



*Département d'Études Anglophones*

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**A Democratic Party?  
The Democratic Party Primary and the Role of Party Leaders in  
Steering the Party to the Center, 1972-2020**

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Master 2 LLCER Research Dissertation  
presented by

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June 2021

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## INTRODUCTION

We have reformed ourselves right out of business.

Suellen Albrecht, former Vice-Chairwoman of the Wisconsin Democratic Party

In recent years, the Democratic Party has come under increasing criticism, in large part by pro-Bernie Sanders activists and commentators, for according to the favored candidate of Party leaders, Hilary Clinton, what they saw as an unfair advantage in the 2016 national primary<sup>1</sup>. The perception of grassroots activists that the establishment<sup>2</sup> was ignoring the input of the rest of Party members threatened Party unity and resulted in a commission, the Unity Reform Commission, to decide on reforms which would remove the ability of Party leaders and elected officials (PLEOs) to vote in the first ballot of the Democratic National Convention, a compromise with which Party leaders hoped to placate pro-Sanders activists. Soon after this concession however, the Chair of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) Thomas Perez would again draw ire for deciding on the conditions to fulfil to gain access to primary debates in 2019 and 2020 behind closed doors, a move declaimed by the same activists as arbitrarily winnowing potential candidates, and again for attempting to direct the nomination process.

Looking back on history, this tug-of-war over the role of PLEOs in the Democratic nomination cycle between Party leaders and factions among Party members contesting its influence essentially dates back to the tumultuous 1968 Democratic National Convention, which left rank-and-file members disillusioned over what seemed to them an (ironically) undemocratic formality and frustrated at their perceived inability to affect the nomination. Prior to this event, the nomination cycle was largely *pro forma* and under the control of elites, prefaced by what political scientists and journalists refer to as the Invisible Primary or peer review, during which hopeful candidates would seek approval from prominent PLEOs and power brokers (Pildes, *The Historical Development of the U.S. Presidential Nomination Process* 37). The visible part of the pre-Convention nomination cycle would only account for 36-38% of total delegates. In the Convention, the establishment controlled the remaining delegates, enough to substantially affect the results and safeguard their political interests, with the only constraint being the natural incentive to back a competitive candidate (Pildes, *The*

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1 In this paper, I will often be referring to the national Democratic primary as “nomination cycle” to avoid confusion with State primaries, as opposed to other delegate selection events such as State caucuses.

2 The establishment can be defined as the most influential members among Party leaders and elected officials.

*Historical Development of the U.S. Presidential Nomination Process* 43). In turn, this allowed for the Party leaders' preferred candidate, Hubert Humphrey, to win the nomination in the Convention with more than 67% of delegates, despite earning only 2% of delegates prior to the Convention<sup>3</sup>, much to the dismay of the Party's rank-and-file. This was a pivotal point in the relationship between Party elites and grassroots, in that this representativity crisis needed to be solved for the Party as a whole to reclaim its democratic legitimacy, culminating in the McGovern-Fraser reforms that eventually reshaped the regulations of Democratic Party primaries, in effect empowering rank-and-file members and forbidding measures discouraging participation, as well as facilitating the participation of ordinary voters in primaries and caucuses. However, only George McGovern (1972) and Jimmy Carter (1976) can be said to have been candidates who were not Party leaders' handpicks but still won the Democratic nomination. This list could also include Barack Obama in 2008, a point which will be developed later. Far from having lost its influence, the establishment has demonstrably been able to have its preferred candidate win in at least 10 out of 13 primaries since 1972, noteworthily losing the two primaries following the reforms.

As Party leaders seemingly regained control of the nominating process, the conservative revolution loomed. The Party, officially unified behind the liberal philosophy of “represent[ing] the interests of working families, fighting for equal opportunity and justice for all Americans”, (democrats.org) would gradually come to disagree on the means to pursue these aspirations. While part of the establishment still embraced liberal ideals such as State interventionism for the reduction of inequalities and the protection of minorities, a new faction known as the New Democrats championed much more moderate and even fiscally conservative ideas, gradually climbed the Party ranks, and formed the Democratic Leadership Council with the ambition of steering the Party to conquer the more moderate voter share in elections by focusing more on neoclassical economic growth policies and defending the interests of the middle class, moving away from the original focus of the Party on Keynesian economics and welfare. Their rapid ascension to power can be attributed to two succinct high-margin defeats and to the popularity across the spectrum of fiscally conservative ideas in the Reagan years. This major shift to the center would in turn cause many internal divisions over Party identity – what a Democrat stands for – without particularly raising the question of the Convention's representativity, but nonetheless leading to underwhelming turnouts in both nomination and election cycles for

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3 All electoral data was sourced by cross-referencing OurCampaigns.com and Wikipedia.com sources, unless otherwise specified.

establishment candidates Al Gore (2000) and John Kerry (2004) in the wake of the Clinton years.

In this paper, I intend to demonstrate that, since 1980, Democratic Party leaders have regained control over the nomination process while also steering the Party away from its original liberal base to the political center, perceiving direct intraparty democracy to negatively influence electability.



# CHAPTER I – PARTY REFORM: IS INTRAPARTY PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY COMPATIBLE WITH NATIONAL REPRESENTATIVITY?

## 1.1 – 1968-1980: An Insurgency?

The Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection, more commonly known as the McGovern-Fraser Commission, started out from concerns surrounding delegate selection and the ease of manipulating results through these processes. Consequently, *The Democratic Choice*, a report from the Hughes Commission released on the eve of the Convention, would make the damning conclusion that “state systems for selecting delegates to the national convention and the procedures of the convention itself, display considerably less fidelity to basic democratic principles than a nation which claims to govern itself can tolerate”. (Polsby, 28) A motion was raised at the 1968 Convention by members supporting Eugene McCarthy, late Robert Kennedy, and other candidates, in favor of an official Party commission to make recommendations on how to re-legitimize the Convention, and was voted by a very narrow margin on the condition said commission would not be led by a McCarthy backer, (Miroff, 20) with Hubert Humphrey eventually admitting to the need for reform. (Pildes, *The Historical Development of the U.S. Presidential Nomination Process* 46) Not only had the 1968 Convention caused public outrage and led to disarray within the Party, but it had also been the stage for a record number of credential challenges, a procedure by which a delegation seeks to invalidate another delegation for a same State. Challenges were sought on grounds of Party disloyalty, racial discrimination, conflicts of interest, unconstitutionality, or violation of Party rules or State laws. Although many of these legal challenges did not bear fruit, they constituted a solid basis for future recommendations. (Schmidt and Whalen, 1438; 1455; 1466)

Up until then, the caucuses were often open only to those who held party office. Some states chose delegates an entire year before the campaign began. Even when the caucuses were nominally open, anyone who was not a party official had a hard time finding out where and when the caucuses were being held; in some cases, different parts of the state might caucus on different days. Under the new rules, if states were going to use local caucuses or state conventions to select delegates, the process had to be open to all who claimed to be party members; the meeting times had to be widely publicized (a significant change), and they had to be held the same year as the presidential election (...). If states used primaries, they now had to be “candidate primaries”—meaning the name of the presidential candidate, rather than the potential delegate, would be listed. (Pildes, *The Historical Development of the U.S. Presidential Nomination Process* 48)

The recommendations were largely approved and implemented by the DNC, in part for fear of renewed Party disunity on the left, but also because there was a genuine desire in the higher echelons of the Party for an orderly and legitimate Convention. (Pildes, *The Historical Development of the U.S. Presidential Nomination Process* 49) The final reforms were summarized into three categories in the commission's guidelines for the 1972 Convention:

- A. Rules or practices which inhibit access to the delegate selection process (...).
- B. Rules or practices which dilute the influence of a Democrat in the delegate selection process, after he has exercised all available resources to effect such influence.
- C. Rules and practices which have some attributes of both A and B. (Polsby, 40)

The reforms included major rule changes and would create anti-discrimination practices and a limit on entry fees, forbid proxy-voting and a range of misleading slate-making or voting procedures, make it mandatory to have 40% of the quorum present to start voting<sup>4</sup> and for delegates to state their preferred candidate (if any), abolish the unit rule<sup>5</sup>, the automatic selection of PLEOs as delegates or the premature influencing of the selection process by PLEOs, urge States<sup>6</sup> to change their delegate apportionment based on the population and Democratic strength within the State and to both deny access to non-Democrats and facilitate the process of registering as a Democrat, and introduce a duty to grant access to all rules related to the delegate selection process to rank-and-file Democrats, which would facilitate the challenging of a delegation in case of non-compliance. (Polsby, 40-52) As Democrats controlled the legislature of most States at the time, the changes were implemented rather swiftly. (Cooper, 771-2) However, the implementation of affirmative action measures to ensure the final nomination system would be in line with the Party's official commitment to civil rights<sup>7</sup> and the abrogation of the unit rule angered many white southern Democrats and southern Democratic State Party leaders, (Sánchez, 5) and is likely to have had negative consequences of unforeseen proportions such as increased rates of defection to the Republican Party, fueling Nixon's "Democrats for Nixon" strategy.

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4 So as to avoid the possibility of abusing the opposition's belatedness.

5 The unit rule made it so that a State could choose to force its entire delegation to vote as a unit for the candidate who had secured a majority of the votes in its contest. It had been deemed to infringe on delegates' individual conscience in the 1968 Convention and was not used that year.

6 Changes which implied State legislation be passed were worded differently, stating that State Parties were required to "make all feasible effort" to achieve the desired results.

7 In 1966, the Special Equal Rights Committee adopted what it would refer to as the "six basic elements" of anti-discrimination, and the DNC reaffirmed its commitment to these six elements in its 1968 official policy statement. The McGovern-Fraser report mentions both the need for State Parties to comply with these six points and overcoming past discrimination by affirmative steps, but that mandatory quotas may not be imposed. (Polsby, 41-2)

On top of the direct implications such changes imply, the McGovern-Fraser reforms inadvertently introduced extrinsic incentives to replace caucuses with primaries. The main incentive was protection from legal challenges, since the burden of proof in credentials challenges had been shifted from those who were contesting the legitimacy of the chosen delegates to those who had a hand in selecting said delegates, meaning State Party leaders, as stated by the 1976 Winograd Commission on the consequences of the reforms. (Polsby, 54-9) The reason for this is simple with hindsight, yet was difficult to predict for reformers, who did not have a first-hand experience in battling credential contests: it is nonsensical for candidate A's team to contest a delegate who must vote for candidate A, and candidate B's team may not want to infuriate part of their potential voters in case candidate B secures the nomination and needs candidate A's supporters to form a winning coalition, but uncommitted delegates are more likely to face a contest if any problem arises. In 1972, 58% of Convention delegates were bound to specific candidates (from 36-38% in 1968), and in 1976, more States held primaries than ever before, selecting a total of 66% of candidate-committed delegates. (Polsby, 64 [Table 2.5]) This change is criticized by some scholars as having opened the valve for populist candidates who rally behind a candidate and not a common cause, creating new issues such as the possibility of having a candidates' own activists flood caucuses and primaries, (Pildes, *The Historical Development of the U.S. Presidential Nomination Process* 47) while others praise the reforms for having realized the Party's democratic ambitions. (Miroff, 20-1; 205)

These developments were not intended by commission reformers. Their main goal was to achieve transparency and openness in order to legitimize the role of the establishment in the nomination process, not to grow the role of primaries (meaning voter-selected delegates pledged to a candidate). The latter had more to do with State Parties' overzealousness for fear of not reaching compliance standards and having their delegations' credentials challenged. (Pildes, *The Historical Development of the U.S. Presidential Nomination Process* 48-9) By affirming its national delegate selection law at the State and local levels, the Democratic Party was for the first time in its history moving toward a nationalized, or federalist, intraparty organization, when it had been historically much closer to a State Party-oriented, or confederate, model. (Wekkin, 45-7)

The legality issue surrounding national credentials and, to an extent, the selection of State delegations, resides in the fact that the nomination contest decides who will run in the national elections and therefore can be said to directly impact national elections, while Parties are considered private associations:

Cousins v. Wigoda, 419 U.S. 477 (1975) (...) upheld the power of the national credentials committee at the 1972 Democratic Convention to exclude delegates from Illinois that had been certified as the state's delegates but chosen under state rules that conflicted with the new rules the DNC had now established. In a later case analogous to a Supremacy Clause case for political parties [Democratic Party of the United States v. Wisconsin ex rel. La Follette, 450 U.S. 107 (1981)], the Court upheld the power of the DNC to exclude delegates selected under state party rules that conflicted with the rules of the DNC. (Pildes, *The Historical Development of the U.S. Presidential Nomination Process* 46)

Furthermore, despite grassroots activists phenomenally gaining in influence on the process, campaign organizers have complained about the unexpected consequences of post-Watergate political finance reform. The high standard for donations and activity cost accountability combined with the legal liability for even honest mistakes had created a new category of campaign experts and overall had discouraged thinly organized movements with little possibility for precise accountability in favor of television ads. Spending limit regulations on voluntary activities would eventually be eased by Congress in 1979. (Polsby, 78-81) The still substantially high financial accountability standards and the democratization of television maintained this need for highly sought campaign agents, who were now key resources for any campaign. The connections of establishment candidates backed by Party leaders is more likely to attract these agents compared to candidates with fewer connections, again giving PLEOs a significant edge over decentralized grassroots movements.

