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## On the Theory of Parties

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**Abstract**

The theory of parties put forward by scholars associated with the University of California at Los Angeles argues that political parties are best viewed as coalitions of intense policy demanders. These policy demanders use their control of nomination processes to select candidates loyal to the groups' shared policy priorities. By highlighting the role of groups, this theory has made a major contribution to our understanding of party politics, breathing new life into important debates about the limitations of democratic responsiveness in the United States. The theory, however, leaves a number of theoretical and empirical issues unresolved. The “invisible primary” hypothesis has performed poorly in recent presidential elections. More importantly, we argue that the next generation of party theorizing needs to account for the distinctive roles and capacities of officeholders and voters, and to reengage the idea of formal parties as institutional intermediaries between groups, politicians, and voters.

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## INTRODUCTION

Political parties are central to the operation of democratic government. Parties are the institutions that organize political competition and policy making in democracies. Given the crucial role of parties, political scientists have long tried to understand how they are created and maintained as well as the interests and functions that they serve in politics. Different theories of parties provide different answers to these questions and therefore generate different predictions about the behavior of parties and their role in enhancing democratic accountability and responsiveness.

Over the course of several decades, leading political scientists have devoted much of their energy to developing theories of party behavior (Aldrich 1995, Key 1955, Schattschneider 1960). No single model of parties, however, has dominated this scholarly conversation. For instance, Key's (1955) famous conceptual move of distinguishing between parties in government, parties as organizations, and parties in the electorate competed with Downs's (1957) parsimonious position that parties are best understood as a cohesive team of office-seeking politicians. At the same time, historically oriented scholars have stressed that logics of party politics are contextual and ever changing and have resisted universalistic theories of party structure and organization.

Major recent works have been added to this mix of competing perspectives. This scholarship represents an ambitious attempt to rethink the nature of political parties in the United States.<sup>1</sup> This effort, whose intellectual leaders are scholars with ties to the University of California at Los Angeles, provides a unified framework for understanding this fundamental feature of democratic politics. The "theory of parties" put forward by this group—which is often referred to as the UCLA School—has, to a great extent, become a new conventional wisdom, providing a lens for understanding American politics with great influence both in political science and in academically informed journalistic analyses.<sup>2</sup> Members of the UCLA School, along with other scholars heavily influenced by its ideas, also founded and now help run a prominent blog, *The Mischiefs of Faction*, which applies its framework to contemporary events.

The "theory of parties" most directly responds to Downs (1957) and the more recent effort by Aldrich (1995) to elaborate and refine the Downsian perspective. For both Downs and Aldrich, office-seeking politicians are central actors shaping each party. At the same time, Aldrich complicates Downs's simple model by adding policy motivations for candidates, broadening his conception of who constitutes the party to include policy-motivated activists, and focusing on the internal organization of parties. Aldrich attempts to explain the major changes in party organization over time, arguing that these shifts can be understood as efforts to solve the changing problems that confront the politicians whom he identifies at the core of a party. In this way, parties are ultimately creatures of politicians to Aldrich, changing in response to the changing interests of those politicians.

The central analytical move of the theory of parties is to shift the focus from candidates and office holders. Instead, Bawn et al. (2012, p. 575) write that "groups of organized policy demanders are the basic units of our theory of parties." In this view, parties are "coalitions of interest groups and activists seeking to capture and use government for their particular goals" (p. 571). In making nominations, the groups that constitute parties define basic party positions, decide how much risk to take in pursuit of those positions, and choose which candidates to put forward under the party banner.

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<sup>1</sup>While this scholarship is predicated on an underlying theory that should broadly apply to the parties in any democratic system, the empirical applications have been almost entirely focused on the parties of the United States.

<sup>2</sup>There is considerable diversity within the group with respect to certain arguments and claims about the functioning of American parties. In identifying the consensus claims of the UCLA School, we draw heavily on two widely cited collaborative statements: the book *The Party Decides* (Cohen et al. 2008) and the article "A Theory of Political Parties" (Bawn et al. 2012). We note those cases where certain authors within the school depart from that consensus.

Whereas Downs and Aldrich give primacy to office holders, the theory of parties sees successful politicians primarily as reliable agents of the groups that constitute the party. While there are significant nuances in the view of office holders taken by specific authors associated with the UCLA School (see discussion below), the core of the theory emphasizes how, under a wide range of circumstances, nomination processes are an effective mechanism for groups to control party politicians.<sup>3</sup>

Critically, the UCLA School holds that these diverse group demands are nonetheless integrated into an entity that can be modeled as an agency with identifiable goals:

[T]he various leaders, activists, and interest group leaders who seek to influence presidential nominations are more than a collection of individual actors; they meet the standard definition of political parties. They are, in other words, a broad coalition aiming to control not only the presidency, but also Congress, the Supreme Court, governorships, state legislatures, city councils and county boards, and every other locus of political power in the United States. (Cohen et al. 2008, p. 6)

Although attentive to differences in the policy priorities among the groups, UCLA School authors often refer to “the Party” making decisions and taking other actions, suggesting that group preferences can be sufficiently aggregated for the party to behave as if it were a more-or-less rational actor (see, e.g., Cohen et al. 2008, pp. 3, 7). Moreover, they posit this basic form of party politics as a constant feature. Cohen et al. (2008) contend that “across the entire span of American history, parties behave in the same basic way—as vehicles by which the most energized segments of the population attempt to pull government policy toward their own preferences” (p. 7).

The UCLA School offers important insights about the nature of party politics. By resurrecting the crucial roles of organized interests, social activists, and intellectuals, the theory of parties provides a useful reminder of the limitations of purely electoral frameworks. The literature that it has inspired has breathed new life into research on crucial questions about the functioning of American democracy. Most importantly, by suggesting that parties often pursue the priorities of narrow groups rather than those of the broad public, the UCLA School contributes to the important political science debate about the limitations of democratic responsiveness in the United States (e.g., Achen & Bartels 2016, Gilens 2012, Hacker & Pierson 2006). As discussed below, scholars working in the UCLA School have also undertaken insightful studies illuminating how parties respond to new groups and group demands (Baylor 2013, Karol 2009) and how nomination rules can facilitate or undermine legislative partisanship (Masket 2007, 2009).

