

Who Wants Circus *Politicus*?

The political convention . . . demands organizational skill and manipulative genius—both of which qualities are exceeding useful in democratic government.

—Pendleton Herring, 1965

Professor Herring was referring to presidential candidates in this quote, but its relevance to them has declined as presidential nominating conventions have largely ratified decisions made by primary and caucus voters since the reforms of the 1970s. Today, we argue the quote more aptly applies to the cities that host the conventions. Cities develop bid strategies and compete with one another to entice the national party committees to choose them. Cities are at the center of complex intergovernmental and public-private networks to plan and implement political conventions. Cities decide how much to invest in infrastructure to attract tourism generally and mega-events specifically as part of their economic development efforts. When presidential nomination conventions or other mega-events come to town, cities can benefit from the short-term boost in delegate spending and the longer-term reputational benefits brought by the national and international media attention. While the potential benefits of mega-events are relatively clear, how and why cities weigh the costs and benefits of pursuing them change over time, how they implement these strategies differently than a normal tourism promotion strategy, and how local politicians (as opposed to the city collectively) can benefit from them are more open questions.

Political scientists have devoted little recent attention to presidential nominating conventions. As the preeminent scholar of conventions, Byron Shafer (2010: 264) puts it, “[C]onventions are widely overlooked—marginalized, even disrespected—as research sites for understanding partisan politics in the United States.” This marginalization is understandable. Since the reforms of the presidential selection process in the 1970s, party nominating conventions no longer decide who the party’s presidential nominee will be.¹ Voters in state primaries and caucuses have made that decision; the convention makes their selection official. We argue that the politics of the convention is now outside the conventional hall. The story of contemporary presidential nominating conventions is less about the nomination of presidential candidates than about the partnership between the parties and the cities to capture the media attention and advance their own goals. Conventions “inseparably linked a city and a political party in their quests for national respect” (Sack, 1987a).

A Partnership: Cities and Parties

In the process of recruiting and implementing a political convention, the host city develops many organizational partnerships and faces the critical task of coordinating them. The most important of these partnerships is with the national party committee that seeks a city as its agent to implement its convention. The party’s goal for the convention is to motivate its delegates to work hard to elect the party nominee and to create a weeklong infomercial for viewers to persuade them to vote for the party nominee. The party seeks a partner in the host city to whom it can delegate the logistics and transaction costs so it can keep its attention (and that of the media) on the party’s message of unity, accomplishment, and promise. The party needs the city to entertain the delegates and media representatives, keep demonstrators out of the news, and fix inevitable glitches quickly and competently so that the only story occurs on the podium.

Cities’ Goals

The city uses its success in the party’s site selection process and accepts the grunt work of implementing the convention to take advantage of the party’s media spotlight to signal the city’s qualities to multiple audiences simultaneously. The city signals to business leaders with the goal of attracting and retaining companies to bolster the local economy and protect or strengthen its existing tax base (Spence, 1973; Preuss and Alf, 2011).

The convention site selection process is a key means by which a city signals its desirable qualities. For cities, the site selection process is an Olympic competition of assets and entrepreneurialism. The city chooses to put itself in a contest with other cities to demonstrate to the party that it has the capacity and can-do spirit to merit hosting the nominating convention. Selection as host by an outside judge verifies the victor's claims regarding the city's merits, adding to the credibility of its marketing claims: "We are a World Class city—an attractive location for conventions, businesses, tourists, and new residents." The victory allows the city to get the attention of audiences who otherwise wouldn't consider the city or to gain an advantage over direct competitors for an organizational convention² or business relocation decision. Winners have shown that they are desirable locations.

Cities are constantly attempting to signal their qualities to maintain existing residents and businesses, and to recruit new ones. They want to let people know that they offer the infrastructure, amenities, and opportunities that lead to a better quality of life. They signal through active advertising campaigns and targeted recruitment efforts. The challenge for any individual city is that the recruitment environment is competitive. Many cities have very similar packages of assets and amenities, and all engage in recruitment and advertising efforts. A business or resident considering relocation thus faces a cacophony of messages from suitors with few clear differences to distinguish one from another. The city has to figure out how to get its signal recognized in an environment where all its competitors are sending similar messages. How can Charlotte distinguish itself from Charlottesville and Charleston? Hosting the Democratic National Convention (DNC) signals that it has more capacity. How can Charlotte distinguish itself from forty-two other major-league cities? Hosting the DNC signals it has the entrepreneurialism. The value of a mega-event is the strength of the signal. It temporarily overrides the competing signals in the environment and allows a city to reach domestic and international audiences who otherwise would be less likely to receive its message. Would the average American know anything about Sochi, Russia, had it not hosted the 2014 Winter Olympics?

