

and the policymaking outlook for the second half of a presidency.

As much as anything, the volume's approach - embracing the uniqueness of Presidents, parties, and events in dictating midterm outcomes - is validated by the most recent 2022 contests, in which Democrats managed something of a stalemate in a year when President Joe Biden's approval should have dictated a bloodbath by the standards of conventional wisdom. The authors of both the initial analyses in Part 1, and of the case studies in Parts 2 and 3, offer a well-balanced acknowledgement of the power of thermostat politics and voters' tendency to rebel against the President's party on the one hand, and the exigencies and complications of intervening events on the other.

In total, the effort put forth in *Midterms and Mandates* is a worthy analytical response to the navel-gazing tendencies of modern political media and popular commentary, who with each passing election cycle seem increasingly

Scott Appelrouth (eds), *Envisioning America and the American self: Republican and democratic platforms, 1840-2016*, London: Routledge, 2019; 125 pp.: ISBN 978-1-138-09204-4

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Party Politics readers should focus on the book's subtitle, Republican and Democratic Platforms: 1840-2016, and not on its title, *Envisioning America and the American Self*. Sociologist Scott Applerouth framed his study around Diane Margolis' 1998 book, *The Fabric of Self: A Theory of Ethics and Emotions*. I am not competent to comment on Appelrouth's social psychological framework, so my review covers only his extraordinary historical analysis of all past Democratic and Republican party platforms. His book is the most comprehensive study of both parties' platforms now in print.

This is not the place to survey the vast research on party platforms. Instead, I offer summary observations on researchers' scope of coverage, their focus of inquiry, and their methods of analysis. Concerning scope, most scholars cover a limited time span and often only one party. Their foci vary widely; some study platform positions on a particular topic, such as abortion, tariff, or civil rights. Others ask whether parties' tend to deliver on platform promises (finding that they usually do). Their research methods also vary widely, from pre-computer studies that discuss platform planks, to statistical analysis of mentioned themes, to quantitative content analysis of entire platform texts.

Appelrouth's book checks all the boxes on scope, focus, and methods. He includes the full texts of all 45 Democratic

desperate to tell a unifying, oversimplified, and often-biased "story" about midterm elections. Instead, by diving mindfully into past midterms, the analyses and case studies offered by *Midterms and Mandates* give us a clear roadmap for how to consider midterms of the future.

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platforms from 1840 to 2016 and all 41 Republican platforms from 1856 to 2016. He maps all likely topics of coverage during those years using modern techniques of computer analysis. While he pays no special attention to platform planks as concrete reflections of party principles, he profusely illustrates his analysis with quotations from specific party platforms.

The book has only 125 pages and skips quickly over topics that interest many students of party politics. "Ideological polarization" is justifiably dismissed in 15 pages, four of which graph House and Senate liberal-conservative congressional nominate scores over time. Appelrouth properly argues that current meanings of liberal and conservative do not apply to Nineteenth Century politics. An even shorter nine-page chapter attempts to establish "the Cultural Grounds of Political Ideology" in the "self and community," invoking concepts of the "obligated self," the "cosmic self," and "relational morality."

The 10-page chapter that follows describes how topic modeling, "a software-assisted, inductive method for assigning topics to a corpus," identified 18 topics in Republican platforms and 14 topics in Democratic platforms based on word patterns. (p.40) The most frequent topic for Republicans was "Agricultural and Industrial Policy"; the second was "The Military." The top two for Democrats were "A New World Order" and "Farm Policies." Graphs show how these topics (all 18 and 14) distributed over presidential election years.

