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THE VIRTUES OF PARTICIPATION WITHOUT POWER: Campaigns, Party Networks, and the Ends of Politics

Daniel Kreiss*

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Following Francesca Polletta's call to reconsider participatory democracy in a new millennium, this article analyzes and makes a normative case for institutional and partisan forms of participation without decision making. I draw on field research and interviews conducted over the last decade on Democratic Party campaigns to argue against contemporary denunciations of partisanship and critiques of institutional participation by radical democrats. First, this article discusses the opportunities available for citizens to participate in electoral politics. Volunteering is often limited to fund-raising and instrumental voter contacts given the constraints of electoral institutions. Although campaign volunteerism is a fundamentally limited form of civic engagement, institutional and partisan participation has democratic value. Campaigns are institutionally linked to political parties that offer distinct moral, ideological, and policy choices to citizens. Recent analytical and empirical work shows that contemporary political parties are constituted by relatively coherent networks of civil society and social movement organizations that devote considerable resources to electoral politics to shape primary and general election outcomes and advance their agendas in governance. This reveals electoral participation to be tightly linked to larger partisan dynamics and institutional sites of power.

In the walkways surrounding the arena floor a sea of white, black, and brown faces wearing Obama gear flows and eddies around us. People talk in small groups, browse souvenir stands, and line up for fried chicken from Bojangles. Media types wearing jeans and blazers and oversized credentials traverse these masses of delegates in hurried strides. Inside the arena, delegates stand and cheer during the speeches; they are the partisan audiences who feed off the emotion of the speakers, engage in call and response with the partisan rhetoric from the stage, wave their signs at the appropriate choreographed moments with genuine emotion, and take pictures on their iPhones to post on Facebook. These delegates are the ones who will spend countless hours knocking on doors, organizing their communities, and carrying the gospel of the Democratic Party and the stories about America told on the stage back to their neighborhoods. The transfer of emotional energy between the stage and audience appears to energize official and delegate alike, the latter to do the hard work that lies in the months ahead, the former to remind them what they fight for.

*Direct all correspondence to Daniel Kreiss, School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 110 Rock Spring Ct, Carrboro, NC 27510; e-mail: dkreiss@email.unc.edu

REFLECTIONS ON FIELD OBSERVATION AT THE 2012 DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION

This was the scene during the three official nights of the Democratic National Convention in September 2012. Thousands of delegates, from all corners of the country, packed into Charlotte's Time Warner Cable Arena at 5:00 p.m. every night to sit through hours of speeches by the party's headliners and undercard performers alike, while gamely conducting perfunctory party business. As spectators, at times they were enraptured, standing to urge on a particularly engaging speaker. At other times, they were patient onlookers, unenthusiastically sitting through flat, policy-oriented speeches. Sometimes, they were distracted and bored, thumbing through ubiquitous smart phones during lulls in the action.

This is the texture of institutional participation at the ground level of a political campaign ritual. These sorts of election-year rituals occupy a fraught place in American political culture. One has only to look at the Occupy Wall Street movement to see the deep currents of dissatisfaction with institutional politics, particularly within the American left (Kreiss and Tufekci 2013). For many, institutional participation in campaigns, and more broadly the political parties they are extensions of, is fundamentally limited and even ultimately disempowering. Since the participatory movements of the 1960s left, and more recently in democratic experiments that feature what Maharawal (2013:178) calls a "radical politics of inclusion" in relation to the Occupy Wall Street movement, activists have deployed nonhierarchical, collaborative, and consensus-seeking forms of organization within movements to prefigure the changes they want to achieve in society.[1] As Polletta (2005:284) has argued, by the 1960s "activists celebrated consensus-oriented and decentralized decision making not for its capacity to train leaders but for its congruence with a radically egalitarian and personalistic worldview. They celebrated it as a radical alternative to mainstream politics rather than as a means by which those excluded from mainstream politics might gain access."

Even many advocates of "mainstream" politics look skeptically at the often highly emotional forms of partisan mobilization around campaigns and party organizations (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012). Historians have shown how progressive era reformers created a cultural ideal of a nonpartisan, general interest, and information-based citizen that stood in sharp contrast with the partisan, parochial, emotional, and social forms of citizenship prevalent during the era of torchlight parades (McGerr 1986; Schudson 1998). In keeping with this normative idea of citizenship, scholars and popular writers have long valued independent, rational, and deliberative political engagement, while being deeply suspicious of the partisanship that fuels campaign participation and helps determine electoral outcomes (Sides and Vavreck 2013). Nancy Rosenblum (2008:2) notes that when political theorists discuss partisanship at all, they "reproduce the antiparty temper that dominates the history of political thought." Journalists routinely rail against the partisanship in Washington, D.C., and state capitals. Ironically, so do politicians, who strive to appear bipartisan and complain about, in President Obama's words, the "hyper-partisanship . . . that's holding us back" (Ngo

2013). Even *delegates* at the "pure partisan institution" (Shafer 2010) of a party convention wear their partisanship lightly when communicating with publics outside the party. As one Pennsylvania delegate told us in response to a question about her Facebook use at the convention, "I try not to get too political, but I want to share my experiences of the convention" (quoted in Kreiss, Meadows, and Remensperger 2014:11).

