

**Party Organizations, Party-Connected Committees, Party Allies,
and the Financing of Federal Elections**

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Abstract

What constitutes party campaign activity in elections? The answer to this question depends on how one defines a political party. This study introduces a definition of political parties as enduring multilayered coalitions that includes actors not often considered part of the party, namely party-connected committees, comprising party members' personal campaign committees and leadership PACs, and party allies, consisting of interest groups that primarily support one party's candidates. The inclusion of these actors highlights the parties' ability to adapt to their political environment and shows that most extant studies underestimate the parties' influence in election campaigns. It also demonstrates that a reliance on datasets that aggregate information in particular ways serves to illuminate some aspects of party (and other) politics, but may lead to other aspects being overlooked.

Political parties in the United States have been criticized, defended, and even deemed indispensable by various academicians, journalists, and reformers. Some of the strongest commendations and condemnations have concerned the parties' activities in election campaigns. Traditionally, such assessments have been directed at the segment of the party referred to by scholars as the party organization. However, in recent years it has become increasingly difficult to determine what constitutes party campaign activity. Does it consist solely of the activities of the party organizations that are formally codified under the law? Does it include "party-connected" committees—those candidate committees and leadership political action committees (PACs) that are connected to the party by virtue of their being sponsored by party politicians and contributing solely to members of one party? Or, does it also include "allied" interest groups and individuals that make virtually all of their campaign expenditures to help candidates of one party? The answers to these questions have implications for election campaigns and their study. They may have relevance for assessments of the strength of parties, for recent developments in governance, including increased party polarization in Congress and what some consider a decline in the constitutional system of checks and balances. The definitions used to characterize party campaign spending and other political activities also have consequences for political science research and political reform.

To address some of these questions and considerations, I first discuss some shortcomings in contemporary definitions of political parties, particularly in terms of their relationships with what I refer to as party-connected committees and party allies. Second, I develop a new conception of political parties as enduring multilayered coalitions comprising these and other organizations and individuals. Third, an examination of campaign spending demonstrates the significance of the roles of party-connected committees and party allied PACs in the financing of federal elections. Fourth, I assess the similarities and differences in these organizations' election efforts using the 2006 House elections as a case study. The findings of these analyses have implications for whether these

organizations should be combined and their election efforts treated as party campaigning, kept separate and examined independently of one another, or considered in relationship to one another. Finally, I address the implications of the rise of party-connected committees and party allies for contemporary politics.

Some Matters of Definition

Definitions are important. The definition one uses influences what one categorizes as belonging to a group of phenomena. It has an impact on the data researchers consider relevant for the analysis of a subject. It also has an impact on the how those data are collected, analyzed, and interpreted. In political science, this is true for such basic terms as democracy, representation, and political party.

Political parties have been defined in a variety of ways, including by their goals, their activities and behavior, their electoral bases of support, and by normative aspirations for their functions in a democratic society. E.E Schattschneider defined the political party in terms of its goals and activities: “first of all an organized attempt to get power” (1942, 35). Leon Epstein also emphasized goals and teamwork, considering a political party as “any group, no matter how loosely organized, seeking to elect governmental office-holders under a given label” (1967, 9). V.O. Key was the first to popularize the distinctions between different segments of the party, identifying them as the party-in-government, the party-in-the-electorate, and the party organization (1958). Joseph Schlesinger (1985) examined the relationships among these parts of the party and the impact of changes in the political opportunity structure on party strength. The authors of *The American Voter* focused on the party-in-the-electorate, considering parties symbolic referents that influence the political loyalties, opinions, and behavior of citizens (Campbell et al. 1960). The American Political Science Association’s Committee on Political Parties took a normative approach, seeking to make U.S. political parties more “democratic, responsible, and effective” (1950, 17) by integrating the

various segments of the party and uniting them around a national policy agenda that was to be derived in part from a participatory process. Such parties, the committee believed, would be highly responsive and accountable to the American public. All of these definitions have been important in educating students, guiding research, informing academic debates, and influencing political reform.

Another important definition of a political party is statutory. Federal law defines a political party as “an association, committee, or organization which nominates a candidate for election to any Federal office whose name appears on the election ballot as the candidate of such association, committee, or organization” for the purpose of participating in elections (Federal Election Commission 2008, 10). This definition is of major consequence because the law governs most party campaign activity, including in the realm of financing elections. It is straightforward and has firm boundaries. The Federal Election Commission (FEC) uses this definition when it aggregates campaign finance data, which has the effect of privileging this definition of party over others among those who do empirical research on the financing of federal elections.

Nevertheless, reliance on this definition may lead to deficiencies in the study of political parties and their roles in elections. If researchers limit themselves to the statutorily defined party, or data collected solely under that definition, they risk ignoring important campaign activities that are carried out by organizations and individuals that are considered part of the party under other definitions. The case of unregulated party soft money exemplifies this.¹ The Federal Election Campaign Act of 1974 (FECA) and its amendments, which provide the foundation for the current campaign finance system, regulated federal but not other party finances.² Largely excluded were funds associated with organizational expenses and spending to influence state and local elections. Within roughly two decades, the parties’ national, congressional, and senatorial campaign committees also raised and spent large sums of money outside the FECA’s regulatory regime to influence federal elections. Indeed, by the 2000 elections unregulated, nonfederal so-called “soft”

money accounted for 40 percent of these organizations' receipts, and by 2002 Democratic the national party organizations had raised more soft money than federally-regulated "hard" money. However, because the legal definition of a party and the regulations governing party activity in federal elections originally did not include language recognizing soft money, these funds were subject to minimal disclosure requirements. Many soft money expenditures that were made to influence specific election campaigns were not reported as such. This made it impossible to use data collected under the FECA to discern the full extent of party involvement in individual federal elections. The narrowness of the law's definition of political parties and party activity resulted in a gaping hole in the regulation and reporting of the parties' campaign efforts until those funds were banned by the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002 (BCRA). Federal law also limited the attention scholars devoted to studying party soft money expenditures (but see La Raja 2008).

Research confined to a narrow statutory definition of political parties also may fail to recognize activities by organizations that are closely aligned with the party, such as the organizations I refer to as party-connected committees and allied interest groups.³ Some of these organizations share personnel and information, coordinate campaign efforts, support each other financially, or pursue similar goals, strategies, and tactics. They also may distribute their resources to the same candidates. The evidence suggests the evolution of campaign finance regulations and party rules has encouraged a *de facto* division of labor between formal party organizations and some of these groups. One example concerns the prohibitions against the national party soft money fundraising and spending introduced by the BCRA. It created a void in soft-money funded "issue advocacy" ads (radio and television ads that do *not expressly* advocating a candidate's election or defeat), voter targeting, and voter mobilization activities that to a large degree has been filled by some existing and some new 501(c) and 527 organizations (e.g. Corrado 2006).⁴ Another example concerns the extraordinary requirements party organizations must meet prior to contributing to a House

nonincumbent candidate in a contested primary. Party rules limiting party activity in these contests, which can influence a party's general election prospects, created opportunities for increased activity and influence by party-connected committees, allied interest groups, and other financiers of elections that can more freely participate in primaries.⁵

This albeit limited discussion of the complex relationships between party organizations and other groups suggests that party campaigning involves more than the activities that formal party organizations finance using their hard money accounts. It provides evidence that parties adapt to changes in the strategic environment in which they operate. It demonstrates that one form of party adaptation consists of creating new financial accounts for different activities, such as hard and soft money accounts. Another form adaptation consists of spinning off some party activities to individuals and groups that do not meet the formal/legal definition of a party but are in a better position than the parties to carry out some traditional party activities. In some ways, party organizational development is analogous to some of the basic principles of architecture: new needs are met by adding new rooms to existing structures or by building new structures to complement existing ones, and the forms these improvements take are influenced by regulatory codes.

