

CHAPTER ONE

JFK and His Party

According to political scientist and Kennedy biographer James MacGregor Burns, JFK's first electoral success "left him with a disdain for routine politics and 'party hacks' that he would not lose for many years, if ever. He had found that the Democratic Party hardly existed as an organization in the Eleventh District; after he won office and consolidated his position, he would say, 'I am the Democratic Party in my district.' Thus he learned the key to winning politics . . . was a personal organization, not the party committees."¹ Burns wrote these words in 1959 concerning John F. Kennedy's 1946 congressional campaign. As Kennedy's pre-presidential political career revealed, his highly personalized and occasionally suprapartisan approach to campaign organization, tactics, and intraparty decisions both reflected and contributed to his meteoric rise in statewide, regional, and then national party politics.

The well-known story of Kennedy's entry into Democratic politics as a congressional candidate in 1946 includes paternal pressure, a young veteran's decision to begin a career path, and the various campaign advantages that Kennedy enjoyed due to his family's wealth, politically famous middle and last names, and John Hersey's previously published account of Kennedy's war record in *Reader's Digest*.² The various accounts of Kennedy's 1946 congressional campaign, however, have not adequately analyzed the extent to which Kennedy's assets as a candidate and the nature of his Democratic Party affiliation were well served by the organizational conditions of the Massachusetts Democratic Party and, more broadly, by the characteristics of his state's political culture in the immediate post-World War II era.³ The significance of the nature of Kennedy's political environment in Massachusetts became more evident in his upset victory in the 1952 Senate campaign.

In 1949, journalist William Shannon calculated that only about ten of the 351 cities and towns of Massachusetts had functioning Democratic local committees and dismissed them as "the private preserves of dead beats and stuffed shirts."⁴ Despite this organizational fragmentation, the New Deal realignment, the steady numerical and proportional growth of this state's Catholic population, and the greater attraction of Democratic candidates to non-Irish Catholic voters

made the Democratic Party of Massachusetts this state's majority party by 1946 in terms of voter registration and at least potential dominance in statewide elections.⁵ Nonetheless, the better-organized, more cohesive Republican Party of Massachusetts continued to demonstrate its ability to frequently control both houses of the state legislature and equally compete with the Democrats for major statewide offices. It partially accomplished this by nominating multi-ethnic Republican slates and adopting moderately liberal "good government" positions on certain issues.⁶

Also, Massachusetts, like other nonsouthern states, experienced what political scientist David G. Lawrence described as a "mini-realignment" in voting behavior and party identification from 1946 to 1950.⁷ During this period, a significant increase in split-ticket voting and weaker party identification occurred among normally Democratic voters primarily because of postwar affluence and an "increasingly Republican coloration to American foreign policy regarding Communism."⁸ This first mini-realignment was especially evident in the federal election results of 1952 when the Republicans won the presidency and control of both houses of Congress, despite the fact that 51 percent of Americans polled in 1952 identified themselves as Democrats and 29 percent as Republicans.⁹ These percentages were virtually the same in 1948 when the Republicans lost the presidential election and control of Congress.¹⁰

In addition to the impact of this mini-realignment on Massachusetts's politics, the political culture of this state was becoming more varied and complex. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, Massachusetts' political culture developed two distinct value systems. According to political scientist Daniel Elazar, moralism, the first subculture, originated in the WASP, or Yankee, Puritan reformist values. By the late 1940s, this ethos was most clearly represented by the two liberal, patrician Republican senators from Massachusetts, Leverett Saltonstall and Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr.¹¹ Political scientists James Q. Wilson and Edward Banfield more specifically identified moralism as the ethos of "good government," which contributed to anti-machine, party-weakening reforms in Massachusetts during the Progressive era, such as nonpartisan local elections and office-column ballots.¹²

Political scientist Edgar Litt formulated a typology of this state's political culture. He identified four types of political cultures in Massachusetts based more on socioeconomic differences than ethnic and religious ones. They are: patricians, managers, workers, and yeomen. Even though he found that in the immediate postwar era, there were more Catholic managers and fewer Yankee yeomen, the Democratic Party still generally expressed Elazar's immigrant-based individualism while the Republican Party still embodied the good government ethos, or Yankee moralism.¹³ Duane Lockard and Neal Peirce likewise noted that despite the fact that more Catholics in this state became college-educated, suburban, middle-class, and white collar in the postwar era, many of them remained Democrats.¹⁴

These various characteristics of the immediate postwar political climate of Massachusetts provided the ideal environment for a political entrepreneur with John F. Kennedy's qualities. In particular, JFK's ideology, rhetoric, socioeconomic and educational background, and campaign tactics ideally positioned him to become the first Irish or "Green" Brahmin, that is, a Harvard-educated Catholic Democrat of inherited wealth who could personify and express the Yankee, patrician, good government ethos.¹⁵ More broadly and theoretically, Banfield and Wilson noted that "the nationality-minded voter prefers candidates who represent the ethnic groups but at the same time display the attributes of the generally admired Anglo-Saxon model."¹⁶

This was a contrast to the image of David Walsh. Walsh was a conservative, isolationist Democrat who was the first Irish Catholic to be elected to the U.S. Senate from Massachusetts. Walsh was defeated for reelection in 1946 by Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., a liberal, Brahmin Republican, partially because many younger, suburban Catholics voted for Lodge.¹⁷

Kennedy's voter appeal as an Irish Brahmin was not limited to younger, upwardly mobile, less partisan middle-class Catholics. It was, to the surprise and dismay of his Democratic opponents in his 1946 primary campaign, equally powerful among older, lower-income, urban "turf-bound" Catholics. The Democrats held a special primary in the Eleventh Congressional District because its most recent congressman, James M. Curley, was elected mayor of Boston in 1945. In sharp contrast to JFK, Curley was the prototype of the provincial Irish machine politician who clearly personified the immigrant ethos of individualism and blatantly appealed to ethnic, religious, class, and partisan differences throughout his colorful, controversial political career.¹⁸

Likewise, Mike Neville, former mayor of Cambridge, and John Cotter, an administrative assistant to Curley and his predecessor, challenged JFK in the primary by stressing their homegrown roots in and long service to the various working-class neighborhoods of the district. Neville and Cotter, JFK's most formidable opponents, and the other candidates portrayed Kennedy as a callow, silver-spooned carpetbagger with no demonstrated ability to represent and serve the district effectively.¹⁹

Although JFK's official residence in the district was a recently acquired, usually vacant apartment, his family had already established a well-known, lasting presence in the district. John F. "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald, Kennedy's maternal grandfather, was a former mayor of Boston and had previously held this congressional seat. Fitzgerald and Curley had engaged in a bitter political rivalry. Less significantly, Patrick J. Kennedy, the future president's paternal grandfather, had been a state senator and ward boss whose constituency included several neighborhoods in the Eleventh District.²⁰

Kennedy also benefited from the advice and campaign management of aides and allies who understood this district and its unusually parochial, often family-centered ward politics well. Joe Kane, a Kennedy cousin and professional political

consultant familiar with this district's politics, Mark Dalton, a speechwriter for JFK, and David F. Powers, a young veteran experienced in the politics of Charlestown, a major, rather xenophobic community in the Eleventh District, were Kennedy's three top campaign aides. They were careful to ensure that Kennedy quickly familiarized himself with the leading religious, ethnic, labor, and veterans' organizations of the district and with its numerous economic problems and needs, especially those pertaining to public housing and its large number of longshoremens.

