The Transformation of Political Institutions: Investments in Institutional Resources and Gradual Change in the National Party Committees

Daniel J. Galvin, *Northwestern University*

Institutional theorists have made major progress in recent years examining gradual processes of endogenous institutional change. Building on this line of theorizing, this article highlights an often overlooked source of incremental change in political institutions: investments in institutional resources. Unlike path-dependent processes, which are relatively open at the front end and relatively closed at the back end, resource investments made in one period serve to widen an institution's path and enhance its capacity to undertake a broader range of activities in subsequent periods. Drawn out over time, these investments can gradually transform institutional operations and purposes. To illustrate these dynamics, this article reconsiders the transformation of the national party committees into "parties in service" to their candidates. The most influential theoretical explanation for this change is supplied by actor-centered functionalist accounts that either ignore the parties' institutional forms or treat them as mere reflections of actors' preferences. As an alternative, I suggest that investments in two types of institutional resources—human resources and information assets—were integral to the process through which each party changed. Piecemeal investments in these resources gradually enabled each national party committee to provide a wider range of campaign services to its candidates, thereby producing ostensibly new "functions" over time. Though the process of institutional change unfolded at very different times in each party, the same dynamics were on display in both cases.

The transformation of political institutions has long been identified as both a *driver* and a *marker* of major political change. This may be why political scientists are so preoccupied with understanding processes of institutional change: to uncover the mechanisms through which political institutions are directed to new purposes is to gain insight into the underlying dynamics of change in the polity.[1] To that end, scholars have made significant progress in recent years examining different types and motors of institutional

change. Questioning the distinction between stability and change, they have shifted emphasis away from transformative *moments* and toward transformative *processes.*[2] Though some important institutional changes are still acknowledged to occur at critical

1. Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek, *The Search for American Political Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 78–119.

2. Elisabeth S. Clemens and James M. Cook, "Politics and Institutionalism: Explaining Durability and Change," *Annual Review of Sociology* 25 (1999): 441–66; Kathleen Thelen, "Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Politics," *Annual Review of Political Science* 2 (1999): 369–404; James Mahoney, "Path Dependence in Historical Sociology," *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 507–48; Adam D. Sheingate, "Political Entrepreneurship, Institutional Change, and American Political Development," *Studies in American Political Development* 17 (2003): 185–203; Jacob S. Hacker, "Privatizing Risk without Privatizing the Welfare State: The Hidden Politics of Social Policy Retrenchment in the United States," *American Political Science Review* 98 (2004): 243–60; Orren and Skowronek, *The Search for American Political Development*; Paul Pierson, *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Wolfgang Streeck and Kathleen Thelen, *Beyond Continuity: Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Stephen Skowronek and Matthew Glassman, *Formative Acts: American Politics in the Making* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen, eds. *Explaining Institutional*

breakpoints and appear in equilibria-disequilibria-equilibria cycles, this new wave of scholarship has demonstrated that gradual processes of change are in fact quite common, and can be extraordinarily significant.

It is noteworthy, however, that most theoretical advances start from the premise that institutions are, fundamentally, rules or constraints on actors' behavior. While they appear in many different forms, institutions are typically described as "instruments of stability" that "limit, constitute, or constrain the range of alternatives actors confront," Adam Sheingate writes; Peter Hall, likewise, describes institutions as "sets of regularized practices with a rule-like quality" that "structure the behavior of political and economic actors."[3] This familiar conceptualization is sufficiently broad to encompass what most people think of as "institutions" but specific enough to enable scholars to pinpoint sources of endogenous change within those rules and constraints themselves.[4] It is also consistent enough with rational choice assumptions about what institutions do (help actors solve problems, constrain choice sets, facilitate collective action, enable equilibrium outcomes) to bridge work in that tradition with research in the historical and sociological-institutional traditions.[5]

Treating institutions as more or less interchangeable with rules or constraints thus has many advantages, but it also has the unfortunate effect of blurring important distinctions between different types of institutions. Through its very conceptual breadth and inclusiveness, it obscures the rich variety of mechanisms of endogenous change that can be found among institutions of different kinds. Consider some of the most prominent and recognizable *political* institutions, such as the U.S. Congress, bureaucratic agencies, or political parties: like rules, they produce stability, constrain behavior, and enforce the "rules of the game"—but they do much else, too. They also mobilize people, enter into political dialogues, compete for power, participate in decision-making processes, and attempt to influence political outcomes. They strategically seek to reshape the broader political environment in which they operate.[6] In order to carry out these myriad activities, such proactive political institutions rely on oftentimes complex internal operating systems.[7] Changes to those internal attributes, I wish to suggest, may generate broader change in institutional operations and purposes.

Specifically, many political institutions contain within them complexes of rules, roles, routines, and resources that support and enable their political activities. Rules, roles, and routines have each received a fair share of attention in this regard, but the fourth "r"—*resources*—has received virtually none.[8] This is unfortunate, I will argue, because

Change: Ambiguity, Agency, and Power in Historical Institutionalism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

3. Sheingate, "Political Entrepreneurship, Institutional Change, and American Political Development," 185; Peter A. Hall, "Historical Institutionalism in Rationalist and Sociological Perspective," in *Explaining Institutional Change: Ambiguity, Agency, and Power in Historical Institutionalism*, eds. James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 204.

4. Streeck and Thelen, *Beyond Continuity*; Mahoney and Thelen, *Explaining Institutional Change*.

5. Formal theorist Kenneth Shepsle, for example, defines institutions as "a framework or rules, procedures, and arrangements" that "prescribes and constrains the set of choosing agents." Kenneth A. Shepsle, "Institutional Equilibrium and Equilibrium Institutions," in *Political Science: The Science of Politics*, ed. Herbert F. Weisberg (New York: Agathon, 1986), 52. William Riker likewise defines institutions as "conventions . . . which are simply rules about behavior, especially about making decisions." William H. Riker, "Implications from the Disequilibrium of Majority-Rule for the Study of Institutions," *American Political Science Review* 74 (1980): 432–46. Economist Douglass C. North similarly writes that institutions are "the rules of the game in a society or, more formally, are the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction." Douglass C. North, *Institutions, Institutional Change, and Economic Performance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 3. Also see Barry Weingast, "Rational Choice Institutionalism" in *Political Science, State of the Discipline: Reconsidering Power, Choice, and the State*, eds. Ira Katznelson and Helen V. Milner (New York: Norton, 2002).

Prominent efforts to bridge research traditions include Peter Hall and Rosemary Taylor, "Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms," *Political Studies* 44 (1996); Thelen, "Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Politics"; Avner Greif and David D. Laitin, "A Theory of Endogenous Institutional Change," *American Political Science Review* 98 (2004): 633–52; Pierson, *Politics in Time*; Ira Katznelson and Barry R. Weingast, *Preferences and Situations: Points of Intersection between Historical and Rational Choice Institutionalism*

(New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2005); Mahoney and Thelen, *Explaining Institutional Change*.

6. For a similar but broader definition of political institutions, see Orren and Skowronek, *The Search for American Political Development*, 83–85.

7. These political institutions therefore share certain characteristics with political organizations; but they are not, or not only, organizations. Because they help to enforce the "rules of the game," and because changes to their operations often have far-reaching "ripple effects" across the political system, they are more properly understood as political *institutions*. They act *in* politics, but their operations are also *constitutive of* politics. North's distinction between the "players" in the game and the "game" itself, in other words, is difficult to sustain in the analysis of such political institutions (North, *Institutions, Institutional Change, and Economic Performance*, 4–5). The perspective advanced here thus bears closer kinship with March and Olsen's view of political institutions as autonomous "political actors" that pursue their own purposes but also help to "define the framework within which politics takes place." James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, *Rediscovering Institutions* (New York: The Free Press, Macmillan, Inc., 1989), 17–18.

8. Consider, for example, prominent studies of rules within Congress, routines within bureaucracies, and roles within the judicial system: Eric Schickler, *Disjointed Pluralism: Institutional Innovation and the Development of the U.S. Congress* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Daniel P. Carpenter, *The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy: Reputations, Networks, and Policy Innovation in Executive Agencies, 1862–1928* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); James Eisenstein and Herbert Jacob, *Felony Justice: An Organizational Analysis of Criminal Courts* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991).

perhaps more than any other attribute, resources enable political institutions to translate purpose into action. Resources supply capacity: they are central to, and constitutive of, what political institutions do. They also grow and diminish over time, and have variable effects. As such, they are not only necessary for institutional action, but they are particularly amenable to empirical research. They are, in short, prime suspects in the search for mechanisms of endogenous institutional change.

The purpose of this article is to suggest that investments in institutional resources, by enhancing the capacity of political institutions to undertake a wider range of activities, can gradually transform their operations and purposes. Two types of institutional resources stand out as especially important in this regard: *human resources* and *information assets.* Human resources refer to the people who operate within an institution as well as their skills; information assets refer to any type of valuable data or intellectual resource controlled by an institution. As I discuss below, investments in each can open up new possibilities for institutional action, which, over time, can effectively alter an institution's "reasons for being."[9] Of course, investments in institutional resources do not always have transformative effects: institutional forms often change only gradually, and their impact on institutional activities is often subtle, incremental, and uneven. The task, therefore, is to clarify the process through which changes in institutional forms cumulatively amount to fundamental change in what institutions do and how they do it.

The effects of investments in these resources, it is worth noting, are quite different from the narrowing effects we observe in path-dependent processes, where investments in existing arrangements set in motion self-reinforcing processes that make it increasingly difficult to change course in subsequent periods.[10] Whereas path-dependent processes are depicted as relatively open at the "front end" and relatively closed at the "back end," this imagery is reversed in the process of institutional resource investments.[11] Specific, targeted investments in one period become multifunctional in the next. They bolster an institution's resilience by enhancing its capacity to adapt to changing conditions, but they also *widen* that institution's path by expanding its range and reach. Rather than "remove certain options from the menu of political possibilities," resource investments gradually *expand* the menu of

options facing institutional actors in the future.[12] They are mechanisms of reproduction, but also of open-ended conversion.[13]

One of the reasons that institutional designers (or in this case, resource investors) often fail to achieve their objectives or "lock in" a particular pattern of behavior is that subsequent actors can take those same resources, update them, augment them, and deploy them in pursuit of purposes that could not have been foreseen by those who established those resources in the first place. To borrow from William Sewell's theory of structure, such investments strengthen an institution's resources while doing little, if anything, to reconstruct or reinforce its "schemas" (its models, scripts, or guides for practical action). Creative actors can therefore gradually alter institutional purposes simply by deploying institutional resources in unanticipated ways.[14] In other words, resource investments are enormously politically consequential precisely because they do *not* generate "lock-in" effects.

To illustrate the importance of resource investments in the process of institutional change, this article examines the transformation of the Republican and Democratic national committees from authoritative political institutions into primarily campaign service vendors whose new purposes ultimately removed them from the center of national politics. This is a familiar story: we have known that the two national committees gradually became more bureaucratic and support-service oriented since at least Cotter and Bibby wrote in 1980; but we have long lacked an adequate theoretical explanation for these changes.[15] The most influential theoretical

9. Orren and Skowronek, *The Search for American Political Development*, 82.

10. Paul Pierson, "Increasing Returns, Path Dependence, and the Study of Politics," *American Political Science Review* 94 (2000): 251–67; Mahoney, "Path Dependence in Historical Sociology"; Pierson, *Politics in Time.*

11. Pierson, *Politics in Time*, 50; Thelen, "Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Politics," 385.

12. Pierson, *Politics in Time*, 12.

13. On institutional "conversion," see Kathleen Thelen, *How Institutions Evolve: The Political Economy of Skills in Germany, Britain, the United States, and Japan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

14. Sewell writes: "Agency . . . is the actor's capacity to reinterpret and mobilize an array of resources in terms of cultural schemas other than those that initially constituted the array." William H. Sewell, "A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation," *American Journal of Sociology* 98 (1992): 19; Clemens and Cook, "Politics and Institutionalism: Explaining Durability and Change," 445.

