Unequal Demands:
Policy, Polarization, and Party Asymmetry in American Politics

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Introduction

Political scientists who are devoted to describing and analyzing the trend of party polarization in the United States seldom find difficulty in convincing their fellow citizens outside the academy of the importance of their findings. Contemporary manifestations of resurgent partisan strength and deepening partisan conflict are sufficiently visible at both the mass and elite level that even intermittently attentive Americans cannot help but notice them—from the declining proportion of ideological moderates in elective office and the expansion of party competition into new issue domains to the sharp partisan divisions in the public's evaluation of national leaders and the separation of the electoral map into regional bastions of "red" and "blue" states. The emergence of a polarized party system over the past four decades represents a challenge to previous intellectual traditions that characterized American parties as ideologically indistinct or factionalized, requiring political scientists to initiate a collective reappraisal of prevailing theoretical expectations in order to better fit their observations of the political world.

Yet new scholarly approaches that account for polarization and other characteristics of today's party politics often share with their predecessors the expectation that the Democrats and Republicans operate as mirror images, pursuing opposite goals through comparable means in the electorate, on the campaign trail, or in public office. This presumption is difficult to reconcile with the procession of recent political events. The trend of ideological polarization in Congress exhibits an asymmetric pattern, with the Republican Party having migrated much further to the right in both the Senate and the House of Representatives over the past generation than

congressional Democrats have collectively shifted to the left. The unique attributes of each party extend from the increasing demographic diversity and insistently technocratic bent of the Democratic Party to the rise of the Tea Party movement and unique power of ideological media sources on the Republican side. Theory-building efforts that fail to account for these and other examples of partisan differences, or even to explicitly justify the widespread but usually tacit assumption that the parties' major characteristics closely match each other across the partisan aisle, risk creating a disjuncture between textbook descriptions of "typical" party behavior and the more complex reality of individual party distinctiveness. By 2016, party asymmetry has become an undeniable facet of political life across an array of phenomena—from Congress and interest groups to primary elections and the news media.

A new "Theory of Political Parties" introduced in a 2012 article (Bawn et al. 2012) by a group of scholars associated with the UCLA political science department (hereafter, the "UCLA theory"), along with related research by several of the article's authors, represents an overdue rethinking of parties' central purpose and role. Previous theoretical approaches that portrayed parties as primarily existing to serve the electoral interests of candidates or to facilitate mutually beneficial alliances among legislators seemed increasingly unable to account for party behavior during a polarized era in which politicians seemed to be routinely subject to constraints imposed by other political actors. The UCLA theory addressed this limitation by advancing a new conception of parties as constituting rival coalitions of "policy demanders"—influential actors who seek political power not merely for its own sake but also as a means to the implementation of their favored public policies. According to this perspective, ambitious politicians do not enjoy the freedom to adopt the positions that maximize their own chances of winning general elections—which might be expected to cause the

parties to converge on the policy preferences of the median voter (Downs 1957)—but are instead subject to consistent pressure exerted via internal party procedures by powerful interests devoted to pursuing particular substantive agendas.

The UCLA theory has directed welcome academic attention to the networks of political figures aligned with, but often formally unaffiliated with, the Democratic and Republican parties, including interest group organizations, financial donors, campaign professionals, and media outlets. The UCLA school also emphasizes the candidate nomination process as a key mechanism by which policy demanders impose their preferences on party politicians, leading political scientists to devote renewed scholarly notice to the distinctive American system of primary elections.

We maintain, however, that the two major parties remain fundamentally distinct in a manner that the UCLA theory does not recognize. Specifically, we argue that the Democratic Party is best understood as a coalition of discrete social groups, while the Republican Party is properly characterized as the agent of an ideological movement (Grossmann and Hopkins forthcoming). The UCLA theory's basic formulation that parties are coalitions of "intense policy demanders" applies better to the Democrats. But an alternate conceptualization of parties emphasizing ideological "coalition merchants" proposed by Noel (2013), a co-author of the UCLA theory, more closely resembles the Republicans. Both views understate the role of voters as important participants in party coalitions who work to reinforce each party's unique character.

In this paper, we seek to describe the foundational difference between the parties in reference to the assumptions and predictions of the UCLA theory, and to consider the implications of this enduring asymmetry for polarization and its effects on American politics. We examine four main subjects: (1) the importance of distinguishing between ideological and group-based political orientations; (2) the role of voter preferences and

actions in shaping the divergent behavior of Democratic and Republican party leaders and candidates; (3) the distinct nature of nomination politics in the two parties; and (4) the increasingly dissimilar modes of governance adopted by Democratic and Republican officeholders. We then conclude with a consideration of the role of theory in enhancing scientific understanding of party politics in the United States.

Republican Ideologues and Democratic Groups

The UCLA theory defines political parties as "coalitions of interest groups and activists seeking to capture and use government for their particular goals" (Bawn et al. 2012, 571). According to the theory, parties are controlled by discrete social groups with specific policy objectives; in one hypothetical example offered by the authors, examples include shepherds seeking a tariff on wool imports, teachers favoring the construction of new schools, and religious leaders wishing to prohibit the legal sale of alcohol. These individual groups, each representing a decided minority of the population, form a mutual alliance under the banner of a political party in order to pool their voting power and ensure the nomination of candidates who make enforceable commitments to pursue the groups' collective policy goals in each corresponding issue domain.

In the world described by the UCLA scholars, political ideology is not primarily a coherent set of abstract beliefs or values to which leaders, activists, and citizens sincerely subscribe, but rather constitutes a rationalization of the collective interests and preferences of each party's most powerful constituent groups. Because policies that represent giveaways to "special interests" are likely to provoke opposition from other groups if they are openly acknowledged as such, party leaders instead portray themselves as motivated by more high-minded concerns. But the authors employ language suggesting that they view these ostensible philosophical commitments as

mere constructs created strategically by self-interested elites for public consumption. "The party programs," they write, "become accepted as natural manifestations of competing worldviews: a 'conservative' one . . . and a 'liberal' one . . . Some voters who care nothing about the interests of the various groups are nonetheless attracted to their parties because of the 'values,' such as social order or equality, that they perceive in their programs" (Bawn et al. 2012, 574).

In related work, Noel (2013) examines the emergence of contemporary ideology in American politics and its association with the Democratic and Republican parties. He argues that a series of "coalition merchants" worked over decades of history to cement political ties among group coalitions and to establish these competing alliances as the two parties' key activist and electoral bases. They developed modern American liberalism and conservatism as forms of intellectual justification associated with revised group coalitions and party policy positions. In Noel's account, these ideological coalitions of group interests synthesized or supplanted each party's individual component constituencies, providing the appearance of a comprehensive political doctrine.

Like Converse (1964), we perceive a more fundamental distinction between ideological and group-based orientations toward politics. We argue that this difference has long separated the two parties: the Republican Party is united by a common adherence to conservative ideology, while the Democratic Party is instead primarily dedicated to the advancement of group interests (elaborated in Grossmann and Hopkins forthcoming).

The basic conception of a party as a coalition of discrete interests, each devoted to the pursuit of multiple specific policy changes intended to provide group members with tangible benefits, serves as a fundamentally sound characterization of the

historical and contemporary Democratic Party. Democratic politicians appear sensitive to the distinct policy demands of a variety of key constituent groups, which maintain their own separate and highly visible social and organizational identities even as they serve as conscious components of the larger party network (examples include labor unions, racial and religious minorities, feminists, gays and lesbians, and environmentalists). To a significant degree, the Democratic policy program represents the aggregated sum of these groups' substantive preferences within the issue domains to which they each devote particular concern.

