

The Roles of Party Organizations, Party-Connected Committees, and Party Allies in Elections

Paul S. Herrnson University of Maryland

What constitutes party campaign activity in elections? The answer to this question depends on how one defines a political party. This study defines political parties as enduring multilayered coalitions. These coalitions include actors not often considered components of the party; namely, party-connected committees, consisting of 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. The study also demonstrates that a reliance on datasets that aggregate information in particular ways serves to illuminate some aspects of 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 academics, 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?¹ Does it also include "allied" interest groups and individuals that routinely 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 also have relevance for assessments of the strength of parties and 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 strengths and weaknesses of 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 definition of political parties as enduring multilayered coalitions consisting of these and other organizations and individuals. Third, an examination of campaign spending demonstrates the significance 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 consequences 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

¹All references to PACs refer to multicandidate federal PACs.

class 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, activities and behavior, bases of electoral 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, identifying 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 (1958) 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. Joseph Schlesinger (1985) examined the relationships among these segments 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 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 col-

lects and aggregates campaign finance data, which has the effect of privileging this definition of party over others among scholars that do empirical research on the financing of federal elections.

Nevertheless, reliance on this definition may lead to shortcomings 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 components of the party under other definitions. This is exemplified by the case of party soft money.² The Federal Election Campaign Act of 1974 (FECA) and its amendments, which provide the foundation for the current campaign finance system, regulated party finances associated with federal elections but not other party finances.³ Largely excluded from federal regulation were funds that became known as soft money, which the parties used to defray some organizational expenses and to participate in state and local elections. Within roughly two decades, the parties’ national, congressional, and senatorial campaign committees began to raise and spend large amounts of soft money to influence specific federal elections. Indeed, by the 2000 elections soft money accounted for 40% of these organizations’ receipts, and by 2002 the Democratic national party organizations had raised more soft money than federally regulated hard money. However, because the regulations governing party activity in federal elections did not originally include language recognizing soft money, the parties were not required to disclose the soft money they spent to help elect candidates to the House, the Senate, or the presidency. The lack of disclosure made it impossible to use FEC data to discern the full extent of party involvement in individual federal elections. The narrowness of the legal definition of political parties and party activity resulted in a gaping hole in the regulation and reporting of the parties’ campaign efforts until soft money was banned by the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002 (BCRA). Limited disclosure requirements and incomplete data also discouraged scholars from studying party soft money expenditures (but see La Raja 2008).

²The term soft money was coined by Elizabeth Drew (1983, 15). See Corrado (2006) on soft money and the FECA’s regulatory regime.

³The FECA of 1974 was preceded by the FECA of 1971, but the 1971 law was too limited in scope to be considered a primary shaper of the current campaign finance regime.

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.⁴ Parties, party-connected committees, and some allied interest groups 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 BCRA's prohibitions against national party soft money. The law created a void in soft-money funded "issue advocacy" ads (radio and television ads that do *not expressly* promote a candidate's election or defeat), voter targeting, and voter mobilization activities that to some degree has been filled by some existing and some new 501(c) and 527 organizations (e.g., Corrado 2006). Another example concerns the extraordinary requirements party organizations must meet prior to contributing to a House nonincumbent candidate in a contested primary.⁵ 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 participate more freely in primaries.

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 with hard money. 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 of adaptation consists of spinning off some party activities to individuals and

groups that are in a better position than legally defined 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

