

**The American Political Marketplace:  
New Citizens, New Machines, New Strategies**

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# **The American Political Marketplace: New Citizens, New Machines, New Strategies**

## Introduction

Over the last 30 to 40 years, America has undergone some significant changes in its political culture and its traditional party system. Cumulatively, these changes have created a new conception of the role of citizens and a new form of interaction between political elites and the general public. American politics is moving away from its history as a democratic system of highly active, citizen participants, and becoming a marketplace of political consumers, perceiving the next candidate for office much as they might perceive the next new and improved commercial product for purchase.

Both encouraging this shift and responding to it, the political parties and their ideological messaging arms are becoming increasingly adept at marketing political candidates and ideas. However, the traditional political parties are quickly being outperformed by extra-partisan marketing machines, designed for the explicit purpose of selling political ideologies to the masses.

The political marketing machine constructed by the Conservative Right serves as a good example of this new type of institution, developed to capitalize on the qualities of the American consumer citizen. As the only such political marketing machine now in existence, the Right has enjoyed a strong advantage in the political marketplace, facing only weak competition from the Democratic Party and progressives in general. If the current trend in this “market-based” politics continues, progressives will have to find some way to compete with conservatives in the messaging war now ensuing.

In this paper, I will offer a general description of America’s new market politics. In Part I, I will outline how the American conception of citizenship has changed since the

1950s. A nation built on citizen participation in politics and membership in social service organizations, America has recently shifted its course, experiencing significant drops in both associational membership and social capital. In addition, the social movements of the 1960s led to the replacement of citizen activists with professional political advocates and generated a corresponding rise in proxy participation. From these changes, a new type of citizen was born, a passive consumer citizen, only indirectly involved in the political process.

The context in which the new American citizen is operating has changed as well. In Part II of this paper, I will demonstrate how the trend toward candidate-centered campaigns, recent reforms in campaign finance regulations, and an increasingly polarized electorate have affected traditional political parties. Forced to fill an increasingly narrow niche, traditional political parties may be on their way to obsolescence.

Part III of this paper will consider how traditional parties have attempted to respond to the new political marketplace, what new institutions have been developed to better meet consumer demand, and what this may mean for the future of American democracy. More specifically, I will describe the conservative's prototype of the political marketing machine and explore how progressives may begin to enter the market.

#### Part I: The New American Citizen: Political Consumer

In the last 30 years, we have witnessed a significant change in the way Americans participate in the political process. A series of simultaneous changes in American culture have begun to shift what was once a highly collaborative democracy towards, what Crenson and Ginsberg call, a "personal democracy." (Crenson and Ginsberg) These changes include a decrease in American membership in associations, a decrease in social capital, and the professionalization of political activism with its associated rise in proxy participation. As Americans come to see themselves decreasingly as citizens obligated to perform

participatory civic duties and increasingly as passive consumers of American politics, their involvement in the democratic process qualitatively changes.

*Declining Membership in Associations*

American membership and participation in voluntary associations historically played an important role in encouraging civic participation and service in America. (Skocpol) These federations, including such groups as the Knights of Columbus, the Masons, the Odd-fellows, and many more, served to engage the public in service and politics, to encourage cross-class social interaction, to educate citizens about political issues, to empower individual citizens, and to link national and local interests. Unlike many more modern organizations existing today, these groups “stressed social and civic purposes...The genius of classic American associational life was that joining something small connected members of local chapters to much grander organized endeavors.” (Skocpol)

In other words, associations were key players in the development of an active citizenship in the United States. As Theda Skocpol describes,

...representatively governed national and state voluntary institutions helped the modernizing United States to become a nation of associational organizers as well as joiners. Supralocal centers provided resources and created incentives for the leaders of voluntary federations to reach out and help to establish new local units...Multiply-tiered national federations were the key institutional supports of American voluntarism because they simultaneously sustained intimate solidarities and facilitated connections to wider worlds...That is how civic leadership was understood and functioned through much of the nation’s history. (Skocpol)

In addition to providing members with a connection to national goings-on, associations also taught members important skills for civic participation. Group decision-making, debate, office-holding, and leadership skills were conferred on members, regardless of social status. Furthermore, since the governance of most federations was based on that

contained in the U.S. Constitution, members were able to develop a first-hand sense of the rules under which their nation functioned.

