

# Presidents and Political Parties: Power in The Hands of Many Changed to The Power in The Hands of One

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## ABSTRACT

It is the aim of this paper to answer one specific question: How do presidents influence and forever alter the political parties they lead? This paper will examine the power dynamics between the American presidency and political parties throughout this nation's history. This paper will analyze how presidents in different political eras have influenced political party leadership. This paper will explore specific case studies of presidents and how they have changed their political parties. And this paper will elaborate on its primary thesis that: Before the modern presidency, presidents who wanted to expand their powers were stopped by strongly mobilized and competitive political parties; now, since the New Deal, presidents have much greater control and leadership over their political party, being the ones to advance or derail political party objectives. Conclusively, this paper finds that presidents, in general, throughout the modern era have made political parties weaker, both in terms of voter turnout and political participation, which is different to how robust and strong political parties were before the New Deal. Additionally, it is found that specific presidents have direct impacts on the political parties they represent, from the demographics of a political party base, to the fundamental policies and ideologies believed by a political party, to the rhetoric used by a political party, and even to the amount of faith voters have in the American government.

## **Introduction**

Nearly every American can recognize the President of the United States, and nearly every American belongs to a political party, but which entity would Americans say is in charge of the other? Well, even according to presidents themselves, it is hard to say who is in charge of the other. For example, on the 2016 presidential campaign trail, former President Donald Trump said this: "The biggest story in all of politics [is] the millions of people that are coming out to vote for me, in all fairness, for the Republican Party." This might have been a Freudian slip on the part of the president because he made sure to include himself before the party he is running for. That might imply that President Trump finds himself to be leader of the Republican Party, and that perhaps the Republican Party is subservient to his power. Another subtle example of how presidents view their own ability to influence the political parties they represent is when Trump's predecessor, former President Barack Obama, said this: "What I want to try to do is unify the two wings of the Democratic Party." According to President Obama himself, he has enough power and leadership over the Democratic Party to mend opposing factions of the party. So, these presidential statements and many others like them point towards a larger conversation about where political party leadership starts and where presidential power ends.

Why does this conversation matter? Well as stated before, most Americans are part of political parties, and it is important to know where our specific party's political ideas and goals are coming from, so we can be aware of the biases that could be informing those political ideas and goals. Furthermore, Americans simply deserve to know who is in charge of the political party they belong to: a singular politician in the White House, or numerous other unnamed politicians behind closed doors. Americans donate their time and money to political parties, so it is only fair for Americans to know who their money and efforts are supporting. Knowing who is in charge of the one's political party also allows American voters to be more informed about the political process, which they can leverage to vote more accurately according to their own beliefs, which hopefully align with their political party's leadership. Moreover,

it is essential to know if presidents are leading the political decisions their political parties are making, so accountability can be properly established. When accountability is properly established, the American people can more accurately understand who is to blame for their political party's woes, and who to praise for their political party's successes. Knowing who to blame and who to praise will make it easier for voters to decide who they will be voting for in the next election.

So, with this broader significance in mind, it is the aim of this paper to answer one specific question: How do presidents influence and forever alter the political parties they lead? This paper will examine the connection between the American presidency and political parties throughout this nation's history. This paper will analyze how presidents in different political eras have influenced political party leadership. This paper will explore specific case studies of presidents and how they have changed their political parties. And this paper will elaborate on its primary thesis that: Before the modern presidency, presidents who wanted to expand their powers were stopped by strongly mobilized and competitive political parties; now, since the New Deal, presidents have much greater control and leadership over their political party, being the ones to advance or derail political party objectives.

## **Background: Political Parties of Presidents Throughout American History**

Before the thesis of this paper can be further elaborated on, it is important to know which political parties presidents were associated with, so a proper timeline can be established, which this paper will refer back to later when looking at specific cases of presidents and how they influenced their political parties, as well as general trends that occurred in political parties during different eras.

