Resilience in the Rust Belt:
Michigan Democrats and the UAW

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Abstract

Scholarly theories predict that strong ties between political parties and industrial labor unions will inhibit party adaptation and lead to its electoral decline in the context of globalization and deindustrialization. This study tests these expectations in the case of the Michigan Democratic Party (MDP), which has long been dominated by the United Auto Workers (UAW). It finds that these general theoretical expectations do not hold in this setting. Despite the persistence of deep and durable party-union linkages, many high profile Michigan Democrats moved rightward in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, embracing policy positions that clashed with labor’s traditional priorities, and the party remained relatively more electorally resilient than neighboring state Democratic parties. This peculiar coincidence—party adaptation despite strong party-union linkages—can be explained by the simple fact that union leaders supported adaptation by Democratic candidates and officeholders. Contrary to the expectation that union leaders will always act in a sincere or naïve fashion, UAW leaders usually adopted a strategic, “Downsian” approach to party politics and sought to build a broad-based coalition. This study thus lends additional support to J. David Greenstone’s (1969) finding that in places where organized labor was deeply intertwined with the Democratic Party, it had internalized the party’s strategic considerations and taken on many of its aggregation responsibilities. Indeed, the basic patterns Greenstone identified in the 1960s appear to have become even more pronounced in the contemporary context of deindustrialization and heightened party competition.
INTRODUCTION

Globalization and deindustrialization have posed major challenges for left-of-center political parties around the world. Rising unemployment and increased out-migration have eroded their core blue-collar constituencies; depleted state and municipal budgets and the growing appeal of neoliberal ideas have undermined their traditional policy agendas; conservative candidates have cut into their electoral coalitions and divided their allies. In this context, left-leaning parties have faced strong incentives to craft new policy appeals, seek out new constituencies, and reassess their traditional organizational alliances. As comparative scholarship on European and Latin American parties has shown, however, not all of these parties have responded at the same time, in the same ways, or with the same degree of success. One factor that has reliably mediated their responses is the strength of their ties to industrial labor unions. In what has now become an almost unquestioned premise in the literature, scholars posit that the stronger the party-union “linkages,” the more difficult the party’s adaptation and the more likely its electoral decline. If labor-allied parties are to remain competitive in the postindustrial age, we assume they must weaken or jettison their ties to industrial labor unions (Valenzuela 1991; Koelble 1992; Piven 1992b; Taylor 1993; Kitschelt 1994; Levitsky 2001; Piazza 2001; Ludlam, Bodah, and Coates 2002; Levitsky 2003; Burgess 2004).

The same assumptions animate the ongoing debate over the relationship between organized labor and the Democratic Party in the United States. Centrist “third way” Democrats have long attributed the party’s electoral challenges since the late 1970s to the outsized influence of organized labor in the party, which they argue has turned off the suburban swing voters needed to build national majorities. If Democrats are to compete
effectively in a postindustrial age, they argue that labor must “no longer be at the center of the party’s national coalition” (Galston and Kamarck 1989; Hale 1995; Baer 2000, 67; Galston 2004). Those on the other side tend to lament labor’s diminished influence within the Democratic Party and argue that its decline has contributed to the party’s rightward drift, abandonment of core values, and loss of enthusiasm at the grassroots (Meyerson 1986; Kuttner 1987; Dreyfuss 2001; Levi 2003; Francia 2006). Both sides thus agree that a negative relationship exists between the party’s ties to organized labor and its adaptive capacities: they differ only in how much of the former they are willing to trade for the latter.

This debate, unfortunately, has generated more heat than light. We still know far too little about the mechanisms through which strong party-labor linkages inhibit adaptation and harm a party’s electoral competitiveness. It remains unclear how, exactly, union pressure is exerted on the party; the conditions under which it is more or less likely to occur; and whether it applies to every type of party-union relationship in equal measure. Indeed, it is not even clear how “linkages” should be conceptualized and operationalized in the first place. Things become especially cloudy in the setting of U.S. party politics, where both party organizations and the labor movement are, and historically have been, quite weak relative to European and Latin American standards. How far do our theoretical expectations travel? Do they illuminate the Democratic Party-organized labor alliance in the United States or only add to the confusion?

This paper takes a first step toward addressing these questions. It zeroes in on the “Rust Belt” region of the United States, giving particular attention to the relationship between the Michigan Democratic Party (MDP) and the United Auto Workers (UAW). If
our theoretical expectations hold anywhere in the United States, they should presumably hold in Michigan, where the relationship between the MDP and the UAW has long been viewed as one of the strongest party-union alliances in the nation, and where the effects of globalization and deindustrialization have been particularly destabilizing. As is well known, Michigan’s automobile industry never fully recovered from the oil shocks of the 1970s. As foreign competition increased, factories started closing or moving elsewhere; blue-collar unemployment rose precipitously; union density fell; depopulation accelerated; budgets tightened; conservative candidates won office with increasing frequency; and Republican partisan identification rose steadily. Under those conditions, Michigan Democrats should have had strong incentives to follow the median voter rightward by developing new programmatic and electoral strategies. Their deep and durable ties to the state’s largest and most powerful union, however, should have inhibited their adaptive capacities.

What this study finds, in brief, is that these general theoretical expectations do not hold in this setting. Despite the persistence of deep and durable party-union linkages, many high-profile Michigan Democrats moved rightward in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, embracing policy positions that clashed with labor’s traditional priorities, and the party remained relatively more electorally resilient than neighboring state Democratic parties. This peculiar coincidence—party adaptation despite strong and durable party-union linkages—can be explained, I argue, by the simple fact that union leaders supported adaptation by Democratic candidates and officeholders. Union officials actively recruited centrist candidates who could “go base-plus” and lent their formidable electoral muscle to support almost anyone who could help the Democratic Party build electoral and
legislative majorities. Contrary to expectations that union leaders would act in a sincere or naïve fashion, I find that they adopted a strategic, “Downsian” approach to party politics and sought to build a broad-based coalition. This helps to explain the first puzzle, but it raises a puzzle of its own—how to explain the union leaders’ unexpected behavior?

