

## **In Reckless Pursuit: Barry Goldwater, A Team of Amateurs and the Rise of Conservatism**

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### **Abstract**

Before 1964, Barry Goldwater had never lost an election. In fact, despite being the underdog in both of his U.S. Senate elections in Arizona, in 1952 and 1958, he defied the odds and won. His keen ability for organization, fundraising and strategy was so widely respected that his Republican colleagues appointed the freshman senator to chair their campaign committee in 1960, with conservatives and liberals alike requesting his aid during contentious elections. Goldwater himself adamantly believed that in politics, "organization is the whole secret." For all of these reasons, 1964 seems to be an outlier in the senator's expansive career. The core qualities of detail, focus and organization present throughout his life were conspicuously absent during the 1964 presidential campaign. This thesis addresses the question of why Goldwater was unable to succeed in his quest for the presidency, focusing on the roles of ideology and organization. It is a common belief that Goldwater's conservative ideology was the primary reason for his defeat, but this thesis instead argues that a lack of effective campaign strategy, coupled with poor organization and leadership, was responsible for Goldwater's failed presidential bid. In strong contrast to his campaigns for the United States Senate, Goldwater demonstrated uncharacteristic reluctance to run in 1964, as well as an overdependence on individuals who were simply unqualified for a national campaign. The thesis explores these areas in both the primary and general election campaigns to argue that it was the lack of an effective campaign organization, not merely his political ideology, which led to Goldwater's landslide loss. Research is based on a combination of contemporary media coverage of the campaign, memoirs of instrumental Goldwater aides. Research was conducted using the collection of the Personal and Political Papers of Barry M. Goldwater at Arizona State University, as well as the Goldwater Papers the Papers of Congressman William E. Miller at Cornell University

**Keyword: Goldwater, Conservatism, Presidential**

### **1. Introduction**

The story of the 1964 Goldwater campaign is one of the greatest stories of twentieth century political history. It is a narrative of the sudden rise of a popular, independent warrior coupled with an equally sudden and tragic fall from grace. Surrounded by a cast described by historians as Machiavellian, it was also Shakespearean.<sup>1</sup> With larger-than-life personalities dominating the political stage, the Goldwater candidacy provides a tremendous contrast in appearance versus reality, seen most clearly in the philosophy the candidate championed versus its extremist portrayal. Equally thematic is the Goldwater campaign apparatus, portrayed early in the campaign as an efficient machine capable of great triumph when in reality it was nothing more than a loose collaboration of political amateurs.

Today, the continuing evolution of the scholarship, as well as the modern political context, allows for the opportunity to further reevaluate the role of ideology in the election of 1964, challenging the arguments that generations of historians have made on the subject. While many scholarly works have dealt with Goldwater's

ideology in comparison to campaigns that would follow, few have analyzed it in relation to his past campaigns. In addition, those past campaigns can also further explain Goldwater's weak organization during the presidential election. Just as 1964 has become valuable to explaining the victories in 1980 and beyond, Goldwater's U.S. Senate campaigns in 1952 and 1958 can shed significant light on the reasons for the candidate's overwhelming loss. In this context, the roles of ideology and organization in the 1964 campaign can help to better understand the chronology of conservatism. Moreover, an examination of the role of organization within the 1964 Goldwater campaign can be more fully dissected in a way that has been largely unexplored by past scholarship, showing that the loss was not based solely on ideology.

Contemporary observers of the 1964 presidential election reiterated the reactions of the popular press, casting conservatism, and Goldwater, as paranoid, destructive and fanatic. Contemporaries noted Goldwater's colorful expression of his political philosophy as the driving force behind his own defeat, concluding that the basic principles of his ideology were therefore misplaced. In 1965, some scholars, including political scientist Irving Crespi, considered the Goldwater movement as a natural branch of McCarthyism, thereby tainting the acceptability of conservatism.<sup>2</sup> Writing in 1969, David Halberstam blamed Goldwater's ideology for driving "Americans back to political divisions."<sup>3</sup> Sheila Koeppen described the conservative cause as an obsession with "conspiracy," while Theodore White referred to the Goldwater movement as one built of pending "resentments, anger, frustrations" and fears within the Republican Party.<sup>4</sup>

