

THE DEMOCRATIC DISCONNECT: Comparing the Stories Political Parties Tell About Themselves to Those That People Tell About Them.

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Current debates about the course of political culture have highlighted the centrality of political ideas, especially those with meaningful moral content. Although, for various reasons, it may strike some as ironic or simply boastful, the Republican Party is often recognized in the public mind and popular conversation as “the party of ideas” or the party “with an agenda.” In this paper I explore the context in which such claims could seem reasonable by contrasting the salient moral claims present in major party platforms and the open-ended codes of the National Election Studies time series data. By examining the points of contact and divergence between elite appeals and mass response a unique picture of the relationship between levels of discourse is presented. It is clear that Republican Party appeals share the same structure with Republican party images. The same is not true for the Democratic Party where a clear moral image is present in the mass images, but not in the party appeals. I argue that this democratic disconnect between structures of moral ideas in the party and the population goes a long way toward an explanation for the force and ubiquity of the Republican Party’s boast and helps to explain why the Democratic Party has trouble in the larger battle for ideas despite its relative surplus of intellectuals.

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Sociologists have long argued about the declining relevance of class – however defined – in American politics (Clark and Lipset 1991; Evans 1999; Hout, Brooks, and Manza 1995; Nisbet 1959; Pakulski and Waters 1996; Teixeira and Rogers 2000). This debate has developed in conversations between perspectives that emphasize thinking about class as a demographic category and class as a cultural product or an idea, each which having its lesson to teach. A parallel conversation has demonstrated how political polarization has increased in American politics in concert with realigning forces (Burnham 1970; Clubb, Flanigan, and Zingale 1980; Key 1955; Sundquist 1983). Some claim that we are in a sixth party system that has replaced the fifth, New Deal system of mid-century sometime in the early 1970s, in which candidates have supplanted parties as focal political symbols (Aldrich and Niemi 2001; Wattenberg 1998). As candidates have become more important, elite polarization has increased (Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2005; Hetherington 2001; Layman and Carsey 2002; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 1997; Poole and Rosenthal 1997). Even so, this polarization in elite behavior seems not to be reflected in mass attitudes, which have changed little over time (Dimaggio, Evans, and Bryson 1996; Evans 2003; Mouw and Sobel 2001). This gap highlights the need to understand the relationship between the agendas of opinions of the mass public and those of the policy elites who may be variously responsive to it (Manza, Cook, and Page 2002). As Fiorina argues, most of the research on political choice and public opinion is not sufficiently attentive to the problem of separating movements in elite and mass views, each of which may change in ways that may be confounded with the other.

In this chapter I provide a solution to solve this problem by tracing the salient moral and intellectual views that partisans both elite and common offer as justifications

for their political positions. To capture these salient justifications, I perform a content analysis of the major party platforms from 1952-2004 and a descriptive analysis of the National Election Studies open-ended party-candidate like-dislike items that have been translated from the party-candidate master code. While many studies have examined changes in the content of the major party platforms (Budge, Klingemann, Volkens, Bara, and Tanenbaum 2001; Budge, Robertson, and Hearl 1987; Carmines and Stimson 1989; Pomper and Lederman 1980) and of the open-ended questions (Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960; Geer 1992; Kelley 1983; Lawrence 1996; Nie, Verba, and Petrocik 1979; Trilling 1976), none have examined both together in a common framework with theoretical attention to their status as moral and discursive objects.

To facilitate comparison between the platform justifications and the open-ended questions both were translated into a common and comparable coding scheme that has been calibrated to match discursive behavior in what I call the popular, public or amateur style (Habermas 1998; Tulis 1987; Wilson 1962). In the popular style, arguments are moralistic, narrated, general, and framed in the idiom of conscience and common sense. This contrasts with other schemes that have attempted to derive policy positions from party documents, an approach that calibrates the framework to elite discursive behavior and what I call the professional style. This tendency is problematic given the well known gaps between elite and mass discourse (Converse 1964; Lane 1962) and leads to confusions and misinterpretations.

Some researchers who attempt to explain political change choose to follow the money, I prefer to follow the mouths (Cramer Walsh 2004; Gamson 1992; Gerring 1998; Lamont 2002). By tracing the content of what people actually say about politics, I am

able to reveal a story about political change quite different from what is commonly told in the literature. Comparing the moral language of vote seeking politicians and approval seeking voters, I find that a striking contrast between the two parties in terms of the relationship between elite and popular justifications. While the Republican data reveal a homology between elite appeals and popular images, the Democratic data reveal a disconnect. Both of the Republican series highlight the same three moral themes that have long been recognized as their philosophical basis, Weberian state authority, Ricardian economic liberalism, and reactionary cultural conservatism. This is not true of the Democratic series, which diverge considerably in the structure of ideas they emphasize. Republican leaders and followers are roughly in step, whereas Democratic leaders and followers are not. This may help to explain what gives rise to the ironic, but widely recognized claim that the Republican Party is the party of ideas.