Political Parties as Enduring Multilayered Coalitions

Political parties in the twenty-first century United States can be defined as enduring multilayered coalitions of individuals and groups that possess mutual goals and share interlocking relationships. The most important actors in the party are those that exhibit the greatest party loyalty, commit the most resources to the party, have the strongest relationships with it, and hold elected or appointed positions authorizing them on the party's behalf. Less important members possess few of these characteristics. Nonaligned individuals and groups possess virtually none.

Parties can be conceptualized as concentric circles with somewhat porous boundaries (see Figure 1). At the core are formal party leaders and the organizations they direct, the next layer (or

ring) comprises party members and their organizations, and next are party allies. These three layers of the party's coalition engage in significant partisan activity and are tied together by extensive networks within and between them. Less actively involved in party politics are loyal voters. Located outside of each party's coalition are independent voters and nonaligned groups. The boundaries between the concentric circles that define a party's leaders, members, allies, and loyalists, and separate them from others, are porous because of the ease with which individuals can move from one layer to the next.

Components of the Party

Party leaders and the organizations they lead make the greatest commitment to advancing their party's objectives. They define the party's specific goals, strategies, and tactics. They mobilize many of the resources the party needs to accomplish its goals. They have the formal authority to act on the party's behalf. Party organizations and leaders in the federal government include the parties' caucuses and their officers, including the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, and the majority and minority leaders of the House and Senate. Extra-governmental party organizations and their leaders, include the Democratic National Committee (DNC), the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC), the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee (DSCC), the Republican National Committee (RNC), the National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC), the National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC), and their chairs and other officers. Party politicians created these organizations primarily to help them pursue their electoral goals (e.g., Aldrich 1995).

Extra-governmental party organizations have evolved in response to changes in their environment to help meet their politicians' campaign needs, while at the same time helping to shape that environment (Esptein 1986). National party organizations came into their own as campaigners in federal elections during the late 1970s and early 1980s (Herrnson 1988). Contemporary national party

organizations recruit candidates, structure the parties' nominating contests, compete to influence the political agenda, and provide assistance to a select group of candidates. This assistance includes campaign contributions, coordinated expenditures made in collaboration with the candidates, and independent expenditures designed to assist a federal candidate but made without that candidate's knowledge or consent. Between 1978 and 2006 spending on these activities increased from \$11 million (\$34 million in 2006 dollars) to more than \$264.8 million.⁶

In addition, the parties furnish selected candidates with specialized services in campaign management, research, targeting, and others areas of campaigning requiring specialized expertise or in-depth research. They also provide transactional assistance to help these candidates raise money, collect endorsements, and obtain other resources from interest groups, individual donors and activists, political consultants, opinion leaders, and others that possess some of the resources needed to wage a viable campaign (Herrnson 1988, 2008). During the 2004 elections, the Republicans introduced a new vehicle for campaign spending: hybrid campaign ads that feature both the candidate and a generic party message (Corrado 2006). The RNC spent \$45.8 million on hybrid ads in support of President George W. Bush in 2004. The DNC spent \$24 million in support of their nominee Senator John Kerry. Because federal law does not recognize hybrid ads, and thus places no ceilings on the amounts the parties can spend on them, these ads could play a substantial role in future presidential elections. Most party assistance has been used to help elect presidential candidates or to advance the causes of House and Senate candidates in competitive elections, especially endangered incumbents.

Despite the augmentation of existing campaign programs and the introduction of new ones, contemporary party organizations operate within a number of constraints. Federal law governs the sources to which a party can turn for money, the amounts it can raise from each, and the contributions and expenditures it can make to influence individual elections. The resources political parties can raise further limit their roles in elections. Considerations of credibility, loyalty, and infrastructure also

limit a party's ability to influence what is communicated in the mass media and to persuade and mobilize voters. These constraints make it impossible for a party to accomplish its electoral goals without the assistance of others. They have encouraged parties to form relationships with a variety of individuals and groups. Included among these are political consultants that possess some of the expertise needed to wage a modern campaign; politicians and interest groups (including PACs) that can raise and spend money, make endorsements, and reach out directly to their members on behalf of a party's candidates; think tanks that can develop policy ideas and proposals; political commentators and other members of the media that provide voters and elites with political information; and individual donors and political activists.

The next layer of the party comprises by party members and the organizations they form to advance partisan and individual objectives. These individuals and organizations are very loyal to their party. They commit significant resources to the accomplishment of formal party goals and coordinate their efforts with it. However, they have less influence than party leaders on the formulation of party goals, strategies, and tactics, and they have less authority to act on their party's behalf. Party members in government include members of Congress (MCs), cabinet officers, and some judges whose decision making is not always above partisan politics. Outside of government they comprise candidates, candidates' personal campaign committees, and leadership PACs—referred to as party-connected committees.⁷ Personal campaign committees, first created by candidates to help them win elections, became increasingly specialized, relying on teams of paid staff and consultants during the mid-twentieth century (e.g. Agranoff 1972). MCs (and others) have long used some of the funds raised by their campaign committees to help elect fellow partisans but it is only in recent elections that they have reached substantial levels. Between the 1990 and 2006 congressional elections the number of politicians who made these contributions increased from 362 to 593, and the amounts they contributed to House and Senate candidates grew from \$1.7 million (\$2.6 million in 2006 dollars) to

\$15.6 million. The first leadership PAC, originally known as the 29th Congressional District of California PAC and later renamed “LA PAC,” was founded in 1978 by Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Calif. Numbering 74 in 1990, leadership PACs sponsored by congressional candidates reached 261 by 2006. Their contributions grew from \$2 million (\$3.0 million 2006 dollars) to \$39.6 million by 2006.⁸ Thus, during the 2006 elections, party-connected committees contributed more than \$55.2 million to candidates for the House and Senate.

Beyond party leaders and party members, and the organizations they lead, are party allies that routinely work with one party in pursuit of their common goals. Party allies include individuals and organizations that spend money to influence elections; political consultants that work in elections; think tanks that develop and disseminate policy ideas; lobbying organizations that seek specific policy benefits; opinion leaders that focus on shaping public attitudes about politics; and party, candidate, and issue activists that seek to influence politics through elections, lobbying, and other channels. Party allies are not as reliable a source of resources as are party leaders, members, or the organizations they lead. Party allies have less influence on party goals, strategies, and tactics, are less likely to coordinate their efforts with party organizations, and possess less authority to act on a party’s behalf. Nevertheless, they are important because they provide one party and its members with money, information, advice, political services, or support that is useful in building electoral or legislative majorities. They often carry out tasks that neither a party nor its members can accomplish on their own, such as financing campaigns, advertising candidates or issues, or pressing legislators to support important bills in Congress. Some allied groups also have the ability to mobilize their own members in service of a party’s efforts. For the Democrats, these include labor unions, environmental groups, organizations advocating women’s rights, and many left-leaning ideological groups, such as MoveOn.org. For the Republicans, they include pro-life groups, the national, and state, and local

affiliates of the Chamber of Congress, religious groups, and conservative ideological groups, such as the Club for Growth.