Yet Democratic-aligned policy demanders do not win electoral support for their substantive objectives by obscuring concrete special-interest benefits behind rhetorical appeals to ideological values. The various social groups that constitute the Democratic organizational and activist network also serve as the primary ties of identity binding individual voters to the party. Voters who belong to, or sympathize with, one or more of the constituencies within this coalition are likely to view the Democratic Party as their appropriate electoral home and to explain their partisan loyalties in group-based terms, describing the Democrats as the party of the poor, African-Americans, women, and so forth.

Each of these groups promotes a well-defined set of policy priorities that reflects its own interests. For Democratic politicians, satisfying the "party base" primarily requires endorsing the specific substantive agenda of each key group and working to implement it within the constraints imposed by practical considerations of political feasibility. Democratic-aligned groups bargain with each other via the party leadership and sometimes clash over their relative influence, which is primarily exerted via interest group organizations and individual representatives claiming to speak for particular segments of the Democratic electorate. As some groups grow in size and power over

time while others decline in importance, the resulting changes in the composition of the Democratic electorate produce corresponding shifts in the contents of the party's policy agenda.

This brand of pragmatic, coalitional politics comes much less naturally to Republicans. The common view among its population of activists and officeholders that the Republican Party stands for the advancement of conservative principles discourages Republicans from thinking of themselves as members of separate constituent groups with well-defined interests, all nested within the larger party network. Rather than bargain or compete with each other over clashing policy demands stemming from distinct group priorities, Republicans differ internally over the proper definition and application of conservative doctrine or their status as members in good standing of the conservative movement. They demonstrate less interest in policy details or execution, preferring instead to emphasize broader and more symbolic themes of limited government, American nationalism, and cultural traditionalism.

While the Democratic Party's extended network contains a plethora of separate interest group organizations representing specific social identities or policy domains, the expanded Republican Party is dominated by a smaller number of actors and institutions that collectively tend to have a broader ideological affiliation and attempt to exert influence over a wide spectrum of issues. Identifiable constituencies within the Republican electorate, such as evangelical Christians or upper-class whites, are encouraged to adopt the conservative ideological label (and associated issue positions) and integrate into the Republican mainstream rather than remain distinct groups with associated interest organizations. While a Democratic politician seeking to gain support from his party's activist population will court the various groups and organizations within the party coalition by crafting separate appeals focusing on each constituency's

top policy priorities, a similarly ambitious Republican will instead appeal to the ideologically-motivated activists within her own party base by promoting her credentials as a conservative and her broader political goals.

The conception of ideology as a rationalized collection of policy positions corresponding to the interests of an alliance of groups within each party thus applies imperfectly to Democrats and Republicans alike. The Democratic Party indeed resembles a group coalition connected by a dense party network, but many of its supporters neither identify themselves as liberals nor view devotion to a common ideological cause as the central purpose of their party. In the past, several populous and powerful groups within the Democratic coalition explicitly rejected affiliation with liberal philosophy (especially southern whites, traditionalist Catholics, and urban machine politicians). Today, most of the party's largest constituencies advance policy demands that are more compatible with liberal doctrine, but many Democrats continue to resist identifying themselves or their party with liberalism as such. More frequently, they describe their partisan attachments in terms of group interest while viewing the Republican opposition as representing the interests of competing or hostile groups. While the UCLA theory predicts that politicians will prefer to sell their favored policies to the general public as derived from abstract principles rather than as "special interest boondoggles" (Bawn et al. 573)—even though they are in fact the product of group demands—Democratic candidates are in fact more likely to propose "laundry lists" of multiple specific policies, each targeted to an identifiable group interest, than they are to emphasize their commitment to the principles of liberalism as such.

For Democratic leaders, the cultivation of an ideological conception of politics or party conflict offers limited strategic benefit. Because many of the existing groups within the Democratic coalition—the poor and working class, African-Americans and

Latinos, non-Christians—exhibit durable party loyalties even in the absence of widespread ideological conceptualization, electorally ambitious Democrats instead emphasize the concrete interests and benefits that the party's policy platform offers to its component constituencies. It is difficult to identify particular "coalition merchants" who worked consciously to assemble the collection of groups located under the Democratic tent by espousing a general philosophy, and even more challenging to trace the conscious historical development of liberal thought within the boundaries of the Democratic party network. The groups within the Democratic coalition exhibit a strong pragmatic streak, prizing partial victories and compromises over the imposition of ideological litmus tests that might only prove counterproductive to the realization of concrete policy change. In response, the intellectual left in America has long maintained an ambivalent relationship with electoral politics in general and the Democratic Party in particular; from "New Left" radicals in the 1960s to Ralph Nader in the 2000s, leftist activists have often consciously distanced themselves from a party that they viewed as indifferent to, or even hostile to, their own ideological commitments.

On the other side of the partisan aisle, the building of the modern conservative movement and its successful integration into Republican institutions—an effort that began in the years after World War II and reached fruition with the nomination and election of Ronald Reagan in 1980—more closely follows the model of an expansive ideology associated with a party via the initiative of intellectual leaders and activists from William F. Buckley Jr. and Milton Friedman to Ed Feulner and Paul Weyrich. It is difficult, however, to accept the claim that conservative ideology is merely a cover for the advancement of disguised group interest. The largest constituencies within the Republican Party—such as observant Christians, upper-middle-class whites, and heterosexuals—are much less conscious of their identity as group members than are the

social minorities that constitute the Democratic coalition, instead viewing themselves as the "regular Americans" of whom Democratic special interests make self-serving demands. Compared to the Democratic side, the interest group universe associated with the Republican Party network contains fewer organizations representing single groups or single issues and more institutions that claim a broader ideological affiliation.

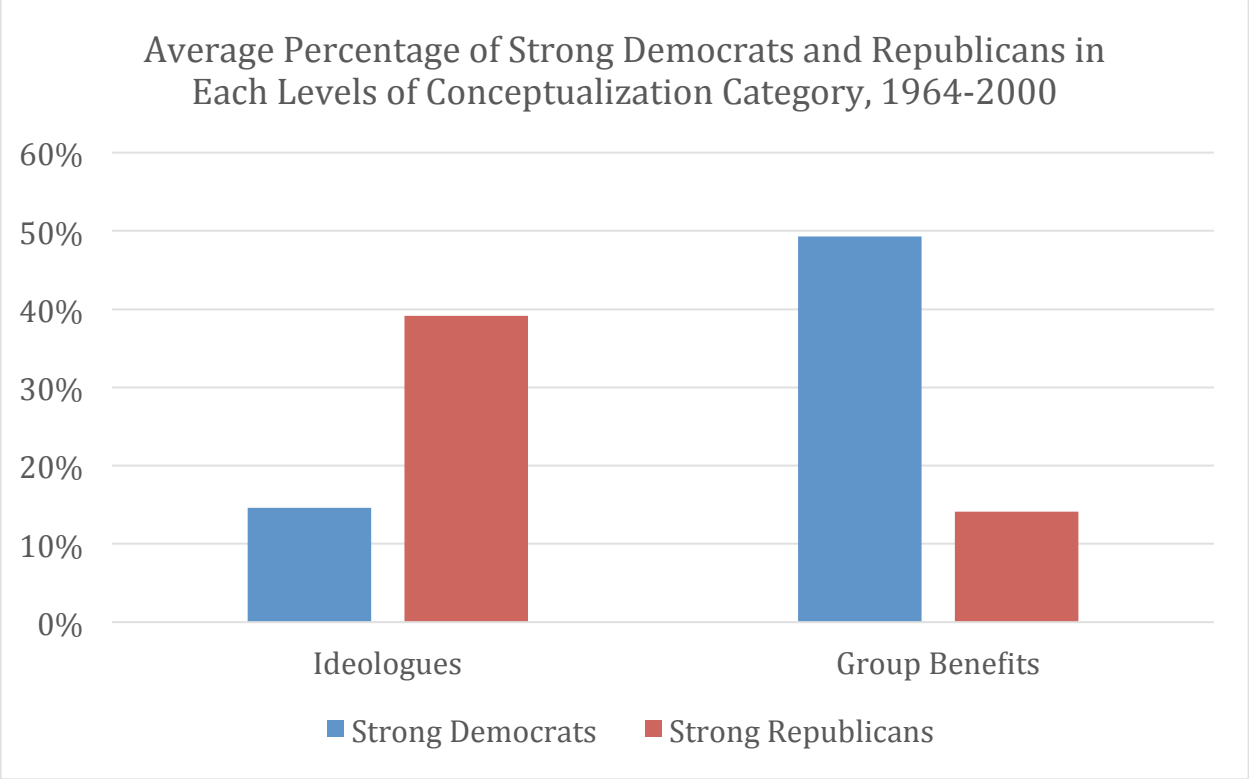
Internal conflict within the Republican Party—an increasingly common occurrence in recent years—is less likely to divide one set of identifiable groups from another than to involve competing definitions of conservatism or debates over the optimal strategy with which to advance it. Republican candidates and elected officials who wish to appeal to their party's activist base do not make a variety of detailed policy commitments to a wide variety of separate groups, as their Democratic counterparts do, but rather insist upon their devotion to conservatism as such. Republicans who wish to "modernize" or "reinvent" their party in order to address emerging social problems or expand its appeal to new types of voters must contend with an ideological tradition that is widely accepted as based on timeless principles and constitutional values, making it easy for other party members to dismiss or attack attempted policy innovations as representing an unacceptable departure from conservative doctrine.