STRUCTURAL HOMOLOGY AND CHARISMATIC MOMENTUM

While many theories of political change assume that politicians are responsive vote gathering entrepreneurs who adapt their policy stands to capture the largest share of the vote that they can (Downs 1957), other elite driven theories recognize the unique powers that leaders have to set the terms of debate through manipulation of the mass media and to guide national policy in opposition to the tide of opinion (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Domhoff 1972; Manza, Cook, and Page 2002; McCombs and Shaw 1972; Pratkanis and Aronson 2001; Zaller 1992). Simply put, the link between changes in mass opinion and changes in elite behavior is not entirely clear. Does the supply of arguments create its own demand for action, with leaders providing themselves and opportunity for

victory by manufacturing consent? It may be that the system is dialectical and synergistic, with each stream conditioning the other in historical spiral. Elites, most likely, have the capacity to define the political situation, but perhaps not in a manner of their choosing.

It is natural to desire a statement of cause to explain the link between elite and mass opinion, but this may not be the most interesting way to think about the problem. Instead, it might be more fruitful to examine the relative homology in the structure of party appeals and party images. Relative homology may be the crucial factor that explains what gives the party's message narrative coherence, and with this, its charismatic appeal and sense of momentum. That is, if a party's message has the same distinctive emphases, with the same rank ordering of themes that move together in relative salience over time as do the images of the party, this might engender that sense of momentum energy and direction that lies behind claims to boldness, future orientation, and formal populism. It might engender claims to be the party of big ideas.

These features are the essence of the popular style and have the capacity to fix attention on the homologous party by endowing it with what Shils would called charismatic centrality or what many would now call brand (Friedland 1964; Shils 1965). Those leaders who can align their message with its perception seem to be in control of the pageant. Their ideas are capable of attaining common sense acceptance as reasonable, even when they are rejected by small majorities of the population. They may accepted as wrong, but are recognized as principled. This description seems consistent with the kinds of authority the Republican party has generated over the past forty years of intellectual top-down social movement work (Blumenthal 1986; Nash 1976; Sundquist 1983), while

the Democratic Party has been accused of fragmentation and excessive variety of opinion (Mayer 1996) and to have little in the way of vision or ideas (Bai 2003).

Consider the following statement about the Democratic Party offered in a public interview with the late Daniel Patrick Moynihan:

Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-NY): "In the 70's the Republicans became the party of ideas. The Democrats had pretty much stopped thinking."

David Brinkley: "You're a Democrat. Your party has stopped thinking, you say. What are they doing if they've not thinking?"

Moynihan: "They're repeating what somebody thought three generations ago."

This Week With David Brinkley, 12/25/94

Also consider the series of statements on the same theme that have followed in its wake:

"Our success springs from our ideas... We are the party of ideas - and 'ideas have consequences'." - Karl Rove

"Oddly enough, it's not just conservatives who say this. Liberals, too, widely attribute their minority party status to a lack of new ideas." - Jonathan Chait (New Republic)

"Right now there simply are no big ideas—and not really many medium-sized ones—that unite and propel the party." - Michael Waldman (Clinton Speechwriter)

"No ideas. No leadership. No agenda. And, just in the last week, we can now add to that list, no class" - Tom Delay

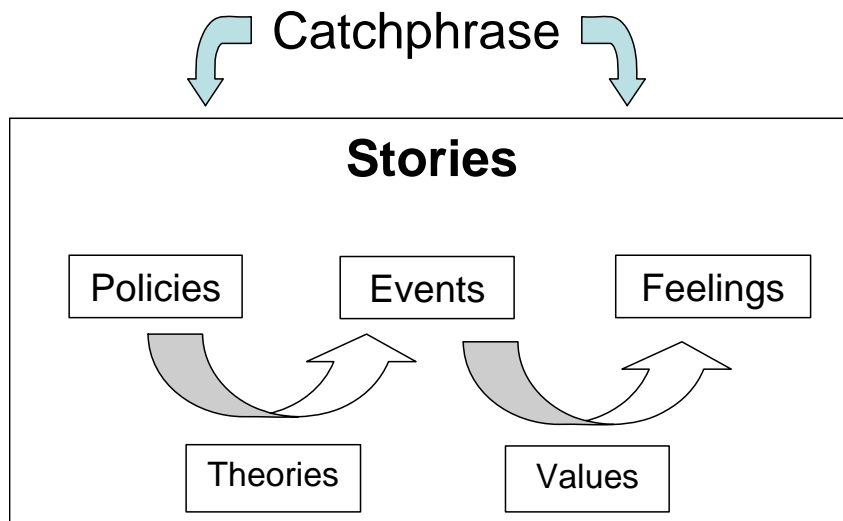
Republican ideas are not new. The ideas of self-regulating markets, national armies and orthodox culture, were more appropriate to the eighteenth century as they are to twenty-first. Moreover, the Republican Party is the party whose leaders are mocked for their lack of policy expertise and intellectualism, while the Democratic leaders are revered for their Rhodes scholars and policy wonks. The term egghead was even

developed to describe the followers of Adlai Stevenson in 1952. Even more, Karl Rove has described a typical Democrat as someone with a doctorate. Clearly something other than novelty or policy smarts is driving claims to Republican primacy with respect to ideas.

