

Realignment and Party Revival:  
Toward a Republican Majority?

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I have previously argued that realignment remains a periodic reality in American politics and a useful concept for electoral analysis (Paulson 2000).<sup>1</sup> Political scientists, relying on theories of dealignment and party decay, generally missed what was the most profound electoral realignment in American history between 1964 and 1972, because that realignment was fundamentally ideological and insufficiently partisan to be recognized widely (Broder 1978; Burnham 1978, 1982, 1989; Ladd 1978, 1980, 1981, 1991; Ladd with Hadley 1975). Nevertheless, it resulted in the end of the New Deal era and was followed by three decades in which the rule was divided government, most often featuring a Republican President and a Democratic Congress. Divided government, however, did not represent electoral chaos. The swing vote during this period was composed mostly of conservative Democrats, disproportionately southern, who voted Republican for President and Democratic for Congress. The three decades after 1964 also involved a long secular realignment in which those conservative Democrats have shifted to the Republicans in Congressional elections as well.

The result is a new ideologically polarized party system in which there will be more party line voting in the early twenty-first century than there was in the late twentieth. The 2000 and 2004 Presidential and Congressional elections have presented an evenly divided, ideologically and culturally polarized electorate, illustrated by the Republican “red” states and Democratic “blue” states. This outcome represents where the major parties have each run strongest in Presidential elections for most of the past

four decades and presents a mirror image to national electoral maps prior to the 1964-1972 realignment. The current electoral map reflects a new electoral environment involving the marriage of the 1964-1972 critical realignment in Presidential elections to the secular realignment which followed in Congressional elections, reaching critical proportions in the 1990s.

The immediate stimulus to the 1960s realignment in Presidential elections was the decisive turning point in a factional civil war within the Republican Party. After more than a generation of frustration inside their own party, conservative Republicans effectively took over the G.O.P at the national level with the nomination of Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona for the Presidency in 1964. While Senator Goldwater lost the ensuing election to President Lyndon B. Johnson by a landslide, the Goldwater movement was the real long term winner in 1964. The long term outcome of their victory within the G.O.P. was that it laid the groundwork for the later elections of Richard M. Nixon, Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush to the Presidency, and a distinctly conservative shift in the national policy agenda. But what is just as important to the current electoral environment of American politics is the fact that the conservative revolution of 1964 also planted the seeds for the development of the new ideologically polarized party system in American politics. In this new party system, four decades later, the Republicans have won the Presidency and majorities in both houses of Congress, and seem to have an opportunity to become the first clear majority party in American politics since the Democrats of the New Deal.

This paper uses the realignment perspective to discuss the chances that the Republicans will capitalize on that opportunity.

## Party Change and the Republicans: A Realignment Perspective

The following analysis of the Republican Party in a new party system is based on five propositions regarding party change and electoral realignment:

1. *The most compelling electoral realignment in American history occurred in Presidential elections between 1964 and 1972* (Paulson 2000, xv-42). A dramatic illustration of realignment in Presidential elections is provided by comparing the electoral map of the 2004 election with the 1916 election. See Figure 1. Both elections were so close that many Americans went to bed on election night without knowing the identity of the winner. In both elections, the incumbent President was narrowly re-elected. The closeness of both elections makes the comparison of the electoral maps meaningful.

Figure 1 here.

In 2004, President George W. Bush, the incumbent Republican, was re-elected over Senator John F. Kerry, Democrat of Massachusetts, by 51 percent to 48 percent of the popular vote. In 1916, President Woodrow Wilson, the incumbent Democrat, was re-elected over Republican Charles Evans Hughes of New York by 49 percent to 46 percent of the popular vote. In 2004, the Republican President carried a solid south and the interior west, while his Democratic opponent carried most of the northeast quadrant of the country. In 1916, the Democratic President carried the solid south and the interior west, while his Republican opponent carried most of the northeast quadrant. The two elections present a remarkable mirror image of each other.

If the comparison of the electoral maps of 1916 and 2000 amounted to a unique mirror image coincidence, it would be a curiosity of only passing interest. But the reversal across a century represents a persistent pattern of state electoral behavior.

There has been a consistent political geography throughout the history of American Presidential elections, with states aligning according to ideology and political culture, reflecting an enduring clash between “traditional” and “modern” values in American politics (Archer, Shelly, Taylor and White 1988; Archer, Shelly Davidson and Brunn, 1996; Burnham 1970; Elazar 1984; Jensen 1978; Ladd with Hadley 1975; Rabinowitz and MacDonald 1986; Schantz 1996; Schneider 1978; Sundquist 1983). Race, from slavery to civil rights, has been the most persistently at the core of this divide, but the debate has extended across a wide range of issues, including the ratification of the Constitution, state vs. national authority, isolationism (or nationalism) vs. internationalism in foreign affairs, and abortion. When state level data is examined, the realignment of the 1964-1972 period appears to be a partisan inversion of all previous alignments. The south, historically solid for the Democrats since the end Reconstruction, shifted toward the Republicans in Presidential elections, and is now almost as solidly Republican. The northeast, once the most Republican section of the country, is now the most Democratic. The west, essential to Democratic Presidential victories through 1948, is now just as essential to Republican victories. This electoral change resulted, at the very least, in the decline of the New Deal party system and, as one author put it, “the collapse of the Democratic Presidential majority.” (Lawrence 1997) Long before the “red” and “blue” state terminology emerged, Rhodes Cook observed that the bloc of states across the south and interior west presented us with “the Republican L” on the electoral map (Cook 1996, 7-11).

Table 1 presents correlations that make numerical what is visual on the electoral maps of 1916 and 2004. Going back to the realigning election of 1896, Table 1 correlates

the Republican vote by state in every Presidential election with 1916, 1964 (the nomination of Barry Goldwater for the Presidency) and 2000. The Democratic vote by state in every Presidential election is correlated with 1916, 1972 (the nomination of George McGovern for the Presidency) and 2000. Through 1944, the last Presidential election won by Franklin D. Roosevelt, the state level electoral coalitions in each party uniformly correlate positively and strongly with each other across elections. The correlations become low and uneven between 1948, the year of the Dixiecrat revolt, and 1960. The mirror image on the map is quantified by the fact that most elections through 1944 correlate negatively with most elections starting in 1964. Table 2 compares the coalitions of states in Presidential elections between the 1896-1944 period and the period since 1964. Table 2 reveals a significant degree of cross-cutting realignment, between the two periods, verifying the changes in the map.

Table 1 here.

Table 2 here.

2. *The realignment of the 1960s occurred because of the resolution of factional struggles within both major parties in favor of the more ideological factions* (Paulson 2000, 43-171). That is, the partisan inversion of state coalitions in Presidential elections is a reflection of the ideological inversion of the major political parties in the last half of the twentieth century. Indeed, electoral realignment has always been associated with the birth of a new political party (the Democrats in the 1830s and the Republicans in the 1850s) or a decisive shift in factional power within a major party (the Democratic nominations of William Jennings Bryan in 1896 and Alfred E. Smith in

1928). Between 1964 and 1972, for the first time in a century, there were decisive factional shifts within both major parties at the same time.

