

The Hollow Parties

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Party politics in 21st century America presents a paradox. Our polarized age is unquestionably also an era of partisan revival. In the mass electorate, party identification predicts voting behavior better than any time since the dawn of polling. In government, intraparty discipline and interparty antagonism have reached unprecedented levels, placing severe strains on the very functioning of a Madisonian system of separated powers and triggering just the kind of chronic, rolling crisis in governance that motivates conferences such as this one. The national party organizations have become financial juggernauts even in a regulatory landscape that offers powerful incentives for political money to flow elsewhere. After languishing in the television-dominated campaign era of the late twentieth century, parties have ramped up their mobilization efforts. During those same decades scholars deemed parties were in permanent decline—but no longer. American parties are strong.

And yet, even as the party divide defines the sides in America's political war, parties *feel* weak. They seem inadequate to the tasks before them—of aggregating and integrating preferences and actors into ordered conflict in American politics, of mobilizing participation and linking government to the governed. This sense cannot merely be chalked up to popular misimpressions or a mistakenly formalistic conception of what modern parties look like. Even prior to 2016, signs had abounded of a brittleness in the capacity of parties and party leaders to influence the political scene and a lack of legitimacy in the eyes of ordinary voters and engaged activists alike. This year's extraordinary political developments should upend any settled consensus that all is well in the party system. American parties are weak.

The solution to this paradox, we argue, lies in the reality that today's parties are hollow parties, neither organizationally robust beyond their roles raising money nor meaningfully felt as a real, tangible presence in the lives of voters or in the work of engaged activists. Partisanship is

strong while parties as institutions are top-heavy in Washington, DC, and undermanned at the grassroots. Fear and loathing of the other side—all too rational thanks to the ideological sorting of the party system—fuels parties and structures politics much more than any positive affinity or party spirit felt by most voters.¹

We focus here on parties more than on partisans, but our critique extends down to individuals. Even if “leaners” – independents who say they “feel closer to” one party – behave in the voting booth exactly like partisans, their increasing numbers should not be passed by so quickly. Instead, they suggest a reticence to march behind a party’s banner.² At the same time, parties motivated by hatred for their opponents lose the capacity to enforce what Russell Muirhead and Nancy Rosenblum term “the discipline of regulated rivalry.”³ They become vehicles for partisans’ own venom and spleen, and their partial democratic visions descend into cabal and conspiracy.

If the “Party Period” of the 19th century featured organizationally robust and locally rooted parties that aggregated participation into meaningful and distinct policy agendas only poorly, the situation has now reversed. Our new Party Period features a grand clash of ideology and interests but parties that are hollowed out and weakly legitimized. And much as 19th century Americans were said to have lacked “a sense of the state,” Americans in the contemporary era of party polarization can be said to lack a sense of party.⁴

¹ Corwin D. Smidt, “Polarization and the Decline of the American Floating Voter,” *American Journal of Political Science* doi:10.1111/ajps.12218; Alan I. Abramowitz and Steven Webster, “The Rise of Negative Partisanship and the Nationalization of American Elections in the 21st Century,” *Electoral Studies* 41 (2016): 12-22.

² Cf. Bruce E. Keith et al., *The Myth of the Independent Voter* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

³ Russell Muirhead and Nancy L. Rosenblum, “Speaking Truth to Conspiracy: Partisanship and Trust,” *Critical Review* 28 (2016), 86. See also Nancy L. Rosenblum, *On the Side of the Angels: An Appreciation of Parties and Partisanship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); and Russell Muirhead, *The Promise of Party in a Polarized Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014).

⁴ H.G. Wells, *The Future in America: A Search After Realities* (1906), quoted in Stephen Skowronek, *Building a New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 3.

Even those Americans driven to engage in political activism—those actors, that is, who do so much to shape modern politics—typically labor outside of the parties. As a result, parties have become tarred with elements of polarization that the public most dislikes—from the screaming antagonism to the grubby money chase—while earning little credit for the ideological engagement and agenda clarity that have also attended modern polarization. And with the parties laid bare in the modern media age, the public sees up a close a gory proceduralism that it likewise detests.⁵

The parties' long-term hollowing-out has cost the American political system dearly. This essay seeks to delineate that cost, in the service of proposing a more robust and meaningful role for parties in American politics. We assuredly do not present such prescriptions as a “solution” to modern polarization. We affirm a politics defined by partisan combat over ideologically informed policy agendas. Indeed, our diagnosis emerges from an older view of responsible party government adapted for a new era. Ironic invocations of responsible parties as laid out in the 1950 report by the APSA Committee on Political Parties have become a staple of political science, usually pitched as a warning to “Be Careful What You Wish For.”⁶ We take a different view, reviving the responsible party prescription of an issue-oriented politics centered on the robust efforts of parties with real integrative tissue and policy capacity. If our take on the modern era of strong partisanship and hollow parties paints a gloomier picture than what many party scholars offer, that may be because we retain a more ambitious vision for political parties in small-d democracy.

⁵ John Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, *Stealth Democracy: Americans' Beliefs About How Government Should Work* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁶ Nicol C. Rae, “Be Careful What You Wish For: The Rise of Responsible Parties in American National Politics,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 10 (June 2007): 169-191.

Our polarized era has set the context for compelling and provocative new scholarly approaches to the study of parties and prescriptions for reform. Group-centered theorists of parties have upended older models of political behavior predicting electorally induced partisan moderation, while a lively revival of skepticism looking askance at procedural reform has occasioned new arguments for old-fashioned partisanship and backroom politics. Both schools of thought share a self-conscious realism about the deep-seated forces underpinning polarization and a welcome leeriness of popular anti-party proposals promising to restore moderation and comity to politics. But neither analysis accounts for the hollowness of contemporary parties or for the legitimacy problems that this hollowness generates. The failure of party scholars to do so hinders their predictive powers and distorts their prescriptions.

Advocates of a group-centered conception of political parties, chief among them a circle of collaborators known as the “UCLA school,” have done a great service by reinvigorating the scholarly discussion of parties for a new era of hyperpartisanship.⁷ They have effectively challenged both excessive formalism in the study of party organizations and excessive emphasis on mass political behavior in the study of electoral politics. Defining parties not as organized teams of politicians but rather as long coalitions of “intense policy demanders”—activists, interests, and ideologues using vote-seeking politicians as agents rather than principals in the quest to achieve policy-related goals—the UCLA school helps account for the sustained absence of Downsian convergence in American elections. Instead, they direct attention to the real stakes, as parties vie for control over policy.⁸ Moreover, by collapsing the distinction between formal party organizations and the networks of nominally independent advocacy organizations and

⁷ Marty Cohen et al, *The Party Decides: Presidential Nominations Before and After Reform* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Bawn et al, “A Theory of Parties: Groups, Policy Demanders, and Nominations in American Politics,” *Perspectives on Politics* 10 (September 2012): 571-597.

⁸ Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson, “After the Master Theory: Downs, Schattschneider, and the Rebirth of Policy-Focused Analysis,” *Perspectives on Politics* 12.3 (September 2014): 643-662.

allied interest groups, the UCLA school's redefinition of parties provides a clearer picture of the actual combatants in the era's political warfare.

Yet if parties appear only as the sum of the groups that comprise them, then parties have no intrinsic features *as parties*. Party politics in the UCLA school's account is a game of engaged elites who, once formally nominated and elected by duped and distracted voters, then pursue relatively extreme agendas in office. It is a testament to the cold-eyed, disillusioned bent of this work that the authors' normative conclusions have ranged from ambivalence to cautious endorsement of this very system and the structuring role that parties play in it.⁹ Little in this analysis, however, engages the relative strength or weakness of parties as they seek to facilitate agreement among their groups, or the capacity of parties to mobilize participation and popular sentiment, *or* the consequences of shifts over time in the legitimacy of parties as actors in the political system.

The confounding events of 2016 have helped to lay bare the consequences. That the Republican Party failed so spectacularly to "decide" its presidential nominee is hardly grounds to reject wholesale the theoretical insights for which the UCLA school's famous argument about party nominations served as an elaborate empirical test. But consider some of the causes of that failure: party actors so terrified of backlash from voters or media-advocacy institutions within their own coalition that they neglected to offer endorsements or take other decisive action in the process; the fruitlessness of the elite signaling that did occur stemming from a collapse in legitimacy; and a massive and exploitable chasm between the respective priorities and agendas of the parties' policy demanders and rank and file GOP voters. These all highlight shortcomings

⁹ See Cohen et al, *The Party Decides*, 360-363; Bawn et al, "A Theory of Parties," 589-591; and Cohen et al, "Party versus Faction in the Reformed Presidential Nominating System," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 49.4 (October 2016) 707-708. Similar normative conclusions emerge from research focused on mass political behavior in Larry Bartels and Chris Achen, *Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 297-328.

in the *theory* of politics as a stable insider game among groups. They compel scholars to bring parties as parties back into the center of scholarship.

A more openly prescriptive set of arguments from scholars and journalists loosely grouped under the moniker “new political realism” shares the UCLA school’s hardheaded sense of democratic limits as well as their fateful blindness to parties’ integrative functions and legitimacy in politics.¹⁰ Fittingly for an approach that celebrates the vote-maximizing transactional politics of a bygone era, the new realists adhere to an older conception of parties. They emphasize candidates’ electoral needs and the imperatives of formal organization. Advancing a comprehensive critique of “romantic” democratic reforms in a number of different areas and institutions, the realists return consistently to a core prescription: empowering formal party actors and enriching formal party organizations relative to other players in the political system. Doing so, they argue, would channel power and resources away from more ideologically motivated and “purist” political actors to the sole institutions preoccupied chiefly with the practical task of winning elections, and thus incentivized toward moderation and bargaining. Stronger parties, suggest the realists, can save us from polarization.

Forceful arguments on behalf of parties as solutions to democratic failings are worth celebrating. But the new realists betray their own romanticism in presuming that a particular *kind* of long-faded party form, ideology-averse and ruthlessly transactional, could be revived under twenty-first century conditions. And their prescriptions to strengthen parties, which focus largely

¹⁰ Bruce E. Cain, *Democracy, More or Less: America’s Political Reform Quandary* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Richard H. Pildes, “Romanticizing Democracy, Political Fragmentation, and the Decline of Government,” *Yale Law Journal* 124.3 (December 2014); Raymond J. La Raja and Brian Schaffner, *Campaign Finance and Political Polarization: When Purists Prevail* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015); Raymond J. La Raja, “Richer Parties, Better Politics? Party-Centered Campaign Finance Laws and American Democracy,” *The Forum* 11 (2013): 313-338; Nathaniel Persily, “Stronger Parties as a Solution to Polarization,” in *Solutions to Political Polarization in America*, ed. Nathaniel Persily (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 123-135; Jonathan Rauch, “Political realism: How hacks, machines, big money, and back-room deals can strengthen American democracy,” Brookings Institution, May 2015.

on helping them more freely and effectively vacuum up large financial donations, would only serve to magnify the parties' legitimacy crisis by doubling down on precisely the roles that the public finds most distasteful.