One idea that might help to explain this phenomenon concerns the role of stories in the process of legitimating ideas. In this view, policy ideas by themselves are naked and in need of interpretation. There is a double hermeneutic at work through which policies are mapped onto events through theories about how the world works and then events are mapped onto feelings through what I will call values—expectations of how we would feel if certain events were to come to pass. In this sense, theories connect policies and outcomes (events) and values connect events and feelings about them. Both theory and value then lose their primitive character and are themselves located in complex webs of social production. Finally, because most citizens are too busy and distracted to concern themselves with this full elaboration of reason, they introspect through the use of stories. Many have suggested that voters use heuristics in making their choices, I suggest that a better term is narrative or story. Voters evaluate any given policy by means of a meaningful and credible story about how government works and how these mechanisms fit in system of justice that can differentiate right from wrong. Citizens then tell stories drawn from previous electoral contests (and other sources) about how to “do the right thing,” but also about how to “do the thing right.” It is through these rough narratives often index by folksy catchphrases like “don’t cut and run,” or “tax cuts for the wealthy,” that voters make up their minds in presidential elections. The basic structure of this view is captured in Figure 1 below. When the stories parties tell match those that voters tell

about them, then the party will be recognized for its ideas. Otherwise they will not matter their investment in “the reality-based community.”

Figure 1.



If this view is correct and homology between appeal and image matters, we should expect to find that the structure of salient justifications in the Republican Party platform, closely matches the structure of the salient justifications in the open-ended evaluations of the Republican ticket in the National Elections Studies data. Similarly, we should expect to find that the justifications in the Democratic Party platform diverge in structure from that of the open-ended responses. Homology and disconnect might then help to explain the rise of the “party of ideas” boast.

DATA AND METHODS

The data for this paper are drawn from two sources. The first is a collection of the major national party platforms for both Republicans and Democrats for the Presidential elections from 1952-2004. These files were scanned and prepared for qualitative coding and quantitative content analysis. The second source is the battery of open-ended evaluations of the parties and candidates contained in the National Election Studies time series data for the same Presidential elections. These open-ended questions are the only available, consistently worded questions extant that could potentially tap into the natural language and modal consciousness of American voters over so long a period. While not ideal for quantitative analysis, these measures are well answered and widely varied in content (Geer 1992; Trilling 1976), and they capture the most important features of voiced moral argument, namely familiarity and perceived rhetorical power. These measures take advantage of a recognized weakness of attitude measurements first noted by Thurstone which may be altered or biased “for reasons of courtesy”(Thurstone 1928). This sense of what is courteous to reveal is precisely the target of moral debate, which speaks of conscience, but recognizes with Menken that conscience is “the inner voice that warns that someone may be watching.” When people invoke justifications in casual conversation, they reveal those arguments they recognize as legitimate in the given context.

Neither the party platforms, nor the open-ended questions are good indicators of true beliefs or deep motives, but they are fantastic indicators of the normative modes of speaking about morality in any given political context. In political platforms, these vocabularies of motive represent the candidate’s attempt to put his best foot forward and

to craft his identity as a reasonable and just person. Similarly, the open-ended evaluations capture the available sanctioned modes of evaluation in the population. They are chosen by the respondent so that he or she appears to an interlocutor as reasonable, aware, and perhaps even admirable. The language a person selects suggest what they take the norms of evaluation to consist of (Gamson 1992; Goffman 1959; Lamont 2002). What makes these questions more appealing is that they are collected amid the Hurley burly of the massive media effects in late fall of election years, when all of the barrage of appeals have largely been made (Zaller 1992). As such they are the effect of the media environment in interaction with the social metabolism. They measure the effects of ongoing hermeneutic struggles.

These two sets of salient justification data were sorted into a common coding scheme, which was developed specifically for purposes of comparing the two data streams. There are problems that arise when comparing such different information sources. The arguments developed in a careful, professional document are more sophisticated, detailed and clever by far than are the off the cuff responses of participants in an in person survey. These problems made it necessary to calibrate the coding scheme to a relatively high level of generality. In general this meant that otherwise more fine-grained platform codes would be limited to match the grosser open-ended question data. The result provides a reasonably fair basis of comparison.

The structure of the coding scheme follows the ideas of Murray Edelman who advocated for a small repertoire of oppositional and myth-like stories behind moral evaluation (Edelman 1975; Edelman 1985; Edelman 1964). There can only be so many truly big ideas in circulation (Reich 1988). The scheme presented here was limited to ten

groups of opposing moral claims to governance, one for the left and one for the right. This led to twenty codes organized around ten themes. Each party was scored on all twenty variables and relative salience was calculated as a function of these variables.

For party platforms, the final indicators of salience were calculated by counting the number of words marked with a code as a proportion of the number of words in the given document. If more words were coded into a category, it was recognized as more salient. This contrasts with other approaches in which paragraphs (Carmines and Stimson 1989) or quasi-sentences (Budge et al. 2001) were counted and is more attentive to the black space accounted for in the document by the code.

For open-ended responses, the symmetry of the evaluations was exploited to capture the proportion of respondents who volunteered a response that fit into a given category. If a candidate or his party was liked for a reason or disliked for its opposite reason, this was captured by a dummy variable to show that the justification was salient for that person. For example, the moral economy justification was coded one if either the party or the candidate was liked for that reason or the other party or candidate was disliked for favoring a claim to good business climate. This leads to twenty dummy variables per party whose description would reveal the most salient of moral justifications proposed by either ticket. Ten of the justifications favor the left perspective and ten favor the right.