The major American political parties are better understood as factional systems, rather than as rational-acting organizations. The Republican Party has historically been a bifactional system, divided between its relatively moderate-to-liberal “Wall Street” faction, and the more conservative “Main Street” faction.<sup>2</sup> The more complex Democratic Party has been a multifactional system: The party regulars, including labor and the big city organizations with their urban working class base; the more middle class reformers; and the more conservative faction, based historically in the south. The first two factions are relatively liberal, and there was little to choose between them until they took over the Democratic Party during the New Deal. Since then, party regulars usually have prioritized economic interests, while the reformers have emphasized the causes of emerging social movements. Each of these two factions have often offered the open door through which relatively disenfranchised groups have been mobilized into the electorate, such as with the “rainbow coalition” popularized by Jesse Jackson. The south was once, of course, the factional home of white supremacy in American electoral politics. Today’s southern Democrats are centrists, often found in the Democratic Leadership Council, which was the factional home of Bill Clinton.

Prior to the middle of the twentieth century, the American party system featured two major umbrella parties, which were not very distinct ideologically. The Republican Party, generally more conservative on economic issues, was also the party of “modern” values, and more liberal on racial issues. The Democratic Party, generally more progressive on economic issues, was also the party of “traditional” values, and

more conservative on racial issues (Jensen, 1978). Since the 1964-1972 realignment, the Republican Party has become the conservative party; the Democratic Party has become the liberal party.

Since the Presidential nominations of Republican Barry Goldwater in 1964 and Democrat George McGovern in 1972, conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats have consolidated power within their parties. The major parties at the national level came to reverse ideological roles: The Democrats became the party of modern values and cultural tolerance, the Republicans the party of traditional (or “family”) values.

Ideological realignment within and between the major parties, reaching critical proportions in the 1964-1972 period, had an immediate impact on the Presidential electoral coalitions of the major parties and has certainly structured electoral realignment since that time. Using state Presidential election data, Table 3 illustrates the relationship between ideological alignment of the 1964-1972 period and partisan realignment between the Presidential elections of 1916 and 2004. States voting more Democratic than the country in all three Presidential elections between 1964 and 1972 are sorted as “liberal;” states voting less Democratic than the country in all three elections, more Republican than the country in 1964 and 1972, and casting a larger combined vote than the country for Nixon and Wallace in 1968 are sorted as “conservative.” All other states are sorted as “moderate.” Although not part of the design of this table, note that all of the states sorted as “liberal” are among today’s “blue” states, and all of the states sorted as “conservative” are among today’s “red” states. Predominantly, “liberal” states voted Republican in 1916, and Democratic in 2004, while “conservative” states voted Democratic in 1916 and Republican in 2004. Only eight states voted for the same party

in both Presidential elections, six of them in the center of the ideological alignment of 1964-1972. This ideological dimension is central to the partisan realignment in Presidential elections between the 1896-1944 period and the 1964-2004 period, illustrated on Tables 1 and 2.

Table 3 here.

3. *Increased split ticket voting between Presidential and Congressional elections after the 1964-1972 realignment was structured by ideological polarization between the national parties, as well as incumbency advantages in Congress* (Paulson 2000, 172-224). Most explanations of split ticket voting and divided government derive from the dealignment/party decay model. According to the dealignment analysis, the increase in split ticket voting and divided government has been accompanied by a decline in party identification on the part of voters, a decline of voter turnout, a decreasing role of political parties and an increasing power of issue-specific interest groups in candidate recruitment and campaign fund raising, the emergence of a candidate-centered electoral system, and almost insurmountable incumbency advantages in elections for the U.S. House of Representatives (Burnham 1975; Hinckley 1981; Jacobson 1990; Mann and Wolfinger 1980; Mayhew 1974). The overwhelming reality of Congressional elections since the 1960s is the rate at which incumbents are re-elected to the House of Representatives – consistently over 90 percent. It makes intuitive sense that the incumbency advantage, by itself, explains much of the split ticket voting between Presidential and Congressional elections. As incumbents build solid electoral bases of support in their Congressional districts, elections for the House become more “insulated” from other electoral trends, and less correlated with the vote for President. The result is

the “two-tier” party system. Until the 1990’s, the two-tier system usually produced a Republican President, while Democrats, aided by the advantages of incumbency, retained control of Congress.

Certainly the electoral change of the 1960s was one of dealignment. But dealignment should be understood as realignment by other means, or as James Q. Wilson put it, “realignment at the top, dealignment at the bottom.” (Wilson 1985) The swing vote in the electorate was not a vote of non-partisan moderates. Rather, the pattern of outcomes would indicate that the swing voters were disproportionately conservative Democrats, from the south, voting Republican for President and Democratic for Congress. The resulting governing coalition was a conservative one, because conservative Democrats held the swing votes in Congress, as well as in the national electorate. Had a Republican majority been necessary to pass the Reagan tax cut, for example, it would never have passed.

Table 4 examines split outcomes in contested Congressional districts between the results of Presidential and House elections since 1972. Certainly there is some evidence supporting the hypothesis that the electoral insulation of House incumbents promotes divided outcomes between Presidential and Congressional elections. But the difference appears to be accompanied by important qualifications. First, until 1988, divided outcomes occurred with slightly greater frequency in contested districts with incumbents running for re-election to the House than in districts with open seats. But the difference is surprisingly small, and since 1992, that difference has diminished noticeably, almost to the point of disappearance. It would appear that over the last decade or so, incumbency has little to do with split ticket voting, at least in contested Congressional districts. Of

more importance to understanding the impact of ideological polarization between the parties on split ticket voting, divided outcomes have not taken place uniformly in Congressional districts where incumbents are running for re-election. Rather, split tickets are most frequent where House incumbents are not in ideological harmony with their party's national ticket. Specifically, divided outcomes tend to appear most frequently where moderate-to-conservative Democrats and moderate-to-liberal Republicans are running for re-election to the House. This has been the case across three decades for moderate-to-conservative Democrats, who retained their seats in the House even as Republicans elected Presidents and carried their districts, particularly in the south. Over the last decade or so, moderate Republicans have been elected to the House almost entirely from districts carried by the Democratic nominee for President. When House incumbents are ideological misfits of either party, divided outcomes in their districts are the rule rather than the exception. On the other extreme, where partisan ideologues, conservative Republicans or liberal Democrats, are running for re-election to the House, split ticket outcomes are rare, and since 1988, occur even less frequently than in open seat districts. These findings seem to support the conclusion that ideological factionalism has more to do with split ticket voting between Presidential and Congressional elections than incumbency *per se*.

Table 4 here.

The same pattern is found in split ticket outcomes between the Presidency and the Senate since 1972. Only there, incumbency advantages are historically smaller than in the House, and split outcomes occur no more frequently where incumbent Senators are running for re-election than in open seats. Indeed, despite greater incumbency insulation

in the House, split ticket outcomes occur more frequently between the Presidency and the Senate.