Modern party scholars have treated parties chiefly as dependent variables, the institutions created in response to other actors' needs and preferences. In doing so they have moved away from thinking of parties as distinct institutions in their own right. For all the genuine insights such an approach has yielded, treating parties as the end products of other actors' work—as vehicles for interests or office-winners for politicians—leaves parties' actual operations a black box while giving short shrift to the corrosive effects of popular disconnection from parties as tangible organizations and subjects of positive affinity.¹¹

Nathaniel Persily, a leading new realist, has defined his view as a “ ‘pro-party’ ‘bad-government’ approach,”¹² This essay, by contrast, reconstructs a good-government pro-party tradition, and applies it to contemporary dilemmas. A good-government, pro-party treatment of parties as serious mediating institutions offers analytical leverage on today's parties—at once warring with each other and internally hollow and fractious—and suggests potential paths forward.

Our outlook is “good government” in the sense that it retains the responsible-party commitment to the organization of political conflict around issues and public policy, and resists nostalgia for past political eras of blurred programmatic alternatives and rampant transactionalism. Our differences with the new realists on this point recall disputes within the

¹¹ In seeking to fill these lacunae, political scientists would benefit from engagement with the burgeoning sociological literature on parties. Stephanie L. Mudge and Anthony S. Chen, “Political Parties and the Sociological Imagination: Past, Present, and Future Directions,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 40 (2014): 305-340.

¹² Persily, “Stronger Parties as a Solution to Polarization,” 126.

New York Democracy in the decades before the Civil War.¹³ One faction, the “Hunkers,” ignored slavery and hunkered after patronage. Their opponents, the “Barnburners,” equally venerated political parties—and saw them as vehicles to rebuild society, foremost in opposing slavery. We place ourselves in the Barnburner tradition. Our vision is “pro-party,” meanwhile, in a more robust sense than the mere acceptance of the need for *somebody* to structure political choices—so why not parties? We emphasize instead the distinct and intrinsic qualities that, at their best, uniquely enable parties to mobilize popular participation, to integrate disparate groups, interests, and movements, and to foster meaningful choice and accountability in policymaking.

A good-government pro-party outlook, we contend, emerges from a venerable intellectual lineage. The midcentury prescription for responsible parties was not, after all, only a call for clearer lines of differentiation between the party programs. It was a vision to put the full force of American-style mass party organizations into the service of issue-based politics. E.E. Schattschneider and his allies celebrated the restless power-seeking energies of the two major American political parties even as they sought their reconstruction into forces for cohesive policy agendas. They shared the Progressive goal of issue-based politics but shunned the Progressive impulse toward anti-partyism. As Schattschneider noted, Progressive anti-partyism was “formulated in language which seems to condemn all partisanship for all time but [was], in fact, directed at a special form of partisan alignment which frustrated a generation of Americans” trapped in the sectional System of 1896.¹⁴ The New Deal had revolutionized national policymaking. A cross-party coalition of northern Republicans and southern Democrats had then

¹³ Herbert D. A. Donovan, *The Barnburners: A Study of the Internal Movements in the Political History of New York State and of the Resulting Changes in Political Affiliation, 1830-1852* (New York: New York University Press, 1925); Jonathan H. Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery and the Politics of Free Soil* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

¹⁴ E.E. Schattschneider, “The Functional Approach to Party Government” in *Modern Political Parties: Approaches to Comparative Politics*, ed. Sigmund Neumann (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 215.

stopped the Fair Deal in its tracks. For advocates of responsible parties, those conditions called for new approaches to parties and party reform. And so too with today's dilemmas, as we seek parties with real ideological meaning and mutual differentiation but also a tangible and felt presence in Americans' lives.

Strong parties are not simply weak parties with strong bank accounts, but formal institutions that effectively and continually engage with voters, activists, and politicians to formulate and then implement party program. In the pages that follow, we evaluate parties in the polarized era upon these criteria. We assess the strength and limitations of modern parties' organizational capabilities, their role in nominations, and their participation in the process by which party agendas are formulated, and then suggest some provisional approaches to reform in the direction of strong, responsible parties.

Any historically grounded account that indicts contemporary American parties runs the risk of golden-age-ism.¹⁵ If only the parties still dispensed turkeys at Thanksgiving, then somehow everything would be better, again. But Americans have never had properly responsible parties in their history. Ideologically defined and sorted parties emerged only after the parties' coordinating capacities had collapsed, and to seek to revive those capacities is to pursue something new in American experience. Reconstruction of the parties begins, moreover, with the bedrock facts of a Madisonian political system, a sprawling state, and a distrustful public. The organizable alternatives in national politics flow from those harsh realities. Given the deep roots of contemporary polarization, our choices are circumscribed. Either Americans live with hollow parties or we reach for responsible parties.

¹⁵ Julia Azari, "We need to rethink party democracy," *Vox*, April 21, 2016.

Organization

As parties in the electorate and parties in government have each revived, parties as organizations have tenaciously held on. But formal parties have not succeeded in building meaningful connections upwards to elected officials or downwards to voters.¹⁶ For local parties, simply keeping the lights on may count as success. In comparison to other federated membership groups, they have proven resilient as their direct peers wither on the vine. While the prophets of civil society largely ignored political parties, they serve as examples *par excellence* of volunteer-led, geographically demarcated federated membership groups. When chapter after chapter of the Elks and the Daughters of Rebekah conducted monthly meetings under Robert's Rules, parties' formal procedures matched familiar routines elsewhere. Now they endure as relics from a bygone age.¹⁷

Surveys of party chairs at the local level in 1980 and in 2008 show remarkable continuity in parties' activities. In 1980, 60 percent of local Republican and 55 percent of local Democratic parties reported having a campaign headquarters at election time; in 2008, the figures were a near-identical 63 percent and 54 percent. And with the avalanche of political money that pays canvassers for campaigns and Super PACs alike, local parties remain volunteer-led affairs. In 2008, as in 1980, only 6 percent of local Republican parties had any paid staff. During the same period, the share of local Democratic parties with paid staff rose from 5 percent to 8 percent.¹⁸

¹⁶ For an early expression of these themes amid a less polarized polity, see John J. Coleman, "The Resurgence of Party Organization?: A Dissent from the New Orthodoxy," in *The State of the Parties: The Changing Role of Contemporary American Parties*, ed. Daniel M. Shea and John C. Green (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1994).

¹⁷ Theda Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Civic Life* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), 100.

¹⁸ Douglas D. Roscoe and Shannon Jenkins, "Changes in Local Party Structure and Activity, 1980-2008," in *The State of the Parties: The Changing Role of Contemporary American Parties*, 7th ed., ed. John C. Green, Daniel J. Coffey, and David B. Cohen (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014).

State parties, bedrocks of the American party system since Martin Van Buren, have been hit worse still. Party reform denied state parties the ability to control their delegations at national conventions. Yet even as parties in service, state parties have been supplanted; in off years, many “barely even have anyone around to answer the phone.”¹⁹ Nor, in a nationalized polity, have large donors stepped up. Dollars have gone directly to candidates, or get directed through new para-organizations; even candidates for lieutenant governor now have dueling Democratic and Republican national campaign committees. A remaining piece of the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002 (“McCain-Feingold”) bars the unlimited transfers of funds from national committees for party-building activities, the so-called soft-money loophole, and forces state parties to maintain separate state and federal accounts.

Legal legerdemain has pushed against statutory limits, without much benefiting state parties themselves. To take a particularly brazen example, the Hillary Victory Fund in 2016 seemingly recreated the old practice, with a donor’s single check landing in the coffers of Hillary for America account, the Democratic National Committee, and state Democratic parties that agreed to participate. The state parties served as mere conduits, however; they immediately routed almost all of their contributions directly back to the DNC, taking advantage of legal unlimited hard-money transfers.²⁰ Thus have state parties become pawns in the mercenary, money-driven, candidate-led, nationalized, and deinstitutionalized game.

¹⁹ Alan Greenblatt, “The Waning Power of State Political Parties,” *Governing*, December 2015, <http://www.governing.com/topics/politics/gov-waning-power-state-parties.html>. See also Peter Overby, “Why State Parties Are Losing Out On Political Cash,” NPR, 9 Feb. 2015, <http://www.npr.org/2015/02/09/384875874/state-political-parties-blames-congress-for-lack-of-funds>.

²⁰ Kenneth P. Vogel and Isaac Arnsdorf, “Clinton fundraising leaves little for state parties,” *Politico*, 2 May 2016, <http://www.politico.com/story/2016/04/clinton-fundraising-leaves-little-for-state-parties-222670>; Bill Allison, “Millions From Maxed-Out Clinton Donors Flowed Through Loophole,” *Bloomberg*, 26 Aug. 2016, <http://www.bloomberg.com/politics/graphics/2016-dnc-contributions/>; Nicholas Confessore and Rachel Shorey, “Democrats Are Raking In Money, Thanks to Suit by Republicans,” *New York Times*, 1 Oct. 2016, A11.

As financiers of elections, the national party committees have held their own, even as total spending by Independent Expenditure PACs (“Super PACs”) now vastly surpasses the parties’ own haul. The brief “soft money” boom that BCRA closed has left few footprints. Yet—and contrary to the new realists’ hunches, based more on spending patterns than direct observation or analysis—we know less about national parties’ actual operations, either inside their staff-led political shops or among their memberships, mostly elected by state committees in little-studied contests. Members of each national committee elect its chair (or, when the party occupies the White House, rubber-stamp its candidate for chair)—but how else do these well-networked individuals link candidates, causes, local notables, and national politics? The UCLA school has rightly shed light on informal interactions across linked networks.²¹ A perspective rooted in formal parties would apply their insights to far thicker interactions inside the nerve centers of parties themselves.

