National Party Organizations and Party Brands in American Politics

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Chapter 1

A Theory of National Committees and Party Brands in American Politics

This dissertation is a study of the Democratic and Republican National Committees (respectively, the DNC and RNC). In focusing on this topic, it contributes to a surprisingly limited literature in political science. While the DNC and RNC are the only continuous national institutions within either party, and have been part of the American political system since the middle of the 19th century, political scientists have thus far paid relatively little attention to these political institutions. This lack of interest in the "party-in-organization" is surprising, since political scientists have extensively studied the two other "domains" of American political parties – that is, party-in-government and party-in-the-electorate.[1] Yet, party organizations have either largely been ignored or dismissed as irrelevant to outcomes in American politics.

The latter is true even for the limited number of scholars who *have* studied the Democratic and Republican national committees as independent political institutions. They too conclude that the DNC and RNC lack relevance in the political system, as they identify the committees as mere 'service providers.' These scholars have argued that as service providers the committees are subservient to the parties' candidates – relevant only by providing assistance in the form of

[1] V.O. Key introduced the three domains of American political parties. See: V.O. Key Jr., *Politics, Parties and Pressure Groups* (New York, NY: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1952). Note that this dissertation specifically concerns the national committees of both parties and any organizations linked to them (such as the youth organizations or the women's federations of both parties). It does not include Congressional party organizations such as the Democratic and Republican Congressional Campaign Committees. For more on the DCCC and RCCC, see: Robin Kolodny, *Pursuing Majorities: Congressional Campaign Committees in American Politics* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998).

campaign funding and expertise. However, since candidates receive these services in largely equal measure, and because the committees lack the power to make decisions on candidate selection, the assessment has been that national party organizations engage in (to use the title of Cotter and Hennessy's major study of national committees) politics without power.[2]

This perspective of party organizations as lacking political relevance is also pervasive in the more recent scholarship that has called for a radical redefining of American political parties. This "UCLA School" has argued that parties should be viewed as "coalitions of interest groups and activists seeking to capture and use government for their particular goals."[3] While different from the traditional parties literature in placing power over the party in the hands of interest groups rather than elected officials, the UCLA School's perspective of the party-in-organization is relatively traditional: it too downplays the role of national party organizations, arguing that studies of political parties in the United States should focus on the interaction between interest groups and elected officials.

Yet, on the basis of an important outlier in the study of party organizations in American politics there is reason to question this paradigm. In recent years a considerable literature in American Political Development has begun to chart the institutional development of both parties' national committees. For example, Daniel Klinghard's research has provided crucial insight into when and how national committees took on the role of organizing national presidential election campaigns on behalf of their parties' candidates.[4] Similarly, Daniel Galvin has focused on the 20th century development of the DNC and RNC into "service providers," and explained the

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[2] See: Cornelius P. Cotter and Bernard C. Hennessy, *Politics Without Power: The National Committees* (New York: Atherton Press, 1964); Cornelius P. Cotter and John F. Bibby, "Institutional Development of Parties and the Thesis of Party Decline," *Political Science Quarterly* 95, no. 1 (1980) 1-27; Paul S. Herrnson, "The Evolution of National Party Organizations," in *The Oxford Handbook of American Political Parties and Interest Groups*, edited by Louis Sandy Maisel and Jeffrey M. Berry. (Oxford; New York: University Press, 2010) 245-264; Paul S. Herrnson, *Party Campaigning in the 1980s* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988); John H. Aldrich, *Why Parties? The Origin and Transformation of Political Parties in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

[3] Kathleen Bawn, Martin Cohen, David Karol, Seth Masket, and Hans Noel, "A Theory of Political Parties: Groups, Policy Demands and Nominations in American Politics," *Perspectives on Politics* vol. 10, no. 3 (2012) 571. See also: Marty Cohen, David Karol, Hans Noel, and John Zaller, *The Party Decides: Presidential Nominations Before and After Reform* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008); David Karol, *Party Position Change in American Politics: Coalition Management* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Hans Noel, *Political Ideologies and Political Parties in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Seth Masket, *No Middle Ground: How Informal Party Organizations Control Nominations and Polarize Legislatures* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2009).

[4] Daniel Klinghard, *The Nationalization of American Political Parties, 1880-1896* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). See also: Michael E. McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics: The American North, 1865-1928* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

differentiation that exists between the two parties in this process.[5] These studies of American political parties from a historical institutionalist perspective have also shown that a myriad of party actors – including presidents, other elected officials, and party activists – pay considerable attention to their national committees, and frequently compete for control of these organizations.[6] For example, Brian M. Conley has shown that conservative activists in the 1960s worked hard to control Republican national party organizations to assist their attempts at gaining control of the party as a whole.[7] Meanwhile, Galvin has shown that presidents can be highly invested in their party organizations, and spend considerable time and energy in party building activities.[8]

These findings raise an important puzzle with regards to the dominant view of the irrelevance of national party organizations: if national party organizations are mere service providers, why do political actors care about controlling them? What explains the disconnect between the view of party organizations as being largely irrelevant as argued by political scientists, and the apparent value politicians place on the national committees?

I. National Committees and Party Brands

I argue we can answer these questions by addressing a specific set of activities the DNC and RNC engage in: providing publicity of the party's policy positions. While these publicity activities can be considered another 'service' to the party, I argue that party leaders believe them to be much more important than that: in their eyes, national committee publicity is of crucial importance to the party because they believe that it helps shape a national party brand – that is, an understanding among voters as to what the party's positions are at a given moment in time. Such brands, or party images, are important to parties and candidates because they provide voters with information that lowers the cost of becoming informed about individual candidates. As a result, it is easier for parties to mobilize voters during election campaigns. The national committees – in the eyes of party leaders – therefore have a clear and important role in the political system: they

[5] Daniel J. Galvin, "The Transformation of Political Institutions: Investments in Institutional Resources and Gradual Change in the National Party Committees," *Studies in American Political Development* 26 (April 2012) 50-70.

[6] See: Philip A. Klinkner, *The Losing Parties: Out-Party National Committees, 1956-1993* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Daniel J. Galvin, *Presidential Party Building: Dwight D. Eisenhower to George W. Bush* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010).

[7] Brian M. Conley, "The Politics of Party Renewal: The "Service Party" and the Goldwater Republican Right," *Studies in American Political Development* vol. 27, no. 1 (2013) 51-67.

[8] Galvin, *Presidential Party Building*.

do not only provide assistance to candidates, they also provide voters with crucial informational cues on the party's positions.

Importantly, I argue that the extent to which party leaders rely on their national committees to provide these publicity services is dependent upon the party's electoral performance. More precisely, it depends on whether parties perceive themselves to be in the minority or majority on a national level. When a party is the national majority, it has managed to produce a winning coalition, and party leaders are less reliant on the DNC or RNC, and the committees' publicity programs decrease. In contrast, when a party is a national minority party, leaders expect their committees to step up their publicity efforts in order to convince voting groups that rejected the party in the previous election to (re-)join their coalition in the future.

The committees of national minority parties prioritize their branding role by investing considerable shares of their budgets in their publicity divisions, inaugurating new publicity programs, and creating new communication tools to reach out to voting groups. They do so with the clear intent of reaching out to voting groups who they believe they must incorporate into their coalition to be able to become the national majority party in the next election(s). However, party brands are not consistent and frequently contested: parties face major internal debates regarding what policy positions to pursue, and which groups to target to gain national majority status. Who within the national minority party decides what groups the committee targets is also a product of the party's electoral performance. The national committees exist of representatives from each individual state. This body of representatives as a whole elects the chair of committee. However, when a party holds the White House, the incumbent president has the power to nominate the committee chair of their liking – a choice national committee members subsequently ratify without controversy. When a party is *out* of the White House, competition for the chairmanship is open: no other party leaders – including the Congressional leadership – can select a committee chair.

This difference in selection not only affects who is in charge of the committee, but also affects committee chairs' term in office. Since presidents can also replace incumbent committee chairs if they are dissatisfied with the committee's performance, committee chairs of in-parties can be regarded as agents of the incumbent president. In contrast, chairs of out-parties can only be replaced by a vote of the full national committee – which meets infrequently, and for which the chair sets the agenda – and therefore are considerably more independent. Thus, when a party is

in the minority in Congress but holds the White House, the president has de facto control over the national party organization and committees will engage in publicity activities but will follow presidential preferences with regard to what *kind* of image it promotes. But in cases where the party does not control the White House, national committee chairs have considerable leeway to decide exactly what image to project.[9] This means that national committee chairs of out-parties can take sides in intra-party conflict and publicize a specific party brand that benefits one side of the party over others.

Combined I argue that this means that national party organizations, in the eyes of party leaders, have considerably more relevance than the general label of 'service provider'- or the more recent focus on parties as coalitions of interest groups – would have us believe. By engaging in a variety of programs intended to inform and persuade voting groups, the national committees are participants in one of the fundamental elements of national party activity: creating a party brand. Additionally, when parties find themselves in the minority and out of the White House, national committee chairs have the freedom to prioritize promotion of a specific type of image. Therefore, while national committees do not have the power to select candidates, they can and do attempt to promote the party brand they prefer. As a result, the national committees have been in the center of major intra-party debates concerning questions of party ideology and issue positioning.

In the remainder of this chapter I will discuss each element of the theory outlined above in more detail. I will start by discussing the basic institutional structure of the Democratic and Republican National committees. Next, I discuss the existing institutional literature that has focused on the national committees' role as 'service providers' to the parties and their candidates. Subsequently, I discuss the historical institutionalist research on the national committees, and the challenge it poses to the dominant view of the DNC and RNC in political science, and explain the importance of party brands to political parties, and their relation to the national committees' publicity provision. Finally, I lay out the methodological approach and case selection in the rest of this dissertation.

[9] This is not to say that national committee chairs and Congressional party leaders must be in an adversarial relationship: it is not uncommon for these two types of party leaders to agree on what the national party image should be, and to cooperate in promoting it. However, what it does mean is that when there is *disagreement* between the two, Congressional leaders do not have direct powers to constrain out-party national committee chairs. Additionally, note that the national committees are rarely alone in their attempts at trying to shape the party's brand: presidents, parties in Congress, governors, state parties, and others political actors and institutions all are likely to help shape voters' perception of the party's image.

II. National Committees as Political Institutions

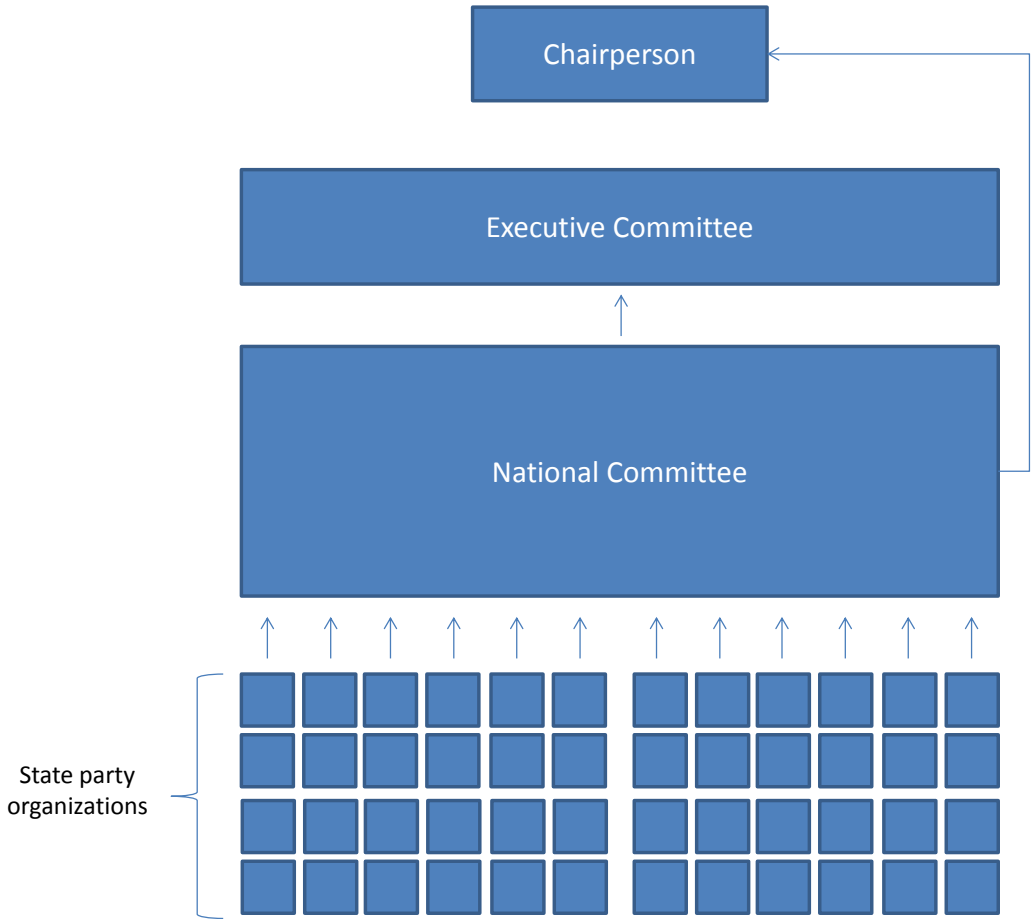
As I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 2, the role the national committees play in American politics has not been constant. Regardless, the basic institutional structure of the committees has not changed much since their founding in the middle of the 19th century (see Figure 1.1). The DNC and RNC represent the party as a national institution. Specifically, the DNC and RNC represent the party's national convention when that body is not in session. Since conventions only occur every four years, this means the national committees generally have considerable leeway in how they conduct their business. The DNC and RNC are made up of representatives of (and selected by) each state party organization.[10] In both parties, the committee is led by a chairperson. Additionally, both committees have executive committees – consisting of a selection of members of the national committee elected by their peers – that are engaged with the day-to-day affairs of the committee.

In theory, the main source of power in both the DNC and RNC lies with the full body of national committee members. These members vote to select the committee's chair, approve the committee's budget, and vote on a variety of other programs the committee could engage in. However, in practice the power divisions within the committees are more complex and skewed towards the committees' chairs. First, the DNC and RNC do not frequently meet in full – mostly because of the costs related to having members from all states travel to the same location. In the 19th and early 20th century, the committees generally only met during president election years. Starting after the 1912 election, the DNC and RNC began to increase the number of meetings to at least once a year. Nowadays, the committees generally still only meet two or three times a year. Because of this, by far most committee members are not involved in dealing with details with regards to the national committee's daily activities. As a result, Cotter and Hennessy have dismissed national committee members as

> "large groups of people variously selected, representing different amounts and kinds of local political interests, who come together now and then to vote on matters of

[10] The manner of selection differs by state and has included possibilities such as primaries, state convention votes, or selection by state party committees. Additionally, in some states members of the national committee would also need to be delegates to the national convention. For a more detailed discussion see Cotter and Hennessy, *Politics Without Power*, 22-33.

Figure 1.1: *Design of the Democratic and Republican National Committees*



undifferentiated triviality or importance, about which they are largely uninformed and in which they are often uninterested."[11]

Because of this, chairpersons of the national committees in practice have considerable agency in running their committees. In the assessment of Hugh A. Bone, chairs "set the tone for their committees, for their headquarters staff, and for the national party in general."[12] Importantly, there is no clear predefined task for national committee chairs. The committee to this day remains responsible for organizing the national convention, and raises funds for the party as a whole. But beyond that, Cotter and Hennessy argue, "the only clear objective of the national chairman is the sweeping command to advance the fortunes of his party."[13] The chairpersons of national

[11] Cotter and Hennessy, *Politics Without Power*, 3.
[12] Hugh A. Bone, *Party Committees and National Politics* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1958) 9.
[13] Cotter and Hennessy, *Politics Without Power*, 61.

committees select staff at the party's headquarters, propose programs and budgets, set the agenda for meetings of both the national and the executive committee, frequently have the power to select the membership of subcommittees or other (temporary) intra-party organizations related to the national committee. Thus, chairs have considerable agency in making both major and minor decisions regarding the national committees' activities under their leadership.

A crucial exception to this occurs when the party holds the White House. As the DNC and RNC took on a more important role in organizing presidential campaigns in the early 20th century,[14] newly selected presidential candidates and incumbent presidents claimed the right to select their preferred campaign manager as chair of the national committee. In recent years, as presidential candidates were forced to build their own campaign organizations to compete in the presidential primaries, the DNC and RNC generally have less responsibility for the organization of presidential election campaigns. As a result, presidential candidates can no longer select a new national committee chair. However, presidents remain in control of the national party organization: they maintain the power to select new national committee chairs and replace existing ones.[15]

Because of this, in-party committees and chairmen find themselves constrained considerably by the demands and preferences of the incumbent president. Since presidents can (de-facto) force national committee chairs to resign, and nominate their replacements,[16] they have the power to dictate much of what the national committee does during their time in the White House. While the national committees must still confirm the president's nominations, in practice national chairmen serve at the pleasure of the president when their party is 'in' the White House.

In contrast to in-party chairmen, out-party chairmen can only be replaced by a vote held during a meeting of the full national committee. However, since chairmen also have some control over when and where the committee meets outside of regular annual appointments this means out-chairmen have a lower risk of losing their position. A recent example of the difference between in- and out-parties in terms of chairman tenure illustrates this logic: during the entire length of the George W. Bush administration, the Democratic National Committee had only two chairmen

[14] For more on this historical development of the role of the DNC and RNC see chapter 2 of this dissertation.

[15] For example, president-elect Donald Trump selected Michigan GOP chair Ronna Romney-McDaniel to be the next RNC chair in December 2016. While the RNC had to officially confirm this selection, there was no doubt that it would indeed elect Romney-McDaniel. See: "Donald Trump Names Top Michigan Official to Senior G.O.P. Committee Post," *New York Times*, December 14, 2016.

[16] Cotter and Hennessy, *Politics Without Power*, 81; Klinkner, *The Losing Parties*, 2.

(Terry McAuliffe and Howard Dean), while the RNC managed to go through six chairs in eight years, all appointed by Bush.[17] So, while national committee chairs have the same official powers during in- and out-party years, their agency is constrained considerably when they serve under a president of their party.

In contrast, out-party chairmen are the only officials in the political system elected to represent the national party and are not reined in by incumbent presidents. Although out-parties have a titular leader in the form of the defeated presidential candidate, these actors lack institutional power to control their party in- and outside of Congress. Congressional representatives and governors can be forceful voices inside the party but represent only a narrow geographical area. In contrast, the national committees – and especially its chairs – are the only party officials in out-parties that represent the party as a whole.

III. National Committees as 'Service Providers'

There is no question that the DNC and RNC have always provided services of some kind to members of their party. Indeed, both committees were founded in the middle of the 19th century to perform one sole task of service to the party: organizing national conventions. However, the limited literature that has studied the national committees as political institutions has explicitly identified the modern DNC and RNC as 'service providers' to the party. This perspective has also introduced the assumption that national committees are inherently not influential in American politics. That is, political scientists dismiss national committees because they do not control candidate selection and are not directly responsible for setting the party's policies. As noted above, Cotter and Hennessy (who themselves were previously employed by, respectively, the Republican and Democratic National Committee) concluded that the members of the national committees are neither active nor particularly powerful.[18] The same authors also dismiss the national chairmen: "It is difficult to say what a national party chairman should do. It is even hard to say what he does do."[19]

[17] Specifically: Jim Gilmore, Marc Racicot, Ed Gillespie, Ken Mehlman, Mel Martinez, and Mike Duncan.

[18] Cotter and Hennessy, *Politics Without Power*, 3.

[19] Cotter and Hennessy do propose a variety of roles national chairmen can play - image-maker, hell-raiser, fund-raiser, campaign manager, and administrator - though they provide no clear theory as to what role is more likely at different moments in time. Ibid, 67

Cotter and Bibby's later account of the development of the national committees is less dismissive.[20] Noting that parties have become less involved in their previous core activities of controlling presidential nominations, managing presidential election campaigns, and dispensing federal patronage, Cotter and Bibby argue that modern national party organizations became permanently active organizations that focus on "rule enforcement, campaign and organizational services, and administrative activities."[21] In Cotter and Bibby's assessment, this development occurred in both parties, though for different reasons: in the Democratic Party, the move towards service provision was seen as a way for the party to constrain state party organizations (most notably in Southern states), while for the Republican Party this process of nationalization focused on presenting a "strong competitive force against the electorally dominant Democrats."[22]

While Cotter and Bibby credit the national committees with pushing parties to embrace a more homogenous set of policy positions, their thesis of 'party decline' has largely been interpreted as a historical argument of how national committees lost crucial powers of party control, and moved into a direction of service provision. As Galvin has summarized this argument, the modern national committees "though they once controlled politicians and subordinated their ambitions to the needs of the collectivity, [...] now play a supportive role, offering resources and services to candidates who seek their help."[23]

It is important to note that the premise of this perspective (regardless of its merits in explaining the development of the committees as institutions, or their broader role in American politics) rests on both a rather debatable representation of Cotter and Bibby's argument, as well as of the historical role national committees played in American politics. At no point in their history did the national committees as institutions ever unilaterally control candidate selection or decide the content of their party's platform. It is true that the national committees have changed their activities in the course of the 19th and 20th century, but to argue that this process is one of decline, is not in line with the history of national party organizations either. The powerful 'party' that

[20] This perspective of 'service provision' has been incorporated in nearly all studies of national party organizations since, including but not limited to: Herrnson, "The Evolution of National Party Organizations,"; Herrnson, *Party Campaigning in the 1980s*; Ralph M. Goldman, *The National Party Chairmen and Committees: Factionalism at the Top* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1990); Klinkner, *The Losing Parties*; Galvin, *Presidential Party Building*; Galvin, "The Transformation of Political Institutions"; Conley, "The Politics of Party Renewal."

[21] Cotter and Bibby, "Institutional Development of Parties and the Thesis of Party Decline," 2.

[22] Ibid, 25.

[23] Galvin, "The Transformation of Political Institutions," 57.

dominated American politics in the 19th and early 20th century was never the DNC or RNC but rather a coalition of local party machines with limited geographic scope. These organizations were under the strict control of local party bosses who controlled candidate selection and patronage in their own regions and negotiated with their fellow party leaders on national nominations in the infamous 'smoke filled rooms' at national conventions.[24]

Galvin has identified John Aldrich's classic *Why Parties* as the most coherent articulation of this view of party organization development.[25] From this 'actor-centered' perspective, the shift towards service provision by national party organizations is a product of a change in preferences of candidates. Aldrich places the root of this change in the 1960s, arguing that "before the critical era of the 1960s candidates had no alternative to using the party organization to gain access to office. There was no technology by which an individual, except the very most well known, could create a personal campaign organization."[26] The proliferation of television in the 1960s changed this equation, allowing candidates to create personal campaign organizations. These developments produced a

> "new form of party, with a new equilibrium apparently emerging of polarized parties among candidates, activists, and officeholders, with therefore a relatively high degree of conditional party government and a resurgent relevance of party reputation in the party-in-elections, and highly resource-rich national party organizations tying these together."[27]

Candidates, now capable of building a personal brand and freeing themselves from party machine politics, effectively took control away from party organizations, leaving them only service provision as a viable political activity. Thus, modern national committees assist candidates by providing campaign advice and support, raising and distributing money, and dealing with administrative tasks for running the party. Yet, the committees have no influence on candidate selection and, because of this, lack true power over the party.

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[24] Aldrich, *Why Parties?*.
[25] Galvin, "The Transformation of Political Institutions."
[26] John H. Aldrich, *Why Parties? A Second Look* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011) 281-282.
[27] Ibid, 260.

IV. The Limits of the 'Service Provider' View

I argue that the 'service provider' perspective – and particularly the underlying assumption that national committees are powerless – rests on a questionable historical understanding of the committees' development, an underestimation of the value political actors appear to place on the national committees, and a rather blunt definition of party organization 'power.' Certainly, there is no doubt that if we define power as having the ability to select a party's presidential candidates, the national committees are indeed *powerless*. At no point in the history of the DNC or RNC did either organization have the ability to select presidential candidates, or candidates for House, Senate, or gubernatorial races. Additionally, the national committees do not even have the power to veto any of the potential candidates.

However, I argue that there are three reasons why this view of national party organizations is too narrow. First, this definition of power is an extreme test in the context of American political parties. Since neither the modern Democratic or Republican parties have political actors or institutions that can independently and autonomously select candidates, by this definition *nobody* within the party has 'power.' It is certainly true that both parties used to have party bosses that had considerable powers over selecting local candidates, but even those actors did not have the power to *independently* select presidential candidates. While the authors of *The Party Decides* argue that party leaders continue to have considerable influence on presidential candidate selection in the primary era, even if this argument is correct, it still requires considerable coordination and – as Donald Trump's victory in the 2016 race shows – is no guarantee for success.[28] Thus, this definition of 'power' within American parties may be so strict that it excludes all forms of influence intra-party institutions may have.

Second, the historical development of the national committees does not seem to match Aldrich's focus on the 1960s as a crucial period of change. Indeed, a cursory examination of the development of both the DNC and RNC reveals that the modernization of the national committees began considerably earlier than the 1960s (for more on the pre-1960s activities of both the DNC and RNC see chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation). Additionally, Galvin notes that the actor-centered theory would predict similar changes in incentives and, therefore, similar temporal developments

[28] See Cohen et al, *The Party Decides.*

in both parties. Yet, the DNC and RNC invested in their national committees at very different moments.[29] National committees have always provided services of some kind to the party: from their founding onwards, the national committees have been engaged in activities intended to assist the party and its candidates. What those activities amount to has not been constant across time, and both the DNC and RNC continue to identify new ways to help their party. But the historical institutionalist literature – most notably Klinghard's work on party organizations in the end of the 19th century – suggests that major increases in DNC and RNC activities occurred much earlier than the rise of a "candidate-centered" party.[30] This earlier development suggests that there may be another explanation to the role of the national committees than service provision in response to an increased power of candidates.

Third, as noted above, the historical institutionalist literature on national party organizations charting the historical development of the national committees has shown that, while most political scientists believe the DNC and RNC are largely irrelevant in shaping political outcomes, political actors seem believe they are considerably more important. For example, Galvin's study of presidential investments in their political parties shows that presidents of minority parties invest considerable time, money, and energy in party building activities – most of which are centered on the party's national committee. Klinkner's analysis of out-party national committees shows that there is frequently considerable competition among party leaders for control of the DNC and RNC when the party has no president in the White House. Finally, Conley's study of conservatives' attempts at controlling the RNC and related party organizations shows that party members perceive control of the party organizations as a political tool worth having.[31]

Combined, these three points raise the question of whether the perception of the national committees as mere service providers covers the full role they perform in American politics. If the committees developed earlier then the candidate-centered view predicts, and if politicians seem to believe that there is some particular value to controlling the national committee, what other role do they play that can explain both?

I argue that the key to understanding the role the DNC and RNC play is that party leaders

[29] Galvin, "The Transformation of Political Institutions."
[30] Klinghard, *The Nationalization of American Political Parties*.
[31] See: Galvin, *Presidential Party Building*; Galvin, "The Transformation of Political Institutions"; Klinkner, *The Losing Parties*; Conley, "The Politics of Party Renewal."

believe they help shape the party's brand – that is, the perception voters have of the policy positions the party as a national institution holds. If correct, this view would help explain the difference between the value political scientists and politicians have placed in the national committees, because party brands are a fundamental connection between candidates and voters.

V. Party Brands in American Politics

A consistent argument in the literature on Congress is that political parties help solve collective action problems that individual members face.[32] As with nearly all studies of Congress, the basic assumption underlying this argument is that members of Congress and candidates for a congressional seat want voters to (re)elect them. However, ensuring that voters turn out and vote the 'right' way is very costly if the candidates have to rely solely on a personal brand. That is, it would take considerable investments of time and resources if each individual member of Congress would have to inform their voters of each of their policy preferences in election campaigns.

Membership of a party provides a solution to this problem in the form of a 'party brand' – which, for the purposes of this dissertation, I define as the general understanding voters have of the party's position on policy issues.[33] Political scientists have acknowledged the benefit political actors receive from connecting themselves to a major party as early as Downs' classic 1957 study *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. In connecting their image to that of a political party, individual candidates provide voters with a heuristic that lowers the cost of gathering information about themselves. That is, a party brand provides voters with a general understanding of what – on average – they can expect from the party's candidates in terms of policy positions. Voters, as a result, can make an educated decision in the voting booth based on a limited set of information that is relatively easy to obtain.[34] Simply stated, a party brand makes it possible for voters to vote for the 'right' candidate without collecting much additional information.

However, for this heuristic to function, a party brand must have clear meaning to the average

[32] For, arguably, the best representation of this perspective see: Aldrich, *Why Parties?*.

[33] Note that brands also include an element of valence – that is, the general assessment voters have of a party's capacity of governing responsibly independently of whether they agree with the positions the party takes. Given that the national committees do not govern, I exclude valence from the definition of party brands for this study. For more on valence and party brands, see: Daniel M. Butler and Eleanor Neff Powell, "Understanding the Party Brand; Experimental Evidence on the Role of Valence," *Journal of Politics*, vol. 76, no. 2 (2014) 492-505.

[34] Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1957). Also see: Stanley Feldman and Pamela Conover, "Candidates, Issues, and Voters," *Journal of Politics* 45 (1983) 810-839.

voter. After all, if, in a counterfactual world we would randomly assign party identification of candidates, voters would gain very little information from the knowledge that a candidate is a Democrat or a Republican. In this world, the range of possible policy positions a candidate could support would be very broad and voters would need to spend considerable time and energy educating themselves on each individual candidate on the ballot. As Jeffrey Grynaviski explains it, parties thus face a similar problem as corporations do with their franchises:

> "the reputation of McDonalds suffers if too many of its local stores offer cold French fries and poor customer service. Similarly, the reputation of a party suffers if it throws its support to too many candidates at odds with their organization on key issues. In both cases, the brand name no longer reduces the public's uncertainty about product or candidate quality, and 'brand equity' is lost, with people now more open to sampling new 'products' rather than remaining loyal to an existing brand."[35]

This means that parties must produce a brand that members across the party largely share. This is not to say that there needs to be unanimous support for all party policies among all members: certainly, intra-party factionalism is very common in day-to-day American politics. Additionally, political actors can even use their deviation from the general brand to send a more specific message to voters as to what *kind* of Democrat or Republican they are. However, if there is a lack of a shared and coherent national brand it introduces a considerable level of uncertainty in the calculation voters must make at election time. A diluted party brand thus comes at a considerable cost for voters and, therefore, for political actors.

This logic underlies the basic argument advanced by competing explanations for the presence of strong party leadership in the House.[36] Cox and McCubbins define the 'party record' as "actions, beliefs, and outcomes commonly attributed to the party as a whole."[37] This party record

[35] Jeffrey D. Grynaviski, *Partisan Bonds. Political Reputations and Legislative Accountability* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 51.

[36] See among others: D. Roderick Kiewiet and Mathew D. McCubbins, *The Logic of Delegation: Congressional Parties and the Appropriations Process* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Gary W. Cox and Mathew D. McCubbins, *Legislative Leviathan: Party Government in the House* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Gary W. Cox and Mathew D. McCubbins, *Setting the Agenda: Responsible Party Government in the U.S. House of Representatives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005; Aldrich, *Why Parties?*; David W. Rohde, *Parties and Leaders in the Postreform House* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); John H. Aldrich, and David W. Rohde. "The Logic of Conditional Party Government: Revisiting the Electoral Connection," (2001).

[37] Cox and McCubbins, *Legislative Leviathan*, 102.

or brand[38] is relevant since the assumption is that it affects all members of Congress who caucus with a party in similar ways:

> "all are hurt by scandal or helped by perceptions of competence, honesty and integrity; all or nearly all are helped by the party's platform, when taken as a package. Thus, party records often can be changed in ways that affect the vast majority of party members' reelection probabilities in the same way."[39]

Cox and McCubbins argue that the party leadership in Congress has a set of powers which allow it to police the party brand to overcome the collective action problem individual members of Congress face in producing such a brand.[40] Despite criticism from the perspective of candidate-centered theories of congressional design (most famously put forward by Krehbiel[41]) there is considerable evidence that parties constrain their members,[42] and that the aim of producing a coherent national party brand is a main reason for why individual members go along.

Grynaviski has built on this basic argument for the importance of party brands by explaining that parties "perform the role of a surety"[43] for voters, and that a system of party government therefore benefits both politicians and voters alike. By creating a party organization in Congress, party leaders succeed in influencing the voting behavior of their members and create a party brand. This brand subsequently informs voters and improves the quality of cues that candidates provide to voters. As a result, voters can reward (or punish) parties more effectively, which produces another round of partisan organization in the next Congress. The system thus reinforces itself: after every election a party that is in the majority will have incentives to organize Congress in a way that produces a coherent party brand, and after this congressional term a new election

[38] Cox and McCubbins rely on the term 'party record' in *Legislative Leviathan* but adopt the term 'party brand' in *Setting the Agenda*. Kiewiet and McCubbins use the term 'brand' in *The Logic of Delegation*. There appears to be no discernable difference between the two terms, but 'party brand' has become the customary term in this literature.

[39] Cox and McCubbins, *Legislative Leviathan*, 103.

[40] The most prominent of those powers is negative agenda control: i.e. party leaders have the ability to keep legislation which goes against the preferences of a substantial subsection of their party off the floor, thereby preventing the party from being logrolled. See: Cox and McCubbins, *Setting the Agenda*.

[41] Keith Krehbiel, "Where's the Party?" *British Journal of Political Science* 23, no. 2 (1993); 235-266.

[42] See, for example: Jeffery A. Jenkins, "Examining the Robustness of Ideological Voting: Evidence from the Confederate House of Representatives," *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (October 2000) 811-822; James M. Snyder and Tim Groseclose, "Estimating Party Influence in Congressional Roll-Call Voting," *American Journal of Political Science* 44 (2000) 193-211; Snyder and Ting, "An Informational Rationale for Political Parties"; James M. Snyder and Michael Ting, "Roll Calls, Party Labels, and Elections," *Political Analysis* 11 (2003) 419-444.

[43] Grynaviski, *Partisan Bonds*, 2.

follows during which voters use that brand as a cue to reward or punish the parties based on their assessments of their brands. Thus, this literature argues, party brands are crucial for candidates' ability to get (re)elected, and *what* that brand looks like is thus a core concern of party members.

VI. National Committees, Publicity, and Party Brands

The studies cited above indicate the crucial role party brands play in American politics. However, these studies have largely relied on using the concept of party brands to explain the logic of party government within Congress. As such, they also assumed that it is the congressional legislative process that *creates* these brands. This is true to a point. Indeed, Woon and Pope have found that voters do rely on party brands in deciding their vote, and update their assessment of those brands based on changes in congressional voting behavior.[44] However, while it is true that congressional activities shape party brands in part, American political parties are not solely congressional institutions. Indeed, it is clear that there are a variety of other signals coming from the parties that voters receive and incorporate in their assessment of what each party stands for. The national committees – as the representatives of the national party – are also responsible for sending a variety of signals to voters regarding the positions their party has taken on salient policy issues through their publicity activities. As I will show in this dissertation, the committees explicitly engage in these activities with the intent of helping shape a national party brand.

Crucially, the fact that the DNC and RNC are *national* party institutions means they try to help create a brand that is not regional or factional but that represents the party as a national institution. My theory is that national committees use their publicity programs to try to reach out to specific voting groups they believe will help their party in future elections. They do so through a variety of programs – including political advertisements, party publications, self-produced TV and radio shows, and public appearances by national committee leaders (such as interviews and speeches). Crucially, I argue that in doing so the national committees try to 'educate' voters on their parties' positions. That is, they try to send signals to specific groups of voters on the issues the party cares about, and the positions it takes on those issues. The national committees do so in the hope that voters incorporate these signals in their perception of the party's brand.

[44] Jonathan Woon and Jeremy C. Pope, "Made in Congress? Testing the Electoral Implications of Party Ideological Brand Names," *Journal of Politics* vol. 70, no. 3 (2008) 823-836.

However, the extent to which national committees engage in this kind of branding activity is not constant. I argue that the party's electoral performance predicts whether it will invest in (new) publicity activities or not. More precisely, it depends on whether parties perceive themselves to be in the minority or majority on a national level. I follow Goldman in defining national majority parties as having:

> "majority status in at least four places simultaneously: (1) the electoral college, derived from pluralities in a sufficient number of states, that is, the party-in-the-electorate; (2) the presidency; (3) the Senate; and (4) the House of Representatives"[45]

When not all of these conditions are met, I will – like Goldman – consider a party to be the national minority party. This means that whenever there is a divided federal government, there is no national majority party but instead two minority parties.[46]

I argue that national committees of parties that are in the national majority – that is, parties which hold the White House and have simultaneous majorities in the House and Senate – will *not* focus on publicity provision, while those in the national minority will. The logic underlying this assumption relies on a set of assumptions regarding both the interests and preferences of individual political actors, as well as the assumptions those actors are likely to have regarding the way voters build their perception of the party's brand.

First, any party that has national majority status by definition must hold the White House.

[45] Goldman, *The National Party Chairmen and* Committees, 569. Note that while (1) and (2) are intended to distinguish the party-in-the-electorate from the party-in-government, they are essentially the same – that is, the party that has a majority in the electoral college by definition also hold the White House.

[46] Goldman's definition may raise some questions. First, the assumption that in a situation of divided government there is no such thing as a "majority party" may be controversial. Second, even in cases where a party does have unified control of government it is possible that the context of this majority may be such that party leaders may not perceive themselves to be the 'true' national majority party. For example, while the Republican Party had unified control of government at the time, RNC chairman Ken Mehlman in 2005 described the party as only being "the dominant party in America," explaining that it did not have a "deep" or "broad majority [...]. We're certainly not in the position that F.D.R. Democrats were in the 1930s and 40s. We're not the overwhelming favorite" ("Some See Risks for G.O.P. as It Revels in New Powers," *New York Times*, January 24, 2005). Third, this definition relies on a dichotomous measure of national party status (that is, holding the White House or not, and having control of both chambers of Congress or not) rather than an ordinal or continuous measure of party strength. These are valid concerns, however for the purpose of this study – in which the independent variable cannot easily be measured as either a continuous or ordinal variable due to a lack of consistent internal data from within the national committees – the definition provided here produces a basic expectation as to party behavior based on party leaders' likely perception of their party's strength. That is, if a party does not have unified control of government, national committee chairs – whether they be acting on behalf of an incumbent president or independently when the party is the out-party – will have the incentive to improve the party's performance in those areas in which it does not yet control of the federal government. In the case studies, I show that party leaders do indeed have these perceptions of their party's status and present them as reasons as to why national committee investments in publicity services are needed.

As Galvin has shown, presidents *can* care deeply about their party's wellbeing and sometimes invest considerable time, energy, and resources in party building activities. National majority party presidents, however, rarely do. The basic explanation is that presidents have extensive responsibilities and are careful in focusing on those issues that require their attention most. If their political party is in the national majority, presidents lack incentives to make investments in their national committees. However, since presidents do *control* those committees, national majority party committees recede in importance as long as the party is both in the White House and holds majorities in House and Senate.

Second, if a party has unified control of government we can assume it has the ability to produce a brand through legislation and governance rather than through the committee's publicity efforts. The national committee does not control the executive branch, nor does it have any power to force members of Congress to draft and pass legislation. At most, the national committee can try to inform voters of what the party *intends* to do for them. Thus, what the DNC and RNC try to use their publicity role for is to tell, but not show, voters what the party's focus is. When a party is in the national majority, this publicity role is likely to be less important – either because the party successfully uses its control of government to achieve policy goals, *or* because voters will hold the party accountable for the status of the 'real world' regardless of its success in governance, or how the party might try to spin its performance. Either way, the national committee's publicity is of secondary nature when a party is in the national majority.[47]

Finally, the national committee's publicity programs are notably different from any other form of 'service' it provides because they can be disruptive to the party's coalition. Nearly all services the DNC and RNC provide to members are such that their presence does not negatively affect other members. Certainly, members are likely to have strong preferences regarding the distribution of certain committee resources – including campaign funding. But while individual candidates might prefer to receive more funding, having the DNC or RNC provide campaign funds to candidate X does not directly harm the (re-)election prospects of candidate Y. Publicity

[47] This assumption is perhaps controversial: Mayhew argues that divided government has no impact in the provision of major legislation. Binder has countered that divided government does produce gridlock but that the cause is in part inherent to the design of the House and Senate. From the perspective of branding, it still seems likely that a national majority party can claim full responsibility for legislation more effectively. See: David Mayhew, *Divided We Govern: Party Control, Lawmaking and Investigations, 1946-2002* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005, 2nd edition); Sarah A. Binder, *Stalemate: Causes and Consequences of Legislative Gridlock* (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2003).

can be different. If there is broad consensus within the party on policy issues, and the committee promotes these policies in its publicity, all members receive similar benefits. However, if the national committees explicitly take sides in intra-party conflicts over the direction of the party, the effect will be different for its members. That is, if the DNC and RNC present the party as supporting a specific policy (Prohibition, Civil Rights, Obamacare, gay marriage, etc.) through national publicity this can be beneficial to candidates who also support those positions. But for candidates who *oppose* them, this kind of service can be damaging since it could help move the party brand away from their own position. Since national majority parties already have a 'winning' coalition, their leaders may be hesitant to rely on committee publicity activities out of concern that they could disrupt this coalition.

In contrast, national minority parties face a different calculation: with the party lacking control over at least one part of the elected branches of government, parties must convince voting groups that rejected the party in the previous election to (re-)join their coalition in the future. Since the party does not have unified control of government, it will be harder to do so through governance or legislation: either the party will be unable to achieve most of its policy goals because of blocks by the other party, or – at the very least – it will be constrained in the extent to which it can claim credit for legislation or governance. Thus, party leaders will expect their national committees to step up their publicity efforts in order to reach out to the voting groups the committees believe the party will need to convert to become the national majority in the next election(s).

Who determines what policy issues the national committee raises and which voting groups it targets is also a product of the party's electoral performance. As discussed above, presidents dominate their party organizations due to their power to select national committee chairs. Because of this, national committees of in-parties are directly or indirectly under the control of the president. As a result, in cases where the party is the national minority the brand it promotes is likely to be in line with the preferences of the president. That is, because the president can select *and* replace the national committee chair, committees of in-parties are run by those who are either in agreement with the president on fundamental policy issues, or – at the very least – those who understand that their position depends on not disappointing the president. Thus, the agency of in-party chairs to determine what kind of brand to promote through publicity is limited.

In contrast, when a party is out of the White House, the role of the national committee and

the importance of the committee chair is distinctly different. First, an out-party by definition is a national minority party, which means we would expect their national committees to engage in considerable publicity activities. Second, the national committee chairs of out-parties do not have a direct 'boss' that can control them: Congressional leaders do not select national committee chairs, nor can they replace them. While the national committee as a whole can vote to end the tenure of a chairman, the committees do not meet frequently and – when they do – it is the chair who sets the agenda. Importantly, it also the chair who proposes committee programs and activities. Thus, the chair of an out-party has a position of considerable power within their party when it comes to determining the scope and content of their committee's publicity programs.

Combined, this provides us with three hypotheses as to the kind of activities we should expect different types of parties to engage in with respect to national committee publicity (see Table 1.1):

Hypothesis 1 *If a party does not have control of the White House – regardless of whether it is in the majority in Congress or not – we would expect its national committee to invest in publicity, and for this committee to have considerable agency in determining what image to promote, and what voting groups to reach out to.*

Hypothesis 2 *If a party has control of the White House, but is not in the majority in Congress, we would expect its national committee to invest in publicity, but to focus on promoting a brand in line with the preferences of the president.*

Hypothesis 3 *If a party has unified control of government, we would expect its national committee's publicity role to decline, relative to the minority-party period.*

VII. Case Selection and Methodology

To test these hypotheses I present a series of historical case studies of national committee activities in both the Democratic and Republican parties between 1913 and 2008 (see Table 1.2). I define a case as the time period in which a party consistently remains in the same quadrant of national party status identified in Table 1.1 - that is, I count the period the Democratic Party controlling the White House, House, and Senate simulatenously between 1961 and 1968 as one

Table 1.1: *National Committee Branding Activities by National Party Status*

	House and Senate	
White House	*Majority*	*Minority*
In-Party	National Majority Party President controlled decline in branding programs	National Minority Party President controlled investments in branding activities
Out-Party	National Minority Party National committee controlled investments in branding activities	National Minority Party National committee controlled investments in branding activities

case. The cases selected cover all 'types' of national party status, across both parties (see Table 1.3). Additionally, this study represents the most extensive historical study of national committee activities and development across time. Of the four empirical chapters, two assess the activities of committees across a broader time period. Chapter 2 focuses on the creation of the national committees and their early history, and subsequently tests the branding theory for both the DNC and RNC through the period 1913-1946. In this period, both parties began to expand the role of their national committees outside of election years. Chapter 5 focuses on activities by the DNC and RNC during the period 1981-2008, during which the Democratic post-New Deal dominance ended and both parties faced a more fluid period of electoral competition combined with major technological changes. Chapters 3 and 4 concern more detailed case studies of – respectively – the DNC between 1953-1968, and the RNC between 1961-1980. These two cases provide important insight into the way both committees attempted to shape their party's brands, and how presidential control of the parties affected their role. These cases were selected in part because of access to primary sources, and partly because they represent crucial moments in the ideological development of both parties. That is, in both the Democratic and Republican parties in this period different ideological wings were in conflict over crucial party positions and the future of the party. In these chapters I show that the DNC and RNC were active participants in these conflicts and took sides by choosing to promote a specific type of party brand.

As we will see, the large majority of these cases support each hypothesis. During the presidencies of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon Johnson – each of whom governed while their party's had majority control of Congress – we will see a drastic *decline* in publicity services provided by the national committee. This includes not just a decrease

Table 1.2: *Chapter Outline*

Chapter	*Party*	*Time Period*	*Party*	*Time Period*
2	Democratic	1913-1920	Republican	1913-1920
		1921-1932		1921-1932
		1933-1946		1933-1946
3	Democratic	1953-1960	Republican	–
		1961-1968		–
4	Democratic	–	Republican	1961-1968
		–		1969-1976
		–		1977-1980
5	Democratic	1981-1992	Republican	1981-1992
		1993-2000		1993-2000
		2001-2008		2001-2008

in publicity output, but also the outright cancellation of major publicity programs had been introduced in previous years when the party was in the minority. In cases where the party is in the White House but in the minority in Congress, we see presidents act decidedly differently, and invest in their national committee's publicity programs. For example, we will see that presidents Nixon, Ford, Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and Clinton, who all governed while their party was in the minority in Congress,[48] all had national committees produce major publicity campaigns to promote their legislative agenda, their own reelection, or to present them as their party's leaders.

Finally, in cases where the party is out of the White House we will see that committees very consistently invested in major publicity programs with the intention of reaching out to (new) voting groups. Notably, we will also see that committees in these circumstances also frequently present policy positions as held by the national party that were controversial among parts of the party. For example, during the Hoover administration, DNC chair John Raskob attempted to push the party to embrace opposition to Prohibition as a national policy position, and during the second Eisenhower term, DNC chair Paul Butler pushed his party to embrace civil rights and other liberal policies. In both cases, these proposed policies the committees engaged in such branding activities despite major opposition from conservative Democrats. On the Republican side, chairmen during the Kennedy, Johnson, and Carter administration attempted to favor either the conservative or the moderate wing within the GOP by promoting the party to Southern whites or black voters, respectively.

[48] In the case of Clinton, the Democratic Party was in the national majority in 1993-1994. Between the 1994 midterms and the 2000 election, the party was in the White House but in the minority in Congress.

Table 1.3: *Case Studies by National Party Status, 1913-2008*

	House and Senate	
White House	*Majority*	*Minority*
In-Party	DNC: 1913-1918; 1933-1946 1961-1968; 1993-1994 RNC: 1921-1930; 2003-2006	DNC: 1919-1920; 1995-2000 RNC: 1931-1932; 1969-1976; 1981-1992; 2001-2002; 2007-2008
Out-Party	DNC: 1955-1960; 1987-1992; 2007-2008 RNC: 1919-1920; 1995-2000	DNC: 1921-1932; 1953-1954; 1981-1986; 2001-2006 RNC: 1913-1918; 1933-1946; 1961-1968; 1977-1980; 1993-1994

To test the branding theory I rely heavily on analysis of primary sources. Through archival research conducted in collections devoted to the DNC and RNC, assessment of newspaper articles published at the time, and analysis of transcripts of DNC and RNC meetings I aim to show not just that there is indeed differentiation in publicity activities in line with the predictions of the theory, but also that party leaders relied on similar logic in making these decisions. By relying on qualitative historical case studies I can assess the context in which party leaders made such decisions, and present the logic political actors used to explain those decisions *at the time*.

VIII. Contribution

This dissertation contributes to the literature on American political parties in two fundamental ways. First, I reassess the role national committees play in American politics. Contrary to the dominant view – shared both by traditional rational choice accounts of party organizations and the more recent UCLA School – of national party organizations as being largely irrelevant to outcomes in American politics, I show that party leaders believe national committees have an important role within their parties: helping shape a national party brand. Given how important party brands are to elected officials and candidates, this perception explains why politicians value the DNC and RNC: in their view, they help determine what a fundamental element of the party structure looks like.

Second, I add to the literature on party brands by moving beyond the role *parties in Congress* play in establishing these brands. By focusing on the national committees as having the potential of creating party brands we can begin to develop a more coherent understanding as to the creation

and change of party brands over time. I do not argue, however, that national committees are the *sole* creators of party brands: indeed, there is extensive literature on the role presidents[49], interest groups[50], and 'academic scribblers'[51] play in helping parties embrace certain policy positions. None of these institutions or actors individually set the party's brand – rather a party brand is a combination of the signals coming from each of them. Additionally, it is difficult to assess exactly how successful the national committees have been in shaping their party's brands. Nevertheless, while the national committees are just one among a considerable set of institutions which produce the parties' brands, by linking them explicitly to the Congress-centered literature on branding moves us towards a more comprehensive understanding of how party brands as a whole are shaped.

[49] See, for example: Sidney M. Milkis, *Presidents and the Parties: The Transformation of the American Party System Since the New Deal* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993); Cary R. Covington, J.M. Wrighton and Rhonda Kinney, "A 'Presidency-Augmented' Model of Presidential Success on House Roll Call Votes," *American Journal of Political Science*, 39, no. 4 (1995) 1001-1024; George C. Edwards III, *At the Margins: Presidential Leadership of Congress* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1989). For extensive discussion of the role presidential vetoes play in providing presidents with the ability to influence legislation in Congress see Charles M. Cameron, *Veto Bargaining: Presidents and the Politics of Negative Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[50] See: Karol, *Party Position Change in American Politics*.

[51] See: Noel, *Political Ideologies and Political Parties in America*.

Chapter 2

Committee Development and Early Publicity Activities: The DNC and RNC, 1913-1946

> "I have been preaching constantly to Democratic leaders the great and urgent necessity for general organization and educational work among the rank and file of Democrats. We are in serious need of more cohesion and better party spirit."
>
> *Cordell Hull, DNC chair, August 1922*

> "Every Republican in Congress today represents both his party and his individual constituency. It was the party which elected him. He is a member of a team, one which he joined of his own free will and with full realization of the responsibilities he was assuming."
>
> *Carroll Reece, RNC chair, March 1947*

Both the DNC and RNC were founded in the middle of the 19th century with the sole initial task of organizing and managing the parties' national conventions. As a result, in the 19th and early 20th century, the national committees were active only in presidential election years. However, starting in the late 19th century, in response to changes in the media landscape, as well as Progressive Era political reforms, the committees began to expand their activities to also organize

Table 2.1: *Democratic Electoral Performance and National Party Status, 1912-1944*

	White House	*% House Seats*	*% Senate Seats*	*Party Status*
1912	IN	66.9	53.1	Majority
1914	IN	52.9	58.3	Majority
1916	IN	50.2	56.3	Majority
1918	IN	44.1	49.0	Minority
1920	OUT	30.1	38.5	Minority
1922	OUT	47.6	43.8	Minority
1924	OUT	42.1	42.7	Minority
1926	OUT	44.6	49.0	Minority
1928	OUT	37.7	40.6	Minority
1930	OUT	50.1	49.0	Minority
1932	IN	72.0	61.5	Minority
1934	IN	74.0	71.9	Majority
1936	IN	76.8	79.2	Majority
1938	IN	60.2	70.8	Majority
1940	IN	61.4	68.8	Majority
1942	IN	51.0	60.4	Majority
1944	IN	55.6	59.4	Majority

Source: Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections (Washington D.C.: CQ Press, 2010).

presidential campaigns, but the parties did not maintain active headquarters in between elections. Both parties changed their approach in this regard in the wake of the 1912 election. In the decades that followed, the DNC and RNC began to develop into the modern political institutions we are familiar with today: active year-round, with permanent staff, consistent fundraising capacities, and provision of a variety of services – including publicity – to the party.

However, this development towards permanent service provision was not a linear process. Additionally, the parties did not invest in their national committees at the same time. In this chapter I discuss the founding of the national committees and their subsequent early history. Next, in case studies covering the activities of both parties' national committees between 1913 and 1946, I show that the DNC and RNC began expanding their publicity services in response to their party's electoral performance in the wake of the 1912 election. Both parties experienced a series of subsequent elections in which they were either the clear national majority or minority party (see Table 2.1). For Democrats, the 1920s were a bleak period in which the party consistently failed to defeat Republican presidential candidates, and was in the minority in both House and Senate as well. In contrast, the New Deal years – starting in 1932 – left the Democrats in the undeniable position of national majority party, while Republicans were consistently in the minority.

Table 2.2: *Republican Electoral Performance and National Party Status, 1912-1944*

	White House	*% House Seats*	*% Senate Seats*	*Party Status*
1912	OUT	30.8	45.8	Minority
1914	OUT	45.1	41.7	Minority
1916	OUT	49.5	43.8	Minority
1918	OUT	55.1	51.0	Minority
1920	IN	69.7	61.5	Majority
1922	IN	51.7	55.2	Majority
1924	IN	56.8	56.3	Majority
1926	IN	54.7	50.0	Majority
1928	IN	62.1	58.3	Majority
1930	IN	49.9	50.0	Minority
1932	OUT	26.9	37.5	Minority
1934	OUT	23.7	26.0	Minority
1936	OUT	20.2	16.7	Minority
1938	OUT	38.9	24.0	Minority
1940	OUT	37.2	29.2	Minority
1942	OUT	48.0	38.5	Minority
1944	OUT	43.9	39.6	Minority

Source: Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections (Washington D.C.: CQ Press, 2010).

As the branding theory predicts (see Tables 2.2 and 2.3), we should see clear differentiation between national committee activities on the basis of the parties national electoral performance. I will show in this chapter that the DNC and RNC largely behaved as predicted. The national committees generally invested in new publicity programs at times when their party was in the national minority. Importantly, this also included early attempts by the committees to claim the power to set party policies at times when the national convention was not in session. On the other hand, the committees generally decreased such activities when their party was in the national majority.

However, the cases below also show that there were crucial exceptions to the theory in this period. In large part, these differences were due to the limited institutional capacity the national committees had in this early era of service provision. For example, during the Coolidge administration – when Democrats were in the national minority – the DNC remained largely inactive, mostly because the committee was unable to raise funds. At other times, the history deviates from the theory's expectations because political actors assessed their party's position differently than the predicted distinction between national minority and majority parties. For example, during Woodrow Wilson's first term in the White House, Democrats also had majorities

Table 2.3: *Democratic National Party Status and Theory Predictions, 1913-1946*

	House and Senate	
White House	*Majority*	*Minority*
In-Party	1913-1918; 1933-1946 President controlled decline in branding programs	1919-1920 President controlled investments in branding activities
Out-Party	– National committee controlled investments in branding activities	1921-1933 National committee controlled investments in branding activities

Table 2.4: *Republican National Party Status and Theory Predictions, 1913-1946*

	House and Senate	
White House	*Majority*	*Minority*
In-Party	1921-1930 President controlled decline in branding programs	1931-1932 President controlled investments in branding activities
Out-Party	1919-1920 National committee controlled investments in branding activities	1913-1918; 1933-1946 National committee controlled investments in branding activities

in the House and Senate. Despite this, the DNC remained more active than it previously had been – largely because Democratic leaders believed their electoral success was based on a major split within the Republican Party and that they, therefore, could not count on a reliable majority.

I. Founding and Early History of the National Committees

While American political parties began to organize in the late 1790s, it took several decades for parties to create permanent national party organizations. Initially, parties had little need for a centrally organized national party since the Democratic-Republican and Federalist parties largely functioned on the basis of intra-congressional relations. In practice, this meant that members of Congress made crucial intra-party decisions – including the selection of presidential and vice-presidential candidates. Initially, little changed in this regard after Martin Van Buren and Andrew Jackson joined forces to found the Democratic Party. While Van Buren and Jackson cooperated partly in frustration with the constraints of the congressional "King Caucus" system of candidate selection, they governed the early Democratic Party largely along similar lines:

intra-party decisions were still made by a select group of political actors.[1]

Several attempts were made in the first half of the 19th century to create some form of permanent party organizations. For example, during the first national convention of the Democratic Party, organized in 1832, delegates voted to appoint a committee of one member from each state to "draft an address to the people of the United States," and passed a resolution empowering the president of the convention to appoint official state committees to correspond with during the campaign.[2] However, after Jackson's reelection this organization disbanded as well. In 1844, with Democrats lacking an incumbent president to lead the party. Party members found that some form of permanent organization was required to arrange for basic intra-party arrangements – most notably, the organization of the national convention. During the 1848 convention, delegates voted to create a permanent committee with the task of organizing national conventions – including deciding the location and timing of the convention,[3] and arbitrating on conflicts regarding the seating of competing convention delegates from the same state.[4] Republicans met for the first time in a national convention in February 1856 and followed the Democrats' lead in creating a

[1] See James W. Ceaser, *Presidential Selection: Theory and Development* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979) 123-169.

[2] Joseph Edwin Howe, *The Democratic National Committee, 1830-1876* (MA Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1919) 1.

[3] In selecting the location of national conventions, committee members could increase the probability of success for certain candidates (or, at the very least, decrease it for others). For example, the nomination of Abraham Lincoln as the Republican Party's presidential candidate in 1860 came about in part because the convention took place in Chicago which produced a home-town crowd that showed considerably more enthusiasm for Lincoln than any other candidate. The selection of Chicago as the site of the convention had been a compromise within the Republican committee presented as a way to avoid benefiting more well-known candidates with supportive crowds in other home-town cities. While most members of the RNC did not choose Chicago with the intention of producing a boom for Lincoln and were tricked into selecting a 'neutral' city by RNC committee member Norman B. Judd, the selection of this convention site clearly brought along considerable advantages to the Lincoln campaign. The power to select convention cities in an era in which the conventions themselves were frequently unpredictable events therefore provided the national committees with considerable powers. See: Ralph M. Goldman, *The National Party Chairmen: Factionalism at the Top* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1990), 51; William E. Barton, *The Life of Abraham Lincoln* Vol. 1 (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merill Company, 1925) 413.

[4] The resolution establishing the Democratic National Committee read: "Resolved, that a committee be appointed to examine the credentials of Delegates, and to report to this body the number of votes to which each State is entitled, and the number and names of the Delegates present from each State who are entitled to seats in this Convention. Resolved, further, that said committee be composed of one member from each State, (except the State of New York,) the Delegates from each State to appoint one member of said committee. Resolved, that the States be now called for the purpose of making said appointments." The original resolution was expanded with the following amendment: "Resolved, that every Delegate, and every person claiming to be a Delegate, shall pledge himself to support the nominees of this Convention, and to use all honorable and just means to secure their election." *The Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention, Held At Baltimore, May 22, 1848* (Washington: Blair and Rives, 1848) 1.

Committee on National Organization – later renamed as the Republican National Committee.[5] [6]

In the early decades of the committees' existence both the DNC and RNC exclusively organized the national conventions, and the committees remained inactive outside of presidential election years. Lacking permanent headquarters, the DNC and RNC functioned as "committees of correspondence," charged with "keeping various elements of the party in touch between presidential elections."[7] A first shift in this role occurred in the late 19th century. Although American political parties have always been distinguishable on major political issues,[8] electoral reforms enacted during the Progressive Era, combined with changes in the media landscape and increased focus on national issues by interest groups, produced a radical change in how parties mobilized voters during election campaigns. As Michael McGerr has argued, parties traditionally relied on 'spectacle politics' to mobilize voters. In the wake of Progressive Era reforms, parties now had to rely on 'educational campaigns' to achieve this goal.[9]

The secret ballot (known as the Australian ballot) was among the more crucial Progressive Era reforms in this regard. The Australian ballot directly undermined the traditional party machine structure and created a direct electoral connection between elected officials and their voters.[10] Prior to the introduction of the secret ballot, local party organizations dominated elections by printing their own ballots and distributing them amongst voters.[11] Because "each party's ballot had a distinctive size and color," and because the act of casting the ballot was public, the party's

[5] During the Republican Party's first national convention the creation of a permanent national organization was the first topic debated by delegates. While delegates suggested other divisions, a majority of the convention decided that the RNC – like the DNC – would exist of one member from each state, including Southern states. *Official Proceedings of the Republican National Convention Convened in the City of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on the Twenty-Second of February, 1856* (New York: New York Republican Committee, 1856) 4-5.

[6] Delegates to the Whig party's 1852 convention also voted to create a national committee, existing of one member from each state. Goldman, *The National Party Chairmen*, 46.

