

Between Conflict and Consensus:

An Analysis of the Language of Party Nominating Conventions

Theories in Action Conference

April 30, 2011

Madeline Meth



The Rhetorical Map



The Primary Campaign

The Party Nominating
Convention



The Inauguration



The Question

What explains the language of Party Nominating Conventions?

Independent Variables

- Party Identification
- Candidate Circumstances

Dependent Variables

- The content and form of convention acceptance speeches

The Issue Ownership Theory

- Each party “owns” a set of issues
- Incumbents’ successes or failures cause short term changes

Democratic Issues	Republicans Issues	Performance Issues
Education, Health Care, The Environment	Foreign Policy, Taxes and Spending, Crime	The Economy

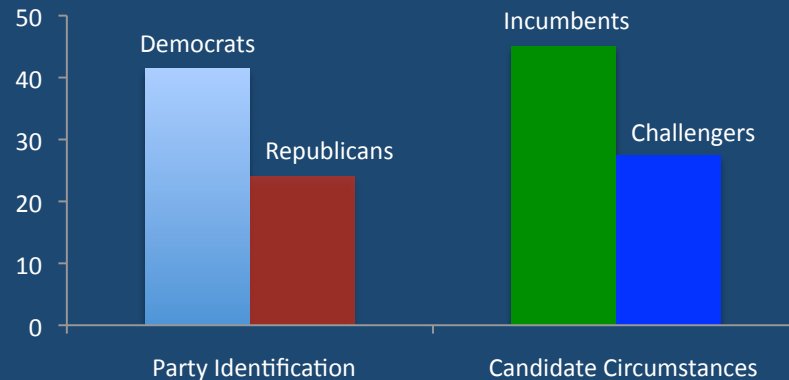
Hypotheses

- 1) A candidates' party identification, and status as either an incumbent or challenger will affect the issue emphasis of convention speeches
- 2) The rhetoric used to frame this issue content will remain consistent across variation in party id and candidate circumstances

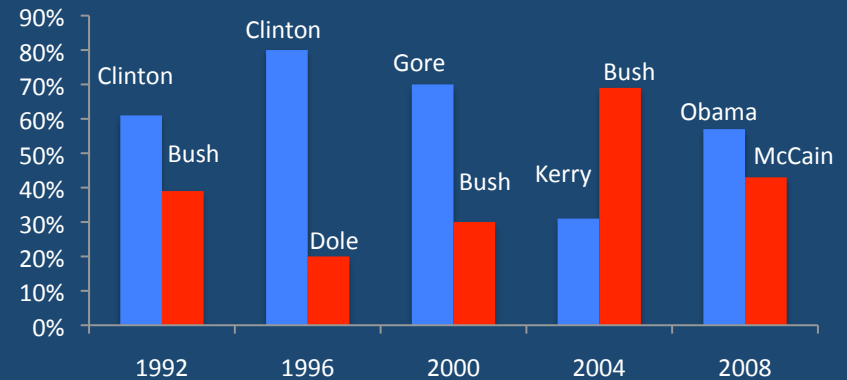
What Explains the Issue Emphasis of Convention Acceptance Addresses?

Example: Candidate Emphasis on Education

**Average Mentions of Education
(3.11)**



Education: Opponents' Relative Emphasis (3.12)



The Rhetoric of Convention Acceptance Addresses

“Let me be the bridge to a time of tranquility, faith and confidence in action.”



Bob Dole at the 1996 RNC

“My fellow Americans, let me say one last time, we can only build our bridge to the 21st century if we build it together and if we’re willing to walk arm in arm across that bridge together.”



Bill Clinton at the 1996 DNC

TABLE 5.1

The Issue Emphasis and Rhetoric of Convention Acceptance Addresses

Chapter 3: Issue Emphasis

Chapter 4: Rhetorical Choices

PARTY IDENTIFICATION

Democrats:

- Issue ownership: education, health care, the environment
- Issue convergence: crime

Republicans:

- Issue ownership: foreign policy
- Issue convergence: education

Democrats:

- Values: opportunity, responsibility, community
- Consensus (53%): the people and the government working together
- Conflict: fighting the status quo

Republicans:

- Values: individual responsibility, freedom
- Consensus (53%): agreeing to follow the best leader
- Conflict (22%): fighting the assault against American values

CANDIDATE CIRCUMSTANCES

Incumbents:

- Issues: the economy, taxes and spending, foreign policy
- Accomplishments provide opportunity for issue trespassing

Challengers:

- Emphasize fewer overall issues
- Prevailing conditions cause issue convergence

Incumbents:

- Consensus (60%): build country unity; connect past achievements with vision of future; define change as a challenge that Americans need to meet together
- Conflict: issue-based

Challengers:

- Consensus (50%): party unity, response to criticisms, create change together
- Conflict: thematic arguments

Selected Bibliography

- Clinton, William J. (1996, August) *Remarks Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago* Chicago, IL
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=53253#axzz1xHzdNuw>.
- Dole, Robert. 1996. *Robert Dole: Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention in San Diego*. San Diego, California. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=25960#axzz1Jignq2Sn>.
- Hart, Roderick P. 2000. *Campaign talk :Why elections are good for us*, Anonymous Anonymous . Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Hart, Roderick P. 2002. "Why do they Talk that Way? A Research Agenda for the Presidency." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 32 (4, What Do We Want to Know about the Presidency?) (Dec.):pp. 693-709. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27552434>.
- Petrocik, John R. 1996. "Issue Ownership in Presidential Elections, with a 1980 Case Study." *American Journal of Political Science* 40 (3) (08):825.
<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=9705100691&site=ehost-live>.
- Petrocik, John R., William L. Benoit, and Glenn J. Hansen. 2003. "Issue Ownership and Presidential Campaigning, 1952-2000." *Political Science Quarterly* 118 (4) (Winter2003):599-626. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=12676977&site=ehost-live>.