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Ideological Integration in Democratic Party Platforms, 1956-1980

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A number of scholars have noted that in recent decades the traditionally decentralized American party has been replaced by a more nationalized organization. In the Democratic party this nationalization was associated with the establishment of national standards in the selection of convention delegates, and growing issue-oriented activism. In this study, state and national Democratic party platforms between 1956 and 1980 were content analyzed to determine the extent, if any, of ideological nationalization in the Democratic party. The data show a modest movement toward intra-party integration, but give little hint of the development of a highly ideological and nationalized party.

Traditionally, one of the most notable aspects of the American party system has been its decentralization. E.E. Schattschneider, for example, contended that decentralization was "the single most important characteristic of the American major party" (Schattschneider 1942, 129). In the last two decades, however, scholars have noted a greater integration of the major party organizations, as the national committees in both parties have sought to exert greater influence over their state and local organizations (Bibby 1979; Kayden 1980; Epstein 1982; Conway 1983; Shafer 1983; Pomper 1984; Weckin 1984, 1985; Kayden and Mahe 1985; Frantzich 1986). "Both Democrats and Republicans," writes Weckin (1985, 35) "have evolved from loose confederations into more federalized structures within which the various party organizations share resources, such as money and technology, as well as functional responsibilities, such as recruitment, research, and delegate selection." In the Democratic party this increasing integration started with the establishment of national standards in the selection of national convention delegates during the 1960s (Shafer 1983, 1988). Beginning with the national party's compromise with the Mississippi party over the seating of their all-white delegation in 1964, and the McGovern-Fraser Commission reforms of the early 1970s, the national Democratic party "laid down, and *was* sustained by the courts in enforcing, rules to which state parties must conform on pain of exclusion from the convention" (Williams 1984, 30).

The nationalizing reforms in the Democratic presidential nominating process, as well as changes in the class structure associated with the movement towards a postindustrial society, contributed to an increasing prominence of amateur, issue-oriented activists at Democratic national conventions in the 1960s and 1970s (Kirkpatrick 1976; Ladd and Hadley 1978; Costain 1980; Miller and Jennings 1986). Unlike the pragmatic, job-oriented party professionals of the New Deal era and before, the new

activists tended to eschew accommodationist politics in favor of a more programmatic and even ideological politics. According to a number of scholars, this led to the development of a more nationalized and ideological party system. Lunch (1987) writes:

The distinction between the decentralized old parties and the new national ones may seem to be academic hairsplitting, but the old local and state parties were organized around the material rewards available in politics, whereas the new national parties are organized around ideological goals, or at least ideas. Parties pursuing ideas, causes, and the moralization of public policy behave very differently from parties that seek only jobs, contracts, and advantages for supporters (224).

Such a system, if it indeed developed, more closely approximates the issue-oriented national parties of the responsible party model than the traditionally non-ideological and decentralized American party system (Reichley 1985).

A question which has not been adequately addressed in the scholarly literature is the extent to which state Democratic parties adopted the national party's public policy agenda during the 1960s and 1970s. At a time when the party was becoming more nationalized through the establishment of binding party rules (and later on through the growing role of the Democratic National Committee as a vendor of campaign services and money), did the state organizations become ideologically closer to the national party? Did Democratic organizations, in Reichley's words, move toward an "increased commitment to a clearly defined ideology?" (Reichley 1985, 196). Or did they continue to be isologues in the federal party structure, pragmatically responding to the specific interests of their constituencies? Research on Republican organizations during this period of growing organizational nationalization shows only minimal ideological integration (Paddock 1991). Through a content analysis of national Democratic platforms and eleven state Democratic platforms over a twenty-four year period, the degree of ideological integration in the Democratic party will be examined.¹