The widespread agreement among Republicans that their party is properly defined by a common ideology thus provides justification for recurrent waves of rhetorical, procedural, and electoral challenges to the existing party leadership and officeholding class on the grounds of insufficient fidelity to the conservative cause. The dramatic and amply-documented collective rightward shift of Republican politicians over the past four decades in response to this relentless pressure is the primary factor contributing to the pattern of ideological polarization visible among party elites in Congress and elsewhere (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006). Yet even the near-

extinction of moderate Republican officeholders and the entrenchment of movement conservatism as the party's foundational creed has failed to satisfy demands from congressional backbenchers, activists, and primary voters for an even more conservative national party. These regular episodes of conservative rebellion are difficult to view as advancing identifiable group interests—indeed, they may sometimes prove counterproductive to the enactment of substantive rightward policy change—but are entirely consistent with a party that views ideology as its shared foundational creed.

Figure 1 illustrates how Democrats and Republicans think differently about political competition. The American National Election Studies regularly asks a sample of Americans what they like and dislike about each major party and presidential nominee, recording their open-ended responses. Philip Converse (1964) used these items to create a "level of conceptualization" scale of categories to "provide some indication of the evaluative dimensions that tend to be spontaneously applied." According to Converse's classifications, "ideologues" rely "in some active way on a relatively abstract and far- reaching conceptual dimension," while "group benefits" voters evaluate parties and candidates "in terms of their expected favorable or unfavorable treatment of different social groupings." Democrats have always been more likely to be categorized as group benefits voters while Republicans have always been more likely to be categorized as ideologues.

Figure 1: Democratic and Republican Political Conceptualization



The Role of Voters in Party Politics

The UCLA theory portrays ordinary citizens as playing a relatively minimal role in shaping the character and actions of the parties. It presents an account of party competition that describes the mass electorate as possessing severely limited political sophistication—as illustrated by the familiar finding that many Americans cannot correctly name the majority party in Congress or demonstrate knowledge of elementary civic facts. Because voters are largely ignorant of, or indifferent to, the contrasting policy platforms of the two parties, politicians are therefore free to satisfy the demands of the attentive interest groups within their party network without unduly endangering their electoral chances. The UCLA scholars argue that party elites view national elections as commonly decided by factors that are unrelated to the electorate's

ideological or policy-related views, and thus perceive little strategic reason to moderate their positions in order to increase popular appeal. Rather than expecting the parties to converge on the substantive preferences of the median voter, as predicted by simple spatial models of party competition, the UCLA theory can thus account for partisan divergence.

We regard the political attitudes of American voters as exerting a greater influence on the behavior of party elites, especially because popular opinion reinforces the asymmetric nature of the two-party system (Grossmann and Hopkins 2015). Political practitioners are less likely than academic analysts to view electoral outcomes as mostly reflecting fundamental factors that are largely out of their control, such as the performance of the national economy or the success of ongoing military operations. Most political leaders are highly attentive to the contours of public opinion, to the extent that it can be intelligibly measured, and do not behave as if electoral results are largely unconnected from the issue and ideological stances that they take in public—even as they recognize that they are somewhat constrained by the demands of their own partisan supporters. Candidates and their advisors invest substantial energy and resources in taking policy positions that will win them votes among like-minded citizens and in developing campaign messages that will prove popular with their constituents. Compared to their Republican counterparts, Democrats are particularly sensitive to the perceived presence of an inevitable tradeoff between ideological purity and electoral viability. Many Democratic leaders interpreted the landside defeats of presidential nominees George McGovern (1972), Walter Mondale (1984), and Michael Dukakis (1988) as reflecting the American public's rejection of excessively liberal candidates—a partisan disadvantage seemingly rectified by the subsequent nomination

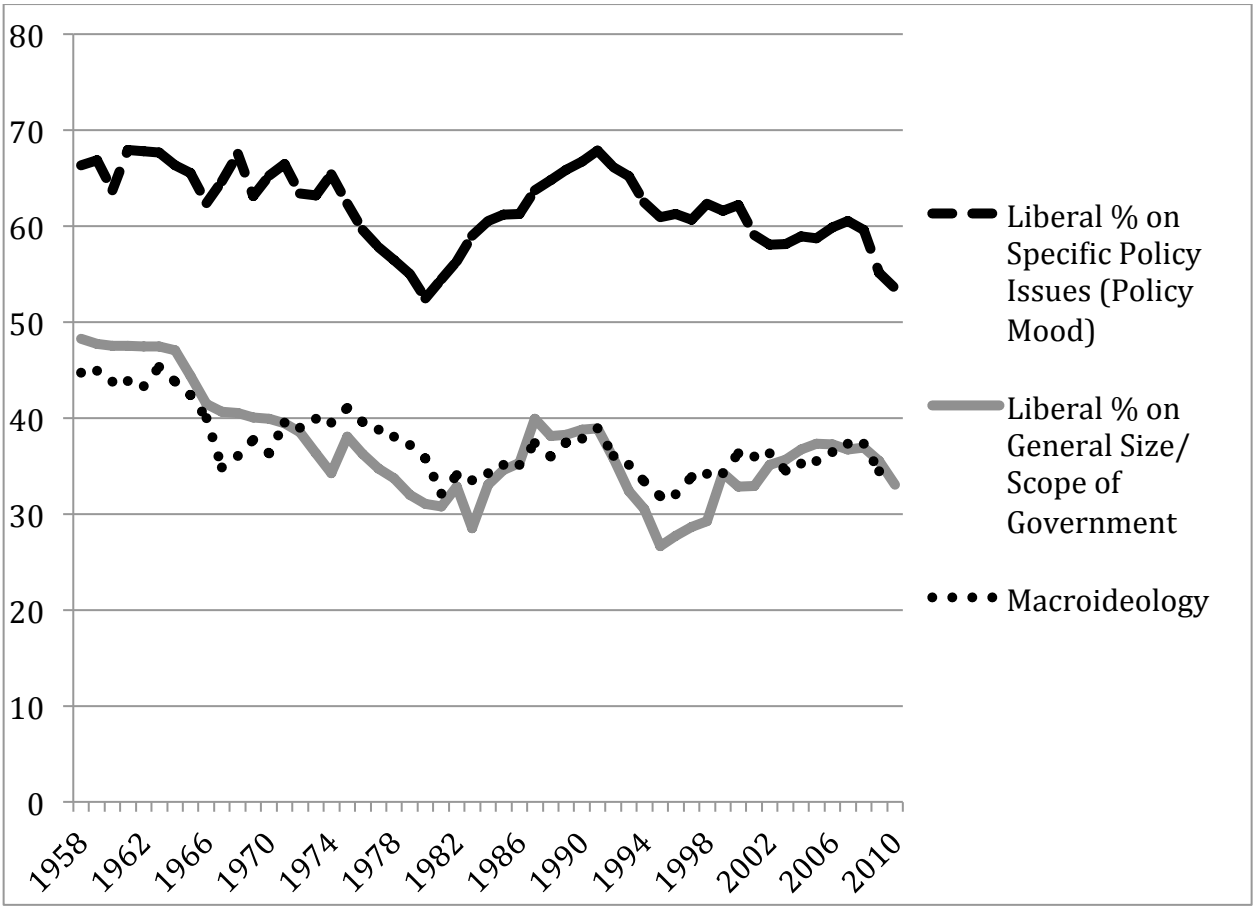
of the more centrist (and more electorally successful) Jimmy Carter (1976) and Bill Clinton (1992).

