The Power of Ideas: How Intellectuals and the Ideologies They Market Can Realign American Politics

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I. Introduction

One of the most vexing issues in debates about American political development (APD) has been explaining how changes in the political system and their resulting effects on matters of public policy and institutional arrangements have come about. Most of the debate in the field of APD focuses on the roles of institutions, ideas, or some combination of the two in explaining how political change comes about. Another theory that has been put forward but fallen out of favor in recent years is the idea of electoral realignments. These are electoral realignments in the sense of sudden, long-term shifts in voting behavior by the electorate that affect party attachments, what issues are considered to be relevant, and what policies are politically feasible to pursue. Several classical examples of such “realigning elections” include the elections of 1800, 1860, 1896, and 1932 all of which resulted in one party demonstrating durable strength in subsequent national elections and a movement in favor of a certain set of ideas and policies that would last for several decades afterward. Scholarly work has attempted to explain the nature of these electoral realignments, who or what is driving them, and how they manifest themselves in election results.

However, less work has been done on the role that ideology plays in such realignments. What are the roles of the ideas put forward by intellectual elites in influencing politicians, activists, and the electorate at large? What brings about the environment for why certain ideas gain a following while others fall to the wayside? How does ideology interact with certain key groups in the political process and through their efforts end up changing the positions of America’s major political parties? These are the questions this thesis seeks to answer. They are relevant because we are in a time when ideas that were seemingly on the fringes have now become mainstream
opinions being put forward by various candidates for president. The implications of such a change could be extremely important for the direction this country takes for the decades to come. By looking to explain where such ideas came from and how they gain traction we will gain a greater understanding of the interaction between ideas, the groups they influence, and their eventual manifestation through election results.

This thesis begins with a section providing a theoretical basis for the discussion of ideology and electoral realignments. The second is an overview of the model and methodology used to inform the research in this thesis. The third section is a case study applying the model to the rise of modern conservatism in the United States from the 1950s to the 1980s and traces how the ideas of conservative intellectuals impacted activists, interest group elites, and voters tied to the Republican Party which eventually led to the election of Ronald Reagan as president in 1980. The fourth section fits this case study into the model presented in the third section as well as analyzes its implications for the literature discussed in the second section. The fifth section speculates on a future case study involving an emerging progressive movement within the Democratic Party from the mid-2000s to the present. The final section discusses the importance of the findings of this thesis as well as directions for future research.
II. Literature Review

Ideological Shifts from the Bottom: Electorate-Driven Realignments

The electorate-driven school of electoral realignment literature rests on the idea that the voters are the catalyst for shifts in party dominance driven by critical elections. Ideological shifts in the electorate will lead them to change voting behavior during critical elections after which party elites will shift their parties accordingly to adjust to this new reality. This school can be broken down into two subschools: one focusing on socioeconomic changes as the explanation for realignments of the electorate and another focusing on ideological shifts of the views of specific groups within the electorate in the context of group politics.

Walter Dean Burnham is the pre-eminent scholar in this school of thought and elucidated an electorate-driven model for electoral realignments. To him critical realignments represent an important view of the changes in the American politics over the course of the nation’s history and as a way of understanding how these changes manifest themselves in the electoral realm. Burnham defines the main elements of such critical realignments as: very abrupt interruptions in established patterns of voting behavior, unusually high intensity between the parties and among the electorate, a periodic recurrence that can be measured by looking at election results, and the transformation of policy and institutions that end up redefining what is considered to be politically feasible (Burnham 1970, 6). He sees electoral realignments as the result of tensions that have built up in society and which the parties, in their current approach to politics, have been unable to adequately respond to (Burnham 1970, 10). These tensions build until a breaking point represented by a critical election, after which a new party system emerges and remains durable for an extended period of time during which one party sets the agenda of politics (Burnham
A stable pattern of electoral politics follows, in which the alignments of voters more or less remains steady until another realigning period occurs.

His important contribution to answering the connection between ideology, electoral groups, and electoral alignments is in his view that critical realignments are the means through which the political system can catch up to socioeconomic changes that it had, up until the point of realignment, failed to adequately address (Burnham 1970, 181). He sees an inherent tension between America’s constitutional order, which while flexible is bound to bring about fragmentation, deadlock, and inertia that prevents sweeping responses to socioeconomic changes linked to developments in capitalism over time (Burnham 1996, 373). Inadequate responses lead to popular frustration with the established order as the current set-up of the political system prevents redress for the issues plaguing critical minorities within the electorate. At some point “crucial minorities…will be energized by a distressing present and prospects for an even worse future to attack the sources of trouble they can perceive and reach” (Burnham 1996, 382). These can take an ideological form depending on who and what is perceived as causing the trouble and what the resolution to that trouble is. Burnham cites this in the case of a potential critical realignment toward the GOP in the 1994 midterm elections when a perception of America’s decline, combined with an antigovernment ideological undercurrent in American political culture, was utilized by the GOP to achieve realignment at the congressional level to bring about a conservative movement in American politics (Burnham 1996, 382).

Everett Carll Ladd takes a different view of realignments than Burnham even as he articulates a similar yet more refined point regarding socioeconomic changes and their role in producing partisan realignments. He believes that realignments can occur without the establishment of a dominant majority party, citing the example of Reagan’s victories in the
1980s which moved Republican Party identification to parity with the Democrats which doesn’t represent a “real” realignment in which there is “the unambiguous emergence of a new majority party” but nevertheless reflected a realignment of the political agenda toward conservative ideas (Ladd 1995, 2). His view is that major party realignments are a result of broad socioeconomic changes that bring about a “philosophical realignment” that is defined as “a clear and decisive shift in the agenda of politics” as manifested within the electorate (Ladd 1997, 2). These broad socioeconomic changes produce “sociopolitical eras” defined by a dominant philosophical outlook toward government and politics among the electorate. The example he looks at is the most recent era (at the time he was writing) which he calls the “postindustrial era” and which sees a “far greater skepticism about government” among the electorate brought about by backlash to the Great Society and the fundamental qualities of postindustrialism (Ladd 1997, 5). These qualities are “dispersion and decentralization” in both the economic and technological spheres as the result of a society “organized around knowledge” rather than man and machines (Ladd 1995, 4). Neither party, however, is necessarily favored by changes in how voters view government and instead depends on which party is in power and the history of the preceding sociopolitical era – in essence the historical context in which the philosophical realignment takes place.

Separate from Burnham and Ladd are Clem Brooks and Jeff Manza (1997a) whose examination of shifts in the voting patterns of different groups in the middle-class reveal new issue cleavages and ideological shifts among specific groups as being important factors in electoral realignments. Looking at managers and professionals, they note that professionals have increasingly voted for the Democratic Party since the late 1960s while managers have remained a solidly Republican voting group. Using statistical analysis of different theories as to why this
shift may have occurred, they find that increasingly “liberal views on social issues such as abortion, women’s roles, and civil rights are the principal reasons behind professionals’ realignment with Democratic candidates and their widening differences vis-à-vis managers” (Brooks and Manza 1997a, 204). This is in line with a “new political culture” explanation for realignments in which “a growing concern with social issues…has led to a new political culture” that is marked by “emphasizing individualism …favoring the relative priority of social over economic issues…and…conjoining fiscal moderation with liberalism on social issues” (Brooks and Manza 1997a, 195). Such a shift in political culture leads to shifts among the views of individual groups in the electorate in response to the new issue cleavage that emerges, leading to new partisan attachments that produce lasting electoral realignments over subsequent elections.

Building on this research, Brooks and Manza (1997b) looked at realignments and electoral shifts among different class groups and concluded that class plays a significant role in realignments of different groups within the electorate. Looking at shifts in the voting patterns of middle-class professionals as well as the self-employed and unskilled workers, they find that between 1972-1992 middle-class professionals underwent a secular realignment toward the Democratic Party while the self-employed had a critical realignment in 1980 toward the Republican Party and unskilled workers also experienced an electoral shift toward the Republican Party but not a realignment since the majority continued to support the Democratic Party (Brooks and Manza 1997b, 391-392). The latter two also saw a significant drop in 1980 in their support for the Democratic Party although it only led to realignment among one of the groups. They conduct a statistical analysis to determine what factors explained these shifts in voting behavior. For professionals that result lines up with their previous research, that increasingly liberal views on social issues slowly pushed middle-class professionals to vote for
the Democratic Party in higher numbers. However, for the self-employed and unskilled workers what they identify as factors related to class politics including higher economic dissatisfaction with a Democratic administration coupled with higher economic satisfaction with a Republican administration as well as an increasing ideological opposition to the welfare state explained these groups’ movements toward the Republicans (Brooks and Manza 1997b, 395–96). This not only adds class as an element in electoral realignments but also connects ideology directly with changes in the voting behavior of different economic classes, suggesting the potential for political elites to respond to ideological shifts by certain groups in the electorate by shifting their own views on certain issue. At the very least, it suggests that ideology does play a role in the electoral realignment of certain groups in the electorate.

**Ideological Shifts from the Top: Elite-Driven Realignments**

This school of thought focuses on the role that political leadership by party elites has on electoral realignments, specifically in how they respond to new issue cleavages by shifting their party’s position, and how this can lead to shifts in the voting behavior of groups in the electorate and thus lead to electoral realignments. They are divided between those who view realignments of elites and the electorate as occurring simultaneously as opposed to those who view elite realignments occurring suddenly while the electorate takes longer to realign. There is also a distinction between those who view political elites as making strategic choices to realign ideologically on their own in response to changing electoral circumstances versus those who view activists as having a role in pushing political elites to shift their party ideologically in order to maintain their support.
James L. Sundquist (1983) provides a critical foundation for this school of thought through his explanation of the process of critical realignments. He views critical realignments as being products of the emergence of a new issue (or set of related issues) that cleaves the electorate into three polarized groups – those on either extreme of the issue (single-issue groups) and those in the middle trying to prevent the issue from tearing each party apart (Sundquist 1983, 35). This issue must dominate political discussion and replace older issues which had formed the basis for the current party system (Sundquist 1983, 304). Both parties attempt to straddle the issue at first even as groups at each pole of the issue organize within each party, eventually a realignment will occur if one of the parties is captured by a “polar force” while the other one is not. The realignment “reaches its climax in one or more critical elections that center on the realigning issue and resolve it,” leading to a cooling of conflict and movement of both parties toward the center in the absence of a new issue that falls along existing party cleavages and polarizes them once again (Sundquist 1983, 317). Sundquist examines these dynamics in the cases of realignments in the 1850s around the issue of slavery, in the 1890s around the issue of the free coinage of silver, and in the 1930s around the issue of government intervention into the economy. In each case he finds that the new issue cleavages led to polarizing divisions in each party that either caused the emergence of an entirely new party (as was the case of the Republican Party in the 1850s), the capture of each party by opposing forces (the Democrats and Republicans by pro-silver and pro-gold forces respectively in 1896), or the takeover of one party by an opposing force that completed the polarization of the parties (the Democrats by pro-activist government forces after 1932).

This view links the interaction between ideology, electoral groups, and electoral realignments through its emphasis on the role of political leadership in influencing and shaping
electoral realignments. Sundquist especially focuses on how political leadership is the decisive factor determining whether a realignment happens or not and that this plays out through struggles over the new issue cleavage between different leaders within both parties. He observes that “historic realignments of the American party system occurred because the leaders either did not try to mediate and compromise the issue or tried and failed” (43). The political leaders on the extreme sides of the emerging issue have an interest in moving the party ideologically toward their position and can, in many cases, capture control of the party and by doing so realign it decisively toward their position. This causes groups within the electorate to change their voting behavior in response to this ideological shift, whether that be in support of the party that has been captured by “polar forces” or against it in order to resolve the issue that has vexed them and roiled the parties.

Jerome Clubb, William Flanigan, and Nancy Zingale (1980) differ with this view on their emphasis on government performance as opposed to party positioning on a polarizing issue as the key aspect bringing about a realignment. They focus specifically on parties as the “primary mechanisms of political and governmental integration, of policy formation and implementation, and as sources of stability and change in mass politics” (12). In their view the electorate is passive and reactive to changes in policy, their only role being to approve of these policies by continuing to vote for current officeholders (14). Instead, ideological shifts on policy emanate from political leaders in response to crises and new issue realignments which end up suppressing issues that are not seen as related to the crisis at hand. These lead to the creation of “symbol and issue patterns” which turn from short-term forces to dominant ones through realignments (Clubb, Flanigan, and Zingale 1980, 34). Realignments, however, are not created through a single critical election but instead through the performance of the government that such a critical election
brings into power which can mobilize and demobilize segments of the electorate to support this new set of policies (Clubb, Flanigan, and Zingale 1980, 32). They examine this through patterns in unified partisan control of government in the context of what scholars have widely acknowledged as critical realignments in the 1860s, 1890s, and 1930s. What they found is that following these periods of unified control corresponding with large majorities in Congress (after elections in 1860, 1896, and 1932) that allowed for innovative policy initiatives to be implemented by the party in power there were increases in periods of unified control of government by that party which reflected the “popularly perceived…[success]” of these initiatives and a new partisan realignment (Clubb, Flanigan, and Zingale 1980, 184).

James Q. Wilson (1985) adds the idea of elite realignments to the mix, in which there has been a change in the identities and views of those with outsized influence within the major political parties including “in the selection of candidates, the writing of the platforms, the definition of the rules, and in conducting the affairs of each party” (300). This contrasts to mass realignments, which are the more familiar shifts in the electoral coalitions of the major parties. He cites the increased ideological polarization of Democratic and Republican party elites since the mid-1960s as evidence of such an “elite realignment” taking place while the public has not really changed its opinions on the issues from where they were in the 1970s. In his view, activists “drawn to their parties by ideological enthusiasm and sustained in their endeavors by issue movements” have been the active agents in this realignment by having large influences in party primaries by pushing party elites to take more ideologically extreme positions through primary challenges in presidential elections and supplying more ideologically extreme delegates to national conventions (Wilson 1985, 301). In addition, such elite realignment at the top produces a corresponding dealignment at the bottom (the electorate) as voters become less
wedded to the parties because of the nomination of increasingly polarizing and unappealing candidates for president, leaving more voters up for grab by each party in elections. Thus, ideological shifts by elites do not cause immediate realignments of the electorate although Wilson does not look at the long-term implications of such trends.

Arthur Paulson (2007) builds on James Q. Wilson’s idea of a “realignment at the top, dealignment at the bottom” by looking at developments since 1984. He notes that the split-ticket voting which Wilson believed constituted a dealignment in the electorate had, in fact, been conservative Southern Democrats splitting their tickets between Republicans for president and Democrats for Congress rather than nonpartisan moderates seeking to check the power of the party controlling the presidency (Paulson 2007, 120–21). Incumbency advantage explained the continued split-ticket voting from the 1960s to the 1990s as well as ideological factionalism since “split tickets have been most frequent where House incumbents were not in ideological harmony with their party’s national leadership” ala conservative Democrats and liberal Republicans (Paulson 2007, 123). That eventually broke in 1994 as the ideological realignments of the parties spread to the congressional level as well. Thus, in his view, it is more like a “critical realignment at the top, secular realignment at the bottom” wherein the parties realigned ideologically at the presidential level and became more polarized but this occurred much more slowly at the congressional level until it reached a critical moment in 1994 when Republicans won in states and districts that had been trending their way for decades (Paulson 2007, 138–39). This view shows how ideological shifts among party elites at a presidential level can be tempered by the lack of ideological shifts at the congressional level, leading to certain groups in the electorate splitting their votes between ideologically similar candidates from different parties and delaying a full realignment until sometime after the initial elite realignment.
Paulson also takes an ideological view on what he considers to be the critical swing voters in the electorate. The balance of the electorate falls on these voters who have a large influence on the results of presidential elections. Previously, Paulson asserts that these voters were culturally conservative but economically liberal, the so-called “Reagan Democrats” who were crucial to electoral victories from the mid-1960s to the 1990s (158). They were crucial components of the “realignment at the top, dealignment at the bottom” that Wilson had astutely observed and voted Republican for president but Democratic for Congress. However, since the mid-1990s they have now been voting Republican up and down the ballot, representing the end of the secular realignment that Paulson previously identified. Now a new swing voter has emerged: libertarian moderates who “tend to be fiscal conservatives…[but] are environmentalists, pro-choice on abortion, and relatively liberal on civil rights” (159). Whichever party can win these voters over in the long-term could usher in a “surge realignment” wherein a new majority party emerges from the current conditions of party parity. This view directly ties ideological appeals and shifts to groups in the electorate, placing the impetus on party elites to bring certain swing voters under their fold by appealing to them on some ideological dimension in order to usher in a critical realignment.

Alan Abramowitz and Kyle Saunders (1998) fill in gaps in Paulson’s explanation of “critical realignment at the top, secular realignment at the bottom” with their theory of ideological realignments, where the policy differences between the two major parties are increased along ideological lines because of policy position shifts by party leaders. Voters become aware of these differences and, as a result, they realign their party loyalties and voting behavior based on which party is closer to their own individual policy preferences (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998, 636). This theory asserts that realignments do, in fact, occur in the electorate
but that they may not occur immediately in response to elite shifts. It also rests on party identification as the measure for durable realignments of the electorate, as has been used in other realignment literature. Their evidence comes from surveys of voters (the National Election Survey) taken in 1978 and 1994 looking at changes in party identification and voter awareness of the policy differences between the parties, which showed a shift especially by white men and white southerners toward the Republican Party that corresponded with increasing awareness of the policy differences between the parties and the resulting Republican sweep in the South in the 1994 midterm elections and their subsequent takeover of control of both houses of Congress for the first time in decades. They address how party leaders, by taking more clearly ideological stances on the issues as a result of generational turnover, can realign groups in the electorate and thus impact election results in the longer term.

Carmines and Stimson (1989) elucidate this leadership-focused school of electoral realignments through the issue evolution perspective, which also responds to the critical realignment literature of the past which they find unsatisfactory in explaining long-term partisan realignments. They sketch out four ways that issues can gain public attention: through the decisions of strategic politicians to highlight certain issues for political gain, through crises and other major outside events which thrust an issue onto the public agenda, through specialized issues which – with enough time – can become new sources of cleavage between parties, and finally through the elevation of certain suppressed issues that divide the parties which reach a breaking point and gain public attention (Carmines and Stimson 1989, 6). The major actors in this model are elites (politicians + activists) who shift the parties on certain policies while the electorate simply chooses whether to respond to these shifts or not (Carmines and Stimson 1989, 15-16). Significantly, they break from the idea that a single critical election can cause a lasting
shift in the political system that leads to a new alignment of the parties and the electorate. Instead, they take a view of “dynamic growth” in which a “critical moment” causes partisan conversion and electoral mobilization of voters in the electorate around a new issue cleavage, followed by the slow recruitment of new voters that reinforces this new issue realignment, and finally culminating in the decay of the party system that had been established as the issue fades from public focus and loses its impact on the partisan identification of new voters (Carmines and Stimson 1989, 145).

This issue evolution model involves elites polarizing the electorate around a new salient issue dimension (an “elite realignment” according to Wilson), resulting in a “critical moment” that then causes conversion and mobilization leading to a long-term partisan realignment that manifests itself through election results (Carmines and Stimson 1989, 160). In order for a mass issue realignment to occur two critical links between elites and the electorate are necessary: 1) the electorate must take cues from the parties and notice their positions on the new issue and 2) the issue must evoke a strong enough emotional response to convince voters to change their partisan identification as well as prompt new voters to orient their party identification around this new issue (Carmines and Stimson 1989, 161). Once these conditions are met a new partisan realignment will take place, as Carmines and Stimson examine through race and the transformations it caused in the American party system in the 1960s and onward as it became a new issue cleavage that polarized the parties and led to a new electoral realignment of the Democratic and Republican parties and changed the partisan identification of different groups in the electorate around race. Their issue evolution approach builds on Sundquist’s approach to elite-driven realignments while, at the same time, exposing how new issue cleavages can lead to
ideological realignments of the party around this issue and, eventually, longer term realignments in the electorate that are ideologically motivated.

Ryan Claassen (2011) looks at this elite-driven issues evolution perspective on realignment, among others as well, through the lens of political awareness. He suggests that differences in political awareness might affect the partisan realignment of less aware voters as compared to more aware voters in regards to their to changes in party positions driven by elites. He postulates that a lack of awareness of the parties’ positions on racial and economic issues could prevent partisan realignment on these issues by less aware voters while more aware voters realign as well in tandem with the parties (Claassen 2011, 820–21). Through statistical analysis, Claassen finds that on racial issues there is indeed a gap in realignment between more aware and less aware voters and that this gap is particularly acute in the South (Claassen 2011, 827). However, on economic issues there is a nonexistent or relatively small gap in realignment based on political awareness. This could be because it was harder to follow shifts in the parties’ position on racial issues from the 1960s and 1970s onward because of how complicated they are and the fact that the parties switched completely on these issues, whereas on economic issues the partisan cleavage remains that produced with the New Deal realignment (Claassen 2011, 826). Political awareness adds another angle of looking at how elite driven ideological realignments impact the electorate, suggesting that there are certain issues which may be less likely to provoke as large a scale of realignment because of unresponsiveness from less aware voters as opposed to other issues (especially economic ones) which are more likely to lead to class-based realignments of partisanship and voting behavior that shows up in election results.

Gary Miller and Norman Schofield (2003) look at elite-driven realignments from a strategic perspective. They define critical realignments as occurring when “shifting public
perceptions of the partisan positions of the two parties lead some subset of the population to switch voting patterns, creating a new winning partisan coalition” (Miller and Schofield 2003, 249). In their view, political candidates face a struggle between staking out centrist positions in order to maximize their votes in an election and appealing to ideological activists who constitute groups of disaffected voters who may also help them maximize votes by “flanking” their opponents on a previously inactive issue dimension. Partisan realignments happen when, via flanking, national political candidates form new coalitions with certain groups of party activists, activating a new dominant issue dimension while suppressing the previously dominant one. These issue dimensions are economic issues (defined in terms of pro-redistributionist vs. anti-redistributionist) and social issues (defined in terms of racial liberalism vs. racial conservatives but also including other issues over time). They examine this in the case of a realignment from a Reconstruction social dimension to a New Deal economic one that occurred from 1896-1960, especially with the efforts by FDR to bring wayward economic liberals into the Democratic Party in the 1930s, and a switch from the New Deal economic dimension to a new social one from 1960-2000, focusing on Goldwater and Nixon’s courting of social conservative activists around the issue of race that made social issues increasingly salient. Their view stresses elite appeals to ideological activists and the resulting ideological shifts in the parties as being a core mechanism in electoral realignments.

