

Democratic Study Group Records

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Collection Summary

Title: Democratic Study Group Records

Span Dates: 1912-1995

Bulk Dates: (bulk 1960-1990)

ID No.: MSS57125

Creator: Democratic Study Group

Extent: 90,750 items ; 260 containers plus 2 oversize ; 104 linear feet

Language: Collection material in English

Location: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Summary: Legislative service organization operating from 1959 to 1995 to assist Democratic members of the United States House of Representatives. Records include research publications, reports, position papers, draft legislation, correspondence, legal documents, government records, voting and whip records, hearing statements, committee and caucus records, surveys, media files, campaign records, photographs, and training material provided to members in support of common political and legislative goals. Also includes financial and administrative records of the organization.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Organizations

Democratic Party (U.S.)

Democratic Study Group Campaign Fund.

Democratic Study Group.

House Democratic Caucus (U.S.)

Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.

Selma to Montgomery Rights March (1965 : Selma, Ala.)

United States. Congress. House--Reform.

United States. Congress. House.

United States. White House Office.

Subjects

Arms control--United States.

Budget--United States.

Campaign funds--United States.

Civil rights movements--Alabama.

Civil rights--United States.

Consumer protection--United States.

Education--United States.

Environmental policy--United States.

Executive power--United States.

Legislative power--United States.

Medical care--United States.

Political campaigns--United States.

Poverty--United States.

Taxation--United States.

Vietnam War, 1961-1975.

War and emergency powers--United States.

Places

United States--Economic policy--20th century.

United States--Politics and government--20th century.

United States--Social policy--20th century.

Administrative Information

Provenance

The Democratic Study Group gave a portion of its records to the Library of Congress in 1976-1977. Additional material was given to the Library in 1997 and 2002.

Processing History

Part I of the collection was processed in 1978 and revised in 2009. Part II of the collection was processed in 2009 and revised in 2014 and 2015. Restricted material was organized separately in 2011.

Transfers

Video and audio recordings have been transferred to the Library's Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division where they are identified as part of these papers.

Related Material

The Manuscript Division also holds the records of the [House Democratic Caucus](#).

Copyright Status

The status of copyright in the unpublished writings of the Democratic Study Group is governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.).

Access and Restrictions

The records of the Democratic Study Group are open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Reading Room prior to visiting. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Roman numeral designating the Part followed by a colon and container number, Democratic Study Group Records, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Organizational History

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>
1959	Like-minded Democrats in the House of Representative establish the Democratic Study Group (DSG) to mobilize and coordinate efforts to enact progressive programs William G. Phillips appointed staff director
1960-1968	DSG plays leadership role in passing Kennedy-Johnson legislative agenda
1968	Richard Conlon appointed executive director, serving twenty years until his death in a boating accident
1970-1990	DSG active in reforming parliamentary rules of the U.S. House of Representatives
1988	Scott Lilly appointed executive director
1995	DSG dissolved under Republican majority reform rules abolishing the organization as a congressionally funded entity

Scope and Content Note

The records of the Democratic Study Group (DSG) document activities of a legislative service organization in the United States House of Representatives from 1959 to 1995. The records are arranged in two parts. Part I contains material from 1940 to 1976 organized in six series: [Fact Sheets, Reports, and Other Material](#); [Campaign File](#); [Chronological File](#); [Subject File](#); [Printed Matter](#); and [Oversize](#). Part II contains records from 1912 to 1995 organized in six series: [Administrative File](#), [Chronological File](#), [Research Publications](#), [Services and Activities](#), [Subject File](#), and [Formerly Restricted](#). There is considerable overlap in Parts I and II for documentation on major DSG activities. Similar arrangement of series in each part facilitates access by topic and document type.

Part I

In 1959, a group of liberal Democratic members of the House of Representatives organized the Democratic Study Group to counterbalance a conservative Republican-Dixiecrat coalition. The group's first need was for research and analysis of legislative proposals, policy options, and political issues in order to exchange information and identify common ground. The DSG provided a constant flow of information to its members in publications found primarily in the series [Fact Sheets, Reports, and Other Material](#) with additional items in the [Chronological File](#) and [Subject File](#) of Part I. DSG publications are also contained in the [Research Publications](#) series of Part II.

