

American grand old party's changes since 1820 research paper

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Political parties change throughout time. Change may occur due to the change in leadership of the party, a landslide defeat in an election, political stand over a certain policy issue, or adapt to the socio-political change of the country or structural change within the party. Political folklore recounts change in the image and philosophy of the parties, thus, changing the identity of the party. Republican Party or the Grand Old Party (GOP) has transformed through the years from a moderate to a conservative party.

The party's platform has shown gradually change from a socially moderate, environmentally conscious, and fiscally cautious party to a conservative, skeptical, anti-abortion and same-sex marriage, and socially intolerant religion-motivated party. The pertinent question that arises is why such a complete turnaround in the party image was necessary. The answer lies in the change in electoral sentiment and the coalition with the conservative White South.

Evidently, GOP has changed over the years since its inception. Its policies, ideas, and philosophies have undergone changes for various reasons at various points of time. This paper aims to trace the changes that have occurred in GOP's ideologies and philosophies and how these changes have helped to form the present state of the party.

This paper will study articles from newspapers, magazines, and journals to trace the changes that the GOP has underwent. In order to understand the changes that have occurred, we need to understand how the party was at its inception and a brief history of its early years. This will help us to understand the changes that have occurred later. In order to understand the changes

that have occurred, it is essential to understand why did the party fundamentally change its identity.

John Gerring identifies two eras of Republican Party ideologies since 1828 - the national Whig Republican era from 1828 to 1924 and Neoliberal Republican era from 1928 to 1992. The end of the twentieth century marked the beginning of neo-conservatism to conservatism. In order to trace the transformation of the Republicans from a neoliberal to the conservative party, we need to study the history of its inception.

The Republican Party was formed in the 1850s when the party, along with the Whig and Free-Soil parties, opposed the then proposed Kansas-Nebraska Act. Then the Republican Party was against the expansion of slavery and strongly criticized the Democrats for their pro-slavery stand. Through the 1850s, the Republicans gained support throughout the Northern states due to their anti-slavery stand. In the 1860s, under the leadership of Abraham Lincoln, the party made a declaration for the complete abolition of slavery.

The beginning of the Civil War firmly established one of the two dominating parties in the US. The Republicans undertook the radical reconstruction of the conservative policies of the South passing the 13th, 14th, and the 15th amendments to the Constitution, granting equal rights to all citizens. Even though the Republicans had lost the southern support, they continued to dominate the congress with the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Thus, the origin of the Republican Party can be found in a neoliberal framework as identified by Gerring.

The rhetoric adopted by the Republicans in the nineteenth century relied mostly on free-labor ideals and support for small businesses. However, in the 1920s and 30s, the ideas based on free labor began to change. The party began to incline towards protectionist trade policies, which was idealized as a tool to protect average American families and laborers.

From 1928, the party's interest in labor started to change and in the 1940s the party devoted attention towards agricultural needs than to the needs of labor. Not only did the party's interest in labor diminish, but also the party's standpoint towards organized labor unions became increasingly antagonistic. Gerring points out, " Organized labor became particularly obnoxious to modern Republicans insofar as such oligopolistic " combinations" violated the natural workings of the marketplace." Thus, the Republicans refashioned themselves from a party that was for labor and capital to one that represented the masses known as the middle classes.

The Republicans changed from a party that engineered a variety of neo-mercantilist policies that encourage domestic small-scale business to one that denounced all governmental regulation in the economy, except in areas where it was necessary to preserve fair competition. Thus, the traditional high tariff policies of the Republicans were abandoned in the 1940s.

The 1936 platform of the Republican Party began as follows: " America is in peril. The welfare of American men and women and the future of our youth are at stake. We dedicate ourselves to the preservation of their political liberty, their individual opportunity, and their character as free citizens,

which today for the first time are threatened by Government itself." Fiscal austerity was the weapon for the Republicans to attack the government as a tyrannical machine. Thus, the party and its leaders began supporting the common man's cause, projecting the government as the autocrat. The presidential candidates were projected as common men instead of advertising their elite image. This marked the populist phase of the Republican Party.

The decades of the sixties and seventies showed a marked change in the party ideologies of the Republicans. These two decades were marked by a stark shift in the support of the conservative south and the west from the Democrats towards the Republicans. The shift occurred primarily due to the marriage between the neoliberal Republicans with the conservative south, which was a way to increase support for the Republicans in the conservative southern states. This consequently led to the brewing problems between the liberals and the conservatives within the Republican Party in the 1960s and 70s.