Boris Heersink (2017) takes a similarly strategic view of electoral realignments but instead focuses on the role that party leaders have in determining the contours and timing of realignments. In his view, the conditions that cause party realignments are largely outside of the control of party leaders because they are a result of historical or economic developments but party leaders do control the form and timing of realignments (Heersink 2017, 632). He looks at
the realignment of the South away from Democrats and to the Republican Party from 1948-1968 to demonstrate the strategic choices that party leaders can make to shape realignments. What he shows is that these choices were “shaped by [party leaders’] goal to maintain or create an electoral coalition that would win them the White House, and majorities in the House and Senate” (Heersink 2017, 632). Thus both parties alternated between taking liberal or no ideological stance on the issue of race (in the case of Democrats) or a liberal to segregationist to conservative stance (in the case of Republicans) in efforts to appeal to certain groups in the electorate (in this case blacks and Southern whites). In the end, Democrats took a decisively liberal, pro-civil rights position on race that, along with Nixon’s moderately conservative position on the issue of integration, marked the end of Democratic dominance in the South. Thus, Heersink shows that party leaders can negotiate realignments by strategically shifting their party’s ideological position on a relevant issue that is cleaving the electorate in an effort to achieve short-term electoral victory while changing party coalitions in the long-term (Heersink 2017, 650). As opposed to Miller and Schofield, Heersink shows how direct ideological appeals to groups of voters (as opposed to party activists) by party elites plays a role in electoral realignments similar to other scholars in this school.

Turning to an approach rooted in American political development literature, Andrew Polsky (2010) views ambitious politicians as being the active agents in partisan realignments. His view, rooted in a partisan regime model of political development, sees elections as part of a recurrent system marking changes between different partisan regimes. Entrepreneurial politicians in the minority party are embedded in these shifts in partisan regimes through their efforts to undermine the existing political order by pointing out its failings and putting forth an alternative set of policies that will fix “what ails the nation” (62). They create narratives that place blame
for the current state of affairs of the nation (presumably during a time of crisis) and sow discontent that they then ride to an electoral victory, becoming empowered by voters to reshape institutions and redefining the conventional wisdom on what is considered to be politically feasible (Polsky 2010, 62). While he does not address this directly, it is likely these partisan realignments would bring about electoral realignments as well and that these alternative sets of policies would be ideological in nature and appeal to certain groups in the electorate.

With a different approach is Rogers Smith (2014), who does not address specifically elections but nevertheless traces the role of ideas in political development by establishing a framework that incorporates ideas into a process of political change and emphasizes the role of individual political actors in ideological shifts in parties. This “Spiral of Politics” has six stages: a political context\(^1\) exists that forms the “prestructured environment” in which new ideas are developed and future political developments take place (Stage 1), political actors use their agency to develop or formulate new ideas through “creative synthesis” and create opportunities/alliances/institutions/policies to advance them (Stage 2), political actors form coalitions to take control of political institutions (Stage 3), these coalitions take control of governing institutions (although not fully) and adopt policies corresponding with new ideas (Stage 4), the context is altered as a result of these policies and their implementation (Stage 5), and this modified context creates a new set of political actors who develop or formulate new ideas and thus restarts the process of political development all over again (Stage 6) (Smith 2014, 129–32). What this framework provides is a means of examining ideational development in the context of political development and also provides for a sequence in which to place elections (during Stage 3) as part of a coalition-building process around a new set of ideas. It complements

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\(^1\) This is “composed of institutions, both governmental and nongovernmental organizations; practices, understood as customary forms of behavior; and ideas, including empirical beliefs and normative values” (Smith 2014, 129).
Polsky’s view of the role of elections in the partisan regime model of political development as well as the role of political elites in this process.

Baumgartner and Jones (2009) discuss the idea of "punctuated equilibria" in relation to what they call "policy monopolies" where a "political [understanding] concerning the policy of interest, and an institutional arrangement that reinforces that understanding” leads to a period of stability on what the solution (what ideas) should be used to address a certain policy area (Baumgartner and Jones 2009, 6). This rests on issue definition - how the issue is framed and what solutions are deemed appropriate and mainstream - that can easily be challenged by political actors opening up new dimensions of conflict on the issue, leading to instability if mobilization by previously disinterested groups occurs and the policy monopoly is eroded. Their concepts of "punctuated equilibria" and "policy monopolies" strike at the ideational aspect of political change and the rapid changes that can occur when new ideas are introduced (through redefining issues and their solutions) that mobilize groups in the electorate and in civil society and undermine established ideas about the appropriate responses to certain political issues. At the same time, it stresses the role that political elites play in redefining issues in ways that will mobilizes groups in the electorate, striking at the connection between ideological shifts and voting blocs in relation to realignments. While not specifically mentioning electoral realignments, their conception of how “punctuated equilibria” are disturbed and destabilized certainly occurs in the context of electoral politics and would result in an electoral realignment as new coalitions are formed around a new issue definition.
Ideological Shifts from the Middle: Group-Driven Realignments

The group-driven school of thought in the electoral realignment literature stresses the role that organized groups play within parties and treats them as the prime actors in shifts in the parties’ positions on issues (specifically those they care about) as a result of the incorporation of new groups into party coalitions which results in partisan and electoral realignments. It is divided between those who believe that party elites still hold some influence on party position changes and those who believe those are driven almost exclusively by contestation between party elites and organized groups.

David Karol (2009) adopts the view that politicians still hold influence over party position changes depending on the context and the issues involved. He views parties as “coalitions of groups with intense preferences on particular issues managed by politicians” and thus politicians and other party elites still wield a degree of power over transformations within their parties (4). He also views groups as “self-aware collection[s] of individuals who share intense concerns about a particular policy area” which therefore opens up the possibility for “groupless” issues to exist on which party elites have considerable flexibility in changing their party’s position based on strategic, electoral considerations (Karol 2009, 9). He puts forward three models to explain party position changes: “coalition maintenance,” “coalition group incorporation,” and “coalition expansion.” Coalition maintenance is when elected officials shift their party’s position on an issue in response to groups already within their coalition, coalition group incorporation is when “party leaders shift positions to attract a particular constituency,” and coalition expansion is when “party leaders adopt a new position to improve their standing with the public generally” (Karol 2009, 18–20). All of these differ in how much of control elites have in initiating the party position shifts and their flexibility afterward, with the least control
and flexibility in a situation of coalition maintenance and the most when it is coalition expansion, as well as in the pace and stability of the change. He demonstrates these models by looking at shifts by both parties on trade policy (examining coalition maintenance), abortion and gun control (examining coalition group incorporation), race (examining how both coalition maintenance and coalition group incorporation can act for different parties on the same issue), and defense and fiscal policy (examining coalition expansion) over the course of the latter half of the 20th century to the present.

Christopher Baylor (2018) sees groups as being the main actors in party changes (and thus partisan realignments) because of their integral role in the political process. He treats organized groups as being separate entities from party organizations and elected officials because of their differing agendas and interests. Thus, politicians have a limited ability to act independently without the aid of groups who can mobilize voters on their behalf and counter the influence of other groups they may be opposed to (9–10). In addition, groups do not care as much about the direction of parties as politicians do so they are much more willing to withhold support to extract concessions or elect a candidate who is more amenable to their agenda in a subsequent election (10–11). He thus sees party changes as arising from the common agendas that groups create with other groups as part of alliances, bringing together their own competing agendas in order to expand their base of support to put pressure on politicians and party elites to adopt positions they favor or face party nomination contests. He examines these dynamics by looking at the transformation of the Democratic Party on the issue of civil rights from the 1940s-1960s as a result of an alliance between civil rights groups and labor unions and of the Republican Party on cultural conservatism from the 1970s-1990s as a result of an alliance between different sects of theological conservatives. In each case he finds that organized groups,
and especially the alliances formed between them, were key in explaining these shifts and their durability in the long-term. He also finds that ideological shifts in parties result in the adoption of ideologies that arise from the coalitions that groups create (through negotiation and the creation of a common agenda) rather than from intellectual elites and pundits and that these are what constrains the positions of parties (Baylor 2018, 8).
III. Research Design

Tentative Answer to Research Question

The research question I intend to answer is how does ideology influence groups in the electorate to produce electoral realignments? Upon review of the relevant literature about elections, electoral realignment, and party position change I have come to the conclusion that the process is a top-down, elite-driven one that focuses on the influence of ideological shifts of the parties driven by elites that then elicits a response in the electorate. This manifests through an electoral realignment, where the voting behavior and party attachments of the electorate shift in a long-term, stable manner in addition to changes in the agenda of politics and what is considered to be politically feasible. These elite-driven shifts are preceded by societal and economic changes that create a situation that makes it advantageous for party elites to adopt certain ideologies in order to produce winning electoral coalitions as well as by intellectual elites who formulate ideologies for party elites to use.

Ultimately, the power to affect electoral change lies primarily with elites whether they are party elites, interest group elites, intellectual elites, or some combination of all three. They hold the greatest sway over political discussion and the political agenda, even if voters have some role in holding elected officials and parties accountable for their performance. Some pressure for electoral change comes from the bottom-up. Social movements, for example, have some capacity to push issues on the political agenda and force politicians to address them, however, they end up becoming the organized groups that are absorbed into party coalitions with their leaders becoming part of the political elite. In addition, ideological shifts emerge from elites rather than
voters, who hold less ideologically coherent policy preferences and are generally less well informed than political elites (Achen and Bartels 2016, 30–34).

**Hypothesis**

My hypothesis is that intellectual elites formulate new ideologies through “creative synthesis” which they “market” to party activists, interest group leaders, and politically aware voters who in turn pressure party elites to adopt the ideology or face the withholding of support from these groups. In response, party elites interested in bringing internal cohesion and strength to their coalitions, not wishing to alienate important groups from their party, and facing societal changes which makes certain issues connected to an ideology more salient agree to adopt this ideology or are replaced by individuals more accommodating to this new ideology which leads to ideological shifts in the parties and eventually an electoral realignment.

**Definition of Concepts**

*Societal Changes:* Changes in society and the economy as well as exogenous events that bring new issues onto the agenda and shake-up existing party coalitions. Example include economic crises like the Great Depression or Great Recession, changes in societal norms such as
those brought about by the Sexual Revolution of the 1960s and feminism, social movements such as the Civil Rights Movement or the Christian Right, economic transformations like the Industrial Revolution and deindustrialization, and demographic changes brought about by immigration and changes in birth rates among different groups.

**Intellectual Elites:** Important political thinkers, writers, and think tanks.

**Ideology:** A “set of policy preferences” in which “what one believes on one issue predicts what one believes on others” (Noel 2013, 14). This does not need to be in a comprehensive sense but can be in a narrower one, for example being able to predict views on one issue dimension (economic or social) rather than on both.

**Party Activists:** “Citizens turning to the political arena to achieve policy goals” who are “free to offer their time, effort, and services, or to withhold them as they see fit” (Aldrich 1995, 182). This will be limited to activists concerned about policy areas relevant to issues that have proved especially important in bringing about electoral realignments that I will study.

**Interest Group Elites:** Those in leadership positions within organized groups that are affiliated with a party and part of its coalition, as opposed to groups outside of a party’s coalition or who are not rooted within an organized constituency in the electorate.

**Voters:** This will include all voters in general but especially those who are most politically attuned and thus susceptible to persuasion by intellectual elites.

**Party Elites:** I will define party elites as “elected officials and legislators” at the federal level who are members of a certain party (Noel 2013, 22). In addition, I will include members of
each party’s formal organizations such as the Republican National Committee and Democratic National Committee.

**Ideological Change:** Changes in the ideological positions of the parties on certain issues that have proven crucial in elections that have marked significant moments in an electoral realignment. This is to ensure that the examination of ideological change is manageable and focused on only the most important issues that have shaped the electoral realignments (or potential realignments) I am examining.

**Electoral Realignment:** I will define electoral realignments as, borrowing partially from Walter Dean Burnham, “intense disruptions of traditional patterns of voting behavior” that leads to “redefinitions of voters, political parties, and the broad boundaries of the political possible” (Burnham 1970, 6, 10). However, I will add changes in long-term party attachments and change in the agenda of politics to this definition as well to reflect the longer-term, measurable impacts of realignments.

**Case Selection**

There is one case study I am interested in looking at to test my hypothesis:

It is the conservative shift in the Republican Party originating in the 1950s but continuing on until 1980. This case allows me to examine a completed case of an elite-driven electoral realignment, looking at the influence of conservative intellectuals on different groups, initially party activists and later interest group elites and voters as well in pushing Republican Party elites to adopt a more ideologically conservative platform on an array of issues from roughly 1964 to 1980 and beyond. The resulting shift in the voting behavior of voters may not have manifested
completely at first and potentially culminated in 1980, an election I shall use for reference as the endpoint of this realignment. The antecedent variable for this shift might be the Cold War, as well as the Civil Rights Movement, the various social movements of the 1960s that fomented conservatism and created a background of turmoil and social unrest, and economic troubles in the 1970s that provided an opportunity for ideological pressure from the various groups described previously to be amplified and making conservative ideology more attractive for Republican Party elites.

**Measurement of Variables**

**Societal Change:** This variable cannot be directly measured except in a qualitative sense in regards to its effects not only on intellectual elites but potentially on voters and party activists as well.

**Intellectual Elites:** Another variable that will be measured qualitatively, this will be in regards to the differences between who the intellectual elites are and what they are saying. They will be identified by looking at who others considered to be major thinkers for a certain ideology that is relevant to the case being examined (7-10 or so). Then their influence on party activists, voters, and intellectual elites as well as any direct influence they may have on party elites will be tracked to see how these ideas propagate and affect the ideological positions of a party.

**Ideology:** This will be measured in regards to individual policy positions being put forward by intellectual elites as well as the more general principles that form the foundation for the ideology they are presenting.
**Party Activists:** They will be identified by looking at party organizations that are explicitly targeted to organizing certain groups and whose membership consists of citizens working to promote the party as well as affiliated groups consisting of organized activists. This will be measured quantitatively by examining variations and changes in the leadership of party organizations and the views being expressed by them in official platforms as well as looking at the efforts of affiliated organizations to influence members of the party elite.

**Interest Group Elites:** They will be identified by seeing which interest groups were aligned with a party in the period being examined. This will be measured qualitatively by looking at the issue positions being adopted by interest groups that conform with ideologies put forward by intellectual elites and the degree of pressure they put on party elites to adopt these positions.

**Voters:** This will be measured through qualitative accounts of voters’ shifting sentiments as well as exit poll or election results when available.

**Party Elites:** This will be measured qualitatively as whether party elites agree to shift or not (and how much resistance to a shift there may be) will have to be described rather than quantified. Party elites will be restricted to elected officials at the federal level (in Congress), the president (or presidential candidates), and members of a party’s national organization.

**Ideological Change:** This will be measured by looking at party platforms over time and how the positions expressed in them shift to be more aligned with the principles and policies of a specific ideology.
**Electoral Realignment:** This will be measured through exit polls (when available) and election results to show shifting voter behavior by certain groups as well as electoral changes within certain regions of the country that would be a sign of a realignment.

For most of these measures the results should be somewhat reliable (election results for example) but many are subjective in nature or not backed by quantitative data that would make them more reliable measures. All of them, however, should be valid measures of the variables they are attached to and elucidate the relationship between that variable and the one it is affecting.

**Data Collection**

Data Collection Methods:

1. Primary/secondary source accounts from/about period
2. Autobiographies and memoirs of key intellectuals and politicians
4. Party platforms
5. Election results
IV. Case Study: The Conservative Takeover of the GOP

Rise of Modern Conservatism: The 1950s

Strands of Conservatism

As the 1950s began American conservative intellectuals were fighting to keep conservative thought alive in academic circles as the liberal consensus of the New Deal era pushed alternative ideas to the wayside. They also lacked a unified, singular ideology to rally behind and instead were split between two main competing strands of thought that were in many ways incompatible and contradictory to each other: traditionalism and libertarianism. Over the course of the decade a third strand (anticommunism) was pushed by some intellectuals and was also much more compatible with both traditionalism and libertarianism than each was to the other. Together these have formed the foundation of modern conservatism and are important in understanding the rise of a conservative political movement in the postwar era.

Libertarianism

Libertarianism (also called classical liberalism) was at its nadir following the end of World War II. Based upon principles of “free markets, private property, limited government, self-reliance, [and] laissez-faire,” it was out of vogue following the failures of such thought to alleviate the situation of the Great Depression and the rise of the New Deal liberalism under FDR which was compounded in the postwar period as a statist consensus emerged amongst the victorious Allies powers (Nash 1976, 3). Nevertheless, libertarian arguments remained the main
critiques of the New Deal over the course of the 1930s and 1940s and were utilized by Republicans such as Herbert Hoover and Robert Taft and members of the American Liberty League (Himmelstein 1990, 47). However, important figures would emerge to revive libertarian thought in an otherwise hostile intellectual environment including Friedrich Hayek whose book, *The Road to Serfdom*, sparked debate among American intellectuals, particularly those on the Left, upon its publication in 1944. It challenged the idea of central planning of economic activity and defended free market capitalism.

Specifically, Hayek in *The Road to Serfdom* argued that centralized economic planning by its very nature suppressed freedom and that its results would also be “arbitrary, capricious, and ultimately destructive of liberty” (Nash 1976, 5). “Socialist tendencies” by which he meant collectivism found its inevitable conclusion in the rise of fascism and Nazism as “any attempt to direct society toward a central goal…necessarily encroached on democracy because it required central planning and a degree of consensus that democratic action could not yield” (Nash 1976, 6; Himmelstein 1990, 48). What Hayek argued to counter this, however, was not a return to the classical liberalism of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Instead, it was a system which rested on the idea of the “Rule of Law” in which government action would be bound within a certain set of rules. The government would work to maintain competition and protect individual freedoms which did not mean doing away within minimum wage laws, sanitary regulations, limits on work hours, or other regulations that had been implemented to protect the physical and economic security of workers. As long as these interventions into the market were meant to preserve “competition, private initiative, and private property” then they were acceptable in Hayek’s ideal “liberal state” (Nash 1976, 6).
Far from calling to undo any and all interventions into the economy, Hayek instead sought to redefine and narrow the scope of legitimate government action that would distort the market. The role of the state would simply be utilitarian rather than moral, establishing a foundation for individuals to pursue their own goals but not determining those goals itself (Himmelstein 1990, 49). By doing so he provided a voice once again to libertarian thought that had seemingly disappeared as a result of the Great Depression and the triumph of left-wing economic ideas. This was despite the fact that Hayek himself was neither an ardent supporter of laissez-faire nor of business. Conservatives were also impressed by how much the book unsettled liberal intellectuals within the United States, which contributed to its appeal as a challenge to the liberal intellectual status quo of the 1940s. *The Road to Serfdom* inspired later conservative intellectuals in the United States in the 1950s most notably Frank Chodorov, John Chamberlain (who would later write for the *National Review*), and Henry Hazlitt who helped spread libertarian ideas in the late 1940s and into the early 1950s (Nash 1976, 7–8). It also introduced a new generation to classical liberal ideas repackaged for modern times as it did future *National Review* publisher and conservative leader William Rusher who first read the book shortly after its publication in 1944 (Rusher 1984, 20–22).

The emergence of libertarian organizations as well, including the Foundation for Economic Education which was founded in 1946, proved vital in helping spread libertarian ideas by circulating libertarian literature for free to those who wanted to read it (Nash 1976, 24). Of particular importance is the creation of the Intercollegiate Society of Individualists by Frank Chodorov in 1953 with William Buckley Jr. as its first president, with the goal to “distribute literature to college students [and] get into their hands the theories and information being marshalled by the new intellectual community” of conservatives (Evans 1961, 62–63). The ISI
proved to be important in cultivating conservatism on college campuses across the country and provided the seeds for activism by young conservatives later in the 1950s.

**Traditionalism**

Traditionalism (also called “New Conservatism”) rested on an “impulse to recover a ‘conservative’ past” in the intellectual realm that had been neglected with the rise of liberalism in both the classical and modern senses (Nash 1976, 63). Many of the traditionalist conservative intellectuals, such as Richard M. Weaver, denounced “materialism, mass society, and relativism” in favor of older communitarian and even feudalist ideals (Hodgson 1996, 84). Some like Leo Strauss focused on intellectual decline in Western thought beginning in the Middle Ages and reached back to earlier eras for a conservative political philosophy rooted in Ancient Greek and Roman ideals and a tradition of natural law. Two of the most influential intellectuals of the traditionalist school of thought, though, were Peter Viereck and Russell Kirk. Viereck in his book *Conservatism Revisited* (1949) not only turned traditionalism into an intellectual force but also stated that conservatism “should be based on Christianity” and the intellectual traditions of Judaism, Ancient Greece and Rome, and the Middle Ages (Nash 1976, 66–67). Kirk, on the other hand, in *The Conservative Mind* (1953) brought forward the thinking of intellectual conservatives from the past two hundred years and relentlessly attacked the foundations of liberalism, focusing on conservative philosophy as revolving around religious and moral issues, traditional life, class order, private property and its connection to freedom, and distinguishing reform from change (Nash 1976, 73).

The impact of this book, amplified by reviews by majors magazines and newspapers such as *Time* and *The New York Times*, made it integral in elucidating a conservative intellectual
tradition and in making conservative ideas acceptable in the intellectual realm in a way they had not been for some time (Nash 1976, 74–75). Kirk’s ideas as expressed through his “six truisms” regarding conservative philosophy also touched on many important topics fundamental to conservatism: the impossibility of achieving full separation of church and state, opposition to an “engineered” life, “the apparent contradiction between freedom and order,” the importance of economic opportunity in the promotion of freedom, the need for internal restraints on behavior to maintain order and stability, and the reality that society cannot and should not be perfect but that it can be guided in the right direction nevertheless (Schoenwald 2001, 19–20). *The Conservative Mind* was also not written by someone from an elite Ivy League university but someone who attended Michigan State College, which contrasted with many of the East Coast conservative intellectuals of the time (Edwards 1999, 76). It was one of the first attempts to define what conservatism was and even though it fell in the traditionalist camp its influence would spread far and wide as it influenced future generations of conservatives and “sparked a wave of interest among intellectuals” toward conservative ideas (Schoenwald 2001, 21). Other traditionalists were more focused on the problems inherent with the society of the 1950s which would elucidate the traditionalist view on the problems that were currently plaguing Western civilization.