[7] Cornelius P. Cotter and John F. Bibby, "Institutional Development of Parties and the Thesis of Party Decline," *Political Science Quarterly* vol. 95, no. 1 (1980) 2-3.

[8] See: John Gerring, *Party Ideologies in America, 1828-1996* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[9] Michael McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics: The American North, 1865-1928* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

[10] David Mayhew famously coined the term 'electoral connection' in his classic *Congress*, and represents the basic assumption that members of Congress are constrained in their activities by their constituents' ability to vote them out of office. While Mayhew believed the electoral connection to be a relatively modern political institution, Carson and Jenkins have argued that the four conditions that must be met for an electoral connection to be present (legislators' desire to be reelected, legislators' autonomy to decide to seek reelection and run (relatively) independently from political machines, legislators' ability to be responsive to their constituents, and voters' ability to keep legislators accountable) have been in place since the late 19th or early 20th century. See: David R. Mayhew, *Congress. The Electoral Connection* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); Jamie L. Carson and Jeffery A. Jenkins, "Examining the Electoral Connection Across Time," *Annual Review of Political Science* 14 (2011), 25-46.

[11] Richard Bensel, "The American Ballot Box: Law, Identity and the Polling Place in the Mid Nineteenth-Century," *Studies in American Political Development* 17 (2003).

workers who distributed them "could tell at a glance who was voting for which party."[12] As a result, parties could mobilize some subsection of voters through vote buying: party workers could bribe voters with money or goods and check that voters subsequently voted 'correctly.' In exchange for mobilizing voters, party leaders rewarded party workers with patronage jobs. As a result, in the pre-secret ballot system, parties were 'strong' as local machines since it was that element of the party that was most effective in mobilizing voters in competitive election campaigns.[13]

Parties' ability to bribe voters decreased after the secret ballot replaced party ballots in the 1880s and 1890s. With the act of voting private and secret, the existing system of mobilization became less effective: party workers could no longer prove to party leaders that they were responsible for voter mobilization. As a result, leaders were less inclined to dole out patronage to the workers. In this regard, the Australian ballot succeeded in achieving Progressives' goal of constraining local party machines and forcing parties to become more issue centric. But the secret ballot also increased the power of *national* parties: under the new system, the cost of 'bolting' the party increased since access to an official ballot was now constrained. Candidates previously could leave their party and distribute their own ballots on Election Day. In the Australian ballot system, candidates faced a much higher hurdle. Elected officials, therefore, faced a complicated calculation: with the existing system of voter mobilization outdated as the secret ballot became the norm across the country, party nominations increased in value because they became the key to access to the ballot.[14] Candidates were thus still bound to their parties, but also needed to find an alternative method of mobilizing voters.

Other reforms of the Progressive Era contributed to the parties' shift towards educational campaigns. One crucial element in this regard was the rise of non-partisan newspapers. While the 'yellow journalism' of the popular papers produced by publishers such as Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst in the late 19th century were hardly high quality journalistic products, they represented a crucial shift from partisan to non-partisan media in American politics.[15] Instead

[12] Robert E. Mutch, *Buying the Vote. A History of Campaign Finance Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014) 16.

[13] Alan Ware, *The American Direct Primary: Party Institutionalization and Transformation in the North* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[14] John F. Reynolds, *The Demise of the American Convention System, 1880-1911* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[15] See: Jonathan M. Ladd, *Why Americans Hate the Media and How It Matters* (Princeton: Princeton University Press,

of supporting parties for political purposes, these newspapers were focused on commercial success and produced a type of journalism that "separated reportage and editorial, fact and opinion, thought and emotion."[16]

Additionally, around the same time, states began to pass laws that explicitly excluded (recent) immigrants from voting. These restrictions on the franchise – combined with the Jim Crow legislation that banned black voters from electoral participation across the South – limited the electorate, and deliberately excluded a set of voting groups that traditionally had been easy targets for local party machines. Finally, the 19th century also saw a noticeable increase in the number of interest groups pushing for national – rather than local – policies to deal with problems of the new industrial age, increasing attention to the importance of national politics and, therefore, national political parties.[17]

Combined, these Progressive Era changes to the political system affected political parties – and, particularly, the national committees – in a crucial way. As Michael Schudson has argued, voters now "needed more information to cast a ballot than the loyal partisan of the nineteenth century."[18] As a result of this, candidates faced the problem that educating voters was a costly process. To decrease this cost, candidates looked towards the national party to help provide voters with the information they now needed to cast their vote.[19] As Daniel Klinghard has argued, this produced a style of national campaigns based on "educating voters through directly distributed, printed political literature" in contrast to the traditional "conception of party principles

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2012).

[16] McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics*, 135. See also: Michael Schudson, *The Good Citizen: A History of American Civic Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1998) 174-182.

[17] See: Daniel J. Tichenor and Richard A. Harris, "Organized Interests and American Political Development," *Political Science Quarterly* 117, no. 4 (2002) 587-612. For just two examples of the role of interest groups in pushing for national policies, see: Elizabeth Sanders, *Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State, 1877-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992).

[18] Schudson, *The Good Citizen*, 185.

[19] In a related point, both Ware and Reynolds argue that the Australian ballot affected parties by modernizing the nominating procedures: starting in the 1890s at the state level, parties began to replace the traditional state conventions (which were frequently dominated by competing machines and rife with fraud) with open primaries or caucuses as a device to select their candidates. Ware has argued that this introduction of primaries can be seen as a direct result of the Australian ballot: with the state now in control of the production of the ballots, settling conflicts regarding the placement of candidates on those ballots became the responsibility of the judiciary. To allow for a selection process that was less vulnerable to elite manipulations and whose outcomes were less likely to be challenged in court, parties therefore began to use primaries or caucuses that were open to their rank and file members to select their candidates. Reynolds argues that the introduction of primaries and caucuses also lessened intra-party conflict since competing factions no longer felt nominations were 'stolen' when a member of an opposing faction was nominated. Ware, *The American Direct Primary*; Reynolds, *The Demise of the American Convention System*.

as subject to compromise and local interpretations, as local campaigners stretched party platforms to suit public opinion."[20] But parties and candidates could not provide voters with such a conception automatically: to inform voters, the party needed to produce educational campaigns, and "required a national party apparatus possessing organizational capacities to reach voters directly, bypassing state and local organizations."[21]

Thus, in the late 1880s the national committees began to expand their role in the party. The DNC and RNC now no longer organized just the national conventions, they also prepared and distributed campaign materials during presidential elections. During the 1888 campaign, the RNC organized a series of Republican 'clubs' which – in the assessment of party organizer Joseph H. Manley – worked on "educating the people on the great questions which should absorb their interest" though "the circulation of newspapers, the distribution of public speeches, and the encouragement of public discussion."[22] Similarly, the DNC prepared campaign literature and materials even before the national convention had met to select the presidential nominee and vote on the party's platform.[23] During the subsequent campaign, the DNC expanded its campaign headquarters to prepare a national educational campaign:

> "Party headquarters now occupied three floors of a Manhattan office building. The 'department of oratory' assigned speakers to rallies; the 'telegraphic bureau' sent out 'proper Democratic news' to the press; [DNC secretary William S.] Andrew's Literary Bureau wrote articles and pamphlets; another bureau prepared documents for the printer; yet another mailed out Andrew's productions to newspapers and local party committees. A dazzled reporter claimed that 'never before, even in 1876, under Mr. Tilden, were there such facilities for the spread of Democratic literature through the country.'"[24]

During the 1890s, the DNC and RNC continued their expansion into the realm of educational

[20] Daniel Klinghard, *The Nationalization of American Political Parties, 1880-1896* (Cambridge University Press, New York, 2010) 104.
[21] Ibid., 109.
[22] Cited in McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics*, 82.
[23] Andrews also called on the DNC to collect addresses and personal data "for a million-and-a-half Democrats and independents," a move which would allow the national party to bypass the traditional local party machines and communicate with voters directly. The DNC did not execute Andrews' plan to collect these addresses due to financial constraints on the campaign. McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics*, 85.
[24] Ibid., 86.

campaigns. To fund such efforts, the committees developed a fundraising apparatus. As a result, the late 19th and early 20th century saw a major reappraisal of the national committees as political institutions. Journalist Rollo Ogden, writing in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1902, described the "quiet and almost unperceived usurpations of political power by the party National Committee, during the past fifteen or twenty years."[25] Similarly, political scientist Jesse Macy wrote in 1904 that "historically speaking, the committee has grown in consequence and power with the growth of the party" and "supplanted the irregular and self-appointed agencies of the early days and assumed prestige and authority."[26]

II. Parallel Trends and Modest Expansions, 1913-1920

Despite this expansion of national committee activity in providing publicity for the party during (presidential) election campaigns, the committees remained inactive outside of election campaigns. The 1912 election provided both the Democratic and Republican parties with the incentive to break with this tradition, and keep their national committees active after the end of the election campaign. For the GOP, in particular, the election outcome signaled that a new approach to voter mobilization was necessary. While the party had been the clear national majority party between 1896 and 1908, its electoral performance had deteriorated dramatically: in 1910, Republicans lost their majority in the House, and in 1912, the party split between progressive and conservative wings. The two wings – represented by former President Theodore Roosevelt on the progressive flank, and incumbent President William Howard Taft on the conservative one – first battled each other over the party's presidential nomination.[27] After Taft secured the nomination, the battle moved to the general election where Roosevelt ran as a third party candidate. The result was a split of the Republican vote, a majority of electoral votes for Democratic presidential candidate Woodrow Wilson, and Democrats with majorities in the House and Senate.

But while the Republican split helped the Democrats win unified control of government, the

[25] Rollo Ogden, "New Powers of the National Committee," *The Atlantic Monthly* (January, 1902), 76.

[26] Jesse Macy, *Party Organization and Machinery* (New York: The Century Company, 1904) 65.

[27] For more on the 1912 Republican National Convention and the subsequent general election campaign, see: Sidney M. Milkis, *Theodore Roosevelt, The Progressive Party, and the Transformation of American Democracy* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2009). For more on the RNC's role in the 1912 convention, see: Boris Heersink and Jeffery A. Jenkins, "Southern Delegates and Republican National Convention Politics, 1880-1928," *Studies in American Political Development* vol. 29, no. 1 (April 2015), 68-88.

peculiar way in which the party won the 1912 elections meant Democrats were suspicious of the durability of their own electoral coalition. Indeed, the Democratic Party's status as the national majority party lasted only four years: Wilson won a tight reelection race in 1916, but the party only maintained control of the House due to coalition support from Progressives. In 1918, Democrats lost both the House and the Senate. Thus, in the period 1912-1920, both parties had similar concerns about their future electoral performance, and the DNC and RNC engaged in relatively similar activities in the period 1912-1920.

Rebuilding a Broken Party: The RNC

In the days after the 1912 election, Taft called for the party to work at convincing progressive Republicans that bolted in 1912 to rejoin the party: "without compromising our principles we must convince and win back former Republicans and we must reinforce our ranks with constitution loving Democrats."[28] During a meeting at the White House in late November, members of the RNC urged Taft and RNC chairman Charles D. Hilles to "take part in the movement to establish active, 'militant' headquarters for the party, to be opened at once, and to lead a general party reorganization movement during the next four years."[29] Hilles and Taft decided that the RNC's headquarters would remain active during the Wilson administration. While this would became common practice in the years that followed (and while the DNC made the same decision after the 1912 election), this was a first in the RNC's history.

The RNC went on to play an important role in bridging the divide between progressives and conservatives within the party. In May 1913, in anticipation of the first RNC meeting after the 1912 election, progressive Republican members of Congress gathered to discuss their future in the GOP. The participants concluded that they would remain in the Republican Party only if the RNC agreed to major reorganizations. Senator Lawrence Yates Sherman (R-IL) – who had supported Roosevelt in the primaries but Taft in the general election – summarized the progressives' view that "the [national] committee would" have to "be amenable to public opinion and keep pace with what was going on" within the party.[30] During the subsequent RNC meeting, members voted to establish a special committee to investigate the appointment rules that had prevent

[28] "Taft, Owning Defeat, Calls to Deserters," *The New York Times,* November 11, 1912.
[29] "Taft Halts Booms," *The Washington Post*, November 27, 1912.
[30] "Republicans Meet; Plan Party Reform," *The New York Times*, May 12, 1913.

progressive delegates from being seated at the 1912 convention. This committee's report resulted in the permanent decrease of Southern representation at the Republican national convention – one of the major demands of Republican progressives.[31]

The RNC also decided to increase its role as the publicity provider for the national party. The committee created a permanent press bureau to "forward the propaganda of Republicanism and keep in close touch with affairs"[32] during the Wilson administration. Additionally, RNC members voted to establish a liaison committee to structure national campaigns with the Republican Congressional Campaign Committee (RCCC).[33] Combined, these developments represented a major expansion of committee activities outside of presidential election campaigns, and were aimed at helping the party present voters with a unified response to the Wilson administration.[34]

The changes enacted in 1913 – while considerable in comparison to the committees' previous activities outside of election years – did not go far enough for some Republicans. In preparation of the 1916 election, members of the RNC called for a further expansion of committee activities. For example, Nebraska RNC member R.B. Howell complained that national committee members regularly had "very little to do" because "work was almost entirely confined to a sub-committee that was selected on the last day or the day following the last day of the Convention four years ago."[35] Instead, Howell suggested the RNC should become a "powerful body for the advancement of the Republican Party, a body very similar to the body that manages the affairs of the two great Political Parties of Great Britain."[36]

While the GOP was more united in 1916, the election was a moderate disappointment: Republicans won more seats in the House but Democrats maintained a majority thanks to

[31] See: Heersink and Jenkins, "Republican Party Politics and the American South." The Republican Party's reunification was assisted in large part due to the Progressive Party's inability to organize itself for the 1914 midterms, and its subsequent division on American participation in World War I. Roosevelt – frustrated with the "professional pacifists" of the Progressive Party – refused to run again in 1916 and instead endorsed the Republican ticket. See: "Roosevelt Declines Nomination," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 27, 1916.

[32] "Old Guard Decides Against Convention," *The New York Times*, May 20, 1913.

[33] Goldman, *The National Chairmen*, 275.

[34] Along similar lines, but outside of the RNC, the RCCC itself also moved in the direction of activities focused on the national party, rather than individual candidates, with RCCC Chairman Frank P. Woods (R-IA) announcing that "the committee's work from now on would not be in the line of direct aid to individual candidates but would consist of furnishing information to voters. ("Campaign Plan Ready," *The Washington Post*, August 30, 1913.) For a full overview of the historical development of the Democratic and Republican Congressional Campaign Committees (respectively the DCCC and RCCC) see Robin Kolodny, *Pursuing Majorities. Congressional Campaign Committees in American Politics* (Norman, Ok.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998).

[35] Paul Kesaris, Blair Hydrick, and Douglas D. Newman, *Papers of the Republican Party* (Frederick, Md.: University Publications of America, 1987) Reel 1, Frame 25-27.

[36] Ibid.

support from Progressive members and Wilson won a close reelection and Democrats retained a considerable majority in the Senate. In response to this defeat, Republican leaders again looked to their national committee as a possible solution. Senator John W. Weeks (R-MA), in a speech in December 1916, criticized the RNC for not doing even more during the first Wilson term – arguing that "if any private business attempted to conduct itself as did the National Committee it would go into bankruptcy in a short time."[37] Weeks called for a "permanent, continuously active National Committee which would be in the field the year around instead of being moribund except for a brief period before and after election days."[38] RNC chairman William Russell Wilcox – who succeeded Hilles in 1916, and remained in office only until February 1918 – used his farewell address to similarly suggest that the RNC ought to "become a very active organization"[39] which should help shape a more national party by connecting local state party organizations to the national Republican leadership in Congress.

Under Will Hays, Wilcox' successor, the RNC attempted to meet these goals. The committee maintained office space in Washington DC and had local offices in New York, Chicago, and San Francisco.[40] Hays also enlisted Republican Party activists to participate in Liberty Loan drives after the United States entered World War I in an attempt to both show patriotism and provide party workers with a chance to build contacts with new voters.[41] Additionally, Hays pushed for closer relations between the RNC and RCCC which resulted in a co-organized 1918 midterm campaign. To finance this expansion of RNC activities, Hays introduced a subscription scheme through which Republican voters across the country signed up for an individual donation plan that would bring in between $1 and $1,000 per year for each participant.[42] Hays also invested in the production of weekly news sheets – sent to 5,145 newspapers a week – and the establishment of a Speaker's Bureau, which allowed the RNC to coordinate requests for appearances of national

[37] "Overhaul Party Is Republican Demand," *The New York Times*, December 2, 1916.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Indeed, Willcox argued that he had no doubt that "had this complete organization which I refer to – this complete harmony – [. . .] existed between the States, [. . .] and had the instructions of the National Committee been followed in all of the States, Hughes and Fairbanks would have been elected." Ibid, Frame 123.

[40] "Republicans Make Ready," *The New York Times*, April 13, 1918; "G.O.P. Chiefs Coming Here," *The Washington Post*, July 01, 1918; Goldman, *The National Party Chairmen*, 288.

[41] After the announcement of the fourth liberty loan drive in September 1918, Hays stated that "the entire Republican organization in every voting precinct in this country shall be a fighting force in this Liberty Loan drive, all else is chores." "Will Drop Politics to Get Behind Loan," *The New York Times*, September 26, 1918; "The Republican Declaration," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 28, 1918.

[42] "Limit of $1,000 Placed On Gift to G.O.P. Funds," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 22, 1919; "Contributions For G.O.P. Fund Limited," *Los Angeles Times*, May 22, 1919.

party leaders across the country.[43]

The most fundamental innovation in the RNC's role was the creation of the Advisory Committee on Politics and Platform. This committee was the first attempt by a national committee to take control of the process of drafting the party's platform prior to the national convention. Hays argued that "heretofore platforms had been written on short notice without prior preparation or study," but that the GOP would benefit from a platform that was instead based on a "careful study of national conditions."[44] This was a fundamental shift in the RNC's role from merely promoting the party's policies to trying to help shape them and, as the *Washington Post* reported, meant the RNC was trying to place "issues above candidates."[45] The RNC's Advisory Committee selected 21 topics – including railroads, agriculture, national economy, military affairs, tariffs, taxation, conservation, social problems, immigration, postal reform, and the high cost of living – and sent questionnaires to 'prominent Republicans' to gauge their views on what positions the GOP should take on those issues in the 1920 platform.[46]

The RNC's activities during the Wilson administration pale in comparison to those national minority parties engaged in later in the 20th century. Nonetheless, the choice to keep the RNC active after the 1912 campaign, to use the committee to rebuild bridges between the conservative and progressive wings of the party, to promote party positions through press releases to newspapers across the country, and to help prepare the 1920 platform all signified a crucial shift in the committee's development. Unlike in previous years, Republicans began to view educational campaigns as requiring consistent activities by the RNC outside of election years.

Defending a Fragile Majority: The DNC

Democrats came out of the 1912 election in a much better state than the GOP. Indeed, with majorities in the House and Senate, and Wilson in the White House, Democrats were the national majority party between 1913 and 1917. However, as Scott James has argued, Democrats faced crucial disadvantages in the Electoral College in the "System of 1896" – resulting in landslide

[43] Kesaris et al, *Papers of the Republican Party*, Reel 1, Frame 345.
[44] "Hays Gives Bases of Party Planks," *The New York Times*, February 05, 1920.
[45] "G.O.P. Convention At Chicago, June 8," *The Washington Post*, December 11, 1919.
[46] "Republicans Seek Data For Platform," *The New York Times*, March 28, 1920; "G.O.P. Questionnaire," *The New York Times*, April 04, 1920; "Currency Questionnaire," *The New York* Times, April 13, 1920; "Republicans Seek Ship Plank Data," *The New York Times*, April 18, 1920.

losses in 1900, 1904, and 1908.[47] Democratic Party leaders – most notably Wilson – understood that the 1912 election was not a realignment, and that they could not count on Republican intra-party conflict alone to maintain their majorities.[48] Thus, Democrats also announced their own plans to conduct "a continual campaign for the education of the people in Democratic doctrines"[49] after the 1912 election. To achieve this, Wilson ordered the DNC to remain active during his administration.[50] DNC chairman William F. McCombs, during the committee's meeting on the day of Wilson's inauguration, stated that he did "not believe that, after an election, whether it results in victory or defeat, a committee should be dormant until a few months before another election" for "in order to assure a continuation of what we have accomplished, we must continue an organized army."[51] The committee voted to maintain both the Wilson campaign's former headquarters in New York, and to establish a Washington office for the DNC.

Much like the RNC and RCCC, the DNC and the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) formed a joint campaign committee in early 1913 to prepare for the 1914 midterm elections.[52] This committee intended to maintain "a continuous militant party organization" to help support the party "until after the next presidential election at least."[53] During Wilson's first term, the DNC's publicity division began promoting the Democratic Party by sending weekly letters with the party's positions on key policy issues to 10,000 weekly and 2,000 daily papers that did not have correspondents in Washington.[54] During the 1914 campaign, the DNC also released campaign materials connecting congressional candidates to the achievements of the Wilson administration, and – in cooperation with the DCCC - released a joint 'Democratic text book' – outlining the party's plans.[55]

The 1914 election continued the party's lack of electoral certainty: Democrats maintained their majorities in Congress, but lost seats in the House, while it expanded its majority in the Senate.

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[47] See Scott C. James, *Presidents, Parties, and the State: A Party System Perspective on Democratic Regulatory Choice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 132-141.

[48] Some Republicans shared this assessment: former Speaker of the House "Uncle" Joe Cannon (R-IL) in December 1913 described Wilson as a "minority" president. "Regrets Past Folly," *The Washington Post*, December 16, 1913.

[49] "Plans 4-Year Campaign," *The Washington Post*, November 08, 1912.

[50] "Home of Party Here," *The Washington Post*, December 24, 1912.

[51] William F. McCombs and Louis J. Lang, *Making Woodrow Wilson President* (New York: Fairview Publishing Company, 1921) 228.

[52] "Palmer Is Chairman," *The Washington Post*, May, 17, 1913.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

[55] "Texts For Campaign," *The Washington Post*, September 27, 1914.

Thus, the DNC continued its publicity activities in the run-up to the 1916 presidential election. In April 1915, the chairman of the DNC's executive committee – A. Mitchell Palmer – proposed that the party should raise $100,000 for the purpose of "making a nation-wide educational campaign": specifically, Palmer argued the DNC "ought to spend at least $100,000 on printer's ink during the immediate year"[56] to promote the party and the Wilson administration. The DNC also inaugurated a 'foreign bureau' to promote the party to "citizens of foreign birth and descent,"[57] by producing campaign materials in these voters' native languages.

Prior to the 1916 campaign, Wilson replaced McCombs with Vance McCormick. While Wilson won a (close) reelection, the party lost seats in the House and barely held on to majority control through support from Progressive members. In the wake of the election, McCormick stressed the ongoing need for a permanently active DNC.[58] However, due to the considerable deficit the party had built up during the 1916 campaign ($600,000[59]), the committee's ability to invest in new publicity programs was limited. Despite attempts by the DNC to turn the 1918 midterms into a referendum on Wilson's leadership during World War I, Republicans succeeded in winning a majority in both the House and Senate.[60]

McCormick resigned in response to the party's poor performance, but advised the party to ensure that the "organization work of the committee" would be "vigorously prosecuted"[61] during the remaining years of the Wilson administration. Under Homer Cummins, McCormick's successor, the DNC created a set of subcommittees to investigate "such questions as a special campaign among women," and "a prospective campaign among the foreign-born voters."[62] Any such attempts certainly had little effect in helping the party in the 1920 election. Without Wilson as a unifying figure, Democrats went into their national convention deeply divided and took 44 ballots to nominate James M. Cox (D-OH) as a compromise candidate. Throughout the fall campaign, the DNC's fundraising remained lackluster and the committee's financial situation was so precarious that in early November the party's workers were locked out of the campaign's

[56] "$100,000 Democratic Fund," *The New York Times*, April 12, 1915.
[57] "Seeking Foreign Vote," *The Washington Post*, August 22, 1916.
[58] "M'Cormick To Fight For 1918 Congress," *The New York Times*, November 22, 1916.
[59] "Democrats Raise $450,000 of Deficit," *The New York Times*, February 28, 1917.
[60] "Line Up For Congress," *The Washington Post*, October 21, 1918; "M'Adoo and Hays in Party Conflict," *The Washington Post*, October 28, 1918.
[61] "Democratic Chairman To Be Chosen Feb. 26," *The New York Times*, January 16, 1919.
[62] "Democrats Meet to Get $5,000,000 Fund," *The New York Times*, September 27, 1919.

headquarters in New York because the committee failed to pay rent.[63] The 1920 election results were unsurprisingly dramatic: Republicans further expanded their majorities in House and Senate and regained the White House and their position as national majority party.

Conclusion

Both the Democrats and Republicans faced uncertain electoral prospects in the period 1912-1920, which resulted in both parties maintaining active national committees throughout the Wilson administration. On the Republican side, the division between progressives and conservatives split the party's vote in the 1912 election. As a result, Republican leaders – including Taft – decided to maintain an active RNC after the end of the election campaign for the first time in the history of the committee. To restore party unity, the RNC engaged in a variety of activities, including the creation of 'news sheets' sent to papers across the country, and coordinated election campaigns with the RCCC. The DNC largely followed the same playbook: it also maintained an active HQ, coordinated its election campaigns with the DCCC, and invested heavily in publicity. Such actions were expected for the period after 1916, when Democrats lost unified control of government, but go against the prediction of the branding theory for the period prior to 1916. The reason for this differentiation appears to be that Democratic leaders were also affected by the Taft-Roosevelt split: while Democrats benefited from the GOP's intra-party conflict, party leaders (including Wilson) realized they could not count on a stable majority and thus invested in their national committee, despite their electoral success.

To be sure, these activities were minor in comparison to the kind of publicity programs national committees would create in the decades that followed. Nonetheless, the fact that both the DNC and RNC engaged in any type of educational campaigning outside of election years after the 1912 election was a crucial critical juncture for the committees as political institutions: moving forward, both parties maintained a nominally active national committee – ready to be activated for additional service provision when the party's electoral performance required it.

[63] "Democrats Barred From Own Headquarters," *The New York Times*, November 03, 1920.

III. National Minority Parties and Party Branding, 1921-1948

The period 1921-1948 saw a much clearer division between national minority and majority parties. Between 1921 and 1930, the Republican Party consistently maintained unified control of government – including three subsequent landslide victories in presidential elections. After the 1930 midterms, Democrats began their ascendency and, after the realignment election of 1932, the GOP found itself the national minority party – a position it would maintain until Eisenhower's victory in 1952. This period thus allows for a clear test of the hypothesis that committees of national minority parties should invest in more publicity programs. The cases below show that the DNC and RNC of national minority parties generally behaved as predicted by the theory: in both parties, the committees' expanded their activities, showed concern with the party's national brand, and attempted to shape it through publicity programs. However, the cases also show how the limited institutional capacity of the DNC and RNC – most notably, a lack of consistent fundraising programs in the 1920s – constrained the committees' ability to meet the expectations it set itself, resulting in several predictive failures of the branding theory.

DNC: Expansion of Publicity Services, With Notable Exceptions

In the wake of the 1920 election – during which Warren G. Harding won in a landslide, and Republicans gained 10 seats in the Senate and 62 in the House – Democratic party leaders looked to their national committee to help rebuild the party. William Gibs McAdoo, the Secretary of the Treasury under Wilson and a potential presidential candidate for the 1924 election, blamed the 1920 losses on the "the failure to get the Democratic side before the people through proper publicity."[64] As a solution, McAdoo suggested the DNC should appoint a full-time chairman – a first for either party at the time, and called for "the establishment and maintenance of permanent national headquarters with sufficient force to carry on [the DNC's] legitimate operations"[65] throughout the Harding administration. Under chairman George White – who Cox had selected to run the presidential campaign – the committee followed these suggestions. The DNC moved its campaign headquarters back to Washington from New York, and appointed a full time executive

[64] "McAdoo On Party's Needs," *The New York Times*, January 9, 1921; "Envy the Elephant," *Los Angeles Times*, January 9, 1921.
[65] "McAdoo On Party's Needs," *The New York Times*.

secretary in charge of management of the new HQ.[66] Most importantly, White appointed a full time Publicity Chairman to shape the Democratic response to the Harding administration.[67] White resigned as chairman in the fall of 1921 and was succeeded by former Congressman Cordell Hull (D-TN), who further expanded the committee's publicity role. Speaking to the press the day after his election, Hull set a clear objective for his term as chairman: developing the DNC into "the most militant and efficient organization" in American politics.[68]

More so than previous chairmen, Hull had a keen understanding of the potential of the DNC, writing in his autobiography that with "the Party out of power and in the minority in both Houses of Congress, whoever occupied the office of chairman of the National Committee was in the highest position of Democratic Party leadership in the nation."[69] In contemporaneous private correspondence, Hull explained his role as chairman of a national committee. Between 1921 and 1924, Hull frequently corresponded with former president Wilson. Hull and Wilson discussed in great detail their concerns about their party's electoral woes, and the role the DNC could play in alleviating them. In these letters, Hull showed particular attention to the necessity of a coherent national party brand for Democrats to be able to retake control of the House and Senate. For example, in May 1922, Hull wrote to Wilson that he had

> "exercised all possible efforts to stump out and minimize all factionalism wherever the same existed" and insisted that "no Democrat had a right to put forward his personal ambition during this year [. . .] where to do so might to any substantial extent jeopardize the success of the party in the November election."[70]

In another letter to Wilson in August 1922, Hull complained that he had been "preaching constantly to Democratic leaders the great and urgent necessity for general organization and educational work among the rank and file of Democrats," concluding that "we are in serious need of more cohesion and better party spirit."[71]

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[66] "Burt New Aid to White," *The Washington Post*, February 21, 1921.
[67] Thomas J. Queenan, *The Public Career of George White, 1905-1941* (dissertation - Kent State University, 1976) 149.
[68] "New Chairman Aims to Unite Democrats," *The New York Times*, November 3, 1921.
[69] Cordell Hull and Andrew Henry Thomas Berding, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1948) 113.
[70] Cordell Hull to Woodrow Wilson, May 27, 1922, Reel 1, Cordell Hull Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C. (hereafter, Cordell Hull Papers).
[71] Cordell Hull to Woodrow Wilson, August 23, 1922, Reel 1, Cordell Hull Papers.

IGoing into the 1922 midterms campaign, Hull focused most of his attentions on fund-raising – a necessity given the debts the DNC still had to pay off for the 1920 campaign. Thanks in large part to Democratic Victory Clubs – a set of local party organizations created by Hull to ensure the DNC would receive a constant stream of income through donation subscriptions – Hull managed to erase the DNC's debts, and work with the DCCC to organize the 1922 midterm campaign.[72] During the subsequent election, Democrats failed to regain majorities in Congress but performed well – winning six seats in the Senate, and 77 in the House. Democratic politicians and the press celebrated Hull as one of the principal architects of the Democratic revival.[73]

After the 1922 midterms, Hull expanded the DNC's activities further. In a letter to Wilson written in February 1923, Hull explained the committee now sent "weekly literature and up-to-date facts" to "about five thousand country weeklies and one thousand local dailies."[74] The DNC's research department had also begun collecting "considerable data" to assist Democrats in Congress, and the committee organized weekly meetings with "a great many leading Democrats" at the DNC's offices "for purposes of conference and exchanges of information"[75] and to provide Democrats an opportunity to coordinate on the party's response to salient policy issues. Additionally, the DNC created the National School of Democracy "to instruct Democratic women in public speaking and party administration"[76] in the wake of enactment of the nineteenth amendment.[77]

Despite Hull's attempts at building party cohesion, the 1924 election again dragged the Democratic Party into a major conflict over the selection of its presidential nominee. This time, delegates to the Democratic National Convention gathered in New York and deadlocked in a race between McAdoo and Governor Al Smith (D-NY). After more than 100 ballots – a new record

[72] Hull claims the Victory Clubs brought in around $70,000 in the first ten months of 1923. (Cordell Hull to Woodrow Wilson, October 27, 1923, Reel 2, Cordell Hull Papers), a far cry from the $1 million the Victory Clubs were intended to raise before the 1924 election ("Democrats to Seek $1,000,000 For 1924," *The New York Times*, March 24, 1923) but nonetheless a significant amount for the perpetually cash strapped DNC.

[73] Goldman, *The National Party Chairmen*, 311.

[74] Cordell Hull to Woodrow Wilson, February 28, 1923, Reel 1, Cordell Hull Papers.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Goldman, *The National Party Chairmen*, 314.

[77] While Hull's achievements in this regard were impressive, initial plans for the expansion of the DNC were even more extensive. One early plan, proposed by Richard Linthieum, the director of publicity of the DNC, concerned the creation of a Democratic National Association which would unite Democratic voters in a membership organization that would provide the DNC with an annual fee of $10 per member ("Suggested Plan for Democratic National Association," December 3, 1921, Reel 1, Cordell Hull Papers). Even more extensive was Hull's suggestion (in an effort to "stump out and minimize factionalism wherever the same existed") "to develop a plan under which some of our Democratic leaders in the House and myself [...] will announce a policy [...] of giving to each section of the country their reasonable representation with respect to committee chairmanships in the House" (Cordell Hull to Woodrow Wilson, May 27, 1922, Reel 1, Cordell Hull Papers).

for either party – delegates eventually settled on former Solicitor General John W. Davis as a compromise candidate. The damage by that point had been done: the 1924 conventions were the first to be broadcast live through radio, and voters across the country thus had directly heard how divided the Democratic Party was. The subsequent election results were a disaster: Calvin Coolidge – who had succeeded Harding after his death in 1923 – won a landslide presidential victory, and Democrats lost 24 seats in the House and four in the Senate.

With the Democratic Party clearly in the minority nationally, the DNC should have invested extensively in publicity programs. Instead, the national committee was almost entirely inactive. The core reason for this was the party's dismal financial position. With donations limited after the 1924 convention, the party ran up a $300,000 deficit by the end of the campaign – more than $4 million in 2015 dollars.[78] DNC chairman Clem Shaver – appointed by Davis after the 1924 convention – was forced to spend most of his time in office raising money, with little success. Because of this, the DNC simply had no funds to spend on new publicity programs. During testimony before a Senate committee on party finances in July 1926, Shaver was forced to confirm that the DNC had collected only $2,000 for that year's midterm campaign and that the DNC did not actually have a budget planned for the year. Senator James A. Reed (D-MO) concluded that "the Democratic Party is nearly bankrupt."[79] Even under these financial constraints, the DNC did not entirely abandon its publicity role. For example, the committee began publishing *The National Democrat* – a new party newsletter.[80] Still, these were minor programs in comparison to the Hull era: as the *Washington Post* reported, "Shaver discontinued the publicity activities of the National committee" because they were "too costly and were not profitable."[81]

Other Democratic party leaders did not support the DNC's lack of activity in this regard. After the 1924 election, the National League of Young Democrats and the New York Democratic Club called for more frequent DNC meetings and national off-year conventions to set party positions. Additionally, the groups called for permanent DNC offices to be created in major American cities to ensure consistent outreach to voters there.[82] Representative William Allan

[78] "Deficit of Democrats Put At About $300,000," *The New York Times*, December 4, 1924.
[79] "Party Chiefs on Stand," *The New York Times*, July 3, 1926.
[80] "Another National Weekly," *The New York Times*, May 18, 1925; "F.W. Steckman to Edit National Democrat," *The New York Times*, May 20, 1925.
[81] "Shaver is Reported Ready to Resign as National Chairman," *Washington Post*, May 27, 1925.
[82] Goldman, *The National Party Chairmen*, 320-321.

Oldfield (D-AR), the chair of the DCCC, complained that the "lack of adequate publicity has been the greatest handicap of the Democratic Party in State and national politics."[83] Franklin Delano Roosevelt – the vice-presidential candidate on the Democratic ticket in 1920 – sent a letter to other Democrats in December 1924 arguing that "the National Committee [. . .] should function every day in every year and not merely in Presidential election years."[84] Specifically, FDR believed that "publicity for fundamental party policy [. . .] should be greatly extended," that party leaders should meet "more frequently in order to exchange views and plan for united party action,"[85] and that the party should organize biannual national conventions to update the party's national policy positions more frequently.

As FDR's biographer James Macgregor Burns has argued, FDR wanted the party to "unite more closely, get rid of its 'factionalism' and 'localism,' to do a better publicity job, to get on a firmer financial basis"[86] – all of which he believed required a more active national committee. Shaver's failure to achieve any of these goals greatly frustrated FDR. In the spring of 1927, FDR wrote in a letter to a political supporter that

> "the present Chairman of the National Committee has very frankly declined to assume any responsibility whatever. The National Committee itself has been perfectly willing to remain even more dormant than this and as a result the body which should guide us and keep us enthusiastic in between elections is, for all practical purposes, non-existent."[87]

However, financial limitations were not the only barrier to a more active DNC. An additional constraint – and one that would be a fundamental element of the national committee's branding activities in the decades that followed – was opposition to national publicity activities by Southern congressional Democrats. As part of a de-facto single party system, these representatives faced little to no threat to their reelection in general elections. As a result, Southern Democrats were generally not concerned with the need to build more active national party organizations. Indeed,

[83] "Another National Weekly," *The New York Times*.
[84] Franklin D. Roosevelt to Randolph, December 5, 1924, Reel 2, Cordell Hull Papers.
[85] Ibid.
[86] James MacGregor Burns, *Roosevelt: The Lion and the Fox* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1956) 95.
[87] Cited in Laurence Robert Jurdem, *Return to the Arena: The Reemergence of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 1921-1928* (dissertation - University of Louisville, Proquest, UMI Dissertations Publishing, 1997) 137.

Burns argues these conservative Democrats feared that the kind of "concerted national effort by the party" proposed by FDR would undermine their traditional strategy of "deserting the party platform and taking a position congenial to local interests."[88] FDR therefore concluded that the result of the national committee's financial troubles and the South's unwillingness to support committee investments was that "we have practically no leaders in a National sense at all."[89]

While the 1928 election did nothing to solve the North-South divide within the party, it did produce a surprise solution to the committee's financial woes. Democratic delegates in 1928 were relatively unified in their support for Smith as the party's presidential candidate. This did not help the party much in the election, which Republican nominee Herbert Hoover won in yet another landslide. However, Smith's candidacy did mean he had the right to select the party's new national committee chairman, for which he chose John J. Raskob. As David Farber has explained, Raskob was a surprise pick. A businessman who had worked his way up from being the personal secretary of Pierre DuPont to becoming vice-president of General Motors, Raskob had generally identified as a political independent. Even in early 1928, Raskob, in declining the position of state chairman of the GOP in Delaware, explained that "I am such a strong believer in voting for good men regardless of party that it would be unfair for me to be aligned too closely with any party."[90]

Raskob was thus by no means a devout Democrat, but accepted the leadership of the DNC for two reasons. First, Raskob was a close personal friend to Smith. While the two had only met in 1926, during the governor's most recent reelection campaign, they bonded over shared 'rags-to-riches' personal histories and Catholic faith. Smith incorporated Raskob in his 'Golfing Cabinet' – a set of wealthy New York donors to Smith's campaign competing for his influence with his more progressive political advisors.[91] Second, Raskob was a strong opponent of Prohibition – both based on his personal unwillingness to abide by the law, as well as his conviction that it was largely the product of anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant campaigns. Additionally, Raskob was concerned that banning alcoholic beverages could inspire bans on other products – including those Raskob had personal financial interests in.[92] Raskob's strong opposition to Prohibition

[88] Burns, *Roosevelt*, 96.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Cited in David Farber, *Everybody Ought to be Rich: The Life and Times of John J. Raskob, Capitalist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 220.
[91] Ibid, 224.
[92] Ibid., 227.

would become an important theme during his chairmanship, and stretch the role of the DNC.

Raskob remained DNC chairman after Smith's loss to Hoover. While controversial during his time in office, Raskob managed to maintain his position largely because he also functioned as the committee's most reliable lender. For example, in September 1932 alone Raskob contributed $10,000 to the DNC – covering nearly all of the committee's operating costs that month.[93] Raskob's willingness to function as the committee's personal credit provider was crucial to securing his position – particularly given that the DNC had a deficit of $1.6 million (more than $22 million in 2015 dollars).[94] Additionally, Raskob's business connections meant the Democrats for the first time in years were competitive among wealthier donors. As Robert E. Mutch has noted, Raskob "brought in three times as many $5,000-plus donors as had contributed in any of the four previous presidential campaigns. Some of these donors [. . .] were reliable Democratic backers, but most were giving to the party for the first time."[95]

Raskob's chairmanship meant a return to Hull's attempts of producing a cohesive Democratic brand. Notably, Raskob went much further than any of his predecessors in either party up to that point, in claiming that the national committee had the power to help *determine* party policies. After the 1928 election, Raskob announced the DNC would again have fully staffed headquarters (under the leadership of Jouett Shouse, who became the chair of the DNC's executive committee) and that himself would be "more than a figurehead."[96] In a letter to Senator Carter Glass (D-VA), Raskob explained that he believed that "insufficient attention has been given to the matter of coordinating the various units into a strong national organization," and that his goal was to "devise ways and means of solidifying [the Democratic Party] into the greatest national party ever known."[97]

To achieve this, Raskob invested in the creation of a new publicity bureau, focused on promulgating the Democratic Party's positions on issues of the day. Shouse, writing in an article in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1931, explained that this division had "the dual purpose of educating the electorate and affording some proper understanding of the Democratic point of view."[98] The

[93] Douglas B.S. Craig, *Rehearsal for Revolt: The Ideological Turmoil of the Democratic Party, 1920-1932* (Dissertation – University of Virginia, 1989) 431.

[94] "Democrats Facing Deficit of $1,500,000," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 17, 1928; "Huge Sum Owed By Democrats," *Los Angeles Times*, November 17, 1928.

[95] Mutch, *Buying the Vote*, 90.

[96] "Raskob to Summon Democratic Chiefs to Build Up Party," *The New York Times*, December 5, 1928.

[97] Cited in Lopata, *John J. Raskob: A Conservative Businessman in the Age of Roosevelt* (thesis – University of Delaware, 1975), 114.

[98] Jouett Shouse, "Watchman, What of the Night?" *The Atlantic Monthly* vol. 147 (Boston: The Atlantic Monthly

division produced daily press releases, and sent them to major and minor newspapers across the country. The DNC in particular attacked the Hoover administration's handling of the unfolding economic collapse, and issues such as the Smoot-Hawley tariff. In one particularly notable stunt, the DNC took advantage of conflict within the GOP on the issue of farm relief: Senator William Borah (R-ID) had criticized Hoover for its failure to help farmers in a speech. The DNC paid to print millions of copies of the speech, and cooperated with Borah to use his franking privileges to send copies to farmers across the country.[99] In the estimation of reporter Frank R. Kent, the Raskob-Shouse led publicity division was the "most elaborate, expensive, efficient, and effective political propaganda machine ever operated in the country."[100]

Raskob and Shouse did not merely invest in new publicity programs, they also tried to use them to adjust the party's position on Prohibition. While the duo was not successful in this regard, Raskob's conviction that the DNC had a central task in providing new ideas and policies in the years between national conventions was an important reassessment of the role national committees could play in intra-party politics.[101] Raskob's goal was to use the DNC to make the repeal of the 18th amendment party policy before the start of the 1932 convention. Several attempts were made to achieve this, but each failed in large part because of Southern opposition. The most notable example came in early 1931 when Raskob announced he would put the issue of Prohibition to a vote in the DNC meeting scheduled for March. Southern conservatives were outraged. Senator Cameron A. Morrison (D-NC) warned Raskob that if he carried "out the will of these nullifiers of the Constitution of the United States and [sought] to determine the policy of the Democratic Party" he would "meet defeat before the committee" or "if they carry the committee, the committee will receive the worst drubbing that any set of men ever received in American politics in the next Democratic Convention."[102]

Roosevelt's role in this chapter of the DNC's attempts at updating the party's brand was notable. While FDR had called for a stronger national committee, clear national party policies, and had been opposed by Southern Democrats on these goals during the Coolidge administration,

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Company, 1931) 251.

[99] "Hoover-Borah Split On Farm Relief Is Seen," *The Miami News*, April 28, 1929; "Democrats Using Speech by Borah," *The New York Times*, September 1, 1929.

[100] Cited in Craig, *Rehearsal for Revolt*, 425.

[101] Ibid, 459.

[102] "Southern Senators Warn Party Wets," *The New York Times*, February 17, 1931.

the 1928 election had changed his political preferences. FDR's election as governor of New York, meant he was now in a strong position to run for president in 1932. To achieve this, FDR would need Southern support at the convention. Because of this, FDR's representatives on the DNC – most notably James Farley, FDR's campaign chairman and the chair of the Democratic Party in New York –opposed attempts to bring Prohibition to a vote in the DNC. Farley issued a public statement criticizing Raskob for confusing "the powers of the national committee by seeking to create an issue or issues on which the national committee cannot by any strength of the imagination bind the party."[103]

Certainly, FDR's concerns about the DNC under Raskob were legitimate: Raskob and Shouse both wanted Smith to be re-nominated in 1932, and – when it appeared Smith was unwilling to run again – actively encouraged other candidates to join the race to keep Roosevelt from winning the nomination.[104] But criticism of Raskob's attempt of using a DNC meeting to bind the Democratic Party to an anti-Prohibition position was not limited to supporters of FDR. Bernard Baruch, a personal friend of Raskob, wrote the chairman in February 1931 to warn him against using the DNC to

> "put forth what it may think is the Democratic position on the great questions. This is not its business, certainly not as much as it is the leaders in Congress. The convention that nominates the presidential candidate is the body which makes the platform and declares its position on all questions and the nominee is the one to expound its principles. I can think of nothing that would be so destructive of the magnificent chances the Democratic Party has before it as to attempt to have the National Committee declare for its policies or views upon great questions of the day."[105]

The wave of criticism stopped Raskob from bringing Prohibition to a vote, but during the DNC meeting he did call on the 1932 national convention to support a new constitutional amendment allowing individual states to opt out of the 18th amendment.[106] However, Raskob's failure to

[103] Goldman, *The National Party Chairmen*, 334.
[104] See Lopata, *John J. Raskob*, 185-191.
[105] Cited in Ibid, 159.
[106] Ibid., 162. This position did not please Southern Democrats either: Senator Joseph T. Robinson (D-AR) warned Raskob and the DNC that they could not "inscribe on the banner of the Democratic Party the skull and crossbones of an illegal trade." See: Ibid, 163.

get a vote from the DNC did not deter him from subsequently pursuing the issue in other ways and using the DNC to signal to voters that the party was shifting on the issue of Prohibition. In April 1931, Raskob sent a letter to DNC members for personal recommendations for the 1932 platform, specifically with regards to prohibition, with the intent of showing a groundswell of support among party leaders for a 'wet' plank.[107] Around the same time, Shouse published an article in *The Democratic Bulletin* – the newsletter of the Women's National Democratic Club of Washington – calling for the party to embrace a so-called 'beer-plank,' which would outlaw hard liquor but allow the manufacturing of wine and beer.[108] In November 1931, Raskob again tried to show Democratic opposition to Prohibition by sending a survey to 90,000 campaign donors requesting their views on the issue.[109]

In the end, Raskob and Shouse failed in their attempt to settle the Prohibition issue before the 1932 convention. Additionally, they also failed in keeping FDR from winning the nomination. Instead, sizeable majorities of delegates passed both a wet plank and nominated Roosevelt.[110] On this basis, it may be tempting to dismiss Raskob as a failed chairman. However, this underestimates the important role the publicity division played in these years in – in the assessment of reporter Frank Kent – to shape "the public mind in regard to Mr. Hoover."[111] Indeed, after the 1952 election – Democratic leaders pointed to the Raskob-era publicity division as an example for how the party should respond to its condition as an out-party.[112] Importantly, the Raskob's attempts at using the DNC for programmatic purposes also more forcefully than ever before introduced the conception that national committees ought to have the power and responsibility of setting party policies.

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[107] "Raskob Insists Party Decide It's Wet Or Dry," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 6, 1931; "Wet, Dry Issue Raskob Appeal Stirs His Party," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 7, 1931; "Raskob Canvasses Party's '32 Policies, Stressing Dry Law," *The New York Times*, April 6, 1931.

[108] "Shouse For Beer as a Party Plank," *The New York Times*, September 21, 1931.

[109] "Raskob Asks 90,000 If Party Platform Is To Be Wet Or Dry," *The New York Times*, November 23, 1931; "Raskob's 'Wet'Poll Viewed As Strategy To Block Roosevelt," *The New York Times*, November 24, 1931.

[110] Raskob – realizing that Smith lacked the necessary delegates to be nominated – made a last minute attempt to push Owen Young (the chairman of General Electric) as Democratic presidential candidate at the beginning of the 1932 convention. Faber, *Everybody Ought to be Rich*, 283.

[111] Cited in Ibid, 254.

[112] See chapter 3 of this dissertation.

RNC: Finding a Response to the New Deal

The 1932 election represented a dramatic shift in political power between the parties. Democrats had already won a majority in the House in the 1930 midterms, but now also had substantial majorities in the House, Senate, popular vote, and electoral college. The election was a knock out punch for the GOP: the party lost 12 seats in the Senate and 101 seats in the House. Herbert Hoover carried only six states.

However, contrary to the theory's predictions, the RNC's initial response to the New Deal realignment was anemic. Everett Sanders – who Hoover had appointed as his final RNC chair after the 1932 Republican convention – remained in office after the defeat, but was in failing health throughout his chairmanship. As a result, the committee lacked leadership to push the organization to a more active role within the party. Still, party leaders were calling on the RNC take on such a role. Sanders, in a speech in 1933, argued that "the very existence of a vigilant, well organized minority party" as "the best preventive against economic and political excesses upon the part of the party in power."[113] Hoover – in a letter to Sanders written in May 1932, argued that the RNC needed to take on a more active role because "government based on the proper functioning of two political parties" required "vigorous activity on the part of the party; and indeed, it is only through such organized discussion of public questions that our people may arrive at the truth."[114]

Sanders resigned in 1934, and under his successors the RNC became a more active organization. Subsequent RNC chairs focused on identifying a broader national argument the GOP could make against the Democrats and the New Deal. Henry P. Fletcher – who remained in office until the 1936 convention – believed the party should be rebuilt "along more liberal lines, but opposed to New Deal theories."[115] Fletcher in particular warned other Republicans that the dramatic losses in the 1934 midterms fundamentally undermined the GOP's chance of survival: the Republican Party risked going "the way of the Whig organization if it did not present appealing issues and a united front in the next Congress."[116]

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[113] "Address to the Young Republican Rally," June 29, 1933, Container 4, Folder 1, Everett Sanders Papers.
[114] Herbert Hoover to Everett Sanders, May 30, 1934, Container 1, Folder 3, Everett Sanders Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C. (hereafter cited as Everett Sanders Papers).
[115] "Fletcher to Speed Party Rebuilding," *The New York Times*, November 8, 1934.
[116] Ibid.

Fletcher was in office for less than two years but still managed to make several crucial contributions to the RNC's expansion. In April 1935, the RNC approved Fletcher's plan to raise funds to expand the committee's staff to mimic that of the DNC during the Hoover administration, and form a permanent campaign organization. Additionally, the committee created a speaker's bureau, opened offices in Chicago, and appointed a full-time executive assistant to the chairman.[117] To court young voters, the RNC also founded a Republican youth division with a monthly newsletter (*The Trumpeter*).[118] Additionally, RNC general counsel John D. Hamilton organized a major grass roots conference in 1935 – bringing together six thousand Republicans from ten states in the Midwest.[119]

After the 1936 convention, Governor Alfred Landon (R-KS), the party's presidential nominee, replaced Fletcher with Hamilton. Landon lost in the GOP's second landslide defeat to FDR, and Hamilton offered his resignation to the RNC. This was a gamble on Hamilton's part: the new RNC chairman did not actually intend to resign but made this offer to secure his own independence as chairman moving forward. Writing to a supporter in December 1936, Hamilton explained that

> "I have thought this course wise for several reasons. First, if the resignation is refused I shall be the Chairman in my own right. Second, refusal will result in an approval of the conduct of the campaign and there can be no future backbiting. Finally, I will be in a position to insist on reorganization in the states which need it which I certainly would not be able to do if I myself had not offered my resignation."[120]

The gamble paid off: the RNC refused to accept Hamilton's resignation, and he remained in office throughout FDR's second term. Under Hamilton's leadership, the RNC expanded its permanent staff to 51 employees, and increased the budget of its research division. The RNC also began providing candidates with speech kits – pre-written speeches and talking points intended to help Republican candidates project consistent messages to voters across the country.[121] The

[117] "Republican Groups to Seek Formula," *The New York Times*, April 28, 1935.
[118] Goldman, *The National Party Chairmen*, 396-397.
[119] "The Grassroots Republican Conference, Springfield, Illinois, June 10-11 1935," Container 1, Folder 1, John D. Hamilton Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C. (hereafter cited as John D. Hamilton Papers). See also: Elliot A. Rosen, *The Republican Party in the Age of Roosevelt. Sources of Anti-Government Conservatism in the United* States (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014) 21-22.
[120] John D.M. Hamilton to A.L. "Dutch" Schultz, December 4, 1936, Container 1, Folder 4, John D. Hamilton Papers.
[121] Galvin, "The Transformation of Political Institutions," 60-61. As will be discussed in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, the DNC also used such speech kits after the dramatic losses in the 1952 elections.

RNC organized regular weekend conferences in 1937 and 1938 to help coordinate party positions – much as the DNC had done under Hull's leadership in the early 1920s. The research division prepared detailed analyses for these conferences, and the committee invited non-partisan experts to help brief the candidates and lawmakers: "for two days each weekend these various groups sat together and discussed ways and means of improving particular problems, such as legislative measures pending before House or Senate, or amendment of bills, or amendment of statues already on the books."[122]

The RNC also returned to George White's attempt at using a Committee on Program to help prepare the party's platform in preparation for the 1920 convention. In November 1937, Hamilton announced that a new committee – existing of no less than 100 members selected by the executive committee of the RNC – to prepare the next platform. Hamilton defended this program as vital to building a Republican Party brand:

> "Surely we cannot be worse off than we are now. We have no common bond – except the name – that unites Republicans anywhere. Men are elected to Congress from different sections of the country, calling themselves Republicans [...] yet holding diametrically opposed views on public questions."[123]

Hamilton argued that the party's failure to produce a clear alternative to the New Deal hurt it in elections: "there's no wonder, when you talk to the average man about the Republican Party, he asks you what the Party stands for."[124] With Democrats winning each election between 1932 and 1936, Hamilton told national committee members that the national committee would need to take control of the party's image: "if there has ever been a time when we must be audacious, it is now."[125]

Hamilton was inspired in part by his 1937 visit to the United Kingdom. During this visit, the RNC chairman interviewed politicians, volunteers, and staff members of the Conservative

[122] Kesaris et al, *Papers of the Republican Party*, Reel 5, Frames 947-948. To fund these new activities, and to pay off the deficit the party was left with after the Landon campaign, the RNC inaugurated several new fundraising programs. This included the unification of national and state appeals to avoid duplicate solicitations, and the introduction of Lincoln Loyalty Dinners – fundraisers in the mold of the DNC's Jefferson and Jackson Day Dinners. The RNC also followed Hull's idea of the Democratic Victory Clubs by charging Republican supporters membership fees. This approach netted the RNC $700,000 in donations in 1938 alone. See: Ibid, frames 298, 277-278, and 392-394.

[123] Kesaris et al, *Papers of the Republican Party*, Reel 5, Frame 435.

[124] Ibid.

[125] John D. M. Hamilton to Frances Bolton, October 25, 1937, Container 2, Folder 4, John D. Hamilton Papers.

Party. In a report of these interviews, Hamilton concluded that "it is a primary principle of the Conservative system [...] that 'politics' is not a seasonal or spasmodic interest."[126] Hamilton concluded that this meant that modern parties could not survive on the basis of volunteer activity as "the backbone of the system is made up of the various paid agents of the Party."[127] Hamilton relied on his findings on the Conservatives' party organization to innovate the RNC – including by investing in an effective publicity machine that targeted media sources across the country with tailored press releases, and nationally produced and distributed pamphlets.

Hamilton resigned after the party's third consecutive presidential election defeat against FDR in 1940. The early 1940s saw a slightly less vital RNC in comparison to the Hamilton years, in part due to conflict between defeated 1940 presidential candidate (and former Democrat) Wendell Wilkie, and conservative Republicans in Congress regarding the party's policy direction. However, despite Hamilton's own pessimism regarding the RNC's role in party politics – stating in a 1944 letter that "we never seem to learn in the Republican Party that activities are a year round proposition and not something to be indulged in spasmodically every four years"[128] – the RNC did in fact remain active throughout FDR's final terms. For example, Joseph W. Martin, Hamilton's successor, created seven subcommittees to deal with the party's organization and publicity programs, outreach to black voters, farmers, Southern states, and women, and issues related to large city problems.[129] The RNC also adopted a plan for a more centralized midterm campaign by assigning "to every Republican worker a specific role in the 1942 Congressional campaigns," a plan which "for the first time in party history" identified clear responsibilities during campaigns for the national committee members but also placed control over the campaign in the hands of the RNC.

Both parties agreed to temporarily suspend political activities after the Pearl Harbor attacks. However, while Martin declared the GOP would "support President Roosevelt to a man in the war effort,"[130] the party did continue its midterm campaign efforts. Additionally, under Harrison E. Spangler – who succeeded Martin after the 1942 election – the RNC organized a major party

[126] "Memorandum on Conservative Party Organization," June 1937, Page 2, Container 2, Folder 2, John D. Hamilton Papers.
[127] Ibid.
[128] John D.M. Hamilton to Roy Garvin, May 5, 1944, Container 5, Folder 1, John D. Hamilton Papers.
[129] "Republicans Name Seven Study Units," *The New York Times*, June 9, 1941.
[130] "Republican Meeting Off," *The New York Times*, December 22, 1941.

conference in September 1943 on Mackinac Island to help settle the party's position on how the United States should position itself on the issue of participation in post-war international organizations.[131] After the final presidential defeat at the hands of FDR in 1944, RNC chairman Herbert Brownell – appointed after the 1944 convention – promised a "vigorous, progressive, all-year program of party activity."[132] Carroll Reece, who succeeded Brownell in 1946, added to this the basic understanding that the national party should outweigh the preferences and rights of individual elected officials. Writing in a Republican newsletter, Reece argued that "every Republican in Congress today represents both his party and his individual constituency," and that therefore "it was the party which elected him. He is a member of a team, one which he joined of his own free will and with full realization of the responsibilities he was assuming."[133]

Conclusion

National minority parties in the period 1921-1948 engaged in a variety of publicity programs with the clear intention of helping shape the party's national brand, in the hope of improving its electoral performance. Under DNC chairmen Hull and Raskob, the DNC invested considerably in its publicity divisions – hoping to provide a consistent Democratic message to voters by providing local newspapers with regular newssheets and press releases. Additionally, the DNC in this period also attempted to play a role in *determining* party policy: under Hull, the committee organized weekly meetings to help Democratic elected officials coordinate their positions. Under Raskob, the DNC attempted to force the party to embrace opposition to prohibition as a national position before the 1932 convention. Only under DNC chairman Clem Shaver did the DNC fail to perform such a task, despite a clear demand for such publicity activities from party leaders such as Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The main cause appears to have been simple: the DNC during the Coolidge administration lacked the financial resources to fund such programs.

The RNC during the New Deal years played a similar role. It too invested in publicity programs intended to counter the Roosevelt administration. Additionally, under RNC chairman Hamilton, the committee created a set of program committees to help the party draft the 1940 platform.

[131] "Republicans Call Platform Parley," *The New York Times*, July 24, 1943; "G.O.P. Leaders Meet to Draft 1944 Platform," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 5, 1943; "GOP At Mackinac Left Doors Open," *The New York Times*, September 12, 1943.
[132] Goldman, *The National Party Chairmen*, 487.
[133] "Reece Urges GOP in Congress to End Discord, Use Team-Work," *The New York Times*, March 3, 1947.

Under Hamilton's successors, the RNC also engaged in similar programs intended to both shape and promote the party's brand – including organizing a major intra-party conference to identify the party's position on international relations for the post-war era. The only exception on the Republican side concerned Clem Shaver – whose activities as chairman were limited due to his failing health.

IV. National Majority Parties and Committee Decline, 1921-1946

Inversely, the 1921-1946 period saw two clear periods of national majority party domination. Between 1920 and 1930, Republicans consistently won presidential elections and held majorities in both the House and Senate. Starting in 1932, Democrats held the White House and majorities in Congress until the 1946 midterms. The branding theory predicts that in comparison to national minority party committees in the same period, the activities of committees of national majority parties should recede. The cases below mostly confirm these expectations: under the Coolidge and Hoover administrations, the RNC dropped many of the additional activities it engaged in during the Wilson years. Meanwhile, under FDR the DNC receded dramatically – despite Roosevelt's own support for an active national committee during the 1920s. The only exception occurred in the GOP under the Harding administration: despite Republican electoral success, the RNC still engaged in publicity activities and even actively criticized progressive Republicans in Congress, and the Harding administration's foreign policy.