Starting with our first president, George Washington (1789-1797): he was an outlier because he actually "never associated himself with any party" (Arndt, n.d.). He, in fact, warned against political parties throughout his career, but as soon as his presidency ended, political parties quickly took over the American presidency.

The first political party to take over the presidency was the Federalists with John Adams. He was the first and last Federalist to be elected president. Democratic-Republicans, the opposition party to the Federalists, would take over the White House starting with Thomas Jefferson, who was the third president, all the way to John Quincy Adams, who was the sixth president. This competition between the Federalists and the Democratic-Republicans is known to political scientists as the First Party System (1797-1824) or the first political era in American history. There "have been six different political eras in American history," also known as party systems, and each "era was a reflection of issues that confronted the country at the time" (Arndt, n.d.).

The Second Party System (1824-1854) refers to the competition between the Democratic party, which was created after the Democratic-Republican party dissolved due to infighting, and the opposition party, the Whigs. The biggest issues during this time were national expansion westward and the Mexican-American War. Andrew Jackson, the seventh president, started the Democratic party, and was followed by Martin Van Buren of the same party. The Whigs then mostly held control of the White House from William Henry Harrison (the ninth president) to Millard Fillmore (the 13<sup>th</sup> president). The second political era ended when the Whig party broke apart due to disagreements on slavery, which "resulted in the creation of the abolitionist Republican party" (Arndt, n.d.).

The Third Party System (1854-1896) started the competition that we still have to this day between Republicans and Democrats. The biggest issues of this time were the Civil War and the subsequent Reconstruction. It started with the election of Republican Abraham Lincoln (the 16<sup>th</sup> president), and Republicans would continue to hold control of the presidency until Benjamin Harrison (the 23<sup>rd</sup> president).

The election of William McKinley (the 25<sup>th</sup> president) ushered in the Fourth Party System (1896-1932) and this political era was yet again dominated by Republican presidents, except for Woodrow Wilson (the 28<sup>th</sup> president). The biggest issues during this time were immigrant, U.S. involvement in world affairs, and women's suffrage. This political era ended with the presidency of Herbert Hoover ended (the 31<sup>st</sup> president).

The Great Depression would be the catalyst for the establishment of the Fifth Party System (1932-1969), which was actually dominated by Democrat presidents for the first time. The Great Depression would also be catalyst

for the change of power dynamics between presidents and political parties, which is integral to this paper's thesis and will be discussed in great detail in the next section. The political era started with the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt (the 32<sup>nd</sup> president) and would not end until after Lyndon B. Johnson (the 36<sup>th</sup> president) left office. The biggest issues during this time were the Second World War and the rise of the United States as a global superpower.

That leaves us with the last political era, the Sixth Party System (1969-present), which is hotly debated, but arguably started with the election of Richard Nixon (the 37<sup>th</sup> president). This political era has been characterized by the change of voting patterns in different regions of the United States. The previously "solid Republican areas in the North...started voting Democrat" (Arndt, n.d.) and the previously Democrat-dominated Southern states transitioned into aligning with Republicans. Divisions between Republicans and Democrats started becoming deeply rooted and party polarization, which is the ideological distance between the two parties on policy issues, has steadily increased during this political era. No party has dominated the Sixth Party System and both parties have switched control of the White House consistently.

The description of these six political eras is important to this paper, which examines how American presidents have influenced political parties, because it sets the stage for the discussion of how the power dynamics between presidents and political parties have changed over time.

## **The Power Dynamics Between Presidents and Political Parties Throughout History**

As mentioned before, the Great Depression is the general era when the power shifts in the relationship between presidents and political parties, but why did this event cause the shift? Well, the Great Depression was the "worst economic crisis in modern [American] history" with "unemployment topp[ing] 20 percent," so President Franklin D. Roosevelt "tried to stimulate the economy with a range of incentives including...New Deal programs" (History, 2023). So, the New Deal is the specific point where power shifts in the relationship between presidents and political parties, but in which way does the power shift?

