

**Commandeering the Ship:
The Influence of Insurgent Presidential Campaigns on Political Parties in the United States**

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April 29, 2020

Abstract

Political insurgents periodically captivate and polarize the American public, provoking extensive media coverage of underdogs with a mission to upend the political system as we know it. The 2016 presidential election contained two remarkably popular insurgent campaigns. While Donald Trump's capacity as president to reshape the Republican Party in his own image is expected, it has been less apparent how Bernie Sanders has had such an impact on the Democratic Party in the years following his loss in the Democratic nomination contest. Employing a comparative-historical methodology with two other cases of presidential insurgencies in the post-McGovern-Fraser era, I develop a theoretical framework for understanding the process through which insurgents can effect major durable changes on a party. Ronald Reagan's loss in the 1976 Republican nomination contest allowed him to ascend to the presidency in 1980 and usher in a new era of conservatism for the Republican Party, while Edward Kennedy's 1980 insurgent campaign against President Jimmy Carter failed to prevent growing neoliberalism within the Democratic Party. In addition to furthering knowledge of insurgent politics and how parties change, this research seeks to contribute to growing scholarship on the importance of revising our understanding of what it means to "win" and "lose" in American campaigns and elections.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	4
Chapter 1. Introduction	5
Chapter 2. Reward in Rebellion: Ronald Reagan's Transformation of the Republican Party in the 1970s	20
Chapter 3. Sailing Against the Wind to No Avail: Edward M. Kennedy's Liberal Challenge to President Jimmy Carter	45
Chapter 4. Bernie Sanders: An Experiment of Political Revolution within the Democratic Party	60
Chapter 5. Conclusion	77
Bibliography	88

Acknowledgements

Within these pages are the fingerprints of a long list of people who have supported and inspired me every step of the way.

A profound thank you to my thesis advisor, Adam. From my very first year, you have inspired me to study the structures in the American political system that facilitate or hinder representation. The passion and expertise you brought to my topic of insurgent politics was utterly invaluable. But even if I hadn't asked the questions I did, I would still be blown away by your ability to guide students with calm insight through the process of planning and presenting academic work. On the Fridays that I came into our meetings anxious about the future of the project, our conversations sent me off with clarity and rejuvenation. Your support has helped me conclude my time at Mount Holyoke feeling confident and worthy.

Thank you to my advisor, Cora Fernandez Anderson, and the many other professors who have taught me how to learn. Thank you to Professors Preston Smith and Jesse Rhodes for serving as my second and third readers. Susan and Peter Betzer, your generous support in funding my research trip to the Ronald Reagan library made this thesis what it is, thank you so much.

Mom, you taught me how to write, and more importantly, how to revise. Dad, our conversations have trained me to question what I see. Cailey and Ryan, you taught me how to argue. Just kidding. Thank you Grandma for always believing in me, you help me believe in myself. Uncle Rich and Aunt Kathy, your incredible hospitality in providing me with a peaceful space to write was critical to my ability to complete this thesis.

Molly, your thoughtful observations and encouragement were so meaningful to me. I find your passion for making sense of the world an inspiration. I couldn't have asked for a better companion on this journey.

I am forever grateful to my friends for their constant encouragement and interest in my project. Kayla Tawa, your sage wisdom and experience with writing a thesis was invaluable. Sara Frieze, Maya Hoffman, Brigit Wolf, and everyone on my beloved team, Daisy Chain, when you lent an ear you lent a hand.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Insurgents are redefining the current political moment in the United States. The rise of Donald Trump has utterly transformed the direction of the Republican Party and the nation, forcing a deep retrospection into how Americans elect presidents. It is fairly evident how Trump's electoral success has resulted in shaping the Republican Party in his own image; through the power of the office he sets the agenda and serves as the party's chief spokesperson and leader. Through his campaign he reshaped perceptions of what wins elections. More puzzling is how Bernie Sanders's *loss* in the 2016 Democratic nomination contest has had such an impact on the party's current form. A self-identified Democratic Socialist, he brought Medicare For All, a \$15 minimum wage, and tuition-free public college into the Democratic Party's vocabulary within just a couple years. As of yet there has been no framework for understanding how insurgents are able to send waves throughout a party from its edges.¹

This thesis is concerned with illuminating the precise processes through which a failed insurgent presidential primary campaign is able to effect party change. In particular, I will investigate both the insurgent's own agency to promote change in the party, as well as the incumbent faction's unintended facilitation of the rising insurgency in attempts to maintain party unity. Through comparative-historical analysis of three different insurgencies in the post-McGovern-Fraser era, I will present a theoretical model of insurgent-driven party change for presidential candidacies.

¹ Adam Hilton, "The Politics Insurgents Make: Reconstructive Reformers in US and UK Postwar Party Development," *Polity* 51 no. 3 (2019): 559-596.

Why Not a Third Party?

Confronted with the existing party system, interest groups, activists, and politicians with far-from-center ideology must decide how to popularize their ideas and accomplish their policy goals. While recent national elections have emphasized the utility of insurgent campaigning within one of the two dominant parties, successful third parties that have surfaced on occasion throughout American history have also had the effect of bringing one or more issues to the forefront of national debate, forcing the two dominant parties' platforms to respond directly. The Socialist Party at the turn of the 20th century advanced women's suffrage and labor rights, and Ross Perot's Reform Party brought the issue of the federal budget deficit into most subsequent presidential campaigns.² The Republican or Democratic parties may choose to fully or partially incorporate the platform of the third party so as to neutralize the threat it presents. Thus, third parties have a role in effecting party change, even when they do not themselves obtain elected offices.

However, third party candidates face many obstacles in securing elected offices. The winner-take-all system of electing candidates with a plurality of votes, campaign finance laws, and the inherent difficulty of promoting voter recognition of a new party label, work together to deter third party endeavors. When they do succeed, it is usually at most at a regional level, as in the case of the Populist Party of the 19th century or George Wallace's American Independent Party. As in the latter case and that of Ross Perot, in seeking national impact the parties may surface around a single personality rather than work to establish a fully functioning party with

² Kristina Nwazota, "Third Parties in the U.S. Political Process," *Public Broadcasting Service*, July 27, 2004.

multiple viable candidates and a machinery that would continue seriously after the first electoral cycle. For a movement with universal and national aspirations, precedent has shown establishing a third party to be too costly and precarious a pathway.

Party Insurgents in the Post-McGovern-Fraser Era

This leaves the option of reshaping one of the dominant parties from within. Not too long ago, however, the presidential nomination rules were almost entirely stacked against an insurgent candidacy. Before 1968, both Republican and Democratic parties were largely in control of selecting their presidential candidate. Party elites would select most of the convention delegates, and those elected through primaries were not beholden to vote for particular candidates. In the 19th century, the pure convention system dominated. State affiliates of the two parties would serve as delegates at national party conventions. Most conventions during the period of the pure system simply confirmed the presumed nominee, although occasionally a “dark horse” candidate was elevated. With the rise of the Progressive Movement at the turn of the century, presidential primaries entered into the process for the first time. The mixed system for nominations lasted from 1912-1968, and was marked by the presence of both a handful of presidential primaries that would often serve to convince party leaders of a candidate’s viability and a national party convention where leaders and elected officials would have the final say. In 1952, Senator Estes Kefauver of Tennessee won all but one of the thirteen primaries he entered, but failed to get more than 30 percent of the convention vote.³

³ William G. Mayer, “How Parties Nominate Presidents,” in *The Oxford Handbook of American Political Parties and Interest Groups*, ed. L. Sandy Maisel and Jeffrey M. Berry (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 189-191.

The 1968 Democratic National Convention marked a critical turning point for the extent and quality of democratic participation in the presidential nomination process. The convention nominated a candidate who did not win or even enter any of the seventeen existing primaries. The resulting outrage pressured the party to establish the Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection, commonly known as the McGovern-Fraser Commission. The commission would go on to recommend that state party organizations reduce their influence over the convention delegate selection. As a result, the number of presidential primaries grew substantially, allowing voters in the party to determine the nominee. With the increased support for primaries among the public, the attention from candidates and media given to primary states, the desire of some state party officials to separate presidential politics from state-level party issues, and the involvement of state law in changing the nomination system, the Republican Party followed in the Democrats' footsteps. In just one election cycle, the number of presidential primaries rose from 17 in 1968 to 23 in 1972. For the first time, a majority of delegates would be decided through primaries.⁴ As a result, candidates who may not have the reputation or relationships with party insiders may appeal instead to voters and capitalize on momentum in the primary season. With conditions much more favorable to insurgents, movements and interest groups that are not represented by the existing party system may be more willing to attempt pushing their own candidate through one of the dominant parties.

While an insurgency need not necessarily happen at the federal or presidential level, to maximize influence beyond a regional level, the movement may try to recruit a candidate to pursue the highest possible offices. The presidential election has commanded the attention of the

⁴ Barbara Norrander, "Primary Elections and Caucuses," in *Guide to U.S. Political Parties*, ed. Marjorie R. Hershey (Thousand Oaks, California: CQ Press, 2014), 271-281.

largest portion of the American public by far since the founding of the Republic. From countless examples of presidential candidates' success stories after the campaign, it is clear that the benefit of running for president is not solely the opportunity to win the election and control the office.⁵ The free publicity that comes from participating in the race can boost a politician's aspirations for other offices, such as Congress, as they seek to gain name recognition. But I will argue that beyond simply serving a politician's personal ambitions, a presidential campaign can provide the chance to significantly expand the boundaries of political debate. Insurgent candidates bring with them both a unique platform and supporter base which the candidates from the party's established faction are forced to confront directly in their own campaigns and governance.

Literature Review: The Causes of Party Change

Scholarly approaches to understanding party change can be grouped into three broad schools of thought. Many political scientists have traditionally categorized party change as a bottom-up process in which changes in voter preferences result in changes in the two dominant parties. Anthony Downs's median-voter theory is popularly used to depict American preferences as a bell curve model with the majority of voters occupying the ideological center.⁶ If the distribution of voter preference changes, the two parties will react to try to maximize their voter return. The realignment school has asserted that every thirty years, identity groups of voters will realign en masse in a critical election, rearranging the agendas and makeup of the parties.⁷ Other scholars

⁵ Matt Flegenheimer, "The Many Reasons to Run for President When You Probably Don't Stand a Chance," *New York Times*, Apr. 13, 2019.

⁶ Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1957).

⁷ V. O. Key, "A Theory of Critical Elections," *The Journal of Politics* 17, no. 1(1955): 3-18; Stephen Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make: Leadership from John Adams to Bill Clinton* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1997).

have pointed to elites as the source of party change in more of a top-down model, seeing the competitive struggle between savvy politicians as the key driver of party change. Those who succeed in capturing positions of power are able to set the agenda and themes within the party.⁸ Lastly, the so-called UCLA school has an interest group theory of party change, suggesting that parties are nothing more than a coalition of interest groups who drive policy and agenda. Voters are perceived to lack strong preferences or abilities to determine whether or not politicians are doing their jobs as desired.⁹ Meanwhile, interest groups have the time and money to be critically tuned in, present their perspective, and apply pressure. In a related vein, both historians and political scientists have also weighed in on sources of party change, emphasizing social movements' influence.¹⁰ The electoral calculus of politicians was transformed when news cycles and public discourse was dominated by the Civil Rights movement, for example.¹¹

Yet none of these perspectives adequately illuminate the role of insurgent presidential candidates in reshaping parties. With the high levels of media and public attention to presidential races, the party's nominees play a critical role as a party leader, especially when the party does not control the White House. So even if scholars are correct that voters do not pay much attention to politics on a daily basis, they and the media pay inordinate attention to presidential races, and particularly to insurgencies within these races. My theory of insurgent-driven party change draws on the insights from existing schools of thought, combining the role of elites

⁸ Robert Harmel and Kenneth Janda, "An Integrated Theory of Party Goals and Party Change," *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 6 no. 3 (1994): 259-87.

⁹ Kathleen Bawn, Martin Cohen, David Karol, Seth Masket, Hans Noel, and John Zaller, "A Theory of Political Parties: Groups, Policy Demands, and Nominations," *Perspectives on Politics* 10 no. 3 (2012): 571-597.

¹⁰ Sam Rosenfeld, *The Polarizers: Postwar Architects of Our Partisan Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019); Daniel Schlozman, *When Movements Anchor Parties: Electoral Alignments in American History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

¹¹ Edward Carmines and James Stimson, *Issue Evolution: Race and the Transformation of American Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

(insurgent presidential candidates in this case), interest groups, and movements out of which the insurgent infrastructure is composed. Voters serve a critical role in performing electoral tests to open up opportunities for insurgents to expand their influence within the party.

Existing historical literature on insurgent candidates has similarly contributed important insights while failing to produce a framework for understanding how they are able to effect party change. Those working in the history discipline have produced a wealth of detailed accounts of particular politicians' careers and singular trends in American politics. For instance, Rick Perlstein's *The Invisible Bridge: The Fall of Nixon and the Rise of Reagan* is a tomb chronicling the years leading up to Reagan's first presidential run.¹² Robert Mason and Geoffrey Kabaservice bring to light the histories of the minority Republican party and moderate Republicans during the New Deal regime, respectively.¹³ Andrew Busch narrates the events leading up to the presidential election of 1980 and the impact of Reagan's ascension to the presidency on the rise of the Right.¹⁴ Timothy Stanley illuminates the overlooked battle for the Democratic nomination in 1980 between President Jimmy Carter and Senator Edward Kennedy.¹⁵ Yet, for all their rich empirical detail, these historical narratives fail to deliver generalizable insights into the mechanisms through which any insurgent might bring about party change. There is no cross-case comparison to translate the specific historical developments into analytically clear processes. In

¹² Rick Perlstein, *The Invisible Bridge: The Fall of Nixon and the Rise of Reagan* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014).

¹³ Robert Mason, *The Republican Party and American Politics from Hoover to Reagan* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Geoffrey Kabaservice, *Rule and Ruin: The Downfall of Moderation and the Destruction of the Republican Party, From Eisenhower to the Tea Party* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

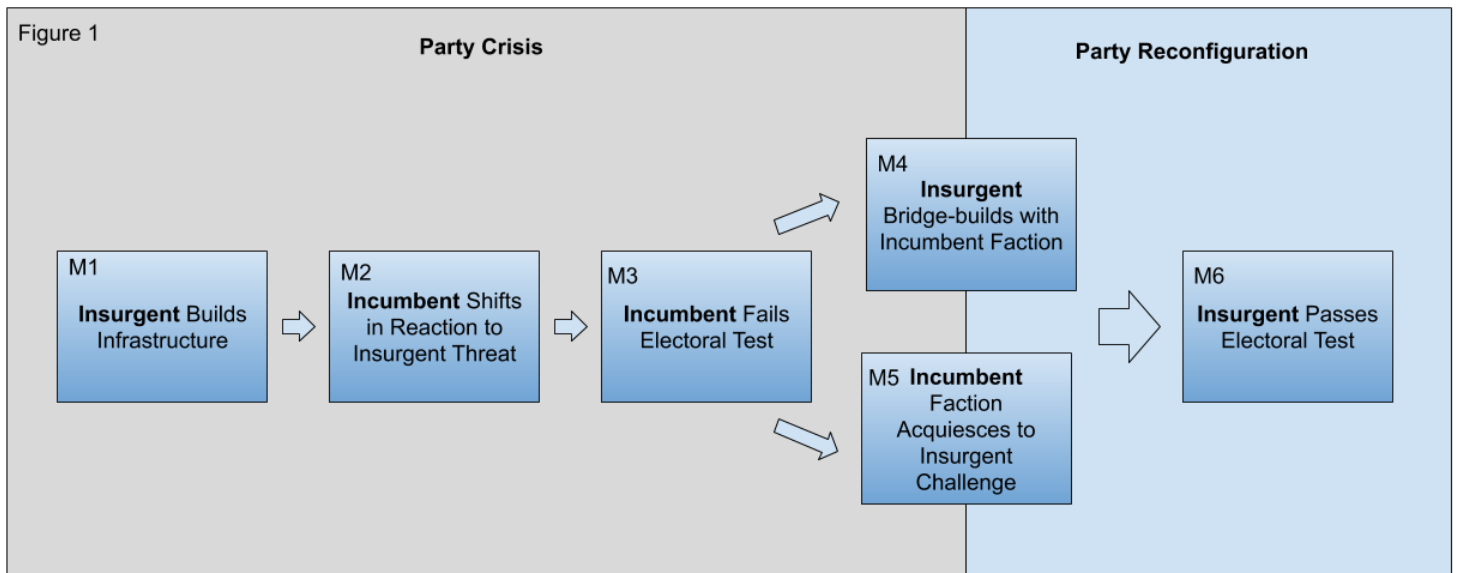
¹⁴ Andrew Busch, *Reagan's Victory: The Presidential Election of 1980 and the Rise of the Right* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005)

¹⁵ Timothy Stanley, *Kennedy vs. Carter: The 1980 Battle for the Democratic Party's Soul* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010).

this thesis I will use these historical narratives to draw out a theoretical model of insurgent-driven party change.