What undergirded traditionalist critiques of modern society was their view of a “decay of belief in a divinely rooted, objective moral order and the decline of community” that meant “the loss of transcendant, spiritual values” and a turn to worldly, materialistic pursuits rooted in individualism. Traditionalists believed that society required moral and emotional bonds between individuals and a shared moral order that would be maintained by the state or “‘intermediate’ institutions like families, neighborhoods, and churches.” The rise of collectivism and totalitarianism in the early 20th century to them was the inevitable outcome of a lack of a
transcendental moral order and strong communitarian institutions (Himmelstein 1990, 50). Such concerns were echoed by Richard Weaver, another important and influential leader of the traditionalist school of thought, in his influential book *Ideas Have Consequences* (1948) in which he identified the main problem ailing modern man as being the “denial of a higher truth” that was greater than and independent of man. Without a “shared image of how the world ought to be” society would lack cohesiveness and a sense of direction and individuals would lack self-discipline and control. Materialism rooted in the use of science and technology was the result of the denial of a higher truth, a problem that found its ultimate representation in the form of capitalism. What Weaver proposed to do was to drive apart the material and the transcendental by focusing on the right of private property by stripping it of its capitalist elements which had allowed private enterprise to deprive property of its privacy, and distributing the ownership of smaller properties to individuals in the form of “independent farms, small businesses, owner-occupied homes, and the like” in order to return the link between individual responsibility and property (Himmelstein 1990, 50–52).

In essence, what linked traditional conservatives was “their insistence on seeking, at the very base of their politics, the anchor of a transcendent moral order” (Hodgson 1996, 84). While their impact rested more in the intellectual realm than the political one they nevertheless served an important role as the catalyst for a revival in conservative thinking that grew over the course of the 1950s as intellectual debates between conservatism and liberalism became a common occurrence and the previous hegemony of intellectual liberalism dissipated.
Anticommunism

Anticommunism was born as a school of conservative thought in reaction to the rise of Popular Front politics\(^2\) abroad in the 1930s and the cooperation of American liberals with communists at home which became even more fervent following World War II and the growing power and influence of the Soviet Union (Nash 1976, 86–88). In the years following 1945 two key anticommunist intellectuals emerged on the scene, both of whom happened to be former communists themselves: James Burnham and Whittaker Chambers. James Burnham would play an important role in defining a strategy for defeating communism abroad, first articulated in his book *The Struggle for the World* (1947) in which he stated that Communism’s ultimate goal was world domination and that the only way to stop it was for the United States to drop any notions that it could stop Communism through peaceful means and go on the offensive to establish a counter to Communism and intervene in the affairs on nations if need to be to stop its growth (Nash 1976, 92–93). These ideas continued to be articulated and expanded upon in his two further books, *The Coming Defeat of Communism* (1950) and *Containment or Liberation?* (1953), both of which called for aggressive responses by the United States to combat the spread of Communism and exerted considerable influence on attitudes regarding the Cold War both within and without government (Nash 1976, 94–96).

Whittaker Chambers also played a crucial role in his involvement in the Alger Hiss case which polarized the nation from 1948 until 1950 along Left-Right lines between those who defended Hiss (mostly liberals) and those who excoriated him as a communist spy sent to infiltrate the State Department (mostly conservatives). It was through his admittance of ties to

\(^2\) The Popular Front was an antifascist alliance of the Left in the 1930s between socialists and communists in Europe that many prominent American liberals also allied themselves with (Nash 1976, 86).
the Communist Party in the 1930s and his implication of Hiss as a fellow comrade-in-arms that
set off the entire affair, which, after Hiss’ trial and conviction for perjury, led to the rise of
McCarthyism. Equally important, however, was the publication several years later of his
autobiography Witness (1952) which emphasized the fundamental crisis that Communism posed
to America, painted the conflict against Communism in terms of “God vs. Man,” and linked
secular liberalism and Communism together as part of a shared intellectual tradition (Nash 1976,
104–5). This laid the foundation for the further growth of anticommunism within conservative
intellectual circles in the years to come.

Anticommunism would come to hold an important place in the development of a unified
conservative intellectual. In the early 1950s conservative speakers traveling the country
spreading the various ideas circulating in conservative intellectual circles used anticommunism
to bring them all together, with men such as Albert Wedemeyer, a retired Lt. General in the U.S.
army, and Raymond Moley, a conservative ideologue, being two prominent examples of such
lecturers road-testing conservative ideas and tying them together with opposition to the spread of
communism (Schoenwald 2001, 28–29). In the intellectual realm as well anticommunism was
easily integrated by the libertarian and traditionalists camps, as libertarians “did not feel any
burning inconsistency between support for individual liberty…at home and tough anti-
Communism either at home or abroad” while Communism represented a threat to Christianity
and all the worse of a modern, permissive, open society that traditionalists feared (Nash 1976,
127–28). Anticommunism also contributed two important aspects to the conservative movement:
popular support in the American heartland and an ideological zeal that helped attract fervent and
growing support for the conservative movement by the mid-1950s (Nash 1976, 128–29). In
doing so anticommunists set the stage for later developments in the ideological development of
modern conservatism as these disparate strands began to be brought together by the end of the decade and the beginning of the 1960s.

**Growth of Conservatism**

Several developments in the 1950s provided the impetus for the growth in conservatism, both in the number of followers and the intensity of those existing and new adherents. These developments would set the stage for larger scale political activism in the 1960s and the movement of the Republican Party decisively toward ideological conservatism.

**The Beginnings of Fusion**

By the middle of the 1950s intellectual conservatism had regained its foothold among scholars, intellectuals, and pundits as a legitimate alternative to liberalism. Yet it remained divided without a coherent, unified ideological coalition behind it as traditionalists and libertarian especially as the differences between their philosophies remained deep. Where libertarians stressed the dangers of restricting individual freedom, traditionalists decried the effects that too much individualism had on the breakdown of moral bonds and transcendent values. Whereas libertarians viewed society as a collection of self-reliant individuals, traditionalists viewed it as a community tied together by common values and institutions. The strong antistatist and pro-capitalist views of libertarians also differed from traditionalists who believed that there could be a positive role for the state and who were also highly critical of capitalism with many in favor of Weaver’s “distributist vision of a society of decentralized industry and small property” (Himmelstein 1990, 53–55). This began to change in the fall of 1955 when William Buckley Jr., a Yale graduate and author of the best-selling *God and Man*
(1953), and Willi Schlamm, a former anticommunist writer at *Time*, joined together to establish the *National Review* as the most influential and, at the time, only conservative journal of opinion in the country (Hodgson 1996, 78). Its mission was not just to attack the left but to “consolidate and mobilize the Right” (Edwards 1999, 80) which is clear from its first issue which contained articles by journalists and intellectuals covering all three major strands of conservatism: John Chamberlain (a libertarian), James Burnham and Wilmoore Kendall (both anticommunists), and Russell Kirk (a traditionalist) (Hodgson 1996, 78). In addition, the conservatism of Buckley as well as Frank Meyer, an important contributor to the *National Review*, spanned multiple schools of conservative thought and helped begin the process of fusion over the course of the late 1950s.

The impact of the *National Review*, though, cannot be understated. Even though its circulation remained small (only thirty thousand by 1960) (Edwards 1999, 81) it had a strong following among young conservatives on college campuses, being the second most influential conservative source amongst this group and the most widely read conservative publication by 1960 (Evans 1961, 54). It served as a counterweight to the various liberal journals of opinion such as the *Nation*, the *New Republic*, and the *Atlantic* that existed at the time and the eagerness of its contributors to take on liberalism in forceful terms riled up its many conservative readers. It would also prove instrumental in efforts in the second half of the 1950s to agitate conservatives against various causes, especially in regards to developments in the Cold War both domestically and abroad, as well as serving as a forum to bring together and familiarize conservative intellectuals with each other as they pushed for a common cause (Nash 1976, 153).

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3 This book would represent Buckley’s fusionist brand of conservatism with its “aggressive contempt of communism, collectivism, and especially for liberalism,” insistence on the need to proclaim religious truths and scorn moral relativism, and in its defense of individualism and free enterprise (Hodgson 1996, 77).
The Cold War

It goes without stating that the impact of the Cold War on the rise of conservatism following World War II was considerable and while it was not the only explanation it was certainly a large part of the story. The Alger Hiss case mentioned earlier was an important event in the rise of anticommunist sentiment spurred by Cold War tensions as a precursor to the McCarthy hearings of the early-to-mid 1950s. Hiss, a former senior State Department official who had also been general secretary of the UN Conference in San Francisco in 1945, was accused by Whittaker Chambers before the House Un-American Activities Committee in August of 1948 of having been a communist agent in the 1930s (Edwards 1999, 33). After incriminating evidence was revealed despite Hiss’ denials of involvement with communist espionage, he was sentenced to five years in prison for perjury in January 1950 while the very next month Senator Joseph McCarthy purported to have a list of communist spies within the State Department (Nash 1976, 109). McCarthyism had begun.

While McCarthyism reflected the widespread concerns in the early 1950s regarding communist subversion in America that was being exploited for political gain, it was also explicitly partisan in nature and a “projection of traditional political divisions in a new context” (Hodgson 1996, 56). McCarthy’s support came from Republicans and those most prominently exploiting the issue were also Republicans such as Bourke Hickenlooper, Karl Mundt4, and Richard Nixon (Hodgson 1996, 57). As a result, McCarthy linked anticommunism with the Republican Party, as conservative intellectuals, most prominently William Buckley Jr. but others as well including James Burnham, Frank Chodorov, and John Chamberlain, defended him in

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4 Bourke Hickenlooper was a United States Senator from Iowa while Karl Mundt was a Representative for South Dakota’s At-large District.
principle even if they did not fully approve of his methods (Nash 1976, 111–12). It also stirred up conservative sentiments within the country, especially in the West, and set the stage for growing anticommunism in the country.

By the late 1950s into the early 1960s public opinion in opposition to communism was shifting as the Cold War continued to heat up and efforts to combat communism at home came under threat. On June 17, 1957, on a day known infamously as “Red Monday” by conservatives, the liberal, Warren-led Supreme Court issued a spate of rulings limiting the ability for the government to use the Smith Act (passed to allow the prosecution of potential traitors to America) to investigate alleged communists and overturned several convictions that had been made under the act (Schoenwald 2001, 38). This incited real and palpable concerns regarding judicial activism (intrinsically linked to liberalism) and accusations of legislating from the bench. The National Review took the lead in criticizing the decisions, citing the popularity of liberalism among Supreme Court justices that caused them to dismiss communist subversion, and soon even conservative members of Congress were taking steps to limit the Court’s powers (Schoenwald 2001, 38–39). While none of this actually came to pass, conservatives had become more vigilant of the Supreme Court and convinced they needed to ensure they had the power to determine who would be on the Court. 1957 also stirred real worries that the United States was falling behind the Soviet Union technologically with the launch of Sputnik I in October which “shattered Americans’ belief in their technological superiority,” ignited a bevy of criticisms of the Eisenhower administration for letting this happen, and brought demands to expand America’s arsenal of missiles and to increase education spending (Brennan 1995, 26).

An even bigger turning point occurred in 1959 after Fidel Castro overthrew the Batista government in Cuba and then President Eisenhower invited Khrushchev to tour America and
hold a summit with him. The Cold War was getting too close to comfort for many Americans as 
Castro’s seizure of power in Cuba and the Eisenhower administration’s failure to prevent it 
seemed to indicate that the United States was beginning to lose the Cold War (Brennan 1995, 
26). Meanwhile conservatives, outraged that Eisenhower would even consider meeting with the 
Soviet leader, and led by the National Review, strongly condemned Khrushchev’s planned visit 
in hyperbolic terms as citizens groups organized around the country in protest. “Khrushchev Not 
Welcome Here” stickers were sold by the National Review for twenty-five cents each and a wide 
range of demonstrations took place before and during the visit that highlighted the strong 
opposition that many held, especially conservatives, to the idea that diplomacy rather than 
forceful opposition was necessary to defeat the Soviet Union and the threat of communism. Even 
though most of the public thought that the visit had been beneficial, it only served to further 
animate a burgeoning conservative movement and put anticommunism front-and-center as the 
1960s began (Schoenwald 2001, 41–44)

Eisenhower and “Modern Republicanism”

The twenty years from 1932 to 1952 were hard for the Republican Party as Democrats 
controlled the presidency and Congress for almost the entirety of that time. The Great 
Depression had swept Franklin D. Roosevelt into power with 57 percent of the popular vote and 
the subsequent New Deal that he implemented not only expanded the role of the federal 
government to depths it had never previously reached but it also resulted in an electoral 
realignment that brought in working-class and urban ethnic voters in the North into a Democratic 
coalition that had previously been dominated by southerners. At the same time Republicans in 
the East saw themselves facing new competition from Democrats in their traditional strongholds 
while the party lost many of its progressive supporters in the Midwest and West to the
Democrats, leaving conservatives in their place (Himmelstein 1990, 16–18). Even as the supporters of the New Deal lost momentum after 1938 and World War II intervened to keep the presidency in Democratic hands, Republicans and conservatives alike failed to incite a conservative reaction to the New Deal that would scale it back due to a lack of public support for such measures and disorganization among their ranks. While Republicans managed to win back control of Congress in 1946 and pass legislation such as Taft-Hartley that pushed back against the New Deal in a limited fashion, Thomas Dewey’s loss to Truman in 1948, a year that saw a divided Democratic Party and a seemingly conservative political mood in the nation, proved the lingering difficulties the GOP was facing in regaining power in the New Deal era (Himmelstein 1990, 19–21).

It was in this context that the struggle over the Republican nomination in 1952 and the eventual victory by Dwight Eisenhower, as well as his subsequent presidency, took place. Both of these are important factors in explaining the rise of conservatism within the Republican Party by the end of the 1950s. After failing to secure the nomination in 1948, Robert Taft was back again feeling vindicated by the defeat of “me-too” Dewey four years prior, with conservatives in the party certain that the cautious and low-key campaign of Dewey proved that the party needed a candidate with clear positions on the issues who would give voters a starker alternative to New Deal liberalism to take back the White House come 1952 (Edwards 1999, 39). Indeed, Taft seemed to be in a strong position to win the nomination in 1952, sweeping more primary contests than Eisenhower and ending up with a delegate lead before the convention that allowed him to have control over floor proceedings. However, because of a credentials fight, polling showing Ike doing better against Stevenson than Taft, and an ineffective effort by Taft’s managers to control the convention, Eisenhower ended up with the nomination, enraging many
conservatives who refused to support his campaign for president and instead vowed to ensure that he would be defeated in November (Edwards 1999, 50–51).

This led to a meeting in Morningside Heights in New York City between Eisenhower and Taft in order to gain his support and placate his supporters which resulted in the Morningside Declaration, with a recognition from Eisenhower that the “fundamental issue of the campaign…was ‘liberty against the creeping socialism in every domestic field’” a statement that dismayed liberal Republicans but satisfied conservatives who expected him to uphold it once he won the presidency (Edwards 1999, 54). That, combined with his decision to run on “Korea, Communism, Corruption,” as well as campaign on the platform drafted by Taft’s supporters which promised to “eliminate from the State Department and from every Federal office, all…who share responsibility for the needless predicaments and perils in which we find ourselves” (i.e. alleged Communist spies) as well as provided for the “reduction of expenditures by the elimination of waste and extravagance so that the budget will be balanced and a general tax reduction can be made” (Edwards 1999, 55). This sealed the deal for conservatives and got them behind his campaign as he won a landslide victory over Stevenson and assumed the presidency.

Conservative dissatisfaction was muted during Eisenhower’s first term as Robert Taft, at least for the first six months of Eisenhower’s presidency before his untimely death, worked to ensure that he upheld his promises during the campaign to reduce spending and balance the budget and acted as an “effective counterweight to the modern Republicanism of the Eisenhower administration” (Edwards 1999, 65). Once he died, this was gone and Eisenhower was allowed

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5 “Modern Republicanism” was in Eisenhower’s own words (as quoted in Brennan 1995) “the political philosophy that recognizes clearly the responsibility of the Federal Government to take the lead in making certain that the
to drift back toward the center and the “metooism” of the Eastern Establishment wing of the Republican Party. It was only after his re-election in 1956, however, when conservative dissatisfaction with the Eisenhower administration came out into the open. Conservative House Republicans such as Richard Simpson, Chairman of the Republican Congressional Campaign Committee, and Clare Hoffman of Michigan criticized Eisenhower in mid-January 1957 for the failure of both him and Modern Republicanism to carry downballot Republicans to victory in 1956 as well as his attempts to impose Modern Republicanism on the rest of the party (Reinhard 1983, 138–39). In April 1957 Barry Goldwater, on the floor of the Senate, publically criticized the Eisenhower administration for its failure to live up to his promises in 1952 to reduce government spending below $60 billion and eliminate the budget deficit (Edwards 1999, 83). This was played up in the newspapers at the same time that conservatives began to wonder if Goldwater was the man to lead them to victory one day. There was also a high profile “battle” over budget appropriations with successful efforts to cut funding for the United States Information Agency (USIA) by an alliance of anti-spending conservative Republicans and Democrats, with the agency itself closely connected to Eisenhower’s Modern Republicanism because it was led by Eisenhower ally and Modern Republicanism promoter Arthur Larson (Reinhard 1983, 140–41).

The next year saw increased criticism of Eisenhower from the National Review, with Buckley calling Modern Republicanism “fundamentally…a retreat from an explicit expression of the meaning of American society” (quoted in Schuparra 1998, 40). It also saw the formation of the John Birch Society by Robert Welch who, despite his extremist views and conspiracy

productivity of our great economic machine is distributed so that no one will suffer disaster, privation, through no fault of his own.” It involved accommodation with the consensus of the New Deal while preventing its further expansion (Brennan 1995, 21–22).
theories (including that Eisenhower was in league with communists) nevertheless provided an outlet for angry conservatives who were upset with America’s foreign policy blunders earlier in the 1950s, the failure to stop communist infiltration of the State Department, and the continued growth of taxation and government spending (Edwards 1999, 85). By 1960 many conservatives were hoping to move away from the “Modern Republicanism” of the Eisenhower years to push the Republican Party in a more conservative direction.

**Opposition to Organized Labor**

Another key aspect of the growth of conservatism in the late 1950s was an increasing willingness to challenge labor on the part of members of the business elite and conservative activists and politicians. While anti-labor attitudes had long been part of conservative opposition to New Deal liberalism, demonstrated by the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947 which importantly allowed states to “prohibit compulsory membership in a union” through right-to-work laws and put limits on labor’s power, no serious attempts to utilize Taft-Hartley to undermine unions had been undertaken by the end of the 1950s (Reinhart 1983, 26). However, with the zenith of labor power in the 1950s and its close association with liberalism as well as its accommodation by moderate establishment Republicans, growing unrest within conservative circles grew. This was no more pronounced than in California where Bill Knowland, the Senate Minority Leader, waged a vigorous campaign for Governor of California in 1958 by pushing for a right-to-work law within the state (Schuparra 1998, 28). His campaign coincided with Proposition 18 which sought to turn California into a right-to-work state and had been put on the ballot by the efforts of businessmen from Southern California who were threatened by the continued activities of organized labor and ended up forming the California Free-Enterprise Association (CFEA) to promote free market capitalism and attack big government through the
distribution of pamphlets to the public (Schuparra 1998, 38). The campaign was important in exposing the libertarian leanings of California conservative and more generally of Western conservatives, with Knowland framing the right-to-work debate in terms of “freedom versus tyranny” with the ability to be able to choose not to join a union as a fundamental civil right against the tyranny of corrupt union bosses (Schuparra 1998, 28–29). While both of these campaigns failed, they represented the first major postwar conservative crusade in California. Not only that but they exposed an increasing pushback by some in the business community to the accommodation of labor that had become a standard practice as a way to maintain economic stability and peace. Despite the failures of both Proposition 18 and the Knowland campaign they helped unify and invigorate the nascent conservative movement in the state, a pattern of long-term growth through short-term defeat that would repeat itself at the national level in the coming decade (Schuparra 1998, 41).

The push for right-to-work laws in 1958 was also not limited to California. In Ohio William O’Neil, the Republican candidate for governor, was also a steadfast supporter of right-to-work legislation on the campaign trail which put Senator John Bricker, a conservative Republican, in a difficult situation as he faced re-election the same year and attempted to distance himself from the right-to-work issue (Reinhard 1983, 144). Such efforts to push for right-to-work laws, however, proved to backfire on conservative Republicans and contributed to losses across the country⁶ such as that of Indiana Governor Harold Handley, a right-to-work supporter, who lost to Democrat Vance Hartke to replace the conservative William Jenner. Other conservatives lost as well such as Nevada Senator George Malone, West Virginia Senator

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⁶ There was also an economic downturn, controversy over the Eisenhower administration’s agricultural policy, and a corruption scandal regarding White House Chief of Staff Sherman Adams that played a role in massive GOP losses in 1958 (Reinhard 1983, 146).
Chapman Revercomb, and Utah Senator A.V. Watkins. Unions turned out their members in higher numbers and in six states where right-to-work was on the ballot 1.5 million more Democratic voters came out to vote than four years previously. Only in Kansas would right-to-work pass via referendum (Reinhard 1983, 145–46). The big winner from this rout of conservative Republicans, part of large-scale GOP losses across the country in 1958, was Barry Goldwater who would immediately become the leading conservative in the United States Senate and fill the void left by Knowland and others as an advocate for right-wing positions (Schuparra 1998, 40).

**Conformity and Cosmopolitanism**

While the 1950s is recognized as a decade of conformity, especially in regards to suburban life, this has been widely viewed as supporting conservative values particularly in regard to the family. However, beginning in the early 1950s there was growing unease among many conservatives with a different kind of conformity that is “permissive in matters of ethics, statist in matters of public policy” (Evans 1961, 16). This conformity is that of cosmopolitanism which conservatives saw as intrinsically linked with liberalism and as furthering a “pragmatic tolerance which undercut the formation of a moral consensus” (Miles 1980, 222). Cosmopolitanism was opposed to Protestant values and furthered by groups in the city that were viewed as being part of the “collectivization” of American society: government bureaucrats, the urban rich, trade unionists, and political machine bosses (Miles 1980, 223). There was a deep resentment by conservatives toward cultural institutions they saw as pushing cosmopolitan values of tolerance, secularism, and openness (and thus liberal ones) especially schools,

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7 His loss had more to do with a third-party run by former Governor H. Bracken Lee than the right-to-work issue (Reinhard 1983, 144).
universities, television, radio, the press, and the entertainment and publishing industries. Many conservatives believed in the need to purge these institutions of cosmopolitan forces and have them instead push an “Americanism” rooted in the small-town, individualism, and the Protestant Ethic (Miles 1980, 226). This took the shape of pressure on the press and on television which were viewed as catering to the political center and thus tolerating “internationalism, the New Deal, and secular cosmopolitanism” all of which offended many conservatives of the 1950s (Miles 1980, 231). Both of these bent to accommodate conservative criticism of their content, with television networks specifically working to show that they would stand up to communism by implementing loyalty oaths and creating positions to investigate and purge suspected communists, yet they did not fully relent to the right (Miles 1980, 236). It was also crucial in the growing intensity of young conservatives on college campuses across the country, with the increasing growth of conservative groups in universities over the course of the 1950s as conservative students dissatisfied with the liberal atmosphere on their campuses banded together to defend and discuss their beliefs and take political action (Evans 1961, 31–33).