4. *The “realignment at the top” of the 1960s has spread to the bottom since the 1990s* (Paulson 2000, 189-224). The conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats who gained control of Presidential nominations in the 1964-1972 period have since consolidated their power over nominations at the state level and in Congressional elections. In the south, the 24<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution and the Voting Rights Act have brought blacks in large numbers into the electorate. The emergence of Democrats like Carter, Clinton and Gore in place of Democrats like George Wallace has only hastened the departure of conservative Democrats to the Republican Party, among both party elites and voters. These conservative Democrats, who had been the voters most likely to split their tickets, were by the 1990s more likely to vote the Republican ticket. The “two-tier” characteristic of the party system has thus been softened as the Presidential and Congressional parties come to resemble each other more. See Tables 5 and 6. Since 1994, when the Republicans won control of the House of Representatives for the first time in four decades, and won a majority of House seats across the south for the first time since Reconstruction, they did so with a Congressional electoral coalition replicating the coalition that had won them Presidential elections most of the time since 1968. Apparently what James Q. Wilson called “realignment at the top, dealignment at the bottom” is better understood as “critical realignment at the top, secular realignment at the bottom.”<sup>3</sup>

Table 5 here.

Table 6 here.

5. *We now have two major political parties that are, by standards of the American experience, ideologically polarized* (Paulson 2000, 288-311). In the spring and summer of 1944, as President Franklin D. Roosevelt was preparing to run for a fourth term, and after Wendell L. Willkie had been defeated for renomination for President in the Republican primaries, the two planned to meet to discuss what they might do to produce a deliberate realignment of the party system along ideological lines. FDR, according to the account of his aid, Samuel Rosenman, was enthusiastic. The President instructed Rosenman to set up a meeting with Willkie, commenting (Barnard 1966, 480-481):

I think the time has come for the Democratic Party to get rid of its reactionary elements in the South and to attract the liberals in the Republican Party. Willkie is the leader of those liberals. He talked...about a coalition of the liberals in both parties, leaving the conservatives in both parties to join together as they see fit. I agree with him one hundred percent and the time is now - right after the election.

Willkie indicated his interest in a meeting. "Both parties are hybrids," Willkie told Rosenman. According to Rosenman, Willkie was interested in a realignment of the parties, "...between all the liberal forces on the one hand and all the conservative forces on the other." (Barnard 1966, 481)

Because both FDR and Willkie preferred to wait until after the election to meet, no meeting ever took place. Willkie died before the election at the age of 52, after a series of heart attacks, and Roosevelt died in office the following year, no action having been taken.

Nevertheless, their vision seems to have become reality. The seizure of power within their parties by conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats, and the electoral realignment in Presidential elections between 1964 and 1972, have been followed by elite realignment. The party-switching parade at the leadership level started mostly with liberal Republicans becoming Democrats: Sen. Wayne Morse of Oregon, Mayor John V. Lindsay of New York, Rep. Ogden Reid of New York, and Rep. Donald Riegle of Michigan, for example. Then there were the conservative Democrats becoming Republicans: Sen. J. Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, Rep. John Bell Williams of Mississippi, and former Gov. John B. Connally of Texas led the early waves; Rep. Phil Gramm of Texas followed in the 1980's. Sen. Richard Shelby of Alabama and Sen. Ben Nighthorse Campbell of Colorado led another wave conservative Democrats into the Republican Party after the 1994 Congressional election. Most recently, Sen. James Jeffords of Vermont, a moderate-to-liberal Republican, became an independent and joined the Democratic caucus in the Senate after the 2000 election.

Party switching at the top has been a reflection of the spread of “realignment at the top” to the “bottom.” Party elites and active party electorates today are polarized everywhere in the country: Democrats are generally more liberal than Republicans, even in the south, and Republicans are generally more conservative than Democrats, even in the northeast. Put in ideological terms, before the 1960s, conservative Democrats, like George Wallace, were clearly more conservative than moderate-to-liberal Republicans, and liberal Republicans, like Nelson Rockefeller, were clearly more liberal than moderate-to-conservative Democrats. Today moderate Democrats are clearly liberals,

even if not liberal Democrats; and moderate Republicans are conservatives, even if not conservative Republicans. Ideological alliances rarely cross party lines as once they did.

The umbrella political parties, born in the nineteenth century, have indeed declined, but the result is not post-partisan politics; it is more likely to be a new, more ideologically polarized party system, to a degree that seems historically almost un-American. This is the reality that defines the electoral environment in which the 2004 election was conducted, and will continue to shape American electoral politics, at least until the system is shaken by still another wave of realigning change.

#### Ideological Polarization and the Republican Party

Two observations are central to understanding the Republican Party as it was before 1964. First, the G.O.P. was widely considered the “party of Lincoln,” the party born of abolitionism and responsible for preserving the union and ending slavery. Second, rather than being a rational-acting organization, the Republican Party was, as major American parties have always been, an uneasy marriage of factions. The “Wall Street” and “Main Street” tags for the Republican factions certainly amount to an oversimplification, but perhaps the most instructive one available. The names certainly indicate accurately the central interests represented by each faction. The Wall Street faction has represented the interests of big business: monopoly and international capital. The Main Street faction has represented small, competitive capital, with its local roots and (sometimes) national markets.

The electoral map within the Republican Party is similar to the historic geography of Presidential elections. The Wall Street faction has found its base of support in the northeast quadrant of the country, particularly New England and the Mid-Atlantic states.

The Main Street faction has always been strong in the heartland and interior west. When the Republican Party was a majority party a century ago, southern Republicans, small in number, supported Republican Presidents, usually products of the Wall Street faction, in hopes of gaining patronage rewards. After the New Deal realignment, with Republicans out of the White House, the south gave relatively strong support to Robert Taft, who was the Main Street candidate for the Republican Presidential nomination three times. By 1964, of course, the south would be the engine of the conservative revolt that seized control of the Republican Party from the Wall Street faction (Paulson 2000, 73-123).

During the New Deal alignment period until 1964, the Wall Street faction was effectively the Presidential and executive wing of the Republican Party, while the Main Street faction emerged as the Congressional and legislative wing of the party. Republican National Conventions and Presidential nominations were controlled by the relatively liberal Wall Street faction, which produced Wendell Willkie, Thomas E. Dewey, and Dwight D. Eisenhower, the lone Republican President of the period. Most Republican Governors, from Dewey of New York and Earl Warren of California, to Nelson Rockefeller of New York and William W. Scranton of Pennsylvania, were also products of the Wall Street faction. Taft and most of the Congressional leadership of the party, serving more parochial and local interests, were products of the more conservative Main Street faction. This repeating pattern is explained by electoral dynamics. To win national elections prior to 1964, Republicans had to appeal to the large, closely contested states, with relatively diverse populations and large blocs of Electoral votes, located mostly in the northeast quadrant of the country. The south was solidly Democratic. The Republicans were generally strongest in the northeast, and could win in the west. They

could win without the west, as they did in 1896; but they could not win without the Electoral votes in the northeast quadrant. In every Republican victory in a Presidential election between the realignment of 1896 and the re-election of President Eisenhower in 1956, the northeast quadrant was solid, or nearly solid, for the Republican. New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, and Illinois all voted Republican in every Republican Presidential victory of that sixty-year period.

The Wall Street faction scored the last of its series of national convention victories in the battle for the Republican Presidential nomination in 1952. The 1952 primaries and convention balloting provided evidence that the factional divisions within the Republican Party had reached a point of extreme ideological polarization. Ike swept the northeast, while Taft won eight of the eleven delegations from the south, and most of the interior west. That is, generally the historically liberal “blue” states were for Eisenhower and the historically conservative “red” states were for Taft. See Table 7.

Table 7 here.

Indeed, had it not been for the outcome of floor fights over rules and credentials at the 1952 convention, Taft would have swept the south, and won the nomination.