This paper endeavors to unpack each piece of this puzzle (strong party-union linkages, party adaptation, electoral resilience, and union support) while addressing some of the more general theoretical and empirical questions posed above. The result is essentially a stylized case study of the MDP-UAW relationship between the 1970s and 2000s, organized around an analytical discussion. What it gains in depth, however, it loses in analytical power: as a single case, it is not equipped to offer an entirely satisfying explanation for the second puzzle of why union leaders supported adaptation.1 Instead, it aims a bit lower. The closing section highlights some seemingly important case-specific factors and discusses the relationship between the paper’s findings and earlier work in this vein, including J. David Greenstone’s (1969) magisterial study of labor in American politics (in which Detroit figures as a central case), Kevin Boyle’s (1995) study of the UAW, and others.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

As noted, in the context of globalization and deindustrialization, strong party-union linkages are widely viewed as a drag on the party’s competitiveness. In perhaps the most prominent formulation, Herbert Kitschelt (1994) writes: “While in the past strong working-class organization in centralized labor unions, allied with social democratic parties, was a political asset that boosted the parties’ electoral fortunes and policy

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1 This paper represents the first installment of a larger comparative-historical study of state-level party politics in the Rust Belt.
effectiveness, this asset has now turned into a liability” in the postindustrial era. “Strong linkages to labor unions privilege traditionalists in the party leadership who are unwilling to take on either the challenge of market efficiency or the challenge of left-libertarian politics” (6, 225). This echoes Frances Fox Piven’s claim that over-reliance on unions can have “perverse effects on the party, as internal oligarchies hobble adaptations to new political conditions...[and] ultimately become political liabilities” (1992a, 16), as well as Thomas Koelble’s (1992, 52) contention that “adaptation is more difficult for parties with a strong organizational connection to blue-collar unions in declining industries and relatively smooth for parties with a greater organizational independence from unions in declining industries.” The same perspective appears in numerous comparative studies of labor-allied parties (Przeworski and Sprague 1986; Collier and Collier 1991; Regini 1992; Taylor 1993; Murillo 2001; Piazza 2001; Levitsky 2003; Burgess 2004) and is reflected in the literature on Democratic Party-organized labor relations in the United States as well (Rehmus, McLaughlin, and Nesbitt 1978; Ferguson and Rogers 1986; Goldfield 1987; Vogel 1989; Dark 1999; Levi 2003; Francia 2006).

Party-union linkages are thus seen as a crucial “internal” organizational factor that mediate party responses to “external” change (Panebianco 1988; Strom 1990; Harmel and Janda 1994; Kitschelt 1994; Levitsky 2001, 2003). Since labor-allied parties in industrialized democracies tend to have multiple veto points, routinized procedures, and high barriers to entry for leadership positions, “old guard” labor leaders within the party hierarchy are presumed to use those institutional levers to block the recruitment of new candidates or the development of new policies that might betray labor’s priorities. The more entrenched union officials are in the party’s decision-making processes, the more
they should be able to frustrate party adaptation. Longstanding alliances with labor unions can also manifest in normative, cognitive, or cultural constraints that make adaptation more difficult for future party actors (Piven 1992a; Kitschelt 1994; Berman 1997; Schwartz 2011). Either way, the widespread assumption is that if left-leaning parties are to adopt new strategies and remain electorally competitive in the postindustrial age, their ties to organized labor must be severed or weakened.

Importantly, this conceptual framework presumes a clear-cut distinction between the perspectives of union officials and the perspectives of party politicians. Union leaders are presumed to be sincere or naïve actors who pursue their interests by pressuring party politicians to stay close to their ideal preferences. Party politicians, in contrast, are presumed to be strategic, sophisticated actors who seek to maximize votes or seats in a “Downsian” fashion, adapting their ideological platforms, policy programs, and electoral strategies to appeal to the median voter, wherever she may be (Downs 1957). Their preferences often overlap, of course—which explains the alliance in the first place—but the strong assumption is that party and union actors have distinct interests and incentives. Indeed, even those scholarly accounts that emphasize the mutual benefits of the party-union relationship describe it as an “exchange” between party interests, on one hand, and union interests on the other (Pizzorno 1978; Przeworski and Sprague 1986; Garrett 1998; Huber and Stephens 1998; Dark 1999; Hicks 1999).

When their interests diverge—as we anticipate under conditions of global economic integration, deindustrialization, and heightened party competition—union leaders are said to face a “loyalty dilemma” (actually, trilemma) in which they must

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2 Francia (2006), for example, writes that “Interest groups have one overriding purpose: to pass or protect legislation favorable to the members they represent. Unions typically assist candidate they anticipate will most likely support workers’ concerns once elected to Congress” (119).
choose between three difficult options (Burgess 2004, 9). Either they abandon the alliance (exit), make demands on the party that violate the terms of the alliance (voice), or acquiesce to party adaptation and accept a more subordinate, less influential position in the party hierarchy (loyalty) (Hirschman 1970; Taylor 1993; Murillo 2001; Piazza 2001; Levitsky 2003; Avdagic 2004; Burgess 2004). Because the costs of exit are usually deemed to be too high, voice and loyalty are seen as the most common responses.³

Voice—making demands that run counter to politicians’ electoral imperatives—is thought to produce different outcomes depending on the strength of party-union linkages. If linkages are weak, then party politicians will refuse the union’s demands, the alliance will fray further, and politicians will adapt more freely. If linkages are strong, then party politicians must either try to weaken those ties or submit to the union’s demands and suffer electorally. The third option, loyalty—in which the union accepts party adaptation without a fight—results in weaker party-union linkages as well, since it implies diminished union influence in the party. Whichever path the union chooses, then, we expect there to be a tradeoff between the party’s adaptive capacities and the party-union relationship. Extant theoretical frameworks thus leave no room for the possibility that party-union linkages—and the union’s influence within the party—might remain strong while the party adapts and remains electorally competitive.

**THE PUZZLE**

The MDP-UAW relationship becomes puzzling in light of these theoretical expectations. Between the 1970s and early 2000s, party-union linkages remained extremely strong—for example, the UAW continuously held 2/3 of party offices and its

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³ Common examples of loyalty include the SAP in Sweden, the SPD in Germany, and the PRI Mexico; examples of voice include the PSOE in Spain, the Labour Party in Britain, and the PJ in Argentina.
preferences on party matters were almost always determinative\textsuperscript{4}—yet Democrats politicians in Michigan frequently adapted and the party remained relatively electorally competitive. This puzzle can be largely explained by another puzzle, which is that UAW leaders actively supported party adaptation. This section, divided into three parts, marshals evidence to show that: (1) an extremely strong party-union relationship persisted between the MDP and UAW throughout this period, as measured along three spheres of “linkages”; (2) many high-profile Democratic politicians conspicuously adapted and the party as a whole remained relatively electorally resilient; and (3) union leaders actively supported this repositioning. Because the historical record on state-level party politics is virtually nonexistent, explicating each piece of the puzzle takes a bit more work than usual. This section draws upon archival research, over two dozen personal interviews with former and current party and union leaders conducted between 2011-2013, secondary sources, and aggregate elections data.