Theoretical Framework: Tracing the Process of Insurgent-Driven Party Change

In this thesis, I define an insurgent as a political candidate who is a) a challenger to the party's presumptive nominee and b) a repudiator of the party's established agenda and composition. Other definitions will only include the former qualification. For example, Congressman Joe Kennedy III's (MA-4) primary challenge for Senator Ed Markey's seat in 2020 may be labelled an insurgency, but his lack of a clear alternative vision for the party precludes his campaign's capacity for long-term effects beyond serving his own personal ambitions. In the interest of understanding how an insurgency can effect party change, the second qualification is essential to the study. Within the scope of "party change," I will examine a party's ideological rhetoric, policy platform and agenda, and its demographic composition of voters. The terms "incumbent," "presumptive nominee," "incumbent faction," and "establishment" are used to represent the party insiders holding the higher levels of authority, influence, and leadership positions in party governance or organization.



As shown in Figure 1 above, I theorize six key mechanisms through which an insurgent presidential campaign can successfully enact party change. First, an insurgent must build sufficient *insurgent infrastructure* to launch a threatening campaign against the presumptive party nominee. Even with a strong divergent vision for the party, a lone candidate cannot hope to pose a serious enough challenge to provoke a response from the incumbent, especially when the incumbent is a sitting president. For example, Bill Weld’s longshot primary challenge to President Donald Trump is a repudiation of many of the Republican Party’s current policy stances on immigration, health care, and gun control. Yet his insignificant polling, lack of endorsements, and lack of name recognition give him an unlikely shot for mobilizing a large and visible opposition against the president or provoking a change in Trump’s own governance.

Second, as was just suggested, once an insurgent has mobilized a threatening challenge to an incumbent party leader by pulling together existing party support and inspiring new party voters to join the campaign, the incumbent may *shift in response*, seeking to neutralize the power of the insurgency by partially integrating its demands into their own governance. This has the

unintentional effect of legitimizing the insurgent. Once an insurgent is seen to be the original voice of dominant political rhetoric and policymaking, they may be able to develop a reputation as the preferred candidate for many who will continue to be loyal to the incumbent for tactical reasons (i.e. for politicians, to preserve their positioning in the party structure; for voters, to elect a candidate who is seen to have the best chance of beating the opposition's nominee)—until, that is, the incumbent *loses the electoral test* in the third mechanism.

Should the incumbent party leader fail to win the general election, it is critical that the insurgent is retrospectively seen to have been the better choice. Once they are seen to represent the future of the party, the third and fourth mechanisms simultaneously serve to expand their campaign into that of a frontrunner for the next presidential election cycle. The fourth mechanism—*bridge-building*—is when the insurgent reaches out to members of the incumbent's camp with the intent of demonstrating their dedication to supporting the party's electoral ambitions and reuniting the party under their own leadership. As the insurgent is highly susceptible to being blamed for the incumbent's failure in the general, they must work to present themselves as interested above all in party unity and helping the party win office, two aspirations that were largely diminished in their primary challenger campaign in favor of their distinct vision for party change. It is also useful to show that although they are in favor of dramatic changes to the party platform and rhetoric, they have the capacity to lead the party, not just a faction. The best chance for bridge-building comes through the subsequent midterm elections, where the insurgent may support the party's campaigns regardless of the candidate's ideology or policy stances.

The fifth mechanism operates concurrently with the fourth. Members of the incumbent's branch of the party will *acquiesce* to the insurgent challenge. For example, the above-mentioned

insurgent support of midterm campaigns only works because party members have accepted their assistance. Additionally, party members will fully or partially adopt the rhetoric and policy stances of the insurgent, perhaps in the hope of capitalizing on the apparent popularity of the new direction of the party. Issues that were not before part of mainstream political discourse may be at the very least debated. Examples include Reagan's signature outrage over the Panama Canal Treaty and Ted Kennedy's and Bernie Sanders's fights for universal healthcare. Donald Trump's 2016 campaign represents an outlier in the history of insurgent presidential runs as he had a significantly expedited progression of influence over the party. His calls for the border wall, reversing the Affordable Care Act, and pulling out of international agreements spread throughout the rest of the Republican presidential primary campaigns like wildfire as he rose in the polls. In the more typical cases, with consensus behind the insurgent's message, high levels of support for a second presidential run is secured.

The sixth mechanism – the *electoral test* – is the insurgent candidate's successful ascendancy both to the party nomination and the presidency. The party must fully invest in the insurgent's vision of the party in the hopes that it is their best shot at securing control of the highest office. But the insurgent must also win the general election to prove their vision's viability among the entire electorate. For example, while Tulis and Mellow argue persuasively that Barry Goldwater's electoral failure in his insurgent 1964 campaign actually established the conditions for the conservative movement's success in putting Ronald Reagan in the White House in 1980, it is nevertheless true that in the short term the Republican Party interpreted Goldwater's landslide loss as an electoral mandate against the conservative ideology he promoted. The party reverted back to the New Deal consensus, e.g. electing Richard Nixon as their next presidential nominee. Upon winning the party nomination and general election, Ronald

Reagan fully cemented the Republican Party's role as the house of conservatives of every variety, white Southerners, evangelicals, and large military expenditures. Once Kennedy decided not to seek the party's nomination for president in 1984, the Democratic Party lost its strongest challenge to the burgeoning neoliberal regime. And while Bernie Sanders's insurgent challenge to the now established neoliberal consensus within the Democratic Party has been unsuccessful in reaching the critical sixth mechanism, the electoral test, there is ample evidence that the other mechanisms help us understand the change he did create and the reasons he was unsuccessful. The following chapters will explore evidence for the six mechanisms within the successful Reagan case study and the partially successful Kennedy case study. In the third case study, I will explore the current status of the Bernie Sanders insurgency.

Methodology: Comparative-Historical Case Studies

My theoretical framework relies on process tracing to identify the mechanisms that explain a causal sequence connecting my independent variable of insurgent presidential campaigns to my dependent variable of party change. For mechanisms, a term which will be referenced frequently in this thesis, I employ the common definition of "a 'black box' that explains a causal relation or sequence."¹⁶ Where most accounts of how Ronald Reagan's rise to power resulted in reshaping the party may approach something of a causal narrative, my study seeks to bring the causal mechanisms to the front of analysis for the purpose of comparison with other cases, placing my methodology squarely under process tracing.¹⁷

Case Selection and Coding

¹⁶ Matthew Lange, *Comparative-Historical Methods* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2013).

¹⁷ Lange, *Comparative-Historical Methods*.

For this thesis, I employ a comparative-case method of process-tracing over three main case studies. If an insurgency is found to contain all six mechanisms, the case is considered to follow the theoretical model. If it contains between 3-5 of the mechanisms, the case is partial. With less than three of the mechanisms triggered, the insurgency is deviant. As displayed in Figure 2 below, the Ronald Reagan chapter provides a case within which all six mechanisms and robust immediate party change can be found with a multitude of evidence. The Edward Kennedy and Bernie Sanders chapters serve as examples of partial cases, which are useful for confirming that an insurgent's ability to enact robust immediate party change does in fact rely on the triggering of all six mechanisms. The conclusion will engage with Donald Trump, the other modern presidential insurgency, as a deviant case that produced robust and immediate party change without fully triggering more than two of the mechanisms. Figure 2 below details whether each mechanism is considered present (X), absent (--), or partially present (X/--) in each of the cases explored.

Figure 2

	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6
Reagan	X	X	X	X	X	X
Kennedy	X	X	X	X/--	X	--
Sanders	X	X	X	X/--	X/--	--
Trump	X	--	--	--	--	X

While the case studies within my comparative-historical methodology focus on the political histories of chosen candidates, only brief space will be devoted to the insurgent's history before the first intent to run for presidential office is evident. In order to present a threatening challenge to the existing party system, an insurgent must have an established reputation in the public eye, or else they will not get further than a longshot candidacy. Ronald Reagan held celebrity and name recognition from both his B-rated acting career and his governance of the state of California. Edward Kennedy and Bernie Sanders had long impressive records in the U.S. Congress. Trump's name was known in celebrity and business circles for decades before he turned to politics. These histories are essential preconditions for insurgent-driven party change, but they do not help us understand why some campaigns succeed and others fail to produce immediate and robust reconfigurations of a party. Nor does the candidate's actions in the years after a failed insurgency help us understand the impact of insurgent presidential campaigns, even if those actions have an impact on the party, as might be argued of Edward Kennedy's long and illustrious career in the Senate after. For the purposes of my research question, the majority of the focus in my case studies will be limited to the time period between the political actor's first intent to run for a party's presidential nomination and the direct aftermath of the result of their last electoral test relating to their campaign(s).

My empirical research on the question of insurgent-driven party change was collected primarily from presidential library archives, press coverage, and historians' secondary narratives. Primary sources from the archives of the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley, California, and the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library in Boston, Massachusetts, largely

consisted of campaign materials, contemporary press coverage, and polls. Secondary sources from historians also provided a critical mass of my research, allowing me to follow the chronologically ordered activities of the insurgent actor within the period of focus.

Chapter Overview

Chapter 2 will present a case study of Ronald Reagan's 1976 and 1980 presidential campaigns as the main case in which all mechanisms proceed in an overlapping sequence to induce immediate robust change in the Republican Party. In Chapter 3, I will explore Senator Edward Kennedy's 1980 insurgent primary challenge to President Jimmy Carter within the Democratic Party as a partial case in which some but not all of the mechanisms occur, and the insurgency only moderately and temporarily recommits the party to the unabashed liberalism his campaign promoted. Chapter 4 seeks to apply the theoretical model to the original inspiration for the research question, the Bernie Sanders insurgency, in order to understand how his two presidential campaigns will affect the Democratic Party in the long run. Finally, I will conclude by reviewing my argument in light of the exploration of cases, address the value of my theoretical framework in extracting insights from the deviant case of Donald Trump, and reflect on what my findings tell us about the health of our democracy.

Chapter 2

Reward in Rebellion:

Ronald Reagan's Transformation of the Republican Party in the 1970s

Just before announcing his primary challenge to incumbent President Gerald R. Ford, Ronald Reagan called the White House to inform the president of his intent to run. The exchange reveals the competing perspectives of the incumbent and insurgent on what the campaign would do to the Republican Party.

“Well Mr. President, I’m going to make an announcement and I want to tell you about it ahead of time. I am going to run for President. I trust we can have a good contest, and I hope it won’t be divisive.”

President Ford replied, “I’m sorry you’re getting into this. I believe I’ve done a good job, and that I can be elected. Regardless of your good intentions, your bid is bound to be divisive.”

“I don’t think it will hurt the party.”

“Well, I think it will,” said Ford, and hung up.¹⁸

President Ford’s response reveals both his position as the defender of the incumbent faction’s record and as the candidate presumed to be most electable. Moreover, it is clear that both candidates see the potential power of this nomination contest to change the party, for better or worse. The two campaigns would come to represent a fork in the road for the Republican Party in the midst of crisis: recommit to active yet fiscally responsible government, or redefine its role entirely under the tenets of the burgeoning conservative movement.

¹⁸ Perlstein, *The Invisible Bridge*, 545-46.

The Republican Party in the Post-New Deal Era

The roots of conservative discontent with Republican leadership in 1976 can be traced back to the party's response to President Roosevelt's New Deal during the Great Depression. One of the primary purposes of the New Deal in the 1930s was to give the government the power and responsibility to provide a safety net for Americans in times of economic crisis. In the following decades, New Deal progressivism would come to be entrenched as the starting-off point for both parties. The agendas of the two parties were so similar, it was considered the "tweedle dee, tweedle dum" era of American politics.¹⁹ Republican President Dwight Eisenhower protected Social Security and established the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.²⁰ Likewise, upon taking office, Richard Nixon declined to undertake an effort to undo Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society programs. Instead, he expanded the federal government's regulation of the economy, increased Social Security benefits, introduced a minimum tax on the wealthy and minimum income for the poor, and even proposed a comprehensive health insurance program.²¹ Even when Nixon faced pressure from the chairman of the Federal Reserve to restrict federal spending in 1970, he acceded to the striking national postal workers' wage demands.²² While Nixon's governance has often been depicted as savvy political calculations rather than as reflective of a consistent belief system, his conduct in office also represents his leadership over a party that lacked coherence or distinction from its opposition.

Eventually, the host of social and economic issues plaguing the United States throughout the late 1960s and 1970s brought into question the adequacy of government programs and

¹⁹ Jeffrey K. Tulis and Nicole Mellow, *Legacies of Losing in American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 103.

²⁰ Tulis and Mellow, 102-03.

²¹ Eduardo Porter, "G.O.P. Shift Moves Center Far to Right," *New York Times*, Sept. 4, 2012.

²² Ken Hughes, "Richard Nixon: Domestic Affairs," Miller Center, University of Virginia, 2019.

regulations in preventing crises. Simultaneously rising unemployment and inflation—termed stagflation—was coupled with the 1973 oil crisis to exacerbate the country’s long-term economic decline. Meanwhile, perceptions of “America’s Retreat” from the fight against communism brought forth predictions of the end of capitalism itself.²³ In the midst of these critical reckonings, the Watergate scandal instantaneously slashed public trust in government. Could an institution that appeared to have defaulted on its key promises of economic security and world leadership hold up against increasing calls for major changes in the midst of such a vivid display of corruption? The cracks in the New Deal regime made way for increased conservative organizing.

Gerald Ford’s role upon assuming the presidency in 1974 was to restore the American public’s faith in its government and in the Republican Party to solve its problems with integrity. Ford and others who had been established within the party for years did recognize the need to adjust tactics so as to expand their loyalties beyond 18 percent of the electorate. Indeed, as a politician Ford was not altogether antagonistic towards right-wing politics. He had sought Goldwater’s vice presidential ticket in 1964, and led the impeachment battle against the Supreme Court’s most liberal justice in 1970.²⁴ However, in his presidential governance, he was largely at odds with the conservative movement. The idea of appealing to the growing conservative movement was widely rejected as political suicide; “Where do elephants go to die?” a political cartoonist from the *Los Angeles Times* queried in a sketch. The answer—“Ronald Reagan’s ranch.”²⁵ After the second annual Conservative Political Action Conference in 1975, 113 of 145

²³ Busch, *Reagan’s Victory*, 12.

²⁴ Perlstein, *The Invisible Bridge*, 440-42.

²⁵ Perlstein, 442.

GOP representatives and 31 of 38 senators signed what *Newsweek* dubbed “a blood oath of loyalty to the President and party.”²⁶ Most within the party responded to the state of the country and to their persistent minority status with calls for “broadening the party,” although the pathway for doing so was not yet resolved.²⁷ Under President Ford’s leadership in a time of economic downturn and declining U.S. hegemony, the objectives of the Republican Party were neither clear nor stable. Initially promoting raising taxes, Ford then asked for and signed off on a major tax cut bill, despite serious reservations about the final product. His continuation of Nixon’s detente policy in foreign affairs also faced increasing opposition from advocates of strong national security, pressuring him to make occasional shows of force. Finally, his decision to pardon Nixon crippled his efforts to lead the way in dissociating the party from its corrupt past.

The burgeoning conservative movement was increasingly frustrated with the Ford administration. His lack of a clear plan in the face of stagflation, embrace of détente, and pick of liberal Republican Nelson Rockefeller for vice president have been credited with “infuriat[ing] conservatives into forming the New Right.”²⁸ Soon they looked to put forth one of their own for presidential candidacy. A Reagan candidacy had been on the public’s mind for years, since his unexpected yet surprisingly successful entrance into the contest in 1968. Afterwards, “he had emerged as the hottest politician in the country.”²⁹ He eventually declared his challenge to President Ford on November 20, 1975. With support from social and fiscal conservatives, evangelicals, and proponents of increased defense spending, he would go on to win 23 primary

²⁶ Perlstein, 442.

²⁷ Perlstein, 442.

²⁸ David D. Kirkpatrick, “Moderate? Conservative? With Gerald Ford, Take Your Pick,” *New York Times*, Dec. 31, 2006.

²⁹ Perlstein, *The Invisible Bridge*, 82.

contests to Ford's 27, capturing nearly 46% of the vote and just 43 fewer delegates than the president. It was the most successful primary challenge to an incumbent in American history.

