The State of the Parties (Sixth Edition)

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THE STATE OF THE PARTIES
The Changing Role of Contemporary American Parties

Sixth Edition

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Acknowledgments

The research effort that generated this book is the product of almost two decades of scholarship. The first edition originated out of research coordinated in 1993 at the Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics on the changing role of political parties in American politics. The second edition reflected the impact of the 1994 elections, while the third, fourth, and fifth editions reported further changes after the 1996, 2000, and 2004 elections, respectively. This sixth edition considers the impact of the 2008 election and subsequent events.

From the beginning of this effort, our goal has been to bring together party scholars from around the nation to discuss the state of 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 has differed each time, the team for this edition is just as strong, including a mix of veteran and emerging scholars. We are deeply grateful for their participation. Taken together, the chapters in this volume offer insight into the “state of the parties” now that the twenty-first century is a decade old.

The development of this volume was greatly aided by the staff of the Bliss Institute. Janet Lykes Bolois was not only instrumental in compiling the chapters and managing the layout but has also honed the unique skill of putting up with the editors—no simple task, to be sure. In addition we would like to thank Janet, Jenni Fitzgerald, and our other colleagues for their help with the 2009 State of the Parties Conference, where these papers were first presented.
As in the past, we owe a debt of thanks to Niels Aaboe, Elisa Weeks, and their associates at Rowman & Littlefield. Finally, we would be remiss if we did not acknowledge our families, principally Lynn Green and Mary Coffey. Without their unwavering support and encouragement, *The State of the Parties* would not have been possible.
On November 4, 2008, Barack Obama made history by becoming the first African American president of the United States. This fact alone marks the 2008 election as an important source of political change, but there were also other, less dramatic changes associated with the election as well. At the same time, the 2008 election represented a continuation of longer-term trends in national elections. For the third straight election, voter turnout increased as the two major parties and their candidates engaged in effective grassroots mobilization, including the innovative use of the Internet. But unlike in the two previous elections, the 2008 results were a solid victory for the Democrats, with Obama winning a solid majority of the popular vote and the party gaining congressional seats for the second election in a row.

In this context, the American system and the two major parties demonstrated remarkable continuity. The major parties are arguably stronger now than at any point in the postwar era: they are financially secure and ideologically distinct, enmeshed in broad and sophisticated networks that reach down to the grass roots. Indeed, many of the goals of the 1950 American Political Science Association Report on Political Parties (American Political Science Association 1950; Green and Herrnson 2002) have been achieved. The major parties have adapted with some success to social change, organizational innovation, and advances in communications technology. This is not to claim, of course, that the major parties do not face significant challenges entering the second decade of the twenty-first century. In fact, there is considerable uncertainty about the exact role of political parties in national politics in the years ahead.
This collection of essays is the sixth in the series that assesses the state of the parties after a presidential election (Shea and Green 1994; Green and Shea 1996, 1999; Green and Farmer 2003; Green and Coffey 2007). In this volume, a group of prominent and emerging scholars examines the state of the parties from a variety of perspectives. These essays reveal American political parties to be vibrant and dynamic institutions, central to all aspects of politics in a functioning democracy and worthy of special study in their own right. But before turning to these essays, a brief review of the 2008 election is in order.

The 2008 Presidential Campaign

The 2008 presidential campaign was the first without an incumbent or vice president on the ballot since 1952: President George W. Bush was not eligible to seek reelection, having completed his second term, and neither Vice President Richard Cheney nor former vice president Al Gore chose to run. So, in effect, there was an “open seat” in the White House, which generated extensive interest in both of the major party presidential nominations.

However, the political circumstances leading up to the 2008 campaign decidedly favored the party out of power, the Democrats. Indeed, the Republicans had suffered several dismal years after the 2004 election, when the GOP kept control of the White House and both houses of Congress. Indeed, shortly after his reelection President Bush began a slow slide in popularity. This decline reflected in part the growing unpopularity of the Iraq War, perceived administrative failures (such as the inadequate response to Hurricane Katrina), scandals among congressional Republicans, and a weakening economy. But it also reflected a resurgent Democratic Party, innovating in response to the results of the 2004 campaign.

These trends came together in the 2006 mid-term elections, in which the Democrats won majorities in both houses of Congress, ending twelve years of GOP control of the legislative branch. The Democrats picked up thirty-one seats in the House of Representatives (the largest Democratic gain since 1974) and six seats in the Senate; they also won six governorships (for a majority of the nation’s statehouses) and gained more than four hundred state legislative seats. These shifts brought about another historic first: a woman serving as Speaker of the House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi. While this dramatic reversal of political fortunes was hardly unprecedented in mid-term elections, it was also largely unanticipated in the immediate aftermath of the 2004 election.
The 2008 Presidential Primary Season

Despite these Democratic advantages, there was no shortage of Republican candidates seeking their party's presidential nomination in 2008, with a dozen plausible candidates seriously considering a race. The acknowledged front-runner was U.S. senator from Arizona John McCain, who had been the chief rival to George W. Bush in the 2000 nomination contest. McCain's most prominent rivals were former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney and former New York City mayor Rudolph Giuliani. However, the McCain campaign ran into difficulties almost immediately, with poor fund-raising a prominent symptom of its problems. By the middle of 2007, McCain was forced to reorganize his campaign, giving his better financed rivals an opening. Both Giuliani and Romney made the most of McCain's difficulties but soon encountered troubles of their own. A key challenge came from the social conservatives in the Republican base, which found Giuliani too liberal on cultural issues and objected to the fact that Romney was a Mormon. In this context, former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee, a former Southern Baptist minister, emerged as a viable contender. But Huckabee, in turn, faced strong opposition from economic conservatives in the party.

Thus, at the beginning of the primary season in 2008, the Republican field was still crowded, including a revitalized McCain campaign, with no clear front-runner. Following Bush's 2000 strategy, all the major candidates had opted out of public financing for the primaries and were thus able to spend as much money on the primary contests as they could raise. The initial event produced a surprise: Huckabee defeated Romney in the Iowa caucuses, a blow from which the Romney campaign never fully recovered. McCain then won a series of early primaries, including New Hampshire, South Carolina, and Florida, and then did quite well in the large number of contests held on Super Tuesday, February 5. These successes in combination with the winner-take-all delegate rules in GOP contests gave McCain a decisive edge for nomination, which was formally settled by March. In this regard, the Republican nomination struggle followed a pattern common in the recent past, ending quickly once one candidate established a clear advantage. McCain then had six months to prepare for the general election campaign.

In contrast, the 2008 Democratic contest was a protracted affair. A large number of candidates also sought the Democratic presidential nomination, with ten plausible candidates considering a race. U.S. senator from New York (and former first lady) Hillary Clinton was the acknowledged front-runner, with former North Carolina senator (and 2004 Democratic vice presidential nominee) John Edwards seen as her principal rival. However, early in 2007, U.S. senator from Illinois Barack Obama emerged as Clinton's principal
opponent. Obama’s emergence was fueled by his successful fund-raising, which included millions of dollars raised in small amounts over the Internet. Both Clinton and Obama opted out of public financing in the primaries and were able to raise large war chests by the end of 2007. Meanwhile, Edwards was less successful at fund-raising, becoming the only major candidate in either party to accept public financing in the primaries.

The 2008 nomination campaign quickly became a seesaw battle between the top two candidates. Obama won the Iowa caucuses, but then Clinton came back to win the New Hampshire primary; Clinton next won the Nevada caucuses, but Obama prevailed in the South Carolina primary. Clinton also received the most votes in the Michigan and Florida primaries, but these controversial contests were not sanctioned by the Democratic National Committee and her rivals did not compete. Clinton and Obama then fought to a draw in the delegate-rich Super Tuesday on February 5. A key factor in these results was the Democratic rules that assigned delegates to candidates on the basis of proportional representation, which awarded even losing candidates a considerable number of the delegates.

After Super Tuesday, Obama won nine straight contests, mostly in small caucus states, and began to pull ahead in finances and organization. Here Obama’s Internet fund-raising was crucial, as was the large number of enthusiastic volunteers attracted to the campaign. Clinton then rallied in March to win the Ohio, Texas, and Pennsylvania primaries, and the seesaw battle continued through all the states and territories until June. But Clinton never managed to gain a decisive advantage over Obama. She then appealed to the Democratic National Committee to count the disputed delegates in Michigan and Florida and also to the Democratic “superdelegates” (delegates appointed from among elected officials and party leaders) to support her candidacy. These appeals proved ineffective, and Clinton withdrew from the race. Obama then turned almost immediately to the general election campaign, largely unscathed by the long nomination contest.

The General Election

On June 10, 2008, Barack Obama announced that he would not accept public financing for the general election campaign, becoming the first president in the history of the public-financing system to forego such funds. This decision allowed Obama to continue his successful fund-raising operation throughout the fall campaign. In contrast, John McCain, a longtime supporter of campaign-finance reform, followed tradition by accepting public funds for the general election, which meant that his campaign could not engage in private fund-raising during the fall campaign. Although Mc-
Cain was not without resources for the general election, given the public funds and assistance from the Republican National Committee, Obama was much better funded, breaking records for funds raised and spent in a presidential campaign.

Obama was formally nominated at the Democratic National Convention in Denver at the end of August and chose U.S. senator from Delaware (and early rival for the nomination) Joe Biden, as his vice presidential running mate. By most accounts the Denver convention was a success, allowing Obama to take a united party into the fall campaign. The Republicans subsequently had a largely successful convention in Minneapolis, where McCain stunned political observers by naming Alaska governor Sarah Palin as his vice presidential running mate, the first Republican woman nominated to this post. Palin’s candidacy generated enthusiasm among the party’s social conservatives and helped unify the party behind McCain.

The fall campaign was waged against the backdrop of a worsening economy, with rising unemployment and troubled financial markets that required extensive government intervention. A key event occurred on September 15 in the midst of the campaign, when the giant investment bank Lehman Brothers declared bankruptcy and the Bush administration decided to not offer a bailout. The next day, the insurance company AIG nearly collapsed, requiring officials from the Treasury Department and the Federal Reserve Bank to step in with an $85 billion rescue package. The damage spread further, with other prominent banks and finance firms teetering on the brink of insolvency. With the markets on the edge of a meltdown, the Bush administration asked Congress to pass a $700 billion rescue package for the financial markets. When the House of Representatives failed to pass the bill, the Dow lost a record 777 points on the same day. Eventually the program was enacted, stabilizing the financial markets but leaving the government as a major shareholder in the banking and financial industries.

This crisis had a major effect on the campaign, elevating the economy to the top priority among voters and largely relegating all other issues to the sidelines. In this context, Obama’s message of “hope and change” resonated strongly with large portions of the electorate, while McCain was forced onto the defensive, with the need to separate himself from the increasingly unpopular President Bush. Both candidates waged aggressive efforts to court voters, but because of its greater resources, the Obama campaign was more sophisticated and extensive, combining traditional television advertising with an impressive grassroots effort to contact voters and turn them out on election day. These resources allowed Obama to expand the campaign beyond the traditional battleground states to states regarded as safely Republican, further stretching McCain’s resources. Although McCain was able
to keep the national polls relatively close, Obama enjoyed a solid lead for most of the campaign.

On election day, Obama won 52.9 percent of the popular vote. While hardly a landslide in historical terms, this solid majority loomed large when compared to the very close 2000 and 2004 election results. Obama obtained the largest majority of any Democratic president since Lyndon Johnson in 1964. More importantly, Obama won 365 electoral votes for more than two-thirds of the Electoral College. He carried all the traditional battleground states, such as Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Florida, but also put Indiana, Virginia, and North Carolina in the Democratic column for the first time in decades. The Democrats also did well in the 2008 congressional elections, gaining twenty-one seats in the House of Representatives and eight seats in the Senate.

In January 2009, President Obama was inaugurated with a high level of public approval and strong support in Congress. The new president then turned to the poor economy and pursued an ambitious legislative agenda, including health care reform and climate change. Obama and the Democrats enjoyed some legislative success. The Democrats briefly gained a “filibuster-proof” majority when U.S. senator from Pennsylvania Arlen Specter switched from the Republican to the Democratic Party in the spring of 2009. But following a historical pattern, President Obama’s popularity slowly declined during his first year in office to about 50 percent approval, reflecting both the continuing weak economy and the struggles over the president’s legislative agenda. Meanwhile, the Republicans rebounded in the off-year elections, winning gubernatorial races in Virginia and New Jersey. These gains were followed by a surprising Republican victory in a special election to fill the U.S. Senate seat of the late Democratic senator Edward Kennedy, when Republican Scott Brown defeated Democrat Martha Coakley almost a year to the day after President Obama’s inauguration. This election eliminated the Democrat’s filibuster-proof majority in the Senate. All these events suggest that the 2010 congressional election will likely follow the historic pattern of congressional losses for the party controlling the White House. These campaigns may be affected by the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* (2009), which invalidated limits on campaign expenditures by corporations and labor unions.

In sum, the 2008 election was an extraordinary one, with unusual nomination politics, record-breaking fund-raising, innovative campaigning, and a change of party control of government. The rest of this book examines the impact of 2008 on the “state of the parties,” noting both change and continuity. This examination proceeds in five parts: the party system, party organizations and activities, party resources, partisan publics, and party in government. A brief review of each section follows.
The Party System

What impact did the 2008 election have on the broader party system in the United States? The chapters in this first section of the book suggest far more continuity than change in the broader party system.

In chapter 2, John R. Petrocik asks an important question raised by the Democrats' broad electoral success: was 2008 a watershed election, one that fundamentally altered the functioning of the party system? After a review of voter turnout, party affiliation, party coalitions, and the impact of issues on the vote, he concludes that 2008 was not a watershed election. Certainly there were some significant changes, but these fell well within the normal flux and functioning of the party system. Instead, Petrocik finds that the 2008 election was a standard anti-incumbent election, with the electorate voting against the party in power. Of course, in 2008 the incumbent, President Bush, was not on the ballot, but his party nonetheless suffered at the polls. Far from being a watershed, 2008 was an example of continuity in the operation of the party system.

In chapter 3, Howard L. Reiter looks at party factions and the major party presidential candidates, and like Petrocik he finds more continuity than change in 2008. Reiter notes that both Barack Obama and John McCain drew on historic constituencies within their parties. After a review of elite party factionalism, the chapter notes the "heavy hand of the past" in party nominations. On the Democratic side, the support for Obama resembled that of earlier "reform" Democrats, who opposed the party "establishment." And on the Republican side, the support for McCain reflected the division between the more liberal northeastern Republicans and the more conservative Republicans from other regions. However, both candidates fit within the high level of ideological uniformity that characterized the major parties, Obama on the left and McCain on the right.

The theme of continuity extends to chapter 4, where John S. Jackson and John C. Green look at national convention delegates in 2008, comparing them to delegates in previous years back to 1992. These delegates were the individuals who formally nominated Obama and McCain, and they offer a glimpse into the views of major party leaders and activists. The 2008 delegates resembled their counterparts in previous years in one important respect: they remained highly polarized on issues. In fact, the 2008 delegates were in some ways more polarized than the 2004 delegates, especially in terms of self-identified ideology. Indeed, the high levels of polarization on health care forecast the national debate on the topic in 2009. Using a different definition of faction than Reiter, this chapter arrives at a similar conclusion: Obama and McCain succeeded within the existing factional structures of their parties rather than by altering them.
Party Organization and Activities

If 2008 showed a high degree of continuity with regard to the party system, there was considerable change in party organizations and activities, as illustrated by the chapters in this section.

In chapter 5, David B. Magleby puts the innovative 2008 presidential campaign in historical perspective. Using the metaphor of politics as a team sport, with teams comprising alliances of candidate, party, and interest group committees, he finds a decided advantage for the Democrats in the 2008 campaign. The character of this team sport depends on the legal regime governing electoral activity, and Magleby identifies three such regimes in recent times: 1974–1994 (featuring candidate-centered campaigns with parties and interest groups in a supportive role); 1996–2002 (featuring the growing importance of parties and interest groups), and the present era, 2004 to 2008 (featuring extensive “team play” by allied organizations). The extraordinary scope and sophistication of presidential campaigns has been an important feature of the current era, with the Obama campaign an especially good example. The Democrats exploited this new regime effectively in 2008, and this advantage may well extend to 2012.

Chapter 6 looks at team work in the 2008 presidential campaign from the vantage point of a local political party, painting a somewhat different picture. Melanie J. Blumberg, William C. Binning, Sarah K. Lewis, and John C. Green provide another case study of party politics in Mahoning County, Ohio, and find that in 2008 the local Democratic Party was on the periphery of the 2008 presidential campaign. This situation stands in contrast to the conduct of previous elections in the county: old-style machine politics in 1992, highly integrated “coordinated campaigns” in 1996 and 2000, and an “uncoordinated campaign” in 2004. The chapter finds that the Obama campaign created a separate, single-purpose organization, the Campaign for Change, effectively integrating resources and volunteers down to the grass roots but not integrating the local party and interest group allies. While in the main successful, the Campaign for Change was not the most effective presidential campaign in this county. But it did give Obama a high degree of control for campaign operations. For this reason alone, it may be a model for future presidential campaigns at the local level.

In chapter 7, Melody Crowder-Meyer reports on the strength and activities of local political parties, drawing on the results of a new national survey of county party leaders, the first such survey in several decades. She finds that county parties are, on balance, strong and active in elections from local to national office. This research also reveals new information on party involvement...
in candidate recruitment and the role of party leaders as gatekeepers. Many local parties are thus potentially valuable allies in national campaigns. However, organizational strength and activity are not uniform across locales, with, for example, Democrats stronger in counties with higher levels of education and Republicans strongest in more affluent areas. In any event, Crowder-Meyer concludes that the party was “still going” at the local level in 2008.

In chapter 8, Daniel M. Shea reviews Obama’s “Netroots” campaign and considers its capacity to reinvigorate political parties. After reviewing changes in party strength over the last three decades, Shea focuses on the recent increase in political activity by young people, a trend that took a large step forward with the Obama campaign. He sees these developments as an opportunity to institutionalize such youth engagement in four ways: by (1) furthering close coordination between candidates and parties (as Magleby reports in chapter 5), (2) using such activism to invigorate local party organizations (which Blumberg et al. do not see in chapter 6), (3) having parties develop an ongoing interest in policy (see chapter 10 on Obama Organizing for America), and (4) continuing the use of innovative outreach technology, such as the Obama campaign’s use of the Internet.

Chapter 9 provides a case study of the impact of the Internet on the 2008 campaign. Kira C. Allmann, Daniel Maliniak, Ronald B. Rapoport, and Lonna Rae Atkeson describe Unity08, a new political party that existed entirely online. Created by Democratic and Republican activists, Unity08 aimed to force the major parties to become more issue focused by mobilizing thousands of like-minded activists via the Internet. Although Unity08 was out of business by January of 2008 largely due to the success of the Obama campaign, the authors surveyed a sample of its members. In addition to providing a useful description of Web-based activism, this survey revealed a strong carryover effect from Unity08 effort and active support for Obama and the Democrats in the fall campaign. This research reveals the potential of online politics to change participation in national campaigns.

In chapter 10, Barbara Trish describes another innovation of the 2008 campaign, Organizing for America (OFA). This effort is an attempt to continue the Obama campaign after the election, mobilizing its activists to advocate for the Obama administration’s policy agenda. While by no means the first attempt of this sort, it is one of the most ambitious, drawing upon the extraordinary volunteer network of the Obama campaign. Housed within the Democratic National Committee, OFA offers the prospect of the kind of ongoing attention to policy that is suggested in chapter 8. Although it is far too early to determine the success of this experiment, Trish offers a detailed description of OFA’s initial activities and prospects.
Chapter 1

Party Resources

Another area of change in 2008 was party resources, especially the funds available to party organizations and their candidates. The chapters in this section describe these changes.

In chapter 11, Michael J. Malbin, Aaron Dusso, Gregory Fortelny, and Brendan Glavin review national party finances from 1999 to 2008 using data from the Federal Elections Commission analyzed by the Campaign Finance Institute. One conclusion drawn from these data is that the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002 (BCRA) did not hurt party fund-raising as some observers had feared, so that by 2008 the major party committees were able to engage in record-breaking spending on behalf of their presidential and congressional candidates, especially in the form of independent expenditures. The authors argue persuasively that a full understanding of national party finance requires an integrated view of parties and candidates (a point similar to the team sport metaphor discussed in chapter 5). Thus, changes in party resources in 2008 were part of a broader development in federal campaign finance.

In chapter 12, Raymond J. La Raja takes a somewhat different view of the changes in national party finances in 2008. He agrees that the national party committees successfully adapted to the new campaign-finance rules promulgated under BCRA and argues that the national parties were affected by the financial decisions of the presidential candidates. Of particular importance was Obama's decision to bypass public funding for the general election campaign and McCain's decision to accept public financing. Taken together, these decisions made the Democratic National Committee a less central player in the 2008 campaign and put pressure on the Republican National Committee to run a parallel campaign in support of its presidential candidates. La Raja believes these changes are likely to make campaigns more candidate centered in the future to the detriment of the parties (and a decline of the team sport metaphor discussed in chapter 5).

The great bulk of the funds raised in the 2008 campaign came from individual donations to candidates, parties, and interest groups. In chapter 13, Costas Panagopoulos and John C. Green use a variety of survey data to assess the size and characteristics of the individual-donor pool in 2008. The authors find a complex pattern of change in 2008. For one thing, the overall size of the donor pool may not have increased in 2008; rather, a surge in 2004 contributing was largely maintained. A more important change in 2008 was a shift of individual donors toward Democratic candidates and party committees and away from their Republican counterparts. Barack Obama's presidential fund-raising appears to have been central to this shift.
It is unclear if these changes represent a temporary or permanent change in the patterns of individual contributing.

Partisan Publics

There were also some changes in partisanship in the general public in the 2008 election, including the decline in identification with the Republican Party and renewed calls for bipartisan or even "postpartisan" politics. The chapters in this section investigate these issues.

In chapter 14, Daniel J. Coffey studies the decline in public support for the Republican Party in 2008, a shift that occurred during President Bush's second term in office. He identifies two sources of such a decline: first, an increased public perception that the GOP was too conservative and, second, a negative reaction to perceived government mismanagement by the party's officeholders, especially the president. Coffey finds some evidence for both sources of decline. One important part of this trend was the rise in the number of self-identified independents, a trend that stands in contrast to the steady decline of independents over the last three decades. In 2008, the new independents included a large number of former Republicans disaffected by the party. These findings suggest unstable partisan publics that can change in response to events, particularly the perceived presidential job performance.

In chapter 15, Rebekah E. Liscio, Jeffrey M. Stonecash, and Mark D. Brewer investigate the claim that the Republican Party is perceived as too conservative on cultural issues, such as abortion and gay rights. The authors set this question in the context of the Republican Party strategy over the previous three decades of pursuing culturally conservative voters. The authors note that up until 2000, this cultural issue strategy may have benefitted the Republicans, allowing them to gain more votes than they lost. But by 2006 and 2008, the strategy appears to have had a negative effect, costing the party well-educated and affluent voters. This change was encouraged by a liberalizing trend on cultural issues in the public and a decline in the salience of cultural issues. These findings suggest that party strategy can have a powerful effect on the size and character of partisan publics.

In chapter 16, J. Quin Monson, Kelly D. Patterson, and Jeremy C. Pope look at the stability of partisanship during the 2008 campaign. Overall, scholars have found self-identified partisanship to be quite stable, changing little over time, and yet, as the previous two chapters report, there can be variation in partisan publics between elections. Here, the authors show that partisan stability is affected by the campaign context, with citizens located in battleground states and those receiving a high volume of campaign communication
most affected. These findings suggest that the overall stability in partisanship may be an artifact of the American political system, in which some citizens are exposed to vigorous campaigns and others are not.

Although partisanship is a common feature of the American public, it has never been very popular in the United States, as Nancy L. Rosenblum points out in chapter 17, noting a long history of "antipartyism" in American political discourse. This tendency was amply on display in the 2008 campaign, when both Barack Obama and John McCain pledged to govern in a "bipartisan" fashion, and commentators talked openly of a new "postpartisan" era in American politics. Rosenblum is sharply critical of antipartyism, arguing for the moral distinctiveness of party identification. She argues that partisanship is valuable in normative terms because of its "inclusiveness, comprehensiveness, and compromisingness," which allow citizens to function effectively in democratic politics. She claims that partisanship is fundamentally positive—and not a fundamental flaw—in the political process.

Party in Government

In keeping with the strong continuity in the party system in 2008, there was also considerable continuity with regard to party in government, with a persistently high degree of partisan polarization. The chapters in this final section consider this topic.

In chapter 18, Richard M. Skinner argues that a major change has occurred in the presidency in the last twenty years, with the "modern presidency" (in which presidents were largely independent of party) having been replaced by a "partisan presidency" (in which the White House is closely connected to party). He sees Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama as good examples of partisan presidents. There is considerable irony here, since many of these presidents, especially Obama, campaigned on reducing partisanship in national politics. The partisan president is both a cause and a consequence of the high level of polarization in national politics, a pattern largely unchanged by the 2008 election results.

A high degree of polarization also persisted in the U.S. Congress, as reported in chapter 19 by R. Lawrence Butler. This chapter reviews congressional politics under Democratic Speaker Nancy Pelosi. Butler finds that Speaker Pelosi has been a strong advocate of advancing a programmatic liberal agenda in the House of Representatives. This advocacy reflects in part Pelosi’s liberal California district and in part her background as the daughter of a Democratic mayor of Baltimore. However, Pelosi’s leadership style is personal and
situational, rather than institutional, leaving her vulnerable to the vicissitudes of ideological politics. Like the partisan presidency, such leadership is both a cause and a consequence of a high degree of polarization.

In chapter 20, Walter J. Stone and Matthew T. Pietryka investigate the question of how citizens are represented in the House of Representatives, using new measures and an innovative research design. They set out to test two hypotheses about representation: first, that voters closer to the view of the median voter in the district are best represented by the member of Congress (a “district effect” drawn from spatial models of elections) and, second, that voters of the same political party as a member of Congress are better represented (a “partisan effect” drawn from the responsible parties model of elections). The analysis finds considerable support for both hypotheses, with strong district and partisan effects. Among other things, this evidence points to a salutary effect of partisan polarization, such as fuller representation of constituents on the winning side within a district, but also the costs of such polarization, with constituents on the losing side feeling particularly aggrieved about the representation they receive.

Unanswered Questions

Together, these chapters provide a detailed review of the “state of the parties” after 2008. But they also raise a number of unanswered questions about the state of the parties in the future. Among the most important are

1. Will the Obama administration be able to effect a permanent change in the party system, either by engineering an enduring Democratic victory or by building a new consensus around key public policies?
2. Will the era of politics as team sport continue, with increasing integration of candidate, party, and interest group organizations? Or will electoral politics revert to a decentralized and less coordinated pattern?
3. Will the key innovations of the 2008 campaign, such as Obama’s “Netroots” and Organizing for America, persist into the future? And if they do persist, will the Republicans adopt these techniques and compete more effectively?
4. Will the trends in campaign finance evident in 2008 continue, breaking new records in every election cycle? Will the individual-donor pool remain larger and continue to expand? Or will new innovations in campaign finance—including new rules and laws—once again change the source of party resources?
5. Will partisan publics remain unstable, shifting with the performance of officeholders, the strategies of parties, and the level of electoral competition? Will antipartyism continue to dominate political discourse, or will partisanship gain a new respectability?

6. Will the high level of partisan polarization persist in the presidency and the Congress? Or will polarization decline, reducing political tensions but also limiting the responsiveness of American government?
Part I
THE PARTY SYSTEM
Was 2008 a Watershed Election?

Observing the State of the Parties in the Election Results

John R. Petrocik

In 2008 Barack Obama won the White House, and Democrats increased their majorities in both houses of Congress, won governorships, and took control of more state legislatures. Those results, in conjunction with Obama’s election, led some to claim that the election was a watershed event. This chapter examines features of the 2008 election by comparing it to the central tendencies and dynamics of elections, looking for evidence of its normality. The assessment assumes that as these features seem typical of recent elections (in which the Republicans prospered), it is unlikely that 2008 was distinctive. Instead, it is more likely that 2008 observed another house cleaning of “failed” incumbents, without obvious implications for the state of the parties or the party system as a whole.

Finding Watersheds in Election Outcomes

Election results are the first measure of the state of the parties in all electoral party systems, including that of the United States, where the “commentariat” and academics often find the seeds of a party transformation in election outcomes (for an academic example, see Crotty 2005). Richard Nixon’s win in 1968 produced ruminations about an emerging Republican majority. Jimmy Carter’s success in several southern states in 1976 generated assertions that the New Deal party coalitions had been reenergized. Ronald Reagan’s triumph and the GOP capture of a majority in the Senate in the 1980 election encouraged commentators and optimistic Republicans to anticipate a 218 majority in the House in 1982 (“218” was an unofficial chant of some at the National
Republican Congressional Committee during much of 1981). George H. W. Bush's victory in 1988 led to "insights" about an Electoral College "lock" that would handicap Democratic hopes to win the presidency for years into the future. The GOP sweep in 1994 produced confident assertions (and rebuttals) about the final emergence of the new Republican majority. Barack Obama's win in 2008, the surge in Democratic victories across the nation, and apparent declines in the Republican vote of some high-visibility groups encouraged commentary (enthusiastically and confidently repeated by Democrats) about the "declining Republican base" (Balz 2009).

It is easy to understand this focus on election results. The literature on realignments, party system eras, and society's issue agenda is partly dependent on a standard set of election outcomes. Electoral success is particularly salient in the United States because our office-seeking party system downplays ideology, programs, and organizational structures in favor of electoral success. So, for commentators and academics, looking for changes in the standard set of outcomes justifies inspecting an election for what it might portend for changes in the party system. Many reasons for the electoral emphasis have been proposed, but the structure of the presidential election and the diversity of the parties are surely important factors. The "big tent" of each party contains supporters and would-be officeholders who share a party allegiance but conflicting programmatic beliefs, perceptions, and intentions. The struggle in 2009 among the majority Democrats in Congress to construct a different health care financing system is a handy example of how partisans of a party can quickly agree that they deserve to win but then struggle mightily among themselves about what policies and programs to pursue. Sometimes power seems to be the only thing officeholders of the winning party share, a conjecture that led James McGregor Burns to see a fractious four-party system masquerading as a two-party model (Burns 1963).

Caveats and cautions notwithstanding, election outcomes are examined for their larger significance, and observers often infer great changes from incomplete evidence or no evidence. Some observers have argued that the 2008 election broke the previous equilibrium. Following the 2004 election, Democrats were a minority in the House and Senate, had governors in only twenty-two states, and controlled fewer state legislatures than the GOP. All this was reversed with the 2008 election. A Democrat became president; Democrats won commanding majorities in both houses of Congress, controlled a majority of both houses in the state legislatures, and held almost three-fifths of the governorships. Subsequent commentary about a "declining Republican base" only made the defeat of John McCain and other Republicans seem more consequential. The 2006 election outcomes take some of the drama out of the 2004–2008 comparison, since both houses of Congress and a majority
Was 2008 a Watershed Election?

TABLE 2.1
A Democratic Surge in 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presidency</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrats in the House</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrats in the Senate</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>51 (2)*</td>
<td>59 (2)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic governors</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The totals include two independents (Joseph Lieberman and Bernie Sanders) who caucus with the Democrats.

...of governors fell into the hands of the Democrats in 2006. Still, the Democrats increased their majorities in both houses of Congress in 2008 and took control of more state legislatures—making it plausible to think of the 2008 election as more than just another election (see table 2.1).

But was 2008 more than a lost election, a response to an election environment with strong pro-Democratic short-term forces at work—economic difficulties, an ineffective response to a natural calamity, incumbent political scandals, unpopular military involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan—and how can you tell? This chapter looks at the central tendencies and dynamics of the 2008 election for evidence of its normality. The assessment assumes that as these seem typical of recent elections in which the Republicans have prospered, it is less likely that 2008 was a distinctive event for the party system but, rather, entailed another house cleaning of “failed” incumbents. Four aspects of the electoral dynamics of the party system are examined: turnout, the electorate’s party affiliation, the stability in the party loyalties of groups that define the contemporary party coalitions, and the issue concerns that shaped the vote. The evidence indicates that 2008 was a standard anti-incumbent election, without obvious implications for the future of the party system.

Turnout in 2008: Electoral Mobilization and Party System Change?

While American turnout rates are low, the history of American presidential elections through 2008 is one of almost continuous growth in the size of the
electorate. Originally, there seemed to be little question about the importance of this growth in fueling party realignments. V. O. Key (1955), E. E. Schattschneider (1975), and Walter Dean Burnham (1970) included a surge in voter participation on their list of the elements that defined electoral realignments, while Samuel J. Eldersveld (1949), Samuel Lubell (1952), Angus Campbell et al. (1960), Kristi J. Andersen (1979), John Wanat (1979), John R. Petrocik (1981), Wanat and Karen Burke (1982), and James E. Campbell (1985) have all documented a strong link between the rise of the New Deal and the partisan mobilization of new cohorts and previous nonparticipants.

There are only four instances of decline in the absolute size of the voting population from one election to the next; the median change is an increase of just under 8 percent. In the forty-five pairs of adjacent presidential elections between 1828 and 2008, the link between changes in mobilization rates and commonly acknowledged realignments is obvious. Explosive growth (exceeding 20 percent) marked eleven presidential contests. Seven of the eleven spikes in growth coincided with major realignments. Three occurred during the period from 1828 through 1840, the years of the formation of the Jacksonian Second-Party System; two occurred between 1856 and 1872, the birth years of the Third-Party System; one was in 1896, a surge that established the dominance of the Republicans; and the seventh occurred in 1928, just as the New Deal era was being created. The connection between turnout changes and party system eras is not peculiar to the United States (Przeworski 1975, Przeworski and Sprague 1986).

The logic of this mobilization-realignment correlation is generally agreed upon: a party system with a large number of chronic nonvoters (the United States) is more susceptible to change through mobilization, whether the mobilization occurs through extending the franchise or the sudden turnout of chronic nonparticipants because a political surge incorporates groups whose interests were not well represented by the existing parties (Rokkan 1970, ch. 7; Schattschneider 1975; Przeworski 1975). An 80 percent participation rate almost always produces a demographically different electorate than one with a 50 percent participation rate, with clear implications for the median policy and party preferences of the citizenry and the likely policy and programmatic orientation of the parties (Lijphart 1997). These considerations led both academics and the political commentariat to suggest that the predicted high turnout for 2008 might be a marker for an enduring change in the party system.

The predicted high turnout did not occur. The increase in the number of voters in 2008 over 2004 was a modest 7.4 percent, about on par with the historical election-to-election increase and below the increases observed for 1984, 1992, 2000, and 2004 (the latter generated the largest election-over-election increase
Was 2008 a Watershed Election?

in almost fifty years). The turnout rate in 2008 increased about one percentage point over the turnout rate for 2004 (which was 60.7 percent of the vote-eligible population), but neither the change from 2004 nor the total turnout rate was exceptional. The total number of voters increased in 2008 over 2004, but that reflects the ever-growing population, and, as the vote-eligible-population turnout rate in figure 2.1 documents, turnout did not surge. The 2008 election turnout rate represents a continuation of a post-1988 return of turnout to the high levels of 1960 (63.8 percent of the vote-eligible population) and 1964 (62.8 percent). There was no surge in 2008, no indication of an unusual spike in mobilization. Some groups did have atypically high turnout rates: both African Americans and those under thirty years of age (including whites under thirty) turned out at a higher rate. Older voters may have voted less. On the whole, however, nothing in the turnout rate points to an election that departed from the status quo of the last few decades.

It would have taken an unusually large surge in 2008 to expect anything of moment to happen. The “turnout-rate status quo” in the last sixty years has had no implications for election outcomes or the party balance. Although it is conventional wisdom to believe that turnout aids Democrats, the oscillation in turnout around the “typical level” of 55 to 60 percent is uncorrelated with election results at either the presidential level or in down-ballot legislative

elections (Kaufmann, Petrocik, and Shaw 2008). High-turnout elections have produced both resounding Democratic wins (1964) and narrow Democratic victories (1960), but overall the Democratic share of the vote is unrelated to the turnout rate. A significant election effect, not to mention a party system effect, requires large turnout surges, probably surges among distinctive groups, to shift the election or party system from its equilibrium. Normal turnout oscillation has no systematic implication for the election outcome, and in the case of the 2008 election, the slight increase in the participation rate almost certainly does not explain the success of the Democrats. The story lies in defection from partisanship.

Partisanship in 2008: Stable Rates and Stable Behavior

The party component of the 2008 election was also familiar, although the balance of party identification took a Democratic turn in the American National Election Studies (ANES) survey for 2008. A six-point Democratic lead in party identification in 2004 became a thirteen-point advantage in 2008. This swing may indicate a shift to the Democrats, but it is more likely to reflect the pro-Democratic tide of 2008. Party identification is substantially stable for individuals and in the aggregate over long periods, but it does oscillate in response to short-term events.

Between 1952 when the ANES series began and the early 1980s, the balance of party preference favored the Democrats by about twenty percentage points. It dropped after 1984 to an average that favored the Democrats by about ten points. But as figure 2.2 indicates, these are only averages. In the earlier period the difference occasionally favored the Democrats by a much larger margin (thirty points in 1964) and a smaller margin (thirteen points in 1956), following the short-term tides that shaped the election outcomes of those years. When the election environment was extremely beneficial to the Democrats, as it was in 1964, not only did Lyndon Johnson win, but the softer GOP partisans (and most of the self-declared independents) either disavowed all party preference or declared a Democratic preference, resulting in a bigger-than-normal Democratic tilt in partisanship at the time of the election. When the environment aided the GOP (e.g., in 1956), the balance in party identification reduced the Democratic lead considerably. Similar oscillation occurred after the mid-1980s. The Democratic advantage has been as great as fifteen points (in 1996) and as small as five points (in 2002). The swing in 2008 is characteristic of the way the balance of partisanship oscillates in response to short-term, election-specific forces.
Was 2008 a Watershed Election?

Surveys since the election in November 2008 show a decline in Democratic identification toward the post-1984 average. Gallup measured a fourteen-point Democratic lead in early 2009 that had shrunk to nine points by June of that year; it had declined further to six points, 48 percent Democrat to 42 percent Republican, by September.

President Obama’s success and Democratic success in elections at all ballot levels can be attributed to the continued Democratic majority in the electorate (albeit smaller than in the 1950s) and, perhaps more importantly, to the favorable short-term environment of 2008. The traditional party balance and partisans behavior characterized the 2008 election. Three pieces of data are relevant.

The first, of course, is just the general stability in the balance of Democratic and Republican identifiers. Through the third quarter of 2009, there was no evidence that anything unusual had happened to the party balance.

The second thing to note is the persistence of the standard relationship between party preference and presidential choice (figure 2.3). Americans are party voters. A proper model of the vote always identifies party identification as the major influence on candidate choice, trumping issues and efforts by
candidates to escape their party affiliation. However, the short-term tilt in partisanship toward the Democrats, the greater loyalty of Democrats to their party preference, and the Democratic votes from independents helped Democratic candidates “sweep” the field in 2008.

Third, at the end of the day in the 2008 election cycle, the net partisan basis of the vote placed 2008 squarely among all recent previous elections (see figure 2.4). Of the presidential vote, 83 percent reflected party voting (Democratic identifiers voting for the Democrat and Republican identifiers voting for the Republican), compared to 84 percent in 2004 and 80 percent in 2000. About 9 percent of the 2008 presidential vote was contributed by independents (60 percent of whom voted for Obama), and another 8 percent of the 2008 presidential vote came from defectors, a majority of whom were Republicans who defected to Obama. The 2008 House elections produced a similar amount of party voting, although the net was slightly lower, reflecting incumbency effects (incumbents draw weak challengers because most incumbents are in safe districts, the challengers are underfunded as a result of their weakness and widely anticipated defeat, and so forth).
Traditional party loyalties also shaped perceptions and expectations. Figure 2.5(a, b) is based on answers to a question about the economy in the future and the overall direction of the country, with most respondents answering negatively over the course of the election year. The responses took a positive turn in October.

The source of the switch in direction is apparent in panels a and b of the figure, which divide respondents by their party identification. Democrats, more than Republicans, thought the country was on the wrong track until Obama’s victory, at which point they were less likely than Republicans to see the country heading in the wrong direction. Perceptions of the future of the nation’s economy were even more dramatically affected by the election outcomes. Democrats had been twice as likely as Republicans to believe that things were going to be worse throughout the year. Expectations of “happy times” surged among Democrats when Obama’s victory was apparent, while gloomy economic expectations became the norm for soon-to-be-defeated Republicans.
FIGURE 2.5(a)
Partisanship and the direction of the country.

FIGURE 2.5(b)
Partisanship and the future condition of the economy.
Stable Party Coalitions

Table 2.2 is based on a group profile analysis of Democratic and Republican partisans over most of the past thirty years. The shifts that occurred in the 1970s and early 1980s eliminated many of the old key distinctions (especially the regional ones) and created party loyalties along different social cleavages. The partisanship of the resulting groups has been largely stable for the last two decades. No significant changes occurred during the 2008 election year. The religiously observant became slightly more Republican, and upscale whites expressed less affiliation for the GOP, but these were small changes, probably reflecting the election-specific oscillation described above. The stable partisanship of the groups produced a vote in 2008 that was almost exactly what would have been expected, given these party loyalties.

The 2008 Republican presidential vote declined about five percentage points overall from 2004 and by at least that much in many, if not most, groups in the electorate. Blacks, Hispanics, the young generally, and first-time voters (some of these categorizations overlap) declined the most. Standard Republican groups—whites, white males, evangelicals, the religiously observant, upper-income groups—supported McCain at lower rates than they voted for George W. Bush in 2004. The shift was an across-the-board rejection of Republicans with the flavor of a retrospective, adverse judgment of the moment rather than a rejection of the Republican Party. The party balance was effectively unchanged (see the earlier discussion about postelection party-identification data), and the 2008 vote corresponds to the prior partisan profile of the groups.

The 2000 and 2004 elections produced Republican victories by George W. Bush, and prior to that Bill Clinton relied on dissatisfaction with the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2.2</th>
<th>The Contemporary Party Coalitions and the Presidential Vote</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Republican Presidential Vote in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2008 (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African Americans</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanics</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jews</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union households</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low socioeconomic-status whites</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upscale whites</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The religiously observant</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other whites</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

incumbent to produce a win in 1992 and a reelection in 1996. Incumbent dissatisfaction defeated McCain, and, as table 2.2 documents, the pattern of the 2008 vote conforms to a structure that reflects the contemporary party coalitions. John McCain received a substantial majority from the religiously observant, and although he carried white voters overall, less affluent whites shifted to Obama in 2008. McCain did poorly among blacks and Hispanics and lost voters in union households by a substantial margin (as Republicans frequently do). Jews voted measurably more for the Republican candidate in 2004 and 2008 than in the previous elections. Indeed, the less Democratic tilt of the Jewish vote in 2004 and 2008 is hard to ignore and has few precedents in the last fifty years. It may represent a new state of affairs or first steps in a continuing movement away from strong Democratic loyalties. These votes may also, however, only be sequential short-term defections (no change in party identification is measurable) that respond to peculiar features of these two elections, including, of course, a strong commitment by Bush and McCain to Israel's military security, a salient issue among American Jews.  

Overall, however, the voting of the groups in 2008 does not stand out from the four preceding presidential elections. Working-class and upscale whites did not vote as heavily Republican in 2008 as they did in 2000 and 2004, a decline that contributed greatly to McCain's defeat. But the general pattern is familiar and in line with expectations. The five-point vote swing was larger for some groups than others, and a few resisted it entirely. But the voting story for 2008 is more plausibly an election-specific tale of retrospective voting and not a party system defining event.

Issues and the Party System

It is not common to evaluate party system stability by assessing the similarity of the impact of particular issues on voting choice across a series of elections; the major focus has been on which party is politically dominant and on the stability of each party's electoral base. However, shifts in the policy agenda of the nation and parties as it is expressed in campaign programs and promises, legislative voting, and legislation enacted have figured prominently in analyses of party system change and realignments going back to Key's (1955) earliest formulations (examples would include Brady 1988 and Ladd 1970). Looked at thusly, the 2008 presidential election demonstrates continuity. The evidence of this continuity is the 2008 relationship between the problem concerns of voters and how they voted for president.

The following analysis of issue effects on the 2008 vote uses most-important-problem (MIP) mentions for the assessment for two reasons. First, al-
though these are not traditional open-ended questions, they are less directive than standard closed-format questions because they ask respondents to select problems from a list. Compared to closed questions, this format tends to elicit responses for more salient issues, avoiding confounding results that might occur because the prior interpretations of the analyst are privileged with closed-format questions to which indifferent responses might be provided by respondents (and voters). Second, the MIP responses permit the analysis to identify whether the relationship between the presidential vote and the issue concerns expressed by the voters is consistent with what we would have expected in 2008 under the assumption of party system stability.

**Issues and Party System Stability**

In a stable party system, the electorate perceives stable differences between the parties in their ability to "handle" problems and issues. This perception reflects the parties' constituencies and governing history, which confer on each party a reputation for being able to resolve issues, effectively making them "owners" of the issues. Issue ownership is a major asset to a candidate's effort to garner votes because party association is a dominant indicator (albeit not the only one) of a candidate's ability to formulate policies and implement programs to handle current problems. The imputed ability matters because a significant determinant of candidate choice is the problems (medical care needs, high taxes, national security, and so forth) that voters want the government to address, not the policies candidates promise to pursue. Concern with problems viewed as better handled by Democrats reinforces Democratic identifiers, provoking defection among Republicans and a Democratic tide among independents. Concern with issues regarded as better handled by the GOP has the opposite effect. The direct electoral effect of this issue-agenda variance is the critical difference among elections because most policy preferences are substantially stable between and among elections, but the problems needing attention will vary greatly (Petrocik 1996). The voter's susceptibility to persuasion that a problem deserves attention provides the candidate with the opportunity to create a winning plurality. It also gives candidates their electoral strategy because sincerity, internal party imperatives, and strategic calculations lead them to emphasize issues owned by their party.

Issue-handling reputations are not invariant. Short-term circumstances (policy failures) can change the issue-handling advantage a party enjoys. Performance-issue reputations (who can assure a strong economy, for example) can be gained and lost in short periods (in concert with, for example, changes in the economy). But constituency-based issue reputations are more stable, although events and personalities can induce some shifts, because they reflect
the party alignment. Stability in these constituency reputations indicates stability in the party system.

The stability exists because constituency pressures within and between the parties, constant party rhetoric, and recurring policy initiatives reinforce issue reputations and keep them intact over long periods. As a result, Republicans are viewed as likely to protect “traditional values” and to keep taxes low, government small, and national security strong. Democrats are expected to help the elderly, protect Social Security and the environment, reduce employment, and ensure fair treatment of minorities.

A candidate or a party can temporarily lose its generally perceived superiority on an issue because dissatisfied voters will be inclined to deny the party or candidate with whom they are unhappy any “redeeming” qualities. Conversely, a popular candidate may be viewed as able to handle a problem that is not usually an issue strength of his (or her) party. Finally, a party can lose an advantage on a constituency-based issue when major shifts occur in the party coalitions. But there is a stable and long-term equilibrium to issue-handling reputations absent major changes in the parties’ constituencies.

Issue Concerns and the Partisan Issue Agenda in 2008

Voters had a diverse set of problems on their minds during September and October 2008. The declining economy was mentioned by more respondents than any other issue. A plurality of 33 percent viewed it as the most important problem, and almost three-quarters of voters saw it as one of the three most important problems. Terrorism was the second most mentioned (at 46 percent), with virtually as many seeing it as the nation’s most important problem (31 percent) as saw the economy as our most pressing issue (the breakdown of first, second, and third most important problems is not shown). Government spending was in a virtual tie with terrorism, in third place only because few saw it as the most important problem. Nothing else approached the salience of these issues. Social-spending concerns (Social Security, standard of living, health care) were mentioned by about 55 percent; cultural issues (values, crime, opportunities for minorities and women) were mentioned by 23 percent; a need for change was offered by about 20 percent of the sample. There were no substantive changes by election day (see table 2.3). The rank order of the issue concerns was approximately the same, although health care references made social-spending concerns more significant (totaling 55 percent) and a top concern for more than half the citizenry.

A stable party system should show continuity in the way issues are connected to the parties and in their influence on the vote. That was the state of affairs in 2008: there was a strong party bias to these mentions and in the ex-
TABLE 2.3
The Issue Concerns of Democrats and Republicans in 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party Identification</th>
<th>Republicans (%)</th>
<th>Independents (%)</th>
<th>Democrats (%)</th>
<th>Total* (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Republican-Owned Issues</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorism</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spending</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Performance Issues</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Democrat-Owned Issues</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health care</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Security</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard of living</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ambiguous Ownership</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>102</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2008 Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project.
*The “total” column exceeds 100 percent because of multiple mentions.

Expected direction. Republicans were the disproportionate source of mentions of problems typically regarded as GOP-owned issues (government spending, values, and such), while Democrats were the primary source of issues historically owned by the Democratic Party and its candidates (see Petrocik 1996; Petrocik, Benoit, and Hansen 2004). The differences were, as expected, substantial. Three-quarters of Republican identifiers selected terrorism as one of the most important problems facing the country, but fewer than 20 percent of Democrats viewed terrorism as important. Government spending showed a similar party tilt: only a quarter of the Democrats thought it was a top problem, whereas two-thirds of the Republicans saw it as a major issue. A concern with the nation’s “values” has an equivalent party bias.

Issues that traditionally advantaged Democrats showed less party difference in mentioning by Democrats and Republicans, but the differential was in the expected direction. Democrats were more likely than Republicans to select traditional Democrat-owned issues as the most important problems facing the country, but the partisan difference was less than the partisan difference for GOP-owned issues. Health care was the only issue to present a big difference by party identification among Democrat-owned issues:
40 percent of Democrats thought this issue was one of the most important problems facing the country, but only 12 percent of Republicans placed it among the top three MIPs.

Performance issues were mentioned inconsistently, relative to party. One might have expected more interparty agreement about performance issues—the economy and the lengthy, costly, and deadly military involvement in Iraq—but they did not. Democrats, Republicans, and independents agreed, by huge majorities, that the condition of the economy was a major problem. However, they viewed the continuing military involvement in Iraq differently. A near majority of Democrats saw it as a major problem; a fifth of independents selected Iraq as a major problem; only 5 percent of Republicans took that position.

### Issue Effects in 2008

From the perspective of the issue-ownership model of voting, the rate at which Republican-owned issues were mentioned more frequently than Democratic-owned issues, shown in the last column of table 2.3, offers some insight into the relative closeness of the presidential election (the presidential vote only shifted five points between 2004 and 2008). Almost everybody mentioned at least one of the GOP-owned issues, equaling about twice the rate at which Democrat-owned issues were mentioned. The key facts of the election were that (1) performance issues were on everybody’s mind regardless of partisanship, and (2) the ownership/handling dimension influenced the vote in exactly the way the issue-ownership model would predict.

Table 2.4 permits a comparison between the expected vote of those who mentioned each issue with (1) the expressed vote intention (the “September—October” columns), and (2) the reported vote (the “Postelection” columns). The expected vote, which is based on the party identification of those who mentioned the issue, permits a control for partisanship that is obviously needed given the differences in the problem and issue concerns of Democrats and Republicans (as seen in table 2.3).

The main findings are straightforward. Both the vote intention in September and October and the reported vote (from the November and December interviews) followed the issue concerns of individuals. Republicans were more concerned about Republican-owned issues (it is one of the things that makes Republicans different from Democrats), they were expected to vote for McCain, and they did. But Democrats who mentioned Republican-owned issues voted for McCain at a higher rate than other Democrats. On the other side, those who mentioned Democratic-owned issues voted
more for Obama, and independents and Republicans who mentioned Democratic-owned issues supported Barack Obama at a rate higher than we would have expected just given their partisanship and the normal voting choices of independents and Republicans.

The prominence of Republican-owned issues (table 2.3, "total" column) in the concerns of voters trumped the incidence of Democrat-owned issues, and voting choices produced a near stalemate in vote intention and the reported vote. The determinant of the election, or at least of the margin of victory by Barack Obama, was the prominence of performance issues and the advantage they gave Obama over McCain. People who mentioned the economy as a major issue in the election voted their party identification, a situation that advantaged Obama given the underlying Democratic majority in the electorate. Those who were concerned about Iraq intended to—and did—vote overwhelmingly for Obama, well above the rate that would have been expected from a simple party baseline. The net effect for the election outcome was a nearly partisan division of the vote that followed party and issue dynamics consistent with the contemporary electoral dynamics of the party system.

### TABLE 2.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue Owned by the</th>
<th>Vote for Barack Obama</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>September-October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intended (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorism</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government spending</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>Perf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>Perf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Security</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard of living</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health care</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2008 Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project.

**Perf** is an abbreviation for Performance Issues that are owned by neither party.
Chapter 2

Conclusion

The election of an African American to the highest political office in the land made the 2008 election a historical event. But on almost every other dimension, the election invoked familiar processes and did not disturb the electoral dimensions of the party system that has shaped our electoral politics for nearly thirty years.

Turnout, rarely important, was not a significant factor in the outcome of the 2008 election. More people voted in 2008 than in 2004, but that was not unusual. The reverse—fewer voters—is unusual and rare. The increase in voters did increase the turnout rate slightly, but at a pace below the recent increases in the turnout rate. Only the turnout of minority voters and the young stands out. The African American turnout increased more than that of others, but this did not increase their share of the electorate to a fraction that might permanently alter the party balance in a way observed during historical realignments in the United States or during major party system transformations in other societies.

The enthusiasm of the youngest cohorts for Barack Obama might portend changes in the coming years. Political science has unresolved questions about the extent to which party regimes are reshaped by the mobilization of new voters (young native cohorts, immigrants, and so forth) as opposed to the conversion of individuals and groups to a different party identification. But however political scientists have examined the question, the distinctive responsiveness of young cohorts to short-term forces has been recognized as has the susceptibility of the young to trends or events that existed in their formative youth. Looked at thusly, the youngest cohorts have displayed something of a Democratic surge during the last two—and perhaps three—elections. The Generation Y cohort (which became eligible to vote after 1996) has a preference for the Democratic Party that is significantly different from the population and their nearest cohort, the Gen Xers, who entered the electorate in the early 1980s. But even the Gen X cohort seems more inclined than average to identify with the Democrats. Overall, then, while 2008 may not have been a watershed for their party identification, the differential response of the cohorts to the parties and their recent candidates may become a foundation for a future change that erodes Republican support.

Two caveats must be attached to these cohort generationalizations. First, the youngest cohorts are the most susceptible to trends and short-term political tides. The baby boomers (whose coming-of-age coincided with the Vietnam War) gave every indication in the 1960s of being much more Democratic in their partisanship and liberal in their ideological orientation—but they
went the other way. Boomers adopted a partisanship that has made them the
most Republican cohort in the electorate—more Republican than the genera-
tions that preceded them (see Kaufmann, Petrocik, and Shaw 2008). Second,
the 2008 election does not seem to be the event that turned the young toward
the Democrats. The patterns for the youngest cohorts do not even suggest a
significant change in 2008. The responsiveness of the youngest cohorts dates
at least to the 2004 election and perhaps earlier. It is at least plausible that
their partisan sentiments may be more linked to a rejection of Bush than any
unique attraction to Obama or events of the last couple of years. Whatever
happened, 2008 is not an obvious watershed for the cohorts despite all the
campaign-period commentary about the young.

No Change in the Partisan Divide

There has been no change in the aggregate partisan divide. George W.
Bush’s narrow (but touted) defeat of John Kerry in 2004 eroded the familiar
eight- to ten-point advantage in Democratic identification to zero in early
2005 Gallup surveys, but it quickly rebounded by the first quarter of 2006.
Obama’s victory and the excitement it fanned had pushed the advantage in
Democratic identification to almost thirteen points by the end of 2008. But
the gain was short-lived, dropping to nine points by June and to six points by
September of 2009—probably in response to wide criticism of the president
and his party’s economic and social policies as well as the country’s continuing
economic difficulties.

Nor has much changed since the election in the “hard” feelings partisans
have toward each party’s leaders and symbols after the election. Division and
polarization have been themes for more than a decade. George W. Bush was
identified as a contributor to both (see Jacobson 2007a), and Barack Obama
promised a lessening of the divide and a period of diminished partisanship.
But there is no evidence of an improvement. Hard feelings were as much the
norm in the early months of Obama’s first term as they were in a similar period
for most recent presidents. Figure 2.6, which plots the approval data of the job
performance of the incumbent in March or April of the new president’s first
term, demonstrates that partisan polarization toward new presidents has been
increasing since Carter’s election. The top part of the figure plots the simple
percentage of those who approve among Democrats, independents, and
Republicans. The bottom part of the figure plots the “approval gap,” that is,
the percentage by which the partisans of the losing candidate are less approv-
ing than the partisans of the new incumbent. A couple of things stand out.
First, the incumbent’s partisans are always more approving. Moreover, there
appears to be some symmetry in the approval. That is, the loser’s partisans are not noticably farther below 50 percent than the winner’s partisans are above 50 percent. Second, the gap has been increasing: the winner’s partisans tend to express a bit more approval over time; the loser’s partisans express more disapproval. The result is that the approval gap has continued to increase. Barack Obama began his presidency without reversing the partisan divide that had been standard. George W. Bush did not start it, and through spring 2010 Barack Obama had done nothing to reverse it.

Finally, the social groups that have defined the Democratic and Republican coalitions and electoral bases over the last two to three decades supported Obama and McCain exactly as their recent votes and expressed party loyalties during the Reagan, Clinton, and Bush presidencies would have led one to expect. Through the election period, there was no change in the political loyalties of these groups; nor was there any evidence of a reshaping of party loyalties along new social differences. The familiar groups voted in the 2008 election pretty much as their party loyalties during recent decades would have led us to expect. There were deviations from the baseline, but none that have not been observed in previous recent elections, and all can be regarded as deviations rather than harbingers of a new state of affairs.\footnote{18}
A House Cleaning

The across-the-board Democratic win in 2008 was a classic retrospective election, which turned out incumbents for poor performance even though the issue environment of the electorate was not as homogeneously dominated by economic concerns as the commentary would have us believe. Voters were concerned with familiar and traditional problems, and issues were linked to the parties in familiar ways—further indicating the stability of the party system. Issues that usually advantage Democrats (social services, health care) reinforced the advantage Obama enjoyed because of performance failures by Bush and Republicans, especially on matters related to the economy and persisting military involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan. But the conventional quality of the election is illustrated by the fact that one or more GOP issues—terrorism, the scale of the national government and government spending, and traditional values—were of concern to a majority and produced more support for McCain than one might have expected, given the state of the economy and a generalized desire for change.

A reasonable conclusion: the 2008 presidential election, like most elections, was not a signal event for the party system. Elections are probably not directly responsible for realigning the party system, notwithstanding popular and conventional enthusiasm for the idea of a “critical election.” Presidents shape the politics of an era, and we will only know whether 2008 was a turning point as we experience the consequences of Obama’s programmatic initiatives and policies (Skowronek 1997).

Notes

1. A certain tolerance toward this quadrennial commentary needs to be maintained since the academic concept of a critical election has legitimized related popular commentary.

2. A caveat: we often emphasize and then lament (the latter when we decry party polarization) the degree of policy consensus within the parties. Officeholders, by contrast, frequently view it very pragmatically (as one said, “You can’t do anything if you don’t win”). Given that policies and programs do change with government control and that we believe (with occasional uncertainty) that election outcomes register the electorate’s state of mind (Stimson 1999), closely examining election outcomes for what they portend for the future makes substantive good sense.

3. This generalization may not be stated with sufficient qualification. There is evidence that nonvoters in the United States are essentially identical to voters with regard to candidate and policy preferences. This suggests that the discrepancy is probably limited to situations in which the nonparticipating population suffers from some structural exclusion—segregation, immigration effects, and so forth. The relative
consistency of the relationship between electoral growth and the party balance has not precluded controversy about it. The causal linkage has been disputed with particular energy, with both factual and methodological objections keeping alive the plausibility that conversion has been the major feature of realignments (see Niemi, Katz, and Newman 1980; Erikson and Tedin 1983), although the data do not lend much prima facie support to the conversion thesis.

4. These data are drawn from Michael McDonald’s United States Elections Project website at http://elections.gmu.edu. The following estimates are calculated from data available on McDonald’s website. All references to turnout rates use the voter-eligible population, not the voter-age population, as the appropriate estimate of the maximum number of possible voters.

5. The increase in black turnout may yet be significant, but prudence argues that it probably is not consequential in the longer term. At about 11 percent of the adult population, African Americans do not represent a group that could significantly alter the party balance since almost all are currently stalwarts in the Democratic coalition, and a persisting twenty-percentage-point increase in their turnout (which would equal white turnout) would add less than two percentage points to the base Democratic vote. The surge in young voters and their overwhelming support for Obama may be more consequential, but the unsettled political orientations of the young may preclude the persistence of their 2008 voting choices.


7. The categories are exclusive, constructed through a targeting analysis in which groups are identified by social characteristics that maximally differentiate them from other social groups according to their party identification.

8. The party bias slipped slightly to the Democrats but recovered by the middle of 2009 to its 2008 level, and the character and the profile of the party coalitions did not change at all.

9. President Obama’s recent pressure on Israel to limit settlement development and expansion in previous Arab areas of Israel may have consequences for the historical preference of Jews for the Democrats. Many GOP programmatic commitments, especially on cultural issues, are not shared by Jews, and that could limit the appeal of the GOP. However, while their party identification may not presage a Republican movement, the presidential voting of American Jews may be more Republican than it has been in the recent past, all depending on future events.

10. To be perceived as “handling” issues entails having a reputation for being more skilled at dealing with them. This reputation is produced by a history of attention, initiative, and innovation toward these issues and leads voters to believe that the party’s candidates are more sincere and committed to doing something about them. See John R. Petrocik (1996; Petrocik, Benoit, and Hansen 2004). George Rabinowitz and Stuart MacDonald (1998), in their “A Directional Theory of Voting,” have similar notions about the importance of commitment.

12. The proposition behind this analysis is that campaigns influence the perceptions and behavior of voters and the outcome of elections. Two papers by Daron Shaw (1999a, 1999b) provide compelling evidence that campaigns influence voters. Christopher Blunt’s (2002) unpublished dissertation shows that campaigns increase salience and increase the consistency between candidate choice and policy preferences. The debate about campaigns can be sampled in Andrew Gelman and Gary King (1993) and Thomas Holbrook (1996).

13. A key empirical underpinning of the theory of issue ownership is that the electorate's beliefs about what constitute the most important problems change in response to what it believes is happening in the world, while its core attitudes and related policy preferences change slowly. The long-term stability of attitudes and preferences is well documented in Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro (1992) and William G. Mayer (1993). Mayer observes more change, albeit over a lengthy period.

14. A candidate can own an issue, as, for example, a famous and successful prosecutor might have high credibility of the issue of crime. See Patrick J. Sellers (1998). Also see William H. Riker (1993).

15. During the first year of Reagan’s presidency, for example, the Democrats and the GOP were viewed as equally good at reducing unemployment, an issue Democrats are normally judged as better able to handle. During the 1992 election cycle, Democrats and Republicans were viewed as equally competent at handling crime and taxes (issues Democrats are usually not thought to handle well).

16. The expected vote is the normal vote projected from the voting behavior of the difference classes of partisans—strong, vs. weak vs. leaning identifiers, and independents. See Philip E. Converse (1966) and John R. Petrocik (1989).

17. The assessment of polarization has emphasized issues and policies, but there is good evidence that symbols are infused with polarization and conflict far more than substantive policy differences. See Karen Kaufmann, John R. Petrocik, and Daron R. Shaw (2008).

18. The 2008 exit survey reported an unusually large vote for Obama among high-income voters. That, in addition to the vote choices of the young and the turnout of minorities, was a feature of the election narrative. Whether the enthusiasm of the very wealthy for Obama actually occurred is an open question. No other data that I have studied (the 2008 National Election Study or the 2008 Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project) show that result. Political observers and consultants with proprietary data have not confirmed that result to me (private conversations).
3

Party Factions in 2008

Howard L. Reiter

In 2008, for the first time in fifty-six years, neither the incumbent president nor the incumbent vice president ran for the White House. This situation produced a wide-open nominating contest within each party and a chance for various factions within each party to fight for control. This chapter analyzes the differences between the supporters of the various major candidates and infers the cleavage structure within each party. What made some Democrats support Barack Obama and some back Hillary Clinton? Why did some Republicans vote for John McCain, while others opted for one of his rivals?

According to some informed observers, nominees Obama and McCain did not present a clear identification with a party faction. A few months into Obama’s presidential term, journalist Michael Tomasky (2009) wrote that the president comes from no faction within the Democratic Party. He has managed to stand apart from all of them. Liberals assume that he is mostly one of their own, which he almost surely is at the level of personal values (strict civil libertarians are probably an exception here). Centrists see a leader who has placed moderates such as Timothy Geithner and Robert Gates in key posts and who sends ample signals that he will bring the liberals in line when he feels he has to—as with the refusal to release more photographs of detainee abuse.

During the campaign, a description of McCain on the New York Times (2008a) website noted that the Arizona senator’s image as a maverick remains a central justification for his presidential campaign, though that image has been diminished somewhat by his efforts to mend fences with some Republicans during his quest to become president.
As we shall see, such ambiguities are belied by the evidence. Both Barack Obama and John McCain appealed to distinct and identifiable constituencies within their parties. Suffice it to say for the moment that Obama’s supporters were neither liberals nor centrists, and McCain’s were not primarily reformers. Before outlining what those constituencies were, I will discuss the role of factions in American party politics.

Factions in American Party Politics

Several features of major American political parties guarantee that they will have internal divisions. First, the United States is a large and heterogeneous country with many groups divided along class, ideological, ethnic, gender, racial, geographic, and other lines. Second, there are only two major parties in the United States, which, combined with the first feature, means that each party will comprise numerous groups. Third, the federal structure of American government enables each party to take a somewhat different profile in different states; parties in Utah and Mississippi are likely to be more conservative than their counterparts in Massachusetts and California. Finally, American political parties have traditionally been less united around a political program than many parties in other nations; therefore, there has been more toleration of a wide variety of perspectives within each party. However, this factor has changed in recent years as the parties have become more internally homogeneous in their ideologies (Hetherington 2001; Stonecash, Brewer, and Mariani 2002).

What is a faction, and why are factions important to study? Two scholars once defined a faction as “any relatively organized group that exists within the context of some other group and which (as a political faction) competes with rivals for power advantages within the larger group of which it is a part” (Beller and Belloni 1978, 419). As a definition, this seems reasonable, as it is neither overly vague nor too precise in its requirements for what a faction is. The authors went on to note that factions

structure the processes of intraparty politics and decision-making[;] . . . define the struggle for control of the party, its policies, its leadership and offices, its doctrines, its treasury, etc.; . . . are devices for the distribution of party patronage—and, for governing parties, of government patronage; and . . . are instruments for generating and supporting rival candidacies for public office (Beller and Belloni 1978, 437).

Most importantly, divisions within parties affect their ability to perform the functions that parties are supposed to carry out as a vital part of the demo-
Party Factions in 2008

43
cratic process. Among these functions are structuring the vote for the electorate, recruiting candidates for public office, organizing government, and, in general, providing linkages between the electorate and public officials. All of these functions and the quality of their performance are conditioned by the nature of the divisions within parties and the intensity of those cleavages. For example, parties help simplify the voting process for citizens by symbolizing particular ideologies or issue positions. However, if a party is deeply divided, the voter may not know which faction is represented on the ballot, and so the party label will mean less. Another example is that parties normally organize legislatures. However, a divided majority party may be unable to form majority voting blocs and get legislation passed.

Is factionalism beneficial or harmful to parties? There is no question that factions have a bad reputation. "Simply stated," Terence Ball has written, "a party is a faction of which one approves, and a faction a party of which one disapproves" (1989, 156). A party riven by factionalism may have difficulty functioning effectively, but factionalism may also give partisans opportunities to work within the party rather than face the unpalatable choice of knuckling under to the party majority or defecting. Factions can also be a way for party members to communicate with party elites (Bowler et al. 1999, 14-16). Factionalism may, in other words, provide a relatively harmless way of letting off steam, or it can divide the party into warring contenders who have lost sight of collective goals. Different kinds of factions might have different effects on the parties of which they are part (Beller and Belloni 1978, 439-42). To a great extent, a party is defined by its factional composition. If the party is divided, it matters greatly whether those blocs are based on ideology, patronage, personal ties, ethnicity, geography, or whatever. Some cleavages, such as those based on ideology, pose more of a threat to party unity than others, such as those based on personalities that come and go.

These considerations should make us cautious about predictions of party splits. Every major American party contains disparate and even contradictory elements, and yet parties usually manage to hold these groups together. Those who predict that social and economic conservatives cannot long coexist in the Republican Party (e.g., Lowi 1995) must confront the fact that they have done so for at least a quarter of a century now and have been fairly successful at submerging their differences in order to win office and govern. Older examples pervade American party history.

In 2008, factionalism was not a serious problem for either party in the November election. For all the length and sometime bitterness of the Obama-Clinton race, the Democrats were fairly united by election day. The National Exit Poll (CNN 2008) showed that 83 percent of Clinton’s supporters voted for Obama, and the American National Election Study revealed that support-
ers of McCain’s rivals were only 6.5 percent less likely to vote for the Arizonan in November than his earlier supporters were. Both parties were able to unite fairly readily by election day.

The Democrats

Ever since the New Deal in the 1930s, a factional structure within each party has persisted over the years. For the Democrats, there have been two cleavages. The better-known one was over ideology, with southerners being a conservative minority within the party. This factionalism began with disputes over Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal program in the 1930s and reached a climax with controversies over racial policy in the 1940s (J. Patterson 1967; Garson 1974; Reiter 2001). This liberal-conservative split, which divided the more liberal North from the more conservative South, diminished over time. The most conservative white southerners began to migrate to the Republican Party beginning with the 1964 election, and those who remained Democrats were more moderate and influenced by the growing number of African American voters in the South. There has been no conservative Democratic presidential candidate since Alabama governor George Wallace in the 1970s.

More lasting has been a second cleavage that emerged from time to time, as maverick candidates representing political reform ran against the party establishment. This division is what James Ceaser and Andrew Busch once called a “new, second dimension” of American politics: “amateur versus professional, the unconventional versus the conventional, the people versus the establishment, life beyond the beltway versus life within the beltway, and—perhaps most commonly—outsider versus insider” (1993, 2). Democratic dissidents included Secretary of Agriculture and then Vice President Henry A. Wallace in 1940 and 1944, Tennessee senator Estes Kefauver in 1952, former Illinois governor Adlai Stevenson in 1956, Minnesota senator Eugene McCarthy in 1968, South Dakota senator George McGovern in 1972, Colorado senator Gary Hart in 1984, and former California governor Jerry Brown in 1992. All these candidates claimed to be running against politics as usual and injecting “new ideas” (as Hart put it) and new voters into the process. As different as these candidates were, they shared that factional identity, and there was a significant correlation between their state-by-state delegate profiles at their respective national conventions. The states most likely to support these candidates have been in northern New England, the upper Great Plains, and the far West—including much of the heartland of the old Progressive movement and the states that Daniel Elazar (1972, 84–126) termed “moralistic,” valuing especially ideology and principled behavior.
Over the years, not only has it become apparent that these candidates shared a geographic base, but surveys show some common features of their mass base. These maverick candidates ran especially well among the well educated and well-off and better among whites than among blacks. The latter trend was due in part to the special appeal that some of their opponents—Robert Kennedy and Hubert Humphrey in 1968, Jesse Jackson in 1984, and Bill Clinton in 1992—had to African Americans. Some of the dissident candidates showed a lack of appeal to people who comprised the Democratic core constituency, including the working class and labor-union members. People with a stake in the Democratic Party machine—party loyalists, union members, often minority groups—were more attracted to candidates who opposed these mavericks, such as Harry Truman in 1944, Hubert Humphrey in 1968, Humphrey, Edmund Muskie, and Henry Jackson in 1972, and Walter Mondale in 1984.