Yet, as we discuss below, the UCLA framework leaves a number of theoretical issues ambiguous or unresolved. Specifically, the micro foundations for coalitional decision making have not been clearly articulated. The framework also faces important empirical challenges. Most prominently, the celebrated “invisible primary” hypothesis has performed poorly over recent elections, failing to predict the nominations of Barack Obama and Donald Trump and dramatically underpredicting the success of Bernie Sanders in his challenge to Hillary Clinton. But the empirical challenges are not limited to those related to presidential nominations. The framework struggles both to explain some contemporary empirical findings about the structure and performance of American parties and to understand the historical role of parties as distinct intermediaries between groups and politicians. We believe addressing these limitations is not simply of historical interest but crucial in building a more satisfying theory of parties upon UCLA’s foundation.

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<sup>3</sup>As discussed below, Karol (2009) attributes an important role to party elites in managing the coalitions of groups. But Bawn et al.’s (2012) seminal article summarizing the theoretical approach clearly articulates the view that groups, rather than party office holders, are the critical actors. *The Party Decides* (Cohen et al. 2008), the UCLA School’s collective statement on the nomination process, likewise puts groups in the driver’s seat.

In the remainder of the article, we describe the contributions and challenges of the UCLA model. Our central theme is that while the UCLA School makes a critical contribution in illuminating the importance of policy-seeking groups to party politics, it has generally been too dismissive of the role and agency of elected office holders and voters in placing constraints on these groups and social activists. We argue that simply acknowledging office holders and voters as part of an extended party network is insufficient. Rather, we believe that the next generation of party theorizing should account for the distinctive roles and capacities of office holders and voters in shaping the party. In particular, future work should reengage the idea of formal parties as intermediaries between groups, politicians, and voters. This move will require considerably greater attention to the legal and institutional frameworks of the formal party.

## THE MODEL

The basic building block of the UCLA model is the organized group. Such groups must compete electorally to elect an executive and legislators who will implement their preferred policies. Because no group can deliver the votes of a majority, it is essential that groups form coalitions that cooperate in mobilizing support for a candidate who represents the coalition's policy demands. But as we know from the well-known theorem of McKelvey (1976), such coalitions are likely to be unstable. When group preferences are multidimensional (as explicitly assumed by the UCLA team), there is no coalition that can uniquely claim an electoral majority. Consequently, if groups A and B form a coalition that defeats group C, C will generally be in a position to offer something better to one of these groups and form a winning coalition of which it is a part.

Given the relative stability of the coalitional structure of American parties, a central concern for the UCLA approach is to describe how parties solve the "majority-rule instability problem" (McKelvey 1976).<sup>4</sup> Their solution centers on the notion of long coalitions developed by Schwartz (1989), and later elaborated by Aldrich (1995) as part of his politician-centered explanation for parties. The idea of long coalitions is that groups find it in their interest to cooperate with the same coalition partners across many elections as a means for reducing electoral uncertainty. But how is such cooperation maintained, given the incentives to defect to an alternative coalition that offers a better deal? The standard answer from the study of legislative parties (see Aldrich 1995, Cox & McCubbins 1993) is that groups must cede some power to a centralized authority that can help maintain party discipline and make defection costly. But the UCLA School resists the idea that there is a centralized authority structure that possesses any substantial measure of autonomy and control over the constituent groups.

Instead, the UCLA-inspired literature has moved in two directions. The first, most closely associated with Noel (2012a, 2014), is to argue that "coalition merchants" develop ideological frameworks that link policy demands across groups in a principled or logical structure. To the extent to which voters and others adopt these ideological systems, they become the basis for partisan brands and images. A defecting group loses any advantages that it had obtained by its association with a party's ideological image. Thus, groups "will internalize the new coalition, and not require agenda-control or party discipline to stick to it" (Noel 2012b, p. 965). However, as we discuss below, the ideological packaging argument seems to work considerably better for the modern Republican Party than it does for the Democrats (see Grossmann & Hopkins 2016).

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<sup>4</sup>Not only the group bases of the parties but also the intraparty coalitions in Congress are very stable, as demonstrated by analysis of roll-call voting (Poole & Rosenthal 2011).

The second approach is to conceive of parties as extended networks. The party is defined as a set of connections among constituent groups. This approach implicitly assumes that making and breaking network connections is costly to the groups involved and that these costs reduce the advantages of shifting partisan allegiances. While making and breaking connections is undoubtedly costly, this raises the question of why some periods—such as the middle of the twentieth century in the United States—feature many important groups with fluid and cross-cutting partisan allegiances, whereas today the partisan networks of groups appear to be much more stable and polarized (Krimmel 2017).<sup>5</sup> How have the costs of making and breaking connections shifted to induce this greater stability?

A concern related to stability is that of the arbitrariness of coalitions. Indeed, one reading of McKelvey's theorem is that the structure of successful coalitions is arbitrary. Any winning coalition can be replaced by another one. So there is a significant indeterminacy about which long coalitions will form and survive. With the exception of Noel's (2012a, 2014) work on intellectual "coalition merchants," the UCLA School has largely neglected the issue of which groups will find it in their mutual interests to coalesce.<sup>6</sup>

Beyond the issue of coalitional stability and structure, any group-centered party theory must come to terms with how the coalitions make decisions internally. There are at least four possible aggregation mechanisms in such a setting: voting, bargaining, hierarchy/delegation, and decentralized coordination. A central argument of the UCLA School is that the voting and delegate-selection procedures that formally nominate candidates essentially ratify the underlying group agreement. Bawn et al. (2012) use the language of bargaining to describe coalitional arrangements but are not explicit about how such bargaining is carried out. Finally, the UCLA School rejects hierarchical solutions based on formal partisan structures that are distinct from the coalition itself. So the theorizing of the school focuses on decentralized coordination (Cohen et al. 2008, pp. 188–90).

The critical mechanism for this coordination is the nomination process. Indeed, the UCLA School's best-known empirical prediction is that presidential nominees are selected through an invisible primary where candidates compete for endorsements and resources from the party's constitutive groups. Cohen et al. (2008, p. 9) write that "party insiders use the invisible primary to coordinate behind a preferred candidate and to endow that candidate with the resources and prestige necessary to prevail." The process is one of "decision by discussion," which the UCLA authors argue is "sufficiently regular to count as an institution" (p. 105). The nominee is predicted to be the candidate who amasses the most endorsements from across the range of groups that constitute the party. Endorsements are understood to be a signal of a candidate's acceptability to party groups; as a result, amassing support from diverse groups—including "out-groups" of which the candidate is not a member—is an especially powerful signal that leads to success in fundraising, in media coverage, and ultimately, at the polls. In sum, "nominees must be *acceptable* to all or nearly all members of the coalition rather than the choice of any small part of it" (p. 84). The test of a "strong" party is its ability to "identify and get agreement on a nominee who is arguably the party's best choice even though the candidate may not be any important group's first choice" (p. 85).