Republican Signature Stories	Democratic Signature Stories
Business Climate	Moral Economy
Expertise	Democratic Participation
Neoliberalism	Economic Authority
Economic Orthodoxy	Mixed Economy
Fair Trade	Free Trade
Personal Responsibility	Safety Net
Privatization	Quality of Life
National Authority	Non-Violence
European Heritage	Anti-Discrimination
Traditional Culture	Moral Freedom

Each of these codes is meant to represent a prevailing moral story that informs public debate about legitimate political authority. While both parties can be evaluated in terms of any of the twenty stories, each party historically owns its side of the issue and has an advantage on it (Petrocik 1996). This makes it possible for politicians to choose a strategy of political choice or echo (Page 1978). In this analysis, this asymmetry is recognized and exploited as described below.

RESULTS

One obvious question that arises in the context of the literature on the growing elite polarization in American politics is that of message polarization in the platforms. It is possible to create a measure of ideological polarization using these salience data that allows for a limited test of the thesis that polarization in party discourse has increased

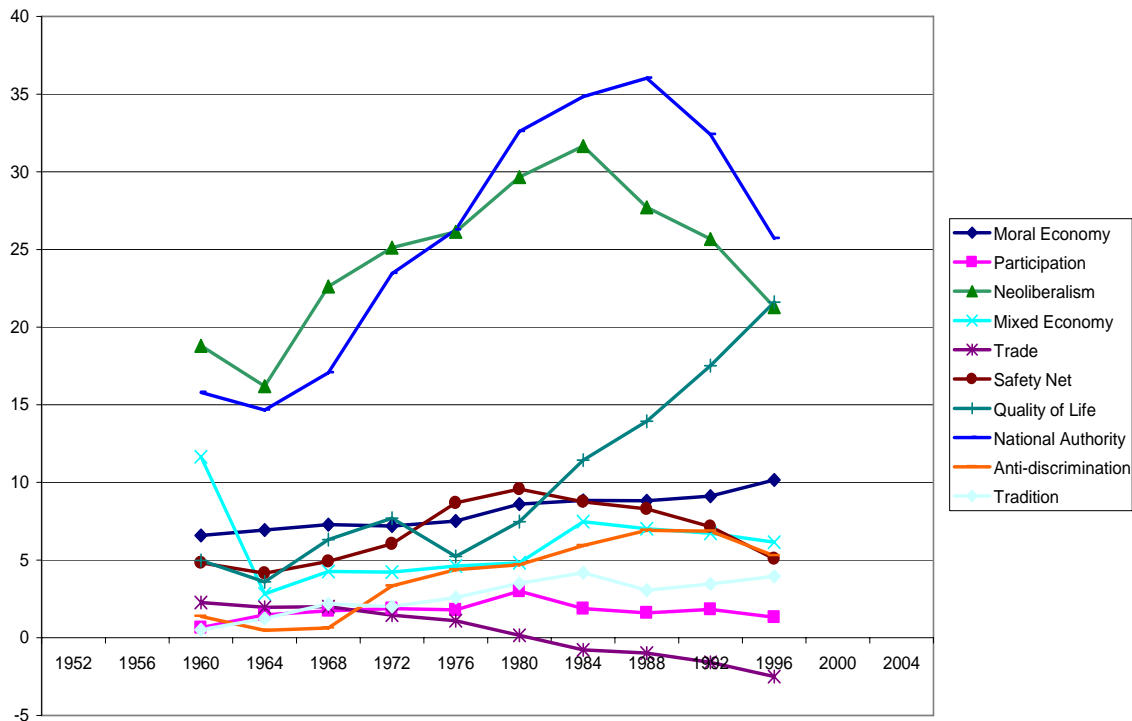
over recent decades and to examine how well the increased polarization conforms to what Layman and Carsey have called conflict expansion as opposed to conflict displacement (Layman and Carsey 2002).

Figure one shows the results of a descriptive analysis of the moral arguments contained in the party platforms for the period 1952-2004. Each of the lines represents a function of one of the ten themes defined as follows:

$$P_{ij} = (\sum_{l=m} T_{ijlm} - \sum_{l=\sim m} T_{ijlm}) / 2$$

Where P_{ij} is the polarization index for theme i in election j , and T_{ijlm} is the proportion of total words captured by the code, where l indexes party and m indexes left-right orientation. Polarization then measures the extent to which the parties emphasize their signature ideas at the expense of their opponent's ideas in any given year. Polarization is the degree to which the parties, taken together, present the voters with a choice, with low values indicating an echo.