The most direct consequence of the reforms was intended, however: democratic transparency and dynamism. Indeed, a plethora of candidates felt encouraged to run. McGovern won the nomination mainly because his team understood exactly how to best benefit from the new rules and used guerilla tactics, optimizing what little resources they had and using their support among students and small but flexible organizations to be where it mattered when it mattered, and in numbers. The tactics used by McGovern's team were not outlandishly innovating by themselves<sup>8</sup>, and the reliance on decentralized groups was not efficient by modern standards, but is recorded to have been a visually impressive movement. The race to the nomination, which had come to be associated with general apathy in 1968 after Robert Kennedy's assassination, now echoed with democratic enthusiasm. Ensued an unpredictable race with massive voluntary involvement, despite criticisms from racial minorities that even with the new regulations, the barriers to nomination were not the same for everyone, something

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8 Save perhaps for McGovern strategists Patrick "Pat" Caddell's application of electoral data analysis methods to find new pockets of voters and Richard G. "Rick" Stearns's in-depth academic knowledge of the potential of the reforms to design more suitable strategies, as experts of their kind would become much more prevalent in the following nomination cycles and elections. (Miroff, 183-4)

Shirley Chisholm very much faced as a woman of color. There was also strong resentment from many white southern Democrats after George Wallace was shot during his campaign. The McGovern-Fraser reforms gave more of a voice to minority fringes: northern New Liberals, southern States-rights advocates, and pro-women, racial equality, and gay rights advocates. Ordinary activists had more influence over the nomination process than ever before, and used this newly found political tool, taking observers and commentators by surprise. (Miroff, 154-76) The New York Times even titled its article covering McGovern's victory "a stunning sweep". Grassroots movements had never been so influential in affecting the national nominee to the Presidency, and therefore the Presidency itself.

## **1.2 – 1980-2007: The Dismantling of the McGovern-Fraser Reforms**

The dismantling of the McGovern-Fraser reforms came mainly as a Party establishment reaction to election losses perceived to have resulted from two interlinked factors: the lack of national representativity of exceedingly direct intraparty democracy, and a decrease of the degree to which the Party establishment could guide the nomination process, which they also perceived to negatively impact national representativity. It was carried out through waves of procedural changes rather than an overhaul of the nomination system, unlike the McGovern-Fraser reforms.

McGovern's loss followed by Carter's unpopular Presidency gave grounds for justifications that the reforms had taken things too far and that the nomination system now rewarded radical left-wing and populist candidates, instead of candidates reflecting the general electorate's median views while possessing the skills and inside knowledge necessary for a successful governance. This conclusion was of course made without the hindsight we presently have, regarding McGovern's "radical" image, which had been grossly exaggerated at the time, or in regard to Carter's Presidency, who was not nearly as politically incompetent and undiplomatic with Congress as once believed. Party leaders, political observers, and scholars were rightly puzzled by the fact denying meaningful participation to the Party's rank-and-file in 1968 unequivocally harmed the Party's chances in the general election, but that reforming the nomination system post hoc to solve this issue seemed to have no effect on how the Party fared in securing the Presidency. This is not to say PLEOs were completely blindsided by other factors for their lackluster performance in general elections, such as the fact they were doing poorly in the ideological warfare with the Republican Party and failed to effectively counter the criticisms to liberalism and its association with sprawling bureaucracy or with harming the economy by undermining opportunity and personal merit, for example. The post-80s dismantling of the reforms can be seen as a step toward addressing precisely that issue by facilitating the steering of the Party to the center of their own accord: "[r]ather than selecting the most appropriate response for the cause of their defeat, the parties usually selected the cause of defeat most appropriate for their traditional response." (Klinkner, 200)

The cautious introduction of measures that would reduce the impact of the McGovern-Fraser reforms was partly a response to a perceived take-over by the left wing of the Democratic Party. After the 1972 election, an influence group formed with the stated aim of pulling the Party back from its left-wing turn, the Coalition for a Democratic Majority (CDM), composed of moderate to conservative Democrats. It included those who had been demoted from their

pre-reform positions of power such as union leader George Meany, as well as political scientists such as Nelson W. Polsby who strongly believed Party leaders ought to be given the tools needed to steer the Party again. The shared objective of the CDM and of most Party leaders post-1972 was to eventually form a winning coalition in the national election by making sure a Party leader-vetted candidate who could win back “the blue collar, Southern moderate, Catholic, and “middle-American” voters who deserted the Democratic ticket in 1972” could and would win the nomination. (Masket, 129-30) Although the reforms did create the perfect conditions for a left-wing democrat such as McGovern to win the nomination in 1972, Klinkner highlights that it is extremely unlikely to have been a coordinated effort toward that goal, as reformers did not have a united stand on policy, and were a diverse coalition united only in their approach to Party reform. (Klinkner, 199)

Another reason was the keeping of structural integrity. Outgoing 1978-1981 DNC Chair John Coyle White would be critical of the 1970s pro-intraparty democracy reforms, expressing his concern that “We [the Party] have become too occupied with fringe issues”. Speaker of the House Thomas Philip “Tip” O’Neill would even declare that “[i]n the 1970s, the preoccupation was with procedural concerns, opening the process and making it more democratic. In the 1980s, ideology and regionalism will be a greater concern.” There was a tacit agreement among national Party leaders that their next step should involve a greater level of structural organization, more efficient ways to raise funds, and a way to better connect with State and local Parties, or in other words, restore the power of the Party apparatus through a stricter hierarchy while also empowering State Party leaders, confirming Speaker O’Neill’s theory. (Klinkner, 158-9) The Party had aggressively moved toward a nationalized model in the 1970s, and concessions to State Parties in this new decade can be regarded as good-will gestures and respect for the political culture of these States in spite of the newly national governing structure. Namely, those concessions made by the New Hampshire Democratic Party in the Winograd Rules Commission for the 1980 nomination cycle whose leaders’ argument for retaining the State’s first Democratic primary of the cycle was upheld, and those made to Southern State Parties in the form of “Super Tuesday”. (Wekkin, 48)

Super Tuesday was initially designed among Party leaders as a way to give more weight to southern primaries and caucuses, and to increase their impact on the race by having the contests be both on the same day and early enough (typically in early March at the time) to maximize media attention, drawing lessons from McGovern’s early win in New Hampshire or Carter’s Iowa win, which propelled them to the forefront of the national stage. The simultaneous contests would be overwhelmingly in southern States: 3 southern States in 1980, 5 southern

States and 4 other States in 1984, 14 southern States and 6 other States in 1988. (Montanaro) Although its aim was to create momentum for southern and moderate candidates, Super Tuesday mostly favored candidates with a strong organization. (Aldrich, 34) Campaigns in the contesting States would need personnel to pay close attention to the media and closer attention to supporters and undecided voters. Theoretically, only a candidate with either overwhelming support among activists on the ground in all contesting States that day or with centralized, standing army-like staffing, could maximize their chances, the latter requiring the most funds, implying massive corporate support, Party funds, or exceptionally ingenious fundraising. Efficient and experienced campaign staff is a rare and even capricious resource which requires political contacts, not to mention that some may stop working for a campaign at any time if the ideology or platform is not one they can morally stand, or that they may use the experience acquired against the candidate in a future election, as did 12% of Sanders's 2015-2016 campaign staff working for Elizabeth Warren's in 2019-2020. (Masket, 182) Good organization is something, John Aldrich adds, that the Party elite can provide and agree on providing well before the Iowa caucus: a gaping "entry-point" into the nomination process. Indirectly, the Invisible Primary, the period before the nomination selection cycle during which Party leaders organize, settle on which candidate(s) to support politically and financially, was gradually gaining in importance. (Aldrich, 34-7)

Perhaps the most visible and direct way in which PLEOs would reassert their control over the nomination process was with the implementing of the reforms recommended by the 1980-1981 Hunt Commission or Commission on Presidential Nominations, chaired by James Baxter Hunt Jr. During a contentious race between Jimmy Carter and Edward "Ted" Kennedy in 1980, the basis for the Hunt reforms would be established and a long debate about the role of Party elites in guiding the nomination process would emerge again.

The convention fight had centered upon Rule 11 (H) that bound delegates to support the candidate in whose name they were elected. Senator Kennedy's campaign, in an effort to convince Carter delegates that they should abandon Carter and support him, waged a series of platform and rules challenges culminating in the fight over Rule 11 (H). In short order the Commission agreed to get rid of the controversial Rule 11(H) and replace it with a less intrusive rule, but one that, nevertheless, urged delegates to vote for the presidential candidate they had been elected to support. The new 11 (H) read: "Delegates elected to the national convention pledged to a presidential candidate shall in all good conscience reflect the sentiments of those who elected them." (...) Yet the exorcism of Rule 11 (H) was not sufficient to solve the deep doubts about the nominating system that had arisen as the result of the bitter rules and platform fights at the 1980 Convention. Congressmen, stung by the lack of impact they had been able to have on the 1980 process, and fearing that 1984 would be a repeat, banded

together to ask that 2/3 of the Democratic Members of the House be elected by the House Caucus as uncommitted voting delegates to the 1984 Convention. Led by Congressman Gillis Long, Chairman of the House Democratic Caucus, Members asserted that they had a special role to play in the nomination process and in the platform process. (...) Hunt was joined by the AFL-CIO<sup>9</sup> and the Democratic State Chairs' Association in calling for a plan whereby 30% of the 1984 convention would be composed of uncommitted delegates drawn from the ranks of party leaders and elected officials. Ironically, this number is close to the number of delegates (38%) who had gone into conventions "unaffiliated" in the pre-reform years. (...) Opposition to this proposal came from supporters of Senator Edward Kennedy (who, at the time was expected to make another run for the presidency) and from organized feminists. Kennedy supporters on the Commission feared that a large number of Senators and Congressmen at the convention could stop him. On the other hand, former Vice President Walter Mondale, felt certain that a large number of these delegates would favor him and his operatives, therefore, embraced the 30% number. (...) The issue was finally resolved through a compromise created by Congresswoman Geraldine Ferraro. The Ferraro Proposal reduced the total number of unpledged delegates to 566 or 14% of the Convention, but it left selection of the Congressional delegates in the hands of the House and Senate Democratic Caucuses. (Kamarck)

A rift had formed yet again over the meaning of intraparty democracy – envisioned either as a purely participatory model where delegates directly express the will of voters or as a trustee model where delegates can exercise judgement (Southwell, 268) – and over the role of Party leaders in the nomination process. Consequently, many more PLEOs would be selected as delegates in the Convention from 1984 onwards and would now gain automatic access, from about 8% of total delegates in 1980 to 15.5% in 1984, (Southwell, 268) a type of delegates which are commonly referred to as automatic delegates, or superdelegates, and are considered unpledged delegates. Although the term unpledged delegate is nowadays used interchangeably with superdelegate, there used to exist delegates who were unpledged but were not automatic PLEO delegates, as there was a possibility in caucuses to vote for delegates who were not pledged to a particular candidate even after the McGovern-Fraser were passed. The main reasons cited by the Hunt Commission were that automatic access to the convention would avoid the public embarrassment of running against one's own constituents for delegate spots, and provide a check on primary voters and caucusgoers. (Masket, 139) Although perceptibly the most direct way to influence the process, automatic delegates played a negligible role in the 1984 Convention, as Walter Mondale was already ahead and only an overwhelming majority of automatic delegates voting for Gary Hart would have changed the outcome of the election. Not

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9 The AFL-CIO or American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations was (and still is) a particularly influential workers union.

a single nomination has been solely attributed to this change, meaning that in no convention was there a slight pledged delegate majority for candidate A which was overturned by an overwhelming vote of superdelegates for candidate B. However, it can be argued that the combined impact of visible and invisible influence over the process adds up to a significant amount, and that an overwhelming vote of superdelegate for a candidate without a similarly sweeping majority of pledged delegates is indicative of PLEOs being unrepresentative of Party rank-and-file, a point which will be debated at length in and after 2016.

According to John Aldrich, primary voters and caucusgoers still “mattered” in the 1980s. Outsider and non-establishment candidates were certainly losing their newly gained ground and were facing more organizational hurdles, but intraparty democracy was still largely intact. 1992-2004 was a much more impactful shift, not because of reforms, but because of a combination of the professionalization of campaign agents and of the growing expertise of insiders in Invisible Primary politics. This created an Invisible Primary, one in which a consensus would be reached among Party elites before any voter could be involved. (Aldrich, 34)

When grassroots favorite Paul Tsongas ran against establishment favorite and former head of the Democratic Leadership Council Bill Clinton in 1992, Tsongas quickly realized that a strong political network and the best campaign resources money can buy were no longer just a staggering perk, but had become the key to a gate-kept nomination process.

Tsongas discovered that someone trying to follow in Jimmy Carter’s foot-steps faced a more expensive and more frontloaded primary season. Thus, instead of being able to use successes in Iowa, New Hampshire, and the like to gain access to significant amounts of campaign resources and still have the time to invest them in subsequent primaries, Tsongas faced a true dilemma. (...) And, with Clinton, his major opponent, having built his resource and organization in advance, the trade-offs Tsongas had to make became impossible for him to counter the less binding constraints facing Clinton. (Aldrich, 34)

Although the Invisible Primary is more so a consequence of setting new campaign standards using newly available technology and not a consequence of a reform decided by Party leaders, this in turn made Party funding nearly essential, and would give the Party more indirect leverage over the nomination process.

In the year 2000, Republican Party candidate George W. Bush’s refusal to receive matching funds<sup>10</sup> would allow him to massively outspend Democratic nominee Al Gore during

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10 Matching funds is a federal program dating back to the 1974 Federal Election Campaign Act whereby the federal government can offer to “match” funds raised until a threshold is met, at the condition that the receiver

the pre-Convention, which was essentially an early election campaign since both candidates had cleared their respective fields by March, but for legal reasons was still considered the nomination campaign and locked in Al Gore's spending limit, thus seriously pressuring future candidates to refuse matching funds. (Aldrich, 35) This further reinforced the financial constraints placed upon candidates who do not possess the connections necessary to do well in the Invisible Primary. Indeed, both John Kerry and Dean Howard refused matching funds in 2004. In essence, this rendered matching funds useless for any Democratic candidate with genuine Presidential ambitions. It would now take assured national Party backing, immense wealth, extraordinary popularity, or major fundraising abilities from the start to stand a chance at a successful bid.

