions, and locally ambitious people. "In America, all politics is local," said the prophet Tip O'Neill.

Verney: I think those complaints were never entirely accurate, but suppose more is left to state parties. What's next?

Lowi: Step 4 is to change your program. Quit singing the same old
song. You can hold to your principles of smaller government, less burdensome taxation, and what not. But you have to add a new set of ingredients. A Reform Party worthy of the name has to be an attack party. Attack what? The two major parties. They, "jointly and severally," are to blame for most of what's wrong in American politics. They are bereft of ideas. Worse, they are a duopoly, and even though they often disagree with each other, they can always agree on one thing: suppress competition. This is why there is the equivalent of corporate welfare in the two-party system—each party depends on wealthy clients, and party A respects the clients of party B, as a condition of party B's respect for theirs. This doesn't take collusion or conspiracy. Each knows precisely the needs of the other. And this is where and why there is expanding corruption in campaign finance, and why no substantive campaign finance reform has taken place, despite solemn bipartisan commitments, such as the famous Clinton-Gingrich handshake in New Hampshire in late 1995. By summer 1996, both confessed campaign finance reform was dead for 1996. It's dead, period, as long as we have the two-party duopoly. Thus, the program, the solemn objective, of the Reform Contract with America is to kill the two party duopoly.

Verney: What do you mean by that?
Lowi: Kill the two-party system. Your aim is not to replace one of those two parties, just as your aim is not to simply get one or both of the parties to accept your program. Note that you already got not only one but both of the parties to accept your program, and so what? Your aim, and therefore your program, should be to add yourself to the system as a third party in a genuine multiparty system.

Verney: That's not . . .
Lowi: Sorry, that is. You have to break loose in your own mind and in the minds of most Americans from the false god of the two-party system. It was a product of the nineteenth century, and it has been long worshipped by the high priests of political science and political journalism, as well as the party professionals. It is in all the textbooks, and it is a key tenet of the American civic religion. The job of the Reform Party is to expose it for what it has become and to change it by making the Reform Party a genuine party.

Verney: The Reform Party campaign can't be a lecture at Cornell. This is the real world.
Lowi: And a very unreal one it is! Just look at what they have done to your program by accepting it! With friends like them, you don't need enemies. In the world I propose, you can still attack deficits, but the attack has to be tied to the evils of the two-party system and the blame they deserve for getting us into this mess and keeping us there. And you can attack party finance scandals and even expose and punish some of
the perpetrators, but the total absence of effective legislation is the product of that two-party world that you call real. You don’t want to escape a real world for an unreal one, I agree. But why won’t you consider escaping the real world of the two-party system with a newly established real world of a genuine three-party system?

Verney: What’s the difference . . . ?

Lowi: All the difference in the world. First, the whole calculus of victory would be altered. Your presence would move us from a majority orientation—where parties and candidates have to appear to be all things to all people—to a goal of not more than 33 percent of the vote. This is the beginning of the end of deceit—a lovely prospect. Second, you’d have a way to overcome the psychology of the wasted vote. Ever wonder why there is usually such a drastic fall-off from the survey results to the actual vote for even a popular independent candidate like Perot? The people who want to use their vote as a form of protest will stick to a candidate like Perot. But the overwhelming majority of Americans consider politics a game, and they want to participate in the game by helping determine the outcome. It is very discouraging to them to have to vote for a candidate they are certain cannot win. They might as well stay out of the game altogether.

Verney: I see.

Lowi: The effective answer to this is that the voter should consider a third party vote an investment, just like a purchaser of the stock of a new company considers it an investment. This means that a longer view of the vote can be just as rational as a longer view of savings and investment. You wouldn’t expect a stock in a new company to pay hearty dividends or earn substantial capital gain after two or three quarters. Likewise, a vote for a genuine third party—a party which proves that it is in the system to stay—might still not win this year’s election or the next, or the next; but (1) it could provide the step toward later victories, given the fact that a mere 33 percent plurality could win a seat, and (2) meanwhile, keeping the third party alive gives it a better opportunity to play a balance-of-power role between the two bigger parties.

Verney: Hmmmm.

Lowi: But there was a step 5 we haven’t gotten to yet, and that’s the biggest step of all: litigation to change the Constitution. Here is the real route to the real world of the near future. If there ever is to be a genuine new party, state laws have to be changed. And since there is a party duopoly in every state today—with airtight albeit implicit contracts to keep all other parties out—the attack has to be at the constitutional level. A third party in America is like a caste in a caste system—as African Americans were until 1954: Members of a caste can achieve no real participation in their political system by incremental steps. For a caste (and
for a third party) the first step has to be through the looking glass, into a new world reality.

Verney: (continued silence, with occasional guttural sounds, indicating he was following the line of argument.)

Lowi: The Reform Party in every state should immediately begin to designate nominees for every elective office possible. The only requirements are that they have a respectable work record, can present a decent appearance in public, and can provide at least a portion of their own campaign finance, either out of their own savings or by going into debt. Then, the very minute an election official rejects a nominating petition for invalid signatures or a missed deadline that is different from that of the major parties, or any other pretext that can be demonstrated as different from the regulation of the major party candidates—slap 'em with a lawsuit.

Verney: Is that all?

Lowi: That's a lot, but the biggest plum in the litigation pudding is fusion.

Verney: Fusion?

Lowi: It's significant you'd have to ask me that. Fusion is a synonym for joint nomination of candidates—seeking out attractive Republican or Democratic nominees who will accept your offer of a Reform nomination and appear on a second spot on the ballot. Forty-three or forty-four states have outlawed fusion since early in this century. This is the second most important barrier to new parties, and it can only be broken by constitutional litigation.

The most promising case got all the way to the Supreme Court in 1997, Timmons v. Twin Cities Area New Party (117 S.Ct. 1364). A small third party operating primarily in the Midwest, the New Party, sought as one of its nominees a Democrat, who also wanted to accept New Party's fusion nomination; moreover, the Democratic Party officials had given their approval for such a joint nomination. Yet the law in Minnesota clearly forbids such joint nomination or fusion, even when all sides agree. Although the Supreme Court rejected the New Party's argument that this was a violation of First Amendment rights of association, the significant thing is that it got all the way to the Supreme Court, having won on First Amendment grounds in the Federal Court of Appeals, Eighth Circuit.

Verney: That sounds like bad news to me. And next time, when a third party offers such a fusion nomination to a major party candidate who wants to accept but the major party rejects the offer, the case will even have a tougher time in the courts.

Lowi: You are absolutely correct. But the significant thing is that a First Amendment challenge to an electoral law has reached the Supreme
Court for the first time; and it is equally significant that three members of the Court—Justices Stevens, Souter, and Ginsburg—dissented on the grounds that the state law placed “an intolerable burden” on the right of expression of political parties.

**Verney:** Sounds overly optimistic to me. . . .

**Lowi:** Yes, but there is a basis for optimism: If several such suits were brought on constitutional grounds in different states, and if inconsistencies of treatment and reasoning show up from one federal court to another, the Supreme Court would be virtually obliged to review the cases and would find it quite difficult to reject an argument that differential treatment of new parties violates the First Amendment and the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. And as an activist, Mr. Verney, you would have to agree with me that anyone who looks at state laws regulating parties, elections and campaigns would find it very hard to disagree with the argument that these state laws do not stand up to close constitutional scrutiny.

**Verney:** I can’t disagree with that, but it doesn’t make me more optimistic about the Court.

* * *

At about this point, Verney had to bid farewell. The only surprise was how long he had stuck with the conversation. What follows is an imaginary ending.

**Verney:** If antifusion laws are the second barrier to third parties, what is the first barrier?

**Lowi:** Electing officials in a single-member district system. Many people believe that it’s ordained by the Constitution and perhaps even by divine providence. Yet, there is absolutely nothing in the Constitution that requires that states take the number of representatives allotted to them by virtue of their population and then subdivide them into congressional districts with each district electing one member to represent it. And sure enough, after the founding, many states did not bother with districts at all but allowed their members to be elected at large—that is, with each member representing the entire state.

**Verney:** So, the whole single-member district practice was artificial, and imposed by law, according to the needs of the two major parties?

**Lowi:** Precisely. As the two-party system strengthened, so did laws imposing the single-member district system. The first was adopted by Congress in 1842, providing that members of the House of Representatives were to be “elected by districts composed of contiguous territory equally numbered to the Representatives to which said state may be entitled, no one district may be entitled to more than one representative.”
And many states followed suit. But because of widespread disregard of the 1842 law, another was adopted by Congress in 1872, another in 1901, and still another, almost identical to the previous ones, in 1911.

Verney: What do you make of all that?

Lowi: If the single-member district were so all-fired natural and so close to constitutional intent, why were so many efforts necessary to stamp out violations?

Verney: Okay, take it on from there, Professor. What’s the larger meaning?

Lowi: This means that our single-member district system is in fact a system of geographic representation, not one based on individual voters at all, or even on population. Now, as long as district lines surround meaningful living units—such as farming communities or commercial centers, homogeneous religious or cultural populations—the geographic unit satisfies the requirement of the representation of interests, because representatives are able to know fairly well the real and shared interests of the voters and their families. But in the twentieth century, all that changed. The distinction between urban and rural was washing out, more and more districts were becoming heterogeneous with regard to virtually every conceivable social and economic category, and it became increasingly difficult for any representative of a geographic constituency to know the “prevailing interests” of that constituency. Then when you combine this with a two-party system, it no longer matters how the district lines are drawn, because the losing party gets absolutely no representation at all. And if the same party regularly loses, and if it is composed of a very substantial minority, sometimes even a minority of 49 percent, that many voters are essentially disenfranchised.

Verney: Can any self-respecting third party support that sort of thing?

Lowi: No. Neither should anybody else support it, even if they love the two-party system. Then you have to add the coming of age of a number of self-conscious minority groups—particularly racial minorities. With or without considerations of party, if such a minority constituted 40 percent of the voting population, but if the person elected was consistently neither a member nor a sympathetic nonmember of that minority group, the minority group was from the start effectively disenfranchised—no matter how legally guaranteed and protected were their votes.

The Voting Rights Act, and federal court interpretations of it after 1965, eventually created a crisis out of these demographic anomalies within the single-member district system. As soon as the courts recognized that there was no way to draw district lines to ensure genuine representation of minority populations by minority members of the legisla-
ture, they began to force a breaking away from the legal provision that districts be compact, contiguous, and as close as possible to equal in size. The result: benign gerrymandering. And the outcome is a number of districts that are so ridiculously artificial and stupidly peculiar in size and shape that they must have been designed by people who were dedicated enemies of affirmative action and any other legal approach to racial and other forms of discrimination.

Verney: I guess the point here is that we should oppose the Voting Rights Act?

Lowi: Not quite. The purpose is good. We have to break down barriers to participation everywhere we can. But we have to reconsider the act in terms of the impossible task it has as long as we have the single-member district system: Despite all the goodwill and all the supercomputers, the only way we can reach the goal of good representation in a multiracial, multicultural, and multi-interest society is to abandon congressional districts and congressional redistricting and all other forms of electoral engineering and go for multiple-member districts with some form of proportional representation (PR).

Verney: Americans would never go for it.

Lowi: It does not have to be the highly formalized PR that people associate with highly fragmented, multiparty systems. Any form of multimember, at-large system that gives voters the number of votes equal to the number of members to be elected would solve the problem of representation in our highly pluralistic society. At the same time it would remove barriers to the emergence of important new political parties.

Verney: Hold on. You’re moving too fast, and you’re moving too far. You frighten me because what you envision could produce a five- or ten-party system, and we would have chaos, such as France and Italy.

Lowi: That’s a chimera. That’s the sort of Horrible Example that the high priests of the two-party system will wave in the air to frighten the frail. As long as we have popularly elected chief executives, at local, state, and national levels, and as long as the two major parties continue to exist, there will always be a strong centripetal force toward the fewer rather than the many political parties. Note, for example, how quickly France moved to a manageable and very effective party system after the Fifth Republic Constitution provided for a strong, nationally elected president along with their premier and their parliamentary system.

Verney: That sounds a little bit better, a little bit more reassuring. But, where does that leave us?

Lowi: That leaves you in the revolutionary position, and it takes us back to litigation. If you build a treasury that permits you to hire a couple hundred litigation-oriented lawyers well trained in electoral law and
imbued with the spirit of constitutional consistency, the revolution is in your hands. If Ross Perot had set aside $10 million of the reputed $60 million he spent during the 1992 election campaign just for litigation, he could have started the revolution that long ago. If the tiny New Party can get an important case all the way to the Supreme Court, just think of what you guys could do.

Verney: Is that the only way you feel we'll ever succeed with a Reform Party?

Lowi: That's exactly what I mean. I've thought about this situation from every angle, and I feel I have shared all the disappointments that third-party founders have felt for the past century; and I am convinced this is the time for a new experiment.

Verney: Experiment?

Lowi: Everything about democracy is experimental, including all the practices we now follow, whether we question those practices or whether we worship them. It's all an experiment. And after over two hundred years, we are still not able to say that the experiment has passed the test. The best we can say is that the case for democracy is "not proven." We can also say that if we have been experimenting all along, it's time to put the two-party system back in the lab and under the microscope. My bet is that if my colleagues in political science and journalism agreed to a discussion of the two-party system in a genuinely experimental spirit, the verdict would be that the two-party system (1) will be found wanting and (2) that it would die a natural death if we pulled out all the legal life supports.

Verney: The party's not over.

Lowi: Mr. Verney, I wish you luck, but on my terms: If the centrist Reform Party doesn't get busy and do the things they have to do to make a place for an important and permanent third party, a more radical party might, and that radical party would be led by the Christian Coalition. They have an enormous membership, they already have many good local and state organizations, they have a much more activist following than you do and certainly than the two major parties do, and they have a good bit more experience electioneering. If they now follow the example of Ross Perot and convert their consciousness movement into a political party, you will have lost forever your chance to be the shaper of the next century of American politics.

Note

1. The Eight Circuit opinion actually cited the leading article on the practice of fusion throughout the 1800s: Peter H. Argersinger, "A Place on the Ballot: Fusion Politics and Anti-fusion Laws" (1980). This piece was reprinted as a chapter in Argersinger's (1992) book.
The Activist Base of the Reform Party in 1996: Problems and Prospects

Walter J. Stone, Ronald B. Rapoport, Patricia A. Jaramillo, and Lori M. Weber

In a country where only two political parties—the Democrats and Republicans—have dominated electoral politics since the Civil War, any electoral headway by a third party or candidate is a noteworthy event. Setting aside Teddy Roosevelt’s Bull Moose Party effort, Perot’s 18.9 percent of the popular vote in 1992 was the largest third-party popular vote since the Civil War. By running again in 1996 and winning 8.4 percent of the vote, Perot became the first third-party candidate to win more than 5 percent of the vote in successive elections since the Civil War. Even his diminished vote in 1996 was surpassed by only three other candidates in the last hundred years. Numbers aside, what was also noteworthy about Perot’s 1996 presidential bid was that, whereas in 1992 he ran as an independent, in 1996 he was the nominee of the new Reform Party. Moreover, he proved to the American electorate that his challenge to the major parties was still relevant four years later. While Perot’s self-financed presidential bid in 1992 was the epitome of candidate-centered politics, his 1996 bid under the Reform Party label may be a testament to the ability of a third party to institutionalize support by taking advantage of what has been, according to some scholars, a long and growing dissatisfaction with the major parties.

Because American third parties have been so unsuccessful in retaining significant support over time, it is extremely difficult to predict the future of any new party early in its existence. The Reform Party is a nascent organization, and its independence from the personality and financing of H. Ross Perot remains a question mark. Although Perot’s effort to convert his candidacy into a party four years later contrasts with the behaviors of John Anderson and George Wallace four years after their forays into third-party politics, it is also the case that Perot did little to help candidates running for lower office under the Reform Party banner.

In assessing prospects for the Reform Party, we must first ask the follow-
ing questions: In what ways does the Reform Party seem to be moving toward becoming an institutionalized party? In what ways does it resemble and differ from the major parties? Defining and evaluating an emerging political party is tricky, especially when the party has not yet secured any public offices. Political parties consist of elite office-seekers and officeholders, organizational activists, and ordinary voters (Baer and Bositis 1988; Beck 1997). V. O. Key (1964) first developed this tripartite conceptualization of political parties, labeling the three parts as party-in-government, party-as-organization, and party-in-electorate. The Reform Party, like most third parties, clearly lacks representation as a party-in-government. It also lacks a large cadre of office-seekers. In 1996, only twenty Reform candidates ran on the actual Reform Party line (while another sixteen major party candidates were endorsed by the Reform Party) (Feigert 1997; Green and Binning 1997). Nonetheless, according to the Reform Party’s national coordinator, Russell Verney, the main goal in 1996 was to establish the party rather than run candidates under the party label for 1996 congressional races (Kalb 1996). And future candidates below the presidential level may be able to capitalize on that success.

Without an office-holding or a large office-seeking contingent, parties must rely on their organizational base for continuity. The party organization is itself a multidimensional entity involving individuals holding paid positions, professional consultants, and volunteers who hold a plethora of official party positions from precinct committee members to state chairs and positions in the national party organizations. Within this vast organizational “middle” of the traditional tripartite classification of the party, we focus on party activists. While by no means arguing that the activists fully constitute the party, focusing on activists enables us tentatively to explore the prospects of the Reform Party as an ongoing political party. Along with Green and Binning (1997), we believe that the activist base of the Reform Party was one of its most important assets. Moreover, if the party is to “survive Perot” and endure, it will be because these activists fill key organizational roles, recruit and support candidates for local and state offices, and persuade ordinary citizens to support the party’s cause. Party activists perform a number of important functions, including canvassing, petition gathering, contributing funds, and carrying out countless volunteer activities in campaigns. More broadly, party activists serve as important carriers of the party’s message to the public and as harbingers of change in the issue and candidate commitments in the party (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Neuman 1986; Stone 1993; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995).

Although it is clear that the Reform Party has an organization, its endurance is a question of institutionalization. An organization undergoes the transformation to an institution as it acquires stability and a distinctive identity (Huntington 1968; Ragsdale and Theis 1997). In this chapter we examine
the question of institutionalization indirectly by studying Reform Party activists. Volunteer activists were important in gaining ballot access for Perot in all fifty states. In 1996 the movement named itself the Reform Party, mounted a handful of congressional races, conducted conventions in some states, held a national convention, and carried out a nomination contest at the top of the ticket. By receiving more than 5 percent of the vote in 1996, the Reform Party also guaranteed itself funding for nomination contests, a national convention, and a general election campaign in 2000, regardless of who the nominee is. This emerging organizational presence of the Reform Party is testimony to its possible institutionalization as a stable part of the U.S. political scene.

On the negative side for the Reform Party, the same two parties have continued to dominate U.S. electoral politics for almost 150 years. The difficult hurdles for new parties are imposed most importantly through the winner-take-all system of elections, although campaign finance laws that reward parties based on the percentage of votes in the previous election and restrictive state ballot access laws also contribute. The sparse degree of organization that the Reform Party achieved in 1996 does not assure institutionalization. The ultimate test of an organization’s transformation into an institution can only be examined over an extended time span (Ragsdale and Theis 1997), and the ability of the Reform Party to overcome these barriers and endure through future elections remains in question. Perot’s dominant role raises doubts as to whether “there is life after Perot” (Green and Binning 1997). Nevertheless, the presence and success of the Reform Party, achieved largely through its activist base, suggest its potential to become a significant force in U.S. politics.

Because of the paucity of successful third parties in American political history, evaluating the Reform Party’s prospects for success is very difficult. For the party to achieve long-term success, it is necessary that it develop an ongoing basis of support. This kind of success requires the development of a common purpose that transcends any individual leader (Beck 1997: 8–9). Theories of political parties in both the rational choice (Downs 1957) and responsible party (Ranney 1962; Schattschneider 1942) traditions emphasize party placement on issue continua as a basis for enduring support. It is also important to recognize the importance and salience of issue priorities. Particularly during times of partisan change—times during which third parties are especially likely to emerge (Beck 1979; Burnham 1970)—new issue agendas may be important catalysts in the development of challenges to the major parties. Moreover, it is possible that a traditional left-right spatial model may fail to reflect an alternative issue agenda. Supporters of the major parties may be in broad agreement on their positions on certain issues, but disagreement about the priority of these issues in the party’s agenda may form the basis for third-party success. In either case, however, there is a
necessity for reasonable levels of consensus on both position and priority within the party if it is to succeed. Our assumption is that looking for such evidence among activists is a feasible way to begin assessing how the Reform Party compares with the two major parties on the various aspects relevant to the activist base.

**Analytic Approach**

In assessing prospects for the Reform Party, we examine several features of activist attitudes and behavior: ideological unity of party adherents and perceptions of the ideological positions of the party and its candidates; issue unity of party adherents and perceptions of the issue positions of the party and its candidates; issue salience; and levels of activism. Because there are no absolute criteria on expectations for what constitutes a successful emerging political party, we compare the Reform Party with the major parties as a way of suggesting how close the party is to its major party competition.

For the established parties, our expectations are fairly clear:

1. **Ideology.** We expect to find significant polarization between the parties and significant unity within the parties on ideology.
2. **Issues.** We also expect to find significant polarization between the parties and significant unity within the parties on a wide range of issues.
3. **Placement of the parties and candidates.** We expect to find that Democratic and Republican activists have reasonably clear ideas of issue and ideological positions of both their party and their presidential candidate. The historical positions of the parties and the variety of party spokespersons should give the party a position distinct from that of any particular presidential candidate, and supporters should be able to differentiate between the two.
4. **Activism.** We should find high levels of partisan activity on behalf of the parties and candidates.

Our expectations about the Reform Party are less clear. To the degree that the Reform Party activists resemble those of the Democratic and Republican Parties on these dimensions, we take it as evidence of potential for institutionalization. For example, if the Reform Party were simply an amalgam of disaffected Democrats and Republicans without any distinctive issue agenda beyond being alienated from both major parties, we should find no issue priorities or ideological or issue positions distinguishable from the major parties. In this case we might also expect a high level of variability across the Reform Party sample for each issue. On the other hand, if there is
a unique issue agenda for the Reform Party constituency, we should find that
the Reform Party supporters do not merely fall halfway between the major
departies but stake out distinctive positions and also show significant consen-
sus on the salient party issues. To the degree that institutionalization implies
differentiation between leader and party, supporters should be able to distin-
guish between party and candidate on issues. Differentiation on either or
both of these would indicate that the Reform Party is acquiring a distinctive
identity and at least the beginning of institutionalization.

Each of the dimensions of analysis discussed here results from a loosely
organized conception of the “party of the activists” rather than a well-devel-
oped theory. We do not mean to suggest that this analysis can definitely an-
swer questions about the institutionalization or future of the Reform Party.
The Reform Party is at an early stage of development. Our presumption is
that the attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors of the Democratic and Republi-
can Parties’ activist bases have something to do with their endurance and
that they are reflective of the end state to be expected of a successful party.
Therefore, our strategy is to assess the state of the Reform Party by compar-
ing it with the two established parties. Our expectation is that Reform re-
2pondents will show less homogeneity, lower levels of consensus, less dif-
ferentiation, and less commitment to the party than Democrats or
Republicans. However, we have no firm expectations about how similar the
Reform Party must be to the major parties to assure its successful future.
Nonetheless, these comparisons will provide important data for a tentative
understanding of the party’s future.

Because American political parties come out of a coalitional two-party
culture, they do not occupy extremes on many of the factors we examine.
On the other hand, because political parties are organizations of “like-
minded men and women,” we know that only limited heterogeneity exists
within each party. While extreme heterogeneity is inconsistent with an insti-
tutionalized party, extreme unity across a broad range of issues does not nec-
essarily ensure a more institutionalized and more durable party in a two-
party system. For example, if we were to study the Socialist Workers Party,
we would expect to see a great deal of unity. Indeed, at any time in American
history, such “cause” parties have always existed, sometimes for extended
periods of time. But, at least since the Civil War, these parties have failed to
achieve long-term success. Rather, it is the coalitional nature of the major
American parties that allows them to be durable in a system requiring close
to majority status in order to win elections. As a result, the Democratic and
Republican Parties serve as reasonable benchmarks for evaluating cohesion
within the Reform Party as well.

Data Sources

At the center of our analysis for this chapter are three comparable na-
tional samples of potential activists in the Democratic, Republican, and Re-
form Parties. All three samples are composed of individuals who have contributed money to their respective parties. The two major party samples were drawn from databases of contributors to the Republican and Democratic National Committees (RNC and DCN, respectively) in late 1994 and 1995. Both parties conduct direct mail campaigns to generate contributions, and both parties maintain extensive databases of contributors, most of whom give small amounts of money to the party. The Reform Party also sought to raise money in small donations by conducting a direct mail and TV advertising campaign during the election campaign. All three parties gave us random samples from their contributor databases that we surveyed by mail during and immediately after the 1996 presidential election.

Because of our interest in the 1996 Republican nomination race, we surveyed our full RNC sample in February 1996, early in the 1996 nomination campaign. We mailed 1,979 questionnaires and received usable responses from 1,071 for a response rate of 54.1 percent. There was no nomination race on the Democratic side, so we mailed surveys to a smaller sample of DNC contributors (905) and received 435 (response rate of 48.1 percent). Immediately after the November election, we resurveyed all respondents to the nomination-round wave, and we supplemented the DNC sample with an additional mailing to 850 respondents who had not been contacted in February. Our overall response rate in the postelection survey was 39.9 percent for the RNC sample and 46.4 percent of the combined nomination and postelection DNC samples.

Because contributions came in during the campaign, the Reform contributor sample was not available until after the November election and was surveyed in the winter of 1997. We identified 3,922 usable addresses in the Reform sample and received responses from 2,332 for a response rate of 59.5 percent.

We characterize all three samples as activists. Contributing to parties is clearly an activity common to a relatively small percentage of Americans. On the other hand, it is quite possible that these respondents were more or less purely “checkbook activists” (Verba et al. 1995) whose amount and type of activism beyond financial contribution is open to question. In this sense they are only potential campaign activists. One of the questions we investigate is the kinds of activities our respondents engaged in during the 1996 campaign beyond contributing.

Findings

Ideology

We begin our analysis of the three parties by examining how respondents of each party placed themselves, their parties, and their parties’ presi-
dential nominee on a traditional seven-point liberal-conservative scale. Although such a scale is very general, it indicates the overall direction of challenge to the major parties and also allows us to compare the three components of each party (activists, party, and presidential nominee). Figure 12.1 presents the ideological locations and the standard deviations for the three potential activist samples and activists’ perceptions of their own party’s and candidate’s location. Based on analysis of Perot voters from 1992 (Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde 1995; Gold 1995), we expected to find Reform Party activists at a position roughly midway between the two parties, and with a significantly lower level of homogeneity than either major party.

Turning first to the major parties and their supporters, their ideological selfplacements and their perceptions of their party’s locations are quite consistent with similar data on activist perceptions we have collected on nomination activists in previous years (Stone and Rapoport 1994). The DNC sample was clearly to the left of center (mean location = -1.32), and saw the Democratic Party as only slightly less liberal (-1.03). Bill Clinton was perceived by Democrats as more moderate than the party (-.85). On the other hand, Republicans saw themselves as a bit more extreme on the right (1.84) than the Democrats were on the left and, like the Democrats, perceived their party and its nominee as slightly more moderate than themselves (1.67 and 1.54, respectively). Equally important, the standard deviations for both parties indicate similar and substantial consensus in these perceptions. Reform Party contributors saw themselves as moderately conservative on the left-right scale (mean self identification = .99), and they placed the Reform Party and Ross Perot slightly to their right (mean placements = 1.21 and 1.37, respectively). These placements locate the party and its candidate to the left of the Republican Party and just to the left of Bob Dole.

As expected, the standard deviations for the Reform respondents’ selfplacements and their perceptions of their party indicate substantially less consensus than in the major parties. This greater diversity has several possible sources. The higher standard deviation for self-placement may mean that Reform activists were simply more diverse in their ideological orientation than their major-party counterparts. If that is the case, it may indicate the Reform Party was successful in mobilizing a broad coalition, with potential appeal to a diverse set of interests. But this relative lack of consensus could also mean that the supporters are simply disaffected Democrats and Republicans with no common issue agenda. It may also indicate uncertainty and confusion because the Reform campaign failed to communicate a clear message or because both the party and its candidate are relatively new to the political scene. Alternatively, because it has defined the conflict between the parties for decades, it is possible that the liberal-conservative dimension of conflict is simply more relevant to Democratic and Republican activists than it is to Reform activists. This would also imply that there may be another
Figure 12.1 Ideological Placements of the Three Parties, Candidates, and Activist Samples

Source: Authors' 1996 potential party activist surveys. Placements are based on mean self-placement for potential activist samples, and mean perceived location for party and candidate by respondents in that party. (Standard deviations of means appear in parentheses.)
issue dimension more relevant to the Reform Party that cannot be captured by the traditional one-dimensional spatial model depicted in Figure 12.1.

The general conclusion from Figure 12.1 is that although the Reform Party and Ross Perot were between the two extremes defined by the Democratic and Republican Parties, they did not offer a strictly centrist alternative. Indeed, on ideological grounds alone, the Reform alternative was very close to that of the Republicans, whose brand of conservatism in 1996 did not appear to offer much room for the Reform Party to carve out a distinct constituency. Although Reform Party supporters represented a distinctive position more than two units from the Democrats and almost one unit from the Republicans, the lack of cohesion evident in the high standard deviations makes an appeal based on this positioning problematic. On the other hand, respondents placed the party itself and its nominee very close to the Republicans, but again with significantly higher standard deviations. This result suggests that based on the traditional left-right dimension, the Reform Party has formidable hurdles before it can become a viable alternative or put together a distinct position.11

**Issue Opinions**

The general ideological map in Figure 12.1 can take us only so far. It is possible that the sorts of issue appeals Perot offered defined an alternative agenda not readily visible in the simple left-right analysis of Figure 12.1. There is no necessity that the same left-right dimension that separates Democrats from Republicans should reliably separate Reform Party members from the major parties. Rather, it may be that Perot supporters distinguish themselves from the major parties on a set of issues that do not fit with the traditional liberal-conservative cleavage.

To explore the possibility that issues defined a distinctive Reform constituency, we present in Table 12.1 the mean issue opinions and standard deviations on eleven issue questions asked of all three samples. The items are scored such that the most liberal response is scored −3 and the most conservative response is scored +3.

We divide the eleven issue items included on the surveys into three broad categories: traditional **liberal-conservative issues** that relate more or less directly to the enduring ideological axis of partisan conflict in American politics; **economic nationalism issues** that tap the underlying view that resources should be more concentrated at home rather than abroad and that the government needs to protect American workers both from unfair foreign competition and low paid foreign workers; and **reform issues** that include proposals to restructure American politics by limiting terms of officeholders and balancing the budget.

Not surprisingly, the results for the liberal-conservative issues mirror
Table 12.1 Mean Issue Opinions by Potential Activist Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>DNC</th>
<th>RNC</th>
<th>Reform Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Traditional liberal-conservative issues</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirmative action programs</td>
<td>-1.19</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.77)</td>
<td>(1.44)</td>
<td>(1.85)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shift more domestic programs to states</td>
<td>-1.00</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>1.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.85)</td>
<td>(.86)</td>
<td>(1.49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National health insurance</td>
<td>-1.87</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.46)</td>
<td>(1.55)</td>
<td>(2.42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase government control of firearms</td>
<td>-2.40</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.24)</td>
<td>(2.30)</td>
<td>(2.50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constitutional amendment limiting abortion</td>
<td>-2.36</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.55)</td>
<td>(2.46)</td>
<td>(2.43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reform issues</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term limits</td>
<td>-.60</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>2.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.34)</td>
<td>(1.74)</td>
<td>(1.56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce deficit, increase taxes</td>
<td>-.72</td>
<td>-.49</td>
<td>-.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.89)</td>
<td>(2.14)</td>
<td>(2.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce deficit, cut programs</td>
<td>-.40</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>1.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.99)</td>
<td>(1.03)</td>
<td>(1.47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economic nationalism</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreased U.S. foreign involvement</td>
<td>-1.12</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.89)</td>
<td>(1.88)</td>
<td>(1.82)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stricter limit on number of immigrants</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>2.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.09)</td>
<td>(1.59)</td>
<td>(1.53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limit foreign imports</td>
<td>-.27</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>1.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.97)</td>
<td>(2.09)</td>
<td>(1.84)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Standard deviations are in parentheses.  
Sources: Authors' 1996 potential party activist surveys.*
those for liberal-conservative placement: Democrats differed relatively sharply from Republicans, and Reform respondents in every case placed themselves between the average opinion of activists in the established parties. Note also that the standard deviations within the major parties tend to be lower than in the Reform Party and compared with the other issue items.12

Observers of the Perot movement in 1992 and 1996 might expect that balancing the federal budget was the lynchpin of the Perot candidacies in both years and would most sharply distinguish Reform Party supporters from the Democrats and Republicans. It taps potential supporters' exasperation with waste in government along with their conviction that the national government needs to cut back on programs and consider raising taxes. However, balancing the budget had been an important Republican issue for the last half-century, and even though Perot's 1992 campaign was successful in calling attention to the deficit problem, Republicans found little difficulty in accommodating themselves to a tough budget position. Even the Democrats under Clinton tried to show their commitment to budget balancing.

We included two items designed to measure respondents' attitudes about balancing the federal budget and the trade-offs implied by that goal: raising taxes and cutting back on programs. Even Republicans were willing to raise taxes to achieve a balanced budget, and both the Reform and Republican Parties were willing (by 90 percent or more) to cut programs in order to balance the budget. Almost half (43.7 percent) of Democrats were ready to cut programs to balance the budget.

Although there was substantial agreement across all three parties on balancing the budget, when the two deficit items were combined, it is clear that activists in the Reform Party were closer to Republicans on the deficit issue than they were to Democrats. Among Republicans and Reformers, the dominant position was a "deficit hawk" preference for reducing the deficit by cutting government programs and increasing taxes. About 63 percent of Republicans were deficit hawks in this sense, while 68 percent of Reform contributors were willing to cut programs and raise taxes to reduce the federal deficit. In contrast, only 35 percent of Democrats were deficit hawks, with the modal position (38 percent) preferring to raise taxes without cutting programs. Although Reform activists were closer to Republicans on the deficit than they were to Democrats, they were slightly more extreme than the Republicans. Still, the deficit issue indicates the difficulty a third party faces trying to be distinctive on a popular issue.

On issues more distinctive (and equally central) to the Perot/Reform agenda in 1996, however, a different pattern holds. On limiting immigration, imposing term limits, placing limits on foreign imports to protect American jobs, and decreasing U.S. foreign involvement, Reform respondents were more extreme than either of the other parties, and in all cases the differences between the major parties were muted. For example, on the question of plac-
ing limits on foreign imports to protect American jobs, Democrats and Republicans were almost identical in their mild opposition (differing by only about 0.25 on a seven-point scale), whereas Reformers were overwhelmingly in support of such restrictions. Moreover, the standard deviation in the Reform sample was below that of the two major parties, which indicates greater consensus among Reform activists than among Democrats and Republicans. Furthermore, the other two economic nationalism issues and term limits maintain a similar (if less dramatic) pattern in which major party polarization is relatively low, and the Reform Party is both more extreme and relatively unified.

None of these four issues corresponds neatly with the traditional left-right continuum, and on each there is relatively little historical difference between the Democratic and Republican Parties. All of them, however, help distinguish the Reform position from both of the major parties and help define an important agenda for the Reform Party. As opposed to our findings on the general left-right continuum, it is clear that Reform Party activists do not simply fall between the major parties in an undifferentiated way. Instead, these issues may define an alternative agenda that the Reform Party is well positioned after 1996 to articulate.

The idea of limiting U.S. foreign involvement militarily and economically while limiting foreign imports and immigrants is one that has not found a congenial home in either major party. In both 1992 and 1996, Pat Buchanan tried to promote such sentiments in the Republican Party, with only limited success. At present, Richard Gephardt is espousing support for parts of this agenda as well, in hopes of capturing the Democratic nomination in 2000. But it is clear from Table 12.1 that no clear consensus on these positions exists within either major party. Neither shows the unity of purpose on such issues that is evident among Reform Party activists. Support for term limits is also an issue that shows some promise for the Reform Party. While Republicans also support limiting terms, Reform activists were both more committed and more unified on this item.

It is not only issue position but issue salience that is crucial to the success of a party. To be distinctive on issues that are not important to one’s supporters provides only a limited base of support. To address the question of issue salience among potential activists in the three parties, we asked respondents to indicate which of the eleven issue items was most important to them. Table 12.2 presents the results. Not surprisingly, the two deficit reduction questions combined were the modal issue for the Reform sample (41.0 percent picked one of the two). The same can be said for Republicans, however, who were even more concerned about deficit reduction than Reformers (45.9 percent most important). Democrats, in contrast, were most concerned about national health insurance, with deficit reduction taking second place (21.7 percent named the two deficit items).
Table 12.2 Percentage Breakdown for Most Important Issue by Potential Activist Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>DNC</th>
<th>RNC</th>
<th>Reform Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic nationalism:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreased U.S. Foreign Involvement</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stricter Limit on Number of Immigrants</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limit Foreign Imports</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform issues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term limits</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce deficit, increase taxes</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce deficit, cut programs</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>27.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Liberal-Conservative Issues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirmative action programs</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shift more domestic programs to states</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National health insurance</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase government control of firearms</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constitutional amendment limiting abortion</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Authors' 1996 potential party activist surveys.

Although the salience of deficit reduction was not distinctive for the Reform Party, the economic nationalism items and term limits were. Reform activists were over three times more likely to name one of these four issues as more important than Democrats, and they were more than twice as likely as Republicans to see these as their greatest concern. With 34.7 percent of the Reform sample naming an economic nationalism item or term limits as most important, only about 22 percent were most concerned about a traditional liberal-conservative issue. In contrast, fully 62 percent of Democrats and 35 percent of Republicans named a liberal-conservative issue as most important.