The city, of course, cannot control either the size of the television audience or the way the media and social media will report on the city. Viewers are obviously tuning in to hear news coverage about the conventions and to hear party luminaries speak directly. Indeed, the Nielson ratings of party conventions since 1984 show that viewership of both party conventions track together, regardless of their locations or even the competitiveness of the election.³ The city tries to supply positive stories about itself to the media during the week, and head off or mitigate negative stories that would damage the city or take the focus off the party nominees.

Beyond the television audience, the participants in attendance at a political convention make particularly good targets for cities to disseminate their messages. The largest single group of visitors during the convention is actually not the delegates; it's the thousands of national and international reporters who will cover the convention. National news reporters will set up broadcasting booths, and convention coverage will be during prime time on all of the major networks. Months before the convention even comes to town, reporters write stories about the city and its preparations. Hosting the Republican or Democratic national convention is one of the biggest publicity opportunities that a city can achieve.

Furthermore, while the delegates themselves are often influential party activists in their hometowns, the influence quotient of the elected and unelected national and state leadership of the party, corporate leaders, and domestic and international media can hardly be equaled. As observed by Bill Langkopp, director of the Greater New Orleans Hotel and Motel Association, "Everybody is a big shot. At most conventions everybody thinks they are big shots but they are not. Here, you do have governors and senators" (quoted in Roth, 1991). These elites come with expectations of being treated well, can make lots of noise when they don't think they are being treated well, and can draw lots of attention whether they complain in private or in public, especially in the age of social media. Cities desire positive word of mouth from the attendees of any convention, but attendees at most conventions do not have the same level of clout and visibility as political conventions attendees.

Charlotte Chamber of Commerce president Bob Morgan explains the specific value of the signaling opportunity provided by political convention:

Usually we are going out to sell the Charlotte story and trying to find people who will listen. This week they're coming to us.⁴ . . . This was a chance to be seen by millions of people who had never been to Charlotte before. . . . Media was here for a year and a half—trade journals, broader publications from New York, DC, Europe, Asia. The media is here for the whole week [of the convention], but they're really interested in Thursday night. We're feeding them stories Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday about Charlotte. . . . I got to do a thirty-minute show on C-SPAN to talk about Charlotte. All softball questions. I'm talking like I'm talking to a corporate executive [who might be persuaded to move]. . . . What is all that worth? You can't put a price on it.⁵

For cities, conventions and other mega-events provide a branding opportunity that cannot be duplicated by traditional marketing and business recruitment campaigns.

Motivations

Certainly, the potential benefits of signaling via mega-events are real for any city. But there is likely to be variation among cities in terms of the specific goal they desire to achieve with this strategy. We consider three types of cities and their motivations: 1) the global city; 2) the redeveloping city; 3) the emerging city. Of course, there are also cities that would not follow a mega-event signaling strategy because they have not invested in the tourism infrastructure to do so effectively.

The megacities of the United States already have domestic and international reputations as centers of business and tourism. They may be traditional megacities (New York City, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Boston) or large, tourism-oriented cities (New Orleans, San Antonio, San Diego, Miami). They have long had the size and infrastructure to host political conventions, sports championships, and other mega-events. They bid for conventions because they can. They have the infrastructure, which was created in part for purposes such as these, so they might as well use them and get some additional economic payoff from them. Because they have established reputations, the signaling benefits of a political convention are low compared to other cities. In fact, there may even be reputational risks in the partisan message of a convention or in security breakdowns (for example, the pitched battles at the 1968 Chicago DNC between police and anti-Vietnam War protesters). For these cities, attracting a political convention is part of their ongoing efforts to maintain their visibility and promote their images as world-class cities. But as the costs of conventions increase, whether from the disruption to commerce caused by post-9/11 security measures or having to risk already strong tourism and convention business for a political convention, these cities are more likely than others to drop out of the competition for political convention bids (Heberlig et al., 2016).

Older industrial cities (Baltimore, Detroit, Philadelphia, Minneapolis, Indianapolis, St. Louis, Cleveland) have invested in tourism infrastructure as redevelopment strategies (Frieden and Sagalyn, 1989; Judd, 2003). They seek to replace the loss of manufacturing jobs with downtowns of office towers, festival malls, convention centers, atrium hotels, sports stadia, redeveloped waterfronts, aquariums, and other amenities to attract the spending of middle-class

employees and tourists. Redeveloping cities need conventions and mega-events as the strong signal for their audience to update and revise their image of the city from one of decay to one of vibrancy and culture. Philadelphia's victory in the 2000 contest for the Republican National Convention (RNC) was hailed as a "rare bit of cachet, and capped the mayor's relentless eight-year effort to turn [Philadelphia] from a nearly bankrupt husk into a worthy rival of the nation's great urban centers" (Nicholas, 2000).⁶