Membership associations also sought to foster active citizenship and civic virtues directly. As Skocpol reports, “In their rituals and programs virtually all voluntary federations stressed basic values of charity, community, and good citizenship.” (Skocpol) They stressed the value of service and involvement in the democratic process, often presented as pillars of patriotism.

Finally, membership associations provided arenas for the discussion of current political issues, for educated debate about controversial themes, and for the mobilization of the public. With their national presence and their deep ties to local communities, associations became powerful voices in the political arena, allowing citizens living far from D.C. to have a voice in legislative decision-making. This gave association members a sense of efficacy in the political process, helping to keep citizens engaged.

But membership in such associations has fallen off significantly in the last 40 years. As Skocpol argues, “...Americans are no longer such avid joiners, although they may be organizing more civic endeavors than ever before.” (Skocpol) The 1960s appearance of large-scale social movements like the Civil Rights movement, overwhelmed traditional associational membership, and turned American activists toward more issue-based politics. “The great social movements of the long 1960s thus synthesized grassroots protest, activist radicalism, and professionally led efforts to lobby government and educate the public.” (Skocpol) In other words, these social movements shifted the focus away from active participation in cooperative social associations and toward more issue-based, proxy participation. This effect will be discussed in greater detail later in this section, but for now, it is worth noting that nothing new has arisen to provide the services once offered by

membership associations. The professional and individualized activist organizations that have come in to fill the void, fail to encourage the kind of civic participation once supported by traditional federations.

### *Decreasing Social Capital*

Coinciding with declining levels of participation in active civic associations, the last 40 years have seen a dramatic decrease in social capital. According to Robert Putnam, "...social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them...the core idea of social capital theory is that social networks have value." (Putnam) This kind of capital has been important in the development and maintenance of strong, highly participative civic structures.

Putnam argues that social capital is an important variable, because it not only considers membership in associations (as described by Skocpol), but represents many other forms of involvement as well. In addition to the benefits of civic education and increased influence associated with membership in voluntary federations, Putnam argues that face-to-face interaction can help prevent citizenship from becoming "a spectator sport." As he writes, "Just as one cannot restart a heart with one's remote control, one cannot jump-start republican citizenship without direct, face-to-face participation."(Putnam) Participation in social endeavors encourages participation in civic endeavors.

In fact, according to Putnam, any kind of face-to-face interaction or co-involvement can help encourage the kind of participation required for a functioning democracy. Measured in terms of organizational membership and participation in social gathering groups, religious groups, political groups, and more, high social capital is said to encourage social trust, a sense of mutual obligation, a feeling of reciprocity, and enhanced information dissemination.

High social capital and high civic participation also decrease instances of partisan polarization, by supporting the voices of individuals who might not fall on an extreme end of the political spectrum, increase pressures on politicians to be accountable to the public, and increase trust in government. In his words, “Social capital, the evidence increasingly suggests, strengthens our better, more expansive selves. The performance of our democratic institutions depends in measurable ways upon social capital.” (Putnam)

Unfortunately, as Putnam clearly demonstrates, social capital is declining in America as well. Political participation, civic participation, mainstream religious participation, informal social connections, and social reciprocity, honesty, and trust have all decreased markedly in the last 40 years. (Putnam; Macedo) As Macedo acknowledges, “Americans have turned away from politics and the public sphere in large numbers, leaving our civic life impoverished.” (Macedo) By nearly all accounts, American social capital is on a steady decent, a trend which is significantly impacting American political life.

#### *Professional Advocates and Proxy Participants*

As associational membership and social capital have declined, a new form of activism has arisen in its place. According to Skocpol, this new form of advocacy arose with the social movements of the 1960s and was itself the cause of the decline in associational membership. As advocacy efforts became more issue-focused and more legislatively based, it became more effective for organizations to hire professional activists skilled in these areas, than to recruit large numbers of local participants to their cause. For this reason, Skocpol argues, “Professionally run advocacy groups and nonprofit institutions now dominate civil society, as people seek influence and community through a very new mix of largely memberless voluntary organizations.” (Skocpol) While the number of volunteer organizations has increased since the 1970s, few of these groups offer citizen membership,

thus failing to grant citizens the skills and influence historically offered by such groups. As Putnam writes, "...Over this quarter century the number of voluntary associations roughly tripled, but the average membership seems to be roughly one-tenth as large – more groups, but most of them much smaller." (Putnam)

