IDENTITY APPEALS DURING 2020 REPUBLICAN AND DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL
CONVENTIONS

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ABSTRACT

GABRIELLE REICHARD. Identity Appeals During 2020 Republican and Democratic National Conventions. (Under the direction of DR. SCOTT FITZGERALD)

Once an essential part of selecting presidential nominees, national presidential conventions have dramatically changed in recent decades. In part due to the shifts in media and the rise of personalized politics, conventions now represent a form of political theater. While previous studies have focused on understanding either one speech or one convention, to my knowledge, there is has not been a study that critically compares and contrasts both conventions to understand their voter appeal strategies. I conducted a content analysis of 2020 convention speeches to demonstrate how both parties construct liberal and conservative social identities. My analysis identifies six themes that appear in both conventions, including strength, tradition, order, progress, and humanity. Overall, my analysis reveals that the speeches at the RNC focus on ideas of fear and safety, while the DNC speeches focus on ideas of hope and change. The parties share a commonality by presenting these emotions through stories and interpretations of current and historical events. Voters were also viewed differently, with the RNC viewing them as vehicles for re-election and the DNC viewing them as agents for change. Findings from this study have the potential to help aid research in Sociology, Political Science, and Communications, as well as possibly sparking new ideas for those trying to find solutions to long-standing consequences due to partisanship in the United States.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Political conventions are a long-standing tradition in the United States political system. Conventions of the past served as a necessary part of the political process by finalizing candidates and highlighting party ideals and key issues. Due to the rise of media, the convention structure has changed. What was once a necessary part of the political process has now become an expensive and highly scripted event used for party promotion. This shift has left many to believe that the conventions no longer serve an essential role in our society. For many others, these conventions now serve as a clear representation of how the parties view themselves.

This analysis aims to uncover what the 2020 convention speeches reveal about the Republican and Democratic parties' view of liberal and conservative social identities. In order to address this question, I will be answering five sub-questions: (1) what does the 2020 RNC reveal about conservative identities, (2) what does the 2020 RNC reveal about liberal identities, (3) what does the 2020 DNC reveal about liberal identities, (4) what does the 2020 DNC reveal about conservative identities, and (5) what are the differences between how the RNC and DNC appeal to conservative and liberal social identities.

The purpose of this analysis is to understand the connection between political parties and how they attempt to gain potential voters during the 2020 conventions. To investigate the presented research questions, I am using selected speeches from the 2020 conventions to highlight one type of political event that makes identity appeals. To answer the research questions, an understanding of conventions, the current political culture, identity, and the connection between identity and political speeches is required.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conventions

The Republican and Democratic Conventions are a tradition within the United States political system. Some argue that modern conventions do not serve a legitimate purpose; others argue that conventions represent the party's key issues, serve as a motivator to base voters, and promote the party's candidates for the next three months of the election cycle (Deaville 2018). Conventions are what finalize the major political parties in our political system (Smith 2006). Over the years, conventions have had many purposes. Before the rise of the media, conventions served as a way for parties to pick presidential candidates and outline party policies and values. It was not until 1956 that both parties adapted their conventions to fit media coverage requirements. However, the rise of televised conventions has led to the over scripted, overdramatized, extravaganza's that can be seen today (Smith 2006; Sweetser and Tedesco 2014; Deaville 2018).

Modern conventions are celebrations of the parties (Benoit, Blaney and Pier 2000). These celebrations can cost millions and are executed by experts in media entertainment to reinforce key party messages (Smith 2006). The higher quality of the convention production equates to more media air time. This increase in views increases the chance for viewers to become party voters. The drive for views puts the importance on appearance rather than policies or issues. Convention speakers are urged to display the party's most extreme views (Smith 2006; Benoit et al. 2000). The thought process behind this decision is that the core messages of the party will relate to their core voters and all potential voters enough for them to vote for that party. The high production level of conventions markets the party and brands the candidate for the public audience (Deaville 2018). This connection through the media allows the possibility of

the convention messages to become part of the viewers' political identity (Dickson and Scheve 2006).

Benoit et al. (2000) analyzed convention keynote speeches from 1960-1996. In this context, attacks and acclaims were both avenues for speakers to address either the party's image or an issue that the party supports or not. Acclaims were typically speeches that positively painted the party, while attacks were negative remarks about other candidates or parties (Benoit et al. 2000). They found that from 1960-1976 these speeches were 51% acclaiming and 48% attacking (Benoit et al. 2000). From 1980- 1996, 52% of speeches were attacks, and 48% were acclaims (Benoit et al. 2000). Benoit also finds that between 1960 and 1996, less than 1% of these speeches were defending the party or other image repair strategies. These findings are significant because they suggest that convention speeches are becoming increasingly negative over time. Parties are becoming more reliant on attacking their competition as opposed to defending or acclaiming positive attributes to themselves. This finding suggests that this negative increase will increase with time depending on political culture during the campaign process.

Partisanship

Over the years, there has been a noticeable partisan divide between the Republican and Democratic parties based on race/ethnicity, gender, religion, and education (PEW 2020; Parker et el. 2018). Pinpointing the exact cause of partisanship in the United States can be difficult. However, research shows that party identification has become increasingly synonymous with political ideology and social identity (such as race, religion, ethnicity, gender) over the last few years (Boxell, Gentzkow and Shapiro 2020). Additionally, increases in technology and media

coverage can also be linked to partisanship (Boxell et al. 2020; Smith 2006; Baldwin-Philippi 2017). While these are not the only causes of the divide, research shows that these causes have had a significant impact. These links to the divide correlate with existing research on Social Identity Theory.

Political efficacy can be defined as a citizen's view of their own power regarding civic duties (Sweetser and Tedesco 2014). When individuals believe that they can make a difference, they are more likely to engage in political behavior. When individuals believe that they do not have the power to make a difference, their identification with any party decreases over time. The decline of group loyalties and political efficacy increases the need for personalized politics (Bennett and Segerberg 2011). Instead of projecting ways to move the group forward, parties are focused on specific political causes. This move towards personalized politics can be thought of as the fundamental difference between modern and traditional political practices (Bennett 2012).

In 2018, right-wing extremism was linked to over 50 extremist murders (ADL 2019). The study reports that since 1995, right-wing extremism has been linked to more deaths than any other group. When discussing this topic, the ADL told the *New York Times* (2019) that from 2013-2016 the number of active hate groups decreased, suggesting that this increase is due to the increase in partisanship since the 2016 presidential election. Following the 2016 election, the number of these active hate groups began to increase (Stacks 2019). While the rise in hate groups does not necessarily correlate to partisanship, it suggests that the documented increase in partisanship can lead to more violent expressions of political identity.

While to some, this may come across as a few isolated incidents, increased partisanship effects can have drastic effects. These effects can look like: a reduced feeling of efficacy toward the government, increased homogeneous behavior among social groups, and altered economic

decisions (Boxell et al. 2020). The connection between an individual and a party or candidate is based on more than what happens inside the group; internal variables affect how one makes these connections (Sweetser and Tedesco 2014). The level of connectivity to the group depends on how willing the individual is to incorporate the views into their own identity and the magnitude they choose to do so.

Identity

While many lenses could be used to understand the connection between political parties and potential voters, Social Identity Theory is among the most common theory used in this area. Social Identity Theory (SIT) comes from the works of Tajel (1978) and Tajfel and Turner (1979). SIT is a theory that tries to explain how intergroup conflict functions in group-based definitions (Islam 2014). The theory's goal is to understand how conflicts in a social group become a part of an individual's identity. SIT asserts that individuals define their identities by looking at social groups in an attempt to protect their personal identity (Islam 2014). SIT is a classic social psychology theory and attempts to connect intergroup conflicts to group-based self-identification (Islam 2014). Social identity theory asserts that the way one categorizes objects in their world determines these objects' meanings. The meaning becomes subjective and then is applied to their social world (Turner et al.1987).

A social identity is solidified when a person categorizes themselves based on the shared similarities they perceive with a specific social category (Malka and Lelkes 2010). This causes one's identity to be more socially focused and influence what social meaning they give to their surroundings (Malka and Lekles 2010). It has been documented that media has a direct influence on how these identities are solidified and turned into a behavior.