Above all, contemporary accounts ascertained that the Radical Right, defined as the John Birch Society and Ku Klux Klan, and synonymous with Goldwater's conservatism, was "a distorted and unrealistic response to Communism" rooted in obsessive anti-intellectualism.<sup>5</sup> Scholars saw the foundations of "radical right" conservatism in prior political movements, drawing particular links to the Populism of the 1890s and the radicalism championed by Huey Long and Father Coughlin during the Great Depression. Like those causes, conservatism was assumed to be both marginal and undesirable.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, radical conservatism was viewed as simply a response to the social reforms of the New Deal, "expressing not poverty, but sudden prosperity, biting the New Deal hand that fed it."<sup>7</sup>

In 2001, the scholarship began to shift with Lisa McGirr noting the difficulty with these "pejorative labels that served in the past to dismiss this movement."<sup>8</sup> Additionally, Rick Perlstein, drawing largely from the major biographies written by Edwards and Goldberg in 1995, offered a new interpretation.<sup>9</sup> With a refocus on the intellectual foundations of conservatism and the grassroots activists that made its national strength possible, scholars began to challenge the long-held notion that 1960s conservatism was simply a burst of radicalism.<sup>10</sup> These elements were mostly ignored by earlier historians, such as Hofstadter, demonstrating the changing views from the "previous understandings of American conservatism as 'fringe' or 'marginal.'"<sup>11</sup> The Goldwater campaign was now understood as a learning experience that later helped the Right secure political dominance. "Despite his massive defeat," Plotke wrote, "Goldwater's campaign reduced the marginality of the radical right."<sup>12</sup>

In 1952, Ernest McFarland was unbeatable. Elected comfortably in 1940 to the United States Senate as a Democrat, he went on to capture nearly 70 percent of the vote in his 1946 reelection, despite Harry Truman's growing unpopularity and Republicans gaining control of Congress for the first time in two decades.<sup>13</sup> A legislative legend, he was a principal author of the G.I. Bill and a popular advocate for veterans' benefits and expanded water projects vital to Arizona. Appointed by his Senate peers as Majority Leader in 1951, and relatively young compared to them at fifty-eight, the chamber's most powerful Democrat seemed assured of another sweeping victory.

Moreover, Arizona had not sent a Republican to the United States Senate since 1920. As late as 1950, Democrats outnumbered Republicans five-to-one in the Grand Canyon state and the party boasted 85 percent of the state's registered voters as members.<sup>14</sup> If anyone was going to win against McFarland, reasoned veteran Arizona campaign hand Stephen Shadegg, they would need 90 percent of Republican votes and at least 25 percent of Democrats'.<sup>15</sup> This was the formidable challenge that the political newcomer Barry M. Goldwater, a freshman Phoenix city councilman, accepted when he announced his candidacy on the steps of the Yavapai County Courthouse in his hometown of Prescott.

While the notion of a newly minted councilman challenging the Senate Majority Leader might have seemed far-fetched, Goldwater was more than that. Chosen by his colleagues as the Council's vice chair, Goldwater was the highest-ranking Republican in the state in 1949.<sup>16</sup> Over the next three years, Goldwater would continue to build his Rolodex of loyalists, while also hammering out an impressive record as a diligent reformer. He certainly had much to boast about: In a single year, the new City Council had reversed a \$400,000 budget deficit into a \$275,000 surplus, reduced the number of city departments by more than 50 percent, eliminated rampant corruption and boosted local business. In 1950, *Look* magazine and the National Municipal League honored Phoenix with the All-American City award, noting the impressive progress achieved through "intelligent citizen action."<sup>17</sup> Prominent

Arizona Democrats, used to easy victories, clearly had something to fear from the bronzed cowboy who was quickly shaking up the Arizona political landscape.