1. STRONG AND DURABLE PARTY-UNION LINKAGES

The relationship between Michigan Democrats and the UAW, the state’s largest and most powerful union, is among the most storied (and studied) relationships in American party politics. Though other states have had higher union densities, Michigan’s heavy reliance on automotive manufacturing, its location as the national headquarters of the UAW, and its concentrated in-state UAW membership (Michigan comprises four of the UAW’s ten regions) has made the UAW a central player in state politics since its

\textsuperscript{4} Indeed, as late as 2013, the UAW’s abrupt decision to oust MDP Chairman Mark Brewer, the longest-serving Democratic party chair in the country (1995-2013)—who in 2003 managed to retain power even against the express wishes of popular incoming Democratic governor Jennifer Granholm—proved decisive and swift. See Kathleen Gray, “UAW spearheading search for challenger to Michigan Democratic Party chairman Mark Brewer,” \textit{Detroit Free Press}, February 5, 2013; Kathleen Gray, “State Democrats choose new leader Lon Johnson as Mark Brewer bows out of race,” \textit{Detroit Free Press}, February 24, 2013.
founding in 1935. Moreover, the UAW’s legendary political activism and the MDP’s open, participatory organizational structure has made the party-union relationship especially strong in this state. On this point, there is little dispute among scholars—the extant literature makes unequivocal and bold statements along these lines. As early as the 1960s, Fenton (1966, 13) observed that the UAW was “a part of the Democratic Party rather than a separate interest group,” and Greenstone (1969, 136) found the UAW to be the “dominant force” within the party. During the 1970s, Buffa (1984a, iv; 1984b, ix) observed that the UAW had such a “stranglehold” on the MDP that “the Democratic party had become a subsidiary of the UAW.” In the mid-1990s, Browne and VerBerg (1995, 207) found that organized labor was “still the single most important element in the Democratic Party organization,” and Form (1995, 29) wrote that “in no other metropolitan area or state did labor so dominate the party as in Detroit and Michigan.”

Secondary-source descriptions provide a useful starting point, but more precise empirical referents of party-union linkages are needed. How, exactly, did the UAW dominate the MDP? Through what mechanisms might it have inhibited adaptation by center-seeking Democrats? Unfortunately, the term linkages is not well-defined or systematically measured in the existing literature. Sometimes it is used interchangeably with “influence,” but the term also implies something more durable, or institutional. Building on Kitschelt (1994), Ludlam et al (2002), and Upchurch et al. (2009), I disaggregate party-union “linkages” into three overlapping but analytically distinct dimensions: structural, procedural, and operational integration (see Table 1).

Theoretically, integration could occur along one, two, or all three dimensions, and in

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5 Also see (Kornhauser, Sheppard, and Mayer Albert 1956; Sarasohn and Sarasohn 1957; Sawyer 1960; Greenstone 1961; Greenstein 1970; Steiber 1970; Greenberg 1973; Korn 1976; Dunbar and May 1980; Weidman 1987; Staebler 1991; Boyle 1995; Lichtenstein 1995; Boyle 1998; Meier and Rudwick 2007)
different degrees along each.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Measuring Party-Union Linkages</th>
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<tr>
<td>• <strong>Structural Integration</strong></td>
<td>◦ e.g., sharing of personnel, physical space, material resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>• <strong>Procedural Integration</strong></td>
<td>◦ e.g., collaborative decision making, strategic planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Operational Integration</strong></td>
<td>◦ e.g., coordination of political activities, delegated tasks</td>
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Between the 1970s and 2000s, I find evidence of extensive party-union integration along each dimension. If anything, the linkages grew stronger over the years. Space constraints do not permit a full presentation of the evidence, but a few examples should suffice.

1. **Structural Integration**

The most important structural tie between the party and the union involved *personnel overlap*, meaning union members who were also party members. This party-union fusion did not always exist: prior to 1972, the UAW maintained a “general policy” of staying out of Democratic Party offices, primarily influencing the party as a pressure group from the outside. After a series of political crises in the early 1970s that UAW leaders felt were mishandled by MDP leaders, however, the union resolved to change its approach. In 1972, the UAW’s political arm, the Community Action Program (UAW-CAP), mobilized local union leaders to assemble slates of delegates to run for the MDP State Central Committee (SCC) in districts across the state. Drawing upon the UAW’s power in numbers and organizational skill, union members easily took majority control of the SCC. From there, UAW members ensured that only labor-friendly party chairmen and DNC delegates were elected. This effort inaugurated a new era in party-union integration.

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6 And by extension, the state AFL-CIO as well, of which the UAW was the dominant union before its disaffiliation 1968 and after its re-affiliation in 1981.
that continues to this day. Of the approximately 3,000 party members attending biannual party conventions, over 2,000 are also UAW members and retirees. Roughly two-thirds of SCC members are UAW members as well. Over the years, other unions have gained in strength within the party as well—including the AFSCME, SEIU, and the Michigan Education Association (MEA)—but the UAW remains the dominant force.7

Among grassroots activists, the distinction between “party members” and “union members” was hopelessly blurred. “Whether it was social groups or political groups or retiree groups, or the leadership of the party—there was a lot of overlap that occurred,” a former non-labor Democratic Party leader noted.8 A former union leader confirmed that local UAW activists “were all party members, and they were all political activists…there’s absolutely no distinction...Everything the Democratic Party does, the UAW was totally involved with. At every level, from the grassroots right on up.”

The party and union shared not only personnel, but also physical space, material resources, and information assets. The SCC, for example, routinely met at local union headquarters around the state; the UAW and MDP regularly shared pollsters; and in the early 1990s, the two entities partnered to assemble a massive voter database.9 “They’re thoroughly integrated into what we do,” a party organization leader reported.