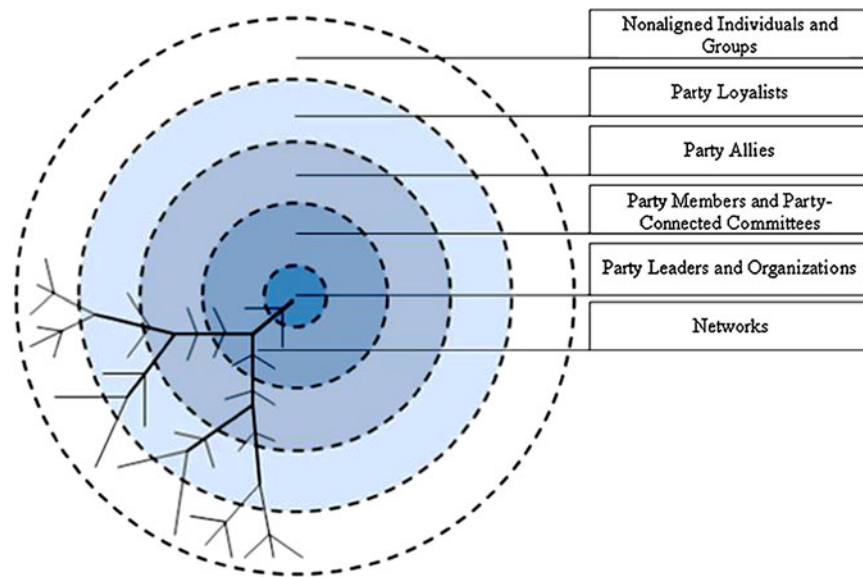
Political parties in the twenty-first century United States can be defined as enduring multilayered coalitions of individuals and groups that possess mutual goals and share interlocking relationships. The most important actors in the party possess the most political power, exhibit the greatest party loyalty, commit the most resources to the party, have the strongest relationships with it, and hold elected or appointed positions authorizing them to act on the party's behalf. Less important party actors possess few of these characteristics. Nonaligned individuals and groups possess virtually none. This definition builds on existing theories that define political parties in terms of their pursuit of power and office (e.g., Epstein 1967; Schattschneider 1942). It broadens these definitions to include the efforts of individuals and groups besides formal party organizations and by introducing criteria to determine whether they should be included in a party's coalition. Some of these groups, including federal PACs, 527 committees, and 501(c) organizations, did not exist or were not visibly active in politics when much of the seminal theorizing about parties occurred. Their introduction to the political arena occurred largely in response to the introduction of new regulations.

The definition of political parties as enduring multilayered coalitions conceptualizes parties 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 non-aligned groups. The boundaries between the concentric circles that define a party's leaders, members, allies, and loyalists (and separate them from other

⁴Research 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.

⁵The 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).

FIGURE 1 Party Organizations, Party-Connected Committees, and Party Allies



individuals and organizations) are porous because of the ease with which individuals can move from one layer to the next.

Components of the Party

Formal party leaders and the organizations they head are the most powerful components of the party. They have a major impact on the nation's political agenda and the policymaking process. Party leaders are responsible for party governance and define the party's specific goals, strategies, and tactics. They control a disproportionate share of the resources needed to advance party objectives and possess the strongest commitment to them. Party leaders use their political clout to mobilize the resources of others, including party members and party allies. Party leaders also have the formal authority to act on the party's behalf and can be held accountable by party members. 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. Extragovernmental 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 officers and members.

Just as politicians created parties to help them pursue their electoral goals (e.g., Aldrich 1995), parties have evolved to help politicians respond to changes in their environment (Epstein 1967, 1986). Extragovernmental party organizations at the national level took major strides toward improving their capacities as campaigners 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 candidates, and independent expenditures designed to assist a candidate that are made without that candidate's knowledge or consent. The limits for party contributions and expenditures in federal elections are complicated. They vary according to whether a party organization is a national committee or a state committee, the level of office sought, and, in some cases, the size of the population residing in the geographic area where an election is held.⁶ Between 1978 and 2006 spending on these activities increased from \$11 million (\$34 million in 2006 dollars) to more than \$264.8 million.⁷

⁶Contributions and expenditures by local party committees count against their state party committee's contribution and spending limits.

⁷These figures exclude party issue advocacy ads financed with hard money 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.

In addition, the parties furnish selected candidates with services in campaign management, research, targeting, and others areas of campaigning requiring specialized skills or knowledge. The centrality of their location within political information networks and their political clout enable party organizations to assist candidates with collecting money, endorsements, and additional 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 Republican Party 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 national party assistance has been used to help elect presidential candidates or to assist House and Senate candidates in competitive elections, especially endangered incumbents (Herrnson 1988, 2008; Jacobson 1980, 1985–86).

