This thesis investigates how George Romney’s successful bid for Michigan’s governorship as a Republican in 1962 was influenced by the struggles of the Michigan Republican Party in the 1950s. Relative decline in Michigan’s manufacturing economy during the 1950s undermined multiple Republican gubernatorial bids, while demographic change, geographic sectionalism and institutional tensions contributed to political gridlock that divided Republicans from voters in metropolitan Detroit. In response to these challenges, Michigan Republicans embraced the concept of business climate as an antidote to economic decline and constitutional reform as a means of ending the political gridlock. Emerging from the constitutional reform movement, Romney built on that foundation by fashioning a political appeal that revolved around jobs, taxes and a promise of effective governance. His appeal resonated with the white, middle class suburbs of metropolitan Detroit and helped politically realign them with the residents of outstate Michigan.
REMAKING REPUBLICANISM: JOBS, TAXES AND SUBURBIA IN MICHIGAN, 1954-1962

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by

Michael Frederick Hart Niemi

Miami University

Oxford, Ohio

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Advisor: Steven Conn

Reader: Ryan Barilleaux

Reader: Marguerite Shaffer

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This Thesis titled

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by

Michael Frederick Hart Niemi

has been approved for publication by

The College of Arts and Science

and

Department of History

______________________________
Steven Conn

______________________________
Ryan Barilleaux

______________________________
Marguerite Shaffer
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Dedication

To my family.
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I want to thank Nishani Frazier for believing in me and pushing me to be a better scholar, and Steve Conn for offering much appreciated guidance that was sharp, insightful and droll. I am thankful to Peggy Shaffer and Ryan Barilleaux for serving on my committee and to the staffs of the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan, the University Archives and Historical Collections at Michigan State University and the Archives of Michigan for being helpful during my research. I also especially want to thank all of my fellow graduate students, but particularly Andy Hall, Kelsey Snyder, A.J. Haight, Trevor Israelsen, Caroline Johnson, Will London, Clint Rodgers, C.J. Spaulding, Jake Beard and Zach Golder. Without their feedback, support and friendship this work would have never come together.
Introduction

“His victory was one of charisma, that indefinable quality of leadership, force and spiritual magnetism that defies pat explanations.”¹ Thus wrote Time magazine about Republican George Romney’s victory in the 1962 Michigan gubernatorial election. To an extent that analysis was correct. Romney argued extensively that his leadership abilities qualified him to solve Michigan’s problems and his victory was in many ways a personal one. Nevertheless, Romney ran as a Republican and, in winning, he became the first Republican governor of Michigan in 14 years. This work seeks to understand how the Michigan Republican Party’s prolonged period in the political wilderness during the 1950s influenced George Romney’s victory in the 1962 gubernatorial election. To accomplish that, it will investigate the root of the Michigan Republican Party’s failures in the 1950s and the ways that Michigan Republicans, including Romney, adapted to conditions in the state.

There has been a dearth of scholarly interest in George Romney and the Michigan Republican Party in the early 1960s over the last several decades. Undoubtedly that lack of interest is partially due to the fact that Michigan political history is, to put it generously, a niche market. Academics’ apathy is also, however, likely related to emergence of the New Right as the dominate force within the Republican Party. Given Romney’s often antagonistic relationship with the early New Right, its eventual success effectively relegated him to serving as a footnote in its histories. Such lack of interest means that scholarly works on George Romney and the Michigan Republican Party in the early 1960s, particularly about the 1962 gubernatorial election, are few in number and often tediously repetitive. There are, however, two groups of works that address cover Romney, Michigan Republicans and the 1962 election: popular biographies of Romney and political science literature on state politics in the period after World War II.

Popular biographies of George Romney proliferated in the mid-1960s as his national political profile grew. The biographies generally combine an overview of the minutiae of Romney’s political career with an evaluation of his personal characteristics. Romney: A Political Biography by D. Duane Angel is an excellent example of a positive Romney biography. Whereas the Democratic incumbent in 1962 was a bland party man, Angel argues that Romney ran as an independent-minded, and largely nonpartisan, advocate of citizen politics who criticized conservatives and lambasted big business. Capitalizing on the political missteps of his opponent,


*The Romney Riddle* by Gerald O. Plas, a rare example of a negative Romney biography, does not fundamentally challenge the narrative established in positive biographies such as Angel’s. Romney’s actions are instead reframed in a more negative light. His tense relationship with some activists in the Republican Party, for example, is stressed in an unsympathetic way. Rather than being independent-minded, Romney is portrayed as opportunistic; his emphasis on leadership is framed as favoring style over substance. Romney biographies, both those disposed toward and against him, are thus centered on how his personality and the everyday events of his political career played an instrumental role in his success.\footnote{Gerald O. Plas, *The Romney Riddle* (Detroit, MI: The Berwyn Publishers, 1967), 8-10, 31-40. For another negative biography, see Antoni E. Gollan, *Romney Behind the Image* (Arlington, VA : Crestwood Books, 1967).}

Political science literature addressing state politics after World War II is the other major source of knowledge about George Romney and the Michigan Republican Party in the early 1960s. These works take a longer view of the development of the Michigan Republican Party, but their narratives do not substantively deviate from the popular biographies of Romney. For example, in his monograph *States in Crisis*, James Reichley notes that Michigan was normatively Republican prior to the 1950s and that the Republican Party of the 1940s was controlled by individuals associated with the auto industry. In the 1950s, however, Michigan Republicans suffered a series of defeats as solid majorities in Detroit and its suburbs allowed Democrats to dominate statewide races. According to Reichley, George Romney helped reinvigorate Republican fortunes when he ran for governor in 1962. Not strongly identified with the Republican Party, Romney was a successful auto executive who was openly critical of the influences of both Big Business and Big Labor in politics. Fresh off of helping overhaul Michigan’s constitution, Romney campaigned on “intangibles such as leadership and unity rather than on a specific program.” Romney, Reichley asserted, “in the end carried the day... by the sheer force of his evangelical personality.” That narrative, echoed in subsequent political science literature, made allowances for other actors and forces to play a major role in shaping events in
Michigan. Romney and his brand of antiestablishment politics, however, was still the main impetus for victory in 1962.4

My work deviates from existing works that touch on the 1962 election by focusing its narrative on the Michigan Republican Party and the demographic and structural forces that shaped Michigan’s political environment. As the existing literature makes amply clear, George Romney ran as an outsider and stressed his personal leadership abilities. The issues on which Romney campaigned, however, were dictated by the electorate and he tailored his appeal to address them. The issues that the Michigan voters cared about in 1962 were directly related to their pocketbooks: taxes, the state’s finances and jobs. The politics surrounding those issues were extensively conditioned by the relative economic decline and political dysfunction that Michigan suffered through in the 1950s. The Michigan Republican Party embraced the concept of business climate as a solution to the state’s economic malaise and an overhaul of the state’s constitution to end its political dysfunction. Romney accepted the Republican positions on business climate and the state’s constitution, and helped facilitate a coalition between rural Michigan and suburban Detroit that emerged from the constitutional convention. The key to solidifying that alliance was Romney’s success in convincing a majority of the white, suburban middle class in metropolitan Detroit to support his candidacy in 1962. He won their support by making the case that he could govern effectively, steward their tax dollars prudently and competently manage Michigan’s economy.

Chapter I

Republican Depressions and the Politics of Business Climate

An unrelenting specter haunted the Michigan Republican Party throughout the 1950s. As a middle aged man from a low income neighborhood in Detroit explained, “I remember the depression. The Republicans just stole homes right from underneath people like myself. Then the Democrats took over; we got work and plenty.”5 This nameless man was not alone in associating Republicans with economic hardship. Encouraged by Democratic politicians, a large segment of Michigan voters connected the Republican Party with poor economic conditions and unemployment. As those connections became increasingly toxic amid periodic economic downturns and the first tremors of deindustrialization in the 1950s, the Michigan Republican Party faced serious electoral difficulties. In the election of 1954, amid a recession, Michigan Republicans echoed the Eisenhower administration’s rhetoric on the economy and suffered an electoral disaster. During the election of 1958, with another recession plaguing the nation, Michigan Republicans chose a different course by focusing their economic message on the state’s business climate. By stressing how Democratic governance created a hostile business climate that undermined Michigan’s economy, Republicans attempted to shift the terms of the economic debate away from a focus on unemployment to more favorable ideological terrain. While that emphasis on business climate did not yield immediate victories, Republicans halted Democratic momentum that had been building throughout the 1950s and laid the foundation for later successes.

Prior to the early 1950s the Michigan Republican Party was a vibrant institution with a history of electoral success. As Chart 1 demonstrates, the unquestioned dominance Republicans enjoyed in both

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5Campaign Issues As Reflected in Four Detroit Neighborhoods. Owen J. Cleary Papers, Box 9, Owen J. Cleary Miscellaneous Political Materials (2), Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
gubernatorial and presidential elections during the 1920s ended in the early 1930s. The advent of the Great Depression, Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the New Deal did not create a lasting Democratic majority in Michigan. Rather, Michigan in the 1930s and 1940s proved to be an electoral battleground. Republicans won two of the five presidential elections between 1932 and 1948 and over half of the ten gubernatorial elections. Competitive presidential elections in the 1940s in particular belied a decade of relative Republican strength in gubernatorial elections. In 1948, however, Republican gubernatorial success came to an end with the election of Democrat G. Mennen Williams.

Mennen, as Gerhard Mennen Williams’s close friends called him, was the scion of a wealthy family that had accrued its fortune by selling men’s toiletries, hence his nickname: Soapy. In spite of his privileged background, Williams was closely connected with a network of Democratic activists who sought to turn the moribund state party into a vehicle for liberal reform. Forging close ties with Michigan’s labor movement, he sought to replicate the New Deal in Michigan by advocating for a broad expansion of government services to better meet the needs of Michigan’s growing population. To fund this expansion, Williams argued for new taxes on corporations. Rather than implement his agenda the Republican-dominated state legislature largely ignored Williams. Republican legislators considered his victory in 1948 to be an aberration and were content to postpone addressing major state business until he was defeated and his two year term ended. Their calculation turned out to be quite misguided; Williams successfully won reelection to five more two year terms.\(^6\)

While Williams and his opponents touched on his reform agenda in the campaigns of 1950 and 1952, both campaigns centered on exchanging simpler, sharper character attacks. In terms of policy, Republicans attacked Williams for proposing tax increases and spending they deemed fiscally irresponsible. Business groups actively opposed any new taxes on corporations, arguing such increases would drive away manufacturers. In addition to such policy critiques, Republicans consistently characterized Williams as a radical socialist who was hopelessly beholden to his union backers. Williams, for his part, continued to advocate for reform and especially expanded government services paid for by new corporate taxes. He spent much of his time on the campaign trail, however, attacking his Republican opponents as the heartless puppets

---

of big business. The character debates that defined the campaigns of 1950 and 1952 ultimately favored Williams, as he won reelection in both contests.\(^7\)

Attacking Republicans as corporate stooges may have helped Williams win in 1950 and 1952, but such attacks did not provide him a secure hold on power. Indeed, Williams did not win either election by a comfortable margin. Over 1.8 million votes were cast in 1950 and Williams only won by roughly 1,100 votes. Similarly, in the 1952 election over 2.8 million people voted and Williams’s margin of victory was 8,600 votes. Thus, in theory at least, Williams was in a precarious position going into the 1954 gubernatorial election and his Republican opponent should have been well positioned to mount a competitive challenge. The reality of the 1954 election proved to be quite different.\(^8\)

Essential to that difference was the recession that plagued Michigan’s economy in 1954. Recessions in the 1950s had a disproportionate impact on Michigan given the nature of its economy. Michigan possessed a strong industrial base and large industrial workforce. Around 1.2 million people, 41% of the total labor force, were employed in manufacturing industries.\(^9\) In comparison, in the nation at large only around 27% of the total labor force worked in manufacturing. The concentration of manufacturing employment made Michigan the fourth most industrialized state in terms of manufacturing employment as a percentage of the labor force in 1950. Only small, Northeastern states like Connecticut, Rhode Island and New Hampshire had similar or greater concentrations.\(^10\) Manufacturing jobs provided Michigan with an important source of employment, but also laid the foundation for the economic difficulties the state experienced in the 1950s.\(^11\)

The nature of manufacturing employment in Michigan made it particularly susceptible to downturns in the business cycle. To a much greater extent than the nation as a whole, manufacturing jobs in Michigan tended to be centered in industries that produced durable goods. Durable goods are products that yield utility over time and do not wear out quickly. That longevity makes regular purchases of durable consumer goods unnecessary and generally allows