In this historical context, the battle between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton appears not to have been ideological. Both were liberals in the mainstream of their party. What differences there were varied by policy area; while Clinton’s health care stance was arguably to the left of Obama’s, for example, his stance on the war in Iraq was more liberal than hers. Instead, their contest fit this dissident- versus-establishment model. The Obama campaign was run at the grass roots like a community organization (Wolffe 2009, 60), while the Clinton campaign was a traditional establishment affair, top-heavy with campaign consultants, endorsements from high-ranking officials, and an early lead in fund-raising. Even Obama’s Secret Service name, Renegade, was appropriate to a maverick campaign. The only major differences from the classic model were Obama’s unique appeal to African Americans and, as I have argued elsewhere, the content of his message, which was in many respects the opposite of that of other dissidents:

Senator Clinton was associated with the politics of sharp partisan differences and harsh attacks, partly because she had been the target of so many Republican charges, and partly because she promised to respond in kind. In contrast, Senator Obama called for more bipartisanship, more compromise, more accommodation—exactly what the Old Politics represented four decades ago (Reiter 2009, 75–76).

When we examine the constituencies to which each candidate appealed, by one measure Obama did not fit the old mold. His state-by-state delegate breakdown, as calculated by the New York Times (2008b), was not correlated with those of most of the earlier dissident candidates. On the other hand, surveys show that Obama’s mass base did indeed resemble those of earlier reform candidates.
Table 3.1 shows the results of a national survey conducted near the end of the nominating campaign in May. The results include those for all respondents and for whites only, as the fact that African Americans tend on average to be more Protestant and of lower income and education than other voters might affect the relationships seen in the first column of data; when nonwhites are excluded,

**TABLE 3.1**

Percentage Support for Barack Obama by Democratic Voters in the Democratic Primaries and Caucuses, May 1–3, 2008
(Excluding Those without a Preference for Obama or Hillary Clinton)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voters</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>White</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>46.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>54.4</td>
<td>49.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race and Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>75.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ideology</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative and very conservative</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>44.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>48.9</td>
<td>43.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very liberal</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>51.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Income</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$0–$29,900</td>
<td>50.4</td>
<td>40.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$30–$49,900</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>26.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50–$99,900</td>
<td>50.4</td>
<td>45.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000 plus</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religion</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>44.7</td>
<td>34.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>34.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>27.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>52.9</td>
<td>43.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College graduate</td>
<td>56.9</td>
<td>52.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Party Identification</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>57.3</td>
<td>32.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaning Democratic</td>
<td>53.9</td>
<td>51.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18–34</td>
<td>55.2</td>
<td>46.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35–54</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>40.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 and over</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>35.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: USA Today/Gallup Poll 2008-18: 2008 Presidential Election, obtained from the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, the University of Connecticut.*
the correlation between support for Obama and income increases, the correlation with religion disappears, and the correlation with partisanship is reversed. Obama received especially strong support from men (his opponent being a woman), liberals, whites of higher income, the highly educated, whites with less identification as Democrats, and the young. In many ways, then, his candidacy reflected the typical base of an antiestablishment Democrat.1

On issues, there were few strong differences between Obama and Clinton supporters, as shown in table 3.2. Even on the Iraq War, the difference between the two did not reach statistical significance, and only four of the eight other issues in the table saw statistically significant differences between Obama and Clinton supporters. The previous table showed that Obama supporters were more likely than Clinton backers to identify themselves as liberals, and on every issue except women’s role (where the difference was minimal), the Obama people took a more liberal stance than the Clinton people. But the overall thrust of table 3.2 is that there were not huge differences between the two groups on the issues.

So, we can conclude from this examination that ideology takes us only so far in understanding the fault line within the Democratic Party in the first half of 2008. Instead, we saw the revival of a cultural gap between upscale, independent reformers and downscale party loyalists. The main difference from previous such contests is that African American voters, who in the past had been resistant to the appeals of such candidates as Eugene McCarthy, Gary Hart, and Jerry Brown, were solidly in the camp of Barack Obama.

### TABLE 3.2
Views on Selected Issues of Obama and Clinton Democratic Supporters, Preelection Survey, 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Obama</th>
<th>Clinton</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iraq War: Percentage saying that the war was worth the cost:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obama</td>
<td>45.8%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td>53.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean score on seven-point scales, with higher value associated with liberal views</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government spending and services</td>
<td>4.99</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defense spending</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>0.93**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health insurance</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government job guarantee</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>0.53*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegal immigration</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>0.77**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental spending</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government assistance to blacks</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>1.02**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s role</td>
<td>5.39</td>
<td>5.46</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Significant at the 0.05 level  
**Significant at the 0.01 level  

Source: American National Election Study.
Chapter 3

The Republicans

While the Democrats have displayed a complex factional structure, the Republicans have had a simpler division since the New Deal. With the gradual disappearance of the old Teddy Roosevelt Progressives and their replacement by western conservatives, a new cleavage structure developed that was deeply ideological and sectional. Northeastern and West Coast liberals were pitted against conservatives whose base was originally in the Midwest and South but later shifted to the South and far West (Joyner 1963; Miles 1980; Reinhard 1983; Rae 1989). The issues included internationalism, the social programs of the New Deal, and civil rights. From 1940 through 1960, the liberal wing controlled presidential nominations, but with Barry Goldwater's candidacy in 1964 came an era of conservative domination that has lasted to the present day. Not since 1980 has a liberal Republican sought the presidential nomination. The liberal wing has been increasingly confined to the Northeast, where the party has suffered continual defeats (Reiter and Stonecash 2010).

John McCain's place in this narrative is not immediately clear. On the one hand, he has been a fairly conservative legislator, receiving a lifetime score of 81 percent from the American Conservative Union (2009). He represents Arizona, part of the heartland of Republican conservatism since Goldwater's day. Among the issues on which he has had a staunchly conservative record are abortion, the war in Iraq, and the size of government. However, McCain has offended conservatives with his strong advocacy of campaign-finance reform, his attacks on religious conservative leaders in 2000, his early opposition to President George W. Bush's tax cuts, and his sometime moderate stances on torture, immigration, and climate change.

In 2000, when he first sought his party's nomination, McCain ran especially well among party moderates and northeasterners. Exit polls showed that during the primaries, he won more than one-third of the vote from Republicans in every northeastern primary and less than one-third from Republicans in every state outside the Northeast except Arizona. In 2008, however, the evidence was more mixed. It is true that he did very well in the Northeast, carrying seven states from Maryland to New Hampshire and losing only Mitt Romney's Massachusetts and the Maine caucuses. McCain received an average of 50 percent of the vote in northeastern primaries and caucuses before his last rival, Mike Huckabee, dropped out of the race and only 34 percent in contests in the rest of the country.²

However, survey data tell a different story. Unlike the Democratic race, which quickly boiled down to two candidates and lasted through the spring, the Republican contest saw early departures of all major candidates except
McCain. Therefore, only the early surveys, when most of the candidates were still in the race, are useful for analysis. We examine two national surveys conducted just before Super Tuesday. Because none of McCain's opponents ran nearly as strongly as he did, we cannot do a matchup as we did for Obama and Clinton. Instead, we assess his support in two ways: one is to use questions asking if the respondent was favorable or unfavorable to McCain; the other is to examine the percentage of the people who had a preference who chose McCain. Table 3.3 shows only limited support for the proposition that northeasterners were especially likely to support the Arizonan. In fact, the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 3.3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Republican Support for McCain, by Region and Ideology, Winter 2008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**I. CBS News Survey**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Favorable to McCain</th>
<th>Support McCain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>70.4</td>
<td>61.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>79.6</td>
<td>48.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>73.2</td>
<td>49.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Far West</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>50.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nation</td>
<td>72.8</td>
<td>51.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Favorable to McCain</th>
<th>Support McCain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>64.4</td>
<td>43.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>62.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>71.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Correlation between Conservatism and Favorability toward a Candidate**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>McCain</td>
<td>-0.235*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huckabee</td>
<td>0.176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romney</td>
<td>0.074</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**II. CNN Survey**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Favorable to McCain</th>
<th>Support McCain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>63.5</td>
<td>48.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>76.5</td>
<td>49.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>67.7</td>
<td>44.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Far West</td>
<td>59.2</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nation</td>
<td>69.0</td>
<td>45.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Favorable to McCain</th>
<th>Support McCain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Conservative</td>
<td>41.4</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>68.6</td>
<td>47.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>81.7</td>
<td>49.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Liberal and Liberal</td>
<td>88.2</td>
<td>82.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Correlation between Conservatism and Favorability toward a Candidate**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>McCain</td>
<td>-0.187*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huckabee</td>
<td>0.052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romney</td>
<td>0.087</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Significant at the 0.01 level
only generalization to be made from these data is that fellow westerners were least likely to back him, due in large part to Romney’s strength in the region.

On the other hand, there is far stronger evidence of ideological factors affecting people’s attitudes toward McCain. Table 3.3 presents that evidence. In the CNN survey, those describing themselves as liberal or very liberal have been combined, as there were virtually no “very liberal” Republicans. There was a strong correlation between liberalism and support for McCain in both surveys. The table also correlates ideology with favorability toward McCain and toward his rivals Huckabee and Romney. McCain shows the only consistent ideological bent. In fact, his are the only negative correlations with conservatism and the only correlations that are statistically significant.

In the CNN survey, opponents of the Iraq War were slightly more likely to side with McCain than were supporters, which indicates that ideology was a more powerful force than congruence with McCain’s own views. On the other hand, those who believed that the surge in Iraq was working were indeed slightly more likely to support the Arizonan.

It is noteworthy that in the fall, when respondents were asked to rate McCain on the zero-to-one-hundred thermometer scale, the American National Election Study shows that conservative Republicans rated him higher than moderate and liberal Republicans. This reflects the fact that in the fall, McCain was his party’s nominee and had great support from the conservative Republican base. His selection of running mate Sarah Palin probably helped boost his support among such voters. On election day, while self-described conservative Republicans gave the McCain-Palin ticket more than 90 percent of their votes, moderates and liberals voted only around 75 percent for that ticket.

Demographic correlations with support for McCain are far weaker than those we have seen for the Democrats. Differences between demographic groups are small, and in different surveys they pointed in different directions. As for issue differences, table 3.4 shows that there were very few, in spite of the ideological differences we have seen. On most issues, McCain supporters were indeed slightly more liberal than the backers of other Republicans, even on the war in Iraq, and the differences were statistically significant only on the general question of the level of government spending and services and on environmental spending. As with the Democrats, this lack of intraparty issue differences may speak more to the growing ideological homogeneity of the parties than to any factional cleavages that may exist (Hetherington 2001; Stonecash et al. 2002).

While ideology was of limited help in understanding the differences between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton’s supporters in 2008, it was the prime factor in identifying who supported John McCain. This is especially
TABLE 3.4
Views on Selected Issues of McCain's and Other Candidates' Republican Supporters, Pre-election Survey, 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>McCain Mean</th>
<th>Others Mean</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iraq War: Percentage saying the war was worth the cost:</td>
<td>59.6%</td>
<td>64.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean score on seven-point scales, with higher value associated with conservative views</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government spending and services</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>1.05*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defense spending</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>-0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health insurance</td>
<td>4.83</td>
<td>5.19</td>
<td>-0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government job guarantee</td>
<td>5.33</td>
<td>5.61</td>
<td>-0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegal immigration</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>-0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental spending</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>-0.77*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government assistance to blacks</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>5.41</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's role</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significant at the 0.01 level

Source: American National Election Study.

The main caveat to this conclusion is that the correlation is strong only with self-identified ideology. When it came to particular issues, the differences between the McCain people and supporters of other candidates largely disappeared.

Conclusion

Our investigation of the Democratic and Republican divisions during the presidential nominating contests of 2008 has produced two general conclusions that apply to both parties. First is the heavy hand of the past. Much of the constituency that supported Barack Obama resembled the base of support that went to earlier reformist Democratic candidates as long ago as the 1940s. And the characteristics of John McCain's backers reflected earlier
Republican contests that pitted a relatively liberal Northeast against more conservative parts of the country; these patterns also went back more than sixty years. In this sense, Barack Obama was a modern-day Henry Wallace, and John McCain a twenty-first-century Thomas Dewey, the New York governor who led his party’s liberal wing in the 1940s. Despite the vast differences between the names in each pairing, there was a genuine commonality in their political bases.

However, in both cases these patterns were only partially replicated. Obama’s delegate support did not correlate with that for most other maverick Democrats, although in a couple of cases it appears that the unique racial profile of his supporters was partially responsible. McCain’s northeastern support stood out in the primaries and caucuses but not in surveys, and the ideological bent of his backers was not evidenced in their views on specific issues.

Perhaps we should conclude that while both parties’ contests reflected long-standing cleavages, most intraparty conflicts are marked by a degree of serendipity. We do not know the degree to which such factors as Obama’s race, Clinton’s gender and association with the conflicts of the 1990s, or McCain’s record as a reformer, his war record, and the disarray of his opponents played a role in determining who supported whom. Battles within parties may be more affected by such particular factors than by the usual ideological and demographic considerations that play such a well-known role in general elections.

This pattern may be especially true in an age like our own, when there is a relatively high level of ideological uniformity within each party. Without sharp issue differences among the supporters of the various candidates, serendipitous factors may be especially important in nominating contests. If anything, it may be surprising that we find any dissimilarities among these groups, but those that we do find fall along predictable historical lines.

Notes

1. As valuable as a national survey is, we can confirm these results with state surveys conducted around the time of those states’ primaries. Respondents to these surveys are voters who were the targets of ads and other campaign appeals and were more likely to be well informed about the candidates and issues. In seven states, the vast majority of demographic and political generalizations in table 3.1 are confirmed, usually by a hefty margin. Only on ideology was there a number of small differences, or differences in the opposite direction of what we saw in table 3.1. For the data in state surveys, see Howard L. Reiter, “Party Factions in 2008,” University of Akron, n.d., www.uakron.edu/bliss/docs/ReiterPaper.pdf (March 29, 2010).
2. Such percentages can be misleading, as they depend in part on how many other candidates are still in the race. For the calculations, I have omitted home states of candidates—McCain’s Arizona, Huckabee’s Arkansas, and Romney’s Massachusetts and Utah—as well as West Virginia and Wyoming, where McCain received no votes. This left nine northeastern states and twenty-four states outside the Northeast.

3. The CBS survey, which was conducted from January 30 through February 2 and had 1,232 respondents, is at the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, #USCBS2008-01E. The CNN survey, which was conducted from February 1 through 3 and had 1,192 respondents, is also at the Roper Center, #USORCCNN2008-003.

Barack Obama’s 2008 election brought considerable change to American politics (J. Jackson 2008), but one area was characterized by strong continuity: the national party elites remained polarized, with the Democrats and Republicans having sharply different visions of government and politics. In fact, on many issues the national party elites were more polarized than in 2004. This chapter reviews the issue positions of the 2008 delegates to the national party conventions—the people who officially nominated Obama and his opponent John McCain—comparing their views to those of their predecessors back to the 1992 election. From this perspective, the 2008 election represented only modest change among national party elites. Indeed, Obama and McCain won their respective party’s presidential nominations by operating largely within, rather than altering, the existing structure of elite opinion and related party factions, taking strategic advantage of that structure. A full assessment of the state of the parties must take into account such continuity among the major party elites in 2008.

National Party Elites

Although national conventions had long attracted the attention of scholars, the focus on delegates as party activists was invigorated by Jeane Kirkpatrick’s (1976) monumental study of the 1972 convention delegates. This study focused on the results of the reform in the presidential nominations that democratized the delegate selection process and created what Kirkpatrick
termed “the new presidential elite.” By 2008, this reformed system was almost four decades old, and these party elites were no longer new. Critics of the reforms, like Kirkpatrick (1976) and Everett Carll Ladd (1982), forecasted a decay of the parties, but instead the parties were transformed, becoming stronger at the national level than ever before in American party history (Green and Herrnson 2002).

National party elites were transformed as well (Cohen et al. 2008): they are no longer the pragmatic and power-seeking activists of the first 120 years of two-party competition between the Republican and Democratic parties—an image still evoked in textbooks even to this day. Instead, the delegates are far more ideological and issue oriented, with a strong interest in public policy (Jackson, Brown, and Bositis 1982). One of the drivers of this transformation was the vigorous contests for the presidential nominations under the reformed system. Most of the delegates in both parties are now chosen in primaries and caucuses, and even the appointed delegates operate within the context of the candidate-centered nomination campaigns. Thus, convention delegates are both the products and agents of the now mature presidential nominations system, and they provide an excellent window through which to view the lower echelons of the two major party organizations (Miller and Jennings 1986; W. Miller 1988).

These party elites are essentially the state and local party activists who come together and collectively form the national parties once every four years. In their collective mode these party activists perform some important, even crucial, functions for the national parties. Most importantly, they officially nominate the candidates for president and vice president. In addition, they adopt the national platforms for their parties. Those platforms are a good indicator of where the national party would like to take the country if its candidate is elected (Pomper and Lederman 1971). These party elites conduct the conventions and adopt the rules likely to control the next nomination contest and the next convention, so they have an impact on the party’s future. In this regard, these delegates are the highest plenary body of their parties for one week out of every four years. And most immediately, the party elites try to get their parties ready for the fall general election campaign.

As representatives of the lower-echelon party organizations, these activists can reveal much about the state of the parties near the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century. With a longitudinal comparison between the 2008 cohort and its predecessors back to 1992, we can put the 2008 election in context, noting differences and similarities over the decades of the 1990s and the 2000s. This era has been a tumultuous one in American presidential politics. For the Democrats, it encompasses the rise of the Clinton-era coalition in 1992 and 1996, Al Gore’s wrenching loss in the very close
2000 contest, followed by John Kerry’s narrow defeat in 2004, and then the party’s rebounding fortunes under Barack Obama. For the Republicans, it marked the end of the Reagan era with the defeat of George H. W. Bush in 1992 at the hands of Bill Clinton and Ross Perot, followed by a similar fate for 1996 nominee Bob Dole. George W. Bush then revived the party’s fortunes in the close elections of 2000 and 2004, only to see them falter with John McCain’s defeat in 2008.

Over this period, American politics has been highly polarized (Nivola and Brady 2006). This polarization is at the heart of the popular “red-state-versus-blue-state” dichotomy for the national map. This regularity is widely noted, and its value is debated at the mass level (Fiorina et al. 2005; White 2003), but there is virtually no debate about this pattern among political elites (Jacobson 2007a; Carsey and Layman 2002; Layman and Carsey 2002). Our own research over the past two decades has systematically documented the depth and scope of this polarization among national convention delegates (Green, Jackson, and Clayton 1999; Jackson, Bigelow, and Green 2003; Jackson, Bigelow, and Green 2007). In this context, part of the appeal of Barack Obama was the prospect of a “postpartisan” politics that would reduce political polarization at the national level. John McCain’s status as a maverick also carried the prospect of some decline in party polarization. Thus, it is worth knowing the degree and details of polarization among party elites, how these patterns undergirded the factions within the major parties, and how Obama and McCain coped with this situation in 2008.

The Party Elites Study

The data in this study are drawn from national surveys of the delegates to the Republican and Democratic national conventions for the years 1992 to 2008. In each year the methodology remained essentially the same. We obtained the official roster of the delegates, listed by state, from the Democratic and Republican national committees. A systematic random sample was then drawn from each list using a skip interval designed to produce approximately one thousand original names and addresses from each party list. The questionnaires were mailed initially the week after the national conventions were held. Each questionnaire contained a cover letter from the study directors explaining the study’s purpose. Approximately one month after the first wave of questionnaires was mailed, a follow-up questionnaire was sent to nonrespondents. The returned questionnaires were gathered up through the day of the national elections. Over the past several cycles, the study has been cosponsored by the Ray C. Bliss Institute at the University of Akron and the
Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, giving the study a bipartisan flavor.

Overall, we obtained a very respectable response rate on these surveys, in a range from 40 to 50 percent, although in 2008 the response rate was somewhat lower (40 percent for the Democrats and 33 percent for the Republicans). In almost all cases, those who responded were not systematically different from nonrespondents and compared favorably to other surveys of convention delegates. In the small number of instances in which systematic differences were discovered, we weighted the data to overcome some demographic deficits among the respondents. Overall, we are convinced that the respondents to the eight surveys are representative of all delegates to the national conventions in the year studied. The surveys contained a series of questions repeated, with their wording largely unchanged, across the entire sixteen years. In most cases, the questions were adopted from the American National Elections Study questions used on the mass voters. Some special questions were added and dropped in particular surveys to reflect the special circumstances of particular elections. On balance, however, we have tried to preserve the advantages of doing the same survey in the same way each year in order to enhance the potential for longitudinal comparisons. Hence, this feature of the surveys allows us to put the 2008 results in proper context.

Party Divisions in 2008

We begin with a standard question asking the delegates to place themselves on a five-point scale from left to right, ranging from very liberal to very conservative. Figure 4.1 provides the results for 2008 and the previous four elections for both parties, collapsing the scale into three categories.

![Figure 4.1: Delegates and ideology, 1992-2008.](image-url)
Of course, we expected there would be a polarization between the party elites in ideological terms, with the Democrats found to be predominantly liberal and the Republicans mostly conservative. However, an elaboration on this basic expectation is warranted by our earlier findings: while most of the liberals were Democrats, not all of the Democrats were liberal. As figure 4.1 shows, between 1992 and 2004 Democratic delegates were divided between liberal and moderate contingents, with the most even division occurring in 2004 (51 to 47 percent). However in 2008, the proportion of self-identified liberals among the Democratic delegates increased to 60 percent, and moderates fell to 37 percent. This shift is interesting given the increased number of Democratic moderates elected to the Congress in 2006 and 2008, as well as the moderate tone of the Obama campaign. Here, the 2008 results most closely resemble 1992, when 57 percent of Democrats called themselves liberals. The elections in between were characterized by Bill Clinton and Al Gore’s more moderate “new Democrats.” One constant, however, was the proportion of conservative Democrats: only 2 to 4 percent adopted this label between 1992 and 2004, and the 3 percent in 2008 fit this pattern well.

This pattern stood in contrast with the Republicans, who were very close to being “like-minded people” in the symbolic embrace of the conservative label. In 2008, 81 percent of the GOP delegates described themselves as conservative, 18 percent as moderate, and just 1 percent as liberal. These figures represent a modest shift to the right compared to 2004, when 75 percent of the Republican delegates described themselves as conservatives. This figure matches the high point of 81 percent conservatives in 1996 and is substantially larger than the 71 percent in 1992.

Thus, Democratic delegates moved in a liberal direction in 2008 after a period of greater moderation, and the Republican delegates moved back in a conservative direction. These trends produced greater polarization in terms of self-identified ideology. While the Democratic delegates still had a much larger moderate contingent than the Republicans, self-identified moderates declined among both sets of party elites in 2008.

Social Welfare Issues: Government Services

We next examine a series of domestic issues that can loosely be described as social welfare issues, beginning with a question about the size and scope of the federal government. This issue has divided the two major parties since the New Deal; thus, we expected continued differences between the parties. The specific question asked, “Some people feel that the government should provide fewer services, even in areas such as health and education, in order to
reduce spending. Others feel that it is important for the government to continue the services it now provides even if it means no reduction in spending. Where would you place yourself on this scale?" The options provided for a scale from one to seven with "Fewer Services" on one end and "No Reduction in Services" on the other end of the continuum. Figure 4.2 reports the results for 2008 and the previous elections for both parties, collapsing the scale into three categories.

Not surprisingly, the Democrats were overwhelmingly on the side of protecting the current level of governmental services. In 2008, 86 percent of Democratic delegates favored no reduction in government services, 8 percent took a neutral position, and just 5 percent favored fewer government services. These figures closely resemble 2004, and they differed most from 1992 and 1996, when the influence of Ross Perot may help explain a somewhat greater interest on the part of Democrats in fewer government services.

The Republicans were almost as strongly committed to the proposition that government must be reduced. In 2008, 74 percent of the Republican delegates supported fewer government services, 15 percent took a neutral position, and 11 percent preferred no reductions. These figures represent a shift in a conservative direction compared to 2004 and 2000. Those elections were characterized by the avowed "compassionate conservatism" of George W. Bush, when some 60 percent of Republican delegates advocated fewer government services. The GOP convention that nominated John McCain shifted back toward the smaller government position of 1992 and 1996, when Ross Perot was a factor in presidential campaigns.

Taken together, these results indicate that the Democratic and Republican elites predominantly adopted their party's signature position on the basic issue of the size and scope of the federal government. The 2008 election saw little change on the Democratic side and a shift to the right among the
Republicans, so the net effect was greater polarization between the parties. Nevertheless, there was still a bit more variation among Republican delegates on this issue than among the Democrats.

Social Welfare Issues: Health Insurance

The next issue taps an important domestic policy issue that became salient in President Obama’s first administration: providing health insurance for the nation. This issue has also divided the two major parties since the days of the New Deal, and we expected a continued high level of division. Here the specific item asked, “Some people feel that there should be a government insurance plan which would cover all medical and hospital expenses for everyone. Others feel that all medical expenses should be paid by individuals, and through private insurance plans like Blue Cross or other company-paid plans. Where would you place yourself on this scale?” The options provided for a scale from one to seven with “Government Insurance” on one end and “Private Insurance” on the other end of the continuum. Figure 4.3 reports the results for 2008 and the previous elections for both parties, collapsing the scale into three categories.

As expected, the Democrats were overwhelmingly in favor of government insurance. In 2008, 82 percent of Democratic delegates favored government insurance, 11 percent took a neutral position, and just 7 percent favored private insurance. As with government services, the 2008 figures closely resemble the figures for 2004—1992. They are, however, substantially higher than in 1996 and 2000, when the Democratic delegates were more moderate on health insurance. So, the Democratic delegates essentially moved back to an earlier high level of support for government insurance.

The Republican delegates were even more strongly supportive of private health insurance. In 2008, 87 percent of Republican delegates backed private
insurance, 8 percent took a neutral position, and 5 percent favored government insurance. These figures differed only slightly from the GOP figures in 2004, 2000, and 1996 but were substantially larger than 1992, when Republican delegates were more moderate on this issue.

Thus, the 2008 party elites were strongly polarized on the issue of health insurance, with the Democratic and Republican delegates being almost mirror images of each other. Indeed, of all the issues we will consider here, health insurance showed the greatest interparty polarization. It is important to remember that these opinions predated the intense national debate on health care in the first year of the Obama administration—and may have, in fact, prefigured it and contributed to the intensity of the fight.

Social Welfare Issues: Aid to Minorities

Race has been a persistent source of division in American politics since the colonial era and one that has often divided the parties internally. For example, prior to the 1960s southern and northern Democrats took opposite positions on ending racial segregation, while the Republicans were more supportive of ending the practice. However, after the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the Democrats became progressively united on racial questions, developing a strong African American constituency. Meanwhile, the Republicans became increasingly united in opposition to such issues, developing a strong constituency of white southerners. Race received considerable attention in 2008 when the Democrats chose Barack Obama as the first African American presidential nominee.

For all these reasons, we expected the two parties to continue to be divided on racial issues. In these surveys, the specific question asked was about aid to minorities: “Some people feel that the government in Washington should make every possible effort to improve the social and economic position of African Americans and other minority groups. Others feel that the government should not make any special effort to help minorities because they should help themselves. Where would you place yourself on that scale?” Here, too, the item employed a seven-point scale, ranging from “Help Minorities” to “No Special Help.” Figure 4.4 provides the results for 2008 and previous elections for both parties, collapsing the scale into three categories.

As expected, the major parties took sharply different positions on this issue. In 2008, 66 percent of the Democratic delegates favored helping minorities, 19 percent took a neutral position, and 15 percent supported no special help for minorities. Interestingly, the 2008 figure is substantially down from 2004, when 76 percent favored helping minorities; in fact, the 2008 figure is the lowest of all these elections. It could be that the very success of Barack Obama and
attendant changes in American society led some Democratic delegates to give minority aid lower priority. An opposite pattern held among the Republican Party elites in two senses. First, 76 percent of the Republican delegates favored no special help for minorities, 13 percent took a neutral position, and 11 percent favored helping minorities in 2008. Second, the GOP delegates became more conservative on this issue, with the no-special-help category increasing from 62 percent in 2004 and 60 percent in 2000. In fact, the 2008 opposition to helping minorities is the highest of all the elections considered here. These figures may represent a reaction to Obama’s nomination as well.

Thus, in 2008 the party elites showed a higher degree of polarization on aid to minorities, but one arrived at by a mix of trends, with the Democrats becoming less liberal on the issue while the Republicans became more conservative. In fact, the parties almost reversed themselves in terms of their relative positions on the issue compared to the previous election: in 2008 the Republicans were more conservative on the issue than the Democrats were liberal, but in 2004 the Democrats were more liberal on this issue than the Republicans were conservative. Despite these shifts, race remained a source of intraparty divisions.

**Foreign Policy: Defense Spending**

The next issues shift focus from domestic to foreign policy. In an earlier era political leaders liked to claim that “partisanship ends at the water’s edge”; if that claim was ever accurate, it certainly cannot be made in the more modern postreform era. There have been clear and intense partisan differences in foreign and defense policy in recent presidential administrations, with the opinions of party elites responding in part to changes in the world situation. A
perennial issue in this regard has been the level of defense spending, but other related controversies, such as the Iraq War, have been salient as well.

Thus, we expected differences between the parties on defense spending. Here the specific item asked, “Some people feel that we should be spending much less for defense. Others feel that defense spending should be greatly increased. Where would you place yourself on this scale?” A seven-point scale was employed ranging from “Decrease Spending” to “Increase Spending.” Figure 4.5 reports the delegates’ views on defense spending in 2008 and the previous elections for both parties, collapsing the scale into three categories.

As expected, the party elites were also divided on the level of defense spending. In 2008, 64 percent of the Democratic delegates favored decreased defense spending, 26 percent took a neutral position, and 10 percent supported increased spending. These figures are quite different from 2004, when just 47 percent favored lower defense outlays, and 2000, when just 32 percent held this view. However, this change did not bring the Democratic delegates back to the level of opposition to defense spending recorded in 1992 and 1996, when the end of the Cold War prompted a strong desire to redirect public resources to domestic concerns.

The Republicans had a quite different perspective on this issue. In 2008, 71 percent of the GOP delegates favored increased defense spending, 18 percent took a neutral position, and 11 percent favored reducing defense spending. However, the 2008 figures represent a decline from 2004 and even more so from 2000, when nine out of ten Republicans favored increased defense spending. All these figures are larger than in 1992, when only 24 percent of GOP delegates favored more defense outlays, a pattern that no doubt reflected the end of the Cold War.

So, the major party elites were more polarized on defense spending in 2008 than in 2004, but with the Democrats moving sharply in a liberal direction.
and the Republicans shifting away from a stronger conservative position. Overall, the Democrats showed somewhat more diversity than the Republicans on this issue.

Surely an important factor in views on defense spending was the Iraq War, an issue that played a prominent role in the 2004 and 2008 presidential campaigns. In 2008, 85 percent of the Democratic delegates reported that the Iraq War was “completely unjustified,” and another 13 percent said it was “probably unjustified.” Thus, the Democrats were nearly unanimous in opposition to the Iraq War, a view shared by Barack Obama. Here, the Republicans largely took the other side, with 45 percent reporting that the Iraq War was “completely justified” and 40 percent that it was “probably justified.” So, more than four-fifths of the Republicans backed the signature foreign policy of the Bush administration, a view supported by John McCain. These patterns resemble those for defense spending, but in this case the Republicans showed somewhat more diversity of opinion than the Democrats.

Cultural Issues: Abortion

A final set of issues include cultural questions, the topics at the center of the culture wars and closely associated with debates over moral values. Among these issues, the legality of abortion has been the major source of contention, with feminists and progressives arguing in favor of reproductive rights and religious conservatives advocating for an unborn fetus’s right to life. Historically, this debate has often cut across party lines. In addition, cultural conflict is not just about abortion, and other issues have been important as well, such as same-sex marriage, school choice, and faith-based social services. We expected important differences between the parties on these cultural issues but anticipated that the patterns might be more complex than for other kinds of issues.

In all of our surveys, a four-point abortion item was asked, ranging from “By law, abortion should never be permitted” to “By law, a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice.” For ease of presentation, the two intermediary options were merged into a single category, where abortion would be legal if a need were established. Figure 4.6 reports the delegates’ views on abortion in 2008 and the previous elections for both parties.

Despite the intensity of the abortion debate, the major party elites have not been as polarized on abortion as on other issues, although there is a clear difference of opinion between them. In 2008, 79 percent of the Democratic delegates favored abortion’s always being permitted by law, 20 percent took the position that abortion should be legal if the need was established, and 1
percent said abortion should never be permitted. These figures were slightly more liberal than in 2004, but much less so than in 2000 and 1992, when some nine out of ten Democrats favored always permitting abortion; 1996 resembled 2008. These results suggest some modest instability on the abortion issue among Democratic Party elites.

In 2008, the Republican delegates showed a different kind of pattern: 26 percent favored never permitting abortion, 62 percent fell into the need-established category, and 12 percent favored abortion’s always being legal. These figures are a bit more conservative than in previous years. For example, in 2004 just 17 percent of the delegates said that abortion should always be illegal. However, the basic pattern held over all the elections, with a substantial majority of Republicans adopting the middle position between always and never permitting abortion.

Thus, compared to other issues, there was somewhat less polarization between the major party elites on abortion due to the greater moderation of the Republicans on the topic. Still, the difference between the strong pro-choice position of the Democratic delegates and the moderate pro-life position of the Republican delegates was substantial. And there was some increase in the more extreme categories for both parties in 2008.

Another high-profile cultural issue is the question of same-sex marriage, an issue that burst on to the political scene in 2004 and remained on the agenda in 2008. This issue shows something of an opposite pattern to abortion, with the Democrats more divided than the Republicans. In 2008, 52 percent of the Democratic delegates favored same-sex marriage, 38 percent opposed same-sex marriage but favored civil unions, and 10 percent favored opposite-sex marriage exclusively. In contrast, 63 percent of the Republican delegates favored opposite-sex marriage exclusively, with 34 percent supportive of civil unions, and just 3 percent favoring same-sex marriage. So, the Democrats
were almost evenly divided on the legality of same-sex marriage, while the Republicans were more united behind allowing only opposite-sex marriage.

Cultural Issues: School Choice

In recent decades, the issue of school choice has become prominent, typically in the form of publically funded vouchers for private schools. This issue is frequently associated with religion and also with race, with vouchers seen as a means for parents to move their children out of the neighborhood public schools and into private schools of their choice. Much of the opposition to vouchers comes from advocates of public schools, including teachers unions, which see vouchers as undermining these public institutions. Given these rival interests, we expected school choice to be a source of division between the parties. In these surveys, the specific item asked, “Would you support a voucher system where parents would get money from the government to send their children to the public, private, or parochial school of their choice? Where would you place yourself on this scale?” A seven-point scale was employed ranging from “Favor Vouchers” to “Oppose Vouchers.” Figure 4.7 provides the results for 2008 and the previous elections for both parties, collapsing the scale into three categories.

As expected, school choice reflects a sharp divide among party elites. In 2008, 83 percent of Democratic delegates opposed school choice, 7 percent took a neutral position, and 10 percent supported vouchers. These figures are slightly less liberal than in 2004 and the two previous elections, but a good bit more so than in 1992, when only 52 percent of the Democratic delegates opposed vouchers. The Republican delegates were almost a mirror image in 2008, with 76 percent in favor of school choice, 6 percent taking

![Figure 4.7](image)

a neutral position, and 18 percent opposed to vouchers. These figures were slightly more conservative than in 2004, but about the same as in the previous years. So, the major party elites are—and have been—polarized on this version of school choice.

One final cultural issue is support for faith-based social services in the form of public grants to congregations and other religious organizations. This policy was one of the signature issues of the Bush administration in the form of the “faith-based initiative.” However, earlier versions of this policy appeared during the Clinton administration in the form of “charitable choice.” And President Obama has continued to support the policy from the White House, albeit with a greater emphasis on social welfare than his predecessor. Meanwhile, secular Republicans and Democrats have remained skeptical of this approach to social services.

Because we had not asked about this policy area in our previous surveys, we did not have firm expectations about the 2008 results, but we predicted that the Democrats would be more evenly divided on the issue, while Republicans would be more supportive of faith-based social services. The 2008 results support this intuition: 53 percent of Democrats also favored such a policy, while about 47 percent were opposed. Meanwhile, 69 percent of the Republican delegates favored the policy, and 31 percent opposed it. These patterns reveal that faith-based social services produced asymmetrical party divisions resembling those for abortion and same-sex marriage, with one party largely united and the other more divided on the issue.


Just because the two parties are significantly polarized on individual issues does not mean that they are polarized across all issues or monolithic in their views internally. We have already seen some indicators of internal partisan divisions. So how did these attitudes fit together among Republican and Democratic delegates in 2008 and how did the structure of delegate opinion compare to previous elections? To answer these questions, we performed a factor analysis on self-identified ideology and seven of the issue questions discussed above for 2008. We then compared these results to a similar analysis of the previous four delegate surveys, from 1992 to 2004, with one exception: in 2008 faith-based social services was substituted for term limits.

In table 4.1, we present results that combine both Democratic and Republican Party elites in a single analysis. The five columns show the results for the individual years, with 2008 in the final column. The results confirm our previous finding that the rival party elites were quite polarized on most of these
TABLE 4.1

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<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.83</td>
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<td>Support minority assistance</td>
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<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.75</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.80</td>
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<td>Support abortion rights</td>
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<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.73</td>
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<td>Support decreased defense spending</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oppose faith-based social services</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td>4.7</td>
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<td>Percentage variance explained</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>57</td>
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<td>Weighted N</td>
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issues. The 2008 patterns are hardly new: a glance back across the table reveals a very similar pattern in each of the previous four years, with only modest variations. One consistent pattern was the steady decline in the impact of term limits, an issue that finally faded from the political agenda by 2008 and thus was not asked in the 2008 survey. Interestingly, faith-based social services played a similar role as term limits in the overall structure of delegate opinion in 2008. In sum, major party elites clearly remained sharply divided along liberal-conservative lines over many issue domains.

The Internal Structure of Democratic Opinion

Within this overall pattern of sharp interparty polarization, there is considerable variation within each party. Such internal differences appear when the same analysis is applied to the Democratic and Republican delegates separately. For the Democrats, two dimensions of opinion emerge from the analysis. The first dimension might be called “welfare liberalism,” composed of self-identified ideology and attitudes toward government services, defense spending, national health insurance, and aid to minorities. Delegates on one end of this dimension of opinion strongly identified as liberals and supported the central priorities of the welfare state (with reduced defense spending to free up resources for such domestic priorities). Delegates on the
other end of this dimension were less likely to identify mostly as moderates, less eager to cut defense spending, and skeptical of new welfare initiatives. 2

The second dimension can be cautiously labeled as “antigovernment populism,” and at its core were attitudes toward school choice and faith-based social services; abortion attitudes loaded most strongly on this dimension in 2008. We use the term antigovernment to distinguish the targets of this populism, public officials, as opposed to business and corporate officials, another form of populism often found on the left. This measure reveals that hostility to government elites and social engineering was (and has been) a significant part of the structure of opinion among some Democratic delegates. Delegates on one end of this dimension favored school vouchers and faith-based social services and opposed abortion rights; delegates on the other end had an opposite view of such limitations, implying a more positive view of government.

These two dimensions of Democratic opinion were quite stable in the five elections under study, with a slight weakening of the populist dimension by 2004 due to the decline of term limits as an issue. Here, support for faith-based social services performs much like support for term limits, suggesting that both items tap the same dimension of opinion, although the policy content is different. Interestingly, this 2008 structure of opinion among Democratic delegates most closely resembles the structure in 1992 among the previous elections.

The Internal Structure of Republican Opinion

The Republican delegates had a more complex structure of opinion in 2008. Readers accustomed to thinking of the Democrats as more diverse than the Republicans may find this result surprising, but other studies of Democratic and Republican elites found similar patterns (see Green and Guth 1991), including our previous surveys. In 2008, three dimensions of opinion emerged among the Republicans. 3 The first dimension, which we label “anti-welfare state conservatism,” reflects views on aid to minorities, government services, and national health insurance. In many respects, this dimension is the opposite of the “welfare liberalism” among the Democratic delegates. Republicans on one end of this dimension strongly opposed the policies of the welfare state, while those on the other end expressed considerable support. Presumably, this conservatism is associated with support for free market ideology.

The second dimension might be called “cultural conservatism” and included views on abortion, self-identified ideology, and defense spending. On one end of this continuum are the religious conservatives who became prominent in the GOP during the 1990s, and on the other end are the cultural mod-
erates once dominant in the party. Finally, the third Republican dimension is a counterpart to the antigovernment populism found among the Democrats. For Republicans, this dimension is defined by support for school choice and faith-based social services. So, these Republican populists supported some limits on public officials by decentralizing the provision of education and social services to private institutions, while the nonpopulists were deeply skeptical of such limits on public officials and decentralization.

Unlike the Democratic dimensions of opinion, these Republican dimensions were much less stable over time, varying considerably from year to year. The three basic dimensions appeared in 1992, 1996, and 2004, but with slightly different loading in each year, and in 2000 the social welfare and cultural dimensions merged into a single dimension. In 1996 and 2004, the cultural dimension was stronger than the social welfare dimension, but in 1992 and 2008, social welfare was stronger. The most consistent dimension over time was antigovernment populism, and as with the Democrats, faith-based social services in 2008 performed like term limits in the previous years. Thus, the structure of Republican opinion in 2008 was also most similar to 1992, as with the Democratic Party elites.


To better visualize this structure of opinion among the delegates, we created a crude measure of factions among the party elites. Here, we dichotomized the issue dimensions at the mean and then cross-tabulated them to group the delegates with various combinations of “high” and “low” scores. For the Democrats, the two issue dimensions produced four such “factions.” For the Republicans, this strategy produced nine groups, but upon inspection we combined three very similar categories for a total of six factions.

Democratic Factions

The four Democratic factions represent various combinations of welfare liberalism and antigovernment populism. The most recognizable of these groups we labeled “traditional liberals” because they scored high on social welfare and low on antigovernment populism. Another group was essentially the opposite, scoring low on social welfare and high on populism; we called this group “traditional centrists.”

The other two factions represent additions largely peculiar to the 1990s. We called one “populist liberals” because they scored high on welfare liberalism but also on populism. With some caution, we labeled the remaining faction
“new Democrats”: they scored low on welfare liberalism, which is consistent with the fiscal restraint of the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), as well as on the populist dimension (fitting with the pro-government vision of the DLC). Although these groupings—and their labels—should be viewed with caution, they allow us to observe the changes in the makeup of the Democratic convention delegates from 1992 to 2008 (see figure 4.8).

In 2008, these factions were nearly evenly divided among the Democratic delegates, with each faction making up about one-quarter of the delegates. This division differed substantially from the previous years, perhaps reflecting the hard-fought nomination campaign in 2008. The traditional liberals made up one-quarter of these party elites, and their numbers were smaller than in 2004, 2000, and 1996, but larger than in 1992. The populist liberals were the largest faction in 2008, being slightly larger than traditional liberals. This faction was larger than in 2004, 2000, and 1996, but still substantially smaller than in 1992. A key factor here was the support for term limits in 1992 (near the height of the term-limits movement) and for faith-based social services in 2008 (as exemplified by Obama’s support for the policy).

In 2008, the new Democrat faction made up slightly less than one-quarter of the delegates and was smaller than in 2004. Here there is a clear trajectory, beginning at a low point in 1992 (the year that Bill Clinton and Al Gore were first nominated), reaching a high point in 2000, and then declining until 2008 (when Hillary Clinton lost the close nomination contest). The traditional centrists were the same size as the new Democrats in 2008, representing a slight increase over 2004 (as well as 2000 and 1996) and nearly returning to their 1992 level. This faction showed the least variation over the five elections.

How did these factions line up in the 2008 presidential nomination struggle? Figure 4.9 shows the initial (and not the final) candidate preferences of four Democratic factions. Overall, Clinton had a very slight advantage over
Obama in delegates' initial preferences, as befitted her front-runner status. Each candidate had the backing of slightly more than two-fifths of the delegates, with about one-eighth of delegates preferring another candidate or having no preference. Obama had a majority of the early support from the populist liberals and edged out Clinton among the traditional centrists. As one might expect, Clinton had the support of a solid majority of the new Democrats as well as of a plurality of traditional liberals.

From this perspective, Obama won in part by stressing the populist element of delegate opinion and doing reasonably well with welfare liberalism. One group of delegates fits this description quite well, and that is African Americans, a group that not surprisingly backed Obama strongly. In contrast, Clinton combined factions that were divided on welfare liberalism (the new Democrats and traditional liberals) but united in opposition to populism. Of course, Obama and Clinton largely agreed on many issues, so the differences between them were often subtle, and part of Obama's success appears to have resulted from his doing much better than Clinton among the delegates who had initially preferred other candidates. In any event, Obama effectively navigated the existing factional structure of Democratic elites to achieve a narrow victory. He does not appear to have altered the factional structure in a significant way.

Republican Factions

The six Republican factions are displayed in figure 4.10. Traditional conservatives are those delegates who scored low on both social welfare and cultural conservatism but less so on antigovernment populism. In partial contrast, populist conservatives scored high on all three dimensions, adding strong support for school choice and faith-based social services to conservative positions on domestic and cultural issues. The core of the Christian Right
can be found among the populist conservatives, as can other elements of the “hard Right,” such as gun owners and antitax advocates. But some of these constituencies are found among the traditional conservatives as well.

In 2008, traditional conservatives made up about one-sixth of delegates, down a bit from 2004 and 2000, slightly up from 1996, and greatly up from 1992. Also, in partial contrast, the 2008 populist conservative group was a bit larger than in 2004 and 2000 but substantially smaller than in 1996 and 1992. The key factor in both cases was the term-limits issue, and faith-based social services had not fully replaced term limits as an engine of populism.

A similar division occurred among the historic rivals of the “hard Right” in Republican circles. These factions included moderates and “populist moderates”; both scored relatively low on welfare and cultural conservatism, but the former were also low on antigovernment populism, while the latter had higher scores. These two factions contained much of the traditional business and professional constituency of the Republican Party. Of course, these “moderates” were still far more conservative than the Democratic delegates.

The 2008 populist moderate group was also a bit larger than in 2004, 2000, and 1996 but a bit smaller than in 1992. However, the 2008 moderate faction was notably smaller than in 2004 (and especially 2000) but still larger than in 1996 (and especially 1992). Like the new Democrats, the moderate Republicans had a distinctive trajectory, following the presidential career of George W. Bush, rising to a majority in 2000, the year he first won the GOP nomina-
tion, and falling to less than two-fifths after an unpopular Bush was preparing
to leave office in 2008.

The fortunes of the two remaining GOP factions were in some respects the
reverse of those of the moderates. The Libertarians scored high on welfare
conservatism and antigovernment populism but low on cultural conserva­
tism, largely on the grounds of personal liberty. Finally, the progressives are
the once potent “liberal Republicans,” who scored low on the welfare and
cultural conservatism and on populist issues. Both of these factions made
slight gains in 2008 compared to 2004 and 2000, essentially regaining their
1996 sizes. However, both were substantially smaller than in 1992, when each
made up more than one-fifth of the GOP delegates.

How did these factions play out in the 2008 Republican nomination? Fig­
ure 4.11 shows the report of the initial (but not final) candidate preferences
of these delegates. As befitted his front-runner status, John McCain had the
most initial support from GOP party elites, at about one-third. The second
place candidate was Mitt Romney at about one-quarter, with the remaining
delegates preferring someone else or having no preference. As one might
expect, John McCain was the initial choice of a majority of the progressives
and had a clear plurality over any other candidate among the moderates and
populist moderates. McCain had much less support among traditional and
populist conservatives, factions that showed an inclination toward Romney
and other conservative candidates, such as Mike Huckabee. McCain also
had less support among the Libertarians, whose favorite candidate was Ron
Paul (the presidential nominee for the Libertarian Party in 1988). McCain’s

![FIGURE 4.11](image)
Initial candidate preferences and Republican factions, 2008.
nomination of Sarah Palin as his vice presidential running mate reflected, at least in part, his weakness with the more conservative factions.

McCain faced a much more difficult task in uniting the Republican Party elites than Obama had in uniting their Democratic counterparts. His maverick status appears to have had both positive and negative consequences. On the first count, it may have appealed to the progressives, moderates, and populist moderates, but on the second count, it may have hurt him with traditional and populist conservatives and Libertarians. At the same time, McCain’s strong support for the Iraq War may have dimmed his appeal with progressives and moderates. Clearly an important factor in the nomination contest was the inability of the more conservative factions to rally around another candidate, such as Romney, Huckabee, or Rudolph Giuliani. In the rough-and-tumble of the primary process, McCain was eventually able to gain support from the initial backers of other candidates. Here, too, he was able to navigate the complex factional structure of the Republican Party elites to secure the nomination. And, like Obama, his candidacy does not appear to have altered the structure of GOP factions substantially.

The State of Party Elites in 2008

Despite the important changes in American politics wrought by the election of Barack Obama in 2008, major parties elites were characterized by a high degree of continuity. For one thing, Democratic and Republican delegates remained highly polarized on ideology and a wide variety of domestic, foreign policy, and cultural issues. One important example of this continued polarization was views on health insurance, about which Democrats and Republicans had starkly different opinions in 2004 and 2008. And the most important changes among the party elites were in the direction of greater polarization. A good example of this trend was the much larger number of Democratic delegates who described themselves as liberals in 2008, a change that disturbed the near parity of liberals and moderates in 2004. Yet another example is the modest shift to the right of Republicans on abortion, away from a more moderate position in 2004. These changes are reflected in the relative size of the Democratic and Republican factions between 2004 and 2008. In this regard, it is worth noting that domestic and foreign policy issues were more divisive among party elites than the hot-button cultural issues.

Of course, party elites have been polarized for a long time, as our longitudinal data and other scholars’ work have shown. Clearly, the pledges by Obama, and to some extent McCain, to lessen party polarization were not rooted in the attitudes of the convention delegates who officially nominated
them. This discontinuity is worth pondering because it reveals the depth of the issue-based divisions that characterize the party system. It may be that a single candidate and campaign may not be able to alter these deep divisions more than incrementally. At the same time, it is worth noting that there is evidence of the impact of candidates and campaigns on party elites in the 1992–2008 time frame. In fact, the 2008 conventions did not always show the largest differences on individual issues. The broader political context may be a factor in these variations, including the nature of the presidential nomination campaigns. In 2008, it appears that Obama and McCain worked within the existing factional structure of their parties rather than seeking to alter the structure, as Bill Clinton and George W. Bush did in previous elections.

What are the political implications of this state of the party elites? Barack Obama assumed the presidency in the context of a highly polarized party system, with sharp and increased differences between the party elites of his own party and those of the opposition—differences that reach down to the grass roots. In this context, there was little room for compromise on policy and consensus in politics, despite a professed desire for both in some quarters. President Obama’s first year in office appears to bear out these difficulties, especially in the intense debate over reforming health insurance. While a bipartisan consensus may ultimately emerge on health insurance and other policies, it will be difficult to achieve, given the high level of polarization among party elites. It could well be that the lessening of these tensions will require a successful policy change at the national level—such as health insurance reform that proves effective and popular as, for example, Social Security and Medicare did. If so, party elite polarization may depend more on policy than politics, with significant change in the party elites coming from government actions rather than campaign innovations.

Notes

1. For purposes of this analysis, we used the full range of the survey items.
2. In 2008, the welfare liberalism factor had an eigenvalue of 2.7 and explained 28 percent of the variance; the antigovernment factor had an eigenvalue of 1.2 and explained 13 percent of the variance.
3. In 2008, the welfare-conservatism factor had an eigenvalue of 2.4 and explained 30 percent of the variance; the cultural conservatism factor had an eigenvalue of 1.3 and explained 16 percent of the variance; and the antigovernment-populism factor had an eigenvalue of 1.0 and explained 14 percent of the variance.
4. For more information on the factions, see John S. Jackson, Nathan Bigelow, and John C. Green (2003, 2007).
Part II

PARTY ORGANIZATIONS
AND ACTIVITIES
Electoral Politics As Team Sport

Advantage to the Democrats

David B. Magleby

While much of the public’s attention in election campaigns remains on the candidates, the reality is that electoral politics has increasingly become an activity with multiple players seeking to elect or defeat certain candidates. In an earlier era, political machines and their interest group allies were also central to electoral politics. Later, elections became more candidate centered (Wattenberg 1991, 1–2). Today’s team politics are more transparent than in the earlier era of political machines, and while candidates remain the central focus of the context, their interest group and party allies and foes have become more important. This chapter examines the ways in which electoral politics have become more a team sport since the surge in soft money and issue advocacy in 1996 through 2002, as well as the continued importance of the teamwork approach under the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (BCRA), which took effect beginning with the 2004 election cycle.

The role of political parties and interest groups changed during the mid-1990s. In competitive contests there arose parallel campaigns, not run by the candidates and in most cases without any coordination with the candidate. To understand competitive federal elections in the United States since 1996, one must also examine these other campaign structures. As I have previously written, these other campaign organizations function very much like candidate campaigns (Magleby 2000a, 2003a; Magleby and Monson 2004b; Magleby, Monson, and Patterson 2007a; Magleby and Patterson 2008b). They do polling and research; they produce radio, television, and print advertising; they register and mobilize voters; they communicate heavily through the mail and via the Internet. Because their goal is to elect or defeat particular candidates,
their methods and communications are often indistinguishable from what the candidates are doing in their own campaigns.

Although law prohibits certain types of coordination among political teammates, evidence that electoral politics is best understood as a team effort is compelling. The financing of campaigns is a primary example. If one were to look only at what the candidates spent on the election, one would have an incomplete picture of spending, at least in competitive contests. For example, in her successful challenge race against North Carolina Republican senator Elizabeth Dole, Democrat Kay Hagan spent $4,490,801 while the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee (DSCC) spent $8,114,198 in the contest (Heberlig, Francia, and Greene, forthcoming, 135).

The Players

The two teams operating in contemporary competitive electoral settings comprise the candidates, their supporting political-party committees, and interest groups. The electoral rules of single-member districts and winner-takes-all elections, along with the tradition of relatively weak political parties, have had the effect of making American electoral politics candidate centered (Mayhew 1974). For example, selecting nominees through primaries elevates candidates over political parties, open primaries do this even more than closed primaries, and blanket primaries, in which voters can select from potential candidates from any party, further lessen the role of parties (Epstein 1999, 43–45). Candidate access to resources apart from those dispersed by parties is another way U.S. elections are more candidate centered when compared to those in the United Kingdom and elsewhere (Lee 2005, 283–84). Candidates, in order to be competitive, must raise substantial amounts of money. Competitive U.S. House open-seat or challenger candidates since 2000 have raised on average about $1.7 million, while competitive U.S. Senate open-seat or challenger candidates since 2000 have raised on average about $8.2 million. They raise that money from individuals, political action committees (PACs), party committees, and their own funds. All of these sources, excluding the candidate’s own money, are limited by federal law. Finally, as Martin Wattenberg has observed, parties represent broad ideologies and core beliefs, but when it comes to policy making and the substantive handling of issues, voters have narrowed their interest to the candidates (Wattenberg 1981, 947).

Still, parties are indispensible teammates. As David R. Mayhew (1974, 29) observed, party popularity in general is a factor in elections. Moreover, while Americans have long been inclined to report that they vote for the person running and not the party, the reality for as long as survey data has existed
is that they vote predictably for the person from the party they identify with. Since 1952, self-identified Democrats vote Democratic for president 77 percent of the time, and self-described Republicans do the same on average 88 percent of the time. This pattern includes independents who later acknowledge partisan leanings. Independent Democrats have voted Democratic for president 72 percent of the time since 1952, and they voted for Barack Obama at 90 percent. Independent Republicans vote Republican 83 percent of the time, and in 2008, 83 percent of independent Republicans voted for John McCain (American National Election Studies 2005, 2008). Partisan identification is therefore an important and consistent element of the voting choice.

Political parties have long played important roles in American elections beyond providing a brand label for candidates. Parties help recruit and train candidates, they raise money to contribute and spend on the candidates' behalf and for the collective good of the party, they monitor the opposition and organize to counter it on an ongoing basis, they help structure the competition in elections, and they help candidates find and use skilled campaign consultants. Interest groups have also been important cue givers to voters in U.S. elections. These groups include trade associations, labor unions, and ideological groups, among others. Endorsements, newsletters from particular groups comparing candidate positions on issues of interest, and invitations to candidates to speak to members of a group all are means groups use to signal to voters which candidates will best represent their interests. Often endorsements are conveyed personally by a member of the group. Interest groups are also important to elections in the United States because they provide campaign funding to candidates. They do this through PACs, which may make contributions of up to $5,000 for each election (primary, general, or special) to federal candidates. Further, interest groups help orient individuals to contribute to particular candidates.

Corporations and unions are allowed to form PACs, raising money from employees for political purposes. Corporate and union PACs have long been an important source of funding for congressional incumbents. Ideological groups also form PACs and contribute to candidates and otherwise work to secure the election or defeat of federal candidates. Interest groups work with other groups in trade associations, broader union groupings, or alliances with like-minded groups. These groupings are often organized under Section 501(c) or 527 of the Internal Revenue Code. Corporations have not been able to spend money from their general treasuries on election campaigns since the Tillman Act of 1907, and unions have been similarly prohibited, since 1947, from using their general treasury funds for federal election activities. However, these prohibitions were lifted by the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission (2009).
The phenomenon of electoral politics as team sport arises largely in competitive general election contests. Party committees direct most of their contributions, as well as coordinated and independent expenditures, to races they see as competitive (Herrnson and Curtis, forthcoming). They generally avoid getting involved in their own nomination contests, and most interest groups sit out these contests as well. Exceptions to this rule include the Club for Growth, which spent heavily in opposition to incumbents like Pennsylvania then Republican senator Arlen Specter in the 2004 nomination phase (Dao 2004) and against Republican Wayne Gilchrest of Maryland, who was defeated in a 2008 primary.

Most congressional races are not competitive; as a result, the parties and, to a lesser extent, interest groups do not concentrate their resources there. Interest groups, through their contributions to incumbents and candidates from the party nominee of the party dominant in the district, are one of the reasons many contests are not competitive. PACs, for example, gave 82.5 percent of their contributions to incumbents in 2008 (Herrnson and Curtis, forthcoming). Other advantages incumbents enjoy are generally higher name recognition, a paid staff, and franking privileges (the ability to send postal mail without paying for postage).

Changing Strategies and Changing Rules

The scope of this chapter encompasses elections since 1974, although some elements of the period before 1974 are clearly consistent with seeing electoral politics as a team sport—complete with illegal plays. For example, one revelation that came out of the post-Watergate investigation was that telephone company International Telephone and Telegraph (ITT) had laundered money, with the cash in suitcases going to presidential candidate campaigns. I will examine how the rules of play have changed across these time periods, or sets.

First Set, 1974–1994: Candidate Centered with Parties and Interest Groups in Supportive Roles

In 1974, in response to the Watergate scandal, Congress amended the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA) to provide comprehensive new laws on campaign finance. FECA included the most comprehensive disclosure requirements of any legislation in this area until that time. The amounts individuals could contribute to candidates, party committees, and PACs were limited. Parties and PACs were restricted in what they could contribute to
candidates and, in the case of parties, what they could spend in coordinated efforts with candidates. These limited and disclosed contributions to candidates, party committees, and PACs came to be called “hard money” because they were restricted and therefore harder to raise.

The FECA contribution limits were generally not indexed for inflation. FECA included partial public financing of presidential elections with a matching system of public funding for the nomination phase of presidential elections and a grant of public money for participating candidates in the general election. The public funding came with spending limitations attached to the acceptance of public matching funds in the primary or of the public grant in the general election.

FECA was quickly challenged in court, and in a landmark decision in *Buckley v. Valeo* (1976), the U.S. Supreme Court upheld limits on contributions to candidates, parties, and interest groups, as well as limits on expenditures that are part of a system of public financing, while overturning provisions limiting expenditures by candidates from their own funds and any limits on independent expenditures. The Court’s decision also addressed in the form of a footnote, a key definition that FECA had ignored: the difference between express advocacy, or electioneering, and issue advocacy. The latter, the Court reasoned, should not be subject to the same limitations as electioneering. Congress had not provided for this key difference, and so the Court did, indicating that in order to be regulated under FECA, communications must contain “express words of advocacy of election or defeat such as ‘vote for,’ ‘elect,’ ‘support,’ ‘cast your ballot for,’ ‘Smith for Congress,’ ‘vote against,’ ‘defeat,’ ‘reject’” (*Buckley v. Valeo* 1976). Two decades later, the language of this footnote would drastically change the campaign-finance game.

Election finance was further altered in response to pressures from both parties for access to funds for generic party-building activities like voter-registration drives, generic party mail and leaflets, and so on. The Federal Election Commission (FEC) interpreted FECA as allowing parties to raise unlimited “soft money” from corporate and union general treasuries, money that could be used for party-building activities (Corrado 2005a, 29). Although this party soft money was easier to accumulate, it could not be spent for party contributions to candidates or for the party-and-candidate coordinated expenditures allowed under FECA. Congress amended FECA in 1979 to allow parties to conduct certain party-building activities “without having those expenditures count” against the FECA contribution or expenditure limits (Corrado 2005a, 32).

For the better part of two decades, from 1976 through 1996, the FECA rules gave candidates, party committees, and interest groups clearly defined roles in federal elections. The system was candidate centered, with candidates
being the focal point in fund-raising and electioneering. Party committees and interest groups largely worked to influence federal elections through campaign contributions to candidates. Candidates exploited partisan and incumbency advantages wherever possible to raise more money (B. Jackson 1990), including forming leadership PACs as a means to raise more money from individuals and other PACs (Buchler 2004). Because of the limits on campaign contributions, candidates who could self-finance their campaigns had a substantial advantage. Incumbents who won elections without spending all of their financial war chest could carry over those funds to the next election cycle, in hopes of deterring serious challengers in subsequent elections.

This is not to argue that parties and interest groups were not important in their support or opposition to particular candidates. PACs, for example, were often criticized for dampening competition through their heavy investment in incumbents (Sabato 1985). It is also important to note that the numbers of PACs and total PAC contributions to candidates rose over time (Magleby and Nelson 1990, 74). Incumbents for much of this period saw party contributions and party-committee-coordinated expenditures essentially as an entitlement.


The 1996 election saw the rather stable strategies for political parties and interest groups start to change, which in turn resulted in changing tactics for both sides. The ability of the parties to play a much more active role in competitive races grew substantially in 1996 as the parties began to direct considerable resources to particular competitive contests in two ways. First, a Court decision permitted the political parties to raise and spend unlimited amounts of hard money on independent expenditures (such as candidate-focused advertising), just as individuals and interest groups had previously (Colorado Republican Federal Campaign Committee v. Federal Election Commission 1996). Accordingly, the National Republican Senatorial Committee spent $10.7 million in independent expenditures in 1996, with the other committees adapting more slowly.

Of greater significance in the short term was a tactic of the Bill Clinton/Al Gore campaign and the Democratic National Committee to spend party soft money on candidate-specific electioneering. Until this time, soft money, as noted, had been spent on generic party advertising, voter registration and mobilization, and other party-building activities. In response to the Clinton/Gore use of soft money for candidate-specific advertising, the Bob Dole/Jack Kemp campaign quickly followed suit. When the FEC failed to stop the activ-
ity on either side, party soft-money expenditures in all forms of candidate-specific electioneering grew.

With this new set of spending opportunities, the party committees and the candidates quickly increased their focus on soft-money fund-raising. While the Clinton White House coffees and sleepovers became legendary as a means to raise soft money, both parties' congressional leaders were hosting briefings for large soft-money donors, and individual committee members beyond the leadership were also active in raising soft money. In the 2000 election cycle and again in 2002, the party committees in the aggregate raised and spent roughly $500 million in soft money (Magleby 2003b; Magleby and Monson 2004a). Despite the dramatic increase in total party receipts, the period of intense soft-money activity did not appreciably strengthen the political parties themselves because so much of the soft and hard money was spent on candidate-specific advertising that was largely indistinguishable from the advertising being run by the candidates (Magleby 2003a, 28).

Soft money was a resource that party committees targeted at competitive congressional contests and presidential battleground states. Soft money was often transferred to state parties for expenditure because the FEC rules for the required ratio of hard to soft money often allowed more soft money to be spent if the spending was done by the state parties. Soft-money-funded television and radio advertising, mail and phone banks, and voter registration and mobilization. Soft-money expenditures were often substantial. For example, in 2002 the party organizations spent over $6.5 million on television ads in South Dakota's U.S. Senate race, while the candidates, Tim Johnson (D) and John Thune (R) themselves only spent $4.2 million (Magleby and Squires 2004, 51).

In 1996 the role played by interest groups in competitive elections also underwent a transformation. The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), exploiting the aforementioned footnote in Buckley v. Valeo (1976), designed communications that were clearly candidate specific but lacked the exact phrases that had been listed by the Court. Without these “magic words,” the ads were considered “issue advocacy”—that is, not subject to the FECA contribution or disclosure limits. The AFL-CIO spent over $30 million in this candidate-specific advertising in 1996, much of it directed at defeating freshmen Republicans elected in 1994, the year the GOP won the majority in the House for the first time in forty years (Magleby 2000b, 63). Once the AFL-CIO had mounted its campaign, opposing groups joined in the practice. By 1998, the use of “issue advocacy” had become a part of the most competitive congressional campaigns. The party and interest group-funded campaigns often spent more money than the candidates' campaigns (Magleby 2000c, 1).
Interest group issue advocacy was often substantial and could come late in the campaign, leaving the opposing team little time to respond. Because the spending was concentrated in competitive contests, the outside group and party soft-money spending often drove up the costs of advertising for the candidates. Legally, party soft-money and interest group issue-advocacy spending could not be coordinated with the candidate who was the intended beneficiary. Not surprisingly, therefore, much of the advertising was negative in tone, attacking the opponent of the favored candidate. For example, in 2000 the Voter Fund of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People issued an ad in which a young girl reminded voters of the violent dragging death of her father, James Byrd Jr., and attacked George W. Bush for not supporting hate-crimes legislation as governor of Texas (Cigler 2002, 176).

The themes and messages of the party and interest group teammates were often similar to those the preferred candidate was raising. Occasionally, the party or interest group teammates of the candidate ran advertising contrary to the wishes of the preferred candidate. In the 1998 Senate election between Republican Bob Inglis and Democratic incumbent Ernest Hollings in South Carolina, the issue ads from the Republican Party were considered overly negative and lacking credibility because they were so out of context. Inglis considered asking the party to stop the ads against Hollings but feared the FEC would interpret that as coordination between the candidate and the party, so instead he remained silent and in the end lost the election (Moore and Vinson 2000, 103). Other candidates who were the intended beneficiaries also saw the work of their teammates as potentially hurtful to them. In Utah’s 1998 Second District election, issue-advocacy ads played both a helpful and a damaging role, prompting Democratic candidate Lily Eskelsen to call outside money a “double-edged sword.” She appreciated an outside group who supported her and attacked her opponent but did not appreciate that the group was “out of [her] control” (Eskelsen 1998). Uncomfortable with the tone of outside groups’ attack ads, candidates often responded that the charges being raised against the opponent were not coming from the candidate’s campaign. To voters, however, the ads from party committees and interest groups were indistinguishable from the ads run by the candidates, and the strong public assumption was that candidates were responsible for the tone and content of the outside campaign (Magleby 2000c, 13).

Candidates in competitive races in this period thus lost some control of their own campaigns, as their teammates’ activities potentially overshadowed their own. At the same time, the pressure on candidates to raise more money was intensified because they felt they would need greater funding to respond not only to their opponents but to their opponents’ teammates as well.
Third Set, 2004–2008: Advantage to the Democrats

The 2004 election was the first conducted under the 2002 BCRA. This legislation banned virtually all forms of party soft money, provided a new definition of electioneering communications, raised individual contribution limits, and indexed those limits to inflation. Further, BCRA increased the limits for contributions to politicians running against self-financed opponents who spent personal resources above an established threshold, a provision called the Millionaires’ Amendment. Parts of BCRA have been successfully challenged in court and declared unconstitutional. Included in this list are the Millionaires’ Amendment (Davis v. Federal Election Commission 2008) and the BCRA definition of what constitutes an electioneering communication (Federal Election Commission v. Wisconsin Right to Life, Inc. 2007).

The BCRA soft-money ban remains in place and has made the raising of limited hard-money contributions a greater priority. Because legislators recognized individuals’ tendency to contribute more to candidates than to parties, BCRA assisted the parties in financing themselves through individual contributions by only allowing individuals to give $42,700 to candidates (in the 2008 cycle) but at the same time allowing individuals to give a total of $108,200 to candidates, party committees, and PACs. The difference between the maximum amount an individual is allowed to give candidates in the aggregate and what they can give overall is the money party committees and PACs most aggressively seek. In 2008 the maximum amount an individual could give any single party committee was $28,500 (Magleby, n.d. b, 36). These “max-out” donors have become important to party finance and were significant in the Democrats’ electoral success in 2008 congressional contests. Republicans have long had a lead in money raised from individual donors giving modest amounts. That advantage has lessened for the Republicans.

In 2004 and 2008, the major party presidential candidates who accepted public funding in the general election (Bush and Kerry in 2004 and McCain in 2008) encouraged individuals to give to the party committees in the general election. This resulted in substantial receipts for the Republican National Committee (RNC) in 2004 and 2008 and for the Democratic National Committee (DNC) in 2004. This money in turn was spent by the respective party committee with its presidential nominee on joint party and candidate voter-mobilization efforts or advertising (Corrado 2005b, 174). Such teamwork helps to stretch candidates’ campaign dollars, and it is essential for the presidential candidates who accept the limitations of the public general election grant. Party-coordinated spending also has the advantage of being able to promote multiple candidates at once, which tends to allow less prominent candidates to ride on the popularity of their party’s top-ticket contenders.
However, it is not always in the candidates' interest to be closely linked to the party, as was the case for John McCain in 2008 (Ferry 2009).

One of the most important changes in BCRA was its doubling the amount individuals can give candidates and then its indexing those limits for inflation. In 2008, an individual could give a federal candidate $2,300 in the primary and $2,300 in the general election. (Had there been a runoff, that individual could have given another $2,300.) Presidential candidates have been the most likely to tap donors who can give the maximum allowable, and these donors were critical to the early fund-raising success of candidates like Obama, Clinton, McCain, and Mitt Romney in 2007. More broadly, by closing the soft-money option, BCRA oriented candidates and parties toward focusing on individual contributors and relying less on the large soft-money donors so important in the 1996–2002 period.

Interest groups have modified their approach in the post-BCRA environment as well. No longer able to make unlimited soft-money contributions to the political parties, corporations have scaled back their overall level of spending on politics. Still, some coalitions of corporations have been active, particularly in races that may sway legislation on key issues.

The first post-BCRA election in 2004 saw a set of highly visible Section 527 and 501(c) organizations. On the Democratic team was a large voter-registration and -mobilization effort conducted by a new 527 group named America Coming Together (ACT). Donors to ACT included wealthy individuals like George Soros, Peter Lewis, and Steven Bing, as well as unions and interest groups like the AFL-CIO and MoveOn.org. ACT spent more than $78 million (Cigler 2006, 229). Other interest group teammates of Democratic candidates were the Media Fund, which mounted television and radio ads and spent $57.7 million, and America Votes, which provided an organizational structure to facilitate coordination among progressive groups (Magleby, n.d. a, 79). Overall, an estimated $389.4 million was spent by 527 and 501(c) organizations supporting Democrats in 2004 (Center for Responsive Politics 2009a).

Republican interest group teammates in 2004 spent considerably less than the Democrats, an estimated $111 million (Center for Responsive Politics 2009a), but generated more controversy and arguably had a greater impact. Two examples stand out. Swift Boat Veterans for Truth ran television ads and sent mail attacking John Kerry's claims to heroism and capacity to serve as commander in chief. Kerry left the group's charges against him unanswered for two weeks, allowing the ads and his nonresponse to become what Allan Cigler described as potentially "the most defining moment of the election" (2006, 234). In 2008, Section 527 and 501(c) organizations were less visible and less important than in 2004. At the same time, overall spending by
interest groups was higher in 2008 than in 2004. The difference was greater spending by PACs. Most of the 527 organizations from 2004 were not active in 2008. One exception was America Votes, which played an enlarged role in coordinating the pro-Democrat interest groups and spent more than $24 million (Center for Responsive Politics 2009b).