Well, according to researchers, "[w]ith the consolidation of executive power during the 1930 and 1940," thanks to the New Deal, "the president, rather than Congress or the party organizations, became the leading instrument of popular rule" (Milkis & Rhodes, 2007, p. 461). This finding is important to this paper, which focuses on how presidents change political parties, because it indicates a time in history where presidents became significantly more powerful, both in terms of executive scope and capacity, as well as influence on political party objectives and trajectory. Furthermore, prior to the New Deal, presidents that attempted to expand their executive powers "were thwarted...by the tenacity of [a] highly mobilized, highly competitive, and locally oriented democracy" (Milkis & Rhodes, 2007, p. 461). This finding is important to this paper because it indicates that political parties had their power originate from small scale grassroots groups all over the country, and not from the president, before the New Deal. In short, the Great Depression and the New Deal "signal[s] the end of an older institutional order based on grassroots mobilization and decentralized political control and the beginning of a permanent ascendance of national...executive administration" (Milkis & Rhodes, 2007, p. 461). That national executive administration being the president of the United States and the new system that replaces that older institutional order revolves around presidential influence on the agenda of political parties. Simply put, before the New Deal, political parties were in charge of presidents, and after the New Deal, presidents are in charge of political parties.

The New Deal is considered "the rise of the modern presidency" and with the modern presidency has come, some researchers believe, the "decline of parties," which is characterized by "chronically low public engagement and voter turnout" (Milkis & Rhodes, 2007, p. 461). It is known that the United States trails behind other developed democracies in terms of voter turnout and overall engagement with politics. Specifically, "[t]urnout in the United States is below average among members of...mostly high-income countries" and researchers are "raising worries over the health of the country's democracy" (Nishizawa, 2022). Without robust participation by voting members of this

nation's democracy, the government will be unrepresentative, which leads to "policy decisions [not being made] in the majority's best interest" (Hubdailer, n.d.). The government's legitimacy will be lowered as well, which makes it harder for elected officials to "implement policy changes and govern effectively" (Hubdailer, n.d.). So, does this low voter turnout and low political engagement have anything to do with presidents taking control over political parties since Franklin D. Roosevelt? Well, that question could be answered by how the modern presidency has changed the American people's perceptions of politics, as well as how elections are run.

As mentioned before, prior to the New Deal, everyday Americans were part of heavily involved political parties that operated on a local level. This emphasis on locality ensured that people had a vested interest in being involved in politics, as specific policies were at the center of debate, and these issues would have a measurable, noticeable impact on one's life. This is due to the fact that local politics will always have a more immediate and direct connection to one's life, as opposed to national politics, which can take years to see the effects of and usually indirectly affect one's life. Elections were about choosing the preferable policies candidates represented and believed in.

This all changed with the New Deal and the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Elections and politics were now about picking the preferable person, rather than focusing on the preferable policies. With the "intensification of candidate-centered (rather than party-based) campaigning" in the era of the modern presidency, it is clear that political parties have become less important than the presidents, themselves (Milkis & Rhodes, 2007, p. 461). This emphasis on candidates has been heightened by the "advent of televised politics and the importance of primaries" (Arnold, 1994, 1000). Televised politics have a focus on presidential debates and sensational stories when campaigning is occurring, which is essentially a battle between two personalities, rather than party policies. Voters are now more focused on the individual representing the political party than the political party behind the candidate. And since voters prioritize choosing a specific personality for president over selecting a candidate that will follow out specific party policies as well as objectives, it is safe to say modern presidents have made political parties less important, at least in presidential elections.

Additionally, primaries circumvent political party leadership by allowing voters to directly nominate a presidential candidate, which then will run in the general election. Before the New Deal and the modern presidency, it was political party elites that "selected nominees for the highest office in the land" in nation-wide party conventions known as caucuses (Skelley, 2016). Voters were not the ones to select the presidential nominee; it would instead be legislators and political elites that performed "behind-the-scenes activit[ies] that led to the final selection of a nominee" (Skelley, 2016). Caucuses began as early as the 1830s, but "[a]s time passed, more and more states began to use presidential primaries," and now there are only five states that still use caucuses today (Skelley, 2016). Since voters (who are already more inclined to pick presidents off of personal preference than off of their political party's objectives) now have a more direct way of nominating the president, political parties and political party leaders are having less and less impact on the outcome of a presidential election.