\(^7\) Noer, 109-116; 129-134.
\(^9\) Michigan’s total labor force in the 1950s peaked in 1953 at around 2.9 million, with around a monthly average of about 2.7 million engaged in nonfarm employment.
\(^10\) Comparable industrial states in the Midwest had lower percentages. Manufacturing employment composed 37% of the total labor force of Ohio, 34% in Indiana, and 32% in Illinois.
consumers to put off such purchases during economic hard times.\textsuperscript{12} Normal downturns in the business cycle, when consumers typically restrain their spending, thus had a much greater impact on durable goods manufacturers. This was especially problematic for Michigan, as in 1953 85% of manufacturing jobs were in industries that produced durable goods. In contrast, in the same year, 59% of U.S. manufacturing employment was in industries that produced durable goods. Recessions thus had a much greater impact on Michigan than the nation as a whole. Downturns in the business cycle, however, were not the only economic threat to Michigan workers in the 1950s.\textsuperscript{13}

As Thomas J. Sugrue demonstrates in his monograph \textit{Origins of the Urban Crisis}, deindustrialization began to plague major manufacturing centers in the Northeast and Midwest during the 1950s. Sugrue studies deindustrialization, which he defines as “the closing, downsizing, and relocation of plants and sometimes whole industries,” by investigating the decline of the auto industry in Detroit. He attributes the beginning of deindustrialization to a variety of different trends, two of the most prominent being the decentralization of industry and the rise of automation. Prior to World War II industry tended to concentrate in urban areas with favorable topography and access to both raw materials and transportation routes. After World War II that trend reversed itself.\textsuperscript{14}

Improvements in transportation and communication after World War II enabled the dispersal of industry to new regions and areas, including smaller urban centers, suburbs and rural areas. Corporate leaders often spearheaded such decentralization in pursuit of access to growing markets and as a means of eroding workers’ union militancy and wages. Decentralization was initially manifested in new industrial plant expansion, and thus had a limited impact on employment levels in Detroit and Michigan more broadly. The creation of new plants in small cities and rural areas in states like Ohio, Indiana and California, however, gradually undermined Michigan’s status as the center of the auto industry. As production became more spread out across the country, major companies like General Motors and Ford were able to gradually reduce

\textsuperscript{12} Examples of durable goods include furniture, home appliances and automobiles. Nondurable goods are generally consumed or deteriorate at a faster rate than durable goods. Examples of nondurable goods include textiles, shoes, food and medicines.


their workforce in Detroit. As Sugrue notes, this helped facilitate the decline of Michigan’s share of national automobile employment from 56% in 1950 to 40% in 1960.15

Automation was another trend facilitating the decline of employment in the auto industry in Detroit and Michigan during the 1950s. Technological advances in the decades after World War II allowed manufacturers to implement automated processes that boosted industrial output while reducing labor costs. While automation eliminated some dangerous tasks and jobs, manufacturers invested in it primarily because they “hoped that self-regulating, computerized machinery would eliminate worker-led slowdowns, soldiering, and sabotage on the line.” Such machinery was typically located in new plants located outside of Detroit and often outside of Michigan. As new plants with fewer workers matched, or at times exceeded, the output of older plants with larger workforces, corporate leaders scaled back production at older factories. An example involves the Ford River Rouge Complex, where employment “fell from 85,000 in 1945, to 54,000 in 1954, to only 30,000 in 1960.” 16

Automation further contributed to the decline of auto manufacturing employment in Detroit by giving a strong competitive advantage to Ford and General Motors, the two largest and best capitalized companies. As Ford and General Motors increasingly dominated the auto market, more poorly capitalized independent automakers often tried and failed to adopt expensive automated processes to remain competitive. Many of these independent automakers either went out of business, consolidated production or merged with one another, invariably leading to layoffs for workers. Such layoffs had profound political consequences for Michigan Republicans as the 1950s wore on.17

As early as January 1954, contemporary observers identified unemployment as one of the key issues that would define the Michigan gubernatorial election that year. The issue of unemployment was expected to help Williams and other Democrats. As one reporter noted, Williams stood “a better than even chance of winning… [another term] unless there is an unexpected upsurge of Michigan industrial production…and a consequent decrease in unemployment.”18 These observations proved prescient. With public anxiety about unemployment high, Michigan Republicans followed the lead of the Eisenhower administration

15 Sugrue, 127-129.
16 Sugrue, 130-138.
17 Sugrue, 130-138.
by connecting unemployment with the end of the Korean War. These efforts proved futile and Michigan Republicans suffered a landslide defeat in the 1954 election.

Michigan’s economy was in less than stellar condition in 1954. A decline in military spending after the end of the Korean War and a prolonged retooling period in anticipation of new automobile models led to layoffs in defense and auto plants across the state. The ranks of the jobless, concentrated primarily in Michigan’s industrial cities, swelled to as high as 300,000. Detroit’s unemployment rate, for example, rose to around 10%. Democrats saw a political opportunity in this economic hardship and did not hesitate to exploit it. As one reporter noted, Williams and the Democrats “are hammering hard on the theme that a Republican administration both statewide and nationally will mean more economic distress. They have made all other issues secondary.” Economic anxieties were not unique to Michigan in 1954, nor were Democratic attempts to capitalize on it.19

Popular concerns about unemployment permeated the United States in 1954. As Chart 2 demonstrates, throughout the year a sizable portion of the public believed that unemployment was going to rise in their local communities within the next six months. Asked in March to explain the origins of the nation’s unemployment problem, only 8% of respondents attributed the rising economic malaise to the normal business cycle. The single largest group of respondents,

around 30%, blamed the end of the Korean War and cuts in defense spending. The next largest group, 15% of respondents, more broadly blamed the Eisenhower administration’s policies and efforts to cut expenses. Both sets of polls indicate that for many Americans in 1954 unemployment was not a remote issue brought on by impersonal market forces. Rather, unemployment was an active threat creeping into local communities as a result of specific actions undertaken by the Eisenhower administration.²⁰

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Democratic Campaign Issues</th>
<th>When Republicans are in office we have hard times and a lot of unemployment</th>
<th>The Republicans are divided among themselves and Eisenhower is unable to control the different factions</th>
<th>The Democrats have given Eisenhower more support in Congress than the Republicans have</th>
<th>The Republicans have been afraid to stand up against McCarthy</th>
<th>The Republicans haven’t given the farmers a square deal</th>
<th>No opinion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Such concerns translated into a political windfall for the Democrats. Table 1 contains the results of a national poll from September 1954 that asked respondents to identify the most compelling argument the Democratic Party made in the campaign. The Democrats most effective argument, according to a plurality of Democratic, Independent and Republican respondents, stressed the seemingly natural connection between Republicans and unemployment. The agreement of all three groups, and the relative intensity among Democratic and Independent respondents, shows how unemployment as a political issue resonated both broadly and deeply with the public. That even a plurality of Republican respondents agreed that their party was less capable of steering the economy reveals how much the Republican Party was tainted by a perception of economic incompetence. Unemployment and economic hardship thus provided the Democrats with a strong, coherent and compelling central narrative for their campaign in the 1954 election.

A similar September poll gauging the effectiveness of Republican arguments in the 1954 campaign highlights the difficulties Republicans faced in crafting a single message and addressing unemployment. As Table 2 indicates, the Republican Party did not have the luxury of having a single argument that resonated across the political spectrum in the 1954 election. Peace in Korea, reduced government spending and efforts to purge communists from the government had relatively strong support from at least two of the three groups of respondents. More problematic was the fact that spending cuts and peace in Korea were identified as two popular Republican arguments. Both issues, as was mentioned earlier, were relatively popular explanations for the nation’s rising unemployment. The popularity of both issues with different groups of respondents and the association of both issues with unemployment thus created a paradox for Republicans. By stressing peace in Korea and spending cuts, Republicans risked indirectly conjuring the specter of unemployment, the most effective Democratic issue of the campaign. Attempting to take credit for the end of the Korean War while simultaneously deflecting blame for unemployment became a major challenge for Michigan Republicans.

Republicans tried to reconcile the tension between rising unemployment and peace in Korea by tying the two issues together and then pivoting to an attack on Democrats as warmongers. For example John Feikens, the chairman of the Michigan Republican Party, acknowledged the attempts of Governor Williams to paint the Republican Party as the party of recession. He asserted, however, that such arguments ignored how peace in Korea and the migration of people into Michigan contributed to the state’s unemployment problem. Furthermore, he argued that the only cure that Democrats ever found for a recession was war. As evidence, Feikens cited how the recessions of 1937 and 1949-1950 only ended with American involvement in World War II and the Korean War respectively. Democrats, Feikens claimed, were “willing to trade the blood of American boys for premium pay and overtime work. That is

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Republican Campaign Issues</th>
<th>The Republicans have gotten rid of a lot of Reds in the Government</th>
<th>The Republicans have reduced Government spending</th>
<th>The Republicans have brought an end to the Korean War</th>
<th>The Republicans have reduced taxes</th>
<th>The Republicans have cleaned up the mess that the Democrats left in Washington</th>
<th>No opinion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

the choice offered to the people of Michigan by the governor.” The Eisenhower administration, Feikens argued, offered a sound prosperity based on peace, with lower taxes and less inflation.21

While Feikens defended the economic record of the Eisenhower administration, the 1954 Republican gubernatorial candidate in Michigan, Donald Leonard, failed to advance the economy to the forefront of his agenda. In the fall of 1954, for example, Leonard offered a brief list of four key priorities he planned to quickly address after entering office. He promised to prepare Michigan for the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway, to create a comprehensive highway program, to address the needs of public schools and to examine the state’s tax structure. While all these issues could have conceivably been framed in terms of their positive economic impact on the state, none of them was. The section on taxes, for instance, stressed how Leonard wanted to “avoid wasteful duplication of services, and give some relief to Michigan taxpayers.” Leonard’s failure to extensively address the economic issues facing Michigan left him reliant on Eisenhower’s economic record as a bulwark against Democratic attacks. That strategy did not bode well for his campaign.22

Republican leaders in Michigan were cognizant of the role unemployment was playing in the campaign and their weakness on the issue. A potential solution championed by Paul Bagwell, the chairman of the Michigan Citizens for Eisenhower-Ferguson Committee, was to have Eisenhower make a campaign visit to Detroit. Democrats, Bagwell explained, had been attempting to exploit the unemployment problem in a handful of Michigan cities, as well as reduced farm income and tax benefits enjoyed by the wealthy. An address in Detroit by the popular Eisenhower, he argued, could “dispel any fears about these matters by pointing up the Peace and Prosperity program of the Republican administration. A hopeful, optimistic talk from him…would gain many thousands of votes this fall.” Such a surge in votes, Bagwell believed, could prove decisive in several tight congressional races and help offset the organizational advantages enjoyed by the Democrats.23

22 G.O.P. Michigan Newsletter, September, 1954. Paul D. Bagwell Papers, Box 7, Republican Party Eisenhower-Ferguson Committee Folder 72, University Archives & Historical Collections, Michigan State University, East Lansing.
23 Paul D. Bagwell to James L. Murphy, September 7, 1954. Paul D. Bagwell Papers, Box 7, Republican Party Eisenhower-Ferguson Committee Folder 55, University Archives & Historical Collections, Michigan State University, East Lansing.
In late October Bagwell got his wish and President Eisenhower visited Detroit. Eisenhower admitted there had been dislocations in the economy as the nation transitioned from war to peace and that those dislocations were greater in an industrial center like Detroit. He argued, however, that the achievement of full employment during the war years had led to “the false belief that the only time America is really prosperous is when she is at war.” Americans needed to sever that perceived connection between war and prosperity. The transition to a peace economy, Eisenhower contended, had actually occurred with a minimum of dislocation and by many measures prosperity still abounded. The unemployed, he acknowledged, suffered discouraging hardships, but he noted that unemployment was falling and the future of the auto industry was bright. Eisenhower’s remarks echoed the arguments made earlier by Feikens, albeit with a larger focus on positive economic news and without any withering attacks on the Democrats. Unfortunately for Michigan Republicans, Eisenhower’s defense of his economic record did not provide a substantial boost for their cause.24

The election of 1954 was a disaster for the Michigan Republican Party. Between the governorship, a U.S. Senate seat and other state executive offices like the Secretary of State, seven statewide races were on the ballot in 1954. Of those seven offices, six had Republican incumbents running for reelection. None of them was reelected. The only Democratic incumbent on the ballot, Governor Williams, won reelection easily, with a margin of over 250,000 votes out of nearly 2.2 million votes cast.25 Leonard blamed the disastrous results on “a national trend set in motion by economic conditions… and voters voicing a natural resentment against these conditions used the Republican party as a whipping boy.”26 Owen Cleary, a former chairman of the Michigan Republican Party and the recently defeated Secretary of State, agreed to an extent. He thought the Democrats’ superior campaign organization and Leonard’s weaknesses as a candidate contributed to the Republican defeat, but he acknowledged “the arguments of the opposition relating to unemployment…had some effect.”27 Michigan Republicans thus understood that the economy was a weak point in their pitch to voters. Following the lead of the

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26 Donald Leonard to Owen J. Cleary, November 15, 1954. Owen J. Cleary Papers, Box 6, Correspondence November 1954, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
27 Owen J. Cleary to Frederick M. Alger, Jr., December 15, 1954. Owen J. Cleary Papers, Box 6, Correspondence December 1954 (2), Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
Eisenhower administration had not helped them. Next time, they would choose a different course by embracing business climate.