Content Analyzing Party Platforms

Party platforms were chosen to measure the extent of ideological nationalization in the Democratic party because they represent, in Ginsberg's (1972, 607) words, "an amalgamation and distillation of the principles, attitudes, appeals, and concerns of the party as a whole, or at least its domi-

nant factions.” “Changes in the character of platform statements over time,” he writes, “reflect changes within the party and/or changes in the segment of the electorate to which the party appeals” (1972, 607). Although party platforms sometimes have been belittled as meaningless acts of political rhetoric, there is considerable evidence that suggests that platform pledges reach voters through indirect means and that once in office parties do a reasonably good job of delivering on their pledges (Pomper 1967, 1968; David 1971; Monroe 1983; Budge and Hofferbert 1990). While platforms clearly do not reflect the values of all the activists in a particular party, they likely reflect the views of the mainstream party activist at a particular time and place. As such, they are useful in a longitudinal analysis of changes in the ideological mainstream of state and national parties.

Because of the amateurism (impermanent headquarters, few resources, volunteer staff) that formerly characterized many state party organizations, complete sets of party platforms over any length of time are extremely rare. Consequently, a random sample of state Democratic parties is out of the question. However, nearly complete sets of party platforms were obtained from eleven state parties and the national party for presidential election years between 1956 and 1980.² Platform statements were content analyzed on the basis of the categories developed by Ginsberg (1972, 1976).³ The Social Issues category was added to Ginsberg’s categories because of its particular relevance to the time period. The unit of analysis was the paragraph. Each paragraph was scored on the basis of a five point scale measuring ideological direction.⁴ The following summarizes the seven categories and the five point scales for each category (a score of 3 on each category indicates a vague or neutral statement).

- *Capitalism*: the aggregation of wealth and control over the distribution of wealth by the private sector.

Scores of 1 and 2 indicate commitment to the values of free enterprise as a means of distributing benefits and burdens. Hostile to government intervention in the private economy.

Scores of 4 and 5 indicate orientation toward public sector action to regulate the private sector’s aggregation of wealth.

- *Redistribution*: the allocation of advantages in favor of the disadvantaged.

1 and 2 indicate opposition to policies redistributing advantages.

4 and 5 indicate advocacy of policies redistributing advantages.

- *Internal Sovereignty*: the exercise of the power and increase of the

role of the national government vis-a-vis the states and localities.

1 and 2 indicate opposition to federal intervention in state and local affairs. (States' rights orientation).

4 and 5 indicate support for a larger role for the national government vis-a-vis the states and localities.

- *Labor*: workers, organized labor, and policies regulating unions and the workplace.

1 and 2 indicate negative, pro-management orientation toward labor issues.

4 and 5 indicate positive, pro-union orientation toward labor issues.

- *Universalism*: equality of rights and privileges for domestic minorities and women.

1 and 2 indicate opposition to policies requiring private or public agencies to promote equal rights for minorities and women.

4 and 5 indicate support for policies promoting equality for minorities and women.

- *Social Issue*: the use of the coercive power of the state to regulate private behavior based upon traditional moral standards.⁵

1 and 2 indicate support for policies preserving traditional values and standards of behavior.

4 and 5 indicate the promotion of free expression and social experimentation, and opposition to the use of the state's power to limit non-economic freedoms.

- *Foreign/Defense*: Actions concerning relations with foreign objects and national security policy.

1 and 2 indicate advocacy of the use of military force or the threat of military force to achieve American interests in the world.

4 and 5 indicate opposition to the use of military force to achieve American interests in the world.⁶

Intra-Party Variation or Integration: Measuring Party Nationalization

If ideological nationalization indeed occurred in the Democratic party, one would expect a greater degree of intra-party integration of platform statements as one moves through the period. The greatest amount of intra-party ideological variation would be expected before the nationalizing trends of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Standard deviations were calculated to determine the extent of intra-party differences, the average

amount of variation around the mean of the national and state parties for each year in the study. Table 1 summarizes the standard deviation values for each issue and year based on the average ideology scores. Table 2 presents similar figures for each state (the extent to which each state differed from the mean scores of all the states in a particular year). An empty cell in Table 1 indicates that the issue accounted for less than 1 per cent of the state platforms in a particular year. An empty cell in Table 2 indicates that a state's platform was unavailable for a particular year.