All of these factors lead to the conclusion that the way presidential elections are run in the modern era makes presidential selection more or less independent of political party leadership influence. With that independence from political party leadership comes the ability for presidents to perform more of their executive functions and powers without consequence of upsetting political elites, since it is primarily voters that will secure their reelection. Presidents are now able to circumvent and disregard political party leadership, if they so choose, because their power emanates from the American people now, as opposed to political elites, as it was before the New Deal. This reality makes presidents both independent from the influence of political party leadership and overall makes presidents stronger than political parties because political party leadership can no longer leverage their nominee selecting power to make presidents do what they want. Simply put, "presidential selection [has become] increasingly personalistic, more dependent on individual candidate organizations than upon central party decision making" (Arnold, 1994, 1000).

With the "transformation from a party-based presidency to an institutionally autonomous presidency," national politics started taking center stage while "parties seem[ed] to fade from center stage" (Arnold, 1994, pp. 999-1000). This increased emphasis on candidates and national policies instead of political parties and localized policy issues has made it harder for everyday Americans to become involved because it is harder to see its effects on one's

life, as compared to how it was before the New Deal with local-level policy issues and the vigorous mobilization of political parties. This is seen in the results of “local elections, [where] fewer than one in five citizens bother to vote” (Drutman, 2018).

As discussed previously, media is hyper focused on national stories, so “almost all of our collective attention is on...the president” (Drutman, 2018), which overshadows the importance of local and state politics as well as elections. And to further reinforce the previous findings, modern presidencies are marked by “candidates [that develop] their own independent organizations” which then rely “on television to reach voters directly” (Drutman, 2018). This cements the arguments that the presidents are both independent from the control of political parties when it comes to nominee selection as well as reelection securing, and that the advancement of technology has increased the prevalence as well as importance of presidents, while decreasing the salience of political party issues on a local level. As a result of this nationalizing of politics, the American people only care about local politics “as they relate to national politics” (Drutman, 2018).

Since all politics relates to national politics now, combined with the fact that national-level political parties are experiencing extreme rates of party polarization as mentioned before, all levels of government are becoming increasingly polarized. The more nationalized American politics becomes, the more polarized the nation becomes on all levels as “these two phenomena reinforce each other” (Drutman, 2018). This is due to the fact that politicians and candidates have an incentive to “ambitiously ride a divisive, polarizing, partisan issue” (Drutman, 2018) because those issues are the only ones voters pay attention to in modern America, due to the media focusing on those nationalized issues. Not to mention, with more polarization comes “clearer and more distinct brands” that political parties must follow, which “makes it more likely that voters [will] evaluate state and local candidates through their national affiliations” (Drutman, 2018).

It has already been established that modern presidents have made politics focused on national issues instead of localized issues and televised media has enforced that shift. Now it has been established that nationalized politics leads to higher rates of party polarization, and vice versa, in a positive feedback loop. So, that means that presidents have indirectly contributed to the increased party polarization seen in the Sixth Party System and the era of the modern presidency. Presidents have an incentive to focus on nationalized, polarizing issues because, as already described, that is all American voters focus on. But that decision has worsened the polarized state of politics in this nation. Party polarization has a very real impact on how effective a governmental body operates. Namely, it results in legislative gridlock, which is the inability to resolve issues through legislation and government action, because there is simply less room for compromise between Democrats and Republicans. Party polarization also increases the tensions between and animosity towards each party, which is never healthy for a representative democracy, because parties in power have less and less incentive to protect the rights of the opposite party since they despise each other. In summary, presidents have indirectly made political parties experience more party polarization since the New Deal.

