

The Party in Disservice:  
An Ethnographic Look at the Walter Dalton for North Carolina Governor  
Campaign's Relationship with the Democratic Party

Leticia Nigro Mazon

A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication.

Chapel Hill  
2013

Approved by:

Daniel Kreiss

Ferrel Guillory

Monica Rector

## **Abstract**

LETICIA NIGRO MAZON: The Party in Disservice:  
An Ethnographic Look at the Walter Dalton for North Carolina Governor Campaign's  
Relationship with the Democratic Party  
(Under the direction of Daniel Kreiss)

This study investigates the ways in which the Walter Dalton campaign interacted with the Democratic Party during the 2012 North Carolina gubernatorial election. The evidence gathered through field observations, limited participant-observation, and open-ended interviews reveals the candidate-party relationship to be quite complex. I provide an analysis of the relations between the Dalton campaign and the various actors within the Democratic Party, and the effects of these interactions on diverse areas of campaign communication. I contend that the contemporary party-candidate relationship is more nuanced than Aldrich (1995) suggests in his approach to the study of parties in American politics, specifically his notion of the role of parties as being “in service” to candidates.

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
North Carolina Politics and the Dalton Campaign for Governor.....	4
Literature Review and Research Questions.....	9
Methods.....	13
Findings.....	15
Bev Perdue, a short primary and the need to represent change.....	17
The Obama campaign, support on the ground and a drag on the ticket.....	20
The NCDP, the importance of the party structure, and the difficulty of identity crafting.....	25
Democratic consultants and the prioritization of candidates.....	30
The DGA and the effects of fundraising and polls on paid and earned media.....	32
The national Democratic Party and a convention in North Carolina.....	36
Discussion.....	38
Conclusion and Limitations.....	40
References.....	44

## List of Figures

### Figure

1. RGA attack ad, September 18, 2012.....	20
2. NCGOP Web Video, September 20, 2012.....	20
3. Walter Dalton Web Logo.....	22

## **Introduction**

One of the most well-received authors on the study of political parties in America, John Aldrich (1995), argues that the main role of political parties is not only to structure elections by providing informational cues to voters, but also to be valuable to their candidates. Aldrich divides the party conceptually into the ‘party-in-elections,’ ‘the party-in-government,’ and the ‘party-as-organization,’ which are mutually reinforcing in support of the common interests of politicians. Aldrich argues that contemporary parties are “in service” to candidates playing, among other functions, the role of mobilizing both the electorate and resources to enable its affiliated candidates to capture office.

Although very influential, Aldrich’s (1995) theory provides little empirical data about the relationship between candidates and parties. Through an ethnographic study, I present the case of the Walter Dalton campaign for governor of North Carolina and its relationship with the Democratic Party. As I show, the idea of “the party in service” does not always hold up in practice.

The Dalton campaign started the 2012 general election with very few resources after organizing a last-minute primary campaign when incumbent governor Bev Perdue opted not to run for re-election. Dalton, the lieutenant governor, decided to run despite having less time to organize and fundraise for the upcoming election than his Republican counterpart, former Charlotte mayor Pat McCrory. Therefore, the Dalton campaign had a number of challenges to tackle, among them the lack of resources throughout the race and the disarray of the North Carolina Democratic Party, which was in shambles after an internal accusation of sexual

harassment shook its structure in the beginning of 2012. This, in addition to the unpopularity of the incumbent governor and scandals involving fellow Democrats, set the stage in a way that was highly unfavorable for Dalton. He eventually won the primary race, but ran in the general election against McCrory, and ultimately lost to his Republican opponent.

The data and analysis presented throughout this study will show that, while the Democratic Party did provide both infrastructural and financial resources to the Dalton campaign, the scandals inside the Party were harmful to the campaign's communications efforts. Dalton tried to distance himself from both the North Carolina Democratic Party (NCDP) and Perdue, though very tactfully and without portraying the latter as a faulty governor. On the other hand, the campaign endeavored to systematically link Dalton to President Obama, whose re-election campaign mounted an extensive effort in North Carolina. Furthermore, the study shows how the party, its affiliated organizations such as the Democratic Governors Association (DGA), and fellow Democratic candidates' campaigns, such as Obama for America (OFA), were not always willing to support the Dalton campaign. Their assistance was highly dependent on their own interests, which suggests that while candidates have become more autonomous (Nielsen, 2012), the party may be more in-service to some candidates than others. Certain politicians, such as presidential candidates, hold a great deal of power within the party while others occupy secondary positions. The "service" the party provides to each candidate is dependent on the place each of them occupies inside this hierarchy.

As I argue, in the case of the Dalton campaign the candidate's party presented itself both as a liability and an asset. This observation leads to me to contend that the contemporary

role of American political parties as they relate to individual candidate campaigns is more complex and nuanced than Aldrich (1995) acknowledged.

The relationship between candidates and parties has important implications for political communication. Political communication scholars typically discuss how campaigns approach things like earned media (news coverage), advertising, new media, and field campaigns. However, they have frequently overlooked in what ways a campaign's relationship with the party influences these communication efforts. I show that the relationship between Dalton and the party, and the roles the party played in this election, as well as those it did not, had a profound impact on how the campaign's communications as a whole were shaped. Messaging, new media, and field strategies were often developed either with limited assistance from the party or by trying to distance Dalton from the reputation problems of the state party and former governor Perdue. The Dalton campaign's lack of financial and human resources, for instance, led it to depend heavily on the Obama campaign to contact voters directly. On the other hand, not wanting to use the help of the North Carolina Democratic Party (NCDP) to attack McCrory, the Dalton campaign had to communicate critical messages to the press directly and faced accusations of running an overly negative campaign. Finally, the campaign's desire to separate itself publicly from the NCDP led to the staffers not being able to enter the party's payroll after the primary election, as traditionally had been the case during gubernatorial campaigns in the state. Having to support these salaries put another financial burden on the campaign, which needed to keep the staff to a minimum and did not have funds to hire a new media team, for instance.

I draw these conclusions from an ethnographic analysis of the Dalton campaign for Governor of North Carolina from August 2012 through election day on November 6th. I

collected the data for this study through field observations, limited participant-observation, and open-ended interviews with key staffers. This amounted to more than 100 hours of field observation recording the daily developments and internal strategizing of the Dalton campaign. The interviews, conducted after the election, provided insight into how staffers thought about the strategies they forged and how they understood the race. This study joins a recent body of literature that uses ethnography and other qualitative methods to study democratic processes (Nielsen, 2012; Kreiss, 2009, 2012).

This study will begin by providing background information on North Carolina politics more broadly and the 2012 gubernatorial race specifically. A review of the literature on parties and political communication follows to provide the theoretical framework on which this study is founded and to which it will contribute. It provides a summary of major theories on the role of parties in American politics, focusing in particular on Aldrich's (1995) notion of the "party in service" to candidates as well as contemporary criticism of it. A section on methods will then detail recent ethnographic studies of political communication and detail how I conducted this investigation of the Dalton campaign. Finally, I will present the evidence and formulate an analysis of the case in light of the literature.

### **North Carolina Politics and the Dalton Campaign for Governor**

North Carolina is as a political paradox. It is a state shaped by both fundamentalist churches and great universities. As a result, though conservatism and even old attitudes toward race still reverberate in the state, a progressive streak sets it apart from the rest of the south. According to Christensen (2010), the state's voters are willing to elect liberals who they think will look after the average man. Strains of business progressivism, conservatism,



and populism have often coexisted in the state, so that thousands of people elected both a conservative, such as Senator Jesse Helms to five terms, and a business progressive, such as Governor Jim Hunt to four terms. Some scholars, such as Paul Luebke (1998), divide the state into traditionalists and modernists. The former includes those such as Helms, tied to conservative churches, the tobacco industry, and conservative values. Hunt, who was connected with big industry and wanted an active government to nurture economic growth, is an example of the latter. The truth is that many North Carolinians' politics do not fit into exact niches and throughout its history North Carolina has oscillated between its progressive impulses and its broad conservative vein.

As to how this all has manifested in contemporary elections, Christensen (2010) argues that the state's Republican leanings are most evident in federal races. In presidential and U.S. Senate races, North Carolina's conservative side (its individualism, respect for the military, and religious social views) becomes evident. Some recent exceptions, however, include Obama's 2008 win in the state and Democratic Senator Kay Hagan's election in the same year. Meanwhile, until the 2010 elections North Carolina remained a Democratic state when it came to Raleigh politics. In Christensen's (2010, p. 317) words, "No state in the country was as politically competitive as North Carolina in the 1990s. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the state's average margin of victory was 7.2 percent, fourth in the country." North Carolina is today a closely divided state, where landslide victories aren't expected by either party.

