

**Foucauldian Micropolitics and the Evolution of Party Polarization:  
Diverging Discourses in America's Two-Party System**

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Thesis submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

In

Political Science

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4 May 2020

Blacksburg, VA

Keywords: Michel Foucault, Polarization, Discourse, Biopolitics, Truth, Power

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ACADEMIC ABSTRACT

Much attention has been paid to the growing level of polarization at both the party level and within the American public, particularly since the late 1970's. Many scholars will either argue that elite polarization is representative of pre-existing, strongly felt political beliefs in the electorate, or that voters act on the basis of the elite cues they observe in politicians. Scholarship has been lacking, however, a microlevel analysis of the polarization of elite discourse, its motivations, and its effects on the American voter. This study quantifies the divergence in party discourse on particular issues through an analysis of published platforms and presidential candidate convention speeches. By employing Foucauldian theories of micropolitics and biopower, a qualitative case study, critical discourse analyses, and ANES polling data, this study finds that not only have the parties been deploying drastically diverging discourses on issues of biopolitical administration, but this also tends to engender political saliency on issues in which voters were not significantly concerned. There are certainly insidious implications for a representative system of government when parties utilize discourse to manufacture political opinions for their own self-interest. The data herein show that both parties have been guilty of such mobilization tactics within the last forty years.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

Even the most casual observer of the American political system will note the adversarial and polarized relationship between Republicans and Democrats. Rather than focusing on the general differences between the two parties, this project looks at how the language and dialogue of political elites affects the average American voter. What I found is that, as the two parties discussed certain issues more frequently and in distinct ways, these issues became increasingly important to the American electorate. In other words, politicians *tell* voters which issues are important to them through their choice of rhetoric. This is quite different than common assumptions of democratic societies where legislators merely *represent* the interests of their constituents, rather than *manufacture* them.

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## **Acknowledgements**

This thesis would not have been possible without the guidance and patience of my committee chair, Dr. Nicholas Goedert as I explored new and unfamiliar methods of analysis throughout this project.

Dr Timothy Luke and Dr. Scott Nelson were invaluable members of my committee for their insights and depth of knowledge, particularly concerning the political theory in which this paper is rooted.

I could never properly thank Brianna Dow, who edited each page of this project almost as soon as they were written. I am sorry to have subjected you to my ramblings as I stumbled my way through this process.

Finally, to my family, your constant love and support have always driven me to strive for excellence and better myself every day. I thank you and love you all.

## Chapter One: The Nature of Polarization

### *A Brief Overview*

All too often, the American public is led to believe that it has grown as polarized as the political elites in Washington. The argument relies on an assumption that the increasing divide between Republicans and Democrats in government is representative of an underlying polarization of the constituency which drives representatives to move further and further away from the ideological center. What's more, there have been countless studies which show that the general public accepts this axiom, resulting in vitriol and animosity between American citizens of opposing viewpoints. Levendusky and Malhotra, for example, find that the electorate perceives a far more significant ideological difference between themselves and members of the opposite party than actually exists. In their conclusion, they suggest further research is warranted into potential causes of such common misconceptions.<sup>1</sup>

What if perceptions of polarization in the public were driven by the polarization of political elites rather than vice versa? What would it mean for American democracy if political discourse was employed by political elites with the intention of provoking a political ideology in the electorate where one did not previously exist? In other words, voters are too often led to believe that their political opinions are generated from within, but in reality, the discourse surrounding these opinions are far more generative than expected. Although there is a wealth of academic work on macropolitical mass and elite polarization, little has been offered in the way of a microanalytical focus on the relationship between the two on an issue-based level.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew S. Levendusky and Neil S. Malhotra, "(Mis)Perceptions of Partisan Polarization in the American Public," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 80, no. S1 (2015), 388.

This study is meant to investigate the validity of claims that political discourse is merely a reflection of established, pre-existing ideological differences in the American polity. Rather than merely accepting public polarization a priori, I specifically analyze the relationship between the deployment of political discourse and public opinion. I started with a detailed analysis of the discourses deployed by political parties in presidential election cycles from 1976 to 2016 to assess the degree to which political discourse and language has polarized over time. What I found was “an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations,” indicative of Foucault’s era of biopower.<sup>2</sup> Current public opinion data, for example, show that issues of biopolitical administration are the most important concerns for voters in the 2020 presidential election.<sup>3</sup> This, however, has not always been the case, which is curious considering these are the most divisive topics in modern American politics.

Specifically, there was a clear and drastic divergence in party discourse on abortion, relationship rights (defined later), immigration, and healthcare over the last forty years. Building on similar work by Converse (1964), McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal (2015), I analyze several open-ended responses on the American National Election Studies (ANES) questionnaire from the same timeframe in order to trace various evolutions in public saliency on these same issues. Interestingly, the issues at the top of the voters’ priorities today are far different than in the preceding decades. Instead, there was a steady increase in saliency from 1976 until 2004, the most recent year with fully coded open-ended responses. What I found leads me to believe that

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<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction* (New York, NY: Random House, Inc., 1978) 140.

<sup>3</sup> Zach Hrynowski, “Several Issues Tie as Most Important in 2020 Election,” Gallup.com, Gallup, January 13, 2020, (<https://news.gallup.com/poll/276932/several-issues-tie-important-2020-election.aspx>).

parties may deploy discourses in order to foster or engender public opinion or political action on their behalf.

Often, what I noticed was that the polarized discourse at the elite level pre-dated public opinion by decades. Employing a largely theoretical approach, this study invokes the micropolitical machinations developed by Michel Foucault in terms of truth, knowledge, and power to highlight the productive capacity of elite political discourse. It utilizes both a qualitative case study and quantitative discourse analysis data to track changes not only in party discourse, but also its relationship with public opinion polling data. Through this lens, I hope to illuminate some hidden aspects of the misunderstood reality of mass “polarization” while also expounding on the consequences for a government system intended to be a representative democracy.

What’s more, the rapid development of party discourse on certain policy issues coincides with party-driven attempts to mobilize certain social groups to vote on their behalf. This could mean that rather than reflecting pre-existing political beliefs in their constituencies, party elites may actually target particular voting blocs with no prior cohesive political practices by the deployment of particular discourse at critical instances. However, before proceeding with where this study may lead, it is important to discuss where the literature on polarization has been, and where it is today. This study, after all, was not designed in a vacuum, but rather on the shoulders of the many scholars who came before.

## **Literature Review**

### *Elite Polarization*



The most prevalent narrative in modern American politics is the growing schism between Republican and Democratic ideologies. For years, studies have shown, to various degrees and with varying methods, an increase in partisan polarization which drives the two parties further from one another externally, and further from their ideological center internally. The polarization of elites has nearly become a forgone conclusion within the academic literature of American politics, as the species of liberal Republicans and conservative Democrats serving at the national level rapidly approaches extinction. Scholars debate the origin of this rapid polarization towards the end of the twentieth century, but even the casual observer will note the rightward ideological shift of the Republican Party and subsequent – albeit not proportionate – leftward response of the Democratic Party. In other words, the movement of the Republicans has been far more pronounced than the Democratic movement towards the left. It seems as though bipartisan legislation is a dying art, at least relative to earlier periods of American history.

A favorite tool of political scientists wishing to highlight this new political reality is the dynamic, weighted, nominal three-step estimation (DW-NOMINATE), which utilizes legislators' entire roll call voting history in order to estimate their position on an ideological scale.<sup>4</sup> This method has also allowed scholars to compare Congressional sessions over time in an effort to trace the evolution of party behavior. Generally, this method has led to several supporting conclusions for the rise in party polarization. As McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal conclude,

The ideological composition of the Democratic Party has become more homogeneous. Intraparty regional differences between northern and southern Democrats have abated. As

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<sup>4</sup> This method was pioneered in Poole and Rosenthal's *Congress: A Political-Economic History of Roll Call Voting* (1997), and further refined in 2007's *Ideology and Congress*.

extreme conservatives have entered the Republican congressional party over the past forty years, moderates have exited, holding the homogeneity of the party almost constant.<sup>5</sup>

In other words, not only have the individual parties largely consolidated their belief systems, but there is less and less ideological overlap *between* the parties. This roll call method of investigation has been pretty indicative of the ills of the American two-party system, and has offered scholars insight into the growing and apparently irreparable schism between Republicans and Democrats. DW-NOMINATE's limitation, however, is that it is restricted to commentary on political elites and those actually in the arena, while offering no explanatory power for electorate voting behavior.

### *Mass Polarization*

While elite polarization has dominated the conversation surrounding American politics in recent years, there is a parallel narrative which is growing in importance and warrants attention: the extent to which the American public is also polarized. Now, unlike the polarization of party elites and career legislators – which is nearly beyond debate – there is far less consensus on this issue, although it has received a great deal of analysis recently. At first glance, one is enticed to believe that the American electorate is, at the very least, equally polarized. Over the past couple of decades, for example, the mean Republican voter's ideology has shifted right, while the mean Democratic voter's ideology has moved left. Less and less of the American public, it appears,

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<sup>5</sup> Nolan M. McCarty, Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal, *Polarized America: the Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: The MIT Press, 2016), 24.

hold mixed political views, while liberal and conservative have become nearly perfect synonyms for Democrats and Republicans, respectively.<sup>6</sup>

Now, there are those who would argue that such ideological reification has been beneficial for the American voter. After all, if the issue positions for the two major parties are more clearly articulated and widely understood, it should be easier for the electorate to hold politicians accountable for policies they do not support. Such issue-based interpretations of mass polarization, then, assume that voters identify with parties that share their opinion on the most salient problems facing individual voters, which strengthen party attachments over time. There is an inherent limitation with this thinking too, however, as it assumes that voters have pre-existing political opinions on all issues espoused by party platforms, which certainly may not be the case.

For many, this conceptualization of mass polarization is most appealing. Fiorina and Abrams, for example, emphasize that “standard dictionary definitions of polarization emphasize the simultaneous presence of opposing or conflicting principles, tendencies, or points of view.”<sup>7 8</sup> Now, such a definition, by its very nature, assumes the *a priori* existence of these opposite political points of view, and many scholars will point to issues such as immigration, gun rights, and same-sex marriage as evidence. Such social issues appear to divide the American polity pretty decisively, and as McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal state, “polarization refers to a separation of politics into liberal and conservative camps.”<sup>9</sup> By this logic, then, there seems to be a compelling argument for issue-based polarization in the American electorate. This argument also

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<sup>6</sup> Doherty, “Polarization in American Politics,” 1.

<sup>7</sup> Morris P. Fiorina and Samuel J. Abrams, “Political Polarization in the American Public,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 11, no. 1 (2008), 566.

<sup>8</sup> It is important to note that Fiorina’s conclusion was that polarization was an elite phenomenon, and that the typical American voter still settled towards the center of the spectrum.

<sup>9</sup> McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal, *Polarized America*, 3.

implies, however, that voters have held consistently passionate opinions on such issues and dismiss the possibility that they were engendered through external processes.

Most scholars who subscribe to this theory of electorate polarization draw similar conclusions about the relationship between the voters and their legislators. Most notably, these studies tend to claim that an existing polarization has simply become more noticeable in recent decades. As Abramowitz and Saunders note, “to a considerable extent, the divisions that exist among policymakers in Washington reflect real divisions among the American people.”<sup>10</sup> Their 2008 study utilized ANES data to analyze issue-based polarization by scaling respondent opinions on sixteen issues including gay marriage, gun control, and defense spending, among others. They then created a scale (+16 for all conservative responses to -16 for all liberal responses) on which to place survey respondents. Now, this method was effective for analyzing ideological thinking based on demographics, which they did quite effectively.<sup>11</sup> Their ultimate conclusion – that elite polarization was representative of a pre-existing mass polarization – was not directly supported by their study. It seems not to account for ways in which party elites engender strong issue-based feelings within the electorate. It also does not account for a secondary trend being observed in the American polity: a perceived rise in affective polarization.

Affective polarization, if indeed it is occurring, may pose the most significant threat to the stability of the American liberal tradition. Over the past two decades, for example, “the share of Americans who express consistently conservative or consistently liberal opinions has doubled.”<sup>12</sup> Similarly, various research has shown that the American voter has become

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<sup>10</sup> Alan I Abramowitz and Kyle L Saunders, “Is Polarization a Myth?,” *The Journal of Politics* 70, no. 2 (April 2008), 554.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 545.

<sup>12</sup> Doherty, “Polarization in American Politics,” 1.

increasingly antipathetic towards their ideological opposites. “The share of Republicans who have *very* unfavorable opinions of the Democratic Party has jumped from seventeen to forty-three percent in the last twenty years. Similarly, the share of Democrats with very negative opinions of the Republican Party also has more than doubled, from sixteen to thirty-eight percent.”<sup>13</sup> Additionally, each party has become more likely to characterize the political aspirations of the other as representing a direct threat to American national interests. The potential of such in-group versus out-group mentality is troublesome and warrants further attention here. Luckily, in recent years, scholars have started paying particular attention to the effects of affective polarization and have offered an abundance of possible remedies if indeed it is occurring.

In *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideologies and Unequal Riches*, McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal confront this issue by noting a curious parallel between income inequality and Congressional polarization beginning towards the end of the twentieth century. In fact, they go as far as to conclude that an increase in income inequality has driven the increased polarization that we have seen over the last forty years. Their first chapter uses three different inequality metrics – the Census Bureau’s Gini coefficient, the share of income going to the top 1%, and the percentage of foreign-born citizens – to support their beliefs. To their credit, each inequality metric is related to the increased polarization index score of Congress – as determined by the DW-NOMINATE method – at a statistically significant level.<sup>14</sup>

The authors spend the following chapters assessing alternative explanations for the rise in affective polarization that they observed in their study. In this sense, the in-groups are similar

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>14</sup> McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal, *Polarized America*, 9.

socioeconomic strata of the American public, while the out-groups represent those of higher (or lower, as applicable) income brackets. Of note, Southern Realignment, primary competitiveness, and congressional reforms were convincingly rebuked as explanatory factors in the rise of ideological groupthink noted in their research.<sup>15</sup> What their research lacks, however, is a definitive causal linkage *from* economic inequality *to* congressional polarization. The correlation is undeniable, but a theory about constituency income directly influencing legislators' voting behavior is a tenuous one. It is a theory that excludes the possibility of an interactive relationship between party polarization and mass polarization by simply implying that income inequality is driving elite polarization. Finally, it would have been more compelling to analyze a relationship between inequality and voter polarization, rather than applying the effect to congressional actors.

Perhaps the strongest attribute of Hopkins and Grossmann's *Asymmetric Politics: Ideological Republicans and Group Interest Democrats*, is that it specifically addresses this weakness by investigating ANES data at the individual level of analysis. By doing so, the authors are able to convincingly illuminate the evolution of group-based affective polarization in the American polity. Rather than trying to find one causal factor to explain the rapid increase in political polarization, Hopkins and Grossmann instead attempt to identify broad in- and out-group classifications through which scholars can more easily understand the modern American voter.

Their commentary begins with a brief account of the relationship between Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich and President Bill Clinton. The anti-conciliatory tone and zero-sum political battle over entitlement spending at the end of President Clinton's first term resulted in two separate government shutdowns in late 1995 and early 1996. The rhetoric on either side of

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 67.

the conflict, the authors believe, is representative of the groups in which the American public has split into over the last couple decades. The congressional Republicans, fighting the expansion of entitlement spending, saw their success in the 1994 midterm election as vindication of their small-government conservative ideology. President Clinton, on the other hand, refrained from framing his argument in terms of broad ideologies, but instead accused the Republican Party of targeting vital welfare programs like Medicare and Medicaid and raising taxes on “the hardest-pressed working families in America.”<sup>16</sup>

For Hopkins and Grossmann, this schism between ideologically focused Republicans and group-interest Democrats is representative of the growing divide in the American public at large. “The Democratic Party’s character as a social group coalition,” they argue, “fosters a relatively pragmatic, results-oriented style of politics in which officeholders are rewarded for delivering concrete benefits to targeted groups in order to address specific social problems.”<sup>17</sup> Republican voters, by contrast, are more likely to form political relationships based on a common ideology, which encourages party legislators to support right-leaning policy positions. To prove this point, Hopkins and Grossmann develop a simple, yet highly effective, research design.

The authors generally borrow from Phillip Converse’s groundbreaking 1964 study, which was the first to utilize open-ended responses to ANES questions to gauge a voter’s ideology. In doing so, he was able to categorize respondents as either ideologues, near-ideologues, group interest voters, nature of the time voters, or none issue content voters.<sup>18 19</sup> Now, in 1964,

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<sup>16</sup> Matthew Grossmann and David A. Hopkins, *Asymmetric Politics: Ideological Republicans and Group Interest Democrats* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016) 22.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>18</sup> Philip E. Converse, “The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics,” *Political Psychology*, 1964) 17.

<sup>19</sup> Converse, Grossmann, and Hopkins all take care to clarify that they do not employ the term “ideologue” with the pejorative connotation it tends to hold in the modern context.

Converse notice that the vast majority of respondents, regardless of self-identification on an ideological spectrum, tended to employ group interest dialogue in their open-ended responses. Hopkins and Grossmann were interested in seeing if and to what extent the trend of affective polarization had changed these observations, so they analyzed the same open-ended opinion questions in their study of 2012 ANES data.

Since 1952, ANES has asked respondents what they like or dislike about each major political party, as well as their candidates for high office. These open-ended responses allowed Hopkins and Grossman to conclude that Republicans were in fact more ideologically linked, while Democrats tended to vote with the group interest in mind. For example, when looking at Republican respondents, the most frequently employed descriptions of the parties were “liberal,” “conservative,” “values,” “responsibility,” and “socialist.” Meanwhile, “across all Democratic activist respondents on the 2012 ANES, the most commonly used substantive words included ‘class,’ ‘concern,’ ‘middle,’ ‘poor,’ ‘rich,’ and ‘women’; the words ‘gay,’ ‘interest,’ ‘programs,’ ‘policies,’ and ‘wealthy’ also appeared among the top 50.”<sup>20</sup> Not a single one of these top-cited substantive terms appeared in the top 50 for the opposing party.<sup>21</sup>

Interestingly, these observations demonstrated that Republicans not only thought of themselves in more ideological terms, but also categorized their political opponents in a similar manner. Similarly, Democratic voters were far more likely to evaluate either party on the basis of policy consequences towards various societal groups. Despite these results, it is important to remember that Hopkins and Grossmann neither vindicated nor dismissed the findings of Converse fifty years prior. Rather, they demonstrated the effect that decades of party evolution

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<sup>20</sup> Hopkins and Grossmann, *Asymmetric Politics*, 33.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.



had on how the electorate saw themselves within the liberal framework of American democracy. The effectiveness of this study played a large role in the design the study to follow herein. Hopkins and Grossmann do not attend to the manners in which these feelings are engendered within the electorate, a shortcoming I hope to address.

Morris Fiorina's *Unstable Majorities*, unlike the previously mentioned works, does not reach the same general conclusion on mass polarization. In fact, he goes as far as to say that the general American public – he calls them normal people - is no more polarized today than they were in the 1976 presidential election which featured two relatively moderate candidates: Ford and Carter. Rather, it is the political class – composed of elected officials, candidates, donors, and activists – that has indeed polarized rapidly over the last forty years.<sup>22</sup> This is an important conclusion because it validates the studies on elite polarization discussed earlier, while rejecting the significance of issue-based or affective polarization. Fiorina largely rejects the argument that a voter who increasingly votes the same way in elections is becoming more partisan. On the contrary, he cites the ideological sorting of party policy stances as the main cause. In this way, he again blames the political context of elite polarization for the misperception of mass polarization on the same scale.<sup>23</sup>

This distinction is important when looking at election trends in recent years. When looking at voter turnout results, Fiorina notes that each major party possesses about one-third of the electorate. Thus, in order to win a national election, each party must compete for the final one-third of undecideds, independents, or moderate leaners. In this sense, the Republicans and Democrats are essentially forced to act as a coalition-building parliamentary majority *during the*

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<sup>22</sup> Morris P. Fiorina, *Unstable Majorities: Polarization, Party Sorting, and Political Stalemate* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 2017) 21.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

*election cycle only.* “Most commonly,” Fiorina notes, “a party that wins an election with the support of independents and some of the more loosely attached adherents of the opposition party overreaches by attempting to impose more extreme policies and/or a more partisan agenda than marginal voters anticipated.”<sup>24</sup> As a result, that party is likely to lose the coalition that they had built in the previous election cycle, offering the opposing party momentum. This is where Fiorina’s work derives its title: *Unstable Majorities*.

Now, this analysis of the American electorate is important for a few of reasons. First, it is one of the few studies that rejects the notion of an a priori mass polarization which certainly puts it in the minority of academia. Research that begins on the basis of assumed polarization may become blind to larger considerations, like the origins of attitudinal shifts – or attitudes in general – of American voters at the individual level. Second, Fiorina does an excellent job of assessing how the polarization of political elites directly influences “normal people” outside of habitual political involvement. Rather than implying that party polarization has grown as a result of issue-based constituent polarization, Fiorina addresses the consequences that elite polarization has on an American representative government. In short, normal people are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the choices offered by America’s two-party system, reflected by the 2016 success of insurgent presidential campaigns like Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump.<sup>25</sup>

### *Issue Framing and Elite Cuing*

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

The studies discussed thus far have offered competing explanations for both elite and mass polarization, but the majority are tethered by the classical definition of a representative democracy beholden to and held accountable by the people. Far less attention has been paid to the methods by which politicians directly affect public opinion, but there is still sufficient work dedicated to issue framing and elite cuing to warrant discussion. These theories are perhaps most applicable to the study at hand, as there are significant and insidious implications for a representative government which engenders the political beliefs they are purported to represent, whether deployed through discursive formations or other means.

Druckman, Peterson and Slothuus (2013) were concerned with this very phenomenon and developed multiple experiments to test the importance of both framing and cuing. The authors define a frame as competing conceptualizations of an issue, problem, or event. To further illustrate this definition, the authors note that:

An oft-cited example is that if a speaker describes a hate group rally in terms of free speech, then the audience will subsequently base its opinions about the rally on free speech considerations and support the right to rally. In contrast, if the speaker uses a public safety frame, the audience will base its opinions on public safety considerations and oppose the rally.<sup>26</sup>

Simply put, framing is a lens through which an individual sees a topic and can influence any conclusions drawn or opinions concerning the governance over such topics.

Elite cuing is the influential capacity of party officials to promote certain frames within the mass electorate. In their experiments, Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus were also interested in investigating the power of cues in a variety of environmental conditions. In particular, they wanted to know if cuing was more effective when party polarization was more prominent, and whether frame strength was related to the shifting of opinions in their test subjects. Through the

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<sup>26</sup> James N. Druckman, Erik Peterson, and Rune Slothuus, "How Elite Partisan Polarization Affects Public Opinion Formation," *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 1 (2013) 58.

content analysis of media coverage concerning two issues – domestic oil drilling and the DREAM Act – the authors recorded the seven most prominent frames being employed. They then crafted questions for respondents which randomly employed these differing frames to assess the impact that each frame had on opinion.<sup>27</sup> Later, the authors would craft questions describing various levels of party polarization on these issues, and would attribute various frames to the parties to see if elite cuing and party polarization would either strengthen or weaken the same frames used before.

Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus drew several conclusions worth noting through their data. In particular, in the absence of elite cues or party endorsements, the stronger frame (or stronger argument) drives public opinion. In fact, they find that even if party endorsements are present in a non-polarized environment, the stronger frame will still influence public opinion more than the weaker frame. In other words, when there is a discernable difference in the substance of argument, the public is influenced by the stronger argument regardless of party. “Party cues only begin to exert influence in nonpolarized competitive environments when the parties offer equally strong arguments and individuals then turn to something other than substance for guidance.”<sup>28</sup> In this instance, a voter is more likely to be influenced by the frame endorsed by their party of preference. This tendency is exacerbated in a polarized environment where partisans are likely to follow their party’s endorsement regardless of the strength of frame or competing frames. Voters are more likely to act based on their party-driven opinion while

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 74.

ignoring alternate frames altogether. As the authors conclude, “elite polarization fundamentally changes the manner in which citizens make decisions.”<sup>29</sup>

While these conclusions are certainly telling, there are some methodological weaknesses worth noting. First, the authors rely on media content analysis for the frames employed in their study. It would have been far more powerful to derive these frames from the documents meant to outline party positions on certain issues – platforms, speeches, and legislative proposals for example. Second, the study does not attend to the ways in which parties change public opinion through their own discourse; a process which likely takes place over time and not through primed questionnaires.

Broockman and Butler (2015) shift the focus away from media-derived frames to politician-deployed discourse through a series of interesting field studies. “The traditional view of democracy,” they write, “conceives of citizens as issue voters... [who hold] politicians in less esteem when politicians support policies citizens oppose, and that politicians cannot meaningfully influence citizens' policy preferences.”<sup>30</sup> This stands in contrast to how Broockman and Butler see modern theories of representative government, such as elite persuasion and position adoption. Much like Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus, Broockman and Butler believe that a politician can manipulate public opinion through the strength of their argument. Similar to elite cuing, “the position adoption perspective predicts that, as citizens often defer to legislators' policy judgments, citizens will not react negatively when political leaders take positions they oppose and may even adopt their positions, regardless of whether politicians justify them.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>30</sup> David E. Broockman and Daniel M. Butler, “The Causal Effects of Elite Position-Taking on Voter Attitudes: Field Experiments with Elite Communication,” *American Journal of Political Science* 61, no. 1 (2015) 209.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 210.

Broockman and Butler were able to work with various legislators at the state level, and crafted policy letters concerning a wide variety of issues. These policy letters described the legislator's stance on a certain issue and were sent to voters who held different opinions on the same issue. The letters could have taken one of three forms: a control letter which simply provided a biography of the legislator, a letter with a basic justification of their stance on a particular issue, or a letter with an extensive justification of their stance. The letter types were randomized, but the issues within the letter were specifically issues on which the politician and respondent disagreed.

Their data show that, contrary to what is expected from the classical view of democratic voters as issue-based actors, there is “no evidence that legislators suffered electoral costs by taking positions constituents disagreed with; citizens who received letters from their legislators taking positions they had disagreed with previously evaluated their legislators no less favorably than those who received a "control letter" with no position.”<sup>32</sup> In terms of elite persuasion and position adoption theories, Broockman and Butler found that the letters containing a basic justification of policy stance did affect public opinion. Basic justification, on average, moved respondents' approximately 0.04 scale points away from disagreement and towards agreement.<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, however, the extensive justification letter was less effective in changing public opinion. This led the authors to conclude that substantive reasoning was not a significant determinate of a legislator's capacity to affect opinion. Contrary to elite persuasion theory, the strength of argument did not have a statistically significant impact on the respondent. The

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 216.

average impact of the extensive justification was still positive, however, meaning that there was still a persuasive mechanism at work in both types of letters unrelated to the substance of argument. “These results are most consistent,” the authors conclude, “with the position adoption view,” or elite cuing.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, Robison and Mullinix (2015) return to the importance of framing by evaluating the manners in which frames are deployed through discourse. Unfortunately, like Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus, Robison and Mullinix focus their study on media as opposed to party framing, but they do identify a significant weakness in the current literature: not understanding *how* polarization is communicated to the public.

The most useful contribution to my research derived from Robison and Mullinix’s work is their categorization of issue-based framing into strategic and value frames. The authors define strategic framing as the media’s tendency to lead readers to believe that politicians are solely motivated through political self-interest. “Such frames might stipulate, for instance, that polarization stems from the need for elites to respond to separate bodies of special interests.”<sup>35</sup> While Robison and Mullinix were focused on the influence of media, parallels can be drawn between news framing and political action. While the authors define strategic framing in terms of media’s relationship with its consumers, strategic framing could similarly describe a politician’s tendency to frame an issue relative to their political self-interest. Such a relationship is far more difficult to identify and necessitate the content analysis of party stances and platforms to identify.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>35</sup> Joshua Robison and Kevin J. Mullinix, “Elite Polarization and Public Opinion: How Polarization Is Communicated and Its Effects,” *Political Communication* 33, no. 2 (2015) 265.

Similarly, Robison and Mullinix discuss value framing as the relationship between media and the mass public. “Polarization in this framing is born out of the ideological commitments of elite partisans rather than, or perhaps in addition to, their strategic incentives”, they note, “[and] we suspect that this type of causal frame may be salient in news coverage of polarization given that polarization is defined, in part, by growing ideological distance.”<sup>36</sup> To draw a comparison between news coverage and the actions of legislators, value framing can be thought of as the tendency of political parties to frame stances in terms of broad ideologies – big government, individual liberty, etc.

Robison and Mullinix set forth to investigate the manner in which the media communicates polarization to the public, but they neglect the important role that the parties themselves play. After all, media coverage – for better or worse – is largely a reflection of the modern political environment. The study herein is designed to attend to the ways in which parties deploy polarized discourse, and how the dominant party frames have transformed over time. While the substantive argument behind party stances remain largely value-driven, the issues being discussed have become decidedly more strategic. In this sense, the spirit of Robison and Mullinix’s study will permeate through the one at hand.

## **Conclusion**

### *Where We Are*

There are certain key conclusions reached in the works reviewed above, conclusions that this project assumes from the outset, namely that the political elites – what Fiorina calls the

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 265.



“political class” – have indeed polarized. The DW-NOMINATE data are overwhelmingly evident of Republican Party legislators shifting right on the ideological spectrum with an opposite, albeit not equal, shift left by Democratic legislators. This is not to say that individual legislators have become more ideological over time, but new classes of elected officials have been more polarized than their predecessors, and their growing numbers have forced their colleagues to vote in lockstep along party lines.

In addition to the polarization of average ideological standing in the political class, there has also been a polarization of the discourse deployed by each party on behalf of their polarizing policy stances. To demonstrate this point, this study operationalizes party discourse in presidential election cycles from 1976 to 2016 as a combination of published party platforms and candidate convention speeches. Using text analysis software, I was then able to trace the evolution of rhetoric surrounding several of the most hotly contested social issues in the modern political environment. In doing so, I was not only able to demonstrate elite issue-based polarization through discourse analysis, but also compared it to relative feelings in the mass public through ANES responses. Perhaps it is unsurprising that the most divisive issues in modern politics concern the administration of life. Personal feelings are hard to avoid as the government makes more concerted efforts to regulate issues like abortion, relationships, immigration, and health care. What is surprising, however, is the general lack of political saliency these issues held in the electorate when the parties began polarizing their discourses in party platforms and speeches.

So, the conclusion that elite discourse polarization is simply a reflection of pre-existing ideological differences in the American electorate likely needs to be rejected. This study attempts to show how discourse is a tool utilized by party elites and legislators to politically mobilize

particular groups who were not previously significantly unified within voting blocs. It is critical for political scientists and scholars to attend to the ways in which voters' moral or ethical beliefs are politicized, manufactured, or at least engendered through elite party discourse. Building upon scholars of elite cueing and issue framing, this study will show that over time, the issues being polarized by political parties are determined by strategic necessity, while still being framed in terms of a broader value-based philosophy.

### *Where We Are Going*

Having established a strong foundation of scholarly contributions to the topic, chapter two will critically engage social theories of power and discursive formations to demonstrate the relevance of discourse analysis to modern political issues. Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Habermas significantly contributed to the field at hand, but the vast majority of this chapter discusses Foucauldian conceptions of communicative and discursive power, and especially the transformation of juridical power into biopower administration. Michel Foucault (*Archaeology of Knowledge, History of Sexuality, Discipline and Punish*) and Habermas (*Philosophical Introductions, "Hannah Arendt's Communications Concept of Power"*) dedicated large portions of their careers to theoretical conceptions of power, discourse, knowledge, and discipline, all of which will be further analyzed in chapter two. Through these lenses, we can begin to understand party platforms and convention speeches as discursive formations with inherent power warranting the attention of polarization scholars and students.

Chapter three employs a qualitative case study of the legislative career of Newt Gingrich, beginning with his election to the House of Representatives in 1978. This will serve a few

important purposes. First, it will orient the reader to the political environment which will be the focus of the text analysis study, 1976-2016. In many ways, the rise of Newt Gingrich was representative of a polarizing elite system. Second, his career was often emblematic of the growing divide between the two major parties, especially when we recall that the 1976 presidential election featured two relatively moderate candidates. Finally, Newt Gingrich's deployment of party discourse and its effects are well documented. In fact, there is no shortage of examples when it comes to Gingrich's radicalization of political discourse. From his television addresses in front of an empty House chamber to his verbal dismantling of Speaker Jim Wright's reputation, it is easy to trace such discourse to the creation of what Mann and Ornstein call "the Insurgent Republican Party."<sup>37</sup>

Chapter four will contain a highly developed research design for the comparison of party platforms and convention speeches to public opinion data through ANES responses to open-ended questions. The study will be composed of forty-four total documents, two party platforms and two convention speeches for each of the eleven presidential election cycles from 1976 to 2016. Particular focus is paid to the rhetoric surrounding certain issues of biopower: abortion, relationship rights, immigration, and health care. Chapter four expounds on the development of party stances on these topics, which changed dramatically over the years being analyzed.

Chapter five will highlight the results of the quantitative study conducted in the preceding chapter. Namely, the conclusion that party elites deploy party discourse in critical instances to politicize and unite potential voting blocs is validated. The Republican targeting of Evangelical Christians in the early 1980s and subsequent Democratic focus on gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender minorities illustrate this point. Chapter five also contains a critique and defense of

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<sup>37</sup> Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein, *It's Even Worse than It Looks: How the American Constitutional System Collided with the New Politics of Extremism* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2016).

methodology, followed by suggestions for further research. Once again, however, before attempting to digest such conclusions, it is crucial to establish the theoretical and philosophical foundation for this study.

## Chapter Two: Foucauldian Theories of Discourse and Power

### *Theoretical Foundation*

There are several key concepts that warrant definition and analysis in the context of a Foucauldian theory of politics prior to any attempt at employing his concepts in qualitative and quantitative manners. Foucault was famous for his theoretical deconstruction of classical power relations and for offering new ways in which to view the dynamics between subject and ruler, or rather between any high-power entity and a lower power entity. Power by itself is relevant – in the case of this paper – in terms of the association between a voter and the two-party system. It can also refer to the voter’s interaction with each individual party, or their specific party of choice. In either instance, the governmental institutions have a significantly higher degree of political power, despite deriving their legitimacy from the will of the people. For this reason, Foucauldian conceptions of power are useful in terms of understanding the mobilizing capacity of political discourse.

Logically, then, discourse will be the next topic needing exploration. Interestingly, Habermas and Foucault offer quite different views of discursive formations and argue over how they function in civil society. Here, a key distinction is the definitions of truth and knowledge as they relate to discourse, a topic on which Habermas and Foucault differ sharply. For Foucault, discourse, truth, knowledge, and power are all intimately intertwined, and a foundational understanding of the intricacies of these relationships is crucial to understanding the exercise of power. Understanding these dynamics can help us grasp the framing of political party platforms

and convention speeches as uniquely discursive formations with unexpected and usually oppressive capacities, although oppression is not strictly a hierarchical deployment of power.

The last theoretical concept to be examined is Foucault's definitions of discipline and punishment. Now, these ideas potentially hold a lot of explanatory power because several ills of the modern political environment stem from the growing improbability of party defection. Even at the elite level, the pressure to conform to what it supposedly "means" to be a Republican or Democrat is immense. A perfect example of this was revealed during President Trump's impeachment trial in the Senate, particularly during the final vote on acquittal. Each side maintained strict party lines: Republicans voted to acquit, and Democrats voted to convict. These party expectations were strictly adhered to by everyone, except of course Mitt Romney, a Republican Senator from Utah. His vote to convict on Article One of impeachment, abuse of power, not only broke party lines, but also led many to speculate it may have ended his political career. Despite invoking traditional Republican themes of religious duty and moral consciousness, his abdication of the political "truth" cultivated by the Republican Party (i.e. a vote to acquit) will likely have severe consequences, although they are yet to be determined. If a sitting Senator can be so affected by the power of political discourse, imagine its relationship with the average American voter.

Finally, chapter two will conclude with a brief discussion of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) methodologies from prominent scholars in the field. Unfortunately, Foucault passed away at the height of his theoretical machinations and did not offer strategies for their

operationalization. For this, I must turn to authorities on the subject like Phillips and Hardy<sup>1</sup> and Dooley and Levinsohn.<sup>2</sup>

### *What is Power?*

Foucault holds many qualifications as a theorist and philosopher, but perhaps his most modernist idea is a basic revision of the Enlightenment conception of power. In fact, he specifically challenges the foundational thinking of the most influential liberal minds in modern political history. Classical liberalism - born from the crucible of Enlightenment and inspiring the likes of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau – theorized power principally in one dimension. “For a long time,” Foucault wrote, “one of the characteristic privileges of sovereign power was the right to decide life and death.”<sup>3</sup> This right, referred to as juridical power, was what Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau proclaimed to be a legitimate exercise of sovereign authority, hence spawning the liberal ideology. Juridical power – in this form – was relatively restrictive: it was required for the sovereign to maintain control and originated from the sovereign’s right to allow life or effect death. Juridical power, Foucault argues, is naturally deductive in that it is solely a power of punitive subtraction. Power flows from the top down – it is held by the sovereign, and it is deployed upon the body politic from above in a traditionally hierarchical structure.

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<sup>1</sup> Nelson Phillips and Cynthia Hardy, *Discourse Analysis: Investigating Processes of Social Construction* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Robert A. Dooley and Stephen H. Levinsohn, *Analyzing Discourse: a Manual of Basic Concepts* (Dallas: SIL International, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 135.

According to Foucault, something unique developed over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Importantly, he did not claim that juridical power with its subtractive capacity disappeared. On the contrary, while juridical power is still very much present in modern society, other forms of power emerged that classical liberalism did not adequately consider. “Deduction,” he writes, “has tended to be no longer the *major* form of power but merely one element among others, working to incite, reinforce, control, monitor, optimize, and organize the forces under it: a power bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them, rather than one dedicated to impeding them, making them submit, or destroying them.”<sup>4</sup> A clear shift, then, is evident from a purely *subtractive* power to one also capable of *production*.

Benedict Anderson, in his *Imagined Communities*, accurately contextualizes the sociohistorical circumstances in which this transformation took place. Similar to Foucault, he was concerned with the development of a productive, multiplying force relation which yielded transformations in how humans thought of themselves and their communities. Anderson notes three fundamental shifts in the thinking of man which allowed for the rise of certain biopolitical formations, particularly nationalism.

The first of these was the idea that a particular script-language offered privileged access to ontological truth, precisely because it was an inseparable part of that truth. It was this idea that called into being the great transcontinental sodalities of Christendom, the Islamic Ummah, and the rest. Second was the belief that society was naturally organized around and under high centers – monarchs who were persons apart from other human beings and who ruled by some form of cosmological (divine) dispensation. Human loyalties were necessarily hierarchical and centripetal because the ruler, like the sacred script, was a node of access to being and inherent in it. Third was a conception of temporality in which cosmology and history were indistinguishable, the origins of the world and of men essentially identical.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>5</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2016) 38.



These societal transformations, according to Anderson, revolutionized the way in which men saw themselves and interpreted their relationships with others and the world at large. He specifically identified print-capitalism as the impetus “which made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways.”<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps most famously, Foucault suggested that the ancient right to take a life or let a life live was gradually being overcome by the ability to foster life or disallow it to the point of death.<sup>7</sup> This inherent responsibility to foster life was largely derived from the transformations in human nature outlined by Anderson, as a host of new scientific fields emerged in an effort to more efficiently govern and manage populations. For many readers, this may seem like a strange idea, but it really quite simple: the role of the governing authority was no longer to punish by way of death; Foucault specifically references the difficulties in justifying the death penalty in modern governmentality as an example. Rather, the government became responsible for the optimization, growth, and sustainment of life, and their successes and failures in so doing generate or detract from their legitimacy. At the same time, the rise of scientific fields and data collection – birth and mortality rates, for example – yielded a multiplication and intensification of the discourses surrounding the proper employment of these techniques of power. Through these discourses, various aspects of human nature were fashioned as concepts, a process that Foucault traces through the example of sexuality.

This evolution of political power occurred in two simultaneous manners. First, governments focused on the body as a machine: employing and utilizing its forces, increasing its

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 38

<sup>7</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 138.

usefulness and docility, and normalizing such expectations. This shift from ruling over to ruling through – to facilitate and manufacture rather than command – gradually gave rise to what Foucault called *governmentality*. Second was the protection of the body for its biologically reproductive capacities: “propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that cause these to vary.”<sup>8</sup> This development means that governing authorities were now able to justify power exertions into private areas of social life. In the modern American context, we can see this play out in debates over abortion, women’s health, and gay rights. The polarizing discourse concerning such issues of the power over life would undoubtedly have a marked impact on the average citizen, even if they did not hold a pre-existing political belief.

Naturally, in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, Foucault was concerned with the growing discourse concerning sex. In the West, Foucault would argue, civilization developed around the repression of sexuality, and as biopolitics gave rise to the power over life, sex was regulated more than ever before. What distinguishes biopower from juridical power, however, is that biopower does not operate through repression, but rather through the production of societal norms. In other words, Western civilization believed they were sexually repressed, but clinics, hospitals, and schools all produced discourse on sexual expectations. How could we possibly be repressed if we are constantly talking about sex? Herein lies the critical distinction: rather than oppress, biopower incites discourse. As Foucault notes, “[most] important was the multiplication of discourses concerning sex in the field of exercise of power itself: an institutional incitement to speak about it, and to do so more and more; a determination on the part of the agencies of power to hear it spoken about, and to cause *it* to speak through explicit articulation and endlessly

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 139.

accumulated detail.”<sup>9</sup> Through this incitement, man hoped to solve the riddles of human nature itself. In this sense, perhaps political parties manufactured political opinions on issues of biopower administration as they incorporated such topics in their platforms. I will look at this tendency more closely in chapter four. To better understand how discourse relates to political party platforms, however, a more detailed discussion on discursive formations is warranted.

### *Discourse*

As early as *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Foucault describes discursive formation as a product of repetitive statements linked, not at the grammatical, propositional, or psychological level, but by a general set of rules which govern those participating in the perpetuation of such statements. Discursive formation, Foucault says, “implies that one can define the general set of rules that govern the status of these statements, the way in which they are institutionalized, received, used, re-used, combined together, the mode according to which they become objects of appropriation, instruments for desire or interest, elements for a strategy.”<sup>10</sup> Statements alone are not sufficient to constitute a discourse, as “a statement belongs to a discursive formation as a sentence belongs to a text, and a proposition to a deductive whole.”<sup>11</sup>

In this sense, discourse is defined as a group of statements belonging to the same discursive formation. To this end, discourse “is made up of a limited number of statements for which a group of conditions of existence can be defined.”<sup>12</sup> Another component of Foucault’s

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>10</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 2002) 115.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 116.

analysis of discourse necessary for the purpose of this discussion is his understanding of discursive practice, or how the power of discourse is deployed.

It must not be confused with the expressive operation by which an individual formulates an idea, a desire, an image; nor with the rational activity that may operate in a system of inference; nor with the ‘competence’ of a speaking subject when he constructs grammatical sentences; it is a body of anonymous, historical rules, always determined in the time and space that have defined a given period, and for a given social, economic, geographical, or linguistic area, the conditions of operation of the enunciative function.<sup>13</sup>

Here, we see that discursive power is particular to the specific context in which it was created. In other words, it is not necessarily constant over time, but is unique to the environmental factors influencing its development. Using the example of Western sexuality, as did Foucault, the discourse surrounding the topic was shaped by the religious, medical, and societal structure of liberal countries and populations.

Through this Foucauldian lens, it is easier to begin to understand political platforms as a discourse, which is one of the intentions of this project. At their most fundamental level, a political platform is little more than a group of statements - or stances - describing the goals, aspirations, strategies, and ideologies of the political party from which it originates. The Republican party is the party of order: pro-life, pro-Second Amendment, and limited government involvement in daily affairs. On the other hand, the Democrats appear as the party of justice: pro-choice, pro-gun control, and the provision of civil liberties by the central government. These stances are just statements; “we are the party of limited government;” “we are the party of equality.” Cumulatively, however, they define existence within the American political system in dichotomous terms. Every decision is reduced to right or left, pro-life or pro-choice, order or

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 116.

equality. The striking lack of success of independents in national elections is indicative of the power of these discourses to define the political existence of the electorate.

The Republican and Democratic party alike are very successful at deploying this discursive power. As Foucault argued, the discursive practice of party platforms is not the process by which an individual voter formulates an idea based on their inferences of party stances, but rather it is defined as the cumulative environment which enables the operation of the stances' enunciative function. In this context, the cumulative environment is the two-party system which has gained universal acceptance in American culture. The enunciative function of individual stances - "states of things and relations that are brought into play by the statement itself"- accumulate as platforms which individual voters – and even party elites - must learn to tolerate in their entirety, for there is no alternative.<sup>14</sup>

Foucault dedicated a lot of effort to studying the potentially oppressive effects of discourse. He referenced discursive consequentialism in terms of power/knowledge regimes, or regimes of truth. Truth, power and knowledge are products of the Western confessing animal, which he also discusses in *The History of Sexuality*.<sup>15</sup> "Confession, he argues is the characteristic discourse of reflexive subjects, a discourse in which subjects discuss themselves."<sup>16</sup> Through confession, truth is manufactured in two ways. First, the truth of individuals came about via Western Christian heritage which encouraged citizens to confess desires and truths about themselves. Second, these admissions are examined for their compliance to accepted societal norms.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>15</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 63.

<sup>16</sup> Nancy S. Love, "Foucault & Habermas on Discourse & Democracy," *Polity* 22, no. 2 (1989) 280.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 282.

The idea that truth is generated through discourse and produced through its repetition is perhaps the critical disagreement between Foucault and Jürgen Habermas. There is only one discursive definition of truth, according to Habermas, and it can only be achieved through “ideal speech situations.” As other scholars have noted, “unrestrained discussion in which all opinions can be criticized leads to unconstrained consensus, to [Habermas’s] discursive definition of truth.”<sup>18</sup> Now, depending on the level of analysis used, Habermas’s reasoning has varying degrees of legitimacy. For example, if we look at individual party level discourse, modern American politics seems to be seeing near-unconstrained consensus – more so than perhaps any other time in history. On the governmental level, however, consensus in any sense seems like a virtual impossibility. As Habermas notes, “the fundamental phenomenon of power is not the instrumentalization of *another’s* will, but the formation of a *common* will in communication directed towards reaching agreement.”<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, Habermas believes that discursive truth is only possible in the absence of power, which he narrowly considers in terms of force. In discussing a truth’s validity claim, Habermas writes, “a contested norm cannot meet with the consent of the participants in a practical discourse unless all affected can freely accept the consequences and the side effects that the general observance of a controversial norm can be expected to have for the satisfaction of the interests of each individual:” consensus in the absence of force.<sup>20</sup> In fact, the only force permitted in the ideal speech situation is the force of the better argument. Unfortunately, the ideal speech situation seems unachievable in the modern two-party environment.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 281.