The idea that nomination processes provide an opportunity for group coordination is an important insight. Indeed, the UCLA effort to explain nomination outcomes stands out as the most

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<sup>5</sup>Although there still are many groups that maintain ties to both parties, there is little doubt that a greater share of politically important groups are aligned with one party today than was the case 50 years ago (Krimmel 2017).

<sup>6</sup>Noel (2014) moves the question back one stage. He argues that parties will coalesce to be consistent with the ideologies developed by intellectual entrepreneurs, but he does not develop a theory as to the types of ideologies that can be constructed. Bawn et al. (2012, p. 590) argue that "ideology reflects a coalitional bargain among diverse policy demanders."

important effort to develop an explanatory model for nomination outcomes since Bartels's (1988) study of the role of momentum. Yet significant questions remain. As game theorists have shown, coordination games often generate multiple equilibria and the outcome reached may be suboptimal, especially if coordination failure is costly.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the equilibria of coordination games in a network often depend on the details of the network and the processes of network change (see Jackson & Watts 2002). *The Party Decides* acknowledges that coordination may at times prove difficult and that the candidate chosen may not be optimal.<sup>8</sup> Yet the argument emphasizes the robustness of “decision by discussion” as a mechanism for successful coordination: Even amid the major changes in the formal rules governing nominations, Cohen et al. (2008, pp. 6–7, 232) argue that the groups at the core of each party have with few exceptions managed to agree on a nominee who is broadly acceptable to each major policy demander. As discussed below, recent nomination contests suggest that “decision by discussion” may be a less successful coordination mechanism than initially thought.

The invisible-primary prediction assumes not only that the groups will generally coordinate successfully, but also that the formal decision-making structure—a selection of nominees based on delegates elected by voters—will faithfully ratify the outcome of this group coordination. Given the indeterminacy of the invisible primaries' outcomes, is it not clear why we should expect primary electorates to accept them. All the UCLA model specifies is that the groups will coordinate on a platform that is broadly acceptable to general election voters. Why should all such outcomes be acceptable to primary voters? Cohen et al. (2008, p. 311) observe that “the reason voters go along with endorsements is not entirely clear, but evidence is consistent with the idea that many partisan voters do not have strong feelings of their own and therefore take the recommendations of party leaders.” This, in turn, implies a boundary condition for the theory that may warrant more attention than it has received: The invisible-primary hypothesis depends on voters viewing endorsers—such as group leaders and party officials—as credible providers of signals about the best candidate.

Our general point concerns the underdevelopment of theory with respect to the aggregation of group preferences. Of course, many social scientific theories model collective actors as a single agent in situations where intragroup conflicts can be justifiably downplayed or ignored. But explicit arguments in favor of ignoring these conflicts within the party network are often missing. This concern is best illustrated with a comparison to models of legislative politics. Legislative scholars have long argued that “Congress is a They, not an It” (Shepsle 1992). Yet each chamber of Congress has decision mechanisms that, under certain assumptions, yield an equilibrium decision—voting, amendment rules, the median voter theorem, etc.<sup>9</sup> For Congress, one can specify a set of rules and assumptions that clearly yield a single equilibrium prediction about what “it” will decide. The UCLA School offers no set of conditions that clearly justify talking about the network as a decision-making agent called “the party.” But the central proposition is that all of the major actors in the coalition generally are able to coordinate so that “the party” can “decide”; “the coalition

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<sup>7</sup>In the language of game theory, agents may coordinate on a risk-dominant outcome rather than the Pareto-efficient one if the payoffs of failing to coordinate on the efficient outcome are especially bad. This less desirable outcome could be avoided if authority within the party were more centralized.

<sup>8</sup>While the UCLA School makes no clear claims of optimality of decentralized party decision making, one would expect greater moves toward centralization if the outcomes were routinely inferior.

<sup>9</sup>These assumptions do not hold perfectly in the real world. But because these idealized conditions have been identified, legislative scholars can specify clear scope conditions on claims about aggregate behavior, such as that the ideal point of the median voter will be the policy outcome if legislators have single-peaked preferences over a single dimension and voting proceeds by open rule. Party theory is not yet in a position to offer such propositions.

develops an understanding that each group will get a certain amount of what it wants and then expects each member of the coalition to support *all* elements of the accepted agenda. Loyalty to the common agenda is key” (Cohen et al. 2008, p. 83).<sup>10</sup>

A second concern about the party-as-network approach is that it assumes that elected officials and formal party leaders serve as agents of interest groups and activists.<sup>11</sup> But clearly, officials and party leaders have different incentives, resources, and formal roles that complicate any simple agency relationship. In the main theoretical statements of the UCLA model (Bawn et al. 2012, Cohen et al. 2008), the party generally controls elected and party officials through its control of nominations and party leadership elections.<sup>12</sup> While these mechanisms may allow the party to select agents who will share its policy priorities, control over other behavioral dimensions may be less attainable by screening at the nomination stage. For example, elected officials and formal party leaders may have strong career incentives that lead them to have very different risk tolerances and time horizons than the party coalition. Such individuals may emphasize winning elections now rather than promoting the groups’ policy goals over the long run. Given these difficult-to-solve agency problems, the institutional features of parties that empower elected and party officials impact the ultimate outcomes of intraparty conflict and structure how policy demanders relate to parties.

As an example of this tension between policy demanders and formal parties, consider the work of La Raja & Schaffner (2015). They examine how variations in state laws regulating campaign contributions to political parties affect the financial role of formal party organizations relative to outside groups in funding campaigns. They argue that the state parties which have faced fewer legal constraints raise more money and then target it in pragmatic ways designed to maximize the party’s legislative seat share. They contrast this behavior with that of individuals and outside groups who tend to focus on ideologically extreme candidates. In support of this argument, they also find evidence that legislative polarization is considerably smaller in states where state party fundraising is less regulated (but see Malbin & Hunt 2017 for a critique). Their findings are hard to reconcile with the view that the formal party apparatus is simply a direct conduit for policy-demanding interest groups and donors.