In a 1964 interview, however, Mark Dalton claimed that the real campaign manager was Joseph P. Kennedy.²¹ The candidate's father was both famous and infamous among Massachusetts' Democrats for his abrasive personality and efforts to buy political influence through his fortune.²² Richard J. Whalen, a biographer of Joseph P. Kennedy, noted that by promoting his son as a war hero, the elder Kennedy used free newspaper and magazine publicity to supplement "the most elaborate professional advertising effort ever seen in a Massachusetts Congressional election."²³ Joe Kennedy was aware, though, that he still attracted controversy due to allegations that as ambassador to Great Britain he was an isolationist and an appeaser. He was careful to avoid attracting publicity to himself.

Thus, there were actually two dimensions in JFK's 1946 primary campaign. The first was the lavishly financed, behind-the-scenes campaign supervised by Joe Kennedy. He fully exploited his political, Hollywood, business, and media connections to promote his son's candidacy through newspaper and magazine articles, billboards, radio commercials, and motion picture ads at movie theaters. Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill, Jr., then a state representative who succeeded Kennedy as the congressman in this district in 1952, estimated "that Joe Kennedy spent \$300,000 on that race, which was six times what I spent in a very tough congressional campaign in the same district six years later."²⁴ The former ambassador even contacted the publisher of the *New York Daily News* to have public opinion polls conducted, a campaign tool previously unheard of in this district's political campaigns.²⁵

The second dimension was the exhaustive, door-to-door campaign conducted by JFK and his army of volunteers, many of them young veterans, friends from Harvard, and young women. Combined with a well-organized schedule of coffee and tea parties where voters could meet the candidate, this dimension gave the Kennedy campaign an image of youthful, idealistic amateurism. But, in organizing the coffee and tea parties, the two dimensions of the campaign converged. Women in the district were provided with the refreshments, china, and other necessary items for hosting parties for Kennedy. They were also paid \$100 each for "cleaning" expenses.

Although *Look* magazine referred to John F. Kennedy as a "fighting conservative," he did not elaborate on his ideology during his primary and general election campaigns in 1946.²⁶ Like his opponents in the Democratic primary, he

emphasized bread-and-butter liberalism, especially support for public housing, a higher minimum wage, and improved veterans' benefits.²⁷ Kennedy, however, was careful not to identify himself as a liberal. This lack of a clear, self-defined ideology characterized Kennedy during his congressional and Senate career. His campaign image was that of an ideologically undefined war hero and celebrity from a family widely perceived as the "aristocracy" of the Irish in Massachusetts. This served Kennedy well in an economically liberal yet socially conservative and militantly anti-Communist district.²⁸

Kennedy's intellectual interest in politics was much greater in foreign policy than in domestic policy.²⁹ Thus, his few profound campaign speeches focused on foreign policy, especially the rebuilding of Western Europe and the containment of Communism. But except for the specific issue of loan legislation to aid Great Britain, Kennedy still spoke in terms of generalities on foreign policy. In an interview with the Harvard *Crimson*, Kennedy stated that the major issue facing the United States was "the struggle between capitalism and collectivism, internally and externally."³⁰ The ominous, martial tone of this excerpt echoed a concluding statement in Kennedy's first book, *Why England Slept*. "We can't escape the fact that democracy in America, like democracy in England, has been asleep at the switch. If we had not been surrounded by oceans three and five thousand miles wide, we ourselves might be caving in at some Munich of the Western World."³¹ As a congressman, JFK would occasionally express strident criticism of the Truman administration's foreign policy in his roll-call votes and Churchillian "Munich lesson" rhetoric.

But the real "issue" in this 1946 primary campaign was John F. Kennedy. His opponents repeatedly, and sometimes imaginatively, portrayed him as an inexperienced, spoiled playboy whose actual residence was in Florida or Manhattan, not the Eleventh District. Mike Neville, one of JFK's most prominent opponents, wore a ten-dollar bill attached to his shirt pocket and referred to it as a Kennedy campaign button.³² Joseph Russo, a Boston city councilor and another congressional candidate, bought newspaper advertising accusing Kennedy of carpetbagging.³³

The focus, though, of Kennedy's opponents on his privileged background and family fortune seemed to enhance, rather than diminish, his celebrity appeal to many voters, especially women. Often accompanied by his sisters and mother in a reception line, Kennedy greeted thousands of well-dressed women eager to meet him and his family. Patsy Mulhern, a precinct worker for Joe Kane, noted that the sharp increase in business for hair stylists and dressmakers in the Eleventh District indicated how heavily attended Kennedy's coffee and tea parties were.³⁴ Journalist Francis Russell later wrote, "After a half a century of oafishness . . . this attractive, well-spoken, graceful, witty, Celtic, Harvard-bred and very rich young man was what every suburban matron would like her son to be. In fact, many of them came to see Jack as their son."³⁵

Primary day, June 18, 1946, was rainy. The Kennedy campaign was careful to provide enough cabs and other hired automobiles to drive many of its targeted voters to the polls. Nonetheless, turnout was light. About 30 percent of the registered voters cast ballots.³⁶ In a ten-candidate field, Kennedy won the Democratic nomination with 40.5 percent of the votes. He received nearly twice as many votes as his closest rival, Michael Neville.³⁷

Since victory in the Democratic primary was tantamount to election in this district, Kennedy's general election campaign was more relaxed and subdued, despite the anticipated Republican sweep of the 1946 midterm elections. The most common Republican campaign slogan, "Had Enough? Vote Republican," originated in Massachusetts. Confident of victory by a wide margin in November, Kennedy devoted several speeches to the nature of his party affiliation. In an August 21, 1946, address to the Young Democrats of Pennsylvania, he stated, "The philosophies of political parties are hammered out over long periods—in good times and in war and in peace. . . . From the days of Andrew Jackson the Democratic Party has always fought the people's fight, (sic) has always been the party that supported progressive legislation."³⁸