15. Cornelius Cotter and John F. Bibby, "Institutional Development of Parties and the Thesis of Party Decline," *Political Science Quarterly* 95 (1980): 1–27. Also see Paul S. Herrnson, *Party Campaigning in the 1980s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Stephen E. Frantzich, *Political Parties in the Technological Age* (New York: Longman, 1989); Ralph Morris Goldman, *The National Party Chairmen and Committees: Factionalism at the Top* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1990). On earlier changes in the national committees, see Cornelius P. Cotter and Bernard C. Hennessy, *Politics without Power: The National Party Committees* (New York: Atherton Press, 1964); Hugh A. Bone, *Party Committees and National Politics* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1958); Alexander Heard, *The Costs of Democracy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960).

framework treats it as a case of new institutional forms emerging as an equilibrium solution to new actor problems—as form following function.[16] The problem with that model, I will argue, is that it conflates the outcome ("parties in service" to their candidates) with the problem (candidates' need for services) while eliding the process (gradual investments in new institutional forms). It assumes that which needs to be explained. As an alternative, this article zeroes in on the process through which piecemeal investments in institutional resources helped to gradually transform the national committees' operations and purposes. The first section elaborates the argument that investments in institutional resources are likely to be important sources of gradual institutional change and discusses how this perspective differs from existing theoretical frameworks. After considering several brief illustrations of the phenomenon in various settings, ensuing sections take up the development of the Republican and Democratic national committees in greater detail. Implications and further considerations are addressed in conclusion.

RULES, ROLES, ROUTINES, AND RESOURCES

Mahoney and Thelen's recent contribution to institutional theorizing explicitly adopts a power-distributional view of institutions—typical if not ubiquitous in historical-institutional work—where relatively resilient rules are constructed to benefit certain actors over others. From this vantage point, they are able to identify how a "dynamic component is built in" to the very foundations of those institutions.[17] For example, institutions often represent contested settlements that, while relatively resilient, require the ongoing mobilization of political support to sustain them. The difficulties inherent in coalition management and the vulnerability of auxiliary supports are thus potential sources of institutional change: as the balance of power underlying extant institutional arrangements shifts, so too may institutional forms and functions. Further, rules are by their nature somewhat ambiguous, and, once established, can

move out of sync with developments on the ground; consequently, creative actors can develop novel interpretations and methods of implementation, application, or enforcement that effectively alter institutional operations and purposes. "Where we expect incremental change to emerge," the authors write, "is precisely in the 'gaps' or 'soft spots' between the rule and its interpretation or the rule and its enforcement."[18]

These insights constitute a major theoretical advance: they help to clarify the dynamics of institutional change in settings as diverse as Suharto's authoritarian regime in Southeast Asia, the decline of organized labor in the United States, the transformation of vocational training institutions in Germany, the formation of new drug regulations by the FDA, and the conversion of the Bank of the United States.[19] But conceptualizing institutions as, essentially, rules, unnecessarily limits the range of potential sources of endogenous institutional change. Indeed, Mahoney and Thelen emphasize that the point is not to privilege one definition over another, but to locate sources of endogenous change in the "change-permitting properties of institutions," whatever they may be.[20] Rules may represent the most-common property of institutions that binds together different types into a conceptual whole, but they do not exhaust the possibilities. Institutions also contain roles, routines, and resources, and each may be understood as a potential source of endogenous change.

18. Ibid., 14.

19. Dan Slater, "Altering Authoitarianism: Institutional Complexity and Autocratic Agency in Indonesia," in *Explaining Institutional Change: Ambiguity, Agency, and Power in Historical Institutionalism*, eds. James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Paul Frymer, *Black and Blue: African Americans, the Labor Movement, and the Decline of the Democratic Party* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Kathleen Thelen, "Institutions and Social Change: The Evolution of Vocational Training in Germany," in *Rethinking Political Institutions: The Art of the State*, eds. Ian Shapiro, Stephen Skowronek, and Daniel Galvin (New York: New York University Press, 2006); Daniel P. Carpenter and Colin D. Moore, "Robust Action and the Strategic Use of Ambiguity in a Bureaucratic Cohort: FDA Officers and the Evolution of New Drug Regulations, 1950-1970," in *Formative Acts: American Politics in the Making*, eds. Stephen Skowronek and Matthew Glassman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Daniel P. Carpenter, *Reputation and Power: Organizational Image and Pharmaceutical Regulation at the FDA* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Eric Lomazoff, "Turning (into) 'the Great Regulating Wheel': The Conversion of the Bank of the United States, 1791–1811," *Studies in American Political Development* (forthcoming).

20. Mahoney and Thelen, "A Theory of Gradual Institutional Change," 3. Eyes-open searches for mechanisms of endogenous change are also advocated in Thelen, "Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Politics"; Thelen, *How Institutions Evolve*; James Mahoney, *The Legacies of Liberalism: Path Dependence and Political Regimes in Central America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Pierson, *Politics in Time*; and Streeck and Thelen, *Beyond Continuity*.

16. John Aldrich, *Why Parties? The Origin and Transformation of Political Parties in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); see also Joseph A. Schlesinger, "The New American Political Party," *American Political Science Review* 79 (1985): 1152–69; Joseph A. Schlesinger, *Political Parties and the Winning of Office* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991); John H. Aldrich and Richard G. Niemi, "The Sixth American Party System: Electoral Change, 1952–1992," in *Broken Contract? Changing Relationships between Americans and Their Government*, ed. Stephen C. Craig (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, Inc., 1996).

17. James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen, "A Theory of Gradual Institutional Change," in *Explaining Institutional Change: Ambiguity, Agency, and Power in Historical Institutionalism*, eds. James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 8.

Institutional *roles*, like rules, are sources of both stability and change. Leadership designations, offices, mandated tasks, assigned responsibilities, and other types of roles set behavioral expectations, shape identities, and induce preferences. Though individuals enter with their own beliefs, values, interests, and goals, their behavior becomes more or less structured once they are assigned a formal role. Yet therein lies a potential source of friction, and thus a potential motor of institutional change. Induced preferences and structured behaviors may change as a result of the incongruous juxtaposition—or clash—of individual interests or identities, on one hand, and institutional mandates and formal roles on the other. Individual creativity and agency can abrade against official responsibilities and functions to produce effectively new roles, thereby inducing new preferences and behavioral expectations, which, in turn, can alter institutional operations over time.[21] As Ira Katznelson and Barry Weingast write, "institutions that result from historical causes themselves induce the formation of preferences, and . . . preferences then recursively enter into the larger dynamics of historical development and change."[22] Whether the engine of change involves self-activated entrepreneurs, leadership renovation and turnover, or simply individuals understanding their responsibilities in new ways amidst changing environmental conditions, the development of institutional roles can generate change in an institution's broader activities. Seen from an evolutionary standpoint, James March and Johan Olsen write: "Duties, obligations, and roles match a set of rules to a situation by criteria of appropriateness. The duties, obligations, roles, rules, and criteria *evolve* through experimentation, competition, and survival. Those followed by institutions that survive, grow, and multiply come to dominate the pool of procedures."[23] Through various mechanisms, then, the alteration of institutional roles can transform institutional operations and purposes.

Routines—understood as persistent patterns of behavior or stable modes of interaction—are, like rules and roles, typically viewed as sources of stability. But they too contain change-permitting properties. As Elisabeth Clemens and James Cook have discussed, the simultaneous operation of multiple routines can generate contradictions, competition, or uncertainty, which can present openings for actors to introduce innovations that result in institution-wide change.[24] Even small modifications of single routines can reverberate across an institutional setting, redirecting basic institutional trajectories. "Learning" can also alter the nature of routines and enhance an institution's adaptive capacities. Institutional routines thus contain the seeds of their own transformation, which can lead to major changes in institutional operations over time.[25]

Resources have received less attention than rules, roles, and routines. Perhaps this is because resources are less conceptually interchangeable with notions of what institutions are than the others: few would conflate resources with institutions, but many collapse the distinction between institutions and rules, roles, and routines. Resources play a more instrumental role—they supply institutions with the capacity for action. Yet even as a secondary property of institutions, they have enormous change-inducing potential for the institution as a whole.

Institutional Resources

Resources will be defined here as "a stock or supply of money, materials, staff, and other assets that can be drawn on by [an institution] in order to function effectively."[26] It is important to be clear, since most power-distributional definitions of institutions use the term "resources" to mean the things institutions allocate or distribute to recipients—valued benefits or goods—not the things institutions rely upon to function. And in some varieties of sociological institutionalism, the term is used interchangeably with structures (when paired with schemas), patterns of human behavior, rules, and even social networks.[27] Using this more conventional definition of resources—as roughly a synonym of "means" or "wherewithal"— means that certain types of institutions are not subject to the dynamics I will describe. Laws, public policies, cultural norms, and other types of institutions that are conceptually closer to rules or constraints do not, strictly speaking, have resources according to this definition.[28]

---

21. The imagery of abrasion borrows from Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek, "Beyond the Iconography of Order: Notes for a 'New Institutionalism'," in *The Dynamics of American Politics: Approaches and Interpretations*, eds. Lawrence C. Dodd and Calvin Jillson (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 321; Orren and Skowronek, *The Search for American Political Development*, 113–14.

22. Ira Katznelson and Barry R. Weingast, "Intersections between Historical and Rational Choice Institutionalism," in *Preferences and Situations: Points of Intersection between Historical and Rational Choice Institutionalism*, eds. Ira Katznelson and Barry R. Weingast (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2005), 15.

23. March and Olsen, *Rediscovering Institutions*, 59, italics added.

24. Clemens and Cook, "Politics and Institutionalism: Explaining Durability and Change," 449–50.

25. Ibid., 448–49; March and Olsen, *Rediscovering Institutions*; Sewell, "A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation." See also Pierson, *Politics in Time*.

26. This is the conventional definition drawn from the Oxford Dictionaries (Oxford University Press): http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/resource?q=resources.

27. Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Introduction of the Theory of Structuration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Sewell, "A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation"; Clemens and Cook, "Politics and Institutionalism: Explaining Durability and Change."