<sup>19</sup> Jürgen Habermas, “Hannah Arendt’s Communications Concept of Power,” *Social Research*, 1977) 4.

<sup>20</sup> Habermas Jürgen, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990) 93.

Importantly, Habermas neglects the productive capacity of biopolitical discourse in favor of a humanistic and universalistic approach to the definition of truth. After all, does it matter what is universally true if a population *believes* something else to be true? Foucault would argue that context-dependent, relativist definitions of truths are far more concerning for civil society. When discourse is pervasive in a society – particularly a democratic one – truth is produced *for* the people, even if they believe they play a significant role in its creation. Societal normalization ensures the propagation, survival, and acceptance of these truths.

Normalization is in fact one of the key consequences of the power over life in relation to discourse. Borrowing another term from Foucault, “normalization is the process where the individual is not just categorized, but also controlled and even constructed by the power vested in institutions and antecedent social practices.”<sup>21</sup> This power is not solely coercive, although there is undoubtedly a coercive element. According to Foucault, it is also productive, or constructive, as it “does not just compel certain forms of behavior; it actually *produces* a certain kind of being.”<sup>22</sup> In the American political context, the process of normalization, a result of the power inherent to the deployment of political discourse, creates liberals and conservatives synonymous with Democrats and Republicans, because that is the current truth of the two-party system. This process of truth formation through discourse and the normalization of political behavior will be further discussed in chapter three’s case study of Newt Gingrich’s career. Before we get there, however, it is important to understand how Foucault imagined punishment and discipline within the nexus of power, truth, and discourse.

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<sup>21</sup> Seamus Miller, “Foucault on Discourse and Power,” *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory* 76 (1990) 122.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

## *Surveillance, Discipline, and Punishment*

Within this framework of the transition from juridical power to the power concerned with managing and disposing productive life, there was a subsequent transition in the manifestation of discipline and punishment. The era of punitive action being solely a subtractive mechanism had ended, according to Foucault. How, then, is a subject disciplined when the sovereign authority's greatest responsibility is the maximization of life rather than the perpetuation of its own power? In large part, Foucault's answer to this question lies within the paradigm of normalization, and this paradigm is particularly illustrative of American political behavior as well.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault expands upon this idea of normalization. An institution imbued with power "bears within it an assessment of normality and a technical prescription for a possible normalization."<sup>23</sup> These prescriptions are both internal and external, but they take a similar shape: The Panopticon. In reality, a panopticon is a prison institutional design where one central guard tower is surrounded by a circle of prison cells, ensuring that any prisoner could be under surveillance at any time. "Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power."<sup>24</sup> In other words, since the possibility of being surveilled is ever present, prisoners act as if they are being watched at all times; their behavior is normalized.

Now, outside of a prison cell, the external implications of a panopticon largely consist of social pressures and expectations of conformity. In this sense, Foucault builds heavily off the work of John Stuart Mill, particularly in *On Liberty*. "We [society] have a right," Mill states, "to

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<sup>23</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (Random House, Inc., 1977) 21.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.



act upon our unfavorable opinion of any one, not to the oppression of his individuality, but in the exercise of ours.”<sup>25</sup> Put another way, society pressures nonconformists to normalize behavior by ostracizing those who they believe act inappropriately. He who challenges the normalized truths are disciplined through such pressures, as Mill and Foucault see it. “We are not bound,” after all, “to seek *his* society; we have a right to avoid it, for we have a right to choose the society most acceptable to us.”<sup>26</sup> Through the fear of such societal ostracization, the metaphorical panopticon is also internalized by the individual. If an individual knows the societal expectations, and they know they could be surveilled at any moment, they act to avoid ostracization; they normalize their own behavior to avoid punishment.

The nexus of political discourse, power, and truth also extends to Foucault’s theorization of punishment and discipline. Essentially, there are two dominant discourses in American politics: The Republican and Democratic discourses. In broad terms, these discourses are synonymous with each party’s platforms. More specifically, however, each stance that a party takes on a particular issue may also be considered a micro- or sub-discourse. Each discourse, through its various deployments and repetitions, produce two separate truths for citizens for the definition of American democracy. This has simultaneously created space in which political entrepreneurs can ideologically organize these discursive truths, a skill which often demands the respect of voters.

Perhaps the effect of normalization on political elites will offer a more concrete relationship between institutional discourse and political behavior. Third parties are unable to achieve sustained success in the two-party structure of the American political system. The only

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<sup>25</sup> John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2002) 76-7.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

president to be elected as an unaffiliated politician, and serve the duration of his term as such, was George Washington. Currently, there are only two independent members of Congress, both in the Senate, and the only independent serving as governor was defeated in 2018. These individuals, however, are clearly not the rule; they are the exception. Political entrepreneurs on both sides of the aisle know that, in order to have success on a national level, they must conform to one of the two established discourses of political platforms. In fact, “given a choice between political victory and fixing real problems...politicians have consistently chosen the former.”<sup>27</sup>

This normalization of politicians’ behavior is perhaps most evident by looking at the primary process. “Our political institutions reward the most extreme views in each political party” through the primary process, in which political hopefuls are required to pander to the most ideological elites of each party.<sup>28</sup> Thus, “the more moderate candidates who might have broad appeal in a general election never get on the ballot” because they do not appeal to the normalized stances of the polarized party institutions.<sup>29</sup>

I believe what Fiorina observed in the ideological sorting of parties – at the level of political elites – is in fact the normative power of discourse with which Foucault was concerned. Conservative Democrats and liberal Republicans are extinct species, in large part because modern political discourse has so narrowly defined what it means to be a member of either party. Thus, one would expect to find an increasingly well-defined party discourse over time, separating the two parties as normalization takes hold. We will see this more clearly in chapter four. The panopticon is very much present in the minds of national legislators; they know that

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<sup>27</sup> Charles J. Wheelan, *The Centrist Manifesto* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013) 68.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

the party institutions are surveilling their voting behavior and they act accordingly to avoid punishment. This is why it was so surprising to the political observer when Senator Romney voted against normalized Republican behavior in President Trump's impeachment hearing.

Michel Foucault was not the only philosopher to investigate the importance of discourse, yet his theories carry significant implications for the study at hand. He rooted his discursive theory in the context of an explosion of various technologies of power, new ways to govern through the optimization of life as opposed to the domination over it. A similar explosion of power is clearly noted in the political discourse of the latter stages of the twentieth century, as will be detailed in the subsequent chapters. Understanding the Foucauldian concepts detailed above may help us understand where these new technologies came from and why American voters so gradually accepted them as America's new political reality.

So, we now live in an environment characterized by the power over life, and discourse produces truths by which this power is normalized. In turn, this normalization encourages self-surveillance through a perceived need to conform to societal norms, ensuring both external and internal exertions of power over the individual. In this framework, then, how could it be possible that elite political polarization is merely a reflection of pre-existing differences in public opinion? The truth is far more complicated than this. These discursive formations are created at the level of political elites, and do not always represent the most critical political interests of American voters. Yet, in some instances, this discourse engenders political beliefs in individuals that were not strongly felt previously. What is worse, parties may utilize this tool to target certain social groups in order to normalize their societal concerns into political action on the party's behalf. This chapter has produced a strong theoretical foundation from which to investigate these claims through party discourse and public opinion. First, however, a brief discussion of scholarly

opinion on critical discourse analysis (CDA) will help justify my approach to operationalizing these Foucauldian principles.

### *Critical Discourse Analysis*

Critical discourse analysts, perhaps unsurprisingly, are quick to reference Foucault while discussing the important power implications of discursive formations. Phillips and Hardy, for example, recall how the nineteenth century psychiatric discourse willed the idea of an unconscious into existence. Invoking Foucault then, they note that “social reality is produced and made real through discourses, and social interactions cannot be fully understood without reference to the discourses that give them meaning.”<sup>30</sup> It is the goal of a discourse analyst then to investigate the dynamics between discourse and reality. Herein lies the true importance of CDA and why it is so critical to the current understanding of political polarization: “without discourse, there is no social reality, and without understanding discourse, we cannot understand our reality, our experiences, or ourselves.”<sup>31</sup> Thus, any attempt at defining polarization without considering the discourse which produced it is a futile and fruitless endeavor.

Dooley and Levinsohn discuss the inherent difficulties surrounding the study of discourse, and how discourse analysts must choose methods which negate these problems. One discourse, for example, is naturally embedded within the framework of other discourses. As they mention, “dialogue can be embedded in monologue (as often happens in a novel), narrative can be embedded in behavioral discourse (e.g., an illustration sermon) ...[and] this kind of

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<sup>30</sup> Phillips and Hardy, *Discourse Analysis*, 3.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

embedding may involve several levels.”<sup>32</sup> When developing the operationalization used in this project, it quickly became apparent that an exhaustive study of every aspect of political discourse over the last forty years would be impossibly broad. To alleviate the embedding tendencies of discourse, this study focused on party platforms and candidate convention speeches, which occur on the same quadrennial schedule as the presidential election cycle. While this surely narrowed the discourse to a handful of written and transcribed documents, the methodology employed sought to unweave the individual issues constituting the overarching discourses. In this way, I unembedded issue-level discourse for the sake of clarity and simplicity.

Now, Dooley and Levinsohn ultimately discuss that a careful unraveling of naturally embedded discourse allows the analyst to uncover the importance of individual components to the larger discourse.<sup>33</sup> In the context of this discussion, perhaps a focus on the most peculiarly evolving issue-based discourses can illuminate the grander machinations of political discourse. For example, if there are issues which begin with similar discourses between the parties, but then rapidly develop in irreconcilable terms, we can showcase the polarizing capacity of discourse. Furthermore, if it appears that these developments predated any significant issue-based concern in the mass public, it will show that discourse has a productive, engendering tendency. Finally, if the development of elite discourse can be correlated to the political mobilization of social issues – through qualitative or quantitative methods – it may have troublesome implications in a civil society predicated on representative democracy.

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<sup>32</sup> Dooley and Levinsohn, *Analyzing Discourse*, 5.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

## Chapter Three: Newt Gingrich and the Rise of the Insurgent Republicans

### *Introduction*

As with any analytical study concerning a social phenomenon, case studies can provide excellent illustrations of the questions being addressed through more qualitative means.<sup>1</sup> In this case, tracing the congressional career of Newt Gingrich serves two primary purposes. First, it sheds light on the effects that discourse – especially polarized discourse – can have at various stages of the political process. Second, it provides the reader with an appropriate frame of reference for the critical discourse analysis being conducted on party platforms and convention speeches in the following chapter. Understanding the evolution of party relations and the political environment prior to referencing the text will aid in analyzing the effects of discursive formations from 1976 to 2016.

Now, the aim of this project is to assess the validity of two general claims with respect to party discourse:

1. Discourses surrounding issues of the administration of biopower diverged noticeably in the second half of the twentieth century. These discourses were far more similar in 1976 than in 2016.
2. The biopower discourses that diverged over time do not always address the most salient issues in the general population, but over time, through party discourse, the issues become more salient.

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<sup>1</sup> Phillips and Hardy, *Discourse Analysis*, 46.

A discussion of the various stages of Newt Gingrich's career will supplement the text analysis conducted in the following chapter by offering qualitative accounts of the claims being asserted. While the quantitative study conducted in the following chapter narrowly investigates certain issues of biopower administration, this chapter will offer more generalizable instances of diverging discourses and the production of saliency. This recounting alone is not sufficient in validating these claims, but it will certainly provide context to any of my observations. It also demonstrates the power inherent in discursive formations acting through all of the mechanisms that were discussed in the previous chapter.

It is important to caveat this section by saying that Foucault would most likely disapprove of using a single figure to illustrate discursive power, as power itself permeates from all participants in the discourse, power, and truth nexus. Although it would be inappropriate to solely blame Speaker Gingrich for the evolution of party discourse, he was certainly keen to the power offered by its deployment and thus makes a useful case study.

### *The Mid 1970's and Failed Congressional Campaigns*

Newt Gingrich's congressional aspirations began at a time with notable similarities between the two prominent political parties. In fact, it was around this time (1968) that George C. Wallace, a third-party presidential candidate, remarked that "there ain't a dime's worth of difference" between the Republicans and Democrats or their candidates, Richard Nixon and Hubert Humphrey respectively. Many – like Steven Gillon – argue that he had a point.

The nation was engaged in a heated debate over civil rights and Vietnam, but the two parties remained remarkably close to the center. The conservative South kept a brake on

the liberal leanings of the Democratic Party, while a sizeable coalition of northeastern liberals and moderates nudged the Republicans to the left.<sup>2</sup>

This is a trend that would remain, metering party-driven ideology until at least the 1976 election which pitted two relatively moderate candidates against one another: Democrat Jimmy Carter and Republican Gerald Ford.

Coincidentally, Gingrich sought public office for the first time in the same year as Bill Clinton, who would ultimately end up the target of the Speaker's rhetoric in the 1990s. 1974, on the other hand, was a less ideological time where both politicians were running in the wake of the Watergate scandal; in an era characterized by the public's mistrust of the Washington political establishment. In fact, Clinton and Gingrich both tapped into this discontent with a similar language, difficult to distinguish from one another. As Gillon notes:

Both focused their attacks on entrenched bureaucracy and greedy special interests while appealing to the economic frustration of the struggling middle class. The "only difference between Democrats and Republicans," Gingrich told audiences, was that "Republican presidents favor big business while Democratic presidents favor big labor." Clinton sounded similar populist themes, attacking the "huge, unmanageable bureaucracies" of big business that are "making a killing on this inflation."<sup>3</sup>

The idea that Clinton and Gingrich had such a noticeable ideological overlap at the beginning of their careers is illustrative of the parties in general. In fact, the only significant difference between Clinton and Gingrich at this point in their political careers was the messaging style with which the two conveyed their ideas.

Gingrich was running in Georgia, a democratic bastion at the city and state levels. By many, the state was considered the yellowest of yellow-dog states in terms of Congressional elections. Georgians had little trust for the party of the Watergate scandal, and many voters

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<sup>2</sup> Steven M. Gillon, *The Pact: Bill Clinton, Newt Gingrich, and the Rivalry That Defined a Generation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) 63.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.



believed Republicans were on the verge of extinction. In fact, “the only Republican in the Georgia delegation was Ben Blackburn, but he, too, was fighting for his political life against the anti-Republican tide of 1974.”<sup>4</sup> Now, Gingrich had spent several years contributing to the campaigns of local GOP candidates, but he quickly saw the futility of running as a Republican in a state where locals still invoked the memory of General Sherman’s “March to the Sea.”<sup>5</sup> At this point in his career, Gingrich saw little benefit to the Republican brand. “He needed to find a message and a strategy that would break through, challenge entrenched political loyalties, and create a new image for the Republican Party.”<sup>6</sup>

Illustrative of the fact that party discourse was significantly more comparable in the 1970s, Gingrich was able to employ rhetoric which attacked his opponent from the left of the ideological spectrum. The incumbent, Jack Flynt, was a classic conservative southern Democrat who had opposed both the Voting Rights and Civil Rights Acts of the 1960s. He had also signed the Southern Manifesto, protesting the Supreme Court’s ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*.<sup>7</sup> In retrospect, thinking of Newt Gingrich as ‘the progressive, forward-thinking reformer running against an old-style conservative Democrat’ seems laughable. However, that is exactly how the *Atlanta Constitution* described him in their endorsement of the 1974 campaign.<sup>8</sup> This flexibility is indicative of two characteristics of the political environment of the 1970s. First, it demonstrates how much ideological overlap there was to allow a candidate to hold both liberal

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<sup>4</sup> Craig Shirley, *Citizen Newt: The Making of a Reagan Conservative* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2017) 35.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>6</sup> Gillon, *The Pact*, 31.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

and conservative views. Second, Gingrich's campaign signaled a shift away from traditional value-based campaigning (small government, less spending) towards strategic framing of issues to court voters across the ideological divide.

In fact, Gingrich relied so little on party identification in 1974 that he avoided referring to his political affiliation to the maximum extent possible. After all, openly running as a Republican in such a solidly Democratic district was intuitively self-defeating. Instead, he was a self-proclaimed common-sense conservative, standing in stark contrast to a corrupt Democratic candidate who was out of touch with his constituents. He attacked Flynt for leasing land to the Ford Motor Company, claiming that he was beholden to the special interests of big business, not the issues of the middle class.<sup>9</sup> Gingrich understood that Georgian voters were far more concerned with issues that affected their livelihoods than broad philosophical party differences. Wage stagnation made it increasingly difficult to provide for a family, unemployment was rising, and average household income was below the national average. Inflation was the issue on every voter's mind, and they wanted solutions. Gingrich capitalized on both these fears, and the lack of governmental relief, criticizing the “‘incompetence and indifference’ of Washington, and a Congress ‘more interested in party squabbling than in problem solving.’”<sup>10</sup>

Despite running in the shadow of the Watergate scandal and in a decidedly Democratic district, Newt Gingrich was able to accumulate forty-eight percent of the vote. He lost the election, but he was emboldened by the results. A Republican could win, but only “if he developed a ‘scorched earth’ style that would shake up traditional – and now largely obsolete –

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>10</sup> Shirley, *Citizen Newt*, 44.

alliances between Georgia voters and the Democratic Party.”<sup>11</sup> Voters defected to the Republican party in presidential elections, Gingrich posited, because they perceived ideological differences between the parties.

As it was in 1974, Gingrich’s rhetoric in 1976 was still notably populist, which struck a chord with the majority of Georgia’s sixth district. The focal point of his campaign’s discourse was still the dysfunctional institutions in Washington and the entrenched, corrupt bureaucrats purporting to represent the people. In his candidacy announcement, he asserted, “those of us who work for a living are being discriminated against...the tax laws favor the rich. The Welfare laws favor the poor. The courts favor the criminal over the victim. Bureaucrats order us around while we foot the bill.”<sup>12</sup> His message had not evolved much at this point, but his deployment was becoming more radical. Rather than focusing on the issues alone, a far heavier emphasis was placed on making his opponent – Jack Flynt once again – look corrupt and unworthy of holding office.

He once more targeted Flynt’s leasing of land to the Ford Motor Company and implied that it had affected his voting behavior in the previous session of Congress. He suggested that Flynt was protecting criminal activity by Democrats in Congress by covering up scandals as the Chairman of the House Ethics Committee. In all honesty, the average voter in Georgia’s sixth district cared less about Flynt’s record in the Ethics Committee or his vote on the Clean Air Act than they did about the general state of the economy. Despite this, it was Gingrich’s energetic discourse that gained the attention of the press, leading the *Atlanta Journal* to describe him as a

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<sup>11</sup> Gillon, *The Pact*, 32.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

“middle of the road, young and candid” alternative to the entrenched, bureaucratic incumbent.<sup>13</sup> In other words, at first glance it appears that Gingrich’s discursive deployment dictated, to a limited extent, what would become salient to voters, illustrative of the second claim.

Again, Gingrich would lose the election of 1976 to Jack Flynt, in large part because of the nomination of Jimmy Carter as the Democratic presidential candidate. A native peanut farmer from Georgia, Carter’s nomination generated a groundswell of Democratic support to the polls. Although this undoubtedly aided Flynt’s re-election efforts, the results were still too close for comfort as he won by a 51.7 to 48.3 percent margin.<sup>14</sup> Gingrich’s defeats were formative, but hardly discouraging. His messaging strategy had proven effective, and there seemed to be a correlation between the aggressiveness of his rhetoric and support at the polling station. The trajectory of his future campaign and governing rhetoric had been established.

### *Electoral Success and a Shift in Discourse*

The election of 1978 was unlike any political competition in which Newt Gingrich had been involved to this point. Towards the end of his second campaign against Jack Flynt, his opponent had suffered a mild heart attack and would not seek re-election against Gingrich a third time. The nomination for Flynt’s Democratic successor – state Senator Virginia Shapard – was far more liberally progressive, and Gingrich quickly realized that he would not be able to siphon away any liberal support from the Democratic Party. This triggered a dramatic shift in both

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 34.

Gingrich's tone and message, as the left of the ideological spectrum was no longer available to him. This would signal the beginning of his polarizing tendencies.

In 1974 and 1976, Gingrich had focused far more heavily on trying to undermine the character and moral standing of Flynt rather than presenting himself as a clear ideological alternative. 1978, however, featured a campaign discourse which fused personal attacks with ideological undertones, and Gingrich embraced both Republican and conservative labels. In fact, "Gingrich went out of his way to present himself as a reassuring symbol of traditional values...[and] suggested that his opponent was a bad parent because she planned, if elected, to commute between Washington and her family."<sup>15</sup> A messaging strategy which focused on what the American family ought to look like was indicative of a rightward shift in biopolitical discourse which Gingrich would internalize throughout his career.

At a very micropolitical level, this lends credence to claim one insofar as Gingrich's ideological overlap with his opponent. There were certainly issues that Flynt and Gingrich disagreed on – segregation and civil rights for example – but his liberal policy stances that attempted to draw Democratic voters to the Republican Party highlight the relative similarities in the candidates' platforms. By 1978, any attempt to run as a non-ideological alternative for Democrats was abandoned. "The environmentalists and college crowd disappeared from the campaign headquarters, which was moved from the Democratic Carrollton...to the other end of the district, the Republican suburbs of Atlanta [and] the 1978 Gingrich volunteers were mostly card-carrying Republicans."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>16</sup> Dale Russakoff and Dan Balz, "After Political Victory, A Personal Revolution," (*The Washington Post*, December 19, 1994) 1.

This shift in messaging was coupled with an evolving Georgian electorate, which opened the door for a possible Republican breakthrough. Voters' racial attitudes were changing rapidly; it was becoming increasingly unlikely that a segregationist Democrat like Jack Flynt would see the same level of success moving forward. This trend was illustrated by the Georgian gubernatorial elections of 1974 and 1978. "Under protection of the Federal Communications Commission, politicians' speech was ruled 'protected,' which allowed Democratic gubernatorial candidate J.B. Stoner to run TV ads asking for white votes to stop 'the n-----s.' He'd run in 1974 and received more than seventy thousand votes in Georgia, mortifying millions of others in the state."<sup>17</sup> Stoner would run again in 1978, and many commentators believed his success in the primary would be a reliable indicator of the current level of racist sentiment in the state. "Stoner was decimated, garnering only 5 percent of the vote."<sup>18</sup> Gingrich, on the other hand, was actively courting the African American vote, indicative of the strategic framing for which he would become known.

