Presidents as Agents of Change

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Presidents have long been seen as operating within a political environment that is intractable and highly resistant to change. Recent historical-institutional research, however, has revealed presidents to be powerful agents of structural change. Building on this emergent literature, this article endeavors to demonstrate that Terry Moe's tripartite analytical framework—of structures, incentives, and resources—remains a helpful starting point for historically oriented scholars seeking to examine the relationship between presidential behavior and institutional change. It offers methodological suggestions for conducting historical research along these lines and illustrates the potential gains by reconsidering some recent research into the relationship between presidential action and party development. Each illustration shows that presidents, through their instrumental efforts to bring inherited party structures into closer alignment with their incentives, contributed to long-term party developments. Rather than leave their structural environment undisturbed, as leading theories might predict, their actions reconfigured party arrangements and altered their trajectories, influencing the choices made by subsequent presidents and other political actors.

Over the last half-century, most presidency research has been built upon Richard Neustadt's (1990 [1960]) premise that modern presidents operate within a political environment that is intractable and highly resistant to change. Though they may rack up some policy accomplishments and enjoy short-term victories over their opponents, presidents are widely seen as having limited capacities to alter the institutional and organizational arrangements that surround them. As George C. Edwards III has written, "there is little evidence that presidents can restructure the political landscape and pave the way for change. Although not prisoners of their environment, they are likely to be highly constrained by it" (2000, 34).[1]

Not all presidency scholars, of course, have shared this view. Scholars of rational choice institutionalism, in particular, ventured into presidency studies in the 1980s and 1990s heralding a very different perspective. In two important essays, Terry Moe (1985, 1993) urged scholars to shift attention from analyses of presidential strategy and style

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1. The argument is more fully developed in Edwards (1989).

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within fixed constraints to studies of how presidents factor into the broader "logic of institutional development" (1985, 236). As an illustration, Moe suggested that all modern presidents had contributed to a dynamic process of change in the executive branch. In their efforts to make administrative structures more competent and responsive to the White House in the short-term—to achieve "congruence" between inherited structures and their incentives for leadership—modern presidents made incremental contributions to the long-term evolution of the "institutional presidency." Often unwittingly, their actions "set in motion" institutional changes that had "reciprocal effects that alter[ed] individual incentives and resources, which in turn propel[led] the next round of institutional changes," thereby shaping the "directions and dynamics of institutional change" (Moe 1985, 237). Rather than leave their structural environment undisturbed, Moe suggested that presidents regularly engage in behaviors that alter their surroundings and "shift the structure of politics for themselves and everyone else" (1993, 367).

These insights opened two new lines of inquiry for presidency research. The first involved reconceptualizing presidents as "generic types rooted in an institutional system" (rather than individual people) who respond systematically to incentives and interact with other institutions in predictable ways (Moe 2009, 704). The second emphasized the downstream effects of those interactions—effects that may alter institutional trajectories in politically consequential ways.

Subsequent work in the rational choice tradition primarily pursued the first line of inquiry. It depersonalized the presidency, constructed refined theories of presidential politicization, centralization, interbranch bargaining, and unilateral action, and designed formal models to specify the conditions under which different presidents are likely to act in similar ways with more or less success (Cameron 2000; Groseclose and McCarty 2001; Howell 2003; Howell and Pevehouse 2007; Lewis 2003; McCarty 2004; Rudalevige 2002). Taking center stage was comparative statics, or the examination of how changes in the model's parameters affect its equilibrium solution.[2] Comparative statics analyses have many advantages, but they do not consider whether (or how) the outcome of one game might alter the constraints faced by presidents in subsequent games. Each game is treated as distinct from the last, with the parameters exogenously determined and the players remaining the same. Presidents are expected to try to alter the status quo—that *is* the game—but the consequences of their actions do not factor into the analysis in any meaningful way. Whether the moves they make are informed or constrained by prior rounds—and whether their actions have any long-term effects on their political environment—are not the subjects of investigation.

In other words, Moe's second suggestion—that presidents not only act *within* but also *upon* their environments in historically significant ways—was not pursued much further, at least not by those who most explicitly sought to build on his insights.[3] Yet this second line of inquiry retains a strong appeal. In addition to offering a clear-cut

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2. "Parameters" refer to inherent properties of the game, defined by nature, such as the "status quo" of a given policy.

3. With the important exception of Lewis (2008), which examines the impact of presidential politicization on bureaucratic performance.

alternative to the familiar Neustadtian model of examining presidential strategy within fixed constraints, it expands the range of questions usually addressed in presidency research and provides an opportunity to bring the illuminative power of historical research to bear. What I wish to suggest in this essay is that studying *how presidents change things* remains a promising path for research. That it was suggested in the mid-1980s by one of the "founding fathers" of the rational choice approach to presidency studies only attests to its enduring interest and importance for the subfield.

The fact of the matter is that presidents can, and often do, alter their structural confines and "restructure the political landscape" (Edwards 2000, 34). They do not always, of course, and certainly not always according to their own designs. But as a growing number of historical-institutional studies have shown, presidents have been instrumental in reorganizing social forces, rearranging political alliances, reconfiguring political structures and organizations, and altering institutional trajectories across the whole of American history (Arnold 2009; Cook and Polsky 2005; Galvin 2010; Ginsberg and Shefter 1988; Hacker and Pierson 2012; James 2000; McMahon 2004; Milkis 1993, 2009; Milkis and Tichenor 2011; Miroff 2003; Sanders 2007; Sheingate 2003; Skowronek 1993; Tulis 1987; Tulis and Mellow 2007; Whittington 2007;Whittington and Carpenter 2003; Wooley 2012). As Stephen Skowronek summarizes in his magisterial *The Politics Presidents Make* (1993, 4), the presidency is a "blunt, disruptive force" that routinely shakes up the basic contours of American politics. To be sure, some parts of the political landscape are more susceptible to change than others. But as these studies have shown, presidents are often powerful agents of change, and to exclude their potentially system-altering effects from the analysis is to miss out on some of the most important things they do.

Building on these historical-institutional insights, this article suggests an analytical framework for bringing presidential effects "back in" to the center of the analysis. It argues for a return to Moe's prescriptions in this regard, makes a few methodological suggestions for conducting historical research of this nature, and illustrates the potential gains by reconsidering some recent research into the relationship between presidential action and party development. The main argument is that without greater attention to how presidents contribute to the changing shape of the political landscape, appraisals of individual presidents, and of the broader significance of the presidency in American politics, will remain incomplete.

Structures, Incentives, and Resources

The basic analytical framework Moe laid out almost three decades ago remains a helpful starting point for anyone seeking to examine the formative effects of presidential action. To summarize briefly, Moe argued that presidents are driven to act by the degree of incongruence they perceive between existing structural arrangements, on one hand, and their incentives for leadership, on the other. Those structures and incentives are not usually in alignment, so presidents will use whatever resources they have at their disposal

to try to bridge the gap. The effects of their efforts, drawn out over time, encourage "certain paths of institutional development and certain patterns of institutional outcomes rather than others" (Moe 1985, 237).