DSG circulars in the collection include *Legislative Report*, a weekly summary of bills and amendments scheduled for action that week. The *Legislative Report* also provided background information on parliamentary situations and the positions of the current presidential administration and public and private interest groups. A *Fact Sheet* containing a more comprehensive analysis of major legislation was published as circumstances warranted. *Issue Report*, circulated during election years, briefed members on campaign issues and election strategy. *Special Report* was issued periodically as background and analysis of controversial issues while *Record Votes* provided a quarterly breakdown of all record votes taken in the House. Finally, the *Staff Bulletin*, a weekly publication, reported on committee actions, hearings and markups, members' projects, and notice of important federal agency rulings. Excerpts from constituent mail were also published in the bulletin.

The [Campaign File](#) in the collection documents DSG support for key House of Representatives election campaigns as well as information concerning Democratic Party candidates in presidential and Senate campaigns. The [Chronological File](#) records the flow of political and legislative events through summaries of activities and group publications. The [Subject File](#), the largest series in Part I, also contains the greatest detail on policy issues, including civil rights and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party's challenge to seat delegates at the 1964 Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey. Other issues detailed in the Subject File include congressional reorganization and reform and tax policy. Administrative records of the Democratic Study Group are also located in the Subject File. The [Printed Matter](#) series contains supplemental publications related to subjects studied by the DSG.

To achieve its goals, the DSG also organized its own whip system to assist the Democratic Party whip coordinate votes on key legislation. Whip files are located in the [Subject File](#). Simultaneously, DSG leaders challenged congressional rules, working to bring greater transparency to Congress and revisions to the seniority and committee systems. Through these combined efforts, documented primarily in the Subject File, the DSG provided the sustained and coordinated machinery that helped to pass the major civil rights and social legislation of the John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson administrations.

Part II

The [Administrative File](#) of Part II complements the [Subject File](#) of Part I in documenting the operation and funding of the DSG. The [Administrative File](#) includes election records for chairmen and executive committee members as well as task force organization and meeting records. Day-to-day operations were the purview of the executive director as reflected in the [Chronological File](#). Included in this series is material of all variety documenting organizational activities and policy issues as they developed.

As the DSG evolved and the views of its members diverged, emphasis shifted to nonpartisan research services. In the 1970s and 1980s, under executive director Richard Conlon, DSG research publications became a primary function of the organization. Contained in the [Research Publications](#) series is the distillation of information provided by the DSG research arm for its members. The DSG *Fact Sheet*, *Issue Report*, *Legislative Report*, and *Staff Bulletin* aimed for impartiality. The

Special Report, issued ad hoc, remained partisan. The *Daily Report* lists the floor schedule of the House and summarizes anticipated amendments. *Record Votes* provides detailed analysis of votes taken during each session of Congress.

The [Services and Activities](#) series documents the administrative and campaign support provided to members, including freshman orientation seminars on setting up an office on Capitol Hill, handling constituent mail, and committee assignments. A DSG Campaign Fund was established as a political affiliate to raise funds and provide assistance in targeted election campaigns. Campaign files in the Services and Activities series treat the resulting support for Democratic Party candidates on presidential as well as congressional levels and the response of Democrats to Republican Party campaign arguments. DSG whip system records are located in the Services and Activities series.

The [Subject File](#) of Part II documents the issues tackled by the DSG. Files on civil rights include testimony from clergy and students on the moral conduct of participants in the 1965 Selma-Montgomery civil rights march in Alabama and records relating to the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party that complement the records in Part I of the [Subject File](#).

Other files from the 1960s and 1970s feature DSG efforts to end American involvement in the Vietnam war, redress a perceived imbalance of power between Congress and the Executive, enact campaign finance reform and consumer protections, and defeat Republican opposition to federal programs on domestic poverty, the environment, health, education, and civil rights. Of note in the [Subject File](#) from the period is a survey conducted in 1979 by the DSG on White House staff performance during the Jimmy Carter administration.