To assess how convention speeches appeal to social identity, we first need to understand the role they play in the identity solidification process. Since the rise of the new social movements of the 1960s, individuals are less motivated by group collective action and more motivated by personal lifestyle values (Bennett 2012). This rise has required political parties to adapt their views to fit this personalization requirement. If parties want voters, they will have to appeal to their individual nature. This large-scale individualization happens by engaging in digital media technologies that allow the party to enable collective action or incite group members to use social media to do so (Bennett 2012).

This shift has been suggested to mean that pollical parties have moved from campaigning based on party identity to campaigning based on individual issues that party members care about. This type of campaigning can lead to a lack of individualized information about the out-group, which leads to collective judgments from the in-group about the out-group (Brewer 1993). Comparisons of this nature allow the in-group to make ambiguous judgments about themselves, relevant out-groups, and members of both groups based on their frame of reference (Brewer 1993). The reference frame for many group members stems from what the media portrays about the relevant groups.

According to Social Identity Theory, individuals have both a personal and social identity that is utilized at a specific point in time (Turner et al. 1987). When one of these identities is perceived to be threatened, the threatened identity will be used in that specific circumstance. The identity used will be more likely to defend that identity even at the cost of the other identity (Carney, Jost, Gosling and Potter 2008). It is suggested that when individuals feel that their political social identity is being threatened, they will align themselves more with the party (or social group), even in cases where their personal beliefs do not match that of the rest of the

group. In the modern era, the media and technological advancements we see directly affect how one behaves when they perceive their identity being threatened (Shawtz et al. 2011).

The limited air time from media outlets requires that the party highlights their key message by utilizing their most extreme outlooks. When viewers watch the conventions, they are experiencing a direct appeal to their social identity, typically through media sources that focus on their specific affiliation. This practice has the ability to change the attitudes and behaviors of the views based on how strongly they already identify with the party. It has been stated that the rise in media has increased the need for conventions to become more scripted and performance based. My analysis is operating under the assumption that this change can be understood as direct appeals to the social identities of potential voters.

Connection Between Identity and Speeches

Dickson and Scheve (2006) report that previous research on public opinion, voting behavior, and campaigns from a psychology and sociology perspective concludes that identity can be an important motivator in voting. They argue that political speeches and advertisements can affect identity by building up the salience of the political identity in the context of that election cycle (Dickson and Scheve 2006). The party's appeal to that identity, and the level of salience that becomes incorporated in that identity, can affect how the individual will behave during that specific time (Greene 2004). While political parties can try to encourage their intended voters to behave a certain way, it is ultimately up to the individual to decide how they will act during that time. This allows for extreme behavior, complete disassociation from the election cycle, or moderate behavior. They find that the mechanism for politicians to appeal to social identities can be described in three ways: (1) Political campaigns may inform and persuade

voters, (2) political messages are a useful coordinating device in elections, and (3) campaign communications may prime voters about particular issues or candidates (Dickson and Scheve 2006).

The crux of this argument is dependent on how the individual engages with the information presented. Individuals are the master of their reality, and due to the increase in social media, their social worlds can be massive (Bennett and Segerberg 2011). These large social networks are typically made up of individuals with similar backgrounds, interests, and ideologies. These networks enable political parties and allow the central leaders and relevant organizations to be ignored to preserve the party's identity (Bennett 2012).

Huddy (2001) examines two social identity theory branches concerning political identity: social identity theory and self-categorization theory. Huddy (2001) finds that voters' political and national identities can be altered due to the words and actions of political leaders. These leaders' actions sway individual voter's identities, but it can also intensify the goals of their party and vary the salience of group identities (Huddy 2001). After reviewing survey data, Huddy finds that social identities, like political or ethnic identities, are more stable than political attitudes (Huddy 2001). This suggests that the political identity that an individual adapts into their social reality is more relevant to them than their political ideologies. On the surface, it would appear that political identity and political ideology would go together. However, during times of conflict, political parties do not always fully uphold all their voters' ideals. During these times, voters will see political identification as more important than their own ideology. For instance, if a liberal voter feels very strongly about maintaining their gun rights, they might overlook this feeling and still vote democrat despite the party being pro-gun control.

Han and Yzer (2020) conducted two studies to uncover how the media furthers partisanship. Study one focuses on how Republicans and Democrats react to partisan- conflict focused news. The study was replicated in study two but focused on gender rather than party identification. Han and Yzer (2020) found that both Democrats and Republicans exhibited attitudes related to partisanship when exposed to this type of media. The parties did not experience partisanship at the same rates. Republicans were ideologically more cohesive than Democrats, allowing for higher partisanship levels within the Republican Party (Han and Yzer 2020). These findings are consistent with previous findings and suggest that Republicans hold more polarizing attitudes than democrats when engaging with media that is party focused— suggesting that Republicans, more than Democrats, might be more likely to defend their party. While this suggests that Republicans hold more partisanship attitudes, the findings are clear that both parties hold these attitudes. Democrats and Republicans increase individual levels of partisanship after being exposed to identity- matched sources.

Malka and Lelkes (2010) find that identity-based social influences significantly impact how individuals use and identify with the labels of "conservative" or "liberal." Specifically, they feel that identity-matched sources impact how these labels are thought of and incorporated into the viewers' social reality (Malka and Lekles, 2010). While they acknowledge that these sources are not the only cause for political identification, they understand how the information provided by these sources can impact social identities. They suggest that ideological identity and party identity function in the same way regarding responding to political cues (Malka and Lekles, 2010). Meaning, the way one responds to political cues is not about merely conforming to the group, but rather, the support comes from adopting these beliefs into their own identity (Malka and Lekles, 2010). Their study appears consistent with previous findings that individual

ideologies are less stable than party identification when exposed to identity matched sources. Individuals can overlook their own ideas when exposed to these sources because of the perceived conflict.

Sweetser and Tedesco (2014) report that under certain conditions, exposure to candidates does improve the connection between them and the voters. However, there are significant differences in how either party's candidates communicate to their potential voters or established group members (Carney et al. 2008; Malka and Lelkes 2010; Bennett 2012; Sweetser and Tedesco 2014; Han and Yzer 2020). It is believed that these communication style differences are present due to the ideological differences between the parties.

Liberal and Conservative Identities

According to PEW Research Center (2020), as of June 2020, 34% of all registered voters identified as independent, 29% identified as Democrat, and 29% identify as Republican. They conclude that white, evangelical, non-college-educated men were more likely to lean Republican, as well as rural southerners, weekly religious service attenders, and men from Generation X (PEW 2020). In the same study, white college-educated women, millennial women, black women, Hispanic Catholics, religiously affiliated people, and urban northeasterners were more likely to lean Democrat (PEW 2020). Parker et al. (2018) finds that democrats are more likely to live in urban areas, while Republicans are more likely to live in rural areas. These clear distinctions show how social environments can affect one's social identity. While these findings do not implicate exactly how individuals apply their social identities to their political ideologies, it suggests that these identities rely on more than personal preference. Their findings appear to be consistent with SIT regarding one's social environment impacting their social identity.

Carney et al. (2008) identify the differences in social identity between liberals and conservatives. To do this, they identify two main personality traits linked to political orientation: openness to experience and conscientiousness. They also look at three other possible personality dimensions with less empirical support, such as extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. Their findings conclude that liberals are more likely to score higher on individual measures of openness, cognitive flexibility, and integrative complexity (Carney et al. 2008). This could be categorized as progressive or progress forward. Conservatives are more likely to possess more substantial personal needs for order, structure, closure, and decisiveness (Carney et al. 2008). They suggest that people who identify as liberal are more open to change, while those who identify as conservative are more interested in sustainable structures. They also find that these identity differences are not differences that arise later in life, these differences can typically develop as early as pre-school, and while they can change throughout life, they do not always do so (Carney et. al. 2008).

In 2004, Greene found that individuals' different partisanship levels in their social identity are significant predictors of that individual's party identification, ideology, and behavior. This means that the amount of partisanship solidified into their social identity and social reality has a significant impact on how they view and behave in political matters. Greene believes that social identity is an essential component of the US partisan divide (Greene, 2004).