This simple framework is useful, in part, because it is portable—it can illuminate the dynamics of structural change across a wide range of settings. It also helpfully focuses the empirical analysis: the researcher is advised to identify the structures the president seeks to change, examine why he wants to change them, assess the resources at his disposal, and trace the effects of his efforts over time. In Moe's study, for example, presidents find the structure of the "institutional presidency" dissatisfying; they want it to be more responsive to the White House and competent in its operations to help them demonstrate strong leadership; and their available resources include their appointment power and executive branch management authority. The steps they take to change it are "halting, highly imperfect, and nowhere near sufficient," but they do produce "incremental reforms—followed by endless adaptations to new circumstances—that aggregate to substantial change" (Moe 1985, 243-44).

Of course, presidents find many different types of structural arrangements dissatisfying and often have the incentives and resources to try to change them. Consider, for example, their parties. Upon entering office, presidents inherit various party structures—institutional, organizational, coalitional, and ideational arrangements—that they perceive to be incongruent with their individual goals and purposes. The party may stand for things the president does not like; it may *not* stand for things that the president wants it to stand for; it may be poorly equipped to carry out the activities he wants it to; the balance of power between party factions may be skewed in ways the president does not like; and so on. The degree of president-party incongruence will vary from incumbent to incumbent, but some level of dissatisfaction should always be expected.[4]

This presents a problem for the president, for the simple reason that he *needs* his party. In the short term, he needs it to help pursue his policy and electoral goals. In the long term, he needs it to help ensure that his policy goals are promoted even after he leaves office. To the extent that the president views his party as unable or unwilling to serve those functions, he has an incentive to try to change it, alter its bearings, reorient its operations, recast it in his image, or otherwise decrease the gap between what the party *is* and what he *wants it to be*. Indeed, the size of this perceived gap may be conceptualized as the driving force behind the president's efforts to alter his party.

So motivated, the president should be expected to summon the resources at his disposal to try to reshape his party. Though he does not technically hold a position in the party proper, the president has numerous resources that no other party leader possesses. First, he has an unparalleled ability to bring national attention to issues of importance to him, thereby altering his party's "brand" and changing its policy positions. This

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4. This tension has been conceptualized in different ways by different scholars. Some see it as a representation problem, where the president represents the whole and his party represents a part, yet the president is responsible to both; some see it as a leadership problem, where the president must negotiate tricky leader-follower dynamics; some see it as a classic principal-agent problem, where mechanisms of accountability are lacking. Whatever the reason, the president-party relationship is generally seen as fraught.

symbolic influence is formidable and can trigger myriad other changes throughout the party. Second, he can influence his party directly—through party management decisions, targeted expenditures, fundraising efforts, strategic appointments, stump speeches, and by personally influencing key party leaders and activists—thereby reshaping its agenda, altering the balance of power within the party, changing its operations, or redirecting its activities. Third, his White House management authority enables the president to develop systems of liaison, outreach practices, and other routines that enable him to modify the shape of the party network. All of these resources and more can be put to use in altering the party's status quo and shaping its developmental trajectory.

The tripartite framework of *structures, incentives*, and *resources* thus provides a useful starting point for examining how any given president might alter his party and shape its development. It focuses the investigation on four main questions: (1) Which party *structures* does the president find dissatisfying? (2) How strong are the president's *incentives* to change them? (3) What *resources* does he have to devote to the party-changing project? (4) What are the *effects* of his efforts to shrink the gap?

Brief Digression on Method

This final area of investigation—measuring the *effects* of presidential action—may be the most daunting for researchers and therefore warrants a brief digression on method. At issue is the knotty problem of causality. How to demonstrate that a presidential action, or a series of presidential actions, necessarily contributed to a specific observed change? No technique will be perfect, but one way to avoid common pitfalls is to begin with a clearly specified unit of analysis. Where will the researcher look for evidence of structural change over time (and where will s/he not look)? Which site(s) will be considered, and which will not? This is a pivotal decision that, when guided by theory, should put the researcher in the best position to observe the effects of presidential action over a lengthy period of time and draw inferences about the president's role in motivating those developments.

Careful site specification is important in all areas of study, but it is essential in the study of president-party relations, given the pervasive lack of consensus over the definition of "party." Common definitions range from "a team seeking to control the governing apparatus" (Downs 1957; Schlesinger 1991) to the entirety of the formal party apparatus (Cotter et al. 1984) to loosely structured "networks" or "long coalitions" of policy demanding groups (Bawn et al. 2012). It is critical to determine, up front, which definition or component of the party will serve as the primary focus of the analysis. For example, the investigation might choose to focus on presidential interactions with the party's national committee structures, with key interest groups in the broader "party network," with the party's national platform, with the congressional party's leadership selection processes, or with any other clearly specified area of the party. Naturally, trade-offs will be made in any such narrowing effort, but the upside is an improved capacity to systematically track changes in particular areas of the party as they unfold over

time, test theoretical propositions on comparable data over many years, and weigh the relative significance of each president's contribution.

In efforts to link presidential action to structural effects, researchers may also benefit from zeroing in on the decision-making processes of presidents themselves. Primary sources often reveal which options the president considered (as well as those he rejected) and which he did not even consider (or simply took for granted). Examining such deliberations over time and across administrations offers another way to demonstrate the downstream effects of earlier presidential efforts, with the added benefit that it keeps the analysis focused squarely on presidential behavior. If presidents are having their intended effects on the structures they wish to change, then each round of changes should alter the menu of options faced by their successors, removing certain options entirely while making others seem more or less costly (or attractive).

The onus, of course, is on the researcher to provide sufficient evidence to demonstrate that a given president would not have acted in the same manner, *but for* the efforts of his predecessors. On this point, there is simply no substitute for careful historical research. Indeed, this is where historically oriented research may add its greatest value to our understanding of presidents as agents of structural change: by tracking over-time developments in a transparent fashion and demonstrating how effects manifest over the long haul, the historical method can do what other methods are simply not equipped to do.

Further, by identifying mechanisms, processes, and sequences, by specifying necessary conditions, and by distinguishing long-term shifts from short-term fluctuations, historical research can make strong, well-substantiated claims regarding the significance of specific political phenomena. Fine-grained historical research can also turn up new findings that might otherwise have gone unnoticed and raise new questions that might not otherwise have been asked. Not every historically oriented study will make all of these contributions, of course. But theoretically driven research designs and transparent historical methods will put researchers in the most favorable position to do so.

Given space constraints, this article can only illustrate the utility of pairing the structures/incentives/resources framework with historical research in broad strokes. The next section thus reconsiders some recent research into the relationship between presidents and party development, using the tripartite framework to clarify the role presidents have played in promoting party change.

Presidents and Party Development

As noted, no single definition of "party" is used consistently throughout the literature. In part, this is because the parties' forms and functions have changed over the course of American history, and scholarly views have changed along with them. But as the following illustrations reveal, irrespective of which definition one chooses to use, presidents across American history regularly perceived their parties to be incongruent with their purposes, and this dissatisfaction led them to take concrete action to make

those parties more responsive to, and reflective of, their goals. Those efforts, repeated over time, became constitutive of several major party developments.