During the last few decades allied (and nonaligned) interest groups have used a variety of organizational structures to participate in elections. After the FECA established the framework for the interest groups to participate in federal elections and the BCRA, various FEC regulatory decisions, and a number of court rulings modified it, many interest groups created or augmented their organizations to include PACs, 501(c) groups, and 527 committees. Party organizations were involved in the creation of some of allied interest groups (Herrnson 2004; Weissman and Hassan 2006). The architecture of interest groups, like that of political parties, is one in which new financial accounts and organizations are formed to take advantage of the opportunities that exist under different parts of the law. Some of the most powerful groups sponsor several organizations of different types in order to maximize their political clout. Because the finances of 501(c) groups and 527 committees are subject to only limited reporting requirements, it is impossible to get a full measure of the activities party allies use to influence federal elections. However, a detailed analysis of allied PACs is possible. The number of allied PACs grew from 983 in 1990 to 1280 in 2006. Their spending increased from \$27.5 million (\$42.2 million in 2006 dollars) to \$96.5 million during this period. As was the case with party-connected committees, the organizational evolution of party allies demonstrates that parties have learned to delegate some activities to other groups that are in a better position to perform them.

The final segment of the party under the definition of parties as an enduring multilayered coalition is its electoral following. Party loyalists, often referred to as party identifiers at the individual level and as the party-in-the-electorate or the party's base as a collectivity, are less actively engaged in politics than are party members or party allies. The numbers of individuals identifying with one party or the other has waxed and waned in response to political conditions, events, and the

performance of the parties and the officials they help to elect. In 2006, approximately 64% of Americans identified themselves as Democrats or Republicans and another 24% identified themselves as independents that lean toward one of the major parties.⁹ Parties cannot take the support of their loyalists, whether identifiers or leaners, for granted. Party loyalists are among the principal targets of party voter mobilization efforts.

Located outside of both parties' coalitions are nonaligned individuals and groups. These include independent voters and nonvoters (who do not lean toward either party), nonpartisan contributors, and independent interest groups that the parties seek to mobilize in support of their candidates and policies. They also comprise the independent journalists whose reporting parties frequently attempt to influence.

Mutual Goals

Party leaders, party members, party allies, party loyalists, and the organizations they seek to advance some basic objectives. First and foremost, they seek to win elections in order to attain, maintain, or increase control over the government.¹⁰ Second, they seek to organize the government in ways that work to advance their individual or collective influence. Third, and related to the first two goals, parties seek to enact policies that are supported by enough leaders, members, allies, loyalists, and nonaligned individuals and groups to maintain or win control of the government. When a party is in the minority, opposing the majority party's policies is often a substitute for the third goal (Gilmore 1995). Of course, individuals and organizations belonging to different layers of the party have different levels of commitment to achieving these objectives.

Relationships

Cooperation between party leaders, party members, and party allies is facilitated by a number of factors beyond shared goals. First, there is the matter of origins. Party leaders and party organizations had a significant hand in facilitating the creation of some party-connected committees

and allied interest groups. They also encouraged candidates to consider using these organizations and their personal campaign committees to raise funds for redistribution to other candidates.

Second, some party-connected committees, party allies, and party organizations share personnel. For example, most of the congressional leaders who serve on their parties' congressional or senatorial campaign committee also head their own leadership PACs and all have personal campaign committees possessing sufficient resources to contribute toward the achievement of party goals. Some individuals employed by one of the national party organizations in the nation's capital also help run various leadership PACs and personal campaign committees. Many party-connected committees and party allies hire political consultants that also work for a national party organization. Occasionally party-connected committees and party allies hire specific political aides and consultants at the behest of a national party organization; sometimes the impetus behind the hiring of specific personnel flows in the opposite direction. The revolving door of partisan employment encourages different layers of a party's coalition to work together.

Third, party organizations, party-connected committees, and party allies routinely share information, strategies, and tactics. The DNC, DCCC, DSCC, DNC, NRC, NRCC, and NRSC are at the nexus of national political intelligence networks (Herrnson 1988, 2008). For example, the parties' congressional and senatorial campaigns routinely provide factual, strategic, and tactical information to members of their caucus in the House or the Senate and to party allies outside of government. They encourage party members to use their campaign accounts and leadership PACs to contribute to candidates in closely contested elections and allied interest groups to supply these candidates with funding, endorsements, and other forms of assistance. Factual and strategic information also flows in the opposite direction. Party members and party allies share information with each other and with party leaders to as part of an effort to encourage others to support the candidates they are backing.

Information flows and coordination between formal party organizations and party-connected committees can be extensive. Indeed, due to a peculiarity in campaign finance regulations resulting from the Supreme Court's 1996 ruling in the *Colorado Republican Federal Campaign Committee v. FEC* the main strategic and tactical decision-making arms of the congressional and senatorial campaign committees are able to work more freely with party-connected committees and party allies than with the teams of party employees and consultants the parties hire to make independent expenditures to advocate the election or defeat of a federal candidate. Unlike regular party organizations, the parties' independent expenditure teams cannot communicate their activities or coordinate their efforts with candidates whose elections they seek to influence or any entities working for those candidates. This isolates the parties' independent expenditure teams not only from the candidates, but also from the party leaders, party staffs, and party organizations that hire and finance those teams.

Fifth, party-connected committees and party allies coordinate many of their activities with party organizations. In addition to campaign contributions and expenditures, these activities range from candidate recruitment to fundraising assistance to voter mobilization efforts. There are numerous instances where DCCC chairs have called on Democratic congressional leaders, MCs, labor leaders, and even presidents to encourage highly qualified nonincumbents to run for Congress; NRCC chairs have orchestrated similar recruitment efforts involving comparable Republican politicians and business leaders. Both parties have established "buddy systems" that match financially needy but promising nonincumbents and first-term freshmen with party leaders, committee chairs, and other powerful MCs to help these individuals raise funds. Working with the leaders of allied PACs and these MCs, congressional campaign committee staffs organize fundraising events and make telephone calls to encourage the flow of money in the direction of the party's priority candidates. Party organizations, candidates, and their party-connected committees have historically

worked with various allies to turn out voters. The Democrats have relied heavily on labor unions and environmental groups, and the Republicans have turned to business groups and some religious organizations for similar purposes (Herrnson 1988, 2008).