As the new realists correctly argue, the dance of congressional legislation and legal interpretation has created a campaign-finance system that uniquely constricts parties, with relatively generous limits on individual contributions, no limits on independent contributions (or expenditures), and strict limits on donations to parties. A constricted view of parties simply as financiers, however, misdiagnoses the problem. The realists’ pro-party arguments rest on a kind of subterfuge. They aim for strong parties, but despite some residual sympathy to turn back the clock on party reform, principally aim to make it easier for party committees to raise and spend vast sums. On the contribution side, they risk blowback from the access afforded to donors and their preferences. Giving parties a more prominent place in a financing system that most Americans—and not just the pure independents or the joined-up members of Common Cause—

²¹ See, e.g., Gregory Koger, Seth Masket, and Hans Noel, “Partisan Webs: Information Exchange and Party Networks,” *British Journal of Political Science* 39 (2009): 633-53.

regard, to a greater or lesser extent, as corrupt will hardly regain for parties their lost legitimacy, or rebuild the frayed ties between insiders and ordinary partisans.²² Nor, as Thomas Mann and E.J. Dionne diagnose, do the new realists reckon with the consequences of rolling out the welcome mat for plutocrats into parties that, unlike narrowly focused pressure groups, putatively equalize political voice.²³ In the 2014 election cycle, one percent of one percent of Americans, a mere 31,976 donors, gave 29 percent of all dollars disclosed by federal election committees.²⁴

So, too, on the expenditure side. Nothing in a strategy to fund parties to the teeth will make them mobilize. Simply spending more money on television ads and, in swing states, on jerry-built campaign operations will not revive parties' fragile roots. Most dollars will go into the interlocking network of political consultants and ad makers.²⁵ Segregated independent expenditure units at the national and congressional committees target funds for media buys and explicitly cannot coordinate with the rest of the party. If a party in service to its candidates wants to maximize seats without an ongoing organization, then its television buyer (duly informed by its pollster), neither a professional politician nor a partisan in any older sense of the term, sits in the catbird's seat.

Assume away the principal-agent problems and even then the realists' model assumes a politics devoid of principled commitments. The realists posit an essentially unreformed party. Politicians interested in winning as many seats as possible, or their minions, control resources—including to candidates who have no loyalty to a party's priorities. Ordinary partisans (or, for

²² Mark Schmitt, "Democratic Romanticism and its Critics," *Democracy: A Journal of Ideas*, Spring 2015.

²³ Thomas E. Mann and E.J. Dionne, Jr., "The futility of nostalgia and the romanticism of the new political realists: why praising the 19th-century political machine won't solve the 21st century's problems," Brookings Institution, June 2015.

²⁴ Peter Olsen-Phillips, Russ Choma, Sarah Bryner and Doug Weber, "The Political One Percent of the One Percent in 2014: Mega Donors Fuel Rising Cost of Elections," Center for Responsive Politics, 30 April 2015, <http://www.opensecrets.org/news/2015/04/the-political-one-percent-of-the-one-percent-in-2014-mega-donors-fuel-rising-cost-of-elections/>.

²⁵ Adam Sheingate, *Building a Business of Politics: The Rise of Political Consulting and the Transformation of American Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

that matter, high-demanding groups) with strong preferences have no say in their choices.

Accountability takes place only via exit, and not by voice. For the realists, the venerable “iron law of oligarchy” that Robert Michels developed to explain why socialist parties seemed the captives of career politicians morphs into a positive good.²⁶

As the spasms of discontent in 2016 signal, the long-term corrosive effects of popular disconnection from parties pose challenges for representative democracy far more severe than the mere ideological distance between the parties, either in the mass public or in Congress. It would be hard to invent a prescription more likely than the realists’ to inflame the particular admixture of anti-partisan purity and anti-plutocracy zeal that powered Bernie Sanders. Nor could all the hedge-fund kings’ horses and men stop Donald Trump.

Stronger parties, the realist view holds when stripped to its bare essentials, are ones whose media buyers, in service to their seat-maximizing bosses, will target particularly efficiently. Rather, opening the spigot and turning parties into financiers ultimately reduces their role in democratic life. It would only worsen the legitimacy problem at the root of the parties’ woes. Forgive any cynicism about the cynics that from such seeds will a hundred democratic flowers bloom.

Mobilization

The torrent of money has not only gone to television. Layered on top of, not parasitic of but neither exactly symbiotic with these party structures, lie the new purpose-built campaign operations, including both para-organizations such as the Kochs’ Americans for Prosperity, and jointly funded but candidate-led coordinated campaigns. Person-to-person canvassing,

²⁶ Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*, trans. Eden and Cedar Paul (1915; repr., Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1949), esp. 393–409.

experiments have repeatedly found, motivates and persuades voters.²⁷ And so, especially on the Democratic side, the field office has become a fixture of contemporary electoral politics.²⁸ Yet despite breathless cheerleading that heralds the return of old-fashioned shoe-leather, candidates and parties still underinvest in it even by their own metrics.²⁹

Nor does the new field renaissance itself portend partisan renewal. Where parties' ward heelers once worked all the year round, contacting now comes only when the calendar demands.³⁰ Although the hard work of canvassing remains in volunteers' hands, paid staff, parachuted in from afar and hoping for jobs in DC or perhaps the state capitol (before consulting or lobbying themselves), run the office. Early-twenty-somethings arrive to serve as organizers in field offices, reporting up to late-twenty-somethings on regional field desks. The campaign—at the most generous interpretation, the joint coordinated campaign—is the principal; party workers are its agent.³¹ Obama for America emphasized building capacity among grassroots volunteers.³² It trained its Captains and Neighborhood Team Leaders extensively—but after Election Day in 2008 and again in 2012, let its organization wither on the vine.

The treatment must be compared with the control. Ryan Enos and Anthony Fowler estimate that the 2012 campaign raised turnout in swing states by about 7 or 8 percentage points.

²⁷ See Donald P. Green and Alan S. Gerber, *Get Out the Vote: How to Increase Voter Turnout*, 3rd ed. (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2015).

²⁸ See, e.g., Seth E. Masket, "Did Obama's Ground Game Matter?: The Influence of Local Field Offices During the 2008 Presidential Election," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 73 (2009): 1023-1039; Joshua P. Darr and Matthew S. Levendusky, "Relying on the Ground Game: The Placement and Effect of Campaign Field Offices," *American Politics Research* 42 (2014): 529-548.

²⁹ David Broockman and Joshua Kalla, "Experiments show this is the best way to win campaigns. But is anyone actually doing it?," *Vox*, 13 November 2014, <http://www.vox.com/2014/11/13/7214339/campaign-ground-game>.

³⁰ For a description of a precinct captain in the Chicago machine's final years, see Milton L. Rakove, *Don't Make No Waves... Don't Back No Losers: An Insider's Analysis of the Daley Machine* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975), 117-31.

³¹ This argument, never made explicitly, drives the analysis in Ryan D. Enos and Eitan D. Hersh, "Party Activists as Campaign Advertisers: The Ground Campaign as a Principal-Agent Problem," *American Political Science Review* 109 (2015): 252-278.

³² Elizabeth McKenna and Hahrie Han, *Groundbreakers: How Obama's 2.2 Million Volunteers Transformed Campaigning in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Yet intensive grassroots campaigning raises turnout so substantially above the baseline precisely because, absent extraordinary mobilization backed with formidable outside resources, ongoing political organization has fallen into such decay.³³

Figures 1 through 4 encapsulate these trends.³⁴ Using data from the American National Election Studies, they show partisan contacting by Democrats and Republicans, in battleground states and non-battleground states, divided into income thirds for respondents aged 25-64. Specifically, the ANES asks: “Did anyone from one of the political parties call you up or come around to talk about the campaign?” We define battleground states as those in which the two-party vote in the average of the previous two presidential elections came within five percentage points in either direction of the national means—in other words, the states that both parties have a reasonable shot at potentially including in their winning coalitions.³⁵

As the figures show, the rise in contacting since 1996, as campaigns have grown closer and more expensive, has been principally limited to the band of closely contested states. So, too, patterns of class stratification appear consistent: across time, across levels of competitiveness, and for Democrats, if somewhat less sharply, as well as Republicans, upper-income voters are more likely to report having been contacted by a political party. Averaging across the 2008 and 2012 surveys, 46 percent of battleground-state respondents reported being contacted by the

³³ Ryan D. Enos and Anthony Fowler, “Aggregate Effects of Large-Scale Campaigns on Voter Turnout,” *Political Science Research and Methods*, forthcoming: 1-19. Note the prevalence of highly competitive elections for Congress or governor even in states whose electoral votes are not much in doubt. See Bernard L. Fraga and Eitan D. Hersh, “Why is There So Much Competition in U.S. Elections?” typescript, 2016, http://www.eitanhersh.com/uploads/7/9/7/5/7975685/fraga_hersh_compet_v2_5.pdf.

³⁴ These graphs merge the insights on stratification by income in Andrea Louise Campbell, “Parties, Electoral Participation, and Shifting Voting Blocs,” in *The Transformation of American Politics: Activist Government and the Rise of Conservatism*, ed. Paul Pierson and Theda Skocpol (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007) and across states in Paul A. Beck and Erik D. Heidemann, “Changing Strategies in Grassroots Canvassing: 1956–2012,” *Party Politics* 20 (2014): 261-74. Beck and Heidemann identify battleground states using a different measure, based on the long-run normal vote.

³⁵ This is the Partisan Voting Index developed in 1997 by election prognosticator Charlie Cook, with lower values indicating states closer to the national average. See <http://cookpolitical.com/house/pvi>. Results are similar using absolute margin of victory in past two presidential elections rather than deviation from national average.

Democratic Party and 42 percent by the Republican Party. Among low-income respondents in uncompetitive states, only 20 percent reported a contact from the Democrats and 10 percent from the Republicans.

The story with contacting confirms a central reality in American politics: the parties have failed to mobilize their voters. The innovations of Big Data and experimentation appear on the margins. Whatever the reasons and the subgroups, the vaunted Obama analytics operation of 2012, let us note, presided over a drop in presidential turnout among the voting-eligible population from 61.6 in 2008 to 58.0 percent in 2012.³⁶ The new experimentalists' signature discovery works through individual shame more than mass mobilization. Registrants are more likely to vote if a mailer—the more official-looking the better—promises that their neighbors will be told (which, of course, they ultimately will not) should they fail to cast a ballot.

Strategies of demobilization are nothing new in American politics. Jim Crow in all its electoral manifestations, from the literacy test to the white primary to the grandfather clause and, with a much weaker treatment, the northern pushback against the popular politics of the Party Period prove as much.³⁷ As in the 1870s and 1880s, the parties again stand evenly matched in national politics. They fight each election aware that control over the entire government hangs in

³⁶ Although turnout estimates using Voting-Eligible Population are usually deemed the gold standard, neither immigrants nor convicts stand outside the parties' reach. Urban machines once paved the path to citizenship for immigrants—not all of them in all cities at all times, to be sure—whom they sought to incorporate, and then brought the new Americans straight to the clubhouse to register. Parties, with Democrats still the critical case, could again play that role, rather than relying on a patchwork of ad hoc mobilization efforts and, especially, the work of nonprofit organizations and their funders. Cf. Steven P. Erie, *Rainbow's End: Irish-Americans and the Dilemmas of Urban Machine Politics, 1840-1985* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), and John M. Allswang, *Bosses, Machines, and Urban Voters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986 [1977]). "On the politics of felon disenfranchisement, see Elizabeth A. Hull, *The Disenfranchisement of Ex-Felons* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006). Ex-felons vote at very low rates with wide partisan gaps between blacks and whites. See Traci Burch, "Turnout and Party Registration among Criminal Offenders in the 2008 General Election," *Law & Society Review* 45 (2011): 699-730.