Dickson and Scheve (2006) find that when individuals are concerned about their social identity, political platforms become unstable. This instability can result in individuals overlooking their own ideologies for the sake of the party. In these cases, political speech can affect the salience of the groups' social identity, affecting the behaviors of members of that group. Due to this, candidates may resort to group-based appeals to strengthen the group's

identity. These attempts vary depending on the event, settings around the election, and policy preferences of the group. Their findings suggest that the way parties appeal to voters' social identity varies over time, event, candidates, and political climate.

According to two prominent media viewing research organizations, Neilson (2020) and AXIOUS (Fischer 2020), Democrats and Republicans engaged with different media news outlets during the conventions. On average, Republicans were more likely to watch Fox news, a right or conservative-leaning news outlet. Democrats were more likely to watch MSNBC, a left or liberal-leaning news outlet (Neilson 2020; Fischer 2020). Their findings suggest that those viewers are engaging with these specific outlets because they fit their relevant political identification's social views. Republicans and Democrats are choosing to engage with information that aligns with their identification.

During the 2020 election cycle, both parties took distinctly different approaches. Instead of releasing a new platform for 2020, the Republican party to choose to endorse President Trump and follow the platform designed for 2016 (GOP 2020). The Democratic Party chose to release a platform designed for 2020 (DNC 2020). The parties' platforms are explained as guides for the candidates and speakers to represent the parties' path of action once their candidate is elected.

These platforms signal to voters how that party plans on governing and the values and ideologies of that party. Both parties explicitly explain that their platforms are the speakers' guide to the 2020 national conventions and that the information in the platform directly represents the identities and values of the people voting for that party (RNC 2020; DNC 2020). Both the RNC and DNC noted specific names for each night of the conventions that were designed as a way to signal the main message for each night. For the RNC, the first night's name was "Land of Heroes," the second was "Land of Promise," the third was "Land of Opportunity,"

and the fourth was "Land of Greatness" (Moore 2020). For the DNC, the first night's name was "We the People," the second was "Leadership Matters," the third was "A More Perfect Union," and the fourth is "America's Promise" (Schwaller 2020).

After reading both platforms, it seemed reasonable to expect the Republicans (GOP 2020) to be represented through themes of strength, tradition, and order. The Democrats (DNC 2020) are expected to be represented through themes of progress, humanity, and equality. These classifications appear to be consistent with previous research.

METHODS

In order to investigate the question of "What do 2020 convention speeches reveal about the Republican and Democratic parties' view of liberal and conservative social identities?" I conducted a qualitative content analysis of randomly selected 60% of all the speeches from the 2020 Republican National Convention and Democratic National Conventions, excluding speeches from Donald Trump and Joe Biden. In order to address this question, I will be answering five sub-questions: (1) what does the 2020 RNC reveal about conservative identities, (2) what does the 2020 RNC reveal about liberal identities, (3) what does the 2020 DNC reveal about liberal identities, (4) what does the 2020 DNC reveal about conservative identities, and (5) what are the differences between how the RNC and DNC appeal to conservative and liberal social identities. Answering these questions requires comparisons between conventions, speech topics, and theme usage to be assessed using NVIVO software. Transcripts used for this analysis have been obtained for all four nights of both conventions through Rev. com. Rev is a well-known, non-partisan transcription company with detailed transcriptions of all four nights of the conventions.

Using a random number generator, I randomly selected approximately 60% of speeches from each convention (59% from DNC and 62% from RNC). Thus, 96 (44 from DNC and 52 from RNC) speeches have been analyzed out of the possible 158. The speeches were assessed in this randomized order, regardless of which convention the speech originated. Both conventions had both politicians and non-politicians as speakers. Out of the 96 speeches analyzed, 49% of the speakers were politicians, and 51% were non-politicians. Out of the sample from the RNC, 48% of speakers were politicians, and 52% were non-politicians. Out of the sample from the DNC, both politicians and non-politicians were represented equally.

Table 1. Characteristics of 2020 RNC and DNC

Data Type	Number of Speeches	Percent of Politician Speakers	Percent of Non-politician Speakers	Percent of Speeches Day 1	Percent of Speeches Day 2	Percent of Speeches Day 3	Percent of Speeches Day 4
RNC and DNC	96	49%	51%	21%	29%	30%	20%
RNC	52	48%	52%	25%	23%	35%	17%
DNC	44	50%	50%	16%	36%	25%	23%
							N= 96

This project aims to examine the speeches by noting how many themes occur throughout all of the speeches. This analysis required that all specific theme references be recorded; however, theme frequency per speech was not assessed. The conceptualization of each theme was necessary to help guide this process (see Appendix A). In order to get the most accurate account of each theme, all relevant material surrounding the theme was identified. This procedure allows for a complete account of the total number of speeches that contain a specific theme. The only exception to this process involves noting how many times the parties make specific mentions of either party. The coding process of identifying themes happens in four main steps.

Step one entailed a complete read-through of the selected speech to identify its purpose (endorse, attack, defend) and its main topic (such as patriotism, economy, COVID-19, healthcare, among others). This step typically took anywhere from 1-4 complete read-throughs. During this step, all mentions of the Democratic Party or Joe Biden were recorded as "Dem Specific," and all mentions of the Republican Party or Donald Trump were recorded as "Repub Specific."

Step two, immediately after step one, the given speech is read for the theme "Strength." This step typically took one to four complete read-throughs; in some cases, more read-throughs

were necessary. Once steps one and two have taken place, the steps are repeated for the remaining speeches until strength is assessed in all speeches.

Step three required repeating step two with the remaining main themes in the order of "Tradition," "Order," "Progress," "Equality," and "Humanity." As with "Strength," each read-through required 1-4 complete readings or more depending on the speech.

Step four entails a check for all major themes once all read-throughs were conducted. Doing this check required re-evaluating and comparing all theme instances to the conceptualization provided by the codebook. Once a thorough check of all of the major themes has been completed, the analysis process can begin.

Themes

The findings from Sweetser and Tedesco (2014) suggest that the ideas presented during one convention would be present during the other. After reading the platforms from both parties, it appears likely that the six major themes that have been identified would be present during both conventions but be presented in vastly different ways. For a complete operationalization of themes, see Appendix A.

The platforms for both conventions begin with a preamble that is designed to sum up the key ideas representing their respected parties. The preamble to the Republican (GOP 2020) platform appears to focus on strength, tradition, and order. The idea of being strong as individuals and as a country is fundamental. This also includes strength in the military and economy. When it pertains to traditions, the focus is on US traditions such as traditional family values, having a strong military, and the US's historic role. This theme is also present with their view of the Constitution being interpreted as written, with no room for flexibility. They stand for

order among people and government officials. This idea is shown through plans to obtain order on the border, education, farms, and businesses.

The 2020 Democratic Platform appears to focus on progress, humanity, and equality. The idea of being progressive and fixing the past is essential. This would include the idea of fixing America or putting policies in place to help American's get the services they deserve. It is clear through the expressed writings of the Democrat's preamble that the people in the United States are the focus of the party. This includes providing care and support for marginalized people, re-aligning ourselves with foreign allies, and taking a more active approach to climate control to preserve our future. Equality for all is another crucial aspect of the party. For instance, the idea of justice for victims, acknowledging national injustices, and creating equal opportunities.

ANALYSIS

The use of the NVIVO software allows for detailed coding. I specifically looked for (1) which themes are the most present in a given convention, (2) which themes appear in both conventions, (3) how frequently do the themes appear across speeches during a convention, and (4) what is the perceived intended impact of the most frequent themes. Following Benoit (2000), I also paid attention to which speeches appear to be acclaims, attacks, or defenses. Benoit's (2000) research on convention speeches suggests that speeches are becoming increasingly negative over time. For this project, it is appropriate to note which party either uses more acclaims, attacks, or defenses or the differences in the delivery of those three styles.

The themes that appeared most frequently throughout a given convention were different for both RNC and DNC. At the RNC, the most common themes were order (found to be present in 81% of 52 speeches) and strength (found to be present in 77% of 52 speeches). The most common themes at the DNC were progress (found in 80% of 44 speeches) and humanity (found in 68% of 44 speeches).

While the most frequently used themes differed between the conventions, there was overlap when looked at as a whole. Across the conventions, the most common themes were humanity (found present in 58% of 96 speeches) and strength (found in 52% of 96 speeches). It is important to note that all themes appeared in both conventions; however, the way themes were represented varied depending on the convention. When it comes to how frequently the themes appear across the speeches, I found that the RNC used all six themes more frequently than the DNC.