In the 2012 election North Carolina once again showed its conservative leaning in the presidential election, going for the Republican candidate Mitt Romney. On the state level, after 20 years of Democratic governors, the state elected McCrory to the seat. McCrory had

been mayor of Charlotte, the state's largest city, for seven consecutive terms from 1995 to 2009. Before becoming mayor, McCrory had been elected three times as Charlotte city councilman, and in 2003 was appointed by then President George W. Bush to the U.S. Homeland Security Advisory Council. In 2008 he ran for the Governor's seat and lost to Democrat Bev Perdue by 50.27 percent to 46.8 percent in what turned out to be the closest gubernatorial election in the United States that year (North Carolina State Board of Elections [NCSBE], 2010). The Dalton campaign's staffers often mentioned they believed that, coming into the 2012 election, McCrory had spent the past four years campaigning. In fact, in the period between 2009 and 2012, McCrory remained active in the state party, participating in events, conventions, as well as organizing bus tours and rallies to further conservative causes or oppose Democratic policies.

While the Republican Party was largely unified behind its candidate, at the beginning of the 2012 election season, the North Carolina Democratic Party was trying to put itself back together after a series of incidents that damaged its public image. In early 2012, allegations of sexual harassment led the NCDP's chairman, David Parker, to resign. In mid-May of the same year, however, the party's executive committee held a vote in which it rejected Parker's resignation. This meant Parker remained chair of the party in the state. According to Dalton's staffers, this incident caused hesitation amongst donors, who were distrustful of the NCDP's managerial capacities. Even entities linked to the national Democratic Party, such as the DGA, chose to finance races in the state directly through super PACs, like N.C. Citizens for Progress, and skipped over the NCDP. Besides this, other scandals involving party members in the state, like the indictment of well-known former

Democratic Senator John Edwards for alleged violations of campaign finance laws, were also perceived by Dalton's staff to have polluted the party's image among voters.

Additionally, incumbent governor Bev Perdue decided not to run for reelection due to very low approval ratings (Public Policy Polling [PPP], 2012a). During her term as governor, Perdue had a series of difficulties dealing with North Carolina's legislature, which was controlled by a Republican majority during her last year in office. The legislature blocked many of her proposals, and even passed its own budget over Perdue's objections (Bonner, 2012). Furthermore, Perdue had to cope with a decline in the economy and with staff members facing accusations of ethical violations. The combination of these factors led her to not seek reelection (Severson, 2012).

These political complications were combined with a problematic economic scenario in the state. In June of 2012, a study entitled "Economic Insecurity Across the American States" revealed that North Carolina experienced even higher levels of insecurity than the rest of the country (Hacker, Huber, Nichols, Rehm & Craig, 2012). The economic security index, which tracks changes in consumers' household income, put NC in 12<sup>th</sup> place in the U.S. based on its average level of economic insecurity from 2008 to 2010. The index measured the proportion of people who lost at least 25 percent of their household income from one year to the next due to changes in income or changes in out-of-pocket medical spending. Additionally, North Carolina's unemployment rate was 9.7 percent in August of 2012, according to the state Division of Employment Security, the fifth highest in the country (Ranii , 2012).

Despite the unfavorable environment for Democratic candidates at the beginning of the primaries, Walter Dalton decided to run in Perdue's place. Dalton had been Senator in the

North Carolina General Assembly from 1997 to 2009 and in 2008 was elected Lieutenant Governor. Being the second highest ranking official in the state government, when Perdue decided not to run for reelection Dalton was the obvious candidate. Seeing the chance of winning the Democratic nomination for governor, however small, Dalton organized a last-minute campaign and entered the race.

In the end, Dalton was severely outspent and ultimately lost to McCrory by a 55%–45% margin (NCSBE, 2013). The electoral prospects of the two parties and candidates were reflected in spending on the race. North Carolina’s 2012 gubernatorial race attracted more than \$8.1 million in outside spending, though McCrory received much of these funds. The biggest outside spender was the Republican Governors Association, based in Washington, D.C., which spent more than \$4.9 million to elect McCrory. N.C. Citizens for Progress, a political action committee funded by the DGA, was the dominant group supporting Dalton, spending \$2.6 million largely on television advertising to benefit his campaign (The Institute for Southern Studies, 2013). These ads, however, and the strategies behind them could not legally be coordinated with the Dalton campaign, which I discuss the implications of below. Excluding outside spending, the Dalton campaign raised \$4.28 million according to campaign finance reports, and the McCrory campaign reported raising a total of \$12.3 million for the entire election, nearly three times as much as his Democratic opponent (Frank, 2013).

Exit polling from the 2012 race also shows just how inhospitable the economic and political environment was for Democratic candidates in North Carolina during the 2012 cycle (North Carolina Datanet, 2013). According to the poll, the 2012 election in North Carolina revolved around a debate over the scope and role of government. Asked about their general

view of government, North Carolinian voters showed a strong preference for limited government, 53 percent saying they thought government does too many things that should be left to businesses and individuals, and 41 percent saying government should do more. Republican candidates, Romney and McCrory, got 8 out of 10 of the votes of those who thought the government was doing too much. Furthermore, over one-third of voters said someone in their household had lost a job in the past four years, another one of the lasting effects of the economic crisis in North Carolina.

All of these issues created an environment that was not favorable for Lt. Governor Dalton, since the “status-quo” was not what voters were looking for. Thus, while the roles and conditions of the Democratic Party contributed to Dalton’s defeat, the overall scenario of North Carolina in 2012 reveals that even a well funded and competently run campaign might not have been enough for Dalton to win the gubernatorial race.

### **Literature Review and Research Questions**

Observing the complexity of the Dalton campaign’s relationship with the Democratic Party reveals some limitations in existing literature about the roles of parties in American electoral processes. I will review Aldrich’s (1995) notion of the “party in service,” as well as recent reworkings of his theory to analyze Dalton’s case.

Aldrich (1995), studying American political parties, argues that they are formed and maintained to provide “service” to politicians. Politicians need parties due to their institutionalized solutions and need to orchestrate large groups of people to form winning majorities. Aldrich contends that politicians face three major problems, and parties are meant to address these concerns. The first problem is organizing their competing ambitions. This

occurs through party recruitment, a nomination process, and the two-party system of access to office. The second issue is mobilizing both the electorate and the resources needed to enable candidates to capture office. In this context, one of the ways parties provide service to candidates is through the informational cues party affiliation generates. Competition makes partisan brands valuable to candidates given the party name often has meaning and value to voters. Parties also aggregate professionals on a national level, who provide campaigns with the financial and intellectual capacity to mobilize voters. The third issue is forging durable majorities to use that control of office to achieve collective goals. Each of these problems produce incentives for politicians to create and use political parties.

Aldrich (1995), building on Anthony Downs' (1957) and Joseph A. Schlesinger's (1991) work, sees competition for office as the particular defining characteristic of the major American political party. He argues that the modern party differs from Van Buren's earlier "mass party" by no longer resting on the "party principle" that the party is more important than the men and women in it. Rather, today's party *is* the men and women in it.

Since Aldrich's (1995) influential work, a number of scholars have reworked theories of political parties. The idea of 'political party' I use here is informed by recent work that casts "parties as networks" (Cohen, Karol, Noel and Zaller, 2008). This notion differs from Aldrich's theory by no longer being a "politician-centered" model, but a "group-centered," model of parties. Rather than focusing on formal party organization or membership of politicians and officeholders, Cohen, Karol, Noel, and Zaller (2008) see parties as networks that include not only top leaders, but also activists, fund-raisers, interest groups, campaign technicians, and candidate campaigns. The party is a working coalition of a large set of actors. Thus, groups such as the DGA, fellow Democratic candidate campaigns such as OFA,

and the more traditional state branch of the party (the NCDP) all fall under the rubric of the Democratic Party network.

At the same time, recent empirical work has undermined aspects of Aldrich's (1995) theory. Rasmus Nielsen (2012) has argued that the time when a strong party organization was considered an essential asset by political candidates, as Aldrich postulated, has passed. In his study of "ground war" campaigns (such as canvassing and phone banking), Nielsen contends that increasingly candidates are forming their own campaign assemblages and infrastructure and relying less on the party organization to mobilize voters and resources. These larger assemblages incorporate resources outside of the party, like unions or non-profit organizations. Although he does not draw on the parties as networks literature, this finding is consistent with the work of Cohen, Karol, Noel, and Zaller (2008). Nielsen argues that in place of the politics of parties, the late twentieth century saw an increasingly candidate-centered form of politics.

Aldrich's (1995) work is theoretical, and provides little empirical data or case studies to support each claim. Drawing on empirical studies like Cohen, Karol, Noel, and Zaller (2008) and Nielsen (2012), and using empirical data on the Dalton campaign, I evaluate Aldrich's notion and find that it fails to account for the complexity of candidate-party relationships. I will analyze whether a contemporary political party did, in fact, provide the support postulated by Aldrich to an individual office-seeker, in this case Walter Dalton. Focusing explicitly on how the relationship between the Democratic Party network and the Dalton campaign affected different areas of communication, I show what services the party provided and what services the party could not or was not willing to provide.