Emerging cities use bids for conventions (and obtaining major-league sports teams) to signal their status to a world that may not know much about them (Dallas, Atlanta, Houston in the 1970s and 1980s, Denver, Charlotte, Tampa, Salt Lake, Phoenix in the 1990s and 2000s). They may not (yet) be the New Yorks or Chicagos, but their bids show that they have the infrastructure to be players in this arena. Denver invested heavily in sports infrastructure and other amenities as "part of a conscious effort to position Denver in the emerging global urban hierarchy" (Clarke and Saiz, 2003: 174), and its multiple bids for political conventions fit securely within that strategy. The 1984 RNC was Dallas's chance to move away from the legacy of the Kennedy assassination, and shift its image from the "scandalous oilmen" of the 1980s television show *Dallas* and the "scantily clad Dallas cowboy cheerleaders" to "one of culture, class, and clout" (McCartney, 1984). The chief of staff to Charlotte's mayor argued that the 2012 DNC gave Charlotte "a new brand. Now people see Charlotte as a metropolitan city rather than a small town. . . . A modern, new American city."⁷

Particularly for the emerging and redeveloping cities, bidding for conventions is a means for city leaders to share the vision for what they want the city to be with residents and potential residents. In this sense, any concrete economic benefits may be beside the point to leaders of these cities (Judd, 1999: 51–52). The site selection process, and later if the city is selected, the implementation process of the convention gives residents a common cause around which to rally. Being selected as host not only advertises a city's vision to meeting planners and businesses, but it is also a powerful civic validation of the leaders and residents of the city. Particularly for cities that do not have widely recognized historical or cultural assets, iconic structures, or resort-like physical locations (Fainstain and Judd, 1999), mega-events may be part of the city's strategy to attract visitors to pay off its investments in tourism infrastructures.

Not a Shriners Convention and Not the Olympics

While attracting tourism and convention business is a standard city development strategy, the presence of the dignitaries and attendant security precautions and national and international media attention change the nature of

convention implementation for political conventions. Core elements are the same: assuring that delegates have hotels, food, transportation, and entertainment.⁸ But political conventions also carry much higher risks of terrorism and disruptions from demonstrators, who also take advantage of the media presence to magnify their messages. The intensive security precautions and large security perimeters surrounding the arenas to deal with them can potentially disrupt existing city business, particularly post-9/11. Cities may prefer their typical in-house planning process, but when the Secret Service is protecting national leaders, it's going to be a top-down operation (chapter 4). Likewise, cities must draw upon thousands of additional police from other cities and integrate them effectively into the local force for a week. Nor do ordinary conventions spur revisions of ordinances on parades and use of public spaces to keep demonstrators from blocking commuters and delegates. And as the city implements its extensive security perimeter, it must communicate with local businesses and residents so that they can adjust their routines accordingly. During the convention, the city must continue to provide routine services to residents while providing world-class treatment to visiting dignitaries, putting a premium on coordination between city departments that do not regularly need to coordinate.

Unlike the Olympics, political conventions cannot be used by local leaders to redevelop sections of the city or to bring in substantial intergovernmental capital revenues (Preuss, 2004). The parties want cities with assets in place. Yet conventions are credit-claiming opportunities that local leaders can use to boost residents' evaluations of the effectiveness of city government and provide a platform for seeking higher office (chapter 5).

Seeking political conventions can fit squarely within cities' broader strategies of tourism-oriented economic development and national and international branding efforts. Certainly the large numbers of attendees make political conventions inviting targets to implement such strategies. At the same time, the intense media coverage and high profiles of the attendees create additional risks to go with the potential rewards for cities. How cities evaluate the risk-reward trade-off is a key to understanding the city politics of convention activities. Additionally, unlike implementing most other types of conventions, political conventions require the city to achieve its goals while simultaneously promoting the objectives of the national party whose main event it is hosting.

Party Goals

If staging a successful nominating convention is important to cities competing for attention, it is critically important to the national party committees.

The convention is one the core functions of the national party committees, and it is the only aspect of the presidential nomination campaign over which they exert substantial control. Presidential conventions and debates are the few campaign events to which a large proportion of the population will pay attention, thereby providing parties with the opportunity to activate their own supporters, remind weak supporters why they typically vote for the party, and frame issues and candidate qualifications in a way that will appeal to persuadable voters. The convention acceptance speech is one of the best opportunities for the nominee to communicate the party's message to the public. Indeed, depending on the election, 15% to 30% of voters claim to make their vote choices during the conventions in the American National Election Studies (Shafer, 2010: 274). Analyses of convention effects on public opinion not only find a short-term "convention bump" for the candidate (Campbell, 2001; Campbell, Cherry, and Wink, 1992; Cera and Weinschenk, 2012; Gelman and King, 1993; Hagen and Johnston, 2007; Hillygus and Jackman, 2003) but also a longer-term effect on candidate support (Atkinson et al., 2014; Erickson and Wlezien, 2012; Shaw and Roberts, 2000; Stimson, 2004). If the national parties are to contribute to the election of their party's presidential nominee, the best way to do it is by controlling the media's message and image about the party and its nominee by executing a competent convention. As presidential elections scholar James W. Davis (1983: 154) argues, "[A] smooth and well-run convention offers the public evidence of the party and the candidate's capacity to manage the government."