The final theoretical building block of the UCLA model concerns how electoral competition might force parties to moderate their ideological and policy demands in order to obtain electoral majorities. In one policy dimension, policy-demanding parties would still be predicted to adopt positions that target the median voter (Downs 1957). Even in multiple dimensions, there are strong theoretical reasons to expect the parties to locate near the issue-by-issue medians (McKelvey 1986). The UCLA response to this issue is to model voters as having a “blind spot”—a region of policy positions where they cannot perceive differences. If policy points  $x$  and  $y$  are located in a voter’s blind spot, then the voters perceive identical utilities from both points.

The appeal of the blind-spot assumption is that it greatly relaxes any constraints that electoral competition places on the coalitions of policy-demanding interest groups that might form. It also provides a rationale for downplaying the role of primary voters in nomination contests. But while

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<sup>10</sup>Koger et al. (2010) show that the groups associated with each party do tend to share their mailing lists with one another. Interestingly, the authors find greater information sharing among Democratic groups than Republican factions.

<sup>11</sup>The UCLA School acknowledges that politicians may “not prefer working as agents” and “prefer to put their own reelections above the wishes of intense policy demanders” (Cohen et al. 2008, p. 37). However, Cohen et al. (2008, p. 38) minimize the agency problems by asserting that control over nominations is sufficient to predict “groups and their agents, the politicians, working together in harmony to achieve the group goals.”

<sup>12</sup>As discussed below, Karol (2009) sees a much more substantial role for elected and party officials in developing and maintaining party coalitions.



there is ample evidence from political psychology to show that voters struggle to understand policy options, it is more debatable that those struggles justify downplaying the role of voters' individual policy commitments in intra- and interparty politics.

With respect to intraparty politics, the UCLA School suggests that the impact of reforms empowering ordinary voters has been exaggerated because analysts have missed the analogy between the pre-convention informal discussion stage in the old system and the invisible-primary stage today. In both cases, "dense communication among the key players over an extended period of time" (Cohen et al. 2008, pp. 104–5) generally forges agreement on a leading candidate. The only "structural difference" is that "in the prereform period, the leading candidate went from the invisible primary to the national party convention, where his supporters voted him the nomination. In the postreform period, the leading candidate goes from the invisible primary to the state-level primaries and caucuses, where his supporters help him win these public contests" (p. 105). Yet the assumption that voters simply follow the cues of elite endorsers appears much less solid in the wake of recent election cycles.

These recent failures underscore the methodological challenge facing efforts to show that endorsements cause success at the polls. Even if voters look to endorsers, endorsers may look to voters and consider how candidates are received as they make their decisions. It seems clear that in the 2016 cycle, many Republican elites held back from endorsing Jeb Bush and Marco Rubio precisely because their poll numbers were disappointing; indeed, many endorsers stated on the record that they were declining to endorse for that reason (Lauter et al. 2015, O'Keefe & Gold 2015). Given the centrality of anticipated reactions to elite endorsement behavior, disentangling the causal role of endorsements from other factors—such as candidates' anticipated appeal to primary voters—requires heroic assumptions that are difficult to sustain. As an example, it seems likely that an exogenous shock that generated greater voter support for any one of the non-Trump candidates in the 2016 Republican race would have led to numerous endorsements from party leaders. One might infer that the reason elites had so much difficulty coordinating on an alternative to Trump was that none of the other candidates managed to appeal to ordinary Republican voters.

In a quantitative analysis, Cohen et al. (2008, ch. 8) attempt to estimate the causal effect of endorsements by regressing delegate shares on endorsements prior to any primary election or caucus results, with lagged controls for polls, media, and fundraising. Similarly, the causal impact of polls is drawn from a regression of delegate shares on polls controlling for lagged endorsements, media, and fundraising. The key assumption for identification of the causal effect of these pre-Iowa endorsements is that the endorsements and popularity are uncorrelated conditional on the lags of endorsements and polls. Such an assumption seems implausible given that endorsers may have access to not only contemporaneous public polls but also private polls and other evidence of candidate popularity. If the assumption is invalid so that contemporaneous endorsements and candidate popularity are correlated, Cohen et al.'s procedure will likely overstate the impact of endorsements. Of course, the causal estimates of polls could be similarly biased. Thus, it is hard to draw any conclusions about the relative importance of endorsements and polls from the authors' data. These same econometric concerns apply to recent work on Senate primaries using fundraising from party donors (see Hassell 2016 as an example). Using tools of causal inference, such as survey experiments and regression discontinuity, Kousser et al. (2015) find significant but modest effects of party endorsements on voter behavior. These estimates, they argue, are considerably smaller than those derived from purely observational data as in *The Party Decides*.

Recent election cycles, alongside the Kousser et al. (2015) results, suggest that voters' actual and anticipated evaluations of candidates may play a critical role in shaping endorsement behavior. In



sum, the assumptions of successful elite coordination through endorsements and of voters simply accepting the result of that coordination have not been well established.

With respect to interparty competition, the blind-spot concept suggests that on any given issue, one or both parties will be out of step with the median voter. Bawn et al. (2012, pp. 584–85) emphasize that parties will use agenda control, secrecy, and other strategies to enlarge and take advantage of the blind spot. Yet when one considers politics on an issue-by-issue basis, one might hypothesize that the party closer to the median voter—perhaps because its own policy demanders have views closer to the median on that issue—will have an incentive to diminish the blind spot, making salient the other party’s distance from voter opinion.<sup>13</sup> For example, Republicans may seek to enlarge the voter blind spot on tax policy by framing cuts that disproportionately benefit the wealthy as cuts that provide apparent (but smaller) benefits to the middle class. If so, Democrats have an incentive to highlight the ways in which these proposals depart from what (they believe) most voters want.<sup>14</sup> The UCLA School does a better job of identifying the incentives and techniques used to mislead voters than of probing the conditions under which at least some party politicians have an incentive to reveal information.

While the electoral blind spot provides a reasonable rationale for predicting that group bargaining will generally deviate from the demands of the median voter, the framework does not eliminate the role of electoral concerns in party decision making. For example, suppose that, as postulated by Bawn et al. 2012 (p. 578), high-demand interest groups agree to policy platforms on the boundary of the blind spot. Any such arrangement will be upset by any changes to the blind spot induced by shifts in voter preferences or the strategic behaviors outlined above. So voter preferences do indeed play a key role in the dynamics of party positioning. Therefore, while party platforms are not necessarily congruent with voter preferences, the model predicts a substantial degree of responsiveness as party platforms move in ways predicted by changes in voter preferences.

