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Duane M. Oldfield

Working Paper 90-11

INSTITUTE OF GOVERNMENTAL STUDIES
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Pat Crashes the Party: Reform, Republicans, and Robertson

Could it be that the reason for my candidacy has been fulfilled in the activation of tens of thousands of evangelical Christians into government? ... For the first time in recent history, patriotic, pro-family Christians learned the simple techniques of effective party-organizing and successful campaigning.

Their presence as an active force in American politics may result ultimately in at least one of America's major political parties taking on a profoundly Christian outlook in its platform and party structure. (Pat Robertson)

Pat Robertson's bid for the presidency failed. Yet his "army" of supporters will play a role in the Republican party for some time to come. Their influence is particularly strong at the state level. Robertson supporters have captured control of several state parties and are a significant minority force in a number of others. Thus Robertson's personal failure does not necessarily mark the end of his movement. Upon returning to his "700 Club" television show, he was asked whether his candidacy had been worthwhile. Robertson replied that the answer would only be known in ten years, on the basis of the people who had become involved in politics through his campaign.

What are we to make of the influx of the Robertsonites? How receptive are American parties to insurgent movements such as Robertson's? This essay will examine these questions in the light of recent debates over party reform. Critics argue that reform has changed incentive structures in a way that favors candidate and issue activists over party regulars. Robertson's challenge to

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George Bush provides one of the clearest examples of a battle between such enthusiasts and party regulars to be found in recent years. It therefore provides a useful opportunity to gauge the validity of the analysis reform critics offer.

The Robertson campaign is interesting for a another reason: it took place within the Republican party. In study after study, descriptions of Democratic party reform pass as analysis of the American party system in general. This presents serious problems for two reasons. First, due to the unique nature of Republican rules and political culture, lessons drawn from the experience of the Democrats may not be applicable. Second, many of the reforms that have so upset critics have not been adopted by the Republican party. If the reforms have been as important as critics claim, then their absence should lead to different results. By ignoring the Republican experience, critics of party reform miss a valuable chance to test their theories.

Before we can test these theories, however, we need to gain a better understanding of the arguments against party reform. The section which follows will lay out these arguments with particular emphasis on the larger vision of parties and societal interests which informs them. The essay will then focus on evidence from the Robertson campaign. The disjunction between anti-reform arguments and the Robertson experience shall provide the impetus for the essay's concluding observations.

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The Case Against Reform

I want to look at one school of thought in particular. This approach is seen in the works of authors such as Austin Ranney, Jeane Kirkpatrick, and Nelson Polsby. These authors are concerned that party reforms of the last twenty years have seriously weakened American parties. They argue that reformers, unaware of the full consequences of their actions, have impaired our parties' ability to perform functions vital to the health of American democracy.

This critique of party reform has its origins in a pluralist understanding of American parties. Against both the advocates of "responsible parties" and antiparty critics rooted in the progressive tradition, this approach defended American parties as

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5 Advocates of "responsible parties" share a number of common concerns. They call for parties which will present voters with a distinct ideological choice at election time. Centralized and well disciplined, victorious parties will have the capacity to enact the platforms on which they ran. At the end of their period in office, parties can be held responsible for government performance in that period and judged accordingly by the voters. While these goals are held in common, responsible party advocates differ as to how they should be achieved. Some call for the adoption of a European parliamentary model of government; others hope to make due with lesser measures such as strengthened national party organizations and a greater reliance upon presidential leadership. The responsible parties position finds clear expression in such works as E.E. Schattschneider's The Semisovereign People and in the APSA's 1950 report "Toward a More Responsible Two Party System".

6 This tradition emphasizes the corruption inherent in party organization. To control this corruption, antiparty reformers call for reliance upon some combination of direct, popular participation (primaries, referendums, nonpartisan elections) and neutral administration (civil service systems, city managers, etc.). While antiparty arguments have found little favor with political
they existed in the prereform era. Effective political parties were seen as the glue which held together the disparate interests and fragmented government structure of the United States. The hidden virtues (and latent functions) of machines and "professional" politicians were extolled. The value of progressive era reforms was questioned. While strong parties were valued, this was not a defense of ideological, disciplined, "responsible" parties. The moderate, coalitional nature of American "catch-all" parties was held to be one of their most valuable qualities. To better understand what party reform is threatening, let us take a closer look at the virtues of indigenous parties as seen by pluralist theorists.

Defense of indigenous parties fits neatly with pluralist depictions of American politics. Pluralists see politics as a complex web of bargaining and compromise amongst a myriad of societal interests; they see parties as necessary to prevent the system from degenerating into utter chaos. Only political parties have an interest in developing broad based coalitions out of the cross cutting regional, ethnic, and occupational interests of the American people. This is of particular importance given the governmental structure of the United States. With formal powers divided and dispersed, informal means of coordination are needed. The parties, feared and reviled by the founding fathers, turn out to be a prerequisite to the functioning of the system they created.