As effective advocacy came to require elevated levels of expertise and expanding quantities of money, membership in organizations and direct citizen participation decreased in importance. Many modern organizations require money, but they do not require citizen input. As Crenson and Ginsberg argue, this shift dissuades citizens from becoming engaged. "Citizens become politically engaged because states and political elites need them and mobilize them. If they remained passive, politically indifferent, or preoccupied with private concerns, the reason may be that our political order no longer provides incentives for collective participation in politics." (Crenson and Ginsberg) In fact, this is exactly the trend we are seeing; American citizens are transitioning from active participants in politics to consumers of political products. They are no longer participating in civic processes or organizations; rather, they are sending checks to professionally run advocacy groups to serve as their proxies in the process.

This is a highly significant transition, with ramifications that resonate throughout American politics. As citizens become passive consumers, the collaborative flavor of American democracy changes. As Crenson and Ginsberg write,

...A crucial difference exists between citizens and customers. Citizens are members of a political community with a collective existence created for public purposes. Customers are individual purchasers seeking to meet their private needs in a market. What is missing from the experience of customers is collective mobilization to achieve collective interests, and the omission is not just a matter of changing semantic fashions along the Potomac. The merging tendencies in civic education and administrative terminology have something in common with one another. They do not portend the downfall of democracy but the advent of a new individualized

democracy in which citizens are less likely to engage in collective action because they can get what they want on their own. It is a personal rather than a public democracy, and it marks the passing of popular mobilization in American politics. (Crenson and Ginsberg)

### *Summary*

A new form of democracy is arising with its own definition of citizenship. In this democracy, citizens would rather contribute their money than their time, and proxy participation in politics can be bought on the philanthropic market. Face-to-face interaction between citizens and membership in active citizen associations are continuously decreasing, and with them, civic participation, democratic skills, political knowledge, trust in the government, trust in other Americans, citizens' sense of political efficacy, and their sense of civic responsibility are dwindling as well. Active involvement in the democratic process is being replaced by passive consumption of political products, and this, when combined with a few other trends in American politics, is having a significant impact on the American political system.

### Part II: New Trends in American Politics: What is happening to the parties?

Simultaneous to the conversion of citizens from participants to consumers, the American political system has changed as well. Influenced in part by the new form of citizenship, and in part by a shift toward more candidate-centered campaigns, direct changes to campaign finance rules, and an increasingly polarized electorate, traditional political parties have been forced to squeeze into a tighter and tighter niche.

#### *The Shift to Candidate Centered Campaigning*

There is general consensus among political scientists that since the 1950s, campaigns have become highly candidate-centered, offering much less focus to the parties themselves. (Farrar-Myers and Dwyre; Aldrich; Green and Herrnson; Macedo; Cohen "Decline and

Resurgence in the American Party System"; Cohen "The Places of Parties in American Politics." Sorauf) As campaigns began to stress candidates personal traits and qualities, party platforms were marginalized. As Sorauf notes, "Often to the displeasure of ideologues within the parties, they are more than ever obsessed with winning elections. Very rarely does party spending for candidates reward loyalty to party platforms or issue positions or even the legislative party itself." (Sorauf) Candidates that used to rely on machine politics to bring in new constituents, no longer needed the party machinery to do so. With access to funds outside the party from political action committees (PACs) and individual donors, and the ability to hire their own campaign consultants and advisors, the candidates were happy to go it alone. Furthermore, the argument said, they no longer needed the endorsement of the party to indicate their political views. This notion led many political scientists to assume that traditional political parties were going to steadily lose influence until they disappeared – the declining party thesis.