The "out" party is particularly dependent on a smooth nominating convention as evidence of its competence, since it does not control the machinery of government to show its skills in policy development and implementation. Mismanaged scheduling of speakers, a partially plagiarized speech from the nominee's wife, technical problems in the arena, allowing Senator Ted Cruz to speak without endorsing the nominee, and repeated off-message comments by the nominee (including attacks on the governor of the host state), led to headlines questioning Donald Trump's managerial capabilities in 2016 (e.g., Henneberger, 2016; Peoples and Colvin, 2016; Politico, 2016; Stokol, 2016). In fact, a post-convention Gallup poll found that 51% of respondents were less likely to vote for Trump based on what they saw or read about the GOP convention compared to 36% who were more likely to vote for him, the only negative net rating the firm has ever measured following the conventions (Jones, 2016).⁹ In contrast, the smoothly managed DNC produced a net positive rating of 4 points for Hillary Clinton in the Gallup polls.

Cotter and Hennessy (1964) describe the twofold task of the national committees during the convention: "It is a function of the national committee

to make possible one of the most important decisions in Western democracy, namely, the nomination of a candidate for president of the United States. But it is also the committee's task to be sure that the nomination takes place in a context in which there are enough sheets and enough telephones for all" (109). Our research question is how the parties achieve both these convention goals—nominating a candidate and handling the logistics—simultaneously. Our theoretical starting point is that the parties seek to prioritize their energy on their first and most important goal of nominating the candidate and controlling the message through the media by delegating achievement of the second goal—the sheets, telephones, and quartering of troops—to the host cities. The party needs a partner with the assets to make its production feasible, the amenities and energy to give the attendees an enjoyable convention, and the ability to fix the glitches. Snafus inevitably happen during conventions, “[b]ut when hotels are roach-infested, burglarized, or located in inconvenient places, the party's image suffers” (Smith and Nimmo, 1991: 85). The challenge of the site selection process is to develop a way to entice competent host cities to bid, and to distinguish the competent hosts from the bidding cities that talk a good game. Once the host is selected, the party can retain its control over the aspects of the convention that are most critical to the dissemination of its message—the renovation of the arena and negotiations with the media—then delegate many of the other logistical tasks of implementation to the city.

The Party Signal

The parties use conventions to send multiple signals. The verbal signals, which are often supplemented by visuals such as films, introduce the nominee and establish themes for the general election campaign. The nonverbal signals are also critical, and thus are also subject to considerable planning and attention to execution by the party: who speaks, unity of delegates, and the physical environment.

The parties' extensive efforts to script the conventions as infomercials for the media to disseminate are well established (see especially Panagopolous, 2007; Smith and Nimmo, 1991). In the infomercial convention, the primary role of delegates is less to select the nominee or ratify the platform than to be the “cheering section for the nominee.”¹⁰ Delegates are provided “home-made” signs—and, in fact, are prohibited from bringing their own—and are led in cheers and chants at designated times (Panagopolous, 2007: 7; Polsby et al., 2012: 137). Though members of the media establishment may complain about the scripted, no-news nature of contemporary conventions, Polsby and colleagues conclude (2012: 136): “[C]onventions are now judged by pundits

on how well they are organized as advertisements. Any intrusion of substantive debate (such as platform disagreements) into the convention is considered a breach of unity and therefore a sign of weakness in the party. More serious still is poor entertainment.” Even Donald Trump’s promise to create a more interesting, Hollywood-style convention ended up as the standard podium-oriented speaker convention fare. As *The Cook Political Report’s* Amy Walter observed, “The most disruptive candidate in modern history has done nothing to dismantle or redefine the party convention” (2016).

The choreography of delegates promotes the convention’s core message of unity: the party is united and enthusiastic about its nominee (Wayne, 2011). The party must introduce its nominee to the voter in a way that mobilizes the party’s traditional supporters to work on behalf of the candidate during the election while simultaneously appealing to swing voters. The party wants to place the nominee in the context of the rich legacy of heroes and accomplishments of the party while simultaneously charting the nominee’s vision for the future of the nation. In essence, the convention serves as the bridge between the nominee’s primary campaign and a general election campaign appealing to a more diverse electorate.

The party will present its convention message both directly through speeches, and indirectly through choices of imagery and visuals—including the selection of who speaks and provides entertainment (Philpot, 2008). Who the party strategically chooses to speak is critical because the media decides which speakers to cover. So much so that Don Fowler, former chair of the Democratic National Committee, has asserted the party’s choice of “the messenger is more important than the message” (quoted in Smith and Nimmo, 1991: 64). Even the demographic mix of delegates itself provides visual, social group cues to the audience (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler, 2002). The convention will mix consensual issues and imagery (how many flag images can be packed into each camera angle; condemning terrorism and praising fiscal responsibility), with messages that will contrast one party effectively with the other: emphasizing issues “owned” by the party (Petrocik, 1996), critiques of the other party, and repetitive talking points for supporters (to increase the likelihood that viewers who are only watching short snippets are exposed to the core points).