As suggested by the heavy investment of ACT in voter registration and mobilization in 2004, the “ground game” of electoral politics has become increasingly important in the recent era of competitive presidential and congressional elections. Republicans since the Bush popular-vote defeat in 2000 have used the RNC as the entity in charge of managing voter-registration and turnout efforts. Leaning on strong RNC fund-raising, strategists Karl Rove and Ken Mehlman, among others, created the 72-Hour Task Force, called by reporter Matt Bai “the most ambitious grassroots model in the party’s history” (2009). Guided by the Republicans’ superior voter database, the task force overrode heavy Democratic investment by ACT, America Votes, and others (Magleby 2006, 15).

Having lost the voter-mobilization contest in 2004, Democratic-leaning groups and individuals adopted a different model in 2008. Long-time activist Harold Ickes developed a corporation called Data Warehouse, which aimed to build a better voter database and foster the kind of microtargeted computer modeling that had helped reelect George W. Bush. The Data Warehouse later became Catalist, a voter file of more than 220 million names, complete in many cases with vote history and consumer data. The investors funding Catalist included unions, environmental and pro-choice groups, and party committees, which shared their own membership information as part of this for-profit enterprise. Importantly, candidates like Senators Clinton and Obama purchased the Catalist list and used it to achieve unprecedented fundraising, microtargeting, and get-out-the-vote success.

How the Democrats Secured the Advantage

In part due to these changes in the finance rules and the advancement in microtargeting, recent electoral politics at the national level have been closely competitive. The 2000 presidential election resulted in a popular-vote victory for Democrat Al Gore, but after a U.S. Supreme Court decision the Republicans secured an electoral-vote majority. Congressional majorities have been close, with party control changing twice since the early 1990s in the House and four times during the same period in the Senate. Going into the 2008 election, the Senate Democrats had a fifty-one to forty-nine majority, but only because the chamber’s two independents voted with the Democrats. The
Chapter 5

public has also been closely divided in terms of party identification. In studies, if independent leaners are not assigned a party, the two parties have been, on average, within six percentage points of each other in the proportion of voters identifying with each party. When independent leaners are assigned to their respective parties, the average difference between the parties has been just over 10 percent since 2000 (American National Election Studies 2005).

In the 2008 election, the Democrats secured the advantage over the Republicans at the level of candidates, party committees, and allied interest groups. They did this by riding the tails of a charismatic presidential standard bearer, by effectively utilizing technology and microtargeting, by building their own voter files, by fostering a culture of cooperation and coordination among allied interest groups, and by engaging in ample candidate, party committee, and interest group spending.

Candidates

Candidates continue to matter a great deal, even in a context in which elections are a team sport. Barack Obama did extraordinarily well in raising money from both large and small donors. His early success in fund-raising helped legitimate his insurgent campaign. In those early days, said Obama’s finance chair, Penny Pritzker, “the money did not grow at the grassroots.” Rather, the campaign used a more typical approach to reach networks of large donors: “We tapped everybody and did every event we could. He’d do seven events in New York, back-to-back-to-back-to-back” (Wolffe 2009, 74).

Obama’s success among large donors continued throughout the campaign, a fact often overshadowed by his success among donors making small contributions. Of the contributions Obama raised over the mandatory aggregate reporting threshold of $200, more than half were in amounts larger than $2,000. Before BCRA this threshold would have been the maximum allowable contribution. As noted under BCRA, in 2008 individuals could give $2,300 in the nomination phase and $2,300 in the general election phase (Magleby, Jones, and Lassen 2009). In tapping donors giving the maximum allowable amount or close to it, the Obama campaign was not unusual. Indeed, John McCain raised more than two-thirds of his receipts from donors giving more than $2,000 (Magleby, Jones, and Lassen 2009).

Obama’s success in raising money from individuals who contributed relatively small amounts has the potential to change campaigns in 2010 and beyond. The campaign reported nearly 4 million contributors, more than twice as many as gave to any other campaign (CBS News 2008). Obama raised over $400 million from unitemized donors (Center for Responsive Politics 2009c). Many of these donors gave more than once, and many contributed via the Internet.
Obama was not alone in applying new messaging and fund-raising tactics; Howard Dean in 2004 and Ron Paul and Mitt Romney in 2008 were innovative in their use of the Internet as well. But Obama achieved a higher level of play. Joe Trippi, who managed the Howard Dean campaign in 2004 and worked for the John Edwards campaign in 2008, said of Obama, "He did everything better. . . . It's like the Dean campaign was the Wright brothers, the Obama campaign was Apollo 11 and we've skipped . . . everything in between" (2008).

The Obama campaign was innovative not only in raising money but also in how it engaged people. Utilizing technology such as Facebook, e-mail, and text messaging, the campaign offered voters multiple modes of participation. Only one of these was contributing money. As new media director Joe Rospars reported, the campaign "tried to enable folks to take control of the process as much as they were willing at every stage" (2009). In this sense the Obama campaign became a viral fund-raising operation. Using the Internet in these creative ways not only expanded the donor pool but also gave the campaign a large group of donors who could be contacted again for additional contributions, since few had maxed out, and who could be invited to volunteer again and again as well. A marker of the success of Obama's integrated approach is in how the campaign mobilized individuals to vote in caucuses, primaries and early voting, and on Election Day (Adler 2008).

Another advantage of fund-raising via the Internet is that the money is available to the campaign immediately; there is no need to wait for checks to be returned through the mail and clear the bank. The Internet allows immediate and timely fund-raising appeals, centered on campaign events like debates or reporting deadlines at the FEC. And those appeals are virtually free—no postage or envelope costs. Using the Internet to raise money also reduces staff time spent building databases of donors who gave by cash or check. To a lesser extent other Democrats and some Republicans made inroads in broadening the base of the donor pool and in using the Internet. A group named ActBlue formed in 2004 to raise Internet donations for Democratic candidates. In 2004 and 2006 ActBlue raised a combined $13.6 million on behalf of progressive House and Senate candidates; in 2008 the group raised $60 million for Democratic Senate and House candidates. Meanwhile, Slatecard.com raised $650,000 for sixty Republican candidates (Hill 2009). In upcoming matches it is anticipated that Republican and Democratic candidates—and the donors who support them—will turn to the Internet more readily.

Political Parties

Prior to BCRA's taking effect, all three national Democratic committees were more reliant on soft money than their Republican counterparts (Dwyre
and Kolodny 2002, 142). By 2002 soft money accounted for more than half (53 percent) of all funds raised by the Democrats, although Republicans, with their overall fund-raising advantage, actually raised more soft money in 2002 than the Democrats did (Magleby and Monson 2004b, 45–46). For some, the banning of soft money was the equivalent of a “suicide bill for Democrats” (Gitell 2003, 106–13). Political scientist Sidney Milkis was more measured in his assessment that “BCRA threatens [to undermine] the reinvigoration of national parties and the revitalization of America’s federal democracy” (2003, 43). Looking more to the future, Raymond La Raja wrote that “recent reforms under the BCRA will make it much more difficult for strongly institutionalized party organizations to emerge” (2008a, 10).

In the post-BCRA period, the Democratic committees have all substantially increased their fund-raising from individuals. Rather than perishing, the DSCC and the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) raised more money than the National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC) and National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC) in 2006 and 2008. The Democrats’ success in substituting hard for soft money is the result of three elements: doing well among large contributors, developing an expanded small-donor pool, and persuading members of Congress to contribute to the party committees. Like Barack Obama, many Democratic candidates have done well with all types of donors, as have the Democratic congressional campaign committees. As noted previously, the DSCC and DCCC both raised much more from max-out donors in 2008 than their Republican counterparts.

Democrats have also surpassed the GOP in congressional-campaign-committee fund-raising in money raised from members. Before the end of soft money, incumbent senators in both parties transferred less than $2 million per cycle to the DSCC or NRSC. That changed dramatically for the Democrats in 2004, the first post-BCRA election, when members tripled their level of contribution to the DSCC. In 2006 and 2008 those levels rose further. Republicans doubled their member giving between 2002 and 2004, but that giving subsided in 2008, resulting in the DSCC’s almost eightfold advantage in member giving over the NRSC.

House members in both parties were more inclined to contribute to their party committees in the period before BCRA than were Senate members. But from 2000 to 2004 House Democrats still more than doubled what they gave their party committee, with contributions climbing from $11 million in 2002 to $23.9 million in 2004. The DCCC saw further growth in 2006, and in 2008 it raised $42.9 million from members. House Republicans also became more inclined to give to their party committee in 2006, but in 2008 the level of member giving dropped, with House Republicans giving the NRCC nearly
$19 million less than House Democrats gave the DCCC. Loans are another way party committees can fund operations. Going into 2007–2008, all party committees were in debt from the 2005–2006 election cycle, with the DCCC and NRCC at near parity in debt and the DSCC in more debt ($6.5 million) than the NRSC ($1.2 million).

Republicans are likely to rebound and compete more effectively with Democrats in party committee fund-raising. However, in the 2006 and 2008 election cycles, the advantage clearly went to the Democrats. The Democratic congressional committee advantage in fund-raising in 2006 and 2008 allowed the party committees to fund more substantial independent expenditures than the Republicans were able to do. Table 5.1 provides the independent expenditure activity for party committees for the 1996–2008 period.

In 2008 the DCCC had a $40 million advantage over the NRCC, and the DSCC spent nearly $30 million more than the NRSC in independent expenditures. These funds helped make more visible and competitive candidates like Kay Hagen in North Carolina and others in states like New Hampshire and Colorado.

Interest Groups

As with candidates and party committees, the pro-Democratic interest groups have outperformed the pro-Republican interest groups in recent elections. Part of this advantage to the Democrats is due to the level and type of activity pro-Democratic groups have pursued, and part of it is due to the decline of some mass-membership interest groups that once supported Republicans. Not only have pro-Democratic interest groups become more involved in electoral politics than pro-Republican interest groups, but they are also more coordinated among themselves than are the pro-Republican groups. This enhanced coordination and communication is due in part to the fifty-three partner groups that belong to America Votes. Since the organization's inception in 2004, members have met regularly to share strategy and coordinate activity (America Votes 2009). Former Texas congressman and America Votes president for 2008, Martin Frost, commented that America Votes was created because "the major donors were tired of the fact that all the interest groups on the left didn't talk to each other" (2009). Partners pay a fee to join the coalition, which in turn gives them strategic information on message delivery and access to a database of voters and polling data (Magleby, Monson, and Patterson 2007b, 17–18).

PACs, an important part of the electoral team for both parties, contributed substantially more to candidates in 2008 than in prior cycles and less to party committees, with the DSCC being an exception. The DNC and
### TABLE 5.1

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DNC</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
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<td>$0</td>
<td>$120,449,777</td>
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<td>NRSC</td>
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<tr>
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<td>$0</td>
<td>$46,901,487</td>
<td>$81,827,610</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** The 2006 total for the DNC is negative due to adjustments made after the original expenditures were reported from the 2004 presidential race.

**Source:** Federal Election Commission 2009.
RNC were at near parity in PAC receipts, but overall PACs gave less to both the RNC and DNC in 2008 than in 2004. Unlike individual contribution limits to candidates, individual contribution limits to PACs were not raised by BCRA—but that did not stop PACs from giving all four congressional campaign committees more money in 2004 than in 2002. Their overall giving rose again in 2006, but then dropped for both the DCCC and NRCC in 2008 (Cigler, n.d.).

One important illustration of how the Democrats have secured the electoral advantage over the Republicans is to contrast the level of activity of unions and corporations in the post-BCRA environment. Unions have long been important to Democratic candidates and party committees due to the money they donate and the volunteers they provide. Among top Section 527 groups in 2008, unions show up frequently. Table 5.2 presents the top twelve Section 527 groups in 2007–2008 in terms of expenditures as reported to the Internal Revenue Service. Additionally, the table indicates whether the group had also a registered PAC with the Federal Election Commission.

A visible and very active union in 2008 was the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), whose 527 group reported $25.8 million in expenditures. The much-publicized divorce between the AFL-CIO and SEIU raised questions about the level of union political activity in 2006 and 2008. Mike

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Committee</th>
<th>Expenditures</th>
<th>Total Receipts</th>
<th>Federal PAC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Service Employees International Union</td>
<td>$25,819,624</td>
<td>$24,857,467</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>America Votes</td>
<td>$20,749,364</td>
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<td>American Solutions Winning the Future</td>
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<td>Fund for America</td>
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<td>EMILY’s List</td>
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<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOPAC</td>
<td>$8,100,840</td>
<td>$8,192,347</td>
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<tr>
<td>College Republican National Committee</td>
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<td>Club for Growth</td>
<td>$5,897,982</td>
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<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers</td>
<td>$5,668,122</td>
<td>$5,529,861</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Citizens United</td>
<td>$5,238,329</td>
<td>$5,644,344</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
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<td>Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund</td>
<td>$5,145,721</td>
<td>$3,961,763</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliance for New America</td>
<td>$4,890,620</td>
<td>$4,890,621</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This data is based on records released by the Internal Revenue Service on December 3, 2008.
Source: Center for Responsive Politics 2008.
Lux of Progressive Strategies, commenting on 2006, saw the aggregate union effort of the AFL-CIO, the coalition Change to Win (comprising the SEIU and six other unions), and the National Education Association as “more than in any earlier year” (Magleby and Patterson 2008a, 53). Overall union activity rose again in 2008 to record-setting levels (Podhorzer 2008). Union alliances, including the AFL-CIO and Change to Win, in turn, often ran coordinated campaigns at the state and congressional district level (Podhorzer 2008). The Democratic team organizer for 2007–2008, America Votes, spent $20.7 million, slightly less than the SEIU, at $25.8 million, while prominent America Votes member EMILY’s List spent $10.8 million.

Corporations, which in the soft-money era were major players along with unions, now seem more content to watch from the sidelines. Allan Cigler’s description of corporate activity in 2004 is equally apt for 2008: “Corporations withdrew from the direct big-money involvement in elections that had characterized the party soft money era” (2006, 228). The exception in 2008 was the U.S. Chamber of Commerce business coalition, which faced off against the unions over the Employee Free Choice Act. Nicknamed “card check,” this mostly Democrat-backed legislation sought, in part, to streamline the process of union formation. Overall the Chamber and allies spent $36 million against the legislation and candidates who supported it (Meyer 2009). More broadly, the chamber worked to elect pro-business candidates. Beyond the chamber, the level of pro-Republican 527 activity was minimal in 2008.

The Democrat-leaning tendency of group spending in total was also reflected in a substantial imbalance of group spending for and against congressional candidates. The imbalance in spending helped Democratic candidates in competitive races in 2008, as did the closer coordination among the Democratic interest group team facilitated by America Votes.

Interest groups on both teams have added a new tool to their voter-mobilization strategies: ballot initiatives. Perceiving that the Bush campaign reaped an electoral dividend in higher turnout as a result of same-sex marriage initiatives in 2004, pro-Democratic groups sponsored minimum wage and other initiatives in 2006 (Galbraith 2008; Wheaton 2006). Initiatives did not figure as much in the game plan of candidates, parties, or groups in 2008 but remain a strategy to return to in future election cycles.

**A Look to the Next Match**

American politics is dynamic, and candidates, political parties, and interest groups experience ups and downs in popular support, including financial and volunteer support. Republicans in 2008 ran in an unfavorable environment
in terms of their having an unpopular GOP incumbent in the White House and a party brand in decline. In many respects 2008 was an extension of 2006, when Republican congressional candidates had to defend an unpopular war and their response to scandal. The broader political environment in 2008 meant there was less enthusiasm for Republican candidates and their party than was the case in 2000 or 2004.

As has been true for all past presidents, Barack Obama’s popularity has declined during his time in office, and that decline will likely continue. Comparing Obama to other presidents, however, requires recognition of his very high approval rating when he took office. In terms of future contests involving Obama, we do not know what impact he or his political and fund-raising skills will have. He has continued, on a large scale, a communications and activation network using e-mail and the Internet (Paddock 2008). Should he run for reelection in 2012, he will begin with a substantial advantage over other candidates in fund-raising and a national network of supporters and volunteers. Future presidential standard bearers for both parties will likely follow Obama’s 2008 game plan and decline public funding in the general election. This in turn will likely lead to new fund-raising records and an even more presidency-centered election cycle in 2012.

Whether Democratic candidates in competitive congressional races will continue to have an advantage based on national networks of donors, either through the Internet or other bundling operations (perhaps mounted by the American Trial Lawyers Association or EMILY’s List) is less certain. The tools used by these and other groups to help candidates raise money are not limited to one ideological persuasion or political party. To date there is no evidence of a serious challenge to the Democratic advantage in this kind of candidate support.

In terms of political parties and campaign finance, the NRSC and NRCC have lost considerable ground to the DSCC and DCCC and now face the challenge of trying to catch up with the Democrats in an environment in which Democrats have the majority in both houses and control the White House as well.

Republicans no longer hold an advantage in voter lists and microtargeting. Catalist and its array of interest group participants will give the Democratic team in 2010 and 2012 advantages lacked by the Republicans, who rely largely on the party alone to update and refine their list. Both teams have skilled social scientists able to use the data, but the modeling is only as good as the data are current and accurate. The Democrats may well be able to surpass the Republicans in this dimension of elections in 2010 and beyond. Democrats enjoy substantial advantages over Republicans in terms of their interest group teammates. During the era of soft money, when corporations helped provide
soft money to Republican committees, there was more parity between corporations and labor in their spending on politics. With the soft-money ban, corporations have scaled back their spending while unions have increased their activity. Recent and pending court rulings provide ways for corporations to invest general treasury funds in political groups engaged in election-related activity, but it remains unclear if corporations will use their resources in this way (Federal Election Commission v. Wisconsin Right to Life, Inc. 2007; Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission 2009).

Democratic interest group teammates also provide support through their active and involved membership organizations. Unions, teachers, and members of environmental and pro-choice groups are predictably active for Democrats. These groups not only give money but also volunteer time and provide personal contacts with friends and work associates—networks that have historically helped the Democrats more than the Republicans. Of course, Republicans have the advantage of a more cohesive coalition, while keeping all of the Democrats happy is a challenge for Democratic Party committees and candidates alike.

The electoral playing field in the United States appears to have changed substantially. The Democratic electoral team has gained substantial ground on the Republicans in recent elections, surpassing the GOP in several key areas. Whether or not the Democrats will be able to retain this advantage for an extended period remains to be seen. To be sure, though, at this point electoral success in the future for either team will be achieved best through a savvy use of technology and information management as well as deployment of energized and empowered individuals, party committees, and interest groups. But as we look to the next set of contests, the Democrats clearly must be favored.

Note

1. Research assistance for this paper was provided by Stephanie Curtis, Bret Evans, Haley Frischknecht, Maren Gardiner, David Lassen, Virginia Maynes, Kristen Orr, and Case Wade. Hilary Hendricks provided helpful edits. Some of the research reported here was generously funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts and the Carnegie Corporation of New York.
The political science literature on local political parties and national presidential campaigns pays relatively little attention to the relationship between these two political actors (Hershey 2007). This chapter addresses this lacuna by looking at the interaction between the national Democratic presidential campaign and a particular Democratic local party organization, generally known as the Coordinated Campaign. The time frame is the past five presidential elections, from 1992 to 2008, and the locale is Mahoning County, Ohio, a key Democratic county in a battleground state.

Between 1992 and 2008, the Democratic presidential campaigns found ways to obtain grassroots services for voter registration and mobilization, a key element of the "service" model of party activities (Aldrich 1995), in Mahoning County, Ohio. However, the presidential candidates obtained these services in different ways with different degrees of integration between the presidential campaign and the local party organization. This variation ranged from a highly integrated effort to a lack of integration, with numerous permutations between the two. Barack Obama's 2008 campaign represents one of these variations: a separate, single-purpose organization created to advance the presidential candidate, with the local Democratic Party organization on the periphery of the campaign.

Mahoning County is a good source of case studies on such issues because of the colorful history of local Democrats (Binning, Blumberg, and Green 1996). The local Democratic Party became a major player in Ohio politics in 1949, when Jack Sulligan (1949–1975) took control of the organization and teamed with long-serving Congressman Michael Kirwan. Statewide and presidential
candidates paid court to the local party, which was an effective grassroots organization. A successor to Sulligan, Don Hanni (1978–1994) attempted to maintain this organization but with less success. Nonetheless, statewide and presidential hopefuls banked on heavy voter turnout in the county where Democrats outnumbered Republicans by nearly six to one.

In 1994, Hanni was toppled by Democrats for Change, a group of reformers who waged an extraordinary campaign that elected a majority of precinct committee members. One of the reform leaders, Michael Morley (1994–1998), became chair and brought the local party into service of the statewide and presidential campaigns, including conducting a sophisticated grassroots effort in the 1996 presidential election. By 2000, Morley had passed the leadership of the local organization to a handpicked successor, fellow reformer David Ditzler (1998–2002), who followed the same model but was unable to maintain the same level of sophistication in the 2000 presidential campaign. Similar problems haunted the subsequent chair, fellow reformer Lisa Antonini (2002–2009). The local party was much less central to the grassroots efforts in 2004, due to multiple organizations active in the presidential campaign, and peripheral in 2008 during the Obama campaign.

Despite differences in local leadership and style, the area remained central to the political fortunes of statewide and presidential candidates. What follows is a brief description of the various permutations of the Democratic Coordinated Campaign in Mahoning County and then a description of the 2008 campaign.

The Democratic Coordinated Campaigns in Mahoning County

The Democratic Coordinated Campaign has been described as “an infrastructure designed to mobilize the vote” (Corrado 1996, 69) that was developed in the 1980s as part of the Democratic National Committee’s modernization efforts (Herrnson 1990). Eventually the concept was extended to all levels of the party organization, but it has retained a special emphasis on integrating the presidential campaign with state and local party organizations as well as down-ticket candidates and interest group allies (Trish 1994). In Mahoning County, the Coordinated Campaign took different forms between 1992 and 2008.

Reliance on the Local Party in 1992

The 1992 Coordinated Campaign had a split personality, as there were essentially two parallel operations in Mahoning County. The “official” cam-
Party on the Periphery

The campaign was headquartered at Chairman Hanni’s downtown law office and run by his handpicked field director. The “unofficial” campaign was housed at Michael Morley’s law office in an upscale suburb. Morley and his law partner, David Engler, were laying the groundwork for their 1994 revolt against Hanni, “Democrats for Change.” Bill Clinton’s presidential advance team shuttled between the two offices, campaigning at the “official” headquarters and strategizing at the “unofficial” one (Binning, Blumberg, and Green 1995). However, Hanni handled the bulk of the effort, a “labor-intensive, street-level politics” (Blumberg, Binning, and Green 2003, 204). Hanni waged this kind of campaign in 1988 on behalf of Democratic presidential nominee Michael Dukakis, and in both 1988 and 1992, the Coordinated Campaign achieved a modest level of integration between the presidential and local party efforts. In effect, the Clinton campaign delegated the local campaign to the local party organization(s), with only informal coordination from the presidential campaign itself. Bill Clinton carried Mahoning County by 33,540 votes, with Ross Perot siphoning 29,417 from both major parties (Ohio Secretary of State 1992). There was a decline in the number of registered voters from the previous election (165,241 from 171,159).

A Highly Integrated Effort in 1996

In 1996, reform chairman Morley orchestrated a Coordinated Campaign that remains unmatched in sophistication and integration with respect to the presidential effort. Morley, for a time, wielded influence with the presidential campaign not seen since the Sulligan era. So important was the Morley organization that he was able to marshal extensive support from the Clinton White House, including patronage in the form of a $115 million Federal Aviation Administration grant to expand the Youngstown-Warren Regional Airport (Binning, Blumberg, and Green 1999; T. Galvin 1997). Armed with the “rich patronage plum” (Binning, Blumberg, and Green 1999, 154) and the respect of Ohio Democratic Party chair David Leland, Morley helped create a political juggernaut that resulted in record increases in the Democratic portion of the vote (Binning, Blumberg, and Green 1999). This campaign was also a model of integration among the local party, the state party, the presidential campaign, and local races. In 1996, Mahoning County provided Clinton with a 41,319 vote margin, representing 70 percent of the two-party vote. These figures were fifteen points higher than his statewide vote (Niquette 1996; Ohio Secretary of State 1996) and were generated with Perot still on the ballot and drawing more than thirteen thousand votes. In 1996, the number of registered voters essentially returned to its 1988 level (171,659).
A Weakly Integrated Campaign in 2000

By 2000, David Ditzler, Morley's anointed successor, was at the local party's helm. Unlike Hanni and Morley, Chairman Ditzler was a part-time chair and could not devote as much attention to the 2000 campaign, which, in addition, was fraught with problems. At the local level there was infighting among local party activists and ongoing investigations into political corruption, which ultimately resulted in the conviction of more than seventy elected officials and attorneys, including Congressman James Traficant (Blumberg, Binning, and Green 2003). As a consequence, many of the local party faithful were "disillusioned" (Blumberg, Binning, and Green 2003, 204). At the state level, Chairman Leland "was underutilized by the Gore/Lieberman campaign and not given credit for his understanding of presidential politics in the Buckeye State" (Blumberg, Binning, and Green 2003, 205). Moreover, the national campaign operatives turned a deaf ear to local leaders, as the outsiders assumed they were more politically savvy than those who had been working for years in the local political trenches. Also, the local effort was harmed when the Al Gore campaign pulled its media spending out of Ohio at the end of the campaign to focus on Florida. In sum, the 2000 Coordinated Campaign was only weakly integrated with the national effort (Blumberg, Binning, and Green 2003). As a consequence, Gore fell 3,504 votes short of Clinton's 1996 total in Mahoning County, and his percentage of the two-party vote fell to 63 percent. At the same time, a strong campaign by George W. Bush picked up 9,063 votes more than Robert Dole had garnered in 1996 (Ohio Secretary of State 1996, 2000). Perhaps due to efforts by both parties, there was also a strong increase in the number of registered voters in 2000 (179,546).

Outsourcing Get-Out-the-Vote Services in 2004

In 2004, much of the grassroots effort in Mahoning County was outsourced to new organizations, especially America Coming Together (ACT). ACT mounted a three-pronged effort to take back the White House: a massive voter-registration drive, a voter-canvassing program, and an aggressive get-out-the-vote (GOTV) campaign. The result was three separate campaign efforts in Mahoning County directed at mobilizing voters for the John Kerry/John Edwards ticket. In part due to the campaign-finance laws, ACT, unions, other interest groups, the presidential campaign, and the local party organization waged an "uncoordinated" campaign (Blumberg, Binning, and Green 2007).

In 2004, the Democratic campaign had several local centers of operation in Mahoning County, one "official" office, an additional center set up to manage an influx of volunteers and other resources late in the campaign, and the local
party headquarters. However, local chair Lisa Antonini, Ditzler’s successor, was hampered by a full-time county job, limited personal resources, and the waning interest of her fellow reformers. In addition, she was focused on an important local race for juvenile judge. Even leaving aside organizations such as ACT, the 2004 Coordinated Campaign had “multiple power and management centers” (Blumberg, Binning, and Green 2007, 194). Despite this lack of integration, John Kerry received 83,194 ballots, some 14,000 more than Gore obtained. However, Kerry secured only 63 percent of the two-party vote, the same as Gore. Meanwhile, George W. Bush picked up an additional 8,301 votes over his 2000 total (Ohio Secretary of State 2000, 2004) as a result of his own sophisticated grassroots campaign (see Brooks et al. 2007). All this activity produced an all-time record in the number of registered voters (194,903).

A Separate, Single-Purpose Campaign Organization in 2008

In 2008, Barack Obama’s organization rewrote Coordinated Campaign “rules” on two levels. First, it rewrote “the rules on how to reach voters, raise money, organize supporters, manage the news media, track and mold public opinion, and wage—and withstand—political attacks, including many carried by blogs that did not exist” in previous presidential elections (Nagourney 2008). Secondly, it replaced the traditional integration between the presidential candidates, local parties, and other organizations with a novel kind of integration: a separate, single-purpose organization reaching down to the grass roots with only modest links to party organizations. This innovation left the local party organization in Mahoning County on the periphery of the presidential campaign. The backdrop to this innovation lies in the 2006 election in Ohio.

The Perfect Storm in 2006

Prior to the 2008 presidential primary, Chair Chris Redfern of the Ohio Democratic Party (ODP) briefed the media on the party’s plan to put Ohio in the blue column regardless of the eventual presidential nominee. Fresh from the 2006 party sweep of four statewide offices (governor, attorney general, secretary of state, and treasurer), plus gains in Congress and the state legislature, he and his associates were convinced the trend would continue through the presidential election if the 2006 strategy was followed to the letter. The key was to court those who voted for George W. Bush in 2004 and then in 2006 for Gov. Ted Strickland and Senator Sherrod Brown. At the news conference, Democratic operatives released a report on 2006 entitled The Perfect Storm, which was to serve as the model for 2008.
The report explained that the new approach was to “build from the bottom up, not the top down,” with collaborative approaches using data, tools, technology, and strategic assistance. It cited John Kerry’s failure to carry seventy-two of the eighty-eight counties in 2004, noted that Ted Strickland won seventy-two counties in 2006, and vowed that 2008 would be different. Traditionally, the Ohio Democrats banked on Democratic strongholds, such as Mahoning County, to compensate for losses in rural areas. The ODP aimed to cut into the Republican vote in exurban counties lost by Strickland and Brown as well as to mobilize the party’s base counties. Under Redfern’s leadership, the ODP developed the resources to implement such a strategy: staff had increased eightfold from five full-time employees to forty-two, and the state party had invested in sophisticated technology, which allowed it to target the “community level” and “individual households” (Spinelli 2008).

In 2008, Governor Strickland first schooled Hillary Clinton in the Ohio presidential primary, then tutored Barack Obama at the Democratic convention on how to win Ohio. He said they could try the Kerry-Edwards method by focusing on metropolitan strongholds or do it the Strickland-Brown way by including “suburban cities and counties as well as the rural areas” (J. Miller 2008b). This blueprint was accepted by the Obama campaign and implemented jointly with the ODP and its interest group allies (S. Rosen 2008).

The 2008 Campaign for Change

The Obama campaign established two organizations with which to carry out the Democratic plan for winning the 2008 general election in Ohio. The first was fairly typical, a state-level division of the national Obama for America campaign. The second was unusual: the campaign and the ODP jointly established a separate, single-purpose campaign organization called the Campaign for Change. The Ohio chapter of Obama for America handled the “air war,” the new media, and candidate appearances, while the Campaign for Change handled the “ground war,” including direct mail, telephone banking, voter registration, and GOTV. Operatives close to Governor Strickland and the ODP played major roles in these organizations, and all three worked together closely during the campaign.

The Campaign for Change integrated staff, volunteers, and other resources across the state within a single organization. It eventually had three hundred paid staffers, including twenty-four regional field directors and seventy-one local offices (plus about a dozen local auxiliary offices opened late in the campaign). In turn, the local offices supervised twelve hundred teams of volunteer
grassroots canvassers, with approximately one canvasser for fifty targeted voters. One campaign official described the lowest level of the organization this way: "What we really ended up having was an extra layer of staff out there. In Ohio, we had over 1,400 people who were putting in 20, 30, 40 hours a week" (Carson 2009, 44). Overall, the Campaign for Change produced forty-eight unique pieces of direct mail, twenty-seven unique telephone scripts, four hundred thousand home visits, and the delivery of 1.5 million large, glossy door hangers to homes throughout Ohio, with details on the exact polling place for each voter, including the street address (Coffey et al. 2009).

The Campaign for Change was funded with $25 million dollars, a record for grassroots politics in Ohio, with the bulk of the money coming from the Obama campaign. These lavish funds were available because Obama had chosen not to accept public financing in the general election and continued his record-breaking primary fund-raising through the fall campaign (Toner 2010). In fact, the decision to forego public financing was closely connected to the planning for an extensive grassroots effort. As David Plouffe, Obama’s campaign manager, writes,

Most painfully, taking the federal funds meant losing control of our secret weapon: we would have to largely outsource our entire grassroots ground campaign to the [Democratic Party]. As with fundraising, there were many people volunteering for us who would offer their help in the name of Obama. If these people were forced to volunteer through the Democratic Party, no matter how clearly the mission was stated, we feared we could lose up to 20 percent of our volunteers. (2009, 260)

This comment highlights the other resource the Obama campaign brought to the effort: a large number of enthusiastic volunteers, many mobilized via the Internet. By election day, an estimated twenty-four thousand people had volunteered for the Obama campaign in Ohio (Coffey et al. 2009).

The Campaign for Change was built from the “bottom up,” principally using activists hired by the Obama campaign for this purpose, many of whom were veterans of the primary campaign. The campaign had begun the process of building a grassroots organization during the long Democratic primary contest. For example, in the first caucus state, Iowa, Plouffe writes,

We made an aggressive gamble and staffed up to huge numbers very quickly. Presidential campaigns usually hire in waves for the caucuses, with most staff brought on toward the end of the campaign when people are beginning to pay closer attention. We took the opposite approach—not an insignificant budget risk at the time—and placed more staff in more communities earlier than any campaign in history. (2009, 62)
Indeed, the Obama primary organization remained active in Ohio after the 2008 presidential primary.

A key to this development was a grassroots organization that was largely independent of other political forces and concerns:

Most politicos . . . thought we were nuts. But we stuck to our guns and refused to engage in many of the bidding wars for support of political figures. This became a source of tension for some of our more traditional supporters, who wondered why we were so focused on volunteers instead of the warlords who had been getting taken care of for decades and had proved they could turn out the vote with some degree of success. (Plouffe 2009, 66)

Although Obama certainly had prominent allies in the state, such as Governor Strickland and the ODP, this independence by and large extended to the staff of the Campaign for Change, allowing for a single-minded focus on implementing the campaign’s strategy: “Our dogged refusal to be led around by the nose by insiders and interest groups was driven by a few factors. . . . We were trying to expand the electorate and attract new and younger voters along with independents and Republicans, [and] we could not afford to spend time at events where there would solely be a limited audience of traditional Democratic activists” (Plouffe 2009, 68).

Following this model, the lower echelons of the Campaign for Change were staffed by the Obama campaign’s own operatives, many of them not from the state or the local areas in which they worked. In keeping with the drive for local independence, if they were from the locality, they were rarely drawn from local interest group or party organizations or chosen in consultation with such organizations. These local operatives were tied to the national campaign in four ways. First, there was constant two-way communication between the operatives and the higher levels of the organization. Second, there was constant communication between the campaign and its volunteers in the local areas. Third, the operatives and volunteers were “empowered” to use the campaign’s formidable online databases: “In a difficult decision, and after a struggle with people who’d done campaigns before, we actually gave volunteers log-ins to our databases, access to all the other volunteers in their area, and told them to get the job done” (Carson 2009, 44).

Finally, each operative had a detailed handbook that laid out the campaign’s goals, methods, and timetables, which was supplemented by extensive training. These handbooks covered all aspects of the grassroots campaign, including voter registration, early voting, voter contact, and GOTV. The handbooks put a special emphasis on information, both detailed information provided to the operatives by the campaign and detailed information on local activities provided back to the campaign from the operatives. Although the handbooks
may not have always fit local political conditions perfectly, they provided the operatives with consistent direction and technical acumen—the kind of resources and skills typically acquired by working in local politics.

If the Campaign for Change was built from the bottom up, it was directed from the top down. The Obama campaign was in control of the grassroots operations, achieving one of the original goals of the campaign's design. Using language that accurately describes the 2004 presidential effort in Mahoning County, Plouffe argues,

[John] Kerry also could not afford to support a field organizing campaign, so almost all his groundwork was done by the DNC, state Democratic parties, and outside groups. This situation offered a clear lesson, one that struck with me—if you believed in running a strong ground game based on people leading the charge in their local communities—nothing could be more problematic than having zero control over that operation. (2009, 257)

This extensive control created a highly “coordinated campaign,” not so much among different partisan organizations, with their “kingmakers,” “warlords,” and other “insiders,” but within the Campaign for Change itself.

Former ODP chair David Leland, the architect of the highly successful Ohio Coordinated Campaigns in 1992 and 1996, said, “I’m telling you I have never seen the kind of ground game the Democratic Party is putting together this year, just in numbers, size, intensity and enthusiasm” (Torry and Riskind 2008). To paraphrase Frank Sinatra, the Obama campaign did it their way.

The 2008 Campaign in Mahoning County

The full details of the Campaign for Change’s operation in Mahoning County are not publically known. However, the available information suggests the resources were extensive, with the campaign having three offices in the county, thirty-five paid staffers, and a large number of volunteers. In addition, the grassroots operation appears to have run smoothly at all stages of the campaign. The local operatives had detailed goals for the number of houses visited, completed phone calls, volunteers recruited, and commitments to vote early; their job performance was evaluated based on meeting these goals (Lewis 2009). For the most part, this operation closely followed the campaign’s handbook.

However, from the perspective of the Mahoning County Democratic Party, the 2008 presidential campaign looked as “uncoordinated” as in 2004. A local Obama operative reported little formal interaction between the Campaign for Change and the local party. In fact, the Campaign for Change staff was
discouraged from working with the county party and instead directed to concentrate on their voter-contact goals. This individual noted that “with the exception of accidentally coordinated activities, the Mahoning County Democratic Party and Obama campaign operated independently.” This extended to voter-registration drives, campaign events, and GOTV activities. The only instance in which this source recalled the Campaign for Change and local party operatives mixing was a one-day training seminar in Columbus, in which both teams were encouraged “to mobilize potential Obama supporters as well as the Democratic base.” But once everyone went into the field, the Obama campaign and local party organization operated separately. The relationship between the local Campaign for Change, Obama campaign staff, and the Mahoning Democratic Party chair was almost nonexistent. An insider said, “If Lisa [Antonini] would have walked into Obama Headquarters, they would not even know who she was.”

The Mahoning Democratic Party may have had even less interaction with the Campaign for Change than other local party organizations in Ohio. This is because Chair Antonini’s relationship with the ODP was strained. In 2005, she had backed Dennis Lieberman over Chris Redfern for state party chair, and in 2006 she backed Michael Coleman over Ted Strickland in the gubernatorial race. Her candidates lost on both occasions. Antonini claimed she was “excluded from state party politics” after voting against Chairman Redfern (Skolnick 2009). However, Redfern explained it differently, saying she distanced herself from the state party by not attending any executive committee meetings after he won the chairmanship (Skolnick 2009). In 2008, she exacerbated the rift by openly backing an independent candidate who ran against the popular Democratic county prosecutor. These kinds of problems are, of course, common in party organizations. In any event, the stage was set for a nearly complete sidelining of the county party in the presidential election.

Keeping the local party out of the presidential campaign had some negative consequences. Attendance was low at many campaign events. David Skolnick, political writer for The Vindicator, said if it were not for organized labor, senior citizens, and school children, some events, such as Joe Biden’s area visit, would have been lucky to draw one hundred people. The major problems were poor scheduling and an inability to rouse the party faithful. Indeed, the county party officials had no role in the presidential campaign except for speaking at selected rallies. Chair Antonini attended most events but was not seated with the VIPs.

The separation also was evident with regard to information sharing. It was a one-way arrangement, with the Obama campaign not sharing new voter information with the county party but the local party providing the Obama campaign with its list of elected officials, area labor and business
leaders, and campaign volunteers. The lists were annotated with detailed and useful information, such as who should be invited to events and who was dependable. Some local party volunteers migrated to the Obama campaign, although most opted to stay downtown at party headquarters. The separation continued through Election Day. The Campaign for Change regional field director was instructed to rent office space for thirty-five attorneys who were deployed from out-of-state to check voter turnout in all precincts against the Democratic Performance Index. They sat at their laptops watching for signs of vote fraud.

The traditional coordinating of the presidential and down-ticket campaigns was largely absent in 2008, although the Campaign for Change and the ODP had announced congressional and state legislative candidates would be included in the GOTV effort. Canvassers were supposed to ask voters for whom they planned to vote, then the information would be entered into the party’s database and could be used for targeting (J. Miller 2008a). The Campaign for Change omitted all other contests from its local phone-banking script, although the ODP left some candidates on its scripts. The same was true for literature drops: Campaign for Change volunteers only distributed Obama campaign materials, while the party volunteers included Obama’s handouts in their packets. Chris Bowers, Open Left editor, noticed the contradiction in Iowa and wondered if the same would hold in Ohio (Ohio Daily Blog 2008b). The ODP responded almost immediately with a memo, “Unprecedented Cooperation between the Obama Campaign and the Ohio Democratic Party” (Ohio Daily Blog 2008a), which outlined the joint efforts. The down-ticket races were not addressed in the memo (Potts 2008).

The ODP’s own Neighborhood Leader Plan, an elaborate blueprint to energize the electorate, was separate from the Campaign for Change. An army of neighborhood leaders, who were tantamount to unelected precinct captains and ward leaders, was expected to network with family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, and congregants to discuss the importance of electing the Democratic slate. Specifically, the volunteers were asked to go door to door to speak with targeted voters and identify potential voters, arrange an event in their homes or communities, and provide the state party with data for VoteBuilder, the ODP’s voter file. The coded walking lists indicated whether the person should collect information for the presidential race or include congressional, state legislative, and other down-ticket candidates (Ohio Democratic Party n.d.). Thus, the inclusion of state and local candidates in party activities appears to have been optional.

In 2008, GOTV efforts were kept largely separate. The Campaign for Change had its own detailed plan for walking precincts and phone banking, which was separate from the state- and local-level ODP operation. Some observers
believed this caused an unnecessary overlap in activities as well as hard feelings within the local party ranks. Numerous party faithful who had been instrumental in many past presidential elections felt ignored by the Obama campaign. The local Campaign for Change included mostly people with little knowledge of Mahoning County politics. Several Obama operatives encouraged family and acquaintances to volunteer in the county, which “inadvertently perpetuated the separation” between the two camps (Lewis 2009).

The Obama campaign’s success at young-voter outreach on college campuses and in local communities is evidenced by the increase in voter turnout among eighteen- to twenty-nine-year-olds and their overwhelming support for the Democratic presidential ticket (Abramowitz 2009). The campaign, however, had its problems at Youngstown State University (YSU) in Mahoning County. According to Joni Koneval, YSU College Democrats president, the student organization and Campaign for Change staff “got off to a good start, but the relationship deteriorated rather quickly.” The first Obama staffer assigned to campus was from South Carolina. He worked closely with the group and understood the constraints under which student groups operate. Two of the three who replaced him “didn’t care” about university regulations, such as signage locations and using campus food services. Koneval warned them about the possibility of being sanctioned, but their response was, “This is the way it is done on other Ohio campuses.”

Koneval is convinced that it would have been easier to coordinate activities, such as voter registration and rallies, with hometown volunteers rather than “outsiders.” The rift resulted in the College Democrats breaking from the Campaign for Change and creating its own group, Students for Change. Approximately one-half of the College Democrats membership wanted nothing to do with the Obama staff. According to Koneval, the YSU College Democrats were virtually ignored at campaign events, including when Obama visited the area. The cleavage led to other problems. The Obama campaign mounted early-voting efforts on campus, which fizzled. It tried to convince commuter students to leave campus in a large white van with a “stranger” so they could vote at the Board of Elections. Another plan was to have students sleep outside the Board of Elections, which is in a high-crime area, so they would be there when the doors opened. Students were rightfully leery of both plans.

As in the past, labor unions played a large and largely independent role in the 2008 campaign in Ohio and in the local presidential campaign as well (Feller 2010). A twofold strategy centered on convincing union households and nonunion white working-class voters to support the Obama-Biden ticket (Russo 2008). Working America, the campaign organization of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations, had two hundred paid staffers on the ground in Ohio. The Service Employees Interna-
tional Union had another 175 paid organizers who targeted African American areas, while allied groups like MoveOn.org and the Public Interest Research Group covered the suburbs (Russo 2008). Ohio union voters were lukewarm about Obama: just 58 percent of union members voted for him as compared to 71 percent in Michigan and 68 percent in Pennsylvania (Russo 2008). According to John Russo (2008), YSU Center for Working-Class Studies director, area union members who staffed phone banks met with resistance from labor union members when asked to vote for Obama. Indeed, Working America was more effective in mobilizing nonunion households to vote for Obama than it was in convincing union members to vote for him. Campaign watchers report that the Obama operatives showed little respect for local-area union leaders, never learning their names or what unions they headed.

How did the Obama campaign fare in Mahoning County on Election Day? On balance, the results were quite positive but not especially impressive by historical standards: Obama received 79,173 ballots and 64 percent of the two-party vote. These figures represent a decline of some four thousand votes from the “uncoordinated campaign” of 2004. This vote loss was a little larger than John McCain suffered compared to Bush in 2004. The 64 percent of the two-party vote was slightly higher than Kerry’s margin in 2004 but far below the 70 percent Bill Clinton received in 1996. Voter registration was also down from its high point in 2004 but still high by historical standards (178,270) (Ohio Secretary of State 2008).

Party on the Periphery in 2008

In many respects, Obama’s innovative presidential campaign bypassed Mahoning County politics, and it certainly bypassed the local Democratic Party organization. Unlike in 1992, 1996, and 2000, the local party provided no significant services to the presidential campaign when it came to grassroots activities. In this regard, the party’s role resembled that in the 2004 campaign, when it played an independent role alongside the Kerry campaign, ACT, unions, and other interest groups. But unlike in 2004, the 2008 presidential campaign in Mahoning County was characterized by a sophisticated grassroots effort, the Campaign for Change. Thus, there was no true “coordinated campaign” that linked the presidential, party, state, and local candidate efforts together at the grass roots. In 2008, the local party was on the periphery of the presidential campaign.

The Campaign for Change represents another variation in the relationship of presidential campaigns to local party organizations. The creation of a separate, single-purpose campaign organization that drew on both the endowments of
the state party and the Obama campaign is an unusual version of a “coordinated campaign”—an integrated grassroots operation within a single organization but not the integration of different organizations. This approach was quite different from the highly integrated organizational effort of the second Clinton campaign in 1996 (and the weaker version of 2000) as well as the reliance on local party organizations for GOTV services in 1992. It was a far cry from the “uncoordinated” campaign of 2004, when the Democrats outsourced grassroots services to ACT, unions, and other interest group allies. In 2008, the Obama campaign kept tight control of its considerable resources, both its finances and volunteers, and deployed them in an effective fashion.

It is worth noting that for all its innovation and success, the Campaign for Change did not perform especially well when compared to the approaches used in other presidential years. Even within the context of a heavily Democratic county, it did not generate the most votes, the highest Democratic percentage, or the highest level of voter registration. Although many factors may have influenced these figures besides the Campaign for Change, it is not unreasonable to have expected better results. Thus, one could ask, Would the Campaign for Change have performed even better if it had worked more closely with the local Democratic Party? Many local observers believe it would have because the great resources and organizational skills of the Obama campaign could have been combined with knowledge of local politics and local resources. Indeed, some local pundits believe that Obama did not care about Mahoning County, perhaps because he had lost the county to Hillary Clinton in the 2008 primary. The Campaign for Change certainly left hard feelings in the local party.

In defense of the Obama campaign, it did avoid entanglement in local party factionalism and the special problems of numerous local “kingmakers,” “warlords,” and “insiders.” It was able to deploy its considerable resources with maximum freedom, exercising great control over the means and method of the grassroots campaign. This operation appeared to display more internal control and efficiency than previous versions of the Coordinated Campaign precisely for these reasons. From the perspective of a presidential candidate, this kind of control is highly desirable in the fast-paced and unpredictable environment of a presidential campaign. And it may well have allowed the campaign to reach new kinds of voters that local party organizations could not. For all these reasons, future presidential candidates may well emulate Obama’s efforts, if they have the funds and volunteers that will allow them to bypass the need for a traditional coordinated campaign.

Note

1. Much of the information on the Campaign for Change is based on off-the-record interviews with operatives active in the broader Mahoning Valley and elsewhere.
The Party's Still Going
Local Party Strength and Activity in 2008
Melody Crowder-Meyer

Political parties have been an important part of the American political system for almost its entire existence. They organize participation, educate the public, recruit leaders, define policy objectives, support candidates, and connect the people to their government (Eldersveld 1982; Huntington 1968; Leiserson 1958). Perhaps, then, it is not surprising that political scientists have devoted so much attention to the study of political parties. One component of party research, however, has received little attention. In recent decades, only a few studies have broadly examined the condition of parties at the local level, considered how this condition varies across locales, or analyzed the effects of such variation. Though difficult to study because they are both numerous and diverse, county parties are primary providers of assistance and information to those seeking to participate in the political system as voters, supporters, or candidates, and they often shape who decides to start a political career. Thus, it is critical to know more about county party organizations and their relationships with other political actors. How do parties interact with candidates, community and interest groups, and particular segments of the population? Where do parties thrive?

In this chapter, I draw on new data from my 2008 Survey of County Party Leaders—the first comprehensive, nationwide survey of county party organizations in several decades—in order to update and expand what we know about the strength, activity, and effects of county party organizations. I also examine questions about several important party activities that have been studied only minimally at the local level—such as party recruitment, party gatekeeping, and party interaction with community and interest groups.
highlight changes in party structure and activity over time, provide a first look at the prevalence of some forms of county party activity, and describe similarities and differences between Democratic and Republican Party organizations. In all, I find that county parties today are structured and active in recruiting and supporting candidates, campaigning, and cooperating with other groups in their communities. As I describe my new data, I lay a foundation demonstrating that county parties have the potential to significantly affect who is recruited to run for office, who receives party support, who gains assistance from community and interest groups, and who is eventually elected to public office.

However, I also find a great deal of variation between county parties in both structure and activity. Because county parties have the potential to affect political participation and voting and can shape who runs for and wins political office, it is important to determine where county parties are strong and active and where they are not. Thus, I look at several measures of party strength in detail and examine which types of counties are most likely to have strong or weak party organizations. I test how county location, population demographics, and political preferences affect party structure, party activity, and the political activity of community and interest groups. In short, I find that parties are less likely to be structured and active in rural counties, counties that vote heavily Republican, and counties with more nonwhite residents. Residents of these counties will less often have county parties that can fulfill their potential to encourage political participation, recruit quality candidates, and connect the public to the government.

Why County Parties?

Many studies of political parties focus on parties at the state or national level. While it is unquestionably important to investigate such parties, these studies can tell us little about the thousands of local party organizations that also have the potential to dramatically shape political participation, political campaigns, and public policy. The diversity that makes local parties difficult to study also provides variation not present in parties at higher levels and, so, provides a unique opportunity to determine the effects of party strength and activities at every level. Local parties are the grass roots of the political system—the organizations most likely to be in contact with any given citizen and consequently most likely to affect whether and how that citizen participates politically (Eldersveld 1982; Gerber and Green 2000). These organizations shape who holds public office at every level, influencing policy making
throughout the American political system (Clark and Prysby 2004; Eldersveld 1982; Frendreis, Gibson, and Vertz 1990; McSweeney and Zvesper 1991).

Thus, it is critical to gain a better understanding of the current state of county parties. However, there have been only a few major studies of local party organizations in recent decades. Cornelius Cotter and colleagues' nationwide study of state and local parties in the late 1970s laid the foundation for modern parties research, providing evidence that party organizations were not on the decline (e.g., Cotter et al. 1984; Gibson et al. 1983; Gibson, Frendreis, and Vertz 1989). Since this seminal work, other scholars have explored the activities of local parties, though they have generally restricted their analyses to particular regions (Steed et al. 1998; Clark and Prysby 2004) or groups of states (Frendreis and Gitelson 1999).¹

Though each of these studies offers a great deal of useful information about local party organizations, their leaders, and activities, there remain several key reasons why additional study of local parties is needed. First, most of the existing studies focus on a specific set of local parties—such as parties in eleven southern states (Clark and Prysby 2004; Steed et al. 1998) or a sample of parties in the one thousand most populous counties (Shea and Green 2007a). As a result, we cannot be sure how well the conclusions from these studies apply to other types of party organizations. Additionally, these studies do not ask questions about several party activities and relationships that research suggests have important implications for political outcomes. For example, though parties have a significant role to play in finding and supporting candidates to run for office and sorting between candidates who may emerge to run for office on their own, these studies ask few questions related to candidate recruitment and no questions related to gatekeeping activities (Eldersveld 1982). Party gatekeeping activities, such as taking sides in primary elections, have significant and potentially negative effects on the political process, but few have examined them in detail (though see Sanbonmatsu 2006; Crowder-Meyer 2009).

Second, these studies do not provide data that allow us to examine closely how county parties interact with other groups in the local political network. Recent research has highlighted the existence of “party networks” or “informal party organizations”—a web of formal party organizations and nonparty actors such as community and interest groups that together recruit and support political candidates (Koger, Masket, and Noel 2005; Masket 2004; Skinner 2005). Yet, the data that currently exist provide little opportunity to examine in detail how parties interact with nonparty groups in candidate recruitment and support.

Consequently, in order to increase our understanding of party recruitment and party interaction with nonparty groups and to update and supplement
our current knowledge about the overall state of local party organizations, I conducted a survey of all identifiable county party leaders in the United States. Between October 2007 and March 2008, I sent a survey questionnaire to 5,427 Democratic and Republican county party leaders across the United States. I received 2,326 completed responses, for a 43 percent response rate.

What Do County Parties Look Like Today?

In this section, I provide a look at the characteristics and activities of county party organizations across the United States using data from my 2008 survey. I compare party strength today to parties in previous decades and introduce new data on county party activities. I describe the components of several measures of party strength, which I later examine in an analysis of what types of counties are likely to have active, healthy party organizations and politically active community and interest groups and what types of counties will more often have parties that fall short in performing some of their key functions.

Party Structure

The results in table 7.1 confirm that county parties are an active component of the American political system. County parties are involved in elections at all levels, with over 80 percent of parties reporting being somewhat or very active in county, state, and national elections. These results reveal a slight Republican advantage in party activity, with greater proportions of Republican than Democratic chairs reporting high levels of activity in elections at each level.

In keeping with previous work on political parties since the 1980s, I find that county parties across the United States continue to be organizations with

| Local elections | 28.2 | 35.7 | 31.5 | 40.4 |
| County elections | 27.0 | 56.3 | 27.9 | 60.0 |
| State elections | 31.6 | 59.8 | 32.5 | 60.2 |
| National elections | 31.8 | 54.4 | 35.1 | 51.4 |

N = 1,038 to 1,128

Question wording: How active is your county party organization in [local/county/state/national] elections? (Not active, not very active, somewhat active, very active)
substantial structure (see table 7.2). Almost half of parties report the presence of a headquarters during election campaigns, and nearly one-fifth of party organizations report they have a year-round office. One measure of structure has particularly strengthened over the past thirty years: parties appear to be more publicly accessible today than ever before. Nearly half of county parties had a website in 2008, while fewer than 30 percent had a telephone listing in 1996 or 1980. Also, while in previous studies Republican parties appeared to have an advantage in terms of party structure, my data demonstrate that Democratic parties have gained an equal footing with Republican parties and even surpassed Republicans in their use of party websites.

Party structure can affect political outcomes in a number of ways. Because party structure provides a way for interested voters, contributors, and potential candidates to access information about the party and its candidates and provides a base from which party candidates can conduct their campaigns, structured parties should more often see their candidates win elections. Such structure also makes it more likely that citizens interested in participating politically will be able to locate the party and become involved—whether by registering as a voter, volunteering for a candidate, making campaign contributions, or deciding to run for office. Compared to previous studies of county parties, I find a slight decrease in party structure, suggesting that candidates may not be able to use party resources in as many counties as they once could in order to support their campaigns. However, the substantial increase in the public presence of county parties, through the existence of party websites, should improve citizens' ability to become politically involved.

At least half of county party leaders report that their parties do not have each of these fundamental components of party structure; thus, they are likely not as well prepared to encourage public involvement in politics as more structured party organizations. So, it is important to determine what factors influence this variation in party structure. At the end of this chapter, I examine in detail what types of counties are likely to have structured and active party organizations, using an ordinary least-squares (OLS) model to test the effects of several county-level characteristics on party structure, activity, and support by community and interest groups.
Party Screening and Recruitment of Candidates

As noted above, one contribution of this study is that it examines a number of questions about the recruitment, screening, and gatekeeping activities of county parties as they relate to the emergence of county and subcounty candidates. It is particularly important to examine candidate emergence at this level, as in many cases the decision to run for lower-level offices provides the foundation for a political career. Additionally, certain underrepresented groups in the population, such as women, are even more likely than others to begin their political careers at the local level (Dolan, Deckman, and Swers 2007; Lawless and Fox 2005). Thus, it is critical to understand candidate emergence at the local level in order to explain representation at all levels of government. Previous examinations of party organizations have found that local parties are involved in candidate recruitment, although we know little about recruitment for county offices specifically and nothing about gatekeeping by local party organizations (Cotter et al. 1984; Shea 1995).

I find that recruitment was a very common county party activity in 2008. As table 7.3 demonstrates, 80 percent of county parties report that they commonly recruit candidates for county legislative office, 65 percent commonly recruit for other county offices such as clerk, sheriff, or treasurer, and over 30 percent of county parties recruit for subcounty offices such as mayor, town councilor, or school board member. While existing data do not provide an exact comparison to the more detailed questions I ask related to party re-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Party Organizations That Commonly Recruit Candidates for County and Subcounty Candidates</th>
<th>Democrats (%)</th>
<th>Republicans (%)</th>
<th>Both (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>County legislative office (e.g., county commissioner)</td>
<td>76.1</td>
<td>84.2</td>
<td>80.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other county office (e.g., sheriff, clerk, treasurer)</td>
<td>57.8</td>
<td>71.1</td>
<td>64.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subcounty legislative office (e.g., mayor, town council)</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>35.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other subcounty office (e.g., school board member, town clerk)</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal office (e.g., attorney, judge, prosecutor)</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>42.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_N = 1,310 to 1,459_

Question wording: Please list the county and local offices for which your party organization commonly recruits candidates. (I coded the open-ended responses into the five categories above.)
The Party’s Still Going

cruitment, an examination of the data collected by Cotter and his colleagues in 1979 and 1980 suggests that county party recruitment activities may have increased since that time.

Split by party, about the same percentage of Republicans and Democrats report recruiting for subcounty offices, though Republicans are more likely than Democrats to commonly recruit candidates for county-level offices. Republicans are also more likely than Democrats to report recruitment of legal-office candidates, who are often elected at the county level. This party difference is also present in the degree of formalization of the candidate recruitment process, with more Republican than Democratic Party chairs responding that their party organization has a process for identifying potential candidates (37 percent of Republicans compared to 31 percent of Democrats) and a person or group within the party organization focused on candidate recruitment (42 percent of Republicans compared to 37 percent of Democrats). This represents a change in the party recruitment balance reported in previous studies of party organizations. Cotter et al. (1984) find that Democrats and Republicans were equally active in recruiting candidates for subcounty office in 1980 and that Democrats were slightly more likely than Republicans to be somewhat or very involved in recruiting county office candidates at that time; yet, in my data, Republicans appear to have taken the lead over Democrats on these fronts.

Although work examining the emergence of candidates for state or federal office often describes candidates as self-starters and minimizes the importance of party recruitment activities, recruitment is an important responsibility for parties at the county and subcounty levels. In addition to these survey results indicating high levels of party recruitment activities, my interviews with state and county party leaders consistently revealed the importance of party involvement in county candidate emergence. These leaders indicated that it is often “really hard to find candidates to run for lower-level offices,” because they pay relatively little but require a large investment of time. While party leaders agreed that “there’s never a shortage of people wanting to run [for higher offices],” when it comes to county elections, they reported that they had to work hard to meet their goal of “running someone for every office.” Thus, candidate recruitment is often critical to ensure both that voters have a choice between multiple candidates for each office and that high-quality candidates emerge to run. As county and local officeholders go on to run for higher offices, the implications of party recruitment at the county level move up the political pipeline. Thus, the increase in party recruitment activity discussed here suggests that county parties may have an even more significant effect on who runs for office today than in the past several decades.
Parties may also become involved in the candidate emergence and nomination process through negative recruitment or party gatekeeping. Party gatekeeping includes such activities as encouraging a candidate not to run for office, becoming involved in party primaries by taking sides or assisting challenged incumbents, and seeking to avoid primaries generally. To my knowledge, table 7.4 presents the first data measuring county party participation in these activities. My data demonstrate that a higher percentage of party organizations participate in many gatekeeping activities than have processes in place to identify and recruit candidates. Given party reports of difficulties getting sufficient numbers of candidates to run for county offices, it is not surprising that more parties report recruiting candidates for county and county legislative offices than report encouraging a candidate not to run. Yet, nearly half of all county party organizations still report getting involved in primary elections in some way.\(^9\)

Few studies have examined party gatekeeping at any level, but this evidence that gatekeeping is fairly common suggests the need for future work to evaluate the implications of these activities. Many party leaders with whom I discussed these types of activities condemned them, suggesting that it is wrong to interfere in the democratic process in any way. They argued that parties should equally support all candidates who want to run for office.

### Table 7.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Party Organizations That Somewhat or Very Often . . .</th>
<th>Democrats (%)</th>
<th>Republicans (%)</th>
<th>Both (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encouraged a candidate not to run for office</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took sides in a primary election</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>37.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped incumbents in a primary election</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>51.0</td>
<td>48.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Party Leaders Who Believe It Is Sometimes or Usually Better to Avoid a Primary if There Will Be a Competitive General Election</th>
<th>Democrats (%)</th>
<th>Republicans (%)</th>
<th>Both (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>65.2</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>64.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Question wording:* In local and county elections in recent years, how often has someone from your county party encouraged a candidate not to run for a local or county office? (Not at all, rarely, somewhat often, very often).

In local and county elections in recent years, how often has someone from your county party (1) helped a challenged incumbent in a local or county office primary, and (2) taken sides in a local or county office primary? (Not at all, rarely, somewhat often, very often).
for their party and should allow primary voters to determine who receives the party nomination. While the party leaders with whom I spoke generally did not elaborate on how party gatekeeping might unfairly shape who runs for office, recent research demonstrates that gatekeeping activities have a negative effect on the representation of at least one politically underrepresented group, women, at both the county (Crowder-Meyer 2009) and state legislative (Sanbonmatsu 2006) levels. The data presented here indicate that Democrats are somewhat less likely than Republicans to engage in gatekeeping activities. As gatekeeping has particularly negative effects on women’s representation, these data suggest that party differences in gatekeeping behavior may partly explain women’s greater representation among Democratic than Republican officeholders.

However, while there are reasons for parties to avoid gatekeeping, other party leaders I interviewed described involvement in party gatekeeping as an important way to strengthen a party’s candidates in general elections. Even speaking on the record, they said things like, “We don’t do primaries in [this] county,” “Primaries divert resources from the general election, so we try not to have them,” and in contested primary elections we work to “send the signal that our Democratic candidate is the Democratic candidate to vote for.” While my data show that Democratic parties engage in fewer gatekeeping activities than Republican parties, and gatekeeping is somewhat more common in the Northeast than other regions, gatekeeping occurs regularly in both parties and throughout the United States. Given incentives for gatekeeping to continue in order to strengthen general election candidates and the potentially detrimental effect of gatekeeping on the fairness of the electoral process, it is important to evaluate party gatekeeping more closely. The data presented here offer an initial baseline, which can be used in future studies of gatekeeping and its effects.

### Party Campaign Activities

Once candidates have decided to run for subcounty and county office, my survey results demonstrate, party organizations are quite active in supporting them in a variety of ways. Table 7.5 reveals that over 60 percent of Democratic and Republican Party organizations report participating at least occasionally in fifteen of the sixteen campaign activities listed in my survey (the exception is helping with a campaign website, which about 43 percent of all party organizations report doing). On average, each party participated in twelve (75 percent) of the sixteen activities listed. Comparing my results to those from studies of county parties in 1980 and 1996 (Cotter et al. 1984; Frendreis and
Chapter 7

TABLE 7.5
Campaign Activities of County Party Organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Party Organizations That Did the Following for Candidates Running for Local or County Office</th>
<th>Democrats (%)</th>
<th>Republicans (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contributed money to candidates</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arranged fund-raising events</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized campaign events (e.g., rallies)</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicized party/candidates by buying ads (e.g., newspaper, radio, TV)</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicized party/candidates with “free” media (e.g., press release, blog)</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized door-to-door or phone canvassing</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped with campaign coordination/strategy</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided/coordinated volunteers</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Produced campaign literature or materials</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped with a campaign website</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided campaign advice/expertise</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided training on issues (e.g., city policy)</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared voter or donor lists with candidates</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made party headquarters available for candidate use</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connected candidates with community/interest groups</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped candidates meet nomination requirements</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 1,767 to 1,968

Question wording: During elections over the past three years, how often did your county party organization provide the following types of campaign support to candidates running for county and local office? (Never, occasionally, sometimes, often)

Gitelson 1999) demonstrates that party activities today match or exceed those reported in previous studies. High numbers of party organizations continue to contribute money to candidates, and even more parties today than in the past arrange fund-raising and other campaign events, help with campaign coordination, and publicize their party and candidates through paid media, free media, and canvassing. Indeed, as suggested above by the number of parties that currently have websites, party organizations appear to be using the power of the Internet on their and candidates’ behalf—via their increased use of free media (like blogging) and their level of assistance with campaign websites. Party organizations also participate at high levels in other campaign activities—providing training and expertise to candidates, assisting in meeting nomination requirements, and connecting candidates with community and interest groups.
These activities are important for several reasons. Fundamentally, party activity is aimed at ensuring candidates contest elections effectively and win elected office. As parties are better able to support candidates in the ways presented in table 7.5, they are better able to ensure that voters are informed about the candidates and issues at stake in elections and are presented with a choice of several qualified candidates. Parties that engage in the activities discussed here also help candidates become better prepared to govern, as my interviews confirmed that training on issues and connections with community groups can be particularly important for new officeholders. Finally, a party that can offer these types of assistance to candidates may be better able to encourage qualified candidates to seek office in the first place—particularly candidates from underrepresented groups who may otherwise doubt their qualifications—which has important implications for quality and equality of representation (Lawless and Fox 2005).

There are some party differences in levels of campaign activity. Republicans lead Democrats in both the total number of activities in which they participate and almost all specific activities. Republicans seem to have a particular advantage over Democrats in campaign strategy and training. They are more active than Democrats in providing campaign advice, training on issues, and help with campaign coordination and strategy. This is a marked departure from past results, which found that in both 1980 and 1996 Democratic county parties nationwide matched or surpassed Republican parties in assisting candidates with campaign coordination.

Parties are most active in the Northeast, followed by north central parties and western and southern parties. Several other county-level factors, such as county-resident wealth, education, race, and urbanity, also influence the level of party activity. I examine the relationships between these variables and party structure, recruitment and gatekeeping activities, campaign-support activities, and interaction with nonparty groups at the end of this chapter.

Table 7.5 indicates that over three-quarters of county party organizations contribute money to candidates—a statistic that seems to have increased over time. Yet, past studies provide little to no detail about these county party contributions. The data in table 7.6 present a look at approximately how large and significant county party contributions are and provide a baseline for future studies of county party spending. Overall, county party leaders report providing a fairly substantial proportion of the funding needed by political candidates: 15 to 18 percent of funding needed for county legislative candidates and 8 to 10 percent of funding needed for local legislative or elected board candidates. However, these results also make clear that county and subcounty candidates must raise or provide the majority of the funding for their campaigns themselves. Inasmuch as party campaign contributions affect
TABLE 7.6
Campaign Spending in County and Subcounty Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Democrats</th>
<th></th>
<th>Republicans</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Median</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Median</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County legislative office</td>
<td>$25,996</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
<td>$19,203</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subcounty legislative office</td>
<td>$10,712</td>
<td>$1,200</td>
<td>$9,534</td>
<td>$2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local elected board</td>
<td>$3,505</td>
<td>$550</td>
<td>$3,521</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What Proportion of That Amount Do Party Organizations Typically Spend or Donate to Assist an Average Candidate for

<p>| | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>County legislative office</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subcounty legislative office</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local elected board</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 1,464 to 1,669

Question wording: To the best of your knowledge, about how much would a candidate for the following offices in your area have to spend, on average, to win both the primary and general elections for that office?

About how much can your party usually spend or donate, on average, to assist an average candidate for the following offices? County legislative office (e.g., county supervisor or commissioner), local legislative office (e.g., city or town council), local elected board (e.g., school board).

the socioeconomic and other characteristics of candidates who enter and win electoral races, these findings merit further consideration.

Party Interaction with Community and Interest Groups

Nearly 90 percent of party organizations report that connecting candidates with community or interest groups is a campaign activity in which they participate. In fact, my data demonstrate that community and interest groups play a substantial role in county and subcounty office elections. About 51 percent of party organizations in my survey indicate that nonparty groups are somewhat or very politically active in their county. There is also a fairly large amount of contact between party organizations and nonparty groups. Table 7.7 contains the responses of party leaders to questions about their contact with community and interest group leaders. Over a quarter of party organizations contacted community and interest groups somewhat or very often in order to get advice about potential candidates or request support. While both parties report being contacted by nonparty groups about equally often, Dem-
TABLE 7.7
County Party Contact with Community and Interest Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How Often Did Someone from the</th>
<th>Democrats</th>
<th>Republicans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>County Party Organization</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Very</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact a Nonparty Group in</td>
<td>Often (%)</td>
<td>Often (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Order to...</td>
<td></td>
<td>(%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find a candidate for local/county</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>office</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get advice about a potential</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>candidate the party was</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>considering</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Request support for the party</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or a candidate</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Often Did a Nonparty Group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact Someone in the County</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party in Order to...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Propose a potential candidate</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give advice about a candidate</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N = 1,913 to 1,932</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question wording: In elections over the last three years, how often did someone from your county party organization contact a community or interest group in order to (1) find a candidate for local or county office, (2) get advice about a potential candidate the party was considering for local or county office, or (3) request support (e.g., donations, volunteers) for the party or a local or county office candidate? (Not at all, not very often, somewhat often, very often)

Democrats are somewhat more likely than Republicans to have initiated contact with community and interest groups in order to find candidates or request support. As the candidates emerging from nonparty groups may differ from those emerging from within the party or elsewhere, this difference between Democrats and Republicans could have important implications for who runs for office from each party. For example, my analysis of data from the Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey (Putnam 2000a) and work by other scholars reveals that while party organizations remain male dominated (Baer 1993), women are more likely than men to be active in a number of other community and interest groups (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001). Thus, the greater contact shown here between community and interest groups and Democratic Party organizations, as compared to Republican Party organizations, may contribute to women's greater likelihood of running for office as Democrats rather than Republicans.

While these data demonstrate a significant amount of communication between parties and nonparty groups related to finding and recruiting candidates,
an even greater proportion of parties report that their candidates receive other types of assistance from nonparty groups. The results in table 7.8 highlight that over 40 percent of party organizations report sometimes or often receiving financial contributions, volunteers, candidate endorsements, and help with GOTV efforts from such groups. Over a quarter of parties also report being helped sometimes or often by these groups with joint sponsorship of campaign activities, production or distribution of campaign materials, and provision of mailing or donor lists.

Indeed, though scholarship rarely examines the relationship between party organizations and community and interest groups at the local level, the results presented here make clear that cooperation between parties and nonparty groups is quite common. As organizations that typically rely heavily on volunteers and work under significant resource constraints (e.g., the funding limits displayed in table 7.6), it is easy to see how parties might benefit from the assistance of community and interest groups in finding and supporting candidates. However, assistance from nonparty groups might also inhibit party success if it serves to promote only candidates who are associated with a specific issue or position of importance to a nonparty group rather than issues that are broadly appealing to the electorate. Future work should consider the effects of political activity by local community and interest groups and their interactions with local parties.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Parties Receiving the Following Services from Nonparty Groups Sometimes or Often</th>
<th>Democrats (%)</th>
<th>Republicans (%)</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Help producing or distributing campaign materials</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>37.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial contributions to the party or candidates</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>42.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endorsement of candidates</td>
<td>51.0</td>
<td>46.4</td>
<td>48.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help with GOTV efforts</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>46.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign volunteers</td>
<td>44.3</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>43.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint sponsorship of campaign activities</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate training seminars</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mailing or donor lists</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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N = 1,885 to 1,930

*Question wording:* Thinking about elections over the past three years, how often do community or interest groups support candidates for local and county office in the following ways? (Never, occasionally, sometimes, often)
Predicting Party Strength

Table 7.9 summarizes a set of twelve OLS regression analyses in which I predict components of party strength and nonparty group activity using several county demographic and political variables. Each column contains the results of an OLS regression, separated by party, in which the dependent variables are scales of party and nonparty group activities created by combining responses to the questions discussed above. Given the important role county parties and other groups can play in promoting political activity among county residents, it is important to determine where county parties and nonparty groups are strong and politically active and where they are not fulfilling this role. This table highlights key county characteristics that can be used to predict the strength of party organizations and the political activity of community and interest groups within a county.