Placement of Parties and Candidates

Even though Reform Party supporters occupy a distinctive position on some issues, the question remains whether the party and its candidates will be seen as occupying the same position. We also examine the amount of awareness of party and candidate positions. After all, the Reform Party is relatively new, and impressions about it may be unformed for many support-
ers. Once again we use the Democratic and Republican Party samples as comparison groups.

Table 12.3 presents the mean perceptions and standard deviations of each sample’s candidate and party on four issues: affirmative action, control of the deficit by cutting programs, abortion, and decreased U.S. involvement abroad. As with our previous analysis of issue items, responses are coded on a seven-point scale, ranging from the most liberal response at \(-3\) to the most conservative response at \(+3\).\(^{13}\)

The data in Table 12.3 are consistent with our findings on activists’ self-placements on the issues. On the two liberal-conservative issues, affirmative action and abortion, the Reform Party and Perot were both placed by Reform

| Table 12.3 Mean Perceptions of Party and Nominee by Party Sample (standard deviation) |
|-----------------------------------------|--------|--------|----------------|
|                                        | DNC    | RNC    | Reform Party   |
| Affirmative action:                    |        |        |                |
| Candidate                              | -1.65  | 1.42   | 1.05           |
|                                        | (.97)  | (1.37) | (1.76)         |
| Party                                  | -1.48  | 1.59   | 1.14           |
|                                        | (.93)  | (1.23) | (1.71)         |
| Reduce deficit, programs:              |        |        |                |
| Candidate                              | -.02   | 1.86   | 2.28           |
|                                        | (1.74) | (.99)  | (1.09)         |
| Party                                  | -.31   | 1.80   | 2.12           |
|                                        | (1.69) | (1.04) | (1.16)         |
| Constitutional amendment limiting abortions: |        |        |                |
| Candidate                              | -2.15  | 1.06   | -.42           |
|                                        | (1.41) | (1.54) | (2.13)         |
| Party                                  | -1.83  | 1.12   | -.43           |
|                                        | (1.37) | (1.42) | (2.02)         |
| Reduce US foreign involvement          |        |        |                |
| Candidate                              | -1.52  | .22    | 1.16           |
|                                        | (1.59) | (1.82) | (1.80)         |
| Party                                  | -1.09  | .41    | 1.22           |
|                                        | (1.53) | (1.75) | (1.76)         |

Note: Standard deviations are in parentheses.
Sources: Authors’ 1996 potential party activist surveys.
activists between the placements of the major parties and their nominees by each party’s activist base. On these issues, too, the standard deviations of Reform perceptions are higher than the standard deviations of Democratic and Republican activists. As with the self-placement data, therefore, there is an indication of greater uncertainty among Reform activists compared with their major party counterparts.

On the two issues closer to the Reform agenda, deficit reduction and especially foreign involvement, Reform perceptions indicate that the party is more extreme or distinctive. The perceptual data, therefore, reinforce our view that Reform party activists understood that their party was most distinctive on the foreign involvement item, which is part of our “economic nationalism” cluster of issues.

Our assessment of activists’ perceptions would be incomplete without an account of how much uncertainty prevailed in each party about party and candidate placement. Even on those issues on which Perot and the Reform Party seem to have staked out unambiguous issue positions, large percentages of the Reform Party sample were unable to place the party (see Table 12.4). For example, on reducing the deficit by cutting programs, 13.2 percent were unable to place the party. On every item in the table, including on the issues that respondents picked as most important, substantial proportions of Reform Party respondents could not place their party. In contrast, there was much less confusion among Democratic and Republican respondents. This lack of information is not attributable to a general inability of Reform Party contributors to place the parties on issues. Reform Party respondents were actually better able to place both the Democratic and Republican Parties than they were their own party (data not shown). Reform activists were consistently better able to place Perot than their party, yet even here their levels of uncertainty were consistently greater than the comparable results among Democrats and Republicans. On several items, including abortion, affirmative action, and foreign involvement, the levels of uncertainty about party and candidate and party placement are high enough to raise very serious questions about the visibility of the party to its own most attentive constituency.

The failure to penetrate the awareness among activists has potentially very serious consequences for the institutional future of the party. The party is new, lacks a long history of position taking, and, as opposed to the Democratic and Republican Parties, has had only one spokesperson in Ross Perot. Still, the results in Table 12.4 clearly indicate that the party has a difficult task in spreading the word even among its own adherents.

Besides the ability of activists to place the party on the issues, institutionalization implies an ability by supports to distinguish between the party and its candidates. We have studied this question by computing the correlation between perceptions of the party’s and its candidate’s placements on
Table 12.4 Percentage Not Sure of Candidate or Party Position on Ideology and Issue Placement Items, by Party

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>DNC</th>
<th>RNC</th>
<th>Reform Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liberal-Conservative item</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>.3</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most important issue</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirmative action</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>29.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reducing deficit/programs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abortion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>33.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>41.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduced foreign involvement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>26.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors' 1996 potential party activist surveys.

the issue items. A perfect correlation of 1.0 would indicate absolutely no differentiation between candidate and party placement. Although we should expect significant positive correlations between candidate and party placement, institutionalization implies organizational positions that go beyond that of any single leader, even the presidential candidate. Thus, for example, when individuals are asked to place the Democratic Party and Bill Clinton on an issue, they are likely, on the average, to see some differentiation. Clinton is known to differ from traditional Democratic Party positions on some issues, and there is a long history of other leaders articulating party positions that may come to mind when thinking about party placement. This differentiation between party and candidate placement is a difficult but crucial step
in party institutionalization, and it implies that the correlations should be noticeably less than 1.0. We would still expect strongly positive correlations in the Democratic Party/Clinton pairings because on most issues the party nominee has staked out a position that is consistent with, if not identical to, the party’s tradition. As the correlations approach 1.0 in value, however, evidence indicates strong identity between candidate and party. This sort of identity would seem to be a major hurdle for the Reform Party to overcome since Ross Perot has been its only candidate, and many saw the party as the creature of its founder.

When we look at the Republicans and Democrats across all of our candidate/party placement items, we find virtually identical average correlations between candidate and party placement (the mean correlation in both parties is .67). As expected, the correlation is strongly and significantly positive, but there is clear evidence that major party activists were able to differentiate between their party’s and their candidate’s issue positions. In contrast, among Reform Party contributors, the average correlations between candidate and party placements were .85. This, of course, is much closer to a perfect relationship of 1.00.¹⁴

**Activism**

The sine qua non of the activist stratum of a party is its degree of actual involvement in party affairs and the stability of that involvement over time. The latter is important, because as activists stay involved their expertise increases, and the potential for building institutionalized party increases as well. Our samples were selected because they had contributed money to their parties, not because they necessarily had engaged in any other campaign-related activities. Indeed, some studies have suggested that the factors that lead individuals to contribute money to a political cause are not necessarily the same as those that lead to other forms of participation (Verba et al. 1995: 47; Whiteley et al. 1994: 77). Therefore, we explore the extent to which contributors were involved in the 1996 campaign in ways other than by giving money.

The data in Table 12.5 indicate that these were not merely “checkbook activists.” We asked respondents a battery of questions about other activities in their party’s presidential race, as indicated by the items included in the table. It is clear that our respondents were involved in the campaign beyond merely contributing money. The most common form of activity in all three parties was trying to persuade others to support the party’s candidate. Significant proportions of activists also canvassed for their candidate, wrote letters, or engaged in at least one other campaign activity. Perhaps the most striking finding in Table 12.5 is the comparative level of activity between the Reform and established party samples. The Reform sample was every bit
Table 12.5 Percentage Active in Presidential Campaign by Party

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>RNC</th>
<th>DNC</th>
<th>Reform Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active in any way other than contributing</td>
<td>53.1</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>62.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convinced others to support candidate</td>
<td>50.4</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>59.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical work for campaign</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone or door-to-door canvassing</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrote letters to magazine or newspaper</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged in other activity</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Author's 1996 potential party activist surveys.

as involved in the 1996 campaign as were the Democratic and Republican samples. If we look at the levels of activity in U.S. House races (data not shown), it is not surprising that we find the major party activists were much more active, since the Reform Party ran so few House candidates. We also find that Reform activists were slightly less likely to vote for their party’s candidate (91 percent voted for Perot) compared with activists in the established parties (95 percent of whom voted for their party’s nominee).

Although the high levels of involvement by the Reform contributors in the 1996 presidential campaign are a hopeful sign for party building after 1996, we have data on the continuity of activity between the 1992 Perot campaign and 1996 that temper optimism. We have a national sample of potential Perot activists we first surveyed in 1992, which we have followed through the 1994 and 1996 elections (Partin et al. 1996). Among those who were involved in the 1992 Perot campaign, only about 20 percent reported remaining active in 1996. This failure to keep a stable activist core between the two elections presents a serious challenge to the future of the Perot movement. Overall, then, we find high levels of activity in our Reform sample in 1996, although much of this appears to come from individuals new to the cause, rather than continuing activists.

Conclusion

In some important respects our analysis shows that the Reform Party activists were remarkably similar to their counterparts in the traditional parties. They were at least as involved in the presidential campaign as Demo-
The Reform Party also seems to have distinguished itself from the major parties by adopting a distinctive set of issue positions, especially issues tapping an "economic nationalist" dimension that combines immigration limits, import limits, and decreased U.S. involvement in world affairs. There is also evidence that Reform activists were distinctive on term limits and, to a much lesser extent, the deficit. At the same time, Reform Party backers were much less aware of their party's positions, even on core issues, than were Democrats and Republicans. Reform Party perceptions of Perot and the party were most secure on the issues at the core of their message, but even on these issues there were relatively high percentages of activists giving "not sure" responses. Likewise, the correlations between Perot and Reform Party placements on the issues were uniformly and substantially higher than was true of the traditional parties, indicating that activists were also less able to differentiate their party from its leader on the issues. Most of these findings are not especially surprising, but they do indicate the extent to which the "institutionalization" of the Reform Party, if it is to occur, is still in its infancy.

What do our results suggest for the future of the Reform Party? Perhaps the greatest challenge facing the party is its ability to survive a transition from Ross Perot to new leadership. This is a crucial step in the institutionalization of any organization, and it is still in the party's future. In data not presented in this chapter, we find very high levels of affection among Reform activists for Perot and for the party. Indeed, the affect measures suggest that Reform activists were more positive about their party and its leader than major party activists were about their party or its candidate. The real question, though, is whether that positive affect can hold for the party once Perot steps aside.

A second major challenge facing the Reform Party will be its ability to differentiate itself adequately from the Republican Party on the deficit issue and other matters close to its center. Its unique policy appeal in the areas of "economic nationalism" and term limits give it an important wedge into political support that will enhance its ability to attract and hold the sorts of potential activists we are studying. However, the major parties have strong incentives to co-opt the most attractive elements of a third party's agenda (Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus 1996), and the bases of support for Reform Party issues, like the economy, are beyond the party's ability to control.
Finally, because the Democrats and Republicans each have a major institutional foothold in the national government, they will have ample opportunities to demonstrate their commitment to key issues such as cutting the deficit. Of course, they may also bog down in partisan squabbling, pass up important reform issues such as campaign financing, and otherwise fail to address concerns important to Reform supporters. The candidate-centered nature of our national politics in company with a prevailing cynicism about politicians and government institutions may continue to provide ample leverage for the Reform Party.

Our ability to look into the future for the Reform Party is obviously limited. The party has already proven itself more successful at the presidential level than any third party in this century, but the jump from where it currently is to becoming a serious and enduring force in American politics is a large one. Because no party since the Republicans has accomplished this feat, this analysis is left with little theoretical guidance. Furthermore, twentieth-century third parties have either disappeared or become totally insignificant after their leader left the fold. Without Wallace on the ticket in 1972, the American Independent Party declined to only 1.4 percent of the votes and thereafter split into factional conflict. Even though it ran presidential candidates in both 1976 and 1980, it received less than a quarter of one percent in both years. Theodore Roosevelt’s choice to forsake the Progressive Party in 1916 helped pull the plug on a party that had a governor of California, a senator, and several members of the House.

Of course, the political environment itself affects the prospects for Reform Party success. Both major parties have tried to co-opt Perot’s constituency, and the state of the national economy can render many of the Perot issues more or less significant. Issues such as immigration and foreign trade remain potent ones at the moment, but the party’s ability to capitalize on them is in question. Moreover, for a party to endure in the complex American system, it must contest many more offices than the presidency, and it must do so with some reasonable chance of success. While the Reform Party has succeeded where most other third parties have failed, it nonetheless faces enormous challenges as it strives to become an enduring force in our national politics.

Notes

We are grateful to the National Science Foundation for a grant to support the surveys on which this chapter is based (SBR 9410869).

1. In contrast, the Libertarian party ran 156 candidates for Congress and 17 for Senate.

2. In Key’s typology, the party in the electorate refers to partisan identifiers. This is far less relevant for a new party that has been in existence only about a year.
3. The Reform Party lacks the comprehensive organization of the two parties. In some states a strong organization is in place, while in others it is much more spotty.

4. Its volunteer base also included members of United We Stand-America. Hence, the Reform Party was able to capitalize on Perot's continued appeal and on the membership of an already established political organization.

5. This distinction between position and salience mirrors, to some degree, Rochon's (1995) typology of third parties as mobilizing or challenging parties. For example, the European Green Parties, with their distinctive environmentalist agendas represent "mobilizing" parties, and antigovernment parties of the Right (e.g., Progress Parties in Scandinavia) or centrist parties in a polarized party system (e.g., the Social Democrats in Britain) represent "challenger" parties.

6. Of course, we are studying activists, who are not themselves candidates, so it is reasonable to assume that their involvement is strongly motivated by programmatic concerns as well as a desire to see their party's candidate win for its own sake. Even perspectives grounded in the rational choice/spatial modeling tradition may emphasize the programmatic concerns of activists and see the pursuit of electoral victory as a means of achieving programmatic ends (Aldrich 1983).

7. Much is left out of Figure 12.1 that is relevant to a fuller understanding of how these potential activists understand the political space. For example, it is clear from our data that activists from all three parties understood that they and their parties are not typical of the average American voter. We asked all samples to place the average voter on the same left-right scale, and the mean placements among the three samples in Figure 12.1 clustered just to the right of center. These perceptions were remarkably close to the actual self-placement in the NES cross-section sample from 1996 (mean = .34), ranging between .09 and .27.

8. The average contribution is approximately $35.

9. Responses range from "strongly favor" to "strongly oppose." The liberal response for each item is defined as supporting affirmative action programs, opposing reducing the deficit by cutting governmental programs, opposing a constitutional amendment to limit abortions, and opposing decreased U.S. foreign involvement.

10. Throughout our analysis of the ideological continuum and of specific issues, we code the most extremely liberal score -3 and the most extremely conservative score +3, with the middle of the scale located at 0. The standard deviations of the means are reported in the figure in parentheses to indicate how much consensus there is within the party in the mean self-identification or -perception. The larger the standard deviation, the less homogeneity within the party.

11. It is interesting that the standard deviations on all of the issue items tend to be markedly higher than was true of the liberal-conservative item.
very substantial difference in the level of differentiation between candidate and party in the
two established parties compared with the Reform Party. We also examined the correlations
between candidate and party affect for each sample and found stronger evidence for differen­
tiation between party and candidate for the Reform Party. In fact, the mean correlation
\( (r = .59) \) is not only much lower than for any issue but is only very slightly greater than the
correlation between Clinton and Democratic Party ratings by Democratic contributors
\( (r = .57) \). The Republicans showed the lowest average party-candidate affect correlation of
the three \( (r = .49) \).

15. It is possible that the slightly higher levels of activity in the Reform sample were
due to the fact that the sample was drawn from contributors to the 1996 campaign, whereas
the major party samples were selected from contributors to the party organizations following
the 1994 midterm elections.

16. The lack of continuity in activity between 1992 and 1996 may be indicative of this
problem.
Politicians, political scientists, and the public generally take it for granted that the United States has and always will have a two-party system. There are good reasons for such an assumption. First, it is borne out by history. New parties have arisen and old ones died out since the founding of the United States, but there have seldom been more than two serious contenders for power at any one time, and then only for a single election.

This history is supported by theory. Several decades ago Maurice Duverger articulated the principle, subsequently known as Duverger’s law, that “the simple-majority single-ballot system encourages a two-party system with alternation of power between major independent parties” (1954: 205), because voters for the third-most popular candidate would always feel that their votes had been wasted. The law does not hold everywhere; Australia, Canada, and India have been exceptions at one time or another. However, it does hold in the overwhelming majority of conditions. Since the single-majority, single-ballot system is used in almost all partisan elections in the United States, there is reason to believe that the historical strength of the two-party system is due to the structure of elections, not merely to voter attitudes. So strong is the belief that only two real parties can exist in the United States that any other parties are referred to as “third parties,” consigning them by this name to permanent peripheral status, although there are many more parties than three.

What I will call the two-party assumption is well founded, then, but we lose something if we do not question it. The assumption is based on conditions, and those conditions—from voter attitudes to ballot laws—can change. Assumptions should never replace data, and the data show an upsurge in activity by parties other than the Democrats and Republicans. H. Ross Perot’s presidential campaigns, in 1996 as the nominee of the Reform Party, are well known and are discussed elsewhere in this volume. Other minor parties contested the 1996 presidential election as well; Harry Browne of the Liber-
tarian Party and John Hagelin of the Natural Law Party appeared on most state ballots and won noticeable percentages of the vote. Ralph Nader was nominated by the Greens and brought that party a marked increase in publicity, although the Greens’ organizational weakness restricted his appearance on state ballots.

Such attention as minor parties receive tends to focus on such presidential campaigns; but most minor party activity is elsewhere. The elections as governor of Lowell Weicker in Connecticut, Walter Hickel in Alaska, and Angus King in Maine, and Bernie Sanders’s elections as mayor of Burlington, Vermont, and then to the U.S. House of Representatives show that strong independent and minor party candidates can win elections. Except for Sanders, those cited were all on the conservative side of the political spectrum. However, the Green Party of New Mexico obtained a substantial increase in its vote when it recruited and ran Roberto Mondragon, an ex-Democratic lieutenant governor, as its gubernatorial candidate in 1994. Mondragón’s embrace of the Green Party drew national attention, particularly when an early poll showed him with 32 percent support (Corbett 1994: 10–11). Although he finished far below that level, the forty-seven thousand votes (10 percent) he received were slightly more than Republican Gary Johnson’s margin of victory; many felt that Mondragón’s candidacy “may have cost incumbent Democrat Bruce King the election” (Barone and Ujifusa 1996: 881). The Mondragón candidacy increased the stature of the Green Party in New Mexico. In 1996, Mondragón was the Green candidate for a state legislative seat from Santa Fe, getting 35 percent of the vote, while fellow Santa Fe Green Fran Gallegos was elected a municipal judge. Three other New Mexico Greens got at least 25 percent of the vote in state legislative or county elections, and Peggy Helgeson, Green candidate for the state Corporation Commission, got 11 percent (Hawkins 1997: 21). In 1997, Mondragón returned to the Democratic Party fold, but New Mexico Green Carol Miller still got 17 percent of the vote in a special election for the House seat vacated by UN Ambassador Bill Richardson, with the result that Republican William Redmond was elected to represent what had been thought to be a safe Democratic district.

Tables 13.1 and 13.2 show the number of minor party and independent candidates for the U.S. House and Senate in elections from 1948 to 1996. As the tables show, the number of such candidates has risen dramatically, except for a dip in 1994, since the mid-1980s. The tables give four measures of these candidates’ electoral impact also: the number of candidates who received 5 percent or more of the vote, the number whose vote total was greater than the margin between the winner and the second-place candidate, the number who finished second, and the number who were elected. Many of these measures declined in 1996 as more minor party and independent candidates competed against each other, but the collective impact of such candi-
Table 13.1 Success of Independent and Minor Party House Candidates, 1948-1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election Totals</th>
<th>Number of Candidates</th>
<th>Number ≥ 5.0%</th>
<th>Number ≥ Margin</th>
<th>Number of Winners</th>
<th>Number in Second Place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>31</td>
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<td>19</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>1984</td>
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<td>1986</td>
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<td>1990</td>
<td>170</td>
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<td>1992</td>
<td>458</td>
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<td>1994</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>18</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>532</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Calculated from election returns reported in Congressional Quarterly Almanac and Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report for respective years.

dates often increased. For example, in the Maine election for the U.S. Senate, Green John Rensenbrink got 3.8 percent of the vote, and independent William Clarke, 3.2 percent. Their combined vote total of 41,564 deprived the winning candidate, Republican Susan Collins, of a majority; however, neither Rensenbrink nor Clarke had enough votes by himself to score on any of the measures in Table 13.2. Whatever their future may hold, minor parties are influencing the outcome of elections today, and they well deserve our study.
Table 13.2 Success of Independent and Minor Party Senate Candidates, 1948–1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election Totals</th>
<th>Number of Candidates</th>
<th>Number ≥ 5.0%</th>
<th>Number ≥ Margin</th>
<th>Number of Winners</th>
<th>Number in Second Place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less California</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Tennessee short term</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Kansas short term</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: No totals were reported for the 1962 election.

Sources: Calculated from election returns reported in Congressional Quarterly Almanac and Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report for respective years.
Most research on minor parties has concerned itself with their role in presidential elections. There has been particular interest in the characteristics of those who vote for independent and minor party presidential candidates and in the social and political factors that tend to bring about significant challenges to two-party dominance (Mazmanian 1974; Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus 1996). Other studies, often comparative in scope, try to evaluate the effect of election laws on the number of parties (Duverger 1954; Gagnon 1981, 1986; Riker 1986; Scarro 1986). A few have looked at the party organizations themselves, although not in much depth (Gillespie 1993); the same can be said of my own earlier work on this topic (Berg 1995). Guth and Green (1996) studied another side of minor parties, their financial contributors, in a survey conducted in 1982 and 1983. David Reynolds (1997) has recently published a study of current minor party activity on the left. Collet and Hansen (1996; Collet 1996) have examined the characteristics of independent and third-party candidates for offices other than president.

In this chapter, I will concentrate on the activity of a selected group of minor parties: the Libertarians, the Greens, the Natural Law Party, all of which have begun to compete in national elections (see Table 13.3); the New Party, which has endorsed one successful Democratic candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives but operates mostly at the local level; and the Labor Party, which has yet to run or endorse any candidates. I will also discuss an attempt to unite the minor parties on the left, the Independent Progressive Politics Network.

Several scholars have proposed typologies of U.S. minor parties. V. O. Key, (1964: 255) classified them into two categories, short-lived parties and continuing doctrinal parties. As Key’s language suggests, the former arise in reaction to a particular situation, but fade into obscurity after an election or two. The latter are more permanent, but retain their members through their commitment to a political doctrine, rather than through any hope of winning elections. George Wallace’s American Independent Party is a good historical example of the former and the Socialist Labor Party of the latter. Short-lived parties arise typically when one or more candidates of high quality decide that the strategic situation is favorable. For continuing doctrinal parties, on the other hand, considerations of strategic opportunity are relatively unimportant; election campaigns are waged in order to get a message out, with little expectation of winning. Candidate quality may still be important, in that parties would like their message to be expressed effectively, but the role of the candidate is secondary to that of the party itself.

Key’s categories are after-the-fact judgments. We can apply them to parties they existed in the past or that have faded into relative obscurity. However, the parties studied here are new and possess in their own eyes the potential to become major parties; it would be inappropriate to consign them to the margins by definition. Guth and Green, following Orren (1982), de-
Table 13.3 Success of Libertarian, Green, and Natural Law Candidates, 1996 Election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Votes</th>
<th>Number of Candidates</th>
<th>Candidates ≥ 5%</th>
<th>Candidates ≥ Margin</th>
<th>Candidates Finishing Second</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For governor:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libertarian Party</td>
<td>128,393</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greens</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Law Party</td>
<td>20,358</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Senate:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libertarian Party</td>
<td>370,757</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greens</td>
<td>69,308</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Law Party</td>
<td>207,738</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For the House:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libertarian Party</td>
<td>600,949</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greens</td>
<td>38,585</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Law Party</td>
<td>557,682</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. "≥ Margin" is the number of candidates whose vote was greater than the difference between the first- and second-place candidates.

Sources: Calculated from election returns reported in Congressional Quarterly Almanac and Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, November 9, 1996, 3250-57.

velop a different classification of minor parties on the basis of the reason for the creation of a given party, rather than on its historical success. They propose three categories. Principled parties "are motivated by a distinctive political philosophy" that is not accommodated by the major parties; protest parties, by strong commitment to one or more salient issues; and personalistic parties, by enthusiasm for an individual politician (Guth and Green 1996: 257-58). Historically, most personalistic parties have been short-lived, and most principled parties have become continuing doctrinal parties, but these are only likelihoods not certainties. The Guth and Green terms allow us to separate a party's basis of unity analytically from its historical fate.

All the parties considered here fall into the principled category. They are also all relatively new. The age of a party is important because of the way it interacts with the strategic thinking of potential candidates and other activists. Recently, a number of studies have examined the strategic decisions made by potential major party candidates about whether and when to run and the impact of such decisions on the outcome of elections (Kingdon
1968; Jacobson and Kernell 1983; Jacobson 1985, 1992; Bond, Covington, and Fleisher 1985; Krasno and Green 1988; Krasno 1994). These works find that potential candidates' decisions to run or not are in good part strategic; that is, attractive candidates are more likely to run if they think their chances of winning are relatively high. The concept of the strategic candidate must be modified in its application to minor parties. While a strategic Democrat or Republican chooses to run for office when he or she thinks the chances of being elected are reasonably good, few if any minor party candidates ever have a good chance of winning at any level beyond the most local elections. Nevertheless, if minor parties are to grow, they need to attract candidates of high quality, and such candidates must have some reason to run. That reason might be to get a hearing for a different point of view, to publicize a party, or to gain personal credibility as a political figure. Any of these purposes might be furthered if a candidate received a proportion of the vote that was higher than expected, even if that proportion was not sufficient to win the election. However, the potential candidate must believe that the party itself has some potential, a belief that will be more credible if the party has not been around long enough to have settled into permanent obscurity.

The Libertarians

The Libertarian Party is the oldest of the minor parties considered here and is certainly a party of principle. Libertarians distinguish themselves from the Democratic Party by their opposition to state regulation of economic activity and from the Republican Party by their opposition to state regulation of personal life. Party activists distribute “the world’s shortest political quiz,” a card containing four questions on one side and a two-dimensional graph plotting personal freedom against economic freedom on the other. The Libertarian Party grew out of the Society for Individual Liberty, which split from the Young Americans for Freedom in 1969 over two issues: opposition to the draft and the criminalization of marijuana. The party itself was founded in 1972, in reaction to President Nixon’s imposition of wage and price controls (Hart 1984: 58).

The Libertarians have run presidential candidates every year since 1972, reaching a high of 920,859 votes in 1980 and generally getting between 200,000 and 400,000 in each election since then (Gillespie 1993: 177–78). Libertarian nominee Harry P. Browne got 485,120 votes in 1996 (Winger 1997a: 11). The party has ballot status in fifteen states; prior to the 1996 election it held about one hundred local offices. Its seventeen candidates for the U.S. Senate in 1996 received 370,757 votes; for the House of Representatives, 155 candidates received 600,949 votes. Official Libertarian registra-
tion was 162,545 as of the November 1996 election (Winger 1997c: 3, "1996 Election Results").

Of all the minor parties, the Libertarians place the most emphasis on contesting elections. The party recruits candidates very actively; in those states where the party has ballot status, it seeks to run a candidate for every office, preferring to nominate an inactive or ineffective campaigner rather than letting a seat go uncontested. In at least one case it recruited two candidates for the same office, so that it could hold a Libertarian primary.

According to Terry Savage, a California Libertarian who has been a candidate and a party leader, the party is divided into “purists,” who believe that “all that is necessary is to remain consistent and wait for the rest of the population to catch on,” and “pragmatists,” who want to win elections (1997: 142). Savage, a pragmatist, believes that his faction is gaining ascendancy within the party and that “a new strategy is emerging” as a result. That may be so; however, a contrary tendency can be seen in the election results. The Libertarian vote seems to be finding its level at no more than 3 to 4 percent. If the party does not soon make a strategic breakthrough of the type envisioned by Savage, it is likely to sink into irrelevancy as a continuing doctrinal party.

The Greens

After the Libertarians, the Greens have had the most consistent record of local partisan electoral activity of any of the new minor parties. They began to run candidates for U.S. House and Senate in 1992, ran a highly visible candidate for governor of New Mexico in 1994, and nominated Ralph Nader as their first presidential candidate in 1996. Nader appeared on the ballot in twenty-one states, and qualified as a write-in candidate in twenty-three more (Feinstein 1997); he received 682,252 votes. In 1996, four Greens ran for the U.S. Senate, receiving 76,977 votes; nine Green candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives received 38,585 votes. Nationwide Green registration is 112,199 (Winger 1997a).

However, the Greens’ strategy emphasizes more local races. In the words of Michael Feinstein (1997), who won election in 1996 to the Santa Monica City Council:

In contrast to most third party efforts that focus almost exclusively on state and/or national office (efforts that usually result in disappointing results that condemn third parties to perpetual marginality), the Greens pursued a more bottom-up, transformative strategy: first, build a foundation through local electoral work, growing out of community-based, issue-oriented activism. Second,
contest only selected state and national offices, preferably where the party already has a base of support.

The Greens ran candidates for at least twenty-three state and thirty-three municipal offices in 1996. Ten of the latter were elected, bringing the number of Green elected officials to thirty-six. The Greens also won majority control of the city council in Arcata, California. Green Keiko Bonk gave up her seat on the Hawaii County Council to run for county mayor; she came in second of three major candidates, with 33 percent of the vote (Ghent 1997; Hawkins 1997: 21).

The Nader campaign brought new visibility to the Greens, even though Nader himself never joined the Green movement and did not campaign very actively. However, this heightened visibility also increased the Greens' internal organizational strains. The party I have been calling "Greens" presently exists in the form of a number of local and state chapters grouped into two overlapping but competing national networks: The Greens/Green Party USA (G/GPUSA) and the Association of State Greens Parties (ASGP). ASGP was formed immediately after the November 1996 election by a group of Greens who were unhappy with G/GPUSA's refusal (since reversed) to recognize state electoral parties (locals affiliated with the national organization directly, not through state bodies). For the next several weeks members of each organization accused the other of attempting to monopolize any public financing for which Nader might qualify (a possibility that failed to materialize).

The formal differences between the two Green organizations concern party structure. The ASGP has an organization that parallels election laws; states are the fundamental building blocks of the party, and membership is ideally, where state laws permit, based on voter registration as a party member. The G/GPUSA, on the other hand, allows both locals and individuals to affiliate directly with the national organization, and it bases membership on the payment of dues. The two sides' views on structure are loosely (but only loosely) related to differences in political outlook. Adherents of the G/GPUSA are more likely to be "Left Greens," who believe that nothing short of a fundamental transformation of the economic system to some sort of ecological socialism will suffice to save human civilization and who tend to give higher priority to direct action than to electoral politics. ASGP stalwarts, on the other hand, place more emphasis on building a party that can win elections and using elective office to reform the system in a Green direction. This difference in outlook is important, but it is amorphous at the same time. ASGP members do not agree that they are primarily interested in elections, and the supporters of the G/GPUSA insist that their organization is the best framework for Greens of any persuasion to work in.

Running Ralph Nader for president was primarily a project of those who
later formed the ASGP. Nader was first nominated by the Green Party of California. The nomination was later confirmed by the annual Green Gathering of the G/GPUSA, which included a “nominating convention.” However, some G/GPUSA activists felt that their hands had been forced by the Green Party of California’s unilateral action. Tensions were heightened by Nader’s dismissal of gay liberation as “gonadal politics” in a campaign interview and by his refusal to accept or spend campaign funds.

Many bitter words have been said and written about the division; nevertheless, most Greens appear to deplore the divisiveness, and a drive for a Green unity is now under way. As of early 1998, several state and local Green organizations have decided to join both G/GPUSA and the ASGP; others refused to join either, while a few took sides by joining one but not the other.

The Natural Law Party

The Natural Law Party (NLP) describes itself as offering “proven new solutions for conflict-free politics and prevention-oriented government” (Natural Law Party 1994). For the 1992 election the party published a twenty-four-page platform with positions on the economy, health, education, and sixteen other issues. However, the essence of the NLP’s program is found in the platform’s introduction, “Natural Law and National Law”:

As modern science has probed more deeply into the laws of nature, it has discovered that the myriad of physical laws governing the universe have their ultimate origin in a deeper, simpler set of laws—in a universal field of nature’s intelligence at the basis of all forms and phenomena in the universe. The knowledge of these fundamental laws—the laws governing the dynamics of this universal field—is now available through both modern science and ancient Vedic science as brought to light by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi....

Stress obstructs the natural connection between individual behavior and the deepest level of natural law which resides within everyone. It is therefore vital for the success of democracy that technologies for reducing stress are promoted. Fortunately, extensive scientific research has shown that collective practice of one such stress-reducing technology—the Transcendental Meditation and TM-Sidhi program—by a small percentage of a population is enough to prevent the build-up of stress throughout society as a whole. Repeated, published studies have found that even the square root of one percent of a population practicing this program significantly reduces crime, accident rates, and other indicators of societal stress, and increases positive trends throughout the whole population. This phenomenon is known in the scientific literature as the Maharishi Effect....

Thus the first thing the Natural Law Party will do once elected is create a single group of 7,000 experts in Washington (approximately the square root
of one percent of the world’s population) to re-enliven natural law in national consciousness and to create a life-supporting, harmonious atmosphere in which our government can more effectively govern the nation. (Natural Law Party 1992: 4)

The NLP-USA was founded in 1992; sister parties exist in Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, and other countries. As the passage quoted here suggests, it is very closely related to the transcendental meditation movement. Its two-time presidential candidate, John Hagelin, was director of the movement’s think tank, the Institute of Science, Technology, and Public Policy, which is located in Fairfield, Iowa, along with Maharishi International University. Mike Tompkins, the party’s vice-presidential candidate in 1992 and 1996, was associate director of the same institute.

In earlier work (Berg 1996), I classified the NLP as a financial opportunist party—that is, an organization that was not fundamentally a political party but that took part in elections to get campaign funds from the Federal Election Commission (FEC). Candidates can qualify for such funds by raising a minimum amount of money in each of at least twenty states. This requirement is not very difficult for organizations that are already established in that many states and whose members are intensely committed. The Natural Law Party is so established because of its close links with the transcendental meditation movement; thus, in 1996 the party’s presidential candidate, John Hagelin, received $504,826 in “primary season” funds (Winger 1997b: 6). In this respect the NLP’s practice is similar to that of the various parties affiliated with Lyndon LaRouche, prior to his imprisonment, and of the New Alliance Party prior to its decision to have its members join the Reform Party in early 1996.

However, I now think that I was wrong to exclude the NLP from study because of this classification. For one thing, it is perfectly possible for a religious party to be serious about politics; the existence of Christian Democratic parties throughout Europe and Latin America, the Bharatiya Janata Party in India, or the former Sokka Gakkai in Japan, among many others, makes that point clear. Moreover, to focus on party leaders’ motivations misses the point; whatever those motivations might be, the NLP is getting votes and affecting the outcome of elections.

Hagelin received 110,194 votes for president in 1996. The NLP’s twenty candidates for U.S. Senate received 207,738 votes. Its 164 candidates for the House of Representatives received 557,682. None were elected, and only four received at least 5 percent of the vote, one in Hawaii and three in Ohio. One of the latter, James M. Cahaney, finished second to Democrat James A. Traficant, Jr., in a two-way race, 91 percent to 9 percent. Six NLP House candidates got more votes than the margin between the winner and the runner-up and so potentially changed the outcome of the election. The party
The New Party

The New Party is closely affiliated with the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), a nationwide network of multiracial community activist groups from which it draws many of its members and staff. It has also been relatively successful in recruiting left intellectuals and has some support within organized labor. Along with the Labor Party, the New Party is less hostile to the Democrats than are the other minor parties on the Left; at times its leaders seem to see their future more as a leftward influence on the Democrats than as an independent political force. In keeping with such an orientation, the New Party in the past gave a high priority to legalizing what they call “fusion” — that is the right of candidates to be nominated by more than one party—in every state. They pursued this goal both legally and legislatively and succeeded in bringing a case to the Supreme Court; however, the Court ruled against them by a 6–3 vote (Cantor 1997).

The New Party has focused on local elections, many of them nonpartisan, and on endorsement of candidates running as Democrats. For this reason, many of the electoral successes of its members were not obtained under the New Party label. This is true, for example, of its most prominent victory, the 1996 election of Danny Davis to the U.S. House of Representatives from Chicago. Davis, who is a member of the New Party, is also a registered Democrat; he ran in and won a Democratic primary and was elected subsequently. The New Party was certainly important in providing campaign workers and other support for Davis’s primary victory, but it cannot be concluded that those who voted for him were supporting the party.

Nevertheless, the New Party’s successes in very local elections are laying a basis for future growth. It has strong city council representation in Little Rock and Pine Bluffs, Arkansas; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and Missoula, Montana (where it held the majority until losing a seat in 1997).

Some of the New Party’s local success comes from its ability to recruit candidates who are already strong. In Boston, for example, the NP approached Frank Jones, an African-American progressive who had come close to winning an at-large city council seat in 1995. He agreed to join the NP and accept its endorsement in the 1997 election (which he failed to win). As with Danny Davis, a vote for Jones cannot necessarily be seen as a vote for the New Party; but to the extent that the party is its candidates, the NP is well positioned for future growth. In a few more years it will be able to offer...
candidates for state legislatures and Congress who have already won elected office.