Even with the victory of Richard Nixon in 1972, the Republicans attained little congressional victories. Though Nixon resigned at the wake of the infamous Watergate scandal in 1974, the Republicans again assumed power with Ronald Reagan as the president in 1980. Reagan's regime marked the beginning of the conservative phase of Republican politics.

Reagan introduced severe tax-cuts and initiated building up of large military force. In the 1970s, the Reagan government campaigned heavily

militarization to support Cold War politics. The shift in the policies of the Republicans towards conservative politics was marked in the seventies and the nineties. In the seventies, the party showed strong alignment towards expanded rights for women and Native Americans, support for education, clear air act of 1970, and environmental legislations. The Republicans still favored the businesses but Nixon believed that the businesses were not adequately safeguarding the workers.

In the 1960s, the primary issue for Republicans was to fight communism. For Nixon, all other issues such as growth, civil right, inflation, or urban development were secondary. Nixon fostered progressive Republican policies such as liberal pays. From the Nixon regime, there was a marked separation between the liberal and the conservative Republicans. In the 70s, the Republicans tried to control inflation by controlling wages and prices. This economic policy increased federal spending on manpower training. During this time, the conservative movement had started to build its base within the Republican Party. Thus, the success of Ronald Reagan in the 80s was a triumph for the conservatives.

From the sixties to the nineties, there was a marked shift of the neoliberal Republican Party towards conservatism. The nineties have seen a steady shift towards the Republican conservative politics. The sixties and seventies observed the Republican platform that vigorously supported the equal-rights amendment to protect women and minorities. In the eighties, the party moved away from the equal-rights movement. Similarly, for D. C. voting rights, the party moves away from strong supporters to categorical silence

from the seventies to the eighties. The abortion issue first arose in the seventies, wherein the Republicans believed that abortion is a moral and personal issue.

In terms of foreign policy, the Republicans have shown consistent support for a military buildup to combat communism throughout the sixties, seventies, and eighties. The 1968 platform spoke strongly of the increasing air and water pollution, which changed dramatically in the nineties in face of the global warming warnings. With the beginning of the nineties, family values became the primary concern of the Republicans. The platform in 1992 condemns the media, the Democrats, and the entertainment industry for destroying American values.

This platform also shows the party's increasing conservative traits through their rejection of same-sex relationships and gay marriage or allowing same-sex couples to adopt children. A party that in the twenties and thirties was for the labors of USA, in 1992 out rightly went against the right of association and called for the elimination of political action committees that supported trade unions. Thus, the Republicans slowly moved towards conservatism in the nineties, which intensified since 2000.

Until the 1990s, the Republicans crusaded for removal of restrictions on businesses. This directly opposed the traditional Republican's ideas of large-scale amalgamation of capital by the federal body. Instead, the party supported small businesses and independent entrepreneurs. At inception, the Republican Party supported industrialization and capitalism. However, in

the neoliberal phase, the party started supporting agricultural farms and the plight of the farmers at the hand of modernization and small business at the hand of corporate monopolies. They started supporting the antitrust laws that they felt was necessary to save the small businesses from the cannibalizing monopolies.

The Republican's standpoint towards social welfare too underwent a similar transformation. Support for social policies often fluctuated as the party policy stressed on safeguarding taxpayers' money. President Nixon emphasized the importance of hard work during the 1972 campaign and "welfare ethic" became the trope for the Republicans.

Nixon emphasized, "None of us has the right to expect a free ride - to remain idle, ... to take advantage of other men's labor." Eisenhower presented similar argument, "The Government must not deprive the individual of his just reward, which was the rights of working men and working women to be productive, the rights of each of us to earn what he can and to save it as far as taxes will let him." Therefore, throughout the twentieth century, the Republicans crusaded for the middle-class populace of the US, steering clear to make any commitment for the poor and greater equality of distribution of wealth.

Evidently, there has been a shift in the ideals of the Republicans from neoliberal views of the fifties towards conservatism in the nineties. A study shows that there has been a decline in the total number of non-conservatives among the Republicans. Liberal Republicans within Congress

have declined from 64 in the 1950s to 11 in the 1990s in the House and 14 in the 1950s to 7 in the 1990s in the senate. The study also indicates a drastic decline in the moderate Republicans in both the House and the Senate from the 1950s to 1990s indicating a shift of the Republican ideology from moderate or neoliberalism to conservatism.

With the dawn of the new millennium, the party politics of the US has become bipolar with two wings - the left and the right. The Democrats swing towards the left while the Republicans swing toward the right. However, there are varied differences within the party that ultimately dictates the party policies. The ideological distribution of the political parties in the US is diverse and extreme.