While the limited knowledge of the mass public is a well-documented attribute of American political life, a lack of factual command does not prevent citizens from forming strong ideological or policy-related preferences. After the Tea Party movement rose to prominence in 2009 and 2010, for example, analysts observed that many of its sympathizers voiced fierce support for costly middle-class entitlement programs that seemed contradictory to the movement's small-government principles; one constituent famously warned his congressman at a public town hall meeting to "keep your government hands off my Medicare." Such substantive misunderstandings reveal what some might regard as a distressingly uninformed electorate, but the role of Tea Party activists in pressuring Republican politicians to adopt increasingly conservative positions reflects the electoral influence of citizens who are highly motivated by ideological considerations—even if they often imperfectly apply those considerations to specific policy matters.

Indeed, the asymmetry of the parties is itself reinforced by an enduring disconnect between the mass public's prevailing ideological predispositions and its collective policy views. For at least half a century, American voters have simultaneously preferred left-of-center positions on most specific political issues even as they lean to the right on more general measures of ideology—resulting in an electorate that is both operationally liberal and symbolically conservative. Figure 2 illustrates this pattern by displaying the percent of liberal answers (out of all non-centrist answers) in three categories of public opinion survey questions: ideological self-identification (the black dotted line), all specific public policy issues (the black dashed line), and broad preferences on the power and scope of national government (the solid gray line). It

reveals a consistent liberal majority on specific policy questions but an equally consistent conservative majority on ideological identity and broad questions on the size and scope of government. Many citizens express antipathy to "big government" even as they call for public-sector solutions to a variety of particular social problems.

Figure 2: Symbolic and Operational Liberalism in American Public Opinion

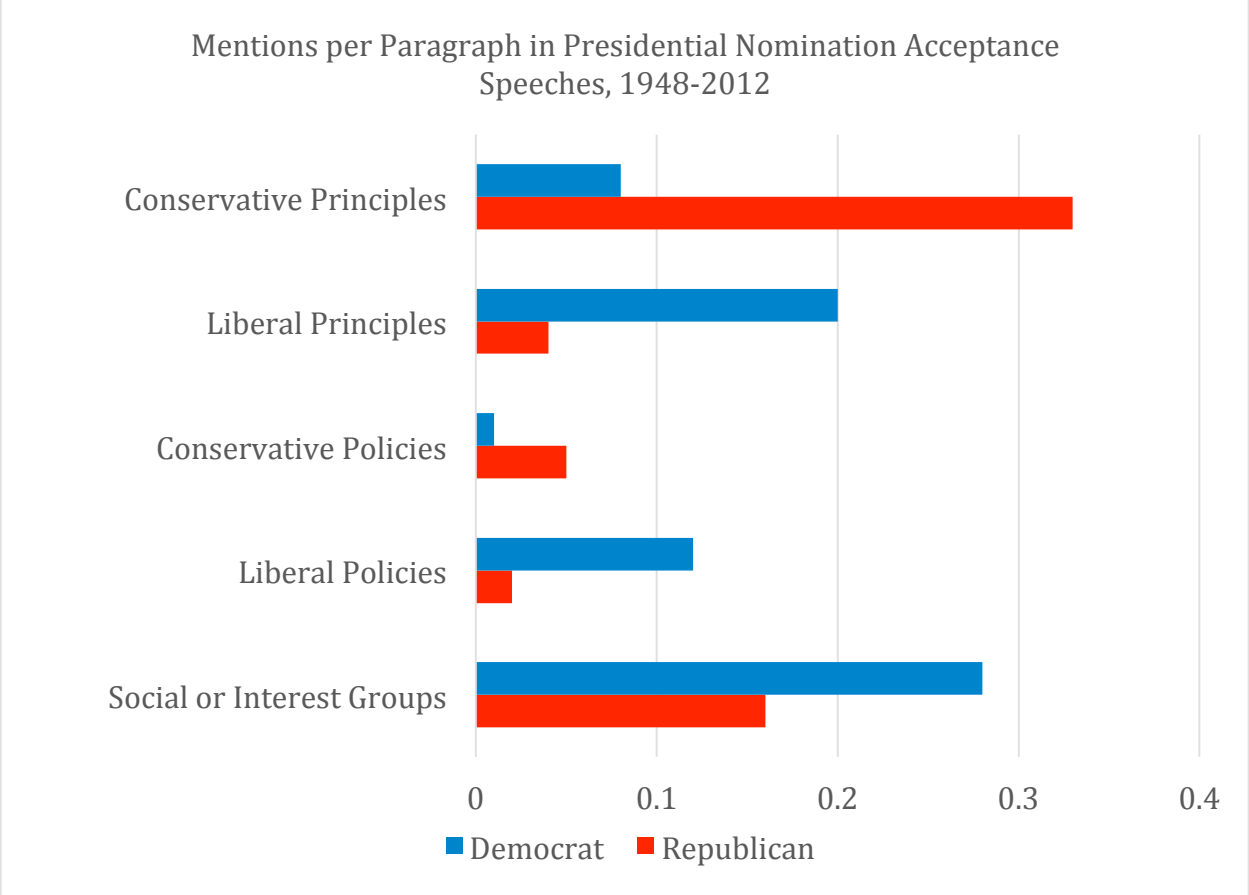


This fundamental hallmark of public opinion in the United States has significant strategic consequences for the parties. Rather than converging at the median voter's position on a unidimensional ideological spectrum (as predicted by many spatial models following Downs 1957) or taking advantage of a "zone of ignorance" among the

electorate to satisfy intense policy demanders in the party network without fear of popular backlash (as posited by Bawn et al. 2012), the parties instead battle over establishing their preferred conceptual ground for electoral conflict. Democrats hold a natural advantage if voters perceive an election as representing a competition over preferred policy stances, while Republicans benefit from framing it as a contest between liberal and conservative themes and values. The parties' campaign rhetoric and advertising content reflects this strategic imbalance. Party leaders do not treat the electorally pivotal sector of the voting public as coherently centrist or as politically ignorant, but rather as conflicted between ideological and policy-related inclinations that lean in opposite directions.