This article analyzes the form and experiences of participation in political campaigns while detailing the linkages between campaigns and the extended networks of political parties. Participation in electoral politics is institutionally constrained by plurality voting systems, making campaigns fall far short of the participatory ideals of radical democrats.[2] That said, these limits do not mean that electoral participation, which often entails narrow and targeted appeals for votes and money premised on highly emotional forms of mobilization, lacks value. Drawing on fieldwork and interviews with political practitioners active in Democratic politics over the last decade, I show that campaign volunteers are active agents of their highly instrumental political participation.[3] They often share both the same goals as campaign staffers and a similar understanding of the limits of their engagement given the need to secure electoral outcomes.

At the same time, campaign participation connects citizens to political processes and, ultimately, a larger network of actors and organizations that pursue their favored moral and policy ends through electoral politics, parties, and government. Indeed, empirical research suggests that many of those volunteering for campaigns, and participating in institutional politics more generally, are simultaneously members of civil society and movement organizations that are aligned with, and help constitute, political parties (Masket et al. 2009; Heaney and Rojas 2011; Nielsen 2012). In recent years, a number of scholars have reconceptualized political parties as extended networks of actors that work more or less in concert to pursue certain policy and ideological ends (Koger, Masket, and Noel 2010) and hold legislators accountable for their actions in government through the nominating process (Masket 2009).

In sum, campaigns are one of the few places in democratic life where staffers and volunteers are in general accord that participation ultimately should serve the end of securing political power—for the candidate they are trying to elect, for the advocacy groups that support her, and for the political party that she represents during the election. And, in our historical moment, the two parties have very different values and governing philosophies, which are reflected in the rhetoric party actors use, the policy agendas they pursue, and the interests that provide them with resources to contest elections (Levendusky 2009). A number of scholars have shown that since the 1970s, the two parties have grown more ideologically coherent and the interests that constitute them increasingly distinct from one another. Sniderman and Stiglitz (2013:6) argue that

> The reality of American politics is not the same as it was a half century ago. It only modestly distorts the facts to say that the official Republican Party is the spokesman for an unqualified brand of conservatism, and the Democratic Party plays the same role for liberalism. American politics at the elite level has, in a word, polarized. . . .

> During the same period of time, voters' party identifications have become aligned with the ideological outlook of their parties.

For these scholars, partisan identification—which is often "a conjunction of an ideological as well as an emotional attachment to party"—makes politics coherent in offering voters stable political values and choices, ones that are "effective predictors of policy outcomes all in all" (Sniderman and Stiglitz 2013:6).

Discounting institutional forms of participation, and giving partisanship a bad name, works to *undermine* political power, especially, as three generations of scholars have argued, for the poor (Key 1949; Schattschneider 1960; Bartels 2009). Contemporary American parties provide distinct choices for voters.[4] Anti-institutional and antipartisan thinking have disproportionately negative consequences on those who rely on partisan affiliation to advance their interests. Anti-institutional and antipartisan discourse denies citizens a language for connecting their lived experience to political candidates, programs, and institutions, especially given that people struggle to connect their political beliefs and knowledge to policy outcomes (see Bartels 2009). Anti-institutionalism and antipartisanship work to deny citizens a set of accessible organizational structures for political mobilization. And, for radical democrats so concerned with equality, a broad anti-institutional orientation and turn away from electoral participation undermines a powerful vehicle for social justice; consider the robust finding that *over a half-century* inequality has gone up during Republican administrations, and down in Democratic administrations (Bartels 2009).

Taking up Francesca Polletta's (2013) call to reconsider participatory democracy in a new millennium, this article proceeds in three parts. First, I analyze the forms of participation available to citizens on electoral campaigns through the lens of Obama's presidential bids. Second, I draw on the insights of a recent body of theoretical and empirical work to argue that electoral participation is particularly important given that campaigns are institutionally and organizationally linked to parties and their extended networks of civil society organizations, interest groups, and other partisan actors. I conclude with a consideration of the broad question of participation and power, making a case for institutional engagement that is divorced from formal decision making. In doing so, I extend arguments I have made previously (Kreiss 2012, 2014) by presenting additional data and linking electoral participation to partisanship and party organization. In doing so, I argue for considering campaign and other forms of institutional participation as part of larger party processes.