The RNC under Harding, Coolidge and Hoover

The GOP, in contrast to the Democratic Party, came out of the 1920 election with a secure national majority position. As a result, party leaders saw no need to continue the expansion of activities of the RNC during the Wilson administration. RNC chairman Hays pushed for the committee to remain relevant, but after his resignation in the spring of 1921 the RNC significantly decreased its activities. Part of the reason for this may have been the committee's substantial debts after the 1920 election.[134] But the committee also made very little attempts at raising the funds necessary to pay off these debts, and invest in new programs: the *New York Times* concluded

[134] The committee still had a deficit of $700,000 – nearly $8.3 million in 2015 dollars – by the beginning of 1922. See: "Still Owes $708,161 For Harding Campaign," *The New York Times*, January 25, 1922.

in October 1922 that the GOP's midterm campaign managers were "confronted with a depleted treasury and refusal of contributions from sources heretofore depended upon."[135]

A surprising shift occurred after the 1922 midterms, during which Democrats (with the newly invigorated Hull-led DNC) gained seats in the House and Senates. In the immediate aftermath, RNC chair John T. Adams attempted to expand the RNC's power over the party's brand. This was in part in response to ongoing intra-party conflicts between progressives and conservatives: as Jeffery Jenkins and Charles Stewart have shown, the 1922 midterms changed the balance of power in the Republican congressional caucus. Now, the GOP's congressional wing included a substantial segment of Western progressives who cooperated on legislation with liberal Democrats.[136] Adams – a member of the party's conservative wing – spent much of his time in office criticizing Republican progressives for failing to support the GOP's platform. More surprisingly, Adams also attacked the Harding administration – mostly on its foreign policy. For example, Adams caused major offense in the spring of 1923 when he attacked America's European allies as "crooks" for failing to pay the United States for the presence of American troops in Europe.[137]

After Harding's death, Adams continued his attacks on progressive Republicans and authored a set of articles in *The National Republican* – a magazine previously published by the RNC, but which had split off in April 1924. The cause for this split was the editorial staff's desire to uphold "only those members of the Republican Party who are faithful to the principles of the regular organization" and to oppose "men classed as Republicans who have not kept step with party principles and policies."[138] While the magazine was now independent of the RNC, Adams was one of the major stock holders and members of the press and Republican progressives saw the publication as an ongoing attempt by the RNC to undermine both progressive members of Congress and the Coolidge administration. In response, Coolidge forced Adams to resign in May

[135] "Republicans Uneasy Over the Election," *The New York Times*, October 15, 1922.

[136] See Jeffery A. Jenkins and Charles Stewart III, *Fighting for the Speakership. The House and the Rise of Party Government* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013) 284-291.

[137] Additionally, the RNC (together with the RSCC and the RCCC) strongly disagreed with the Harding administration's position on American participation in the World Court. See: "Republicans Charge Allies Are 'Crooked'," *The New York Times*, May 24, 1923; "'Allied Crooks' Circular Gives Harding Shock," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 25, 1923; "Harding Harassed By Party Managers," *The New York* Times, May 26, 1923; "Adams Raps Critics of Committee Slur on Allied Nations," *The New York* Times, May 30, 1923.

[138] "Republican Organ Adopts New Policy," *The New York Times*, April 24, 1924.

1924.[139]

After the Adams resignation and Coolidge's own victory in the 1924 election, the RNC receded again. Coolidge named RNC chairman William Butler to run his presidential campaign, and remained in office until the summer of 1928. However, after the death of Henry Cabot Lodge (R-MA) in November 1924, Butler was also appointed senator – making him a part-time committee chairman. While Butler did express his believe in "the necessity of strong efforts to win in the congressional elections of 1926,"[140] the RNC was a political institution of little consequence during his tenure. The RNC itself met irregularly, and when meetings did occur focused almost exclusively on organizing the 1928 convention.[141] Under Butler, the RNC maintained headquarters in Washington, but with only limited staff and few publicity programs. Butler himself was largely invisible as well: while the chairman did go on a national fact-finding tour in the spring of 1927 to prepare for the upcoming presidential election, he otherwise remained out of the spotlight.[142]

During the 1928 election, the RNC played a subservient role in organizing the campaign – a task then still one of the core services the committee provided for the party. While presidential candidate Herbert Hoover selected Hubert Work as Butler's successor, the two quickly fell out. As a result, the Work lead RNC was excluded from the planning and execution of the presidential campaign.[143] After Hoover's victory, Work proposed a decentralization of organization activities within the party: although he stressed that "one central headquarters during a campaign should be adequate,"[144] Work called on state parties to raise their own funds, and create and print their own campaign materials.

Hoover initially showed some interest in expanding his party's national organization, but in practice achieved little – in part because of constant conflicts and scandals surrounding his selection of RNC chairmen. Work remained out of touch with the Hoover administration, and resigned as chairman in June 1929. His successor was Claudius Huston, who initially showed

[139] "Coolidge Chooses Butler to Succeed Adams as Chairman," *The New York Times*, May 2, 1924.
[140] "Must Fight In 1926, Declares Butler," *The New York Times*, May 21, 1925.
[141] Kesaris et al, *Papers of the Republican Party*, Reel 2, Frame 443.
[142] A *New York Times* columnist, in discussing a speech Butler gave in Philadelphia in May of 1925, mocked the aloof RNC chair as not having been heard of for some time: "there was a general impression that he had taken refuge in the Citadel of Protection there to brood over the wonders that his abracadabra has wrought for the textile industries of his State and on his singular personal triumph in reviving the tariff issue – till President Coolidge said No." "Senator Butler Is Found," *The New York Times*, May 22, 1925.
[143] Goldman, *The National Party Chairmen*, 381.
[144] Kesaris et al, *Papers of the Republican Party*, Reel 3, Frame 316.

enthusiasm for a more active RNC. During his first speech as RNC chair, Huston proclaimed that "the work of a national party organization is no longer a mere spasmodic campaign effort"[145] and that his "program as Chairman will be that of seeking to build up [...] an organization which will ensure full expression of that public confidence which stands with and by the Republican Party."[146] However, Huston only served for a year: a scandal surrounding his personal finances resulted in his resignation in August 1930.[147]

With the 1930 midterms just weeks away, Hoover replaced Huston with Senator Simeon D. Fess (R-OH), with assistance from RNC executive director Robert Lucas.[148] Fess intended to resign after the midterms, with Lucas as his likely successor. However, Lucas became embroiled in a scandal regarding his activities during the 1930 midterms, during which he had actively campaigned against the reelection of a Republican senator, George W. Norris of Nebraska.[149] While Lucas managed to maintain his position as executive director, his actions made him too controversial among congressional Republicans to be elevated to the chairmanship. As a result, Fess remained in office until the summer of 1932 – a job he clearly had little interest in. The RNC thus remained inactive throughout Hoover's presidency.

FDR and the DNC

While during the 1920s, FDR had been one of the strongest proponents of a more active and publicity oriented DNC, as president he mostly ignored his party's national committee. This was despite FDR's control over the organization: during the 1932 convention, Roosevelt replaced Raskob – who had been hostile to his presidential ambitions – with his confidant James Farley. Farley remained chairman throughout FDR's first two terms, and as Postmaster General played a crucial role in dividing up patronage. However, the DNC itself quickly after the 1932 election

[145] Ibid, Frames 367-368.

[146] Ibid, Frame 369.

[147] Huston was accused of having used funds for the Tennessee River Improvement Association to support his personal stock margins. Despite this controversy, Huston remains in office for another few months before finally announcing his resignation in July 1930. See: "Huston Expected to Quit As Republican Chairman," *The New York Times*, March 21, 1930; "Lobby Fund for Stock Margin to Unseat Huston," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 22, 1930; "New Post Planned When Huston Quits," *The New York Times*, July 12, 1930.

[148] "Old Guard Victory in Choice of Fess," *The New York Times*, August 10, 1930. See also: Glen Jeansonne, *The Life of Herbert Hoover: Fighting Quaker, 1928-1933* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) 184-185.

[149] Lucas "secretly ordered and paid for literature to be distributed in Nebraska in the recent campaign on behalf of former Senator Gilbert M. Hitchcock, the Democratic senatorial nominee, and against Senator George W. Norris, the Republican nominee whom the Republican national committee was professing to support for reelection." See: "G.O.P. Leader is Held Hidden Foe of Norris," *The Washington Post*, December 20, 1930.

became a skeleton organization.

In part, this was the consequence of the financial structure that the committee had survived on during the Hoover administration. Raskob provided the committee with enormous loans to pay for its expansive publicity division, but – with his political opponent in the White House – now expected to be repaid.[150] Thus, after the 1932 election the DNC had a debt of nearly $750,000 ($13 million in 2015 dollars). Raising funds to pay off these debts was not easy – and after the 1934 midterms the committee still had a deficit of $477,000.[151]

But financial limitations were not the sole reason for the DNC's decline under the New Deal. As Sean J. Savage has argued, Roosevelt's preferences changed noticeably after he became president: regardless of his own positions in previous years, FDR now "no longer found it necessary for the DNC to become a major vehicle for liberalizing Party ideology."[152] Additionally, the Democratic Party's electoral successes in the early years of the New Deal – in spite of the DNC's financial limitations – convinced FDR that the party could be successful on the basis of his personal popularity alone. FDR ordered Farley to cut the DNC's staff and its expenses after the 1934 midterms, in which Democrats surprisingly expanded their already substantial majorities in House and Senate.[153]

The DNC still remained involved in presidential elections – mostly to raise funds for FDR and other Democratic candidates. In this regard, the committee innovated considerably. For example, in 1936 the committee sold a commemorative program of the convention and organized a series of 'Nominator Rallies' across the country at which Democrats gathered to hear Roosevelt accept his re-nomination.[154] But much of the logistics of the 1936 campaign itself were lifted from the DNC to other organizations – most notably organized labor.[155]

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[150] Raskob left the Democratic Party after Roosevelt's election, joining Smith in the anti-New Deal American Liberty League.

[151] "Farley Maps Drive to Pay Party Debt," *The New York Times*, February 15, 1933; "Democratic Fund $21,294 on Oct. 25," *The New York Times*, November 2, 1934.

[152] Sean J. Savage, *Roosevelt: The Party Leader, 1932-1945* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1991) 81.

[153] FDR demanded that the DNC's monthly budget would not exceed $6,000 a month. See: James A. Farley, *Jim Farley's Story: The Roosevelt Years* (New York: Whittlesey House, 1948) 49.

[154] "Democrats Pushing Sale of Their Book," *The New York Times*, June 1, 1936; "Farley Opens New Drive For Campaign Cash," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 4, 1936; "Democrats Gain $500,000," July 1, 1936.

[155] Savage, *Roosevelt*, 82. This was, in part, based on electoral strategy: as Sidney Milkis has argued, "the principal problem FDR faced in [the 1936] campaign was to appeal to activists in the labor movement and other independent progressives who might work for him but refused to do so through the Democratic party." As a result, FDR and Farley pushed for the creation of auxiliary organizations and committees that could recruit volunteers in a way the Democratic Party could not. See: Sidney M. Milkis, *The President and the Parties: The Transformation of the American Party System Since the New Deal* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), 76.

An additional wrinkle occurred through the deterioration of the relationship between Farley and FDR during Roosevelt's second term. With Farley opposing a third term, Roosevelt pushed the DNC chairman out of his inner circle.[156] Combined with FDR's own attempts at reshaping the Democratic Party through the (failed) purge of 1938,[157] the DNC became even less important: FDR relied on his role as president to shape the Democratic Party, and no longer trusted the man he put in charge of its national committee to assist him in doing so.

In broader terms, the DNC's potential as a publicity machine for the party remained unnecessary for most of the Roosevelt years. Democrats continued to expand their majorities in the House and Senate through the 1936 election. While the 1938 midterms resulted in the first major losses, the Democrats' national majority position remained secure: the party still held more than 60% of seats in the House, and 70% of seats in the Senate. The DNC remained effective as a fundraising organization – introducing a new formula of $100 plate dinner nights to raise major sums of money throughout the year.[158] The result was that Democratic candidates had little trouble funding their election campaigns, while Roosevelt's personal popularity left little need for additional branding operations.

Farley resigned as chairman after FDR's third presidential nomination during the 1940 convention. Under his successors, the DNC remained largely inactive. Each of these successors "focused on maintaining the intra-party cohesion necessary for raising funds,"[159] but none initiated major publicity programs. Ed Flynn only intended to be chairman until after the 1940 election but remained in office until 1943, with little interest or enthusiasm for the job. Under Flynn, the DNC was "in a state of dormancy, with only a skeleton staff."[160] Flynn resigned in 1943 after a scandal regarding his personal finances and FDR replaced him with Frank C. Walker, also Postmaster General, who only remained in office for several months.[161] Walker's replacement became Robert

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[156] Farley, *Jim Farley's Story*, 68-76.

[157] For a full description of Roosevelt's failed attempt at purging the Democratic Party from (Southern) conservatives see: Milkis, *The President and the Parties*, 83-92; Susan Dunn, *Roosevelt's Purge: How FDR Fought to Change the Democratic Party* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010).

[158] See: "Dinners to Raise Democratic Fund," *The New York Times*, February 23, 1937; "Hail 'Happy Days' At Victory Dinner," *The New York Times*, March 5, 1937; "Campaign Funds Reported For 1937," *The New York Times*, January 4, 1938; "Jackson Day Dinners Brought In $221,545," *The New York Times*, March 12, 1939; "45 States Democrats Dine Loyally Tonight," January 8, 1940; "Democrats to Issue Book to Aid Funds," *The New York Times*, August 8, 1940; "$100 Dinners as Usual," January 5, 1941.

[159] Savage, *Roosevelt*, 82.

[160] Goldman, *The National Party Chairmen*, 355. See also: Savage, *Roosevelt*, 100-101.

[161] Savage, *Roosevelt*, 101.

E. Hannegan, who served until 1947, but was left to work with what the *New York Times* called "an 11 year old machine."[162]

With FDR up for a fourth term, and increasing discontent within the New Deal coalition, the party had little choice but to once again rely on Roosevelt's personality and (now standard) New Deal policy promises. Noticeably, the DNC's role had decreased even further with regards to running presidential campaigns: the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), a federation of industrial unions supportive of the New Deal, took control of organizing most campaign activities. While during the 1936 campaign the DNC employed 700 full time staff at its HQ, during the 1944 election campaign the committee only had 250 paid employees.[163]

The *New York Times* summarized the state of the Democratic Party after FDR's death in 1945, as being "in the condition of an aging athlete who has grown soft and fat through laziness and overconfidence" – an overconfidence based on Roosevelt's own conviction "that he could be reelected each time he faced the polls."[164] Whether this was indeed overconfidence or a correct assessment of his political strengths, Roosevelt's president-centered partisanship meant that throughout the New Deal "there was little cooperation between the White House and the Democratic National Committee."[165] This decline in the DNC's role was particularly true with regard to its party branding role: the committee remained active in raising funds for the party, but cut its publicity role almost entirely.

Conclusion

With the exception of the RNC's ongoing (and disruptive) attempts at party branding during the Harding administration, the committees of national majority parties performed as expected. The RNC had become more active in promulgating and attempting to shape the GOP's brand during the Wilson administration, and it continued to play this role until Harding's death. Yet, under Coolidge and Hoover the RNC became increasingly irrelevant in Republican Party politics. This was partly the result of a series of scandals and conflict relating to the RNC chairmen. However, if Republican presidents and other party leaders believed that this lack of activity

[162] "Democrats Overhaul Machine for '44 Race," *The New York Times*, January 23, 1944.
[163] "Washington Calling: Rebuilding the Democratic Party," *The Washington Post*, November 13, 1944.
[164] "Democrats Tackle Job of Reviving Party Zeal," *The New York Times*, October 5, 1947.
[165] Ibid.

from their national committee was harming the party, Coolidge and Hoover could easily have intervened and replaced the committee's leadership. Under FDR, the DNC receded dramatically: the publicity division built by John Raskob was dismantled under James Farley, and FDR ordered major cuts in both staff and budget after the 1934 midterms. The DNC did not go out of business entirely: during the New Deal years the committee innovated considerably with regards to its fundraising apparatus. But in terms of publicity programs, the committee was nowhere to be found: instead, the party relied on the president's personal popularity, and auxiliary groups related to the party to promote the New Deal.

V. Conclusion

In the wake of the 1912 election, both the DNC and RNC for the first time in either institution's history remained active at the end of an election campaign. In the decades that followed, both parties saw their committees grow into the habit of maintaining a consistently active national committee. But, as the cases presented in this chapter show, this was not a linear process – nor did it happen at the same time for both parties.

In general terms, the cases presented here are in line with the branding theory of national committee activities. During times when their parties were in the national minority, the DNC and RNC generally invested more in publicity programs – including the creation of speech kits, a constant stream of newssheets to local newspapers that did not have reporters in Washington DC, and organized meetings for party leaders to coordinate their positions on policy issues. On the other hand, when their parties were in the national majority, the DNC and RNC receded – dropping many of their publicity tasks, while maintaining their role as the main fundraisers for the party.

Four exceptions to the theory's prediction did occur. Specifically, the DNC remained somewhat active in the realm of branding during the first Wilson administration, despite the fact that Democrats also had majorities in House and Senate. The reason for these activities appears to have been that Democratic leaders (including Wilson) realized that the party's success in 1912 was based (at least in part) on the GOP splitting its vote between Taft and Roosevelt. As a result, Democratic leaders did not believe their majorities truly reflected a stable national majority.

Second, in the period 1921-1924 the RNC remained active in branding activities, despite the fact that the party was in the national majority. However, the disruptive role the RNC played in these years – attacking both progressive Republican members of Congress and the Harding administration – also serves as an example why party leaders (and, particularly, presidents) would rather have their national committee avoid publicity engagements altogether. Finally, there were two instances in which the national committees *should* have invested in new publicity programs but failed to do so: Clem Shaver's leadership of the DNC during the Coolidge administration, and Everett Sanders' chairmanship of the RNC during the first two years of the New Deal. In both cases, external factors made such investments impossible: Shaver faced a national committee that was both broke, and unable to raise new funds. Sanders struggled with poor health and was unable to invest the time and energy required to expand the RNC's role in this period.

Chapter 3

Towards a Liberal Party Brand: The DNC, 1953-1968

> "If [Southern Democrats] don't want to go along on the racial problem and the whole area of human rights, then I think they are going to have to take asylum wherever they can find it, either in the Republican Party or a third party."
>
> *Paul Butler, DNC chair, October 1958*

The period 1953-1968 covers two distinct periods of party performance for the Democrats. During the 1950s, the Democratic party lost two presidential elections in landslides but mostly remained in the majority in the House and Senate. In contrast, after John F. Kennedy's victory in the very close 1960 election, Democrats managed to maintain their status as a national majority party until 1968 (see Table 3.1). Based on the branding theory of national committee activity there should therefore be a clear differentiation in DNC activities across these two periods. Between 1952 and 1960, the DNC should have invested in publicity programs in attempts at convincing voting groups to (re-)join the party and help return it to national majority status. In contrast, under Kennedy and Johnson we should expect to see the DNC decreased its publicity programs since the party's attention should switch to the White House and Congress (see Table 3.2).

As the cases below show, the DNC's activities did indeed change in line with the theory's predictions. During the Eisenhower administration, Democrats invested in new publicity programs with the intent of recapturing traditional New Deal voters lost in the 1952 and 1956 presidential

Table 3.1: *Democratic Electoral Performance and National Party Status, 1952-1966*

	White House	*% House Seats*	*% Senate Seats*	*Party Status*
1952	OUT	49.0	49.0	Minority
1954	OUT	53.3	50.0	Minority
1956	OUT	53.8	51.0	Minority
1958	OUT	64.8	65.3	Minority
1960	IN	60.0	64.0	Majority
1962	IN	59.3	66.0	Majority
1964	IN	67.8	68.0	Majority
1966	IN	57.0	64.0	Majority

Source: Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections (Washington D.C.: CQ Press, 2010).

elections. In contrast, under Kennedy and Johnson the DNC receded noticeably: the committee dropped many of the publicity programs inaugurated in the previous decade, cut budgets and staff, and focused instead on fundraising activities.

Crucially, the cases presented below show the extent to which a national committee of a party lacking a president has agency to promote a *type* of brand it believes will benefit the party. During the 1950s, DNC chairmen – facing a major ideological schism between Southern and Northeastern members of the party – switched their strategies in response to the most recent election results. In the wake of the 1952 election, with party leaders particularly concerned by a Southern swing towards Eisenhower, the DNC focused on a 'unity' approach intended to return Southern voters to the party. Both of the DNC chairmen who served in this period (Stephen Mitchell and Paul Butler) maintained this unity approach throughout Eisenhower's first term. In the wake of the 1956 election, during which black and blue collar voters in the Northeast abandoned the party, Butler switched tactics and instead began using the national committee to promulgate a party brand that was decidedly liberal, and strongly in support of civil rights. In doing so, Butler did not hide from the consequences this approach had for the future of the Democratic Party's coalition: in the assessment of *New York Times* columnist Arthur Krock, Butler attempted to "impose conformity to his particular brand of political philosophy on all Democrats or expel them from the party."[1]

[1] "Butler's Ninth Life May Be His Last," *New York Times*, March 8, 1960.

Table 3.2: *Democratic National Party Status and Theory Predictions, 1953-1968*

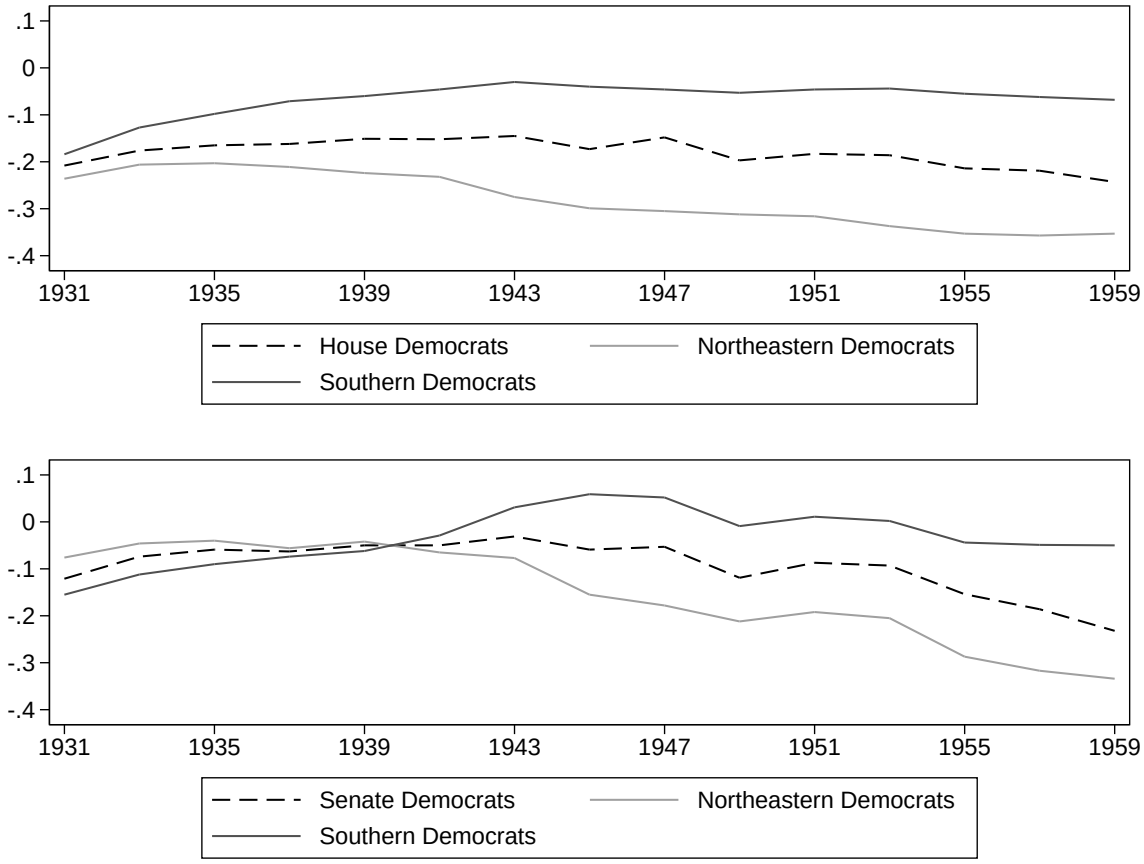
	House and Senate	
White House	*Majority*	*Minority*
In-Party	1961-1968 President controlled decline in branding programs	– President controlled investments in branding activities
Out-Party	1955-1960 National committee controlled investments in branding activities	1953-1954 National committee controlled investments in branding activities

I. DNC and the First Eisenhower Term: The Unity Approach

The 1952 election left the Democratic Party in a complex electoral situation moving forward. Eisenhower's victory meant that Democrats now lacked a clear party leader for the first time since Franklin Delano Roosevelt's victory in 1932. Even more concerning, the New Deal coalition of Southern conservatives and Northeastern liberals had become increasingly unstable since FDR's death. As can be seen in Figure 3.1, which charts the mean DW-NOMINATE scores for Democratic, Northern Democratic, and Southern Democratic members of the House and Senate in the period 1931-1959, Southerners within the Democratic Party throughout this period were nearly always conservative outliers within the party. Conflict between the two camps had been intense at times prior to 1945, but the presence of a commanding figure in the form of FDR, and a shared incentive to maintain a winning electoral coalition, produced a set of concessions on both sides. With FDR's death in 1945, a more contentious period of intra-party relations began, particularly with regard to the party's response to the growing civil rights movement. Most notably, Southern conservatives walked out of the Democratic convention and ran their own presidential Dixiecrat ticket in the 1948 election. While Truman managed to win a surprise victory over his Republican challenger Governor Thomas Dewey (R-NY), the Democratic coalition remained unstable. With the Truman administration increasingly unpopular, and Eisenhower's credentials as a war hero, Republicans not only won the 1952 presidential election but also swept the congressional elections. Notably, Eisenhower performed better in the South than nearly any other Republican presidential candidate since Reconstruction winning Florida, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.[2]

[2] Herbert Hoover also won North Carolina in his 1928 victory.

Figure 3.1: *Mean DW-NOMINATE Scores for Democrats in the House and Senate, 1931-1960*



Source: Howard Rosenthal and Keith Poole, Voteview.com.

The 1952 election thus convinced Democratic leaders that – as the economist John Kenneth Galbraith wrote to defeated presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson – without the "imagination and intellectual vigor of the Roosevelt era,"[3] the party had to rebuild its majority coalition. DNC chair Stephen Mitchell, who had been appointed by Stevenson during the 1952 convention, concurred that as a national minority party Democrats should see "the current period, while we are out of office nationally," as "the time of opportunity for broadening our Party and reviving it where necessary with new ideas and new leaders."[4] However, the extent to which the Democratic Party could easily reinvent itself was constrained by the practical limitations of its existing electoral coalition. With neither conservatives nor liberals willing to abandon the party or each other,

[3] Cited in Arlene Lazarowitz, *Years in Exile: The Liberal Democrats, 1950-1959* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1988) 78.

[4] Stephen Mitchell to Lawrence M.C. Smith, January 7, 1954, Container 24, Folder 4, Stephen Mitchell Papers, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, Independence, MO (hereafter Stephen Mitchell Papers.

Democratic leaders in- and outside of Congress saw few options but to continue their marriage of convenience and to work together to find a brand the party as a whole could unite on.[5]

During the first Eisenhower term this meant that the DNC worked closely with congressional leaders. Mitchell announced in December 1952 that he expected the committee to seek "an effective liaison with the Democratic members of Congress."[6] From Mitchell's perspective, the DNC would function as "sort of a Department of Supply," and would "endeavor to do what we can to support the articulate voices of the Party which, of course, are in the Senate of the United States, and in the Congress."[7] That is, while the DNC would promote the party brand it would allow congressional leaders to set out what that brand should look like. Mitchell's belief that the DNC should take on an aggressive publicity role now that the party was in the minority was broadly shared. Democratic leaders insisted an active DNC publicity program would be necessary to counter the Eisenhower administration, and specifically pointed to the DNC's record of attacking Herbert Hoover under the chairmanship of John Raskob.[8] Stephen Spingarn, a former aide to Truman, suggested to Stevenson after the election that the party would need to engage in "a continuous hard-hitting and coordinated effort to keep steadily before the country each and every gap between Republican campaign promises and actual performance."[9] To achieve this, Spingarn suggested a "strong, resourceful and imaginative leadership at the Democratic National Committee," and, in particular, "a strong Research Division" and "an equally strong publicity division."[10]

In January 1953, Mitchell announced that the DNC would indeed operate its "public affairs activities – publicity, research, speaker's bureau – at campaign tempo."[11] To achieve this, Mitchell

[5] Stevenson was acutely aware of the problems inherent in being the head of the Democratic Party as a losing presidential candidate. Writing in 1956, he stated that "the titular head has no clear and defined authority within his party. He has no party office, no staff, no funds, nor is there any system of consultation whereby he may be advised of party policy and through which he may help to shape that policy. There are no devices such as the British have developed through which he can communicate directly and responsibly with the leaders of the party in power. Yet he is generally deemed the leading spokesman of his party" (Adlai E. Stevenson, *What I Think* (New York: Harper, 1956) ix-x.).

[6] "Revitalized Party Seen by Mitchell," *New York Times*, December 3, 1952.

[7] Transcript Democratic National Committee Eastern Regional Conference Meeting, February 14, 1953, Container 113, Folder 13, Democratic National Committee Meeting Transcripts, Democratic National Committee Records, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library (hereafter cited as DNC Meeting Transcripts).

[8] "President Calls Stevenson Head of Nation's Democrats," *New York Times*, November 8, 1952.

[9] Stephen J. Spingarn to Adlai E. Stevenson, November 6, 1952, Container 413, Folder 1, DNC Chairman's Files 1956-1960, Records of the Democratic National Committee, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library (hereafter cited as DNC Chairman's Files 1956-1960).

[10] Ibid.

[11] "Report to Members of the Democratic National Committee and State Chairmen," January 20, 1953, Container 219,

reorganized the DNC by creating a new Public Affairs division. This division was headed by DNC staffer Clayton Fritchey and included an expanded "research-publicity-strategy group" that was "staffed with impressive new talent from among the refugee New and Fair Dealers." The research subdivision predominantly provided members of Congress with "guidance and leadership"[12] by coordinating attacks against the Eisenhower administration.[13] One example of such coordination was a speech kit that the research division began providing to Democratic candidates. The kit consisted of pre-written speeches identifying the Democratic positions on salient policy issues which candidates were encouraged to incorporate verbatim in their stump speeches.[14]

The new publicity division also invested heavily in direct outreach by the DNC itself. Most notable in this regard was the introduction of the *Democratic Digest* – the committee's own monthly magazine. While a publication with the same name had previously existed as the DNC's Women's Division's newsletter, the *Digest* introduced in May 1953 was a fundamentally different publication. For the first time, a national committee attempted to communicate directly with voters on a month to month basis. The *Digest* was available to consumers through subscription services and at newsstands across the country for 25 cents, at a run of 100,000 copies per issue. The DNC presented the *Digest* as "the voice of the Democratic party"[15] with the principle task of identifying "the campaign issues for the party and [projecting] them in terms easy for the public to understand."[16]

The DNC filled the first issues of the *Digest* with transcribed speeches made by Democratic politicians, and reprinted articles and cartoons from newspapers. However, the public affairs

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Folder 2, Records of the Democratic National Committee, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library (hereafter cited as Records of the DNC).

[12] "Democrats in Congress Find New Role Not Bad," *New York Times*, February 15, 1953.

[13] The research division was highly active during the Democrats' time as a minority party in the 1950s. In 1953 alone the division produced reports on agriculture, civil service, social security, defense cuts by the Eisenhower administration, monetary policies, and Democratic policies against Communism. Notably, the research division did not engage issues on race or civil rights in 1953 – in line with the focus on unification among most Democratic leaders at the time. "Numerical Index of 1953 Research Division Documents," Container 22, Folder 1, Stephen Mitchell Papers).

[14] In his introduction of the speech kit, Philip M. Stern of the DNC's research division wrote that it was his "hope that, when you are called on to fill speaking engagements, you will be able to select those 'Speech Sections' which will be of interest to your audience and put them together to make a complete speech." The issues for which the DNC provided Democrats with ready made speeches included: high prices, the GOP's public power 'sell-out,' farmers, veterans, education, labor, big business administration, housing and rents, sales tax, small businesses, social security, "corruption GOP style," civil service, and tight money. No speeches on civil rights or race were made available in 1953. "Speech Sections," August 29, 1953, Container 22, Folder 2, Stephen Mitchell Papers.

[15] "Pocket Sized Digest Planned By Democrats," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 31, 1953. See also: "Democrats to Issue 'Digest' Monthly 25-Cent Magazine," *New York Times*, May 31 1953;

[16] "In the Nation," *New York Times*, July 19, 1955.

Table 3.3: *Source of Democratic Digest Articles, 1953-1954*

	Reprinted Articles	Original Articles
Number of Articles	200	387
Total Pages	760	608

Source: Roger H. Marz, "The Democratic Digest: A Content Analysis," *The American Political Science Review* Vol 51, No. 3 (1957) 697.

division staff quickly began writing original material for the magazine (see Table 3.3). In the assessment of political scientist Roger H. Marz, writing in 1957, the *Digest* was "an essentially new form of activity in the American party arena."[17] The magazine was no money making venture: while the *Digest* had an impressive early launch (20,000 subscribers before the first issue was published, and 40,000 by September 1953[18]), it never was financially self-sustaining. Instead, the DNC paid the *Digest's* deficits because the magazine provided it with a direct form of communication to promote the party. The *Digest* was under editorial control of the DNC's leadership, which meant the committee could use it to focus on issues it believed to be central to the national party's agenda, without interference from the media or party leaders in Congress.

While it is difficult to measure whether the *Digest* directly or indirectly affected voter perception of the Democratic Party's policy positions, the magazine did receive considerable media attention. Throughout its existence, newspapers regularly reported on items published in the *Digest*. Fritchey, during a meeting of the DNC in 1954, assessed the success of the magazine in terms of trickle-down public opinion, noting that the *Digest*

> "is now closely followed by editors and publishers, by columnists and commentators, by political writers, educators, clergymen, civic leaders, lecturers, by the producers of radio and TV forums which have audiences in the millions. [...] In the world of thought, opinion does trickle down. It is certainly a fact that the thinkers in any

[17] Roger H. Marz, "The Democratic Digest: A Content Analysis," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 51, No. 3 (1957) 696.

[18] Report to Members of the Democratic National Committee and State Chairmen, September 4, 1953, Container 114, Folder 4, DNC Meeting Transcripts. Early subscribers included the Eisenhower White House, General Motors, and the Soviet Union's embassy in Washington DC. Along similar lines, *Digest* editor Clayton Fritchey recounted boarding a flight with DNC staff member Philip Stern and noticing "a certain famous senator preceding us on the plane, accompanied by his equally famous young counsel. [Laughter] Soon after we were aboard and had taken off in flight, Mr. Stern left his seat to go down to the magazine rack. He came hurrying back and said: "Come with me." I walked down the aisle, and he pointed over the shoulder of Senator McCarthy. There were Senator McCarthy and young Mr. Cohn, both of them eagerly reading the *Democratic Digest*." – see: "Democratic Digest Has a Broad Reader Appeal," *The New York Times*, June 17, 1953; "Proceedings DNC Executive Meeting," May 5, 1954, Container 223, Folder 5, Records of the DNC.

country influence the nonthinkers. That is why I attach so much importance to the circulation and prestige of the *Democratic Digest*."[19]

To help this trickle-down process, Fritchey also actively pushed news organizations to report on items published in the *Digest*. For example, he told DNC members that "when one of the news services failed to carry a story on the issue of the *Democratic Digest* a few days ago, when it came out, we got in touch with friendly publishers. They brought pressure to bear and we had the story out to 2,000 more papers than it would have gone out to otherwise."[20]

While the DNC became more active in presenting the party's positions on policy issues to voters, it chose to promote a brand that was acceptable to both conservative and liberal Democrats. With Eisenhower maintaining his popularity in the South throughout his first term,[21] this meant that the DNC mostly refrained from attacking the president, and instead targeted Republicans in Congress. Additionally, the committee ignored controversial issues that could disturb the rickety North-South balance in the party. For example, between 1953 and 1956, the *Digest* almost entirely ignored civil rights issues.[22] Instead, the DNC used the 1954 midterm campaign to highlight issues conservatives and liberals in the party broadly agreed upon. For example, the DNC blamed (congressional) Republicans for the economic downturn, called for more federal assistance for farmers, and criticized "Old Guard" Republicans in Congress and Vice-President Richard Nixon for their attacks on Democrats.[23] One particularly notable foe of the committee was Senator Joe McCarthy (R-WI), as the DNC frequently countered McCarthy's claims of (perceived) communist influences in the Democratic Party. For example, during one of McCarthy's speaking tours in

[19] "Proceedings DNC Executive Meeting," May 5, 1954.

[20] Transcript Meeting of the DNC Executive Committee, April 1, 1953, Container 114, Folder 1, DNC Meeting Transcripts.

[21] Gallup polls between February 1953 and June 1955 show Eisenhower's approval ratings consistently remained above 60% in the South. In some months, approval for Eisenhower in the South was even higher than his national approval rating. See: George Gallup, *The Gallup Poll, 1949-1958* (New York: Random House, 1972).

[22] The two exceptions during the first Eisenhower term concerns a short article in the *Democratic Digest* of November 1953. This condensed reprint of a *Cincinnati Post* article discusses African American POWs who were separated from white POWs by their North Korean captors. The black soldiers are praised for withstanding attempts at indoctrination: "For once, [the African American POWs] are proud of their country on the issue of segregation. The army has abolished segregation. Communists practiced it" ("Communists Failed to Convert Negro POWs," *Democratic Digest* No. 4 (November 1953) 102). Meanwhile, the July 1954 issue included an article condensed from the book *Breakthrough On The Color Front* by Lee Nichols which argued the Korean War was evidence of successful racial integration of the Armed Services ("All Americans Can Fight," *Democratic Digest*, No. 12 (July 1954)). In both cases the *Digest* defended a policy that was instituted by the last Democratic president and could easily be defended as a settled party position.

[23] "Democrats Set Farm Panel," *New York Times*, April 30, 1954; "Mitchell Scores Farm Policy," *New York Times*, August 22, 1954; "Democrat Rally Set," *New York Times*, August 27, 1954; "Democrats Aim '54 Drive At Downswing," *The Washington Post*, February 23, 1954; "Democrats Meet On Fall Strategy," *New York Times*, March 5, 1954.

the spring of 1954, the DNC sent 'truth kits' with information countering his attacks to editors of newspapers, radio and television station commentators, and Democratic officials in the cities McCarthy appeared in.[24]

The unity approach was mostly successful at maintaining intra-party peace, although at times tensions still surfaced. In February 1953, Senator Richard B. Russell (R-GA) gave a radio speech in North Carolina that the DNC intended to rebroadcast nationwide. During the speech, Russell warned "self-styled liberals" they were carrying the party to "the most disastrous defeat in American political history" by trying to "drive the South out of the party."[25] The DNC cancelled the national broadcast. In September 1953, there was confusion about whether Democratic Southern leaders were excluded from invitations to a DNC meeting, with Mitchell, as the *New York Times* reported, left "like a nervous hostess [...] whose dinner invitations were lost or delayed in the mails."[26] Mitchell himself, meanwhile, described Governor James F. Byrnes (D-SC) as an "ex-Democrat" for failing to support Stevenson in the 1952 presidential elections.[27] While Democratic leaders in the DNC and Congress worked hard to limit their disagreements, the North-South divide remained a threat to party unity.

The DNC leadership thus remained vigilant to limit opportunities for intra-party conflict as much as possible. For example, the DNC blocked a proposal to hold a national convention in the run-up to the 1954 midterms. The proposal was created by Paul Butler (then a DNC member from Indiana), and relied on the assumption that midterm convention would "afford the Democratic Party the ideal means of scouting the major areas of disagreement within the party,"[28] and "demonstrate persuasively that the Democratic Party is alive, awake, alert, a living national organization."[29] While the plan received a positive response from political observers outside the party,[30] congressional leaders rejected it – arguing that such a convention would constrain the ability of individual members to "profess a liking for President Eisenhower" while rejecting "the

[24] "Truth Kits' Sent to Fight McCarthy," *The New York Times*, February 6, 1954; "Mitchell Assails 'Hate' Campaign," *New York Times*, March 18, 1954.
[25] "Democrats Face New Defeats If South Is Lost, Russell Says," *Washington Post*, March 1, 1953.
[26] "Mitchell Seeking Democratic Peace," *New York Times*, September 2, 1953.
[27] "Byrnes Called Ex-Democrat By Chairman," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 5, 1953.
[28] "Democrats Get Plan For a '54 Convention," *New York Times*, April 2, 1953.
[29] "Democrats Ponder 1954 Rally," *Washington Post*, April 2, 1953.
[30] The *Washington Post* in an op-ed concluded that "midterm conventions of both parties would also serve the national interest by sharpening campaign issues and promoting party cohesiveness" ("Midterm Conventions," *Washington Post*, April 3, 1953).

Republican Old Guard influence in Congress"[31] in their campaigns. In addition, party leaders feared a midterm convention would push civil rights to the forefront.[32] As the *Wall Street Journal* concluded, most Democrats feared that a midterm convention "would only produce the kind of party rows they had at the last convention. Once every four years, they believe, is enough."[33] A DNC subcommittee shelfed the proposal.

Mitchell resigned as DNC chair after the successful 1954 midterms – during which Democrats regained (small) majorities in the House and Senate – largely because he believed his outspoken support for Stevenson's nomination in 1956 would undermine his effectiveness as chairman moving forward.[34] While Mitchell's tenure as chair was short, it was also important. As the *New York Times* noted, Mitchell "took over with a fixed, intelligent plan the task of reorganizing the party machinery and binding up the wounds inflicted by factionalism."[35] Through investments in a variety of publicity approaches – including ensuring that the 1956 Democratic convention would be televised – Mitchell succeeded in expanding the DNC's ability to reach voters and promote the Democratic Party's policy positions. From a strategic perspective, Mitchell remained devoted to party unity throughout his chairmanship: in his last report to the committee, Mitchell stressed that "one of our primary goals has been to build a greater degree of unity among Democrats of all regions – particularly to eliminate or reduce the old frictions between Northern and Southern Democrats."[36]

In the contest to succeed Mitchell several candidates were 'boomed'.[37] Stevenson and Truman, in an attempt at cooperation between the titular- and former leaders of the party, sought in vain to

[31] "Democrats Cooling on Off-Year Convention: Leaders Fear Platform-Writing Wrangles," *Washington Post*, August 11, 1953.

[32] See also: "Convention Plan Decried," *New York Times*, April 5, 1953; "Democrats Cooling on Off-Year Convention," *Washington Post*.

[33] "Democrats Borrow Eisenhower Tactic: A Study Committee," *Wall Street Journal*, September 15, 1953.

[34] Ralph M. Goldman, *The National Party Chairmen and Committees: Factionalism at the Top* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1990), 447.

[35] "In The Nation," *New York Times*, December 7, 1954.

[36] In the same report, Mitchell also notes how the Democrats' loss of majority party status in 1952 had affected the positions of political actors within the party: "during our years of success, we had drifted apart. As soon as we suffered our 1952 defeat, we all saw that we could no longer afford the luxury of feuding among ourselves. And once we became disposed to cooperate, we discovered that the differences among us had been magnified – that the matters on which we agreed were vastly more important than the matters on which we disagreed." "Report to the Democratic National Committee," December 4, 1954, Container 23, Folder 7, Stephen Mitchell Papers.

[37] Potential candidates for the position mentioned in the media prior to the December 1954 DNC meeting included Toledo Mayor Michael V. DiSalle, Senator Earle C. Clements (D-KY), former Governor Elbert N. Carvel (D-DE), State Treasurer Archibald S. Alexander (D-NJ), and Philadelphia City Council president James A. Finnegan. See: "Choices for Democratic Chairman Narrow Down," *Los Angeles Times*, November 9, 1954; "2 More Mentioned to Head Democrats," *New York Times*, November 14, 1954;

persuade former Secretary of the Air Force Thomas Finletter to run. Butler, who had announced his candidacy in November and received the backing of Mitchell, had the benefit of being the only member of the DNC running and won the election with 70 out of 105 votes.[38] Butler's support came from DNC members from all parts of the country, but he was particularly popular among Southern DNC members: Southerners made both of the two nomination speeches on his behalf, and Butler received 95% of Southern votes in comparison to 67% of the total vote.[39] In his acceptance speech, Butler expressed his pride in having had support "from all sections of the country," and reiterated that he was "against any sectionalization of our Party by any issue, activity or any proceeding in the Democratic Party, and [would] attempt to serve the Party and all members of the Party, all sections of our Country, with the same degree of understanding and appreciation of their problems in their local areas as they certainly are entitled to at all times."[40]

While Butler continued the unity approach in the period before the 1956 election, he was considerably more aggressive in attacking Eisenhower than Mitchell had been. In one of his first public comments as DNC chair, Butler attacked Eisenhower for lacking the capacity to govern and unite the country, and concluded that "a military background is not a complete preparation for the Presidency."[41] In January 1955, the DNC privately circulated analyses of the State of the Union that were more critical than those put forward by Democratic congressional leaders. The documents, which were quickly leaked to the press, included "a heavy unsparing and detailed assault upon the very Presidential document that the Johnsonians in Congress had on the whole little criticized."[42] Other 'private' assessments from the DNC's offices also found their way into the press, including critiques on the ratification of a mutual defense treaty with the Republic of China, Eisenhower's 1955 budget, and a proposed school construction bill.[43] In each of these

[38] "Democrats Elect Butler as Chairman," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 5, 1954.

[39] "Transcript of DNC Meeting," December 4, 1954, Container 223, Folder 7, Records of the DNC.

[40] Ibid.

[41] "Political Nuances," *New York Times,* December 7, 1954. RNC chairman Leonard Hall concluded that, under Butler, Democrats had thrown into the ash can" their promise to work with Eisenhower. Senator H. Alexander Smith (R-NJ) concluded that the American people would be "justified in resenting this reflection on their collective capacity to elect capable officials." Eisenhower himself described Butler as the kind of politician "who, looking in the glass, sees only reflections of doubt and fear and the kind of confusion he often tries to create." See: "Knockout of Bystander," *New York Times*, December 9, 1954.

[42] "Democrats Wary on China Treaty," *New York Times*, January 12, 1955. See also: "Democratic Party Attacks Program Set By Eisenhower," *New York Times*, January 8, 1955; "Democratic Analysis of President's Speech," *New York Times*, January 8, 1955.

[43] "Democrats Wary on China Treaty," *New York Times*, January 12, 1955; "'Confidential' Memo Attacks Ike's Budget," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 19, 1955; "Democrats' Memo Raps President's School Bill," *Los Angeles Times*, February 21, 1955.

instances, Butler stretched the boundaries of the DNC's role as outlined by Mitchell after the 1952 defeat: the committee not only provided members of Congress with information on policy issues, it also took specific stances on those issues which sometimes were counter to that of congressional leaders like Rayburn and Johnson.

However, while Butler was willing to challenge congressional leaders he stayed clear from civil rights, the third rail of intra-party politics in this period. Prior to the 1956 election, this issue was certainly not fading. Mitchell, now a former chair, called on the party to reject "half-Democrats or phony Democrats,"[44] such as Shivers and Byrnes from the 1956 convention. Similarly, Senator Hubert Humphrey (D-MN), in a private letter to Butler, warned that Democrats would "suffer at the ballot boxes"[45] at the hands of black voters in the Northeast who were becoming increasingly disappointed in the party for failing to take on civil rights legislation. Still, Butler remained loyal to the South: after a DNC research group chaired by Mitchell suggested state parties would be required to list national candidates on their state ballots (thereby eliminating the possibility of Dixiecrats running one of their own as the 'Democratic' candidate in the South), Butler instead assured Shivers that he remained welcome in the party.[46] Civil rights was absent from a DNC produced list of the top ten policy issues for the 1956 campaign.[47] Butler explained that "the time is not right" for civil rights, and that Democrats in Congress would not try to pass civil rights legislation in 1956.[48] While Butler criticized the Eisenhower administration's claims that it had produced significant progress on civil rights as "a fraud upon the American people,"[49] the DNC made no attempts at pushing for a more expansive civil rights plank to be included in the 1956 platform. Even the brutal murder of Emmett Till – a 14 year old boy from Chicago lynched by a mob in Mississippi after allegedly flirting with a white woman while visiting his family – could not move Butler from his 'unity' position. Despite pleas by local Democratic organizations across the country, the NAACP, Rep. James Roosevelt (D-CA), and California DNC member Paul Ziffren

[44] "Senate Democrat Attacks Bolters," *New York Times*, April 20, 1955.

[45] Hubert H. Humphrey to Paul Butler, February 7, 1956, Container 441, Folder 21, Chairman's Files, 1956-1960.

[46] "In The Nation," *New York Times*, April 22, 1955; "Butler Tells Shivers Party Won't Bar Him," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 6, 1955.

[47] The list consisted of: falling farm income, tax favoritism for the rich, the public power give-away, favoritism to big business, misconduct in government, the rising cost of living, small business failures, G.O.P. anti-labor policy, the school crisis, and the growth of monopolies. "10 Top Issues for '56 Listed by Democrats," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 18, 1955

[48] "Rip Butler Over 'Time Not Right' Stand," *Chicago Defender*, February 11, 1956.

[49] "Butler Charges 'Fraud' On Rights," *New York Times*, March 6, 1956.

for Butler to merely call for a fair trial of Till's murderers,[50] the DNC chair refused, stating that he could not interfere publicly because he was "Chairman of all Democrats, white and Negro, North and South."[51]

II. Pushing a Liberal Party brand: The DNC and the Second Eisenhower Term

Despite Butler's early devotion to the unity approach, the DNC radically switched tactics after the disappointing results of the 1956 election. At first glance, the results were not particularly bad for the party: Democrats managed to maintain their razor thin majorities in Congress, and while Stevenson again lost in a landslide in the presidential race, this was not particularly surprising given Eisenhower's consistent personal popularity. However, Democratic liberals believed that the *way* in which Eisenhower won fundamentally undermined the argument for continuing the unity approach. First, avoiding civil rights did not improve Stevenson's performance in the South: Eisenhower won Texas, Virginia, Florida, Louisiana, and Tennessee and slightly improved his vote total across the South (see Figure 3.2). Second, as the *Wall Street Journal* noted, the 1956 election saw "large-scale defections of Negroes and laborers from the Democratic fold." Indeed, as Figure 3.3 shows, Eisenhower gained considerably among black voters – receiving close to 40% of the black vote. As political analyst Samuel Lubell concluded after the election, the 1956 results raised the peculiar paradox of "the Negro and the white Southerner [casting] a protest vote against one another by voting for the same man, Dwight D. Eisenhower."[52]

As Philip Klinkner has noted, Johnson and Rayburn believed the 1956 election vindicated their strategy of cooperation with Eisenhower.[53] However, liberal Democrats disagreed and concluded that "the compromising attitude [. . .] toward the South hurt the party far more than it helped."[54] Butler's own analysis of the election stressed Eisenhower's success among black, Catholic, and

[50] See: A.E. Johnson to Paul Butler, September 19, 1955, Container 457, Folder, 10, Chairman's Files, 1956-1960; Manny Rohatiner to Paul Butler, October 12, 1955, Container 457, Folder 10, Chairman's Files, 1956-1960; James Roosevelt to Paul Butler, October 17, 1955, Container 457, Folder 10, Chairman's Files, 1956-1960; Paul Ziffren to Paul Butler, January 12, 1956, Container 457, Folder 10, Chairman's Files, 1956-1960.

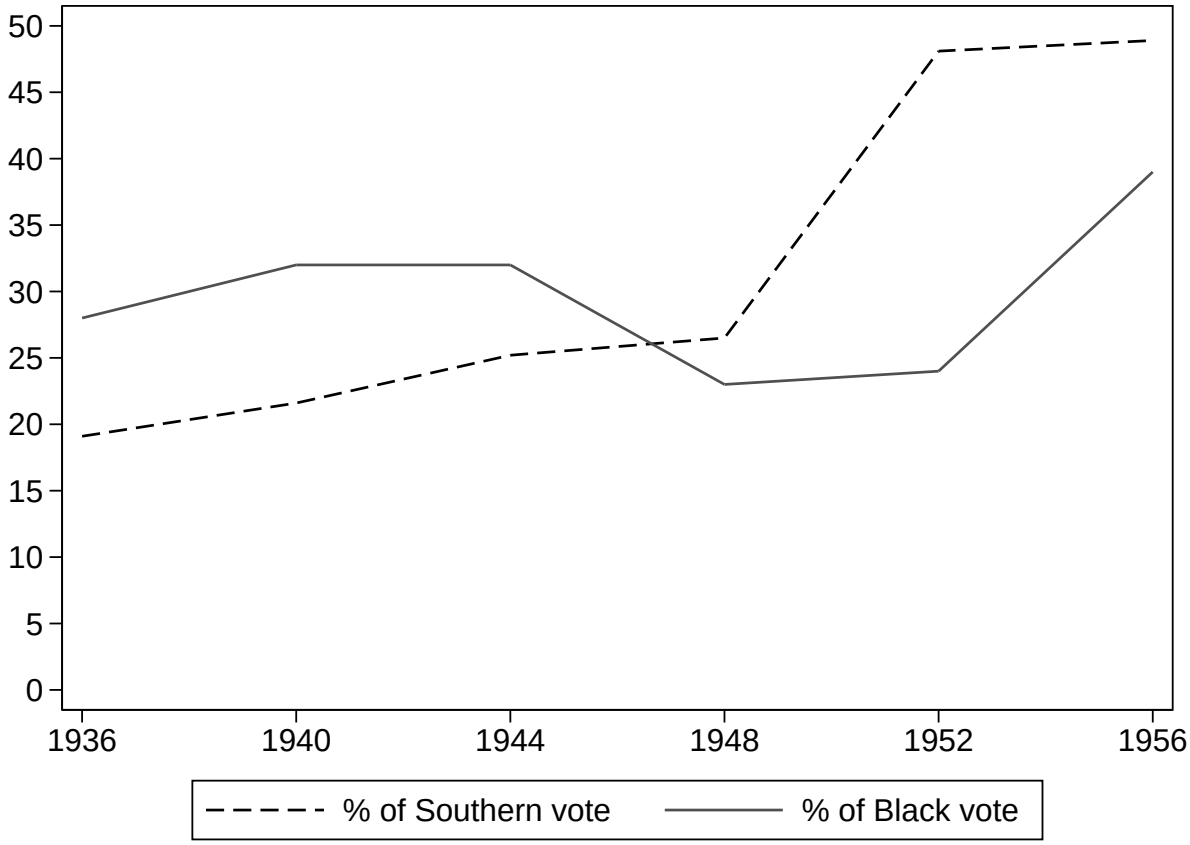
[51] Paul Butler to Paul Ziffren, February 16, 1956, Container 457, Folder 10, Chairman's Files, 1956-1960.

[52] Cited in Sean J. Savage, *JFK, LBJ, and the Democratic Party* (Albany, NY.: State University of New York Press 2004) 36.

[53] Philip A. Klinkner, *The Losing Parties: Out-Party National Committees, 1956-1993* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 15.

[54] "Democratic Row: Northern 'Liberals' Prepare to do Battle With the South for Control of the Party," *Wall Street Journal*, December 14, 1956.

Figure 3.2: *Republican Share of Presidential Vote in Southern States and Among Black Voters, 1936-1956*



Source: *Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections* (Washington D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Ltd., 1994); Everett Carll Ladd, Jr. and Charles D. Hadley, *Transformations of the American Party System: Political Coalitions from the New Deal to the 1970s* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975); David A. Bositis, *Blacks & the 2012 Democratic Convention* (Washington DC: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, 2012).

union voters – all traditionally reliable Democratic voting groups that were now turning away from the party.[55] Butler also concluded that, despite him talking "softly" on civil rights, "he got the label anyhow of being too liberal" and that with "a surprisingly noticeable shift of Negro votes to the Republican side" an actual shift towards more liberal policies would be inescapable to prevent future losses in the North, East and West.[56]

[55] Ibid.

[56] "Top Man on Democratic Totem Pole," *Chicago Defender*, April 26, 1958. Mitchell, in correspondence with the *New York Times'* Arthur Krock, concluded that while he had viewed the chairmanship of the DNC as "a trusteeship to protect and strengthen and maintain the party and its various parts between conventions and general elections," Butler's tenure after 1956 took place "under very different circumstances," without the binding leadership of Stevenson and without Democrats being united by "the McCarthy, Nixon, Dewey, Hall effort to destroy the party by identifying the party and its leaders with Communism." See: Stephen Mitchell to Arthur Krock, August 1, 1959, Container 13, Folder 11, Stephen Mitchell Papers.

Liberal Democrats were particularly frustrated with Southern control of the congressional agenda. Part of this control came from the leadership of Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn (D-TX) and Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson (D-TX). But even more important was the domination of Southerners among chairmen of congressional committees. Since Southern Democrats generally did not face competitive general elections, they had an easier time building up seniority. The result was that Southern Democrats in Congress could relatively easily prevent the production of a national liberal Democratic brand by blocking liberal legislation. As Butler explained in a 1959 television interview, the 'regionalized' Congressional leadership was due to:

> "the procedures and rules governing the Congress, where seniority applies and where members of the Democratic Party from Southern states, both members of the Senate and House, have longer service, longer tenure than Democrats generally from Northern Congressional Districts, or Northern States for Senators, and the seniority system lends itself to the build up of power and influence, control of committees; by Southern Democrats, when the Democrats are in control of Congress. And this point of view generally expressed by these Southern leaders does not represent the national point of view."[57]

The 1956 election convinced Butler and other liberals in the party that the unity agenda had failed, that the party had to make the choice to be a clear liberal *national* party, and that it would be very difficult to achieve any of this in Congress. Therefore, liberals turned to the DNC. In late November 1956, the DNC's executive committee gathered in a private meeting to discuss the election results. In a lengthy – and, frequently tense – discussion, Southern and liberal committee members openly discussed the issues facing the party. Liberals expressed their dismay that Republicans had bypassed Democrats on civil rights, and the possibility that the GOP would move further in that direction. California DNC member Ziffren feared that "the Republican Party is going to pose, or at least try to pose as a great liberal party, a champion of civil rights."[58] Pittsburgh's mayor David Lawrence similarly argued that "Eisenhower is liable to do the thing that we accused him of not doing, accepting the real leadership and the hard work of striving for

[57] Celebrity Parade, WMAL-TV, July 5, 1959, Container 460, Folder 21, Chairman's Files, 1956-1960.

[58] Transcript DNC Executive Committee Meeting, November 26-27, 1956, Container 119, Folder 4, DNC Meeting Transcripts.

the things that he is supposed to believe in"[59] on civil rights. Should the Republicans succeed in doing so, these liberals feared, the black vote in the North could switch permanently to the GOP in 1958 and 1960.

The liberals in this meeting also addressed the issues they faced in creating an alternative regional liberal Democratic party image to overcome Southern domination in Congress. Lawrence explicitly argued that the dominance of conservative Southerners in Congress made it impossible for Northeastern Democrats to connect with black voters:

> "There isn't any question that in a great many areas in the north we lost a substantial colored vote and labor vote; and the arguments about [Senator James] Eastland [D-MS] on the one hand, and [Chairman of the House Committee on Education and Labor Graham A.] Barden [D-NC] on the other hand were just unanserable [sic], you couldn't answer them. [...] We could go into all the details of what Roosevelt did for the colored people, and what Truman did, and what we have done in cities and in states for them. But that was too long-drawn-out. They just say, "Eastland"; they say "Barden"; and that answered all kinds of arguments."[60]

The solution, Lawrence argued, was for the DNC to override Congress and to take the position that "when the National Convention is not meeting, we are the representatives of the Democratic Party."[61] The DNC should have this right, liberals argued, because – as Colonel Jacob Arvey, a DNC member from Illinois noted – Southern Democrats were also "elected on the Democratic Platform," and that "we either have a National Party or we do not have."[62]

To help solve this problem, the committee voted to install a "new 17 man top level advisory committee to formulate party policy and shape a 'liberal' legislative program."[63] This advisory committee, which would come to be known as the Democratic Advisory Council (DAC), represented a crucial expansion of power for the national committee. The DNC executive committee created this new party institution with the unambiguous purpose of countering the Southern

[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid. The liberals in particular blamed Lyndon Johnson for allowing the South to dilute the party's brand. Ziffren argued that Johnson had "arrogated to himself the position of spokesman for the Party. We don't feel that's proper; we don't feel it's desirable; we don't feel it's in the best interest of the Democratic Party." Ibid.
[63] "Democrats Name Group to Shape Party's Policies," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 28, 1956.

dominated congressional brand with a national liberal one. Southern members on the executive committee abstained in protest.[64] In his press release announcing the DAC, Butler stressed that the council would produce a national Democratic message: "the Council will be a vehicle for rallying national support behind constructive programs and organizing and giving voice to opposition to unwise programs which ill-serve the national interest."[65] Additionally, the DAC would serve as a voice for "millions of Democrats not represented in Congress," and would engage "in an unprecedented effort to make a national political party more responsive and more responsible to its members and to the public."[66]

The creation of the DAC represented a radical expansion of national committee power. For the first time, a national committee claimed to hold the right to decide the party's positions on policy issues on a national level. The DAC was, in part, inspired by recent political science research on the American political party system. Specifically, political scientists writing in the classic 1950 APSA report *Towards A More Responsible Party System* had called for a system with a higher level of party loyalty to provide voters with two ideologically homogeneous and distinct parties. The report had criticized the party's reliance on national convention as the institution empowered to set party policies as "unwieldy, unrepresentative and less than responsible in mandate and action."[67] The report's criticism was hardly new: indeed, as noted in Chapter 2, national committee chairmen such as Raskob and John D.M. Hamilton had argued decades earlier that a convention that gathered only once every four years limited parties' ability to respond adequately to changing political issues and circumstances. Butler – who had proposed a midterm convention in 1954 – clearly shared these concerns as well. Additionally, the authors of the report argued that congressional party members would not produce a truly national brand since they were all individually constrained by their local preferences.