³⁷ J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880-1910* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); Michael McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics: The American North, 1865-1928* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

the balance—and they reject compromise, lest they hand their opponents any leverage whatsoever.³⁸ Yet neither party has organized to maximize its vote.

Whether one views parties as the creations of politicians or high-demanding groups, or as autonomous organizers of conflict, they exist to bring to the polls would-be voters who will elect a government that achieves backers' goals to wield power and influence the distribution of society's goodies. Both parties, and the pols and groups behind them, now suffer the consequences of inadequate mobilization—the Democrats particularly at midterm and the Republicans in presidential years. Their failures to turn out potential voters are not just structural facts but *partisan* failures.

Critics from the left have bemoaned the feckless Democrats for decades,³⁹ but the devastating midterm losses of 2010 and 2014 give the charge new salience—and new urgency. Gerrymanders leave Democrats as permanent minorities in state legislatures, and, absent the rare wave election, constrict their chances to win seats in Congress. The consequences have devastated groups at the very heart of the Democratic coalition. In Wisconsin, Michigan, and North Carolina, as well as in deep-red states, Republican legislatures have passed draconian restrictions on abortion rights and crippled unions in the public and private sectors alike.

For their part, Republicans have in the “voting wars” instituted voter ID requirements to protect against the miniscule problem of in-person voter fraud, and restricted voting procedures, such as early voting, disproportionately used by their political opponents.⁴⁰ The voting wars raise larger questions about the racial odyssey of the Republican Party and the bounds of

³⁸ Frances E. Lee, *Insecure Majorities: Congress and the Perpetual Campaign* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

³⁹ Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Why Americans Don't Vote* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988).

⁴⁰ Richard L. Hasen, *The Voting Wars: From Florida 2000 to the Next Election Meltdown* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012); Ari Berman, *Give Us the Ballot: The Modern Struggle for Voting Rights in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2015).

legitimate political competition. Yet the Republicans, too, suffer from failure to mobilize their would-be voters. In an influential analysis, Sean Trende attributed the Mitt Romney's defeat in 2012 principally to 6 million "missing white voters," mostly downscale and outside the Greater South, who chose to stay home.⁴¹ The disconnect between Republican elites and the mass base, the party's particular malady, manifests in a failure to design appeals that would reach its would-be supporters, and then a failure to put boots on the ground to turn them out.

Perhaps, naysayers will reply, at a time when the video game and the app have replaced the torchlight parade, and the Super Bowl the excitement from a booze-soaked Election Day waving the party ticket, even rising education cannot replicate the sky-high turnout of the Party Period. The United States has not, however, put that hypothesis to a proper test. It is hard to imagine truly strong parties when such weak organization manifests in mediocre presidential and midterm turnout—and harder still to argue that the parties have really tried to mobilize their potential supporters.⁴²

Nominations

Parties still choose their nominees by the votes of delegates assembled at a national convention, as the Democrats have since 1832 and the Republicans have since 1856. The parties' formal authority still reaches its apex at "the pure partisan institution" of the convention.⁴³ Behind the debate over the ability of insiders, including elected officials, well-connected donors, and allied interest groups, to shape contemporary nominations—and, unsurprisingly, we see the

⁴¹ Sean Trende, "The Case of the Missing White Voters, Revisited," *Real Clear Politics*, 21 June 2013, www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2013/06/21/the_case_of_the_missing_white_voters_revisited_118893.html

⁴² Matthew A. Crenson and Benjamin Ginsberg, *Downsizing Democracy: How America Sidelined Its Citizens and Privatized Its Public* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

⁴³ Byron E. Shafer, "The Pure Partisan Institution: National Party Conventions as Research Sites," in *The Oxford Handbook of American Political Parties and Interest Groups*, ed. L. Sandy Maisel and Jeffrey M. Berry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

nomination of Donald Trump as a severe symptom and not as a cause of dysfunction in the Republican Party—lies a process that resists partisan appeals to authority. Like the new political realists, we think parties ought to control their nominations.⁴⁴ But we would add a caution against Pyrrhic victories and poisoned chalices, in which procedures survive merely as much-criticized relics and party organizations endure quadrennial turns as punching bags.

From their received Jacksonian institutional inheritance the parties still retain influence. The states select delegates to a convention that is essentially a private meeting—and not a public utility subject to regulation. Proposals for a national primary have come and gone since the first presidential primaries without ever coming close to passage, not least because states like to set their own calendars in statute. In the Party Period, primitive practices mixed with a politics where parties mobilized mass electorates. Now only the forms linger, a product of a decidedly incomplete modernization. “If there is any arena where the rights of US states have survived the twentieth century, the New Deal, and all other expansions of the scope of the federal government,” Walter Dean Burnham wrote in 2015, “it is the conduct of elections.”⁴⁵

Yet even as the delegate hunt—and, for that matter, the voting wars, including their uglier sides—trace far back in American political history, the popular conversation increasingly accepts the plebiscitary logic of a national primary, in which the candidate with the most votes automatically gets the nomination. Attacks against perceived violations of that norm come fast and furious. Parties and partisans offer only muted, and at times hypocritical, replies. One would be hard-put to find a full-throated defense of parties as the correct deciders of nomination—and still less, of parties as deciders not simply because they will pick electable nominees who will

⁴⁴ See Nathaniel Persily, “Stronger Parties,” 128-30.

⁴⁵ Walter Dean Burnham, “Voter Turnout and the Path to Plutocracy,” in *Polarized Politics: The Impact of Divisiveness in the US Political System*, ed. William Crotty (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2015), 32.

make good presidents⁴⁶ but because they will put forth appropriate standard-bearers for the party's vision of democracy.

The most sustained attention to parties as arbiters of procedure comes from presidential contenders on their way to losing the nomination, and it is not pretty. Especially once the debates have stopped, and there are few issues to pick over any longer, losing candidates turn their fire to a process that they claim to be rigged against them. Front-runners blithely ignore the complaints, keeping their eyes on November, and challengers attack the system. The ongoing Trump implosion, while broadly consonant with the idea that parties prove weak defenders of their prerogatives, raises larger, still unsettled questions to which we return in the conclusion; the Democrats' lessons seem clearer.

Even in 2004, Howard Dean showed the homage that outsider vice paid to partisan virtue. At every rally, he repeated that he was a candidate from “the Democratic wing of the Democratic Party.” A dozen years later, Bernie Sanders, similarly running as a Vermont outsider, although much to Dean's left on economics (and hewing closer to the labor-liberal tradition⁴⁷), abandoned any pretense that he was the more loyal Democrat, and his surrogates repeatedly attacked a rigged process—and especially the convention's superdelegates, almost all arrayed against him.

No procedure has been more controversial than the unpledged Party Leader Elected Official delegates introduced by the Hunt Commission in time for the 1984 convention. The unpledged PLEOs, whom everyone terms superdelegates, have always been a hard sell. They aimed to recreate the old process by which party leaders could judge their peers—but, critically,

⁴⁶ In this sense, Nelson Polsby, *The Consequences of Party Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) has proven prescient.

⁴⁷ See Daniel Schlozman, “The Sanders Phenomenon,” *n+1*, 13 October 2015, <https://nplusonemag.com/online-only/online-only/the-sanders-phenomenon/>.

served as a new innovation in the process, in service to an old goal.⁴⁸ In February 2016, Debbie Wasserman Schultz, the chair of the Democratic National Committee, offered the risibly incorrect view that superdelegates exist to allow grassroots activists a chance to attend the convention without having to run against elected officials to earn a slot.⁴⁹ Even the chair of the national party could not defend with an appeal to public reason her party's hard-fought procedures, which allow her own peers in Congress and on the Democratic National Committee to sit in judgment of the nominee. Wasserman Schultz clearly wanted Hillary Clinton to win the nomination and lost her position to the perception of unfairness. But she stuck out her neck not for long-established procedures that happened to benefit her chosen candidate but for the candidate herself.

Rather than seeking to take over the Democratic National Committee, the Sanders forces sought to neuter it. In pre-convention talks, the Clinton camp acceded to a commission that will almost certainly strip DNC members of their unpledged first-ballot votes, and also to a left-leaning platform. Then, his demands met, Sanders became—poof! presto!—an apostle of party responsibility, even waving a copy of the platform on “Real Time with Bill Maher.”⁵⁰ None of the leading players in the Democrats' 2016 drama stuck up for party principle when it went against expedient interest. Democrats emerged from their convention ultimately united—but devoid of a sense of party.

⁴⁸ Ned Resnikoff, “Why Will Superdelegates Decide the 2016 Democratic Primary? Unearthed Documents Hold the Key,” *International Business Times*, May 16, 2016.

⁴⁹ Callum Borchers, “We need more questions like this one from Jake Tapper to Debbie Wasserman Schultz [video],” *Washington Post* online, 12 February 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/02/12/we-need-more-questions-like-this-one-from-jake-tapper-to-debbie-wasserman-schultz-video/>. In fact, the Democrats' pledged PLEO delegates, chosen by state party conventions or committees and allocated in proportion to candidates' vote share, precisely address Wasserman-Schultz's professed concern.

⁵⁰ John Wagner, “Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren teaming up Sunday to pitch Clinton to progressives,” *Washington Post*, 16 October 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2016/10/16/bernie-sanders-elizabeth-warren-teaming-up-sunday-to-pitch-clinton-to-progressives/>.

Program

The paradox of our partisan era—in which parties dominate politics while seeming institutionally ancillary to that very domination, at once central and wraithlike—characterizes parties’ programmatic functions as much as it does their strength as electoral organizations and their role in nominations. Parties structure policy choices and articulate conflict in 21st century politics. In mutually reinforcing processes, the ideological sorting of elites, activists, and the mass electorate alike into the “correct” party has attended the elaboration of stark programmatic differences in the two parties’ national policy agendas. The parties now take distinct positions on ever greater numbers of topics, along multiple issue dimensions. Contrary to expectations that, for example, the rise of new social and cultural issues since the 1960s would depolarize parties on economic and role-of-government issues, the contemporary party divide encompasses both kinds of issues and more.⁵¹ Just as members of Congress have polarized, as documented exhaustively using aggregate roll-call-based measures like NOMINATE, positions in party platforms have diverged over time.⁵²

This divergence is not only real but, perhaps just as importantly, *perceived*. At midcentury, the APSA Committee on Political Parties identified as a core problem of American party politics the fact that “alternatives between the parties are defined so badly that it is often difficult to determine what the election has decided even in broadest terms.”⁵³ Even as a system of separated powers still stymies party responsibility, the 21st century electorate at least has

⁵¹ Geoffrey C. Layman et al, “Activists and Conflict Extension in American Party Politics,” *American Political Science Review* 104.2 (2010): 324-346.