Despite the augmentation of existing campaign programs and the introduction of new ones, contemporary party organizations operate within a number of constraints. As noted earlier, federal law governs the sources to which a party can turn for money, the amounts it can raise from each source, and the contributions and expenditures it can make to influence individual elections. The money a party actually raises also restricts its campaign spending. Issues of credibility, loyalty, and infrastructure limit a party's influence over what is communicated by the mass media and the party's ability to persuade and mobilize voters. Collectively, these constraints make it impossible for a party to accomplish its electoral goals without the assistance of others. They have led parties to form relationships with a variety of individuals and groups. These include 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 and supporters 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 political party consists of 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 pursuit of party goals and coordinate their efforts with formal party organizations. However, they have less influence than party leaders on the formulation of party objectives, strategies, and tactics. Party members also 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 and their personal campaign committees and leadership PACs—referred to as party-connected committees.⁸

Personal campaign committees, originally consisting of volunteers that helped candidates win elections, became increasingly specialized and reliant on teams of paid staff and consultants during the mid-twentieth century (e.g., Agranoff 1972). MCs (and others) have long used these organizations to assist fellow partisans, but it is only in recent elections that their contributions reached substantial levels. Personal campaign committees can contribute up to \$2,000 per federal candidate in each phase of an election (nomination, general election, and runoff). Between the 1990 and 2006 congressional elections, the politicians that used their personal campaign committees to contribute to other candidates increased in number from 362 to 593. 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. Leadership PACs (and other PACs, including allied PACs) can contribute up to \$5,000 to a House candidate in each phase of an election. Their contributions grew from \$2 million (\$3 million in 2006 dollars) to \$39.6 million by 2006.⁹ Thus, during the 2006 elections,

⁸Most leadership PACs and personal campaign committees are sponsored by members of Congress but a few are sponsored by congressional retirees and other politicians.

⁹The 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 2008b).

party-connected committees contributed about \$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, and support that are 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 MC's to support key pieces of a party's legislative agenda. 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 prolife groups, the national, 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 non-aligned) interest groups have used a variety of organizational structures to participate in elections. After the FECA established the contemporary framework that governs interest group participation in federal elections and the BCRA, various FEC regulatory decisions, and a number of court rulings modified it, many interests formed PACs, 501(c) groups, or 527 committees. Other interest groups augmented their existing organizations to include some of these structures. The organization of interest groups, like that of political parties, is one in which new financial accounts and entities are created 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 and other groups use to influence federal elections. However, such groups are estimated to have spent at least \$143.2 million in connection with the 2006 congressional elections (Weissman and Ryan 2007).

Similarly, it is virtually impossible to get a full accounting of all of the contributions made by individuals that could be classified as party allies. Federal candidates collected a total of \$865.8 million from individuals during the 2006 elections. Despite the significance of this sum (almost 58% of their total receipts), FEC data are not aggregated in a way that make it possible to readily determine how much each of these individuals donated to specific candidates of each party. Thus, the data pose a major barrier to classifying individuals that make the vast majority of their contributions to a party's candidates as allies and to distinguishing these allies from individuals whose pattern of contributions is sufficiently non-partisan to classify them as independents. Nevertheless, it is estimated that 75% of all individual donations of \$200 or more made in congressional elections are given to candidates that share the donor's party affiliation. Party affiliation and geography are the top two influences on these contributions (Francia et al. 2003). This evidence suggests that a large proportion of individual donors are probably allies. It also demonstrates, once again, that a reliance on FEC data results in researchers underestimating the contributions that party allies make to candidates.

Despite the impossibility of getting a precise accounting of contributions made by many of the parties' interest group and individual allies, a detailed analysis of allied PACs is possible. The number of allied PACs shrunk from 1,022 in 1990 to 817 in 2006, probably as a result of the shift in PAC giving that resulted from turnover in and increased competition over majority control of the House and Senate during this period. However, allied PAC spending actually increased from \$41.5 million (\$63.9 million in 2006 dollars) to \$115.7 million between the 1990 and 2006 elections. As was the case with party-connected committees, the increased roles of party allies demonstrates that parties have delegated some activities to others that are in a 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 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.¹⁰ 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 that do not lean toward either party, habitual nonvoters, 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 lead share some basic goals. First and foremost, they seek to win elections in order to attain, maintain, or increase control over the government.¹¹ 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. In some cases, differences in priorities can lead to conflict.

¹⁰Figures calculated from Jones (2006).

¹¹This 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.

In others, such as when a negative campaign ad backfires, the efforts of party coalition members may even be harmful to a party's candidates. Unwanted political fallout is likely to occur because many members of the public do not distinguish among activities conducted by candidates, party organizations, party-connected committees, or party allies. In general, members of a party's coalition that are more centrally located are more likely to conform to their party's goals and strategies, and members of more ideologically coherent party coalitions are less likely to undermine each other's efforts.

