Party Development in the Twentieth Century:

Laying the Foundations for Responsible Party Government?

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the development of major party organizations between 1900 and 2000 from the perspective of the responsible party model. First, we abstract a set of criteria from the APSA Report's recommendations and then apply them to party organizations in the early, middle, and late Twentieth Century--periods that roughly coincide with the implementation of Progressive reforms, the rise of candidate-centered politics, and the strengthening of national parties. By the end of the Twentieth Century, the major party organizations have met many but not all of the recommendations of the APSA Report, contributing to party responsibility. This process was slow, incremental, and more incidental than planned. We conclude that developments in party organizations alone are not sufficient to sustain responsible party government on a permanent basis. A century of party developments may have laid the foundations for responsible party government, but much remains to be done if this ideal is to become a reality.

The influence of party organizations in American politics has waxed and waned over the Twentieth century, but concern over their impact on national government has been a constant. Central to this concern has been a long and often frustrating quest for "responsible party government" (Schattschneider 1942). The best-known milestone in this quest is the report of the Committee on Political Parties of the American Political Science Association, "Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System" (1950). From the point of view of party organizations at least, this quest has not been entirely in vain.

We explore the development of major party organizations between 1900 and 2000 from the perspective of the responsible party model. First, we abstract a set of criteria from the APSA Report's recommendations and then apply them to party organizations in the early, middle, and late Twentieth Century--periods that roughly coincide with the implementation of Progressive reforms, the rise of candidate-centered politics, and the strengthening of national parties. By the end of the Twentieth Century, the major party organizations have met many but not all of the recommendations of the APSA Report, contributing to party responsibility. This process was slow, incremental, and more incidental than planned. We conclude that developments in party organizations alone are not sufficient to sustain responsible party government on a permanent basis. A century of party developments may have laid the foundations for responsible party government, but much remains to be done if this ideal is to become a reality.

Party Organizations and Party Responsibility

American political parties are first and foremost concerned with controlling the

government by winning elections (Epstein 1967, 9). Politicians created parties to help them win

elections (Aldrich 1995)**,** and politicians have introduced innovations in party organizations to

improve their electoral prospects (Herrnson 1993; Klinkner 1994; Kolodny 1993, 169,175-

181). The specific component of the party that focuses its efforts on organizing and contesting

elections is commonly referred to as the party organization. It exists outside of formal

governmental institutions, but elected officials are usually closely involved in its activities, and it is

subject to government regulation (Epstein 1986, chapter 6).

Party organizations have traditionally had a major influence on the candidate selection

process and recruited candidates to run under their labels. Parties have provided general

election candidates with money, political expertise, volunteers, and other forms of campaign

assistance. They have helped candidates collect campaign resources from interest groups and

political activists. Party organizations also have carried out public relations activities designed to

set a political agenda that is beneficial to a party's entire ticket. The specific techniques used by

party organizations for these purposes have changed over the course of the Twentieth Century,

both in response to innovations introduced by individual politicians as well as changes in the

larger environment in which the parties operated.

Some of these changes are strikingly similar to the dozens of recommendations for party

organizations outlined in the APSA Report. These recommendations were part of a larger set of

proposals directed at encouraging the parties to behave more programmatically--in the authors' terminology more "responsibly." These proposals envisioned parties using locally based democratic processes to communicate the policy preferences of formal party members to local, state, and national party leaders, who would distill those preferences and turn them into a national party platform. The platform would then provide a basis for campaigning and governing. The Report argued that party organizations would have to be more centralized, participatory, representative, and useful in mounting campaigns for this vision to become a reality.

The Report's authors harbored few illusions about the major party organizations in this regard. They noted that the environment in which American parties operate presented enormous obstacles to responsible behavior, not the least of which was the U.S. Constitution. But following a long American tradition, the Report argued that changes in party organizations could help overcome these obstacles (Milkis 1999). The Report's proposals were reformist, opting to change political parties rather than pursuing more radical changes in government structure, such as replacing the separation of powers with a parliamentary system or curtailing federalism in favor of a more centralized government. Such fundamental changes might have done more to increase the likelihood of party responsibility, but they were deemed impractical and even undesirable on other grounds.

The Report was the product of a particular time and circumstances. Although it captured the imagination of a generation of scholars, it was not without its shortcomings or critics (Turner 1951; Ranney 1951). It was criticized as being informed by a narrow and singular vision of democratic politics, failing to engage in adequate goal and derivational thinking,

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and faulty in its empiricism. Its strongest detractors characterized the Report as "unscientific, slipshod, and mainly mistaken" (Kirkpatrick 1971, 965).

The Report's recommendations for strengthening party organizations can be divided into three broad areas: national party organizations; state and local organizations, and party activities (see Table 1).[1]

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

National Party Organizations

The largest set of recommendations concerns national party organs. The authors believed strong national parties were essential to the formation of clear party programs. They considered the national conventions to be the parties' ultimate governing body, and argued that smaller, more frequent, and more representative conventions would have greater legitimacy and decision-making capacity.

The Report argues for the creation of a national party council to manage the party between conventions. The council was intended to replace the informal coordination that occurred among party organizations with a formal institution made up of a small number of key leaders drawn from all elements of the party. Central to the council's coordinating functions were developing, interpreting, and enforcing fealty to the party platform. Giving the national party council responsibility for screening potential candidates for federal office and the authority to appoint some convention delegates were intended to make it a force in promoting party responsibility.

The Report's authors also advocated that national committees play a larger role in party

politics. "Institutionalized" national party committees, which were representative, permanent and financially secure, would have the organizational capacity to conduct research and wage effective campaigns. This institutional capacity would provide tangible support for responsible party activities, assisting the party councils and conventions in their work. It this regard, the Report advocated federal financial subsidies to the parties and public provision of election statistics and other forms of politically relevant information.

State and Local Party Organizations

The modernization of state and local party organizations also was part of the APSA Report's vision. One aspect of that vision was the development of participatory, issue-oriented state and local parties. These organizations would meet regularly, form close working associations with each other, hold regional conferences, and contribute to the formation of national platforms. State and local parties were expected to produce their own platforms that were consistent with the national program. Another role of state and local parties was to integrate allied interest groups into party activities and resist interest group pressures. Finally, these party organizations would possess the wherewithal to make important contributions to the campaigns of the parties' nominees and help them win election. Modern state and local parties would thus further the programmatic nature of the national parties and provide incentives for the parties' elected officials to enact the program once in government.