## **PARTIES AS INTERMEDIARY INSTITUTIONS**

The idea that political parties respond to group demands has a long pedigree. But political scientists have generally conceptualized parties as intermediary institutions: Demands emanating from groups in society are channeled through parties, which have an internal logic and organization of their own (see, e.g., Schattschneider 1960). The political professionals who (often) lead party organizations have a personal stake in the party’s vitality that cannot be reduced to the interests of the groups that support the party.

In this view, parties do respond to particular group demands, but only to the extent that the party’s officials and candidates judge that doing so serves their interests, either as individuals or as partisans. At times, this means that a particular group finds it necessary or advantageous to develop ties to both major American parties. In classic studies in the pluralist tradition, groups that had a strong foothold in both parties—such as the farm lobby, business groups, and veterans—were seen as the most effective in translating their priorities into policy (Truman 1951; see also Hansen 1991,

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<sup>13</sup>Of course, there are fully developed models that can support the prediction that policy-oriented candidates may diverge from the median voter in equilibrium. But these models rely on very different mechanisms than the blind spot, such as candidates’ uncertainty about the preferences of the median voter (see Calvert 1985, Wittman 1983).

<sup>14</sup>Outside actors and dissident factions within the party may, at times, have an incentive to open up blind spots. For example, candidates Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders arguably raised the salience of several issues that most of their respective party leaders would have preferred to keep low on the agenda, since the party position did not align with that of many base voters (e.g., immigration in the case of Trump; trade, single-payer health insurance, and tighter financial regulation in the case of Sanders).

Krimmel 2017). Other groups, such as labor unions, have had durable ties to a single party, gaining an important voice in internal party councils but also leaving group members vulnerable to shifting political tides when the opposing party dominates Washington. Alternatively, as Frymer (2010) has argued about African Americans, a group tied closely to one party may end up “electorally captured” and taken for granted by its party patron.<sup>15</sup> But in any of these scenarios, the parties themselves are understood to be institutions separate from the groups, with office holders and other party officials making decisions about how to respond to the array of pressures emanating from both groups and voters.

The UCLA School takes the role of groups a step further, arguing that the parties *are* the groups. Groups themselves form a “long coalition” and the party is the instrument through which they pursue their policy goals. In this account, politicians are agents of the groups, which hold the ultimate power within the party. Rather than being a separate, intermediary institution, the party is the sum of the bargains made by the groups that compose it. This move collapses “the distinction between formal party organizations and the networks of nominally independent advocacy organizations and allied interest groups” (Rosenfeld & Schlozman 2016).

There is a clear potential analytic benefit of cutting through the formalism that has characterized earlier versions of party theory. If parties ultimately serve the interests of intense policy demanders, it is more parsimonious to focus on the demanders themselves and to bypass the distinction between the formal party apparatus and the network of groups that determine what the party does in practice. But if the framework is unsuccessful in accounting for key empirical findings and historical developments, then we should reject the parsimonious group-based view for one that incorporates distinct party institutions.

Our main concern about the UCLA focus on parties as groups is that it sidesteps the ways in which institutions shape the translation of group interests into party decisions. As noted above, the UCLA School identifies nominations as the critical mechanism through which groups control parties. But group influence in nomination processes may vary in important ways depending on the institutional structure of the parties. This variation, in turn, may either limit or reinforce the extent to which a party’s policy commitments reflect those of its constituent policy-demanding groups.

For example, a core institutional feature of American political parties has been their federal character. Federalism has afforded both cross-sectional and over-time variation in the relationship between group demands and party decision making about policy and nominations. We are not arguing that federalism is the only institution that drives a wedge between interest group demands and party behavior, but it is an important and observable manifestation of the role of institutional structure on parties.

Mayhew’s study, *Placing Parties in American Politics* (1986), draws primarily upon cross-sectional variation in state party organizations to underscore the critical role of party structure in mediating group demands. Mayhew develops the concept of a traditional party organization (TPO), which he defines as a long-lasting party entity with substantial autonomy and a hierarchical internal structure. A TPO also regularly tries to nominate candidates for a wide range of offices and relies extensively on material, rather than purposive, incentives in motivating work on its behalf. Mayhew codes 13 states as having strong TPOs as of the 1960s, most prominently a belt of states running from Connecticut through much of the upper Midwest, including New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio. A handful of border states—Missouri, Maryland, and Kentucky—also have strong TPOs, but none exist in the newer states of the west.

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<sup>15</sup>See also Schattschneider (1960, p. 55): “If business groups can do nothing but support the Republican candidates, the Republican party dominates the pressure groups.”

The presence of a TPO structures how groups relate to parties, shaping each group's strategic options. Historically, individual corporations had plenty of influence in cities with strong machines but not the same kind of influence as in Dallas and Atlanta, where the business community organized itself to seek broad goals and recruit candidates for office (Mayhew 1986, p. 241). Similarly, unions often took on the role of junior partner in their relationship with TPOs, facing serious obstacles when they attempted to mobilize independently of the party organization (pp. 242–43). In other cities and states, where a TPO was absent, the party organizations were weaker, operating more as arenas for group competition. Mayhew's analysis shows that the penetration of parties by group pressures should be seen as an important variable rather than a constant feature of party politics.

Indeed, Mayhew's findings suggest that variation in party organizational form shapes important political outcomes. States with strong TPOs tend to have smaller public economies, less programmatic policy making, and weaker class and ideological cleavages evident in their politics. Both Krimmel (2013) and McCarty (2015) find that states Mayhew characterized as having TPOs continue to have less polarized legislatures than other states. These local partisan dynamics also can have important implications for national politics. For example, following the New Deal the Democratic Party leaders in strong TPO states often had a very different political philosophy from national-level New Dealers, influencing how programs were implemented (Mayhew 1986, Weir 2005).

One might defend the primacy of group demands by arguing that the party's institutional structure itself is caused by the types of groups present in a state. There is no doubt that party institutions are endogenous, but the durability of party structures in the face of major societal transformations makes it seem unlikely that there is a simple relationship between group demands and party organization. Mayhew's (1986, pp. 204–6) finding that all of the TPO states had been admitted to the Union by 1821 suggests instead that the origins of this particular organizational structure should be sought in the political environment of the colonial or early nineteenth-century period. Durable party institutions seem likely to have regulated how groups entered into the party system as much as these institutions were shaped by the groups themselves.