Even though Howard Dean was not John Kerry's main contender in the 2004 nomination cycle, Dean's web-based fundraising, a novel and surprisingly efficient way of raising the necessary funds to campaign without matching funds, allowed him to run a competitive campaign despite being strongly opposed by many PLEOs. The Democratic Leadership Council, by then in a strong position as a Party faction, notably played a critical role in depicting Dean to other influential Party leaders and regulars as weak on foreign policy, and more particularly as an unelectable northern-eastern liberal. (Trautman, 158) This latter accusation was mostly due to his comprehensive universal healthcare platform, a policy idea the DLC has always been strongly against. Dean was far from being a Party outsider, and even secured endorsements or pledges from 117 superdelegates during the Invisible Primary, (Southwell, 269) running both inside and outside the track. His organizational talents and fundraising expertise would lead Dean to become the Chair of the DNC in February 2005, only months after the election, attesting to the newly found importance of exploiting emergent technologies for national organizational and fundraising purposes among Party leaders.

Grassroots did play a role in 2000 and 2004, but organic grassroots had largely receded after the 1980s. According to McGovern's former chief scheduler Steve Robbins these mobilizations were not on the same scale as the marches of 1972. They were not built up over time by canvassing voters going door to door and convincing them but were rather "raised" by relying much more on email address registers and phone banks than community campaigning and listening to local grievances: the new grassroots strategies were closer to a top-down model. (Miroff, 176) 1972-type grassroots mobilizations would most likely have been deemed too

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limit their spending to the raised funds plus the corresponding matched funds with a maximum of double the threshold. If a candidate were to raise \$55 and the threshold were \$50, they would receive another \$50 but would only be allowed to spend \$100, and not \$105.

complicated to monitor, and the lack of issue-framing at the base can funnel into difficult demands for the top to uphold, which would impact electability. (Miroff, 176) The nationalization of the Party, initiated in the 1970s by New Politics reformers who wanted to increase intraparty participatory democracy and agreed to by Party leaders as a compromise, was gradually reinforced as a national top-down model, mainly as a consequence of the efficiency of such a model in steering the Party and ensuring maximum electability.

### 1.3 – 2007-2016: Was Obama an Establishment Pick?

In 2008, Party leaders were arguably at the historical height of their influence over the nomination process since 1968, both in terms of actual influence in the Convention and of pressure for candidates to seek the support of Party elites. Superdelegates made up approximately 20% of total delegates, (Southwell, 268) and Super Tuesday was comprised of 24 primaries and caucuses. (Montanaro) This was the largest number of simultaneous contests in United States History, selecting 52% of pledged delegates for this nomination cycle, (Balz) requiring elite-tier organizing and campaign skills. (Aldrich, 35) As previously stated, such an immense organizational challenge places extreme pressure for candidates to have both dizzying financial means – as much as \$35 million just for a week of television ads in each of these States (Balz) – and the necessary connections to hire the most adept campaign agents. Furthermore, this Super Tuesday took place on February 5, 2018, too early to allow for significant momentum-building up to that point, with a mere month between the January 3, 2008 Iowa caucus and Super Tuesday.

As Hilary Clinton emerged the clear winner of the Invisible Primary, organizations such as MoveOn.org and Democracy for America attempted to pressure superdelegates into supporting whoever would win the nomination cycle pre-Convention so as not to overturn the collective decision of rank-and-file voters. Those superdelegates in agreement with this principle would be monikered “the Pelosi Club”, after Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi. (Southwell, 270)

Barack Obama was most definitely an underdog as he was preparing to enter the race, yet he won the nomination in a clutch facing what would have been impossible odds to an outsider. Obama’s stance on fundraising and rich donators’ access to power is perhaps one of the most indicative signs of his transformation from a virtual outsider to a staunch insider:

Obama was a guest on Meet the Press on the Sunday before the [2004] Boston convention opened. One topic was the comments made in 1996 about accessibility and the Democratic National Convention in Chicago: “Chicagoans have grown especially jaded watching the Democrats raise cash for this month’s national convention in Chicago. The convention’s for sale, right? You got these ten-thousand-dollar-a-plate dinners, Golden Circle Clubs. I think when the average voter looks at that, they rightly feel they’ve been locked out of the process. They can’t attend a ten-thousand-dollar breakfast. They know that those who can are going to get the kind of access they can’t imagine.” Host Tim Russert wanted to know how he felt about the big contributors at the 2004 Boston convention and the political symbolism it conveyed: “A hundred and fifty donors gave forty million dollars to this convention. It’s worse than Chicago, using your standards. Are you offended by that, and what

message does that send the average voter?" (...) Obama deflected Russert's question by noting the bipartisan problem of political money, minimizing the importance of the convention, and generalizing about the party's historic appeal to underdogs. In *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama admits to privately liking his 1996 remarks better than what he said in 2004. The key word is privately. The future president was moving from being an outsider to an insider. (Trautman, 173-4)

His address at the 2004 Convention (C-SPAN) was a major political opportunity given to him by Party leaders, even though they most definitely did not expect Obama to gain such momentum that he would be a serious contender for the 2008 nomination. As a result of both the wild success of his Convention address and the dropping out of initial GOP candidate Jack Ryan, Obama ended up with a largely won-in-advance U.S. Senate race in 2004-2005. Obama chose to help other Democratic candidates outside of Illinois and contributed \$225,000 of unnecessary campaign funds to the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, (Trautman, 173; 176) which is likely to have positively portrayed him as a team-player to more experienced Party insiders, making them less adverse to his supplanting Hilary Clinton as the Democratic nominee as he proved popular during the race to the nomination.

But Obama was also running on the inside track. Unlike Howard Dean in 2004, Obama made sure to tiptoe around hot button issues and to soothe the Democratic Leadership Council, namely by consciously adapting his rhetoric on healthcare to sound more moderate. (Marcetic) He did not only need to win the most delegates; he needed to win the support, or at least the approval, of a majority of the establishment. Obama had solved the "Tsongas trade-off", in that he managed to both fundraise and drum up support campaigning on the ground, essentially combining Tsongas grassroots appeal and Dean's original fundraising strategy to a certain extent. Still, the new standard for success in the nomination cycle raises questions around whether fundraising abilities equate to Party representativity, national representativity, or even competence, and, consequently, around funding regulations:

[M]aybe we are happy with unregulated, open fundraising on the Internet without constraint. But it seems likely that strength in Internet fundraising abilities will vary by candidate—and not vary in a way that is strongly correlated with attributes that would make the best president. So, perhaps we might consider reform, too. (Aldrich, 38)

On paper, this might appear to be a historical shift, inasmuch as for the first time since Carter the establishment could not get its initial preferred candidate nominated. Assuming that PLEOs are first and foremost politicians and are unlikely to go against a massive trend set by their fellow Party regulars and/or rank-and-file constituents, (Masket, 140) but would overwhelmingly vote for their preferred candidate given the opportunity, then Obama was, at

the moment of the first ballot at least, an establishment candidate. The Obama movement initially relied on grassroots support, but his nomination was supported by 66% of superdelegates in the end, including several who changed allegiances only after Obama secured most of their State's delegation. (Masket, 140) The 2008 race was a close one, close enough for PLEOs to directly choose the winner: Obama was in the lead by a mere 63 pledged delegates, and superdelegates who voted for either candidates represented an additional 724 ½ votes. Obama would have still won if superdelegates were voting according to the preferences of their States' primary voters and caucusgoers, but there was ample possibility to tip the scales if Obama had been undesirable to the establishment.

Pressure from the Party's grassroots was slowly mounting in 2011-2012 after Obama's first term did not rise to the extremely high expectations not only he but also commentators and activists had been setting for himself. In addition, external factors such as the consequences of the financial crisis and of the resulting Occupy Wall Street movement made him somewhat vulnerable from his left, as shown by Bernie Sanders's aborted plans to "primary" Obama, (Dovere) even though Republican control of the House would limit the ability of any candidate on the left wing of the Party to govern effectively. Obama still remained largely popular among the Party's rank-and-file, albeit commentators and activists had much less illusory expectations.

## 1.4 – 2016-2020: Are Open Primaries More Democratic?

Decades after the last intraparty disputes over the weight of Party leaders in the selection of the Presidential nominee, and after decades of growing their influence over the process, the establishment would again draw the ire of the left wing and of a large share of the Party's grassroots.

The catalyst for this was the 2016 election, in which superdelegates played both a formal and an informal role. Hilary Clinton, the establishment candidate in the race, had won many more contests (34 compared to Bernie Sanders's 23), yet the delegate count almost came to a dead-heat: Clinton obtained 2205 (54%) pledged delegates, and Sanders 1846 (46%), for a total of 4051, while superdelegates who voted for either candidates were 614, or 13% of total delegates. Although Clinton would have still won with a distribution of superdelegates' votes similar to that of pledged delegates, the point of contention for Sanders supporters consisted in the fact these superdelegates overwhelmingly voted for Clinton (570 ½ against 43 ½ for Sanders), formally undermining the chances of any closely nominated candidate deemed "undesirable" by the establishment. A front consisting of more than 12% of the tally in this case could theoretically pull the favorite candidate of the establishment from the brink of defeat to a close lead, neglecting the will of rank-and-file primary voters and caucusgoers. Some also contended that this applied an informal influence over the process, as supporters of candidates who are not in favor with the current Democratic establishment know they are facing an uphill battle, which could discourage less moderate candidates from running, or supporters from contributing their time, energy, or funds to said candidates. Supporters of Sanders also made allegations that there was intent on the part of Party leaders to minimize the visible part of the nomination cycle (too few debates, the Iowa debate airing coinciding with a major football game) so that Clinton may keep her advantageous position in the polls. (Masket, 122-3) Beyond the simplistic analysis of a Clinton-Sanders divide, this was the reopening of old wounds and the resurfacing of an older debate.

Sanders supporters sought to alter the nomination system right after the Convention in July 2016, but failed in their efforts, instead securing a compromise: a reform commission made up of 19 members (9 appointed by Clinton, 7 by Sanders, and 3 by DNC Chair Thomas Perez) would consider and debate different avenues of restoring legitimacy to the nomination process. (Masket, 134) The resulting Unity Reform Commission would in turn recommend "that [the votes of superdelegates] be bound to the voters' preferences on the first ballot of the Presidential roll call vote", which would prevent superdelegates from voting in the first ballot of a contested

Convention, virtually removing them from the process since the last brokered convention dates back to 1952. As per its name, the Unity Reform Commission was a way to reinforce a perception of consensus and to display unity. Even though the Sanders side would largely come out on top, both sides defended their views to the bitter end.

On top of defending Party insiders as legitimate and knowledgeable on assessing electability and governability, a key argument from the opposition to the recommendations came from African American Commission appointees, Representatives, and activists who pointed to the affirmative action role superdelegates play nowadays. Although race was also a contentious issue many found with the McGovern-Fraser reforms, since they had favored the statistically wealthier and white, (Polsby, 158-9) a similar objection could not have been raised at the time on account of Party insiders given the opposition of southern State Party leaders to the anti-discrimination sections of the reforms. Yvette Lewis, Chair of the Maryland Democratic Party and Clinton appointee to the Unity Reform Commission, warned against the unintended but very much possible diluting of racial minority voters by overwhelmingly white unaffiliated voters. (Masket, 136-7) As superdelegates include the Congressional Black Caucus and African Americans are not as involved in the nomination process as whites are in terms of national representativity, disenfranchising superdelegates would lead to an effective partial disenfranchisement for African Americans and other minorities, and could constitute a potential civil rights issue. This point was bitterly contentious on both sides.

At the meeting of the Black Caucus during this convention, Randy Kelly, the Caucus' Vice Chair, argued that an African American voting for this measure was like a runaway slave voting for the Fugitive Slave Act. Caucus Chair Virgie Rollins told me in an interview that it took a long time for African Americans to rise to their numbers and importance in the party. She said that it's an open party, and people are welcome to join in and work their way up, but the reform supporters were effectively skipping their place in line. (Masket, 145)

As a matter of fact, not all Black Caucus members agreed. Representative Keith Ellison of Minnesota was very much in favor of the reform, (Masket, 143) and the same can be said about many minority activists:

[O]nlookers in the crowd shouted "Not true!" and "Lies!" when [former DNC Chair] Fowler contended that stripping superdelegate powers would curb representation of African Americans, LGBT people and those with disabilities. And when Fowler stepped away from the lectern, he was treated to a small chorus of boos. (Siders and Korecki)

The respite bought by Clinton appointees and the DNC for the public image of the Democratic Party would be short-lived, as DNC Chair Thomas Perez came under fire over his

implementing regulations on accessing the primary debates without consulting with the rest of the DNC or with former Unity reformers. Debate access regulations, arguably there to winnow out candidates who do not have the competence or minimum early appeal necessary to be a Presidential nominee, were removed at the same time a powerful Democrat, former New York mayor Michael Bloomberg, was struggling to meet the regulations and make it onto the debate stage. The regulations were perceived as arbitrary by supporters of peripheral candidates and by Sanders supporters, and their removal was seen as favoring elite Democrats when appeals by less influential candidates had been ignored. (Masket, 146-53)

The reform would also seek to extend the Party's outreach to unaffiliated voters encouraging open and semi-closed primaries (as opposed to closed primaries, which only allow registered Democrats to partake in the vote), a different strategy than that of the McGovern-Fraser reformers who had similar aims but were not in favor of opening primaries to all voters, only to facilitate the process to becoming a Democrat. It should be noted that although the core of the debate was the meaning of intraparty democracy, these points of contention are vastly different from those raised in the years following the 1968 Convention of course. Party insiders, even using the 2016 regulations, were nowhere near controlling 64 to 68% of total delegates and having as much control over the nomination process overall. It could be argued however, as it has been in the past, that any number of automatic delegates is undemocratic. According to section C-2 of the 1969 adopted Party guidelines on delegate selection (Polsby, 50) mentions that current State laws, Party rules, and Party resolutions were "inconsistent with the Call to the 1972 Convention", the third reason given for this contending that "[d]elegate selection by a process in which certain places on delegation are not open to competition among Democrats is inconsistent with a full and meaningful opportunity to participate", and requires of Democrats who control State legislatures to make every possible effort to remove laws which entail automatic (unpledged PLEO) delegates. While there is little in common between the objections of Democratic powerbroker and AFL-CIO leader George Meany in 1968-1972 and a majority of the Congressional Black Caucus in 2016-2020, both opposed primary reform on practical grounds. What therefore should be the role of participatory democracy in Party representativity? How is the will of the citizenry better represented and protected? Indeed, there exist no constitutional guidelines pertaining to the selection of potential candidates to the Presidency:

James Madison claimed that the Constitution (...) was a means for abating the mischiefs of faction. (...) The means for accomplishing that end are the construction by constitutional provision of institutions that force factions to behave strategically, thus forming coalitions. In the American case, there are a number of coalition-forcing institutions: single-member congressional districts, (...) the

bicameral Congress, the electoral college. It is a peculiar feature of a political system so constituted that the task of tending to the coalitions which feed their preferences through these institutions is itself performed by an extra-constitutional entity, namely, the political party. (Polsby, 66)

State primaries are evidently not to be misconstrued as direct democracy: the 15% rule<sup>11</sup> is in fact a coalition-forcing check other United States political institutions rely on, as highlighted by Polsby. Scholars have tended to disagree on just how participatory intraparty democracy should be. While some such as Pildes and Polsby maintain that distancing Party elites from the nomination process opens the flood gates to rampant populism, others such as Miroff contend that lesser amounts of Party leader influence would clear the way for activists and rekindle the passion of the average voter for politics. Pildes argues that although the place of individual citizens should be central *in fine*, “romantic” doctrines and policies which neglect the importance of institutional leadership in regulating the political process, moderating Party views, and producing candidates whose ideology is closer to that of median voters “undermine the capacity of the democratic system as a whole to function effectively”. (Pildes, *Romanticizing Democracy, Political Fragmentation, and the Decline of American Government* 804-52) One such undermining consequence would be the production of polarizing candidates who fracture the Party into minority factions and who are not representative of the median voter, not to mention they are unlikely to be electorally competitive. (Pildes, *Why the Center Does Not Hold* 273-333) Pildes does not attribute particular legitimacy to grassroots organizations, as they are not tied to a Party and therefore have no need to follow through on promises, making them much less accountable.

The creation of (...) super-delegates was designed precisely for the purpose of providing a check against the party adopting nominees who would be unlikely to win in the general election (McGovern) or be unable to govern effectively (Carter). But under pressure from the populist politics of Bernie Sanders’ supporters, the Democratic National Committee—once again looking to buy peace between its competing factions, just as in the aftermath of the 1968 convention—agreed that, in 2020, the super-delegates would not be able to vote on the first ballot. (Pildes, *The Historical Development of the U.S. Presidential Nomination Process* 52)

Polsby’s political philosophy can be summarized thus: “[w]here party organizations are strong, coalition-building flourishes; where they are weak, the politics of factional rivalry prevails”, and factions lead to differentiation, not consensus. (Polsby, 66-7) It should also be noted that Polsby did not write that the current system of delegate selection is inherently flawed,

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11 In order to obtain delegates, a candidate must score at least 15% in any given contest, whether the contest is a caucus or a primary.

but rather suggested that the fact it replaced a flawed system and has democratic appeal should not be grounds for ignoring its largest flaw, namely the impossibility of adequate deliberations and its lackluster national representativity in practice. (Polsby, 166-7) While Polsby and Pildes argue that primaries are less representative of the general electorate than a process mediated by local Party leaders, the main problems they find with the current system of primaries is not so much the fact it is not mediated by Party leaders, but the fact it is more likely to produce unrepresentative or incompetent candidates without the intermediation of Party leaders.

Miroff, on the other hand, claims that limiting participation in the democratic process leads to political apathy. He also points out that, taking 1968 as a case-study, a forced coalition delimited by a top-down process disregarding the opinions of the Party's rank-and-file did not unite Democrats behind a Party-sponsored candidate either, and in fact achieved the opposite. (Miroff, 200-1) Historically, it did lead to the delegitimization of the process, to general apathy among most of the 92.7% of voting Democrats who had not voted for pro-Hubert Humphrey or pro-Lyndon B. Johnson delegates, and, eventually, led activists to antagonizing their Party's leaders.

Theoretically, voters who participate in primaries were more likely to be white, in the wealthier brackets, in the more educated brackets, and therefore ideologically off-center in 1976, (Polsby 158-9) and still are, but empirical data from 1992 and 2000, a period during which the median citizen voted for moderate and fiscally conservative candidates, has shown that less restrictions on voter entry in primaries led to more moderate candidates being favored, at the condition that such a candidate is present on the ballot. (Kaufmann et al., 465-73) Open primaries with a more representative range of voters and candidates would be more nationally representative, and would retain legitimacy in a political context in which empowering Party leaders is so divisive. Facilitating and incentivizing participation in primaries to increase their national representativity would be a viable avenue of experimentation which could lessen the rift between both sides. As for peer-review and the winnowing out of unpresidential candidates, such a system already exists (since the DNC sets the rules for accessing debates) and could co-exist, at the condition the process is transparent so as to avoid unnecessary controversy.

The perfect candidate selection system should essentially abide by Polsby's four "desiderata" for Presidential selection: it should settle on a single candidate, come to a conclusion in time for the start of the election campaign, should minimize harm to the Party's ability to field candidates or to its chosen candidates' chances in the elections, and it should ensure candidates "are able to execute the duties and responsibilities of the office of President with some exceptional degree of distinction". (Polsby, 168)

## CHAPTER II – THE SHIFT AWAY FROM LIBERAL PRINCIPLES

### 2.1 – The New Liberals and Party Unity

Nelson W. Polsby differentiates two types of entities affecting the political process through the Party system: factions and coalitions.

A political faction is (...) a group acting through a political party in pursuit of a common interest. Factions may give to political parties the loyalties of voters, which contribute to the party's mass base, ideological justifications for party programs, and organizational linkages between leaders and followers. (...) [they provide] a political focus for the expression of the perceived needs of citizens (...). Coalitions are less fundamental structures than factions, in that they are alliances among groups organized for the purpose of achieving goals common to their constituent parts. (Polsby, 65)

Given the State-centered and coalition-forcing nature of the federal democratic institutions in the United States, it is common for entities fitting Polsby's definition of a political faction to describe themselves as "coalitions" regardless, since "faction" conjures up the idea of division and refusal to cooperate with others. The terms can be subjective however, as electorally competitive factions at the national stage tend to embrace the label of coalition, regardless of how little internally politically complex and cohesive.

The 1968 Convention gave rise to an already existing "modern liberal" faction whose main political objective was to realize the Party's philosophical ambitions. These New Liberals embraced the idea that the Democratic Party should be representative of the nation at large, and put the people first when selecting Presidential candidates. It was not the first time a candidate had been losing in the nomination cycle yet had been awarded the nomination in the Convention. Looking back at the last century, William McAdoo won a majority of pledged delegates in 1920 and 1924, and so did Estes Kefauver in 1952 and 1956, but both failed to secure a single nomination without any movement pushing for reforms arising from these occurrences. (Polsby, 11) The near autocratic handling of the Convention by Mayor of Chicago Richard J. Daley, in addition to the manipulation of delegate selection processes by Party leaders (Polsby, 27) and the media portrayal of the event, tipped the scale in favor of reform. Party leaders were seen as suppressing the rest of Party activists using undemocratic means, which brought about comparisons between their top-down decision process and the use of violence to unconstitutionally threaten freedom of speech and by the same token freedom of the press, as described in the ensuing Walker Report. (McDonald, 124)

While Humphrey's opponents Eugene McCarthy, Robert Kennedy, and George McGovern ran on the "outside-track", campaigning and organizing on the ground, relying on rank-and-file Democrats to vote for them in the nomination cycle, he simply ran an "inside-track" campaign. He appealed to county Party leaders, knowing this was a decidedly more effective way of securing a nomination since Party leaders controlled approximately 65% of delegates, more than rank-and-file Democrats ever could. This was not a strategic misreading on his opponents' part however: only Kennedy and Humphrey had the political clout to be able to count on Party leaders to select and instruct delegates to vote for them with complete disregard for the visible part of the nomination cycle. In effect, this strategy was only available to the most influential members of the establishment, or members who could convince the establishment they would run with their preferred platform. He was also the only competitive pro-war candidate, a position he was strong-armed into endorsing by then-sitting president Lyndon B. Johnson, but which afforded him the support of the establishment on Lyndon's side. Rank-and-file Democrats were understandably frustrated with their inability to affect the results, and this no matter what they did or in what numbers they did it. In addition, the media's depiction of the Convention as a thuggish and even autocratic display seriously played into the already growing public outrage against the Democratic Party. In light of this, Humphrey would agree to what would become the McGovern-Fraser reform commission. (Polsby, 45-6) The establishment would largely underestimate the impact of the reforms, but was conscious of this faction slowly but surely gaining in influence. Some even feared a takeover. Their pragmatic concern was that they could irreversibly lose control of the Party's nomination process and that this could lead to inexperienced, unvetted, or radical candidates. This type of thinking contextually made sense considering Barry Goldwater's landslide defeat to Lyndon Johnson in 1964, a self-described endorser of "extremism in the defense of liberty" who was perceived by both the Republican and the Democratic establishment to have single-handedly caused his Party to lose the race. ("News Analysis; The Extremism Issue")

An intense cultural war had been undergoing nationally for more than a decade over questions as central as how much farther the federal government should aim to expand welfare and job programs to reduce wealth inequality, what the role of the government should be in guaranteeing full participation in democracy for all regardless of race, gender, sexuality, or creed, and what the stance of the United States should be in the Cold War world balance. New Liberals had in common that they were in favor of tax reform to foster a more equal economic situation, supported women's and gays' rights, and that they rejected southern politics as well as the current hawkish stance of the United States. As argued previously, the claims that

McGovern-Fraser reformers acted in view of purposefully facilitating the election of McGovern holds little water, (Klinkner, 199) and a similar case can be made about the factionalism of New Liberals. Although pro-reformers and New Liberals had a concomitant goal (Party reform), these activists and politicians had different priorities, and have been accused of both factionalist behavior by holding views too radical for the moderate electorate and caving in to the demands of too many interest groups at the same time. In fact, McGovern did seek consensus by moderating his voting records in the years prior to running, and abandoning measures deemed controversial from his platform, such as his \$1000 a year “Demogrant” idea. A 1972 Newsweek article titled “How Radical Is McGovern?” even concluded that McGovern’s attempts to alleviate the concerns of the moderate establishment was “hardly the mark of a radical candidate”. (Miroff, 120) In spite of his grassroots following, his long-term strategy relied on the fact he was a member of the establishment himself. McGovern expected the sense of self-preservation and the desire for unity of Party leaders to cause them to rally to his cause if he were to win the nomination, and ran on a more moderate platform during the race for the Presidency, a consensus-seeking plan which his team coined the “left-center” strategy. (Miroff, 135)

Nevertheless, McGovern’s role in the reforms had angered powerful Democrats and played against him in both the nomination and the election cycles. George Meany, the union leader of AFL-CIO, did not necessarily disagree with McGovern – they even agreed on minimum wage – but the union had lost part of their influence as local powerbrokers due to the reforms and categorically refused to negotiate an endorsement, instead joining forces with his opposition and later with Party leaders on the Winograd and Hunt commissions to seek to reverse the disapproved changes. Meany would use this in combination with McGovern’s anti-Vietnam war stance to portray him as a leftist extremist, but his radical label was objectively a stretch. His opposition coalesced into a Stop McGovern movement, (Miroff, 72) and although some regulars eventually endorsed McGovern after his attempts at coaxing members of the establishment, such as Mayor of Chicago Richard J. Daley, other highly influential Democrats such as Hubert Humphrey and Ted Kennedy would refuse to join his ticket. The hesitance to endorse McGovern among Democratic elites even after his nomination by the Party understandably gave more credibility to the argument that McGovern was a factionalist and a radical. (Miroff, 97)

Southern politics played a non-negligible role in emphasizing intraparty divisions, the highlight of which was George Wallace’s very successful Presidential race as an independent in 1968. With a pro-welfare, pro-segregation, and anti-war platform, he had tremendous

influence on the 1968 election, carrying 5 States and 13.5% of the popular vote, and had a large following in the 1972 Democratic nomination cycle as well, winning 5 State contests. The 1965 Voting Rights Act (VRA) was still extremely controversial in the south, and southern PLEOs did not take kindly to the reforms pushing for demographic representativity through the outlawing of the unit rule or through the recommendation of making affirmative steps.