However, parties do not appear to be disappearing at all. In fact, if anything, the electorate is getting more partisan. Nonetheless, parties were forced to respond to the shift toward candidate-centered campaigns to keep themselves in the game. As Farrar-Myers and Dwyre note, "Although the national parties no longer play as large a role in some areas of their candidates' campaigns, such as recruitment and communicating with voters, the parties have reconfigured themselves to play a meaningful role in candidate-centered campaigns." (Farrar-Myers and Dwyre)

#### *The Effects of Campaign Finance Reform*

The 1971 Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA) significantly changed the way political parties received and handled their financial contributions. It "greatly diminished the parties' financial role by limiting contributions and expenditures and forcing the parties to

separate their federal election activities from their state and local party activities.” (Farrar-Myers and Dwyre) It also supported the rise of PACs, which have become highly visible in recent presidential and congressional campaigns. In conjunction with more candidate-centered campaigning, campaign finance reform significantly weakened the role played by traditional political parties.

But the FECA did not succeed in controlling party spending to the degree it hoped. Parties found loop-holes, developed coordinated expenditure strategies, and strengthened their positions as financial assistants to candidates. As described by Farrar-Myers and Dwyer, national parties got better at helping candidates

raise money from PACs and individuals; direct them to professional media, polling, and fund-raising consultants; provide opposition and issue research; compile voter lists; conduct candidate and consultant training sessions; and run generic television and radio ads designed to benefit everyone on the party ticket...All of these party-sponsored services are possible because of the parties' enhanced resource base and increased professionalization. (Farrar-Myers and Dwyre)

Frustrated with the continuing influence of big money on political campaigns, lawmakers tried to reform campaign finance law again in 2002, raising familiar concerns. Among other things, the McCain-Feingold-Cochran Campaign Reform Bill, as it was named, banned “soft money” (less highly regulated money) contributions to national political parties and required that parties offer greater disclosure about their campaign finance information. (HooverInstitution) But, as Greenblatt writes, “Many people debate whether the 2002 federal campaign finance reform law succeeded in limiting the influence of big money in politics. But they don't disagree over one of the law's unintended consequences: the weakening of America's two major political parties.”(Greenblatt) With their limited ability to fund candidates' campaigns, their inability to reach out to the grassroots public, and their

cumbersome bureaucratic organizational structure, parties are not as helpful to candidates as they used to be.

*The Polarized Electorate*

Recent evidence suggests that despite decreasing levels of civic participation and the declining ability of parties to serve the political market, American citizens and the American political elite are more ideologically polarized than they have ever been before. According to Greenblatt, "...Americans are more perfectly sorted politically than they have been in living memory...[and] moreover, parties are sorting themselves out ideologically in ways they never have before." (Greenblatt) In the words of Hetherington, "...elite polarization has clarified public perceptions of the parties' ideological differences..." (Hetherington) And Fleisher and Bond found that, "The views of party identifiers toward a variety of political objects – candidates, parties, issues, ideological self-placement, and presidential performance – show a growing divergence...American politics in the 1980s and 1990s became more partisan and ideological." (Fleisher and Bond) A 2003 article in *The Economist* claimed that partisanship is highly evident in everything from Congress and congressional committees, to redistricting policies, lobbying, and the electorate. ("Politics as Warfare")

What seems clear is that increased levels of polarized partisanship are rife throughout American politics. What is less clear is why this has happened, how it affects citizen engagement in politics, and what it means for the future of democracy in this country. In an era when the country is nearly equally divided between the two major political parties, politicians are encouraged to work on strengthening their partisan bases, rather than wooing new constituencies. As written in *The Economist*, "The upshot is that politics has become warfare. What matters most is the size and bloodthirstiness of your troops, not winning over neutrals." ("Politics as Warfare") Segments of the electorate that fall nearer to the

center are neglected, and eventually, if polarization in the electorate follows that of political elites (Hetherington; Fleisher and Bond), they might disappear. As Macedo worries, “As independents exit the electoral process, we fear that the parties will not simply offer clearly delineated political choices, but instead will diverge so far from one another as to become increasingly unrepresentative of mainstream voters’ preferences, driving overall levels of electoral engagement down even further.” (Macedo)

According to some political scientists, this increase in partisan identification demonstrates that the political parties are not declining or weakening at all. (Fleisher and Bond; Cohen "Decline and Resurgence in the American Party System"; Hetherington) But this does not necessarily follow. According to *The Economist*, “This [increasing partisanship] does not mean that party structures themselves have strengthened. In fact, in terms of raising money they are weaker than they have been throughout most of American history. But the parties are ideologically more distinct. And within the parties, politicians are more partisan and less diverse in their backgrounds.” (“Politics as Warfare”)

