Ideological Integration in the Democratic and Republican Parties, 1956-1992

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In recent years scholars have observed a process of organizational nationalization in both the Democratic and Republican parties. This study updates data from two earlier studies which attempted to determine if organizational nationalization of the parties was associated with ideological nationalization of party platforms. State and national party platforms between 1956 and 1992 are content analyzed to determine the extent of ideological integration. Similar to the two earlier studies of ideological integration, the data show only a modest movement toward intra-party integration, and little evidence of the development of a highly ideological and nationalized party system.

American political parties often are described as being decentralized in structure. State and local organizations attempt to win political office by fashioning policy alternatives that appeal to "the local conditions of the political market" (Pomper 1992, 90). In recent years, however, scholars have observed a process of nationalization and integration in both the Democratic and Republican parties, as the national organizations have exerted greater influence over their state and local parties, and the component parts of the party organizations have exhibited a greater tendency toward sharing resources and responsibilities (Bibby 1979; Kayden 1980; Epstein 1982; Conway 1983; Shafer 1983; Pomper 1984; Wekkin 1984, 1985; Kayden and Mahe 1985; Frantzich 1986; Herrnson 1988; Gibson et al. 1989; Herrnson and Menefee-Libey 1990; Schwartz 1990; Beck et al. 1993; Clark and Trish 1993). The increasingly bureaucratized national parties have established national standards in the selection of national convention delegates, and have brokered services and money to state and local parties and candidates. "The national parties," writes Pomper, "have become extensive bureaucracies in their own right and are more impressive than the state organizations" (Pomper 1992, 25).

Conceptually, it is important to distinguish between party nationalization and integration. Party nationalization refers to a growing tendency for power to flow downward from the national party to the state and local parties. This clearly differs from the upward flow of power in the traditionally decentralized American party system. Party integration, however,

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"describes the interdependence of different units" (the national, state, and local parties) within the broader party organizations, the degree to which the component parts of the parties interact on a regular basis (Clark and Trish 1993, 13; Beck et al. 1993, 8). Party integration, therefore, is not necessarily in conflict with a decentralized party system: the component parts of a party organization may work toward common goals, yet maintain their own unique characteristics. Greater integration, however, probably increases the chances of a genuinely nationalized party system, in which the state and local organizations cooperate and work with the national organization.

The nationalization and integration of American parties has important theoretical implications for American democracy. Many scholars have contended that contemporary party activists (particularly national convention delegates) are more programmatic and ideologically motivated than their more pragmatic counterparts a generation ago (Wilson 1962; Wildavsky 1965; Soule and Clarke 1970; Kirkpatrick 1976; Ladd and Hadley 1978; Costain 1980; Miller and Jennings 1986). This, coupled with growing organizational nationalization, has prompted some scholars to suggest that the American party system is "moving toward the model of tightly structured programmatic parties common in other western democracies" (Reichley 1985, 176; Lunch 1987). This is a significant contrast to the traditionally non-ideological and decentralized American party system.

It is nonetheless unclear whether the well-documented organizational nationalization has contributed to an ideological nationalization of the parties. Measuring the degree of ideological nationalization presents problems for the researcher. There are few measures of the ideological orientations of the component parts of the national parties—the state parties—over an extended period. No longitudinal analysis of the attitudes of state party activists has been done. We know very little about the ideological orientations of the state parties during the recent period of organizational nationalization.

However, a researcher can employ historical documents to measure the ideological orientations of state parties at a particular time. One of the few historical records of a state party's ideological orientations is the party platform: "the principal official statement of party principles and policies" (Porter and Johnson 1970, vi). Party platforms, Ginsberg writes, represent "an amalgamation and distillation of the principles, appeals, and concerns of the party as a whole, or at least its dominant factions" (Ginsberg 1972, 607). A recent study that employed content analysis of Democratic state and national party platforms between 1956 and 1980 showed only a modest movement toward intra-party ideological integration during the period (Paddock 1990). A similar study of Republican organizations found no

evidence of intra-party ideological integration (Paddock 1991). Since the organizational nationalization of the 1960s and 1970s continued, and perhaps accelerated during the 1980s, an update of these studies of party platforms seems warranted. Did the modest Democratic ideological integration continue and/or accelerate in the 1980s and early 1990s? Was there any evidence of ideological integration in the Republican party after 1980? Or did both parties continue to exhibit a fundamentally decentralized approach to the articulation of policy alternatives? This paper will address these questions through a content analysis of national and state Democratic and Republican platforms between 1956 and 1992.