2. Procedural Integration

Structural integration becomes politically significant to the extent that it results in shared decision-making authority. On this score, the evidence is overwhelming that union

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7 The MEA, for example, which has grown rapidly in prominence since the 1990s, stood with Brewer in 2013, only to be defeated by the UAW in this most important test of party clout. See note 4.
8 The names of the participants have been removed to ensure the anonymity of my respondents.
leaders’ preferences have been nearly determinative on every important party decision since at least the early 1970s. A good illustration can be found in the Unity Caucus, a subterranean vehicle designed in the 1970s to ensure union influence in the party’s decision-making processes. An informal device, the Unity Caucus met in advance of SCC meetings and party conventions to set the agenda, rank nominees for statewide office, make endorsements, determine policy stands, and settle differences behind closed doors. With most contentious issues resolved, tabled, or at least discussed thoroughly in advance, the public portions of party meetings appeared relatively seamless. In the 1990s, its name was changed to the Labor Caucus, but it continues to meet to this day. A similar model could be observed at the local level as well, where local UAW-CAP council meetings were often held in conjunction with congressional district Democratic party meetings. “We’d be at the same location…we would meet with our membership, and then they would go to the Democratic Party meeting,” one union member explained.

Less formal collaborative decision-making was also common. Roughly every two weeks, an unnamed “continuing operation” brought MDP party leaders together with representatives from the UAW, other statewide unions, the MEA, elected officials, and other influential actors to facilitate collaborative decision-making on candidate selection, campaign operations, and resolving other political issues. This informal mechanism enabled ostensibly independent groups to influence party actions, and vice versa. Of course, truly informal collaboration—discussions over the telephone and in person—has always been the most common form of party-union interaction. Party chairmen routinely called the political directors of UAW-CAP to discuss appointments. Said one UAW-CAP leader: “He wasn’t getting my permission—he was just discussing it with me. We were
consultants to each other.” Another CAP leader reported: “We always picked up the phone and called [campaign] political directors, the party caucus chairs…When you’ve got that much clout, that many votes, you don’t stand at the back door of the convention and just say this is where the UAW is at…I would always make sure that I talked to all the party officers, and I’d have a discussion: How do you feel, where are you at on this.” Collaborative decision making, in other words, has long been the norm.10

3. Operational Integration

The deep structural and procedural integration of the MDP and UAW enabled myriad coordinated campaigns and political operations. For example, the party and union (UAW-CAP) routinely ran joint training programs to educate and mobilize activists across the state on voter targeting, messaging, media relations, and voter contact techniques.11 The primary area of operational integration, however, involved election year “Coordinated Campaigns,” in which the broad network of Democratic Party and affiliated groups divvied up fundraising tasks, campaign expenditures, voter registration and mobilization activities, candidate recruitment efforts, issue ad placements, and other activities. Despite the UAW’s outsized influence in the state, the union was deeply committed to the Coordinated Campaigns. A statewide operation, it enabled the party and union to exert significant control over candidates. Candidates seeking the UAW’s endorsement, for example, were told:

“If you want to run for a university board and you’re going to go out asking for campaign contributions, okay, well here’s what you need to do. That money needs to go into the Michigan Democratic Party Coordinated Campaign. There’s not a thing you can do with that paltry $30,000, $40,000, $80,000 you’re going to get. Keep $5,000 for yourself to cover incidentals, but the rest of it better go to

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10 For detailed evidence from the 1970s, see Buffa 1984b, 236.
11 See for example, “June 4th UAW Region 1D Training, Black Lake,” Chairman’s Correspondence, 1992-1994, Box 47, MDP (8355)
the Coordinated Campaign. This is how it works: it’s what we can do for you statewide; that’s where the money needs to go.”

To summarize, relations between the MDP and the UAW were so strong between the 1970s and 2000s that it would not be an exaggeration to describe the party and the union as fused. Participants often took for granted their connections, shared purposes, and dual loyalties. Extensive personnel overlap helps to explain it, but so too does the reliable reproduction of collaborative practices over time. Drawn out over many years, little meaningful distinction could be made between the party and the union.

2. PARTY ADAPTATION AND RELATIVE ELECTORAL RESILIENCE

Despite strong and enduring party-union ties, a surprising number of prominent Democratic candidates and officeholders moved rightward—conspicuously embracing “third way” policies that were often at odds with labor’s policy agenda—in the hopes of appealing to split-ticket voters, Independents, and Republicans. Many high-profile Michigan Democrats did not reposition, of course (e.g., liberal stalwarts Sen. Carl Levin, Rep. David Bonior, and Rep. Howard Wolpe)—and those from “safe” districts had no reason to—but many did, including the two most successful Democratic politicians in Michigan during this period: Governor James Blanchard (1983-1991) and Governor Jennifer Granholm (2003-2011). Publicly, both governors embraced centrist “New Democrat” positions that clashed with the traditional priorities of organized labor.

Blanchard, in fact, was a founding member of the centrist Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) in the mid-1980s and served as chairman of Michigan’s DLC chapter. Other Democrats who also publicly affiliated with either the congressional New Democrat Coalition (NDC), the New Democrat Network (NDN), or the “Third Way” think tank included well-known figures like Sen. Debbie Stabenow (also U.S. House),

These and many other Michigan Democrats embraced centrist, reformist positions on myriad policy issues, including many that rolled back labor’s historic advances in protecting workers and providing for their economic security. Though the initiatives presented in Table 2 represent only a smattering of the policies supported by these Democrats at the state level, interview respondents consistently identified these issue areas as politically significant and highly salient departures from past practice. The point is that many Democratic politicians—especially those running in statewide elections or in swing districts—perceived it to be in their interest to move to the right.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2 Policies Advocated by Democrats Contrary to Labor’s Traditional Priorities</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Workers’ Compensation Reform (‘82, ‘85, ’87)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Harder for workers to qualify for benefits; harder for injured workers to sue employers for damages; changes to “disability” definition</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Unemployment Compensation Reform (80s-90s)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Stop growth in unemployment benefits (in 1989); UCF restructuring 1992; reduce payments, raise monetary eligibility requirement (1995)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Business-friendly Policies (80s-00s)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tax cuts, tax incentives, balanced budgets, regulatory reform (1980s, 1990s, 2000s); use state pension funds as venture capital for startups; Michigan Strategic Fund (public-private partnerships); 21st Century Jobs Fund (“corporate welfare”)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Education, Training Initiatives (80s-00s)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Buyouts with training if union membership is revoked</td>
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Policy adaptation need not result in electoral success, of course. Candidates may reposition on salient policy issues and still lose their elections (as Blanchard did in 1990
to Republican gubernatorial candidate John Engler). Yet the inverse is almost always presumed to be true: in comparative studies of party adaptation, electoral competitiveness is frequently taken as evidence of, or used as a proxy for, policy adaptation (see, for example, Kitschelt 1994; Piazza 1991). That may not always be a safe assumption, but in this case, we have evidence of both policy adaptation and electoral resilience.