Across each component of party and nonparty group activity, population density has a clear effect: the higher the proportion of the population living in rural areas, the less structured and active are party and nonparty groups. Traveling to interview party leaders made this distinction clear, as I visited urban county party leaders in high-rise county party offices and interviewed rural party leaders at Denny’s. My interviews provided explanations for this population density effect as well. Party leaders indicated that parties in rural areas have more difficulty finding candidates and activists to work for the party and its candidates during elections simply because people are so “spread out” making travel to the county seat more difficult. They also suggested that rural parties often have difficulty competing with urban county parties for attention and resources from higher-level (state) party organizations. In fact, party leaders I spoke with indicated that even when state parties do assist county parties in rural areas, “their techniques don’t always work as well” in the rural environment, so parties are not able to use provided resources effectively.

Even controlling for county partisanship, examination of the data indicates that several county characteristics have different effects on Democratic and Republican Party strength, suggesting that these parties draw their support from somewhat different demographic groups. For example, counties with a higher median household income tend to have more active Republican county parties, while county wealth is not statistically significantly related to Democratic Party strength and often has negatively signed coefficients for Democrats. Conversely, counties with a more highly educated population—where a greater proportion of the residents have a college degree—are more likely to have strong, active Democratic county parties. For Republicans, on the other hand, the education level of the population is rarely statistically
TABLE 7.9
The Effects of County Characteristics on Party and Nonparty Group Strength

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<td></td>
<td>D</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>R</td>
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<tr>
<td>Median household income</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage with at least bachelor's degree</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percentage nonwhite</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage over sixty-five years old</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percentage twenty-five to sixty-four years old</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
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<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage living in a rural area</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage Democratic presidential votes in 2000</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>North central</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeastern</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 650 to 1,037

Note: Plus and minus signs indicate the direction of each coefficient. Shading indicates a coefficient is statistically significant at p < 0.1, though most shaded coefficients have substantially smaller p-values. For space reasons, I have displayed the results of these tests in summary form. The full results are available from the author.

Source: 2008 Survey of County Party Leaders, the 2000 U.S. Census, the CQ Press Voting and Elections Collection.
significantly related to party strength. There is also evidence that both parties benefit from a primarily working-age population. Though my discussions with some county party leaders highlighted the importance of retirees to the party organization—suggesting that people who work fewer hours in an occupation often have more time available to volunteer for the party—these data suggest that having a greater working-age population is more strongly related to party strength and activity. The structure and activity of both parties is also lower in counties with larger racial minority populations. Despite the close voting relationship between some racial minority groups and the Democratic Party, the presence of such groups within a county does not appear to strengthen Democratic county party organizations.

The region coefficients in table 7.9 should be considered relative to parties in the excluded region—the West. Thus, in general, after taking into consideration all the included demographic and political variables, western county parties are more likely to be involved in candidate recruitment than county parties elsewhere, but they are otherwise less active in campaigns than parties in the northeastern and north central regions. The regional results for non-party group recruitment and support are particularly clear: county parties in the West receive more assistance from community and interest groups than do parties in the rest of the U.S. These results are in line with expectations, as many elections in the West are officially “nonpartisan.”

Examining just the average party strength by region, without controlling for other county characteristics (not shown), Democratic county parties are strongest in northeastern states, followed by states in the West, while Democratic parties are weaker in the north central states and weakest in southern states. Among Republicans, parties are also strongest in northeastern states and western states, while parties are weaker in the north central and southern states. Overall, the strongest county parties are northeastern Democratic parties, and the weakest are southern Democratic parties. This indicates some change in regional party strength since 1980. Though parties in the South remain weaker than parties elsewhere in the United States for both Democrats and Republicans, my findings demonstrate a clear strengthening of southern Republican parties relative to other local parties, compared to Party Transformation Study results in which southern Republican parties were by far the weakest of the entire group.

In all, these results illustrate where county parties are active and where they may not be fulfilling their potential role in the political system. County parties can serve as a critical contact point for citizens interested in becoming politically involved. As the results presented here demonstrate, many county parties canvass during elections, provide information about
candidates to voters, recruit quality candidates to run, help train candidates in issues important for local governance, and engage in many other activities that support the political process. However, not all citizens are equally well served by party organizations. People living in rural areas and in areas that vote more heavily Republican (for president) typically have county parties that are less structured and less active in recruiting candidates and in many other political activities. Areas with substantial racial minority populations are also likely to have weaker county parties, suggesting that residents of these areas may not be as easily able to participate in the political process as residents of other counties.

Conclusion

The new data I have presented here from my 2008 Survey of County Party Leaders demonstrate that county parties are strong and active in elections for subcounty through national office. County parties spend time and effort identifying and recruiting candidates for county and subcounty elections and are involved in supporting candidates for these offices in a wide variety of ways. Local community and interest groups are also active in recruiting and supporting candidates, supplementing and assisting with local party activities.

While party strength varies across counties, there are some consistent county correlates of party and nonparty group political activity. Rural counties are least likely to have strong party organizations, while counties with greater working-age populations have stronger party organizations. Democrats build stronger parties in counties with more highly educated residents, while Republicans benefit more from counties with wealthier residents. Finally, the greater the proportion of racial minority residents, the weaker county parties will be. The political activities of both parties and community and interest groups are generally similarly shaped by county demographics, leaving less possibility that nonparty groups will compensate for weaker political party organizations in areas where parties are less active.

The variation in party and nonparty group political activity discussed here may have important implications for the representation of citizens in various types of counties. Parties play a role in recruiting and supporting candidates to run for office, in ensuring that elections are contested by high-quality candidates, and in promoting political participation through registering voters, distributing information about candidates, and otherwise engaging with the public. Thus, counties in which parties are less strong and less active may provide fewer opportunities for citizens to engage in politics and may therefore produce inequalities in political representation.
Notes

1. Throughout this chapter, I use the terms county and local party interchangeably. Although some use the term local to include town or city parties in addition to county parties, in this chapter, I refer to town or city parties as subcounty, while county or local refers specifically to county party organizations. Also, counties include areas recognized by the census as being "county equivalent," such as parishes in Louisiana, boroughs in Alaska, and cities or consolidated city-counties throughout Virginia and in some other states.

2. Other work on local party organizations has also been conducted in recent years—for example Denise L. Baer and David A. Bositis's (1988) study of party-elite policy positions and beliefs about party procedural rules, Daniel M. Shea and John C. Green's (2007a, 2007b) study of party mobilization of young people, and Richard Skinner and Daniel Shea's (2008) examination of rational versus responsible party leadership. However, to my knowledge, these studies do not provide appropriate comparisons for the broad examination of party strength that is the focus of this chapter.

3. Theoretically, there could be 6,282 possible Democratic and Republican county party chairpersons from the 3,141 counties in the United States. I sent surveys to a slightly smaller number of party chairs because it was sometimes impossible to identify party leaders or to obtain party contact information in some counties. There is no centralized database of county party contact information, even within most states, and in some counties no organized Democratic or Republican Party organization exists. Thus, these counties are left out of my survey distribution.

4. My survey responses come from counties that are closely representative of counties nationwide. Comparing the counties about which I have data to all U.S. counties, there are no differences in population age or partisanship, though counties in my data set are slightly less rural, more racially diverse, wealthier, and more educated than the average U.S. county. I could not send surveys to some counties because they did not have operating party organizations. As I collected data, it became clear that this was more often the case in rural counties, which also tend to be less wealthy and less educated. Thus, the small differences between counties with survey responses and those without are at least partly attributable to this—indicating that while my data is not perfectly representative of all counties nationwide (though it is close), it is even more closely representative of all counties with county party organizations.

5. In the results presented here, I use data that is weighted to take into account the thirty-eight county parties from which I received more than one completed response (because a party organization had two cochairmen, both of whom completed the survey). Their responses are half-weighted. In these descriptive results I also include responses from town and district party chairpersons, who I surveyed in the few places where party organizations are not organized by county (primarily towns in Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Connecticut and districts in North Dakota and Alaska). Although county party organizations may differ from town or district party organizations in some ways, in the results that follow, including or excluding town and district parties has virtually no effect. According to the measures in my survey, county parties are marginally
stronger than town and district parties, but this difference is small and far from statistically significant. Thus, in the results presented here, I include town and district parties and, in doing so, can more accurately compare my results to those from past studies, such as the Party Transformation Study, that also included these parties.

6. Because these results are based on the reports of party leaders, it is possible they overstate the levels of party strength and activity due to some sort of social desirability bias. However, my data suggest that this is occurring only minimally, if at all. In over four hundred counties, I have a completed response from both the Democratic and Republican county party leaders. I asked these party leaders to rate the strength of their party organization and the other party organization in their county on a scale from one to four. Comparing the respondents’ self-evaluations with the evaluations made by their opposing party, I find that 86 percent of respondents rated their party strength within one category of how they were rated by the opposing party. Overall, 38 percent gave themselves the identical rating as their opponent, 32 percent rated their party one category stronger than their opponent did, and 16 percent rated their party one category weaker than their opponent did.

7. In this and later discussion, I compare my measures to similar measures reported in work using the 1979–1980 Party Transformation Study of county parties in all fifty states (Cotter et al. 1984) and John Frendreis and Alan Gitelson’s 1996 survey of county parties in nine states (Frendreis and Gitelson 1999).

8. My survey results confirm this, as over 40 percent of county party leaders reported that most or some of the state legislative candidates in their area held county or local office before running for state legislature.

9. Further, given that involvement in party gatekeeping activities may be seen as undemocratic or otherwise unacceptable, these figures may underestimate the true level of party gatekeeping.

10. Party assistance with candidate websites has dramatically increased in recent years, at least when comparing party activity to that in John A. Clark and Charles S. Prysby’s 2001 survey of southern party leaders. In 2001, only 10 percent of southern party leaders reported assisting with campaign websites, compared to 41 percent of southern party leaders in my study, who assisted with campaign websites occasionally (21.2 percent), sometimes (13.4 percent), or often (6.6 percent). Studies of parties outside the south, occurring prior to this 2001 study, do not ask about party assistance with websites.

11. The dependent variable “party structure” combines responses to the three measures in table 7.2. The dependent variable “party recruitment” combines responses to two questions asking whether a party has a process for identifying potential candidates and whether a person or group within the party organization focused on candidate recruitment. The variable “party gatekeeping” combines responses to the four measures in table 7.4. The “party activity” variable combines responses to the sixteen measures in table 7.5. The “nonparty group recruitment” and “nonparty group support” variables combine responses to a question asking, “For each of the following [fourteen types of nonparty] groups, please indicate first if they have helped your party identify or recruit county or local candidates, and second if they have helped support your party’s candidates during their county or local office campaigns.” The sample size decreases somewhat in this table due to missing responses in components of each of these scales.
Nearly twenty years ago, the fate of party politics in the United States was uncertain. In-government structures seemed feeble, and levels of party identification were at historic lows. In 1992, Ross Perot, a political neophyte and certainly a nontraditional candidate, was able to pull a stunning 19 percent of the popular vote from the major party candidates. As noted by the editors of the first State of the Parties volume, “The rise of Ross Perot, deep divisions within the governing coalitions, and the continued decline of voter partisanship all point to a weakened state of the parties” (Shea and Green 1994, 1).

And yet, party organizations seemed to be headed in a different direction. Those same editors noted, “The patterns are confused, however, by counter-trends, [primarily] continued expansion of party organizations” (Shea and Green 1994). Mounting evidence suggested that national, state, and, to some degree, local party committees were not only surviving but perhaps thriving in the new environment. The editors concluded that the party system was “in a state of flux” (Shea and Green 1994).

Today, few would suggest the parties in America are in flux. Political parties have recaptured their prominent place in American politics. The movement away from party identification, which began in earnest in the 1970s, has turned rather dramatically in another direction. Several indicators suggest both 2004 and 2008 were two of the most partisan elections on record. In 2004, for instance, some 93 percent of Republicans and 89 percent of Democrats voted for the candidates of their respective parties—unprecedented
figures since the advent of polling (Reichley 2007, 16). Measures of party unity in Congress and in state legislatures have also increased. Some scholars have suggested that our current system mirrors other robust party periods in American history. A. James Reichley, a leading scholar of party history, writes, “Contemporary political parties appear to come close, at least structurally, to the model proposed by the famous 1950 APSR report” (2007, 16).

The Obama “Netroots” phenomenon seems to have added fuel to the resurgence fire. One of the glaring paradoxes of the organizational growth period of the 1980s and 1990s was alienation of voters. John J. Coleman wrote of this issue in the first edition of The State of the Parties: “Though today many political scientists do indeed scoff at the public’s discontent, suggesting that the public is either spoiled, ignorant, manipulated by demagogues, or all three, the negative mood is reflected in turnout, voting behavior and attitudes toward parties” (1994, 314). But recent evidence suggests a growing, intense allegiance to party labels and deep engagement in the electoral process.

The issue of young voters was also a major concern during the organizational resurgence period. Their distance from, and often disdain for, politics has been one of the most worrisome aspects of American politics in the last few decades. Yet, the change in young voter engagement, discussed in detail below, has been stunning. Many scholars and pundits have suggested that the efforts by the Obama team, in particular, have reinvigorated localized politics, as well as a passion for engagement among America’s youth.

But is it really the case that the contemporary party system mirrors other periods in American history? Because parties seem increasingly active and influential, does that imply strengthening of the party system? What about local structures and involvement of individuals in party activities? The Obama Netroots campaign propelled activism, particularly among young citizens, but will this translate into more vibrant local parties? Perhaps more to the point, will youth political involvement be sustained beyond the dynamic candidacy of Barack Obama?

This chapter argues that recent elections have triggered a dramatic change in the electoral system, affording party organizations a unique opportunity to draw all citizens, but especially young citizens, into the party rubric in meaningful ways for decades to come. National, state, and local party committees have a rare opportunity to swell their ranks with dedicated, informed, and active participants. But they will only be able to do so if they shift their approach from a rational, candidate service model to a more responsible, policy-based model. How party leaders respond to these new conditions will define the nature of the American party system for decades to come.
Trends in Party Politics

One of the most pronounced changes in party politics has been the recent resurgence of party identification. There is scant room in this chapter to recount the turbulent love affair that Americans have had with party identification. It might suffice to say that not long after a generation of scholars cut their teeth on *The American Voter* (Campbell et al. 1960), which placed party identification at the heart of one’s vote choice (indeed, one’s electoral being), things began to change. About a decade later the authors of *The Changing American Voter* (Nie, Verba, and Petrock 1976) drew our attention to a growing uneasiness toward party labels and the entire electoral process. They wrote that voters in the mid-1970s were “more detached from political parties than at any time in the past forty years, and deeply dissatisfied with the political process” (1976, 1). A few years later, Everett Carll Ladd and Charles Hadley suggested much the same: “Evidence of a weakening of party loyalties is abundant.... We are becoming a nation of electoral transients” (1978, 312).

Scores of works during the last two decades have sought a fine-tuned understanding of partisanship. Warren Miller, one of the authors of *The American Voter*, teamed up with J. Merrill Shanks to write *The New American Voter* (1996). This careful, impressive body of work suggested, among other things, that party identification outside the South was likely a bit more robust than had been previously believed. It also highlighted an important trend: the nonalignment and nonengagement of young voters. Whereas in the 1950s only about 7 percent of the youngest voters were “pure” independents, by the 1990s that figure had jumped to 19 percent. Nearly two-thirds of young voters in the 1950s and 1960s regularly read news stories about elections. By the 1990s that figure had shrunk to less than one-half.

The story of in-government party activities during the past generation has been a bit different. A rather dramatic decline in party unity in Congress stretches back to about 1944 (Brady, Cooper, and Hurley 1979, 385). Party unity scores in Congress were quite modest in the 1960s. For example, by 1969, only about one-third of roll call votes resulted in a majority of one party opposing a majority of the other. David W. Brady, Joseph Cooper, and Patricia Hurley (1979) suggest that party unity increases when the number of first- and second-year legislators is high. The logic is that newly arrived members of Congress are more susceptible to party cue than are seasoned members. And given that the number of long-term legislators skyrocketed during this period, a corresponding dip in party unity seemed to make sense. A second view is that members simply reflect the policy preference of constituents. Simply stated, southern Democratic legislators, the so-called Boweevils, reflected
the concerns of conservative constituents, especially in matters related to civil rights. Other scholars point to the relationship between party leadership on party unity. Ronald Peters Jr. writes of this period, "The Democrats [who were in charge during most of this time,] were dedicated to egalitarian principles of internal governance and the party's internal divisions discouraged the centralization of legislative control" (1990, 93).

Ironically, party-unity scores began to increase at nearly precisely the same time party identification began to plummet. By the 1980s, that same measure of party unity had reached 70 percent of congressional roll call votes for both parties, and by 1994 it had topped 80 percent of votes. By 1996, GOP party unity had reached a stunning 87 percent. In recent years, levels have dipped somewhat, but Gerald Pomper's claim that the "congressional parties now are ideologically cohesive bodies" remains valid (2003, 276). There is even evidence to suggest members of Congress are more willing than in the past to help other party members win election: "Members of Congress are increasingly cooperating to elect fellow partisans by providing financial assistance to candidates and party committees" (Dwyer et al. 2007, 110).

As for party organization, the third leg of the tripod, most scholars had assumed that party committees were headed for extinction following the disruptions of the 1960s and 1970s. Interest groups were poised to dominate the policy process, and political action committees and campaign consultants ruled the roost during elections. David Broder's oft-cited line, "The party's over," became the conventional wisdom.

By the 1980s, however, it was clear that American parties were "resilient creatures" (Bibby 1990, 27). Both parties were developing campaign-centered branch organizations, revamping their internal operations, and devising innovative ways to raise huge sums of cash. Additionally, the number of full-time party employees, the size of their operating budgets, their average financial contribution to individual candidates, and the range of services provided had vastly increased (see, among others, Cotter et al. 1984; Frendries et al. 1994; Aldrich 1999).

At the national level, the data could not have been clearer. There were numerous indicators, including the growing list of services parties were providing candidates. Perhaps the best indicator of party vitality was party finance. Resurgent parties should have more money, and by the late 1980s they surely did. The pace of growth was staggering, even when considering inflation. As noted by Robert Putnam, "The growth chart for this political 'industry' exhibits an ebullience more familiar in Silicon Valley" (2000b, 37).

And yet, there was another disturbing paradox: while party organizations were experiencing a period of dramatic resurgence, most citizens shunned party and electoral politics. Joseph Schlesinger argued that changes in party-
in-the-electorate helped explain the growth of party organizations: “It is the very weakness of partisan identification among the voters which is a stimulus for the growth of partisan organizations” (1985, 1167). Given that split-ticket voting, a good measure of electoral volatility, hit its peak immediately prior to the organizational buildup of the 1980s, this argument seemed logical. Putnam made a similar claim: “Since their ‘consumers’ are tuning out from politics, parties have to work harder and spend much more, competing furiously to woo voters, workers, and donations, and to do that they need a (paid) organizational infrastructure” (2000b, 40). John Aldrich (2000) argued that the growth of electoral competition in the South (declining Democratic loyalties) during the last two decades has led to the creation of aggressive, vibrant party structures.

Parties and Young Voters

One of the long-held suppositions about the value of vibrant party organizations was their ability to draw young citizens into the political realm. The oft-cited 1950 “Responsible Parties” report noted, “More significant operations of the party system would create greater interest in voting” (American Political Science Association 1950, 76). This clearly did not occur during much of this organizational resurgence period. When eighteen-year-olds were first guaranteed the right to vote, in 1972, for example, about 50 percent did so. By the 2000 election that figure had dropped to just 35 percent. And the problem ran much deeper than nonvoting. Briefly stated, young Americans had become turned off by politics. “Very little of the net decline in voting is attributable to individual change, and virtually all of it is generational” (Putnam 2000b, 35).

It is important to point out, however, that other data revealed that the same young Americans who were abstaining from politics were quite civically engaged. A report by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), for example, suggested young Americans were volunteering at significantly higher rates than older Americans. Moreover, the frequency of pitching in had increased: in 1990, some 65 percent of college freshmen reported volunteering in high school, and by 2003 that figure had risen to 83 percent. Rates of volunteer work for those under twenty-five were twice as high as for those over fifty-five.

This leads to the question why a generation so eager to be involved in community projects would refrain from politics? Scholar Bill Galston suggested a plausible answer:

Most young people characterize their volunteering as an alternative to official politics, which they see as corrupt, ineffective, and unrelated to their deeper
ideals. They have confidence in personalized acts with consequences they can see for themselves; they have no confidence in collective acts, especially those undertaken through public institutions whose operations they regard as remote, opaque, and virtually impossible to control. (2001, 224)

In other words, young Americans were disengaged from the policy process because they felt marginalized within the political process. Might they have felt marginalized from party politics? Given the public's uneasiness about excessive money in the political process and that money was jet fuel for revitalized party organizations, perhaps many young Americans equated party politics with corrupt politics. While we know that negative campaigning does not always demobilize the electorate, as first thought, it might have a lasting negative impact on young voters and those likely less to become partisan (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995). Party organizations have shown an increased receptiveness to negative, attack-style electioneering. We also know that the locus of party rejuvenation has been primarily at the national and state levels. As the party system moved from the local structures, young voters conceivably found less of a connection to the entire electoral system.

Are local party committees reaching out to new voters? In the fall of 2003, Daniel M. Shea and John C. Green conducted a telephone survey of 805 local party leaders with the hope of better understanding the relationship between local party committees and young voters. Their findings, published in The Fountain of Youth, reveal that party leaders of both parties overwhelmingly agreed with the statement "The lack of political engagement by young people is a serious problem," and more than nine in ten agreed with the statement "Local parties can make a big difference getting young people involved in politics" (2007b, 28). But were the respondents' party committees working to attract young voters? An open-ended question asked, "Are there demographic groups of voters that are currently important to the long-term success of your local party?" Young voters (defined as eighteen to twenty-five years of age) were mentioned by just 8 percent of party leaders. Senior citizens were mentioned nearly three times as often, even though the question addressed the long-term success of the party. Respondents were asked to think of a second group, and young voters were mentioned by only 12 percent of the respondents. Finally, respondents were asked a third time to mention an important demographic group for the long-term success of the party, at which point 18 percent mentioned younger voters. In all, local party leaders were given three opportunities to suggest that younger voters are important to the long-term success of their party, but barely one-third did so.

Why would so many party chairs suggest that youth disengagement is a serious problem and that their efforts have the potential to make a difference, yet not consider this group's importance for the long-term success of the
party? Clearly, a local party might consider numerous groups to be of critical importance to their efforts. Minority voters, union members, and women, for example, were frequently mentioned by Democratic leaders, and blue-collar workers and middle-class citizens were often noted by Republican leaders—to mention just a few. Yet, census estimates are that younger voters make up only 14 percent of the electorate, and given the importance of political socialization, the lack of attention to young voters seems puzzling.

The Resurgence of the American Voter

The decline in partisanship, as well as overall interest and faith in the electoral process, has taken a dramatic turn in recent years. Voter survey data only extends back to the late 1940s, so it is risky to make sweeping historical generalizations, but it is probably safe to say that the 2000 election triggered one of the most significant transformations in American electoral history.

Turnout for all Americans continued to sag throughout much of the 1980s and 1990s (with the modest exception of 1992), but after the 2000 election, there was a solid rebound. This was especially true for young Americans, as their turnout jumped 11 percent between 2000 and 2004 and then another 4 percent between 2004 and 2008, as noted in figure 8.1. Scores of other indicators suggest a similar resurgence. For instance, American National Election Studies (ANES) data suggest sharp increases in the number of strong partisans, the number paying attention to election, the number talking about politics with friends and family, and much else.

As to why there has been such a dramatic turnaround, theories abound. Thomas Patterson of Harvard’s Vanishing Voter Project points to the importance of issues and voter concerns: “Americans historically have voted in higher numbers when the nation confronts big issues. That was as true in the late 1800s and 1930s as it has been more recently. The meltdown in the financial markets [in the fall of 2008] likely confirmed Americans’ belief that 2008 was a watershed election” (2008). Another possibility is that the competitiveness and importance of the 2000 election drew new participants into the process. David Hill writes, “National elections in the United States since 2000 have been very competitive and thus it is possible that the cohorts entering the electorate during this period will create a footprint . . . and turnout will increase in future elections” (Hill 2006, 5). Still another possibility may be changing attitudes toward government and the electoral process. According to ANES data, the percentage of Americans suggesting that the election outcomes do not make public officials listen to the voters shrank from a high of 20 percent in 1984 to just 7 percent in 2004. In fact, the 2004 figure matches the lowest level in the survey’s history.
Still another possibility relates to the number of persuadable voters. Throughout much of the last three decades, about one-fifth of the electorate “knew all along” who they would vote for. That figure jumped to 33 percent in 2004, according to ANES data. Similarly, about 7 percent of voters made up their minds on election day during the revival period. In 2004, this figure had shrunk to just 2 percent. This affects voter mobilization in two ways. First, as more and more voters establish voting preference early in the process, the number of voters who struggle with the “costs” of casting an informed vote declines. Second, and more importantly, as election activists confront a predisposed electorate, resources are shifted from persuasion to mobilization. This might have been especially important for the mobilization of young voters.

The Obama Netroots Effect

What should we make of Barack Obama’s historic “ground game” in 2008? A reasonable guess is that Obama had four times as many ground troops as did
John Kerry or Al Gore. This pattern was especially true in swing states. For example, John Kerry had ten field offices in New Mexico, while Obama had thirty-nine. As noted by one observer, “The architects and builders of the Obama field campaign have undogmatically mixed timeless traditions and discipline of good organizing with new technologies of decentralization and self-organization” (Exley 2008). Marshall Ganz, a labor organizer who has led training sessions for Obama staff members and volunteers, noted much the same: “They’ve invested in a civic infrastructure on a scale that has never happened. It’s been an investment in the development of thousands of young people equipped with the skills and leadership ability to mobilize people and in the development of leadership at the local level. It’s profound” (UPI.com 2008).

Indeed, the reach of the Obama Netroots effort was massive: the Obama team e-mail list boasted some 13 million addresses, and during the course of the campaign, the team sent some seven thousand different e-mail messages. In total, one billion e-mails were sent. On election day, everyone who signed up for alerts in battleground states received three text reminders to vote. Some 3 million calls were made during the final days of the race using MyBo’s virtual phone-banking system, and over 5 million people, again mostly young folks, signed up as supporters of Obama on social-networking sites. Over 5 million clicked the “I Voted!” button on Facebook, and the campaign raised over $500 million over the Internet (Vargas 2008).

And, of course, the efforts seem to have paid off. According to a November 24, 2008, CIRCLE report, 64 percent of eighteen- to twenty-four-year-olds and 43 percent of eighteen- to twenty-nine-year-olds were first-time voters. This compares to just 11 percent of all voters. Also, young voters were most likely to engage in online campaign activities supporting Obama on election day. In fact, the margin of victory for Obama from those under thirty was 68 to 32 percent. John McCain actually received a majority of votes from those over forty-five. Few were surprised to hear McCain’s daughter, Meghan, remark a few months after the election that the Republican Party was “on the precipice of becoming irrelevant to young people” (Gerstein 2009).

Post-Obama Party Politics

It is a bit early to say so with certainty, but most observers suggest the Obama Netroots approach may have transformed the top-down, microtargeted, television-based model that has dominated American politics since the early 1960s. “They have taken the bottom-up campaign and absolutely perfected it,” noted Joe Trippi (2008). The extent to which these new organizations connected with existing party committees, however, is unclear. On the one hand, Daniel Galvin may be correct in arguing that while Obama was surely a
A charismatic candidate, which was essential, his team also focused extensively on building grassroots organizations in every state. “Indeed, his commitment to rebuilding the Democratic Party [was] not incidental to his candidacy. It [was] seen as a major selling point, something that attract[ed] Democrats to his campaign” (Galvin 2008).

On the other hand, Obama’s ground troops were, for the most part, young, new activists, likely less inclined to merge their efforts with the establishment. Howard Dean, then chair of the Democratic National Committee (DNC), noted as much to a gathering of liberal activists in July 2008: “In my generation, we would have started a political group. The Netroots generation simply goes online to find an affinity group, and if it can’t find one, simply starts its own to get things done” (Trygstad 2008). Many (perhaps most) local party leaders endorsed Hillary Clinton during the nomination contest, and there was lingering animosity between the two camps.

One of the key indicators of how the efforts of the Obama campaign might spill over into party dynamics concerns the lists garnered by the Obama team in 2007 and 2008. The fact that the Obama campaign compiled an e-mail inventory of over 13 million aggressive, active supporters was not lost on the DNC. Would the team hold these contacts close to its vest, drawing them out when it believed them important, or would it turn them over to the DNC and to state and local party committees? Put a bit differently, would the Obama Netroots campaign be coupled with party-building efforts—or would it remain a separate entity, to be used by the president when needed?

Shortly after the election, lead Obama strategist David Plouffe sent an e-mail to 10 million activists soliciting funds to help the DNC retire its 2008 debt. The success of the note remains unclear, but activities of this kind run a risk, as noted by one commentator: “By becoming a ubiquitous presence in the digital lives of its supporters, the Obama [team] could become like that friend who I.M.’s a little too often” (Carr 2008). We also know that Obama’s pick for DNC chair, Gov. Tim Kaine of Virginia, has publically stated that he expects the lists to be “rolled into the party” for permanent use. Moreover, he intends to use the list to motivate supporters to engage in numerous policy battles. “We’re very focused on the notion that engagement should not just be around contributing or being part of election cycles. It should be around governance and social change” (Brown 2009).

As for helping the party move forward with policy initiatives, the record during the first year of the Obama administration has been lackluster—at best. Early in 2009, the Obama team announced that it would spin-off its campaign unit, Obama for America (OFA), into an independent, policy-centered operation dubbed Organizing for America (also OFA). It would be removed from White House activities and housed at the DNC headquarters.
Again, the goal was to maintain the momentum with young voters and shift efforts to policy battles. The effectiveness of this operation has been spotty. A massive staff was created, with at least one organizer in every congressional district, but precisely how these operatives would “organize” was unclear. In some instances these young staffers worked with party committees, but most often they worked independently and at times at odds with the party. There have been accounts of OFA staffers “going rogue” because of what they saw as the watering down of the health care bill, for instance. As noted in a Politico.com article, “One leading OFA volunteer in Florida blasted an e-mail to a statewide listserv urging activists to ‘just say no’ to the phone-banking effort [promoting the most recent health care bill]—uncorking a torrent of frustration from Florida Democrats. . . . Some OFA subscribers replied directly to the call-to-action e-mail with angry messages and others asked to be removed from the list entirely” (Vogel 2009a). It would seem that the chasm between Democratic moderates and progressives, narrowed during the election, has once again widened—and OFA might actually be contributing to the split. Another Politico.com article later noted, “Progressives blast OFA as a soulless, top-down machine that’s alienating the base, even as some state party officials complain that the group is stepping on their toes. Conservative Democrats, too, grumbled over the summer when OFA ran mild, campaign-style ads in their districts backing health care reform, a violation of political etiquette.”

And what about GOP outreach efforts? According to ANES data, in thirteen of seventeen presidential and midterm elections between 1970 and 2008, Republican identifiers were more likely to report being contacted by a political party than were Democratic identifiers. In every one of these elections GOP followers were contacted more often than were independents. This would suggest that Republican outreach efforts were quite robust. Not surprisingly, turnout in heavily Republican areas was actually down in 2008. As they regroup to win back some of the local, state, and federal office seats they have lost in recent elections, will Republican organizations shift resources from grassroots mobilization to direct candidate services?

Conclusion

Regardless of the precise root of the dramatic turnaround, two essential features emerge. First, recent elections demonstrate that young Americans can channel their interests into political action. Second, many young Americans discovered their potential in electoral politics does not mean that the momentum will be sustained for future elections or that it will spread to nonelectoral political engagement. There is simply no guarantee that the net-based expression of
involvement will endure in the rough-and-tumble world of policy making. For those unaccustomed to the difficulties of policy making in a polarized political climate, the value of an electoral win might seem trivial. A young voter might exclaim, "I busted a gut and my guy won! Now where's all that change that I worked for?" Discussion of our nation's history of incremental change or the theoretical values of constitutional obstruction would fall on deaf ears. Explaining that party divisions have been common might help young folks understand the Blue Dog Democrats, but it would do little to ease their frustration. Even the most seasoned activists can get annoyed with the pace of change. For political neophytes, these realities could be crippling.

One should also bear in mind the rationale for youth civic engagement. Columnist Jane Eisner summarized it as follows in *Taking Back the Vote: Getting American Youth Involved in Our Democracy*: “The attraction of service for young people is undeniable, and growing. It is propelled by the characteristics of this generation—their tendency toward compassion and their nonjudgmental concern for others, and away from what they see as a political system driven by conflict and ego” (2004, 80). If anything, recent politics seems to be very much mired in “judgmental concerns.” The prominence of abrasive radio and television talk show hosts and the proliferation of antagonistic blogs and websites—which surely seem driven by “conflict and ego”—may push young citizens back to community service. Moreover, many young citizens do community work because there is a tangible payoff. Why endure overheated, hostile political battles when real change can be seen down at the hospital, literacy program office, or soup kitchen?

Thus, the parties at the dawn of the twenty-first century are confronted with a rare opportunity. Recent elections have created a meaningful commitment to party labels and a renewed interest in political activism. But the challenges of keeping this momentum are numerous. Four steps can be taken:

1. There must be close coordination between candidate efforts and party activities. Shortly after Barry Goldwater lost his bid for the presidency in 1964, his team of advisors turned over their list of several hundred thousand contributors to the Republican National Committee (RNC). “Over the course of the next two decades, the RNC built it into a group of millions that became the lifeblood of the modern Republican Party” (Libit 2009). On the other hand, George McGovern turned over an even larger list to the DNC after his 1972 campaign, but little came of it. The Obama Netroots campaign redefined the electoral process—and in doing so propelled a first-term senator to the presidency. In order to translate this energy into a genuine movement for the Democratic Party,
there must be close, recurrent collaboration. Simply sharing lists might not be enough.

2. There must be a focus on reinvigorating local party structures. In the past few decades organizational resurgence has primarily been at the state and national levels. In order to maintain the momentum—especially the engagement of young citizens—an emphasis must be on the base of the system, on the mom and pop shops of the party system. Much of the continued success of party rivals, such as MoveOn.org, has been due to their recognition that interpersonal connections matter. And much of the criticism of OFA has centered on its Washington-driven operation.

3. Party organizations must shift their focus from merely helping candidates to a more purposive direction—to policy concerns during nonelection periods. And they must work to rally supporters around these initiatives. Episodic participation is an old story in American politics, but the dangers are much greater for young citizens. Simply stated, if they tune out during nonelection periods, they may not return (especially if candidates are less dynamic than Barack Obama).

4. Party organizations must continue to use innovative outreach technologies. Americans, especially young Americans, keep in touch with friends and family in ever-changing ways, and there is no reason why party committees cannot follow a similar path.

The route parties chart in the years ahead may affect their role in our political system as well as the democratic character of that system. The most consequential outcome of contemporary activities will likely be what they do to the spirit of the electorate. While party organizations will surely continue to provide candidates with cutting-edge services, will their activities foster an affinity for politics among Americans? The revival of party organizations over the past few decades has been impressive. The electorate stands ready to embrace a more participatory and ideological role. But will the service-oriented parties seize the opportunity?
The 2008 election generated a significant amount of buzz, in part because of the prominent inclusion of technology on the political front lines (Hoffman 2008). The Internet played a particularly notable role, becoming integrated into the presidential campaigns and allowing contenders from Barack Obama to Ron Paul to organize events, mobilize their online supporters, and raise substantial amounts from small contributions given over the Web (Terhune 2008). This surge in Internet activity was presaged by the prominence of MoveOn.org, political Weblogs, and the success of the Howard Dean campaign in 2004.

The adoption of digital-age strategies has never been the province of major party candidates alone, but for the first time a new party, Unity08—the brainchild of Gerald Rafshoon and Hamilton Jordan, both strategists in Jimmy Carter’s 1976 campaign, and Doug Bailey, creator of The Hotline and former adviser to Gerald Ford—emerged as an organization almost entirely on the Web. Unity08 proposed to use online surveys to assess supporter attitudes, online discussions to resolve issues and write a platform, and ultimately an online convention to nominate candidates. It sought to harness the democratic potential of the Internet in a grassroots organization with minimal cost, wide participation, and electronic communication.

Throughout its history, the American political system has witnessed a variety of election bids by minor parties. However, few of these have experienced real electoral success, hindered by the challenges of ballot-access laws, funding disparities, and the ongoing difficulty of inspiring and maintaining support. Unity08 planned to overcome these challenges by harnessing the positive
democratic potential of a new technological tool to unite moderate Americans in pursuit of a bipartisan presidential ticket (Green 2007). Though Unity08 ultimately disbanded with no nominated candidate, its organizational model created an example that will likely influence future campaigns and constitutes a unique study in the political harnessing of technology.

Unity08 was never meant to be a long-standing political party but rather, as Washington Post writer Jim VandeHei wrote, a momentum-building movement that would “force Democrats and Republicans to revamp themselves by becoming more issue-focused, responsive and candid” (2006). “Our view in late 2006 and early 2007 was that the country’s politics were in bad shape,” said Doug Bailey. “We didn’t see substantial leadership coming forward to change things, and there was a desperate need to find different answers” (2009).

Unity08 launched a recruitment strategy based heavily on using television visibility to generate interest in the movement’s website and motivate existing members to recruit new ones. These media efforts included appearances by Doug Bailey and Unity08 spokesperson Sam Waterston on Comedy Central’s The Colbert Report and The Daily Show, Fox’s The O’Reilly Factor, network Sunday-morning talk shows, and the Lehrer News Hour on PBS. In all of these appearances, Unity08’s website was touted as the location to visit to get involved in the movement.

While Unity08 faced the same challenges that third-party candidates have faced throughout American history, their problems became more severe when the Federal Election Commission suspected Unity08 had secretly chosen a candidate, an allegation that Bailey firmly denied (Bailey 2009). As a result, the commission restricted Unity08 to a maximum donation of $5,000 per person, rather than the $25,000 that parties can accept. This ruling was a significant blow to the Unity08 organization and doomed the ballot-access initiative predicated on the larger contribution limit.

Historically, third parties tend to form around a charismatic leader. Unity08 faced more of an uphill battle because the absence of a figurehead and the lack of clearly stated issue positions were intrinsic to the purpose of Unity08. The founders intended for movement members to select both the candidates and the issues. Nonetheless, the lack of a leader was ultimately fatal, as Doug Bailey admitted: “We were not dramatically successful in using the Internet to its fullest potential. We assumed that if the technology was there, then they would come. That’s what the Obama campaign assumed also, and in that case, they came. That’s because he was there. He was there within the traditional forms of politics and they didn’t have to guess who the candidate was” (2009).

In early January 2008, Unity08 closed its doors. “We basically had to bring it to an end and intentionally decided to do that before Iowa voted so it would
not be seen as a reaction” Bailey explained (2009). Unity08 had amassed just
$1.5 million over two years (Danis 2008) and disappointed its founders, who
had dreamed of an online convention of 10 million voters (Green 2007).
Nonetheless, it did attract a membership of more than one hundred thou­
sand, which raises a number of interesting questions. Who were these Unity08
members who had logged on and joined the movement to address frustra­
tions with the political system? What caused some to become more active
in Unity08 than others? Where did they go politically when their movement
evaporated in 2008?

Methodology

This chapter is based on repeated surveys of a sample of thirty-seven hundred
Unity08 members supplied by the movement. Our first survey went out in
May 2007, the second in January 2008, and our final wave in December 2008,
shortly after the election. We utilize only responses from the May 2007 and
December 2008 waves in this analysis. For the May 2007 wave, we received re­
sponses from 40.7 percent of eligible respondents. Our final wave resurveyed
both those who had responded to the first two waves and those who had only
responded to the May 2007 wave. Based on an eligible sample of 1,111, we
received a response rate of 48.1 percent in the postelection wave.

Who Were the Unity08 Members?

As Unity08 was an Internet-based party with relatively low media coverage and
neither an obvious candidate nor a set of substantive issue positions, it would be
surprising if its members were not distinctive. Table 9.1 compares them with a
sample of all eligible voters drawn from the 2008 American National Elections
Studies (ANES) and with a sample of almost twelve hundred eligible voters
drawn from the Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project (CCAP), whom we
define as “party activists” because they “wore a button,” “contributed money,”
or “attended a rally” for any primary candidate in 2008.

First, given its lack of a candidate, clear issue positions, and Internet focus,
we might expect Unity08 members to have higher levels of resources—both
educational and economic—which more readily exposes them to political
information via both traditional and Web-based channels than either eligible
voters or major party activists. Our results in table 9.1 support this expecta­
tion: 65.3 percent of Unity08 members hold at least a bachelor’s degree com­
pared with 38.4 percent of CCAP party activists and only 28.3 percent of the
TABLE 9.1
A Comparison of Unity08 Supporters to CCAP Party Activists and the ANES National Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Unity08 (%)</th>
<th>CCAP Party Activists (%)</th>
<th>ANES (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demographics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's degree or higher</td>
<td>65.3</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income above $100,000</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>72.5</td>
<td>56.0</td>
<td>47.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>94.8</td>
<td>73.3</td>
<td>75.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Party Identification</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Democrat</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak Democrat</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Democrat</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Republican</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak Republican</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Republican</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ANES national sample; Unity08 supporters are also wealthier than either the ANES national sample or the CCAP party activist sample. In addition, as was the case with Ross Perot supporters in 1992 and 1996, higher proportions of Unity08 supporters are male, and significantly more are white than are either major party supporters or those from the national sample.

When we turn to political variables, Unity08 members reflect the bipartisan, independent, moderate approach of the party. One in six Unity08 supporters is a “pure independent” compared with 11.3 percent of the ANES sample and only 7.2 percent of the CCAP activist sample. Correspondingly, Unity08 supporters are far less likely to identify as strong partisans of either party. While only 21.1 percent of Unity08 activists strongly identify with either major party, fully 35.8 percent of the national sample and 57.2 percent of CCAP activists do so. In terms of partisan preference, the ratio of Democrats to Republicans is better than 3:1, compared with a 2:1 Democratic preference among ANES sample members.

Alienation from the political system has been widely regarded as a stimulus for third-party support (Gold 1995; Hetherington 1999). Unity08 supporters were far from satisfied with the status quo. Only 6.2 percent said they could trust the government to do what is right “almost always” or “most of the time.” Furthermore, almost three-quarters reported feeling “very dissatisfied” with politics in America, and only 4.1 percent reported being either “very satisfied” or “satisfied,” while almost three-quarters of the sample said that public officials did not care what people like them thought. Unity08 members comprise a group with clear indications of alienation from the status quo.
Further, respondents also displayed a willingness to support a third alternative, reflected in the majority (52 percent) of the sample who reported that “even if the race was very close between the two main parties,” they would still consider voting for a third party.

But what of the potential issue appeal for Unity08? In 1992, Ross Perot identified three clusters of substantive issues—economic nationalism, reform, and the budget—on which he took strong issue positions distinct from the major parties, and he attracted a large following in part because of this approach. Of course, since Unity08 disappeared before full discussions relating to issues and the platform could take place, it is difficult to conjecture with any certainty regarding issue priorities. Significantly, however, the single issue that does stand out for Unity08 members is health care. Fully 39.9 percent rated it their single-most important issue among the twelve issues on which they ranked themselves, roughly four times as many as the second-highest issue. Furthermore, 82 percent agreed with a “government-sponsored national health insurance plan covering all Americans,” and more than half of these “strongly agreed.” The problem facing Unity08 was that among all the issues included in the survey, this was the one most clearly owned by the Democratic Party. Thus, it is difficult to believe that members sought out the Unity08 movement specifically because of its stance on national health insurance. Doug Bailey (2009) emphasized this point, contending that it was bringing about change in the process of governance—bipartisanship and reform—rather than specific substantive issues that motivated support.

Determinants of Unity08 Activity

Predicting levels of activity is far from straightforward because Unity08 was a relatively small party that never reached even two hundred thousand members, never had a candidate or a substantive platform, and went out of business before the first caucus in Iowa. In contrast to the Perot movement, where the candidate and the issues had been staked out, Unity08 was founded on the proposition that the grass roots should select the issues and the candidates. It catered to those who were dissatisfied with the general state of American politics and desired a moderate, bipartisan alternative.

Our measure of Unity08 activity is a count of the number of activities performed for Unity08 prior to its dissolution. On average, our sample performed three activities, and those in which most people engaged were talking to their friends and family about the party, filling out Unity08 surveys, and ranking issues of importance on the Unity08 website. These activities clearly include both the social networking component of Unity08’s recruitment strategy as well as the interactive element so easily facilitated by the Internet.
In considering independent variables, we might expect determinants of Unity08 activity to resemble those affecting political activity in general (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 15): resources, motivation, and mobilization. Resources include education, age, and prior activity in major parties and in nonpolitical groups. Motivations, which, in the case of Unity08, are mainly push factors away from the major parties, include political dissatisfaction and absolute distance from the closer major party on the issue the respondent cares most about.

Finally, although we do not have direct measures of mobilization since the party did little of this, we are particularly interested in comparing the effects of exposure to new media with the effect of more traditional mobilization strategies based on solidarity, friendship-based incentives for activity. It seems likely that this new-media access will open the respondent up to mobilizing messages on the Web, Unity08's primary medium. Even though the party was entirely online, we still expect to find a role of social context—measured as number of family and friends interested in Unity08.

Our analysis in table 9.2 shows mixed results. For the resource variables, previous partisan activity for major parties does not have a significant effect;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.889</td>
<td>0.685</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.009+</td>
<td>0.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.395*</td>
<td>0.152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.038</td>
<td>0.056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonpolitical group activity</td>
<td>-0.086</td>
<td>0.087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006 Democratic activity</td>
<td>0.056</td>
<td>0.038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006 Republican activity</td>
<td>0.088</td>
<td>0.071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength of party ID</td>
<td>-0.082</td>
<td>0.081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with U.S. politics</td>
<td>0.337**</td>
<td>0.121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue proximity to closest major party</td>
<td>-0.070</td>
<td>0.077</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denial that would vote for third party in close election</td>
<td>-0.093*</td>
<td>0.046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of new media</td>
<td>0.102</td>
<td>0.156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family/friends interested in Unity08</td>
<td>0.543***</td>
<td>0.091</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N: 427
Adjusted R-square: 0.15
Standard error of estimate: 1.372

* p < 0.05
** p < 0.01
*** p < 0.001
+ p < 0.10
neither does education or activity for nonparty groups. In terms of motivational variables, willingness to support third parties and dissatisfaction with American politics are both substantively and statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). Neither distance from closest major party on most important issues nor strength of partisanship is statistically significant. Even though Unity08 was an online party, the role of social support for activity cannot be ignored. While blog and political chat room activity has an insignificant effect on party activity, the number of friends and family interested in Unity08 has a highly significant effect ($p < 0.001$). In fact, as figure 9.1 shows, the difference in Unity08 activity between two respondents at the mean on all other variables—one having no family/friends interested in Unity08 and the other with six or more interested family/friends—is equivalent to 1.63 additional activities. This far surpassed the effect of any other variables in the model.\textsuperscript{2} Apparently, even in an online party, face-to-face support encourages activity.

**FIGURE 9.1**
Effect of social support on Unity08 activity.

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**Carryover of Unity08 Activity to the General Election**

The appeal of a party like Unity08 and the characteristics of those who participate in it are interesting to investigate in their own right. We might also ask whether Unity08’s long-term effect, if it exists, can be instructive in understanding larger and more successful third parties or even political activity more generally.
Successful third parties, like Ross Perot’s 1992 effort, are often viewed as election-altering events and serious threats to the major parties, while unsuccessful ones like Unity08 are viewed as irrelevancies. George H. W. Bush (1999) and other Republicans continue to blame Bill Clinton’s win on Ross Perot’s presence in the 1992 campaign, but few analysts even mention the role of the Green, Libertarian, Independent, or Constitution parties in their discussion of 2008.

We contend that the ways in which these third parties, large and small, impact the major parties may be functionally similar, even though the net impact is proportionate to the party’s size. We do not necessarily observe the most important effect of third parties in the election contemporaneous with their candidacy or organizational persistence. Rather, the long-term effect of third parties is more likely seen when they have completely disappeared or seen their support seriously diminish; this effect is evidenced by the shift of supporters’ activity to one of the major parties (Rapoport and Stone 2005).

By drawing almost 20 percent of the vote, Perot had the potential to alter the outcome of the election, as Bush claimed; however, there is much evidence to suggest that he did not. Voter News Service exit polls showed that his voters split down the middle in terms of their preference for Bush or Clinton (actually favoring Clinton slightly over Bush). Nonetheless, Perot’s supporters were to play a crucial role in electoral change when, in 1994, they shifted their support heavily to the Republicans. The most highly mobilized Perot supporters in 1992 became the most active Republican supporters in 1994 (controlling for their prior Republican activity). This extends the logic of carryover found by Walter J. Stone, Lonna Rae Atkeson, and Ronald B. Rapoport (1992) among nomination activists.

The logic of carryover is straightforward: a major party candidacy or a third party mobilizes activists, which sensitizes them to the political stakes involved. As they become aware of the choice they are facing, they move to support the candidate closest to them. That their preferred candidate is not on the ballot does not detract from the appeal of a major party candidate who presents a clearly preferable alternative out of the remaining choices.

A party like Unity08 presents challenges to this theory. Because of its size, neither major party had an incentive to target Unity08 members. But the highly involved Unity08 supporters are still likely to be sensitized to the choices offered in the general election. Carryover rarely affects support for both major parties equally. Perot activity translated much more directly into Republican support in 1994 and thereafter than it did into Democratic support. In contrast, Unity08 was far more Democratic than Republican in its composition. When Unity08 members were asked who would be acceptable as a Unity08 nominee, Barack Obama led all candidates, garnering support
from more than three-quarters of our sample. This is more than twice the percentage of our Unity08 sample that found John McCain an acceptable Unity08 nominee. The two-to-one margin in acceptability that Obama enjoyed over McCain became significant once each was nominated.

The strength of Obama’s appeal is reflected in a comment by Doug Bailey: “If we had known at the outset the Obama candidacy could succeed, we probably would have concluded there was no need for Unity08” (2009). Even though Democrats did not make an explicit bid for Unity08 supporters, like the Republican bid for Perot supporters in 1994, we should expect a similar asymmetry in the effect of Unity08 activity on major party support—only this time favoring the Democrats over the Republicans.

One way to examine the value added to major party support by Unity08 support is to ask if Unity08 activity can stimulate major party support among those who were inactive two years earlier. We expect to find a stronger effect of Unity08 activity on the 2008 Democratic activity than on 2008 Republican activity.

Consistent with our expectations, of those inactive for the Democrats in 2006, 60 percent of the most active Unity08 supporters (five or more activities) were active for Democratic candidates in 2008, versus 38.7 percent of those who were moderately active for Unity08 (two to four activities). Further, only 28.8 percent of those who did little for Unity08 (zero to one activities) were active for a Democratic candidate. On the other hand, Unity08 activity makes virtually no difference in the level of 2008 Republican activity among those uninvolved in Republican campaigns in 2006. Even among the most involved Unity08 supporters, only 13.3 percent were active for the Republicans in 2008, barely more than the 9.5 percent of those least active in Unity08.

These results simply dichotomize major party activity in 2008 rather than predicting the level of activism, and they are restricted to those who did nothing for major party candidates in 2006. A fuller model must account for the level of 2008 major party involvement and include those respondents who were active to some degree in 2006 with the expectation that their level of activity in 2008 would increase as a function of their Unity08 activity.³

Most importantly, however, our results have not controlled for a number of relevant confounds. It is possible that Unity08 activists increased their activity for the Democrats in 2008 because Democratic candidates were more likely to contact them, and it is the contact, rather than Unity08 support, that contributed to their increased Democratic activity. Additionally, it may be the case that Unity08 supporters were concurrently active in Democratic primary campaigns, and this sort of activity, independent of anything they did for Unity08, accounts for the results. Finally, respondents might have strong affective preference for Obama over McCain, and this explains their support
for Democratic candidates in 2008. Thus, our control for the difference in evaluations of Obama and McCain is particularly strong because work on motivated reasoning and cognitive dissonance predicts that those most active for Obama should show commensurate increases in positive evaluations of Obama relative to McCain (Lodge and Taber 2007).

Controlling for these confounds ensures that any effect of Unity08 activity that we find is independent of activists’ party identification, relative evaluations of the two presidential candidates, actual past activity in primaries, prior Democratic activity, and general election contact from Democratic campaigns. If anything, these strong controls are likely to understate the independent effect of Unity08 support on 2008 Democratic activity.

Our regression analysis in table 9.3 shows, as expected, that continuity of Democratic activity is very strong, and campaign contact, primary activity, candidate preference, and partisanship all have significant effects on 2008 Democratic activity. Interestingly, neither education nor age has a significant effect. Most important among the control variables is the very strong effect of Democratic primary activity. Nonetheless, the effect of Unity08 activity is robust to these possible confounds \( p < 0.01 \). For every additional activity that respondents performed for Unity08, they increase their activity for Democratic candidates by 0.173 activities.

### Table 9.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.289</td>
<td>0.588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unity08 activity</td>
<td>0.173*</td>
<td>0.061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.007</td>
<td>0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education level</td>
<td>-0.015</td>
<td>0.074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity in 2008 Democratic presidential primaries</td>
<td>0.522**</td>
<td>0.042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006 Democratic activity</td>
<td>0.287**</td>
<td>0.055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact by Democratic presidential and congressional candidates</td>
<td>0.255**</td>
<td>0.051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preference for Obama over McCain</td>
<td>0.151*</td>
<td>0.046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party identification</td>
<td>-0.199*</td>
<td>0.075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R-square</td>
<td>0.607</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard error of estimate</td>
<td>1.895</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>458</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\*p < 0.01

\**p < 0.001
Running a parallel analysis for Republicans (data not shown) produces results for control variables that are consistent with the findings for Democratic activity, Republican campaign contact, primary activity, 2006 Republican campaign activity, candidate effect, and partisanship all significantly affect 2008 Republican activity. However, in clear contrast to Democratic activity findings, Unity08 activity has virtually no effect on 2008 Republican activity. This asymmetry of effect clearly supports Doug Bailey's intuition that Unity08's goals succeeded when Obama won, even though that was not the original intention of the party.

Mechanisms of Carryover

The previous analysis raises an additional puzzle: was there a mechanism through which Unity08 activity translated into Democratic activity in 2008? In the case of Perot supporters, their activity translated into Republican activity contingent on contacts from Republican candidates in 1994 (Rapoport and Stone 2005). Republicans targeted Perot supporters with mailings that emphasized Perot's issues, but this was not the case with Unity08 supporters; their small size made them essentially irrelevant to the 2008 election outcome.

One thing that is unique about Unity08 is its reliance on the Internet. To be sure, an Internet-based political movement should attract those who have Internet access and use it often. Fully 52.5 percent use the Internet between one and three hours per day, and an additional 22.6 percent use it more than that. More than two-thirds of Unity08 members use online news daily, and an almost equal percentage view television news daily, but barely half read a newspaper daily. Because the Obama campaign emphasized the use of the Internet, raising vast sums of money and coordinating online discussion, meet-ups, rallies, and so forth via the Web, we hypothesize that among Unity08 supporters who rely on the Web, the Obama message would achieve maximum mobilization potential. We therefore created a dummy variable based on whether respondents engaged in interactive Internet activity (either political blogs or online political discussion), which we call "new media."

We ran our analysis of 2008 Democratic activity including the count of new media and its interaction with Unity08 activity. The interaction captures the degree to which Unity08 activity translates into Democratic activity at differing levels of exposure to new media. A positive coefficient indicates that among new-media users, Unity08 activity translates into a higher level of Democratic activity than it does among other respondents.

Table 9.4 shows that the interaction of Unity08 activity with our new-media variable is highly significant and positive ($p < 0.001$). Moreover, the
TABLE 9.4
New Media and Unity08 Activity Effects on Democratic Activity, Controlling for Other Relevant Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.274</td>
<td>0.581</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unity08 Activity</td>
<td>0.078</td>
<td>0.067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
<td>0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education level</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity in 2008 Democratic presidential Primaries</td>
<td>0.515***</td>
<td>0.041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006 Democratic activity</td>
<td>0.298***</td>
<td>0.054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact by Democratic presidential and congressional candidates</td>
<td>0.256***</td>
<td>0.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preference for Obama over McCain</td>
<td>0.141**</td>
<td>0.045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party identification</td>
<td>-0.194**</td>
<td>0.074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of new media</td>
<td>-1.028*</td>
<td>0.381</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction of new media and Unity08 activity</td>
<td>0.475**</td>
<td>0.111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R-square</td>
<td>0.617</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard error of estimate</td>
<td>1.871</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>458</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.05
**p < 0.01
***p < 0.001

The main effect for the Unity08 activity level is close to zero, which means that for a Unity08 supporter who did not use new media at all, there is only a small and insignificant effect of Unity08 activity on Democratic activity. On the other hand, for someone who frequents blogs or political chat rooms, the effect of Unity08 activity is almost three times as great. Including these two new variables does not substantively affect the coefficients of any of our control variables.

Figure 9.2 illustrates the differing effect of Unity08 activity on 2008 Democratic activity between interactive Internet users and nonusers (holding all other variables at their means).

Although Unity08 was a relatively small movement, the finding that activity on its behalf carries over into increased general election activity on the Democratic side without a countervailing diminution in Republican activity is significant. It builds on and extends findings of carryover from presidential nomination activists into the party's general election presidential campaigns (Stone, Atkeson, and Rapoport 1992) and congressional campaigns (McCann et al. 1996), as well as findings of carryover from Perot activity in 1992 into Republican campaign activity in 1994 and thereafter (Rapoport and Stone 2005). It further touches on findings of translation of nonpolitical activity
FIGURE 9.2.
Effect of Unity08 activity on the Democratic general election activity by level of new media use.

into political activity (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995) by examining new-media effects in particular.

Conclusion

Even though Unity08 was not a group targeted by either major party, involvement in the movement spilled over spontaneously into support for the Democrats in 2008, and the effect went beyond simple preference for the Democratic presidential nominee. Independent of candidate preference, Unity08 activity translated into actual activity on behalf of Democratic candidates. The inclination of those active to remain active politically seems strong from this analysis.

Mobilization around one party or candidate easily carries over into activity for another candidate or party when there is a mobilizing medium, be it the campaign, Internet involvement, media exposure, or something else. In other cases, it may spill over to all prior activists as they are exposed to the broader campaign. In any case, the carryover effect identified initially for supporters of nomination campaign losers clearly has applicability to third-party movements of various types, and in the case of Unity08, the usage of new media
among members of the movement was directly related to their involvement with the Democratic Party. Having existed without a candidate or even a firm party platform, Unity08 was a creation of the Internet and its networking potential. Thus, even without targeted messaging, the Obama campaign witnessed activity from Unity08 supporters catalyzed by the medium through which they obtained their political information.

Notes

We would like to acknowledge the generosity and support provided by Doug Bailey in giving us access to a sample of members of Unity08 at a very early point in its development and in granting us an extended interview at the end of the project to clarify much about the movement.

1. The other activities included “attended a Unity08 event,” “signed a petition to get Unity08 on the ballot,” “gathered petitions to get Unity08 on the ballot,” “posted comments on the Unity08 website,” “donated money to Unity08,” and “got friends to join Unity08.”

2. Because the index of Unity08 activity includes two items involving friends/family (“Talked to family/friends about Unity08” and “Got friends to join Unity08”), we reran the analysis purging the activity measure of these two items. The effect of the number of friends/family interested in Unity08 remained highly significant even in this case ($p < 0.05$).

3. Not surprisingly, those active for a major party in the 2006 congressional elections almost always engaged in at least one activity for the major party in the much-higher-stimulus 2008 campaign.
When Barack Obama took office, he recast his highly touted campaign organization as a policy tool. The transformation of Obama for America into Organizing for America (OFA) was heralded as a way for the new president to marshal the power of the campaign into the presidency itself and, in doing so, to refashion the Democratic Party in the president’s mold. Not surprisingly, this move was controversial. On one hand, it was seen as a brilliant and transformative move by Obama insiders David Plouffe and Mitch Stewart, seeking to enlist the people who had fueled the election campaign—namely, those on the famed 13-million-strong e-mail list—in the business of governing. On the other hand, OFA was described as a potentially nefarious organization, with unthinking members pledged to support their leader, regardless of the merits of his initiatives. But with decidedly less hyperbole, Sidney M. Milkis and Jesse H. Rhodes (2009) posed the pressing question of the day: could OFA be as effective in governing as its earlier iteration was in campaigning? Many doubted that it could be. And, in fact, the politics of the early Obama presidency suggest that OFA did not become the player in politics, even in party politics, that some might have envisioned. Yet, it represents an innovative application of grassroots politics, which relies on new technology and is embedded in the official party framework. Furthermore, advancing the president’s policy agenda may not be the sole criterion on which OFA should be judged.
To envision an Obama organization that would extend beyond the election was a bold idea, though not without precedent and certainly not uncharacteristic of the Obama team’s approach to party leadership. President Obama showed early signs of being a strong party leader but was eventually plagued by the same internal party tension that prevails in many aspects of U.S. party politics.

In the early summer of 2008, at the conclusion of the state nomination contests, nominee-apparent Obama took a first step toward exercising control over the party. He moved key functions of the national party in Washington, DC—including voter mobilization and voter identification—to the campaign headquarters in Chicago. At about this time, observers of the 2008 contest were alive to the possibility that the presumptive nominee would replace Democratic National Committee (DNC) chairman Howard Dean. However, the candidate retained Chairman Dean but moved Paul Tewes, a top strategist who had run his Iowa caucus campaign, to DNC headquarters to negotiate the terms of the future relationship of the campaign and the formal party.

Chicago remained the hub of activity, certainly for the campaign organization but also for many of the formal party’s activities, through the fall. This period is typically a tricky time organizationally for the party, especially when the candidate at the top of the ticket is a nonincumbent. The decision to cede control of the party to the nominee is difficult, especially with the party’s concern for all of its candidates on the ballot. From the candidate’s perspective in a postreform era, nomination is his own doing, not the party’s. Thus, to adopt a more inclusive mind-set may seem unwarranted. Considerations like these mark the early to mid-summer of election years, necessitating a delicate dance between the party and the candidate to set the parameters and the tone for the remainder of the campaign.

The notable quality about 2008 was that there was not much of a dance, at least as manifested in the coordinated campaign. A mainstay of Democratic Party politics since 1984, the “coordinated” aspires to gains in efficiency associated with coordinating the activities that are played out at the state and local level—especially voter registration and mobilization—among candidacies up and down the ticket. Though it is premised on the idea that a rising tide lifts all ships, in a presidential year the race at the top of the ticket sometimes becomes the most important ship. In 2008, this was clearly the case, with very little coordination in practice. In fact, either Obama forces were going it alone, dominating the coordinated campaign fully, or the state party, in effect, ran a shadow coordinated effort. Both of these dynamics extended at least partially from the timing of the nomination contests. Because the battle between Obama and Senator Hillary Clinton had lingered so long, there was
no time for the typical spring negotiation in states among candidates, including the presidential nominee, of the coordinated plan.

When it comes down to it, for party insiders presidential politics involves a strong dose of both intra- and interparty tension. But the promise of a winning ticket can attenuate the former, and in fact things went fairly smoothly at the national level. It helped that the candidate demonstrated a degree of sensitivity to the formal party. A “no-drama Obama” effort was a stated goal of the candidate and his national organization, acknowledging that the candidate faced plenty of challenges: his inexperience, his race, and, by the end of the nomination season, the fences that needed to be mended with Senator Clinton and her supporters. With these hurdles in mind, there was no need to create more by stepping on the toes of the party regulars. A relatively smooth integration of the campaign and party apparatus during the summer and fall was also aided by the close fit of Howard Dean’s “50-state strategy” with the goals of the campaign. Chairman Dean’s signature program at the DNC was also the stated plan of the campaign as it looked toward November. And the nominee, like party operatives in the states, seemed to appreciate the inroads in party organization building that the chairman had made during his tenure.

Establishing a permanent postelection integration of the Obama forces and the party organization was a little more complex. Discussions began as early as September, with pointed debates about what would eventually happen to the famed e-mail list, which was highly celebrated as a critical factor in Obama’s strength. Options included keeping the list at the White House, handing it over to the party, or giving it to some other outside entity. The talks took on new urgency as election day approached, with concern that the momentum of the fall would quickly fade away. Ultimately, it was decided that the list would be under the control of campaign manager David Plouffe. This move departed from the norm established by Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, both of whom loaned their campaign lists to their parties upon winning their elections.

The public launch of OFA, of which the list was the cornerstone, came immediately before President Obama’s inauguration. OFA played up its close association with the winning campaign operation, sharing the same initials as Obama for America, the same BarackObama.com Web address, and essentially the same logo. These factors suggest a high degree of strategic planning from the upper ranks of the organization. OFA was billed as a “special project” of the DNC, thereby maintaining a structural connection to the formal party apparatus. But the party website acknowledged that it had a unique status, emphasizing that OFA built “on the movement that elected President Obama.” Organizationally, OFA is a department of the DNC and is connected
to the party's new-media operation. In fact, the new-media web page revealed the line of demarcation between party regulars and the Obama forces, distinguishing "longtime subscribers" from "folks from the Obama campaign."

While embracing the new organization, the DNC made it clear that OFA was distinct from the party. From the perspective of OFA, this decision was all for the better. To keep the campaign spin-off intact, rather than integrate it into the normal structures of the DNC, offered a layer of protection to OFA supporters. This arrangement also exempted OFA from the more mundane work of the organization, leaving that to the party. The DNC could reap the benefits of the fund-raising capacity of the e-mail list, without much effect on its day-to-day operations. It regarded the Obama loyalists as simply doing their own thing until they are reactivated for a reelection bid. Despite these distinctions, the finances of the DNC and OFA are merged, at least as far as the Federal Election Commission (FEC) is concerned. Opponents see this as deliberate obfuscation. At a minimum, it renders the task of isolating the financial prowess of OFA very difficult.

In short, divisions between the Obama forces and the Democratic Party—over all of the various iterations since the end of the nomination season—were alive and well, at points vocal and at points subdued, yet always influenced by the unique nature of the nomination and general election contests and the bold moves made by Barack Obama as an emerging party leader. Indeed, some of the internal division reemerged as OFA grew organizationally and became active in the politics of policy formation.

**Organization and Activities**

In 2009, OFA was staffed at the national level by a handful of paid operatives, including its director, Mitch Stewart, drawn from the ranks of the Obama presidential and coordinated campaigns. Gradually over 2009, the organization extended its reach to the state level, putting in place state directors and eventually field directors. Journalistic accounts, reporting figures released by OFA, show that there was staff in thirty states by early June and an additional twelve by early August. As of September 1, 2009, staff were in place in forty-five states, putting OFA "within weeks" of reaching its goal of having hired staff in every state. Mitch Stewart reported that in many states OFA staff operated out of state party headquarters.

By traditional measures of party institutional strength (Cotter et al. 1984; Aldrich 2000), this organization was weak. And it paled in comparison to its earlier campaign iteration. Perhaps it is apt that the "O" in OFA stands for "organizing," not "organization." However, while it is unwise to ignore tra-
ditional standards of strength completely, those same criteria do not capture fully the institutional capacity of an entity like OFA. In fact, in large part both its presence and its activities were virtual, represented by the ability of a small number of operatives to reach a large number of activists by means of advanced communications technology. This does not require a lot of people or space but rather a shared “sense of mission” (Cornfield 2009, 221). Yet, at the same time, OFA was institutionalized within the confines of the DNC, an organization in the more traditional sense of the word.

Beginning in March and extending through the end of 2009, OFA undertook a number of activities. These can be loosely categorized according to purpose, with the first set oriented to organization building, which was the focus of the spring and early summer. This appears to have been eclipsed in the summer—to the extent that the two are separable—by the second set of activities, grassroots mobilization. And through the entire time frame, fundraising, namely, in the form of e-mail solicitation, marked the OFA effort.

The ongoing process of organizing the states began in earnest in March and April 2009, when OFA began to put into place state directors in a small number of states. These individuals had typically served in the campaign, though not necessarily in the state in question; on whole they were young (i.e., twenty-five to thirty-five), yet experienced politically. One of the first activities performed by the state director was to take an organizational “listening tour,” connecting with former campaign activists and organizers, as well as with county party leaders. These listening tours were for the stated purpose of soliciting ideas about how to organize the OFA state effort and what to prioritize in terms of issues. The first states with directors in place included a number of 2008 battleground sites like Iowa, Wisconsin, New Mexico, Missouri, and Colorado. But OFA in its nationwide effort organized early in Republican presidential strongholds like Texas and Georgia as well. Also in the mix of early states was Indiana, an Obama surprise win in 2008. The precise size of the national operation remained a bit of a mystery, though two hundred paid nationwide staff would be a reasonable estimate for October 2009.4

OFA’s early activities, even as early as December 2008 and before its official introduction, were directed toward sustaining the interest and involvement of the campaign supporters in an ongoing effort to back the new president, yet under parameters that had yet to be determined. In other words, OFA was feeling its way. In December 2008, the nascent OFA activists reportedly held forty-five hundred house parties nationwide. House parties, a technique promoted first nationally during the 2004 Howard Dean nomination campaign, are meant to bring together like-minded political people, often neighbors, in a small, intimate gathering. Though this is an orchestrated version of structures and relationships among party regulars that marked the distant past of party
politics in the United States, the precise purpose of house parties at this juncture for OFA was ambiguous, beyond providing a venue to engage activists at a time traditionally marked by inactivity. Indeed, everything typically crashes to a halt after an election.

A later push for house parties in February coincided with congressional consideration of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the so-called stimulus package, which was the first major legislative initiative of the new administration. Reportedly fewer in number, these house parties seemed to vary in effectiveness. For example, while some one hundred house parties had been scheduled in the greater Atlanta vicinity during December, there were thirty-eight house parties at the time of the stimulus debate. Similarly, though, the purpose of the gatherings was unclear. Told by the president by e-mail, "I need your help to spread the word and build support," house party attendees were not necessarily advised about what should follow. "It was unclear exactly what people were supposed to do, other than watch a streaming video from [OFA] and talk about it. Participants were not systematically asked to contact legislators or otherwise mobilized to service, an OFA push that would come later in the spring and summer. Yet, some participants found the experience of attending a "stimulus party" valuable and inspiring. Commentary on a gathering of thirty-six people in a Maryland home reports that group leaders distributed "information-packed handouts" after an initial "30-40 minutes [of attendees'] sharing their stories." Later, breakout sessions focused on issue areas that were included in the stimulus and on a plan of action to contact members of Congress.

The budget was the second major legislative initiative that engaged OFA; the timing of this involvement was coterminous with the first listening tours. As the budget debate waged during March in Washington, a significant coalition of interests formed in opposition to the president. This included not only Republicans but some of President Obama's fellow partisans, most notably a number of moderate Democrats. OFA called up the troops for a weekend of canvassing in late March 2009, with volunteers asking people to sign a "pledge"—a petition, really—that would be delivered to Congress. Canvassers were also asked to encourage people to take direct action by visiting the OFA website and then contacting members of Congress directly in order to convey popular support for their president. This campaign garnered significant attention, including that from traditional news media, which in most cases was eclipsed by the new media and the blogosphere. During this late-March period, Obama voices walked a fine line between touting the novelty of the effort and keeping expectations intact. David Plouffe emphasized the desirability of the "conversation" and
debates about politics occurring on “doorsteps and [in] diners,” not just “on cable TV among Washington politicians.” He acknowledged, at the same time, that “there will be some trial and error.”

Even as OFA turned more directly to mobilization, it continued to work on organization building, naming state directors and field directors well into the summer. It also encouraged activists to engage their local party organizations—to attend precinct committee meetings and otherwise work to enlist the formal party in the OFA effort. And the operation made a deliberate effort to draw activists and the party organizations into service activities on an ongoing basis, but especially as directed toward a National Health Care Day of Service in late June. This service-day campaign and others like it were highlighted by President and Mrs. Obama, who espouse a personal commitment to community service. That said, this sort of activity was something new for traditional party organizations, which have historically focused their efforts more narrowly and directly on the election of candidates under the party label (Cotter et al. 1984; Aldrich 2000). Undoubtedly many party leaders and activists have a service-oriented impulse at a personal level. And, in fact, service might even indirectly advance the cause of the party and its candidates by engendering positive reactions among the community. Still, it remains that community service, first and foremost, serves a narrow, instrumental purpose for both the traditional party and for organizations like OFA. Service is a vehicle for sustaining the engagement of activists between election seasons and, as such, helps fulfill organization-building goals.