The National Slate of Independent Progressive Candidates

The Independent Progressive Politics Network (IPPN) was founded at the National Independent Politics Summit in Atlanta on April 14, 1996, as a coalition of several small electorally oriented parties and other organizations on the Left. Most of the groups involved had also attended a prior summit, held in Pittsburgh in August 1995. The earlier meeting had concluded that conditions were not in place for launching a new organization at that time, but the group had adopted several collective projects, meant to improve communications and build mutual confidence among the member organizations. Those organizations favor the eventual establishment of a broad left-wing electoral party but believe that there is not yet sufficient trust between the organizations and potential constituencies of such a party for organizational unity to be appropriate. Those projects were continued by the 1996 meeting, which also elected a twenty-five-member National Steering Committee (with five seats to be filled by co-optation), and adopted “Principles of Unity” and an organizational structure (which consists of the National Steering Committee and an annual National Summit/Conference). The May 1997 summit in Decatur, Illinois, established the IPPN as a membership organization and continued its ongoing projects.

The IPPN is a real coalition, but it is probably fair to say that has been more closely linked to the National Committee for Independent Political Action (NCIPA) than to its other member organizations. NCIPA initiated the summit that led to the founding of the IPPN, and its staff director (who is the only staff member for much of the time) also serves as the coordinator of the network. NCIPA’s centrality to the IPPN is due partly to its initiating role and partly to its not being a party itself, and so not in direct competition for members or votes with the Greens, the New Party, the Labor Party, the Socialist Party USA, the Peace and Freedom Party, or the Campaign for a New Tomorrow.

This is not to say that the other member organizations are not supportive of the IPPN. For example, the G/GPUSA devoted much of the winter 1997 issue of its magazine, Synthesis/Regeneration, to a symposium on the IPPN and its major components. However, it is probably true (or was until very recently) that the IPPN would not be able to sustain itself without the organizational work of NCIPA and particularly of its director, Ted Glick. Certain elements of NCIPA’s orientation, such as its positive identification with the left tradition in the United States and its conviction that combating racism is absolutely central to building a left party, are not fully shared by some of
the other members of IPPN. Unity has been maintained because NCIPA has been fairly scrupulous about not confusing its own positions with those of the network. During the summer of 1997, NCIPA began an internal discussion about whether to continue a separate existence or merge into IPPN.

The common projects adopted by the 1996 summit are described here. The first two were terminated upon completion, but the IPPN National Steering Committee has decided to continue the second two through 1997 (Glick 1997: 3).

1. The Independent Presidential Candidate Task Force attempted to coordinate efforts with the Draft Nader campaign. However, the summit did not endorse Nader (or any other candidate), largely because of "reservations based upon Nader’s lack of a consistent history in dealing with issues particular to communities of color, as well as his unwillingness to speak to those issues right now, today, 1996." The Task Force continued to experience difficulty in working with the Nader campaign.

2. The Caravan/March for Social Justice, a cross-country series of demonstrations, was initiated by Native American activists and endorsed by the summit. The Caravan/March "began on the Pine Ridge Lakota Sioux Indian reservation on May 13th, traveled to several Indian communities throughout South Dakota and ended with a rally at the State Capitol in Pierre demanding action on a series of unsolved attacks and murders of Indian people." It then resumed in San Diego and crossed the country, culminating with a rally on Wall Street on October 29, 1996.

3. The National People’s Pledge Campaign is an attempt to collect signatures on a pledge to join a new left party (with a platform meeting guidelines contained in the pledge) as soon as one million people have signed.

4. Finally, the summit decided to organize a National Slate of Independent Progressive Candidates. The first National Slate was organized in 1996; a second slate was announced for 1997. Candidates join the slate by agreeing to a thirteen-point “Candidate’s Covenant,” whereby, among other things, they “affirm that I am an independent candidate or a candidate of an independent progressive party” (cross-endorsement by the Democratic, Republican, or Reform Parties is allowed as long as the candidate’s “primary organizational commitment and accountability is to an independent progressive party”) and “affirm my agreement with the basic principles, though not necessarily every detail, of the Common Platform.” The Common Platform is a compendium of progressive proposals on economic issues, health care, ecology, human rights, antiracism (including affirmative ac-
tion), feminism, and antimilitarism. Candidates joined the Slate as individuals; they included candidates of the Greens, the Peace and Freedom Party, the Socialist Party, the D.C. Statehood Party, the Vermont Liberty Union, the Oregon Pacific Party, the New Jersey Independents, and others.⁸

The slate ultimately included sixty-five candidates from eighteen states. Five of them won, all for local office; most received less than 5 percent of the vote. The quality of the candidates on the slate varied a great deal. Some ran highly polished campaigns, while others distributed crudely duplicated flyers marked by bad grammar. The IPPN considered this first effort a success. The slate will be repeated in 1997, with more effort put into candidate training (Glick 1997: 2).

The Labor Party

The Labor Party must be mentioned as potentially the most significant new party of all, provided that its leaders attain their goal of uniting the labor movement in a union-based electoral party. The Labor Party’s predecessor, Labor Party Advocates (LPA), was founded by Tony Mazzochi of the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers (OCAW). The OCAW voted in 1981 “to support and participate with other unions in developing a new political strategy for labor in the 1980s that will not rely on the Republican or Democratic Party for success” (quoted in Mazzochi 1983: 39), and LPA was launched soon thereafter. LPA did not consider itself a party and did not run candidates for office; rather, it worked to collect signed pledges from union members that they would join a labor party once one hundred thousand signatures have been gained.

Although the hundred thousand signature goal was never achieved, the “Founding Convention of the Labor Party of the United States” was held in Cleveland on June 6–9, 1996. The convention call was issued by four international unions: the OCAW; the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers Union; the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees; and the International Longshoremen’s and Warehousemen’s Union—and by “hundreds of AFL-CIO local unions, district councils, lodges and regional bodies” (LPA convention call flyer, undated). The California Nurses Association also sponsored the convention. The convention decided not to run or endorse any candidates for the next four years, primarily in order to avoid an antagonistic split with those unions that were committed to the reelection of President Clinton.

Mazzochi is said to believe that winning local offices would be a strategic mistake, because the winners would be forced to take the blame for fiscal
austerity imposed by the national government (Seymour 1992). From his early statements, at least, Mazzochi seems more interested in pushing the Democrats to the left than in actually changing the American party system. He wrote:

The current American political system, unlike the European parliamentary system, seems to have no room for third parties. But it is also important to remember that both Henry and George Wallace had a powerful impact on the national debate through their third-party efforts. And in Milton Friedman's view, the New Deal was stolen right from the 1928 Socialist party platform. (1983: 40)

If the large labor unions of the United States were to commit themselves to a new political party, that party would immediately have much greater significance than any of those discussed here. However, such a commitment would be a very radical break with the traditions of the mainstream of the labor movement. Given the AFL-CIO's heavy efforts on behalf of the Democrats in 1996, this possibility seems distant at best.

Conclusion

This is not the first upsurge in minor party activity in the United States. Periods of major party realignment have been periods of minor party growth as well. The rise of the Republicans to major party status was predated by the Liberty and Free Soil Parties, the realignment of 1896 by the People's Party, and the New Deal realignment by flurries of activity from the Progressive and Farmer-Labor Parties. In the past, a new two-party system has been consolidated, and minor parties have dwindled back into obscurity. There is another possibility, however. Those seeking change in the political system could focus on changing the election laws in ways that would encourage development of a multiparty system—for instance, by the adoption of proportional representation in legislative elections. Unless such changes are won, the new principled minor parties of today are likely to become the continuing doctrinal parties of tomorrow.

Notes

1. Several states allow independent candidates to designate a party label to appear on the ballot, whether or not such a party exists; consequently, it is not always clear from the election results which candidates are independent and which are from minor parties.
2. David Gillespie defines a third type, the "non-national significant other" (Gillespie 1993: 10-12). This category is valid but not relevant to the point under discussion.
3. Some of the data in this and the following sections come from a mail survey of 1996
minor party candidates, conducted during the spring and summer of 1997. The responses received were insufficient to allow quantitative analysis, but candidates were also asked to enclose personal statements and samples of their campaign literature; these have been used as appropriate.

4. Because of ballot restrictions, Greens in Oregon ran on the Pacific Party label; Maine Green John Rensenbrink and Rhode Island Green Graham Schwass appeared on the ballot as independents.

5. As of September 1997, the New Party was considering a change of its name to Progressive America.

6. Some of the Greens who later founded the ASGP have played leading roles in a rival unity effort, a series of conferences called “Third Parties ’95” and “Third Parties ’96.” Unlike the IPPN, these have also tried to include the Libertarians, what is now the Reform Party, and other groups outside the Left. This was partly for the purpose of debate and discussion and partly an attempt to unite around issues of ballot access and election law reform.

7. All quotations in this and the following paragraphs on the IPPN are from the IPPN’s eight page tabloid, “Independent Progressive Politics Network: Founded in Atlanta, Ga. April 14th, 1996.”

8. Independent Politics News; (Summer 1997).
Strategically Unambitious: 
Minor Party and Independent Candidates 
in the 1996 Congressional Elections 

Christian Collet and Martin P. Wattenberg

Although 1996 will be remembered as a year of affirmation for Bill Clinton and rejection for Bob Dole, it was also a year of continuation and credibility for America’s “other” political parties and candidates. Ross Perot’s performance and influence declined from 1992, but he nonetheless made history by being the first alternative presidential candidate in ninety years to receive at least 3 percent of the vote in consecutive elections, and the first ever to twice exceed 5 percent. Harry Browne, the Libertarian nominee, qualified for the ballot in all fifty states, marking the second consecutive election that the Libertarian Party candidate has done so. The Green Party, though less successful, was able to attract a standard bearer of national stature in consumer advocate Ralph Nader. The unique national convention of Perot’s Reform Party received gavel-to-gavel coverage on CNN and C-SPAN. Although alternative candidates were excluded from the presidential debates—causing considerable public and editorial dissent—Perot, Browne, Nader, and candidates from the U.S. Taxpayers and Natural Law Parties were given the opportunity to debate in forums broadcast nationally on CNN’s Larry King Live. These are all small accomplishments, perhaps, but to use a Persian proverb, in the ant’s house, the dew is a flood.

Below the presidential level, minor parties and independents continued to build on their breakthrough year of 1992. In terms of candidacies, 1996 was one of the most significant elections in the twentieth century for minor parties—close to six hundred ran for both houses of Congress. This figure was nearly three times as many as in the watershed 1968 election and roughly twice as many as in 1980. All told, two-thirds of the districts featured at least one alternative candidate. And minor party politics were no longer confined to the traditionally maverick West and Northeast. Midwestern states such as Kansas, Missouri, and Ohio showed considerable growth
in the number of candidates running, as did Mississippi and North Carolina in the South. In Tennessee, twenty-seven independent candidates ran in the state’s nine congressional districts. With the trend toward major party competitiveness continuing into 1996 (Republicans won 49.0 percent of the national vote compared with 48.7 percent for the Democrats), the increased presence of minor parties and independent candidates is taking on greater significance. The fraction of votes that they attract can no longer be ignored; in an increasing number of districts, minor party and independent candidates have the potential to impact the outcome of the race.

This chapter poses two major questions: what drives minor party and independent candidate emergence in House elections, and what influences the share of the vote received by these candidates? Although these questions have been addressed on the presidential level (Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus 1996; Gold 1995; Asher 1995; Abramson et al. 1995), rarely have they been addressed below it. In fact, very little is known about the district-level conditions associated with minor party candidate emergence or under what circumstances people support them at the polls.

In this chapter, we address these two questions as they pertain to the 1996 elections. First, we examine recent trends in minor party and independent candidacies, noting a considerable rise since 1968. We then review the relevant literature and develop two models that seek to explain both the incidence of and vote for minor party and independent candidates in 1996. Following this, we test the models using aggregate, district-level data. We find that the most important predictors of a minor party candidacy are (1) whether minor parties have run candidates in past elections in that district, (2) the presence of an incumbent running for reelection, and (3) the closeness of competition between the major parties. In the vote model, we find that the structure of the ballot fund-raising and the minor party vote for president are among the most significant variables.

Our most surprising finding is that ballot access laws explain very little of the variance in either the number of minor party candidacies or the vote for them. These results suggest that activists—as well as scholars—are overstating the importance of ballot access as the key to minor party and independent candidate success and also understating basic factors associated with quality candidacies, such as fund-raising.

Recent Emergence of Alternative House Candidates

Elections to the U.S. House of Representatives have been characterized in recent years by the greater involvement of minor party and independent candidates. Figure 14.1 displays the percentage of House districts with at least one alternative candidate over the last eight presidential elections. In
Figure 14.1 Percentage of U.S. House Districts with One or More Minor Party/Independent Candidate, 1968-1996

Sources: America Votes and Congressional Quarterly.
1968, a year of tumult and strife in the party system, less than a third of all congressional districts had at least one minor party or independent candidate involved in the House race. This increased somewhat after Watergate; in 1976, nearly half of all districts had one or more such alternatives. With the national emergence of the Libertarian Party and the inspiration from John Anderson’s National Unity Campaign, this percentage stayed above 40 percent in 1980. But after steady declines in the subsequent two elections, the percentage exploded in the 1990s, reaching 68 percent in 1996. Thus, more than twice as many districts had minor party or independent candidate involvement in 1996 as compared with 1968.

The 1996 elections were also notable for the depth of minor party and independent involvement. All together, there were 134 House races with one minor candidate, 100 with two, and a remarkable 53 races featuring three or more such contestants. No election in recent times has seen such pluralism and variety. In many ways, it is this depth that has come to distinguish the 1990s from previous eras of vigorous minor party activity.6

Although the congressional field saw more alternative candidates in 1996, their mean vote share was a mere 2.0 percent, excluding seats that were uncontested by the major parties and the two outlying cases—in Vermont and Missouri—where independents candidates won. This was a full 1.0 percent lower than in 1992. However, with tighter competition between the major parties for House seats since 1992, votes for minor parties had the potential to influence more outcomes. Overall, there were twenty House seats in which the combined percentage of the minor vote exceeded the difference between the major party candidates—almost exactly the number of seats that separate the major parties in the 105th Congress.6

Thus, given their growing presence and increasing relevance, we believe it is important to assess the conditions under which minor party and independent candidates emerge in congressional elections. Furthermore, we seek to learn about why voters support them. We take a step in this essay toward answering both questions by reviewing the relevant literature and developing some testable hypotheses.

What Motivates Alternative Candidates to Run?

To address the question of “Why do minor parties and independents run for Congress?” one must first ask “Why does anyone run for Congress?” The scholarly response to this complex question has fused sociology, psychology, and economics, blending candidates’ personal attributes and experience with career ambition, and goals and external influences impacting their political environment. Or, to build on a notion of Barber’s (1965), the decision to run can be thought of as three basic questions that the candidate
asks: (1) Do I want it? (ambition and goals), (2) Can I do it? (experience and resources), and (3) Do they want me? (political environment).

In recent years, rational actor models have attempted to capture Barber's three questions in a single "calculus of candidacy." As originally formulated by Black (1972), this approach posits that candidates, like Downsian voters, calculate the costs (C) and benefits (B) of running, as well as the probability of winning (P) before mounting their bids for office. The rational office seeker will then run, if (PB) > C or if the utility of holding the office is greater than any alternative. A candidate is considered to be "strategic" if he or she uses this type of calculation and runs when the greatest opportunity to win clearly exists (Jacobson and Kernell 1983).

In this calculus, politicians consider a variety of costs. According to Black, one of the most important factors is the candidate's immediate political environment, or the electoral context, as Fowler and McClure (1989), Kazee (1994), and others have put it. Context encompasses many district-level factors, including the demographic makeup of the electorate and the relevant groups and coalitions that are apt to be involved in the campaign. However, given the strong correlation between incumbency and electoral success, perhaps the most significant concern is whether an incumbent is seeking reelection. The prototypical strategic politician is leery of running against an incumbent because he or she knows that the chance of winning is usually rather small. Furthermore, incumbents who have amassed records of lopsided electoral victories are particularly menacing to the strategic politician and usually frighten off all but the lesser quality challengers (Krasno and Green 1988). As such, the ambitious politician is more likely to run when the opportunity is ripe, usually when an open seat becomes available.

Another very relevant factor is the recent performance, or competitiveness, of the candidate's party in the district. "Have the voters of this district supported other candidates like me?" Ambitious candidates want to know whether the district has a history of voting for their party's presidential candidate and how previous party nominees have fared in the office they are seeking. If the potential candidate's party has an established presence in the district and has tended to fare well, he or she will be more likely to run (Jacobson and Kernell 1983).

State election laws and regulations are additional contextual concerns. When considering the literal costs of running, the strategic candidate accounts for the expenses of filing for office and gaining access to the ballot. State ballot access laws can vary widely in restrictiveness (Winger 1995) and can have considerable impact on a potential candidacy. Ansolabehere and Gerber (1996) have found that as filing fees and petition requirements increase, major party candidates are deterred from contesting office.

As the literature has developed, strategic politicians have come to be thought of as politically experienced candidates affiliated with the major par-
ties. But, as Canon (1993) has aptly demonstrated, even some major party “amateurs” behave strategically. Canon draws an important distinction between amateurs who are “ambitious” and those who are “hopeless” or “experience-seeking.” The former have some political resources and are more likely to run for open seats or when an incumbent is vulnerable; the latter lack experience as well as resources and run for the sheer thrill of it, or for the “private consumption value” (Canon 1993: 1130).

An overwhelming number of minor party and independent candidates—particularly at the subpresidential level—would presumably fit in this latter category. As Collet (1997) has found, such contestants run to promote their ideology, advertise their party, or express discontent with the major parties. Therefore, we are inclined to expect that minor party and independent candidates will show little evidence of strategic behavior. Because their interest is more expressive than ambitious, minor and independent candidates should be less discriminating about the districts in which they run, emerging regardless of competitiveness or whether an incumbent is present.

Although the political environment might be of less concern, we would expect ballot access laws to be quite important in discouraging minor party candidacies. For such candidates, access laws are potentially deterrents of great consequence, because these contestants often lack the financial and organizational resources to overcome them. In addition, such laws are regularly even more complex for minor and independent candidates because of the fact that they have often been consciously established to maintain the hegemony of the major parties (Champagne 1987; Lewis-Beck and Squire 1995; Winger 1995; Smith 1991). As Flood and Mayer write, “the first obstacle confronting third-party challengers—and the place where third-party candidates usually begin their preelection planning—is coming to grips with the imposing array of rules and procedures enacted by state governments to regulate ballot access” (1996: 285). Thus, we would expect ballot access laws to be a very important consideration in the emergence of minor party candidates.

We would also expect some demographic characteristics to be important. High levels of education, for example, have been linked to alternative activists (Partin et al. 1996; Guth and Green 1996; Elden and Schweitzer 1971) as well as candidates (Collet 1997). Thus, we might expect alternative candidates to emerge in districts where the general educational attainment is high. And, as Kim and Ohn (1992) find, the regional cleavages in a society can be significant in determining the growth and persistence of minor parties. Given the American experience with minor parties, we would expect certain regions to have more such candidates than others.

**Why Do Voters Support Minor Parties in House Elections?**

What factors account for why voters support minor party and independent candidates? In their work on presidential elections, Rosenstone and his
colleagues (1996) follow congressional voting literature and argue that much depends on the quality of the candidate. “The relative success of a third party depends in part on who heads its ticket,” they write. “Support is highest when a prestigious or nationally prestigious politician runs” (Rosenstone et al. 1996: 188). Prestigious politicians are obviously well known, well connected, and more likely to be deemed credible by the press. Perhaps more important, it is these qualities that will give them access to money and perpetuate the money-media-momentum cycle that will improve their chances. As Dwyre and Kolodny (1997) and many others have noted, minor party and independent challengers have considerable obstacles to overcome as it is. Financial resources are crucial for helping candidates overcome these barriers. Therefore, we would expect minor party candidate expenditures to be closely related to their electoral performance.

Contextual factors also impact congressional outcomes. Incumbency, prior involvement of a party, the number of candidates running, the performance of the party’s presidential candidate, as well as region and demography are typically associated with the vote. In particular, the closeness of the election can be significant for alternative party candidates. In the literature dealing with strategic voting, it has been found that many voters will eschew alternative candidates (even if they are the most preferred) because they realize that their vote will be “wasted” on someone who is likely to lose (Duverger 1963; Cain 1978; Abramson et al. 1995). As a race becomes more competitive, voters may consider their vote more valuable and be less inclined to “waste” it. Consequently, we would expect voting for minor party candidates should be higher as the vote difference between the major parties increases.

Ballot access may also play a role in minor and independent candidate performance in House elections. Winger (1997) has linked the incidence of minor party victories with the ballot access laws in each state. “[M]inor parties win elections in states with favorable election laws,” he argues, “and . . . they don’t win elections in states with unfavorable laws” (1997: 159). The suggestion here is that minor parties would do better if ballot access were more lenient. As such, we would expect candidates to get a higher percentage of the vote in districts where ballot access requirements are less restrictive.

Ballot structure and voting procedures also are commonly thought to impact the vote. Winger again writes that “the tendency of voters to be more generous with their votes for minor party candidates . . . is dampened” in states that have straight-ticket ballot options (1997: 166). In other words, if voters have a structural opportunity to cast a straight party vote—through the use of a “party lever” or similar mechanism—then they would be less likely to vote independently or for a minor party. Consequently, we would expect voting for minor candidates to be reduced in states that have the straight-party option.
Data Sources

To test our theoretical expectations, we compiled an original data set that included every U.S. House election in 1992, 1994, and 1996. Along with standard vote totals, which were furnished by Congressional Quarterly and its Almanac, we also included district-level demographic data listed in The Almanac of American Politics 1998 (Barone and Ujifusa 1997), expenditure data from Federal Election Commission reports (http://www.tray.com/fec-web/states.htm), and ballot access data from Voter Choice '96: A 50-State Report Card on the Presidential Elections (Rosenkranz 1996). We also used State Party Profiles (Appleton and Ward 1997) for information on which state ballots offer the straight-party ticket option. The appendix to this chapter provides a complete explanation of the variables, their sources, and the coding.

Explaining Candidate Emergence

Our analysis begins by looking at some descriptive data concerning the incidence of minor party and independent candidates in 1996 House elections. Table 14.1 shows the mean number of candidates per district cross-tabulated by a variety of independent variables, including region, social characteristics, ballot access, incumbency, and the electoral history of the district dating back to 1992. Districts in the western and northeastern states had more alternative candidates than those in other parts of the United States in 1996. Education also appears to be an important factor, with districts that have a high proportion of college-educated individuals attracting a higher number of alternative candidates. On the other hand, minor party candidates tend to be more commonly found in districts that have a minority majority, which typically have the lowest mean levels of education.

Turning to political variables, we find solid evidence that minor party candidacies are not idiosyncratic onetime efforts in hopeless races. Margin of victory in the preceding election (in this case, 1994) seems to be meaningful, indicating that minor party candidates are not found primarily in hopeless races but instead more often in close races in which their impact might be greatest. Similarly, alternative candidates were more likely to run in open seats than in districts in which incumbents were running. These races are typically the most hotly contested by the major parties. Lastly, the prior incidence of minor party involvement in the district is noteworthy. Seats that saw alternative candidates in the 1992 and 1994 elections had an average of roughly two candidates in the 1996 campaign. Thus, many of these minor candidacies involved either the same people running again or candidates following in the footsteps of members of their party who had run before.
Table 14.1 Mean Number of Minor Party/Independent Candidates in House Districts in 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Mean Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Region:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;35% college educated</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35%-50%</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;50%</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ballot access grade (score):</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A (83-100)</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B (73-82)</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C (60-72)</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D (50-59)</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F (0-49)</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnic racial composition:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority-majority district</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not minority-majority</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1992 House victory margin:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;10%</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10%-20%</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;20%</td>
<td>1.3</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1994 House victory margin:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>&lt;10%</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10%-20%</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;20%</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1996 seat status:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open seat</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent-held</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of minor/independent candidates in 1992:</strong></td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No minor candidate</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continues)
The most surprising finding in Table 14.1 is that ballot access laws show very little relationship to the number of alternative candidates running in the district. Regardless of whether the state was considered to be an "A" in ballot accessibility or an "F," the average number of candidates per district was the same (1.4). In fact, the highest mean number of candidates was found in districts whose states were considered to be only average ("C" grade) in ballot access. This, of course, does not mean that ballot access laws are not obstacles for minor party candidates to overcome. But it does indicate that they are an impediment unrelated to the number of alternative candidates that eventually appears on the ballot.

When we examine these variables in two regression equations (Table 14.2), we find that the results largely support our descriptive analysis. In the first model, we include basic information on the makeup of the districts. We include dummy variables for region (South and West), minority-majority districts, whether the district was an open seat, as well as interval-level variables for ballot access and education. We find open seats to be the most significant variable in this equation, followed by education and ethnic majoritarianism. Our dummy variable accounting for Southern districts was also significant—in the negative direction. Western districts and ballot access show no significant relationship to the number of minor party candidates. Perhaps most important, the entire model explains only 7 percent of the variance, thereby indicating that basic features of districts are not good predictors of where minor party candidates will emerge.

However, when we include variables for closeness or past races and the previous number of minor candidates running in the district, we more than quadruple the explained variance ($R^2 = .32$) in the regression equation. A comparison of the two equations therefore indicates that it is the past political history of a district far more than the basic characteristics that explains the number of minor party candidates for the House in 1996. In the second equation, open seats is again significant at the $p < .01$ level, but it is eclipsed by the number of minor candidates running in 1992 and 1994. The variable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Mean Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of minor/independent candidates in 1994:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No minor candidate</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Congressional districts left uncontested by one of the major parties in 1996 were excluded.

Sources: Congressional Quarterly; 1998 Almanac of American Politics; Rosenkranz (1996).
Table 14.2 Regressional Equations Predicting the Number of Minor Party/Independent Candidates in House Districts in 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Equation 1</th>
<th></th>
<th>Equation 2</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( b )</td>
<td>Standard Error</td>
<td>( b )</td>
<td>Standard Error</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>-.313*</td>
<td>.137</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>.124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>.208</td>
<td>.160</td>
<td>.329*</td>
<td>.139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage college educated</td>
<td>1.557*</td>
<td>.631</td>
<td>-.183</td>
<td>.570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballot access</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority-majority</td>
<td>.364*</td>
<td>.182</td>
<td>.142</td>
<td>.174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open seat in '96</td>
<td>.523**</td>
<td>.177</td>
<td>.504**</td>
<td>.155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closeness of 1992 race</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closeness of 1994 race</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>-.009*</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of 1992 minor candidates</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.278***</td>
<td>.043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of 1994 minor candidates</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.464***</td>
<td>.070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.275</td>
<td>.428</td>
<td>.739</td>
<td>.380</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( R = .28 \) \quad \text{Adj. } R^2 = .07 \quad \text{R} = .58 \quad \text{Adj. } R^2 = .32

\(^* p < .05. \quad ^{**} p < .01. \quad ^{***} p < .001. \)

\textit{Note}: Congressional districts left uncontested by one of the major parties in 1996 were excluded. \( N = 390 \) for both equations.

for the West becomes more significant, while variables for the South and education become less so. The closeness of the immediately preceding 1994 election is significant, but closeness in 1992 is not. As in the first equation, ballot access was insignificant.

Explaining the 1996 Vote for Minor House Candidates

Turning to an examination of the vote share received by minor party candidates, Table 14.3 follows the descriptive pattern of Table 14.1, focusing on the mean vote percentage. As in Table 14.1, we include only districts that were contested by both major parties, but in this case we include only districts where at least one minor candidate was on the ballot in 1996. Also, the two districts where independents actually won are excluded because they are extreme outlying cases.

Table 14.3 demonstrates a number of similarities to what we found for the emergence of minor party candidates: voting for minor party and independent candidates tends to be higher in the Northeast and West and lowest in the South. Minor candidate voting is higher in districts in which the percentage of college-educated adults is above 50 percent. And ballot access laws show very little relationship with vote share for minor party candidates.

Looking at the variables we have added specifically for an analysis of voting, the mean vote tends to be somewhat higher in seats with incumbents and those for which the race is less competitive (victory margin greater than 20 percent). As with major party candidates, alternative candidates who are able to raise and spend money improve their electoral performance dramatically. In seats for which minor candidates spend nothing, their average 1996 performance was 3.0 percent; this improves to 5.5 percent when a candidate spends $10,000 or more. Another important variable is the vote in the district for minor/independent presidential candidates. Minor candidates for the House received nearly 4 percent of the vote in districts in which national minor candidates collected over 12 percent. In contrast, they garnered an average of only 2.2 percent in districts in which the minor presidential vote fell below 8 percent.

Finally, we find that instead of ballot access, it is ballot structure that makes a difference in the vote received by minor parties and independents running for the House. The average minor party share of the vote in districts without the straight-ticket option is double the average vote share in districts with this ballot option. This finding indicates that rather than worrying about ballot access laws, supporters of minor political parties could profit from the abolition of ballot formats that facilitate voting straight down the line for one of the established major parties.

Our regression model predicting the minor party and independent vote
Table 14.3 Mean Combined Percentage of the Vote Received by Minor Party Candidates in House Districts in 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Mean Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Region:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;35% college educated</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35%-50%</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;50%</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballot access grade (score):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A (83-100)</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B (73-82)</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C (60-72)</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D (50-59)</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F (0-49)</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic racial composition:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority-majority district</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not minority-majority</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996 House victory margin:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;10%</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10%-20%</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;20%</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996 seat status:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open seat</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent held</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballot type:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straight-ticket option</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No straight-ticket option</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor party expenditures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1 to $10,000</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;$10,000</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continues)
Table 14.3 (continued)

| Number of minor/independent candidates in 1996: |  
| 1 | 2.5%  
| 2 | 3.6  
| 3 | 4.3  

Vote for minor/independent presidential candidates in 1996

| <8% | 2.2% |
| 8%-12% | 3.4 |
| >12% | 3.7 |

Note: Districts where no minor party candidates were on the ballot were excluded from the analysis. The two districts where independent candidates won House seats (Missouri’s eighth and Vermont) were excluded because they are statistical outliers.

Sources: Congressional Quarterly, 1998 Almanac of American Politics; Rosenkranz (1996); Appleton and Ward (1997); Federal Election Commission reports.

yields solid results (Table 14.4), predicting 50 percent of the variance. The West, presidential minor party vote, straight-party ticket option, and expenditures all reach significance at $p < .001$. Another significant variable, as we might expect, is the number of minor and independent candidates running in the district; for every candidate running, the total minor party vote per district increases by more than a quarter percent. Once again, we find ballot access to be an insignificant factor. Similarly, the closeness of the election (which, as one recalls, was significant at $p < .001$ in the second candidacy equation) points unexpectedly in the positive direction and is not significant. Variables representing education, open seat, majority minority, and the South are in their predicted directions, although none attain significance at the $p < .05$ level.

Discussion

The findings in this chapter challenge some conventional notions about minor party and independent candidacy and voting at the U.S. House level. Although previous research has found minor party and independent candidates to be amateurish in their campaign practice (Collet 1997), the results of this analysis show that they are nonetheless strategic in their campaign planning. To some extent, this challenges Canon’s (1993) findings. Minor party and independent candidates tend to run for open seats and in more competitive districts. More often, they run in districts where other minor candidates—quite possibly themselves—have established a presence in recent elections. Similar to high-quality and “ambitious amateurs,” they tend
Table 14.4 Regression Equation Predicting the Combined Percentage of the Minor Party/Independent Vote in House Districts in 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>-.119</td>
<td>.241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>1.275***</td>
<td>.246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage college educated</td>
<td>1.628*</td>
<td>1.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballot access</td>
<td>-.007</td>
<td>.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority-majority</td>
<td>.197</td>
<td>.337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closeness of 1996 House race</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open seat</td>
<td>.236</td>
<td>.253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of 1996 minor party candidates</td>
<td>.274**</td>
<td>.089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straight-party ticket option</td>
<td>-.972***</td>
<td>.219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage for 1996 minor party presidential candidates</td>
<td>.274***</td>
<td>.089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money spent by House minor candidates</td>
<td>.017***</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.668</td>
<td>1.036</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ R = .72 \quad \text{Adj. } R^2 = .50 \]

\*p < .05
\**p < .01
\***p < .001

Note: \( N = 280 \). Districts where no minor party candidates were on the ballot were excluded from the analysis. The two districts where independent candidates won House seats (Missouri’s eighth and Vermont) were excluded because they are statistical outliers.

Sources: Congressional Quarterly, 1998 Almanac of American Politics; Rosenkranz (1996); Appleton and Ward (1996); Federal Election Commission reports.
to run when the conditions are ripe for maximizing chances for electoral success. This finding suggests that, regardless of party, resources, or even the possibility of winning, candidates for Congress make strategic choices about whether to run in a given year so as to maximize their performance.

It is ironic, then, that minor candidates should perform better, on the average, in seats that are less competitive and where incumbents are present, as illustrated in Table 14.3. Furthermore, in the multivariate analysis, we find that it is actually the alternative presidential vote that is crucial in predicting the vote at the district level. Thus, there may be an alternative coattails effect: a Perot or Browne who does well at the national level may inspire voters to cast ballots for other alternative candidates down the ticket. However, there is no evidence presented here that is party-specific—that Perot or Browne voters, for example, are more likely to vote for Reform or Libertarian congressional candidates. All we find is a relationship between a district’s support for alternative presidential candidates and its support for alternative congressional candidates. How the two are linked is a question for future research.

Our finding that ballot access laws make little difference is perhaps the most striking. Contrary to Winger’s contention that “the more favorable the state law toward minor parties, the greater the likelihood of minor party success” (1997: 169), we find no significant relationship between ballot access and both of our dependent variables. This is particularly noteworthy with regard to candidate emergence, which should theoretically be where ballot access laws have their greatest impact. Regardless of whether the district was in a state with lenient or stringent laws governing ballot access, minor party candidates emerged all the same. In so-called lenient states such as Colorado and Arkansas, there are few candidates; conversely, Alaska, California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Indiana Maine, and New York remain hotbeds for alternative candidates in spite of their restrictive laws. Such a finding challenges any notion that the simple removal or lowering of ballot access hurdles will result in an eruption of alternative party and candidate activity. At best, lenient ballot access laws allow minor and independent candidates to preserve their limited resources for other activities.

Beyond barriers to the ballot, however, we find that the structure of the ballot makes a difference. Voters unconstrained by straight-party ballot mechanisms will more often vote for alternative candidates. In addition, resources are also crucial factors. Minor candidates with financial and organizational means, and the willingness to exercise them, do better at the polls. As Rosenstone et al. (1996) note about the Perot campaign in 1992, resources, combined with ripe conditions for major party defection, can separate a respectable minor party performance from a meaningful one.

Although we have shown that minor party candidates often resemble major party candidates in terms of strategic behavior, they are clearly differ-
ent with regard to the *substance* of their ambition. Unlike the classic Schlesingerian (Schlesinger 1968) politician, around which so much of candidacy theory has been based, few alternative candidates have illusions about winning office and carving paths to illustrious political careers. Instead, most are running to articulate their ideologies, advertise their parties, and express their discontent with the Republicans and Democrats. One might call them "strategically unambitious," as they may lack the burning desire for political careers but nonetheless plan their candidacies with at least some strategic consideration of the political context.

As long as they continue to possess very limited resources, minor party and independent candidates will continue to do best in races where they do not make a difference. Overcoming this wasted-vote paradox, attracting quality candidates for timely races, and developing an organizational apparatus to assist them will continue to be major challenges facing alternative parties and candidates as they look beyond 1996.

As the party system evolves beyond the 1996 elections, however, we can think of minor party candidates as reflective of both continued disaffection and slowly developing change. When record numbers of minor candidates run for Congress in an election filled by neither burning issues nor economic stagnation, one has to wonder about the long-term stability of the contemporary system and the appeal of alternatives to it. The fact that minor party candidates have appeared in particular regions of the country consistently throughout the 1990s indicates that they are already institutionalized in many places. In California, for example, fifty of the fifty-two congressional districts had minor parties contesting for the House of Representatives in 1996. California voters have come to expect at least three choices for most offices, and it is commonplace for minor party candidates to receive at least 5 percent of the vote. In the twenty-first century, it is quite possible that this will be the case throughout most of the country.

### Notes

1. It should be noted that throughout this chapter, we use the term *alternative* as a synonym for "minor party and independent." The widely used "third party" becomes an anachronism—not to mention confusing—in an era in which there is more than one alternative to the Republicans and Democrats.

2. Eugene V. Debs, representing the Socialist Party, received less than 1 percent in the 1900 election, 3 percent in both the 1904 and 1908 elections, 6 percent in 1912, and, while serving a prison sentence, 3 percent in 1920. Perot received 19 percent in 1992 and 8 percent four years later.

3. In a poll taken by *Newsweek* on September 19–20, 1996, 57 percent said that they disapproved of the Debate Commission's decision to exclude Perot. Dissent with the decision also came from editorial and opinion writers affiliated with the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Boston Globe*, *Chicago Sun-Times*, and *San Francisco Chronicle*, as well as a number
of smaller papers. Read the *Portsmouth Herald*, "This exclusionary practice will serve only to deepen the lack of trust and feelings of political impotence far too many of our citizens already feel" ("Editorial" 1996).

4. This is not to say that minor party candidates and voting at the subpresidential level have been entirely ignored. See, for example, Gargan (1975), Magleby and Monson (1995), Reiter and Walsh (1995), Collet (1997), as well as work relating minor parties to realignment by Key (1964), Burnham (1970), and Freie (1982).

5. For more on this notion, see Collet (1997).

6. As of this writing, the composition of the House was 227 Republicans, 206 Democrats and 1 Independent (with one vacancy). Including the Independent, Bernard Sanders of Vermont, who effectively votes with them most of the time, this would leave the Democrats exactly twenty seats short of a majority.

7. The variable that we used to determine state ballot access was the overall score given to that state in the *Voter Choice '96* study. The overall scores ranged from 0 to 100 and were based on three raw scores given to each state based on their major party primary access, independent candidate access to the general election ballot, and party access to the general election ballot. These raw scores were based on a variety of measures, including, but not limited to, filing fees, signature requirements, deadlines, vote and registration requirements, and challenges and technicalities imposed by state law. For detailed information, see Rosenkranz (1996: 192-205 and his Figures I1.1-I1.4).