After Ford lost to Jimmy Carter in the 1976 general election, there was an opening for the Republican Party to reconsider its choice of leadership. Reagan entered the next election cycle in 1980 as the frontrunner in the polls. Despite the new advantages for his insurgency, many political pundits expected his age, conservatism, or lack of foreign policy experience to sink his campaign at some point over the primary season.³⁰ He faced a sizable list of opponents with longstanding reputations in the party. As former director of the Central Intelligence Agency in the Ford administration and former chairman of the Republican National Committee, George H. W. Bush represented the incumbent faction's lingering objections to conservative leadership of the party. John Anderson's campaign in the Republican primaries and later as an independent served as the last breath of resistance from the moderate Rockefeller Republicans. After underestimating the importance of the Iowa caucuses, Reagan quickly bounced back to secure 44 primary contests. Once he had successfully captured the nomination, he brought Bush onto the ticket as vice president to promote reunification. Upon winning the election, he was able to fully entrench his agenda within the GOP. In the remainder of this chapter, I will trace the process through which his loss in the 1976 Republican nomination contest allowed for him to take over the party's direction in 1980.

M1: Building Insurgent Infrastructure

Insurgents mobilize and channel radicals into an existing party's infrastructure, serving to both tie supporters into the project of reshaping the party *and* pressure established party members to

³⁰ Lou Cannon, "Reagan: Iowa Loss Allowed Him to Campaign His Way," *Washington Post*, June 1, 1980.

accept or expel this new source of support. Reagan claimed a role as a leading voice of conservatism after the older generation faded out, and coordinated the conservative standpoints concerning the economy, social issues, and foreign policy. Critically, his decision to run for president put an end to calls for a third party, recommitting the ideologues to reforming the GOP in the way Barry Goldwater intended in the decade prior; ““We are conservatives,” once proclaimed the Arizona senator. “This great Republican Party is our historic house.”³¹

Growth of the Movement

Various forms of conservatism have existed throughout the timeline of American politics, but in the post-New Deal era it was specifically designed as a distinct counterpoint to the new and dominant conception of the state’s role as the primary provider of economic and social welfare. As Tulis and Mellow demonstrate in *Legacies of Losing in American Politics*, modern conservatism presented its first significant challenge to the New Deal order in the form of Barry Goldwater’s presidential candidacy in 1964. His crushing defeat may have signified the health and popularity of redistributive politics at the time, but it also provided the necessary conditions for Reagan to achieve success later on. The organizing and rhetorical strategies from Goldwater’s campaign remained intact over the following decade as an unpopular yet ever-present rebuttal to New Deal hegemony.³² And after Reagan’s famous speech, “A Time for Choosing,” at the 1964 Republican National Convention and Goldwater’s loss in the general election, Reagan catapulted into the national spotlight as the new voice of the conservative movement.

³¹ Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 94.

³² Tulis and Mellow, *Legacies of Losing*, 102-133.

Despite campaigning in the midst of a firmly liberal era, Nixon had begun the work to court conservatives and expand the Republican coalition, even as a moderate. In contrast to his 1960 presidential campaign, in 1968 he called for reform of the welfare state, strong national defense, states' rights, and employed vigorous rhetoric concerning law and order. The appeal to conservatives, and particularly to southern and western states, was unsurprising considering the threat that George Wallace's third party bid presented to his campaign.³³ However, his presidency was in no way rewarding for the conservatives who had supported him, revealing a contrast between his campaign rhetoric and his presidential governance.

Paul Weyrich, Joseph Coors, and Edwin Feulner would found the Heritage Foundation a year into Nixon's second term, partially out of objection to the administration's adherence to the "liberal consensus" of the New Deal regime. After two decades of service, Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity Howard Phillips resigned when Nixon reneged on his commitment to veto legislation that would increase funding for Johnson's Great Society programs. Phillips went on to found the Conservative Caucus in 1974. As more voices began to reject active redistributive government, most found it imperative to organize outside of the formal Republican Party. The conservative movement was not naturally linked together, but required intentional outreach and partnerships between the New Right, social conservatives, evangelical Christians, and advocates of strong national security. Phillips and Weyrich recruited Christian conservative leaders, supported their political activities, and used them to connect with television evangelists like James Robison, Pat Robertson, and Jerry Falwell. The New Right was thus closely involved

³³ Tulis and Mellow, 118-121. Here we can see a third party equivalent of M2, where a party incumbent reacts to a threat through integrating the agenda of the challenger.

with the Religious Right's "virtual labyrinth of PACs, lobbies, educational and research foundations, publications, TV programs, and churches."³⁴

The escalation of conservative organizing did nothing to boost the fortunes of the Republican Party, however. The party had been in the minority in Congress for twenty years, and Nixon's coattails were not very long. Conservatives had long called for a more outright repudiation of the dominant regime, as exemplified by Phyllis Schlafly's 1964 book *A Choice, Not an Echo*.³⁵ But it was not until Watergate that the Republican Party faced a full crisis of legitimacy, leading many to wonder whether the party was salvageable from its public image of corruption and aimlessness. With extremely low voter identification with the party, the conditions were ripe for a reenvisioning of the party's appeal. However, conservative leaders were wary of throwing the weight of their organizational infrastructure behind such an unpopular party, particularly with such tension between Republican leaders and the movement. The main takeaway from the 1975 Conservative Political Action Conference was conservatives' "astonishing depths of revulsion against Ford," despite his standing as arguably the most conservative president since Warren G. Harding.³⁶ Leading conservative Senator Jesse Helms demanded an all-conservative platform convention to draft a "second Declaration of Independence."³⁷ The conservative movement envisioned abandoning the Republican Party in favor of a new Conservative party, with Reagan and George Wallace sharing the presidential ticket.

³⁴ Busch, *Reagan's Victory*, 16-17.

³⁵ Phyllis Schlafly, *A Choice, Not an Echo* (self-pub., 1964).

³⁶ Perlstein, *The Invisible Bridge*, 440.

³⁷ Perlstein, 440.

Publisher of the *National Review* and leading third party advocate William Rusher introduced Reagan at CPAC's closing banquet as "the next President of the United States."³⁸ But Reagan's speech in no way echoed the calls of Rusher or the rest of the Conference. Instead he asked the room, filled with representatives of the growing conservative movement ready to storm the presidency and federal government from the outside, "Is it a third party that we need, or is it a new and revitalized second party, raising a banner of no pale pastels, but bold colors which could make it unmistakably clear where we stand on all the issues troubling the people?"³⁹ Thus, from the very conception of Reagan's presidential campaign, it was clear that he would operate as an insurgent *within* the Republican Party, committed to the party whilst deeply dissatisfied with its current form.

Bringing the Movement into the Campaign

The official launch of Reagan's insurgent challenge for the Republican nomination required campaign organizing, endorsements, and donations to overcome the disadvantages of running against an incumbent president. Economic conservatives provided the base for Reagan's campaign from the very beginning. Halfway through the primary season, however, the campaign was struggling with unexpected losses in the first two contests, Iowa and New Hampshire. Voters in New Hampshire were concerned that his proposal to put states and localities in charge of funding for a variety of federal programs would threaten the state's lack of an income tax. Later on, concerns over Reagan's perceived plans to make Social Security optional or invest the

³⁸ Perlstein, 440.

³⁹ Perlstein, 440.

program funds in the stock market assisted Ford's victory at the Florida primary.⁴⁰ The campaign continued to struggle until he began to amplify socially conservative issues. Critical activist mobilization rewarded his "denunciations of permissiveness, abortion rights, and gun control."⁴¹ Reagan continued to consolidate these issue stances into one cohesive ideological challenge to Republican moderates: "You know," he said, "sometimes I think moderation should be taken in moderation."⁴² Meanwhile, to the White House it seemed that the Ford campaign was "in real danger of being out-organized by a small number of highly motivated right wing nuts," according to one aide.⁴³ Although the president would pull through to secure the nomination, the infrastructure of organized and coordinated conservative activism would remain largely intact, ready to move on to its next political contests.

Popularizing the "Conservative Republican"

Conservative PACs grew and expanded their activities in the aftermath of the 1976 election. Jesse Helms's political machine, the North Carolina Congressional Club, had helped deliver Reagan's critical win in the 1976 North Carolina primary. With backing from the Club and the National Conservative PAC, a handful of conservative insurgents entered the Senate in 1978, including William Armstrong, a radio-station executive from Colorado, Roger Jepson, an Iowa businessman, and Gordon Humphrey, a New Hampshire airline pilot.⁴⁴ The Congressional Club would go on to raise an estimated \$4 million for Reagan's campaign in 1980 and help bring

⁴⁰ Robert Mason, *The Republican Party*, 243.

⁴¹ Mason, 243.

⁴² Mason, 243.

⁴³ Mason, 243.

⁴⁴ Peter Ross Range, "Thunder From the Right," *New York Times*, Feb. 8, 1981.

another five New Right candidates into the Senate.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, Reagan used \$1.5 million of his leftover 1976 campaign funds to establish Citizens for the Republic, a political action committee and grassroots organization to keep his supporters connected.⁴⁶ Grassroots conservative activists within the Republican Party who were inspired by Reagan's insurgent bid ironically turned increasingly pragmatic Goldwaterites out of office.⁴⁷ In partnership with the expansive list of organizations in the conservative movement, Reagan invested conservatives into the project of reshaping the Republican Party through the appeal of sending one of their own to the White House in 1980.

The process of building insurgent infrastructure spanned from the early stages of Reagan's 1976 presidential campaign to his successful nomination in 1980. Once Reagan was seen to have a command over a substantial base of voters within the party in his first campaign, Ford was forced to shift his own strategies so as to maintain control over the nomination process. Thus, it is necessary to return to Reagan's 1976 campaign in order to understand how Ford's early response to the threat contributed to legitimizing the demands for party reform.

M2: Incumbents Shift in Reaction to the Insurgent Threat

An insurgent challenge can pressure incumbents to concede to the desired changes in the hopes of neutralizing the threat. In doing so, the incumbent allows the insurgent to be and be seen as the agenda setter. Even before Reagan announced his candidacy, President Ford was already taking Reagan and the conservative wing very seriously; "for many moderates, his rhetoric on

⁴⁵ Range, "Thunder From the Right."

⁴⁶ Busch, *Reagan's Victory*, 52.

⁴⁷ Kabaservice, *Rule and Ruin*, 350-51.

school prayer, busing, government spending, and abortion began to sound uncomfortably like Reagan's."⁴⁸ Ford withdrew from overt détente policy. If the fall of Saigon in April 1975 served as a devastating symbol of the erosion of American global power under his presidency, the rescue of the USS *Mayaguez* three weeks later provided Ford with a brief success story of continued dominance. After the merchant ship had been captured off the coast of Cambodia, he used the episode as a way to prove that he was willing to draw the line and exercise hard power. Bypassing congressional consent, Ford and Kissinger authorized a much larger military operation than was necessary to recover the crew. Conservatives, moderates, and liberals alike celebrated the bloody victory, and his approval ratings rose 11 points. From members of the president's team to conservative columnists, calls for Reagan to be president were predicted to come to an end.⁴⁹

As the 1976 primary campaigns were underway, moderates in the party felt increasingly isolated. Maryland Senator "Mac" Mathias, a progressive, contemplated "entering the presidential primaries as a way of pressuring Ford from the left to counter the pressure from the right." Ford dissuaded him with a warning that it would only strengthen Reagan's campaign.⁵⁰ Thus the moderates within the party were dissuaded from using the same mechanism of party influence as the conservatives. According to Mathias, "progressive Republicans were largely paralyzed."⁵¹ By the time Reagan finally entered the race, his campaign was already poised to wield power over the discourse surrounding the primaries. "The astonishing thing," Scotty Reston of the *New York Times* wrote the day after Reagan announced his candidacy, "is that this

⁴⁸ Kabaservice, 347.

⁴⁹ Perlstein, *The Invisible Bridge*, 464-65.

⁵⁰ Kabaservice, *Rule and Ruin*, 347.

⁵¹ Kabaservice, 347.

amusing but frivolous Reagan fantasy is taken so seriously by the news media and particularly by the President. It makes a lot of news, but it doesn't make much sense."⁵² Before the fortitude of conservative activism was even visible to observers like Reston, the incumbent was already lending legitimacy to Reagan's insurgency.

Challenged incumbents may try to preempt an insurgent's campaign. Florida was a particularly evident demonstration of the incumbent's strategy of using presidential powers to combat most of Reagan's attacks.⁵³ Sometimes Ford's actions were meant to distinguish himself from Reagan. For example, he touted his strong commitment to the Social Security program and doled out many federal contracts for projects in Florida. Other times, however, he tried to blur the differences between the two candidates. Polls showed his weakness was voters' perception of his foreign policy. Reagan had not yet challenged the president's record concerning the fight against communism, but he had staked out a strong position on the subject, and it was clear the attacks would come soon. In Florida, one day before Reagan "accused Ford's presidency of presiding over the military decline of the United States," the president offset the impact of his opponent's charges by ordering a \$33.6 million Air Force contract for an advanced strategic air system and amplifying his rhetoric against Fidel Castro in front of Cubans being naturalized in Miami.⁵⁴

Despite another electoral loss in the Florida primary, lessons from the state's contest gave Reagan a clear path forward. For North Carolina, the campaign turned towards decisively

⁵² Perlstein, *The Invisible Bridge*, 546.

⁵³ Lou Cannon, "Federal Contracts Help President: Ford Gaining in Florida," *Washington Post*, Mar. 7, 1976.

⁵⁴ Cannon, "Federal Contracts Help President."

contrasting Reagan and Ford on foreign policy.⁵⁵ Loss in Vietnam and perceived passivity towards the Soviet Union, Cuba, and Panama became the frontline attacks. “All I can see is what other nations the world over see: collapse of the American will and the retreat of American power,” said Reagan to one crowd during the campaign.⁵⁶ His challenge to détente became such a symbol of his campaign by the end, that all subsequent Republican rejections of the policy would be inextricably tied to him. Whenever Ford moved to embrace anti-communist interventionist rhetoric or policy, he may have succeeded in protecting his place as the party’s nominee. But he also legitimized Reagan’s policies. By the time the following mechanism provided an opening for new party leadership, Reagan’s agenda was no longer so extreme or unimaginable.

M3: Incumbent Faces the Electoral Test and Loses

Once the incumbent secures the nomination, the general election will not only determine which party controls the executive branch, but also whether or not the established party model can garner enough popular support. When Ford lost to outsider candidate Jimmy Carter, many different interpretations circulated on why Ford lost and how the party could recover. Reagan worked in the immediate aftermath of the general election to interpret the loss as a mandate against the party’s moderate past. He wrote in his column the week after Election Day,

As for the Republicans, history may write that 1976 was the last time they tried to piece together a coalition of the party’s conservative majority with a vocal, but fading liberal faction whose theme has been don’t-worry-about-convictions-let’s-win. This faction, which hasn’t done much winning in recent years, is the last vestige of that 1930’s brand of Republicanism which was content to say “yes, but” to Democrat big-government initiatives (“yes, but a little less; yes, but a little slower”).

⁵⁵ Lee Edwards, “Ronald Reagan vs. Gerald Ford: The 1976 GOP Convention Battle Royal,” *National Interest*, Apr. 16, 2016.

⁵⁶ Mason, *The Republican Party*, 243.

Party activists, mostly conservatives (and many of them recent converts), have been restless about this “yes, but” approach. But, the party wasn’t quite ready this year to rechristen itself and to openly offer a permanent new home to conservative independents and Democrats. It did take a big first step when its rank-and-file members hammered out a platform which recognizes that a majority of Americans – according to public opinion polls – today consider themselves conservatives. It leaves little doubt that, just below the surface, the Republican Party is hankering to be reborn.⁵⁷

The incumbent faction’s electoral defeat had created an opening for the insurgent faction to popularize the “conservative” label within the party. The insurgent’s new leverage provoked shifts in the interactions between Reagan and the party’s old guard, as explored in the following two sections.

M4: Insurgents Bridge-build with the Incumbent Faction

“I insist Barry Goldwater was never defeated on the basis of his philosophy. The opposition, aided and abetted by Republican opponents in the primaries—which makes me so strong in my Eleventh Commandment belief—created a straw man, and what the people really voted against was a false image of a dangerous radical.”

-Ronald Reagan⁵⁸

Once insurgents attain enough support to be considered a frontrunner for the next election, they may extend invitations of cooperation and unity to the incumbent party faction so as to secure access and acceptance. While insurgents may wield a formidable base and clarity of rhetoric, they still rely on the establishment for support in extending their votes into a majority or plurality in the state primaries. The combination of a party convention in which Reagan was perceived to be the better choice by the end and the unsuccessful electoral test of Ford’s brand of Republicanism in the 1976 general election opened up a window of opportunity for Reagan.

⁵⁷ Ronald Reagan, “Reagan foresees dangers,” *Courier-Post*, Nov. 8, 1976, Box 10, Ronald Reagan 1980 Presidential Campaign Papers, 1965-1980, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, CA.