However, post-2001, the Republican ideology, and the platform focused on the Bush government's ' war on terror' rhetoric. Post 9/11, George W. Bush took the nation to war in Afghanistan. This was a conservative as well as a populist move that took place right after the attack on WTC. The Republican president's conservative stand intensified as he evoked religion to counter-terror. Then there was the invasion of Iraq in order to take down a distant threat from Saddam Hussein.

The paranoia about the weapon of mass destruction and the search for the imminent threat to the US homeland became the primary concern of the Bush administration. The conservatism regarding the foreign policy shown by the Bush administration resounded the changing ideology of the Republicans at the beginning of the millennium. The Republicans often criticized the

Democrats of having softened the concerns regarding national security after US defeat in Vietnam, which emboldened the erstwhile USSR during the Cold War. With the war on terror, the conservatives gained a sense of purpose and direction. Bush's idealistic foreign policy gained attention from the evangelists and influenced in creating federal laws against religious extremism in other nations.

The foreign policy that Bush fostered reflected the traditionalist Republican foreign policy of strong defense in order to safeguard national security and domestic priorities. The foreign policy of the Republican has not shifted significantly only the target has altered. The Republican idea of national security and safeguard of the homeland has not changed since the reign of Ronald Reagan. However, there has been a shift in the concentration from confrontation with the USSR and Cuba to the Middle East, North Korea, and China. In the current 2016 election, the Republicans for projecting a foreign policy that will keep the army from harm's way and still keep the homeland safe by carpet bombing the nations that pose threat to the US. Nevertheless, the Republican xenophobia of the foreigner, currently the Muslims, alienated them, creating grievance among them Islamic nations towards the US.

Today, the Republican party is a staunchly conservative party that has turned away from its stand on civil rights and has mooted on social issues such as anti-same-sex marriage, abortion, birth control, etc.

The policies and ideology of the Republican Party, which was once the party of libertines like Lincoln, are changing dramatically towards absolute

conservatism. The coalition established by Nixon in 1968 between the Republicans and the conservative white South has started to show its effect on the ideology and philosophy of the party. The Republican Party that once fought for civil rights and slavery has become a retrograde that refuses to become tolerant of social value and personal behavior.

They choose to turn a blind eye toward a more tolerant America and scout the cause of social taboos and race prejudices, gender and sexual freedom, immigration, and religion. The marriage with the liberal East Coast institution with a conservative white South ensured that the Republicans would retire from their initial commitment towards Civil Rights. This coalition with the Republican Party brought together three different groups of people – the business class, the neoliberal Republicans, and the poor churchgoers of the south. The formation of the alliance led to drastic changes in the policies of the Republicans, observed since the time of Richard Nixon.

The party radically changed from one that fought against slavery and for civil rights turned against abortion, birth control, capital formation, and gay marriage. In 1980, Ronald Reagan began his speech of first presidential campaign with the rhetoric to “ restore to the states and local communities those functions which properly belong there.” Similar anti-racist campaigns found precedence during the elections of George H. W. Bush in 1988 and the Senator Jesse Helms’s reelection in North Carolina in 1990. Thus, the party adopted bigotry, primarily due to an alliance between three contradictory factions. Thus, the majority of the philosophical and the ideological changes

that occurred in the Republican Party were due to a bad marriage between the liberal Republicans and the conservative right-wing South.

The image of the Republican Party has undergone a change from moderates or neoliberals to political conservatives. The reasons for this change are varied - change in party leadership, the coalition with the right-wing white conservatives from the South, change in electoral sentiments, and changes in the domestic and international political scenario. Republican Party currently portrays itself as a conservative party that presents its core ideologies as opposed to change and endorsement of inequality.

A categorical shift from a moderate party to a conservative party is striking as this shift alters the core values that the Republicans once stood for. One reason is the change in the electoral base of the Republicans as most of the republican voters are conservatives. Thus, the party's image, philosophy, and ideology changed to suit the sentiments of the voters. This change towards conservatism began in the sixties with the 1968 nomination of Barry Goldwater as the Republican presidential candidate that marked a steep rise in white voters who preferred conservative policies.

With the adoption of conservative policies, there was a dramatic increase in the seats won by Republicans in the South. The conservative Democrats found it increasingly difficult to hold on to their seats in the South. This, evidently, was the result of the policy shift of the Republicans. Further, changes within the Republican Party with the inclusion of the conservative southerners in the party during the time of Nixon altered the ideologies of

the party. Thus, there was a decline in the number of moderate Republicans and an increase in a number of conservative Republicans. These factors largely influenced the change in the ideology and philosophy of the Republican Party.

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