In doing so, I bring the literature on parties to bear on scholarship of political communication, which generally mentions the impact of parties only tangentially. Besides Nielsen's (2012) study of field campaigning, few scholars have discussed how the relationship between parties and candidates affects the diverse areas of political communication. Daniel Kreiss's (2009, 2012) work, in which he discusses the use of media and information technologies in political contests, is an exception. Kreiss shows how the Democratic Party had a big role in rebuilding the technological infrastructure necessary to mobilize supporters by implementing an online platform and leading the effort to create a national voter database system. The Obama campaign in 2008 took advantage of these tools and knowledge to harness mobilization around his candidacy. The Party also made these infrastructural resources available to other candidates. As I show below, the Dalton campaign, for instance, used the Party-provided voter database to target voters.

Another point of interest when analyzing the interaction between the Dalton campaign and the Democratic Party is how it affected the campaign's capacity to gain earned media and the messages it put forth. Shanto Iyengar (2011) contends that there has been a fundamental change in the themes in news coverage of campaigns. The press's focus has shifted from issue-based coverage to stories that emphasize the horse race, advertising, strategy, and scandal. As I show below, the campaign's press strategy was adversely affected by its relationship with the party. The Dalton campaign's staffers perceived this rise of interpretive journalism to have been unfavorable to Dalton, given that the press tended to link him to the ethical problems of the NCDP. Furthermore, realizing that polls shape the media narrative around the election, Dalton struggled with his continuous position as the trailing candidate.



The candidate-party relationship also affected the campaign's ability to portray the symbolic qualities of the candidate. Regarding this issue of forging a candidate's image, Jeffrey Alexander (2010) argues that to be elected in a democratic society a candidate must become a collective representation, a symbolic vessel filled with what citizens hold most dear. Candidates must convince audiences that they possess capacities of a purely civil kind, and can also create meaning by creating difference, making a candidate pure while polluting an opponent. However, neither Iyengar (2011) nor Alexander (2010) mentions how or even whether candidates' relationships with their party influences their efforts in these areas.

I will build on Iyengar's view of the relationship between media and campaigns, as well as Alexander's work on the importance of identity building, to analyze the ways the Dalton campaign coordinated efforts in these areas with the Democratic Party. I look at how staffers perceived this interaction with the party to have helped or hindered these efforts of communicating with the media and building Dalton's identity. For example, I show how Dalton grappled with his inevitable association with the ethical misconduct of the NCDP and the unpopularity of his predecessor, which made it very difficult for him to define himself as a candidate with purely civic qualities.

Bringing empirical data based on field observations and interviews to this study of parties and political communication, I hope to further the discussion on the role of parties in the American political process. Broadly, then, I ask in what ways the Dalton campaign's traditional communications, field operations, and new media communications strategies took shape through interaction with elements of the Democratic Party, and how this process took shape?

## **Methods**

I conducted an ethnographic study of the Walter Dalton campaign in the North Carolina gubernatorial election of 2012. Through observation and interviews I aimed at getting participant-observer insight into how the campaign functioned, as well as its interactions with the North Carolina Democratic Party.

The Walter Dalton campaign was chosen as the site for my research due to two main reasons. First, and most significantly, due to its size and relevance. The campaign that I studied had to be of enough complexity to warrant research on many facets of communication strategy and important enough to have significant party involvement. The Dalton campaign fit these criteria perfectly. It was a gubernatorial campaign in a swing state, in which the Democratic Party had been campaigning heavily since Obama took the state in 2008. The Democratic National Convention of 2012 reveals North Carolina's importance to the party, since it decided to house its convention in the state. The gubernatorial election in North Carolina was also relevant nationally, being one of the six races in the country in which the DGA (Democratic Governors Association) invested its resources in 2012. The second reason I chose the Dalton campaign as my research site was that it provided me with extensive access. Many of the campaigns in the region that I contacted simply did not feel comfortable letting me have daily access to their headquarters. The often sensitive and secretive nature of political campaigning makes gaining access for a project like mine especially challenging (for a discussion of these issues see Nielsen, 2012).

I conducted the observation from August to Election Day. During these months I visited the campaign from one to three days a week, 25 times total. These 25 days of ethnographic observations account for well over 100 hours of field observations. In addition,

I attended two press conferences, two campaign events, and countless staff meetings. Furthermore, I monitored social network and professional news media coverage of the gubernatorial race daily beginning in August, including the three debates and Dalton's participation in the Democratic National Convention.

Furthermore, I conducted interviews with key members of the campaign's communications team to gain more depth in specific issues that were not necessarily evident during the observation, and to bring to light the attitudes and mindsets of central actors on the campaign. I conducted three interviews approximately a month after the election that together lasted around 5 hours. The first was with Hafford Porter, Press Secretary, which lasted about 45 minutes. The second and longest interview, over two hours, was with Schorr Johnson, Communications Director. The third, nearly two hours as well, was with Daniel Gilligan, Research Director. Recording devices were used during the interviews, and with the express consent of the interviewees, so as to preserve the accuracy of their responses.

I chose the timeframe of this study based on the months the organization of the campaign was structured enough to allow analysis of a general election campaign. Also, the research began when the planning and strategizing were taking place, and as the race progressed I also had the opportunity to watch as these plans were implemented.

## **Findings**

The data collected during the observation of the Dalton campaign and of the ways in which it interacted with the Democratic Party during the 2012 election cycle reveal the contemporary forms of the candidate-party relationship to be quite complex. To reduce this multifaceted association into simply 'beneficial or harmful' to the campaign would be an

oversimplification of the subject. In other words, these findings reveal that the party-candidate interaction is more nuanced than Aldrich (1995) suggests in his approach to the study of parties in American politics.

Seeing the party as a network of a large set of actors, I first address the campaign's connections with relevant members of the Democratic Party coalition. These actors include the national party organization, the local branch of the party (the NCDP), the Democratic Governor's Association and liberal group NC Citizens for Progress, and Democratic consultants, as well as other Democratic campaigns and politicians, such as the Obama campaign and former governor Bev Perdue. I will address the Dalton campaign's interaction with each of these actors, detail how they were supportive or damaging (or both) to Dalton, and discuss more specifically how these relations impacted areas of campaigning such as field operations, media relations, new media strategies, and candidate image-building.

The analysis will begin with the nomination process and relationship between former governor Bev Perdue and the Dalton campaign. I then analyze the Dalton campaign's relationship with presidential candidate Barack Obama and his campaign. Having addressed the interrelation between Dalton and other Democratic politicians, this study will examine the intricate relationship between the campaign and the NCDP. I will then analyze the interaction of the Dalton campaign with Democratic consultants, which are a combination of local and national party actors, since there were both in-state and national firms involved. Finally, the examination will proceed to the national level of the party organization, addressing the relationship between the Democratic Governor's Association and the Dalton campaign, as well as the effects of the party's national convention, which was held in North Carolina in 2012.

*Bev Perdue, a short primary and the need to represent change*

“Dalton lost because of many things, starting by the short calendar we were given.” Ford Porter interview.

Aldrich (1995) points to the nomination process as one of the ways political elites organize their ambition, and one of their reasons for joining parties. Therefore, it is important to understand how the nomination process affected Dalton’s campaign in 2012. North Carolina’s incumbent governor, Bev Perdue, announced only in late January that she would not be running for re-election. This gave Democratic candidates seeking the office less time than usual to organize and fundraise for their campaigns. Even so, former U.S. Rep. Bob Etheridge, state Rep. Bill Faison and then Lt. Governor Walter Dalton faced off in the Democratic primaries in the state. This late start in fundraising, along with a somewhat competitive primary race, led Dalton to reach the general election with little funds left in his campaign coffers. Schorr Johnson synthesized this issue stating that:

“The two main factors why Dalton lost were Perdue and money. The main factor being Perdue, because of her late decision not to run and her unpopularity. The fact that she waited until so late means he didn’t have time to raise the money necessary to put the organization in place. He raised a lot of money quickly, but then had to spend it all in the primary, so he didn’t have a good chance to define himself. By the time the primary was over, the Republicans were on TV defining him with Perdue, and there was really no turning back. Perdue kept all the money she had raised, which was nearly 5 million dollars. She gave only 200,000.00 to us. So why he lost, really was Perdue and money, in that order.” Schorr Johnson interview.

Additionally, according to Dalton's staffers, despite believing that the association with Perdue would likely be damaging to Dalton, there were a series of challenges that the campaign would face by choosing to clearly detach the two. The extent of this distancing needed to be carefully negotiated. Some staffers made it clear after the election that, looking back, they would have distanced Dalton more markedly from Perdue:

“The one thing I would have done differently would be separating Dalton publicly from Perdue, and speaking out against her. Those who were against this separation thought we would lose more than we would gain from going after her. There was really a false hope that she would give us the money she had raised, and she did it on purpose. She thought she could ‘keep Dalton good’ by holding the money over his head, and after all that she just gave him \$200,000.00. She knew exactly what she was doing, which was holding that money hostage. Also, because she was vice chair of the DGA, she could have stopped the DGA money too.” Schorr Johnson interview.