PARTICIPATION WITHOUT DECISION MAKING ON CAMPAIGNS

In December 2007, I signed up as a volunteer precinct captain for the Obama campaign in San Francisco. Over the ensuing three months until California's primary on February 5, I made hundreds of phone calls and door knocks in an approximately five-block radius in the Mission District, where I lived in a small box of an apartment. I stewarded a list of approximately 120 voters, which meant attempting to identify whom they were

supporting in the upcoming primaries. For those voters already supporting Obama, I asked them to volunteer and sought to turn them out to vote. For those who were undecided, it meant at times biweekly check in calls aimed at persuasion. During the Get Out the Vote (GOTV) phase, the final week before the campaign, I led a team of one-time volunteers that attempted to contact in-person dozens of "decline to state" and "unaffiliated" voters. I found these voters through the campaign's online voter file.

It was taxing work. I dreaded intruding on people's dinners—although the vast majority of phone calls ended after many, many unanswered rings. Some of the people I called criticized the policies of the candidate, such as Obama's position on health care. Others told me to stop calling. Some people spoke nonsensically into their apartment intercoms when I rang. I stood in the cold mist for hours in the early morning with signs and bumper stickers for Obama at the Kaiser Permanente Marathon. I walked the quiet streets of the Mission at 4:00 a.m. on election day with door hangers for Obama-identified households that reminded people to vote. I checked in at the polls throughout that day and monitored who on my list of Obama supporters had turned out, and showed up at the doorsteps of those who did not late in the evening before the polls closed. Sometimes the volunteer work was more fun, such as attending the rally with John Kerry at Mission Dolores High School the Saturday before the vote and marching in the San Francisco pride parade with other Obama supporters soon after Hillary Clinton conceded. But those moments were far and few between. Far more often, it was "super volunteers" such as precinct campaigns motivating one another on listservs and in bars to get through the dull drudgery of the campaign. It was campaign staff working to inspire its people through the constant reminders of the historical importance of the campaign. And it was us inspiring ourselves, streaming Obama's stirring campaign speeches and inspirational videos such as the "Yes We Can" song on our laptops to get into the emotional state to do the exhausting work of calling voters.

The ends that define electoral politics—securing a majority of votes—have remained the same for well over a century but "political styles," which encompass "the different fashions in which people perceive, discuss, and act in politics," are by no means stable or uniform (McGerr 1986:9). My experiences as a precinct captain detailed above are the result of a number of changes in electoral participation that have occurred since the nation's founding. The "style" of campaigning has undergone significant transformations, from local leaders "standing" for office (Schudson 1998) and the era of raucous torchlight partisan parades, to the advertising and marketing of individual candidates through mass media that dominated much of the second half of the last century. While campaigns routinely turned volunteers away throughout the 1990s given an emphasis on the "air war" (Nielsen 2012), over the last decade and a half there has been an extraordinary rediscovery of field organizing and mobilization-based campaigns more broadly. This form of campaigning is premised on actively engaging volunteers to personally contact citizens (Kreiss 2012; Nielsen 2012), the activities that I detailed above.

Changes in the style of political participation are shaped by larger cultural contexts that define legitimate forms of social authority (Schudson 1998). Even more, what campaign staffers perceive is effective in electoral contexts, what they believe citizens

are capable of, and what they think democracy is and should be all shape the opportunities for political participation that campaigns provide. These beliefs, and the decisions and practices that flow from and shape them, are written into the strategy and organization of campaigns and even the design of technologies that facilitate contemporary participation (Kreiss 2012).

For example, decisions by the 2008 Obama campaign to invest early, and heavily, in volunteer ground efforts shaped my experiences and work as a precinct captain. The 2008 campaign worked with the firm that built its technical platform, Blue State Digital, to move "the line between staff and volunteer a lot higher on the organization chart," in the words of cofounder Jascha Franklin-Hodge (personal communication, December 22, 2008, quoted in Kreiss 2012:22). In practice, this meant that volunteers, often with only minimal training, were entrusted with tools that enabled them to access voter files, organize canvass events, and conduct fund-raisers on behalf of the campaign, entirely independently. I used tools such as My.BarackObama.com to organize the visibility event for Obama at the Kaiser Permanente marathon, recruit volunteers for canvassing events around GOTV, and make phone calls in advance of primaries in states that voted after California and to swing states during the general election. I used an online voter database and interface system called VoteBuilder to access voter records, create lists of targeted voters, plot them on neighborhood maps, review call scripts, and enter data on the outcomes of my conversations. As such, the 2008 campaign was designed from the outset to be fundamentally premised on significant supporter participation in such domains as voter contacts and fund-raising, a departure in both scale and scope from other contemporary electoral efforts (and in ways that shaped campaign practice in 2012).[5]