Figure 1. Polarization of Moral Justifications in Major Party Platforms 1952-2004

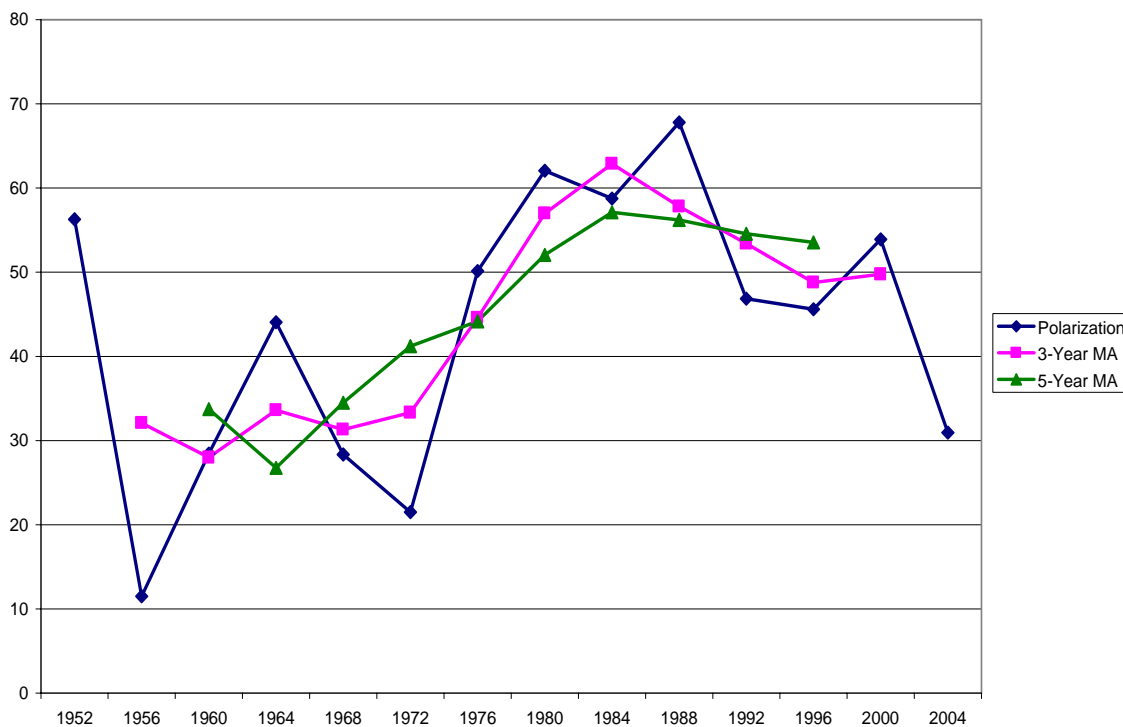


As is clear from figure 1, the major conflicts have been over what are here labeled national authority/non-violence and neoliberalism/ economic authority cleavages for most of the data series. The two trend lines show that ideological polarization rose through the 1970s and the 1980s and declined thereafter. The dominance of these arguments suggests no displacement of moral conflict. However, polarization around what are here called quality of life concerns are clearly on the rise. It seems that arguments about the rights of citizens to expect the government to help them to live well as opposed to merely surviving are become more salient in the party platforms.

A global indicator of ideological polarization in party ideology can be calculated by summing over the ten P_i for all j . This global index appears in figure 2. In this figure, trend lines representing raw index scores, and three and five election moving average

scores are presented. Ideological polarization has increased steadily since 1964 with only a slight fall off in the post 9/11 election of 2004. This evidence suggests that conflict as captured in the popular ideas of the period is on the rise, oppositional moral claims are more common today in party discourse than they were a generation ago. However, which side has advantage in this rhetorical battlefield is not clear in these measures.

Figure 2. Total Polarization In Party Platforms 1952-2004



To get a sense of advantage in this war of words, I have created an index of idea salience that is party specific, measuring the degree to which the party takes a stand on its own issues at the expense of the other side's. Therefore the Salience index is a sub-component of polarization index described above. These party salience indices are straightforward to calculate.

Platform Saliency

$$S_{ij} = T_{ij11} - T_{ij12} \text{ for Democrats}$$

$$S_{ij} = T_{ij22} - T_{ij21} \text{ for Republicans}$$

Saliency on theme i in election year j for the Democratic platform is simply the proportion of total words in the Democratic platform coded on the left side of theme i minus the proportion of total words coded on the right side of theme i . A similar calculation applies for the Republican platforms.

To calculate justification saliency in the respondent data, a similar index was created that has slightly different properties due to the different nature of the data. First, the respondent pool was limited to the group of supporters who might be susceptible to mobilization by the two major parties, the center-right and center-left. The center-right is defined by party identification, with those selected true independent or Republican leaning independent as their identification. Similarly, center-left respondents are those who answered true independent or Democratic leaning. This means that there is some overlap in these two groups. The saliency score for these groups was calculated by subtracting the proportion who identified the party with the opponent's signature idea, from the proportion who associated the party with its own signature idea. The index is then a difference of proportions.

Respondent Salience

$S_{ij} = p_{ij1} - t_{ij12}$ for Democrats

$S_{ij} = p_{ij2} - t_{ij21}$ for Republicans

The platform and respondent salience indices are not directly comparable because one represents a function of the proportion of total words in a text and the other a function of the proportion of respondents who volunteered a family of justifications. They are radically different genres. Even though their metrics differ, their structural properties can be compared. This turns the analysis to considerations of homology.