Party members' individual records and public reputations form an important part of the informational cues that determine how the electorate perceives a political party. In June of 2012 a Public Policy Polling (PPP) Poll showed that Perdue had a disapproval rating of 59%, with only 30% approving of the job she had been doing (Public Policy Polling [PPP], 2012a). Those numbers made her the most unpopular sitting governor in the country out of more than 40 that PPP had polled. The unpopularity of the Democratic governor, and the economic difficulties faced by the state led staffers at the Dalton campaign to believe that the candidate needed to avoid being defined as a continuation of Perdue's government. This was a difficult, given he was not only a member of the same party as her, but also the Lt. Governor at the time, and the informational cues that the association between him and the party brought were not necessarily positive for his campaign, as Johnson explained:

“This was an election in North Carolina that ‘status quo’ was not something you wanted to be, especially with the economy not being great, and coming after Bev Perdue. He (Dalton) needed to be something different, he needed to be a change from Perdue. Our consultants were telling us he needed to be something different.” Schorr Johnson interview.

The observation of the Dalton campaign led me to conclude that, throughout the election, the campaign’s strategy was to try and define Dalton as a change from Perdue, but tactfully and without directly framing Perdue as a faulty governor. This discreet and, in reality, only partial distancing of Dalton from Perdue was the main regret that staffers pointed to after the election had been lost. They lamented not having more directly shown the ways in which Dalton was a change from Perdue, and pointed out that the main reason for the diplomatic approach the campaign had taken during the election was the fact that they expected her to transfer the money she had raised to Dalton. Attacking Perdue would have not only shut out the possibilities of ever receiving the money she had fundraised, but might also influence negatively the DGA’s funding of the race, given she was also vice-chair of the Association. This strategy, however, caused certain discord inside the campaign:

“Even though we realized that this (the association to Perdue) was a problem, there wasn’t a willingness to disassociate Dalton from Perdue or other party folks, though I myself certainly advised that we should draw a contrast with the Governor. Looking back on it, I would have in much more substantive ways contrasted how Dalton was different from Perdue, even in policy issues.” Daniel Gilligan interview.

The McCrory campaign and the GOP, in turn, were very aggressive in linking Dalton to Perdue. From the beginning of the general election, the McCrory campaign portrayed the previous government as the “Perdue-Dalton administration.” This depiction was present in

many of McCrory's ads, press releases, debate discourses, statements and social media messages:

Today, the RGA released an attack ad on TV. The ad is an attack on Dalton due to his association with Governor Bev Perdue and his vote to raise taxes as a legislator. Field notes, September 18, 2012.



NCGOP Web Video. Field notes, September 20, 2012.



Today, the McCrory campaign released a statement in which it once again used the term 'Dalton-Perdue': "(...) This is just another desperate attack from the Perdue-Dalton smear machine." Field notes, September 25, 2012.

*The Obama campaign, support on the ground and a drag on the ticket*

“Something that is interesting in this election, given North Carolina's history, is that it's the first time where the Democratic candidate for governor very openly and continuously



tried to associate himself with the Democratic candidate for president. I don't think that has happened in the last 50 years in the state. This was usually seen as a weakness, because North Carolina Democrats tend to be more conservative than national Democrats. A Democratic president was very far left of where a North Carolina Democrat needed to be.” Daniel Gilligan interview.

While the Dalton campaign struggled to discretely distance itself from Perdue, its strategy regarding Obama was the opposite. The Dalton campaign tried to coordinate efforts with the Obama campaign throughout the election. A close analysis of this relationship between Democratic candidate campaigns reveals that it was intricate and evolving, in the sense that its nature changed during the race. It is important to point out, as mentioned by Gilligan in the excerpt above, that this was a new relationship between a Democratic gubernatorial candidate and a Democratic presidential candidate in a North Carolina election. In general, North Carolina Democrats tend to be more conservative than national Democrats, and the gubernatorial candidates therefore try to keep a distance from the presidential candidate. In this election, however, the Dalton campaign tried continuously to link its candidate to Obama, assuming the President would have a strong presence in the state, as he did in 2008. Before Obama, the last Democratic presidential candidate to win North Carolina was Jimmy Carter, 32 years earlier.

These efforts to connect Dalton to Obama came across in many of the Dalton campaign's communication materials and interactions with the press. In a series of Dalton's statements, for instance, it is possible to see that his campaign borrowed some of the key themes from the Obama campaign. A clear indication of this is that the Dalton campaign began using the “forward” slogan, which was also Obama's, in most of its communications:



First gubernatorial debate, Dalton’s opening statement: “We are at crossroads. I want to move state of NC forward. I will protect middle class, the working class, and senior citizens. My father taught me that the right policies can lift lives. I will work with you to lead us to a better day. I look forward to sharing my vision with you today.” Field notes, October 3, 2012.

Furthermore, Dalton attacked McCrory using some of the same issues that Obama was using to criticize Romney, such as alleging that his policy plans had “no details” at the same time as the Obama camp attacked Romney’s tax plan for having “no details.”. This synchronicity in attacks also happened when McCrory refused to release his tax returns, similarly to Romney. Although there wasn’t evidence of any direct coordination with the Obama campaign in these attacks, Dalton’s staffers welcomed this synchronicity of themes. In this sense, it was a deliberate strategy deployed by the Dalton campaign, as seen in this instance:

Today the campaign will attack McCrory on the issue of his personal tax returns, which they link to the fact that he is said to have been a lobbyist for the past few years. Staffers mention how this is good because it is in sync with Obama’s attacks on Romney. Field notes, September 13, 2012.

Aside from the messaging, the actual relationship between the two campaigns began well. In the first days of October, the Obama campaign assisted Dalton by distributing 650,000 flyers that encouraged voting for both Obama and Dalton. The flyers were paid for by the NCDP, and distributed on the ground by Obama’s volunteers using his campaign’s

infrastructural resources. The ground assistance came at a time when Dalton had placed 10 points behind his adversary in polls, and staffers were hopeful that it would be influential in reducing this difference:

Yesterday's PPP poll, which put Dalton at 37, or 10 points behind McCrory, was extremely frustrating to the staff. Campaign Manager Caroline Valand says she really doesn't think the race is so far apart, and that the DNC has just printed 650,000 flyers that will be distributed on the ground by the Obama camp, and have Obama and Dalton on them. Field notes, October 2, 2012.

This assistance provided by the Obama campaign was critical to Dalton, and ended up being the most substantial field operation effort that the Dalton campaign had throughout the election. Thus, the resources and organization of the Obama campaign benefited Dalton at certain stages of the race, as Campaign Manager Caroline Valand's comments illustrate:

Valand mentions that the simple fact that the Obama campaign has been strong on the ground in North Carolina helps Dalton, since it is more likely to get Democratic voters to the polls in November, and since many of the materials being distributed by the Obama campaign feature Obama and Dalton. Field notes, September 18, 2012.

While the support the NCDP provided was limited to printing the flyers to be distributed, the Obama campaign was the organization that actually had the volunteers and the infrastructure in place to implement the field operation. This observation speaks to Nielsen's (2012) argument that the traditional party structure has lost its ability to mobilize supporters and has lost its place as the main manner by which candidates contact the electorate. Parties do not have their 'standing armies' in place anymore. Staffers at the Dalton campaign specifically mentioned the noticeable collapse of local party organizations and the

networks they sustained. Rather, these networks and this infrastructure were put together by the Obama campaign, and by the wide assemblage it formed, as Johnson pointed out:

“Functionally, the party used to be able to put together a good operation, a good infrastructure. But now, for instance, the Obama campaign just came in 2008 and built their own infrastructure, around the party. The Obama campaign never left North Carolina, they didn’t win now, but they did a really good job in building infrastructure. That used to be the role the party had, the local chair would be the person to coordinate the infrastructure around that county.” Schorr Johnson interview.

However, as the race progressed and poll numbers continuously showed Dalton trailing McCrory by a considerable margin, the Obama campaign sought to disassociate itself from the Lt. Governor. Dalton’s staffers were not necessarily stunned by this, some even referred to it as being a natural course of action:

“The relationship between us (the Dalton campaign) and the Obama campaign was really positive for a long time, and then it was every man for themselves. But I think that’s normal, we became a drag to their ticket.” Ford Porter interview.

Dalton was excluded from events organized by the presidential campaign, such as first lady or the vice president’s visits to North Carolina. Another example of this complex relationship between campaigns was the event in which Bill Clinton campaigned for Obama, just days before the election. Dalton was allowed to attend, but when he got too much visibility in the press coverage of the event, the Obama campaign accused the Dalton campaign’s staff of “hijacking” the president’s event:

Valand mentions she got a few angry emails and calls being accused of “hijacking” the president’s event, due to the fact that a lot of the TV coverage focused on Dalton’s participation. Also, one of Dalton’s staffers, Ferroz, distributed about 50 Dalton signs to

people in the crowd, and the TV cameras showed mostly these signs and not the Obama signs. Field notes, October 5, 2012.