Although the presence of President Eisenhower in the White House would delay the showdown, the bitterness and polarization of the 1952 struggle would linger, and set the stage for the conservative revolt against the party establishment in 1964.

#### The Revolt of 1964

The very narrowness of his defeat for the Presidency at the hands of Democrat John F. Kennedy in 1960 exposed Richard M. Nixon to second guessers from every corner of the Republican party, instead of gaining him credit for a close race well run.

According to liberal Republicans, Nixon could have carried Illinois, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Michigan, more than enough to win the election, if only he had more vigorously endorsed civil rights. But conservative Republicans answered that by endorsing states' rights and a reversal of the growth of the welfare state, Nixon could have carried the south and won the election. The debate within the Republican Party was more than a discussion of strategy of course; it was a conflict over ideology that would split the party in 1964 and alter its direction thereafter.<sup>4</sup>

The outcome of lasting importance from the 1964 Presidential election is not that President Johnson was elected by a landslide, but that Senator Goldwater was nominated and the conservative movement took over the Republican Party from the ground up. From the time F. Clifton White assembled a dozen friends in Chicago in 1961 to plot a coup for 1964, until the party's national convention three years later, conservative Republicans gave an exhibition of an ideologically based citizen activism which would become the norm in the internal politics of both parties in years to come. Over the next two years, White and his co-conspirators recruited allies down to the state and local level who put together an organization at the grass roots.

We might forget today that Goldwater's nomination in 1964 was hardly inevitable, and that it required an unprecedented intra-party insurgency plus a lot of luck. The Senator himself was reluctant to run for President. Indeed, his two leading opponents had self-destructed, Nixon by his defeat for Governor in California in 1962, and Rockefeller by his divorce and remarriage. But more important was the fact that the Goldwater movement was on the ground, ready to go, before the 1964 election year began. Put in today's terms, Goldwater had won the "invisible primary."<sup>5</sup>

The Goldwater organization at the grass roots was such an effective guerilla operation that no one, not even the leaders of the Republican establishment, knew what was going on until it was too late to stop it. At least until after the California primary, most moderate-to-liberal Republicans remained confident that Goldwater was too conservative to be nominated, not to mention elected, and that he would be stopped at the convention. Goldwater's opponents realized only too late that Goldwater already had the delegates to be nominated. The Goldwater activists were not playing what was, before 1964, the normal pre-convention game, in which supporters of a candidate would lobby party leaders for endorsements, and then allow the leaders to deliver the delegates. Instead, while Goldwater was only holding his own in the primaries, his supporters were taking over the party in the of states selecting delegates by caucuses and state conventions. Having won in the precinct caucuses, the Goldwater activists then won most or all of the delegates at county conventions and Republican state conventions. Party leaders who would not support Goldwater were simply lost their delegate seats in the process. In many cases, it was not until state conventions met that party leaders recognized that they had lost control of the state party apparatus and the delegation to the national convention.

After Goldwater narrowly defeated Rockefeller in the California primary, despite the eleventh hour entry of Governor William Scranton of Pennsylvania into the race, the Republican National Convention became a coronation of Goldwater as the party's nominee for President, much as national party conventions have become in recent times.

Nevertheless, the Republican National Convention in 1964 was not the harmonious celebration that national conventions now seem to be. It was the convention

of a party suffering severe ideological polarization from within. The divisiveness of internal battle defined the convention's atmosphere, although conservative Republicans had the votes to shape the party platform and deliver the party's nomination for the Presidency. The delegates soundly defeated minority reports by liberal Republicans for civil rights and against political extremism, and then nominated Goldwater for President by an almost identical margin.

The convention, reflecting a new Republican Party, had ratified Goldwater's words accepting the nomination in advance: "...extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice...moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue!"

The convention balloting for President reflected the conservative coup. The historically conservative "red" states voted for Goldwater, while the historically liberal "blue" states voted for Scranton or Rockefeller. It presented a mirror image to the Republican nominating coalition of 1952. See Table 8. This mirror image is much the same as the mirror image which has developed in Presidential elections, illustrated above, on Tables 2 and 3.

#### Table 8

The nomination of Barry Goldwater would, in years to come, prove to be the defining moment in the making of today's Republican Party, as the nominating coalition assembled by his campaign persists as the majority faction within the GOP to this day. His southern strategy in the 1964 election reflected the enduring Republican electoral model ever since, successful in winning seven out of ten Presidential elections since, placing Richard M. Nixon, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and George W. Bush in the White House.

## Ronald Reagan and the Ideological Homogenization of the Republican Party

The unraveling of the Nixon administration by the Watergate crisis and the resulting electoral accidents of 1976 hid two realities from observers of American politics at the time: First, conservative Republicans had become the normal governing faction of their party; and second, the Republicans had assembled a normal majority in Presidential elections.

When Gerald Ford assumed the Presidency upon the resignation of President Nixon, conservative Republicans did not consider him to be one of their own. While he had a solidly conservative record as Minority Leader of the House of Representatives, he had always been allied with moderate Republicans in party affairs. Doubt turned to opposition as he appointed Nelson Rockefeller as Vice President, set up a system to pardon Vietnam era draft resisters, and took a tolerant position on abortion rights. Finally, President Ford did not enjoy all the normal advantages of incumbency: He had never been nominated by his party for the Presidency, had not built the national organization required to win such a nomination, and he remained unelected. In the view of most conservative Republicans, challenging him was not an act of disloyalty to the party. In June of 1975, three conservative Republican Senators, James L. Buckley of New York, James McClure of Idaho, and Jesse Helms of North Carolina, issued a joint statement urging Ronald Reagan to seek the Republican Presidential nomination in 1976 (Witcover 1977, 51):

...as neither the President nor the Vice President was elected to office, it would be in the best interest of the Republican Party and of the country for the 1976 presidential and vice-presidential nominations to be sought and won in an

open convention...The merits of the current administration must be judged in 1976 by delegates pledged only to support the principles of their party.

This was the logic by which Reagan, who earlier had issued the eleventh commandment – “Thou shalt not speak ill of any fellow Republican” – could challenge President Ford in 1976. The battle for delegates yielded the geographic and ideological pattern on the historic map. Ford won most of his primaries and delegates in the northeast quadrant of the country, while Reagan scored his victories across the south and the interior west. See Table 9.

Table 9 here

The pre-convention maneuvering in 1976 revealed that even Reagan and his advisors did not yet fully understand what had happened in 1964. Hoping to win the support of uncommitted delegates in the northeast (particularly Pennsylvania), Reagan chose Sen. Richard Schweiker of Pennsylvania, a liberal Republican, to be his running mate for Vice President in advance of the convention. But the real uncommitted delegates were not from the northeast, where supporters of President Ford controlled party organizations. Rather, they were from the south and west, conservative Republicans torn between their ideology and their President. When Reagan chose Schweiker, he effectively neutralized the consideration of ideology, and sent those delegates into the Ford camp, assuring the nomination of the President (Paulson 2000, 128-131).

The important outcome of the 1976 primaries was not that President Ford had won the Republican nomination, but that Reagan had come so close to defeating the

incumbent. Even in defeat, conservative Republicans had secured their electoral base and consolidated their power within the party.