Investing volunteers with responsibilities typically accorded to paid staffers created management challenges for the campaign. Staffers sought to coordinate participation toward the institutionally defined ends that campaigns must pursue. Staffers assumed that supporters were with them in their goal of defeating opponents, yet also recognized that at times they had their own ideas as to what was effective in an electoral context or expected different things from their participation entirely. For some staffers, these were problems of participation that needed to be managed. One senior level staffer who joined the campaign after an extensive career in commercial consulting, for instance, talked about the need to clearly articulate expectations for supporter participation. As this staffer (personal communication) relates:

> Volunteers are not professional political operatives so some of the things that they think of as being helpful are not helpful, right? . . . I also think that we did a really effective job teaching people what we value and what that means is that if you are going to devolve power down around our organization—if you don't teach people how you want them to act, and not like what to do because people don't follow directions all that well, but if people understand how to behave they are basically going to do the right things. And then people are also lazy, so I say on one end people don't follow directions but people are lazy so if you lay things out in front of

> them that are simple and seen in mind of what they believe they are supposed to do, like help the campaign—like "don't shit on the other candidates."

The key here is that staffers sought to impart to their volunteers the *values* of the Obama organization. These values entailed things such as not denigrating other candidates, conducting respectful discourse, hearing out opposing sides, and communicating moral stories. The hope was that these values would inform the way supporters participated on the campaign. These values provided the overall normative framework for political participation on the campaign, and they were taught alongside practices of voter contact across the campaigns' many volunteer training sessions, such as the precinct captain trainings I attended in San Francisco.

While throughout my fieldwork I observed a remarkable degree of adherence to these principles, volunteers were also the recalcitrant, autonomous actors that this staffer describes. In this, my observations echo what Nielsen (2012:121) characterizes as the dynamic between volunteers and campaign staffers in his richly detailed ethnographic study of the ground efforts in two congressional campaigns:

> Everyone involved continues to want to win . . . and all recognize the project at hand. But they understand the project, their own involvement, and the other participants in very different ways, even as they work together.

Nielsen saw this in the ways that volunteers often saw themselves in equal relationships with staffers, and offered to do things such as write speeches and give policy advice, whereas staffers needed them to make phone calls. In this context, staffers tried to exercise control over volunteers by "creating a setting where there is little to do but work" (Nielsen 2012:125). On the Obama campaign in 2012, staffers used similar tactics of guiding engagement toward defined electoral ends, such as building campaign tools that have "structured interactivity" (Kreiss 2012)—affording activities such as making phone calls to voters and organizing canvass and fund-raising events, while not permitting volunteers to do something like e-mail a senior policy staffer.

That said, there were real limits to this control. While I rarely observed the desire to give policy or strategy advice to the campaign—save around extraordinary incidents such as the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) detailed below—there were often disconnects between the desires of staffers and the at times competing expectations, wills, and even demands of volunteers. In field offices that I visited, staffers routinely struggled to motivate volunteers who were tired, bored, or just uncomfortable making phone calls. I observed one Obama staffer, clearly frustrated and visibly angry, berate a room full of volunteers who were standing around talking in the Mission District field office instead of making calls at 8:45 p.m., 15 minutes before the campaign-imposed canvass cutoff time. In a field office outside of Reno, Nevada, I watched as staffers faced questions from volunteers about the effectiveness of their operation, received uninvited and unwelcome comparisons with other campaigns, and were questioned about the scripts volunteers were asked to read. In my own experience as a pre-

cinct captain for the campaign, I routinely ignored, edited, and went off the scripts we were told to rigidly deliver (volunteer discomfort with these unnatural scripted conversations was behind the decision of the 2012 Obama campaign to do away with them all together). I observed as volunteers (myself included) ignored the names of individual household targets and just spoke to the first person that answered the door so as to avoid the awkwardness of asking to speak to a wife, husband, sister, or brother instead of the person standing in front of them.

In response to some of these issues, and to overcome problems of volunteer fatigue and dropout, there was a tremendous amount of cultural work that went into creating and sustaining participation on the campaign. As the discussion above suggests, staffers need to inspire volunteers (and frankly themselves) to devote considerable time and effort on unpaid and often psychologically taxing and physically stressful activities. The challenge for most campaigns lies in *creating* participation, not *manipulating* it—which is where concerns over legitimation and power lie. The mass mobilization by supporters and Democratic Party groups around the Obama campaign, or presidential campaigns more broadly, is the exception to the rule of generally low participation in electoral politics, and even then there is never enough volunteer labor for the enormity of the task of contacting the electorate (Nielsen 2012). A considerable amount of participation is motivated by partisanship. Political psychologists Iyengar et al. (2012) argue that the high holidays of presidential elections unfold, in part, through the sorting of citizens into teams. Partisanship provides a collective, social identity premised on the active and emotional dislike of the opposing side, which is heightened by agonistic political campaigns. For example, the Obama campaign mobilized those who were already ideologically aligned with the party to volunteer and vote, especially low-income and non-white citizens, as well as white liberals. Campaigns themselves try and create the symbols and emotional energy that will inspire what Alexander (2010) has called “fusion” between candidates and members of the public to mobilize the time, energy, and talents of volunteers. The rhetoric and design work of the 2008 Obama campaign, such as stylizing images of the candidate based on iconic photographs from the civil rights movement, was intended to create the perception of the transformative promise of Obama’s candidacy and convince supporters of their political efficacy (Kreiss 2012). The California Field Director Buffy Wicks would often include “Yes We Can” or Barack Obama’s quote “I’m asking you to believe. Not just in my ability to bring change to Washington . . . I’m asking you to believe in yours” in her e-mails to precinct captains (the latter of which also graced the banner of the campaign’s Web site).