Summer OFA mobilization activities began with a dual focus; yet, one quickly surpassed the other. OFA efforts directed at supporting the confirmation of Sonia Sotomayor to the Supreme Court focused on encouraging its ranks to “Stand with Sotomayor”—to contact senators and to write letters to the editor, both activities facilitated by the communications technology embedded in the OFA website. But prospects for confirmation congealed essentially when Sotomayor testified before the Justice Committee in the third week in July.

The health care campaign of the second half of 2009 represented OFA’s most ambitious initiative yet. Analytically, the case is important because it reveals the fundamental difficulty of sustaining activism in pursuit of an outcome decidedly less conclusive than winning an election. And it also exposes those fault lines between the organization and others in the party.

Just as the health care-reform debate was fluid, so too were OFA activities. In June, as the debate inched its way toward Congress, OFA asked its activists to be, in effect, conduits for the dissemination of information potentially relative to the health care debate. It urged them to participate in
letter-writing campaigns, both to members of Congress and to newspapers, thereby pushing the same tactic—at the same time—that it used in the Sotomayor contest. But with health care, OFA experimented with new techniques. For example, it asked members to collect “health insurance horror stories” to post online. And e-mail recipients were urged to create “phone booths,” that is, impromptu public gatherings in which cell phone users approximate a traditional phone bank, both to convey messages via telephone and to garner public and media attention.

Activity ramped up in July, as did a debate about strategy among prominent Democratic voices and even among OFA activists. An intraparty fault-line formed between the congressional Blue Dogs and more liberal ranks in the party, especially on the topic of whether a public option should be included in the White House proposal. This raised a strategic dilemma of sorts for reform advocates. Given Republican opposition, the president needed the support of the moderate Democrats. But to pressure them—especially on the matter of a public option, considering that many represented moderate constituencies—could endanger the members themselves and possibly threaten their support for even a more watered-down package that might well emerge in time. Put differently, the strategic concerns weighed short- and long-term prospects, all in an environment of considerable uncertainty about what would eventually happen. Unsurprisingly, given these circumstances and Democratic propensity toward factional division, internal party conflicts emerged in full measure.

One ad run by the DNC, promoted by OFA and generally positive in tone, argued that “it is now time” for reform. But at that point, the president maintained his insistence on a public option, so the placement of the ad in districts with wavering Democrats appeared to be a strong-arm tactic, a threat to fellow partisans whose support was questionable. The ad ran in about twenty media markets. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid spoke up, saying, “It’s a waste of money to run ads from Democrats attacking Democrats.” But at about the same time, OFA ventured into the fray directly, with some of its supporters resorting to confrontational tactics—for example, demonstrations outside offices of Blue Dogs. More forcefully, MoveOn.org, then approaching a decade as a prominent grassroots voice of the Left, actually ran attack ads at the end of July targeting Democratic congressmen who did not support the president. During the next month, Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel weighed in on the issue, with hallmark profanity, deriding the stupidity of Democrat-on-Democrat attacks. July had exposed the underlying tension within the Democratic Party, as the details were negotiated. Indeed, OFA was a part of the tension, to the extent that it supported voices that prioritized a particular policy position—and the president—over the party itself.
At about the same time that Democratic infighting emerged, there was a growing awareness that despite President Obama’s promise of a new politics, in many ways it was still politics as usual. Figures released earlier in the summer highlighted the extraordinary sums spent on lobbying by interests in the health care industry on both sides of the issue. *CQ MoneyLine* reported that the health sector had spent $149 million on lobbying in 2009. And the media devoted considerable attention to the inside politics of the Senate Finance Committee, with its bipartisan “gang of six” plodding toward a compromise, while the House committee was hung up on its one-thousand-page bill, trying to build support among a set of varied Democratic interests. This included some new Democratic members who represented affluent districts, exerting strong, antitax sentiment within the party. As the August recess approached with no chance of legislative accomplishment, OFA began to mobilize for the next battle, pushing with traditional and new tactics to express their support for reform when members were back in their districts.

OFA’s fall arsenal of activities was wide-ranging, at times shotgun in quality. It devoted considerable effort to mobilizing supporters to the recess town hall meetings, especially to offer a counterweight to vocal and disruptive antireform forces whose voices dominated in many settings. It reactivated the house party technique but also experimented with some new tools on the Web. It made an apparent one-time use of a robo-call in August, asking supporters to “take the opportunity to pay tribute to the late Ted Kennedy” after the senator’s death. And in a much-publicized, one-day campaign on October 20, 2009, OFA activists placed three hundred thousand phone calls to members of Congress.

But as the health care battle waged over the summer and fall, OFA routinely returned to the activity that had so marked its success during the campaign: fund-raising. Indeed, from January through October, OFA regularly made fund-raising appeals to its supporters. A noteworthy October campaign was framed as an effort to fund television ads, in order to bring the compelling stories of reform supporters to American viewers. One prominent component featured “the cavalry,” doctors and nurses in white who would offer heart-wrenching accounts of Americans whose health and lives had been compromised by their lack of access to insurance and treatments.

With appeals like these and with its repeated attempts to mobilize activists over 2009, OFA attempted to affect the policy-making process, hoping to rally support for the president’s initiatives. Its techniques were sometimes new, at other times versions of established ones. And while it appeared ready to tailor in a flash its strategy to the twists and turns of the policy debate, it also appeared to continue to feel its way, even in the waning months of President Obama’s first year in office.
Something New?

When OFA emerged on the political scene in early 2009, it was touted as an innovative organization. However, to leave it at that ignores the important story about the diffusion and development of political structures and campaign activities that provides the historical context and the practical foundation for OFA. For, in fact, OFA neither invented nor reinvented the wheel, but it did reposition it.

On an abstract level, OFA represented one cog in President Obama’s approach to party leadership that confirmed him as a partisan president, so clearly a departure from the dominant model of the second half of the twentieth century. To lead by means of the party was an approach challenged by Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who oversaw the expansion of the administrative capacity of the presidency and who, as a result, substituted the exercise of executive power for party power. Indeed, under FDR, the Democratic Party became “the party to end all parties” (Milkis 1993, 5). But in time, the pendulum swung back. The election of Ronald Reagan ushered in a new era in which the president both exercised control over the party and used the party to accomplish his political goals. If FDR was the “modern” president, in light of his use of the modern administrative state to govern, then Reagan and his successors returned to a partisan approach. Perhaps no president did this more forcefully than George W. Bush, a consummate partisan who even perfected the use of the administrative state for partisan ends (Skinner 2006; Milkis and Rhodes 2009).

It was clear at an early stage that President Obama resembled his predecessor on at least one count: his attempt to place his imprimatur on the party and to use the party as a tool of governing. And the early record supported the contention that Obama was cut from the Bush cloth, though the president’s rhetoric routinely positioned himself above the fray. He moved quickly and with assuredness to make his mark on the party, even before his nomination, with the placement of Tewes at the DNC. And once elected, he turned to his ally and friend Tim Kaine to be his voice at the DNC as in-party chairman. As details of the Obama appointment process emerged, it became apparent that some of his practices could enhance a sense of obligation that Democratic members of Congress felt toward him. He ventured into territory typically off-limits to presidents, initially urging New York governor David Paterson not to run for election in 2010. And after losing the Kennedy senate seat in early 2010, he moved to reclaim control of the party apparatus.

If President Obama resembled his predecessor in his general orientation as a partisan, he did as well with respect to OFA, at least as the entity was sketched out at its origin. OFA looked like a George W. Bush initiative run
by Ken Mehlman, former George W. Bush/Dick Cheney campaign manager, then chairman of the Republican National Committee (RNC). This initiative, described by George C. Edwards, drawing from Washington Post coverage, was marked by the following: “A national database of 7.5 million e-mail activists, 1.6 million volunteers, and hundreds of thousands of neighborhood precinct captains—to build congressional support for Bush’s plans, starting with Social Security” (2009, 197). The brainchild of Karl Rove and Mehlman, the David Axelrod/David Plouffe team of the day, the Bush-era entity is in some respects a vivid precedent for OFA. But it did not accomplish much. “What was probably the largest and best-organized public relations effort to sell a policy in the history of the Republic ended with a whimper—and in failure” (Edwards 2009, 198). Nonetheless, OFA resembles with eerie similarity the description of President Bush’s policy-promoting initiative.

There are other precedents as well. In fact, in terms of basic structure, OFA looked like a typical national electoral campaign in its nascent stages. But perhaps more aptly, it resembles organizations like MoveOn.org, which rely heavily on e-mail lists and have remarkably small staffs. Indeed, over the last decade, the Netroots organizations of the Left have developed and refined those same organizational tactics and activities that Obama for America pursued before the election and that OFA has pursued since the president took office.

The close connection between the activities of Obama for America and Organizing for America prompted some to refer to OFA as the “permanent campaign.” This is a particularly powerful image because it also resonates with the idea that in time OFA will be reinvented again, this time returning to a stark electoral orientation. But perhaps more aptly, OFA is a permanent campaign in the sense that Hugh Helco used the term. In his words, it is an entity that permits “a nonstop process of seeking to manipulate sources of public approval to engage in the act of governing itself” (quoted in Ornstein and Mann 2000, 219). But this is far from new. Ronald Reagan cast the die when he appealed to the public on television to contact congressmen and to push for support of his tax-cut initiative. The permanent campaign has simply been taken to extraordinary levels in the intervening years (Edwards 2007). And in many ways, OFA is an extension of structures and activities that have marked the politics of the twenty-first century. Even its reliance on cutting-edge communications technology is a step in a natural progression, one that we have seen move from elections to governing, and now even to government with “Gov 2.0.”

OFA offers a dizzying number of new communications technologies to engage its supporters. Activists who visit the BarackObama.com website, whether mobilized by e-mails from OFA or otherwise inspired, find a visually
active—at times downright busy—site that bombards the viewer with offers of more information and invitations and tools to participate. It is “Web 2.0” in orientation, promoting interaction, not simply passive viewship, and facilitating person-to-person exchanges and online communities. To the Facebook generation, this is familiar territory. To the over-thirty-five crowd, it may be a bit daunting.

Visitors who register with BarackObama.com gain entry to MyBO and its arsenal of activities and opportunities: form a phone booth, create a blog, receive text messages, participate in an online video challenge or an online conference call—and track your activities and progress. While this may all seem new and foreign to some, it is quickly becoming a modus operandi of politics. Granted, some of the individual techniques have been invented by OFA; however, the most significant, new aspect of OFA is that it is housed at the DNC. That, indeed, is pathbreaking.

Effectiveness

Milkis and Rhodes (2009) posed the important question of whether OFA would be as effective as its earlier campaign iteration. Yet, judging effectiveness is particularly difficult due in part to the unavailability of good data. Even basic measurements of the capacity of this entity—basic descriptions—are more elusive than for other political organizations. OFA operates under a shroud of secrecy. Still, the available evidence suggests that the structures in place and the activities actually undertaken are but a fraction of what characterized Obama for America during the campaign. The e-mail list remains central to the operation; available information provides some insight into its characteristics and quality.

First, the list is in-house and separate from that of the DNC. Obama for America, during the campaign, was keen to keep proprietary control over its list, while still contributing to the larger Democratic effort to build and refine lists. In fact, in this regard 2008 was a breakthrough year in general for Democrats, who have historically lagged behind Republicans in terms of detailed and workable lists. The notable Voter Vault and the 72-Hour Project of the GOP had been the centerpiece of the party’s successful get-out-the-vote campaign in the recent past. And despite Democratic stabs at list refinement and mobilization since as early as 2000, their efforts paled in comparison to those of the Republicans.

The situation in 2008 was markedly different, with the party and many left-leaning organizations contributing to a for-profit data management consortium, Catalist, run by Bill Clinton-ites Harold Ickes and Laura Quinn. This,
in conjunction with the “VAN” and other Web-based platforms by which party and campaign workers (including canvassers in the field) updated voter records, put the Democrats at least on a par with the GOP for the first time ever.\textsuperscript{11} The DNC and Obama for America both contracted with Catalist during the 2008 campaign. Yet, while the DNC continued to use its services, the OFA list was apparently not dependent on Catalist efforts.

Descriptions that emerged after the election shed some light on the campaign’s own techniques for list management and innovation; one can presume that OFA continues in the same vein. In 2008, the campaign worked to refine the list in light of complementary information provided about voters and activists (e.g., through polling and canvassing), which was collected during the campaign. To the extent, however, that this information is not present in the governing stage, one can infer that the task of list management is more difficult for OFA than it was for the campaign. Undoubtedly the list has shortcomings. E-mails erroneously directed to students, presumably because of the presence of an .edu domain, suggest that OFA was not doing the sort sophisticated list enhancement that is offered by such firms as Catalist. One even wonders about the size of the list. It is not uncommon for individuals to be registered with OFA under two different e-mail addresses. And most certainly in the nine months of its OFA life, the list has experienced some churn, with activists unsubscribing or otherwise discontinuing their involvement. At the same time, some definitely have been added to the list. Yet, it remains, be it too high or too low, that 13 million was the reported list size over 2009.

Regardless of the list size, not all e-mail recipients respond. Again, OFA’s situation is unclear, but we do know that the “open rate” for nonprofits hovers at around 16 percent. That is, on average 16 percent of the total number of messages sent by an organization are opened.\textsuperscript{12} Precisely what this implies for OFA is not entirely clear. Certainly presence on the list is taken as an indication of membership in the organization. And to expect someone to open an e-mail seems a low hurdle to confirm membership. At the same time, e-mail is but one of the means of communication between OFA and its members, and even among members, with a plethora of other options available (e.g., social networking, texting, Twittering). Yet, all things considered, logic would hold that if the list were cleaned and included only those who passed some minimal criterion like opening an e-mail, it would shrink to considerably less than 13 million names. Still, the reputation of the OFA e-mail list is strong. In its consideration of the best e-mail lists, Politico ranked OFA’s as number one. “It is in a league of its own, not only in terms of size, but with regards to its management.”\textsuperscript{13} Second and third places in the ranking went to MoveOn.org and the RNC, respectively.
Even in-house mail operations generally have the ability to track the response to their appeals easily. In all likelihood, OFA knows who opens an e-mail, who follows a Web link, and even who forwards the appeal to someone else. And evidence from the campaign era suggests that the organization would use this information to fine-tune appeals. “Campaign staff would frequently break their supporter list . . . into several randomized groups, whose members would then receive different e-mails based on the message or feature being tested. . . . [With] the results in hand (messages opened, actions taken, donations made) . . . the team could apply this information to the next round of e-mails” (Delany 2009, 34–35).

This assess-and-modify approach is representative of a more general observation about the mind-set of the campaign. Namely, it developed tools and techniques that were sufficient and then “incrementally improved them through testing and experience” (Delany 2009, 17). It looked beyond the short term and envisioned a more effective arsenal in the future, an approach more easily undertaken with the luxury of time than under the tight constraints of an election campaign.

Specifics about the list aside, some measures do tap the extent of the activity of those OFA activists and even begin to address the effectiveness of OFA appeals. For example, viewership of OFA’s YouTube channel is tracked by Tube-Mogul. Numbers from June 2009 through the end of the year show considerable fluctuation on a daily basis, with some remarkable spikes over the time span. Hovering at around forty thousand daily viewers through the fall, it had dropped considerably by the end of the year. There were, however, dramatic spikes. September 13, the day that the president addressed the United Nations General Assembly, saw 113,000 views. And on September 23, the OFA YouTube channel showed the Steve Kroft 60 Minutes interview with Obama, which was aired just days after Rep. Joe Wilson (R-SC) interrupted the president’s congressional address with a shout of “You lie”; this had 135,000 views. In general, though, viewership fell far short of the levels established during the campaign and even at the outset of the new administration.

Of course, there is no clear way to identify who is part of the online traffic; it can just as easily comprise the mobilized opposition as supporters. But it does seem clear that considering its various social networking activities, the texts, the Twitters, and the other tools of MyBO, OFA has generated a certain degree of traffic among real supporters. Still, on a very concrete level, this may be little more than an interesting phenomenon. Something more has to happen for it to be significant politically. The “online buzz” needs to be converted to “offline activity.”

Financial data offer another glimpse of OFA effectiveness, and the picture that emerges is one of limited success. In terms of contributions to
their national committees, in 2009 Democrats lagged behind Republicans. Because OFA’s finances are indistinguishable from those of the DNC—at least as revealed in FEC data—this measure is not ideal. But it shows that the image of endless money entering the Obama coffers, though applicable to the campaign, does not characterize OFA. By the end of 2009, the RNC had raised $91.2 million compared to $79.3 for the DNC. The year began with a stark GOP advantage, with Republicans outpacing the Democrats in January receipts by a margin of four to one, which contributed to a secure cash-on-hand cushion for the RNC that extended for much of the year. On a monthly basis, two parties alternated in winning the receipts contest, sometimes achieving close to parity and at other times being separated by as much as $3 million, as illustrated by the DNC monthly advantage in July. The RNC cash-on-hand advantage was actually erased in October; by year’s end the DNC had $13.2 million compared to the RNC’s $8.4 million on hand. Yet, over the entire year, the RNC carried no debt, while the Democratic debt hovered at around $5 million. All in all, the financial data show that the DNC, though on reasonably solid ground after 2009, did not appear to reap huge financial benefits from its in-party status. And although OFA’s role in this is not clear, it is safe to conclude that OFA did not pull in the sort of cash that Democrats had envisioned.

The limited data of a systematic character, along with the qualitative judgment of observers, points to the conclusion that OFA efforts have not been highly effective. Its efforts to mobilize the activist base seem to have been met with modest success. Campaigns to produce petitions, to deliver supporters to meetings, to get letters placed on editorial pages, and to garner positive media attention, for that matter, all seem marked by limited results. The delivery of 214,000 petition signatures to Congress after the vigorous budget campaign seems somewhat unimpressive, considering that it represents less than 2 percent of the 13 million reportedly on the list. Even three hundred thousand telephone calls, given multiple calls per person, undoubtedly engaged a small fraction of the list. At the same time, for a single congressional office, one thousand signatures offering support for the president on the budget could effectively balance the one thousand calls, faxes, and e-mails sent by opposition forces. Furthermore, to deliver two to three hundred bodies to a recess town hall could balance or even overwhelm a strong antireform turnout. In other words, in order to understand the effect of the mobilization activities of OFA, one needs to consider the targeted nature of the appeals. It is quite possible that with this in mind, OFA has been more effective than otherwise estimated.

However, the attitude of the traditional and new media, as well as of some academic voices who have weighed in, has been skeptical. Political scientist
Thomas Mann, commenting on the petition drive of the spring 2009 budget campaign, called it "a pretty lame start to the effort, and largely inconsequential to the outcome." On the issue of OFA health care-reform efforts, Harold Myerson of the Washington Post offered a biting prediction: "All very commendable, and about as likely to affect the outcome of the health care deliberations as the phases of the moon."

Undeniably there is some foundation for this skepticism. But there also seems to have emerged a tendency, especially among the new media, to find newsworthy the fiascos and debacles of OFA. Under one such account, MyBO offered a "Tweet Your Senator" tool, providing activists with preloaded Tweets—a "Tweetbomb." In one case, however, it used the wrong e-mail address, thereby bombarding an innocent bystander with Tweets. A similar flop occurred with another MyBO tool. An appointments widget led some constituents to believe that they had really scheduled an appointment with Senator Diane Feinstein (D-CA). In light of this, Sonja Sharp, blogging for Mother Jones, asked a pointed question: "Is Organizing for America making itself a nuisance?" At the same time, OFA did some creative things in 2009. When "death panels" entered the lexicon of health care reform in late summer, OFA purchased ads on Google to accompany the results of a Google search on the term. Shown at the right of the screen under "Sponsored Links," the advertisement read: "They [Death Panels] Don’t Exist. Obama’s Plan Will Protect Seniors. Get the Facts Now!" The ad also provided a link to OFA, which, if followed, offered the death-panel searcher with an array of OFA communications tools to help dispel the rumor.

Anecdotes may illustrate both the limitations and the potential of technology, but in the end assessments about the effectiveness of OFA are inseparable from political outcomes. To the extent that the health care reform effort failed or succeeded to realize the hopes of reform-minded Democrats, OFA will be considered complicit in that failure or success.

**Discussion**

OFA faces some fundamental challenges in carving out a productive role for itself in the realm of policy. Two seem particularly pressing, the first dealing with a challenge from within and the second from without. Regarding the former, activists on whom OFA relies so heavily were pulled in directions not necessarily conducive to the organization. Certainly, a sense of exhaustion marked many Obama for America activists, who had worked so hard for the campaign, some for more than a year. This, of course, is precisely what OFA fought to overcome. But even for those activists still game for politics, other
agenda items vied for their attention. Local issues pulled activists away from involvement with OFA, which focuses on the national level. Gay marriage, for example, returned to the policy agenda in states. Local off-year electoral contests and even national issues that were not among those highlighted by the organization, cap and trade for example, exerted a pull, leading activists away from OFA. For those who remained involved over the entire year, there was growing disillusionment, a feeling that the appeals to contact members of Congress would never end; nor would the requests for money. Indeed, the beauty of an electoral campaign is that it is over at some point, but a policy campaign can go on, seemingly, forever. And though the public has grown to accept that it plays an important role in financing elections, it is hard for activists to understand why the president has continued to ask for their money to advance his policy agenda.

The challenge from above comes from an embarrassment of riches, a massive and active set of organizations on the Left, some well-funded, many with creative leaders and active grassroots support—all reinvigorated by the outcome of the 2008 election. But this massive progressive force is not monolithic; its policy foci vary—from the environment, to concerns unique to labor, to international aspects of human rights. And despite new efforts to coordinate the Left—especially in Washington, DC—at some critical point the dynamics become zero-sum. There is only so much space on the policy agenda, so big a pool of activists to mobilize, and so much money available. The administration situated itself firmly in this progressive nexus. For example, top Obama insiders were reportedly regulars at the weekly Tuesday meeting of the Common Purpose Project. But there was no clear role for OFA in this arrangement. And at a minimum, OFA was just one of many voices and organizations of the Left.

There is also a second challenge from outside of the organization—namely, the realities of policy making that maintain that strong dose of politics as usual, with critical details hammered out in committee chambers, replete with trade-offs, compromises, and even occasionally with deliberation. In its starkest form, the permanent-campaign aspect of OFA does not lend itself to the “cooperation, negotiation, and compromise” necessary under the typical mode of governing (Helco, quoted in Edwards 2007, 286).

All of this is to say that perhaps we should look beyond the realm of public policy for signs of OFA effectiveness. Three areas in particular come to mind. The first involves future electoral efforts. Sometime well before the 2012 contest, President Obama will in all likelihood reactivate the famed list for the purposes of his reelection bid. To the extent that its ongoing work will make that easier and more productive, OFA may serve a useful function for the president. Until then, it walks a fine line, needing to approach, but stop
short of, that legal thread that separates a party from a campaign organization. Undoubtedly, the GOP is watching this carefully.

A second, less instrumental realm of impact or effectiveness involves the possibility that there could be some currency in OFA as a device to help change the culture of politics, to facilitate citizens' ongoing attention and involvement. Over the last two decades, organized interests on the left and the right have done this effectively, while the parties have barely made an effort. To instill in citizens a sense of meaning as partisans whose political involvements and connections are central to their lives is a noble goal. Of course, emphasizing a person over a party—President Obama over the Democratic Party—may not be the way to go about this. And, admittedly, the image of OFA and its activists spinning their wheels will unlikely contribute to a real culture change.

Finally, scholars and practitioners alike should give due consideration to the idea that OFA is, in reality, an experiment—both in terms of structuring a party organization and utilizing the new technologies offered to politics. They should reflect on the merits of placing such a candidate-centered organization within the party and assess objectively the techniques and technologies associated with OFA. We have known for a long time that lists and other new developments are not going away. "For better or worse, the new forms of media that came of age in the 2008 elections are here to stay" (Gulati 2009). If the party can learn from this experiment in the long term, then it might ultimately lead to enhanced success or strength, even if OFA is deficient on measures of policy impact. OFA, despite the impression that it is still trying to figure out what it wants to do, does seem to reflect on the question of what works and what does not. It is incumbent on the party at large as well as the Obama-based party forces to do the same. Possibly, with a more distant time frame in mind, President Obama could advance the cause of other presidents in their efforts to lead their parties and to perform effectively in office.

Notes

1. The early fall registration of OrganizingforAmerica.com and .org, potentially valuable domain names after the public launch, implied impressive foresight or very early active planning for OFA, according to Fables of the Reconstruction (blog) at http://mithras/blogs.com/2009/01/obama-20.html.
4. Politico's analysis of FEC data suggest that OFA staff constituted the "lion's share" of the DNC's nationwide staff of 380, which was more extensive than in the past. The analysis emphasizes that the staff, though marked by campaign experience, had little experience with the formal party (Vogel 2009b).
7. The Huffington Post, Politico, and Marc Ambinder, blogging in *The Atlantic*, offered thorough and insightful commentary in 2009 on OFA.
10. He departed from strict dictates of senatorial courtesy in some cases, favoring a process that ensures a consensus choice emerges from the entire state Democratic delegation.
11. Marc Ambinder's release in early October 2009 of the Catalist report on its 2008 efforts, prepared for its client organizations, offers to the larger community a unique view of the operations of this firm. Along with other reports about 2008, including the August 2009 Colin Delaney report on online communications and the Obama campaign and a 2009 M+R Strategic Services benchmark study of nonprofits, a clear picture is emerged about state-of-the-art lists and techniques, especially on the left.
12. There are more stringent standards for recipient action beyond merely opening an e-mail. The "response rate" refers to the percentage of respondents who take the action requested by the e-mail (e.g., call your member of Congress or contribute money). While the response rate for advocacy messages is under 5 percent, it is under 1 percent for fund-raising appeals (M+R Strategic Services and the Nonprofit Technology Network 2009).
14. A YouTube "view" simply refers to each instance in which the video is started. TubeMogul research on top video sites finds that the typical view is very short. (YouTube was not one of the sites.) On average, 10 percent of views last less than ten seconds. A three-minute video will be viewed in its entirety in only about 17 percent of the views (TubeMogul, "How Much of a Typical Video Online is Actually Watched?" TubeMogul, December 1, 2008, www.tubemogul.com/research/report/18 [last accessed March 29, 2010]).
15. Facebook friends are marked by the opposite trend. On election day, Barack Obama had 2.4 million friends, compared to John McCain's 0.6 million. But after a sizable boost in friends in February and early March, when the president had 6.0 million friends, his numbers climbed steadily to just over 7 million by the end of 2009. By contrast, at year end Sarah Palin had just over 1 million Facebook friends. (Facebook data are from TechPresident.com.)
17. Monthly receipts are compiled from the Swing State Project (www.swingstateproject.com) and cash-on-hand from the Center for Responsive Politics (www.crp.org.).
Part III

PARTY RESOURCES
When Barack Obama took office, he recast his highly touted campaign organization as a policy tool. The transformation of Obama for America into Organizing for America (OFA) was heralded as a way for the new president to marshal the power of the campaign into the presidency itself and, in doing so, to refashion the Democratic Party in the president’s mold. Not surprisingly, this move was controversial. On one hand, it was seen as a brilliant and transformative move by Obama insiders David Plouffe and Mitch Stewart, seeking to enlist the people who had fueled the election campaign—namely, those on the famed 13-million-strong e-mail list—in the business of governing. On the other hand, OFA was described as a potentially nefarious organization, with unthinking members pledged to support their leader, regardless of the merits of his initiatives. But with decidedly less hyperbole, Sidney M. Milkis and Jesse H. Rhodes (2009) posed the pressing question of the day: could OFA be as effective in governing as its earlier iteration was in campaigning? Many doubted that it could be. And, in fact, the politics of the early Obama presidency suggest that OFA did not become the player in politics, even in party politics, that some might have envisioned. Yet, it represents an innovative application of grassroots politics, which relies on new technology and is embedded in the official party framework. Furthermore, advancing the president’s policy agenda may not be the sole criterion on which OFA should be judged.
Third, because presidential candidates and their parties have long worked together, it is not possible to say, in a meaningful way, from the parties’ financial figures alone that the national parties have played a less (or more) prominent role in presidential elections after BCRA than before.

Fourth, we can say, however, that the congressional parties are every bit as prominent in House and Senate elections as they ever have been. Their receipts are up, while their independent spending made them the dominant voice during the closing weeks of many, if not most, of the close elections for the House and Senate in 2006 and 2008.

Finally, we conclude with a policy observation. The parties have maintained or expanded their role both by increasing their receipts and by using constitutionally protected independent expenditures to replace soft-money issue advertising. This substitution has had a problematic effect, although not the one usually identified by BCRA’s initial opponents. Parties and candidates were able to coordinate over the parties’ soft-money expenditures because the law before BCRA pretended that soft-money spending was not campaign related. Now the parties and their candidates have to pretend independence. We do not consider such independence to be healthy. At the conclusion of this chapter, we endorse a recommendation for increasing coordination between the parties and their candidates.

Democratic and Republican National Committees

It was perfectly reasonable during the debate over BCRA to expect the parties to lose money—at least initially. It was also perfectly reasonable to overinterpret results from the first election after BCRA (2004) to emphasize the importance of small donors. The elections of 2006 and 2008 reveal a more nuanced picture.

Table 11.1 shows the receipts of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and the Republican National Committee (RNC) from 2000 through 2008. Individual “hard-money” contributions are presented in columns that aggregate each donor’s giving over the course of a two-year cycle. We chose to present aggregate giving by donors rather than to follow the Federal Election Commission (FEC) procedure of reporting contributions (or transactions) because the transactional method gives a misleading impression that appears to overstate the role of small donors. Many of the donors to the parties give monthly contributions by credit card or electronic transfer. By using aggregate contribution data, we are counting a person who gives $50 per month for two years as having contributed $1,200. The procedure affects how we see donors up and down the giving scale. At the higher end, some donors
**TABLE 11.1**
National Party Committees' Receipts, 1999–2008

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<td></td>
<td>Total Receipts (millions)</td>
<td>$200 or Less (millions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dollars</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NC</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>X08</td>
<td>260.1</td>
<td>69.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X06</td>
<td>130.8</td>
<td>63.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>X04</td>
<td>404.4</td>
<td>128.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>X02</td>
<td>162.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>X00</td>
<td>260.6</td>
<td>41.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VC</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X08</td>
<td>427.6</td>
<td>116.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X06</td>
<td>243.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>X04</td>
<td>392.4</td>
<td>129.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>X02</td>
<td>284.0</td>
<td>85.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X00</td>
<td>379.0</td>
<td>91.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Campaign Finance Institute analysis of FEC records.
(including professional lobbyists) divide their anticipated contribution budgets to respond to several expected requests or to attend more than one ticketed event. We count a person with five $500 events as a $2,500 donor.

The procedure for creating the tables involved two basic steps. The first was to aggregate each donor’s contributions by matching names and addresses. The second was to “back out” from the apparently “unitemized” contribution totals any amount that we could attribute to donors who subsequently crossed the $200 disclosure threshold. (The evidence is in the form of a disparity between a donor’s first itemized contribution amount and the year-to-date amount that also appears in the same FEC record.)

The columns further to the right in the tables should be self-explanatory. The column labeled “other” includes contributions from political committees, interest income, loans, and so forth. “Soft money” appears in the far right column in tables 11.1 and 11.4 for the two pre-BCRA election cycles (2000 and 2002), below a line that divides pre- and post-BCRA elections in these and other tables in this chapter.

Overall Receipts

The DNC’s and RNC’s receipts for 2006 and 2008 shown in table 11.1 were about the same as in 2000 and 2002, showing that the parties have continued to raise enough hard money to make up for the loss of soft money after BCRA. In presidential election years, the RNC’s receipts moved steadily upward from 2000 to 2004 and 2008, despite the loss of soft money after 2002. In each of the three elections, the party’s presidential candidate accepted public funding for the general election while rejecting it for the primaries. The DNC’s picture is not as linear. Its receipts spiked in 2004 when the party’s nominee rejected public financing for the primaries but accepted it for the general election. The DNC’s receipts then fell in 2008 to the same levels as 2000, but with all of the 2008 funds coming from hard money. We argue below that Barack Obama’s decision to reject public financing for the general election had much to do with the dip between 2004 and 2008. In midterm elections, which are of secondary importance to the two national committees, both committees had lower receipts in 2006 than 2002, despite a substantial increase in hard money.

Sources of Funds

The parties’ fund-raising success in 2004 was presented at the time as largely resulting from a surge in small donors, many of whom gave over the Internet. There is an element of truth to this story. The RNC’s receipts from
small donors (defined here as giving a total of $200 or less) increased by more than 40 percent between 2000 and 2004. The DNC’s numbers were even more impressive, as the DNC more than tripled its receipts from small donors between 2000 and 2004. However, the small-donor surge was only part of the DNC’s story in 2004; it also raised 4.5 times as much hard money from donors who gave between $201 and $999, 2.5 times as much from donors who gave $1,000 or more, and 4 times as much from donors who gave $20,000 or more. In raw dollars, the increase from donors who gave $1,000 or more exceeded the increase from those who gave $200 or less.

Let us now expand the story to compare the most recent midterm and presidential election cycles (2006 and 2008) with the final set before BCRA (2000 and 2002), putting aside for the moment the remarkable DNC fund-raising of 2004. During the most recent two elections, the DNC raised about $29 million more per two-year cycle from $200-and-under donors than it did during the pre-BCRA cycles of 2000 and 2002. This again nearly doubled the DNC’s support from small donors. Over the same period, however, the DNC’s large donors ($1,000 or more) went up by $49 million per cycle, with about $40 million coming from donors who gave $20,000 or more. The RNC’s numbers are comparable. Small donors gave the RNC about $19 million more per election cycle. At the same time, the RNC’s large donors ($1,000 or more) went up by $86 million per election, with donors who gave $20,000 or more accounting for $52 million of the increase. From this we conclude that the RNC and DNC both did in fact replace the soft money they lost, but the hard-money increase came from across the fund-raising spectrum, with more coming from large donors than small.

Presidential Candidates and the Parties

Table 11.1 shows that the DNC experienced an enormous funding surge in 2004, which dropped back to lower levels in 2008, while the RNC’s receipts showed a steady and modest increase across the three presidential election years of 2000, 2004, and 2008. The differences between the parties and across elections become less puzzling if we look at the candidates and their parties together. We begin with an analogy. The congressional party committees have been described by political scientists as agents of the incumbent members of Congress. Robin Kolodny (1998) has shown that for much of their history since the Civil War, the Hill committees were seen as agents for reelecting incumbents. This changed in the 1990s when incumbents came to accept having the committees concentrate on close races—helping challengers and open-seat candidates as well as incumbents. The members’ goal had changed
from simply serving the needs of all incumbents, including safe ones, to that of gaining or holding majority control in the institution (Currinder 2008). But even with the change of mission, the committees would still be serving the goals or interests of sitting members, defined here as including the desire to wield power or influence policy. If the congressional committees are agents of the members of Congress, are the national committees similarly the agents of presidents and presidential candidates? For three of every four years, the answer is no for the out-party committee. But the fourth year, the presidential election year, is different, beginning from the day on which the selection process makes clear who the party’s presidential nominee will be.

This observation helps explain the DNC’s fund-raising bulge. In 2004, both major party presidential candidates, George W. Bush and John Kerry, saw a flood of small-donor contributions after Kerry sewed up the Democratic nomination on Super Tuesday in early March. At that point, Kerry’s staff began to merge his fund-raising operation with the DNC’s. If Kerry decided to accept public financing for the general election (which he did not finally decide to do until the summer), he—like previous publicly funded presidential candidates—stood to benefit from the party’s support. For several elections through 2000, much of that support came in the form of soft-money issue advertising. But with the ban on soft money, the parties planned to put their money into independent spending.

The Supreme Court had said in 1996 in *Colorado Republican Federal Campaign Committee v. Federal Election Commission* (known as *Colorado I*, 518 U.S. 604 [1996]) that parties had a right to make unlimited independent expenditures; the Court then verified in *Federal Election Commission v. Colorado Republican Federal Campaign Committee* (known as *Colorado II*, 533 U.S. 431 [2001]) that Congress had the authority to limit coordinated expenditures. FEC regulations had questioned after *Colorado I* whether the two national party committees could truly be independent of their presidential candidates, but this was not put to the test because the parties preferred to coordinate their issue advertising rather than make uncoordinated (that is, independent) expenditures. BCRA in 2002 said that the parties would have to choose between making coordinated campaign expenditures (which have been limited and fully within the campaign laws, unlike soft-money spending) and independent expenditures (which are also defined and covered by the campaign laws, particularly by their disclosure provisions, but are not limited). The Supreme Court in *McConnell v. Federal Election Commission* (540 U.S. 93 [2003]) declared this provision to be unconstitutional on its face. Subsequent FEC regulations implementing BCRA omitted the previous ban on national party independent spending in presidential election campaigns (69 Federal Register 63919; see Corrado 2006).
Interestingly, the law required candidates and their parties not to coordinate on the parties' independent expenditure communications, but it permitted them to work together to raise the money for the party's general treasury, knowing full well that much of it would be used for independent spending. As a result, the Kerry campaign (like other presidential campaigns before and since) helped raise money for the DNC through major events. One interesting innovation was a click-through button on the campaign committee's website to stimulate Internet contributions to the DNC. The resulting surge helped pay for $110 million in independent spending during the general election campaign.

From a candidate's perspective, this approach is problematic. Kerry's campaign team was happy for the DNC to have the money, but many of the senior advisors would rather the campaign had simply raised the money for the candidate directly so the candidate could control the spending decisions. These Kerry advisors were among those who helped persuade Obama to turn down public financing in 2008. The effects of this decision on party fund-raising are evident if we consider table 11.2, which presents data about presidential fund-raising, in tandem with table 11.1 for the DNC and RNC.

One could say a lot about fund-raising during the prenomination period. Obama raised substantially more than Bush, Kerry, or John McCain in all donor categories, although his numbers were particularly high for small donors. To make our points about the parties, however, we shall focus on the general election. Unconstrained by spending limits, the Obama campaign raised almost as much money for the general election campaign alone ($337 million) as the DNC raised for the entire two years of 2007 and 2008 ($260 million) plus the presidential public-funding grant he passed up ($85 million). The decision affected not only the amount of party money but its sources. Because they could not raise money for themselves, Bush, McCain, and Kerry raised as much as they could for the national committees, including via Internet contributions from small donors. In contrast, Obama's fund-raising for the DNC focused on large-donor contributions to joint fund-raising committees. Obama's small-donor receipts went directly to the Obama campaign. The $114 million Obama raised from small donors in the general election nearly doubled the DNC's small-donor decline of $58.2 million from 2004 to 2008.

The impact of Obama's fund-raising on the DNC is most obvious during the height of the general election campaign season, from August through election day.

**DNC's Decline, 2004–2008**

In the months of August to November 2004 alone, the DNC raised $249 million of its $404 million total for the full two years. During this period,
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Individual Contributions Net Dollar Total</th>
<th>From Donors Aggregating in the Primaries to…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$200 or Less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dollars</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Nomination</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerry</td>
<td>215,915,455</td>
<td>43,570,535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush</td>
<td>256,081,557</td>
<td>66,413,991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obama</td>
<td>409,153,859</td>
<td>121,235,784</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McCain</td>
<td>203,538,725</td>
<td>42,162,065</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### General Election (Privately Funded)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Contributions</th>
<th>From Donors Aggregating in the General Election to...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$200 or Less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008 Net Dollar Total</td>
<td>Dollars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obama</td>
<td>336,923,179</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Full Election Cycle (Primary and General Election Contributions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Contributions</th>
<th>From Donors Aggregating in the General Election to...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$200 or Less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008 Net Dollar Total</td>
<td>Dollars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obama</td>
<td>746,077,038</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**

1. This table, like Table 11.1, includes all money transferred from joint fund-raising committees. In this table, donors are included in the appropriate category based on their contributions to the candidate.

2. Because Obama is the only candidate who raised and spent private funds for his general election campaign committee, these tables present his aggregate contributions per donor separately for the primaries and general election. This permits a direct comparison of Obama’s primary fund-raising to that of other candidates and Obama’s general election fund-raising to his own primary fund-raising. Under this procedure, a donor who gave $150 in the primaries and $150 in the general election would be characterized as being in the separate “$200 or less” aggregates for the primary and general election. For the “full election cycle” line, donors were aggregated based on their contributions for the full two-year cycle. These full-cycle numbers therefore are not comparable to those for other presidential candidates, but they are comparable to the methods used elsewhere in this chapter for candidates for the U.S. House and Senate.

*Source: Campaign Finance Institute analysis of FEC records.*
Kerry was running a publicly funded campaign. Four years later, in August to November 2008, the DNC raised $145 million. Obama raised $337 million for his general election. The $144 million August–November difference between 2004 and 2008 almost exactly equals the $144.3 million difference between the DNC’s two-year totals for 2004 and 2008. Almost all of that difference can be explained by independent spending. In 2004 the DNC spent $110 million independently to support John Kerry or oppose George W. Bush. In 2008, the DNC made only $1.1 million in independent expenditures in the presidential election campaign.

RNC’s Increase, 2004–2008

Meanwhile, the RNC’s August–November fund-raising went up from $140 million in 2004 to $198 million in 2008. The $50 million increase stems partly from McCain’s joint fund-raising from high-end donors. In 2004 the RNC made $18 million in independent expenditures. In 2008, the RNC’s independent spending came to $53.5 million.

In fact, even though much of the fund-raising publicity in 2004 and 2008 centered on the Internet and small donors, both of the major candidates in 2008 were raising large contributions for the parties through joint fund-raising committees. Table 11.3 shows how joint fund-raising committee receipts were divided between the candidates and national party committees in 2008.

Obama’s joint fund-raising committees were responsible for 40 percent of the DNC’s total two-year receipts for 2007 and 2008. McCain’s joint fund-raising committees were responsible for 28 percent of the RNC’s total two-year receipts for 2007 and 2008. Most of the joint fund-raising committee money allocated to the parties came from high-end donors who contributed $20,000 or more.

DNC-RNC Conclusion

The DNC’s and RNC’s receipts cannot be understood as those of disembodied party organizations. They reflect the efforts and strategic needs of parties’ presidential candidates. The DNC raised less money in 2008 than in 2004, but that difference clearly was due to the fact that only in 2008 was the candidate raising general election money for himself as well as for the party. Even so, the DNC still raised as much in hard money in 2008 as it had raised in hard and soft money combined in 2000. On the Republican side, John McCain accepted public funds in 2008, as Bush and Kerry had done in 2004. Since his strategic need for party support was the same as his predecessors’,
McCain therefore made every effort to help the party raise money. The result was an increase in RNC money in 2008. The strategic fund-raising decisions by candidates on both sides about public financing (and therefore about spending limits for the candidates and the desirability of unlimited independent spending by the parties) thus strongly affected the party committees’ receipts. In effect, the candidates and party committees were using their multiple tools in a coordinated strategy to achieve the same goal.
Congressional Campaign Committees

The four congressional campaign committees also demonstrate an interweaving of candidates (or officeholders) and their parties, but in a different manner. Table 11.4 shows the total receipts and sources of receipts for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC), National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC), Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee (DSCC), and National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC). As with the previous tables, individual donors are grouped by their aggregate contributions.

Beginning with overall receipts, the four Hill committees as a group have made up in the aggregate for the loss of soft money after BCRA, but there is substantial difference among the committees. Both Democratic committees (DCCC and DSCC) have higher receipts in hard money alone than they used to have in hard and soft money combined. Both Republican committees (NRCC and NRSC) have less. This seems to reflect a change in political fortunes for the two parties and not a differential impact of BCRA. Three of the four committees (DCCC, DSCC, and NRCC) showed especially large shifts between 2006 and 2008, after Democrats gained majorities in the House and Senate in the 2006 elections.

Turning to the sources of receipts, table 11.4 shows that for each of the four committees, receipts were higher across most or all hard-money donor categories in 2006 to 2008 than in 2000 to 2002. The gains were particularly significant among the largest donors to the two Democratic committees. The four committees also showed impressive gains in the amount and percentage of money received from the principal campaign committees of members of Congress. Fully 27 percent of the DCCC’s receipts in 2008 and 22 percent of the NRCC’s came from members of Congress. Because of the growing importance of members’ contributions to the party committees, tables 11.5 and 11.6 show the sources of congressional candidates’ funding over the ten years beginning in 1999.

The major change BCRA made to congressional fund-raising was to increase individual contribution limits from a fixed $1,000 per election to $2,000 with a biennial cost-of-living adjustment (which brought the limit to $2,300 in 2008). Largely because of this change, and because of sparse competition, the incentives for congressional incumbents have not led them to look for small donors or to move toward Internet campaigning. Despite the fact that total receipts are up since 2000, the amount coming from small donors declined after BCRA.

- Senate  The percentage of funds Senate candidates raised from small donors declined from 17 percent in 2002 to 16 percent in 2006 and to 14 percent in 2008. Senate incumbents raised only 9 percent of their money from small donors in 2008.
### TABLE 11.4

House and Senate Party Committees' Receipts, 1999–2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Receipts</th>
<th>Individual Contributions (by Donors' Aggregate Contributions)</th>
<th>Members' Campaign Committees</th>
<th>Other (e.g., PACs, Loans)</th>
<th>Soft Money</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$200 or Less</td>
<td>$201 to $999</td>
<td>$1,000 to $19,999</td>
<td>$20,000 or More</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dollars (millions)</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Dollars (millions)</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congressional Campaign Committees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>108</td>
<td>176.2</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>106</td>
<td>139.9</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>104</td>
<td>93.2</td>
<td>22.9</td>
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<td>102</td>
<td>102.9</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>105.1</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>108</td>
<td>118.3</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>16.1</td>
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<td>102</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate Campaign Committees</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCC</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>108</td>
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<td>RSC</td>
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<td>108</td>
<td>94.4</td>
<td>33.1</td>
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<td>106</td>
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<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>96.1</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1.4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Campaign Finance Institute analysis of FEC records.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Receipts</th>
<th>Individual Donors</th>
<th>PACs</th>
<th>Other (Including Self-Financing)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dollars (millions)</td>
<td>Donors Aggregating to $200 or Less</td>
<td>Dollars (millions)</td>
<td>Percentage of Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Candidates</td>
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<td>853.6</td>
<td>72.1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2005-2006</td>
<td>779.5</td>
<td>71.0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>626.3</td>
<td>62.7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2001-2002</td>
<td>555.3</td>
<td>66.5</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1999-2000</td>
<td>538.4</td>
<td>82.1</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Incumbents</td>
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<td>575.3</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2005-2006</td>
<td>527.2</td>
<td>33.2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2003-2004</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>1999-2000</td>
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<td>Open Seats</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2001-2002</td>
<td>110.4</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1999-2000</td>
<td>79.9</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Campaign Finance Institute analysis of FEC records.
### TABLE 11.6
Senate Receipts from Individuals, PACs, and Others, All General Election Candidates, 1999–2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Receipts</th>
<th>Individual Donors</th>
<th>PACs</th>
<th>Other (Including Self-Financing)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dollars (millions)</td>
<td>Donors Aggregating to $200 or Less</td>
<td>Dollars (millions)</td>
<td>Percentage of Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>All Candidates</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007–2008</td>
<td>391.7</td>
<td>56.6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>33.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005–2006</td>
<td>517.0</td>
<td>84.9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>46.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003–2004</td>
<td>371.2</td>
<td>62.9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>39.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001–2002</td>
<td>288.3</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>34.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999–2000</td>
<td>367.7</td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>36.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Incumbents** |               |                     |      |                                  |                   |                    |                   |                       |
| 2007–2008      | 233.8          | 20.8               | 9    | 17.8                             | 94.3              | 40                  | 59.4              | 25                     |
| 2005–2006      | 278.0          | 43.2               | 16   | 25.1                             | 133.4             | 48                  | 50.6              | 18                     |
| 2003–2004      | 171.1          | 29.0               | 17   | 17.2                             | 75.6              | 44                  | 38.9              | 23                     |
| 2001–2002      | 122.5          | 20.9               | 17   | 15.5                             | 43.1              | 35                  | 33.3              | 27                     |
| 1999–2000      | 128.8          | 24.7               | 19   | 15.0                             | 40.0              | 31                  | 32.6              | 25                     |

(continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Individual Donors</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Receipts</td>
<td>Donors Aggregating to $200 or Less</td>
<td>Donors Aggregating to $201 to $999</td>
<td>Donors Aggregating to $1,000 or More</td>
<td>PACs</td>
<td>Other (Including Self-Financing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dollars (millions)</td>
<td>Dollars (millions)</td>
<td>Percentage of Total</td>
<td>Dollars (millions)</td>
<td>Percentage of Total</td>
<td>Dollars (millions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Challengers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>99.9</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>36.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2006</td>
<td>158.3</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>50.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>64.4</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-2002</td>
<td>61.5</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999-2000</td>
<td>75.2</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Open Seats</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2006</td>
<td>80.8</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>34.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>135.7</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>64.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-2002</td>
<td>104.3</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>37.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999-2000</td>
<td>163.7</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>41.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Campaign Finance Institute analysis of FEC records.
The Need for an Integrated Vision of Parties and Candidates

- **House**  The percentages were even lower for the House: all candidates received 9 percent of their funds from small donors in 2006, and 8 percent did so in 2008. Incumbents raised only 6 percent from small donors in 2008.

In raw dollars, House incumbents raised only three-quarters as much from small donors in 2006 to 2008 as in 2000 to 2002, despite increasing their fund-raising overall.

Meanwhile, the role of large donors increased.

- **House**  House candidates more than doubled the amount they raised from individuals who gave more than $1,000.
- **Senate**  Senate candidates raised 1.8 times as much from $1,000-plus donors in 2006 to 2008 as in 2000 to 2002.

The money from political action committees (PACs) has also gone up. House candidates raised 49 percent more money from PACs in 2006 to 2008 as in 2000 to 2002. For Senate candidates, the increase was 37 percent. The combined receipts from PACs and $1,000-plus donors accounted for 79 percent of the money House incumbents raised in 2008 and 66 percent of the funds for Senate incumbents. As a result, it is fair to see the entire increase in members' contributions to the four congressional party committees as coming from only a portion of new money incumbents have raised from large donors and PACs. Moreover, we can even say that BCRA's increase in the hard-money contribution limit for candidates has helped the members and congressional leaders in a partisan era to use the members' fund-raising prowess to help make up for the loss of soft money. What BCRA took away with one clause, it replenished with another.

**Conclusion**

It is evident from tables 11.1 to 11.6 that BCRA did not hurt party fund-raising. Moreover, it has not prevented the congressional parties from spending whatever they can raise to help elect their candidates to office. In 2008, the four congressional campaign committees made more than $200 million in independent expenditures, with most of that spending focused on close races during the closing weeks of the campaign. In several of those close races, party spending during the campaign's final weeks exceeded candidate spending for the full two-year cycle. In many more races, party spending was the dominant
financial force in a district or state during the final month. For example, the parties put more than $17 million into the highly competitive U.S. Senate race in North Carolina, almost all toward the end of the campaign. The two major party general election candidates, Elizabeth Dole (the Republican incumbent) and Kay Hagen (the successful Democratic challenger), raised and spent a combined total of $26.5 million for the full two-year cycle. And in House elections, the DCCC reported putting more than $1 million into independent spending after Labor Day in each of thirty-eight different election contests (see Campaign Finance Institute 2008; FEC 2009).

While those who support a strong role for political parties should be encouraged by the level of party activity after BCRA, there nevertheless are some distinct oddities to the manner in which this has been brought about. Our empirical findings show that one has to understand parties and candidates as being interwoven at the strategic level. Nevertheless, parties and their candidates are forced by the law to maintain their independence with respect to specific party expenditures. The parties have maintained their role by substituting constitutionally protected independent spending (supported by hard money) for so-called issue advertising (financed with soft money). While one of us has argued elsewhere that unlimited soft-money contributions were properly limited to prevent actual corruption (Malbin 2008), soft-money spending did have a virtue: because the law pretended that soft-money spending was not campaign related, candidates and parties could coordinate with respect to this allegedly noncampaign spending without triggering the Federal Election Campaign Act’s limits on how much a party could spend on coordinated campaign spending. BCRA essentially did away with the fiction that any party advertising could be separated from political campaigns. Therefore, if the parties want to pour unlimited amounts (of hard money) into a campaign, they have to maintain their independence from the candidates with respect to those expenditures. Parties create separate staffs to make these expenditures and then prohibit them from communicating with the campaigns they are trying to help. The staffs typically spend their money attacking their candidate’s opponent, while the candidate gets blamed for the message.

A recent joint working group of the Campaign Finance Institute, Brookings Institution, and American Enterprise Institute (in which one of us participated) argued in January 2010 that it is unhealthy for the law to push parties and candidates into a forced posture of independence from each other. The working group recommended that the parties should be allowed to spend unlimited amounts of money in coordination with their candidates, provided that the money spent in this way comes from donors whose contributions aggregate to $200 or less (Corrado et al. 2010). The requirement that this spend-
ing be limited to money raised from small donors is meant both to act as an incentive for small-donor fund-raising and to prevent party accounts from becoming circumventions of the limits on contributions to candidates. Such a policy shift would move the interweaving we have found at the strategic level down into the realm of specific party campaign decisions. The net result would do more than strengthen parties. It would enhance public accountability by making it more difficult for candidates to deny responsibility for what the parties do to help elect them. The parties and candidates are, and should be, interwoven; this approach would further strengthen that bond.
Back to the Future?
Campaign-Finance Reform and the Declining Importance of the National Party Organization

Raymond J. La Raja

This chapter explores changes and continuities in how political parties organized themselves in the 2008 elections through the lens of party financing. Two questions motivate this analysis. First, how do changes in campaign-finance laws affect political parties? Specifically, I observe changes wrought by the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (BCRA) of 2002, which was implemented during the 2004 elections. After two presidential elections under the new law, with its ban on party soft money, it is now possible to observe changing patterns of party financing. The second and broader question is closely related to the first: how does the presidential public-financing system, implemented in 1976, interact with the new campaign-finance law to shape party activity? In the past decade, the public-financing program has become increasingly obsolete because it does not provide sufficient resources or flexibility to run contemporary presidential campaigns. Major party nominees have shunned the program in the presidential primaries and general election. A candidate's decision to "go private" in raising money for his or her campaign has important implications for party organizations and how they finance elections.

To address these questions, this study uses campaign-finance data from between 1992 and 2008 to observe changes in party activity. First, I observe trends over time and assess whether BCRA created postreform effects on party activity. I show that party organizations maintained previous levels of spending in the first year after BCRA, even increasing the amount they spent on television ads. But the unraveling of the public-financing system—especially evident in 2008—dampened party spending as candidates assumed a greater role in
financing their elections. Second, I show how party organizations fared relative to other major institutional actors, specifically with respect to candidates and interest groups. Here, the results are relatively clear. The party organizations have fallen behind as other institutional actors have taken advantage of new campaign-finance rules that do not constrain them as much as parties.

Overall, BCRA appears to have reinforced the candidate-centered nature of political campaigns, a system in which candidates are chiefly responsible for raising and spending money. This shift is abetted by the collapse of the presidential public-funding system. When presidential candidates decline public funding—and the constraints that go along with it—they attract private contributions that might have gone to the parties. As a result, the parties experience a significant decline in funds. This trend is likely to continue as candidates raise considerably more private money for their campaign organizations than they would get from the current public-financing program. In 2008, Barack Obama demonstrated this clearly. In this context, the political parties will have greater competition from candidates to raise political funds, without recourse to soft money, which is now banned.

The theoretical starting point for this analysis is the proposition that campaign-finance laws affect the organization being regulated, as well as organizations that fall beyond the reach of the law or statute. When the regulated organization faces legal constraints, other political organizations in the partisan network try to innovate and develop alternative ways of financing politics. We observe this dynamic clearly after each wave of political reforms, such as the Federal Elections Campaign Act (FECA) of 1971, its amendments in 1974 and 1979, and 2002’s BCRA. Prior to BCRA, political parties began to exploit soft money in response to changes to the FECA in 1979. The relative ease with which they could raise and spend soft money—and the simultaneous constraints on candidates—enabled them to carve a major position in financing U.S. campaigns.

After the passage of BCRA in 2002, however, parties have been pressed back to many previous constraints of the FECA, making candidates and interest groups relatively more prominent in financing political activity. In short, the campaign-finance system has shifted toward nonparty groups. Given the avowed goals of BCRA supporters, this is hardly surprising. Reformers had argued that BCRA was intended to restore the campaign-finance system to how it operated under the FECA (Mann 2008). The FECA, of course, was a strong candidate-centered regulatory system, one that institutionalized the role of interest groups in financing politics (Herrnson 2008).

The findings suggest that BCRA did, in fact, succeed at restoring some dynamics inaugurated by the FECA, though not exactly as intended. New groups have been institutionalized by BCRA outside the interest group po-
political-action-committee system, namely 527 and 501(c) organizations. These political groups are a crossbreed of issue activists and party professionals who share partisan electoral goals. By law, most of these groups must pursue campaign work outside the channels of formal party organizations because they use soft money. This dynamic has important implications that I discuss later in the chapter.

For present purposes, it is important to clarify how I conceptualize political parties in this analysis. Recent research encourages scholars to consider political parties more broadly as a network of partisan activists who may not even work for party organizations (Kolodny and Logan 1998; Skinner 2007; Massey 2009). The argument is that activists from issue groups as well as political consultants share the party's electoral goals, if not a core ideology, which gives them common cause. In contemporary politics, the party is constituted by a web of relationships among partisan individuals rather than a formal party organization. Indeed, the relationship is so tight that political organizations appear uniquely porous as partisans change jobs fluidly from party committees to interest groups and back to the party in just a few short years.

This reconceptualization of the political party is important because it allows scholars to analyze interorganizational dynamics and dependencies that often get ignored in studies of formal party organizations. And yet, the extended view of what constitutes the party also blurs important distinctions. Partisan activity outside the formal party organization is qualitatively different from that which goes on within. However much interest groups may ally themselves with political parties to pursue mutual electoral goals, it must be kept in mind that party and interest organizations do not share other goals. If parties are predominantly concerned with winning elections, interest groups see elections as a means to influence policy in their special domain. These different goals can easily come into conflict, depending on the electoral context.

What makes the party-network metaphor so appealing today is that the conflict within party coalitions has been dampened because the two major parties are so polarized. Differences over policy issues within the party coalitions lead to fewer quarrels when it is obvious to everyone in the coalition that the greater threat to all their interests comes from having the opposing party in power. An added incentive to stick together is that party competition is so tight, small gains in votes could make the difference for one party to take power. Today, interest groups are closely aligned with their ideological brethren, including party organizations, precisely because the outcome of who controls government remains so uncertain (Franz 2008). With elite opinion divided clearly between the two parties, it matters a great deal which party is in power. For this reason, there are powerful incentives for interest groups to
align dutifully with a party rather than to take an antagonistic stance toward party leaders who might be unreliable on policy.

Thus, the party-network metaphor may obscure as much as it clarifies, depending on the political context. In this analysis, I choose to employ a traditional conception of the party organization, knowing its limitations but also aware that formal distinctions among organizations matter. It is the party committee that has the authority to nominate candidates for the ballot. Moreover, the formal party organization remains the one organization with the dominant goal of seeing the party take control of government. All else is subordinate to this goal. In pursuit of this goal, political parties generate socially desirable outcomes such as increasing political competition and holding political elites accountable. To the extent that the party loses resources to other institutional actors, the goal of winning becomes less salient than the concerns of individual incumbents or advocacy groups. The distinction becomes even more important in congressional races, where narrow interests have greater opportunities to influence an election—even with limited resources.

Using traditional distinctions between parties, interest groups, and candidates, I demonstrate that parties have been affected negatively by the current configuration of campaign-finance laws. With data from the Federal Election Commission and other organizations, I compare different institutional actors over time. The results show a rise in the party’s financial position during the 1990s through 2002—a period in which they were less constrained by campaign-finance laws—and then a decline after the implementation of BCRA relative to other institutional actors. This chapter is primarily about the national committees, but it gives some attention to the congressional party committees. Before moving to the analysis, I begin with a description of the strategic context of the 2008 elections, which influenced subsequent patterns of financial activity.

Strategic Context of the 2008 Elections

By any measure, the political environment leading up to the 2008 elections looked promising for Democrats. The Republicans were tied to a president with record-low approval ratings, an economy on the brink of depression, and a public turned strongly against the war in Iraq. In the spring of 2008, the Republicans proceeded to lose three special House elections in districts that typically favored them, including that for the Illinois seat of former Speaker Dennis Hastert. These contests were like canaries in a coal mine, portending disaster in the November elections. Having won back both chambers in Congress in the 2006 midterm elections, the Democrats used their majority
status to challenge the president at every turn and to raise record amounts of money. With abundant resources and a national tide cresting in their favor, Democrats were poised to increase their majorities in both houses. It seemed clear that the only realistic strategy for Republicans was to defend vulnerable incumbents and limit losses in Congress.

In the presidential elections, the enthusiasm of party activists and flow of resources would favor the Democratic nominee, regardless of who was chosen. To be sure, the dynamics of the Electoral College ensure that the Republican nominee has a chance of winning. Furthermore, a long, hard-fought primary for the Democratic nomination opened the possibility that the party might remain divided going into the general election. In the end, the Democrats nominated a young, charismatic candidate, Barack Obama, who, to the surprise of most insiders, beat Hillary Clinton. The Obama campaign displayed remarkable organizational discipline and benefited from an astounding surge of political contributions over the Internet, as well as old-fashioned fund-raising among major donors. But the fact that Obama was a liberal, black politician from Chicago raised the possibility that he would not win sufficient support in the general election from older, white constituencies that supported Hillary Clinton, as well as independents looking for centrist candidates.

On the GOP side, the nomination went to John McCain early in March 2008. A war hero, McCain was popular with the national press and earned a public reputation as a maverick who stood up to party leaders. While this image helped him with independents, it did not endear him to many party activists who disagreed with him on several key issues, including immigration policy and campaign-finance reform. McCain’s difficult task was to show the party base he was “one of them” without tying himself too closely to a president who was very unpopular with independents. Despite differences with the party activists, McCain raised money surprisingly well after a faltering start before the primaries. He had amassed a total of $220 million for his campaign committee before the Republican convention.

But McCain’s treasury paled in comparison to that of Obama. The enthusiasm of party activists and liberal voters helped the Obama campaign committee raise $500 million from 6.5 million individual donations. Obama was also well placed, with a Chicago network of fund-raisers that included Penny Pritzker and Oprah Winfrey, to attract major donors who could give the maximum of $4,600 to his organization and additional funds for the national and state parties (Vargas 2008).

Given the disparate situation with regard to campaign resources for the presidential nominees, the stage was set for a critical decision about whether to participate in the presidential public-funding program. The presidential
candidates could accept public "matching funds" in the primaries (which both Obama and McCain rejected) and a grant of $85 million in the general election, awarded after the party conventions. To receive the grant, however, candidates had to promise to forego receiving private cash for their campaigns.

The consequences of taking public money have become more acute since the cost of presidential campaigns has outstripped the value of the inflation-adjusted grant. For the past several election cycles, the grant has been inadequate for running a full-throated presidential campaign during the final three months between the party convention and election day. As the gap between the grant's value and campaign cost widened, the role of political parties became increasingly important. From the mid-1990s until the passage of BCRA, the configuration of campaign-finance laws limited presidential candidates but gave parties wide latitude to finance elections. In 1996, parties used a mix of hard and soft money to fund issue ads and contact voters in swing states of the Electoral College. The more that regulations hemmed candidates in, the greater the incentive became to build the capacity of party organizations to help candidates. As the public-funding program became increasingly obsolete (particularly with front-loaded primaries), the parties had a strong incentive to exploit soft money to help their candidates. Starting in 1996, the financing system shifted from a dominant candidate-centered system toward a more party-centered one (albeit still mostly controlled by candidates).

Fortuitously for this study, the candidates made decisions in 2008 that provide an interesting natural experiment to understand the relationship between campaign-finance laws and party activity. The major party nominees chose alternative financing strategies for the general election campaigns, which had important effects on the political parties. McCain accepted public grants, while Barack Obama did not, making him the first major party candidate in history to do so. This decision enabled him to raise and spend money, constrained only by the regulation that no donor could contribute more than $4,600 to his campaign. What makes the experiment even better is that the parties raised the same amounts in the 2004 elections when both their nominees rejected public financing in the primaries but accepted the public grant in the general election. Thus, the major parties shared a baseline going into the 2008 election.

All else being equal, candidates prefer to control their own destinies rather than rely on other organizations for support. Given restrictive regulations on coordinating with parties and outside groups, Obama understood that accepting public funds would make it difficult for his campaign to control political communications. In looking back at the 2004 campaign, John Kerry lamented that his biggest mistake had been to accept public funds
because, given his limited resources, he hesitated to challenge the negative (and devastatingly effective) ads sponsored by an independent organization called Swift Boat Veterans for Truth. The Obama campaign learned from this experience. Rather than put their faith in the Democratic National Committee (DNC) or a coalition of liberal interest groups organized into a 527 organization, they chose to exploit their resource advantage by continuing to raise money from private contributors. This decision would have an important effect on the strategic choices of other groups, both parties and interest groups. The Obama team was so confident about raising enough money for the campaign that it even discouraged donors from contributing to liberal 527 organizations that were prepared to place ads attacking McCain (Murray and Bacon 2008).

For the Republican nominee, the calculation was entirely different. McCain could not excite a demoralized party base to compete dollar for dollar with the Obama campaign. Moreover, among donors simply looking to support a winner—the “smart money” crowd—the odds appeared very much against McCain’s winning. Just before the convention, one Republican consultant commented, “If you’re an access giver, you’re thinking twice about going out on a limb for McCain now because Obama’s leading in the polls” (Mooney 2008a).

Given their financial disadvantage, the McCain campaign chose to accept public funds, knowing it could exploit loopholes to raise private money for the party through a “joint” candidate party committee (the DNC would do the same, but with less success). A donor, for example, could write a single check of $61,600, with roughly $57,000 going to the party and $4,600 to the candidate for both the primary and general election. The McCain campaign site sent potential donors to a separate page at the Republican National Committee (RNC) to give money to McCain-Palin Victory 2008. The McCain campaign could also transfer unused funds from the primary to the party. In this manner, the RNC stockpiled resources that would supplement the $84 million grant to the McCain campaign.

The McCain strategy was fraught with risks. Essentially, McCain was bargaining that the RNC would be able to run a parallel campaign that would achieve parity with the Obama efforts. The RNC had a strong record of raising money and organizing campaigns—much better than the DNC historically. But the logistics of doing so were incredibly complex under the campaign-finance rules, since party operatives could not communicate with the McCain campaign when airing independent ads. The innovative use of “hybrid” ads allows coordination with the candidate, but such ads must mention congressional candidates or refer to broad party themes—a requirement that
limits their impact. In the previous cycle, these kinds of party expenditures exploded, with the DNC spending $120 million on independent expenditures (mostly negative advertising aimed at George W. Bush) and $24 million on hybrid ads. The RNC spent $18.2 million on independent expenditures and $45.8 million on hybrids (Mooney 2008b). The parties could also spend money in coordination with the candidate—no strings attached—except that they were limited to just $19 million.

McCain’s dependence on the RNC also posed problems for the congressional party. The RNC typically plays a role in helping congressional candidates. With congressional Republicans facing difficulties raising money (given the loss of majority status, scandals, and so forth), the RNC would be needed to help close the gap with congressional Democrats. Over the years, the RNC had built up a loyal base of donors who gave in good or bad years for Republicans. McCain’s choice meant that funds might drain resources from congressional candidates to support a presidential race that many party insiders viewed as a lost cause. McCain had to worry that party leaders might choose to throw him overboard in an effort to retain more congressional seats. In 1996, in a similar situation, the RNC altered its presidential strategy to move more funds into congressional races rather than focus so heavily on the Electoral College strategy (La Raja 2008a).

In sum, for both candidates the decision to participate in the public-funding program was a purely strategic rather than principled choice. Though Obama avowed early in the campaign that he supported public financing of elections, he did not hesitate to stick with private financing when it gave him so many advantages. McCain could argue that, as the champion of campaign-finance reform, he stayed true to his principles by taking public funds. In reality, though, he continued to raise large, private contributions for the party through joint committees, and this money would be used to help his campaign. McCain hoped public opinion would force Obama to take public funds when he called on the Democrat “to keep his word to the American people” (Cooper and Zeleny 2008). In the end Obama wisely ignored everyone who urged him to take public funds, and voters did not seem to care.

Thus, the stage was set. One party, the Democrats, had strong expectations of taking back the White House and expanding its majorities in Congress. These expectations helped motivate supporters to give generously to Democratic candidates in the presidential and congressional elections. The Republicans, in contrast, understood that the 2008 elections would call for a defensive strategy. They would rely heavily on a party-centered strategy to win the presidency and limit losses in Congress. The following analysis illustrates how the campaign-finance laws affected the contours of party activity in 2008.
Change and Continuity in Party Financing of Elections

As I explained at the outset, two questions motivate this analysis: (1) whether changes in the campaign-finance law under BCRA altered party finances, and (2) how the faltering presidential public-financing system interacts with BCRA to shape party activity. The analysis focuses on three institutional actors in presidential elections: parties, candidates, and interest groups. The data collected for this chapter compares spending in 1996, 2000, 2004, and 2008. With only two presidential election cycles after BCRA, the full impact of these reforms remains unclear, but the contours are highly suggestive. I show that reforms affect party organizations negatively and that, in combination with the deteriorating public-financing system, presidential elections will return to the kind of candidate-centered campaigns we observed in the 1970s and 1980s.

Fund-Raising: Presidential Candidates and Party Organizations

The first set of data show differences in fund-raising between major party candidates for president compared with national committees (RNC and DNC). For the candidates, these sums include amounts they raise in the primaries, matching public funds, as well as grants for the general election and private funds for legal costs. For parties, the funds include both hard and soft money until the latter was banned in 2002. Figure 12.1 shows that parties

![Graph showing campaign receipts: presidential nominees and national parties (RNC, DNC), 1992–2008.]

FIGURE 12.1
did extraordinarily well during the 1990s, benefitting from soft money while candidate financing was constrained by the presidential public-financing system. In 1992, for example, parties and candidates had equal receipts of roughly $300 million apiece. In the subsequent presidential election, when parties exploited soft money more audaciously during the Bob Dole/Bill Clinton campaigns, party coffers swelled to more than $700 million, while the presidential candidate committees inched up to $340 million in receipts. Candidates had some control over party funds since the candidate committee could coordinate production and airing of issue ads with staff at the national committees. And yet, using party soft money was not a perfect solution for candidates. Soft money issue ads could not make brazen electioneering statements, such as “Vote Clinton,” and the party funds could also be siphoned off for party administration and voter mobilization to support candidates lower on the ticket (La Raja 2008a).

In 2004, candidate finances still lagged behind party fund-raising, even though Bush and Kerry declined to accept matching funds in the primaries, which allowed them to raise more money. In that election, the parties appeared to adapt well to the soft-money ban by advancing their fund-raising totals. But much of this success can be attributed to the fact that both major party candidates chose to campaign under the public-financing system. Thus, political contributors were channeled to the party organizations once the nominees were picked. In this context, the campaign-finance system remained party “friendly,” if only because candidates had tight constraints on their finances. This changed in 2008, when neither candidate accepted public financing in the primaries and one of them, Obama, chose to avoid the public-financing system altogether. The consequences of candidates’ sticking with private funds became clear. Total party fund-raising declined significantly to $688 million from the previous high point in 2004, when it was $908 million. Furthermore, major party candidates outpaced parties by accumulating a total of $1.1 billion (most of it by Obama). Overall, the combination of BCRA’s constraints on parties and minimal incentives for candidates to use public funds caused a shift in the campaign-finance system away from political parties and toward candidates.

Figure 12.2 shows that the problem of fund-raising was especially problematic for the DNC, which raised just $260 million compared to $428 million for the RNC. The party was unable to take advantage of an extremely favorable fund-raising environment because the party’s presidential candidates during the primaries vacuumed cash from potential donors. More critically, the extended nature of the primary contest between Obama and Clinton made it difficult for party fund-raisers to tap donors before midsummer. For the DNC, attracting donors in the off-election years has never
been easy since Democratic contributors typically focus on the candidates (Finney 2008). For this reason, among others, the DNC had valued soft money because it was easier to raise early in the electoral cycle for building campaign infrastructure.