Relationships

Cooperation among 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 (Weissman and Hassan 2006). They also encouraged candidates to consider using their leadership PACs and personal campaign committees to raise funds for redistribution to other candidates (e.g., Herrnson 2008).

Second, many party leaders are closely involved with a party-connected committee or party ally. For example, House majority leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md.), a longstanding member of the DCCC, heads the leadership PAC "AmeriPAC." During the 2006 elections, AmeriPAC contributed roughly \$916,000 to Democratic House candidates and Hoyer's personal campaign committee contributed another \$248,226. Former Representative Tom Davis III (R-Va.), chairman of National Republican Congressional Campaign Committee from 1999 to 2002 and chairman of the House Government Oversight and Reform Committee from 2003 to 2007, exemplifies the convergence of personnel among Republican party leaders and members that head party-connected committees. His leadership PAC, the "Federal Victory Fund," donated \$267,000 to Republicans running for the House in 2006.¹²

Third, there is considerable overlap among staff employed by party organizations in the nation's capital and various leadership PACs and personal campaign committees. In addition, many party-connected committees and party allies contract with political

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

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. Overlapping personnel and the revolving door of partisan employment illustrate the pervasiveness of networks within the parties' coalitions and provide an important foundation for cooperation.

Fourth, party organizations, party-connected committees, and party allies routinely share information, strategies, and tactics. The DNC, DCCC, DSCC, RNC, NRCC, and NRSC are at the nexus of national political intelligence networks. Their ability to collect and distribute information is a major source of influence. For example, the parties' congressional and senatorial campaign committees routinely provide factual, strategic, and tactical information to members of their caucus in the House or the Senate to persuade them to use their campaign accounts and leadership PACs to contribute to candidates in targeted elections. Such information also is used when prevailing on 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 about their preferred candidates with party leaders to encourage formal party organizations to provide these candidates with direct campaign support and help with collecting money and other campaign resources (Herrnson 1988, 2008).

The flow of information between formal party organizations and party-connected committees and party allies 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 communicate 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 staff the parties' independent expenditure teams cannot discuss their activities with the candidates whose elections they seek to influence or any entities advising 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 organizations coordinate some of their election efforts with party-connected committees and party allies. In recent years party-connected committees and party allies have participated in a number of campaign activities that were once considered the bailiwick of party organizations. DCCC and DSCC chairs have called on Democratic congressional leaders, other MCs, and labor leaders to encourage highly qualified nonincumbents to run for Congress; NRCC and NRSC chairs have orchestrated similar recruitment efforts involving comparable Republican politicians and business leaders. The Democratic and Republican congressional and senatorial campaign committees have enlisted party leaders, other powerful legislators, and party allies to host events, schedule meetings, and undertake other efforts to encourage the flow of campaign contributions to candidates in targeted races. Both parties have histories of coordinating other election efforts, including voter mobilization drives, with allied interest groups (Herrnson 1988, 2008).

A sixth reason for the close relationships that exist among party leaders, 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 give to incumbents and candidates are well documented (e.g., Herrnson 1988, 2008) and have 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. Less frequently discussed and just as important is the financial assistance that party-connected committees and party allies provide to party organizations. Candidates can make unlimited transfers from their personal campaign committees to party organizations. They also can use their leadership PACs to make a maximum contribution of \$15,000 to a party's national organizations and \$5,000 to each state party organization per year. During the 2006 elections, Republican MCs directed \$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.¹³ 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

¹³A 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).

on the finances of the parties' congressional and senatorial campaign committees, which were responsible for most party campaigning in the 2006 mid-term 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 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 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 improve the election prospects of Republican House and Senate candidates and 35% of the monies the DCCC and DSCC spent to elect Democrats to Congress.

Allied (and other) PACs are subject to the same restrictions on contributions to parties that apply to leadership PACs. During the 2006 elections, allied PACs contributed substantially less to party organizations than party-connected committees. Their donations amounted to only 4% of the parties' total budgets and 6.7% of the budgets of the parties' congressional and senatorial campaign committees. However, there is good reason to believe that allied individual donors contributed a great deal more. FEC data do not make it possible to determine the portion of each party's receipts that is furnished by individuals that could be categorized as party allies, but they do show that individual donors in general contributed \$485.7 million to Republican party organizations and almost \$342.1 million to Democrat party organizations. These contributions account for 80.6% of the Republican party's and 70.7% of the Democratic party's total federal receipts. It is safe to assume that a large portion of these receipts were contributed by individuals that are party allies. Prior to the BCRA's ban on soft money contributions to the parties, allied individuals and interest groups contributed considerably more (e.g., La Raja 2008).