TABLE 1. Standard Deviations by Issue and Year: State and National Democratic Parties, 1956-1980

Issue	Overall	1956	1960	1964	1968	1972	1976	1980
<i>Social Issue</i>	.62	--	--	--	.50	.80	.72	.42
<i>Foreign/Defense</i>	.59	.53	--	--	.40	.73	.50	.64
<i>Universalism</i>	.52	.85	.88	.33	.27	.29	.17	.15
<i>Internal Sovereignty</i>	.49	.74	.66	.31	.48	.37	.33	.23
<i>Labor</i>	.44	.50	.60	.52	.41	.27	.25	.33
<i>Redistribution</i>	.28	.32	.25	.29	.31	.34	.24	.19
<i>Capitalism</i>	.25	.35	.23	.21	.22	.24	.20	.25
<i>OVERALL</i>	.44	.58	.57	.35	.38	.45	.35	.29

Note: An empty cell indicates that a platform was not obtained from that year.

TABLE 2. Standard Deviations by State and Year: State and National Democratic Parties, 1956-1980

State	Overall	1956	1960	1964	1968	1972	1976	1980
<i>Texas</i>	.81	1.42	1.10	---	.50	.46	.24	.25
<i>North Carolina</i>	.69	.74	1.28	.78	.61	.45	.32	.25
<i>West Virginia</i>	.51	.34	.28	.32	.36	.94	.25	.35
<i>Kansas</i>	.47	.53	.41	.36	.49	.61	.27	.27
<i>Rhode Island</i>	.38	.32	.21	.09	.21	---	.74	.51
<i>North Dakota</i>	.37	.59	.31	.23	.29	.29	.30	---
<i>Wisconsin</i>	.34	.43	.29	.32	.53	.22	.47	.45
<i>New Jersey</i>	.32	.44	.31	.34	.24	.33	---	.17
<i>Maine</i>	.30	.33	.35	.23	.29	.26	.24	.33
<i>Connecticut</i>	.30	.33	.30	.16	.41	.37	.18	.18
<i>Illinois</i>	.27	.19	.21	.24	.19	.29	.41	.27
<i>National</i>	.20	.16	.30	.31	.22	.18	.10	.09

Note: An empty cell indicates that a platform was not obtained from that year.

On the surface, it appears that there was movement toward greater intra-party ideological integration after 1960. The highest overall standard deviation values were measured in 1956 and 1960. With the exception of 1972, the overall standard deviation values dropped substantially after 1960. The decline in standard deviation values can be seen on all issues

except the social issue and foreign/defense policy. The most obvious decline in intra-party variation occurred on universalism and internal sovereignty. The significantly increased intra-party integration on universalism and internal sovereignty reflects the waning of a states' rights-civil rights division in the Democratic party after 1960. Early in the period, the two southern parties--North Carolina and Texas--contributed to the greatest amount of intra-party variation. At a time when most state organizations were pledging support for the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the North Carolina and Texas parties preached the values of segregation and states' rights. By 1968, however, both southern parties moved into the Democratic mainstream by pledging support for the national party's civil rights agenda. The speed of the transition of the North Carolina and Texas parties from reactionary critics of civil rights to supporters of the national party's policies in this area is striking--so striking that it is tempting to ascribe the transition partly to the 1964 national convention edict that state parties choose their 1968 national convention delegates in a nondiscriminatory manner (Democratic National Committee 1967). The explanation of this transition, however, is more likely related to changes in southern society and politics than to nationalizing party reforms. Some scholars of contemporary southern politics have suggested that as viable Republican organizations began to develop in the South and court the region's traditional conservatism, the Democrats were forced to shift direction and seek support from different constituencies. In an increasingly urban and bourgeois South, where blacks played a more important role in electoral politics, the Democrats shifted their coalitional strategy to build a fragile alliance between blacks and traditionally Democratic whites (see esp. Lamis 1984). As such, something approximating a civil rights consensus among the component parts of the national party had developed by the end of the period.