The challenge by Ronald Reagan almost certainly cost President Ford and the Republicans the Presidential election that year. But when Reagan announced that he would again seek the Republican Presidential nomination in 1980, he was not regarded as a disloyal maverick, as one might expect for a candidate who had challenged his own party's incumbent President. Rather, he was the candidate of his party's majority conservative faction, the presumptive front runner. The translation of faction leadership into party leadership without Reagan paying a price for his challenge four years before, and the relative ease with which Reagan proceeded to the Republican Presidential nomination in 1980 illustrate the new rule of the nominating game: A candidate who can unite the majority faction party in the primaries will secure the nomination well in advance of the convention.

The ease with which Reagan achieved not only his nomination, but party unity after the withdrawal of George Bush as his opponent, stands in contrast to the divisive end game of the 1964 pre-convention period, when Rockefeller withdrew to support Scranton in their eleventh hour stop-Goldwater campaign. In 1980, Reagan was not considered to be outside the Republican mainstream, as Goldwater was perceived to be in 1964, and liberal Republicans found it much easier to accept the inevitability of Reagan's nomination. The Republican Party of which Reagan was the nominee was a united party, and a conservative party. It has remained the conservative party in American politics ever since.

## Republican Presidential Primaries and the New Nominating Equilibrium

It should not be surprising that the new political parties of the ideologically polarized party system practice new nominating procedures for their national leadership, yielding a new pattern of outcomes in Presidential nominations. The following patterns have emerged in recent Presidential nominating contests of both parties, and appear likely to persist until party change as fundamental as that of the post-1964 period occurs again. For purposes of the current study, my examples will focus on the Republicans:

1. *Presidential nominations are now participatory processes*, a reality that is unlikely to be reversed in form, even if it is neutralized to some degree in practice. Nomination processes are candidate-centered, rather than party-centered, much as elections themselves have become. The vast majority of convention delegates are now chosen in primaries; most of the rest are chosen in caucus/convention systems which are participatory and structured around candidate competition rather than party leadership or loyalty. These open nominating systems, then, are manipulated by more ideological issue activists, whose first concerns are issues and candidates, rather than the interests of the party. Among the Republicans, even more than the Democrats, however, the once conflicting concerns of issue activists and party leaders are no longer mutually exclusive. As power within the Republican Party has shifted ideologically to the right, and geographically to the south and west, issue activists have increasingly emerged themselves as the new party leaders.

2. *Primaries decide Presidential nominations, conventions ratify them.* Not since 1952, has a national convention of either party gone beyond one ballot to select a nominee for President. Not since 1976 has there been a serious contest for the Republican

Presidential nomination at a national convention. The Goldwater coup in 1964 was then a very strange event, indeed. Prior to that time, candidates entered Presidential primaries in order to persuade party leaders to nominate them at the convention. Now candidates routinely enter primaries with the purpose of winning enough delegates to seize the nomination before the convention meets. Conventions have become ceremonial affairs, campaign inaugurations, and four-day advertisements, hardly worthy of media coverage. This reality has solidified as the delegate selection schedule of primaries and caucuses has become front loaded over the past two decades.

3. *Campaign reform has had an influence on nominating politics in both parties, particularly the Democratic Party, but not necessarily the influence intended by reformers* (Crotty 1983; Polsby 1983). Certainly, requirements for participatory delegate selection have promoted the growth of primaries and delegate-centered caucuses, although as discussed below, even that has not had the impact intended. But proportional representation, for example, has had, since 1972, almost no impact on the outcomes of nominations. It was widely expected that proportional representation would make it more difficult for any candidate to obtain a majority of the delegates to a convention, leading to more open conventions. But the pattern has been that early victories and momentum for the front runner have winnowed out the opposition, and the nomination has been effectively settled before the convention. In Republican contests, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Robert Dole, and George W. Bush have all gone to the convention facing only token opposition, if any, to their nominations.

Campaign finance reform was expected to have a democratizing impact; what Federal matching funds have in fact done is make it easier for candidates with access to

money to raise more money. Front runners with money today are able to discourage opposition and limit the nomination contest even more than party leaders of the old umbrella parties could once discourage opposition to the party's choice, if there was one.

Both proportional representation and campaign finance reform have had much more influence on who runs, rather than who wins once the running starts. Proportional representation played a role in expanding the early fields of candidates, and in building the now common strategy of running in almost every primary. A candidate no longer has to win to earn a share of the delegates, and he or she almost has to run everywhere to avoid being crowded out of the race. These large early fields have not, however, stopped the winnowing process; indeed they have increased its decisiveness. Candidates need to win primaries to stay in the race. Before reform, there were fewer candidates in the primaries, but more candidates still active at the convention, than there are now.

Federal matching funds and crowded fields of candidates have created longer campaigns, and particularly the now widely recognized "invisible primary" which determines front runners and eliminates candidates even before the election year begins, quite contrary to the intention of the Democratic reform which restricted delegate selection to the election year (Hadley 1976). Sometimes even potentially major candidates are eliminated before a vote is cast, as was the case with former Vice President Dan Quayle who, before 1996, saw the money being raised by another conservative Republican, Sen. Phil Gramm of Texas, and who at the same time was being squeezed out in his home state of Indiana by Sen. Richard Lugar (Buell 1996). Elizabeth Dole was eliminated from the race for the Republican Presidential nomination before 2000 by the fund raising juggernaut of George W. Bush and the developing insurgency of

Sen. John McCain of Arizona. Other potentially important candidates, who almost certainly would have gathered convention delegates before reform, have been discouraged from putting the time and money necessary into such complex campaigns. Jack Kemp, for example, may well have been a candidate for the Republican Presidential nomination in 1996, if fund-raising and delegate selection still been conducted under the pre-reform system.

4. *The early front runner, if one is identified, is most likely to be nominated.* This would seem ironic, and is the result of a dialectical process. Reform opened up the nominating system; the participatory process created more primaries and a longer campaign. At first, this led to upsets in contests for the Democratic Presidential nomination in 1972 and 1976. Then, the accumulation of primaries promoted front loading, as states competed for influence; fund raising reforms and the long crowded calendar made early organization and financing all the more important. Now, even established party leaders must have candidate-centered campaign organizations ready to go early, as only insurgents had to in the days of Barry Goldwater and George McGovern. There no longer is an open path to the guerilla-like sneak attacks such as the one the Goldwater movement waged on the Republican party establishment in 1964. The invisible primary, taking a year or more before delegate selection begins, winnows the field considerably, and often anoints a front runner. Early upsets in Iowa and New Hampshire always seem to occur, but when they do, the surprise winner does not have the resources to hold off the early front runner, who comes back to win. Thus, we are back pretty much where we started: A clear early front runner, if one can be identified, is more likely than any other candidate to win the nomination. This general rule describes

the all of the contests for the Republican Presidential nomination since 1980. Reagan and George H.W. Bush both lost Iowa before beginning recoveries with victories in New Hampshire; Dole and George W. Bush both lost New Hampshire before recovering. For all four of these candidates, the South Carolina primary served as a firewall, and victories on Super Tuesday effectively clinched the nomination.

It is, of course, not necessarily the case that an early front runner is identified. Larry Bartels has classified three types of nomination contests. The first is the front runner against the field, which describes every contest in the Republican Presidential primaries since 1980. The second is the one-on-one race between two leading candidates, which describes the Ford vs. Reagan showdown of 1976. The third is the crowded field, which occurs periodically in the Democratic Party, but has not occurred in the Republican Party since 1948.