To measure the latter, we first need a set of similar state parties against which to compare Michigan Democrats. Confining the analysis to the Rust Belt is a good start, but the region has artificial, subjective boundaries (see Figure 1).12

**FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE**

This study thus zeroes in on the four most manufacturing-reliant states within the Rust Belt—Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, and Wisconsin—where deindustrialization challenges should have figured most prominently in state politics, where the political pressures to adapt should have been strongest, and where unions were prominently and regularly involved in state party politics (see Figure 2).13

**INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE**

In these four Rust Belt states, self-identified Republicans in the electorate grew by about 10 percentage points between the mid-1970s and early 2000s, mirroring the trend across all fifty states, while Democratic party identification declined by about 2 percentage points and self-identified Independents declined by about 8 percentage points (Wright, McIver, and Erikson 2003). All four states trended together, and the partisan changes in Michigan were perfectly average for the region (see Figure 3). As such, we

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13 The economies of New York, Pennsylvania, and Illinois are more diverse and significantly less reliant on manufacturing than Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, and Wisconsin. The population centers of the first two, as well, lie outside the usual boundaries of the Rust Belt (Figure 1).
would expect Democrats in all of these states to have faced similar incentives to move rightward in order to remain competitive.

**INSERT FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE**

But where to look for signs of electoral success? In the fragmented U.S. political system, the answer is not obvious. Though some may prefer a different combination of offices, the inquiry here will be confined to the regularly competitive elective offices that state parties tend to value most highly and target most routinely: state legislature; state senate; state governorship; U.S. House; U.S. Senate; and U.S. presidency. Ceaser and Saldin’s (2005) Majority Party Index (MPI), which aggregates, weights, and tracks election results for these six categories every two years, is therefore particularly useful for our purposes.  

14 Ceaser and Saldin track (and weight) the two-party Republican vote for president in the last election (25%); two-party vote for two most recent U.S. Senate elections (12.5%); two-party vote for all U.S. House elections, averaged (12.5%); two-party vote for governor in last election (25%); two-party percentage of all seats in the state legislature (12.5%); two-party percentage of all seats in the state senate (12.5%). Updated data online at: [http://scholar.harvard.edu/saldin/data](http://scholar.harvard.edu/saldin/data).

This metric has two advantages for our purposes. First, though it is less useful as a measure of a party’s strength in a single year, it tracks the over-time ebb and flow of party competitiveness quite nicely, which is the main topic of interest here. Second, unlike most other measures, it combines state-level and national-level votes in a single value. Since state parties work to elect their party’s candidates up and down the ballot, this comprehensive measure is precisely what is needed here.

As Figure 4 indicates, Republicans assumed ostensible “majority party” status (over 50 percent) in all four states during the 1990s, but each state’s electoral trends were not all of a piece: Democrats in Michigan dampened the Republican wave more effectively than Democrats in any other state. By the mid-1990s, Ohio (which was Michigan’s electoral twin in the 1970s) and Wisconsin (which was even more solidly Democratic than Michigan in the 1970s) had each swung a full 9 percentage points toward the Republican Party, while the Republican gain was less than half that in Michigan.
Given the region-wide swing toward the Republican Party, these differences may appear small. But in a competitive two-party state, only one or two MPI points can mean the difference between unified control of state government and out-party status. A party’s ability to dampen the region-wide trend and remain within striking distance of 51 percent—to exhibit resilience in the face of adversity—is therefore of crucial importance. Michigan Democrats not only remained more competitive than neighboring Democrats on average, but they experienced less electoral volatility as well. Table 3 shows the standard deviation from the mean and range for each state (also measured as MPI).15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Mean</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>48.8%</td>
<td>43.7%</td>
<td>52.8%</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>54.8%</td>
<td>48.9%</td>
<td>60.1%</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
<td>39.2%</td>
<td>55.0%</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>51.5%</td>
<td>44.5%</td>
<td>59.4%</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To be sure, factors other than policy adaptation by prominent Michigan Democrats likely helped to generate this relative electoral resilience during this period.16 But simply as an empirical matter, the five election campaigns in which Blanchard and Granholm led the Democratic ticket (1982, 1986, 1990, 2002, 2006) weigh heavily in the MPI statistic, and both took pains to distance themselves from the traditional liberal-labor policy agenda. In sum, then, Democrats in Michigan managed to remain more electorally resilient than neighboring Democrats, and part of the explanation is that many moved to the right in their policy positions.

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15 The next-most stable state, Indiana, was also the most Republican. Thus, if it were possible for a Democratic candidate to choose which Rust Belt state in which to seek election during this period, s/he could not have done better than to run in Michigan.
16 As I discuss elsewhere, some of these other factors include the UAW-CAP’s magnification of the MDP’s organizational capacities and other sources of base stability.
Nothing said thus far is very surprising, given that a foundational premise of political science is that parties under pressure will alter their strategies and adjust the nature of their appeals to keep pace with changing voter preferences. Adaptation is what parties and candidates are expected to do as a matter of course (Downs 1957; Riker 1962; Lowi 1963). Given the rightward movement of the Michigan electorate noted above, it is therefore to be expected that many high-profile Democratic politicians would have moved rightward in their policy positions. What is surprising is that adaptation occurred despite extremely strong party-union linkages. But as it turns out, the explanation is actually quite simple: UAW leaders actively supported party adaptation.

3. UAW SUPPORT FOR PARTY ADAPTATION

Contrary to theoretical expectations, UAW leaders acted in a strategic or sophisticated manner rather than in a sincere or naïve fashion: they recognized that electing less reliable “non-labor” Democrats was far preferable to the election of more Republicans. And when they deemed it necessary for the party’s electoral success, they compromised on some of their policy commitments. In other words, they found their interests to be intertwined with, and inseparable from, the electoral interests of the Democratic Party.