Two months later, Kennedy gave a similar speech to the Junior League in Boston. He began his speech by blandly stating that, for him, as for "some 95 percent of this group here tonight," party affiliation was simply a matter of family inheritance.³⁹ JFK proceeded to speak in historical generalities about the policy and doctrinal contributions of such prominent Democratic presidents as Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, and Franklin D. Roosevelt. He concluded his speech by quoting John W. Davis, the conservative Democratic presidential nominee of 1924. "And do not expect to find a party that has always been right, or wise or even consistent; that would be scarcer still. Independent judgment and opinion is a glodious (sic) thing on no account to be surrendered by any man; but when one seeks companionship on a large scale, he must be content to join with those who agree with him in most things and not hope to find a company that will agree with him in all things."⁴⁰

While this speech and his other previous and future speeches on party affiliation disclosed little or nothing about JFK's ideological identity, it is rather revealing that Kennedy included this particular quote from Davis. Kennedy implied a certain independence from the Democratic "party line" in Congress, which became especially pronounced during his early Senate years. The Democratic congressional nominee told an interviewer, "If you must tag me, let's make it 'Massachusetts Democrat.' I'm not doctrinaire. I'll vote 'em the way I see 'em."⁴¹

JFK's doctrinal vacuum and issue eclecticism worked well in 1946. He received 72 percent of the votes in the November election. Meanwhile, the Republicans of Massachusetts won nine of that state's fourteen U.S. House seats. They also now controlled both U.S. Senate seats since Republican Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., defeated veteran Democratic Senator David I. Walsh by a margin of

20 percent. Likewise, incumbent Democratic Governor Maurice Tobin was defeated for reelection.⁴² Throughout all of JFK's campaigns for the House and Senate, he performed distinctly better as a vote getter than most other Democratic nominees for major offices in Massachusetts. Kennedy's successful electoral performance was especially accentuated by the fact that he entered the House of Representatives in 1947 and the Senate in 1953 as a member of the minority party in each chamber.

JFK's six-year tenure in the House of Representatives was characterized by an often lackluster, unreliable attention to his legislative duties, especially his committee service. Kennedy's lackadaisical job performance especially irked John W. McCormack, the leading Democratic congressman from Massachusetts who served as House majority leader after the Democrats regained control of Congress in 1948. McCormack later clashed with Kennedy in 1956 over control of their state's Democratic committee and delegation to the 1956 Democratic national convention.⁴³

JFK was careful to develop and maintain a high-quality staff in Massachusetts and Washington, DC, in order to provide responsive, effective constituency service during his House and Senate years. He was also careful to support most social welfare measures needed by his mostly working-class constituents, such as public housing and the Truman administration's proposal for national health insurance.⁴⁴ Kennedy's safe seat provided him with the political security to distinguish himself as the only Democratic congressman from Massachusetts to refuse to sign a petition written by John W. McCormack urging President Harry Truman to pardon James M. Curley, the former congressman and mayor of Boston imprisoned for federal crimes.⁴⁵ JFK supported the McCarran Internal Security Act of 1950, which required the registration of Communist groups and increased the power of the federal government to deport subversives. It became law over Truman's veto.⁴⁶ Kennedy also opposed direct, comprehensive federal financial aid to parochial schools.⁴⁷

Kennedy's independence from the typical voting patterns of other northern, urban Democratic congressmen was also evident in the reluctance and ambivalence of his opposition to the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947. As a member of the House Education and Labor Committee, JFK believed that some union leaders had used their power to call strikes excessively and irresponsibly in the immediate postwar years and was concerned about the infiltration of Communists in some unions. Kennedy submitted a one-man report to this committee accusing both management and labor of selfishness. Ultimately, though, he opposed the Taft-Hartley Act for being too restrictive toward labor unions.⁴⁸

JFK's seat on this committee was an asset for developing and publicizing his most prominent and consistent intellectual and programmatic interest as a congressman—the development of staunch yet sophisticated policies to effectively oppose the spread of both domestic and foreign Communism. On this issue,

JFK formed a cordial, constructive relationship with a fellow committee member, Republican Congressman Richard M. Nixon. While Nixon rose to national fame during his investigation of Alger Hiss, JFK had a similar yet more obscure experience investigating Harold Christoffel. Christoffel was a United Auto Workers (UAW) official suspected of instigating labor strife in 1941 as part of a plot by American Communists.

Although Christoffel was later tried, convicted, and imprisoned, civil libertarians were disturbed by Kennedy's aggressive questioning of the labor official and his hasty call for Christoffel's indictment.⁴⁹ Regarding the Christoffel case, a journalist referred to Kennedy as "an effective anti-Communist liberal" who "is more hated by Commies than if he were a reactionary."⁵⁰ During JFK's 1952 Senate campaign, the candidate issued a press release praising a Supreme Court decision upholding Christoffel's conviction for perjury. JFK concluded this press release by stating, "The Communists, when I demanded that Christoffel be indicted, called (sic) 'Witch Hunter' but I knew I was right. Now everybody should know."⁵¹

With his hawkish anti-Communism and occasional efforts to reduce federal spending as the basis for his identification in his 1946 campaign as a "fighting conservative," Kennedy elaborated on his occasionally conservative rhetoric and policy behavior as he prepared for his Senate campaign.⁵² He was especially outspoken in his criticism of Truman's foreign policy toward the anti-Communist Chinese nationalists. In a January 30, 1949, speech in Salem, Massachusetts, Kennedy denounced Truman and the State Department for contributing to the "tragic story of China whose freedom we once fought to preserve. What our young men had saved, our diplomats and our President have frittered away."⁵³

JFK's eclectic conservatism on foreign policy and some economic issues, ambivalent liberalism on most social welfare and labor issues, and aloofness toward Democratic leaders in Congress and in Massachusetts, the Democratic National Committee (DNC), and Harry Truman's presidential party leadership were especially evident shortly before and during his 1952 Senate campaign.⁵⁴ Democratic Senator Edmund S. Muskie of Maine stated in 1966 that liberals and veterans' rights activists in Massachusetts "were disturbed" by Kennedy's "apparent determination to be independent of the 'regular' party organization."⁵⁵ But, as political scientist James MacGregor Burns indicated, there was no meaningful "regular" Democratic party in Massachusetts. "The Democratic Party had become, more than ever before, less a unified organization than a holding company for personal organizations that often warred with one another more fiercely than with the Republicans."⁵⁶