Bartels classification of nominating campaigns, based on primaries, is not unlike the earlier classification of nominations by William Keech and Donald Matthews which was based more on the convention decision (Keech and Matthews 1977). For reasons discussed above, the convention no longer decides, but that fact makes their classifications all the more instructive about what has happened to pre-convention politics.

First, Keech and Matthews describe *consensual* nominations, in which there is a single candidate identified as the front runner before the primaries, and who never faces serious opposition. This occurs more frequently in the party in the White House, of course, particularly when the incumbent President is seeking renomination, but it occurs in the party out of the White House as well. Second, *semiconsensual* nominations are

those in which a front runner emerges early and faces vigorous opposition during the primaries before finally securing the nomination. The semiconsensual nominee is not a unanimous choice, but is broadly acceptable across factions of the party. Finally, the *nonconsensual* nomination seriously divides the party along factional lines, sometimes doing telling damage lingering after the convention.

Table 10 sorts Republican Presidential nominations, using the Keech and Matthews categories, since 1936, the first nominations they classified. Keech and Matthews recognized what most observers of party politics at the time of their work did not, that vigorous campaigns in Presidential primaries do not necessarily damage the party. The pattern of consensus developing around a front runner emerging in the early primaries has become the new form of semiconsensual nomination. Since 1976, in fact, nonconsensual nominations have disappeared in both parties. This reflects the fact that factional conflict within the parties before and during the 1964-1972 realignment has been replaced by ideological polarization between the parties, and ideological homogenization within the parties, resulting in generally greater party unity. This unity, of course, works to the benefit of the early front runner.

Table 10 here

5. *Ideological homogenization within the parties has had as much or more to do with the new nominating system and its outcomes than reform in general or front loading in particular.* Goldwater's activists seized the Republican Party before, not after reform, and reform could not have been passed in the first place had not a coalition of liberal Democrats already had the convention majority to do it in 1968. Ideological polarization between the parties was already well advanced before the impact of reform was felt, and

the increased ideological homogenization within the parties has done much to shape nominating politics since then. The ideological homogenization of the vote in contests for the Republican Presidential nomination since the factional civil wars of 1952 and 1964 is illustrated using the 1964-1972 ideological alignment of states on Table 11.

Table 11 here

Ideological homogenization has certainly promoted pre-convention consensus building, and contributed to nominations being decided early. Opposing candidates often withdraw once a front runner is established partly because they are out of money, but partly also because their ideological differences with the front runner are not that great. The losers' supporters generally do not find it that difficult to support the winner at the convention and in the election. Indeed, considerations of money and ideology are not mutually exclusive. If ideological differences among the leading candidates in the primaries were greater, issue activists would be out raising money for their candidate, or for a new candidate, in a last ditch effort to stop the front runner. Thus, despite apparent personal animosity, John McCain found it relatively easy to withdraw in favor of George W. Bush in 2000, just as Robert Dole withdrew in favor of Bush's father in 1988, compared with Nelson Rockefeller, who when he withdrew, could not bring himself to support Barry Goldwater in 1964.

The front loading of primaries has often been cited as a cause of the early clinching of nominations (Mayer 1997; Hagen and Mayer 2000). Certainly, front loading has much to do with the fact that the nomination race is decided so early, after only a few weeks in recent years. But it has little to do with the fact that conventions no longer nominate. The last convention to take more than one ballot to nominate, the Democratic

convention of 1952, was twenty years before reform, and 36 years before any serious front-loading of primaries occurred. And although the nominating contest was decided at several conventions between 1952 and 1976, never since 1952 has any convention of either party displaced the pre-convention front runner.

The ideological polarization between and ideological homogenization within the parties has much more to do with nominations being settled before the convention than front loading. If the current front-loaded primaries were being contested between Republicans Dwight D. Eisenhower and Robert A. Taft, or Nelson Rockefeller and Barry Goldwater, or Gerald Ford and Ronald Reagan, the battle would still go all the way to the convention. But such extreme ideological differences within each party have not been observed in contests for Presidential nominations since 1980. Conversely, it would seem that if the nominating contests since then were fought under pre-reform rules, or prior to front-loading, with the party electorates the way they are today, the results would have been quite the same. It may have taken longer to decide these contests, if only because of the calendar, but they would have been settled, with the same winner, before the convention.

#### Ideological Homogenization and the Nomination of George W. Bush

When George W. Bush prepared to run for President in 2000, he faced a challenge common to all candidates seeking nominations for the Presidency from ideologically homogenized parties in today's ideologically polarized party system. He had to appeal ideologues in his own party to be nominated, and to independents and moderates to be elected, appeals which are, to a significant degree, mutually exclusive. But he had a plan.

Bush began the election year with a considerable bankroll, the endorsement of the party establishment, and a strategy to present himself as a “compassionate conservative.” The plan was to secure the Republican Presidential nomination without a major fight, and then run in the general election as a moderate Republican, appealing to the center. Even if the plan did not work perfectly, Bush apparently anticipated that his leading opponent for the nomination, if one survived into the primaries, would be a conservative Republican, such as Steve Forbes or Pat Buchanan. According to the strategy, Bush would win that contest, his status as a moderate fortified. But Bush himself was collecting the money from conservative interests, who were intent on a Republican victory in the election. Forbes, who had run in the 1996 primaries as a “pro-choice” Republican, had the money to make the race, but lacked credibility among ultraconservatives. No other candidate to Bush’s right was able to stay viable, and his only surviving opponent was Senator John McCain of Arizona.

The fact that moderate Republicans considered McCain as an alternative to Bush is an indication of how conservative the Republican Party has become, because McCain has a solidly conservative voting record in the Senate. But his reputation as an insurgent, which made him attractive to independents and Democrats who could vote in cross-over primaries, both established the viability of his candidacy, and made his nomination highly unlikely.

The electoral map of the contest between Bush and McCain, like the subsequent map between Bush and Gore, is shaped by the ideological alignment of 1964-1972. Except for his home state of Arizona, McCain scored all of his victories in the northeast quadrant of the country where, historically, liberal Republicans have won primaries.

Bush rebounded from his early defeat in New Hampshire by winning South Carolina and Virginia, then clinched the nomination with victories in New York, Ohio and California. Bush did particularly well in states that supported conservative Republicans Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan in nomination contests between 1964 and 1980. Interestingly, three states which his father had won against Reagan in 1980 voted before George W. Bush clinched the nomination in 2000: Michigan, Connecticut and Massachusetts. He lost all three. See Table 12.

Table 12 here

Bush had survived the primaries. In fact, he had won by a rather decisive margin. But he had not able to unify the party without a fight, and he had to appeal to his right to do it. It only gave him a longer trip to make when he tried to dash back to the center for the general election. It is a challenge Republican candidates for the Presidency are likely to face in 2008 and beyond, an ideological mirror image to the challenge their Democratic opponents are likely to face.

The Republican Presidential Nomination in 2008

Since Ronald Reagan, contests in the Republican Presidential primaries have matched conservatives against ultraconservatives. There is still factionalism in the Republican Party, but it is factionalism in an ideologically homogenized party. Just as the Democratic umbrella is now to the ideological left of the center of the American electorate, the Republican umbrella is to the right of center. While electoral prediction is risky, it is safe to predict that the Republican nominee for President will be a conservative.