Figure 12.3 suggests that financial problems were less acute for the RNC, which has more institutionally oriented donors than the DNC. Keep in mind, however, that the RNC needed to stretch its dollars further because congressional party fund-raising was doing poorly. Overall, figures 12.2 and 12.3 illustrate how parties’ fortunes rise and fall depending on how their candidates participate in the presidential public-funding system. When the candidates participate fully in the presidential system (during both primaries and general elections), as the Democratic candidates did in 1992 to 2000, the political parties are the primary collectors of campaign money. When the Democratic nominee in 2004 (Kerry) chose not to accept matching funds, the party advantage was greatly diminished. When the candidate opted out of public financing for both the primary and general election, the party fell behind significantly in raising money. A similar dynamic occurs on the Republican side, except that in 2000 the RNC outpaced its nominee, George W. Bush, even though he was the first major party candidate to refuse public funds in the primaries.

Expenditures: Party Organizations and Interest Groups

The other institutional actors that rival party activity are interest groups. The data in figure 12.4 include both party and interest group spending from
1992 through 2008, in constant 2008 dollars, for national, congressional, and state organizations. Political spending has grown in real terms since 1992 for both parties and interest groups (the party trend is a zigzag reflecting differences in spending in presidential and midterm elections). The gains for parties were most dramatic during the prereform era. They increased spending by 83 percent from 1992 to 1996 and by 33 percent from 1996 to 2000. The rate of increase slowed considerably after BCRA (19 percent between 2000 and 2004 and 7 percent between 2004 and 2008), but the gains are still impressive given that parties could not raise soft money starting in 2004. Significantly, party spending dropped by about $100 million between the 2004 and 2008 elections. Also, parties experienced a decline in spending during midterms of $217 million between 2002 and 2006.

In contrast, we observe steady growth of interest group expenditures, with large increases in both the 2000 and 2004 elections. In the postreform 2004 elections, interest groups spent almost $1.6 billion, which was approximately $450 million more than they spent in 2000. Spending rose by $118 million in 2008 (while party spending declined in real terms). Similarly, interest groups' spending jumped from $1 billion in the 2002 midterms to almost $1.5 billion in 2006. In fact, interest group spending surpassed party spending for the first time in the period since 1992. It is quite possible that interest groups had been spending more than party organizations prior to this election because the data include only media expenditures by 527 and 501(c) organizations and not money such groups spend on overhead or voter contacts.

Overall, the comparison between parties and interest groups suggests a postreform shift in spending toward the latter. To be sure, most interest
groups that engage in campaign efforts, beyond political contributions, are allied strongly with a party. Thus, it is plausible to argue, as many scholars do, that a significant portion of interest group spending is really “party” spending, because it reflects a coordinated (if parallel) effort to help the party and its candidates. On the other hand, citizens do not know who these nonparty groups represent, particularly since these groups are unlikely to keep the same name for more than one or two elections. For example, high-spending organizations from the 2004 elections, such as America Coming Together, have already melted away. The loss for the party system is that the party organizations are constantly making short-term strategic decisions based, in part, on changes to the campaign-finance laws and the choices made by partisans outside the formal party structure. Under these circumstances, it becomes more difficult for the party to consider long-term planning and to institutionalize relationships with nonparty groups. Moreover, it is not clear if such nonparty groups will choose to ally themselves closely with a party when majorities in Congress are unlikely to change or when policy positions of the parties become less polarized.

Party Media Spending

One hope of reformers was that a ban on soft-money issue ads would encourage parties to spend more money on grassroots activities rather than advertising. Regrettably, this does not appear to have happened. Table 12.1 shows that an increasing percentage of party budgets (national, congressional,
TABLE 12.1


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<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Party spending on ads</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other spending</td>
<td>746</td>
<td>666</td>
<td>1,123</td>
<td>816</td>
<td>1,298</td>
<td>1,253</td>
<td>1,247</td>
<td>917</td>
<td>1,134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>749</td>
<td>672</td>
<td>1,227</td>
<td>861</td>
<td>1,488</td>
<td>1,371</td>
<td>1,616</td>
<td>1,154</td>
<td>1,513</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Ads</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and state) is going to television media in the postreform period. In 2000, for example, the percentage of party spending on broadcast advertising was 13 percent. In the postreform period, this percentage doubled in 2004 to 26 percent and dropped slightly in 2008 elections to 22 percent. The shift is dramatic in midterms as well. Party spending went from just 9 percent of total spending in 2002 to more than 21 percent in 2006. The additional spending has taken the form of independent expenditures and hybrid advertising rather than soft-money issue ads.

The underlying reasons for this shift are not entirely clear. A few explanations might be considered. First, it is possible that soft money, which is relatively easy to raise, encouraged parties to spend more money on grass roots; after all, that was the intent of amendments to the FECA in 1979 that allowed soft money. Another possibility is that party fund-raising for hard money occurs relatively late in the cycle, making advertising the most efficient use of spending at this point. However, the increase in spending on media raises the question of what the parties have chosen to cut back on. Have national parties made their operations leaner with fewer staff? Or have they encouraged allied interest groups to do more of the voter contacts? These questions should be explored when the data become available.

Given the strategic context of the 2008 presidential elections, it seemed clear that the RNC would spend more on media than the DNC. With McCain participating in the public-funding program, he needed the party to run television ads for him to compete with the Obama campaign. The RNC spent about $103.5 million in independent and hybrid ads in 2008 compared to less than $2 million for the DNC! The Obama campaign instructed the DNC not to run TV ads, because the candidate campaign wanted to control advertising. The Obama campaign also discouraged interest groups from advertising because the campaign had such an overwhelming advantage over the McCain/RNC campaigns. As one RNC staff member put it,

We brought a knife to a gun fight and we had to do everything that we could do to maximize the resources we had. So the hybrid ads were one effective way.
We had coordinated spending, we had independent expenditure spending and then we had the McCain campaign. So we had all of those, we tried to maximize them as effectively as possible. At the end of the day, we were overwhelmed by the number—just pure number of spots. (Beeson 2008)

Even if the RNC could have matched the number of Obama ads, the Republicans remained at a disadvantage because the RNC could not coordinate most of its ads with the McCain committee. Moreover, hybrid ads had to be crafted to include a broader party message that weakened its effect on voter impressions of the presidential race.

State Party Activity

In previous elections, the national committees had become a source of financing for the state parties to engage in federal elections. Republicans especially had spent decades building up their state parties and traditionally outperformed their Democratic counterparts. In a historic turnaround, Democratic state parties in 2008 spent much more than Republican ones. The fifty Democratic parties spent a combined $272 million compared to Republican parties, which spent $208 million (see table 12.2). Howard Dean, chair of the DNC, apparently kept his promise to support the state parties. The national committees (mostly the DNC) sent $116 million to state parties, or 43 percent of their total receipts. The amount and percentage reflect the same figures given to state parties before the BCRA.7

Dean had the luxury of not having to run advertisements for his presidential candidate, so he focused on state party efforts. In contrast, the RNC could not support its state parties as much because it had to preserve funds to help

| TABLE 12.2 |
| State Parties and National Party Support (adjusted 2008) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Republicans** | | | | |
| State Party Expenditures | 63 | 101 | 184 | 224 | 208 |
| Transfers from national | 12 | 59 | 112 | 56 | 46 |
| Medium transfer | n/a | 0.878 | 1.383 | 0.511 | 0.050 |
| % from national | 20 | 58 | 61 | 25 | 22 |
| **Democrats** | | | | | |
| State Party Expenditures | 78 | 109 | 238 | 200 | 272 |
| Transfers from national | 11 | 26 | 111 | 72 | 116 |
| Medium transfer | n/a | 0.784 | 0.509 | 0.174 | 0.415 |
| % from national | 14 | 24 | 47 | 36 | 43 |

Note: Does not include funds or transfers spent on issue ads.
the cash-strapped McCain campaign and congressional candidates. Moreover, the RNC concentrated its funds in a few presidential battleground states. The median transfer from the RNC to the state parties was only $50,000—a significant decline compared to 2004 when its median transfer was $511,000 and, pre-BCRA, when its median transfer was $1.3 million. This figure suggests how much the Republican Party was engaged in a defensive strategy with its limited funds. In contrast, the DNC pursued Howard Dean's fifty-state strategy, with a median contribution to state parties of $415,000. The Democratic state parties appeared to rebound from a disastrous 2004 election cycle when they had less to spend than pre-BCRA and all of the funds were concentrated in just a handful of states.

Conclusion

This study of party finance demonstrates that campaign-finance rules affect how institutional actors pursue campaign goals. The national parties adapted to campaign reforms that banned soft money by raising additional hard money and outsourcing activities to nonparty groups. At the same time, they have been affected indirectly by the demise of the public-financing system. The ability of some presidential candidates to raise private funds that greatly exceed the payout of public subsidies makes the party role in financing campaigns less imperative than during the 1990s. On the Democratic side, the Obama campaign proved so adept at fund-raising and organization that one might wonder whether the DNC played any significant role at all in the 2008 elections. On the Republican side, the nominee, John McCain, accepted public funding, which made him very dependent on the RNC to run a parallel campaign.

In future elections, it is unlikely that a major party nominee will participate in the current public-funding system. This means elections should become more candidate centered, as candidates become less reliant on party organizations to support their campaigns. At the same time, party organizations will be disadvantaged relative to interest groups that can use soft money to fund both advertising and grassroots campaigns. Indeed, the role of nonparty groups (which often includes former party staff) will likely increase relative to party organizations since court decisions have been scaling back restrictions on spending by interest groups (see, e.g., EMILY's List v. Federal Election Commission 2009). The U.S. Supreme Court's opinion in Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission (2009) eliminated the ban on soft-money issue ads for interest groups in the months leading up to an election. This ruling will surely make interest groups a more attractive venue for organizing campaigns relative to party organizations.
Partisans, of course, will adapt. Some observers argue that party activists will navigate the new contours of BCRA in the aftermath of *Citizens United* and pursue additional campaign activities outside the formal party organization. Regrettably, this behavior reveals the futility of trying to prevent money from entering politics through strict campaign-finance reforms. More regrettably still, adaptations by partisans are not necessarily good for the party system. Partisans may get their paychecks and pursue their electoral goals outside the formal party organization, but decentering the node of the party network outside the official party apparatus could hamper the ability of the party to create broad-based governing coalitions throughout the country. Party organizations have an institutional history that sustains loyalties across national, state, and local committees, despite ideological differences among party members in different regions. More importantly, the formal organization has institutionalized channels of accountability that link elites at every level of government. The current combination of campaign-finance laws appears to push partisan elites in Washington outside the formal party structure, which could make them less attentive to the concerns of parties in the states. Instead, party elites in Washington will tend to socialize and work more than ever in the same circle of professionals, moving among various nationally based interest groups, consultant firms, and advocacy organizations. Collectively, they share a sophisticated expertise in managing large, short-term campaigns from Washington, but they may increasingly lack formal and close ties to state party leaders and local activists.

These thoughts are speculative. They are guided by the premise that organizational boundaries matter, even if an “open-systems” approach to understanding parties can be helpful in specific political contexts. An open-systems approach should not obscure the fact that political motives and goals vary across organizational boundaries, even if institutional actors share a desire to help one particular party. To argue that one organizational form is as good as another suggests a functionalism that is analytically weak and susceptible to overlooking maladaptive behaviors that could produce socially undesirable outcomes. For this reason, party scholars should continue to assess the dynamics of campaign finance by isolating different aspects of political parties using both formal (closed-system) and extended (open) models of organizational behavior.

Notes

1. An incumbent, by contrast, might want the party to capture the majority, but certainly not if it means putting his or her own seat at risk. Similarly, an advocacy group will be reluctant to support party candidates who disagree with policy stance
of the advocacy group. (Indeed, they may support a challenger in the primary when control of the legislature does not hang in the balance.)

2. It should also be noted that the congressional parties felt hemmed in by limits to their ability to help candidates with relatively low limits on contribution and coordinated expenditures. The intense competition to control the chambers encouraged them to exploit the use of soft money to help party candidates as well.

3. According to Karen Finney, communications director at the DNC, “We found ourselves in a cycle where our big donors would give closer to the cycle and not sort of throughout the years when certainly some—on some of the off years for some of the building. And I think part of the argument we made to people was you’ve got to give in the off years because we’ve got to—we can’t wait until the election is here. We’ve got to build a voter file, we’ve got to build ground troops, and we need resources to do that” (2008).

4. I include all levels of party because it is not possible to isolate interest group spending on presidential elections. Thus, I include spending for all federal activity to make party versus interest group comparisons.

5. Data from the Federal Election Commission (FEC) for itemized expenditures have not yet been released. However, I estimate the amount spent on political advertising by assuming that independent expenditures, which are reported to the FEC, reflect money spent on broadcast advertising.


7. None of these figures includes funds that were transferred or used for issue ads prior to BCRA.

8. The DNC attempted to build and implement an online mobilization tool called Neighbor-to-Neighbor (N2N) at a cost of $12 million that would rival the Republican microtargeting database built by the RNC in previous elections. The DNC claimed that more than 125,000 volunteers used N2N to make more than 6 million phone calls or personal visits to neighbors. The Obama team was also contacting voters using its own lists (Finney 2008).

9. This analysis focuses primarily on the national committees, but additional work should focus on trends among the congressional parties to see whether campaign-finance laws have affected the party’s ability to recruit and support candidates.
The story of the 2008 election cannot be told without highlighting the historic developments in campaign finance. The major candidates, political parties, and other organizations raised a record-breaking amount of money, mostly in the form of donations from individuals. The sheer volume of fund-raising in 2008 is staggering. As table 13.1 shows, candidates for federal offices raised over $3.2 billion in the 2008 election cycle. Cumulative spending in 2008 exceeded the 2004 totals by almost 60 percent, with significant increases occurring for all kinds of federal candidates. Simply put, participants in the 2008 elections were flush with cash.

Especially noteworthy was presidential-campaign fund-raising in 2008. Open contests for the nomination in both major parties and the promise of a competitive general election attracted politically and ideologically diverse fields of primary candidates in both parties, who in turn, sought financial backing from a broad swath of supporters. To avoid the constraints associated with accepting public funding in the primary elections, most contenders in both parties chose not to accept it. On the Democratic side, only John Edwards, Christopher Dodd, Joe Biden, and Dennis Kucinich received public matching funds, while only Tom Tancredo and Duncan Hunter did the same among Republicans. Free from campaign finance limitations, the candidates demonstrated considerable financial prowess during the primaries. As table 13.2 demonstrates, four Democratic and six Republican candidates amassed more than $10 million in campaign receipts from individuals in 2008. Among Democrats, Hillary Clinton raised an impressive $195 million in individual contributions, and John Edwards collected over $35 million. Barack Obama,
the eventual Democratic nominee, raised an astounding $427 million in individual contributions during the primary season alone. On the Republican side, John McCain, the eventual Republican nominee, raised $184 million from individual contributors in the primary, while Mitt Romney raised $60 million and Rudy Giuliani collected $54 million.

### TABLE 13.2
Presidential Candidate Receipts from Individual Contributors and Total Receipts (in Millions of Dollars) (Presidential Primaries, 2008 Cycle)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Individual Contributions ($ millions)</th>
<th>Total Receipts (Adjusted) ($ millions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democrats</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obama</td>
<td>$427</td>
<td>$467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td>$195</td>
<td>$228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edwards*</td>
<td>$35</td>
<td>$58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richardson</td>
<td>$22</td>
<td>$24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dodd*</td>
<td>$9</td>
<td>$17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biden*</td>
<td>$8</td>
<td>$12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kucinich*</td>
<td>$4</td>
<td>$5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vilsack</td>
<td>$1</td>
<td>$1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gravel</td>
<td>$0.5</td>
<td>$0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republicans</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McCain</td>
<td>$184</td>
<td>$219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romney</td>
<td>$60</td>
<td>$108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giuliani</td>
<td>$54</td>
<td>$58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>$34</td>
<td>$35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thompson, F.</td>
<td>$23</td>
<td>$24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huckabee</td>
<td>$16</td>
<td>$16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tancredo*</td>
<td>$4</td>
<td>$8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brownback</td>
<td>$3</td>
<td>$4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunter*</td>
<td>$2</td>
<td>$3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thompson, T.</td>
<td>$1</td>
<td>$1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Candidate received public matching funds in primary.

Source: Federal Election Commission. Figures are rounded.
For the first time since the start of the presidential public financing system in 1976, a candidate, Barack Obama, also bypassed public funds for the general election campaign. Obama ultimately raised an additional $230 million from individual contributors in the general election. Overall, he raised $765 million between the primary and general election campaigns, besting John McCain's $314 million by more than two to one. Put into recent historical context, Obama spent more than twice what George W. Bush and John Kerry each spent in 2004 and more than twice the combined spending of Bush and Al Gore in 2000 (Boatright 2009). In contrast, John McCain accepted public funding in the general election, for a total of $84 million, in return for which his campaign stopped raising private funds. However, both of the major political parties and their interest group allies spent extensively in the general election as well, with much of those funds also raised from individual donors.

A central element of Obama's fund-raising success was his campaign's ability to attract donations of less than $200. Anthony Corrado explains that no previous presidential contender had ever raised as much money through small individual contributions, making Obama's "small donor fund-raising the preeminent campaign finance story of the 2008 election" (2009, 114). Much of Obama's success in mobilizing small donors resulted from the effective use of online fund-raising and volunteer recruitment that capitalized on the availability of Web-based fund-raising tools, social-networking websites, search engines, text messaging, and e-mail. Obama alone was responsible for more than half of the $410 million in primary money that came from small contributions. By contrast, McCain took in $62 million, and Clinton collected $52 million from small donors during the primaries (Corrado 2009). Overall, small contributions constituted 53 percent of Obama's total primary funds, compared to 31 percent of McCain's or Clinton's funds. As Corrado summarizes, "In terms of small contributions, Obama was in a league of his own" (2009, 114).

As this fund-raising became apparent during the 2008 campaign, speculation about the factors that accounted for these developments mounted. Analysts examined the sources of funds and debated whether these patterns reflected an expansion in the size of the individual-donor pool or shifts within the pool (Corrado and Corbett 2009; Nelson 2010). This chapter probes this issue further using evidence from surveys of the public to evaluate several key questions: First, did the individual-donor pool increase as a percentage of the population in 2008? Second, was there a partisan shift in the donor pool in 2008? Third, did the 2008 donor pool differ from the past in terms of demographic and political characteristics? Finally, what role did the presidential campaign play in the changes in the donor pool? The answers to these questions have implications for a deeper query: was there a change in the source of financial resources available to the party system in 2008?
Individual Campaign Contributors

Federal elections are, for the most part, privately funded affairs, and the vast proportion of these funds come from individual donations (Brown, Powell, and Wilson 1995). Even at the presidential level, where the system of public financing has been in place since 1976, individual donors account for a major source of funds. And the decay of the public financing system over the last decade has only increased the importance of individual contributions (Green and Corrado 2003). Scholars view individual contributing behavior as an important form of political activism, but one that is rare among Americans because of financial constraints (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Previous research has demonstrated that, largely due to these limitations, donors are unrepresentative of the general citizenry in terms of demography, being disproportionately affluent, older, white, and male (Brown, Powell, and Wilson 1995; Francia et al. 2003). The donor pool has been unrepresentative politically as well: contributors have tended to be more interested in politics and more politically active in other respects compared to other citizens, as well as more Republican and more conservative on issues (Panagopoulos and Bergan 2006).

Recent election cycles have challenged these long-standing patterns. For example, the close 2004 race between Democrat John Kerry and incumbent Republican George W. Bush attracted widespread interest from Democrats. The technology revolution in fund-raising that operated in full swing in 2008 had already begun by 2004, facilitating broad participation in terms of contributing. The confluence of these factors resulted in notable shifts in donor characteristics in this cycle. Unlike in 2000, for instance, when donors were ideologically more conservative than nondonors, studies revealed no difference between these two groups in terms of overall ideology in 2004 (Panagopoulos and Bergan 2006). It is conceivable that the opportunities created by technology and campaigns in 2008 broadened the donor pool further, attracting donors who were more representative of the population as a whole. A good place to begin investigating this topic is with the size of the donor pool in 2008.

Size of the Donor Pool

Did the individual donors increase as a percentage of the adult population in 2008? Figure 13.1 displays weighted data from the American National Election Studies (ANES) that tracks the proportion of Americans who report contributing to political organizations in presidential election years between 1952 and 2008. The ANES has asked respondents whether they contributed to a candidate or party organization in election cycles over this entire period,
and since 1980 it has asked about contributions to other political groups, such as political action committees (PACs); the figure plots both series of questions. These data must be viewed with some caution since individual respondents may overreport their contributing behavior, much as they overreport voting behavior. Furthermore, changes in both the campaign-finance system and survey-question wording influence these patterns. Indeed, one of the high points in the reported candidate and party contribution series occurs in 1976, when the presidential public financing system was first initiated and ANES asked respondents specifically about contributions to the public financing fund via a checkoff on federal income tax forms. Despite these limitations, the patterns in figure 13.1 are instructive.

In 2008, 12.8 percent of the adult population reported contributing to a candidate or party, up only slightly from 12.6 percent of respondents in 2004. These figures are not distinguishable statistically but were higher than in any presidential election back to 1952 except for 1976 (and, as noted above, this data point may be anomalous). However, when contributions to other organizations are added, a total of 14.9 percent of the adult population reported contributing in 2008, less than the 15.7 percent who did so in 2004. This difference is not statistically significant either. But here, too, the 2004 and 2008 elections had significantly larger donor pools than in previous elections back to 1980. Indeed, the 1980–2000 data suggest that a functioning presidential public financing system may have helped limit the overall size of the donor pool. There was, however, an increase between 2004 and 2008 in terms of reported giving to candidates (11.4 to 8.9 percent, respectively) and a decrease in reported giving to parties (8.0 and 8.9 percent, respectively) and other political organizations (3.9 to 5.8 percent, respectively).

It seems likely that the intense competitiveness of the 2004 and 2008 presidential elections was a factor in the overall size of the donor pool. But structural features may have also been at work. The regulatory changes brought about by the enactment of the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act in 2002 may
have had an effect, including the prohibition of soft money to political parties and increases in individual contribution limits. Similarly, the departure of major candidates from the presidential public financing system and changes in fund-raising technology may have been factors as well. Such structural factors help account for the large increase in the size of the donor pool between 2000 and 2004 as well as the differences in the distribution of donations between 2004 and 2008.

Patterns of Giving

Although the size of the donor pool probably did not increase in 2008, there was a shift in the pattern of giving between 2004 and 2008. Figure 13.2 presents data from the ANES on giving by party in 2004 and 2008. Historically, Republicans have courted campaign contributors more successfully than Democrats, but this pattern changed in 2008, with Democratic candidates and party organizations faring better than their Republican counterparts. In 2008, 62.6 percent of donors reported contributing to a Democratic candidate organization, while 35.1 percent reported contributing to a GOP cause. In contrast, 50.4 percent of donors gave to a Republican candidate and only 44.4 percent contributed to a Democratic candidate in 2004. Similarly, 56.3 percent of donors reportedly contributed to the Democratic Party in 2008, compared to 43.7 percent who gave to the GOP. In 2004, 55.2 percent of donors reported a contribution to the GOP compared to 42.2 percent who indicated giving to the Democrats. So, there appears to have been a substantial increase in donors to Democratic organizations in 2008 and a decrease in donors to their Republican counterparts.

The 2008 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) permits a more nuanced look at reported giving by type of committee. Figure 13.3 indicates that the presidential campaign attracted the lion's share of individual contributors,

![Figure 13.2](image-url)

**Figure 13.2**
with nearly one in five (19.6 percent) donors contributing to a presidential candidate. In contrast, a bit more than one-twentieth (6.8 percent) reported giving to a party committee. By comparison, less than 4 percent of donors reported contributing to PACs, state and local committees, and congressional candidates. Presidential campaigns may have dominated campaign contributing in previous elections as well, but the margin was certainly large in 2008.

Figure 13.4 breaks down the contributions to all these kinds of committees by party. These data show that Democrats held a large advantage over Republicans among donors to the presidential committees, with 61.3 percent of donors contributing to a Democratic presidential committee in 2008, compared to 38.7 percent who reported giving to a Republican presidential committee. Democrats in 2008 also fared better than Republicans in terms of attracting out-of-state donors to the U.S. Senate and U.S. House races, as well as donors to party committees. The donors were more evenly split between the two parties for within-district contributions to congressional races, PACs, and state and local committees.
The CCES data also allows us to examine contribution size by party and committee type. Figure 13.5 provides some illustrative patterns. In 2008, the Democrats enjoyed a large advantage over the Republicans among small donors to presidential candidates: 62.2 percent of donors who contributed $200 or less to a presidential candidate in 2008 contributed to a Democrat. This pattern is certainly consistent with other evidence from the campaign. The Democratic advantage was larger among small donations compared to the largest donations ($4,600 or more), with just 55.8 percent of the largest donations going to Democrats. However, it is worth noting that the Democrats enjoyed an edge over the GOP across all sizes of presidential donations. This pattern is likely the result of Obama's extraordinary fund-raising success.

This presidential pattern for contribution size was not replicated for all types of committees. For example, the Republicans had more success than the Democrats in obtaining small donations to party committees—long a GOP strength—and the two parties broke even in small, in-district donations to U.S. House candidates. The size of donations to these two kinds of committees diverged for the largest donations, however, with the Democrats enjoying an advantage among the largest party donations and the Republicans holding an edge among in-district U.S. House candidates. These patterns also reveal the distinctiveness of presidential donors in 2008.

In sum, the presidential campaign had a major impact on the donor pool in 2008, shifting contributions strongly in a Democratic direction. A similar pattern occurred for party committees and out-of-district congressional donations as well. So, much of the change in 2008 was a Democratic shift within, rather than an overall increase in the donor pool.

**Characteristics of the Donor Pool**

What about the demographic composition of the donor pool in 2008? Figure 13.6 illustrates these relationships by presenting the zero-order correlations...
FIGURE 13.6

(Pearson’s r) between three key demographic measures (income, age, gender) and contributing between 1952 and 2008. As noted earlier, income, age, and gender have been shown to be correlated with campaign contributing. As one might expect, income was more strongly correlated with contributors than age or gender. The patterns over time are intriguing. Although income is strongly correlated with contributing behavior, the magnitude of the relationship has tended to decrease over time, with one of the smaller correlations occurring in 2008. This evidence suggests a modest broadening of the donor pool to include some less affluent donors.

Age shows something of an opposite over-time pattern compared to income: after 1976, the correlation between age and contributing increased steadily, revealing an aging donor pool. But this trend ended abruptly in 2008, with a substantial drop in the correlation compared to 2004. This evidence also suggests a broadening of the donor pool to include younger donors. In yet another pattern, gender does not show as much change over most of the period we study, with men consistently more likely to contribute than women. However, this relationship largely disappeared in 2004 and 2008. Here, too, the evidence suggests a broadening of the donor pool to include more women. Thus, the expansion of the donor pool in 2004 and 2008, as well as the Democratic shift in presidential and party contributing in 2008, helped change the donor pool to be somewhat more representative of the general public than in previous elections.

What about the political characteristics of the donor pool? Figure 13.7 reports the correlations between three political measures (political activity, interest in the election, and partisanship) and contributing between 1952 and 2008. As noted earlier, political activity, interest, and partisanship have tended to be correlated with donors in the past. Given that contributing is a form of political activity, it is hardly surprising that the level of such activity is more strongly correlated with donors than either interest in the campaign or partisanship. In fact, the relationship between political activity and contributing
intensified considerably in 2008, following a sharp upward trend after 2000. In contrast, the correlation between interest in the election and contributing was more constant over time and actually decreased slightly in 2008. Partisanship has shown a less stable pattern over the period, but Republicans have been more likely to be donors. However, note the sharp decline in this correlation in 2008, when the Republican bias in contributing largely disappeared—a pattern consistent with the foregoing evidence on the Democratic shift in contributing at the presidential level.

Thus, there is less evidence of a broadening of the donor pool when it comes to political characteristics: in 2008 donors were still quite (and more) active in politics and more interested in the election than nondonors. Figure 13.8 illustrates the political continuity in the donor pool by comparing the percentage of the adult population that reported making a contribution to the percentage that reported doing volunteer work in a campaign between 1952 and 2008. Reported contributing has always been greater than reported campaign work, and beginning in 2000, the gap between the two series widened. This pattern is interesting because time for volunteering is more evenly distributed in American society.
than the financial resources to make a donation (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Of course, such “checkbook” activism may also require less of a personal commitment, and it is easier to make multiple contributions than to volunteer in many campaigns. These patterns reveal the wisdom of recognizing contributing as a major source of political activism in its own right. It is worth noting that campaign volunteering also increased in 2004 and 2008, along with the increase in the number of donors. In 2008, this form of activism has broadened to include more Democratic donors.

The evidence we present above suggests there were some meaningful changes to the characteristics of the donor pool in 2008. When combined with the foregoing evidence on the Democratic shift in contributing, these findings highlight the special impact of the presidential campaign. Figure 13.9 illustrates these changes by looking at the correlation between key demographic and political variables and donors to the Obama and McCain campaigns, using data from the 2008 Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project.

This evidence reveals that donors to both presidential campaigns tended to be more affluent, more masculine, and older than nondonors. However, the Obama contributors were less affluent, more feminine, and younger when compared to the McCain donors. Thus, the surge in Obama donors appears to be a major reason for the broadening of donor-pool demography in 2008. Likewise, both sets of contributors tended to be more politically active and interested in the campaign than nondonors, but here the Obama donors were more active and more interested than the McCain donors. The most striking difference was, not surprisingly, partisanship: Obama donors tended to be Democrats, and McCain donors tended to be Republicans. Taken together, these findings reveal that the Obama campaign modestly broadened the demography, substantially increased the political activity, and largely evened up the partisanship of the donor pool.
Chapter 13

Flush with Cash

The survey data we report above confirm that important changes did indeed occur in the donor pool in 2008, although the patterns are complex. For instance, the overall size of the donor pool probably did not increase in 2008—but a significant increase occurred between 2000 and 2004. This pattern suggests that structural factors played a major role in expanding the donor pool, such as changes in the campaign-finance laws, the decay of the public financing system, and innovations in fund-raising technology. However, in 2008 there were shifts in the pattern of contributing, especially toward Democratic candidates and party committees. Clearly, this change reflects the extraordinary success of the Democrats in raising funds from individual donors in 2008—and it may also reflect the relative lack of success of the Republicans. This Democratic shift appears to have made the donor pool modestly more representative of the population as a whole in demographic and partisan terms but arguably more distinctive in terms of political activity and interest. The Obama presidential campaign was central to all these changes. In sum, the party system had a somewhat different source of financial resources in 2008 than in previous elections, leaving the participants, especially candidates, flush with cash.

It remains unclear whether Obama’s phenomenal fund-raising experience, as well as its impact on the donor pool in 2008, is a temporal aberration or the wave of the future. As we have seen, expansions in the size and characteristics of the donor pool have occurred in past elections, but many of the changes did not result in long-term shifts. In fact, one of the longest trends was the relative decline in the size of the donor pool between 1980 and 2000, during the heyday of the presidential public financing system. Even new fund-raising technologies, such as the use of the Internet, may reach their limits soon (Panagopoulos 2009). So, the changes of 2008 (and 2004) may not be sustained in the longer term.

It could be that a confluence of short-term factors largely explains the 2008 patterns. The campaign featured several “firsts”—including the first-ever African American Democratic nominee and the first-ever female vice presidential nominee for the GOP. It unfolded against the backdrop of a nation roughly evenly divided in terms of partisan identification and remained competitive throughout. Open contests for the nominations in both major parties attracted significant interest and media attention. Moreover, important national issues, including national security, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and a swift economic downturn in the middle of the fall campaign, all helped to make 2008 an idiosyncratic election cycle. It seems unlikely that many of these factors will have the same effect in the near future.
However, other factors could contribute to a continued expansion of the
donor pool. The impact of new campaign-finance laws and the continued
decay of the presidential public financing system may provide incentives
for increased fund-raising and contributing. The new role of the Internet in
fund-raising, amply illustrated by the Obama campaign, may continue to
expand as other candidates learn the lessons of 2008. Indeed, by this logic
a competitive Republican presidential candidate in 2012, who bypasses
public financing and has effective online fund-raising, might expand the
donor pool and shift it in a different direction. Such an eventuality might
make the donor pool even more representative of the general public—or it
could shift it back to the well-known patterns of the recent past. All these
possibilities highlight the crucial role that individual campaign contributors
play in resourcing the party system.

Notes

1. The analysis is based on three surveys of the public, the American National Elec­tion Studies, 1952 to 2008 (www.electionstudies.org); the 2008 Cooperative Congres­sional Election Study (www.polimetrix.com/news/060908.html [December 8, 2009]);
and the 2008 Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project (www.polimetrix.com/news/ ccap.html). All the analysis in this chapter is our responsibility.

2. A correction of the 1976 figure to remove the reported participation in the
check-off funds produces an estimate of 12.7 percent for contributions to candidates
and parties. Thus, it seems likely that the beginning of the public financing system
increased the size of the donor pool.

3. The political activity measure is a simple additive index of three items: attend
a political meeting, work for a party or candidate, and display a campaign button or
sticker.
Part IV

PARTISAN PUBLICS
IN November 2004, the George W. Bush administration readied itself for a second term, having triumphantly expanded the party majority in both houses of Congress. The nation seemed on the verge of a solid Republican majority for perhaps the first time since before the Great Depression. Of course, it now appears that 2004 was a high-water mark for the GOP. Barack Obama’s election in 2008 is closely tied to a resurgence of the Democratic Party to its strongest electoral position since Bill Clinton was elected in 1992.

Surveys of the American public confirm that a shift in public attitudes toward the parties took place during Bush’s second term. For example, surveys by the Pew Research Center revealed in early 2009 that public identification with the GOP had fallen to 23 percent, while the remaining proportion of independents had sharply tilted toward the Democrats. Numerous other polls by other organizations found a substantial Democratic advantage in mass identification.

This chapter explores the nature and causes of these shifts in party identification. I examine changes in mass public attitudes toward the two parties, rather than voting behavior, to gain a more in-depth understanding of what factors account for the Republican Party’s troubles after 2004.

One of the most common interpretations of the GOP’s troubles is that the party veered too far to the right during Bush’s second term in office and was generally perceived as out of touch with the beliefs of most Americans. I argue, however, that mass attitudes toward the parties reflect two distinct sets of considerations. While there is evidence that the party is perceived as too conservative, survey evidence also indicates that perceptions about the
party are based on negative attitudes about the state of the economy and the troubled Iraq War, as well as beliefs that the party had become corrupt and mismanaged. As such, changes in mass identification represent the result of both retrospective and ideological evaluations. In the post-Bush era, the GOP faces both ephemeral and long-term challenges in regaining public support.

Moving Left or to the Center?

The 2008 American National Election Studies (ANES) confirms the results of other surveys that the partisan balance in the nation has shifted toward the Democratic Party in recent years. As figure 14.1 shows, Democratic gains actually began in 2004, coinciding with Bush’s reelection. The gains have been modest but are most striking in terms of the proportion of “leaning Democrats,” which has nearly doubled since 1988. Overall, when leaners are included as partisans, the Republican disadvantage in mass identification (which has existed since the ANES began polling in 1948) jumps from a nearly historic low of six points in 2002 (forty-nine to forty-three) to a more sizable gap of fourteen points (fifty-one to thirty-seven), the largest since 1998.

What accounts for the rise and fall of Republican fortunes? There have been two primary explanations for the GOP’s rise. First, the GOP suc-

![Figure 14.1](mass-party-identification-1976-2008-source-anes-cumulative-file)
cess has been attributed to excellent organization. Tom Hamburger and Peter Wallsten (2006), among others, have argued that the party's superior fund-raising and organizational structure allowed it to run highly effective, nationalized campaigns. The party worked hard to develop a "permanent majority," focusing on appointing conservative judges and civil servants, developing close ties with conservative think tanks and lobbyists, and controlling the redistricting process at the state level. Such an explanation admits that the GOP was, at best, only even with the Democratic Party in terms of national popular support, but a superior organization would help the party control government in a highly competitive electoral environment (Armstrong and Moulitsas Zúniga 2006).

Alternatively, a second explanation focuses on the GOP's conservatism and the rightward shift in public opinion (Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde 2006). These explanations have argued that Republican success reflected broad public support for the party's core conservative principles, which focused on tax cuts, a strong national defense, and, increasingly as the 1980s wore on, socially conservative positions associated with the religious right. In fact, survey evidence indicated that beginning in the 1970s, there was a rightward shift in opinion (Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002), and this appears to explain much of the conservative shift in policy at the federal and state levels during the 1980s and 1990s. By the 1990s, conservative beliefs had become ascendant and seemed to be deep and enduring in the public mind-set (Micklethwait and Wooldridge 2004).

These explanations for GOP success must now confront the party's troubles in recent years. In the first place, GOP failures are largely organizational; corruption scandals and incompetent leadership have prevented realization of the dream of a permanent majority. Alternatively, increases in Democratic organizational strength also have successfully countered what was once a major Republican advantage.

Most explanations of Republicans failures, however, have focused on the party's ideology. There are two, perhaps complementary, rationales on this point. As the party came to be dominated by religious and largely southern conservatives, its focus on divisive social issues alienated moderates and independents, damaging the party brand name. Critics point out that the party holds only one congressional seat from New York to New England and has generally lost ground across much of the Midwest as well. Thus, the party is in danger of becoming marginalized as a minor regional party (Abramowitz and Teixeira 2008).

On the other side of the coin, some have seen evidence of a broad social shift toward "progressive" or liberal values (Judis and Teixeira 2002; Abramowitz and Teixeira 2008). Such views are bolstered by surveys showing large
identification gaps among the youngest voters in favor of the Democrats as the partisanship of the Millennial generation is markedly to the left of Generation X (Pew Research Center 2009). Proponents argue that such trends indicate a profound seminal change in the values of the electorate. While the GOP’s social conservatism moved along this realignment, this view argues that the values of the next generation would be at odds with even a moderate GOP.

While these theories probably have merit, an alternative theory suggests that the GOP’s problems may be more temporal than the direst assessments would lead one to believe. Republican difficulties could be due to retrospective evaluations. Morris Fiorina’s (1981) theory of retrospective voting holds that parties and elected officials are rewarded when times are good and punished when times are not. Indeed, national economic performance turns out to be one of the most reliable predictors of election outcomes in forecasting models (Lewis-Beck and Tien 2005).

It is worth noting that Fiorina’s theory is not limited to economic evaluations and that it explains not just election outcomes. One of his main findings was that citizens incorporate recent policy achievements and failures of the governing party and current economic conditions into updated partisan attachments. In bad times, voters do not just throw the bums out; at least some portion of the public switches parties. Fiorina attributed the decline in Republican support in the ANES panel waves in the 1970s to Watergate and the end of the Vietnam War, not just to poor economic conditions.

Retrospective evaluations are as much about competent management as they are about economic performance. Such evaluations are more ephemeral in nature but encompass a general measure of party performance. Recent changes in mass party identification could reflect the incorporation of such sentiments rather than a broad shift in social values. This explanation would certainly appear to fit given that 2008 marked the worst economic conditions since the Great Depression and the GOP was the incumbent party, controlling the White House for the previous eight years and the Congress for most of that time. This explanation would suggest that the Republican Party’s predicament may be temporary in nature.

Attitudes toward the parties must be understood within a highly polarized political environment. Numerous studies have found high levels of partisan and ideological polarization. This is true in terms of mass partisanship (Bartels 2000; Hetherington 2001). A major cause of this partisan polarization is that attitudes on a range of disparate issues are becoming more consistently organized around a single line of cleavage dividing liberals and conservatives (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998, 2008). In this environment, partisan attitudes operate as such a powerful information filter that perceptions of factual information differ dramatically according to an individual’s partisan affilia-
Polarization could conceivably override the effect of short-term considerations, such as the state of the economy on evaluations of the parties. It is therefore important to ask whether retrospective evaluations are driving the mass public’s shift away from the GOP or if ideological considerations are the main force at work.

Survey Evidence

The rest of the chapter examines evidence for each explanation, retrospective and ideological, to account for public attitudes toward the two parties, particularly the Republican Party. I begin by examining the evidence for the ideological explanation. Recent survey data provides mixed support for this claim. Studies by the Pew Research Center show almost no leftward movement in public opinion in recent years, despite a noticeable shift in the public toward the Democratic Party. Their studies find that independents, which have risen to their highest proportion in years, actually hold more conservative views. This pattern is in part due to the fact that most new independents are disaffected Republicans. In contrast, Robert S. Erikson, Michael B. MacKuen, and James A. Stimson (2008) find that their measure of the “macropolity,” which is a composite measure of aggregate ideological and policy views,
shows evidence of a consistently increasing liberalism and support for government intervention in the economy over the entire Bush presidency, with 2008 marking a high point in the public’s liberal policy “mood.”

The ANES data provide a similarly mixed picture. As can be seen in table 14.2, since 1994, the proportion of self-identified liberals has increased, while at the same time the proportion of conservatives has decreased, so that the gap is now about half of what it was during the year of the “Republican Revolution.” If we take these numbers as a guide, the historic Republican wins of 1994 were no accident; there was an identifiable and fairly dramatic shift to the right among the public that year. Currently, however, while conservatives still outnumber liberals, the more even balance suggests not only that the public is more likely to vote for Democratic candidates but that a more sizable share of the electorate is open to supporting liberal candidates and policies. In fact, there has been a growth in the proportion of self-identified liberals in each ANES since 1994.

Moreover, attitudes toward the parties indicate that the public is more sympathetic to the policies and agendas of the Democratic Party. For example, the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) polled voters at the end of 2007, prior to the formal nomination of presidential candidates. The CCES data show that voters clearly perceived Republicans as too conservative relative to Democrats. While 54 percent of respondents saw the Democratic Party as too liberal, 30 percent felt the party was “just right.” By comparison, 64 percent of respondents saw the GOP as too conservative, while only 16 percent saw the party as “just right,” half the Democratic figure.

In terms of ideological placement, the ANES data similarly point to the ideological explanation. When asked if any party represented their beliefs “reasonably well,” of those who said yes (59 percent), 68 percent stated that it was the Democratic Party compared to only 29 percent who identified the Republican Party. Party-feeling thermometers show a dip in the proportion of the public that viewed the Republican Party positively compared to the Democrats. While the Democratic mean thermometer rating of fifty-seven was virtually unchanged from the score of fifty-eight in 2004, the Republican score of forty-seven marked the lowest mean score since ratings were measured beginning in 1978.

Yet, such evaluations could also be due to retrospective evaluations. Socioeconomic evaluations are highly predictive of voting in national elections (Kinder and Kiewiet 1981). Presidential approval has long been shown to be connected to economic performance, and George W. Bush’s approval ratings during his second term declined steadily, reaching nearly historic lows. The ANES survey shows 90 percent of respondents said that the economy was worse than it had been a year before, the highest proportion in the ANES time series, exceeding the previous high of 80 percent in 1980. Not
surprisingly, 41 percent of respondents said the economy would improve if Obama won, while just 20 percent believed the economy would improve if John McCain won. Nearly twice as many respondents (40 to 23 percent) believed that the Democrats were better at handling the nation’s economy than Republicans. Moreover, when asked which party would best handle the nation’s most important problem and second-most important political problem, Democrats were preferred by a wide margin on both (53 to 27 and 55 to 29). The negative views of the GOP were not limited to economic evaluations; 76 percent of respondents stated that the Iraq War “was not worth the cost,” and more respondents believed that the war increased the threat of terrorism than those who did not.

Context and Analysis of Open-Ended Comments, 2008

We can dig deeper into party evaluations by analyzing party likes and dislikes. In the ANES, respondents are asked open-ended questions about whether there is anything that they like or dislike about both of the parties. Such measures can provide a more detailed explanation of voter attitudes and can be used to complement the other measures of citizen perceptions about the parties (Miller and Shanks 1996).

Overall, respondents were generally more favorable toward the Democratic Party than the GOP. Of respondents, 58 percent stated that they liked something about the Democratic Party compared to only 45 percent who stated that they liked something about the GOP. By comparison, 49 percent stated there was something that they disliked about the Democratic Party, while 56 percent stated that there was something that they disliked about the Republican Party.

These answers, however, do not describe exactly what it is that the respondents like or dislike about the parties. Reviewing the redacted comments, I coded the ANES open-ended likes and dislikes into seven categories: ideological; issue or policy specific (including general foreign policy references); related to candidates or elected officials; retrospective; related to competence or organization; pertaining to groups; and other.

As can be seen in table 14.1, the patterns are surprisingly similar in terms of the categories for each party. The plurality of comments referenced an ideological consideration. While the coding as “ideological” may be generous, one in five respondents referenced some aspect of the Democratic Party’s liberalism, moderate foreign policy, and commitment to social justice and civil rights as something they liked about the party, while just slightly fewer referenced the Republican Party’s conservatism, belief in limited government and the free
TABLE 14.1
Coding of Party Likes and Dislikes from 2008 ANES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Democratic Likes</th>
<th>Democratic Dislikes</th>
<th>Republican Likes</th>
<th>Republican Dislikes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific policy/issues</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groups</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidates</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management/organization</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retrospective</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>52.4</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>44.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N 2,323

Note: Proportions for the “nothing” category are slightly different from those for the first question (“Is there anything you like?”) since some of the responses did not fit any category.

Source: 2008 National Election Study, redacted open-ended comments.

market, and commitment to traditional social values. Almost identical percentages (about 13 percent) had some dislike about either party that focused on these considerations.

Policy issues were similar across both parties, although there were more policy-specific comments for Democrats. This pattern is consistent with the party’s tendency to be perceived as a collection of interest groups, and many comments (likes and dislikes) were focused on health care, the environment, and abortion. Republican comments were less policy specific but in general focused on the party’s unilateral foreign policy, tax policies, and social policies (again, frequently regarding abortion). In addition, while not generally considered ideological, comments referencing groups were remarkably consistent. That is, the Democrats were broadly seen as the party of the poor and the working and middle classes, while Republicans were perceived as the party of the rich and the upper-middle class. The pattern is somewhat instructive in that Democratic group comments were generally positive while Republican references were more likely to be negative.

Not surprisingly, retrospective comments were more common for the GOP as the party controlling the White House, even though Democrats controlled the Congress during the two previous years. Democrats were seen more positively than negatively with regard to their action on the financial crisis and opposing the President’s Iraq War policy, while Republicans were largely blamed for the crisis and poor management of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Comments about the Iraq and Afghanistan wars tended to be less ideological (concerned with why the United States went to war or to how foreign policy
should be conducted) than focused on performance (the number of casualties, poor funding, refusal to bring the troops home).

I distinguished comments about management or performance issues. Many comments focused on competence in office rather than casualties or economic conditions. Such were common for both parties, but again took on a more positive tone for the Democrats. Democrats were seen positively for restoring fiscal stability and reducing government corruption. The GOP comments on balance focused on the party’s corruption scandals and increasing budget deficits, and numerous Republicans and conservatives commented that the party was too incompetent to accomplish its core goals. There were some negative comments about the Democrats as well, largely about the party leadership’s failure to effectively stop the Iraq War and its inability to govern in a unified manner since taking control of Congress in 2006.

In reality, the areas overlapped, so I combined the comments into two main categories (dropping comments in the last two categories): ideological, group, and issue concerns and economic, candidate, and management concerns. The first category can be thought of as comprising comments referencing long-term or stable considerations, while the second category combines comments that reflect short-term considerations. As noted, group-focused comments, while not usually considered ideological, represent fundamental lines of cleavage and perceptions about who the other party is, and such perceptions are largely stable from election to election (Conover and Feldman 1981).

Overall, party likes were not very different for those individuals who offered a response, but they are instructive in terms of how the electorate viewed the parties. Including those who had nothing to say, 40 percent of ANES respondents referenced a stable consideration as a reason for liking the Democratic Party, while just 13 percent referenced short-term factors. Thus, the bulk of positive comments about the Democratic Party (three in four) were about stable considerations. For the GOP, less than one in three respondents referenced a stable factor as a reason for liking the party compared to 11 percent who listed a retrospective or candidate-centered reason. The balance of stable to short-term factors was similar to that of the Democrats.

Party dislikes show a more pronounced pattern that reflects the environment of the 2008 elections. In fact, dislikes are more focused on short-term factors, with slightly more dissatisfaction with the GOP’s performance in office. One in three Democratic dislikes referenced a stable consideration, double those stating a short-term factor. There were greater percentages expressing dislike of the GOP, with one in three providing a negative comment on a stable factor, but this was more balanced with those referencing a short-term factor (19 percent).
The results are also quite revealing when broken down by party. Nearly half of all Republican dislikes were about candidates or the party’s performance in office. Republicans, overall, were satisfied with their party’s ideology, as over 60 percent had a positive comment that dealt with an issue position of the party or its overall ideology, compromising over three in four stated likes about the party. Democrats were similarly happy with their party’s ideology, with 59 percent stating there was something they liked in terms of policy, issues, or overall ideological positions. Not surprisingly, Democrats had more negative things to say about Republicans, and these comments largely focused on ideological issues, while Republicans similarly were more negative about Democratic ideological or issue positions (see figure 14.3).

Independent comments were fairly balanced. Generally, they were more positive about the Democratic Party’s ideology than about the GOP’s, as almost one in three positive comments about the Democrats referenced an ideological issue, compared to only one in five positive comments about the GOP.

Reasons for Public Perceptions

I test the relative influence of retrospective and ideological factors on party evaluations using a variety of party-oriented questions in the 2008 ANES. Table 14.2 shows the bivariate question correlations for several items, tapping into each set of considerations against party-feeling thermometers (measured

![Figure 14.3](image-url)

Open-ended comments about the Democratic Party. Source: 2008 ANES.
FIGURE 14.4
Open-ended comments about the Republican Party. Source: 2008 ANES.

TABLE 14.2
Correlates of Party Attitudes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Republicans</th>
<th></th>
<th>Democrats</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feeling</td>
<td>Like</td>
<td>Feeling</td>
<td>Like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thermometer</td>
<td>Dislike</td>
<td>Thermometer</td>
<td>Dislike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retroactive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociotropic</td>
<td>-0.221**</td>
<td>-0.181**</td>
<td>0.161**</td>
<td>0.203**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Iraq War worth cost&quot;</td>
<td>0.430**</td>
<td>0.431**</td>
<td>-0.380**</td>
<td>-0.426**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;U.S. more secure&quot;</td>
<td>-0.352**</td>
<td>-0.353**</td>
<td>0.324**</td>
<td>0.323**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush presidential approval</td>
<td>0.544**</td>
<td>0.556**</td>
<td>0.462**</td>
<td>0.507**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological placement</td>
<td>0.135**</td>
<td>0.240**</td>
<td>0.445**</td>
<td>0.544**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological distance</td>
<td>-0.523**</td>
<td>-0.548**</td>
<td>-0.492**</td>
<td>-0.575**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-Ended</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like stable</td>
<td>0.359**</td>
<td>0.372**</td>
<td>0.291**</td>
<td>0.281**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like retro</td>
<td>0.120**</td>
<td>0.094**</td>
<td>0.199**</td>
<td>0.151**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dislike stable</td>
<td>-0.227**</td>
<td>-0.200**</td>
<td>-0.347**</td>
<td>-0.337**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dislike retro</td>
<td>-0.033**</td>
<td>-0.101**</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td>0.017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** p < 0.001

Note: Party-feeling thermometers measured 0 (cold) to 100 (warm). Like-Dislike scale measured 1 ("Strong Dislike") to 10 ("Strongly Like"). Cell entries are bivariate Pearson correlation coefficients. Data are weighted.

on a scale of zero to one hundred) and a closed-ended like-dislike scale (measured from one to ten, from “strongly like” to “strongly dislike”).

These were compared to retrospective factors, which included a measure of economic performance (assessment of the nation’s economy over the previous year on a scale of one to five, with five indicating “much worse”), whether the Iraq War was “worth the cost” (measured as one, “worth the cost,” and zero, “not worth the cost”), whether the United States had become safer from “foreign enemies” since 2000 (one, “much less secure,” to five, “much more secure”), and approval of Bush’s job performance (one, “approve strongly,” to four, “disapprove strongly”). These measures should tap into attitudes toward party performance. If the retrospective hypothesis is correct, then the correlations should be significant, with positive assessments associated with positive evaluations of the GOP and negative assessments correlated with negative assessments of the GOP. Alternatively, the reverse may be true for the Democrats, although I expect retrospective evaluations to be less strongly correlated with attitudes about the Democratic Party as the party out of power. It is possible, however, that as the out party, the Democrats may have received improved evaluations as voters perceived them to be a better option.

I also included additional measures of ideology. In one, the respondent placed each party on a scale of one (left) to ten (right). I then created an absolute ideological distance measure of the respondent’s self-placement on the ten-point scale and the placement of each party. Finally, I included dummy variables for the open-ended comments for each type of positive and negative evaluation that a respondent offered.

The correlations are not a test of causality, but they are instructive in terms of showing the importance of both sets of factors. In almost all cases, the ideological measures were strongly correlated with party attitudes. This is, however, to be expected in an era of intense party polarization. Thus, the further respondents placed themselves from either party, the less positively they viewed that party. Ideological placement reveals an interesting pattern. While respondents clearly distinguished between the ideology of each party, the further to the right respondents placed the GOP, the more positively the party was viewed, but Democratic evaluations were correlated with a rightward as opposed to leftward placement. In other words, both positive evaluations were correlated with perceptions of more conservative parties. At the same time, the set of retrospective measures also related strongly to party evaluations. Economic perceptions hurt the GOP; the worse respondents believed the economy was performing, the less positively they viewed the GOP and the more positively they viewed the Democrats. The same pattern, with similar
strength, can be observed for attitudes about the Iraq War, evaluations of whether the nation is safer, and presidential approval.

The open-ended comments show a similar pattern, with some minor differences. Respondents who offered a positive comment about either party viewed each more favorably for both retrospective and stable considerations, but the correlations were stronger for the stable attitudes. Party dislikes show a slightly different pattern, with stable measures significantly correlated with party attitudes. Dislikes focusing on retrospective comments did not correlate with evaluations of the Democrats, but they were significant for the closed-ended ten-point scale of party likes and open-ended comments about retrospective dislikes of the Republican Party.

In a more systematic test, I used a simple regression model to evaluate the impact of each set of considerations. The model controls for gender, race, education, church attendance, income, and marital status. I measured retrospective factors using the standard measure of sociotropic attitudes (respondent perception of the state of the nation’s economy over the previous year). I measured ideological factors using the absolute value of the distance of respondents’ ideological self-placement on the ten-point scale and their placement of each party. The dependent variables were each party’s feeling thermometer and the ten-point closed-ended like-dislike scale.

For the sake of brevity (and because the results are largely what would be expected), I present only the standardized coefficients for the variables measuring retrospective and ideological considerations (see table 14.3). Comparing the standardized coefficients, I find ideological distance is more strongly related, but sociotropic views, controlling for other factors, still significantly impacted mass public attitudes toward each of the parties. Ideological attitudes clearly dominate, but given the fact that this analysis is a static (i.e.,

<p>| TABLE 14.3 |
| Comparison of Retrospective and Ideological Explanations for Party Attitudes |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Republicans</th>
<th>Democrats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Feeling Thermometer</strong></td>
<td><strong>Like-Dislike</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociotropic</td>
<td>-0.155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological Distance</td>
<td>-0.453</td>
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</table>

Note: Party-feeling thermometers measured 0 (cold) to 100 (warm). Like-Dislike scale measured 1 ("Strong Dislike") to 10 ("Strongly Like"). Cell entries are standardized regression coefficients. Data are weighted. \( p < 0.001 \), \( N = 974 \).

single-election) measure of attitudes, it is more than plausible that the cause of changes in party evaluations is retrospective evaluations.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the reasons for the shift in mass partisan identification by examining public attitudes toward the two political parties. Popular accounts of the gain in Democratic identifiers (and, correspondingly, the party’s success in both the 2006 and 2008 elections) have focused on a rejection of the GOP’s perceived conservatism. The 2008 ANES provides some evidence for this claim but shows that a retrospective interpretation of recent elections is just as robust an explanation.

I find evidence for both explanations, which is both good and bad news for the GOP. Specifically, comments about Republicans reflect not anger toward party positions, as is commonly assumed, but rather beliefs that the party was poorly managed, that party leaders were incompetent, and that the party was to blame for high casualties in Iraq and for the 2008 financial crisis. Fiorina, after all, has theorized that partisanship is largely the weighted average of these considerations, and short-term evaluations have long-term impacts on mass partisanship, especially if they are not countered by positive considerations. As such, partisanship is dynamic and responsive to short-term factors.

Ultimately, the simple answer is that time will tell exactly how dark a period this is for the GOP. One trend that has received less attention is an apparent rise in the proportion of the electorate that self-identifies as independent. This stands in contrast to a slow but steady decline in independents from the 1970s until the 2002 ANES. This rise is taking place within a still highly polarized political environment and most theorists on mass public opinion predict that stronger partisan signals from elites cause the general public to internalize these messages and react by becoming more partisan. This had been the leading explanation for the revival of mass partisanship among the American public beginning in the 1980s. Yet, a 2009 Pew Research Center report concluded that the proportion of independents in the electorate had reached the highest level in seventy years at 39 percent.

This trend suggests a potentially unstable electorate from a partisan viewpoint and provides more evidence that the 2008 election outcome was the result of retrospective evaluations. As noted by the Pew Research Center, many of the new independents are disaffected Republicans who are still fairly conservative. As President Clinton learned in 1994, however, independents can quickly shift their anger toward the incumbent. The ambitious agenda of the Obama administration may produce some electoral volatility. For example,
the Tea Party Movement may reflect a similar process to the one described by Ronald Rapoport and Walter Stone (2005) involving the Reform Party activists in the 1990s. Key issues, such as health care, may entice or return some portion of these independents to the Republican fold. Alternatively, renewed economic growth and policy successes by the Obama administration may win over many independents. The coming years may prove quite decisive in determining the balance of power between the parties.

Notes

1. There is some debate about the usefulness of open-ended measures. As noted by Warren E. Miller and J. Merrill Shanks (1996), open-ended comments are not superior measures of voter attitudes compared to closed-ended survey questions, but they can provide meaningful information about the exact types of concerns that may vary from election to election.

2. The results are models that did not include partisanship or a direct measure of ideology. I excluded these variables because they were so highly correlated with the dependent variables or because the ideological distance variable is a more direct measure for the test of ideological considerations I am performing. When these variables were included, they generally did not affect the relative importance of the coefficients, so the results here can be considered robust to alternative specifications.
"McCain's losing to Obama among college graduates and voters who have attended some college underscores how much the GOP franchise is in trouble. My hunch is that the Republican Party's focus on social, cultural, and religious issues—most notably, fights over embryonic stem cell research and Terri Schiavo—cost its candidates dearly among upscale voters."

"Suggestions that we abandon social conservatism, including our pro-life agenda, should be ignored. These values are often more popular than the GOP itself."

The struggle of the Republican Party in the late 1990s to become the majority party was lengthy, but by 2000 it could be regarded as finally successful. In the 1994 elections Republicans won control of the House of Representatives for the first time since 1952. In the 1990s the percentage of Americans identifying as Republican twice surpassed the Democratic percentage, a rare occurrence in the last fifty years. In 2000 George W. Bush won the presidency, and identification with the Republican Party once again equaled that for Democrats (Pew Research Center 2007). Following 9/11, President Bush had remarkably high approval ratings (Jacobson 2006), and in the 2002 elections Republicans increased their number of seats in the House. Bush won reelection in 2004. After decades of largely being the minority party, Republicans appeared to have achieved a stable majority within American politics.

Since then the party has experienced an abrupt reversal of fortunes, losing the House and Senate in the 2006 elections and even more seats in 2008. By 2009
Republicans were down to 178 House seats and just 40 Senate seats, and Democrat Barack Obama was president. A New York Times poll indicated that only 28 percent of respondents had a favorable impression of the party, the lowest level ever in one of that newspaper’s polls (Zeleny and Sussman 2009).

The challenge facing the party, and the aim of this chapter, is to account for this decline. Two broad explanations have dominated discussions. The first, drawing on the retrospective view of voting, is that a series of largely short-term factors—Iraq, reactions to Bush, Katrina, and an abrupt economic decline in mid-2008—hurt the party. Americans concluded that a Republican president and a Republican majority in Congress from 2001 to 2006 were to blame for the problems facing the nation (Harwood 2008; Steve Rosen 2008). Voters then turned to the Democratic Party and Barack Obama as an alternative. Many of those focusing on the impact of these short-term factors argue that they will fade in impact over time and that the Republican Party may not really be in deep trouble.

A second explanation holds that the long-term strategy the party pursued to expand its electoral base has had the unintended consequence of driving away voters the party probably presumed it would retain. In this view, the problem the party faces is long-term, because it has created an identity that is alienating voters. The issue to be explored here is whether pursuing social conservatives is costing the party support. We focus on the strategy the party has pursued in recent decades, the expected effects, and what the evidence indicates about who the party gained and lost. There is no doubt that the short-term factors resulted in many voters wishing for change in 2006 and 2008, contributing to recent Republican defeats. While we acknowledge the power of short-term factors, our concern is whether there is evidence that a deeper problem exists for the party.

Attracting New Voters with Wedge Issues

If a candidate cannot win an election solely with his or her partisan base, there is a powerful incentive to try to attract voters away from the other party. The challenge is to emphasize issues that create conflict for voters identifying with the other party. These are issues on which voters from the opposing party disagree with their party and that they regard as important. Called wedge issues, or cross-pressuring issues, they refer to policy concerns that may divide the voter bloc of the opposing party (Hillygus and Shields 2008, 36).

A party in the minority, such as the Republicans in the 1950s and 1960s, has a particular motivation to pursue a strategy of using wedge issues so that it may build a coalition large enough to regain control. Democrats won the
presidency five consecutive times from 1932 to 1948. While Dwight Eisenhower won in 1952 and 1956, there was concern that he won only because he was a war hero and Democrats ran a weak candidate in Adlai Stevenson. For most of the years since 1932, the party had been in the minority in Congress. Furthermore, the Republican base had been the Northeast, but support within that region had slipped beginning in 1932 and did not appear likely to return to prior levels (Reiter and Stonecash 2010). There was also considerable frustration within the party that it was not serving as a conservative alternative to Democrats. The plan among Republicans was to appeal to conservative Democrats who were unhappy, or cross-pressured. Specifically, the Republican Party recognized that conservative white Democrats in the South disagreed with their party’s position on the issue of race, and so the Republican Party actively courted these voters.

Republican presidential candidates, in particular, have tried various issues over time to attract more voters. In the 1960s they focused on issues of race and resentment about federal intrusion into state and local affairs. In his 1964 presidential campaign, Barry Goldwater opposed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and supported states’ rights, producing significant gains in the South. In his 1968 presidential campaign, Richard Nixon actively courted southern Democrats by campaigning on the theme of restoring “law and order.” By emphasizing a more conservative position on race, Nixon and the Republicans attracted whites long loyal to the Democratic Party (Eldersveld and Walton 2000). In the 1980s Ronald Reagan focused on issues of social disorder and welfare abuse, attracting more conservatives (Edsall and Edsall 1991).

Despite the efforts of Goldwater, Nixon, and Reagan, the Republican Party was still largely in the minority in the 1980s and needed to attract a new constituency in order to gain control of the government. The rise in concern about cultural issues presented another opportunity for the party. The emergence of cultural issues in American politics has its roots in the reactions of social-conservative activists to societal changes and public policy decisions that began in the 1960s. In a 1962 decision the Supreme Court banned prayer in public schools. Later came the sexual revolution and the emergence of a reenergized women’s movement. Crime was increasing, as was the number of people on the welfare rolls. To conservatives these developments signaled society’s heading in a direction that stood in opposition with their worldview. According to these individuals, the recent turn of events threatened—and in some cases disregarded—traditional values and morals, leading to a decaying American culture (Hunter 1983; Oldfield 1996; Reichley 1985).

When the Court legalized abortion nationwide with the *Roe v. Wade* decision in 1973, many social conservatives, a great number of whom were evangelical
Christians, decided the time had come to act politically (Kohut et al. 2000; Oldfield 1996; Reichley 2002; Wald 2003). While evangelicals had played prominent roles in many major political issues and events throughout the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries (Marsden 1980; Smith 1998; Wald 2003), they retreated to the sidelines with the advent of scientific discoveries and advances, the division of American Protestantism into mainline and evangelical camps, and the public ridicule brought about by the Scopes trial in 1925. Fearing a society based on immoral social behavior, these activists reentered the political fray with intensity, constructing impressive communication networks and organizational structures in which membership steadily grew (Fowler et al. 2004; Hunter 1983; Oldfield 1996; Smith 1998). These activists became more troubled with the continuation of the sexual revolution, new efforts to ensure gay rights, greater protection of obscenity and pornography by the courts, and more explicit sex education in schools. Concern about cultural decline became increasingly important, bringing questions of values to the forefront of the political agenda (Wuthnow 1988, 1989).

The success of conservative activists in getting abortion and other social issues on the political agenda brought to an end the public’s quiet consensus regarding social behavior. Once social issues became salient among the electorate, social-conservative voters—like the activists—became concerned about the direction in which society was heading. Cultural issues that first appeared in national discourse in the early 1960s dominated American politics by the early 1990s (Hunter 1992, 1994). Subsequent studies have provided empirical support for the existence of an increasing division in the electorate based on social issues (e.g., Evans 2003; Layman 1999, 2001; Leege et al. 2002; McConkey 2001).

Republicans have responded by framing the choice as being between Democratic liberal elites, dismissive of traditional values, and Republicans, populist supporters of enduring moral values (Frank 2004; Kazin 1995). Even more important, by increasingly emphasizing and taking a decidedly conservative stance on social issues such as gay rights and abortion, the Republican Party has used social concerns as a wedge issue in an attempt to attract cross-pressured voters, or “persuadable voters,” and thereby add to its existing base (Hillygus and Shields 2008). The strategy of pursuing social conservatives began in 1980 with the involvement of the Moral Majority in Ronald Reagan’s campaign for president. In the 1990s the congressional parties sponsored more legislation to restore traditional values, from opposing the Equal Rights Amendment and abortion to advocating welfare reform in the sense of limiting access to it, seeking to establish the right to prayer in schools, and limiting gay rights (Brewer and Stonecash 2006). Once George W. Bush became president in 2000 and the party controlled both houses, the
party was able to go farther, banning partial-birth abortions. In the 2004 election Karl Rove pursued social conservatives by emphasizing Bush’s positions on gay marriage, abortion, and stem cell research. In 2005 the party sought to draw attention to its efforts to prevent the courts from allowing the removal of a feeding tube from Terri Schiavo. The Bush administration also banned the use of U.S. aid within any country for the purposes of abortion. In 2008 John McCain’s choice of Sarah Palin, a “hockey mom” who judged abortion to be an “atrocity,” as a running mate brought more emphasis within the campaign on social conservatism.

The efforts were successful in drawing more of those supporting traditional values to the party, in large part because appeals based on social issues tapped individuals’ conceptions of how the world ought to be (Hetherington and Weiler 2009). Those who attend church regularly moved steadily to vote Republican (Olson 2010), as did those opposed to abortion. Conservatives in general steadily moved toward the party and formed a larger percentage of those identifying with it (Brewer and Stonecash 2006). By the 1990s the Republicans were pulling even with the Democrats in terms of those self-identifying with their party. They took both houses of Congress and in 2000 won the presidency. As noted earlier, it appeared the strategy had worked and had brought the party an expanded electoral base.

The logic of appealing to social conservatives, as Thomas Frank summarized it in What’s the Matter with Kansas (2004), was that Republicans would raise issues like abortion and gay rights and agitate less tolerant working-class whites. They knew that the white-working class tends to be relatively more supportive of traditionalist values (Hunter 1992, 63; Carmines and Layman 1997, 297; Hetherington and Weiler 2009). Promoting the “culture wars” would then pull lower-income voters away from the Democratic Party and toward the Republican Party and would reduce the role of economic issues in voting (Ladd and Hadley 1978, 233, 243; Inglehart 1990, 275; Dionne 1995; Carmines and Layman 1997, 284, 296). With less focus on class issues, the party had more leeway to enact tax cuts for the more affluent in an attempt to retain that base (Frank 2004). The party could attract new voters and expand its base, allowing it to stress issues of limited government and to provide direct benefits for a constituency that returned the favor in the form of campaign donations (Bartels 2008).

The Possible Risks

While the usual concern with wedge issues centers on who is attracted, the strategy is also likely to come with a cost. As V. O. Key noted, “The contrivance
of a group strategy involves the hazard that gains by an appeal to one group may be offset by losses from another group antagonistic to the first” (1964, 464). In making these appeals it is easy for both parties to underestimate losses. In the late 1940s, when President Harry Truman became more supportive of civil rights legislation (Gardner 2003), his advisors incorrectly thought the South would stay Democratic (Sitkoff 1971, 597). Considerable attention has been given to Democratic losses among whites as the party expressed sympathy about racial inequities (Edsall and Edsall 1991). Likewise, as conservatives within the Republican Party in the early 1960s began to argue in earnest for a southern strategy to attract disaffected southern Democrats angry about civil rights, William Rusher was certain that the Northeast would not go Democratic (Rusher 1963, 112). That assessment proved equally inaccurate. As the Republican Party pursued the South, it steadily alienated its historical northeastern base, eventually losing the region to the Democrats (Reiter and Stonecash 2010).

Over the last several decades, analysis of the negative effects of the Republican pursuit of social conservatives has been limited—perhaps due to an assumption that the party would successfully retain its existing base, the more affluent, by continuing to emphasize promises of tax cuts. The empirical issue is whether the party may have miscalculated regarding its ability to retain its historical core of those with higher incomes or more education. There are theoretical reasons to expect losses. Partisans are more likely to disagree with their party’s position on social issues than on economic ones (Hillygus and Shields 2008), which creates the potential for strong social-conservative stands to drive away some voters (Cook 2008). As Geoffrey Layman suggests, “Conservative cultural stances may lessen the GOP’s appeal to its traditional supporters, as better-educated, more affluent individuals tend to be less traditionally religious and more culturally liberal than lower-status citizens” (2001, 14). Layman further posits that the Republicans may lose even more votes due to the “steady increase in the number of nonreligious individuals and . . . the growing moral permissiveness of the larger culture” (2001, 14). John F. Bibby and Brian F. Schaffner also suggest this thesis, noting that “those with advanced degrees—especially well-educated women—seem to reject the Republican emphasis in recent campaigns on traditional values” (2008, 237–39).

To be more precise, there are at least three specific, plausible explanations for why the Republican Party may have alienated the more educated and more affluent with its emphasis on social conservatism. First, the more educated never were all that conservative on social issues and have become more tolerant over time on some. They are also less authoritarian and more accepting of ambiguity in moral codes (Hetherington and Weiler 2009). Many college-
educated voters may have found the Republican Party threatening to their more tolerant values and turned to the Democratic Party (Frum 2008b).

Second, social-conservative rhetoric laced with populism—including the ubiquitous references to Joe the Plumber during the 2008 election campaign—likely alienated the more affluent, who generally have more education. Because voters with more education tend to value science over religion, to hold a view of an interconnected global world, and to favor pragmatism over ideology (Penn 2008), populist, emotional appeals may resonate less with them than do pragmatically grounded platforms. Prominent Republican strategists and politicians have warned of the downfalls of the party's use of populism, noting the likely costs to Republicans of being seen as an "angry white men's party" (Cooper 2008).

Third, there are reasons to question whether the party's strategy of large tax cuts for the affluent and deregulation has attracted the lower-income whites who hold positions on social issues opposed to the more liberal positions of the Democratic Party. Although it is widely thought that less affluent whites have moved away from the Democratic Party (Frank 2004), the evidence does not bear out this assumption (Stonecash 2000; Ortiz and Stonecash 2008). Critics of the party argue that many voters are concerned primarily with economic issues—not social issues—and that the Republican Party failed to attract these voters by neglecting to develop policies that ameliorated economic conditions (Brooks 2008; Frum 2008a). Our concern here is whom the party has lost as it has pursued social conservatives. If it has lost voters, do the losses have relevance for the most recent decline facing the party?