The unit rule was one of the remaining tools at the disposal of Southern party leaders to maintain a modicum of influence in the national nomination process, but the debate to eliminate the rule was just the latest development in a decades-long power struggle between the national party and Southern Democrats. Most notable were the proceedings of the 1936 Democratic National Convention that lowered the required votes to win the presidential nomination from two-thirds to a simple majority of all delegates. The elimination of the two-thirds rule destroyed what was essentially a Southern veto of any nominee and formed part of Franklin Roosevelt's effort to replace "the intransigent localism of the party" with a national liberal agenda. Defanged southern party leaders notoriously expressed their dissatisfaction with this arrangement through the Dixiecrat Rebellion, in which Southern conservatives walked out of the 1948 National Convention and supported counter-nominee Strom Thurmond in protest of the party's civil rights platform and nomination of Harry S. Truman for president. In the context of the Democratic Party's midcentury turn toward racial liberalism, an attack on the unit rule was the potential death knell for the influence of Southern parties in the Democratic presidential nomination. In this way, the National Committee's effort to shift the Democratic Party from a state-centric system to a strong national organization was deeply rooted in the persistent problem of Southern factionalism. But opposition to the unit rule was not totally exogenous given that some of the most prominent voices in the Rules Committee debate were southerners. Irving K. Kaler, a convention delegate from Georgia, urged the committee to replace the unit rule with a reformed nomination process "unbound and untutored by a bossism which we believe to be represented by the unit rule." Jim Hunt, president of the Young Democrats of North Carolina (and eventual four-term governor of the state), also found the unit rule to be a tool used by state bosses to repress the political preferences of youth, blacks, and liberals in the South. (Sánchez, 5)

The scholarly debate around the question is still ongoing. Richard H. Pildes and David M. Kennedy disagree on how much of an impact the VRA and the reforms had on polarization in the south. Pildes argues that post-VRA racial gerrymandering reduced district competitiveness and allowed for the rise of politicians with extreme stances on both sides of racially charged issues, therefore creating additional tension, (Pildes, *Why the Center Does Not Hold* 287-97) while Kennedy contends that it is unlikely racial gerrymandering in these districts played a major role in reducing the competitiveness of districts, although he also mentions a lack of available empirical data conclusively confirming either theories. (Kennedy, 354-6)

In what McGovern scholar Bruce Miroff described as “[t]he most extensive empirical investigation of the 1972 election”, (Miroff, 253) the main theory about this election was confirmed:

Indeed, when the relative contributions of the three general factors explaining the vote, namely, the candidates, parties and issues, are compared to previous elections, it becomes clear that not only was this an issue election but that it may more appropriately be labeled an ideological election. Above all else, the outcome of the election was the result of the ideological polarization within the Democratic ranks that pitted the left-wing Democrats against those on the right. (Miller et al., 778)

This is not to say the Democratic Party would have ensured its victory had Humphrey been nominated in 1972. In fact, any presidential hopeful that year would have faced an uphill battle against Richard Nixon. His incumbent position, recent image boost from the historic summit in Peking, the furthering of détente with Moscow, and his introduction of price controls, (Miller et al., 755) made him popular across Party lines and, in addition to the ideological crisis the Democratic Party was undergoing as well as his unconstitutional use of federal resources for electoral advantage and as political attack arsenal (Miroff, 239-43), helped him secure 37 to 42% of the Democratic vote, depending on scholars. (Miroff, 254)

The defecting Democrats were much less in favor of immediate withdrawal from Vietnam; they were much more likely to support the use of police force as the means of ending campus demonstrations; and they strongly opposed an active role for government in maintaining or improving the quality of life experienced by minority groups. On each of the specific issues, as well as on a more general policy orientation index and a liberal-conservative scale, Democrats as a whole were a very heterogeneous collection of citizens. This lack of cohesion reflected long-standing regional differences between southern and non-southern Democrats, but, even within regional subgroups, a substantial degree of intraparty polarization was exposed by the general election. (Miller et al., 757)

There were evidently blunders and mishaps which negatively influenced McGovern’s chances. Nominating Senator Thomas Eagleton without properly vetting him is indeed one of the most prominent ones in campaign accounts of the time. Yet the main factor hard data highlights was that a large part of self-identified Democrats did not come out to vote for McGovern precisely because this self-identification had scant relation to actual ideology.

## 2.2 – Liberals and Attack Politics: “Weak on Defence”

McGovern had replaced Goldwater as the exemplar of the unelectable radical for the next decade, and every failed attempt from a liberal nominee to secure the Presidency would conjure up the specter of left-wing radicalism. The greatest irony is perhaps that this burden was McGovern’s to bear, a United States Senator from a conservative and typically Republican-leaning State – South Dakota – with a record of middle-of-the-road positions by liberal standards. The growing moderate part of the Democratic establishment would come to associate his name with a perceived insurgency and an attempted takeover of the Party apparatus by a “McGovernik” faction, in spite of the much more complex ideological composition of McGovern-Fraser reformers. The left-wing of the Party was losing a defensive ideological war on two fronts: on the national stage against Republicans, and in the intraparty struggle for policy direction as a result of the Party’s identity crisis.

Conservative commentator Daniel McCarthy points to the inconsistencies in Republicans’ use of McGovern as a standard-bearer for the radical left – an inaccurate reflection of McGovern’s person or platform – and to the double-edged sword that is levying McGovern-era attack politics when facing any Democratic nominee regardless of how moderate or sympathetic to conservative views they may be. (McCarthy) Yet McGovern-era attack politics were not always so damaging to the right, and in fact were electorally devastating to the Democratic Party. The “Nixon playbook”, consisting of well-organized scandals in the press, played a large role in transforming McGovern’s image. First, incumbent President Richard Nixon essentially removed Edmund Muskie, a Democratic Senator who was leading him in the polls, (“Poll Finds Muskie Leads President by 43% to 40”) from the Democratic nomination cycle. His team had a fake letter insulting Canadian Americans forged and published in the *Union Leader*, and nudged a media storm in his direction by popularizing the idea that Muskie had cried when reacting to the publication on camera and was emotionally unstable. The next phase was to prevent McGovern from backpedaling and lock him into the “left” part of his “left-center” strategy by focusing on what McGovern had said during the nomination cycle, or even by attempting to force him into difficult stances on hot button issues by having astroturfed or fake activists make demands in front of journalists. Howard Hunt, a former Nixon aide made (in)famous for his role in Watergate, even admitted to having planted fake, “disreputable-looking” supporters to exacerbate McGovern’s “radical” media image. (Miroff, 83-4) Nixon’s experienced and well-funded reelection committee faced a divided Party with only a weak grasp on their media image. At best, Democrats appeared to be unable to fend off these media attacks,

at worst, unwilling. Nixon's general strategy against McGovern can be summarized as hammering this radical image on television through attack ads exploiting intraparty division, while the Republican Convention was dubbed a "clockwork convention" by Newsweek, and had been scripted to emphasize harmony and order, "right down to pauses for laughter and applause" according to a document leaked to the press. (Miroff, 103)

The three campaign commercials ended with the same tag line: "Paid for by Democrats for Nixon, John Connally, Chairman." The President did not appear in any of them. (...) "Ostensibly autonomous," Newsweek discloses, "Democrats for Nixon in fact operates as a satellite of the Nixon campaign, which designed its television spots and lent it \$180,000 for newspaper ads. Connally consults almost weekly with Mr. Nixon, campaign manager Clark McGregor, and his predecessor, John Mitchell." The Democrats whom Connally enlisted were further to the right than the regulars that had battled McGovern into the convention. As columnist Clayton Fritchey observed, among these party defectors were a number of "ex-Southern Democratic governors, most of whom, like Connally, have been crypto-Republicans for years." Several had been vocal segregationists. (Miroff, 228-9)

Among the Party, McGovern's coalition was depicted as an elite: his activists were more educated on average and seen as being far-removed from the general electorate while seeking unfair influence over the Party. (Miller et al., 774-5) His role in designing the reforms that would make the anti-discrimination pledge of the Party enforceable associated his campaign with the idea that McGovern was catering to minority interest groups, and played off the impression of some southern white Democrats that civil rights regulation gave African Americans unfair electoral advantages. What also exacerbated tension in the Party was McGovern's handling of the dilemma of either alienating Party leaders or a large enough part of the grassroots to lose his campaign momentum. By seeking consensus and moving to the center on economic issues and to the right on foreign policy – answering the "weak-on-defense" trope with a solid backing of Israel – he was courting a part of the establishment which decidedly did not want him as the nominee after his victory in the Convention. This did not help McGovern, and in fact harmed his campaign with little upside. Not only did it open him to criticisms that he was "indecisive, inconsistent, or opportunistic" after his nomination, but the establishment did not rally behind him as originally planned. As a result, McGovern and his team found themselves in a situation where they had to fight for the nomination until the very end of the nomination cycle despite a two-contest lead and favorable polls by May, 23rd, a "lost month" of preparations for the election they partly blamed for later errors in the race for the Presidency. (Miroff, 71-3)

A perfect example of the intersectionality of Republican and intraparty attacks on the McGovern campaign was the “Acid, Amnesty, and Abortion” slogan touted by Democratic Senator Henry “Scoop” Jackson as part of his “Stop McGovern” campaign. Conservative journalists Rowland Evans and Robert Novak originally quoted an anonymous Democratic Senator making the largely false claim that “McGovern is for amnesty, abortion, and legalization of pot” to paint McGovern not only as a radical, but as a known radical in his own Party. This was the inspiration for the slogan, originating from Republican Senate minority leader Hugh Scott: McGovern, “the candidate of the three As”, standing for acid, amnesty, and abortion. Humphrey used this ready-made image during the campaign for the 1972 nomination, and it was only a matter of evoking these already entrenched themes for Nixon’s re-election committee to score political points. (Miroff, 120-2; 137-8) Humphrey viciously attacked McGovern on TV on points he himself brought up during his political career in the form of policy ideas comparable to McGovern’s on defense budget cuts and welfare increases. (Miroff, 177) Whether these claims were true or not was beside the point for his opponents, what mattered was the damage caused by making the lapel pin stick and to potentially cause a political faux pas as a reaction. This was also exemplified by the controversies surrounding McGovern’s “demogrant”, a universal income taxed based on income level which would help reform the costly welfare bureaucracy. It was moderately popular among liberal scholars at the time and the brainchild of his top economic aide, Gordon L. Weil.

The demogrant was only one of many income maintenance schemes floating around among economists and politicians in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and it was by no means the most radical. It was a cousin to President Nixon's failed Family Assistance Plan of 1969 and to the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) passed by Congress in 1975. But as Weil noted with chagrin, while the substance of the proposal was defensible, “it was a terrible idea to inject in a political campaign.” The demogrant was too unfamiliar and controversial for a campaign, a problem only compounded by the McGovern campaign’s failure to prepare in advance for the likely economic and political objections that would be leveled against it. Even worse, as [economist] James K. Galbraith observes, “it was easy to make fun of.” It was also easy to distort. Because families up to a middle-class income would be able to keep part of the cash grant even after taxes, first Humphrey in his California debate with McGovern and then the Nixon campaign in its fall TV ads made the outrageous but politically effective charge that McGovern was proposing to put half of the American people on welfare. (Miroff, 134-5)

Criticisms of McGovern’s liberal successors would sound eerily familiar, swapping out the “radical” pin for a “liberal” one. Walter Mondale could not distance himself from his “tax and spend” image in 1984, even though he aimed to balance the budget, a traditionally conservative undertaking. In comparison, it was much harder for Democrats to leverage similar

accusations against Ronald Reagan for his increase of federal revenue through “base-broadening” (reducing various federal tax breaks and loopholes) and his increase of the defense budget. (Sahadi) The image would have been theoretically true, but the Democratic public would not have been sensitive to it in terms of political culture. Culturally, liberal Democrats were on the defensive, and could not mimic these strategies. Michael Dukakis, the 1988 nominee, notoriously responded to accusations of being soft on crime and on defense issues with a photo-shoot in a tank, which worked against him and became an unfortunate highlight of his campaign. In essence, McGovern-era attacks shaped their unfortunate responses, and the strategy of new Party leaders became to avoid the ideological battleground altogether and to embrace a less direct (and easier to defend) form of liberalism.

### 2.3 – A National Consensus Around Fiscal Conservatism

As the 1970s came to an end, the national conversation had pivoted to the need for fiscal conservatism, mainly as a result of the influence of a series of world events on the domestic economy. The United States dollar had enjoyed a generous gold standard under the Bretton-Woods agreement, with foreign countries either not converting U.S. dollars to gold out of sheer confidence in the currency itself or to remain in the United States' good graces and knowingly trading at a disadvantage. As these countries started to challenge this commercial hegemony around 1971, they started to massively convert their U.S. dollar reserves to gold, leading to a sudden devaluation of the currency, and consequently to inflation domestically. Not long later, an oil crisis caused by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries placing an embargo on nations supporting Israel in 1973 – which included the United States – and a similar constraining of oil supply following the Iran revolution in 1979 drastically increased production costs and slowed commercial output, especially in the West. Production started to stagnate domestically both because production would be more expensive and because the economic situation was uncertain and so demand was equally unstable. This was known as stagflation, and the federal government was arguably, but most importantly perceived as, ineffective in meaningfully restarting the national economy and growth. (Romano, *Chart 4.12 US unemployment, inflation, and productivity 1959–2000* 76) FDR-era large stimulus programs relying on deficit spending were increasingly disregarded as having the potential to raise the debt ceiling, causing interest rates to soar and further handicap growth, and the redistributive part of these programs to fuel inflation as the buying power of most Americans would massively and simultaneously increase. Lowering government spending by cutting welfare programs was considered a legitimate conservative alternative to solving stagflation, by simultaneously unburdening the nation of its foreign debt to reduce interest rates, and incentivizing domestic investments in the form of tax cuts.

Conservative attacks had shifted from issue-based and culture-war-based attacks to attacks on the federal structure and on how the government should function, painting liberal policies as pro-big government and inefficient bureaucracy which had little effect or solving citizens' problems locally. "Government" was decreasingly seen as a system whose aim was to regulate sources of inequality and ensure a fair society, and was increasingly perceived as a primordial source of inequality by itself, especially at the federal stage where the local and State nuances of governance could be omitted for a one-fits-all size national policy which, as made evident by changes in the electoral habits of voters, many had grievances against. Traditional

liberalism was on the decline nationally, and conservatism was gaining in popularity. Jack Godwin summarizes conservatism thus:

Conservatism is a belief system (or ideology) respectful toward traditional institutions and resistant to radical change, which generally places a high priority on the following principles:

- Individualism: Self-reliance, individual freedom, and individual autonomy supersede social obligations.
- Economic Freedom: The right to work, own property, and participate in the free market are fundamental human rights.
- Limited Government: Government authority should be decentralized and restricted by law. (Godwin, 57-8)

Jimmy Carter was notably advocating against a strong central government in 1976, with perhaps the exception of environmental regulation. His form of centrist ideology was eminently personal, and stemmed from his southern distaste for the Democratic establishment and for Washington politics in general. Carter's objectives were not economic in nature, but much more ideologic, and his campaign image was one of decency in the face of perceived electoral opportunism and Party bossism, driven by his regional culture and his Baptist faith, which in a historic perspective sets him apart from later, less ideologic centrists. New centrist themes would become recurrent in the following decades, and included personal responsibility and reforming the welfare system, indirectly answering the criticisms of the conservative movement against traditional liberalism. Gary Hart, a close runner-up to Walter Mondale for the 1984 nomination, would adapt Democratic ideals to popular, fiscally conservative policy ideas to better fit the political context of the conservative revolution. The popularity and perceived electability provided by such policies would lead to their becoming a staple of the moderate Democratic establishment, and would lead to gradually more centrist candidates in 1988 with Michael Dukakis, and with Bill Clinton in 1992.