When it comes to the DNC, Progress referred to policies that would be introduced or addressed. While specific policies were mentioned, progress typically referred to emotions

connected to those policies. Ideas of humanity were referenced in multiple ways. One way was by sharing stories about Joe Biden that the speaker thought demonstrated his love for his fellow man. Another was sharing ideas that invoke strong and passionate feelings about an issue or injustice that has occurred and what support would be needed to move forward. When it comes to the RNC, it seems that tradition referred to a suggestion that the country needs to stay on the current path for the sake of safety. Tradition also seems to be linked to an inflexible interpretation of the constitution or that the ways of the founding fathers are better than anything new the country could attempt to do. Strength seems to pertain to how important, and great the US and Americans are perceived as being. Ideas of strength were also a meaningful way to communicate that we would not be these things if Trump were not elected.

One of the last elements I specifically looked for involved the purpose of the actual speeches themselves. Benoit (2000) predicts that convention speeches will become increasingly negative over time. During the 2020 conventions, it appears that endorsement speeches (73% of 96) were more common than attacks (16% of 96). My findings suggest that the RNC was more negative than the DNC, with 19% of speeches being attacks, 71% being endorsements, and 4% being defenses. The DNC had 11% of speeches being attacks, 75% being endorsements, and 2% being defenses. Eight speeches did not fit any of the purpose categories and were found to be more present in DNC than RNC (11% in DNC and 6% in RNC).

Speakers at the RNC asserted that the DNC spent a significant amount of time mentioning or attacking them. The findings show that the DNC referred to themselves in 82% of speeches and the Republican party in 89% of speeches. In comparison, the RNC referred to themselves in 94% of their speeches and Democrats in 58% of their speeches. Looking at how many times party-specific references appeared throughout the speeches was important to this analysis's

context. My findings show that the DNC spent more time talking about the RNC than the RNC spent talking about the DNC. However, I find that the mentions of the Democratic party happened more frequently in fewer speeches at the RNC. While more speeches at the DNC referenced the Republican Party, the Republican Party made more specific mentions about the Democratic Party. Many references to the Republican Party at the DNC were typically statements about Donald Trump or a few Republican leaders instead of Republican voters. At the RNC, speeches included remarks about Democrats as a whole, including Democratic leaders and voters. The mentions of the Democratic Party at the RNC were typically more negative than mentions of the Republican Party at the DNC.

Table 2. Speech Topics in 2020 Convention Speeches

Topic Type	Total Speeches Present in	RNC Speeches	Percentage	DNC Speeches	Percentage
RNC Unique					
Order	6	6	12%	0	0%
Donald Trump	5	5	10%	0	0%
Strength	4	4	8%	0	0%
Education	3	3	6%	0	0%
Tradition	2	2	4%	0	0%
DNC Unique					
Progress	5	0	0%	5	11%
Climate Change	5	0	0%	5	11%
Equality	4	0	0%	4	9%
Joe Biden	2	0	0%	2	5%
COVID-19	2	0	0%	2	5%
Overlapping Topics					
Economy	11	9	17%	2	5%
Humanity	7	1	2%	6	14%
Military	4	2	4%	2	5%

Trump v. Biden	3	2	4%	1	2 %
Health Care	3	2	4%	1	2%
Resilience	2	1	2%	1	2%
					N= 96

Note: The following topics appeared in one 2020 RNC speech: Republican Party, Law Enforcement, Cancel Culture, Criminal Justice Reform, Guns, Patriotism, Crime, Heroes, Environment, Women, Foreign Policy China Business, Agriculture, and American Dream. The following topics appeared in one 2020 DNC speech Democratic Party, Bernie Sanders, Activism, Immigration, Gun Violence, Racism, Leadership, Empathy, History, The Future, Indigenous People, Faith, and Voting.

Out of the 96 speeches, there was a distinct difference in what each convention focused on and the variety of topics covered in each convention. The RNC had 20 unique speech topics, while the DNC had 18. Out of the 52 RNC speeches, 67% were found utilizing the 20 unique topics. The most commonly used unique RNC topics were "Order" (12%) and "Donald Trump" (10%). However, it is essential to note that the most common topic for an RNC speech is Economy (17%), a topic that overlaps with the DNC, and therefore not a unique topic. Out of the 44 DNC speeches, 31 were found utilizing the 18 unique topics. The most commonly used unique DNC topics were "Progress" and "Climate Change" (both occurred 11% of the time) and Equality (9%). Similar to the RNC, the DNC's most used topic was Humanity (14%); however, it was not unique. Out of the convention unique topics, both the RNC and DNC only had one speech centered on their specific party, and zero that focused on the other party. The RNC was also more likely to center their speeches on Donald Trump than the DNC was to center their speeches on Joe Biden. RNC topics centered on Donald Trump occurred in 10% of speeches, while DNC speeches that centered on Joe Biden occurred in 5% of speeches.

While topic overlap was not extremely common, it did exist. There were four topics noted that incorporated these topics to some extent, and there were two topics that experienced equal use across the conventions. The most commonly used overlapping topics included

"Economy" (present in 11 speeches, nine being from the RNC or 17% and two from DNC or 5%) and Humanity (present in 7 speeches, six from DNC or 14% and one from RNC or 2%). One important note about the overlapping topics involves the "Trump v Biden" topic used more frequently by the RNC than DNC (4% of RNC and 2% of DNC). There were only two equal use topics including "Resilience" and "Military". However, out of these two, "Military" was used more often, totaling four times (two for each convention).

FINDINGS: THEME USAGE

The six themes assessed in the conventions were strength, tradition, order, progress, equality, and humanity. Table 3 describes the distribution of these themes and what percentage of these speeches referred to each theme at least once. The purpose of this section is to give a detailed account of how each theme appears in each convention.

Table 3. Theme Usage Across 2020 Conventions

	Strength	Tradition	Order	Progress	Equality	Humanity
Conventions Combined	52%	44%	47%	49%	47%	58%
RNC	77%	65%	81%	23%	37%	50%
DNC	23%	18 %	7%	80%	59%	68%
						N= 96

Strength

Strength was a key theme for the RNC and highlighted how strong the US has become and how much could be lost if Trump did not get re-elected. Strength references signaled how great America and Americans are. Strength referred to expressed ideas of patriotism, "American First" ideas, and positive attributes about the US and Donald Trump. Strength was noted in several cases talking about the weakness of other politicians or countries.

> Nikki Haley: "This president has a record of strength and success. The former vice president has a record of weakness and failure. Joe Biden is good for Iran and ISIS, great for communist China, and he's a godsend to everyone who wants America to apologize, abstain and abandon our values. Donald Trump takes a different approach. He's tough on China and he took on ISIS and won, and he tells the world what it needs to hear"… "Joe Biden, and the socialist left would be a disaster for our economy, but President Trump is leading a new era of opportunity. Before communist China gave us the coronavirus, we were breaking economic records left and right. The pandemic has set us back, but not for long. President Trump brought our economy back before and he will bring it back again." [RNC 19. Day 1. Politician]

> Bob Vlaisavljevich: "Since the Iron Range economy is vulnerable to economic trends and to foreign trade, we have always needed a strong voice in Washington. We looked to Democrats to fill that void for many years because we actually thought they cared about our welfare. Not anymore" [RNC 30. Day 2. Politician]

For the DNC, strength references talked about the strength of all people, especially people who were perceived to have endured social or political injustices. Strength was alluded to in many cases in reference to reasons the speakers believed Donald Trump is not strong enough to lead. It referred to ways to lift up all people, but like the RNC, it was used to attack the other party in moments. Strength signaled accomplishments from before the 2016 elections, talk about the glory of the US, and urged voters to vote for Joe Biden to preserve strength and bring strength back after perceiving it has been lost over the last four years.

> Michelle Lujan Grisham: "And I'm proud how we embrace our multicultural identity as our greatest strength" [DNC 45. Day 3. Politician]

> Chuck Schumer: "We need a president with dignity, integrity, and the experience to lead us out of this crisis. A man with a steady hand and a big heart who will never, ever quit on America. That man is my friend, Joe Biden. He will be a great president. But if we're going to win this battle for the soul of our nation, Joe can't do it alone." [DNC 23. Day 2. Politician]

Tradition

When referring to the RNC, references to tradition talked about sticking to or getting back to "American" principles like pro-gun, pro-Christianity, Make America Great Again, and more. In many cases, this theme referred to quotes from past political leaders to urge a specific direction. Instances of tradition communicated a fear for safety that the speakers hold about Americans and the nation as a whole. In many instances, references were made to highlight the past and compare it to now, especially when it pertained to protests and protestors.

