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“Taking this Party Back:
Barry Goldwater and the Draft Goldwater Campaigns of 1960”

As early as the 1960 presidential election, many conservatives hoped for a presidential candidate who would represent a principled departure from the consensus politics of the 1950s. Far from representing the last vestiges of McCarthyism or a final, frenzied gasp of status anxiety, these conservative activists hailed from many of the constituencies who would become power centers of a new, more ideologically rigorous Republican Party—among them, youth, southerners, and conservative thought and opinion leaders. The politician around whom these constituents rallied was iconoclastic Arizona senator Barry Goldwater.

This paper seeks to trace some of the predominant strains of Goldwater support in 1960, arguing that in fact, it was the grassroots efforts of this election that laid the groundwork for the rise to prominence of conservative ideology in the Republican Party. While Goldwater was not a cooperative candidate in 1960, preferring instead to work for the election of Richard Nixon and drive change from within, he refused to compromise his central ideals. His strident rhetoric and image as a conservative standard bearer garnered him continuing support, despite his disavowals of interest. The grassroots efforts of 1960, with the foundations they laid, culminated in the organization established shortly after the 1960 election to convince Goldwater—and the country—that he would be the nation’s saving grace in 1964.