8. In the *Voter Choice* study, Colorado received an overall grade of A+; Arkansas, a grade of A. By contrast, Connecticut received a C+, California a C, Maine a C-, Indiana a D+. New York and Alaska received D's, respectively, and Hawaii earned an F.

9. As Rosenkranz writes, "Ballot rules siphon mounds of money out of campaign coffers. Then, in many states, candidates spend another bundle defending the petitions against legal challenges—sometimes litigating minutiae as trivial as the ink color or the validity of a signature that substitutes ‘Wm.’ for ‘William’ or ‘Jim’ for ‘James.’ Thus, candidates spend precious campaign resources simply getting into the race rather than reserving their resources to spread their message" (1996: 12).

10. In districts in which the minor party vote for candidates other than Perot was below 1.5 percent, the *Almanac* did not report these votes. We therefore estimated this portion of the district vote based on the statewide percentage for these candidates. This was done in roughly 60 percent of the districts.

11. See note 6.
### Appendix. Variables and Coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of 1992 minor candidates</td>
<td>Number of minor party and independent candidates running in the district in the 1992 general election. Taken from election returns reported in <em>Congressional Quarterly</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of 1994 minor candidates</td>
<td>Number of minor party and independent candidates running in the district in the 1994 general election. Taken from election returns reported in <em>Congressional Quarterly</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of 1996 minor candidates</td>
<td>Number of minor party and independent candidates running in the district in the 1996 general election. Taken from election returns reported in <em>Congressional Quarterly</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage college educated</td>
<td>Percentage of the total population over twenty-five years of age that have attended, but not necessarily completed, any level of college according to the 1990 U.S. Census. Taken from <em>The Almanac of American Politics 1998</em> (Barone and Ujifusa 1997).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of minor party House vote</td>
<td>Percentage of the total vote given to all candidates other than Republican or Democratic in the 1996 House general election. Taken from election returns reported in <em>Congressional Quarterly</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage for 1996 minor party presidential candidates</td>
<td>Percentage of the total vote for all presidential candidates other than the Republican and Democratic nominees in the 1996 general election. Adapted from data reported in <em>The Almanac of American Politics 1998</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballot access</td>
<td>The overall state ballot access score for a given district, according to <em>Voter Choice '96</em> (Rosenkranz 1996).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closeness of 1992 race</td>
<td>Difference between the percentage of vote for the winning candidate and the percentage of vote for the second-place candidate in the 1992 general elections. Calculated from election returns reported in <em>Congressional Quarterly</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closeness of 1996 race</td>
<td>Difference between the percentage of vote for the winning candidate and the percentage of vote for the second place candidate in the 1996 general elections. Calculated from election returns reported in <em>Congressional Quarterly</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority majority</td>
<td>According the 1990 U.S. Census, the total percentage of the district population that is nonwhite. Adapted from data reported in <em>The Almanac of American Politics</em> 1998. (<em>0 = majority of population is white; 1 = majority of population is nonwhite.</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money spent by House minor party candidates</td>
<td>The total amount of money spent by minor party candidates in a given House district in 1996, according to Federal Election Commission reports. Taken from <a href="http://www.tray.com/fecweb/states.htm">http://www.tray.com/fecweb/states.htm</a>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open seat in 1996</td>
<td>Whether an incumbent was running in the 1996 general election in the district. Calculated from election returns reported in <em>Congressional Quarterly</em> (<em>0 = incumbent ran; 1 = open seat</em>).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>Whether the district is in the South: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, or West Virginia (<em>0 = nonsouthern district; 1 = southern district</em>).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straight-ticket party option</td>
<td>Whether the district was in a state whose ballot structure allows voters a straight-party ticket option. Taken from Appleton and Ward (1997: 374-75) (<em>0 = no straight ticket option; 1 = straight ticket option</em>).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>Whether the district is in the West: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Nevada, Montana, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, or Wyoming (<em>0 = nonwestern district; 1 = western district</em>).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parliamentary Government in the United States?

Gerald M. Pomper

In 1996, the important political decision for American political warriors was not the contest between Bill Clinton and Robert Dole. "For virtually all of the powerful groups behind the Republican Party their overriding goal of keeping control of the House stemmed from their view that that was where the real political power—near- and long-term—lay." Moreover, "Sitting in his office on the sixth floor of the AFL-CIO building on 16th Street, political director Steve Rosenthal said that labor, too, saw the House elections as the most important of 1996—more important than the contest for the Presidency" (Drew 1997: 2, 72).

These informed activists alert us to a major shift in the character of American politics. To baldly summarize my argument, I suggest that the United States is moving toward a system of parliamentary government, a fundamental change in our constitutional regime. This change is not a total revolution in our institutions, and it will remain incomplete, given the drag of historical tradition. Nevertheless, this trend can be seen if we look beyond the formal definition of parliamentary governments, the union of legislature and executive.

The parliamentary model is evident in both empirical and normative political science. Anthony Downs begins his classic work by defining a political party virtually as a parliamentary coalition, "a team of men seeking to control the governing apparatus by gaining office in a duly constituted election" (Downs 1957: 25). Normatively, for decades, some political scientists have sought to create a "responsible party system" (American Political Science Association Committee on Political Parties 1950), resembling such parliamentary features as binding party programs and legislative cohesion.

Significant developments toward parliamentary government can be seen in contemporary American politics. The evidence of these trends cannot be found in the formal institutions of the written (capital C) Constitution. Institutional stability, however, may disguise basic change. For example, in formal terms, the president is not chosen until the electoral college meets in
December, although we know the outcome within hours of the closing of the polls in early November.

Let us go beyond "literary theory" and compare the present reality of U.S. politics with more general characteristics attributed to parliamentary systems. In the ideal parliamentary model, elections are contests between competitive parties presenting alternative programs, under leaders chosen from and by the parties' legislators or activists. Electoral success is interpreted as a popular mandate in support of these platforms. Using their parliamentary powers, the leaders then enforce party discipline to implement the promised programs.

The United States increasingly evidences these characteristics of parliamentary government. This fundamental change is due to the development of stronger political parties. In particular, I will try to demonstrate transformations of American politics evident in the following six characteristics of the parties:

- The parties present meaningful programs;
- They bridge the institutional separations of national government;
- They reasonably fulfill their promises;
- They act cohesively under strong legislative leadership;
- They have assumed a major role in campaigning; and
- They provide the recruitment base for presidential candidates.

**Party Programs**

A parliamentary system provides the opportunity to enact party programs. By contrast, in the American system, observers often have doubted that there were party programs, and the multiple checks and balances of American government have made it difficult to enact any coherent policies. For evidence, I examine the major party platforms of 1992–1996, the 1994 Republican Contract with America, and the 1996 Democratic Families First Agenda.

In previous research (Pomper and Lederman 1980: chapters 7 and 8), we argued that party platforms were meaningful statements and that they were good forecasts of government policy. We found, contrary to cynical belief, that platforms were composed of far more than hot air and empty promises. Rather, a majority of the platforms were relevant defenses and criticisms of the parties' past records and reasonably specific promises of future actions. Moreover, the parties delivered: close to 70 percent of their many specific pledges were actually fulfilled to some degree.

Furthermore, parties have differed in their programs. Examining party manifestos in the major industrial democracies over forty years, 1948–1988,
Budge concludes, “American Democrats and Republicans . . . consistently differentiate themselves from each other on such matters as support for welfare, government intervention, foreign aid, and defense, individual initiative and freedom. . . . Indeed, they remain as far apart as many European parties on these points, and more so than many” (1993: 696f.).

In recent years, we might expect platforms to be less important. National conventions have become television exercises rather than occasions for party decision making. The expansion of interest groups has made it more difficult to accomplish policy intentions. Candidate-centered campaigning reduces the incentives to achieve collective, party goals and appears to focus more on individual characteristics than on policy issues.

The party platforms of 1992 provide a test. An independent replication confirms our previous research on platform content. Perhaps surprisingly, this new work indicates that the most recent platforms, like those of previous years, provide significant political and policy statements. These manifestos meet one of the tests of a parliamentary system: meaningful party programs.

The 1992 platforms\(^2\) can be divided into three categories: puff pieces of rhetoric and fact, approvals of one’s own party policy record and candidates or disapproval of the opposition, and pledges for future action. The pledges, in turn, can be categorized as being simply rhetorical or general promises or more useful statements of future intentions, such as promises to continue existing policies, expressions of party goals, pledges of action, or quite detailed promises.\(^3\)

As seen in Figure 15.1, there is much in the platforms induces yawns and cynicism. The Democrats were fond of such rhetorical statements as “It is time to listen to the grassroots of America.” (Actually a difficult task, since most plants are speechless.) The Republicans were prone to vague self-congratulation, as when they boasted, “Republicans recognize the importance of having fathers and mothers in the home.” (Possibly even more so if these parents are unemployed, not distracted by jobs?)

Nevertheless, these documents—while hardly models of rational discussion—did provide useful guides to party positions. When the Democrats criticized “the Bush administration’s efforts to bankrupt the public school system . . . through private school vouchers,” and when the Republicans declared that “American families must be given choice in education,” there was an implicit policy debate. Comparison was also facilitated by the similar distributions of platform statements across policy areas. Each party tended to devote about as much attention to particular or related policy areas as its opposition. The only important difference is that Democrats gave far more attention to issues involving women and abortion. Overall, about half of the platforms were potentially useful to the voters in locating the parties on a policy continuum.\(^4\)

The 1994 Contract with America was even more specific. It consisted
entirely of promises for the future, potentially focusing attention on public policy. Moreover, the large majority of its fifty-five sentences were reasonably specific promises. Pledges of definite action comprised 42 percent of the total document, and detailed pledges another 27 percent, while less than 4 percent consisted of only vague rhetoric. From the promise of a balanced budget amendment to advocacy of term limits, the Republicans foreshadowed major innovations in American institutions and law. This high degree of specificity can facilitate party accountability to the electorate.

**Party as Programmatic Bridge**

The great obstacle to party responsibility in the United States has always been the separation of national institutions, the constitutional division between the executive and legislative branches. Party has sometimes been praised as a bridge across this separation (Ford 1914), and party reformers have often sought to build stronger institutional ties, even seeking radical constitutional revision to further the goal (Ranney 1954). Despite these
hopes and plans, however, the separation has remained. Presidential parties make promises, but Congress has no institutional responsibility to act on these pledges.

In a parliamentary system, the most current research argues—contrary to Downs—"that office is used as a basis for attaining policy goals, rather than that policy is subordinated to office" (Budge and Kerman 1990: 31, chapter 2). In the United States as well, party program rather than institutional discipline may provide the bridge between the legislature and its executive. In previous years, however, we lacked a ready means to compare presidential and congressional programs. Now we have authoritative statements from both institutionalized wings of the parties. The Republican Contract with America marks a major first step toward coherent, interinstitutional programs.

The 1994 contract was far more than a campaign gimmick or an aberrational invention of Newt Gingrich. It was actually a terse condensation of continuing Republican Party doctrine, as can be seen in the left-hand columns of Table 15.1, a comparison of its specific pledges with the 1992 and 1996 Republican platforms. A majority of these promises had already been anticipated in 1992 and the party endorsed five-sixths of its provisions in 1996.

For example, the 1992 national platform criticized the Democratic Congress for its refusal "to give the President a line-item veto to curb their self-serving porkbarrel projects" and promised adoption of the procedure in a Republican Congress. The 1994 contract repeated the pledge of a "line-item veto to restore fiscal responsibility to an out-of-control Congress," while the 1996 platform reiterated, "A Republican president will fight wasteful spend-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 15.1 Inclusion of Congressional Pledges in National Party Platforms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Republic &quot;Contract&quot; Party Platform of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took credit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future promise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No mention</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: N = 42 for "Contract;" N = 90 for "Agenda." Percentages appear in parentheses.*
ing with the line-item veto which was finally enacted by congressional Republicans this year over bitter Democrat opposition. Republicans built on traditional party doctrine, specified the current party program, and then affirmed accountability for their actions. Building on this achievement in party building, and their claims of legislative “success,” the Republicans have already promised to present a new contract for the elections at the turn of the century.

The Democrats imitatively developed a congressional program, the Families First Agenda, for the 1996 election. Intended primarily as a campaign document by the minority party, it is less specific than the Republican contract. Still, 90 of its 204 statements were reasonably precise promises. The legislative Democrats also showed significant and increasing agreement with their presidential wing and platform. By 1996, as detailed in the right-hand columns of Table 15.1, three-fourths of the congressional agenda was also incorporated into the Clinton program, and the official platform specifically praised the congressional program. The agenda’s three sections—“security,” “opportunity,” and “responsibility”—paralleled those of the national platform (which added “freedom,” “peace,” and “community”—values presumably shared by congressional Democrats), and many provisions are replicated from one document to another.

The Republican contract with America and the Democratic Families First agenda, then, can be seen as emblems of party responsibility and likely precedents for further development toward parliamentary practice in American politics. Party doctrine has become a bridge across the separation of institutions.

**Program Fulfillment**

Both Democrats and Republicans, as they held power, followed through on their election promises, as expected in a parliamentary model. Despite the clumsiness of the Clinton administration, and despite the Democrats’ loss of their long-term control of Congress in their catastrophic election defeat in 1994, they actually fulfilled most of the 167 reasonably specific pledges in their 1992 manifesto (see Figure 15.2).

A few examples illustrate the point. The Democrats promised negative action, in opposing major change in the Clean Air Act—and they stood fast. In their 1993 economic program, the Democrats won action similar to their platform pledge to “make the rich pay their fair share in taxes.” Through executive action, the Clinton administration redeemed its promise to reduce U.S. military forces in Europe. The Democrats achieved full action on their promise of “A reasonable waiting period to permit background checks for purchases of handguns.”
Figure 15.2 Fulfillment of 1992 Democratic Platform Pledges

Percentage of 167 More Specific Pledges

- 19 /No action
- 11 /Defeated
- 9 /Negative action
- 13 /Full action
- 8 /Executive action
- 40 /Similar action
To be sure, the Democrats have not become latter-day George Washingtons, unable to tell an untruth. There clearly has been no action on the pledge to “limit overall campaign spending and ... the disproportionate and excessive role of PACs.” In other cases, the Democrats did try but were defeated, most notably in their promise of “reform of the health-care system to control costs and make health care affordable.” (It is obviously too early to judge fulfillment of 1996 Democratic pledges, made in either the presidential platform or the congressional party Families First Agenda.)

Most impressive are not the failures but the achievements, illustrated in Figure 15.2. Altogether, Democrats did accomplish something on nearly 70 percent of their 1992 promises, in contrast to inaction on only 19 percent. In a completely independent analysis, another researcher came to remarkably similar conclusions, calculating Clinton’s fulfillment of his campaign promises at the same level, 69 percent (Shaw 1996). I do not believe this record is the result of the virtues of the Democratic Party, which I use for this analysis simply because it controlled the government, nor can this record be explained by Bill Clinton’s personal qualities of steadfast commitment to principle. The explanation is that we now have a system in which parties, whatever their names or leaders, make and keep promises.

This conclusion is strengthened if we examine the Republicans. While the GOP of course did not hold the presidency, it did win control of Congress in 1994. In keeping with the model of parliamentary government, Republicans interpreted their impressive victory as an endorsement of the Contract with America, and then they attempted to implement the program. We must remember that the 1994 election cannot be seen as a popular mandate for the Republican manifesto: two-thirds of the public had not even heard of it in November, and only 19 percent expressed support. The contract expressed party ideology, not voter demands.

Despite its extravagant tone and ideological character, the Republicans delivered on their contract, just as Democrats fulfilled much of their 1992 platform (see Figure 15.3). Of the more specific pledges, 69 percent were accomplished in large measure (coincidentally, perhaps, the same success rate as the Democrats'). Even if we include the rhetorical and unspecific sentences in our test, as in Figure 15.3, more than one-half of this party program was accomplished.

Despite the heroics of vetoes and government shutdown, despite bicameralism and the vaunted autonomy of the Senate, and despite popular disapproval, the reality is that most of the Contract with America was implemented. The Republicans accomplished virtually all that they promised in regard to congressional reform, unfunded mandates and welfare, as well as substantial elements of their program in regard to crime, child support, defense, and the social security earnings limit. Defeated on major economic issues, they later achieved many of these goals, including a balanced budget.
Figure 15.3 Fulfillment of "Contract" Pledges

Percentage of 55 Total Pledges

5 /No action
29 /Full action
18 /Defeated
24 /Rhetoric, General

24 /Similar action
agreement in place of a constitutional amendment, a children’s tax credit, and a reduction in capital gains taxes. On these questions, as indeed on the general range of American government, they won the greatest victory of all: they set the agenda for the United States, and the Democratic president eventually followed their lead. Such initiative is what we would expect in a parliamentary system.

Congressional performance on the Contract with America also carries significant implications for the theory of political parties. Monroe and Bernardoni (1995) test its implementation against two party concepts: responsible parties and a Downsian spatial model. Overall, the implementation of the contract lends support to a different “cleavage” model developed by Page (1978), in which the parties “offer ideologically distinct positions ... on those issues which have historically divided the parties and are related to support from voting blocs and interest groups” (Monroe and Bernardoni 1995: 2). This model fits well with that developed through the Manifestos Research Project, comparing party programs across Western democracies. In this model, “what parties offer electors thus seems to be a choice between selective policy agendas, not between specific alternative policies addressed to items on a universal agenda” (Klingermann, Hofferbert, and Budge 1994: 25).

**Party Cohesion**

Program fulfillment results from party unity. The overall trend in Congress, as expected in a parliamentary system, is toward more party differentiation. One indicator is the proportion of legislative votes in which a majority of one party is opposed to a majority of the other (i.e., “party unity” votes). Not too long ago, in 1969, such party conflict was evident on only about one-third of all roll calls. By 1995, nearly three-fourths of House votes and over two-thirds of Senate roll calls showed these clear party differences.

Figure 15.4 shows another trend—the increasing commitment of representatives and senators to their parties. The average legislator showed party loyalty (expressed as a “party unity score”) of less than 60 percent in 1970. In 1996, the degree of loyalty had climbed to 80 percent for Democrats and to an astounding 87 percent for Republicans. Cohesion was still greater on the thirty-three House roll calls in 1995 on final passage of items in the Contract with America. Republicans were unanimous on sixteen of these votes, and the median number of Republican dissents was but one. Neither the British House of Commons nor the erstwhile Supreme Soviet could rival this record of party unity.

The congressional parties now are ideologically cohesive bodies, even with the occasional but significant split among Democrats on such issues as
Figure 15.4 Partisan Unity in Congress

The graph shows the average party unity score for Republicans and Democrats over the years from 1970 to 1996. The score is measured on the y-axis, with 100 being the highest score. The x-axis represents the year of the congressional session.
trade and welfare reform. We need to revise our political language to take account of this ideological cohesion. There are no more “Dixiecrats” or southern conservative Democrats, and therefore there is no meaningful “conservative coalition” in Congress. Supportive evidence is found in the same roll call data: the average southern Democrat supported his or her party 71 percent of the time in 1996, and barely over a tenth of the roll calls found Dixie legislators in opposition to their own party and in alliance with a majority of Republicans. It also seems likely that “liberal Republican” will soon be an oxymoron restricted to that patronized minority holding a pro-choice attitude on abortion, confined to the back of the platform or, so to speak, to the back of the party bus.

Republicans have been acting like a parliamentary party beyond their ideological unity on a party program. The “central leaders efforts during the Contract period were attempts to impose a form of party government,” which succeeded in winning cooperation from committee chairman and changed roll call behavior as “many Republicans modified their previous preferences in order to accommodate their party colleagues” (Owens 1997: 259, 265). Beyond programmatic goals, the Republicans have created strong party institutions in Congress, building on previous Democratic reforms (Rohde 1991).

Even after the Contract with America is completely passed or forgotten, these institutions will likely remain. In their first days in power, as they organized the House, the Republicans centralized power in the hands of the Speaker, abolished institutionalized caucuses of constituency interests, distributed chairmanships on the basis of loyalty to the party program and in disregard of seniority, and changed the ratios of party memberships on committees to foster passage of the party program. Instruments of discipline have become more prevalent and more exercised, including caucus resolutions, committee assignments, aid in securing campaign contributions, and disposition of individual members’ bills.

The building of parliamentary party institutions continues. Some of the structural changes in the House have now been adopted by both the Senate and the Democrats, perhaps most significantly the rotation of committee chairmanships, curbing the antiparty influence of seniority. The Republicans have insisted that committees report party bills, even when opposed by the chair, as in the cases of term limits and telecommunications. The party record became the major issue in the 1996 congressional elections, with party leaders Newt Gingrich and Richard Armey doing their best to aid loyalists—but only loyalists—through fund-raising and strong-armin of ideological allies among political action committees.

The party differences and cohesion in Congress partially reflect the enhanced power of legislative leaders. The more fundamental reason for congressional party unity—as in parliamentary systems—is not discipline as
much as agreement. Party members vote together because they think the same way. Republicans act as conservatives because they are conservatives; Democrats act like liberals or, as they now prefer, progressives because they believe in these programs.

Supportive evidence on the ideological consistency of party elites can be found in studies of other partisans. In research conducted nearly forty years ago, Herbert McClosky and his students (1960: 406–27) demonstrated the large ideological differences among the two major parties' national convention delegates. Continuing party differences are also shown in more recent studies of convention delegates. John Kessel and his students (Bruce, Clark, and Kessel 1991: 1089–1106) have drawn the ideological structures of these party representatives. Though not monolithic, they are sharply distinct between the parties. These divisions persist among broader layers of party activists, such as contributors and campaign workers (Bruzios 1990: 581–601). Similarly, extensive surveys of state party convention delegates show consistent ideological differences, independent of state cultures (Abramowitz, McGlennon, and Rapoport 1986: chapter 3). There is a difference, consistent with the expectations of a parliamentary system.

The most recent nominating conventions provide further support for the ideological cohesion of the national parties. The CBS/New York Times Poll found massive differences between Republican and Democratic delegates on questions involving the scope of government, social issues, and international affairs (see Table 15.2). A majority of these partisans opposed each other on all of ten questions; they were remotely similar on only one issue—international trade—and were in essentially different political worlds (fifty or more percentage points apart) on issues of governmental regulation, the environment, abortion, assault weapons, civil rights, affirmative action, and immigration.

**Party Organization**

Party unity has another source, related to the recruitment of individual candidates with a common ideology. Unity is also fostered by the development of strong national party organizations, precisely measured by the dollars of election finance. Amid all of the proper concern over the problems of campaign contributions and spending, we have neglected the increasing importance of the parties in providing money, "the mother's milk of politics."

There are two large sources of party money: the direct subsidies provided by the federal election law, and the "soft money" contributions provided for the parties' organizational work. Together, even in 1992, these funds totaled $213 million for the major candidates and their parties. Under-
Table 15.2 Percentages for 1996 Convention Delegates’ Issue Attitudes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Democratic Delegates</th>
<th>Democratic Voters</th>
<th>Republican Delegates</th>
<th>Republican Voters</th>
<th>All Voters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scope of government:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government should do more to:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solve the nation’s problems</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulate the environment and safety practices of business</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote traditional values</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social issues:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abortion should be permitted in all cases</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favor a nationwide ban on assault weapons</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Necessary to have laws to protect racial minorities</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirmative action programs should be continued</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized prayer should be permitted in public schools</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>International:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade restrictions necessary to protect domestic industries</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children of illegal immigrants should be allowed to attend public school</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


lining the impact of this party spending, the Republican and Democratic presidential campaigns in 1992 each spent twice as much money as did billionaire Ross Perot, whose candidacy is often seen as demonstrating the decline of the parties.

An enhanced party role was also evident in the other national elections of 1992. Beyond direct contributions and expenditures, the parties developed a variety of ingenious devices, such as bundling, coordinated spending, and agency agreements, to again become significant players in the election finance game. Overall, in 1992, the six national party committees spent $290
million. (For comparison, total spending in all House and Senate races was $678 million.) The party role became even more evident in 1994, with the victory of a Republican majority originally recruited and financed by Newt Gingrich’s GOPAC, a party body disguised as a political action committee.

The party role expanded hugely in 1996, bolstered by the Supreme Court, in its 1996 Colorado decision. The Court approved unlimited “independent” spending by political parties on behalf of its candidates. Moreover, four justices explicitly indicated that they were prepared to approve even direct unlimited expenditures by parties, and three other justices are ready to rule on that issue in a future case.

The parties quickly took advantage of the Court’s opening. Together, Republican and Democratic party groups spent close to a billion dollars, conservatively 35 percent of all election spending, without even counting the $160 million in federal campaign subsidies for the presidential race. Despite the commonplace emphasis on “candidate-centered” campaigns, the parties’ expenditures were greater than that of all individual House and Senate candidates combined. In discussions of election finance, political action committees receive most of the attention, and condemnation, but the reality is that PACs are of decreasing importance. PACs’ money has barely increased since 1988, and they were outspent 2 to 1 by the parties in 1996. The parties now have the muscle to conduct campaigns and present their programs, to act as we would expect of parliamentary contestants.

**Party Leadership**

Parties need leaders as much as money. In parliamentary governments, leaders achieve power through their party activity. That has always been the case even in America when we look at congressional leadership: a long apprenticeship in the House and Senate has usually been required before one achieves the positions of Speaker, majority and minority leader, and whip. A strong indication of the development of parliamentary politics in the United States is the unrecognized trend toward party recruitment for the presidency, the allegedly separated institution.

The conventional wisdom is quite different. Particularly since the “reforms” of the parties beginning with the McGovern-Fraser Commission after 1968, presidential nominations have apparently become contests among self-starting aspirants who succeed by assembling a personal coalition that appeals directly to the voters in a series of uncoordinated state primaries. We have come to assume the disappearance of party influence in presidential nominations.

In reality, however, the parties have become important sources of leadership recruitment. Since 1980, as specified in Table 15.3, we have seen ten
presidential nominations, all of them the choice of an established party leader, even in the face of significant insurgencies. These selections include four renominations of the sitting party leader, with only one facing a strong challenge (Carter in 1980); four selections of the leader of the established dominant faction of the party; and two selections of the leader of a major party faction.

Presidential nominations certainly have changed, but the trend is toward different, rather than less, party influence. Look back at the "traditional" convention system, as analyzed by Paul David and associates (1960). Historically, some presidents retired voluntarily or involuntarily after one term, but every chief executive since 1972 has been renominated, including Gerald Ford, never elected to national office. When nominations have been open, inheritance and factional victory have become the universal paths to success. In contrast, past patterns of inner-group selection or compromise in stalemate have disappeared.\(^4\)

The selection of presidential nominees still evidences influence by leaders of the organized parties or its factions, even if these choices have not been made primarily by the formal party leadership (such as Democratic "superdelegates" and similar Republican officials). These decisions are quite different from the selection of such insurgents as Goldwater in 1964 or McGovern in 1972, the typical illustrations of the asserted decline of party. While insurgents do now have access to the contest for presidential nominations, the reality is that they fail in that contest, as shown by the examples of Democrats Edward Kennedy in 1980, Gary Hart in 1984, and Jesse Jack-

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Table 15.3 Recent Presidential Nominations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>Carter</td>
<td>Renomination of incumbent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>Reagan</td>
<td>Dominant factional victory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>Mondale</td>
<td>Dominant factional victory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>Reagan</td>
<td>Renomination of incumbent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>Dukakis</td>
<td>Factional victory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>Bush</td>
<td>Dominant factional victory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td>Factional victory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>Bush</td>
<td>Renomination of incumbent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td>Renomination of incumbent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>Dole</td>
<td>Dominant factional victory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
son in 1988 and the virtual absence of any Republican insurgents throughout the period until 1992.

The presidential nominations of 1992 and 1996 particularly evidence the party basis of recruitment. There were notable insurgent candidates: Republican Pat Buchanan twice attempted to reincarnate Barry Goldwater, Jerry Brown imitated McGovern, and Paul Tsongas eschewed partisanship. In contrast to earlier years, however, all were soundly defeated by established party figures. George Bush not only was the incumbent leader but also typified the career of a party politician, securing his nomination as the heir of the retiring leader, Ronald Reagan. Robert Dole is the quintessence of a parliamentary party leader, achieving nomination on the basis of his past service as national chairman, vice-presidential candidate, and legislative leader of the Senate and, moreover, against very pallid opposition, including a Buchanan insurgency even weaker than in 1992.

Bill Clinton came to party leadership from the position of governor, reflecting the variety of career opportunities available in a federal system, but Arkansas was hardly a robust power center. Clinton’s real base was the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), which provided much of his program, his source of contacts and finances, and his opportunity for national exposure. The DLC, composed of party officials and officeholders, is an organized party faction (Hale 1994: 249-63). Clinton’s 1992 success is a testament to the influence of that faction, far more than evidence of the decline of party and the substitution of unmediated access to the voters. The absence of any challenge to the president in 1996 underlines the renewed importance of party leadership, despite his political vulnerabilities and intraparty discontent with his turn away from party orthodoxy.

Contrary to the fears of many observers (Polsby 1983), the new presidential nominating system has developed along with new institutions of party cohesion. Front-runners have great advantages in this new system (Mayer 1995: chapter 2), but that means that prominent party figures—rather than obscure dark horses stabled in smoke-filled rooms—are most likely to win nomination. Contrary to fears of a personalistic presidency, the candidates chosen in the postreform period tackle tough issues, support their party’s program, and agree with their congressional party’s leaders on policy positions as much, or even more, than in the past (Patterson and Bice 1997).

Contemporary presidential nominations have become comparable—although not identical—to the choice of leadership in a hypothetical U.S. parliamentary system. Is the selection of Reagan in 1980 that different from the British Tories’ choice of Margaret Thatcher to lead the party’s turn toward ideological free market conservatism? In a parliamentary system, would not Bush and Dole, Reagan’s successors, be the ideal analogues to Britain’s John Major? Is the selection of Mondale as the liberal standard-bearer of the liberal Democratic Party that different from the lineage of left-
wing leaders in the British Labour Party? Is the Democratic turn toward the electoral center with Clinton not analogous to Labour’s replacement of Michael Foot by Neil Kinnock, John Smith, and Tony Blair?

To be sure, American political leadership is still quite open, the parties quite permeable. Presidential nominations do depend greatly on personal coalitions, and popular primaries are the decisive points of decision. Yet it is also true that leadership of the parties is still, and perhaps increasingly, related to prominence within the parties.

**Toward Parliamentary Government?**

Do these changes amount to parliamentary government in the United States? Certainly not in the most basic definitional sense, since we will surely continue to have separated institutions, in which the president is elected differently from the legislature, and the Senate differently from the House. Unlike a formal parliamentary system, the president will hold his office for a fixed term, regardless of the “votes of confidence” he wins or loses in Congress. By using his veto and the bully pulpit of the White House, Bill Clinton has proven that the president is independent and still “relevant.” It is also true that we will never have a system in which a single political party can both promise and deliver a complete and coherent ideological program. As Jones correctly maintains, American government remains a “separated system,” in which “serious and continuous in-party and cross-party coalition building typifies policy making” (1996: 19). These continuing features were strikingly evident in the adoption of welfare reform in the 104th Congress.

But parliaments also evidence coalition building, particularly in multiparty systems. British parliamentarians can be stalemated by factional and party differences on issues such as Northern Ireland just as the Democrats and Republicans were on health care in the 103d Congress. Achieving a consensual policy on the peace process in Israel’s multiparty system is as difficult as achieving a consensual policy on abortion among America’s two parties.

In the 105th Congress, we have already seen more open coalition building. With a close division among the parties in the House, more frequent use of filibusters in the Senate, and the president’s veto threats, the necessities of politics and government have forced compromise, most notably in the budget-balancing agreement. Nevertheless, the party basis of parliamentary government will continue, because the ideological basis of intraparty coherence and interparty difference will continue and even be increased with the ongoing departure of moderate legislators of both parties. The need for strong party institutions in Congress will also be furthered by new policy

Of course, the presidency will remain relevant, yet it may also come to be seen as almost superfluous. A principal argument on behalf of Bob Dole’s candidacy was that he would sign the legislation passed by a Republican Congress—hardly a testament to presidential leadership. President Clinton fostered his reelection by removing himself from partisan leadership, “triangulating” the White House between congressional Democrats and Republicans, and following the model of patriotic chief of state created by George Washington and prescribed in The Federalist: “to guard the community against the effects of faction, precipitancy, or of any impulse unfriendly to the public good” (Madison 1941: 477).

In keeping with this restrictive model, Clinton has become less involved in controversial issues, newly emphasizing the less partisan area of foreign policy, while appealing to consensual attitudes such as “family values” and school achievement. He adopted Republican programs, even changing previous positions on many issues, most prominently the balanced budget and welfare reform. He succeeded in winning reelection, but at the cost of the loss of policy initiative.

Political ambition, immodestly evidenced by President Clinton, Senator Dole, and their peers, is no sin. But the implications of the 1996 election campaign for American government remain important. The presidency is already a diminished office because the end of the Cold War has removed a principal support of its power, the predominance of foreign and defense policy. The limits on federal funds, created by the emphasis on budget balancing and the burden of middle-class entitlements, restrict the energy of the executive. Clinton’s pieties on children and Dole’s condemnation of drugs and pornography evoked no mandate for meaningful policy initiatives.

The absence of presidential initiative is more than a problem of the Clinton administration. Throughout American history, the president has persistently provided the energy of American government, the source of new “regimes” and policy initiatives (Skowronek 1993). Perhaps the lassitude of contemporary politics is only the latest example of the recurrent cycle of presidential initiative, consolidation, and decline. Or, more profoundly, perhaps it marks the decline of the executive office itself as a source of creativity in the government of the United States.

America needs help. It may well be time to end the fruitless quest for a presidential savior and instead turn our attention, and our support, to the continuing and emerging strengths of our political parties. We are developing, almost unnoticed, institutions of semiparliamentary, semiresponsible government. To build a better bridge between the past and the future, perhaps this new form of American government is both inevitable and necessary.
Notes

I gratefully acknowledge the help of Andrea Lubin, who performed the content analyses of party platforms included in this essay.

1. The phrase is from Walter Baghot’s (1928: 1) classic analysis of the realities of British politics.


3. Each sentence, or distinct clause within these sentences, constituted the unit of analysis. Because of its great length, only alternate sentences in the Republican platform were included. No selection bias is evident or, given the repetitive character of the platforms, likely. In total, there are 426 units of analysis in the Democratic platform, 758 in the Republican. For further details on the techniques used, see Pomper and Lederman (1980: 235–48). To avoid contamination or wishful thinking on my part, Lubin did the analysis independently. My later revisions tended to classify the platform sentences as less specific and meaningful than hers, contrary to any optimistic predisposition.

4. The “useful” categories are policy approval and policy criticism, candidate approval and candidate criticism, and future policy promises classified as pledges of continuity, expressions of goals, pledges of action, and detailed pledges.


6. Using the same content categories, Carolyn Shaw (1996), of the University of Texas, lists 150 presidential campaign promises of 1992 in the more specific categories. In regard to fulfillment, she employs the methods of Fishel (1985). With this method, she finds that there was “fully comparable” or “partially comparable” action on 69 percent of Clinton’s proposals. This record is higher than that found by Fishel for any president from Kennedy through Reagan.

7. Even this figure underestimates the impact of the Contract with America. I have counted the failure to pass term limits as a defeat, although the Republicans actually promised no more than a floor vote, and I have not given the party credit for achievements in the following Congress.

8. These data are drawn from *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 54 (December 21, 1996): 3461–67.


12. The parties spent $628 million directly, plus at least $263 million and up to $400 million in soft money. For detailed figures, see *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 55 (April 5, 1997): 767–73.

13. For an excellent discussion of 1996 election spending, see Corrado (1997).

14. The only exception to the trend away from inner party selection or compromise since 1924 is Alf Landon’s designation at the Republican candidate in 1936. The last president “voluntarily” to decline a second term was Lyndon Johnson in 1968.
The elections of 1994 and 1996 reveal a critical destabilization in the political bases of the two major parties in the United States. In a Downsian political world, political parties orient their policy positions toward the center of the ideological spectrum (Downs 1957). When that center point shifts, as it seems to have done to the right in the 1990s, both parties adjust accordingly. This movement can pose problems for specific segments of the parties that had staked out positions near the system’s previous center. This chapter describes two significant party factions caught in the crossroads of party transformation: liberal Republicans (mostly from the Northeast and Midwest) and conservative Democrats (mostly from the South). These groups have formed party caucuses, the Tuesday Group among liberal/moderate Republicans, and the Coalition among moderate/conservative Democrats.

The Logic of Party Factions in the 1990s

Once candidates are elected to a body such as the U.S. Congress, it is natural that they would join forces with other like-minded officeholders to achieve their common goals of reelection, power in the chamber, and good public policy (Fenno 1978; Aldrich 1995). This tendency is the minimal explanation for why officeholders create party organizations in government. But what if the party conference/ caucus cannot help members attain all of their goals, specifically their reelection and policy goals? At this point, officeholders have two options. They may abandon their initial party affiliation and join the other major party if the other party’s actions seem especially well matched to their ideal points (Prinz and Larson 1996). Although such switching does occur, the drawback to this strategy is that party switching due to national-level forces may not be well appreciated at the local level and can cause officeholders to lose their seats. The second option is to join
or create a faction within their party, usually in the form of a caucus organization. Organized factions within parties have tremendous value for members. They allow members to ally with their party if that seems prudent and to oppose their party as part of a bloc when necessary—a strategy that is often preferable to being a lone maverick bucking the party.

Hence, it is logical for moderates both to remain within one of the two major parties and at the same time to join a factional group that allows members to identify their differences with the larger party. But not all moderate factions assume the same stance vis-à-vis their parties. Factors that affect this relationship include whether the faction is in a majority or minority party, the absolute difference between majority and minority status in the major parties, and the salient issue cleavages that distinguish the factions from the major parties. Factions either can protest their marginalization by openly opposing the dominant party, or they can emphasize their commonalities with the dominant party and try to influence its direction.