28. Public policies, for example, are sometimes considered political institutions because they promulgate rules that govern behavior. But they do not contain internal resources of the sort examined

But many political institutions *do* rely on their internal resources in order to carry out their activities. Money, for example, is a primary resource that is almost always necessary if a political institution is to do anything at all. But it is also instrumental: money does not, by itself, generate institutional capacity. Capacity, I will posit, is derived primarily from the investments actors make in two other kinds of institutional resources: *human resources* and *information assets*. Human resources—which include personnel, staff, and their knowledge and skills—can enhance an institution's adaptive capacities and enable it to solve new problems, tackle new challenges as they arise, and engage in myriad activities. Information assets—which include any type of proprietary information or intellectual resource that is deemed to be of value—can likewise reinforce or improve current operations while multiplying the range of political activities an institution can undertake in the future. Both types of resources are *multifunctional*, in that they have varied uses, and *generative*, meaning they can produce new institutional capacities. Thus, rather than "lock in" patterns of behavior as in path-dependent processes, these investments have open-ended, instrumental feedback effects. As actors inherit resources, add to them, alter them, and deploy them in pursuit of new purposes, they contribute to a gradual process of institutional transformation. This shift, it should be emphasized, need not be intentional or "by design"—more likely, it will be the unintended byproduct of political actors pursuing short- or medium-term goals under changing circumstances.[29]

The multiple and varied effects of investments in institutional resources can be observed across diverse settings. In Stephen Skowronek's seminal study of state building, for example, investments in the human resources of the War Department around the turn of the twentieth century are shown to have transformed the army into a politically significant institutional battleground.[30] In the Supreme Court, Artemus Ward and David Weiden find that the "institutionalization" of the law clerk—representing investments in both human resources and information assets—gradually expanded the Court's operational capacities, influenced the types of cases it heard, and even affected some of its substantive rulings.[31] And in Daniel Carpenter's detailed study of the Department of Agriculture, strategic investments in the department's information assets gave it a monopoly on policy information and established for it a central "political brokerage" role within its policy domain.[32] Or consider Jeffrey Lax and Justin Phillips's recent study, which reveals that investments in the professionalism of state legislatures (money, staff, analytic capacities) produced greater legislative responsiveness to public opinion at the state level.[33]

Investments in institutional resources have also transformed the U.S. Congress. Consider the centralization of power in the leadership offices of both chambers. Prominent scholarship has shown that as each party caucus became more ideologically homogeneous, it became more willing to delegate institutional authority to its leaders via new chamber or party rules. Repeated over time, this pattern contributed to the rise of partisan polarization over the last thirty years.[34] But as Matthew Glassman has recently demonstrated, this development was also motored by gradual investments in the leaders' human resources and information assets.[35] From 1982 to 2010, majority and minority leaders used their annually appropriated funds (which more than doubled in that span) to build large, well-oiled, professionalized, and expert staffs. The numbers alone are striking: while overall staff in the House and

---

here: they change through different mechanisms and processes. Likewise, Orren and Skowronek's definition of political institutions includes "extensions of governmental authority deep into society, into the institution of the family, for instance . . . and to workplaces," as well as "the institution of lobbying" (2004, 84). Such political institutions, likewise, fall outside the purview of this analysis. Which is as it should be: different types of political institutions should be expected to exhibit different mechanisms of endogenous institutional change. The task at hand is to identify which mechanisms are more or less prevalent among different subsets of institutions and examine their significance. On public policies as institutions, see Paul Pierson, "Public Policies as Institutions," in *Rethinking Political Institutions: The Art of the State*, eds. Ian Shapiro, Stephen Skowronek, and Daniel Galvin (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

29. For a similar theory of "political investment," see Steven M. Teles, "Transformative Bureaucracy: Reagan's Lawyers and the Dynamics of Political Investment," *Studies in American Political Development* 23 (2009): 61–83; Steven M. Teles, *The Rise of the Conservative Legal Movement: The Battle for Control of the Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

30. Stephen Skowronek, *Building a New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877–1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 212–47.

31. Artemus Ward and David L. Weiden, *Sorcerers' Apprentices: 100 Years of Law Clerks at the United States Supreme Court* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

32. Carpenter, *The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy*, 316–17.

33. Jeffrey R. Lax and Justin H. Phillips, "The Democratic Deficit in the States," *American Journal of Political Science* 56 (2012), doi: 10.1111/j.1540-5907.2011.00537.x.

34. Gary W. Cox and Mathew D. McCubbins, *Legislative Leviathan: Party Government in the House* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Gary W. Cox and Mathew D. McCubbins, *Setting the Agenda: Responsible Party Government in the U.S. House of Representatives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); David W. Rohde, *Parties and Leaders in the Postreform House* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); John H. Aldrich and David W. Rohde, "The Consequences of Party Organization in the House: The Role of Majority and Minority Parties in Conditional Party Government," in *Polarized Politcs: Congress and the President in a Partisan Era*, eds. Jon Bond and Richard Fleischer (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2000).

35. Matthew Glassman, "Congressional Leadership: A Resource Perspective," in *Party and Procedure in the United States Congress*, ed. Jacob Straus (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012).

Senate grew by 11 percent and 52 percent, respectively, staff in each chamber's leadership offices grew by 233 percent and 274 percent, and staff in the Speaker's office more than quadrupled. This veritable "army" of experts—many of whom are specialists in particular policy areas and bring many years of political experience to the table—provide leaders with an enhanced capacity to acquire, manage, and disseminate information about public policy and politics. Since rank-and-file members do not have the money to invest in the same caliber or quantity of staff or generate the same quality of information on their own, they turn to the leadership. This, Glassman argues, gives leaders the "capacity to dominate the production and flow of information on Capitol Hill. With such information domination, leadership can more easily enforce their preferences upon the rank-and-file, even when such preferences drift away from the caucus median."[36] Investments in the leaders' human resources and information assets thus not only contributed to the gradual shift in the balance of power between leaders and members (and committees), but they also produced an entirely new dimension of power—informational power—which leaders have used to extend and deepen their control.

Investments in Congress's information assets have produced dramatic changes in other ways as well. For example, the formation of the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) in 1974—a major investment in information assets if ever there was one—marked a critical turning point in the Congress's role in national policymaking.[37] Prior to 1974, Congress was forced to rely on the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) figures and projections, which put it at a significant informational disadvantage vis-à-vis the presidency in federal budget negotiations. The CBO, Philip Joyce has shown, gives Congress the capacity to gather and analyze information and forecast policy effects on its own, thereby enabling it to stand toe-to-toe with the president.[38] Along with investments in other legislative agencies—including the Congressional Research Service (CRS), which provides research and analysis on diverse policy issues to members and committees, and the Government Accountability Office (GAO), which serves as Congress's "watchdog" over the federal government—Congress's investments in its information assets have furnished it with the capacity to engage in a much wider range of policy debates and oversight operations than it could have otherwise, thus cementing a role for

Congress that most would consider essential to the proper functioning of the checks-and-balances system.[39]

Or consider Steven Teles's study of the Department of Justice (DOJ) during the Reagan presidency. Investments made by a group of ideologically motivated, forward-looking political appointees in the DOJ, Teles shows, transformed the department into a training ground for conservative lawyers and a sponsor of the broader conservative legal movement.[40] Step by step, Attorney General Edwin Meese and his team built long-term planning capacities at the DOJ (information assets) and hired "intelligent, highly ideologically committed young lawyers" (human resources) to staff all levels of the department. In the public affairs division, they "increased the resources and upgraded the personnel" in order to amplify the conservative ideas generated within; and perhaps most importantly, they brought in entrepreneurial ideologues to redirect the purposes of the DOJ's Office of Legal Policy (OLP). By the middle of Reagan's second term, the OLP had been transformed from a largely bureaucratic office into a "strategic legal 'think tank'" that helped to produce a "deep shift in the department's culture."[41] These sorts of institutional investments effectively remade the DOJ's role in American politics: DOJ became an incubator and promoter of conservative ideas (originalism) and young conservative lawyers (a "farm team") who would go on to advance the conservative legal movement in subsequent years. "The legacy of the department's investment in personnel," Teles writes, "can be found on the bench and in conservative public interest law firms" around the country.[42]

In both of these illustrative cases—in Congress and in the bureaucracy—investments in human resources and information assets made incremental changes to the activities, purposes, and roles played by each institution. In Congress, investments in leadership office staff gradually facilitated a shift in power away from the members and toward the leadership, affecting operations in both chambers; investments in Congress's support agencies enabled the national legislature to play a more central role in budgetary politics and counterbalance the executive branch in all manner of activities and disputes. In the DOJ, investments in institutional resources altered the institution's political orientation and advanced the broader conservative legal movement. Both cases of

---

36. Ibid., 18.

37. Philip G. Joyce, *The Congressional Budget Office: Honest Numbers, Power, and Policymaking* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011).

38. Joyce notes that it also serves a democratic function of providing citizens with a credible source of information about proposed public policies and their likely effects.

39. For further commentary along these lines, see Matthew Glassman, "Whigging Out," November 30, 2011, http://www.mattglassman.com/?p=1970.

40. Teles, "Transformative Bureaucracy: Reagan's Lawyers and the Dynamics of Political Investment"; see also Teles, *The Rise of the Conservative Legal Movement: The Battle for Control of the Law.*

41. Teles, "Transformative Bureaucracy," 63, 67, 69.

42. Ibid., 71, 69.

institutional change reveal that incremental investments in institutional resources were multifunctional and generative—they enabled each institution to undertake a wider range of activities in the future—which, in turn, politically reoriented each institution and generated new purposes.

The above vignettes also suggest something more about the process of institutional change. It must only be suggestive at this point, but it is worth entertaining the possibility that institutional resource investments may be linked to electoral dynamics. In both Congress and the DOJ, the timing of resource investments directly coincided with major electoral shifts. In the case of congressional resource development, for example, though overall increases in leadership staff were gradual, some curious patterns could be observed in the House Speaker's office. Staffing held remarkably steady (ten to fourteen staffers) from 1982 until 1994, but when Republicans recaptured the majority for the first time in forty years, the number of staff nearly quadrupled (under Speaker Gingrich). Staffing held fairly steady again during the ensuing years of Republican control (under Speaker Hastert) but then spiked again once Democrats recaptured the majority, nearly doubling under Speaker Pelosi (from thirty-six to sixty-four).[43] In the DOJ, Reagan's political appointees believed that the 1980 elections "represented a sharp break in the development of American law and public policy, and that they had won a mandate to reverse the politics of the previous two decades."[44] Motivated by deep ideological commitments and the feeling that the moment was ripe to introduce fundamental change, these appointees set out to transform the DOJ and the wider array of conservative organizations and networks of which it was an integral part in order to "shift the terrain of political competition in later periods."[45]

That there may be a connection between competitive electoral dynamics and actors' motivations to make investments in institutional resources has both an intuitive logic and a deep intellectual lineage.

Competitive electoral pressures have long been identified as one of the motive forces behind political innovation. Theodore Lowi may have put it best with his proposition that "innovation is a function of the minority party, that is, the 'government in the making.'"[46] This notion also has roots in the scholarship of E. E. Schattschneider, Anthony Downs, William Riker, Robert Dahl, David Mayhew, and Martin Shefter, among many others.[47] Put simply, political actors who seek to reconstitute their group, organization, or institution and improve their competitive standing are likely to engage in experimental, entrepreneurial, or otherwise constructive efforts to develop new operational capacities. Investments in institutional resources, I wish to suggest, may be one of those efforts.

Of course, it would be foolish to argue that *only* electoral competition drives these investments; political actors clearly invest in staff and information assets under many different circumstances and for many different reasons. But as a hypothesis to be tested against the evidence, it stands to reason that electoral dynamics may be a recurrent trigger for actors to make institutional resource investments. Indeed, in the following case studies, piecemeal investments in the DNC and RNC's human resources and information assets are shown to have been driven, in large part, by competitive electoral pressures felt by the ostensible "government in the making."

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE NATIONAL PARTY COMMITTEES

Gradual but transformative change in the two national party committees is a well-documented development that, because it involves the functional conversion of two prominent national political institutions, appears in many accounts of twentieth-century American political development. In brief: though they once controlled politicians and subordinated their ambitions to the needs of the collectivity, the national committees now play a supportive role, offering resources and services to candidates who seek their help. This shift in their primary functions has been accompanied by a remarkable transformation of their institutional forms: they have become more bureaucratic, vertically integrated, technologically

43. Glassman, "Congressional Leadership: A Resource Perspective," 27. Even the establishment of the CBO was associated with electoral dynamics; the proximate cause, of course, was the struggle for authority between the Nixon administration and congressional Democrats over federal spending, the impoundment power, and inter-branch relations. But the Budget and Impoundment Act represented more than a reaction against executive aggrandizement: majority Democrats, Eric Schickler writes, also "feared that they would be blamed for Congress's lack of a fiscal policy" in the 1974 elections. Institutional reform was thus pushed as a "common carrier" for multiple interests. Schickler, *Disjointed Pluralism: Institutional Innovation and the Development of the U.S. Congress*, 196, 191.

44. Teles, "Transformative Bureaucracy: Reagan's Lawyers and the Dynamics of Political Investment," 65.

45. Ibid., 62.

46. Theodore Lowi, "Toward Functionalism in Political Science: The Case of Innovation in Party Systems," *American Political Science Review* 57 (1963): 575, italics removed.