Business climate was developed as a concept during the 1940s and 1950s as part of an effort to systemize and rationalize corporate industrial investment in order to ensure maximum profitability. Broadly defined, business climate referred to the set of factors corporate leaders weighed when deciding, for example, where to build a new industrial plant. As Elizabeth Shermer notes in her monograph *Sunbelt Capitalism*, “few academic investigators of private consultants ever fully agreed on what specific issues played the largest roles in managerial…decisions.” Factors ranged from tangible concerns about ready access to growing markets to more intangible ones like whether an area’s cultural atmosphere was conducive to attracting a skilled workforce. Government policies that potentially affected corporate bottom lines were integral, if hotly debated, aspects of business climate. Corporate leaders generally looked favorably on low tax rates, anti-union regulations and various financial incentives. Business climate thus provided a comprehensive, technocratic rationale for industrial investment.²⁸

Shermer argues that businessmen eager to diversify and develop the southern and southwestern United States agitated for policies associated with a good business climate in the years after World War II. Such businessmen “were not laissez-faire ideologues: they instead developed their own state-dependent vision for the economic growth and social development of these heretofore remote regions.” Organized into local business groups, businessmen aggressively courted potential investment by using their political power to have local governments meet the needs of corporates leaders. The advent of such pro-business corporate welfare in the South and Southwest, Shermer contends, generated an interregional competition to produce “favorable conditions for industry” in the hopes of securing economic growth. That competition “eroded the legitimacy and potency of liberal economic doctrine” in manufacturing centers outside of the South and Southwest, as local governments began to adopt the business climate ideal.²⁹

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²⁹ Shermer, 3-4.
The adoption of business climate in the 1950s coincided with the beginning of a political mobilization of conservative businessman. Such businessmen rallied against the cornerstone institutions of the New Deal, including both labor unions and the welfare state. As the popularization of business climate can attest to, however, they did not limit themselves to electoral politics. Rather, they sought to reshape the terms of the intellectual debate around the economy in a way that would, from their perspective, preserve the free market from the growing encroachment of government. To change the economic debate, conservative businessmen often used their personal resources to found and support institutions that fostered ideas they found amendable. The popularization of business climate as an ideal can be seen as an outgrowth of that movement.\(^\text{30}\)

In Michigan, the push for business climate came both from local business organizations and major corporations based in the state. The Detroit Board of Commerce often tried to mobilize support for the business community using tactics rooted in business climate. For instance, the Board argued that business inventories were too highly assessed for the personal property tax and that created an undue burden on businesses. The Board also produced a survey of its members that indicated that they believed the flight of businesses to the suburbs was a direct result of high local taxes. In addition to attacking specific taxes and surveying its members, the Board also funded a study in the mid-1950s that compared corporate tax rates in between Michigan and other Midwestern states. The study found that Michigan corporations faced a higher relative tax burden. That claim gained additional weight when the president of General Motors acknowledged in the late 1950s that his company had located new plants outside of Michigan due to its level of business taxation. The popularization of business climate nationally, and its embrace by business organizations and corporations in Michigan, had a profound impact on the 1958 gubernatorial election.\(^\text{31}\)


The election of 1958 was similar in many ways to the election of 1954. The United States was deep in a recession and that recession led to major economic anxieties. As Chart 3 indicates, throughout the year a sizable portion of the public believed that unemployment was likely to rise in their local communities within the next six months. Such anxiety was likely disproportionately represented in Michigan, as the state had the highest rate of unemployment in the nation in the fall of 1958. Although hiring had begun to pick up, around 420,000 workers were still unemployed. Governor Williams, running for another term, trotted out a familiar argument to explain the state’s economic troubles: he blamed an “Eisenhower recession.” The president’s inability to maintain national prosperity, Williams argued, led to a downturn in the automobile industry that disproportionately weakened Michigan’s economy.  

Eisenhower, for his part, vigorously defended his administration’s economic record and its response to the nation’s economic woes. He noted that his opponents, whom he deemed extremists, had “tried to frighten all of us… [by saying that] we were plunging dangerously into a depression.” Their solutions, he argued, had been to waste money on spendthrift public works programs, which only stiff Republican opposition prevented. Eisenhower argued that the economic trouble the nation faced was a temporary pause in growth caused by a natural result of

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the business cycle. He also pointed out that unemployment was falling rapidly. In the meantime, his administration developed programs to address the nation’s economic woes. Eisenhower’s pitch, with its emphasis on the strength of the larger economy and the falling unemployment rate, was reminiscent of his appeal in 1954. Unlike in 1954, however, Michigan Republicans did not make echoing Eisenhower the centerpiece of their appeal to voters. Rather, they focused intently on mimicking Michigan’s business community’s embrace of business climate.

By 1958, Michigan Republicans had largely institutionalized business climate as a part of their overall program. A statement of principles created by the party, for example, listed reconstructing Michigan’s industrial base as its first goal. Economic reconstruction, the statement emphasized, required a firm stand “against the harsh anti-business climate created by the Democrats.” Only a healthy business climate could produce “more jobs and better wages for Michigan’s expanding population and better living conditions for all.” That meant an overhaul of Michigan’s tax structure to provide financial stability for the state, but also a rejection of the “confiscatory and discriminatory taxes” favored by Governor Williams. Special consideration needed to be given to “the problems of small business, and... formulation of a tax policy that will encourage all business and industry to remain, or be attracted to, Michigan.” 34

Paul Bagwell, the Republican gubernatorial candidate in 1958, did not hesitate to attack Williams’s inability to foster a good business climate. Bagwell argued that, to keep up with population growth, Michigan’s workforce had needed to grow by nearly 600,000 jobs between 1949 and 1957. Under Williams, however, actual job growth had been limited to a little over half of that number. Williams, Bagwell asserted, had directly contributed to that anemic growth through a hostility toward business. His advocacy of “higher taxes on business to finance his programs” had stirred resentment within the business community. His close political ties with the labor movement had given Michigan a reputation as a place where business “could not get a fair hearing on its problems.” His failure “to recognize the industrial development problems and take positive action... helped create the negative attitude toward Michigan on the part of those who locate new plants.” To rebuild the state’s economy, Bagwell promised to meet with business leaders across the nation and promote Michigan as a site of industrial development. He further pledged to overhaul the state’s tax structure, to consider creating an industrial development

34 Principles and Philosophy. Republican Party (Mich.) State Central Committee Records, Box 50, Platform Committee – 1958 Interest Group, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
authority and to protect the rights of working people to organize, bargain collectively and control their unions. Bagwell asserted that his program would “create a new atmosphere and a new day in Michigan.” Whether Bagwell’s program would have accomplished what he claimed is impossible to know, as he lost the election.\textsuperscript{35}

By most standards, the 1958 election was a terrible year for the Michigan Republican Party. Like in 1954, seven statewide races were on the ballot in 1958 and Republicans lost each one. Williams, Republicans’ great nemesis, won a historic sixth term by a margin of 147,000 votes out of 2.3 million votes cast.\textsuperscript{36} Overall, however, Michigan Republicans were relatively content with the results. The 1958 election had been disastrous for Republicans nationally, with the poor economy playing a significant role in their net loss of 5 governorships, 13 Senate seats and 47 House seats.\textsuperscript{37} In that context, the Democrats’ clean sweep of the statewide races and the defeat of two Republican incumbents in Michigan’s congressional delegation were not especially demoralizing for Michigan Republicans. In fact, they took comfort in knowing that Williams’s margin of victory in 1958 was less than the 400,000 vote margin he wanted and less than the 290,000 margin he had won by in 1956.\textsuperscript{38} In explaining this relative success, one well-connected Republican leader noted that business climate “was a key issue in our gubernatorial campaign” that did significant damage to Williams.\textsuperscript{39} A businessman likewise lauded business climate as an issue, writing to Bagwell that his embrace of business climate had allowed him, according to one analysis, to buck “the national trend by over 400,000 votes.”\textsuperscript{40} Intensely focusing on Michigan’s business climate allowed state Republicans to outperform national Republicans. That superior electoral performance, and the relative difficulties faced by Williams, convinced Michigan Republicans that business climate was a potent political weapon.

\textsuperscript{35} Economic Climate in Michigan by Paul Bagwell. Republican Party (Mich.) State Central Committee Records, Box 50, Camp. 1958 Bagwell guber. campaign, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.


\textsuperscript{39} Richard C. Van Dusen to Lawrence A. Coleman, November 19, 1958. Richard C. Van Dusen Papers, Box 2, Political and Legislative File Chronological File 1958 General Nov. – Dec., Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

\textsuperscript{40} Elwood Sampson to Paul D. Bagwell, January 6, 1959. Paul D. Bagwell Papers, Box 13, Republican Party Correspondence Jan. 1-6, 1959 Folder 35, University Archives & Historical Collections, Michigan State University, East Lansing.
Michigan Republicans turned business climate into a central element of their political appeal in gubernatorial elections after 1958. Republican George Romney echoed Bagwell’s economic pitch in his successful bid for the governorship in 1962. Romney argued “[h]ow businessmen feel about expansion in Michigan or about establishing new businesses here… [is] a vital consideration for all of us.” He asserted that Michigan had experienced substandard job growth, with “a net increase in employment of only 60,000 jobs” between 1950 and 1962, because businessmen were concerned about the disadvantages of investing in Michigan. Those disadvantages, Romney noted, included a tax structure that “seems to penalize rather than encourage business” and a state government with a reputation for hostility toward business. Romney pledged to, among other things, overhaul the state’s tax structure, create a better industrial development authority and sell Michigan as an investment opportunity to both national and international business leaders.41

The adoption of business climate by the Michigan Republican Party was a process mediated by electoral failure. As periodic recessions engulfed Michigan in the 1950s, Democrats emphasized a natural connection between the Republican Party and a poor economy. During the 1954 election, Michigan Republicans tried to counter such Democratic messages by embracing the Eisenhower administration’s framing of the nation’s economic troubles. That effort failed conclusively. In 1958 Michigan Republicans took up the cause of the state’s business climate and, in their estimation, outperformed national trends. Business climate provided a comprehensive, technocratic argument that rooted Michigan’s economic woes in Democratic hostility toward business while offering a hope of economic growth in exchange for prioritizing the interests of business. This argument shifted the terms of the economic debate to ideological terrain more favorable to Republicans. That changing ideological terrain helped Republicans navigate out of the political wilderness they languished in throughout the 1950s, a process that culminated in George Romney’s gubernatorial victory in 1962.

41 Economic Growth Speech. George Romney Early Papers, Box 12, Aug. 31, 1962, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
Chapter II
Political Gridlock, Fiscal Crisis and the Road to Con-Con

Explaining the central political tension in the Michigan fiscal crisis of 1959, a columnist in *The New Republic* explained “you can have a Democratic landslide in Michigan and hardly touch the rigged Senate.” Like in many states in the 1950s, legislative districts in Michigan were designed to favor rural areas over urban ones. Republicans, the party of the Michigan’s rural population, thus remained safely ensconced in the legislature, even as Democrats consistently won the governorship by running up large margins in Detroit. That tension was the product of Michigan’s changing demographics, deep sectionalism within the state and, indeed, the structures that conditioned the state’s politics. The public exposure of that tension during the political gridlock that enabled the 1959 fiscal crisis led to a Republican-dominated constitutional convention and the ratification of the Michigan Constitution of 1963. The willingness of suburban voters in metropolitan Detroit to align with voters outside of the metro area to ratify the new constitution helped signal the beginning of a new statewide coalition that benefitted Michigan Republicans.