For the classic statement of this position see Pendleton Herring, *The Politics of Democracy*. Leon Epstein's *Political Parties in the American Mold* provides an excellent discussion of the debate between advocates of responsible parties and the defenders of indigenous institutions. (See, in particular, Chapter 2- "The Scholarly Commitment").
Yet pluralist parties must not be too strong. Responsible parties threaten to suppress the interaction among group interests that pluralists cherish. If policy flows from the public's choice between competing party platforms in the general election, little room is left for independent group influence. Coalitional, nonideological parties are held to be superior for a number of reasons. First, the diversity of the American electorate can not be reduced to a small number of clear competing platforms and is therefore better represented by the complex—even contradictory—coalitions characteristic of American parties. Second, the sorts of choices made in general elections are of necessity simple. Simple electoral choices fail to take into account the intensity of preferences and the specialized knowledge that party elites can bring to decision making. Finally, by polarizing the population between competing alternatives, responsible parties threaten the compromises which have managed to hold this diverse nation together. While the intellectuals who advocate a responsible party model may desire a choice between ideologically distinct parties, pluralists argue that there is little evidence that the public is looking for a choice between competing extremisms.

The pluralist party was embodied in the figure of the "professional" party member (or "party regular") and in patronage based party organizations. Defense of patronage went against popular opinion but, given the kind of party pluralists desired, it made eminent sense. Patronage formed the basis for strong party organizations without bringing along unwanted ideological baggage. Because patronage depended upon the capture of political office, patronage organizations were likely to be flexible and pragmatic in their pursuit of those offices. Ideological purity was a luxury they could not afford. The professional viewed politics in terms of local (or self) interests, not in terms of national causes. He (few women were professionals) was closely tied to the multiplicity of local organizations so valued by the pluralists. The amateur,
on the other hand, tended to be a cosmopolitan intellectual active in politics for ideological reasons. His loyalty was to issues, not to the party. Valuing ideological purity over victory, the amateur was likely to ignore the pragmatic advice of professional colleagues and lead the party to disastrous defeats such as Goldwater's debacle in 1964. Those attracted to politics for ideological reasons were well to do and well educated; the politics of amateurism was not representative of the general public.8

Given the pluralist approach to American parties described above, criticism of party reform is quite understandable. Critics argue that reform of the presidential nominating system has disenfranchised party professionals and restructured the party system to benefit amateur activists. This has undermined the ability of our parties to perform their essential functions. In fact, critics claim, we have ended up with a system which combines the faults of both the antiparty and the responsible party positions.

Like the system favored by antiparty reformers, our current system is unable to form effective coalitions out of the diverse elements of the American polity. The presidential nominating process was one of the few places where local parties and interests were required to unite around a common cause (or at least a common candidate). Presidential candidates were forced to put together broad based coalitions to gain the nomination and, in the process, forged valuable ties to elected officials and organized interests. The new nominating system allows candidates to bypass local parties

8 I take the distinction between amateurs and professionals from James Q. Wilson's The Amateur Democrat but the argument is a common one. The early editions of Polsby and Wildavsky's Presidential Elections use the terms "purist" and "politician" in place of Wilson's "amateur" and "professional" but the argument is basically the same. More generally, defense of self interested party organizations against their reform minded competitors can be found in almost all versions of pluralism.
while it puts a premium on personal, media oriented campaign organizations. Thus candidates form personal factions rather than broad based coalitions. This may get them the nomination— even the presidency— but, it is argued, it does not prepare them to govern. Nelson Polsby uses the Carter presidency as his prime example of this phenomena. The reformed nominating system allowed Carter to run an outsider's campaign which ignored (or insulted) local parties and elected officials. Carter, Polsby argues, continued to apply the lessons of the campaign after his election. Yet given the fragmented nature of power in the American system of government, such inattention to one's potential allies was bound to lead to the failure of Carter's initiatives.  

Like a responsible party system, critics claim, our new nominating system places too much emphasis on simple electoral choices and on ideology. Reform critics point out the imperfections of the primary as a method for nominating presidential candidates. Like a general election between responsible parties, a primary is able to convey only a limited quantity of information. In complex choice situations, it may turn out that the plurality winner in a multicandidate field would prove less acceptable to the majority of the electorate than would a rival candidate. The intensity of preferences is not taken into account. Nor, in a primary situation, is the specialized knowledge of political elites utilized; peer review by those who know the candidate best does not take place. Whatever its other faults, the old style convention was able to take these factors into account in its deliberations. In addition, it is pointed out, the primary electorate is small and not representative of the general public. Well educated, well to do citizens are over-represented. Their preference for ideology over victory can lead to the nomination of a candidate far from the moderate dispositions of the American public. If both parties

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9 See Nelson Polsby, The Consequences Of Party Reform, Chapter 3— "The Consequences for Governing: The Conduct of the Presidency".
succumb, we may end up with the responsible party model's choice between competing extremisms (without the advantages of party discipline and, hence, the responsibility associated with that model).