Bawn et al. (2012) concede that TPOs are a partial exception to their general view of parties, but they equate TPOs with the urban machines of Richard Daley and other "colorful examples [which] make clear that there is no inevitability to domination of parties by interest groups and policy-oriented activists" (p. 588). At the same time, Bawn et al. observe that other machines "were dominated by private groups rather than politicians," and that "the greater part of the United States has never been under domination of a political machine" (p. 588). Even so, based on Mayhew's coding, a substantial share of the United States—including most of the northeast, mid-Atlantic states, and much of the upper Midwest—featured TPOs for much of American history. These organizations had systematic effects on the nature of political contestation—including the role of interest groups—suggesting that a fully satisfying theory of parties needs to grapple with the causes and consequences of variation in party institutions.

The cross-sectional variation in party institutions across states indicates a more general point about the operation of parties as intermediary institutions in a federal system. The theory of parties depicts a world in which "bargaining among policy demanders constructs not only the party system, but also the ideological system" (Bawn et al. 2012, p. 575). But for much of American history, groups have had to work through partially independent state parties that shaped their possibilities for influence.

Consider presidential nominations. While the theory of parties acknowledges that the process of selecting nominees has undergone significant changes, the basic logic has remained the same: The policy-demanding groups and activists that constitute the core of the party coordinate on

a candidate who is broadly acceptable. This coordination now occurs through the long invisible primary rather than through bargaining at a national convention, but the groups are the key drivers of the coordination process, regardless of the changes in timing and setting. This focus on groups elides an important change in the actors directly engaged in bargaining. For much of American history, groups had to work through state (and at times local) party organizations to influence convention decisions. The delegates to the national convention were selected by these organizations, and their career paths typically depended on their relationship with the party organization. The incentive for an individual delegate to be responsive to the state party's perceived electoral interests is stronger if the delegate's career depends on pleasing state party officials than if their immediate audience is outside group members.<sup>16</sup>

Crucially, each state party organization had its own electoral base and answered to its own set of constituencies. One might say that each state party was itself a coalition of policy demanders.<sup>17</sup> But even so, the state party would be the institution reconciling those policy demands before bringing them to the national level. Channeling group conflict through the intermediary institution of state parties can be expected to give rise to a distinctive set of interests and dynamics.

When the agents deciding on a presidential candidate and national platform are state parties, they weigh group demands alongside their own concern for winning in their own state. There is an important difference between a situation in which conflict is rooted in (and channeled through) geographically based state and local parties—each with a partly independent electoral base—and the more free-flowing network identified today. In the old system, when New York Democrats and Texas Democrats disagreed about the ideal nominee, it was a dispute between two state party organizations. The leaders of the respective delegations, often state party leaders, were the ones negotiating any potential settlement. Fights today are no longer rooted in state parties with distinct constituencies but in more autonomous interest groups and ideological activists that often span the country.

The independent geographic base of state parties also makes it possible for a single national party to include groups that are deeply opposed to one another. No group was more central to the Democratic Party in the 1930s than southern whites committed to Jim Crow. If one thinks of a party as a coalition of policy demanders, it is hard to understand how a critical coalition member—arguably the single most powerful group in the party—would allow groups committed to the destruction of Jim Crow to be incorporated into the Democratic coalition. Yet that is precisely what happened, as the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) and northern African Americans entered the party in the mid-to-late 1930s. Southern leaders and activists understood that the CIO–African-American alliance forged in these years constituted a mortal threat to their core interests (Schickler 2016). The southerners responded by sponsoring antilabor legislation, among other initiatives, intended to weaken the same unions that were essential to electing many northern Democrats. But the southerners could not veto the entry of these new groups. Northern Democratic state parties and rank-and-file politicians saw labor and African Americans as partners who could help them win office, and they forged deep ties to these groups (Schickler 2016). Rather than a single coalition of groups that forge an agreement on shared goals, federalism has meant that parties can incorporate hostile groups that each have a power base in particular areas of the country.

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<sup>16</sup>In the case of the Democrats, state control was reinforced by the frequent use of the unit rule, in which the state party bound national convention delegates to vote as a bloc for the candidate favored by a majority of the state's delegates (Klinghard 2010).

<sup>17</sup>This move leaves aside the concern that states with TPOs generally limited the influence of group demanders on party decision making.

The role of federal parties is likely changing amid the nationalization of fundraising networks, media coverage, and issue agendas. A critical facet of contemporary polarization is that group alignments and issue stances appear to be far more consistent across states, as national-level cleavages permeate the 50 states. This arguably constitutes a fundamental shift in American party politics, analogous to earlier major transformations identified by American political development scholars, such as the rise of mass parties in the 1820s–1840s and the decline in the so-called partisan mode of governance in the early twentieth century (McCormick 1986). Whereas the theory of parties aims to subsume such shifts under a single framework, a key claim of historical institutional scholarship is that these shifts in institutional forms have a substantial impact on how parties channel conflict and on political outcomes more generally.

It is important to note that scholars working within the UCLA School have undertaken important studies that address some of these concerns, taking both party elites and institutions seriously. Among UCLA School authors, Karol (2009) has been the most attentive to the role of elected officials in channeling group demands. Karol views party leaders as managers of the policy-demanding groups that make up the party coalition. Yet it is unclear how much autonomy these officials are assumed to have when dealing with groups. Karol argues that when an existing coalition partner changes its position, party officials follow and rapidly change their positions to remain in line. There is perhaps more space for autonomy when it comes to incorporating a new group into the party, as in Karol's excellent analysis of the development of Democrats' alliance with African Americans. Karol demonstrates that northern Democrats shifted their voting behavior and positions on race-related issues as African Americans began to enter the party coalition during the Roosevelt years. But the story is still primarily one of politicians reacting to a group's demands rather than an exploration of how institutional structures—such as the federal party system—mediated African Americans' entry into the party. That one set of officials would bring in a group that is antithetical to the interests of another set of officials with deep roots in the same party is puzzling from the UCLA perspective.