Another component of Gingrich's third congressional campaign warrants discussion in terms of the Foucauldian mechanisms discussed in the previous chapter: namely the relationship between discourse and truth. Not only did Gingrich run on a decidedly conservative platform, but his rhetoric was designed to undermine the traditional values of his opponent. Gingrich's positive ad campaign almost always involved his wife and children, while his negative efforts directly implied the lack of family values and religiosity of Virginia Shapard. One such ad showed Gingrich surrounded by family on one side, and Shapard alone on the other. It read:

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<sup>17</sup> Shirley, *Citizen Newt*, 78.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

Newt will take his family to Washington and keep them together; Virginia will go to Washington and leave her husband and children in the care of a nanny. Newt is deacon of the First Baptist Church of Carrollton; Virginia is a communicant of the Church of the Good Shepard in Griffin.<sup>19</sup>

Accuracy notwithstanding, the campaign was effective in generating an accepted truth surrounding Virginia Shapard. The Gingrich campaign appealed to underlying southern prejudices against women who worked for a living, and the term “communicant” was intended to define Shapard as a Catholic in a predominantly Evangelical district. His campaign manager, Carlyle Gregory, later stated that “those ads stopped her campaign,” because they defined her as unrelatable to the majority of the electorate.<sup>20</sup> The discourse employed by the Gingrich campaign had yielded truths about each candidate, and Shapard’s new “truth” was her ultimate undoing.

Realizing that repeating liberal discourse in a Democratic district was a futile strategy, Newt Gingrich altered his approach in 1978. By employing a conservative discourse, he foreshadowed the disappearance of liberal Republicans in Washington and demonstrated the truth-producing capacity of political discourse. He had finally won his seat in Congress, but his method of deploying discursive truths against Democrats had just begun.

### *The 1980s*

In terms of Newt Gingrich’s career, the 1980s were primarily focused on overthrowing the Democratic majority which had controlled the House since the election of the 84<sup>th</sup> Congress

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<sup>19</sup> Russakoff and Balz, “After Political Victory,” 1.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

in 1954. His governance strategy was, in many ways, influenced by the success of his 1978 campaign, producing negative truths about his opponents while offering clear ideological policy positions. This method would only intensify in Congress. “The core strategy was to destroy the institution in order to save it, to so intensify public hatred of Congress that voters would buy into the notion of the need for sweeping change and throw the majority bums out.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, he was going to have to engender feelings in the public where, if they existed previously, they were not sufficient to achieve his objectives.

His method for achieving this generative function was essentially two-fold: doing everything he could to convince Americans that the Democratic Party was to blame for the corruption prevalent in Washington while also reifying the Republican conservative ideology. As Ornstein and Mann note, his goal was “to unite his Republicans in refusing to cooperate with Democrats in committee and on the floor, while publicly attacking them as a permanent majority presiding over and benefitting from a thoroughly corrupt institution.”<sup>22</sup>

Gingrich did not take long to target Democrats for their corruption, adding a statement to the official Congressional Record that “the people are demanding we clean up our own House...how could we explain to the people if a measure was decided by one vote – and that one vote came from a convicted felon?”<sup>23</sup> Now, he was referring to Democratic Congressman Charles Diggs of Michigan, who had been convicted for utilizing campaign finances for personal use. Of course, this was not an overwhelming demand of the people, but rather an effort by

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<sup>21</sup> Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein, *It's Even Worse than It Looks How the American Constitutional System Collided with the New Politics of Extremism* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2016) 33.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>23</sup> Gillon, *The Pact*, 49.



Gingrich to advance his discourse on the corruption of the Democratic Party. Although a very modest beginning, Gingrich would soon find an alternative method of delivering his message.

In ironically appropriate symmetry, the House career of Gingrich coincided with the start of C-SPAN's coverage of House proceedings. In the early years of the process, junior Representatives would reserve time at the end of the day to provide speeches usually concerning pet projects or noteworthy stories from their home districts. "Special orders," as they are known, most often occur in front of an empty chamber after official duty hours but were still entered in the official Congressional Record. And now, they were televised. Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill had long protested against the inclusion of cameras in the chamber, but finally acquiesced with one caveat: the camera was only allowed to show a close-up of the speaker, which did not allow viewers to see the happenings within the chamber itself.<sup>24</sup>

"What Gingrich realized was that the fixed cameras meant C-SPAN viewers had no idea the speakers in the evening sessions were in fact addressing empty seats in the chamber," which offered the Republicans an opportunity.<sup>25</sup> Gingrich could now export his discourse on Democrats to a wider audience while appearing to be directly challenging his opponents. He recognized television as a purification mechanism for his message; he "had the ability to communicate directly with voters and opinion makers without having to negotiate [his] message or defer to senior members of [his] own party."<sup>26</sup>

Gingrich and his followers made it a habit of reserving time for special orders at the end of the day, but their speeches were designed to mobilize the conservative sentiment against

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>25</sup> Ornstein and Mann, *It's Even Worse Than It Looks*, 33.

<sup>26</sup> Gillon, *The Pact*, 49.

Democrats. This “small group of lawmakers engaged in colloquies that attacked Democrats for opposing school prayer, being soft on Communism, and being corrupt,” and ultimately “threatened to file charges against ten Democrats who had sent a warm letter to Nicaraguan leftist leader Daniel Ortega.”<sup>27</sup> This focus on traditionally conservative values was designed to convince the majority of the American public that the Democratic Party was corrupt and immoral, using a slew of issues that were not being mentioned in public opinion polls at the time with any significant frequency.

Even though there were no members of Congress present during these special orders, Gingrich made a habit of “turning as if he were addressing Democrats in the chamber, and the lack of response made it appear as if those in the audience either accepted the charges or were unwilling or unable to counter them.”<sup>28</sup> By May 1984, Speaker O’Neill had decided it was time to address these tactics by ordering the C-SPAN cameras to pan the chamber, showing the viewer the empty seats to whom Gingrich was speaking. In response, Gingrich took the House floor in session and accused the Speaker of violating the rules of the special orders, to which O’Neill responded: “You deliberately stood in that well before an empty House, and challenged these people, and challenged their patriotism. It is the lowest thing that I’ve ever seen in my 32 years in Congress.”<sup>29</sup> Interpreted as a personal attack against a member, the Speaker’s words violated House rules. Republican leadership immediately had the words stricken from the record, the first time since 1792 that the Speaker of the House had been so censured. This was a major

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<sup>27</sup> Ornstein and Mann, *It’s Even Worse Than It Looks*, 33.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>29</sup> Cannon, Carl. “Newt vs. Tip: Partisanship at Its Apogee?” RealClearPolitics. Accessed February 12, 2020. [https://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2014/05/15/newt\\_vs\\_tip\\_partisanship\\_at\\_its\\_apogee\\_122643.html](https://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2014/05/15/newt_vs_tip_partisanship_at_its_apogee_122643.html).

win for Gingrich's discursive deployment of radical conservatism and Democratic corruption, but it would not be the last.

The Eighth Congressional District race in Indiana of late 1984 would provide further fuel for Gingrich's ideological fire. Republican challenger Rick McIntyre had officially won the election, twice. In November, he had beaten incumbent Democrat Frank McCloskey by 34 votes, which mandated a recount in accordance with Indiana state law. McIntyre would win the revote as well, this time by over 400 votes, and these results were certified by the Indiana Board of Elections and Indiana's secretary of state. Regardless, House majority leader Jim Wright refused to seat the would-be Republican freshman. Further, the Democrats refused Republican requests for a special election to definitively name a winner. Instead, a Democratic-led task force decided to count hundreds of unnotarized absentee ballots which swung the vote in McCloskey's favor.

When sent to the floor, the House voted 236-190 in favor of McCloskey. Despite ten Democrats joining the Republicans, the vote largely broke along party lines. "Simply put, the national Democrats stole the race, fair and square, even as the Republican there had been certified the winner" by state officials.<sup>30</sup> In response to the apparent corruption of the Democratic Party seating McCloskey, Gingrich organized a walkout of the entire GOP caucus in full view of C-SPAN and network cameras alike. "A few minutes later," however, "their leader, Bob Michel, shook McCloskey's hand [which] in Gingrich's eyes...was a sign of appeasement."<sup>31</sup>

The Republican caucus had long tired of Michel's perceived appeasement strategy, and those who were skeptical of Gingrich's scorched Earth strategies were starting to come around.

In fact:

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<sup>30</sup> Shirley, *Citizen Newt*, 219.

<sup>31</sup> Gillon, *The Pact*, 60.

The incident was galvanizing. The minority Republicans now fully embraced Gingrich's idea of guerilla warfare, introducing resolutions, forcing paper ballots rather than electronic voting, denouncing the Democrats from the well in the most acerbic terms allowed, all to the point that House majority leader Jim Wright recessed the chamber. In response, the Republicans en masse went to the steps of the US Capitol and ripped the Democrats even more for the benefit of the national media.<sup>32</sup>

The old Republican approach of cooperation and concession had been replaced with retaliation and confrontation. The old guard of representatives like Bob Michel, known for his friendly relationship with Speaker O'Neill, was being replaced with the new radical Republican minority. In Foucauldian fashion, the Gingrich approach became normalizing as the Republican grand strategy, as freshman Republicans began caucusing further and further right. The "Bloody Eighth" incident represented partisanship for its own sake; there was no issue-based dispute fueling this dueling party discourse. Yet, it perfectly illustrates Gingrich's mastering of strategic framing, employing discourse for the political self-interest of the Republican Party. He would continue to build on the discourse of Democratic corruption throughout his time in Congress.

In fact, perhaps his largest victory in this regard would come years later and at the expense of another Democratic Speaker of the House, Jim Wright. In 1987, Wright had negotiated a publishing deal for a new book where he was entitled to fifty-five percent of the royalties, an unusually high amount. Furthermore, it seemed as though a large portion of the book's sales were in bulk orders, usually traced back to Wright's political supporters. It was later determined that many campaign supporters were using the book as a method of exceeding the \$1,000 limit on campaign contributions.<sup>33</sup> When Gingrich learned of the details, he once again looked to capitalize on the perception of corruption.

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<sup>32</sup> Shirley, *Citizen Newt*, 220.

<sup>33</sup> Richard L Berke, "Behind Jim Wright's Book, His Friends," (*The New York Times*, June 12, 1988).

At this point in Gingrich's career, many scholars note that he had shifted from a campaign of guerilla fighting to total, scorched-earth warfare against the Democratic Party establishment. His method for attacking Speaker Wright demonstrates the effectiveness of Foucauldian discursive formations. After the Ethics Committee refused to take action against the Speaker's book deal, "Gingrich turned to the media, contacting newspaper editors, calling television news producers, lobbying public interest groups, and telling supporters to call radio stations and keep the issue on the agenda."<sup>34</sup> He had repeated a refrain of rhetoric indicting the Speaker as a corrupt figure so aggressively in an attempt to engender a similar feeling in the public. In fact, in a newspaper interview, he recalled that "we worked on the assumption that if enough newspapers said there should be an investigation, Common Cause would have to say it. Then members would have to say it. It would happen."<sup>35</sup> Remember, Foucauldian power is incitement to discourse; that is exactly what Gingrich was pursuing here in order to reify a "truth about Speaker Wright. Wright understood that he could not maintain his position without permanently tarnishing the image of his party and office, and his resignation in 1989 compounded public distrust in Congress."<sup>36</sup>

Gingrich's rhetoric and aggressive strategies through the 1980s are illustrative of not only claims one and two of this project at a microlevel of analysis, but also justify many of the discursive mechanisms proposed by Foucault. The final stages of his Congressional career, however, start to illuminate the primacy placed on the administration of biopolitics and the intentional mobilization of particular groups of people through polarized dialogue. In many

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<sup>34</sup> Gillon, *The Pact*, 60.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>36</sup> Ornstein and Mann, *It's Even Worse Than It Looks*, 35.

ways, the candidacy and presidency of Bill Clinton provided a perfect platform from which to warn of the decline in traditional American values in the 1990s, as we will see in the next section.

### *Gingrich vs. Clinton: The 1990s*

The relationship between Evangelical Christians and the Republican Party is to the point where the two are nearly synonymous, but it was not always that way. The 1976 presidential election saw Jimmy Carter win while courting fifty-six percent of evangelicals. While this may be a majority, it certainly did not suggest that the born-again vote was a monolithic certainty for either party. By 1984, however, “evangelicals voted for Ronald Reagan by a lopsided 81 to 19 percent.”<sup>37</sup> In large part, this was due to the policy issues that Republican voices chose to focus on, Reagan and Gingrich included. The most aggressively pursued issues tended to revolve around the administration of the power over life, namely abortion, gay rights, and traditional family and religious values.

Such issues had been a part of Gingrich’s platform since Reagan’s election, when he witnessed first-hand the potential power of the conservative movement. Interestingly, however, even conservative leaders realized that Gingrich was targeting their group to mobilize them on his behalf. Paul Weyrich, leader of the new Christian right movement, once recalled the difference in their approaches to America’s problems.

When I hear about an issue, or when I’m considering a policy, the first question I ask is ‘Does this conform to the Judeo-Christian teachings on whatever subject it is we’re talking about?’ [Gingrich] does not start at that point. He starts at a different point. Is this

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<sup>37</sup> Gillon, *The Pact*, 63.

good for the country? Is this good for the Republicans? Is this going to strengthen his majority?<sup>38</sup>

In other words, Gingrich's political ambitions drove his acceptance of certain conservative values, not true Christian conviction. Here, Gingrich illustrates how political entrepreneurs can harness the power of discourse to generate support on their behalf.

Now, I do not mean to imply that no Americans were concerned with abortion or gay rights in the 1980s and early 1990s, but opinion polling data shows that Americans were not focused on such topics at a significant level.<sup>39</sup> Yet, Gingrich and the Republicans chose these issues on which to predicate their platform in order to mobilize a social group which, as recently as 1976, had not been particularly passionate in election cycles. By the 1992 presidential primary, these stances had become an ideological mainstay in the party's platform as the Clintons became symbolic of a cultural deterioration bred from the sexual revolution. "At the same time, delegates adopted a rigidly conservative platform that opposed abortions and denounced gay rights."<sup>40</sup> Clinton had come to represent the religious and moral decay wrought by homosexuality, drug use, and adultery, claims that were repeated often by his Republican rivals.

Gingrich's biopolitical incursion into the American electorate was further aided by a series of incidences early in Clinton's first term. The first was his effort to raise the ban on homosexuals serving in the military, which Republicans argued was necessary for good order and discipline of the armed forces. Soon after, news broke that his nominee for attorney general

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>39</sup> Chapter four will detail analyses on public opinion data from 1976 to 2016, including a ranking of the most important issues facing voters each year (Table One).

<sup>40</sup> Gillin, *The Pact*, 92.

– Zoe Baird – had previously hired an illegal immigrant to work as a nanny for her family.<sup>41</sup> The similarities between Baird and his opponent in 1978, Virginia Shapard, were not lost on Gingrich, and he deployed a similar message about the importance of traditional family structures. He had found a nerve in the now-consolidated evangelical voting bloc, and he struck it as often as possible. “He called Clinton ‘the enemy of normal Americans,’ citing his appointment of a lesbian, Roberta Achtenberg, as assistant secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and a strong sex education advocate, Dr. Joycelyn Elders, as surgeon general.”<sup>42</sup> This messaging campaign was repeated incessantly throughout Clinton’s first term, and the Republican success in the 1994 midterm election was a reflection of its effectiveness.

For the first time in forty years, the Republicans held the majority in the House, and Newt Gingrich had risen to Speaker a mere five years after driving Jim Wright into resignation. His moral, religious, and conservative discourse had helped in creating the strong relationship that we see today between evangelicals and the Republican Party. Gingrich and Clinton would define the 1990s in adversarial terms, although occasionally returning to the center for budget discussions and social security reform. It was the relationship that Gingrich built with the new Christian right, however, that would eventually lead to the unceremonious ending of his Congressional career.

The Starr Report of 1998 seemed to validate the claims about the Democratic Party representing the moral decay of American values. President Clinton had not only committed adultery, but he had lied to Congress and the public about it. Starr – himself a steadfast

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 122.



conservative – wrote the report in terms of the traditional values that Gingrich had brought to the forefront of the modern American lexicon. “Many Americans were appalled, and fascinated, by the level of sexually explicit detail in the Starr Report...The file was downloaded 750,000 times, and most major newspapers reprinted the full 112,000-word text.”<sup>43</sup> Although Gingrich preferred to avoid the Lewinsky topic – likely due to his own history of infidelity – the influence of the evangelical community pressured him to act. Despite the fact that the majority of Americans disagreed with pursuing articles of impeachment, Gingrich utilized the debate in campaign ads designed to bolster Republican support ahead of the 1998 midterm election.<sup>44</sup>

Despite Gingrich’s best efforts to frame the issue in terms of the rule of law, most Americans saw it as revolving around sex, including the conservative coalition now backing the Speaker. Unfortunately for Gingrich, however, the evangelical voting bloc he had targeted through his discursive formations did not represent the opinions of the American public at large. In the wake of the impeachment inquiry and trail, Clinton’s approval rating only improved, and Gingrich fell out of favor with the public and many within his own caucus. He would later reflect that he “was out of sync with the culture. This is a culture that is much more open, and has gone through many more experiences, than a person of my age and my background understood.”<sup>45</sup>

### *Conclusion*

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 241.

<sup>44</sup> Ornstein and Mann, *It’s Even Worse Than It Looks*, 42.

<sup>45</sup> Gillon, *The Pact*, 276.

Ironically, the public discourse which Gingrich engendered throughout his entire career had been his undoing. He succeeded in getting America to talk about traditional American values and issues of biopolitical administration, and many would cite such concerns as the most pressing topics facing the country today. He failed, however, to account for the opposing emotions his discourse would invoke in those who disagreed with his policy positions. Regardless, the totality of his career still serves as a great example of not only the power of discourse, but also the mechanisms through which it works.

Although there were institutional processes driving the changes in party discourse from 1976 to 2016, reflections of these processes can be seen in Gingrich's Congressional career. His first campaigns painted him as a moderate, commonsense Republican, but he ended up leading a conservative revolution, in support of claim one. When he did start veering to the ideological right, most of the issues he chose to focus on were not at the top of voters' concerns, as indicated by public opinion data. After a decade of discourse deployment though, such issues had taken center stage in the American political arena as claim two suggests. These issues directly relate to Foucauldian theories of biopower - or the power over life - like abortion, gay rights, and immigration, and health care, which are more closely scrutinized in the following chapter. Finally, these policy stances not only pre-date public opinion data, but also began polarizing prior to the consolidation of the evangelical Christian vote as a decidedly Republican bloc, evident by Jimmy Carter's ability to win their majority in 1976.

While using Newt Gingrich as a qualitative case study provides cursory support for the claims raised at the beginning of this chapter, further investigation at the party-level is warranted. The following chapter investigates both Republican and Democratic discourse through the same era just discussed. With a common understanding of the political environment in which these

discourses were produced, the critical discourse analysis to follow complies with Foucault's relativist interpretation of context-driven truth. Through this lens, I hope to further emphasize the manners in which party elites have employed discourse to produce political Democratic and Republican truths.

## Chapter Four: An Issue-Based Critical Discourse Analysis

The design of this project was driven by a specific set of research questions. Have party platforms polarized as drastically as political elites have over the last forty years? If so, were platforms becoming more polarized in response to pre-existing and strongly held political beliefs in the electorate to better represent the parties' constituents? Were there any trends in the types of issues fueling the divergence in discourse? Now, my research into party elites and the political environment from the late twentieth century until today led me to the hypotheses outlined in chapter three. Again, they are that:

1. Discourses surrounding issues of the administration of biopower diverged noticeably in the second half of the twentieth century. These discourses were far more similar in 1976 than in 2016.
2. The biopower discourses that diverged over time do not always address the most salient issues in the general population, but over time, through party discourse, the issues become more salient.

To test these beliefs, I employed a mix of critical discourse analysis and more traditional assessments of public opinion data.

As leading critical discourse analysts will attest, “texts are not meaningful individually; it is only through their interconnection with other texts, the different discourses on which they draw, and the nature of their production, dissemination, and consumption that they are made meaningful.”<sup>1</sup> It was upon this foundation that I made the decision to study political platforms and convention speeches from presidential candidates from 1976 to 2016. Looking at one party’s

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<sup>1</sup> Phillips and Hardy, *Discourse Analysis*, 4.

platform in one election cycle would not be effective in understanding the effects that political discourse has on an American voter.

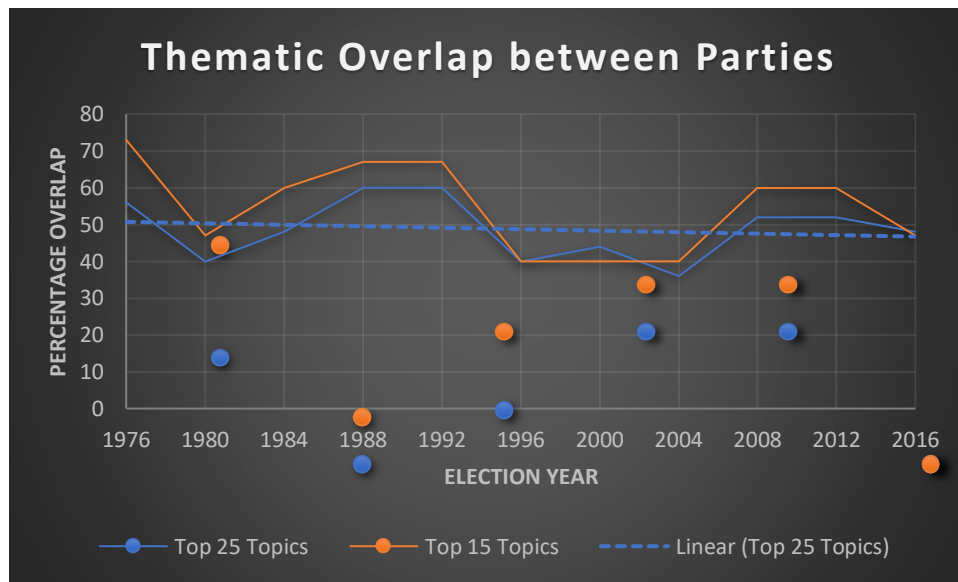
This study, then, included a total of forty-four documents from eleven presidential election cycles: two party platforms and two transcribed speeches per election. The documents were uploaded as either Word documents, PDF files, or notepads into NVIVO 12 Pro in order to trace the evolution of party discourse over the time period in question. Building upon the methods of Converse (1964), Hopkins, and Grossmann (2016), I pulled public opinion from American National Election Studies questionnaires and utilized STATA IC to analyze the data. I want to begin with a brief discussion of my initial findings that drove further research and conclude with a thorough discussion of each claim put forth in this project supported by the data.

### *Initial Findings*

The first investigation I did was a targeted search of the documents for different ideological words and themes that I anticipated would be prevalent. These terms, in order, were “abortion,” “guns,” “religion/God,” “immigration,” “tax,” “health care,” “welfare,” “marriage,” “sex,” and “big government.” First, I searched all platforms and speeches for these terms and got a relative frequency for how often each party discussed each term. Unsurprisingly, both parties were discussing these topics, but there was a noticeably higher frequency with the Republicans. The only topic more frequently addressed by the Democratic Party was immigration. At first glance, this suggests that the Republicans have been more ideologically focused than Democrats over the last forty years or so, in support of Hopkins and Grossmann.