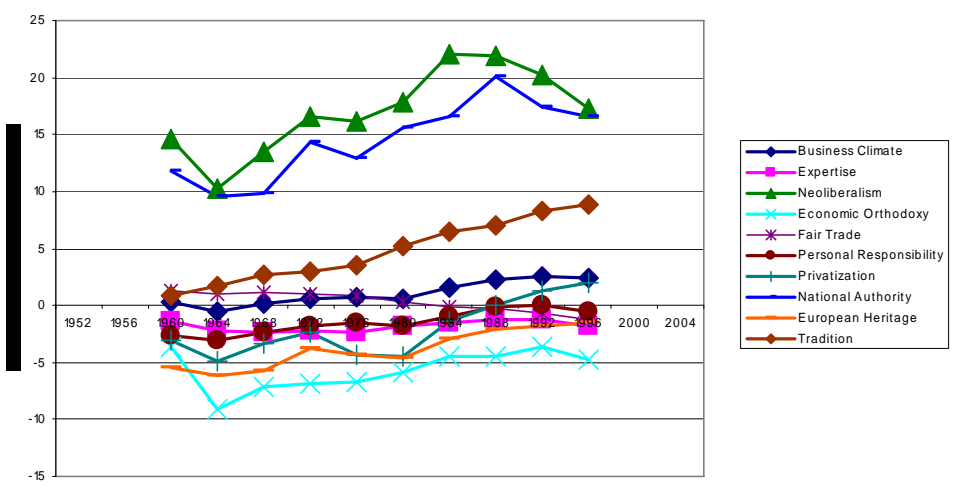
Figures 3 and 4 contain the comparisons of the platform and respondent salience indices respectively. In the top of each figure is the party salience data and in the bottom is the respondent salience data. Direct comparisons facilitates meditation on the structural similarities of the two series. An examination of the Republican data in figure 3 reveals quite a similar structure in the platform and survey data. In both series, the rank order of the major arguments is the same. First comes neoliberalism, then national authority and finally traditional culture.

There are some differences in the series. The Republican platform data show an extreme separation between the two system arguments – neoliberalism and national authority- and all of the other arguments. Traditional culture pulls up a distant third place. In the survey data, salience of traditional culture is stronger. This may suggest that there is more room in the Republican agenda for appeals of this kind.

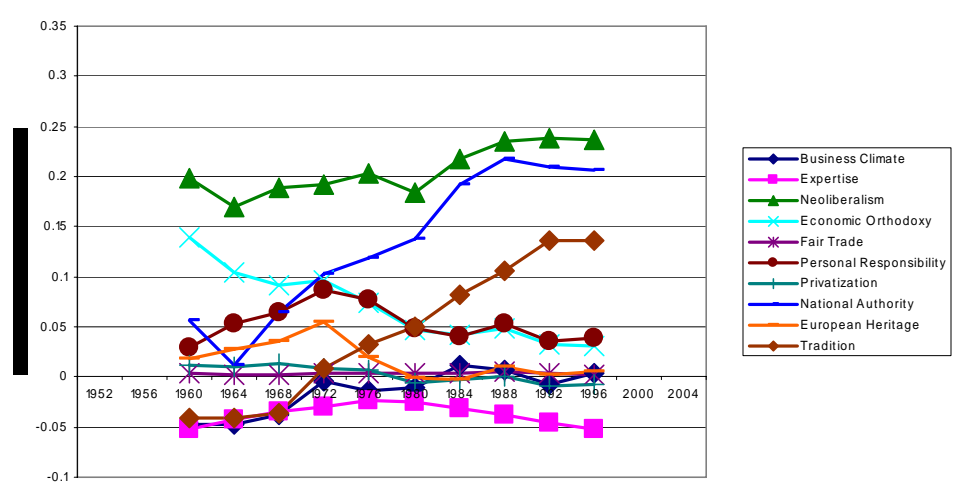
Nevertheless, in each case, the top three arguments are those that comprise what has often been called a modern fusion of the elements of conservative philosophy (Nash

1976). These three justifications stand out from the others and provide a distinctive form to the message in both sets of data. This is somewhat of a surprise because the data sources are so dissimilar. The Republican message is reflected in the Republican image in the center-left electorate. This reinforcing emphasis demonstrates a source of the perceived ideological integrity on the right.

Figure 3. Salience of Moral Justifications in Republican Party Platforms 1952-2004

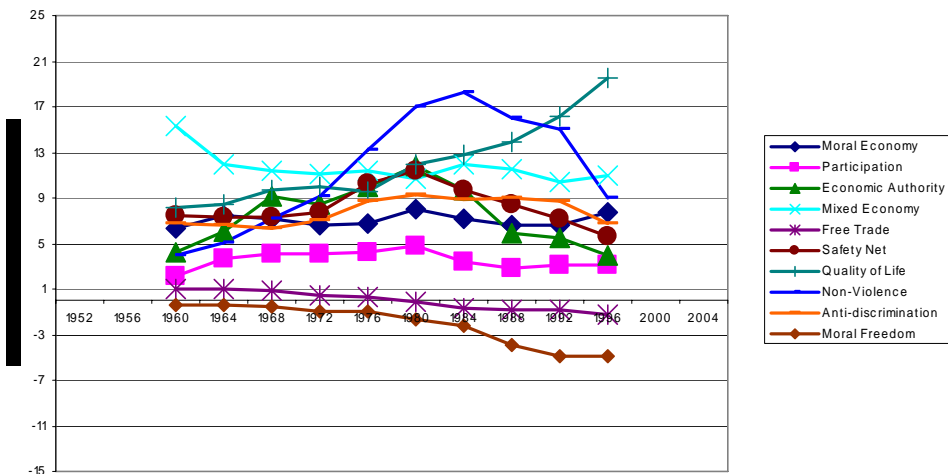


Relative Salience of Republican Party Evaluations by Center Left Respondents 1952-2004