Applerouth warns, "not only can the clusters of words be difficult to decipher, but they also may not include terms that are known recur frequently," (p. 1) and later admits: "On their own, the topic models do not expose how each party crafted its vision of the nation" (p.47). Nevertheless, "In the chapters that follow" he uses the topics to explore "a closer

reading of the platforms, a reading that is informed by the central topics identified here. (p 47)”

In a 50-page chapter (longest in the book) on the Republican Party, Applerouth says its “platforms were dominated by three topics: Governmental Power (Topic 2), Party Politics and Fiscal Policy (Topic 8), and Maintaining the Union (Topic 17)” (p. 50). Why the next-to-the-last most frequent topic (17 out of 18) is a dominant topic is unclear. However, how Applerouth deciphered the computer-generated topics is less important than how expertly he quotes platform passages (specifying years) in his analysis: ‘Republicans offered a clear diagnosis for the nation’s ills: “(A)t the root most of our troubles today is the misguided and discredited philosophy of an all-powerful government, ceaselessly striving to subsidize, manipulate, and control individuals” (1980). Declaring itself to be the “party of individual Americans,” it is “Republicans [who] stood at the rampart of freedom, defending the individual against the domineering state” (1992).’

A shorter (30-page) chapter on the Democratic Party also skillfully cited platforms to show how Democrats identified

and promoted new rights: ‘the right to earn enough to provide adequate food and clothing and recreation” (1960); “the right to adequate protection from the economic fears of old age, sick employment” (ibid.); the right “to another job” if “any man or woman workers displaced by a machine or by technological change” (1964); a “right to as much education and training as he desires and can master . . . Even if his family cannot pay for this education” (1968); . . . “the right to quality, safety, and the lowest possible cost on goods and services “(1972)’ (p. 91).

Party politics scholars will probably be disappointed by Appelrouth’s computerized “topic modeling” applied to the Democratic and Republican party platforms, which seemed not to produce clear results. Readers more interested in politics than social psychology may find little of interest in his interpretative framework. Nevertheless, parties’ scholars should appreciate Appelrouth’s study of American party platforms and his selective, informative quotations of passages to describe the parties’ positions. No other book combines such breadth and texture in discussing the platforms of the two major US parties since their founding.

Keith Weghorst, *Activist Origins of Political Ambition: Opposition Candidacy in Africa’s Electoral Authoritarian Regimes*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge, 2022; xvii + 381 pp.; ISBN: 978 1 316 51992 9, £90 (hbk)

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Why do rational individuals stand as candidates for opposition parties in electoral authoritarian regimes, where the chances of winning are slim and the costs of running high? In *Activist Origins of Political Ambition: Opposition Candidacy in Africa’s Electoral Authoritarian Regimes*, Keith Weghorst tackles this intriguing question head on, arguing that, far from being rare and irrational occurrences, the decisions of opposition candidates to run in such regimes are both frequent and entirely explicable.

Anchoring his argument in a detailed case study of Tanzania, Weghorst convincingly shows that opposition candidates in electoral authoritarian regimes are motivated by different goals and perceptions of risk than their ruling party counterparts, and that these differences are both rooted in, and shaped by, earlier life experiences. Specifically, he finds that previous experience with activism and civil society organizations is associated with a higher likelihood of standing as an opposition candidate, while a history of career partisanship is more common for candidates associated with the ruling party. He argues that this is because civil society activism leads individuals to see value in

candidacy even when they might not win the election, to have a higher tolerance for risk and repression, and to value ideological expression over and above material gain. All qualities that support opposition candidacy. Career partisanship, in contrast, involves deep commitment over a long period of time to the structures of a party, which is not only more feasible for members of the ruling party (where party structures are larger and able to operate more freely), but is also typically a requirement to be allowed to stand as a ruling party candidate in the first place.

Weghorst’s book is well-written and compelling, rooted in a deep understanding of the Tanzanian context. The argument is underpinned by a variety of rich data, including some novel measurement approaches (most notably the use of *methali* or local proverbs to measure risk appetite), which have the potential to revolutionize our research in the region. By challenging dominant explanations of candidacy decisions and party behavior on the continent, moreover, Weghorst contributes to an important area of emerging scholarship, tackling head on the problematic claims that legislators in Africa are unanimously motivated by personal gain, and that parties in the region rarely hold genuine policy positions.

As compelling as the overall argument is, however, the book somewhat frustratingly leaves unanswered the question of what propels individuals into these early life experiences in the first place. That is, if the decision to stand for the opposition versus the ruling party in Tanzania is affected by previous involvement in civil society or party activity, what underpins the decision of individuals to choose one of these two paths? Suggestions are made at times - such as in discussions of the life history of one of the