Disgusted with New Deal-Fair Deal liberalism and disenchanted by Truman's no-win war in Korea, Goldwater saw an opportunity to expand the ideological agenda of individual free enterprise. Even more disturbing to Goldwater was the conduct of incumbent Ernest McFarland, who he viewed as a "servile handmaiden" for the president obsessed with his own promotion.<sup>18</sup> Friends had warned Goldwater that if "I ever opposed [McFarland], he'd saw me in half," but Goldwater had his own reputation for tough politicking.<sup>19</sup> As Robert F. Kennedy would write years later, "[Goldwater] could cut you to ribbons, slit your throat, but always in such a pleasant manner that you would have to like him."<sup>20</sup> And while Goldwater's constant pledge was a campaign of principles, not personalities, there is no doubt that personality was partially responsible for his victory.<sup>21</sup> After all, he had spent years cultivating his own powerful message and the skill with which to deliver it.

Additionally, he surrounded himself with some of the most influential individuals in the state. Eugene Pulliam, a wealthy newspaper publicist originally from Dirksen's home state of Illinois, had been a Goldwater ally since his City Council run. The owner of both the *Phoenix Gazette* and *Arizona Republic*, Pulliam guaranteed favorable press coverage from two of the state's leading papers. Further, Goldwater hired one of the state's premier operatives, Stephen Shadegg, as his campaign manager. A registered Democrat until meeting Goldwater, Shadegg had managed veteran Democratic Senator Carl Hayden's reelection effort in 1950.<sup>22</sup> Asked by Shadegg why he thought he could win, Goldwater depended solely on the power of his personality: "I can call ten thousand people in this state by their first name."<sup>23</sup>

Goldwater's success was due in part to his natural ability to build coalitions, a talent that would later be absent in his 1964 presidential campaign. While emerging Republicans in other states quarreled in an attempt to balance the 1952 feud between the conservatism of Senator Robert Taft and the moderation of General Dwight Eisenhower, Goldwater played both sides. Although sympathetic to Taft's ideology, Goldwater recognized Eisenhower's influence and engineered a deal to give the war hero a healthy representation within the Arizona delegation to the national convention.<sup>24</sup> This brokering won Goldwater widespread appeal within the party. He faced little opposition in the primary, allowing him to focus squarely on McFarland, and both Taft and Eisenhower traveled to Arizona to campaign for him.<sup>25</sup>

The 1952 campaign exemplified Goldwater's discipline. The candidate rarely strayed from his core message, and although Shadegg had written every word of his carefully tailored speeches, Goldwater himself served as a devoted architect of his own ideology.<sup>26</sup> Throughout the spring, as Goldwater looked to diminish McFarland's large lead, the Republican wedded the incumbent to the unpopular president, who he referred to as "the architect of socialism."<sup>27</sup> "We find McFarland trying to loosen from his neck the terrific weight of Truman," Goldwater railed. In addition, Guy G. Gabrielson, chairman of the Republican National Committee, called McFarland "the Senate spokesman for the Truman New Deal-Fair Deal crowd," sent to "defend their pitiful record."<sup>28</sup> The *Tucson Daily Citizen* endorsed Goldwater in October, writing that as Senate Majority Leader, McFarland "must be held accountable for the star-spangled shame," which, in their view, included high taxes, runaway spending, appeasement of Communism, and rising national debt.<sup>29</sup> These issues were constantly on Goldwater's mind throughout the campaign and he recognized that well-articulated positions would be crucial to swaying the necessary bloc of Democratic voters. "This being a strong Democratic state," Goldwater wrote to Senator Dirksen on June 2, "we have got to give reasonable, intelligent answers to those questions and I want to be sure to include the experience and the thinking that you have on the subject."<sup>30</sup>

Confident in victory, and indifferent to his state's growing conservative sentiment, McFarland hardly took his challenger seriously.<sup>31</sup> When the *Arizona Republic* published a September poll showing the gap had narrowed, with McFarland at 49 percent and Goldwater at 46 percent, it was already too late.<sup>32</sup> By the end of October, the poll had flipped: Goldwater stood at 49 percent and McFarland at 46 percent.<sup>33</sup> While Eisenhower carried Arizona over Adlai Stevenson by a wide margin of 55%-45% on Election Day, either due to his own strong candidacy or the unpopularity of Truman, Goldwater's slim victory of 6,725 votes of nearly 260,000 cast was still remarkable considering the political prowess of McFarland, and his relative popularity only months earlier.