As a solution to this problem, the authors of *Towards A More Responsible Party System* suggested both parties should create a 'party council.' This council would "consider and settle the larger problems of party management" – including proposing a draft of the party platform and interpreting the platform in between national conventions.[68] The similarity between the APSA

[64] Ibid.
[65] Publicity Division Press Release B-1491, April 9, 1957, Container 449, Folder 1, Chairman's Files, 1956-1960.
[66] "Democratic Chiefs Split Over Policies," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 4, 1957.
[67] *Toward A More Responsible Two-Party System* (New York: Rinehart, 1950) 37.
[68] *Toward A More Responsible Two-Party System*, 5.

report's suggestion and the DAC was not a coincidence. In fact, the report had a major influence on the decisions DNC leaders took in this period. For one thing, several political scientists – such as James Sundquist, and Bernard C. Hennessy – worked at the DNC in the late 1950s.[69] Most important in this regard was the relationship between Butler and Paul Willis, an Assistant Professor of Government at Indiana University. During the 1950s, Willis and Butler collaborated frequently – both during the years Butler was Indiana's representative to the DNC, and during his subsequent chairmanship of the committee. Willis also introduced Butler to the APSA report, lending the future chair a copy in 1953.[70] After Butler became DNC chair in 1955, Willis joined the DNC as his personal assistant.[71]

In December 1956, Butler announced the preliminary DAC member list, which included party elders such as Truman, Stevenson, and Eleanor Roosevelt, and congressional leaders such as Rayburn, Johnson, House Majority Whip Carl Albert, and Senators Humphrey, Mike Mansfield (D-MT), and John F. Kennedy (D-MA), and Governors Averell Harriman (D-NY), G. Mennen Williams (D-MI), and Ernest W. McFarland (D-AZ). The suggested list was something of a political ploy since Butler assumed Rayburn and Johnson would refuse to serve on a committee intended to curtail congressional power over the party. Indeed, all members of the congressional leadership refused to join the committee.[72] In selecting the members of the DAC that *did* accept, Butler ensured that the committee had a strong liberal slant: even the Southern representatives were all seen as progressives.[73] Additionally, the DAC's steering commission – consisting of five members – included only one Southerner while the other members (Stevenson, Harriman, Williams, and Ziffren) were all outspoken liberals.[74] There was therefore little doubt, the *Wall Street Journal*

[69] Mitchell described his relationship with Sundquist as having been "constant companions" during their time at the DNC (Stephen Mitchell to Basil L. Walters, Container 14, Folder 13, Stephen Mitchell Papers). Hennessy went on to co-author *Politics Without Power*, one of the few political science books devoted specifically to the national committees. See: Cornelius P. Cotter and Bernard C. Hennessy, *Politics Without Power: The National Party Committees* (New York: Atheron Press, 1964).

[70] George C. Roberts, *Paul M. Butler: Hoosier Politician and National Political Leader* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1987), 36.

[71] Ibid., 60. Willis received a leave of absence from Indiana University and worked at the DNC between January 1955 and January 1957. See: Paul Butler to Dr. Walter H.C. Leves, January 31, 1955, Container 446, Folder 34, Democratic Chairman's Files, 1956-1960; Paul Butler to Dr. Herman B. Wells, May 5, 1955, Container 446, Folder 34, Democratic Chairman's Files, 1956-1960; Walter H.C. Leves to Paul Butler, April 5, 1956; Container 446, Folder 34, Democratic Chairman's Files, 1956-1960; Paul Willis to Paul Butler, January 22, 1957, Container 446, Folder 35, Democratic Chairman's Files, 1956-1960.

[72] "Democrats Name 20 To Chart a Program," *New York Times*, December 6, 1956; "Rayburn Balks Party Plan to Sit As Adviser," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 9, 1956.

[73] "Democrats Name 20 To Chart a Program," *New York Times*.

[74] Gravel, the DNC committee member from Louisiana, member of the DNC's executive committee, and the only

concluded, that "Northern party leaders planned to use this advisory group as a weapon to prod Senator Johnson and House Speaker Rayburn of Texas into more 'liberal' legislation."[75]

Initially, the DNC's executive committee restricted the DAC's role to reaffirming the party platform passed by the 1956 convention. However, during the first meeting of the DAC in February 1957, its members expanded the council's powers even further. Herbert H. Lehman (D-NY), who had retired from the Senate the month before, explained that "this committee has to have the right, even if it means a fight with the congressional leadership, to force the point of view of what I consider the Democratic Party."[76] Lehman particularly believed that a political party's national positions on policy issues could not be introduced by a presidential candidate in the months or weeks leading up to an election, but instead would require a much longer process of continuous branding activities:

> "Adlai Stevenson, or anybody else, who may be our nominee, may go around the country and talk his head of [sic] and heart out, but that isn't going to do the thing unless the issues have been made in Congress and unless the leadership is going to be influenced by what this Advisory Committee proposes and suggests and urges."[77]

The members of the DAC ended their first meeting with a clear rejection of the Rayburn-Johnson unity approach, proclaiming that "we can win in 1960 only if we begin now to hammer out a forceful, coherent policy and to keep communicating it to the public."[78]

Among the first party positions the DAC set was strong support for civil rights. Specifically, the DAC called on members of Congress to "redeem party pledges by supporting civil rights legislations" and requested "legislation to end discrimination of all kinds."[79] The council also criticized the Eisenhower administration for its handling of the Little Rock school controversy,[80]

Southerner on the DAC's executive committee, was ousted as DNC member by Louisiana's Democratic Party for being too liberal on segregation. Remarkably, the DNC allowed Gravel to remain on the committee regardless. "Democrats Press Civil Rights Bills," *New York Times*, February 18, 1957; "Party Ousts Louisianan," *Washington Post*, October 9, 1958; "Butler Rejects Removal of Aide," *New York Times*, October 10, 1958.

[75] "Democratic Row," *Wall Street Journal*.

[76] Proceedings of Advisory Council of the Democratic National Committee Meeting, February 15-16, 1957, Container 120, Folder 3, DNC Meeting Transcripts.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Cited in Klinkner, *The Losing Parties*, 25.

[79] "Democrats Agree On Rights Policy," *The New York Times*, February 17, 1957.

[80] The Council specifically criticized Eisenhower personally for failing "in his duty to make the principle clear to all of the country that the first responsibility of a Governor is to uphold the Federal Constitution and that Governor Faubus

and called on it to execute the 1957 civil rights bill at increased speed.[81] The DAC also passed a resolution criticizing anti-labor right-to-work legislation – a clear rebuttal of Senator John L. McClellan's (D-AR) attempt to add such a bill as a poison pill amendment to the 1957 Senate civil rights bill.[82] Butler used the DAC's positions to become more vocal in his own support for civil rights. In September 1958, Butler called out Governors Faubus (D-AR), Almond (D-VA), and Griffin (D-GA) for their failure to implement civil rights reforms – explain that these elected Democrats did "not represent the position of the Democratic Party."[83] Butler went even further during a TV interview weeks before the 1958 midterms, telling Southern Democrats that "if they did not like the party's official stand in favor of integration they could find asylum either with the Republicans or in a third political party."[84] The DAC thus gave Butler and the DNC cover to consistently oppose segregation and support civil rights. Criticizing the RNC's attempts at reaching out to Southern whites by stressing states rights, Butler in a 1959 TV interview explained that "our National Party and spokesmen for our National Party, whether they speak in the North or the South, or the East or West are holding to the position that the Democratic Party must take a strong moral position on this issue."[85]

The DAC did not limit itself to civil rights and union issues alone: it also called for an increase in federal government spending, opposed the Eisenhower administration's 'tight-money' policy, and blamed the (perceived) drop in American military power and economic performance on Eisenhower's budget cuts.[86] In 1957, the DNC authorized the DAC to create specialized

should be using his powers to uphold the orders of the courts instead of using them to bar the Negro students and thereby thwart the law." Faubus was, of course, a Democrat. DNC Publicity Division Press Release B-1560, September 15, 1957, Container 449, Folder 1, Chairman's Files, 1956-1960.

[81] See: Democratic Advisory Council Press Release, October 21, 1957, Container 449, Folder 1, Chairman's Files, 1956-1960; Democratic Advisory Council Statement on Civil Rights, February 2, 1958, Container 449, Folder 1, Chairman's Files, 1956-1960.

[82] Transcript of Meeting of the Advisory Council of the Democratic National Committee, May 5, 1957, Container 121, Folder 7, DNC Meeting Transcripts. See also: "M'Clellan Scored On Right-To-Work," *New York Times*, May 9, 1957.

[83] "Butler Assails Southern Governors," *Daily Defender*, September 9, 1958.

[84] "Smathers Chides Butler on Rights," *New York Times*, October 22, 1958. Butler also opposed right-to-work legislation, writing all Democratic candidates and members of state legislatures in New Mexico, Indiana, Utah, and Wyoming to remind them that "our national Party has taken a positive position in our platform against all right-to-work legislation both at the state and Federal levels." See: Paul Butler to Candidates for Legislature in Wyoming, September 26, 1958, Container 459, Folder 11, Chairman's Files, 1956-1960. See also: Paul Butler to Harry S. Allen, January 13, 1959, Container 459, Folder 9, Chairman's Files, 1956-1960; Paul Butler to all Democratic members of the Senate and House in Indiana, January, 1959, Container 459, Folder 8, Chairman's Files, 1956-1960; Paul Butler to Democratic members of Utah legislature, February 16, 1959, Container 459, Folder 10, Chairman's Files, 1956-1960.

[85] Transcript Celebrity Parade, WMAL-TV, July 5, 1959, Container 460, Folder 21, Chairman's Files, 1956-1960.

[86] See: Democratic Advisory Council Press Release, February 16, 1958, Container 449, Folder 1, Chairman's Files, 1956-1960; "Economic Policy in 1958 – A Statement by the Democratic Advisory Council," February 2, 1958, Container 449, Folder 1, Chairman's Files, 1956-1960; "America's Present Danger and What We Must Do About It – A Statement

advisory sub-committees on a broad range of issues. In June that year, former Secretary of State Dean Acheson became chair of the Advisory Committee on Foreign Policy.[87] A similar committee on economic issues – chaired by John Kenneth Galbraith – was formed in September. In the months that followed, the DAC created specialized committees on party finances, political technology and development, labor, and other issues.[88] These committees criticized the Eisenhower administration, but also used their authorization to set party policy positions.[89] The subcommittees had considerable autonomy but Butler supervised the organization through a three-member Administrative Committee that "directed advisory committees as to what topics to pursue, approved pamphlets coming from advisory committees for distribution to the DAC, considered political ramifications of DAC appointments, and implemented plans for congressional liaison."[90]

The DAC voted on each proposed party policy position, and minority opponents were allowed to publicly dissent. However, with the exception of Southern members opposing the DAC's civil right positions, such public dissent was rare: with a liberal dominated membership there was generally consensus on the positions the DAC enacted. In this regard, membership selection also affected the policy proposals produced by the different subcommittees. For example, the Advisory Committee on Labor Policy produced policy proposals supportive of unions.[91] That this committee proposed such party positions was not surprising given that the chairman of the subcommittee was George M. Harrison, the President of the Brotherhood of Railway Clerks, its vice-chairman was Joseph D. Keenan, the International Secretary of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, and its secretary was Arthur J. Goldberg, Special Counsel of the AFL-CIO.[92]

The 1958 midterm results strengthened liberals' conviction that the party's move to the left was paying off. Democrats won a substantial number of seats in both the House and Senate (respectively, 45 and 15). Most notably, while all Southern Democrats in the South retained their

by The Democratic Advisory Council," February 1, 1958, Container 449, Folder 1, Chairman's Files, 1956-1960. Also see: Klinkner, *The Losing Parties*, 33.

[87] DNC Publicity Division Press Release B-1562, September 24, 1957, Container 449, Folder 1, Chairman's Files, 1956-1960.

[88] Roberts, *Paul M. Butler*, 111.

[89] For example, see: "Democrats Accuse Ike of Blunders," *Washington Post*, April 1, 1959; "Democratic Unit Censures G.O.P. On Jobless Total," *New York Times*, April 6, 1959;

[90] Roberts, *Paul M. Butler*, 113.

[91] In one of the policy brief produced by the DAC the council called "a strong, free, responsible trade union movement [. . .] one of America's great assets." See: Democratic Advisory Council Press Release, June 12, 1958, Container 449, Folder 1, Chairman's Files, 1956-1960.

[92] Chairman Report to the Members of the Democratic National Committee, February 27, 1959, Container 122, Folder 8, DNC Meeting Transcripts.

seats, all newly won races were in other parts of the country (see Figure 3.3 for the geographical division of Senate results in the 1958 midterms). The class of 1958 in both the House and Senate represented an important wave of liberalization for the party's congressional wing. In the House, the increase of Northern liberals inspired the creation of the Democratic Study Group, which pushed for increased power for the party leadership at the expense of the seniority system.[93] In the Senate, the class of 1958 included future liberal stalwarts such as Edmund Muskie (D-ME), Philip Hart (D-MI), and Eugene McCarthy (D-MN). As Barbara Sinclair notes, these "new Democratic senators differed from their senior party colleagues in region of origin, ideological proclivities, and electoral security" and were a "markedly liberal group."[94] Democrats also did well in the West in 1958. In response to the midterm results, Ziffren called on DNC members to develop a 'Western accent' and Butler successfully pushed for the 1960 convention to be held in Los Angeles.[95]

As Eric Schickler has shown, the DNC was not alone in calling for the liberalization of the national Democratic Party in this period. Indeed, many Democratic state party organizations embraced civil rights reform in the 1950s, and liberals in Congress began to organize to push for civil rights legislation after the 1956 election.[96] Still, Southern Democrats strongly opposed the DNC's switch to the left. Hugh N. Clayton, a DNC member from Mississippi, early on expressed his opposition to the DAC, and challenged the decision to give the DNC chairman the sole power of member selection.[97] Rayburn, in February 1959, warned the DNC that he had "no patience with people who claim to be Democrats who say they want to run other people who claim to be Democrats out of the party."[98] Senator Robert C. Byrd (D-WV) in a lengthy letter to Butler cautioned that "if we hope to be victorious next year, we should and we must adopt unity as our watchword [underline in original]" and reminded Butler that "our Party is big enough for the liberals, the conservatives, and the middle-of-the-roaders [. . .] if it is a Party that seeks to cast out all of the liberals, or, conversely, all of the conservatives, then it will cease to be the Democratic

[93] David W. Rohde, *Parties and Leaders in the Postreform House* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 7.

[94] Barbara Sinclair, *The Transformation of the U.S. Senate* (Baltimore; The Johns Hopkins University Press), 31.

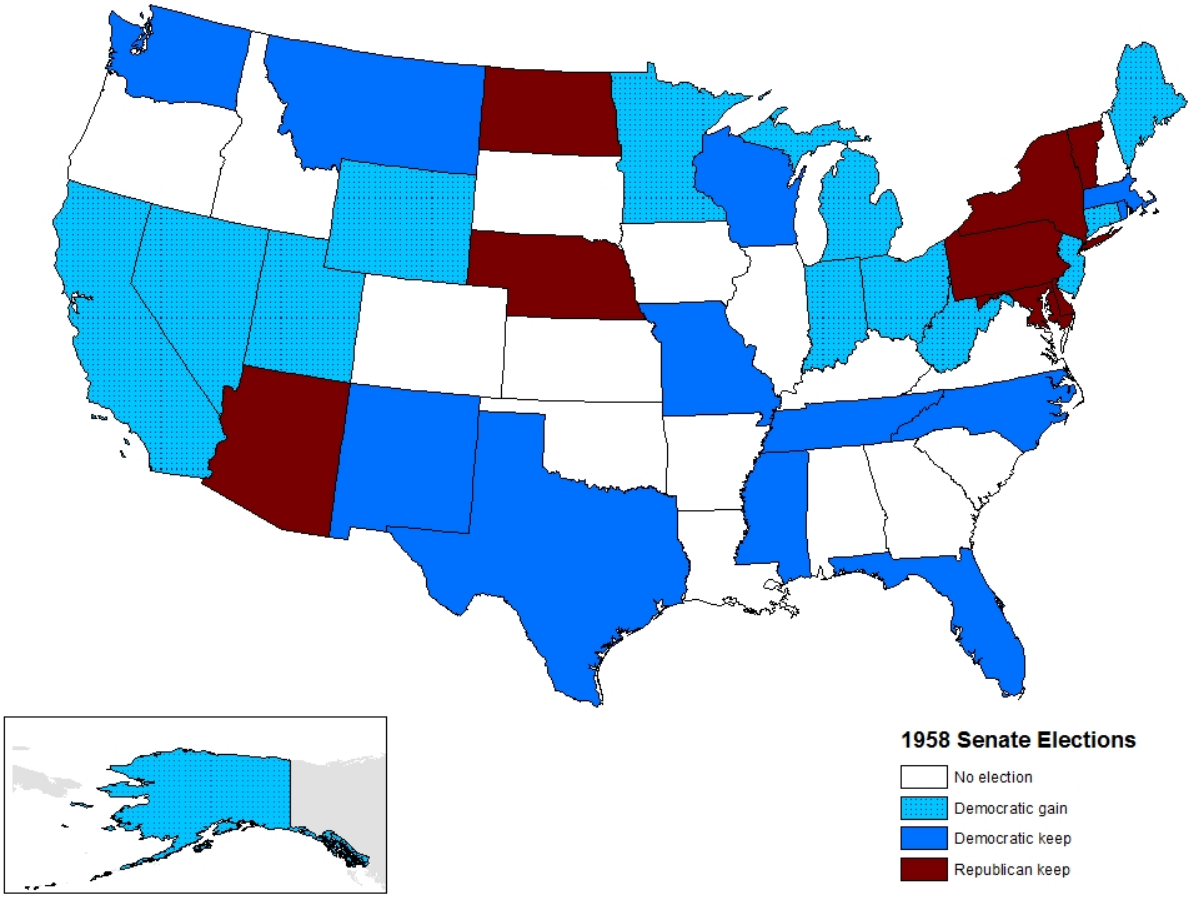
[95] This Western perspective also included the release of a special 'California edition' of the *Democratic Digest* in 1958. DNC Publicity Division Press Release B-1776, Container 15, Folder B-1776, Publicity Division, Records of the Democratic National Committee, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library (hereafter cited as DNC Publicity Division). See also: "Democrats Told To Stress West, Minimize South," *New York Times*; "L.A. Gets Democratic Convention For 1960," *Los Angeles Times*, January 19, 1959.

[96] Eric Schickler, *Racial Realignment: The Transformation of American Liberalism, 1932-1965* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 226-229.

[97] Hugh N. Clayton to Paul Butler, December 18, 1956, Container 434, Folder 21, Chairman's Files, 1956-1960.

[98] "Follow Steps of F.D.R., Party Urged," *Los Angeles Times*, March 1, 1959.

Figure 3.3: *Senate Gains and Losses by Party in the 1958 Midterms*



Source: *Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections* (Washington D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Ltd., 1994). Map produced in ArcGIS.

Party." Senator Spessard Holland (D-FL) in a letter to Butler, criticized the DAC and explained that "the great bulk of our members are distinctly out of sympathy with the pronouncements of the Advisory Council which seems to be running directly counter to the efforts of the leadership and the majority of the Democrats in both Senate and House."[99] Other Southern Democrats threatened to bolt from the 1960 convention and run a Dixiecrat ticket.[100]

Such opposition did not deter the DNC. In advance of the 1960 convention, the DNC tried to increase its influence of the process of drafting the party's new platform. To do so, the committee organized public hearings during which "panels made up of distinguished members of the Party" met in different parts of the country "so that citizens can appear and suggest planks for the

[99] Spessard L. Holland to Paul Butler, July 11, 1959, Container 449, Folder 7, Chairman's Files, 1956-1960
[100] "Dixiecrats Set Up Worry For Party," *New York Times*, March 29, 1959.

platform."[101] Butler explained that incorporating such hearings in the drafting process showcased "the increasing importance which we, as a Party, attach to our national platform, not merely as a campaign document, but as a living expression of our party's deepest conviction, principle and promise, to be acted upon affirmatively once elected."[102] That is, the DNC attempted to increase the importance of the platform as a binding commitment Democratic elected officials should follow once in office. Around the same time, the DAC introduced a civil rights subcommittee chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt, which assigned itself the task of drafting the platform's civil rights plank. In this plank, the DAC called for Congress to go "squarely on record as opposed to racial segregation in public schools" and "to enact additional laws to protect [...] rights of American citizens to register and vote free of discrimination based on race, color, religion or national origin."[103] Despite protests from Southern members of the DAC, the convention enacted the civil rights proposal.

It is clear that Butler and the DNC attempted to rebrand the Democratic Party as a national liberal institution after the 1956 elections. In doing so, Butler frequently clashed with Southern conservatives, and the party's congressional leadership. The extent to which the DNC was successful in rebranding the party is less clear. Assessment of the DNC's performance by reporters and political scientists at the time were largely negative. For example, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* concluded that the DAC's legislative program was "dying on the vine"[104] because Rayburn, Johnson, and the party's (Southern) committee chairmen simply ignored the proposals. The *New York Times* similarly concluded that Butler achieved little in his struggle against Democratic leaders in Congress.[105] Political scientists Daniel Ogden and Evron M. Kirkpatrick writing in the 1960s and '70s therefore concluded that, while Butler had tried to implement the APSA report's recommendations on party organizations, his attempts largely failed.[106]

[101] "Democrats 'Share Work' On Platform," *Washington Post*, March 8, 1960.
[102] DNC Publicity Division Press Release B-2025, March 7, 1960, Container 17, Folder B-2025, Publicity Division.
[103] "Democratic Split On Rights Widens," *New York Times*, March 16, 1960.
[104] "Butler Group Sees Program Dying on Vine," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 13, 1959.
[105] "Butler Needs Allies in Democratic Battle," *New York Times*, July 19, 1959. Butler also became controversial due to a series of gaffes – such as his suggestion in March 1960 that Eisenhower had "something to answer for" after the death of 19 members of the Navy in an air disaster during the president's visit to Brazil. Butler added; "what right has he to take the Navy Band on a tour around the world. Was this a political sow or something?" After criticism from both Democratic and Republican leaders Butler apologized. See: "Butler's Series of Blunders Seen Damaging Value as Party Chairman," *Los Angeles Times*, March 8, 1960.
[106] Kirkpatrick was a member of the committee that authored the APSA report. Daniel M. Ogden, "Party Theory and Political Reality Inside the Democratic Party," paper delivered at the 1960 meeting of the American Political Science Association, New York (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilm, Inc.); Daniel M. Ogden, "Paul Butler,

It is certainly true that congressional Democrats did not follow the DAC's policy prescriptions. However, this is not the sole metric of success that can be applied to the DNC and DAC activities in this period. Indeed, when we think of the DAC as a publicity program, Butler's attempts at liberalization appear far stronger. The DNC's promotion of the Democratic Party as a national liberal party produced major media attention. Throughout Eisenhower's second term, the DNC continued to publish the *Democratic Digest* and relied on it to promote proposals enacted by the DAC.[107] As James Sundquist has argued, this "uncompromisingly liberal stand" the DAC took on civil rights after the 1956 election sent a strong message to voters that the "moderation" of Johnson and Rayburn and the "outright defiance" of Southern Democrats "was not the Democratic party's position."[108] Similarly, the DAC's support for liberal economic policies, the environment, and Medicare helped shape a policy platform the party would enact during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations.[109]

During the second Eisenhower term the DNC invested in new publicity tools with the goal of reaching out to traditional liberal voting groups that felt betrayed by the party's previous Southern centered unity approach. Since liberals understood they could not force compliance from their powerful conservative colleagues in the House and Senate, they relied on the national committee in an attempt to override the legislative brand. The DNC therefore focused its activities largely on providing voters with a clear image of the liberal policy positions the party as a national institution embraced in an attempt to drown out the conservative opposition to civil rights and unions from Southern members of Congress.

Party Theory, and the Democratic Party," in John E. Kersell and Marshall W. Conley (eds), *Comparative Political Problems: Britain, United States and Canada* (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall of Canada, Ltd., 1968) pp. 117-125; Evron M. Kirkpatrick, "'Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System': Political Science, Policy Science or Pseudo-Science?" *The American Political Science Review* vol. 65, no. 4 (Dec. 1971), pp. 965-990.

[107] James L. Sundquist, *Politics and Policy. The Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson Years* (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1968) 409.

[108] Ibid, 409-410.

[109] On Medicare the DAC was ahead of the curve and its support may have played a role in placing the issue on the 1960 platform. While a bill creating Medicare had been introduced in Congress in 1957, it had failed to move forward in either House or Senate in part because of opposition from conservative Democrats. The DAC endorsed Medicare in 1958 and despite the fact that Democratic congressional leaders failed to bring Medicare to a vote, the Democratic platform of 1960 endorsed the program. See: Ibid, 410-414.

III. Committee Decline Under JFK and LBJ, 1960-1968

After the Kennedy-Johnson ticket won a tight victory in 1960, Kennedy named John M. Bailey chair of the DNC. Bailey remained chair throughout both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, but the DNC's role receded immediately upon the party's shift to national majority status. In the weeks after the election, the DNC began a process of "retrenchment" in which staff members were fired and programs cut.[110] The DNC terminated the *Digest* as a party magazine in mid-November 1960. Attempts at continuing the magazine independently produced only a celebratory issue surrounding the Kennedy inauguration in January 1961.[111] The DNC also ended the Democratic Advisory Council. Newspapers reported that JFK planned "a quiet death" for the institution which had "served to emphasize the deep liberal-conservative split within the party,"[112] and the DNC announced the official end of the DAC in March 1961. Bailey acknowledged that the DAC had "served a function" while the party was out of the White House, but now that the Democrats restored their national majority, argued that "policy should be made at the White House and by the leadership of Congress."[113]

Of course, winning the presidential election did not end the intra-party conflict that had divided Democrats in the 1950s. With the committee under presidential control, the DNC now used its sparse remaining propaganda tools to promote the administration's policies – specifically through a new program called "Operation Support." Active mostly in 1961 and 1962, Operation Support was built around assisting the Kennedy administration. For example, the DNC sent information on administration supported bills in Congress to local party organizations in districts of members who opposed the plans.[114] Additionally, the DNC organized several conferences across the country at which Kennedy administration officials explained their policy positions to local Democrats. In 1963, the DNC used Operation Support to support Kennedy's proposed tax cuts plan.[115] But the program was short lived: after JFK's death in 1963, Operation Support

[110] "Democrats Cut National Headquarters Staff," *Washington Post*, November 17, 1960.
[111] "Digest Suspends," *New York Times*, November 18, 1960; "Party Digest Shifts," *New York Times*, November 22, 1960.
[112] "Advice Without Consent," *Wall Street Journal*, December 19, 1960.
[113] "Democrats End Advisory Council," *New York Times*, March 12, 1961.
[114] Specifically, "the practice will be to send a telegram to the Democratic chairman in the member's state or district advising him of the vote and suggesting that he get the 'facts' of the situation as widely publicized as possible." See: "Party Will Press Kennedy Program," *New York Times*, April 5, 1961.
[115] In doing so the DNC mostly targeted Republican districts. However, the DNC was forced to apologize after it was revealed that it had also sent materials to Tennessee to influence Senator Albert Gore ("Democrats Mail Tax Cut Publicity,"

activities ended as well.

Beyond the restricted scope of "Operation Support" the DNC's ambitions were limited throughout the Kennedy and Johnson years. Early attempts by Bailey to reorganize the DNC fizzled out. Additionally, while the DNC provided some advice to black and Latino action groups, it did not actively organize voter registration drives. Contrary to Butler in the 1950s, Bailey was "careful not to antagonize southern Democratic politicians and state committees"[116] that remained supportive of Jim Crow.[117] Bailey and the DNC staff instead "tried their best to avoid favoring one faction or candidate over another in intraparty disputes within the states."[118] This was hardly surprising. As the *New York Times*' Arthur Krock wrote immediately after the election, the 1960 results indicated that Kennedy "and the 'liberal' non-Southern party majority that nominated him on a platform repugnant to the South, are deeply in debt to the Southern leaders"[119] for providing enough Southern electoral votes to win the election.

The DNC did continue to provide other non-publicity related services, most notably fundraising. Here, the national committee innovated and created a new set of programs. Under Butler, the DNC had attempted to combine fundraising and grassroots activism. Bailey and DNC treasurer Richard Maguire replaced this project with a more elite system based on membership programs. The approach was successful: the DNC had erased its debt from the 1960 campaign by 1963.[120] Still, the committee did not use its fundraising ability to create new (or revitalize old) publicity programs.

After taking office, Johnson further diminished the DNC's non-fundraising activities. While LBJ was successful in pushing through major pieces of legislation that had stalled under Kennedy – including the 1964 Civil Rights Act – he relied on a broad coalition of Democrats and Republicans

New York Times, October 15, 1963; "Democrat Takes Blame for Tax-Cut Slap at Gore," *Los Angeles Times*, October 22, 1963). Operation Support falls in the type of branding activity we would expect to see limited to national minority parties. However, the Kennedy administration found itself frustrated with an unreliable Democratic congressional majority and relied on the DNC in an attempt to tie individual members of Congress to the administration's policies. Crucially, though, Operation Support was not designed to expand the party's coalition, or to promote a specific party image. Rather, it saw the party try to pass individual pieces of legislation and move on to other topics as the legislative agenda moved forward. The White House and DNC thus "aimed to activate the natural Democratic majority to bring pressure to bear on Congress in *this* session, on behalf of certain policies that were being considered *now* [emphasis in original]" rather than promote a party brand as part of a long term electoral strategy" (Daniel Galvin, *Presidential Party Building: Dwight D. Eisenhower to George W. Bush* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010), 166).

[116] Savage, *JFK, LBJ, and the Democratic Party*, 153.

[117] See also: Galvin, *Presidential Party Building*, 175-177.

[118] Savage, *JFK, LBJ, and the Democratic Party*, 154.

[119] "The Parties' Futures," *New York Times*, November 13, 1960.

[120] Savage *JFK, LBJ, and the Democratic Party*, 155.

to do so. At the same time, LBJ attempted to placate (conservative) Democrats on other policy issues. A publicity centered DNC would not serve either purpose, since "LBJ perceived a strong, national party organization with regular publicity [...] activities emphasizing partisan differences to be a threat to the suprapartisan, centrist consensus that he wanted to develop for his presidency."[121] After the massive Democratic success in the 1964 presidential and congressional elections, the DNC's activities were further limited. With a considerable campaign debt, LBJ ordered Bailey to fire 30% of the DNC's regular staff.[122]

The cuts meant that the already limited services the DNC provided were "savagely reduced."[123] For example, the DNC cut the number of telephone lines members of Congress used to record messages for radio stations in their district. As a result, "members with something timely to say find that their recorded statements, which the Committee is supposed to deliver to home-town radio stations, often can't be recorded until it's too late."[124] Anonymous Democratic party leaders, and the media, described the state of the DNC under Johnson as "absolutely disgusting," "sharply curtailed," and "a skeleton organization."[125]

In the wake of the 1966 midterm elections – in which Democrats lost 47 seats in the House and three in the Senate – and under pressure from Democratic governors and members of Congress, Johnson ordered Bailey to begin expanding the DNC's operations again. However, even then the DNC remained mostly invisible.[126] Not until 1968 – when the combination of Vietnam, race riots, and challenges from, first, Eugene McCarthy and later Robert Kennedy in the 1968 presidential primaries began to scuttle the LBJ presidency – did the DNC take on a role publicizing issues again. At a set of regional meetings in early 1968, Johnson administration officials and other Democratic leaders (such as former DNC chair James Farley) deflected criticism on the Vietnam

[121] Ibid., 160.

[122] See: "The Democratic Deficit," *Washington Post*, September 23, 1965; "Democrats Reduce Jobs in National Committee," *Los Angeles Times*, December 22, 1965; "Demo Committee Cuts Staff, " *Chicago Defender*, December 25, 1965; "Republicans Intensifying Efforts in Big Cities as Democrats Cut Back Their Urban Staff," *New York Times*, December 29, 1965.

[123] "Campaign Breakaway," *Washington Post*, March 25, 1966.

[124] Ibid.

[125] See: "Campaign Breakaway," *Washington Post*; "Democrats in Distress," *Wall Street Journal*, March 30, 1966; "President Failed to Satisfy Governors on National Committee Shortcomings," *Washington Post*, January 1, 1967; "Democrats Grope for Fresh Ideals, For Fresh Ideas," *New York Times*, January 2, 1967.

[126] A November 1967 mailer in which Democratic critics of the Vietnam War was identified by *Washington Post* columnists Evans and Novak as "the sophomoric tone of 'Campaign '68" and described as "a jumbled, poorly-written eight-page compilation of anecdotes and pronouncements" which revealed "once again the low level of competence at the Democratic National Committee." "Democratic Campaign letter Gibes at Many Anti-LBJ Party Leaders," *Washington Post*, November 24, 1967.

War and other issues. The DNC also produced a set of pamphlets defending the administration and distributed them among party activists.[127] However, after LBJ announced his intention not to run for reelection, the DNC ended all major fundraising efforts and public conferences until the national convention.[128]

The DNC's limited activities during the Kennedy-Johnson presidencies follow the expectations outlined in the brand theory. There was a major decline in national committee activities after the 1960 election, and this decline persisted throughout both the Kennedy and Johnson presidencies. At the same time, though, the DNC did not go out of business entirely: its fundraising apparatus was remodeled and effective. The Democrats also did not cease their campaign activities in the midterm elections of 1962 and 1966 or the presidential elections of 1964 and 1968. Yet, the type of publicity activities that the DNC had invested in during the Eisenhower administration mostly disappeared. Most notably, the *Digest* and DAC both ended around the time of Kennedy's inauguration, and the DNC largely remained out of intra-party debates about policy, and did not engage in any major branding programs.

IV. Conclusion

The DNC's activities during the 1953-1968 period fall into two clear categories. During the Eisenhower administration, when the party was in the national minority, the committee invested considerably in new publicity programs – most notably the *Democratic Digest* and the Democratic Advisory Council. Additionally, the lack of presidential control of the national committee meant that DNC chairmen had considerable agency in choosing what party image the committee promulgated. During the first Eisenhower term, when party leaders believed its best chance at returning to national majority status relied on regaining support in the South, Mitchell and Butler doubled down on a 'unity' approach in which the party avoided issues such as civil rights, and instead focused on a party brand the committee hoped would help restore the traditional North-South New Deal coalition.

After the 1956 election, liberals in the party successfully modified this strategy. With a number of traditional Democratic voting groups switching their allegiance to Eisenhower, liberals

[127] Savage, *JFK, LBJ, and the Democratic Party*, 165.
[128] "Major Fund-Raising Halted by Democrats," *Washington Post*, April 5, 1968.

were concerned that continuing the 'unity' approach would endanger their own electability in the Northeast. Thus, Butler switched tactics and began using the DNC to promote the Democratic Party as a liberal institution. Through the DAC, *Digest*, and countless interviews and public appearances the committee now promulgated the Democratic Party as strongly supportive of civil rights, unions, and increased government spending. Southern conservatives clearly did not desire such 'service provision' from the DNC, and complained bitterly about the DNC and DAC activities during the second Eisenhower term.

However, the DNC's attempts at setting and promoting party policies receded dramatically after the 1960 election. With the party now back in a national majority position, the DNC immediately ended some of its most important innovations – including the *Digest* and DAC. During the JFK and LBJ administrations, the DNC was nominally involved in supporting the party's presidents, but such publicity efforts were minor and inconsistent. Under Johnson in particular, the DNC receded dramatically – facing major budget- and stuff cuts. Crucially, the LBJ cuts did not constrain the committee's fundraising capacities. Rather, the Democratic Party's national majority status produced a noticeable decline in the committee's attempts at shaping a national party brand.

Chapter 4

Building and Battling a Conservative National Party Brand: The RNC, 1961-1980

> "Now is the time to create a public image of the word 'Republican' [. . .]. Now is the time to sell the resurgent Republican Party."
>
> *Duke Burgess, advertising executive, January 1962*

> "We failed to present a clear-cut image and sell it to the voters. [. . .] It was the fault of those whose business it was to project the true Republican image. It was the national committee's business and it flubbed the job."
>
> *Senate Minority Leader Everett Dirksen (R-IL), December 1964*

The Republican Party saw a mostly negative record of electoral achievements in the period 1961-1980 (see Table 4.1). While the party managed to win one major presidential victory (Nixon's reelection in 1972) throughout the 1960s and '70s it was clear to party leaders that the GOP did not represent a majority party. As the branding theory of national committee activities predicts (see Table 4.2), the RNC invested considerably in publicity programs – both when the party was in, and out, of the White House. Such programs included the committee's production of magazines, radio

Table 4.1: *Republican Electoral Performance and National Party Status, 1960-1978*

	White House	*% House Seats*	*% Senate Seats*	*Party Status*
1960	OUT	40.0	36.0	Minority
1962	OUT	40.0	34.0	Minority
1964	OUT	32.2	32.0	Minority
1966	OUT	43.0	36.0	Minority
1968	IN	44.1	43.0	Minority
1970	IN	41.4	44.0	Minority
1972	IN	44.1	42.0	Minority
1974	IN	33.1	38.0	Minority
1976	OUT	32.9	38.0	Minority
1978	OUT	36.3	41.0	Minority

Source: Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections (Washington D.C.: CQ Press, 2010).

programs, TV specials, and the creation of new party institutions – inspired by the Democratic Advisory Council – to set party policies.

Throughout this period, the RNC's publicity programs existed in a larger context of intra-party conflict regarding what the party's national brand should be. The GOP in the 1960s and '70s (much like the Democratic Party around the same time) found itself in a major ideological conflict between competing wings. In the GOP, self-described conservatives and moderates vied for control of the national party image. As predicted, the extent to which the national committee could favor either wing depended on its level of agency. When the GOP controlled the presidency as they did under Nixon and Ford, the RNC promoted a presidential understanding of the Republican party brand. However, in the party's out-years in this period, the RNC took a clearer positional stand: during the 1961-1964 period, when the RNC was under the leadership of two conservative party chairmen, the party supported the conservative aim of incorporating white Southern voters. During the years 1964-1968 and 1976-1980, however, the RNC was under moderate control and instead focused on appealing to minority voters – most notably, black voters in major cities.

I. The RNC Moves South: Project Dixie, 1961-1964

During the presidency of Dwight Eisenhower, the GOP (mostly) was in the minority in Congress and thus the RNC remained active in party building activities. In doing so, the committee followed Eisenhower's personal preferences: RNC chair Leonard Hall went so far as to explain that the national committee in these years was "the 'selling' organization for the Administration

Table 4.2: *Republican National Party Status and Theory Predictions, 1961-1980*

	House and Senate	
White House	*Majority*	*Minority*
	–	1969-1976
In-Party	President controlled decline in branding programs	President controlled investments in branding activities
	–	1961-1968; 1977-1980
Out-Party	National committee controlled investments in branding activities	National committee controlled investments in branding activities

and the entire Party."[1] The RNC developed a variety of projects toward the goal of increasing the party's electoral fortunes. For example, in 1955 the RNC created a GOP Campaign School to train candidates for Congress and local elections. In 1957, the RNC created "Operation Dixie" – a program to build party organizations in the South after Eisenhower's electoral success there in 1952 and '56. Finally, after the 1958 midterms, when the GOP lost 48 seats in the House and 13 in the Senate, the RNC created the Percy Committee – tasked with identifying a statement of the party's guiding principles.[2]

But the party's electoral performance in the 1950s did not improve much beyond Eisenhower's presidential election victories. While he was a popular national leader, Eisenhower did not produce major coattails for down ticket Republicans: with the exception of the 83rd Congress (1953-1955), Republicans remained in the minority in both chambers. As Republicans were unable to break through and become a stable national majority party, conservatives and moderates continued to clash over the question of what kind of party the GOP should be. As Geoffrey Kabaservice has noted, Republican moderates' aim "was to rationalize and reform the New Deal rather than repeal it."[3] Eisenhower clearly placed himself in this moderate camp, arguing that "the Republican Party must be known as a progressive organization or it is sunk."[4] Conservatives had a different perspective, refusing to view the New Deal as a new political reality that the Republican Party could tame. Instead, conservatives considered the New Deal "to be wholly alien to the American

[1] Cited in Daniel Galvin, *Presidential Party Building: Dwight D. Eisenhower to George W Bush* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 45.

[2] See: Ibid., 41-69.

[3] Geoffrey Kabaservice, *Rule and Ruin. The Downfall of Moderation and the Destruction of the Republican Party. From Eisenhower to the Tea Party* (Oxford University Press, 2012) 15.

[4] Cited in Galvin, *Presidential Party Building*, 51.

tradition and aimed to eradicate it."[5]

The 1960 election provided both conservatives and moderates with further incentives to continue this battle. Importantly, the election presented an outcome that the different wings in the GOP interpreted in decidedly different ways. The Republicans remained in the minority in the House and Senate despite winning seats in both chambers. In the presidential election, Kennedy's victory over Nixon was razor thin: while Kennedy received a substantial majority of the electoral vote (303 to 219), the difference in the popular vote was a mere 112,827 votes – less than half a percentage point of the total vote.[6]

Like the Democrats after the 1952 elections, Republican party leaders looked to their national committee after 1960. Members of both wings of the GOP agreed that the RNC should be in charge of creating a new national image. For example, conservative Senator Barry Goldwater (AZ) argued that the RNC should "re-establish itself to its rightful positon as the governing body of the Party."[7] Similarly, moderate Governor Nelson Rockefeller (NY) argued that "the actual agency heading the Party in the next four years"[8] should be the national committee.

But such a consensus was missing when it came to identifying *what* image the RNC should promulgate, and *which* voting groups it should target. Moderates believed the 1960 loss was a result of the party's dismal performance in major cities among black and ethnic voters. Along these lines, Senator Thruston Morton (R-KY), Richard Nixon's selection as RNC chair during the 1960 campaign, concluded that "when you lose in the cities by 1.8 [million votes] and you lose an election by 112,000 clearly we have a job in certain metropolitan areas."[9]

In contrast, conservatives contended the lack of a consistent conservative party brand and the strategic failure of not focusing on the South caused Nixon's defeat.[10] Goldwater argued that "we

[5] Kabaservice, *Rule and Ruin*, 25.

[6] With widespread allegations of Democratic fraud in major cities (most notably in Illinois' Cook County) and in Texas, the RNC set out to investigate voter fraud in 11 states immediately after the election. However, the committee abandoned these challenges as quickly as they took them on after it became clear that Nixon had no interest in further pursuing them (see: "GOP Probes for Vote Fraud," *Washington Post*, November 12, 1960; Philip A. Klinkner, *The Losing Parties: Out-Party National Committees, 1956-1993* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 43). Lyndon Johnson's biographer Robert A. Caro claims that LBJ relied on the political machine of George Parr in the Lower Rio Grande Valley to provide the Kennedy-Johnson ticket with the votes necessary to win his home state of Texas (see: Robert A. Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Passage of Power* (Alfred A. Knopf; New York, 2012) p. 150-155).

[7] Paul Kesaris, Blair Hydrick, and Douglas D. Newman, *Papers of the Republican Party* (Frederick, Md.: University Publications of America, 1987), Series B, Reel 1, Frame 280.

[8] "Nixon, Rockefeller Discuss Role of Party in Leadership Dilemma," *Washington Post*, December 3, 1960.

[9] Kesaris et al, *Papers of the Republican Party*, Series B, Reel 1, Frame 88.

[10] Goldwater argued that the 1960 election identified the "necessity for a return to a vigorous, forward-looking, dynamic conservative philosophy which will clearly identify the Republican Party and Republican candidates as

should recognize the necessity for a return to a vigorous, forward-looking, dynamic conservative philosophy which will clearly identify the Republican Party and Republican candidates as supporters of a concept of government totally different from that which Mr. Kennedy and his people offer the nation."[11] In particular, conservatives noted that the party's poor performance in Congress was a direct result of Democratic domination of the South: if Republicans could take advantage of the new liberal direction of the Democratic Party and break the solid South, conservatives argued, the GOP could win presidential elections *and* majorities in Congress.

With Morton as chairman, the RNC initially followed the moderates' prescription, and created a fourteen member committee to improve the Republican performance in big cities, chaired by Ray C. Bliss – the chairman of the Ohio Republican Party.[12] Of states that contained the ten cities with the highest population in 1960, Republican only won two.[13] However, Kennedy won many of those high population states narrowly: Illinois went to the Democrats by a mere 0.2 percentage points, Michigan by a little more than 2 points, and Pennsylvania by less than 3 points. Relatively minor shifts in voting in each of those three states would have tilted the election to Nixon from a 201 electoral vote loss to a 297 vote victory.

Moderate control of the RNC after 1960 was short-lived. Morton announced his resignation in the spring of 1961 to focus on his own Senate reelection effort in 1962. The RNC voted to replace him with conservative Congressman William E. Miller (R-NY).[14] Among Miller's first projects as chairman was to propose major investments in the RNC's public relations division. Speaking at an RNC meeting in January 1962, Miller argued that

> "In the area of publicity and promotions, I know you will agree with me that there is room for improvement, today, in the public image of the Republican Party. I propose

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supporters of a concept of government totally different from that which Mr. Kennedy and his people offer the nation." ("The Republican Party's Choices are Conservatism or Liberalism," *Los Angeles Times*, November 20, 1960.)

[11] "The Republican Party's Choices are Conservatism or Liberalism," *Los Angeles Times*, November 20, 1960.

[12] "G.O.P. Names Panel to Scan Urban Vote," *New York Times*, January 29, 1961; "G.O.P. Names Panel to Scan Urban Vote," *New York Times*, January 29, 1961.

[13] According to the 1960 Census, the biggest cities were: New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Detroit, Baltimore, Houston, Cleveland, Washington DC, St. Louis. Republicans only won the electoral votes of California and Ohio. The District of Columbia did not yet have electoral votes in the 1960 election.

[14] "G.O.P. is Expected to Name Miller," *New York Times*, May 27, 1961. Ray Bliss – the moderate chairman of the GOP in Ohio – was the only other candidate but withdrew his candidacy before the vote. Despite concerns by some Republicans that Miller's "views were too conservative and that the party needed a full-time chairman" (Ibid) this left Miller as the only acceptable candidate and the RNC voted unanimously to elect Miller as its new chair in its June meeting.

> that we go about creating more interest by effectively presenting these Republican leaders and Republican issues to the voters of the 50 states. The short-range public relations objective will be to use promotional techniques to aid us in the 1962 elections, but also to keep them consistent with the long-range public image that we must create in the general."[15]

Miller connected the need for such publicity programs to the GOP's national status, noting that "we are a minority party. We do not have the White House. We are not in control of the House or Senate."[16] Other party leaders and advisors agreed; in a presentation to the RNC in January 1962, advertising executive Duke Burgess advised the committee that "now is the time to create a public image of the word 'Republican' [. . .]. Now is the time to sell the resurgent Republican Party. It will cost far less now; it is easier to sell now."[17] The RNC followed this advice and dedicated a considerable part of its budget to publicity: in 1962, the divisions that made up the RNC's publicity arm comprised a third of its monthly operating budget.[18] The RNC used these funds to produce a bi-weekly newsletter (*Battle Line* - sent to 100,000 subscribers), speech kits for Republican candidates, and *Ratio* – a weekly radio program sent to independent and small affiliate radio stations that lacked correspondents in Washington, DC.[19]

The *type* of voting groups the committee targeted, however, changed under Miller. To be sure, the RNC did not abandon black and ethnic voters in big cities entirely.[20] In January 1962, the RNC approved a six point plan to recruit black leaders, increase organization activities in states with a large black population, and recruit black women to work for the party in their communities. Additionally, the RNC planned to reach out more regularly through black owned media. Finally, the committee also produced more publicity materials aimed at foreign language newspapers and radio stations.[21] Still, under Miller, the committee downgraded expectations considerably.

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[15] Kesaris et al, *Papers of the Republican Party*, Series B, Reel 1, Frame 623.

[16] Ibid., Frame 562-563.

[17] Ibid., Frame 770.

[18] This consisted of the Public Relations, Research, and Speaker's Bureau divisions. Combined, these three publicity divisions counted for $339,400 of the RNC's total $1.3 million 1962 budget – the largest subset within the budget. Within publicity, Public Relations represented more than 61% of expenses. See: Ibid, Reel 2, Frame 484.

[19] Ibid., Frames 636-638.

[20] Additionally, proponents of the Big City approach were not blind to the value of Republican investments in the South; Ray Bliss, the chairman of the Big City committee, for example, supported "long-range" party building programs in Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, and Texas with an eye on creating a two-party South in the future. See: Ibid, Reel 1, Frame 694.

[21] "GOP Designs Program, Hopes to Win Negro Vote," *Chicago Daily Defender*, January 18, 1962.

Miller believed a small improvement among black voters would be enough – noting in a 1963 press conference that "all we need to do is get a fair percentage of the votes. If we get 25 or 30 per cent of the vote in Philadelphia we can carry Pennsylvania."[22]

Miller was far more concerned that the party improve its performance in the South since, as Klinkner argues, he "knew that the Republicans' only chance to capture the House was to win seats in the South and that a big city strategy offered no such hope."[23] Miller noted the surprise victory of Texas senatorial candidate John Tower in the race to win Lyndon Johnson's old seat in 1961, and saw it as evidence that the GOP could indeed make the South competitive. As a result, the RNC expanded its Southern strategy accordingly. A large element of this expansion included using the committee's publicity division to target Southern white voters and push a conservative party brand aimed at convincing them to switch their allegiance. Operation Dixie was a crucial element in the RNC's strategy during the 1962 midterm campaign and Southern expenditures represented a considerable part of the RNC's budget (see Table 4.3). In April 1962, the RNC began producing *The Republican Southern Challenge*, a newsletter aimed at Southern whites. By 1964, the newsletter had become a monthly publication with a distribution list of 39,000 people, that "emphasized 'conservatism,' and [...] pushed hard for a two-party system in the South."[24] Additionally, the RNC ran ads in Southern newspapers and magazines criticizing the Democratic Party for neglecting Southern needs.[25]

The Committee believed these investments paid off: during the 1962 midterms, Republicans performed well in the South – gaining 4 new House seats in the former Confederacy.[26] In its analysis of the midterm results, the RNC's research division concluded that "the most impressive aspect of the 1962 election was the sharp increase in Republican strength in the South," noting a popular vote increase of 243.8% there in comparison to the 1958 midterms.[27] At the first RNC

[22] Kesaris, *Papers of the Republican Party*, Series B, Reel 3, Frame 8.

[23] Klinkner, *The Losing Parties*, 54. The RNC had begun investing in the South after the Dixiecrat walkout in 1948, but despite Eisenhower's success in winning Southern states in both 1952 and 1956, the 1950s the RNC's Southern outreach program (known as "Operation Dixie") saw relatively little congressional success. See: Joseph E. Lowndes, *From the New Deal to the New Right: Race and the Southern Origins of Modern Conservatism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 45-68; Galvin, *Presidential Party Building*, 63-67.

[24] Cited in Klinkner, *The Losing Parties,* 55.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Republicans gained one seat each in Florida, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas. See: "GOP Snaps 1-Party Grip in the South," *Washington Post*, November 8, 1962.

[27] Congressional Quarterly Almanac, 88th Congress, 1st Session, 1963 Vol. XIX (Congressional Quarterly Service, Washington DC, 1963) 1168.

Table 4.3: *RNC Campaign Division Expenditures, 1962*

Activity	*Expenditures*
Southern Division	$40,000
Special Events	$20,000
Labor Division	$18,000
Minorities Division	$18,000
Business and Professional Groups	$15,000
Senior Citizens Division	$13,000
Nationalities Division	$10,000
Big City Panel	$4,000

Source: Philip A. Klinkner, *The Losing Parties: Out-Party National Committees, 1956-1993* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994) p. 59.

meeting following the 1962 midterms, Miller strongly defended all party-building elements of Operation Dixie, boasting that "we worked to find good candidates, and we provided the money – more than a quarter of a million dollars – to help them get started, as well as supporting them with tailor-made campaign materials. You have seen the results."[28] Given these results, the RNC ramped up its Southern strategy and approved a "massive 1964 GOP assault on Democratic strongholds in the segregationist South."[29]

Still, Operation Dixie was controversial among moderates in the party. *Advance*, the magazine of the Young Republican organization, criticized the GOP for supporting segregationist candidates in the South, and Senator Kenneth Keating (R-NY) warned that the Republicans would be "forever a minority party" if they were to adopt segregationist policies in their effort to win in the South.[30] In contrast, conservatives in the party believed that – as the *Washington Post* summarized their views - "the Republicans are impractical fools to worry about the Northern Negro voters, because nothing will tempt the Negroes from their solid Democratic allegiance."[31] Miller remained steadfast in his support of the Southern strategy, arguing that "our successes in the South need no apology. They are the product of hard and intelligent efforts on the part of people dedicated to the Republican principle of freedom and sound government."[32] Thus, the RNC continued to prioritize white voters in the South over black voter outreach efforts in major northern cities.

[28] Kesaris, *Papers of the Republican Party*, Series B, Reel 2, Frame 577.
[29] "GOP Leaders Approve All-Out Drive in South," *Los Angeles Times*, December 8, 1962.
[30] "G.O.P. is Attacked for Its Aid to Segregationists in the South," *New York Times*, November 26, 1962; "Keating Urges G.O.P. to Shun Segregation in Bid for the South," *New York Times*, December 1, 1962.
[31] "The Southern Strategy," *Washington Post*, December 7, 1962.
[32] "GOP Leaders Approve All-Out Drive in South," *Los Angeles Times*, December 8, 1962.

Goldwater's 1964 presidential campaign complemented the RNC's strategy well.[33] In June, days after narrowly defeating Rockefeller in the California primary, Goldwater was one of only six Republican senators to vote against the 1964 Civil Rights Act. While Republicans had been pivotal in the passage of the bill in both the House and Senate, Goldwater's opposition meant that "the credit – even the glory – that the Republican Party should have enjoyed" for supporting it "was effectively negated."[34] Goldwater's stance carried over to the Republican convention and the general election campaign in an attempt to recruit Southern whites. During the convention, Goldwater successfully demanded that the party abandon a proposed plank confirming that the Civil Rights Act was constitutional, and stated that no person "should violate the rights of some in order to further the rights of others."[35]

Goldwater's right as the Republican nominee to select a new chairman meant the RNC remained under conservative control. Goldwater selected his personal aide Dean Burch as the new RNC chairman and chair of his election campaign.[36] 'Owning' the RNC was a major conservative goal in and of itself: Karl Hess, a member of Goldwater's campaign organization, wrote that conservative control of the RNC was "for the future of the party, [. . .] secondary in meaningfulness only to an electoral victory"[37] in the presidential election.[38] Burch reorganized the RNC in a matter of weeks into an organization devoted solely to Goldwater's presidential campaign. Moderate staff members were fired and replaced with Goldwater loyalists.[39] Even the RNC's office decorations were now dedicated solely to its presidential nominee with "the freshly painted walls of sand beige tones [. . .] adorned with giant size photographs of Senator Goldwater."[40]

During the general election campaign, Goldwater and the RNC continued to appeal to Southern whites. A crucial moment in this regard occurred when segregationist Dixiecrat Strom Thurmond

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[33] Kabaservice, *Rule and Ruin,* 83-84.

[34] Ibid, 101. Goldwater's no vote inspired another moderate – Pennsylvania governor William Scranton – to announce his candidacy for the presidential nomination, with Rockefeller dropping out in support. This last ditch effort to derail Goldwater's presidential nomination was too little and too late: Goldwater had secured an unsurmountable majority in delegates.

[35] "South's GOP Chiefs Reassured on Rights," *Washington Post*, July 11, 1964.

[36] Notably, Goldwater selected RNC chairman Miller as his running mate.

[37] Cited in Stephen Hess and David S. Broder, *The Republican Establishment: The Present and Future of the G.O.P.* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967) 39.

[38] Another anonymous Goldwater supporter stated in the summer of 1964: "I know we probably won't win in November and I don't give a damn. Winning control of one of the two major parties is victory enough for me" (Cited in Klinkner, *The Losing Parties*, 72).

[39] "G.O.P. Committee Gets a New Look," *New York Times*, September 3, 1964.

[40] "Goldwater Glitter Gilds Headquarters," *Washington Post*, October 4, 1964.

switched to the GOP in September 1964. Burch welcomed Thurmond to the party, describing him as "a man of rare honesty, courage, and integrity" and noted that Thurmond's "fundamental American principles have led him into our party."[41] Despite criticism from the National Negro Republican Assembly for this warm welcome, Goldwater also embraced Thurmond – appearing with him at rallies across the South. Walter Lippmann, writing in the *Los Angeles Times*, noted of Goldwater's campaign activities that its purpose "was not so much to win this election but to inaugurate the so-called southern strategy in order to lay the foundations for a radically new Republican Party." Lippmann also noted that while Goldwater did not actually mention civil rights during his campaign appearances in the South, "there was no need to mention civil rights or to take notice of the existence of a large Negro population when he could consort publicly with Sen. Strom Thurmond."[42]

The conservative experiment of 1964 resulted in one of the largest defeats in Republican Party history. LBJ beat Goldwater in an unprecedented landslide, receiving slightly more than 61% of the popular vote. The one silver lining in an otherwise bleak election was Goldwater's success in the South: the groundwork of Operation Dixie combined with a full-on conservative platform and candidate produced one of the biggest Southern success in the Republican Party's history to this point. Of the six states that Goldwater won, five were in the South.[43] Additionally, Goldwater came within 5 points of winning two other Southern states.[44] Goldwater received 49% of votes cast in the former Confederate South. The Goldwater campaign – while otherwise a disaster – thus provided conservatives with evidence that it was possible to nominate one of their own as a presidential candidate, and run and finance a general election campaign.

II. Ray Bliss and the Return of Moderate Control of the RNC, 1965-1968

Moderates saw in the 1964 defeat evidence that the Southern strategy – as applied by Goldwater, Miller, and Burch – had backfired. Governor Mark Hatfield (R-OR) called for the GOP to re-establish "a broad middle-ground philosophy and [to] outline positive positions on civil rights,

[41] Burch welcomed Thurmond to the party, See: "Thurmond Given Praise and Scorn," *New York Times*, September 17, 1964.
[42] "Goldwater Lays Foundation for a Radically New Republican Party," *Los Angeles Times*, September 23, 1964.
[43] Goldwater won Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina.
[44] Goldwater received 49% of the vote in Florida and 46% in Virginia.

medicare, taxation, conservation, education, and foreign aid."[45] Senator Jacob Javits (R-NY) warned that "the Republican party faces not only a major reconstruction job throughout the nation; it also faces the difficult task of exorcising the image which the 'Southern strategy' created – that of an impending transformation to a 'lily white' party."[46] Senate Minority Leader Everett Dirksen (R-IL) blamed the 1964 loss squarely on the RNC's publicity programs, arguing that "we failed to present a clear-cut image and sell it to the voters. [...] It was the fault of those whose business it was to project the true Republican image. It was the national committee's business and it flubbed the job."[47] Despite Goldwater's continuing support for Burch, moderates in the RNC used the defeat to set up a challenge to his leadership. As Burch and Goldwater realized they could no longer count on majority support within the RNC, Burch resigned as chairman.[48]

Burch was replaced with Ray Bliss, the chair of the Republican Party in Ohio and the former chairman of the Big City committee. The change in leadership did not affect the committee's broader publicity strategy. Bliss – like Miller and Burch before him – announced that the RNC would run "a 12-month a year, 24-hour a day" permanent election campaign.[49] Under Bliss, the RNC expanded both its total budget, and the amount it spent on publicity, every year (see Table 4.4). Crucially, the RNC also regularly increased the percentage of its total budget spent on publicity related divisions – up to 40% in 1967.

The Bliss-led RNC initiated several major national publicity projects. Most notably, the radio program introduced under Miller was renamed *Comment* and was expanded from 170 radio stations in 1965 to 2,000 by 1968 – one-third of all stations in the United States.[50] *Comment* consisted of a five minute radio spot that stations could either play in its entirety or split up and use as separate clips in their news reporting. RNC Director of Public Relations Fred Morrison argued the format allowed the national party to "give the greatest possible impact to [issues] which the leaders of the party are attempting to drive home on a national scale."[51] Based on the RNC's own figures, by 1968, 1,600 stations that received the material used parts of it, and 400

[45] "Aide Expects Barry to Make Unity Move," *Washington Post*, November 13, 1964.
[46] "The Road Back for the G.O.P.," *New York Times*, November 15, 1964.
[47] "Dirksen Puts Onus on Republican Committee," *Los Angeles Times*, December 13, 1964.
[48] "Burch Quitting Job April 1," *Chicago Tribune*, January 13, 1965.
[49] "G.O.P. Told Why Barry Lost," *Chicago Tribune*, January 24, 1965.
[50] See Kesaris et al, *Papers of the Republican Party*, Series B, Reel 4, Frame 909; Reel 5, Frame 830-831.
[51] Ibid., Reel 5, Frame 456-457.