Furthermore, economic education from 1950 to as late as 1990 relied on mostly decontextualized data, or did not sufficiently take into account pre-1945 economic data, and largely omitted the role of fiscally conservative policies in allocating an increasingly significant share of created wealth to capital gains and not to salaries, (Piketty, 385-6) causing an explosive income gap between lower wealth brackets and the highest wealth brackets. This is likely to have impacted Party leaders and economic advisory experts and expert bodies to PLEOs in both Parties.

In 1992, two of the three most popular candidates to the nomination, Paul Tsongas and Bill Clinton, were pro-business advocates with supply-side, Reaganomic-era programs in lieu of the wealth redistribution platforms which were until then associated with the Democratic Party, a testament to the cultural shift among the Democratic establishment and among a large part of the Party.

## 2.4 – The New Democratic Establishment

By the 1980s, a majority of PLEOs believed that reforming the nomination process to increase participatory intraparty democracy had exacerbated the fragmentation of the Party by facilitating factionalism instead of encouraging coalition-building. The Party had a broad ideological base, which produced dividing candidates that were less appealing to the general electorate and pushed Democratic voters who were on the fence to defect to the Republican side. (Polsby 85-8) It is no surprise that Polsby's seminal book on – and eminently critical of – the McGovern-Fraser reforms, *Consequences of Party Reform*, was endorsed by Morley Winograd, former Chairman of the Michigan Democratic Party but more importantly former Chairman of the 1976 Winograd Commission on the consequences of the reforms, and later an influential member of the DNC<sup>12</sup>.

What would become a major movement in the Party had humble beginnings, with a few influence groups concerned with electability, Party control, and steering the Party to the center such as the 1972-formed Coalition for a Democratic Majority (CDM), as well as centrist candidates to the nomination such as Gary Hart, who kept liberal aims but had more fiscally conservative means of achieving them. These groups started to gain influence as an increasing number of liberal candidates were losing elections. CDM members who would go on to become New Democrats were mostly from the south and for a “national interest”, which translates to less focus on foreign policy, local powerbrokers such as unions and identity interest groups, and more focus on businesses and economic growth, (Miroff, 271-2) although the group was not monolithic since the CDM did include union leaders, or politicians with hawkish views on foreign policy. They would embrace the label of New Democrats, and would coalesce into the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC). The DLC was founded in 1985 as an unofficial organization moderates in the Party relied on for fundraising and networking among similarly minded activists, with a strong emphasis on being “an idea generator” pushing for an ideology and culture shift away from traditional liberalism to integrate more business-friendly policies. It would quickly develop into an influential faction with permanent institutions and staff. (Medvic, 588-9) The “New Democrat” label itself poses some semantic problems. While some liberals embraced the term and associated with the DLC to grant themselves the possibility to move further to the right on certain issues to remain electorally competitive in their constituencies without losing face, they were mainly interested in making liberalism more

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12 His exact quote on the back cover reads: “No one should be allowed to discuss, much less vote upon, any further changes in our presidential nominating process without first swearing that they have read and understood this book.”

palatable, not in changing the Party's dominant ideology. Contrary to the core centrists in the faction, liberal New Democrats saw the DLC as a forum to expand liberalism, not as a movement to restrict it and to permanently alter the Party's policy direction. Many left-leaning New Democrats would distance themselves from the DLC and the label after the first report from their newly created think-tank, the Progressive Policy Institute, heavily criticized "fundamental liberalism" in December 1988. (Medvic, 589-90) At its core, this dispute was not an ideological rift and more of a disagreement on how to achieve those goals while remaining electorally competitive, since both sides were in favor of equal opportunity. The rhetoric of the DLC in the 1990s did posit that Democratic liberalism had historically been for equality of outcomes, but this should be regarded as highlighting the differences in their political approach, especially their different position on redistributive policies.

[T]he purpose of the DLC was to offer a new, more business-friendly image of the Democratic Party to the public. As expressed in the 1990 conference, their beliefs included that "the Democratic Party's fundamental mission is to expand opportunity, not government . . . [and] the free market, regulated in the public interest, is the best engine of general prosperity." In 1991, the organization opposed organized labor's position on free trade. They also issued a statement that read, in part, "in the minds of too many Americans, the Democratic Party has stood for government programs that don't work . . . [and] special interests before the interests of ordinary people. (Trautman, 147-8)

The New Democrats would emphatically qualify themselves as a coalition, a likely consequence of not wanting to be associated with interest-groups. They chose an ideologically moderate line rhetorically but also favored education, training, and generally seemed to address the lower wealth brackets. The March 1990 New Orleans Declaration proposed, among others, measures such as student loan forgiveness in exchange for national service, an enhanced Earned Income Tax Credit, and subsidized apprenticeship programs for non-college-bound skilled workers. (Borrelli, 433-5)

The first draft of the platform was written by John Holum, a former McGovern speechwriter and staffer who had known [Bill] Clinton since the 1972 campaign. Contemporary news analysts reported that Holum's initial draft of the 1992 platform was laden with DLC proposals and rhetoric. The obviousness of the DLC influence is interesting in light of Holum's claim not to have used DLC documents when preparing the draft; instead, he relied on Clinton's speeches and policy statements. Thus the link between the DLC proposals and the platform pledges was Clinton's own rhetoric. In addition to the main themes of Opportunity-Responsibility-Community, the first platform draft borrowed a number of specific DLC proposals, including progressive taxation, national service, the Police Corps, welfare reform, "reinventing government," increasing the earned income tax credit, and investing in infrastructure. After the DLC, the most evident influence on the draft was the House

Democratic Caucus, whose ideas were conveyed to Holum through daily phone conversations with Congressman Bill Richardson (D-N.M.), the drafting committee chair. We can gauge the congressional Democrats' influence by examining a policy document called *Taking Charge of America's Future*, released by the House Democratic Caucus on 28 May 1992. Although Holum did not specifically mention this document, an unmarked copy was found in the National Archives in the same group of boxes as the platform drafts and meeting transcripts. If we combine the *Taking Charge* document with the two DLC manifestos and Clinton's New Covenant Speech, we can identify specific sources for more than 60 percent of the pledges in the 1992 Democratic platform. (...) Forty percent, or ten of the twenty-five participants in the drafting committee process, were connected with the DLC in some way. (...) Of course, by 1992 membership in the DLC was fairly widespread—30 percent of Democratic House members and 57 percent of Democratic Senators belonged—so it is possible that even a group of Democratic elites selected at random would have contained a significant number of DLC members. From a qualitative perspective, however, the presence of the group's leader and founder, along with others highly active and visible in the organization, suggests an effort by the Clinton campaign to ensure that the final draft bore the DLC's hallmark. (Borrelli, 435-7)

New Democrat-selected pledged delegates and the New Democratic establishment were turning a new page, rejecting traditional liberalism from the original platform draft while having traditional liberal Democrats present for the sake of representativity, but with the specific objective of not giving in to their demands with no official way to offer and vote on amendments to platform documents in the draft phase. They mostly influenced flavor-language, such as changing “customers” with “citizens” when addressing the American people, and refraining from using certain terms such as “underclass” or “law and order”. (Borrelli, 441-3) It should also be noted that the restraint shown by these traditional liberal Democrats can be attributed to a manifestation of a political science phenomenon whereby mainstream Parties moderate their policy proposals after consecutive defeats. (Tarik and Orłowski, 11-2; Somer-Topcu, 240) Moreover, liberal Party leaders might have been held responsible for Bill Clinton's defeat (had he lost) if the plank had been altered too much. As electoral concerns grew and accusations were exchanged behind closed doors, tolerance for ideological deviation increased among liberals. (Borrelli, 456) The committee also refused to move too far to the right on some topics, rejecting propositions to implement an across-the-board tax cut on capital gains. (Borrelli, 443) The full platform committee would give non-DLC members more opportunities to propose changes, but attempts to speed up the process<sup>13</sup> and to keep the platform short – mainly to avoid

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13 Although the regulations stated that amendments of more than five lines should be printed, handed out, and debated if seconded by fifteen members, some were simply read out, leading longer amendments to be voted down without due consideration. (Borrelli, 448; 450)

diluting the point of the original draft and appearing to give in to interest-groups – made it difficult to do so. (Borrelli, 447-8; 450-2)

In most cases, [Jim] Brady [Chair of the Association of Democratic Party Chairs in 1992] or [Al] From [Founder; President of the DLC in 1992] explicitly stated that they were speaking officially for the Clinton campaign. Occasionally, Brady or From would say something like “we can accept that” and “we have no problem with that.” In these cases I assumed that “we” referred to the Clinton campaign (...). *In no case where Brady or From expressed disapproval did an amendment pass in its original form. At the same time, all but one of the amendments that were approved had received explicit endorsement from the Clinton campaign.* The only successful amendment that slipped by without explicit Clinton campaign approval was an innocuous proposal to add “counties” to state and local governments as beneficiaries of greater flexibility granted by the federal government in implementing federal mandates. (Borrelli, 450-1)

This is not to say, however, that the New Democratic establishment was a single-minded faction, and constituency pressure played an appreciable role in asserting off-center demands due to the Clinton campaign and the DLC’s inherent need for local support:

Occasionally the other delegates bristled when the Clinton campaign’s need for control seemed excessive. For example, when New York City Mayor David Dinkins proposed adding “provide a safety net through public hospitals” to a list of health-care provisions supported by Clinton, Brady responded by requesting that the “safety net” be deleted, prompting Mayor Dinkins to reply testily, “I’m one of those that’s out on the stump trying to sell our candidate. And I don’t think it is a lot to ask.” After some of the delegates applauded Dinkins’s stand, Brady agreed to support the amendment. (Borrelli, 451)

In effect however, the New Democrats were not so much a coalition of initially competing factions coming to a compromise to further their interests, but rather an opportunity for already moderate to conservative Party leaders to recuperate part of the ground they had lost to other factions more to the left. This rapidly growing centrist faction had the potential to delimitate the (broad) ideology of the Party between the center-right and the pragmatic left. In Congress, this would manifest first as the Mainstream Forum, a “loosely-knit gathering” of centrists and conservatives which included 90 House Democrats by 1994. In 1997, the movement would have a formal congressional caucus: the New Democrat Coalition. (Medvic, 590) On top of congressional influence, the DLC also applied informal pressure in the form of endorsements, public criticisms, and backing by its associated think-tanks and lobbies. Additionally, the influence of national Party leaders had significantly grown by then, as the Party had heavily centralized at the national level around the DNC starting in the 1970s. They can in effect push the Party to the center or to the right on issues by making the alternative too

costly in terms of intraparty political capital, as well as using their external influence. Healthcare reform is one of the areas where the DLC has been actively fighting off a particular liberal alternative – a single-payer system – by using its influence to discredit Howard Dean in 2004, and is likely to have played a role in Hilary Clinton and Barack Obama’s hesitant tone on the issue in 2008. It then informed the New York Times that the organization was “pleased that none of the Democratic candidates supports a single-payer health-care system.” (Marcetic)



## **CHAPTER III – FROM THE NEW DEMOCRATS TO A PROGRESSIVE ESTABLISHMENT?**

### **3.1 – Centrism as Electoral Opportunism**

We have seen that generations of Party leaders have gone to great lengths to restore a form of national, top-down steering mechanism, and while this was not the sole reason, steering the Party's policy direction to the center has been an official objective associated with this process since at least the 1976 Winograd Commission. While it is common for centrism to be perceived as a vote-maximizing position in mainstream political Parties after repeated election losses across contemporary democracies, (Tarik and Orłowski, 11-2; Somer-Topcu, 240) the American model has one particularly relevant idiosyncrasy: its State-oriented institutions. The way the Electoral College and the Senate operate combined with the prevalence of Republican-leaning "red" States gives a significant edge to moderate candidates to the Senate and to the Presidency. Furthermore, the winner-take-all system greatly aids the Party that is able to convince the median voter of a given State. With these factors in mind, and the observation that the Republican Party fields more moderate candidates who end up winning Senate seats or the Presidency with comparatively fewer votes than Democratic liberal candidates, (Masket, 54-5) the decision to steer the Party to the center to maximize Party influence over Senate legislation and the executive branch is a coherent conclusion to reach for Party leaders.