**Expectations and Evidence**

If Republicans' strategy to attract new voters and expand their base has been effective, then we should see some very specific effects. Efforts to woo social conservatives should pull them to the party. If social conservatism is greater among those with less education and income, there should be a concomitant reduction in Democratic voting among this demographic. At the other end of the spectrum, if the party emphasis on less government and lower taxes has been helpful in retaining support among those with higher education and income, then there should be no change in their partisan vote. In short, the party strategy should have pulled in some less affluent voters and lost none of the more affluent.

The first matter to assess is whether the broad trends that the strategy should have created actually occurred. Figure 15.1 provides data from the American National Elections Studies (ANES) on the matter of how different
FIGURE 15.1

income groups have behaved. It tracks the percentage voting for Democratic presidential candidates from 1952 to 2008. The last several elections have produced considerable fluctuations, but three matters are clear. First, among the bottom third, voting for the Democratic Party has not declined. Indeed, excluding the 1964 election, lower-income voting for Democrats is higher now than for the years 1952 to 1960. Even among the middle-income group, support for Democratic candidates has not declined.

Second, among the more affluent (top one-third), support for the Democratic Party is now higher than in the 1980s, when the cultural wars began. Third, the difference in the percentage voting Democratic between lower and higher income groups (subtracting the percentage for higher from that for lower) has not declined over time, but it has increased. The evidence does not fit the expected pattern that Republicans have retained the more affluent, attracted the working class or less affluent, and diminished class voting.

Figure 15.2 indicates voting for Republican presidential candidates by education levels. The patterns are important because of presumptions about the effects of the cultural wars of those with different education levels. From 1952 through 1976 (with the exception of 1972) Republicans received voting support among those with a college degree or more that was on average fourteen points higher than for those with a high school degree or less. Since
then differences in support levels by education have diminished. What is most important is that, over time, support for Republican presidential candidates has dropped among all groups, but the most sustained decline has been among those with a college degree or more. In the last two elections the party has struggled to achieve 50 percent within that group. The thesis of some regarding the cultural wars is that Republicans have used social issues to attract those with less education, while presumably retaining those with more education. The reality is that support among those with less education is no higher for the last five elections compared to prior years and support among those with a college degree or more is now less.

In summary, there are some unexpected trends for Republican presidential candidates. They have not increased their percentage of the vote among the less affluent, and support among the more affluent is now less than it was twenty years ago. Party support among those with more education is also now less than it was twenty years ago, and there is no clear increase in support among those with less education. The issue is whether the culture wars have played a role in these changes. To assess this we first examine the relationship between education and income and opinions about social-conservative issues. We then examine how those opinions have affected the movements of income and education groups over time. Finally, we examine how the distribution of opinion about cultural issues has changed over time and how this has affected the situation of Republicans.
Income, Education, and Social-Conservative Views on Abortion and Gays

The Republican strategy has presumed that those with less income and education are more troubled by abortion and homosexuality. To the extent that this thinking prevails, Republicans can affirm their commitment to traditional values, create a contrast with the more liberal Democratic Party, and pull these cultural conservatives to the Republican Party. Figure 15.3 indicates the percentages of lower- and higher-income individuals who are pro-choice. It also indicates the percentage that is pro-choice for those with a high school education or less and those with a college degree or more. Those with less income and education are consistently less likely to be pro-choice. The basis exists for appeals to these voters to move them more toward the Republican Party.

These results also suggest that those with more education and income are more supportive of the pro-choice position. Republican emphasis on a pro-life position may have the effect of alienating voters who are pro-choice. There is a basis for attracting some voters with a policy position but also for losing others.

Figure 15.4 presents similar information regarding positive reactions to gays. ANES surveys since 1984 have asked respondents to rank their feelings about gays on a scale from zero (cool) to one hundred (warm) with fifty being neutral. All those who place themselves at fifty-one or more are regarded as holding positive feelings toward gays. In the 1980s and through most of
the 1990s, there was no difference between groups with high and low levels of education and income. In the late 1990s and the 2000s, a difference has emerged, with higher-education and -income groups becoming more positive. By 2008, even with the decline recorded in the ANES results (contrary to other surveys),\(^6\) higher-education and -income groups were much more positive toward gays than they were twenty years earlier. By the 2000s there was a potential basis for appealing to those with less income and education by stressing opposition to gay rights. Just as with the abortion issue, however, there is a basis for alienating those with more education and income.

### The Evidence Concerning the Impact of Cultural Issues

For these differences to become the basis of partisan divisions, the parties must also differ, and voters must respond to these differences. Over the past two decades, party positions on abortion and acceptance of gays have diverged, and these issues have become more important in affecting voting decisions (Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox 1993; Adams 1997, 723–24; Brewer and Stonecash 2006). Specifically, two questions about voter behavior are important. First, how have opinions about these issues affected those with less income and education? That is, have Republicans succeeded in pulling these voters away from the Democratic Party? Second, how has the emergence of these issues affected those with more income—and education—who are more liberal on these matters?
We first address how those with less income have behaved. Figures 15.5 and 15.6 present those results. The first figure indicates how those in the bottom third of the income distribution, grouped by pro-life and pro-choice opinions, have voted for Democratic presidential candidates. From 1972 through 1988, there was no consistent voting difference between pro-life and pro-choice individuals. Beginning with the 1992 election, their voting patterns began to diverge, with the pro-choice group becoming more Democratic by about ten percentage points. The pro-life group dropped from about 59 to 50 percent Democratic. The overall effect—with 50 percent of the less affluent pro-choice supporters and less than 50 percent of pro-lifers—has been a net increase in the percentage of the bottom third voting Democratic, regardless of whether the starting comparison point is 1972 or 1980. While abortion opinions affect Democratic voting and those who are pro-life are less Democratic, the net effect has not been to move the less affluent away from the Democratic Party.

Essentially the same pattern holds for reactions to gays among the less affluent. Beginning in 1992 a consistent difference appeared in Democratic voting between those with positive and negative feelings about gays. With more in the positive than negative category over time, the net effect has not been a movement of the less affluent away from the Democratic Party. Republicans may have been able to hold down (not reduce) increases in Democratic voting among the less affluent, but they have also pushed more of those with liberal opinions toward the Democrats. The net effect has not been to attract the less affluent.

The more interesting group is the more affluent. In regard to abortion, pro-choice supporters have moved strongly toward the Democratic Party over time, while pro-lifers have moved strongly away from it. The more affluent have been consistently more pro-choice than pro-life over time (figure 15.3), shifting the weight of the net effect to how pro-choice voters have behaved. In regard to gays, those with positive and negative feelings have differed in their Democratic support since 1984, and the difference has grown over time. Over that same period the more affluent have become much more positive in their reaction. The net effect has been that those with more positive attitudes comprise a bigger percentage of the more affluent and that the more affluent, compared to 1980 and 1984, now tend to vote Democratic more in presidential elections (figure 15.1).

The problems for the Republican Party go beyond just attracting social conservatives and alienating other groups. The larger concern is that the percentage of the electorate that holds the opinions the party has been emphasizing is declining. The ANES studies have asked about both abortion and gays since 1984, which allows us to track the joint distribution of opinions on the two issues. Figure 15.7 indicates three important groups. First, there
FIGURE 15.5

FIGURE 15.6
are those who are pro-life and cool toward gays (zero to forty-nine on a one-hundred point scale). In 1984, 29.4 percent of voters fell into that joint category. By 2008, that number had dropped to 17.5 percent. Then there are those who are pro-choice and either neutral (at fifty) or warm (fifty-one to one hundred) regarding homosexuals. From 1984 to 2008 the percentage that is both pro-choice and neutral increased from 16.6 to 22.6. Those who are both pro-choice and warm increased from 9.9 to 23.4 percent. Those who are pro-choice and either neutral or warm toward gays have increased from 26.5 to 46.0 percent of all respondents since 1984. For the last decade the Republican Party has been presenting itself as pro-life and largely unreceptive to gays, while the percentage holding such views has been declining. Given the trends in public opinion, the party is fighting a losing battle.

To return to our initial question about what explains the decline of the Republican Party in the 2006 and 2008 elections, the evidence indicates that the party’s positions on social issues have harmed its performance at the polls. There is no doubt that Iraq, George W. Bush, and the economy played a role in these elections, but it also appears that the party’s stance on cultural questions played an important one as well. Contrary to what many suggest, the party has not succeeded in pulling less affluent voters away from the Democratic Party. Perhaps more important, the unstated assumption that Republicans would retain higher-income voters, presumably through tax cuts, has not been borne out. The probably unintended consequence of their
strategy has been to alienate many higher-income voters who are primarily pro-choice and more tolerant in their views about gays than the conservative wing of the party has acknowledged. Like the Democrats from 1948 through the 1960s and their own party in the 1960s and 1970s, Republicans have not demonstrated a great ability to judge the political effects of pursuing some voters and shifting their emphasis.

Voting Behavior and the Future of Social Conservatism

What explains the gradual shift in voters’ allegiances? We surmise that the American electorate reacted slowly to parties’ changing or new emphases on cultural stances because party positions evolved, and the salience of these issues varied. Voters gradually responded to parties’ changing platforms and images by evaluating their compatibility with their own views and realigning themselves accordingly (Stonecash 2005). Over time, parties and the media increasingly devoted attention to cultural issues (Hetherington and Weiler 2009). Also, during certain periods, the salience of cultural issues diminished due to the appearance of other pressing issues on the national agenda.

The role of social conservatism in the party’s platform presents a dilemma to the Republican Party. While many argue the party needs to dispense with—or at least deemphasize—its adherence to traditional values (e.g., Cooper 2008; Boaz 2009; Frum 2009), others remain committed to these norms of behavior (Rove 2008; Thomas 2009). According to Karl Rove, “Culture matters. Suggestions that we abandon social conservatism, including our pro-life agenda, should be ignored. These values are often more popular than the GOP itself” (2008). Cal Thomas contends that Sarah Palin “has energized a sizeable portion of the GOP base” (2009) and that pursuing a conservative agenda should be the focus of the party. Others, including David Frum, disagree: “Republicans need to modulate our social and cultural message” (2009). Gov. Charlie Crist of Florida has argued that the party must emphasize economic, rather than social, issues and calls for the party to invoke a broader appeal: “If you’re going to be successful in this business, you have to win a majority. It’s not just a majority of Republicans . . . it’s a majority of the people” (Cooper 2008). If Republicans were to deemphasize cultural issues, it is possible that some voters in the social-conservative base would feel abandoned by the party and either abstain or vote for an alternative candidate. Yet, if the Republican Party does not moderate or deemphasize its positions on social issues and continues to employ populist appeals, it will continue to have difficulty attracting the more affluent and will remain a minority party.
Winning back the more affluent constituency will take time. The Republican Party will need to deemphasize social issues for a while in order to regain moderates and once again become a majority party. Just as it took the electorate time to recognize the party brand of social conservatism, it will also take time for voters to assess the party in light of a new image, one in which Republicans place less emphasis on social conservatism and populist rhetoric.

Notes

3. Numbers reflect the percentage of respondents who indicate they voted for the Democratic presidential candidate (vcf0705). They are actual percentages, not the percentage of the two-party vote. The data are from the ANES files for 1948 to 2004 (ANES, American National Election Studies Cumulative Data File, 1948–2004, 12th ICPSR version). We derived the income categories by grouping the reported family income for each year (vcf0114). We coded those in the zero to thirty-third percentile as the bottom third and those in the sixty-sixth to one hundredth percentile as the top third. The data for subsequent figures also come from ANES data.
4. Specifically, those who choose option one or two for vcf0837 and vcf0838 in the ANES cumulative file are treated as pro-life. Those choosing options three or four are classified as pro-choice.
5. Other evidence indicates that as income rises, so does support for abortion rights (Legge 1987, 486). Voters of higher socioeconomic status are more likely to favor legalized abortion than those of lower socioeconomic status (Abramowitz 1995, 176). As education levels increase, so does tolerance for abortion rights (Legge 1987, 480; Wang and Buffalo 2004, 102). Education exposes individuals to alternative worldviews and encourages critical thought (Petersen 2001, 189). In this sense, education has a “liberalizing effect” on abortion views (Himmelstein and McRae 1988, 500). Higher-income voters are thus more likely to embrace a less absolute, modernist view of social issues.
The Campaign Context for Partisanship Stability

J. Quin Monson, Kelly D. Patterson, and Jeremy C. Pope

Much previous research shows that partisanship is among the most stable concepts in political behavior. Despite this consensus, there is evidence of partisan change, so we ask an intermediate question: under what campaign conditions is partisanship more or less stable? We use 2008 Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project (CCAP) data to examine the stability of partisan identification within the context of the 2008 presidential election campaigns. The results of our model suggest that stability is clearly related to an individual’s location within the campaign environment. Respondents living in presidential battleground states and receiving the most intense campaign messages are very likely to remain stable, as are voters at the opposite end of the spectrum. Voters between these extremes appear to be slightly more susceptible to change, even within the context of a single election. We theorize that the stability of partisanship among certain segments of voters is the result of a competitive context that is able to activate a citizen’s underlying dispositions to support a party.

Partisanship is one of the most widely used concepts in political science, making appearances in all of the subliteratures that relate to elections. However, significant questions remain about the nature of partisanship and the best ways to measure it. Some researchers argue that partisanship has a dynamic dimension that means voters shift their allegiance in response to different political factors. Others argue that partisanship is stable and that most variation in individual preferences results from measurement error. These two positions on the nature of partisanship bracket a more basic question: under what conditions is partisanship more or less stable?
Citizen inattention to politics seems to suggest that the most frequent opportunity for citizens to assess their partisanship occurs during political campaigns. This is not to say that other political events (e.g., a debate over a war, a major piece of legislation, or a presidential appointment) will not lead individuals to reflect on their partisanship, but elections routinely present voters with the opportunity to question their partisan allegiances, making the key question for this research, how does the campaign context affect partisan stability?

The Nature of Partisanship

Though it is not our intention to resolve long-standing debates about the nature of partisanship in this short chapter, a review of that literature is an important prelude to our discussion of the campaign context for partisanship stability.

The publication of *Voting* (1954) by Bernard R. Berelson, Paul F. Lazarsfeld, and William N. McPhee and of *The American Voter* (1960) by Angus Campbell et al. established partisanship as a psychological attachment to the political parties. This attachment contained both cognitive and affective dimensions. Individuals identified with a party because of its issue positions and also because of feelings they may have about the parties. The authors of *The American Voter* and subsequent researchers adopted the view that an individual's party identification reflected long-term forces of socialization. They also argued that partisanship was slow to change. If change occurred at all, it was produced by significant changes in the life cycle (e.g., relocating to a new area) or major political events (e.g., war, economic crisis). The authors of *The American Voter* conclude, "A general observation about the political behavior of Americans is that their partisan preferences show great stability between elections" (Campbell et al. 1960, 120). Scholars argued for the existence of microulevel stability even while demonstrating that macropartisanship changed in response to assessments of the president and the confidence expressed by consumers (Erikson, Mackuen, and Stimson 1989, 1998).

Other researchers focused on the possibility that partisanship may be more dynamic than *The American Voter* and some of the subsequent models specified. Various research traditions developed almost simultaneously with *The American Voter* model that allowed for short-term factors to influence the partisanship of an individual. For example, the early rational-choice model posited that party identification results from the issue preferences of individuals or is the summation of their different issue preferences (Downs 1957). This theory allows for partisanship to change because individuals,
when confronted with new information about issues, could revise their commitment to a party. Other short-term factors were identified that may also cause an individual to change party preferences, or at least the strength of those preferences. These short-term factors included assessment of the political parties and their performance on issues (Page and Jones 1979; Fiorina 1981; Franklin and Jackson 1983; Franklin 1992) and candidate personalities (Brody and Rothenberg 1988). Electoral systems can also affect the commitment of individuals to their party (Finkel and Scarrow 1985; Bowler, Lanoue, and Savoie 1994). All of this research assumes that partisanship can change in response to alterations in individual preferences or in the institutional environment.

A more recent entry into the theoretical debate comes from social identity theory. This theory holds that the groups to which individuals belong—or at least to which they believe they belong—comprise an important element of their social selves (Hogg, Terry, and White 1995; Stets and Burke 2000). It also helps to explain how individuals develop and keep partisan attitudes and behaviors (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002). However, it does not necessarily solve the debate over the dynamics of partisanship because the theory, with certain extensions, allows for individuals to reassess their party identification depending on the kinds of cues and stimuli they receive from the political environment (Greene 2004).

The debate over the dynamics of partisanship also depends heavily on the data and methods selected by researchers to try to detect change. Researchers have mostly used panel data to model the effects of change, but they have also used other types of survey data, including rolling aggregate data (Allsop and Weisberg 1988), experimental data (Niemi, Reed, and Weisberg 1991), and cross-sectional data (Page and Jones 1979). The debate over stability has also been complicated by such factors as the time between the waves of the panels and how exactly to conceptualize change across the separate waves. Finally, researchers have argued that measurement error must also be included in any effort to model partisan change. Indeed, they find that when measurement error is accounted for in the model, the effects of other variables on partisan change become insignificant (Green and Palmquist 1990; and Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002).

Typically this literature has focused on achieving better measures of partisanship, without paying substantial attention to modeling consistency in partisan affiliations. Debates have centered on the meaning of real change or whether instability is an artifact of measurement error. But if voters are ambivalent about their partisan affiliation because of their personal positions on issues or their knowledge of politics (think of a pro-life Democrat or someone considering politics for the first time), their attachments may not
be very stable. Uncertainty, ambivalence, and outright ignorance may create instability in partisanship. We turn now to a description of that instability and a discussion of the context for it: the scheduled campaign season.

**Battlegrounds, Campaign Context, and Stability in Partisanship**

Scholars of campaigns and elections have long been interested in the extent and source of campaign effects. The accumulation of research in this area indicates that across a wide spectrum of behavioral phenomena, campaigns matter. Much of the research focuses on the persuasive effects of campaigns, such as whether they play an important role in vote choice (e.g., Hillygus and Jackman 2003). Other research examines the effect of campaigns on levels of political knowledge and interest (e.g., Gronke 2000).

More recently, scholars of campaign effects have sought to assess their impact by studying voters who reside in battleground and nonbattleground states during presidential elections. Battleground states are those in which presidential candidates expend their time and resources in an effort to secure the electoral votes cast by its delegates. Already, a rich literature exists emphasizing the differences in campaign strategies and resources across states that candidates believe are competitive (e.g., Shaw 1999c, 2006). These strategic choices result in the creation of different campaign contexts for citizens. States designated as battlegrounds receive more attention from the candidates and the political parties (Shaw 2006; Wolak 2006; McClurg and Holbrook 2009). The information-rich environments and the efforts made to contact and mobilize voters help to stimulate turnout among previously inactive voters (Gimpel, Kaufman, and Pearson-Merkowitz 2007), structure the vote choice for individuals (McClurg and Holbrook 2009), and reduce uncertainty for voters (Jackman and Vavreck 2009a).

The idea of a battleground raises interesting questions for the issue of partisanship. If we begin with an expectation that most voters possess and can express a "true" underlying partisanship, we would expect some voters in some campaign contexts to be better at giving consistent answers than other voters. In other words, some voters apparently do not know how to map their beliefs and ideas onto the categories presented by the question about partisanship. This inability may be a consequence of their uncertainty about the parties or their ambivalence about how to label themselves. If, as suggested by John Zaller (1992), voters answer survey research questions with whatever considerations come to mind at the moment the question is posed, they may be plagued by ambivalence due to conflicts between their political beliefs and their partisanship, or they may be burdened by uncertainty about the positions of the parties'
and how their own beliefs should map onto those positions. However, voters in an environment teeming with information about the campaigns, the parties, and the issue positions should have an easier time acquiring information and using it to help them more firmly grasp their partisanship.

It seems important to divide this campaign environment into two categories: residence and campaign volume. In this formulation, residence in the battleground states should more efficiently activate voters' latent preferences (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944; Finkel 1993; Gelman and King 1993), thereby reducing voter uncertainty and ambivalence and therefore reducing partisanship instability. The analysis below confirms much of our intuition. Being in an intense campaign simply forces voters to consider their viewpoints and reject alternative arguments.

Residence Hypothesis

Living in a presidential battleground state should increase partisanship stability as the welter of messages, images, and arguments produces more considerations that lead to higher levels of certainty among voters.

But not all aspects of the campaign are created equal, and simple residence in an environment is far from the concept of saturation. Television advertisements are not the equivalent of free media or mass mailings or telephone calls or face-to-face contact. Indeed, the campaign literature hints that these different media for the campaign message should have different effects and be targeted at different levels to different individuals and groups. Immersion in this campaign volume should also have a strong positive effect on stability.

Campaign-Volume Hypothesis

Immersion in the campaign messages should increase partisan stability as increased knowledge of the messages produces higher levels of consideration to help a voter maintain partisan stability.

Taken together, the two hypotheses suggest that the combination of a strong campaign context, such as residence in a battleground state, along with campaign contact will have the strongest effect. Citizens in the midst of an intense campaign but who receive relatively little from the campaigns should be less stable. In contrast, voters who live in the battleground states and receive a high volume of campaign messages clearly have an object to which they can pay close attention. They will discuss the campaign more, read more about it, hear more over the air, and also receive more campaign messages from television, in the mail, and via other means. These messages are likely to have the
strongest partisan content and therefore are likely to have the strongest effects on partisan stability. Thus, we include an interaction hypothesis.

**Interaction Hypothesis**

Partisan stability should be strongest among those living in the battleground states and receiving the highest campaign volume.

**Our Aims and Our Data Set**

The 2008 election offered an opportunity to examine our hypotheses about partisan stability in the context of a presidential election. We explore these ideas using data from the 2008 CCAP, a large-scale panel survey conducted by YouGov/Polimetrix throughout the 2008 campaign.

The CCAP is a representative national sample similar to the slightly better known Cooperative Congressional Election Survey. The CCAP sample was constructed using an innovative model-assisted sampling technique. The process begins with a target sampling frame from the 2005–2007 American Community Survey (ACS) using a variety of demographic variables. With the target from the ACS defined, respondents were then chosen from the YouGov/Polimetrix panel with an oversample in presidential battleground states and contacted for the survey. For each wave of the panel, all previous respondents were invited to participate, and a fresh sample was added. The final pool of completed interviews totals approximately forty-eight thousand. The completed interviews from the YouGov/Polimetrix sample are then matched to the ACS sampling frame using weighted Euclidean distances. Each individual in the ACS has several possible matches among the completed interviews. Nearest-neighbor matching is used to find the closest match for each person in the ACS target sample among the completed interviews, reducing the pool from forty-eight thousand to about twenty thousand. This final match is called the matched sample. With over eleven thousand respondents who answered the question of party identification on every wave, we gain tremendous leverage on the question of partisan stability over the course of the 2008 campaign.

The CCAP panel data are ideal for our purposes for three reasons. First, a standard partisan identification question was asked of respondents in all six waves of the panel survey, enabling us to examine the stability of party identification multiple times within a single campaign. Second, the sampling design of the survey was intended to concentrate on the dynamics of the presidential campaign and thus included an oversample of respondents in states thought
to be competitive at the presidential level throughout the campaign season. Because the presidential campaign is fought in fewer than half of the states, the sample design allows us to test hypotheses about campaign effects with increased precision for the possible impact of the effects. Third, because much of the focus was on the presidential campaign, the questionnaire included an extraordinary number of questions about respondents’ contact with each of the campaigns.

Party identification is measured using the question, “Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a . . . Democrat, Republican, Independent,” with standard follow-up questions to create a seven-point scale. The seven-point scale is used as the dependent variable in our analysis. For battleground states, we used a list of eighteen states released by Barack Obama’s campaign in June 2008 as its targets. The list includes a set of large states, such as Ohio, Florida, and Missouri, as well as small states, such as Nevada, Colorado, New Hampshire, and New Mexico, commonly believed by many sources to be presidential battlegrounds in 2008. This list has the added benefit of directly measuring where the campaigns intended to focus much of their activity. We expect that a list of states for John McCain’s campaign would be very similar to the Obama list. Finally, the CCAP questionnaire in each pre-election wave included a set of campaign-contact questions intended to measure the extent to which respondents experienced the campaign, including via television and radio advertisements, campaign mail, political discussions, and more. The activity is self-reported, but the question stem asks the respondent to recall only what happened “yesterday,” alleviating some of the potential problems with reliance on self-reported campaign-contact data. The full question wording and variable coding details for the variables used in this chapter are included in the appendix.

Evidence from the 2008 Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project

Testing partisanship stability is difficult because of the absence of a clear standard and because of the risk of measurement error. Since all partisanship data is self-reported, it cannot be checked against any hard facts. Any individual response can only be checked against a previous response to the question. Any deviation in the response indicates a possible shift (or at least some ambivalence) in a respondent’s partisanship. But the risk of miskeyed data casts some doubt on that inference (e.g., Green and Palmquist 1990). Perhaps a respondent feels some degree of ambivalence about a response and so occasionally offers a different one from the average (i.e., a woman may almost always say “strong Democrat” but occasionally say “weak Democrat”).
If almost all responses fit clearly into one category, it seems most reasonable to place this person in that category, even if there are occasional aberrations. The number and degree of aberrations might tell us something about the level of instability for a given individual.

Because it is easy to overstate the amount of instability, we should treat simple tabulations of the percentages of citizens who display perfect stability with some degree of caution. For instance, if one simply tabulates the percentage of respondents who consistently gave the same answer to the partisanship question in the CCAP across all waves, typically more than two-thirds of respondents were consistent across partisan categories, and more than half were consistent across specific strength levels (i.e., “weak Democrats” or “independents leaning-Republican,” and so forth). One might argue this pattern is evidence of significant instability, but that ignores the fact that in most cases respondent instability is only seen in one of the six waves. There is slightly more evidence in the data that people are a bit more stable in battleground states, but the differences are small and somewhat untrustworthy given measurement-error issues.

So, how much of the inconsistency is due to measurement error or to minor deviations from a person’s standing answer to the partisanship question? To better answer this question, we fit a simple model of partisanship as a function of lagged partisanship, whether or not a respondent lived in the battleground, and how much campaign contact the respondent reported. Because the interest is in discerning the effect of the campaign and the battleground, all of the terms were interacted (in order to test the interaction hypothesis). The idea is to investigate whether the stability of partisanship is affected by exposure to the campaign, in and out of the battleground. The full details of the model are included in the appendix.

Because the results of a model with triple interactions are very difficult to parse simply by looking at coefficients, we focus on the predicted values for the various conditions of interest, depending on a respondent’s partisanship, residence in the battleground, and reported exposure to the political campaign, presented in table 16.1. Each block of predictions can be compared with the value of perfect stability: one for strong Democrats, two for weak Democrats, and so forth.

The overwhelming prediction is that voters tend to be very stable in their partisanship. No group strays far from its typical response, consistent with models like this one designed to measure the true latent partisanship. Despite this overall stability, there are small but interesting differences we think are attributable to the campaign effects. In general, it appears that respondents are affected by a sort of centripetal force back toward the center of the partisanship distribution. Most respondents (except the independents and indepen-
### TABLE 16.1
Predicted Partisanship and Difference from Hypothesized Value

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partisanship/(not) in a Battleground with/Campaign Status</th>
<th>Partisan Estimate</th>
<th>Difference from Hypothesized Stability Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong Democrat in a battleground with high campaign contact</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Democrat in a battleground with little campaign contact</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>-0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Democrat not in a battleground with high campaign contact</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Democrat not in a battleground with low campaign contact</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak Democrat in a battleground with high campaign contact</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak Democrat in a battleground with little campaign contact</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak Democrat not in a battleground with high campaign contact</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak Democrat not in a battleground with low campaign contact</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Democrat in a battleground with high campaign contact</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Democrat in a battleground with little campaign contact</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Democrat not in a battleground with high campaign contact</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Democrat not in a battleground with low campaign contact</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent in a battleground with high campaign contact</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent in a battleground with little campaign contact</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent not in a battleground with high campaign contact</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent not in a battleground with low campaign contact</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Republican in a battleground with high campaign contact</td>
<td>4.94</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Republican in a battleground with little campaign contact</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Republican not in a battleground with high campaign contact</td>
<td>4.95</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Republican not in a battleground with low campaign contact</td>
<td>4.90</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
Table 16.1 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partisanship/(not) in a Battleground with/Campaign Status</th>
<th>Partisan Estimate</th>
<th>Difference from Hypothesized Stability Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weak Republican in a battleground with high campaign contact</td>
<td>5.90</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak Republican in a battleground with little campaign contact</td>
<td>5.81</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak Republican not in a battleground with high campaign contact</td>
<td>5.87</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak Republican not in a battleground with low campaign contact</td>
<td>5.87</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak Republican in a battleground with high campaign contact</td>
<td>6.86</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak Republican in a battleground with little campaign contact</td>
<td>6.74</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak Republican not in a battleground with high campaign contact</td>
<td>6.85</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak Republican not in a battleground with low campaign contact</td>
<td>6.84</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Bolded coefficients indicate statistical significance at \( p < 0.05 \).

dent Democrats and a few other isolated examples) move slightly toward the center of the distribution (at 4.0). But this centripetal force is not constant. The second column of table 16.1 denotes the difference between the hypothesized value (of no movement) and the actual predicted value generated by the model. The movement ranges from essentially nothing in the case of several conditions, all the way to a high of 0.27 in the case of strong Republicans living in the battleground states who reported little campaign contact. This means that those respondents moved, on average, about 25 percent of the way from being strong Republicans to being weak Republicans across each wave in the campaign. This movement would amount to a lot if it were consistent across all respondents, though, of course, it is not.

It is instructive to consider the average absolute difference by four categories: a citizen living in the battleground with high campaign contact (i.e., both Republicans and Democrats). In a battleground state with high campaign contact, that difference was only 0.08, while for low campaign contact, it was 0.15. For citizens living outside the battleground, the estimates were 0.11 and 0.08, respectively. The results suggest that, in general, two groups were relatively more stable: those living inside the bubble of heavy-duty campaigning, that is, respondents who resided in the battleground states and were reporting
high campaign contact, and those living completely outside the bubble, that is, respondents who resided outside the battleground and experienced relatively little campaign contact.

The results confirm some of our hypotheses but also suggest unanticipated patterns. As is consistent with the interaction hypothesis, respondents who were in the battleground and receiving the strongest campaign messages were the most stable, but only relative to voters who were receiving some level of campaign attention either because of their residence in a battleground or because they were getting many such messages (presumably some level of choice matters in the receipt of those messages). The other two hypotheses, residence and campaign volume, receive some support, but relative to the baseline of no immersion in the campaign, not as much as expected. Indeed, the two groups that are the most stable are those receiving the strongest messages in the battleground and those receiving essentially no messages outside of the battleground. We emphasize that since this model is designed to thwart the possibility of measuring too much instability, it is significant that we are finding this much instability clearly related to the campaign. But it does not subvert the overall finding of stability.

When Zaller writes (admittedly in a very different context) that “public opinion can be understood as a response to the relative intensity and stability of opposing flows of . . . communications” (1992, 186), he seems to be describing a phenomenon that applies to partisan attitudes. Immersed in the most intense flow of information, respondents were extremely stable. They were also extremely stable in environments completely lacking in intensity. Put voters in between these two extremes, and they appear to become somewhat more unstable—moving in some cases, on average, as much as a quarter of the way toward a more centrist category (across waves).

However, this overall pattern masks some partisan differences in the instability. Figure 16.1 divides the average absolute instability by partisanship and shows that Republicans are always more likely to be unstable. Republicans living in the battleground, but not getting the reinforcement of high campaign contact, move an average of almost 20 percent toward the category of “weak Republican.” This seems like a feature of the 2008 campaign, in which Obama was remarkably popular and clearly maintained the upper hand in the campaign almost through the general election contest (and much of the primary as well).

On balance, we take three simple lessons from the data. First, partisanship is generally quite stable. It is not the case that any group here is making wild shifts: people are clearly stable, on average. Second, there is some instability that must be linked to the campaign. Given that much of the campaign is accounted for in the model by simple residence in or out of the battleground,
a causal mechanism seems to be at work. The self-reported measure of campaign contact may blur the causality, but we think that this measure is a good proxy for actual exposure to the campaign. Thus, others who have written about the magic of the battleground are right. Partisanship—perhaps the most ubiquitous concept in American politics and certainly one that everyone regards as among the most stable attitudes possible—is clearly affected by the campaign experienced by a voter. Finally, we would point out that this model provides evidence that not only the specific campaign tactics (contacts, advertising, and so forth) but also the fundamentals matter. The Republicans began 2008 in a deep hole because of the fundamentals of the race. An unpopular president, his foreign adventures, and an incredibly poor economy all combined to create a situation in which much more of the instability that appears in the data came from Republicans rather than Democrats.

**Discussion**

The model results broadly support some of our expectations: not all inconsistency is created equal. Some partisanship instability is measurement error...
The Campaign Context for Partisanship Stability

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in the sense of miscoding or simple mistakes, but some is clearly related to campaign environment and volume. While partisanship may be a social-psychological identity, it is partially the result of interactions with the political environment, particularly the short-run environment of intensive campaigning. This makes sense. Individuals who construct a social identity do so in a given context. That context can either reinforce or undermine the identity and present the individual with new questions about, or perhaps even new dimensions of, that identity. This seems to be the dynamic element of a model of social-psychological identity. It is also thoroughly consistent with models of electoral change that specify the ways in which voters “update” preferences given party performance.

When political scientists measure partisanship, they typically rely on the simple question, “Generally speaking, do you consider yourself a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or something else?” However, this question does not directly tap the ambivalence and uncertainty many citizens may have. And it certainly does not tap dimensions that would tend to strengthen or weaken identities. Someone may identify as a Republican simply because he feels closer to that party than to the other. Change the electoral conditions or find the right campaign message, and that identity may well be positively or negatively reinforced for the voter. Indeed, while campaigns are obviously designed to win votes, they are the perfect environment in which to test a person’s commitment. Maybe he identifies as a Democrat, but is he so committed to the identity that he will never allow conflicting messages or images to cause him to question it?

We believe this work simply scratches the surface of the issue. Some of the research that has been done on “certainty” of votes should probably be conducted on certainty of partisanship. Alternative wording to questions would also be helpful. Lastly, the interesting effects of different campaign media suggest the need for experimental work on types of campaign messages that reinforce partisan identities. Voters can be conflicted—sometimes for very good reasons. They can disagree with other members of their party on a key issue, at times simply because of the campaign context. Voters are sometimes unaware of conflicts between their opinions and their partisanship, and only the campaign arena is likely to highlight that disparity. Clearly we should expect partisanship stability from the voter, but perhaps only under the right conditions. Most of the time, voters are already correctly sorted into parties and comfortable with their identity. New issues or dramatic elections that can upset that applecart do not come along every day. In a political environment in which individuals have ready access to political information and cues, we might see partisan stability as not just the typical case but the overwhelming one. However, given the right political fundamentals
and campaign conditions, we should not expect partisanship to be stable under all circumstances. This means that the observed stability of partisanship may be, in part, an artifact of the nature of our party system, in which some candidates vigorously contest some jurisdictions and virtually ignore others, thereby maximizing the chances of stability for some individuals but minimizing them for others.

Appendix: Question Wording, Variable Coding, and Statistical Model

Party Identification

Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a . . . Democrat, Republican, Independent, Other, Not Sure?

Respondents answering "Republican" or "Democrat" were asked, "Would you call yourself a strong [Republican/Democrat] or a not very strong [Republican/Democrat]?"

Respondents answering "Independent," "Other," or "Not Sure" were asked, "Do you think of yourself as closer to the Democratic or the Republican Party?"

We used the full seven-point party identification scale from each wave of the panel. Respondents answering "Not Sure" a second time to the "leaner" question were reclassified as "pure independents" (four) on the seven-point scale.

Battleground States

The battleground-state variable was coded using a list of eighteen states considered by the Obama campaign to be major battlegrounds as of June 2008. See www.fivethirtyeight.com/2008/06/obama-eighteen.html (last accessed April 4, 2010).

The eighteen states are Alaska, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Wisconsin. Most of these states are familiar to recent presidential contests and/or other lists of 2008 battleground states; thus, the list has tremendous face validity. There are a few unusual states on the list, but these unfamiliar battlegrounds, such as Alaska, Montana, and North Dakota, have small populations and thus do not make up a large proportion of the survey respondents. Their presence or absence in the battleground list does not appreciably affect our results.
Campaign Contact

Thinking about the presidential candidates and their campaigns, did any of the following things happen to you YESTERDAY? (Choose as many as apply.)

1. Saw a campaign ad on TV
2. Received a piece of campaign mail (U.S. Post or e-mail)
3. Donated money to a candidate or party
4. Received a pamphlet on my door
5. Wore a button or sticker for a candidate
6. Discussed a candidate with someone
7. Received a visit from a campaign worker
8. Heard a radio ad for a candidate
9. Saw a yard sign for a candidate
10. Went to hear a candidate speak
11. Got a phone call from a campaign
12. Visited a candidate website
13. Heard about a candidate at a religious service
14. Watched a video of a candidate on the Internet [September and October waves only]

We summed the contacts for each of the five pre-election campaign waves. The resulting index is right skewed, and so we took the natural log of the index, included both in the model, and used the log of campaign contact to create the interaction terms.

Statistical Model

We fit a simple model of partisanship ($\psi_t$) as a function of lagged partisanship ($\psi_{t-1}$) and whether or not a respondent lived in the battleground ($\theta$) and received a given level of campaign contact ($\gamma$). Because the interest is in discerning the effect of the campaign and the battleground, all of the terms were interacted (in order to test the interaction hypothesis), and a random-effects term was included for each individual in the sample. The following is a formal representation of the model: $\psi_t = \alpha_i + \beta_1 \psi_{t-1} + \beta_2 \theta_i + \beta_3 \gamma_i + \beta_4 \psi_{t-1} \gamma_i + \beta_5 \psi_{t-1} \theta_i + \beta_6 \theta \gamma_i + \beta_7 \theta_{t-1} \gamma_i \psi_{t-1} + e_i$. The weighted version of the model was fit via maximum likelihood.

The idea is to investigate whether the stability of partisanship is affected by exposure to the campaign, in and out of the battleground. Table 16.A reports the results. All the coefficients are significant, and given that the model includes both a lagged term and respondent-level random effects, we are confident in the fit of the model.
### TABLE 16.A

Model Results from a Random-Effects Maximum Likelihood Model of Partisanship
(Standard Errors of Coefficient Estimates Are Given in Parentheses.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lagged partisanship</td>
<td>0.978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Standard Errors of Coefficient Estimates Are Given in Parentheses.)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battleground state</td>
<td>0.291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.025)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign contact</td>
<td>0.068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged partisanship * campaign contact</td>
<td>-0.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.002)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battleground state * campaign contact</td>
<td>-0.115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.012)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged partisanship * battleground state</td>
<td>-0.062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.007)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged partisanship * battleground state *</td>
<td>0.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>campaign contact</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( n = 16,545 )</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log likelihood = -62,368.392</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes**

We would like to thank participants at the 2009 State of the Parties Conference, Akron, Ohio, and research lab participants at the Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy (CSED) for helpful comments. Ryan Merriman, an undergraduate research fellow at CSED, provided research assistance.

1. Indeed, it would make a lot of sense to be uncertain, given that political parties do often send conflicting messages.


3. For more information about the 2008 CCAP, see Simon Jackman and Lynn Vavreck (2009b).

4. These include age, race, gender, education, marital status, number of children under eighteen, family income, employment status, citizenship, state, and metropolitan area. Voter registration and turnout from the November 2008 Current Population Survey Supplement was matched to this frame. Data on religious affiliation, church attendance, born-again status, news interest, party identification, and ideology were matched from the 2007 Pew Religious Life Survey. For more details on the matching, see Lynn Vavreck and Douglas Rivers (2008) and Simon Jackman and Lynn Vavreck (2009c).
5. The distance function variables include the percentage survey waves completed, state, region, metropolitan statistical area, marital status, born-again/evangelical status, income, employment, age, race, years of education, interest in news, gender, party identification, ideology, the interaction of news interest and ideology, and turnout.

6. The panel survey waves, together with the large number of cases in the CCAP, permit us to examine the question of partisanship with substantially more precision and freedom. Respondents were asked about their partisanship in each of six waves: the baseline (December 2007) and the subsequent 2008 waves in January, March, September, October, and postelection.

7. There are obviously different standards one could use to measure these changes (i.e., a voter’s response on the final wave, the first wave, etc.). Small differences in the described pattern might appear, but the overall pattern would remain.

8. At least, it was the best that we could locate within the CCAP data.
IN 1880 HENRY ADAMS, the historian and heir of two presidents, published a novel, *Democracy* (1968). Adams’s heroine, New York socialite Madeline Lightfoot Lee, suffers from ennui. She has lost interest in salons, in philanthropy, in business. “She had resorted to desperate measures,” Adams wrote; “she read philosophy in the original German.” Still desperate, Mrs. Lee transplants herself to Washington, where enthralled by “the great game of politics,” she is revived.

That’s literature. In political theory, by contrast, the story is one of persistent antipartyism, and the phrase “the great game of politics” is derogative. Political parties and their partisan supporters are disparaged, if not actively despised. They always have been. The canonical history of political thought is a record of relentless opposition to parties as institutions and of moral disdain for partisans. I have created a typology of the “glorious traditions of antipartyism” that still resonate today (Rosenblum 2008). One tradition abhors parties as “unwholesome parts” that disfigure what should be a perfectly unified political community. Because parties have partiality and opposition as their aim, they stand out among groups and associations as the most morally, politically, and aesthetically unabidable. The second tradition of antipartyism accepts political pluralism but abhors parties for impeding balance or harmony among recognized social parts. Parties are magnifiers or inventors of cleavages; they are fatally divisive. Parties do have one classic defender, Edmund Burke, of whom William Goldsmith wrote in 1774, “Here lies our good Edmund. Who, born for the universe, narrowed his mind. And to party gave up what was meant for mankind.”
Democratic theorists do more than echo these traditions of antipartyism; they are creative in their loathing. They have had to be. For only after elections were open to most citizens and run as contests to shape public opinion could parties be described as “perverters of the democratic spirit.” These charges are familiar. Parties are too responsive to powerful minorities. They are insufficiently responsive to powerless minorities. Above all, parties are routinely unresponsive to majorities. Parties are associated with personal and institutional corruption and with the policy equivalent of patronage. The main thing dividing these dismal critics is whether they see political parties as the agents of powerful corporate predators, captured by “special interests,” or as principals advancing their own sinister interests, extortionists involved in “elaborate influence-peddling scheme[s]” (Phillips 2002, 325). This family feud about the direction of “undue influence” divides advocates of campaign-finance reform today.

Small wonder aversions predominate. Party politics is so grimy, so mundane, so nakedly political. To arouse antipathy it would be enough to say that parties are the creatures of politicians—men and women for whom politics is a business and pleasure and who are prepared to give and receive heavy punishment without flinching. As for partisanship, we recognize “partisan” as invective; the barb comes out of improbable mouths, a virtual reflex. While party activists battle one another, each claiming they are on the side of the angels, critics demonize them all and praise independents as their undisputed moral superiors.

To orient us on the terrain of antipartyism, it is helpful to understand that virtually every political pathology and every scheme for correcting the system by eliminating, circumventing, or containing parties and converting partisans into independents has its roots in the Progressive Era. True, bribery, bossism, patronage, and fraud—key motivators of Progressive antipartyism—have been eclipsed; after the 2000 presidential election, “machine politics” refers to the technology used to tabulate votes, not Boss Tweed. Still, there is a remarkable continuity of Progressive antipartyism up to the present.

Contemporary democratic theorists who describe their work as “nonideal theory” (deliberative theorists, neo-Republicans, and others) are Progressives’ heirs. They write, often expressly, as if we could have democracy without parties and partisanship. The objects of their affection include just about every institution for political participation and representation except parties: self-styled public interest groups and social movements, direct democratic institutions like initiatives and referenda, arrangements for guaranteed representation, and devolution of decision making to “problem-solving” units like workplaces. Proponents of deliberative democracy, for example, favor decision making by specially created deliberative polls and citizens’ juries removed from conventional political arenas, with participants chosen to represent “lay citizens and nonpartisans.”
Progressive roots and borrowings are also pronounced in election law, or "the law of democracy," which has emerged in the last decade as a legal specialty. The leading scholars in the field are professed Progressives who see the "civic religion" of the two-party system as pathological, an impediment to "the ritual cleansing born of competition" (Issacharoff and Pildes 1998, 646). They adopt a standard Progressive theme, characterizing the major parties as a legal duopoly or cartel. There is no electoral state of nature, they argue; legal barriers to political competition from third parties, fusion parties, write-in voting, and independent candidates are the work of partisans in control of state legislatures and Congress in what amounts to self-entrenchment. The cartel analogy serves legal scholars by directing the course judicial intervention should take: applying antitrust law to the major parties.

From the Supreme Court, where justices have consistently expressed the view that elections are about choosing an individual to hold public office, not choosing a party to control office, to palpable public distaste for parties (a third of voters prefers that "candidates run as individuals without party labels" (Wattenberg 1994, 48)), we get a sense of the flavor and scope of antipartyism.

My focus in this chapter is more circumscribed than antipartyism, though. It is antipartisanship, narrowed further to the United States. Antipartyism and antipartisanship are separable. We can appreciate partisanship in the general sense of organized advocacy—"partisans of a cause"—yet despise parties as vehicles, just as we can concede the usefulness of political parties and despise partisanship. Democratic theorists might glumly concede that parties are convenient mechanisms for "reducing the transaction costs" of elections and that, while partisans are not admirable, some of them are indispensable to realizing the value of parties. At the same time, however, they echo Progressives who insisted that if we must have parties, at least voters should be nonpartisan, and who made "independent" an honorific status. Even this minimal concession is pragmatic, unexuberant, unphilosophical, grudging.

My theme, then, is antipartisanship, more specifically, opposition to ordinary citizens' identification with a political party, and efforts to foster the political identity of independent. I am going to take sides—not between opposing partisans but between partisanship and independence. I chip away at the moral high ground claimed by independents and provide "party ID" an iota of dignity. I cast partisanship as the morally distinctive political identity of representative democracy. The commonplace of contemporary democratic theory—that an intelligently and progressively democratic system depends on the ability of its supporters to attain a nonpartisan spirit—is exactly wrong.

I am going to make three points each about independence and partisanship. My focus, again, is on civilians, "we partisans," though similar arguments apply to partisans in government.
The Civic Ideal of Independence

In the United States today, independence is a distinct political identity. That is, while over 90 percent of survey respondents agree with the statement, “The best rule in voting is to pick the best candidate, regardless of party label” (White 2001, 5), only some people elevate this assertion into proud self-designation as independent. The author (and former editor of Christian Retailing trade magazine) of the manifesto We the Purple put it nicely: “We’re not undecided. We have decided to be independent” (Ford 2008, 10).

Plainly the label itself is inviting. “Independence” has a certain luster. The positive moral resonance of independence in the United States owes to a civic ideal of self-reliance as a virtue in economic and social life. Citizenship requires “men who have been accustomed to independence of action and that breadth of view which only the responsibility of directing their own affairs can produce” (cited in Sandel 1996, 273). This long-standing civic ideal was later transplanted in the soil of electoral politics, so that citizens must “be independent persons in both their political and civil roles, who give and withdraw their votes from their representatives and political parties as they see fit” (Shklar 1991, 25). As voting became the ritual expression of citizenship, independence became associated with political conduct and meant nonpartisanship. From early on, then, partisanship was cast as degraded citizenship, as abject dependence rooted in clientelism, capture, or dumb loyalty. And enthusiasm for independence was rooted in the conviction that it was both a laudatory disposition and predictor of responsible political behavior. Independents were voters persuaded; partisans were voters bought. Independents were the hope for good government and clean elections.

The civic ideal of independence so pronounced in American political thought lends luster to independence as antipartisan. It provides the permanent structure of antipartisanship in American political life. That said, with the surge of independence as an avowed political identity in recent decades, several variations have emerged clearly. Each was articulated in the election of 2008.

**Fundamentalist independents** avow that their independence is not the result of dissatisfaction with current parties. They see party divisions as inherently too rigid to allow personal judgment to be exercised over time. No party (indeed no political association) can encompass the precise constellation of values and reasoned arguments that correspond to the fundamentalist’s own understanding of justice, right policy, and means of realization.

**Circumstantial independents** present as a separate type. They see current parties as creating the wrong kind of divisions—not those that in their individual judgment are politically important. One recurrent complaint has
been that parties are undifferentiated, mongrels, hodgepodge. Instructive is Justice Lewis Powell’s opinion in a Supreme Court case deciding whether the national Democratic Party should be required, in violation of its own rules, to seat delegates from Wisconsin chosen by an open primary. Powell wrote, “If appellant National Party were an organization with a particular ideological orientation or political mission . . . the state law . . . open[ing] the organization to participation by persons with incompatible beliefs [might] interfere with the associational rights of its founders. The Democratic Party, however, is not organized around the achievement of defined ideological goals” (Democratic Party v. Wisconsin 1981, 132). Things change, and today circumstantial independents’ animus is better captured by the equation partisan = ideological = extremist. The only thing of note is how swiftly a political analysis with the title Off Center supplanted Dead Center: The Perils of Moderation. Independents will not identify with these errant conglomerations—or, it should be said, with any feasible or even conceivable party division. As such, they merge in practice with fundamentalists.

A third type, pragmatic independents, wants to bypass partisanship because it thwarts practical solutions to problems. The adjectives these independents attach to “partisan” are nasty and diminishing: “petty,” “bickering” and “small.” (We heard this from presidential candidate Barack Obama: “Let’s resist the temptation to fall back on the same partisanship and pettiness and immaturity that has poisoned our politics for so long” [Obama 2008, 277]). “Just fix it” is, of course, a perennial feature of American apolitical thought. Pragmatic independence is captured by the designation of certain model officials as “the new action heroes,” politicians like Arnold Schwarzenegger, who plays the role of fixer in a style approaching “camp” and who repeats at every turn, “How about being realistic and just solving the problem?” (Grunwald 2007). Independence is a distinct political identity, then, and all independents share a positive, even heroic self-image that invokes the civic ideal. In the words of one proud independent, “We’ve decided that we cannot be anything other than independent-thinking, which is what drew us to this political persuasion in the first place” (Ford 2008, 86).

“Escape from the Deadly Groove”

Progressives introduced the influential view that where the partisan is seduced or bought, the independent is a free agent. Supporters of party organizations were characterized as ignorant, inert, set in some “deadly groove,” and under some affective thrall. “The ‘good people’ are herded into parties and stupefied with convictions and a name, Republican or Democrat,” Lincoln Steffens
charged; he was blunt: “I don’t see how any intelligent man can be a partisan” (1931, 136). Today, the contrast is posed in cognitive as well as moralistic terms. Where partisans are “judgment impaired,” crippled by perceptual bias, the independent is a nimble “positive empiricist,” “cognitively mobilized.” The author of the odd manifesto Party Crashing: How the Hip-Hop Generation Declared Political Independence quotes Charisma, a black woman in her twenties: “I’m a registered independent because I’m an independent thinker” (Goff 2008, 42).

These assertions do not stand up to empirical scrutiny. “Far from being more attentive, interested, and informed, independents tend as a group to have somewhat poorer knowledge of the issues, their image of the candidates is fainter, their interest in the campaign is less, [and] their concern over the outcome is relatively slight” (Campbell et al. 1960, 143ff.). This fifty-year-old assessment still holds. “Pure independents” (one of the ever-more-refined subcategories employed by survey researchers) are the least interested in politics, the most politically ignorant, and the lightest voters. To the extent that they “escape from the deadly groove,” they disregard partisan reference points and arguments in their own thinking, and because they spend less time attending to politics and have fewer hooks for taking in new information, independents’ considerations are more likely to be chaotic and ad hoc than partisans’ rather than more coherent. Even a presumably informed subgroup of independents (as “leaning independents” or my Harvard students are said to be) do not appear to have or use more, different, or better information than partisans, to be more deliberative or “cognitively mobilized.”

If independence begins to lose some of its luster, it is readily burnished by claiming an affinity to certain aspirational types that figure in moral and political philosophy. It is hardly surprising that philosophers vaunt independence. Whether the ideal perspective for judgment is Socratic questioning, Humean impartiality, or a transcendent “view from nowhere,” it is the antithesis of a partisan perspective. Laudatory representations of independence invoke these poses and deserve to be treated skeptically.

For one, “escape from the deadly groove” does not make the independent bravely Thoreauvian, guided by conscience, doing in every case “what I think right.” After all, conscientious or not (and there is no reason to think that independents are more moved by moral considerations, much less by commands of conscience, than others), independents are not dissidents; they are reduced to choosing among courses arranged by others. Nor is there warrant for casting independents as David Hume’s “impartial observer,” who brings appreciation of the limitations of each side and balanced information to bear—as if independents are judicious umpires inclining victory to this side
or that as they think the interests of the country demand. The Humean characterization of independents as uniquely motivated and equipped to judge the nation's interest is echoed in independents' self-description; for example, "'Patriot' and 'partisan' may share a few letters, but partisans owe allegiance to a political faction, while patriots put the nation's welfare above their own" (Flowers 2008). Finally, there is no warrant for viewing independents as Millians attuned to the dynamic by which every position derives its utility from the deficiencies of the other, so that in J. S. Mill's words, truth is "a question of the reconciling and combining of opposites ... and it has to be made by the rough process of a struggle between combatants fighting under hostile banners." On this high-minded view, independents are the beneficiaries and carriers of the corrections that emerge from the clash of partisans, "persons who actually believe [half-truths], who defend them in earnest, and do their utmost for them" (Mill 1977, 253).

Have I focused on real-life voters and not grappled with independence as a regulative ideal? What if independents were disinterested deliberators of the public interest? Or intrepid citizens presenting themselves as antidotes to the furies of partisan extremism? Or impartial observers and correctors of the deficiencies of every party? What if independence described actual voters in contexts contrived to provide balanced information and deliberative decision making? Independence does not stand up in any case, for even the most admirable independent in a hypothetically reformed system lacks the moral distinctiveness of party ID I describe shortly. Moreover, independents are politically detached and weightless.

Weightlessness

Along with independence as a general civic ideal and escape from the deadly groove is the third characteristic: weightlessness. Partisanship is identification with others in a political association. "We partisans" organize and vote with allies, not alone. If Ignazio Silone is right that the crucial political judgment is "the choice of comrades," independents do not make it. They are as detached from one another as they are from parties. The independent demands to be "recognized as a unique individual who could express herself significantly in public and in private" (Shklar 1991, 60). This is not quite romanticism, but it comes close. As recently confessed "conservative independent" New York Times columnist David Brooks wrote, "There is the repulsive force of teamism, which is the great corrupter of modern politics. It's the way people crush their own personalities and views in order to fit in with the team" (2009).
Independents are weightless, but they can be forgiven the illusion of efficacy and a hint of smugness because they are the object of tender solicitude—made vivid in the 2004 “town meeting” presidential debate between George W. Bush and John Kerry to which only “undecideds” and independents were invited. The headline of the Pew Research Center’s 2009 study *Trends in Political Values and Core Attitudes: 1987–2009* reads, “Independents Take Center Stage in Obama Era.” Pew reports that since the 2008 election, the percentage of Americans self-described as “independent” has increased to 36 percent, compared to 35 percent Democrats and 23 percent Republicans (Pew 2009).

Weightlessness comes from the fact that whatever their numbers, independents are not sending a coordinated message (even if analysts are in the business of interpreting what their votes mean). The Pew Research Center also confirms that “as a group independents remain difficult to pin down” (2009). This confirms their self-reporting: “I’ve met independent voters whose political views span the entire ideological spectrum, from ultraconservative to ultraliberal. . . . [Independent voters] are impossible to pigeon-hole” (Ford 2008, 1–2). On occasion, nonpartisan voters may decide an election, but to say that they throw the election one way or the other is misleading because there is no “they” there. Simply, the vicissitudes of independent votes have that unplanned, uncoordinated effect. Independents do not assume responsibility for the institutions that organize public discussion, elections, and government and are not responsible to other like-minded citizens. They do not owe or offer justifications to any group. The independent is politically unreliable, though political science is too polite to portray this as querulousness—in Henry Adams’s words, as “[a mask] for political vacillation, weakness, inconsistency of temperament, or an excuse for self-indulgence” (1876, 429). Atomism is an overworked metaphor, but it applies to independents: they are atoms of the unorganized public bouncing off the structures of a party system.

Nevertheless, a potential army of independents appeals to the political imagination of antipartisans. Each new wave of voters arouses hope that they will be correctives to partisanship. Early feminists were vocal on this point. Frances Gilman described political parties as institutional expressions of “inextricable masculinity” and anticipated that once women were enfranchised, “a flourishing democratic government [could] be carried on without any parties at all” (Eisenach 2000, 116)—which is why weightlessness is the perennial concern of those who imagine independents as the agents of democratic reform. Teddy Roosevelt warned against what he called “mere windy anarchy.” Schemes for creating a new “Independent Party” typically fail, among other reasons, because learning to act “in accordance with a script they don’t write themselves” (Walzer 2008, 92) forms the core of political organizing and is
just what independents cannot abide. A recent example is Unity08, a new online party founded by former Democratic and Republican party leaders who aimed at attracting independents with a bipartisan ticket. The party enlisted one hundred thousand members online but could not settle on agreeable candidates or a platform (Allmann et al., chapter 9, this volume).

Still, the goal of giving weight to independents persists, most notably when it comes to the chief Progressive reform, the direct primary. Hopes for organizing independents and seizing control from partisans are the motivation behind current battles over the form primary elections should take. A good example is California’s Proposition 198, passed by popular referendum in 1996. It changed the state’s system from a traditional closed-party primary to a “blanket” primary, which required the state to list candidates randomly on a single ballot and allowed voters, regardless of their party affiliation, to vote for any candidate from any party for any office. This means that elections to choose a party’s nominee are open by law to independents, undecideds, and cross-over voters from rival parties—to those “who, at best, have refused to affiliate with the party and, at worst, have expressly affiliated with a rival” and whose votes are potentially decisive (Justice Scalia, California Democratic Party et al. v. Jones, 126). A more benign and realistic characterization than “strategic raiding” is simply that an amorphous group of nonpartisans selects the nominee that carries the party’s name. Producing nominees and positions other than those partisans would choose if left to their own devices was the whole point, of course. California’s traditional closed-primary system, advocates insisted, favors the election of party hard-liners . . . and stacks the deck against more moderate problem-solvers.

Plainly, the California initiative exhibited more than a whiff of aversion to partisanship. It charged parties with turning off voters and depressing participation. It identified partisan voters with extremists. It described those who would not affiliate with a party in order to vote in its primary as “disenfranchised.” It would have used electoral laws to lock in a particular theory of party competition—“centrism.” Democratic, Republican, and several minor party leaders challenged the law, which the Supreme Court struck down in 2000 (prompting something potentially more threatening to parties: the “nonpartisan primary” enacted by referendum in Washington State).

In sum, independents should not be ceded the moral high ground. As the Pew Research Center (2009) reports, they are fickle, ungrounded, and liable to mistrust; in particular, they are of two-minds about the scope and role of government. Lack of partisanship is one source of instability and lack of direction in democratic politics today. Independents make it dizzying for elected officials to advance their understanding of the public welfare, for it is difficult to articulate and advance bold and expensive policy changes (or
for that matter incremental ones) not only because of partisan divisions but also because of uncertainty about independents.

Partisanship

Posed against the luster of independence is partisanship. What is there to appreciate? Political scientists have pointed to important systemic positives, like the role partisans play in organizing legislatures and governing, or the demonstrable relation between party ID and high levels of participation. If we think that “the simple act of voting is the ground upon which the edifice of elective government rests ultimately” (Shklar 1991, 25), we might expect that when the percentage of nonvoters is often high enough to raise the alarm of democratic failing, partisanship would have defenders. Even here, few democratic theorists find anything to appreciate in the fact that without partisans pronouncing grievances, pointing up dangers, arousing resentment, and naming opponents, it is unimaginable how citizens become agents with opinions, rallied for the contest. Another systemic consideration is that parties preserve an ongoing political connection between representatives and citizens. My appreciation of partisanship takes a different turn, however, and focuses on the moral distinctiveness of party ID. So, now for three notes of appreciation for partisanship, which correspond to the three elements of my ethic of partisanship.

Inclusiveness

The first is the inclusive character of party ID, which is characteristic of, though not unique to, partisanship in the United States. At its most basic, partisanship is identification with Republicans or Democrats from Florida to California and with political competition at every level of government. No other political identity is shared by so many segments of the population as measured by socioeconomic status or religion, and partisans are not clumped tightly together on an ideological spectrum.

This is not to say that all partisans have a deep moral commitment to inclusiveness—only that they are ambitious to be in the majority. In this context, creating and sustaining a majority is more than a requirement of democratic institutional design—after all, partisans want to win elections—but a plurality can suffice. They want to have their policies enacted, but there are other effective avenues of political advocacy and influence. Rather, partisans want the moral ascendancy that comes not only from achieving a governing majority but also
from earning the approval of “the great body of the people.” Persuading a majority of the people over a broad swath of socioeconomic statuses and religions, and preserving that majority over more than one electoral moment, is a triumph. In this respect, partisan inclusiveness is a conscious democratic value.

Party candidates may have short-term strategic interests or safe seats that allow them to speak only to “the base” or to “activate” only certain voters (so that nonvoting is an effect of misnamed mobilization, not its antithesis). Incumbents may not want the party to capture a majority if it means putting their seats at risk (see chapter 12, this volume). But ordinary civilian partisans aspire to persuade and mobilize as many as possible to identify with them. Their horizon of political expectation extends beyond a single election cycle, and they aim at an inclusive “we.”

Comprehensiveness

The second element of an ethic of partisanship and grounds for appreciation is attachment to others in a group with responsibility for telling a comprehensive public story about the economic, social, and moral changes of the time and about national security. Of course, partisans sometimes focus on a specific issue or event and their party’s competence to deal with it. And, of course, partisans pursue partial interests, but this is not unreconstructed interest group pluralism since they share a complex of concerns and connect particular interests and opinions to a more general conception of the public interest. Just as partisanship in government is the condition for coordinated political decisions so that not every decision is a unique negotiated agreement, voters’ party ID is the condition for a degree of coherence and continuity of some conception of the public good.

It would be overstating the case to say that partisans assume the obligation John Rawls articulated: to advance a conception of the public good that is situated in the most complete conception of political justice we can advance (Muirhead and Rosenblum 2006). It would be understating the case to say merely that in contrast to members of interest and advocacy groups, including self-styled public interest groups, partisans are not single-issue voters. Partisans do not hold to a single value or policy as uniquely important but identify with a complex of concerns continuously balanced against one another.

An important consequence of comparative comprehensiveness is that adhering single-mindedly to one dominant idea has little appeal, and ordinary partisans are seldom extremists (though parties are sometimes vulnerable to capture by a faction). The extremist is one-eyed, monotonic, not just right but right on a particular matter of such singular urgency that it eclipses all
competing matters, suppresses all cautions, and rationalizes unfortunate consequences. Extremists care about principles. They represent intransigence as a virtue. They do not find failure ignominious. Consider this Republican’s contest with President George W. Bush: “There’s not a single piece of legislation that needs to be passed in the next two years for this president. In fact, if Congress wants to come together, adjourn, and leave, it’s all right with us” (quoted in Duffy and Goodgame 1992, 82).

Because “extremism” is a commonplace descriptive today, a word of explanation may be helpful. On the one hand, extremism is an erroneous and destructive charge when leveled wholesale and used as a synonym for partisanship. On the other hand, it would be wrong to think that in current discourse extremism is a thoughtful reference to a position on an ideological spectrum, for it is widely leveled at partisans of every stripe. The valid meaning of extremism applied to American parties today indicates a falling off from the elements I identify as comprising the ethics of partisanship. Thus, extremist signals failure to be inclusive, to take responsibility for persuading and mobilizing voters other than purists. It signals failure of comprehensiveness, the single-minded taking of one idea or aim to its limit and an unresponsiveness to the range of concerns facing the nation. And by its failing, extremism points to the third element of an ethic of partisanship: compromisingness as a moral disposition.

Compromisingness

Inclusiveness and a comprehensive account of what needs to be done are only possible if partisans also demonstrate the disposition to compromise. We know what that typically entails: tolerance of small gains, getting less than we want in order to get something, settling for less in order to prevent an even worse outcome. In democracies compromise is the essential political act. We also know that very often the hardest compromises are intraparty, and compromise with fellow partisans is a political obligation, part of creating, acknowledging, and sustaining the partisan “we.”

Of course, compromise can be evidence of abject pandering or raw opportunism. Working out the bounds of reasonable compromise is part of the stern discipline of partisanship, and it is true for partisan voters as well as officials. Intraparty conflicts rage over every aspect of campaigning, governing, and opposition. What interests and issues are the crucial lines of division? What message is communicated by a certain position in the politics of the moment? What ideas or candidates fall outside the bounds and are unfaithful to “the soul of the party”?
Political theorists have written very little on the subject of compromise, and they typically focus on the moral and constitutional limits of compromise, not the justifiable political grounds for it (see Kuflick 1979; Carens 1999; Bellamy and Hollis 1999; May 2005). J. S. Mill is exceptional for setting out criteria for sound compromise, among them that the time is not ripe for the preferred alternative, the agreement could facilitate future cooperation, and concessions will not set back progress already made (Thompson 2007). On these points, of course, partisans, like philosophers, will disagree. For the most part, however, political theorists neglect this element of my ethics of partisanship, compromisingness, in favor of consensus. Or they give the name “compromise” to a settlement that rests on principled agreement and common ground rather than one in which the sides give up something significant and, often enough, without parity.

Inclusiveness, comprehensiveness, and compromisingness set the contours for an ethic of partisanship. They provide grounds for criticism of actual partisans. Finally, they point to the overarching achievement of partisanship and to the moral distinctiveness of party ID.

The Achievement of Partisanship

Inclusiveness, comprehensiveness, and compromisingness enable the work distinctive to partisanship, which is to draw politically relevant lines of division and shape the system of conflict that orders democratic deliberation and decision. Party antagonism focuses attention on problems, information and interpretations are brought out, stakes are delineated, points of conflict and commonality are located, the range of possibilities is winnowed, and relative competence on different matters is up for judgment. Without party rivalry, “trial by discussion” cannot be meaningful. It will not be if the inclusion of interests and opinions is exhaustive and chaotic, and parties are in the business of selection and exclusion. Nor will it be fruitful if interests and opinions are disorganized and not brought into opposition, their consequences are not anticipated, and argument is evaded. Shaping conflict is what partisans do, and it will not be done, certainly not regularly and reasonably coherently in the way representative democracy requires, without them. The claim that partisanship “fundamentally damages the political process” is fundamentally wrong (Quarles 2007).

This achievement of parties is regularly disparaged, and to bring the point home, I’ll return to the blanket-primary case, California Democratic Party et al. v. Jones. The question for the Court was whether the asserted state interest in “increasing voter turnout” outweighed the parties’ claim that the blanket primary was “compelled association” in violation of their First Amendment
right of association. That is, it contravened the right of parties to determine for themselves how inclusive the process of candidate selection and agenda setting should be at what stage. Primary elections are often critical arenas in which partisans enact inclusiveness, comprehensiveness, and compromise. The possible effect of a legally mandated blanket primary would be not only to alter the identity of the nominee but also to subvert the business of partisanship more broadly. The Supreme Court ruled California’s blanket primary unconstitutional, siding with the parties strictly on the basis of a constitutional right of association, constrained by its own precedents. The larger democratic consideration here is the significance of party autonomy: the worth of the right to vote does not exist apart from the institutional framework in which it is exercised. The meaningfulness of the vote is dependent on the political identity of parties and candidates; centrally, it depends on the achievement of parties in drawing lines of division.

My account of the achievement of partisanship speaks directly to political theorists who prize deliberation that includes a “variety of perspectives” while rejecting partisanship. In fact, “the clash of political beliefs, and of the interests and attitudes that are likely to influence them,” which Rawls and other political philosophers concede is “a normal condition of human life” (Rawls 1971, 196), does not spontaneously assume a form amenable to democratic debate and decision. I will repeat this point: drawing lines of division is the achievement of partisanship.

Moreover, great or small, parties are not simply reflections of cleavages “there” in society any more than they adopt fully developed conceptions of justice that exist antecedent to political activity. Politically salient positions are unlikely to be cast as Mill’s “serious conflict of opposing reasons” unless partisans do the work of advocating on the side of the angels. Party competition is constitutive, then; it creates a system of conflict. It “stages the battle.” That is, partisans do. Attempting to capture this, Maurice Duverger used language that moves back and forth between metaphors of natural and artistic creation: parties crystallize, coagulate, synthesize, smooth down, and mold. Creativity in politics is rarely a subject of political theory, and then it is identified with founding moments or constitutional design, with higher lawmaking or transformative social movements or revolution, and not with “normal politics.” Partisanship is the ordinary, not (ordinarily) extraordinary locus of political creativity.

The Moral Distinctiveness of Party ID

I have proposed three elements of an ethic of partisanship and identified the overarching achievement of parties. Finally, I have to make good on my
promise to affirm "the moral distinctiveness of party ID." Commitment to political pluralism, to regulated political rivalry, and to shifting responsibility for governing makes party ID the morally distinctive political identity of representative democracy. The foundation of these commitments is embedded in the term partisan. Put simply, while thinking they should speak to everyone, partisans do not imagine they speak for the whole or that their victory is anything but partial and temporary. True, partisans are on the side of the angels, offering a satisfactory account of what needs to be done. But however ardent and devoid of skepticism, there is this reticence. That is the moral distinctiveness of party ID: partisans do not imagine that their party speaks for the whole. Even in power, they are not the nation. De Tocqueville observed that parties in America know, and everyone knows, that no party represents everyone, or even a permanent majority. "This results from the very fact of their existence" (De Tocqueville 2000, 185). It requires stern self-discipline to acknowledge partiality even when there is a powerful urge to claim the mantle of the nation and pretend to represent all thoughtful Americans. On New Hampshire primary night, January 8, 2008, Barack Obama exhibited this reticence when he said, "You can be the new majority who can lead this nation out of a long political darkness—Democrats, Independents, and Republicans... Our new American majority can end the outrage" (2008).

Partisanship accepts regulated rivalry and the fact that the political conflict is iterative. They keep the losing side alive, on the ready not just to alter a particular outcome but to have their party take responsibility for governing. They do not secede, revolt, or withdraw in defeat, and "elections are not followed by waves of suicide" (Schattschneider, 1942, 91). True, "greatness is made of sterner stuff than successfully facing the exigencies of the electoral cycle" (Wolfe 2005, 5). But political aspirants must channel their ambitions through this collective, constraining, typically unheroic institution. They endure the "terror" of the opposition's vigilance and exposure. And for ordinary citizens, too, partisanship entails the knocks of compromise and defeat.

Again, partisanship is the political identity that does not see political pluralism and conflict as a glum concession to the ineradicable circumstances of politics. The moral distinctiveness of partisanship lies in democratic commitment to political pluralism and to the task of shaping a system of conflict. We might think that the vicissitudes of political fortune and the limits of human volition make this existentially true, a felt experience. Or we might say that all democratic citizens have a part in this moral distinctiveness, as they do, formally. We see, however, that many citizens judge political argument unnecessary and political conflict illegitimate, valuing independent aloofness or pragmatism or consensus. We may know that in political life partiality and disagreement are inescapable, as are groups and associations of
all kinds organized in opposition to one another. But we tend to forget that political parties and partisanship are not inevitable and should not be taken for granted. Between high-minded disapproval on the one hand and taking parties and partisanship for granted on the other, we are liable to lose sight of the achievement.

Skeptics of my appreciation of partisanship can be forgiven; it is clear why recent experience has fueled antipartisanship. Party leaders sometimes appear to want to destroy one another as an effective and legitimate opposition—even to the extent of trying to criminalize political differences. They are hubristic, claiming to represent the whole nation, not a part. Compromise even with fellow partisans is not in their repertoire, even if constructive policy making is thwarted and the public business is not done. The thrust of my ethic of partisanship is critical as well as appreciative. In any case, a falling off of inclusiveness, comprehensiveness, and compromisingness is not a reason to constrain or circumvent parties and partisanship or to prize independence and anticipate “postpartisanship.” That would be a hopeless idealization and a misguided abandonment of the distinctive political identity of representative democracy.