A sixth reason for the close relationships that exist among party organizations, party members, party allies, and the organizations they lead concerns the financial support they provide to one another. The contributions and other assistance that party organizations and allies give to party members and candidates is well documented (e.g., Herrnson 2008) and has been discussed above. The support that party organizations provide to party allies is less well-documented, but party organizations have helped some allied groups meet their start-up costs (Herrnson 2004). Less frequently discussed and just as important, is the financial assistance that party-connected committees and party allies provide to party organizations. For example, during the 2006 elections Republican MCs contributed (or transferred) \$37.3 million from their campaign committees and leadership PACs to Republican party organizations; their Democratic rivals provided about \$51.1 million to Democratic party organizations.¹¹ These sums, which do not include the millions of dollars MCs raised for their party, represented 7.7% and 10.6% of the parties' total respective receipts. If one focuses solely on the finances of the parties' congressional and senatorial campaign committees, which were responsible for most party campaigning during the 2006 midterm contests, the contributions of party politicians amounted to 12.1% of the receipts collected by the NRCC and NRSC and 15.8% of the receipts collected amassed by their Democratic counterparts. To more fully appreciate the value of party-connected donations to party organizations, one need only compare them to the \$112.3 million the NRCC and NRSC spent on contributions, coordinated expenditures, and independent expenditures in the 2006 congressional elections and the \$118.0 million the DCCC and DSCC spent on these same activities. This comparison shows that the party-connected donations were the equivalent of 28.9% of the funds the NRCC and NRSC allocated to advance the elections of

Republican House and Senate candidates and 35% of the monies the DCCC and DSCC spent to elect Democrats to Congress. Allied PACs contributed less to party organizations in 2006, amounting to only 4% of their total budgets and 6.7% of the budgets of the parties' congressional and senatorial campaign committees. Prior to the BCRA's ban on soft money contributions to the parties, some party allies contributed considerably more (e.g. La Raja 2008).

Other Foundations for Collaboration

Politics is about deal-making and compromise. Party politics are no different. Shared goals and interlocking relationships provide some of the foundation for the teamwork that exists among individuals and groups that belong to different layers of a party's coalition. Exchanges among politicians, sometimes referred to as *quid pro quos*, also are important. Some exchanges involve broad grants of power. When party members select leaders they give up some autonomy in order to empower their leaders to set the party's agenda, plot strategy, and implement tactics that are expected to benefit the party as a collectivity (Sinclair 1983). Other exchanges are intended to promote private benefits. Many studies of individual and PAC contributions test this hypothesis (e.g., Grenzke 1989; Francia et al.2003). Another category of exchanges are intended to produce both collective and private benefits. The financial contributions that party leaders and members contribute to party organizations and candidates for public office are intended to accomplish two goals: to help the party maintain or increase its power, and to help those making the contributions to realize some individual benefits, such as continuation or advancement in the ranks of congressional leaders (Cann 2008).

Party leaders in and out of government are the most committed to party goals because party members grant them the authority and responsibility to establish those goals and pursue them. In the language of principal agent theory, party leaders are agents that are selected by party members, their principals, to use the party's resources to pursue its collective interests (Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991). Success results in leaders remaining or moving up in the leadership; repeated or flagrant

violations of authority typically results in party leaders losing their positions. The primary goals of leaders of the party's extra-governmental organizations are to win as many elections as possible. For the chairs of the DCCC, NRCC this translates into maximizing the number of House seats under their party's control, for example. To accomplish this goal DCCC and NRCC chairs traditionally allocate the vast majority of their resources to candidates in competitive elections and are especially supportive of incumbents in jeopardy of losing their seats (e.g., Jacobson 1985-86; Herrnson 2008).

One would expect party members to work closely with party leaders in the pursuit of party goals because party members are the principals who authorized party leaders to work on their behalf. However, party members usually are not as committed to these goals as are party leaders, and they have the autonomy to deviate from them. Most party members use their party-connected committee for both collective and personal benefits. The former concern the maximization of offices the party controls and the latter include attracting the support needed to run for higher office, win congressional leadership races, claim valued committee assignments, or sway the legislative votes of their colleagues. Party members pursue the former goals by contributing to their party and supporting some of the candidates it supports (Currinder 2003; Heberlig 2003; Heberlig, Heatherington, and Larson 2006; Brewer and Deering 2005). They pursue the latter by contributing to politicians likely to be in a position to advance their individual goals. The group includes incumbents, most of whom have a very high probability of reelection. It also includes candidates running for open seats or marginal seats that are occupied by members of the opposing party, many of whom have reasonable prospects for success. Many party members make contributions to the nomination campaigns of this latter group of candidates in order to advance the careers of politicians that are most likely to emerge as political allies if elected to Congress. Should that candidate win the nomination general election support is likely to follow, if not some party members will support the candidate who defeated their preferred standard-bearer in the primary.

Party allies can be expected to have weaker commitments to party goals than party leaders and party members because unlike these politicians, members of allied groups have neither principal nor agent relationships with the party. Rather, allied groups are agents of the specific interests they represent. They form enduring alliances with one of the two major parties because historically this relationship has provided the greatest benefits to their group's principals. The same is true of those groups' supporters, including some individuals who routinely contribute thousands of dollars per election to a party's candidates or organizations (Francia et al. 2003). Although the campaign activities of allied groups are sufficient to consider them associated with one of the parties, as noted above, these groups have their own goals, strategies, and principal-agent relationships. They are most likely to coordinate efforts with a party when their goals overlap heavily with those of the party.

Several manifestations of allies' relationships to their party are visible through their roles in nominating contests and general elections. First, and unlike party organizations and party-connected committees, some party allies go to great lengths to support a primary challenger seeking to defeat an incumbent who belongs to their party's coalition. Should the challenger prove unsuccessful in the general election, they may abandon the race during the general election, even if the race is so competitive that it becomes a top party priority. During the 2006 elections, for example, the Club for Growth's PAC spent in excess of \$48,000 to support the nomination of Cranston Mayor Stephen Laffey over incumbent Lincoln Chafee in Rhode Island's GOP Senate primary and another \$485,000 in independent expenditures attacking Chafee and calling for his ouster.¹² Following Laffey's defeat, the Club redirected its resources away from the Rhode Island Senate race in favor of other contests, leaving behind a weakened Republican incumbent who was later defeated in the general election. The Club's efforts contributed to the GOP's loss of a Senate seat.

Second, regardless of an ally's participation in the nomination process, its willingness to support a party or its candidates during the general election may wax or wane in response to the

specific candidates the party nominates. Republican pro-life allied groups, for example, routinely abandon GOP candidates who downplay the abortion issue or take pro-choice stances, even when these candidates' races are deemed a top priority by a the NRCC, NRSC, or some other Republican party organizations. Not surprisingly, pro-choice groups typically pay little attention to the campaigns of pro-life Democratic nominees, despite the fact that the DCCC, DSCC or other Democratic party organizations have prioritized their races.

Third, allies are likely to react more strongly to a change in the partisan control of political institutions. Unlike party organizations and party-connected committees some allied PACs respond to changes in partisan control by shifting some of their support away from the old majority party and toward the new majority party (e.g. Herrnson 1997; Cox and Magar 1999; Rudolph 1999). The Republican takeover of Congress in 1994 worked a as a catalyst for several PACs, including some party allies, to begin to redistribute a portion of their resources away from the Democrats and toward the GOP and its candidates. The Democrats' winning control of the House and Senate in 2006 has had the opposite effect. In both cases, some allies moved out of one party's coalition and into the realm of nonaligned groups.