The Report's authors believed that party members should play important roles in the party organization. Consistent with their vision for responsible parties, they called for parties to use their platforms, campaign activities, and other organizational and legislative efforts to

develop loyal, policy-oriented, dues-paying members who could be relied on to actively participate in party affairs. These formal party members were expected to be the original source for many of the policy preferences that would eventually become part of the party's national platform and governing agenda.

Platforms, Nominations, and General Election Campaigns

Party platforms were envisioned as central to the decisions of voters, party activists, members of the party organization, candidates, and officeholders. National party platforms were to be drafted biennially by members of Congress and other party leaders, focusing on both party principles and policy proposals. Having elected officials and prospective officeholders contribute to the platforms, it was believed, would encourage them to campaign on the platform and support it once elected.

The Report advocated that party organizations play a major role in nominations. They favored using closed primaries to directly choose congressional candidates. These would also choose national convention delegates who, in turn, would select presidential candidates at the national conventions. They advocated that party organizations issue preprimary endorsements for individuals seeking nominations.

The authors of the Report believed that more extensive and effective campaigning by party organizations would both increase candidates' prospects for winning and their willingness to enact the parties' platform once in office. They advocated that national party organizations play a major role in the financing federal campaigns and that there be no unreasonable restrictions on receipts, contributions, or expenditures. They believed campaigns should be

waged on the basis of the party platforms rather than candidates' personalities or promises of patronage. Finally, party organizations should wage issue-oriented campaigns in all states and localities and encourage citizen participation in politics.

Party Development in the Early Twentieth Century

Complaints about traditional party organizations were legion as the Twentieth Century began. These organizations still dominated electoral politics in 1900 (White and Shea 2000, 48-52; Mayhew 1986) and served as a point of departure for both reformers and responsible party advocates. Despite the vitality of these organizations and their ability to engage the public, they had three serious flaws (Merriam 1922; Schattschneider 1942).

First, traditional party organizations had weak national organs. The national conventions and committees were essentially temporary coordinating devices for organizing presidential nominations and campaigns. They rarely survived beyond Election Day and had little influence on policy making. Second, traditional party organizations were unrepresentative, often non-participatory, and notoriously non-programmatic. Organizational strength was located at the state and especially local levels, where efficiency and honesty were frequently in short supply. In lieu of formal party members, there was a cadre of patronage-oriented workers who were deeply involved in party operations. Third, major party campaign activities fell short of the responsible party ideal. Party platforms were largely campaign documents and rarely useful guidelines for policy making. Nominations were often settled in "smoke-filled rooms" with a

minimum of popular input. And although national organizations played a role in presidential

campaigns, the bulk of the campaign resources and activities were in the hands of local

committees.

This kind of criticism contributed to a torrent of reform between 1900 and the late

1920s. Growing out of the Progressive movement, some of the reforms had a direct impact on

party organizations, whereas others influenced parties indirectly (Key 1964; McSeveney 1994).

These reforms combined with a host of demographic and technological changes to alter the

status, influence, and operation of party organizations (Herring 1965).

National Party Organizations

The Progressive reforms had little direct impact on national party conventions, which

already performed some of the functions assigned to them by the responsible party model,

although perhaps not especially well (Merriam 1922). However, there was some modest

movement toward the Report's recommendations (see Table 2). For instance, an increasing

number of convention delegates were selected via direct primaries. By 1912 twelve states used

primaries, selecting 360 delegates in each party (approximately one-third in both cases), and by

1920, twenty states used the direct primary to select 600 delegates in both parties (roughly

60% for Republicans and 55% for Democrats). Although the delegations to both parties

continued to be apportioned by population rather than party strength, the Republicans

reapportioned their delegations in 1916 and 1924 and partially addressed the imbalance

(Merriam and Gosnell 1929, 277-279).

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

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The number of delegates remained relatively small, increasing from less than 1,000 in 1900 to 1,100 by 1932, which was almost small enough for genuine deliberation. And national conventions did deliberate, including requiring numerous ballots to pick the presidential nominees. The best known of these struggles were in 1912, when it took 46 ballots to nominate Woodrow Wilson, and in1924, when 125 ballots were needed to nominate John W. Davis.

There was some experimentation with party councils during this period. Wilson proposed a council in 1916 for the Democrats. The Republicans established one in 1919 to make recommendations for their platform; it was quietly disbanded a few years later.   The Republican National Committee established a permanent national headquarters under chairman Will Hays in 1918. The Democratic National Committee followed suit a decade later under chairman John J. Raskob in 1929 (Merriam and Gosnell 1929, 226-227). Although the parties received no direct federal subsidies, President Theodore Roosevelt proposed the public financing of presidential campaigns in 1907 (Mutch 1988).

State and Local Party Organizations

The Progressive reforms had their greatest impact at state and local levels. The advent of the direct primary lead to the demise of state and local conventions as decision-making bodies, and with it a decline in the frequency of state and local platforms (Merriam 1924). Over the period, the reforms undermined some traditional organizations, so that by the late 1920s the state-level machines had largely disappeared. Local parties, especially the urban machines, adapted more effectively to the reforms and in some instances, actually became stronger and more professional (Mayhew 1986). A new set of interest group organization began to exercise

increased influence in politics in the wake of party decline (Clemens 1997).

After 1900 the combined effect of ballot reform and direct primary legislation produced a legal measure of party association in most states: voluntary party registration (Epstein 1986; Rusk 1974). Party registration was widely used to determine eligibility to vote in primaries, thus allowing more widespread and diverse participation in one element of party decision making. The advent of Progressivism may have briefly interjected a greater level of programmatic interest among some partisans, but party membership fell far short of the Report's criteria.

Platforms, Nominations, and Campaign Activities

The national conventions continued to enact platforms, which resembled those from 1900 in tone and form. However, some platforms, such as Wilson's New Freedom program in 1912, came much closer to those envisioned by the responsible party advocates (Milkis 1993: chapter 1). Elected officials, including members of Congress, helped shape the platform in their capacity as convention delegates, but officeholders had no special role.