Table 4.4: *Republican National Committee Publicity Expenses, 1965-1968*

	1965	*1966*	*1967*	*1968*
Public Relations	$221,763	$306,160	$363,680	$600,000
Speakers Bureau	$23,249	$43,264	$45,000	$65,000
Minorities	$20,467	$45,105	$101,000	$145,000
Senior Citizens	$3,288	$24,145	$20,800	$27,000
Big Cities	$1,790	$36,990	$33,500	$75,000
Arts & Sciences	$2,861	$25,789	$92,100	$80,000
RCC	$47,855	$74,944	$103,500	$95,000
Governor's Association	$0	$24,799	$67,000	$90,000
Total Budget	$1,381,426	$1,891,523	$2,020,000	$3,084,500
Publicity Share of Budget	23.2%	30.7%	40.9%	38.1%

Source: Ray C. Bliss Papers, Ohio Historical Society, Series 2, Subseries 2, Box 78, Folder 20; Box, 121, Folder 8.

played the entire program each week.[52] In 1967, the RNC also introduced a television version of *Comment*, and by February 1968, 42% of all TV stations received the weekly program.[53] To reach out to academics, the RNC created the Arts and Sciences division - distributing literature and recruiting "Republican professors" for party work. By 1967, the division distributed its newsletter, *Republican Report*, to more than 11,000 Republican-oriented faculty members.[54]

Additionally, the RNC created the Republican Coordinating Committee (RCC) – a new party institution inspired by the DAC.[55] RNC leaders had previously expressed admiration for the DAC – precisely because of its role in promoting the Democratic Party during the Eisenhower administration. During an RNC meeting in January, 1961, then-chairman Morton noted that the DAC "gave [Democrats] a forum for political publicity purposes."[56] Similarly, Burch, in January 1965, while noting the opposition of Democratic congressional leaders to the DAC, explained to

[52] Ibid, Reel 6, Frames 622-623.

[53] Ibid, Reel 6, Frames 340-341; 624.

[54] The Arts and Sciences division was especially focused on political scientists: the RNC had a stand at the American Political Science Association and Southern Political Science Association conferences between 1965-1968, and Thruston Morton delivered an address at APSA in 1965. See: Report by the Chairman to the Republican National Committee (July 1 1965 – January 31, 1966), Ray C. Bliss Papers, Ohio Historical Society Series 2, Subseries 2, Box 94, Folder 3, p. 20 (hereafter: Ray C. Bliss Papers); The Chairman's Report for 1967 to the Republican National Committee (February 23-24, 1968), Ray C. Bliss Papers, Series 2, Subseries 2, Box 94, Folder 3, p. 23.

[55] Outgoing chairman Burch during the January 1965 RNC meeting that voted to create the RCC noted that during the Eisenhower years "the Democrats had a committee – I don't even recall the name of it. [...] You may further recall that Lyndon Johnson and Sam Rayburn black-balled this particular organization – would not participate in it. Nevertheless, this Advisory Committee did function. It did release its reports and got considerable attention in the press. The press looked at the stature of the people on this committee. As I recall, Eleanor Roosevelt, Adlai Stevenson, people of that nature and they gave a good deal of attention to their deliberations and to their report." See: Kesaris et al, *Papers of the Republican Party*, Series B, Reel 4, Frame 647.

[56] Ibid, Reel 1, Frame 95.

RNC members that "this Advisory Committee did function. It did release its reports and got considerable attention in the press."[57] For similar purposes, the RNC therefore created a similar party institution. As the *New York Times* noted, the RCC was created to help the party deal with its persistent minority position:

> "the party's whole problem is to broaden its base and give recognition to those states and districts where it did poorly last November. The Republicans must look not inward to the survivors on Capitol Hill – who represent its irreducible hard core – but outward to the independent 'swing' voters, who offer its only hope of future recovery."[58]

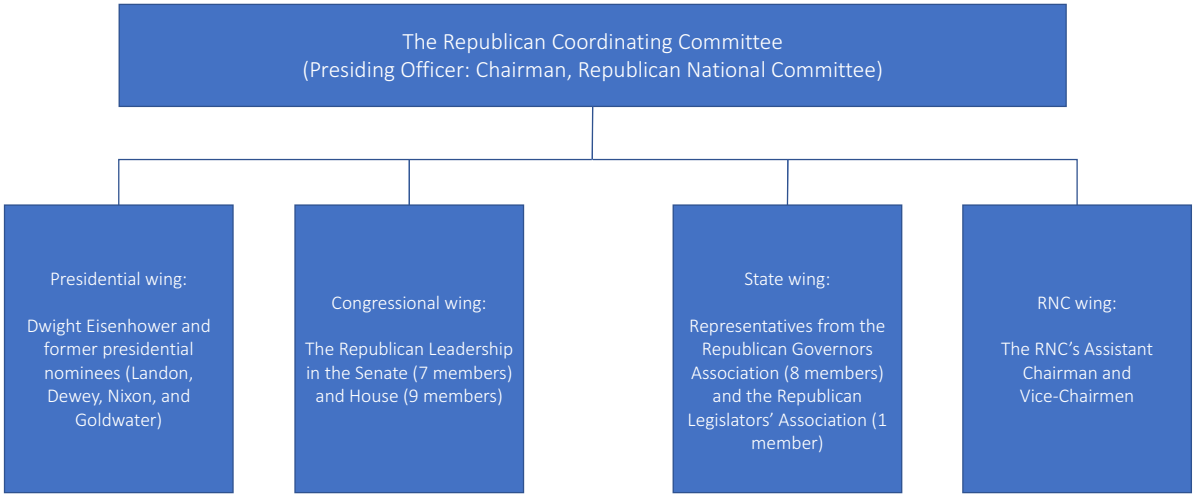
Unlike the DAC, members of the House and Senate were active participants in the RCC. Indeed, the coordinating committee managed to be a full reflection of the party as a whole – incorporating Eisenhower and the former presidential candidates, congressional leaders, representatives of governors and state legislators, and representatives of the RNC – all under Bliss's leadership (see Figure 4.1).

While Bliss's image was one of an organizer interested in nuts and bolts politics rather than ideology, the new RNC chair fell on the moderate side of the party split. Within weeks of taking office Bliss fired a number of Goldwater-era appointees and replaced them with moderates.[59] Similar hires occurred throughout Bliss's term in office, with (Southern) conservatives frequently passed over in favor of moderate Republicans.[60] Under Bliss's leadership, the RNC also began providing financial support to the Republican Governors Association – then the center of moderate Republican power – by paying for full-time national headquarters in Washington, D.C. for the organization – and providing moderate Republicans with more direct influence in the national party.[61]

The RNC also refocused its attentions on black voters in major cities. In February 1966, the committee announced a major new push for black votes, with Bliss appointing an advisory

[57] Ibid., Reel 4, Frame 647.
[58] "Exit Mr. Burch," *New York Times*, January 13, 1965.
[59] "Bliss Starts Shuffle of G.O.P. Staff Jobs," *Chicago Tribune*, March 31, 1965.
[60] "Supporter of Scranton Given Key GOP Post," *Los Angeles Times*, January 25, 1967. Bliss also expelled the conservative "Rat Fink" faction of the New Jersey Young Republicans organization, and opposed conservative Phyllis Schlafly's attempts at becoming the chairwoman of the National Federation of Republican Women. See: "Bliss Curbs YR Clubs, Acts to Expel 'Finks'," *Los Angeles Times*, June 21, 1966; Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism. A Woman's Crusade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005) 155-162.
[61] "G.O.P. to Give Party Governors $100,000 for Office in Capital," *New York Times*, December 20, 1966.

Figure 4.1: *Design of the Republican Coordinating Committee*



Source: "The Chairman's Report 1969 - Republican National Committee," Ray C. Bliss Papers, Ohio Historical Society, Series 2, Subseries 2, Box 94, Folder 3, p. 1.

committee consisting of 12 black Republican leaders. The committee was to help Bliss "prepare a program to strengthen Republican support among Negroes."[62] Bliss hired a special assistant – Clarence Lee Townes Jr. - and three additional black staff members to help "recruit Republican voters among the nation's Negro population."[63] During 1966, RNC representatives attended "21 major Negro conventions and meetings" at "which some 15,000 delegates represented more than five million Negro voters."[64] In December 1966, the RNC announced Junius Griffin, an aide to Martin Luther King, had joined the committee to further assist it in connecting with black voters. As an RNC staffer, Griffin advised Republican candidates such as John L. Waner – the GOP candidate in the Chicago mayoral election of 1967.[65] With national black Republican support up in 1966 (19% of the vote in comparison to 13% in 1964), Townes and the RNC set their goal for

[62] "12 Negroes Chosen as G.O.P. Advisers," *New York Times*, February 27, 1966.
[63] "Negro to get Post on Top G.O.P. Unit," *New York Times*, March 12, 1966; "GOP Moves to Change Image," *Chicago Defender*, May 7, 1966.
[64] "Report by the Chairman 1966," Ray C. Bliss Papers, Series 2, Subseries 2, Box 94, Folder 3, p. 17.
[65] "Civil Rights Aide Offered GOP Position," *Los Angeles Times*, December 16, 1966; "Waner Gets G.O.P. Race Expert's Aid," *Chicago Tribune*, January 21, 1967.

1968 at 30%.[66]

The RCC, under Bliss's leadership, also attempted to "moderate the party's image."[67] Like the DAC before it, the RCC produced a considerable number of policy papers. These papers supported moderate policy proposals on issues such as transportation, metropolitan planning, water pollution, poverty, aid for the elderly, and strengthening the United Nations. The positions the RCC took deviated from those taken in 1964. For example, the RCC embraced civil rights legislation,[68] and called on all Republicans to "reject membership in any radical or extremist organization."[69] As Mary Brennan has noted, "eliminating the extremist blemish on the party was central to the new image Republicans tried to create."[70] By having an RNC controlled party organization signal to the broader electorate that the period of conservative domination was over, Bliss and other moderates hoped to rebrand the GOP as a right-of-center party that could be trusted with control of government again. Bliss, speaking during a January 1967 RNC meeting, praised the RCC for helping the public understand "the general direction of movement of our party" and for producing "an image [. . .] around it. So we received tremendous publicity and more and more the papers are starting to pick up and review our papers and editorialize on them [. . .]."[71]

Much like the DNC in the 1950s, the RNC thus responded to its minority status by engaging in a variety of publicity programs to expand the party's voting coalition. These programs saw major financial investments, and were a priority to the party leadership. However, the groups that were targeted depended on the wing of the party that controlled the committee. Under the leadership of conservatives Miller and Burch, the RNC focused on convincing white Southerners to join the GOP. After 1964, under control of moderate chairman Bliss, tactics changed and the RNC instead targeted black voters in major cities. The RNC had the freedom to take positions in intra-party conflict: depending on the wing of the party that held the chairmanship, the specific

[66] "GOP Designs Blueprint to Snag Negro Vote," *Chicago Defender*, February 4, 1967.
[67] Klinkner, *The Losing Parties*, 84.
[68] "Equality in America: A Promise Unfulfilled," Republican Coordinating Committee, Task Force on Human Rights and Responsibilities, Ray C. Bliss Papers, Series 2, Subseries 2, Box 110, Folder 3.
[69] Cited in Hess and Broder, *The Republican Establishment*, 52.
[70] Mary C. Brennan, *Turning Right in the Sixties: The Conservative Capture of the GOP* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 109.
[71] See: Kesaris et al, *Papers of the Republican Party*, Series B, Reel 5, Frame 826. After the 1968 election, Bliss also praised the RCC for producing position papers which formed the basis of the party's platform. See: Ibid., Reel 7, Frame 148.

type of image it promoted shifted from conservative to moderate.

III. National Committee Publicity Programs Under Presidential Control, 1969-1976

The 1968 election produced a mixed result for the Republican Party: while Richard Nixon won a close presidential election against Democratic candidate Hubert Humphrey, Democrats maintained control of both the House and Senate. Four years later, Nixon won reelection in an unprecedented landslide, but Democrats again retained their majorities in Congress. Therefore, while Republicans controlled the White House between 1968 and 1976, they were not the national majority party. As a result, the RNC continued to invest in (new) publicity programs under Nixon and Ford. Immediately after the 1968 election, Nixon's advisor Herbert G. Klein appeared on *Face the Nation* and announced that Nixon intended to "develop the Republican Party into a stronger political entity."[72] Part of this project was an active publicity role for the RNC, and Nixon thus decided to replace Bliss as chairman – preferring "an issue-oriented man" as the "chief Republican spokesman during a period when the party needs promotion rather than consolidation."[73] Rogers Morton, Bliss's replacement, was acutely aware of the GOP's party status – noting that to shed its "role as a minority party" Republicans would have to become "massively involved with millions of young people, with millions of poor people, with American Indians, with national and ethnic groups, farmers, senior citizens, and city folk."[74]

With the committee under control of the White House, the image it promulgated was inherently linked to its president. As a result, the RNC modified its message in comparison to that promoted during the Bliss era. In preparing for the 1968 presidential nomination contest, Nixon had built relationships with Southern Republican party leaders and secured their support at the Republican convention.[75] During the general election campaign – in a nation reeling from the major riots in American cities after the assassination of Marin Luther King in April 1968 – Nixon relied on

[72] "Klein Says Nixon Will Help Party," *New York Times*, November 18, 1968.
[73] "G.O.P. Governors Cool to Ray Bliss," *New York Times*, December 7, 1968.
[74] "Morton Urges G.O.P. to Shed Stand-By-Role," *Chicago Tribune*, April 15, 1969.
[75] Nixon met with Southern Republican leaders as part of a series of meetings set up by Harry Dent – an aide to Senator Strom Thurmond (R-SC). During these meetings Nixon expressed support for the Supreme Court's ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* but also promised he would not insist on swift implementation of the ruling. Additionally, Nixon promised he would only appoint strict constructionists to the bench, opposed busing, and would appoint southerners to key administration positions. See: Lowndes, *From the New Deal to the New Right*, 111-112.

a "Southern strategy" that, in contrast to the approach used by Goldwater, Miller and Burch, repudiated segregation while courting Southerners by stressing "law and order, reform of the welfare state, and the promise of a secret plan to end the war in Vietnam."[76] Unlike the Goldwater approach, which proved successful in the South but alienated voters elsewhere, Nixon's campaign walked a fine line between trying to win Southern states and not repelling voters in other regions. In doing so, it benefitted considerably from disenchanted white voters outside of the South who did not support segregation, but did see blacks as a threat to their job or believed they were receiving undeserved governmental support.[77]

During the first years of the Nixon administration, the White House and RNC attempted to combine Nixon's personal Southern strategy with the RNC's outreach to black voters. For example, Nixon advisor Harry Dent asked the RNC to "intensify [its] efforts to enlist Negro leaders and, in fact, develop Negro leaders to work for our Party" by hiring "part-time workers all through the South."[78] Under Morton, the committee attempted to bring in new voting groups by improving the party's campaign apparatus through the Mission '70s Party Organization Program – intended to coordinate the campaign efforts of county, state, and national party organizations.[79] The RNC also used the president himself to promote the party. In 1970, the RNC produced a major new promotional film, *Setting the Course*, with behind the scenes footage of Nixon's first year in office.[80]

Nixon replaced Morton after the disappointing midterm elections of 1970. White House insiders criticizing Morton for failing to build a better political organization. More important, however, was Nixon's displeasure with Morton's role as a public defender of his administration.[81] One anonymous source from within the administration complained to the *Los Angeles Times* that while DNC chair Lawrence O'Brien "is out there every day slugging" Morton failed to respond: "When he is called and it is suggested that maybe he should say something, he always says, 'Well…' and nothing ever happens."[82] Believing that the RNC needed a chairman who would

[76] Donald T. Critchlow, *The Conservative Ascendancy. How the GOP Right Made Political History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007) 88.
[77] See: Timothy N. Thurber, *Republicans and Race: The GOP's Frayed Relationship with African Americans, 1945-1974* (Lawrence, KN: University of Kansas, 2013) 257.
[78] Galvin, *Presidential Party Building*, 77.
[79] Ibid., 79.
[80] "GOP Shows Nixon Film: First Year in Office Extolled," *Washington Post*, February 20, 1970.
[81] Galvin, *Presidential Party Building*, 80.
[82] "Nixon Advisers Reported Irked With Morton – Showdown Due," *Los Angeles Times*, November 7, 1970.

attack Democrats more aggressively – H.R. Haldeman, Nixon's Chief of Staff, noted in his diary in early November, 1970 that Nixon had decided to replace Morton with a "nut cutter"[83] – Nixon thus selected Senator Bob Dole (R-KS). Newspapers interpreted the selection of Dole as an attempt by the administration to name a new "major spokesman for the party."[84]

Dole indeed became a much more visible chairman than Morton, attacking anti-war Democrats and the media for their criticism of Nixon's Vietnam policies.[85] After the 1970 election, the RNC aimed, in the assessment of RNC vice-chairman Thomas Evans, to use its publicity tools to "provide Republican leaders [...] with ammunition with which to speak up for the President"[86] and to "get the story of Republican accomplishments out all over America."[87] The core communication tool the RNC relied on in this regard was *Monday*, a weekly publication distributed to Republican Party members and reporters that produced headlines in part through its attacks on (potential) 1972 Democratic presidential candidates – including Edmund Muskie, George McGovern, Ted Kennedy, and Hubert Humphrey.[88] The publication was distributed to 285,000 recipients each week by the summer of 1973.[89] Additionally, the RNC produced and distributed over 3,000 video clips for use by television stations.[90]

Nixon's president-centered approach to party building may have helped win his own major reelection victory in 1972, but produced limited success for the Republican Party as a whole. While Republicans won some House seats, they lost seats in the Senate. In Dole's view, the 1972 election was therefore "sort of a standoff" since "after you take the President's personal landslide,

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[83] Cited in Galvin, *Presidential Party Building*, 80.

[84] "Dole is Selected to Direct G.O.P.," *New York Times*, January 6, 1971. Other articles reported that Dole was expected to be the "party's public spokesman," or "the Senate's White House spokesman." See: "Dole Eases Into Role as Head of G.O.P. National Committee," *Chicago Tribune*, January 14, 1971; "Dole New GOP Chief," *Los Angeles Times*, January 16, 1971.

[85] See, for example: "'72 Dem Hopefuls Draw Dole Reply," *Chicago Tribune*, March 10, 1971; "Dole Blasts Coverage of War Protests," *Washington Post*, May 6, 1971; "Dole Assails Critics of Vietnam Policy," *Washington Post*, June 13, 1971; "Dole Urges Panel to Fix War Blame," *New York Times*, January 22, 1972; "Dole Assails Democrats for Vietnam War Role," *Washington Post*, January 22, 1972.

[86] Kesaris et al, *Papers of the Republican Party*, Series B, Reel 8, Frame 512.

[87] Ibid., Frame 513-514.

[88] See: "GOP Assails Democrats on Peace Plan," *Los Angeles Times*, March 21, 1971; "The GOP Newsletter Prepares for '72, Hits At All Possible Foes," *Wall Street Journal*, April 23, 1971; "Hartke Wrong on POW Trade, GOP Declares," *Washington Post*, May 17, 1971; "Muskie's Temper Rapped by G.O.P.," *Chicago Tribune*, October 10, 1971.

[89] "Republicans' Monday Calls It a Day," *Washington Post*, July 31, 1973. Vice-President Spiro Agnew, in December 1972, also lauded the success of *Monday*: "no party organ in my memory has ever been quite as effective as this one, not simply because it is newsworthy, but because it is constructively partisan. [...] What it does is to try to draw the issues between our political positions and those of the opposition party and it does it in a highly partisan effective sense [...]." See: Kesaris et al, *Papers of the Republican Party*, Series B, Reel 9, Frame 158.

[90] Kesaris et al, *Papers of the Republican Party*, Series B, Reel 9, Frame 95.

there wasn't any landslide at all."[91] Dole consequently concluded that the RNC did not have the luxury to "go underground" and would have to "continue a full-time operation aimed at winning the support of disaffected Democrats, primarily blue-collar workers and ethnics who voted for President Nixon, and concentrate on the 1974 election."[92] Nixon, now safely reelected, refocused his attentions on helping the Republican Party achieve national majority status, but he believed this required yet another new chairman and he thus replaced Dole with George H.W. Bush, then ambassador to the United Nations.[93] As Galvin has argued, Nixon sought "a chairman who was young, well-respected by all segments of the party, and capable of spearheading"[94] the party building activities Nixon believed to be necessary for the party to improve its performance outside of presidential elections.

Under Bush, the RNC began organizing 'New Majority Workshops' intended to train party activists to help ensure that the voters "who came over to us in such great numbers in support of President Nixon"[95] in 1972 would vote in congressional and gubernatorial races as well. During the workshops, the RNC shared 'best practices' on how to work with "ethnic voters, Spanish speaking voters, senior citizens, youths, blacks, and the blue collar laborers"[96] – all traditional Democratic voting blocs that Nixon and the RNC believed needed to be incorporated into the Republican Party for it to become the majority party. The logic behind this program was clear – as Mississippi RNC member Clarke Reed explained: "The Republican Party is the minority party. The President is the majority president. Let's bridge that gap. [...] I say let's sell what's popular. That's the President."[97]

However, the Nixon-centered New Majority program almost immediately stalled as the scandal surrounding the cover-up of the Watergate burglary of the DNC during the 1972 election began to consume the Nixon presidency and the party. Kenneth Reitz, a Nixon 1972 campaign aide hired by the RNC to run the New Majority campaign, resigned his position after he was implicated in a "spy corps" set up by the Nixon campaign to gather intelligence on Democrats.[98] Watergate also

[91] "Victory Bittersweet for GOP," *Washington Post*, November 9, 1972.
[92] Ibid.
[93] "GOP Chief Dole Getting Set to Leave," *Washington Post*, December 2, 1972; "Bush to Take GOP Post as Dole Quits," *Los Angeles Times*, December 11, 1972.
[94] Galvin, *Presidential Party Building*, 91.
[95] Ibid., 96.
[96] Ibid.
[97] "Bush Remolds GOP Committee Into Adjunct of White House," *Washington Post*, March 19, 1973.
[98] "G.O.P. Aide Resigns," *Chicago Tribune*, April 25, 1973.

harmed the RNC by reducing donations: by the middle of 1973 the RNC was $1 million behind in fundraising, which resulted in a 25% cut in staff.[99] The cuts also meant *Monday* was now limited to a monthly publication – as the committee was unable to afford the $25,000 weekly production cost.[100] Beyond financial limitations, the RNC found that the media's focus on Watergate made its publicity role for the broader party impossible. As Bush told RNC members in September 1973: "we have cranked out reams of really positive comments, information on programs, but for the last six months a lot of the press has been interested in only you know what."[101] Despite these dire conditions, Bush did not abandon the RNC's image setting role. Most notably, Bush proposed to resurrect the Republican Coordinating Committee, which had been dormant since 1968."[102]

After Nixon's resignation in 1974, but before that year's midterms, Bush resigned the RNC chairmanship to become U.S. ambassador to China. On Bush's recommendation, incoming President Gerald Ford named RNC member and co-chairwoman Mary Louise Smith as his replacement – making her the first female chair of either national committee. Smith, a self-described 'Republican feminist,' was broadly perceived to be a moderate. However, Smith made it clear that she did not consider herself to be the leader of the party with Ford in the White House: "a President of your own party is certainly considered the leader of the party and plays the dominant role, and should."[103] As such, Smith viewed her role as that of an administrator, running the party on behalf of its president.

Smith and the RNC anticipated major GOP losses in the 1974 midterms, and began planning a series of activities to rehabilitate the party even before the elections. This included a major program to reintroduce the Republican Party to American voters. The problem Smith identified before the 1974 elections was that "somewhere the Republican Party is doing something wrong, or else we are not doing enough things right. Either we are being outorganized or we are being outsold and I suspect it is some of both."[104] The 1974 midterm elections were indeed disastrous for the GOP: after losing another 48 and four seats respectively, the party held just one-third of

[99] "G.O.P. Committee, Facing Deficit, to Cut Staff 25%," *New York Times*, July 18, 1973.
[100] During a September 1973 RNC meeting Bush stressed that the end of the weekly *Monday* publication was purely for financial reasons. See: Kesaris et al, *Papers of the Republican Party*, Series B, Reel 11, Frames 270-271.
[101] Ibid., Frame 271.
[102] Ibid., Frames 285-286.
[103] Suzanne O'Dea, *Madam Chairman: Mary Louise Smith and the Republican Revival After Watergate* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2012), 71.
[104] Kesaris et al, *Papers of the Republican Party*, Reel 12, Frame 56.

the House and 38% of seats in the Senate. In response, Smith was even more convinced that the RNC would need to "reshape the image of the Republican Party and what it stands for in the minds of the American people."[105] To help overcome this problem, the RNC proposed a $2 million advertising program aimed at improving the Republican Party's national image.[106] During a March 1975 RNC meeting, Smith explained the program would help give "voters a closer look at who we are and where we stand."[107]

The plan – which also included training programs and voter registration efforts – represented a considerable investment given that the Watergate scandal had turned off many prominent donors and the RNC was now nearly bankrupt. In fact, by the end of 1975, the RNC was so insolvent that it closed down its office for the month of December to save money on heating and electricity.[108] While the publicity plan was controversial among a subset of RNC members and party leaders,[109] Smith pushed forward and in the summer of 1975 three 30-minute television shows[110] were broadcast on CBS and NBC showing – among others – "citizen testimonials to individualism, free enterprise, and local government" in an attempt to "combat the widely held misconception that Republicans are rich fat cats unconcerned with the problems of ordinary Americans."[111]

Unlike the DNC under the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, the RNC remained engaged in providing branding related services during the Nixon and Ford administrations. Crucially, the party invested in several major new branding operations – most notably, under Smith's chairmanship. The fundamental difference between the DNC and RNC under these presidents was the lack of a Congressional majority: while Kennedy and Johnson saw no reason to rely on the DNC given their party's comfortable majority, Nixon and Ford faced a different calculation – understanding that the national committee would need to act to help expand the party.

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[105] "GOP Seeks to Improve Its Image," *Washington Post*, November 15, 1974.

[106] "Marketing the GOP," *Washington Post*, November 24, 1974.

[107] Kesaris et al, *Papers of the Republican Party*, Reel 12, Frames 392-393.

[108] "Hard-Pressed GOP Unit to Close for 2 Weeks," *Los Angeles Times*, October 25, 1975.

[109] For example, Sen. Charles Percy (R-IL) warned that a major advertising push could "lose votes and the money would be better spent for research and for supporting good Republican candidates than for promotional television commercials." See: "G.O.P.'s Ad Plan Hit By Percy," *Chicago Tribune*, February 12, 1975.

[110] Smith described the shows as being "a kind of Republican magazine of the air" in which the party could promote "an exciting program launched by one of our governors, [...] a legislative report on bills pending in Congress, comments by Republican leaders on current issues [...]." The shows thus represented "a Republican perspective on the news, on goings on in this country among Republicans and what they are doing" (Kesaris et al, *Papers of the Republican Party*, Reel 12, Frame 393).

[111] "G.O.P. Plans TV Advertising to Combat Its 'Fat Cat' Image," *New York Times*, June 5, 1975.

IV. The Moderates' Last Stand: Bill Brock and the RNC, 1977-1980

The 1976 election produced another major defeat for the GOP: Ford lost to Democratic presidential nominee Jimmy Carter in a close election, while in Congress the Republicans lost a seat in the House and gained one in the Senate. Combined, this meant the GOP remained in a precarious position: Republicans were now out of the White House for the first time in eight years, still held just one third of the House, and controlled only 38 seats in the Senate. Polls conducted in the months after the election underscored just how bad the GOP's position was: only 20% of Americans self-identified as Republicans.[112] Party leaders were conscious of the fact that this disadvantage was not just a temporary embarrassment: Smith, during a meeting of the RNC executive committee, warned that while it was "almost inevitable that we will make some modest gains over the next two years" the party should not confuse such gains with a permanent recovery and "lapse into smug self-satisfaction and be content to remain a minority party forever."[113]

In response to the election, Smith announced her resignation in November 1976. In the run-up to the January 1977 RNC meeting at which Smith's successor would be elected, a considerable number of possible replacements were boomed in media reports – including Ronald Reagan, Treasury Secretary William E. Simon, former Illinois governor Richard Ogilvie, U.S. Ambassador to Britain Anne Armstrong, and Ford's Chief of Staff Donald H. Rumsfeld.[114] The intense speculation on Smith's successor indicated the importance party leaders placed on who would be in charge of the national party committee and resurrect the party. Former RNC chair Dole, who had been Ford's running mate, expressed his hope that "another Ray Bliss will come along" to "rescue us from the danger of becoming an endangered species."[115] Meanwhile, Pat Buchanan – a former speech writer for Richard Nixon – suggested the GOP needed its next chairman to be "an articulate leader who can exploit the Democratic divisions, appeal to the disgruntled conservatives of Carter's coalition, and present a positive program of action that will attract back to the GOP

[112] "20% of Voters Found Affiliated to G.O.P.," *New York Times*, August 21, 1977.
[113] Kesaris et al, *Papers of the Republican Party*, Series B, Reel 14, Frame 616.
[114] "Party Shuns Fight: Simon Emerges as Prospect for GOP Chairman Post," *Washington Post*, November 25, 1976; "County GOP Group Backs Reagan for Top Party Post," *Los Angeles Times*, December 3, 1976; "For GOP Chairman: Ogilvie," *Chicago Tribune*, December 4, 1976; "Anne Armstrong is Sounded Out as GOP Head," *Washington Post*, December 11, 1976; "Rumsfeld Recommended as Republican Leader," *Washington Post*, December 20, 1976.
[115] "Dole: GOP Needs a Strong Leader," *Washington Post*, November 29, 1976.

the votes we won in 1972."[116]

Bill Brock, a senator from Tennessee who lost his reelection bid in 1976, announced his candidacy for the chairmanship of the national committee in early January. Brock was not a favorite of either wing in the party, but benefited from the inability of Ford, Reagan, Rockefeller, and former Secretary of the Treasury John Connally to unite behind one compromise candidate.[117] By the time the RNC gathered to vote, Brock managed to be the one candidate left standing who was acceptable enough to both sides.[118] Indeed, Mississippi RNC member Clarke Reede concluded that Brock was "the most conservative candidate who can get elected."[119] Much like other party leaders, Brock was aware of the position the GOP found itself, writing in March 1977 that "the Republican Party is a minority in the Congress with a Democrat Administration," and thus "Republican programs will continue to fly in the face of the wind until we get adequate representation in the Congress."[120]

While there may have been consensus that the party needed to radically improve its electoral performance, moderates and conservatives continued to disagree as to *how* that should be achieved. Conservatives, like Reagan, called for the RNC "not to sell a philosophy but to make the majority of Americans who already share that philosophy, see that modern conservatism offers them a political home."[121] In contrast, moderates warned that the conservative path would lead to even further decline for the party. Smith, in her resignation announcement, warned against "a fatal lurch to either extreme of the political spectrum."[122] Similarly, Dole argued that the GOP was facing an "anti-people image"[123] that could only be overcome if the GOP radically expanded its voter coalition:

> "We need the women, the young, the blacks, the Hispanics, the ethnics, the Indians. We need working men and women. [. . .] If we sit idly by in the complacent belief that

[116] "GOP Heads for Another Blunder," *Chicago Tribune*, December 28, 1976.
[117] "Top Republicans Unable to Agree on Filing Two Major Party Posts," *New York Times*, January 7, 1977.
[118] Brock was perceived to be a conservative in part because, as a Congressman, he had voted against the 1964 Civil Rights Act. However, Brock later regretted this vote, calling it "the worst vote I ever cast." See: Leah Wright Rigueur, *The Loneliness of the Black Republican: Pragmatic Politics and the Pursuit of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015) 265.
[119] "Brock Elected GOP Chairman," *Los Angeles Times*, January 15, 1977.
[120] "William Brock to James O. Fortuna," March 29, 1977, William Emmerson Brock III Papers, MPA 0106, University of Tennessee Libraries, Knoxville, Special Collections (hereafter Brock Papers), Box 35, Folder 18.
[121] "A 'Shadow Cabinet' Suggested by Ford," *The New York Times*, January 16, 1977.
[122] "GOP Chairman to Resign; Warns Against Extremes," *Los Angeles Times*, November 22, 1976.
[123] "Dole: GOP Needs a Strong Leader," *Washington Post*, November 29, 1976.

> Gov. Carter will make a botch of things and give us a new lease of life, we may not have a comeback."[124]

Brock was not strongly opposed to the conservative wing. As chairman, Brock mixed moderates and conservatives in crucial appointments. For example, Peter Teeley, who was named director of communications for the RNC in February 1977, was previously the press secretary to moderate Republican senator Jacob Javits (NY).[125] Two months after selecting Teeley, Brock appointed Charles R. Black, who previously served as Senator Jesse Helm's special assistant, as the RNC's campaign director.[126] As chairman, Brock invested considerably in publicity programs. However, while he did not exclude conservatives from the RNC, the brand the party promoted through these programs was largely in line with that proposed by moderates.

After his election, Brock noted that the crucial challenge facing the RNC was changing "the perception of this party."[127] To achieve this, Brock argued, the RNC would need to "identify with the majority of the American people and they, in turn, identify with our goals."[128] Part of Brock's strategy to achieve that goal was to invest in 'nuts and bolts' programs intended to help Republican candidates become more competitive in local elections. In 1977, Brock announced a "very ambitious $1.7 million plan" to "hire, train, and pay a full-time organizer for each state, with the specific responsibility of rebuilding the party's badly eroded base."[129] In so doing, Brock hoped to restore "the roots, the foundations of our party at the local level": he went on to say that "[if] we don't start electing people to City Hall and courthouses and state legislatures, we have no foundation on which to build."[130]

But the RNC under Brock did not limit itself to the 'nuts and bolts' approach to party building. Indeed, the committee invested heavily in publicity programs to help change the public's hostile perception of the GOP. RNC Director of Communications Pete Teeley, in March 1977, explained

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[124] "GOP Governors Hear Dole Plea for Unity," *Los Angeles Times*, December 1, 1976.
[125] "GOP Communications Post Goes to Aide of Sen. Javits," *Washington Post*, February 14, 1977.
[126] "Brock Picks Attorney as GOP Campaign Chief," *Washington Post*, April 20, 1977.
[127] Kesaris et al, *Papers of the Republican Party*, Series B, Reel 14, Frame 735.
[128] Ibid, Frame 738-739. Similarly, the Advisory Committee on Outreach, installed by Brock, concluded in a 1979 report that the party would need to actively seek "to bring non-Republicans into the party structure, a kind of political affirmative action. We cannot continue to approach non-Republicans at election time, soliciting their votes and their dollars for the candidates we have selected for them and ignoring them inbetween [sic] times" ("Steve Bull to William Brock," August 2, 1979, Brock Papers, Box 38, Folder 18).
[129] "The New National Chairman of GOP is a True Believer," *Los Angeles Times*, January 31, 1977.
[130] "GOP Leader Calls Energy Plan Ripoff," *Chicago Tribune*, April 30, 1977.

that his division was focusing on communicating "at the national level on issues we are concerned with" by relying on "personal appearances for RNC spokesmen, broadcasting, press conferences, news releases, films."[131] The committee continued to publish *First Monday* and to rely on the *Comment* format. The RNC also created a series of half hour TV programs, such as a special on the Republican Party's proposals regarding energy policies that aired on NBC in June 1977 as a response to a Carter energy speech.[132] The committee's strategy in this regard, as Brock explain in April 1977, was to solve the GOP's "image problem" by "being much more specific in terms of what this party stands for and what we would do to resolve problems – whether it is joblessness, inflation, or energy."[133]

Brock also reintroduced a set of advisory committees to help set and promote party positions on salient policy issues. These committees were created to "make specific recommendations"[134] to the RNC and Republicans in Congress, and throughout Brock's term they engaged a broad array of topics – including, economic affairs, natural resources, 'human concerns' (that is, welfare reform, urban policy), national security, and international affairs.[135] A who's who of Republican leaders and thinkers – including Alan Greenspan, Herbert Stein, Robert Bork, Paul O'Neill, James Buckley, Caspar Weinberger, George Romney, Hugh Scott, and Pierre du Pont – were enlisted as chairmen of the different (sub)-committees.[136] In 1978, the RNC began publishing a new journal – *Commonsense*, "a Republican Journal of Thought and Opinion" – to promote the findings of the Advisory Committees as well as publish independent articles.[137] The journal, which the RNC published until 1981, provided space for conservative and Republican academics and politicians to write about salient issues including welfare, international relations, the party reforms of the 1970s, and inner city politics. Brock, writing in the first issue, explained that since "the contest for votes must also be a contest of ideas" *Commonsense* would function as a venue for introducing "ideas into the policy debate; for testing and refining those ideas; and for accommodating them

[131] Kesaris et al, *Papers of the Republican Party,* Series B, Reel 15, Frame 4.
[132] Ibid, Reel 15, Frames 142-145; Chairman's Memo, June 9, 1977, Brock Papers, Box 38, Folder 38.
[133] Kesaris et al, *Papers of the Republican Party,* Series B, Reel 15, Frame 66.
[134] "Chairman's Memo," March 26, 1977, Brock Papers, Box 38, Folder 38.
[135] "Compendium of Reports, Work in Progress and Recourse Material," Brock Papers, Box 40, Folder 1.
[136] "Republican National Committee Advisory Councils Committees Directory," January 1979, Brock Papers, Box 44, Folder 4.
[137] "Memorandum from Mike Baroody to Bill Brock," September 21, 1977, Brock Papers, Box 66, Folder 15. The research division spent a considerable part of its budget on *Commonsense*: in 1978, the division budgeted $300,452 out of its total request of $894,337 for the journal. See: "Memorandum from Mike Baroody to Arlene Triplett," September 14, 1977, Brock Papers, Box 66, Folder 15.

to the diverse desires of a pluralistic people."[138] Contributors included elected officials, such as Representatives Jack Kemp (R-NY), Newt Gingerich (R-GA), and David A. Stockman (R-MI), and Senator Bob Packwood (R-OR), and Republicans who had served in the executive branch (such as Rumsfeld). However, most contributors (40% of all authors) were academics, including a considerable number of political scientists (such as Jeane Kirkpatrick, Aaron Wildavsky, and John F. Bibby).

The committee also spent broadly on educational projects aimed at a broader public.[139] For example, in the spring of 1980, the RNC spent more than $5 million – 20% of the committee's budget for the year – on a media project consisting of, among others, a series of TV broadcasts in 50 media markets. The aim of this project was "campaign education – educational television" focused "primarily, on the fact that Democrats are the majority in Congress, that Congress has created our problems, it is the source of inflation, that Republicans would commit to reduction in federal spending, a reduction in taxes, and increase in our defense, those things which would address the need for a change in the Congress."[140]

Brock used these publicity programs to try to broaden the GOP brand, and characterize it as a more inclusive party. Since Republicans had done so poorly in elections since 1972, the number of voting groups the RNC could target in this regard was considerable. Thus, the RNC engaged in something of a scattershot approach. During Brock's tenure the committee relied on specialized advertising in – among others – Chinese, Polish, Russian, Italian, Spanish, German, and Catholic newspapers across the country.[141] Meanwhile, to improve the party's appeal to Jewish voters, the RNC relied on positions on Israel and the PLO provided by the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC),[142] and organized meetings in 1978 and 1979 with "key

[138] Bill Brock, "Introduction to a Republican Journal of Thought and Opinion," *Commonsense* vol. 1, no. 1 (1978) iv.

[139] Brock also proposed creating a "party line" – a telephone number Republican supporters could dial to hear recordings with information about the party: "it would be used by not only our candidates, but our state party people and local county public relations people so that, in a lot of cases, Republicans all around the country would be talking about the same issue at the same time" ("Memo from Bill Brock to Pete Teeley," February 28, 1978, Brock Papers, Box 38, Folder 23).

[140] Kesaris et al, *Papers of the Republican Party,* Series B, Reel 18, Frame 226-227.

[141] See: "Memorandum from Cheryl Davis to William Brock, Ben Cotton and Jean Hawkins," February 7, 1980, Brock Papers, Box 38, Folder 4; "Memorandum from Cheryl Davis to William Brock, Ben Cotton, and Jean Hawkins," February 1, 1980, Brock Papers, Box 39, Folder 4; "Memorandum from Cheryl Davis to William Brock, Ben Cotton, and Jean Hawkins," May 1, 1980, Brock Papers, Box 39, Folder 4; "Memorandum from Don Shea to Pete Teeley," January 10, 1979, Brock Papers, Box 40, Folder 4;

[142] "Report on the Outreach Program of the Republican National Committee for Increased Support from the Jewish Community," October 23, 1978, Brock Papers, Box 39, Folder 14.

national Jewish Republican leaders" – including former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.[143]

But the voting group Brock prioritized most were black voters. In the spring of 1977, Brock identified regaining support among African Americans as one of his top priorities: "if we today are rejected by 90% of the black vote, we must intensify our efforts to earn that support – not because we will soon receive it, but because we care deeply about those individuals who have been discriminated against."[144] Brock appears to genuinely have felt that re-incorporating black voters into the party was important.[145] Still, 'caring' was not the only reason: in the 1976 election, Carter had won 13 states in part because of his lopsided majority among blacks.[146] As Leah Wright-Rigueur has noted, Brock himself also suffered the consequences of this race-gap: Brock lost his reelection in 1976 by 78,000 votes – his Democratic opponent received 130,000 black votes.[147]

The RNC engaged in a variety of programs to regain support among black voters. In 1978 the National Black Republican Council (the RNC's official body representing black Republicans) organized five regional workshops to train black Republicans to reach out to voters in the black community. [148] Brock also met with representatives of black media, and urged other Republican leaders to maintain regular contact.[149] Additionally, the RNC bought advertising around black television shows – including a set of one-minute commercial spots on *America's Black Forum* – a weekly news television show targeted to a black audience.[150]

Most notably, Brock extended an $800,000 contract to Wright-McNeill & Associates – a

[143] "Lawrence Y. Goldberg to William Brock," January 19, 1978, Brock Papers, Box 57, Folder 14; "H. David Weinstein to Carol Browning," 13 November, 1979, Brock Papers, Box 57, Folder 2; "William Brock to John Trubin," December 3, 1979, Brock Papers, Box 57, Folder 11.

[144] Kesaris et al, *Papers of the Republican Party*, Series B, Reel 15, Frame 4.

[145] In private letters written throughout his term as RNC chair Brock frequently mentioned and defended his outreach to black voters. For example, in February 1977, Brock responded to a letter with party building suggestions from Newt Gingerich (then still an Assistant Professor at West Georgia College and a two-time failed Congressional candidate) by noting that "I was intrigued by what you did not mention [underline in original], especially in light of the large amount of press on this particular subject. I am, of course, referring to the added emphasis on Blacks" ("William Brock to Newt Gingerich," February 21, 1977, Brock Papers, Box 35, Folder 18). Around the same time, Brock also met with the director of the non-partisan Elections Research Center Richard M. Scammon to discuss the potential of persuading black voters to (re)join the GOP ("Richard M. Scammon to William Brock," February 3, 1977, Brock Papers, Box 43, Folder 6).

[146] According to analysis by the Joint Center for Political Studies in Washington, D.C., Carter won Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, and Wisconsin because of black support. See: "The GOP Knows It Has a Problem," *Chicago Tribune*, March 27, 1977.

[147] Wright Rigueur, *The Loneliness of the Black Republican*, 264.

[148] "Third Force Seminar and Leadership Conference," Brock Papers, Box 39, Folder 3.

[149] "Memo from William Brock to Pete Teeley," February 27, 1978, Brock Papers, Box 38, Folder 38.

[150] "Ben Cotton to America's Black Forum, Inc.," March 27, 1978, Brock Papers, Box 57, Folder 22.

Republican, black-owned political consulting firm from Georgia.[151] Wright-McNeill had become famous within the GOP because of its success in the 1976 election. While across the nation, blacks voted Democratic by large margins, in Georgia white clients of Wright-McNeill managed to win over half of the black vote while their black clients won more than 90%.[152] By engaging the services of Wright-McNeill, the RNC hoped to produce national "campaign strategies geared toward the Black community."[153]

Wright-McNeill went on to advise a considerable number of Republican candidates and campaigns in at least sixteen states – predominantly, but not exclusively, in the South.[154] The GOP felt confident black voters would be open to the Republican Party due to disappointment with the Carter administration. As Robert Wright wrote to Brock, "Black dissatisfaction with Jimmy Carter is obvious and growing," with several civil rights leaders (including Jesse Jackson, Vernon Jordan of the Urban League, and Ben Hooks of the NAACP) expressing "displeasure of the Carter administration."[155] However, the firm also noted that "the greatest barrier to the Republican Party in making a significant, indelible impact on the Black electorate's voting pattern was the negative image the Republican Party has in the Black community."[156]

The Wright-McNeill playbook thus relied on having local (white) Republicans build connections with local black leaders and reaching out to black voters through publicity efforts. For example, in May 1979, Thelma Duggin – a field coordinator in the Wright-McNeill program – sent an outline of different steps the local Republican Party in Montgomery (AL) should take to connect to black voters. Duggin identified three phases: research, public relations and education, and voter education. In particular, local Republican leaders were encouraged to inform themselves about, and make connections with, black community leaders in clubs and churches. Once the local GOP had created such a "working relationship" their next task was to set up speaking engagements with organizations, schools, and churches, distribute literature on the necessity of a two party

[151] Brock described the amount as an "enormous" expenditure, indicating the importance he placed in this project ("Republicans Courting Black Voters in South After Years of Inactivity," *The New York Times*, August 1, 1978).
[152] Wright Rigueur, *The Loneliness of the Black Republican*,267.
[153] Cited in ibid.
[154] Based on staff reports, Wright-McNeill representatives worked with campaigns in Texas, Georgia, Tennessee, Ohio, Illinois, Virginia, Florida, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Arkansas, Alabama, Kansas, New York, and Kentucky in 1978 and 1979. See: "Wright-McNeill and Associates Field Reports," Brock Papers, Box 40, Folder 23.
[155] "Memorandum from Bob Wright to William Brock and Charlie Black," August 11, 1977, Brock Papers, Box 40, Folder 23.
[156] "Robert L. Wright to William Brock," February 1, 1979, Brock Papers, Box 40, Folder 23.

system in the South, "constantly [preparing] news releases for the press on activities and stands on issues of concern to the Black community," and invite speakers "such as Alex Haley, Jesse Jackson, [and] Black Republican elected officials" to come to town.[157] The Montgomery Republican Party implemented the outreach program.[158]

However, not all Republican candidates were compatible with a strategy of wooing black voters, and Wright-McNeill reserved the right to refuse to work with candidates the firm believed to be beyond saving. For example, in April 1978, Wright and Duggin met with Congressman Ron Paul (R-TX) – who had lost his reelection in 1977. In her report, Duggin recounted that Wright

> "informed [Paul] that if he [. . .] wanted the Black vote, it would be necessary for him to moderate his stand on issues. Paul vehemently refused, saying that he was right and would not moderate his stands. [. . .] I talked to about 20-30 Blacks, both by phone and in person. I received very negative responses and at times had to defend my 'helping' Ron Paul. Ron Paul was, overall, described as an insult to Black voters. [. . .] They described him as being extremely conservative with racist tendencies."[159]

Based on this visit, Duggin and Wright concluded that Paul's positions on welfare, the minimum wage, and healthcare were too far to the right to ever convince black voters to support him for office.

Beyond advising local candidates, Wright-McNeill also pushed Brock to improve the party's relations with Jackson, Hooks, and Jordan.[160] Brock followed this advice by inviting Jackson to address the RNC's January 1978 meeting. Brock explained to Jackson that "the RNC has embarked on a program to open the Republican Party to greater participation by black Americans.[. . .] To achieve this end, we Republicans must listen to and be responsive to blacks, but it is equally important that blacks truly participate in the Republican party and become deeply involved in the making of our Party's decisions and policies."[161] The RNC saw the Jackson speech as a major turning point in the relationship between the GOP and black voters, and Brock invited Congressional Republican leaders – including Senate minority leader Howard Baker – to be present

[157] "Thelma Duggin to Jack Crittenden," May 29, 1979, Brock Papers, Box 50, Folder 17.
[158] "Jack P. Crittenden to Bill Brock," June 7, 1979, Brock Papers, Box 50, Folder 17.
[159] "Field Report Form," April 6, 1978 (Texas), Brock Papers, Box 40, Folder 23.
[160] "Memo from Phyllis Berry to William Brock," December 13, 1977, Brock Papers, Box 38, Folder 31.
[161] "Bill Brock to the Reverend Jesse Jackson," December 23, 1977, Brock Papers, Box 57, Folder27.

for Jackson's speech to "show Reverend Jackson, his supporters and others that the leadership of the Republican Party is unified in its effort to bring blacks into our Party, to encourage them, help them and listen to them."[162] During his speech, Jackson returned the favor by calling for an alliance between blacks and the GOP: "black people need the Republican Party to compete for us so that we have real alternatives for meeting our needs. The Republican Party needs black people if it is to ever compete for national office or, in fact to keep it from becoming an extinct party."[163] Jackson stated that such an alliance was not only preferably but also possible because of Carter's actions in office: "the priorities that we voted for Mr. Carter on have changed. The President would have gotten far fewer black votes if he had run on a platform of energy and government reorganization."[164] Jackson's speech was a hit among Republican moderates: Dole thought it was "a breakthrough just having him here," while Brock wished "we had Republicans who speak like that."[165] The RNC's relationship with Jackson continued into 1979 when the RNC sponsored a fundraiser for Jackson's Push EXCEL educational scholarship program.[166]

Brock himself addressed the NAACP's annual conference in May 1978, promising his audience that black votes were "extremely important" to the GOP, and announcing that "if I can have a legacy for those who follow me, it will be that no political party in America will ever again take black voters for granted or write them off as a captive of the opposition."[167] In July, the GOP organized an urban conference in Detroit. During the meeting, Governor William Milliken (R-MI) warned that the GOP could not "use tax limitation as the current euphemism for the anti-black, anti-Spanish-speaking and anti-poor sentiments of some segments of the population," and that if it did "the inevitable reckoning will only leave a smaller minority party than ever before and we will have forfeited any right to be a national political party."[168]

Reaching minority voters was a clear priority for Brock who, in 1979, reported that such outreach programs had been "multiplied about threefold" over what they had been under Smith's

[162] "Bill Brock to Howard H. Baker," January 10, 1978, Brock Papers, Box 56, Folder 33. Similar invitations were sent to House Minority Whip Robert H. Michel, NRSC chair Bob Packwood, House Minority Leader John Rhodes, Assistant Minority Leader in the Senate Ted Stevens, and NRCC chair Guy Vander Jagt.
[163] "Blacks and GOP Need Each Other – Jesse Jackson," *Los Angeles Times*, January 21, 1978.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Ibid.
[166] "Memorandum from Robert Wright to William Brock," June 25, 1979, Brock Papers, Box 40, Folder 23. NAACP executive director Benjamin Hooks also spoke at an RNC meeting in 1978. See: "Benjamin L. Hooks to Bill Brock," August 24, 1978, Brock Papers, Box 57, Folder 29.
[167] "Can't Take Your Vote for Granted, GOP Chairman Tells NAACP," *Chicago Tribune*, May 8, 1978.
[168] "GOP Launches Bid for Blacks, Ethnics," *Washington Post*, July 20, 1978.

leadership, and that "extensive efforts" had been made in the "Catholic community, the Hispanic community, the Black community, with labor, with small business, with people who had not had an adequate voice in the Party, and with women."[169] The GOP's shifting fortunes in the second half of the Carter administration confirmed to Brock that the RNC's approach was working. During the 1978 midterms, the GOP won seats in both the House and Senate – for which Brock claimed (partial) credit.[170] Additionally, polling conducted by the RNC in November 1979 showed that the public was increasingly more positive towards the GOP after the low point of 1976. For one thing, respondents gave Republicans considerable leads when asked which party they trusted on economic issues – a notable achievement since, as Brock noted, this was "the first time in [my lifetime], that the Republican party will go into [...] elections favored by the majority of the people of this country on economic issues."[171] While after the 1976 election, some Republicans wondered whether the party should change its name altogether to escape the mark of Watergate, by 1980 RNC opinion researcher Bob Teeter concluded that "the word Republican [...] ceased to be such a millstone as it has been around the neck of many of our candidates."[172]

In January 1979, the RNC decided to make its most public declaration of outreach to black voters by choosing to hold the 1980 convention in Detroit – despite opposition from conservatives. The choice of Detroit (which one RNC member dismissed as a "crummy"[173] city), in Brock's view, said "something about the party's commitment, not only to minorities, but to ethnic groups, workers, and the urban community."[174] While holding the convention in Detroit was unlikely to

[169] Kesaris et al, *Papers of the Republican Party*, Series B, Reel 17, Frame 95. Expansion of these programs did not mean they were broadly lauded even *within* the communities the RNC was trying to target. Representatives of the National Republican Heritage Groups and the Republican National Hispanic Assembly complained that their organizations were underfunded – especially in comparison to the amount of money the RNC spent on black outreach (see: "Bill Brock to Benjamin Fernandez," April 7, 1977, Brock Papers, Box 57, Folder 16; "Edward J. Derwinski to Bill Brock," March 27, 1977, Brock Papers, Box 57, Folder 16). Meanwhile, the RNC's reliance on Wright-McNeill caused considerable frustration among the leadership of the National Black Republican Council (NBRC) – which accused Brock of hiring "[his] Blacks" ("James C. Cummings, Jr. to Bill Brock," December 12, 1979, Brock Papers, Box 58, Folder 4) instead of relying on the NBRC. After the NBRC decided to boycott Republican candidates who received support from Wright-McNeill Brock cut its funding (see "James C. Cummings, Jr. to Ben Cotton," December 31, 1979, Brock Papers, Box 58, Folder 4).

[170] Brock noted that the goal for 1978 had been to "restore and expand our political base" and that the RNC "did so in part within the context of existing programs, our regional directors, our finance programs, our communications, our research efforts, but in part with a lot of new programs. [...] I think those results speak for themselves. We are not there, but we have come a long way." See: Kesaris, et al, *Papers of the Republican Party*, Series B, Reel 17, Frame 95.

[171] Brock reported to an RNC meeting in January 1980 that "when asked which party can best deal with economic issues, those issues which they cite as being those most important to themselves, we now have a 17 point lead on spending, and 8% lead on tax reduction." See: Ibid, Reel 18, Frame 173-174.

[172] Ibid, Frame 193-194.

[173] "Republicans Reach Out to a Wider Audience," *The New York Times*, January 28, 1979.

[174] Ibid. See also: "Detroit Picked By GOP as 1980 Convention Site," *Los Angeles Times*, January 24, 1979. Notably,

affect either the process of selecting a presidential candidate or the writing of the party's platform, it did – in the assessment of *The New York Times* – vindicate the "kind of leadership [Brock] has tried to give the party, a combination of nuts-and-bolts technical work and the insistence that the party must reach out, not merely try to further please those voters it pleases already."[175]

Ironically, the convention that was supposed to instigate a major breakthrough in the GOP's courting of minority votes instead became the coronation of the conservative takeover of the party with the presidential nomination of Reagan. This conservative victory was not entirely surprising. While Brock may have believed that the RNC's actions were paying off for the party, conservatives were not convinced. Evans and Novak reported that several members of the RNC considered Jackson's 1978 speech "an irrelevant exercise."[176] One anonymous Republican insider shared with Evans and Novak that he had told "[Brock] when he started on this that it was okay so long as it didn't detract from our main chance at getting more blue-collar workers. He told me it wouldn't, but he was wrong."[177] Buchanan dismissed Brock's attempts along similar lines: "the reality is that Bill Brock can no more deliver a platform satisfactory to Jesse Jackson than can Jesse Jackson deliver a black precinct to the Republican Party of Goldwater, Nixon, Reagan, and Ford. The road to Republican recovery does not lie through Harlem or Watts."[178] Conservatives thus continued to work on ensuring one of their own would win the presidential nomination in 1980.[179]

While the RNC was mostly out of step with the conservatives who would take over the party in the 1980 election and beyond, it was responsible for helping establish one of the fundamental connections that would help define this conservative era of the GOP. The evangelical Christian religious right movement had begun in earnest following the attempt at ratifying the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). The ERA had passed both the House and Senate in 1970 with large bipartisan

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William McLaughlin, the chairman of the Michigan Republican State Committee, in his bid to convince the RNC to choose Detroit as the convention city also connected Detroit to the Equal Rights Amendment: "It is important to note that Michigan was one of the first states in the nation to ratify the ERA" (Kesaris et al, *Papers of the Republican Party*, Series B, Reel 16, Frame 135).

[175] "Republicans Reach Out to a Wider Audience," *The New York Times*, January 28, 1979.

[176] "The GOP's Curious Quest for Black Votes," *Washington Post*, January 26, 1978.

[177] Ibid.

[178] "Jesse, GOP Still Far Apart," *Chicago Tribune*, February 7, 1978.

[179] As Leah Wright Rigueur has noted, Reagan incorporated attempts at reaching out to black voters in his 1980 campaign strategy. Reagan met with black Republicans during the 1980 convention and received their support. During the fall campaign, Wright McNeill helped produce campaign strategy for Reagan to attract black support, as well as to remind black voters of their distaste of Carter. Reagan himself campaigned in the South Bronx to appeal directly to black and Latino voters, but the appearance was mostly a failure that "quickly deteriorated into a shouting match between the politician and about seventy demonstrators." See: Wright Rigueur, *The Loneliness of the Black Republican*, 286.

majorities and the (token) support of President Nixon.[180] However, the process of ratification ended in failure in 1979. One of the core activists behind the anti-ERA campaign was life-long Republican activist Phyllis Schlafly. Schlafly and her supporters – mostly Christian women demanding the right to let "women be women" – targeted the limited number of states that had not yet ratified the amendment, with considerable success: while 30 states ratified the ERA in 1972 and 1973, the stream slowed down considerably in the years that followed. Additionally, several states that had previously ratified the amendment switched their support.[181] The failure of the ERA inspired a host of evangelical Christian leaders to become politically active and push issues such as abortion, feminism, and homosexuality to the center of political debate.

While the anti-ERA campaign had certainly been a *conservative* movement, it was not necessarily a *Republican* one. Republican members of Congress had voted for the ERA in 1972, and the party expressed support for the amendment in both its 1972 and 1976 platforms. Additionally, some of the most strident voices against the ERA had not been Republicans but (Southern) Democrats – such as Senator Sam Ervin (D-NC) who argued the ERA would usher in the legalization of gay marriage.[182]Additionally, in the 1976 general election, most evangelical voters had supported Carter – himself a born-again Southern Baptist.[183] But evangelical voters became frustrated with Carter's performance in office, and conservatives aimed to take advantage of this new gap between evangelicals and the Democratic Party. During his presidential campaign, Reagan explicitly targeted evangelical ministers for support. Most notably, in August 1980 at a major convention of 15,000 ministers, Reagan told the audience that "I know this is nonpartisan, so you can't endorse me, but I want you to know that I endorse you."[184]

Notably, the RNC had begun to reach out to the Christian right before Reagan made his appeals. In 1979 and 1980, the RNC organized a series of meetings between Brock and evangelical leaders, and began to provide evangelicals with advice on how to organize their followers. As Brock's deputy, Ben Cotten, explained during a 1980 RNC meeting, the match between the GOP

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[180] Robert Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004) 155.
[181] Christlow, *Phyllis Schlafly*, 214.
[182] Ruth Murray Brown, *For a "Christian America": A History of the Religious Right* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2002), 85.
[183] See: Sidney M. Milkis, Daniel Tichenor, and Laura Blessing, ""Rallying Force": The Modern Presidency, Social Movements, and the Transformation of American Politics," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 43, no. 3 (2013) 658.
[184] Cited in ibid, 659.

and the evangelicals was a natural one: "it was our belief [. . .] that not to participate and become involved with people who had never before been involved in the political process would have been to abandon an opportunity to expand the party" because the "issues that motivate them – faith, freedom, and family – [. . .] is precisely why the Republican Party and the evangelicals should go hand in hand."[185] Brock made a similar appeal to the evangelical leaders. In invitations for a meeting at the RNC sent out to evangelists in the fall of 1979 – including Jerry Falwell, Bob Jones, Pat Robertson, Tim LaHaye, and Jim Bakker – Brock expressed his concern that "the assault upon our spiritual heritage is awesome and growing" and explained that the "Republican Party is seeking advice on the necessary content of the 1980 RNC Party Platform as to reflect those basic values which have contributed so much to the strength of this nation."[186]

To what extent Brock expected he would actually have to deliver such a platform is less clear. While the RNC was hopeful that Christian conservative voters could help the party's electoral performance, the committee's leaders were not impressed with the Moral Majority's political capabilities. For example, Brock's briefing on a May 1980 meeting with evangelical leaders – which included Falwell, LaHaye, and Robinson - noted that "the degree of political sophistication amongst this group is very low."[187] Brock was advised to stress to the Christian right leaders that, while he wanted them to "be a part of the decision-making process, i.e. that their voices will be heard and they will be part of the action,"[188] they should not expect big changes in the short run: "It would not be wise to try and suggest to them that if Republicans are elected that all their concerns will be dealt with an all the problems will go away."[189]

Whether the RNC underestimated the lack of political sophistication of the Christian right or not – Reagan would cater to the evangelicals to an extent that caught Brock and other RNC leaders by surprise. During the 1980 convention, Reagan's delegates tailored the platform to

[185] Kesaris et al, *Papers of the Republican Party*, Series B, Reel 18, Frame 560-562.

[186] "William Brock to leaders in the evangelical community (form letter)," November 19, 1979, Brock Papers, Box 44, Folder 19.