Other Foundations for Collaboration

Politics are 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, some-

times 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., Francia et al. 2003; Grenzke 1989). Another category of exchanges are intended to produce both collective and private benefits. The financial contributions that party leaders and members make 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 realize private benefits, such as advancement in the congressional hierarchy (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 in their posts or moving up the ranks of the leadership; failure or serious violations of authority typically result in party leaders losing their positions. The primary goals of leaders of the party's extragovernmental organizations are to win as many elections as possible. For the chairs of the DCCC and the NRCC, for example, this translates into maximizing the number of House seats under their party's control. 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 (Herrnson 1998, 2008; Jacobson 1985–86).

One would expect party members to work closely with party leaders in the pursuit of party goals because party members are the principals that authorized party leaders to work on their behalf, and party leaders can help party members advance their political careers. 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 committees to pursue both collective and private 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 goal by contributing to their party and supporting some of the candidates it supports (Brewer and Deering 2005; Currinder 2003; Heberlig 2003; Heberlig, Hetherington, and Larson 2006; Wilcox 1989). They pursue the latter goal by contributing to politicians likely to be in a position to advance their individual goals. That group includes incumbents, most of whom have a very high probability of reelection. It also includes nonincumbents that contest either open seats or marginal seats occupied by members of the opposing party. Most of these nonincumbents have reasonable chances of success. Many party members contribute to their nomination campaigns because they consider them potential future allies. Should a preferred nonincumbent win the party's nomination, general election support is likely to follow. If not, some party members will support the general election candidate that defeated their preferred standard bearer in the primary.

Party allies can be expected to have a weaker commitment to party goals than party leaders and party members because, unlike the others, party allies have neither principal nor agent relationships with the party. Rather, allied interest groups are agents of the specific interests they represent. A party ally forms an enduring alliance with a party because historically this relationship has provided substantial benefits to the group's principals. Thus, even though the political activities of an allied interest group overwhelmingly benefit one party, the group is likely to go its own way when its goals and those of the party conflict.

Some of the limitations to the relationships between party allies and a party are visible through their activities 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 that belongs to their party's coalition. Should the challenger prove unsuccessful in the primary 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.¹⁴ 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 that 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 prolife allied groups, for example, routinely abandon GOP candidates that downplay the abortion issue or take prochoice stances even when these candidates' races are deemed a top priority by the NRCC, NRSC, or some other Republican party organization. Not surprisingly, prochoice groups typically pay little attention to the campaigns of prolife Democratic nominees, even when Democratic party organizations have prioritized their races.

Third, allies are likely to react 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., Cox and Magar 1999; Herrnson 1997; Rudolph 1999). The Republican takeover of Congress in 1994 worked 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 because the benefits associated with coalition membership were outweighed by the costs.

Recent Trends in Campaign Spending

Having described the parties' goals and the relationships that exist among the different elements 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

¹⁴Figures are from the Center for Responsive Politics Web site at <http://www.opensecrets.org/index.php>. Accessed August 19, 2008.

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's 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.¹⁵

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, spending by party allies only includes contributions and independent expenditures made by allied PACs. Thus, it underestimates the total spending by party allies. Allied PACs are defined as political action committees that commit 90% of their campaign spending to one party's candidates. This is a somewhat conservative definition. Substituting a definition that requires less loyalty to a party would result in the attribution of more campaign spending to allied PACs, and party coalitions more generally, but it would increase the possibility of including funds that are spent by organizations whose other political activities suggest they might be more accurately categorized as non-aligned groups.¹⁶

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 29% of the campaign spending associated with Democratic organizations;

in the 2004 and the 2006 elections they accounted for 16.6% and 23.9%. The portion of Republican party-related spending provided by party-connected committees and allied PACs accounted for 14.4%, 8.2%, and 18.6% of GOP-related spending in the 1996, 2004, and 2006 elections.

Overall, the figures make the 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 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 parties as enduring multi-layered coalitions, is to analyze the expenditures of party-connected committees, party allies, and party organizations separately from one another and to anticipate similarities in their spending patterns. 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.