The advent of direct primary nominations represented the biggest advancement toward the responsible party model, becoming the most common means of nominating congressional candidates by the late 1920s. Primaries also were a significant factor in the politics of presidential nominations between 1908 and 1917, but declined in the 1920s (Epstein 1986: 89-94). During this period, most primaries were closed, although there were fusion and blanket primaries in some states. Informal pre-primary endorsements by party managers became commonplace in many states and localities, and there was serious discussion of formalizing this process in 1902 and 1921 (Merriam and Gosnell 1949: 358). In 1918, Wilson undertook a

controversial and largely unsuccessful attempt to defeat Democratic members of Congress in primaries who had not supported his program (Herring 1965:219-220).

Party organizations, especially local parties, were still central to general election campaigns during this period. As in 1900, the national committees continued to coordinate presidential campaigns and provide financial resources (Overacker 1932). The congressional campaign committees expanded their efforts in the 1920s (Kolodny 1998). However, candidates below the presidential level began to play bigger roles in their own campaigns. The national parties were first subjected to national campaign finance regulations during this period, but no undue restrictions were placed on party spending (Mutch 1988).

The Progressive reforms did not encourage the extension of party competition to all regions of the country. In fact, much of the country became less competitive between 1900 and 1932. Moreover, the restrictive rules that governed some primaries disenfranchised African Americans and other minorities (McSeveney 1994). In addition, there was a dramatic decline in voter turnout among Northern working-class men in the North in the 1920s (Wiebe 1967).

Party Organizations and Party Responsibility

What impact did party organizations have on responsible party government in the early Twentieth Century? Did their development have an impact? The operation of the national government approximated the responsible party ideal on several occasions during this period, most notably during Wilson's first term. A self-conscious advocate of party responsibility, Wilson campaigned in 1912 on a platform that was unusual for its programmatic character. Once in office, he marshaled Democrats in Congress to pass most of his program. In 1916, he

and his party campaign for reelection on the basis of their program and were returned to office. Some Democratic members of Congress abandoned part of Wilson's program following that election, and opposed them in their 1918 primaries. Other less dramatic approximations of party government occurred during the Republican administrations of presidents Theodore Roosevelt, William Taft, and Herbert Hoover.

Party organizations may well have contributed something to these approximations to party responsibility in government. Wilson, and to a lesser extent his Republican counterparts, used their party's organizations to back their programs, infusing a greater sense of unity and integration into the party system. The major innovation of this period, the direct primary, may well have aided these efforts somewhat. The direct primary weakened local party organizations' iron grip on the candidate-selection, allowing presidents and other leaders to intervene in congressional nominations and use public pressure to encourage wavering members to support their policies.

However, the party organizations of this period fell so far short of the responsible party model that it is hard to credit them with promoting programmatic party government. Presidential leadership in party policymaking was in many respects the antithesis of a participatory and representative process advocated by the responsible party model. The absence of strong, permanent, and effective national party organs hampered presidents' abilities to develop a sustained party program. In fact, these weaknesses spurred on the quest for party responsibility. Thus, one must look elsewhere for the primary sources for programmatic party activity during this period. The Progressive movement and the enthusiasm it generated within and outside both

major parties was one factor. The pragmatic party organizations of the day, which tended to

produce unified party control of the government, are another. They gave presidents an

opportunity to fashion more coherent program after the election.

Party Development in the Middle of the Twentieth Century

In the late 1920s, party organizations were subject to many of the same criticisms that

had been made in 1900. These concerns became stronger as a result of difficulties associated

with enacting the New Deal's liberal program and the rise of the labor movement and the Civil

Rights movement. Each of these factors as well as continued demographic and technological

changes influenced the development of party organizations (Bibby 1994). However, unlike the

previous period, the greatest impact was indirect, occurring via the rise of candidate-centered

politics and the failure of party organizations to adapt.

The Progressive reforms allowed candidates and interest groups to play a greater role in

electoral politics independently of party organizations (Schlesinger 1991). President Franklin

Roosevelt exploited this role. Drawing on the Wilson's legacy, Roosevelt imposed his program

on the Democratic Party and then used the party to build public support for it. Roosevelt had

somewhat greater success implementing his program than did Wilson, but faced similar

obstacles (Milkis 1999). In fact, Roosevelt's experience in this regard was a prime motivation

for APSA Report on responsible parties (Epstein 2000).

The initial impact of the New Deal was to strengthen party organizations, especially the

Democrats. The New Deal programs provided a new source of largely unregulated patronage

for urban machines and Southern organizations for a short period. However, such patronage was eliminated by the 1939 Hatch Act, and the New Deal social programs eventually contributed to the decline of the machines (Epstein 1986). Similarly, the labor movement provided Democrats with a powerful ally, but one that often competed with local organizations for power. Policies set in motion by the New Deal eventually gave rise to the Civil Rights movement, which ended the Democratic "solid South." Finally, Roosevelt's personal organization and appeal transcended Democratic Party organizations, providing a model for his successors and other candidates in the post-war period (Milkis 1993).

By 1950 the development of candidate-centered politics was well under way. Presidential and congressional candidates were increasingly self-recruited, won nomination by their own efforts, and organized their own general election campaigns (Bibby 1998:153-154; Strahan 1998). This trend came to a head with the 1972 McGovern-Fraser Commission reforms, which formalized candidate-centered politics in presidential nominations (Ceaser 1978). While not entirely inconsequential, party organizations became increasingly peripheral to general election campaigns (Herrnson 1988, 18-29).

National Party Organizations

National conventions resembled their predecessors in most respects until 1972, but subtle changes in the directions advocated in the Report were already under way (see Table 3). The Democrats abolished the two-thirds rule for presidential nominations, and the Republicans began to develop a detailed body of written party rules in 1936 (Merriam and Gosnell 1949). Over the period, the number of convention delegates increased substantially, from 1,100 for

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both parties in 1932 to 2,622 for the Democrats and 1,331 for the Republicans in 1968.