Figure 3 illustrates these patterns with a comparison of Democratic and Republican presidential nomination acceptance speeches at party conventions since 1948. We coded each paragraph for any mention of ideology or philosophical principles, social groups or interest groups, public policy and coded each ideological or policy mention as liberal, conservative, or neither. The patterns reveal that Republicans are far more likely to invoke party-consistent ideological principles but far less likely to promote specific policies to match those principles. Democrats mention some policy proposals and principles, but are most likely to invoke particular groups they are intending to represent or oppose.

Figure 3: Democratic and Republican Nomination Speech Rhetoric



The Unbalanced Nomination Process

The UCLA theory has wisely emphasized the importance of the nomination process in party politics. Primaries have historically attracted much less notice from both theoretical and empirical scholarship than general elections, despite their critical role in determining the choices presented to the wider electorate. In an era in which many constituencies below the presidential level are electorally secure for one party or the other, primaries take on additional importance as the key stage at which most individual officeholders are effectively selected by the public.

The nomination process has also received increasing attention from critics of polarization, who often hold small and ideologically unrepresentative primary electorates responsible for pulling the parties away from the moderate, pragmatic political center and toward the rigid, uncompromising extremes. In their telling, most participants in primary elections are left- or right-wing activists who are motivated by the objective of imposing doctrinal purity on their favored party by selecting extremist nominees. To some observers (such as Fiorina 2005), the primary process has distorted the American system of representation by denying the majority of citizens who are not zealous ideologues the ability to express their political preferences by voting for like-minded candidates in general elections.

Yet it is clear that the use of primaries as a tool of ideological enforcement is much more prevalent in the Republican Party than on the Democratic side. As Table 1 shows (using data from Boatright 2013), Republican primary challenges to sitting members of Congress have for decades been more commonly motivated by ideological differences than have Democratic challenges. Since the 1990s, conservative interest group organizations such as the Club for Growth and FreedomWorks have regularly endorsed and funded advertising campaigns on behalf of right-wing Republican congressional candidates, including those running against veteran incumbents or in competitive constituencies vulnerable to capture by the Democratic opposition. Nearly one-third of the Republican senators seeking reelection between 2010 and 2014 were held to 60 percent or less in their primary race—with three losing renomination outright to more conservative rivals—while insurgent conservatives such as Ted Cruz (Texas), Rand Paul (Kentucky), Sharron Angle (Nevada), and Christine O'Donnell (Delaware) captured Republican nominations in open-seat races over more establishment-friendly opponents. Members of the House of Representatives have been targeted as well; for

example, House majority leader Eric Cantor of Virginia became an unexpected electoral casualty in his June 2014 primary against Tea Party supporter and political neophyte Dave Brat.

Table 1: Ideologically Based Democratic and Republican Primary Challengers

Percent of Primary Challengers Based on Ideology by Decade					
	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s
Democrats	9%	3%	5%	13%	11%
Republicans	24%	17%	19%	24%	42%

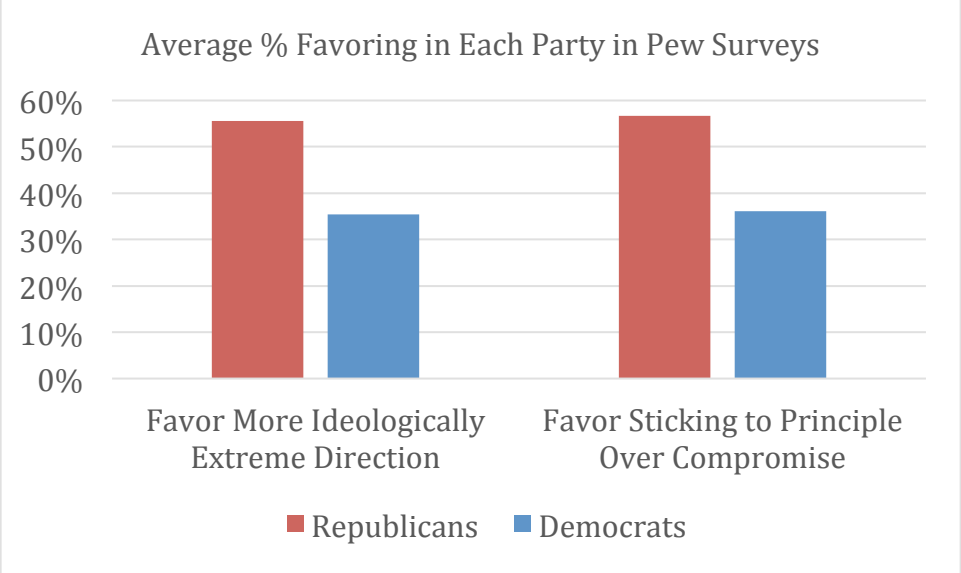
Much of the popular dissatisfaction among Republican voters with their party's leading officeholders reflects the perception that Republicans in government have failed to sufficiently uphold or advance conservative values while in office. In one common account, conservative candidates who are elected to Congress risk becoming corrupted from exposure to liberal ideas and interests, tempting them to "go Washington" and abandon their prior ideological commitments—thus justifying their replacement with more principled successors. This worldview is often promoted by the conservative media universe, which patrols the voting records and public rhetoric of Republican incumbents for any signs of ideological or partisan infidelity and provides favored primary challengers with valuable publicity.

No comparable electoral environment exists in the Democratic Party. Serious opposition to Democratic congressional incumbents is relatively rare—and, when it occurs, is more likely to be provoked by scandal or conflicting group identity than perceived ideological impurity. The left lacks a powerful interest group network or media apparatus devoted to enforcing ideological doctrine on Democratic incumbents and publicizing outsider challengers. Democratic leaders therefore enjoy more freedom

to take a pragmatic approach to politics—for example, by taking moderate positions in order to bolster their general-election appeal—without risking a backlash from dissatisfied primary voters.

Figure 4 illustrates how these patterns also reflect different views about governance in each party in the electorate. We report the average percent favoring movement in a more ideologically extreme direction over moderation and the percent favoring sticking to principles over compromise in each political party. Democrats are consistently more likely to favor moderation and compromise, giving their leaders more room to maneuver in governing.

Figure 4: Public Opinion of Compromise and Moderation in Each Party



The UCLA theory characterizes the voters who participate in primaries as reliably open to influence by policy demanders within their party's extended network, who coordinate with each other in order to provide favored candidate with valuable campaign resources—such as financial donations and public endorsements—that prove

decisive in determining electoral outcomes. This hypothesized mechanism of elite control over nominations seeks to account for partisan polarization by providing an explanation for the increasing proliferation of non-centrist nominees and officeholders. Yet Democratic and Republican voters are not equally receptive to elite messages enlisting them on behalf of efforts to move the party in a more ideologically pure or uncompromising direction. Democratic voters are consistently more likely to prize substantive moderation and a cooperative governing style, while Republicans voice a preference for a more conservative and principled party.

The fundamental differences in nomination politics between the two parties is also visible in presidential primary contests. Republican candidates usually distinguish themselves from their competitors by claiming a superior adherence to conservative principles and by emphasizing broad themes of limited government, American nationalism, and cultural traditionalism—often modeling their campaigns after conservative patron saint Ronald Reagan and explicitly invoking his legacy. In comparison, Democrats are more likely to discuss specific policy proposals designed to benefit specific social groups within the party coalition while eschewing more general debates over ideological liberalism.

The 2016 presidential nomination race between Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders serves as a particularly revealing example of the prevalence of group-based politics within the Democratic Party. Sanders, a self-described democratic socialist who had previously declined to identify as a Democrat during his long career in public office, ran an energetic campaign based on the central premise that excessive political power exercised by corporations, wealthy interests, and the financial sector had produced unacceptable levels of economic inequality, justifying large-scale ameliorative responses from the federal government such as single-payer health insurance, free

college education, and stringent campaign finance regulation. He criticized Clinton for inadequate boldness in addressing the economic challenges faced by many Americans and suggested that cozy ties to Wall Street prevented her from adopting sufficiently left-wing positions.