47. E. E. Schattschneider, *The Semi-Sovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960); Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1957); William H. Riker, *The Theory of Political Coalitions* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1962); Robert A. Dahl, ed., *Political Oppositions in Western Democracies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966); David R. Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974); Martin Shefter, *Political Parties and the State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

sophisticated, professionally staffed, and financially endowed than ever before.[48] The national committees have thus become increasingly capable of undertaking myriad political and electoral operations, even as they have moved into a more peripheral role in national politics. Power has shifted toward the candidates themselves, as well as to interest groups, activists, PACs, and even consultants. Academic scholarship has kept pace with these trends: researchers have increasingly shifted their attention to the shape and character of broader, informal "party networks," of which the national committees now constitute but one component part.[49]

The precise relationship between changes in the national committees' institutional forms and functions, however, remains unclear. The most prominent theoretical explanation is supplied by actor-centered functionalist models, in which institutions are treated as reflections of actors' preferences—as instantiations of their "congealed tastes."[50] This perspective, best articulated in John Aldrich's *Why Parties?*, conceptualizes political parties as "endogenous institutions" that are subject to change when the problems faced by their political actors change.[51] Contemporary "parties in service" to their candidates thus represent "institutionalized solutions" to the problems faced by ambitious politicians in the modern era.[52]

This model has many virtues, but it leaves wide open the question of how parties actually take on new forms. If anything, it suggests that the process of institutional change is easy, if not instantaneous. As is common in "actor-centered functionalist" models, it falls back on the concept of "punctuated equilibrium" to explain change.[53] Aldrich writes that the transformation of the national committees into "parties in service" was "akin to Stephen Jay Gould's theory of evolution," where "long-term equilibrium [was] punctuated by a short, intense period of rapid change, leading to a new long-term equilibrium."[54] The historical breakpoint, in this view, was the 1960s, when a series of "sweeping and fundamental" changes in public opinion and electoral behavior—as well as the impact of social movements, riots, assassinations, and the end of Cold War consensus—created new problems for ambitious politicians that existing institutional arrangements were ill-equipped to solve.[55] In an increasingly fractious, candidate-centered era, "mass" parties could no longer control campaigns or satisfy their candidates' needs. This "mismatch between form and problem" prompted party actors to dismantle old institutional forms and create new ones that better served their purposes.[56] "Parties in service" were the result. "The principal claim I make," Aldrich writes, "is that these traumatic events [of the 1960s] were associated with a critical era that led to fundamental changes in the *institutional* bases of political parties."[57]

One problem with this framework is that it bends the history to fit the theory. The argument hinges on the claim that environmental shifts during the 1960s explain *why* and *when* old party forms "collapsed," "disappeared as an institutional form," and were subsequently replaced with new ones.[58] But as I will show, not only did each party's institutional forms change on entirely different timetables, but the 1960s did not represent a critical breakpoint in either party's development. Institutional changes in

48. Cotter and Bibby, "Institutional Development of Parties and the Thesis of Party Decline"; Xandra Kayden and Eddie Mahe, *The Party Goes On: The Persistence of the Two-Party System in the United States* (New York: Basic Books, 1985); Leon D. Epstein, *Political Parties in the American Mold* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986); Herrnson, *Party Campaigning in the 1980s*; Frantzich, *Political Parties in the Technological Age*; Aldrich, *Why Parties?*; John Clifford Green and Daniel M. Shea, *The State of the Parties: The Changing Role of Contemporary American Parties* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999); Daniel M. Shea, "The Passing of Realignment and the Advent of the 'Base-Less' Party System," *American Politics Quarterly* 27 (1999); David Menefee-Libey, *The Triumph of Campaign-Centered Politics* (New York: Chatham House Publishers, Seven Bridges Press, LLC, 1999); Sidney M. Milkis, *Political Parties and Constitutional Government* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Paul S. Herrnson, "National Party Organizations at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century," in *The Parties Respond: Changes in the American Parties and Campaigns*, ed. L. Sandy Maisel (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2002); John C. Green and Paul S. Herrnson, *Responsible Partisanship?: The Evolution of American Political Parties since 1950* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002); John F. Bibby, "State Party Organizations: Strengthened and Adapting to Candidate-Centered Politics and Nationalization," in *The Parties Respond: Changes in the American Party System*, ed. Louis Sandy Maisel (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2002).

49. This article seeks to clarify the process through which the functions of the national committees changed, gradually displacing them from their more central position in the broader party network. On informal party networks, see Kathleen Bawn et al., "A Theory of Political Parties," paper presented at American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, 2006; Marty Cohen, David Karol, Hans Noel, and John Zaller, *The Party Decides: Presidential Nominations before and after Reform* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Gregory Koger, Seth Masket, and Hans Noel, "Partisan Webs: Information Exchange and Party Networks," *British Journal of Political Science* 39 (2009): 633–53; Seth E. Masket, *No Middle Ground: How Informal Party Organizations Control Nominations and Polarize Legislatures* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009); Jonathan J. Bernstein and Casey B. K. Dominguez, "Candidates and Candidacies in the Expanded Party," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 36 (2003): 165–69.

50. Aldrich, *Why Parties?*; Schlesinger, *Political Parties and the Winning of Office*. On "congealed tastes," see Riker, "Implications from the Disequilibrium of Majority-Rule for the Study of Institutions."

51. Aldrich, *Why Parties?*, 19.

52. Ibid., 26.

53. "Actor-centered functionalism" is a term coined by Paul Pierson, *Politics in Time*, 104.

54. Aldrich, *Why Parties?*, 261–62.

55. Ibid., 262–63. See also Aldrich and Niemi, "The Sixth American Party System," and Schlesinger, *Political Parties and the Winning of Office*, 187–99; Schlesinger, "The New American Political Party."

56. Aldrich, *Why Parties?*, 286.

57. Ibid., 263. Italics in original.

58. Ibid., 269.

the Republican Party began in the 1930s, and the Democratic Party did not begin its transition to a "party in service" until the 1980s. Such a historical oversight might be shrugged off as a casualty of theoretical parsimony, were it not inextricably linked to a basic conceptual problem: the misidentification of the main problem to which actors were responding. The primary catalyst for party leaders to begin building campaign-service capacities was not a new set of problems facing politicians in the 1960s, but *electoral crises* occurring at different times for each party. For Republicans, the New Deal realignment of the 1930s prompted them to begin making service-oriented investments in their institutional resources in the hopes of improving their electoral fortunes. For Democrats, it was the shock of the 1980 elections—in which Ronald Reagan won the presidency and Republicans took control of the Senate for the first time in a generation—that pushed them to finally make the kinds of investments Republicans had been making for decades. In other words, rather than change in synchronous response to the same exogenous shocks in the 1960s, the Democratic and Republican parties began their transitions into "parties in service" at very different times, in response to electoral changes that affected each party differently.

But the main difficulty with the actor-centered functionalist model is *theoretical*, not historical. For even if the parties began their transitions to "parties in service" at different times, the core argument would still hold, that parties' institutional forms will, eventually, serve the needs of the politicians who use them. This proposition is difficult—if not impossible—to refute, as politicians do seem to get what they want from their parties (or at least, they want what they can get from them). The problem, therefore, is not what goes into the model, but what it leaves out: the institutional attributes of the parties. By making politicians' problems and preferences the main object of inquiry, the actor-centered functionalist account is unable to make all but the most basic observations about the institutional attributes of the parties and the processes through which they change (or fail to change).

According to Joseph Schlesinger, omitting the institutional side of the story is not only intentional, it is "essential" to the explanatory power of the model.[59] Aldrich does not go quite that far, acknowledging that "institutions achieve some permanence and require substantial effort to change."[60] But where that "permanence" comes from and what those "efforts" entail are left unexplored. This is probably because the primary obstacle to change is not seen as institutional, but behavioral: it is the difficult task of mobilizing and aligning the interests of a diverse set of ambitious actors.[61] Ostensibly, all institutional possibilities are on the table, so long as they solve actors' most pressing problems. To be sure, resolving collective action and social choice problems is no small feat, and these behavioral dilemmas should be expected to weigh heavily on reform-minded actors. But depicting parties as fundamentally "congealed tastes" glosses over the institutional side of the story and removes from consideration the possibility that the parties' institutional forms might, themselves, be integral to the processes through which they change.

The alternative is to bring their internal attributes front and center. This does not mean that actors (and their problems) must be stripped from the story—far from it. As we will see, national committee leaders deliberately sought out solutions to their politicians' most pressing dilemmas (raising money, winning election, etc.) by investing in their parties' institutional resources. But what those leaders discovered was that the national committees' institutional forms were not so easily dismantled and replaced. The basic dynamic was one of "layering"—inherited institutional forms were gradually added to, updated, and adapted to new conditions. Rather than appear as a process of "breakdown and replacement," the national committees gradually acquired new operational capacities and were directed to new purposes in a piecemeal fashion.[62] The range of activities they could undertake and the extensiveness of the services they could provide for their candidates expanded incrementally as their institutional resources became increasingly operational, effective, and technologically sophisticated over time.

Thus, it is simply not possible to specify a date—or even a short span of years—when the national committees can be said to have been "functionally" transformed. Not only did each party follow its own distinct timetable, but different candidate-service capacities emerged within each party at different times: some appeared immediately, some were more fully realized in the medium-term, and some developed over the "longue durée." Empirically, therefore, it makes little sense to begin the inquiry with a search for institutional "functions." Rather, one must begin with changes in specific institutional forms, then move to the expansion of institutional capacity, and only

---

59. Schlesinger writes: "The character of the organization, how it is arranged, what (if any) lines of authority it has, how disciplined it is, how much division of labor exists, is not part of the Downsian definition of party. These omissions are essential if the definition of party is to be flexible enough to understand changes in the party's form." It should come as no surprise, then, that the conclusion he reaches is that the parties' institutional arrangements do not matter in how they change. Schlesinger, *Political Parties and the Winning of Office*, 7.

60. Aldrich, *Why Parties?*, 284.

61. Ibid., 295.

62. "Breakdown and replacement" is from Thelen, *How Institutions Evolve*, 30.

then consider changes in institutional functions.[63] Inverting the actor-centered functionalist model, in other words, enables us to track the process of institutional transformation as it actually happened, and directly observe the mechanisms of change at work.

The case studies below detail these dynamics while adding new bits and pieces to the historical record. However, their primary contribution is theoretical: histories of the national committees have been more skillfully presented elsewhere.[64] The aim, below, is to track how investments in human resources and information assets contributed to the incremental expansion of each party committee's institutional capacities. In the Republican National Committee (RNC), these investments commenced much earlier than the actor-centered model allows, effectively altering that institution's operations and purposes well before the ostensible "critical era" of the 1960s began. Similar investments did not begin in earnest in the Democratic National Committee (DNC) until the 1980s. Though they were separated by almost fifty years, virtually identical processes of institutional change were on display in both cases.

Resource Investments in the Republican National Committee

The first systematic and sustained efforts to expand the RNC's service-oriented capacities occurred in the 1930s. Motivated by Franklin D. Roosevelt's two landslide victories and enduring popularity, as well as four consecutive congressional elections losses between 1930 and 1936, RNC leaders began in 1937 to invest in new institutional resources.[65] The bulk of their innovations involved the development of new human resources and information assets.