In the first study discussed below, parties are treated holistically, as composites of party-in-the-electorate, party-in-government, and party-as-organization. As we will see, this conceptualization proves useful in examining how presidents contributed to the "nationalization" of political parties and the rise of presidential party leadership in the late nineteenth century. The second study zeroes in on the party-as-organization, examining presidential efforts to reconfigure party structures around the middle of the twentieth century. Their efforts, discussed below, were instrumental in gradually bringing about the modern "party in service." The third study, treating the party as a "network" or a "long coalition" of groups and organizations, considers how presidential efforts to strengthen ties to interest groups in the short term had long-term consequences for the growth of "special interest partisanship" (see Krimmel, 2012, 2013). Each study illustrates how the structures/incentives/resources framework enhances our understanding of presidents as agents of change.

Party Nationalization and the Emergence of Presidential Party Leadership

For most of the nineteenth century, the decentralized structure of the Jacksonian party system acted as a constraint on presidential ambition. Patronage practices, nominating rules, and norms of deference to subnational party units limited the areas in which presidents could influence their parties and, perhaps most significantly, deprived them of the tools to ensure their own renominations. It was not until the 1880s and 1890s that presidents began to break free from those constraints and assert *leadership* over their parties. In a recent study, Daniel Klinghard (2010) explains that this change in the president's role was part of, and integral to, a broader shift in the nature of the party system—what Klinghard terms the "nationalization" of the political parties. In those two decades, the scope of national presidential campaigns underwent a dramatic expansion; new modes of mass political communication were employed; new expectations developed regarding national party unity; and new organizational capacities were built at the national level of the parties. Late nineteenth-century presidents contributed to these changes and were the primary benefactors of them. Drawing upon newly emergent resources, they began to more regularly initiate, articulate, and promote their parties' national policy commitments—thereby reversing the flow of influence between the presidency and the parties. Though it happened incrementally over the span of about 20 years, Klinghard describes this reversal as a developmental shift of the first order.

To be sure, multiple forces propelled the nationalization of the parties and the accompanying shift in president-party relations, and the aim here is not to privilege one explanatory factor (presidents) over others. Our interest is in clarifying the role presidents played in pushing these developments along. *What* did they do, *why* did they do it, and *with what effects*? To get at these questions, the structures/incentives/resources framework is quite helpful. By bringing the incongruity between inherited party structures and presidential incentives into clearer view and by taking stock of the evolving resources available to each president, it helps to illuminate the dynamics of presidential action and

clarify the relationship between those actions and the emerging mode of presidential party leadership. Klinghard's detailed historical investigation lends itself nicely to this type of analysis.

Structures. Grover Cleveland did not set out to "nationalize" his party; indeed, it is not even clear that he found the Jacksonian organizational mode's restraints on presidential authority all that frustrating. Though Cleveland's actions ultimately helped to loosen the constraints that decentralized party structures and norms of "deferential compromise" imposed on presidents, those constraints were not the main source of his discontent (Klinghard 2010). In his first term (1885-89), Cleveland was mainly dissatisfied with the structure of his party's policy agenda—specifically, its traditional approach to tariff policy, then the central political issue of the day.

The Democratic platform of 1884 advocated a reduction in tariff rates—the party's stated objective was to bring rates to the lowest possible level to fund "economical government."[5] Indeed, every national Democratic Party platform since the Civil War had taken precisely the same stance. But time and again this central plank was exposed as little more than rhetoric, as a minority bloc of northern Democrats joined with Republicans to kill any tariff reform bill that came for a vote. Curiously, though, this minority bloc not some renegade faction: the leader of the Democratic protectionists, Samuel Randall, was elected to serve as House speaker from 1876-81. Nor was the faction small: its members cast 17% of all Democratic votes on tariff bills between 1878 and 1888 (Bensel 2000, 470). The Democratic Party, in other words, relied on this bloc of industrial Democrats to form a majority in the House. Tolerating party disunity on the tariff was thus a coalitional imperative. But however rational it may have been for the legislative wing of the party, it was a source of great frustration for the new president.

Incentives. For Cleveland, the status quo in his party was dissatisfying for several reasons. First, it offended his personal commitments: Cleveland had long been opposed to the idea of protectionism as well as its economic effects. Second, it undermined the Democrats' credibility and added weight to the Republican claim that Democrats were incapable of governing. Third, it left his administration vulnerable to being blamed for any economic downturn that might result from a monetary contraction, which was possible should tariff revenues continue to swell while government spending declined. Fourth, the party's failure to deliver on tariff reform prevented Cleveland from using it as a coalition-building tool. If the party stood firmly against protectionism, it could demonstrate to western agrarians—the key group of swing voters in that era—that the party had something to offer them. Western agrarians may have disliked Cleveland's position on the currency, but they detested the artificially high prices on consumer products generated by high tariffs even more. Acting forcefully on tariff reform might

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5. "Democratic Party Platform of 1884," July 8, 1884, *Political Party Platforms*, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29583.

therefore attract more votes in that critical region, disrupting the Republican coalition and reducing the Democrats' traditional dependence on party machines in states like New York. Taken all together, then, a shift in the party's approach on the issue held the potential to directly benefit Cleveland's various political purposes, including renomination and reelection. Although very few nineteenth-century presidents had received a second nomination, Cleveland realized that if he took the lead in disciplining the Democratic Party on this issue, he might be able to "establish his reputation as a party leader," thereby making himself indispensable to his party and ensuring his renomination (Klinghard 2010, 166).

Resources. What Cleveland could do to advance his goals depended on the resources he had available to him. Cleveland found two resources particularly useful: the President's annual message to Congress on the state of the Union and the increasingly popular "educational" campaign, which had become widespread during the "associational explosion" in the years following the Civil War. The latter involved Cleveland's adoption of a new style of communication; the former involved using an old institution in a new way.

Every president since George Washington had delivered an annual message to Congress, following the constitutional directive that the president "shall from time to time give to the Congress Information of the State of the Union, and recommend to their Consideration such Measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient." Traditionally, these messages reviewed "the entire public business"—but as Cleveland observed, there was no requirement that they always do so. Cleveland's innovation was thus to devote his entire 1887 message to a single subject—tariff reform. This break with tradition drew considerable attention, which was precisely Cleveland's intention. Klinghard explains that Cleveland strategically sought to "grab popular attention, inviting public comment and giving the party-in-the-electorate reason to read the message in the privacy of their homes—it was the 'campaign of education' applied to presidential leadership" (Klinghard 2010, 167).

An early adoption of the modern strategy of "going public"—making direct appeals to voters so that they might pressure members of Congress to join with the president—Cleveland sought to shift public opinion in his favor. He was operating on the assumption that "if the public could only understand the actual situation [with respect to tariff reform], there would be an influence upon Congress which would effect the necessary reforms."[6] But Cleveland's message was also targeted at fellow partisans; he wanted his message to serve as a "guide" in upcoming elections. Of course, the Democratic platform *already* stood for tariff reform, so what Cleveland's message did was to raise the salience of the issue, "goading" Democrats to take a firm stand in favor of reform prior to the election. In this roundabout way, Cleveland sought to make subsequent legislative action more likely (Klinghard 2010, 166-67).