Armed with successive popular mandates, Democratic Governor G. Mennen Williams spent the 1950s pressing for the expansion of government services that he regularly advocated in his political campaigns. As his biographer Thomas J. Noer noted, Williams believed that “government must first look at the needs of the people and then find the revenue to pay for programs to help meet them.” To that end, Williams passionately advocated for more funding for education, infrastructure and prisons, as well as increased benefits for veterans, injured workers, the unemployed, the elderly and the disabled. While Williams readily acknowledged that such new spending required increased taxes, he tended to be oblique on what kind of taxes should be implemented. He regularly expressed opposition to increasing taxes on ordinary people, arguing that they were taxed enough already. Throughout his gubernatorial career, Williams only expressed consistent support for a tax on corporate profits. Williams’s insistent advocacy for more spending and a corporation profits tax was met with consistent hostility by the Republican-

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dominated legislature. Conflicts over the budget were a consistent feature of Williams’s gubernatorial tenure.\textsuperscript{43}

The political battle over the budget in 1953 is indicative of the kind of conflicts over spending that were fought during Williams’s governorship. Michigan entered the year with a projected deficit and Williams, decrying the prospect of a potential bankruptcy, called for a corporate profits tax to stave off disaster. Cuts to public services could, he argued, not be tolerated. Michigan, Williams noted, already spent less on its citizenry than similarly sized states. Republicans responded straightforwardly. They rejected a corporate profits tax, blamed the deficit on Williams’s profligacy and, after pointing out his proposed spending increases, accused him of hypocrisy and fear-mongering.\textsuperscript{44}

In the end, both sides compromised. Spending on some programs, like unemployment insurance, was increased while spending on others, like welfare payments, was not. Increased fees and consumer taxes (e.g. specific taxes on alcohol, automobiles, etc.) helped pay for the new spending. Such compromises formed the core of a consensus on taxes and spending in Michigan during the 1950s. Spending on social programs rose somewhat haphazardly and in return, tax increases to offset the cost were narrow and mostly limited to consumers. Both sides accepted the consensus, albeit begrudgingly and only with a recurrent war of words. Despite that lack of enthusiasm, the uneasy political consensus on taxes and spending had a major impact on Michigan’s finances in the 1950s.\textsuperscript{45}

According to a report produced by the nonpartisan Citizens Research Council, total government expenditures and revenues rose dramatically in Michigan between 1948 and 1959. Expenditures grew from $471 million to $1.09 billion and revenues expanded from $466 million to $1.01 billion. Both increases are in part a natural increase associated with demographic change occurring in Michigan during that period. As the state’s population grew, tax revenues naturally increased. Similarly a growing population and the need to match the rate of inflation necessitated increased government spending. The CRC report notes, however, that, even after being adjusted for inflation and population growth, government spending in particular rose by 38\% between 1948 and 1959. The expanding size of Michigan’s government between 1948 and 1959 was a

\textsuperscript{44} Noer, 136-137.
\textsuperscript{45} Noer, 136-137.
product of the uneasy political consensus on taxes and spending accepted by Williams and Republican legislators. Undergirding Michigan’s expanding budget, however, was a problematic and rigid fiscal state structure.46

As was noted above, Michigan’s revenues increased substantially between 1948 and 1959, but the structure of the state’s finance limited the legislature’s discretion in spending that revenue. A combination of constitutional earmarking, existing legislation and strings attached to receiving federal aid restricted around 70% of the state’s revenues to a relative handful of specific purposes. The sales tax, for instance, generated around 30% of all state revenues in 1959. The legislature, however, only had free discretion in spending 1/6 of that sum. The constitution required that the rest of the revenue raised by the sales tax be split between funding schools and local governments. Such restrictions meant that the legislature relied heavily on the limited revenue over which it had unbound control, a relative handful of business and consumer taxes, to fund basic government functions and programs. That overreliance on a handful of taxes left the state with little flexibility in funding the government.47

Michigan’s limited financial flexibility, embodied in its rigid fiscal structure, was tested throughout the 1950s by the periodic economic downturns addressed in Chapter 1. As consumer spending fell and businesses retrenched during recessions, the handful of taxes that Michigan relied on to produce unbound revenue generated less revenue. A lack of unfettered access to deep, diverse revenue streams thus made Michigan susceptible to fiscal crises. While the consensus on taxes and spending held, the weaknesses in the system were, after the usual war of words, papered over by Williams and Republican legislators. The inability of Williams and Republican legislators to move beyond that consensus meant that, even as state spending expanded in the 1950s, the financial foundation of the government remained shaky. Michigan perpetually remained one recession or one political fight away from a major fiscal crisis.

That crisis finally came in 1959 when, in the face of a financial crunch caused by the recession of 1958, Williams proposed the creation of a state income tax. Williams’s position on a state income tax evolved over the course of his gubernatorial tenure. Early in his career Williams opposed the creation of an income tax, arguing that it would only add to the already heavy tax

burden born by common people. By 1957, his opposition had softened considerably. An income tax, Williams admitted, might be preferable to more regressive consumer taxes, but only so long as the income tax included exemptions that limited its impact on the non-wealthy. Williams refrained, however, from outright recommending an income tax. He merely noted that an income tax was one possible option and an unlikely one at that given the hostility toward it in the legislature. By the late 1950s Williams was thus open to an income tax, but hardly a leading advocate for it.48

Faced with a substantial deficit following the 1958 recession, Williams shed his ambivalence by proposing the creation of a graduated income tax in early 1959. Entering his sixth term, with his name occasionally floated as a presidential prospect and the state House evenly divided, Williams felt confident in his political position. Republican legislators, eager to stifle Williams’s national ambitions and unwilling to embrace a graduated income tax, refused to consider the governor’s proposal. After Williams rejected a series of counter-proposals, Republican legislators rallied around creating a new use tax. Williams, arguing that the use tax was actually a constitutionally dubious increase of the sales tax, refused that proposal as well. With Williams refusing to countenance anything other than a graduated income tax, and Republican legislators coalescing around the use tax, the political consensus on taxes and spending broke down.49

With Michigan’s political leadership at war with itself, the fiscal crisis precipitated by the 1958 recession entered into full bloom. Twice, in April and then again in May, the state government ran out of money as incoming revenues failed to cover expenses. Tasked with prioritizing the state’s financial commitments, Williams withheld paychecks for some state employees, including legislators, and ensured that welfare payments were maintained. To help alleviate the government’s financial problems, some businesses voluntarily paid their taxes in advance and controls on some restricted revenues were loosened. Nevertheless, Michigan’s fiscal crisis and the political gridlock that sustained it continued throughout the summer and became a national news story, with much of the blame being directed at Williams. By August, Williams finally relented and agreed to abandon his proposed graduate income tax. In return for a minor

49 Noer, 192-193.
increase of existing business taxes, Williams signed the Republican proposed use tax into law, ostensibly ending the fiscal crisis.⁵⁰

At first glance, the struggle between Williams and Republican legislators over taxes and spending throughout the 1950s was a straightforward conflict driven by their individual choices. Williams the reformer pushed for change that Republican legislators resisted and more often than not they found some middle ground. That model of interaction, in turn, lasted until Williams made the decision to push, unsuccessfully, for a graduated income tax, which Republicans chose to vehemently oppose.

Beneath that simplified narrative of individual agents, however, lay a tension-ridden web of interconnected geographic sectionalism, demographic pressure and political structure that inextricably shaped Michigan’s political debates. The tensions in that web remained largely beneath the surface of Michigan’s politics throughout the 1950s, thanks to the uneasy consensus embraced by Williams and Republican legislators. The 1959 fiscal crisis, however, exposed both those tensions and their capacity for fomenting political gridlock.

A key source of tension in Michigan in the 1950s was endemic sectionalism based on geographic and demographic cleavages. The main geographic divide in Michigan’s politics was between Metro Detroit and Outstate. Metro Detroit, located in southeastern Michigan, was composed of the densely populated and highly urban Wayne County and suburban Macomb and Oakland Counties. The remaining 80 counties in Michigan formed an area often referred to as Outstate. Within those two large regions, however, were further cleavages that helped shape Michigan’s politics. Metro Detroit was divided between Detroit itself and the Suburbs, the areas of the metropolitan area excluding the central city. Outstate there was a split between urbanized Heavyweight counties and more rural Small counties.⁵¹ Michigan politics throughout the 1950s was dominated by the rivalries of voters in these regions.

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⁵⁰ Noer, 194-197.
⁵¹ The Heavyweight counties are the 15 largest Outstate counties by population in the 1960 census. Included among those 15 counties are Bay, Berrien, Calhoun, Genesee, Ingham, Jackson, Kalamazoo, Kent, Lenawee, Monroe, Muskegon, Ottawa, Saginaw, St. Clair and Washtenaw Counties. Most of the Heavyweight counties included major urban areas outside of Metro Detroit (e.g. Flint is in Genesee County) and contained around 1% or more of Michigan’s population in 1960. The Small counties are the 65 remaining counties Outstate.
Table 3: Comparison of Michigan’s Population Distribution by Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>1910</th>
<th>1950</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Detroit</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburbs</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavyweight</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Underlying the sectional tensions within Michigan in the 1950s was the profound demographic change that the state experienced in the first half of the twentieth century. Michigan’s government in the 1950s was shaped by its constitution, which was ratified in 1908. In 1910, two years after the ratification of the 1908 Constitution, the state had a population of approximately 2.8 million people. By 1950, Michigan’s population had grown by over 128% to nearly 6.4 million people. Detroit, the Suburbs and the Heavyweight counties all experienced substantial growth between 1910 and 1950, with the population of each area growing by over a million people. In contrast, Michigan’s Small counties experienced an anemic rate of growth, with an increase of only 74,000 by 1950. Table 3 demonstrates how uneven growth across the four regions fundamentally altered the distribution of Michigan’s population. In 1910 about 78% of the state’s population lived Outstate; by 1950 only around 53% resided there. That decline was driven almost entirely by the falling percentage of the state’s population living in the Small counties. The Heavyweight counties maintained a relatively stable percentage of Michigan’s population. Meanwhile, the significant growth in Metro Detroit led to nearly equal increases in the population share of both Detroit and the Suburbs. Detroit continued, however, to have about 10% more of the state’s population than the Suburbs. Michigan in 1950 thus was a far different state demographically than it had been in 1910. The largely rural state that had ratified the Constitution of 1908 gave way to an industrial, highly urbanized one whose center of gravity had shifted significantly toward the three counties of Metro Detroit.\(^{52}\)

Table 4: Average Democratic Gubernatorial Vote Share by Region, 1948-1958

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>1948-1958</th>
<th>Detroit</th>
<th>Suburbs</th>
<th>Metro Detroit</th>
<th>Outstate</th>
<th>Michigan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent of the Vote</td>
<td></td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The Michigan Democratic Party was the primary beneficiary of the growing concentration of people in the southeastern corner of the state. As was noted in Chapter 1,\(^{53}\)

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52 All percentages contained in tables are rounded up.
Michigan was not safely Democratic in statewide elections until the late 1940s and the rise of G. Mennen Williams. As Table 4 indicates, Williams became a mainstay of Michigan politics in the 1950s by forging an electoral coalition based in Metro Detroit. Over his six successive gubernatorial victories from 1948 until 1958 Williams averaged 62% in Metro Detroit by winning over two-thirds of the vote in Detroit and 55% of the vote in the Suburbs. With the significant narrowing of the population gap between Metro Detroit and Outstate by 1950, Williams’s commanding majority in Metro Detroit allowed him to consistently win statewide while only winning an average of only 44% of the Outstate vote. Those electoral victories allowed him claim a popular mandate for his leadership and sustained his ability to push for his agenda in the face of fierce Republican opposition throughout the 1950s. Demographic change facilitating the rise of Metro Detroit as a political base on par with Outstate thus underlay Williams’s position in the budget wars of the 1950s.

While Williams repeatedly won office by running up popular majorities in his Metro Detroit stronghold, Republican legislators leveraged their advantages in the state’s political structure into power. In particular, they relied on the malapportionment of legislative seats to help secure their majorities in the state legislature.\(^54\) In Michigan during the 1950s, malapportionment provided Republicans with a major advantage in securing legislative majorities. That advantage was rooted in the apportionment provision of the Constitution of 1908, which was the subject of reform efforts in the early 1950s.

At the advent of the 1950s, the apportionment provision of the Constitution of 1908 was under severe criticism for several reasons. The legislature was, in theory, constitutionally obligated to reapportion legislative districts after every federal census. In practice, the 32 member state Senate had not been reapportioned in nearly three decades. In contrast, the 100 member state House of Representatives had been regularly reapportioned, but the legislature was bound by the moiety requirement of the 1908 Constitution. Moiety was an imprecise term that meant that a district needed a population of at least one half the ratio of representation. In Michigan that meant roughly 0.5% of the state population. The moiety requirement entitled every county with a moiety to a House seat, which favored lightly populated counties over more

\(^54\) Apportionment is the process of creating electoral districts and reapportionment is the process of changing districts. Malapportionment refers to the creation of districts without trying to ensure that each one has a roughly equal population. With a malapportioned legislature, legislators representing a minority of voters can thus wield a disproportionate influence.
heavily populated ones. For example, in the 1940s Wayne County was entitled to 38 seats based on its population. After all the counties with a moiety received seats, however, there were only 27 seats left for Wayne County. Dissatisfaction with the legislature’s unwillingness to reapportion the Senate and the moiety requirement led to efforts to amend the apportionment provision in 1952.55

The amendment that passed, Proposal 3, created the political structure that shaped Michigan’s politics throughout the 1950s. Proposal 3 expanded the number of Senate seats to 34 and the number of House seats to 110. The boundaries for each Senate seat were explicitly defined in the constitution, with county lines rather than population primarily defining their shape. The term moiety was discarded, but the principle of assigning a House seat to each county with at least 0.5% of Michigan’s population was maintained. The increased number of House seats, however, meant there were more seats leftover for major population centers after lightly populated counties received their constitutional due. Reapportionment of the House remained the purview of the legislature, but no provision was made for future reapportionment of the Senate. The effect of these changes was nuanced. More House seats, more Senate seats and mandated reapportionment of the House effectively increased representation for Metro Detroit. Outstate, however, benefitted immensely from the 0.5% population requirement, the use of county lines to largely define Senate districts and the removal of any pretense of future reapportionment of the state Senate. Overall, Proposal 3 thus largely entrenched and clarified Outstate control over the legislature, while making some allowances for greater representation for Metro Detroit.56