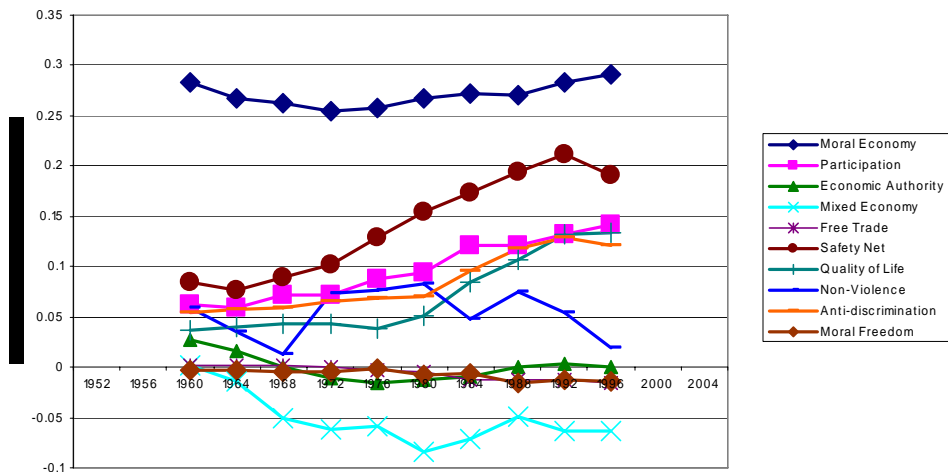


The complimentary salience data for the Democratic Party are presented in figure 4. In contrast to the Republican Party data, there is little in common between the platform and survey data. In the platform series, quality of life and non-violence justifications are consistently at the top of the agenda, followed by the mixed economy. These three issues represent the inclusive and moderate characteristics of Democratic leadership that Schlesinger called the vital center that have governed in what Gerring has called the era of universalism (Gerring 1998; Schlesinger 1949). It is important to note that even though some ideas stand apart from the others a bit, there is much overlap and competition between the Democratic big ideas. There is no strong unopposed contender.

Figure 4. Salience of Moral Justifications in Democratic Party Platforms 1952-2004



Relative Salience of Democratic Party Evaluations by Center Left Respondents 1952-2004



This moderate and undifferentiated message data are quite different from the image data in the bottom of figure 4. In the respondent data, alone at the top of the list are moral economy arguments that stress basic economic fairness, distributive justice and concern about corporate exploitation. The moral economy is clearly the big idea about the

Democratic Party among center-left respondents. The next and rising issue is the safety net, covering ideas like social insurance and welfare provision. There has been a recent downturn in the salience of safety net images after the Clinton era, but safety net themes are still quite distinctive and rising. The two reformist themes are followed by democratic participation. These capture general appeals to bring about universal equality and leveling in politics. Democratic participation stresses the dangers of elitism and the virtues of citizen input in the process of governing. These three themes, moral economy, the safety net and democratic participation, are as distinctive as are the Republican counterparts neoliberalism, national authority and traditional culture. They seem to point to an agenda of Democratic reform with a target on business as the source of economic uncertainty.

It is fascinating to note that the next two themes when ranked by salience are quality of life and non-violence, the two ideas dominate the Democratic platforms. Moral economy, safety net and democratic participation are all classical reform themes in which distributive concerns are paramount (Hofstadter 1955). These classical reform arguments are not salient in the Democratic platforms to the same degree. It as if the party leadership assessed the ideas that were available to them in their base and truncated the top contenders to focus on the second tier of interpretive materials.

While the rank ordering of big ideas differs in the Democratic data, it is also important to stress that the Democratic platform data present no clear sense of centrality - no sense of brand as the party attempts to sell its candidate. There are many prominent arguments in the platform, but no clear and distinctive message to match the Republican series. Even so, the respondent data do have a distinctive brand-like pattern, organized around the themes of the classical reform tradition. The way that center-left respondents

evaluate the party has a distinctive tone, which is not well reflected in the Democratic platform and therefore not in its message. The relative salience of arguments in both series is quite distinct.

In summary, the structure of the Republican Party platform data match that of center-right evaluations of the Republican ticket quite well. The homology between these two discursive streams suggests that party leaders and potential party followers see the party in the same light. The terms they use conform to the crucial elements of Republican Party philosophy that are often cited as the basis of conservative intellectual ascendancy. The message of the Democratic Party has no such distinctive flavor and fails to conform to the structure of popular evaluations of the party. The center-left of the electorate takes the Democratic Party to be the party of the exploited, the insecure and the unconnected. They like the party for standing up for these principles first and only turn to issues of quality of life and non-violence second. To the extent that the party leadership promotes a message that stresses second things first, it engenders a heterology or disconnect between message and image that should weaken the sense of the party's charismatic momentum. In such a context the party would be viewed as adrift, without ideas and internally fragmented when in fact, the center-left is not (Mayer 1992; Mayer 1996).