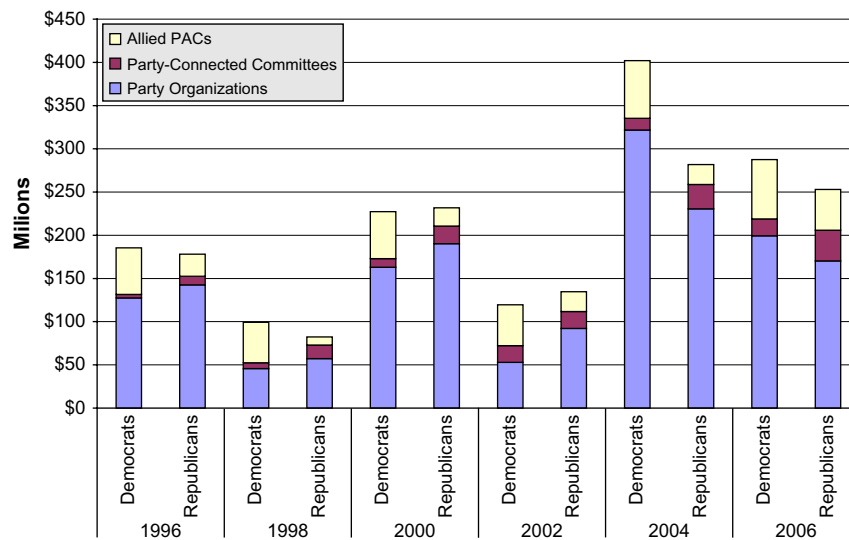
The 2006 Elections for the U.S. House of Representatives

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 components 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 primarily aimed

¹⁵Prior to 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 these expenditures cannot be allocated to specific congressional candidates.

¹⁶This includes groups that contribute the vast majority of their funds to candidates of one party, but publish scorecards and participate in other political activities that benefit candidates of both parties.

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.

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 appears to have been influenced by the political environment.¹⁷ 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 elections earlier were strikingly similar—only then it was the Republicans, not the Democrats, that 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 in the analysis 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 exis-

tence? 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 incumbents, one should expect them to allocate most of their resources to candidates in competitive contests, especially MCs in jeopardy of losing.

During the 2006 elections Democratic party organizations spent roughly \$67.9 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 6% were spent to promote the elections of Democratic candidates in competitive elections.¹⁸ Two-thirds of the funds were used to

¹⁷See, for example, Jacobson (1985–86) and various editions of Herrnson, *Congressional Elections* (Washington, DC: CQ Press).

¹⁸Competitive 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 20-point classification produces results similar to the forecasts of political journalists that handicap elections. When the seats the *Cook Political Report* classifies as “lean,” “likely,” or “toss-up” races (based on 10 reports from September 1, 2006, through November 2, 2006) are combined into one category, 90% of those races are considered competitive under the 20-point classification. For more discussion of the classification scheme, see Herrnson (2008).

support Democratic challengers in hotly contested races, including the 20 that won their general election. Another 6% of the party's funds were contributed to incumbents in elections with uncertain outcomes, and 22% were committed to open-seat candidates in close contests. Not surprisingly, the Democrats spent no funds in uncontested races. The party was able to allocate its resources in an aggressive manner because of a national political agenda that favored it.

Democratic members of Congress contributed \$15.1 million from their campaign accounts and leadership PACs to Democratic House candidates in the 2006 elections, increasing the level of pro-Democratic spending by 22.2% over that spent by formal Democratic party organizations. The pattern of Democratic party-connected committee expenditures is extremely similar to that of the expenditures made by Democratic 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 that occupied safe seats. This suggests that Democratic House members spent some of these funds to advance their party's collective goal of seat maximization and others to pursue private benefits related to enhancing their political careers. The overall similarities in the allocation of party funds and funds from Democratic party member's campaign accounts and leadership PACs, along with the theoretical and descriptive information presented earlier, 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.