Content Analyzing Party Platforms

Because of the traditionally transient nature of many state party organizations, complete sets of party platforms over an extended time are rare. State party archives, while potentially promising sources for recent state organizational data, are generally lacking in their holdings of historical party documents (Appleton and Ward 1993, 23). State party organizations, state libraries and archives, and state historical societies were contacted several times over the period 1985-1992. While platforms were available from a large number of states from the 1980s to the present, few states had records of such documents from a more extended historical period. Nearly complete sets of party platforms were obtained from eleven state parties and the national party for presidential election years between 1956 and 1992. The platforms were content analyzed on the basis of the categories used by Ginsberg in his studies of national platforms (Ginsberg 1972, 1976).[1] The Social Issues category was added to Ginsberg's categories because of its relevance to the period. Each paragraph was scored on the basis of a five point scale measuring ideological direction.[2] The following summarizes the seven categories and the five point scale for each category (a score of 3 on each category indicates a vague or neutral statement).

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

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

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

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

1 and 2 indicate opposition to policies redistributing advantages; 4 and indicate advocacy of policies redistributing advantages.

Internal Sovereignty: the exercise of the power and increase of the role of the national government vis-a-vis the states and localities.

1 and 2 indicate opposition to federal intervention in state and local affairs (States' rights orientation); 4 and 5 indicate support for a larger role for the national government vis-a-vis the states and localities.

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

1 and 2 indicate negative, pro-management orientation toward labor issues; 4 and 5 indicate positive, pro-union orientation toward labor issues.

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

1 and 2 indicate opposition to policies requiring private or public agencies to promote equal rights for minorities and women; 4 and 5 indicate support for policies promoting equality for minorities and women.

Social Issues: the use of the coercive power of the state to regulate private behavior based upon traditional moral standards.

1 and 2 indicate support for policies preserving traditional values and standards of behavior; 4 and 5 indicate the promotion of free expression and social experimentation, and opposition to the use of the state's power to limit non-economic freedoms.

Foreign/Defense: actions concerning relations with foreign objects and national security policy.

1 and 2 indicate advocacy of the use of military force or the threat of military force to achieve American interests in the world; 4 and 5 indicate opposition to the use of military force to achieve American interests in the world.

Findings

To measure the extent of ideological nationalization, standard deviations were calculated to determine the extent of intra-party differences, the average amount of variation around the mean of the national and state parties for each year in the study. If ideological nationalization occurred, one would expect lower standard deviation values (greater intra-party integration) as one moves through the period. Table 1 presents the standard deviation values for each issue and year based on the mean Democratic ideology scores. Table 2 summarizes the combined mean ideology scores for

Table 1. Standard Deviations by Issue and Year: State and National Democratic Parties, 1956-1992

	Overall	1956	1960	1964	1968	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992
CAP.	.24	.35	.23	.21	.22	.24	.20	.25	.22	.16	.27
RED.	.27	.32	.25	.29	.31	.34	.24	.19	.27	.20	.26
I.S.	.45	.74	.66	.31	.48	.37	.33	.23	.32	.26	.38
LAB.	.42	.50	.60	.52	.41	.27	.25	.33	.42	.36	.33
UNI.	.48	.85	.88	.33	.27	.29	.17	.15	.25	.29	.42
S.I.	.54	—	—	—	.50	.80	.72	.42	.41	.34	.45
F.D.	.52	.53	—	—	.40	.73	.50	.64	.42	.27	.46
Overall	.41	.58	.57	.35	.38	.45	.35	.29	.33	.27	.37

Note: In 1960 and 1964, only the national party mentioned foreign/defense issues. The Social Issue was not addressed by any of the parties in 1956, 1960, and 1964.