> .Mark and Patricia McCloskey: "At this moment in history, if you stand up for yourself and for the values our country was founded on, the mob spurred on by their allies and the media will try to destroy you." [RNC 14. Day 1. Non-politician]

> Nicholas Sandmann: "Because the truth was not important. Advancing their anti-Christian, anti-conservative, anti-Donald Trump narrative was all that mattered. And if advancing their narrative ruined the reputation and future of a teenager from Covington, Kentucky, well, so be it. That would teach him not to wear a MAGA hat." [RNC 32. Day 2. Non-politician].

Ideas of tradition were not common in DNC, but when the ideas were present, it typically referred to a perception of how political positions should operate and point out how current leadership is not operating the way it should be. The DNC typically talked about tradition in the phrases like "For generations now" or "We continue on the path of the people before us." In these instances, speakers are typically talking about the tradition of a group fighting for equality.

> Tracee Ellis Ross: "For far too long, black female leadership in this country has been utilized without being acknowledged or valued, but we are turning the tide." [DNC 21. Day 2. Non- politician]

> Bill Clinton: "A presidential election is the world's most important job interview. At the end, we hire a leader to help us solve problems,, create opportunities and give our kids better tomorrows"… "At a time like this, the Oval Office should be a command center. Instead, it's a storm center. There's only chaos. Just one thing never changes, his determination to deny responsibility and shift the blame. The buck never stops there." [DNC 27. Day 2. Politician]

Order

Order was the most common idea found in the RNC and referenced RNC policies, support Order was the most common idea found in the RNC and referenced RNC policies, support for the military, first responders, police, and statements that appeared to condemn Black Lives Matter protests and assert All Lives Matter. Ideas of order are present in references that promote equality, such as "America First" policies, education choice policies, and giving opportunities to unborn Americans. RNC policies that relate to order appear to be not necessarily about correcting governmental oversights or wrong doings; but are policies designed to help people help themselves, encourage the idea of working your way out of poverty, or learning how to do things for yourselves. Policies that relate to order might use historical injustices as the backdrop, but they do not address the root of the issue. Phrases like "law and order" are common

and seem to urge for stabilization through standardization. Order was the most common way for the RNC to invoke fear in their viewers about what could be lost if Donald Trump did not win.

> John Peterson: "Donald Trump was elected president and he knew what it was like to build a company and create jobs. One of the first things he did was to cut red tape and put an end to draconian type banking regulations. He also cut taxes on small businesses, allowing us to be more competitive, both domestically and internationally. In fact, we increased revenues by 25% for two years in a row. By getting rid of the job-killing NAFTA and negotiating the US-Mexican-Canada Trade Agreement, president Trump ensured a more competitive playing field for American companies. Even with all the challenges presented by the Coronavirus, president Trump is rebuilding and our economy is roaring back again. [RNC 28. Day 2. Non-politician]

> Kevin McCarthy: "The socialist Democrats have a different agenda. They will dismantle our institutions, defund our police, and destroy our economy." [RNC 67. Day 3. Politician]

Order was the least present theme for the DNC. When order was referred to, it was in connection to showing support for the military.

> Colin Powell: "Our country needs a commander in chief who takes care of our troops in the same way he would his own family. For Joe Biden, that doesn't need teaching, it comes from the experience he shares with millions of military families, sending his beloved son off to war, and praying to God he would come home safe. Joe Biden will be a president we will all be proud to salute. With Joe Biden in the White House, you will never doubt that he will stand with our friends, and stand up to our adversaries, never the other way around." [DNC 37. Day 2. Politician]

> Barack Obama: "They understand that in this democracy, the commander-in-chief does not use the men and women of our military who are willing to risk everything to protect our nation as political props, to deploy against peaceful protestors on our own soil." [DNC 52. Day 3. Politician]

Progress

Progress was the least common theme for the RNC. Ideas of progress appear to pertain to either being critical of DNC policies or wishing for hope and looking towards the future. It was

typically found as negative remarks towards Democrats and is the only theme explicitly used to talk negatively about the other party. While it happens in other instances, RNC references of progress are the only theme that focuses on negative attributes or ideas of another party besides instances where political parties were specifically mentioned.

> Andrew Pollack: "Far left Democrats in our school district made this shooting possible because they implemented something they called restorative justice. This policy, which really just blames teachers for student's failures puts kids and teachers at risk and make shootings more likely, but it was built as a pioneering approach to discipline and safety." [RNC 13. Day 1. Non-politician]

> Daniel Cameron : "Joe Biden is a backwards thinker in a world that is craving forward-looking leadership." [RNC 39. Day 2. Politician]

Ideas of progress are the most common reference for the DNC. Progress references discussed policies that addressed issues like climate change and systematic racism. References to progressive policies include addressing historical injustices, acknowledging the roots of major social/ political issues, and improving the country through governmental support. Progressive policies appeared not to be discouraging fixing problems for yourself but acknowledge that issues cannot be fixed without a proper foundation, no matter how much work one does due to systemic injustices. Progress was also about looking towards the future, having hope, and wanting to make a change.

> Jon Meacham: "Extremism, nativism, isolationism and a lack of economic opportunity for working people are all preventing us from realizing our nation's promise. So we must decide whether we will continue to be prisoners of the darkest of American forces or will we free ourselves to write a brighter, better, nobler story? That's the issue of this election." [DNC 67. Day 4. Non- politician]

> Lucy and Jessica Sanchez: "It breaks our hearts to see children separated from their families at the border. That's wrong. Those children need their parents. On November 3rd, I'm going to vote for my mother, my sister and my daughters. I have a vote for a future where all of our lives have dignity and respect"… "We need a leader who will fix the broken immigration system and commit to keeping families together." [DNC 51. Day 3. Non-politician]

Equality

In regards to the RNC, equality references were similar to DNC equality references. The major observed difference between RNC and DNC equality usage is the people who are suggested as needing more equality. The RNC acknowledged police brutality among African Americans and followed up with how "rioting" was not the answer. Other groups of people acknowledged as needing equality include farmers, businessmen, and working/middle-class Americans. Finally, equality references include declarations that the foundation of the American spirit and dream is equality and justice.

> Donald Trump Jr.: "All men and women are created equal and must be treated equally under the law. That's why we must put an end to racism and we must ensure that any police officer who abuses their powers, is held accountable. What happened to George Floyd is a disgrace and if you know a police officer, you know they agree with that too, but we cannot lose sight of the fact that our police are American heroes." [RNC 20. Day 1. Politician]

> Charlie Kirk: "I am here tonight to tell you, to warn you, that this election is a decision between preserving America as we know it and eliminating everything that we love. For decades, ruling class leaders in both parties sold out our future to China, to faceless corporations, and to self-serving lobbyists. They did it to preserve their own power and enrich themselves, all while rigging the system to hold down the good, decent middle class patriots striving to build a family and pursue a decent life." [RNC 1. Day 1. Non-politician]

The DNC mentions equality in connection to bringing attention to unequal processes and institutions in US life. Stories were told about victims of police brutality, struggles of the immigration process, and other groups of people from marginalized groups like indigenous Americans and LGBTQ+ people. References to equality also included urging people to vote for a candidate who will make the United States a more equal and fair place for everyone, not just rich and powerful people.

Cedric Richmond: "It's about whether people who didn't inherit millions from their parents can build a business from the ground up and have a real chance to compete" … "And it's about whether in the richest country on earth, everyone, including women and people of color, feel included and empowered" [DNC 16. Day 1. Politician]

Philonise Floyd: "George had a given spirit, a spirit that has shown up on streets around our nation and around the world. People of all races, all ages, all genders, all backgrounds, peacefully protesting in the name of love and unity. It's a fitting legacy for our brother, but George should be alive today. Brianna Taylor should be alive today. Ahmaud Arbery should be alive today. Eric Garner should be alive today. Stefan Clark, Tatiana Jefferson, Sandra Bland. They should all be alive today. So it's up to us to carry on the fight for justice. Our actions will be their legacies. We must always find ourselves in what John Lewis called good trouble for the names we do not know, the faces we'll never see, those who can't mourn because their murders didn't go viral." [DNC 2. Day 1. Non-politician].