What has led to this sorry point? Anti-reform critics realize that party reforms are not the only cause of shifts in political intermediation. Higher levels of education were bound to bring more amateur issue activism. Changes in campaign technology and the increasingly central role of the electronic media allowed candidates to bypass the local party in their appeals to voters. Local party organizations have suffered from a long process of decline; even prior to the much criticized reforms, amateur Goldwater activists were able to gain control of their party. Nonetheless, critics continue to stress the role of party reform. Reform, they argue, significantly accelerated trends towards the dominance of amateur activism. Equally important, party reforms were the product of conscious manipulation. While little can be done about broad demographic and technological changes, party reforms may be revised, or even reversed.

How has reform undermined our party system? Many factors are cited but the following four are of central importance.

1. The proliferation of primaries. Reacting to the McGovern-Fraser Commission's complex set of rules governing caucuses and conventions, many states decided that the simplest course of action would be to switch to a primary. As Democratic state legislatures made this choice, their decisions often affected the Republicans as well. The number of primaries increased sharply in both parties. Critics argue that primaries bypass local parties and lead to a media and candidate dominated nominating system. The primary electorate is held to be unrepresentative of the general public,
skewed toward the well to do, the well educated, and the ideologically extreme.

2. **Limitation of delegate selection to the election year.** This is held to promote dominance by candidate enthusiasts that might be prevented if decisions were made earlier, before they were mobilized.

3. **National party dictation of nominating rules.** This diminishes the role of the state parties and prevents them from adopting procedures best suited to local needs, especially to the needs of local parties.

4. **Quotas—**Regulations governing the composition of convention delegations along racial, gender, and age lines are held to be artificial limitations of representation which hinder participation by party regulars.

**The Robertson Campaign as a Test Case**

What can the Robertson campaign tell us about the validity of the pluralist critique of party reform? How did the factors mentioned above affect the fortunes of Robertson's amateur activists? As quotas are not a factor in the Republican nominating process I will ignore them here. Factors 1-3 were crucial to the fortunes of the Robertson campaign in 1988. However, their impact was precisely the opposite of what reform critics would predict. Republican party regulars were better served by primaries than by caucuses. Republican state parties did not face strict national regulation of their nominating procedures; if they so desired they were allowed to start their delegate selection process well before the year of the election. I will argue that party regulars would have been better off if they had been forced to operate under the restrictions their Democratic counterparts faced. To demonstrate these points, a review of Robertson's campaign is in order.
The review which follows is divided into three sections. Section 1 examines data on Robertson and Bush supporters to help determine the extent to which they fit the respective categories of "amateur" and "professional". Section 2 looks at the location of Robertson's successes and failures, with particular attention to differential success rates between caucuses and primaries. Section 3 describes the resources available to Robertson's campaign.

1. Amateurs and Professionals?

"Who are these people? Where were they four or eight years ago when we needed them? Why are they all of a sudden coming out of the woodwork?" (Kaytee Davis—An Iowa GOP County Chairman)

Ms. Davis was responding to the Robertson campaign's surprising strength in the state of Iowa but her questions were echoed by party members throughout the country. The fact that county chairmen such as Ms. Davis were unfamiliar with Robertson's supporters strongly suggests that these people were not party regulars. Press accounts painted a similar picture. They depicted raging battles between Robertson's newly mobilized "invisible army" and state party establishments loyal to George Bush.

The evidence that exists on Robertson and Bush activists supports such a view on most counts. Amateurs and professionals are generally held to be distinctly different in three areas: party service and loyalty, ideological extremism, and demographic characteristics. Differences in the first two of these areas fall along expected lines. Demographic differences do not but, it will be argued, this need not invalidate a characterization of Robertson and Bush activists as, respectively, amateurs and professionals. The data which follows is drawn from a number of sources: John

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McGlennon's study of delegates to the 1988 GOP state nominating convention in Virginia, a similar study of delegates to the Michigan state convention conducted by Corwin Smidt and James Penning, the work of James Guth and John Green on contributors to Republican candidate PACs, and my own interviews with Bush and Robertson activists.  

Party Service and Loyalty

As table 1 indicates, Bush and Robertson delegates differ greatly in terms of party service and party loyalty. Clearly, the Bush delegates have more experience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 - Bush vs. Robertson State Convention Delegates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Party Service</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active in Party less than 5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Comm. Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elected local official</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apptd. govt. office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active in 1980 Pres. Election</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity in local election campaigns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very active-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately active-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all active</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The data in table 1 is drawn from the McGlennon and the Penning and Smidt papers. On the last question (party switching) it is important to note that Robertson supporters were not only more likely to have switched parties, they were also much more likely to have made that switch recently.
in and more loyalty to the GOP than do their counterparts in the Robertson campaign. My interviews led me to a similar conclusion. In both Michigan and Virginia, the dividing line between the state party hierarchy and the Bush campaign was often unclear. Bush's supporters complained that the Robertsonites were upstarts who wanted influence within the party without putting in their dues. In addition, it was claimed that Robertson's followers made excessive demands on candidates with little concern for the ways in which this would affect their chances in the general election. Robertson's supporters, on the other hand, portrayed the party as a closed club in which they were not welcome. Party officials were castigated for caring more about maintaining their positions than about fighting for conservative principles.