Coda: Bipartisanship 2009

In the face of occupation of the moral high ground by independents and exhilarating dreams of postpartisanship, many partisans have taken up bipartisanship as a line of defense. Bipartisanship is the partisan’s shield, the way to demonstrate that while not conceding the luster of independence, he or she is not just another go-along party politician. In the 2008 presidential campaign, self-protective bipartisanship inspired Senators Obama and John McCain to promise, if elected, to govern in a bipartisan fashion. Both avowed that they were not reflexive partisans, and both offered a track record of bucking their own party as a qualification for leadership. The political credit taking, premature self-congratulation, and dubious interpretations of history such as the claim that twentieth-century achievements stemmed from bipartisanship under divided government and that virtually nothing of consequence was accomplished otherwise (Thomas and Beckel 2007, 190).

Self-styled realists protest that “bipartisanship is not the first instinct; it is an option to be considered within the context of perceived electoral imperatives” (Hilley 2008, 228). This is too restricted a view. It assumes that something called “pure electoral advantage” or “naked” partisan advantage is divorced from policy and principle. It plays into the now standard cynical conjunction of partisanship with narrow political self-interest. In any case, it
is quite at odds with invocations of bipartisanship today, which plainly promise more than political compromise for electoral advantage. Bipartisanship has been moralized, even romanticized. (Consider William Safire's definition of the term as "cooperation in pursuance of patriotic, civic, or philanthropic goals" [2008].) Bipartisanship is supposed to result in genuine agreement, in consensus. Or it is supposed to entail an acknowledgment that each party is a carrier of half-truths, so that each acknowledges the reasonableness of the other side's view while insisting on comparable recognition for its own. At a minimum, bipartisanship is used to invoke simple, elementary fairness by which parties "come together in the middle"; they "split the difference."

The hopes for bipartisanship as an antidote to partisanship are anodyne, bordering on apolitical. Actual accounts of bipartisanship detail political compromises that only sometimes proceed along one dimension ("more or less") or allow for splitting the difference. The middle is not "there." The ground of compromise may not be in the middle anyway, depending on relative party or factional strengths and purposes. It is rarely common ground at all; instead, each side gives up something significant. My point is that the possibility of productive governing today depends less on the luster and political influence of independents or on weariness with polarization or idealizations of bipartisanship than on the skill of party leaders. Bipartisan compromise (like intraparty compromise) is politically determined by skilled party leaders who can control the legislative process, understand substantive and procedural hurdles, argue the merits in caucuses, rally moderates, appease, inform, guide, cajole, massage, and win the support of their troops. Nothing is more common than declaring a position principled as a strategic move or, having routinely declared a position to be one of principle, then finding the political costs of compromise increased. Bipartisanship requires leaders to reveal the lines they cannot lead colleagues across. The process is typically, necessarily marked by lack of transparency and the need to provide "cover."

Political theorists are not alone in being fundamentally antipartisan and disinterested in the fact that governing in representative democracy requires skillful party politicians. Consider Sean Wilentz's (2009) review of the recent historical literature on Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln hagiography touts him as a redeemer-president who transcended partisan politics, while radical Lincoln critics charge him with failing to transcend politics tout court. Wilentz corrects both camps: "[Lincoln] saw no shame in the practice of politics, and experienced no priggish discomfort about what it takes to get great things done. He was never too good for politics. Quite the contrary: for him, politics—ordinary, grimy, unelevating politics—was itself a good, an instrument for good" (2009). He was "a hard-nosed politician who sought to placate every element of his faction-ridden party" (Wilentz 2009).
I use this illustration because President Obama has tied himself to Lincoln, and his ardent supporters see him as "destined to be thought of as Lincoln’s direct heir" (Henry Louis Gates as cited in Wilentz, 2009) as our national savior—that is, as something other than a partisan politician. We hear that Barack Obama “ran an idealistic campaign as progressive leader . . . pledged to bring Americans together, overcoming the raw partisanship that had polarized the Washington community for nearly two decades” (Milkis and Rhodes 2009, 1). During the 2008 presidential election (and since), we witnessed the fantasy that Barack Obama would “transcend the grubby machinations and tawdry favor-swapping of party politics” (Zorn 2006). This is a misunderstanding of him and a failure to understand the achievement of partisanship. We should watch for whether President Obama is an ethical partisan: inclusive, articulating a comprehensive story of what needs to be done, able to achieve compromise among Democrats and, if there are willing partners, with the Republican opposition. The possibilities for politics will rest on his skill as a party leader, and his accomplishments will be gauged by the challenges he faces from both the opposition party and the internal, factional conditions of his own party.

For what we need is not independence or postpartisanship but better partisanship—which is all the more reason for democratic theorists to connect the practice of democratic citizenship with partisanship and to consider the terms and conditions of better partisanship as seriously as they do impartiality, independence, and institutions designed to work without parties or partisans.
Part V

PARTY IN GOVERNMENT
Barack Obama and the Partisan Presidency

Richard M. Skinner

Political scientists have traditionally seen the powerful presidency of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as the enemy of strong parties (Milkis 1993, 1999; Greenstein 1978). In this view, through an “objective” media, “modern presidents” appeal directly to voters, over the heads of party leaders, seeking a nonpartisan image. They build ad hoc coalitions of support in Congress without regard to party lines. They preside over an executive branch staffed by nonpartisan experts more interested in policy than politics. Presidents show little interest in their party’s performance in down-ballot races, let alone its long-term fate. While all these propositions held true for presidents of the 1950s through the 1970s, especially Dwight Eisenhower, Lyndon Johnson, and Jimmy Carter, since 1980 we have seen the rise of a new kind of presidency—a partisan presidency. The decisiveness of the Barack Obama era is not an exception to the rule or the product of a recent change (see table 18.1).

Partisan presidents have polarized the electorate along partisan lines to an extent unimaginable a generation ago, often experiencing an “approval gap” of forty points or more. (The approval gap is the difference between the approval given to a president by his partisans, as opposed to that given by members of the other party.) Relatively few members of the other party have voted for them.

Partisan presidents have received overwhelming support in Congress from their party. More notably, they have confronted strong—sometimes near-unanimous—opposition from the other party. They have often relied heavily on their party’s leadership to deliver votes on Capitol Hill, and they have been
TABLE 18.1
The "Modern Presidency" and the "Partisan Presidency"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Modern Presidency</th>
<th>Partisan Presidency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congressional relations</td>
<td>President's party is often divided; works across party lines</td>
<td>Characterized by partisan polarization; president works closely with own party and has difficult relations with the opposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive administration</td>
<td>Relies on nonpartisan experts and civil servants; patronage is in decline</td>
<td>Pursues an administrative presidency for partisan/ideological ends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy advice</td>
<td>Uses nonpartisan experts</td>
<td>Uses political consultants and ideological think tanks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public opinion</td>
<td>Gains support across party lines</td>
<td>Seeks support of a polarized public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media relations</td>
<td>Is cooperative; uses broadcasting to reach the mass public</td>
<td>Makes antagonistic use of &quot;alternative media&quot; or a &quot;partisan press&quot; to reach niche public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral politics</td>
<td>Engages in candidate-centered politics; plays down party affiliation; wins support across party lines</td>
<td>Characterized by increasing polarization and revival of party organizations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

unable to enjoy the cozy relationship that earlier presidents had with the opposition. Barack Obama has had almost no success in developing a productive relationship with Republican congressional leaders, while his party's Capitol Hill leadership has driven most of his legislative agenda.

Partisan presidents have sought to put a stronger partisan imprint upon the executive branch, centralizing personnel decisions and favoring ideological loyalists or spinmeisters over career civil servants or nonpartisan experts. It is hard to imagine presidents less interested in "neutral competence" than Ronald Reagan or George W. Bush. Partisan presidents, particularly Reagan and George W. Bush, have actively campaigned for their party's candidates and sought to use the national party committees as tools of governance. Reagan, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush all showed an interest in their party's long-term fortunes that escaped, say, Jimmy Carter. George W. Bush, perhaps our most partisan president, showed limited interest in wooing the conventionally "objective" media. Barack Obama has built ties with liberal talk show hosts and made a point of singling out representatives of the black and Spanish-language media at press conferences.

We need to move beyond outdated notions of presidents as above party politics and instead understand presidents who are passionately engaged in them and seek to use their parties as tools of governance.
The Modern Presidency and Political Parties

Most scholars of the presidency agree that a distinctive modern presidency emerged in the first half of the twentieth century, first under Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt, then, most fully, under Franklin D. Roosevelt (Greenstein 1978). Generally speaking, the heyday of the “modern presidency” (roughly from the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt through those of Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon) saw political parties in decline in the electorate, in government, and as organizations. Roosevelt alienated southern Democrats through his wages-and-hours bill and his attempt to “pack” the Supreme Court; increasingly, these southerners aligned with Republicans as part of a “conservative coalition” opposed to expansion of the New Deal. This split only grew over the next generation, making it difficult for Democratic presidents to look to their party to serve as a base of support in Congress and elsewhere (Greenstein 1978).

The Rise of the Partisan Presidency

The past quarter century has seen a reversal of the trend toward weaker relationships between presidents and their parties. Beginning with Ronald Reagan, recent presidents have increasingly relied upon their parties for support both in the electorate and in Congress. They have presented a more distinctively partisan image to voters and found it difficult to cultivate support from the opposition. They have sought to lead their parties, using the national committees to garner support for their policies, campaigning extensively for their parties’ candidates, and even seeking to mold their parties’ futures.

This presidential era is partisan in more ways than one—most obviously, through the close ties binding presidents to their parties. But it is also partisan in that the executive branch is used as a tool to support the president’s agenda; advice is valued to the extent that it promotes the party’s platform and the president’s political future, rather than how it fulfills the ideals of “neutral competence.” Finally, this presidency is partisan because the president performs as a partisan in the combat of the “permanent campaign.” The parties that these presidents lead are not the decentralized, nonideological federations of the nineteenth century. They are nationalized, ideologically coherent, and headquartered in Washington—ultimately in the Oval Office (Aldrich 1995).

While some of the elements of the partisan presidency emerged under Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan defined the partisan presidency as surely as Franklin Roosevelt did the modern presidency. In an era when many look
back to the 1980s as a less divisive period, we must remember what a polarizing figure Reagan himself was. He sought to remake the Republican Party in his conservative image and to vault it into majority status; in this mission, he repeatedly campaigned for Republican candidates. He used the Republican National Committee to win support for his programs and worked closely with Republican leaders in Congress, especially Senate Majority Leader Howard Baker. In response to Reaganism, House Democrats devolved more authority unto Speaker Tip O'Neill (Rohde 1991). Reagan polarized the electorate more than any of his predecessors, even Richard Nixon. Through centralization of policy decisions and appointment of ideological loyalists, Reagan managed to make the executive branch a tool of conservative governance (Milkis 1999). Despite his previous service as chairman of the Republican National Committee, George H. W. Bush harkened back to a less partisan style of leadership with his willingness to work with a Democratic Congress. But the era of détente did not last. Conservative Republicans angrily opposed Bush’s agreement to raise taxes in the 1990 budget agreement, and Bush found himself desperately tacking to the right to win back his base as the 1992 election approached. Meanwhile, congressional Democrats increasingly blocked his legislative proposals in anticipation of a Democratic win in November.

Bill Clinton was not as relentlessly partisan as his successor, but he still fits into the post-Reagan paradigm. While he had his own brief period of détente with congressional Republicans beginning in late 1996 and climaxing with the 1997 budget agreement, he usually faced a remarkably united and determined opposition. In 1993 and 1994, Republicans almost unanimously opposed Clinton’s budget and health care plan; in 1995 and 1996, an empowered GOP sought to impose its own agenda, attempting to overturn one of the defining characteristics of the modern presidency; and in 1998 and 1999, congressional Republicans attempted to remove Clinton from office, despite widespread public opposition. Clinton deeply polarized the electorate, experiencing an approval gap even larger than Reagan’s (Guth 2000; Harvey 2000).

George W. Bush set a new standard for partisanship by a president. If Reagan was the Franklin Roosevelt of the partisan presidency, Bush was the Lyndon Johnson, building upon his predecessor’s legacy to an amazing extent. Unlike Reagan, Bush was able to work mostly with Republican Congresses, freeing him of the need to win over Democrats. After the 2006 elections, he did little to mend fences, falling behind a wall of vetoes and filibusters to protect his policies. With the exception of the rally period after 9/11, Bush was intensely unpopular with Democrats.

While Barack Obama pledged to end an era of partisan division, his presidency, while young, shows far more continuity than change. Like George W. Bush, Obama has been able to work with Congresses of his party, while facing
relentless opposition from the other side. He, too, has polarized public opinion, inspiring intense devotion and loathing disturbing to many observers.

The President As Party Leader

Modern presidents placed little priority on leading their party and often found allies across the aisle. By contrast, partisan presidents have served as active party leaders, campaigning for candidates, working with party committees, and even trying to mold their party’s future. Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush both sought to make the Republican Party both a majority party and a more clearly conservative party. Bill Clinton, while less disciplined in his commitment, tirelessly raised money for the Democratic Party and outlined a “New Democrat” vision to appeal to the center (Rae 2000). Both Bush and Clinton set new standards for presidential travel and fundraising on behalf of their parties’ candidates (Kernell 2006). While Barack Obama has not yet laid out an agenda for a Democratic future, his ambitious legislative program seems to rest more on long-standing party goals (and the demands of an economic crisis) than on priorities of his own. Any plans he has must rely exclusively on Democratic votes, given the solidarity of Republicans in opposition.

A Partisan Public?

The approval gap is the difference between the percentage of the president’s partisans who approve of his performance and the percentage of members of the opposite party who do. Before 1980, presidents rarely experienced an approval gap over forty points; Dwight Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy enjoyed popularity across party lines; while Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter confronted significant opposition within their own parties. Partisan presidents have experienced a much larger approval gap than their predecessors. From Eisenhower through Carter, no president had an average approval gap of more than forty-one points; the approval gap never exceeded forty-eight points in any quarter. By contrast, Ronald Reagan had an average approval gap of 52.9 points; Bill Clinton experienced one of 55 points, falling below 50 points in only two quarters (Jacobson 2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2007a).

George W. Bush set new standards for approval gaps. He not only experienced the largest approval gaps ever measured but was the first president to have one exceeding seventy points, as he did during most of the 2004 campaign (Jacobson 2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2007a). For most of his presidency, Bush
received more than 90 percent approval among Republicans, making him one of the most popular presidents ever with his own party; in 2004, his support among Democrats was among the worst ever received by a president from the opposition party. During his last year in office, with an economic crisis replacing Iraq in the headlines, Bush’s support among Republicans finally began to crumble, sending his overall ratings into the twenties. In 2006, this polarization came back to haunt Republicans, as they lost six seats in the Senate and thirty in the House. Not only did Democrats vote almost unanimously for their party, but exit polls showed 57 percent of independents voting Democratic in House races (Jacobson 2007b). Two years later, Republicans lost eight more Senate seats and twenty-one in the House.

Obama’s presidency has featured an approval gap similar to that of his predecessor. For example, the Gallup Poll found during the week of November 16 to 22, 2009, that 82 percent of Democrats approved of Obama’s performance, but only 16 percent of Republicans did—an approval gap of 66 percent. His average approval gap, according to Gallup, has exceeded sixty points since March. This places him firmly in George W. Bush territory.

Partisan presidents are also operating in a political system in which public opinion has become much more polarized along party lines (Bartels 2000; Hetherington 2001; Lawrence 2001; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006; Jacobson 2007a; Nivola and Brady 2007). Americans perceive far more ideological distance between themselves and presidents than they did in the 1950s and 1960s; arguably, more and more citizens see an enemy, not a leader, in the White House (Hetherington and Globetti 2003). The past three presidents have spawned opposition of unusual intensity in the “birthers,” the “truthers,” and the conspiracy theorists who accused Bill Clinton of murder. While such extremism has always flourished at the far ends of American politics, more mainstream figures seem to be embracing it than in the past.

Partisan Elections

Modern presidents such as Eisenhower, Johnson, and Nixon received substantial cross-party support; their campaigns downplayed partisan themes in favor of invocations of national unity. By contrast, partisan presidents must operate in an environment of increased party loyalty and growing ideological polarization. Candidates find it difficult to win over cross-partisans and may decide that swing voters have become rare. According to the American National Election Studies (ANES), the 2000 and 2004 elections showed the highest level of party loyalty in history: in 2000, 87 percent of voters supported the
presidential candidate of their party; in 2004, 90 percent did. Not surprisingly, the 2004 race also found both campaigns focusing on turning out their core supporters. The ANES showed that Republicans expressed toward John Kerry the most negative views of any Democratic candidate since George McGovern; Democrats gave George W. Bush the lowest thermometer rating that they have ever bestowed on a Republican nominee.

In 2006, the partisan presidency may have reached its logical conclusion. Exit polls showed that 91 percent of Republicans remained loyal to their party’s House candidates; the base stood firm. But only 7 percent of Democrats voted Republican, and fewer than two in five independents did. Not surprisingly, a Republican House could not rest only on a foundation of Republican votes. In 2008, according to exit polls, 89 percent of Democrats backed Obama, while John McCain won 90 percent of Republicans, showing little change from previous elections.

If the “reformed” presidential process of the 1970s produced nominees such as Carter and McGovern, who had had little contact with their party establishments, the “postreformed” process of the past quarter century has produced nominees backed by party insiders during the “invisible primary” (Cohen et al. 2008). In some ways, Barack Obama marks a shift from the two decades of insider control. Hillary Rodham Clinton was the establishment choice for the Democratic nomination, and Obama benefited from the support of many liberal activists alienated by her refusal to apologize for her vote on the Iraq War. On the other hand, he also enjoyed the backing of such quintessential insiders as Tom Daschle and Richard M. Daley; nor did his candidacy open deep ideological divisions within the party, since Obama and Clinton agreed on virtually all issues. Despite the months of struggle, Democrats united fairly easily during the summer of 2008. After his victory, Obama stocked his administration with numerous veterans of the Clinton administration, including his leading opponent for the nomination.

Congressional Relations

Modern presidents often could not depend upon their congressional parties for legislative support. But the period of the partisan presidency coincides with the rise of polarization and party leadership in Congress (Rohde 1991). In an era of increased partisanship, presidents find it more difficult to win support across party lines in Congress. But it is also true that presidents are now better able to rely on their congressional party for support than their predecessors could (Sinclair 2000). Barack Obama has delegated much of his domestic policy to the Democratic congressional leadership; even his
chief of staff is a former chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee.

But congressional partisanship, of course, goes far deeper than the personalities of particular presidents. The voting records and constituencies of congressional Democrats and Republicans increasingly diverge; party leaders wield more clout than they once did. Even a president who wanted an old-fashioned bipartisan relationship with Congress, George H. W. Bush, was ultimately unable to have one. Clinton’s brief period of détente with congressional Republicans ended not only because of the Monica Lewinsky scandal but also because Speaker Newt Gingrich nearly lost his position in an uprising by conservatives who were angry that he had “sold out.” Partisan presidents have helped create our polarized system, but they also must operate within it. The options available to them are limited.

Barack Obama originally sought to reach out to congressional Republicans, but his efforts bore virtually no fruit. Two cycles of Democratic triumph had nearly eliminated the moderate Republicans who might have been disposed to cooperation. Republican leaders, especially Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell and House Minority Whip Eric Cantor, found it easy to rally their troops around united opposition to the new president’s program. Republican opposition to Obama’s major initiatives—the economic stimulus, “cap and trade,” financial regulation, and health care reform—has been virtually unanimous. Obama has had to rely entirely on Democratic votes to support his program. While he has been subject to the divisions within the party, he has also benefited from the desires of his co-partisans for a Democratic president to succeed.

Partisan Administration

Modern presidents led an executive branch in which party politics played a diminishing role. Technocrats and personal loyalists replaced patronage hacks in key jobs, especially under Kennedy and Johnson (Milkis 1999). Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower relied heavily on the “neutral competence” of the Bureau of the Budget in shaping their domestic policies. Kennedy appointed Republicans as secretaries of defense and treasury and as national security advisor; Carter often preferred technocrats or corporate executives to fill top positions. Johnson had nonpartisan task forces, dominated by academics and other specialists, formulate his leading policy proposals. Nixon’s first cabinet was so ideologically diverse as to lack coherence (Nathan 1983; Moe 1985).

Nixon set the pattern for presidents taking greater control of the executive branch. Frustrated by the tendency of appointees to “go native” and by
the continuing power of civil servants and clientele groups, Nixon sought to remake his administration in 1972 and 1973 (Nathan 1983). He centralized power in the White House and in a handful of trusted aides, he increased the power of the White House Personnel Office, he appointed loyalists to cabinet and subcabinet positions, and he tried to use the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to rein in regulatory agencies (Nathan 1983).

While Nixon’s efforts were thwarted by Watergate, Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush showed that his methods could reorient government in a more conservative direction. Both presidents selected ideologically sympathetic subordinates, centralized policy and personnel decisions in the White House, and used the OMB to curb regulatory excess. Bush took the “administrative presidency” a step further by seeking to curb the power of public employee unions (Moe 1985; Aberbach 2004). The Reagan and George W. Bush administrations also sought to secure greater partisan/ideological control of the judiciary by creating recruitment processes that emphasized philosophy as much as competence or political connections (McKeever 2004; O’Brien 2004; Yalof 2002).

Like his Democratic predecessor Bill Clinton, Barack Obama does not seem to share Republicans’ instinctive hostility to the career bureaucracy. Indeed, his cabinet features a substantial share of nonpartisan technocrats such as Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and Secretary of the Treasury Timothy Geithner. His top appointees also include several longtime Democratic figures—such as Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius—as well as veterans of the last Democratic administration—Attorney General Eric Holder and White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel. Unlike other presidents, Obama has not brought a large retinue of personal intimates from his home state. Even those Chicago figures who accompanied Obama to the White House are mostly national Democratic insiders, such as Emanuel and advisor David Axelrod. This mixture of technocrats and party veterans reminds one of the cabinets found in European governments.

**Partisan Media**

Many scholars of the presidency see as the model for presidential press relations the amiable back-and-forth between reporters and presidents like Franklin D. Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy; they may also envision the reliance of Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan on televised addresses, presumably aimed at the nation as a whole. Neither paradigm fits the reality of media relations in this partisan era. Since Nixon, administrations have actively tried to manage the news
through the White House Office of Communications (Maltese 1994). With the rise of the Internet and cable television, the audiences for presidential addresses, except in crisis situations, have been declining; there is some evidence, at least for George W. Bush, that those audiences have also become partisan. Evidence continues to mount that presidents can do little to shift public opinion (Edwards 2003). Under those circumstances, and given the polarized state of public opinion, why should presidents not focus their public relations efforts on motivating support from their loyalists?

Both the Clinton and George W. Bush administrations sought to bypass the conventional media: Clinton by using the “alternative media” (such as the Internet and cable television) and Bush by using conservative media outlets such as Fox News and conservative talk radio (Maltese 1994; Kurtz 1998). While most media outlets have audiences that reflect the partisan diversity of the general public, a few have striking tilts in viewership. A 2006 survey by the Pew Research Center found that 34 percent of Republicans “regularly watch” Fox News; only 20 percent of Democrats do. One in ten Republicans regularly listen to Rush Limbaugh’s radio show; only one in one hundred Democrats do (Pew Research Center 2006).

The Obama era has only seen these trends accelerate. As in previous administrations, nothing encourages partisan media more than being out of power. Conservative commentators (both long-standing figures such as Rush Limbaugh and Ann Coulter and relative newcomers like Glenn Beck and Michelle Malkin) have increased their visibility during Obama’s few months in office. When Democrats wanted to attack Republican leaders during the early days of the Obama presidency, they chose former vice president Dick Cheney, former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, and Limbaugh rather than any currently serving officeholders. Obama himself has cultivated the Democratic “partisan press,” including liberal bloggers and talk show hosts such as Ed Schultz. In his press conferences, he has called upon representatives of the liberal website Huffington Post, the African American magazine *Ebony*, and the Spanish-language media.

This “new partisan press” has real political implications. Gary C. Jacobson finds that the failure to find weapons of mass destruction or to demonstrate a connection between Saddam Hussein and the attacks of September 11 undermined the support of Democrats and independents for the Iraq War. But Republicans continued to accept these justifications and so remained supportive of the war. This differing perception of reality may be due to Republicans' consumption of conservative media that consistently supported Bush’s rationales for war (Jacobson 2007a). Similarly, polls have found large numbers of Republicans believing that Barack Obama was not born in the United States.
Barack Obama pledged to end an era of partisan division, but his ambition seems to have borne little fruit. His rhetoric of national unity appealed to a public desire for harmony—but there is no policy consensus that could give form to it. Obama’s charisma does allow for some outreach beyond the Democratic base to the young, some independents, and those transfixed by a pop-culture phenomenon. Many parts of his personality, however, serve to alienate his conservative opponents. A biracial, Ivy League-educated intellectual who grew up outside the continental United States and spent most of his adult life in urbane locales like Hyde Park and Morningside Heights naturally grates on the sensibilities of some Americans. But one could make similar statements about a often inarticulate Texas evangelical born to oil wealth or a onetime McGovern supporter and admitted marijuana user with a history of marital infidelity. And Obama’s personal popularity (while hardly staggering) remains higher than his job approval as president or support for the Democratic Party.

Unlike Bill Clinton or George W. Bush, Barack Obama was not the choice of party insiders. But once he won the nomination, he benefited from a united Democratic Party eager to regain the White House. He was also aided by the rise in Democratic Party identification during George W. Bush’s second term. Despite his “postpartisan” rhetoric, Obama has polarized the electorate much as Bush did, and he has advanced an agenda that has so far proved to have little cross-party appeal.

Implications of the Partisan Presidency

The partisan presidency may have some positive effects on our political system. Voter turnout has increased in the past two presidential elections, which both featured strikingly polarized views of the candidates among voters (Abramowitz and Stone 2006; Hetherington 2007).

Voters report clearer images of the two parties, images with greater ideological coherence than in the past. The 2004 ANES showed the highest number of voters ever who cared who won the election and who tried to influence someone else’s vote. The decline of the Progressive doctrines of “objectivity” in journalism and “neutral competence” in administration may have undermined the credibility of the mass media and the authority of the federal government. An “objective” media, however, can also demobilize voters, turning citizens into spectators, while turning over government to unelected experts can undermine democratic control.
But citizens also report greater ideological distance between themselves and presidents, which may be associated with increased distrust (political trust has fallen substantially since the mid-1960s; one effect has been to suppress presidential-approval ratings) (Hetherington 2001, 2005). Our three most recent presidents have generated unusually intense support and opposition, often distorting the national debate. The relentlessness of the “permanent campaign” makes it difficult for politicians of opposite parties to work together.

United government in this partisan era may lead to greater productivity, but it may also lead to the adoption of policies out of sync with public sentiment. Politicians may then respond more to ideological (or interest-group-related) currents within their party than to public desires or to objective expertise. Divided government may lead to George H. W. Bush-era gridlock or to Clinton-era political warfare. Nor do strong parties in our era produce processes of collective decision making that might restrain presidents; instead, they often serve as cults of personality adoring the occupant of the Oval Office.

Has the twenty-first century produced a throwback to the politics of the nineteenth? Party loyalty has replaced individualism, patronage (of a sort) has replaced good-government Progressivism, and a new partisan press has replaced objectivity. But today’s highly centralized, ideologically coherent, presidency-centered parties bear little resemblance to the decentralized, philosophically diverse parties of 150 years ago.

Are we perhaps seeing the Europeanization of American politics? Legislatures with tight party discipline, an openly biased media, and ideologically fervent partisanship were all once seen as characteristic of the politics of Great Britain or France but not of the United States. European parties once famously drew upon divisions of class and religion, while American parties could not rely on such loyalties. But the support that African Americans give to Democrats or that white evangelicals give to Republicans show exactly that sort of commitment. The 2008 election found such geographic and demographic divides only expanding, despite Obama’s pledge of national healing.

Even in this polarized era, our political system continues to restrain presidential partisanship. The separation of powers often produces conflict that does not follow party lines; it also allows for divided government that can force cross-partisan coalitions, although they have become more difficult to form in recent years. The numerous countermajoritarian features of our system—ranging from the Supreme Court to the Senate filibuster—continue to make party government only a limited possibility.

Despite Barack Obama’s efforts to reach across the partisan aisle, few Republicans have reached out to take his hand. Nor, given the content of Obama’s policies and the attitudes of the GOP base, has there been much reason for them to do so. Perhaps the war in Afghanistan will remake the par-
tisan divide, if Democratic doves turn against their president (as they did Lyndon Johnson) and Republicans rally around the commander in chief. Liberal activists have been disappointed by Obama’s policies on gay rights and the closing of Guantánamo Bay, but given his rock-solid support among minority voters (many of them culturally conservative), a primary challenge from the left appears unlikely. Some Rust Belt Democrats have turned critical of climate-change legislation that might negatively affect coal-burning utilities, but it is hard to imagine party leaders completely ignoring their concerns.

Even in a polarized system, Democrats could win a clear governing majority; 2008 seemed to have produced such a result. But the widespread use of the filibuster may have raised an insuperable hurdle in this era—it is hard to imagine the party winning more than sixty seats in the Senate. Democrats will probably suffer significant losses in 2010, if only those typical of a midterm election, and prospects of partisan dominance will grow fainter. A deep recession could hand Republicans a governing majority in 2012, although it would require them to swim against a demographic tide.

But most of the factors contributing to the partisan presidency appear to be long-term, not short-term; we are not likely to see a return to the above-the-fray style of the Eisenhower administration anytime soon. Perhaps polarization is the normal state of American politics, not just now but throughout history, with the modern presidency era as the exception, not the rule.

Notes

1. The author wishes to thank Harold Bass, James MacGregor Burns, Susan Dunn, John C. Green, Sidney Milkis, and Barbara Sinclair for their comments and suggestions.

2. For example, the Gallup Poll found that the audience for Bush’s address on June 27, 2005, in which he defended his Iraq policy, was 50 percent Republican, 27 percent independent, and 23 percent Democratic—a much more Republican group than the nation as a whole. Not surprisingly, three-quarters of viewers approved of the speech. A similar partisan pattern prevailed for many Bush addresses. See E. J. Dionne, “Who’s Listening to the President,” Washington Post, July 1, 2005, A25; Kenneth Bazinet, “Bush Jumps in Polls after War Speech,” Daily News (New York), June 30, 2005, www.nydailynews.com/archives/news/2005/06/30/2005-06-30_bush_jumps_in_polls_after_wa.html (last accessed March 29, 2010). At the time, the most recent Gallup Poll showed only 45 percent of Americans approved of Bush’s performance as president, with only 42 percent approving of his handling of Iraq.
THE POSTREFORM ERA of the U.S. House of Representatives began in 1975, halfway through a forty-year period of Democratic control. The liberal majority, frustrated by the dominance of southern committee chairs, shifted power in the chamber to party leaders. In exchange, they demanded a series of rule changes that also empowered the caucus, enabling the rank and file to participate in the development and implementation of party strategy.

When Republicans took control of the House after the 1994 elections, they adopted a new style of party governance. Like their predecessors, Republicans gave authority to the Speaker, Newt Gingrich, but they abandoned the Democrats' consensual style of party governance. Instead, they reempowered committee chairs but forced them to seek caucus support in frequent, competitive elections. This governing style remained in place when Dennis Hastert replaced Gingrich as Speaker.

The Democrats' return to power in 2007 raised some interesting questions. This time, Democrats would develop a party leadership structure upon ascending to power rather than in the middle of an extended reign. Would Speaker Nancy Pelosi bring back the consensual style that had been the hallmark of previous Democratic regimes? Or would she mimic the Republicans' approach of centralizing power in the hands of those who had triumphed in highly competitive, and frequent, leadership contests?

This chapter examines the first three years of the Pelosi speakership in search of preliminary answers to these questions. It begins with a review of Pelosi's political biography to discover her personal political style. We then examine the mood of the caucus since 2007 to establish the type of leadership
style that the party has desired. We then examine the leadership structure put in place in 2007 to see whether it more resembles the previous Democratic model or the existing Republican approach. Finally, we explore Pelosi’s floor strategy under both divided and unified government. Together, this should give us an initial snapshot of how party governance is being achieved in the Pelosi speakership.

The Politics of Nancy Pelosi

Nancy Pelosi, born in 1940, is the daughter of Thomas D’Alesandro, a congressman and three-term mayor of Baltimore and the head of an old-fashioned political machine. Biographies of Pelosi point to this formative experience as having educated her in the ways of politics (see, e.g., Bzdek 2008; Sandalow 2008). Throughout her youth, Pelosi watched as her father conducted party business from their residence. The house was often full of constituents seeking help from the mayor, who dispensed favors in exchange for party loyalty. Ideologically, her father was a New Deal Democrat, supporting job creation through public works at home and anticommmunism abroad.

In 1969, at the age of twenty-nine, Pelosi moved to San Francisco. In that era, San Francisco was the heart of New Left politics. That movement challenged the political and social conventions of the day, embracing public policies well to the left on the prevailing political spectrum.1 To this day, the phrase “San Francisco liberal” remains a moniker for the left wing of the Democratic Party.

Pelosi’s voting record as a U.S. Representative from San Francisco reflects her embrace of that city’s political ideology. Her DW-NOMINATE scores in her early years in Congress plant her firmly in the left wing of her party. In her first term from 1987 to 1988, her voting record was 1.5 standard errors to the left of the median House Democrat. Over time, she drifted back toward the center of her party, but at the time she was elected Speaker, she was still 0.6 standard errors to the left of the party median.

Figure 19.1 compares Pelosi’s voting record to other members of Congress who were elected Speaker in the postreform era.2 At the time of her election, her ideological position within the caucus was similar to that of Speaker Tip O’Neill and Speaker Jim Wright. Unique about Pelosi’s voting record, however, is the path that she took to get there. O’Neill and Wright began their careers as more centrist members of the caucus but drifted to the left over the years. Pelosi started out on the far left of her party and drifted back toward the center over time. Figure 19.2 demonstrates that this shift occurred in absolute
FIGURE 19.1
DW-nominate scores of future speakers relative to their caucus.

FIGURE 19.2
DW-nominate scores of future speakers.
terms, not just relative ones. The caucus moved to the left during her career, but she also drifted slightly to the right. The last Speaker whose ideology moderated over the course of his career was Joseph Martin, who served two nonconsecutive terms as Speaker in the 1940s and 1950s.

Thus, Nancy Pelosi brought an unusual brand of politics to the speakership. Her ideology came from San Francisco, and her governing style came from Baltimore. As we will see, that odd mixture is reflected in her performance as Speaker of the House.

The Mood of the Democratic Caucus

In their seminal article on leadership style in the U.S. House, Joseph Cooper and David Brady (1981) argue that successful leaders must adopt the style desired by the caucus. As is often the case in politics, one’s preference for leadership style is shaped primarily by what has come before. Thus, when a party has been out of power in the Congress for a significant period, it has a substantial pent-up demand for legislation. Thus, the caucus would be likely to desire a leader capable of enacting the party’s agenda.

Such was the case in 2007. House Democrats had chafed under the twelve-year rule of a Republican House majority—and the six-year rule of a Republican president—whose policies they abhorred. Democrats had not only failed to enact their own ideas but watched as Republican majorities passed legislation that they believed to be destructive. Additionally, the tone of political debate had grown poisonous due to years of partisan wrangling.

So, what did the base of the Democratic Party want? They wanted to roll back the George W. Bush-era fiscal policies that they saw as wrongheaded and counterproductive. They wanted to advance their own policy ideas on health care, environmental, fiscal, and labor policy. And many of them wanted to punish members of an administration they viewed as having been illegitimately elected and governed unconstitutionally. House Democrats were ready for a strong leader.

At the beginning of the 111th Congress in 2009, that mood was even stronger. Democrats now controlled the White House and had a nearly filibuster-proof majority in the Senate, as well as a substantial majority in the House. (In June 2009, they gained their sixtieth vote in the Senate after Republican Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania switched parties and Democrat Al Franken was declared the victor in his Minnesota Senate race after a prolonged recount; they then lost it when Republican Scott Brown won the Senate seat vacated by the death of Senator Edward Kennedy.) They believed that they could now pass all of the items that had been blocked during
the two previous years by the president and the Senate. The time appeared right for a strong leader who would push through the Democratic agenda. Party governance was the order of the day.

**Leadership Structure**

The postreform era was institutionalized when Democrats reallocated power among party leaders, committee and subcommittee chairs, and the caucus. Previously, power had been centralized in the committee chairs, and southern Democrats had used the seniority system to guarantee that they controlled most major committees, especially the Rules Committee. Thus, legislation could not make it to the House floor without the approval of southern Democrats, who were more conservative than the caucus as a whole.

In 1975, Democrats reshuffled the cards. Power was shifted from the committee chairs upward to the party leaders and downward to the subcommittee chairs and caucus members. Party leaders were given authority over the committee-assignment process and the selection of committee chairs with the input of caucus representatives. They increased the number of subcommittees and freed the subcommittee chairs from dominance by the full committee chairs. Caucus members were given a voice in all decisions of the leadership and the power to veto party leaders' choices for committee chairmanships. In short, Democrats established a collaborative system of party governance.

When Republicans took charge in 1995, they overhauled the structure of party governance. They reempowered committee chairs by reducing the number of subcommittees and giving full committee chairs greater authority over their work. However, committee chairs were limited to serving for three terms, and the seniority system was virtually abolished. Committee chairs were elected by the caucus through a highly competitive process that gave them a great deal of power for a short period. Instead of using collaboration to monitor the work of their leaders, Republicans used competition (Butler 2007).

Thus, when Nancy Pelosi came to power, Democrats had two models to draw on in deciding how to allocate power. They could return to the collaborative system of earlier Democrats or keep the Republicans' competitive system. Table 19.1 demonstrates that Democrats did not significantly expand the number of committees and subcommittees. In 1995, Republicans had reduced the number of committees from twenty-seven to twenty and the number of subcommittees from 123 to 86. By the time they lost the majority, Republicans had allowed the number of committees and subcommittees to grow to twenty-one and ninety-six, respectively. In 2007, Democrats added
Table 19.1

Number of House Committees and Subcommittees in Selected Congresses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Congress</th>
<th>Committees</th>
<th>Subcommittees</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>103rd (1993–1994)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>110th (2007–2008)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>111th (2009–2010)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

one full committee, the Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming, and six subcommittees, three of which were appropriations subcommittees that the Republicans had eliminated. Thus, Democrats did not increase participation in policy making by expanding the ranks of subcommittee chairs as they had in 1975.

Despite their long-term opposition to term limits of any kind, Democrats adopted them for committee chairs, keeping the policy originally established by the Republicans. At the time of their adoption, many analysts were skeptical that Democrats would keep term limits in place six years later, when they would first have an impact. So, while we are uncertain as to whether the Democrats have established effective term limits, we do have evidence regarding the extent to which Democrats are holding competitive elections for committee chairs.

In 2007, the senior member of each standing committee was chosen as chair with little debate. Some of these chairs had even held that position in 1994, when Democrats had last controlled the House. By the end of 2009, several openings had occurred due to the death of the committee chair or his shifting to head another panel. In each of these cases, the next most senior Democrat got the nod with very little competition. The only break from seniority occurred when Henry Waxman (CA) defeated John Dingell (MI) for the chairmanship of the Energy and Commerce Committee in 2009. This takeover closely resembled those of the 1970s and 1980s, when an aging chairman, whose views on the issues in his committee’s jurisdiction were more conservative than those of the caucus, was pushed aside by the second-ranking member whose views were more liberal. Thus, even if Democrats enforce term limits on committee chairs in 2013, there is no sign that they will adopt the Republican model of competitive elections. Instead, they appear headed for a modified seniority system in which the senior member almost always chairs the committee, perhaps only for a limited time before passing the reins to the next most senior member.
Floor Strategy

Pelosi’s first year as Speaker began with House passage of the Democrats’ “Six for ’06” agenda. Like the Republicans’ 1994 Contract with America, Six for ’06 consisted of popular items that had been blocked in previous congresses by the majority party. In the first one hundred legislative hours, Speaker Pelosi successfully engaged in responsible party governance by holding her party together to pass its campaign agenda fully intact.

The remainder of the Congress would be much more challenging. Two areas of policy dominated the agenda for the 110th Congress: military and intelligence issues and the annual appropriations bills. The political alignment made party governance in these areas extraordinarily difficult. Regarding military and intelligence issues, President Bush had ordered a surge of forces in Iraq and sought authorization (mandated by the Supreme Court) for the detention and surveillance policies he had put in place shortly after 9/11. Most Democrats wanted the military to withdraw from Iraq and opposed the president’s intelligence initiatives. In the Senate, Democrats held a small majority, insufficient to break a Republican filibuster.

On these issues, Speaker Pelosi had the House pass a maximalist position, putting into effect timelines for withdrawal from Iraq and sharp restrictions on the president’s detention and surveillance policies. The Senate was unable to do so and ultimately acquiesced to the Republican policies with only minor amendments when funding was about to run out and authorizations were about to expire. Rather than cut the best possible deal and declare victory, Pelosi refused to compromise. Instead, she allowed the conference reports to pass the House with the support of virtually all Republicans and a small number of moderate Democrats. Most Speakers would have avoided such a public defeat for fear that it would diminish their power. In fact, her predecessor, Speaker Hastert, had enunciated a “majority of the majority” rule, arguing that no bill would pass the House unless it was supported by a majority of Republicans. Pelosi emphasized position-taking over victory, believing it necessary to demonstrate clearly the differences between the two parties on these issues.

On appropriations bills, Pelosi avoided conflict. In 2007, appropriators in the two chambers ultimately reached compromises with the White House that allowed for the belated passage of the spending measures. In 2008, President Bush sharpened his rhetoric by threatening to veto any bills that spent more than his budget request. Rather than provoking a public conflict, Democrats passed a continuing resolution that delayed spending decisions until a new president was inaugurated. They believed that a Democrat
would retake the White House, so the new president would sign appropri­ations bills that spent significantly more than any amount they would be able to negotiate with Bush.

As they expected, the political climate changed dramatically after the November elections. Democrats did indeed reclaim the White House, along with gaining a substantially larger margin in the House. By spring 2009, it had become clear that Democrats would soon also have a filibuster-proof majority in the Senate. Pure responsible party governance appeared possible as Republicans had no capacity to block initiatives backed by a unified Democratic Party. House and Senate Democrats quickly executed their plan for increased domestic spending as they belatedly passed the appropriations bills left over from the previous years. After that, they moved on to the more difficult items on their agenda—legislation on climate change and comprehensive health care reform.

Both climate-change and health care legislation initially passed the House with a very narrow majority. On these major parts of the Democratic Party agenda, Pelosi again had the House pass a bill as far to the left as possible for its opening position. However, this move was now part of a larger strategy designed to advance the party’s agenda.

Although the first move is identical, the ultimate strategy appears to be different.

In charge of the White House and with a filibuster-proof majority in the Senate, Democrats had a unique opportunity to enact legislation that they have long favored.

In late October 2009, House Democratic leaders crafting their chamber’s health care reform bill were having trouble finding a majority due to objections by some of their moderate members. One concession they made was to delink the public option from Medicare reimbursement rates. Party leaders indicated that they felt comfortable making this concession in light of Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid’s efforts to include a public option in the bill he brought to the Senate floor. Had he adopted the Finance Committee’s more moderate position of establishing private-sector co-ops, House Democrats would have wanted the negotiating counterbalance of Medicare reimbursement (Newmyer and Dennis 2009).

In December 2009, the Senate passed a health care reform bill that included a publicly managed health care exchange—a middle ground between the public option and private-sector co-ops. However, Senate Democrats lost their filibuster-proof majority in January when Republican Scott Brown won a special election in Massachusetts. This precluded the Senate from accepting major structural changes to the bill in negotiations with the House. Speaker Pelosi prevailed upon her caucus to accept the Senate bill with
whatever limited changes could be accomplished through reconciliation—a process that would allow for Senate passage by a simple majority. In the end, Pelosi made the necessary compromises in the interest of enacting the most liberal bill possible.

As the House was adjourning for 2009, Pelosi held a press conference in which she discussed the legislative agenda for the following year. She indicated that the House would not take the lead to enact other controversial Democratic priorities such as comprehensive immigration reform and the Employee Free Choice Act (commonly known as “Card Check”). Instead, she would wait for the Senate to act before bringing those measures to the floor (Allen 2009). Again, this suggests that Pelosi’s ultimate goal was not position taking but passing legislation as far to the left as possible. Her floor strategy in the 111th Congress was designed to influence the legislative outcome, not to demonstrate ideological purity.

Conclusion

Nancy Pelosi’s political background is reflected in her leadership style as Speaker of the House. Her exposure to the Baltimore machine taught her that parties could be mobilized to advance a policy agenda. Her political ideology, consistent with her San Francisco base, energized her to push for legislation as far to the left as her party would allow. Moreover, her ascension to the speakership after twelve years of Republican rule created the opportunity to engage in responsible party governance. The rank and file of her party wanted to enact an aggressive policy agenda and has given her the necessary power to accomplish that goal.

Nonetheless, her leadership style appears so far to be personal and situational, not institutional. She has accepted the institutional structure of her Republican predecessors rather than returning to the Democratic Party model. She has not reestablished the Democrats’ participatory approach to party governance, but she has not instituted the vibrant competition of the Republican approach either. Rather, she has taken the Republican institutional structure and the Democratic values as givens, deviating only when there has been a roadblock to passing the party agenda. When the chairmanship of the Energy and Commerce Committee was held by a member the party did not deem strong enough on environmental issues, she first worked around the problem by establishing a new committee on Energy Independence and Global Warning, headed by a staunch environmentalist. Then she allowed the Energy and Commerce Committee chair to be replaced by someone more acceptable to the liberal base of the caucus.
Where Pelosi has had the opportunity to appoint people to positions of leadership, she has pushed aside rivals and elevated allies. She unsuccessfully tried to get John Murtha (PA) elected to the majority leader position over her rival and second in command, Steny Hoyer (MD). Also, she refused to reappoint Jane Harman (CA), whom she had clashed with in the past, to a new term as chair of the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. But even there Pelosi replaced Harman with the next most-senior member of the committee who was untainted by scandal.

On the floor, Pelosi has pushed the caucus to pass legislation as far to the left as possible. She has carved out narrow majorities on key agenda items, personally lobbying moderates to obtain the last needed votes for passage. She appears determined to take advantage of this rare opportunity to enact a Democratic Party agenda, even if she has to sacrifice the seats of a significant number of her party members. As a result, the Washington press was full of accounts in late 2009 of moderate Democrats expressing their fear of defeat and their reluctance to go out on a limb for health care reform, having already done so on climate change.

Speaker Pelosi’s approach to party governance may well prove effective in the current political climate. However, she has not put in place an institutional structure that allows the caucus to participate in the decision-making process either through collaboration or competition. She is therefore vulnerable to meeting the same fate as her predecessors Jim Wright and Newt Gingrich, who got too far in front of their colleagues and were removed from power when things went badly.

Notes

1. For a full discussion of the New Left, see E. J. Dionne Jr. (2004, ch. 1).
2. In this figure, negative values reflect a voting record that is more centrist than that of the median party member. Thus, a positive value for a Democrat reflects a voting record to the left of the party median, and a positive value for a Republican reflects a voting record to the right of the party median.
3. For DW-NOMINATE scores, positive numbers are conservative, and negative ones are liberal. The algorithm forces scores to show a linear career path.
THE CONCEPT OF REPRESENTATION is at the heart of our study of political parties, candidate competition, and elections in a contemporary democracy such as the United States. Nowhere is it more relevant than in the study of elections to the House of Representatives, an institution established by name and constitutional imperative as the locus of representation in the national government. However, as numerous scholars have pointed out, representation is a complex, multidimensional concept that is difficult to study empirically (Achen 1978; Miller and Stokes 1963; Pitkin 1967). In this chapter we report on a study using new measures to address enduring questions in the study of representation in Congress.

Our point of departure is the spatial model of candidate competition based on ideas developed most prominently by Anthony Downs (1957). The elements of this model are widely accepted in political science and inform a great deal of theoretical and empirical work related to the problem of voting choice, electoral competition, and representation. In fact, the spatial model relates to the way commentators and ordinary citizens think about campaigns and elections, for example, when an observer suggests that candidates win elections by appealing to centrist voters.

The essential ingredients of the spatial model are simple: candidates are located on a left-to-right dimension of conflict or policy space, ranging from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Voters locate themselves in the same space based on their policy preferences. An advantage of spatial models for the analysis of representation, then, is that they allow us to place voters, candidates, and officeholders on the same ideological dimension of political
conflict and choice. Voters choose the candidate closest to them, and candidates compete by attracting votes based on where they position themselves on the liberal-conservative scale. This setup leads us to a fundamental assumption that guides our analysis throughout this chapter: the closer the voter is to the candidate or officeholder on the liberal-conservative dimension, the better represented he or she is.

**Median-Voter and Partisan Theories of Representation**

In theory, candidates and representatives align themselves with their constituents to win election and reelection. Elections are based on the principle of equality, with each voter having one, and only one, vote. An egalitarian system of representation composed of voters who choose the candidate closest to them on the liberal-conservative scale, with two candidates competing for votes by the positions they take on that scale, should cause candidates to converge on the position of the median voter in the constituency because the median voter is pivotal in creating a majority (Downs 1957; Merrill and Grofman 1999; Morton 2006).

Figure 20.1 illustrates the logic of competition between two candidates in a spatial model with an example based on a hypothetical congressional district composed of five voters and two candidates running for election in the district. Voter₃ is the median voter in this example because she is in the middle of the distribution of voters. Note that opinion among all voters in this district tends to the liberal side because a majority of the voters are left of center. Indeed, by the median-voter theorem, district opinion can be thought of as represented by the location of Voter₃, which is left of center. If Voter₃ were located to the right of center, say, very close to Voter₄, then the district could fairly be described as relatively conservative, compared with the district depicted in figure 20.1.

![Figure 20.1](image)

*The median voter and candidates in a hypothetical congressional district.*
In the district represented in figure 20.1, which candidate will win? By the logic of the spatial model of voting, Candidate 1 wins because she attracts three votes to two votes for Candidate 2. This follows because Voters 1, 2, 3 are all closer to Candidate 1 than they are to Candidate 2, and in the spatial model, voters support the candidate closest to their preferred positions. Several other conclusions that follow from this example are important to the rest of our analysis:

1. Because we define representation as proximity to a candidate’s position, Voters 1, 2, 3 are better represented by Candidate 1 than they are by Candidate 2. This is merely another way of saying that these voters will vote for Candidate 1, as explained above.

2. It is also true, however, that Voter 3 is better represented by Candidate 1 than are Voters 1, 2, 4, 5 because Voter 3 is closer to Candidate 1 than any of these other voters. By the same logic, the order of representation offered by Candidate 1 to the five voters is Voter 3 > Voter 2 > Voter 1 > Voter 4 > Voter 5, because the distance between each voter and Candidate 1 increases in that order. This example illustrates our premise from the spatial model that representation decreases with distance between the voter and a candidate. Similar statements, of course, with a different ordering of the voters, can be made about the representation offered by Candidate 2.

3. While it is true that if the candidates remain at their current positions in figure 20.1, Candidate 1 wins, Candidate 2 can change that outcome by moving closer to Voter 3 than Candidate 1 and thereby winning her vote. Candidate 2 could respond by moving closer still to Voter 1’s position, and so on, which is the logic behind the median-voter theorem: candidates converge on the position of the median voter in the electorate.1

One significant complication to inferences from the spatial model is the impact of political parties on how voters decide and how candidates compete. Political parties also form the basis of an understanding of how representation should work that is at odds with the ideal suggested by the importance of the median voter in spatial models. Studies of voting choice show that many voters are influenced by their party identification more strongly than by ideological considerations and that their vote choice often reflects party more than it does proximity to the candidates on an ideological or issue scale. If party can trump ideological and issue concerns in determining voter choice, it may also come into play in the strategies candidates follow in order to maximize votes. For example, voters’ reliance on party cues may cause candidates to take positions in campaigns that are distant from the median voter in their constituencies, especially in an era when the parties are relatively polarized (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998; Stonecash, Brewer, and Mariani 2002).
The example in figure 20.1 can illustrate how political parties might alter the calculations of candidates from what the simple spatial model expects. If we assume that the liberal voters are Democrats and the conservative voters are Republicans, and if Candidate_1 is a Democrat and Candidate_2 is a Republican, it is possible that Candidate_2 would not attract Voter_3 by moving closer than Candidate_1 because Voter_3 prefers Democrats to Republicans, even if the Republican is closer on the left-right scale. Other party pressures may constrain the candidates from converging on the median voter’s position, including the need to win a primary election composed of party voters and to attract funds and other resources from the national party.

From the perspective of a strictly egalitarian system of voting within the spatial model, pressures on candidates to diverge from the position of the median voter in their district might be seen as distorting the system away from the ideal. However, a competing conception of representation celebrates the role of political parties in the system and suggests an alternative ideal that departs from the median-voter standard. This tradition, often referred to as responsible party theory, emphasizes the importance of political parties as institutions that link popular preferences to governmental performance. In this model, political parties organize both voters and politicians around broad principles, interests, and goals (Ranney 1962; Schattschneider 1942). This structure may emerge in ways that are broadly consistent with the spatial model, as when Democratic officeholders, candidates, and voters take liberal positions against Republicans in and out of government who take conservative positions. However, when candidates take positions that diverge from one another because candidates have commitments to their parties, the median-voter logic may be offset by party pressures. Responsible party theory sees ideologically distinct candidates as desirable because programmatic differences between the two parties and their candidates give voters a clear choice.

Our analysis of representation in the House of Representatives draws on both the spatial and responsible parties models by evaluating the consequences of the median-voter and party-centered expectations for who gets represented. As noted, our approach adopts the spatial model’s perspective that defines representativeness as proximity on the left-right scale. This assumption of proximity as representativeness (or distance as decreasing representativeness) is fundamental to the analysis we report (Achen 1978; Griffin and Newman 2007).

Employing a proximity-based analysis, we will evaluate the median-voter and party-centered ideals of representation. These ideals suggest two hypotheses:

1. The closer the individual constituent is to the median voter in the district, the better that individual will be represented by candidates for the House seat in the district.
2. Constituents who share the party of the candidate or Representative are better represented than those who do not share the party or are from the opposite party.

These hypotheses may seem to conflict with one another, since the median voter in the typical district is relatively centrist, while partisans are off-center to the left or right, depending on their party. As we shall see, however, it is possible for both hypotheses to be supported, even though they represent different ideals of representation—the first from the traditional spatial model, the second from responsible party theory.

Against these two ideals of what constitutes good representation, we can also consider influences that may distort the process away from either ideal. In this chapter, we investigate the impact of political activism. Activists have repeatedly been shown to have different—often more extreme—views than the public at large. If their participation by contributing money, campaigning, or performing other actions beyond voting is efficacious, activists may have disproportionate influence over electoral outcomes. A major focus of research on political participation (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995) is that activists have the potential to distort the process of representation toward their interests, away from the preferences and interests of ordinary citizens. Politicians may be more attentive to activist participants because they can be more effective at communicating their preferences and because activists provide support and resources that politicians need in exchange for policy concessions. Socioeconomic status is a related factor that may distort the process because high-status individuals are more likely than low-status citizens to become activists, and high-status individuals may have greater access to political decision makers because of shared social networks and experiences.

Research Design

We utilize a study of the 2006 U.S. House elections that surveys registered voters and district experts in a sample of districts. The voter sample pools respondents from two surveys of registered voters in the study districts: the Indiana University Congressional Election Study and the University of California, Davis (UC Davis), module of the Cooperative Congressional Election Study. Both studies drew respondents from a random cross-section national sample of ninety-nine U.S. House districts and a supplementary sample of fifty-five districts that were open or that close observers of congressional elections judged to be competitive. We conducted an independent survey
of district experts, who could provide information about the two parties’ candidates running in each House district in the sample. These experts comprise 2004 national convention delegates and state legislators in both political parties who resided in one of the sample districts. A key component of the district-expert survey is a pair of questions that ask informants to place the Democratic and Republican candidates in their districts on a seven-point liberal-conservative scale identical to the one put to respondents in the Indiana and UC Davis studies. We treat the mean expert rating as the candidate’s “true” position, after correcting for partisan sources of bias. In the district-level analysis, we report results from the random cross-section of districts combined with the oversampled competitive districts. In the individual-constituent analysis, we employ the full sample, with weights to adjust for the fact that competitive districts were oversampled.

Results

Figure 20.2 makes use of our data on the placement of citizens, incumbents, and challengers on a common liberal-conservative scale in the 2006 election. It provides a picture of the 2006 elections that fits with most other research on congressional elections, but it has the advantage of placing these key actors—constituents and politicians vying for their support—in a common framework consistent with the spatial model of competition. Note that the positions denoted in figure 20.2 are averages across all districts, candidates, and individual constituents. Breaking the data down by pairing districts with candidates and candidates with individual constituents is also possible, as we will see.

Even at this high level of aggregation, figure 20.2 illustrates some observations. The most obvious conclusion is that party separates candidates quite sharply. This finding is consistent with a large body of work noting the polarized nature of our national politics, with Democratic candidates and officeholders on the left and Republican politicians even more uniformly on the right (Fiorina 2006; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006). Party differences among House candidates are echoed among constituents. Districts held by Democrats are more liberal (or less conservative) than districts held by Republicans. The differences between the parties are more apparent when we compare Republicans in Republican-held districts with Democrats in Democratic districts. The difference between partisans within districts approaches in magnitude the difference between House incumbents of the opposing parties. Note as well that campaign activists in each party are at least slightly more extreme in their position than rank-and-file partisans who were not campaign activists.
Figure 20.2 only hints at a second pattern: the effect of district differences on candidate positioning. One way of seeing this is to ask why districts represented by Democrats are more liberal than districts represented by Republicans. The answer is that districts dominated by liberals tend to elect liberal (Democratic) candidates, whereas districts dominated by conservatives elect Republicans. Another indication of the effect of district differences in figure 20.2 is the fact that challengers in both parties tend to be more moderate than incumbents. The reason for this is almost certainly rooted in district differences, because Democratic challengers run in Republican-held, and therefore relatively conservative, districts. Likewise, Republican challengers run against Democratic incumbents who are typically elected by relatively liberal or moderate districts. Thus, challengers in both parties are less extreme than their office-holding copartisans because they are striving to win in districts dominated by constituents of the opposing ideological and partisan persuasions.

Let us put these results in the context of two hypothetical districts, the first of which is depicted in figure 20.1. The second district is identical, except that the median voter is moderately conservative, close to Voter_4, rather than moderately liberal, as in figure 20.1. In the first district, Candidate_1, a left-of-center Democrat wins; in the second district, Candidate_3, a right-of-center Republican wins. Moreover, it is easy to imagine that, with the shift of Voter_3 from a liberal to a conservative position, both candidates 1 and 2 will be more conservative in the second district than in the first.
District Effects on Candidate Positioning

We can see the effects of district variation in actual House elections in figure 20.3. On the horizontal axis, we order districts from the most liberal to the most conservative, using as our measure of district conservatism the average percentage vote for George W. Bush in the 2000 and 2004 elections. On the vertical axis, candidates are ordered by their positioning on the left-right scale as determined by expert observers in their districts. The upper, dashed line indicates the general tendency of Republican candidates to be increasingly conservative as districts are more conservative. The lower, solid line depicts a similar tendency of Democratic candidates to take more conservative positions as they run in more conservative districts. This tendency of candidates in both parties to become more conservative with the increasing conservatism of their districts is consistent with the median-voter hypothesis because the median voter represents the average voter in the district. Therefore, candidates concerned about winning the election respond by taking relatively conservative positions to match the increasingly conservative views of the average voter in their districts.

It is also apparent from figure 20.3 that there is more going on than the effects of district conservatism. The two political parties' candidates are consistently distinct from one another, as indicated by the gap between the dashed and solid lines. This party polarization—a gap that averages more than three

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FIGURE 20.3
Candidate placement on liberal-conservative scale by district presidential vote.
points on the seven-point liberal-conservative scale—is consistent with the
differences between Democratic and Republican candidates in figure 20.2. Republicans striving to win in relatively liberal districts may be less conserva­
tive than their colleagues running in conservative districts, but they are still
conservative in the positions they take and differ sharply from Democrats
running in the same districts. Despite the effects of district preferences, then,
the partisan divide between Republicans and Democrats on the left-right scale
persists. One focus of this chapter is observing this balance between district
effects associated with the median-voter hypothesis and the effects of party
consistent with responsible party theory.

Disentangling District, Party, and Activism Effects

Figures 20.2 and 20.3 show that both district opinion and party matter
in accounting for the positions candidates take on the liberal-conservative
scale. Moreover, figure 20.2 indicates that activists in each party are more
extreme in their positions than ordinary partisans. How can we disentangle
these different effects to observe the impact of district, party, and activism
on who gets represented?

Our approach is to shift the analysis to a comparison of individual con­
stituents. We begin by exploring the mean distances between constituents and
candidates in table 20.1. In this and the remaining analysis, each constituent­
respondent is paired with the Democratic candidate in his or her district, then
paired again with the Republican candidate. The entries in table 20.1, then,
are the mean distances between constituents and candidates in their districts.
This setup allows us to make the comparisons necessary to evaluate our hy­
potheses about who gets represented in House elections and to disentangle
differences in who gets represented due to district, party, and activism.

The first entry in table 20.1 indicates that the distance between the average
constituent and candidate in our study is just two units on the seven-point

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 20.1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constituent-Candidate Distances on Liberal-Conservative Scale, 2006</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Distance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>All constituents, all candidates</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constituents who share party of candidate</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonactivist partisans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constituents from opposing party from candidate</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonactivist partisans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activists</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* UC Davis and Indiana University 2006 congressional surveys.
liberal-conservative scale. Because most constituents and all candidates affiliate with a political party, this overall average distance blurs the distinction between parties, which we know is important in accounting for the distance between constituents and candidates, but it serves as a useful baseline. The effects of party are apparent in the differences between nonactivist partisans in the candidate's party compared with nonactivist partisans in the opposing party. When constituents and candidates share the same party, the average distance is much less (1.28 units) than when they are from opposing parties (2.80 units). These results are another way to illustrate the party effects we have already seen in figures 20.2 and 20.3. Note that the average distance between constituents and candidates is reduced further when constituents are active in the candidate's party, while the average distance is increased when constituents are active for the opposing party. Again, this confirms the results depicted in figure 20.1, where activists in the Democratic Party were more extreme in their liberalism, and Republican activists were more extreme in their conservatism than rank-and-file partisans.

A multivariate analysis is necessary to examine the independent effects of district, party, and activism on the average agreement between constituents and candidates in House elections. Table 20.2 presents regression results to

TABLE 20.2
Explaining Constituents' Distance from House Candidates: Median Voter, Party, and Activism (Robust Standard Errors; *N* = 2,821)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proximity to the median voter in district</td>
<td>-0.527*</td>
<td>-0.527*</td>
<td>-0.529*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.034)</td>
<td>(0.033)</td>
<td>(0.032)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonactivist in candidate's party</td>
<td>-0.802*</td>
<td>-0.860*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.052)</td>
<td>(0.090)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonactivist in opponent's party</td>
<td>0.711*</td>
<td>0.671*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.078)</td>
<td>(0.099)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activist in candidate's party</td>
<td>0.949*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.128)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activist in opponent's party</td>
<td>0.949*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.128)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constituent's socioeconomic status</td>
<td>-0.015</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.025)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>3.434*</td>
<td>3.445*</td>
<td>3.464*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.107)</td>
<td>(0.115)</td>
<td>(0.115)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>F</em></td>
<td>83.01*</td>
<td>196.79*</td>
<td>179.04*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>R</em>²</td>
<td>0.122</td>
<td>0.328</td>
<td>0.407</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Controls for party of candidate and constituent survey sample insignificant and not shown; * *p < 0.01.
Source: UC Davis and Indiana University 2006 congressional surveys.
address this question. Consider column 1, which analyzes the distance between constituents and candidates as a function of constituents’ proximity to the median voter in their districts. The analysis shows a strong and highly significant effect. Constituents who are closer to the median voter in their district are also closer, on average, to candidates in their districts. This supports the median-voter hypothesis because constituents closer to their district median voter are in greater agreement with their candidates than constituents who are more distant from their district median voter. This effect, in other words, is perfectly consistent with the district analysis reported in figure 20.3.

Column 2 in table 20.2 includes indicators for whether the constituent shares the party of a candidate or is of the opposing party. The effects on distance are pronounced and approximately symmetric: constituents in the same party as the candidate are substantially closer on the left-right scale, while those in the opposite party are more distant by almost as great an amount. These results associated with party are consistent with the mean comparisons in table 20.1 and support hypothesis 2: constituents of the same party as a candidate are better represented by that candidate than constituents in the opposite party.

Note that the effect of proximity to the district median voter is as strong in column 2, which includes the party effects, as it is in column 1, which does not. The fact that both the median voter and partisan hypotheses are supported is clear evidence that they are not incompatible with one another. Indeed, the strong effects of the district median and party affiliation in table 20.2 are complimentary to the pattern we saw in figure 20.3, which shows that Republican candidates from relatively liberal districts were noticeably less conservative than Republican candidates from conservative districts, and likewise for Democratic candidates. The results here demonstrate that party and district effects can work in tandem. On the one hand, it is true that candidates respond to variation in district opinion, as is consistent with the median-voter theory. On the other hand, party differences persist within districts: in liberal districts, candidates in both parties are more liberal, but the party differences, with Democrats being more liberal and Republicans more conservative, remain evident. Likewise, in conservative districts, both Democratic and Republican candidates are more conservative, but the gap between the parties remains large.

In the final specification (column 3), we add indicators for whether constituents were activists for the candidate or for the opposing candidate and a control for the socioeconomic status of the constituent. The partisan and median-voter effects remain strong and significant, as in the other specifications, but there is an additional payoff associated with activism in the candidate’s campaign. Activists enjoy a significantly higher level of policy agree-
ment with their candidate and exhibit a greater distance from the opposing candidate—even compared to their candidate’s partisan rank and file. This analysis suggests three broad mechanisms that affect who gets represented by candidates for the U.S. House: a district or median-voter effect, a partisan effect, and an activism effect. The control for socioeconomic status is insignificant but provides assurance that activism is not associated with reduced distance between constituents and candidates merely because activists are of higher socioeconomic status than other constituents.12

Conclusion

By placing candidates and voters in the same ideological space, we have been able to incorporate the spatial model of candidate behavior into an empirical analysis of constituency and constituent representation. This design, in turn, permits us to begin sorting out the effects of different mechanisms thought to affect the process of legislative representation. Based on our analysis we can conclude that the median-voter logic is alive and well, but so is the logic of partisan competition. We have also seen that activism appears to pay off for those involved in the process beyond voting. Socioeconomic status does not appear to affect the process of ideological representation.

Our analysis thus far does not allow us to distinguish among a variety of causal processes that could produce the effects we observe. Three examples illustrate the point: First, the median-voter effects we observe are consistent with electoral models that posit responsiveness of candidates to electoral incentives. Another possibility that would produce the same effect is if candidates were selected at random from their districts’ populations. Candidates would reflect district mean or median opinion to some degree simply because they were selected from districts that vary in opinion. The greater the cross-district variance (and the smaller the within-district variance), the stronger would be the link, without any electoral motivation on the part of candidates. This is an important competing explanation because the makeup of House districts has substantial variation, which could account for agreement between district opinion and representatives without the direct mechanisms of electoral control and candidate response.

A second example is in the context of the partisan effects we observe. One possible mechanism for the partisan departures from the median-voter model is that party might cause voters to back candidates on partisan rather than ideological grounds, and candidates’ responses might in turn produce “misrepresentation” by the ideological proximity model. Alternatively, the partisan effects we observe could be rooted in elite behavior, such as candidate
recruitment, that does not immediately reflect voter behavior. Other possible mechanisms are also consistent with the partisan effects we observe.

Finally, the activism effects in our analysis are ambiguous as to their root causes as well. It could be, as we have speculated, that activists are closer to candidates because of the efficacy of their active participation. Candidates respond to activists, perhaps, because they need the resources and support activists uniquely provide. But again, other possibilities abound. It may be that activists and candidates share preferences because candidates emerge from the activist stratum in their districts or because both activists and candidates tend to be more extreme in their positions. Whatever forces make activists more extreme than ordinary partisans may also be at work on candidates, without any direct influence or responsiveness between activists and candidates. It is even possible that candidates influence activists, rather than the other way around (Zaller 1992).

Our core finding that district and partisan effects are both at work in producing representation in Congress indicates the hybrid nature of the American electoral process. District effects are rooted in the geographical and political makeup of House constituencies that shape the interests that distinguish them from one another. This is apparent in our data, which shows a clear correlation between district and candidate ideology. House members, of course, pay close attention to district interests in other ways, by taking frequent trips home, opening district offices, and pursuing legislative benefits for their districts.

At the same time, the two national political parties are an inescapable part of the process of representation in the United States. Citizens benefit from their proximity to candidates of their own party but are distant from candidates of the opposite party. This situation has probably always more or less characterized our politics, but the polarization between the parties, which permeates candidate position taking and constituent opinion within House districts, has doubtless increased its effects, in comparison with the period in the mid-twentieth century when the parties were less distinct in their ideological positions. While many observers lament the polarization between the parties in the contemporary period, there are also benefits to ideologically distinctive parties. It is possible, for instance, that the degree of distortion linked to activism would be exacerbated if the parties were not as distinct among ordinary citizens. Moreover, as is consistent with the responsible party theory of representation, distinctive political parties may increase collective responsibility as policy outcomes are more clearly linked to party programs when the differences between parties are more apparent. That comes with a cost made clear in our results: while constituents who share the partisanship of a candidate (or officeholder) benefit, those who are in the opposing party
may feel particularly aggrieved by the distance between them and the winning candidate or the government when it is in the hands of the opposing party. This, in turn, may elevate the stakes that citizens have in election outcomes and in the processes of government, with any number of consequences for the broader electoral and political process.

Notes

We are grateful to Matt Buttice and Ben Highton for comments and assistance on this chapter.

1. The median-voter theorem holds only under the strict condition of the spatial model and proximity voting. If we relax some of these conditions, other outcomes are possible. For example, the candidates might care about the policy positions they take for reasons other than winning the election, which might prevent them from converging on the median voter’s position. Candidate might try to win not by changing his position to be closer to Voter, but by persuading Voter, to change her position to be closer to his. These examples are excluded from the traditional Downsian spatial model because candidates are assumed to take policy positions only to win votes and because voter positions are assumed to be fixed.

2. We have reconciled slight differences in the coding of several variables by grouping these variables into identical categories. Ideological placement variables were coded identically between the two studies. In the multivariate analysis, we include a dummy variable control for the sample, which is never statistically significant.

3. We consulted the Congressional Quarterly, Cook Report, National Journal, and Larry Sabato’s Crystal Ball in the early summer of 2006 to identify districts rated “tossup” or “leaning competitive” by any of the sources. The four sources substantially agreed on which districts they anticipated to be competitive (r > 0.70).

4. The district-expert survey was conducted by mail during October 2006 and was completed before election day. The response rate was 21 percent.

5. We have investigated at length the validity and reliability of informant-based measures of candidate placements. For summaries, see Stone and Simas (2010) and Stone et al. (2010). The short version is that candidate placements by informants are very strongly correlated with standard measures of incumbents’ left–right positions based on roll call votes (e.g., NOMINATE and ADA scores), that these correlations remain strong within party, and that expert ratings are highly reliable by several different models of measurement reliability.

6. The results reported are not dramatically different when we restrict ourselves to the random cross-section of districts, but the number of districts is reduced substantially.

7. Respondents were counted as campaign activists if they engaged in any of the following activities for a House candidate’s campaign: volunteering in the campaign,
attending a meeting or rally, putting up a yard sign or wearing a campaign button, or contributing financially to a campaign.

8. The presidential vote is a commonly used measure of district ideology because district samples of survey data directly measuring the ideological proclivities of constituents are typically quite small and therefore unreliable. For a version of figure 20.3 based on large district survey samples, see Stone and Simas (2010).

9. The distance between the constituent and the candidate is a continuous variable, so ordinary least squares is the appropriate method of analysis.

10. The comparison is with strict independents. Thus, constituents who share the party of the candidate are 0.80 units closer to the candidate than strict independents; constituents in the opposing party are 0.71 units further away from the candidate on the liberal-conservative scale.

11. The socioeconomic status measure is an additive index of two self-reported variables: (1) family income, and (2) education. Family income is a three-point measure, and education is a six-point measure, each standardized with mean = 0 and variance = 1.

12. We do not find an effect of socioeconomic status at any level, including a simple bivariate relationship. Thus, our results are not consistent with those reported in Senate elections by Larry Bartels (2008).
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