6. Richard Watson Gilder, quoted in Klinghard (2010, 167).

Effects. Cleveland's message did not result in the enactment of any major policy reform, but it was successful in committing the Democratic Party, "till then but half-hearted," to a radical downward revision of tariff rates.[7] Congressional Democrats mobilized for tariff reform, and on relevant roll call votes in the House between 1888 and 1897, the oppositional Democratic bloc disappeared completely. Some were replaced by Republicans after the 1888 elections, but Cleveland's effect on his party was clear: over 30 state party conventions endorsed tariff reform, many mentioning Cleveland by name; and the leader of the Democratic protectionists, Randall, was rebuked by his own state party and local party club (Bensel 2000, 471; Klinghard 2010, 169). Cleveland's message was also instrumental in ensuring his renomination in 1888. By tying himself so closely to the tariff reform issue, he required of his party "either an about-face on the tariff or a difficult effort to explain how another nominee better represented the party's stance" (Klinghard 2010, 171).

Though Cleveland lost the 1888 election (despite winning the popular vote), he remained the most popular figure in the party and in 1892 was renominated an unprecedented third time. Cleveland again assumed the mantle of party leader and presented himself as "a president who claimed distinct authority to define partisan purposes" (Klinghard 2010, 176-77). He helped to write the party platform, was personally involved in orchestrating the 1892 campaign, and upon his reelection, claimed to have received a mandate to carry out the party's objectives (Conley 2001, 55).

Cleveland's multiple assertions of party authority set important precedents, Klinghard argues. Most important was the lesson in leadership that Cleveland had provided to his successors—that "the presidential capacity to define party objectives was a valuable partisan tool" (Klinghard 2010, 171). Through skillful presidential leadership, he demonstrated that the president could "pressure the subnational party establishment" to promote *his* goals, thereby reversing the flow of influence and breaking with the traditional "Jacksonian mode" of president-party relations. Moreover, Cleveland showed *how* to do it: the critical move, as Klinghard describes it, was his appropriation and application of the "language and style of the educational campaign," made familiar by national interest group associations, to presidential politics. This new mode of communication enabled him to bypass traditional constraints on presidential leadership and assert independent authority (Klinghard 2010, 168).

In addition, Cleveland's action contributed to the development of a new *idea* of party. In the new conceptualization, political parties would be more responsive to public opinion and more willing to shift positions "according to changing issues." Instead of adhering to fixed principles and prioritizing "deferential compromise" among elites over responsiveness to voters, parties would now prioritize voter interests and policy substance (Klinghard 2010, 174). Further, Cleveland's actions suggested that presidents (and presidential candidates) could serve as the critical links between the parties and the voters, both *listening to* and *shaping* public opinion. By taking the initiative, articulating the party's policy agenda, disciplining party members to follow it, and educating the

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7. Quote from historian F. W. Taussig, in Klinghard (2010, 170).

citizenry regarding its importance, Cleveland had demonstrated that presidential leadership was indispensable to the party. Thereafter, "both voters and party leaders looked to the candidates to articulate party doctrine" (Klinghard 2010, 175).

The transformation of president-party relations was far from complete, however. Cleveland had demonstrated that presidents could seize upon available resources to move their parties into closer alignment with their views, but his efforts were more of a foreshadowing of what was to come than the commencement of a path-dependent process. Klinghard argues that it fell to Cleveland's successors, especially William Jennings Bryan (the Democratic nominee in 1896) and President William McKinley, to flesh out the new mode of presidential party leadership we find so familiar today.

Because Klinghard's main focus is the nationalization of the parties, he does not explicitly discuss the causal links between presidential actions, their effects, and subsequent presidential behavior. He does offer strong suggestions, however, that Cleveland's bold assertions of party leadership were *necessary conditions* for Bryan and McKinley to do the same, and that taken all together, the behaviors of all three fundamentally altered the trajectory of president-party relations. Cleveland's influence is detected, for example, in Bryan's ability to run a national campaign that circumvented recalcitrant state party organizations, which Klinghard notes was "only possible because the party had become flexible and independent under Cleveland" (2010, 189). Similarly, Cleveland's crusade on behalf of tariff reform is said to have "paved the way" for Bryan's crusade on behalf of silver, partly because Cleveland had "introduced the Democratic party to the kind of interest-based economic appeals that Bryan would expand" and partly because Cleveland had alienated the silver movement and allowed it to build up steam (Klinghard 2010, 190). Likewise, Bryan's legendary speaking tour during the 1896 campaign is described as a logical next step in the gradual routinization of candidate-centered campaigns. Bryan's campaign "was no surprise," Klinghard writes, "and should be viewed as the culmination of two decades of party transformation" (2010, 184). Bryan's efforts "displayed just how central presidential candidates had become to their parties, and how thoroughly party leaders had accepted the campaign of education" (Klinghard 2010, 187).

But Bryan's campaign in 1896 was more than just a repeat performance—he also made his own distinctive contributions to the development of modern president-party relations. Like Cleveland, whose attempt to reduce the incongruity between existing party structures and his incentives for leadership contributed to a long-term rearrangement of authority in the party system, Bryan's pursuit of a major shift in the party's stance on monetary policy (the inherited party structure with which *he* was most dissatisfied) had major long-term ramifications for the way citizens understood the role of party in American politics. Bryan's efforts, Klinghard writes, "shaped the way Americans viewed the national party organizations. The old view of the national parties as grounded in deferential compromise and restrained by local organizations was challenged by a view that recognized the primacy of the national candidate as central to the party's message" (2010, 189).

McKinley, the victor of the 1896 election, is also said to have learned directly from Cleveland's example. "Following Cleveland's lead," Klinghard writes, McKinley further established "a role for the presidency in holding his party accountable to party

commitments." In particular, McKinley's landmark speech on the gold standard in 1898, just like Cleveland's 1887 message, "was meant for the public as much as its immediate audience." It, too, was designed to shrink the gap between the party he inherited and the party he wanted. Also an educational appeal to the public, McKinley's speech aimed to discipline the Republican Party in Congress and end its vacillation on the most pressing policy issue of the day (Klinghard 2010, 232-33).

Various other actions taken by McKinley—including his letter accepting renomination in 1900, in which he claimed the prerogative to define his party's purposes on his own terms—likewise demonstrated that "Democratic-style presidential party leadership had been fully embraced by the Republican Party." The GOP had been "inching slowly toward the new idea of party that this style implied" for decades, Klinghard writes, with its evolution culminating in "McKinley's full embodiment of the modern president as party leader" (2010, 234).

Klinghard argues further that McKinley's "example influenced later presidents— and later American publics," both anticipating and helping to legitimize Theodore Roosevelt's assertions of presidential authority. Though TR was undoubtedly a unique individual with bold ideas of his own, Klinghard contends that it was "McKinley's presidency [which] showcased the mode of presidential party leadership that came to dominate the twentieth century . . . Roosevelt got away with it not because of his personality but because party leaders had, by then, learned a lot about the value of presidential party leadership" (2010, 234).

As these brief examples suggest, by working to reduce the incongruity between inherited party structures and their incentives for leadership, presidents and presidential candidates in the 1880s and 1890s contributed to the gradual nationalization of political parties and the emergence of a new mode of presidential party leadership. As parties expanded the scope of their campaigns, emphasized more concrete policy issues, and adopted new communication techniques, they enabled presidents to assert more authority, which further contributed to the nationalization of their parties. These were mutually reinforcing patterns that depended on the persistent efforts of presidents and presidential candidates to modify inherited arrangements so as to make them more congruent with their purposes. Though Klinghard does not use these specific terms, those presidential efforts would appear to be historically necessary conditions for the *timing* and *form* of party change as it occurred (Whittington and Carpenter 2003).