Presidential aspirants became increasingly adept at mobilizing delegates on their behalf,

especially those chosen by primary. These candidate activities reduced the scope of convention

decision-making: 1952 was the last convention in either party where the nominees were not

chosen on the first ballot. Convention delegations were apportioned by population rather than

party strength until the McGovern-Fraser reforms and their subsequent impact via state law in

1972 (Polsby 1986).

[TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

This period witnessed continued experimentation with a party council. The Republicans

formed a "program committee" that lasted between 1938 and 1940 to develop platform

proposals in response to the New Deal (Merriam and Gosnell 1949). They also formed a

"coordinating committee" to help them recover from defeat in 1964 that met for four years

(Bibby 1994). The Democrats formed an "advisory committee" following their defeat in 1956

that lasted four years as well (Roberts1994).

The national committees also made some organizational changes. The Republicans

added successful state party chairs to the national committees in 1952 and all state party chairs

in 1968, which fostered greater party integration. Although largely temporary in nature, the

Republicans made important organizational gains under Chairmen John Hamilton (1937-1940)

and Ray Bliss (1965-1969) (Bibby 1994). Democratic Chairmen James Farley (1932-1939)

and Paul Butler (1955-1960) made some improvements at their national committee (Roberts

1994**).** The national party committees experienced fundraising difficulties over this period, and

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began experimenting with direct mail fundraising in the mid-1960s. Public financing of

presidential campaigns was enacted in 1971 (although not implemented) and subsidies to

national parties were debated during this period (Mutch 1988).

State and Local Party Organizations

Most state party organizations were weak and local machines slowly declined during

the middle of the Twentieth Century. These organizations failed to adapt their campaign

machinery to changes in technology, the increased influence of candidate organizations, and

prominence of interest groups (Sorauf 1980; Bibby 1998; Ware 19985; Mayhew 1986).

Parties did not develop dues-paying, issue-oriented memberships and continued to rely on

voluntary voter registration to determine who could participate in primaries. Cadres of liberal

and conservative activists began to appear in party politics in the post-war period (McClosky,

Hoffman, and O'Hare 1960). By the 1960s, issue-oriented activists had a greater hold in some

local positions, leading to tensions between them and traditional party volunteers (Wilson 1960).

Platforms, Nominations, and Campaign Activities

The national conventions produced platforms that became somewhat more

programmatic during the New Deal and again during the 1960s. Officeholders continued to

have only a limited voice in platform writing, which was done by convention delegates.

However, traditional disputes between the White House and Congress over policy development

spread to party organizations, with the leaders of congressional campaign committees arguing

that they, and not the national committees, should be the prime source of policy (Bibby 1998;

Milkis 1993).

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Most congressional and state-level candidates were nominated in closed primaries during this period. In the post-war period, candidates for presidential nominations revived the custom of competing in non-binding primaries to demonstrate public support. There were continued experiments with pre-primary endorsements early in the period, including President Franklin Roosevelt's attempt to purge anti-New Deal members of Congress in Democratic primaries. Like Wilson's efforts in 1918, the purge was very controversial and produced mixed results (Herring 1965:221-223).

The national committees continue to play a major role coordinating presidential campaigns, although their ability to raise adequate funds was often strained. In 1940, federal campaign finance laws set limits on the amount of money national party committees could spend in campaigns, a provision that probably delayed the further development of national organizations (Mutch 1988). Thanks in large measure to the Civil Rights movement, two-party competition spread to more regions by the end of the period. Citizen participation also increased, reaching a high point in the 1960s, but not matching the levels recorded in the Nineteenth Century (Mayer 1998).

Party Organizations and Party Responsibility

This period included the New Deal, which was probably the closest approximation to party government in American history. Roosevelt's efforts resembled Wilson's New Freedom program in many respects. Roosevelt, like Wilson, passed much of his program with the support of congressional Democrats, but eventually ran into opposition within his party's. He later intervened in Democratic primaries to help friends and harm foes of his program. One major

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difference was that the New Deal evolved after 1932 and was first fully presented to the

Democratic Party and the electorate in 1936, whereas the New Freedom was presented to

voters prior to Wilson's election. The New Deal also was more comprehensive than Wilson's

program and had longer lasting effects on the Democratic Party and nation. Finally, the promise

of the New Deal encouraged its advocates to champion responsible parties.

Other Democratic presidents offered similar programs during this period, including

Harry Truman's Fair Deal, John Kennedy's New Frontier, and Lyndon Johnson's Great

Society. The Republicans presented their most ideologically cohesive and programmatic

platform during Barry Goldwater's 1964 presidential campaign; George McGovern's liberal

platform in 1972 was similarly ideological. Goldwater and especially McGovern sought to

recruit new issue-oriented activists into their respective parties.

Party organizations may have contributed something to the movement toward

programmatic government. The New Deal revitalized Democratic organizations, and Roosevelt

was able to use them to advance his program in elections and government. Direct primaries

made many party organizations more open and receptive to public response to the New Deal.

The presence of permanent national committee headquarters aided in the defense of--and

opposition within his party to--the New Deal programs. The national committees helped

integrate and centralization party efforts on particular occasions.

Nevertheless, some characteristics of party organizations did little to promote

responsible party government. Roosevelt and his successors spent considerable effort struggling

against state and local party organizations. The rise and eventual institutionalization of candidate-

centered politics also meant that presidents needed to devote more time to persuading self-recruited officeholders to support their programs. Missing was an overarching organization, like a party council, by which candidates could be held accountable to the platform.

The national party organizations of this period were not strong enough to support the development of programmatic liberalism, or its eventual opponent, programmatic conservatism. Other factors were more important to the approximations to party government that occurred during this period. The New Deal was the product of the unusual circumstances of the 1930s: a genuine domestic emergency coupled with a charismatic president and pent up demands for social and economic reforms. These circumstances were sufficiently powerful to bring a high degree of coherence to government, regardless of the state of party organizations. Other, less profound events had a similar impact of partisanship in government, including the Civil Rights movement and other social movements of the 1960s.