In addition to determining who speaks, the other key facet of the party’s message control is the creation of the visual environment that viewers will see. The stage itself is part of the party message: the height and shape of the stage, the style of the podium and chairs, the backdrop, the colors, the lighting, are all planned to achieve an objective such as making the candidate stand

out, to project calmness and confidence, and to reassure the audience about the nominee on an emotional level.¹¹ In fact, the major expense to the party of producing the convention is to reconstruct the city arena as a production stage for the party message. In 1988, New Orleans officials went so far as hiring an architectural consultant just to help them design the delegates' chairs (which cost \$805,500 in 2014 dollars) to look good on television (Roth, 1991). The message the viewer expects to receive comes from the content and identity of the speakers, but it is powerfully supplemented by the visual world constructed in the arena.

The parties' message management is more critical than ever given the declining amount of live television coverage in the past several election cycles (Panagopolous, 2007; Shaffer, 2010) and the simultaneous rise of full-time cable news stations devoted to commentary and instant analysis. In this environment, the parties have a smaller margin for error as any "off message" moment has the potential to crowd out a large portion of coverage and marginalize the message the party wants the audience to receive. This challenge is magnified with the growing importance of the new media, many of whose chroniclers never seek to go into the arena or interview any party officials, and the fact that anyone (indeed, everyone) can "report" on convention-related happenings through social media. Anything occurring in the city or by people associated with the convention can now easily find a broader audience.

Thus, despite its best efforts, the party cannot entirely control the message coming out of the convention. The more they attempt to script the media, the more the media will seek stories that are unscripted. Conflict and drama bring the media their audience, and professional journalists resist being used as mouthpieces for the parties. As R. Sam Garrett (2007: 126–27) observes, "[I]n bringing increased political order, modern conventions also open themselves to *message crises* in lack of coverage and lack of interest. Modern conventions can be just plain boring. This causes political journalists and producers to focus on whatever conflict they find, sometimes implying crises based on minor disagreements" [*italics in original*]. In 2012, for example, considerable media attention was devoted to whether Governor Chris Christie's speech promoted Christie more than GOP candidate Mitt Romney, and what Clint Eastwood was doing in pretending to have a conversation with an empty chair (representing President Obama). Other times, the disagreements are real: Pat Buchanan's culture war speech in 1992, the Democrats preventing Pennsylvania governor Robert Casey from delivering an antiabortion speech in 1992, or Texas senator Ted Cruz's prime-time diss of 2016 GOP nominee Donald Trump as he urged delegates to "vote their conscience." The parties

and the nominees thus have considerable incentive to negotiate platform concessions and make other accommodations to losing candidates and party factions to keep them from using the nearby cameras to air their grievances (Malbin 1981). And other times, the media focuses on events outside the hall: the 1968 battle between anti-Vietnam War demonstrators and police in the streets of Chicago, and Hurricane Isaac in Tampa 2012. Often the events of the convention that captivate the audience are the human moments that may have little policy or “political” content. As Ricky Kirschner, executive producer of DNC 2012, observes: “I can tell you what the highlights of the Tony Awards, Super Bowl halftime show are ahead of time because we plan them. I can’t tell you what the highlight of the convention will be. Gore kissing Tipper. Obama walking out at Invesco Field. Obama’s 2004 convention speech. We couldn’t have predicted ahead of time that these would be the memorable events.”¹²

Regardless of what events end up receiving lots of media play and making a public impression, there is little doubt that parties try to maximize the messages favorable to them and minimize distracting or incongruent messages. To do this, they need a partner—a host city who will not only relieve the party of many of the transaction costs of putting on the big production (finding hotels and entertaining thousands of delegates and allies, recruiting thousands of volunteers, upgrading telecommunications capacities for the media—and smart phone—using hordes) but who also will competently issue permits to get the arena and hotels renovated on time, raise the funds to pay for the production, protect the dignitaries and contain the demonstrators (without beating them up), fix the inevitable glitches quickly and quietly, and “feed the [media] beast” with positive stories.¹³ By selecting a competent host, the party will increase the probability that voters will judge the party to be competent and worthy of support (e.g., Cover, 1986; Peffley, Feldman, and Sigelman, 1987).

Recently, the Democratic Party has made a more concerted effort to use the presence of the convention as a tactic to mobilize local residents (see chapter 5). The city’s host committee, which traditionally has focused on entertaining the delegates and visiting dignitaries, organizes festival activities to which local residents are also invited. The party uses the event to register voters, collect contact information, attract campaign volunteers, and buff its image. The city benefits from having the residents experience the perks of hosting a convention while simultaneously subsidizing the party’s get-out-the-vote efforts. In this way, the partners benefit on dimensions beyond message control.