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have illustrated the ways that the Republican message and its reception have developed in tandem to create a homology in the structures of the two streams of justification. In contrast, the Democratic message has developed in ways largely independent from the popular conversations about the legitimate moral project of

the party. This rhetorical disconnect may lie at the root widely recognized Democratic difficulties in developing a coherent narrative for victory while Republicans claim the mantle of the party of ideas.

By tracing the salience of moral claims in the major party national platforms and in the open-ended responses of the National Election Studies party/candidate evaluation questions, this chapter makes it possible for the first time to see how these two levels of discourse relate to one another. Unlike other similar projects, both platform and open-ended evaluation data were translated into a common framework, calibrated to capture the moral arguments that are typical of popular discourse. By directing this empirical project to a middlebrow level of discursive sophistication, I am able to explore relationships between message and image that have previously been overlooked.

Party platforms were selected as representatives of elite moral discourse because of their obvious moral and self justifying tone. Although rarely read, these documents are the source of bitter partisan wrangling precisely because they serve as a powerful constraint on campaign messages and because they reveal the public face of the party. The platforms are surely not to be trusted as honest moral claims, but do serve as the source of moral images that the parties would like to project as they struggle to win the hearts and minds of their potential constituency. The party platforms reveal the bases of elite consensus on matters of public message. They are moralistic and vague in tone precisely because they are meant to work on the level of ideas politics. In addition, party image data were selected because they are the only existing historically comparable data source that can be plausibly claimed to capture the salient moral arguments that citizens use to evaluate the major political options. Justifications that appear in these open-ended

responses are limited to those that are familiar and convincing, not those that are interesting to the researcher. Their form is attuned to the natural rhythm of evaluation in a popular style.

The Republican message emphasizes the same three moral claims in the same order that the Republican images do: neoliberalism, national authority and traditional culture. The Democratic message emphasizes claims quite different from those of the Democratic images: The moral economy, the safety net and democratic participation. Contrary to the conventional conception about the decline and fall of social class, this analysis suggests that the Republicans remain the private interest and the Democrats remain the party of the public purpose. The capacity of the Republican Party to accept this state of affairs and the inability of the Democratic Party to do so may have been extremely consequential for the recent history of party competition.

It is widely recognized that American politics has become more polarized in recent years. This trend toward confrontational engagement is compatible with and a feature of what is often called the politics of ideas in colloquial discourse. In this battleground or marketplace of ideas, the parties do battle by appealing to voters over the heads of their colleagues- substituting the press conference for the budget meeting. Which of the two parties is capable of articulating the structure of their appeals with the structure of the leadership images voters employ in conversation may develop a powerful, self-enforcing, charismatic environment in which future battles become easier to win. Such a party can turn to the people for pressure and support when their colleagues become intransigent. Without such a charismatic environment, the party is both

vulnerable in matter of day-to-day governance and incapable of successfully waging the permanent campaign of electoral politics.

The relationship between the popular appeals of elites and the echo chamber survey indicators of the national conversation tells a story about ideas politics in an era of polarization. Rather than trying to assess causal direction between these two discursive streams, I focus on the structural homology between the two discursive streams. Where Republican appeals share an unmistakable affinity with right-center evaluations, the opposite is true of the Democratic series. The lesson of polarization is that parties must develop the capacity to appeal successfully to their partisan base, with particular attention to the centrist coalition of potential supporters that can either support them or stay at home and change the television channel and wait for more exciting times. When parties war, they need a public to support them. To garner that support, they require more than plans, they require ideas that resonate with the many tiny messages that people convey to one another in collective attempts to interpret their political environment in conscientious ways. Because the parties differ in this capacity, with the Republicans speaking the same language as center-right identifiers and Democrats out of step with their potential constituency, the Democrats look “out of step,” they are accused of “being out of touch,” and of missing what “it’s all about.” The Republicans then take advantage of what Hertzberg called “big talk” (Hertzberg 2004). They become the party of ideas.

There are many reason why this Democratic disconnect may have taken place. Some argue that Democrats lack the right language to win or that they need to pick better words with which to steer the debate in a more favorable direction. This may be true, but surely more important is the fact that the moral stories they tell as justification for their

right to lead have almost nothing to do with the top three justifications their potential supporters volunteer as reason to support them. These core arguments have been purged from or muted in the message, while leadership focuses on the fine print. While there is no clear answer as to why this odd elision may have taken place, but the class character of the Democratic story in the electorate may hold a clue. The Democratic Party may have fallen under the weight of its own professionalization as wealthy and well educated donors steer it away from what feels like an antiquated message better suited to the middle twentieth century than to the present. Domhoff's catchy image of "fatcats and Democrats" and Ferguson and Rogers "golden rule" point to this possibility. Before party elites compete for votes, they compete for dollars (Domhoff 1972; Ferguson 1995). There may be reason to believe that this competition has gone worse for Democrats than for Republicans whose donors stand to benefit from the core components of the Republican message, while Democrats do not. If the data presented here can be trusted to represent what they are here claimed to, the Republican Party will enjoy its tempered hegemony until the Democrats can bring their message and image into closer alignment.

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