To be sure, further historical work is needed to clarify the causal links between presidential actions, their effects, and subsequent actions. To pinpoint exactly how presidents were constrained or motivated by earlier presidential efforts (as well as how they subsequently constrained or motivated their successors), a narrower site specification is probably necessary, with more space devoted to substantiating causal claims. But what Klinghard achieves is significant. In addition to posing a formidable challenge to the received wisdom regarding the timing of party nationalization and the emergence of the modern presidency, he makes an important contribution to our collective theory-building enterprise. His study reinforces the notion that discrete presidential actions, often undertaken for instrumental, short-term purposes, can incrementally but cumulatively contribute to major shifts in the structure and role of party in the long term.

Republican Presidents and the Emergence of the Modern "Party in Service"

In Klinghard's (2010) study, multiple concepts of "party" are employed simultaneously. Late nineteenth-century presidents are shown to have disciplined and reshaped their party in Congress, reconfigured their party coalition in the electorate, altered the party's national policy commitments, contributed to a shift in public expectations regarding the role of party, and made changes to their parties' formal structures. Taking a narrower view, my own research zeroes in on the relationship between presidents and the "party-as-organization" (Galvin 2010). It asks, in the latter half of the twentieth century, how did presidents interact with their formal party organizations, and with what effect?

It finds that while every modern president found his inherited party structures dissatisfying and ill equipped to help him deliver on his sky-high expectations for leadership, Democratic and Republican presidents differed greatly in *how* they approached their party organizations. Whereas Democratic presidents tended to ignore or undercut their party, Republican presidents worked consistently to enhance their party's organizational capacities. This behavioral divergence, I argue, had important consequences for each party's trajectory of organizational development.

Several consequences are examined in the book. Due to space constraints, only one is discussed here: by consistently making constructive investments in their party's campaign-oriented capacities, Republican presidents accelerated their party's transformation into what John Aldrich (1995, 7) has termed a "party in service" to its candidates. Whereas the national parties once consisted of loosely structured networks with little institutional presence, over the course of the twentieth century they became increasingly institutionalized, routinized, and organizationally capable. Modern "parties in service" are usually identified by the significant fundraising, data analysis, communications, research, and other campaign-oriented services they are now able to offer their candidates—"that only the Kennedys, Rockefellers, Perots, and movement leaders may otherwise posses," Aldrich writes (Aldrich 1995, 273; see also Cotter and Bibby 1980; Cotter et al. 1984; Galvin 2012; Herrnson 1988, 2002; Kayden and Mahe 1985; Schlesinger 1985).

Thanks in part to the contributions of Republican presidents, this transformation began almost 50 years earlier in the Republican Party than in the Democratic Party. In the intervening decades, a conspicuous organizational imbalance between the two national parties emerged. Though it did not necessarily determine election outcomes, it meant that Republican candidates had access to in-house campaign resources, technical advantages, and other operational efficiencies that were unavailable to Democratic candidates through their party. The GOP's superior campaign service capacities provided incentives for Republicans to "turn to" their party rather than extrapartisan alternatives, encouraged upstart Republican candidates to challenge long-serving Democratic incumbents, and altered many other campaign behaviors as well.

To draw out the contributions Republican presidents made to this important development, the following discussion reframes some of the historical research presented in the book using Moe's tripartite framework. Doing so helps to more efficiently

summarize the historical material while shining the spotlight on the formative potential of presidential action. Still, the present discussion can only review a few presidents' interactions with their party organization. Dwight D. Eisenhower, Richard M. Nixon, and Gerald R. Ford are chosen for attention here—in part, because they constitute somewhat surprising cases of presidential party leadership, in part because their efforts represented critical stages in the GOP's transformation into a "service" party.

Structures. Eisenhower, Nixon, and Ford did not set out to transform the "role" of party in American politics. Their interests were more instrumental: they were frustrated by their party's weak competitive standing and concerned about the threat it posed to their short and long-term goals. Each perceived the structure of his party organization to be part of the problem—it had not been able to help Republican candidates win enough elections—but also a potential part of the solution. Equipping it with enhanced campaign service capacities offered one way to give Republican candidates an edge in their electoral campaigns.

Though each president inherited an increasingly capable party organization, each discovered numerous organizational problems worthy of redress. Eisenhower, for example, inherited a party organization that had changed from a "skeletal operation of episodic significance" into a "well-staffed organization with budget and program, operating 12 months in the year" (Cotter 1983, 265), but it operated more like a think tank—most adept at supplying congressmen with policy research—than a reliable electoral resource for an ambitious president. The party organization inherited by Nixon was far more organizationally adept than the one inherited by Eisenhower, but Nixon was continually frustrated by what he perceived to be its inadequate responsiveness to the White House and deficient campaign support capacities. Likewise, Nixon bequeathed to Ford a party structure with many more campaign services, training programs, and analytic capacities than it had ever had in the past, yet Ford believed that much more needed to be done if the party was to expand its electoral reach and improve the quality of the services it offered. All three presidents thus found their inherited party structures to be inadequate for their purposes and in need of attention and significant investment.

Incentives. But why even bother with their party? Why not just go it alone and make the best of divided government? The problem was that their party's weak competitive standing stood as an obstacle to the fulfillment of their ambitions. In the short term, its minority status in Congress jeopardized their policy objectives and forced them to make difficult substantive compromises; in the long term, the absence of a strong "farm team" at the state and local level and the lack of partisan support in the electorate decreased the likelihood that their commitments would be sustained and perpetuated after they left office. Those pressures provided incentives for Eisenhower, Nixon, and Ford to try to change the GOP's image, expand its reach, and equip it to win more elections. Eisenhower's determination to remake his party into a "Modern" Republican Party—in program, policy, and image—reflected precisely those concerns. So too did Nixon's effort to build a "New Majority," which he immodestly hoped would promote his brand of

politics and dominate American politics for a generation or more. Ford's vision was less grand, but repairing the damage done to his party by the Watergate scandal similarly promised to redress multiple concerns simultaneously.

To be sure, all three presidents sought to improve their party's competitive standing through nonorganizational measures as well—via new policy initiatives, new rhetorical strategies, the appointment of new personnel, new public liaison programs, and more—but as a tactic, enhancing their party's organizational machinery had much to recommend it. For one thing, a more capable party organization could conduct more effective voter registration drives, get-out-the-vote programs, and activist enrollment initiatives, which promised to grow the party's support in the electorate. Offering training programs and campaign assistance for state and local parties, likewise, helped the party recruit higher-quality candidates and encourage them to run for office even when they faced long odds. These and other organization-building initiatives thus offered a direct way to improve the party's probabilities of electoral success, thereby advancing the president's short- and long-term goals simultaneously.

Resources. Each president drew upon the same key resources to advance their party-building projects: their authority as the titular leader of their party, their national prestige, and their unique fundraising abilities. Those resources enabled them to set strategic priorities in their party organization and make critical managerial and spending decisions that altered their party's structures, processes, and activities.