The Organizational Chart

Implementing a presidential nominating convention is an organizationally complex task. It involves the national parties, the campaigns of their prospective nominees, the city government, the host committee organized by the city to undertake convention planning, officials from federal, state, and neighboring local governments, private vendors who will provide services during the convention, city residents and businesses whose lives will be temporarily dislocated by the convention, and thousands of volunteers . . . all under the glare of the domestic and international media.

Three key organizations make a political convention happen: the national party committee, the city government, and the host committee. The national party committees are officially responsible for the business of the nominating conventions. Traditionally, their main responsibility has been to conduct the convention to nominate their presidential candidate and approve the party platform. Their direct involvement comes through two different guises: 1) initially the site selection committee, and 2) once the host city is chosen, the Democratic National Convention Committee and the Republican National Committee's Committee on Arrangements (hereafter National Party Convention Committees).

The National Party Convention Committees (NPCC) are responsible for the "business" of the convention—the official program that occurs inside the convention hall. Their programmatic decisions include identifying and scheduling the speakers, entertainers, and video clips, and hiring the consultants to produce them. They handle negotiations with the media regarding camera placement, skyboxes and other physical spaces for the press, technical needs, and scheduling their access to facilities. They also assure that their contract with the city gives them control over renovations of the hall. Controlling the physical space of the hall allows control over the visual backdrop that is a core element of the party messaging effort. The NPCCs coordinate the activities of and serve as the communications channel for the delegates, other party officials, "affiliated groups," (a.k.a. representatives of the interest groups aligned with the parties), and VIPs.¹⁴ They decide who gets credentials—and how many (and since there are never enough, they manage the fallout). They assign hotels to the delegates, media, and affiliated groups, and coordinate transportation from the hotels to the arena and other venues for the delegates. They provide the security within the arena. They solicit bids for and oversee arena construction. They manage contracts, hiring, legal, insurance, and communications. Smith and Nimmo (1991: 43) argue that conventions

have become “almost as much of a showcase for managerial as for partisan political skills.” The NPCCs must exhibit both managerial and political skill to execute conventions. Importantly, they retain control over the messaging (physical, scheduling, script, onstage personnel) and media management elements of the convention while delegating the hospitality and financing tasks to the host city.

The host city contracts with the national party committee to provide the various resources necessary to conduct the convention, but the main responsibility of the city government is providing security. This includes contracting with police officers and other security personnel from many other cities to expand the city force during the convention, purchasing equipment for them, and working with the Secret Service, FBI, and other federal security agencies to develop and implement security plans for the convention. Chapter 4 will show that these are significant tasks and often require cities to depart from their standard modes of decision-making and operations.

The rest of the convention implementation responsibilities are delegated to the host committee, a nonprofit (typically a 501c3 or 501c6 organization) set up by city leaders to recruit and implement the convention. Officially (that is, legally from the perspective of the Federal Election Commission), the host committee is responsible for activities that promote the host city but are independent of activities inside the conventional hall. The host committee is the bridge between the NPCC, all the city agencies, and private and civic organizations in the city to make the convention happen. The host committee promotes the city to the national party committee during the site selection process and promotes the city to the delegates, dignitaries, and media audience during the convention. They provide the hospitality to assure that convention attendees leave with a positive impression of the host

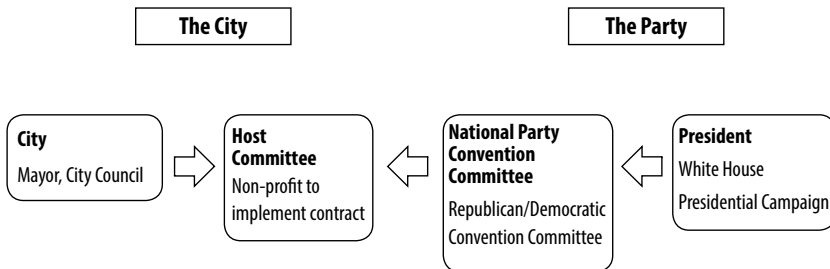


Figure 1.1. The organizational chart.

city. As explained by Kevin Monroe, the chief of staff to Charlotte's mayor, the goal of the host committee is to "Entertain the delegates. You can't just drop them in any city. Charm the media first. . . . Wine and dine the media [before the convention] on their site visits so that their first impressions, and the first impressions they give the audience, of your city are positive."¹⁵ Typically, this hospitality includes a media party and a delegate party promoting local themes, food, and music in the days before the opening gavel. The host committee recruits and trains thousands of volunteers and procures thousands of hotel accommodations for the visiting dignitaries. The host committee coordinates the image and branding activities for the city.