Recent Trends in Campaign Spending

Having described the parties' goals and the relationships that exist among the different layers of the party under the definition of political parties as enduring multilayered coalitions, the next step is to see whether there is anything to be gained from using this new definition to examine campaign spending. What are the relative contributions of party organizations, party-connected committees, and allied PACs to the electoral causes of Democratic and Republican candidates? Have they changed over time? Spending by party organizations comprises contributions to candidates, coordinated expenditures, independent expenditures, and national party transfers to state party organizations. It is important to recognize that not all national party transfers are made to directly support federal

candidates; some are made to fund voter mobilization activities intended to improve the prospects of all of the candidates on a party' ticket residing in a specific geographic location, and others pay for party-building efforts and organizational maintenance. Thus, including party transfers to some degree overstates the role of party organizations in funding federal campaigns.¹³ Party-connected committee spending consists of contributions by politicians' personal campaign committees and leadership PACs. Because the availability of only limited data for expenditures by interest groups and individuals associated with those groups, spending by party allies is solely made up of contributions and independent expenditures made by allied PACs. Allied PACs are defined as political action committees that commit 95% of their campaign spending to one party's candidates. The omission of contributions made by other groups and individuals that make this level of financial commitment to one party results in an understatement of the roles of party allies in federal elections.

The figures for both parties demonstrate that party organizations, account for most of the party-related spending made in connection with federal elections (see Figure 2). The data available for allied interest groups (limited to PACs) and party-connected committees suggests they also contribute significant funds, and these are especially important in midterm elections. During the 1996 elections, the combined spending of party-connected committees and allied PACs accounted for 28.7% of the campaign spending associated with Democratic organizations; in the 2004 and the 2006 elections they accounted for 19.3% and 26.8%. The portion of Republican party-related spending provided by party-connected committees and allied PACs experienced consistent growth over this period. These groups accounted for 18.5%, 22.3%, and 31.7% of GOP-related spending in the 1996, 2004, and 2006 elections.

Overall, the figures make case that party-connected and allied interest group expenditures have become too large to be ignored (even though the former does not include the sums party-connected committees donate to parties and the latter underestimates the activity of allied groups

because it ignores 501 (c) groups and 527 committees). However, the conceptual issue that that remains is how these groups should be considered? One option is to lump them together with expenditures by party organizations. A second option is to ignore their existence altogether. That is, to consider the activities of leadership PACs and allied PACs along with all of the other groups the FEC categorizes as PACs and to consider candidate-to-candidate contributions on their own or disregard them altogether. The second option is the one most frequently chosen by researchers. A third alternative, suggested by the theory of party as enduring multilayered coalitions, is to analyze the expenditures of party-connected committees and party allies separately from one another and from those of party organizations. This approach acknowledges the existence of these groups and their relationships to each other, but it recognizes that they possess both shared and distinctive goals. How they weigh these goals should influence the degree to which they cooperate in elections.

The 2006 Elections for the U.S. House of Representatives

Having described the goals, relationships, and aggregate spending levels of party organizations, party-connected committees, and allied PACs, the next step is to investigate whether these different layers of the party spend their funds in concert. I do this using the 2006 elections for the U.S. House of Representatives as a case study. The 2006 election cycle was in many ways typical of recent elections for the lower chamber. A relatively small number of seats were competitive and those shifted over the course of the campaign season. The national political agenda favored one party. That party (the Democrats) went on the offensive, focusing most of its efforts on gaining seats held by the opposing party; the other party (the Republicans) took a defensive posture aimed at protecting endangered seats held by its incumbents. As has been the case in most elections for which there are reliable data, the distribution of party contributions and coordinated expenditures appear to have been informed by these strategic imperatives.¹⁴ Two ways in which the election was somewhat atypical are: the election was to some degree nationalized in terms of the issues (Herrnson and Curry 2008),

and one party swept the other out of power both in the House and Senate, defeating many incumbents without losing any incumbent-held seats to its opponents. However, even in this respect, the 2006 election is not all that unusual compared to at least one recent contest. The overall dynamics of the campaigns held three midterm election seasons earlier were strikingly similar—only then it was the Republicans, not the Democrats, who emerged victorious in 1994. Thus, the 2006 elections are a serviceable case study for analyzing the flow of campaign expenditures by party organizations, party-connected committees, and allied PACs. Expenditures by nonaligned PACs are included for the purpose of making comparisons.

Did party-connected committees and allied PACs distribute their funds in ways that were similar enough to formal party organizations to suggest that current conceptualizations of parties include these groups as part of the party, somehow related to the party, or at a minimum to acknowledge their existence? Or, is it sufficient to include only the campaign activities carried out by those entities that are conventionally categorized as party organizations and codified as such under the law? Given that the parties' election goals are to maximize the number of offices under their control and to protect their existing members, it is of little surprise that they typically allocate most of their resources to candidates in competitive contests and especially incumbents in jeopardy (e.g. Jacobson 1985-1986; Herrnson 1988, 2008).

During the 2006 elections Republican party organizations spent roughly \$83.1 million in contributions, coordinated expenditures, and independent expenditures to promote the election of their House candidates (see Table 1). These funds were deployed very efficiently. All but 5% were spent to promote the elections of GOP candidates in competitive elections.¹⁵ Two-thirds of the funds were used to support Republican incumbents in hotly-contested contests, including the twenty who lost in the general election. Another 6% of the party's funds were contributed to competitive challengers, and 21% were committed to candidates in close contests for open seats. Not surprisingly,

the GOP spent no funds in uncontested races. This allocation of resources is consistent with the defensive posture the party was forced to take because the political agenda favored the opposing party.

Republican members of Congress contributed \$26.1 million from their campaign accounts and leadership PACs to GOP House candidates in the 2006 elections, increasing the level of pro-Republican spending by 31.5% over that which was spent by Republican party organizations. The pattern of Republican party-connected committee expenditures is extremely similar to that of the expenditures made by Republican party organizations. Among the few differences are party-connected committees allocated slightly less money to competitive races and somewhat more funds to House incumbents, including those occupying safe seats. This suggests that GOP House members spent some of these funds to advance the GOP's collective goal of seat maximization and others to pursue private benefits related to enhancing their influence in Congress. The overall similarities in the allocation of party money and funds from Republican party member's campaign accounts and leadership PACs suggest that it is appropriate to consider the campaign activities of party members to be connected to their party. It also suggests that analyses of party campaign efforts that do not consider these campaign activities are incomplete.

Republican allies spent \$9 million on contributions, independent expenditures, and internal communications designed to help GOP candidates in the 2006 House elections. This represents a 10.9% increase over the funds spent by Republican party organizations. Although these PACs allocated most of their expenditures to competitive elections, they spent 27% of them in one-sided contests, including 1% in connection with incumbents in uncontested general elections. The funds these groups distributed to incumbents who faced little or no opposition were clearly motivated by something other than helping the GOP maximize its number of House seats. Most were probably informed by the same motives that inform the expenditures of many interest groups—a desire to gain

access to House members in order to influence the policymaking process (Frendreis and Richard Waterman 1985; Langbein 1986; Hall and Frank Wayman 1990; Wright 1989, 1990; Romer and Snyder 1994). Indeed, Republican allied PAC spending had fewer similarities to Republican party organization and Republican party-connected committee spending than it did to the pro-Republican spending of nonaligned PACs. Although Republican allied PACs are clearly in the GOP's coalition, the distribution of their campaign funds suggests that it is appropriate to label them as allies. After all, allies generally support each other rather than their opponents, but each ally's contribution to their common goal is contingent upon and shaped by its individual objectives.