JFK recognized the need to develop a suprapartisan, personal organization on a statewide basis in order to successfully run for a statewide office. He began to speak regularly throughout Massachusetts in 1948 and more frequently after his 1950 reelection. The opportunistic nature of Kennedy's ideological, partisan,

and policy identity during this period was most succinctly yet clearly revealed in an address given at Harvard University on November 10, 1950. Among other opinions that he expressed, the congressman criticized the Truman administration's conduct of the Korean War and spoke favorably about Senator Joseph R. McCarthy's anti-Communist crusade and Republican Congressman Richard M. Nixon's defeat of Democratic Congresswoman Helen Gahagan Douglas.⁵⁷ According to several sources, including the memoirs of Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill, Jr., and Nixon, JFK personally delivered a \$1,000 contribution to Nixon, and his father gave a total of \$150,000 to Nixon's Senate campaign.⁵⁸

In another appearance at Harvard in late 1951, Kennedy disclosed that he definitely intended to run for the Senate in 1952 against the Republican incumbent, Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr.⁵⁹ The titular leader of the Massachusetts Democratic Party, Governor Paul Dever, posed a possible obstacle to JFK's ambition to become a senator. It was widely assumed among Massachusetts Democrats and in the media that Dever would run for the Senate in 1952 instead of reelection as governor.⁶⁰ Congressman Kennedy maintained the façade of being equally available for either of the two statewide offices. He confided, though, to historian and later White House aide Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., his preference for the Senate. "I hate to think of myself up in that corner office deciding on sewer contracts."⁶¹ Likewise, in 1946, Kennedy was relieved that he could begin his political career by running for a congressional seat instead of for lieutenant governor.⁶² Developing his political career in Washington, DC, instead of in state government enabled JFK to separate himself from the intraparty conflicts and spoils of state government and exercise his intellectual interest in foreign policy.⁶³

Shortly after a meeting between JFK and Dever, a Kennedy-Dever campaign organization was established in Boston.⁶⁴ This committee was chaired by John E. Powers, a well-known state senator from South Boston popular among party regulars, and its expenses were mostly covered by the Kennedy campaign. JFK avoided campaigning much with Dever. From JFK's perspective, the purpose of this committee was to nominally identify him with Dever's supporters, especially among party regulars who had long resented the fact that the Kennedys had rarely contributed much to the Democratic state and local committees.⁶⁵ The Kennedy campaign became aware that, except for Dever's most loyal allies in Boston, the governor was increasingly unpopular throughout Massachusetts. JFK was also aware of how popular Republican presidential nominee Dwight Eisenhower and, to a lesser extent, Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin were among Massachusetts voters later in his campaign. Kennedy was careful to limit rhetorically and visually identifying himself with President Truman, Democratic presidential nominee Adlai Stevenson, and Dever.⁶⁶

The Kennedy-Dever campaign committee was one of the least important of the many committees that constituted JFK's campaign organization. The Kennedy campaign exploited state and federal campaign finance laws so that Joseph

Kennedy could spend heavily on it. Also, in order to conduct a truly independent, suprapartisan Senate campaign, a large, diverse network of Kennedy campaign organizations was created throughout Massachusetts.

As early as 1947, Congressman Kennedy had considered running for either governor or senator in 1948. JFK regularly spoke throughout Massachusetts during his House career in order to develop statewide name recognition, but he lacked a statewide organization.⁶⁷ While Joseph Kennedy privately developed the overall campaign strategy and provided seemingly unlimited funding, Robert F. Kennedy directly implemented this strategy and micromanaged its details. RFK created a statewide organization headed by 286 local campaign chairs known as “Kennedy secretaries.”⁶⁸

“Secretaries” signified that these local Kennedy campaign leaders were not necessarily part of regular Democratic committees. This distinction was especially important for local Kennedy committees in heavily Republican rural and suburban communities. Also, some of Kennedy’s “secretaries” were independents and Republicans.

This terminology seemed to be more likely to attract a large number of previously apolitical women and less likely to antagonize local Democratic chairmen.⁶⁹ This connotation was compatible with the Kennedy campaign’s effort to sharply increase voter registration in small and medium-sized cities outside the Boston area, especially among women and young adults. On election day, the percentages of registered voters casting ballots in these cities averaged 91 percent.⁷⁰

The most dramatic, suprapartisan, and possibly bipartisan element of Kennedy’s campaign organization was a committee entitled Independents for Kennedy. It was chaired by T. Walter Taylor. Taylor was a Republican businessman who helped to lead the effort of conservative Republicans in Massachusetts to nominate Senator Robert A. Taft of Ohio for president in 1952. In a letter to other pro-Taft Republicans, Taylor explicitly linked Taft to Joseph Kennedy. He also stated that he and other “Independents and Taft people” were “very happy at the privilege of bringing the Kennedy message to the people.”⁷¹ Ironically, Joseph Kennedy had financially contributed to Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr.’s 1942 reelection campaign in order to spite Franklin D. Roosevelt by implicitly opposing Lodge’s opponent, Democratic Congressman Joseph Casey. Casey was previously opposed in a Democratic senatorial primary by John “Honey Fitz” Fitzgerald.⁷²

In addition to Taylor’s committee, the Kennedys also generated the support—or at least the nonvoting neutrality—of more anti-Lodge, pro-Taft Republicans in Massachusetts through the editorial endorsements of two pro-McCarthy, anti-Lodge publishers. Basil Brewer, a staunch Republican, was outraged by Lodge’s aggressive support for Eisenhower against Taft at the 1952 Republican national convention. Moreover, in June 1951, General Douglas MacArthur told Joseph Kennedy that Lodge “was strictly a pro-Trumanite on foreign policy” and was increasingly alienating conservative Republicans.⁷³

Brewer owned newspapers on Cape Cod and in New Bedford in southeastern Massachusetts. Like the rural areas of western Massachusetts, this region's mostly WASP small towns usually provided huge margins of electoral support for Lodge or any Republican nominee. Brewer praised JFK as a more effective anti-Communist than Lodge. Endorsed by Brewer, JFK carried New Bedford by approximately 21,000 votes and greatly reduced Lodge's support in heavily Republican small towns.⁷⁴

As Congressman Kennedy attacked Lodge for being too soft and ineffective against Communism, his campaign still feared the prospect of Senator McCarthy suddenly traveling to Massachusetts to personally endorse Lodge.⁷⁵ Such an appearance might generate the winning margin of votes for Lodge from previously undecided, pro-McCarthy Democrats and Republicans. While a joint McCarthy-Lodge appearance was never held in Massachusetts, Kennedy received the endorsement of the *Boston Post*.⁷⁶ John Fox, its publisher, was not a Republican activist like Brewer. But he was even more stridently pro-McCarthy than Brewer. He purchased this newspaper in 1952 primarily to advocate his militant anti-Communism and criticism of Truman's foreign policy.