⁵⁸ Perlstein, *The Invisible Bridge*, 555.

Reagan had certainly attempted bridge-building with the party establishment during the race. For example, his campaign manager John Sears decided on a last-minute action to solicit the uncommitted delegates; breaking all precedent, Reagan announced his pick for vice president before the convention. Senator Robert Schweiker of Pennsylvania served as a bridge between Reagan's repudiatory campaign and the moderate wing of the party. However, the gambit backfired; not only did he fail to capture the remaining northeastern delegates, but he lost some of his southern delegates as well with the conservative wing's disgust at the Schweiker choice.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, this would become a fairly insignificant misstep after the general election.

Reagan's continued bridge-building after the election was critical for tying together the recently antagonized factions within the party. With his self-proclaimed 11th Commandment—"Thou shalt not speak ill of another Republican"—he personally declined to endorse or support insurgent conservatives, many inspired by his own campaign, in their primary challenges against established Republicans. Meanwhile, conservative operatives at the state level were giving ultimatums to incumbents and encouraging challengers. His own PAC, Citizens for the Republic, was partisan before it was ideological. The PAC even supported the campaigns of GOP candidates who were running against conservative Democrats. Even moderate or liberal Republicans were preferred to conservative Democrats.⁶⁰ Reagan's principal goal was not to put conservatives in office, but to put Republicans in office.

While Reagan used the immediate time period after the 1976 election to promote his vision of the party as the future, as time progressed it became necessary to blur the differences between him and the party establishment. It was no longer profitable to continue to go after

⁵⁹ Craig Shirley, *Reagan's Revolution: The Untold Story of the Campaign That Started It All* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2005), 292-94.

⁶⁰ Citizens for the Republic briefing memo, Box 510, Ronald Reagan 1980 Presidential Campaign Papers, 1965-1980, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, CA.

Ford's moderateness when an unpopular Democrat was in the oval office. Carter provided Reagan and the conservative movement with the opportunity to reconstruct the Republican Party in a moment of opposition, which was much more desirable. Now, disagreeing with the administration was not a betrayal of the party. In fact, the louder one disagreed, the more loyal to party one appeared.

But still, Reagan was vulnerable to the perception that he was to blame for Ford's loss to Carter. At least as early as 1978, his advisors were crafting his message to downplay his previous insurgency. An internal memo detailing potential questions and answers to press inquiries included the following:

Q: What about disagreements between Ford and you?

A: The best answer to that just took place. As you saw, President Ford and I are here together to help elect Bill Clements, Governor of Texas. If that's a feud, we've given the word a new definition.

Q: What about his forthcoming book which blames you for his defeat in 1976?

A: So far as I know, his book hasn't been written yet. I think most everybody agrees that our contest in 1976 gave new strength to the Republican Party. You'll recall that before that a lot of the so-called experts were writing our party off as a dead duck. Yet, Mr. Ford came within a whisker of beating Carter.⁶¹

While Reagan had never been outright antagonistic towards Ford, these responses were a far cry from his immediate post-election analysis. In November, 1976, Reagan had been touting his campaign's role in bringing forth a new direction to the Republican Party. Two years later, his 1976 campaign served the purpose of giving it "new strength."

⁶¹ Briefing Material, "Possible Q&As at Press Availabilities," Box 510, Ronald Reagan 1980 Presidential Campaign Papers, 1965-1980, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, CA.

Q: If you and Ford are such good friends now, what was so bad about him that made you run against him?

A: There were issues on which we disagreed at the time. But that was two years ago and we can leave that to the historians. Considering the performance of the present incumbent in the White House I think history is going to have some good things to say about President Ford. And both of us have the same objective in mind here: a united party that will win elections so we can clean house in Washington.⁶²

For Reagan the frontrunner, the image of a united party against Carter was much more powerful, especially since much of his insurgent platform had already gained dominance in the party's discourse by then.

The Flight of the Moderates

After 1976, despite Reagan's efforts at bridge-building, the growth of Reagan's insurgent infrastructure pushed some moderates and liberals out of the party. For instance, progressive Representative Charles Whalen was long considered "one of Ohio's most respected politicians," and pulled through in the difficult 1974 midterms without even provoking a Democratic challenger. But after 1976, state Republican leaders gave him an ultimatum: lean into the conservative wave, or face a challenger. In response, he retired in 1977, opening up the race to a more conservative candidate.⁶³ Reagan may not have been a direct participant in encouraging conservative insurgencies around the country, but rather he served as the inspiration and the national leader drawing together the individual fights into a national movement. Long-time leader of the liberal Republican faction, Rockefeller would also retire from New York politics during this time. The new support for Reagan from New York Republicans "was viewed by

⁶² "Possible Q&As at Press Availabilities."

⁶³ Kabaservice, 350; Citizens for the Republic Briefing Material on 1978 midterms, Box 510, Ronald Reagan 1980 Presidential Campaign Papers, 1965-1980, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, CA.

some as another signal of the diffusion of leadership in the New York party since Nelson A. Rockefeller, a former governor and a strong political foe of Mr. Reagan, began to eschew active politics.”⁶⁴ One by one, liberal and moderate Republicans were confronted with a choice: lean right or leave the party. When moderate Representative John Anderson failed to garner support in the GOP primaries, he left the party to pursue an independent candidacy. Had he remained in the GOP and spoke at the convention, the event might not have so uniformly displayed moderate acquiescence to conservative leadership. Instead, Anderson’s departure and Reagan’s nomination resulted in expelling more moderate and liberal voters from the party.

Running as an Insurgent Frontrunner

For his part, Reagan made every attempt not to “repeat the errors of Goldwater in 1964 by reading [moderates] out of the party.”⁶⁵ In areas with traditional Republican support, his team worked to convince voters and state party officials that his campaign was targeted towards them as much as towards conservatives. In an internal campaign memo, his advisors discussed “solidify[ing] a natural Republican base” through campaigning in Ohio and other states that they had left to the incumbent the last time around.⁶⁶ The memo went on to detail the extensive list of former Ford supporters they had recruited to work on the campaign.⁶⁷ At points in his campaign, Reagan even had to disassociate from “insurgents and right-wingers” who organized for him

⁶⁴ Frank Lynnox, “Support for Reagan is Increasing Among New York GOP Chiefs” *New York Times*, Aug. 19, 1979, Box 510, Ronald Reagan 1980 Presidential Campaign Papers, 1965-1980, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, CA.

⁶⁵ Kabaservice, *Rule and Ruin*, 361.

⁶⁶ Memo from Frank Donatelli to Jim Stockdale, “Re: September 21s, Cincinnati visit,” Sep. 14, 1979, Box 510, Ronald Reagan 1980 Presidential Campaign Papers, 1965-1980, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, CA.

⁶⁷ Memo from Frank Donatelli to Jim Stockdale.

outside of the official campaign structure. Roger Stone wrote to Reagan about conservative organizing in New Jersey: “It would indeed be tragic if this group ran independent slates of Reagan delegates against our official Reagan slates.”⁶⁸ It is likely the concern was that the group’s delegate selection would lack the moderates and members of the party establishment included in the campaign’s own slates.

Once Reagan had ascended to become the party’s presumptive nominee, he continued bridge-building with the party establishment. The convention was clearly in the control of conservatives, who did away with support for the Equal Rights Amendment in the platform for the first time in 40 years and replaced it with pro-life planks. Although the party’s agenda was under reconstruction, established Republicans were not sidelined. In fact, “most of the convention’s prime speaking spots went to moderates including Ford, [Donald] Rumsfeld, and Representative Margaret Heckler.”⁶⁹ Elected progressive Republicans remained in the party even after their base of progressive Republican voters fled, but were left vulnerable and in the minority. Reagan took deliberate steps to reach out to them. He conceded to feminists’ call for him to nominate a woman to the Supreme Court, and resolved to share the ticket with a non-conservative. He first made an offer to Ford, but it fell apart when the former president pushed the idea of a co-presidency. Consequently, the vice presidency went to Ford’s preference, George H. W. Bush.⁷⁰ As the following section will show, Republican party activists and elected officials who remained in the party were swept up into the project of conservative reform.

⁶⁸ Memo from Roger Stone to Ronald Reagan, “Re: Briefing for Middlesex County (New Jersey) Republican Dinner. September 20, 1979,” Sept. 10, 1979, Box 510, Ronald Reagan 1980 Presidential Campaign Papers, 1965-1980, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, CA.

⁶⁹ Kabaservice, *Rule and Ruin*, 361.

⁷⁰ Kabaservice, 361-62.

M5: Incumbents Acquiesce to the Insurgent Challenge

When the incumbent faction loses in a general election, the party undergoes a process of reinterpreting where the new path to an electoral majority lies. Many will concede that the insurgent may have been right on at least a few points, endorsing both their platform and claim to the next presidential nomination. By the time Reagan officially launched his 1980 campaign for the Republican presidential nomination, he had much more influence over political discourse than the last time around.

Despite losing the nomination, the Republican National Convention of 1976 provided Reagan with the tools he needed for the second phase of his insurgency. The platform committee allowed him influence over the document, including a plank on “morality in foreign policy,” a fairly direct rebuttal to the Ford administration’s detente policy. Reagan would begin exploiting these victories no more than a month after the general election. In December, he encouraged the party to pass a resolution to commit the party to its convention platform, although the document is normally viewed as largely symbolic.⁷¹ He went so far as to partially attribute Ford’s loss as a result of failing to fully utilize the platform in his campaign. Reagan wrote, “Though President Ford pledged support of the platform, he took only intermittent advantage of its many clear-cut differences from the Democrats. And, his vice president, Nelson Rockefeller, took pains to belittle it.”⁷²

In the national spotlight provided by his televised speech at the convention, Reagan articulated his agenda so persuasively that by the end of the event, he was seen as the better nomination. Ford had made the decision to give Reagan an impromptu speech slot, likely as an

⁷¹ Ronald Reagan Newspaper Column, Dec. 10, 1976, Box 10, Ronald Reagan 1980 Presidential Campaign Papers, 1965-1980, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, CA.

⁷² Ronald Reagan, “Reagan foresees dangers,” *Courier-Post*, Nov. 8, 1976, Box 10, Ronald Reagan 1980 Presidential Campaign Papers, 1965-1980, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, CA.

attempt to reunite the party around his own leadership. The effect, however, was to give Reagan a highly visible platform to reiterate his clear conservative vision for the party. The widespread view after the event was that while Ford had captured the nomination, Reagan had conquered the future of the party. Afterwards, a Ford delegate from Florida turned to a Reagan operative, and said, “Oh my god we’ve nominated the wrong man.”⁷³ Reagan’s campaign chairman, Senator Paul Laxalt (NV) said of the convention, “Though we lost we really won.”⁷⁴

The convention broke ground both in integrating Reagan’s platform and in centering Reagan as a leader in the party. But it was not until the general election that Ford was truly displaced. After the loss, moderates had scarce “defense against a conservative takeover.”⁷⁵ With Carter capturing the coveted “New South” electoral groups that included African Americans, socially liberal business elites, and suburbanites, moderate Republicans did not have the strength to justify holding strong against the conservative push.⁷⁶ Reagan already had the attention of many fellow Republican politicians who had previously been loyal to Ford. At one dinner party, “Reagan was surrounded by Republican senators who hope[d] to win his blessing—and the party’s banner—in 1980.” They assumed he would run again and were prepared to hitch their wagons to his movement.⁷⁷

In the period between Reagan’s campaigns, while plenty of moderates remained united against his conservative reshaping of the party, others were eventually more amenable to the change. By 1980, Reagan was the party’s frontrunner. The Ripon Society, a Republican research and policy organization that calls its members “fiery moderates,” serves as a useful example of

⁷³ Randy Dotinga, “How the 1976 GOP convention set Reagan on the path to power,” *Christian Science Monitor*, June 22, 2016.

⁷⁴ Perlstein, *The Invisible Bridge*, 556.

⁷⁵ Kabaservice, *Rule and Ruin*, 348.

⁷⁶ Kabaservice, 348.

⁷⁷ Mary McGrory, “... and the View from the Other Side,” *Boston Globe*, Dec. 21, 1977.

the shift of moderate groups during Reagan's insurgency. In 1968, as Reagan launched his very first presidential campaign while governor of California, the Society released their opinion journal, the Ripon Forum, blasting him as unfit for the office. The editors wrote that he "wielded a crude meat cleaver" with respect to the state's budget. They recommended that the party make "good use of his talents for fundraising, for campaigning and for communicating ideas," but that it was "rash for Republicans to consider nominating him for the highest national office."⁷⁸ The editors continued to argue that the vice presidential ticket should be kept away from Reagan as well, regardless of whether Nixon or Rockefeller won the presidential nomination. A Nixon-Reagan ticket would deprive Nixon of support from the left wing of the party, which guarded the gates to an electoral majority. Meanwhile, a Rockefeller-Reagan ticket would reduce Rockefeller's chances because he would lose his support from Democrats and Independents as well as the Republican moderates; he wouldn't even collect Reagan's hard-core delegates who "find Nixon too liberal and who booed Rockefeller for 15 minutes" at the convention.⁷⁹ When Reagan's insurgency was still in its infancy, the Ripon Society had little incentive to engage with him.

After Reagan's performance in the 1976 primaries, the Ripon Society attempted to find overlap between his and their priorities. While the Society still diverged from Reagan on social issues, they found they could get behind his agenda for the economy, "with respect to tax incentives for savings and investment, curbs on excessive government regulation, accelerated depreciation schedules for business equipment, deregulation of key industries, and a lowering of trade restrictions and tariffs."⁸⁰ Moderates eventually found enough appeal within his campaign

⁷⁸ Ripon Forum, June 1968 Issue 4, no. 6, Box 10, Ronald Reagan 1980 Presidential Campaign Papers, 1965-1980, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, CA.

⁷⁹ Ripon Forum, June 1968 Issue 4, no. 6.

⁸⁰ Kabaservice, *Rule and Ruin*, 358.

to support his candidacy in 1980. Some within the Ripon Society, such as Peter Wallison, former head of the New York chapter, and William Bagley, leader of progressive forces in the California Assembly, actually began to envision Reagan as not just a viable or acceptable president but even “the better president.”⁸¹ Whether moderates’ stances had really swayed more conservative over time or not, it was key that those who remained in the party did not find cause to continue to push back against the tides of change.

It is important to note that Reagan’s bridge-building did not moderate the influence of the conservative movement that backed him. Evidence for this includes his running mate George H. W. Bush’s abandonment of his moderate position on abortion and his central primary campaign attack on Reagan’s so-called “voodoo economics.”⁸² Reagan may have been collaborating, but in dealings he maintained the upper hand in designing the party’s future. By this point, moderates sought any common ground with Reagan that would allow them to maintain their party identity *and* working relations with the presidential candidate. They endeavored to find commonalities with the party nominee’s agenda, rather than the other way around. Thus, the fight over the reins of the Republican Party had largely been settled even before Reagan assumed office.

M6: Insurgent Faces Electoral Test and Wins

When the insurgent is chosen as the party’s nominated leader and wins in the general election, they are able to use both the electoral mandate and presidential powers to consolidate their project of party reconfiguration. After Reagan captured the Republican nomination in 1980, the entire party united around his challenge to incumbent President Carter. Despite many attempting

⁸¹ Kabaservice, 358.

⁸² Kabaservice, 361.

to cast it as such, his success in the general election was not universally perceived as a mandate for Reagan's conservatism. It was acknowledged that the Iranian hostage crisis, economic downturn, and other dissatisfactions with the incumbent president were more important factors in voter choice than Reagan's own political vision. However, no longer could it be said that a conservative candidate could not win a presidential election for the party. In just four years, Reagan had gone from a leader of right wing radicals to the leader of an entire party. If he had followed in Goldwater's footsteps, winning the nomination and losing the election, it is unlikely that the conservative movement would have had a mandate to control the Republican Party.

As president, he held both rhetorical and legislative powers to set the agenda of the party, popularizing supply-side economics, the reversal of detente foreign policy, and rollbacks of regulation and government programs. Additionally, in his leadership of the RNC during his presidency, he was able to further consolidate his Southern Strategy of voter outreach, producing long-term changes in the geography and demography of the Republican voter base. The patterns we see today of the southern Republican dominance, the formal political activism of the Religious Right, and even white working class Trump voters can be traced back to Reagan's party-building work. The New Deal era that celebrated liberal political identity and an active government that could protect people from the adverse effects of capitalism was over. Long after Reagan's presidency, the Republican Party has continued to champion the framing of the government's role in society that was established in his time. Reagan's 1976 campaign exemplifies the great potential for a presidential insurgency to drive major durable change within a party.