The contest is likely to follow the factional pattern in place since 1988, with one exception. There is a very good chance that the 2008 race will differ from the last four contests for the Republican Presidential nomination by starting without a clear front runner. For the first time since in more than five decades, there may be a crowded field of Republicans entered in the primaries, with no clear leader. Supporters of all of the potential candidates are probably pleased that Richard Cheney is the Vice President. He is highly unlikely to run for President, and no heir apparent has yet emerged.

We can expect that a number of Republicans will be seeking the nomination by attempting to fill that role, hoping to be the effective candidate of the Bush administration. These candidates will all present themselves as conservatives, but not too extreme to win a general election, worthy of support from the party establishment. At this writing, Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist appears to be positioning himself strategically for that role.

Then there is Senator John McCain of Arizona. He will be 72 in 2008, and it is unclear whether he will run for President again, although the current consensus seems to be that he will. If he does not run, a Republican in the McCain mold, a moderate conservative with agnostic attitudes toward the party leadership, will be seeking to win the support of his constituency. Senator Chuck Hegel of Nebraska, who endorsed McCain for President in 2000 and who has kept himself in the public eye since, could be that candidate. Or it could be Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, a House prosecutor in the Clinton impeachment who has since maintained legislative independence from his party leadership and has cooperated with moderates of both parties in the Senate in avoiding a showdown on the filibuster of judicial nominations.

Probably, there will be a moderate Republican among the early entries who is more libertarian on social issues; pro-choice on abortion, for example. Former Mayor Rudolph Giuliani of New York attracts attention as this sort of candidate. His notoriety as Mayor from the September 11 attack on his city may position him to make a greater national security appeal to conservatives, than might be expected, and he might make a strong showing based on early victories in New Hampshire, Massachusetts and New York. Giuliani still enjoys broad popularity in the electorate at large, but his pro-choice views on abortion will give him trouble with the Republican primary electorate.

There are two conservative Republicans who are not, like Frist, insiders in the Bush administration, but who could potentially run well in primaries in the northeast, normally counted as part of the moderate Republican base. Senator Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania is an ideologue who has a strong pro-life record on abortion and appeals to the Christian right. Governor Mitt Romney of Massachusetts has a name that might appeal to moderate Republicans with a good memory, while he presents himself as a Mormon who is solidly conservative on “family values,” particularly with his opposition to gay marriage.

Finally, there is likely to be an ultraconservative Republican in the image of Pat Buchanan or Pat Robertson, whose purpose would be to keep mainstream conservatives “honest.”

To take our projection a step further, the Republican nominee will probably be either the Bush administration candidate (i.e. Frist?) or McCain or his heir. The former could win almost any contest, and might win it early; the latter could win a race where

Giuliani or the relatively liberal Republican was eliminated early, or a race in which the ultraconservative Republican survives longer than expected.

Whoever wins the nomination, the Republican nominee for President will be a conservative, appealing to the center of the electorate from the right.

#### Turn of the Century Realignment: Toward a Republican Majority?

With the re-election of President Bush in 2004, the Republicans won a majority of the popular vote in a Presidential election and a majority of seats in both houses of Congress for the first time since 1952. Of course, Republican victories in Presidential elections is nothing new. What is new is that the Republicans seem to have a genuine opportunity to become the majority party in American politics.

#### The Republican Majorities and the New Governing Coalition

The Republicans won five out of six Presidential elections between 1968 and 1988 with a coalition of states nearly identical to the coalition nearly identical to the one that elected George W. Bush in 2000 and 2004 (See Table 1). Although they were able to assemble a governing coalition with the support of conservative Democrats in the electorate and in Congress, the Republicans were never able assemble partisan majorities in Presidential and Congressional elections simultaneously. Nevertheless, the Republican majority which emerged in the 1994 Congressional election has persisted into the current Bush Presidency (See Tables 5-6). The result is that the electoral and policy environment in which today's Bush administration operates is very different from the electoral and policy environment faced by the Reagan and Bush administrations two decades ago. The Republican Presidential majorities of the 1980s were much larger than the Republican margins in the 2000 and 2004 Presidential elections, and the Republican Presidents of the

1980s had a greater opportunity (and faced a greater necessity) to build bipartisan coalitions. Today's Republicans are almost entirely dependent on holding their thin majority together to govern. Compared with the divided government and conservative governing coalition of the Reagan-Bush years, today's Bush administration and the Congressional Republican majority have a more complete, but more tenuous, hold on power. See Tables 13 and 14.

Table 13 here

Table 14 here

What is fascinating, in terms of the history of the American party system, is that the President and much of the Republican leadership in Congress seem perfectly content with taking on that challenge. The policy agenda of the Bush administration and the Republican majority in Congress is not the sort of appeal to the middle-of-the-road that would be expected if it were dictated by electoral rationality. This much can be said for them: They believe in their agenda, and its ideological premises.

This can be explained by the fact that ideological polarization between and ideological homogenization within the parties has become the reality in Congress, particularly in the House of Representatives. The process of ideological homogenization occurred more quickly over the last four decades, and more extremely, within the Republican Party. Table 15 shows the ideological composition of party caucuses in Congress in 1964 (the year of the Civil Rights Act), 1974 (the climactic year of Watergate), 1981 (passage of Reaganomics), 1995 (Contract With America), and 2004.

Table 15 here

Since winning both houses of Congress in 1994, the Republicans have conducted themselves more as a parliamentary majority party, than as a traditional American umbrella party, which given changing political realities, might seem to make sense. The 1994 Congressional elections left Newt Gingrich of Georgia as the new Speaker of the House. He conducted himself as if he were prime minister, and presented the proposed legislation of the Contract With America as if it were a policy agenda he had been elected to execute (Killian 1998; Wilcox 1995). By 1999, House Republicans were treating Bill Clinton as if he were the vulnerable prime minister of a minority party, rather than President of the United States. The impeachment of President Clinton had more of the feel of a no confidence motion. Now, at this writing, Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist has threatened the traditional rule of the filibuster so that the Republican majority can move on President Bush's judicial nominations to federal courts, and President Bush is pushing his plan to reform Social Security, long an untouchable issue in American politics. The question at this moment seems to be whether the Republicans can govern from the ideological right, and then win re-election for having done so. That question may be answered less by the spatial positioning of the electorate on the ideological spectrum than by voter's evaluations of the policy outcomes produced on the issues.

The current policy agenda being offered by the Bush administration and Congressional Republicans can be put in three terms: national security, Social Security, and strict construction.

President Bush won re-election in 2004 largely on the national security issue, with emphasis on the war against anti-American terrorism. The swing voter in 2004, it seems, was simply not persuaded that Sen. Kerry and the Democrats would be tough enough on

war and peace issues related to terrorism, and Sen. Kerry did not accompany his criticisms of the Bush administration on the war in Iraq with clear alternatives. The fact that the swift boat controversy was so effective in taking Kerry off message is evidence of the lingering cultural divide in American politics, tracing back to the Vietnam War and the issues of the 1964-1972 realignment. The Republicans can continue to benefit from the national security issue if there are no major successful terrorist attacks on the United States; if there are no major foreign policy disasters; and if the Republicans can continue to portray their Democratic opponents as weak on national security.