Fox had intended to endorse Lodge, but Brewer's intervention, and, possibly, the loan that he later received from Joseph Kennedy, persuaded Fox to endorse JFK.⁷⁷ With the *Boston Post's* readership concentrated among pro-McCarthy, split-ticket Catholic Democrats, Fox's endorsement helped to further solidify and unite Catholic electoral support for Kennedy. Unfortunately for Lodge, the more cerebral, influential, widely circulated, Brahmin-owned *Boston Globe* remained neutral in the Senate race.

While Kennedy and his media backers relentlessly attacked Lodge from the right, JFK also lambasted Lodge from the left on domestic policy, especially the Taft-Hartley Act.⁷⁸ On such social welfare issues as public housing, minimum wages, Social Security coverage, and federal aid to education, JFK's and Lodge's legislative records were similarly liberal. But Lodge had voted for the Taft-Hartley Act. JFK, however grudgingly, had voted against it and had cordially yet eloquently debated it with Congressman Richard M. Nixon in Pennsylvania in 1947.⁷⁹

Before labor audiences throughout Massachusetts, JFK repeatedly used the Taft-Hartley Act to exaggerate and dramatize his policy differences with Lodge and to excoriate Lodge for not doing enough to prevent the increasing migration of manufacturing jobs, especially in the textile and shoe industries, from Massachusetts to the South.⁸⁰ In particular, JFK blamed the right-to-work provision of this law for giving the South an unfair advantage over Massachusetts in labor costs. Kennedy then used this as the basis for other votes on economic issues in which Lodge allegedly failed to serve his constituents.⁸¹ Despite JFK's chronic absenteeism from his own congressional district and poor attendance record in Washington, his most widely used campaign slogan was that he would more faithfully and diligently serve the policy interests of Massachusetts in the Senate than Lodge had.⁸²

Another dimension of the Kennedy campaign was social, virtually apolitical, and issueless. Rose Kennedy, Joseph Kennedy's wife, her daughters, and daughter-in-law Ethel, RFK's wife, conducted heavily attended, well-advertised coffee and tea parties for women throughout the state. In particular, the Kennedys concentrated these parties in small to medium-sized cities outside the immediate Boston area where their campaign targeted voter registration and turnout drives. These parties highlighted the celebrity and aristocratic status of the Kennedy family, especially among Catholic women of all age cohorts and socioeconomic strata.⁸³ But the formality and dignity of the invitations and reception lines were especially attractive to working-class Catholic women. These often issueless, seemingly nonpartisan parties developed a large receptive audience of viewers for "Coffee with the Kennedys."⁸⁴

"Coffee with the Kennedys" was one of several paid television programs financed by the Kennedy campaign. Consultants had previously coached JFK on the use of television, both in the use of free media, such as interviews on news programs, like *Meet the Press*, and paid media, such as call-in question-and-answer programs. Lodge, by contrast, spent far less on television advertising and often appeared stiff and uncomfortable when televised.⁸⁵ Two television stations in Boston reported that Kennedy spent about \$15,000 and Lodge about \$5,000 on television advertising.⁸⁶ Instead, Lodge emphasized the use of newspaper advertising which compared his voting and absentee records to JFK's.⁸⁷

This advertisement, printed in every daily newspaper in Massachusetts, and Lodge's oratory criticizing the details of Kennedy's legislative record seemed to have little impact on the voters. In general, Lodge conducted a belated, hastily organized, lackluster reelection campaign with no clear, consistent strategy for counterattacks against Kennedy. He refused to indulge in the type of jeering accusations and ridicule about Joseph Kennedy's wealth and power used by Congressman Kennedy's Democratic primary opponents in 1946. The gentlemanly, dignified Republican tried to unite his Republican base, retain the support of Democrats and independents who had previously voted for him, and benefit from the coattails of Dwight Eisenhower. Eisenhower enjoyed a widening lead over Adlai Stevenson in the polls of likely voters in Massachusetts.⁸⁸ Lodge's rhetorical emphasis on the liberal, bipartisan nature of his foreign and domestic policy positions attracted few Democratic voters and further angered and alienated pro-Taft Republicans.⁸⁹

Lodge refused to publicly request a campaign visit by Senator Joseph McCarthy, who had required that Lodge make such a request public. Lodge hoped that a televised, election rally with Dwight Eisenhower in Boston Garden would enable him to prevail. The enthusiasm of the crowds and strict television scheduling, however, prevented Lodge from introducing Eisenhower.

The 1952 election results in Massachusetts yielded a Republican sweep of the governorship, most of the state's U.S. House seats, most seats in both houses

of the state legislature, and the popular and electoral votes for president for the first time since 1924.

They also included a 91 percent voter turnout and an upset victory for John F. Kennedy. JFK received 51.4 percent of the votes in the Senate race and a winning margin of 70,737 votes.⁹⁰ Analysts of and participants in JFK's first Senate campaign have not agreed on one common factor for his victory. Was it the popularity of the tea parties with female voters, sophisticated use of free television coverage and television advertising, the opposition to Lodge from pro-Taft Republicans, possibly influenced by Brewer's and Fox's newspapers, JFK's issue portrayal of Lodge as both anti-labor and soft on Communism, or the absence of a personal endorsement of Lodge by Joe McCarthy?⁹¹ What is more evident and less disputable is that JFK's family-based, suprapartisan network of campaign committees enabled him to attract votes through all of these factors. The Kennedy campaign located offices in remote, staunchly Republican small towns that had rarely, if ever, experienced the presence of active Democratic campaign offices. The Independents for Kennedy committee cultivated the electoral support, or at least the neutrality, of anti-Lodge, pro-Taft Republicans in the Senate race.