Whereas Karol focuses on the role of officials as managers, Masket's (2007, 2009) creative study of informal party organizations and nomination processes argues that legislative polarization depends on nomination rules that empower outside actors. Masket leverages the use of cross-filing from 1914 to 1959 in California, which allowed candidates to run in as many party primaries as they wished; until 1954, their party affiliation was not listed on the primary ballot. The cross-filing system made it much harder for parties to control nominations and instead empowered office holders. Masket shows that there was much less partisan polarization in the California legislature during the cross-filing period and that the abolition of cross-filing led to a marked increase in partisan behavior. An important implication of Masket's study is that legislative partisanship depends on nomination institutions that vary over time. Under certain conditions, office holders, rather than outside groups, hold sway, and these conditions lead to weaker legislative parties. Even so, cross-filing is a rare exception to the more general pattern, in which Masket sees groups as controlling nominations. Masket (2007, p. 495) concludes that “the results presented here may also call into question Aldrich's claim that parties are the creatures of ambitious candidates and officeholders. If anything, the opposite would appear to be true. Those who control a party's nominations rule the party. . . and, for most of American history, it is these key outsiders who have actually controlled nominations.”<sup>18</sup> Masket's analysis of variation in nomination institutions thus reinforces

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<sup>18</sup>Masket's California study demonstrates that local party bosses were among the actors who at times encouraged legislative partisanship, but his emphasis is still on policy-demanding activists. He concludes that the California case “has enabled us to see what happens when the link between incumbents and outside activists is severed and later restored. The results suggest that this link is the lynchpin [sic] for legislative partisanship.” More generally, “only when outsiders who desire something

the UCLA School claim that policy-demanding groups generally use the nomination process to control office holders, inducing much of the partisan behavior we observe in legislatures.

## THE ASYMMETRY OF AMERICAN PARTIES

The UCLA School has provided a framework for thinking about party formation and competition that treats each party symmetrically. Both parties are seen as solving the same problem: how to build a coalition of groups that can win elections and implement the coalition's preferred policies. Both parties are predicted to solve this problem in similar ways, and hypotheses such as the decisive role of the invisible primary are assumed to hold for both.

While this symmetric approach may be useful in terms of parsimonious theory building, it fails to capture many of the important differences between the Democratic and Republican parties. Grossmann & Hopkins (2016) argue that the two parties are structured in fundamentally different ways. In their account, the Democratic Party is a coalition of discrete identity groups that lack an overarching ideological structure to tie their policy demands together. As a result, Democrats tend to view policy making as a series of pragmatic endeavors to solve the policy problems facing each group. The Republicans, according to Grossmann & Hopkins, approach politics and policy quite differently. The modern Republican coalition is tied together by an overarching ideology based on a set of principles about the role of government and the role of the United States in world affairs. Consequently, fidelity to these principles is the ultimate goal of Republican policy making. In a series of empirical analyses, Grossmann & Hopkins demonstrate how these differences manifest themselves in policy making, campaigning, and voter behavior. Notably, this argument may also account for the documented asymmetry in partisan polarization, where the Republican Party has repositioned itself much further to the right than the Democratic Party has moved to the left (Hacker & Pierson 2006, 2010; Mann & Ornstein 2016; McCarty et al. 2016).<sup>19</sup> While it may be possible to reconcile the party asymmetry with the theory of parties, the theory provides little guidance as to the conditions under which a party (or policy demanders) would choose to build one type of coalition over another.

## THE UCLA SCHOOL RESPONDS TO TRUMP

In light of the unexpected success of Donald Trump in 2016, Cohen et al. (2016) provide a post mortem highlighting how specific features of the 2016 race and other changes in presidential electoral politics produced a Republican nominee with so little support from the party's established factions and leaders.<sup>20</sup> Following so soon after John Kerry's rise from the middle of the pre-primary pack in 2004 and Barack Obama's upset victory over insider-favored candidate Hillary Clinton in 2008, Cohen et al. acknowledge that Trump's victory should not be dismissed as simply an uninformative outlier. Instead, their explanation focuses on three trends that they argue have made elite coordination more difficult since 2004. These include the emergence of new political media, a flood of early money, and enhanced conflict among factions.

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from government have the will and the means to control party nominations will legislative parties actually fight each other" (Masket 2007, p. 495).

<sup>19</sup>There are, of course, a number of alternative explanations for asymmetric polarization. Hacker & Pierson (2010) argue that the dramatic increase in top income shares cross-pressures Democrats dependent on the superwealthy for campaign contributions, while reinforcing Republicans' shift to the right on economic issues. This explanation is arguably compatible with a group-based view. Bonica et al. (2013), however, argue that the positions of large Democratic donors are more moderate than those of Democratic voters and legislators, suggesting that wealthy donors are less than fully in control of the party.

<sup>20</sup>Our discussion focuses specifically on Cohen et al. (2016) as it provides a rough summary of the arguments put forward by the UCLA group in public commentary on the 2016 election.



Few would deny that these trends exist and have potentially disruptive effects on presidential nominations. But each of these explanations calls into question whether the UCLA model was a valid framework for thinking about party nominations over the six elections from 1980 to 2000, in which party favorites were generally able to secure their party's nod.

Our criticism of Cohen et al. (2016) focuses on three issues. First, the nature of political media and the timing of campaign fundraising were not clearly articulated in the original work as scope conditions for the theory. Thus, appealing to these trends now in light of new evidence is akin to overfitting the model. This criticism does not apply to their claims about increased factional conflict. The UCLA model is predicated on factional conflict, but it is precisely the UCLA claim that the party coalition has developed mechanisms and institutions for effectively managing the conflict. The theory is silent on the question of how much conflict is too much for the invisible primary to reconcile.

Second, the trends identified above may largely be endogenous to the theory. This is easily the case with claims about early fundraising. Extensive early fundraising may be a symptom of the decline of party control or a fracturing of the underlying network as reasonably as it may be a cause. Similarly, early news coverage of insurgent candidates may be a reflection of actual divisions within the party elite rather than the cause, as the press pays attention to conflicts evident on the ground. The proliferation of early debates may also be a symptom of party decline rather than a cause.

Third, it is not obvious a priori that several of the postulated trends should necessarily complicate efforts at elite coordination. What is required for coordination failure is not simply that nonfavored candidates have more resources than before, but that their resources are closer to parity with those of the preferred candidates. Consider early fundraising. From the data offered (Cohen et al. 2016, figure 3), it is clear that minor candidates raised more money in recent elections than in the 1980s. But the advantage of the leading candidate has also grown. Consider 1988, a typical election by *Party Decides* standards. George H.W. Bush and Pat Robertson both raised about \$25 million. The top two Democrats were Michael Dukakis (who raised about \$20 million) and Joseph Biden (about \$10 million). Clearly, these numbers have been exceeded by many candidates over the past three elections. But the gap between the number 1 and number 2 candidates has grown as well. In 2008, Mitt Romney outraised Rudy Giuliani by more than \$20 million and John McCain by more than \$30 million. Early fundraising does not seem a good explanation for why McCain was able to upset Romney.