To be sure, in solidly Democratic districts, the UAW typically backed the most pro-labor Democrat possible. But in “swing” or “marginal” districts—including statewide elections—the UAW tended to employ a different political calculus, seeking to recruit “lukewarm” (non-labor) Democrats who could appeal to a wider range of voters.

Interview respondents repeatedly remarked that it was almost too obvious to mention—and silly to even ask—of course the party needed to field candidates who could reach
beyond labor’s base in those races. A former UAW-CAP director explained:

“Look, if you haven’t been able to get to a point of a clear majority of Democrats [in the legislature], but you’re right on the edge, chances are that your membership—or people associated with the labor movement—are less than that. So if the candidate is a dog—and can’t go beyond the base—can’t go base-plus, and then can’t go beyond that, we are not going to get a majority. And if we cannot get a majority, they’re going to [hurt] us. So, what are you looking for, then? You’re looking for someone who can appeal to a broader set of people than just the union.”

Rank-and-file union members were sometimes less enthusiastic than their leaders about supporting candidates who went “base-plus.” UAW-CAP officers would hear complaints like: “You’re always going with somebody you think can win, and not staying true to what we believe in!” Those arguments did not hold much water for UAW political leaders, however, who would reportedly respond: “Sure, this guy’s a nice guy; he says all the right things; he’s for everything we’re for. But how do you think he’s going to win this district?...You can have five of them that way, but geez, if we get below 52, we don’t have control of the House—and when we don’t have control of the House, we’re [in trouble]...So what is it you want to do here?”

Another union leader explained: “We always worked with our membership to help them understand that we had all these broad issues that went all across the spectrum, and needed candidates who would represent those issues, too.” According to a different UAW respondent, “We always have known that we need to broaden the base. We can’t win with what we’ve got. So we need to be reaching out.” Still another: “To win an election, we’ve got to appeal to people that aren’t our members—or if they are members, [didn’t care]—and who believe that we’re not being accommodating, or that the Democratic Party’s program doesn’t deal with creating new businesses, etc. That’s moderate Democrats or ‘business’ Democrats, or Independent voters. We’ve got to
appeal to them, too.” Union leaders did not prefer “lukewarm” Democratic candidates to reliable pro-labor Democrats, but they took the initiative in recruiting them anyway, for the simple reason that those candidates increased the party’s chances of winning majorities: “It’s the whole thing about what I want, what I’d like to have, and what I can live with. I can hardly remember having [a candidate] that I wanted. I spent a lot more time in the ‘live with’ category. And that’s what you have to do,” one UAW leader explained.

Prospective Democratic candidates were sometimes surprised to learn the extent of the UAW political leaders’ strategic thinking. One former UAW-CAP leader recounted: “They’d sit down and start talking to me about worker’s comp, and this and that, and I used to say: ‘You know what? I appreciate what you’re telling me, but you’ve got to understand something. I don’t need you to take care of that. That’s what we do.’”

The UAW sought to recruit Democratic candidates who could attract voters on non-labor issues. In its lobbying activities, the UAW pressed for policy “purity,” or as close to it as possible—but in competitive districts and statewide elections, it sought to recruit Democratic candidates who could appeal to a wide range of voters.

Party regulars were acutely aware of the UAW’s political sophistication. One former party chairman said that UAW leaders would occasionally warn him not to be too supportive of labor in public: “They’d say…sometimes you’re going to have to chew us out a little.” A Democratic state representative likewise explained that the UAW’s political leaders understood the imperatives of majority-building in a legislative setting: “They knew that there were Democrats that—you couldn’t count on a 100% vote [record on labor’s issues], but maybe 65% was pretty good for the community they were in—to
UAW-CAP leaders sometimes criticized party leaders for not being strategic enough. Said one former UAW-CAP director:

“The Michigan Democratic Party has always been extremely sensitive with wanting to make sure that they balance the ticket...make sure we have minorities, a woman, and so on. And sometimes I think that was maybe not the best strategy because it didn’t necessarily mean we were going to win. We may look good, but I always thought elections were about winning! ... There were some times when we basically had to step in and say this has got to be the candidate for Secretary of State, because he can win.”

Illustration: Recruiting and Supporting Governor Blanchard

The UAW’s embrace of the party’s broader strategic considerations was on prominent display in 1982, when UAW leaders helped to recruit James Blanchard to run for governor. Blanchard, then a U.S. congressman from suburban Detroit, had made a name for himself by helping to orchestrate the Chrysler bailout and championing neo-corporatism—“a positive working relationship between government, labor and management”—which, at the time, was seen as steering a middle course between the interests of labor and business.17 One local magazine described Blanchard’s vision for state government as “startling in its divergence from New Deal Democratic policy.”

Regarding the “unusual business-labor coalition behind his candidacy,” Blanchard was quoted: “I’m interested in creating a new political force for the future,” meaning one that was less dependent upon the UAW.18 Yet UAW political operatives not only recruited Blanchard to run, but offered him crucial support in the primary and general election.

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campaigns. With popular Republican governor William Milliken retiring after fourteen years and the state economy in recession, UAW leaders perceived a rare opportunity for Democrats to recapture the state executive’s office. Blanchard was clearly not “in their pocket,” but because he appealed to “Milliken Democrats” and other split-ticket voters, the UAW saw him as the party’s best chance to win.

As governor, Blanchard conspicuously embraced policies that departed from, and occasionally rolled back, labor’s hard-won achievements. He understood that his reelection prospects in 1986 depended on his ability to “pick up on a stable basis 25 to 50% of the liberal wing of the Republican Party,” his adviser wrote in a confidential memo.\(^{19}\) His close team of advisors therefore concluded that the traditional “labor-oriented economic message was untenable in what today we’d call the postindustrial economic setting.”\(^{20}\) Blanchard thus set out to develop a distinctly nontraditional Democratic policy agenda that included initiatives to attract business and invest in promising industries, reform Workers’ Compensation rules, create a “Michigan Business Ombudsman,” and more. Blanchard also became the state chairman of the DLC—a sometimes overtly anti-labor group seeking to move the party rightward—and throughout his 1986 campaign took pains to distance his administration from organized labor. Yet the UAW remained supportive of Blanchard and backed his policy objectives. Blanchard held weekly meetings with UAW officials, cabinet secretaries, and key administration officials to give labor leaders an opportunity to weigh in on policy decisions.\(^{21}\)

Why did the UAW tolerate Blanchard’s “third way” repositioning? According to

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\(^{19}\) “Four Years Out: Jim Blanchard Will Have…” Memoranda/subject files, Box 272, JJB (6848).