Sanders gained a devoted following from a cadre of leftist activists, intellectuals, and celebrities, and proved remarkably successful at winning votes from young whites and political independents. But he faced greater difficulty in attracting key groups within the Democratic coalition, such as African-Americans, Latinos, and feminists, and occasionally demonstrated a lack of sound political instincts in seeking their support. For example, Sanders dismissed abortion rights organizations that had endorsed Clinton as part of the political "establishment" while suggesting that he would improve race relations in America by creating "millions of jobs for low-income kids so they're not hanging out on street corners."[1]

While Sanders advanced an ideologically-motivated grand theory of politics, the Clinton campaign courted the Democratic electorate by openly invoking the interests of separate constituencies within the party. Clinton herself explicitly argued that Sanders's signature focus on economic inequality failed to address other concerns of Democratic-aligned groups such as racial and gender discrimination, gay and lesbian rights, and access to affordable childcare. "I am not a single-issue candidate," she declared at one debate, "and I do not believe we live in a single-issue country."[2] Clinton was less effective than Sanders at integrating her various policy positions into a coherent belief

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[1] See Gregory Krieg, "Bernie Sanders: I Would Absolutely Improve Race Relations," *CNN*. http://www.cnn.com/2016/02/11/politics/bernie-sanders-race-relations-democratic-debate/

[2] See Jonathan Swan, "Clinton: I am Not a Single Issue Candidate," *The Hill*. http://thehill.com/blogs/ballot-box/dem-primaries/269220-clinton-i-am-not-a-single-issue-candidate

system that appealed to idealistic liberals and young voters, but her popularity among key Democratic groups—especially racial minorities—allowed her to build a prohibitive advantage in the pledged delegate count early in the 2016 primary season, preventing Sanders from seriously threatening her chances to win the Democratic nomination.

On the Republican side, the triumph of Donald Trump's presidential candidacy over a large field of more conventional and experienced rivals represented one of the biggest electoral upsets in recent political history. Though he characterized himself as a conservative and praised Ronald Reagan's presidency, Trump relied less than most Republican candidates on rhetorical invocations of small-government principles or religiously-identified social traditionalism—which, when combined with his previous support for Democratic candidates and criticism of Republican leaders such as George W. Bush, prompted some opponents to criticize him for not being a "true conservative." Instead, Trump heavily emphasized nationalist themes, pledging to "make America great again" by restricting immigration, taking a harder line on international trade agreements, and serving as a "great cheerleader for the country."

While Trump's nomination represents a departure from the otherwise-strengthening ideological purification movement within the Republican Party—a sentiment that was best represented in the 2016 nomination race by Texas senator Ted Cruz, who ultimately placed second to Trump in the delegate count—his rise is more consistent with two other long-term trends within Republican politics that similarly lack Democratic counterparts: (1) a decreasing valuation of policy detail and expertise in favor of broader and more symbolic rhetoric and gestures; and (2) a transfer of influence within the party from elected officials to popular figures within an ideologically-identified news media universe. Trump has appeared uniquely indifferent to policy specifics, often contradicting his own positions on particular issues from one

day to the next, even as the general themes of his campaign remain intact; he has also benefited from implicit or explicit acceptance by key conservative media personalities such as Sean Hannity, Bill O'Reilly, Rush Limbaugh, and Ann Coulter.

Trump leads no identifiable faction of Republican elites or activists, and it is unlikely that his candidacy will succeed in remaking the GOP in his own image—especially if he is unable to win the general election. Yet his emergence raises the natural question of why the Republican Party has proven much more hospitable than the Democrats to an "outsider" candidate with no political experience, little emphasis of policy details, and few enthusiastic supporters among the party in government. Like the Tea Party movement, Trump's electoral success appeared to be a manifestation of widespread frustration among Republican voters with the traditional leadership of their party, as well as a populist expression of ethnocentric sentiment in the age of Obama.

If the primary election process is indeed the key mechanism by which party-aligned policy demanders impose their agenda on politicians, the very different tenor of nomination politics within each of the major parties suggests a more fundamental divide. The UCLA theory identifies the threat of "getting primaried" as a powerful weapon in the arsenal of policy demanders: "If initial nomination fails to select office holders faithful to [the] party agenda, then fear of de-nomination can finish the job" (Bawn et al. 2012, 585). In the Democratic Party, however, ideologically-motivated primary challenges to incumbent officeholders (even "Blue Dog" moderates) are relatively infrequent and very rarely successful, and open-seat races in competitive constituencies—including for the presidency—seldom produce sharply left-wing nominees. Democratic interest groups are more likely than Republican activists to tolerate ideological moderation in service of electoral pragmatism, Democratic voters whose partisan identity is primarily based on group sympathy are not particularly

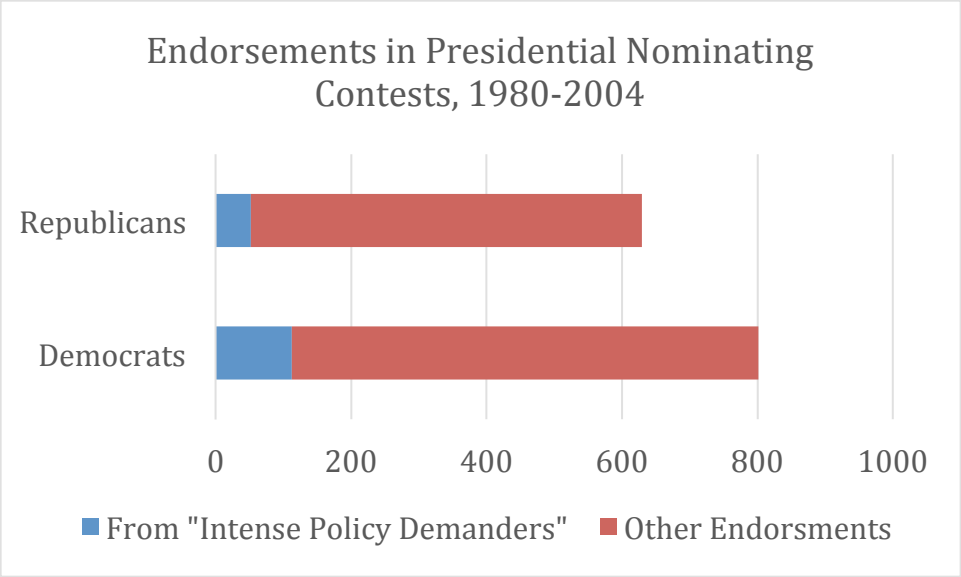
persuadable by ideological appeals, and the American left lacks a powerful ideologically-affiliated media apparatus with the capacity to enforce liberal purity within the Democratic extended network.

Republican nomination contests, in contrast, have long been venues for the imposition of conservative ideology on the party's candidates. This trend has intensified over the past two decades as Republican voters have become more likely to identify as conservatives, interest groups dedicated to advancing conservative purity have proliferated, and the conservative media universe has grown substantially in size and influence. But a Republican primary electorate that is more devoted to symbolic than operational conservatism is likely to judge candidates on the basis of broad rhetoric and stylistic affect as well as specific issue positions, and to view compromises and partial victories as signs of ideological disloyalty rather than effective strategies for governing. The nomination process transparently exposes Republican politicians to the influence of demanders within the party, but these actors' demands do not always concern the details of policy.