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5: Vote on Proposal 3 in 1952</th>
<th>Metro Detroit</th>
<th>Outstate</th>
<th>Heavyweight</th>
<th>Small</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proposal 3 Yes Vote</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


People understood how Proposal 3 affected their respective region and voted in their sectional interest. Around 2.2 million voters cast a ballot on Proposal 3 and, as Table 5 indicates, it passed easily with the support of 57% of voters. Support from Outstate was overwhelming and came from both the Heavyweight and Small counties, although the former were slightly less inclined toward Proposal 3. Opposition from Metro Detroit was significant, but that opposition

varied between the three counties of the metropolitan area.\textsuperscript{57} In Wayne County, the largest of the three by a significant margin and the location of Detroit, only 35\% of voters supported Proposal 3. Attitudes toward Proposal 3 in the two suburban counties were less hostile, but not positive. Around 41\% of Macomb County voters, increasingly blue collar and Democratic as the 1950s progressed, supported Proposal 3. In traditionally Republican and largely white collar Oakland County, 49\% of voters cast a ballot in favor of Proposal 3. The split within Michigan over the apportionment provision of the 1908 Constitution thus fell along the fault line between Outstate and Metro Detroit.\textsuperscript{58}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6: Comparative Distribution of Legislative Seats by Region\textsuperscript{59}</th>
<th>Detroit</th>
<th>Suburbs</th>
<th>Heavyweight</th>
<th>Small</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michigan Population</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate Seats</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House Seats</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Outstate voters were amply rewarded for their support of Proposal 3. As Table 6 shows, the malapportioned legislative districts created after the passage of Proposal 3 were located disproportionately Outstate. Around 53\% of the Michigan’s population lived Outstate in 1950, but 57\% of House seats and 73\% of Senate seats were located there after the ratification of Proposal 3. The Small counties were the clearest beneficiaries of this malapportionment, as their representation in both the state House and state Senate exceeded their actual population. Heavyweight counties, while being underrepresented in the state House, held more representation in the state Senate relative to their overall population. In contrast, the Suburbs and Detroit were underrepresented in both houses of the legislature, although this disadvantage was more pronounced in the state Senate. Taken together Tables 5 and 6 indicate that voters viewed Proposal 3 as a sectional issue and that the Outstate voters who supported it succeeded in maintaining an advantage for themselves in the political structure of Michigan.

\textsuperscript{57} The \textit{Michigan Manual} series provides voter returns for major state elected offices by both community and county, allowing the author to calculate Detroit’s support for candidates independent of the rest of Metro Detroit. For constitutional amendments and statewide referenda, however, the \textit{Michigan Manual} series only provides voter returns by county, making calculating Detroit’s position relative to the Suburbs impossible given resources available at the time of writing.


\textsuperscript{59} Some districts contained areas in more than one region. In that case, it was labelled under whichever region contributed more population. For example, the Senate 7\textsuperscript{th} District contained Berrien County, a Heavyweight county, and Cass County, a Small one. As Berrien contributed nearly 116,000 people to the district and Cass contributed a little over 28,000, the 7\textsuperscript{th} is considered a Heavyweight in this analysis.
Malapportionment that tilted the balance of power in Michigan toward Outstate also significantly benefitted Republicans. An analysis of legislative seats created for the Republican Party prior to the election of 1962 highlights this advantage. The analysis labelled each state Senate and state House seat as either marginal, semi-marginal or safe for either the Republican or Democratic Party. For a seat to be considered semi-marginal or safe for either party, it needed to return at least 54% for that party. Tables 7 and 8 indicate the number of semi-marginal and safe seats in both houses of the legislature by region and in Michigan overall. Republicans had a somewhat slim, 4 seat advantage over the Democrats in the House. The Senate, by contrast, favored Republicans by 11 seats. Notably, there is a clear partisan division in the distribution of semi-marginal and safe seats between Outstate and Metro Detroit. Of the 72 House and Senate seats that favored Republicans, 93% were located Outstate. Of the 57 House and Senate seats that favored Democrats, 82% were located in Metro Detroit. Malapportionment thus provided Republicans with an advantage in securing majorities in the legislature.60

The tensions that were laid bare in the 1959 fiscal crisis, and which had lain beneath the surface of the budget wars of the 1950s, involved the distribution of political power in Michigan. Demographic change in Michigan led to a relative parity in terms of population between Outstate and Metro Detroit. That parity allowed G. Mennen Williams to secure the governorship and advance his political agenda from a political base centered preeminently in Metro Detroit. Republicans, by contrast, leveraged Outstate voters’ desire for sectional advantage over Metro Detroit, embodied in the passage of Proposal 3, into a malapportioned legislature that favored

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60 State House of Representatives Districts: 1954-60. Republican Party (Mich.) State Central Committee Records, Box 22, Vote Analyses and County Profiles, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
them. Republican legislators and Williams thus exercised power through distinct institutions and with backing from distinct sections of Michigan. That sectional and institutional polarization, fueled by demographic change and enshrined in the political structure of Michigan, shaped the conflicts between Williams and Republican legislators during the 1950s. As long as both sides were willing to subscribe to the uneasy consensus of increased spending offset largely by consumer taxes, that polarization could be contained. With the implosion of the consensus, the unsustainability of that polarization came to the fore and forces agitating for structural change began to gain traction.

Neither political party took the lead in calling for major structural change in the wake of the 1959 fiscal crisis. Instead, civic groups like the Michigan Junior Chamber of Commerce, the League of Women Voters and Citizens for Michigan coalesced around the idea of calling a constitutional convention. The civic groups designed an amendment to the 1908 Constitution they called the Gateway Amendment. The Gateway Amendment restructured the process for calling a convention and scheduled a vote on whether to call one in April 1961. A petition drive spearheaded primarily by the League of Women Voters successfully placed the Gateway Amendment on the November ballot in 1960. The amendment passed by a margin of 350,000 votes out of 2.2 million total votes cast. Around 1.2 million voters went to the polls the following April and the referendum on calling a convention narrowly passed by a margin of 23,000 votes.61

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 9: Comparison of Statewide Constitutional Convention Yes Votes by Region</th>
<th>Metro Detroit</th>
<th>Heavyweight</th>
<th>Small</th>
<th>Michigan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960 Gateway Amendment</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1961 Referendum</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite a drop in turnout, the coalition of voters who supported the 1960 Gateway Amendment and the April 1961 Referendum looked remarkably similar. Metro Detroit proved to be the driving force behind each proposal, with over 70% of voters supporting both proposals. Additionally, there was little division on the issue within Metro Detroit. At least two-thirds of the voters in each of the three counties that made up Metro Detroit supported both proposals. Detroit and its suburbs were thus overwhelmingly in favor of an overhaul of the constitution. In contrast, Outstate was divided on the issue. Despite the overwhelming opposition of the Small counties, the Heavyweight counties endorsed the Gateway Amendment by a small margin. In the April

Referendum, both Outstate regions found common ground in opposing the actual call for a convention, but not with the same degree of enthusiasm. Around 42% of voters in Heavyweight counties still supported the idea of a convention in April, which was significantly more than the 26% mustered in the Small Counties. Opposition to calling the convention did not, however, dilute Outstate influence in the convention itself.\textsuperscript{62}

The structure of the constitutional convention, or Con-Con as it became known, favored Outstate and the Republican Party. Delegates were elected from existing legislative districts and, given the malapportioned nature of those districts, Outstate was automatically overrepresented relative to its population. Since Republicans controlled 78 of the total seats in the 1960 legislature, while Democrats only controlled 66, the expectation was that Republicans would control Con-Con. As expected, Republicans secured control over Con-Con following delegate elections, but by a far larger margin than anyone anticipated. In total, Republicans won 99 seats to the Democrats 45 in the delegate elections. Republicans secured that 2-1 margin due to a low turnout of around 20% of registered voters. A mixture of an apathetic working class and a coalescing of the good government vote allowed Republicans to make inroads in Metro Detroit and Outstate urban areas. For example, Republicans swept all four seats in Genesee County, the location of Flint and normally a Democratic stronghold. Republicans success in securing a 2-1 majority, however, masked major internal divisions among delegates.\textsuperscript{63}

Republican delegates to Con-Con split into several relatively fluid factions. Each faction adopted an ideological label to differentiate itself from the others, but those labels meant little in terms of holding cohesive policy views. The moderate faction was the largest. Composed of 40-45 delegates, the moderates held diverse ideological views and mostly came from Outstate urban areas and suburban Detroit. Most of the committee chairmen at Con-Con belonged to the moderate faction and moderates tended to be invested in producing a positive outcome at the convention. The conservative faction was the second largest of the Republican factions, with around 20-25 delegates. Coming mostly from rural districts Outstate, many of the conservatives had opposed calling Con-Con and they tended to support preserving as much of the present


\textsuperscript{63} Sturm, 38; 44-46.
constitution as possible. The jockeying between conservative and moderate Republican delegates played a preeminent role in shaping the results of Con-Con.\textsuperscript{64}

Observers at the time expected a bipartisan coalition of the Democratic delegates and the moderate faction of Republicans to dominate Con-Con’s proceeding, but that alliance failed to materialize in a sustained way. The premise of a potential moderate-Democratic alliance was that both groups tended to come from urban areas and supported substantive constitutional change, unlike the conservatives. That potential was undermined, however, on some fundamental issues such as the organization of the Executive branch, where moderates wanted to consolidate the number of statewide elected officials, which Democrats opposed. Similarly, the announcement that George Romney, the leader of the moderate faction, intended to run for governor weakened the likelihood of cooperation between Democrats and the moderates. Democratic delegates also somewhat unexpectedly made common cause conservatives on issues like local government, where rural Republican and urban Democratic officeholders found their interests aligned. Faced restive conservatives flirting with increasingly hostile Democratic delegates, the leadership of the moderate faction chose to compromise with the conservatives.\textsuperscript{65}

The compromise covered a wide range of constitutional issues, including apportionment, earmarking and taxes. On apportionment, the minimum percentage of the population necessary for a county to receive a House seat was raised from 0.5% to 0.7%. The number of state senators was also increased to 38, with the four new senators going to Oakland, Macomb and Wayne Counties in Metro Detroit and Genesee County (i.e. one of the Heavyweight counties). Similarly, provisions were made to reapportion the state Senate in 1970 on an 80% population, 20% land formula. On earmarking, a number of minor changes were made to give the legislature more flexibility in spending restricted funds, but the system itself was largely maintained. The compromise also explicitly forbade a graduated income tax, but allowed the legislature to implement a flat rate tax. Some urban and suburban Republicans expressed dismay with different aspects of the compromise, but conservatives were generally content with it. Democrats both in and outside of Con-Con vigorously attacked the compromise. When the time for voting inside

\begin{footnotes}
\item[64] Sturm, 106-108.
\item[65] Sturm, 118-119.
\end{footnotes}
Con-Con came, however, a reliable Republican majority coalesced in support of the compromise.\textsuperscript{66}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 10: Comparison of Yes Votes in Select Referenda by Region</th>
<th>Metro Detroit</th>
<th>Heavyweight</th>
<th>Small</th>
<th>Michigan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960 Gateway Amendment</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1961 Referendum</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963 Vote to Adopt Constitution</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In the spring of 1963 the prospective constitution was put on a ballot before the Michigan electorate and confirmed in an incredibly narrow vote. Out of 1.6 million votes cast, the new constitution was ratified by margin of 7,000 votes. As Table 10 indicates, the coalition of voters who supported the new constitution was substantially different from the one that had passed the Gateway Amendment and called the convention in April 1961. The Heavyweight counties returned to supporting the idea of constitutional revision and, for the first time, the Small counties also embraced constitutional change. In the 1960 and 1961 votes, Metro Detroit had been the bulwark behind the drive for a new constitution. In 1963, that support dipped significantly. Of the three counties in Metro Detroit, only Oakland Count supported the constitution, providing a 62% vote in favor; Wayne and Macomb Counties offered 45% and 46% respectively. The new constitution thus was passed with tepid support from Outstate, major support from Oakland County and strong, but not overwhelming, opposition from the rest of Metro Detroit. The new constitution was thus passed by a coalition that transcended old geographic divides on such structural issues.\textsuperscript{67}

The vote on the new constitution represented the beginning of new political era in Michigan. Throughout the 1950s the rigid fiscal structure of the state government had left Michigan only a few steps away from financial disaster. As long as the uneasy consensus about taxes and spending held between Republican legislators and Governor Williams, that fiscal crisis was held at bay. With the decline of that consensus following Williams’s proposal of a graduated income tax in 1959, the geographic and institutional polarization between Governor Williams and his supporters in Metro Detroit and Outstate Republican legislators came to the fore of

\textsuperscript{66} Sturm, 120-122; 223-226.

Michigan politics. The gridlock in 1959 mobilized a coalition of civic groups seeking to address the polarization that plagued the Michigan’s politics by changing the state’s political structure.