### *Summary*

Not only has the American conception of citizenship changed since the 1950s, but the role of political parties has shifted as well. Once acting as principle-based machines responsible for selecting and supporting political candidates, they have been weakened by the development of more candidate-centered campaigns and changes to campaign finance laws. Yet citizens and political elites demonstrate a more polarized partisanship than ever before, leading some to conclude that though different, political parties have not been weakened at all. The debate over whether parties are in decline or in resurgence is ongoing in the political science community, however, when considered in the absence of the new American consumer citizen, I believe the debate may be missing the bigger picture.

### Part III: The New Political Marketplace

As citizens have shifted from active participation in the political process to passive consumption of its products, the American political system has responded. If there is anything America is good at, it is operating in a consumer culture, and American politics is no exception. Americans are settling into their new identity as consumers of politics, and thus, they have fueled a powerful demand for strong activist proxies and marketable candidates. Stepping in to meet that demand are increasingly professional advocacy organizations and increasingly autonomous political candidates. But, in a consumer society as sophisticated as ours, political products like these cannot simply sell themselves; politics has become, now more than ever before, a no holds barred marketing war.

#### *A New Role for Political Parties?*

Over the last 20 years, political parties have accepted their new role as marketers of political products, offering consumers two distinct brands. As Aldrich wrote in 1995, “Parties ‘produce’ candidates, platforms, and policies. Voters ‘consume’ by exchanging their votes for the party’s product...they may be faithful consumers, ‘brand name’ loyalists as it were, but they are still only the targets of partisans’ efforts to sell their wares in the political marketplace.” (Aldrich) In other words, identifying as a Republican or a Democrat today may influence a citizen in much the same manner as would her identification as a drinker of Pepsi or Coke. Consumers become loyal to one or the other, and rationalize their preference by claiming the superiority of their chosen brand.

However, research into consumer products such as Pepsi and Coke have demonstrated that it is primarily the power of the product brand, rather than its inherent qualities, which inspires consumer loyalty. According to a 2004 article in Neuron,

Brain scans of people tasting the soft drinks reveal that knowing which drink they're tasting affects their preference and activates memory-related brain regions that recall cultural influences. Thus, say the researchers, they have shown neurologically how a culturally based brand image influences a behavioral choice. These choices are affected by perception, wrote the researchers, because "there are visual images and marketing messages that have insinuated themselves into the nervous systems of humans that consume the drinks. " (Samuel M. McClure)

In other words, an awareness of brand, and the loyalty this inspires, can overwhelm the qualities of the product itself.

The same effect, I would argue, is occurring in American politics. As citizens come to relate to political candidates and issues in much the same way they relate to their favorite soda product, they become more susceptible to party brand marketing than they were before. Thus, increased polarization in the electorate might not represent changing attitudes toward policy content or issue qualities at all, but a growing identification with one political brand over another. It may also not represent a resurgence in political parties, but simply a strengthening of brand image to an increasingly well-trained consumer public.

But if Americans are truly beginning to vote with their dollar, to disengage from the creative process of democracy, and to allow themselves to be manipulated by ever more sophisticated political marketing schemes, there may be significant cause for concern. The ability of American citizens to act toward the larger good is under serious threat, and the public is much more vulnerable to manipulation than it previously had been. In fact, political groups are becoming expert at marketing to the consumer public, and if this theory holds, those groups that develop the most effective marketing campaigns will gain power, regardless of the policies they support.

*Outsourcing the Message: New machines for winning in the market*

While political parties have begun to adapt to the new political market, they may not, in the end, be the best entities for the job. Institutions designed more specifically to excel in political marketing have begun to supplement traditional parties and may very well replace them in the years to come; a political survival of the fittest.

Though this conception may be new to the political arena, it is not at all new to the business world. As Philippe Kahn, a leading software marketer (said to have introduced “radical guerilla marketing” to the software business (Darrow)) once remarked, “The key word is flexibility, the ability to adapt constantly. Darwin said it clearly. People thought that he mainly talked about survival of the fittest. What he said was that the species that survive are usually not the smartest or the strongest, but the ones most responsive to change.”