**The Campus Rebellion**

The campus rebellion was rooted in dissatisfaction with secular cosmopolitanism which would begin to have a serious impact by the end of the 1950s. This manifested itself in a struggle between the “other-directedness” of society in the 1950s pushing individuals to focus on conforming with society’s expectations of acceptable behavior rooted in secular cosmopolitanism as opposed to the “inner-directedness” of those who continued to hold onto traditional values and a moral code that limited and guided their behavior⁸ (Evans 1961, 16). The former mindset pervaded college campuses in the eyes of conservatives being pushed by

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⁸ It could also be viewed as “collectivism” versus “individualism.”
professors who were overwhelmingly liberal in identification, viewed as being “relativists, agnostics, or atheists,” and supported statist views of government and Keynesian economics (Evans 1961, 24–25). Many of the students who were part of the conservative rebellion on college campuses held values that were individualistic and focused on self-responsibility, patriotism, and traditional morality (Evans 1961, 50–51). These overlapped with the three strands of conservative thought which provided fertile ground for cultivating the seeds of a conservative youth movement as well as fitting into an “inner-directed” mindset that continued to fuel rebellion against a liberal orthodoxy that seemed to be trying to impose itself on college students.

Young conservatives would begin to organize more aggressively in the late 1950s in reaction to ongoing developments within the Republican Party as well as growing anticommunist sentiment. In 1957 the Young Republicans were overtaken by conservative forces as John Ashbrook and Jerrie Kent were elected Chairman and Vice-Chairman respectively and the Young Republicans adopted a platform with conservative positions on a variety of issues from education to labor, foreign aid, cultural exchanges, and China that were all opposed to the Eisenhower administration’s position on these issues. This continued two years later in 1959 with the adoption of conservative planks on a wider range of issues including social security, public power, labor, taxes, government subsidies to agriculture, and the budget (Evans 1961, 131–33). In 1958 the passage of the National Defense Education Act led to an attempt by then Senator John Kennedy and others to repeal a loyalty oath provision requiring anyone who received a loan from the government to pledge allegiance to the United States and to pledge not to support organizations seeking the violently overthrow the U.S. government. This prompted the formation of a Student Committee for the Loyalty Oath that founded chapters on college
campuses across the country that organized and fired up conservative students with its various campaigns in defense of the loyalty oath in the NDEA (Edwards 1999, 98). The first serious coordinated campaign by conservative college students, the fight over the loyalty oath and the expression of liberal “permissiveness” that its attempted repeal signified would have ramifications come the 1960s in a push by young conservatives in 1960 and 1964 to nominate Barry Goldwater for vice-president and president respectively.

**Bringing Together a Conservative Movement: Goldwater and the Early 1960s**

**The Fusion of Conservative Thinking**

The early 1960s saw pressure from intellectuals and conservative activists to bring together the differing strands of conservative thought into a single, coherent, and broad ideology that would provide a foundation for the creation of an active conservative political movement. It was the writers of the *National Review* who were central in pushing for this fusion of conservative thought, especially Frank Meyer who believed that beyond the differences between the separate factions of conservatism laid a general consensus of principles that defined conservatism. To him, the important principles of conservatism were its focus on individual freedom, the belief in limiting the power of the state, and a desire to protect Christian moral values in the face of utilitarian and secular thought (Nash 1976, 172–74). The way to encourage virtue was not through the use of the power of the state but of making men free to pursue virtue for themselves with the state’s functions limited to those that would establish the conditions for freedom: “national defense, preservation of domestic order, and the administration of justice
between man and man” (Nash 1976, 173). Meyer and Buckley as well sought to merge libertarian and traditionalist thinking by arguing for individual freedom and capitalism on moral rather than economic grounds9 in order to strengthen conservative arguments against the growing power of the state (Himmelstein 1990, 57–58). This line of thought would end up being called “fusionism” and represented the biggest attempt yet at finding an intellectual consensus that conservatives could rally behind.

What Is Conservatism? (1964), a collection of essays from prominent conservative intellectuals representing all strands of conservative thought and edited by Meyer, proved to be the most important step toward establishing the “fusionist” perspective as the dominant one among conservatives. In it Meyer, reflecting upon the different ideas argued by his various peers, concluded that despite their differences conservatives could still agree on several fundamental ideas: a belief in “‘an objective moral order’” of “‘immutable standards by which human conduct should be judged,’” a valuing of “‘the human person’ and [opposition to] liberal attempts to use the State ‘to enforce ideological patterns on human beings,’”10 a belief that the power of the state should be limited, support for the Constitution as it was “originally conceived,” and opposition to Communism as a threat to Western civilization (Nash 1976, 175). In attempting to bring together libertarian and traditionalist ideas Meyer “demanded of traditionalism that it give up virtually everything except its emphasis on an objective moral order” for he and other fusionists (like Buckley) “had little use for the traditionalist notion of society as an organic whole and less use

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9 Previous arguments criticizing the welfare state and promoting capitalism and individualism had been grounded on materialistic and utilitarian grounds e.g. ‘Social Security is bad because it will bankrupt the U.S.’ or Hayek’s justification of freedom as “the condition under which individuals can best achieve their private goals, material progress advances most quickly, and would-be social engineers are most easily held in check” (Himmelstein 1990, 57–58).

10 These arguments take the form of 1) support for a moral order “rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition” from which society could be based and 2) a focus on the individual and opposition to attempts to constrain individual freedom (Himmelstein 1990, 59).
for its critical insights into capitalism” while asking libertarians to accept a moral backing rooted in Judeo-Christian tradition for their arguments (Himmelstein 1990, 59–60). Not surprisingly, the most vehement critics of fusionism in the early 1960s would be traditionalists such as Russell Kirk, John Hallowell, Richard Weaver, and L. Brent Bozell (Buckley’s brother-in-law) who took issue with the focus on freedom and individualism to the detriment of virtue and community. Others such as Wilmoore Kendall and Felix Morley also saw issues with fusionism as being either “doctrinaire” or lacking any sort of consensus that laid a strong foundation for a coherent account of conservatism (Nash 1976, 175–77).

Despite this initial opposition to his attempt at bringing conservative thought together, Meyer’s fusionism would end up triumphing by the end of the 1960s for a variety of reasons. These included a desire by conservatives to have a set of basic principles upon which they could construct a conservative political movement, the cohesion brought by conservatives’ common enemy in the form of Communism and liberalism that was reflected in their support for anti-Communism, and a recognition that Meyer’s set of conservative principles reflected many conservatives’ own feelings about what they stood for (Nash 1976, 179). Thus by the time Goldwater was nominated in 1964 intellectual conservatives were increasingly emphasizing the similarities between their thinking and that of other schools of conservatism rather than continuing the bitter contestation between which ideas truly encapsulated conservatism that had been characteristic of the intellectual debates of the 1950s.

**Turning Ideas into Action**

As the 1960s dawned the nascent conservative movement, not yet unified but with its numbers growing by the day, began to produce stronger and more enthusiastic political activism
by its increasing number of adherents. While there had been some political organizing going on by the late 1950s, it was the 1960 election and the years that followed which saw a large increase in conservative activism along with the emergence and growth of new conservative political organizations. At the same time demographic and economic changes intrinsically linked to geography furthered fueled the growth of conservatism as well as changed the balance of power within the Republican Party. These ultimately came together with the nomination of Barry Goldwater in 1964 which, while resulting in a landslide defeat for the GOP, was vital in giving conservatives political experience as well as normalizing the discussion of conservative ideas on the national political stage as an alternative to liberalism.

**Goldwater for (Vice) President**

Even though conservatives had begun to organize during the 1950s serious efforts to organize within the Republican Party began in 1960 as a result of many years of dissatisfaction with the “Modern Republicanism” of the Eisenhower administration and a distrust of Nixon as a result of his reluctance to advocate for conservative policies and attempts to occupy the middle ground which resulted in him “frequently [advocating] conservative means to achieve liberal ends” (Brennan 1995, 29). Looking for a leader, conservatives had already been attracted to Goldwater because of his plain-spoken manner and opposition to increases in federal spending during Eisenhower’s second term. Goldwater, however, would also prove to be intimately connected to the conservative intellectual movement of the 1950s through his close friendship with one of the most influential conservative intellectuals of the decade: Russell Kirk. Brought together through their mutual friend Jay Gordon Hall, an executive at General Motors, Goldwater and Kirk would marry conservative ideas with a messenger who could transmit these
ideas to millions of Americans who would otherwise not hear them and energize the conservative grassroots (Birzer 2015, 245).

Kirk began advising Goldwater both directly and indirectly either at the end of 1956 or the beginning of 1957, right before Goldwater became more critical of the Eisenhower administration, up until the end of 1963 prior to Goldwater’s announcement of his campaign for president. His influence extended to suggesting ideas for Goldwater’s speeches inside and outside the Senate\(^\text{11}\), providing Goldwater with articles and books that he had written, and becoming one of the first respected conservative writers in the late 1950s to suggest that Goldwater should run for president (Birzer 2015, 273–74). Goldwater himself praised Kirk as one of the most influential conservative writers of his time and even noted in 1984 how Kirk (along with Hall) had provided him with the desire to fight for the conservative cause by giving him “logical, intelligent reasons” for some of his deeply held beliefs (Birzer 2015, 275–76).

While Kirk’s direct role as a political advisor to Goldwater diminished over the course of 1963 until it ceased completely, his impact on Goldwater’s rise as the political leader of the conservative movement in the late 1950s and early 1960s and on Goldwater’s own brand of conservatism cannot be understated.

It was also the publication of *The Conscience of a Conservative* in April of 1960 which allowed Goldwater to galvanize a new generation of conservatives who were interested in political activism rather than intellectual debates between different schools of conservative thought\(^\text{12}\) (Andrew 1997, 24). He emphasized the spiritual aspect of conservatism while also

\(^{11}\) He even wrote two speeches for Goldwater delivered at Notre Dame and Yale in the spring of 1962, the first “[infusing] Christian humanism into Goldwater’s ideas” while the latter expressed Goldwater’s (and Kirk’s) hawkish anticomunist views on foreign policy (Birzer 2015, 277–79).

\(^{12}\) *The Conscience of a Conservative* was, however, largely ghostwritten by Buckley’s brother-in-law L. Brent Bozell (Gifford 2009, 114).
touching upon support for freedom and order, opposition to excessive government control, and
the need to take a more aggressive stance against the Soviet Union by withdrawing recognition
from all communist countries and using nuclear weapons as a means of liberation (Brennan
1995, 31). This application of conservative principles to a variety of issues, with its foundation
being influenced by Kirk’s “six canons” of conservatism, proved to be an important step in
defining conservatism to the general public. National Review fawned over the book with not
only a review by Frank Meyer shortly after its publication but also an editorial dedicated to the
book’s impact being published the following month (Gifford 2009, 115–16). Through
Conscience of a Conservative Goldwater firmly established himself as the heir to Robert Taft
and as a spokesman and national leader for the emerging conservative movement.

In the spring and summer of 1960 Goldwater for President groups were founded across
the country (in addition to groups supporting him for the vice presidential nomination) with
young conservatives heavily involved as well. The Midwest branch of the Young Republicans
endorsed Goldwater for the Republican presidential nomination in April 1960. The next month
Youth for Goldwater for Vice President was founded by Doug Caddy and Marvin Liebman while
in June “Americans for Goldwater” was established to ensure that conservatism would be
presented as a political alternative to liberalism through the nomination of Goldwater for
president (Andrew 1997, 47). His support among college students reflected his broad appeal that
was not simply confined to groups like the John Birch Society, with their presence on campuses
all across the country allowing for any organization involving them to reach outside of the South
and West (Andrew 1997, 48). These groups came together at the 1960 Republican National
Convention in Chicago to push for his nomination as the GOP’s presidential candidate, with
Goldwater already having support from delegations in South Carolina and his home state of
Arizona (Edwards 1999, 93). They came to the convention angry, however, about a meeting Nixon had held the previous week with New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller.

In a demonstration of the relative power of each faction of the Republican Party in 1960 Nixon viewed Rockefeller, a liberal Republican who had been making signals that he was open to a draft movement at the convention, as a greater threat to party unity than the conservatives who were just beginning to organize at a national level. Rockefeller became more openly critical of the Eisenhower administration over the course of the spring of 1960, with the most outspoken criticism coming in a speech on June 8 in which Rockefeller expressed his concerns that the GOP under Eisenhower had lacked a positive agenda to present to the American people and that Nixon was waiting too long to make his views on the issues clear. Presenting a list of ten “concrete and crucial” issues that the GOP needed to state it position on, he proceeded to criticize the Eisenhower administration for letting America’s place in the world fall, failing to provide adequate defense spending, allowing the economy to weaken, and not doing enough to protect Brown v. Board of Education while pushing for increased spending on “federal education aid and scholarship programs” as well as an expansion of the “existent system of contributory social insurance” in order to provide needed medical assistance for the elderly (Gifford 2009, 46–47). Rockefeller, refusing Nixon’s entreaties to become his running mate and any other efforts to get his wing of the party behind Nixon’s candidacy, forced Nixon to court his support in a meeting with him a week before the convention. At the July 22 meeting Nixon made concessions to Rockefeller on the party platform to gain his for Nixon’s campaign including a strong plank on civil rights recognizing the immorality and injustice of racial discrimination and calling for its complete eradication (Gifford 2009, 76), much to the displeasure of Eisenhower

13 This became derided by conservatives as the “Treaty of Fifth Avenue” that was compared by Goldwater at one point to a “domestic Munich” in reference to the Munich Conference of 1938 (Rusher 1984, 88).
and the platform committee who were coerced by Nixon as well as Platform Committee members Melvin Laird and Charles Percy to accept the changes. Conservatives, however, were even more enraged at what they saw as a “surrender” to the liberal wing of the party by Nixon, who conservatives viewed with suspicion, and prompted Barry Goldwater’s willingness to have his name placed into nomination at the convention even if he planned to immediately withdraw from the race (Brennan 1995, 35–36).

The response to the Nixon-Rockefeller pact, however, would galvanize Goldwater’s support at the convention and cause hesitation from delegations already committed to Nixon. This was demonstrated when Goldwater’s name was placed into nomination by Arizona Governor Paul Fannin and the delegations of various states from the South and West filled the aisles of the convention, declaring Goldwater to be their favored candidate over Nixon (Edwards 1999, 93–94). While Goldwater subsequently withdrew his name and called on conservatives to unite behind Nixon, this demonstration of support nevertheless showed the growing conservatism within the Republican Party as the 1960s began and the potential that conservatives had to seize the party within the coming years. It also inspired further action in the months to come as young conservatives realized they needed to do more if they wanted to ensure that conservatism would have a lasting place within the Republican Party.

**The Sharon Conference and Young Americans for Freedom**

On the weekend of September 9-11, 1960 a group of young conservatives gathered at the Buckley estate in Sharon, CT to form the Young Americans for Freedom, a new youth-oriented conservative group that would be independent from any political party and work only to advance the interests of the conservative movement. This group originated from the Student Committee
for the Loyalty Oath that was formed in response to liberal attempts to repeal a provision of the National Education Defense Act of 1958 that stipulated that a student must “sign an affidavit stating that he was not a member of any subversive organization and was loyal to the U.S. government from which he was seeking a grant for his higher education” (Edwards 1999, 98). Both William Buckley and Marvin Liebman (founder of the Committee of One Million to Keep Red China out of the United Nations) had important roles in the formation of the YAF, having reached out to Douglas Caddy and David Franke, two leaders in the loyalty oath effort, urging them to form a youth organization for young conservatives which provided the impetus to hold a conference at the Buckley family’s Sharon estate (Andrew 1997, 54).

The Sharon Conference would prove to be an important moment in transforming the ideas of conservative intellectuals into broad principles upon which a conservative political movement could be built as well as beginning a new period of unified political activism by young conservatives to advance the movement independently from the Republican Party. Of great importance is the Sharon Statement, drafted by M. Stanton Evans, which laid forth the basic beliefs of the YAF and brought together different ideas drawn from the separate strands of conservative thinking with influences from the traditionalists Richard Weaver and Russell Kirk, libertarians like Ayn Rand, and anti-communists such as Whittaker Chambers (Andrew 1997, 60–63). The Sharon Statement declared that “free will and moral authority come from God…political and economic liberty are essential for the preservation of free people and free institutions…government must be strictly and constitutionally limited…the market economy is the system most compatible with freedom…[and that] communism must be defeated, not simply contained” (Edwards 1999, 99). It was, however, far from perfect as it was more a statement of conviction rooted in antistatism and anticommunism than a specific guide for the sorts of policies
conservatives would pursue once they gained power, with the broadness of the principles laid out glossing over important divisions between conservatives\(^\text{14}\) that would lead to issues later on (Andrew 1997, 58–59). Nevertheless the Sharon Statement would prove to be critical to uniting the young conservatives gathered in Sharon and providing them with an ideological basis from which to wage their battle against moderates and liberals in both major parties but especially the GOP. It also reflected the later movement toward fusionism that was already being pushed by Frank Meyer but was still being opposed by a range of conservative intellectuals.

The Young Americans for Freedom would prove to be an important organization outside of the Republican Party that nevertheless worked to expand the influence of conservatives within it and bring about the nomination of Barry Goldwater in 1964. Despite a rocky start, by 1963 it was becoming a central force within the conservative movement, organizing an array of national political activities to engage and educate young conservatives about the political process and ways they could get involved while co-sponsoring a political action conference (dubbed “Operation Young America”) with the conservative magazine *Human Events* that drew almost 500 conservatives and included Barry Goldwater as its keynote speaker (Andrew 1997, 172–73). They also proved successful in getting their chosen candidate, Donald “Buz” Lukens, elected as President of the Young Republicans once again marking a conservative takeover of the organization and successful efforts to build support for a Goldwater candidacy within Republican Party institutions (Andrew 1997, 175–76). By the time Goldwater’s campaign for president picked up in earnest following his announcement for the nomination, YAFers would hold high-level roles in the various youth organizations that supported his bid for the nomination including Youth for Goldwater and many would campaign for him in the fall election. A representation of

\(^{14}\) These would fall along lines of moderates, “objectivists” following Ayn Rand’s brand of “anarchic individualism,” libertarians, and others proscribing to different conservative views (Andrew 1997, 58–59, 61)
the zeal of young conservatives to advance their cause, the YAF would prove to be just one
member of the array of outside groups working to transform the Republican Party into a vehicle
for conservative principles. Their success in organizing a legion of new conservative activists to
advance the cause even if Goldwater faltered in 1964 planted the seeds for the efforts of future
conservatives in expanding their power and influence within the GOP.

The Draft Goldwater Movement

The Draft Goldwater movement started in 1961 following Nixon’s defeat to Kennedy the
previous year as a joint effort between F. Clifton White, William Rusher, and Congressman John
Ashbrook to ensure that the Republican Party would become a conservative force in American
society, with the nomination of Goldwater seen as the means through which this would occur
even though their efforts were not officially in support of a Goldwater candidacy in 1964
(Brennan 1995, 66). White’s role was especially important as was tasked by the other members
of this group to organize grassroots conservatives and build their power within the Republican
Party in order to hopefully set the stage for the nomination of a conservative in 1964 (White and
Gill 1967, 41). He traveled across the country meeting Republican Party officials in an effort to
build conservative support at the state and local level while also working to expand conservative
influence in key GOP organizations such as the Young Republicans, the Federation of
Republican Women, and the Republican National Committee. White encouraged these groups
and others to “to organize conservatives at the precinct, district, and state level” and establish a
national network committed to nominating one of their own in 1964 (Brennan 1995, 66).
Goldwater was reluctance to seek the presidency when the group attempted to gain his approval
for their efforts in early 1963 because he was not ready to give up the privacy required by the
job, he knew that it would be difficult to push Congress and the federal bureaucracy to enact his
conservative agenda, and he was aware that his campaign was a long-shot and was thus not enthusiastic about waging a losing battle (Goldwater 1979, 161). Despite this, White and other conservatives decided to draft him anyway by forming the National Draft Goldwater Movement in April of that year and working to convince Goldwater that he had the support to win the party’s nomination the following year (Brennan 1995, 69).

The ultimate success of this effort rested on a variety of factors both long-term and short-term that both boosted the strength of conservatives within the GOP while allowing their organizing efforts to go undetected and unchallenged for several years. The first set of factors has to do with demographic and social changes that were especially concentrated in the South and were leading to increasing Republican support in that region as early as 1960\textsuperscript{15}. Industrialization across the region during WWII had brought millions of poor Southern whites out of poverty and into the working and middle classes, causing them to turn from federal welfare beneficiaries to first-time taxpayers and leading to a rise in resentment toward welfare policies that were no longer benefiting them but folks they thought as less deserving. This caused many to turn against the traditional Democratic leadership in the South and become more susceptible to Republican rhetoric on government spending and taxes (Brennan 1995, 41–42).

The rapid urbanization and population growth brought about by this industrialization, heavily dependent on the federal government’s subsidization of infrastructure projects as well as the military and the flourishing aerospace industry, also “created a culture that celebrated unfettered development, free-wheeling investment, and individual enterprise” in what could otherwise be called “un-regulated capitalism” (Himmelstein 1990, 75). Other demographic changes were

\textsuperscript{15}As evidenced by GOP gains in “rim” Southern states such as Virginia, Texas, Florida, North Carolina, and Tennessee over the course of the 1950s with four backing Eisenhower in both 1952 and 1956 and three Nixon in 1960 (Himmelstein 1990, 76).
occurring as well, including the movement of Northerners to the South who had fewer ties to the Democratic Party and were more willing to support Republicans at the ballot box (Brennan 1995, 42). In addition, national Democratic support for civil rights and an unwillingness to defend Jim Crow was causing concern among Southerners, opening up a potential base of support for conservative Republicans in the region (Brennan 1995, 42). These Southern gains strengthen conservative Republicans because new southern members “embraced the classical liberal ideals embodied in the Republican Party’s opposition to high taxes, federal spending, and government centralization” (Brennan 1995, 43).