The Democratic and Republican Parties have long had a variety of factions manifested in voting coalitions (which deviate from the majority of the party) in Congress. Such factions have been discussed by many others looking to explain party unity (or disunity) in congressional voting (Rae 1989; Sinclair 1989; Rohde 1991; Connelley and Pitney 1994; Koopman 1996). When the Democrats enjoyed their substantial majority in Congress from the 1940s to the 1990s, conservative Democratic members were often found defecting from the majority position of their party and voting with Republicans to form majorities on certain issues (Shelley 1983; Sinclair 1989). This “Conservative Coalition” greatly disturbed the majority of liberals in the Democratic Party and led to the reforms in Congress in the 1970s (Rohde 1991). Since these reforms stripped senior conservative Southern Democrats of their institutional power bases, these members were left with important choices to make about their political futures. Some of the more moderate members in this group became part of organizations such as the Democratic Leadership Council, and some made moves toward Republican conversion.

While the Democratic Party was becoming more liberal, the influence of the “New Right” was pulling the Republican Party in a more conservative direction. Though Republicans had always had a more conservative wing from the South and West, that wing was relatively small until the mid-1970s (Rae 1989). As the political fortunes of Ronald Reagan brought activist conservatives into the Republican Party, the liberal wing still held a significant presence. One advantage of the liberal wing was their seniority in Congress and solid reputations, which contrasted with the more activist methods of newer conservatives (Connelly and Pitney 1994; Koopman 1996). Some liberal Republicans became active members in such groups as the Ripon Society, the Wednesday Group, and in the late 1980s, the 92 Group. Virtually no Republican officeholder switched his or her party affiliation to Democrat,
though some became enchanted with the political candidacy of Ross Perot and flirted with forming a third party (e.g., Warren Rudman, Pete DuPont, and Lowell Weicker).

The historic importance of the 104th Congress, which followed the dramatic 1994 election, is just beginning to be understood. Once discussions of a “tsunami” of political attachments and behaviors subsided, sober reflection showed that such a political configuration had been coming. Aside from the evidence that Americans were applying their presidential voting behavior to congressional elections (Jacobson 1996), scholars also had to admit that the Republicans had been accepted by mainstream society as a viable governing party and not simply the permanent minority (Connelly and Pitney 1994). Though the question of Republican acceptability is a complex one, we can see that the popularity of Ross Perot’s candidacy in the presidential election of 1992 allowed a critical view of both parties’ performance, resulting in a more negative assessment of the Democratic Party in Congress relative to the Republican Party.

While there is no disputing that the Republican Party did become more conservative with the 1994 elections, there was no conservative “revolution.” The size of the Republican margin in the House was quite thin, and like it or not, the president was a Democrat—and one who had moved his party toward the right as well. These realities spurred the two groups at the center fringes of each party to mobilize themselves both inside and outside the Congress. The efforts of the moderate/liberal Republican Tuesday Group and the moderate/conservative Democratic Blue Dog Coalition demonstrate a desire on the part of some officeholders to preserve their position in a major party and to secure the support of the median voters whom they believe only they truly represent.

Though both groups’ members are sympathetic to the third-party discussions of several of their former colleagues, they have organized themselves in Congress in an effort to protect their position in the party (and the attendant advantages that brings both inside and outside the legislature—see Aldrich 1995) rather than to abandon the party for a new, untried party. Some Blue Dogs clearly used the Coalition as a signal to the Republican Party and their constituents that a switch to the Republican Party would be in the best interest of all, although only a few actually became Republicans. In contrast, no Tuesday Group members have used their organization as a device to convert to the Democratic Party. One thing that both groups have in common is that they are staking out the moderate position in their parties to force the party leadership to respond to, or at least acknowledge, their concerns.

The Tuesday Group and the Blue Dog Coalition

Both the Tuesday Group and the Blue Dog Coalition are informal caucuses of moderates in the Republican and Democratic Parties in the House
of Representatives, respectively. Both groups meet all the criteria specified by Hammond (1997) as defining a party caucus: they operate outside the formal structures of Congress, are voluntary, have an organizational structure, and have continued for more than one Congress. Hammond lists both the Tuesday Lunch Bunch (Tuesday Group) and the Blue Dog Coalition as intraparty (or just party) caucuses. Intraparty caucuses are normally based on an ideology. Both groups claim moderation as their ideology and stress their goal of creating workable solutions to public policy problems, even if that means compromise with other factions or parties. Finally, Hammond lists three general activities of caucuses: information gathering and exchange, influencing agendas, and other floor-oriented activities (Hammond 1997: 281-88). Each of these functions, as well as campaigning, will be described here in turn.

Information Gathering and Exchange

The Tuesday Group

The initial reason for the creation of the Tuesday Group was for the sharing of information. The group originally met weekly on Tuesdays at noon for lunch. Congressman Steve Gunderson (R-Wisconsin), one of the co-founders of the group, described it this way:

Our Tuesday lunches are very casual, but the attendance is strictly limited. Only members of the lunch bunch are invited, and any given member’s staff people are welcome only if that member is present. Lobbyists, guests, and reporters are not allowed. We do ask various people to come in and speak to us. ... But mainly we talk policy, hashing out our agenda for the week. (Gunderson and Morris 1996: 189)

Throughout the 104th Congress, the group met on the average every week, although many additional meetings were scheduled at times when matters of particular concern to group members were imminent. Each Monday, key staff members of Tuesday Group cochairs met to suggest agenda items for the upcoming meeting. Normally, topics for discussion concerned impending floor business. More frequent meetings coincided with the floor consideration of issues most important to the group such as welfare reform, social spending priorities during the appropriations process, and reconciliation throughout the fall. Occasionally, individuals would be invited to address the group. The most frequent guest was Speaker Newt Gingrich. Other guests included Majority Leader Armey, members of the Blue Dog Coalition, and representatives of various conservative Republican groups.
The Blue Dog Coalition

Like the Tuesday Group, the coalition met weekly to share information, focusing their attention on impending floor activities. Their meeting day of choice was Wednesday; their meal was breakfast. The coalition also allowed members to bring a staff member with them. Occasionally, members considering coalition membership would join the meetings, but they did not tend to have guest speakers as the Tuesday Group did. Although the coalition’s discussions naturally centered on the current floor activities, they were more likely to focus on long-range planning, especially concerning initiatives they might be able to develop to introduce as Blue Dog Coalition bills at some point in the session.

In their statement of purpose, the Blue Dog Coalition says that it “is in a position to define the center of the spectrum in the House of Representatives” rather than the center of the Democratic Party. The purpose of stressing the ideological center of the House is to prevent a forced choice between extreme liberal and conservative perspectives and also to form working relationships with moderate Republicans. Indeed, the Blue Dog Coalition hoped for “the possibility of forming a united, bipartisan group” (Blue Dog Coalition 1996a). However, the idea of working with moderate Republicans may be undermined by the coalition’s assertion that they would avoid taking positions on social issues. The preamble to their articles of organization emphasizes the coalition’s goals of fiscal restraint, small government, and local determinism. The Blue Dog Coalition also embraces a more restrictive view of membership than the Tuesday Group. Members can petition the group for membership, but that petition is subject to a group vote. Once membership is established, the coalition selects a variety of leaders with specific responsibilities: three cochairs, three vicechairs, and a chief whip. The articles of organization also call for weekly group meetings when the House is in session and more frequent meetings of the steering committee (composed of the seven officers). The articles go on to describe procedures for procuring endorsements by the coalition on policy positions and how particular task forces may be formed (Blue Dog Coalition 1996b).

Influencing Agendas

The Tuesday Group

Hammond (1997: 281) states that most caucuses influence agendas by either setting agendas or maintaining agendas. The Tuesday Group, however, because of its size, its situation of being in a new majority, and the zealotry of the majority of their party is most effective at limiting items most objectionable to them. In one sense, the Tuesday Group is maintaining their agenda by asserting that the status quo is preferable to any change in an
undesirable direction. But the Tuesday Group’s mission was not so much to hurt the majority party’s agenda or position but to protect their party from being embroiled in controversial issues that would obscure the core set of issues that united them all. Congressman Gunderson’s insights are again telling:

I insist on calling us “governing Republicans.” It’s the term I like to use rather than “moderate Republicans,” because I think ideological labels are increasingly difficult to define and, I think, increasingly irrelevant... We want to work through government to get something accomplished. We’re not driven by some narrow ideology; we’re not willing, as some are, to throw political hand grenades in order to make an ideological point... We believe in the institution of Congress and believe in two parties working together to fulfill the obligations of a governing Congress. (Gunderson and Morris 1996: 188–89)

Thus, group members pursued activities in reaction to controversial proposals from the majority of the Republican Party, rather than generating new proposals themselves.

The Blue Dog Coalition

Though the coalition has less than half the membership of the Tuesday Group, their formation sent a signal of independence from either party to their fellow members. This allowed them to play a broker role between the two parties, rather than just within the Republican Party. By positioning themselves this way, the coalition hoped to shape public policy by making their support available to both parties (Kahn 1995b), even at the expense of their relationship with the Democratic Party.

Other Legislative Activities

The Tuesday Group

As would any other caucus, the Tuesday Group developed legislation, offered amendments, and mobilized colleagues to achieve their ends. Since the group often focused on preventing items they object to from being considered, blocking tactics were often used. If the group could not convince the leadership to table discussion of a controversial issue, they tried several other strategies such as lobbying the rules committee for a rule to allow them to present alternative amendments, opposing the rule if no concessions were made, supporting the Democrats’ motion to recommit, or opposing final passage of a bill. The Tuesday Group lobbied, and received, a seat at leadership meetings, though the leadership stipulated that the position must rotate among various Tuesday Group members.
The Blue Dog Coalition

While the Tuesday Group focused on blocking tactics, the coalition focused on drafting legislative proposals on several controversial issues in which the parties’ median positions seemed most at odds. Examples include the “takings” bill (private property rights versus environmental concerns), welfare reform, unfunded mandates, the balanced budget amendment, and the budget itself. In addition, the Blue Dog Coalition earned some recognition from the leadership in two ways. First, coalition cofounder Charlie Stenholm (D-Texas) was named to the Leadership Advisory Group formed early in the 104th Congress. Second, Chet Edwards, a moderate Democratic congressman from Texas, was named a chief deputy whip and given the task of reaching out to the coalition and other conservative and moderate Democrats (Kahn 1995b). Third, coalition cofounder Gary Condit was named to the conference committee on unfunded mandates by the Republicans after being snuffed by his own party despite his considerable leadership on the issue (Kahn 1995c).

Issues

The Tuesday Group

The Tuesday Group most often defects from their party on environmental issues, followed by abortion and family planning issues, civil rights/civil liberties matters, and arts policy (Kolodny 1998). Since their party unity scores were relatively high, it is not difficult to pinpoint the source of the defections. However, because the goal of the Tuesday Group is to avoid conflict, the major successes of the Tuesday Group are much harder to measure because the Group prefers not to have divisive votes than to have them. That is, the Tuesday Group has convinced the leadership not to hold votes on some welfare and affirmative action matters under threat of group defection.

The Blue Dog Coalition

In contrast, the coalition prefers to construct their own alternative proposals to legislative problems. Their brokering role was critical to initiatives in several key areas: unfunded mandates, welfare reform, “takings” legislation, product liability, regulatory reform, environmental policy, and budget matters. On several of these matters, specifically the Clean Water Act and “takings” legislation, the Blue Dog Coalition compensated for some of the defections by the Tuesday Group, helping the Republican majority circumvent members of their own party. On some of the other issues, such as unfunded mandates and welfare reform, the coalition and the Tuesday Group had similar positions and moderated the legislation ultimately signed into
law so that it better reflected the median position in the House. One material issue difference between the groups is their willingness to address social issues. The Blue Dog Coalition avoids them entirely, while the Tuesday Group often finds them at the center of their differences with the majority of their party.

**Campaign Activities**

**The Tuesday Group**

The Tuesday Group has not formed their own PAC, but this does not mean they lack a campaign strategy. One of the group's core members keeps the group abreast of the activities of many of the "independent-minded" organizations affiliated with the Republican Mainstream Committee. Such organizations include MODRN PAC, the RIPON Society, Republicans for Choice, WISH List, the John Quincy Adams Society, the Log Cabin Republicans, and the Main Street Coalition (Republican Mainstream Committee 1997). This gave the Tuesday Group a potentially strong network of PACs, educational foundations, and research arms to work with. Unfortunately, many of these organizations are very small operations. Nevertheless, better structures are in place for the Tuesday Group than for the Blue Dog Coalition to institutionalize themselves in campaigning.

**The Blue Dog Coalition**

About six weeks after the coalition formed, a Blue Dog PAC was launched. Several reasons were cited for the PACs' creation. First, several moderate southern Democrats had been defeated in preceding elections. Second, there was concern that the group's open defiance of Democratic leadership would make DNC or DCCC support less forthcoming (Kahn 1995a). This second concern seems to have hung over the coalition. Four of its members (all of whom ultimately switched parties) resigned their positions on the DCCC in June 1995. When these members switched parties, the DCCC indeed asked them to return funds the DCCC had given to them in the last election cycle (Kahn 1995d).

**Participation in Moderate Party Caucuses**

**Membership: A Tale of Different Mores**

*The Tuesday Group*

I identified Tuesday Group members in the 104th Congress from a fax list used to notify members of upcoming group meetings and agendas. Be-
cause they want to preserve their position in the party, Tuesday Group membership is not publicly advertised; fifty-four members asked to be apprised of Tuesday Group meeting times and information, though fewer members were regular participants. Table 16.1 shows the distribution of the Tuesday Group members of the 104th Congress by region. Virtually all of the New England Republicans (87.5 percent) are members of the Tuesday Group. Nearly one-half of the Mid-Atlantic Republicans and 40 percent of the midwestern Republicans are in the group. Although one-fifth of the Tuesday Group’s membership comes from the Great Lakes region, only 26.2 percent of all Great Lakes Republicans are Tuesday Group members. The southern and western regions account for only a very small part of the Tuesday Group and also a very small proportion of the Republican Party’s delegation from these areas.

The Blue Dog Coalition

As of January 1996, the Blue Dog Coalition made their statement of purpose, articles of organization, and membership list available on the In-
ternet. This pattern is a stark contrast to the Tuesday Group’s secrecy and stresses the open defiance of the coalition to their party. In the first session of the 104th Congress, the group had twenty-four members (whose names were listed in Roll Call). Table 16.1 shows that coalition membership is more regionally concentrated than that of the Tuesday Group. No Democrats from New England or the Mid-Atlantic belong, while 62.5 percent of the coalition comes from the South. The next most represented regions are the Midwest and the border states, each having three coalition members. Interestingly, the proportion of these coalition members to all Democrats is relatively close: 29 percent of all southern Democrats and 21 percent of all Midwest and border state Democrats. We might expect a greater number of southern Democrats in this group, but reapportionment resulted in a considerable number of southern Democrats representing more liberal districts, and Republicans had victories in many areas where conservative southern Democrats might have been expected to succeed.

Partisanship and Ideology

The ideological composition of congressional parties has long been a subject of discussion. Although recent scholars of House Republicans have emphasized the multidimensionality of Republican factionalism, other analyses have confirmed the regional division of Republican ideology. Rohde (1991: 120-27) has commented on the liberalism of northeastern Republicans compared with the rest of the Republican Party, demonstrated by lower party unity scores for northeastern Republicans. Recently, Cover, Pinney, and Serra (1997: 228-34) have found great distinction between eastern Republicans and the remainder of the Republican Party based on their ADA (Americans for Democratic Action) scores measuring liberalism. Likewise, conservative Democratic scores have deviated from the Democratic norm as noted by Rohde (1991), Rae (1994), and Sinclair (1989). Here, I look at both these measures of ideological dispersion in the 104th Congress.

At first glance, it would seem that any Republican divisions evaporated in 1995, though some division seems to have returned in 1996. Party unity scores for Republicans are very tightly clustered together (91.19 in 1995 and 86.62 in 1996), whereas Democrats are more widely dispersed (80.36 in 1995 and 80.13 in 1996). Table 16.2 presents these party unity scores. As expected, Blue Dog Democrats and Tuesday Group Republicans deviate the most from the rest of their party. The same goes for Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) scores. The level of Republican conservatism is notable. The mean ADA scores are exceptionally low for all Republicans. Still, the Tuesday Group Republicans are significantly more liberal than the remainder of their party, confirming Cover et al.’s (1997) earlier findings. With the Republicans now in the majority, the range of options for the most marginal
Table 16.2 Party Unity and ADA Scores

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday Group Members (N=54)</td>
<td>84.37 78.36 6.82</td>
<td>19.09 21.00 11.29 15.35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Tuesday Group Republicans (N=181)</td>
<td>93.22 89.14 3.76 7.61</td>
<td>3.13 6.44 5.40 7.43</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Republicans</td>
<td>91.19 86.62 5.93 9.13</td>
<td>6.80 9.83 9.83 11.59</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Blue Dog Democrats (N=19)</td>
<td>52.37 55.00 13.12 13.02</td>
<td>47.37 45.26 18.06 17.36</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Blue Dog Coalition Democrats (N=179)</td>
<td>83.34 82.79 11.82 11.61</td>
<td>82.20 78.23 15.09 16.32</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Democrats</td>
<td>80.36 80.13 15.02 14.30</td>
<td>78.86 75.07 18.47 19.09</td>
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party members are necessarily proscribed. In other words, we should expect that Republican control of Congress, at least in year 1, would polarize voting patterns of both parties, and the numbers indeed bear this out.

With that said, it remains the case that members of the Tuesday Group are significantly more liberal and less partisan than the majority of their party. Table 16.2 shows that the mean party unity and ADA scores are substantially different for Tuesday Group members and the remainder of the Republican conference. Tuesday Group members are less likely to vote with their party almost 10 percent of the time in both years and had four to six times the ADA score of their nongroup colleagues. The standard deviations of both these measures show how much more varied Tuesday Group members are than their nongroup colleagues. Analysis of variance tests for both
sets of group comparisons (between Tuesday Group and nongroup Republicans and within categories of the Tuesday Group) were found to be statistically significant. This finding demonstrates that the Tuesday Group does indeed consist of ideological outliers.

Despite the Blue Dog Coalition's expressed ideological similarity to moderate Republicans, their ADA scores do not bear them out. Their mean ADA score is 47.37 in 1995 and 45.26 in 1996, more than double the mean ADA score for the Tuesday Group. However, their standard deviation is also much higher than that of the Tuesday Group, which suggests that the coalition is more ideologically diverse than the Tuesday Group. Where the coalition is really a significant outlier is in their party unity scores. The mean coalition score is only 52.37 in 1995 and 55.00 in 1996, considerably less than the Tuesday Group at 84.55 and 78.36 and than non-Blue Dog Democrats at 83.34 and 82.79. Clearly, Blue Dogs are more likely to vote against their party to illustrate their dissatisfaction than the Tuesday Group is to vote against theirs.

Predicting Caucus Membership

These ideological measures beg the question of why liberal Republicans and conservative Democrats choose to form groups for the purpose of opposing the mainstream of their party. Clearly, regional and ideological factors contribute to this choice. Also, close observers of Congress suggest that other hard-to-measure factors such as a willingness to get things done (pragmatic versus ideological orientation), a suspicion of the power of an opposing factional group within the party, and a fear that one's district could prove electorally inhospitable to the general trend of the party overall can push members to seek political relief in a centrist group. The last of these factors may be measurable. Two questions arise: are the members in these groups electorally marginal, and is the normal vote in their district potentially marginal? Table 16.3 looks at these factors in a number of ways. First, what is the average Democratic congressional vote for each of these members in 1994? It does seem that members of these factional groups are more threatened by the strength of the other party than their copartisans. However, ANOVA analysis performed for both parties only shows that these differences were significant for the Blue Dogs, but not for the Tuesday Group.

The second measure, support for Perot in the 1992 presidential race, yields similar results. Although both Blue Dogs and Tuesday Group members represent districts giving more support for Perot than the rest of their partisan colleagues, only the Blue Dogs have significant results. Lastly, district marginality was assessed by adding the vote for Clinton to the vote for Perot in 1992 to see whether this “opposition to Republican” score had any differential effect on these groups. This measure was indeed significant in
Table 16.3 Means and Standard Deviations of Vote Measures by Group Membership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Democrats</th>
<th>Non-Blue Dog Democrats</th>
<th>Blue Dog Democrats</th>
<th>All Republicans</th>
<th>Non-Tuesday Group Republicans</th>
<th>Tuesday Group Republicans</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congressional district</td>
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<tr>
<td>Democratic vote 1994</td>
<td>64.43 (12.29)</td>
<td>65.08 (12.68)</td>
<td>59.54 (7.37)</td>
<td>30.20 (14.93)</td>
<td>29.94 (15.32)</td>
<td>31.06 (13.69)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Congressional district</td>
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<tr>
<td>1992 Perot vote plus 1992 Clinton vote</td>
<td>68.52 (8.88)</td>
<td>69.91 (8.27)</td>
<td>58.08 (5.94)</td>
<td>57.38 (6.44)</td>
<td>56.65 (6.50)</td>
<td>59.76 (5.66)</td>
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both parties. For non-Blue Dog Democrats, this combined measure had a mean of 69.91 percent, but coalition members had a mean of only 58.08 percent. These data put the average Blue Dog in the marginal category and show more vulnerability than the congressional district vote measure for 1994 shows. For the Republicans, non-Tuesday Group members had a 56.65 percent Republican opposition vote in their districts in 1992, while Tuesday Group members had a 59.76 percent opposition vote. Thus, although the average Tuesday Group experienced 10 percent less opposition in their congressional district vote in 1994, they still appear to come from more marginal electoral districts than the rest of their party.

Conclusion

This chapter has described the origins and motivations of two moderate party caucuses representing factions of the contemporary congressional parties: the liberal/moderate Republican Tuesday Group and the conservative/moderate Blue Dog Coalition. Both groups are on the center fringe of the party system’s cleavage, but rather than leave their parties they choose to organize in an effort to demonstrate the limits of the ability of their party’s leadership to represent them, while providing them with an outlet for dissent acceptable to their constituencies. Interestingly, both groups’ proposals more closely resemble passable products than the positions championed by the majorities in their parties. That is, as one Tuesday Group staffer put it, conservative Republicans were upset with the Tuesday Group’s success (a surprise to the Tuesday Group whose initiatives usually lose in the House) because the Tuesday Group’s position was always close to the position that came out of the Senate and was acceptable to the White House. Congressman Gunderson’s pronouncements in this regard rang true: the Tuesday Group position often was the governing position. Likewise, the Blue Dog Coalition has shown remarkable compromise abilities in this regard, especially on the welfare bill and a number of budget issues. This fact may be why region and ideology do not neatly explain membership in these moderate organizations. The real variable of import may be the willingness to work toward a tenable solution that does not dramatically disrupt current political arrangements and solves the public policy issues on the immediate agenda.

If current political trends continue, we must pronounce both these species headed for extinction. Northeastern support for Republicans seems to be waning, and southern support for Democrats is also shifting. This shift prompted a number of southern Democrats to change their party allegiance to Republican, many while holding office as elected Democrats (the RNC claims almost three hundred party switchers at all levels of government from 1993 to the present). The reverse trend, of Republicans becoming Demo-
Moderate Party Factions

crats, does not seem to be occurring (although this does not rule out secular nonrecruitment—the scenario in which young people with “Rockefeller Republican” views become Democrats outright, saving themselves from switching later on). But for the moment, moderates of both parties seem to be persisting in government.

The study of moderate factions of the two major parties in Congress illustrates two tensions in American party politics: the persistence of definable factions despite the insistence by the parties that they are “big tents,” and the tension between the practical mandates of governing and the rhetorical imperatives of ideological posturing.

Notes

1. This information was obtained from a background interview with a Blue Dog Coalition member staffer.
2. Similar representation is given to the Tuesday Group’s effective counterpart CATs (Conservative Action Team).
3. Though the Tuesday Group had fifty-five at the end of the 104th Congress, Tom Campbell (California-15) was sworn in on December 15, 1995, and thus did not vote on most issues in 1995, the year under examination. Therefore, he is excluded from this part of the analysis.
4. The F-statistic was 4.377, significance was .038.
5. The F-statistic was 2.749, significance was .099.
In what ways can parties inside the legislature be conceptualized, investigated, and thereby understood? When we speak of the congressional or state legislative parties, what meanings may we give to these entities? Answering these questions does not come very easily to American scholars, for appraisals of our political parties all too frequently pay scant attention to the legislative parties, or treat them as merely derivative, “conditional” phenomena. The traditional English distinction between the parliamentary parties and the extraparliamentary parties remains uncommon in the American parties literature (Brand 1992). Rather, Americans have tended to follow V. O. Key’s lead in dividing party life trilaterally—party-in-the-electorate, party-as-organization, party-in-government—thus rendering the legislative party but one part of a larger whole (Key 1964: 313–712; Beck and Sorauf 1992). Yet Key himself was profoundly aware that “the party group within the representative body has its own organization and identity quite independent of the party outside the government,” but “in the United States the notion of a dual personality of party is not so commonly recognized” (1964: 654). Although much has been learned about American party politics subsequently, Truman’s conclusion that “a curious feature of the congressional party is that its existence is so familiar . . . , and yet its essential character . . . is at best only vaguely understood,” remains all too valid (1959: 42).

Notwithstanding this relative neglect of the legislative party, a variety of approaches to understanding it may be culled from the extant literature. The first of these, and perhaps the most common, is to consider the legislative parties as organizations. This practice is well illustrated by the leading textbook on Congress, in which congressional parties are portrayed by organization charts, with leaders, caucuses, party committees, and informal party groups (Davidson and Oleszek 1996: 161–92), even if the “organizational life” of these entities has largely failed to be explored in sufficient detail (Little and Patterson 1993). Alternatively, legislative parties may be conceptualized as constituency rooted. It is well-known that legislators’ proclivity
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to act in concert in the legislative arena may be conditioned powerfully by common constituency demands and interests. “The roots of the legislative parties’ persistence ... lie outside the groups themselves ... in the rugged loyalty of broad sections of the electorate” (Truman 1959: 95). Strong partisanship in Congress has often been traced to partisan polarization in electoral alignments (see Brady 1973; Rohde 1991). Legislative parties can be conceptualized as entities organized to reflect these roots and to help reinforce them or as merely derivative of constituency interests. The derivative legislative party gives the exogenous appearance of strength without carrying substantial meaning to legislative actors.

In the bosom of the legislative chamber, legislative parties may be conceptualized as primarily electioneering units, teams of office seekers driven by an office-holding preference, the reelection incentive, and a flair for patronage and pork (see Schlesinger 1991). Here, the legislative party is seen principally as a campaign vehicle for current or prospective legislators (Gierzynski 1992; Herrnson 1988; Shea 1995). Such organization as exists within the legislature exists mainly to serve external, electoral needs. Another different conceptualization views the legislative party as action oriented, its members and leaders engaged in a variety of policy or lawmaking activities. An important form that party action takes is decision making or voting; the legislative party may take on meanings that are indicative of clusters of representatives in voting agreement. Some observers link the action focus with the organizational, conceptualizing legislative parties as “intralegislative organizations” that engender leadership structure in which collective action problems are resolved by leaders “internalizing” the self-interests of their party rank and file (Aldrich 1995: 201–21; Krehbiel 1991). Indeed, one pair of scholars has argued that members’ self-interests lead them to accept the congressional parties as “a species of legislative cartel” (Cox and McCubbins 1993: 278). Again, legislative parties may be conceived as networks of actors, aggregated by interpersonal ties of affect, respect, deference, or trust (see Caldeira and Patterson 1987; Schwartz 1990). Party networks are denoted by high frequency of intraparty interaction, creating and reflecting the tight and durable interpersonal bonds that cement their members together, providing their caucus a high degree of cohesiveness and amenability to leadership.

Finally, actors in the legislative parties can be understood as collectives of like-minded individuals, holding similar attitudes or preferences on major matters of public policy. Our own understanding of the legislative party adopts this latter focus. We are interested in the legislative party as an ideological group in which members share highly salient values, policy attitudes, and political preferences and in which the party label is thus meaningful as an expression of these shared characteristics. Our perspective does not condemn other approaches to understanding the legislative party as being of no
relevance. But we do contend that a vital reference point for understanding the "essential character" of legislative parties must remain the experience of the actors themselves, those who actually constitute the legislative party and shape both what it is and what it may become. Ultimately, legislators are the foundation on which the legislative party is built.

Our aim in this analysis is, therefore, to characterize the legislative party by examining legislators' own orientations toward their party and exploring the factors that underpin these orientations. Is party a label without much substantive meaning for legislators in terms of strong sentiments of partisan attachment and loyalty? Is partisanship largely nonideological, engendering political behaviors that are mostly pragmatic responses to shifting issues and demands? Or are Democratic and Republican legislators distinctive ideological groups whose partisan orientations are grounded in ideological affinities? In addition to ideology, what other political and partisan experiences can be seen to shape party loyalty? And how strongly are values of party loyalty tied to legislative roll call voting? In sum, what meaning does the legislative party have for legislators themselves, and why?

Legislators' Partisan Predispositions

Our analysis here draws upon a rich data source—derived not from the United States Congress, the target of choice for most investigators, but rather from a state legislative house, the Ohio House of Representatives. As previous investigators have discovered, choosing a state chamber as a research site facilitates conducting intensive personal interviews with a large proportion of the members of the legislature (Entman 1983; Reeher 1996). We have exploited this opportunity to obtain data able to speak closely to our questions about legislative parties. Moreover, Ohio is endowed with a mixed economy, a good mix of cities and rural areas, and relatively competitive partisan politics (Fenton 1966; Gargan and Coke 1972). Accordingly, it is reasonable to believe that the legislative party experienced by Ohio representatives will be recognizable to that encountered by legislators in many other American settings.

The bicameral Ohio state legislature is constructed of a ninety-nine-member House of Representatives and thirty-three-member Senate (Arnold and Patterson 1995). Republicans held majorities in both Ohio houses in the 1960s. From 1973 until 1995, Democrats constituted the House majority; the Republicans recaptured control of the House in the 1994 election, retaining this majority in 1996. The Senate majority was Democratic in the 1970s, but Republicans controlled the Senate for the years since 1980, except for one term, 1983–1984 (Patterson 1994).

From April to June 1993, the Ohio Legislative Research Project, a com-
bine of political scientists at Ohio State University, conducted personal inter­
views with 95 percent of the members of the legislature. The interviews
averaged just over an hour, probing widely into legislators’ recruitment, so­
cial backgrounds, interpersonal relations, role orientations, constituency perspec­
tives, institutional perceptions, and political attitudes. In particular,
these interviews included questions concerning legislators’ partisan political
experiences, attitudinal items dealing with members’ orientations toward the
legislative party, and a set of questions designed to tap members’ ideological
position. In addition, we assembled the roll call voting record of these Ohio
legislators in 1993–1994 and a limited number of demographic variables for
legislators’ constituencies.

The interview items designed to measure supportive orientations toward
party were crafted around the criteria of salience, attachment, and positive
evaluation. These items are drawn from previous studies, particularly the
classic four-state study of Wahlke et al. (1962: 502–3) and the research of
Flinn (Flinn 1972: 168; 1973: 268–69). The key partisan predispositions are
shown in Table 17.1, along with the extent of legislators’ agreement or dis­
agreement with them.

As can be seen, Ohio legislators in general are split on whether party
cost of district support, whether representa­
atives should support their own party on party votes as a matter of principle,
and whether the party leadership builds party cohesiveness. Most members
do not think they should support their party or their party’s governor even
when they disagree with their leadership, nor do they believe either in non­
partisanship or fully fledged responsible partisanship. But most Ohio legisla­
tors do endorse the leadership in the legislature against that of the governor,
and they agree that party loyalty is necessary to get ahead in the legislature.
These general differences encompass, however, some highly interesting
party distinctions, portrayed vividly in Figure 17.1. Republican legislators
exhibited relatively low partisan support (with more than one-third of Re­
publicans having “low” party support scores compared with only 14 percent
who score “high”). In contrast, more than a third of Democrats are “high”
partisan support scorers, and only 16 percent score “low.”

It is possible, as other scholars have argued, that interparty differences
in partisan support are contextual, dependent upon the majority-minority
status of the parties. The weakness and frustration often associated with mi­
nority party status may erode partisan support, especially when minority
members perceive that they can satisfy their personal or political goals or
preferences if they soft pedal partisanship or even collaborate with the ma­
jority leadership (e.g., Kingdon 1989: 110–33; Wahlke et al. 1962: 344–51).
This interpretation is consistent with the results observed in Ohio. Alterna­
tively, they may be idiosyncratic to Ohio, reflecting in particular the popular
Table 17.1 Percentage of Ohio State Legislators’ Partisan Orientations, 1993

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partisan Interview Items</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>No Opinion</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If a bill is important for his or her party’s record, a member should vote with the party even if it costs some support in the district.</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislative leaders of my party helped to get me elected to the legislature, so I have an obligation to vote with our party even if I disagree with its stand.</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td>34.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A legislator’s first loyalty should be to the party leadership in the legislature rather than the governor, if they disagree.</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A legislator should support the plans and programs of a governor belonging to his or her own party whether or not the governor can impose rewards or punishments.</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>48.9</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A legislator should vote with the majority of his or her own party in the legislature whenever the majority of one party opposes the majority of another, and he or she should do this as a matter of principle, not merely as a matter of self-interest.</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To get ahead in the legislature a member must support the stands taken by a majority of his or her own party.</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>44.7</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data derive from the Ohio Legislative Research Project (OLRP) legislator interviews, conducted in 1993.
Figure 17.1 Party Support among Ohio Legislators

Percentage

Supportive Partisan Orientations

- LOW -1.5 to -0.9
- MEDIUM LOW -0.9 to -1
- MED. HIGH -0.1 to 0.7
- HIGH 0.7 to 2.5

Democrats Republicans
and powerful leadership of longtime Democratic Speaker Vernal G. Riffe, Jr.

A more adequate understanding of these differences requires desegregations of the six partisan measures. Prima facie, these six items appear directly linked to party loyalty, specifying conditions under which legislators should vote with their fellow partisans against the opposition. That these items tap party loyalty along a single dimension is indicated by submitting the legislators' responses to them to a principal components factor analysis, revealing a very well-defined dimension of partisan support that we have denoted party loyalty. All six items yielded high factor loadings on this dimension and provided us a very tidy basis for assigning factor scores to representatives as a metric for party loyalty. In sum, this factor sharply distinguishes representatives who harbor strong beliefs in the efficacy of partisanship from those whose partisan attachments are fainter, less salient, more individualized, and perhaps even irresolute. This dimension, with its incumbent measures, will provide an important ingredient in our later analysis.

Political Ideology and Partisan Loyalty

We stipulate that an ideology is "a set of core beliefs that organize perceptions of political issues and that underlie individual preferences" (Jackson and Kingdon 1992: 814). We fully accept that the concept of ideology can embrace farther-ranging issues of environmental complexity, cultural constraints, Weltanschauung, myth, sophistication, and language (see Boudon 1989; Brown 1973; Lane 1962; Mullins 1972; Putnam 1971; Schull 1992; Van Dyke 1995). But we confine ourselves to a few highly political issues that can delineate variations in economic or social liberalism-conservatism. Previous work has concluded that, for political decision makers, ideology is "central to decision making and to policy outcomes" (Jackson and Kingdon 1992: 814). Our aim here is to discover the degree to which it also underlies partisan attitudes and, in particular, party loyalty.

Even with an agreed definition and understanding of what ideology entails, however, problems of operationalizing and measuring it remain. For measurement of the ideological orientations of members of the U.S. Congress, scholars customarily have relied upon interest group ratings, most commonly the liberal-conservative ratings of Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), derived from congressional roll call votes. ADA-based indexes do appear to be fairly reliable and valid indicators of general ideological orientations (Carson and Oppenheimer 1984; Fowler 1982; Shaffer 1982, 1983, 1989; Smith, Herrera, and Herrera 1990); they also have the more practical virtue of being readily available. More to the point, alternatives usually have not existed: it is very difficult to measure legislators' ideological predispo-
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However, our legislator-derived data supply us with both direct and indirect measures of ideological stances. The interviews included a battery of fourteen issue items tapping members’ ideological orientations (listed in Table 17.2), adapted from that used by Entman in interviews with Connecticut and North Carolina representatives (Entman 1983: 180–81). For each of these statements, legislators responded in a Likert-type format, indicating strength of agreement or disagreement. In Table 17.2, “liberal” responses are shown in boldface. In addition, we asked legislators to characterize their own ideological position: “generally speaking, regardless of your political party affiliation, do you describe yourself on most issues as very conservative, conservative, middle-of-the-road, liberal, or very liberal?” Responses to this item permitted interesting comparisons with representatives’ ideological orientations measured by the fourteen-item scale.

Unsurprisingly, the major ideological divide among legislators is between Democrats and Republicans. Nor is this an artifact of one measurement technique. Comparing “measured” and self-reported ideological orientation, the correlation is quite substantial ($r = .68$). Although there are some ideologically moderate Republicans among House members, these representatives tend to characterize themselves as conservative. Democrats appear to be more liberal than they admit; perhaps the contemporary unpopularity of the “L word” inclines Democrats to shun it. Moreover, while a smallish contingent of conservatives exists among House Democrats, Republicans are not liberals and do not characterize themselves as such. The sizeable correlation between legislators’ ideological orientations and their self-identifications suggests that for them, in contrast to the general public, ideology is largely issue oriented and is not primarily symbolic in nature (Conover and Feldman 1981: 621–22).