Even the data collected in support of the UCLA theory demonstrates that Democratic Party actors are more active in using endorsements to select presidential nominees. Endorsing actors are also more likely to be prototypical "intense policy demanders" or interest groups with specific concerns. Figure 5 illustrates these patterns with data on the average number of endorsements from 1980-2004 in each contested presidential nominating contest, separating those labeled "intense policy demanders" in the dataset provided by Marty Cohen and used in *The Party Decides* (Cohen et al. 2008). Democratic contests have a lot more elite participants, more of whom are interest groups representing single-issue and identity-based concerns. Yet in both parties, many more of the endorsements come from party politicians and organizational leaders.

Based on the "in-group endorsements" identified by the authors, even these individual party actors in the Democratic Party more often select a potential nominee on the basis of demographic or interest organization ties.

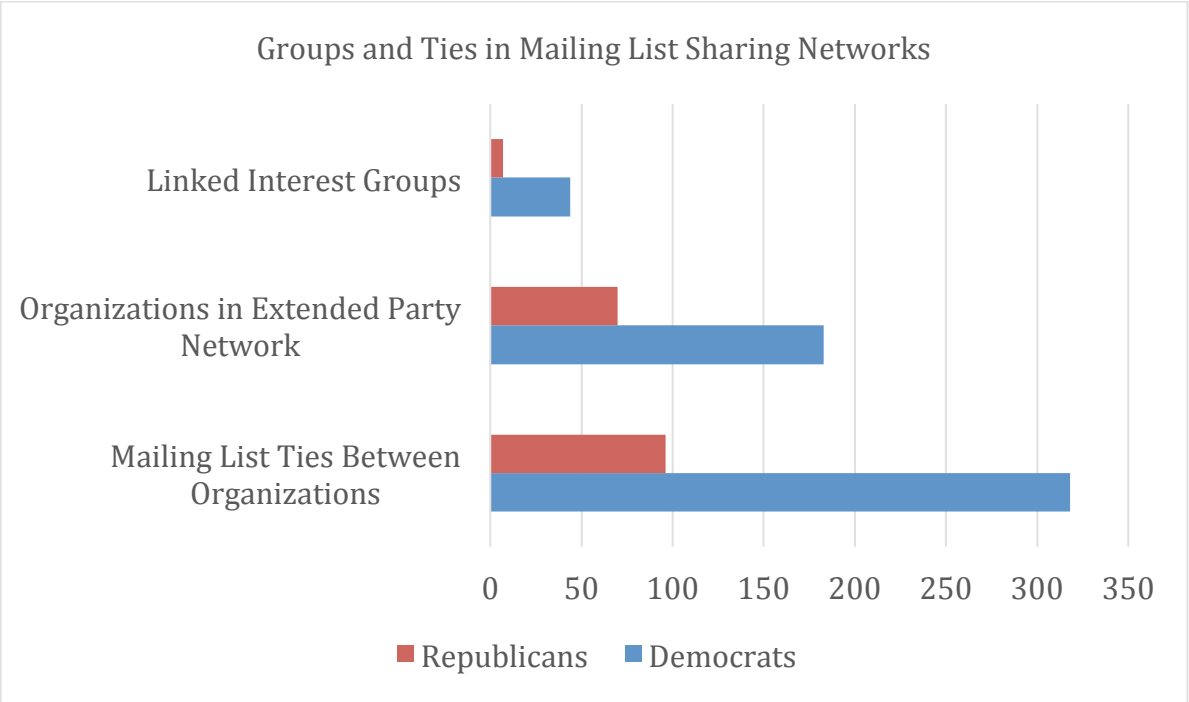
Figure 5: Presidential Candidate Endorsements in Each Party



These nominating contexts are a window into broader party differences. Democratic convention delegates, donors, and activists have more interest group ties than their Republican counterparts whereas Republican party organizational leaders are consistently more concerned with ideology (see Grossmann and Hopkins forthcoming). The party's extended networks of allied organizations also reflect these differences. Figure 6 illustrates how these patterns are reflected in mailing list sharing among affiliated groups and candidates in each party. To track shared mailing lists among Democrats and Republicans, Gregory Koger, Seth Masket, and Hans Noel (2009) made donations to political organizations and candidates using different pseudonyms and recorded what other mail each "donor" received. They found three times as many

shared mailing list ties on the Democratic side and 2.6 times as many organizations sharing contacts. Interest groups are central to the Democratic network whereas the most central organizations in the Republican network were ideological newsmagazines.

Figure 6: Characteristics of Democratic and Republican Extended Party Networks



Two Styles of Partisan Governance

One of the most frequently-lamented apparent manifestations of contemporary polarization is the intensifying partisan warfare visible in the legislative branch. Although previous eras of American history are sometimes excessively romanticized in retrospect, the frequency of bipartisan collaboration in Congress (or between Congress and the president) undeniably declined after the 1970s, while the use of more aggressive procedural tactics—from closed rules in the House to the filibuster in the Senate—became increasingly normalized. In response to these developments, theories of Congress that emphasized the committee system, policy entrepreneurship, and

constituency-based distributive politics have given way to approaches that more fully acknowledge the central institutional role of parties and party leaders.

Yet the congressional parties, too, retain substantial distinctiveness. Over the past 30 years, a pattern has emerged in which alliances of backbench conservatives routinely exert pressure on—and occasionally declare war upon—a Republican leadership that is held to have unacceptably drifted from conservative principles. In time, many of these rebellious junior members (including Newt Gingrich, John Boehner, and Trent Lott) have advanced up the leadership ladder themselves, only to be subjected to incoming fire from a new generation of conservative rebels. Revolts led by disaffected conservatives contributed to Gingrich's exit from the speakership in 1998 and directly prompted Boehner's departure from the same office 17 years later. Democratic congressional leaders have faced no comparable recent challenges from within the ranks of their own party, allowing them to govern without fear of internal retribution.

Conflict within the congressional Republican Party is less likely to involve actual policy differences than to stem from disagreements over preferred governing style and strategy. Critics on the right, from the House Freedom Caucus to Texas senator Ted Cruz, routinely accuse Republican leaders of excessive willingness to compromise with, or acquiesce to, the "liberal" Democratic opposition, arguing that a more confrontational approach better serves the conservative principles to which both sides claim to adhere. Republican hard-liners are particularly fond of provoking procedural crises such as government shutdowns and threats to default on the national debt as highly visible demonstrations of symbolic ideological commitment.

Because flexibility and compromise are often necessary attributes to achieve policy goals, however, the growing influence of party purists can in fact be counterproductive to the realization of substantive accomplishments. The current