⁵² Joel Paddock, “Interparty Ideological Politics in 11 State Parties, 1956-1980,” *Western Political Quarterly* 45.3 (1992): 751-760; Daniel Coffey, “More than a Dime’s Worth: Using State Party Platforms to Assess the Degree of American Party Polarization,” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 44 (2011): 331-337; Soren Gordon, Clayton McLaughlin Webb, and B. Dan Wood, “The President, Polarization and the Party Platforms,” *The Forum* 12.1 (2014): 169-189.

⁵³ Committee on Political Parties, *Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System: A Report of the Committee On Political Parties of the American Political Science Association* (New York: Rinehart, 1950), 4-5.

significantly less difficulty recognizing that the parties offer genuine alternatives on Election Day. The proportion of Americans who saw no “important differences in what the Republicans and Democrats stand for” declined from 42 percent in 1972 to 35 percent twenty years later to 18 percent in 2012; the proportion who did detect such differences increased from 46 percent to 60 percent to 81 percent in those same years.⁵⁴ The problem of blurry alternatives emphasized by the APSA Committee on Political Parties has been solved. When contested, general elections provide choices rather than echoes. The days of tweedle dum and tweedle dee are over.

But the parties themselves, in a formal and visible sense, stand at the sidelines of the processes by which their programs are generated. The engines of agenda development are instead found, true to American type, within fragmented and typically less visible networks of organized actors in civil society engaging individual candidate campaigns and office holders. For the UCLA school and other contemporary scholars who subsume such forces into a more broadly encompassing definition of party, the meaningful distinction between formal party platform processes and the congeries of “outside” forces setting party agendas collapses. But that move elides important distinctions. Platform-by-proxy imposes real costs, both in substance of the agendas themselves and to the perceived legitimacy and relevance of the parties as such.

The weakness of American parties as vehicles for generating and articulating policy agendas is an old story. The *sturm und drang* of campaign rhetoric and the lofty bromides of party platforms notwithstanding, the major American parties have been held to be comparatively lacking in coherent policy agendas or ideologies at least since the Party Period.⁵⁵ Analysts have

⁵⁴ http://www.electionstudies.org/nesguide/text/tab2b_4.txt. Similarly, Americans are better able to identify the Republicans as the more conservative party; see http://www.electionstudies.org/nesguide/toptable/tab2b_5.htm.

⁵⁵ The most sustained argument against this traditional view in favor of the salience and stability of distinct ideological agendas in American parties across history is made by John Gerring, though the actual processes and actors that generate those parties agendas largely fall outside his research purview. See *Party Ideologies in America, 1828-1996* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

pointed variously to institutions (Madisonian fragmentation), culture (liberal anti-majoritarianism), and historical sequencing (early democratization).⁵⁶ Whatever the mix of causes, the result is an exceptional system in which formal parties lack the in-house research and policy operations typical among parties in parliamentary systems.⁵⁷

Recurring and at times consequential experiments in party-driven policy formulation did, however, dot the parties' twentieth century histories, some even prior to the 1950 publication of *Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System*, with its array of prescriptions for programmatic party work. That report was emphatic that parties should be organized in terms of issues, since "the choices provided by the two-party system are valuable to the American people in proportion to their definition in terms of public policy."⁵⁸ Democrats in the 1950s and the GOP in the late 1970s made serious efforts to create and sustain in-house policy councils, while the Democrats also mounted three national midterm issue conferences in 1974, 1978, and 1982.⁵⁹ All told, such sporadic twentieth-century experiments suggested the potential for fruitful and significant political achievement rather than simple futility.

In recent decades, however, such an approach largely proved a road not taken. The modern system consists instead of ideologically diverging parties pursuing agendas that are

⁵⁶ Leon Epstein, *Political Parties in the American Mold* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986); David Samuels and Matthew Shugart, *Presidents, Parties, and Prime Ministers: How the Separation of Powers Affects Party Organization and Behavior* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Austin Ranney and Willmoore Kendall, *Democracy and the American Party System* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1956); ; Ira Katznelson, "Working Class Formation and the State: Nineteenth Century England in American Perspective," in Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Reuschmeyer, and Theda Skocpol, eds., *Bringing the State Back In* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985): 257-284; Martin Shefter, *Political Parties and the State: The American Historical Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 21-97

⁵⁷ Diane Stone, *Capturing the Political Imagination: Think Tanks and the Policy Process* (New York: Frank Cass, 1996); Donald E. Abelson, *Do Think Tanks Matter? Assessing the Impact of Public Policy Institutes* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), National Democratic Institute, *Political Parties and Democracy in Theoretical and Practical Perspectives: Developing Party Policies* (Washington DC: National Democratic Institute, 2013); John L. Campbell and Ove K. Pederson, *The National Origins of Policy Ideas: Knowledge Regimes in the United States, France, Germany and Denmark* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

⁵⁸ *Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System*, v.

⁵⁹ Sam Rosenfeld, *A Choice, Not an Echo: The Creation of an Ideological Party System in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, forthcoming 2017).

themselves generated by satellite research and interest group networks in civil society engaging candidates and office holders directly. (The fate of one recent effort to revive programmatic experimentation was poetically illustrative. RNC chairman Mike Duncan created an in-house think called the Committee for Republican Renewal in 2009 to bring an “increased policy focus” to party activities; it shuttered within two months, and soon after Duncan became founding director of the GOP SuperPAC American Crossroads.)⁶⁰ Our polarized era features a grand partisan battle over public purposes from which the parties themselves have receded.

The hollowness of the parties’ programmatic efforts is evident along various fronts. Outside of their core electoral service functions, the national party committees engage issues and policy largely through publicity efforts on behalf of the party “brand” rather than attempts to alter the brand itself through substantive research and deliberation.⁶¹ The modern platform-drafting process at the conventions is not devoid of significance, but that significance lies more in gauging different factions’ relative institutional clout within the party at a given point than as a determinant of the party’s ultimate agenda in government. Victorious nominees often use the platform as a consolation prize, ceding control over large swathes as consolation to activists and interests who had largely lost out in the nomination fight. At other times the documents are largely unmediated litanies of policy positions advocated by specific interest groups. As a logroll, the platform becomes the progeny of a thousand fathers; as meaningful expression of the party’s agenda in government, it is an orphan.

In place of programmatic formal parties are polarized networks of interest and advocacy groups, drawing on research and expertise from higher education and the exceptionally robust

⁶⁰ Ben Smith, “GOP Launching ‘Renewal’ Think Tank,” *Politico*, December 16, 2008.

⁶¹ The strongest case for the significance and centrality of the national committees’ “branding” functions is made by Boris Heersink, but such party activity generally involves packaging existing agendas rather than helping to create and revise the substance of those agendas. See “Party Brands and the Democratic and Republican National Committees, 1952-1976,” unpublished working paper, 2016.

American community of think tanks. A fluid midcentury landscape of “issue networks” working in ad hoc bipartisan coalitions has given way to a far more structured pattern of conflict between densely clustered partisan teams in civil society.⁶² This conflict is ordered enough to lend plausibility to theories that categorize all participants in such networked behavior as components of the parties themselves. But agenda formation carried out among less visible and formalized channels of elite actors faces real limits without the cross-fertilization of ordinary peoples’ concerns, technical expertise, and political savvy that only parties can provide.

First, just as the formal parties’ organizational hollowing out over time has augmented the upper-class bias of American politics, so does their absence from policy development. Parties bring in actors with experiences and priorities beyond the technocrats’ ken. Second, the dominance of interest groups in generating policy with respect to their particular issues limits the potential for substantive coherence and responsibility in the party agendas. Finally, the parties are perceived—rightly—as institutions disconnected from the work of generating policy agendas in their name, especially by the very actors engaged in such work. This amplifies the parties’ legitimacy problems and further diminishes the sense of party in the system.

The two major parties betray contrasting strengths and weaknesses in their approaches to program. The conservative movement transformed public policy expertise in the second half of the twentieth century. Conservatives propounded a model of openly ideological advocacy think tanks exclusively engaged in a single party’s extended network.⁶³ For all its potential pitfalls, that approach warrants appreciation from those interested in party responsibility. The turn away

⁶² Barbara Sinclair, *Party Wars: Polarization and the Politics of National Policymaking* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), 308-343.

⁶³ R. Kent Weaver, “The Changing World of Think Tanks,” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 22, no. 3 (1989): 563-578; David M. Ricci, *The Transformation of American Politics: The New Washington and the Rise of Think Tanks* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Andrew Rich, *Think Tanks, Public Policy, and the Politics of Expertise* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Jason Stahl, *Right Moves: The Conservative Think Tank in American Political Culture since 1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

from a mythos of disinterested technocracy toward advocating the open mobilization of expertise in structured, conscious conflict goes at least part of the way toward legitimizing parties as programmatic actors. Under conditions of 21st century polarization, however, the right's policy infrastructure has bifurcated. At the programmatic core of the modern GOP's agenda are a set of upwardly redistributive economic policies propounded by interest groups and donors notably lacking in mass support (even among Republican partisans) and all but unchecked by electoral considerations.⁶⁴ Outside of the narrow channels that generate such policy positions, however, and occupying a growing share of the conservative advocacy infrastructure, are populist campaigns of position-taking, symbolic conflict, and mobilized resentment that frequently merge seamlessly with the activities of the right's commercial media institutions. The story of the Heritage Foundation in the Obama era is illustrative. The venerable advocacy think tank took a page from its own Democratic imitator the Center for American Progress and organized a 501(c)4 ancillary called Heritage Action. The new offshoot soon plunged into Tea Party-fueled campaigns targeting GOP incumbents over issues like defunding the Affordable Care Act, precipitating the government shutdown of 2013.⁶⁵ Both sides of the modern Republican approach to agenda generation—the narrow band of regressive policy commitments and the Foxified world of permanent confrontation—only accentuate the yawning gap between Republican elites and Republican voters on basic priorities and policy views.

The Democratic Party, for its part, enjoys comparatively robust policy capacity, in part thanks to its continued advantage in accessing expertise within academia and among the major Progressive-model think tanks. Yet the class skew inherent to the process by which the party

⁶⁴ Paul Pierson and Jacob Hacker, *Winner Take All Politics: How Washington Made the Rich Richer—and Turned its Back on the Middle Class* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010).