There was also a host of shorter-term factors both internal and external to the Republican Party and the grassroots organizing effort of White and others that also led to the successful build-up of conservative support within the party. The rise of the “Radical Right” led by the John Birch Society was causing issues for the image of the Republican Party in the beginning of the 1960s, with many liberal and moderate Republicans associating the John Birch Society and other far-right groups with the conservative-wing of the party. Many ended up using the “extremist” label to their political advantage as a way of both dissociating themselves from the Radical Right and dismissing conservative Republicans (Brennan 1995, 55). However, this dismissal of the growing influence and enthusiasm of conservatives worked to their benefit as White was able to keep the activities of the Chicago Group (as they were called at the time) a secret and prevent significant opposition emerging from within the party from 1961 until their efforts were publicized at the end of 1962 (Brennan 1995, 69). Conservatives were also getting help from an unlikely source as President Kennedy’s fiscal conservatism and willingness to forge stronger government-business relations pulled more liberal members of the business community to his side, depriving liberal Republicans of corporate funding while forcing a heavier reliance on
Southern businessmen and rank-and-file members for GOP funding who tended to be more conservative, shifting the financial balance within the party toward the conservative wing (Brennan 1995, 45–46). Finally the grassroots, decentralized nature of the Chicago Group’s efforts meant that not only would there be a strong foundation of people in positions of power within the party at the state and local level who would be ready for a conservative takeover when the time was right but that the conservative movement within the GOP would be able to outlast any individual candidacy and continue to influence the party after the 1964 election (Brennan 1995, 69).

**Capturing the Nomination**

By the end of 1963 Goldwater was ready to jump into the race following the demonstration of his support among the Republican grassroots over the course of the year, but this was complicated by President Kennedy’s assassination in November of that year. Goldwater, who greatly admired Kennedy despite their ideological and political differences, was quite affected by Kennedy’s assassination and once again became hesitant to pursue the nomination as he thought it would be nearly impossible to defeat Lyndon Johnson until it became clear that he could not disappoint all of those who had been working so hard for months to promote his candidacy for president (Brennan 1995, 70). Thus Goldwater “with extreme reluctance and a conviction that he could not win” announced he was running for the Republican nomination on January 3, 1964 (Brennan 1995, 70–71). Buckley, who had wanted to help Goldwater’s campaign directly in late 1963 to “tap into the expertise of conservatives to provide Goldwater with intellectual support for his positions” but was rebuffed by members of Goldwater’s campaign staff, instead used the *National Review* to support his campaign from the sidelines. During the primaries the *National Review* would be a vocal supporter of Goldwater’s bid for the
Republican nomination, with Buckley personally attacking Goldwater rivals such as Henry Cabot Lodge and Rockefeller in an effort to boost Goldwater’s campaign while expounding Goldwater’s own qualities that made him an ideal nominee for the GOP (Felzenberg 2017, 145–48). In addition, through the efforts of White as part of his role with the Goldwater for President Committee to establish “Goldwater Clubs” among groups of citizens to support his campaign and the failure of a moderate alternative to Goldwater to emerge it was clear that it would be difficult to prevent his nomination, an idea that greatly concerned Republican leaders.

Rivals did emerge in the form of George Romney, Nelson Rockefeller, and Pennsylvania Governor William Scranton but all of them had their own issues that sunk their candidacies for the nomination. However, in the process Goldwater’s image as an “extremist” was etched into the popular consciousness as Rockefeller, in an attempt to defeat Goldwater, continually attacked him on the trail as too radical for the Republican Party (White and Gill 1967, 411). Goldwater did not help by making a series of unfortunate comments ranging from saying that participation in Social Security was optional to stating that the NATO commander should be able to use nuclear weapons in the field and suggesting the use of atomic weapons to defoliate the jungles of Vietnam in an effort to disrupt communist supply lines (Edwards 1999, 117–21). Despite the best efforts of moderate and liberal Republicans Goldwater secured the Republican nomination on the first ballot, ensuring conservative control of the party and dashing the hopes of moderates of being able to maintain control.

16 Romney’s nascent campaign never got off the ground when he was publicly embarrassed after saying that Nixon had urged him to run, a statement which Nixon vehemently denied. Rockefeller underestimated the strength of conservatives and faced lingering personal issues regarding his marriage that brought doubts to his personal character and led to his loss to Goldwater in the California primary. Finally, Scranton entered the race only five weeks before the convention and was too late to stop Goldwater due to the efforts of the Draft Goldwater movement (Brennan 1995, 73–75).
The platform that ended up being crafted was overseen by Congressman Mel Laird of Wisconsin, a strong supporter of Goldwater (Skipper 2016, 166), and reflected Goldwater’s priorities with a weak stance on civil rights coupled with hardline anticommunist stances on issues of foreign policy and defense that repudiated the liberal wing of the party while pleasing conservatives (Brennan 1995, 77). While Goldwater originally wanted to choose Scranton as his running mate the infamous “Scranton Letter,” which repudiated the Draft Goldwater movement and called Goldwaterism “a whole crazy-quilt collection of absurd and dangerous positions that would be soundly repudiated by the American people in November,” sunk any chance of that happening (Skipper 2016, 171, 178). Instead Goldwater chose little known New York congressman and RNC Chairman William Miller as his running mate without consulting anyone beforehand (Skipper 2016, 178–79). While he provided geographic balance to the ticket he did not balance the ticket ideologically because his views were close to Goldwater’s (Brennan 1995, 77). The situation was not helped by Goldwater’s acceptance speech, in which he criticized moderates and praised extremism especially in his infamous lines “extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice. And… moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue” (Brennan 1995, 78). These lines had been written by Harry Jaffa, a political science professor at Claremont College who had been tasked by Goldwater with helping write a new draft of the speech after he had rejected the first, and their inclusion was debated by Goldwater’s speech writing staff until Goldwater insisted on keeping them in the final draft (Skipper 2016, 181–82). While conservatives were enthusiastic that Goldwater was holding his ground moderate Republicans were shocked and convinced that he would lose the election, with the party hopelessly divided and Democrats with plenty of ammunition to use to paint Goldwater as an extremist who was too dangerous to be in the White House and as being outside of the political mainstream.
Conservatives may have taken control of the Republican Party but the cost was victory in November.

**The Goldwater Campaign**

While Goldwater’s campaign suffered from disorganization, frequent misstatements, and an extremist image he could never shake off, it was an important moment in cementing the conservative presence within the GOP and in giving a new generation of conservatives the political experience needed to advance their cause. It was also important in pushing conservative ideas into the political mainstream. Goldwater himself spent the beginning of the campaign working to delineate and emphasize a conservative vision for America on a variety of policy areas focusing on reducing taxes and balancing the budget, turning governmental programs such as farm price supports and social security into voluntary ones, and developing individual initiative and corporate-sponsored programs for domestic policy while emphasizing the need to maintain military superiority over the Soviet Union at the same time that he offered a vague promise of “freedom” to the rest of the world on matters of foreign and defense policy (Brennan 1995, 84–85). Much of what Goldwater said on the campaign trail voiced concerns that many Americans had about civil rights, urban chaos, and a sense that there was an attack on traditional values but he was hampered by GOP division, media hostility, and the Kennedy assassination (Hodgson 1996, 107). Indeed, the 1964 election was less a referendum on conservative ideas than it was a referendum on Goldwater as his efforts to present an alternative to the status quo were not picked up by the American public, who instead were concerned about his extremist image which had been pushed during the GOP nomination contest (amplified by the attacks of the Johnson campaign) and perceived radicalism as well as his rhetoric, which frightened many voters who were unaccustomed to it (Brennan 1995, 86).
What the Goldwater campaign was, then, was an opportunity for conservatives to gain political experience, further grow their movement, and prove their viability when it came to fundraising. This is no less evident than from the strong grassroots organizing effort that was waged by the campaign, with White being appointed national director of Citizens for Goldwater-Miller and seeking to mobilize politically inactive and disillusioned Democrats and Independents (Brennan 1995, 87). Goldwater’s campaign, through Citizens for Goldwater-Miller, coordinated with an array of conservative grassroots organizations that had sprung up in the previous decade and eagerly supported Goldwater including Americans for Conservative Action, Fighting Aces for Goldwater, and Americans for Constitutional Action. The Goldwater campaign also proved to be incredibly successful in broadening the fundraising constituency of the Republican Party, with a mail-list technique allowing the campaign to reach out to members of conservative organizations to ask for money and take advantage of the newly energized and organized conservative movement that had been emerging over the past few years. In fact, White was able to replace reliance on money from the East (home of the traditional Republican establishment) with a wider constituency across the country, with an increase in the amount of individual contributions under $500 showing support for Goldwater’s campaign among more ordinary Americans than Eisenhower or Nixon while retaining support from Eastern businessmen who had long backed the GOP (Brennan 1995, 87–88). This showed that outspoken conservative candidates could raise a lot of money from traditional sources while the introduction of direct mail solicitation, which had been developed by then YAF executive director Richard Viguerie in the early 1960s for use by the organization in its fundraising efforts (Hodgson 1996, 95), demonstrated that raising money from small donors could be a very effective way to fundraise for conservative political campaigns. Another lasting impact of the Goldwater campaign was the
recruitment of large numbers of new conservative activists and political experts who would later staff the Nixon and Reagan campaigns as well as GOP state and local races, creating a new pool of conservative political talent that would have long-term influence on the Republican Party (Hodgson 1996, 108).

The closing days of the Goldwater campaign saw the emergence of Ronald Reagan on the national political scene and on conservatives’ radar as a primetime telecast from him entitled A Time for Choosing, which had been organized by a group of conservative California Republicans who had heard Regan speak at the Coconut Grove nightclub in Los Angeles, aired on October 27, 1964 and boiled down a long-standing speech he had been giving to smaller audiences across the country. In it Reagan criticized the Johnson administration and past liberal administrations for the unsoundness of their policies, attacked liberalism as a form of domestic communism that took the shape of all of the New Deal policies from taxes to government regulations and unions, and finally presented citizens with a choice between the totalitarianism of the left or the support for individual freedom espoused by the right and reflected in Goldwater’s campaign (Schoenwald 2001, 196–97; Hodgson 1996, 111). His speech energized conservatives who inundated the Goldwater campaign with calls and it was replayed for days, ultimately raising nearly $8 million for the Goldwater campaign and the Republican Party (Reagan 1990, 143).

Even though Goldwater would go on to lose in a landslide defeat only eleven days later it was not a defeat for conservatism, which had not been the focus of campaign, but rather for Goldwater personally as his rhetoric and image were rejected by the American public. His victories in the Deep South marked the first time Republicans had won there since Reconstruction and Johnson’s reliance on the African-American vote to win states in other parts of the South showed an ongoing shift in the electoral bases of both parties that foreshadowed
future conservative gains (Hodgson 1996, 105). The grassroots army that had been built for the campaign persisted afterward as a force within the Republican Party and from the ashes of the Goldwater campaign emerged a new leader for conservatives in the form of Ronald Reagan, whose effectiveness in communicating a conservative message would make him an emerging leader of the conservative movement and one of its most important figures in the years to come.

Consolidating Power and the Nixon Presidency: 1965-1974

Ideological Maturation and the Disorder of Liberalism:

Conservativism after Goldwater

By 1965 conservativism was maturing as an intellectual movement as fusionism seemed to become the consensus among conservative scholars and Buckley and others involved with the National Review publicly rebuked the extremism of John Birch Society to dissociate mainstream conservatism from those on the far-right who were threatening its continued growth and public acceptance (Nash 1976, 293). At the same time the conservative press was continuing to spread its reach with the National Review tripling its circulation by the late 1960s to around 100,000 from 30,000 in 1960, Buckley getting a popular debate series called Firing Line in 1966, the ISI founding its own journal called the Intercollegiate Review in 1965 that soon became the premier conservative journal in the country, and the establishment of the Conservative Book Club which circulated works by leading conservative intellectuals to over 30,000 members by 1965 and became the leading conservative publisher in America (Nash 1976, 293–94). The development of conservative intellectual infrastructure came at the same time that the country was entering a profound crisis manifested through Vietnam, urban riots, and unrest on college campuses across the country. Conservative intellectuals began to more aggressively attack the liberal elite and
governing establishment they had been railing against for many years as being behind this disorder and “the decay of the spiritual and moral foundation of civilization” (Nash 1976, 295).

The growing radicalism and protest on college campuses became the fixation of conservative intellectuals in the late 1960s and early 1970s and they found the cause of this disorderly conduct in intellectual liberalism. First expounded by Will Herberg in 1969 and then Jeffrey Hart in the fifteenth anniversary issue of the National Review in 1970, the emerging conservative argument regarding the New Left student rebellion was that it was the result of an “adversary culture” that had been pushed by liberal intellectuals and was fundamentally antagonistic to the existing social order (Nash 1976, 298–99). Another article in the National Review later than same year by Gerhart Niemeyer would label this the “counter-culture” and present a similar assessment of the New Left as being at its core dedicated to “the destruction of the entire social order and the reversal of all values in Western countries” (as quoted in Nash 1976, 300). This attack on the New Left found itself echoed by an unlikely source: a group of liberals who viewed the New Left as radicals dissociated from liberalism and who, in fact, were a “cultural movement masquerading as a political movement” that sought to radically transform society in a way that “true liberalism” did not (Gerson 1996, 108–9). The men extolling such a view – Norman Podhoretz, Irving Kristol, Daniel Bell, and Daniel Patrick Moynihan among others – would become major leaders of neoconservatism in the 1970s which, at this point in time, was not yet fully developed. Nevertheless, the agreement between this group of liberals and conservatives on the threat to the existing social order posed by radicalism on the left foreshadowed the developments that would take place in the 1970s and the increasing appeal of conservative ideas in the intellectual realm as a reaction to the growing radicalism of the Left.
During Nixon’s presidency conservative intellectuals continued to achieve successes and spread their ideas to a public willing to listen because of attacks on customs and authority that made “ideas like tradition, order, authority, restraint, duty, morality, and community [seem]…to address the truly basic perplexities of the time” while they simultaneously had access to the presidency for the first time since conservatism’s revival (Nash 1976, 336). Nixon included several prominent right-wing scholars in his administration including “Arthur Burns\(^\text{17}\) at the Federal Reserve Board, Warren Nutter at the Defense Department, Richard V. Allen of the Hoover Institution on the staff of Henry Kissinger, and Martin Anderson (author of *The Federal Bulldozer*\(^\text{18}\)) on the White House staff” (Nash 1976, 337). The Nixon administration, at least in its first year, reached out to Buckley and the *National Review* for “support for its nominees and policy proposals,” efforts for which Nixon would give his personal gratitude on at least two occasions over the course of 1969 (Felzenberg 2017, 211). Conservative critiques of the media and intellectuals, both based on their perceived liberal bias, were echoed in the speeches of Vice President Agnew in 1969 who denounced the television networks and the newscasters on them as “nattering nabobs of negativism” (Felzenberg 2017, 211) while saying that liberal intellectuals were causing “a spirit of national masochism” that had led to the disorder of the late 1960s (Nash 1976, 307). Buckley’s brother James mounted a successful campaign for the United States Senate in New York under the banner of the Conservative Party\(^\text{19}\) in 1970, receiving the tacit although not explicit support of Nixon and his donor network as well as other Republicans in the

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\(^{17}\) Burns had been a professor of economics at Rutgers in the early 1930s and influenced Milton Friedman’s thinking on economics during his time there (Nash 1976, 284).

\(^{18}\) A devastating critique of the failure of urban renewal programs to alleviate the growing demand for housing in America’s cities (and by extension the effectiveness of government intervention in general) while extolling the achievements of the free enterprise system (Nash 1976, 274–75).

\(^{19}\) A party that Buckley played a large role in the creation of as a right-wing counterpart to the Liberal Party of New York, having articulated the need for such a party during and after Rockefeller’s first campaign for governor and then lending the *National Review*’s support for it as well as its list of donors and subscribers when it was officially established in 1960 (Felzenberg 2017, 99, 103–4).
state, a victory for conservative intellectuals in the heart of liberalism at the time as the *National Review* had been strongly supportive of his candidacy (Felzenberg 2017, 214–16).

Conservative publications such as the *National Review* (with more than 100,000 subscribers by 1970), *Modern Age*, and the *Intercollegiate Review* also continued to put out conservative literature while the conservative journal *Human Events* became the most influential within the Beltway with columnists such as Buckley, John Chamberlain, Russell Kirk, Jeffrey Hart, and others gracing its pages. Television and radio also became a medium for conservatives to spread their ideas with right-wing journalists M. Stanton Evans, Jeffrey St. John, and James J. Kilpatrick appearing on CBS’ *Spectrum* radio series and the National Education Television network holding a debate series that included the likes of William Rusher and J. Daniel Mahoney, chairman of the Conservative Party of New York (Nash 1976, 335–36). Conservative intellectuals during the Nixon era felt that they had now emerged as a powerful force on the national stage speaking for the “silent majority” of Americans who opposed the changes being brought about by radicals on the Left (Nash 1976, 338). Their influence could no longer be ignored as their ideas resonated with an American public starting to become weary of the excesses of liberalism even if not yet fully committed to abandoning liberalism completely.

**Conservative Gains and the Rise of Reagan**

Following Goldwater’s landslide loss to Johnson in the 1964 presidential election, the Republican Party was looking for scapegoats as well as a path forward from this crushing defeat. Conservatives, now holding power within major party organizations, realized that with their newfound power came a need for flexibility and to accommodate and work with all factions of the party if they were to maintain the control they had. Promoting a unified GOP was an
approach embraced by Goldwater, William Miller, the editors of the *National Review*, and also Ronald Reagan during and after his run for Governor of California (Brennan 1995, 111–12). At the same time Republicans of other stripes such as Richard Nixon, recognizing the importance of shedding the image of extremism that had plagued the party during the Goldwater campaign and the power that conservatives now held within the party, publicly repudiated extremist organizations like the John Birch Society while refraining to link them to conservatives within the party (Brennan 1995, 109). Rather than being crushed by Goldwater’s loss, conservative groups instead continued to grow in number to build off the momentum of the Goldwater campaign and saw the creation of a unified mailing list at the behest of Richard Viguerie which further fueled their growth in the late 1960s (Brennan 1995, 115). Conservatives viewed 1964 not as a defeat for conservatism but of a “false image” of conservatism in the words of Reagan, with many instead awed by the remarkable progress the movement had made in only a decade going from a small group of intellectuals discussing ideas to a movement that had taken over one of America’s major parties (Nash 1976, 292). “27 million can’t be wrong” became the rallying cry of conservatives who saw that while Goldwater had lost in 1964 they had won control of the party, alerted the American people to the dangers the left posed to the country, and provided the Republican Party with an ideological foundation upon which it could challenge New Deal liberalism (Schoenwald 2001, 155–56). With the conservative movement rapidly maturing after its crusade against liberals and the GOP establishment in the early 1960s, all it needed was a new leader who could articulate conservatism in a way that made it attractive to middle-class Americans who had been turned off by Goldwater’s rhetoric in 1964. Ronald Reagan proved to be the very leader that conservatives were looking for.

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21 A reference to the number of votes Goldwater received in 1964.
California was an appealing target for conservatives seeking to prove that conservatism was electorally viable in the wake of Goldwater’s defeat. The state was facing a litany of problems going into 1966 that were fomenting discontent and yearning for a change from the liberalism of Gov. Pat Brown: “the Watts riots of 1965, protests at the University of California at Berkeley, air pollution…, a rising crime rate, a yearly influx of 300,000 newcomers, a widening ‘morality gap’ between the generations, and a growing fiscal crisis in which the state’s mounting debt threatened to rage out of control through ever-expanding governmental programs” (Schoenwald 2001, 191). Reagan was pushed to run by a group of millionaire California businessmen comprised of Holmes Tuttle, Henry Salvatori\(^{22}\), and Cy Rubel who created a group called Friends of Ronald Reagan and met with him personally to convince him to run, stating that they would cover the finances of his campaign if he did so (Schuparra 1998, 111). Formally announcing in January 1966, Reagan based his campaign on the image of a “citizen politician” who would utilize his experience outside of government to provide fresh solutions to the problems that career politicians in Sacramento had failed to solve (Schuparra 1998, 113–14). His campaign energized conservatives across California, received endorsements from right-wing groups such as the California Republican Assembly (CRA) and the United Republicans of California, and was boosted by continued unrest linked to urban riots and campus protests against the Vietnam War as well as a judicial ruling on May 10, 1966 by the California Supreme Court that overturned a referendum that had been passed in 1964 to repeal an unpopular fair housing act pushed through by Governor Brown in 1963 (Schuparra 1998, 119). Despite attempts to link Reagan to extremist groups during both the primary and the general election, a strategy deployed to mimic the devastating attacks against Goldwater in 1964, his affable

\(^{22}\) Both Salvatori and Tuttle had been involved with Goldwater’s campaign, with Salvatori specifically having served as Goldwater’s California finance chairman in 1964 (Schuparra 1998, 92).
personality and charisma as well as a deterioration in support for liberalism within both parties ultimately led to resounding victories in both elections as conservativism finally found its success in California.

Reagan was not the only conservative to win a gubernatorial race during the 1966 midterm elections. Paul Laxalt in Nevada, Claude Kirk in Florida, and Pat Williams in Arizona all also won their races while 133 of 153 House candidates supported by the American Conservative Union won their races as well (Brennan 1995, 119). In total Republicans gained forty-seven seats in the House, three in the Senate, as well as eight new governorships while the number of Republican congressmen from the South doubled from fourteen to twenty-eight as they rode on a wave of dissatisfaction with the Johnson administration and the turmoil in America’s cities and on its campuses, concern about the conduct of the Vietnam War, and backlash to the Great Society (Hodgson 1996, 119). Conservativism was well and alive in the wake of Goldwater and, while moderates also had success as well, the tide of public opinion was slowly turning in conservatives’ favor. Successful efforts to remove conservatives’ association with extremism as well in favor of electoral pragmatism and as a result of a shift from ideological based conservative appeals to ones rooted in “personality and contemporary events and issues” signaled a maturation of the conservative movement and the increasing appeal of conservative ideas at a time of uncertainty and unrest (Schoenwald 2001, 219).