\(^{20}\) Personal interview with former administration official.

\(^{21}\) “Governor to Rick Cole, re: UAW Meeting,” February 19, 1987, Staff (and others) memoranda, 1987-1989, Box 271, JJB (8645)
one former party leader, the explanation was simple: “They’re realists! They recognized the kinds of pressures facing the party, the need to have a broader tent.” A former UAW political leader explained:

“Blanchard used to say he couldn’t have survived, couldn’t have even been governor, if we hadn’t had a lot of tolerance for all his business initiatives. And it was true: we tolerated an awful lot of crap that he and his Department of Commerce guys did. We were pretty good on compromise on a whole bunch of issues Blanchard and business community wanted to deal with. We let him have a lot of them. Why? Because we couldn’t win without him.”

In truth, the UAW’s pragmatic attitude and “Downsian” behavior came as a surprise to this author. It was assumed that union leaders would share stories of hard-fought battles to protect labor’s policy gains, even at the cost of the party’s electoral fortunes. At the very least, it was expected that union officials would evidence reluctant acquiescence to the imperative of party adaptation. Instead, union leaders revealed themselves (almost uniformly) to be shrewd political realists and strong partisans who were determined to maximize the Democratic Party’s gains, even if it meant compromising on certain policy particulars. They understood the primacy of electoral success.

Though surprising, their strategic behavior helps to explain the coincidence of deep party-union integration and conspicuous policy adaptation by Democratic politicians.22 It suggests that the hard distinction that is often made between union leaders

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22 There is, of course, another potential explanation for why our theoretical expectations do not appear to hold in this setting. It could simply be that U.S. party organizations are so weak—with so few tools to hold candidates to account—that candidates feel free to reposition on policy matters as they see fit, irrespective of the strength or weakness of party-union linkages. The party organization can be beholden to labor or not, but candidates will still be free agents. The problem with this argument is that while it may be true in some states, Democratic candidates in Michigan tend to covet the UAW’s endorsement and compete vigorously for the MDP’s official nomination. The UAW’s deep pockets and armies of volunteers, as well as the MDP’s vast network of grassroots activists, entice most candidates to actively seek out the union’s blessing and the party’s support. (But not long-serving incumbents, the independently wealthy, or the already famous.) Furthermore—though the evidence is not systematic—interview respondents frequently
(as sincere) and politicians (as strategic) may be softer than is typically allowed. At least under certain conditions, union leaders may act like sophisticated vote-maximizing politicians. This seems to solve the first puzzle. But in doing so, it presents another puzzle—one that is more difficult to answer here—why were union leaders so strategic?

**DISCUSSION: EXPLAINING THE UNION’S STRATEGIC BEHAVIOR**

In the context of a single case study, it is impossible to resolve the matter conclusively: several plausible explanatory factors can be identified within this particular case alone. For example, the UAW may be an “exceptional” union—unusually politically engaged, ideological, and partisan. Or perhaps Michigan’s extraordinarily bad economy simply forced UAW leaders to compromise more than they would have liked. Or perhaps the union’s steep decline in membership forced the UAW into survival mode, and support for adaptation was the only way it could protect the last vestiges of employment and retirement security for its aging and retiring members. Further comparative analysis is needed to sort through these various factors—all of which seem to capture a portion of the truth—and draw conclusions with greater confidence.

What we can say, at present, is that the findings presented here fit comfortably with standard accounts of labor’s traditional weakness in the U.S. and its generally accommodationist stance since the late 1940s. As many labor historians and political scientists have shown, although organized labor showed signs of a more militant, class-based approach to politics during the New Deal period, its radicalism dissipated in the immediate postwar years. Rather than push for a “social democratic breakthrough” in American politics, once-radical CIO unions began to aim much lower. They decided to mentioned the high value Democratic candidates placed on party/union support. In other words, while not all Democratic candidates are dependent on the party and union, most are likely to be responsive to them.
swim with the tide of anti-communism and purge members from their ranks; give up on building a labor party and cement their allegiance to the Democratic Party; and reduce their once-transformative ambitions to the “much narrower goal of winning ever larger wage settlements for their members through the collective bargaining process circumscribed by the federal government” (Boyle 1995, 2).

Some see this “deradicalization” process in the postwar years as a conscious, strategic decision by labor leaders, including longtime UAW president Walter Reuther— their determination to compromise on political and economic matters traded the prospect of a veritable labor “movement” for a seat at the table, ultimately reducing labor’s power and limiting its reach (Lichtenstein 1995). Others focus less on agency and more on structure, emphasizing how “policy shapes politics.” Labor’s “deradicalization” and long-term decline has been blamed, for example, on racially motivated efforts by Southern Democrats and Republicans to water down national labor law to exclude agricultural and domestic laborers from coverage and protection and make it more difficult for unions to organize workers in the future (e.g., Farhang and Katzenelson 2005). In Kevin Boyle’s important work on the UAW, structure and agency are combined: Reuther’s commitment to social democracy is not doubted, but Boyle sees it as tamed and constrained by the need to build a cross-class, biracial coalition to achieve labor’s policy aims within the U.S. two-party political system. Policy structures, the party system, and other institutional arrangements, Boyle shows, severely circumscribed the possibilities for social democratic politics in the United States during this critical period in labor’s history (Boyle 1995).