Democratic allied PACs spent \$47.6 million on contributions, independent expenditures, and internal communications designed to help Democratic candidates in the 2006 House elections.¹⁹ This represents a 70.1% increase over the funds spent by Democratic party organizations. It is noteworthy because it calls attention to the party's traditional dependence on outside groups. Although Democratic allied PACs allocated most of their expenditures to competitive elections, they spent 42% of them in one-sided contests, including 8% in connection with incumbents in uncontested general elections. The funds these groups distributed to incumbents that

faced little or no opposition were clearly motivated by something other than helping the party 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 (Freundreis and Waterman 1985; Hall and Wayman 1990; Langbein 1986; Romer and Snyder 1994; Wright 1989, 1990). When viewed through the lens of the two criteria that guide most party campaign efforts—competitiveness and incumbency—Democratic allied PAC expenditures had fewer similarities to spending by Democratic party organizations and Democratic party-connected committees than to the pro-Democratic spending of nonaligned PACs. The considerable support Democratic-allied PACs give to Democratic candidates and the distribution of that support among different types of candidates make it appropriate to label these PACs as allies. After all, allies generally support each other rather than their opponents, but each ally's contribution to a common goal is contingent upon and shaped by its individual objectives.

The findings for the Republicans have many similarities to those for the Democrats. This is particularly evident when one considers that the political environment forced the GOP to be primarily concerned with minimizing its losses, whereas it put the Democrats in a position to focus on gaining seats. One similarity between the two parties' coalitions involves the importance of party-connected committees and party allies in the financing of House campaigns. Formal Republican party organizations invested \$83.1 million in these races, while Republican party-connected committees spent \$26.1 million and Republican allied PACs spent another \$12.3 million (see Table 2).²⁰ The funds committed by the latter two parts of the Republican coalition increased spending intended to assist GOP candidates for the House by 31.4% and 14.8%, respectively. As was the case with the Democratic Party, the Republicans benefited substantially from groups belonging to its coalition.

Other similarities between the Republicans and the Democrats concern the distribution of funds by their coalition members. First, formal Republican party organizations, like their Democratic counterparts,

¹⁹Preliminary analyses that used cut-off points ranging from 80% to 95% to define allied PACs produced distributions of allied PAC spending that had few differences from those presented in Table 1 and supported the generalizations in the current text.

²⁰As was the case for the analysis of Democratic allies, using different cut-off points to define allied PACs produced distributions of allied PAC spending that had few differences from those presented in Table 2 and supported the generalizations in the current text.

TABLE 1 Spending by Democratic Party Organizations, Party-Connected Committees, Allied PACs, and Nonaligned PACs in the 2006 House Elections

	Party organizations	Party-connected committees	Allied PACs	Nonaligned interest groups
Competitive				
Incumbents	6%	15%	4%	7%
Challengers	66	49	44	36
Open seats	22	17	10	11
Uncompetitive				
Incumbents	1	12	29	33
Challengers	0	1	2	0
Open seats	5	4	3	3
Uncontested	0	1	8	10
\$, millions	\$67.9	\$15.1	\$47.6	\$165.1
Number of candidates = 421				

Source: Compiled from data from the Federal Election Commission and the 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 PACs that have contributed 90% or more of their 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.

distributed almost all of their funds to candidates in competitive elections. The Republicans focused most of their resources on incumbents in close contests, followed by open-seat candidates, which is to be expected given the pro-Democratic political environment in 2006. Second, spending by Republican party-connected committees paralleled their party's formal organizations except that the party-connected committees contributed more to incumbents, including some in lopsided contests. This is the same pattern reported for the Democrats. Third, the distribution of Republican allied PAC expenditures bore greater similarity to the pro-Republican spending of non-aligned PACs than to the expenditures of formal Republican party organizations. Once again, these findings parallel those for the Democrats.

In sum, the findings for Republican party coalition members and Democratic party coalition members suggest that the formal organizations of both parties allocated their funds in accordance with a goal of seat maximization. The findings for the party-connected committees associated with each party suggest that they made their contributions in a manner that is consistent with both maximizing the number of seats under their party's control and the pursuit of private benefits. The findings for each party's allied PACs intimate that they pursued a mixed strategy of helping their party pursue its collective goals while pursuing access to its 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 efforts 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 emphasizes 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; or may 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.

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

TABLE 2 Spending by Republican Party Organizations, Party-Connected Committees, Allied PACs, and Nonaligned PACs in the 2006 House Elections

	Party organizations	Party-connected committees	Allied PACs	Nonaligned interest groups
Competitive				
Incumbents	67%	65%	49%	58%
Challengers	6	7	4	3
Open seats	21	13	15	11
Uncompetitive				
Incumbents	0	9	24	22
Challengers	0	3	2	0
Open seats	5	3	3	3
Uncontested	0	0	2	3
\$, millions	\$83.1	\$26.1	\$12.3	\$223.6
Number of candidates = 389				

Source: Compiled from data from the Federal Election Commission and the 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 PACs that have contributed 90% or more of their 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. Columns may not add to 100% due to rounding.