The kinds of attitude items appearing in Table 17.3 have been used previously as if they formed a single liberal-conservative continuum, scoring legislators for their percentage of liberal responses (Entman 1983: 166). By the same token, ideological self-identification presupposes a single ideological dimension. At the same time, much research suggests that ideological orientations and persuasions are, for the most part, multidimensional. The ideological items included in our interviews were invoked with the expecta-
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideology Interview Items</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>No Opinion</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When individual producers and consumers are left free to follow their self interest, natural economic laws operate to produce the greatest public good.</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>51.1</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History shows that economic and social planning by governments in democratic countries can be quite beneficial.</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty could be almost entirely done away with if we made certain basic changes in our social and economic system.</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>48.9</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We should oppose the more even distribution of wealth since it is likely to stifle individual initiative.</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The government has the responsibility to see to it that all people, rich and poor, have adequate housing, education, medical care, and protection against unemployment.</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industries such as electricity, mines, and railways should be owned and operated by the government—not for private profit.</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>53.8</td>
<td>38.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>True democracy is limited in the United States because of the special privileges enjoyed by business and industry.</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>23.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Oppose</td>
<td>Strongly Oppose</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our government must get at the real base of our economic problems by cutting taxes on the wealthy so that capital can be available to produce jobs.</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>41.3</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To ensure adequate care of the sick, we need to change radically the present system of privately controlled health care.</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The government should not prevent women from having abortions; such decisions are decisions private matters.</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society should be quicker to throw out old ideas and traditions and to adopt new thinking and customs.</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>50.5</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The rebellious ideas of young people contribute to the progress of society.</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The government should not interfere with the private behavior of consenting adults, even if most citizens consider that behavior immoral.</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All groups can live in harmony in this country without changing the system in any way.</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>53.2</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data derive from the Ohio Legislative Research Project (OLRP) legislator interviews, conducted in 1993; liberal responses appear in boldface.
Table 17.3. Factor Analysis of Legislators' Ideological Orientations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideological Items</th>
<th>Factor I: Economic</th>
<th>Factor II: Social</th>
<th>Uniqueness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Free market produces greatest public good</td>
<td>-.71</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social planning done by government</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>-.32</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eliminate poverty by changing system</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppose redistribution of wealth</td>
<td>-.74</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government should provide social welfare</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>-.50</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government should nationalize industries</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>-.38</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy is limited by business privileges</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>-.41</td>
<td>.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxes on wealthy should be cut</td>
<td>-.51</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health care system should be radically changed</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>-.62</td>
<td>.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abortion should not be prevented</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>-.66</td>
<td>.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Throw out old ideas, adopt new thinking</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.64</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebellious ideas contribute to progress</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>-.74</td>
<td>.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private behavior of consenting adults</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>-.74</td>
<td>.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group harmony without changing system</td>
<td>-.24</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of variance</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data derive from the Ohio Legislative Research Project (OLRP) legislator interviews, conducted in 1993.

tion that at least two dimensions might emerge: economic ideology (concerning the role of government in the economy, inequalities of wealth and income, and the status of the market) and social liberalism-conservatism (referring to moral or expressive beliefs on health care, abortion, traditional ideas, rebellious youth, homosexual behavior, or intergroup harmony) (Lerner, Nagai, and Rothman 1996: 43–49).

Subjecting the fourteen issue items to a principal components factor analysis produced the anticipated consequences. As Table 17.3 shows, legislators' ideological orientations cling pretty tightly to two distinct dimensions. Economic liberalism-conservatism provides the primary chord for this orchestration of attitudes (accounting for 40 percent of the variance), although social ideology remains fairly robust. While these attitudes only account for half the variance among legislators, underscoring the possibility of other ideological dimensions, these two very clean and handsome factors
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indicate the considerable ideological constraint exhibited by these politicians.

Our analytical interest here is to investigate the basis for variation among representatives in their partisan loyalties. Why does party carry strong, substantive meaning for some legislators and less for others? There is good reason to think that party loyalties are rooted in ideology—that partisan Democrats are those sharing strong liberal ideological orientations and partisan Republicans have matching conservative orientations (Putnam 1971). But an alternative argument, which must be tested, is that attitudes toward one's party arise out of political experience—in the trenches, so to speak. In our interviews with legislators, we inquired about a variety of pertinent formative experiences that might have helped shape attachments to their political party.

We have drawn a number of these “political immersion” variables from the interview data, providing a cluster of predictors that, we hoped, would indicate political experiences shaping and intensifying loyalty to the legislative party (these measures are described in the appendix). The first of these variables we call party effort. We deemed party effort in the legislator’s district to be substantial when members reported “party organizations to be very important” in determining who will win the legislative seat” and, more particularly, when they reported that their political party was “very active” during the 1992 campaign in regard to promoting the “entire party ticket.” The analytical assumption is that representatives who perceive significant partisan electoral investment in their constituencies will acquire more loyal partisan predispositions than those who report negligible party effort in their election.

A second “immersion” variable is leadership position, entered into our model estimation on the simple assumption that representatives who served in positions of party leadership—as speaker, floor leaders, caucus officers, or whips—would more likely acquire partisan loyalties than members devoid of such experience. Legislators who served, or had previously served, in the leadership could be expected to possess a particularly strong personal inclination toward upholding party loyalty. A third measure we denote party experience to indicate that this measure taps the extent to which legislators are personally involved in political party life. Here, we combined four indicators: (1) whether the legislator reported that his or her interest in politics had developed because of growing up in a “political family,” (2) whether the legislator ever held a party office prior to election to the legislature, (3) whether the member reported that political interests arose because he or she “worked in a campaign,” and (4) whether the legislator got interested in politics through “party work.” We hypothesized, of course, that such party socialization experiences would likely induce loyalty to party.

Finally, we include two independent variables relating to legislators’
partisan contacts. We asked members "who they usually consulted ... when they are uncertain whether to support or oppose a bill." Those reporting consultation of party leaders outside and inside the legislature were scored high in partisan consultation, while members consulting in a different direction (lobbyists, committee chairs, constituents, experts, etc.) were scored low. And we constructed a party campaign financing measure to discriminate legislators whose campaigns were heavily party funded from those who drew their campaign funds mainly from nonparty sources (family, friends, political action committees, etc.). Again, the notion is that substantial partisan consultation and party financial support may condition and engender party loyalty.

With party loyalty factor scores as the dependent variable, we estimate a model in the eight independent variables we have described: party affiliation, two indicators of liberal-conservative ideology (economic and social), and five indicators of political immersion (party effort, leadership position, party experience, partisan consultation, and party campaign financing). The estimations of the extent of the effects of the independent variables on party loyalty are displayed in Table 17.4.

Democratic legislators exhibit greater party loyalty than Republicans, and we have conducted our estimations separately for each party. Far and away the most telling effect on party loyalty is the legislators' ideological orientations, particularly on the economic ideology factor. Those most loyal to their party are liberal Democrats and the conservative Republicans. Ideology is a less weighty force for party loyalty among Republicans, though for them the ideological effect includes both economic and social ideology. We suspect that this party difference in loyalty, and in the impact of ideology on loyalty, develops from majority-minority party status in the legislature, but we cannot assay this supposition without longitudinal data. Our theorizing about the potential impact on partisan orientations of measures of political immersion, however, is not consistently supported by the results, which are mixed.

Party effort carries some weight, especially for Democrats, but for them ideological considerations seem overwhelming. Republican party loyalty appears strongly influenced by proximate legislative experience—consulting with other members about positions on bills and serving as a legislative party leader. Speculation from these results is risky, but the lesson seems to be that legislative politicians, although they presumably learn their party identification through earlier socialization processes, do not acquire or strengthen meaningful legislative party loyalties in prelegislative experiences. Legislators, especially our Republicans, may attract the most loyal partisans to leadership, and leadership and consultative experience in the legislature can, for them, boost party loyalty. But legislative party loyalties depend primarily on their ideological underpinnings.
Table 17.4 Variables Sustaining Legislators’ Partisan Orientations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Estimated Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>T-ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Democrats:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-1.886</td>
<td>.866</td>
<td>-2.2**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic ideology (I)</td>
<td>-.482</td>
<td>.168</td>
<td>-2.9***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social ideology (II)</td>
<td>-.175</td>
<td>.218</td>
<td>- .8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party effort</td>
<td>.218</td>
<td>.115</td>
<td>1.9*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership position</td>
<td>.613</td>
<td>.615</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party experience</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>.180</td>
<td>.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisan consultation</td>
<td>-.002</td>
<td>.317</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party campaign financing</td>
<td>.118</td>
<td>.087</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Republicans:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-2.293</td>
<td>.636</td>
<td>-3.6****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic ideology (I)</td>
<td>.417</td>
<td>.141</td>
<td>3.0***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social ideology (II)</td>
<td>.399</td>
<td>.159</td>
<td>2.5**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party effort</td>
<td>.097</td>
<td>.081</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership position</td>
<td>1.454</td>
<td>.394</td>
<td>3.7****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party experience</td>
<td>.092</td>
<td>.125</td>
<td>.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisan consultation</td>
<td>.422</td>
<td>.178</td>
<td>2.4**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party campaign financing</td>
<td>.108</td>
<td>.117</td>
<td>.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .09.
** p < .05.
*** p < .01.
**** p < .001.

Note: For Democratic legislators, $R^2 = .31$; Adj. $R^2 = .17$; $F = .086*$; $N = 39$. For Republican legislators $R^2 = .61$; Adj. $R^2 = .50$; $F = 5.78$****; $N = 34$.

Party Loyalty and Party Voting

Is legislative voting along political party lines—Democrats vote on one side and the Republicans on the other—largely artifactual? Is legislative party voting just a random walk across the issues of the day in which party cleavage is something of an accident? Alternatively, is party voting merely derivative of constituency demands organized in such a way as to correspond to legislators' partisan affiliations, so that members can merely "vote their districts" and produce considerable partisan cleavages? These inferences, here put baldly, are uttered by those who believe that party has little substan-
tive meaning within the legislature; that party, as has been said in a wider context, is “something to stand on, not stand for.”

We have already provided strong evidence that, at the levels of attitudinal orientations, this view is surely overstated. But do attitudes translate effectively into behavior? To help answer this question, we gathered the roll call voting record for Ohio House members for 1993–1994. From this record was distilled those votes on which the parties were substantially divided. Of the 614 roll calls in our database, 102 were party votes (when 50 percent + 1 of the Republicans vote together against 50 percent + 1 of the Democrats). The issues most conducive to party division in the Ohio House during 1993–1994 concerned appropriations, budget, elections, reapportionment, labor, education, and veterans’ affairs.

On these party votes, Democrats voted with their party considerably more often than Republicans: Democratic Party voting stood at 92 percent; Republican Party voting, at 81 percent. Democrats were also more tightly knit together on party votes than Republicans; the standard deviation from the Democratic mean was just over 6 percent, while the Republicans’ standard deviation was almost 10 percent. The greater partisanship and cohesiveness of the Democratic representatives, in no small part due to the strong party leadership provided by longtime Speaker Riffe, means that at the aggregate level at least, party attitudes do translate into behavior. But what about at the individual level? We derived an index of party voting from these roll call votes to evaluate the impact of party loyalty on individual legislators’ voting behavior.

Considerable scholarly attention has been directed to explaining why individual representatives vote in support of their political party in the legislature. Some seek the cause in party leadership, but substantial party differences tend to persist even where such leadership is weak. Some pursue the answer in the representatives’ constituencies, showing striking differences in salient characteristics of the districts from which Democrats and Republicans are elected (Bernstein 1989; Fiorina 1974). Still others assay patterns of interpersonal relations with the legislative halls, dissecting friendship and other interpersonal linkages and cues (Arnold, Deen, and Patterson, 1995; Caldeira and Patterson 1987; Matthews and Stimson 1975). Finally, some scholars have suggested that the morale of party caucuses stimulated by common party and electoral experiences enhances a spirit of party (see Kingdon 1989: 120–23).

We sought to generate variables allowing us to test for at least some of these posited explanations of party voting. These included measures of constituency differences, to assess the question of whether partisan or ideological effects were spurious, that party voting issued mainly from constituency preferences or demands. We have chosen four constituency variables that we think stand for significant differences among Ohio legislators’ districts: (1)
percentage employed in manufacturing, (2) percentage African American, (3) percentage with a college education, and (4) percentage with a household income greater than $50,000. These four constituency attributes show expected party differences. Unsurprisingly, on the average Republican legislative districts tend to be relatively high in level of educational achievement and income, Democratic districts tend to be relatively high in their minority populations; and both Democratic and Republican districts are just shy of a third in population employed in manufacturing.

In addition to these indicators, we have included a dummy variable denominated leadership attitude in an effort to estimate the impact of party leaders on partisan loyalties and party voting. On this indicator, legislators were scored “1” if Democrats mentioned Speaker Riffe or Republicans mentioned Minority Leader Jo Ann Davidson in response to an interview question regarding the “most respected member” of the House, “0” if otherwise. As House Democratic leader for two decades, Speaker Riffe was unusually adept at making political capital out of his members’ respect for his leadership. As the leading statehouse reporter, Lee Leonard, perceptively wrote: “Riffe was unsurpassed at swiftly extracting votes from wavering members on critical issues.” With his own partisans, “Riffe had intimate knowledge, developed during years of studying human nature, of their wants and needs. When crunch time came, he exploited those pressure points. He reminded wavering members of the times he helped them, which were numerous.” Jo Ann Davidson became speaker when the Republicans captured a House majority in 1996, and “she has skillfully managed her fractious caucus,” but “she has a more difficult task than Riffe,” because “her caucus, even her leadership team, is more fragmented philosophically.”

Table 17.5 presents regression estimates for a model in which Ohio legislators’ party voting scores are analyzed in the light of their party affiliation, party loyalty, economic and social ideology, and constituency characteristics. Interestingly, of the constituency variables only “percentage African American” has a significant effect on party voting, a statistical tribute to the powerful presence of the substantial black caucus in the Ohio House of Representatives. But of more general interest, the model indicates that party voting by legislators is strongly influenced by their underlying partisan loyalty. Members most loyal to their party in attitudinal terms are, in fact, those who are most supportive of their party in voting. Also, although much of the impact of ideological orientations is embraced in differences among legislators in party affiliation and loyalty, some independent effect of economic ideology remains significant. The “leadership effect” that we felt called upon to test did not prove independent of the strong influence of partisan ties and loyalties included in the model. Party voting is not merely a stand-in for empty party labels or the immutable contours of constituency variations. These results provide compelling sustenance for our claim that when legisla-
tors divide along party lines, this division is "real" in the sense that it represents strong ties and a genuine sense of party group attachment and loyalty.

## Conclusion

Since the 1980, American politics has become more polarized ideologically. Consequently, the older research indicating an ideological default in representatives' conversion of their attitudes into their behavior now seems vaguely dated. Heinz Eulau once elaborated a marvelous theory about the conversion of ideological predispositions into party roles and supportive party attitudes among state legislative politicians in the late 1950s. Drawing on interviews in 1957 with state legislators in California, New Jersey, Ohio, and Tennessee, he asserted that "ideology, insofar as it does differentiate between Republicans and Democrats, does not enter their definition of the legislative situation in which party orientations and party roles are salient considerations." Furthermore:
Depending on the particular legislative issue, there may or may not be an association between ideological and party-line thinking or partisan role taking. Our data suggest that, in general, there is not association. Though Republicans and Democrats differ when confronted with alternatives involving ideological commitment, as in the case of our ideology scale, their party orientations and partisan role expectations seem to constitute a definition of the legislative situation in which ideological considerations are simply not mobilized. (Wahlke et al. 1962: 375)

By contrast, while the ideological engine may not be revved to high velocity among contemporary legislators, ideological differences between Democrats and Republicans are substantially converted into meaningful orientations toward party and party loyalty. Recent studies of congressional decision making underscore the weightier effects of legislators’ ideological predispositions on their voting today (Kingdon 1989: 265–74). Indeed, one scholar has summarized recent research by concluding that “on virtually every issue, the prime determinant of congressional voting is the personal ideology of the representative” (Bernstein 1989: 94).

While we hesitate to state the claim so unequivocally, contemporary legislative politics in Ohio, as in much of the contemporary United States, clearly is partisan and ideological. Legislators’ party affiliation and partisan loyalties are both conceptually and analytically distinct from their ideological predispositions. Party and ideology are, however, importantly intertwined. Legislators carry important values and beliefs, and within the two parties they share attitudes and commitments about broad policy issues with their fellow partisans. These ideological beliefs identify each party and give it an immediate and substantive meaning to party members. These meanings, manifested in strong and explicit loyalty to their party and shared ideological commitments, bear directly on their policy-making behavior. In sum, these political phenomena—party loyalty, ideology, and party voting—vary in degree among legislators, but their presence is distinctive and their effects are unmistakable.

The essential ingredients for party government are present among Ohio legislative partisans. When political issues arise that lie within the realm of party loyalty, partisan divisions and party responsibility are manifested. Moreover, when party leaders properly mobilize their caucuses, party voting readily develops. Legislators bear strong predispositions to making policy decisions on which they divide along the aisle in the legislative chamber that separates Democrats and Republicans. Party has important meaning to legislators, and party government is the natural alchemy of issues and leadership that divide the parties.
Notes

For methodological advice, we thank David C. Kimball. Patterson’s work at the early stages of this project took place while he was a fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, Stanford, California, supported by National Science Foundation grant SES-9022192. An earlier version of parts of this chapter was presented as “Ideological Thinking in Legislative Decision Making” at the 1997 annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago.

1. The Ohio Legislative Research Project has been an ongoing study of legislative politics in Ohio. The 1993 legislator interviews were conducted by Ohio State University graduate students enrolled in a seminar on legislative research. Special assistance with interviewing, coding, data entry, codebook preparation, and preliminary data analysis was provided by Laura W. Arnold, Rebecca E. Deen, Hans J. Hacker, Audrey A. Haynes, Eric S. Heberlig, David C. Kimball, Zoe Oxley, and Linda M. Trautman. We are indebted to the Ohio legislators whom we interviewed, and especially to then Speaker Vernal G. Riffe, Jr., Senate President Stanley Aronoff, and Representative Mike Stinziano.

2. The aggregate level of party voting in the Ohio House reached 23 percent in 1993 and dropped to 9 percent in 1994, for an overall 1993–1994 average of about 17 percent. The roll call analysis was conducted by Laura W. Arnold, Rosalee A. Clawson, David C. Kimball, and Zoe M. Oxley, graduate students at Ohio State University. Their results are reported in a paper on “Party Loyalty in the Ohio House of Representatives.” We are indebted to them for the party voting scores for 1993–1994. Roll call votes involving resignations of legislators and the appointment of new members thereafter were excluded from the analysis.


4. Quoted in the Columbus Dispatch, August 4, 1997, 9A.

5. In the regression analysis presented in Table 17.5, we employ pairwise deletion of missing cases to preserve as much of the data as possible in the analysis. The results are substantially the same had listwise deletion been used.
### Appendix: Variables in the Multivariate Analyses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Party Affiliation</strong></td>
<td>Republicans=0, Democrats=1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economic Ideology</strong></td>
<td>Factor scores on the economic ideology items, Factor I.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Ideology</strong></td>
<td>Factor scores on the social ideology items, Factor II.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Party Effort</strong></td>
<td>Linear combination of importance of party organization in the legislator's district (scored from &quot;very important&quot; = 1 to &quot;very unimportant&quot; = 4) and perceived extent of party election efforts in the district (scored from &quot;very active&quot; = 1 to &quot;didn't do anything&quot; = 4).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership Position</strong></td>
<td>1 if legislator held a leadership position; 0 if not.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Party Experience</strong></td>
<td>Linear combination of &quot;held party office&quot; (1 if &quot;yes&quot;; 0 if &quot;no&quot;); came from a &quot;political family&quot; (1 if &quot;yes&quot;; 0 if &quot;no&quot;); &quot;worked in campaign&quot; (1 if &quot;yes&quot;; 0 if &quot;no&quot;); and &quot;party work&quot; (1 if &quot;yes&quot;; 0 if &quot;no&quot;).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Partisan Consultation</strong></td>
<td>Consults &quot;party leaders&quot; and &quot;party caucus&quot; in &quot;making up their minds when they are uncertain about whether to support or oppose a bill&quot; (1 if consults party leaders and caucus, 0 if not).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Party Campaign Financing</strong></td>
<td>Linear combination of the extent of reported campaign funding from &quot;local party,&quot; &quot;state party,&quot; and party &quot;leaders.&quot; For each, legislators were asked to indicate whether &quot;none,&quot; &quot;up to ¼,&quot; &quot;½ to ¾,&quot; or &quot;all&quot; of their campaign funding derived from the source. No legislator reported that all of his or her campaign funds came from a party source, so members were scored from 1 (for &quot;none&quot;) to 4 (for &quot;½ to ¾&quot;) for each source.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Party Voting</strong></td>
<td>Percentage of the time the legislator voted in support of his or her party on party votes, those votes in which a majority of Republicans voted together against a majority of Democrats.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constituency Indicators</strong></td>
<td>Raw percentages for manufacturing, college educated, or African American; dollars for average district income.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership attitude</strong></td>
<td>1 if House Democrat mentioned Riffe or House Republican mentioned Davidson as one of the most respected members of the legislature; 0 if not mentioned.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The 1996 State Legislative Elections: The Fate of Responsible Parties in America

Thomas H. Little

For more than forty years, journalists, politicians, and scholars have been pronouncing the requiem of political parties in America. The functions they once performed have been, it was argued, co-opted by government, interest groups, campaign professionals, media experts, fund-raisers, and pollsters. Parties could no longer perform the very electoral and governing functions for which they were established. In the 1970s and 1980s authors went so far as to describe the crisis (Scott and Hrebenar 1979; Burnham 1982), decline (Crotty 1984), end even demise (Broder 1971) of political parties.

However, the mid-1980s witnessed a resurgence in political parties at the state and national level that was also reflected in scholarly efforts such as The Party Goes On (Kayden and Mahe 1985), The Party’s Just Begun (Sabato 1988), The Parties Respond (Maisel 1990), and “The Persistence of State Parties” (Patterson 1989). As parties adapted to the new candidate-centered, expensive, high-technology politics of the 1980s, they redefined themselves as full-service operations, willing and able to provide technical, strategic, and financial assistance to candidates at all levels (Schlesinger 1985). However, until 1994, neither state nor national parties made much effort to influence the agendas on which these races were run.

The revitalization of the political parties in America reached its peak with the efforts of the Republican Party in 1994. Under the direction of Newt Gingrich, Haley Barbour, and Pete DuPont, the Republicans coordinated the issue agendas of their candidates across the nation, from the “statehouse to the courthouse.” This effort, which will be discussed here, was the closest a major American political party has come to replicating responsible parties (Schattschneider 1942) in over a half century. However, one election does not a trend make. Was 1994 evidence of the resurrection of a new variant of responsible parties in America or merely an aberration that can be attributed to the unique context of that election? This essay is an effort to answer that question by looking at the 1996 election.
The effects of the responsible party-type activities of 1994 are examined in two distinct ways. First, the 1996 state legislative election results are examined to determine the degree to which Republican activities in 1994 helped or hindered Republican candidates in 1996. If, as many argue, the 1994 Contract with America became an albatross around the necks of candidates in 1996, then such efforts are not likely to be replicated soon, and 1994 was indeed merely a brief detour on the road to candidate-centered politics. Second, the 1996 election is examined to see the degree to which Republican and Democratic parties alike replicated the strategy of developing and promoting an agenda on which candidates based their campaigns. If such efforts were replicated across the country, one might consider that the newly "responsible" parties have some staying power.

**Responsible Parties in the American Mold**

For structural, historical, and political reasons, parties in America will never take the disciplined form of their European counterparts. Rather, responsible parties in America, if they are to exist at all, must reflect the political environment that defines American politics. Given the federal nature of the American political system and the autonomy traditionally accorded state institutions, the national party must rely on persuasion rather than coercion to establish national policy or influence state elections or agendas. Because of the distribution of power across and within institutions, political parties must find solutions and issues that are in the best interest of candidates who reflect very different electoral constituencies and institutional objectives. Considering the increasingly candidate-conscious American voter, parties that hope to influence general election outcomes must be prepared to make their case to voters based on the strength of their ideals and the power of their message. Finally, if they hope to succeed in the world of candidate-centered campaigns, parties must find a way to either compete with or co-opt political action committees, political consultants, professional fund-raisers, media advisers, and pollsters. In short, responsible national parties in the American mold must rely on their ability to persuade party officials, voters, and candidates, because they do not possess the tools to intimidate or discipline them.

**The Election of 1994: An Experiment in Responsible Parties**

On September 27, 1994, Newt Gingrich and more than three hundred Republican candidates for the United States Congress stood on the steps of the nation’s capitol and made ten promises to the American public. The po-
political significance of "The Republican Contract with America," both positive and negative, is well documented by political scientists and journalists (Koopman 1994; Jacobson 1996). However, much less well known is the fact that the national activity was only one part of a three-pronged effort to coordinate the issues and campaigns of Republican candidates all across the country. It was the vision of Newt Gingrich and other Republicans that the party would "present a complementary vision, a seamless web, if you will, a vision of a Republican Party at the local level that is in sync with, and complimentary to, and strengthening the message, and proposals, and vision of the Republican Party at the national level" (Contract with America 1994).

While this effort is documented much more thoroughly elsewhere (Little 1997, 1998), a brief summary is useful. In February 1994, the leaders of the House Republican Conference decided to produce a list of ten issues on which their candidates for Congress could run as a group. They formed several subcommittees to select the issues and develop the positions that would be included in the Contract with America. In June, Newt Gingrich and Republican National Committee (RNC) Chairman Haley Barbour met in Los Angeles and determined that this effort should extend to state and local parties as well. Barbour agreed to dedicate more than $400,000 of RNC funds to the effort (Barnes 1994) and former Delaware Governor Pete DuPont agreed to put his considerable influence with state Republicans behind it.

In August, the Republican National Committee and GOPAC, a PAC headed by Gingrich, distributed an audiotape outlining the electoral plan to more than twelve thousand Republican officials, candidates, and supporters across the country. On one side of the tape, Gingrich, DuPont and Congressman Dick Armey outlined the vision for a coordinated agenda, and on the other, Haley Barbour offered very practical and concrete advice about developing and promoting such a document (Contract with America 1994). While there would be no effort to censor the subnational agendas, the tape and interviews with Republican leaders indicate that these agendas were expected to reflect the conservative ideals embodied in the national document: opportunity, accountability, and responsibility.

In addition to providing money and vision, the national party provided manpower, office space, and technical support. Two RNC staff members were assigned to encourage state and local party officials to prepare and promote such documents for their election. Each had at their disposal the considerable resources of the national party, including polling data, past voting patterns, media consultants, and technical support. The state parties coordinator spent the bulk of her time trying to persuade recalcitrant state party officials that the national party was not trying to encroach on their autonomy but rather that this strategy was beneficial to both the state and national par-
ties. In addition, she and others encouraged states to produce and promote agendas, offering suggestions and examples from other states.³

In the end, the effort paid off, with twenty state Republican parties developing and promoting contractlike agendas prior to the election, and four states offering one after the election but prior to the opening of their legislative session. This strategy had the anticipated policy and political consequences. Over one-half of the items in each state “contract” reflected items from the national agenda, and seven state documents included only items noted in the national document (Little 1997). In addition, the public seemed willing to reward the party for offering this united agenda, with Republicans making significant House (over 7 seats) and Senate (over 2.5 seats) gains in states that offered electoral contracts relative to state Republican Parties with no such agendas. These differences remain significant even when factors usually associated with midterm losses (presidential popularity, previous electoral losses or gains, and economic changes) or partisan legislative gains (the number of seats to be elected, financial support, partisan control, legislative professionalism, and strength of the state party) are taken into consideration. The election of 1994, at least for Republicans, showcased a national party coordinating the campaigns, message, and publicity of their candidates for offices nationwide.

The Conditions Contributing to Responsible Parties in the Modern Era

Several factors came together in 1994 that made a uniquely American brand of responsible parties possible. Probably the most obvious source of this strategy was the new leadership of the Republican Party. Two prominent Republican leaders emerged in 1994 who envisioned a proactive Republican majority in America: Newt Gingrich and Haley Barbour. Interviews with various Republican staff members reveal that Gingrich had harbored ideas of a national Republican agenda since his early days at GOPAC. Haley Barbour, who became RNC chair in January 1993, enthusiastically embraced the idea of a unified agenda for national, state, and local parties “because he saw that it could have a unifying effect on the party’s message for incumbents and challengers alike” (Barnes 1994: 477).

Second, the minority status of the Republican Party in Washington, D.C. and many state capitols made this strategy feasible. While the idea for an electoral contract may have been in Gingrich’s mind for some time, it was not politically feasible during the previous twelve years of his tenure in the U.S. House. Had the Republicans presented their contract during that time, the Republican White House or Senate would had to have shoulderred, at least implicitly, some of the blame for the problems addressed by the agenda. Minority status in the legislative and executive branches allowed the
Republicans to propose solutions without having to take blame for creating the problems (Jacobson 1996). Thus, being in the minority gave the Republicans the freedom to implement the strategy that Gingrich and Barbour envisioned.

A third factor that probably contributed to the development and success of the Contract with America was the forty-year reign of the Democrats in the House of Representatives. While a minority party is free to accuse the majority of policy failures, a forty-year minority party could tap into the concerns of a public that already held the U.S. Congress in very low regards (Jacobson 1996). They could appeal to the sense of democratic competition and fairness in the face of forty-year autocratic rule (Gillespie and Schellhas 1994: 13).

Finally, while many argued that the low popularity of Bill Clinton made the contract unnecessary, it also made such a document more appealing to the voting public. Republican leaders and candidates were quick to contrast the positions in the contract with actions of the Clinton administration that they argued were out of step with the mainstream of America, including tax increases, health care reform coupled with a failure to address welfare reform, the budget deficit, and crime. These contrasts all made the Republican contract more appealing to the American public (Jacobson 1996).

The Context of 1996: Electing a President, Not a Party

Most of the conditions that contributed to partisan coordination in 1994 were no longer evident in 1996. First, while the visionary and ambitious Gingrich could take charge of the Republican efforts in 1994, the 1996 Republican Party had at its helm a moderate, midwestern senator with a long history of government service who had eschewed the whole idea of the contract in 1994 and a national chair who clearly knew his days were numbered and had lost enthusiasm for the job. Second, the liberal and unpopular Bill Clinton who was the focus of so many Republican barbs in 1994 was replaced in 1996 by a more moderate Bill Clinton who had seen his popularity rise to new heights as the election approached and seemed reinvigorated by the campaign.

Third, at the state and national level, the Republican successes of 1994 meant that the party could no longer blame Democrats for failures of policy or politics in the states, which was a key ingredient of the 1994 effort (Kopman 1994). Where Republicans made promises and gains in 1994, they had to take responsibility in 1996. Further, by 1996, Democrats had co-opted many of the conservative items that had driven the Republican agenda in 1994, including welfare reform and tax cuts.

Finally, having moved from challenging the system to running it, many
of the Republican legislators who had ridden the “contracts” to victory in 1994 were now merely incumbents and, as such, were viewed as part of the problem rather than part of the solution. Many Republicans became victims in 1996 of the same skepticism that had given them victory in 1994. Although his fall was farther and harder than most, Speaker Newt Gingrich’s problems were indicative of the problems that faced many new Republican leaders in 1996. With the declining popularity of Gingrich, a primary architect of the 1994 strategy, many state parties (as well as national officials) felt that a 1996 electoral agenda would be an albatross around the necks of the party’s candidates.

The 1994 Agendas and the Election of 1996: The Voters Respond to a Responsible Party

A primary tenet of the responsible parties model of politics is that the voters will hold the parties accountable for their promises and actions. Early in the 1996 electoral cycle, Republicans looked forward with great anticipation to reaping the political benefits of delivering on their promises. By the end of the first one hundred days of the 104th Congress, Republicans in Washington had already mapped their 1996 electoral strategy as “Promises Made, Promises Kept.” It was, they felt, logical that the voters would reward them for passing parts of their agenda and making honest efforts to implement the rest. In like manner, Republicans across the country planned to ride their legislative achievements to victory in 1996, making plans to solidify and add to majorities gained in 1994 (Roberts et al. 1995; Hansen and Rhymes 1996).

However, by late 1995 and early 1996, the tide had begun to turn against the Republican juggernaut. Missteps and miscalculations by national leaders took their toll on the prospects of state, as well as national, elections. In these mistakes and the political resurgence of their own president, the Democrats saw hope for halting and even reversing the damage done in 1994 (Hansen and Rhymes 1996). On the second anniversary of the signing of the Contract with America (September 26, 1996), Democrats gathered on the steps of the nation’s capitol to “remind voters of exactly what this Congress has stood for: government shutdowns and deep spending cuts in Medicare, Medicaid, the environment, and education.” Similar events took place in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Iowa, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Maine, and Michigan. In North Carolina, one county Democratic Party went so far as to publish a newspaper advertisement with caricatures of local Republican officeholders (U.S. Congressman Richard Burr, state senators, and state representatives) as “The Newt Clones,” and linking the national leaders to state activities:
In 1994, the Republicans, led by Newt Gingrich, adopted their Contract with America. In Raleigh, newly elected Republicans copied Newt with their Contract with North Carolina. What they both had in common was a willingness to destroy our government if they didn’t get their way. The Republicans in the United States Congress shut down the government twice, and the Republicans in the North Carolina state legislature walked off the job. Face the facts. . . . No Newts is good Newts.

What effect, if any, did the 1994 state level documents have on the state legislative elections of 1996? Did they allow Republicans to soar like eagles as expected in early 1995, or did they become albatrosses around the necks of Republicans as Democrats urged in 1996? To answer that question, consider the Democratic state legislative gains in 1996 as presented in Tables 18.1 and 18.2. The models test four distinct explanations of the state legislative election outcomes of 1996. These theories reflect explanations proposed

### Table 18.1 Determinants of Democratic Seat Gains in 1996 State House Races

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>(b)</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Standard Error of (b)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economy:</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment change, 1992-1996</td>
<td>1.006</td>
<td>.167</td>
<td>.703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential coattails:</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton vote percentage</td>
<td>.175</td>
<td>.200</td>
<td>.110*</td>
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<td>Republican Agenda:</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signers of 1994 &quot;Contract&quot;</td>
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<td>.009</td>
<td>2.183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>-.219</td>
<td>1.595**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bipartisanship:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Republican house majority</td>
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<td>.295</td>
<td>1.726*</td>
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<td>Republican governor</td>
<td>.970</td>
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<tr>
<td>Control variables</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994 Republican House gains</td>
<td>.391</td>
<td>.467</td>
<td>.132***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of House positions</td>
<td>.036</td>
<td>.364</td>
<td>.015***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\*\(p = .10\).
\**\(p = .05\).
\***\(p = .01\).

Note: \(N = 43; R^2 = .611; \) Adjusted \(R^2 = .520\).
Table 18.2 Determinants of Democratic Seat Gains in 1996 State Senate Races

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>$b$</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Standard Error of $b$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economy:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment Change, 1992-1996</td>
<td>.051</td>
<td>.022</td>
<td>.322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential coattails:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton vote percent</td>
<td>.209</td>
<td>.639</td>
<td>.056***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican agenda:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signers of &quot;Contract,&quot; 1994</td>
<td>.491</td>
<td>.068</td>
<td>1.045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State party &quot;Contracts,&quot; 1994</td>
<td>-1.253</td>
<td>-.277</td>
<td>.712**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bipartisanship:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican Senate majority</td>
<td>1.752</td>
<td>.390</td>
<td>.682**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican governor</td>
<td>-.651</td>
<td>-.143</td>
<td>.651</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control variables:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican 1994 Senate gains</td>
<td>.249</td>
<td>.321</td>
<td>.127***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Senate positions elected</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>.073</td>
<td>.026</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p = .10.
**p = .05.
***p = .01.

Note: $N = 42$; $R^2 = .408$; Adjusted $R^2 = .264$.

by journalists and scholars. First, some suggest that just as the Republicans bore the blame for a poor economy in 1992, Democrats were rewarded for economic success in 1996 (Cook 1996; Apple 1996). To test that hypothesis, the model includes the state-level change in unemployment from 1992 to 1996, the years of the first Clinton administration. A second hypothesis is that a more moderate and rejuvenated president, juxtaposed against the extremist Republican Congress and a lackluster Republican presidential campaign, extended lengthy coattails to the downticket Democrats in the states (Clines 1996; Cook 1996; Cooper 1996; Koszczuk 1996). To control for this possibility, the model considers the percentage of the two-party vote received by Bill Clinton in 1996. Third, some journalists (and apologetic politicians) suggested that the real message of 1996 was one of bipartisanship, with voters intentionally tapping a Republican legislator and a Democratic
executive, or vice versa. To determine whether such a theory has any validity, we consider the partisan control of the legislative and the executive branches prior to the election. If this theory is true, then Democrats should do best in states with Republican majorities, particularly a Republican executive.

Finally, one might consider the 1996 election as a referendum on the Contract with America and the conservative agenda it put forth (Bennet 1996). To determine the residual effects of the 1994 agendas, we control for the proportion of 1996 candidates for Congress who signed the 1994 Contract with America, and whether or not the state Republican Party promoted its own contract in 1994. The former variable tests the effect of the national document and the latter, of the state versions. Republican seat gains in 1994 and the number of seats up for election in 1996 are added as controls.

The results suggest that the 1994 “contract” documents did not prove to be the albatross around the Republican necks that many predicted going into the election. While the proportion of 1996 congressional candidates who had signed the Republican document in 1994 had no significant effect on Democratic state legislative success in 1994, the presence or absence of a state Republican document in 1994 did. In the forty-three states electing members to their lower chambers in 1996, Republican gains were significantly higher (additional 2.645 seats), controlling for the other factors, in states where the Republican Party had promoted a coordinated agenda in 1994. Likewise, Democratic upper chamber losses (loss of 1.253 seats) were significantly higher in states that wrote and promoted a document in 1994, controlling for the other factors.

While the effects of these documents were significant, they were not the driving force behind this election. In lower chamber models, the effects of the contracts were less important than the presence of a Republican majority, the size of Republican gains in 1994, and the size of the chamber. In the Senate races, their effects were dwarfed by the coattails of the president, as well as the presence of a Republican majority in the chamber.