In practice, the host committee is "the father of the bride"¹⁶—they raise the money for the party convention committees to spend. The NPCCs traditionally have been limited to spending money provided by a portion of the income tax's presidential public financing check-off (Garrett and Reese, 2014), but the parties required the cities to raise substantial funds to supplement them in their requests for proposals (RFPs) and contracts with the host cities. As we will elaborate in chapter 3, fundraising consistently poses a challenge for the host committees even as the demands of the parties and the funding streams available to cities have changed over time.

While the host committee is officially responsible for convention implementation and fundraising activities, the city government often serves as the backstop. The mayor often becomes the chief fundraiser for the committee, and city governments have to develop plans to cover shortages if fundraising falls short. If cities seek conventions to boost their images, that goal is at risk if the host committee stumbles. A city's inability to provide funds undercuts its signal to businesses and event planners that it has the can-do to pull off events of this magnitude and follow through on its commitments. Los Angeles city councilwoman Ruth Galanter described the city's situation when the Los Angeles Host Committee asked the city council for an additional \$4 million to cover fundraising shortfalls: "However uncomfortable we may be with this, I don't think we have a whole lot of choices. It is the city that will be hosting all these people. They're not going to turn around and say the host committee didn't do this or didn't do that. They're going to say it was the city of Los Angeles that didn't do something" (quoted in *Daily Breeze*, 2000).

The campaign organization of the party's presidential nominee plays a variable role in the convention decision-making hierarchy. When the incumbent president seeks reelection, the campaign is frequently consulted and makes the decision when it has strong preferences. The chief executive is, after all, also the chief of the party. Dan Murrey, president of the Charlotte in 2012 Host Committee, describes the benefits of planning a convention for the

campaign of the president: “Working with an incumbent president decreases the uncertainty. You know all the players. With hurricanes, hot weather, demonstrators, and anarchists, it’s nice to have a few things you’re certain of.”¹⁷ Conventions without incumbents are also more complicated to plan because preparations must be made not only for the nominee but also for the staff and supporters of all the other contending candidates.

A nonincumbent nominee’s campaign contributes to decisions regarding the messaging and staging of the convention, but has little input into the key logistical decisions. Most of those decisions must be made by the NPCC before the nominee has won a majority of delegates in state primaries and caucuses through the winter and spring of the convention year. One of the key exceptions was the 2008 decision for Obama to give his acceptance speech in Mile High Stadium in Denver—a different venue from the Pepsi Center where the rest of the convention was planned. The DNC and Denver Host Committee had forty-nine days to develop a process for selecting which members of the public could attend, develop new credentials for the public (to differentiate them from the delegates), develop new transportation and security plans, and design and build a new stage and media production facilities in the new venue.¹⁸

The challenge of coordinating across organizations is compounded by the fact that presidential nominating conventions are rare events in the sense that they only occur once every four years. The staff members of the NPCCs have experience in party and presidential campaign politics but varying levels of experience with past conventions. Similar to many campaign staffers, they are frequently young and confident beyond their years. The NPCC staffs swoop into town to confront city and host committee staffers who are experienced in hosting large conventions, but who probably have never been involved in a political convention. At best, the city players have talked to their compatriots in previous host cities to get an idea of what worked and didn’t work there. The NPCC wants to plan the convention based on their experience with other cities, and the city staffers think they know what will work in their city.¹⁹ We will see in chapter 4 that a similar dynamic occurs between city officials and federal security agencies. The city staff wants to retain control of the convention and conduct the convention in a way that will help brand the city positively and uniquely. The inevitable tension is compounded by generational differences between the young and brash party staffers and the older city staffers who don’t appreciate being told how to run their city.

Given the stakes for both the parties and the cities, they learn to work together. They must plan security arrangements and contingency plans for dealing with emergencies with a large number of federal and state secu-

rity agencies. They must expand the police force with officers from many jurisdictions and train their police forces, who may not frequently deal with mass marches and thousands of demonstrators. They must raise the funds and develop methods of soliciting and screening vendors so that the convention production makes both of them look good. They must communicate with local employers and residents whose ordinary routines will be disrupted by the convention. At the same time, cities must continue to deliver the full array of services to local residents as if a major international event were not in town. If governing is often a balancing act, governing during a mega-event is governing on a high wire.