⁶⁵ Molly Ball, "The Fall of the Heritage Foundation and the Death of Republican Ideas," *The Atlantic*, September 25, 2013.

absorbs new issue positions via candidates' ties to technocratic policy networks too often limits Democrats to expertise produced by white men with fancy degrees. Or, as Daniel Patrick Moynihan once remarked tartly, "a party of the working class cannot be dominated by former editors of the *Harvard Crimson*."⁶⁶ Connections between core electoral constituencies and commitments to wield power on their behalf have frayed, and Democratic policy elites responded to rising inequality only fitfully. Their technocratic solutions retreated from larger questions of political economy.⁶⁷ And as the politics of Obamacare well indicate, feedback from that kind of opaque policymaking rarely shores up partisan loyalties.⁶⁸

For critics, elite technocratic control dovetails with the Democrats' reliance on large donors to produce elite agenda control. And because the party as a formal organization is not seen to actually participate in programmatic work, it gets none of the credit even when candidate nomination fights, movement mobilizations, or other intraparty dynamics actually help to produce significant and progressive changes in the party agenda. This dynamic played out like clockwork during the 2016 nomination fight, and helps explain why a substantive success story for insurgent energies seemed to produce so little in the way of new, positive attachments to the Democratic Party.

Toward More Responsible Mass Parties

If hollowness provides the answer to the paradox of ineffectual parties in an age of hyperpartisanship, what achievable steps might address that hollowness and imbue American politics with a stronger sense of party? In the search for a usable past, a good-government *pro-*

⁶⁶ Jacob Heilbrunn, "The Moynihan Enigma," *American Prospect*, July 1997.

⁶⁷ Margaret Weir, "Political Parties and Social Policymaking," in *The Social Divide: Political Parties and the Future of Activist Government*, ed. Margaret Weir (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 1998), 11.

⁶⁸ Jonathan Oberlander and R. Kent Weaver, "Unraveling from Within? The Affordable Care Act and Self-Undermining Policy Feedbacks," *The Forum* 13.1 (2015): 37–62.

party approach emphatically rejects a period that good-government *anti-party* advocates happily tout. In the Progressive Era, middle-class reformers aimed to purify the political system by weakening parties. In their stead, they substituted a technocratic elite that would staff the burgeoning bureaucracy. Progressives believed in their shared ability—even destiny—to steer the public weal. They shared a common WASP class and cultural background. They defined their notions of the public interest from it, and their reforms often bypassed those outside it. In a fractured and pluralistic polity, we have no elite unified and confident enough, or invested with sufficient public support, to continue such a project today. Nor does the further recrudescence of the Progressive strategy to strengthen the presidency at the expense of party organizations and Congress seem wise for a repeat run.

Innovations such as the secret ballot, the direct primary, off-cycle elections, the nonpartisan municipal election and the city manager, and civil service reform all broke the connection between patronage-oriented local parties, the nerve centers of nineteenth-century politics, and the perquisites of office. With the loss of those engines of popular control, turnout plummeted nationwide—and especially in the Jim Crow South, many of whose framers were also good Progressive reformers. Those today who bemoan polarization and public apathy in the same breath might ponder the Progressives' lessons.

Addressing the hollowness of modern parties begins with attending to the parties as organizations. Reversing a macrohistorical phenomenon such as the decline of federated mass member organizations may not be in the cards. Together, anti-party small-d democratic norms and anti-party facts on the ground in the networks of SuperPACs and dark money make the challenge a daunting one. Nevertheless, polarization creates a setting distinctly suited *for parties in particular* to build more robust participatory organizations. That means tapping into the

tributaries of movement activism and independent political organizing where they exist, from the weathered but stubbornly viable labor and evangelical networks that have anchored the parties for decades to the nascent political mobilizations that have dotted the twenty-first century—Dreamers, Occupy, Black Lives Matter, and also the Tea Party and the Alt-Right—not only to generate votes on Election Day but to bring movement cadres into formal party work.⁶⁹

It also means reinvigorating party committees from the national all the way down to the precinct level. At the national and state levels, where staff working directly with top politicians, typically run the show, their membership ought to reflect genuine commitment—and not simply, as too often on the Democratic side, the pure politics of recognition.⁷⁰ When membership means more than adjudicating rules, it should prove more appealing to activists, high-demanding groups' leaders, and politicians alike.

History provides examples of formal parties that combine robust organization with issue-oriented politics. Reformist Democratic state parties in the postwar era, such as the UAW-aligned Michigan Democratic State Central Committee or the Democratic Farmer-Labor Party that powered Hubert Humphrey's rise in Minnesota, provide living models of responsible parties along the lines that midcentury RPG proponents sought.⁷¹ Whether or not the legal fetters on formal parties give way as the new realists advocate, we see real value in challenging normative

⁶⁹ Daniel Schlozman, *When Movements Anchor Parties: Electoral Alignments in American History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

⁷⁰ The membership, to take one example, of the Massachusetts Democratic State Committee reads like a parody dreamed up by the skeptics of McGovern-Fraser. On top of 80 seats chosen by primary voters and 80 by caucuses of local party committee members, the party reserves seats, also all strictly divided between men and women, for: College Democrats, college students (one of the authors once held a college seat), Young Democrats, youth, French speakers, Portuguese speakers, bisexuals, gay men and lesbians, transgender, labor, and seniors, in addition to members of Congress, statewide elected officials, and state legislative leaders. Finally, to open up further seats in all the other categories, members who have served for twenty years earn lifetime seats. And then gender-balance seats ensure that the membership divides evenly between men and women. All told, the committee has, as of October 2016, 420 members.

⁷¹ Dudley W. Buffa, *Union Power and American Democracy: the UAW and the Democratic Party, 1935-72* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1984); Carl Solberg, *Hubert Humphrey: A Biography* (New York: Norton, 1984), Part 2.

perceptions as to the dignity and legitimacy of formal party work—to step out of the shadows of the party networks and walk forthrightly into the bright sunshine of open partisanship.

Those models of responsible partisanship were found at the state level, however, and they suggest one key point where midcentury theorists got the story wrong. As good New Deal liberals, the academic proponents of responsible national parties deplored sectionalism—above all in the Solid South—and sought coherent national parties oriented around national issue commitments. Yet they failed to anticipate how nationalized parties would hollow out the very organizations, reform as well as machine, that did the parties' work on the ground.⁷² Party-building in the twenty-first century requires sustained and continuous investment in state and local parties, and in our nationalized partisan era the onus falls on the national party organizations to carry that out. The fruits of sporadic twentieth-century efforts in this vein make the case for pursuing such activity as a core party task.⁷³ More recently, while the intra-Democratic kerfuffle occasioning DNC chair Howard Dean's Fifty State Strategy initiative quickly fell into desuetude once the project ended along with his tenure, early research tentatively suggested that the effort had, indeed, built capacity and won seats for Democrats even in deep-red states.⁷⁴ As long as big-donor-funded shadow party organizations remain central to electoral politics, moreover, the staffers and elected officials who gatekeep and direct their

⁷² For powerful evidence of the significance of state party organizations in generating meaningful ideological change within a national party coalition well into the twentieth century, see Eric Schickler, *Racial Realignment: The Transformation of American Liberalism, 1933-1965* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

⁷³ Paul S. Herrnson, *Party Campaigning in the 1980s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980); Philip Klinkner, *The Losing Parties: Out-Party National Committees, 1956-1992* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Daniel Galvin, *Presidential Party Building: Dwight D. Eisenhower to George W. Bush* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Brian Conley, "The Politics of Party Renewal: The 'Service Party' and the Origins of the Post-Goldwater Republican Right," *Studies in American Political Development* 27.1 (2013): 51-67.

⁷⁴ Elaine Kamarck, "Assessing Howard Dean's Fifty State Strategy and the 2006 Midterm Elections," *The Forum* 4.3 (December 2006); Louis Jacobson, "Looking Back at Howard Dean's 50-State Strategy," *Governing*, May 6, 2013. Dean has since fallen off the two-party wagon; see Howard Dean, "How to Get Beyond Two Parties," *New York Times*, 8 October 2016, A21.

giving ought likewise to steer rich donors to, and then reward them for, investment in state-level organizing and party-building.

The task of significantly boosting turnout is a daunting one. The first step comes in making a conscious commitment and shifting electoral resources further away from advertising and toward mobilization—continually and not just quadrennially. Experiments allow parties to identify techniques that work in mobilizing voters, and then to make the case that significant investment in mobilization would be money well spent. The modern Democratic Party whose loyalists fail to vote at midterm feels the mobilization challenge more acutely. Yet in rates of party registration across the states, which still tend Democratic, the party asymmetry is reversed, and the potential for Republican advances revealed.

So, too, do the voting wars hold obvious implications for mobilization. For Democrats in particular, partisan investment in getting out the vote unavoidably entails robust investment in legal and legislative efforts to lower barriers to voting, enforce voter protections, and expand the franchise. Non-partisan goo-goos may fear to tread in those controversial swamps. Nor can non-partisan civil-rights advocates from, for example, the LDF and ACLU, who so often appear in courtrooms, shoulder the burden alone.

Perhaps no partisan realm reveals such a gap between widespread norms and the institutional practices necessary for strong and vibrant partisanship than candidate selection. Even when party actors do succeed in “deciding” their nominations in the modern era, they do so via low-visibility signaling and deck-stacking. 2016 revealed the brittleness of even their capacity to do that. Small-d democratic norms serve as the default standard by which any potential reform to the system is judged, with perverse consequences for party responsibility. In this area, the central and most difficult task will come in changing those very norms among

partisans themselves. Rolling back the Progressives' watershed introduction of primaries is unlikely. And the activists who powered the McGovern-Fraser reforms at the national level had their reasons, in spades.⁷⁵ But the first step in advancing the idea that permeable and issue-driven parties are entitled to a say in deciding who stands for office in their name is for party officers themselves to cease speaking out of the sides of their mouths in deference to their own legitimacy problems, and instead to begin forthrightly making the party's case. Democrats on the precipice of eliminating their DNC superdelegates might first pause to take a long, sober look at Donald Trump and what his candidacy tells us about the presidential nominating process. Republicans, of course, must take an even longer look at the same thing.

Bringing parties back into the process of policy development and agenda setting may prove comparatively easier. The "diminishing oddness" of American parties in our polarized era has arguably rendered them *more* conducive to explicit programmatic work now than ever before.⁷⁶ Pushing the parties in this direction would serve to instill a greater sense of party in American politics. In principal-agent language, for the UCLA school, parties are delegated with implementing policies chosen by the groups in the party coalition. But what if, alternatively, groups make their preferences clear and delegate to parties the task of forging policy? Given the integrative functions that parties alone possess at their best, such a process might be expected to produce agendas that better reflect the priorities of members and that bear the stamp of clearer, more responsible authorship. Past experiments provide the precedents and potential forms that such programmatic work might take: formal policy councils housed in the party committees,

⁷⁵ David Plotke, "Party Reform as Failed Democratic Renewal in the United States, 1968-1972," *Studies in American Political Development* 10.3 (Fall 1996): 223-288.