Clearly, Goldwater had ridden Eisenhower's coattails to Washington, but he had also developed an impressive organization, which deserved tremendous credit for his victory. Over the course of only three years, Goldwater had provided the Arizona Republican Party with a well-articulated philosophy, a national network of donors, a registry of activists and the discipline and energy to win.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, he achieved this while vocalizing a deeply conservative ideology, albeit with some moderate touches, in an overwhelmingly Democratic state. He became the first Republican to represent Arizona in the United States Senate in twenty-six years, and in the process had won the endorsement of 50,000 Democrats.<sup>35</sup>

That well orchestrated apparatus would be conspicuously absent in 1964, and the strategic errors of Goldwater and his team would lead to his landslide loss in November. Goldwater's construction of that campaign team was odd in both who he included, and who he did not. Among the most questionable appointments was that of campaign manager, which would have widespread ramifications in the coming campaign. Since 1952, Goldwater had had only one manager, the well-known and well-respected Arizona heavyweight Stephen Shadegg. It was Shadegg who had helped jumpstart Goldwater's infant candidacy for the United States Senate, had worked to articulate the conservative philosophy and had carefully orchestrated Goldwater's rise to national prominence. It would have been obvious for Goldwater to appoint his long-time deputy to lead his presidential run. Despite that decade-long friendship though, Goldwater cast Shadegg aside, one of his most substantial strategic errors.

In the place of political professionals like Shadegg, Goldwater turned to a man "who had neither the skill nor the temperament to direct a national campaign."<sup>36</sup> Denison Kitchel, the least experienced presidential campaign manager in decades, was "selected because he was a warm friend of the senator."<sup>37</sup> Charles Mohr described him simply as "a newcomer," but also a positive "contrast to the candidate's Western exuberance."<sup>38</sup> Robert Novak commented towards the end of the campaign that one of Goldwater's chief failings was his criterion for filling campaign jobs, "not so much on political astuteness as on unquestioned loyalty."<sup>39</sup> Kitchel himself noted the oddity in his selection, writing to the senator, "You have picked a real green horn, but if enthusiasm and determination can eventually produce a qualified campaign manager, I expect to make the grade."<sup>40</sup> Neither enthusiasm nor determination ever truly made the grade though.

Moreover, while Shadegg's exclusion was the most damaging, Goldwater also purged the greatest conservative intellectuals of the era, including William F. Buckley, Bill Rusher and Brent Bozell, all of whom had been enthusiastic Goldwater supporters.<sup>41</sup> The protective advisers, and Goldwater himself, "drew the curtains so tightly that Buckley was relegated to advising Goldwater through the pages of *National Review*," wrote Goldberg.<sup>42</sup> Barry Goldwater, while at one point an admirer of the intellectual elite, had grown distrustful of them. Calling themselves "a bunch of cowboys," Perlstein notes that they were "proud, almost, of what they didn't know."<sup>43</sup> And while such well-known academics as Robert Bork and Milton Friedman would advise the campaign in various capacities, their expertise would never match the influence of the "Arizona Mafia."<sup>44</sup>

The single event that would silence any hope of a Truman-style comeback was Goldwater's acceptance speech for the nomination, the clearest example of the weaknesses of the organization. Finally engaged, Goldwater devoted more attention and care to his acceptance speech for the Republican nomination than to any speech of his political career. In consultation with speechwriters Karl Hess, Bill Baroody and Harry Jaffa, Goldwater hoped to clearly articulate his conservative philosophy to a wider audience than he had ever addressed.