Despite this cultural work, as detailed above there were routine differences in the instructions handed down by campaign staffers and their enactment by volunteers. At other times, however, there were more serious challenges to the campaign at the level of policy. As I have written about extensively (Kreiss 2012, 2014), the most high-profile example was when supporters organized the “Get FISA Right” protests on the campaign’s own digital platform after Obama endorsed granting telecommunications firms immunity for complying with the Bush administration’s warrantless wiretapping

program after the primaries. This incident reveals the delicate balance that existed between campaign staffers and supporters who voluntarily supplied their labor to the campaign. For the most part, volunteers wanted their favored candidate to win and trusted that staffers knew the best path toward securing electoral victory. However, for some subsets of supporters, there were issues or political values that, when threatened, were worth challenging the campaign for control over decision-making power. The issue for staffers was how to manage situations when there were genuine differences in political values or policy, such as around FISA, while also pursuing the strategy and goals of the campaign.

In many staffers' telling, there was genuine respect between the campaign and its supporters, even though supporters lacked decision-making authority within the campaign or accountability over the candidate's policy positions. Indeed, the outcome of the FISA protests, which failed to get Obama to change his position but did prompt a response from the campaign and candidate, reveal the limits to substantive participation on the campaign. When asked about this, some staffers argued that inviting higher-level participation would have been *manipulative* given the structural limitations of the electoral process. Staffers did not believe that they had the ability in terms of resources or capacity to accommodate higher order participation. Sam Graham-Felsen (personal communication, April 18, 2011), the 2008 campaign's director of blogging and blog outreach, provides his perspective:

> We enabled FISA to happen but it is not like—we certainly weren't soliciting feedback and having on a regular basis chats with David Axelrod [a chief strategist to the campaign] where people could like share their ideas. . . . I think part of the reason why we didn't do that was because it would have been so fucking phony if we had done that and then incorporated none of the ideas. . . . If we are opened up for user generated content and ideas and things like that, if it doesn't work it's embarrassing and it is disrespectful. . . .
>
> We had this thing called "MyPolicy" early on in the campaign and it is like we didn't get that many great ideas through MyPolicy. We had actually this woman Amy . . . she actually wrote into MyPolicy and the reason we responded to her is because she actually told us great stories specifically about her personal life and why the healthcare reform is needed in her personal life, right. And we responded to that and I think what we ended up realizing is much more powerful than asking people for input or whatever is asking people to share their stories.
>
> I think the cynical person could say "yeah, but you are just taking these stories and what are you giving people in exchange for their stories" but I would argue that it was something intrinsically important about asking people for their stories then putting them out there and sharing them, elevating these people's stories. . . .

"Elevating" people's stories is not accountability or formal input, but it is a form of political visibility and voice through participation. And, while this participation may

not meet the normative requirements of many theorists, it offers a form of political visibility that accords with the constraints of electoral institutions.

In other areas of the campaign, participation without decision making was designed to build civic capacity for *future* democratic action. The social movement scholar Marshall Ganz helped conceive and implement the campaign's community organizing field effort in some key states. Ganz argues that there was value in this model in terms of building long-term civic capacity—but it was not radically democratic. The campaign developed many leaders in communities throughout the United States, but they did not have a say in the strategy of the campaign or policy positions of the candidate.

For Ganz (2010), however, participation without decision making was justified because a campaign is but one step with its own constraints and rules in a much longer process of pursuing institutional power. Indeed, as Nielsen (2012) has also suggested, campaign staffers and volunteers are *both* reliant on the basic premise that their interests are aligned most of the time; that volunteers are participating and campaigns are creating opportunities for participation because they want to achieve the same ends, believe in the same values, and desire to defeat the same opponents—ultimately to elect a candidate that they believe will represent their political beliefs when they are elected.

