



OF PRESIDENTS AND PARTIES

by David S. Broder

Four months after Inauguration Day, President Carter invited his party's congressional leadership to the White House for a breakfast-table briefing on the economic policies of the new administration. Charles L. Schultze, chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers, displayed charts showing that, with full cooperation from business, labor, and consumers, it might just be possible to generate enough economic growth to balance the federal budget by 1980, as the President had promised.

Bert Lance, as director of the Office of Management and Budget, followed with a sermon on the stiff discipline that would be required to meet that goal, pointing out that many past Democratic programs would have to be pared in the process. As the climax to the briefing, the President introduced Arthur Burns, chairman of the Federal Reserve Board and living symbol of a cautious, conservative economic policy, and Burns gave his heartfelt blessing to the whole Carter approach.

That was just a little too much for House Speaker Thomas P. (Tip) O'Neill (D-Mass.) to swallow with his coffee and Danish. "Something has changed around here," O'Neill growled, "and I don't think it's me."

Indeed it had. The Democrats' jubilation over their first presidential victory since 1964 was quickly tempered by the realization that, as *New York Times* columnist Tom Wicker noted, they had nominated and elected the most conservative Democratic President since Grover Cleveland.

Part of their shock, of course, reflected little more than the belated recognition that the American public had grown weary of the liberal federal programs that were the meat and potatoes of the Democratic Party and had nurtured Tip O'Neill in the Irish wards of Cambridge and Boston. The ideas that had sustained most Democrats from the New Deal through the days of the Great Society had lost their allure, if

not their relevance. And no new ideas had replaced them.

The new President had grown up in an environment largely untouched by traditional Democratic ideals, even when they possessed vitality. An Annapolis graduate, a south Georgia farmer-businessman, he was as far removed from the Northern urban Democratic coalition of labor, ethnic, and racial blocs as could be imagined. He ran for President as a critic of Big Government—bureaucratic Washington, but he was more of an outsider than even his own rhetoric suggested.

Such a man could have emerged to lead the Democratic Party only after its presidential-selection process had undergone a thoroughgoing transformation. The new procedures allowed Mr. Carter to reap great advantage from the early support of a plurality of Democratic activists in primary elections in such relatively conservative states as Iowa, New Hampshire, and Florida. Traditional Democratic power-brokers—leaders of organized labor, big city mayors, governors, and congressional leaders—were late and, in some cases, reluctant boarders of the Carter bandwagon.

Tax funds, available for the first time in significant amounts for a presidential campaign, provided sustenance for Carter's homebred campaign organization (of the \$13.2 million he spent to win the nomination, \$3.5 million was in matching federal funds); and the legislated limits on individual financial contributions prevented his chief rivals (Henry Jackson, Birch Bayh, Morris Udall, Jerry Brown, Frank Church, and Henry Jackson) from fully exploiting their potential advantage in soliciting large-scale individual or interest-group contributions.

The whole meaning and role of national political parties had changed in the quarter century since O'Neill was elected to Congress in 1952. Being a Democrat or a Republican means less today than it did then to almost everyone from the candidate down to the average voter.

The current decline of national political parties got under way just about the time Jimmy Carter left the Navy in 1953

David S. Broder, 48, is an associate editor of the Washington Post and a nationally syndicated columnist. Born in Chicago Heights, Illinois, he received his B.A. (1947) and M.A. (1951) from the University of Chicago. A national political reporter for Congressional Quarterly, the Washington Star, and the New York Times, he joined the Washington Post in 1966. He is coauthor, with Stephen Hess, of The Republican Establishment (1967) and author of The Party's Over; The Failure of Politics in America (1972).

and began the career that was to take him to the White House. After 1955, the symptoms could be found in the sorry record of unimplemented and underfunded government programs, of uncompleted reforms, of political careers ended abruptly in violence or frustration.

There has been general agreement on what a responsible two-party system means and what has caused it to erode over the past generation. As early as 1950, the American Political Science Association had catalogued a lengthy list of reforms to achieve "a more responsible two-party system." "An effective party-system," the Association's report stated, "requires first, that the parties are able to bring forth programs to which they commit themselves, and, second, that the parties possess sufficient internal cohesion to carry out these programs." The test of an effective party, in other words, would be its capacity to give the voters a credible pledge to pursue a plausible agenda and to achieve the consensus and discipline required to act on it, once the party was in office.