The apparent increase in the divisiveness of social issues and of foreign and defense issues is problematic because neither kind of issue was particularly salient at the state level prior to 1968. Only in 1956 did foreign and defense issues account for more than 1 per cent of the content of state platforms during the 1956-1964 period. Hence, there is no meaningful basis for comparison of standard deviation values. However, the increasing salience of these types of issues in 1968 and after suggests that, at least in some states, party activists began to emerge who were less inclined to emphasize traditional New Deal economic issues and more inclined to stress social issues and the increasingly divisive foreign policy issues. Not unexpectedly, the relatively high standard deviation scores in

1972 on social issues and foreign policy were related to the Vietnam War and the proper response to domestic unrest related to that war. The division was epitomized by the North Carolina party's pledge to "oppose draft card burning, . . . refusal to serve our country when needed, and expressions of disloyalty to State and Nation." Meanwhile the Wisconsin Democrats called for "mandatory inquests in all deaths involving use of weapons by law enforcement personnel," and the North Dakota party pledged to "abandon war or the threat of war as an instrument of national policy" and to move toward an "international society" in which "war, racism, and exploitation" will no longer "plague us." Such pledges from North Dakota Democrats were common in a state with a long tradition of isolationist leanings. In fact, the relatively high standard deviation value for foreign policy in 1956 was primarily the result of the North Dakota party's rejection of the Cold War consensus. By 1972, however, the consensus had shattered, and North Dakota was more in line with the mean ideology scores of the national party and the other state parties. The states that lagged behind national trends and continued to support the Cold War consensus (e.g. West Virginia) tended to have the highest standard deviation values in 1972.

TABLE 3. Mean Ideology Scores of Eleven State Democratic Parties and the National Democratic Party, 1956-1980

Party	1956	1960	1964	1968	1972	1976	1980	Overall
Wisconsin	3.83	3.62	3.85	3.90	3.85	3.86	3.78	3.82
North Dakota	3.92	3.18	3.32	3.50	3.89	3.65	----	3.64
Maine	3.32	3.50	3.53	3.75	3.42	3.37	3.69	3.63
Connecticut	3.68	3.30	3.68	3.68	3.71	3.55	3.41	3.56
Illinois	3.39	3.32	3.67	3.48	3.60	3.44	3.38	3.48
New Jersey	3.00	3.27	3.58	3.47	3.47	----	3.33	3.40
Rhode Island	3.33	3.42	3.56	3.37	----	3.16	3.00	3.38
West Virginia	3.47	3.34	3.21	3.43	3.40	3.18	3.17	3.32
North Carolina	3.14	3.05	2.93	2.85	3.52	3.38	3.38	3.28
Texas	2.30	2.33	----	3.14	3.21	3.43	3.44	3.21
Kansas	3.00	3.04	3.35	3.11	3.04	3.12	3.04	3.10
OVERALL STATE	3.43	3.31	3.54	3.54	3.55	3.44	3.41	3.47
NATIONAL PARTY	3.32	3.29	3.27	3.34	3.77	3.40	3.30	3.37

Note: An empty cell indicates that a platform was not obtained from that year.

The platforms give little indication of a substantial growth in liberal activism in the party after 1968. Table 3 summarizes the average ideology scores for the eleven state parties and the national party for each year in the period. At least in terms of party platforms, 1972 appears to be the peak year for liberal activism at the national level. Given the success of George McGovern's insurgent candidacy at the national party convention that

year, this is clearly no surprise. Interestingly, however, the increasing amateur activism in Democratic conventions in 1972 and after was not reflected in the 1976 and 1980 platforms, both of which had mean ideology scores very near the pre-1972 levels.