Table 2. Combined Mean Ideology Scores: State and National Democratic Parties, 1956-1992

	Overall	1956	1960	1964	1968	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992
CAP.	3.34	3.24	3.16	3.31	3.44	3.39	3.27	3.26	3.29	3.43	3.49
RED.	3.56	3.54	3.49	3.62	3.59	3.65	3.42	3.42	3.51	3.63	3.70
I.S.	3.63	3.42	3.54	3.90	3.70	3.77	3.65	3.62	3.39	3.53	3.63
LAB.	3.67	3.81	3.53	3.66	3.72	3.73	3.74	3.67	3.38	3.66	3.67
UNI.	3.74	3.45	3.63	3.87	3.74	3.81	3.77	3.81	3.70	3.70	3.78
S.I.	3.29	—	—	—	3.11	3.66	3.39	3.58	3.21	3.24	3.24
F.D.	3.24	2.87	2.83	2.65	3.11	3.78	3.30	3.05	3.54	3.72	3.43
Overall	3.45	3.39	3.30	3.45	3.49	3.60	3.42	3.37	3.40	3.51	3.54

the national and eleven state Democratic parties for each category and year. An empty cell in Table 1 indicates that three parties or fewer mentioned the issue in a particular year. An empty cell in Table 2 indicates that an issue accounted for less than 1 per cent of the state platforms in a particular year.

The figures in Table 1 indicate that the lower standard deviation values after 1956 and 1960 noted by Paddock (1990) continued between 1984 and 1992. With the exception of 1972, the standard deviation values do not vary a great deal from 1964 to 1992. One might speculate that the slightly higher intra-party differences in 1972 resulted from the battle between liberal insurgents associated with George McGovern's presidential candidacy and more pragmatic party "regulars" (Ladd and Hadley 1978). As noted in a previous article on intra-party ideological integration, the most plausible explanation for the decline in standard deviation values after 1960 is the waning of the states' rights-civil rights division in the party (Paddock 1990). In the 1960s, as viable Republican organizations began to develop in the South and as southern blacks became enfranchised, Democratic organizations began to court blacks and liberal whites. As such, these organizations (in this study, North Carolina and Texas) increasingly moved toward the national Democratic "mainstream" on civil rights issues (Lamis 1984). It is interesting to note, however, that while intra-party differences on universalism waned to a low point in 1976 and 1980, they began to rise in the period 1984-1992. This, however, is more likely a reflection of varying emphases on issues such as affirmitive action rather than a re-emergence of the pre-1964 civil rights schism.

The most striking feature of Tables 1 and 2 is the relative consistency of the data from year to year. With the notable exception of universalism and internal sovereignty in 1956 and 1960, the relative divisiveness of each issue remained fairly stable. Similarly, the "ideological center of gravity" within the eleven state parties and the national party remained fairly stable. The parties were slightly more liberal in 1972 (the possible result of the liberal activism associated with the McGovern insurgency). In addition, the parties clearly became more liberal on foreign policy issues after 1964 (the likely result of the Vietnam War's role in breaking down the Cold War consensus of the 1950s and early 1960s). However, in all ten years the overall ideological score fell within the rather narrow range of .30 (3.30 in 1960 to 3.60 in 1972).

Table 3 presents the Republican standard deviation values for each issue and year based on the mean ideology scores. Table 4 summarizes the combined mean ideology scores for the national and eleven state Republican parties for each category and year. The figures in Table 3 suggest a slight movement toward ideological integration after 1980. The overall standard

Table 3. Standard Deviations by Issue and Year: State and National Republican Parties, 1956-1992

	Overall	1956	1960	1964	1968	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992
CAP.	.28	.28	.21	.29	.20	.18	.34	.33	.29	.24	.33
RED.	.26	.14	.21	.35	.27	.14	.23	.30	.39	.22	.24
I.S.	.56	.70	.71	.74	.46	.66	.61	.37	.40	.27	.40
LAB.	.47	.43	.25	.55	.25	.62	.69	.40	.45	.49	.47
UNI.	.39	.34	.44	.37	.40	.36	.53	.42	.37	.15	.35
S.I.	.43	—	—	.36	.26	.51	.38	.68	.44	.24	.41
F.D.	.51	.38	.62	.68	—	—	.41	.49	.34	.30	.40
Overall	.41	.39	.43	.49	.32	.42	.48	.43	.39	.28	.37