Party Organizations at the End of the Twentieth Century

The last quarter of the Twentieth Century constitutes a period of revitalization for political parties, particularly at the national level. The parties did not become sufficiently programmatic to label as "responsible," but there was an increased centralization of power and a greater emphasis on party programs. National party organizations played larger roles in elections and governance, and they developed stronger ties to candidates, consultants, interest groups, and voters than they did during the parties' mid-century nadir. Many of their candidates campaign on common themes and issue agendas (Herrnson and Patterson 1965; Herrnson,

Patterson, and Pitney 1996; Little 1997), their legislators exhibited greater unity on roll-call votes (Rohde 1991), and even voters have become more responsive to party cues (Bartels 2000).

As was the case in previous periods, some of the party organizational developments near the end of the century were similar to the recommendations made in the APSA Report. However, other changes bear no relationship to the Report's recommendations, and still others moved the parties in the opposite direction of the Report (see Table 4).

[TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE]

National Party Organizations

National party conventions developed in ways that both conform and counter the Report's recommendations. The national conventions have formally retained their status as the parties' ultimate decision-making bodies, but they have not become the deliberative meetings envisioned in the Report. The national conventions were too large for deliberation to take place. An estimated 45,000 people, including 2,066 delegates, attended the Republicans' national convention in 2000. The Democratic national convention was of a similar magnitude and included 4,336 delegates.

The national conventions are not fully representative of their supporters' views despite the fact that both that parties apportion delegates on the basis of the state's size and party strength. The Democrats' delegate selection process ensures that the composition of the convention reflects, with some degree of accuracy, the presidential preferences of individuals participating in its primaries and caucuses. "Super delegates" ensure that Democratic

officeholders' views are heard. The Republican delegate selection process does not reserve slots for party officials, and it does not require states to distribute their delegates in accordance with the level of support garnered by each candidate for the presidential nomination. However, both parties' nomination processes overemphasize the importance of early primary states, resulting in candidates who have not done well in the early primaries dropping out of the nomination contest and the under-representation of their supporters at the convention.

National conventions evolved from decision-making bodies to largely symbolic campaign-related events during the last decade of the Twentieth Century. What were traditionally the convention's most important decisions--the selection of a nominee and a running mate--are completed and publicized prior to the convention. Conventions have evolved into general election kick-off events. They are heavily scripted and feature gimmicks popularized by television talk show hosts and documentaries to hold the audience's attention. Conventions have become so choreographed that the major network broadcasters do not deem them newsworthy and afford them only limited coverage.

The parties have not created national councils. Nevertheless, other national party organizations began to perform some of the functions of a party council. Formal party rules and the concentration of money at the national level have given national party organizations greater control over some aspects of party operations, such as rules for selecting delegates. The strengthening of national, congressional, and senatorial campaign committees has fostered greater coordination among national, state, and local party organizations.

The national, congressional, and senatorial campaign committees have become

institutionalized. That is, they are fiscally solvent, organizationally stable, own headquarters buildings, have large skilled staffs, and use professional-bureaucratic decision-making procedures. The national parties' institutionalization resulted in their becoming major centers of political resources and dramatically altered the flow of power within both the Democratic and Republican Party organizations (Bibby 1981; Herrnson 1988). The Republicans have done a better job at broadening their financial base to include more individuals who make modest contributions, but both parties have become adept at raising and spending "soft money" in cooperation with their state party affiliates (Dwyre 1996). The national parties receive a modest subsidy from the federal government to support the national conventions, and fourteen states directly subsidize party campaign activities (Malbin and Gais 1998, 52-53).

The national parties recruit candidates, conduct issue and opposition research, and have instituted numerous programs to train, raise money for, and provide campaign services to candidates (Herrnson 1988, Frantzich 1989). The national parties also provide money and training programs to modernize and strengthen state and local party organizations (Bibby 1980, 108-109; Conlon, Martin, and Dilger 1984, 11; Herrnson 1988, 43-44). There has been a similar renewal at the state level and some gains at the local level (Bibby 1999).

Party reform and renewal have combined to produce a greater centralization of authority and resources within the nation's federated party system. National party organizations play larger roles. They have stronger ties to candidates, consultants, interest groups (Herrnson 1988, 2000; Kolodny 2000), and voters (Bartels 2000).

State and Local Party Organizations

Party renewal also has contributed to the development of state and local party organizations. Most state parties maintain permanent and sophisticated headquarters and legislative campaign committees have appeared in several states to carry out functions that parallel those of the congressional and senatorial campaign committees (Gierzynski 1992; Shea 1995). Although local parties are not as strong as at the turn of the century, many are stronger than at the time the Report was written (Lawson 1981, Marshall 1981, Mileur 1981, Cotter, Gibson, Bibby, and Huckshorn 1989, 61-80; Bibby 1999, Blumberg, Binning and Green 1999; Friendreis and Gitelson 1999).

Neither party has developed a mass membership base, and voter registration rolls and contributor lists remain weak surrogates for this. Party organizations have not made much of an effort to enlist the participation of party registrants, identifiers, or donors in party affairs. The surveys that accompany direct-mail solicitations for party contributions occasionally ask donors what they think of core party positions, but these are designed to motivate donations rather than encourage political dialogue or recruit volunteers. Ideologically oriented activists have become more involved in party nominations, but their candidate and issue loyalties often outweigh their party loyalty.

Platforms, Nominations, and Campaign Activities

Party platforms in recent times continue to emphasize general party principles and help differentiate the major parties (Pomper 1999, 256-260). They remain moderate in tenor, but have become modestly more programmatic. Members of Congress have become significantly more involved in writing national platforms, and mid-term policy documents that resemble

platforms have become more common. These include the House Republicans' Contract with America and issue handbooks and policy papers prepared by both parties' House members (Herrnson, Patterson, and Pitney 1996). There has been a resurgence of state party platforms as well. For example, Republican parties in 29 states emulated the Contract (Little 1997). Both parties have held hearings to get input from state and local party members. Their participation in the platform writing process has encouraged greater policy consistency across national and state parties.

Party nominations conform more closely to the APSA Report's recommendations. Most state parties use primaries to select delegates to the presidential nominating convention. Direct primaries also are used to select candidates for the House, Senate, and most other offices. Open and blanket primaries became more common in recent decades, but the Supreme Court ruled the latter to be unconstitutional in 2000 (*California Democratic Party et al. v. Jones*). All but ten states prohibit fusion tickets in primaries (Spitzer 1997, 129).