The findings for the Democrats have many important similarities to those for the Republicans. This is particularly evident when one considers that the strategic environment put the Democrats in position to focus on gaining seats, whereas it forced the Republicans to be largely content with minimizing their losses. One important similarity concerns the importance of party-connected committees and party allies in the financing of House campaigns. Formal Democratic party organizations invested \$67.9 million in these races, while Democratic party-connected committees spent \$15.1 million and Democratic allied PACs spent another \$35 million (see Table 2). The funds committed by the latter two parts of the Democratic coalition increased spending intended to assist Democratic candidates for the House by 22.3% and 51.5%, respectively. The large expenditures by Democrat allied PACs are especially noteworthy and are indicative of the party's traditional dependence on outside groups.

Another similarity between Democratic and Republican spending is that both parties distributed their funds with great efficiency. Democratic party organizations allocated almost all of their funds to Democrats in competitive elections. The party's spending was almost a perfect mirror image of the Republican's spending: the Democrats focused most of their efforts on challengers, followed by open-seat candidates; they spent little on incumbents. Spending by Democratic party-

connected committees was similar to spending by Democratic party organizations, except that the committees contributed more to incumbents, including some in lopsided contests. Allied PACs distributed their funds in a pattern that bore greater similarity to the allocation of pro-Democratic spending of nonaligned PACs than Democratic party organizations. More than 40% of their spending was allocated to candidates in uncompetitive elections, with the majority of that committed to shoo-in incumbents. The evidence suggests that is the case with the Republican coalition, Democratic party organizations distributed their funds in accordance with a goal of seat maximization, Democratic party-connected committee made their contributions in manner that is consistent with both maximizing the number of seats under their party's control and the pursuit of private benefits, and Democratic allied PACs allocated their funds in accordance with a mixed strategy of helping the party pursue its collective goals while pursuing access to Democratic MCs for the purpose of private gain.

Conclusion

Research guided by contemporary definitions of political parties, including legal definitions, has provided tremendous insights into the roles of parties in the political system. However, as this examination of the financing of federal elections suggests, such research has been incomplete because it has not considered the efforts of party members and the party-connected committees they sponsor or the expenditures of party allies, including allied PACs. The definition of political parties as enduring multilayered coalitions highlights the importance of relationships that extend beyond formally authorized party leaders and organizations in a way that other definitions do not. It stresses the role of party organizations in coordinating the efforts of individuals and groups that share many but not all of a party's goals; may have overlapping memberships; may exchange information, funds, and other resources; and may (or may not) have principal-agent relationships with party members. This coordination is important given these groups are subject to different legal and political

constraints and possess different types and amounts of resources. Although it is beyond the scope of this analysis, research is needed to fully explore the relationships between party leaders and organizations and the political activists, individual donors, political consultants, think tanks, and public opinion leaders and others in and out of government who routinely support one party. The loyalties, activities, and influence of these individuals and groups suggest that many of them should be classified as party members or party allies (Verba et al 1995; Francia et al. 2003; Kolodny and Dulio 2003; Magleby et al. 2002; Barker 1999).

The implications of these findings are important. First, the growth in party, party-connected, and allied interest group campaigning demonstrates that political parties are malleable institutions, capable of adapting to legal, technological, and broader systemic changes in their environments. The formation of some of these organizations was partially driven by the need to spend more money in elections. It also was in part a reaction to the introduction of constraints on the activities of party organizations, the creation of opportunities for political action by others, and increased competition between the parties. Hard money expenditures by party-connected committees and allied PACs (analyzed above), and soft money expenditures by 501(c) organizations and 527 committees (not analyzed in this study) to some degree represent an outsourcing of party campaign efforts in response to legal and other constraints on formal party activity. They are signs of increased party influence in campaign politics. Parties have been portrayed by some as being inconsequential in congressional elections (Committee on Political Parties 1950; Broder 1972). Analysis employing the definition of political parties as enduring multilayered coalitions demonstrates that parties have more influence than they receive credit for.

Second, the increased importance of money in elections and the corresponding growth in the roles of party organizations, party-connected committees, and party allies in the financing of campaigns may have had a significant impact on American political institutions and processes. Party

campaigning has become important in electing some politicians to Congress, helped to extend some congressional careers, and enlarged the influence of legislators who are able to raise sufficient funds to contribute to their congressional colleagues, their party, and the nonincumbent candidates it fields for office. Many MCs that enjoy fundraising and spending advantages have used these advantages to influence which candidates win their party's nomination and succeed in the general election. This may have enabled them to influence the composition of their congressional caucus and to build the support needed to win congressional leadership races, claim prized committee assignments, and sway the legislative votes of their congressional colleagues. Given that politicians who hold less moderate political views and use more inflammatory rhetoric have significant advantages in fundraising (Godwin 1988), including from some party allies, it is not surprising that congressional leaders (and members) have become more strident in their rhetoric and that the congressional party politics have become more polarized (Heberlig, Heatherington, and Larson 2006).

Some political observers have gone so far as to suggest that the growth of the party connection in campaigning, has strengthened partisan loyalties in governance to the detriment of the institutional loyalties that are central to the checks and balances that form the basis for the U.S. Constitution (e.g., Edwards 2008). They argue that the rise of partisanship has compromised James Madison's formula for harnessing the self-interest of individual politicians who serve in separate political institutions as a means to prevent any one of those institutions from exerting too much power. That is, when members of Congress depend on party organizations and the individuals and groups that belong to its coalition for election, political advancement, or even political survival, they become more concerned with promoting their party's success and less concerned about the encroachment on Congress's constitutional powers by a president who shares their party affiliation.

Third, the revitalization of party organizations, the emergence of party-connected committees, and the increased prominence of party allies can have an effect on political reform. Those who define

party campaign activity narrowly, comprising only the spending of formal party organizations, tend to have different opinions about the fairness of the campaign finance system than those who define it broadly and include the efforts of party-connected committees or party allies. For many years the Republican Party raised more money than the Democratic Party, leading many Democrats and their supporters to claim that the campaign finance system favored the Republicans. Republicans and their supporters often responded that when you add to the expenditures of Democratic party organizations those made by labor unions and the other organized interests that routinely support Democratic candidates, it is the Republicans that are disadvantaged. It is difficult for partisans to pass meaningful campaign finance reforms when they disagree at the outset over what constitutes a political party and what comprises party campaign activity. Disagreements over definitions also can lead to the enactment of regulations that have unintended consequences, result in protracted courtroom battles, or have other undesirable policy consequences.