Humanity

Humanity references found in the RNC were different from those made in the DNC, especially in connection to who was being represented, such as the "silent majority" (Eric Trump, 2020). Other humanity references include stories about how much Trump truly cared about people suffering from a loss or scared. Typically, these people were farmers, businessmen, working/middle-class Americans, essential workers, military personnel and families, and children. While the RNC did acknowledge pain, providing concrete solutions was not as common. Presented solutions typically included shifting blame to either Democrats, the Obama administration, or the individual person. Like with order, humanity might have been sympathetic, but there are strong undertones that people need to find their own solutions.

Eric Trump: "Joe Biden, and the radical left are now coming for our freedom of speech. They want to bully us into submission. If they get their way, it will no longer be the silent majority, it will be the silenced majority. This has to stop" [RNC 38. Day 2. Non- politician]

Burgess Owens: "As we speak to you tonight, we send our thoughts and prayers to those facing terrible fires in California, recovering from storms in Iowa, and preparing for hurricanes in Louisiana and the Gulf Coast" [RNC 60. Day 3. Politician]

Humanity was a key theme in the DNC. References to humanity typically consisted of stories perceived as demonstrating how Joe Biden and other Democratic politicians cared deeply for different people. Other instances include ideas of making social change, including climate control, immigration, and for people affected by COVID. Stories and passionate speeches about what could happen if things did not change make up a large part of this theme. It appears that the DNC references humanity in a way to portray themselves as the party for the people, the party for change, the party for everyone. Humanity ideas typically came with expressing feelings such as "this person cares," acknowledging pain, and attempting to find solutions.

> Jacquelyn Asbie: "But in the short time I spent with Joe Biden, I could tell he really saw me, that he actually cared, that my life meant something to him. I knew even when he went into his important meeting, he'd take my story in there with him. That's because Joe Biden has room in his heart for more than just himself. We've been through a lot and we have tough days ahead, but nominating someone like that to be in the White House is a good place to start. That's why I nominate my friend, Joe Biden, as the next president of the United States." [DNC 31. Day 2. Non-politician]

> Nancy Pelosi: "That is the guiding purpose of house Democrats, fighting for the people." [DNC 54. Day 3. Politician]

DISCUSSION

The goal of this analysis is to gain a new understanding of the connection between political parties and their appeals to potential voters. In order to investigate this issue, I have found it beneficial to answer five sub questions, including: (1) what does the 2020 RNC reveal about conservative identities, (2) what does the 2020 RNC reveal about liberal identities, (3) what does the 2020 DNC reveal about liberal identities, (4) what does the 2020 DNC reveal about conservative identities, and (5) what are the differences between how the RNC and DNC appeal to conservative and liberal social identities.

2020 Conventions and their connection to Identities

In response to the question of what the 2020 convention speeches reveal about the Republican and Democratic parties' view of liberal and conservative social identities, I conclude that the way the two parties view identities at the conventions is observable through the topics of the speeches and the identified themes. One of the most significant differences between conventions appears to be the utilization of emotions in the speeches. The DNC relies on ideas of hope, change, and doing what is morally right for the sake of all people to overcome systematic injustices. The RNC uses ideas of fear, safety, and doing what is morally right for the sake of keeping the American dream and American ideals alive. These findings are supported when looking at what speakers communicate in their speeches. As mentioned, humanity was the most common theme for the DNC and contained many stories that tried to communicate a shared understanding of human emotions. Order was the most common theme at the RNC and pertained to policy suggestions and mentions of specific events that needed attention and stabilization,

such as problems at the border and 2020 protests. While these ideas are most prominent in these two themes, the same ideas can are present throughout the conventions.

Based on my findings, it seems appropriate to suggest that the RNC projects that conservative identities are based on principles that keep all aspects of public life simple. This requires maintaining order, remaining strong, and holding the founding fathers' ideals at the forefront of all decisions. For the RNC, appealing to a conservative identity means striving for a safe nation, where change is limited, and how the US presents itself to the world being extremely important. The findings also suggest that the RNC views liberal identities as weak, complicated, and disinterested in "American" principles. Appealing to these identities requires a plea for understanding how important these institutions and traditions are in American life. The RNC and the 2020 Republican Platform explicitly explained that their main goal was to re-elect Donald Trump. Appealing to both of these identities relied on presenting Donald Trump in a way that was attractive to both identities. For conservative identities, this meant representing the ideas previously mentioned. For liberal identities, this meant changing the current perception of Donald Trump from being intolerant, racist, and xenophobic to helpful, understanding, and inclusive.

These findings suggest that the DNC projects that liberal identities are based on principles that advocate for change and acknowledgment from political leaders that American life has not always been perfect. This requires new progressive policies, a spoken dedication to equality, and an appreciation and understanding for all humans. The findings for the DNC about conservative identities are less clear than the RNC's view of liberal identities. When references about Republicans were made in the DNC, they were typically about specific republican leaders and not conservative voters. The findings suggest that the DNC views conservative identities as

being based on intolerance, a disinterest in Americans, and an unwavering alliance with Donald

Trump. Appealing to these identities was based on a perceived need for change, specifically

regarding Donald Trump's administration and policies. For liberals, this meant discussing all the

areas of public life that Donald Trump has let down. For conservatives, this meant appealing to

their sense of humanity in hopes of changing their perception of Donald Trump.

RNC and Conservative Identities

 Through the topics and themes most commonly used at the 2020 RNC, I find that the

evidence supports Carney et. al.'s (2008) ideas towards conservative identities, including having

a substantial need for order, structure, closure, decisiveness, and sustainable structures. These

findings suggest that the inferences from the 2020/2016 RNC platform about conservative

themes' strength, tradition, and order were correct. RNC conservative appeals appear to be

related to fear for personal safety, a lack of order in social structures, and a sense of duty to the

nation. One interpretation of the speakers chosen at the RNC is that they resemble what PEW

(2020) defines as individuals who are more likely to be Democrats. Many speakers were white,

evangelical, non-college-educated men; others were rural southerners, weekly religious service

attendees (or at least claim to be), and men from generation X. While this description does not

fit all the speakers at the RNC, it appears that a large enough majority fit these criteria enough to

find merit in this observation.

 When it comes to RNC appeals to conservative identities, appealing to a sense of order

was imperative. Order was the most common theme for the RNC and typically referred to as an

attempt to gain a sense of control. Structures perceived as needing order include the border,

schools, families, marriages, prisons, and protests. The RNC showcased a viewpoint that

suggested that a lack of order meant a lack of control, and a lack of control meant there was something to be feared. Fear was a catalyst for many conservative appeals, most specifically a fear of being or being seen as weak. In combination with being perceived as weak, this idea about fear allowed RNC speakers to assert that all Democrats and liberals were trying to take Republican strength. The idea of losing strength in such a way was framed as a reason to be mocked or ridiculed later in the future and should be something that is feared. To avoid this fear and to remain safe, conservatives needed to come together to keep the person who was perceived to have given them this safety in the first place in office.

While fear was a major part of conservative appeals, solutions to fears were rarely provided outside of the re-election of Donald Trump. In many cases, the idea of a small government or a government that uninterested in Americans' day-to-day life was ideal. Uses of fear refer to speakers speaking about problems that voters were to be fearful of. These issues included high unemployment, high numbers of poorly educated individuals, lack of medical insurance, and housing. While these issues were not explicitly explained away, individuals were encouraged to seek solutions for themselves, leaving the impression that it was the individual's job to solve their problems without government interference.

According to Han and Yzer (2020), Republicans were more likely to be ideologically more cohesive than Democrats, and therefore more likely to defend their own party. This idea was represented at the 2020 conventions through their platform, and speakers expressed goal to re-elect Donald Trump. My findings suggest that the expressed goal of the RNC can be thought of as putting personal identity aside for the sake of the party. Following the rationale of Dickson and Scheve (2006), it appears likely that a major tactic at the RNC was to

appeal to conservative voters in a way that puts the state of their party above their individual needs, thus supporting ideas from Dickson and Scheve (2006).