| Table 2-Bush vs. Robertson State Convention Delegates |
|-------------------------------------------|--------|--------|
| Virginia                                  |         |        |
| Always support the party                  | 79%     | 39%    |
| Only candidates, issues I like             | 21%     | 61%    |
| Michigan                                  |         |        |
| Would stop working for the party if I     |         |        |
| disagreed with it on a major issue        | 19.3%   | 80.3%  |
| Broad electoral appeal more important to  |         |        |
| party than taking stands I agree with     | 80.7%   | 19.7%  |

B. Ideology

All three studies find Robertson activists to be more conservative than Bush activists. It is often argued that while Robertson's supporters are conservative on social issues, they are more liberal (or populist) on economic issues. These studies
provide only limited support for such a view. Robertson's supporters are fairly similar to Bush's in their economic views and these views are none too liberal. On "moral" issues and foreign policy all three studies find Robertson's supporters to be distinctly more conservative.

As striking as differences in issue positions are differences in issue salience. In marked contrast to the priorities of Bush supporters, Robertsonites focus on moral issues, particularly on the issue of abortion. Robertson's campaign built upon previous anti-abortion campaigns, a fact reflected in McGlennon's finding that 62% of Virginia Robertson delegates belonged to an anti-abortion group. Thus Robertsonites are most motivated in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3- Ideology</th>
<th>Bush Del.</th>
<th>Rbtsn Del.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self Identification (Michigan)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely lib./lib</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly lib./Mid of the Road/Slightly Con.</td>
<td>50.7%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conserv./Extmly.Cons.</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
<td>95.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Virginia)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely Con.</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly Con.</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle of Road</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly Lib.</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Abortion Amendment (VA)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favor</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppose</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue Salience (VA)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most Important Issue</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abortion</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain Defense $</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balanced Budget Ammdt.</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contra Aid</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Prayer Ammdt.</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12 McGlennon makes much of Robertson delegates' higher levels of support for tariffs and farm aid as indications of economic liberalism on their part. However, differences between Bush and Robertson supporters are not large. Nor is it clear that these questions are suited to accurately capture distinctions between economic liberalism and conservatism. The other two studies, which include a broader array of questions, find Robertson activists to be somewhat more conservative than Bush activists on economic issues.
precisely those areas where their differences with Bush supporters, and the American public, are the greatest.

C. Demographic Characteristics

The demographic characteristics of the Robertsonites do not fit depictions of the well to do, well educated amateur activist. All three studies find Robertson supporters to be poorer, younger, and less well educated than their counterparts in the Bush campaign. It is the Bush delegates who are more elite and further from the characteristics of the general public. This failure to match the characteristics predicted for amateurs is likely due to the fact that most descriptions of amateurs and professionals are drawn from the experience of the Democrats. Republican party regulars are a much more elite group than their Democratic counterparts; it is unrealistic to expect that ideological outsiders would be of even higher status.

Robertson's activists truly distinctive in one area, however, that of religious beliefs. Robertson's supporters are far more likely to be charismatics, to attend church regularly, to identify themselves as born-again, and to claim that religion is very important in their lives. In Michigan, for example, 89% of Robertson's delegates attended church every week or more often (Bush 37%) and 57% called themselves charismatics (Bush 3%). In Virginia, 97% of Robertson's delegates described themselves as "born again" Christians (Bush 33%); 75% claimed they were "very religious" (Bush 27%).

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13 Even the Robertson delegates are a fairly elite group. In Virginia, for example, 59% are college graduates and 30% make over $50,000 dollars a year. The comparable figures for Bush delegates are 66% and 60% respectively.
While income and education of Robertson supporters may be closer to those of the general public than those of Bush supporters, their religious beliefs are less representative. In any case, demographics are not central to the argument of reform critics. It is the amateur's ideology and disregard for the party which threaten to undermine the functioning of pluralist democracy. On these counts it is fair to portray the Robertson campaign as an amateur challenge to party professionals supporting the candidacy of George Bush.

2. Where was Robertson successful?

This question is crucial to an understanding of Robertson's impact and, fortunately, the answer is quite simple. As table 4 illustrates, Robertson was successful in caucuses. Not included in table 4 are strong Robertson showings in the caucus states of Nevada and Michigan. In Nevada, Robertson lost the straw vote in the first round caucus meetings but won a majority of the delegates in the final round. (Robertson delegates were instructed to vote "uncommitted" in the first round in order to hide their true strength.) In Michigan, an accurate count of first round caucus results is not available but informal estimates gave Robertson roughly 40% of total support at this level, putting him about even with George Bush. In contrast to his strength in caucus states, Robertson averaged only 9% of the vote in primary states.
In no primary state did Robertson even come close to winning. Oklahoma was his strongest primary state, yet he pulled only 21.1% of the vote and finished a distant third behind George Bush and Robert Dole.\(^{14}\)

Caucus/primary differences far outweigh regional impacts on Robertson's success. He did tend to run more strongly in southern primaries than northern ones. Still, Robertson ran roughly twice as well in Iowa and Minnesota caucuses as he did in the "bible belt" primaries of Mississippi and Alabama.