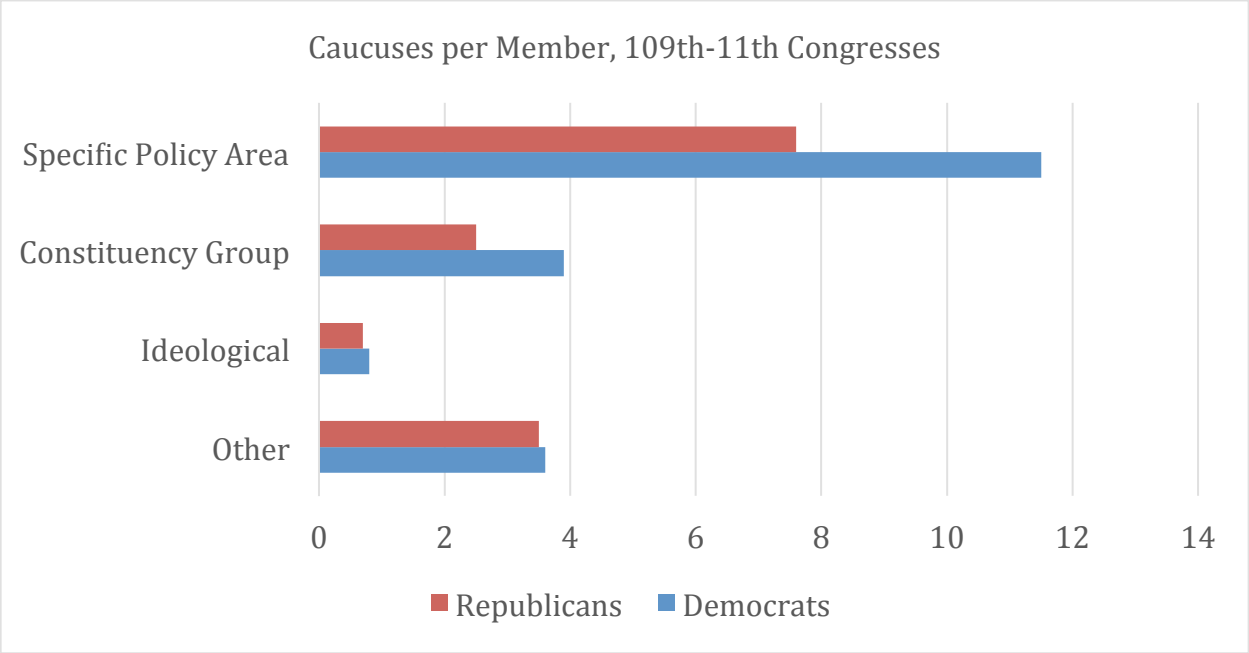
Republican congressional majority has regularly prized empty expressions of ideological devotion—such as multiple show votes on measures to repeal the Affordable Care Act—over legislative productivity in pursuit of policy change. Hard-line opposition to Republican-drafted appropriations legislation has repeatedly weakened the hand of Republican congressional leaders in budget negotiations with the Obama administration and forced Boehner to pass critical legislation through the House with minority Democrats supplying most of the votes—a tactic that fueled resentment among Republican purists. Current speaker Paul Ryan's acquiescence to the House Freedom Caucus's demands for "regular order" recently resulted in the adoption of a Democratic-sponsored gay rights amendment to an energy and water bill that was in turn voted down by conservatives, jeopardizing Ryan's attempt to build a record of productivity during his first year leading the House.

The model of a legislative party that develops a substantive agenda to satisfy a coalition of discrete constituencies and works pragmatically to implement these policies while in office thus applies much better to congressional Democrats than to their Republican counterparts. Democratic leaders must contend with internal divisions of their own—especially between liberals and moderates—that can endanger the successful enactment of the party's perennially ambitious legislative program even when the party holds unified control of the federal government. But Democratic officeholders consistently prioritize actual policy change, even if it falls short of the ambitions of party leaders and activists, over symbolic expressions of ideological purity. Most of the landmark legislation enacted in the first two years of the Obama presidency, including the Affordable Care Act, the Dodd-Frank financial regulation bill, and the economic stimulus package, required substantial compromise in order to

survive the legislative process—yet no recalcitrant bloc of liberals mobilized in opposition or publicly questioned their party leadership's devotion to principle.

The differences in internal organization of the parties in government are also evident in quantitative indicators. One useful illustration is party difference in caucus memberships, visible in data collected by Jennifer Nicoll Victor (from Ringe and Victor 2013) and summarized in Figure 7. Democratic members of Congress were active in many more caucuses—especially those focused on a particular policy issue or constituency group. Ideological caucus memberships were more even, but even in this category Democrats were split between a progressive caucus and more moderate "Blue Dog" and "New Democrat" caucuses whereas the vast majority of Republicans joined the conservative Republican Study Committee.

Figure 7: Legislative Caucus Memberships of Democrats and Republicans



Party Asymmetry and Party Polarization

As several scholars have recently noted (Hacker and Pierson 2005, Mann and Ornstein 2012), contemporary analyses of polarization too often mistakenly treat the phenomenon as occurring to a comparable extent in both parties. Whether one conceives of "polarization" as merely referring to the collective ideological distance between Democratic and Republican elites or instead follows common media practice by extending the term to encompass increasing procedural hardball in government, more frequent ideologically-based primary challenges to incumbent officeholders, and the emergence of a rebellious faction of self-proclaimed ideological purists in Congress, the Republican Party has contributed disproportionately to the phenomenon over the past three decades. In our view, this asymmetric pattern reflects and reinforces a more fundamental difference between a Republican Party united by ideology and a

Democratic Party organized as a group coalition. Just as accounts claiming that polarization has proceeded equally in both parties risk elevating analytic simplicity over empirical verisimilitude, general theories that expect comparable organizational traits, governing styles, and policy-making approaches cannot fully account for the distinctive nature of each party.

The difficulties that arise from attempting to realize ideological purity within a separation-of-powers system with frequent elections and staggered terms of office are thus experienced more keenly by Republicans than by Democrats. Republican politicians also face the challenge of fulfilling the symbolic conservatism demanded by the party's supporters without alienating an operationally liberal national electorate; limited-government principles and traditionalist cultural values often lose popularity when translated into specific policy outcomes. Failure to deliver on their own stated conservative aims, however, leaves Republican leaders vulnerable to the charge that their devotion to these objectives is insincere—a view that has fueled serious challenges to party leaders from congressional backbenchers and primary voters alike, claiming a growing political casualty list that, somewhat remarkably, included both the sitting speaker and majority leader of the House of Representatives during the 16 months between June 2014 and October 2015.

At the same time, the distinctively ideological nature of the Republican Party provides an explanation for its procedural aggressiveness and obstructionism in government that is not simply based on a diagnosis of collective pathology, as some critics suggest. Nor is the gap between the Republican platform and the stated policy preferences of the American electorate indicative of a breakdown in representative democracy; if the Democratic Party can claim to represent the public's collective policy views, the Republicans can similarly claim to represent its prevailing ideological

predispositions. Many Democrats assume that elite-level polarization in general, and staunch Republican conservatism in particular, does not reflect legitimate popular sentiment but can instead be substantially reversed via "democratizing" process reforms such as campaign finance regulation, jungle primaries, and same-day voter registration—an attitude which significantly understates the degree of symbolic conservatism in the voting public. Expectations that a series of defeats in presidential elections will compel Republican leaders to adopt a more moderate approach in order to expand their party's national appeal must also contend with the limited capacity for adaptive change maintained by a party whose most active members view themselves as dedicated to the advancement of timeless values.

It is hardly a coincidence that the growth of party polarization has dismayed Democrats and liberals more than Republicans and conservatives. The rightward ideological shift of the Republican Party over the past four decades, along with its increased success in congressional and state-level elections during the same period, has managed to slow the expansion of government activism that characterized the 1960s and early 1970s, preventing Democratic constituencies from realizing many of the more ambitious elements of their policy agenda. Yet conservatives have proven even less successful in subsequent years at rolling back the scope of government responsibility, despite the presence of self-described "revolutionaries" in Congress who are rhetorically devoted to engineering a fundamental reduction of federal power. Such failures further stoke the frustration of conservative activists and voters, producing repeated cycles of ideological revolt against Republican leaders and creating a vacuum within the party that is increasingly filled by insurgent candidates.

The compositional diversity, popular appeal, nomination politics, governing style, and policy-making approach of the two parties have all become sufficiently

dissimilar that it is difficult to develop a single theoretical approach that covers both sides. Given each party's unique historical trajectory and set of constituencies, there is no reason to assume that Democrats and Republicans will act in a comparable manner even when occupying similar strategic positions. While party theory does not always grant ordinary voters significant agency in shaping the behavior of political elites, the durable asymmetry of the parties also reflects a fundamental ambivalence in the mass public. As long as most Americans continue to prefer Democratic specifics and Republican generalities, the parties will attempt to satisfy these contradictory demands—keeping American politics in a permanent state of imbalance.

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