In this sense, the Dalton campaign's relation to the Obama campaign presented a reversal from what was traditionally the interaction between gubernatorial and presidential Democratic candidates in North Carolina. Of course Obama also ended up losing North Carolina to his Republican opponent in 2012, but still had a significantly larger number of votes than Dalton. In total, 2,178,391 people voted for Obama, while only 1,931,580 chose Dalton, a difference of 246,811 votes (NCSBE, 2013). Dalton's staffers had a clear understanding of this situation, in which Dalton needed to remain close to Obama, who in turn had to push away:

“We wanted to keep Dalton actually further to the left than he was comfortable, because we needed the Obama voters. We needed Obama more than they needed us. It was a weird balancing act because Obama obviously got a lot more votes than Dalton. (...) It (the relationship with OFA) was fine for a while but at a point they saw that we were behind and were going to be a drag on them. The Obama campaign did polling early on, they knew what was happening, people weren't voting the straight ticket this year. They needed a lot of people who were also voting for McCrory. So they tried to distance themselves from us, cut Dalton out of events. They were our get-out-the-vote operation, we needed them, they didn't need us.” Schorr Johnson interview.

*The NCDP, the importance of the party structure, and the difficulty of identity crafting*

Of all the actors that form the party coalition, the state branch of the Democratic Party, the NCDP, was perhaps the one that had the most intricate relationship with the Dalton campaign. Despite keeping a formal distance, the Dalton campaign coordinated efforts with

the state party's communications team daily. The NCDP's Communications Director was included in the morning communications meetings, which meant most activities were shared and coordinated with him, though there was very little that the party could actually help the campaign with in practice. This was due to the fact that the series of scandals inside the NCDP led the Dalton campaign to devise a strategy to disassociate itself from the local party. This meant that Dalton's name should never appear in the media with the party's Chair, David Parker. The strategy of public dissociation came from the fear that staffers inside the Dalton campaign had that the connection between these names would generate an association of Dalton with the accusations of unethical behavior that surrounded Parker and the NCDP. In essence, Dalton's staffers wanted him as far away as possible from the scandals that surrounded the state party, as Gilligan explains:

“If they (the NCDP) had not been not going through what they were, they could have been a lot more effective in helping us, not just financially, but also be a more credible source to criticize McCrory. If you have a chair that is a more credible media personality, he can go out and say things that the candidate can't, but the way things were, we didn't want the chair of the Democratic Party saying anything. We didn't want our name in the paper with his, or with the current governor (Perdue).” Daniel Gilligan interview.

Ultimately, the inevitable association between Dalton and the NCDP was harmful to the campaign's efforts to forge the candidate's image. As Alexander (2010) argues, it is essential for a candidate to become a representation of that which voters consider purely civic, to become a hero of sorts, while at the same time polluting the opponent's image. The Dalton campaign had difficulty communicating this portrait of an idealized candidate to the media, while avoiding the frame that he was a long time member of this party that appeared

to be ethically flawed. Ford Porter described how this association affected the campaign on the issue of ethics:

“During the election we talked a lot about Dalton’s ethics and talked a lot about the McCrory tax returns, attacking him on his ethics. I think the ethics issue was very hindering in this election. It was bad because of all the outside problems with the party and with the current governor (Perdue). So in other words, the party brand did some damage, but still, Walter Dalton himself was so ethically good that we wanted to compare him to McCrory.” Ford Porter interview.

The necessity to keep a public distance from the party also manifested in the manner in which the Dalton campaign attacked McCrory. As many of the staffers described, one of the tactics that campaigns traditionally adopt to pollute an opponent’s image is send messages through the party, through press releases or conferences. However, staffers from the Dalton campaign said that they wouldn’t want David Parker giving press conferences about the gubernatorial race, because he did not have the necessary credibility with the media to be able to make claims on issues such as ethics, for instance. This led the Dalton campaign to take a visibly aggressive stance, attacking McCrory directly. Being openly critical left Dalton open to accusations of running an excessively negative campaign. Johnson revealed how awkward this association between the NCDP and the Dalton campaign really was:

“The Executive Director (of the NCDP), was helpful to us as much as he could be under the circumstances, because they had too many problems of their own, and we had to run away from them. Also in past elections, the party used to have press conferences and do a lot of the negative messaging, but this year we basically did our own because we didn’t want David Parker giving press conferences. (...) We definitely did coordinate communications strategies with the NCDP, but that was also something we had to do differently in this election. A lot of the times candidates want to be all positive and let the

party do the negative messaging, but this time we were okay putting out negative messages directly.” Schorr Johnson interview.

Still, the local party provided some infrastructural resources to the Dalton campaign during the election, such as the 650,000 GOTV flyers distributed door-to-door by Obama’s ground operation mentioned above. The NCDP also provided the voter database, which gave access to information on the electorate and permitted the Dalton campaign to target its direct communication specifically to each audience. The campaign might, for instance, chose to place robo-calls one day to female African American voters who had voted in 2008 but not in 2010, and the next send out direct mail to registered male Democratic affiliated voters who resided in Orange County. The database provided enough information to identify these different groups of voters and contact them. According to staffers, the NCDP is responsible for distributing only relevant portions of its extensive data to each candidate. They described this process as being somewhat bureaucratic; the information is kept centralized in the party organization and then distributed in a ‘top-down’ manner. Though staffers were unwilling to describe exactly what information they had access to, in his interview Schorr Johnson described this process, stating that Democratic candidates might only have access to information on voters from determined counties, depending on the district where they were running:

“Local party activists tend to be older, less information or technologically savvy. The national party built the voter database and state parties distribute parts of this database to local candidates and campaigns. Candidates might only get access to a county, for example. It’s extensive, and it is only done as a top-down thing. It used to be that we would call the county party chair, and he would give us a list, but that doesn’t exist anymore.” Schorr Johnson interview.



This demonstrates what Kreiss (2012) describes in his work as the technological infrastructure provided by the Democratic Party to candidates. The national voter file, called VoteBuilder, extended the ability of the party and its candidates to contest elections, target the electorate and share updated data across campaigns and levels of government. However, without the organizational processes and structures in place, and with limited voter excitement around Dalton, the campaign was not able to fully leverage the database provided by the party, or even other technological tools like new media, to mobilize supporters in the ways that the Obama campaign, for instance, was able to. The Dalton campaign's experience shows clearly that where there is limited support or excitement, social media and technology alone are incapable of creating them. Their use of this the database was mainly for targeting email, direct mail or robo-calls to certain groups of voters, and since money was a constant limiting factor, the campaign was also not able to do much direct mail communication:

“We used the voter database to target voters online. Also, all the mail that we did was targeted at swing voters. The problem was that most of where you would target voters would be through mail, and the thing is we just didn't do much mail communication.”

Daniel Gilligan interview.

Furthermore, in past elections, the gubernatorial campaign's staff joined the NCDP's payroll after the primaries. This was the case, for instance, during Perdue's 2008 campaign. However, in 2012, Dalton's staff stayed on the campaign payroll during the general election in order to avoid any association between Dalton and the NCDP. For the Dalton campaign, which was already facing severe financial constraints, having to deal with staff salaries was an added burden. The campaign's organizational structure ultimately suffered from this. With its staff being almost completely occupied with the traditional communications or fundraising activities, and not having enough funds to add staff in areas like new media, the

campaign had little room left for innovation. As Porter explained, the decision to not join party payroll was a direct consequence of the necessity of keeping a distance from the NCDP:

“We were obviously not working very closely with the traditional party structure. After their scandal in the primary, it was more like they did their thing we did our thing. There was not a whole lot of crossover. Also, four years ago the Perdue campaign staff went on the party payroll after the primary campaign, and we never did that. Partly because of financial reasons but also because we didn’t want the press that could come from this.”

Ford Porter interview.

Despite all of these issues, the state party structure was still essential to the Dalton campaign financially. North Carolina law limits the amount of money individual donors can give to a specific campaign; however, it does not limit the amount that these donors can give to the party, nor the amount the party can transfer to campaigns. Thus, much of what was donated to the Dalton campaign needed to go through the NCDP. In the 2012 election, this arrangement, while necessary, was not ideal for the Dalton campaign, due to supporters’ hesitance in entrusting the NCDP with their donations. Johnson explained this process:

“They (the NCDP) were working with us to the extent that they could. We were raising a lot of money into the party that was then being returned to us. So the party as a structure had to be in place, because it is the only legal entity that can take unlimited contributions and give unlimited contributions.” Schorr Johnson interview.

### *Democratic consultants and the prioritization of candidates*

During his campaign, Dalton hired consultants that were either known North Carolina Democratic actors, such as Raleigh-based firm Nexus Strategies, or national actors of the

party, such as pollster John Anzalone. The campaign's consultants, thus, were both local and national agents of the party, and the very structure of these consultancies (sometimes having offices in a few different states) makes a clear classification of their status as either one or the other difficult. As both Nielsen (2012) and Aldrich (1995) contend, consultants integrate parties and are an essential asset to a candidate's organization. My observations revealed that consultants were important in molding Dalton's strategies and were therefore very influential to his campaign. During the primaries, Dalton hired pollster John Anzalone, from Anzalone Liszt Research, a Washington DC-based firm, which also worked for the Obama campaign. The Dalton campaign, however, only had funds to develop internal polling until August, and had to depend on public polling during the majority of the general election:

“We couldn't afford polling. We did a big poll in August but then we couldn't pay for polling anymore. So we would depend on PPP polls, which were public, to know where things were. When I worked for the state senate, we would have tracking polls that would go out several times week and we would know exactly where to advertise, but here we were so short in money and wanted to put everything on TV.” Schorr Johnson interview.