⁷⁶ Nicol C. Rae, "The Diminishing Oddness of American Political Parties," in *The Parties Respond: Changes in American Parties and Campaigns*, 5th ed., eds. Mark D. Brewer and L. Sandy Maisel (Boulder: Westview Press, 2012), 25-46. See also Gerald M. Pomper and Marc D. Weiner, "Toward a More Responsible Two-Party Voter: The Evolving Bases of Partisanship," in *Responsible Partisanship? The Evolution of American Political Parties Since 1950*, eds. John C. Green and Paul S. Herrnson (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 181-200.

party-sponsored publications covering substantive topics in public policy, and biennial issue conferences that once before and might once again serve as, in the words of James MacGregor Burns, “a transmission belt between movement politics and party politics.”⁷⁷ A party system that at last reliably produces choices rather than echoes would benefit from the parties themselves generating those choices.

What might the parties look like with more robust and meaningful organizations and more significant roles in agenda development? Thanks to differences in their organization and behavior in the twenty-first century, the implications of responsible mass partisanship differ for the two major parties. Drawing on a growing body of scholarship documenting the disproportionate contribution of the GOP to modern polarization, Matt Grossmann and David A. Hopkins argue for a more fundamental partisan asymmetry in American politics pitting a Republican Party organized as a vessel for ideological conservatism against a Democratic Party organized as a coalition of distinct social groups seeking benefits in the form of public policy.⁷⁸ Our read on the disarray visible within the hollow parties inclines us toward skepticism about the significance of Republicans’ alleged zeal, given that little in the way of ideological constraint appears to unite engaged Republican elites and the party’s base voters behind a shared program. The elite agenda, built around marginal tax cuts to the rich that reflect a potent group interest fortified with its own sort of intense class solidarity, drifts farther and farther away from a set of priorities among base voters that stem from equally potent group identities of race, faith, and nationalism. The gap between the two proved ripe for exploitation in 2016, with explosive results. An invigorated formal Republican organization might help to attenuate that gap at least

⁷⁷ Thomas E. Cronin, “On the American Presidency: A Conversation with James MacGregor Burns,” *Political Science Quarterly* 16 (Summer 1986): 536.

⁷⁸ Matt Grossmann and David A. Hopkins, *Asymmetric Politics: Ideological Republicans and Group Interest Democrats* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016)

marginally. As for the Democrats, the very group-oriented log-rolling—at times reified in theories of pluralism and pragmatism—that can undercut the party's capacity to articulate a coherent agenda provides a rationale for party mechanisms that provide connective tissue and an *esprit de corps* to the party's coalition members.

Since midcentury, when responsible partisanship left behind its Anglophiliac roots, liberals have proven its strongest adherents. For liberals frustrated at the travails of factionalism buttressed by constitutional fragmentation, responsible partisanship signaled a path out of deadlock into the mainstream of welfare capitalism, state activism, and racial justice. Beyond such policy goals, moreover, responsible parties answered liberals' fears about party and polity alike. The Democratic Party would serve as an engine of democracy, bringing together elites and the mass public, cementing voters' loyalties and—through a party program more coherent than anything bubbling out of Congress, less laden with goodies than anything that might simply please interest groups, less drily technocratic than the white papers from think tanks, and less personalistic than whatever might get sent down from the White House—counteracting the centrifugal tendencies in the American system. The promise of a cohesive, issue-driven party lived on in new guises and different emphases among liberal reformers in later decades, even as rhetoric of openness and inclusion supplanted the older neoparliamentarian celebration of discipline and organization. The socialists who followed Michael Harrington into the Democratic orbit accepted a similar logic. The promise of responsible, integrative parties likewise provides today's liberals an answer to the travails of polarized and plebiscitary national politics.

Conservatives have shared similar frustrations with both party practice and mass politics. Yet they largely separated the fears that liberals fused, and so rarely reached toward the concept of responsible partisanship. Conservative intellectuals and policy entrepreneurs energetically

fought over and built up the Republican Party. They were more than busy bees. At times, they groped toward a responsible partisanship that dared not speak its name. The theory, still suspicious of mass democracy, however, stayed behind the practice that embraced it. When intellectuals—even those who cut and parried with the best factional warriors in intraparty battles—pondered the republic’s travails, they took on a different tone, combining a Burkean taste for distance between elites and the mass public and a Madisonian celebration of institutional combat.⁷⁹ They dredged up nineteenth-century parties to celebrate a politics within limits, not raucous popular combat. In practice, they seized the Republican Party to remake the sprawling national government. Yet even with venerable notions about wise men steering the ship of state vitiated in practice, conservative elites still paid—and, as they confront Donald Trump, still pay—homage to the old gods. And so even in the vast corpus on modern conservatism, a project deeply imbricated with the Republican Party, serious writings on the nature and functions of the political party appear few and far between.

Still, at a time when the priorities of Republican elites and masses seem so distant, a responsible conservative partisanship remains a worthy goal. To be sure, turning it into an organizable alternative is a daunting task, more so in Trump’s wake than had Republicans in the 1970s and ’80s drawn a *cordon sanitaire* against the most revanchist elements in grassroots conservative revival.⁸⁰ Such a task goes beyond even the vexed question of demographics. Instead, the intellectual concerns that long separated would have to fuse, and then be made flesh inside the party. A rejuvenated Republicanism could no longer cede its messages to talk radio, Fox News, and Breitbart. Republican elites would have to broaden their agenda beyond tax cuts

⁷⁹ James Burnham, *Congress and the American Political Tradition* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1959); Willmore Kendall and Austin Ranney, *Democracy and the American Party System*; Wilmoore Kendall, *The Conservative Affirmation* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1963), 1-49.

⁸⁰ See Daniel Schlozman, “Trump and the Republicans,” *n+1*, 11 March 2016, <https://nplusonemag.com/online-only/online-only/trump-and-the-republicans/>

for the rich, and decide whose ox gets gored.⁸¹ The fractious Congressional caucus would have to embrace the challenge of governing, a task easier said than done. For the country's sake, the program that unites the party's base with its policy demanders would need to avoid a common-ground politics of racial and ethnic nationalism.⁸² And the party would have to move beyond showmanship and position-taking to devote itself to policies that strengthens the frayed bonds of family and civil society. That these statements sound so exhortatory precisely emphasizes the distance between hollow and responsible partisanship in contemporary Republicanism. At a broad level, this agenda probably meshes better with prescriptions from the young, policy-minded conservatives known as Reformicons than with anything else on offer from the right—but the Reformicons have yet to move from policy entrepreneurs to partisan operators or visionaries.⁸³ Perhaps the center-right mass party can no longer answer populist discontent. Yet whatever the prospects for a responsible conservative party, the alternatives on the right seem far, far worse.

Our vision of responsible parties as the solution to hollow parties is unavoidably hooded and suggestive, as is our notion of how to get from here to there. The central effort of this essay has been to diagnose the correct problem with American political parties in our polarized age. The connection between party organizations and the lived experience of ordinary Americans has frayed over time. The centrality of explicit party policy and party responsibility to the conflicts that structure the modern party system and powerfully shape policy has likewise faded. Stronger parties won't solve the core dilemma posed by the ill fit between disciplined ideological

⁸¹ Ross Douthat and Reihan Salam, *Grand New Party: How Republicans Can Win the Working Class and Save the American Dream* (New York: Doubleday, 2008).

⁸² For an unapologetic One Percenter consciously seeking to forge such links, see Edward Conard, *The Upside of Inequality: How Good Intentions Undermine the Middle Class* (New York: Portfolio, 2016).

⁸³ E.J. Dionne, Jr., "The Reformicons," *Democracy Journal* 33 (Summer 2014).

partisanship and Madisonian institutions—though we suspect they would mitigate the potential for crisis. But they will help to clarify the nature of the conflict and mobilize Americans to participate. A great partisan era calls for parties without apology.

Appendix

Data:

American National Election Studies, Time Series Cumulative Data File, 1948–2012.
Dave Leip’s Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections, uselectionatlas.org.

Procedure:

We include only respondents aged 25-64. Using the age variable (VCF0102), we drop all respondents younger than 25 (codes 0, 1) and older than 64 (codes 6, 7).

We recode the income variable (VCF0114) so that all respondents who are in the 0 to 33rd percentile of the income distribution displayed the same code (1, 2 to 1). We follow the same procedure for respondents in the 34th to 67th percentile (3 to 2) and in the 68th to 100th percentile (4, 5 to 3).

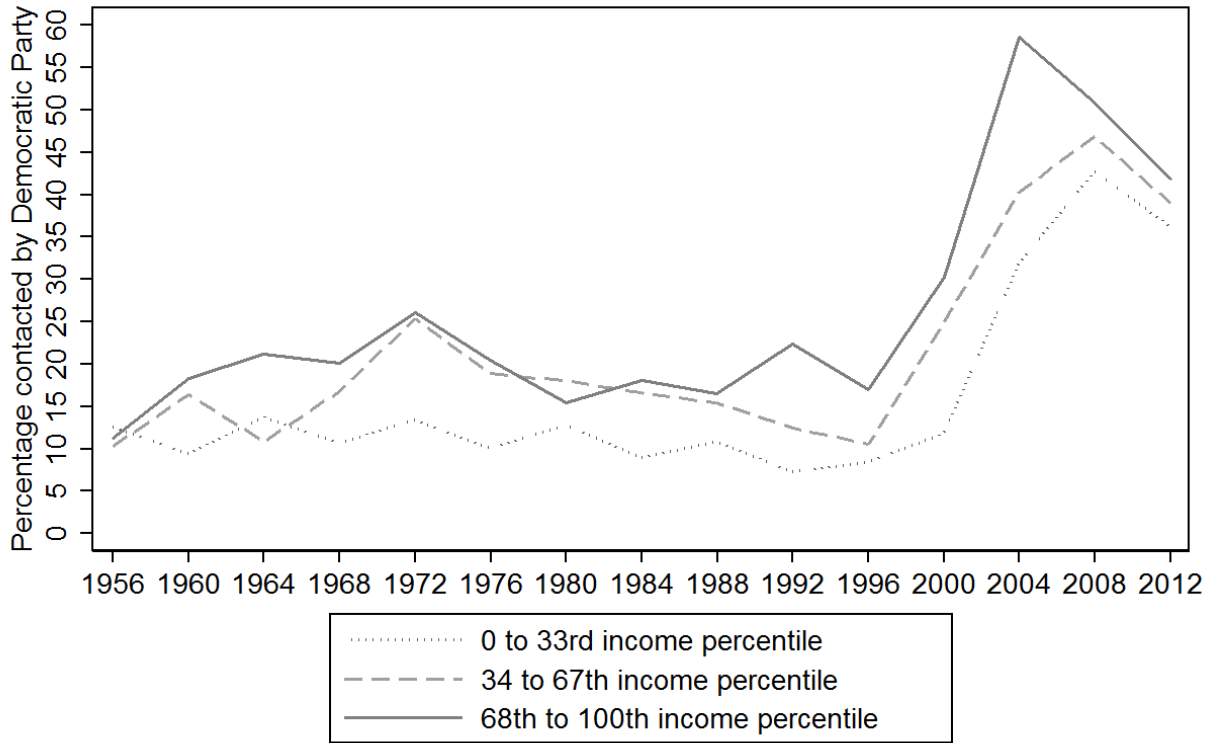
Battleground states are those with Partisan Voting Index (<http://cookpolitical.com/house/pvi>) whose absolute value is less than 5. Alaska and Hawaii in 1960 and 1964 and the District of Columbia in 1964 and 1968 are coded as non-battleground states.