[187] "Memorandum from Eddie Mahe, Jr. to Bill Brock," May 19, 1980, Brock Papers, Box 38, Folder 10.

[188] Ibid.

[189] Ibid. To assist Christian conservatives in bringing out voters for the GOP, the RNC created a "Program for Political Participation of Church-Going Christians" – made available to ministers to reach out to their congregation. The program proposed three steps for ministers to take: first, ensuring that the members of their congregation were registered to vote. Second, that "an effective method of communication must be developed so they will know without question, for all positions on the ballot, not just President or U.S. Senator, which candidates support the values they themselves support and which ones on the basis of their record or their public statements do not." Finally, ministers were urged to ensure their flock actually turned out to vote on election day. See: "A Program For Political Participation of Church-Going Christians," 1980, Brock Papers, Box 38, Folder 10.

appeal to (white) Christian voters – rejecting (for the first time in a GOP platform) both the ERA and abortion rights. In response, Mary Dent Crisp – Brock's co-chair, a self-decribed feminist, and strong supporter of both the ERA and abortion rights, announced her resignation: "I am afraid we are suffering from serious internal sickness. I am deeply disturbed by yesterday's action [. . .]. Our party has endorsed and worked for the Equal Rights Amendment for 40 years. Now we are reversing our position and are about to bury the rights of over a hundred million American women under a heap of platitudes."[190]

Reagan's dramatic victory against Carter in the general election, and the GOP's new majority in the Senate, healed some of these wounds. In the wake of the 1980 election, Brock, in a letter to Governor Lamar Alexander (R-TN) celebrated the success of his committee's strategy in helping produce this remarkable Republican victory. "The excitement to me," Brock wrote,

> "came in the breadth and depth of our success. The attraction of Democrats, blue collar workers, Catholics, over 35% of the Jewish voters, and twice the anticipated level of black support reflected in not just a Presidential landslide, but Senate, Gubernatorial, Congressional and legislative races as well."[191]

The 1980 election, however, also shifted the balance of power within the Republican Party. While conservatives had come close to gaining control over the party in the early 1960s, Goldwater's defeat ensured that moderates could retake the national committee and push for the Republican Party to become a national majority party built on a broad coalition of white and minority voters. The Reagan victory fundamentally changed the intra-party political landscape: while the GOP was still not the national majority party (the share of Republican seats in the House remained stuck at 44%), Reagan proved that a conservative strategy could produce the kind of electoral success moderates believed impossible.

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[190] Kesaris et al, *Papers of the Republican Party,* Series B, Reel 18, Frame 974. Brock, himself a supporter of the ERA as well, defended the Republican platform in letters to concerned Republicans: "At no point does [the platform] oppose the Equal Rights Amendment. [. . .] In my own view, our Platform in no way inhibits those of us who support the Equal Rights Amendment from proceeding to seek its adoption." ("Bill Brock to Dorothy B. Ward," July 21, 1980, Brock Papers, Box 55, Folder 18).

[191] "Bill Brock to Lamar Alexander," November 15, 1980, Brock Papers, Box 63, Folder 26.

V. Conclusion

While moderates controlled the RNC for most of the period between 1960 and 1980, they failed to redesign the Republican Party in their image. Nonetheless, it is equally clear that both moderates and conservatives *tried* to use the party's national committee to help produce the kind of party brand they believed would help the party achieve national majority status. Indeed, regardless of which wing controlled it, the RNC's role in the GOP was remarkably consistent between 1960 and 1980. Throughout this period, the committee invested considerable elements of its budget in producing new publicity programs and introducing new communication tools (including magazines, radio-, and TV programs). Additionally, the goal underlying these programs was consistent as well: Republican leaders understood their party was a national minority party and would need to convince voting groups that previously voted against the party to change their minds.

The extent to which the RNC engaged in producing such publicity programs did not change much. As predicted, the RNC focused extensively on providing branding services during the years in which the Democratic Party was the national majority party (1961-1968, 1977-1980). During the years when the GOP was itself in the White House, the committee strategy did not noticeably change either: despite presidential election victories in 1968 and 1972 the GOP remained in the minority in both House and Senate, and the RNC thus continued to promote the party's brand. Noticeably, the RNC prioritized such branding activities even when the party was close to being insolvent: after Watergate, the party faced a major drop in donations but still invested millions of dollars in a publicity campaign to reintroduce voters to the GOP.

While publicity was a priority for each RNC chairman between 1960 and 1980, the agency these chairs had in deciding what to promote and which voting groups to target was not constant. Under Nixon and Ford, chairs Morton, Dole, Bush, and Smith were constrained in the kind of image they could project: with a president in control of the national party organization, each focused mostly on promoting the president and their view of what the national party brand ought to look like.

In contrast, the out-chairmen – Miller, Burch, Bliss, and Brock – had considerably more freedom and used their agency to focus on the brand they personally believed would help the

party win the national majority. For conservatives Miller and Burch, this meant that the RNC engaged in a clear strategy aimed at winning support from white conservative Southerners through "Operation Dixie." After the defeat of Goldwater in 1964, Bliss radically changed course: rather than emphasize white voters, the RNC now pointed its arrows at convincing black voters in major cities to reconsider the GOP. After Ford's defeat in 1976, Brock engaged in a similar strategy: doubling down on appealing to black and other minority voters instead of following the conservative prescription of exclusively targeting white voters.

Chapter 5

National Committees After the Reagan Realignment: The DNC and RNC, 1981-2008

> "If we are to compete for the presidency, Democrats must strengthen their reputation on important "command" issues – foreign policy, the economy, defense and crime. And we must find a way to deflect voter focus from their sometimes emotional and misleading aspects toward the traditional Democratic position of unquestioned strength tempered with compassion and common sense."
>
> *Charles Manatt, Frmr. DNC chair, February 1989*

> "I view myself as the chief political operative of the Republican Party. I do not consider myself the leader of the Republican Party. President Bush is."
>
> *Lee Atwater, RNC chair, December 1989*

With the election of Ronald Reagan, the national committees of both the parties entered a changing political landscape from the one in which they had both operated for nearly half a century. Between the election of FDR in 1932 and Jimmy Carter's defeat in 1980, Democrats had dominated both presidential and Congressional elections. Even when Republicans held the White

Table 5.1: *Democratic Electoral Performance and National Party Status, 1980-2006*

	White House	*% House Seats*	*% Senate Seats*	*Party Status*
1980	OUT	55.9	46.0	Minority
1982	OUT	61.8	46.0	Minority
1984	OUT	58.2	47.0	Minority
1986	OUT	59.3	55.0	Minority
1988	OUT	59.8	55.0	Minority
1990	OUT	61.4	56.0	Minority
1992	IN	59.3	57.0	Majority
1994	IN	46.9	48.0	Minority
1996	IN	47.4	45.0	Minority
1998	IN	48.5	45.0	Minority
2000	OUT	48.7	50.0	Minority
2002	OUT	47.1	48.0	Minority
2004	OUT	46.4	44.0	Minority
2006	OUT	53.6	51.0	Minority

Source: Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections (Washington D.C.: CQ Press, 2010).

House during the Eisenhower, Nixon, and Ford years, the GOP remained in the national minority due to its perpetual disadvantage in Congress. In contrast, Democrats had near continuous majorities in both the House and Senate, and also frequently held the White House. This period of Democratic national majority status ended with the beginning of the Reagan era: starting in 1980, Republicans won three consecutive terms in the White House and then control of Congress in 1994. Yet, while the period of frequent Democratic majority status ended, Republicans did not succeed in achieving a similar level of success in this period: throughout the Reagan and Bush years, Democrats maintained their House majority. Thus, Republicans only achieved unified control of governed under George W. Bush, between the 2002 and 2006 midterms (see Tables 5.1 and 5.2).

On this basis, the branding theory predicts that we should see both the DNC and RNC engage in considerable publicity efforts nearly continuously. With national majority status rare, the core distinction being the two parties frequently was whether they were a minority party in- or out of the White House (see Tables 5.3 and 5.4). Thus, the DNC and RNC activities in this period should largely be distinguished by the extent to which national committees had agency to promote a party brand in line with their own beliefs, or whether they provided publicity to promote their party's president.

The cases below mostly confirm this theory, though notable exceptions exist. For example,

Table 5.2: *Republican Electoral Performance and National Party Status, 1980-2006*

	White House	*% House Seats*	*% Senate Seats*	*Party Status*
1980	IN	44.1	53.0	Minority
1982	IN	38.2	54.0	Minority
1984	IN	41.8	53.0	Minority
1986	IN	40.7	45.0	Minority
1988	IN	40.2	45.0	Minority
1990	IN	38.4	44.0	Minority
1992	OUT	40.5	43.0	Minority
1994	OUT	52.9	52.0	Minority
1996	OUT	52.2	55.0	Minority
1998	OUT	51.3	55.0	Minority
2000	IN	50.9	50.0	Minority
2002	IN	52.6	51.0	Majority
2004	IN	53.3	55.0	Majority
2006	IN	46.4	49.0	Minority

Source: Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections (Washington D.C.: CQ Press, 2010).

the DNC engaged in high levels of publicity activity during the first two years of the Clinton administration, when the Democratic Party was still the national majority party. On the other hand, both the DNC and RNC showed a lack of publicity activity at times when the theory predicted an opposite response. In part, these exceptions were affected by specific external constraints that limited the committees' effectiveness. However, the cases also suggest that the introduction of longer presidential primary campaigns in the 1980s undermined the committees' publicity role: with presidential candidates hawking the spotlight, even national committees of out-parties now face a shorter time-period in which they can attempt to shape their party's public image.

I. The Democratic National Committee, 1981-2008

The DNC's activities during the period 1981-2008 were framed by concerns among leaders within the party regarding its ability to produce consistent majority coalitions in elections. Indeed, throughout this period, the Democratic Party faced major electoral defeats in presidential elections (in 1980, 1984, and 1988), as well as the loss of its previously persistent majority in the House (in 1994). Democratic leaders blamed these losses on the party's poor performance among white voters (see Figure 5.1). While Democrats dominated among nonwhites throughout the 1960s, and '70s, white support declined noticeably. While in 1964, 59% of whites voted for Lyndon Johnson,

Table 5.3: *Democratic National Party Status and Theory Predictions, 1981-2008*

	House and Senate	
White House	*Majority*	*Minority*
	1993-1994	1995-2000
In-Party	President controlled decline in branding programs	President controlled investments in branding activities
	1987-1992; 2007-2008	1981-1986; 2001-2006
Out-Party	National committee controlled investments in branding activities	National committee controlled investments in branding activities

Table 5.4: *Republican National Party Status and Theory Predictions, 1981-2008*

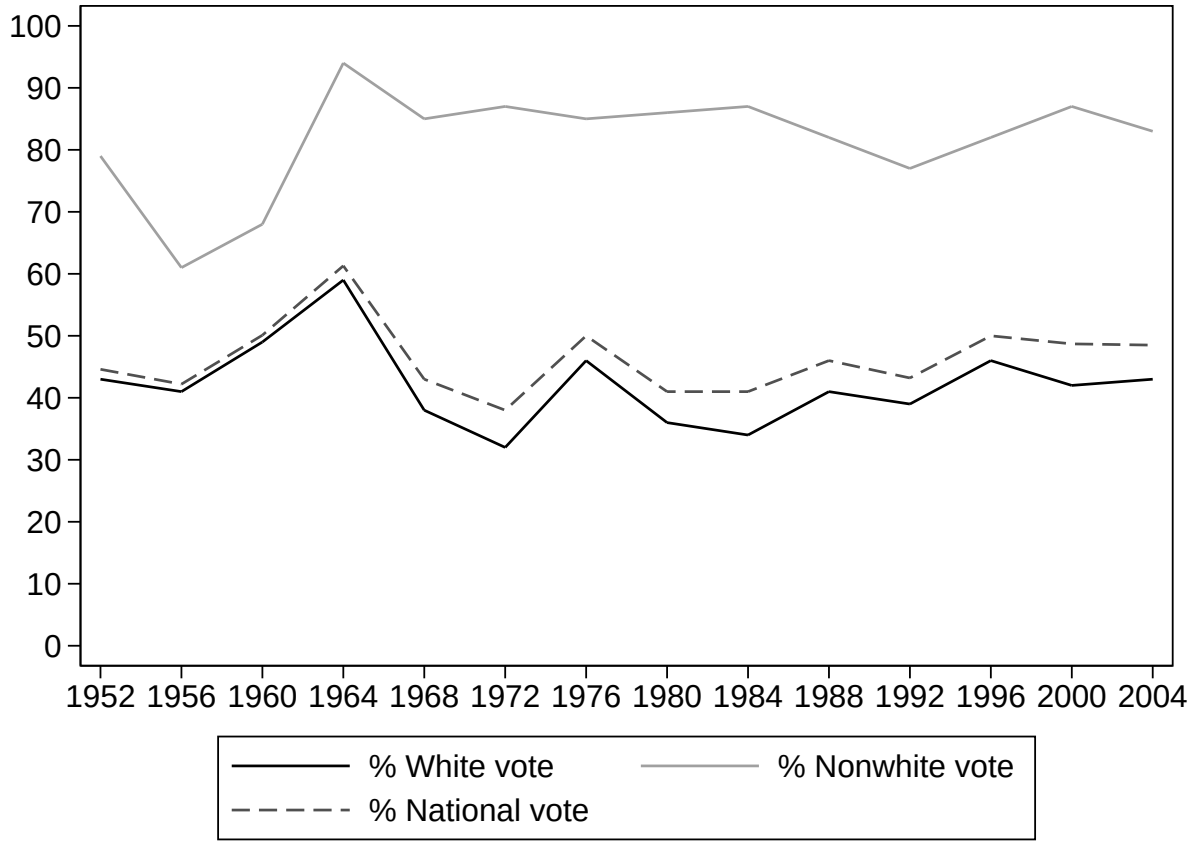
	House and Senate	
White House	*Majority*	*Minority*
	2003-2006	1981-1992; 2001-2002; 2007-2008
In-Party	President controlled decline in branding programs	President controlled investments in branding activities
	1995-2000	1993-1994
Out-Party	National committee controlled investments in branding activities	National committee controlled investments in branding activities

in the 1980 and 1984 elections, Democratic presidential candidates received well below 40% of white support. Democratic leaders, including the party's national committee chairs, thus assessed that the only path back to national majority control would require the party to move to the 'center' of American politics – that is, regain white support. To achieve this, the party would have to abandon the 'identity' politics it embraced in the 1970s, and find a way to reconnect with the white voters that had left the party in the 1980 election.

Seeking the Center, 1981-1992

The 1980 election represented one of the worst performances of the Democratic Party in modern history. Incumbent President Jimmy Carter – who had managed to win the White House against his unelected opponent Gerald Ford in a tight race in 1976 – by 1980 had alienated both a considerable part of his own party, and the electorate at large. After first facing down a major primary challenge at the hands of Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA), Carter thus was defeated in a landslide by Republican candidate Ronald Reagan. The scope of Carter's defeat was considerable: he received just 41% of the popular vote, and managed to win only six states and the District

Figure 5.1: *Support for Democratic Presidential Candidates Among White and Nonwhite Voters, 1952-2004*



Source: "Election Polls - Presidential Vote by Groups," *Gallup*, 2016.

of Columbia.[1] This meant Carter was the first elected president to lose reelection since Herbert Hoover in 1932. Additionally, while Democrats managed to hold on to their majority in the House, Republicans picked up 12 seats in the Senate and, for the first time since 1954, held the majority there.

In the wake of this defeat, Democratic party leaders identified the need for their party to reconfigure its message to voters. In the days after the election, party leaders told the *Wall Street Journal* that the loss would require them to "sit back and try to figure out what the party really stands for."[2] The *Los Angeles Times* reported that "many Democrats believe their basic problem cannot be solved until they go through the tortuous process of finding a new identity for themselves."[3] Harold Ickes, a campaign organizer for Kennedy, noted that "when you say 'I'm a

[1] The six states were Georgia, Hawaii, Maryland, Minnesota, Rhode Island, and West Virginia.
[2] "Licking Wounds," *Wall Street Journal*, November 6, 1980.
[3] "Democrats Seek Formula for Regrouping in 1980s," *Los Angeles Times*, December 22, 1980.

Democrat' now, people don't know what you stand for. [. . .] The Democratic Party has to develop a new core of ideas."[4] Outgoing Vice-President Walter Mondale also shared this perception for a need to reassess the party's positions, noting that "one of the virtues of losing is that it gives you time to think again, and to refresh yourself" and that 1980 provided the party with "a priceless opportunity" to focus on the "central questions" of what the party stood for.[5]

To help reformat the party's brand, party leaders turned to the DNC. Part of the logic in this regard was that Democratic strategists credited Bill Brock's leadership of the RNC in the previous four years as one of the core causes of the GOP's successes in 1980,[6] and thus called for copying "the Republicans by setting down some basic themes and promoting them through a national advertising campaign."[7] A set of party leaders – including Senate minority leader Robert C. Byrd (D-WV), Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill (D-MA), and representatives of the Democratic Governors Association – also called on the DNC to break with what had been a president-centered approach of the Carter era, and increase its support for down-ballot candidates.[8]

That these party leaders turned to the DNC is notable because the committee was hardly in top shape. As Daniel Galvin has argued, Carter had been largely uninterested in his party's national committee, and the DNC declined considerably during his time in office. While the DNC had built up a considerable debt in helping Carter get elected in 1976, the president refused to help raise enough money to fully pay off these debts. Kenneth Curtis, Carter's choice as DNC chair, came into office with plans to continue party building activities but resigned his position after less than a year in office in protest at Carter's lack of support for the committee.[9] In the wake of Curtis' resignation, Carter promised to invest more time and effort in the DNC, but in practice he did not. Carter occasionally relied on the DNC to promote his administration's policies or himself,

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] "Even Democrats agree that GOP Chairman Bill Brock should be given much of the credit for the Republican landslide Tuesday. Never before has a party raised so much money or supplied so much help to its candidates. The Democrats would like to do something approaching that performance." See: "Licking Wounds," *Wall Street Journal*. See also: Philip A. Klinkner, *The Losing Parties: Out-Party National Committees, 1956-1993* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994) 157.

[7] Additionally, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-NY) called for the party to follow the RNC's example of *Commonsense* and publish its own journal of opinion. See: "In Era of Permanent Campaign, Parties Look to 1982," *New York Times*, January 26, 1981.

[8] See: "Byrd Faults Party Panel on Handling of Election," *Washington Post,* November 16, 1980; "2 Democratic Leaders Seek Aid for Local Candidates," *New York Times,* November 22, 1980; "15 Governors Want Shift by Democrats," *New York Times,* December 9, 1980.

[9] Daniel J. Galvin, *Presidential Party Building: Dwight D. Eisenhower to George W. Bush* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010) 208-209.

but the relationship between president and party organization never recovered. Indeed, in 1982, Carter described the DNC as being "of very little help, either to an incumbent President or to the nominee of our party" and as "more of a burden on a nominee than" an "asset to him."[10]

The result was that, by the end of the Carter era, the DNC was radically underfunded and had receded as an organization within the party.[11] DNC chairman John White – a Carter appointee – announced in mid-November 1980 that he would not seek reelection. In the subsequent contest for his replacement, Democratic leaders called for the next chair to be "a good spokesman,"[12] as well as a fund-raiser. Several elected officials who had lost their offices in the 1980 GOP landslide – including Governor Bill Clinton (D-AR), Senator Birch Bayh (D-IN), and Rep. John Brademas (D-IN) – all considered running for chairman.[13] In the end, however, only one major candidate emerged: Charles Manatt, the chairman of the Democratic Party in California and chair of the DNC's national finance council. Manatt campaigned extensively, spending between $48,000 and $72,000 to win the job.[14] This aggressive tactic worked: by the time the DNC met in late February, 1981, Manatt had secured majority support among committee members and his remaining opponents dropped out of the race.

In his acceptance speech, Manatt described the DNC as "out-conceptualized, out-organized, out-televised, out-coordinated, out-financed, and out-worked" in the 1980 election, and promised that under his leadership the committee would help "recapture the initiative in ideas and organization and planning."[15] During the first Reagan term, the DNC attempted to play a role in shaping the Democrats' positions and criticizing the Reagan administration. In doing so, the DNC focused on economic issues and Social Security. For example, in a letter sent to 2 million Democratic voters in September 1981, Manatt attacked the GOP for being captured by "one small fringe group" intended on weakening Social Security.[16] During the 1982 midterms campaign, Manatt argued

[10] "Carter Rips Democratic Panel," *Los Angeles Times*, October 28, 1982. In response, former DNC chair John White dismissed Carter's criticism by noting that he had the DNC's full support: "I can't even get mad, all I can do is laugh about it." Other party leaders criticized Carter's statement by noting that "after he became President, he totally ignored the committee."

[11] The *Wall Street Journal* reported that by 1981 the DNC had "15 IBM Selectric typewriters" in its HQ "but only three 'elements' (those little round typing balls) to operate them." See: "The Democrats Now Search for Solutions," *Wall Street Journal*, July 27, 1981.

[12] "Democrats Seek Party Chairman in Bid for Unity," *New York Times*, November 12, 1980.

[13] Ibid.

[14] "Manatt Working to Win Party Post," *Los Angeles Times*, January 24, 1981.

[15] "Manatt Takes Over as New Democrat Chief," *Los Angeles Times*, February 27, 1980.

[16] "Democrats Assail Reagan in Mailings," *New York Times*, September 3, 1981. After Reagan announced he would

that Democrats "reject the narrow rigid ideology of trickle-down economics, unfair tax cuts and unwise program cuts."[17] This economic argument continued through the midterms: throughout 1982, the DNC attacked Reagan and the GOP for being "unfair to the poor, insensitive to the risk of nuclear war and unconcerned about women's rights."[18] In the summer of 1982 the DNC spent $2 million on TV ads attacking Republican programs for benefiting only the wealthy. One DNC ad featured "Republican tax cuts filling champagne glasses but trickling only a few drops into a coffee mug," and closed with the slogan: "It isn't fair, it's Republican."[19] The DNC also criticized Reagan for breaking his pledges on jobs, trade, investment, and for failing to balance the federal budget.[20] As David Broder wrote in the *Washington Post*, the DNC thus succeeded in "orchestrating an effective Democratic propaganda attack on such issues as Social Security and the recession."[21]

In countering the Reagan administration, Manatt's DNC introduced a variety of new approaches to present this Democratic criticism of the Reagan administration. For example, in response to the 1983 State of the Union, the DNC produced a 30 minute program featuring 15 Democratic legislators including Senator Joe Biden (D-DE), O'Neill, and Byrd. The program presented a series of Democratic alternatives to Reagan's agenda, all aiming to regain support among white middle class voters. In the program, the DNC proposed simplifying tax laws, establishing federal budgets on a pay-as-you-go basis, investing in modernization of industries, rebuilding infrastructure, and being "tough on trade."[22] Another notable example in this regard concerned a 17 hour telethon – described as a 'political Woodstock' – that aired on NBC in 41 states in May 1983. During this show, the DNC aimed to add 300,000 new donors and raise $8 million while simultaneously promoting the party.[23] The broadcast combined appeals by politicians like

drop his proposals to change Social Security later that month, Manatt warned voters that "given a different chance [Reagan] would go right back at Social Security again." See: "Attack by Democratic Chief," *New York Times*, September 25, 1981.

[17] "Democratic Convention May Vote on Nuclear Freeze," *Washington Post*, June 13, 1982.

[18] "Democrats Open Parley by Assailing Reagan," *New York Times*, June 26, 1982. See also: "The Democrats Find Unity and Pride," *New York Times*, June 28, 1982.

[19] Other TV ads in this cycle included a Baltimore factory worker who had appeared in a Reagan ad in 1980 but now blamed Republicans for "unemployment [being] the highest since the Great Depression," while another featured a rampaging elephant in a China shop. See: "Democrats Plan New Set of TV Ads," *New York Times,* July 28, 1982; "Democrats Slate Radio-TV Blitz on GOP Policies," *Los Angeles Times*, September 14, 1982.

[20] "Democrats Charge Reagan Has Broken Promises," *Washington Post*, July 14, 1983.

[21] "Manatt Rebuilding Democrats, Step by Step, for 1984 Battles," *Washington Post*, February 5, 1983.

[22] "Democrats Answer Reagan with Fistful of Solutions," *Los Angeles Times*, January 26, 1983.

[23] See: "Democrats Plan a 17-Hour 'Political Woodstock' on TV to Raise Campaign Funds," *Los Angeles Times*, January

Kennedy with a plethora of celebrities, including actors Jane Fonda, Paul Newman, Gregory Peck, and Jack Lemmon, and musicians Kris Kristofferson, and Waylon Jennings.[24]

The DNC's role was not limited to merely producing material for the party, as the DNC also attempted to determine the party's policies. For example, Manatt reintroduced a new version of the Democratic Advisory Council. Shortly after the 1980 election, the *New York Times* reported that "some leading Democrats" believed the party was in need of "a new kind of instrument, similar to the old Democratic Advisory Committee [sic] of the 1950's, to help develop and publicize [. . .] new ideas about governing and new means of pursuing the traditional Democratic goals [. . .]."[25] In line with this idea, Manatt introduced the National Strategy Council, with the purpose of "[shaping] new ideas for the party."[26] The DNC also tried to prevent (Southern) Democrats in Congress from supporting Reagan's 1981 tax cut proposals. In June, 1981, the executive committee of the DNC unanimously called on House Democrats to oppose Reagan's tax legislation and cutbacks in future Social Security benefits. While the DNC did not propose specific sanctions against House Democrats who did defect the party line, Richard G. Hatcher, the mayor of Gary and vice-chairman of the DNC, warned Democrats that "we are watching very, very closely" and that "those who present themselves to the electorate as Democrats [. . .] are expected to support the principles of the Democratic Party."[27] In 1983, Manatt tried to help determine a party-wide policy on nuclear weapons, announcing that the Democratic Party was strongly in support of arms control. As news reports noted at the time, Manatt's announcement placed "his party and

28, 1983.

[24] The telethon was mostly a bust in terms of financial gains: initially scheduled to cost just $1 million when the project was announced, by the time the telethon aired the budget for the show had ballooned to between $5 and $6 million. Local party leaders warned in the days before the broadcast that the show would never be able to recoup this amount. On top of this, the RNC called on Republicans to call in to the show and keep the lines busy so that Democrats would be unable to get through and donate. While Manatt initially announced that the show made $20 million, in reality only $3 million was raised and only 100,000 new donors added. See: "Democrats Plan a 17-Hour 'Political Woodstock'," *Los Angeles Times*; "Telethon Assailed in New Mexico by Leading Democrats," *Washington Post*, May 21, 1983; "Democratic Head Assails Bid by G.O.P. to Disrupt Telethon," *New York Times*, May 24, 1983; "TV Highlights: Stars Are Out for Democrats," *Chicago Tribune*, May 28, 1983; "Party is Deep in Red: Democrats Must Stump for Dollars," *Wall Street Journal*, July 3, 1984.

[25] "Democrats in Search of Ideas," *New York Times*, January 25, 1980.

[26] "Democrats, Mood Optimistic, Plan Election Moves," *New York Times*, February 7, 1982. Note that the NSC was mostly inactive throughout Manatt's term: in the assessment of DNC executive director Eugene Eidenberg, the goal of the NSC was "to give elected officials a hospitable environment in which broad discussion of public policy, unencumbered by narrow constituency or special interests, or lobbying can occur [. . .]." In practice, the NSC met very infrequently, had limited staff, and was perceived as a low priority within the DNC. See: David E. Price, *Bringing Back the Parties* (Washington D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Inc, 1984) 273-274. See also: Caroline Arden, *Getting the Donkey Out of the Ditch: The Democratic Party in Search of Itself* (New York, NY: Greenwood Press, 1988) 53-60.

[27] "Panel of Democrats Makes Loyalty Plea," *New York Times*, June 5, 1981.

its presidential candidates on record in favor of a mutual and verifiable nuclear freeze," despite the fact that at least one potential Democratic 1984 presidential candidate – Reubin Askew, the former governor of Florida – opposed such a freeze.[28] Finally, the DNC organized a series of meetings across the country to help its platform committee write the 1984 Democratic platform.[29]

Notably, Manatt's actions – and those of his direct successors – were shaped by a shared concern that Democrats had lost support from white blue collar voters, and that the cause of this had been the increased role 'interest groups' – including blacks, feminists, and members of the LGBT community –in Democratic Party politics in the 1970s. DNC chairman White, speaking in February 1981, explained that:

> "The political needs of our traditional supporters – white ethnics, urban dwellers, labor, blue-collar workers, small businessmen – have changed but we haven't changed with them. We must realize this is a new America, with new constituents and a new culture. [...] Blue-collar workers have moved into the same middle-class bracket as white-collar workers and have the same concerns about taxes, the environment, schools. [...] For us to write off that segment of society would be a mistake. We have to capture the center. But that doesn't mean we have to be less compassionate or progressive."[30]

To win back white blue collar voters, the DNC thus attempted to decrease the power of these minority groups, while strengthening the party's ties to unions. In one of his first actions as DNC chair, Manatt successfully increased the representation of union members at the DNC, while decreasing that of black members.[31]

As part of the same process, Manatt also decreased the importance of the party's midterm convention. The potential of a midterm convention had frequently been proposed within both parties since the early 20th century as way for the national party organization to increase its power

[28] "Party Chairman Puts Democrats Behind a Freeze," *Washington Post*, September 21, 1983. For more on the background of Manatt's support for the nuclear freeze see: Thomas Ferguson and Joel Rogers, *Rigth Turn: The Decline of the Democrats and the Future of American Politics* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1986) 152-153.

[29] Stops included New York, Birmingham, AL, Springfield, IL, Cleveland, Houston, and Washington, DC. See: "Democrats Start Shaping Platform," *New York Times*, April 10, 1984.

[30] Cited in Klinkner, *The Losing Parties*, 156.

[31] "Democrats Bicker Over Black Seats," *Los Angeles Times*, February 27, 1980.

by updating the party platform more frequently.[32] After decades of failed attempts at creating a midterm convention, the Democratic Party finally voted to introduce them during the 1972 convention. However, once installed, party leaders quickly grew disillusioned with the concept. During the 1974 convention, organized labor walked out in protest after black and feminist delegates passed their proposed resolutions. In 1978, Kennedy used his speech to attack Carter, and set up his primary challenge for 1980.[33] In the perception of party leaders, the midterm conventions thus did little but increase intra-party conflict. Manatt "cut down" the 1982 midterm convention to a smaller scale, with fewer delegates and less possibility for groups within the party to engage in public debate.[34] The DNC also voted to introduce 'superdelegates' for the 1984 convention. On the advice of a commission led by Governor James Hunt (D-NC), the DNC agreed to decrease the power of interest groups by reserving delegate spots for elected officials. With 548 new delegates added for the 1984 convention, this meant that "members of Congress, governors, mayors, state chairmen, and other officials" would make up slightly more than 14% of the total delegation. As the *Chicago Tribune* reported, this move "reflected the widespread feeling in the party that 13 years of reform had gone too far in the direction of giving power to citizen activists at the expense of elected officials."[35] As Hunt explained, the introduction of superdelegates would "make the convention more representative of the mainstream of the party."[36] While decreasing the role of minority groups in the party, the DNC attempted to improve the party's relations with unions by creating the Democratic Labor Council – an organization combining representatives of the DNC with 20 of the biggest unions.[37]

By most accounts, Manatt was successful in revitalizing the DNC. A year after Manatt's election, the *Washington Post* described the DNC as "awash in Republican-style task forces and

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[32] For example, both Franklin Delano Roosevelt (in the 1920s) and Paul Butler (during the first Eisenhower administration) proposed holding midterm conventions with this purpose. See chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation.

[33] Price, *Bringing Back the Parties*, 276-277.

[34] See: Arden, *Getting the Donkey Out of the Ditch*, 62-63; "Democratic Parley Urged in Early '82," *New York Times*, April 28, 1981; "Democrats Plan Smaller Meeting in '82, Restoring Leaders' Power," *New York Times*.

[35] "Dems Alter Convention Rules," *Chicago Tribune*, January 16, 1982.

[36] "Democrats' Unit Votes to Relax '70s 'Reforms'," *Washington Post*, January 16, 1982.

[37] The organization included Seafarers, Bricklayers, Railway Clerks, Ironworkers, Electrical Workers, Machinists, Operation Engineers, Teachers, and both large government employees' unions. The Teamsters did not participate (see: "Democrats, Labor Formally Become Allies," *Chicago Tribune*, January 6, 1982). Black Democrats interpreted the combination of these actions as direct attacks on their role in the party: California assemblywoman and DNC member Maxine Waters expressed the hope that "Chuck Manatt will stop his one-man effort to disrespect blacks and minorities that he's been carrying on for some time." See: "Blacks Issue Election Warning," *Chicago Tribune*, April 21, 1984; "Black Mayors Criticize Democratic Committee," *Washington Post*, April 21, 1984.

targeting committees, strategy councils and study groups, programs for recruitment and programs for direct mail fundraising and workshops where they tell each other how to put it all together."[38] On the other hand, these reforms do not appear to have produced much success: the 1982 midterms were a moderate success: in the House, Democrats added 26 seats, but in the Senate, Democratic gains were cancelled out by GOP successes and the party remained in the minority. Additionally, the DNC was practically broke by the summer of 1984 – carrying more than $5 million in debt at the start of a presidential election campaign.[39]

In the 1984 presidential election, Democratic candidate Walter Mondale went down in an even bigger defeat than Carter: Mondale won only one state (Minnesota), and merely 40.6% of the popular vote.[40] While Manatt tried to put a positive spin on the outcome – noting that "we've gained in the Senate, kept our majority in the House and will never, ever have to face Ronald Reagan again"[41] – other Democrats predicted a "long and agonizing appraisal of how they can renew their appeal to the white majority in Presidential elections"[42] without alienating the party's support among minority groups. Manatt announced shortly after the election that he would not run for a second term, but warned that the party should continue to work towards presenting a party brand that "appeals to working people and independents, one that will win back white voters in California, New York, and Alabama [. . .]."[43] Other Democrats shared this view. Governor Bruce Babbitt (D-AZ) claimed the problem "of the Democratic Party is not the lack of a messenger but the incoherence of our message."[44] Dick Lodge, chair of the Democratic

[38] "Why Can't Democrats Be More Like Republicans? They're Trying," *Washington Post*, March 23, 1982.

[39] "Party is Deep in Red: Democrats Must Stump for Dollars," *Wall Street Journal*.

[40] Manatt's term ended in a clash between himself and Mondale, the party's new presidential nominee. After winning the nomination, Mondale attempted to replace Monatt with Bert Lance, the Georgia Democratic party chairman, to appeal to Southern voters. However, Monatt refused to resign and a majority of DNC members opposing the selection of Lance (a strong supporter of Carter), Mondale had to back off. As a result, Manatt was retained for the duration of the campaign, and told to focus on raising money for the ticket. Notably, the Manatt-Mondale dust-up represented the first time that a presidential candidate was denied the right to select and replace his party's national committee chair. While presidents would remain in charge of their committees, this meant that moving forward this shift meant that failed presidential candidates no longer had the ability to shape their party's national committees through their choice of chair after their defeats. See: Leon Epstein, *Political Parties in the American Mold* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1986) 225; "Mondale Requests that Manatt Quit Party's Top Post," *New York Times*, July 15, 1984; "Manatt Retained as Party Chairman," *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 1984; "Chairman's Job Said Secure Through Fall," *Washington Post*, July 16, 1984.

[41] "The Democrats: Numb and Dazed," *Washington Post*, November 7, 1984.

[42] "Party Looks Inward for Ways to Regain Majority," *New York Times*, November 8, 1984.

[43] "Manatt Urges TV Training for Nominee," *Los Angeles Times*, November 13, 1984. See also: "Democrats Voice Future Concern," *New York Times*, November 10, 1984; "Democrats Focus on Party Chief," *Washington Post*, November 9, 1984.

[44] "Democrats Need a Message as Much as a Messenger," *Washington Post*, December 26, 1984.

Party in Tennessee, similarly noted that "the problem is the public's perception of the Democrats. The perception is that we are the party that can't say no, that caters to special interests and that does not have the interests of middle America at heart."[45]

The race to replace Manatt came down to two major candidates: Paul Kirk, a former adviser to Kennedy, and Nancy Pelosi, then a member of the DNC for California, with Kirk winning comfortably.[46] As chairman, Kirk continued Manatt's attempts at reaching out to the center, announcing he would help the Democratic Party "earn anew the intellectual and political respect of mainstream Americans."[47] Still, Southern and Western party leaders – including Babbitt, Senator Sam Nunn (D-GE), Representative Richard Gephardt (D-MO), and Governor Charles Robb (D-VA) – united in late February 1985 to announce the creation of the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) – a new organization independent of the DNC, with the goal of pushing the Democratic Party to the center.[48] While the DLC continued to frame a centrist path for Democratic politics well into the Clinton administration, the DNC under Kirk did not cede ground in this process. Upon winning the chairmanship, Kirk announced he would create a new "national policy institute" in the DNC to help "update the party's message to voters."[49] In May 1985, the DNC created the Democratic Policy Commission, under the leadership of Governor Scott Matheson (D-UT). This commission – which also included House Majority Leader Jim Wright (D-TX), Senator Al Gore (D-TN), Governor Richard Riley (D-SC), and Governor Mark White (D-TX) as members – would produce a "definitive set of proposals" on policy issues to "set a tone" for the Democratic Party as a national institution in the 1986 midterms.[50] The commission held public sessions across the country to help shape its final report aimed at helping "convince

[45] "Democrats Chart the Way Back," *Washington Post*, November 19, 1984.

[46] Southern Democrats argued that "a longtime political adviser to Ted Kennedy [...] and a liberal woman from northern California," and, as a result, Southern party leaders had no candidate "to 'take back home' as evidence that the South is not being written off by the Democratic Party." See: "A Sop for Southern Democrats?" *Chicago Tribune*, January 19, 1985.

[47] "Party Elections Angers Jackson," *Chicago Tribune*, February 2, 1985. The January 1985 DNC meeting that elected Kirk was far from unanimous on the direction of the party: some reporters noted that Kirk's selection represented a confirmation of the important relationship between the party and the AFL-CIO, and simultaneously a rejection of the party's black caucus and 1984 presidential candidate Jesse Jackson. However, others described the party as deeply divided and that many Democrats were "deeply ambivalent about its growing dependence on its allies in organized labor." One DNC member was quoted as saying that after "one more meeting like this [...] I'm going home and hang myself." See: "Democrats Voted Like a House Divided," *Washington Post*, February 2, 1985; "No Cinderella Story," *Washington Post*, February 5, 1985; "Democrats Remain in Doldrums," *Washington Post*, February 3, 1985.

[48] "Southern and Western Democrats Launch New Leadership Council," *Washington Post*, March 1, 1985.

[49] "Democrats Pick a Kennedy Ally as Party Chief," *New York Times*, February 2, 1985.

[50] "Democratic Panel is Formed to Lure Voters Back to Party," *New York Times*, May 16, 1985.

disaffected Democrats in the South and the West that the party has broken the grip of such interest groups as organized labor."[51] The commission's report – entitled "New Choices in a Changing America" – was released in September 1986, and focused on providing 'pragmatic' responses at the local level to economic change and domestic economic reforms, while mostly ignoring issues like entitlement programs, or civil rights.[52]

Kirk also continued Manatt's shift away from identity politics. One crucial move in this regard was the DNC withdrawing its recognition of caucuses – minority group organizations within the committee. Even before his selection as DNC chair, Kirk opposed the role caucuses played within the party – blaming the caucuses for "white male Americans [saying], 'Do we have to have a caucus to have a vote in the party?' Enough is enough."[53] During his first appearance on *Meet the Press*, Kirk attacked the caucuses as "political nonsense."[54] In interviews with the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, Kirk described the image of the Democratic Party as "sort of a status quo party, kind of trapped in the past and not fighting to get up with the country as it goes through transition"[55] but that "the proliferation of caucuses makes diversity a weakness. And if caucuses are a reflection of politics by separation, that is a formula for defeat."[56] Thus, in May 1985, the DNC executive committee revoked the official recognition of the party's Black, Women's, Hispanic, Asian-Pacific, Liberal-Progressive, Lesbian and Gay, and Business and Professional caucuses within the DNC.[57] While the groups were still allowed to hold informal meetings at party events – including conventions and DNC meetings – they were no longer seen as part of the

[51] For example, in the Midwest, the commission gathered to discuss the Reagan administration's lack of assistance for farmers. In Boston, the commission discussed the future of the industrial economy, while in New Orleans it gathered to assess Democratic military and foreign policy. Finally, in its Salt Lake City meeting, the commission focused on issues related to "family and community." See: "Panel of Democrats Studies Policy Directions," *New York Times*, May 4, 1986; "Democrats Focus on Farm Crisis in Midwest," *New York Times*, February 16, 1986.

[52] "A Modest First Step for the Democrats," *Washington Post*, July 30, 1986; "Democrats Elect Pragmatism Over Ideology," *Washington Post*, September 23, 1986.

[53] "Democrats Chart the Way Back," *Washington Post*.

[54] "Democratic Party Starts to Get Its Act Together," *Los Angeles Times*, February 7, 1985.

[55] "The Democratic Party: A View from the Top," *New York Times*, February 15, 1985.

[56] "New Democratic Chairman Meets with the Party's Southern Leaders," *Washington Post*, February 17, 1985. Public opinion research conducted by the DNC seemed to confirm that voters shared this concern: a voter-attitude survey in the fall of 1985 found that when Democratic "party leaders talk about fairness, middle-class voters see it as a code word for giveaway. See: Voters Wary of 'Fairness' Theme," *Washington Post*, November 23, 1985.

[57] Note that Klinkner argues that this move was mostly symbolic: by allowing the caucuses to continue meeting during DNC affairs, they were allowed to continue informal use of the committee's staff and resources. Thus, stripping the caucuses of their formal status was much more about affecting the public's perception of the Democratic Party than it was about genuinely reducing their influence on intra-party decision making processes. See: Klinkner, *The Losing Parties*, 188.

party's national organization.[58] Additionally, Kirk also ended the midterm conventions: noting that the cost of holding a 1986 convention – at least $1 million – would be considerable, and that the only real consequence of holding one would be to highlight internal divisions, Kirk concluded that "I just think it's wrong to spend a lot of money on [...] what becomes an exercise in damage control."[59]

In a more surprising move, the DNC also publicly embraced the party's flaws in an attempt to regain support from voters that had abandoned the party for Reagan. In response to the 1985 State of the Union, the DNC produced a program narrated by Bill Clinton. In a statement announcing the program, Kirk wrote that Democrats recognized that "we must earn anew the political respect of mainstream Americans."[60] The program included testimonials from Democratic voters crediting Reagan with improving the economy, and criticizing Mondale's proposal to raise taxes during the 1984 campaign. Clinton's narration presented a view of a new Democratic Party that would "work for a government that will go beyond the prison of past thinking, a government that will work in partnership with the private sector to foster economic growth, a government that will operate its own programs with a commitment to excellence and accountability and independence [from] narrow interests [...]."[61]

In the 1986 midterms, Kirk saw confirmation that his move away from identity politics was paying off: Democrats won five seats in the House, and eight in the Senate, and restored their majority there for the first time since 1980. Kirk believed these gains meant the party had regained its "psychological edge and shattered the thesis that the electorate was undergoing a fundamental

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[58] This move was met with outrage from representatives of minority groups. For example, Rep. Mickey Leland (D-TX), a black member of the DNC, described the decision as "an abomination. The caucuses have been a means for blacks and Hispanics to participate and generate interest in the party, and this is going to stifle them" ("DNC Withdraws Recognition of 7 Caucuses," *Washington Post*, May 18, 1985). Meanwhile, 1984 presidential candidate Jesse Jackson described Kirk's leadership as "a scheme to prove its manhood to whites by showing its capacity to be unkind to blacks" ("Kirk Mollifies Blacks," *Washington Post*, June 30, 1985).

[59] "Kirk to Seek Cancellation of Midterm Convention," *Washington Post*, May 10, 1985; "Democrats Move to Set New Agenda," *New York Times*, June 26, 1985.

[60] "Democrats Defensive in Response," *Washington Post*, February 7, 1985.

[61] Ibid. Later that spring, Kirk himself called on Democrats in Congress to support eliminating Social Security for those who had "no real need for them" and proposed an across the board budget freeze for one year. Both the State of the Union response program and the Kirk's Social Security proposals were not popular with Democrats in Congress: Speaker of the House O'Neill and former DNC chair White both criticized the State of the Union broadcast for attacking Mondale, and Democrats in Congress immediately rejected any changes in the Social Security system. See: "Top Democrat Draws Fire on Social Security," *Los Angeles Times*, April 18, 1985; "Democrats: No Emmy, Please," *New York Times*, February 8, 1985; "Democrats Trying to Contain Damage from Kirk Remark," *New York Times*, April 19. 1985.

change in party allegiance."[62] Still, party strategists remained concerned about the party's ability to compete effectively at the presidential level in 1988. Therefore, they called for the DNC to help produce a set of "goals and themes that would attract enough voters to give [the Democrats] an electoral college majority" and "replace the tarnished liberal image of the past [. . .]."[63]

While the DNC would remain engaged in this regard throughout the rest of Reagan's second term, it faced two notable obstacles. First, the party had considerable financial troubles: in the fall of 1985, the DNC was still paying off campaign debts from the 1980 presidential campaign. With Carter refusing to participate in raising money, the DNC had a bank debt of more than $1 million. Fundraising also continued to underwhelm: in 1985 the party only raised $7 million, the lowest amount it raised since 1981.[64] The second obstacle concerned the early start of presidential primary campaigns. While in the pre-reform era, presidential candidates frequently waited until the start of the presidential election year to announce their campaign, the primaries pushed these start dates back into the preceding year.[65] As presidential candidates began to dominate news coverage, and debate intra-party politics among themselves, the DNC was largely overshadowed. The committee did attempt to manage the primary process. For example, Kirk called for a positive campaign that avoided "self inflicted political wounds, of meaningless straw polls, of campaigns devoting considerable expense and effort to tearing down the opposing Democratic candidates, to trashing our traditional base constituencies, to bashing the party itself and to bickering about nominating rules and internal procedures."[66] Kirk created a Democratic Unity Task Force that assisted in monitoring the tone of the presidential primaries and "advise, admonish, and –if necessary – publicly bring a political pressure to bear upon any candidate, campaign, or

[62] "Oh What the New Year Might Bring," *New York Times,* January 1, 1987.

[63] "Parties Face Challenges as They Gear Up for '88," *Los Angeles Times*, December 26, 1986.

[64] See: "Democratic Party Skirted the Edge of Solvency at Mid-Year," *Washington Post*, August 12, 1985; "DNC's Bank Debts Mount," *Washington Post*, September 30, 1985; "Democrats' Fund-Raising Skids," *Washington Post*, February 18, 1986. The DNC did play a role in attacking the Reagan administration's failures with regard to the Iran-Contra scandal. After the release of the Tower commission's report on Reagan's involvement in the scandal, Kirk commented that the "American people have to make a choice of whether this policy is based on ignorance or deniability. In either case, the conclusion is not a good one." See: "Report Seen as Strengthening Democrats for '88," *New York Times*, February 27, 1987.

[65] In part, this was a response to the 'frontloading' of the primary calendar – that is, starting in 1980 a higher number of convention delegates were divided by states earlier each presidential election year. As a result, candidates also began their campaigns earlier to raise funds, earn support from party leaders, and raise their public profile. See: William G. Mayer and Andrew E. Busch, *The Front-Loading Problem in Presidential Nominations* (Washington D.C.; Brookings Institution Press, 2004); Marty Cohen, David Karol, Hans Noel, John Zaller, *The Party Decides: Presidential Nominations Before and After Reform* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

[66] "Democrats to Clean Up Act for '88," *Chicago Tribune*, March 12, 1987.

constituency group, indulging in negative campaigning."[67] However, with the spotlight firmly on the party's presidential candidates, the DNC's publicity role declined.

One notable exception in this regard concerned the party's 1988 platform. Kirk called for this platform to be short, and devoid of the 'legislative laundry lists' that characterized previous platforms. Instead, the 1988 platform was to be "an open letter to the American people"[68] that would avoid "potentially damaging stances on specific, complex issues such as taxes, abortion or gay rights [...]"[69] – the logic being that a platform lacking specifics would deprive Republicans of easy attacks, and also meant Democrats in the South and West would not have to campaign against their own party's platform.[70] Indeed, the 1988 platform was just 3,500 words long. Additionally, during the final votes in writing the platform, the DNC commission rejected inclusion of specific proposals favored by Jesse Jackson – the runner-up to nominee and governor of Massachusetts, Michael Dukakis – calling for higher taxes on corporations, a freeze in military spending, and a 'no first use' rule for nuclear weapons.[71]

Kirk was largely praised for eliminating the special interest caucuses and the midterm conventions, and for increasing the role of elected officials as spokesmen and strategists for the party. Al From, the CEO of the DLC, argued that "Kirk has moved the center of gravity away from the activists, away from the activist wing of the party and to the governing wing."[72] Still, this shift towards a more centrist Democratic Party did not produce electoral success: while Democrats slightly improved their majority in the Senate, and maintained it in the House, Dukakis went down in another landslide defeat to Reagan's vice-president George H.W. Bush.[73] Thus, while Democrats controlled Congress, the party would face another four years out of the White House.

Kirk announced he would not run for another term as DNC chair in early December, 1986. The early front runner, and eventual winner, in the race to replace him was Ron Brown – a lawyer, Jesse Jackson's manager at the 1988 convention, the first black chairman of either party, and a

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[67] Ibid.
[68] "Top Democrat Asks Platform of Few Words or Promises," *New York Times*, December 4, 1987.
[69] "Kirk Wants Platform to be Brief, Simple," *Los Angeles Times*, December 5, 1987.
[70] "Kirk Wants '88 Platform to be Brief," *Washington Post*, December 5, 1987.
[71] "Democratic Panel Passes Platform," *New York Times*, June 26, 1988.
[72] "Chairman Has Stressed Unity," *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 1988.
[73] Dukakis' performance was somewhat better than that of his direct predecessors – winning ten states (Hawaii, Iowa, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin) and the District of Columbia, and 45.6% of the popular vote.

self-identified "independent, mainstream, progressive" Democrat.[74] Crucially, Brown received considerable support from across the different wings of the party: in addition to an endorsement from Jackson, he also received support from Kennedy, Governor Mario Cuomo (D-NY), Senator Bill Bradley (D-NJ), the AFL-CIO, and Babbitt – who argued that Brown was a suitable candidate because he had the "credibility with the liberal wing to bring the party to the center. [...] It's the Nixon-to-China effect."[75] Still, Brown remained controversial with the Southerners in the party, as well as the DLC. For example, Al From opposed Brown because "we have been trying to move the party in a new direction for four years and that is not the direction of Jesse Jackson and Ted Kennedy."[76] Similarly, Louisiana Democratic Party chair James J. Brady opposed Brown because he believed his election would send "a message to the electorate in this state [...] that we are going away from the middle," and Alabama party chair John Baker argued that "Brown's selection will say that Ted Kennedy, Mario Cuomo and the other northeast liberals are back in control."[77]

Upon his election as chairman, Brown announced that would use the DNC as a "campaign organization, not a bureaucracy" and that in national elections the party would "have to do better, [...] we have to send a different kind of message."[78] Specifically, Brown argued that the Democratic Party needed a 'tougher' image: "We need to say flat out: There is no one tougher than Democrats when it comes to protecting our children from drugs, when it comes to protecting our cities against crime, and when it comes to protecting our nation against aggression and terrorism."[79] Other Democratic leaders shared this belief that the party required a 'tougher' brand. For example, former DNC chair Manatt argued that:

> "If we are to compete for the presidency, Democrats must strengthen their reputation on important "command" issues – foreign policy, the economy, defense and crime. And we must find a way to deflect voter focus from their sometimes emotional

[74] Steven A. Holmes, *Ron Brown: An Uncommon Life* (New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, 2000) 166.

[75] "Jones, Barnes Join Race to Head DNC," *Washington Post*, December 15, 1988. Support for Brown was not unanimous. See also: "Kirk to Quit Top Democratic Party Job," *New York Times*, December 6, 1988; "The Jackson Problem," *Washington Post*, December 11, 1988; "Cuomo and Bradley Back Jackson Aide to Lead Democrats," *New York Times*, December 22, 1988; "Labor Leaders Back Brown for DNC Chair," *Washington Post*, January 12, 1989.

[76] "Front-Runner Ron Brown Raises Doubts for Democrats Choosing New Chairman," *Los Angeles Times*, December 26, 1988

[77] "Brown's DNC Rival Bows Out," *Washington Post*, January 26, 1989.

[78] "Ron Brown: Party's Image is on the Line," *Los Angeles Times*, February 9, 1989.

[79] "New Chairman Tells Democrats to be Tough," *New York Times*, February 16, 1989.

> and misleading aspects toward the traditional Democratic position of unquestioned strength tempered with compassion and common sense."[80]

Brown argued such an updated message was crucial because the Democrats "don't have a real strong identity" and, as a result, "all the garbage, trash and nonsense our opponents throw at us stick."[81]

Much like his predecessors, Brown engaged in a variety of attempts at shaping Democratic Party policies and attempted to produce a centrist party brand that would appeal to voters that had supported Reagan and Bush. In 1990, Brown called on Democrats to support a proposed bill by Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-NY) that would roll back Social Security payroll taxes. Brown described this plan as "a political stroke of genius"[82] because "frankly, it just makes sense for us Democrats to be on the side of cutting payroll taxes for working people [. . .]."[83] Brown also criticized Bush for breaking his 1988 pledge to refuse new taxes, asking "how do you read the president's lips when he speaks out of both sides of his mouth?"[84] In 1991, Brown criticized Bush for his efforts in the war on drugs – arguing that "everyone knows that drug violence in this country is getting worse, not better. Cocaine addiction is up, the murder rate is the highest ever, our prisons and courts are overflowing and overwhelmed"[85] – and that Democrats would fight a 'real' drug war by increasing the number of police officers on the streets, and prosecutors.

Brown faced several hurdles that affected his ability to use the DNC to promote party policies. First, Brown was not immediately successful in improving the DNC's fundraising efforts. Early reports indicated that Brown faced problems in bringing in funding.[86] In 1989, the DNC raised only $9.5 million, while the RNC, RCCC, and RSCC combined raised $80 million.[87] Additionally, as the DNC's first black chairman, Brown faced considerable early problems in navigating the

[80] "The Democrats' Weak-Party Image," *Chicago Tribune*, February 10, 1989.

[81] "Democrats: Let's Get On With It," *Chicago Tribune*, June 19, 1989. Notably, however, Democratic leaders continued to express concerns about the (lack of a clear) party brand throughout most of Brown's time as DNC chair. For example, during a DNC meeting in March 1991, Tony May, the executive director of the Pennsylvania Democratic Party, complained that the party should take "a hard look at how we define ourselves with the people who actually vote for Democratic candidates. Who are the Democrats, and where are the Democrats. How do we identify them and hold them?" ("Democrats Meet to Plan Future," *Chicago Tribune*, March 22, 1991).

[82] "Democrats Warm to Moynihan Plan," *New York Times*, March 24, 1990.

[83] "Moynihan Plan Gets Big Backer," *Chicago Tribune*, March 24, 1990;

[84] "Democratic Leaders Talk Tough on Taxes," *Washington Post*, March 24, 1990.

[85] "Ron Brown Blasts Bush's Durg War Efforts," *New Pittsburgh Courier*, September 28. 1991.

[86] "Democrats Train in Fund Raising, And Many Blame New Chairman," *New York Times*, July 17, 1989.

[87] "Contributions to Democrats Lagging," *New York Times*, February 7, 1990.

troubled relationship between black and white Democratic leaders. For example, in March 1989, Brown endorsed Richard M. Daley and campaigned with him publicly, despite the fact that Jackson supported black independent candidate Timothy C. Evans. Gus Savage (D-IL), a black member of Congress, criticized Brown for interfering in the election, warning that "when Ron Brown brings his Oreo you-know-what into Chicago, I'll guarantee I'm going to help organize a reception party for him at the airport and to follow him all the way to some white hotel to denounce his coming in [to Chicago]."[88] Jackson, meanwhile, argued Brown's visit to Chicago was "not to garner votes for Daley" but "a litmus test for his unconditional loyalty to the party."[89] At the same time, the DLC began to openly challenge the DNC's status as the national Democratic Party's organization. In 1990 the DLC announced it would add new chapters in Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, and Texas.[90] During a DLC meeting in May 1991, Clinton argued that the organization would soon be strong enough to supplant the DNC as the focus of Democratic Party organizational activity – noting that he'd "like [the DLC] to be what people think of when they think of the Democratic National Committee"[91] – and that the DLC would "define a new middle ground of Democratic thinking on which someone can run for president and be elected."[92]

The Gulf War also produced a (temporary) rise in Bush's popularity and focused attention away from the economic issues the DNC aimed to promote. As a result, Democrats were concerned that Bush's 1992 reelection would be guaranteed.[93] Throughout the war, Brown did attempt to use his role as DNC chair to both support the military, defend Democrats who had voted against the war, and continue raising economic issues. In January 1991, for example, Brown warned that the war could not distract from the economy because Democrats had to ensure that "the

[88] "For Democrat Brown, Warmth Turns to Chills," *Washington Post*, March 12, 1989. See also: "Democratic Leader, Bowing to Pressure, To Stump in Chicago," *New York Times*, March 14, 1989. Brown and Savage clashed again in 1990 after the latter criticized his (white) primary opponent for accepting contributions from Jewish donors. As a result, Brown decided the DNC would no longer fund Savage's reelection campaign. See: "Democratic Leader Scolds Savage," *Chicago Tribune*, March 25, 1990; "Ron Brown Cuts Funds From Savage Campaign," *New Pittsburgh Courier*, April 7, 1990.

[89] "Jackson Urges Unity to Help Evans," *Chicago Tribune*, March 20, 1989. See also: Holmes, *Ron Brown*, 201-203.

[90] "Moderate Democrats Trying to Grow Grass Roots," *Washington Post*, December 12, 1990.

[91] "'Mainstream' Democratic Group Stakes Claim on Party's Future," *Washington Post*, May 3, 1991.

[92] Notably, Rep. Dick Gephardt (D-MO), who had been one of the founders of the DLC and its first chair, rejected the direction Clinton and From had taken the organization – seeing it as too exclusive of liberals. Meanwhile,. Jesse Jackson described the DLC as trying to 'suburbanize' the Democratic Party. See: Ibid.

[93] Democratic pollster Harrison Hickman concluded that "Saddam Hussein is really becoming [Bush's] Willie Horton for 1992" ("Bush's War Success Confers an Aura of Invincibility in '92," *New York Times*, February 27, 1991).

men and women of Operation Desert Storm, who by the way are overwhelmingly the sons and daughters of the working class, come home to a nation that is unequivocally dedicated to meeting their needs."[94] At the same time, Brown criticized the RNC after it attacked Democratic doves, accusing the GOP of "playing politics when millions are now wearing gas masks and facing death in bunkers and in bomb shelters."

Bush's popularity during the Gulf War did result in a slower start to the 1992 primary campaign, and helped Brown in increasing the role of the DNC in planning the 1992 general election campaign. In September 1991, Brown announced the DNC would raise money, plot strategy, and conduct research for the general election, while allowing presidential primary candidates to fight among themselves. Once a candidate was officially nominated, the DNC would allow their campaign organization to be integrated in the national party organization. In this regard, Brown particularly attempted to target Midwestern and Southern border states, while also reviving efforts to mobilize black voters – who had been largely ignored in the 1988 campaign.[95] As it became clear in 1992 that Clinton was going to be the nominee, Brown began to work on identifying a way to 'sell' him to Democratic voters. Additionally, the DNC engaged in a variety of activities to attack the Bush-Quayle ticket – including spending considerable funds on finding information linking Bush to the scandals related to the savings and loan industry, and sponsoring a contest for aspiring commercial makers for the best 30-second attack ad against Bush.[96]

The Brown era of the DNC represented a mixed bag in terms of party publicity. On the one hand, the DNC did not produce major new initiatives: there appears to be no indication that the DNC invested in new publicity programs, or in new party organizations to help set party policies. On the other hand, under Brown's chairmanship, the Democratic Party was more successful than it had been in previous years: in the 1990 midterms, Democrats strengthened their majorities in both House and Senate. In 1992, the party finally ended its presidential losing streak: assisted at least in part by third party candidate Ross Perot, Bill Clinton achieved an easy electoral college

[94] "Liberals in Search of Values Run Into Discord over War," *New York Times*, January 27, 1991. After the end of the war, Brown proclaimed that "our victory in the Persian Gulf was not a Republican victory, not a Democratic victory, but a victory for all America. We silenced the Scud missiles that were aimed at Israel and Saudi Arabia, now [...] it is time to silence the Scud missiles of crime and drugs, of inadequate housing, education, health care" ("Democrats Battle GOP War Gains," *Los Angeles Times*, March 3, 1991).

[95] "Democrats Plan Talks on '92 Race," *New York Times*, May 18, 1991; "DNC Poised to Play Role in Late-Starting Campaign," *Washington Post*, September 23, 1991.