Chapter 3

Sailing Against the Wind to No Avail:

Edward M. Kennedy's Liberal Challenge to President Jimmy Carter

"Sometimes a party must sail against the wind. We cannot afford to drift or lie at anchor. We cannot heed the call of those who say it is time to furl the sail."

-Edward Kennedy⁸³

Senator Edward M. Kennedy's primary challenge against incumbent President Jimmy Carter has many unique circumstances not present in the Reagan or Sanders insurgencies. As a popular senator from a prominent political family, Kennedy was arguably more established within the Democratic Party than the president himself. His politics reflected the long traditions of New Deal liberalism. He was also on good terms with congressional leaders, many of whom were aligned with his key policy proposals. By contrast, Carter had maneuvered his way to the presidency as a Washington outsider just four years prior, and was frequently at odds with the Democratic-controlled Congress. As soon as Kennedy had entered the primaries, most polls gave him a massive lead over the incumbent for most of 1979; Carter's popularity only started to pick up when the Iranian hostage crisis resulted in a "rally 'round the flag" effect.⁸⁴

Despite these differences when compared to the circumstances shared in the cases of Reagan and Sanders, Kennedy's challenge still fits my definition of insurgency. He both challenged the party's presumed nominee and repudiated the party's established agenda under

⁸³ Edward Kennedy, "Address to Democratic National Convention, Memphis, Dec. 9, 1978," quoted in Adam Clymer, *Edward M. Kennedy: A Biography* (New York: Morrow, 1999), 276.

⁸⁴ George Gallup, "Kennedy Makes Strong Early Showing Against Carter, Mondale," *Gallup Poll*, Feb. 18, 1982, Adam Clymer Personal Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library Archives, Boston, MA.

President Carter, who had a high level of influence over Congress regardless of ideological and policy differences. My theoretical framework can help us understand how Kennedy's campaign resulted in limited success in returning the party to its liberal activist roots, despite holding advantages not usually associated with insurgents.

Kennedy's insurgent campaign was a reaction against the increasing conservatism within the Democratic Party. The impact of Reagan's 1976 campaign and the proliferation of conservative think tanks, interest groups, and grassroots activism resulted in a sense across the nation, regardless of party affiliation, that government was the problem, not the solution. As president, Carter's moderate governance limited and altered the ground upon which the Democratic Party stood. The modesty of his first budget seemed to symbolize a rejection of both partisanship and public enthusiasm for the liberal Democratic platform.⁸⁵ While it may be expected that an unpopular president leads to a decline in party identification, it was a clear reflection of Carter's leadership that the largest drops over his term "took place within the Democratic base, rather than among moderates or conservatives." From 1976 to 1979, the number of Democrats who identified as "liberal" fell by 33 percent. African American Democrats dropped 20 percent, union members 18 percent, and Catholics 13 percent.⁸⁶ Carter was losing the party's base, which did not just mean they would start losing elections; eventually, there would be consequences for Democratic governance and the types of Democratic politicians elected to office. This was a critical moment for the party as it had to decide whether to lean into the conservative trend, or capitalize on its dialectic opposition among liberals, minorities, and interest groups.

⁸⁵ Timothy Stanley, *Kennedy vs. Carter: The 1980 Battle for the Democratic Party's Soul* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 51.

⁸⁶ Timothy Randolph Stanley, "'Sailing Against the Wind': A Reappraisal of Edward Kennedy's Campaign for the 1980 Democratic Party Presidential Nomination," *Journal of American Studies* 43, no. 2 (2009): 237.

After being initially supportive of Carter, Kennedy eventually decided to run against him in 1979, believing that the president “posed a threat to liberal reform and that the many goals that Kennedy thought America should commit itself to would never be realized under his presidency.”⁸⁷ With the support of unions, ideological liberals, and activists of all sorts, Kennedy went on to win twelve primary contests and over seven million votes nationwide. His campaign struggled to combat the advantage of incumbency, the effects of the Iranian hostage crisis, revival of the Chappaquiddick scandal, and backlash against the senator’s contentious remarks concerning the former Shah of Iran and Iranian terrorists.⁸⁸ Many realignment theorists point to Carter’s loss to Reagan in 1980 as signaling a nationwide shift to a neoliberal interpretation of the government’s role in society. However, close examination of the activities of Kennedy and his liberal coalition reveals significant momentum for the Democratic Party to take a different direction. When he decided not to run again in 1984, he abandoned the project of changing the party through a presidential campaign.

M1: Building Insurgent Infrastructure

As I showed in the previous chapter, Reagan drew his base of support from conservative groups who had formed out of frustration with the Republican Party’s failure to incorporate their new ideas into the platform. In this case, Kennedy’s insurgency was built from liberals, black and Hispanic voters, unions, feminists, and other activists who had only recently become estranged from Democrats since Carter moved the party away from social welfare programs and business regulations. By the 1978 Democratic midterm convention in Memphis, Tennessee, it was clear

⁸⁷ Stanley, *Kennedy vs. Carter*, 51.

⁸⁸George Gallup, “Kennedy Makes Strong Early Showing Against Carter, Mondale,” *Gallup Poll*, Feb. 18, 1982, Adam Clymer Personal Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library Archives, Boston, MA.

that the Carter administration was at odds with a substantial portion of the party. After exerting much effort, the White House barely defeated a resolution calling for increased federal spending for social and economic purposes. As this was a central tenet of the Democratic party's traditional platform, based in decades-old labor support, the conflict served to unite union leaders, liberal lobbyists, and Democratic Socialists against a second term for Carter.⁸⁹

At a trade union meeting in Iowa at the end of March, 1979, a Draft Kennedy movement was officially born.⁹⁰ Rather than channel the numerous sources of support for the senator into a single organization, a coalition of union leaders, local and state activists, and Democratic officeholders formed informal partnerships. While Kennedy publicly dissociated himself from the movement, his aides encouraged their activities.⁹¹ Draft Kennedy groups popped up around the country, but especially in the critical primary states of New Hampshire, Florida, and Iowa.⁹² The International Association of Machinists Union took a prominent role in the movement. Among other things, the union successfully lobbied Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), the leading voice of the liberal establishment of the time, to join the call for a Kennedy insurgency. The ADA put forth a resolution in June stating that although they had endorsed Carter in 1976, the president had defaulted on his campaign promises and the "historical promises of the Democratic Party."⁹³

While the various components of the movement largely conducted their own work independently, they all worked to support the Draft Kennedy groups in the key primary states. Perhaps the most powerful source of support for a Kennedy insurgency came from officeholders

⁸⁹ Barney Frank, "How Ted Got Drafted," *New Republic*, Oct. 6, 1979.

⁹⁰ Bill Peterson, "ADA Joins the Draft-Kennedy Movement," *Washington Post*, June 25, 1979.

⁹¹ Adam Clymer, *Edward M. Kennedy: A Biography* (New York: Morrow, 1999), 282.

⁹² Frank, "How Ted Got Drafted."

⁹³ Peterson, "ADA Joins the Draft-Kennedy."

within the Democratic Party itself. Representatives Richard Nolan, Richard Ottinger, Pete Stark, and Edward Beard joined the movement in opposition to their own incumbent president. Neither Reagan or Sanders enjoyed such early support from politicians in the party establishment, highlighting a key distinction within Kennedy's insurgency; while Reagan and Sanders drew their base from highly ideological groups on the party's fringes, Kennedy's base largely mirrored the historical base of the party.⁹⁴ At the AFL-CIO State Convention in Cincinnati, Ohio, in late May of 1980, Kennedy said, "To those who say we must not divide the Democratic Party, let us reply that we dare not divide that party from the people who have been its roots and its reason for being."⁹⁵ Once he accepted the mandate to enter the race, announcing on November 7, 1979, his challenge was to recover the loyalty of groups within the Democratic base which had been largely ignored under the Carter administration.

Kennedy built on broad support from a group of well-established, well-organized, unskilled or semi-skilled labor unions with a long history of involvement in political campaigns. Even when unions endorsed Carter or declined to endorse the senator, many of their members or state chapters would break with leaders to join the insurgency.⁹⁶ But in addition to strengthening his relationships with labor, the civil rights movement, and others with whom his brothers had worked with in the past,⁹⁷ he drew from supporters of his own work in the Senate. In particular, the National Health Insurance bill he coauthored with the Committee for National Health helped him build support from a broad coalition of feminist, LGBT, civil rights, and traditional New Deal groups. The campaign for the bill had been "a perfect example of how universalist ideas

⁹⁴ Frank, "How Ted Got Drafted."

⁹⁵ Remarks of Senator Edward M. Kennedy at the AFL-CIO State Convention, May 21, 1980, Office of Edward M. Kennedy, Adam Clymer Personal Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library Archives, Boston, MA.

⁹⁶ Stanley, *Kennedy vs. Carter*, 109-110.

⁹⁷ Stanley, 40.

could bring liberals together.”⁹⁸ His coalition of support provided him with primary wins not just in predictably liberal states, but in a handful of industrial states (New York, Michigan, and Pennsylvania) and two traditionally conservative states (Arizona and South Dakota).

Kennedy’s insurgent challenge was both the last time a presidential nomination was contested going into the party’s convention and the last time a candidate won a primary against an incumbent president. By maintaining his campaign until the second-to-last day of the convention, Kennedy demonstrated the adamancy of his coalition’s opposition to Carter. To him and his supporters, the president presented the party with a threat much greater than that of disunity. In his concession speech at the 1980 convention, Kennedy made it clear that he did not perceive the loss as a sign that the fight to bring liberal direction to the party was over. “For me,” he said to the crowd, “a few hours ago, this campaign came to an end. For all those whose cares have been our concern, the work goes on, the cause endures, the hope still lives, and the dream shall never die.”⁹⁹ Many considered this to be the best speech of his political career, leaving those at the convention with palpable concern that they had nominated the wrong man.

While a run in 1984 remained a possibility, Kennedy continued to push for his vision of an unapologetically liberal Democratic Party. He energized supporters at the 1982 Democratic midterm convention in Philadelphia, declaring, “The last thing this country needs is two Republican parties.”¹⁰⁰ He also used his position as senator to promote a liberal agenda for the party. Despite lacking a chairmanship, he held pseudo-hearings that drew consistent press coverage. He led the campaign for a mutual nuclear freeze with the Soviet Union. As the

⁹⁸ Stanley, 52.

⁹⁹ Edward Kennedy, “Address to the Democratic National Convention, New York City, Aug. 12, 1980,” John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

¹⁰⁰ Clymer, *Edward M. Kennedy*, 5.

“unquestioned leader on civil rights legislation,” he played a leading role in extending the Voting Rights Act in 1982.¹⁰¹ When Kennedy finally ruled out a second presidential run, the particular coalition he had built was susceptible to breaking down as a new list of 1984 presidential candidates crafted their own bases of support.

M2: Incumbents Shift in Reaction to Insurgent Threat

Confronted with a developing insurgency, incumbents may seek to neutralize the threat through conceding to some of the desired changes. Reagan had successfully pressured President Ford to take a stronger stance on national security and drift to the right on social issues. However, Carter only grew more conservative over his term in office, rarely yielding to pressure from Kennedy and the left of the party. As a result, Kennedy did not have much opportunity to be and be seen as the agenda setter, at least until Carter was out of the picture after the election. Three episodes serve particularly well to illustrate the nature of Carter’s reaction to the threat Kennedy presented to his leadership of the party. First, Carter’s movement on the issue of healthcare is fairly representative of the increasing schism between his and Kennedy’s policy stances. Second, the normalization of relations with China serves to show Carter’s considerable reluctance when he found it imperative to coordinate with Kennedy. Third, Carter’s use of presidential powers while Kennedy campaigned against him reveals a high level of independence from the policies advocated in the insurgent campaign.

During his campaign and early in his presidency, Carter fully committed to Kennedy’s national health insurance proposal. But by 1978, he and many of his advisors faltered on their commitment to the difficult project as inflation and the energy crisis increasingly shaped the

¹⁰¹ Clymer, 6.

political landscape. Joseph Califano, Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, had been in charge of developing a plan for national health insurance. He was one of the earliest from within Carter's circle to impress upon the president the difficulty of passing national healthcare legislation.¹⁰² In June, after Carter put forth a watered-down version of Kennedy's proposal, the senator rescinded his support of the legislation at the last minute. Support for the bill subsequently died out. A month later, the president dismissed four cabinet members; one of them was Califano, as he was perceived to be too close to Kennedy.¹⁰³ Perhaps because of the incompatibility of their personalities more than anything, as the threat of an insurgency became increasingly inevitable, Carter only grew less receptive to Kennedy's policy proposals.

For decades, Kennedy had taken on a pioneering role in advocating for the U.S. to normalize relations with the People's Republic of China. Upon entering office, the Carter administration had been struggling to advance the process of normalization inherited from its predecessors. Days before the Secretary of State left for the administration's first trip to China to resume negotiations between the two countries, Kennedy made a speech, which infuriated Carter and Secretary Cyrus Vance, to increase their flexibility in diplomatic negotiations. He also put forth a deadline for the administration to establish relations with mainland China by 1978.¹⁰⁴ Within a week of Kennedy's famous "Sail Against the Wind" speech before the 1978 Democratic midterm convention, the Carter administration announced that the two countries would normalize relations. The timing of the sudden announcement both kept within the deadline Kennedy had called for and coincided with Congress's holiday. Conservative Republicans in Congress condemned the policy changes, and blindsided Democrats demanded more explicit

¹⁰² Stanley, *Kennedy vs. Carter*, 52.

¹⁰³ Clymer, *Edward M. Kennedy*, 283.

¹⁰⁴ Jerome A. Cohen, "Ted Kennedy's Role in Restoring Diplomatic Relations with China," *New York University Journal of Legislation and Public Policy* 14, no.2 (2011): 347-56.

promises from China. Consequently, Kennedy got involved to help craft the language for the legislation that would be acceptable to China and reflected the administration's stance. Carter was indignant about the senator's assistance; tensions between the two politicians had increased after Kennedy's speech at the midterm convention spread rumors that he would challenge Carter. Kennedy was deliberately omitted from the guest list to the state dinner honoring Deng Xiaoping's visit, although Secretary Vance pressured the White House to eventually invite him.¹⁰⁵ It would distort and belittle Carter's role in normalizing relations with China to assert that his changes in policy were intentionally designed to preempt a challenge from Kennedy. Rather, the episode reveals the complicated story of coordination and antipathy between the two politicians. As a result, Kennedy was able to demonstrate his strength as a policymaker and agenda-setter in direct comparison with the president.

As is custom for an incumbent president, Carter used his presidential powers to combat the insurgency more than any form of direct campaigning once Kennedy officially launched his primary challenge. In the case of labor unions, he attempted to recover their support while sidestepping the policies they found so appealing in Kennedy's campaign. The AFL-CIO's president, Lane Kirkland, found that Carter's attention to the union federation corresponded with Kennedy's prospects during the campaign. Kirkland restrained state chapters from officially endorsing the senator so as to protect a recent accord with the federal government that provided labor with a seat at the table for decisions relating to prices and incomes.¹⁰⁶ To appease the United Auto Workers, Carter bailed out the struggling Chrysler Corporation; for the National Education Association, he established the Department of Education; he provided garment unions

¹⁰⁵ Clymer, *Edward M. Kennedy*, 278-79.

¹⁰⁶ Stanley, *Carter vs Kennedy*, 110.

with protection against low-cost imports.¹⁰⁷ It was clear to everyone in the Democratic Party that unions were a critical source of support in the coalition. Once Carter was out of the picture after losing the 1980 election, Kennedy's ability to mobilize unions could have proved useful to the party in 1984, had he decided to run. For the most part, however, Carter did not make a concerted effort to appeal to those from within Kennedy's coalition, preferring instead to push consideration of his character over his policies. Meanwhile, his State of the Union address in 1980 sounded an awful lot like "something that might have been written by none other than Ronald Reagan."¹⁰⁸ The mood of the country after the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan a month prior led Carter to amplify Cold War rhetoric in the speech and urge Congress to approve increases to the defense budget for 1981. The high level of independence of the Carter administration from the pressures of Kennedy's campaign did not sink the insurgency's prospects after the following mechanism played out. However, Carter's decision to react to the insurgent threat by comparing character rather than neutralizing policy differences was undoubtedly harmful to Kennedy, as the lion's share of his vulnerability came from the public's struggle with the perceived immorality of the Chappaquiddick incident.

M3: Incumbent Faces the Electoral Test and Loses

After Carter finally locked down the nomination at the 1980 Democratic National Convention, the next hurdle for his model of the party was passing the electoral test in November. Just as in the case of Ford in 1976, Carter was unsuccessful in retaining office. Amidst the drawn out hostage crisis and economic decline, he lost to Reagan by a landslide in the electoral college. The

¹⁰⁷ "Out to Stop Kennedy: Now the battle is in the open, and Teddy's troubles will grow," *TIME Magazine* 114, no.14, Oct. 1, 1979.