RNC and Liberal Identities

RNC appeals to liberal identities were fairly indirect. In many cases, it appeared as if the RNC was trying to mimic what had happened at the DNC since it has happened a week prior to the RNC. Examples such as this include stories being told in similar ways, speaker's occupations were similar, and similar messages about humanity were spread. It should also be noted that the RNC was much more likely to mock voting Democrats than the DNC was to mock voting Republicans. While it was common to mention specific people like Joe Biden or Nancy Pelosi, it was also common to refer to all Democrats and all liberals in a derogatory way. An argument can be made that appeals were made during these instances due to how RNC speakers viewed weakness. By calling Democrats and liberals weak, an appeal for them to vote for Donald Trump was occurring so they would no longer be considered weak.

Other liberal identity appeals seen in the RNC consist of strong appeals during speeches to women and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). These groups were found by PEW (2020) to traditionally lean towards the Democratic Party, and therefore by appealing directly to them, could be argued as being a liberal identity appeal. In addition, North Easterners were also speakers at the RNC, which could also support PEW's (2020) findings as a liberal identity appeal.

A final type of liberal identity appeal at the RNC included showcasing people who were not typical Trump supporters. These appeal types suggest that by showing liberal viewers other people who would not traditionally vote for Donald Trump, they might be persuaded into voting

for him as well. These speakers include people such as Rand Paul, Daniel Cameron, and Vernon Jones. These appeals suggest that the RNC is trying to convey a similar message to that of the Dickson and Scheve (2006) findings of overlooking personal ideologies for the sake of party identification during times of conflict. This idea can be supported through the speeches of individuals like Rand Paul, who assert that they do not always agree with Donald Trump but continue to vote for him because, "our occasional policy differences are far outweighed by our significant agreements." Speaker Daniel Cameron sends a message to Joe Biden where he says, "Mr. Vice President, look at me. I am black. We are not all the same, sir. I am not in chains. My mind is my own. And you cannot tell me how to vote because of the color of my skin". Speaker Vernon Jones, a self-described lifelong Democrat, states, "The Democratic party does not want black people to leave their mental plantation. We have been forced to be there for decades and generations, but I have news for Joe Biden. We are free". These messages seem to be appealing directly to potential Democratic voters who are unsure how to vote come election day.

DNC and Liberal Identities

Through the topics and themes most commonly used at the 2020 DNC, I find that the evidence supports Carney et. al.'s (2008) findings of liberal identities, including being more open, cognitively flexible, and demonstrating higher levels of integrative complexity. Pew (2020) found that democrats were more likely to be women who were white and college-educated, black, and millennials. The same study also suggested that Democrats are more likely to be Hispanic Catholic, individuals affiliated with a religion, and individuals from the North East. After reading the DNC's 2020 platform, my impression was that the focus would be on ideas that promote progress, equality, and humanity; support for these impressions came after

completing the coding process. These ideas seem to be supported by those chosen to speak at the DNC, like Billie Ellish, who appeal to younger voters.

Engagement with liberal identities included proposing progressive policies such as health care for all and policies addressing climate change. The perception of these policies appears to be that they will help the country and equally help Americans become stronger. These policies simultaneously encouraged change while benefiting humanity, suggesting a certain level of cognitive flexibility and openness. The DNC showcased a certain level of openness to change by acknowledging systematic oppression for members of many marginalized groups, most notably African Americans and Hispanic immigrants. Speakers would talk about how for generations, no one was willing to speak up to address the root of social problems and how a vote for Joe Biden and Kamala Harris would change that and help find solutions for these issues. Speakers left the impression that the system is the problem, and it is the system that needs to find the solution.

Han and Yzer (2020) find that Republicans are more likely to defend their party over Democrats. While the RNC used its platform to express a need for the re-election of Donald Trump, the DNC used its platform to suggest changes to American life that they perceive would benefit all Americans. While the DNC's goal was to get Joe Biden elected, their expressed main focus was on all people in the US. These findings appear to support Huddy's (2001) findings on social identities being more important than political attitudes. These findings suggest that the 2020 DNC appealed to social identities by engaging with topics and ideas that would personally connect to the intended audience. These findings suggest that a major tactic at the DNC was to appeal to liberal voters in a way that suggested their personal identities were more important than political affiliation, thus supporting ideas from Huddy (2001).

DNC and Conservative Identities

Huddy's (2001) claims appeared to also be present in DNC appeals to conservative identities. It appears that the DNC echoed this message by trying to appeal to the humanity of voters rather than spending long periods of time talking about individual issues. While speeches focused on individual issues like gun violence, climate control, and COVID, these speeches were typically shorter than other speeches. This finding suggests that the DNC was more concerned with the convention presenting as a place of hope, rather than a lengthy discussion of specific problems.

Conservative appeals at the DNC involved messages from speakers like Tom Perez, who stated, "If the literal meaning of the word convention has to do with coming together, then what is brought us together this year is not partisanship, it is purpose. That is what has allowed us to bring both diehard progressive's and conservative ex Republicans under the same tent". Other appeals appear to be from speakers, like Kristen Urquiza, trying to convince others of the dangers of re-electing Donald Trump. She explains that it was a combination of COVID-19 and her father's unwavering faith in Donald Trump that led to his passing. Other speakers, like Stacy Abrams and Amanda Litman, assert that voting for Joe Biden is more about getting rid of Donald Trump. Stacy Abrams asserts that this election "isn't just about defeating Donald Trump. We are in this to win for America, so let's get it done". Amanda Litman states that "Our next president needs to be the one helping us heal. That's why I'm glad and excited to vote this fall, not just against Trump, but genuinely for Joe Biden". These messages suggest an appeal to conservative identities by appealing to their humanity over their party affiliation.

Other examples of DNC's appeals to conservative voters include marketing Joe Biden as a reasonably moderate candidate, especially by Republican speakers. In many instances, Joe

Biden is presented as a stand-up guy who wants to see his country prosper. In addition, Biden is referred to as a church-going Catholic, who supports the military, and understands the value of hard work. These ideas could be interpreted as appealing to what PEW (2020) defines as individuals who are more likely to be Republicans.

Differences in RNC and DNC Appeals

There are several differences between the RNC and DNC's styles of appeals. One of the key differences is the way both parties utilize fear. The RNC used fear as a major catalyst for suggesting areas for improvement or areas that needed to remain the same. The RNC use of fear typically revolved around personal safety regarding imminent threats on Americans or an American way of life, which then shifted to calls for order. The DNC used fear as one of many ways to promote change. When fear references occur, it typically revolves around fears for communities and groups. While fear was a significant factor for the RNC, the DNC relied mainly on ideas for hope and change. When conservative identity appeals happened, the RNC relied on using the past as a guide for how life should be, an image that has been very popular with conservatives who adhere to the "Make America Great Again" campaign. When liberal identity appeals happened, the DNC relied on looking at the past as something not to be repeated, an image popular with liberals who believe in systematic oppression. These differences can are most noticeable in the immense differences in the parties' theme usage and speech topics.

The most significant difference in appeal strategies between the two parties is that the RNC viewed voters as vehicles for Donald Trump's re-election, and the DNC viewed voters as agents for change. As stated in the Republican platform and during the RNC, the overall goal was the re-election of Donald Trump. It is important to note that this could be due to the

Republicans' incumbency status. However, this does not change the fact that this was their expressed main goal. The Democrat's primary goal is more challenging to uncover. While their goal was to get Joe Biden elected, this was not their expressed main goal. The Democratic platform states that the focus of the part was on the people in the US. Throughout the DNC, many Democratic speakers spoke about addressing institutionalized and systemic injustices to make change and progress. These expressed goals symbolize the differences between the way the two parties perceive the role of voters.

LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations associated with this analysis. First, this analysis focuses on the 2020 national conventions, meaning that it cannot be generalizable to all previous conventions. Second, this analysis can only speculate the intended representation of the party. There is no way to assess if my findings are precisely how the parties intended to represent themselves; instead, it is speculation as to what could have been the intended representation. Third, the research on political identity shows that the solidification of that identity does not happen with one event. Therefore, there is no way to predict how effective the parties' identity appeals were accurately. Fourth, due to the data I am using, there is no way to tell how viewers interacted with the material presented to them. Social identities are typically researched by assessing how individuals interact with political information. There is no way to tell if the speeches are effective identity appeals due to looking at convention speeches instead of voters. Finally, and most importantly, my findings are not generalizable to other political events. My analysis focuses on conventions; however, my findings cannot explain how other types of events might appeal to identities. My findings suggest how identity appeals happen at national conventions, but they cannot predict how events like rallies, canvassing, phone calls, and other political events make these appeals.