The American Superstate

The last time such a two-party system existed on any kind of a durable basis was the period of Democratic dominance from 1932 to 1952. Franklin D. Roosevelt had his difficulties with Democrats in Congress and suffered political setbacks along the way, but for a full generation, under Roosevelt's New Deal and Truman's Fair Deal, the Democrats mounted major attacks on America's social and economic ills and led the nation through World War II and the Korean crisis. In helping to establish the Atlantic Alliance and the United Nations, they also created the American superstate, with its enduring military and welfare bureaucracies that even today, a generation later, consume 90 percent of the federal budget. Moreover, they did this as Democrats, provoking from the Republican Party a challenge to almost every major policy decision, foreign and domestic. During that long period, despite each party's regional differences and factional splits, American voters were rarely in the dark about what was at stake in national elections.

To political scientists, the New Deal realignment, or Roosevelt Coalition, was the dominant force in the fifth major-party system since the birth of the Republic. Before 1932, four other critical elections inaugurated a new party system.

The first was the victory of Thomas Jefferson in 1800,

**CARTER'S 1976 VOTE AS A PERCENTAGE OF VOTES CAST
FOR TOP DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATES FOR STATEWIDE OFFICE**

Alabama 101%	Louisiana 153%	Ohio 103%
Alaska 129%	Maine 79%	Oklahoma 78%
Arizona 65%	Maryland 98%	Oregon 81%
Arkansas 82%	Massachusetts 82%	Pennsylvania 107%
California 105%	Michigan 93%	Rhode Island 104%
Colorado 101%	Minnesota 82%	South Carolina 89%
Connecticut 115%	Mississippi 103%	South Dakota 201%
Delaware 125%	Missouri 102%	Tennessee 109%
Florida 90%	Montana 76%	Texas 94%
Georgia 105%	Nebraska 74%	Utah 65%
Hawaii 90%	Nevada 72%	Vermont 105%
Idaho 77%	New Hampshire 102%	Virginia 136%
Illinois 141%	New Jersey 86%	Washington 82%
Indiana 109%	New Mexico 114%	West Virginia 88%
Iowa 87%	New York 99%	Wisconsin 74%
Kansas 137%	North Carolina 85%	Wyoming 89%
Kentucky 131%	North Dakota 88%	

Source: *Guide to 1976 Elections*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, July 1977.

An analysis of voting data from the November 1976 election shows that in 27 of the 50 states President Carter drew fewer votes than the most popular Democratic candidate for statewide office.

which ended Federalist Party dominance of the young Republic. The second was the election of Andrew Jackson in 1828, a triumph for frontier democracy. The third was the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860, bringing the new Republican Party to power and precipitating the Civil War. The fourth was the election of Republican William McKinley in 1896, in which industrialism won a victory over the agrarian-populist forces that had captured the Democratic Party with the nomination of William Jennings Bryan. The fifth was the Depression-induced victory of Roosevelt and the New Deal Democrats.

Each of these realignments saw millions of voters shifting allegiance in response to what they perceived as new and vital issues and making the kind of emotional commitment to their new party that could be eroded only over a long period of time.

Because that process of erosion—and realignment—has occurred at fairly regular intervals, many scholars have formulated a cyclical or generational theory of party realignment. According to that theory, America should have had another critical presidential election in 1964 or 1968. Nothing like that happened. Instead, we have seen a series of random movements during the last two decades, in which near land-

slides for one party or the other (1956, 1964, 1972) alternated with near dead heats (1960, 1968, 1976), all the while granting the Democrats a comfortable congressional majority.

The old pattern began breaking up in 1952. The immediate catalyst was the personality of Dwight D. Eisenhower. As a war hero and a national figure, "above party," Eisenhower played a major role in breaking the habit of party-voting. He, more than any other individual, introduced ticket-splitting into American politics. An analysis of the 1952 election made by the University of Michigan Center for Political Studies found that "three out of five of those Democrats and Independents who voted for Mr. Eisenhower in 1952 were not willing to support the rest of the Republican slate."

The Broken Link

That lack of support was underlined two years later when the Republicans lost control of Congress despite Eisenhower's vigorous campaign efforts, thus inaugurating a long era of divided government. During 14 of the 22 years between 1954 and 1976, Republicans controlled the executive branch while Democrats reigned on Capitol Hill. No such lengthy period of divided party control can be found in America's previous history.

The 1952 election was notable for another reason. It marked the rise of Lyndon B. Johnson to leadership of the Senate Democrats. Johnson shared Eisenhower's belief that partisanship is the enemy, not the servant, of responsible and effective government. For eight critical years the two men managed to divorce party labels from pertinent issues and to practice what Johnson liked to call "consensus" government. It was during this period of Eisenhower-Johnson hegemony that the vital links that joined the public to government through the political party mechanism were broken. Once broken, the links were not repaired. John F. Kennedy, invoking the memory of Franklin Roosevelt, made a start at restoring party government but died before much had been achieved. None of the later Presidents cared much, or tried.