Using the “Word Frequency Query” in NVIVO 12 Pro, I then worked to identify the primary themes discussed by each party in all eleven election cycles from 1976 to 2016. This command produces a list of the most commonly employed words in each document or set of documents, and the context in which they were used. After eliminating several “stop words” from being counted, the parties’ themes were compared.<sup>2</sup> When doing so, it becomes almost immediately apparent that there is a high level of overlap in *what* the parties include in their discourse. When comparing Republicans and Democrats on a yearly basis and over time, there is a significant and steady degree of overlap in the prevailing themes.<sup>3</sup> After conducting a year-by-year analysis of each party’s platforms, I measured the similarities between both the top twenty-five and top fifteen most highly discussed themes.

**Graph One.**



<sup>2</sup> “Stop words” are programmed into NVIVO to keep the program from counting them towards the “Word Frequency Search” command. The full list of stop words can be found on Appendix A.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix B.

As Graph One indicates, there is a very slight negative trend in the thematic overlap between party platforms over the last forty years, but the average hovers right around 50% for both the top twenty-five and top fifteen topics. Interestingly, the highest overlap between the top fifteen themes in party discourses occurred in 1976, when scholars argue ideological overlap was at its height in this study's timespan.

This, of course, does not mean that the Republicans and Democrats believed the same things; there is a major distinction to make here between thematic and ideological overlap. Yes, parties tend to talk about the same things, but the *way* they talk about them is what differentiates Republicans and Democrats. To further examine this distinction, I used NVIVO to analyze the most commonly linked language to targeted words or phrases within the cumulative platforms of each party. In other words, this query was run for the totality of Republican and Democratic platforms and speeches from 1976 to 2016. When searching for the theme of "guns," for example, the most prevalently linked words for Republicans were "rights," "Second Amendment," and "protection." Democrats, on the other hand, most often discussed guns in terms of "control," "crime," and "violence." As another example, each party frequently employed the word "rights" in their discourse, but a cumulative analysis of each party shows the disparity between them. Republicans were most likely to be discussing "Constitutional," "economic," "family," and "individual rights." On the other hand, Democratic references included "gay," "LGBT," "reproductive," and "women's rights." "Life" was a prominent Republican theme, while "women's health" was a Democratic theme. Neither of these terms appeared in the most prominent themes by year, but both appeared in the cumulative analysis.

Another example of the difference in language and discourse between parties comes from analyzing their discussions on marriage. When discussing the concept of marriage,

Republicans were more likely to mention “traditions,” “sacred contracts,” “sanctity” and “respect,” while Democrats barely discuss marriage at all. Their employment of the word “gay” was actually more prevalent than “marriage” itself. In fact, 62% of the time Democrats discuss marriage, they are either referring to the repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act or advocating for same-sex rights.<sup>4</sup> In stark contrast, the Republican Party never once employs the words “gay,” “homosexual,” or “lesbian” in their platforms or speeches. The first time that Republicans even discuss “same-sex marriage” was in their 2004 party platform. Here, they reaffirmed their support for states not to recognize same-sex marriage licenses. In 2008, the verbiage of the sentence remained unchanged, but the word “marriage” was now written in quotation marks. By 2012, Republicans had disbanded the idea of same-sex marriage, referring to “same-sex relationships” instead.<sup>5</sup>

In many ways, these observations validate the work of scholars who describe the evolution of separate languages between the parties. Gentzkow, Shapiro, and Taddy, for example, analyze the evolution of party specific language in Congressional speech.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the level of elite polarization observed over the last few decades has not necessarily occurred at the thematic level, but the syntactic level. Seeing similar trends in presidential election cycles implies that the observation transcends Congress itself. Given the fact that the language concerning marriage and gay rights had diverged so dramatically, my follow-on research revolved around discourses of biopower administration, or the power over life. The scope was expanded slightly to also include health care and abortion due to their saliency in the

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix C.

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix C.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew Gentzkow, Jesse Shapiro, and Matt Taddy, “Measuring Group Differences in High-Dimensional Choices: Method and Application to Congressional Speech,” *National Bureau of Economic Research*, July 2016) 4.



modern context. The findings, discussed below, lend credence to the two central claims of this project.

*Claim One: Divergence in Biopower Discourses over Time*

It is important to note that the divergence of biopower discourses is not unique to the time period being evaluated in this study. Foucault even discusses how genocidal agendas and institutional racism are not derived from the antiquated right to kill, but rather they occur “because power is situated and exercised at the level of life, the species, the race, and the large-scale phenomena of population.”<sup>7</sup> In other words, periods of American history which were defined by elite polarization over racism and slavery originated from biopolitical discourse aimed at the preservation of the white American population. What *is* unique about this timeframe is that the single-issue polarity of slavery (1860s) and civil rights (1960s) has been replaced with a far greater number of issues concerning the administration of the power over life. Perhaps this distinction adds to the explanation of why scholars believe the political system is more polarized now than at any other time in history.

As the initial findings imply, there is not a significant divergence in themes being discussed between the parties, so if claim one is to be validated, it is at an issue-based level of analysis. It is easy to identify issues which highlight the differing governmentalities of Republicans and Democrats with respect to the responsibility to reinforce, control, monitor, and optimize the lives of their populations. In fact, the issues most frequently debated between the two parties revolve around these very tasks. I have chosen four of the most contentious modern

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<sup>7</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 137.

issues of biopower to analyze the validity of the first claim: abortion, freedom in relationships, immigration, and health care. Each issue shows evidence of overlap between party governmentality in 1976, with subsequent divergence – to varying degrees – over the following forty years.

### Abortion

The abortion discourse did not enter the Republican platform until 1976, and in their platform, they acknowledged that “there are those in our Party who favor complete support for the Supreme Court decision which permits abortion on demand, [and] there are others who share sincere convictions that the Supreme Court's decision must be changed by a constitutional amendment prohibiting all abortions.”<sup>8</sup> They continue to say that they hope public discourse on the topic continues, and although they take a generally pro-life view, they refrain from taking a concrete stance, citing the complex nature of the topic. Four years later, however, the 1980 Republican platform states that “there can be no doubt that the question of abortion, despite the complex nature of its various issues, is ultimately concerned with equality of rights under the law.”<sup>9</sup> From this point forward and with increasing ferocity, the Republican discourse includes an official push towards a pro-life Constitutional Amendment.

The Democratic platform had an equally interesting evolution, but again, started from almost an identical position to the Republicans. In 1976, their platform stated that “we fully recognize the religious and ethical nature of the concerns which many Americans have on the subject of abortion. We feel, however, that it is undesirable to attempt to amend the U.S.

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<sup>8</sup> 1976 Republican Party Platform.

<sup>9</sup> 1980 Republican Party Platform.

Constitution to overturn the Supreme Court decision in this area.”<sup>10</sup> By 1980, more specific pro-choice verbiage was added to their platform, and by 1992, the religious aspect of abortion was removed from the discourse altogether. Over time, it appears, there was an equal and opposite evolution of opposing discourses.

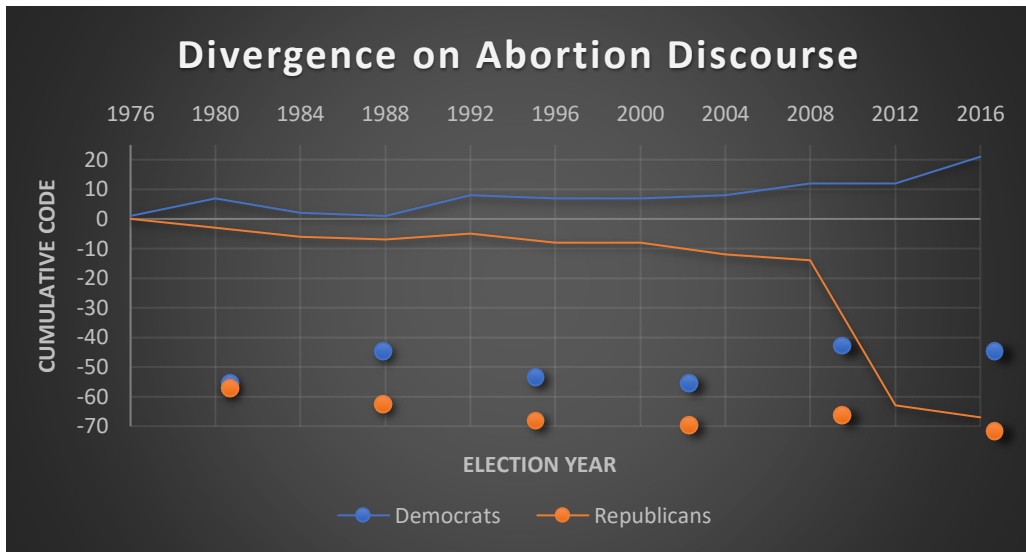
To further illustrate the divergence in discourse, I employed a coding methodology in NVIVO which assigned a positive or negative value to discursive formations within party platforms and speeches. Each discursive formation was coded as either a +1 or -1, depending on its context within the discourse. +1 was assigned to discursive formations which favor the rights of the individual to choose, while -1 was assigned to phrases championing government regulation on individual rights. For example, references to abortion that were coupled with phrases like “women’s rights,” “right to choose,” support for *Roe vs. Wade*, etc. were coded as a +1. On the other hand, abortion discourse about life starting at conception, calls to repeal *Roe vs. Wade*, and demands to defund planned parenthood were coded as a -1.<sup>11</sup> The results are shown below.

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<sup>10</sup> 1976 Democratic Party Platform.

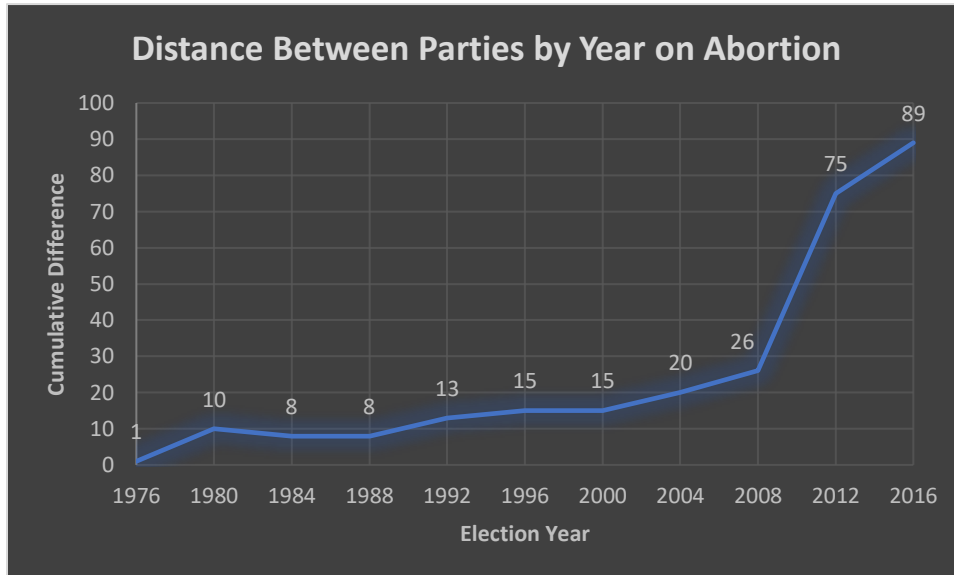
<sup>11</sup> The positive and negative coding was assigned agnostic to personal opinions on the subject. An assigned negative code is not meant to imply it is any less valid than a positive code.

**Graph Two.**



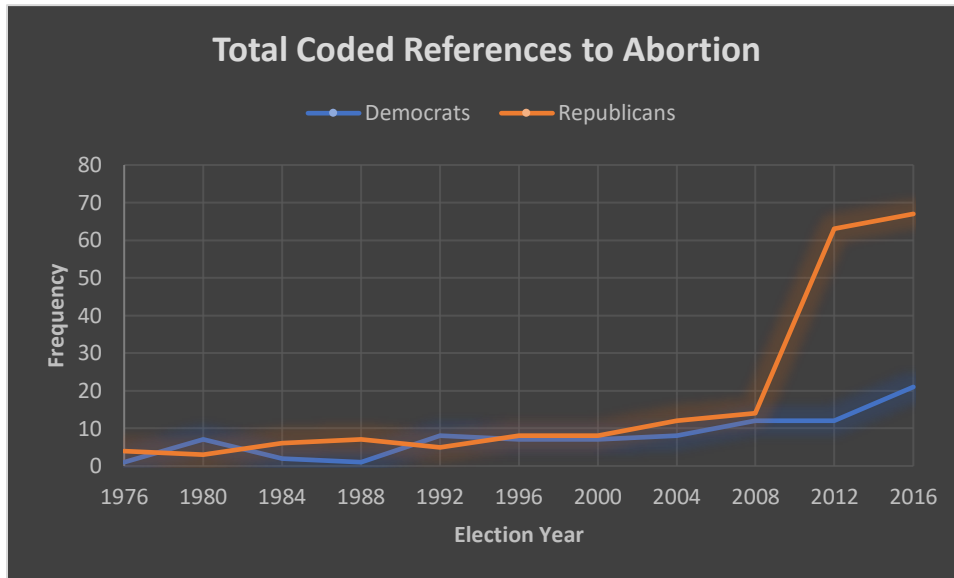
Graph Two clearly shows the similarity in the governmentality concerning abortion in 1976. As previously discussed, the two platforms in that election year were almost the exact same. The differentiating feature in 1976 was that the Democratic platform and speech only made one reference to abortion, and that reference was a positive code. Republicans, on the other hand, had four total discursive formations on abortion, but two advocated the primacy of life (negatively coded) while two insisted further discussion was required before taking a stance against *Roe vs. Wade* (positively coded). These codes cancelled each other out, and 1976 saw the least amount of distance between the two discourses (1). From 1980 until 2016, however, Republicans became increasingly more negatively coded, while Democrats seemingly mirrored them on the positive side of the spectrum. This resulted in a steady increase in the divergence between party discourses, highlighted below.

**Graph Three.**



The final observation to note for claim one is the relative increase in the frequency of discursive formations concerning abortion. Remember, 1976 was the first time that either party had included abortion in their platforms, and there were only five total coded discursive formations. By 2016, that number would rise to 88. Each party saw a generally steady increase in the discussion of abortion in platforms and convention speeches from 1976 to 2008, but the Republican discourse exploded in 2012. Democrats saw a similar rise after 2012, but not nearly as significant. This supports the idea of biopower as incitement to discourse. Graph four shows this trend.

**Graph Four.**



In terms of abortion, the data show how similar Republicans and Democrats were at the beginning of this study’s window, 1976. It also shows, by employing a positive and negative coding methodology, that there was a steady and consistent divergence in these discourses from 1976 through 2008, at which point the divergence was exacerbated. Abortion seems to validate not only the first claim, but also the Foucauldian conception of biopower as incitement to discourse over the administration of the power over life. I will try to corroborate this observation through the remaining discourses.

### Relationships

In the context of this study, the term “relationships” can best be understood as the discourse describing party governmentalities concerning what an American family is supposed to

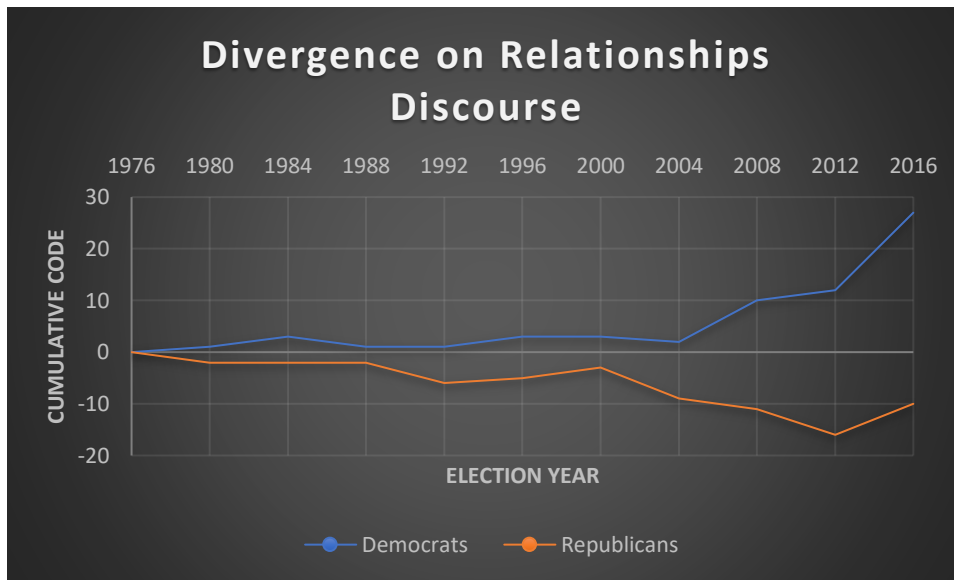
look like. This is truly a biopolitical issue, as any attempt to regulate or restrict who can be in a relationship is the definition of power over life. If a government's legitimacy is now derived from the production, multiplication, and sustainment of its population – as Foucault believes – the preservation of traditional models of the nuclear family may be of interest to politicians. As it turns out, the discourse surrounding relationships followed a similar trajectory as abortion; both obviously concerned with the “specific phenomena and its peculiar variables” that Foucault attributed to populations.<sup>12</sup>

The party discourses on relationships were coded into two categories: traditional family preservation and freedom of choice. For example, references to the “traditional family,” “a man and a woman,” and “traditional marriage” were coded as a -1. In the same spirit as the methodology for abortion, the code -1 applies to discursive formations which encourage government regulation over individual choice, such as legally defining marriage in terms of the traditional nuclear family. Discussion of “gay rights,” “same-sex marriage,” and “LGBTQ” were coded as a +1, indicating a preference for individual choice rather than government oversight. Now, each specific reference was individually coded to ensure that the context in which it was employed matched its coding. For example, “same-sex” has been featured in both Republican and Democratic platforms and speeches, so each instance was contextualized for coding.

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<sup>12</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 25.

**Graph Five.**



As Graph Five shows, the two parties were coded with the exact same value in their 1976 platforms. In fact, neither party mentioned marriage in any context, sexual orientation was not yet a political consideration, and the discussion of traditional family values was completely absent. The similarities here can best be illustrated by the parties’ respective anti-discrimination statement. In 1976, Democrats stated that they were dedicated to ensuring no American faced discrimination “on the basis of sex, age, color, religion or national origin.”<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Republicans pledged “to work to eliminate discrimination in all areas for reasons of race, color, national origin, age, creed or sex.”<sup>14</sup> The only difference between these planks is the inclusion of “race” in the Republican platform, which is implied in the Democratic platform.

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<sup>13</sup> 1976 Democratic Party Platform.

<sup>14</sup> 1976 Republican Party Platform.



The trajectory of divergence in relationships discourse becomes apparent in 1980, when the Democratic Party added gay rights to their anti-discrimination plank. “All groups must be protected from discrimination based on race, color, religion, national origin, language, age, sex or sexual orientation.”<sup>15</sup> Simultaneously, the Republican platform began promoting traditional family structures, values, and the protection of such ideas from moral erosion. “We will work,” Republicans stated, “for the appointment of judges at all levels of the judiciary who respect traditional family values.”<sup>16</sup>

This distinction would continue with increasing frequency until 2008, where Democrats first started noting their consideration of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) community which caused an even greater divergence. This also signaled the first time that the Democratic Party included “gender identity” in their anti-discrimination statement. Republicans, on the other hand, never once used the words “gay,” “lesbian,” “bisexual,” “transsexual,” “queer/questioning,” or any of their derivatives in any platform or convention speech. Republicans mentioned sexual orientation once in their 2016 platform when they accused President Obama of trying “to impose a social and cultural revolution upon the American people by wrongly redefining sex discrimination to include sexual orientation or other categories.”<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, the only time Democrats mentioned traditional families was in Bill Clinton’s convention speech in 1992. This would be the only negatively coded Democratic discourse on relationships.

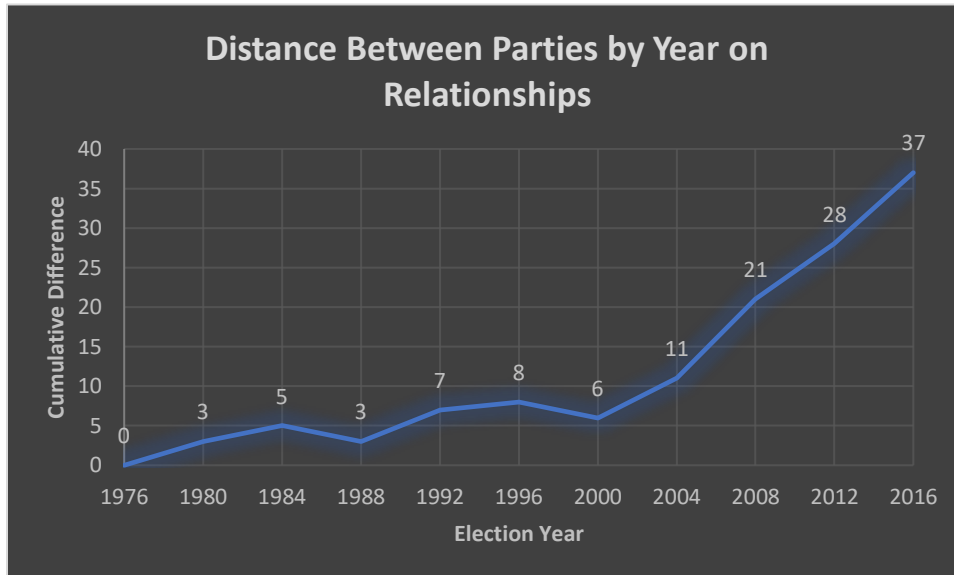
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<sup>15</sup> 1980 Democratic Party Platform.

<sup>16</sup> 1980 Republican Party Platform.

<sup>17</sup> 2016 Republican Party Platform.

**Graph Six.**

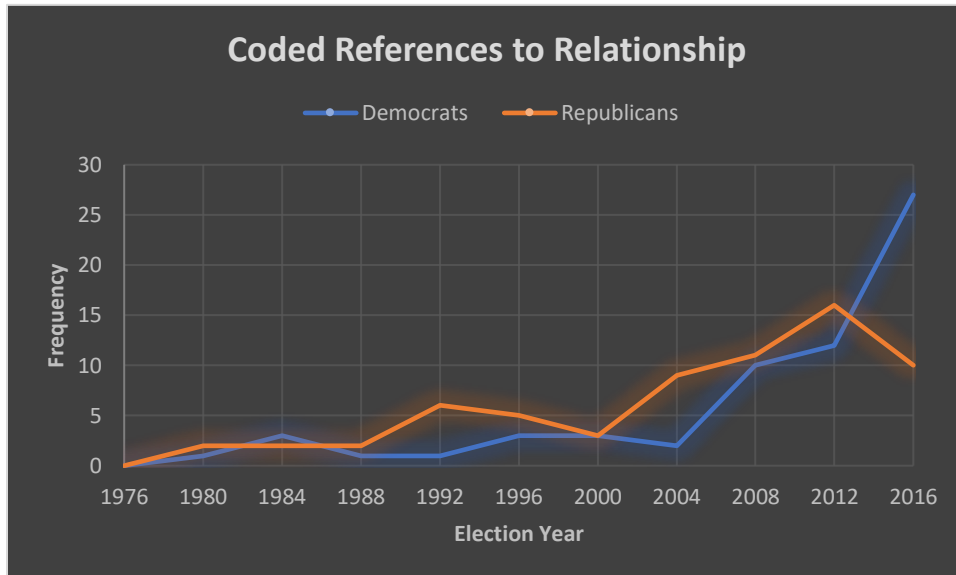


Graph Six shows just how rapidly the divergence between the two parties has grown, particularly since the Democratic expansion to appeal to the LGBTQ community in 2008. This illustrates the growing importance of the politicization of biopolitical regulation at the elite level since 1976, with a clear differentiation between a governmentality of restriction and preservation and one of civil liberty. Like abortion, there has been a steady growth in the frequency of deployment of discourses surrounding relationships. The only significant exception to this observation is a roughly 33% decrease from 2012 to 2016 in the Republican discourse. This could be explained by the fact that 2011 was the first time that the majority of Americans supported same-sex marriage, causing Republicans to moderate the ferocity of their message.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> "Changing Attitudes on Same-Sex Marriage," Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, May 14, 2019, (<https://www.pewforum.org/fact-sheet/changing-attitudes-on-gay-marriage>).