So, to conclude this section, presidents have changed political parties, since the New Deal and since the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt, by making presidential campaigns more about the selection of an individual, rather than the selection of a political party. This change in combination with the expansion of executive administrations since the New Deal have made presidents independent of a political party’s leadership when it comes to decision-making during one’s presidency. Presidents have additionally made political party politics national issues, which is a change from how political party politics were highly localized debates about specific policies before the New Deal. Presidents have also changed political parties, since the New Deal, by making political parties weaker as evidenced by the decreased voter participation and voter turnout during non-presidential elections. Presidential elections have the highest voter turnout, and even that highest level of voter turnout is very low in comparison to how it was before the New Deal. This means that voters care most about presidential elections and do not care nearly as much about local and state elections. This is a symptom of the shift from party-based campaigning to candidate-driven elections. Candidates are simply more important than the political parties or ideas they represent. And presidential candidates are overall the most important candidates to American voters. But this shift to a cult of personality in the relationship between political parties and presidents since the New Deal has been a determinant to the political health of the United

States. With weakened political parties, due to the strengthen of presidential power since the New Deal, voters have overall become less involved in politics, which makes this nation's politics less representative to the actual concerns and needs of the American people. Additionally, presidents' actions since the New Deal have made political parties disagree more frequently and with more severity, due to the positive correlation between nationalized politics and party polarization.

## **Case Studies: How Particular Presidents Directly Changed Their Specific Political Party**

Now that the era of the modern presidency has been thoroughly explored in terms of how presidents have, in general, changed political parties, it is time to examine specific examples of how particular presidents influenced their political parties. Case studies are important to this paper because they dive a little deeper into the various ways presidents have forever changed the political parties they represent. These case studies will also serve as further evidence to support the previously discussed findings that apply to the entire era of modern presidents. But, in addition to cementing previous claims, providing chronological, specific examples of how presidents have changed political parties will allow readers to better understand how much influence modern presidents have on politics. Knowing how much power presidents have had on political parties in recent history will empower voters to recognize the ever-changing landscape of political parties and the role future presidents have in those changes, which will make voters overall more informed constituents. And the more informed Americans are about the politics affecting our nation, the easier it is to make "decisions that align correctly with [their] own personal values" (Jennings, n.d.). Meaning that if Americans can recognize the changes occurring in their political party and can accurately trace those changes back to the president, then Americans can better determine if they will support their current president in future elections. Informed voters also "recognize the importance of their vote" and understand that the "decisions [they] make at the polls have a direct effect on [their own] life and the lives of others" (Jennings, n.d.).

### **President Woodrow Wilson**

Even though Woodrow Wilson's presidency preceded the monumental New Deal that forever changed all political parties, his presidency did have lasting impacts on politics and the Democratic Party. During his presidency, Woodrow Wilson changed the Democratic Party to "assume the mantle of reform," which then cemented Republicans becoming "more conservative" by contrast (Ambar, n.d.). President Wilson did this through his "wartime mobilization program [which] became a model for the New Deal's fight against the Great Depression" (Ambar, n.d.). Woodrow Wilson's actions as president set the groundwork for the precedents Franklin D. Roosevelt set, so Wilson deserves some credit for the emergence of the modern presidency. Specifically, he transformed American foreign policy from one of "isolation to internationalism" and "his ability to...mobilize public opinion fashioned the modern presidency" (Ambar, n.d.). His ideology also transformed what the Democratic Party fundamentally believes in and operates off of. Wilson "laid the basis for the modern welfare state" which the Democratic Party still strives to achieve to this day (Ambar, n.d.).

### **President Franklin D. Roosevelt**

Franklin D. Roosevelt is a very fundamental president to this paper because the actions he took during his presidency started what we know as the modern presidency, which gave rise to all the changes to political parties previously discussed. But he also had influence on his particular political party, the Democratic Party, which resulted in everlasting changes. Aligning with what was discovered earlier, "[b]efore [Franklin D. Roosevelt] rose to national prominence in the early 1930s, the [Democratic] party represented a loose conglomeration of local and regional interests"

(FDR4freedoms, n.d., p. 1). This cements the argument that before President Roosevelt, political parties had their power concentrated in local grassroots political organizations.