For each year (VCF0004), for all three income groups, and for battleground and non-battlegrounds states, we plot the percentage of respondents who indicated that they were contacted by the Democratic Party (VCF9030b) and by the Republican Party (VCF9030c).⁸⁴

We employ sample weights (VCF0009z). For 2012, we include the full sample (in-person and online).

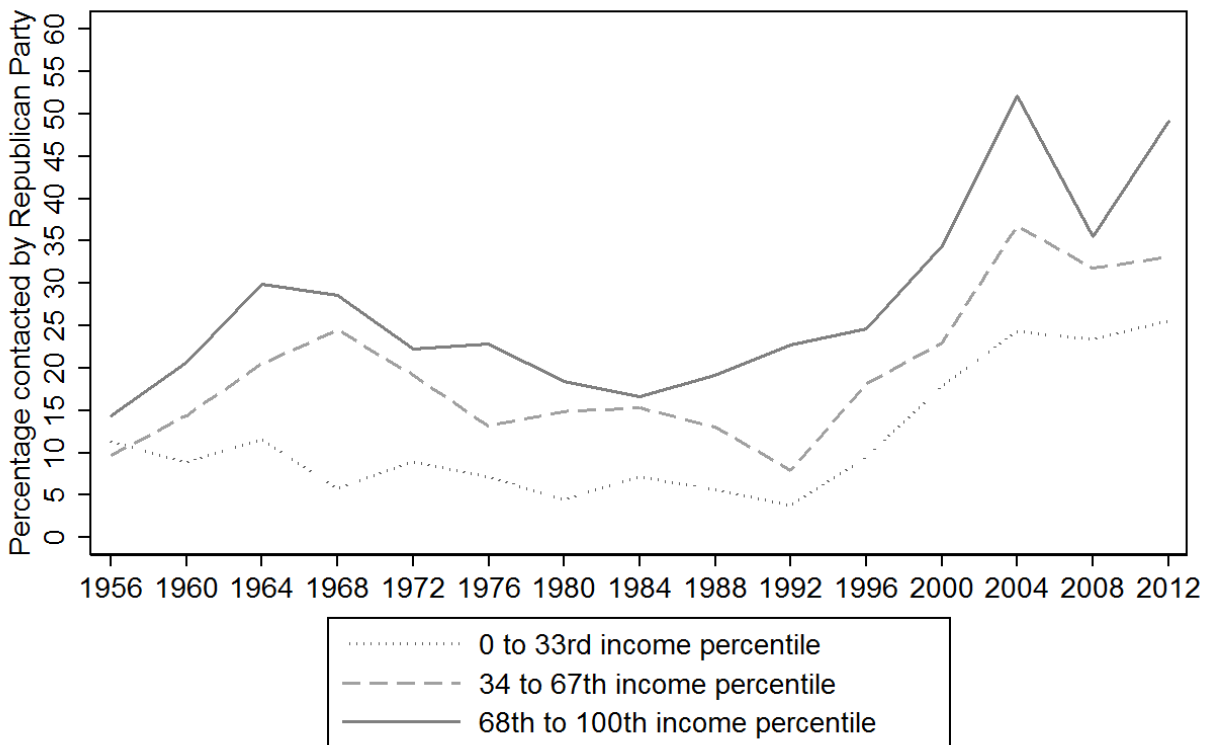
⁸⁴ The ANES cumulative file contains a coding inconsistency in 2012 for the variables VCF9030b and VCF9030c. Respondents contacted neither by the Democratic nor the Republican Party were coded as 9 “NA if contact” in the times-series file where they should have been coded 2 “No contact by Democratic [Republican] party.”

Figure 1
Contacting by Democrats in Battleground States, 1956-2012



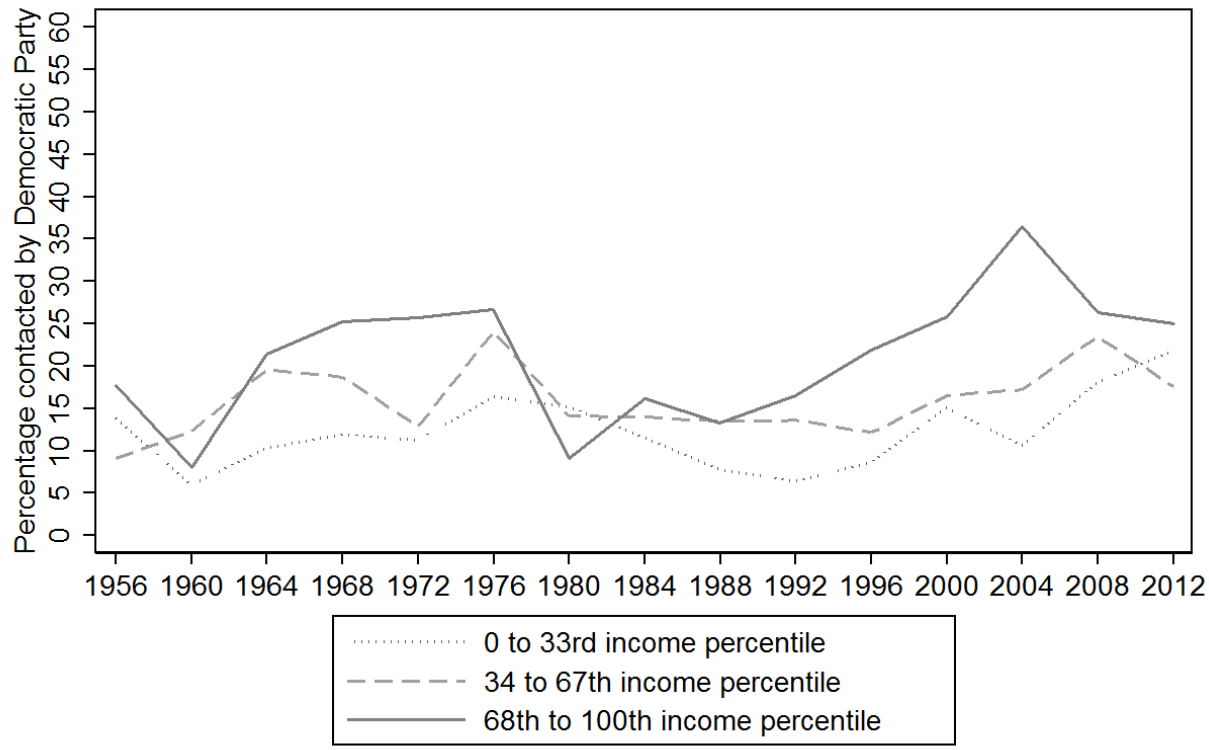
Source: American National Election Studies

Figure 2
Contacting by Republicans in Battleground States, 1956-2012



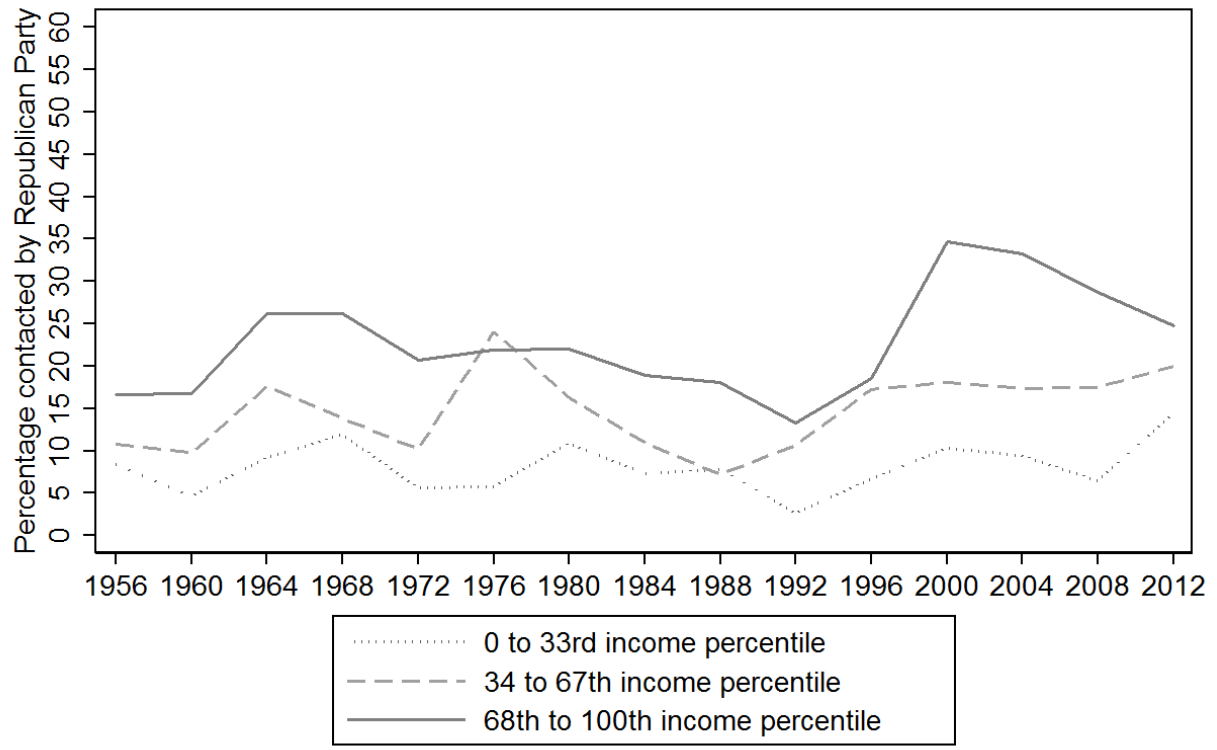
Source: American National Election Studies

Figure 3
Contacting by Democrats in Non-Battleground States, 1956-2012



Source: American National Election Studies

Figure 4
Contacting by Republicans in Non-Battleground States, 1956-2012



Source: American National Election Studies