(StrategyTree.com) Unfortunately for traditional political parties, in the current era of highly specific public opinion research, new messaging technologies, and state-of-the-art constituency mapping, traditional parties are slow to respond and relatively unresponsive of real-time innovation, making them unable to take full advantage of the constantly evolving political market.

Yet, if something new were to step in to capitalize on the marketing weaknesses of political parties, it would have to out-compete them. First, it would have to be primarily a political marketing institution, designed for that end. Second, it would have to be capable of processing and reacting to the changing market environment quickly and effectively. Third, it would have to outsell its competitors on the market by developing more effective and powerful marketing campaigns and a highly recognizable brand. Finally, it would have to be oriented toward a bottom-line, placing product content at a lower priority than achieving marketing success.

In fact, such an entity does exist, and in the last five years, it has taken up a firm position as the marketing arm of the Bush Administration. Referred to as “the Republican Noise Machine” by Brock, the “conservative infrastructure” by the Commonweal Institute, and the “Right’s meta-structure” by Krencicki and Wilson, the development of this new entity is being heavily investigated by many members of the progressive community. (commonwealinstitute.org; Krencicki and Wilson; Brock) A complex and coordinated network, harnessing the power of significant media influence, strong grassroots presence, and carefully derived think-tank research, this political marketing machine has become a potent new player in American consumer politics.

The conservative political marketing machine was designed to be a marketing entity. First arising after Goldwater’s landslide presidential defeat in 1964, the machine was developed through the creation of an authoritative strategic plan, focused on crafting powerful political messages and building a structure through which to deliver them. (Krencicki and Wilson; Brock) From the beginning, this plan sought not to design a new political product, but to market an ideology already possessed by its supporters. In the 30 years since its effective institution, the conservative political machine has grown stronger and stronger and increasingly successful at out-marketing its rivals.

The conservative marketing machine is also more adaptable than the traditional parties have been. The conservative machine is known for being impressively quick to respond to changing perceptions in the electorate, partly due to the strategic brilliance of its leaders. Capable of taking advantage of new “sophisticated polling techniques” described by Crenson and Ginsberg, the machine is able “to target specific slices of this truncated and already-mobilized audience with political advertising designed to appeal to their particular interests.” And given the high degree of coordination among the machine’s component

parts, it can quickly and effectively deliver consistent messages from each of its various public outlets.

The conservative marketing machine also possesses the third qualification: it has proven its ability to out-market its competitors with a powerful brand. As Alterman writes,

Let us merely note that the creation of a vast network of complementary institutions, including think tanks, pressure groups, publications, and eventually, entire radio and television networks, did successfully create a new world for right-wingers; one in which their ideological arguments soon counted for more than mere 'facts' or 'evidence' as previously understood by reporters. (Alterman)

Just as described in the Coke-Pepsi example, the Right's machine has proven that an effective brand, such as their "conservative" brand, can become more important than the specific qualities of their product. Marketing a brand ripe with such taglines as "free enterprise," "limited government," "individual freedom," "traditional American values," and "strong national defense," the conservative machine has brilliantly positioned its ideological product to be attractive to American political consumers. (HeritageFoundation)

Of significant importance to our discussion here, is the fact that the conservative marketing machine seems to out-market not only its ideological competition, but also the traditional Republican Party. Where political parties have found themselves limited to supporting particular candidates in a candidate-centered political context, the conservative machine has figured out how to market a whole ideology. Furthermore, recent campaign finance reform has taken away a great deal of the parties' autonomy in conducting effective marketing campaigns, preventing them from being a full-time hub for ideological marketing. Finally, the fact that the Republican brand still includes some moderate constituents who might not identify under the more ideologically extreme "Conservative Right" brand, has hampered the party's attempts to clearly hone their identity. However, given the current polarization of the electorate and the new tendency for candidates to focus on appealing to

their bases, it is likely that, as the conservative brand becomes more powerful, the Republican brand will come into increasing alignment with it. Thus, as we have witnessed in the last two years, the Republican Party will, at the least, attempt to piggy-back on the success of the conservative brand, and at most, be consumed by it. The marketing success of the conservative machine's well-organized, multi-pronged, ideological campaigns may overwhelm and out-compete even the Republican Party itself.