Eisenhower exploited each of these resources as he sought to remake his party into what he called a "Modern" Republican Party. His party-building initiatives involved overhauling the Republican National Committee's (RNC) organizational structure and placing greater emphasis on publicity and public relations, two GOP "Campaign Schools" held in 1955 and 1958 designed to train party personnel in campaign management techniques, a "Republican Recruit" program to build the GOP's corps of volunteer activists, and several field-assistance programs and other support services for state parties. Eisenhower was also personally involved in launching and then continually promoting several new national fundraising programs, door-to-door solicitation drives, candidate recruitment initiatives, and a series of regional conferences to build party unity and disseminate organizational best practices.

These and other efforts were designed to reduce the gap Eisenhower perceived between the party he inherited and the party he wanted. In 1952, the RNC was stacked with lifelong conservative Republicans and organized primarily to serve the needs of congressmen. It had little to offer in the areas of campaign management training, activist enrollment, public relations expertise, data collection, or fundraising. By the time Eisenhower left office, the party was not only more responsive to the White House—and its national committee was stocked with "Eisenhower Republicans"—but it was able to offer a growing number of useful campaign services to Republican candidates at all levels of the party. It is worth emphasizing that Eisenhower's main objective was *not* to transform his party into a "party in service." He simply sought to bring his party into greater congruence with his principles and policy goals, expand its appeal in the electorate, and enhance its electoral competitiveness in the short and medium term. The

party's growing service capacities were *byproducts* of his efforts to reduce the incongruity he perceived between existing party structures and his incentives for leadership.

Between 1961 and 1968, "out-party" RNC chairmen continued to invest in the same organization-building priorities that Eisenhower had emphasized in the 1950s, including campaign management training, improved fundraising capabilities, candidate and activist recruitment, and state party support (Bibby 1994; Bibby and Huckshorn 1968; Galvin 2012; Klinkner 1994). The formal party apparatus Nixon inherited in 1969 was thus better equipped to provide campaign services to Republican candidates than ever before. Yet the party remained in the minority in Congress and fared no better at the state and local level. Nixon was deeply pessimistic about its chances of regaining majority status during his tenure and even contemplated starting a new party in his image that would co-opt and replace the GOP. But after much deliberation, Nixon concluded that the existing Republican Party organization offered the best hope for building a new political force. The party would have to change, of course, but Nixon was determined to "revitalize the Republican Party along New Majority lines"(Nixon 1978, 764).

In his first term, Nixon and his team launched multiple new initiatives at the RNC to recruit new, quality candidates, enhance the party's technological and analytical capacities; develop more efficient and effective fundraising systems; provide field teams and task forces to help state parties; create more efficient voter registration, get-out-the-vote, and redistricting programs; teach campaign management techniques; build the ranks of volunteer activists; and in various others ways, turn the RNC into more of "a service organization" (quoted in Galvin 2010, 80).

Following his landslide reelection victory in 1972, Nixon's determination to manufacture a partisan realignment led him to redouble his commitment to party organization-building. Central to this effort was refocusing the RNC on candidate recruitment and campaign management. His new team at the RNC (led by future president George H. W. Bush) made significant headway in building new organizational capacities, and by the time Nixon resigned, the party's biggest problem was in the realm of public relations, not organization—the national party was better able to conduct campaigns and provide services to candidates and subnational party units than ever before.

The Nixon case serves as a useful reminder that when we consider a president's effect on institutional development, it is critical that his various successes and failures on other fronts do not distract from the relationship of interest. For example, as Moe (1985) shows, irrespective of his scandals, dramas, and ultimate political collapse, Nixon made incremental contributions to the centralization of White House structures and the politicization of executive branch agencies. The same lesson emerges here: despite his political problems unfolding elsewhere, Nixon made important contributions to the RNC's transformation into a "party in service."

When Ford assumed office in August 1974, the Republican Party's public support was at an all-time low. This presented a real problem for Ford: as the first unelected president, Ford had no electoral base of his own; he had little choice but to rely on his party to help him build his political support. Furthermore, in the context of large Democratic congressional majorities, Ford had little chance to leave a policy legacy of his

own designs. Reviving his party thus offered one way in which he might establish a meaningful political legacy for himself, whatever the outcome in 1976. Although the incongruity between inherited party *structures* and the president's *incentives* may have been somewhat smaller for Ford than for his predecessors, thanks to the improved condition of the party organization he inherited, he still had several good reasons to make further investments in his party's campaign-oriented capacities.

Ford's political team drew up an extensive "party-building program" to guide the RNC's activities in 1975-76. The objectives remained the same as they were under Nixon: to continue equipping the RNC to provide institutional support and campaign-related services to state and local party organizations and candidates. The next two years saw many incremental changes: the RNC expanded its field programs, undertook new candidate recruitment campaigns (in which Ford participated personally), upgraded its data analysis capacities, developed new polling services for candidates and party organizations, expanded its Campaign Management College (CMC), made fundraising innovations, launched several direct mail initiatives; and Ford went on a 23-state campaign to raise funds for indebted state parties. In each of these areas, Ford and his team took the up-and-running initiatives they inherited from Nixon at the RNC and expanded them, thereby contributing to the committee's gradual transformation into a party-in-service.

Effects. Organizational development at the RNC involved piecemeal investments and incremental changes in the party's structural forms and operational capacities as it changed hands from Eisenhower in the 1950s to the "out-party" chairmen of the 1960s to Nixon to Ford. Whether in pursuit of Eisenhower's Modern Republicanism, Nixon's "New Majority," or Ford's goal of party revival, the small changes introduced by each president contributed to a major shift in the party's ostensible "functions." As such, what Aldrich (1995) has described as a wholly new kind of party—a "party in service" to its candidates—emerged only slowly, as each round of investments built upon prior rounds to endow the party with expanded organizational capacities. When Ronald Reagan assumed the presidency in 1981, the RNC was much more of a service-oriented political organization than it had ever been before. But it is not possible to specify a date when the party was officially "transformed." Its development was a gradual, cumulative, ongoing process, and as Reagan's team discovered, the party organization required additional investments if it was to continue to be an effective resource (Galvin 2010).

Evaluating presidents strictly in terms of their ability to maximize their utility within fixed constraints obscures effects like these, which unfold over long periods of time. Analyses that examine presidents in isolation from one another or that treat each "game" as wholly independent of the last will surely miss out on them. Historical research, by examining patterns and sequences of presidential action over longer spans of time, enriches our understanding of individual presidents and illuminates the role of the presidency in institutional development. It allows us to view Eisenhower as a complex actor whose mix of incentives and structural constraints led him to make important contributions to his party's evolution into a more service-oriented party. It enables us to understand Nixon not just as a tragic figure who brought the GOP to a new low but as a president whose outsized ambitions were channeled into a major party-building

campaign with lasting effects. It portrays Ford's otherwise brief and unremarkable tenure as an important step forward in the Republican Party's functional transformation. A historically oriented approach, in short, enables us to view the presidency not just as a proving ground for strategic actors seeking to outmaneuver their opponents and score quick wins but as a persistent force in the broader logic of institutional change.