Another voting trend is evident. Robertson was less successful as time went on. All of his caucus victories came on or before Super Tuesday. Robertson exceede 10% of the vote in 14 primaries on or before March 8, but in no primaries thereafter. After Super Tuesday, he had exhausted his funds and the nomination of George Bush was a foregone conclusion. Robertson's poor showing, therefore, was not surprising. Also important is the fact that after March 8 the battle shifted to northeastern and midwestern states where one would not expect Robertson to run strongly.

A more difficult question concerns the impact of Robertson's famous misstatements. His claims concerning Cuban missiles and Bush's involvement in the Swaggart affair came shortly after his stunning second place finish in Iowa. They could not have helped his cause. The press focused on these claims in a way that

\(^{14}\) All figures on caucus and primary results in this section are from "1988 Republican Primary Results," and "1988 Republican First-Round Caucus Results," Congressional Quarterly, Vol. 46, No. 33, Aug. 13, 1988, pp. 2254 and 2255. Information on delegates won by Robertson (table 2) is calculated from an Aug. 12, 1988 Americans For Robertson press release. Aligned delegates—those pledged by law to other candidates but in actuality Robertson supporters—are not included in Robertson's delegate totals. States with a nonbinding primary and a caucus are included as caucus states.
reinforced existing doubts about Robertson's character. How would he have fared without these mistakes? It is difficult to tell but two points should be kept in mind. First, Robertson's negative ratings in the polls were quite high prior to his misstatements. Second, the difference between primaries and caucuses remained crucial. Whatever damage Robertson did to his chances in Super Tuesday primaries, did not carry over into the lone Super Tuesday caucus (Washington state), which he won easily. Conversely, the fact that Robertson did well in early caucuses should not lead to the conclusion that he would have won Super Tuesday primaries if only he had watched his mouth.

3. Resources

What resources allowed Robertson to run as well as he did? What kept him from going further? To understand Robertson's campaign a quick look at the Christian Broadcasting Network is necessary. By 1987, CBN's annual budget exceeded 200 million dollars. CBN's main religious program, the 700 club, was seen by an estimated 7.2 million households in an average week. Pat Robertson was its host.

When Robertson formally announced his candidacy, he left the 700 club and resigned from the Baptist ministry. Nonetheless, his religious background remained central to his campaign strategy.

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15 David Edwin Harrell, Jr., Pat Robertson, p. 73.

16 Jefferey Hadden and Anson Shupe, Televangelism, p. 155.
The millions of CBN viewers provided an invaluable base of financial and political support. Television ministries have quite a bit in common with contemporary political campaigns. The media and fundraising skills developed at CBN were easily transferable to Robertson's quest for the presidency. Used to raising over 200 million dollars a year, Robertson was well prepared for the fundraising challenges of a presidential campaign. He managed to qualify for more federal matching funds than any other Republican candidate and spent over 21 million dollars in pursuit of the nomination.

Robertson could count on organizational help from a number of conservative Christian churches. Churches can be powerful molders of political belief and provide useful preexisting social networks for campaigns to tap into. Local church networks were central components of Robertson's campaign organization. This point was repeatedly stressed in my interviews with campaign staffers.

17 There is one sense in which Robertson's experience at CBN could have been a handicap. Used to an adoring audience which shared his beliefs, Robertson may have been unprepared for the caution he would have to exercise in his dealings with the national news media. Several sources in the Robertson campaign told me that this might help explain his famous "misstatements".


19 By no means, however, should it be assumed that Robertson had monolithic—or even majority-support from conservative Protestant churches.

Church support was bolstered by the Freedom Council. Closely tied to CBN, the Freedom Council had been working with local churches since the early 1980s to promote a wide variety of causes. It provided useful groundwork to prepare the way for Robertson's candidacy. Indeed it got into trouble for being too useful. Charges that its efforts to involve "Christians" in the Michigan caucuses were in fact a promotion of Robertson—and thus a violation of the organization's tax status—led to the Freedom Council's disbandment.

Local organization, money, media skills, and an extremely loyal core of supporters were a powerful combination. They proved effective in a number of caucus states, partly because overall caucus turnout was extremely low. In the four states Robertson won, combined attendance at first round caucus meetings was under 30,000—this in states with a total population well in excess of 6 million. In contrast the New Hampshire primary alone drew over 150,000 voters. While the Robertson campaign was well organized to get its motivated followers through the complications of the caucus process, it had greater difficulty reaching beyond that core to succeed in a primary.

Why? To put it simply, Robertson was not very popular. His following was intense but small. Worse, many of those who did not support him had very negative feelings toward him. A Washington Post-ABC News poll taken prior to the campaign was indicative of the public's view of Robertson. Only 6% of Republicans said that they would vote for him. 28% claimed that they would "definitely not consider" voting for Robertson, a negative rating far higher than that of any other candidate. (Only 5% would not consider

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21 Ibid.—"1988 Republican Primary Results," and "1988 Republican First-Round Caucus Results".
voting for Bush.) Nor were those more active in Republican politics willing to support him. James L. Guth and John C. Green surveyed contributors to PACs linked to various Republican candidates. They found that—

Many Republicans are, in fact, quite hostile to Robertson and other expressions of the Christian Right, such as the Moral Majority... Indeed, many mainstream Republicans claim that they could not accept Robertson on the ticket under any circumstances... Clearly Robertson is a divisive force in the GOP, having yet to attract significant support beyond his own special constituency.