The figures in Table 3 also demonstrate remarkable stability over time in the aggregate ideological orientations of the state parties. Not unexpectedly, the states with more progressive political traditions, issue-oriented politics, and moralistic political cultures (e.g. Wisconsin, North Dakota, and Maine) had the most ideological platforms (i.e. they strayed furthest from the 3.0 neutral position). More important to the central questions of this study, however, is the fact that there was no clear movement toward greater liberal activism as one moves through the period. During the more "ideological" elections of 1964, 1968, and 1972 (see Nie, Verba, and Petrocik 1976), the state parties did show a slight tendency toward greater policy specificity, but not to a major degree. In sum, the increasing issue-oriented activism of national convention delegates associated with party reform had little impact on the ideological orientations of both the state and national platforms.

Summary

The evidence suggests that there was some movement toward intra-party integration in the Democratic party during the 1960s and 1970s. Although it is impossible to demonstrate a causal link, this integration was probably the result of a growing civil rights consensus among Democrats that probably had little to do with the nationalizing reforms of the 1960s and 1970s. As the conservative, segregationist wing of the party moved toward the Republicans, the southern Democratic party began to court the region's newly enfranchised blacks. As such, the intra-party division on civil rights issues virtually disappeared. Although intra-party differences emerged in 1972 and after on foreign policy and social issues, they never accounted for as much intra-party variation as the civil rights/states' rights issues did in 1956 and 1960.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the Democratic platforms from the period was the relative ideological stability from election to election. With a few exceptions, most of the organizations demonstrated remarkable consistency in their platform statements throughout the period. This finding is consistent with similar research on Republican organizations' platforms during the same period (Paddock 1991).

While the data show a modest movement toward intra-party ideo-

logical integration, Democratic platforms give little hint of the development of a philosophically cohesive and nationalized party. Rather, what emerged from the period appears to have been a slight trend toward the nationalization of campaign platform content in what traditionally has been a decentralized American party system. This is consistent with, but not particularly fortifying of, the recent literature on party nationalization and integration.

NOTES

¹The twenty-four year period dates from 1956 to 1980. The midpoint year of this period is 1968, the year of the Democrats' tumultuous national convention and the beginning of the party's major nationalizing reforms. This allows for a longitudinal analysis of Democratic platforms over a period in which the party was allegedly transformed from a pragmatic, decentralized majority party in the New Deal setting to a more nationalized and ideological party in the post-New Deal setting.

²Platforms were gathered from both Republican and Democratic parties as part of a broader research project (see Paddock, 1991). It is difficult to obtain platforms of both parties for an extended period. Many state parties never drafted the documents. In the state parties that did draft them, there was often little consistency in the periodicity of such endeavors. Platforms were obtained from Connecticut, Illinois, Kansas, Maine, New Jersey, North Carolina, North Dakota, Rhode Island, Texas, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. These states clearly do not fully capture the variety of party organizations, political subcultures and electoral systems in the United States, but they do reflect considerable diversity. However, because of the lack of a complete universe of state Democratic platforms, the findings of this study must be treated with caution. Presidential election years were chosen because they represent a consistent four year interval for the purpose of longitudinal comparison. In the states (e.g. New Jersey) in which party platforms were drafted in non-presidential election years, the platform from the year closest to the presidential year was used (e.g., the 1965 New Jersey platform was used for 1964.)

³Ginsberg's categories were used because they are general enough to allow a wide variety of policy statements (common in state party platforms) to be coded.