**Graph Seven.**



Despite this dip in the deployment of relationship discourse, the data still show the growing importance and significant divergence of this issue of the administration of biopower, in support of claim one. Interestingly, both abortion and relationship discourses saw massive growth after 2008, which may imply that these biopolitical concerns will remain a polarizing factor for American political elites farther into the twenty-first century.

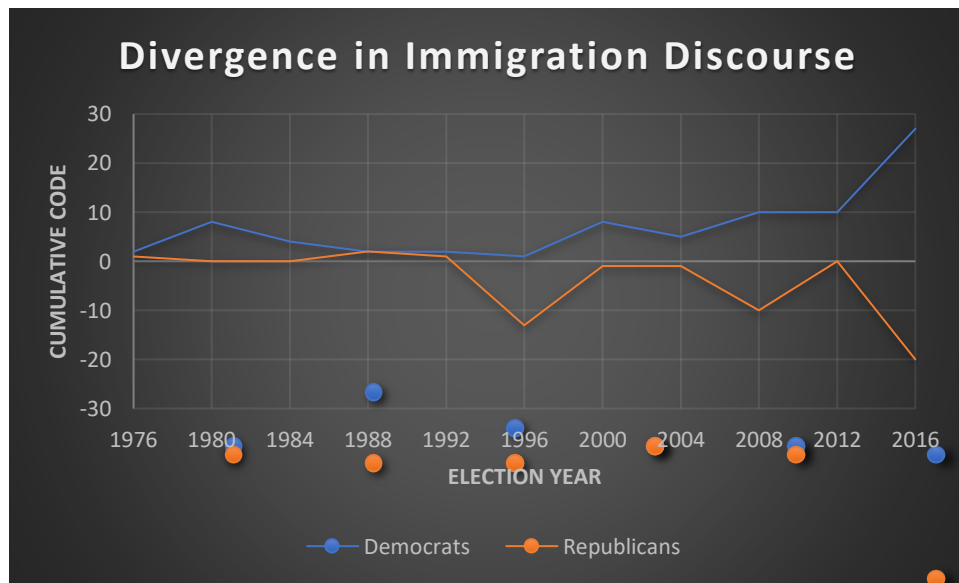
### Immigration

Unlike abortion and relationship discourses, immigration did not appear in party platforms for the first time in 1976 or 1980. As a nation of immigrants, after all, American politics could not ignore immigration policy and legislation for as long as they avoided abortion and marriage rights. Regardless, immigration is very much an issue of biopower, as the regulation of human movement, settlement, and opportunity are at the heart of the power over

life. Claim one, however, is not that biopolitical discourse *began* in 1976, but rather that party stances were far less polarized then, and now significantly contribute to the levels of elite polarization.

Much like the two previous studies, the coding methodology for immigration distinguishes government regulation and border enforcement from alien rights and amnesty. Rather than searching for a wide range of syntactic structures to code in the appropriate context, I searched each platform and convention speech for the word “immigrant” and its derivatives.<sup>19</sup> Each reference was contextualized as either favoring government regulation or promoting the positive aspects of immigration. Negative codes imply the promotion of government regulation while positive codes again promote the rights of the individual. Unlike the previous two issues, Republicans and Democrats received a significant amount of both positive and negative codes on immigration. Overall, Democrats were more likely to be positively coded (92 vs 13) while Republicans tended to code negatively (69 vs 27).

**Graph Eight.**



<sup>19</sup> Derivatives of “immigrant” include “immigration,” “immigrate,” etc.

As Graph Eight shows, the obvious divergence in immigration discourse did not occur until around the 1996 election, followed by an obvious increase in 2008 and 2016. Again, however, there is a similarity in 1976, when there were only three total references to the topic of immigration, all positively coded. The only Republican mention was in Gerald Ford's convention speech, when he invoked the memory of America's "revolutionary founders and our immigrant ancestors."<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Jimmy Carter described the Democratic Party as having a long history of accepting and promoting immigration to America, while their platform supported "a provision in the immigration laws to facilitate acquisition of citizenship by Resident Aliens."<sup>21</sup> In the first year of this study, both parties had cumulatively positive codes, and were only separated by the amount of deployments of discursive formations.

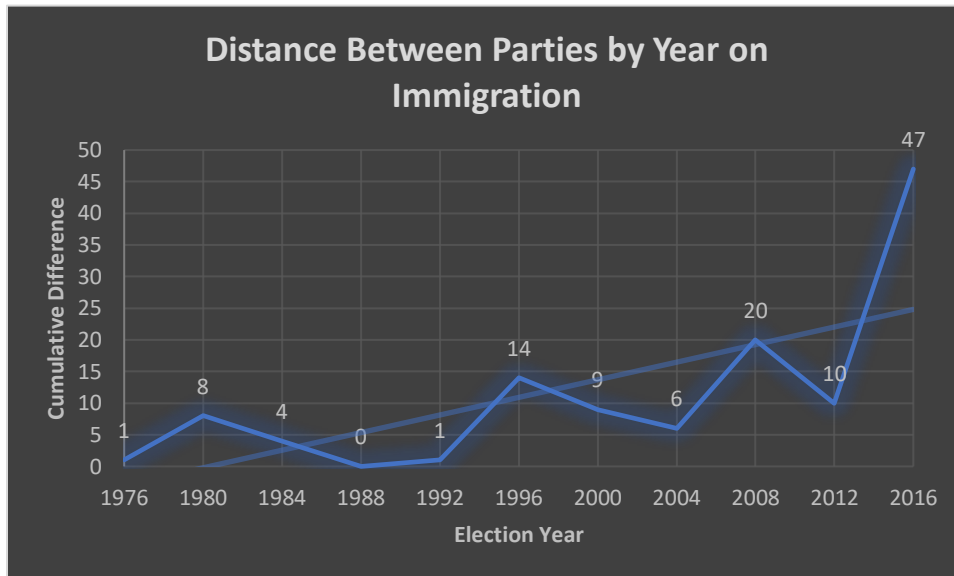
While Republicans began employing rhetoric advocating governmental regulation of immigration in 1980 and 1984, these negative codes were offset by an equal number of positive references to immigration. In fact, Republicans were still net positive until 1996, at which point they began favoring a discourse of regulation *over* that of individual liberty. 1996 also saw a high number of negatively coded Democratic discourse as well, but they remained net positive throughout the scope of this study.

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<sup>20</sup> Gerald Ford, 1976 Republican Presidential Candidate Convention Speech.

<sup>21</sup> 1976 Democratic Party Platform.

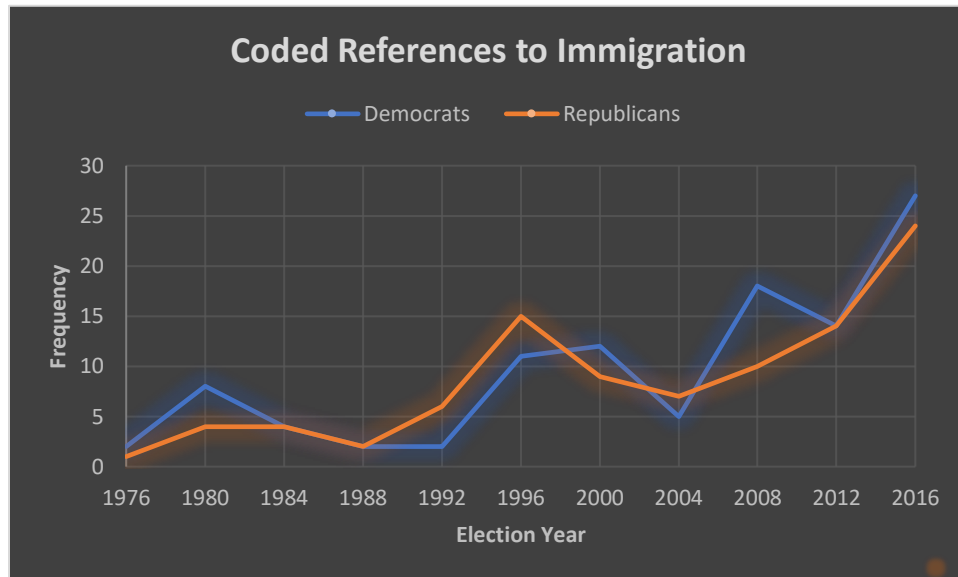
**Graph Nine.**



Now, Graph Nine does not as clearly demonstrate a constantly diverging discourse as the issues of abortion and relationships provided. The trendline does, however, show that there was a general upwards trend in elite polarization on immigration from 1976 to 2016. It was obviously not a linear growth, but was cumulatively positive, implying that the party discourses on immigration did become more polarized over time. This supports both components of claim one. The dramatic divergence in 2016 is due to Donald Trump's inclusion of a southern border wall in the Republican Party's platform, and an equal transition to a Democratic focus on amnesty for illegal immigrants. The Democratic discourse seems to have had the more dramatic evolution here. In 1996, there were five discursive formations denouncing illegal immigration as a crime, coded as a -5. By 2016, there would be a total of seventeen deployments of discourse advocating for either amnesty or paths to citizenship for illegal and undocumented aliens. This cumulative

code of +17 does not even include a significant number of other positively coded references that year.

### Graph Ten.



Again, immigration discourse pre-dates the scope of this study within party platforms and convention speeches, unlike abortion and relationship rights. There is, however, a generally upward trend in the frequency of each party to deploy immigration discourse. The data also show that there was a significant level of ideological overlap on immigration until 1992, at which point the discourses diverged in notable ways. Just like with abortion and relationship rights, the fact that 2016 represented the highest degree of divergence between the two parties leads to the conclusion that such biopolitical issues will continue driving elite polarization into the future.

## Health Care

In many ways, the issue of health care is the epicenter for Foucauldian conceptions of biopower and indicative of its tendency to incite discourse. These discourses do not originate from a desire to impose restrictions on individuals – as was the case in juridical power – “but on the contrary an intensification of the body, a problematization of health and its operational terms: it was a question of techniques for maximizing life.”<sup>22</sup> The diverging discourses on health care really emphasize the growing polarization over such techniques, as detailed below.

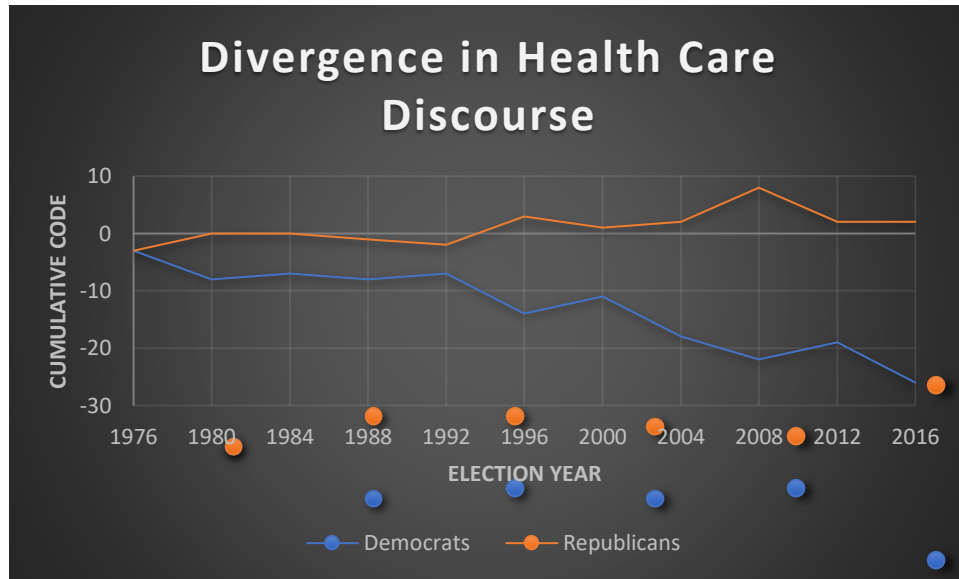
The two dominant techniques for maximizing life through American health care can be categorized into the same two categories as the previous issues: a focus on government regulation and an emphasis on the individual. To remain consistent, government regulatory discursive formations received a negative coding. These references include universal health care, federal involvement in the provision of health care, and other federal government action to ensure fairness and equality. Positive codes concerning the individual focused on personal responsibility for maintaining good health, deferment to states in the provision of health care, and the importance of individual choice in terms of health care plans. In other words, any reference to individual choice or a rejection of federal involvement in health care were coded as a +1. Instances of the promotion of federal regulation or administration of health care were coded as a -1. The results are seen below.

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<sup>22</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 122-23.



**Graph Eleven.**



Interestingly, the cumulative coding of Republican and Democratic platforms and convention speeches were exactly the same in 1976. The Republicans asserted that health care should be a right ensured to the American people and discussed the government’s responsibility “to contain the rapid increase in health care costs by all available means.”<sup>23</sup> At the same time, however, they clearly “[opposed] excessive intrusions from Washington in the delivery of health care.”<sup>24</sup> Despite this opposition, the cumulative codes concerning government involvement in the regulation of pricing outweighed their disdain for federal delivery 7 to 4. Similarly, Democrats referenced several failed federal regulations – like the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) – as “a typical example of a well-intentioned regulatory effort which has imposed large costs but has not solved our problems.”<sup>25</sup> Despite also categorizing health care as

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<sup>23</sup> 1976 Republican Party Platform.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> 1976 Democratic Party Platform.

a right that all Americans ought to enjoy under the protection of the federal government, the negative codes outweighed the positive codes 6 to 3. In other words, both parties were supremely concerned with the inflation of health costs and the necessity of government intervention.

From 1980 to 1992, both parties would continue to utilize discursive formations favoring both coded category of this study. Republicans consistently used a similar amount of negatively and positively coded phrases which held their cumulative code close to zero. Democrats, on the other hand, would increasingly emphasize the federal government's responsibility in the provision of health care equality while reducing references to individual choice in health care policy. This trend would continue to an even greater degree from 1996 to 2016, where negative codes outnumbered positive codes 17 to 3 and 27 to 1, respectively. The 2008 Democratic Platform laid the groundwork for "Obamacare" and the Affordable Care Act, which aided the evolution of Democratic discourse. By 2016, the prominent theme of Democratic discourse on health care had become "universal." Published in their platform that year, in a section titled "Securing Universal Health Care," Democrats said:

[We] believe that health care is a right, not a privilege, and our health care system should put people before profits. Thanks to the hard work of President Obama and Democrats in Congress, we took a critically important step toward the goal of universal health care by passing the Affordable Care Act, which has covered 20 million more Americans and ensured millions more will never be denied coverage because of a pre-existing condition. Democrats will never falter in our generations- long fight to guarantee health care as a fundamental right for every American.<sup>26</sup>

Hillary Clinton would echo a desire to achieve universal health care in her speech to the Democratic National Convention.<sup>27</sup> Like the other issues investigated, 2016 represented the

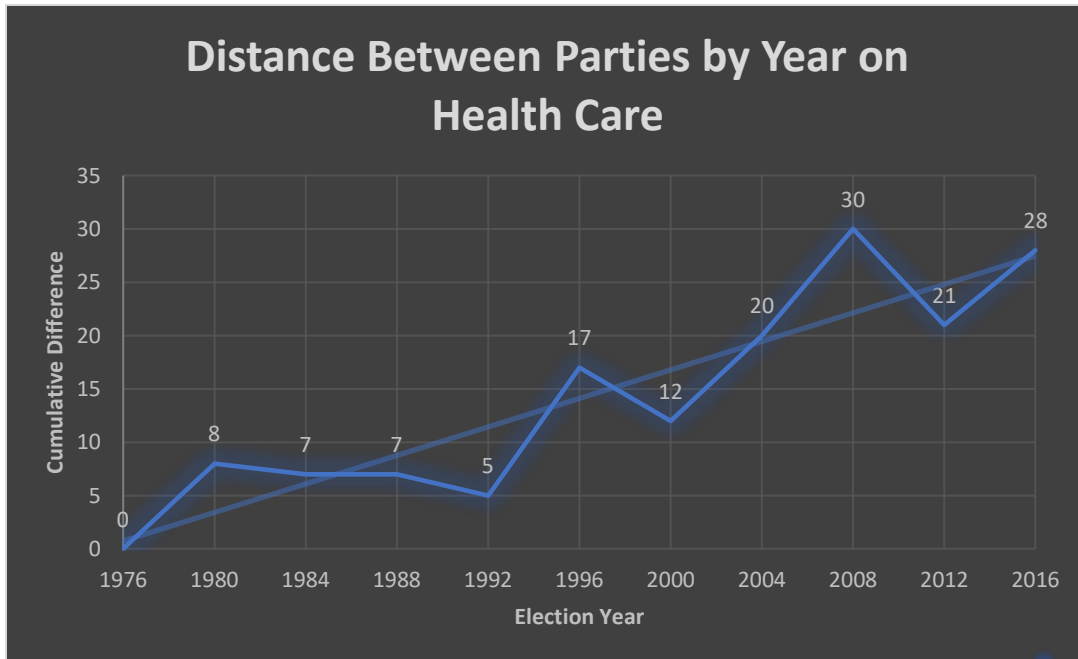
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<sup>26</sup> 2016 Democratic Party Platform.

<sup>27</sup> Hillary Clinton, 2016 Democratic Presidential Candidate Convention Speech.

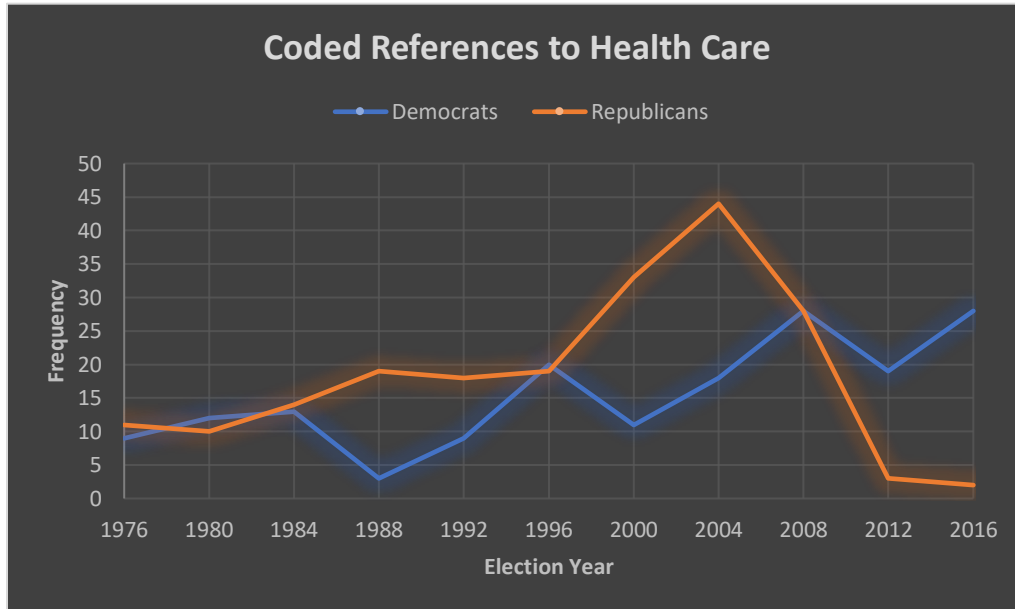
maximum divergence between party governmentalities as articulated through their platforms and convention speeches. The trend is illustrated below.

**Graph Twelve.**



As with immigration, the polarization of health care discourse is not as linearly increasing as abortion or relationship rights. Unlike immigration, however, the trend line indicates a much more significantly positive rate of divergence over time. This would likely have been even more pronounced if not for a noticeable decline in Republican deployment of health care discourse in 2012 and 2016. Interestingly, Republicans only discussed health care three times in 2012 and twice in 2016 as shown below.

**Graph Thirteen.**



Although the frequency of Republican deployment of health care discourse declined in the two most recent presidential elections, the data suggest that the parties did indeed polarize their discourse from 1976 to 2016. The fact that the Democratic platform and convention speech in 2016 was more negatively coded than any election prior, coupled with the successful campaigns of Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren in the 2020 primary, likely suggest that this trend will continue. Each issue-based discourse analyzed through CDA methodology seems to support both components of claim one: the increasing polarization of governmentality concerning the administration of biopower and the marked similarity of such discourses in 1976 compared to the modern environment.

*Then and Now: A Comparison*

At the beginning of this section, Graph One indicated that, over time, there has been a significant level of thematic overlap between the most commonly discussed topics in Republican and Democratic platforms and convention speeches. The subsequent evidence shows that, from 1976 to the present, issue-based polarized discourse on several topics of biopower administration has increased dramatically. Polarization, however, is not unique to this era, so one must ask what issues were important to the parties before this discourse took roots in party discourse. Here again, the career of Newt Gingrich can offer insight.

As discussed previously, Gingrich's early campaigns for Congress were founded on a populist message of discontent over Washington's corruption and failure to control crippling inflation. Party platforms and convention speeches of the mid-to-late 1970s show that the parties were more concerned with distinguishing themselves on economic principles than any other issue. The Democratic Platform of 1976, for example, references the Republican Party 29 times. 93% of the time, this invocation was meant to differentiate the parties on an economic basis: economic mismanagement, stagnation, and health spending among others. Similarly, 85% of Republican mention of the Democratic Party is also centered on philosophical differences on economic policy. Illustrative of this point, the Republican platform opens with the following:

'The Platform is the Party's contract with the people.' This is what it says on the cover of the official printing of the Democrat Platform. So it should be. The Democrats' Platform repeats the same thing on every page: more government, more spending, more inflation. Compare. This Republican Platform says exactly the opposite—less government, less spending, less inflation. In other words, we want you to retain more of your own money, money that represents the worth of your labors, to use as you see fit for the necessities and conveniences of life.<sup>28</sup>

In the 1970's, parties were still marred in classic conceptions of polarization as broad philosophical differences. The issues that the parties discussed were the issues with which the

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<sup>28</sup> 1976 Republican Party Platform.

majority of the electorate were primarily concerned, as was Gingrich's technique in his early campaigning. The defining polarization of the era was also derived from a single issue. The civil rights issues of the 1950's and 60's had given way to an economic focus in the 1970's. It was the main concern of the American voter.

Beginning in 1980, as the data show above, the parties began employing diverging discourses concerning a much broader range of issues. Yet, as the coding methodology above demonstrates, party positions were still categorizable into general philosophical differences between the parties: the relationship between government power and individual rights. Thus, Robison and Mullinix would argue that party platforms have consistently employed value-based framing over the last several decades to distinguish themselves from their counterpart. I argue, however, that such logic masks the underlying cause of the diverging discourses analyzed above.