CAMPAIGN PARTICIPATION AND PARTY NETWORKS

Campaigns are both dependent upon, and a part of, a wide network of actors that constitute the two political parties. These actors collectively shape the legislative and other priorities of political parties. Masket et al. (2009:1) argue that political parties are "decentralized, nonhierarchical, fluid systems with porous boundaries among a wide array of actors" that "include interest groups, social movements, media, political consultants, and advocacy organizations, in addition to the usual suspects of elected officials, party officials, and citizen-activists."[6] Campaigns rely on the network of the party their candidate belongs to, drawing on the resources of 501c(4) and civil society groups, movement organizations, and unions for their electoral runs (Nielsen 2012). These organizations, in turn, make strategic decisions as to which campaigns to support based on their assessments of candidates, such as their favorability to certain policy stances, and other considerations such as existing institutional support. Campaigns must appeal to these organizations for the money, volunteers, and staff they need. Candidates do so, in part, by claiming they will represent their interests in government.

While there exists no reliable data about the multiple and overlapping affiliations of volunteers on campaigns such as Obama's two presidential bids, it is likely that many have ties to groups in the extended Democratic Party network such as unions, netroots organizations such as MoveOn, women's health organizations such as Planned Parenthood, the environmental group the Sierra Club, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights organizations such as the Human Rights Campaign. During the 2008 primaries and general election, numerous Democratic Party–aligned organizations

coordinated volunteer canvasses, voter registration drives, and turnout operations, in addition to encouraging their members to get involved in the campaigns of their endorsed candidates. These organizations seek to transfer the commitments supporters have for their causes to the candidates they endorse, such as Obama. A number of empirical studies point to this entangling of movements, civil society organizations, and interest groups with electoral politics and political parties. In a highly publicized series of studies, Heaney and Rojas (2007, 2011) show how the fortunes and strength of the antiwar movement rose and fell with the dynamics of partisan mobilization around the 2004 and 2008 elections. Masket et al.'s (2009) systematic survey of the membership affiliations of party delegates at the 2008 conventions reveals the extended networks of actors that compose the two parties and drive partisan and campaign participation. In interviews with LGBT caucus delegates at the 2012 Democratic National Convention, we also found many layers of organizational affiliation (Kreiss et al. 2014).

These findings have wide-reaching implications because they upend much empirical work and normative democratic theory that both explicitly and implicitly cast "civil society" and "social movement" organizations and "parties" as different, separate, and often opposed, organizational entities.[7] Given a spate of recent empirical research that reveals that these civil society and movement organizations actually *are* a part of parties (Cohen et al. 2008; Masket et al. 2009; Heaney and Rojas 2011), electoral participation among these groups and their memberships should be seen as a means for these organizations to pursue political power. Indeed, the participation of civil society, social movement, and interest group organizations and members in electoral campaigns during party nominating processes and general elections is an important mechanism for enforcing democratic accountability. As Masket (2009:197) shows, "coalitions of top elected officials, activists, and benefit seekers" band together to control the party nomination process, which enforces discipline and accountability for issue positions on legislators (who rarely face competitive general election races). While this has made legislators more partisan and extreme in terms of issue positions, Masket argues, it has also made them more responsible:

> disciplined parties may be making Americans feel less efficacious and less confident in their governing institutions, even as they make those institutions more accountable to them and more likely to produce policies in line with their preferences, at least in the aggregate. (P. 197)

Organizational actors in extended party networks, and presumably their members, see campaigns as means to the end of accountability and political power, which is why many devote considerable resources to electoral processes. In other words, electoral politics is only one area of institutional democratic life and ultimately a means toward achieving larger moral, ideological, and policy outcomes in governance. I have already argued that the goals of many of Obama's supporters were generally aligned with those of the campaign, but it is worth considering the president's tenure in office during his first term after they worked to elect him. At the most general level, the critique of

Obama's administration from the progressive left is that the president has not made enough progress toward achieving equality and remedying injustice through social and economic policy. For many of the partisans in the Democratic Party and the organizations they belong to, Obama has not accomplished enough of what he promised to do in his sweeping, transformative rhetoric on the campaign trail. And the primary reason he has not accomplished more is because of unified Republican opposition to his presidency. It is difficult to imagine that citizens participating in policy crafting on the campaign or at the White House, or having decision-making authority to directly set the president's or party's legislative priorities, would have any effect on Obama's ability to pass an agenda. Even more, the policy victories the president did achieve and that campaign supporters desired—such as health care—were largely partisan, not bipartisan, accomplishments. Given the outcome, it is hard to see how expanded public participation would have altered the institutional barriers to securing policy change over a unified opposition.

In this context, decision making may be one, or many, steps removed from volunteering on a campaign or even serving as a delegate to a party convention, but these forms of participation are consequential. The party exists as a network through which different actors with different interests make strategic alliances to pursue their specific policy agendas and secure institutional power. To gain the levers of institutional power, activists need to work through campaigns to push the party toward their desired ends and defeat the opposition that is working for very different outcomes. The process is more open and pluralistic than it was a half century ago, in part because central party leaders are organizationally weaker and campaigns are dependent upon aligned organizations to subsidize participation and contribute resources.