⁴The five-point scale measures both ideological direction and the degree of policy specificity. The scores of 1 and 2, for example, are both in the same ideological direction, but represent varying degrees of specificity. A 1 is a stronger, more issue specific statement than a 2. Hence, the five-point scale should be viewed as a continuum on which 3 is a vague or neutral position. The further one moves from the center, the greater is the policy specificity in a particular ideological direction. For example, the following statement from the 1980 Wisconsin Democratic platform was coded as a 5 on capitalism because it clearly articulated a strong position toward taking a public sector action to control the private sector's aggregation of wealth: "We call for the nationalization of all energy producing companies, so that energy will be produced for the benefit of the many rather than for the profit of the few." Far more common, however, were statements such as the following from the 1976 North Dakota Democratic platform: "We support a continuing investigation of all major oil companies by the Congress of the

United States.” This statement was coded as a 4 because while it clearly favored public sector action to control the private sector, the position was not as clear (nor the proposed action as severe) as in the Wisconsin pledge.

These examples illustrate the unavoidably subjective nature of content analysis. Because of this subjective component, care was taken to insure coder reliability. Intra-coder reliability tests (using a random sample of 10 percent of the platforms from the period) were done on all categories and averaged .90 overall. Intra-coder reliability was calculated by dividing the number of scores on which there was agreement between the two coding periods by the sum of all scores for both periods. Intra-coder reliability scores for each category are as follows: Capitalism .90, Redistribution .88, Internal Sovereignty .86, Labor .93, Universalism .90, Social Issue .83, Foreign/Defense .90. These figures also include the analysis of Republican state and national platforms that were part of a broader study. Because of the relatively small number of mentions of the Social Issue (overall it accounted for slightly less than 4 per cent of all platform statements), its relatively low intra-coder reliability score had little impact on the overall value.

⁵Because of the lower reliability of the Social Issue and the fact that the category has not been employed in the previous literature on party platforms, further elaboration on the scale ratings seems warranted. Statements scored 1 and 2 emphasized maintaining the existing social fabric as a higher value than the promotion of libertarian lifestyles, free expression, and social experimentation. An example of “social decay” is identified (e.g. lawlessness, drug abuse, liberalized sexual mores) and solutions are recommended (e.g. support for law and order, tougher drug laws, and opposition to birth control, abortion, and homosexuality). An example is this statement from the 1968 Texas Democratic Platform:

We call on all Texans to support the proper actions of their police. Let there be an end, we pray, to the encouragement of civil disobedience, to over-permissiveness; to undue tolerance of criminals, rioters and anarchists, and to the indifferent acceptance of obscenity, immorality, and degradation as a new way of life in this country.

A statement was coded a 3 when the party deliberately avoided taking a position relating to state regulation of private behavior (e.g. abortion, school prayer, drug usage). An example is this statement from the 1976 Maine Democratic platform:

The complex subject of the rights of the unborn and of the women carrying them has been the subject of intense discussion. . . . The Platform Committee feels it is impossible to arrive at a consensual opinion. . . . We therefore recommend taking no position.

Statements coded as 4 and 5 emphasized freedom and social experimentation (e.g. right to protest, right to an abortion, legalization of marijuana) as higher values than state regulations to maintain existing social mores. An example is this statement from the 1972 Maine Democratic Platform:

The Democratic Party opposes criminal penalties for private acts which are considered “victim-less” crimes. We also recommend a review of the statutes to eliminate those laws which attempt to dictate morals and values to the people, recognizing the individual’s right to determine his own acts in private, provided such acts do not impinge upon the rights of others.

⁶As Wittkopf (1986; 1987) notes, foreign policy attitudes can be conceptualized

by two, rather than one dimension of conflict: support for and opposition to cooperative internationalism, and support for and opposition to militant internationalism. From these two dimensions Wittkopf develops four types of foreign policy attitudes: accommodationist, internationalist, isolationist, and hardliner. In order to maintain consistency with the other categories in this analysis (which have one dimension of conflict) the Foreign/Defense category measures only the militant internationalism dimension. While this does not capture the depth of the foreign policy debate, it allows for operational consistency with an issue that was not a major part of the state party platforms.

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