Republican Presidents and the Party Network

Political parties, however, consist of more than just the Democratic National Committee, RNC, state parties, and other formal party structures. As a growing body of scholarship has demonstrated, they may also fruitfully be envisioned as informal party "networks" or "long coalitions" that are comprised of formal party structures *and* interest groups, advocacy organizations, private companies, nonprofits, and myriad other groups and actors that regularly work toward common purposes (Bawn et al. 2012; Cohen et al. 2008; Koger, Masket, and Noel 2009; Masket 2009). Most effort, thus far, has been put toward defining these networks and establishing their existence. Partly because of this careful work—and partly because recent changes in the campaign finance system have thrust them into the political spotlight—the value of this more expansive definition of party is no longer seriously questioned. Parties *are* usefully conceptualized as networks, and when viewed as such, they can illuminate a great deal about the workings of American politics. In the present inquiry, treating parties as networks offers a useful third lens through which to view presidents as agents of party development.

In fascinating new work in this vein, Katherine Krimmel (2012, 2013) finds that Republican presidents, in repeated efforts to bring inherited structural arrangements into closer alignment with their incentives, were instrumental in forging tighter bonds between the GOP and its many allied interest groups over the last four decades.[8] In their efforts to leverage groups' communications capacities, membership networks, information assets, and other key resources on behalf of presidential purposes in the short term, Krimmel finds that Nixon, Ford, and Reagan made important contributions to the growth of the Republican Party's "long coalition" in the long term. Their efforts to systematize and routinize party-group interactions in the White House Office of Public Liaison gave them enhanced access to the groups' valuable financial and informational resources as well as critical assistance in organizing, mobilizing, and publicity. This development was part and parcel of what Krimmel terms the rise of "special interest partisanship"—the movement from less structured, "pluralist" party-group relations to more institutionalized, long-term linkages that hold together modern party networks.[9]

Structures. As discussed in the preceding section, Republican presidents in the post–New Deal era were consistently dissatisfied with the capabilities of the party organization they inherited from their predecessors. Their constructive organizational

8. I thank Katherine Krimmel for generously giving permission to discuss her work in this article.

9. Emphasizing the efficiency gains and competitive pressures driving the formalization of party-group relations, Krimmel (2012, 2013) offers an innovative new theoretical framework and uses it to guide her historical research.

investments were made in the hopes of bringing those structures into closer alignment with their purposes. Specifically, they hoped that improved campaign-oriented capacities would help Republican candidates win more elections, which would benefit them in myriad ways. The formal party organization, however, did not have an exclusive claim on electoral outreach, candidate recruitment, or voter contact. The political landscape was also populated by thousands of interest groups that had their own capacities to mobilize and communicate with citizens. Traditionally, however, most of those interest groups were nonpartisan or bipartisan, either staying out of politics altogether or working with both parties to advance their causes. Presidents interacted with them frequently, but with few exceptions (organized labor for the Democrats, business groups for the Republicans), they were not reliable partners—group leaders were more likely to place demands on presidents than serve as loyal and dependable allies in electoral and legislative campaigns. President-group relations could thus be described as loose and "pluralistic" (Krimmel 2013; see also Neustadt 1990 [1960]). Even when interest groups shared the president's motives and purposes, their assets remained beyond his reach and outside his control—not only were they formally independent, but neither the president nor his party had institutionalized processes for interacting and coordinating with them. The traditional structure of group relations, in other words, was a source of frustration for presidents—especially Republican presidents, who urgently sought new ways of expanding their political support.

Incentives. To the extent that Nixon, Ford, and Reagan were dissatisfied with their party's minority status and by their inability to reach voters more generally, they had strong incentives to try to harness interest groups for their own purposes. With established networks of loyal supporters and significant informational and organizational capacities, interest groups represented potentially valuable party-building resources: they were "well positioned to help parties understand how to appeal to new constituencies and address new issue areas" (Krimmel 2012, 36). The perception that the formal Republican Party organization was not quite up to the task likely only intensified each president's motivation to reach out more aggressively to interest groups and develop more systematic relations with them.

Resources. The most important resource available to these presidents as they set out to build stronger connections to interest groups was their executive branch management authority. By rearranging staff, assigning responsibilities for group liaison, and creating new White House offices, they were able to institutionalize and systematize group outreach. As Krimmel details, each president used this authority to move from more pluralistic to more institutionalized relations with groups.

The White House inherited by Nixon lacked any formalized processes of group liaison. But as discussed above, Nixon had high majority-building ambitions and was determined to find new sources of political support. In his first year, Nixon and his team thus set out to more systematically "understand, organize and draw upon the resources of the domestic political substructure and to further the President's objectives and policies" (cited in Krimmel 2012, 37). Nixon charged Special Counsel Charles Colson with

primary responsibility for overseeing group liaison. Colson's strategy was twofold: to engage with organized groups when the payoff was clear but otherwise to circumvent them and attempt to contact voters directly.

The direct voter-contact strategy seemed to stem from the Nixon administration's general distrust of outside sources. Preferring unfiltered information and unmediated communication with voters, Nixon's team commissioned its own polls and sought to create its own organizations to connect with groups. Foreshadowing what would become a common tactic in contemporary national presidential campaigns—making "microtargeted" appeals to voters with messages tailored to their specific demographic characteristics or patterns of interest—Nixon and his team sought to bypass traditional organizations and their leaders (such as labor union leaders who usually allied with Democrats) and contact their memberships directly (Krimmel 2012).

Still, Nixon and Colson acknowledged that many organized groups had information assets and communication capacities that could not otherwise be matched by the White House or the Republican Party. When interacting with groups, the Nixon White House therefore sought to extract as much information as it could—on subjects ranging from group members' preferences to opposition research on candidates to the identification of talented potential appointees. Further, by generating coverage of the president's meetings with group leaders in "special interest publications," the White House found that it could reach "specific parts of the electorate at little to no cost." Catholic newspapers, for example, reached 50 million people, and to the extent that they covered Nixon favorably, they offered a useful way to reach many more potentially persuadable voters. In all of these ways, Colson's work demonstrated the importance of having a "centralized liaison" in the White House and served as "an important building block for the expansion of group-party relations under Ford" (Krimmel 2012, 37-41).

Ford took the concept of centralized liaison to new heights by establishing the Office of Public Liaison (OPL). The "OPL was a party-building institution, consistent with other efforts to strengthen the party during this time," Krimmel writes. "Like other Republican presidents, who viewed their party as the minority, Ford was not only concerned about his own re-election, but also party fortunes over the long term" (2012, 44). By institutionalizing group outreach in the OPL, the Ford administration ensured that it would be in constant two-way contact with organized groups. Though it had only a small staff and a limited budget, Ford's OPL demonstrated that presidents had the capacity to durably alter the structure of party-group relations and bring them more into line with their incentives.

In what Krimmel describes as "a major step away from pluralism into routinization on the group-party continuum" (2012, 42), the OPL conducted weekly meetings in which it brought to the White House representatives from interest groups ranging the spectrum of American society—from veterans' groups to volunteer organizations to grocery manufacturers to business women. The meetings offered the administration a chance to collect useful information on group interests, a more systematic means of reaching their memberships, and a forum for group leaders to weigh in on the administration's policy decisions. The OPL also held regional field conferences twice a month to communicate with a wider range of groups at the local level.