The resulting constitutional convention was dominated by Republicans, who produced a document that was acceptable to moderate delegates from urban and suburban areas and conservative, rural delegates. The new constitution was narrowly ratified by a coalition of voters that included a small majority Outstate and a near majority in Metro Detroit. Driven by a strong performance in suburban areas like Oakland County, that near majority reveals how a potential split between Detroit and its suburbs could create a new, functional statewide majority. That new majority, a marriage of Outstate and the Suburbs, offered Republicans the opportunity to once again be electorally competitive statewide. Republicans just needed a candidate capable of solidifying that alliance. They found him in 1962 when George Romney, the leader of the moderate faction of Republican delegates, ran for governor.
Chapter III
George Romney and the Election of 1962

Writing about George Romney’s 1962 gubernatorial victory, Richard C. Fuller argued that Romney’s success was the result of “his determination to wage his campaign as an individual and a citizen, and not as a Republican.” Fuller’s analysis is indicative of conventional wisdom concerning the 1962 election. During his 1962 bid for the governorship of Michigan, Romney did not make his party affiliation the centerpiece of his candidacy. Romney and his strategists, however, fashioned a compelling argument for his candidacy that resonated beyond that specific election. By stressing the personal nature of his candidacy, the need for pragmatic governance and the politics of the pocketbook, George Romney successfully won the loyalty of middle class voters in Metro Detroit and thus the election. That type of personalized campaign secured Republicans the governorship for the first time in 14 years and served as a template for successful Republican gubernatorial bids in Michigan for the next two decades.

The advent of the 1960s marked the beginning of major change in Michigan’s political leadership. After 12 years as governor and six successive gubernatorial victories, G. Mennen Williams announced his intention not to stand for reelection in the spring of 1960. Williams’s decision sparked a competitive Democratic primary fight between his lieutenant governor, John Swainson, and the secretary of state, James Hare. Strongly supported by elements of organized labor, Swainson racked up large margins in Metro Detroit and succeeded in securing the nomination. In the general election in November, Swainson faced off against Paul Bagwell, the Republican candidate who had been defeated by Williams in 1958. Despite Bagwell’s previous failure, Republicans were optimistic about the 1960 election.

Republicans had a number of reasons for that optimism. Bagwell had outperformed expectations in his previous run and successfully halved Williams’s margin of victory from 290,000 votes in 1956 to 147,000 in 1958. He thus seemed positioned to do well in 1960, especially once he faced no serious opposition for the Republican nomination. Without Williams at the top of the ticket, and with Swainson emerging from a bitter primary fight, there were hopes that the Democratic ticket would be significantly weakened. In addition, the presidential election

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1960 seemed to benefit Republicans. Michigan had, after all, voted Republican in the previous three presidential elections. That optimism, however, proved to be misplaced.\footnote{Buffa, 55-56.}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 11: Comparison of 1958 and 1960 Republican Gubernatorial Vote by Region</th>
<th>Detroit</th>
<th>Suburbs</th>
<th>Heavyweight</th>
<th>Small</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The Democratic Party won the 1960 election in Michigan. Once again all the statewide offices on the ballot went Democratic, including the governorship. To add insult to injury, Michigan voted for the Democratic candidate for president for the first time since Franklin Delano Roosevelt was on the ballot in 1944. Michigan Republicans could, however, find a few, admittedly limited, silver linings. Both the presidential and gubernatorial races were close affairs and Bagwell outperformed the Republican presidential candidate, Richard Nixon. Out of 3.3 million votes cast in the presidential election, Nixon lost by a little under 67,000 votes. In contrast, over 3.2 million votes were cast in the gubernatorial race and Bagwell only lost by a bit over 41,000 votes. Additionally, as Table 11 indicates, Michigan Republicans made inroads into every region of the state compared to their results in 1958. In both Small and Heavyweight counties Outstate, Bagwell outperformed his 1958 totals by 3%. In Metro Detroit, he increased his share of the vote by 2% in Detroit and 4% in the Suburbs. Michigan Republicans could thus, in theory, take solace knowing they had registered their best gubernatorial performance since the early 1950s and were arguably making progress toward ending Democratic dominance of statewide races.\footnote{Michigan Secretary of State, Michigan Manual 1957-1958 (Lansing, MI: State of Michigan, 1958), 430; 435-437; 453.}

A postmortem of the 1960 election produced for the Republican State Central Committee, the central leadership of the state party, did not, however, dwell on silver linings. Rather, the postmortem offered a structural analysis of why the Michigan Republican Party continued to lose election after election. Whether or not a candidate was weak, or if a part of the campaign had been mismanaged, could not adequately explain seven successive gubernatorial losses. The postmortem argued that Republicans’ difficulties instead lay in long term demographic trends, the lasting legacy of the Great Depression and a failure of the party to adapt
to changing circumstances. The key to understanding Republicans’ electoral challenges was not in the idiosyncratic circumstances of the 1960 election or any of the other previous losses. The postmortem argued instead that such difficulties began with the emergence of the “big-city masses” in the 1930s.\textsuperscript{72}

The big-city masses, according to the postmortem, were the significant number of second-generation Americans who came of age in congested cities amid the Great Depression. Nostalgic paeans to rugged individualism, a mainstay of the Republican Party, meant little to them. They were wage-earners who understood that without a job they “had no bread, no rent, [and] no fuel” and that “a wage-cut was too plainly an act of the Boss.” To the big-city masses, a laissez faire outlook “seemed totally unrealistic” and government needed “to make sure baby’s milk wasn’t tubercular.” The Democratic Party recognized such needs and responded by championing an expanded role for government and the establishment of the welfare state. The big-city masses, particularly in Detroit, responded with a steadfast loyalty to the Democratic Party that was imparted to their children. Upward mobility into the middle class and movement into the suburbs had failed to alter that loyalty.\textsuperscript{73}

The path forward for the Republican Party, the postmortem argued, was clear, if challenging. The party’s greatest weakness was its status as “a party of nostalgia” that “remains rooted in an earlier era in which it was dominant.” It had failed to “bring its image and philosophy into harmony with the changing needs and conditions of a dynamic and intricately complex industrial society.” The Democratic Party, with extensive assistance from organized labor, benefited from that failure by rallying increased support from the “new middle class” and African Americans. Even farmers no longer supported Republicans as strongly as they once did. The only response, according to the postmortem, was to not focus on winning individual elections. A minority party, such as the Michigan Republican Party, could win an occasional election. The goal, the postmortem argued, should be working toward regaining a majority-party status. That meant turning the Michigan Republican Party into a “dynamic, responsive, forward-looking, majority party of the future.” The state party needed to innovate, experiment with new campaign techniques and strengthen itself organizationally. To that end, the postmortem

\textsuperscript{72} Political Realignment in Michigan, Republican Party (Mich.) State Central Committee Records, Box 22, White folder, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

\textsuperscript{73} Political Realignment in Michigan, Republican Party (Mich.) State Central Committee Records, Box 22, White folder, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
suggested potential improvements to the Republican State Central Committee in seven different areas, ranging from advertising to research.74

The postmortem indicates that Republicans within the state leadership, and likely beyond the leadership, understood that their party faced fundamental challenges that were not insignificant or transitory. The urban middle class, and indeed much of the suburban middle class, did not readily identify with the Michigan Republican Party and had continually resisted supporting it in elections for over a decade. Organized labor had played a role in fostering that resistance, but the exodus of African Americans from the Party of Lincoln likely did not help. Support from rural areas, once key to Republican victories, could no longer be relied on to offset urban major losses. To attain a majority-party status, the Republican Party needed to be reconstructed by reshaping its image and strengthening its administrative apparatus. In the interim, the postmortem acknowledged that electoral victories were attainable and desirable. The candidate that won that first statewide victory, and in doing so helped reshape the Michigan Republican Party, was George Romney.

The 1962 Romney gubernatorial campaign possessed an understanding of the electorate that largely mirrored the conclusions of the postmortem. Polling early in the year indicated that around 30% of respondents identified as Republicans, a little over 42% associated themselves with the Democrats. In Wayne County, the location of Detroit and its inner suburbs, those numbers were even starker: over 59% of respondents considered themselves Democrats and only 17% identified as Republicans. The Romney campaign thus concluded that party strength alone could not carry their candidate to victory. The campaign needed to dedicate itself to winning the support of the 26% of statewide respondents who identified as Independents. Of that 26%, however, only around 15% were estimated to be truly independent; the rest were considered closet partisans who likely did not deviate in their voting from election to election. Nevertheless, the goal was to focus on persuading self-identified Independents of the benefits of George Romney in the hope of winning their support.75

The Romney campaign did not view Independents in Michigan as a monolithic voting bloc. Rather, the campaign broke them into two groups: undecideds and ticket-splitters.

74 Political Realignment in Michigan, Republican Party (Mich.) State Central Committee Records, Box 22, White folder, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
75 Strategy Memo from Walt De Vries to Elliott, Romney, et. al., May 22, 1962, Republican Party (Mich.) State Central Committee Records, Box 22, Polls, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
Socioeconomically, there was not much difference between the two groups. Undecideds tended to be “clerical sales people skilled and semi-skilled workers; middle aged; more catholic than protestant; middle income ($7,000 - $10,000); and tend to be union members.” They were, essentially, “the urban middle and lower middle classes.” Ticket-splitters had the same basic socioeconomic characteristics as undecideds, but generally had “slightly higher incomes and tend to be middle and upper middle class.” Both undecideds and ticket-splitters were similar in the sense that they decided on whom to support “based not on issues, but other factors.” The main difference between undecideds and ticket-splitters lay in their approach to politics and the political system more broadly.\footnote{Strategy Memo from Walt De Vries to Elliott, Romney, et. al., May 22, 1962, Republican Party (Mich.) State Central Committee Records, Box 22, Polls, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.}

Ticket-splitters were, at the most basic level, people who voted for candidates from both parties for different offices on the ballot. In the 1962 election the Romney campaign narrowed that definition to voters who supported one party at the top of the ballot (e.g. the gubernatorial candidate), but the other party in the remaining races (e.g. attorney general, local candidates etc.). So, for example, a ticket-splitter supporting Romney in 1962 would have supported him for governor, but then voted for the Democratic candidates in the other races. Believing these voters to be valuable sources of potential support, the Romney campaign invested significant resources identifying them and areas where they resided. In particular, the campaign did a precinct by precinct analysis of Wayne County looking for a high incidences of ticket-splitting and voter turnout, with the intention of investing resources there during the election. The campaign treated ticket-splitters as a group distinct from either Republican or Democratic voters.\footnote{Walter DeVries and V. Lance Tarrance, The Ticket-Splitter: A New Force in American Politics (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 95-99.}

In contrast to ticket-splitters, undecided voters were not a treated as distinct from Republicans or Democrats. Rather, undecided voters were, one Romney strategist noted, more accurately described as “alienated” voters. The Romney campaign thought that undecided voters had little faith in politicians, political parties or the political system writ large. Undecideds saw “campaigns as nothing more than mutual character assassination” and believed that “voting is useless and reform impossible.” Indeed, they “structure[d] the political world in terms of powerful interests against which they the voters are powerless outsiders. They often feel wrongfully excluded, powerless and politically impotent.” An undecided voter did not vote for
anything. Rather, they voted against a perceived evil, against politicians and against the rich and the powerful. Undecideds represented around 12% of all voters and, according to polling, about 47% of were ticket-splitters, 41% were essentially Democratic voters and 8% generally supported Republicans. Winning over undecided voters, and ticket-splitters, became the main focus of the Romney campaign.78

One of the primary ways the Romney campaign attempted to win the support of undecided voters was to capitalize on their sense of alienation from the political system and process. The campaign intended emphasize “that the present administration is the cause of the citizen’s powerlessness” in order to increase their alienation from the political status quo. As a strategy memo noted, alienation tended to lessen voters identification with either political party and instead converted them into independents. Republicans, as the minority party, stood to benefit from this phenomenon, at least so long as they could capitalize on it. To capitalize on alienation, George Romney was to be presented by the campaign as a solution to that sense of alienation. In the words of one strategist, Romney was meant to represent “a way out” for undecided voters. He offered “them a promise of power and a feeling of participation” as part of an effort to restore their control over Michigan’s government. Alienation among voters thus needed to be specifically connected to political conditions in Michigan.79

The Romney campaign created a basic rhetorical framework to shape their approach to stoking and addressing that alienation throughout the campaign. Efforts to nationalize the election by referencing national issues, problems and politicians were to be avoided. Romney and his campaign planned to instead emphasize the need to “put an end to division, deadlock, drift, and decline in Michigan—to government for some instead of all.” The campaign intended to acknowledge that the political gridlock gripping the state was the result of “destructive paralyzing partisanship” and that such partisanship was the responsibility of both Swainson and the legislature. The question Romney’s campaign wanted to pose to voters was: how can the state’s current leadership be trusted to “change the tragic, sorry Michigan mess it helped produce?” The state needed new leadership “that has demonstrated capacity to compose differences, motivate united action, face and solve difficult problems.” The goal of the campaign

78 Strategy Memo from Walt De Vries to Elliott, Romney, et. al., May 22, 1962, Republican Party (Mich.) State Central Committee Records, Box 22, Polls, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
79 Strategy Memo from Walt De Vries to Elliott, Romney, et. al., May 22, 1962, Republican Party (Mich.) State Central Committee Records, Box 22, Polls, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
was achieving “greater unity through the reduction of sectional strife, economic conflict, and partisanship.” The Romney campaign would “give politics, the Republican Party, and Michigan a fresh new meaning…arising from a modern application of our pioneer American principles.” George Romney, the campaign argued, was the person to lead that principled renewal of Michigan.80

The basic strategy of the Romney campaign was thus simple. Similar to the postmortem produced in the aftermath of the 1960 election, the Romney campaign believed that the key to victory involved winning over middle class voters in Michigan’s urban areas. Romney strategists, however, further narrowed that goal. They planned to focus their efforts on winning over ticket-splitters who habitually vote for both parties and undecided voters alienated from the political process. To accomplish that goal, the Romney campaign intended to increase voter alienation with the political status quo, primarily by emphasizing the gridlock in the state. Their solution to that gridlock, and the troubles besetting Michigan more broadly, was Romney himself. The intention of the Romney campaign was to argue that proper leadership could reduce tensions in the state and give Michigan a fresh start. Romney, the campaign argued, could provide such leadership and, with the support of ordinary voters, turn the state around. Selling unhappy, urban middle class voters on George Romney as a solution to Michigan’s political problems was thus the central goal of his campaign in 1962.