Table 4. Combined Mean Ideology Scores: State and National Republican Parties, 1956-1992

	Overall	1956	1960	1964	1968	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992
CAP.	2.67	2.73	2.83	2.75	2.96	2.99	2.66	2.42	2.62	2.66	2.50
RED.	2.95	3.05	3.03	2.99	3.08	3.05	2.88	2.70	2.95	3.00	2.88
I.S.	2.59	3.04	3.00	2.25	2.82	3.11	2.17	2.07	2.47	2.67	2.80
LAB.	2.83	3.09	3.11	2.90	2.77	3.10	2.50	2.32	2.45	2.36	2.50
UNI.	3.24	3.44	3.60	3.17	3.08	3.50	3.27	3.17	2.97	3.21	2.91
S.I.	2.27	—	—	2.14	2.73	2.43	2.14	2.12	2.23	2.28	2.22
F.D.	2.53	2.71	2.60	2.36	2.71	2.92	2.65	2.20	2.35	2.43	2.69
Overall	2.71	2.92	2.96	2.68	2.93	3.03	2.68	2.44	2.61	2.66	2.54

deviation values of .39 (1984), .28 (1988), and .37 (1992) are all less than the overall value for the period (.41). The year 1988 stands out as a time when the parties were clearly more unified; with the exception of labor issues, standard deviation values dropped significantly in all policy areas. Issues that were particularly divisive early in the period—internal sovereignty and foreign/defense—were significantly less divisive after 1980.

A possible explanation for the slight movement toward Republican ideological integration can be found in the data from Table 4. In the aggregate, at least, the party clearly swung to the right after 1972. Before 1972 (with the exception of the Goldwater insurgency year of 1964), the party was clearly dominated by the moderate wing. The overall ideology scores varied only a small amount from the neutral 3.0 position on the ideological scale. Intra-party differences arose between the moderate (at that time

"mainstream") organizations, such as Rhode Island, West Virginia, Connecticut, and Kansas, and the much more conservative state parties, notably North Carolina and Texas (Paddock 1991). In 1976, however, the parties (at least in the aggregate) became significantly more conservative, and remained that way through 1992. One might speculate that the moderate wing became less of a factor in internal party affairs, which reduced the intra-party ideological differences. Between 1984 and 1992 the Republicans showed greater unity—and slightly greater conservatism—on the two most divisive issues of the 1956-1992 period: internal sovereignty and foreign and defense issues.

Summary

The data suggest that both parties experienced a modest movement toward intra-party ideological integration during the 1956-1992 period. The Democrats moved toward greater ideological integration relatively early in the period (1964). This seemed to be largely the result of the southern parties adopting a more "mainstream" position on civil rights issues (rather than being related to national party attempts to nationalize the delegate selection process). The Republicans experienced a very modest movement toward ideological integration after 1980, possibly the result of the weakening of the moderate wing of the party, or possibly the result of greater organizational nationalization.

The data in this analysis are not surprising. They reflect two parties with ideological centers of gravity slightly to the left and right of center, with some movement toward greater inter-party ideological differences (particularly the result of growing Republican conservatism). They also reflect an essentially decentralized party system with clear, if not major, intra-party ideological differences. While these intra-party differences might be slightly waning, there is little evidence from either party to suggest a significant trend toward ideological nationalization.

NOTES

[1]Platforms were obtained from Connecticut, Illinois, Kansas, Maine, New Jersey, North Carolina, North Dakota, Rhode Island, Texas, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. These states clearly do not capture fully the variety of party organizations, political subcultures, and electoral systems in the United States, but they do reflect considerable diversity. However, because of the lack of a complete universe of state platforms, the findings of this study must be treated with caution. Presidential election years were chosen because they represent a consistent four-year interval for the purpose of longitudinal comparison. In the states (e.g., New Jersey) in which party platforms were drafted in

non-presidential election years, the platform from the year closest to the presidential election year was used (that is to say, the 1965 New Jersey platforms were used for 1964).

[2]The five point scale measures both ideological direction and the degree of policy specificity. For a complete explanation of the scale, see Paddock (1990).

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