New RNC Chairman John D. M. Hamilton explained that while the party's ultimate goal—to "return to a majority position"—was a long-term proposition, he was determined to take the first steps: "I don't intend that the next Republican chairman should have to build from the ground up, such as I did," Hamilton told reporters.[66] His first move was to try to generate higher levels of professionalism in the party's support staff. Hamilton hired a cadre of experienced and talented division leaders, insisted that the headquarters operate continuously (even during nonelection years, for the first time in party history), and gave the entire RNC staff assurances of tenure.[67] He gave multiple speeches and circulated memos to boost the "morale" of party workers and even floated the idea of creating a pension plan for employees, an idea that was only slightly ahead of its time (a pension plan was not established until 1956).[68] These modest efforts to nurture the party's human resources had a clear impact on the party's internal operating culture: by 1939, the RNC's fifty-one staff members referred to themselves as a "standing army," a "live-wire headquarters force" that was poised to make a difference in Republican campaigns in 1940.[69]

Hamilton also invested in the RNC's information-gathering and analytical capacities (information assets) by expanding the Research Division, increasing its budget, growing its staff (which he called the RNC's "brain trust"), creating an in-house library with over 7,000 volumes, and appointing a Yale economics professor as its director.[70] Among other tasks, the division compiled detailed voting statistics; gathered valuable data on local variations in election laws; systematically tracked news reports and political columns; and developed expertise in multiple policy domains including agriculture, trade policy, civil rights, foreign policy and defense, budgetary politics, and other contentious areas.[71] This expansion of the party's intellectual resources multiplied the range of political issues on which the RNC could provide assistance for Republican politicians. Indeed, the information generated and analyzed by the Research Division proved to be of immediate value for members of Congress, who relied on its reports in

63. Similarly, Frank Sorauf writes: "A meaningful approach to political parties must be concerned with parties as organizations or structures performing activities, processes, roles, or functions . . . The logical intellectual and analytical point of reference is the party as a structure. Activity (or function) is certainly important, but one must begin by knowing who or what is acting." Frank J. Sorauf, "Political Parties and Political Analysis," in *The American Party Systems: Stages of Political Development*, ed. William Nisbet Chambers and Walter Dean Burnham (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 38.

64. Cotter and Bibby, "Institutional Development of Parties and the Thesis of Party Decline"; Cotter and Hennessy, *Politics without Power: The National Party Committees*; Goldman, *The National Party Chairmen and Committees: Factionalism at the Top*; Philip A. Klinkner, *The Losing Parties: Out-Party National Committees, 1956-1993* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994).

65. Why not sooner? We cannot know for certain, but according to the *New York Times*, "Between 1932 and 1936 the Republican leaders still had hopes and many of them, by November of last year, had by a species of self-hypnosis convinced themselves that the party would squeak through and beat Roosevelt. The overwhelming New Deal victory [in 1936] dispelled all illusions and today the party's leaders, in and out of Washington, are wondering and discussing among themselves what the next step shall be." See Delbert Clark, "The Republicans Face a Great Decision," *New York Times*, June 20, 1937.

66. Associated Press, "Hamilton Puts 'Revitalization' of Party First," *Washington Post*, November 10, 1936.

67. Karl A. Lamb, "John Hamilton and the Revitalization of the Republican Party, 1936–40," in *Papers of the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts, and Letters*, ed. Sheridan Baker (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1960).

68. Ibid., 240.

69. Edward T. Folliard, "Eyes on 1940, G.O.P. Expands Its National Headquarters," *Washington Post*, June 25, 1939.

70. "G.O.P. 'Brain Trust' Busy: Wide Range of Studies," *New York Times*, December 17, 1939.

71. Their records are well organized and publicly accessible via the Republican National Committee Collection, Boxes 642-718, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas.

legislative debates over pressing issues such as "national debt policy and the extraordinary powers of the President."[72] Moreover, these information assets enabled the RNC to offer Republican candidates talking points memos, "speech kits," and information-filled political reports that could be put to practical use in their campaigns.[73] A Research Division staffer boasted openly of the value this information brought to party politicians: "politicians will not remain sure-footed in an increasingly technical world," he said, "unless they make increasing use of the sound advice and information on technical problems which can be furnished only by persons who make it their main business to keep abreast of technical matters as they impinge on contemporary politics."[74] Investments in the RNC's new information assets and analytic capacities, in other words, altered and expanded the range of services the national committee could provide to Republican candidates.

Money, as noted, is a primary institutional resource, without which other capacity-expanding efforts are impossible. Efforts to build more sustainable fund-raising operations during this period were thus crucially important. Financing at the RNC had long been precarious: without the institutional capacity to identify and solicit new donors, the party depended on the willingness of wealthy individuals to give large donations—which they did, but their contributions ebbed and flowed with each election cycle. To generate a steadier source of income that would enable the national committee to undertake operations even during nonelection years, the RNC launched in 1937 a "sustaining membership" small-donor program that mobilized local volunteers to "fish" for new donors among their neighbors. According to program founder and director Carlton G. Ketchum, this represented the "pioneer attempt in this country" by a major party to institutionalize a fund-raising system that would rely upon "continuous-pledge giving . . . through the solicitation of as many loyal Republicans as possible, as continuously as possible . . .The method is that of volunteer solicitation under professional direction."[75] The effort was successful: in its first year, the "Sustaining Memberships" program generated over 6,000 pledges totaling $220,000; by 1940 it had grown to over 150,000 members, and the RNC had completely wiped out its debt from Alf Landon's failed 1936 presidential campaign. The RNC was now "comfortably in the

black" and had "systematic records" that could be drawn upon in future campaigns.[76]

With thousands of individuals making small donations on an annual basis (in exchange for a membership card signed by Hamilton), the RNC generated enough steady income to operate continuously, reinvest a portion of that money back into its fund-raising capacities, and use the surplus to expand its political activities in other areas. Equally important, the program turned donors into activists: contributors became, in effect, multifunctional human resources that the party could call upon in future fund-raising drives and electoral campaigns. The individual-level data generated by this program—which included personal demographic information, contribution histories, and so on—was also an information asset that could be used for multiple and varied purposes in the future. In other words, these investments in human resources and information assets enhanced and multiplied the functional capacities of the national committee, both in the short- and medium-term.

Hamilton also centralized all national, state, and local Republican fund-raising operations, including fund-raising for the two congressional campaign committees, in the National Committee. This unified finance system, the precursor to the Republican National Finance Committee, enabled the party to reduce redundancies and ensure a steady stream of income that could, likewise, be put toward multiple purposes. It was also designed to save candidates, especially incumbents, from having to "engage in private fund-raising campaigns."[77] Some independent fund-raising was thought to be inevitable, but it was hoped that the centralized system would create new efficiencies while giving candidates a reason to "turn to" their party.

The parallels to Aldrich's description of campaign service-oriented parties in the modern period are uncanny.[78] Each of Hamilton's investments was designed to make the party more relevant and responsive to party politicians. The difference, of course, was that these initiatives were motivated primarily by the GOP's disadvantaged competitive position during Roosevelt's presidency (not the "traumatic events" of the 1960s). In order to win more elective offices and recapture the majority, Hamilton made investments in resources that would enhance institutional operations and enable the RNC to offer a broader menu of services to candidates.

The Sustaining Memberships program, however, was temporarily put on hold during the 1940 campaign when the Willkie campaign feared that it would "reduce large contributions from some

72. "G.O.P. 'Brain Trust' Busy: Wide Range of Studies."

73. "G.O.P. Book Charges Roosevelt Broke Vows," *Los Angeles Times*, September 17, 1938; see also, for example, "G.O.P. Paper Guides Party Workers," *New York Times*, October 2, 1938.

74. C.A.H. Thomson, "Research and the Republican Party," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 3 (1939): 306–13.

75. Carlton G. Ketchum, "Political Financing, 1937 Model," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 2 (1938): 136–37.

76. Heard, *The Costs of Democracy*, 257, 217; Lamb, "John Hamilton and the Revitalization of the Republican Party, 1936–40," 239.

77. Ibid., 223.

78. Aldrich, *Why Parties?*.

donors."[79] The United States' entrance into World War II had a further stultifying effect by making partisan activities appear inappropriate; contributions slowed to a crawl, and Hamilton's successor was "forced to curtail many committee activities."[80]

Yet the RNC ventured into the 1940s with greater institutional capacities than it had ever had before. The Research Division, for example, endured and remained the most widely respected and stable division at the RNC. In fact, its second director, Dr. Floyd McCaffree, a Michigan-educated political scientist who began his career as a research assistant at the division in 1939, served as its director in high esteem from 1945 until 1961.[81] The party's unified fund-raising system, including its annual campaigns predicated on the Ketchum "community drives" system, persisted for decades.[82] The RNC's staff, likewise, continued to be regarded as highly professional and reliable, even during the party's lean years. In contrast to operations at the Democratic National Committee—where, as I will discuss, similar investments in institutional resources simply were not made—the RNC evidenced "a much higher degree of permanence and continuity" over those decades.[83] Thus, Hamilton's early efforts had important effects: they expanded the range of activities the party could undertake well into the future.

When Thomas Dewey's unsuccessful 1944 presidential campaign left the party with a $300,000 surplus, new RNC Chairman Herbert Brownell set out to use those funds to revitalize the RNC and prepare it for the elections of 1946 and 1948. Brownell's top priority was to invest in human resources—to "build up and retain a nucleus of qualified people in every important area of activity."[84] In addition to hiring new full-time staff that was "trained" in research, investigation, and publicity, Brownell invested in information assets, including new polling capacities and new initiatives to expand the contributor base of the party, with an emphasis on identifying and soliciting more small donations.[85] Even as the political climate and key personnel changed, electoral pressures thus continued to motivate party actors to make investments in the internal resources of the RNC in order to expand its campaign-oriented services for candidates.

The full range of activities undertaken by the RNC during the late 1940s are too numerous to recount here, but it is worth highlighting the "School of Politics" launched by RNC Chairman Guy Gabrielson in 1950, which represented the first major professional campaign training program in the party's history. The human resource-building initiative educated teams of "professional organizers" on "how to win elections and influence voters" before sending them into competitive states and districts to teach local campaign staff how to conduct registration drives, get-out-the-vote operations, and public relations campaigns.[86] Where financing was available, the teams would train party personnel in less competitive districts as well. In addition to the School of Politics, which continued to be replicated well into 1951, the RNC began to provide candidates with "all kinds of new campaign services, from lectures on Korea . . . to one-minute radio recordings on the wickedness of all Democrats."[87] In these ways, incremental investments in the RNC's institutional resources produced a gradual but persistent multiplying effect on the national party committee's service capacities.

Eisenhower's election to the presidency in 1952 presented the first opportunity in twenty years for the RNC to leverage the fund-raising power of an American president for its institution-building purposes. Eisenhower, however, was an unlikely party leader—a celebrated military general recruited by both parties in 1952, he was expected to rise "above party."[88] But as I have shown elsewhere, Eisenhower viewed his party's minority status as a drag on his presidency and an impediment to his legacy. As a result, he became fiercely determined to remake the GOP in his image—to shape it into a more "modern," inclusive, and attractive party.[89] Further investments in the party's human resources figured prominently in this effort. In 1955, 1957, 1958, and again in 1960, Eisenhower and his team sponsored a series of "GOP Campaign Schools" and regional campaign training

79. Heard, *The Costs of Democracy*, 257n65.

80. James J. Kenneally, *A Compassionate Conservative: A Political Biography of Joseph W. Martin, Jr.* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2003), 77–83.

81. "Floyd E. McCaffree, C.W. Post Professor," *New York Times*, June 3, 1963.

82. John H. Kessel, *Presidential Campaign Politics: Coalition Strategies and Citizen Response* (Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press, 1980).

83. Bone, *Party Committees and National Politics*, 84; also see Heard, *The Costs of Democracy*.

84. Bone, *Party Committees and National Politics*, 39; Goldman, *The National Party Chairmen and Committees: Factionalism at the Top*, 488.

85. James Hagerty, "Republicans Set 4-Year Campaign," *New York Times*, January 23, 1945; Goldman, *The National Party Chairmen and Committees: Factionalism at the Top*, 487–88.