[96] "Democrats Use Experts to Seek Data on Bush," *New York Times*, July 2, 1992; "Democrats Hire Firms to Investigate Bush," *Washington Post*, July 2, 1992; "Contest Set by Democrats," *New York Times*, May 18, 1992.

victory. Crucially, Clinton managed to win not just in the Northeast and West, but also won several Southern and Midwestern states.[97] With solid Democratic majorities in both House and Senate, Clinton's victory meant the party returned to national majority status for the first time since 1980. Commentators credited Brown for this victory by helping shape the party's criticism of Bush's economic record. For example, the *Washington Post* argued that Brown changed the DNC "from a political backwater into a significant force in developing party and presidential campaign strategy."[98] Similarly, *Chicago Tribune* columnist Steve Daley noted that

> "back in the days when Bush was setting records for public approval, Brown was the guy on television telling giggling interrogators that, yes, a Democrat could win in 1992. [...] Brown kept pushing the idea that if Democrats could stop the ideological self-immolation they performed every four years, they might be able to organize themselves to beat the Republican ticket. [...] He raised money, calmed fears and talked about the issues and beliefs that united Democrats."[99]

Back in the White House: The DNC and the Clinton Era, 1993-2000

As his first DNC chair, Clinton selected David Wilhelm, his campaign manager and a veteran of Chicago politics. Wilhelm began his tenure as chair optimistic that the DNC would play a considerable role under Clinton. Wilhelm himself was to be a regular participant in daily White House briefings, and Clinton administration officials promised the relationship between the administration and the committee would be considerably tighter than they had been under Carter.[100] Wilhelm predicted that "the [DNC] will emerge as the principal vehicle for how President Clinton can communicate outside the Beltway."[101]

Notably, while the Democrats had unified control of government for the first two years of the Clinton era, Democratic strategists expressed concerns about the strength of Clinton's victory.

[97] Clinton won Arkansas (his home state), Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Tennessee (his running mate, Al Gore's home state), and West Virginia.

[98] "Clinton Team Assumes Control of DNC Today," *Washington Post*, January 21, 1993.

[99] "Some Advice for Next GOP Chairman: Learn from Democrats' Ron Brown," *Chicago Tribune*, November 15, 1992. Despite Clinton's own opposition to the DNC as chair of the DLC, and despite the early concerns of other DLC leaders about Brown's capacity to move the party to the center, the new president at least to some extent appeared to agree with this assessment: as a reward for his service as DNC chair, Clinton appointed Brown Secretary of Commerce.

[100] "Chicago Political Veteran to Lead Democratic Party," *Chicago Tribune*, January 15, 1993; "Clinton Taps Wilhelm as Party Chief," *Washington Post*, January 15, 1993.

[101] "New Party Chairman Is Planning to Look Beyond Washington," *New York Times*, January 16, 1993.

Stanley Greenberg, Clinton's pollster in the 1992 election, in a presentation to the DNC in January 1993, warned that Clinton's victory was a result of intra-party disagreement within the GOP and that "we need to understand that the Republican coalition collapsed in 1992, but we have not yet formed a new Democratic coalition."[102] From this perspective, the three-way presidential victory of 1992 was similar to that of Woodrow Wilson in 1912, and Richard Nixon in 1968 – that is, Democratic leaders did not view their 1992 presidential election victory as a confirmation of their national majority status. As Greenberg argued, "this election was not in any way a realigning election. [...] We have [...] to bring [Ross Perot supporters] over. I believe that is our primary task if we are going to turn this election from a Republican collapse into a genuine Democratic victory."[103]

In this spirit, Wilhelm began his chairmanship with a set of major party branding initiatives. For one, the DNC announced a "national membership drive" to get individual voters to sign up as DNC supporters for $15 a year – the same amount Perot charged for membership to his organization United We Stand America.[104] As Paul Herrnson has noted, Clinton and Wilhelm also "created a new public relations function" for the DNC intended to "generate public support for Clinton and his policies to help the president convince members of Congress to vote for his legislation."[105] In February 1992, Wilhelm announced a new grassroots initiative intended to reach out to millions of voters directly. Wilhelm explained in an interview with the *Los Angeles Times* that

> "we're in the process of contacting a million people. We have sent out a half-million pieces of mail; we're on the phones to another half million. We're encouraging them to get engaged in the debate, call their congresspeople [sic], call radio talk shows, write letters to the editor, to help make a reality what the campaign was all about – which was fundamentally economic change."[106]

The DNC also played a major role in promoting the Clinton administration's healthcare

[102] "Democrats Get a New Chairman, and a Warning," *New York Times*, January 22, 1993.
[103] "New Democratic Party Chief Named," *Los Angeles Times*, January 22, 1993.
[104] "Democrats Plan Perot-Style Membership Drive," *Washington Post*, May 25, 1993.
[105] Paul S. Herrnson, "Bill Clinton as a Party Leader: The First Term," in Paul S. Herrnson and Dilys M. Hill (eds), *The Clinton Presidency: The First Term, 1992-96* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1999) 71.
[106] "David Wilhelm: Charting a Permanent Campaign for a Changing Democratic Party," *Los Angeles Times*, March 8, 1993.

plan.[107] The committee hired a campaign manager with the specific purpose of organizing grassroots support for health care reform.[108] However, the roll-out of this program faced major problems: the DNC had to abandon an initial attempt to use a foundation to raise money from "corporations, unions, and others" to pay for a PR campaign on behalf of health care reform ended prematurely after questions were raised about the bi-partisan nature of the organization. The committee ended the foundation and brought the program back into its own organization in June 1993. Subsequently, the DNC had to cancel a "National Health Care Awareness Day" in September due to a lack of planning, and media competition from the signing of the peace treaty between Israel and the PLO. As the legislative process continued into the spring of 1994, the DNC abandoned attempts at major grassroots campaigns entirely.[109] Still, the DNC did support Clinton's push for healthcare reform by airing television ads targeting senior citizens – including a spoof of the infamous 'Harry and Louise' ad put forward by insurance companies –, organizing events – such as parties across the country for people to gather at and watch Clinton's major speech on health care in late September 1993 – and defend the plan from criticism of opponents – including insurance companies.[110]

While the DNC was more active in the 1993-1994 period than the branding theory predicts, its support for Clinton and his policies was entirely in line with expectations regarding behavior by in-party national committees. Indeed, House Democrats criticized the DNC for failing to provide them with political cover during the debate over Clinton's economic plan in 1993, which narrowly passed in both the House and Senate.[111] Senate Democrats criticized the DNC's TV advertisements promoting the health care law: for example, Senator Richard H. Bryan (D-NV) complained that the ads sent the wrong message and that "those of us who know our states"

[107] See: Galvin, *Presidential Party Building*, 226-229.

[108] "David Wilhelm," *Los Angeles Times*; "DNC-Backed Lobby to Push Health Plan," *Washington Post*, June 3, 1993.

[109] See: "DNC Dissolves Private Fund-Raising Project," *Los Angeles Times*, June 4, 1993; "DNC Drops Health Plan Lobby Fund," *Washington Post*, June 4, 1993; "DNC Cancels Event Set to Push Health Reform," *Washington Post*, September 14, 1993; "DNC Ready to Give Up Grass-Roots Health Lobby in Favor of Media Blitz," *Washington Post*, March 19, 1994.

[110] "The Health Care Speech, Closely Watched," *Washington Post*, September 23, 1993; "Democratic Party Chief Scorches Clinton Agenda's Foes," *Los Angeles Times*, October 10, 1993; "Democrats' Ad for Health-Care Reform Distorts Governor's Position, GOP Says," *Wall Street Journal*, February 16, 1994; "Getting Even With Harry and Louise," *New York Times*, July 10, 1994. See also: Jacob Hacker, *The Road to Nowhere: The Genesis of President Clinton's Plan for Health Security* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997) 139.

[111] "House Democrats Tell Wilhelm DNC is 'Inept'," *Washington Post*, June 23, 1993. Notably, the DNC also lobbied Democrats in Congress directly to help pass this economic plan: DNC staff met with vulnerable members of the House and Senate to assure support for their 1994 re-election races in exchange for their vote for Clinton's economic plan. See: Bob Woodward, *The Agenda* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1994) 119.

should "have been consulted in what was the most effective way to craft a message," while Senator Bob Kerrey (D-NE) urged "all my friends for the moment not to give money to the Democratic National Committee."[112] Thus, as the *New York Times* concluded, the DNC "devoted itself, and millions of dollars, to fighting for Mr. Clinton's programs rather than promoting the prospects of individual Democrats [. . .]."[113] Harold Ickes, Clinton's Deputy Chief of Staff, confirmed the power the Clinton White House had over the DNC, describing Wilhelm as "the president's agent."[114] For the 1994 midterms, the DNC's strategy was to attack the religious right, while condemning the GOP for attempting to obstruct Democratic reforms. Additionally, the DNC spent $2 million on advertisements attacking the GOP's "Contract With America."[115]

Despite all this, the 1994 midterms were a major disappointment for the Democratic Party. With major losses in the House (54 seats) and Senate (nine seats), Republicans gained majorities in both, and the Democratic Party was left holding only the White House. In Wilhelm's assessment, the results were disastrous: "Call it what you want: an earthquake, a tidal wave, a blowout. We got our butts kicked."[116] Notably, press assessments at the time placed at least part of the blame for the Democrats' collapse on the DNC's investment in providing publicity support for the Clinton administration. For example, David Broder, writing in the *Washington Post*, argued that the DNC's focus on defending Clinton meant the organization "diverted much of its focus to support efforts – mainly misguided TV campaigns masterminded by White House consultants – for the embattled Clinton legislative program. The fundamentals of precinct-level organizing were given short shrift."[117] Wilhelm had announced he would leave the DNC after the midterms in September.[118] In January 1995, Clinton announced he had selected Senator Chris Dodd (D-CT) and Donald Fowler, a veteran DNC member from South Carolina, to lead the DNC together.

[112] "New DNC Health Ads Wind Up Offending Senate Democrats," *Washington Post*, July 15, 1994.
[113] "Clinton Moving to Avoid Losses in '94 Elections," *New York Times*, February 22, 1994.
[114] Ickes also joked that "if we asked [Wilhelm] to drop himself off a bridge, he might raise a modest objection. At least he might ask for a low bridge." See: "Man On a Tightrope," *Washington Post*, April 20, 1994.
[115] "Democrats Struggle to Build Damage-Control Strategy for Fall Elections," *Washington Post*, June 26, 1994; "Democrats' New Ads Attack G.O.P. 'Contract,'" *New York Times*, October 13, 1994.
[116] "Democrats Name Director Acting Party Chairman," *Washington Post*, November 15, 1994.
[117] "The Road Back," *Wahsington Post*, November 20, 1994.
[118] Wilhelm's immediate replacement, interim chair Debra DeLee, was somewhat controversial in her short time as DNC chair; while it was clear she would not become permanent chair, she nonetheless moved into Wilhelm's old office, updated DNC stationary identifying her as char, and placed her picture on the wall of the DNC building. See: "Rolling Out the National Debt for Middle America," *Washington Post*, September 1, 1994; "An Interim Chairwoman For Democratic Party," *New York Times*, November 14, 1994; "Portraits of Power? Up in Arms at DNC," *Washington Post*, December 2, 1994.

In this set-up, Dodd promoted the party while remaining in the Senate, and Fowler dealt with day-to-day affairs at the party's HQ.[119]

Dodd took his role as spokesman for the party seriously, in part because he believed the midterm defeats were "due to the fact that we did a miserable job as a party in letting people know exactly what had been done."[120] While Dodd came out swinging in his media appearances against Republicans – including the new Speaker of the House, Newt Gingerich – the DNC in the 1995-1996 period still focused predominantly on supporting Clinton.[121] As early as March 1995, the DNC sent out a mailer advocating for Clinton's reelection. More importantly, between August 1995 and January 1996, the DNC spent more than $15 million on ads backing Clinton's reelection campaign, and scheduled another $10 million for the spring and summer of 1996. The ads were part of a scheme designed by Clinton's pollster Dick Morris – who was put on the DNC payroll in 1995 –aired in more than 20 states, and focused on a variety of policy issues, including Medicare, education, and the environment.[122] Other ads presented Clinton as a crime fighter, or as a supporter of tax cuts, welfare reform, and a balanced budget. Crucially, while the DNC paid for the ads, Clinton himself was directly involved in their creation and personally went through possible 30-second ads, "offered suggestions and even edited some of the scripts."[123]

After the successful reelection of Clinton (which still left Democrats in the minority in both House and Senate), Dodd announced his retirement as DNC chair.[124] While the DNC invested considerably in helping keep Clinton in the White House, the way it went about funding those activities would come to haunt it during Clinton's second term.[125] To pay for the TV ads that supported Clinton in 1995, the DNC engaged in major fundraising operations in which the

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[119] "Aides Say Clinton Will Choose Dodd to Lead Democrats," *New York Times*, January 10, 1995; "Clinton Seeks to Have Dodd, Fowler Share Party's Chairmanship," *Wall Street Journal*, January 10, 1995. This set-up had previously been introduced in the RNC during the Reagan presidency, as discussed later in this chapter.

[120] "New Democratic Chief Declares that Party Will Recoup," *New York Times*, January 20, 1995.

[121] Note that Dodd was not always supportive of Clinton's policies. For example, in August 1996, in his role as senator, Dodd criticized Clinton's welfare reform bill as punishing sick children. "Dodd is Going on the Offensive Against the G.O.P. Majority," *New York Times*, January 23, 1995; "Life of the Party: As DNC Chief, Onetime Bad Boy Chris Dodd Rises to the Occasion," *Washington Post*, August 22, 1996.

[122] "Dick Morris, Burning His Bridges," *Washington Post*, February 3, 1999; "Democrats Aim Straight at Heart on Reelection," *Washington Post*, March 29, 1995; "2 Political parties Turn to Airwaves for Medicare Debate," *New York Times*, August 16, 1995; "Attacking the G.O.P.'s Plan for Medicare," *New York Times*, November 4, 1995; "Party Spends $15 Million On Ads to Burnish Clinton," *Washington Post*, February 7, 1996.

[123] Bob Woodward, *The Choice* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1996) 236, 344.

[124] "Clinton's Pick Declines Offer of Party Job," *New York Times*, December 31, 1996.

[125] Herrnson, "Bill Clinton as a Party Leader," 73.

party ended up accepting considerable donations from non-citizens.[126] In October, 1996 the Dole campaign first suggested the DNC might have broken the law in accepting a major donation from an Indonesian couple. Further reports indicated that the DNC received considerable funds from non-US citizen Asian donors, some of which were collected during a fundraiser at a Buddhist temple in California at which Vice-President Gore had been present.[127] The DNC fired its finance vice chairman John Huang who was held responsible for these events, and began returning suspect donations.[128]

As investigations into the DNC's finances continued, Clinton named another duo-team to lead the committee: Governor Roy Romer (D-CO) and Steve Grossman. Romer and Grossman identified "restoring the DNC's public image, and instilling a heightened appreciation for fund-raising laws"[129] within the committee as their core priority. As part of this process, Clinton publicly admitted that the DNC made mistakes in the fundraising efforts of the 1996 campaign, and the committee announced it would no longer accept donations from foreign nationals and American subsidiaries of foreign corporations, nor donations over $100,000. However, the scandal continued throughout 1997 and 1998 – and included revelations that the DNC had accepted donations from impoverished Native American tribes in exchange for participation in a White House lunch. Additionally, the DNC's decision to transfer donations intended for the committee to Clinton's presidential campaign meant several of the party's most reliable donors inadvertently gave more to Clinton's reelection effort than they were legally allowed to.[130] By summer 1998, a Justice Department probe into the matter concluded that there was little evidence of criminal wrongdoing at either the DNC or the White House. Still, the return of donations, legal cost, and

[126] The DNC was projected to have a deficit of $7 million unless Bill and Hillary Clinton, and Al Gore engaged in considerable fundraising activities. Gore in particular was active in this regard, while Clinton refused to make direct requests for contributions. See: "Gore Was 'Solicitor-in-Chief' in '96 Reelection Campaign," *Washington Post*, March 2, 1997; "Clinton Told of Need to Make Fund-Raising Phone Calls in '95," *Washington Post*, March 29, 1997.

[127] The Buddhist temple fundraiser was also controversial because as a religious institution it was tax exempt.

[128] "Dole Aide Suggests 'Potentially Criminal Actions' in DNC Gift," *Washington Post*, October 15, 1996; "DNC Donor Controversy Widens as Republicans Step Up Criticism," *Washington Post*, October 18, 1996; "Democrats Relieve Top Fund-Raiser," *Washington Post*, October 19, 1996; "DNC Acknowledges Inadequate Checks on Donors," *Washington Post*, November 2, 1996; "DNC Returns More Big Donations With Foreign Ties," *Washington Post*, November 8, 1996.

[129] "Gov. Romer is Tapped for DNC," *Washington Post*, January 14, 1997.

[130] The Native American tribes donated in the hope of allowing their leaders to talk with Clinton in the hope of getting 7,500 acres of tribal land seized by the federal government a century earlier returned. It was not. See: "DNC Bars Foreign Donations," *Washington Post*, January 22, 1997; "'Mistakes Were Made,' Clinton Says of Gifts," *Washington Post*, January 29, 1997; "Chinese Embassy Found to Direct Money to Democrats, Paper Says," *New York Times*, February 13, 1997; "A Tribal Shakedown," *New York Times*, August 13, 1997; "$2 Million Diverted by Party to Candidates, Records Say," *New York Times*, September 10, 1997.

the DNC's own ban on major donations meant that by spring of 1997, the committee had debts of over $14 million, while facing another $4 million in legal bills, while returning $2.8 million to foreign donors. As a result, the DNC found itself in the peculiar situation of having to raise money among 'lawful' donors to be able to repay its 'unlawful' ones.[131]

The committee's financial worries limited its ability to engage in publicity activities: its debts meant the DNC was "forced to consider cutting programs and planned staff growth."[132] Indeed, the DNC "was so preoccupied with trying to clear" its debt that in the 1997 off-year gubernatorial elections in New Jersey and Virginia – both of which resulted in Republican victories – it did "far less than it did four years ago to benefit candidates [...]."[133] However, in early 1998, as the scandal around Clinton's affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky began to receive major media attention, the DNC did step in to defend the embattled president by creating an office of damage control to distribute new information to media surrogates. The DNC also urged Democratic voters to express their support for Clinton by calling into talk radio stations, or even in "coffee break conversations at the office." Romer and Grossman stressed that Clinton "is doing a great job [...] and the American people want him to go on doing the job they elected him to do. *Do not sit back and let the President's opponents do all the talking* [italics in original]."[134]

After the 1998 midterms – in which Democrats managed to win five seats in the House - Grossman resigned as DNC chairman at the end of 1998 due to health issues in his family.[135] In January 1999, Clinton selected Indiana Democratic Party chair Joseph Andrew as the new DNC chairman. With the presidential primaries in full swing, Andrew mostly focused on attacking the likely Republican nominee, George W. Bush. For example, in June 1999, Andrew followed Bush around campaign appearances in New Hampshire and Iowa to attack him as an extremist in moderate's clothing.[136] In September 1999, Romer stepped down and was replaced with

[131] "Democratic Party Unable to Pay Debts from Last Year's Elections," *New York Times*, March 27, 1997; "Owing $14 Million, DNC Can't Refund $1.5 Million In Questionable Gifts," *Washington Post*, April 13, 1997; "Democrats Return $1.4 Million in Questionable Donations," *Washington Post*, June 28, 1997; "Campaign-Finance Probe Finds Little Evidence of Criminal Wrongdoing at DNC, White House," *Wall Street Journal*, June 26, 1998.

[132] "DNC Considers Plans to Contain Financial Crisis," *Washington Post*, May 19, 1997.

[133] At the end of 1997 the DNC ended its self-imposed ban on donations over $100,000 again and from legal aliens. See: "Democrats' Big Debt Hurts Efforts in 3 Races," *New York Times*, October 30, 1997; "DNC Lifts Cap on $100,000 Donations," *Washington Post*, November 22, 1997; "DNC Dumps Ban on Donations From Legal Aliens," *Washington Post*, January 11, 1998.

[134] "Democratic Chiefs Urge Faithful to Go On Offense For Clinton," *New York Times*, February 20, 1998.

[135] "Democratic Chairman Grossman to Step Down," *Washington Post*, December 3, 1998.

[136] "Bush Sets No Litmus Test for Judges," *Washington Post*, June 15, 1999.

Philadelphia Mayor Ed Rendell, who predominantly focused on raising money. Clinton's selection of Rendell was nonetheless notable because he had already endorsed Gore: combined with Andrew (who had been recruited by Gore), Finance Chair Beth Dozoretz (who had donated to Gore), and Senior Adviser Pat Ewing (who had previously been Gore's communication director), this meant that the DNC was almost exclusively run by political strategists with direct connections to the vice-president.[137]

After Gore won the Democratic nomination in early 2000, the DNC began aggressively promoting their party's presidential candidate through a series of campaign ads. The Gore campaign proposed that the DNC spend $30 million dollars between May and August to prop Gore up and introduce the public to his personal history. One early DNC ad buy of $2 million focused on Gore's positions on the cost of prescription drugs while another ad focused on Gore's support for a constitutional amendment protecting the rights of crime victims. The DNC also relied on the internet for the first time: while the DNC had been the first of either American political parties to create a website in 1995, during the 2000 campaign the DNC began a campaign to urge Democratic voters to become "e-precinct leaders" by sending e-mails regarding the campaign to at least 10 friends.[138]

The DNC versus George W. Bush, 2001-2008

Al Gore's contested loss to George W. Bush in the electoral college, and the ongoing Republican hold on the House of Representatives meant that Democrats came out of the 2000 election as the clear minority party.[139] Shortly after Gore's concession, a clear favorite emerged to be the next DNC chair: Terry McAuliffe, a top fundraiser for Clinton throughout the 1990s. McAuliffe received the support of Clinton, Gore, and the party's Congressional leadership and, despite a last

[137] Note that Rendell 'un-endorsed' Gore after he became DNC chair, and Dozoretz resigned as the DNC's chief fundraiser in October, 1999. See: "Democrats' New Chairman is Sign of Al Gore's Power," *New York Times*, September 24, 1999; "DNC's Upper Echelon is Dominated by Gore Supporters," *Wall Street Journal*, September 27, 1999; "Party Chief Changes Mind on Gore," *New York Times*, September 28, 1999; "Top Democratic Fund-Raiser Resigns," *New York Times*, October 5, 1999.

[138] "Crossing the Finish Line: The Democrats," *Washington Post*, July 23, 1995; "Gore Aides Seek Huge Party TV Ad Buy," *Washington Post*, May 23, 2000; "Gore as Defender of Drug Benefits for Elderly," *New York Times*, June 8, 2000; "NC Issue Spot Touts Gore's Medicare Plan," *Washington Post*, June 8, 2000; "Gore Backs an Amendment for Crime Victims' Rights," *New York Times*, July 13, 2000; "Campaign Briefing: The Internet," *New York Times*, September 16, 2000.

[139] A 50-50 split in the Senate did mean the party shared power with the Republicans there, until Senator Jim Jeffords (R-VT) left the GOP in March 2001, providing Democrats with a majority there until the 2002 midterms.

minute challenge by former Atlanta mayor Maynard H. Jackson, won the chairmanship easily.[140] Despite the broad support McAuliffe enjoyed among party leaders, in the assessment of the *New York Times*, he was a symbol of "the wretched excess of the Clinton years" and his election raised questions regarding the extent to which McAuliffe could function as "a principal party spokesman during the presidency of George W. Bush."[141] An early example of the Clinton-McAuliffe problem was a February 2001 revelation that McAuliffe had lobbied Clinton for a pardon on behalf of James H. Lake – convicted for providing illegal campaign contributions – in the last days of the Clinton presidency. Lake received his pardon.[142]

While fundraising was McAuliffe's specialty, the new chair also expressed his intent to expand the DNC's publicity role for the party. Immediately after his election, McAuliffe stated that "without a Democratic president and White House podium, we must change how the D.N.C. does business" and announced that with regards to publicity he would follow the RNC's example from the Clinton era: "The Republicans [expanded the RNC's PR apparatus] from the day Bill Clinton took office [...] George Bush is about to taste that same medicine."[143] The extent to which the DNC actually delivered on this promise was mixed, due to a variety of factors. One distraction was a last-minute dash for fundraising before the passage of new campaign finance laws. With both parties facing the possibility that new restrictions would constrain their ability to raise money moving forward, both the DNC and RNC prioritized fundraising in 2001 and 2002.[144] In this regard the DNC was highly successful: by July 2001, the party had raised more than $23 million –a party record in a non-election year. In March 2002, the day after the Senate voted to abolish soft money contributions, the DNC announced it had received the highest known donation in the history of American politics: a $7 million check from billionaire Haim Saban.[145] It should be noted, however, that McAuliffe's attention to fundraising was partly necessary to fund improvements in the DNC's publicity apparatus. Indeed, McAuliffe used a considerable part of

[140] "Clinton Confidant Gains Support to Lead the DNC," *New York Times*, December 16, 2000; "Clinton Ally Set to Lead DNC," *Washington Post*, December 16, 2000; "Black Democrats to Contest Party Leadership," *New York Times*, December 22, 2000

[141] "Democrats Shift Into Reverse," *New York Times*, February 2, 2001.

[142] "Access Proved Vital in Last-Minute Race for Clinton pardons," *New York Times*, February 25, 2001.

[143] "Democrats Choose Close Friend of Clinton to Lead Party," *New York Times*, February 4, 2001.

[144] "Race is Under Way for Campaign Cash Before New Limits," *New York Times*, February 11, 2001.

[145] "Democratic Donations Reach a Record for a Nonelection Year," *New York Times*, July 7, 2001; "Pocketing Soft Money Till Pocket is Sewn Up," *New York Times*, March 4, 2002; "Soft Money Lives: Democrats Take in $12 Million (2 Gifts)," *New York Times*, March 22, 2002.

the money raised in 2001-2002 to build a new party HQ which, at a cost of $32 million, included state of the art television and radio studios.[146] As McAuliffe explained in his autobiography, his perspective was that:

> "You get what you pay for. The Republicans had invested heavily in developing their infrastructure, dating back to Ray Bliss's groundbreaking work with direct mail in the 1960s, and they had been well rewarded for their foresight. [...] We needed to run the DNC like a business and keep in mind a very simple concept called return on investment. The issue was not how much you spent, but what that money bought you."[147]

A second factor that limited the DNC's ability to shape the party's brand were the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent war in Afghanistan. While McAuliffe had been "on TV and in the press every day jabbing Bush with reminders to the country that he had not been elected President"[148] prior to the attacks, after 9/11 Bush's approval ratings skyrocketed and McAuliffe and other Democrats scaled back their criticism of the president. However, McAuliffe did attempt to reignite political debate on Bush's leadership. In preparing for the 2002 midterms, the Democrats focused on domestic policy – such as healthcare, education, and pensions. In a campaign project created by the DNC and Democratic leaders in Congress, the party argued that America's security relied not exclusively on fighting terrorism but also on "a safe retirement benefit, access to affordable prescription drugs, and a reassuring sense that children will be well educated and that the environment will be protected."[149] McAuliffe used domestic policies as a way to attack Bush and the GOP again. In early 2002, McAuliffe described the Enron scandal as a 'metaphor' for the Bush administration and accusing the administration of "cooking the books" on the federal budget in the same way Enron's corporate leadership had.[150] Later that spring, McAuliffe attacked the

[146] "Soft Money Lives," *New York Times*. Notably, Democrats in Congress were not all supportive of these investments in a new DNC HQ, arguing that the money should be spent instead on their reelection efforts in the 2002 midterms. See: Terry McAuliffe and Steve Kettmann, *What A Party! My Life Among Democrats: Presidents, Candidates, Donors, Activists, Alligators, and Other Wild Animals* (New York, NY: Thomas Dunne Books, 2007) 277.

[147] McAuliffe and Kettmann, *What A Party!*, 279.

[148] Ibid, 274.

[149] "Facing Wartime President, Democrats Focus on Home Front," *New York Times*, April 22, 2002.

[150] McAuliffe also appeared on *Meet the Press* to criticize the White House's ties to Enron and called on them to reveal any contacts that had existed between the administration and the corporation. McAuliffe and Kettmann, *What A Party!*, 317.

Bush administration for rolling back privacy rules on medical data.[151] In August 2002, McAuliffe gave a major address that the *New York Times* described as "among the toughest any Democrat – including possible presidential contends has made about Mr. Bush since last September," intended to free Democratic candidates to follow his lead. McAuliffe argued Bush had squandered an "extraordinary opportunity" to take the nation through difficult times: "All this trust, all this support – what an opportunity to lead. But in the end, to what end? A White House that even Republicans call the most political ever. An administration adrift, with polling numbers as their only compass and high approval ratings as their only destination."[152]

Despite these attempts at reframing the political debate towards domestic policies, terrorism – reignited by the potential of an upcoming war in Iraq – remained a top priority for voters. While McAuliffe continued to express the hope that Democratic candidates could bypass the issue of Iraq by focusing on unemployment figures, Bush's extensive campaigning for Republican candidates and relentless focus on national security helped Republicans win seats in both House and Senate, producing the party's first period as a national majority party since the 1954 midterms.[153]

In the wake of the midterm results, several Democrats called for McAuliffe's resignation: the Reverend Al Sharpton – gearing up for his own 2004 presidential campaign – called a press conference to attack McAuliffe's management of the 2002 campaign, while one Democratic fundraiser criticized the DNC chair for not being "ready to be the image and the spokesman for the Democratic Party."[154] One Democratic strategist defended McAuliffe against this last charge by noting that "Terry is the mechanics guy. Holding him responsible for lack of a national message is like holding the piano tuner responsible for an atonal sonata."[155] With a full field of Democratic presidential candidates out campaigning full-time from February 2003 onwards, the DNC largely ceded the stage to them. While McAuliffe remained active in fundraising, and

[151] Note that while Enron's connections to the Bush administration were extensive, the company also donated $100,000 to the DNC during the Clinton era. See: "Don't Attack Bush on Taxes Yet, Democrats' Leader Tells Party," *New York Times*, January 19, 2002; "Enron Woes Revive Debate on Campaigns," *New York Times*, January 22, 2002; "Bush Rolls Back Rules on Privacy of Medical Data," *New York Times*, August 10, 2002.

[152] The *New York Times* noted that "historically, leaders of political parties have more flexibility in making these kinds of attacks" than elected officials. See: "With Eye to 2004, Democratic Party Chief Reproaches Bush," *New York Times*, August 11, 2002.

[153] During the campaign the DNC released one notable controversial ad in which a cartoon version of George W. Bush pushes two elderly people in wheelchairs down the jagged line of a chart to criticize him for undermining Social Security. See: "Daschle Sharply Attacks Bush's Economic Policies," *New York Times*, September 19, 2002; "Democrats' Ads Has Bush Mistreating Elderly," *New York Times*, October 4, 2002.

[154] "Stung By Losses, Party Buzzes About Its Leader," *New York Times*, November 12, 2002.

[155] Ibid.

occasionally attacked Bush,[156] his role as a public spokesman for the party was mostly over after the 2002 midterms.

In the wake of the 2004 election, McAuliffe announced he would not run for a second term, while praising the Bush campaign as "much more sophisticated in their message delivery, very specific targeted niche. Which is what we now need to do as a party."[157] Among McAuliffe's possible successors was one particularly prominent candidate: Howard Dean, the former governor of Vermont, had become a favorite of liberals and anti-war activists in the party after his failed presidential primary campaign. While both Dean and his campaign leaders originally expected his campaign to be issue oriented – mostly with regards to his opposition to the Iraq War and in terms of trying to raise awareness for Dean's achievement of universal healthcare in Vermont for children – Dean became the front-runner for the nomination in the summer of 2003. Thanks to his major fundraising success among small donors on the internet, Dean's campaign surged until right before the start of primary voting in 2004. After defeats in Iowa and New Hampshire, Dean receded in the polls and dropped out soon after. With Democratic nominee Senator John Kerry (D-MA) going down in defeat, Dean saw an opportunity to take over the DNC, calling for the party to "speak plainly" and for its agenda to "clearly reflect the socially progressive, fiscally responsible values that bring our party – and the vast majority of Americans – together."[158]

A crucial selling point of a Dean DNC chairmanship towards the members of the committee was his promise of a "50-state strategy" – through which the DNC would provide all states with funding, and provide each state Democratic party with an executive director.[159] Dean was by no means a consensus candidate: news reports at the time indicated a considerable number of senators, members of the House, and governors expressed concerns that Dean was too liberal, and too unpredictable to function as an effective spokesperson for the party.[160] However, DNC

[156] In May 2003, after Bush officially filed papers for his reelection run, McAuliffe predicted the 2004 election would be focused on jobs and that the American public was "sick and tired of [Bush] trying to use patriotism to push through an ultra-right-wing agenda." In February 2004, McAuliffe attacked Bush over the question of whether he was 'AWOL' during the Vietnam War: "I look forward to that debate, when John Kerry, a war hero with a chest full of medals is standing next to George Bush, a man who was 'AWOL' in the National Guard." See: "Candidate Bush Files Papers for '04 Race," *New York Times*, May 17, 2003; "Democratic Chief Says 'AWOL' Bush Will Be an Issue After a Nominee Emerges," *New York Times*, February 2, 2004.

[157] "Democratic Leader Analyzes Bush Victory," *New York Times*, December 11, 2004.

[158] "Dean Enters Race for Democratic Chairman," *New York Times*, January 12, 2005.

[159] "Dean Looks at Party Chairmanship," *New York Times*, November 9, 2004; "Howard Dean Runs Again. But for What? Stay Tuned," *New York Times*, December 9, 2004; "Democrats Hear from 8 Who Want to Lead Party," *New York Times*, December 12, 2004.

[160] "Dean Emerging as Likely Chief for Democrats," *New York Times*, February 2, 2005. Some Republicans also shared

members argued his 2003-2004 campaign indicated major potential for the DNC. For example, Scott Maddox, the chairman of the Democratic Party in Florida explained that

> "The only knock against Howard Dean is that he's seen as too liberal. I'm a gun-owning pickup-truck driver and I have a bulldog named Lockjaw. I am a Southern chairman of a Southern state, and I am perfectly comfortable with Howard Dean as D.N.C. chair. What our party needs right now is energy, enthusiasm and a willingness to do things differently. I think Howard Dean brings all three of those things to the party."[161]

DNC members elected Dean as their chairman in February, 2005.[162] As chair, Dean frequently used his position to attack Republicans: for example, in May 2005, Dean called for Tom DeLay to resign as House Majority Leader due to ethical transgressions and predicted that DeLay could end up in jail because of them. Dean also, again, criticized the Iraq War, and attacked Republican legislators as "never having made an honest living in their lives."[163] In the wake of the devastation of Hurricane Katrina and the Bush administration's slow response in terms of relief efforts, Dean argued that

> "The Democratic Party needs a new direction, and I think it's become clear what the direction is: restore a moral purpose to America. Rebuild America's psyche. This is deeply disturbing to a lot of Americans, because it's more than thousands of people who get killed; it's about the destruction of the American community. The idea that somehow government didn't care until it had to for political reasons. It's appalling."[164]

In April 2006, the DNC held its spring meeting in New Orleans, with Dean spending time visiting areas hit by the hurricane and helping pick up debris, and describing the issue as "searing, burning": "I think it's going to cost George Bush his legacy, and it's going to cost the Republicans

this view of Dean as a potential liability to the Democrats: former RNC chair Richard Bond described Dean as "a very capable guy, he's got high energy" but predicted that Dean would "reinforce all of [the Democrats'] worst instincts. His style and message is one that will narrow his party's options rather than expand them."

[161] "Florida Democrats Back Dean as Leader," *New York Times*, January 18, 2005.

[162] "Democrats Elect Dean as Committee Chairman," *New York Times*, February 13, 2005.

[163] "Dean, Feisty and Unbowed, Stands by Words on DeLay," *New York Times*, May 23, 2005; "Dean's Remarks Draw Fire From Both Sides of Aisle," *New York Times*, June 10, 2005; "Democrats Still Search for Plan On How to Deal With Iraq," *New York Times*, December 8, 2005.

[164] "Democrats Intensify Criticism of White House Response to Crisis," *New York Times*, September 8, 2005.

the House and the Senate and, maybe very well the presidency in the next election. People will never forget this."[165]

Under Dean's leadership the DNC supported attempts at reaching out to white working class voters. Crucially, this had also been a part of Dean's own primary campaign when he, famously, had claimed he wanted "to be the candidate for guys with Confederate flags in their pickup trucks."[166] While at the time dismissed as a 'gaffe,' this comment reflected a conviction on Dean's side that Democrats would need to adjust their positions to appeal to white, rural, blue-collar voters. One part of this strategy was an increased effort by the DNC to reach out to Christian voters. Dean specifically promised that the DNC would start to communicate to these voters by talking about values: "We have done it in a secular way, and we don't have to."[167] During an appearance on *Meet the Press* in December 2004, Dean had expressed his belief that "we ought to make a home for pro-life Democrats"[168] in the party. Dean supported efforts by local Democrats in Southern states to include the bible in public school curriculums. Leah Daughtry, Dean's chief of staff at the DNC and a Pentecostal minister, organized a Faith in Action [FIA] program existing of seven staff members and a 60-person faith advisory board, that helped provide local Democratic candidates with ways to articulate the values of Democratic Party policies to evangelical voters.[169] FIA's activities helped promote the party in ways that it had not done before. For example, the program financed faith outreach programs in several Southern states promoting Democratic candidates' life stories as framed around religious narratives. While Daughtry herself identified as pro-choice, the FIA program was catholic in terms of the religious arguments promoted.[170] For example, in Alabama prior to the 2006 midterms, the local Democratic Party – with financial support from FIA – presented a 'covenant for the future' in advertisements in local newspapers, that proposed mandatory bible literacy courses in public schools, a constitutional amendment banning abortion, and opposed same-sex marriage.[171]

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[165] "Democrats Looking to Use New Orleans as G.O.P. Used 9/11," *New York Times*, April 22, 2006; "In New Orleans, Dean Criticizes G.O.P. on Lack of Aid," *New York Times*, April 23, 2006.

[166] "Rivals Attack Dean for Wooing 'Guys With Confederate Flags," *New York Times*, November 2, 2003.

[167] "Democrats in 2 Southern States Push Bills on Bible Study," *New York Times*, January 27, 2006.

[168] Amy Sullivan, *The Party Faithful: How and Why Democrats Are Closing the God Gap* (New York, NY: Scribner) 159.

[169] "Helping Democrats Find a Religious-Friendly Voice," *New York Times*, October 20, 2007.

[170] Note that the DNC's FIA was not operating in a vacuum in this regard: as Amy Sullivan has noted, after the 2004 election a broader debate existed within the Democratic Party regarding its positions on abortion and the potential of reaching out to pro-life voters. See: Sullivan, *The Party Faithful*, 157-158.

[171] "On Sunday She Is a Pentecostal Preacher. During The Week She Is Planning the Democratic Convention," *New*

While the 50-state strategy received considerable credit for the Democratic successes in the 2006 midterms,[172] Congressional leaders were largely opposed to it. Both Rep. Rahm Emanuel (D-IL) and Senator Chuck Schumer (D-NY) – the respective chairs of the DCCC and the DSCC – believed the DNC squandered money by sending resources to states where Democrats would never win. In contrast, a DNC spokesman stressed the need for party organizational infrastructure to make Democratic candidates competitive in every state.[173] The 2006 election – in which Democrats won majorities in both the House and Senate by tiny margins – from Dean's perspective confirmed the wisdom of the 50-state approach. The DNC in particular celebrated the effects of its Faith in Action program: internal polling showed that, while Republicans still received more support from conservative Christian voters, their lead had dropped from 30 points to just 10 in 2006.[174] After the midterms, Dean warned that Democrats "must not squander opportunities to keep building the party"[175] and should strengthen its efforts at reaching out to evangelical voters.

However, like Kirk, Brown, and McAuliffe before him, the presidential primaries – and in particular the match-up between Senators Barack Obama (D-IL) and Hillary Clinton (D-NY) meant that Dean's public role receded after the midterms. As one *New York Times* profile from October 2007 noted, the chair conducted "business in near obscurity, rarely appearing on television or at public events."[176] Dean announced after the 2008 election that he would not serve a second term as DNC chair, but claimed credit for Obama's victory. In a memorandum sent to members of the DNC, Dean asserted that the extent of Obama's victory, as well as Democratic gains in House and Senate, were a direct effect of his 50-state strategy.[177]

Conclusion

Throughout the period 1981-2008, the DNC largely behaved as predicted by the branding theory. In the period 1981-1992, and 2001-2008 with the party out of the White House, the DNC

York Times, July 20, 2008.

[172] At least two new Democratic members of the House – Tim Walz (D-MN) and Nancy Boyda (D-KS) – explicitly credited the 50-state strategy with them winning their elections. See: "Democratic Leader Reminds Party That Victory Is No Mandate," *New York Times*,

[173] "Dean and Party Leaders in a Money Dispute," *New York Times*, May 11, 2006.

[174] "Helping Democrats Find a Religious-Friendly Voice," *New York Times*.

[175] "Democratic Leader Reminds Party That Victory is No Mandate," *New York Times*.

[176] "His Meteoric Days Behind Him," *New York Times*.

[177] "Dean Won't Seek New Term as D.N.C. Chief," *New York Times*, November 11, 2008; "Dean Seeks a Share of Credit in Obama Victory," *New York Times*, November 12, 2008.

frequently invested in publicity programs intended to help the party regain support among white working class voters. During the Clinton administration, the DNC continued such efforts but mostly focused on defending the incumbent president and his policies – including healthcare, and Clinton's own reelection effort. Notably, in the period 1993-1994 – with Democrats in unified control of government – the branding theory would predict a decline in DNC activities, which does not seem to have occurred. A possible explanation is that DNC strategists pointed to the particular circumstances of the 1992 election – that is, a strong third-party – to explain the ongoing need for the DNC to promote party policies.

One crucial developmental issue in this time-period concerned the way the rise of presidential primaries affected the DNC's publicity role. The time-frame available to chairs to try and influence the debate was shortened considerably: while in the period prior to major reforms of the 1970s and the development of modern, multi-year presidential primary campaigns, national committee chairs introduced major new publicity programs well into the presidential election year. However, starting with the 1988 primaries this declined considerably. While DNC chairman Kirk did play a role in shaping his party's platform in that election year, by the 2000s the DNC mostly receded to the background after the party's presidential candidates began presenting themselves to voters after the midterm elections – shortening the time period chairs McAuliffe and Dean had to help shape the party brand to just two years.

II. The Republican National Committee, 1981-2008

In the period 1981-2008 the GOP was considerably more successful in presidential election than it had been in the previous half-century, holding the White House for all but eight out of twenty-eight years. However, with the exception of the period 2002-2006, the party was still consistently the minority party in American politics, due to its inability to win control of the House of Representatives during the Reagan-Bush era. As a result, for most of this period, the RNC maintained active in publicizing the party image in an attempt to elevate the party to national majority status. However, because of the party's success at the presidential level in this period, presidents Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and George W. Bush all had considerable influence on the committee's activities. That is, throughout the period 1981-1992 and 2001-2008

a core priority of the RNC was promulgating the incumbent presidents' policies and reelection efforts. Under Reagan this meant the RNC promoted the administration's economic policies and consistently tied the party's broader image to Reagan himself, while also making attempts at overcoming the disadvantage the GOP had among women voters. Under Bush, the RNC made an attempt at also reaching out to black voters – though with little success. Finally, under George W. Bush – prior to the party winning unified control of Congress in the 2002 midterms – attempted to promote the party to Hispanics, a voting group Bush himself had been popular with in the 2000 election. In contrast, during the Clinton administration the RNC invested considerably in new publicity programs, and backed the "Contract With America," created by Republican Congressional leaders.

A Presidential Minority Party: The RNC and the Reagan-Bush Era, 1981-1992

After the 1980 election, Reagan selected Richard Richards, the chair of the Oklahoma Republican Party, to lead the RNC. Richards was a longtime supporter of Reagan, and the first state chairman to endorse him in his 1976 primary challenge to Gerald Ford.[178] While Richards represented the conservative wing of the party, he stressed that Reagan's victory was the product of a broad coalition of voters and that, as chairman, his goal was "to make this a party of opportunity for everyone – for Hispanics, blacks and whites, rich and poor, young and old, from the big cities and the small towns."[179] Additionally, Richards believed that – despite the Reagan landslide of 1980 – the GOP "still [had] a long way to go,"[180] and quoted Reagan's desire "to see us make the Republican Party the majority party in the country."[181]

Richards' interpretation of the 1980 election results shaped his perspective of how the RNC would achieve this. As Richard B. Wirthlin, Reagan's pollster argued, the key to achieving this goal was for the party to reach out in particular to union members, blue collar workers, the middle-aged, and Southerners.[182] This thus reflected a considerable shift from the approaches

[178] "Utah Lawyer is Said to Be Reagan Choice as G.O.P. National Chairman," *New York Times*, December 17, 1980.
[179] "New GOP Chief Says Right is Overstating Its Influence," *Los Angeles Times*, January 18, 1981.
[180] "Party's Organizational Man," *New York Times*, January 18, 1981; "New GOP Chief Seeking to Gain Majority Status," *Washington Post*, January 18, 1981.
[181] "G.O.P. is Urged to Work Harder to Build Up Party at Local Level," *New York Times*, March 28, 1981. Both Richards and Reagan referred to their goal of turning the GOP into a 'majority party' frequently throughout 1981. See for example: "GOP to be Majority Party, Chief Predicts," *Washington Post*, June 9, 1981; "The G.O.P. Bid for Majority Control," *New York Times*, June 14, 1981; "Make GOP Majority, Reagan Urges Party," *Los Angeles Times*, June 13, 1981.
[182] Ibid.

Brock had relied on during the Carter era. Indeed, while Richards did not abandon outreach to nonwhite voters entirely, he radically altered the RNC's approach in this regard by eliminating the special liaison offices that had existed as separate divisions within the RNC, and instead incorporated them into the RNC itself.[183] The reason for this change was straightforward: while the goal of the offices had been to help the party reach out to black, Hispanic, Jewish, and other 'ethnic' voting groups, in practice, in Richards' view

> "[the liaison offices] became very exclusive groups. They haven't reached out. They haven't expanded. [...] What happens when you form groups like this is that they talk to themselves. The effort we made toward blacks and Hispanics was in error. It didn't work."[184]

With the Reagan 1980 victory as a blueprint, the RNC in April 1981 presented "A Republican Strategy for Controlling Government in America in This Century" – a major report focused on the goal of achieving unified Republican control of government before the year 2000. Press reports at the time described it as "ambitious" with a core element of the proposals focused on the committee producing "new magazines and television productions to spread the party's message," and "to spend 5 percent of its annual budget on research and development in political technology."[185] In another report published in the summer of 1981, the RNC proposed the party should embrace the computer age by establishing a 'futurist desk' to reach out to voters.[186] Beyond these long-term publicity goals, a core task of the RNC in this period was to assist the Reagan administration's legislative agenda. For example, the RNC attempted to use party publicity to force Democratic members of the House representing conservative districts to support Reagan's economic proposals. The committee used FEC data to create a list of voters and organizations that had donated both to Reagan *and* conservative Democratic legislators and contacted them, urging them to reach out to those members of Congress. The RNC also encouraged voters to write op-ed pieces in hometown newspapers of conservative Democrats, and distributed nearly one million copies of a special edition of *First Monday*, the committees' ongoing monthly newsletter, supporting the Reagan

[183] Galvin, *Presidential Party Building*, 126.
[184] "GOP Chairman is Abolishing Ethnic Liaison Groups," *Washington Post*, February 19, 1981. See also: "Republican National Committee 'Desegregated,'" *Los Angeles Times*, June 9, 1981.
[185] "G.O.P. Sees Good Works as Good Politics," *New York Times*, April 19. 1981.
[186] "Republicans Look at the Future and See High Technology and Tight Discipline," *Washington Post*, July 2, 1981.

budget.[187] The RNC and RCCC also spent $500,000 on radio ads supporting Reagan's tax cuts bill aired in areas where the party was hopeful it could swing Democratic congressional votes.[188]

In collaboration with the party's congressional campaign committees, the RNC engaged in, what it referred to as, the longest and most expensive national advertising campaign in the history of either party. Starting in September, the party aired $9 million worth of national advertisements in the fall and winter of 1981, and another $3 million in the spring of 1982.[189] Crucially, the ads directly tied the GOP to the image and policies of Reagan, defending the president's policies on the economy, taxation, and Social Security. During the fall 1982 midterm campaign, the RNC released additional commercials explicitly defending Reagan's performance as president, with one ad featuring a "grandfatherly mail carrier," describing the president's successes thus far and urging voters to "give the guy a chance!"[190]

While the GOP's performance in the midterms was not especially bad – with a loss of 26 seats in the House and no movement in either direction in the Senate – the results suggested that the party's path towards majority status was more complex than previously thought. With Richards announcing his retirement before the election, Reagan selected Senator Paul Laxalt (R-NV) and Frank Fahrenkopf to lead the RNC. In this arrangement, Laxalt served as the party's spokesman and 'general chairman,' while Fahrenkopf was RNC chairman and ran the committee on a day-to-day basis.[191] With the 1984 election coming up, the Laxalt-Fahrenkopf team – unsurprisingly – remained focused on supporting Reagan. Indeed, the RNC went so far as to unanimously endorse Reagan for reelection during its January 1983 meeting, before the president himself had even announced that he would run again.[192] Throughout 1983-1984, reelecting Reagan was the top priority for the committee. As Galvin has argued, the RNC was fully integrated into the Reagan-Bush campaign, providing assistance both in terms of organizing voting registration

[187] "GOP Going to Bat to Get 62 Democrats on Bade With Reagan Budget," *Washington Post*, May 2, 1981.
[188] "G.O.P. Radio Tax-Cut Ads Set," *New York Times*, July 24, 1981.
[189] "GOP Launches Ad Blitz 13 Months Before Vote, Aims to Deflect Griping," *Washington Post*, September 29, 1981; "G.O.P. Fund Goals Set for '82 Races," *New York Times*, October 29, 1981; "Weepy TV Ad Could Give GOP Something to Really Cry About," *Washington Post*, May 18, 1982; "G.O.P. Ad Crediting Reagan For Pension Rise is Attacked," *New York Times*, July 7, 1982.
[190] "G.O.P. to Focus Campaign on 'Give Him a Chance,'" *New York Times*, September 3, 1982.
[191] Reagan appears to have had concerns about Richards' performance since at least December 1981, when he added his advisor Richard Bond as a chief operating officer to the RNC. See: "White House Puts Its Own Man on GOP Committee," *Los Angeles Times*, December 10, 1981; "White House Tightens Its Control Over GOP," *Washington Post*, December 11, 1981.
[192] "Reagan Unanimously Endorsed for '84," *Los Angeles Times*, January 29, 1983.

drives and providing voters with campaign materials.[193] The RNC also invested considerable resources in major publicity campaigns to promote Reagan. For example, in the spring of 1983, the RNC began a $1 million nationwide television advertising campaign crediting Reagan with turning the nation's economy around. The committee ads featured a woman stating that "the economy is starting to come around. Jobs are starting to pick up again. People are going back to work because President Reagan didn't go for the quick fix."[194] The committee engaged in a similar major TV ad campaign – this time worth between $3 and $4 million – aired in the early months of 1984 during the Democratic primary campaign, to counter criticism of the administration's achievements by Democratic presidential candidates.[195]

Aside from providing support to Reagan and his legislative agenda, the RNC in this period also engaged in a series of broader projects aimed at improving the GOP's general public image. For example, the committee created a two-year effort in providing homeless shelters without federal funding. The Working Partners program, which was active in 40 states, promoted food-, clothing-, and job drives, and shelters for the homeless. All projects related to this program relied on the goal of activating private sector involvement in these matters. The idea had originated in Colorado, where local Republicans in Denver funded homeless shelters and received considerable media attention crediting them with the project.[196] The RNC also attempted to overcome the gender gap between the GOP and the Democratic Party (see Figure 5.2). In 1983, Fahrenkopf expressed his concern about party's lack of popularity among women and announced he would work on "the steps we need to end discrimination"[197] on the basis of gender. In the spring of 1983, the RNC began to train women in the party to help convince other women to (re-)join the GOP, by focusing on the effect economic growth had on working women.[198] In 1984, the RNC announced it would put significant funding behind female Republican candidates, and would "get the message out that [Reagan] is a strong support of women's rights and issues"[199] through an ambitious advertising campaign.[200]

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[193] Ibid, 131-132.
[194] "GOP Ads Will Credit Reagan for Turnaround," *Los Angeles Times*, March 11, 1983.
[195] "GOP to Spend Up to $4 Million on TV Ads," *Los Angeles Times*, December 22, 1983.
[196] "Republican Shelters More Than a Mission of Mercy,'" *Los Angeles Times*, January 16, 1984.
[197] "GOP Chief Prods Reagan for Early Candidacy 'Signal,'" *Washington Post*, February 4, 1983.
[198] "G.O.P. Starts Training in 'Gender Gap' Politics," *New York Times*, June 6, 1983.
[199] "Republican Party Makes an Effort to Close a Perceived 'Gender Gap,'" *Los Angeles Times*, February 17, 1984.
[200] "G.O.P. Starting Campaign to Show 'Reagan is Terrific on Women's Issues," *New York Times*, April 6, 1984. At

Figure 5.2: *Support for Republican Presidential Candidates Among Female Voters, 1952-2004*

Source: "Election Polls - Presidential Vote by Groups," *Gallup*, 2016.

To the extent that the RNC's activities may have helped achieve Reagan's performance in the 1984 presidential election, the results were an undeniable success: Reagan won 49 states, and close to 59% of the popular vote. In Congress, however, the election was a mixed bag: in the Senate, the GOP lost two seats but remained in the majority; in the House, Republicans gained 16 seats, but remained in the minority. Thus, in January 1985, Fahrenkopf announced another new long-range plan to capture the House. This particular scheme relied on the party undoing Democratic gerrymandering at the state level by courting Democratic office holders in state legislatures to flip to the GOP.[201] To showcase the potential of this approach, a first group of 100 formerly Democratic

the same time, though, the RNC also continued to reach out to evangelical Christians – distributing a handbook that provided "churchgoing Christians" with information on how to become politically active. See: Galvin, *Presidential Party Building*, 134.

[201] Fahrenkopf argued that "the only way that the Republican party is going to become competitive in the House is if the Republican party does a better job making sure that they control state legislatures, because they are the ones who draw the congressional district lines." See: Kenneth W. Thompson (ed.), *Leadership in the Reagan Presidency, Part II:*

officials joined Reagan for breakfast at the White House in June 1985. Around the same time, the RNC announced Operation Open Door, an attempt at convincing 100,000 Democratic voters to switch their party identification by summer 1985. To promote this program, the committee engaged in major outreach efforts, communicating with Democratic voters by telephone, direct mail, television, and door-to-door canvassing.[202] The committee also sent out 1.3 million pieces of mail to registered Democrats in four states, and aired TV advertisements inviting Democrats to "leave the party of Walter F. Mondale and Edward M. Kennedy" and to "join the party of President Reagan."[203]

Reagan thus remained a dominant figure in the RNC's publicity, and the image of the GOP it promoted. But the committee's reliance on presenting the GOP as 'Reagan's party' also represented a risk: for the 1986 midterms, Republican strategists complained that the RNC lacked a central message separate from the administration, and while Reagan remained popular on a personal level, the party faced considerable disagreements on policy – most notably economic issues – that the RNC was failing to acknowledge in its publicity.[204] During the 1986 midterms, Republicans for the first time since 1980 faced a considerable defeat, losing eight seats – and its majority – in the Senate, as well as five seats in the House. In response, Fahrenkopf announced in early 1987 that the party would aim for a new message, abandoning anti-government rhetoric, and instead presenting the GOP as the party of compassion:

> "Compassion [is] a word we should never be afraid to use. Despite what the Democrats think, compassion doesn't belong just to them. The Republican Party does not need solutions to problems bound by hard-nosed approaches with little or no concern for people. [...] Concern over budget deficits will not override the concern of even the most conservative voter worried about losing the family farm, sending a child to college, or the need to clean up a toxic-waste site [...]."[205]

However, despite Fahrenkopf's intentions to help adjust the GOP's image, in practice the RNC

Eleven Intimate Perspectives (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993) 35.

[202] Galvin, *Presidential Party Building*, 136-138; "Republicans Re-Elect Leaders of Top Panel," *New York Times*, January 19, 1985; "White House is Seeking Converts to GO.P. Chiefly in Stateshouses," *New York Times*, March 19, 1985; "Republicans Launch Campaign to Convert 100,000 Democrats," *Los Angeles Times*, May 8, 1985; "G.O.P. Opens Drive for 100,000 Voters," *New York Times*, May 8, 1985; "GOP Welcomes Ex-Democrats," *Washington Post*, June 11, 1985.

[203] "Republicans in 4 States Try to Lure 100,000 Voters From Democrats," *Washington Post*, July 27, 1985.

[204] "So Far This Year, GOP Strategists Can't Find a Reason for Running," *Washington Post*, March 16, 1986.

[205] "GOP Leaders Compose a New Song," *Washington Post*, January 24, 1987.

appears to have become less active with regards to providing party publicity in 1987 and the spring of 1988 – partly due to media attention to the Republican presidential primaries, and partly because the party saw a considerable decline in fundraising, that forced the RNC to lay off 15% of its staff in July 1987.[206]

In the 1988 presidential election Bush easily defeated Democratic candidate Michael Dukakis in both the popular vote and the electoral college. However, the GOP once again did not benefit in down ballot races: in fact, in both the House and Senate, Democrats gained seats (respectively, two and one), strengthening their majorities there. Bush selected Lee Atwater – his campaign manager - as the next RNC chairman, and Atwater announced that under his leadership the committee would continue to focus on gaining a majority in Congress, though it would rely on a new strategy of concentrating the committee's resources on contesting a relatively small group of seats in the House.

Notably, under Atwater the RNC also reengaged its attempts at reaching out to black voters – which remained lackluster (see Figure 5.3). Atwater argued that "there is a kind of 45-and-under black [...] who is prone to listen to our message and is tired of being considered of being in the hip pocket of the Democratic Party."[207] This goal was particularly noteworthy given the criticism the Bush campaign, and Atwater in particular, had faced after the Willie Horton ads used in the presidential election campaign.[208] Still, during his acceptance speech as chairman, Atwater reiterated that reaching out to black voters was "more than just a political necessity; it is a moral imperative" and that increasing black GOP support would result in a "a strong representative party [...]."[209] Atwater prioritized his appeals to black voters in the first months of his chairmanship by giving a speech at Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church on Martin Luther King

[206] "GOP Committee Lays Off 40, Blames Lack of Funds," *Los Angeles Times*, July 15, 1987. Do note that, after Vice-President George H.W. Bush secured the GOP nomination, the RNC backed his election campaign by connecting Bush to the Reagan economic record. For example, in the summer of 1988, the RNC spent between $3 and $4 million in TV advertising arguing that it was still 'morning in America.' One ad featured a seven year old girl that asked "Why would we ever want to go back to the way things were before she was born and risk anything as precious as her future?" See: "GOP Ad Campaign Hit Airwaves," *Washington Post*, July 27, 1988.

[207] "Atwater Tells GOP Governors of Plans to Attract Blacks," *Washington Post*, November 22, 1988.

[208] Galvin, *Presidential Party Building*, 149-151; "Bush Names Sununu Chief of Staff," *Los Angeles Times*, November 17, 1988; "House and Local Seats to be Targets of G.O.P.," *New York Times*, December 11, 1988. For more on the Willie Horton advertisement and its racial implications, see: Tali Mendelberg, *The Race Card: Campaign Strategy, Implicit Messages, and the Norm of Equality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001) 134-165.

[209] "Atwater is Elected Chief of RNC, Outlines Goals," *Washington Post*, January 19, 1989. In February 1989, Atwater was elected to the board of trustees of Howard University, Washington, DC's major historically black college. After student protests, Atwater resigned again a month later. See: "Atwater Resigns From Howard Board, Yields to Student Protest," *Los Angeles Times*, March 8, 1989.