The sharing and financing of one committee in Boston with Governor Paul Dever appeased party regulars suspicious of the Kennedys, but this committee had no significant influence on Kennedy's campaign strategy. JFK carefully distanced himself from Dever's floundering campaign. Lawrence F. O'Brien, a Kennedy campaign aide from western Massachusetts, commented that "we would let the regulars do or die for Dever; our only hope was to build our own independent Kennedy organization, city by city, town by town, and, if possible, to build it without offending the party regulars."⁹² Kenneth P. O'Donnell and David F. Powers, two other Kennedy campaign aides, stated, "This was the first campaign for the U.S. Senate, incidentally, in which the candidate had a state-wide organization with headquarters of his own in the various cities and towns."⁹³

While this sprawling, decentralized network of campaign committees helped the Kennedy organization to actively campaign throughout the state, the actual strategy and tactics were privately orchestrated by Joseph P. Kennedy as de facto campaign chairman and publicly implemented by RFK as the official campaign manager.⁹⁴ In a 1967 interview, RFK bluntly stated, "We couldn't win relying on the Democratic political machine, so we had to build up our own machine."⁹⁵ The large number and diversity of campaign committees with such innocuous, misleading, apolitical names as "Improvement of the Textile Industry Committee" and "Build Massachusetts Committee," were also used to receive and expend vast sums of money from the Kennedy fortune and from Joseph P. Kennedy's political allies and business connections. All of these Kennedy committees officially reported \$349,646 in expenditures to the Lodge campaign's official report of \$58,266.⁹⁶

But estimates of the actual amount spent by the Kennedy campaigns range from a half-million to several million dollars.⁹⁷ The officially reported figure does not include the funds spent on the extensive “pre-campaign” from 1947 until April 1952.⁹⁸ During this period, money was spent on polling and campaign operatives as Congressman Kennedy traveled and spoke throughout Massachusetts in order to strengthen his name recognition and help decide whether he would run for governor or senator in 1952 or further delay a statewide race. It also does not include the well-publicized contributions that the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation made to various religious and charitable institutions in Massachusetts.⁹⁹ Finally, it is impossible to accurately calculate the invaluable labor and expertise for the Senate campaign provided by employees and associates of the nationwide Kennedy business interests.

The Kennedy campaign organization was so impressive and successful in 1952 that it was the basis for JFK’s reelection campaign in 1958, in which he received a record-breaking 73 percent of the votes and, to a lesser extent, his 1960 presidential campaign.¹⁰⁰ Within the politics of Massachusetts, JFK’s victory in his 1952 Senate created, in effect, a new, enduring state party—the Kennedy party. Tip O’Neill, who was elected to JFK’s congressional seat in 1952, later ruefully observed that the Kennedy organization “quickly developed into an entire political party, with its own people, its own approach, and its own strategies.”¹⁰¹ Almost fifty years after JFK’s 1952 Senate campaign, political scientist Lawrence Becker concluded that, in Massachusetts, “the state’s royal family, the Kennedys, essentially constitute a separate political party of their own.”¹⁰²

The Kennedy party developed into more than a personal following during the 1950s and 1960s. It became a highly effective, suprapartisan political entity that included a polyglot of voting blocs ranging from socially conservative, lower-income, Catholic, straight-ticket Democrats to socially liberal, “good government,” ticket-splitting, upper-income WASP Republicans.¹⁰³ Its seemingly unlimited finances, prestige, and “winner” status enabled it to attract the best pollsters, media experts, and other campaign professionals and academic advisors, as well as thousands of enthusiastic volunteers. The Kennedy party often either co-opted rival Democratic politicians through campaign contributions, endorsements, or patronage, or decisively defeated opponents in bitter intraparty conflicts. These tactics made even the most determined anti-Kennedy Democrats reluctant to challenge the Kennedy party.

With the Republican-owned *Chicago Tribune* proudly echoing *Look’s* 1946 labeling of JFK as a “fighting conservative,” one of the first phone calls of congratulations that the Massachusetts Democrat received on the election night of 1952 was from Senator Lyndon B. Johnson of Texas.¹⁰⁴ LBJ was currently serving as the Democratic majority whip of the Senate and soon became Senate minority leader because of the GOP’s capture of the Senate. The thirty-five-year-old Democrat’s unexpected triumph over a presumably secure liberal Republican

incumbent closely associated with Eisenhower's candidacy was one of the few electoral successes for the Democratic Party in 1952.¹⁰⁵

JFK's status as a freshman member of the minority party and one of a reduced number of nonsouthern Democrats actually benefited his already budding national ambitions. It made his frequent absences from the Senate floor and committee meetings seem less egregious, and his family's connection to Senator Joseph McCarthy less onerous as the increasingly controversial, beleaguered Wisconsin senator became primarily a burden and an embarrassment for the Republican majority of the Senate and the Eisenhower White House.¹⁰⁶ In his role as Senate minority leader, LBJ's style and strategy sought to position himself as a pragmatic, nonideological, less partisan, national (rather than regional) legislative leader who compromised and cooperated with Eisenhower and the Republicans to develop and pass moderate, consensual legislation in both foreign and domestic policy.¹⁰⁷

LBJ's legislative behavior increased JFK's freedom to stake out independent positions on certain policy issues. For example, Kennedy initially compiled a Senate record as a fiscal conservative who supported Eisenhower's budget cuts, especially for agricultural subsidies and federal water and power programs, favored by most Republicans and opposed by most Democrats in Congress.¹⁰⁸ Johnson's policy of increasing the number of less senior, nonsouthern Democrats assigned to major committees also helped JFK. Kennedy now attracted favorable national publicity, especially for his image as an enlightened centrist regarding the threat of Communist expansion in the Third World and labor relations reform later in the 1950s.¹⁰⁹

Besides benefiting JFK's status in the Senate, LBJ's friendly, often preferential treatment of JFK until the late 1950s freed the Massachusetts Democrat to devote more time and effort to solidifying his domination of the Democratic Party of Massachusetts and developing a national reputation as a popular speaker at party functions and guest in televised news programs.¹¹⁰ These intraparty activities further enhanced JFK's position and reputation at the national level. Kennedy was determined to lead and deliver a united Massachusetts delegation to Adlai Stevenson at the 1956 Democratic national convention in Chicago.

JFK waged a successful yet contentious effort to oust the current Democratic state chairman, William "Onions" Burke, and replace him with John M. "Pat" Lynch. Burke was a party regular from western Massachusetts and a close ally of John W. McCormack, a Democratic congressman from Boston and House majority leader.¹¹¹ Earlier in 1956, Lawrence F. O'Brien provided JFK with a memo analyzing the importance of controlling the Democratic state committee "for the far more practical reason of self-preservation."¹¹² In addition to McCormack, JFK had also developed a mutually suspicious rivalry for control of the state party apparatus with Democratic Governor Foster Furcolo.¹¹³

Before JFK could effectively project a televised appeal to fellow Democrats at the 1956 convention in Chicago and campaign throughout the nation for

Stevenson, he needed to ensure that his own state's delegates were united under his party leadership. In his conclusion, O'Brien ominously warned the Democratic senator, "It is not necessary to cite other examples of specific adverse affect (sic) of failure to accept leadership. . . . Certainly this alone could be disastrous to any person seeking national recognition within the Party."¹¹⁴ As the new Democratic state committee chairman, Pat Lynch was JFK's rubber stamp at the national convention. Lynch was also grudgingly acceptable to McCormack and Furcolo.¹¹⁵

From JFK's perspective, Chicago was an excellent site for the 1956 Democratic national convention. Joseph P. Kennedy owned the Merchandise Mart in Chicago. It was managed by one of his sons-in-law, R. Sargent Shriver, and they had cultivated a friendly political and business relationship with Mayor Richard J. Daley.¹¹⁶ With Daley's control of the largest bloc of Democratic delegates from Illinois and his machine's ability to "pack the galleries" and deter demonstrations by an opponent's delegates, JFK was later disappointed to learn that the Democratic National Committee chose Los Angeles, not Chicago, to host the 1960 Democratic national convention. Also, Chicago's location and time zone were conducive to coast-to-coast television broadcasts of the proceedings.