Structurally, then, Ford's OPL operation began to close the gap that had long existed between presidents and interest groups. But while the OPL offered the president the *opportunity* to exploit group resources for his own purposes, it did not guarantee successful outcomes. Indeed, it is far from clear, for example, that the Ford administration was able to convince groups to side with the White House on pressing policy issues. Krimmel does find evidence of influence running in the other direction, however: the Ford administration evidently embraced a more conservative stance on abortion at least in part because its interactions with Catholic groups convinced it that there were electoral gains to be had by more clearly distinguishing the Republican position from the Democratic position on the issue. Some early signs of partisan polarization can therefore be observed in the growing solidification of party-group relations in the mid-1970s.

The Reagan administration picked up where the Ford administration left off. But rather than cast a wide net and seek to provide liaison "to all private organizations" as Ford had done, Reagan and his team pursued a narrower strategy of engaging aggressively with "a rather small and ideological homogeneous collection of groups." Specifically, Christian conservative groups, gun rights groups, and right-to-work groups were targeted for intensive liaison. This effort to construct a more ideological homogeneous party network represented a turning point in president-group relations, Krimmel finds, marking the "beginning of a long coalition that still exists today." Importantly, however, she emphasizes that this was not an ideologically driven project, but the result of "strategic party-building" by Reagan and his team (Krimmel 2012, 50).

In the hopes of building a durable new Republican majority that would capitalize on Reagan's popularity and extend the GOP's recent gains in the 1980 elections, Reagan's OPL put particular effort into building ties to Christian conservative religious groups, recognizing that those groups had well-developed infrastructures and unparalleled capacities to communicate with, and persuade, their memberships. The Moral Majority, for example, regularly reached tens of millions of Americans and had a budget that exceeded the RNC's. Conveying messages through such organized groups was thought to be more effective than "going public" strategies that relied on more traditional "left-leaning" media outlets to get the word out. Thus, religious groups offered "what unions had long provided for Democrats: a solid grassroots network and coalition anchor" (Krimmel 2012, 51).

Like Ford's team, Reagan's OPL discovered that the best way to leverage conservative groups' organizational capacities and vast networks for the administration's party-building purposes was to stake out clear positions on issues of importance to the groups, and to do so in a way that distinguished Republicans from Democrats and made the former appear to be the groups' stalwart allies. By linking the groups' policy agenda to the party's electoral fate, Reagan and his team found that they could solidify group-party ties. "Internalizing" groups into the party coalition in this way generated efficiency gains and ensured greater reliability in their joint operations over the long haul. "With a long coalition in place," Krimmel explains, "the party does not need to go out and build a new coalition" around every new policy initiative (2012, 53). Strengthening party-group links—by informally integrating them into the party—thus advanced Reagan's objective of building a durable new party coalition that could advance his legislative goals in the short term and perpetuate his broader political purposes in the future.

Effects.   The cumulative effect of Nixon, Ford, and Reagan's incremental strengthening of party-group linkages was to advance the movement of interest groups into the partisan fray ("special interest partisanship") and increase the likelihood that groups would feel compelled to "pick sides" and align with one party or the other. By the mid-1990s, for example, GOP party leaders in Congress found it possible to systematically discipline interest groups that offered support to Democratic candidates. Whipping groups into line ensured that their financial resources and organizational capacities were devoted exclusively to support Republican candidates (Krimmel 2012, 54-55). By solidifying and systematizing the links between their party and issue-oriented interest groups, Nixon, Ford, and Reagan thus helped to launch the long-term growth of the more ideologically homogeneous Republican Party network so familiar today.

Put somewhat differently, they contributed to what scholars have described as "asymmetric polarization," or polarization as a Republican-led phenomenon (Hacker and Pierson 2005; Hare, McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2012; Mann and Ornstein 2012). Based on her careful research, Krimmel is able to conclude that the conventional narrative that "activists caused political polarization" tells, at best, only half the story. Activists and interest groups certainly contributed to the crystallizing of two distinct ideological party networks, but presidents and parties were "at the very least" equally complicit: they were "active, willing participants in this endogenous transformation of the American party system." Though Nixon, Ford, and Reagan were simply acting instrumentally to leverage existing group capacities on behalf of their myriad political goals, an important byproduct of their efforts was that "groups become more strongly linked to the party apparatus, party-group relations become more clearly defined, and the parties become more distinct" (Krimmel 2012, 56).

Conclusion

The preceding sections have sought to illustrate how presidents, through their instrumental efforts to bring inherited party structures into closer alignment with their incentives and purposes in the near term, contributed to long-term party developments. These dynamics are borne out in examples drawn from across American history, using three different conceptions of "party." As we have seen, late nineteenth-century presidents, seeking to influence their party's policy agenda, contributed to the nationalization of the political parties and the emergence of modern modes of presidential party leadership. Mid–twentieth-century Republican presidents, in their ill-fated quests to build new Republican majorities, made investments in their party organization that contributed to its transformation into what has been called the modern "party in service." And in attempting to bridge the gap between the White House and interest groups, those same GOP presidents built a new White House office—the OPL—and advanced the consolidation of an ideologically distinct Republican party "network" that is constitutive of contemporary partisan polarization. In each of these illustrative examples, presidents are revealed to be agents of party change. Rather than leave their structural environment undisturbed, as leading theories might predict, their actions reconfigured party

arrangements and altered their trajectories, influencing the choices made by subsequent presidents and other political actors.

This article has also endeavored to demonstrate that the tripartite analytical framework suggested by Terry Moe in 1985—of *structures, incentives*, and *resources*—remains a helpful starting point for historically oriented scholars seeking to examine the relationship between presidential behavior and institutional change. Whether one is looking at the executive branch, the party, or any other domain, this framework emphasizes the rational basis for presidential behavior *without losing sight of the effects*. Keeping one eye fixed on the *structures* of interest, the effects of earlier presidential behaviors can be treated as constitutive of subsequent behaviors, and each episode reveals information about what has come before as well as what will likely follow. The value of historical research, in this context, is that it enables us to treat the "reciprocal relationship" between structure and agency as a hypothesis to be tested against the evidence—and to specify the causal links as they reveal themselves over time. Moe writes, "Individual choices create institutions, but institutions condition individual choices" (1985, 236). Rather than *assume* this reciprocal relationship, historical research enables us to *explain* it.

Finally, the examples considered here suggest that the standard measures of evaluation used in presidency scholarship may be in need of modification and refinement. As we have seen, even seemingly small presidential actions, undertaken for short-term purposes, can influence institutional trajectories and other political developments in meaningful ways. The usual measures of presidential "success"— presidential "box scores," the proximity of policy outcomes to the president's ideal points, appraisals of "skill"—will completely miss out on those effects. But if we are to develop a fuller and more accurate portrait of any individual president and his place in history—and of the role of the presidency in American political development more generally—we must not only compare his aims to his outcomes and appraise his behavior, we must also consider his impact on the environment in which he operates. We must remain open to the possibility that even when presidents act instrumentally, they serve as agents of change. As this article has attempted to show, historical research attuned to these dynamics can help to bring this defining characteristic of presidential action into clearer view.

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