Also during the primary race, Peter Cari, of the Washington DC-based firm Prism Consulting, was hired as the main media consultant. Nexus Strategies, a Raleigh-based consulting firm, was hired to advise Dalton, and the main collaborator inside Nexus was Morgan Jackson. The most active among consultants, the majority of key strategic decisions throughout the election cycle were run through Jackson, and his insight was fundamental to the decision-making process inside the campaign. The following passage is one of many that illustrate Jackson's participation in key moments of the campaign:

The candidate has asked that only two people be in the room during the debate prep.

They will be Johnson and Morgan Jackson. Field notes, September 24, 2012.

Staffers within the Dalton campaign, however, revealed that they often felt like Dalton was not a priority client to his consultants, and that they felt their assistance could have been greater:

“Our consultants were very good, but I got the feeling that their participation was kind of phoned in, that this was their 6th, 7th or 8th priority client. We just couldn’t get the type of attention we needed and I think that showed.” Daniel Gilligan interview.

The observation of this interaction between the Dalton campaign and parts of the party network, once again, reveals the perceptible sorting of candidates into levels of importance and the distinction of services provided based on this hierarchy. While I lack evidence as to the exact motives of consultancies for attributing this secondary importance to Dalton, given the statements of staffers it seems likely that this was a result of both Dalton’s lack of funds to “buy” consultants’ time, and their belief that the candidate would probably be unable to defeat his republican opponent.

#### *The DGA and the effects of fundraising and polls on paid and earned media*

Regarding the involvement of national actors of the Democratic Party, one of the factors that influenced Dalton’s chances of being elected in the 2012 gubernatorial race was the financial support of the Democratic Governors Association. The DGA invested its funds in seven gubernatorial races during the 2012 election, and North Carolina was one of them. As noted above, the group contributed approximately 2.6 million to support Dalton’s candidacy. Due to the public image problems surrounding NCDP and its hesitance to entrust the chair with its money, the DGA routed this funding through the liberal group NC Citizens for Progress, which in turn produced and ran television ads for Dalton. These ads were essential to Dalton, once the financial constraints of his campaign led it to advertise later and

less than McCrory. As mentioned previously, these communications strategies could not be coordinated with the Dalton campaign due to legal restrictions on campaign financing. Thus, the substance of these ads, as well as their placement were completely defined by N.C. Citizens for Progress, and the Dalton campaign's staff was not always pleased with these decisions. As Johnson pointed out:

“If they had been smarter with the money they spent than they could have gotten farther. For instance, we weren't on the air in Charlotte because we couldn't afford it, so why didn't they air their commercials there? Even though we couldn't coordinate with them, they could figure it out, they needed to be a supplement to us.” Schorr Johnson interview.

As the race developed, however, and Dalton stayed behind in polls, the DGA pulled out of the race. Its counterpart, the RGA, stayed in the race and invested heavily in the Republican candidate. While it is true that the DGA's support was essential to Dalton's chances of winning, it is also true that its withdrawal from the race marked the campaign's demise. Campaign Manager, Caroline Valand, made this clear to staff during the race:

Valand asks that the staff invest all their energy and time in the next three weeks, saying that if poll numbers don't begin getting closer, the DGA might very well pull out of the race. If that happens, according to her, winning this race will be next to impossible, exempted something horrible comes out on McCrory. Field notes, September 18, 2012.

The DGA's desertion of the Dalton campaign is revealing of the relations of power that are established inside parties. If parties are formed by a working coalition of actors, it is important to consider the weight that each of these actors has within the party and in relation to one another. While Aldrich's (1995) view that contemporary parties are not more important than its actors, but rather *are* these actors, it is clear that not all of these players are 'created equal' inside the party, and some have a much higher status and importance in the

party hierarchy than others. Parties have become more responsible to some candidates, and the “service” they provide to each candidate is not equal. Staffers inside the Dalton campaign revealed that they felt this lack of engagement of the DGA with the campaign even early on:

“We definitely did not get all the assistance we could have from the DGA. Although, to their credit, the DGA is responsible for spending the money that they raise wisely, and they looked at the polls, as we did. We were taking resources away from races where they had a better chance of winning.... They (the DGA) were pretty good, but as far as actually helping us, they wouldn’t return phone calls or emails, they weren’t very engaged in our race. It became clear early on, despite what they were saying publically, that they were going to pull out.” Schorr Johnson interview.

One of the most significant impacts of the lack of funding on the Dalton campaign’s communication was its inability to advertise. McCrory began running ads in August, a month before Dalton, which gave him a lead in voter name recognition (PPP, 2012b). Porter explained the effects of this scarcity of resources for advertising:

“Because we were outspent so heavily, they were able to make those attacks seem true, and we were not able to attack or defend.” Ford Porter interview.

This, in turn, affected polls, giving McCrory what became a double-digit lead by October (PPP, 2012c). The DGA pulled out of the race, and individual donors demonstrated increasing hesitance in contributing. Thus, while McCrory’s constant TV presence created a virtuous cycle, Dalton’s late and scarce TV presence seems to have created a vicious cycle, formed by the interrelation of fundraising, advertising and polls. When a candidate has funds to advertise, this tends to help his placement in polls, which then assists in the fundraising efforts, since donors are inclined to trust that the candidate has a chance of winning. This

fundraising, in turn, is what allows the candidate to advertise more, as Valand explained to her staff:

The next 3 weeks are key. DGA has just come into the race with a media buy. According to Valand, the Dalton campaign has put a lot of money “up front” on the media buy for ads, and now needs to fundraise to cover this “financial hole”. Valand mentions that this is a cycle that feeds off itself; with more ads, poll numbers improve, making it is easier to fundraise and buy even more paid media. Field notes, September 18, 2012.

With these difficulties fundraising and advertising, the Dalton campaign depended heavily on earned media to stay visible and communicate messages. However, with the contemporary diminishment of issue-driven journalism and a focus on ‘horse-race’ issues (Iyengar, 2011), it is not ideal for candidates to rely on the mass media to drive a campaign. Staffers at the Dalton campaign had a great difficulty creating momentum in a context in which Dalton was constantly the trailing candidate.

Most newspaper editorial boards are announcing their endorsements this week. Valand and Johnson hope for a few good endorsements so that they can publicize this, use it to fundraise, and possibly create some momentum from it. Johnson mentions that, apart from a good poll, which seems unlikely, this will be what the campaign can use create some good news and some momentum. Field notes, October 16, 2012.

Staffers often expressed their frustration with the media’s focus on polls, and with what they considered to be horse-race coverage of the election, as well as the negative effect of this coverage on fundraising:

“It was frustrating that all the media coverage was poll-driven, and there are just so many public polls now, that there were maybe two weeks at most in between polls. With automated polling, its easier and cheaper to do. Democrats and Republicans know that it shapes media narrative, media will cover it, so both sides now have shops set up to do as

much public polling as possible. It had a very reverberating effect on our fundraising, how people didn't see us as viable because for instance PPP had Dalton down by 14 points by the end. People just didn't see us as being in the fight anymore. It was tough because even our internal polling showed that we had a winning message if we could communicate it to enough people, but we just didn't have enough money to do that."

Daniel Gilligan interview.

Dalton's staffers realized that polls helped shape the media narrative, and expressed that one of their main tasks in dealing with the media was trying to portray Dalton as having a better chance of winning than he actually did. As Johnson revealed:

"We spent a lot of time trying to convince the press that the race was actually closer than it was. That the DGA, for instance, was totally behind us, when they weren't. We (Ford and I) were trying to do a lot of "window dressing," making the race seem more competitive than it really was. We kept thinking that if we did that long enough than we would start raising more money and it actually would be. We spent a lot of time with the press trying to avoid their frame of why Dalton was behind, how we were going to catch up, how much money we had raised. (...) And as soon as we would get some good press there would be a poll that would take away any momentum and any positive coverage that we had gotten." Schorr Johnson interview.

### *The national Democratic Party and a convention in North Carolina*

The Dalton campaign's interaction with the national Democratic Party was minimal, with most interaction being with the state branch of the party. This is not to say, however, that the national Democratic Party's decisions did not influence the campaign. The most marked example of this was that in 2012 the Democratic National Convention was held in Charlotte. This fact had repercussions for the Dalton campaign. On one hand, it provided



some visibility to local candidates by giving them an opportunity to have some face time with the local press during the event. And, on the day of Obama's acceptance, Dalton got to make a minute-and-a-half speech. The following passage illustrates the staffers' perception of the importance of the earned media that the convention could generate:

The staffers discuss the convention. Walter is set to speak on Monday in the "celebration of North Carolina" day, and again on the same day as Obama. Schorr mentions he wants to keep interviews local, they also mention a series of fundraising events, and emphasize that spontaneous media out of this event will be very important for the campaign. Since Dalton's ads won't start running for another month (only in September after the convention and the Olympics), the Dalton team is trying to get earned media from the convention, and other events to fight back against McCrory, who already started advertising on TV. Field notes, August 9, 2012.