CONCLUSION

Social Identity Theory aims to explain intergroup conflict and how those conflicts become ingrained in an individuals' identity (Islam 2014). Through my analysis, I have demonstrated how the Republican and Democratic Parties use a specific example of a political conflict to engage with the identities of potential voters. By looking at the connection between convention speeches and identities, we can view these events in the proper light. Conventions are more than just speeches on television once every four years; they are events where hand-selected speakers and topics reflect a specific message to potential voters and the rest of the world. By looking at these choices in-depth, we can gain new insight into how the two major parties view voters and what they believe is important to Americans at the moment.

Using qualitative methods, I have found several key findings that I believe achieve this goal. Based on the parties' platforms, it appeared likely that the Republican Party planned on focusing on ideas of strength, tradition, and order; the Democratic Party on ideas of progress, equality, and humanity. I have found support for these claims and have found that all themes appear across both conventions; however, their presentation is vastly different. Both the RNC and DNC appeal to identities through strong emotions. During the RNC, the focus was on ideas of fear and safety, while the DNC focused on ideas of hope and change. The conveying of these emotions happens through stories and interpretations of current and historical events. The most significant finding was the way each party appeared to view voters. The RNC appears to view voters as vehicles for re-election; the DNC appears to view voters as agents for change.

This analysis can hopefully prove to be beneficial to one day help inform campaign managers and political event coordinators about what was happening during one of the most decisive elections in American history. As research shows, polarization has been rising in the US

for many years. By understanding how the parties themselves spread these messages, we can hopefully one day de-escalate the many widespread negative consequences polarization has on individuals and communities. While choosing who runs our country is extremely important, it should not need to be decided based on political affiliation alone. As we saw from 2016 and on, aligning one's social identity closely to political affiliation can cause problems between individuals and their children, parents, friends, romantic partners, jobs, and more. It is my personal goal that through this project, individuals can see outside red and blue and start to make decisions that align with what is personally deemed essential to their identity.

Future studies on the 2020 national conventions could take this analysis and move in many different directions. One idea would be to replicate the present study and assess how many times specific themes occur in a given speech. A second possibility would be to replicate the study and include 100% of the speeches. A third possibility would be analyzing the same percentage of speeches and include speeches from Donald Trump and Joe Biden. Another idea would be to analyze all other types of materials present at the conventions, including videos and conversations, to see if those types of convention materials share similar themes and theme use as the speeches. A final direction that could be taken would be to analyze speech topics to understand what specific types of issues were being discussed at length and determine how important those ideas are to the party as a whole.

More broadly, this analysis can benefit social science research in sociology, political science, and communications. For example, researchers may find this analysis beneficial when trying to connect more dots to Social Identity Theory to both conservative and liberal identities and other types of political identities. Researchers might also find use in this analysis when studying American life and politics during the COVID-19 epidemic. Other potential applications

for this analysis could be studying the difference between past and future conventions or gaining new insight into different aspects of political theatre. A final avenue that future researchers might consider would be to consider this analysis during research on how political events affect voting behaviors and campaign strategies.

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Appendix A **Code Book**

Main Themes

Strength

Coding for strength includes direct and indirect displays of strength. Strength can appear as using the word strong in relation to a characteristic about the nation, a politician, or political party. This theme can also be demonstrated through strong references to patriotism. Strength can be conveyed through messages like "building a stronger America" or "America is the strongest nation in the world". It can be seen in ideas like maintaining a strong military, building a stronger economy, and creating strong borders. Strength does not have to be directly referenced to; it can also be seen when weakness is mocked or holding the idea of being feared. Strength can also be expressed through comments about maintaining or obtaining power. Strength can be referred to through claims of fighting for Americans or an American way of life.

Tradition

Coding for traditions relates to ideas of the past. Tradition can be seen through the phrase of "traditional family values". Traditional family values can include Christian beliefs and heterosexual marriages. Tradition can also be referenced in relation to an inflexible interpretation of the constitution or traditional views of government positions. This idea can also be present in saying such as, "Make America Great Again" or "Getting back to a simpler time". Tradition can also be expressed by a need to maintain or continue on the political path at the time of convention. Coding for tradition can also include instances of denying progress for the sake of the founding fathers or safety. This can pertain to immigration reform, drug laws or punishments,

LGBTQ+ rights, or addressing racial inequalities. Tradition can also look like quotes from past influential people that are used to signal a current or past direction we either need to take, or should be taking. Tradition does not have to be positives about the past, it can be in referenced to through critical remarks about the past as it pertains to our current path. It can be seen through statements like "For generations now…" and "We continue on the path of the people before us".

Order

The idea of order is related to law and policies. Order can be seen by expressing a need for order in social structures, such as education, criminal justice system, the border, and the military. Ideas of being pro- law enforcement/ military personnel, anti- defunding the police (police reform), keeping America safe, and taking proactive approaches towards protests and riots. This idea can be expressed through ideas of being tough on crime and keeping the peace. Order can be seen through standardization efforts in education, immigration, criminal punishments, and more. Policies that pertain to order include educational freedom to choose, pro-life policies, exiting NATO, leaving trade deals with China and other former American allies, policies that promote freedom (that are not pro-choice or policies that address climate change), and an "American First" approach to foreign policy. Policies that relate to order are not necessarily about correcting governmental oversights or wrong doings, they are policies designed to help people help themselves, encourage the idea of working your way out of poverty, or learning how to do things for yourself. Policies that relate to order might use historical injustices as the backdrop, but they do not address the root of the issue.

Progress

Progress can be seen through progressive policies such as universal healthcare, climate control (Paris agreement), defunding the police, education for all, women's right to choose, and immigration reform. Progress can be expressed though the need to move forward, looking towards the future, or correcting the past. Progress can be seen when speakers express the need for new policies and policy reform. It can be related through ideas of hope and change. Progressive policies address historical injustices, acknowledge the roots of major social/ political issues, and aim for bettering the country through governmental support. Progressive policies do not discourage fixing problems for yourself, but acknowledge that without a proper foundation, issues cannot be fixed (no matter how much work you do) do to systemic injustices.

Equality

Equality refers to the idea of addressing inequality. Equality can be conveyed by attempting to find justice for victims of police brutality and being for the Black Lives Matter movement. It can be addressed through policies that try to combat inequalities and create equal opportunities. Equality can be seen through the word "equality" or "equal" and refers to ideas of creating a fair America.

Humanity

The idea of humanity refers to helping people in America and across the globe. It can be conveyed through sympathetic messages about people affected by COVID, victims of police brutality, and victims of political and social injustices. Humanity ideas can be seen through ideas of empathy, healing wounds, and providing care and support. Humanity refers directly to

acknowledging the oppression of marginalized people. Instances of humanity can also be present in mentioning of people coming together as people, for humanity.

Specific Codes

Party Specific

Party Specific codes refer to direct mentions of either the Republican or Democratic parties or their representatives. These references can either be positive or negative and should be coded as: anti- Democrat, pro- Democrat, anti- Republican, pro- Republican. Party specific references can include praises, disappointments, approval, and disapproval of party efforts. Party specific codes also refers to speakers who use the VOTE 30330 (Democrat) or 88022 (Republican) in their speeches to generate party support among voters.

Speech Topic

Speech topic refers to an identification of what each speech is centered on. A topic is identified by subtle references made by the speaker throughout the duration of the speech.

Purpose

Each speech has been designed with a specific purpose in mind. In this analysis, coding for purpose includes speeches that endorse, defend, or attack. An endorsement speech is any speech who focuses on endorsing their candidate or party. These speeches are highly positive and refer mainly to the reasons why an individual should vote for they endorse. A defensive speech is one that focuses on defending their party or candidate from attacks made by another person, party, group, or organization. An attacking speech is highly negative and focuses on

attacking another person or party that is not their own. These speeches are primarily focuses on another candidate or party, rather than building up their own. To code these speeches, the file name will be coded with the corresponding purpose code.