The UCLA School was far from alone in its failure to predict the rise of Trump, but few models were so categorical in the prediction that Trump could not happen. We believe that partisan dynamics of 2016—along with other recent presidential nomination contests in which the insider favorite either fell short or barely held on—call for a much fuller reconsideration of the nature of American parties.

## CONCLUSIONS

Although we have raised a series of concerns about the UCLA theory of parties, the approach has made vital contributions to our understanding of American politics. Group interests have an important impact on party behavior and can provide insight into the reasons that parties often adopt noncentrist positions. Policy-demanding interests are also clearly important players in nomination politics: The pressure for candidates to be acceptable to key groups aligned with the party is evident in the well-documented shifts of Democratic and Republican presidential candidates on issues such as abortion (Karol 2009). Furthermore, viewing parties as responsive to intense policy demanders has led scholars to think more critically about the role of parties in ensuring responsiveness and representation in democratic political systems.

While we have concerns about the explanatory power of the UCLA framework and the persuasiveness of certain claims, we believe this work represents a major advance in our understanding of party behavior and nomination processes. Placing group demands front and center in party politics is a key contribution, even though we believe the theory of parties leaves out much that is important. Specifically, the bold simplification at its core obscures the critical role played by both elected officials and voters in party politics, and elides the extent to which changing institutional rules empower officials, activists, groups, and voters in different ways. As discussed above, some authors working in the UCLA mold, such as David Karol, have suggested a more active role for elected officials in channeling group demands. We believe that the next generation of party scholarship should build on Karol's work, focusing squarely on the interplay between formal party officials and the groups that seek to use the party to pursue policy goals. Such an analysis might usefully explore how alternative institutional arrangements affect the degree of autonomy and agency exercised by party officials. Schlozman's *When Movements Anchor Parties* (2015) is a promising example of this approach, building upon the UCLA School's focus on groups while attending to the institutional distinctiveness of parties. Schlozman argues that enduring, deep alliances between parties and "anchoring groups"—such as labor for the Democrats and Christian conservatives for the Republicans—have had a major impact on American politics. But Schlozman highlights the strategic calculus used by party elites in deciding whether to ally with a potential anchoring group, emphasizing that the group must persuade party officials that an alliance will serve their pragmatic interest in winning office and that the group provides resources (such as face-to-face networks to help reach voters) that the party needs. Furthermore, Schlozman's analysis underscores the ways in which changes in institutions can tilt the balance of power in negotiations between party elites and groups. He argues that parties' loss of control of political resources, such as patronage, has forced them to rely increasingly on outside partners for money, time, and networks. These outside groups have been able to demand "ideological patronage" in return, pulling outcomes away from the median voter and promoting polarization.

Krimmel (2013, 2017) also highlights the importance of attending explicitly to the role of elected officials. Through a careful study of the activities of the White House Office of Public Liaison, Krimmel traces the party-building activities of Presidents Nixon through Reagan. Her evidence indicates that these activities were initiated by the presidents and were not primarily the result of group pressures. Moreover, presidential overtures to groups are driven less by ideological factors than by the desire to create partisan majorities and build support for the president's legislative program.

More generally, future work on parties might usefully consider the potential differences in the strategic goals and approach of the different actors that the UCLA School argues make up the party network. For example, some policy demanders that support a party—such as media figures and talk radio hosts—might have a much smaller stake in the party actually winning elections than do office holders, as ratings tend to be higher in opposition. Recent scholarship on the Koch network also suggests the potential for policy demanders to use novel organizational forms to both cooperate with and compete with the formal party apparatus (Skocpol & Hertel-Fernandez 2016). Similarly, Schlozman's (2015) focus on specific group resources underscores the need to distinguish among different types of policy demanders; candidates and office holders are likely to have more leverage over diffuse groups than highly organized ones. The balance of influence between these different types of players changes over time, with potentially important implications for party strategy and positioning. This, however, might push analysts back toward an earlier line of work, which made an analytic distinction between those formally enmeshed in the party structure and other claimants on the party.

We think such an approach that takes candidate autonomy seriously may help explain some of the recent empirical challenges to the UCLA model. Trump's victory, as well as other anomalies—such as Obama's 2008 triumph—suggests a theoretical problem confronting the idea that insiders will successfully coordinate through the invisible primary. Take as the starting point a set of practices concerning fundraising, campaign strategy, and so on that yields a clear advantage for a single insider candidate in a nomination battle. All of the other candidates will have an incentive to innovate—to develop new sources of money (such as through small donations on the internet) or new ways to reach voters—that offsets the insider-candidate's advantage. The nonfavored candidates may also have an incentive to team up against the insider favorite, as occurred in the early Republican primary debates in 2016. Put simply, individual candidates are every bit as likely to behave as strategic actors as are groups. Those disadvantaged by an insider-dominated process seek opportunities to undermine that process, with evident success in recent cycles. The information-rich context of presidential nomination contests—in which voters have access to an array of signals beyond those provided by the party—may make it especially ripe for outsider strategies. Although the theory of parties was initially developed with presidential primaries in mind, it may be that lower-information contests are better suited for group collusion.

Finally, we think future theorizing needs to take voters more seriously. One need not assume a particularly high level of voter information, sophistication, and engagement to recognize that both primary and general electorates can constrain the types of party coalitions that can be formed and maintained. In historical hindsight, it is all too obvious that a coalition of southern segregationists, northern liberals, and African Americans could not survive the enfranchisement and mobilization of southern blacks after the passage of the Voting Rights Act. Today we are confronted with questions about the future of the Republican coalition of business and working-class white voters. A clear lesson of the 2016 election is that candidates such as Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders can create voter coalitions that overlap uneasily with existing group-centered coalitions.

These suggested pathways for future work build upon the important contributions that the UCLA School has made to our understanding of party politics. Notwithstanding its limitations, the bold theoretical move at the core of the UCLA approach—conceptualizing parties as coalitions of intense policy demanders—has reoriented the study of political parties in a compelling direction. By forcing scholars to grapple directly with the ways in which group demands intersect with party institutions, the UCLA School puts in sharp relief critical questions about representation, responsiveness, and the contemporary polarization in American politics.

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