¹⁰⁸ Robert Coles, "Ronald Reagan, Populist," *New Republic*, April 12, 1980, Box 44, Ronald Reagan 1980 Presidential Campaign Papers, 1965-1980, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, CA.

incumbent president carried just six states and Washington, D.C. The Republican Party also took control of the Senate for the first time in 25 years. Through his analysis of the historical contingencies related to Kennedy's insurgency, Timothy Stanley challenges the interpretation of scholars within the realignment theory that the 1980 election marked a sharp and durable rejection of Democratic liberalism across the nation.¹⁰⁹ The insurgent infrastructure of liberal activists that Kennedy's campaign had helped mobilize was not erased after Reagan won. Rather, there was a window of opportunity for them to use their momentum coming out of 1980 to determine what Democratic opposition would look like. Carter's team put much of the blame for his loss on Kennedy's primary challenge. Meanwhile, Kennedy and his supporters argued that Carter lost because he did not provide clear enough direction to the party or country. In the period following the election, Kennedy's ability to popularize unabashed liberalism amongst Democrats would depend in part on his agency and on the other members of the party.

M4: Insurgents Bridge-build with the Incumbent Faction

With his momentum leading up to and during the 1980 Democratic National Convention, Kennedy was able to enter the position of being considered a frontrunner for the 1984 election, just as Reagan had been in the period following the 1976 election. However, it was critical that Kennedy should extend invitations of cooperation to reunite the party under his own leadership. His relationships with the congressional party leadership were old and strong. He had been in the Senate for nearly twenty years, and while he had a bit of a reputation of commandeering other senators' policy projects, he was largely respected and admired nevertheless. Furthermore, just as Reagan did in the time leading up to the 1978 midterms, Kennedy devoted the fall of 1982 to

¹⁰⁹ Stanley, *Kennedy vs. Carter*.

“campaigning for any Democrat who wanted him, picking up IOUs in 18 states while having a message on economic injustice and nuclear uncertainty.”¹¹⁰ Throughout the first two years following Carter’s loss, he took the traditional pathway of an insurgent consolidating support for a second presidential campaign among his own mobilized constituency as well as former members of the Ford camp. For example, he successfully persuaded Harold Hughes, moderate senator of Iowa, to support his 1984 presidential campaign over that of Alan Cranston.

However, once Kennedy declined to run in 1984, he reduced his bridge-building activities, choosing to revert back into his role as a senator in the party’s liberal wing. This reduced his repudiation of the increasingly neoliberal direction within the party as he shifted his behavior back to being a member of Congress rather than a prospective presidential frontrunner. He would go on to influence the party’s legislation throughout his tenure in the Senate and as Chair of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pension Committee. However, his presidential campaign did not succeed in inspiring an immediate yet durable wave of liberalism throughout the party that might have been possible.

M5: Incumbents Acquiesce to the Insurgent Challenge

Once Carter lost in the general election, the Democratic Party underwent a process of predicting the new path to an electoral majority. The outcomes of the platform drafting process during the 1980 Democratic National Convention foreshadowed the incumbent support Kennedy was to have post-election. Just like the Reagan campaign pushed for a platform plank against the Ford administration’s detente foreign policy in 1976, Kennedy’s team pushed for planks that were seen as “a rebuke to the president: a call for a \$12 billion stimulus spending program, a measure

¹¹⁰ Clymer, *Edward M. Kennedy*, 4.

to fight unemployment and an endorsement of wage and price controls—proposals far to the left of Carter’s.”¹¹¹ After his widely celebrated speech at the convention, the first two planks passed. Moreover, according to the Kennedy campaign, on some votes at the platform drafting, a significant number of Carter delegates defected from the incumbent to support the insurgent’s planks.¹¹²

Once Carter as the incumbent president was no longer seen as part of the future of the party, politicians who had remained loyal to the president were free to welcome a second presidential run from Kennedy. However, his decision not to run in 1984 meant the mechanism was not fully triggered; the incentive for establishment Democrats to rally around his liberal vision for the party was lost. Particularly as Reagan’s reconstructive presidency consolidated the neoliberal regime that would undergird the entire party system’s vision of government,¹¹³ Kennedy’s 1980 campaign failed to continue to pressure the party to capitalize on its previous momentum.

M6: Insurgent Faces the Electoral Test and Wins

Winning both the party’s nomination and the general election allows a candidate to use both the electoral mandate and presidential powers to shape the party in their own image. Like Reagan, Kennedy had come out of his first campaign with good prospects for the following election cycle. Because he decided against running, he never had the opportunity to unite the party around his own presidential campaign or use the powers of the presidency to consolidate his

¹¹¹ Jon Ward, “The Humiliating Handshake and the Near-Fistfight That Broke the Democratic Party,” *POLITICO*, Jan. 21, 2019.

¹¹² 1980 Campaign Draft Material, “All the Good News That’s fit to Print,” June 30, 1980, Adam Clymer Personal Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library Archives, Boston, MA.

¹¹³ Stephen Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make: Leadership from John Adams to Bill Clinton*, Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1997), 57.

influence. At the time, it was not at all clear Kennedy would not run again. In fact, in 1982 he had gone so far as to put a shadow campaign in place to ramp up for 1984. The day after Thanksgiving that year, the senator, his family, and his administrative assistant gathered to decide whether or not to truly commit to making a second run for president. When the assistant presented the pros and cons, it was clear the senator felt an imperative to “run and make the liberal case in a conservative age.”¹¹⁴ But by the end of the family meeting, his children’s strong reservations had convinced him that it would be best to step aside.

As a result, there was no test on whether or not Kennedy’s vision of the party was politically viable as the path forward. His campaign was able to mobilize and wield a liberal activist faction of the party in the short term, between his primary campaign and 1982. But he was not able to use presidential powers to pursue his platform or bring his coalition into the party’s leadership roles, reducing his insurgency’s ability to ensure long-term influence on the party’s agenda and rhetoric. The Democratic presidential candidate who took his place in 1984 was Walter Mondale, vice president under Jimmy Carter. Mondale, a liberal senator of the same generation as Kennedy, had ended up largely supportive of Carter’s decisions during their time in office. Alongside Carter, he had backed away from his support of national health insurance, and it was not a part of his campaign in 1984. His key campaign promises included raising taxes, a nuclear freeze, and the Equal Rights Amendment. But perceptions of Reagan as being strong on national security and active in providing economic prosperity resulted in a widespread party switch of white blue-collar workers, something that Kennedy might have been able to prevent had he run. Instead, the Democratic Party in the following decade would not shape itself around

¹¹⁴ Clymer, *Edward M. Kennedy*, 5.

an unqualified recommitment to liberal, activist government, but around a neoliberal reaction to Reagan's governance.

Chapter 4

Bernie Sanders:

An Experiment of Political Revolution within the Democratic Party

The mechanisms involved in Reagan and Kennedy's influence over their parties can also be used to understand the ongoing momentum and influence of Senator Bernie Sanders's 2016 insurgent presidential campaign. As Secretary of State under President Barack Obama, former senator of New York, and former First Lady, Hillary Clinton was the clear frontrunner for the Democratic nomination in 2016. While Senator Sanders (VT) officially launched his presidential campaign a month after Clinton, he had been stating his intent to do so for many years. As a Democratic Socialist who ran as an independent for his Senate seat, Sanders has consistently distanced himself from the Democratic Party while continuing to caucus with it. His campaign was motivated by discontent with "obscene levels" of income disparity, lack of universal access to health care and higher education, the impact of the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* on campaign finance, and global warming. In her memoir of the 2016 election, Clinton writes, "I think [Bernie] was fundamentally wrong about the Democratic Party—the party that brought us Social Security under Roosevelt; Medicare and Medicaid under Johnson; peace between Israel and Egypt under Carter; broad-based prosperity and a balanced budget under Clinton; and rescued the auto industry, passed healthcare reform, and imposed tough new rules on Wall Street under Obama. I am proud to be a Democrat and I wish Bernie were, too."¹¹⁵ With the mobilization of a grassroots campaign of activists from Occupy Wall Street, environmental

¹¹⁵ Hillary Clinton, *What Happened* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017), 229.

justice, the youth/student generation, Sanders went on to win 23 primary contests and 1,865 delegates to Clinton's 34 and 2,842, respectively.

After further consolidation of his insurgent infrastructure after the 2016 election, Sanders announced a second bid for president in 2019. The beginning of the Democratic contest for the party's 2020 presidential nomination left voters anxious about how to make sense of such a large and diverse pool of candidates. However, by March 3rd, they were left with a clear but similarly perplexing choice. The results of Super Tuesday coalesced behind two candidates representing distinct wings of the party: Bernie Sanders and former vice president and longtime U.S. senator from Delaware, Joe Biden. As a member of the party establishment, Biden presented an argument for a return to the Obama years, reaching out to disillusioned Trump voters on appeals of decency and order. When the 1,338 delegates at stake on Super Tuesday were channeled into the Biden and Sanders campaigns, it became clear that there would be no room for straddling the two wings. Senator Elizabeth Warren's modifications on Sanders's progressivism, Pete Buttigieg's and Amy Klobuchar's more updated presentations of Democratic centrism, and those who were knocked out early on with mixed platforms (e.g. Kamala Harris, Kirsten Gillibrand, Cory Booker, Julian Castro, and Beto O'Rourke), became casualties of the advantages of these two standard bearers of centrism and progressivism.

Party members fearful of a Sanders takeover struggled up until the last moment to unite around a single candidate to oppose him. A group of first-term House Democrats gathered together in late 2019 to collectively endorse a moderate, but could neither reach consensus nor ignore the possibility of alienating voters in their district who supported Sanders or Warren. Other efforts to rally the center-left base around Biden met the same fate prior to Super Tuesday, thwarted by his poor results in the earlier state contests and performances in the Democratic

debates.¹¹⁶ The surge in momentum for his campaign can be understood as a push of the party's incumbent faction against Sanders's momentum, seeing his campaign as a threat not just to ousting Trump but to swing district contests at every level of politics.

M1: Building Insurgent Infrastructure

Regardless of the outcome of the 2016 or 2020 Democratic presidential nomination contests, Bernie Sanders has already pressured the party to directly contend with a mobilized force of progressives. Beginning his first campaign with just 3% in the polls in April 2015, he would go on to energize a widespread and fervent following of liberals, young people, Latinx voters, and people without college degrees. By the end of his first presidential run, he had gathered 8 million individual donations from over 2 million people, with an average contribution of \$27. He had key endorsements from unions and the full support of progressive groups like MoveOn.org and the million-member Democracy for America (founded by close Clinton ally and surrogate Howard Dean). He won 22 state contests, receiving over 13 million votes.¹¹⁷ The results had shown that progressives inside and out of the party could be mobilized as a significant independent force from the will of the party establishment.

On June 12, 2016, after it had become clear that Sanders had lost the nomination contest, he gathered key supporters and campaign staffers around him to discuss next steps. They agreed that it would be a waste for the mobilization and organizing generated from the campaign to fall apart. Out of the ashes of the 2016 campaign was born Our Revolution, a progressive PAC that

¹¹⁶ Jonathan Martin and Alexander Burns, "How the Democratic Establishment Stumbled as Sanders Surged," *New York Times*, Mar. 2, 2020.

¹¹⁷ Bernie Sanders, *Where We Go From Here* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, an imprint of St. Martin's Press, 2018), 9-10.

would go on to help elect new members of Congress that year like Pramila Jayapal (WA), Jamie Raskin (MD), Nanette Diaz Barragán (CA), as well as a string of mayors and other local officials. By 2018, there were about six hundred local chapters of the organization.¹¹⁸ With the help of Our Revolution and other progressive groups, the 2018 midterms saw a wave of Sanders-like congressional candidates in Ohio, Iowa, Montana, Nebraska, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, and Massachusetts to name a few. Some were also insurgents challenging an incumbent Democrat, like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Ayanna Pressley, or challenging a candidate backed by the establishment, in the case of Ben Jealous. While not all those who ran on a platform similar to Sanders won their races, the success stories of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Ayanna Pressley have been widely acknowledged as a new generation in Congress better representing the diversity of the party and country and the issues affecting marginalized groups. The new generation of liberals that came out of the midterms have also provided critical support for advancing the two most progressive 2020 campaigns, Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren. Ben Jealous serves on the board of Our Revolution. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has given a powerful endorsement to Sanders, alongside other new progressive freshmen representatives Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib. Ayanna Pressley endorsed Warren.

In the time between campaigns, Sanders kept himself busy beyond his senatorial duties, in an attempt to capitalize on the momentum for new voices in the Democratic Party. He published two books, *Our Revolution* (2016) and *Where We Go From Here* (2018). He held rallies in Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Michigan to support progressive candidates and build support among the working class in the Rust Belt.¹¹⁹ He also advocated for the party to invest

¹¹⁸ Sanders, *Where We Go From Here*, 34-36.

¹¹⁹ Sanders, 148.

more in a fifty-state strategy rather than leave half of the states to the GOP. He travelled to Arizona, Montana, Mississippi, Kansas, West Virginia, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Georgia, Florida, Nebraska, Texas, and Utah. He spoke at a training session for 450 progressive candidates running for all levels of elected office, most for the first time.¹²⁰ He also received and accepted frequent requests for media appearances and interviews.¹²¹

Learning from the failures of his 2016 campaign to raise issues affecting people of color to the forefront of political discourse, the 2020 Sanders campaign greatly expanded its platform beyond economic inequality and increased outreach to black and Latinx communities. The 2020 Nevada caucuses particularly displayed his success in bringing Latinx support into his coalition. Critically, the Latinx and Chicax organization Mijente provided its first ever presidential endorsement leading up to the caucuses. Sanders won 41% of the Latinx vote in the state, up twelve percentage points from 2016.¹²² He also held a significant portion of the Latinx vote in California and Texas, especially from younger voters. While Latinx political participation has historically been relatively low compared to other racial and ethnic groups in the country, his 2020 campaign has tapped into the high levels of enthusiasm in the current moment. Employing more extensive efforts of mobilization than Biden or the Democratic Party organization, it is possible that one of the lasting effects his insurgency will have on the party is the expansion of young, energized Latinx voters within the progressive base of the party.

Sanders's 2016 campaign was one of the most successful insurgencies in American history because of the impressive mobilization and organization of a variety of movements and

¹²⁰ Sanders, 178.

¹²¹ Sanders, 10.

¹²² Suzanne Gamboa, "Latinos boosted Sanders on Super Tuesday. A lesson for the Biden campaign?" *NBC News*, Mar. 4, 2020.

groups. Young people, the working class, climate activists, Occupy Wall Street, immigration activists, and others showed up to the primaries united against the party establishment's preferred candidate. As a result, the party's official platform and unofficial agenda would be altered to partially reflect the demands of the campaign. The period leading up to and during his second presidential run further consolidated the support necessary for taking control of the party's direction. With an historically large and diverse field of candidates in the race, the advantage of such a strong existing infrastructure allowed him to perform well compared to other qualified candidates with strong name recognition. With the inter-campaign activities of Sanders himself and the movement he created, other candidates calling for radical change and getting money out of politics were able to run popular and sometimes successful campaigns. Thus, the party organization has changed, the party-in-office has changed, and the party-in-the-electorate has changed. The extent to which these changes can be considered long-lasting, however, depends on whether the other mechanisms within the framework are enacted or surmounted.

M2: Incumbents Shift in Reaction to Insurgent Threat

Initially receiving pressure from groups to launch a campaign to the left of her 2008 platform, Hillary Clinton faced a more direct threat to adapt her strategies once she was confronted with a formidable primary opponent. In her memoir recounting the 2016 election, *What Happened*, she writes that her team and President Obama both urged her to restrain herself from alienating Sanders's supporters. "Noting that his plans didn't add up, [...] or that they were little more than a pipe dream—all of this could be used to reinforce his argument that I wasn't a true progressive."¹²³ As Sanders relentlessly campaigned on Medicare For All, free public college

¹²³ Clinton, *What Happened*, 230.

tuition, a \$15 minimum wage, and addressing the climate crisis, Clinton's campaign was forced to respond to his reordering and expansion of the party's agenda. In the beginning of the campaign, she had called for: cutting taxes for the middle class; closing corporate tax loopholes; investing in infrastructure; immigration reform; a \$12 minimum wage; cap and trade solutions to climate change.¹²⁴ With Sanders's rhetoric of a "political revolution" against economic inequality and political corruption, her own campaign language changed throughout the primary season. In March, 2016, John Cassidy of the *New Yorker* wrote,

To gauge [Sanders's] influence, you need only listen to one of Clinton's campaign speeches. On issues like inequality, trade, the environment, corporate offshoring, and bringing Wall Street miscreants to justice, the former Secretary of State has adopted Sanders's language—and, in some cases, his policies. Clinton had undoubtedly always intended to run as a center-left progressive in 2016, just as she did in 2008, but Sanders has forced her onto ground she hadn't originally intended to occupy.¹²⁵

By May, 2016, she had switched to supporting the "fight for \$15" at the state level. She distanced herself from her own Wall Street donors and amplified criticism of large corporations, such as pharmaceutical companies.¹²⁶ In trade, Clinton avoided discussing the Trans Pacific Partnership, which she had called the "gold standard" while serving in the Obama administration.¹²⁷ With these revisions she likely intended to combine her argument of electability with an illustrated receptivity to the mood of the party electorate. However, it also had the unintended consequence of presenting voters with a choice between Sanders's "I believe" with Clinton's "I agree, but..."