Overcoming negative impressions was a difficult task. Televangelists, especially after the scandals of the last few years, have a very poor reputation with the American public. Robertson, therefore, tried to portray himself as a "Christian businessman". Yet such attempts at image control faced serious obstacles. While Robertson's organization was well equipped to identify and mobilize a small core constituency, it could not control what networks and newspapers had to say about him. Robertson's image was defined, for the most part, in the extensive media coverage he received. Much of this coverage was unfavorable but equally important was the fact that he had little control over it. Robertson's attempts to redefine his image and move beyond his religious constituency met with little success. Clyde Wilcox, using data from the NES Super Tuesday survey, found support for Robertson confined to a very narrow base of pentecostal Christians.

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Reform Reexamined: Lessons from the Robertson Campaign

The Robertson campaign did not turn out as reform critics would have predicted. To see what went wrong let us turn first to the issue of primaries. Ideological outsiders averse to compromise, Robertson's backers are the sort of "amateur" activists the reform critics worry about. Yet it is the primary which is the system's bulwark against them. However skewed the primary electorate may be, it is far larger and more representative than the caucus electorate. In a primary setting, the dedication and organization of Robertson's supporters could not overcome the problem of limited overall levels of support. Is Robertson's relatively greater success in caucuses a fluke attributable to the unique nature of his candidacy? Probably not. Jesse Jackson showed on the Democratic side that the caucus is no refuge for party regulars.

What does this anomaly tell us about anti-reform arguments? One thing it reveals is a deep ambivalence concerning the caucus. The proliferation of primaries replaced caucuses (such as those which selected Hubert Humphrey in 1968) which really were controlled by party regulars. A tacit assumption in much of the anti-reform argument seems to be that this is still the case—that caucuses are a realm of party regular dominance. Yet Republican caucuses proved quite permeable to Goldwater activists in 1964 and the McGovern/Fraser commission opened up Democratic caucuses starting in 1972. Many caucuses have, in effect become mini-

25 See John G. Geer, "Assessing the Representativeness of Electorates in Presidential Primaries," American Journal of Political Science, Vol. 32, No. 4, pp. 929-945. He argues that claims concerning the unrepresentative nature of presidential primaries are greatly overstated. Comparing primary electorates to the parties' potential supporters in the general election, Geer finds only minor differences in education, income, and ideology. The differences he does find run in the opposite direction from what reform critics would predict. The exit poll data he analyzes suggests that primary electorates are more moderate than potential supporters in the general elections.
primaries marked only by their lower turnout. Anti-reform theorists are not unaware of this but they continue to aim their fire at the proliferation of primaries.

This position is rooted in a desire to make the caucus back into a party controlled and party building institution, free of some of its past abuses. (Most notably, racism.) Nelson Polsby puts the argument this way:

> Interest groups at the local and state level ought to be given incentives for involving themselves in alliances with local and state parties. State and local parties can be greatly strengthened in their state and local political efforts by such alliances, and these alliances can be further facilitated by the assurance that state and local parties—not deals directly with presidential candidates—will form the basis for participation in the presidential nominating process. 26

This sounds good—make state and local parties the vehicles for participation in the nominating process and interest groups will have to make alliances with them. Many would like to see state parties reinvigorated. Instead of being bypassed by a primary selection process, the state and local parties would again be key players.

The experience of the Robertson campaign, however, suggests serious difficulties for such a plan. Put simply, state and local parties may be overwhelmed rather than strengthened. The forces unleashed in a presidential campaign may prove to be more than state parties can handle. This was certainly the case in Michigan. Getting a jump on Iowa and New Hampshire, the state GOP set up a complex caucus system which began in August of 1986. The system seemed well designed to maximize the state party's control; the early start was thought to offer relief from the election year enthusiasm of candidate activists. (Note that the reform critics

26 Polsby, *Consequences of Party Reform*, p. 185.
make similar arguments. They oppose reforms that require that delegate selection take place only during the election year. Early selection, they believe, will help party professionals.) The expectation in Michigan was that party regulars would control the process for George Bush.