George Romney did not, however, exist in a political vacuum. The Romney campaign’s central goal was to capitalize on voter dissatisfaction by pointing to the “dreary Swainson record” and emphasizing the “charismatic and messianic features of Romney’s personality.” Such rhetorical assertions, however, had to be tied to the pressing political issues of the day. According to polling, around 70% of respondents, including Republicans, Democrats and ticket-splitters, considered taxes the most important issue in the 1962 election. Jobs and the state’s financial condition, according to the same polling, were the two other most important issues in the election. Just as there was little partisan difference in assessing the issues, there was also very little in the way of sectional differences. Voters in Metro Detroit considered taxes, jobs and the state’s financial condition, in that order, to be the three most pressing issues in the election. In comparison, Outstate voters ranked taxes, the state’s financial condition and jobs, in that order,

80 Romney Campaign Strategy memo, George W. Romney Papers, Box 354, Campaign Strategy Memos, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
as the three most important issues. Reflecting on the importance that voters attributed to such pocketbook issues, a Romney strategist wrote that “maybe Marx was right.” The main issues addressed by the Romney campaign in the 1962 election thus were taxes, jobs, and the financial management of the state. Tying the three together, connecting them to other issues and emphasizing how Romney’s leadership could help became a major task of his campaign.81

Taxes, long a controversial issue in Michigan as indicated in Chapter 2, had the potential to be a major obstacle to the Romney campaign. Polling in 1962 indicated that most Michigan voters opposed any tax increases. When pressed, however, opinions on what type of taxes should be raised were divided. In Metro Detroit, 46% of respondents favored implementing an income tax, while 33% supported an increase in the sales tax. In comparison, only 33% of Outstate respondents supported an income tax. Another 37% of respondents from Outstate favored an increase in the sales tax. Most of the remaining respondents in both regions supported increasing various other taxes instead of either a sales tax increase or an income tax. In the face of such polling, the Romney campaign decided to only discuss taxes “as part of [a] reform package—including jobs, financial condition, etc.” Taxes thus were to be acknowledged as an issue, but only in relation to other pressing issues facing the state and only as part of a comprehensive solution to Michigan’s problems writ large.82

Another pressing financial issue facing Michigan were the state government’s finances. According to polling, 86% of respondents in Metro Detroit and 82% in the Outstate area believed that Michigan was in financial trouble. Around 50% of respondents blamed a mix of poor management and unnecessary spending for the state’s fiscal woes. Only 16% of respondents blamed an inadequate tax structure. When where blame lay specifically, 60% blamed the state’s political leadership. That frustration, one strategist noted, highlighted voters’ alienation with the present political situation. He argued that it was indicative of an attitude that boiled down to voters believing “politicians in politics act like damn politicians.” A cause for optimism for the Romney campaign was that respondents seemed to believe that Romney was better positioned to

81 Strategy Memo from Walt De Vries to Elliott, Romney, et. al., May 22, 1962, Republican Party (Mich.) State Central Committee Records, Box 22, Polls, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
82 Strategy Memo from Walt De Vries to Elliott, Romney, et. al., May 22, 1962, Republican Party (Mich.) State Central Committee Records, Box 22, Polls, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
handle the state’s financial mess. Around 59% of respondents in Metro Detroit and 54% in the Outstate area acknowledged as much.\footnote{Strategy Memo from Walt De Vries to Elliott, Romney, et. al., May 22, 1962, Republican Party (Mich.) State Central Committee Records, Box 22, Polls, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.}

In contrast, Swainson garnered the support of only 35% of Metro Detroit respondents and 32% of respondents from Outstate. Much of Romney’s support on the issue stemmed from personal characteristics like his background, his leadership experiences and his individual virtues, like his honesty and integrity. Swainson’s support, by contrast, mostly stemmed from his status as a Democrat (i.e. “he is for working people, little people and pygmies”) and because he was the incumbent and thus presumably understood the issues. Michigan’s financial condition, and particularly the way it lopsidedly favored him compared to Swainson, thus provided Romney with a potent political advantage in the 1962 election.\footnote{Strategy Memo from Walt De Vries to Elliott, Romney, et. al., May 22, 1962, Republican Party (Mich.) State Central Committee Records, Box 22, Polls, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.}

Less advantageous to Romney, according to polling, was the perceived jobs situation in Michigan. On jobs, there was a clear sectional divide between Metro Detroit and Outstate. 58% of Metro Detroit respondents, compared to 22% of Outstate respondents, believed that Michigan was worse off than the nation as a whole in regard to jobs. In contrast, 54% of Outstate respondents, and 31% of Metro respondents, believed that the jobs situation in Michigan was as good as the nation at large. A plurality of respondents, around 40%, blamed a lack of political leadership for the employment situation in Michigan, compared to 19% who blamed Labor and 16% who blamed Industry. Democrats enjoyed a 2-to-1 advantage, 42% to 21%, over Republicans on which party was most capable of addressing the situation. The Republican label, the strategy memo argued, thus needed to be avoided, because “[i]f voters are convinced Dems can do a better job than Romney – they win in a landslide.” The jobs situation in Michigan thus represented a major potential pitfall for Romney as a political issue and one that he needed to handle gingerly.\footnote{Strategy Memo from Walt De Vries to Elliott, Romney, et. al., May 22, 1962, Republican Party (Mich.) State Central Committee Records, Box 22, Polls, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.}

Taxes, Michigan’s financial condition and jobs, the core concerns of the Michigan electorate in 1962, provided the ground on which Romney waged his rhetorical campaign of alienation and made his case for his leadership ability. Swainson was to be portrayed, preferably by surrogates lest Romney’s image be tarnished, “as [a] weak, indecisive, divisive, inadequate,
stand-pat, inexperienced, hands-tied, special interest puppet.” Romney was to be portrayed as an above the fray, anti-politician who avoided mudslinging and talked about “problems, issues, and what he’s going to do to get this state rolling again.” The Romney campaign sought to bolster both of those images by creating a cogent economic argument that tied the unemployment, tax, and state government financial situations together.86

Romney’s official statement on Michigan’s financial condition tied together jobs, taxes and the state’s finances into a single, cogent argument. Romney stated that he knew “from experience that the way to solve a financial mess is not to put the only emphasis on one aspect of the problem.” Fixing the state’s finances, he argued, required a holistic solution. Such a solution, Romney noted, involved weighing the essentialness of services, diligently ensuring their fiscal efficiency and reforming the revenue structure to ensure a flow of adequate funding for them. The tragedy of the Swainson administration, Romney asserted, was that it had failed to favor such comprehensive reform. Instead, the Swainson administration’s “primary, solitary emphasis has been placed on only one part of this whole problem of financial reform. The continued and insistent cry has been for more money.” That impulse, Romney acknowledged, was not entirely wrong. He believed that “tax reform in our state is absolutely necessary.” Tax reform, however, also needed to be comprehensive.87

Romney had a broad vision of what successful tax reform looked like. Any overhaul of Michigan’s tax structure, Romney argued, needed to make taxes more equitable and conducive to economic growth. Equitability meant a smaller tax burden on low income families and tax relief for property owners. Local governments, however, also needed more revenue so that “problems can be handled more adequately by the government closest to the people.” To promote economic growth, any overhaul needed to adjust Michigan’s business taxes to make them more competitive, or even advantageous, compared to other states. A revision of the tax structure in regard to the business community, low income families, property owners and local governments necessitated also considering new forms of taxation. With spending reform and the other proposed tax changes, Romney argued that new taxes did not necessarily mean a higher tax burden on Michigan’s citizens overall. He admitted though, that new taxes might mean an

86 Strategy Memo from Walt De Vries to Elliott, Romney, et. al., May 22, 1962, Republican Party (Mich.) State Central Committee Records, Box 22, Polls, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
income tax. He would never, however, “favor an income tax for the sole purpose of imposing an income tax… [or] just to meet the staggering state deficit.” The income tax was only tolerable, Romney argued, if it was part of broader fiscal reform that was equitable, conducive to economic growth and coupled with spending reform. Romney connected such fiscal reform to the larger governmental reforms necessary “to rid ourselves of the division, deadlock, drift and decline which has been our sorry fate.”

Romney’s statement effectively combined the major concerns of the state’s electorate into one argument while also, obliquely, reinforcing the images of himself and Swainson that his campaign sought to promote. Romney made the case that he was qualified to be governor by emphasizing his personal experience before discussing the state’s finances. He avoided the kind of direct, personal attacks his campaign was keen to have surrogates make by criticizing the Swainson administration, rather than the governor personally. Arguing that the incumbent administration’s obsession with new revenue misunderstood Michigan’s financial issues, in turn, tied Swainson to unpopular tax increases and called into question his fiscal competence. Romney’s advocacy for a fiscal reform that combined spending reform with tax changes that benefitted businesses and ordinary people without increasing the overall tax burden allowed him promise fiscal competence and new jobs without appearing callous. Acknowledging the likely need for new taxes, including a conditional openness to an income tax, allowed Romney to appear as a pragmatic problem solver. Connecting his preferred fiscal reform to the end of Michigan’s political conflicts allowed Romney to present himself and his campaign as a solution to those conflicts.

Romney’s attempts to combine his particular rhetorical framework with the specific concerns of voters clearly resonated with some voters, including Democrats. In a letter to the editor of the Detroit News, Alexander Wilenkin explained his support for Romney. Wilenkin identified himself as a lifelong Detroiter and regular Democratic voter. He argued, however, that Williams and Swainson had bankrupted Michigan through financial mismanagement and had driven industry from the state. Still, Wilenkin acknowledged, he likely would not have supported any Republican other than Romney. Wilenkin believed that Romney stood ready to end the antagonism that had paralyzed the capital and divided voters. Romney’s advocacy of properly

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spending the taxes already paid by the people of Michigan, instead of simply advocating newer and higher taxes, convinced Wilenkin of his sincerity. He thought that Romney would bring “the same efficient business administration which has brought him success in every venture in which he has engaged through the years.” Wilenkin thus bought wholly into the rhetorical and policy argument offered by Romney and his campaign.89

Similarly, Samuel Lubell, a public opinion analyst writing in the Detroit Free Press, found support for Romney among Democrats in a survey of eleven bell weather precincts across Michigan. Not all Democrats, of course, supported Romney. Some considered his personality-centered campaign egotistical and his vaunted business success overblown. No Democrats interviewed in two working-class neighborhoods in Detroit and Flint supported Romney; they expressed hostility toward his business background and were concerned he might support anti-worker legislation. Nevertheless, Lubell found Democrats who liked Romney’s business experience, who believed he could lure industry to Michigan and who supported him out of frustration with the prospect of new taxes. The focal point of the election, in Lubell’s estimation, came down to an interaction between a machinist and his wife in Warren, a suburb of Detroit. The machinist did not blame Swainson for the gridlock in the state; he blamed Republican legislators and he doubted Romney would be better able to win them over than Swainson. His wife responded by expressing an openness to Romney, noting:

“Why not give him a chance?” retorted the machinist’s wife. “There’s a man down the street who is a fine husband when he works. He brings home pay without taking anything out. But he lost his job and has gotten to drinking. Now he doesn’t bring home his full unemployment pay. Michigan has had enough of that kind of thing. We need someone who will do something.”