Preparations for the speech began on July 11, only days before the convention opened. Instead of the traditional theme of party unity, Goldwater and his advisors were convinced that the speech needed to be a declaration of a conservative takeover.<sup>45</sup> Goldwater later reflected that it appeared "politically illogical and personally contradictory" to "offer olive branches" to the Rockefeller faction of the party. Rather, he preferred the greatest speech of his career to reflect the "historic break" as conservatives charted "a new course in GOP national politics."<sup>46</sup>

In the final working draft, Baroody noted, "The convention speeches thus far get off the ground like a fuseless rocket—we must have them jumping in the first page." Everyone agreed that the acceptance speech needed to be laced with intense passion and emotion. In the final draft, Baroody scrawled across the top, "More punch at beginning." Despite that call for emotion, the amateur team remained too preoccupied with less controversial lines to recognize the true shortcomings of the speech. The infamous line of the speech, "Extremism in defense of liberty is no vice. Moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue," was left untouched in the final revision.<sup>47</sup> The fact that none of the speechwriters recognized that the word "extremism" had come to have a special meaning in the campaign is almost unbelievable.

While the speechwriters ignored the buzzword "extremism," they concluded that the speech as a whole "could be a bit more 'gutsy.'"<sup>48</sup> This desire for the speech to be more "gusty" may have been one reason for overlooking "extremism." Another was that, articulated in the proper context, "extremism" could be fully explained, potentially dispelling the issue for the remainder of the campaign. Lee Edwards contends that Harry Jaffa, who penned the infamous phrase, had a clear rationale for doing so. Thomas Paine had written in 1791, "Moderation in temper is always virtue; but moderation in principle is always vice" and Martin Luther King, Jr. had written only one year earlier, "Nonviolent efforts as those of an extremist... So the question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be."<sup>49</sup> Historian Robert Alan Goldberg believes that Jaffa, a political scientist who penned the phrase weeks earlier, was inspired by Aristotle's work, but adds that the statement "lacked either explanation or example."<sup>50</sup> Goldwater wrote that Jaffa had told him that similar words were first used by Cicero in defense of Catalina in the Roman Republic: "Extreme patriotism in defense of freedom is no crime."<sup>51</sup>

While this understanding of the term “extremism” is reasonable, the speechwriters never provided that context, therefore forcing listeners to define the word using the context readily provided by Rockefeller and his associates. Shadegg later claimed that while Jaffa had written the phrase for a Platform Committee plank, where a context would have been provided, he never intended it to be used in the acceptance speech. Despite being one of Goldwater’s chief speechwriters, it is not farfetched to suggest that Jaffa was not part of a conversation about the line’s inclusion because he was not part of the campaign’s inner circle.<sup>52</sup> All of that explanation though fails to elucidate what the Goldwater staff anticipated the reaction to the line might be. Goldwater himself did not believe the media or his critics would pay any attention to the phrase, which is why it was left intact while less obviously derisive phrases were underlined, edited and cut in the final draft of the speech. After a months-long debate circling the very word “extremism,” Goldwater and his team should have realized that the phrase would be poorly received, that it would confirm the negative portrayal of the nominee, and that it would further handicap an already disadvantaged campaign.

“There’s an old saying you can win a battle and still lose a war,” Raymond L. Baker wrote to Bill Miller after the fallout from the speech.<sup>53</sup> As Goldwater accepted his nomination with those infamous words, “Extremism in defense of liberty is no vice,” the issue immediately became a central theme of the general election. “My God, he’s going to run as Barry Goldwater,” one reporter is said to have gasped.<sup>54</sup> Clif White later recalled, “I was as stunned as anyone that night by the abrasive quality of his words.”<sup>55</sup>

Moreover, Goldwater’s choice of words simply drew more questions. In June, Goldwater had “defined extremism as Fascism and Communism,” so was he now endorsing these ideologies? In addition, the convention had just previously taken up debate to condemn “extremist groups,” such as the John Birch Society and the Ku Klux Klan, forcing many to wonder if these were the extremists Goldwater was defending.<sup>56</sup> “You said that you would not repudiate the support of the Ku Klux Klan. I do not understand this,” wrote Solomon Rosengarten of Brooklyn, New York a few weeks later. “How can you support an organization which is dedicated to the subversion of our constitutional government.”<sup>57</sup> Emmet John Hughes of *Newsweek* even went so far as to refer to the Klan and Birchers as “lesser menaces” compared to the “enraged delegates” that supported Goldwater.<sup>58</sup> The newly minted nominee provided few insights.