Having so far remained aloof from the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), whose liberal activism was unpopular with party regulars and southern conservatives, JFK had been chosen by the DNC to narrate its campaign film, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, and by Stevenson supporters to nominate Adlai Stevenson for president. Kennedy was selected for both speaking roles partially because of his popular reputation as a guest speaker at party functions and his acceptability to a broad spectrum and variety of often conflicting Democrats.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, the fame of JFK's best-selling book, *Profiles in Courage*, and Joseph P. Kennedy's influence with the film's producer, Hollywood mogul Dore Schary, also helped to secure the selection of JFK as its narrator.¹¹⁸

In dictating notes for his memoirs in 1963, JFK stated that in every political contest it was essential for him to begin campaigning earlier than his opponents.¹¹⁹ It was uncharacteristic, then, for JFK to reject his father's advice and suddenly compete for the Democratic vice-presidential nomination after Adlai Stevenson announced that he would let the convention select his running mate.¹²⁰ Stevenson had been previously warned by party leaders that his most likely running mate, Senator Estes Kefauver of Tennessee, was unpopular with southern conservatives for his moderate position on civil rights. Kefauver was also opposed by urban machine bosses for his televised committee investigation of organized crime that had revealed collusion between gangsters and local Democratic politicians during the Truman administration.¹²¹ Stevenson disliked his former competitor for the presidential nomination. Some advisors believed that the convention needed to seriously and publicly consider the selection of a Catholic vice-presidential nominee in order to improve Stevenson's image with Catholic voters.¹²²

With this unexpected opportunity, JFK, his staff, and family began to actively lobby delegates for the vice-presidential nomination. The results of the first ballot for vice-presidential nominee indicated that, except for JFK, the delegate support for the twelve candidates competing against Kefauver was mostly scattered among favorite-son candidates. What embarrassed Kefauver and further weakened his delegate strength was the fact that all thirty-two of his home state's delegates voted for his junior colleague from Tennessee, Senator Albert Gore, Sr.¹²³ With 687 votes needed for the Democratic vice-presidential nomination, Kefauver received 483½ votes to JFK's 304 on the first ballot.¹²⁴

On the second ballot, Senator Estes Kefauver was nominated for vice president by a close margin of 755½ votes to JFK's 589.¹²⁵ At one point in this process, Kennedy came within thirty-eight votes of being nominated for vice president. The greater significance of the second ballot's results was the broad, diverse regional, factional, and ideological distribution of delegate support for JFK.¹²⁶ The Massachusetts Democrat received votes from almost all of the northeastern and Illinois delegates, all of the delegates from Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia, and most of the delegates from Alabama and North Carolina.¹²⁷

Impressed by the solid backing that he received from conservative, segregationist southern delegates, the New England Catholic senator told journalist Arthur Krock, "I'll be singing 'Dixie' the rest of my life."¹²⁸ Determined to leave the delegates at the convention and the television audience a gracious impression, JFK told his fellow conventioners that the spirited contest for the vice-presidential nomination "proves as nothing else can prove how strong and united the Democratic Party is."¹²⁹ After JFK asked that the convention make Kefauver's nomination unanimous by acclamation, the convention responded with thunderous applause.

While JFK conducted a national speaking tour promoting the Stevenson-Kefauver ticket, RFK traveled with the Stevenson campaign as an observer in order to learn how to manage a presidential campaign.¹³⁰ RFK later admitted that he voted for Eisenhower in 1956 because of his disgust with the inefficiency and disorganization of Stevenson's campaign.¹³¹ With polls confirming the conventional wisdom that Dwight Eisenhower would be easily reelected, the actual, self-serving purpose of JFK's speaking tour was to convince the major Democratic power brokers that he was loyal and diligent to their party's presidential ticket. He also wanted to solidify his proven bases of delegate strength in the Northeast and South while cultivating Democratic activists elsewhere in the nation.¹³²

Kennedy delivered a speech to the Young Democrats of North Carolina at the Robert E. Lee Hotel in Winston-Salem on October 5, 1956. The senator from Massachusetts dismissed Eisenhower's contention that the Republican Party was "the party of the future" oriented toward young Americans.¹³³ Criticizing the dearth of young men in the Eisenhower administration and its policies, JFK

asserted that “it is the Democratic Party that is the party of change, the party of tomorrow as well as today.”¹³⁴ Praising his party’s domestic and foreign policy ideas as more progressive and appealing to youth and the prominent number of younger Democrats who held high elective offices, JFK concluded, “Adlai Stevenson, and the young men and women who are supporting him and running for office with him, truly represent a new America.”¹³⁵

From the time of his speaking tour for Stevenson in 1956 until he officially announced his presidential candidacy on January 2, 1960, JFK’s speeches throughout the nation sought to transform one of his liabilities as a prospective presidential candidate, his youth, into an asset. He accepted a disproportionate number of speaking invitations from organizations of Young Democrats, civic associations oriented toward young businessmen and professionals, and colleges and universities. These speeches often combined an idealistic tone, especially concerning a new direction for American foreign policy in the Third World, with a pragmatic, centrist content, especially regarding the reform of labor-management relations.¹³⁶ JFK’s rhetoric associated youth with a receptivity to new, bold ideas in contrast with the presumably backward looking stagnation of the Republican Party.