At the same time, other factors were influencing U.S. voting patterns. Four of these are important enough to be identified:

Television. In the last 20 years, television has established itself as the prime medium of political communication. The

most significant point to be made about television, as compared to printed media, is that it is personality dominated. It deals with political figures, not political institutions. It is first and foremost the President's instrument, but it is available to any politician with wit and flair, as George Wallace and Ronald Reagan have demonstrated.

Political parties as such have almost no role in television's portrayal of the political drama. Efforts by the opposition party to gain access to television to respond to presidential statements have been frustrated more often than not by the networks, the Federal Communications Commission, and the courts.

Television cameras focus on the parties only at convention time; then, they move in so massively that they almost overwhelm the convention, making it impossible for professional politicians to conduct the kind of negotiations that formerly characterized convention week. Under the gaze of the television cameras, party conventions have been largely transformed into carefully scripted theatrical productions for the ratification of decisions already made elsewhere. It is no accident that no convention has gone beyond one ballot in the selection of a President during the television era.

Education. As mass education has grown and spread, the behavior of voters has changed. In my own interviewing, I have found a significant difference between the political perceptions of those with at least a high school education and those who left school before eighth grade.

Educated voters are not content merely to vote the party ticket. They consider themselves capable of making sophisticated judgments on the individual worth of the candidates they have seen on their living-room screens. They tell you proudly, "I don't vote for the party; I vote for the man" (or, if their consciousness has been raised, "for the person"). And they do. The percentage of ticket-splitting voters has risen significantly in the last quarter century.

Affluence. Prosperity has blurred the economic issues that once served to differentiate the two parties. The New Deal was essentially a class realignment, with important racial, religious, and ethnic elements. For the most part, Republicans represented the affluent classes and the Democrats the less well-off—except in the South, where it was many years before better-off whites were willing to ally themselves with the party of Lincoln.

Post-World War II prosperity and the industrialization of

PERCENTAGE OF TICKET SPLITTERS

	<u>1952</u>	<u>1964</u>	<u>1968</u>	<u>1972</u>	<u>1976</u>
Pres./Gov.	26.1	18.1	25.9	28.0	24.8
Pres./Sen.	10.8	20.6	28.6	29.0	25.4
Pres./Gov./Sen.	22.0	28.3	37.0	42.9	43.1
All of the above	19.6	22.3	30.5	33.3	31.1

Source: Howard L. Reiter, assistant professor of Political Science, University of Connecticut, based on data from the Survey Research Center, University of Michigan.

The chart shows the growing trend of voters to support the Presidential candidate of one party and the Governor and/or Senate candidate of another. The highly partisan 1976 election slightly reversed the trend.

the South have taken many Americans far from their economic origins and thereby blurred old party allegiances. Overall, the country has become more inflation-conscious and conservative in the past decade—but not more Republican.

Participation. With education and affluence came an ideological demand—not confined to any single sector of the populace but led by the college-educated—for a greater direct voice in decisions that affect people's lives. The activism of the civil-rights movement (not to mention the peace movement, the environmental movement, the consumer movement, the equal-rights movement, the right-to-life movement, and all the opposition movements they have spawned) has carried over into the political parties, where it is expressed largely as a demand for participation, for "opening up the system." One result has been a great rush of rule-writing, designed to bring the informal processes of political brokering under prescribed and publicized codes, so that everybody, not just the insiders, can understand how the game is played.

Another result has been the sudden proliferation of state primary elections—from 16 in 1952 to 31 today—as a device for increasing public participation in the party's most important decision, the choice of its presidential nominee. Since 1952, the key to nomination has been performance in the primaries, and as a result, the role and influence of party cadre, the professionals, has steadily declined.

Most of these trends were evident at the time I wrote *The Party's Over* in 1971. The tone of that book was gloomy, for in the Washington of that day a policy stalemate between a President and a Congress of opposing parties was frustrating effective action on crises ranging from Vietnam to Detroit and Newark. That stalemate was duplicated in almost half the states, where divided governments were also struggling to cope.

I quoted—but did not sufficiently heed—the words of Stephen K. Bailey, the Syracuse University political scientist, who had written that “as long as we lack strong national parties operating as catalysts in the Congress, the executive branch, and the national government as a whole, and between the national government and state and local governments, power will continue to be dangerously diffused, or, perhaps what is worse, will whipsaw between diffusion and presidential dictatorship.”