Nixon’s Return and the 1968 Election

With Goldwater’s defeat many Republicans expected to nominate a moderate in 1968, recognizing that an outspoken conservative was not yet able to win at the national level and wanting to maximize their chance of victory in the next presidential election. Conservatives
became more pragmatic, as has been previously mentioned, and knew they had to accommodate moderates and liberals within the GOP if they wanted to gain access to the presidency (Schoenwald 2001, 157). Initially the man who would win the nomination seemed to be George Romney, the moderate Governor of Michigan who had briefly flirted with running in 1964, but struggles to gain traction within the party ended his brief bid in early 1965 and left an opening for the return of Nixon to the national political stage (Brennan 1995, 121). Nixon earned an early endorsement from Goldwater in January 1965 for the Republican nomination in 1968 in recognition of his status as one of the few Republican leaders to campaign vigorously for Goldwater in 1964 and as part of the attempt to promote a unified Republican Party in 1968 (Edwards 1999, 161). Over the course of 1966 and early 1967 Nixon made persistent efforts to utilize the resources that conservatives had developed and woo conservatives to support his nascent candidacy for the Republican nomination in 1968 knowing he could not win without their support. In January 1966 he hired Pat Buchanan, an editorial writer for the *St. Louis Democrat* and a fervent supporter of Goldwater in 1964, to be his speechwriter while also hiring Pat Kleindeinst, who had helped gather delegates for Goldwater, as his national political director. That summer he met with various conservative journalists as well as young conservatives to discuss the issues of the day while holding a private meeting in January 1967 with William F. Buckley and William Rusher, which resulted in sympathy from Buckley for Nixon’s campaign23 even if Rusher and others were strongly opposed. Finally he assembled a team of conservative policy analysts to “help him frame the issues” in conservative terms (Edwards 1999, 162–63).

All of these efforts to court conservatives represented a dramatic shift from 1960, when Nixon had been more preoccupied with getting Rockefeller and liberal Republicans behind his  

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23 Buckley did not think Reagan had enough experience to win the GOP nomination in 1968 and he personally liked Nixon, so much so that he not only did he give Nixon an easy time on his show *Firing Line* in September 1967 but he implicitly endorsed Nixon in an interview with the *Miami News* later that fall (Felzenberg 2017, 197–98).
campaign while taking conservative support for granted, and represented both the substantial growth of the conservative movement and its newfound power within the Republican Party by the late 1960s.

Nixon, however, was not without competition for the Republican nomination. Reagan, with the urging of state party leaders in California, reluctantly agreed to run as a favorite-son candidate in the California primary to ensure unity between the party factions within the state party (Reagan 1990, 176–77). Party leaders were not the only ones pushing for Reagan to run as both Rusher and F. Clifton White also wanted Reagan to run as a conservative alternative to Nixon even as other conservatives were either standing on the sidelines or pledging their support for Nixon (Brennan 1995, 124). At the same time Nelson Rockefeller, by now becoming a perennial candidate for the Republican nomination, once again prepared to run even after having said he would not and formally announced his candidacy in April 1968. His indecision about running had alienated many of his liberal supporters in the party and as a result his only hope was that Reagan would deadlock the convention and prevent Nixon from winning the nomination on the first ballot (Brennan 1995, 123–24). Reagan, however, convinced he was too inexperienced to run for president vacillated on a bid for the nomination for several months until the eve of the RNC when he decided he wanted to be a serious candidate for the nomination at which point he was facing great difficulty in gaining the support of Southern Republicans who were closer to him philosophically than either Nixon or Rockefeller (Brennan 1995, 125). Nixon’s efforts to woo conservatives were now beginning to pay off as the 1968 RNC began, especially in light of the fact that the share of delegates from southern and border states was now at 27 percent, on par with the share of those from the Midwest and the Northeast and boosted in
part by Goldwater’s victories in Deep South states in 1964 which gave them additional delegates as part of the GOP’s delegate allocation formula (Nelson and Hetherington 2017, 144).

Nixon’s diligent politicking and courting of Southern Republican proved to be the decisive factor in his nomination and subsequent general election victory in 1968. Months before the 1968 RNC he had been able to convince Senator Strom Thurmond, a former Dixiecrat who had switched over to the Republican Party in 1964 to back Goldwater’s candidacy, to support him for the GOP nomination because he was the party’s best chance for victory in November and was conservative enough to please Southerners and conservatives alike (Brennan 1995, 126). Thurmond, along with Goldwater and Texas Senator John Tower, proved vital in shoring up Nixon’s support among southern delegates on the convention floor as Reagan aggressively attempted to court them, demonstrating how important their support for Nixon was in ensuring his nomination (Edwards 1999, 164). Nixon also addressed the three issues that southern delegates were most concerned about in a satisfactory manner: “busing to achieve school desegregation, the liberal Supreme Court, and the vice presidential nomination.” Specifically he stated that he opposed busing, would appoint justices who would not engage in the judicial activism of the Warren Court, and would not choose a liberal as his running mate (Nelson and Hetherington 2017, 148). Their support was not without concessions from Nixon, who accepted a center-right convention platform and picked Spiro Agnew as his running mate to show his commitment to southern Republicans as he was viewed favorably by both Goldwater and Thurmond, had a high profile clash with civil rights leaders in Maryland early in 1968 that endeared him to conservatives and southerners, and came from a border state that would be crucial in Nixon’s efforts to sweep the Upper South as it was clear that George Wallace would carry the Deep South in November (Nelson and Hetherington 2017, 153–54).
Nixon campaigned in the fall as a conservative and law and order candidate in a bid to cement his support on the right and appeal to voters weary of the chaos and disorder of the past four years. This included declaring the need to seek negotiated peace in Vietnam, rejecting military parity with the Soviet Union, opposing wage and price controls, and proposing to establish a commission to decentralize government functions and transfer them to the private sector (Edwards 1999, 165). Nixon was greatly aided by political developments over the course of 1968 which increased support for conservative solutions including growing dissatisfaction with the conduct of the Vietnam War, protests on campuses across the country, the assassinations of MLK and Robert Kennedy, and feelings among middle and working-class Americans that the post-1945 economic prosperity was coming to an end with “a growing trade deficit, volatile international financial markets, and rising inflation” combined with growing resentment of high taxation which was believed to be boosting the pockets of ungrateful welfare recipients (Brennan 1995, 128–30). Even as Nixon consolidated conservative support behind his campaign and successfully appealed to the South, he still barely won the popular vote even as he romped to a larger victory in the Electoral College. Nevertheless, Republicans were back in control and conservatives would see how much of an ally Nixon would be to them as he assumed office.

The Nixon Presidency

Nixon’s presidency would prove to be disappointing to many conservatives as his pragmatic and centrist tendencies overshadowed the advancement of the conservatism that rested behind some of his policies. Combining elements of both modern Republicanism and conservatism, Nixon advanced efforts to decentralize power from Washington to the states with his “New Federalism” (in the form of revenue sharing) which, while not stopping the growth of federal spending on welfare and entitlement programs, did fulfill “the conservative goal of
maintaining local control over programs” to some degree (Hodgson 1996, 121; Brennan 1995 134-135). He brought the “Southern Strategy” to practice during his administration as well, getting a Southerner, Lewis Powell, confirmed to the Supreme Court and delaying the implementation of mandatory busing which upheld a promise he had made to southern Republicans as he was working to win the nomination in 1968. In addition, Nixon pleased conservatives who wished to see the Vietnam War end in honor while reducing American casualties and intensifying bombing with his Vietnamization strategy, worked to quell and intimidate the antiwar movement, fought the creation of many new regulatory agencies (although not completely in the case of OSHA and the EPA), and utilized conservative rhetoric to cultivate a conservative image among the general public (Brennan 1995, 136). Finally he was able to control the overall growth of federal spending, a long concern of conservatives that had caused dissatisfaction during the Eisenhower administration, with spending as a fraction of the GDP ending up at its lowest point since 1945 by the time Nixon left office (Edwards 1999, 167).

What mattered more, though, were the aspects of his presidency that greatly disappointed and even angered conservatives. One of them was his Family Assistance Plan which shocked conservatives with its provision of guaranteed income and was eventually abandoned in 1971 following conservative opposition (Brennan 1995, 135; Hodgson 1996, 121). Conservatives were also displeased by his support for efforts to expand environmental regulations through the creation of the EPA, his support for the Clean Air Act and Endangered Species Act, and his approval of the creation of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) which were all viewed as yet another expansion of the federal bureaucracy and regulatory state (Edwards 1999, 167). On matters of foreign policy, Nixon’s attempts at détente with the Soviet Union were similarly viewed with suspicion even as there was a “welcome undertone of
confrontation beneath the surface of diplomacy” (Hodgson 1996, 120). However, conservative tolerance for Nixon’s ventures into liberal domestic policy and diplomatic foreign policy reached a breaking point with his announcement of wage and price controls and his announcement of a visit to China both of which occurred over the summer of 1971. Twelve leading conservatives (known as the “Manhattan Twelve”) announced in the August 10 issue of the National Review that they were suspending their support for the Nixon administration because of its outreach to Communist China and a decline in military spending more so than it was regarding his domestic policy initiatives they disapproved of. These twelve included many editors of the National Review such as Buckley, Meyer, and James Burnham as well William Rusher; two editors of the conservative journal Human Events; the chairman of the New York Conservative Party, J. Daniel Mahoney; two directors of the ACU; the executive director of the YAF; and an executive vice president of the Southern States Industrial Council (Edwards 1999, 170). They eventually decided to draft a conservative challenger to Nixon for the Republican nomination in 1972, with Congressman John Ashbrook the only sitting officeholder willing to take up the conservative mantle and mount a long-shot bid against Nixon to hold him accountable for his various transgressions from conservative policy (Edwards 1999, 171–72).

While Ashbrook failed to gain much traction, he did gain enthusiastic support from many young conservatives even as other conservative leaders such as Reagan and Goldwater continued to stand behind Nixon as Ashbrook’s candidacy was viewed as being doomed from the start. Nevertheless, it seems the challenge did force Nixon to veto a piece of legislation (the Child Development Act) that conservatives opposed, prevented him from dumping Agnew from the ticket, and caused him to address the issue of busing openly while also leading to efforts by senior aides and Agnew to bring conservatives back into the fold. It also showed that
conservatives would not be afraid to stand up for their principles if a Republican president happened to cross them and that they could not be ignored like they had been in the past (Edwards 1999, 174). Later that year Nixon defeated George McGovern in a landslide 23 point victory that saw him winning all but one state and the District of Columbia and put conservatives on the cusp of a much desired political realignment. Indeed, there were serious talks over the winter of 1972-1973 between members of the Nixon administration and nearly forty House Democrats, many of them conservatives from the South as well as others deeply disturbed by the direction they saw their party going in, that would have given Republicans control of the House for the first time in twenty years. Watergate, however, quashed any sort of realignment that could have occurred at this time (Hodgson 1996, 125–27). What it did do, however, was three fold: it prevented moderate Republicans from regaining fuller control of the party, it eroded public trust in the government and convinced some of the “dangers of too much government” (Edwards 1999, 136–37), and it laid the foundation for the emergence of both the New Right and neoconservatism in the years that followed (Edwards 1999, 176). Conservatives, having strove for party unity in the wake of Goldwater so that Republicans could regain the presidency, were now in a position to take complete control of the GOP in the years to come.

**Victory of the Right: Resentment and Action in a Decade of Change, 1974-1980**

**The Rise of the New Right**

Nixon’s resignation and the assumption of the presidency by Gerald Ford, the former House Minority Leader who had only been Vice President for over a year, marked the beginning
of a new phase in the conservative movement driven less by intellectuals than by political 
activists on a crusade against liberalism, elitism, and the power of the East in American politics 
and culture. The rise of the New Right, a label meant to distinguish it from the “Old Right” of 
Robert Taft and country-club Republicans, occurred as a result of Ford’s choice to nominate 
Nelson Rockefeller as Vice President which angered a group of conservatives who despised 
Rockefeller not only because he was a liberal but also because he was a member of the GOP’s 
Eastern Establishment (Edwards 1999, 183). This group included Richard Viguerie, Howard 
Phillips, Paul Weyrich, and John “Terry” Dolan with the former three having been members of 
either the YAF or the Young Republicans during the 1960s as well as veterans from the 
Goldwater campaign in 1964 (Williams 2010, 167). Richard Viguerie had been the first 
executive director of the YAF and has been noted earlier as an important figure in the 
implementation of direct-mail solicitation that was widely adopted by conservative groups 
during the mid-1960s while Phillips had assisted in the revision of the Sharon Statement in 
September 1960 (Kalman 2010, 24). These men were not intellectuals but political activists and 
were motivated by a strong desire to fight “Big Government, Big Business24, Big Labor, and Big 
Media” in a form of populist conservatism quite different from the conservativism of Goldwater, 
Buckley, and other leading conservatives from the 1950s and 1960s (Edwards 1999, 184). Their 
influence, however, reached far and wide as they established an array of organizations meant to 
push their agenda and move the Republican Party and the nation further to the right.

24 This hostility to big business rested on a belief that corporations had been cooperating too closely with the 
government to advance their interests, were too eager to help provide machinery and other technologies to 
communists, had supported publications such as Playboy and Penthouse that were contributing in the decline of 
moral values in America, and were subsidizing the national news media that New Rightists despised (Crawford 
Many important right-wing organizations were created through the efforts of New Right leaders seeking to promote their ideas, recruit and train new activists, and support the campaigns of conservatives in both the Republican and Democratic parties. In 1973 Paul Weyrich, with funding from wealthy Colorado beer magnate Joseph Coors, founded the Heritage Foundation which focused on conducting public policy research and studies that promoted New Right opinions to elected officials and the press (Crawford 1980, 11–12; Kalman 2010, 27). Two years later Terry Dolan founded the National Conservative Political Action Committee (NCPAC) which took advantage of new campaign finance rules allowing for unlimited spending in the form of independent expenditures to support conservative candidates during primaries and in the general election. It was able to raise $3 million in 1978 and $7 million in 1980 in support of conservative candidates through these rules (Williams 2010, 169). This proved to be instrumental in the defeats of liberal Democrats by conservative Republicans in both of these years including Senators Dick Clark of Iowa and Floyd Haskell of Colorado in 1978 and such big names as George McGovern, Birch Bayh, and Frank Church who all went down to defeat in 1980 to conservative challengers who had been supported by the NCPAC (Edwards 1999, 186–87). 1975 would also see the establishment of the Conservative Caucus by Howard Phillips which worked to recruit and train activists at the local level, engage in grassroots lobbying, and set the terms of national debate (Edwards 1999, 187). All of these were strung together by Viguerie, whose centralization of fundraising efforts of the New Right put him in a powerful position, and direct-mail solicitation which proved to be an effective way to bypass both parties and the media to inform citizens about their representatives and to mobilize them in support of the New Right’s agenda (Kalman 2010, 26–27). Weyrich, Phillips, Dolan, and Viguerie were not the only ones in the New Right working to mobilize conservatives and influence national politics.
Phyllis Schlafly, a graduate of Radcliffe College who had unsuccessfully run for Congress in Illinois in 1952 before becoming a conservative activist and strong supporter of Goldwater in his 1964 campaign, was an equally important figure in the New Right (Williams 2010, 108–9). With the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment with overwhelming support in the House and Senate in 1972, as well as support from President Nixon, and its quick ratification in over thirty states it seemed the constitutional amendment was well on its way to being ratified by thirty-eight states necessary for it to become part of the Constitution. Then in the fall of 1972 Schlafly launched the STOP ERA campaign which used its very limited resources to target key legislators in key states as well as train wives and mothers on how to appear before the media and conduct letter-writing campaigns to put pressure on state legislators to vote against the ratification of the ERA (Edwards 1999, 192). Mobilizing evangelical Christian women who wished to preserve traditional gender roles and the special legal privileges that women had, the campaign quickly stopped the ratification of the ERA in Oklahoma and Illinois in 1973 and later led to Kentucky’s rescindment of its approval of the amendment as well as anti-ERA referenda in both Florida and Nevada that successfully passed and caused the pro-ERA forces to lose momentum that they were never able to get back (Edwards 1999, 193). It also marked one of the first high-profile fights of the “culture wars,” with the issue having been framed by Schlafly as a feminist attempt to destroy the family that would eventually allow same-sex marriage, permit rape, and force women to be drafted and assume combat roles in the military (Kalman 2010, 72–73). The STOP ERA campaign also transformed many evangelical and conservative women into Republican Party activists, bolstering the efforts of social conservatives and the New Right to seize control of the party, and resulted in a close defeat at the 1976 RNC when Schlafly and her supporters attempted to remove the party’s plank supporting the ERA (Williams 2010, 111).
Despite being products of the efforts of conservative intellectuals and activists to forge a conservative movement in the 1960s, members of the New Right saw their enemies as “the elite, the established, the affluent, the cultivated intellectual” which applied not just to liberals but to conservatives as well (Crawford 1980, 166). They identified with the grievances and resentments of white, lower middle-class Americans who felt left out of the halls of power that they viewed were controlled by a “professional technical elite” of intellectuals and white-collar workers (Crawford 1980, 168, 170). This anti-elitist and anti-intellectual zeal of the New Right is ironic in light of the fact that they were influenced by the works of neoconservatives such as Irving Kristol and Daniel Bell in their discussion of “the New Class” of bureaucrats and managers that controlled the government whom members of the New Right viewed as wielding “power and prestige undemocratically.” In addition the New Right’s “populist attachment to the masses” and anti-Eastern stance had been expressed during the late 1940s and early 1950s by such conservative intellectuals as Whittaker Chambers, James Burnham, Willi Schlamm, and Willmoore Kendall (Crawford 1980, 169–70). They were suspicious of neoconservatives despite their agreement on foreign policy because they were viewed as elitist and were centered in New York City, the center of the Eastern Establishment that the New Right loathed (Crawford 1980, 173–74). Even though this disconnect existed between the New Right and the neoconservatives, they would eventually find themselves on the same side in 1980 in support of Reagan’s campaign for president. They also did not exert as broad an influence on public opinion, media, and politicians as that exercised by the neoconservatives and their new school of conservative thought.

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25 Buckley would be a frequent target of New Right ridicule, coming from a wealthy and distinguished Eastern family and having an Ivy League education that screamed of elitism, and his frequent deviations from conservative orthodoxy over the course of the 1970s such as supporting the Panama Canal Treaties and the de-criminalization of marijuana estranged him from many of his colleagues on the right (Crawford 1980, 176–77).
Neoconservatism and Conservative Intellectuals in the 1970s

The turmoil of the late 1960s and early 1970s birthed a new conservative intellectual movement driven by former liberals who had become disillusioned with the chaos, weakness, and confusion that modern liberalism seemed to represent. McGovern’s campaign for president, the willingness to withdraw from Vietnam and let it fall to communism, the sexual revolution, an unwillingness to condemn the anti-Israel sentiment in the UN, and the radicalization on college campuses were all developments that caused men such as Irving Kristol, Norman Podhoretz, and Daniel Bell to re-evaluate liberalism and their support for the Democratic Party (Edwards 1999, 194). At its height this group of intellectuals, mostly centered in New York, included Daniel Patrick Moynihan, James Q. Wilson, Samuel Huntington, Robert Nisbet, Seymour Martin Lipton, and Nathan Glazer many of whom were Jewish and graduates of the City College of New York (Hodgson 1996, 131). Their important contribution to conservatism was their emphasis on “the need to reassert American nationalism or patriotism or ‘Americanism’ or ‘American exceptionalism’: the idea that American society, however flawed, is not only essentially good but somehow morally superior to other societies” (Hodgson 1996, 133). Neoconservatives would end up being some of the loudest critics of détente, the opposition to which they were aligned with the New Right and conservative Republicans, as well as the decline of the U.S. military which was amplified by the sympathetic Democratic Senator Henry Jackson of Washington (Kalman 2010, 193).

Neoconservatives also proved to be strong defenders of free market capitalism and especially critical of what they saw as the “anticapitalist” sentiment of New Deal liberalism. Specifically they believed that liberal intellectuals, while purporting to support a vague “socialism,” in fact opposed capitalism without favoring an alternative. Neoconservatives linked
this with their idea of Americanism, saying that such anticapitalist was “anti-Americanist” and showed contempt by the Left for what neoconservatives viewed as the American way of life rooted in a capitalist society (Gerson 1996, 207–8). They defended capitalism by asserting that it was the only system that ensured widespread economic mobility for everyone, that the profit motive is not inherently bad and that the greed that the left faults capitalism for is in fact a human failing, and that capitalism is the best defense against totalitarianism by dispersing power to centers other than the government (Gerson 1996, 212–23). They were also especially critical of New Deal liberalism’s focus on welfare programs as the solution to poverty, believing that it was the role of the government to ensure that as many people as possible were brought into the free market system and allowed to be rewarded for their abilities and hard work. Welfare programs, on the other hand, undermined incentives for hard work and creativity as well as “bourgeois virtues” by saying that “something can be received for nothing” (Gerson 1996, 224–26). Nevertheless neoconservatives did defend the need for a welfare state, if limited in nature, to serve as a “buttress against the painful dislocations generated by capitalism” while also recognizing that there was no way that America would return to the days of pure laissez-faire government. Instead they viewed the need for a “limited, energetic public sector” that would help “remove obstacles or create opportunities for individuals to flourish in the free market” (Gerson 1996, 243–45).

Despite being a small group of New York intellectuals, neoconservatives would end up being an important factor in the further growth of conservative sentiments among the American public and elected officials in part because of their “connections to America’s leading

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26 Specifically “diligence, humility, probity, punctuality, temperance, industry, [and] frugality” all of which neoconservatives believed were “essential components of a free, democratic, and capitalist society (Gerson 1996, 227).
universities and the more important mass media, direct access to officeholders and the political elite, good relations with ‘major elements of the labor movement,’ and strong roots in influential foundations and think tanks with multimillion-dollar budgets” (Edwards 1999, 196). In fact, their influence could be felt in the increasingly hostile media coverage of the Soviet Union in the late 1970s driven by the Soviet Union’s interventions in the Third World and its anti-Semitic attitudes which led to the adoption of a neoconservative, anti-Soviet tone in many newspapers including the Washington Post, New York Times, and The New Republic (Hodgson 1996, 237). Leading neoconservative intellectuals such as Kristol and Podhoretz were also prolific in the establishment of neoconservatives institutions including publications such as The Public Interest, The National Interest, and The New Criterion; groups such as the Coalition for a Democratic Majority and the Committee on the Present Danger; and think tanks such as the Institute for Educational Affairs which worked to wage a war of ideas against New Deal liberalism and the New Left and hopefully push businessmen to more forcefully oppose the liberal status quo (Edwards 1999, 196–97).

By the late 1970s neoconservatives were exerting strong influence on both the Democratic and Republican parties. During the 1976 election campaign Jimmy Carter adopted a more aggressive tone on foreign policy akin more to Reagan than traditional Democrats in part to court the support of neoconservatives27 (Kalman 2010, 176). Neoconservatives would also prove to be strong opponents of affirmative action programs which became evident as the Bakke case made its way to the Supreme Court, with Jewish neoconservatives being especially critical in bolstering conservative arguments on the issue by linking opposition to affirmative action to the “rhetoric of colorblindness and antidiscrimination” (Kalman 2010, 192). While they were

27 He would end up winning the votes of both Jews and neoconservatives on November 2 (Kalman 2010, 178).
wedded more to the Democratic Party than to the Republicans over the course of the 1970s, their “fierce anticommunism and equally determined resistance to the raging counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s” would appeal to a broad array of conservatives in both parties and lead Reagan to reach out for their support in 1980 along with the New Right (Edwards 1999, 197).