This is not to say that having centrist policies on one's platform was the sole metric in deciding whether to rally behind a candidate for Party leaders. Gary Hart is a perfect example of a candidate who was more to the center than the establishment's favorite in 1984, Walter Mondale. Hart, a former McGovern strategist, outdid expectations thanks to an original and well carried-out campaign strategy. His team's strategy was to drum up support and "bet" their resources on New Hampshire instead of Iowa, by accounting for the fact that Carter's Iowa strategy was going to be replicated by more mainstream candidates with more resources than he could muster. History would prove a textbook application of his team's theory, and they used the resulting shock factor to build momentum. What was a long-shot candidacy turned into a close race, but Mondale still finished in a comfortable 765 delegate lead on Hart before the Convention. Mondale did lack the necessary delegates to win, but Hart was not within reach of

winning the nomination<sup>14</sup>. Superdelegates still overwhelmingly voted for Mondale in the end. It is likely that, if Party leaders wished for more moderate candidates, the decision to back Walter Mondale was due to his establishment status, and that Michael Dukakis, though more moderate than Mondale, was chosen over more centrist candidates because the New Democrats were still a fledgling faction, and that such a rightward turn would have been theoretically too sharp for rank-and-file Democrats to band behind the establishment candidate. Drawing from the lessons of Michael Dukakis's defeat to George H. W. Bush in 1988, Bill Clinton delegates and Party leaders sought to avoid wedge issues and to distance themselves from the special-interest tag by adhering to the DLC's line when drafting their platform:

[T]he Democratic presidential nominee had to make significant policy concessions to his defeated rival, not only in 1980 but also in 1988; in 1984, the price of intraparty harmony was a platform that promised everything to everybody. For the Democrats, 1992 stands out as a year in which a party truly decided to "trust the nominee" and the faction that helped propel him to the nomination (...) (Borrelli, 454)

It is also unlikely Party leaders would have made a similar leap of faith with a non-centrist candidate based on the efforts of the bulk of Party leaders in the previous two decades to gradually tip the scales in favor of moderate candidates in the nomination cycle. Bill Clinton's ascent to the Presidency was without a doubt the DLC's culminating feat in 1992. A former McGovern staffer, Bill Clinton, like Gary Hart, had moved to the center politically and sought to bring a much more modern and pragmatic vision to the Party. As a former Chairman of the DLC from 1990 to 1991, he was the perfect opportunity for the New Democratic establishment to field a candidate, and a great case-study of the DLC in action. In Bill Clinton's words, his core strategy was to take the Party's mainstream values and to "marry them to modern ideas and policies", valuing "relevant and effective" above all else. He wished to bring a fresh take on politics, a "triangulating" position which could unite moderates around already popular ideas such as reducing government waste and running government more efficiently, distancing himself from the images of "tax and spend" or "big government" which had plagued liberals for the last decades. As Jack Godwin puts it, "if you don't win you can't govern". (Godwin, 138) Bill Clinton's brand of government, the Third Way, had liberal aims, but, simply put, conservative means. The Public Policy Institute of California, a center-right think tank affiliated to the DLC, gave the following definition of the Third Way:

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14 Even if 100% of superdelegates had voted for Hart, no candidate would have had a majority and a brokered Convention would have been declared. Balloting would have had to continue until 38 superdelegates switched to Mondale, one more than the amount of superdelegates Hart actually received in the 1984 Convention.

(1) equal opportunity for all and special privileges for none; (2) mutual responsibility, meaning rejection of the politics of entitlement and the politics of social abandonment; and (3) encouraging citizens and communities to play active roles in public life. In general, proponents believe the left-right debate is obsolete, ill-suited to the challenges of the information age and unresponsive to the powerful forces shaping American society and the global economy. Proponents reject conservative efforts to dismantle government and instead envision an alternative form of government that emphasizes technological innovation, competitive enterprise, and education as a means to spread economic opportunity and ensure economic security. On questions of values, the third way encourages tolerance and civility and respects traditional moral and family values but resists attempts to impose values on others. (Godwin, 154)

The Third Way was, in the economic sense, about balancing the budget by rendering departments more effective and reallocating resources so as not to need to increase resources through taxation or other means impacting taxpayers. It envisioned more cooperation between the private sector and the federal government, with encouraging results on “mixed” projects with both private and government funding and equity with federal government decided regulations. It was also about incentivizing investment in the desired fields by using tax breaks and essentially behavioral economics government programs. The main problem was the disconnection between these growth measures and any liberal aims claimed rhetorically such as equal opportunity and the rejection of the politics of social abandonment. While critical of a large part of Reaganomics and of the concept of trickle-down economics, Bill Clinton’s program was factually very much supply-sided, and even his one spending objective – increasing funding in education and research – barely met the inflation level and can be equated to a funding freeze, not an increase. (Romano, 67-8) Personal responsibility was also a recurrent theme rhetorically for Bill Clinton and a DLC policy goal, but did not yield anything substantial in terms of policy. With programs so overwhelmingly focusing on those with investment capabilities, wealth inequality soared as more opportunities presented themselves for those in the wealthiest brackets such as the high-middle class than for those in the lower brackets. The Third Way arguably succeeded in fulfilling its promises to the economic right by reducing federal spending in percentage of GDP to 1965 levels (Romano, *Chart 4.1 US federal discretionary spending (% of GDP) 1962–2001* 54) and by balancing the budget and entering surplus in 1998. (Romano, *Chart 4.2 US federal receipts, outlays, and budget surplus (% of GDP) 1993–2000* 57) The same cannot be said about its liberal aims. Third Way policies increased wage inequality, (Romano, 80) and despite claims from the Clinton administration that “gains were shared at all income levels”, the total net worth (assets minus debts), financial wealth (liquid assets), and income of the bottom 40 percent of households declined

significantly. (Romano, 85) Evidently, Bill Clinton was not solely responsible for this strict shift to the economic right. Budget deficit reduction was initially secondary in his platform, but failed attempts at passing a stimulus package and healthcare reform due to Republican opposition as well as intraparty opposition would push Bill Clinton and his advisers to make the shift. This would have the collateral effect of locking his government in a position of lean governance with theoretically higher political cost for increasing the deficit. The simplest way to explain this shift from the internal logic of the Third Way is that it was politically easier to do. It could be that this is a common theme with Democratic centrism since the lack of ideological rigidity can lead to voting record volatility, which results from 1999 and 2000 confirm, but whose author contends do not suffice to confirm conclusively. (Medvic, 598) Finding the path of least resistance is not mutually exclusive with good policy, and Godwin even points out that pragmatism and not adhering to a strict ideology is not necessarily a character flaw. (Godwin, 4) Others such as Miroff would argue that political opportunism creates a conviction gap and leads to an apathetic coalition, leaving the Party electorally vulnerable in the long run. (Miroff, 301-2)

Defensiveness and opportunism only exacerbate the identity crisis of the Democratic Party. In 2004 some voters who did not agree with President Bush or his policies nonetheless appeared to prefer his firm air of conviction to a Democratic challenger who seemed to have few convictions at all. (...) The conviction gap between the centrists ascendant in the Democratic Party and the conservatives who dominate the Republican Party leads to a *passion gap* in presidential campaigns. Following the centrists' strategy, with its defensive crouch and constrained aspirations, Democratic presidential nominees such as Michael Dukakis, Al Gore, and John Kerry generate scant enthusiasm for their candidacies. Dispirited activists come to feel that their party has no fundamental purpose or message save opposition to the right wing. (Miroff, 302)

Courting the center is a complex gambit, and its success is contingent on ideological coherence, Party support, and a relative lack of resistance from the left.

### 3.2 – Grassroots Movements Reclaiming the Political Space

While the grassroots groups on the left of the Party cannot be said to have been dormant during the Bush years, especially on the war in Iraq, (Carty, 21-5) a series of events in 2007-2008 caused a financial crisis and became the spark for the already flammable social context by destabilizing the United States economy and disparately impacting its most vulnerable denizens. Activists needed to rally behind a winning candidate to avoid another Republican Presidency, and the grassroots appeal Barack Obama ignited despite being very much one of the establishment candidates in 2008 did win them over, even if some pointed out the differences in his rhetoric depending on whom he was trying to win over. (Coates, 46-66) But as the crisis took hold, more in the nation became outraged by the fact the government had let it happen in the first place and at the Obama administration for its response.

A combination of years of predatory loaning practices by banks, the reselling of the consequently risky loans under misleading packages, conflicts of interest among rating agencies, and demonstrable incompetence from governmental regulatory bodies led to a sudden deflation in the value of real estate, a stock market crash, and, eventually, to a financial crisis impacting the whole of the American economy. The public simultaneously learnt in a widely televised Senate hearing that Bernard Madoff, a prominent Wall Street investor, had been running a surprisingly uncomplicated Ponzi scheme all along and that the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) had been shockingly inept in stopping him or others like him. Harry Markopolos, the financial analyst who had been pressing the SEC to investigate Madoff, made damning, if somewhat exaggerated for effect, remarks about the agency in his testimony to the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs:

In my dealings with the SEC I have noted many deficiencies (...). I believe the one over-arching deficiency is that the SEC is a group of 3,500 chickens tasked to chase down and catch foxes which are faster, stronger and smarter than they are. It's painfully apparent that few foxes are being caught and that Bernie Madoff, like too many other securities fraudsters, had to turn himself in because the chickens couldn't catch him even when told exactly where to look. As currently staffed, the SEC would have trouble finding first base at Fenway Park if seated in the Red Sox dugout and given an afternoon to find it. Taxpayers have not gotten their money's worth from the SEC and this agency's failures to regulate may end up costing taxpayers trillions in government bailouts. (Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs)

The case itself was not what was relevant to the public *per se*. The relevant part was that this chase of comical proportions between a government agency and a Wall Street bigwig provided a microcosm for the current crisis in the public eye.

Bush's Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) in 2008 and Obama's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) in 2009 were perceived to funnel hundreds of billions of taxpayer money into bailouts for banks and, according to Republican-leaning commentator Rick Santelli during a famous rant on CNBC, into help for "losers" who had contracted high-risk mortgages and loans, by which he meant the Homeowners Affordability and Stability Plan (a part of the Housing and Economic Recovery Act). The result was a mixture of shock from the sudden lifestyle changes due to the economic shock which impacted the livelihoods of many, confusion from all the media attention and government programs targeting the crisis all at once, and a growing resentment against the federal government and Wall Street. This caused very different reactions from the right and from the left of the national spectrum.

On the right, a movement by the name of the Tea Party rapidly formed, a mostly top-down organization with on-the-ground, local chapters engaging in grassroots tactics, criticizing the federal response to the crisis as a waste of taxpayer money, and drawing momentum from anti-Obama racial resentment. It would yield significant influence, either by pressuring sitting Congresspersons to oppose the Obama administration and Democratic initiatives at all costs or by having openly pro-Tea Party candidates challenge lukewarm Republican incumbents. (Zelizer, 14-6)

On the left, reactions were immediate but the group response was latent. Occupy Wall Street, a grassroots movement reminiscent of the assault on Wall Street in Don DeLillo's anticipatory *Cosmopolis*.

The Occupy Wall Street movement was however a much more diverse movement than typically presumed, starting out with fringe political radicals such as anarchist thinker and anthropologist David Graeber but soon evolving into a much more motley crowd:

[T]he few grew in numbers, a demographic that didn't conform to media clichés: a gritty spiral jetty of anarchist punks and out-of-work construction workers and teachers who sleep in the park and rise early to get to school. Cooks and nannies and librarians, lots of librarians, and Teamsters and priests and immigrants, legal and otherwise, and culture jammers, eco-warriors, hackers, and men and women in Guy Fawkes masks, an army of stunt doubles from *V for Vendetta*, all joined by young veterans of the Arab Spring and the revolts in Greece and Spain – actual revolutionaries who had overthrown dictators and made Western nations shake. (Sharlet)

The movement did not turn out to revolutionize the way the American economy operates, but was culturally significant enough to garner the public support of the Congressional Progressive Caucus and the Black Caucus (Gachon, 176) and to change perceptions among the

public<sup>15</sup>: “[t]ransient progress was achieved, as testified by public opinion polls, but without radically transforming society: economic inequality was not erased, nor was the functioning of Wall Street even disrupted.” (Gachon, 180)

Part of this transient progress included concrete political consequences: Bernie Sanders, an independent Senator from Vermont and advocate of social democracy, gained enough traction to become a mainstream candidate on the national stage in the 2016 and 2020 nomination cycles. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a New-York representative and member of the Democratic Socialists of America, ran and won in 2018 on a platform directly linked to the subprime crisis and its consequences, which had tremendous impact on her own private life. One of the focal points of her campaign was the influence of corporate-donated money over politics, and the fact she would refuse corporate Political Action Committee donations, making ordinary voters the central agents of her election finances. (Ocasio2018.com; Opensecrets.org)

Moreover, the Occupy nebula included subgroups such as Occupy the Hood focusing on educating the public on racial economic inequality and police brutality, (Taylor, 159) whom, for a vast majority, would later find themselves in the ranks of similarly organized groups protesting against racial inequalities on a much larger scale. On top of affecting racial minorities disparately, (Brown University) the consequences of the added economic pressure worsened already existing systemic inequalities in the treatment of black minorities in Ferguson, Missouri, (Department of Justice) and the parallel mounting of racial tensions eventually gave rise to a wide variety of groups focusing on racial inequality, known collectively as the Movement for Black Lives, which includes Black Lives Matter. (Campaign Zero)

Hilary Clinton demonstrably earned more of the share of the black vote than Bernie Sanders, but failed to convince many Democrats and unaffiliated black voters whom the rise in racial tensions had convinced Clinton would not address their problems. And although Clinton did open a dialogue with Black Lives Matter activists, she used the neoliberal rhetoric of immediate political feasibility, pitching and selling ideas to mainstream America, misunderstanding Black Lives Matter’s stance on traditional politics:

Once there is a reckoning that racism is still a deep-seated issue in the nation, the next question by people who are on the sidelines, which is a vast majority of Americans, (...) is: “what do you want me to do about it?” (...) that’s what I’m trying to put together in a way that I can explain it and I can sell it, because in politics if you can’t explain it and you can’t sell it, it stays on your shelf. (...) I don’t believe you change hearts; I believe you change allocation of resources, you change the way systems

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15 Excluding Republican Representative Allen West, who was particularly vocal about being against the Occupy movement. (Nichols)

operate, you're [BLM] not going to change every heart, you're not, but, at the end of the day, we can do a whole lot to change some hearts and change some systems and create more opportunities for people who deserve them (...). (Reilich)

She was accused of missing Black Lives Matter's point by spreading a counter-slogan she mistakenly took as a more inclusive version of their own, All Lives Matter. (Rappeport) This was arguably a misconception shared by many Party leaders about the growing grassroots movement for reparative policies, not for a wide but ideologically lukewarm coalition.