From this perspective, the 1996 election may not have helped the cause of responsible parties dramatically, but it clearly did not put the death nail in it either. While the Republicans did not get the sweeping victories they hoped their efforts would yield when they worked to pass their agendas in 1995, they were not hammered for those efforts, either. At the state level, the presence of such a document actually proved to be positive. However, if the responsible parties model were here to stay, one would expect that parties would not just react to the past contracts but replicate the efforts in 1996.

1996 Campaign Strategies: The Fate of the Responsible Parties Model?

As noted earlier, the Republican united agenda of 1994 might have influenced the elections of 1996 in two ways. First, the data presented in Tables
18.1 and 18.2 suggest that the voters did not find the Republican agendas as extreme or out of touch as many journalists and political pundits predicted. The residual effects of the effort were positive. Second, if this model of elections more closely resembling responsible parties is to be more than an aberration in the drive toward issueless, candidate-centered efforts, then we should see it replicated in 1996. We turn to that election now.

At the beginning of the 1996 election cycle, basking in the glow of the past year's success, state parties were anxious to replicate their efforts and their successes in 1996. Republican parties that had prepared and presented contracts in 1994 with limited effort, talked of hiring pollsters, consulting political operatives, and expending significant resources on a 1996 document. The Republican Party of Texas, whose 1994 “Contract with Texas” event was canceled two days before it was to occur, went so far as to form a committee of politicians, consultants, and scholars, charged to produce the “Republican Compact” for 1996. New Mexico Republicans placed a series of issues on their Web page to determine popular issue positions among its constituents for a 1996 contract. Several other state Republican and Democratic parties established formal or informal committees to explore the possibility of a 1996 document.

Table 18.3 reveals the results of a survey of state Republican and Democratic chairs regarding their “agenda setting” efforts in 1996. Of the thirty-one Republican parties responding to the survey, almost 60 percent (eighteen) at least considered writing a document. Of the eleven that gave no consideration to such action, seven did not act in 1994 either. Of the eleven 1994 “contract” states who responded, seven at least considered documents in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Republicans</th>
<th>Democrats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never considered agenda</td>
<td>11 (35.5)</td>
<td>16 (59.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considered, did not write</td>
<td>11 (35.5)</td>
<td>8 (29.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrote, did not promote</td>
<td>4 (12.9)</td>
<td>1 (3.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrote and promoted</td>
<td>2 (6.5)</td>
<td>2 (7.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoted after election</td>
<td>2 (6.5)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not respond</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Percentages of respondents appear in parenthesis and may not add up to 100.0 because of rounding.
1996. Of those who considered but did not produce documents or produced but did not publish documents, most noted similar reasons for their decisions: the time for the contracts had passed, public attitudes toward Gingrich and the national party were not positive, no one was at the top of the ticket to take an active leadership role in developing or promoting the idea, and a desire was expressed to run on the promises made, promises kept theme noted earlier.

Not surprisingly, Democrats were not as likely as their Republican counterparts to consider such electoral documents. Of the twenty-seven responding Democratic Party directors, almost 60 percent (sixteen states) indicated that their party did not even consider preparing a contract in the image of the 1994 Republican documents. However, eleven state Democratic parties did actually consider replicating the Republican effort, signaling a dramatic change from the politics of 1994 when only one Democratic Party (North Dakota) took the Republican effort seriously enough to offer its own document. More significantly, eight of the eleven Democratic parties who at least considered such a document in 1996 were in states where the Republicans had successfully developed and run on a “contract” in 1994. Clearly, the efforts of the Republicans in 1994 influenced Democratic strategy in 1996.

Four Agendas in 1996: Contracts from Both Parties

While the use of the contract strategy was not nearly as prevalent in 1996 as it was in 1994, political parties in four states, two Democratic and two Republican, actually prepared and publicly presented documents similar to the 1994 Republican Contract with America. On September 3, 1996, North Carolina’s Democratic governor unveiled the “Hunt Agenda for North Carolina 2000,” which was very similar to Republicans efforts of two years earlier (Rhee 1996). Just like the New Contract for the People of North Carolina made by the Republicans in 1994, the Hunt Agenda promised to improve education, reform welfare, aggressively seek economic growth, eliminate waste, cut taxes, and get tough on crime.

On October 27, 1996, twenty-seven Republican candidates for the Hawaii General Assembly stood on the steps of the state capitol to present their “Power to the People” pledge (Wright 1996). Included in the pledge were promises to limit pensions for lawmakers, enact term limits, localize control of education, revise the state constitution, and let the voters decide the fate of the state’s same sex marriage law (Star-Bulletin 1996). Republican House Leader Gene Ward hailed the event as a “turning point from the old Hawaii to the new Hawaii, a new political majority” (Wright 1996).

In South Carolina both parties presented agendas prior to the election. Hoping to replicate their dramatic success of two years earlier, when the Re-
publicans took control of the House for the first time since Reconstruction, Republican House members stood on the steps of the capitol on September 19, 1996, and pledged to support the “Palmetto Pledge II” (Scoppe 1996a). While claiming credit for keeping their promises of 1994, the Republicans offered to continue the “Republican Revolution” by voting for and passing within the first ninety days of the legislative session property tax relief, school safety, education initiatives, supermajority for tax increases, and term limits.

In a preemptive strike, House and Senate Democratic leaders had laid out their “Dinner Table Agenda” two days earlier on the same steps. According to state Democratic Party Chairman Ron Maxwell, who in 1994 belittled a similar Republican event, “These are issues I think that are more important than the issues they talked about two years ago. These are issues people are concerned about” (Scoppe 1996a: B1). Both parties made very public displays of their agendas, and leaders of both parties worked to make them issues in the campaigns. Focusing almost exclusively on educational issues and borrowing heavily from the Republican agenda of 1994, the Dinner Table Agenda promised to increase resources for education, deal with school discipline, increase parental involvement and local control of the schools, and expand access to a college education.

While the number of states offering contracts is insufficient to consider in a model of predicting electoral change, it should be noted that Republicans made significant gains in Hawaii and South Carolina, while Democrats regained much of what they lost in North Carolina. The only “contract” party that did not fare well was the South Carolina Democrats, who faced a more focused and organized Republican effort that had the legitimacy of two successful years behind it.

Conclusion: The End of the Experiment?

Do the 1996 election results suggest that the 1994 Republican effort to provide a united state, local, and national agenda was merely an aberration on the path to candidate-centered, personal campaigns that are void of party direction or message? Or do they provide some hope that a party can make promises to the American public and be rewarded for making and trying to keep those promises? The 1996 election seems to provide a mixed answer to those questions.

Obviously, the results presented here do not suggest that the responsible party effort of 1994 revolutionized state and national politics as the early successes might have suggested. In light of declining Republican popularity at the national level, increasing disenchantment with the national contract, and absent any significant encouragement from the national party (whose
attention was focused on capturing the White House), few state parties replicated the effort in 1996.

Yet, evidence indicates that such a coordinated effort can be positive, and, indeed, voters seem willing to reward the party who takes the risk to promote and work toward a unified agenda. Controlling for other factors, Republicans in contract states were significantly more likely to make House and Senate gains in 1996 than were their counterparts in states who made no concerted effort in 1994. Further, the Republican success of 1994 also altered the way state parties and legislative caucuses approached the elections of 1996. Rather than merely providing candidates with financial or technical support or letting them go it alone, over half of the party officials responding to a survey indicated that they at least considered developing and presenting an agenda on which all candidates would be encouraged to run. In short, they considered running a campaign in the mold of the responsible parties model. Furthermore four state parties actually promoted such a document in 1996, with three of the four finding electoral success.

Although the election of 1996 did not reflect the kind of unified agenda or widespread success for the Republican (or Democratic) Party that was evident in 1994, neither did it prove to be the great downfall of the Republicans that Democrats predicted going into the later stages of the campaign of 1996. Perhaps the message of the 1996 election is that parties that act in a manner similar to Schattschneider’s (1942) responsible parties, with a good measure of Schlesinger’s (1985) new political party thrown in, can be successful in the modern era.

Responsible parties of this very particular kind can work in America. However, the degree to which they occur and succeed appears to be very dependent on the context of the election. The key to responsible parties may lie at the top of the ticket. If the candidate at the top of the ticket (be it for president, governor, or legislative leader) is interested in promoting such an agenda, then the others on the ticket seem willing to follow. Second, the issues chosen for such an agenda need to be popular and in the best interest of the candidates—modern candidates show no interest in falling on their electoral swords for the good of an ideologically pure party agenda. Finally, such issue-based efforts will continue as long as candidates perceive that they will be rewarded by the voters for developing, promoting, and working toward a particular agenda. If the voters have no interest in responsible parties, candidates will have no incentive to work toward them. In short, while the responsible party model may play a prominent role in future American elections, its fate is in the rather fickle hands of leaders, candidates, and voters.

Notes

1. There is considerable disagreement as to who first had the idea to include state and local races. A staff member of Haley Barbour indicated that the RNC chair suggested the
plan to Gingrich, a longtime Gingrich staffer suggested that it was part of Gingrich’s master plan all along, and Pete DuPont revealed that he planted the idea in Gingrich’s head before the June meeting. At any rate, all three agreed that such a strategy was a good idea.

2. This influence was greatly enhanced by the fact that DuPont was a former governor himself and former president of the Republican Governor’s Association (Interview, October 30, 1995).

3. Interview with RNC staff, October 31, 1995.
5. DNC press release, September 26, 1996.
7. Gubernatorial elections are not considered for two reasons: (1) they are beyond the scope of this chapter and, (2) the small number of gubernatorial elections (twelve) would make analysis rather suspect.


9. This is not to imply that all voters consciously rewarded Republicans for their “responsible party” efforts in 1996 or that candidates on either side made a dramatic issue of it. Indeed, a survey of state parties reveals that while up to half of the Republican candidates for state legislature mentioned the past agendas in their campaigns, few Democratic parties made an effort to bring the issue to the forefront.

10. Interview with Texas Republican officials.
11. Interview with New Mexico Republican executive director.
12. Survey’s were sent to the executive director of each party in the forty-three states holding state legislative elections in 1996. After one follow-up letter for those who did not respond initially, the response rate was 70 percent for the Republicans (thirty responses) and 63 percent for the Democrats (twenty-seven responses). The Republican leader of New York returned the survey with a letter saying he does not respond to surveys. That response is not included.

13. In West Virginia, the concern was the opposite. House Republican Leader Bob Ashley noted that a 1996 “Contract with West Virginia” was rejected because its promises might have hamstrung the Republican candidate for governor.
“You Don’t Know Me, but Here I Am”:
Congressional Candidates and Party Strength

Robert G. Boatright

Political scientists have never reached a consensus about how to define a political party. It is no wonder, then, that we have also failed to ascertain what a “strong” party is. Is party strength synonymous with the organizational ability to field viable candidates for as many seats in government as possible, regardless of the policy views of those candidates, or is it a function of the ability to present a clear ideological agenda to voters, regardless of the electoral consequences of that agenda?

In this chapter I evaluate theories of party strength through interviews with nonincumbent candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives. These interviews provide evidence that the two theories of party strength cannot be reconciled. Ideological coherence between candidates and parties in these races was achieved either at the expense of running competitive campaigns or where there was little chance of making the campaign competitive to begin with. In areas in which the two major parties have traditionally been organizationally strong, competitive candidates reported little pressure from their party to adhere to any preordained set of issue positions. If parties applied any pressure at all to their candidates, it was pressure to take moderate positions that were most likely to result in victory or to maximize vote share. These candidates, however, often took a cynical view of their party, regarding it as little more than a source of money. Less competitive candidates in these areas were often ignored by their parties, yet they were much more positive about their opportunity to, as they saw it, pull their party in one ideological direction or another in their district. In areas in which the parties have traditionally been more ideologically coherent (and organizationally weaker), candidates reported a more conflictual relationship with their party. They reported that rather than seeking candidates with moderate positions, their party often sought to pull candidates away from the political center, even when such movement cost the candidates votes. In the majority of cases of both types, the parties sought to influence issue positions through recruit-
ment and endorsements before the candidates were nominated. After nominees were selected, the parties served primarily as a resource, either in terms of money or in terms of political capital and linkage of their congressional candidates to other party candidates or officeholders.

Political scientists have given quite thorough treatment to the supply side of the party assistance equation; that is, we have documented what services political parties provide to their candidates and which candidates are selected as recipients. In this chapter, I survey the candidates who are consumers or party services. I evaluate their demands on their parties, their satisfaction with their party's performance, and the implications of this relationship for our theories of party strength. Before doing so, however, a few words on the theories in question and on the nature of the candidates interviewed are in order.

Party Composition, Goals, and Strength

When political scientists write about parties, it is almost obligatory to begin with V. O. Key's (1958) tripartite division of parties: the party-in-government, the party organization, and the party-in-the-electorate. While this distinction is factually accurate, it is one that we seldom explicitly make in everyday conversation. When we say “The Democrats stand for the social safety net” or “The Republicans stand for free enterprise,” we are not speaking of any one function of the party or group within the party but of a general ideological predisposition that cuts across different party groups or functions. Members of the party may differ in their motivations for taking policy positions, yet we tend to assume that there is some underlying consensus within the party on a set of policy principles or objectives. In rational choice literature, members of the party in the electorate have policy preferences that arise either out of economic self-interest, group identity, or philosophical affinity for a particular notion of what is right. The party organization gains from translating these preferences into a set of proposals that are then presented to the electorate, while the party in government gains from seeking to enact these proposals into law, regardless of whether they actually agree with them. All three groups may thus share a platform, even though they do not benefit equally from it.

This division also does not address the dynamic nature of individual political activity. While the majority of citizens remain exclusively within the party-in-the-electorate, those who participate in organizational activities or those who hold political office have moved from one sector of the party to another. Nonincumbent candidates, in particular, represent a blend of the three. They have chosen to run as candidates of the party they have previously merely identified with as citizens. They have moved from the elec-
It is here that party theorists part ways. In Anthony Downs's (1957: 34) formal model of electoral competition, parties must have a uniform motivation for position taking; the motive thus must be winning elections. This instrumental conception has no room for voters or for the candidate who wishes to use the party as a platform for expressing his actual policy preferences; such an individual would be participating in the "intraparty power struggle," not acting as an agent of the party per se. Downs's conclusion that parties would inevitably seek to capture the allegiance of the median voter, and would therefore take roughly identical policy positions, was a rebuttal to the more normative discussion of parties that took place in the early 1950s. The American Political Science Association (APSA) report of 1950 called on parties to take contrasting positions, to give voters an informed choice between the two parties. (American Political Science Association Committee on Political Parties 1950). Whereas the APSA report argued that parties should stand for different ideas, Downs's work argued that parties had nothing to gain from doing so unless the electorate was highly polarized.

Subsequent work, however, has established a position between Downs' positive theory and the APSA report's normative argument. Riker and Ordeshook (1973) demonstrated that in parties concerned with winning elections rather than with maximizing votes, noninstrumental policy preferences can shape the positions of candidates and of the party in government (see also Schlesinger 1975). The party, in this sense, can be said to include the voters as well, for it is in their capacity as citizens that individuals formulate policy preferences that are not targeted at personal gain of office. At a minimum, where a party can win with two or more different policy positions, it can be expected to take the position closest to the policies it actually prefers, independent of instrumental concerns. A crucial addition to that theory, for the purposes of this chapter, is that the same logic holds for losing elections—in cases in which a party will almost certainly lose, why not lose while taking positions that reflect the party's ex ante, noninstrumental positions, rather than lose while taking a compromise position?

We thus have two dimensions for evaluating policy views within a party. Instrumental positions are positions taken solely to win elections, gain votes, or secure other material benefits, while expressive positions follow from philosophical or ideological beliefs about what government should do. Likewise, we have two dimensions for evaluating party strength: the organizational dimension, in which parties are evaluated in accordance with their ability to win material benefits, and the ideological dimension, in which they are evaluated in terms of their ability to present different sets of policy proposals to voters, increasing their proximity to the views of most voters.
While many political science models consider party ideology, the greatest consideration of this dimension comes from outside the academy. Political pundits frequently bemoan “finger to the wind” politicians or campaigns in which candidates do not present the voters with contrasting proposals, yet if forced to choose between Downs and the APSA report, few political scientists would stand against the median voter model. Contemporary empirical literature in political science emphasizes what Mayhew (1986) defines as “material” rather than “purposive” benefits that parties provide to candidates. Herrnson (1995: 82) found that the party’s national organizational wing has little interest in ideological “litmus tests” and instead provides assistance to candidates based on their chance of winning. Candidate assistance is apportioned according to fulfillment by the candidates of nonpolicy criteria, such as individual fund-raising levels and favorable polling numbers. The parties may provide research on the popularity among voters of different issue approaches, yet in doing so they are merely appealing to candidates’ instrumental self-interest.

I argued earlier, however, that we seldom are referring to a particular functioning unit of the party when we make pronouncements about what parties do. It would thus be folly to limit this inquiry to specific organizational actors within the party. The discussion I present here leaves definitions of party open to the candidates; they may refer to local or state party leaders, to the voters, to the national organization, or to prominent officeholders. I break their discussions of party into three sections. First, I explore candidates’ comments on party identification. Do candidates ally themselves with their party in an instrumental manner, or do they demonstrate a more psychological commitment to their party as an ideological entity? Second, what did their party, in its various guises, actually do for them in their campaigns, and how did they react to that assistance (or lack of assistance)? Third, did the party have a role in shaping or attempting to shape the candidates’ issue positions? If so, how do these attempts correlate with our two conceptions of party strength, and can systematic differences be identified?

The Interview Sample

Between November 1996 and July 1997, I interviewed fifty-two of the fifty-seven nonincumbent 1996 U.S. House candidates in Illinois, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Ohio. Table 19.1 compares this sample with all nonincumbent candidates. Only six of the candidates in my sample were elected to Congress, four of whom were open seat candidates. This rate is typical of the 94.5 percent national reelection rate for incumbents in 1996. The candidates are a fairly representative sample in terms of ideology, party, and financial resources.
Table 19.1 Comparison of Interview Sample with All Nonincumbent 1996 Candidates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Interview Sample</th>
<th>All Races</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Party (in percentages):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>57.7</td>
<td>54.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>45.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitiveness (in percentages):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winners</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very competitive</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat competitive</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>39.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long shots</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>34.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median campaign spending$^b$</td>
<td>$180,310$</td>
<td>$201,710$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median ideology$^c$</td>
<td>.640</td>
<td>.580</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N | 52 | 469

$^a$Competitiveness is measured such that long-shot candidates received less than 35 percent of the vote and raised under $100,000, somewhat competitive candidates either received 35 to 45 percent of the vote or raised over $100,000, and very competitive candidates received over 45 percent of the vote. The statistics for very competitive candidates include winning candidates.

$^b$Thirty-three candidates did not report campaign spending; I coded these candidates as <$5,000.

$^c$Ideology measurements are made by scaling the questions asked in the 1996 Congressional Quarterly candidates survey; a score of 0 reflects the most conservative set of answers, while a score of 1 reflects the most liberal set of answers. The results, then, indicate that the candidates interviewed were slightly more liberal than those not interviewed, a function of the slightly larger number of (non-southern) Democrats in the sample. For more details, see Boatright (1997) and Sellers and Hollan (1997).

Sources: Author's own calculations; 1996 Federal Election Commission year-end reports; 1996 Congressional Quarterly candidate survey.

Apart from actually winning, the candidates are also typical of national trends in vote share. Throughout this chapter, I will collapse the sliding scale of candidate competitiveness into three types: long shots (under 35 percent of the vote and less than $100,000 raised), somewhat competitive candidates (35 to 45 percent of the vote or, failing that, over $100,000 raised), and very competitive candidates (over 45 percent of the vote) (Table 19.2). This is an admittedly ex post facto definition of competitiveness; it assumes that candidates did about as well as they could have been expected to do and that their competitiveness was a determinant, not a result, of their finances and
Table 19.2 Candidate Interview Summary Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Long Shots</th>
<th>Somewhat Competitive</th>
<th>Very Competitive</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Partisanship and experience:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous political office</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other political experience</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No political experience</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong party identification</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruited</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Party Assistance:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributed money</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polling</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help with PACs</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set expectations</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No help</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary and ideological competition:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faced primary opponent</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faced competitive opponent</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological pressure from party</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>52</td>
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*Source:* Survey by author.

the views recounted here. To support this assumption, I refer the reader to the very high correlation of 0.875 between incumbent vote share in 1994 and 1996. The low success rate of challengers and the self-selection of challengers (see Fowler and McClure 1989; Jacobson 1997) also illustrate the relative consistency of challenges to most incumbents.

One area in which the sample is not representative, of course, is geography. Within these four states, though, there is a great degree of variation; I leave it to the reader to judge whether this is a basis for generalizability. Each of the four states displays a variety of urban, rural, and suburban districts, and each displays a level of volatility in elections great enough to qualify them as relatively competitive two-party states. As of the 1996 election, Ohio and Wisconsin had predominantly Republican congressional delega-
tions, Illinois was fairly evenly split, and Minnesota was predominantly Democratic. Parties in Ohio and Illinois have been termed organizationally strong by Mayhew and patronage oriented by Fenton (1966), while the parties in Minnesota and Wisconsin have been termed organizationally weak and decentralized by Mayhew and issue oriented by Fenton.

The Candidates' Perceptions of Their Parties

Party Identification

Party loyalty in the electorate has been steadily declining for the past decade (Nie, Verba, and Petrocik 1979: 49; Abramson and Ostrom 1991). Accordingly, one might expect that candidates share the voters' skepticism about party labels. On the other hand, one might argue that candidates, because they are more knowledgeable about politics than the average citizen, would exhibit stronger ties to their party than do most voters. Among the candidates with whom I spoke, party identification was strongest among those candidates whom we would expect to be most strategic in choosing policy positions. The most competitive candidates were more likely to strongly identify with their party than were less competitive candidates, who often spoke of their ideological beliefs without associating themselves directly with the traditional ideology of their party.

Measuring party identification here is a rather subjective endeavor. One place to start is with reference to Jacobson's (1987: 46–48) candidate quality work. Of the long-shot candidates, none had previously held political office, although 53 percent had either held a position within their party, served on a congressional staff, or had run before. The balance shifts with the somewhat competitive candidates; 38 percent had previously held political office, generally as a state legislator, mayor, or county official. An additional 43 percent had previously held an appointed position in their party or had run previously, and only four had no political background. Seventy-nine percent of the very competitive candidates had held office, one had served on a congressional staff, and only two had no previous political experience.

Political experience, however, is not necessarily an adequate proxy for party identification. Experienced candidates may be better known within their party, but experience tells us little about whether the candidates view their party in instrumental terms or about whether they make partisan appeals. I chose not to ask the candidates directly about party identification, fearing that I would not receive useable answers, yet it is fairly easy to assess their relationship with their party from their comments. Candidates break down along roughly the same lines as they did on the political experience question; 47 percent of the long shots identified strongly with their party,
while 71 percent of the somewhat competitive candidates and 85 percent of the very competitive candidates (all but the two with no prior political experience) did. The candidates who did not indicate a strong relationship with their party, however, differ dramatically. The following quote is typical of many long shots, who often saw the party label as a matter of convenience:

I ran as a Democrat, but God knows, my policies are not Democratic policies.
It was only because I ran as a Democrat that I achieved the kind of audience that we were able to achieve in a district that has been a Republican bastion for years. (Illinois)

Among somewhat competitive candidates, as well as some of the long-shots, disaffection with the party was based more upon party factionalism. Candidates often spoke of being "on the outs" with their party, of using their candidacy to encourage the party to move in a particular ideological direction. For weak party identifiers, this was often a direction not favored by the party establishment:

Even though I lost, I was able to address the issues that I wanted to, and I think I came out of it respected by the political insiders. I want to either force the Republican Party back to the center, or to help the Reform Party move either party back to the center. (Minnesota)

You've got two types of politicians. You've got the people who are in the political arena because they're idea people. They have great visions for America, and that's what they want to go to Washington for. The other candidates are business politicians. Unfortunately, in this state a majority of Republicans and Democrats are business politicians. I was an idea guy, and I scared the Republicans. There's no crying in this state to think that I won't run again. (Illinois)

Comments such as these bespeak campaigns that were run not out of party loyalty but out of a desire to move their party in a particular direction—to the center in the first quote and to the right in the second.

Among the most competitive candidates, there is little indication of dissatisfaction with the party. This may be because these candidates received resources that were denied to other candidates, yet it also indicates that their candidacies were not aimed at changing the party's direction. It does not mean that these candidates found their party entirely helpful; those without strong party identification agreed with the strong party identifiers that personal coalitions were more valuable than party support:

The successful state representatives have their own organization, and that's what happens at the congressional level. You need to work with the party, but you really need to build your own organization. (Illinois)
Among candidates with strong ties to their party, answers were somewhat more uniform. Many long shots ran out of a sense of duty, to ensure the party was represented or to help others on the ballot. Among recruitees, this sentiment ran particularly strong:

I created a perceived concern on the part of a lot of Republicans, and they demanded [my opponent’s] presence more than they ever had in the past. But also, the fact that he was here and not somewhere else campaigning for other people was one of the key goals of many of my contributors. (Ohio)

Thirteen candidates claimed to have been recruited; seven of these thirteen were long shots, and only one ran a highly competitive campaign. Perceptions of recruitment are somewhat subjective, since many candidates who said they had been recruited also admitted having made their interest in running known to party leaders. Most of these candidates had been recruited merely to ensure that their party fielded a candidate. In three cases, however, including some quite competitive races, candidates claimed they had been recruited because their party was dissatisfied with the announced candidates on ideological grounds.

Views I cast as strong party identification among the most competitive candidates are difficult to capture in interview quotes. Because many of these candidates had held previous office, they had a record of party activity, and their identification with it was reflected in the claiming of credit for state legislative initiatives or in references to their close ties with national party leaders.

Party Activities and Assistance

Because the candidates displayed such different types of ties with their parties, I began my questions about the party’s activities on their behalf with several open-ended questions. Instead of naming specific party organizations, such as the DCCC or the NRCC, I merely asked candidates, “Were you satisfied with your party’s efforts on your behalf?” While some candidates diligently listed the activities of the national campaign organizations, the national coordinated campaign, the state parties, and the county or even township party organizations, most gave fairly inclusive, straightforward answers that did not make distinctions. In most cases, this answer was no. This is surely to be expected, as the parties provide a convenient scapegoat for losing candidates. Even many of those who said they were satisfied added that they had expected little assistance from their party to begin with.

As one would expect, candidates’ satisfaction with party assistance varied with their level of competitiveness and with their financial resources. Sixty-four percent of the highly competitive candidates—including all but
one of the victorious candidates—reported that they were satisfied with what their party had done for them, whereas only 19 percent of the somewhat competitive candidates and 29 percent of the long shots reported satisfaction with the party’s efforts.

Most of the dissatisfied directed their criticism at the national campaign organizations. Eighty-six percent of the highly competitive candidates reported receiving financial assistance from the DCCC or the NRCC, as compared with 33 percent of the somewhat competitive candidates and only one of the long shots. Those who did receive money from the national organizations often had little actual need for it—the median very competitive candidate raised $569,610. Despite their own successes in fund-raising, however, candidates still frequently reported that money was the most important party contribution:

Money was the most helpful thing. We didn’t want much more than that, because then they get into your campaign and they start running campaigns that are not geared toward the district. I wanted their money and I wanted to run, I didn’t want a lot of advice that came with that that I would have to follow.

(Wisconsin)

Many of the dissatisfied pointed to their meager campaign coffers and said that they could have done a lot more with small contributions than some of the wealthier candidates, yet several also identified a less tangible sense of support that would have gone with party money:

We kept [the DCCC] informed, although we didn’t expect anything from them. The only time I ever asked them for anything was there is a moment in time when they cut off candidates. They announce to the world that they’re dead. I called six weeks before the election and I said “Do not cut us off. I never asked you for anything, you just can’t do this to me.” (Illinois)

Among the most bitter candidates were those who narrowly missed being targeted. These included many Republicans who had run (and done well) in 1994 and who expected that their previous performance would make them contenders for party support. The three tiers I have set up map closely onto national party services. Almost all candidates reported receiving some amount of issue information and training from the national organizations. Even among the long shots only 29 percent reported receiving no assistance whatsoever from the national party organizations, and those who received no assistance acknowledged that they had not sought assistance. At the very least, candidates reported that they had been appraised of the “hurdles” they would have to leap in order to receive further assistance.

Two of the long shots made reference to such hurdles and to at least considering how their campaign might fulfill the party’s expectations. The
theme is much more prevalent, however, among somewhat competitive candidates. Forty-seven percent of these candidates made reference to the DCCC or NRCC's expectations that they poll early (and with favorable results) and that they raise $100,000 before the end of June. Sometimes they were successful in doing so:

We went out [to Washington] at the end of July, and they said "You're great, [your opponent] stinks. But it's a bad district. Go home, young man, and get media attention, and then we'll talk." So between July and the election, we talked every week, but they wanted to see polling results. Obviously, they thought it was a hopeless cause. They finally came forward at the end and maxed out for us, based on polls. (Illinois)

More frequently, however, these candidates were losers in the fight for the scarce money of the national campaign organizations:

I think what you really compete with is whatever the other forty or fifty competitive races are nationally. There were a few other races that were higher in the pecking order than mine, but they were always going to be higher than mine, based on the Democratic performance of their district. (Ohio)

There is a whole continuum that we were on. Supposedly they were going to eventually get behind two of us [in Wisconsin]. . . . Unless we had a poll that showed us even or close to even, then the open seats and the races against the first-term Republicans would be a higher priority for them. (Wisconsin)

The various types of resources a party can provide—polling, financial assistance, help in lining up PAC contributions—all beget each other and are a result, not a determinant, of competitiveness. The story told by almost all candidates was that national party assistance was targeted at those candidates who had already demonstrated that they were competitive candidates. One must therefore look elsewhere to find any party activity that is designed to make candidates competitive, to create a winning effort where none would otherwise exist. Such activity is not easily found; it may merely be a function of district demographics or of the individuals who run for office.

Few of the candidates reported assistance from their state parties; the only exceptions to this rule were Illinois Republicans and Wisconsin Democrats. Most candidates recognized that their state parties were more concerned with state legislative races. If candidates were adopted by any level of the party at all, it was by local party organizations or neighboring officeholders.

There were few patterns to this support; in many cases the reasons for strong local parties are specific to their areas, and these parties are often dependent on one or two individuals. As one rural Republican commented:
Local parties play a prominent role early in the campaign; all but one of the candidates who were recruited to run said they were recruited by local party officials. By far the most frequently cited source of assistance for candidates at all levels, however, were incumbent members of their state’s House delegation. Even the most long shot candidates reported some contact with one or two prominent members of their state’s delegation. In Ohio, for instance, where the Democrats had lost six seats in the past four years, virtually all Democratic candidates reported extensive help from Representatives Marcia Kaptur and Sherrod Brown. When I asked one long shot candidate why he thought congressional incumbents would help him, he remarked:

Sometimes they will do this because they aspire to run for another office. They want to make contacts. You help these little guys working down here, and they’ll be out there working for you. [Kaptur and Brown] knew my chances of winning were pretty slim, but they contacted me, and I’m willing to go to work for them one day. (Ohio)

Such self-interested motives should not be expected to result in long-term party building. Assistance from others in the party can generate enthusiasm among candidates and provide some moral support, but, if the prior quote is correct, its primary aim is not necessarily strengthening the party. Thirteen of the districts in the sample were districts that had been vacated within the last four years by popular, long-serving Congress members. Few candidates here found a local organization that had been nurtured by the previous incumbent. One Democrat remarked of the local party organization:

It’s been pretty loose, because [the previous Democratic incumbent] was so popular for so long that we didn’t have to do anything. He always won, and the Democrats would just try to get their local people elected. They weren’t real successful, and so we don’t have a real strong party organization in this district. (Minnesota)

Ideology and Party Strength

The previous discussion sheds some light on what makes for a successful campaign. Attention from the national congressional campaign organizations is crucial, yet this attention is often predicated on the district’s past performance. To speak of the strength of the national campaign organiza-
tions, however, one must make intertemporal comparisons, which I do not
do here. Does the relative strength of local and state political parties matter
in congressional campaigns? In Ohio and Wisconsin, where there were no
statewide races in 1996, the state parties did take a greater interest in House
races. In Minnesota and Illinois, homes of very competitive Senate races,
some state party assistance trickled down from the statewide campaigns. The
candidates' perspectives on the relative strength of their local or district par­
ties, however, are better suited to highlight important components of party
strength. First, party strength is not based upon an ideological agenda; in­
stead, it is reflected in the containment of ideological conflict, regardless of
the disparity in issue preferences of local party leaders or would-be Congress
members. Second, party strength paradoxically has little to do with the par­
ty's success in past elections; districts that had long been in one party’s
hands still had disorganized local parties. Third, party strength, according to
many of the interviewees, ensures that there is a deep talent pool of candi­
dates and that the talent pool is tapped and a nomination is made with mini­
mal friction.

A relatively small number of candidates reported any direct pressure on
issues from their party at any level. Among those that did, however, the dif­
ferences are striking. Virtually all candidates who reported ideological pres­
sure stated that it was a result of the primary, that they were forced to run
away from the political center in the primary and were then impeded in run­
ning toward it in the general election—a phenomenon that has been a staple
of presidential primary literature for years. Candidates who reported strong
district or local party organizations, however, noted that such maneuvering
was not necessary in their primaries:

I ran against [the incumbent] in the primary. The other candidates saw me as
the front-runner, so they campaigned against me. But I stayed against [the in­
cumbent] the whole time. I just presented myself as the one who had the best
chance of beating him, and that’s what the party leadership did, too. (Illinois)

All three of us were concentrating on [the incumbent]. I was not fearful of mak­
ing that my focus, because we were all three focusing on that. So I figured that
whoever won the primary would come out with a boost, and I think that’s what
happened. After [the primary] ended, we did it in style, all coming together.
We had a unity dinner three days after the primary. People came together, and
we raised $190,000 in the next month. (Wisconsin)

Twenty-four candidates—79 percent of the very competitive candidates,
38 percent of the somewhat competitive candidates, and 29 percent of the
long shots—faced primary opposition. Some of them did not regard their
primary opponents as serious competitors, but eighteen of the twenty-four
reported that they did need to spend money or campaign in the primary. All
but two of the six uncompetitive primaries occurred in the less competitive races. Eleven candidates reported some attempt by their party or leaders of their party to exert ideological pressure upon the nominee—in determining either who the nominee would be or what issues the nominee would have to address. These candidates are not concentrated in one particular category—three were very competitive, four were somewhat competitive, and four were long shots. All of them, however, were either recruited by the party or faced a primary opponent. Their discussions of party intervention all involve the local parties, and they break down quite neatly: candidates reporting strong local parties felt that any issue pressure present was applied to ensure a centrist candidate, while candidates reporting weak local parties felt pressure exerted to pull them away from the political center. These latter types correspond well with the areas Fenton and Mayhew term weak, or issue-oriented, party states. Several Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Chicago area Republicans of all different competitiveness levels talked about being pulled “off message” by divisive primaries and of failing to unify the party behind them. Over the course of my interviews I heard several variations on the following story:

I had been actively involved in the Republican Party for eighteen years, so I had a track record. I am a politically moderate Republican. That doesn’t mean I don’t have a strong conservative record on many issues, including a number of social issues, but what happened here is a candidate came out of nowhere. He spent far more money in the primary than any candidate had ever spent up here. When he spent that amount of money, in attack mode, I had to respond. I didn’t have the opportunity to really develop a positive aura and talk about my record, talk about my plans. I was on the defensive very much in the primary. My opponent inflamed the passions of a number of groups in the party. He also distorted certain things. If you don’t have the money to clarify these issues, to tell your own story, that stuff sticks. (Wisconsin)

Because the two parties in Minnesota endorse candidates prior to the primary, some candidates run unopposed in the primary yet face opposition for the party’s endorsement. Several somewhat competitive Minnesota candidates made comments about being hurt by ideological pressure from their parties:

The candidate that will most likely emerge next time is a former military man. The first words out of his mouth at the district convention, the question was “What are the most important issues to you?” His answer was “Life.” There was nothing else. Is he willing to take that conservative slant, to sell his soul as I did to get the endorsement? He probably will if he really wants it. I just think the Republican Party, unless we start coming together as an entity, will lose. There’s no coordination of efforts. The new Republican guard has just pushed people like me out. There’s a lot of anger that has to be overcome, and that’s going to lead to more defeats. (Minnesota)
The party activists in my districts are very conservative. They didn’t like my candidacy, and they will work against me if I run again in 1998. (Minnesota)

Compare these responses with candidates from organizationally strong parts of Ohio and Illinois, who took more nuts-and-bolts approaches to their local organizations:

I guess I made the decision to run as soon as I won the party’s endorsement of the executive committee. You know how those things go. It begins with speculation, people start talking, you start talking with people about whether you should go, people started encouraging me to run, there started to develop a consensus among party leaders that I would be the strongest candidate among those who were thinking of running. There were some other party establishment folks who had been long time members of the party who had been talking about it, but clearly wouldn’t be the strongest candidate. The party chairman and leadership sort of persuaded those folks that this just wasn’t the right time. (Ohio)

One second-time candidate from a strong party area faced a primary, yet it proved not to be a divisive one. A campaign staffer remarked:

The key thing was that he didn’t stop campaigning after his last race, so when he declared and filed as a candidate he already had a base of support in all these different counties. He knew the party structure, and the party structure knew him. They knew he was going to be someone who would be there to help. So he was not in a situation of saying “You don’t know me, but here I am, God’s gift to the Republican Party in this district. I’ve never done anything for you here in this county, but now I want you to go out and campaign for me.” It’s the personal relationships in this district that make a huge difference in getting people in the party excited and involved in the campaign. (Illinois)

Sixty-eight percent of the Illinois candidates claimed that the local parties in their district were “strong.” The same sentiment was shared by 56 percent of Ohio candidates, 50 percent of candidates in Wisconsin, and 29 percent of Minnesotans. There were no major differences in these reports between parties. It is difficult to generalize beyond the personalities of the individuals concerned, but it is clear from the interviews that party strife rarely hurt Ohio or Illinois candidates, while it damaged several candidacies in Wisconsin and Minnesota.