There continued to be some experimentation with pre-primary endorsements. However, these occasionally resulted in significant intra-party squabbles at the congressional level and became less common (Herrnson 1998). In only twelve states do one or both parties use conventions to make pre-primary endorsements (Jewell and Morehouse 1999).

Party activity in general elections increased dramatically at the end of the Twentieth Century. Parties distributed roughly $38.1 million in contributions and coordinated expenditures in 1998, and spent at least $220.7 million in soft money on overhead, state and local party building, issue ads, generic campaign communications, and other campaign-related efforts.[2]

Although restrictions on party spending have not been lifted, various court rulings and Federal Election Commission spending (FEC) decisions have had a similar effect. Parties will probably smash their previous fundraising records during the 2000 elections (FEC 2000a, 2000b). Soft money will also play a substantial role in the presidential election and in competitive House and Senate campaigns.

National parties have moved well beyond making campaign contributions to candidates. By the close of the century they were working to set a national campaign agenda, aggressively recruiting candidates, and providing candidates in competitive races with assistance in campaign management, issue and opposition research, communications, and other aspects of electioneering requiring technical expertise or in-depth research. They also helped these candidates attract money and campaign assistance from PACs, political consultants, and other groups that participate in politics. In addition, parties began to make independent expenditures and issue advocacy advertisements. National party funding also was critical to the massive voter mobilization efforts conducted by state and local parties. Most of this assistance was delivered to help federal candidates, though others benefited from it (Bibby 1999 ; Herrnson 2000, 93-115).

Two-party competition has spread to all regions and many localities as the century draws to a close. Party recruitment and campaign assistance contributed to this trend, especially in the South where Democratic hegemony gave way to two-party competition in some places and Republican dominance in others. Nevertheless, party efforts did not increase voter turnout. Only 49 percent of all eligible voters went to the polls in 1996, the lowest turnout rate since

1924.

Party Organizations and Party Responsibility

Did the recent changes in party organizations lead to increased programmatic behavior in government at the close of the Twentieth Century? The events surrounding the 104th Congress give some insights into this question. On the surface the House Republicans' efforts bore a close semblance to the model of responsible party government. Republican party organizations, particularly the National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC), did many of the things one would expect of a responsible party. They recruited a record number of exceptionally talented congressional challengers, and helped them candidates raise record amounts of money (Herrnson 2000, 43).

The NRCC, the Republican National Committee, Republican political consultants, and allied interest groups worked with the House Republican leadership to develop and disseminate the Contract with America, which presented an alternative to the Democrats' then-prevailing post-New Deal agenda (Gimpel 1996, West and Loomis 1999, 114-117). Through their Victory '94 program, Republican national party organizations transferred more than $14 million to state and local GOP committees, which these organizations used for party-building, campaign advertising, voter list development, and voter mobilization efforts.

Once the election was over, Republicans claimed that the election gave them a mandate to enact the contract--despite the fact that only 35 percent of all voters had even heard of it prior to the election--and took steps to carry it out (Koopman 1996, 147). The NRCC held training sessions to teach lawmakers and their staffs how to use mass media, town meetings, and

other communications to sell contract-related legislation. They distributed television and radio shows extolling the contract's virtues to cable and broadcast stations. Chairman Haley Barbour routinely met with Republican House and Senate leaders to coordinate the Republican message and to discuss political and legislative strategy. These efforts, combined with the measures House Republican leaders took to centralize power under Gingrich helped the party ability to pass in less than 100 days all but nine points of their ten-point contract in the House (Gimpel 1996, 36-40, 115-117; Sinclair 1997, 175-216). Nevertheless, several planks of the contract fell victim to bicameralism and divided government, as Senate Republicans altered or rejected some pieces of contract legislation and President Bill Clinton vetoed others.

In 1996, Republican party organizations defended House members who supported the contract from attacks by Democrats, unions, and other liberal groups. They worked with local party activists and Washington-based interest group leaders to orchestrate op-ed pieces, letters to the editor, and TV ads praising these legislators. They provided candidates in close races with significant election support. However, Republicans did not seek to set a campaign agenda based on the contract (Herrnson, 1998a, 97-102).

Despite the House Republicans successes, the party's organizational efforts fell short of the APSA Report's standards for responsible parties. Only a small group of national Republicans participated in the formulation of the contract. Members of state and local party organizations or the Senate candidates had no impact on it. Only a limited number of House candidates explicitly campaigned on the contract, and most of those drew only on those planks that conformed to their individual campaign platforms (Gimpel 1996, 22-26; Kolodny 1998,

204-205). The shallowness of the Contract's roots made Republican leaders' claims of a mandate questionable. They also help explain why many Senate Republicans did not fully embrace it. The contract demonstrates that a lack of an active grassroots party membership, the separation of powers, and bicameralism limit prospects for responsible party government.

There also are alternative explanations for the high levels of party-line voting exhibited by House Republicans during the 104th Congress that have little to do with the efforts of Republican party organizations. These include the ideological sorting out of the two parties' congressional caucuses (Rohde 1991, 23-24), the election of seventy-three new Republican House members who had no experience with the decentralized style of leadership that had prevailed under the Democrats, and the predisposition of many new and senior members to support the centralization of power under Gingrich, who had orchestrated the GOP takeover. Finally, GOP legislators recognized that part of the reason for their ascendance on Capitol Hill was the public's frustration with government gridlock and understood that a failure to achieve any significant legislative accomplishments could cost them their party its slim majority. These alternative explanations do not undermine the argument that Republican party organizational efforts contributed to the heightened programmatic behavior exhibited by House Republicans, but they suggest that party organizational activity was not the only important factor.

Conclusions

The quest for responsible party government has inspired numerous scholars to recommend ways to reform the U.S. political system. The authors of the APSA Report focused a substantial portion of their recommendations on party organizations. They believed that more

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centralized, participatory, representative, and effective party organizations could enhance the possibility for responsible party government. At the center of these organizations, they envisioned an active, issue-oriented membership, a clear party program for government, and candidates who felt bound to that program, all disciplined by formal party leaders at the head of powerful institutions.