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. Contributions and expenditures made by party-connected committees and allied PACs to some degree represent an outsourcing of party campaign efforts in response to legal and other limitations on formal party activity. The same is true of campaign contributions by allied individual donors and soft money expenditures by allied 501(c) organizations and 527 committees, which are not analyzed in this study but are made in many of the same races that are targeted by party organizations (Gimpel, Lee, and Pearson-Merkowitz 2008; Herrnson 2008). Analysis guided by the definition of political parties as enduring multilayered coalitions provides evidence of increased party influence that is missed by narrower definitions of parties.

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 and helped to extend some congressional careers. It also has increased the influence of legislators that are able to raise sufficient funds to make contributions to their congressional colleagues, political party, and fellow partisans that run for office. These contributions have enabled these MCs to influence the composition of their party's congressional caucus and to lay some of the groundwork needed to compete for congressional leadership positions, prized committee assignments, and increased influence in the policymaking process. Given that politicians that hold more extreme political views and use inflammatory rhetoric have significant advantages in fundraising (Godwin 1988), it is not surprising that congressional leaders and other MCs have become more hostile to members of the opposing party in recent years. These dynamics have contributed to the increased polarization of congressional politics (Heberlig, Hetherington, and Larson 2006). Some of this polarization also may be the result of MCs becoming more responsive to the policy views of party allies that contribute to their campaigns.

Some political observers and insiders have gone so far as to suggest that the growth of the party connection in campaigning has strengthened the partisan loyalties of public officials to the detriment

of the institutional loyalties that are the basis for the U.S. Constitution's system of checks and balances (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 that serve in separate political institutions as a means to prevent any one of these 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 that shares their party affiliation.

Third, the revitalization of party organizations, the emergence of party-connected committees, and the increased prominence of party allies can influence political reform. Those that 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 that 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. The 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 reform 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 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 most of the contributions and 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.

Apart from 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 results in new insights into party election efforts. Additional research should assess the relationships between political parties and political activists, individual donors, political consultants, lobbyists, think tanks, and public opinion leaders in and out of government. Their loyalties, activities, and influence suggest that many of these individuals and groups should be classified as party members or party allies.²¹

Further research also should employ metrics beyond campaign contributions and expenditures to assess the roles of party leaders, party members, party allies, and the organizations they lead. Interviews and surveys of party officials, interest group leaders, political consultants, elected officials and candidates, and campaign donors and activists can provide descriptive and systematic data for assessing some of these actors' roles in candidate recruitment and campaign management, fundraising, research, and other areas of electioneering traditionally considered the bailiwick of formal party organizations.²² Analyses of television advertisements and direct-mail, email, telephone calls, door-to-door canvasses, and other "below the radar" mobilization efforts hold similar possibilities for assessing the partisan roles of the various interest groups.²³ Studies of legislators, lobbyists, executive branch officials, interest group leaders, political consultants, think tanks, and public opinion leaders can provide insights into the roles of party members and allies in writing legislation, participating in oversight activities, and mobilizing

²¹For examples of studies of these actors see Francia et al. (2003), Kolodny and Dulio (2003), Magleby, Patterson, and Thurber (2002), and Barker (1999).

²²For examples of studies providing these data see Herrnsen (1998, 2008), Kolodny (1998), Cotter et al. (1989), Biersack, Herrnsen, and Wilcox (1999), Thurber (1999), Dulio (2004), and Francia et al. (2003).

²³For examples of studies using these approaches see Goldstein and Rivlin (2003) and Magleby et al. (2007).

public support for or against various policy initiatives. An additional line of study could determine whether generalizations formulated at the national level apply to the states.

Regardless of the outcomes of future research, the findings of this study demonstrate that in order to take full measure of party efforts in federal elections one must take into consideration the efforts of party-connected committees and party allies. Hopefully, these findings will influence academic debates, empirical research, normative arguments, and public policy initiatives concerned with political parties and elections.

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Paul S. Herrnson is director of the Center for American Politics and Citizenship and professor of government and politics, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742.