¹²⁴ "Hillary Clinton on the Issues," *New York Times*, April 12, 2015.

¹²⁵ John Cassidy, "What Bernie Sanders Has Achieved," *New Yorker*, June 19, 2017.

¹²⁶ Annie Karni, Todd S. Purdum, and Nick Gass, "How Bernie Changed Hillary," *Politico*, May 3, 2016.

¹²⁷ Doug Palmer, "Clinton raved about Trans-Pacific Partnership before she rejected it," *Politico*, Oct. 8, 2016.

In order to convince progressives and youth not to buy into the image of her as the watered-down version of Sanders's platform, Clinton also attempted to champion issues not at the front of his campaign. Over the nomination contest, she would eventually fill in the gap on discourse surrounding gun violence and racial inequality, delivering "wide-ranging speeches about systematic racism in the country and criminal justice reform."¹²⁸ These issues were not necessarily points of contention between the two campaigns, merely of emphasis. Thus, even on the issues the Sanders campaign neglected to highlight, Clinton came to see progressive policy as critical to her success. While it often felt to Clinton that she was left to "play the unenviable role of spoilsport schoolmarm"¹²⁹ in contrast to a prophet of radical change, the evolution of her campaign actually did make critical concessions to the rising current of progressivism. As a result, Sanders, a self-proclaimed outsider long disregarded by the party leadership, came to be and be seen as an agenda setter for Democrats.

M3: Incumbent Faces the Electoral Contest and Loses

Bernie Sanders's success in pulling Clinton to the left may be seen as expected and temporary given the nature of primaries. After Sanders dropped out, it would then open up space for Clinton to establish a new strategy for capturing a majority within the general electorate that did not necessarily prioritize the demands of his mobilized progressive base. However, when the effects of the second mechanism are followed by the presumed nominee's loss in the general election, there is an opening for the insurgent camp to interpret the loss as a consequence of the incumbent's failure to present a sufficiently clear and bold direction for the country.

¹²⁸ Karni et al., "How Bernie Changed Hillary."

¹²⁹ Clinton, *What Happened*, 227.

In *What Happened*, Clinton writes that “Bernie’s presence in the race meant that [she] had less space and credibility to run the kind of feisty progressive campaign that had helped [her] win Ohio and Pennsylvania in 2008.”¹³⁰ She also asserted that Sanders’s “attacks caused lasting damage, making it harder to unify progressives in the general election and paving the way for Trump’s ‘Crooked Hillary’ campaign.” Meanwhile, Sanders used the results of the 2016 election to argue that “the business model of the Democratic Party was broken, and no sane person could defend it.”¹³¹

His role in limiting the power of superdelegates, opening up primaries, reforming caucuses, and increasing transparency in the party after the 2016 election was one of the first signs of his insurgency’s influence. Even though the commission in charge of reforming the nomination process consisted of appointees of Clinton, Sanders, and DNC Chair Tom Perez, the members were fairly agreed on the need for party reform. By August, 2018, the DNC had approved the most comprehensive package of reforms in decades.¹³²

M4: Insurgents Bridge-build with the Incumbent Faction

Bernie Sanders has hardly engaged in a spirited operation of bridge-building with the party establishment. If he wins the party nomination and general election, it will have been with this distinct deviation from Reagan’s campaigning strategy. In comparison with Elizabeth Warren, he has not touted a record of working with other members of the party to pass legislation. As the longest serving independent in Congress, Sanders has rarely felt the pressure to conform to or compromise with the Democratic Party, opting rather to continuously introduce bills (Medicare

¹³⁰ Clinton, 74.

¹³¹ Sanders, *Where We Go From Here*, 248.

¹³² Sanders, 250.

For All, a \$15 dollar minimum wage, tuition-free college, etc.) that were designed to present unadulterated progressive policies with no eye for a realistic path to a legislative majority.

After losing the 2016 nomination contest, Sanders conformed to the custom of any other failed primary candidate, endorsing Clinton (albeit a month later) and campaigning on her behalf for the general election. Regardless, he faced the same criticism from media and party insiders as Reagan did in 1976 and Kennedy in 1980 – that he did not work hard enough to reunite the party and send his supporters to the polls for the party nominee. Admittedly, a vocal number of his supporters were aggrieved over his decision to support her, and 12% of Sanders primary voters supported Trump in the general election. However, this was a fairly normal occurrence between primaries and general elections; in 2008, for example, 25% of Clinton supporters voted for John McCain.¹³³ Nevertheless, with Clinton promoting this narrative of the 2016 election, it would then become critical that he defend himself from the reputation of spoiler or party divider.

Just as Reagan and Kennedy did after their initial unsuccessful primary campaigns, Sanders campaigned for his party's midterm candidates. However, he did not become a dedicated foot soldier for the DNC, instead opting to focus his support on progressives. In October 2018, he stopped in nine battleground states to offer support to campaigns that were mostly but not exclusively on the left side of the party. The list of campaigns did include candidates from the established faction of the party, such as Rep. Jackie Rosen (NV), who was encouraged to run by former Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (NV); Gretchen Whitmer of Michigan¹³⁴; and Rep. Jared Polis of Colorado, a former 2016 Clinton superdelegate.¹³⁵

¹³³ Danielle Kurtzleben, "Here's How Many Bernie Supporters Ultimately Voted for Trump," *National Public Radio*, Aug. 24, 2017.

¹³⁴ Erin Kelly, "Sen. Bernie Sanders to Campaign in Nine Battleground States to End 'Right-Wing Government'," *USA Today*, Oct. 11, 2018.

¹³⁵ James Anderson, "Bernie Sanders Stumps for Democrat Polis in Colorado," Associated Press, October 24, 2018.

Nevertheless, it does not appear that Sanders's efforts in the 2018 midterms were as extensive or as ideologically diverse as those of Reagan or Kennedy. He also supported campaigns in red states the Democratic establishment had written off as unwinnable or requiring a moderate, centrist candidate. His involvement in these races was independent from the party organization's strategy and further aggravated its relations with him. The tension is reflected in Clinton's infamous quote, "nobody likes Bernie." As perplexing as her remark seems when observing his energized and vocal following and his respectable polling numbers, it is more clear when one considers "nobody" to mean the party elites with whom Clinton has surrounded herself with over the years.

Overall, Sanders has been fairly consistent with his character in preferring ideological integrity over strategic bridge-building, reflecting his desire for political revolution rather than just a new popularity for his ideas and platform. His decision to run for president starts from the standpoint that the Democratic Party may be taken over rather than transformed. His failure to bridge-build did not present an issue for his 2020 campaign when the field of candidates was crowded, as he could rely on the insurgent infrastructure he had built up over the past five years. However, when it became clear that his base might decide the nomination, the party establishment was not restrained by any debt or partnership with him in their decision to coalesce around a less-than-ideal alternative candidate.

M5: Incumbents Acquiesce to the Insurgent Challenge

Since Clinton lost in 2016, incumbents have had a mixed record of acquiescing and rejecting Sanders's desired party reforms. On the one hand, his 2016 platform has claimed space in debate within the party where it was previously excluded. On the other, while the moderates of the

party accepted his agenda-setting influence, they have continued to outright reject his policy proposals and bid for party leadership.

On June 14, 2016, two days after meeting with his inner circle of supporters, Sanders sat down with Clinton to discuss how to go forward.¹³⁶ She and the party further incorporated elements of Sanders's campaign into their own messaging. Despite adding moderation, she “embraced Sanders's proposal for free public college in July, leaving behind a more conservative ‘debt-free’ emphasis in favor of a plan to pay for public and state tuition fees.”¹³⁷ And the party platform included planks on “legalizing marijuana, capping greenhouse gas emissions, criminal justice reform, and promises to regulate Wall Street and break up big banks.”¹³⁸ The party’s reasoning to take on these progressive standpoints in their official agenda can be explained as the desire to tie the Sanders supporters to the Democratic Party and maintain their interest in showing up for Clinton on Election Day. But rather than allowing these planks to float away from the party’s agenda after they had served their purpose (or failed to) on November 4th, 2016, they were incorporated into the rhetoric of many party members, particularly in the 2018 midterms and 2020 primary campaigns.

After Sanders almost singularly eschewed corporate PAC money in his campaign alongside his criticism of the *Citizens United* ruling, there has been an explosion of campaigns taking on similar commitments. “In the 2018 cycle, 185 Democratic candidates promised not to

¹³⁶ Sanders, *Where We Go From Here*, 10.

¹³⁷ Brendan James, “Hillary Clinton adopted these 4 policies from Bernie Sanders – will she stick to them?” *Vice*, Sep. 16, 2016.

¹³⁸ James, “Hillary Clinton adopted these 4 policies,” Sep. 16, 2016.

accept money from corporate PACs.”¹³⁹ And most of the 2020 presidential primary candidates began their campaigns with the same promise, although not all lived up to their commitments.¹⁴⁰

But beyond campaign tactics, the very rhetoric and agenda of the party has shifted to distinctly resemble Sanders's 2016 campaign. For example, “the Wall Street Democrats whom Sanders has long pointedly denounced have moved in his direction. Andrew Cuomo, New York’s governor, who [in 2018 faced] a left-wing primary challenge by the actress Cynthia Nixon, joined Sanders at a press conference, in the winter of 2017, to announce that he would be implementing a version of the socialist’s free-college program.”¹⁴¹ Additionally, former Clinton supporters such as Kara Eastman, Laura Moser, and Cynthia Nixon ran unabashedly progressive Sanders-style campaigns in the 2018 midterms, while others such as Leslie Cockburn and Sean Casten adopted components of his platform, including Medicare For All.¹⁴² Many other Democrats have at the very least moved to the left on health care policy. It is perhaps unsurprising, given that just a year after Sanders's campaign, a survey from the Pew Research Center “found 52 percent of Democrats thought the country should have a single national program for health care, up nearly 20 points from the same poll taken three years earlier.”¹⁴³ And in 2017, congressional Democrats signed off on legislation establishing a \$15/hr minimum wage. Even Clinton campaign staffers have endorsed the new progressive direction Sanders called for in 2016. “Jake Sullivan, who had been in charge of policy for Hillary Clinton’s Presidential

¹³⁹ Elaine Godfrey, “Why So Many Democratic Candidates are Dissing Corporate PACs,” *The Atlantic*, Aug. 23, 2018.

¹⁴⁰ Lee Fang, “Democratic 2020 Candidates Promised to Reject Lobbyist Donations, but Many Accepted the Cash Anyway,” *Intercept*, Apr. 17, 2019.

¹⁴¹ Benjamin Wallace-Wells, “Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and the Legacy of the Bernie Sanders Movement,” *New Yorker*, June 27, 2018.

¹⁴² Alex Roarty, “Hillary Clinton acolytes adopt Bernie Sanders agenda to drag Democrats left,” *McClatchy D.C.*, May 22, 2018.

¹⁴³ Roarty, “Hillary Clinton acolytes,” May 22, 2018.

campaign, wrote a long essay for the journal *Democracy* making the case for the Party to embrace a more radical idea of government, and a more expansive view of what voters would tolerate. ‘The bottom line is that Democrats should not blush too much, or pay too much heed, when political commentators arch their eyebrows about the party moving left,’ Sullivan wrote. ‘The center of gravity itself is moving, and this is a good thing.’”¹⁴⁴

In March, 2019, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) enacted a policy change directly aimed at ostracizing the new wave of progressive groups involved in backing insurgent candidates. The Committee announced it would suspend all business with organizations supporting primary challengers to Democratic incumbents. In response, Justice Democrats, Democracy for America, Our Revolution, and other groups established the DCCC Blacklist to provide a database of groups willing to support progressive primary challengers. The conflicting responses from House Democrats revealed the decision’s impact on further alienating the party establishment from the progressive wing. House Majority Whip Rep. James Clyburn, who would go on to provide a critical endorsement for Joe Biden in the South Carolina primaries, commended the DCCC’s decision to stand behind established members of Congress. Herself a recently successful primary challenger to a longtime incumbent, Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez argued on Twitter that the move was “extremely divisive & harmful to the party.” Rather than make a case on the basis of a healthy democratic process within the party, her tweet was clearly aimed at threatening functional vulnerability for the party if it continues to marginalize the progressive movement. This is further confirmed by her call for supporters to give directly to candidates rather than donate to the DCCC.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Wallace-Wells, “Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez,” June 27, 2018.

¹⁴⁵ “Our Revolution,” Ballotpedia.

The 2020 Democratic presidential primary campaigns have been the clearest demonstration of Sanders's influence over the party's rhetoric and agenda. Not only did the majority of candidates adopt Sanders's extraordinary tactic of refusing corporate PAC money, but immediate universal health care has become the standard goal of all candidates, with Medicare For All becoming a point of debate in the party for the first time in years. The debates have also included robust conversations on free public college and climate change. Additionally, previously moderate politicians like Senator Cory Booker, “who once, over the loud protests of the teachers’ unions, sought to remake Newark’s schools in partnership with Mark Zuckerberg—called for a pilot program that would model a federal jobs guarantee, an idea that until very recently belonged only to the progressive fringe.”¹⁴⁶ And Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, “who as a corporate attorney helped to defend Philip Morris in the great tobacco lawsuits of the nineteen-nineties, has signed up for just about all of it: the jobs guarantee, Medicare-for-all, free college.”¹⁴⁷ Two of the four candidates who have become frontrunners by the beginning of 2020 are running progressive campaigns.

M6: Insurgent Faces the Electoral Test and Wins

Sanders has lost the race to be the Democratic party's 2020 presidential nomination, meaning he will not face the electoral test in November. As a result, there is ample opportunity for the mobilized progressive coalition he has created to fall apart in the face of party pressure, calls for increased bipartisanship in the face of the Coronavirus pandemic and the consequent economic downturn, or other influences. However, although he will not be able to consolidate his vision of

¹⁴⁶ Wallace-Wells, “Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez,” June 27, 2018.

¹⁴⁷ Wallace-Wells, “Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.”

the party in the sweeping manner provided by a presidential term, his insurgency has had effects that will not be immediately or easily reversed. The potential to mobilize young and Latinx voters and to recover white working class voters who have gone Republican in recent election cycles is evident to the party. Even though many primary voters found him to be too risky a candidate to nominate to take on Trump, his policies have become widely popular. In many of the states in which he lost the primaries, a majority of Democratic voters and the general electorate supported his signature policies, Medicare for All and free tuition for public colleges.¹⁴⁸ Biden has even incorporated some of the ideas in Sanders's and Warren's campaigns, including a proposal to make public college free for some students and Warren's bankruptcy plan. Sanders's insurgency also helped usher in a network of progressives in local, state and federal offices. His loss is undeniably a setback, but these voices will not disappear overnight. They may either work other angles to enact their vision of the party or find a new leader to pursue change through future presidential primaries.

While the Sanders and Reagan insurgencies had unquestionably different outcomes, they shared remarkably similar beginnings. Both clear outsiders of the party in their own way, they drew from a highly ideological base of support that energized those on the fringes of the party's base and mobilized new groups into political engagement. The insurgent infrastructure provided sufficient leverage for both candidates to influence the establishment they challenged. After the incumbent party leader lost the electoral contest, there was an opening for both insurgencies to further pressure radical changes to the floundering party model. The insurgencies inspired others to run campaigns like theirs, and some succeeded. The Sanders case breaks with Reagan's trajectory after this point, as he failed to secure the party nomination in his second campaign.

¹⁴⁸ NBC News Exit Poll Desk, "Voters in five states support free college tuition, 'Medicare for All'," *NBC News*, Mar. 3, 2020.