The Democratic Party was loosely comprised of “farmers, as well as...ethnic populations,” but “did not adhere to a central ideology” and was “heavily influenced by religious and geographical...interests” (FDR4freedoms, n.d., p. 1). But President Roosevelt “would reconfigure” the “Democratic coalition [to] take in the majority of working people, farmers, and racial minorities” and establish a central political philosophy that the Democratic Party still follows to this day (FDR4freedoms, n.d., p. 1). Due to President Roosevelt, the demographics of the Democratic Party were cemented into what they are today: the “vast majority of working Americans, the labor movement, and overwhelming majority of African Americans and Hispanic Americans” (FDR4freedoms, n.d., p. 3). And the central political philosophy still engrained in the Democratic Party, that was established by President Roosevelt, is “that government can and must be responsible for providing all Americans some measure of social and economic security” (FDR4freedoms, n.d., p. 4).

As discussed in the first section of this paper, the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt “ended a long period of Republican dominance in national politics” (FDR4freedoms, n.d., p. 1). And after Franklin D. Roosevelt implemented his “enormously popular” New Deal programs, the “foundation of the modern Democratic Party” was further strengthened (FDR4freedoms, n.d., p. 3). Franklin D. Roosevelt’s political successes translated into longevity for the Democratic Party, with strong majorities established in Congress and Democrats taking primary control of the White House for the next three to four decades.

## President Lyndon B. Johnson

As described in the first section, Lyndon B. Johnson’s presidency marked the end of Democratic dominance in the White House and the Fifth Party System that President Roosevelt started. The end of his presidency also marked several fundamental changes in the Democratic Party. First, after Lyndon B. Johnson, there was a “shift in the Democratic base” from “white southerners and industrial laborers” to “white-collar suburbanites, young people and members of underrepresented groups” (Geismer, 2018). Besides demographic changes, Democrats now “questioned the ideological basis of Johnson’s liberalism, especially its faith in the federal government to fundamentally refashion American society” (Geismer, 2018). This refers to President Johnson’s initiatives and executive actions that expanded the federal government and bureaucracy through programs he called the Great Society.

Lyndon B. Johnson attempted to emulate and follow in Franklin D. Roosevelt’s footsteps of strengthening the federal government, but by the end of Johnson’s presidency, the American people and Democrats no longer believed in that political idea. Democratic presidents after Lyndon B. Johnson “agreed with Johnson’s commitment to stimulating economic growth, [but] they eschewed the Great Society for increasing bureaucracy” (Geismer, 2018). In summary, the actions of Lyndon B. Johnson expanded the federal government, which were once goals of the Democratic Party, but Democrats no longer sought to expand the government and no longer had as much faith or trust in the government, as a result of the failures of the Vietnam War.

## President Ronald Reagan

Now that Democratic presidents have been thoroughly examined, it is time to see how Republican presidents have changed their own party. Ronald Reagan saw major political successes during his presidency and that translated into fundamental shifts in the Republican Party. Before Reagan, Republican “conservatism [was seen] as something extreme and at the fringes of the American belief system” (Quince, 2016). But due to Reagan and his strategists, Republicans started to “soften the idea of conservatism” so it could be seen as less extreme to its demographic base. Reagan also “explicitly aimed at winning over white ethnics, white religious groups, [the] white working class, [as well as] white liberals and moderates who might be afraid of conservatism otherwise” (Quince, 2016). Reagan succeeded in

transforming the demographics of the Republican Party, and for “more than 30 years, the Republican Party was defined by Ronald Reagan’s famous three-legged stool: a coalition of fiscal conservatives, social conservatives and national security hawks” (Cohn, 2023).

The political ideals of the Republican Party have since changed from the age of Reagan, but the demographic base of the party remains mostly unchanged. The strength of the Republican political party also saw “evidence of partisan resurgence...at the organizational...and grassroots levels” which shows some reversal of the previous claim that presidents have made political parties weaker at lower levels (Milkis & Rhodes, 2007, 461). There is still evidence that modern presidents have made political parties weaker at the grassroots level, but Reagan’s presidency changed that downward trend for a time.