Conclusion

Why, one might ask, should parties care about any congressional nominees other than those who are likely to win? The election outcomes for many,
perhaps most, of the candidates with whom I spoke were preordained. What
good is assessing party strength in cases like these, in which party strength
does not necessarily make a critical difference in the outcome of the race?

Political parties, in the words of the candidates with whom I spoke, are
not merely tools to be utilized in elections, nor are they solely vehicles for
ideological expression. Yet they do comprise an element of each. Research
has established the central role of the national campaign organizations, yet
that is not what Mayhew or Fenton are discussing when they speak of party
strength. These interviews demonstrate that state and local parties do have
an important role to play in national elections. They can help recruit candi­
dates that are appropriate to their district, and they can provide some support
to candidates who are not receiving support from the national parties.

Virtually all of the candidates with whom I spoke believed, or at least
hoped, that their campaigns had made some difference to at least some vot­
ers. While the interviewees are representative of 1996 candidates, it is diffi­
cult to assess whether 1996 was a representative election year. In 1996, the
number of uncontested seats dropped to a post–World War II low. Only 3.2
percent of incumbents ran unopposed; in comparison, 17.2 percent of incum­
bents ran unopposed in 1994, and only once, in 1992, had the percentage of
uncontested seats fallen below 10 percent (Jacobson 1990: 46; Kazee 1994:
3). The recruitment efforts of both parties in 1996 indicate that local party
leaders, as well as sitting representatives and the national campaign organi­
sations, saw some advantage in fielding candidates. These candidates may
bring volunteers into politics, they may preserve party interest in contesting
the House seat so that when the incumbent retires or becomes more vulnera­
ble, the party will have information about strategy in running districtwide;
or they may simply turn out a few extra people to vote in local or statewide
that members of Congress are generally wary, perhaps overly wary, of taking
their reelection prospects for granted; maintaining some semblance of com­
petition may enable the parties to check each other, even in districts that one
party has little hope of winning.

These interviews show that party strength can vary dramatically, even
across small geographic and political distances. It may have been the case
that no Democrats could be unseated in Minnesota in 1996, yet the ideologi­
cal divisions confronted by Minnesota’s Republican candidates may discour­
age viable candidates from running in the future. Ohio’s Democratic Party,
also in bad shape following the 1994 elections, benefitted to a great degree,
in the eyes of its candidates, from the efforts of younger incumbent Demo­
crats to foster an organized party effort. The parties in other states illustrate
patterns described by Mayhew and Fenton. Illinois and Ohio did have
stronger state and local party efforts, and patronage, rather than ideology,
was a frequent topic of discussion for the candidates. Wisconsin’s state and
local parties show signs of strength, yet it is difficult to gauge whether this was because of the high stakes in Wisconsin’s 1996 races—two open seats and as many as four vulnerable incumbents.

Party strength, according to virtually all of the candidates with whom I spoke, has everything to do with maximizing competition and little to do with ideological coherence. Strong parties only put ideological pressure upon candidates in order to ensure centrist candidates who could steal votes from the opposition. Even in districts where one party is at a tremendous disadvantage, a party may still be strong if it can successfully coordinate the efforts of its candidates and lend its full support to its candidate. Weaker parties tend to be more concerned about ideological expression. This preoccupation may help to rally the faithful when the race is a long shot to begin with, but it can hurt in districts where a unified party effort could unseat an incumbent. Ideological fights within the party, or between the candidate and the party, tend to occur in moderately competitive districts, where the stakes are high enough that politically ambitious candidates may emerge, but not high enough that party members are willing to compromise their political convictions. In long-shot races, candidates tended either to see themselves as party builders or as lone voices crying out against the party “establishment.” Party strength often dictated which type of candidate emerged, yet it may not necessarily have a direct effect on the outcomes in these districts. In somewhat competitive races, candidates were much more likely to feud with their party—they may have had higher, and unfulfilled, expectations of the party, or they may have been involved in an ideological tussle with their party. Again, these two types of candidates fell into differing camps in their assessment of party strength. For the very competitive candidates, strong parties were deemed helpful in their campaign efforts; where they were not, the parties were irrelevant and personal coalitions assumed a greater role.

Why, then, do parties matter in congressional elections? Many observers have argued that they do not matter. While the party label may still matter in many of these districts, the efforts of the party cannot demonstrably determine victory or defeat. It would be folly to evaluate party efforts in such a short-run scenario. The simplest proof of parties’ importance in these races is the fact that few candidates who expressed disgust with their party’s level of support showed a desire to run again, or at least to run without greater support from their party. Candidates whose party made a strong effort to help them make the most of their campaign reported a desire either to run again or to help the eventual nominee. Surely a party that alienates its own candidates cannot be said to have healthy future prospects, while a party that keeps them active and in the fold may be said to have strengthened the commitment of at least one of its members, if not the many more who were involved in some way in that campaign.
Strong ideas and strong parties may be important for the collective health of the American political system, but are they helpful to the political health of the individual American congressional candidate? By now, political scientists have convincingly shown that a candidate-centered campaign is the electoral vehicle of choice for most congressional hopefuls and incumbents (Fenno 1978; Cain, Forejohn, and Fiorina 1987; Jacobson 1992: 88–93; Alford and Brady 1993; Rivers and Fiorina 1989; see Squire 1995 for an overview of the literature). Candidate-centered does not mean that a candidate refuses party assistance in campaign funding or strategy but that the candidate seeks to establish an image with the voters largely independent of the candidate’s party label: the candidate, not the party, should be the center of voters’ attention. Sharing the party’s general predisposition toward issues, the candidate aims to appear distinctive from the party on specific policy stances. Successfully executed, candidate-centered campaigning evolves into an “incumbency advantage” by which incumbents can stay afloat when political currents threaten to capsize their party. Depending on their perception of the currents in the electoral environment, including both district and activist sentiment, candidates might choose either to eschew or pursue a more moderate image than the party. Following one of the most contentious and ideologically polarized Congresses in recent decades, a Congress during which charges of “extremism” flew with regularity, establishing a moderate image may have been even more important—and more difficult—for candidates in 1996 than in other years.

If the public were unaware of this party polarization and conflict, the candidates’ job might be easier. But the public has noted the recent changes in party politics. Figure 20.1 presents two measures of party discipline in the House—the percentage of party votes and the percentage of House members
that are part of the party "base"—and the proportion of the public perceiving important differences between the parties.\(^2\) Overall, the public's perception of increased party differences has reflected the reality in Congress. For political scientists, particularly those of a responsible party bent, such news is welcome. For candidates interested in candidate-centered campaigning, however, such improved clarity is not necessarily a blessing. With stronger public images about the parties, and with the images of the two major parties diverging, candidates may face a more difficult job convincing the public that they are "in" their party but not entirely "of" their party.

Sources: Congressional Quarterly Almanac (party votes); Fleisher and Bond (1996) (party base); National Election Study (important differences).
Can candidates solve this problem by fooling voters, by pretending to be something they are not? Scholars have acknowledged that at times confusion might be an optimal electoral strategy, but such a strategy is unlikely to work over time or for most candidates. Box-Steffensmeier and Franklin (1995; see also Franklin 1991) show that an incumbent's roll call voting record (the "long campaign") cumulates into highly accurate voter perceptions of the incumbent and contributes significantly to the voter's decision on election day. Working from a political psychology approach, Lodge, Steenbergen, and Brau (1995) similarly conclude that voters construct a running tally of information about candidates that significantly influences their voting decisions. Voters are particularly sensitive to candidate stands that differ from those expected for members of the candidate's party.

If candidates do intend to create an image that is distinct from their parties, abundant financial resources would make the task more attainable. Financial resources in 1996 were, if nothing else, plentiful compared with previous election cycles. Spending a large sum of money increases a candidate's probability of winning an election, although there exists some disagreement about the relative advantages accruing to incumbents and challengers (Green and Krasno 1988; Jacobson 1992; Goidel and Gross 1994; Squire 1995; Kenny and McBurnett 1992, 1994). But between the campaign spending and the election outcome lies the black box of public attitudes and opinions (Jacobson 1992: 114–32; Kenny and McBurnett 1997). Campaign spending could provide a means for candidates to divorce themselves from the stereotypes and images associated with their political parties. Ironically, if spending places a wedge between public perceptions of candidates and parties, then party assistance to candidate advertising and mobilizing would separate public perceptions of parties and candidates. If candidates in 1996 could buy themselves an image of moderation, a party intent on building the brand label would need to spend millions of dollars to counteract the effect of the spending of their own candidates. Not only would such behavior mislead voters, it would also undermine the possibility of responsible parties.

Such fears were misplaced in 1996. Candidates did establish images distinct from their parties, and these images were typically more moderate than the party. But candidates were generally not able to spend their way to moderation, and incumbents were not able to fool the voters. Responsible parties face many obstacles, but the spending of candidates does not appear to be one of them. Candidate-centered campaigns and responsible political parties need not be inherently at odds. During the 1996 campaign, incumbent spending improved public accuracy regarding the incumbent's ideology, and that ideology, even if distinctive from the incumbent's party, was usually in accordance with the party. Candidate-centered campaigning conducted through campaign spending can reinforce rather than erode the party and party image building.
Like Their Parties, Only Less So

If candidates are separating themselves from their parties, we should see that survey respondents place parties and candidates at different points on ideological and issue scales. Although the public perceives an increasingly polarized party atmosphere (see Figure 20.1), candidates in 1996 proved remarkably effective at making a candidate-centered case. The 1996 National Election Study (NES) asked respondents to place themselves, the parties, and the congressional candidates on preference scales concerning general ideology, government spending and services, defense spending, and permissive versus restrictive abortion regulations. On all four issue and ideology items in Table 20.1, respondents see the Democratic and Republican Parties anchoring the left and right, respectively, with the Democratic and Republican candidates closer to the center (value of 4 on the seven-point scale used in all but the abortion item) but still on the “correct” side of the scale. The four-point abortion item differs from the other items in that it does not permit a true middle value and each value is given specific content in the NES question, but the general pattern of more moderate candidates prevails.

Expected differences between candidates and parties hold up for different kinds of races and different kinds of candidates. In only four of the thirty-two sets of comparisons is the candidate scaled at a less moderate position than the party—three of these exceptions concern the Democrats and defense; two of the four are in the open seat races. Looked at a different way, respondents, on the average, position parties farther from the center than they do candidates, and they place Democratic and Republican candidates about the same distance away from the center. T-tests of the party or candidate deviation from the center show that these deviations are statistically significant. Overall, on Election Day 1996, the public saw a wider gap between the abstract Democratic and Republican Parties than between the concrete Democratic and Republican candidates listed on the ballot.

One might object that these mean scale placements obscure the fact that in some districts candidates were perceived as more “extreme” than their parties. In percentage terms, a plurality of respondents saw candidates of both parties, but especially Republicans, as more moderate than their parties, and larger percentages placed the candidates rather than the parties at or within one unit of the scale center. Party identification made little difference, but Republican candidates were especially effective in convincing independents that they were not as extreme as the Republican Party itself, with over half the Independents placing the Republican candidate to the left of the party. In fact, most House Republicans also sought to burnish their moderate image by moving to the left in 1996. Fifty-seven percent of House Republicans had more liberal Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) scores in 1996 than in 1995, while only 14 percent became more conservative; the
Table 20.1 Mean Placement of Parties and Candidates on Ideology and Issue Scales, 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Configuration</th>
<th>Democratic Party</th>
<th>Democratic Candidate</th>
<th>Republican Party</th>
<th>Republican Candidate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All districts:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>5.09</td>
<td>4.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government services</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>4.93</td>
<td>4.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and spending</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defense spending</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>4.74</td>
<td>4.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abortion</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>2.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic incumbent:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>5.18</td>
<td>4.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government services</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>4.96</td>
<td>4.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and spending</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defense spending</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>4.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abortion</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>2.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican incumbent:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government services</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>4.93</td>
<td>4.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and spending</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defense spending</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>4.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abortion</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>2.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open seat:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>4.99</td>
<td>4.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government services</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td>4.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and spending</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defense spending</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>4.62</td>
<td>3.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abortion</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>2.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Entries are mean placements by respondents on a seven-point scale (except abortion, which has a four-point scale), with higher values indicating more conservative placement. Items are from the 1996 National Election Study. N varies from 544 to 1577.
Source: 1996 National Election Study.
remainder were unchanged. Like Republicans, Democrats attempted to moderate their image in 1996. A plurality of Democratic House members, 45 percent, moved rightward on the ADA index in 1996 to establish their moderate bona fides; the remainder split evenly between those moving left and those staying ideologically put.

Candidate-centered campaigning appears able to soften the party image for many candidates, but that does not mean the public sees no difference between the candidates or between the parties. T-test comparisons show that the public perceived significant differences in many ways in 1996: candidates differed from their parties, candidates differed from each other, and the parties differed most of all. The procedure here is to measure the gap between the placement of the Democratic and Republican candidates, for example, on the ideology or issue scales and compare it with zero. If the public did not perceive differences between the candidates, then the perceived gaps should not differ significantly from zero. Table 20.2 indicates that across the board the gaps between the candidates and the gaps between the parties are statistically significant. Now, one can legitimately question

Table 20.2 Perceived Issue and Ideology Gaps Between Candidates and Parties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gap between Respondent Placement of</th>
<th>D and R Parties</th>
<th>D and R Candidates</th>
<th>D Candidate and D Party</th>
<th>R Candidate and R Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(71.76)</td>
<td>(25.26)</td>
<td>(26.45)</td>
<td>(28.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Govt. services and spending</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(59.89)</td>
<td>(20.30)</td>
<td>(21.99)</td>
<td>(23.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defense spending</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(50.01)</td>
<td>(14.28)</td>
<td>(19.43)</td>
<td>(19.99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abortion</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(54.93)</td>
<td>(16.45)</td>
<td>(15.75)</td>
<td>(15.45)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: D = Democratic; R = Republican. Entries are mean gaps (absolute values) between respondents' placements of the two parties or candidates on seven-point scales (except a four-point scale for abortion). T-values in parentheses. All t-values are significant at .001, two-tailed.*

*Source: 1996 National Election Study.*
whether a gap of 1.2 points (on a seven-point scale) between candidates on defense issues amounts to much substantively, but it is a consistently perceived, nonrandom gap.

What Incumbents Do and What the Public Sees

It appears, then, that following the highly polarized Congress of 1995–1996, candidate-centered campaigning worked its desired magic: to the typical voter, the Republican or Democratic candidate in the district did not look as “extreme” as the Republican or Democratic Party writ large. If a candidate is indeed more moderate than the party, then campaigning is simply producing a more informed electorate. If, however, a candidate convinces voters that he or she is more moderate or centrist than the party when this is not true, then campaigning produces a magical result of which Disney could be proud. To what extent are candidate-centered campaigners misinforming rather than informing the public?

To answer this question, I take ADA ratings of House members from 1995 to 1996. These ratings provide both a mean measure of each party’s ideology and a measure of how far a candidate deviates from the party mean. Because ADA ratings apply only to incumbents and not challengers, this analysis is restricted to the former group. A Democratic candidate is considered “the same as” his or her party if his or her ADA score falls within plus or minus eight points of the mean party ADA score. A Republican candidate is considered “the same as” his or her party if his or her ADA score falls within plus or minus 5.5 points of the mean party ADA score. These ranges represent one-half of a standard deviation for the two parties, respectively. Table 20.3 presents the ADA’s rating of individual Democratic and Republican incumbents compared with the ADA’s mean rating for all incumbents of the respective party. The public is most accurate when the candidate-party relationship exudes moderation—namely, Democratic candidates who are more conservative than the party as a whole and Republican candidates who are more liberal than the party as a whole. Those candidates who are less “extreme” than their party appear to do a good job making sure the public understands the distinction.

In what some might consider the worst case scenario—a Democratic candidate perceived as being to the left of the Republican Party or a Republican candidate perceived as being to the right of the Republican Party—the public perception is askew, especially for Republican candidates. Candidates that are even more “extreme” than their party appear to do a very good job convincing the public otherwise. Republican candidates who were more conservative than the party overall (as measured by the ADA) were perceived this way by only one in four members of the public. Although the numbers
Table 20.3 ADA Ideological Rating versus Respondent’s Perception of Incumbent’s Ideology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incumbent’s ADA Voting Rating</th>
<th>Respondent Perceives Incumbent as (in percentages)</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More Conservative Than Party</td>
<td>Same as Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic incumbents:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More conservative than the party</td>
<td>50.4</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same as the party</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>39.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More liberal than the party</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>31.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican Incumbents:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More conservative than the party</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>37.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same as the party</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>33.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More liberal than the party</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>34.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Percentages total to 100 percent across rows. For Democrats, “same as the party” means within eight points of the party mean; for Republicans, within 5.5 points of the party mean. Source: Almanac of American Politics for ADA scores.

are less impressive for Democratic candidates, the finding is the same: Democratic candidates who were more liberal than their party were so perceived by 40 percent of the public. Candidate-centered campaigning, then, seems both to inform and misinform voters about the relationship of candidates and parties. Candidates who are in fact more moderate than their parties are reasonably successful in conveying this to the public. Yet those candidates who are more extreme than their parties are also very successful in defusing that perception among the public. Given the extremism label pasted on the Republican Party, it is notable that no matter whether a Republican’s ADA score was more conservative, more liberal, or the same as the party’s, a plurality of voters saw the incumbent as more liberal than the party. Even controlling for the respondent’s ideology does not seriously alter this pattern.  

Influences on Public Perceptions

The public in 1996 separated candidates from parties and placed candidates closer to the ideological center. Why? I consider a range of factors in addressing this question, but my primary focus is on the role of money in
campaigns. As discussed earlier, 1996 provided candidates with substantial financial resources. Candidates might argue that the resources were insufficient, and they might even be right, but the volume of dollars was nonetheless remarkable. Still, candidate spending created a larger perceived gap between the party and the candidate only in particular circumstances for challengers and not at all for incumbents. Similarly, incumbents who are more extreme than their parties do not mislead the public about this relationship by using campaign cash. To the contrary, incumbent spending increases voter awareness of the incumbent’s policy preferences.

Multiple regression permits a systematic identification of the significant influences on public placements of candidates and parties. I look at two aspects of these placements: distance and incorrect placement. For distance, I use the gap (in absolute value) between the respondent’s placement of the candidate and the candidate’s party on issue and ideology scales. For incorrect placement, I use dichotomous dependent variables that indicate whether the respondent was mistaken in his or her perception of the incumbent’s position relative to the party and whether an incumbent with a liberal or conservative voting record was placed as a centrist. If, for example, the incumbent’s ADA record places him or her to the left of the party but the respondent perceives the incumbent to be to the right of the party, this would be counted as a mistaken placement for the first dichotomous variable. For the second dichotomous variable, I convert the incumbent’s 1995–1996 ADA score into a seven-point scale analogous to the seven-point scales used in the NES. An incumbent whose roll call voting record places him or her at points 1, 2, 6, or 7 on the seven-point ADA scale but who is placed at points 3, 4, or 5 by the respondent on the seven-point NES ideology scale would be counted as a mistaken placement.

Several factors might be related to distance and incorrect placement. These factors can be clustered into one group that concerns the incumbent and challenger and a second group that concerns the respondent’s orientation toward the candidates and toward politics. In the first cluster, the incumbent’s voting record—the “long campaign”—should matter. More moderate incumbents should be perceived as more distant from the party. I measure the incumbent’s roll call moderation by folding the incumbent’s average ADA score from 1995 and 1996. The original ADA scale runs from 0 (conservative) to 100 (liberal). Folding produces a scale from “extreme” (0) to “moderate” (50) roll call voting. I also include a dummy variable that is 1 when the incumbent is either a conservative Republican or a liberal Democrat and 0 otherwise. Finally, education alone should not influence the size of the perceived gap between a candidate and party, but education may condition whether an individual picks up on cues about the incumbent’s voting record. To test this possibility, I include an interaction between the respondent’s level of education and the folded ADA score.
As discussed, candidate campaign spending might also influence distance and mistaken placement by increasing the first and increasing the probability of the latter. Specifically, spending by the candidate would be expected to increase the perceived distance, and spending by the opponent would be expected to decrease the distance. One much-noted problem with using incumbent and challenger spending data in regression analysis is that the two variables are endogenous: each influences the level of the other. The remedy for this problem is an instrumental variables, two-stage least-squares procedure. I follow that procedure in the analysis presented here. To disentangle the effects of spending and incumbency, I include a dummy variable that indicates whether the incumbent has been in office more than one term.

The second cluster of variables concerns the respondent's orientations toward the candidate, the candidate's party, and politics. Party identification ranges from strong supporters of the challenger's party to strong supporters of the incumbent's party. Strong partisans may be less likely to divorce candidates from their parties. A feeling thermometer measures affect for either the challenger or the incumbent; the expectation here is that candidates that are well liked are more likely to be seen as distant from the party. Finally, a respondent's perceptions about the candidate and party might be influenced by the gap that the respondent perceives between him- or herself and the candidate's party. Previous studies suggest that projection or rationalization by respondents would increase the perceived distance between the candidate and the party as the gap between the respondent and the candidate's party grows.

The respondent's orientations toward politics may also influence distance and incorrect placement. I include a measure that asks respondents whether they feel politics is complicated, confusing, and hard to understand—respondents feeling this way may be more likely to perceive gaps between parties and candidates. Another measure asks how closely respondents have followed news about the campaign. Respondents who profess little concern might be expected to be less likely to match party and candidate stands and, therefore, more likely to assume distance and to place incumbents incorrectly.

Can Money Buy Love?

Campaign spending by incumbents and challengers has no significant impact on the perceived distance between incumbents and their parties. On the other hand, Table 20.4 shows that the incumbent's voting record does affect the public's perception. Incumbents with more moderate ADA scores are placed more distantly from their parties on overall ideology as are "extreme" (liberal) Democrats and "extreme" (conservative) Republicans. Pers-
haps the clearest pattern in Table 20.4 is that the respondent’s political orientation significantly conditions how the respondent perceives the relationship between the incumbent and the party. The stronger one feels that politics is too complicated, the more likely one is to see parties and candidates as separate and distinct. The stronger one’s identification with the incumbent’s party, the more likely one is to place the party and incumbent similarly rather than distancing the two. Strong partisans appear to hold their candidates to the party standard.10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Gap between Incumbent and Party on</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ideology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate related:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent spending (in 10,000)</td>
<td>-.000</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>-.003</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenger spending (in 10,000)</td>
<td>-.002</td>
<td>-.003</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent is post-freshman</td>
<td>-.092</td>
<td>.092</td>
<td>.074</td>
<td>-.049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent is liberal Democrat or conservative Republican</td>
<td>.334***</td>
<td>.176*</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>.091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folded ADA score</td>
<td>.016***</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folded ADA score × respondent's education level</td>
<td>-.000</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>-.000</td>
<td>-.002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent Related:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Politics is too complicated</td>
<td>.080***</td>
<td>.128***</td>
<td>.074**</td>
<td>.063*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention to news about campaign</td>
<td>-.092**</td>
<td>-.080**</td>
<td>-.042</td>
<td>.056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party identification</td>
<td>-.047***</td>
<td>-.062***</td>
<td>-.040**</td>
<td>-.046**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling thermometer: incumbent</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.004**</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.004**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scale gap between respondent and incumbent's party</td>
<td>.020</td>
<td>-.020</td>
<td>.086**</td>
<td>.098***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Constant | .365* | .311 | .362 | .584** |
Adjusted $R^2$ | .08 | .11 | .13 | .08 |
Standard error | .902 | .891 | .889 | .824 |
$F$ | 5.820*** | 7.152*** | 6.997*** | 3.372*** |

* $p \leq .10$.
** $p \leq .05$.
*** $p \leq .01$.

Source: 1996 National Election Study.
For challengers, campaign spending has a significant impact on issue scale placement but not overall ideology. The findings in Table 20.5 suggest at least a modest relationship between spending by the candidates and the distance respondents see between the challenger and the challenger’s party. Most important is the strength of the relationship between spending and the gap in government spending and services, given the importance of this issue area in House elections. The relationship is in the expected direction: the more incumbents spend, the closer respondents link the challenger to the

Table 20.5 Gaps between Scale Placements of Challengers and Parties, 1996 House Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Ideology</th>
<th>Government Services &amp; Spending</th>
<th>Defense Spending</th>
<th>Abortion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Candidate related:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent spending (in 10,000)</td>
<td>-.003</td>
<td>-.007**</td>
<td>-.006*</td>
<td>-.004*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenger spending (in 10,000)</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.009**</td>
<td>.009**</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent is postfreshman</td>
<td>.022</td>
<td>.073</td>
<td>-.123</td>
<td>.059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent is liberal Democrat or conservative Republican</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>.295</td>
<td>-.075</td>
<td>-.150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folded ADA score</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folded ADA score x respondent's education level</td>
<td>-.003**</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>-.002</td>
<td>-.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent Related:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics is too complicated</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.083*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention to news about campaign</td>
<td>-.162**</td>
<td>-.074</td>
<td>-.136**</td>
<td>-.042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party identification</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td>.032</td>
<td>.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling thermometer: challenger</td>
<td>.007**</td>
<td>.011***</td>
<td>-.002</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scale gap between respondent and incumbent’s party</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td>-.098</td>
<td>1.08**</td>
<td>-.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.187</td>
<td>.391</td>
<td>.094</td>
<td>1.105**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard error</td>
<td>.924</td>
<td>.938</td>
<td>.872</td>
<td>.955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F$</td>
<td>2.618***</td>
<td>4.837***</td>
<td>3.740***</td>
<td>1.407</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p \leq .10$
** $p \leq .05$
*** $p \leq .01$

Source: 1996 National Election Study.
party; the more challengers spend, the more respondents divorce challengers from their party. Consistent with the bulk of the research on campaign spending, this finding suggests that campaign spending is especially important to challengers, who are often unknown to the public and likely to start at the "default" position of being linked closely to party positions. Other relationships for the challenger are sketchy—significant for one or more issues but not others—but are as expected. More attention to the campaign reduces the perceived difference between challengers and parties. The "warmer" one's feelings about the challenger, the more the distance between the challenger and the party. Complicated politics, party identification, and the gap between the respondent and the challenger's party are signed mostly as expected but do not generally reach statistical significance.

Not only are incumbents unable to distance themselves from their parties using campaign spending, but they also cannot spend their way to an image that varies from their congressional voting behavior. Nor does it appear that they wish to. Table 20.6 shows that campaign spending has a significant impact on the public's mistaken placements of incumbents, but incumbent campaign spending does not fool the public. Franklin (1991) notes that it may be more in the challenger's than the incumbent's interest to confuse voters about the incumbent, and that appears to be the case. Whether looking at all incumbents or only at those who might be in 1996's worst case scenario (a Democrat more liberal than the party or a Republican more conservative than the party), incumbent spending reduces mistaken placement by the public. Incumbents do not use campaign spending to create a new image distant from the party or to buy an image of moderation. Instead, the more incumbents spend, the more accurate are public perceptions about the incumbent's ideology relative to the party and relative to the center of the political spectrum. Interestingly, the results suggest that incumbent campaign spending would offset the tendency of respondents to place postfreshman incumbents incorrectly relative to the party.

Challenger spending also plays a significant role, making mistaken placement of the incumbent more likely and, as previous research suggests, seeming to produce more bang for the buck. Challengers may conclude that, on the average, incumbents are successful because they are in at least rough accordance with constituency views. If this is correct, then the challenger's chance for victory may depend on confusing the public about the incumbent's relative partisan and ideological positioning. Federal Election Commission data for districts in the 1996 NES sample shows that median challenger spending is nine times higher in districts held by conservative Democrats than in districts held by liberal Democrats, and five times higher in districts held by liberal Republicans than in districts held by conservative Republicans. If these relatively moderate incumbents have captured districts that could plausibly switch party hands, then it would be in the challenger's
Table 20.6 Foolers on the Hill?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Incumbent Placed Incorrectly Compared with Party*</th>
<th>Incumbent Placed Incorrectly in Ideological Centerc</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>&quot;Extreme&quot;b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate Related:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent spending (in 10,000)</td>
<td>-.004*</td>
<td>-.006**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenger spending (in 10,000)</td>
<td>.014**</td>
<td>.014*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent is postfreshman</td>
<td>.668**</td>
<td>1.023***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folded ADA score</td>
<td>-.038**</td>
<td>-.057</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folded ADA score x respondent's education level</td>
<td>-.003</td>
<td>-.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent Related:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics is too complicated</td>
<td>.207**</td>
<td>.351***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention to news about campaign</td>
<td>.019</td>
<td>-.198*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party identification</td>
<td>.057</td>
<td>-.165**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling thermometer: incumbent</td>
<td>-.012**</td>
<td>-.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scale gap between respondent and incumbent's party</td>
<td>.134*</td>
<td>.244**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.349</td>
<td>.114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagelkerke $R^2$</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-2LL</td>
<td>452.876</td>
<td>339.725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage correct</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p \leq .10$.
** $p \leq .05$.
*** $p \leq .01$.

*aIncumbent's ADA score places him or her to one side of the party (left or right), but respondent places incumbent to the other side of the party.

*b"Extreme" column includes only Democrats whose ADA score is more liberal than the party and Republicans whose ADA score is more conservative than the party. For Democrats, "more liberal" means more than eight points higher than the party mean (in the ADA scale, higher values are more liberal); for Republicans, "more conservative" means more than 5.5 below the party mean.

*cIncumbent ADA rating is liberal or conservative (points 1, 2, 6, and 7 on a seven-point scale), but respondent places incumbent in the ideological center (points 3, 4, and 5 on a seven-point scale).

Source: 1996 National Election Study.
interest to suggest that the incumbent is not as much of a conservative (in the case of a conservative Democratic incumbent) or as much of a liberal (in the case of a liberal Republican incumbent) as he or she claims.

Looking at the case of “extreme” incumbents (Democrats more liberal than the party, Republicans more conservative than the party) provides one illustration of the impact of spending. What is the probability of an extreme incumbent being mistakenly considered a centrist? I place all nonspending variables at their (rounded) mean values. If challenger spending is placed at its mean value, and if incumbent spending totals $100,000, the probability of a mistaken placement is .40. Increasing incumbent spending to $1,000,000 and leaving challenger spending at its mean value, the probability drops to .28. Varying the challenger’s spending induces even sharper effects. With incumbent spending set at its mean and challenger spending at $100,000, the probability of mistaken placement is .28. Pushing challenger spending to $1,000,000 shoots the probability of a mistake to .58. Another way to see the power of challenger spending is to set both the incumbent and challenger’s spending to the same amount. If both candidates spend $100,000, the probability of a mistaken placement is .35. When both candidates spend $800,000, however, mistakes become the norm as the probability moves to .51.

They Run, But They Don’t Hide

To the public, candidates and parties are alike but different. They are alike in that the Democratic Party and its candidates typically anchor one end of an issue or ideology scale, while the Republican Party and its candidates anchor the other end. They are different in that candidates and parties are usually not placed together in issue or ideological space but are clearly and consistently separated by survey respondents. Candidate-centered campaigning, then, appears to achieve one of its objectives.

But this campaigning has its limits. Incumbents cannot simply buy themselves further distance from their parties. Neither the incumbent’s nor the challenger’s spending appears able to jar public perceptions of the gap between the incumbent and the party. Particularly for public perceptions of the incumbent’s ideology, the roll call voting record over the previous two years creates an image for the candidate that sticks. Public predispositions and orientations toward politics, many of which are likely outside a candidate’s control, also can expand and contract the perceived distance between the incumbent and party. Republicans tagged as “extremists” in 1995 and 1996 could not simply buy their way out of that label.

If it does not appear that incumbents can buy “distance” during the fall campaign—that is, distance beyond that existing before the campaign—the
situation for challengers differs somewhat. With less of a public image beyond that provided by the party label, the challenger can and probably should, according to candidate-centered campaign theory, use campaign spending to build some distance from the party. Challengers achieve this result with some success. At the same time, incumbent spending ties the challenger back to his or her party. Challengers may buy themselves some love, but incumbent spending may counteract the challenger's courtship of the public.

Although incumbent spending does not influence the public perception of the distance between the incumbent and the party, this spending does influence whether survey respondents make mistakes in their ideological placement of the incumbent relative to his party and on the ideological scale overall. Incumbents do not fool the public through their campaign spending, nor does it appear they wish to do so. The more the challenger spends, the higher the probability that a respondent will mistakenly place the incumbent's ideological position relative to the incumbent's party or on the ideological scale overall. Additional spending by the incumbent serves to set the record straight.

Of course, these results are based on only one election year. It is possible that 1996, following a remarkably polarized Congress, was atypical. Still, several results reported here are consistent with findings in other studies. Based on that consistency, I put forward implications for campaign finance reform and for responsible parties, even if tentatively. Much discussion followed the 1996 campaign concerning the impact and reform of campaign finance. There may be several good reasons to reform campaign finance, including the excessive time spent fund-raising, the difficulty of defeating well-financed incumbents, and the perception that the system corrupts law-making. In previous editions of this volume, I warned that scholars should be careful about associating proficient campaign fund-raising with party "resurgence" or "renewal," because to the public success in a campaign finance system perceived as corrupt and dysfunctional was not likely to result in improved views toward parties and the party system (Coleman 1996: 373–74). On the positive side, however, the present study suggests that one thing we cannot say, for 1996 at least, is that incumbents use the campaign finance system to run away from their record. To the contrary, in 1996 incumbent spending helped voters place the incumbent correctly in issue and ideological space. The broader point is that as talk about campaign finance reform proceeds, identifying impacts of the present system other than the probability of voting for or against the incumbent will be important. The health of the democratic system and political discourse, not just whether money makes it easier for incumbents to win, should be the key. We see in the data that incumbent spending had beneficial effects.

Incumbent spending had beneficial effects in another profound respect.
If incumbents do not spend their way to an image distant from their parties, and if their spending clarifies their stances relative to both the party and the ideological center, then candidate-centered campaigning must not be considered entirely incompatible with responsible political parties. This does not mean that candidates did not differ from their parties in 1996—clearly incumbents and challengers did differ from their parties. However, candidates were placed closer to their party position than to the position of their opponent (see Tables 20.1 and 20.2). Challengers used campaign spending to help build an image separate from the party, but incumbents did not do so. Rather than run away from the record, incumbent spending seemed to get voters to run toward the record. Considering the high level of partisanship in the 1995–1996 Congress, this finding suggests that incumbents as candidate-centered campaigners behaved much in the manner one would hope for from responsible political parties.

Candidates in the late 1990s may be only partly at odds with their parties. Challengers spend money to build an image that distances them from the party. However, far more money is spent by incumbents, and that money appears neither to distance the incumbent’s public image farther from the party—that is farther than the distance already built by the incumbent’s voting record and by the voter’s political orientations and predispositions—not to fool the public about the incumbent’s voting record. Parties spend millions of dollars to build a public image, and candidate spending alone does not offset that image.

Notes

The author thanks Paul Manna and Brett Koeller for excellent research assistance and the Graduate School and Letters and Science Honors Program at the University of Wisconsin for financial assistance. Thanks to Charles Franklin for providing candidate quality data.

1. The current debate between proponents of proximity and directional theories of voting reinforces the point that neither a moderate nor “extremist” candidate strategy is consistently optimal (Merrill and Grofman 1997; Macdonald and Rabinowitz 1997; Morris and Rabinowitz 1997).

2. Party votes data are from various issues of Congressional Quarterly Almanac. The party base consists of those members who are closer to their party’s mean Americans for Democratic Action rating than to the opposition party’s rating; this measure is from Fleisher and Bond (1996). Perception of important differences between the parties is taken from National Election Studies data.

3. Most accounts suggest that challengers receive the greater marginal gain from spending, but there is some dispute regarding the size of the incumbent-challenger differential and the campaign venues and activities in which the differential grows or shrinks.

4. The abortion item, scaled 1–4, differs from the other items in that it does not permit a true middle value and each value is given specific content in the NES question. Roughly, then, a mean value of 2.5 is an approximate middle value.
5. Only on the four-point abortion scale were a majority of respondents likely to place the parties and their candidates at the same location.

6. Dividing respondents into three self-reported ideological groupings and performing the analysis for each of the Republican scenarios in Table 20.3 produces nine possible scenarios. For seven of these, the plurality public perception was that the Republican incumbent was more liberal than the party. For Democratic incumbents, a plurality of respondents perceives conservative Democrats in six of the nine scenarios.

7. This dummy variable correlates with the folded ADA measure; removing it from the estimation has no significant impact on the results.

8. In addition to the nonspending variables listed in Table 20.4, the instruments included the quality of the challenger, the percentage of college graduates and the median family income in the district, the incumbent’s share of the vote in 1994, a dummy variable indicating whether the challenger’s party won the district in the 1992 presidential election, the party of the challenger, and dummy variables for the Northeast and West. Other potential problems with the use of campaign spending figures are discussed in Squire (1995: 902), Ansolabehere and Gerber (1994), and Kenny and McBurnett (1997).

9. The number of years the incumbent had held office is another potential form of this variable. Because this alternative did not perform any better than the dummy variable and much of the literature on “incumbency effects” stresses the importance of surviving that first reelection battle, I employ the dummy variable.

10. Because the party’s position on a scale can affect the potential size of the candidate-party gap, I include the party’s perceived distance from the center as a control variable in Tables 20.4 and 20.5. The problem is that a party placed at point 4 on the scale can differ from the candidate by a maximum of three points, but a party placed at points 1 or 7 could be six points away from the candidate. Including a control for the placement of the party relative to the center of the scale avoids incorrectly attributing causal influence to other variables. The main substantive impact of leaving the control out of the estimations is, not surprisingly, to weaken the significance of party identification and the distance between the respondent and the candidate’s party. In all other respects the substantive interpretations are unaffected.
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