86. Goldman, *The National Party Chairmen and Committees: Factionalism at the Top*, 499; Clayton Knowles, "G.O.P. To Teach 'Winning Politics'," *New York Times*, December 20, 1949; Robert W. Ruth, "G.O.P. School of Politics a Woman-Power Project: And That Old Republican 'Mutual Admiration Society'," *The Sun*, April 15, 1950; "G.O.P. Graduates 25 in School of Politics," *New York Times*, May 4, 1950.

87. James Reston, "Revitalized G.O.P. In Scientific Drive," *New York Times*, November 1, 1950; "School of Politics," *The Washington Post*, October 21, 1951.

88. Ralph Ketcham, *Presidents above Party* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987).

89. Daniel J. Galvin, *Presidential Party Building: Dwight D. Eisenhower to George W. Bush* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); also see Cornelius P. Cotter, "Eisenhower as Party Leader," *Political Science Quarterly* 98 (1983): 255–83; Steven Wagner, *Eisenhower Republicanism: Pursuing the Middle Way* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006).

seminars to share best practices, swell the party's corps of committed activists, and encourage institution-wide learning. Like Gabrielson's earlier initiative, these efforts were not limited to the national level of the party: once the national training programs were completed, state party chairmen were given resources to replicate the workshops for their county chairmen, and county leaders were encouraged to replicate the training schools at the precinct level.[90]

Despite his ultimate failure to transform the GOP into a more moderate party, Eisenhower found that investments in the party's human resources had significant downstream effects at the institutional level of the party. For example, human resources were multifunctional: trained staff could be deployed for purposes that ranged from campaign activity to candidate recruitment to policy development to opposition research to voter mobilization, and so on. They were also generative: they contained within them the seeds of their own reproduction and expansion. Once trained personnel acquired specific skills and knowledge and became capable of transmitting that knowledge to others, they became, themselves, conduits of further institutional development. Indeed, many notable party leaders—party chairmen, division heads, state chairs—were graduates of the party's training programs (a pattern that continued into the 2000s).[91] Assuming positions of leadership, those individuals were able to make further investments in the party's human resources and improve its ability to offer increasingly sophisticated campaign services for candidates. Investments in human resources, in short, were important mechanisms in the party's gradual conversion into a "party in service" to its candidates.

A particularly good example of this generative effect at the institutional level of the party can be found in the person of Ray Bliss. As chairman of the Ohio Republican Party, Bliss was an active participant in the party's training programs in the 1950s, and he replicated those "workshop sessions" for state legislators and party leaders across Ohio. When he became chairman of the State Chairman's Advisory Committee, he held further campaign training workshops for Republican state chairmen; those patterns were then repeated after he assumed the chairmanship of the RNC in 1965. In 1966, he enlisted the RNC's still highly valued Research Division to teach research techniques to the staff of twenty-three state parties. And between 1965 and 1969, John F. Bibby

shows that Bliss ran thirteen regional campaign management seminars and a dozen local seminars attended by 6,042 people; eight "big city" workshops attended by party leaders from 135 metropolitan areas in all 50 states; two pre-election workshops for over 20,000 people; and several specialized training seminars emphasizing "public relations, research, and data processing."[92] Investments in the party's human resources thus bred further investments in the party's human resources, and leaders like Bliss became, themselves, mechanisms of endogenous institutional change.

During Richard Nixon's presidency, investments in the RNC's service-oriented capacities did not cease, as many observers assumed at the time. In fact, precisely the same human resource-building commitments were institutionalized in the party structure in the form of a "Campaign Management College" (CMC) run out of the RNC. Young Republicans, College Republicans, and state parties then adopted the CMC model, expanded its operational focus, and ran similar programs in locales across the country. In the mid-1970s, the CMC was further built upon, as additional seminars on advanced campaign techniques and new evaluative methods to test the skills of trained party workers in the field were developed. This growing administrative apparatus was layered atop the existing training system, thereby enabling the RNC to improve the efficacy, precision, and reach of its training initiatives.[93] In the late 1970s, another particularly skilled and energetic RNC chairman, Bill Brock, created a Local Elections Campaign Division at the RNC to recruit and train state legislative candidates and campaign staffs. Those same programs were then expanded during Ronald Reagan's presidency, and the number of sessions held by the CMC was doubled.[94] By the 1990s, the CMC had become a familiar rite of passage for Republican leaders and activists.

These human resource-building initiatives were custom tailored to develop specialized knowledge of core party operations—for example, media relations, voter mobilization, data processing—thereby effectively expanding the range of services the RNC could provide to party candidates. Though the

90. Galvin, *Presidential Party Building*, 46–48.

91. For example, Lee Atwater, Ed Gillespie, and Karl Rove, among many others. John Joseph Brady, *Bad Boy: The Life and Politics of Lee Atwater* (Reading, PA: Addison-Wesley, 1997); Edward Gillespie, *Winning Right: Campaign Politics and Conservative Policies* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2006); Karl Rove, *Courage and Consequence: My Life as a Conservative in the Fight* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2010).

92. John F. Bibby, "Party Leadership, the Bliss Model, and the Development of the Republican National Committee," in *Politics, Professionalism, and Power: Modern Party Organization and the Legacy of Ray C. Bliss*, ed. John C. Green (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 1994), 27–28. Also see John F. Bibby and Robert J. Huckshorn, "Out-Party Strategy: Republican National Committee Rebuilding Politics, 1964-1968," in *Republican Politics: The 1964 Campaign and Its Aftermath for the Party*, eds. Bernard Cosman and Robert J. Huckshorn (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1968).

93. Galvin, *Presidential Party Building*, 106–7.

94. M. Margaret Conway, "Republican Political Party Nationalization, Campaign Activities, and Their Implications for the Party System," *Publius* 13, (Winter, 1983): 1–17; Galvin, *Presidential Party Building*, 124–25; Klinkner, *The Losing Parties*, ch. 7.

personnel occupying the National Committee chairmanship changed every few years, the party remained in the minority in Congress, prompting each new chairman to make new rounds of institutional investments. Inherited programs were continually fine-tuned, their curricula updated, and new techniques for evaluating the students' performance were developed and deployed. After each election cycle, the RNC collected new information about the efficacy of the program and used that knowledge to make targeted improvements.[95]

A similar dynamic was on display in the party's *information assets* beginning before and carrying through the 1960s as well. Throughout the 1940s, for example, the Research Division was enlisted to provide a diverse set of services for party candidates. Without that key information asset, the RNC would never have been able to conduct such sundry exercises as exposing corruption among members of President Roosevelt's family; conducting analyses of voting returns in order to predict the most fertile territory for Republican appeals in 1950; exposing President Truman's weekend "getaways" on the Potomac; or keeping a scorecard of the Democrats' "promises kept" in the first session of the 81st Congress.[96] Likewise, periodic investments were made in the collection of data on Republican voters and donors, and quantitative studies were undertaken to gauge the organizational readiness of the party down to the "grassroots." For example, after conducting a survey of state and local party committees during the 1950 midterm election year, the RNC claimed to have filled 117,000 "vacancies" among GOP precinct workers and recruited 140 county chairmen to fill 167 vacancies in those roles; the remaining 27 counties without a Republican chairman were all in the Deep South.[97]

Annual door-to-door fund solicitation drives modeled on Ketchum and Hamilton's program in the 1930s were continued throughout the 1940s and 1950s, and the idea spread to the local level as well. Primarily a "women's project," state Republican finance committees regularly ran "Neighbor-to-Neighbor" fund-raising drives with backing from the Republican National Committee. These local drives were both human-resource- and information-

asset-building initiatives: they not only raised money and generated lists of Republican donors for use in later campaigns, but they trained Republican women in the art of grassroots mobilization. "Each solicitor is given Republican 'education' before going out to ask for funds," the RNC announced. "They are fully informed about issues, about the record of the party. Each is really a doorbell ringer, doing a double job of acquainting the voter with Republican philosophies and policies and making every person conscious of their personal responsibility, through actual sharing in the financial support of the party."[98] The program was deemed so effective in 1952 that it was repeated in 1955 and again in 1956 in the run up to Eisenhower's reelection campaign.[99]

RNC leaders were so enthusiastic about it that they ran an off-year Neighbor-to-Neighbor "pilot program" in 1957 to test its effectiveness on a larger scale. Party activists were sent into twenty-one states to build the Republican Party's small-donor base and "compile precinct records" for use in future campaigns. Party leaders identified the project's strengths and weaknesses, made improvements, and Neighbor-to-Neighbor was repeated in all forty-eight states in advance of the midterm elections of 1958.[100] Despite the GOP's disappointing showing that fall, the RNC managed to gather about half a million names and addresses by 1961 and collect about one million dollars. Those assets, as well as the party's new operational emphasis on person-to-person contact, laid the groundwork for further expansions in this area; and with the growing availability of new technological capacities, the party was soon able to complement its doorbell-ringing initiatives with direct-mail expeditions. Exploiting the growing ease of printing and mass mailing, it revived its "Sustaining Membership" program in 1962, which incrementally expanded the party's pool of donors.[101] By the end of 1963, the program had raised almost two million dollars, which "constituted about one-half the combined budgets of the three national-level Republican committees."[102] With the proceeds from direct mail covering overhead and operating costs at the national headquarters, the RNC was able to devote surplus income to aid in candidates' campaigns and to make new institutional investments.[103] The party's growing stores of individual-level data, in other words, were capable of being used on behalf of

95. Republican National Committee (RNC), "Chairman's Report" (Washington, DC: Republican National Committee, 1993); Ken Mehlman, "Special Elections Confirm the Importance of Grassroots Turnout" (Washington, DC: Republican National Committee Press Release, 2005); Richard N. Bond, "Personal Interview" (Washington, DC: 2007).

96. "GOP Conspiracy," *The Washington Post*, September 19, 1945; Cabell Phillips, "Both Parties Pin Hope on Farm Vote in 1950," *New York Times*, June 26, 1949; "Truman's Weekend Relaxation," *The Washington Post*, March 15, 1951; "Republicans Hold '48 Pledges Unkept," *New York Times*, March 7, 1949.

97. Alexander Holmes, "Getting into Grass Roots with GOP's Ex-Infielder," *Los Angeles Times*, December 4, 1950.

98. "G.O.P. Women Show Fund-Raising Zest," *New York Times*, June 1, 1952.

99. "Women's Group For GOP Sets For Fund Raising," *Atlanta Daily World*, November 8, 1955; Norma H. Goodhue, "GOP Fund Drive Launched in State," *Los Angeles Times*, April 27, 1956.

100. Galvin, *Presidential Party Building*, 49.

101. Klinkner, *The Losing Parties*, 61; Cotter and Hennessy, *Politics without Power: The National Party Committees*, 185–86.

102. Cotter and Hennessy, *Politics without Power*, 185–86.

103. Klinkner, *The Losing Parties*, 80.

multiple purposes; their value extended into other domains of party activity.

Thus, while important developments clearly did occur in the ostensibly "critical" era of the 1960s—especially the advent of direct mail, but also the expansion of the party's training initiatives—those advances built directly upon the laborious efforts of earlier party leaders to develop the RNC's human resources and information assets during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. As Hugh Bone summarized in his 1958 publication: "through the building up and institutionalization of its national headquarters, the national committee has become a large *service organization* for the party's national candidates."[104] To be sure, the emergence of new technologies in the 1960s was clearly quite significant. But new technological capacities hardly represented a new "problem" that required party actors to select new institutional forms. Rather, they came into play when, in ongoing efforts to enhance their party committee's campaign-service capacities, party chairmen repeatedly updated, upgraded, retooled, and expanded upon the institutional resources they inherited from their predecessors.

To summarize, in recurrent efforts to redress the Republican Party's competitive disadvantages, party chairmen as early as the 1930s made incremental investments in their party's human resources and information assets. These investments gradually altered the RNC's institutional forms, enabling it to undertake a wider range of services for Republican politicians. Thus, what is usually presumed to be a rather automatic process of functional transformation was, in fact, a laborious process of piecemeal change in the RNC's institutional forms and operational capacities.