However, the framework derived from Reagan's insurgency helps us isolate some of Sanders's critical flaws. As a lifelong party outsider, his commitment to bringing underrepresented people and ideas into the political system almost always eclipsed any impulses to strategically build relations with those already in power. His lack of bridge-building in turn made it all the less likely that established leaders in the party would passively allow or actively support his nomination. There is no guarantee that Sanders would have secured the nomination and won in an election against Trump had he engaged in more bridge-building. Nor is it out of the question that he might have won despite his deviations from Reagan's strategies. Rather, from analyzing Sanders's insurgency through my framework, we gain a better understanding of the importance of bridge-building, incumbent acquiescence, and winning the electoral contest for Reagan to successfully effect deep and durable party change.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Not only can the causal processes articulated in this thesis explain Ronald Reagan's successful insurgent campaigns to transform the Republican Party, but they can also provide insight into the failed or partially successful attempts of other insurgent presidential campaigns. Particularly when a party is in a moment of crisis, an insurgent may find enough support from activists, interest groups, and like-minded politicians to build a sufficiently threatening campaign against the status quo. The incumbent faction, forced to contend with this internal complication to attaining or maintaining control over one or more branches of government, must make decisions concerning their response to the threat. In the cases explored in this thesis, there is ample evidence of the incumbents shifting to partially adopt the agenda and style of the insurgent so as to reduce the incentive for voters to stray from the safe choice. But once the incumbent fails the electoral test, there is an opening for the insurgent to continue to build their support and present themselves as the future of the party. The insurgent then reaches out to previous supporters of the incumbent, who will largely acquiesce to the insurgent's intent to assume leadership of the party. Once the insurgent secures the presidential nomination and wins the election, they are able to use both roles as party leader and chief executive to secure their mark on the shape of the party's rhetoric, policy, and constituency.

“(Let’s) Make America Great Again”: A Comparison of Two Insurgents’ Paths to Changing the Republican Party

When looking at today's political moment, Bernie Sanders's insurgency is only half the story. Donald Trump's takeover of the Republican Party in 2016 was the most unexpected episode of

presidential politics in American history. A political outsider refusing to appeal on the basis of ideological coherence, a populist billionaire who seemed to thrive with bad press, Trump's insurgency threatened not just to reshape the Republican Party, but to upend electoral politics entirely. In the 2010 midterms, the GOP enjoyed major increases in elected offices, picking up 63 House seats, six senate seats, six governorships, 675 state legislative seats, and occupying 60 percent of the states' executive branches of government. But they suffered losses since then, losing the 2012 presidential election and seats in Congress. In the years leading up to the 2016 election, the Republican Party was operating with a vacuum of leadership. The George W. Bush administration had lost its popularity with the disaster of the Iraq war and the financial crisis of 2007-08. In 2009 the Tea Party movement was established with the astroturfing strategies of the Koch brothers. Tea Party activism was marked by their intense opposition to the federal government, specifically concerning President Barack Obama's economic recovery efforts, deficit spending, the Affordable Care Act, abortion, immigration, and any acknowledgement of climate change as an issue. Although many of their demands remained unmet by the time the movement faded out, the populist, anti-establishment, and anti-government themes primed voters to focus much of their rage against Republicans in power. Tea Party activists were pushing their state and local party chapters to the right.¹⁴⁹ Getting primaried by more conservative candidates came to be known as being "cantor'd," after the presumptive heir to the speakership of the House, Rep. Eric Cantor, suffered an embarrassing defeat to a political novice supported by conservative radio hosts.¹⁵⁰ The decentralized movement never had a clear leader or platform, although John McCain's decision to share the ticket with Sarah Palin was seen as a concession to

¹⁴⁹ Paul Schwartzman, "Va. GOP's power broker unelected but never ignored," *Washington Post*, May 10, 2015.

¹⁵⁰ Roxanne Roberts, "Two years ago, Eric Cantor lost his House seat - was it just in the nick of time?" *Washington Post*, June 15, 2016.

the pressure of right wing populists as was Mitt Romney's pick of Paul Ryan a concession to the Tea Party-affiliated Freedom Caucus in Congress.

And in 2013, after Romney lost and the party was unsuccessful in congressional races, the RNC released an autopsy report detailing the need for massive changes within the party's strategies. The consensus among leaders was that they needed to appeal better to minority voters. Newt Gingrich, Paul Ryan, and others began rebranding their party, calling for comprehensive immigration reform, for example. Even at that time Trump was using Twitter to rail against this proposed direction of the party. "New RNC report calls for embracing 'comprehensive immigration reform,'" he wrote the day the report was released. "Does the RNC have a death wish?"¹⁵¹

In the following sections I will apply my theoretical model of insurgent-driven party change to Trump's 2016 campaign so as to understand exactly how his candidacy deviates from what has come before. While the other cases examined within this thesis indicated a minimum of at least two election cycles before an insurgent might reach a position to effect party change, Trump capitalized on the highly divided nomination contest to ascend to the presidency within a single campaign. Thus, many of the mechanisms critical to the framework have been adapted to the compressed timeline of the case.

M1: Building Insurgent Infrastructure

While the support for Trump's insurgency was built around his own personality and style rather than any pre-established socio-political movement, he nevertheless was able to inspire high levels of early and vocal electoral support. While Donald J. Trump has held celebrity status for

¹⁵¹ Kyle Cheney, "Trump kills GOP autopsy," *Politico*, Mar. 4, 2016.

decades as a real estate mogul and reality TV personality, he did not break into the political arena until taking the leading role in the birther movement, promoting the conspiracy that President Obama was not born in the United States. Through his relentless false claims concerning Obama's eligibility as president, he was able to capitalize on racist and xenophobic sentiment among the American public. At its peak, the birther movement convinced over a third of the American electorate that Obama was not born in the United States, and over half the Republican electorate.¹⁵²

Populist nationalism had been on the rise for many years. On *Breitbart News*, which enjoyed enormous popularity, Steve Bannon had been promoting xenophobia, isolationism, anti-globalization, and other far-right messages. The far right's antagonism towards the GOP was impassioned. Bannon called Speaker of the House Paul Ryan a "limp-dick motherfucker who was born in a petri dish at the Heritage Foundation."¹⁵³ The 2016 Republican primary season brought forth many candidates upon which Bannon and others could place their bets. Senator Ted Cruz (TX) and neurosurgeon Ben Carson also launched campaigns appealing directly to the base rather than opting to woo party leadership.¹⁵⁴ But it was Trump's promotion of the birther conspiracy that signed the ink on the contract between the far right and Trump's insurgent campaign.

With an unprecedentedly large pool of candidates in the GOP race, Trump was not directly presenting an insurgent challenge to a presumed leader of the party. It is true that at the earliest stage of the nomination race, Jeb Bush, with his position as the continuation of the family

¹⁵² Kyle Dropp and Brendan Nyhan, "It Lives. Birtherism is Diminished but Far From Dead," *New York Times*, Sept. 24, 2016.

¹⁵³ Amanda Holpuch, "'Where's my Steve?': how Bannon masterminded Trump's election win," *Guardian*, Jul. 18, 2017.

¹⁵⁴ Eugene Robinson, "The Year that Changed the GOP Forever: Eugene Robinson," *Los Angeles Daily News*, Dec. 30 2015.

dynasty, enjoyed particularly high polling. But his lead was fairly quickly beaten down as the number of high-profile candidates entered the race.

In 2015, *Washington Post* columnist Eugene Robinson asserted that Trump had irrevocably changed the GOP before the primaries and caucuses had even begun. He argued that in previous years, the GOP had a noticeable gap between its rhetoric and its actions. For example, the party's politicians would denounce "illegal immigration" and call Obama's policies "soft," while supporting legislation for comprehensive immigration reform that would allow those without documentation to remain in the country. And during the campaign season, after lambasting President Obama throughout his presidency for declining to use the phrase "radical Islamic terrorism," all other GOP presidential candidates were forced to withdraw from their fiery rhetoric to clarify that they did not condone Trump's call for banning all Muslims from entering the country (although Cruz and Rand Paul had their own plans to ban refugees or immigrants from Muslim-majority countries where ISIS was operating).¹⁵⁵

Robinson made the prescient assertion that either Donald Trump would win and the establishment would "[lose] all control" or they would somehow find a way to defeat him, simultaneously losing the support of much of the party's base that had already been converted. Either way, he wrote, "history will remember 2015 as the year when The Republican Party As We Knew It was destroyed by Donald Trump. An entity called the GOP will survive—but can never be the same."¹⁵⁶

M2: Incumbent Faction Shifts in Reaction to Insurgent Threat

¹⁵⁵ Robinson, "The Year that Changed the GOP," Dec 30 2015; Jeremy Diamond, "Donald Trump: Ban all Muslim travel to U.S.," *CNN*, Dec. 8, 2015.

¹⁵⁶ Robinson, "The Year that Changed the GOP," Dec. 30, 2015.

There is contradicting evidence on how Trump's insurgency influenced the positionings of his fellow Republicans. Before he had announced his candidacy, he played a role in influencing political discourse through promotion of the birther conspiracy during the Obama presidency. He found that "prominent Republicans would not strongly condemn his accusations," benefitting from the damage the conspiracy did to the president's popular legitimacy. Even amidst his 2012 presidential campaign to challenge President Obama, Mitt Romney accepted the support of the famous birther, although he tried his best to carefully distinguish himself from his celebrity supporter's ideas while accepting his endorsement and money.¹⁵⁷

Romney's unsuccessful campaign against President Obama had left his position as party leader in doubt, nor was he holding elected office at the time. Before Trump's campaign secured the nomination, there was much more of a vacuum of party leadership than in the previous cases explored. He had not been challenging a single presumed nominee, but rather a whole field of candidates representing the entire range of the Republican Party's ideological spectrum. Therefore, there was no clear incumbent leader of the party to react to Trump's insurgency through their own governance. Perhaps because his popularity was consistently perceived to inevitably collapse as he made endless political blunders and offensive remarks, the party in governance did not recognize the threat in time to bother attempting to preempt it.

Once Trump entered the race for the 2016 GOP nomination, his absolute domination over media coverage constantly forced fellow candidates to react to his claims, actions, and proposed policies, granting him agenda-setting influence. The reactions were mixed, some integrating his isolationist, anti-immigrant, populist appeals, some emphasizing their differences. The mobilization of his base was a concern for many of the other candidates, who were fearful of

¹⁵⁷ Frank James, "Romney Seeks Majority, Trump's Birthers Too, But Defies Conventional Wisdom," *National Public Radio*, May 29, 2012.

alienating themselves too much from his supporters. Thus, when Trump called for building a wall along the southern border, a significant number of the other candidates joined in (Cruz, Rubio, Kasich) or at least enhanced their rhetoric for border security and against illegal immigration. His leadership over the rhetoric against international agreements like the Paris Climate Accord and the Iran Nuclear Agreement also placed others in the position of either holding their ground or shifting to try to capitalize on the popularity of his demands and neutralize his threat as a candidate.

However, most of his attempts to change the party were outright rejected by party leadership and other candidates. They condemned his proposed Muslim ban and disagreed with his objections to the North American Free Trade Agreement. While there is some evidence that politicians reacted by shifting towards Trump, as is predicted in this framework, significant moments during his 2016 campaign showed widespread dismissal from party elites. In early March, Romney released a speech, in effect endorsing anyone but Trump. However, rather than unifying Republicans against Trump's takeover of the party, his speech only fueled Trump's reputation as going up against the establishment to "drain the swamp." This further confirms the deviant nature of Trump's path to the White House as compared to the other insurgencies examined in my theoretical model.

M3: Incumbent Loses Electoral Test

The Trump case deviates from the norm of building electoral support over two consecutive election cycles. As a result, he never faced a loss in the nomination race, nor did a presumptive heir to the party's leadership lose in the general election while his insurgency was active. Despite this deviation from the patterns explored in this thesis, the theoretical framework can still inform

us of the importance of Mitt Romney's loss in 2012 for Trump's win in 2016. As was previously stated, the RNC acknowledged after 2012 that there needed to be a new direction for the party in order to garner more electoral support, although their idea of what that would look like was very different than what much of the base had in mind. The Tea Party movement had passed its peak, but its lingering influence combined with the Alt-Right to present a contestation over which direction the party should take to mobilize the base and bring in new constituencies. This uncertainty of leadership and direction in an out-party allowed an opening for Trump to present his own brand of Republicanism.

M4: Insurgent Bridge-builds with the Incumbent Faction

It is clear that Trump has never engaged in a targeted strategy of bridge-building with the incumbent faction since his entrance into politics. His vice presidential pick, Mike Pence, could be seen as a moment of bridge-building with the Christian Right and conservative wing of the party, which could arguably be considered the incumbent faction by 2016. But all other decisions during his campaign were clearly aimed at showing his independence from the party. His populism, captured in one of his campaign slogans, "drain the swamp," consistently outweighed any incentive to coordinate or compromise with the party leadership. Most candidates coming from a non-political background start off their campaigns with few and weak relationships with other politicians. With a deliberate strategy of reaching out and offering political favors and compromises, it may be possible to overcome this deficit. While this can be seen in Trump's governance in office, it was far from evident in the insurgent campaign itself. Thus, in this mechanism we can clearly see how Trump's path to power deviates from the path Reagan followed.

M5: Incumbent Faction Acquiesces to Insurgent Challenge

If we were to apply Trump's single-cycle case to the framework, we would need to shift the interval of focus for this fifth mechanism, as there is no between-campaign period in which incumbents come around to the reform demands of the insurgent. Looking at the period between Trump's nomination as the Republican candidate for the presidency and the 2016 general election can give us some insight into how his takeover of the party occurred through carving a new path to power that deviated significantly from that of Reagan. When the video that included his admissions to raping women leaked, prominent Republicans withdrew support after he had already secured the party nomination. George H. W. Bush, George W. Bush and Mitt Romney all refused to vote for him, along with a long list of other Republicans in the party. Trump did not win because of an acquiescence of support from party elites. Rather, the appeal of his anti-government, anti-establishment populist campaign style and Clinton's unpopularity, particularly among Republican voters, contributed to a level of acquiescence within the party base.

M6: Insurgent Faces Electoral Test and Wins

After Trump won the 2016 general election against Clinton, he assumed full leadership over the party. Few Republican politicians who were against him during the campaign have continued to sail against the wind. The party supported his executive actions repealing DACA and banning immigrants from majority-Muslim countries. They unified around efforts to fund the border wall and supported the president's family separation policy. The most glaring evidence that party officials have been unwilling to deviate from their leader is in the lack of Republican support for the president's impeachment. The Republican National Committee no longer holds the slightest

prospect of developing minority support as the racism and xenophobia that Trump's presidency has legitimized becomes ingrained into the party. The party change taking place in the GOP as a result of Trump's insurgency is deep. It will have lasting effects on the expectations of truth, civility, and limited power within the presidency and the politicians who seek it.

Too Much Change, Too Fast? Reconsidering the Space We Leave for Presidential Insurgents

The day after the 2016 election left the majority of the country, and certainly the world, in utter shock. How did the host of *The Apprentice*, a birther conspiracist, a pathological liar with authoritarian tendencies ascend to the presidency with no previous political experience? Blame has been doled out at all angles in the years since. Those who have stepped back to look at the longer historical trends have noted rises in economic inequality, racism, and xenophobia. Plenty have opted to take a narrower lens, pointing to the faults in the Hillary Clinton campaign, the strategies in the Trump campaign, the FBI Director James Comey's decisions surrounding the Clinton email investigation, or the electoral college. Those familiar with the party nomination system and its evolution over time, namely political scientists and politicians, have pointed to the process as too open, allowing demagogues to enter and delude the ignorant public.

Insurgent-driven party change is facilitated by the two dominant parties' rules and norms surrounding the presidential nomination process. The system brought on by the McGovern-Fraser reforms has been increasingly entrenched in party politics, making a return to elite-controlled nominations highly unlikely. As difficult as it is to advance democratic processes, it is infinitely harder to take them away. Nevertheless, this should not keep us from asking, is the process of insurgent-driven party change something worth retaining as a potentiality in our

political system? Many debates relating to the structure of the American democracy are centered around the central question of how responsive to changes our government should be. The practice of establishing checks and balances has been a marker of the American political system since the writing of the Constitution, resulting in governance that largely leans towards the status quo. Most of the restraints on responsiveness in the system do not actually restrict *who* can enter the system of representation or *what* they can stand for, but rather the power they have over governance and law. Excluding insurgent candidates from the presidential race would not only do this in the most visible political race in the country, but it would remove a major source of immediate and durable change for social movements.

The power of Bernie Sanders's insurgency to mobilize the progressive movement, inspire grassroots campaigns across the country, and increase access to the political system for underrepresented people and ideas would not have been possible within such a short timeline outside of a presidential campaign. Searching for technical fixes to prevent anti-democratic candidates like Trump from accessing the presidency would not only circumvent the larger systemic issues relating to his popularity, but it would do more harm than good to our democracy. With remarkable expediency, presidential insurgents play a vital role in forcing American parties to reconsider—and occasionally break with—the status quo.

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