Reagan also altered the “national political agenda” by attacking the “big government” ideals that Democrats had established in the Fifth Party System, essentially putting the Democratic Party on the “defensive” (Milkis & Rhodes, 2007, 465). He made “Republican issues such as tax and budget cuts, defense spending, and traditional morality at the center of American politics” and he forced the Democratic Party search “for some new identity” (Milkis & Rhodes, 2007, 465). So, Reagan not only had a profound change on the Republican Party, but also on the political dialogue in America, and even made Democrats reassess their own party’s ideology.

## President Donald Trump

The last president this paper will examine is the most recent Republican president, Donald Trump. And he has made significant changes to the Republican Party, from “policy to rhetorical style” (Greenwood, 2022). For example, President Trump has changed the Republican party’s perception of media, the same media that strengthens modern presidents’ ability to reach the American voters as well as circumvent approval from political party leadership. He has “driven Republican animosity toward the...mainstream media to new heights” as well as has “fundamentally alter[ed] the way Republicans think about the news and the people who report it” (Greenwood, 2022). Furthermore, since Trump’s presidency, ad hominem attacks have become a staple of Republican politicians and candidates: “countless Republicans have sought to mimic Trump’s...bombastic and vitriolic rhetoric” (Greenwood, 2022). Trump has also decreased the overall trust and faith Republicans have towards “the government, the media and the world at large” (Greenwood, 2022). He cites “institutional corruption” in organizations such as the FBI and NATO (Greenwood, 2022), and this decreased trust in government is similar to what happened to the Democratic Party after Lyndon B. Johnson’s presidency. Trump has also changed the Republican Party’s foreign policy objectives. He had made “massive shift[s] away from...former presidents like Ronald Reagan...who embraced international free trade and alliances” (Greenwood, 2022). Trump has made the Republican Party prioritize “America first” which is “now part of Republican orthodoxy” (Greenwood, 2022). Overall, there have been major changes to the policies Republicans believe, how Republican politicians act, and how Republicans view institutions, as a result of Donald Trump’s actions as president.

## Conclusion and Future Implications

This paper has thoroughly examined how presidents change the political parties they lead, through describing the general power dynamics between presidents and political parties throughout the modern presidency, as well as providing case studies that explain specific changes to political parties. This paper has found that the New Deal is the turning point for presidential power over political parties, meaning that after the New Deal presidents have become independent from the power of political party leadership and have overall weakened political party participation. This paper has also found that presidents have become increasingly in charge of the political parties they lead, meaning that presidents determine the policy objectives and perceptions of political parties. Besides general trends in presidential influence over political parties, this paper has found that specific presidents change the demographics of political



parties, as well as the strategies that political parties utilize to win elections and hold onto power. Presidents also have influence over how much Americans trust the government and international institutions.

Now, it is time to conclude this paper by providing thoughtful insight into what these findings mean for the future. As explained before, it is essential for the American people to know how presidents shape the politics this country focuses on, so Americans can be more informed voters at the ballot box. More informed voters mean a better represented nation, as well as mean that voters will accurately choose candidates according to their personal beliefs. It is also important that Americans know how presidents influence the specific political party voters follow so accountability can properly established, and voters can accurately praise or blame the person or persons responsible for the decisions of their political party. These findings also indicate that presidents have significantly more influence over politics than the founding fathers ever intended, which could bring into question whether or not this development of presidential power over political parties is good for the health of this nation. This paper has already discussed the consequences of weakened political parties, and the negative effects that nationalized politics have on local and state politics, as well as the ever-increasing party polarization that is being contributed to by presidential actions. More research ought to be done into what can restrengthen political parties to levels before the New Deal, so the political health of this nation can be restored. In conclusion, the findings of this paper are important to the longevity of this nation as they explain the political changes occurring in this country and can pinpoint any future changes to American political parties back to presidents.

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