That this process in the RNC began much earlier than the punctuated equilibrium model allows helps to clarify two important dynamics of institutional change that appear in the following case of the DNC. First, as we have seen, the most persistent exogenous motivator for change at the institutional level of the party was electoral competition. Second, the cumulative development of service-oriented capacities was not inevitable or instantaneous: it required both the persistent attention of party leaders and the multifunctional and generative effects of the institutional resources themselves.

Resource Investments in the Democratic National Committee

Between 1933 and 1980, Democrats enjoyed nearly uninterrupted majorities in Congress and won two-thirds of all presidential elections. The party could consistently claim the affiliation of a strong plurality of voters, and almost always held the balance of state houses and governors' mansions. In the South and in urban areas where party "machines" still predominated, Democrats took for granted that they would hold onto most elective offices. Under these circumstances, the condition of the national party committee's institutional apparatus was simply not a pressing concern—other priorities took precedence instead. Rather than make the kinds of investments their Republican counterparts were making in institutional resources, DNC chairmen undertook extensive procedural reforms, struggled to build harmony among a diverse and often fractious coalition, and worked to manage relationships with affiliated extrapartisan groups like organized labor, civil rights groups, and issue advocacy organizations.

As a result of the party's commitment to internal debate and procedural democracy, these coalitional struggles were often played out in the open. Observers and scholars have tended to see these internecine battles as an important factor in the Democrats' comparatively slower adoption of new campaign techniques.[105] There is no disputing that these internal conflicts played a role in the Democrats' delay. But with large and seemingly secure majorities, Democratic leaders perceived little urgency to invest in new institutional capacities. Indeed, when the Democrats eventually did begin to make institutional investments in the 1980s, there was no indication that their internal conflicts had subsided, that their diverse coalition had become any less diverse or opinionated, or that their commitment to internal democracy had waned. On the contrary, there was quite a bit of evidence that the party's traditional mode of operating persisted—indeed, many have suggested that it has continued to characterize party processes well into the contemporary period.[106] What did change for the Democrats in the early 1980s was their electoral incentives.

But whatever the reason for the Democrats' continual neglect of their institutional apparatus prior to the 1980s, the effects were striking. With minimal institutional resources available in the formal party apparatus, Democratic candidates consistently turned to extrapartisan allies—especially organized labor but also interest groups, private consultants, and local networks—to supply the campaign

104. Bone, *Party Committees and National Politics*, 116, italics added.

105. Jo Freeman, "The Political Culture of the Democratic and Republican Parties," *Political Science Quarterly* 101 (1986): 327–56; Klinkner, *The Losing Parties*; Jules Witcover, *Party of the People: A History of the Democrats* (New York: Random House, 2003); Bruce Miroff, *The Liberals' Moment: The McGovern Insurgency and the Identity Crisis of the Democratic Party* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007).

106. Matt Bai, *The Argument: Billionaires, Bloggers, and the Battle to Remake Democratic Politics* (New York: Penguin Press, 2007); Ari Berman, *Herding Donkeys: The Fight to Rebuild the Democratic Party and Reshape American Politics* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010).

resources that Republicans were developing in-house at the RNC.[107] This further reduced the demand for new resources at the DNC, and investments in institutional resources that candidates could collectively draw upon in their campaigns were simply never made. Democratic campaigns, as a result, were often characterized by their lack of coordination, confusion over campaign responsibilities, and operational inefficiencies and redundancies. Candidates were left to hastily assemble new staffs, teach campaign techniques, and design strategies anew every election cycle.

Or consider the Democrats' fund-raising patterns. In contrast to their counterparts at the RNC, Democrats refused to give sustained attention to the development of a small-donor fund-raising program. A "Dollars for Democrats" program initiated during the 1956 election petered out when a lingering debt from Kennedy's 1960 campaign "focused attention on the need for large amounts of money."[108] The Democratic Party's ensuing reliance on a "fat cat" contribution solicitation strategy during the Kennedy and Johnson presidencies resulted in a debilitating cycle of debt assumption, partial repayment, and further debt assumption. A lingering debt of nine million dollars from Hubert Humphrey's 1968 campaign, for example, was not eliminated until 1981; these were crippling financial liabilities that left even ambitious party chairmen—like Robert Strauss (1972–1977) and Kenneth Curtis (1977–1978)—with little room to maneuver.[109]

These patterns—outsourcing for campaign resources, persistent debt liabilities—did not change until the early 1980s, when Democrats were jolted out of their complacency by Reagan's electoral landslide, their loss of majority status in the Senate, and the narrowing gap in partisan identification in the electorate. In 1981, new DNC Chairman Charles Manatt explained that "we have mentally adjusted to the fact that we are the minority party." Recapturing ostensible "majority status," Manatt argued, required forward-looking investments in the DNC's institutional resources.[110]

Escaping old fund-raising patterns was a necessary first step: without a steady flow of financial resources, there was little else Manatt could do. Manatt thus hired a consulting firm to help the DNC launch a small-donor direct-mail fund-raising program. By the summer of 1981, the list of active contributors to the party had grown to 60,000 names, and proceeds were reinvested in the system, generating a "building effect." By January 1984, the list of active contributors to the Democratic Party had grown to over 400,000 names. But Manatt's efforts were not everywhere successful. In late 1983, for example, he orchestrated a major telethon event to raise $10 to $20 million for the party. With considerable fanfare and heightened expectations, the DNC borrowed $6 million to finance the telethon. But the event was a flop, raising only $1 to $2 million and leaving a deficit upwards of $4.5 million. "It was the most slipshod operation I've ever seen," said the Iowa party chairman.[111]

Having learned from Manatt's experiences, the next DNC chairman, Paul Kirk, made additional investments in the DNC's direct-mail systems. By 1986, the party could happily report that it was raising $600,000 per month through small donations. Kirk also made strides in collecting "soft money" from large donors, and by the end of the 1988 campaign, the DNC had $3 million on hand.[112] He also invested in other information assets, including new polling capacities, expanded voter lists, and computer assistance for state parties.[113] These new institutional resources enabled the DNC to offer a wider range of services for Democratic candidates, thus beginning its gradual transition to a "party in service."[114]

Both chairmen also made efforts to invest in the party's human resources. In addition to recruiting talented, experienced personnel to help run the DNC, Manatt established a "Democratic National Training Academy," the first training program for Democratic candidates and campaign staffers in the party's history. The Academy offered basic courses in voter contact, fund-raising, communications, and other modern "details of running for office."[115] Two years later, the DNC pooled "resources and information" with twenty-one state party committees to offer another round of training conferences to emphasize "advanced campaign techniques."[116] Kirk added additional sessions of the "Democratic Training School," established new regional field teams, and formed an "Election Force" to assist local candidates in their 1986 campaigns.[117] DNC Chairman

107. J. David Greenstone, *Labor in American Politics* (New York: Knopf, 1969); Taylor E. Dark, *The Unions and the Democrats: An Enduring Alliance* (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 1999); David R. Mayhew, *Placing Parties in American Politics: Organization, Electoral Settings, and Government Activity in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986); Dana Fisher, *Activism, Inc.* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006).

108. Herbert E. Alexander, *Financing the 1960 Election* (Princeton, NJ: Citizens' Research Foundation, 1962), 77; Bernard Hennessy, "Dollars for Democrats, 1959," in *Cases on Party Organization*, ed. Paul Tillett (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1963).

109. Galvin, *Presidential Party Building*; Klinkner, *The Losing Parties*.

110. "Can the DNC Adjust to Being a Minority?" *National Journal*, September 5, 1981; "Democratic Party Takes Some Strides Down the Long Comeback Trail," *National Journal*, October 8, 1983.

111. "Democratic Party Takes Some Strides Down the Long Comeback Trail;" "A Tale of Two Parties," *National Journal*, January 21, 1984.

112. Klinkner, *The Losing Parties*, 181.

113. Ibid., 182.

114. See, for example, Rhodes Cook, "Kirk Leaves, Floodgates Open," *CQ Weekly Report*, December 10, 1988.

115. Adam Clymer, "Democrats: New Views," *New York Times*, September 24, 1981; "Can the DNC Adjust to Being a Minority?"

116. "Democratic Party Takes Some Strides Down the Long Comeback Trail."

117. Klinkner, *The Losing Parties*, 182.

Ron Brown (1989–1992) continued to develop the party's field teams, worked to integrate and coordinate national, state, and local campaigns, and invested in additional campaign-service capacities. By 1992, the DNC was prepared to launch an intensive, multistate campaign effort to aid whomever the party chose as its nominee. Thus, as was the case in the RNC, piecemeal investments enhanced the DNC's capacity to undertake new activities and offer new support services to the party's candidates, but those capacities arrived only slowly, and in an uneven fashion.

Brown's investments were especially costly, and when Bill Clinton entered the White House in 1993, the DNC was again $4.5 million in debt. For an incoming president, this would not necessarily have been a prohibitive debt, but presiding over the first unified Democratic government in twelve years, Clinton was not inclined to worry about the state of his party. Playing out the role of the "party predator" in classic fashion, Clinton exploited the DNC's existing resources—most conspicuously in his ill-fated effort to build support for health care reform—and then drove the DNC further into debt with legal bills stemming from the campaign finance scandals of 1996. By January 1997, the DNC owed over $12 million, and any new contributions the DNC received were being put toward debt repayment and legal fees. The DNC political team drew up plans to invest in new information technologies and run new training programs, but financial liabilities stood in the way of their implementation.[118]

In 1996, Clinton won reelection, but it was a personal, not party victory: the Democrats failed to recapture the majority in Congress. What was initially thought to be a temporary interregnum of Republican control during the 104th Congress now seemed to be a much more intractable problem. Clinton and his team thus began to direct their attention to redressing the party's financial troubles and rebuilding the DNC's campaign-oriented capacities. Clinton undertook an intensive fund-raising campaign to refill the party's coffers, and by 1999 he had raised enough to bring the DNC out of debt. The Monica Lewinsky scandal proved to be a boon for the party's finances as well: in demonstrations of support for the president, donations streamed into the DNC. By January 1999, the DNC finally had both the financial resources and the electoral imperative to begin repairing the damage Clinton's earlier exploitation had caused at the institutional level of the party.[119]

As new DNC Chairman Joe Andrew developed plans to use the DNC's newfound surplus in constructive ways, the diminished state of the party's human resources emerged as a pressing concern. With the 2000 elections fast approaching, the party needed to rebuild its rolls of campaign professionals, activists, and volunteers. Andrew thus ran twelve national campaign-training programs in the 1999–2000 period alone and enlisted over a million volunteers to work on campaigns in 2000. In addition, a new "National Executive Director Program" directly funded staff at the state level to "help rejuvenate state party organizations," "recruit and retain political professionals," and help the state parties dedicate more resources to campaigns.[120]

Investments in information assets, however, soon became the central focus of the new initiative. In particular, Clinton and Andrew were determined to build a national voter file that would enable any Democratic candidate to access high-quality, updated information on individual voters in their districts. If stored at the DNC, such a voter file would serve as a valuable collective good that candidates and party leaders could draw upon (and continually improve) for many years. The DNC thus undertook systematic efforts to upgrade and standardize the software and hardware used by state parties, build new communication links between state committees and the DNC, and offer technical support for the new systems through newly expanded field teams.[121] First steps were taken to work out data-sharing agreements with the state parties and construct new database management capacities at the DNC, but the project was only in its infancy when Clinton left the White House in early 2001. Despite their grand ambitions, Clinton's team discovered that building new institutional resources was a slow process that required time and persistent attention.