With more horizontal grassroots structures filling a void by occupying the political space, political representatives found themselves lagging behind as this form of contestation of the current verticality of democracy was setting the tone for the demands that would pave the way to Sanders's campaign for the 2016 nomination, and to the Unity Reform Commission.

### 3.3 – National Polarization

One also should not place too much emphasis on the free agency of any one popular movement without accounting for larger political transformations at the top echelons. In 1976, prominent political science scholars were already writing:

In the electoral realm we have been too prone to try to assemble disembodied data to map the “natural history of an issue” with little regard for the likely fact that leadership decisions to promote, to modify, to resist, or to surrender in a policy fight are major factors in determining that “natural” history. Systematic electoral research has largely ignored a major source of the observed change in the quality of mass attitudes on questions of public policy: leadership behavior that brings the substance of issue politics into the public domain. (Miller et al., 754)

Taking a step away from nomination and Presidential elections, a great source of concern since the 2000s has been the ever-growing polarization of elected officials based on Party allegiance and the way this issue is interconnected with the polarization of the general public. As intraparty tensions mounted in the 1970s, the seniority system was replaced with a secret vote to elect the main Party leaders in the House and the Senate by attributing Speakerships and Committee Chairpersonships. While the former system was evidently arbitrary, the latter introduced new potential flaws. It gave much more control to the Party majority in centralizing policy direction as Party leaders could directly influence the careers of House and Senate elected representatives.

From the late 1930s to the late 1960s, Democrats had held the majority almost continuously, but the party’s leaders were relatively weak. Strong committee chairs who maintained power through a strict seniority system controlled the legislative agenda, and a “conservative coalition” of Southern Democrats and Republicans often stymied the Democrats’ policy agenda. By the early 1970s, frustrated liberals and an influx of new Democratic members successfully pressed for reforms, giving the speaker much more control over the legislative agenda and members’ careers. Democrats reformed the seniority system, instituting an automatic, secret vote on all committee chairs by the Democratic Caucus. (...) Democrats empowered the leadership-controlled Steering and Policy Committee to make committee assignments. The speaker was authorized to select chair and Democratic members of the House Rules Committee, rendering the Committee a tool of the leadership. (...) [T]he Rules Committee could no longer thwart the leadership’s agenda. The Speaker was also given the power to refer legislation to more than one committee, to set time limits on committee consideration, and to expedite the consideration of legislation in committee and on the House floor. (...) [W]hen Speaker Nancy Pelosi took the gavel after twelve years of GOP control, she benefited from Republicans’ expansion of leadership power. Even with an influx of Democrats from swing districts in 2006 and

2008, Democrats were more unified under Pelosi's leadership than ever before, not only voting together at record levels, but raising more money for the party and for one another, too. (Pearson)

Party cohesion is essentially maintained by making access to Committees and Chairpersonships institutionally contingent on Party loyalty, and not necessarily on the accurate representation of the interests of one's constituents, a large factor for re-electability for any given politician. Marvin H. "Mickey" Edwards, a former Republican Congressman and commentator, deplores the current state of the Speakership and assigns it with much of the blame of modern Congress polarization. Polarization is, by the very nature of politics, far from being a novelty in the analysis of electoral behavior. He underlines the increase in political incentives to toe the Party line – and more importantly of potential punishment for not raising enough funds for the Party or not toeing the line adamantly enough – on both sides of the aisle. Giving and taking away committee or subcommittee positions and Chairpersonships have indeed become powerful tools in Congressional Party politics, and Edwards places the brunt of the charge on Newt Gingrich for instituting this strategy as early as 1995 as Republican Speaker of the House. (Edwards, 91-112) He also accuses Gingrich of having focused solely on getting Republicans elected, "[w]hether the targeted Democrats were liberal or conservative, whether they crossed party lines to support Republican positions", (Edwards, 93) a phenomenon which still impacts Congressional Party politics and is likely to persist.

Thomas Jefferson said in his inaugural address, "We are all Federalists; we are all Republicans," the precursor to Barack Obama's later assertion that "there's not a liberal America and a conservative America; there's the United States of America." But while it was largely true in Jefferson's time, it was far from true when Obama said it. (...) There had always been divisions—disunity—in politics, and that was true in Washington's time and in Jefferson's, as it is today—but they saw, and warned of, the dangers inherent in "faction" and "party" and in putting one's partisan allegiance ahead of the national interest—something that is the common coin of today's political realm. To most of us in the United States, party-centric parliaments are simply a foreign way of doing things, irrelevant to any but scholars of government. But America's founders were well aware of parliamentary systems and they made a conscious effort to create something very different in their new nation, putting most of the nation's power in the hands of elected representatives, making the legislative branch of government fully independent of the executive, and requiring that all members of Congress actually live in the states they represent. That system is disappearing, as presidents and legislators who share the same party label increasingly see themselves as allies, not as independent actors, and party solidarity trumps both analysis and representation. (Edwards, 31-2)

Third Parties and independents have historically been held to a higher standard than candidates for both major Parties, and even more so between the post-Watergate political

finance reforms of matching funds and their effective end around the 2000 race to the Presidency, as reimbursement for legal campaign spending was delayed to after the election and contingent on a minimum share of the votes. (Polsby, 82-3) Party membership is a near requirement, and this has by the same token impacted electoral behavior in significant ways. Republican Tea Party Congresspersons' obstructionism of Democrats for the sake of opposing Obama tended to hurt citizens with more modest means disproportionately, as this prevented welfare and entitlement programs from being updated with no political alternative, (Zelizer, 14) including Medicare and other economic programs many Tea Party activists relied on. An apparent conservative consensus emerged that Obama's recovery program was virtually a socialist policy, in spite of the fact it had been designed mostly by center-right, Clinton-era economists like Robert Rubin, Timothy Geithner, or Lawrence "Larry" Summers with the specific aim of assuaging financial institutions, or that his program was building on a previous Republican policy, Bush's Troubled Assets Relief Program. (Zelizer, 15) The surrounding national climate of polarization is currently so potent that it incidentally made either Party gradually rely on echoing voices for their nomination debates. GOP leaders drew the noteworthy conclusion in 2012 that some moderators were antagonistic to their Party's goals, and have consequently made recommendations after their 2012 defeat to include more conservative voices in the moderating panels of Republican primary debates. (Masket, 148)

Mounting polarization has led many rank-and-file Democrats to place electability concerns over their own political ideology, (Masket, 55) believing their Party to be the lesser of two evils rather than voting specifically for the Party's platform because it matches what they believe a candidate to the Presidency should strive for. This theoretically negates part of the appeal of a candidate who is more representative of such a Democrat's views but is less likely to be elected if nominated, and in turn gives an edge to establishment candidates or candidates widely known to be agreeable to the establishment. History would confirm this theory. As more Party activists grew concerned with electability after Hilary Clinton's defeat to Donald Trump, (Masket, 102-3) fewer and fewer voted for non-establishment candidates or chose not to pick a horse until the field had cleared and a favorite had emerged. (Masket, 103-5) This partly explains why Sanders's pledged delegate share plummeted from 46% in 2016 to 26% in 2020. Although not the only factor, national polarization and antagonism toward incumbent President Donald Trump played a major role in favoring candidate and current President Joe Biden, and turned both the Democratic nomination cycle and the election into a vote of no confidence in Donald Trump.

### 3.4 – Toward a Shift to the Left?

At the start of the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress, using House Caucus membership, New Democrats held 93 seats and Blue Dogs held 18, for a total of 111 or precisely half of House Democrats. In contrast, Congressional Progressives held 93 seats<sup>16</sup>, including 4 members of the Democratic Socialists of America. Although far from being a precise categorization in terms of ideology or political stances, this is an important visualization of the fact that as of 2021 the majority of Party leaders and Congressional Representatives are still on the moderate wing of the Party.

Shifting our focus away from Presidential nominations and taking a closer look at recent House races, the possibility of a more left-wing Democratic establishment – one much closer to the current grassroots of the Party in terms of ideology – does not seem as far-fetched as it could have been mere years ago. Indeed, more moderate establishment Democrats have been facing increasing electoral competition from their left since 2018, either forcing them to adapt and adopt stances usually attributed to the left wing of the Party, or even ejecting them from their seat and replacing them with a more progressive candidate, or even with a self-proclaimed socialist candidate. (Graham) There is of course significant resistance to this shift, namely the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee's (DCCC) intervention to help its preferred candidate win the nomination in 41 primaries in 2018, succeeding in 38. (Kamarck and Podkul) While a legitimate strategy to ensure a competitive candidate would represent the Democrats in the actual election, the tensions this move caused in the left wing could represent a sign of an era of intraparty discord to come. Moreover, if the debates the Unity Reform Committee raised on either wings of the Party are any indication, a new *status quo* among Party leaders could have a lasting impact on the Presidential nominee selection process and perhaps on regulation affecting the nomination process in the future.

Since 2018, a faction inside the larger and more mainstream progressive movement has emerged associating Democratic liberalism with socialism. Though not without its risks of alienating mainstream voters at a glance, there is an ongoing process for openly socialist elected officials to attempt to galvanize their faction against both the outside and inside political attacks of the McGovern-era by historicizing their movement not as a transition away from the mainstream but as a return to what used to be the Democratic (and the American) mainstream.

By using the lexicon of New Deal liberalism when he launched his first Presidential campaign, Bernie Sanders sought to address subliminal messages to liberals across the board with a view to building a

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16 The number of Congressional Progressive seats given here includes Deb Haaland and Marcia Fudge, who had been nominated to Secretary positions prior to the convening of the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress, but who were holding their seats until their swearing-in.

potentially electable coalition, broader than the radical ranks of democratic socialism—a coalition assimilable to the mainstream of American politics. (Gachon, 108)

This strategy of Roosevelt-era coalition-building failed in 1972, yet the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) have been gaining momentum in recent years. Through gaining organizational experience and mainstream appeal, notably by campaigning for Bernie Sanders in 2016 and 2020, Nevada's left-wing activists from the Left Caucus and the DSA have been able to win every seat of the Party legislature. The seats were formerly controlled by officials handpicked by formerly DLC-associated Senator and former Majority Leader Harry Reid, a figure of the moderate establishment. This was largely achieved by realizing the untapped potential of Latino American constituents, who had been overlooked by the former administration. (Lacy and Grim) By building on existing lower wealth bracket coalitions and focusing on growing demographics, the DSA, the Left Caucus, and other organizations could increase their representativity, and by the same token increase their electability now that their organizational capabilities are demonstrably competitive.

With the current Party establishment is at an ideological crossroad, and the recent momentum from grassroots-backed left-wing candidates, the Progressives could very well tip the intraparty balance of power in the near future. A power shift to the left wing of the Party would in theory call for a diminution of Party control over the Democratic Presidential nomination process, or at least for the maintaining of the Unity reforms, and avoid the type of dismantling the McGovern-Fraser reforms underwent at the hands of the Party's leadership in the decades after their inception. There is however little to expect with regard to reverting public opinion polarization, a problem which finds much of its root in how Parties themselves have evolved as institutions, as a shift to the left in the Party's mainstream could in fact worsen the current fragile national political equilibrium, especially on social issues.

## CONCLUSION

History does not repeat itself, but it often rhymes, as is often misattributed to Mark Twain, and a strikingly resonant discord over the role of Party leaders is resurfacing. The establishment was asserting a much softer form of direct control compared to pre-McGovern-Fraser standards in 2016, but showed demonstrable impact on the nomination process, which culminated in reforms similar in aim. This led Seth Masket to come to a similar conclusion to the one the present paper attempts to make apparent: “in terms of party reform efforts, there’s really no way to understand 2016-2020 without understanding 1968-1972.” (Masket, 123) The two-party system, despite the initial drive behind its inception striving for precisely the opposite result, has come to incentivize toeing the establishment’s Party line and opposing the other Party instead of working across the aisle.

In a political context where empowering Party leaders has once again become so divisive, envisioning ways to facilitate and bolster participation in primaries to increase their national representativity would be a viable solution to revitalize the democratic process. One possible avenue of experimentation based on empirical data could be to embrace the spirit of the Unity reforms and open primaries while seeking additional measures to reduce representativity gaps. Although there is significant scholarly disagreement with this conclusion, a large number of scholars agree that open primaries tend to favor non-establishment candidates, but not necessarily political extremes. (Kaufmann et al., 471-3) This would in theory alleviate resentment linked with interferences from Party leadership with the intraparty democratic process and still produce representative candidates. This however, even in ideal conditions, does not fulfil Polsby’s fourth “desideratum”, as it is unlikely to prevent populist or incompetent candidates unfit to “execute the duties and responsibilities of the office of President with some exceptional degree of distinction”, (Polsby, 168) as there would be no possibility for the leadership to vet candidates. Such a system would arguably be more constitutionally legitimate, relying more on the citizenry, but would inherit a major flaw of the current Republican nomination system.

Much ink has been spilled over specific components of electability – the historic driving force behind the argument in favor of a strong leadership – but others are not as feverishly debated simply because they are not within the direct grasp of the Party. They include incumbent advantage, backlash effect following prolonged control of the Presidency by either Party, the political context (also referred to as “the electoral mood”), scandals, world events and

the global economy, or even the standards of national and international media when deciding which candidates to give a platform to. (Masket, 147)

The Democratic Party is still prone to divisions of another era about the true meaning of coalition-building or of the policy form its liberal aims should take, and the history of the Party up to this point holds truths which are difficult to ignore even for its most passionate activists.

For liberal activists in the Democratic Party, it contains cautionary lessons about the difficulties of a campaign on the left, especially if it takes the form of an insurgency. For their centrist adversaries in the party, it suggests that the muffling of the liberal message brings a different set of problems, fostering timid and tepid candidates who fail to inspire anybody. (...) The question of what to call the Democrats' core convictions – progressive, liberal, or something else – is not a critical question. But it will inevitably come up (...). They will be better served by acknowledging the label and giving an account of what it means in their own terms. (Miroff, 299; 304)

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