Bush did eventually win but in the process the state GOP was badly battered. Robertson's strong first round showing put Bush's victory in doubt. For 17 months Kemp, Robertson, and Bush supporters battled each other in elections, caucuses, and in court. When the state convention met at last to select delegates, Robertson's supporters boycotted it and staged their own rump convention. Political consultant Eddie Mahe summed up the feelings of state party members: "Any time you put such collective stupidity on display it is bound to have a negative effect on the party." 27

The Republicans are particularly subject to attempts to take over state parties. Unlike the Democrats, the Republicans have little national regulation of their delegate selection process. State parties, therefore, become more important as arbiters of the rules. Control of the state party becomes a valuable asset in the struggle between competing presidential factions. In Michigan, Robertson's supporters used control of the state party to rule 1,200 elected officials (mostly Bush supporters) ineligible to participate in the state convention. Bush supporters used their control of local party organizations to redraw district boundaries in ways that favored the Vice President. 28


Michigan was not an exception. In state after state, Robertson supporters claimed Bush's allies in the state parties were manipulating the rules in order to exclude them. In North Carolina and Georgia this led to festering conflict and even fistfights. The bitter Georgia dispute was not resolved until the national convention in New Orleans. While manipulation of the rules by Bush supporters may have succeeded in the short run, it led Robertson supporters to conclude that their only option was to seize control of state parties for themselves. And, in a number of states, they succeeded. Even where they failed, the process did little to strengthen party regulars or build the parties themselves. As battles raged between the various candidate factions, little attention was paid to the ongoing functions and interests of the state parties.

While analysis of one case—Robertson's 1988 campaign—can not confirm or refute an entire analysis of party reform, the case does provide some interesting perspectives on its validity. Let us summarize the lessons one should learn from this case:

1. Primaries may not be the leading promoters of candidate and issue enthusiasts over party regulars.

2. Party regular control of caucuses can not be assumed.

3. Attempts to reinvigorate state and local parties by channelling the nominating process through them may have unintended consequences. These parties may be overwhelmed rather than strengthened.

As we have seen, the Robertson case does not fit well with arguments of reform critics. Caucuses, early selection of delegates, and state rulemaking authority did make state parties more important players in the presidential nominating process. Yet party regulars still proved unable to control that process. Indeed the return to local influence appears to have been to the benefit of "amateur" candidates and issue activists. What went wrong?
For the strategy of reform critics to succeed, it is necessary not simply for power to be returned to local arenas but for party regulars to still have the strength to control those arenas. Yet local party organizations have undergone a long process of decline. New technologies have allowed candidates to appeal directly to voters, undermining the need for the services parties provide. Direct mail, radio and television appeals, sophisticated polling operations, all overseen by professional campaign consultants, have come to replace grassroots local party organizations. As officeholders in Congress and the state legislatures gained resources to protect their incumbent status, the patronage resources available to local parties were steadily eroding. Candidates grew stronger as the parties grew weaker. 29

This happened at the presidential level as well. Howard Reiter does an excellent job of documenting the growth of candidate independence from local parties in the presidential nominating process. 30 He argues that "the nominating process has evolved since the early 1950s gradually into one in which state and local party leaders can no longer control nominations, and this is due to the long term decline of party organization in the United States." 31 Reiter looks at a variety of indicators: multi-ballot conventions, uncommitted delegates, favorite son candidacies, control of delegates by state officials and local party leaders, the demography of delegates. He finds that major changes have occurred in the last 30 to 40 years but sees the process as long term and gradual; little support is found for the argument that party reform

29 See Alan Ware, The Breakdown of Democratic Party Organization 1940–1980 for an excellent description of these processes on the Democratic side.


31 Reiter, p. 14.
was crucial to these changes. If the cause of change was not reform, reversal of reform is unlikely to restore the influence of local party leaders that pluralist critics desire.

In recent years, scholars have pointed to a number of developments as evidence that life and vigor have returned to our party organizations. While their arguments are sound, they do not negate the case made here. The major focus of these studies is on the growth of national party structures. Cotter, Gibson, et al. do see greater strength in state party organizations. However, when inflation is accounted for, these gains are modest. Moreover, renewed party strength at the national and state levels is quite different in form from the locally based parties celebrated in pluralist theory. Contemporary national and state parties can provide sophisticated technical assistance and expert advice to party candidates. They are not, however, well suited to control the outcome of caucuses or to pack local party meetings in the face of insurgent challenges.

The Unintended Consequences of Counter-Reform

In the tradition of Edmund Burke, reform critics are fond of pointing out the unintended, deleterious consequences of human
attempts at social engineering. Unpleasant consequences are in store for those who would attempt to reform as complex an organism as the American party system. My argument is similar in style, if not in content. I argue that if reform critics got the rules changes they desired (more caucuses, less national regulation of party rules, earlier selection of delegates), the results would not be to their liking. In a changed environment, rules which used to work to the benefit of party regulars can have very different effects. Placing undue emphasis on the role of reform, critics underestimate the role of other factors which have altered the party environment.

Arguments against reform are strongly tied to the environment of the 1960s and early 1970s. Reform critics are generally Democrats (or ex-Democrats) reacting against the influx of black, feminist, and antiwar activists into the party that took place in that period. Reform, the critics argue, was the wedge which allowed these activists to displace party regulars, leading to the disastrous McGovern nomination of 1972 and a variety of ills which have persisted ever since. Yet should such a period of activism return, the reforms which critics denounce may help protect party regulars. The Robertson experience indicates that in today's political environment an active ideological minority will have an easier time capturing control of caucuses than they will winning over primary electorates. Faced with a new surge of activism, Democratic party regulars at the state level may be quite happy that their party's rules help isolate them from the ideological passions mobilized in presidential campaigns. Indeed, state and

35 While future insurgent movements may lack some of the monetary and organizational resources the Robertson campaign possessed, they may, like the movements of the 1960s, have a broader base of enthusiastic supporters to draw upon. They therefore could mount an even stronger challenge to party establishments.
local parties' best strategy may be to utilize a nominating process which insulates them from such passions.