Cities and Mega-Events

As has been well documented, cities seek mega-events to attract tourism spending and media attention (e.g., Andranovich et al., 2001; Burbank et al., 2002; Eisinger, 2000; Judd and Swanstrom, 2012; Smith, 2014; Strom, 2008). We seek to use the frequency and regularity of presidential nominating conventions to explore the costs and benefits of mega-events more systematically. In examining which cities bid for political conventions and which cities win them, we use the convention as our dependent variable; in examining the political and economic effects of conventions, we use convention activities as an independent variable. And in several chapters, for example, on convention fundraising, we use the host cities to define our population for analysis. Our approach is not to develop and test a theory of political conventions specifically or mega-events generally, but to use conventions as a site to analyze the behavior of numerous political actors who are involved in them. Some of the actors and their activities will be most interesting to political scientists: political parties, fundraisers, voters, and ambitious mayors. Some activities will be most relevant to urban scholars: mega-event strategies and economic development benefits. Other activities will find their audience among public administrators: policy implementation, organizational analysis, intergovernmental relations, and residents' evaluation of government. But in taking more of a cross-disciplinary and multi-methods approach, we intend for the whole of the analysis to provide a compelling exploration of how cities operate and adapt in a competitive economic environment in the U.S. federal system.

In particular, we analyze how changes in the environment affect the cost/benefit evaluations of cities. We develop a database of 131 cities that are potential hosts for political conventions since the 1990s. In chapter 2, we analyze which cities receive Requests for Proposals (RFPs) to assess the

qualities that the parties desire in host cities. We then analyze the cities' bids to explain why cities recruit mega-events. We find that the qualities desired by parties has remained consistent over time, yet the disruption costs imposed by post-9/11 security measures have changed the cost/benefit calculation for cities and thus the types of cities willing to bid for conventions. Moreover, despite parties' political incentive to select host cities in states that could provide a boost in the Electoral College vote, our evidence shows that parties' prioritize consideration of cities that can be reliable agents and that will run a competently executed convention.

Not only have the costs and benefits of political conventions changed over time, but so have the financing methods by which cities pay for conventions. In chapter 3, we show that the legal environment governing convention financing has changed dramatically and as such has affected the types of cities that can bid for conventions and the balance of power between the national parties and the cities. Cities have increasingly succeeded in financing conventions by shifting away from direct appropriations to a combination of federal security grants and private fundraising from an unwieldy coalition of local donors, access-oriented national donors, and party activists. We use Federal Election Commission data on host committee donors to analyze the amounts and timing of donations to explain the dynamics of convention fundraising.

We also explore the political benefits of political conventions (chapter 5) in addition to the economic benefits (chapter 6). Parties have recently attempted to use conventions to engage local residents and mobilize them to affect the Electoral College outcome in the host state. We use a post-2012 election survey of Charlotte residents to measure the results of these efforts. We find that conventions can have modest effects on campaign voluntarism, efforts to persuade others, campaign interest, and vote choice, mostly for those who follow convention coverage closely in the local media. Convention effects are especially large for Democrats who would be most likely to be energized by the local presence of the DNC.

But the political benefits of conventions may be more valuable to local government officials than to the national parties. Our survey data shows that conventions have significant effects on how residents evaluate local government and local officials. The evaluations of "out-partisans" are especially susceptible to influence when they believe the event has been successful. Finally, we show that host city mayors think they are the beneficiaries of political conventions. Having a high-profile accomplishment spurs them to seek higher office at rates significantly higher than other mayors—though voters do not seem to be impressed by this particular accomplishment.

While the mega-events literature has given substantial attention to why cities promote them, it has given less attention to the public management issues that are critical to implementing them. City governments, host committees, party committees, federal security agencies, and local stakeholders all must coordinate. Typically, as we show in chapter 4, they do not have any experience coordinating with one another, and must develop plans in an environment that maximizes uncertainty. Given the security issues at stake, cities must adapt their traditional decision-making and planning activities to federal security agencies' authority. Regardless of the economic benefits, cities benefit by deepening their capacity to work across city agencies, working with other organizations across government and the private sector, developing and practicing emergency management plans, engaging with civic organizations and citizens to do something constructive together, and earning trust in a polarized political environment.

The mega-events literature has typically focused on the decision making of local economic and political elite. Key players in the local "regime" believe investments in tourism infrastructure are necessary for the city's economic development, and they develop and execute the city's marketing strategy. Often these investments are made using financial strategies that do not require the approval or direct financial commitment of residents to avoid backlash against regime decisions.²⁰ Political conventions are no different. Still, we know little about how citizens evaluate mega-events or cities' investments in them or the conditions under which citizens would be more or less willing to financially support attracting mega-events. In chapter 7, we use our survey data to analyze residents' commitment to mega-events as economic development and reputation-building strategies.

In our final chapter, we also return to the question about which parties, city officials, and residents should care most: What makes a successful convention? We use our 2012 Charlotte survey to assess how residents evaluate the success of a convention. We use our interviews and case studies to present best practices for public administrators. For potential bid cities, we discuss why would/should a city host a convention (or not). For residents of the rest of the nation, we discuss whether contemporary conventions are "worth it." For scholars, we discuss what the changing politics of convention siting and implementation tells us about party and city politics. Merely because the selection of the nominee has become a foreordained conclusion, this doesn't mean that there is no politics at party conventions. The politics has left the hall; the politics is out in the cities.