**Conservative Revolt: The Battle for the 1976 Republican Nomination**

President Ford had done much to anger conservatives over the course of his short time in office. Along with the aforementioned nomination of Rockefeller as Vice President there was his continued push for détente at the urging of Henry Kissinger, the vocal support by him and First Lady Betty Ford for the ERA and his appointment of feminist Mary Louise Smith as the first chairwoman of the Republican National Committee (Kalman 2010, 75), and his firing of James Schlesinger as Secretary of Defense as part of the “Halloween Massacre” of 1975, who had been an ally of neoconservatives and conservatives working to undermine détente from within the administration (Kalman 2010, 125-126). In a testament of the growing power of the New Right and Ford’s increasing worry about a challenge from the right for the GOP nomination was his reneging of support to expand the power of unions to picket at construction sites through his veto of the legislation authorizing it at the end of 1975 (Kalman 2010, 162). Despite relenting to pressure from conservatives to oppose this pro-union piece of legislation, Ford’s many actions in fall 1974 and over the course of 1975 had alienated enough conservatives in the party that a challenge from Reagan, who was being pushed by conservatives to run, was all but guaranteed and was confirmed when he announced his own candidacy in November of 1975.
Reagan, however, did not have unanimous support from all factions of the right. Members of the New Right in particular such as Viguerie were deeply suspicious of Reagan’s conservatism as a result of his time as Governor of California, during which he “signed into law a bill liberalizing access to abortion, participated in a bipartisan effort to achieve welfare reform, realized that the withholding taxes he vowed to oppose were essential, raised other taxes, and more than doubled government spending” (Kalman 2010, 32). It is possible that their ambivalence toward Reagan and lack of enthusiasm for his campaign contributed to his narrow defeat for the GOP nomination in 1976 although missteps by Reagan’s campaign along the way may have also been crucial to his eventual loss to Ford (Kalman 2010, 165). Nevertheless, he enjoyed enthusiastic support from grassroots conservatives and the American Conservative Union, Young Americans for Freedom, Human Events, and the National Review (Kalman 2010, 163). Even though he was challenging Ford for the nomination, Reagan and his campaign manager John Sears decided to focus his attacks on Democrats and their support for big government while running on the theme of Reagan as a Washington outsider who could offer a clear alternative to Democrats (Reagan 1990, 201). Meanwhile President Ford used the old attack line that had been used against Goldwater twelve years prior, that Reagan was “an extremist whose candidacy would ensure a Democratic triumph” at the same time that the national media dismissed the seriousness of Reagan’s campaign against Ford (Kalman 2010, 165).

Hoping to win early states in order to deny Ford’s campaign credibility, Reagan was set back by a speech he made in the fall of 1979 calling for $90 billion in spending cuts and for transferring control of federal housing, welfare, education, and Medicaid to the states which was criticized by Ford who pointed out that it would require raising local taxes in order to pay for
these program (Kalman 2010, 166; Edwards 1999, 201). Additionally Sears had Reagan pull out from planned appearances in New Hampshire over the final weekend and instead visit Illinois, a grave mistake that resulted in Reagan’s narrow 1,587 vote loss to Ford in the New Hampshire primary which was strong for a challenger to an incumbent president but underperformed expectations that Reagan would win the state (Kalman 2010, 166; Edwards 1999, 201). Reagan changed strategies and began to wage an “ideological holy battle” against Ford in the Sunbelt, criticizing him for his support of détente and for trying to hand the Panama Canal back to the Panamanians. Despite attacking Ford from the right, Reagan lost the Florida primary on March 9 and his campaign was on the brink of ending until he made a comeback in the North Carolina primary on March 23 (Kalman 2010, 166–67). This would not have come about without critical support from conservatives, with Senator Jesse Helms backing Reagan and the ACU spending nearly $250,000 to bolster Reagan’s campaign in the state (Kalman 2010, 167–68). Turning things around, Reagan won a series of primary victories in Texas, Indiana, Georgia, and Alabama over the course of May, receiving crossover support from Democrats and independents, especially “Wallace Democrats” for whom he gave a positive agenda to support. By the end of the primary season Ford and Reagan were in a deadlock, with Ford winning Ohio and Reagan winning his home state of California (Edwards 1999, 203). Neither candidate had a majority of delegates, though, and the GOP went into its first convention since 1952 without a clear nominee.

With Reagan having the support of at least 1,050 delegates and Ford at least 1,100 both fell short of the 1,130 needed to win the nomination. Ford, however, had an advantage because of his ability to hand out favors, the support of James Baker III who proved effective at wrangling delegates, and this control over the Republican National Committee (Kalman 2010,
He also had received the support of Barry Goldwater six weeks before the convention, which counteracted the support by conservatives such as Senator Paul Laxalt of Nevada and Strom Thurmond for Reagan (Edwards 1999, 204). In a desperate move to win over liberal Republicans, Sears had Reagan announce Pennsylvania Senator Richard Schweiker as his running mate before the convention. However, not only did this move fail to win over liberals but it gave an excuse for the Mississippi delegation, which had been pledged to Reagan, to switch its support to Ford while also infuriating members of the New Right whose suspicion of both Sears and Reagan only grew even further (Kalman 2010, 169). The Reaganites fought on, however, but after failing to pass a rule requiring Ford to reveal his running mate before the vote on the nominee it was clear that Reagan had lost. While Reagan may have lost the nomination he and his supporters had a powerful influence on the Republican platform, passing a plank that condemned the Helsinki Accords and negotiations over the future of the Panama Canal, repudiating the Ford administration’s foreign policy. In addition, conservatives managed to add a plank saying the party “[supported] the efforts” of those pushing for a constitutional amendment to protect the life of unborn children (Busch 2005, 81) while narrowly failing to repeal the plank supporting the ERA. Bowing to conservative pressure, however, Ford selected Senator Bob Dole of Kansas as his running mate (Kalman 2010, 169–70). As the dust of the 1976 RNC settled it was clear that even though Reagan lost the nomination he had successfully moved the Republican Party further to the right and prevented a likely defeat from Carter that year due to the headwinds that the GOP was facing after Watergate which not only would have made it difficult for Reagan to run again in 1980. Even if he had won conservatives would have been blamed for the crises of the late 1970s, perhaps ending any chance they would have at power for some time (Howison 2014, 88–89).
Instead it was Ford who would go on to lose to Carter in a race that was more about character and leadership than it was about the issues (Kalman 2010, 172). Ford’s defeat left the GOP at a low point as the party was bitterly divided between the Ford wing and the Reagan wing and had failed to make any headway in the South (which was almost completely swept by Carter). The only bright spot for conservatives was the election of Orrin Hatch in Utah to the United States Senate who would be an ally to the New Right (Kalman 2010, 178–79). The Carter presidency, however, would see a dramatic change in the fortunes of both the GOP and conservatives by the end of 1978 because of the backlash and mobilization it spurred on the right (Kalman 2010, 179).

The Mobilization of Evangelicals and the Christian Right

Evangelical and fundamentalists Christians have had a long history of political activism that stretches back to the 1920s with efforts to support Prohibition, combat the growing teaching of evolution in public schools, and to protest against the changes in sexual and gender roles in that decade (Williams 2010, 2). Such activism continued on for decades afterward, changing with the issues that were salient from the Cold War and the threat of communism to the changes brought about by countercultural movements and feminism in the late 1960s and 1970s. What made the 1970s different, though, was the degree to which fundamentalist and evangelical Christians were able to come together to fight the cultural and societal changes that were ongoing over the course of the decade as a result of the end of civil rights as a divisive issue between both of these groups (Williams 2010, 6). Jimmy Carter’s candidacy for president also brought evangelicals into the political fray as a self-identified evangelical himself Carter would excite many evangelical Christians who had the opportunity to support one of their own, before his socially liberal stances on issues such as abortion and the ERA brought disappointment to
many evangelicals as well as conservative Southern Baptists (Williams 2010, 125). His campaign also aroused the ire and condemnation of fundamentalists such as Jerry Falwell as well as evangelicals after Carter gave an interview with *Playboy* magazine in which he revealed he had “committed adultery in [his] heart many times” (Williams 2010, 126–27). Despite these remarks and Ford’s effort to court evangelical support, Carter would still manage to win 49% of the evangelical vote to Ford’s 51% (Williams 2010, 132). However, his presidency would see evangelicals solidify their relationship with the GOP and become a more politically organized force.

The closest thing that evangelical Christians had to intellectuals were Francis Schaeffer, a Presbyterian missionary in Switzerland, and H. Edward Rowe, a leader of the Christian Freedom Foundation (Williams 2010, 137; 141). Schaeffer had been a well-known Christian thinker for many years before he published his influential and best-selling book *How Should We Live Then?* (1976) that would also been turned into a popular documentary among evangelical Christians. In it he traced the lineage of humanist thinking in Western society, showing how it had become influential in popular culture and society while Christian thinking and a biblical standard of morality had fallen out of favor. He called on Christians to reverse this trend and take action to oppose the “rise of authoritarian government” that was undermining traditional moral values (Williams 2010, 140). This alarmist account of the rise of “secular humanism” would be echoed the same year by Rowe, who critiqued secular humanism in his book *Save America!* (1976) and tied it to the rise of economic and social liberalism within America, both of which he claimed had been driven by “the nation’s turn toward secular humanism” as demonstrated by the rise of the feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s. He went as far as to call for the creation of Christian political organizations that would back candidates that supported Christian values.
while providing guidance to those lawmakers seeking to vote in line with the “Christian position” (Williams 2010, 142). While neither of these Christian thinkers stirred immediate political action they formed a backdrop to greater scrutiny of the Carter administration by evangelical Christians especially on matters of feminism, gay rights, and abortion.

The Carter administration took many actions that evangelical Christians abhorred, from Carter’s appointment of feminists to state conferences for International Women’s Year and his support of the ERA (Williams 2010, 143), to his criticism of those who tried to limit the rights of the gay community (Williams 2010, 149), and his willingness to uphold Roe v. Wade despite his personal opposition to abortion (Williams 2010, 154). Increased political mobilization of evangelicals also took place, with Schaeffer engaging in successful organizing efforts to bring evangelical and fundamentalist Christians together with Catholics as part of a larger pro-life movement that also inspired Jerry Falwell to work as well to make this happen (Williams 2010, 154–56). An especially critical moment in the mobilization of evangelical Christians occurred in 1978 when the IRS revised guidelines regarding the charitable status (and thus tax exemptions) of independent Christian schools on grounds of racial discrimination (Hodgson 1996, 176).

Years of pent-up frustration with what they saw as the undermining of traditional, Christian values reached a breaking point as the National Christian Action Coalition, led by the fundamentalist activist Dr. Bob Billings, organized a letter-writing campaign that saw hundreds of thousands of letters being sent to the IRS, the White House, and Congress and ultimately resulted in the passage of legislation blocking the new IRS guidelines from taking effect (Edwards 1999, 198). Now that Christians could no longer stay isolated from the political arena, having realized their way of life was under threat if they did nothing, they would build a network
of organizations meant that would allow them to influence the political process and become a central component of the Republican coalition.

One of these key organizations was Christian Voice founded in January 1979 by Robert Grant, a Baptist minister, that was committed to taking on all the “evils” of the countercultural movement that evangelicals deplored from abortion to gay rights and the ERA. Christian Voice would grow quickly, with 100,000 members joining within six months which doubled by October 1980. It proved critical in bringing together the anti-ERA, pro-life, and anti-gay-rights movements and sought not only to support evangelical Christian candidates but also to defeat liberals by supporting conservatives “regardless of religion or personal morality” (Williams 2010, 164–66). The organization would also support a wider array of conservative causes, especially anticomunist ones, consistent with conservative Protestants’ long-held hostility to the Soviet Union and their concerns regarding America’s military strength in comparison to the Soviets (Williams 2010, 166–67). Another key organization of the Christian Right was brought about through the efforts of prominent New Right figures who found themselves allied with evangelical Christians on a variety of social issues and were looking for a way “to turn…apolitical social conservatives into conservative Republican activists” (Williams 2010, 171). So prominent New Right leaders Weyrich and Phillips through the help of Ed McAteer, a businessman and Christian lay leader, met with Jerry Falwell in early 1979 and convinced him of the need to mobilize social conservatives Americans into a powerful political force which led to the establishment of Moral Majority that May. Gaining the support of televangelists like Pat Robertson of the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) and Jim Robison of Dallas this newly established organization would mark the beginning of the religious right and be important in registering millions of new voters from the ranks of evangelical Christians before the 1980
election (Edwards 1999, 198–99). United, the New Right and religious right would be a powerful force fueling the further growth of conservatism.

Economic Crisis, the Organization of Business, and New Classical Economics

The economic troubles of the 1970s would lead to a profound transformation in economic thinking pushed by business elites that would find a home among conservatives who believed in lower taxes and reducing government spending. The impetus for this change was multifaceted, with one important factor being increasing inflation coupled with high unemployment or “stagflation” as it came to be known. One can find its origins in the Arab oil embargo of 1973, which caused a sharp uptick in the price of oil and removed the advantage of cheap energy that the United States and other developed countries had enjoyed and, combined with increasing commodity prices, led to a dramatic increase in inflation (Hodgson 1996, 188–89). At the same time American corporations were facing the dual pressures of foreign competition which was creeping into the domestic market as well as saturation in certain industries such as automobiles and consumer appliances as there were already so much of these goods that demand for them diminished. Facing rising costs due to inflation and decreasing prices caused by foreign competition American corporations saw profits collapse, causing business elites to look for an explanation (Hodgson 1996, 190). The one they came up with, the “capital shortfall theory,” became the belief of not just business elites but the government as well. This theory says that underinvestment by the private sector caused by high taxation and spending by the U.S. government had depressed the savings rate and led to slow productivity growth and thus high inflation and high unemployment (Cox and Skidmore-Hess 1999, 148). Its consequences would
be felt once corporate leaders began to organize, shift public opinion in their favor, and lobby the government to lower taxes.

By the early 1970s business interests began to organize in a way they had not previously in order to face the crisis that their companies were facing. In 1972 the Business Roundtable was founded by the unification of three earlier business groups: “the Construction Users Anti-Inflation Roundtable, concerned with cutting labor costs and union power in the construction industry; the Labor Law Study Group, formed to oppose organized labor’s efforts to repeal right-to-work laws; and the March Group, an informal gathering of top corporate executives concerned about the declining industrial competitiveness of American industry” (Himmelstein 1990, 140). It brought together the CEOs of America’s largest corporations who worked to lobby for the collective interests of corporate business with a focus on fighting labor unions, cutting taxes, and decreasing government regulation of industry (Hodgson 1996, 206–7; Howison 2014, 94). They gained a sympathetic ally in the new Treasury Secretary William Simon who pushed a series of think tanks and foundations\textsuperscript{28} to promote “free markets, small government, low taxes, and cuts in welfare expenditure” to the American public and elected officials (Hodgson 1996, 207–8).

Another organization promoting business interests was the American Council on Capital Formation\textsuperscript{29} which, under the leadership of Charls Walker, successfully built a bipartisan coalition in 1978 to pass legislation cutting capital gains and corporate taxes while increasing investment tax credits (Hodgson 1996, 208–9). These and other organizations like them worked to bring together businessmen, intellectuals, and politicians and advance free market capitalist

\textsuperscript{28} Includes the John M. Olin Foundation, the Heritage Foundation, the Hoover Institute, the Manhattan Institute, and the Institute for Educational Affairs (Hodgson 1996, 207–8).

\textsuperscript{29} Previously the American Council on Capital Gains and Estate Taxation (Hodgson 1996, 208)
ideas that corporate leaders had previously been reluctant to discuss but were forced to by the economic troubles of the times.

An important action the Business Roundtable took was to promote the idea of “supply-side economics” that was relatively obscure at the time but was being promoted by economist Arthur Laffer and Wall Street Journal writer Jude Wanniski and was part of the “New Classical Economics” which replaced Keynesianism as the economic theory guiding government policy by 1980 (Howison 2014, 95). The concept, as expressed through the Laffer Curve, was that there would come a point when lower taxes, rather than decreasing revenue, would actually increase it by expanding the tax base and spurring investment by businesses. When combined with decreased government spending, free trade, and “prudent monetary policy” it would solve the issue of inflation once-and-for-all (Kalman 2010, 227–29). Initially laughed off by the likes of Dick Cheney as well as economists from the Kennedy and Ford administrations, the lobbying by Laffer and especially Wanniski for the idea would find a receptive ear in Jack Kemp, a congressman from a working-class district in upstate New York that was suffering from a decline in manufacturing. It also saw support from the New Right, Human Events, and the Wall Street Journal, as well as conservative intellectuals such as Irving Kristol which increased its credibility among conservatives (Kalman 2010, 230–31). In 1977 Kemp would work with Delaware Senator William Roth to introduce a bill that became known simply as Kemp-Roth and called for reducing federal income taxes and corporate taxes to stimulate the economy. While the bill went nowhere, the victory the following year of Proposition 13 in California which cut property taxes while controlling increases in the market values of property was hailed as a demonstration of a popular “tax revolt” by its backers including Howard Jarvis, a long-time activist for lower taxes and lower government spending, as well as supply-siders who saw it as
proof that there was a public desire to lower taxes even though there are debates over whether that was actually the case or not\textsuperscript{30} (Kalman 2010, 233–35). Even with the interpretation of Proposition 13’s passage uncertain, it was clear that popular opinion was moving in an economically conservative direction by the end of the 1970s and setting the stage for Reagan to capitalize on this sentiment in 1980 (Howison 2014, 98–99).

The other side of this shift in economic thinking was the monetarism being promoted by Milton Friedman and others in the Chicago School of Economics. Behind monetarism is the idea that the money supply was the biggest factor determining total spending in the economy and economic growth and that by controlling it could the government fight the scourge of inflation. As opposed to Keynesianism which focused on reducing unemployment at the expense of higher inflation to spur economic growth, monetarism focused on reducing inflation without regard for its effects on unemployment to arrive at the same outcome. However, those who had an interest in low inflation were “businessmen, investors, [and] those whose savings supply a major part of their income” while those who lost was anyone relying on wages and salaries for income, in effect almost all American workers (Hodgson 1996, 201–3). Support for a restrictive monetary policy in line with monetarist ideas was strong within the financial community which hoped to increase the purchasing power of the dollar and thus reduce the cost of foreign resources used in the production process while at the same time weakening organized labor (Cox and Skidmore-Hess 1999, 162–63). Monetarism, combined with supply-side economics, would prove to be an appealing combination for conservatives such as Reagan who sought to reduce the government intervention into the market while also working to cut government spending and lower taxes. Multinational corporations, looking for ways to cut costs and maintain global and domestic

\textsuperscript{30} Daniel A. Smith (as quoted in Howison 2014, 98) says that it was less a popular mobilization of citizens to lower taxes and more a centrally organized effort by large property interests to reduce their own tax burden.
market shares in the face of increased foreign competition, would also find these ideas appealing (Cox and Skidmore-Hess 1999, 165). With Reagan taking advice from economic intellectuals such as Laffer and Friedman as early as December 1975 as he was challenging Ford for the GOP nomination the movement of these ideas from intellectuals to business elites and eventually to party elites within the GOP is clear as is their contribution to the rightward movement of the Republican Party on economic issues as the 1980 election approached (Hodgson 1996, 211).

The 1980 Election and the “Reagan Revolution”

Going into 1980 President Carter was in a weak position with inflation at 11.3% and climbing, a recession looming on the horizon, and a hostage crisis in Iran that would come to represent the failure of his leadership in foreign affairs and of America’s perceived decline internationally (Busch 2005, 8). While seven prominent Republicans jumped in the race for the Republican nomination to take on Carter in the fall, only two would end up winning any contests in the race: Reagan and George H.W. Bush. Both represented the main divisions within the Republican Party in 1980 between ascendant conservatives from the South and West as (represented by Reagan) and the moderate Eastern Establishment that had dominated the party until the mid-1960s but had been declining in power ever since (represented by Bush). Reagan had proved to be the front-runner in the race for the GOP nomination, though, consistently polling between 40-50% of the Republican primary electorate over the course of 1979 (Edwards 1999, 207). In addition his conservatism would not be an issue during the campaign as it was in 1976 and might have even been an asset as over half of American’s disagreed in a Harris poll taken in 1979 that Reagan was “too conservative” to be elected president and a majority of those polled agreed with Reagan that the government should get out of the way of business and allow the free market to run its course (Edwards 1999, 206). The challenge in the Republican
primaries, then, would be to see if the moderate Bush could dislodge Reagan from his frontrunner position and take the nomination for himself.

Like 1976 the focus would be on victories in early states but once again Reagan would struggle in the very first contest in Iowa, with Bush’s superior organization in the state combined with Reagan’s confidence that he would win Iowa which led to him making only infrequent visits, resulted in Bush narrowly winning the state 31.5% to 29.4% for Reagan despite a large-scale mobilization of pro-life voters to support Reagan’s campaign (Busch 2005, 65–66). Claiming the “Big Mo’,” Bush would turn to New Hampshire for another victory. However, Reagan’s anti-tax message combined with a well-organized campaign by the NRA and strong debate performances led to a 27 point Reagan victory in the New Hampshire primary five weeks later (Busch 2005, 67–68). Reagan would go on to win further victories in Vermont, South Carolina, Illinois and Wisconsin with Bush only managing to win Massachusetts and Pennsylvania, the latter after having come out forcefully against Reagan’s support for supply-side economics that Bush called “voodoo economics,” a demonstration that support for supply-side ideas was not yet a standard Republican position with some still supporting Keynesianism even if it was falling out of favor as an economic theory (Busch 2005, 69–72). Reagan would go on to beat Bush in his adopted home state of Texas as well as win a pair of primaries in New York and Oregon both of which would seem to be favorable to a moderate Republican like Bush, who would win the Michigan primary during the same stretch of the race. Bush would end up withdrawing on May 26 as a result with Reagan having finally secured the Republican nomination on the third attempt (Edwards 1999, 210). And the coalition that had supported him during the primaries was “more middle and working class, more ethnic, more Catholic, more
entrepreneurial, and more ‘new money’” than those supporting Bush, a preview of the coalition he would assemble in the general election against Carter (Busch 2005, 97).