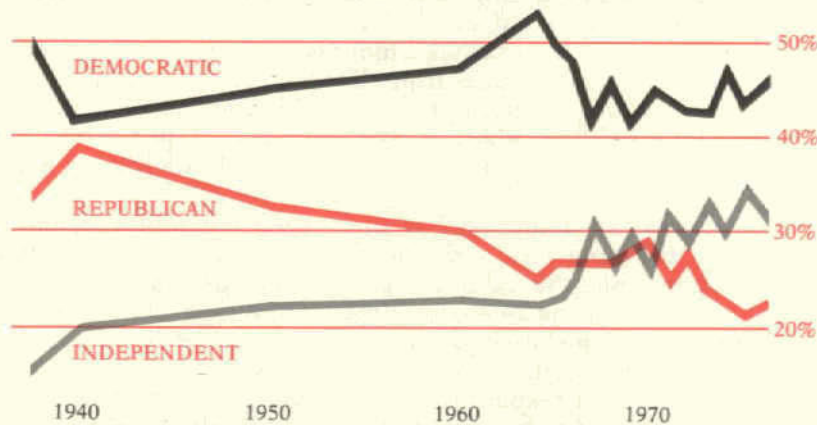
I commented, “We have been through that dreadful cycle once . . . from diffusion of power under Eisenhower to the excessive concentration under Johnson . . . and with Nixon, we may be starting on a second run through that frustrating course.” Obviously, I did not anticipate that shortly after *The Party's Over* was published, the Watergate scandals would reveal the covert, illegal steps Richard Nixon had taken, partly to relieve his frustration and gain the power he and his party had failed to win legitimately in the election of 1968.

Ebbing Party Strength

Unfortunately, there is little sign of a revival of the two-party system. Watergate decimated the Republicans on both national and state levels. When Nixon was forced to resign in August 1974, they lost the only card-carrying, life-long Republican President in two generations. They also lost most of their carefully cultivated reputation as the party of law and order and the party of America's “respectable people.” In the 1974 Watergate-year election, they approached their all-time Depression low, losing 43 House seats, 4 Senate seats, and 5 governorships.

While the Republican party has been badly weakened, the Democrats have barely held their own. In Maine, public disillusionment with both parties was so great in 1974 that James Longley was able to become the first Independent governor in 38 years. Fundamentally, the Democrats have been losing strength as markedly as Republicans. In 1976,

HOW VOTERS IDENTIFY THEMSELVES



Source: Gallup Opinion Index, March 1973; June 1976.

both parties were 8 points below their peak strength of the previous decade, measured by voters' self-identification. The Democrats had dropped from 53 to 45 percent; the Republicans, from 30 to 22 percent. It was the Independents who gained strength.

Institutional changes are also weakening the grip of the political parties. It is a remarkable irony that the single most important "reform" legislation stemming from Watergate, the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1974, may severely damage both political parties. Its framers rejected the opportunity to strengthen the parties by making them the conduits for public subsidy of presidential candidates. Instead, it gave money directly to candidates (\$67 million in 1976), while allocating only a few million to the parties for convention expenses (\$2 million to the Democrats, \$1.6 million to the Republicans), thus further widening the breach between presidential candidates and their parties.

At the same time that the share of the parties in financing candidates is being minimized, their role in the choice of nominees is being significantly reduced. The result of changes in the Democratic delegate-selection rules has been a proliferation of primaries. The Republicans, who have dabbled with minor rules reforms of their own, have been carried along in the Democrats' wake to a primary-dominated presidential-selection system. In 1976, more than 70 percent of the dele-

gates to both conventions were chosen in the primaries, not in state caucuses and conventions, where party cadres normally dominate the proceedings and often produce a sharper definition of what the party stands for.

Instead, we have what amounts to a national primary conducted state by state from late February to early June, with television amplifying the (generally inconclusive) results of early tests into giant waves of personal publicity that drown out almost any other consideration of qualifications for the office.

Only inside Congress has there been a bit of a counter-trend. Party caucuses, party leadership, and party discipline have been strengthened in the past decade, as first the Republicans and then the Democrats sought leverage with which to protect their legislative jurisdiction against the inroads of an unchecked President.

Advocates of responsible party government must welcome the reassertion of these party functions in the Congress, but they do so with bittersweet recognition that so long as the President remains largely outside the party system, this development is almost certain to result in greater conflict between the White House and the legislature. To many people, the greatest surprise of the early months of the Carter administration was the spectacle of frequent battles between the White House and the Democratic majorities in Congress. But those who understood that Carter truly was an outsider, the product of a selection process in which the party cadre, including many senior congressmen, had little voice, were not surprised.

Such analysts understand that the party system has now deteriorated to the point where it is possible for a President to face an "opposition" Congress organized and run by members of his own party.

In 1971, in *The Party's Over*, I argued that the result of the decline of our parties was stalemate in government. With the advantage of hindsight, I would now amend that to read: Lacking a responsible party system, we can anticipate more stalemates—or more Watergates.