Finally, the conservative political marketing machine is indeed oriented toward a single bottom-line: power. As has become clear through their support of many of Bush's policies, the conservative machine is willing to make product content secondary to achieving marketing success. Take, for example, a few of the conservative brand tag-lines described above. While the machine claims to support "limited government" and "individual freedom," many of their policies appear to support something altogether different. The creation and implementation of new "homeland security" legislation, for example, including the infamous Patriot Act, not only expands the power of government, but it directly impedes the individual freedoms of American citizens. The Patriot Act allows government to do such things as search the homes of private citizens without reporting it to them; collect information about what books citizens read, what they study, and what they buy; seize business and financial records; read private emails and monitor internet use, without ever directly connecting suspects to an international terrorist or spy plot. (ACLU) Similarly, the conservative-supported creation of a new class of prisoners called "enemy combatants," has also expanded government power to the detriment of individual freedoms by denying prisoners any habeas claim for protection against government-funded torture or abuse, denying any mandatory court appeal of a military commission conviction of a detainee for fewer than ten years, and allowing the government to hold a prisoner indefinitely without

ever determining their status. (ACLU) These are only a few examples of how the conservative machine's ideological marketing does not necessarily match up with the true content of its product- the policies it supports.

As demonstrated above, the conservative marketing machine has perfected the art of marketing politics to the new American citizen. It was possibly the first significant institution to react so effectively to the changing conception of citizenship, and it has proven unique in its ability market political ideology. As the only real ideological machine in the market, it has enjoyed a significant leg-up on the competition. But in the wake of its success, many are now calling for a progressive marketing equivalent.

*Entering the Political Marketplace: A Progressive Equivalent?*

The challenges facing the development of a progressive marketing machine are many-fold. First, most progressives are highly uncomfortable with the new definition of citizen as consumer of politics. Second, it has proven very difficult to identify a clear progressive brand. Finally, many progressive groups are also uneasy with the idea of seeking a power-based bottom line rather than the principles and policies that define their product. It is unclear, as of yet, whether progressives will be able (or will chose) to overcome these obstacles. What is evident, however, is that progressives will likely be unable to compete in the political marketplace if they do not develop a brand and a marketing strategy on equal par with that of the Right.

Though progressives may become better marketers, if they wish to maintain their principle base, they must find a way of doing so that does not sacrifice their values or engage them in behaviors they find ethically unpalatable. Thus, the progressive marketing machine must, among other things, find a way to sell American political consumers a more active, participation-based form of citizenship, which may eventually make its marketing efforts

obsolete. It is a paradoxical challenge and one that progressives have been slow to undertake. Nonetheless, new progressive framing and messaging initiatives, plans for building progressive solidarity, and the development of progressive media outlets are bringing progressives closer to offering the ideological marketing presence they will need to stand up to the competition.

### Conclusions

America is not the same place it once was. Designed to be a republican democracy of the people, by the people, and for the people, it was assumed that “the people” would continue to take an interest in exercising their democratic freedoms. At the time of the nation’s founding, a great percentage of Americans shared civic principles of service, charity, community, and good citizenship, and in the name of these principles, they became members of a wide variety of voluntary associations and clubs. But American citizens no longer seem to share much of a community spirit, much less a sense of civic responsibility. Rather, they are engaged in what Crenson and Ginsberg call a “personal democracy,” motivated first and foremost to maximize their own personal interests. (Crenson and Ginsberg) They have become passive consumers of American politics, one step removed from the activism in which many of our American ancestors were deeply involved.

It seems questionable to me whether American democracy can function effectively in its new market form, and I believe it is worthwhile to try and reverse the decline in social capital, associational membership, and civic participation in general. As participation in politics declines, politics gets more extreme and combative to the detriment of our country. Furthermore, if American politics ever comes to be dominated solely by marketing machines, it is likely that its citizens will become far more susceptible to manipulation than

citizens who are actively engaged in the democratic process. In order to protect our democracy and the well-being of the American people, it will be necessary to find a way out of the new political marketplace and into a more community-oriented, civically responsible, citizen-driven system.

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