On the other hand, the convention diverted much attention from the local races until September, and Dalton's Campaign Manager, Caroline Valand, argued that it made fundraising more difficult, since many important in-state donors had been giving a lot to the Convention:

Valand believes that most Democratic Charlotte donors have already given to the convention, and this was personal money. According to her, it's a nightmare for fundraising. Field notes, August 7, 2012.

Schorr Johnson, evaluating the pros and cons of the convention, concluded that:

"The Democratic National Convention was really so much more of a curse than a blessing to us. It sucked away a lot of the money in North Carolina, sucked away a lot of the organization and people were all tapped out. It was a show that just didn't particularly help us, and it also didn't carry North Carolina for Obama." Schorr Johnson interview.

## Discussion

The close examination of the Dalton campaign's relationship to the Democratic Party, in its various facets, shows that this was never one dimensional or uncomplicated. As could be expected of a network with diverse actors whose objectives do not always coincide, the candidate-party relationship varied so widely in its shapes and effects that the party's role can be described as a mixture of supportive and damaging concurrently. This observation shows that the interaction between candidates and parties, and the roles that the modern political party plays in American electoral races, is more nuanced than Aldrich (1995) considers in his argument that the party is in service to its candidates.

The fact is that the various actors in the party coalition did provide the Dalton campaign with resources, both infrastructural and financial. Without the party structure to receive contributions, for instance, Dalton could not even have run his campaign. Without OFA's support on the ground, Dalton would have had no field operation. And, without the DGA's financial support Dalton would have had even less advertising, and much lower name recognition among the electorate. It is possible to say, more generally, that without the Democratic Party, its structure, and the resources it provided, Walter Dalton would have had no chance to win the gubernatorial election.

However, it is also undeniable that actors in the party seriously hindered Dalton's campaign. Beginning with the last-minute primary and the subsequently short time he was afforded to organize and fundraise for his campaign, Dalton began with a disadvantage. Furthermore, the fact that the incumbent governor, his party-mate, had such low approval ratings made it so that those informational cues that party affiliation provided to the electorate were not helpful to Dalton's campaign. Finally, the services and resources that the

party provided to Dalton were, more often than not, overshadowed by those it did not provide.

Fellow Democratic office-seekers' campaigns, such as OFA, may have been cooperative to a certain point, but as soon as the association with Dalton became a liability to them, their final goal became clear: it was not to help elect fellow Democrats, it was to re-elect President Barack Obama. As for the DGA's involvement, their removal from the race was *de facto* the final blow to the Dalton campaign. After losing their financial support, the Dalton campaign was not able to acquire paid media and have a TV presence comparable to McCrory's, and depended mostly on earned media to drive the campaign. Dalton's staffers argued that it was this scenario that led the candidate's name recognition to remain low throughout the election cycle, and led to the McCrory campaign defining Dalton before he could define himself. In addition to this, the NCDP's reputation troubles and Dalton's inevitable association with the party of which he was a member also compromised the crafting of Dalton's identity, and made polluting McCrory's identity more challenging.

This intricate party-candidate relationship is revealing and provides enough empirical evidence to enable a critique of Aldrich's (1995) idea of the party in service, especially as it relates to the author's conception of the role of the party in the nomination process and its role in mobilizing both the electorate and the resources needed to enable the political elites to capture office. In the 2012 gubernatorial election in North Carolina, the problems began in the nomination process itself. Furthermore, Aldrich argues that candidates face informational and mobilizational collective action challenges when running for office. In this case, Dalton's connection to the local party and its bad reputation, as well as his predecessor's low approval ratings, created an environment in which the informational cues that voters received from

associating Dalton with his party complicated the campaign's crafting of Dalton's identity, and facilitated his opponent's task of polluting his image. Dalton's informational problem was not solved by his association with the Democratic Party, rather it was worsened by this connection. As for the party's function in mobilizing both the electorate and the resources needed by these office-seekers, Dalton's case is filled with examples of how the Democratic Party was unable or unwilling at times to provide the resources needed by the campaign.

This is not to say that the Democratic Party did not provide *any* resources to the Dalton campaign, or that it did not strive to assist the candidate in winning the election. The argument that follows this analysis is that, while Aldrich's (1995) conception of the party-in-service to its candidates is still relevant, once the party does, through its structure and its network of actors, supply an essential service to candidates, this connection is more nuanced than the author proposes. One must consider, for instance, the hierarchy that political elites assume inside parties, as seen in the Dalton case in the DGA's selective support of candidates and the consultants' prioritizing of clients. One must consider how these informational cues can be damaging to candidates' identity, and what resources parties are unable to provide in contemporary contests. While it is true that Dalton could not have won the 2012 gubernatorial election without the assistance of the Democratic Party, it is also true that his very association to this party hindered his campaign significantly at certain points.

### **Conclusion and Limitations**

My ethnographic study of the Walter Dalton campaign adds to an existing body of literature that discusses the role and significance of American political parties. While most of these works look at the party's function, I study the interaction between the party and an

individual candidate's campaign. Building mainly on Aldrich's notion of "the party in service," I bring empirical data from the Dalton campaign to analyze whether the party, in fact, provides the resources needed to help a candidate capture office.

Though not as common as other methods of investigation, there is an existing body of literature that uses qualitative methods, such as ethnographic fieldwork, to study political communication. There are, however, a few limitations associated with ethnographic fieldwork. Firstly, it makes for a very particular view, and it is undeniably trickier to draw generalizations from a single case. Methods such as surveys or content analysis provide a more distributional view, allowing generalizable conclusions more easily, though much more reductively. Ethnographic observations, in turn, are very focused on the particular site chosen, and this particularity forces the researcher to put much thought into the process of seeing the complexities involved in these day-to-day observations and then connect them with wider social processes. It is this connection of the empirical (the cases and sites observed) and the analytical implications that has to be negotiated carefully in ethnographic research. As a researcher, I draw the larger conclusions while respecting the research site's limitations and keeping these inferences in context.

Furthermore, ethnographic fieldwork, in particular, is restrained by practical issues like geography and time. I made choices when and where to make these observations, and this process is inevitably tied to a certain loss. If one chooses to be in the campaign's headquarters one day, for instance, instead of a press conference, there is a gain and a loss there, and my data reflects these choices.

As mentioned previously, my research observation site was limited, both in political orientation (I observed the Democratic candidate for governor) and in range (my site was a

gubernatorial campaign in North Carolina). Furthermore, had I also studied the McCrory campaign and how it interacted with the Republican Party, I might have had a somewhat different or more nuanced understanding of this relationship. This specificity, in conjunction with the wide range of variance that can be observed in the American political context, makes it imperative to keep in mind the boundaries of this case when generalizing these conclusions.

The fact that this is a particular case study, however, does not impede me from logically drawing larger theoretical implications that can contribute to scholarly knowledge on the subject of party-candidate relations and its implications for political communication. The relationship between the Dalton campaign and the Democratic Party reveals the complexities of candidate-party relationships that theoretically should be analogous to those faced by other candidates, even those of other parties. Dealing with a party predecessor that suffers from low approval ratings, for instance, is a difficulty that many candidates are faced with. Of course the exact circumstances in which Dalton campaign found itself may be unique, but it serves to illustrate how candidates negotiate their relationship with parties and how they can impact communications capacities and strategies.

Finally, it is important to consider that a series of factors beyond what could be observed from within the Dalton campaign had relevance in this campaign. Dalton himself, for instance, was not a candidate that generated much excitement, he came to the election with several disadvantages, and McCrory had been preparing his campaign since he lost the gubernatorial bid four years earlier. Beyond this, the manner in which the Republican opponent organized and carried out his strategies, and the merits of this campaign should not

be disregarded. The relationship between the Dalton campaign and the Democratic Party, while relevant to, was not the only feature decisive for the outcome of the election.