Both Republicans and Democrats were critical in their post-convention reactions. Pat Brown, the Democratic governor of California, railed that “[the speech] was an open invitation to the John Birch Society and the Ku Klux Klan,” declaring that the only thing missing was a “Heil Hitler” for the Jewish nominee.<sup>59</sup> Dwight Eisenhower offered a lukewarm endorsement, saying, “I will do my best to support [the ticket]—although as I say it was not my personal choice.”<sup>60</sup> The *Washington Post* implored that “Candidate Goldwater start over again and tell the people in carefully chosen words precisely what he does believe ‘extremism’ is and how it affects the country’s constant search for freedom and justice.”<sup>61</sup> The *New Republic* called Goldwater a “deviate Republican,” writing, “The Republican nominee for President is not the captive of the crackpots, but he is their candidate.”<sup>62</sup>

In response to the mounting criticism, Goldwater simply became angry. “Would [Rockefeller] fight for his life?” he railed. “That would be extreme action. Is it extreme action for our boys to give their lives in Viet-Nam?”<sup>63</sup> On a separate occasion, the senator tried to laugh it off. “Some members of my own party seem to have their own version of that quote, like: ‘Extremism in defense of moderation is no vice, moderation in pursuit of Goldwater is no virtue,’” he joked.<sup>64</sup> These types of responses were hardly the well-reasoned clarification many expected. Not only had the Goldwater staff failed to anticipate the impact of the line, but they had also failed to effectively handle the sudden fallout. Permanently handicapped for the remainder of the campaign, Goldwater would carry only six states in November.

For all his past campaign successes, Goldwater was ill-prepared for the national undertaking. Especially in the context of the slowly shifting political environment in which he operated, his ideology harshly challenged the reality that many Americans had grown accustomed to and seemed to threaten the system that granted those Americans greater security. Goldwater’s attempt to modernize the Social Security system, while necessary in retrospect, was premature, as was his hard-line on the growing threats of Communist China and the Soviet Union. The policies he espoused in 1964 were not seriously considered until the 1980s, and we continue to deal with many of the same issues Goldwater attempted to discuss fifty years ago. Goldwater was largely a figure before his time, arguing for rapid solutions to problems that were still being slowly digested.

Even still, there would have been a groundswell of support for a well-articulated opposition to perpetual liberalism, especially from a figure with the national standing of Goldwater. That carefully crafted message was never developed though, and Goldwater’s philosophical overtures were neither recognized nor accepted. Steadfastly independent, Goldwater despised the constraints that were put on presidential candidates and refused to be controlled or suffocated.<sup>65</sup> There is a certain appeal that accompanies that desire to break the mold, but Goldwater

ignored traditional strategy and refused to replace it with an effective alternative. Dragging his feet through every step of the process, Goldwater remained reluctant throughout the yearlong effort and when he was finally driven to actively campaign he only damaged his standing.

In 1952 and 1958 though, the same Goldwater had been corralled, rarely straying from his message. Stephen Shadegg, the campaign manager in both of those difficult Senate campaigns, had carefully crafted Goldwater's message and compelled the candidate to remain focused. The campaign team of 1964 was unable to replicate Shadegg's mastery. Inexperienced, unskilled and unqualified, the "Arizona Mafia" failed to provide the background campaign apparatus that had always made Goldwater stronger. Moreover, while Kitchel, Burch, Baroody and Kleindheist clearly could not organize a national effort, they refused help from those who could. In the name of purity, they purged the intellectuals, the experts and the party elders from the campaign. The result was ensured destruction and, coupled with Goldwater's irate personality, was the ultimate failure.

This complex of variables more completely explains the Goldwater defeat than simply ideology. To relegate the landslide loss to conservatism simply fails to account for the more nuanced issues within the campaign. Regardless of what Goldwater may have hoped, the 1964 presidential election became very literally a campaign of personalities, not principles, which can be attributed to the poor choices made by Goldwater and his organization.

## 2. Acknowledgements

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