A final implication, especially important to political science, relates to research that uses datasets that are come with some prepackaged variables but not others. These data may make it easy to study many of the activities of certain groups, but in the process of illuminating those activities they relegate to the shadows the activities of other groups for which the data have not been aggregated. FEC data, for example, shed light on the contributions and most of the expenditures made by formal party organizations, but they make it easy to overlook the contributions and expenditures made by others, including those made by party members and party allies, and the personal campaign committees, leadership PACs, or allied PACs they direct.

Regardless of these implications, this analysis has highlighted the growth, importance, and similarities and differences of various types of partisan organizations that participate in elections. It has introduced a new definition of the political party, explicated the relationships among the different actors associated with it, and demonstrated that research guided by this definition provides new

insights into party election efforts. Hopefully, the introduction of party-connected committees and party allies into the study of party campaigning will influence academic debates, empirical research, normative arguments, and public policy initiatives concerned with political parties and the financing of elections.

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Figure 1. Party Organizations, Party-Connected Committees, and Party Allies

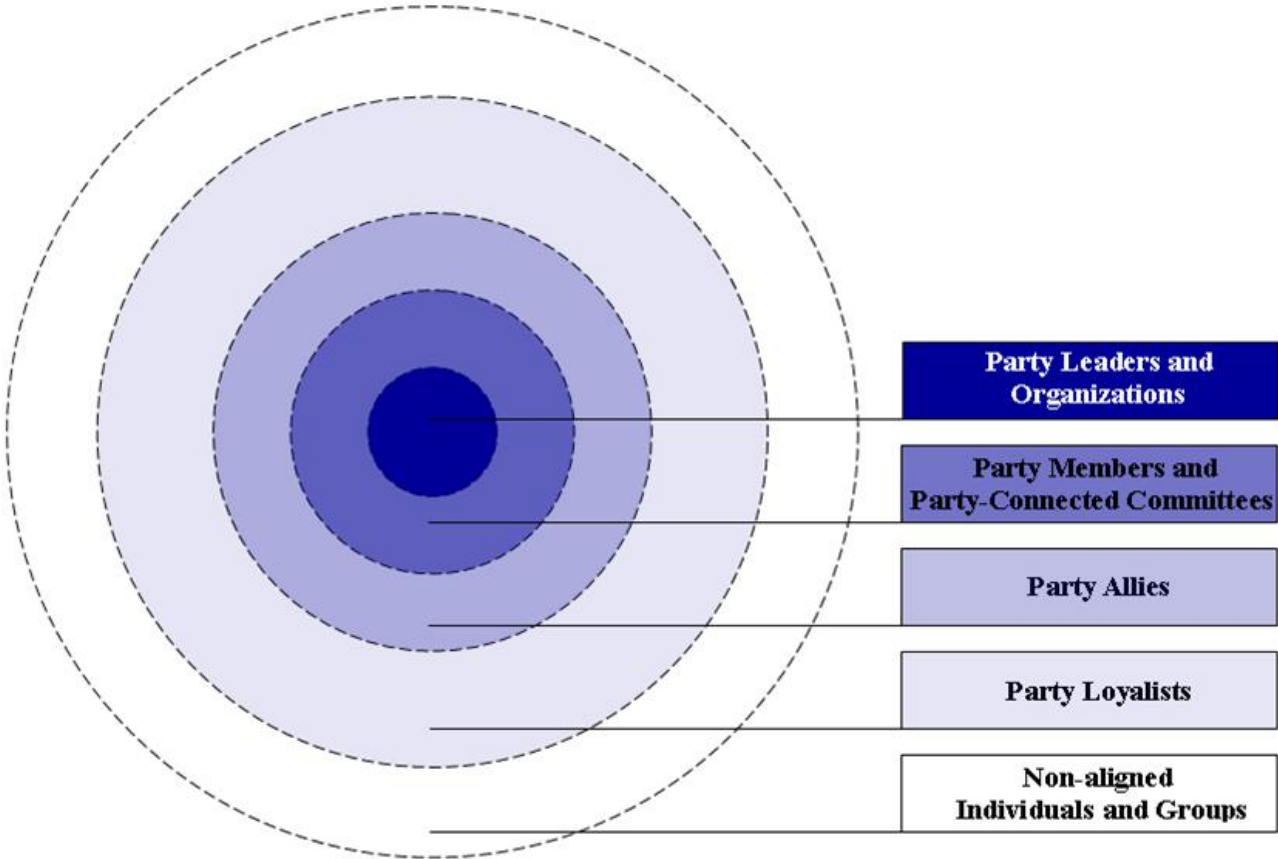
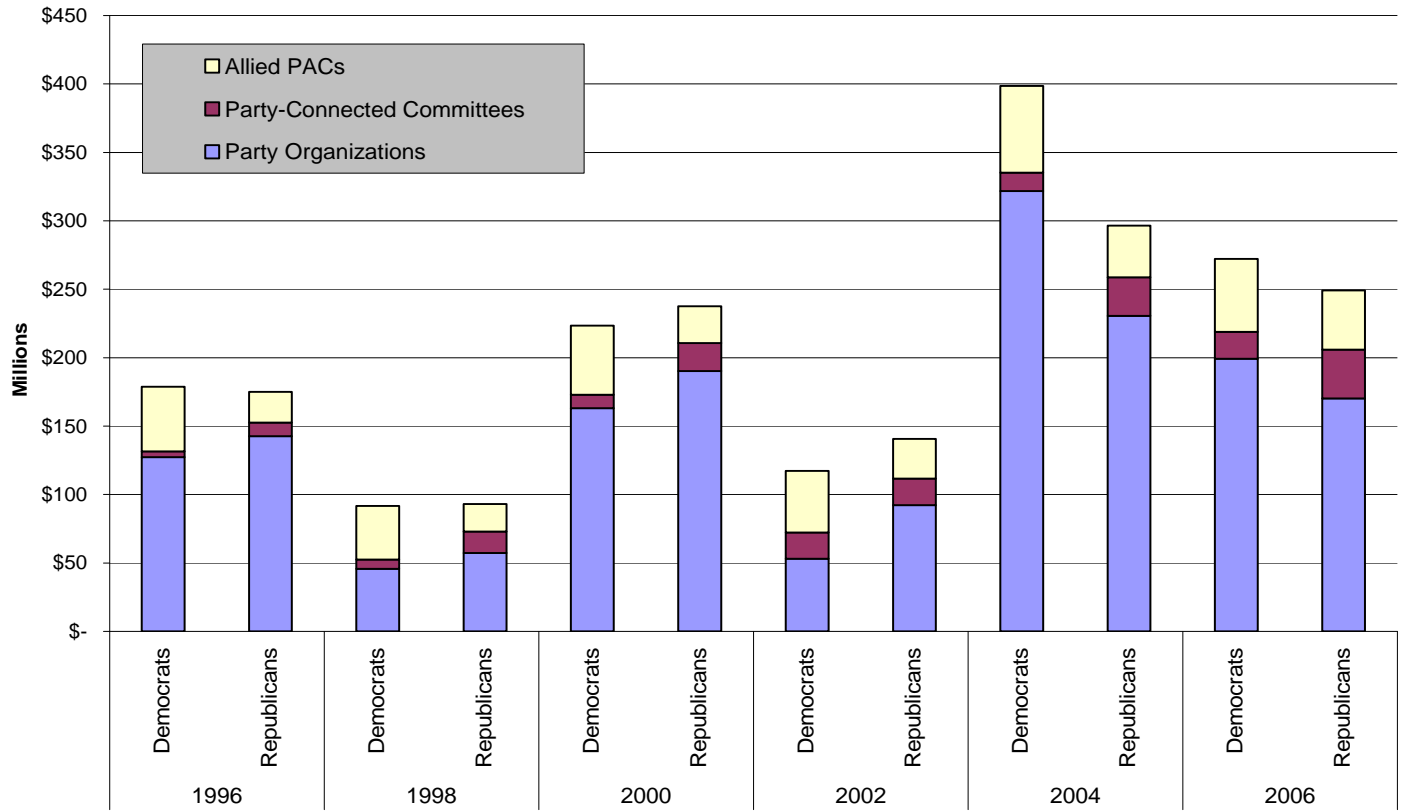


