

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Beyond the Base:
Republican Party Organizations & Minority Outreach in a Context of Reform

by

Nicholas Anthony Boushee

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Political Science
University of California, Riverside, December 2015
Dr. S. Karthick Ramakrishnan, Chairperson

Following two consecutive presidential defeats and facing rapidly changing racial demographics, the Republican Party has sought to reform its minority outreach strategies. This dissertation looks at how the GOP is making this attempted reform, what the barriers are to doing so, and how successful the national party organization is at gaining compliance across the multiple tiers of the party (i.e. from local party organizations). The Republican National Committee has devoted much attention and significant resources to increasing minority engagement on the state and local level. These outreach efforts are most clearly embodied in the RNC's *Growth and Opportunity Project*. With a mixed method approach including a survey of county chairs, my dissertation speaks to the county-level compliance gained by the RNC, and the attitudes of local leadership regarding the national party and the goal of increased minority outreach and racial inclusion. Additionally, with the use of participation observation fieldwork I illustrate how calls for change within a party organization characterized by federalism (i.e. existing across state and national planes) may bring about barriers to collective action in one state (Nevada) while garnering coordination and compliance in another (California). I argue that coordination vs. contention across the levels of party organization is not simply a matter of electoral context (e.g. the market explanation of outreach necessitated by voter demographic change), but rather is in large part due to the attitudes of local leadership, state central committees, and county chairpersons. This research also contributes to our understanding of: party organizations and their motivations and capacity to mobilize minorities, intra-party factionalism and internal campaigning, and the reforming of racialized rhetoric in a context of racially conservative currents. I find that most local party organizations lack the capacity to engage voters beyond the English language, internal campaigning can contribute to intra-party factions and collective action problems, and reform strategy involves a focus on the rhetorical and symbolic more than on issue-based/substantive development as a means to go beyond the partisan base.