Prominent as themes during the 1980s are budget, tax, and economic proposals by the Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush administrations, along with arms control and war power issues.

The DSG also concentrated on reform of House rules and worked to revive the dormant Democratic Caucus as the basic arbiter of Democratic policy in that body. Group leaders headed committees to study and propose reforms that would adjust the seniority system, open committee meetings to the public, allow recorded votes on floor amendments, require secret ballot votes on committee chairmen at the start of each Congress, and give junior members a voice in committees. Among the relevant files in the [Subject File](#) series are the records for the Committee on Organization, Study and Review, chaired by Julia Butler Hansen in 1971; records for the Select Committee on Committees, chaired by Richard Bolling in 1973; records of the Commission on Administrative Review, chaired by David R. Obey in 1976; and material pertaining to the Second Select Committee on Committees, chaired by Jerry Patterson in 1979.

The [Formerly Restricted](#) series in Part II includes correspondence and memoranda, meeting records, reports, and printed matter from the period 1986-1995.

Arrangement of the Papers

The collection is arranged in two parts. Part I contains material from 1940 to 1976 organized in six series and Part II contains records from 1912 to 1995 organized in six series.

Part I:

- [Fact Sheets, Reports, and Other Material, 1959-1976](#)
- [Campaign File, 1960-1974](#)
- [Chronological File, 1963-1972](#)
- [Subject File, 1940-1975](#)
- [Printed Matter, 1953-1971](#)
- [Oversize, 1971-1972](#)

Part II:

- [Administrative File, 1939-1995](#)
- [Chronological File, 1958-1994](#)
- [Research Publications, 1959-1994](#)
- [Services and Activities, 1937-1994](#)
- [Subject File, 1912-1995](#)
- [Formerly Restricted, 1986-1995](#)

Description of Series

<i>Container</i>	<i>Series</i>
BOX I:1-12	<p><u>Part I: Fact Sheets, Reports, and Other Material, 1959-1976</u></p> <p>Research publications issued to members of Congress, correspondence, memoranda, draft legislation, whip notices, and miscellany.</p> <p>Arranged chronologically and thereunder by publication title, topic, or document type</p>
BOX I:13-31	<p><u>Part I: Campaign File, 1960-1974</u></p> <p>Reports, polling data, campaign manuals and literature, fund-raising files, correspondence and memoranda, photographs, and newspaper clippings and media coverage of presidential, Senate, and House of Representative elections.</p> <p>Arranged chronologically by election cycle and thereunder alphabetically.</p>
BOX I:31-41	<p><u>Part I: Chronological File, 1963-1972</u></p> <p>Summaries of Democratic Study Group activities and publications.</p> <p>Arranged chronologically.</p>
BOX I:42-73	<p><u>Part I: Subject File, 1940-1975</u></p> <p>Research material, correspondence and memoranda, briefing books, draft legislation, legal documents, government records, voting and hearing records, committee and caucus records, press releases, media files, and news clippings concerning the political and legislative activities of the Democratic Study Group along with administrative records of the organization.</p> <p>Arranged alphabetically by topic or document type and thereunder chronologically.</p>
BOX I:73-74	<p><u>Part I: Printed Matter, 1953-1971</u></p> <p>Pamphlets, booklets, reports, and related material.</p> <p>Arranged chronologically.</p>
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Arranged alphabetically by topic or document type and thereunder chronologically.

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Part II: Subject File, 1912-1995

Correspondence and memoranda, briefing books, position papers, resolutions and rule making, legal documents, government records, voting and hearing records, committee and caucus records, research materials, draft legislation, surveys, press releases and media files, news clippings and printed matter.

Arranged alphabetically by topic or document type and thereunder chronologically.

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Part II: Formerly Restricted, 1954-1995

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Arranged and described according to the series, containers, and folders from which the items were removed.

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