Figure 2. Party Organization, Party-Connected, and Allied PAC Spending in Federal Elections, 1996-2006



Source: Data compiled from the FEC and the Center for Responsive Politics.
 Note: Figures are in 2006 constant dollars.

Table 1. Spending by Republican Party Organizations, Party-Connected Committees, Allied PACs, and Nonaligned PACs in the 2006 House Elections

	Party organizations	Party-connected committees	Allied interest groups	Nonaligned interest groups
Competitive				
Incumbents	67%	65%	48%	58%
Challengers	6	7	5	3
Open seats	21	13	19	10
Uncompetitive				
Incumbents	0	9	20	22
Challengers	0	3	3	0
Open seats	5	3	3	3
Uncontested	0	0	1	3
\$, millions	\$83.1	\$26.1	\$9.0	\$223.6

N=389

Source: Compiled from data from the Federal Election Commission and Center for Responsive Politics.

Notes: Party spending consists of contributions, coordinated expenditures, and independent expenditures for a candidate or against a candidate's opponents. Party-connected spending consists of contributions made from candidates' personal campaign committees or leadership PACs. Allied PAC spending consists of contributions, independent expenditures, and internal communications by a PAC that has contributed 95% or more of its funds to one party's candidates. Nonaligned PAC spending consists of contributions, independent expenditures, and internal communications by PACs not categorized as leadership or allied PACs. Elections won by 20% or less of the vote are categorized as competitive. All others are categorized as uncompetitive or uncontested. Figures include only expenditures for candidates that competed in the general election.

Table 2. Spending by Democratic Party Organizations, Party-Connected Committees, Allied PACs, and Nonaligned PACs in the 2006 House Elections

	Party organizations	Party-connected committees	Allied interest groups	Nonaligned interest groups
Competitive				
Incumbents	6%	15%	4%	7%
Challengers	66	49	45	36
Open seats	22	17	10	11
Uncompetitive				
Incumbents	1	12	27	33
Challengers	0	1	2	0
Open seats	5	4	4	3
Uncontested	0	1	8	10
\$, millions	\$67.9	\$15.1	\$35.0	\$177.7

N=421

Source: Compiled from data from the Federal Election Commission and Center for Responsive Politics.

Notes: Party spending consists of contributions, coordinated expenditures, and independent expenditures for a candidate or against a candidate's opponents. Party-connected spending consists of contributions made from candidates' personal campaign committees or leadership PACs. Allied PAC spending consists of contributions, independent expenditures, and internal communications by a PAC that has contributed 95% or more of its funds to one party's candidates. Nonaligned PAC spending consists of contributions, independent expenditures, and internal communications by PACs not categorized as leadership or allied PACs. Elections won by 20% or less of the vote are categorized as competitive. All others are categorized as uncompetitive or uncontested. Figures include only expenditures for candidates that competed in the general election.

Notes

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¹ The term soft money was coined by Elizabeth Drew (1983, 15). See Corrado (2006) on soft money and the FECA's regulatory regime.

² The FECA of 1971 was preceded by the FECA of 1974, but the 1971 law was too limited in scope to be considered a primary shaper of the current campaign finance regime.

³ Research informed by a narrow definition of party also directs attention away from a few organizations that at one time were part of a federal party and subject to federal law, and later formally separated themselves from the party in response to changes in that law. The Republican Governors Association, once a part of the RNC and now a 527 committee, is such a group

⁴ Note that parties are permitted to make hard-money financed issue advocacy ads during some parts of an election cycle (e.g., Herrnson 2008).

⁵ The DCCC, for example, requires the approval of a state's Democratic House delegation prior to funding a nonincumbent in a contested primary. Party organizations routinely support incumbents in contested primaries (Herrnson 2008).

⁶ These figures exclude party-sponsored "issue advocacy" ads because FEC reporting requirements do not make it possible to determine how much was spent in an individual election or the total spent in an election cycle. First used in the 1996 elections, most issue advocacy ads are intended to influence a specific election but do not *explicitly* advocate a candidate's election or defeat. The figure for 1978 excludes independent expenditures, which first became legal in 1996.

⁷ Most leadership PACs and personal campaign committees are sponsored by members of Congress but a few are sponsored by congressional retirees and other politicians.

⁸ The number of leadership PACs in 1990 was calculated from Zuckerman (1992); the figure for 1996 is calculated from data provided by the Center for Responsive Politics. The figures for candidate-to-candidate and leadership PAC contributions in 1990 are from (Campaign Finance Institute 2008).

⁹ Figures calculated from Jones (2006).

¹⁰ This discussion applies to the Democratic and Republican parties and to some minor parties. However, it does not apply to all minor parties, some of which have as their major objectives placing issues on the political agenda or receiving patronage appointments.

¹¹ A small portion of these contributions were made by congressional retirees and other elected officials. For more information on candidate transfers to parties see Herrnson (2008) and Corrado and Varney (2007).

¹² Figures are from the Center for Responsive Politics website <http://www.opensecrets.org/index.php>. Accessed August 19, 2008.

¹³ Prior the enactment of the BCRA national transfers to state parties included both hard and soft money; after that it included hard money transfers. National party transfers are included in this analysis, but not in Tables 1 and 2 because that these expenditures cannot be allocated to specific congressional candidates.

¹⁴ See, for example, Jacobson (1985-86) and various editions of Herrnson, *Congressional Elections* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press).

¹⁵ Competitive elections are defined as those won by 20% or less of the vote; all others are classified as uncompetitive or uncontested. Twenty percent is an appropriate victory margin given the heightened level of uncertainty in contemporary congressional elections. A narrower margin, such as 15%, would have eliminated campaigns that were competitive for part of the election season but were ultimately decided by more than 15% of the vote. Slightly changing the boundaries for the competitiveness measure does not significantly change the results. Moreover, the twenty-point classification produces results similar to the forecasts of political journalists who handicap Democratic elections. When the seats the *Cook Political Report* classifies as "lean," "likely," or "toss-up" races (based on ten reports from September 1, 2006, through November 2, 2006) are combined into one category, 90% of those races are considered competitive under this classification. For more discussion of the classification scheme, see Herrnson (2008).