Campaigns, then, should be evaluated by what they leave behind. Electoral campaigns are an initial step in a much longer process of translating participation into political power. The relevant question is not just whether a candidate won at the ballot box, but whether a campaign changed the balance of interests in the party network. Did a campaign serve as an effective vehicle for civil society and movement organizations to pursue their agendas or create a tie with a representative who can promote their interests in a formal political body? Did a campaign animate or reinvigorate a partisan party network? Did a campaign create a stronger connection between citizens and the political process, or a deeper cultural identification with a party network that best represents their moral, policy, and ideological concerns? Or was a campaign just about temporary and instrumental mobilization that, ultimately, began and ended with the vote?

These are the normative questions by which campaigns should be judged. It would have been not only impractical, but disempowering for volunteers to have controlled the policy agenda of the 2008 or 2012 Obama campaigns given the risk of a loss at the ballot box. Power flows from the presidential office and supporters are better represented by Obama's administration than what would have been McCain's or Romney's. Campaign practitioners and supporters alike seemingly recognize this. During the general election of a presidential campaign, party networks are generally unified as

they clash with the opposing side. Rivals within party networks vie during primaries for their favored candidates who they believe will best represent them and similarly compete over legislative priorities when a party holds power. In the end, what matters is citizen engagement in the contexts, such as elections, where they can shape larger forces of institutional power.

CONCLUSION

Forms of participation such as on campaigns have not really been separated from power, at least in the sense that electoral participation is a means toward particular ends that must be secured in governance. Electoral politics does not exist in a vacuum. It is tied into larger dynamics of party networks and the pursuit of legislative agendas in government. Political representation is the outcome of a series of mediations of participation—citizens volunteer for candidates, civil society and movement groups engage in campaigns, and configurations of power in party networks that ultimately shape moral and policy outcomes change as a result. To take seriously organizational linkages and mobilizational dynamics would be to situate campaigns in larger networks that constitute the form of political representation. It would be to provide citizens with deeper understandings of the cultural and institutional links between candidates and parties—and even more, civil society organizations and movements. Indeed, in their finding that political parties are dominated by coalitions of interest groups that control nominating processes—and drawing on Hacker and Pierson's (2010) poignant note that politics "is organized combat"—Bawn et al. (2012:591) argue:

> Perhaps in a society in which politics is complicated and most citizens are too busy with their lives to pay much attention, group-centric parties are the best that can be realistically hoped for. Perhaps then giving society's most intense policy demanders a semi-institutionalized position at the heart of government is a better way of ensuring that all points of view are heard than relying on the insipid discourse of mass politics for this purpose. Not everyone is represented, but many are. Perhaps the solution to the problem of parties and democracy would be more group involvement rather than less, so that all segments of society have representation in the system.

The suggestion is that we need more organizational and group participation around electoral processes, particularly among those who are underrepresented, such as the poor. And yet, the cultural links that would encourage more group and partisan participation in electoral politics are routinely severed in the course of American campaigning, in part given the twin impulses of anti-institutionalism and antipartisanship. In previous eras, voters had symbolic attachments with parties, not candidates. Now, candidates symbolically need to run for office as autonomous individuals that are bipartisan in orientation and representative of the entire body politic (Alexander 2010). Our candidate-centric politics means that emotional engagement and electoral participation too often begin and end around individuals and their campaigns,

disconnected from larger programs, partisan networks, and institutions that provide a broader and more durable framework for political life and connect local experience to national politics. Meanwhile, civil society and movement organizations, for legal and legitimacy purposes, symbolically define themselves in terms distinct from, and often opposed to, political campaigns and parties, even those of the party network they are a part of, ideologically aligned with, and actively helping to promote through electoral mobilization.

These symbolic acts of differentiation among candidates, civil society and movement organizations, and political parties work to undermine the collective identity of partisans and citizen knowledge of the real sources of democratic accountability. In our era, large-scale moments of collective effusion are more likely to take shape around independent candidate campaigns than rallies for independent candidates than political parties (Cohen et al. 2008). But where candidate affiliations are fleeting, collective partisan identity can help sustain political awareness and engagement across electoral cycles. Partisan identity can help citizens connect their daily, lived experiences to political issues, particularly at times when the mobilizing and focusing power of political campaigns is not present. Partisan identity can help movement and civil society organizations see themselves as collectively engaged in a shared fight to achieve particular ideological and moral ends. Parties are durable institutions that can help citizens situate these organizations, candidates, and representatives at all levels of office in terms of larger moral, ideological, and policy frameworks, and the key antagonists in the dramas of the legislative process. As Levendusky (2009) argues, in the context of the choices voters are actually called upon to make, partisanship increases the likelihood that inattentive citizens with comparatively low levels of political knowledge will vote according to their political values and ideological interests. Even more, persistent anti-institutional and antiparty thinking undermines emotional and identity-based forms of institutional participation. If extended, party networks are the base unit of political representation, and we lack cultural linkages between campaigns, civil society organizations, movements, and parties, then citizens do not have a clear choice of what is at stake—in either the extended interests that representatives will be beholden to given electoral participation (Masket 2009) or the larger cluster of issues that are tied together through party networks. Even more, this symbolic differentiation undermines citizens' ability to see themselves as a part of a broader collective with shared values, ideologies, and the capacity for social action.