DNC Chairman Terry McAuliffe (2001–2005) made a number of investments in the party's institutional apparatus—including the construction of a new "state-of-the-art" headquarters with permanent facilities for "campaign schools," an expansion of the party's e-mail and direct-mail lists, and new

---

118. Galvin, *Presidential Party Building*; Daniel J. Galvin, "Changing Course: Reversing the Organizational Trajectory of the Democratic Party from Bill Clinton to Barack Obama," *The Forum* 6 (2008).

119. Electoral incentives clearly played a role in changing the Democrats' mentality. For example, after many years of running disparate, largely uncoordinated campaigns, the heterogeneous Democratic coalition finally began to come together to develop cooperative campaign plans. According to DNC Chairman Joe Andrew, this was a direct result of the changed electoral context: "We didn't have all these guys around a table—for example organized labor—to do something for years. Literally, it wasn't because of me, I did nothing. I just invited them all to come to talk. They did it because of the fact that they were so concerned that we weren't going to win! There was no secret sauce here . . . People were willing to come together and talk and coordinate the way they had not been, because—what choice did they have?" Personal Interview with Joe Andrew, June 26, 2007, Washington, DC.

120. "America 2000," Washington, DC: Democratic National Committee, 1999.

121. Ibid.

fund-raising initiatives—but his efforts to construct a national voter file remained incomplete by the end of his term.[122] The challenges he faced in developing this critical information asset illustrate the difficulties involved in orchestrating change in a large, complex political institution like the Democratic Party. To create a unified national voter file, state party chairs had to be convinced of its benefits, software had to be made compatible, data had to be integrated, and the output had to be user friendly. According to one party activist, the main problem with the voter file in 2004 was that it had no "front end, no user interface." It "didn't do what a field organizer needs it to do . . . You weren't going to get walk lists or other tools out of it. It doesn't do bupkus."[123]

McAuliffe's successor at the DNC, Howard Dean, who was charged with rebuilding the party after George W. Bush's reelection, invested upwards of ten million dollars to complete the database project (called "VoteBuilder") in the 2005–2008 period and ran several pilot projects to test its effectiveness in grassroots campaigns. In conjunction with a new "Neighborhood Volunteer" online tool (dubbed "Neighbor-to-Neighbor"—the same exact name given to the RNC's lower-tech program of fifty years earlier), the DNC's new voter file helped grassroots canvassers organize in their communities, retrieve information on individual voters from the centralized system, and feed newly collected information back into it. Barack Obama's campaign field director later noted that this dynamic information asset played an integral role in Obama's successful 2008 campaign.[124]

As DNC chairman, Dean also ran multiple training programs for campaign professionals and volunteers, and his much-vaunted fifty-state strategy funded at least four coordinators in every state to help local parties rebuild and recruit new talent. As if they were following the RNC model from the 1950s, trained field operatives then held additional rounds of training programs at the local level throughout 2007 and 2008.[125] The main difference was that Dean also decentralized many of the party's human resource-building efforts: to ensure that the party's

activist base would continue to grow even when the party's leadership personnel changed, local activists were empowered to run training sessions without the top-down coordination of the national party.[126] When Dean stepped down from the chairmanship in 2009, he bequeathed to President Obama's political team a DNC that was, at long last, equipped with numerous institutional resources that could offer valuable services to candidates' campaigns. Those resources, it should be noted, could be continually adapted, upgraded, and deployed for a variety of purposes in the future.[127]

During Obama's first year in office, the DNC and Organizing for America (OFA)—the custodian of the 2008 campaign's thirteen million e-mail addresses, now housed at the DNC—were used for multiple purposes, including generating public support for the president's policy initiatives and aiding Democratic candidates' campaigns.[128] As they began to transition into electoral-support mode in preparation for the 2010 midterm campaigns, earlier investments in information technology were leveraged to develop new campaign-oriented programs.[129]

A particularly good example of how investments in information assets had altered the party's operations and purposes was the "Raise Your Vote" (RYV) initiative. This program sought to do four things: identify and register more Democratic voters; collect more individual-level data for use in Democratic campaigns; exploit the broader progressive organizational network for party-building purposes; and strengthen those extrapartisan partners at the same time. RYV was a user-friendly "voting information and registration hub" that offered "embeddable widgets" for progressive groups, independent Democratic campaigns, and state and local parties who participated in the collective project of registering new Democratic voters across all fifty states. In exchange for their participation, any "host" that embedded the registration widget on their Web site received valuable, detailed, and carefully tailored information on individual Democratic voters in particular geographic

122. Terry McAuliffe and Steve Kettmann, *What a Party!: My Life among Democrats* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2007).

123. Brian Reich, "Please Standby . . . The DNC Is Still Experiencing Technical Difficulties," *Personal Democracy Forum*, April 18, 2005.

124. Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Electing the President 2008: The Insiders' View* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 42, 155–57; "DNC Launches McCain Ad and New National Field Organizing Effort," (Washington, DC: Democratic National Committee Press Release, 2008).

125. "A 50-State Strategy," Washington, DC: Democratic National Committee, 2006, http://www.democrats.org/about/fifty_state_strategy; Elaine C. Kamarck, "Assessing Howard Dean's Fifty State Strategy and the 2006 Midterm Elections," *The Forum* 4 (2006); Sam Stein, "Obama and Dean Team up to Recast the Political Map," *Huffington Post*, June 5, 2008; Berman, *Herding Donkeys*.

126. Matt Bai, "The inside Agitator," *New York Times Magazine*, October 1, 2006; Jamieson, *Electing the President 2008: The Insiders' View*.

127. As incoming DNC Chairman Tim Kaine promised to do. See Tim Kaine, "Tim Kaine Answers Questions About Future of Party," 2009, http://www.democrats.org/page/invite/questionsvideo.

128. Ari Melber, "Year One of Organizing for America: The Permanent Field Campaign in a Digital Age," *A techPresident Special Report*, January, 2010, http://www.techpresident.com/files/report_Year_One_of_Organizing_for_America_Melber.pdf; Berman, *Herding Donkeys*.

129. Sidney M. Milkis and Jesse H. Rhodes, "Barack Obama, the Democratic Party, and the Future of the 'New American Party System'," *The Forum* 7 (2009); Sidney M. Milkis and Jesse H. Rhodes, "Barack Obama, the Democratic Party, and the Evolution of the American Party System," paper presented at Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, 2010, in Washington, DC.

areas. The main dataset would be kept in a centralized location at the DNC, but it was shared freely with party partners in an effort to "lift all boats" in the broader Democratic network.[130]

The significance of this multifunctional information asset in a party whose heterogeneous coalition and diverse extrapartisan network had traditionally presented coordination problems around election time was hard to miss. After a decade of persistent investments in human resources and information assets, the DNC was discovering ways of embracing its great diversity and harnessing it for collective purposes. Rather than working in resistance to its heterogeneous coalition, it had become a party "in service" to it.

CONCLUSION

Political scientists studying processes of institutional change have made major progress in recent years treating institutions as, essentially, rules that contain their own change-permitting properties. But many political institutions consist of more than rules, and do more than just structure or constrain behavior. Some of the most recognizable political institutions also act strategically to influence political outcomes and compete for power. The U.S. Congress engages in interbranch struggles over governing authority; bureaucratic agencies work to build their reputations and act as autonomous policy innovators; political parties contest elections so as to control the institutions of government. In order to undertake their myriad political activities, such proactive political institutions rely on complex internal systems of operation that furnish them with the capacity to act. I have suggested that we need to take a closer look at those internal attributes and consider how modifications made to their arrangements may result, over time, in significant changes in their broader operations and purposes.

Investments in *institutional resources*, I have argued, may be particularly important in this regard. Across a variety of settings, we have seen that investments in an institution's human resources and information assets can be multifunctional—they enable those institutions to pursue multiple tasks—and generative, meaning they facilitate the development of new operational capacities in the future. Once investments in these resources are made, actors can adapt them to new contexts, build upon them in subsequent rounds, update them with new technologies, and redeploy them in different situations. They therefore lend institutions flexibility and enhance their adaptive capacities; most importantly, they expand the range of activities those institutions can undertake

in subsequent periods. In contrast to path-dependent processes, in which positive-feedback effects narrow the range of options over time, resource investments generate open-ended instrumental feedback effects: they *widen* the institution's path by enabling future actors to utilize institutional resources in pursuit of new and different purposes.

These dynamics are on display in the transformation of both national party committees into primarily service vendors during the twentieth century. In both cases, investments in institutional resources proved to be integral to the processes through which those storied national institutions changed.

I have argued that electoral incentives provided the proximate motivation for party leaders to make those investments *when* they made them. Yet other motivating factors were undoubtedly at work as well. Scholars have shown, for example, that changes in election laws, as well as the rise of political action committees (PACs), well-funded interest groups, campaign consultancies, and other party-like alternatives generated pressures for national party chairs to make their campaign-service offerings more responsive to candidates' needs. Shifts in the underlying coalitions of the two parties—the partisan realignment of the South and the growing ideological homogeneity in the parties' legislative caucuses, for example—may have also encouraged party leaders to develop resources that had collective value for all candidates sharing the party label. All of those developments occurred in the 1970s and beyond, however, which means that they are of little help in explaining why Republicans made investments in campaign-support services as early as the 1930s. Nevertheless, I do not wish to dispute the notion that national party leaders had multiple reasons for investing in service-oriented capacities, or that different reasons may have figured more prominently at different times.

What I do mean to suggest is that the national committees' new institutional forms were *not* automatic or reflexive responses to those external pressures. Treating them as "caused" by those developments, as some accounts do, obscures more than it reveals about the process of institutional change. After all, party actors still had to translate their (multiple) incentives into change at the institutional level of the party. The result, as discussed, was a piecemeal process in which actors layered new forms atop existing forms and refashioned them to pursue new purposes. The impact of broader environmental changes on the national committees, in other words, was mediated by existing institutional arrangements. A new "service" orientation did emerge in both national committees, but not at a certain date or corresponding to any particular critical juncture: it appeared unevenly, as the utility of specific institutional resources spilled into new realms of activity and gradually expanded the range of the national committees' campaign service offerings.

---

130. Nancy Scola, "The New 'Raise Your Vote': OFA's Design to Turn out Mid-Term Voters," *TechPresident.com*, June 17, 2010; Nancy Scola, "Dems Release Voter Reg Widget," *TechPresident.com*, July 14, 2010.

The process is usually depicted quite differently, so it is important to be clear. Prominent theoretical accounts treat the emergence of "parties in service" as a classic case of form following function, where new institutional forms (service-oriented capacities) are explained as reflections of new actor preferences. The analytical challenge is to discern how and when actors' interests changed; institutional changes are presumed to follow. I have made a case for flipping this perspective around. By starting with institutional forms, moving from there to expanded capacities, and only then considering changes in institutional functions, we can identify and specify the discrete mechanisms of change at work. Directing attention to these internal processes also has a substantive payoff: it helps us to recognize forward-moving trajectories *as they happen* and develop a better understanding of where an institution might be headed. The alternative requires us to wait for exogenous shocks to disrupt the status quo while we remain agnostic about the shape the new equilibrium will take.

There is still much to learn about the interplay between form and function. The two are often conflated or inadvertently collapsed, such that the emergence of new forms is presumed to generate new functions, or the observation of new functions is thought to imply the existence of new forms. Changes in one do not always imply changes in the other, however, since new functions can emerge without new forms (old forms can be redirected to new purposes), and new forms can emerge without changing institutional functions in any significant way. We know that links between form and function exist, but extant models offer little theoretical purchase on when changes in one are likely to produce changes in the other, or how that might occur. This article has argued that investments in certain types of institutional forms can, under certain conditions, lead to the development of new institutional functions. If we are to make further theoretical progress along these lines, however, the key will be to distinguish more clearly between the two. Researchers can then begin to identify the generative potential of specific institutional attributes, track the conditions under which they alter institutional capacity, and connect those patterns to broader shifts in institutional functions.