We have shown that over the course of the Twentieth Century party organizations moved in many, but not all, of the directions advocated by the Report. This process was slow, incremental, and more incidental than planned. The major contribution of the early Twentieth Century was the direct primary, which allowed greater participation in party organizations by the citizenry and undermined the power of traditional party organizations. These features contributed to the rise of candidate-centered politics during the middle of the century, increasing concern with policy and making party organizations peripheral to the campaign process. All of these developments set the stage for the expansion of national party organizations in the late Twentieth Century, bringing greater coordination to party efforts and consistency to party politics. Of course, some recommendations have not been achieved, such as the development of dues-paying, issue-oriented mass memberships. In some other respects the parties have moved away from the Report's recommendations, including those concerning the national conventions.

Some of these organizational developments undoubtedly contributed to the emergence of party government on occasions, but others limited the scope and duration of what party leaders could accomplish. Party officials in government also became increasingly partisan and

programmatic in their behavior, although instances where the governmental process approached the responsible party model were episodic and short-lived. Transitory factors, such as economic and social conditions and partisan control of Congress and the executive branch, which occasionally encouraged the parties to act in a unified manner, had the opposite effects at other times. Enduring factors, including the checks and balances embodied in the Constitution, Americans' traditional ambivalence toward parties, and their reluctance to become actively involved in politics, served as major obstacles to party government.

Thus, a century of party developments may have laid the foundations for responsible party government, but much remains to be built. Barring major constitutional reform and the rise of a more ideological and politically active citizenry, it is unlikely that the U.S. will develop a political system characterized by programmatic parties. Given the improbability of these developments, the quest for a responsible two-party system is destined to continue well into the twenty-first century and beyond.

Notes

1. For other tabulations of the Report's recommendations, see Pomper (1971); Herrnson (1992), and Baer and Bositis (1993).

2. This figure includes national party soft money expenditures only. State parties are not required to disclose their soft money transactions to the Federal Election Commission.

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Table 1. Characteristics of Responsible Party Organizations
==

National Party Organizations

National Conventions

-The national party conventions:

 Are held biennially

 Debate and pass the party platform and pass on other party business

 Oversee the seating of national convention delegates

 Help select national committee members

 Help select party council members

 National party convention delegates:

 Are substantially elected by party membership via primaries;

  others are appointed by party organizations

 Are apportioned to reflect the party strength in the states

 Are few enough in number to allow for genuine deliberation (roughly 600 delegates)

National Party Council

-Create a national party council which:

 Centralizes national party leadership in a small group (50 people) of party leaders

  representing all major elements of the party

 Meets quarterly and governs the party between conventions

 Appoints national convention delegates who are not officers in other party

  organizations

 Coordinates and integrates the activities of state/local party organizations,

  interest group allies, and the party elected officials

 Holds public hearings on the platform and proposes a draft party platform

  prior to the national convention

 Interprets the party platform and enforces state and local party compliance with it

 Screens potential presidential and congressional candidates

National Committees

-The national committee:

 Maintains a permanent national party headquarters in Washington D.C.

 Supervises a large, permanent, and professional staff to conduct party operations

 Raises adequate funds from numerous sources to finance party operations

-National committee members are apportioned to reflect party strength in the states

-The federal government provides financial subsidies to national party organizations

-The federal government collects and distributes election statistics to national party

 organizations for use in campaigns; the government also publishes information

 on party activities and party regulations for use by party organizations

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State and Local Party Organizations, Membership

-*State and Local Party Organizations*:

        Hold frequent participatory issue-oriented meetings

        Hold regular, regional party conferences

        Develop state/local platforms that conform with national platform on national issues

        Integrate allied interest groups into party activities in an appropriate fashion

        Maintain professional campaign machinery

-*Party Members*:

        National parties maintain a mass membership that is dues-paying, issue-oriented
            and actively engaged in party affairs

Party Activities

-*Party Platforms*:

        National party platforms are issued biennially by national conventions

        National party platforms focus on general party principles and policy proposals

        Elected officials, especially members of Congress, are involved in platform writing

-*Nominations:*

        Direct primaries play a central role in nominations:

                -national convention delegates chosen to nominate presidential
                    candidates in convention

                -congressional candidates chosen directly

        Primaries are closed; blanket and fusion ballots prohibited

        Party organizations issue pre-primary endorsements of candidates

-*General Election Campaign Activities*:

        National party organizations play a significant role in the collection and
            distribution of campaign funds

        National parties play a significant role in campaigns, including
            congressional campaigns

        There are no unreasonable restrictions of contributions or expenditures

        Campaigns are waged primarily on the basis of the party's platform, rather than
            candidates' personalities or promises of patronage

        Party organizations compete in all states and localities throughout the country

        Party organization encourage citizens to participate in politics at all levels

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Source: Committee on Political Parties, American Political Science Association, "Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System," *American Political Science Review,* supp. 44 (1950).

Table 2. Party Organizations and the Responsible Party Model, 1900-1932
===

National Party Organizations

National Conventions — Democrats / Republicans

	Democrats	Republicans
-The national party conventions:		
Held biennially	N	N
Pass platform, other party business	E	E
Seat delegates	E	E
Help select national committee	N	N
Help select party council	T	T
-National party convention delegates:		
Elected via primaries, others appointed	M	M
Apportioned by party strength	N	M
Few enough for deliberation	O	O

National Party Council

	Democrats	Republicans
-Create a national party council:	S	S
Small number of representative leaders	S	T
Meets quarterly, governs between conventions	N	N
Appoints national convention delegates	N	N
Coordinates and integrates the party activities	N	N
Develops and proposes platform	S	T
Interprets/enforces party platform	S	T
Screens presidential and congressional candidates	N	N

National Committees

	Democrats	Republicans
-The national committee:		
Maintains national headquarters	M	M
Supervises professional staff	M	M
Raises adequate funds	N	N
-National committee apportioned by party strength	N	N
-The federal government provides financial subsidies	S	S
-The federal government collects and distributes information	N	N

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State and Local Party Organization, Membership