The effort to reform Social Security probably best represents the President's pledge to spend the political capital he "earned" in the election. His proposals are enough to stimulate a great ideological debate about the welfare state. He sees free market policies and tax cuts as a higher priority than increased federal government expenditure to protect Social Security. His "progressive indexation" proposal, cutting Social Security benefits to middle and higher income people, while maintaining benefits for the working poor, portrays Social Security as a poverty program, while his opponents view it as a continuing entitlement. The policy outcomes of Social Security reforms are decades into the future. Therefore, their foreseeable electoral impact in the short run is more a matter of public relations. Can President Bush portray his proposal as a real benefit for the poor as well as an investment opportunity for the middle class that saves Social Security? Or will the Democrats succeed in portraying the Bush proposal as too risky to their retirement? Finally, how will the business cycle in the next few years impact how people view the proposal?

Finally, President Bush is committed to appointing conservatives to the federal courts, particularly the Supreme Court, where, it seems, at least two vacancies will occur during his Presidency. Almost certainly, the tenure of William Rehnquist as Chief Justice will come to an end, and John Paul Stevens, try as he might to avoid it, will retire. The controversy about the filibuster is only a warm up to Senate battles over Supreme Court in the next few years. On this, and other issues where conservatives consider moral values to be the determining factor (abortion, gay marriage, the science curriculum in public schools, etc.), the great cultural divide is again likely to be engaged. The more conservative supporters of President Bush have found it useful to argue, with a surprisingly ineffective response from their opponents, that the 2004 election was decided by the vote of Christian conservatives. They have reason to believe it, but it isn't so, because they are not the swing voters; in the current electoral environment, most of them would vote Republican. After all, the Republican in any election is almost certain to be not only a Republican, but a conservative Republican who appeals to them much more than any Democrat.

#### The Last Realignment and the Next

The realignment of 1964-1972 did not produce a new normal majority party in American politics, but it was realignment nonetheless. It left behind an electoral order in which Republicans normally won Presidential elections, and the Democrats normally won Congressional elections. The swing vote in both Presidential and Congressional elections, as well as in Congress, were conservative Democrats, and the outcome was a relatively stable, conservative governing coalition.

In the 1990s, most of these conservative Democrats became, by voting behavior if not party identification, Republicans. The new and apparently growing swing vote seems more genuinely moderate in political attitudes, leaning toward libertarian positions on both economic and cultural issues. These small government voters, thus, tend to be fiscal conservatives who are environmentalists, pro-choice on abortion, and relatively liberal on civil rights. Historically liberal Republican in their voting behavior, these voters gave relatively strong support to John B. Anderson in 1980, and Ross Perot in 1992 and 1996. Large numbers of them voted for President Clinton on the Democratic line in 1996, but Republican for Congress. These voters are apparently moderates who find Republicans to be too dogmatic on the right, and Democrats too dogmatic on the left.

This change in the complexion of the swing vote, from the populist to the libertarian, or from the “Reagan Democrat” to the “soccer mom,” or the “security mom,” contains the seeds of realignment at the turn of the twenty-first century. This realignment would not necessarily mean that most voters had themselves been “realigned” to new partisan habits. Rather, there would be more stable partisan bases to electoral coalitions in an ideologically polarized party system: A large and perhaps growing independent vote in the center, surrounded by liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans. The partisan voters would vote the party ticket more than has been the case in the post-New Deal party system, while the independent moderates would divide similarly in Presidential and Congressional elections. Less frequently divided government is the likely result.

Whether the Republican Party will emerge as the majority party in this new electoral environment is a more open question. Despite the fact that they are no longer

faced with extreme internal ideological conflict, Republicans hoping to extend their recent narrow electoral majorities face a “collective action” problem.<sup>6</sup> On the one hand, they have their ideological ultraconservatives, wedded to their policy agenda. On the other hand, they have the more moderate conservatives, who seem more focused on attracting the new swing voter. Already, moderate Republicans, particularly in the Senate, are attempting to find a basis for compromise on Social Security and judicial nominations. But the GOP leadership is hardly focused on the new swing voter. The selection of Senator Zell Miller, Democrat of Georgia, to keynote the Republican convention in 2004, seemed to indicate an assumption that conservative Democrats from the south were still the key swing voters. The campaign to re-elect President Bush seemed based on the same assumption. And, if it is based on electoral calculus at all, so is the current legislative agenda of the Bush administration. Majorities are lost in realigning periods at least partly because the recent electoral winners continue to follow a strategy that has worked, and fail to respond to the changing electoral environment.

Even if there is periodicity to electoral change, as realignment theory suggests, there is no inevitability to election outcomes. Certainly, party and policy elites of both parties are presented by the electoral context of the turn of the twenty-first century with both opportunities and dangers. While there is some evidence of a developing realignment, the actions of elites, and policy outcomes, will determine electoral winners and losers, and whether a stable partisan majority will actually emerge in the near term future.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> My own work builds on a rich body of literature on electoral realignment. See especially V.O. Key, "A Theory of Critical Elections," *Journal of Politics* 17 (1955): pp. 3-18; Walter Dean Burnham, *Critical Elections and the Mainsprings of American Politics* (New York: Norton, 1970); Gerald Pomper, "From Confusion to Clarity: Issues and American Voters, 1956-1968," *The American Political Science Review* 66 (1972): pp. 415-428; Pomper with Susan Lederman, *Elections in America: Control and Influence in Democratic Politics* (New York: Longman, 1980); James L. Sundquist, *The Dynamics of the American Party System: Alignment and Realignment of Political Parties in the United States* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1983). See also Kristi Andersen, "Generation, Partisan Shift, and Realignment: A Glance Back to the New Deal," in Norman H. Nie, Sidney Verba, and John R. Petrocik, *The Changing American Voter* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), and *The Creation of a Democratic Majority: 1928-1936* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1979).

<sup>2</sup> The Wall Street versus Main Street terminology is commonly used, but my own introduction to the terms came from Nelson Polsby, "Coalition and Faction in American Politics: An Institutional View," in Lipset, ed., *Emerging Coalitions in American Politics* (San Francisco: Institute for Contemporary Studies, 1978).

<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Burnham sees realignment reaching critical proportions around the Congressional election of 1994. See Burnham, "Realignment Lives: The 1994 Earthquake and Its Implications," in Colin Campbell and Bert A. Rockman, eds., *The Clinton Presidency: First Appraisals* (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House, 1996), pp. 363-395.

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<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the most dramatic journalistic telling of the story of the battle for the Republican Presidential nomination in 1964 is by Robert Novak, *The Agony of the G.O.P. 1964* (New York: Macmillan, 1965). See also Theodore H. White, *The Making of the President 1964* (New York: Athenium, 1965), particularly Chapters 3-5, and Chapter 7.

<sup>5</sup> The concept of the “invisible primary” was initially authored by Arthur T. Hadley in *The Invisible Primary* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1976). See also Emmett H. Buell, Jr., “The Invisible Primary,” in William G. Mayer, ed., *In Pursuit of the White House: How We Choose Our Presidential Nominees* (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House, 1996), pp. 1-43.

<sup>6</sup> I refer of course to the theory advanced by Mancur Olson. See Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), and Olson, *The Rise and Decline of Nations: Economic Growth, Staflation, and Social Rigidities* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), particularly Chapter 2.

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