Jr. Day. Around the same time, Atwater argued that "affirmative action has worked" but that, because of this, black voters should join the GOP since there now "is a large Black middle class and we are the party of the middle class."[210] After David Duke – a former leader of the KKK – won a seat in the Louisiana state legislature running as a Republican, Atwater denounced him in strong terms and ensured that black radio stations across the country had a chance to broadcast a recording of his dismissal of Duke as a Republican.[211] Atwater also stressed Bush's interest in education and revitalizing inner cities as key selling points towards black voters:

> "The emergence of blacks and other minorities into the American middle class will not happen without quality public education. As the 'education President,' George Bush knows this. His focus on choice, accountability and the basics is going to reverse the decline of public schools. [...] Fresh approaches are needed to revitalize our inner cities. President Bush is committed to a new agenda for urban America, starting with enterprise zones and then better housing with private ownership whenever possible."[212]

Crucially, though, as during the Brock era, reaching out to black voters did not mean Atwater suggested dramatically altering the party's *policies*. For example, in May 1989, Atwater met with black business people and professionals in Houston. While he acknowledged that the GOP had "a bad image on civil rights" and that the party would "have to be very aggressive on knocking that image problem down" by "aggressively [opening] the party [up] and [showing] people that they are welcome," Atwater also stressed he did not believe the GOP would have to make "any great changes" in its policies to achieve this.[213]

With Atwater as its (highly visible) chair, media reports in the first year of the Bush administration suggest that the committee had grown in importance. Some Republicans pointed to Bush's history as being the only former national committee chair to become president as an

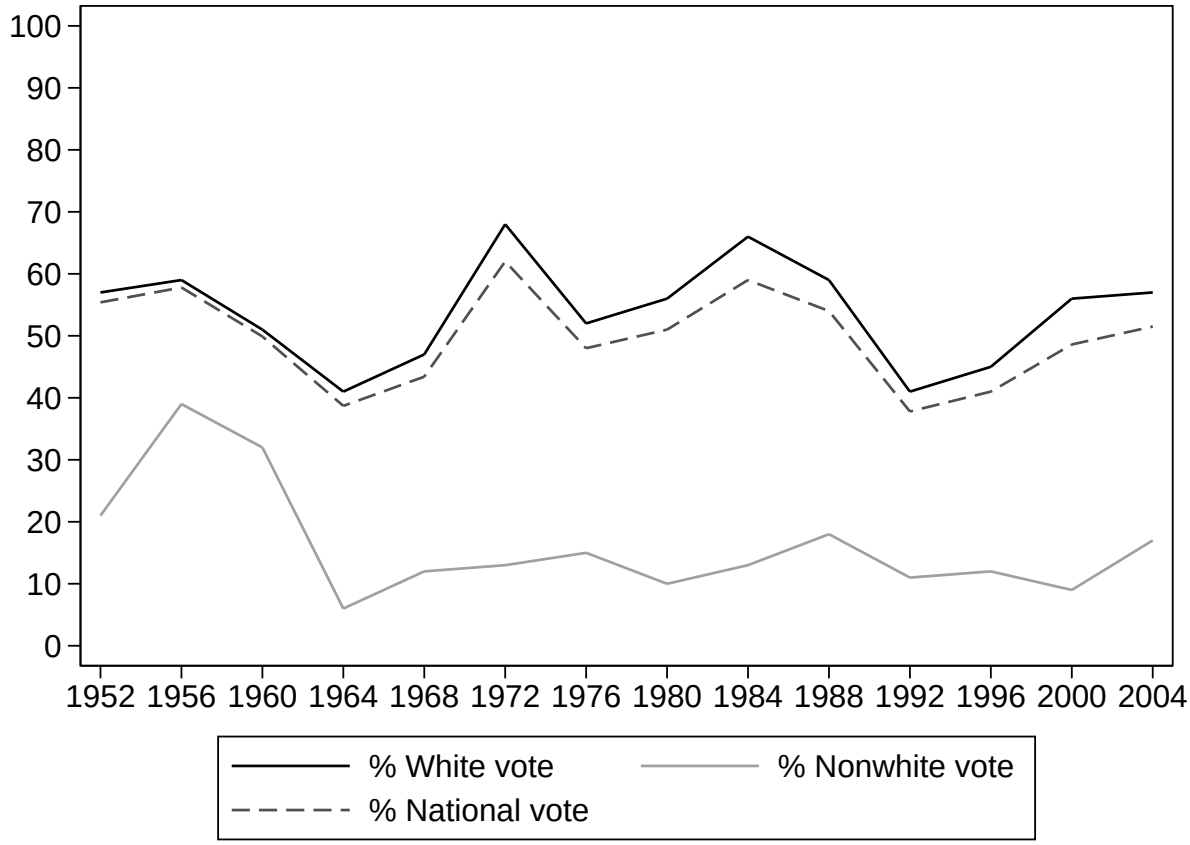
[210] "GOP Chairman Will Reach for Blacks," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 11, 1989.

[211] Duke argued that he said "openly and loudly what a lot of the other Republicans have not been willing to talk about on the campaign trail." Atwater dismissed Duke as "not a Republican as far as I am concerned. He is a pretender, a charlatan, and a political opportunist who is looking for any organization he can find to legitimate his views of racial and religious bigotry and intolerance. We repudiate him and his views and we are taking steps to see that he is disenfranchised from our party." See: "Winner in Louisiana Vote Takes on G.O.P. Chairman," *New York Times*, February 20, 1989; "Ex-Klansman's Victory Poses Hard Questions for G.O.P. Head," *New York Times* February 25, 1989.

[212] "Toward a G.O.P. Rainbow," *New York Times*, February 26, 1989.

[213] "Republicans Under Bush Reach Out to Minorities," *Los Angeles Times*, May 29, 1989.

Figure 5.3: *Support for Republican Presidential Candidates Among White and Nonwhite Voters, 1952-2004*



Source: "Election Polls - Presidential Vote by Groups," *Gallup*, 2016.

explanation for his personal investment in the committee, and praised Bush as a party leader invested in more than just his own reelection.[214] For example, Republican consultant Edie Mahe concluded that "with all due respect to the former President, Ronald Reagan didn't understand anything about the Republican Party, it was purely a vehicle for him. Bush is heart and soul part of the party."[215] However, while Bush may had a genuine appreciation for the RNC as a broader political organization, there was no doubt that the RNC was there to support him. Atwater stressed in interviews that he saw himself as "the chief political operative of the Republican Party.

[214] "Attack Shows G.O.P. Strategy Shift," *New York Times*, June 11, 1989. Frank Fahrenkopf also identified Bush's background in party politics as a benefit in this regard: " I know George Bush is the only president of either party to have been the national chairman of his party. He was the Harris County, Texas, party chairman. He may also be the only president who has ever been a county Republican chairman, and that's getting down where the rubber meets the road. He understands. He has probably been out hammering those signs in the ground" (Thompson, *Leadership in the Reagan Presidency*, 40).

[215] Ibid.

I do not consider myself the leader of the Republican Party. President Bush is."[216] As Bush's agent, Atwater engaged in different types of intra-party conflicts on policy. For example, while conservative Christians within the party called for a full embrace of a pro-life position, Atwater expressed his support for pro-choice Republicans who feared that the abortion issue would hurt the GOP in the 1990 midterms and beyond.[217] Additionally, under Bush-Atwater, the RNC also directly intervened in primary elections: supporting the candidates Bush and the RNC wanted to see represent the party in general elections.[218]

The RNC's role declined from 1990 onwards, largely due to Atwater's health. Atwater collapsed during a speech in March 1990 and was diagnosed with a terminal brain tumor. While he remained in office as the party's 'general chairman' until his death in March 1991, Atwater's ability to run the RNC declined, as did the committee's influence.[219] In January 1991, Bush selected Secretary of Agriculture Clayton K. Yeutter as the new RNC chairman – an appointment criticized by some in the party as being too low profile.[220] Under Yeutter, the RNC attempted to use the U.S.'s involvement in the Gulf War to help promote the party and its president. For example, Yeutter warned Democrats who opposed the war that if "the conflict goes well, that will work against them."[221] Additionally, the RNC mailed 500,000 form letters to contributors criticizing anti-war protesters.[222] However, after just one year at the RNC, Yeutter moved back to the Bush administration – this time as domestic policy director – and Bush appointed Richard Bond as the next RNC chairman. Bond was a longtime Bush advisor and expected to help coordinate RNC activities with those of the Bush-Quayle campaign – despite the fact that Bush faced a primary challenge from conservative Pat Buchanan. Still, an RNC spokesman left no

[216] "Man As Symbol: Atwater's First Year as the Republican National Chairman," *New York Times*, December 29, 1989.
[217] "The GOP's Abortion Travail," *Washington Post*, January 15, 1990; "G.O.P. Blurs Focus on Abortion, To Dismay of Some Party Faithful," *New York Times*, January 18, 1990.
[218] "National GOP Abandons Hands-Off Policy in Primaries," *Washington Post*, May 22, 1990.
[219] "GOP Leader Hospitalized After Collapse," *Chicago Tribune*, March 6, 1990; "Republican Chairman is Hospitalized Again," *New York Times*, March 24, 1990; "Atwater's Surgeon Says Brain Tumor is 'Aggressive and Dangerous,'" *Washington Post*, April 5, 1990.
[220] In November, Bush announced that Bill Bennett – the former Secretary of Education under Reagan – would become RNC chair in January 1991. While Bennett began to consider who to bring into the RNC as his staff, he declined the position in December because of financial concerns regarding a book he was under contract writing. Conservative activist Paul M. Weyrich concluded that the eventual appointment of Yeutter "shows how far down in the Rolodex they had to go" to fill the position. See: "Yeutter Picked for Top GOP Post, Sources Say," *Los Angeles Times*, January 5, 1991. See also: "Bennett Said in Line for Top GOP Post," *Washington Post*, November 18, 1990; "Revamping the RNC," *Washington Post*, November 25, 1990; "Bennett Declines Republican Party Post," *Los Angeles Times*, December 13, 1990; "Lee Atwater, Master of Tactics for Bush and G.O.P., Dies at 40," *New York Times*, March 30, 1991.
[221] "New GOP Chief Starts Partisan Fight on War," *Chicago Tribune*, January 25, 1991.
[222] "500,000 GOP Letters Solicit War Support," *Washington Post*, February 15, 1991.

doubt that the committee's focus was on reelecting its president: "The chairman is 100% behind George Bush and so is the committee."[223]

The RNC versus Bill Clinton, 1993-2000

Despite the RNC's support for its incumbent president, Bush failed to win reelection in 1992. With Democrats maintaining their majorities in the House and Senate, and now also controlling the White House, this meant Republicans were fully in the minority. After the election, a set of prominent Republicans, including former Secretary of Education Bill Bennett, and former governors John Ashcroft (R-MO) and Pete DuPont (R-DE), considered running for the now vacant position of RNC chairman. Meanwhile, Senate Minority Leader Bob Dole (R-KS) proposed appointing Senator Mitch McConnell (R-KY) as the party's 'general chairman.'[224]

In the end, however, Haley Barbour, a political aide in the Reagan administration and a lawyer and lobbyist, managed to win the first competitive election for the RNC chairmanship since 1977.[225] As chair of an out-party, Barbour tried to use his position to promote a set of GOP policy positions that included balancing the budget, as a way of highlighting the ideological differences between the GOP and the Democratic Party.[226] To help achieve this, Barbour – who listed his predecessors Bliss and Brock as models – advanced the RNC's technological capacity to communicate with voters considerably.[227] Among the biggest investments in this regard was a new TV studio – at a cost of $1.7 million – in the RNC HQ. The committee used this studio to produce daily 15-minute news feeds that it broadcast to 750 television affiliates and news services around the country. Additionally, the RNC produced a weekly news show called *Rising Tide* that ran on 2,000 cable systems. The new publicity center at RNC HQ also allowed Republican candidates in the 1994 midterms to tape radio and TV interviews for stations in their districts. The party also joined the internet age: beginning in 1994, the GOP had an outlet on the CompuServe online service called *Republican Forum*. In 1994 and 1995, more than 100,000 people used the

[223] Bond also accused Buchanan of having hijacked David Duke's message on race and religious tolerance and put a jacket and tie on it and try to clean it up." See: "Buchanan Calls for Ouster of GOP Chairman Bond," *Los Angeles Times*, March 11, 1992.

[224] "Republicans' Next Contest is Strictly Internal as Party Fights to Avoid Democrats' Fate in '70s," *Wall Street Journal*, November 5, 1992; "Dole Wades Into Republican Battle, Urges Sen. McConnell for New Post," *Washington Post*, January 8, 1993; "Rarity for Republicans: Party Leadership Race," *New York Times*, January 13, 1993.

[225] "Lobbyist Takes Over GOP," *Washington Post*, January 30, 1993.

[226] "Quiet Force in G.O.P. Shepherds Both Politics and Policy," *New York Times*, April 28, 1996.

[227] "GOP Chief Says Party Can't Just Be Negative," *Chicago Tribune*, July 8, 1993.

CompuServe service to download information about the party. In 1995, the party built its first website. These investments put the RNC at a considerable advantage in comparison to their Democratic counterparts during the Clinton years. In response to these investments, Senator Tom Daschle (D-SD) concluded that the Republicans were "years ahead" of Democrats with regards to political communications.[228]

Throughout the Clinton years, the RNC consistently criticized the president, his administration, and its proposals. As early as May 1993, Barbour described the Clinton administration as a "godsend" for the GOP in that it provided the party with the opportunity to create a new national message by contrasting Republican policies with those put forward by the Democrats.[229] For example, in response to the 1993 Clinton economic plan, the committee sent a form letter to Republican donors urging them to forward the letter to their members of Congress, and threatening them with political repercussions if they voted for Clinton's economic plan.[230] The RNC also reintroduced the tactics it had relied on during the first Reagan term of attempting to influence the behavior of conservative Democratic members of Congress through its publicity activities. Throughout 1993, the RNC 'bombarded' conservative Democratic districts with radio ads criticizing Clinton's tax policies and House Democrats who voted for tax increases but against $90 billion in spending cuts.[231] In 1994, the RNC continued its assault on Clinton's policy proposals by attacking the administration's healthcare plan. Notably, this healthcare attack was partly funded by 1992 third party candidate Ross Perot, who offered $1 million of his own money for the RNC to air a nationally televised TV program criticizing the Clinton plan.[232]

While opposition to Clinton was a core element of the RNC's publicity in this era, Barbour also warned that it would not be enough for the party to simply identify what it was against:

"Our success will not be guaranteed by [Clinton] messing up. We have to be seen as a

[228] "Leading the Political Communications Race," *Washington Post*, April 24, 1995.

[229] "GOP Hopes Rise Amid Signs of Grand Old Comeback," *Los Angeles Times*, May 23, 1993.

[230] This also meant that a set of Republican legislators received these letters, causing Representative Fred Grandy (R-IA) to wonder why the committee was "raising money among registered in order to send [. . .] threatening letters to sitting Republican members of Congress." See: "A Threatening Letter from GOP Draws Apology," *Los Angeles Times*, May 2, 1993.

[231] "For Some House Freshmen, Supporting Clinton Is Balancing Act," *Washington Post*, August 5, 1993; "G.O.P. Ads Attack Democrats on Tax Rise," *New York Times*, December 9, 1993.

[232] "G.O.P. Sees Crime as a Major Issue," *New York Times*, January 22, 1994; "GOP Works to Retain Its Best Issues," *Washington Post*, January 25, 1994; "Still Seeking an Alternative, GOP Launches Ads Against Clinton Health Plan," *Washington Post*, May 21, 1994; "G.O.P. Studies Offer by Perot," *New York Times*, July 1, 1994; "Texan's Cash Will Finance TV Program for G.O.P.," *New York Times*, July 2, 1994.

> party of ideas. [In 1992], a lot of people didn't have a sense the Republican Party was for anything except to win the next election."[233]

To help produce new policy ideas for the party, the RNC invested $4 million in a new National Policy Forum existing of 14 councils on a variety of salient policy issues, including the economy, health care, family issues, and foreign policy. Each council existed of 50 to 80 members and held meetings around the country in late 1993 and early 1994 to showcase Republican ideas to a broader audience.[234] The RNC also embraced the "Contract With America" plan proposed by Republicans in Congress. Barbour argued that any risk inherent in the proposals outlined in the contract were "far outweighed by the fact that most Americans agree with us."[235]

The 1994 midterm election finally produced Republican majorities in both House and Senate – with the GOP gaining eight seats in the Senate and 54 seats in the House. With Republicans in control of Congress and aiming to implement the policies it had promised in the "Contract With America," the RNC adjusted its publicity tactics and now began to promote the individual pieces of Republican legislation. For example, in February 1995, the RNC paid for TV ads supporting the GOP's balanced budget amendment to the constitution in seven conservative leaning states with Democratic senators.[236] Barbour was directly involved in promoting the GOP's plans on Medicare reform, acting as "a vigorous field general in the rhetorical war" between Democrats and Republicans.[237] To promote reform, the RNC attempted to influence media coverage of the plan, in part by trying to prevent reporters from referring to Republican proposals as incorporating 'cuts' in the program. Barbour contacted the nightly news anchors of NBC and ABC, and a correspondent of CBS, chiding them for using the term in their reports.[238]

The RNC also took a strong stance on the issue of legal immigration. In a March 1996, press release entitled "America: Welcome Mat or Doormat" that the *Wall Street Journal* dismissed

[233] "GOP Chief Says Party Can't Just be Negative," *Chicago Tribune*.
[234] "GOP Opens Hunt for New Ideas, Consensus," *Washington Post*, September 29, 1993.
[235] "GOP Offers a 'Contract' to Revive Reagan Years," *Washington Post*, September 28, 1994.
[236] The states were: South Dakota, North Dakota, Nebraska, Nevada, Iowa, New Mexico, and Kentucky: The ads had limited to no effect: the constitutional amendment failed in the Senate by one vote, with only one Democratic senator in the targeted states – Senator J. James Exon (D-NE) – voting in favor. See: "GOP Ads Push Budget Amendment," *Washington Post*, February 14, 1995; "Budget Plan Fails In Senate, Setting Back GOP Agenda," *Wall Street Journal*, March 3, 1995.
[237] Barbour had advised Congressional leaders to postpone changes to Medicare until after the 1996 elections. Once the decision was made to move on the issue earlier, Barbour came on board. See: "Republican Leaders Win Battle By Defining Terms of Combat," *Washington Post*, October 29. 1995.
[238] "Republican Leaders Win Battle By Defining Terms of Combat," *Washington Post*.

as "nativist,"[239] the RNC blamed immigration for 50% of the decline in real wages for the lowest-skilled American workers. Barbour defended the release, arguing that

> "Republicans believe America must continue to be the land of opportunity, but that does not mean that everyone in the world can come live here. [...] While anyone has a right to advocate open borders, it is inaccurate to label as nativists those who support high, but limited levels of immigration. Nor is it nativist to protect our borders against the flood of illegal immigration that places an unfair burden on American taxpayers."[240]

In June 1996, the RNC continued its focus on immigration with a $1.5 million ad buy – mostly in California – criticizing the Clinton administration for spending $5.5 billion to "support illegal immigrants."[241] The committee also blasted Clinton for economic policies, spending $1.5 million on a tax season ad campaign aired in 22 states, attacking the president for vetoing Republican tax cuts.[242] In contrast, Barbour refused to discuss intra-party disagreements regarding abortion rights, arguing that "it doesn't do any good to say bad things about each other. It's silly to think everybody's going to agree on every issue."[243]

After the party's major gains of the 1994 midterms, the 1996 election proved to be a disappointment. Clinton easily defeated Republican presidential candidate Dole, and Barbour announced he would retire as chair. In a *Washington Post* op-ed, Barbour warned Republicans that the party could not win the White House unless it improved its standing with women and minority voters. Barbour warned Republicans in Congress not to "[ignore] national goals and presidential races in order to focus only on keeping the majorities in Congress," and concluded that Republicans were "failing to communicate effectively to many women and minorities why our proposals are the right policies to solve the problems that concern them most." The RNC, therefore, Barbour concluded, ought to "reach out to those who agree with us on the issues but do not yet vote for us."[244]

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[239] "Nativist RNC," *Wall Street Journal*, March 20, 1996.
[240] "We're For Immigration: But There Are Limits," *Wall Street Journal*, April 2, 1996.
[241] "The Republicans Attack on Spending for Illegal Immigrants," *New York Times*, June 22, 1996.
[242] "GOP Ad Campaign Hits Clinton For Vetoing Tax Relief," *Washington Post*, April 10, 1996.
[243] "GOP Leaders Urge End to Party Squabbles," *Washington Post*, May 6, 1996.
[244] "Some Parting Advice," *Washington Post*, January 16, 1997.

A series of possible candidates were floated to replace Barbour, including Republican fundraiser Betsy DeVos, former Representative Vin Weber (R-MN), RNC chief counsel David Norcross, former Governor Steve Merrill (R-NH), and Texas GOP chairman Tom Pauken. Notably, the race included a series of 'nasty' incidents, including anonymous attacks regarding Merrill's previous marriages,[245] and resulted in something of a stalemate after Merrill and Norcross failed to win majorities in a series of ballots during the party's 1997 winter meeting. The eventual compromise winner was Jim Nicholson, an RNC member from Colorado, who faced immediate backlash against his leadership – with GOP insiders criticizing his lack of political experience and inability to play a major public role.[246] This criticism did not decline much over time, with one Republican strategist complaining in the summer of 1997 that "[Nicholson]'s never seen, he's never quoted, he's excluded."[247] Partly, Nicholson may have been limited by the RNC's financial issues coming out of the 1996 election. As the DOJ and FBI investigated the DNC's questionable fundraising practices in the 1996 race, the RNC's financial habits also came under scrutiny and reports indicated that the GOP also received considerable foreign donations, which the party had to return.[248] Additionally, several news sources indicated that Barbour's National Policy Forum had provided donors who contributed more than $100,000 with active involvement in the organization's policy role within the GOP.[249]

While otherwise more in the background than most out-party chairs, Nicholson did play a crucial role in the ongoing intra-party debate about abortion. In early 1998, anti-abortion advocates attempted to pass a resolution during the RNC's winter meeting that would prevent the party from supporting any Republican candidates who opposed a ban on late-term abortions.[250] The resolution caused considerable debate within the party, with Nicholson – himself pro-life – urging

[245] "Top GOP Post Could Attract Many Contenders," *Washington Post*, November 12, 1996; "List of Aspirants Grows for Top RNC Job Opening," *Washington Post*, December 13, 1996; "Reach Out, Barbour Tells RNC," *Washington Post*, January 17, 1997.

[246] Even Nicholson's home state party members were not particularly enthusiastic about the choice, with former Colorado state chairman Don Bain describing Nicholson as "a political rookie": "New Leader for Republicans," *New York Times*, January 18, 1997.

[247] "RNC Chairman Trying to Move into Spotlight," *Washington Post*, July 20, 1997. Republican strategist Roger Stone in January 1998 concluded that Nicholson was "not a tremendously effective spokesman." See: "GOP's Chairman is Facing Major Challenges," *Wall Street Journal*, January 15, 1998.

[248] "GOP Groups Will Return Foreign Funds," *Washington Post*, May 9, 1997.

[249] "GOP Tool to Revive Party instead Results in Scrutiny," *New York Times*, June 2, 1997; "RNC Papers Detail Close Ties With Big Donors, Policy Forum," *Washington Post*, July 3, 1997.

[250] "GOP Abortion Foes to Seek Fund Ban," *Washington Post*, October 19, 1997; "GOP Facing New Abortion Debate," *Washington Post*, December 30, 1997.

RNC members not to make abortion a litmus test of any kind. Other former RNC chairs, including Bond, Barbour, and Fahrenkopf, backed Nicholson's opposition, as did Representative Henry Hyde (R-IL) – a major figure in the party's pro-life movement. Meanwhile, Governor Bill Weld (R-MA), a pro-choice Republican, described the resolution as "a litmus test worthy of Lenin."[251] During the winter meeting, RNC members voted the resolution down.[252]

After the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal broke in January 1998, the RNC began to use the issue in TV advertisements. One ad the committee released as part of the midterm campaign featured two women talking about how to explain Clinton's behavior to their children, while also criticizing Democrats for giving us "higher taxes and more government" and praising Republicans for "cutting taxes, balancing the budget, putting people on welfare back to work, and having a plan to save Social Security."[253] However, the party's attempt at framing the 1998 midterms as a question of ethics backfired, with Democrats gaining seats in the House.[254] In the immediate aftermath of the 1998 midterms, Nicholson faced down a challenge to his leadership, with top GOP donors criticizing the RNC and Congressional leaders for failing to "articulate a clear message" and focusing on "scandal and impeachment." In response, Nicholson promised the RNC would "have a better message discipline about taxes, about improving our national defense" moving forward.[255]

While mostly lackluster in terms of publicity, Nicholson did continue Barbour's investments in one crucial publicity element: the party's activities on the internet. Most notably in this regard, the GOP announced in 1999 that it would begin its own internet service. For a subscription fee of $19.95 a month, party donors and subscribers of Republican Party publications could join the GOP's internet access service and receive direct correspondence from the national committee. As

[251] "Who is a Republican," *New York Times*, January 14, 1998. See also: "Chairman of the Republican National Committee Fights 'Litmus Test' on Abortion," *New York Times*, January 7, 1998; "Abortion Proposal May Dominate RNC Meeting," *Washington Post*, January 7, 1998; "RNC Is Warned Against Antiabortion Tactic," *Washington Post*, January 13, 1998.

[252] The RNC did vote for a resolution rejecting partial birth abortion. RNC member Tim Lambert who wrote the original 'litmus test' resolution rejected this as "not a compromise" but "capitulation" to pro-choice Republicans. See: "Republicans Reject Abortion Litmus Test," *New York Times*, January 17, 1998.

[253] "The Republican Ad that Revisited the White House Scandal," *New York Times*, October 29, 1998. See also: "Republican Party Chief Enters Fray with Attack Over Clinton Scandal," *New York Times*, February 13, 1998; "Lewinsky Issue Inspires Theme for G.O.P. Ads," *New York Times*, September 2, 1998.

[254] Republicans maintained their majority in the House, by 223 to 211 seats. In the Senate, the partisan division remained stable at 55 Republican seats to 45 Democratic seats.

[255] "Big Donors Say G.O.P. Leaders Lack Direction," *New York Times*, January 16, 1999. See also: "Engler Claims No Wish for RNC Job," *Washington Post*, November 16, 1998; "RNC Chief Lobbies to Keep Job," *Washington Post*, November 19, 1998; "G.O.P. Chairman Overcomes Challenge to His Re-Election," *New York Times*, January 23, 1999.

Larry Purporo, deputy chief of staff of the RNC and director of the 'e.GOP' program explained, the GOP's role as internet provider meant that voters would receive the party's response to political events as quickly as party leaders would: "when Al Gore double-speaks on his record on the nuclear test ban treaty, we'll get our response in [subscribers'] hands the same minute as it reaches a state party chairman."[256] The internet service also came with an 'anti-smut filter,' and in advertising pitches the RNC promoted it as particularly suited for "people who want freedom FROM the press" [capitalization in original].[257] During the 2000 convention, the GOP provided a prime-time internet broadcast each night of the proceedings, presenting the broadcast as allowing citizens to watch the GOP's message "without intrusion from Democratic attacks and spin – not to mention the intrusion of editorializing journalists."[258]

Backing the President: The RNC under George W. Bush, 2001-2008

The 2000 election barely won the GOP the White House – after the Supreme Court's decision in *Bush v. Gore*. At the same time, the party's majority in the House declined, and the Senate now was split evenly between Republicans and Democrats.[259] Yet, Bush and his top political advisor Karl Rove, set themselves the goal of building a "long-lasting GOP majority."[260] While Bush and, in particular, Rove remained dedicated to growing the Republican Party in this regard, during the Bush era, the RNC's role was mostly modest. This is in line with the branding theory's prediction with regard to the period between 2002 and 2006, when the party had unified control of government. The most notable element of the committee in this period was the remarkable number of committee chairs appointed and replaced by Bush (see Table 5.4), with several chairs serving less than a year at the committee.

Bush's first chairman was Virginia governor Jim Gilmore.[261] With the party coming out of a close presidential election, and not fully in control of Congress, Gilmore announced he believe the RNC should continue reaching out to new voters. During its May 2001 meeting the committee focused on how the party could reach out to minority voters, concluding that the party should

[256] "Republicans Plan to Offer a Party Line to the Internet," *New York Times*, November 8, 1999.
[257] "G.O.P. Plans Year of Raising Money and Reaching Out," *New York Times*, January 17, 2000.
[258] "GOP Web TV: An Unconventional Airing of the Republican Gathering," *Washington Post*, July 30, 2000.
[259] This meant Vice-President Dick Cheney would have the deciding vote on any split votes. After Senator Jim Jeffords (R-VT) left the GOP in the spring of 2001, Democrats became the official majority party in the Senate.
[260] Cited in Galvin, *Presidential Party Building*, 255.
[261] "Bush Taps Gilmore As RNC Chairman," *Washington Post*, December 22, 2000.

Table 5.5: *Republican National Committee Chairmen Appointed by George W. Bush, 2001-2008*

Chairman	*Period in Office*
Jim Gilmore	January 2001 - December 2001
Marc Racicot	December 2001 - June 2003
Ed Gillespie	June 2003 - January 2004
Ken Mehlman	January 2004 - January 2007
Mel Martinez	January 2007 - October 2007
Mike Duncan	October 2007 - January 2009

increase its permanent presence in minority communities. Gilmore also initiated a program aimed at decreasing the ongoing gender gap between the GOP and the Democratic Party. Lead by RNC co-chair Ann Wagner, the RNC created the 'Winning Women' program, which focused in part on publicizing the important role female Republican leaders such as Karen Hughes and Condoleezza Rice played in the Bush administration.[262]

However, Gilmore lasted less than a year at the RNC, and his tenure was marked by a lack of interaction between the committee and the Bush administration. While the RNC and Bush worked together in coordinating fundraising activities, Gilmore rarely communicated with the president.[263] White House advisors complained that he was not "suitably aggressive in pitching the president's agenda," and Rep. Thomas M. Davis (R-VA), chairman of the GOP's Congressional campaign committee, complained that "[Gilmore] needs to understand that he's the president's guy. It's not his committee. He's the president's eyes and ears."[264] After the GOP lost both the New Jersey and Virginia gubernatorial elections in 2001, Bush replaced Gilmore with former Montana Governor Marc Racicot.[265]

Racicot, Bush promised, would "reach out to members of the labor unions and the minorities" and "continue to take our positive, optimistic message to all neighborhoods around the country."[266] News reports also stressed that Racicot and Bush were old friends, increasing the possibility of more direct interaction between president and national committee. However, despite this friendship, Racicot and Bush rarely met in person, and Rove was the main source of contact

[262] "G.O.P. Tries to Counter Lack of Support Among Women," *New York Times*, August 1, 2001.
[263] "Bush and His Cabinet Stepping in as Chief Fund-Raisers for G.O.P.," *New York Times*, April 19, 2001; "Bush Gala Expected to Net $15 Million," *New York Times*, May 20, 2001.
[264] "Tensions Touch G.O.P. Chief's Tenure," *New York Times*, July 20, 2001.
[265] "GOP Leader is Criticized Over Party's Election Losses," *New York Times*, November 9, 2001; "Ex-Governor Weighs Top Republican Post," *New York Times*, December 4, 2001.
[266] "Party Chairman, presidential Friend," *New York Times*, December 6, 2001.

at the White House. Still, the RNC did introduce several new publicity programs, including attempts by the committee to build on Bush's popularity among Hispanic voters by creating a new half-hour weekly television program in Spanish called *Abriendo Caminos* – or 'forging paths.' The RNC broadcast the program in electoral battlegrounds with high concentrations of Hispanic voters, and the show provided information about the Bush administration's proposals. The program specifically aimed to convince Hispanic voters that the GOP was working for them, while Democrats attempted to block them: for example, the first episode featured a segment on Miguel Estrada, a Hispanic nominee for appellate judge whose confirmation hearings were delayed by Senate Democrats.[267]

Republicans succeeded in winning seats in the 2002 midterms[268] – a rarity for an in-party – and gain unified control of government. Bush named Racicot chairman of his reelection campaign in June 2003, and appointed lobbyist Ed Gillespie as his third RNC chair. Gillespie acknowledged the basic truth of his position as an in-party chair, noting that "if the president doesn't think I'm doing a good job, I won't be in the job very long."[269] With Republicans in the majority, Bush unchallenged for re-nomination, and Democratic presidential candidates focused on campaigning against each other in their primary races, Gillespie mostly focused on fundraising while occasionally attacking Democrats for their opposition to the Iraq War.[270] The RNC postponed major media buys until November 2003, when it aired an ad focused on terrorism – directly invoking 9/11, and calling on voters to contact their member of Congress and "tell them to support the president's policy of pre-emptive self-defense."[271] After John Kerry became the likely Democratic nominee in March

[267] "The Party of George 'Doble Ve'," *New York Times*, June 24, 2002. The RNC had begun to reach out to Hispanic voters in earnest in 1999 after polling suggested that Hispanic voters were largely dissatisfied with the Democratic Party. Bush had won nearly half of Hispanic votes in his reelection in Texas in 1998, and the RNC used his candidacy to reach out specifically to Hispanic voters by relying on Spanish language ads. See: Leslie Sanchez, *Los Republicanos: Why Hispanics and Republicans Need Each Other* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 1997) 162-172; Zachary W. Oberfield and Adam J. Segal, "Pluralism Examined: Party Television Expenditures Focused on the Latino Vote in Presidential Elections," in Federico A. Subervi-Velez, *The Mass Media and Latino Politics: Studies of U.S. Media Content, Campaign Strategies and Survey Research: 1984-2004* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008) 291-308.

[268] Republicans gained eight seats in the House, strengthening their majority there to 229-205. In the Senate, the GOP added two seats, overturning the temporary majority Democrats gained after Republican Senator Jim Jeffords (VT) left the GOP in the spring of 2001.

[269] "Bush Names Lobbyist as Leader of G.O.P.," *New York Times*, June 17, 2003.

[270] For example, during a Democratic presidential debate in Iowa in November 2003, the RNC "was churning out news releases [. . .] pointing out all the things Mr. Bush's would-be opponents were doing wrong" and Gillespie was "on hand to bash the Democrats." See: "New G.O.P. Chief Hammers Democrats," *New York Times*, July 26, 2003; "Instant Response, By Committee," *New York Times*, November 30, 2003.

[271] This part of the ad frustrated Republican foreign policy experts in the State Department and White House because they argue the Bush doctrine relied on pre-emptive self-defense only as a last option. See: "When Foreign Policy Aims and Campaign Needs Clash," *New York Times*, November 28, 2003. See also: "G.O.P. to Run and Ad for Bush on Terror

2004, the Bush campaign and RNC engaged in a 90-day media strategy aimed at defining Kerry as "indecisive and lacking conviction" through "a coordinated blitz of advertisements, speeches, and sound bites."[272] Additionally, in the fall of 2004 the RNC admitted that it had funded mailers sent to voters in Arkansas and West-Virginia warning that liberals were seeking to ban the bible.[273] However, the core activities were masterminded by Rove from within the Bush-Cheney campaign.

After winning reelection – and strengthening Republican majorities in House and Senate – Bush replaced Gillespie and named his former campaign manager Ken Mehlman as his fourth RNC chair. Mehlman celebrated the Republican electoral performance in 2002 and 2004 as the party winning "a majority, not a plurality twice" and announced that "one of our goals now needs to be to take these gains and make them more durable."[274] Still, Mehlman acknowledged that "we're certainly not in the position that F.D.R. Democrats were in the 1930s and 40s. We're not the overwhelming favorite. There are going to be challenges. [...] But it does mean we're in a very strong position."[275]

As chair, Mehlman returned to the party's persistent lack of support among black voters. According to news reports, Mehlman spent considerable time and energy raising money for black Republican candidates, and promoted a religion-based program as a way of creating a relationship between the RNC and black churches. Notably, Mehlman also appeared at the NAACP's 2005 conference, and used his speech there to apologize for the GOP's reliance on the Southern Strategy while simultaneously criticizing the Democratic Party taking black voters for granted:

> "Some Republicans gave up on winning the African-American vote, looking the other way or trying to benefit politically from racial polarization. I am here today as the Republican chairman to tell you we were wrong. [...] If my party benefited from racial polarization in the past, it is the Democratic Party that benefits from it today. I know it is not in my interest as chairman of the Republican Party for close to 90 percent of African-Americans to vote for the Democrat every election. But more important, it's not in the interest of African-Americans for 90 percent to vote for the Democrat every

Issue," *New York Times*, November 21, 2003.

[272] "90- Day Strategy By Bush's Aides to Define Kerry," *New York Times*, March 20, 2004.

[273] "Republicans Admit Mailing Campaign Literature Saying Liberals Will Ban the Bible," *New York Times*, September 24, 2004.

[274] "Bush Picks Campaign Chief to Head G.O.P.," *New York Times*, November 16, 2004.

[275] "Some See Risks for G.O.P. as it Revels in New Powers," *New York Times*, January 24, 2005.

election."[276]

However, beyond these attempts at reaching out to black voters, the RNC largely remained inactive in the run-up to the 2006 elections. In terms of building on Bush's popularity with Hispanic voters, Mehlman continued to argue that Bush's policies defined the party line. However, Republicans' failure to pass immigration reform muddled this message.[277] Facing a set of major corruption (involving former House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-TX)) and sex scandals (involving Representative Mark Foley (R-FL)), the aftermath of the administration's poor response to Hurricane Katrina, and increasing voter opposition to the Iraq War, the RNC limited its activities in the 2006 campaign to just six states.[278] Despite reassurances that the RNC could rely on its 2004 campaign apparatus and a well-financed Get Out the Vote Project, Republicans faced major defeats in the 2006 midterms, resulting in Democratic majorities in both the House and Senate.[279]

In the wake of this defeat, Mehlman announced he was not available for a second two-year term, and was replaced by Senator Mel Martinez (R-FL).[280] While Martinez announced that under his leadership the RNC would reach "out to all Americans, speaking to their hopes and aspirations and dreams,"[281] attempts at promoting the party as open to minority voters stalled – with all Republican presidential candidates refusing to participate in a September 2007 PBS debate on minority issues.[282] Martinez resigned only ten months after starting as chair, and Bush named RNC general counsel Mike Duncan as his final chairman.[283] However, with media attention focused squarely on both parties' presidential candidates, and with the party facing considerable fundraising limitations related to Bush's decrease in popularity, Duncan predominantly focused on raising money in his year in office.

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[276] "Bush and Party Chief Court Black Voters at 2 Forums," *New York Times*, July 15, 2005. See also: "Republican Party is Backing Black Candidates in Bid to Attract Votes," *New York Times*, July 1, 2005.

[277] "G.O.P. Risking Hispanic Votes on Immigration," *New York Times*, March 30, 2006.

[278] "Rove's Word Is No Longer G.O.P. Gospel," *New York Times*, September 3, 2006; "In House Races, More G.O.P. Seats Are Seen at Risk," *New York Times*, October 7, 2006.

[279] "Democrats Have an Intensity, But G.O.P. Has Its Machine," *New York Times*, October 15, 2006.

[280] "Republican Party Chairman Will Not Seek Another Term," *New York Times*, November 10, 2006; "Hispanic Is Expected to be Next Public Face of the G.O.P.," *New York Times*, November 14, 2006.

[281] "Outgoing Chief Warns G.O.P. on Outlook for 2008 Races," *New York Times*, January 18, 2007.

[282] "The G.O.P.'s Candidate-Free Debate," *New York Times*, September 20, 2007.

[283] "Senator Steps Down as a Top G.O.P. Official," *New York Times*, October 20, 2007.

Conclusion

Throughout the period 1981-2008 the RNC was largely under the control of its parties' presidents. As the branding theory of national committee activities predicts, during the Reagan and George H.W. Bush administration, the committee thus engaged in a variety of major publicity activities – most commonly major advertising campaigns – in support of the president and their policy proposals. During the Clinton administration, particularly under the leadership of Barbour, the RNC invested heavily in new technology that would help the party promote its program through television shows, and the internet. The committee's public role appears to have declined under the leadership of Jim Nicholson – a surprise victor in the 1997 race for the RNC chairman, though the committee did continue to invest in the party's internet presence. During the George W. Bush administration, the RNC midterms provided notable publicity support until the 2002 midterms, but after the party gained control of Congress its role appears to have been more as a side-show to the White House's own political operations as planned by Bush advisor Karl Rove. Certainly, the revolving door policy Bush maintained towards the committee's chairmanship suggests the RNC was not a top priority during these years.

III. Conclusion

Throughout the period 1981-2008 both the DNC and RNC engaged in a variety of major publicity efforts on behalf of their parties and, in the case of in-party minority parties, their presidents. These efforts included the creation of new television shows, major advertising campaigns outside of election years in support or opposition of specific policies, and – in the 1990s and beyond – investments in the party's internet presence. Mostly, the cases above are in line with the expectations underlying the branding theory. That is, with both parties predominantly in the national minority, both the DNC and RNC consistently invested in the kind of publicity programs predicted by the branding theory. For example, during the Reagan and George H.W. Bush administrations the RNC frequently engaged in major publicity programs intended to support the legislative programs supported by its presidents. At the same time, the DNC countered this message while trying to reposition the party in the center and regain support among working class white voters. Similarly, during the Clinton and George W. Bush administrations the RNC and

DNC (respectively) engaged in outreach efforts aimed at attacking the incumbent administrations, and expanding their party's voting base.

Notably though, not all cases confirm the theory. One notable failure concerns the DNC's activities during the first two years of the Clinton administration. While the party held the White House and also was in the majority in the House and Senate prior to the 1994 midterms, the DNC still engaged in several major publicity efforts in support of the Clinton agenda – a differentiation from the predicted outcome that potentially was caused by the nature of Clinton's 1992 victory by way of a major third-party challenger. Additionally, during Clinton's second term the DNC should have been *more* active, but instead appears to have declined in terms of publicity. This may have been the product of the party's major financial and legal difficulties after the fundraising scandals surrounding the 1996 election.

The cases presented above also suggest that the changes in the presidential primaries – most notably the 'frontloading' of both the start of the primary elections, and that of the candidates' campaigns – has affected national committee publicity efforts. With presidential candidates engaged in major intra-party debates as early as the start of the year *before* a presidential election, both the DNC and RNC appear to scale back their publicity activities in the during contested primaries.[284] While it is perhaps not surprising that the media attention the party's presidential candidates receive might preclude the national committees from engaging in major new publicity programs, if correct this development would indicate that in the post-1980 period, the role of national committees has declined considerably. That is, even for out-party committees, the extent to which they try to influence the party brand through publicity is now limited to just those years between a lost presidential election, and the moment its parties' presidential candidates begin their campaigns in earnest.

[284] That is, 1984, 1988, 1992, 2000, 2004, and 2008 for the Democrats, and 1988, 1996, 2000, and 2008 for the Republicans.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

In this dissertation I have argued that the existing literature on the Democratic and Republican national committees has failed to identify the core value these political institutions provide to their parties, namely that party leaders believe the DNC and RNC exist to help produce a national brand for the party. As I have shown in case studies covering both parties between 1913 and 2008, the national committees do indeed engage in a variety of publicity activities with the intention of informing voters of their party's policy positions, and party leaders very consistently look towards their national committees to do exactly that.

Crucially, the DNC and RNC do not consistently engage in such branding activities. Additionally, they also do not consistently have the agency to determine *what* they can promote. Indeed, as theorized in chapter 1, national committee branding activities are related to the party's electoral performance. Specifically, if a party has unified control of the federal government, and is the national majority party, we would expect to see a decline in publicity services. If the party is in the White House, but in the minority in Congress, we would expect to see their committee engage in major publicity programs, but for those to be in service of the president. Finally, if the party is out of the White House – regardless of whether it has a minority or majority in Congress – then we would expect it to engage in major publicity programs and for the committee and its chair to have considerable freedom in determining what image it promotes.

As illustrated in Table 6.1, the large majority of cases presented in this dissertation are in line with the theory's predictions. In 20 out of 27 cases, the national committees acted as predicted. In an additional three cases, the results were mixed - usually indicating that for most of the period

Table 6.1: *Case Study Results by National Party Status, 1913-2008*

	House and Senate	
White House	*Majority*	*Minority*
In-Party	DNC: **1913-1918**; 1933-1946 1961-1968; **1993-1994** RNC: *1921-1930*; 2003-2006	DNC: 1919-1920; *1995-2000* RNC:**1931-1932**; 1969-1976; 1981-1992; 2001-2002; **2007-2008**
Out-Party	DNC: 1955-1960; 1987-1992; 2007-2008 RNC: 1919-1920; 1995-2000	DNC: *1921-1932*; 1953-1954; 1981-1986; 2001-2006 RNC: 1913-1918; 1933-1946; 1961-1968; 1977-1980; 1993-1994

Note: Cases that are in line with the branding theory's expectations are printed in regular text, those that produced mixed results within the case are italicized, and those that went against the theory are printed in bold.

covered the committees' publicity activities followed the theory predictions but for a subset of time they did not. In only four cases, the the theory's predictions were incorrect entirely. In the sections that follow I briefly summarize the findings that are in line with the theory's expectations. Subsequently, I will discuss cases included in this dissertation that go against the theory. Finally, I will discuss the implications of these findings for the study of the national committees and American political parties more broadly, and avenues for future research.

I. National Committees of 'Out-Parties'

The branding theory predicts that national committees of parties that do not control the White House should invest in new publicity programs, and that the chairs of such committees have considerable agency in determining what policies to promote, and what voters to target. The logic underlying this expectation is that national minority parties will want to convince voting groups that rejected the party in the previous election to (re-)join their coalition. Since the party lacks control of the federal government, it cannot easily do so through successful governance, and – thus – will have to 'tell' instead of 'show' voters why they should support the party. Because the party lacks a president, the chair of the committee has increased job security and, therefore, more agency than they would have if the party was 'in' the White House. The cases presented in this dissertation largely confirm the theory's prediction. Indeed, many of the biggest publicity programs either committee introduced in the time period covered in this dissertation, were created

during a party's time out of the White House, and committees of out-parties frequently placed themselves in the middle of major intra-party debates on policy.

On the Democratic side, the DNC invested in publicity programs during the Harding-Coolidge, and Hoover administrations. Under chairmen Hull and Raskob, the DNC was expanded to include publicity services aimed at reaching out to voters. Raskob in particular invested considerable sums of his own money in creating, what was described as, the "most elaborate, expensive efficient, and effective political propaganda machine ever operated in the country."[1] Under Eisenhower, the DNC was revitalized and invested in two major publicity programs: the *Democratic Digest* – a magazine aimed at presenting "the voice of the Democratic party"[2] to voters – and the Democratic Advisory Council (DAC) – a new party institution created to let the DNC set, and subsequently promote, policies for the national party. Under the Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and George W. Bush administrations, the DNC engaged in a variety of publicity efforts aimed at reconnecting their party to the white voters that had flocked to Ronald Reagan and the GOP in the 1980 election.

In the GOP, out-party national committees engaged in very similar activities. During the Wilson administration, the RNC created a press bureau to "forward the propaganda of Republicanism"[3] and an Advisory Committee on Politics and Platform to help shape the 1920 platform. During the FDR years, RNC chairmen created new programs aimed at producing a unified GOP response to the New Deal, including a new committee to prepare the next party platform. During the Kennedy and Johnson administrations RNC chairs invested in major publicity programs such as a set of new party publications, advertisements, a weekly radio and TV program called *Comment*, an Arts and Sciences division aimed at reaching out to conservative academics, and the Republican Coordinating Committee (RCC) – a copy of the DNC's DAC. During the presidency of Jimmy Carter, RNC chair Bill Brock created a new journal, *Commonsense*, and promoted the GOP to a variety of voting blocks, including conservative Christians, 'ethnic' voters, and – most importantly – blacks. During the Clinton years, the RNC embraced the Contract With America, used advertisements to put pressure on conservative Democrats to oppose the

[1] Cited in Douglas B.S. Craig, *Rehearsal for Revolt: The Ideological Turmoil of the Democratic Party, 1920-1932* (Dissertation; University of Virginia), 425.

[2] "Pocket Sized Digest Planned by Democrats," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 31, 1953.

[3] "Old Guard Decides Against Convention," *The New York Times*, May 20, 1913.

administration's economic policies, and began investing in online initiatives, including providing internet service to Republican customers through its 'e-GOP' program.

Crucially, national committee chairs had considerable agency in determining what kind of policy positions they wanted to promote, and what voters they wanted to target. Indeed, it was quite common for national committee chairs to find themselves in the middle of intense intra-party conflict on the policy direction the party should take. For example, Raskob attempted to use the DNC to make the Democratic Party embrace opposition to Prohibition, and Paul Butler used the DNC and DAC to push the Democratic Party to the left during the second Eisenhower term. In both cases, conservative Democrats strongly opposed such moves. Similarly, in the GOP RNC chairs used their agency to attempt to push their party in their preferred ideological direction. For example, RNC chairs Bill Miller and Dean Burch saw the future of the GOP as a conservative party and focused their attentions on reaching out to Southern white voters. In contrast, Ray Bliss and Bill Brock used the same position to move the party to the center, and attempted to appeal to black voters.

II. Presidents and Minority Party National Committees

The branding theory predicts that national committees of parties that hold the White House but lack a majority in Congress will behave similarly to those of parties that are 'out' of the White House. That is, we should expect committees of minority party presidents to also invest in major publicity programs. However, because presidents can hire and fire national committee chairs, and, therefore, have considerable control over their national party organizations, we should expect such committees to promote a brand that is in line with the preferences of the president.

The cases presented also confirm these expectations. On the Republican side, there are several cases of the party holding the White House while being in the minority in Congress. In all of these cases, the RNC did indeed remain active in providing publicity for the party, but in doing so the committee focused on promoting the president and their preferred policies. For example, under Richard Nixon, RNC chairs Rogers Morton, Bob Dole, and George H.W. Bush invested in major publicity programs including *Monday* (later, *First Monday*) - a weekly publication focused on attacking Democrats and promoting the Nixon White House, and organizing a set of New

Majority Workshops intended to convince those voters that had voted for Nixon in 1972 but not for other Republicans down ticket to join the party in full. Under Gerald Ford, RNC chair Mary Louise Smith invested a considerable part of the committee's limited budget in a major advertisement campaign which included three 30 minute television specials aired on the major networks. During the administrations of Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush, the RNC engaged in similar activities – including producing a considerable number of TV advertisements promoting the president's policy positions, and connecting the party directly to the president. Even under George W. Bush – during which the party was largely in the national majority, and in which the main political strategist (Karl Rove) worked in the White House, not the national committee – the RNC still attempted to build the party's popularity among Hispanic voters, for example through *Abriendo Caminos*, a Spanish language weekly TV show.

On the Democratic side, the party's weakness in the System of 1896, and its subsequent dominance in Congressional elections in the post-1932 electoral system, meant that the combination of control of the White House and a minority in Congress was rare. However, while the DNC was less effective during his second term, after Democrats lost control of both the House and Senate in the 1994 midterm losses the committee invested heavily in TV advertisements aired across the country promoting Clinton's reelection starting in the summer of 1995.

In each of these cases, the committees' publicity service was focused on promoting the president, their legislative proposals, and their broader vision of the party. In part, this was simply the product of, what Galvin terms, presidential 'predation'[4] of party resources: presidents who were up for reelection used the committee's publicity divisions to promote themselves to the public. But president-centered publicity programs are not always a reflection of presidential desire to take advantage of their parties. Indeed, in cases where a party has the White House but not a majority in Congress, the president is both party leader *and* the only elected official who managed to win majority support from the public.[5] By tying the party to the president, national committees frequently were trying to tap into the successful presidential electoral coalition and apply it to the broader party. That is, the logic, as one RNC member explained in the spring of 1973, of national

[4] Daniel J. Galvin, *Presidential Party Building: Dwight D. Eisenhower to George W. Bush* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

[5] This, of course, is a simplification: presidents frequently win the White House winning less than 50% of the vote and in rarer cases even when losing the popular vote. Still, in most scenarios minority party presidents are more popular than their parties.

committees of minority in-parties is to "sell what's popular. That's the President."[6]

III. Committees of National Majority Parties

Finally, the branding theory predicts that in cases where the party is in the national majority – that is, when it simultaneously has a president in the White House, and majorities in both the House and Senate – the party's committee should decrease its publicity role. The logic behind this prediction is that national majority parties have presidents who are likely to be less focused on party building activities, and party leaders who are more likely to try to produce a brand through legislation and governance than through publicity, and may want to avoid the kind of intra-party conflicts that committee publicity can accentuate.

In nearly every case of a national majority party presented in this study, we do indeed see a noticeable decline in publicity activities. On the Democratic side, Franklin Delano Roosevelt inherited a national committee with a major publicity organization when he won the 1932 election. While he made one of his top advisors, James Farley, DNC chair, and while FDR himself had called for the DNC to play an active role in providing publicity for the national party in the 1920s, the committee declined dramatically and remained "in a state of dormancy, with only a skeleton staff"[7] throughout the New Deal years. Similarly, after eight years of major investments in publicity programs during the Eisenhower administration, John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson cut many of these programs – including the *Digest* and DAC. On the Republican side, the RNC under Coolidge met irregularly and focused nearly exclusively on organizing national conventions. Meanwhile, after the 2002 midterms, the RNC under George W. Bush became a revolving door of chairmen – some of whom served less than a year – without major publicity programs. Note that the decline of the committees in these cases did not mean that the DNC and RNC went out of business entirely. Indeed, the committees consistently raised money for the party and provided other services (including campaign advice to candidates).

[6] "Bush Remolds GOP Committee into Adjunct of White House," *Washington Post*, March 19, 1973.
[7] Ralph M. Goldman, *The National Party Chairmen: Factionalism at the Top* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1990), 355.

IV. Exceptions

Unsurprisingly, not all cases presented here confirm the theory. To provide some explanation for why the theory fails in some cases, it may be helpful to think of such exceptions to fall in one of two possible categories: (1) cases in which the theory predicted that the national committees *should* engage in publicity programs, but they did not; and (2) cases in which the theory predicted that the national committees should *not* engage in publicity programs, but they did.

The first category includes cases such as the DNC's lackluster performance during the Coolidge administration (1925-1928), the second Clinton term (1997-2000), and in the period right before major presidential primary campaigns (specifically the 1988, 1992, 2000, 2004, and 2008 elections), and the RNC's lack of activity during the last two years of the George H.W. Bush administration, Bill Clinton's second term in the White House, and in the last two years of George W. Bush's second term.

One explanation for a lack of publicity activity is simply a lack of funding. Providing publicity costs money, and when a party is incapable of convincing donors to provide the party with cash flow, publicity programs may be desired, but cannot be paid for. This was certainly true for the Coolidge era DNC, when the party did not even have a budget going into the 1926 campaign, and in the DNC during Clinton's second term, when the party faced a major deficit due to the financial scandals of the 1996 campaign. Additionally, the recent developments of committee publicity decline during contested presidential primary campaigns suggests the DNC and RNC aim to stay out of the way of their party's candidates.

The second category includes cases such as the DNC under the first years of Woodrow Wilson and Bill Clinton in the White House, and the RNC under the Harding administration. The Harding era RNC is something of a mystery that may simply be an extreme outlier: the GOP had comfortable majorities in the House and Senate, and held the White House. Yet, RNC chair John T. Adams publicly attacked progressive Republicans in Congress and even the Harding administration itself. From a theoretical perspective, the Wilson and Clinton cases are more interesting: in both cases, the Democrats had majority control of Congress and won the presidency, but the DNC remained more active than the theory would predict. However, in both cases the presidential victory came out of a three-way race: in 1912, Woodrow Wilson won the White

House at least in part because of the division on the Republican side between Taft and Theodore Roosevelt. In 1992, Clinton won the White House in a three-way race between incumbent President George H.W. Bush and third-party candidate Ross Perot. In the aftermath of these elections, party leaders – including Wilson himself and top advisors to Clinton – showed concern about the nature of their victory, and expressed doubt that their party could count on a reliable voting majority in future elections. This suggests – unsurprisingly – that party leaders do not think of majority or minority status in purely dichotomous terms, and in such (rare) cases incorporate the broader context of election results into their assessment of the kind of activities they need from their national committees.

V. Implications and Future Research

This dissertation contributes to our understanding of political parties in several ways. On the most basic level, it represents the most complete history of national committee activity in political science thus far. While most studies of the DNC and RNC focus on their role in the period after the New Deal, this study covers the period from 1913 – the first time the committees decided to keep their HQs open after the end of an election campaign – through 2008. As a result, this dissertation provides a more complete assessment of how the committees have been involved in major debates across time about important intra-party decisions – including the crucial process of partisan sorting in the 1950s, '60s, and '70s – and how they have tried to incorporate new technological approaches (ranging from print publications, to radio, to television, to the internet) to reach their goal of providing voters with information about the party's policy positions in the hope of shaping the party's brand.

Additionally, this study contributes to our understanding of the role party organizations play in American politics. In doing so, it presents a major reassessment of the dominant perspective in research on the Democratic and Republican national committees in which these institutions are dismissed as mere 'service providers.' While studies in this literature are correct in noting that providing services for their party is a core task of both the DNC and RNC, I have argued that this literature has missed a crucial component of what makes these institutions relevant to political actors: the role they play in helping to try and shape a national party brand for their

party. Because national party brands are so important to political actors, the publicity campaigns and activities national committees engage in are relevant to all party members – as is the question who controls their national committee. Thus, the DNC and RNC are a lot more important than the 'service provider' literature has given them credit for: they engage in an activity that is fundamental to modern political parties. Importantly, in cases where the party is out of the White House – national committee chairs also have considerable freedom in shaping what brand their committee promulgates. Thus, this dissertation shows that the national committees are far more relevant to political parties than previously thought.

These findings also present a challenge to the more recent literature on political parties as coalitions of interest groups (known collectively as the 'UCLA School'). It should be noted that this study coexists well with many of the tenants of the UCLA School's view of American political parties. That is, it is clear from the cases presented in this dissertation that political actors generally appear to think about electoral politics in terms of the kind of voting *groups* – for example, black voters; Southern white voters; white working class voters; Hispanic voters; female voters – they need to incorporate into their voting coalition to do better in future elections. As a result, the committees adjust the way they promote the party to appeal to specific voting groups. However, while the UCLA School has largely rejected the role institutions play in coordinating intra-party group politics, the cases presented in this study show that party leaders actively aim to shape their party's voting coalition, and that they believe party institutions are crucial in achieving that goal.

This study also adds to the literature on party brands. While party brands are a fundamental explanatory variable in studies of political party activities in American politics, the bulk of research that incorporates this concept focuses on Congress. As a result, much of this literature also argues that party brands are created *by* Congress. This is certainly true, but this study argues that other party institutions also attempt to help shape this brand – frequently in cooperation with fellow partisans in Congress, but sometimes also in opposition to them. These findings suggest that a more comprehensive view of party brands – one in which we view a national brand as a collection of many signals from partisans in Congress, the White House, national committees, state politics, and the media – is necessary to understand how a brand is produced.

Unsurprisingly, this dissertation raises considerable additional research questions that go

unanswered here but that future studies may be able to engage. First and foremost, the study presented here is exclusively qualitative – as most studies of national committees are. The basic reason for this is that access to consistent quantitative data regarding national committee activities (such as internal budgets) are hard to come by. While the cases presented here cover both a considerable amount of time, and all 'types' of parties, we currently lack a consistent quantitative test of the branding theory's argument as to when we should expect to see increases and decreases in publicity activity. It may, however, be possible to find some external measure of committee publicity – through news coverage of the DNC and RNC, measures of advertisement buys, etc. – that could provide an indirect measure of such committee activities. Additionally, while this study expands on our understanding how politicians belief party brands are created, it does not tackle the question of whether national committees are actually effective in doing so. Thus, while a more expansive understanding of party brands beyond Congress is necessary, so is an assessment of how voters make sense of the different signals they receive from within the same party.

Finally, future research must assess the fact that the political context in which committees function has faced considerable changes since 2008. The rise of the internet as a tool of political communication has radically altered how individual politicians can communicate with voters: while in the past, considerable financial and technological resources were required to reach voters through magazines, radio broadcasts, TV shows, and advertisements, today politicians can reach large audiences for free through messages on their Twitter accounts, YouTube videos, and Facebook posts. While both national committees joined the internet age in the 1990s and early-2000s, and continue to maintain an internet presence, it is undeniably true that any dominance the DNC and RNC may have once had in promoting a party brand to a national audience has decreased dramatically. Additionally, the Supreme Court's 2010 ruling in *Citizens United v. FEC* has meant a radical restructuring of the financial basis of American election campaigns. While in the past, national committees were the dominant fundraising source for many election campaigns within the party, increasingly outside groups are playing a more dominant role in funding election campaigns.

Combined this suggests that there is a possibility that this new political context has affected how party leaders view the role of national committees. For example, while he was the leader of a national minority party for six out of his eight years in office, President Barack Obama was

notoriously disinterested in the DNC – preferring instead to focus his party building attentions on his own campaign organization Organizing For America (OFA).[8] On the other hand, national committees have also not abandoned their attempts at shaping their party's public image. The RNC – under the chairmanship of Michael Steele (2009-2010), and Reince Priebus (2011-2016) – presented a series of programs and proposals aimed at improving Republican performance among black, Hispanic, and LGBT voters.[9] Additionally, after the disastrous 2016 elections and the controversial role of the DNC in the Democratic primaries of that year, the 2017 race for DNC chairman between Secretary of Labor Tom Perez and Rep. Keith Ellison (D-MN), saw both candidates propose major expansions of the committee to counter the presidency of Donald Trump.[10] Even Barack Obama – in January 2017 – took "some responsibility" for the weak state of his party, explaining that "partly because my docket was really full" with the economic crisis and foreign affairs

> "I couldn't be both chief organizer of the Democratic Party and function as commander in chief and president of the United States. We did not begin what I think needs to happen over the long haul, and that is to rebuild the Democratic Party at the ground level."[11]

Thus, while future studies of the national committees must incorporate the changing political context in which they function, it appears likely that in the years to come party leaders -will continue to look at their national party organizations as an important element in helping shape their party's public image.

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[8] OFA began as Obama For America – Obama's 2007-2008 primary and presidential election campaign organization and was spun off as its own independent organization after the 2012 election. See: Sidney M. Milkis and John Warren York, "Barack Obama, Organizing for Action, and Executive-Centered Partisanship," *Studies in American Political Development* (forthcoming).

[9] Most notably, the RNC produced the "Growth and Opportunity Project" – commonly known as the committee's 'autopsy' of the 2012 election – in which the committee concluded that voters' perception is that "the GOP does not care about people" and that "instead of driving around in circles on an ideological cul-de-sac, we need a Party whose brand of conservatism invites and inspires new people to visit us" (Republican National Committee, *Growth and Opportunity Project*, (2013), 5)

[10] "Democrats Elect Thomas Perez, Establishment Favorite, as Party Chairman," *New York Times*, February 25, 2017.

[11] "President Obama Finally Admitted he Didn't Pay Enough Attention to the Democratic Party," *Washington Post*, January 9, 2017

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