Several state Republican parties have, in fact, decided upon such a strategy. My dissertation research has focused on three states: Michigan, Washington, and Virginia. Each of these states utilized a caucus in 1988. Reacting to the experiences of that year, each state has since returned to a primary system. In Michigan, disgust with the fiasco of 1986-1988 was so complete that there few publicly opposed such a change. In Washington State, a primary was adopted through the initiative process. State party leaders opposed the initiative but it was strongly supported by moderate Republicans, many of whom were extremely upset over Robertson's Washington victory in 1988. In Virginia, the move to a primary was tied to the 1989 gubernatorial race. Supporters of candidates Stan Parris and Paul Trible, thought to have better prospects in a primary, prevailed over the supporters of Marshall Coleman, who favored a caucus. While this change was not directly a reaction to events in the presidential nominating system, it is interesting to note that it was the candidate who had the strongest backing from the Christian Right (Coleman) who thought that a caucus would be to his advantage.

Against this trend toward primaries, there existed in each state advocates of the caucus and of closer links between the state party and the presidential nominating process. However, they were not the people reform critics would lead us to expect. I found

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36 That the three states I had previously decided to study all returned to a primary system is something of a coincidence but as I argue here this move did make sense as a response to the strong Robertson showings in these states.

37 Despite this setback, Coleman managed to win the primary before going down to eventual defeat to Democrat Douglas Wilder.
little evidence that moderate party professionals, those most interested in winning elections, were pushing the caucus option. The pattern I observed was that the caucus was favored by the more conservative elements in each state party. Many were in favor of the caucus because it would bring in new workers at the grassroots level. While most of those activated by candidate enthusiasm were likely to fade away after the nomination battle was over, it was argued that enough would remain to significantly strengthen the local party workforce. Those brought into the party, however, were not moderate professionals interested in politics as a way of gaining the spoils of victory. Instead, the process tended to mobilize activists with strong ideological beliefs and to strengthen the conservative wing of the party.

Nelson Polsby's hopes for stronger alliances between interest groups and state and local parties (see p. 22) also failed to materialize. Making state and local parties an integral part of the presidential nominating process means involving them in divisive battles among the ideological and candidate factions active in that process. Many group leaders prefer to avoid such controversy; the potential for making enemies is simply too high. Bypassing the party and giving directly to candidates becomes a more attractive option. My interviews tended to support such an interpretation. A number of state party officials expressed concern that divisive party battles were scaring away business support. I do not have data on business donations to the three state parties, therefore definitive conclusions on this matter can not be drawn.38 Again, 

38 See Earl Mollander, "Seduced and Abandoned: Business and the Republican Party at the State Level" (A paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, DC September 4, 1988). He provides an interesting analysis of relations between business and the Republican party in the state of Oregon. Conflict between the Christian Right and party regulars led business to withdraw its support from the party, leading it to the point of bankruptcy. Business simply bypassed the party and dealt directly with candidates. As Oregon is not a caucus state, this does not fit my argument exactly, but it does
however, we see reason to doubt that the measures called for by pluralist critics of reform will lead to the outcomes they desire.\textsuperscript{39}

This is not to say that all proposals of reform critics are doomed to failure. Superdelegate rules, which guarantee seats at the convention for party and elected officials, can help bring peer review back into the nomination process and, perhaps, help reestablish linkages between the nominee and other officeholders. Various legal restrictions on the parties can be relaxed. Even the measures discussed in this essay may have the desired effect in those areas where party regulars remain strong or where their opponents are not mobilized.

As argued earlier, the party system defended by pluralist critics of reform is rooted in the figure of the party "professional" and patronage based local party organizations. The Robertson experience and a variety of other evidence indicates, however, that these "roots" are no longer healthy. Without strong, non-ideological local party organizations the pluralist vision of party democracy is unlikely to be realized. Counter-reforms which return control of the presidential nominating process to local arenas will not have the consequences pluralists desire if party regulars can no longer control those arenas.

These counter-reform measures may well be defensible on other grounds. Caucuses can provide an arena for types of democratic participation not available in a primary setting. The infusion of new activists into state party organizations could prove to be a

\textsuperscript{39} Of course, one can argue that the caucus process has encouraged alliances between the party and one set of interest groups, those of the Christian Right. However, the Christian Right does not qualify as the sort of moderate, pragmatic interest that pluralist reform critics celebrate.
key to their revitalization. Advocates of responsible parties may look favorably upon measures which bring more ideological activists into the party organizations and lead to more clear cut choices between the two parties. These, however, are not the intended consequences of counter-reform.
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