JFK and his chief speechwriter, Theodore C. Sorensen, cultivated an image of the Massachusetts Democrat as a reform-minded intellectual through his speeches and magazine articles.¹³⁷ They were careful to avoid having the public perceive JFK as a liberal ideologue. During his first year as a senator, JFK firmly stated to the *Saturday Evening Post* that he was not a liberal and did not belong to the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), the most prominent group of liberal activists. Nevertheless, DNC chairman Paul M. Butler did invite JFK to join the Democratic Advisory Council (DAC) that the DNC established shortly after the 1956 election.¹³⁸ Since the DAC sought to formulate and advocate more distinctly and consistently liberal policies for future national platforms, including civil rights, JFK declined this invitation.¹³⁹ He formally justified this decision by citing the need to base his legislative behavior on the needs and interests of his constituents, rather than on partisan or ideological lines, as he prepared for his 1958 reelection campaign.¹⁴⁰

Eleanor Roosevelt, a member of the ADA and DAC, emerged as a harsh, outspoken critic of JFK, partially because of her conviction that JFK lacked sincere liberal principles. But JFK did not want to antagonize Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn and Senate Majority Leader Lyndon B. Johnson. Rayburn and LBJ criticized the DNC for interfering with their congressional party leadership.¹⁴¹ JFK waited until November 1959 to join the DAC. He did this a few weeks after a memo from an aide warned JFK that in order to secure the Democratic presidential nomination he needed to be identified “as a 1960 liberal in clear and unmistakable terms.”¹⁴²

Kennedy’s voting record on legislation and, to a lesser extent, his campaign rhetoric became more consistently and emphatically liberal after the 1958 Senate election results. With a sharp increase in the number of nonsouthern, liberal

Democrats elected to the Senate, LBJ's position and effectiveness as a power broker for bipartisan, multiregional, nonideological centrism and compromise were greatly diminished.¹⁴³ Liberal activists and voting blocs, like organized labor and civil rights advocates, were now more confident that they could insist on a liberal platform and a liberal presidential ticket in 1960.¹⁴⁴

On the issue of civil rights, however, JFK was still questioned and challenged about his commitment to stronger civil rights laws and their effective enforcement. White liberals and NAACP leaders were especially chagrined at JFK's distinction as one of the few nonsouthern Democrats to join southern Democrats and conservative Republicans in voting to refer the civil rights bill of 1957 to the Senate Judiciary Committee, chaired by James O. Eastland of Mississippi, an unyielding segregationist. JFK also voted to adopt a jury trial amendment for this bill, in effect a guarantee of usually all-white juries in the South for persons prosecuted for violating this statute.¹⁴⁵ Originally enlisted to maximize black electoral support in Massachusetts for JFK's 1958 reelection campaign, Marjorie Lawson, a black civil rights leader and attorney, served as JFK's spokeswoman and liaison with NAACP members and other civil rights activists to assure them of JFK's mostly liberal views on civil rights issues.¹⁴⁶ Nevertheless, Kennedy found it necessary to periodically defend his two controversial votes on the 1957 civil rights bill as matters of procedures and principles, namely, respect for typical committee procedures on any bill and for the Common Law tradition of trial by jury. He also distributed a memo to northern liberal Democrats outlining his entire record on civil rights issues.¹⁴⁷

But Kennedy's speeches on civil rights, especially before southern audiences, were balanced and courteous enough in tone and substance to minimally satisfy the more moderate southern opponents of the federal integration of public education and other civil rights objectives. Angry with Eisenhower for appointing Earl Warren to the Supreme Court and sending the U.S. Army to integrate Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1957, southern whites were less inclined to vote Republican for president in 1960, especially if the Republican and Democratic national platforms of 1960 were similarly liberal on civil rights.¹⁴⁸ In the late 1950s, JFK usually stated that all Americans should respect and obey the authority of the Supreme Court but were also free to disagree with its decisions.¹⁴⁹

When JFK criticized how Eisenhower enforced school integration in Little Rock, some southern politicians had the impression that a Kennedy administration would be more accommodating and "reasonable" in implementing federal court orders and civil rights laws than another Republican administration.¹⁵⁰ Consequently, the earliest southern supporters of JFK's still unannounced presidential candidacy were the segregationist governors of Mississippi and Alabama. John Patterson, then the Democratic governor of Alabama, later stated that he and other pro-JFK southern Democratic politicians hoped that if they contributed to JFK's election to the presidency then "we would have a place where we could get an audience for the problems that we had and could be heard."¹⁵¹

In short, JFK, as an unannounced presidential candidate from 1956 to 1959, succeeded in solidifying the base of support that he received for his impressive yet unsuccessful vice-presidential candidacy at the 1956 Democratic national convention and extending his appeal to party leaders and factions that were previously neutral or hostile toward his presidential ambition. JFK's sophisticated media skills, eclectic, centrist policy record, and idealistic, cerebral speaking style enabled him to attract the pre-convention support of a variety of often conflicting factions and interests within the national Democratic Party. In his biography of JFK, first published in 1959, James MacGregor Burns observed that the weak, decentralized nature and structure of the national Democratic Party were well suited to JFK's political assets and pursuit of intraparty support prior to 1960. "He is no more willing to be thrust into the role of organizational 'Democrat' than into any other. Kennedy is independent not only of party, but of factions within the party."¹⁵²

JFK's prior experiences, struggles, and victories in his home state's steadily growing yet bitterly factionalized Democratic Party and his family's development of a superimposed Kennedy party in Massachusetts as the vehicle for his ambitions prepared him well for seeking the Democratic presidential nomination within such a byzantine, fragmented organizational environment.¹⁵³ Before JFK formally announced his presidential candidacy in 1960, he was able to campaign unofficially for the presidency through public speaking and private negotiations and generate favorable publicity because of his Senate activities and reelection campaign in Massachusetts. Fortunately for JFK, few journalists critically emphasized his frequent absences from the Senate while he campaigned to cultivate a broad, consensual bandwagon effect behind him among Democratic power brokers and grassroots activists before 1960.

Ironically, the Democrat who was instrumental in enabling JFK to use his Senate seat as the foundation for developing his presidential campaign was the same Democrat who eventually posed the greatest threat to JFK's nomination at the 1960 convention—Senator Lyndon B. Johnson. First as minority leader and then as majority leader, LBJ led the Senate Democrats throughout JFK's Senate career. Despite Kennedy's lack of seniority and his reputation for inattentive behavior toward the drudgery of committee duties, LBJ ensured that JFK was appointed to the highly coveted Foreign Relations and Labor Committees in the Senate.¹⁵⁴ LBJ's indulgence toward JFK made it easier for the Massachusetts Democrat to use these two committee positions, especially the latter, to attract favorable publicity.

Meanwhile, JFK was often absent from committee meetings and Senate roll-call votes as he campaigned frequently during the late 1950s.¹⁵⁵ The most significant event during the second balloting for the vice-presidential nomination at the 1956 Democratic national convention was LBJ's decision to switch all fifty-six of Texas's delegate votes from Al Gore, Sr., to JFK.¹⁵⁶ At the time, JFK may not have realized that Johnson was boosting Kennedy's political career in order to eventually help the Texan fulfill his own presidential ambition.¹⁵⁷