Just as Gingrich soon abandoned his populist message in pursuit of hyperconservatism, the parties relied less and less on the most salient issues for voters to frame their philosophical differences. Looking at these data through a lens of strategic issue framing, one can begin to see how the issues focused on in platforms and convention speeches were more heavily predicated on the self-interest of the party, not the people. In other words, the parties themselves continued to frame their issue stances on value-based substance, but the issues themselves were chosen for more strategic reasons. Again, this does not imply that parties stopped discussing the most salient issues for voters altogether, it merely suggests that certain issues were focused on to engender saliency in the mass electorate at the same time. This could very well be indicative of the rise of identity-based politics, which is generally attributed to the Democratic Party. However, Republican courting of the Evangelical vote, for example, would indicate that both parties are guilty. There are serious implications for a representative democratic society featuring two

dominant parties with tendencies to target specific social blocs or identities in an effort to mobilize them on behalf of their own self-interest. To prove the validity of such conclusions, I first analyze public opinion data from 1976 onwards, hoping to show that the most contentious modern political issues did not originate due to the demand of the American electorate, but rather somewhere more insidious.

*Claim Two: Engendering Public Opinion through Biopolitical Discourse*

The American National Election Studies surveys have asked respondents several open-ended questions every election year from 1976 to 2016. For this study, the questions of interest asked respondents to describe the most important issues facing the country, the most noticeable differences between the two major parties, and reasons to either like or dislike the Republicans and Democrats at the time of the interview. ANES researchers then coded every open-ended response into hundreds of categories based on the content of the answer. For example, the number one issue with respect to the most important national issue in 1976 was “unemployment; general reference to employment/unemployment; compensation; job retraining,” which was coded as 010. There were similar codes for abortion, relationship rights, immigration, and health care for each of the questions being analyzed.

There were some limitations to the ANES data which warrant a brief discussion. First, the open-ended responses have only been coded through the 2004 surveys. For 2008, 2012, and 2016, ANES only provides the raw textual responses, which cannot be analyzed through the same coding methodology. Second, in 2004, ANES only asked respondents if there was a noticeable difference between the two parties, but did not request open-ended elaborations like

they did from 1976 to 2000. Thus, the analysis of substantive perceived differences only extends from 1976 to 2000. Finally, the surveys from 1976 to 2000 asked respondents to continue naming important issues until they could not think of any others, but in 2004, ANES restricted respondents to listing one most important problem. This formatting change skews the data, so only 1976 to 2000 are analyzed with respect to important issues. Furthermore, all coding placeholders such as “respondent did not reply” or “respondent did not know” were not factored into the ranking of categorical responses.

Soon after analyzing respondents’ opinions on the most important issues facing the country, it became apparent that abortion, immigration, relationship rights, and health care were not at the top of voters’ minds through the 1970s or 1980s. When looking at the top ten most cited issues facing America, the first time any of these issues appear in the ANES data is 1996, when “religious or moral decay” placed sixth. Perhaps it is unsurprising that this appearance perfectly coincides with the vitriolic rhetorical campaign that Newt Gingrich launched against President Clinton and the Democrats in the mid-1990s, trying to paint him as the enemy of traditional and family values. This demonstrates the generative power that discourse can exert over public opinion. Although religious and moral decay could theoretically apply to either gay rights or abortion, the only direct reference to the issues in this study was “the cost of health care” in 1996. Table One shows the top ten most important issues facing the country from 1976 to 2004.

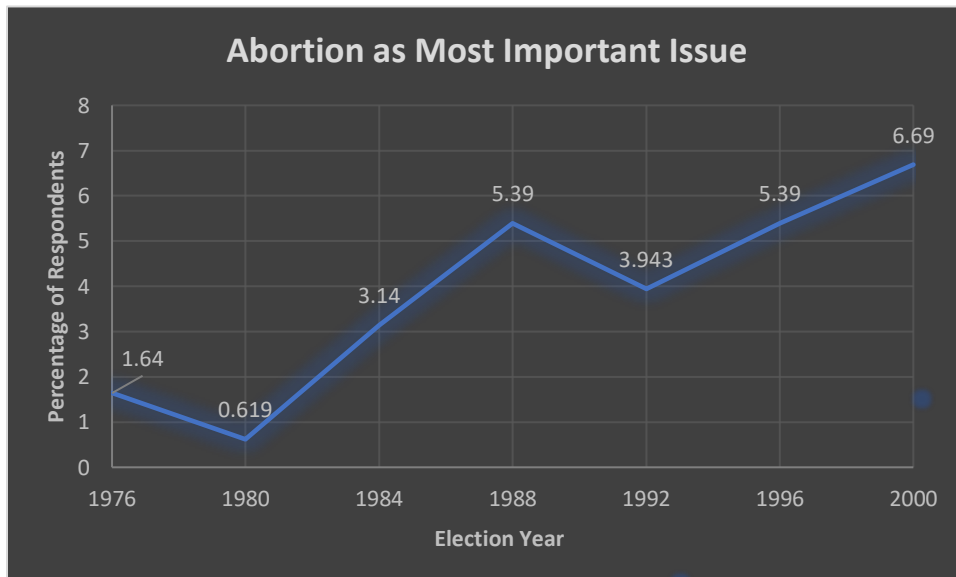


**Table One. Most Important Issues per Election Year**

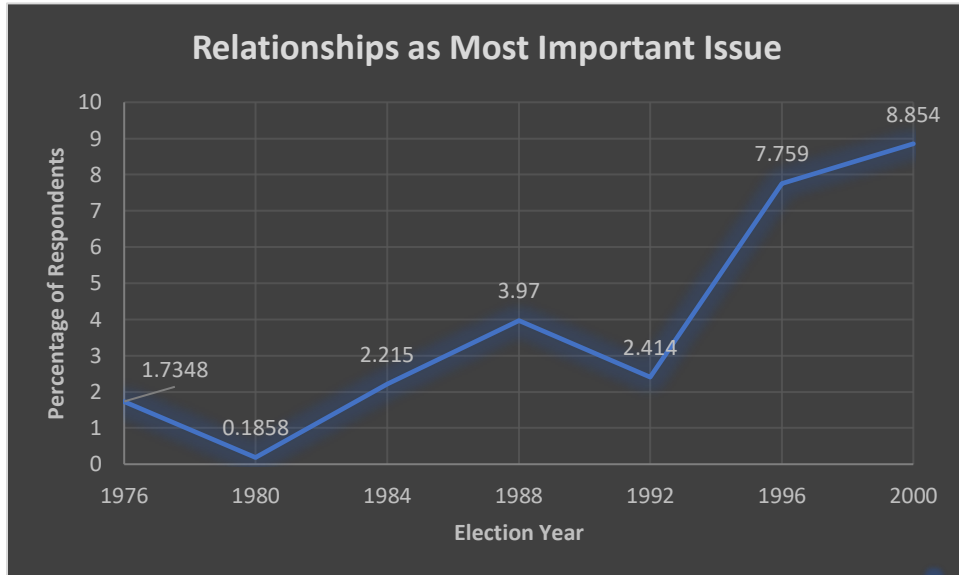
	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004
Jobs	Inflation	Gov Spending	Gov Spending	Narcotics	Middle East	Crime	Education	Terrorism
Inflation	Iran	Welfare	Narcotics	Narcotics	Gov Spending	Gov Spending	Help for Elderly	Iraq
Economy	Jobs	Jobs	Jobs	Unemployment	Welfare	Health Care	Health Care	Economy
Fuel	Disarmament	Nuclear War	Housing	Narcotics	Jobs	Moral/Religious Decay	Moral/Religious Decay	Prevention of War
Crime	Economy	Prevention of War	Poverty	The Economy	Education	Crime	Crime	Jobs
Taxes	Prevention of War	Inflation	Crime	Poverty	Moral/Religious Decay	Gov Spending	Gov Spending	Foreign Relations
Foreign Relations	Fuel	Poverty	Prevention of War	Natural Resources	Narcotics	Poverty	Poverty	National Defense
Welfare	Gov Spending	Disarmament	Natural Resources	Recession	Aid to Poor	Narcotics	Gov Spending	Gov Spending
Domestic-General	Domestic-General	Latin/South America	Help for Elderly	Pollution	Health Care	Recession	Moral/Religious Decay	Moral/Religious Decay
Recession	Foreign Relations	Aid to Poor	Pollution	Housing	Poverty	Decay of Family	Health Care	Health Care

When analyzed in conjunction with the growing importance that the political elites had placed on certain biopolitical discourses, table one seems to imply that the growth in discourse was not due to a pressing demand in the electorate. Rather, through exposure to the growing discourses being deployed by political parties, certain issues gained salience – namely the cost of health care and the deterioration of moral, religious, and family values. This evaluation is further supported by looking at the relative percentage of the respondents who reference abortion, relationships, immigration, or health care as one of the most important issues facing the country. While the overall proportion is small, the data do suggest that the growing prevalence of elite discourse was driving increased saliency over time.

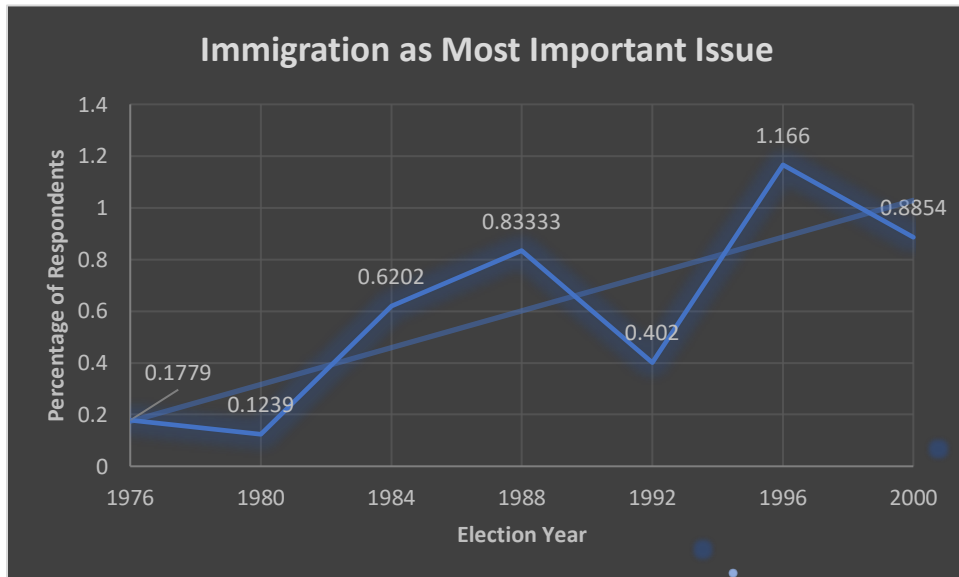
**Abortion.**



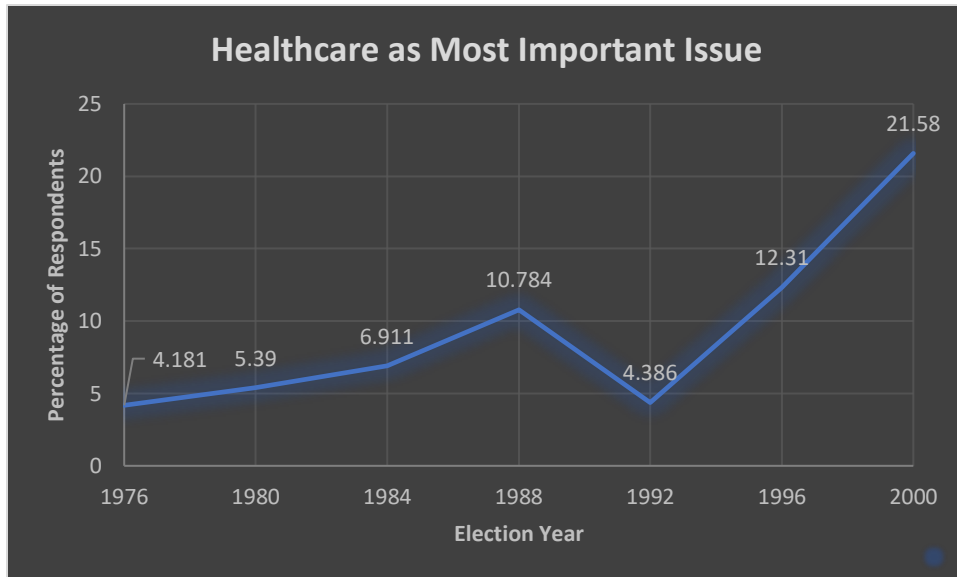
## Relationships.



## Immigration.



## Healthcare.



Now, I do not intend to imply that there were no American voters concerned with these four issues prior to their arrival in the top ten responses of ANES surveys. These data do indicate, however, that the percentage of the electorate that felt as if these four issues were grave political concerns was too low to be responsible for the polarization of elite discourse. In other words, the percentage of respondents citing abortion, relationship rights, immigration, or healthcare as an important issue in the presidential election of 1976 was not significant enough to cause the divergence in discourses seen thereafter.

Another noticeable observation when looking at ANES's coded data is that the four biopolitical issues being investigated did not significantly or consistently effect how the electorate viewed the parties from 1976 to 1992. In fact, there were only two instances in this time period where one of these issues penetrated the top ten reasons why voters either liked or disliked the Republicans and Democrats. The first example was 1976, where Democratic support for socialized medicine was the tenth most cited reason to dislike the party. This reason would

not significantly factor into voters' opinions again in this study. The second was in 1984, when the eighth most cited reason for liking the Democratic Party was their support of equal rights for everyone. This could have been influenced by the party's decision to include sexual orientation in the anti-discrimination plank in 1980. However, this reason would not play a significant role in voters' opinions indicated by the ANES data again.<sup>29</sup> In other words, the four biopolitical issues – abortion, relationship rights, immigration, and health care – did not have a significant effect on the electorate's decision to support one party over the other from 1976 to 1992.

In 1996, however, categorized abortion responses alone would account for 15% of the top reasons to either like or dislike the Republicans or Democrats.<sup>30</sup> This trend would extend into 2000 as well, when 15% of top responses were again related to the issue of abortion. Despite being a staple distinction between the two parties' governmentality since 1980, abortion did not define either party within the electorate until sixteen years earlier. In other words, abortion was not a significant factor in the electorate's decision of which party to support until after the elite discourse had started polarizing. This implies an insidious manufacturing of saliency, particularly in defining what it means to be either a Republican or Democrat. Through the truth-producing capacity of discourse, these data would suggest claim two has validity. If voters are provided with distinct truths for being Republican or Democrat, Foucault would suggest that the internal panopticon normalizes party stances within the voter regardless of their true position on less salient issues.

Similarly, these issues were also not prevalent in respondents' description of the substantive differences between the parties over the same span. Except for abortion in 1992,

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<sup>29</sup> See Appendix C.

<sup>30</sup> See Appendix C.

there was no significant mention of these issues as important differences between the parties until 2000.<sup>31</sup> In 1992, abortion was the tenth most cited difference between the parties, but still only accounted for 0.5% of responses. In other words, despite the importance that the parties placed on differentiating their discourses on these issues, the divergence was not significantly salient to the public until much later. In fact, according to the ANES data, the single most defining difference between the parties in 2000 was their position on abortion. Unfortunately, ANES stopped collecting data on the substantive explanations of this question following 2000, so it is not yet possible to confirm the continuation of this trend through the same methodology.

### *Conclusion*

There was clearly a divergence in party discourse concerning abortion, relationships, immigration, and health care from 1976 to 2016. Political platforms and presidential candidate convention speeches took an increasingly dichotomous tone with respect to these biopolitical issues over the last few decades. Not only is the obvious divergence evident through the use of the NVIVO coding methodology, but the striking similarities between discourses were rather surprising. Through these analyses, claim one has validity.

Claim two purports that the four biopolitical issues that diverged from 1976 to 2016 were not relevant to the most salient issues for the majority of the electorate, and the ANES data seem to support that idea. Further, over time, the divergence in discourses – and the concerted effort that the parties made to distinguish their biopolitical stances from one another – significantly aided the increased saliency of those issues. The political demand for representation on abortion,

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<sup>31</sup> See Appendix C.

relationship rights, immigration, and healthcare were just not sufficient enough to warrant the focus they received in party platforms. This would refute the popular literature which suggests that party polarization is the result of pre-existing, strongly felt political beliefs in the electorate. The actual dynamics of polarizing discourse and the relationship between party and voter are far more complex than current scholarship suggest. The conclusion will offer a possible alternative explanation for the divergence in discourse and a critique and defense of my methodology, followed by suggestions for further research.

## Chapter Five: Final Thoughts

### *Key Conclusions: Targeted Discourse for Self-Interest and the Evolution of Party Polarization*

If there is insufficient evidence to suggest that elite polarization is a result of pre-existing political beliefs in the electorate, there must be another explanation for parties focusing their discourse on *relatively* insignificant issues. Perhaps it has less to do with a demand from the electorate, as many scholars of polarization would imply, and more to do with parties trying to mobilize certain apolitical social concerns into political action on their behalf. It would not be unreasonable to hypothesize that the political elites' recognition of biopower outpaced that of the electorate. If this were the case, it would follow that governmentalities concerning the administration of biopower would originate at the party level.

I have frequently referenced the courtship of the Evangelical Christians by the Republican Party in the 1980's, which transformed the group from a non-ideologically unified voting bloc into the monolith conservative right. Many scholars argue that abortion was the catalyst through which this evolution occurred, but the data show that the emphasis that parties placed on this issue pre-dated significant levels of concern in the American electorate. It is not unreasonable, then, to conclude that the Republican Party actively targeted Evangelicals for their own self-interest. In response, the Democratic Party began simultaneously targeting the pro-choice social movement to counteract the loss of the fifty-six percent of evangelicals that had voted Democrat in 1976.

There is also evidence that the Democratic Party has employed similar discursive tactics for the political mobilization of social groups. This is most evident in their relatively recent



appeal to the LGBTQ+ community. In many ways, the 2012 presidential election was a watershed moment for the Democratic Party's relationship with the community's voters. CNN exit polls suggest that there was a noticeable increase in LGBTQ+ voters supporting the Republican Party from 2004 through 2010, from twenty-three to twenty-nine percent.<sup>1</sup> While these numbers may seem underwhelming, it would naturally be concerning to see a reliably Democratic group start defecting in national elections. 2012's presidential election, which saw a reversal in this trend, highlighted the vitality of this voting bloc to the Democratic Party. Remember that the data showed a clear focus by the Obama administration on the LGBTQ+ community, which likely contributed to the reconsolidation of the voting bloc, and further research demonstrates the crucial role that it played in his reelection.

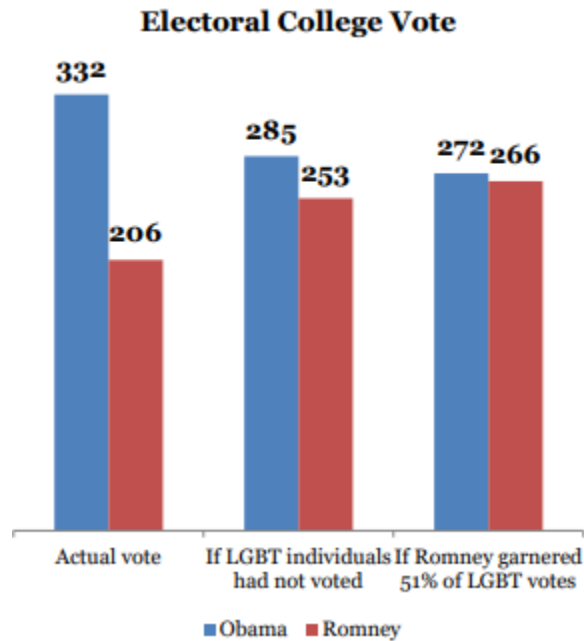
In a study conducted by the Williams Institute, Gary Gates drew two significant conclusions in this regard. "Strong LGBT support for President Obama in Ohio and Florida was enough to alter the outcome of the election in those two states in his favor [and] had Gov. Romney garnered 51% of LGBT votes nationally and in state tabulations, he would have won the popular vote and won the battleground states of Ohio, Florida, and Virginia."<sup>2</sup> Image One was originally published in the same study, and clearly shows just how critical the LGBTQ+ community was in 2012:

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<sup>1</sup> "2004-2012 U.S. General Election Map," CNN (Cable News Network), accessed March 27, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/election/2012/results/race/president/>.

<sup>2</sup> Gary J. Gates, "LGBT Vote 2012," *The Williams Institute*, n.d., <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Gate-LGBT-Vote-Nov-2012.pdf> 1.

**Image One.**



Is it any surprise, then, that the Democratic Platform of 2016 would dedicate an entire chapter to the topic of LGBTQ+ rights? Now, the data in chapter four still show that these issues were not of significant importance to the American electorate as a whole, but the Democratic Party recognized how important a consolidated voting bloc was in national elections, and deployed targeted discourse in pursuit of that goal. Exit polls suggest that this is an effective strategy. There are many troubling implications for a representative governmental system which purposefully targets and politicizes social identities for their own self-interest, and the data in this project suggest that both parties have been culpable.

A second troubling development is the nature of party polarization itself. In 1976, as discussed previously, nearly all of the discursive deployments meant to differentiate one party from the other in their platforms and convention speeches were framed in economic terms. At the

time, these were the issues with which the majority of Americans were concerned.

Unemployment, taxes, and the state of the economy were all in the top ten most cited public concerns in 1976, so it follows that the parties made a concerted effort to distinguish themselves in these terms. From 1980 onward, these terms changed dramatically. As chapter four showed, not only did the parties start producing political discourse on an increasing range of biopolitical issues, but they also engendered saliency in the general population on issues which were not statistically significant at the time.

The Newt Gingrich case study and empirical evidence conducted herein show how the discourse of political actors should be viewed through a frame of self-interest more so than the broad philosophical differences of classical interpretations of party polarization. Even if parties continue to frame their stances in these terms – big government, individual liberty, etc. – their choice of discourse may be more predicated on self-preservation than traditional interpretations of democratic society would suggest. Now, the Foucauldian nexus of truth, power, and discourse has solidified what it means to be a Republican or Democrat in decidedly biopolitical terms. Political elites consolidate under the umbrella of their party's platform and agenda, and the grounds for bipartisan compromise are rapidly eroding. More troubling, voters are being told what issues are important, which simply does not align with any definition of liberalism. Foucauldian theory offers a bleak and pessimistic outlook of the American political system. This is not to say that a party realignment is impossible at some point in the future, but the panopticon of party discourse makes any elite or voter defection increasingly unlikely.

## *A Defense of Method*

The most predictable critique of this study is the choice of documents used in the empirical study. Focusing on only presidential elections produces a four-year gap in which data is not accurately pictured in the graphs and table of chapter four. Midterm elections also provide political parties with ample stages to further their platforms and agendas on the national stage, so why does this study not attend to those instances? What is the significance of party platforms and convention speeches?