Whatever caused the UAW to lower its horizons and join the Democratic Party—and many factors appear to have been at work—our main concern here is with the
downstream effects of party-union integration. That, too, is the focus of J. David Greenstone’s (1969) seminal *Labor in American Politics*. In his study, the MDP-UAW relationship sat at one end of the continuum of party-union relationships; the opposite “polar case” was Chicago, where labor activity and influence was severely limited by that city’s strong party organization; and at the “midpoint” lay Los Angeles (xvi). Through detailed ethnographic study and comparative analysis, Greenstone was able to conclude that where the union was most thoroughly integrated with the Democratic Party (Detroit), it adopted the party’s perspective as its own and ceased to be a radical force for change. “Labor was free to enter the Michigan Democratic party,” he wrote. “But once it made this choice it could not merely consider the interests of its own members or even those of all wage earners…Entry into the Democratic Party…meant creating structural flow channels within the existing patterns of the political system, limiting the UAW’s capacity to convey working-class demands on behalf of welfare issues” (137-8). Once labor “began to function as a party campaign organization,” it “became subject to many of the external constraints that limit the party itself” (12, 70). In short, he argued that the UAW “was restrained by its own role as leader of the Democratic party. With this leadership went the responsibility for party success, that is, to win elections by assembling broadly based electoral coalitions that necessarily include non-UAW members” (111).

Whereas traditional pluralist theories anticipate that interest groups will *articulate* demands and political parties will *aggregate* them, Greenstone found that organized labor had become so intertwined with the Democratic Party that it had internalized the party’s strategic considerations and taken on many of its aggregation responsibilities. “When two political organizations cooperate intimately for a long period of time,” he wrote, “their
patterns of activities begin to fuse” (13). Nowhere was this more apparent than in the UAW’s support of “non-labor” Democratic candidates “sympathetic to unions but independent enough to aggregate labor’s interests with those of other Democrats” (285).

My findings would appear to lend additional support to Greenstone’s main argument. Indeed, despite the myriad of economic, political, and social changes that have taken place since he conducted his study forty-five years ago, his insights remain instructive. Decades of extensive party-union integration have further blurred the distinction between party and union. Party politicians and union actors have developed collective identities and a sense of shared fate, and their perspectives on electoral politics have converged. If anything, the basic patterns Greenstone identified in the 1960s seem to have become even more pronounced in the contemporary context of deindustrialization and heightened party competition.

There is still much work to be done, of course, to specify the variable effects of different configurations of party-union relations on party adaptation processes. First and foremost, we still want to know if the Michigan case is exceptional, or whether it is illustrative of a broader logic of party-union relations in the United States. Could it be that the “Downsian” behavior of union leaders is more pronounced in cases of deep and durable party-union integration and less pronounced in cases exhibiting weaker party-union linkages? In those latter cases—where unions are less institutionally tied to the party and/or the alliance is still relatively new, with shared purposes and dual loyalties not yet reinforced and solidified—are union leaders more likely to take actions (e.g., contest nominations, withhold resources, dampen grassroots enthusiasm) that thwart party adaptation and “drag” down the party’s competitiveness? Such a logic would
suggest the inverse of the theoretical expectations derived from European and Latin American cases, but it would be more consistent with what Greenstone finds in his comparative analysis of Detroit, Los Angeles, and Chicago in the 1960s, as well as with the findings presented here.

Future work, following Greenstone’s model, can take advantage of the rich variation in party-union relations found at the state and local level in the United States to flesh out these hypotheses. There are at least two critical dimensions of the party-union relationship to consider: the type of union(s) in the alliance and the degree of party-union integration. Steelworkers in Ohio or public sector unions in Wisconsin, for example, may have different perspectives on party politics, different levels of political engagement among their memberships, and different organizational capacities; they may therefore bring different assets and liabilities to their party alliances. Likewise, in states where several different unions compete for political power (e.g., Wisconsin), the Democratic Party may benefit from the unions’ aggregate help in elections, but there may be weaker incentives for union and party officials to integrate as extensively in decision-making processes. In such cases, we might observe more operational than structural or procedural linkages, resulting in different kinds of party-union relations. Hypothetically, party adaptation might be more difficult under such circumstances, even though party-union linkages are comparatively looser. Further comparative research at the state and local level offers a promising way to get more leverage on these questions.

Two final observations. The present study speaks not only to the party’s adaptive capacities amid changing economic and political circumstances, but also to the motivating concern of Greenstone’s study: the limited capacity of labor unions in the
United States to serve as a “flow channel” for workers’ demands. The old chestnut is often heard: *why no labor party in the U.S.?* 23 Those who lament its absence must either overlook the Michigan Democratic Party or simply be too disappointed with the results to admit that we have, in fact, had a labor party in the U.S. for many years. It is a striking fact, further evidenced by this study, that one of the most politically powerful, well-organized unions in the nation has for decades acted more like a vote-maximizing, coalition-building party than an issue-oriented economic interest group out to protect workers from the hazards of the capitalist system. That this pattern of behavior has persisted from Greenstone’s day to the present—from the heyday of labor unions’ organizational power to its current low point—only serves to highlight the formidable structural impediments that stand in the way of expressing working-class demands from “inside” the political system. Whatever the reason—the vortex of the two-party system, the limitations of current policy structures, the labyrinthine constitutional system, the lack of a feudal tradition or class-consciousness in America, or the routine efforts by the right to undermine the foundations of collective bargaining—it is hard to escape the conclusion that an effective “flow channel” may never exist within established political structures in the United States.

That, however, is a more speculative than substantive point. It is probably more productive to treat this paper’s findings as an intervention in the debate between “third way” Democrats and “labor Democrats.” New Democrats have long advocated for creating more daylight between organized labor and the Democratic Party so that Democratic candidates might be freer to adapt to changing economic conditions and reflect the evolving preferences of the electorate. But if even a large and very powerful

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23 For a good treatment of the subject, see (Archer 2007).
union like the UAW—one deeply integrated into state party structures—consistently supports party adaptation and works to bolster the party’s electoral resilience, then it is difficult to see what is to be gained by further weakening party-union ties. The costs could very well outweigh the benefits, in terms of organizational support and grassroots enthusiasm. Again, further comparative analysis is needed. But the present case suggests that the debate between Democrats of different stripes tends to be more conjectural than empirical. The evidence that strong party-union linkages serve as a drag on the party’s adaptive capacities is mixed, at best.

FIGURE 1

The Rust Belt
FIGURE 2
Manufacturing as Share of State GDP, Averaged, 1980-2000

FIGURE 3
Republican Party Identification in the Rust Belt, 1976-2003 (with trend line)

24 Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.
25 Source: (Wright, McIver, and Erikson 2003). Data presented as four-year moving average.
FIGURE 4
State Party Strength Over Time, 1970-2010
(Higher = more Republican)

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Source: (Ceaser and Saldin 2005). Updated data online at: http://scholar.harvard.edu/saldin/data