The 1980 Republican National Convention in Detroit, Michigan would see conservatives in complete control of crafting the Republican platform with the effort headed by Jesse Helms and Jack Kemp in a partnership of traditional conservatism and economic conservatism. In the resulting platform the GOP would call for:

- a 30 percent tax cut in accord with the Kemp-Roth plan; the systematic reduction of federal rules and regulations over business and industry; the decentralization of social welfare and public assistance programs; free enterprise zones in the inner cities to attract capital, entrepreneurs, and jobs…;
- a constitutional amendment banning abortion on demand; the support for equal rights for women but not the Equal Rights Amendment;
- the building of new weapons systems to help the United States achieve military superiority over the Soviet Union; strong support for Israel and the Republic of China on Taiwan; and a North American economic accord among the United States, Canada, and Mexico (Edwards, 211).

These planks represented the newfound influence that intellectuals such as Laffer and the neoconservatives as well as social conservatives in the New Right and Christian Right had over the Republican Party with Reagan’s victory in the primaries. In a demonstration of their dominance over the party, efforts by liberal and moderate Republicans to challenge the platform by requiring floor debate and a roll-call vote on it rather than the voice vote it was passed with failed to secure the support of a majority of five state delegations that was required by convention rules (Busch 2005, 82). Reagan would also listen to the protestations of New
Rightists such as Phillips, Schlafly, and New Hampshire Sen. Gordon Humphrey over choosing a member of the “Ford wing” of the party as his running mate as well as concerns from members of the Christian Right such as Jerry Falwell if he disappointed them with his vice presidential selection (Edwards 1999, 213). While he would ultimately not heed their advice it was clear that they were an important part of the new coalition that Reagan was trying to forge. After a brief flirtation with putting former President Ford on the ticket, Reagan settled on Bush who could “balance the ticket both ideologically and geographically” and help unify the party as it turned to the fall campaign against Carter (Busch 2005, 82–83). This was a far cry from the decision by Goldwater sixteen years prior to put a fellow conservative on the ticket and showed both Reagan’s pragmatism and the maturation of the conservative movement as it came to grips with the reality of winning a national election which required a unified Republican Party. With an acceptance speech focused on the complicity of Democratic leadership in the crises that the country was facing, punctuated by a call out to FDR who Reagan claimed had campaigned on conservative ideas but which had been betrayed by modern liberalism, Reagan would be off to face Carter in November (Busch 2005, 84).

The battleground of the fall campaign between Carter and Reagan was two-fold. Geographically it was focused on the industrial states of the Midwest and Northeast as well as the South which had backed Republicans, Democrats, and independent candidates in the past two decades and seemed up to grabs for Republicans even as Carter retained strong support there. Demographically it was concentrated on blue-collar white ethnic voters, Catholics (which overlapped with the prior group), and white evangelicals who were especially concentrated in the South as well as rural areas in the North although no group was taken for granted with Republicans also trying to court the votes of Jews while Carter tried to go after moderate
suburbanites who had support Ford and Nixon (Busch 2005, 104–7). Carter would focus on attacking Reagan as a “right-wing extremist opposed to peace, arms control, and working people” pulling out the old playbook that had been used against Goldwater in 1964 to much success (Edwards 1999, 218). While this proved effective at first, Reagan’s performances in both the first debate with John Anderson, a liberal Republican who was running as an independent, on September 21 and the second debate with Carter on October 28 both dispelled the idea that he was dangerous and belligerent as he came across as reasonable and well-spoken during each debate (Busch 2005, 112). At the same time Reagan’s attacks on Carter’s record, as encapsulated with his “are you better off than you were four years ago?” remark at the pivotal debate between him and Carter proved effective in turning the election into a referendum on Carter’s presidency and his failure to address the troubles facing the country (Busch 2005, 119). When the votes came in on November 4th they not only surprised the media and Democrats in how large Reagan’s victory was but they also revealed a fundamental realignment of the American electorate that had been building for years.

The final results were on the edge of landslide territory with Reagan receiving 51% of the popular vote and 489 electoral votes to Carter’s 41% and 49 electoral votes. Reagan won forty-four states spread across the entire country while Carter only managed to hold onto Minnesota, the home of Vice President Walter Mondale; his home state of Georgia; and the states of West Virginia, Maryland, Rhode Island, and Hawaii as well as the District of Columbia. Reagan’s victories in many southern states, however, were narrow despite his large margins in other parts of the country. These included states such as Tennessee, Arkansas, Alabama, and North Carolina (Busch 2005, 125–26). Reagan swept numerous key demographic groups that had made up the New Deal coalition including blue-collar whites, white ethnic voters, Catholics, and even Jews.
(a group over which neoconservatives held influence). He also won evangelical Christians by a 2-to-1 margin on Carter, which was key to his victories in states across the South (Busch 2005, 127–28). However, it is clear that Reagan benefited from many advantages brought about by both the conservative movement and the shift in public opinion over the course of the 1970s as a product of events and societal and economic changes. He had strong state and local organizations filled with enthusiastic supporters volunteering on behalf of his campaign, a product of years of grassroots organization by conservative organizations (Busch 2005, 101). The economy and foreign policy were top issues for voters, both of which played to Reagan’s favor because of Carter’s failures on both fronts (Busch 2005, 130). All three pivotal groups in the election – blue collar voters, Catholics, and evangelical Protestants – were culturally conservative groups offended by Carter’s cultural liberalism on many issues as well as his weakness on foreign policy that were difficult for him to overcome (Busch 2005, 136). They were also groups that had been becoming more conservative since the end of World War II as a result of anticommunist, traditionalist, and libertarian sentiments that were only heightened as a result of the social revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s (Howison 2014, 110).

The depth of victory for Reagan and conservatives is only emphasized by results for Congress which saw the defeat of liberal incumbents in Senate races across the country including Birch Bayh, Frank Church, and George McGovern as well as Warren Magnuson of Washington, John Culver of Iowa, and Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin. Four had been targeted by NCPAC and five by the Moral Majority, showing the strengths of these organizations in supporting conservatives up and down the ballot (Busch 2005, 153). The Republican gain of thirty-three seats in the House also allowed for an effective conservative majority to exist with Democrats on a variety of issues (Busch 2005, 1). While this may not have represented a whole-scale embrace
of conservatism, there was evidence that “confidence in the federal government as a national economic planner – and the high taxes, big spending, and aggressive regulation that such control required – collapsed” over the course of the late 1970s (Busch 2005, 143). Such a drop in confidence in government played right into the antistatist arguments that conservative intellectuals had been making since the 1950s and the supply-side economics being pushed by Laffer and then Kemp in the latter half of the 1970s. A sense of America’s military decline amid Soviet aggression abroad stoked anticommunist sentiment that by the 1970s was being pushed by neoconservatives. Finally, the growing prominence of social issues and the mobilization of social conservatives, especially the Christian Right, touched on traditionalist ideas regarding the authority of God and the promotion of a moral order in the political realm. The movement of the Republican Party to the right and the “Reagan Revolution” stem from the ideas put forward by conservative intellectuals in the 1950s that, through activism and social and economic changes, brought about a realignment of the American electorate in 1980.
V. Analysis

Looking at what brought about Reagan’s election in 1980 and with it the completion of the conservative takeover of the Republican Party reveals the key role that conservative intellectuals, in combination with party activists and interest group elites, had in not only creating a conservative movement but in taking advantage of events to push public opinion and Republican Party elites in a conservative direction. The end result of this was an electoral realignment in 1980 brought about as a result of the cultural impact of the social movements of the 1960s and the economic turmoil of the 1970s, as well as the efforts of conservative intellectuals and activists to take advantage of these changes, that resulted in the end of the New Deal era and the beginning of what could be called the “Reagan era” which continues to this day. This follows the model presented in Section III quite well although with noted deviations.

First during the mid-to-late 1940s and the early 1950s a group of conservative intellectuals articulated three different strands of conservative thought: libertarianism as articulated by Hayek, Chodorov, Hazlitt, and Chamberlain; traditionalism as articulated by Kirk, Weaver, and Viereck; and anticommunism as articulated by Chambers and Burnham. From the mid-1950s and accelerating after 1960 was the process of “creative synthesis” in which a coherent conservative ideology was brought together from these different strands especially libertarianism and traditionalism\(^3\) by another group of intellectual elites led by William Buckley Jr. and his associates at the \textit{National Review} which included members of all three strands of conservatism. This “fusionism” was not being crafted just by intellectual elites but also elected officials such as Barry Goldwater (with the help of intellectuals) and by young conservative activists in the form

\(^3\) Anticommunism was an intrinsic element of both libertarianism and traditionalism and as such was easily incorporated into a conservative ideology.
of the Sharon Statement. Largely libertarian in character but incorporating the traditionalist belief in the need for a “transcendent moral order” rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition, this fusionism would provide a shared set of principles upon which a conservative movement could be forged. The marketing of a conservative ideology, however, occurred before, during, and after the development of fusionism in the form of the ISI in the early 1950s which targeted college students, public speeches by men such as Wedemeyer and Moley during the same period extolling a blend of anticommunism and other conservative ideas, the pages of the National Review and other conservative journals of opinion such as Human Events, and later television programs such as Buckley’s Firing Line in the late 1960s. These appeals however went out not just to activists, voters, and interest group elites but also sympathetic party elites such as Goldwater as demonstrated by the influence that Russell Kirk exerted on him in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

The efforts of party and ideological activists, influenced and driven by the ideas of conservative intellectuals, would also prove to be instrumental in the growth of the conservative movement in the late 1950s and early 1960s more so than the efforts of either interest group elites (mainly in the form of business) or voters who were still supportive of the liberal consensus. However, these were considerably influenced by intellectual elites such as the National Review which inspired grassroots protests to Khrushchev’s visit in 1959, Buckley and William Rusher who helped form the YAF in 1960, and then Rusher’s involvement in the Draft Goldwater movement along with F. Clifton White in the early 1960s. The efforts by groups such as the YAF, the Draft Goldwater movement, and even the John Birch Society (which remained estranged from mainstream conservativism) mobilized grassroots conservatives who then worked to ensure that conservatives could no longer be ignored by the establishment of either
major party but especially the GOP. The pressure that such grassroots activism placed on Republican party elites to more openly embrace conservatism in part rested on the capture of local and state Republican parties by the Draft Goldwater movement which put conservatives into positions of power within the party as well as demographic shifts that bolstered the strength of southern Republicans (who were overwhelmingly conservative) and a shift in the base of financial support in the GOP toward southern and western donors who were more conservative in their views. Goldwater’s nomination in 1964 represented a conservative takeover of the Republican Party that, while receding a bit in the following years as moderates regrouped, would change power dynamics among elites in the party in the long-term and lead the party to shift ideologically to the right beginning in 1964 and then much more rapidly and consistently after 1976. The stark contrast between Nixon’s appeal to Rockefeller and liberal Republicans in 1960 and his attempts to get southern Republicans and conservatives behind his campaign for president in 1968 demonstrates the impact of this shift on the behavior of party elites.

At the same time events such as Vietnam, urban riots, and unrest on America’s college campuses were used by both conservative members of the Republican Party as well conservative intellectuals to push the idea that liberalism had run amok and that conservative ideas were the solution to the turmoil that the country faced. This corresponded with increasing sentiment by working class, blue collar voters that was turning against excessive welfare programs which they thought benefited underserving groups (mainly African-Americans) and a sense that the post-war economic boom was beginning to come to an end. Such a movement in public opinion by voters, while not being directly influenced by conservative intellectuals, nevertheless played a role in pushing politicians such as Nixon to embrace more conservative rhetoric even if he governed in office more as a centrist who still made sure to placate conservatives when he could to keep them
on his side such as with his efforts to delay the implementation of forced school busing. Nixon’s presidency however shows how conservatives, while exerting influence over the Republican Party and holding positions within the White House, still had yet to grow powerful enough to prevent a Republican president from embracing liberal ideas such as universal income (through Nixon’s Family Assistance Plan) or expanding the regulatory state (through environmental legislation and the establishment of OSHA). Even though they became disillusioned with the Nixon administration conservatives such as Buckley, Rusher, and Meyer could not stop him from being nominated for re-election even if they may have forced him in the short-term to take actions that pleased conservatives. This all changed, however, following Watergate and the growing impact of the counter-cultural movement of the late 1960s.

The events of the 1970s challenge the model presented in Section III because many of the developments that contributed to the further growth of the conservative movement, while elite-driven, were not as much the result of intellectual influence on activists as the influence of activists on party elites. This is the case with the rise of the New Right which was not motivated by ideas that were a part of existing conservative ideology due to the focus on social conservatism by members of this group including Vigerie, Weyrich, Phillips, and Dolan as well as Schlafly and others. Instead they were motivated by ongoing societal changes that unnerved them, a concern they would also share with evangelical and fundamentalist Christians. The New Right was also anti-intellectual in nature and even though some New Rightist concerns overlapped with those of intellectuals such as the neoconservatives they were still openly hostile to members of the conservative intellectual elite such as Buckley. At the same time the conservative intellectuals of the 1970s – the neoconservatives – exerted less direct influence on party activists and interest group elites than on voters as well as elites in both major parties as
demonstrated by Jimmy Carter’s adoption of neoconservative rhetoric and the growing public hostility to the Soviet Union that they fostered through the press. In spite of this, however, neoconservatives through their belief in American exceptionalism and nationalism that would motivate opposition to the Panama Canal treaties during Carter’s presidency by conservative activists and politicians alike as well as by the New Right, did show some influence on conservative activists and party elites but not to the same degree as earlier conservative intellectuals in the 1950s and early 1960s. Intellectual influence can also be found in the mobilization of the Christian Right by Christian thinkers such as Francis Schaeffer and F. Edward Lowe and in the inclusion of supply side and monetarist economic ideas as elements of conservative economic policy as pushed by Laffer and Friedman on party elites such as Jack Kemp and Ronald Reagan.

The ideological shift of the Republican Party over the course of the 1960s and the 1970s as a result of pressure from conservative party activists and interest group elites especially is quite clear as Eisenhower’s modern Republicanism was abandoned in favor of conservativism. Republicans went from strongly supporting civil rights in their 1960 platform to weakly supporting it in the 1964 platform. Their support for the ERA in 1976 gave way to opposition to the ERA come 1980 as did the inclusion of a plank calling for a constitutional amendment to protect the life of unborn children in 1980, a strengthening of a plank that conservatives had managed to put into place in 1976 supporting efforts to establish such a constitutional amendment. Nixon pushed for the beginnings of the devolution of federal power over welfare and other programs through revenue sharing and by 1980 Republicans were calling for the full-scale decentralization of such programs, both of which were a far cry from the expansion of Social Security and creation of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare under
Eisenhower in the 1950s (Gifford 2009, 22). Finally the GOP went from supporting austerity policies such as those pursued under Ford to embracing tax cuts and spending cuts as the proscription for economic prosperity in line with conservative principles.

An electoral realignment in 1980 proved to be a culmination of the long growth of the conservative movement and the later elite-driven grassroots movements of the 1970s such as the New Right which included veterans of earlier organizations such as the YAF and the Young Republicans and the mobilization of the Christian Right led by Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, James Robison, and other influential elites within the evangelical and fundamentalist Christian communities. This came about due to growing prominence of the feminist and gay rights movements over the course of the decade that fueled a backlash by traditionalist forces – the same forces that had been excluded from the fusionist conservative ideology developed in the early 1960s – as well as economic difficulties that cut into the profits of big business and led to increased corporate lobbying of Congress by the end of the decade. Backed by a conservative ideology developed many years before that had been marketed to activists, interest group elites, and voters as well as party elites over the previous three decades and a public turning against economic and cultural liberalism as a result of economic and societal changes that liberal ideas either could not respond to or had caused, Ronald Reagan swept to victory in 1980 over Jimmy Carter. With it he pulled support among three key groups in the New Deal coalition – blue-collar voters, white ethnic voters, and Catholics – as well as newly mobilized evangelical Christian voters which together formed the backbone of a new (if fragile) conservative coalition led by the Republican Party which now had the power to push for a conservative agenda that had been years in the making.
When it comes to the literature on electoral realignment, this case study lends credence to both the elite-driven and group-driven schools of thought. The influence that intellectual elites had in creating and spreading a conservative ideology as well as those of men like White and Rusher and later the leaders of the New Right who organized grassroots conservatives shows the integral role that elites played in the conservative takeover of the GOP that culminated in Reagan’s realigning electoral victory in 1980. Business elites also played a role, with prominent southern and western businessmen funding conservative groups and causes over the course of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s and ramping up their efforts in the 1970s to influence public policy, party elites, and the general public to advance their own interests which corresponded with those of conservatives on economic issues. So too did party elites play a crucial role in appealing to conservatives and pushing the Republican Party in a conservative direction, a role that Goldwater was pivotal in, as well as other like Nixon who acknowledged and courted the growing conservative movement and Reagan who took much greater advantage of the movement in both of his later campaigns for president in 1976 and 1980 to put himself and conservatives in a position to at first influence and then write the Republican platform.

However, at the same time it cannot be denied that the conservative movement, if viewed as an organized group come the 1960s and afterward, as well as other groups such as the Christian Right also proved vital to the conservative shift in the Republican Party. Their mobilization made them groups that party elites could not ignore, especially in the case of conservatives whose successful mobilization in the early 1960s, while elite-driven, nevertheless led to their momentary takeover of the GOP before moderates regained strength following Goldwater’s landslide defeat in 1964. They altered power dynamics in the party long-term, however, and ensured that party elites could not ignore them or their concerns if they wanted to
win elections and prevent primary challenges. The Christian Right similarly proved to be a tantalizing target for Republican Party elites, especially Reagan and other conservatives, who saw them as a potential new constituency that not only fit in with their beliefs but could prove vital in putting the South in the Republican column in the long-term. They also actively worked to encourage Republican candidates to earn their support as a key electoral constituency and pushed conservative candidates who would work to further their interests on social issues. This shows both the role that elites had in reaching out to groups and the influence that groups had in pushing party elites to support their positions on the issues they cared about or face potential challenges or withholding of support.
VI. Future Case Study: Progressive Movement in the Democratic Party

A future case study that the framework developed in this thesis can be used to address is a potential leftward shift in the Democratic Party from the mid-2000s to the present day. This would serve as a parallel to the case that has already been examined showing an equivalent process going on in the opposite direction. It is clear that the Democratic Party has moved further to the left since the days of Bill Clinton and even since the beginning of Obama’s presidency. Just five years ago it would have been unimaginable to see Democratic candidates for president not only discussing but supporting ideas like Medicare-for-All, a federal jobs guarantee, reparations for African-Americans, a “Green New Deal,” and abolishing ICE. Yet today that is the case so the question is how did this happen? The model presented in this thesis focusing on the influence of intellectual elites on party activists, interest group elites, and voters who in turn put pressure on party elites to shift their party toward the ideology they are promoting may provide a clue in the apparent emergence of a newly empowered and growing progressive movement. So too would the impact of societal changes and events that have made progressive ideas more attractive and more mainstream than they have been in the recent past.

While liberal (or progressive) ideology has long intellectual roots going back nearly a century an examination of the recent turn in the Democratic Party toward such views would likely rest on the influence of a more recent group of progressive intellectuals who have been marketing progressive ideas to party activists, interest group elites, and voters as well as directly to party elites. They likely would not have to go through the task of recreating a progressive ideology as conservative intellectuals had to do for conservatism during the late 1940s and early
1950s but likely have been taking advantage of events that have sown dissatisfaction with conservatism to promote their progressive ideology. Identifying who these intellectuals are and how they have influenced key groups involved with the Democratic Party would be important to seeing the impact of ideas on the growing progressivism of the party. It is likely that events such as the Iraq War and the Great Recession, economic changes such as growing income inequality and wage stagnation over the past forty years, and societal and demographic changes such as the #MeToo movement and increasing racial diversity have also contributed to the increasing appeal of progressive ideas.

Then by looking at how groups such as party activists, interest group elites, and voters have pushed Democratic Party elites to embrace more openly progressive policy stances would we see how an emerging progressive movement backed by ideas being put forward by progressive intellectuals has moved the Democratic Party ideologically to the left. Party activism especially would be an important factor in examination of an emerging progressive movement in light of protests such as Occupy Wall St. and the burst of progressive activism following Bernie Sanders’ unsuccessful campaign for the Democratic nomination in 2016 as well as in reaction to Donald Trump’s election as president. This is reminiscent of the burst of conservatism activism in the early 1960s following Nixon’s defeat in 1960 as well as Goldwater’s defeat in 1964 which saw the emergence of even more grassroots conservative organizations. Similarly in the past few years progressive groups such as Our Revolution, Justice Democrats, and Brand New Congress have been founded as direct efforts to elect more progressives as Democrats to positions at the state and federal level while others such as the Women’s March and March for Our Lives have focused on organizing and mobilizing citizens around single issues such as women’s rights and gun control.
While it is too soon to ascertain whether an electoral realignment fueled by progressive sentiment is taking place the political developments of the past fifteen years have shown that such an examination would be warranted in the near future should it indeed come to pass. A burgeoning progressive movement now exists that is intent on taking over the Democratic Party much as the conservative movement was intent on taking over the Republican Party in the early 1960s. Whether that happens is yet to be seen but the model presented in this thesis should provide a means through which to analyze the growth of such a movement and connect it to broader electoral changes that could result in an electoral realignment toward the Democratic Party in the coming years.
VII. Conclusion

Ideologies and the movements they produce can have a profound influence on the two major parties that constitute America’s political system. The examination of the development of modern American conservatism from its roots in the 1950s to the 1970s and the concurrent creation of a conservative movement that eventually took over the Republican Party and resulted in the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 is a testament to this fact. This matters because it shows that ideas cannot be ignored and neither can the organized interests pushing them because they have the capacity to move public opinion especially when societal and economic changes as well as other events make them appealing to certain groups in the electorate. They also have the ability to transform parties especially when ideological differences are rooted in geographic and by extension cultural differences. These are factors that should not be ignored because they proved key in the conservative case study and reflected the shift in power within the Republican Party which rested, in part, on demographic changes that were geographically rooted. The approach outlined in this thesis also provides another perspective from which to examine political development within the United States that rests on ideology, grassroots activism, and elections that is not touched on by much of the literature on the matter.

Future research should seek to extend the framework from this thesis to other cases, most notably that of a potentially emerging progressive movement within the Democratic Party over the past fifteen years. In addition more quantitative research into ideology, ideological changes within the parties, and electoral realignment as a result of such changes would complement the qualitative research conducted in this thesis and strengthen the case that ideas have been a motivating factor in changes within the American political system.
VIII. Bibliography