Most of his interviewees, according to Lubell, were like the machinist’s wife: considering whether to give Romney a chance and, for the most part, deciding in his favor.90

A September survey of Wayne County voters commissioned by the Romney campaign also indicated the campaign’s attempts to frame the election were effective. Romney trailed Swainson in Democrat-heavy Wayne County 38.3% to 50.9%, but that

margin masked the fundamental strength of the former’s campaign. Most of those interviewed saw the election through the framing offered by the Romney campaign. Swainson was viewed “as a nice guy, but weak and ineffectual” by Democrats and ticket-splitters supportive of Romney and even many of Swainson’s Democratic supporters were “somewhat apologetic about supporting him.” In contrast, Democrats and ticket-splitters who liked Romney saw him as a capable businessman “who can straighten out the mess in state government.”

Those contrasting images were born out in the candidate preferences of the interviewees. Romney had the support of over 98% of Republicans, 11% of Democrats and 72% of ticket-splitters. Swainson was supported by only 77% of Democrats and 11% of ticket-splitters. None of the Republicans interviewed intended to support the incumbent. Around 9% of interviewees remained undecided, many of them Democrats. Such undecided Democrats were largely apathetic and ill-informed; the Romney campaign believed they were unlikely to vote for Romney. Overall, the campaign strategist analyzing the interviews noted that there was “nothing in the...interviews to indicate that a radical shift in campaign strategy is called for.” Hammering home that Romney’s leadership was the solution to the political mess in Michigan seemed to be working just fine.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 12: Comparison of 1960 and 1962 Republican Gubernatorial Vote by Region</th>
<th>Detroit</th>
<th>Suburbs</th>
<th>Heavyweight</th>
<th>Small</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The Romney campaign’s faith in its strategy proved to be well placed, as Romney beat Swainson in the 1962 gubernatorial election. Out of nearly 2.8 million votes cast, Romney won by a margin of over 80,000 votes. As Table 12 indicates, the shift of votes from 1960 to 1962

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91 Research Memo: Moro Depth Interview Survey: Wayne County, September 10, 1962, Richard C. Van Dusen Papers, Box 4, Political and Legislative material Romney file 1962 Election Campaign General Sept. (1), Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

92 Research Memo: Moro Depth Interview Survey: Wayne County, September 10, 1962, Richard C. Van Dusen Papers, Box 4, Political and Legislative material Romney file 1962 Election Campaign General Sept. (1), Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

in Romney’s favor was entirely sectional. Romney received the same percentage of the vote in both the Heavyweight and Small counties as Bagwell did in 1960. In Metro Detroit, however, Romney outperformed Bagwell’s results in both Detroit, where he did 2% better, and the Suburbs, where he increased the Republican share of the vote by 5%. Romney’s success in Metro Detroit, and thus the election more broadly, was driven by his ability to make significant inroads into middle class areas of the region.

Romney’s gain in Detroit was driven by increases in a few populous wards with concentrations of white middle and upper class voters. According to an analysis of voting patterns in Detroit created by the Wayne County Republican Committee, ten of the city’s twenty-two wards possessed significant middle or upper class elements. Three of those wards, Wards 2, 21 and 22, were traditionally friendlier to Republicans than the city at large and provided the largest gains for Romney. Economically and racially diverse, Ward 2 had a strong concentration of upper class whites and middle class African Americans. Ward 21, on the eastside of Detroit, was about 75% white and around two-thirds of voters worked in unionized factories and earned about $5,000 - $6,000 a year. On Detroit’s west side, Ward 22 was largely white, with a mix of upper class and lower middle class residents. Combined Wards 2, 21 and 22 produced about 44% of the votes cast in Detroit in 1962. Romney won about 48% of the votes in those three wards, which was an increase from the 44% that Bagwell received in 1960. In contrast, Romney performed about as well as Bagwell in the rest of the city. In the seven remaining wards with a strong middle and upper class presence, Romney and Bagwell both won over 24% of the vote. In the other wards, both Romney and Bagwell won around 18% of the votes cast. Romney’s gains in Detroit thus were rather mixed, with most of his improvement limited to three already Republican-friendly wards.94

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 13: Comparison of Republican Gubernatorial Vote in Select Cities in the Suburbs</th>
<th>Above Middle Income Cities</th>
<th>Middle Income Cities</th>
<th>Below Middle Income Cities</th>
<th>Suburbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In the Suburbs, Romney’s gains were broader and deeper than in Detroit, but still primarily driven by votes from middle class areas. In 45 cities spread across Metro Detroit, Romney only underperformed Bagwell in Pontiac, the largest city in Oakland County. About 65% of the population of the Suburbs lived in the 45 cities. As demonstrated in Table 13, Romney gained 6% in the 23 cities that fell under the definition of middle income set out by his campaign early in 1962. Together, those 23 cities contained about 38% of the suburban population. Romney also, however, posted fairly significant gains in cities above and below the middle income threshold. About 5% of the suburban population lived in the 8 above middle income cities and Romney posted a 4% gain in those cities. In the 14 cities below the middle income threshold, where 22% of the suburban population dwelt, Romney increased the Republican vote by 3%. In total, Romney did 5% better than Bagwell in the 45 cities across Metro Detroit, which matched his overall increase in the Suburbs and helped power his victory in the state.

George Romney waged and won a personalized campaign for the Michigan governorship in the 1962 election, but his politics were never defined by personality alone. Romney’s campaign presented him as a pragmatic man of action and leader whose experiences in the business world qualified him to fix the dysfunction gripping Michigan. His pragmatism, however, was shaped by polling and calculation to win over a stratum of urban middle class voters displeased with the status quo. He promised action on the pocketbook issues that they, and the broader electorate, held near and dear. Competent management of their tax dollars and

improvements to the tax structure, Romney argued, would stabilize the state’s finances while promoting equitability, economic growth and without having to raise the overall tax burden. Only Romney’s leadership, and not the continued ineffectual administration of John Swainson, could provide that to Michigan. That message resonated with middle class voters in Metro Detroit, and particularly in the Suburbs. Their support for Romney fueled the first Republican gubernatorial victory in 14 years.
Conclusion

Campaigning in Detroit during the 2012 presidential election, Vice President Joe Biden remarked that the modern Republican Party was not “Mitt Romney’s father’s Republican Party.” In a write-up of the event, a reporter explained that George Romney, 2012 Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney’s father, was a former governor of Michigan who had been associated with “the moderate-to-liberal wing of the GOP.” The elder Romney had “raised taxes during his time as governor, courted labor unions and tangled with the right wing.” A staunch advocate of racial equality, George Romney had also refused to endorse Barry Goldwater, the conservative 1964 Republican presidential nominee, over his stance on civil rights. George Romney, and implicitly the Michigan Republican Party of his era, thus represented a now extinct Republicanism that was open to taxes, pro-civil rights, labor-friendly and opposed to conservatism. That summary of George Romney’s politics is indicative of the received wisdom that defines the popular memory of him and the Michigan Republican Party he led. That received wisdom, however, is selective in its remembrances. At his core, George Romney was a suburban politician whose brand of politics mirrored those in other regions of the nation and whose legacy resonates today.99

That received wisdom about George Romney is not inaccurate. On civil rights in particular, Romney supported policies designed to promote racial equality throughout his business and political career. Prior to the start of his political career, Romney criticized segregation in defense housing during World War II and in Detroit’s housing program in the early 1950s. While leading American Motors, he was one of only a handful of corporate leaders to support the passage of a Fair Employment Practices Act. Romney was a proponent of civil rights at the Constitutional Convention and, as governor, signed into law one of the strongest Fair Housing Acts in the nation. Furthermore, during his time as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development during Richard Nixon’s first term, Romney attempted unsuccessfully to encourage suburban integration. Opposition from within the Nixon administration to Romney’s efforts to combat segregation was one of the key reasons behind his resignation as Secretary of HUD after Nixon’s reelection. While Romney has a solid civil rights record, there is an overemphasis on it, 99

and other issues like taxes, in the received wisdom about George Romney that distorts the popular memory of him.100

George Romney did not win the 1962 gubernatorial election because of his support for civil rights. In a Detroit News poll shortly before the 1962 election, Romney was polling 14.1% with African Americans. In contrast, a poll for the Detroit News shortly before Election Day in 1960 showed Paul Bagwell winning the support of 16.3% of African Americans. These results likely did not surprise members of the Romney campaign. Writing retrospectively, one leading member of the Romney campaign noted that a natural skepticism from African Americans toward election year wooing, and their strong identification loyalty to the Democratic Party, made successfully courting them unlikely. Funds for outreach to African American were thus limited by the fear that such efforts might prove unsuccessful. Indeed, the African American realtor tasked with managing outreach to black voters acknowledged “that the balance of opinion within our campaign was heavily weighted in favor of conceding the Negro Vote.” There were fears, he noted, that if Romney expressed too much interest in winning African American support, then there might be less enthusiasm for his candidacy in suburban Detroit. The 1962 Romney campaign thus never expected a major surge in support from African Americans nor made a serious effort to create one. Nevertheless, George Romney’s support for civil rights remains a cornerstone of the received wisdom that shapes popular memory about him.101

A more essential element of Romney’s political appeal was his ability to win the loyalty of the white middle class of suburban Detroit. Romney argued that his leadership abilities (i.e. his personal characteristics and business background) made him uniquely qualified to solve Michigan’s problems. His choice of campaign issues, however, was dictated by the electorate and voters in 1962 cared about pocketbook issues like taxes, the state’s finances and jobs. Those concerns were definitively shaped by the relative economic decline and political dysfunction that

gripped Michigan in the 1950s. By arguing that he could govern effectively, steward their tax dollars prudently and competently manage Michigan’s economy, George Romney won the loyalty of white middle class voters in suburban Detroit. Winning that loyalty allowed Romney to solidify the coalition between Detroit’s suburbs and Outstate that was essential to his victory in 1962. Romney’s ability to win the support of middle class, white suburbanites through pocketbook appeals mirrors trends in suburban politics elsewhere in the nation.

In *The Silent Majority*, Matthew Lassiter investigates the transformation of the political culture of the metropolitan South in the decades after World War II. He rejects an “overreliance on race-reductionist narratives to explain complex political transformations…and downplays the centrality of class ideology in the outlook of suburban voters.” Partisan affiliation, according to Lassiter, mattered less to middle-class suburbanites than their identifications as “homeowners, taxpayers, and schoolparents.” Such suburbanites, often migrants from outside the metro area and not the nearby central city, embraced a rhetoric of color-blind innocence and class-based individualism to justify their privilege. In municipal politics, they supported the candidates of corporate leaders who promoted what Lassiter calls the Sunbelt Synthesis. The Sunbelt Synthesis mixed racial moderation (i.e. a rejection of segregationist violence in favor of gradual, negotiated progress on civil rights) and economic growth. The expansion of voting rights to African Americans and Supreme Court rulings invalidating malapportioned legislatives districts shifted political power from rural areas to metropolitan ones. Lassiter argues that those collective changes ended the era of southern exceptionalism and converged with the other regions of the nation into a new suburban era.102

There are striking parallels between the events in Michigan during the 1950s and the early 1960s and the transformation of the metropolitan South described by Lassiter. George Romney was a corporate leader with a constituency based in the middle-class suburbs of metropolitan Detroit. A racial moderate, Romney campaigned on a model of economic growth favored by Michigan’s business elite and promised a version of fiscal reform that would not add to the tax burden of his constituents. His politics, his program and the structural forces enabling him thus align in many ways with the Sunbelt Synthesis detailed by Lassiter. Romney’s experiences, however, deviate from the Sunbelt Synthesis in two significant ways. First, his

version of middle-class suburban politics compromised with entrenched rural interests for the sake of achieving political power. Romney also operated in the context of a manufacturing economy associated not with the growing Sunbelt, but instead with the declining Rust Belt. Even with those differences, Lassiter’s conclusions about the emergence of a suburban era seems legitimized by the parallels between the rising Sunbelt and changes in Michigan that facilitated the political ascent of George Romney.

The core of George Romney’s political appeal, pocketbook politics and promises of effective governance, are still echoed in modern politics, particularly in ostensibly Democratic states. For example Rick Snyder, the Republican governor of Michigan elected in 2010, ran “as a businessperson… [who] knew what it takes to create jobs and balance the budget.” He never objected to being called a moderate, never mimicked the strident Tea Party conservatism gaining steam elsewhere in the nation and worked to cultivate appeal outside of normal Republican voters. Similarly, Charlie Baker, the Republican governor of Massachusetts elected in 2014, built his successful 2014 gubernatorial campaign on “a promise to make government perform better.” In the wake of a Democratic administration plagued by allegations of administrative mismanagement and patronage hiring, Baker’s call for effective governance gained traction. A final example is Larry Hogan, the Republican governor of Maryland elected in 2014. Facing an uninspiring Democratic opponent and a resistive electorate, Hogan “focused on presenting himself as someone who could revitalize the state’s economy.” His campaign also portrayed his opponent as an ineffective administer who was responsible “for botching the rollout of the state’s health care system and for the state’s subpar job growth.” The electoral success of these Republican governors indicates that, contrary to the assertion of Vice President Biden in 2012, the pocketbook politics and promises of effective governance that formed the core of George Romney’s political appeal, if not the received wisdom that largely defines his place in popular memory, are still present in the modern Republican Party.

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