State and Local Party Organizations:	*Democrats*	*Republicans*
Hold frequent participatory issue-oriented meetings	N	N
Hold regular, regional party conferences	N	N
Develop state/local platforms	O	O
Integrate allied interest groups	N	N
Maintain professional campaign machinery	O	O

-Party Members:

	Democrats	*Republicans*
Dues-paying, issue-oriented and active membership	M	M

Party Activities

-Party Platforms:

	Democrats	*Republicans*
National party platforms are issued biennially	N	N
Focus on general party principles and policies	T	T
Elected officials participate in platform writing	N	N

-Nominations:

	Democrats	*Republicans*
Primaries central to presidential nominations	M	M
Primaries central to congressional nominations	A	A
Primaries are closed; blanket and fusion ballots prohibited	M	M
Party organizations issue pre-primary endorsements	T	T

-General Election Campaign Activities:

	Democrats	*Republicans*
National parties provide significant campaign funds	E	E
National parties play a significant role in campaigns	E	E
No unreasonable restrictions on funds	E	E
Campaigns are waged on the basis of platform	T	T
Parties compete throughout the country	O	O
Parties encourage citizen participation	O	O

==

Source: See Table 1

Legend:

A = achieved   N = no significant change
E = already in effect   P = performed elsewhere
M = movement toward   O = movement away
S = suggested and discussed   T = achieved temporary, revoked

Table 3. Party Organizations and the Responsible Party Model, 1933-1972

===

National Party Organizations

National Conventions	Democrats	Republicans
-The national party conventions:		
Held biennially	N	N
Pass platform, other party business	E	E
Seat delegates	E	E
Help select national committee	N	N
Help select party council	T	T
-National party convention delegates:		
Elected via primaries, others appointed	M	M
Apportioned by party strength	N	N
Few enough for deliberation	O	O

National Party Council	Democrats	Republicans
-Create a national party council:	T	T
Small number of representative leaders	T	T
Meets quarterly, governs between conventions	N	N
Appoints national convention delegates	N	N
Coordinates and integrates the party activities	N	N
Develops and proposes platform	T	T
Interprets/enforces party platform	N	N
Screens presidential and congressional candidates	N	N

National Committees	Democrats	Republicans
-The national committee:		
Maintains national headquarters	E	E
Supervises professional staff	A	A
Raises adequate funds	O	O
-National committee apportioned by party strength	N	N
-The federal government provides financial subsidies	S	S
-The federal government collects and distributes information	N	N

State and Local Party Organization, Membership

State and Local Party Organizations:	Democrats	Republicans
Hold frequent participatory issue-oriented meetings	N	N
Hold regular, regional party conferences	N	T
Develop state/local platforms	N	N
Integrate allied interest groups	O	O
Maintain professional campaign machinery	O	O

Party Members:	Democrats	Republicans
Dues-paying, issue-oriented, and active membership	M	M

Party Activities

Party Platforms:	Democrats	Republicans
National party platforms are issued biennially	N	N
Focus on general party principles and policies	M	M
Elected officials participate in platform writing	O	O

Nominations:	Democrats	Republicans
Primaries central to presidential nominations	M	M
Primaries central to congressional nominations	E	E
Primaries are closed; blanket and fusion ballots prohibited	O	O
Party organizations issue pre-primary endorsements	T	T

General Election Campaign Activities:	Democrats	Republicans
National parties provide significant campaign funds	O	O
National parties play a significant role in campaigns	O	O
No unreasonable restrictions on funds	O	O
Campaigns are waged on the basis of platform	T	T
Parties compete throughout the country	M	M
Parties encourage citizen participation	M	M

==

Source: See Table 1

Legend:

A = achieved N = no significant change
E = already in effect P = performed elsewhere
M = movement toward O = movement away
S = suggested and discussed T = achieved temporary, revoked

Table 4. Party Organizations and the Responsible Party Model, 1973-2000
==

National Party Organizations

National Conventions	Democrats	Republicans
-The national party conventions:		
Held biennially	T	N
Pass platform, other party business	E	E
Seat delegates	E	E
Help select national committee	M	M
Help select party council	N	N
-National party convention delegates:		
Elected via primaries, others appointed	A	A
Apportioned by party strength	M	M
Few enough for deliberation	O	O

National Party Council	Democrats	Republicans
-Create a national party council:	N	N
Small number of representative leaders	N	N
Meets quarterly, governs between conventions	N	N
Appoints national convention delegates	N	N
Coordinates and integrates the party activities	P	P
Develops and proposes platform	P	P
Interprets/enforces party platform	N	N
Screens presidential and congressional candidates	N	N

National Committees	Democrats	Republicans
-The national committee:		
Maintains national headquarters	E	E
Supervises professional staff	E	E
Raises adequate funds	A	A
-National committee apportioned by party strength	A	A
-The federal government provides financial subsidies	M	M
-The federal government collects and distributes information	N	N

State and Local Party Organization, Membership

-*State and Local Party Organizations*:	Democrats	Republicans
Hold frequent participatory issue-oriented meetings	M	M
Hold regular, regional party conferences	N	N
Develop state/local platforms	M	M
Integrate allied interest groups	M	M
Maintain professional campaign machinery	M	M

-*Party Members*:	Democrats	Republicans
Dues-paying, issue-oriented, and active membership	M	M

Party Activities

-*Party Platforms*:	Democrats	Republicans
National party platforms are issued biennially	T	N
Focus on general party principles and policies	M	M
Elected officials participate in platform writing	M	M

-*Nominations*:	Democrats	Republicans
Primaries central to presidential nominations	A	A
Primaries central to congressional nominations	E	E
Primaries are closed; blanket and fusion ballots prohibited	O	O
Party organizations issue pre-primary endorsements	N	T

-*General Election Campaign Activities:*	Democrats	Republicans
National parties provide significant campaign funds	M	M
National parties play a significant role in campaigns	M	M
No unreasonable restrictions on funds	M	M
Campaigns are waged on the basis of platform	M	M
Parties compete throughout the country	M	M
Parties encourage citizen participation	O	O

===

Source: See Table 1

Legend:

A = achieved	N = no significant change
E = already in effect	P = performed elsewhere
M = movement toward	O = movement away
S = suggested and discussed	T = achieved temporary, revoked