Meanwhile, the work of organizations within party networks and the symbolic workings of partisanship helps mitigate the letdown that comes when campaigns end, candidates take office, and promises and dreams ultimately are left unfulfilled. Partisanship provides a narrative of a new enemy: the opposing side. Seeing candidate campaigns as part of a larger and longer struggle between parties would help citizens attribute responsibility for successful governing or the failure to achieve legislative aims.

In other words, while scholars and democratic activists have focused on the opportunities for participation in the policy agendas of campaigns or political party organizations, the appropriate focus should be on the network of *decision makers* that are

convened around electoral processes. As the party networks literature suggests, political representation is mediated through the large network of organizations that constitute political parties and provide resources to campaigns. Campaigns are important not just for the avenues of participation they afford, but also for the particular set of ideological and policy interests they advance given that there are struggles both between and within party networks over policy agendas and changing alignments of different groups vying for power.

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NOTES

[1]This does not mean the Occupy movement was structureless (see Leach 2013) or did not have links with other organizations such as unions (see Piven 2013).

[2]For a discussion of the limits of the two-party system, see Disch (2002).

[3]The evidence in this article is drawn from a number of research projects that I have conducted over the last decade. During the 2008 presidential primaries and general election, I interviewed over 60 political practitioners active across three presidential cycles and served as a volunteer precinct captain in San Francisco, CA and Laredo, TX (virtually), as well as traveled to Reno, NV, during the general election. This datum is presented in Kreiss (2012). During the 2012 presidential cycle, I conducted a five-day field research project at the Democratic National Convention, which entailed observations and interviews with delegates, activists, and journalists. This datum is presented in Kreiss et al. (2014). I am currently interviewing a number of party and campaign staffers on both sides of the aisle for a second book project. This research informs the arguments presented here. To date, I have conducted more than 30 interviews with staffers who worked in field, digital, and analytics from the 2000 through the 2012 presidential campaign cycles for candidates from both the Republican and Democratic parties.

[4]Should people perceive differences between the two parties is another question, primarily one of information (Bawn et al. 2012). For the normative argument that parties have a responsibility to stake out different issue positions, and make them clear to voters, see Schattschneider (1942).

[5]In doing so, the campaign was inspired by—but ultimately went beyond—Bush's reelection bid. The Republican Party has recently been working to match this approach to data-driven field campaigning premised on volunteer participation.

[6]Contemporary parties are "nonhierarchical" at the interorganizational level. While party bureaucracies exist in the sense of there being formal organizations presided over by a chairperson and having federated structures, these bureaucracies are only one component of a broader field of organizations arranged in a nonhierarchical party network. The networked structure of parties is apparent in primary races. The chairperson of a bureaucratic party organization, party "bosses," or even elites within a party such as elected officials at the federal level cannot on their

own determine the candidate that will emerge from a primary or even dictate where donors direct their resources. These donors and elites—and a whole host of organizations, activists, and consultants—vie among themselves to shape the outcomes of contested primaries that the party network as a whole decides collectively. That said, some individual and organizational members of the party network have more status, resources, or power than others. Indeed, recognizing differences across the party network and their own position, strategic actors create coalitions to promote their favored candidates—those individuals they believe will represent their interests and those of the organizations they are allied with. There are many reasons to think that the contemporary workings of parties is premised on the broad decline, over much of the 20th century, of centralized, formal party structures—although even these structures were always variably and unevenly distributed across the states.

[7]Clemens's (1997) magisterial history of the birth of interest groups reveals how they emerged to challenge parties and elites. The question is whether a tighter alignment of interest group and party is historically recent. The recent books on parties—Aldrich (2009), Cohen et al. (2008), Masket (2009), and Rosenblum (2008)—do not cite or engage with Clemens's arguments. Levendusky's (2009) argument about elite partisan sorting is consistent with the view that this is a recent phenomenon. Meanwhile, a number of scholars have looked at parties through the lens of linking citizens to government—although these accounts lack the expansiveness of the "party networks" approach. In a comprehensive recent statement, Dalton, Farrell, and McAllister (2011:17) show how parties around the world link to citizens through campaigns, participation, ideological associations with policies, political representation, and policy outcomes. See also, Lawson (ed.) *Political Parties and Linkage: A Comparative Perspective*; Romele, Farrell, and Ignazi, *Political Parties and Political Systems: The Concept of Linkage Revisited*. These works continue to draw distinctions between parties and civil society organizations, as does much normative theory (see, for instance, Rosenblum (2008:261–7).

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