It is true that the intervening years between presidential elections would offer further data for analysis, and this study does not account for any changes in the data which may be witnessed in midterm cycles. Presidential elections, however, see a far higher level of voter turnout than do midterm elections. “In recent elections,” for example, “about 60% of the voting eligible population votes during presidential election years, and about 40% votes during midterm elections.”<sup>3</sup> Political parties understand the importance of presidential elections to the electorate at large, which is why party platforms are published on the same four-year cycle. Party platforms and convention speeches are meant to appeal to the greatest number of potential voters, in contrast to the primary season which strictly appeases the parties’ base supporters. Platforms and convention speeches solidify the parties’ issue-stances for the next four-year cycle, and thus offer the strongest and most accurate depiction of where the parties stand in relation to one another.

Many modern scholars of polarization would also question the use of platforms and convention speeches as a measure of public opinion when many voters do not read platforms or listen to convention speeches. These scholars would instead point to the echo chambers of

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<sup>3</sup> FairVote.org, “Voter Turnout,” FairVote, accessed March 27, 2020, ([https://www.fairvote.org/voter\\_turnout#voter\\_turnout\\_101](https://www.fairvote.org/voter_turnout#voter_turnout_101)) 1.

modern news media as the main source of the public's political information. This is understandable considering there are more forms of mass media today than in any other period of history. From news outlets to social media sites, political elites on both sides of the aisle have become adept at utilizing these technological tools in unison with the social tools discussed above. Consider, for instance, modern choice of news outlets. "Television provided a mere seven channels to the average household in 1970, and three broadcast networks captured eighty percent of all viewing. By 2005, over eighty-five percent of households had cable or satellite access, and the average viewer had a choice of about a hundred channels."<sup>4</sup> This exponential increase in choice has been accompanied with a growing source of unabashedly partisan programming. Both parties have their primary source of repetitive information: Fox News Channel on the right, and MSNBC on the left, among others. The growth of partisan programming has laid the foundation for a theory of selective exposure for the increasing polarization of the American political system. "The preponderance of evidence cited in recent studies confirms that partisan audiences do select media that lean in the direction of their own views...and such a relationship is common across virtually all forms of media."<sup>5</sup> Thus, these "echo chambers" provide a constantly available, daily-scheduled source of the repetitious discourse of the American political institution. This helps to produce increasingly partisan voters and limits the extent of truly independent political thought.

"Repetition is a prerequisite for learning, providing the possibility of assimilating experience, committing it to memory, and thus also the basis for prediction" of behavior.<sup>6</sup> The

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<sup>4</sup> Pietro S. Nivola and David W. Brady, *Red and Blue Nation?* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, Stanford University, 2006) 224.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>6</sup> Penelope Brown, "Repetition," *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 9, no. 1-2 (1999): pp. 223-226) 223.

increasingly available sources of political information presented through the partisan perspective create echo chambers in which the social tool of repetition is employed on a massive scale and on a daily basis. The repeated rhetoric produces easily-understandable electrical charges within the viewer's psyche, and "these electrical charges resonate back and forth, generating a political machine more potent than the aggregation of its parts."<sup>7</sup> That machine, the institutional discourse of American politics, has the undesirable consequence of making the left and right more polarized, while simultaneously subjecting independent thought to the partisan perspective. The technological tools of news media and social tools of repetition are disproportionately powerful controls over the viewer. "The position of immobility amplifies the affective intensities received, just as a basketball coach *feels* the intensities of the contest more than the players on the floor who *absorb* the intensities into action."<sup>8</sup> Political decisions are thus reduced and restricted to a choice between symbols, slogans, and ideologies: right or left, red or blue, elephant or donkey, social order or social justice. Herein lies the connection between an increasingly polarized two-party system and an increasing number of self-identified independents posed in the introduction: the discourse of the two parties, through all of its mediums and tools of control, subject American voters to a binary political landscape which reifies their control over their base while simultaneously muting the moderate voices of dissent.

There is obviously an argument to be made for the influence of mass media, and many scholars have rightly studied this relationship. One could argue, quite easily I believe, that the source of information being repeated through this medium originates at the party-level. In other words, the source of the chamber's echo is party-level discourse. After all, scholars do not claim

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<sup>7</sup> William E. Connolly, "The Evangelical-Capitalist Resonance Machine," *Political Theory* 33, no. 6 (2005): pp. 869-886) 876.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 880.

that media outlets manufacture the opinions of political parties, but rather that they further the agendas that the parties have already established. While not exclusively, parties set these agendas through their platforms, and are further articulated in presidential candidate convention speeches. Thus, while I certainly appreciate the gravity of importance surrounding the echo chambers of mass media, these channels are guided by political elites and often only repeat what has already been proclaimed in the documents analyzed in this study.

### *Further Research*

Although this study has provided corroborating evidence for the claims and conclusions discussed in this project, it merely scratches the surface of potential research questions. Further studies ought to investigate the ways in which parties targeted social blocs and engendered political opinions outside the scope of this paper's focus. This would offer further insight into the historic relationship between party discourse and the American electorate. It would also further validate the idea that identity-targeting discourse is a relatively recent phenomenon.

Further research may also more closely analyze the relationship between party discourse and that of media outlets. Much scholarly work has been dedicated to the dynamics between elites and the public and the media and the voter, but more work is warranted in the overlap between party discourse and news publications. Hopefully, such studies would vindicate my claims that the echo chambers would be aimless without party-established discourse.

Finally, it is worth investigating the root cause of the transition from economic-driven polarity towards biopolitical polarity. The scope of this study – 1976 to 2016 – commences after this transition had already started, and the driving factor likely lies in the sociopolitical

environment immediately preceding the presidential election of 1976. This is purely speculation, but one possible explanation lies in the resolution of the civil rights movement. In fact, the success of the civil rights movement dealt a large blow to the capability of parties to govern in terms of the administration of biopower. Perhaps in the wake of this revelation, the parties sought other biopolitical avenues through which to regulate the American population. This would explain the explosion of biopolitical discourse in party platforms and convention speeches witnessed in the late 1970's. If true, however, that would be an even more crippling indictment of the reality of American representative democracy than this study could have projected.



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<sup>1</sup> The American Presidency Project was created by the University of California Santa Barbara, and contains all of the speeches and party platforms analyzed in this project.

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## Appendix A: NVIVO Stop Words

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### Appendix B: Thematic Overlap Between Parties

Election Year	Themes Overlapping out of 25	Percentage	Themes Overlapping out of 15	Percentage
1976	14	56	11	73.33333333
1980	10	40	7	46.66666667
1984	12	48	9	60
1988	15	60	10	66.66666667
1992	15	60	10	66.66666667
1996	10	40	6	40
2000	11	44	6	40
2004	9	36	6	40
2008	13	52	9	60
2012	13	52	9	60
2016	12	48	7	46.66666667
	Averages	48.7272727		54.5454545

## Appendix C: Discourse Codes by Party

### Democratic References to Relationships

Name	In Folder	References	Coverage
1980	Files\\Democratic Platforms	1	0.03%
1984	Files\\Democratic Platforms	3	0.08%
1988	Files\\Democratic Platforms	1	0.25%
1992	Files\\Democratic Platforms	2	0.28%
1996	Files\\Democratic Platforms	2	0.13%
1996	Files\\Democratic Speeches	1	0.17%
2000	Files\\Democratic Platforms	3	0.19%
2004	Files\\Democratic Platforms	2	0.06%
2008	Files\\Democratic Platforms	8	0.11%
2008	Files\\Democratic Speeches	1	0.48%
2012	Files\\Democratic Platforms	11	0.26%
2016	Files\\Democratic Platforms	26	0.78%
2016	Files\\Democratic Speeches	1	0.35%

## Republican References to Relationships

Name	In Folder	References	Coverage
1980 (2)	Files\Republican Platforms	2	0.08%
1984 (2)	Files\Republican Platforms	2	0.08%
1988 (2)	Files\Republican Platforms	2	0.06%
1992 (2)	Files\Republican Platforms	5	0.21%
1996 (2)	Files\Republican Platforms	4	0.17%
2000 (2)	Files\Republican Platforms	3	0.10%
2004	Files\Republican Speeches	2	0.49%
2004 (2)	Files\Republican Platforms	6	0.09%
2008 (2)	Files\Republican Platforms	9	0.22%
2012 (2)	Files\Republican Platforms	11	0.21%
2016 (2)	Files\Republican Platforms	9	0.14%

## Democratic References to Abortion

Name	In Folder	References	Coverage
1976	Files\Democratic Platforms	1	0.04%
1980	Files\Democratic Platforms	3	0.06%
1992	Files\Democratic Platforms	4	0.28%
1992	Files	1	0.01%
1992	Files\Democratic Speeches	2	0.23%
1996	Files\Democratic Platforms	4	0.12%
1996	Files\Democratic Speeches	2	0.29%
2000	Files\Democratic Platforms	6	0.16%
2000	Files	4	0.05%
2000	Files\Democratic Speeches	4	0.05%
2004	Files\Democratic Platforms	3	0.04%
2008	Files\Democratic Platforms	4	0.01%
2008	Files\Democratic Speeches	1	0.20%
2012	Files\Democratic Platforms	6	0.05%
2016	Files\Democratic Platforms	8	0.12%
2016	Files	1	0.04%
2016	Files\Democratic Speeches	1	0.04%



# Republican References to Abortion

Name	In Folder	References	Coverage
1976 (2)	Files\Republican Platforms	4	0.02%
1980 (2)	Files\Republican Platforms	3	0.01%
1984 (2)	Files\Republican Platforms	6	0.03%
1988	Files\Republican Speeches	1	0.04%
1988 (2)	Files\Republican Platforms	6	0.02%
1992 (2)	Files\Republican Platforms	5	0.02%
1996	Files\Republican Speeches	1	0.02%
1996 (2)	Files\Republican Platforms	7	0.03%
2000	Files\Republican Speeches	2	0.03%
2000 (2)	Files\Republican Platforms	6	0.02%
2004 (2)	Files\Republican Platforms	12	0.02%
2008 (2)	Files\Republican Platforms	14	0.03%
2012 (2)	Files\Republican Platforms	63	100.00%
2016 (2)	Files\Republican Platforms	67	100.00%

## Democratic References to Immigration

### Positive Codes

Name	In Folder	References	Coverage
1976	Files\\Democratic Platforms	1	0.10%
1976	Files\\Democratic Speeches	1	0.73%
1980	Files\\Democratic Platforms	8	0.47%
1984	Files\\Democratic Platforms	2	0.12%
1984	Files\\Democratic Speeches	2	1.95%
1988	Files\\Democratic Platforms	1	0.45%
1988	Files\\Democratic Speeches	1	0.60%
1992	Files\\Democratic Platforms	2	0.58%
1996	Files\\Democratic Platforms	5	0.61%
1996	Files\\Democratic Speeches	1	0.30%
2000	Files\\Democratic Platforms	10	0.95%
2004	Files\\Democratic Platforms	5	0.30%
2008	Files\\Democratic Platforms	12	0.34%
2008	Files\\Democratic Speeches	2	0.90%
2012	Files\\Democratic Platforms	10	0.66%
2012	Files\\Democratic Speeches	2	0.91%
2016	Files\\Democratic Platforms	24	1.03%
2016	Files\\Democratic Speeches	3	1.68%

### Negative Codes

Name	In Folder	References	Coverage
1996	Files\\Democratic Platforms	5	0.66%
2000	Files\\Democratic Platforms	2	0.22%
2008	Files\\Democratic Platforms	4	0.09%
2012	Files\\Democratic Platforms	2	0.09%

## Republican References to Immigration

### Positive Codes

Name	In Folder	References	Coverage
1976	Files\\Republican Speeches	1	0.76%
1980	Files\\Republican Speeches	1	0.41%
1980 (2)	Files\\Republican Platforms	1	0.11%
1984	Files\\Republican Speeches	1	0.45%
1984 (2)	Files\\Republican Platforms	1	0.06%
1988	Files\\Republican Speeches	1	0.50%
1988 (2)	Files\\Republican Platforms	1	0.03%
1992 (2)	Files\\Republican Platforms	3	0.19%
1996 (2)	Files\\Republican Platforms	1	0.06%
2000	Files\\Republican Speeches	3	0.78%
2000 (2)	Files\\Republican Platforms	1	0.05%
2004 (2)	Files\\Republican Platforms	3	0.06%
2012	Files\\Republican Speeches	2	1.06%
2012 (2)	Files\\Republican Platforms	5	0.20%
2016 (2)	Files\\Republican Platforms	2	0.05%

### Negative Codes

Name	In Folder	References	Coverage
1980 (2)	Files\\Republican Platforms	2	0.20%
1984 (2)	Files\\Republican Platforms	2	0.13%
1992 (2)	Files\\Republican Platforms	3	0.28%
1996	Files\\Republican Speeches	3	1.35%
1996 (2)	Files\\Republican Platforms	11	1.03%
2000 (2)	Files\\Republican Platforms	5	0.36%
2004 (2)	Files\\Republican Platforms	4	0.19%
2008 (2)	Files\\Republican Platforms	10	0.50%
2012 (2)	Files\\Republican Platforms	7	0.21%
2016	Files\\Republican Speeches	11	6.19%
2016 (2)	Files\\Republican Platforms	11	0.40%

## Appendix D: Voter Opinions of the Two Parties

1976			
<b>Like Democrats</b>	<b>Dislike Republicans</b>	<b>Like Republicans</b>	<b>Dislike Democrats</b>
1. Support Common Man	1. Pro-Upper Class	1. They're Conservative	1. Spend too Much
2. Better for Employment	2. Can't Trust Them	2. They're Efficient	2. Too Liberal
3. Helps the Poor	3. Watergate	3. Would Spend Less	3. Can't Trust Them
4. I'm a Traditional Democratic Voter	4. Too Conservative	4. I'm a Traditional Republican Voter	4. Bad for Peace
5. Better for Prosperity	5. Nixon	5. Better Chance for Peace	5. Increase National Debt
6. Better for Middle-Class	6. Bad for Employment	6. Pro-Small Government	6. Pro-Welfare
7. They're Liberal	7. Dishonest	7. Lower Inflation	7. Pro-Labor Unions
8. Improvement of Social Conditions	8. Against the Poor	8. Pro-Big Business	8. Pro-Carter
9. Pro-Carter	9. Just Dislike them	9. Generally Like Ideas	9. Pro-Big Government
10. Pro-Labor Unions	10. Not Different Enough	10. Pro-Ford	10. Pro-Socialized Medicine
1980			
<b>Like Democrats</b>	<b>Dislike Republicans</b>	<b>Like Republicans</b>	<b>Dislike Democrats</b>
1. Support Common Man	1. Pro-Big Business	1. They're Conservative	1. Pro-Welfare
2. Helps the Poor	2. Too Conservative	2. They're Efficient	2. Too Liberal
3. I'm a Traditional Democratic Voter	3. Anti-Working Class	3. Pro-Big Business	3. Spend too Much
4. Listens to the People	4. Can't Trust Them	4. General Positive View of Party	4. Poorly Organized
5. They're Liberal	5. Reagan	5. Pro-Small Government	5. They're Inefficient
6. Improvement of Social Conditions	6. Against the Poor	6. Generally Good for Economy	6. Can't Trust Them
7. Better for Employment	7. They Sling Mud	7. Better for Prosperity	7. Carter
8. Represents Wider Group of People	8. Bad for Country	8. Pro-Military	8. Pro-Big Government
9. General Positive View of Party	9. Not Improving Social Conditions	9. I'm a Traditional Republican Voter	9. Pro-Labor Unions
10. Generally Like Ideas	10. Worse for Prosperity	10. Generally Like Ideas	10. Worse for Prosperity
1984			
<b>Like Democrats</b>	<b>Dislike Republicans</b>	<b>Like Republicans</b>	<b>Dislike Democrats</b>
1. Support Common Man	1. Pro-Big Business	1. They're Conservative	1. Too Liberal
2. Helps the Poor	2. Too Conservative	2. Reagan	2. Spend too Much
3. I'm a Traditional Democratic Voter	3. Reagan	3. Pro-Military	3. Pro-Welfare
4. Represents Wider Group of People	4. Anti-Working Class	4. They're Efficient	4. Pro-Big Government
5. Better for Middle-Class	5. Represents Smaller Group of People	5. Good Economic Policy	5. Can't Trust Them
6. They're Liberal	6. They're Inefficient	6. Good Leaders	6. Bad Leaders
7. Listens to the People	7. Against the Poor	7. Well-Organized	7. Poorly Organized
8. Pro-Equality	8. Separation of Church and State	8. Better Chance for Peace	8. Bad for Peace
9. Selected a Woman for Vice President	9. Tax Policy	9. I'm a Traditional Republican Voter	9. They're Inefficient
10. Better for Employment	10. Bad Foreign Policy	10. Pro-Big Business	10. Tax Policy
1988			
<b>Like Democrats</b>	<b>Dislike Republicans</b>	<b>Like Republicans</b>	<b>Dislike Democrats</b>
1. Support Common Man	1. Pro-Big Business	1. They're Conservative	1. Too Liberal
2. Helps the Poor	2. Too Much Military Spending	2. Pro-Military	2. They're Inefficient
3. Better for Middle-Class	3. They're Inefficient	3. Better for Prosperity	3. Tax Policy
4. Generous	4. Tax Policy	4. They're Efficient	4. Pro-Big Government
5. Pro-Big Government	5. Dishonest	5. Pro-Big Business	5. Spend too Much
6. I'm a Traditional Democratic Voter	6. Can't Trust Them	6. General Positive View of Party	6. Poorly Organized
7. Pro-Labor Unions	7. Too Conservative	7. Positive View of Performance	7. Pro-Welfare
8. Generally Like Ideas	8. They Sling Mud	8. Clear-Cut Foreign Policy	8. Anti-Defense Spending
9. Represents Wider Group of People	9. Anti-Working Class	9. Better for Employment	9. Can't Trust Them
10. Better for Employment	10. Against the Poor	10. Generally Like Ideas	10. They Sling Mud

1992			
<b>Like Democrats</b>	<b>Dislike Republicans</b>	<b>Like Republicans</b>	<b>Dislike Democrats</b>
1. Support Common Man	1. Pro-Big Business	1. They're Conservative	1. They're Inefficient
2. Helps the Poor	2. Anti-Working Class	2. They're Efficient	2. Too Liberal
3. I'm a Traditional Democratic Voter	3. Against Closing Loopholes	3. Tax Policy	3. Bad Leaders
4. They're Liberal	4. Against the Poor	4. Good Leaders	4. Tax Policy
5. Listens to the People	5. W. Bush	5. I'm a Traditional Republican Voter	5. Can't Trust Them
6. Pro-Welfare	6. Dishonest	6. W. Bush	6. They Sling Mud
7. Better for Middle-Class	7. Tax Policy	7. Necessary to Balance Power	7. Poorly Organized
8. Pro-Big Government	8. Bad for Peace	8. Improvement of Social Conditions	8. Pro-Welfare
9. Necessary to Balance Power	9. They Don't Listen	9. Pro-Big Business	9. Spend too Much
10. Generous	10. Generally Bad for Country	10. Reagan	10. Generally Bad for Country
1996			
<b>Like Democrats</b>	<b>Dislike Republicans</b>	<b>Like Republicans</b>	<b>Dislike Democrats</b>
1. Support Common Man	1. Pro-Big Business	1. They're Conservative	1. Pro-Big Government
2. Helps the Poor	2. Can't Trust Them	2. Small Government	2. Too Liberal
3. Better for Middle-Class	3. Too Conservative	3. They're Efficient	3. Can't Trust Them
4. Generous	4. Anti-Abortion Reform	4. Pro-Traditional Values	4. They're Inefficient
5. Represents Wider Group of People	5. Against the Poor	5. Anti-Welfare	5. Poorly Organized
6. Pro-Big Government	6. Anti-Abortion General	6. Pro-Big Business	6. Pro-Special Interests
7. I'm a Traditional Democratic Voter	7. Pro-Special Interests	7. Generally Like Ideas	7. Pro-Welfare
8. Pro-Abortion	8. Generally Bad for Country	8. Tax Policy	8. Spend too Much
9. Listens to the People	9. Tax Policy	9. I'm a Traditional Republican Voter	9. Pro-Abortion General
10. Pro-Education	10. Anti-Working Class	10. Patriotic	10. Pro-Abortion Reform
2000			
<b>Like Democrats</b>	<b>Dislike Republicans</b>	<b>Like Republicans</b>	<b>Dislike Democrats</b>
1. Support Common Man	1. Pro-Big Business	1. They're Conservative	1. Pro-Big Government
2. Better for Middle-Class	2. Too Conservative	2. Small Government	2. Too Liberal
3. Helps the Poor	3. Anti-Abortion Legalization	3. Tax Policy	3. Can't Trust Them
4. I'm a Traditional Democratic Voter	4. They Sling Mud	4. They're Efficient	4. Spend too Much
5. Represents Wider Group of People	5. Can't Trust Them	5. Pro-Traditional Values	5. Bill Clinton
6. Good for Economy	6. Anti-Abortion General	6. Generally Like Ideas	6. Tax Policy
7. Listens to the People	7. Anti-Common Man	7. Pro-Work Ethic	7. Pro-Abortion Reform
8. Pro-Big Government	8. Poor Governmental Appointments	8. Pro-Special Interests	8. They Sling Mud
9. Generous	9. Poor Beliefs System	9. Anti-Abortion Legalization	9. They're Inefficient
10. Pro-Social Reform	10. Less Representative of Country	10. Strong Military Support	10. Weak Belief System
2004			
<b>Like Democrats</b>	<b>Dislike Republicans</b>	<b>Like Republicans</b>	<b>Dislike Democrats</b>
1. Support Common Man	1. Pro-Big Business	1. They're Conservative	1. Too Liberal
2. Better for Middle-Class	2. They're Inefficient	2. Small Government	2. Pro-Big Government
3. Helps the Poor	3. Lack of Patriotism	3. Strong Military Support	3. Can't Trust Them
4. Generous	4. Too Conservative	4. Generally Like Ideas	4. Weak Belief System
5. Generally Like Ideas	5. They Sling Mud	5. Pro-Work Ethic	5. They Sling Mud
6. They're Liberal	6. Can't Trust Them	6. Strong Belief System	6. They're Inefficient
7. Represents Wider Group of People	7. Anti-Abortion General	7. Tax Policy	7. Bad Leaders
8. Pro-Social Reform	8. Generally Dislike Ideas	8. Anti-Abortion Legalization	8. Lack of Patriotism
9. I'm a Traditional Democratic Voter	9. Selfish	9. Pro-Big Business	9. Pro-Abortion Reform
10. Pro-Abortion Reform	10. Tax Policy	10. Pro-Traditional Values	10. Anti-Work Ethic

## Appendix E: Top Ten Cited Party Differences Per Election Year

<b>1976</b>
How They Treat Working Class
How They Treat Businesses
General Philosophies
Relationship with Special Interests
How They Treat Upper Class
Ideology
How They Spend Money- General
How They Treat the Economy
Welfare Spending
Vision for Peace
<b>1980</b>
How They Treat Working Class
How They Treat Businesses
General Philosophies
Ideology
Capitalism Vs. Socialism
How They Treat Upper Class
Relationship with Special Interests
Welfare Spending
Republicans Spend Less- General
Democrats Spend More- General
<b>1984</b>
General Philosophies
How They Treat Upper Class
How They Treat Working Class
How They Treat Businesses
Ideology
Relationship with Special Interests
Capitalism Vs. Socialism
Democrats Spend More
Views on National Security
Welfare Spending
<b>1988</b>
How They Treat Working Class
How They Treat Businesses
How They Treat Upper Class
General Philosophies
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