## References

- Aldrich, John H. (1995). *Why Parties? the Origin & Transformation of Political Parties in America*.
- Aldrich, John H. (2000). Southern Parties in State and Nation. *Journal of Politics*, 62(3), 643.
- Alexander, Jeffrey C. (2010). *The performance of politics: Obama's victory and the democratic struggle for power*. New York: Oxford Univ Pr.
- Auyero, Javier. (2006, Fall2006). Introductory Note to Politics under the Microscope: Special Issue on Political Ethnography I, Editorial, *Qualitative Sociology*, pp. 257-259. Retrieved from [https://auth.lib.unc.edu/ezproxy\\_auth.php?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bth&AN=22172177&site=ehost-live&scope=site](https://auth.lib.unc.edu/ezproxy_auth.php?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bth&AN=22172177&site=ehost-live&scope=site)
- Benford, Robert D., & Snow, David A. (2000). FRAMING PROCESSES AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: An overview and Assessment. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26(1), 611.
- Bergan, Daniel E., Gerber, Alan S., Green, Donald P., & Panagopoulos, Costas. (2005). GRASSROOTS MOBILIZATION AND VOTER TURNOUT IN 2004. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 69(5), 760-777. doi: 10.1093/poq/nfi063
- Boczkowski, Pablo, & Lievrouw, Leah A. (2007). "Bridging STS and Communication Studies: Scholarship on Media and Information Technologies." In *The Handbook of Science and Technology Studies, Third Edition*. Edited by Edward J. Hackett, Olga Amsterdamska, Michael Lynch, and Judy Wajcman.: MIT Press.
- Christensen, R. (2010). *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics: The Personalities, Elections, and Events That Shaped Modern North Carolina*: University of North Carolina Press.
- Cohen, M., Karol, D., Noel, H., & Zaller, J. (2009). *The Party Decides: Presidential Nominations Before and After Reform*: University of Chicago Press.
- Cohen, Marty. (2008). *The party decides: presidential nominations before and after reform*: University of Chicago Press.
- Datanet, North Carolina. (2013, March). *2012: The Year of a Republican Wave*. Retrieved from: <http://southnow.org/files/2013/04/ncdn54.pdf>
- Downs, A. (1957). *An economic theory of democracy*: Harper.



- Eldersveld, Samuel J. (1965). *Political parties: a behavioral analysis*: Rand McNally.
- Elections, North Carolina State Board of. (2010, March 17). *2008 Election Results*. Retrieved from: <http://results.enr.clarityelections.com/NC/7937/21334/en/vts.html?cid=175>
- Elections, North Carolina State Board of. (2013). *2012 Results*. Retrieved from: <http://results.enr.clarityelections.com/NC/42923/114645/Web01/en/summary.html>
- Emerson, R.M., Fretz, R.I., & Shaw, L.L. (2011). *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, Second Edition*: University of Chicago Press.
- Frank, J. (2013, January 15). Morning Memo. Retrieved from [http://projects.newsobserver.com/under\\_the\\_dome/morning\\_memo\\_mccrory\\_gets\\_campaign\\_cash\\_from\\_indicted\\_donor\\_hudson\\_on\\_the\\_rise-storylink=cpy](http://projects.newsobserver.com/under_the_dome/morning_memo_mccrory_gets_campaign_cash_from_indicted_donor_hudson_on_the_rise-storylink=cpy)
- Franz, Michael M., & Ridout, Travis N. (2007). Does political advertising persuade? *Political Behavior*, 29(4), 465-491. doi: 10.1007/s11109-007-9032-y
- Galvin, Daniel J. (2008). Changing Course: Reversing the Organizational Trajectory of the Democratic Party from Bill Clinton to Barack Obama. *Forum (1540-8884)*, 6(2), 1-21.
- Galvin, Daniel J. (2010). *Presidential party building: Dwight D. Eisenhower to George W. Bush*: Princeton University Press.
- Gerber, Alan S., & Green, Donald P. (2000). The Effects of Canvassing, Telephone Calls, and Direct Mail on Voter Turnout: A Field Experiment. *American Political Science Review*, 94(3), 653.
- Gerber, Alan S., & Green, Donald P. (2008). *Get out the vote: how to increase voter turnout 2nd ed*: Brookings Institution Press.
- Hacker, J. S., Huber, G. A. , Nichols, A. , Rehm, P., & Craig, S. (2012, June). *Economic Insecurity Across the American States*. Retrieved from: [http://economicsecurityindex.org/assets/state\\_reports/ESI\\_cross\\_state.pdf](http://economicsecurityindex.org/assets/state_reports/ESI_cross_state.pdf)
- Howard, Philip N. (2005). Deep Democracy, Thin Citizenship: The Impact of Digital Media in Political Campaign Strategy. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 597, 153-170. doi: <http://ann.sagepub.com/archive/>
- Iyengar, Shanto. (2011). The Media Game: New Moves, Old Strategies. *Forum (1540-8884)*, 9(1), 1-6. doi: 10.2202/1540-8884.1425

- Johnston, Anne, & Kaid, Lynda Lee. (2002). Image Ads and Issue Ads in U.S. Presidential Advertising: Using Videostyle to Explore Stylistic Differences in Televised Political Ads From 1952 to 2000. *Journal of Communication*, 52(2), 281-300. doi: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.2002.tb02545.x
- Johnston, Hank, & Noakes, J.A. (2005). *Frames Of Protest: Social Movements And The Framing Perspective*: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Incorporated.
- Katz, Daniel, & Eldersveld, Samuel J. (1961). THE IMPACT OF LOCAL PARTY ACTIVITY UPON ELECTORATE. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 25(1), 1-24.
- Key. (1963). Politics, parties and pressure groups: V O Key: Crowell.
- Klandermans, B., Kriesi, H., & Tarrow, S.G. (1988). *From Structure to Action: Comparing Social Movement Research Across Cultures*: Jai Press.
- Kreiss, D. (2012). *Taking Our Country Back: The Crafting of Networked Politics from Howard Dean to Barack Obama*: OUP USA.
- Kreiss, Daniel. (2009). Developing the “Good Citizen”: Digital Artifacts, Peer Networks, and Formal Organization During the 2003-2004 Howard Dean Campaign. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 6(3/4), 281-297. doi: 10.1080/19331680903035441
- Lancendorfer, Karen M., & Lee, Byoungkwan. (2010). Who Influences Whom? The Agenda-Building Relationship Between Political Candidates and the Media in the 2002 Michigan Governor's Race. *Journal of Political Marketing*, 9(3), 186-206. doi: 10.1080/15377857.2010.497737
- Lippmann, W. (1922.). *Public Opinion*: New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co.
- Nielsen, Rasmus Kleis. (2012). *Ground wars: Personalized communication in political campaigns*. Princeton, NJ US: Princeton University Press.
- Nitz, Michael, & Ihlen, Oyvind. (2006 2006 Annual Meeting). *Oil and Gas as Natural Riches or Environmental Problems: Framing Contests in Public Relations*.
- Polling, Public Policy. (2012a, June 15). *Perdue numbers hit new low; fracking veto could help*. Retrieved from: <http://www.publicpolicypolling.com/main/2012/06/perdue-numbers-hit-new-low-fracking-veto-could-help.html>

- Polling, Public Policy. (2012b, September 3). *McCrorry maintains lead over Dalton*. Retrieved from: <http://www.publicpolicypolling.com/main/2012/09/mccrory-maintains-lead-over-dalton.html>
- Polling, Public Policy. (2012c, October, 1). *McCrorry leads by 10*. Retrieved from: <http://www.publicpolicypolling.com/main/2012/10/mccrory-leads-by-10.html>
- Ranii, D. (2012, September 21). N.C. unemployment rate rises to 9.7 percent, *The News & Observer*. Retrieved from <http://www.newsobserver.com/2012/09/21/2358317/nc-unemployment-rate-rises-to.html>
- Ranney, Austin. (1975). *Curing the mischiefs of faction: party reform in America*: Univ. of Calif. Press.
- Ridout, Travis N. Fowler Erika Franklin. (2012). Explaining Perceptions of Advertising Tone. *Political Research Quarterly*, 65(1), 62. doi: 10.1177/1065912910388189
- Ridout, Travis N., Franklin Fowler, Erika and Branstetter, John, . (August 23, 2010). Political Advertising in the 21st Century: The Rise of the YouTube Ad. *APSA 2010 Annual Meeting Paper*.
- Ridout, Travis N., & Searles, Kathleen. (2011). It's my campaign I'll cry if I want to: How and when campaigns use emotional appeals. *Political Psychology*, 32(3), 439-458. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9221.2010.00819.x
- Rogers, Everett M., & Dearing, James W. (1993). The anatomy of agenda-setting research. *Journal of Communication*, 43(2), 68.
- Schattschneider, Elmer Eric. (1942). *Party government text ed*: Farrar.
- Schlesinger, J.A. (1991). *Political Parties and The Winning of Office*: University of Michigan Press.
- Severson, K. (2012, January 26). North Carolina Governor's Decision May Aid Obama Bid, *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/27/us/politics/bev-perdue-north-carolina-governor-wont-seek-re-election.html? r=0>
- Sorauf, F.J. (1980). *Party politics in America*: Little, Brown.
- Studies, The Institute for Southern. (2013, March 11). *Outside spending climbs to \$14 million in NC state races*. Retrieved from:

<http://www.southernstudies.org/2012/11/institute-report-outside-spending-climbs-to-14-million-in->

Wacquant, L. (2003). *Body & Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer*: Oxford University Press, USA.

Weaver, David, & Elliott, Swanzy Nimley. (1985). Who Sets the Agenda for the Media? A Study of Local Agenda-Building. *Journalism Quarterly*, 62(1), 87-94.

Wekkin, Gary D. (1984). National-State Party Relations: The Democrats' New Federal Structure. *Political Science Quarterly*, 99(1), 45.

White, T.H. (2009). *The Making of the President 1960*: HarperCollins.

Woolgar, Steve, & Latour, Bruno. (1979). *Laboratory life: the social construction of scientific facts*: Sage Publs.